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## THE CONCEPT OF WORLD-CLASS UNIVERSITIES: TIME FOR RADICAL REVISION



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*The article is devoted to the disclosure of the concept of the global university market and the rationale for the need to abandon the idea of a world-class university (WCU) the concept is based on. The authors have shown that in 2022, due to increased global geopolitical turbulence, the global university market began to split into local (regional) segments, and the consensus reached in the previous two decades on the criteria for leading universities was finally broken. The paper notes that the confrontation between the West and the East, which worsened in 2022, led to the destruction of the US monopoly in the higher education market and the transformation of a homogeneous university market into a heterogeneous one, for which the WCU concept loses its former meaning. This is largely due to the denial of the former role of global university rankings, which have become completely irrelevant under international sanctions with the accompanying phenomenon of scientific ostracism of individual countries. The authors prove that the system of international university rankings leads to the formation of the effect of false prestige, when the scientific achievements of the United States and Europe are unduly exaggerated, including by imposing false ideologemes and mythologemes regarding progressive organizational models of universities. As an alternative to the WCU, the authors propose a concept of Higher Class University (HCU), which is based on the closest connection of the university with the high-tech sectors of the national economy*

*through its participation in research and production and experimental projects of the country's leading companies. The article shows that the new concept and the adoption of the construction of a HCU set as the goal of modernizing the system of higher education in Russia leads to revolutionary changes in the organizational model of domestic universities. The authors have considered the most important aspects in the field of personnel policy during the HCUs creation.*

*World-class university, global university rankings, global university market.*

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#### **Introduction**

World university education policy in recent decades has been captured by the idea of building a global hierarchy of universities with world-class universities (WCUs) as taking the highest position in it.

As early as at the end of the last century, various countries began to actively put forward initiatives to achieve outstanding results in the field of higher education and build WCUs with the help of special state programs. The first of these, to create a network of centers of excellence, started in Canada in 1989. Gradually, different countries around the world joined this movement: 1991 – Denmark, 1995 – Finland, 1996 – China, 2002 – Japan, 2003 – Australia, Norway, 2004 – South Korea, 2006 – Germany, Singapore, 2007 – Japan (up to 6.4 million dollars per center per year), Singapore, 2008 – France, Nigeria, 2009 – Spain, Thailand, 2010 – Israel, 2012 – Russia (Salmi, Froumin, 2013). These projects were backed by multi-billion dollar funding aimed at building a competitive university system in these countries in the global higher education market.

At the same time, there is still no complete understanding of what the WCU is. It requires strict criteria, on which no consensus has yet been reached in the scientific community. In this regard, the goal of the article is to study the existing interpretations of the WCU and consider their meaningful definition, especially in the context of the geopolitical inversion taking place in the world. As a consequence of this goal, we need to formulate an alternative conceptual framework for the study of the

global university market (GUM), which is more adequate to the present in comparison with the concept of WCU.

#### **The concept of "world-class universities" and criteria for their identification**

Perhaps the first and deliberately simplistic understanding of the WCU goes back to Charles William Eliot, who headed Harvard University during the period of 1869-1909, who believed that to build the WCU one needs 50 million dollars and 200 years. However, the University of Chicago soon disproved this claim by its own example, proving that it is possible to reach the world level for such money in just two decades (Altbach, 2004).

Early modern interpretations of WCU relied on the Global Competitiveness Index, which was used by educational institutions to attract paying students as one of the sources of self-financing, as well as an indicator of the internationalization and commercialization of higher education (Batty, 2003).

The scholarly discourse on WCU was initiated by Philip G. Altbach in 2004, when he pointed out that "everyone wants a world-class university... the problem is that no one knows what a world-class university is, and no one has figured out how to get one" (Altbach, 2004, p. 20). In his work, Altbach outlined the criteria that, in his opinion, should form the basis for the WCU identification. These included excellence in research; academic freedom and intellectual atmosphere; effectiveness of university management based on self-

government; innovative teaching; advanced infrastructure for academic work; long-term adequate funding (Altbach, 2004).

