

Dr. Jan Sadlak, President of IREG Observatory  
Opening remarks, IREG-5, 7 October 2010

Dear Mr. Greisler,  
Dear Professor Ziegele,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of IREG Observatory I welcome you at the conference we start today. It is for the fifth time that under a framework of IREG those who are involved directly or indirectly in academic rankings and are associated with its developments are getting together. IREG's meetings became a place to share experiences and views about this relatively new development which, nevertheless, in a short time, has drawn so much attention inside and outside of higher education.

The program of IREG-5 demonstrates that also this time we are going to have an opportunity to expand our knowledge and understanding of rankings.

Many thanks are due to Gero Federkeil and those who assisted him in putting together such an interesting programme as well as to the speakers who accepted the invitation.

Dear Colleagues,

It is for the second time that IREG's meeting takes place in Berlin. The first time it was in 2003 at IREG-3 conference. We are most thankful to our German hosts that we can meet again here in Berlin. In particular our thanks are addressed to the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research, DAAD – German Academic Exchange Service for all their support and funding. I am particularly grateful to DAAD as its financial support made possible that we have a bigger than usual number of participants from developing countries.

Let me just remind you that when we met last time in Berlin, IREG adopted the *Berlin Principles on Ranking of Higher Education Institutions*. The so-called Berlin Principles represented a set of guidelines for conducting rankings. It was a first indication that those who, despite all the due reservations, see rankings to be a useful way of informing and comparing performance of higher education institutions, study programs as well as other activities. But as it has been indicated in a title of our conference, to be popular is not enough, rankings have to be reliable and relevant. This challenging task was one of the reasons which were behind transformation of IREG from a non-formal network into a non-governmental institutional organization – the IREG Observatory on Academic Ranking and Excellence. It is for the first time that IREG Observatory is acting as co-organizer of IREG conference.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is encouraging to see that university rankings have “smartened up” on both sides - those who produce and those who use or just look at the rankings. Of course there are and will be those who will go so far as calling it a “disease” arguing that all universities are good because they add value to what they do and the differences are of such proportions that they cannot be compared or that rankings by measuring the wrong things can produce distortions and perverse incentives. It cannot be excluded that there were and might happen again such “collateral damage” incidents but more and more university leaders and other stakeholders are aware of what rankings can and what they can not measure or reflect.

A recent example of such positive use of rankings for analyzing university performance can be found in a paper published by the Ministry of Education of New Zealand which looks at the average performance of its universities in the six measures used in 2010 Academic Ranking of World Universities in relation to the size of the country's economy [so-called 'per capita' measure] as well as comparing their performance with leading Australian universities [[www.educationcounts.govt.nz](http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz)].

Dear Colleagues,

As rightly has been pointed out in a recently published Advice Paper on university rankings which was written for the League of European Research Universities "rankings have such a hold on the public imagination that they are likely to be permanent features of the landscape. Can they be improved?" Definitely they can and those directly involved in rankings are aware of the needs for getting better.

It is the reason for which IREG Observatory comes with initiative to develop and apply a robust evaluation mechanism of rankings called "*IREG-Ranking Audit*". This initiative, for which a reference point are *the Berlin Principles* should enhance the transparency about rankings, give users of rankings a tool to identify trustworthy rankings, and lead to an overall improvement of quality of rankings.

As you can see, the programme of our conference devotes one whole session to the presentation and discussion of "*IREG-Ranking Audit*". The comments received during this conference as well as those of other members of IREG Observatory will be taken into account in the course of finalization of the criteria and procedures.

In conclusion, it looks that Berlin once again will be a place where important proposals aimed at improving rankings are brought forward and that we are starting today a conference which is going to meet your and organizer's expectations.

Thank you.