

Rankings may have started life as an information tool for the global era of higher education. But today they are principally a mechanism to collect and monetise data. As one ranker said to me: "Rankings themselves cannot make money; one has to find funding or make money to support ranking activities." No wonder THE describes itself in its accompanying press releases as first and foremost a "trusted data partner to global higher education". Until recently, too little attention has focused on rankings as a business – and the increasing integration between rankings, publishing and data analytics as detailed by George Chen and Leslie Chan. The global higher education intelligence business has created "vast data lakes" containing "triple-digit billions of data elements". Owning data-rich resources, as well as the smart tools to capture and interpret them, is where the real money and power lies. Data is essential for good governance. But without a comprehensive database and analytic capacity, governments and higher education have effectively enabled the collection, management, warehousing and analysis of higher education data to be privatised and monetised. The best that can be said about THE Impact Rankings is that they highlight the importance of the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) and provide a tool for self-assessment which higher education institutions can then showcase to students and others. This may be enough for some people. (F: E. Hazelkorn, UWN 30.04.22)