In the future, the list of WCU basic characteristics was expanded due to such indicators as the high qualification of the teaching staff (TS); quality education; talented students; effective research activities; academic freedom; availability of infrastructure and advanced equipment for teaching and research; autonomy of management structures (Khoon et al., 2005; Salmi, 2009) and even criteria that are difficult to formalize, such as contribution to the development of modern society and independence in developing a strategy for one's own development (Alden and Lin, 2004).

The most meaningful, in our opinion, is the concept of Jamil Salmi. He described WCU as institutions whose excellent results are achieved by the skillful combination and interaction of three key success factors: a high concentration of talented teachers, researchers and students; abundance of resources (financial, infrastructure and personnel); effective management, which is characterized by a strong management team, absence of bureaucratic barriers, academic freedom and strategic thinking (Salmi, 2009). In subsequent years, these characteristics were supplemented by one more related to closer cooperation between universities and business corporations, which allows WCU not only to generate strong learning through interaction effects (Geuna, Muscio, 2009; Perkmann, Walsh, 2009), but also to conduct research valuable to the economy (Muscio et al., 2013).

Thus, as a result of scientific discussion, the world community formulated four key pillars on which WCU is based: research; high quality education; communication with society through the implementation of research projects; research and innovation management (Altbach and Salmi, 2011; Cazorla and Stratta, 2017). At the same time, the leading role was assigned to research, as a result of which it was research universities (RUs) that the scientific community began to consider as a benchmark for the quality of universities and applicants for the role of WCU (Lavalle, de Nicolas, 2017). The main RUs'

characteristics claiming global leadership are summarized in a study by Kathryn Mohrman, Wanhua Ma, and David Baker, and include a mission that goes beyond the nation state; intensive research; the new role of teachers; diversified financing; new relationships with stakeholders; recruitment around the world; greater internal complexity and global collaboration with research universities in other countries (Mohrman, et al., 2008).

Despite the multidimensionality and fairness of the given interpretations of the WCUs, their main drawback is the lack of a quantitative assessment of each feature, as a result of which they become of little use in practice. That is why the status of the WCU is increasingly identified with the presence of universities in a particular global ranking, numbering several dozen in the world today.

### **Global university rankings as an identifier of world-class universities**

The struggle for world leadership among universities began with the emergence of an international rating movement to evaluate their activities. The construction of global university rankings (GURs) dates back to 2003, when the first edition of the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) was published.

In 2005, the First International Conference on WCU was organized by Shanghai Jiao Tong University. It resulted in the publication of essays collection entitled "The World-class university and ranking: aiming beyond status" (Saldak, Liu, 2007), where international rankings were recognized as the very quantitative measure that allows assessing "going beyond status" outside of subjectivity.

Starting from this moment GURs begin growing rapidly, their wide distribution became possible due to the globalization that has swept the world; at the same time, a global market for ranking companies – rating developers – appears. The process of homogenization of the organizational form of science has led to the fact that rankings have become a tool for measuring and comparing relatively homogeneous activities with common properties (Huzzard et al., 2017), and ranking competitions have intensi-

fied the process of introducing global management patterns that contributed to the loss of the universities' national identity (Muller, 2018). At the same time, universities that topped the rating lists began to be considered role models all over the world and gradually acquired the status of world-class universities, which began to be understood as universities that developed management models that are not dependent on the state, but focused on markets and other non-state interested structures, which means they can be replicated around the world (Benner, 2020).

The trend towards universities' greater institutional autonomy against the backdrop of reduction in state participation was set as a defining one in Europe as well. The EU Commission has made it clear that universities will not become innovative and will not be able to respond to ongoing changes without real autonomy. This formulation was well combined with the development of the Bologna education System, contributing to its promotion and expansion. In order to increase WCUs' competitiveness, European universities were asked to focus their efforts on building managerial capacity through the creation of bodies involved in university management (Hyvönen, 2020). However, the desire for "world class" status by strengthening the managerial component and manipulating the GUR indicators, which resulted in the fact that managers got the available mechanisms for managing the work of the university teaching staff into their hands, contributed to a decrease in professors' morale, their motivation to engage in any type of activity other than research, a decrease in the quality of their work, as well as the growth of a bureaucracy aimed at increasing quantitative indicators (Walton, 2011; Nixon, 2020).

As a result, the systemic view of higher education was weakened by politics, and universities, in pursuit of ranking positions, turned from "academic competitors" into "managerial competitors" (Munch, 2013). At the same time, the GURs themselves began to portray academic activity as global competition, idealizing the leading American universities as

a role model, without questioning either the political image of competition or the "American model" of education associated with it (Erkkilä, Piironen, 2020).

As a result, the concept of WCU has turned into a kind of positive euphemism in the modern world, when classifying a university as a "world class" often simply veils the aggressiveness of the management of the corresponding organization, its dishonest methods of competition, and sometimes "dirty" technologies in achieving certain results.

At the same time, GURs' leading role in shaping public opinion about the university and its affiliation with the WCU (Rigoglioso, 2014), recognizing them as a non-alternative way to quantify universities (Wang et al., 2013) and a tool that reduces the uncertainty of the WCU concept (Huisman, 2008) did not automatically solve the problem of their identification. For example, the question arises about the size of the GURs top list characterizing WCUs, as well as about which ratings from the available variety identify this type of objects reliably.

There have been numerous attempts in the scientific literature to answer these questions. Thus, French researchers Jean-Claude Thoening and Catherine Paradeise identified four types of universities represented in the GUR: the best universities; venerable; imitators; missionaries (Thöening and Paradeise, 2016). The first type, according to the authors, includes universities that are recognized throughout the world, to which the WCU concept is just applicable. These include the highest positions of the GUR top 100 represented by 20–30 universities. They are characterized by large budgets, especially the research ones; breakthrough innovation activity; active "recruitment" work aimed at attracting both leading teachers from around the world and foreign students. For these universities, the GURs serve as a tool to confirm their world status and realize global ambitions. Thus, J.-K. Toning and K. Pardize define WCUs as universities represented in the GUR top 30, while other researchers are of the opinion that the cut-off criterion for WCU is the top 50 (Rider, 2020) or top 100 (Balatsky, Ekimova, 2012; Borjesson, Cea, 2020). The threshold of the top 100 is the

most common in the research environment, because it provides a fairly wide coverage of universities, it is relevant for more countries, and at the same time it is still exclusive enough to speak of the superiority and elitism of the educational institution (Borjesson, Cea, 2020).

One of the rankings' main disadvantages is that the notion of defining "world-class universities" is seen as part of a global competition for status, which is directly dependent on the structure and system that sets the conditions for comparison (Rider, 2020). Consequently, GURs form their own evaluation criteria and create various combinations of WCUs. For example, ARWU prefers North American research universities, while QS and THE tend to Anglo-Saxon educational standards (Bornmann, Glanzel, 2017). That is why, answering the question about the ratings identifying the WCUs, Michelle Stack from the University of British Columbia defines them by getting into the "big three" of the GURs, which includes the ratings of Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), Times Higher Education (THE) and Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU)<sup>1</sup>. The same ratings were chosen as benchmarks for the Russian program for universities' adaptation to world standards "Project 5-100".

Based on the rating concept, we made an attempt to give our own definition of WCU, taking into account the scale of the organization's achievements and the strength of its brand: a world-class university can be considered a university that has received wide international recognition and has first-class scientific results in a wide range of scientific areas (Balatsky, Ekimova, 2022a). Such an interpretation implicitly combines both the criteria of Jamil Salmi and the quantitative assessment of WCU, since "wide international recognition" is approximated by the fact that a university is in the top 100 of at least one of the reputable GURs, and "first-class scientific results" are approximated by the fact that a university is in the top 50 of the Subject

University Rankings (SURs) of a certain ranking system (e.g. QS), "wide range of research areas" is a heuristically determined number of SURs in which the university was in the top 50 list.

Recent research on university rankings have uncovered underlying problems. Thus, the analysis of the WCUs Ratings for 2017, 2019 and 2021 based on the basic algorithm for their identification<sup>2</sup> showed that they take into account the technological aspect of state's development unacceptably poorly (Balatsky, Ekimova, 2022a). For example, the validity index of the WCUs Rating, which takes into account the presence of the Nuclear Club countries in the rating lists, is 43.3%, which is less than the critical mark of 50%. This indicates that the WCUs Ratings do not provide adequate results, are not relevant and cannot be used as a reliable source of information. Moreover, the analysis shows that the WCUs Ratings are Western-centric, when the countries of the Nuclear Club of the West are included by 100% in them, while the states of the East are presented only by one third (Balatsky, Ekimova, 2022a). However, the WCUs Ratings take into account the general cultural aspect no less weakly, when the shame and public scandals associated with the "blunders" of successful university graduates are treated as a significant argument about their insolvency (Balatsky, Ekimova, 2022b). In addition, the modern methodology and practice of compiling university rankings generate not only contradictions between the rating products of different developers, but also instrumental conflicts between the products of the same ranker – between GURs and SURs (Balatsky, Ekimova, 2022a). The foregoing finally undermines the credibility of the rating movement that has gained momentum.

### **Rethinking the concept of "world-class university"**

At present, the concept of WCU requires a serious rethinking. As it was shown above, it is already now subjected to very serious criticism from different positions. We will try to

<sup>1</sup> Stack M.L. What's 'world class' about university rankings? Available at: <http://www.socialsciencespace.com/2016/10/whats-world-class-university-rankings>

<sup>2</sup> World Class Universities Ranking. Available at: <http://nonerg-econ.ru/cat/16/201/>

systematically state their general logic without trying to give an exhaustive picture of the existing critical arguments.

First of all, the very concept of WCU says that there is a certain *consensus* in the world as to what it is. Without the recognition of some properties of advanced universities by the world community, it is impossible to measure and track them, therefore, it is also impossible to compare universities in terms of the degree of satisfaction with certain threshold parameters, so that later the winners of such a comparison would be recognized as reference objects, i.e. WCUs that demonstrated superiority over other participants in the GUM. In turn, the properties of the WCU are somehow connected with the mission of the university as a special organization that performs certain specific functions for which it, in fact, exists. It is quite logical that the self-description of the WCU does not contradict the self-description of the university as such. However, already at this stage, logical and essential collisions arise. For example, Ronald Barnett rightly notes that the idea of a university has historical depth and modern (spatial) breadth. For example, in the 19th century, the German philosophical idea of the university as the “universe of the mind” dominated, and later as a “space of intellectual freedom” (education, research, etc.) in the English tradition (Barnett, 2020). Today, these concepts have lost their relevance and efficiency, but we cannot say that they have been replaced by some new universal idea. Each state puts its content into the concept of a university, thereby rejecting the universality of its understanding and reinforcing the pluralism of the very idea of a university. In this case, the search for a universal metric for assessing university’s success becomes obviously groundless. And this is the point where we should dwell in more detail on the situation that has arisen.

For example, when speaking about the historical and spatial contextuality of the very idea of a university, R. Barnett rebels against the thesis that the idea of a university is just a “grand narrative” of history, which now is devoid of content and can be safely set on fire (Barnett, 2020). However, at this point,

R. Barnett contradicts himself, citing many fruitful modern ideas of the university: the university of wisdom (Maxwell, 2014), the sustainable university (Sterling et al., 2014), the virtuous university (Nixon, 2008), the Christian university (Astley et al., 2004), University of Ecology (Barnett, 2017), University of Dissenters (Rolfe, 2013) and others. It is noteworthy that in an earlier work he identified more than fifty modern ideas of the university (Barnett, 2013), which are constantly supplemented. Moreover, the very idea of a university becomes obviously dependent on the development level of the country where it is located, the stage of its evolutionary development. At the same time, from the given interpretations of the university, the complete futility of such a blatant pluralism for its unified understanding is quite obvious.

In addition, the literature rightly emphasizes that the modern university has “integrated” into the social system in such a way that it is inextricably linked with the economy of its country and dependent on it, with the digital national ecosystem and other segments of social life (Barnett, 2020). It is impossible to determine the level of university achievements without looking at other ecosystems, understood in the broad sense of the word.

The accumulated contradictions in the concept of WCU can no longer be hushed up and hidden. It is clear that the consensus on this concept is broken. In this regard, it is legitimate to ask the question: what is the reason for this? What has caused it? And what should replace the old concept?

We will try to answer the questions posed.

Any concept that has a global sound implies a unified environment (market) and an intellectual consensus on the parameters that characterize it, which became possible due to the total globalization of all markets in the last 50 years. However, these very years were the years of uncontested US leadership in the global geopolitical system. At present, the cycle of accumulation covering the period of American hegemony is ending (Arrighi, 2006; Arrighi, 2009a; Arrighi, 2009b). In fact, the United States has lost its place as a world center of capital even today, but this place cannot yet

be fully occupied by China, which claims to be the new hegemon; no other country can do it either. Such a period, when the old center of capital has already ceased to exist, and the new center has not yet begun, is called the period of geopolitical turbulence or geopolitical inversion in the literature (Balatsky, 2014). During such periods, not only the geopolitical confrontation between different countries escalates, but also the previously established norms and standards collapse. The standards for leading universities are no exception to this rule.

As we said earlier, all WCU standards were somehow not only produced, but also “tested” by the West. It is not surprising that under these conditions, a completely natural monopoly of the West on the definition of WCU has arisen. The monopoly was supported, first of all, by the fact that information ecosystems in the form of international scientific databases (ISDB) were in the hands of the West. In addition to these information platforms, there were methods and algorithms of Western science for processing the information in their hands. A unique situation was created when universities of all countries of the world, claiming international recognition, had to get into the information space of the West in the form of ISDB first, and then work to improve their performance indicators defined by the West. At the beginning of the 21st century, these requirements were accepted by all countries, which contributed to the consolidation of the GUM and the strengthening of its qualitative homogeneity. In many ways, it was the openness and unification of all universities that was the goal of the rating movement. It took 20 years for the created GUM to start to falter, and the international university ranking system to crack.

The Americans themselves were the first to speak about the inconsistency of the WCU idea. For example, James Mittelman, a professor at the American University in Washington, points out in his book *Implausible Dream*, that the WCU concept is viable only for a wealthy minority of countries that can afford what is required to maintain such a status (Mittelman, 2018). At the same time, the complex hierarchy of universities, according to the author, is

determined precisely by globalization, which is always characterized by an unequal distribution of resources and opportunities (Filippov, 2019).

An event that could fundamentally upset the established equilibrium was required for the GUM’s full-scale collapse. This was Russia’s special military operation (SMO) in Ukraine. Russia’s political “démarche” violated the global interests of the West in the region. Firstly, Russia thus severed ties with the West at the level of power elites and regained political sovereignty, which was not completely available since 1991 to 2022; secondly, there was a threat of reintegration of the USSR’s former parts and the emergence of a powerful player in the international arena, thirdly, there appeared the ground for concluding new political alliances between Russia and other countries. The West’s reaction to the SMO was an economic blockade of the Russian Federation, including a ban on the export of its hydrocarbons, the import of Western technologies, as well as scientific ostracism, which implies a ban on the entry of Russian citizens and organizations into the global information space. As a consequence of these processes, Russia lost access to the ISDB, its universities were no longer included in the global rankings, and its national university system dropped out of the GUM.

However, among other things, the SMO showed many countries of the world that their university systems are clearly and deliberately underestimated by the West. For example, there are no WCUs in India, Pakistan and Iran, which does not fit well into the logic of technological development. Such an assessment system leads to the formation of a false prestige effect, when the scientific achievements of the United States and Europe are unduly overestimated. Moreover, the peak of globalization, which took place at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries, naturally increased the effect of the false prestige of the United States. For example, among the winners of the Nobel Prize in Economics in 1969–1999 almost 60% (59.5%) were the representatives of the United States, and in 2000–2022 these were almost 90% (88.9%). This effect manifested itself even in natural sciences, albeit much earlier and

on a smaller scale. Thus, in 1901–1949, only a third (32.1%) of the Nobel laureates in Physics were the representatives of the United States, in 1950–1999 these were more than half of them (56.6%), and in 2000–2022 there was a half of them already (50.0%). In 1901–1949, 17.9% of the Nobel laureates in Physiology and Medicine were the representatives of the United States, in 1950–1999 there were almost 2/3 (63.7%) of them, in 2000–2022 – still more than half (52.7%)<sup>3</sup>. Similarly, there is information in the public discourse that half of the world's countries have a GDP less than Harvard University's endowment. This almost instantly convinces people that modern WCUs are a corporate force in themselves comparable to the state<sup>4</sup>. At the same time, there is a logical distortion effect in the information: GDP is produced by the country in one year, while the endowment of Harvard University has been accumulating for almost 400 years, while this result is typical only for one of the richest universities in the world and at the peak of the power of the American state, which allowed Harvard to achieve such impressive results.

The main result of the SMO was the process of curtailing globalization, and in particular, GUM's disintegration. As new regional alliances began to form among countries, so did national university systems begin to close themselves off from external organizational models of development. It became clear that the only correct direction for the modernization of universities is their strongest connection with the national economy. Starting from this moment, we can say that the basis for the very understanding of the WCU has finally been lost. Opposition of such centers of power as Iran, Russia, China and India to the United States can no longer proceed on the basis of mutual openness of national scientific and university systems. In the context of geopolitical turbulence, a kind of competition between the technological sovereignties of the most powerful states is unfolding against the backdrop of a military confrontation between West and East. From this point on, there can be no question

of any consensus regarding the credibility of certain university rankings, therefore, the very basis for measuring the global effectiveness of educational organizations disappears.

It would not be wrong to say that global turbulence and the strengthening of the national political sovereignty of many countries are destroying two important globalist ideologemes or even mythologemes regarding universities: the first one is that any university is a special case of a corporation; the second one is that the university in its status is equivalent to the state and, therefore, acts itself as a state within a state. The falsity of the first ideologeme becomes obvious from the fact that any university, in addition to purely commercial tasks characteristic of corporations, also solves the problem of preserving academic traditions. It is the balance of these two tasks that constitutes the main feature of the university as an organization. The falsity of the second ideologeme became obvious after the SMO began, when all Russian universities were automatically excluded from the international scientific space just because they were located on the territory of the Russian state, regardless of their status and nature of activity.

### **Higher Class University vs World Class University**

Now let's consider the question of what should replace the concept of WCU. As soon as the world level has ceased to be an effective reference point, it must be replaced by something more operational and adequate to the current new conditions. Apparently, this can be the concept of a Higher Class University (HCL), which can be understood as a university that is as closely connected as possible with the high-tech sectors of the national economy through participation in research, production and experimental projects of the country's leading companies.

Paradoxical as it may seem, but such an understanding of an advanced university leads to an organizational revolution of the entire Russian system of higher education. The fact is

<sup>3</sup> The Nobel Prize. Available at: <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/economic-sciences/>

<sup>4</sup> Balatsky E.V. (2017). *University Endowments and Competitiveness of Russian Universities*. Moscow: Buki Vedi.

that Russian universities are focused primarily on teaching students, while practical activity is not the main one for them and, as a rule, causes rejection at all levels of staffing. On the contrary, the HCU model assumes a strict division of the educational process into levels – elementary, intermediate and advanced. Such a gradation suggests a different staffing strategy, when the initial training is provided by teachers having good pedagogical skills, but who are not professional researchers, the middle stage is provided by employees with solid research experience, and the advanced level is provided by employees of the universities' research departments and highly skilled staff from specialized organizations.

Thus, for the implementation of the HCU model, it is advisable to separate scientific and educational activities. Currently, both research structures of universities, for which research is the main type of work, and teaching staff, for which this type of work is an addition to their rather large main teaching load, are involved in the implementation of research work in Russian universities. In this regard, it is necessary to restructure research activities organization at universities fundamentally, when research departments are responsible for the implementation of research work, with the involvement of qualified scientific and pedagogical personnel if necessary. The organizational scheme of scientific activity should undergo a radical revision in this model. Thus, it is necessary to create coalitions with the customer (public authorities), which allow to establish clear interaction between the research departments of the university with government departments, ministries, etc., as a result these departments should receive specific tasks to perform. The work on the task should take place with constant interaction with the supervising structure, which eventually carries out the acceptance of the work. Unaddressed works cannot be adequately evaluated due to the lack of interested parties and, as a result, evaluation criteria. Of course, this does not mean that initiative research cannot or should not be carried out at Russian universities, but such

research will not be the dominant feature of HCU's scientific activities.

The evaluation of the effectiveness of the activities of universities' structural divisions also needs to be reviewed. It should be carried out mainly based on the results of the implementation and acceptance of research works and projects. The appeal of potential customers of scientific projects to the university management should launch an internal open procedure for selecting or creating a structural unit capable of performing the proposed work with high quality. When carrying out scientific projects, the concept of a temporary creative team should be abandoned, since such a concept contradicts the very existence of specialized scientific structural units. The involvement of employees from other departments should take place in the working order on the basis of the universities' internal procedures.

The scientometric approaches to assessing the effectiveness of science practiced in previous years can be preserved as auxiliary ones for obtaining more general information; on the whole, the achievements taken into account by these methods should be recognized as a surrogate or semi-finished product of real scientific work.

The HCU model suggests that these include universities participating in world-class projects that completely replace the more vague concept of WCU. World-class projects include projects that are either at the forefront of world science or help solving the country's large-scale technological issues. Of course, assigning a specific order to a world-class project can only be carried out on the basis of expert procedures.

### **Conclusion**

The conducted research allows us to state the scientific death of such an outwardly attractive concept as world-class university, and the rating movement closely related to it. The accumulated errors and contradictions in the methodology and practice of building the GURs and SURs, and on their basis the GUR Ratings, no longer allow them to be used either as reliable sources of information or as guidelines for different countries in order to understand

their weaknesses in building a higher education system. In 2022, the rankers' tendentiousness, among other things, also stumbled upon the aggravated geopolitical confrontation between different countries. Russia's SMO in Ukraine served as a detonator for the split of the global world and the formation of large geopolitical alliances, which in the foreseeable future will focus only on their own markers of development. Under these conditions, the concept of WCU should be replaced by something more efficient and modern.

One of the possible solutions to replace the euphemism of the WCU could be a more neutral term of Higher Class University. Then, a requirement to build a reasonable number of HCUs should become a global goal of re-

forming and improving the Russian system of higher education. However, this category implies a truly revolutionary increase in the practical orientation of national universities through their integration into the innovation and production cycles of the country's leading science-intensive companies. All other criteria: publicity, citation, universities' international openness, etc, can only serve as auxiliary and secondary indicators of university performance.

It is possible that in the future, when a new center of global capital and the country taking on the role of this center take shape, the global criteria and the concept of WCU together with them will regain their former meaning. However, for now it is too early to talk about this.

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