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National				Worldwide			
League		Multidimensional		League		Multidimensional	
Research only	Multifactorial	Research only	Multifactorial	Research only	Multifactorial	Research only	Multifactorial
	Perspektywy		CHE	ARWU	THE		U-Multirank
					QS	CWTS	

Choice of indicators^b

- Complex processes, but simple indicators
- Proxies or representative?
 - e.g. ARWU: education = alumni with a Nobel prize
- Size dependent: absolute or relative indicators?
 - e.g. staff: fte or headcounts?
- Quantity versus efficiency

Semantic description of indicators^b

- Lack of/poor semantic description of indicators
 - e.g. PhD student = student or researcher?
- Context-specific interpretation resulting in differences in data collection

Public databases (e.g. WoS, Scopus)

- International, scientific articles
- Other article types? Books? Non-English publications?
- Field-specific (dis)advantages

Universities

- In-depth data but often not objective
- Lack of proper control mechanisms on data
- Time-consuming

Surveys

- Up to 50% of total ranking score (e.g. QS)
- Response-rate often very low
- Reputation representative for:
 - Performance analysis
 - Quality

Transparency

- Is methodology adequately described?

Objectivity

- Often predefined choice of weights

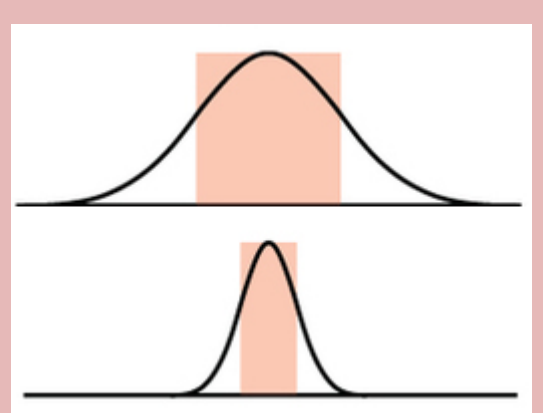
Poor description of methodology

- e.g. publications: whole or fractional counting?

Calculation of total ranking score^c

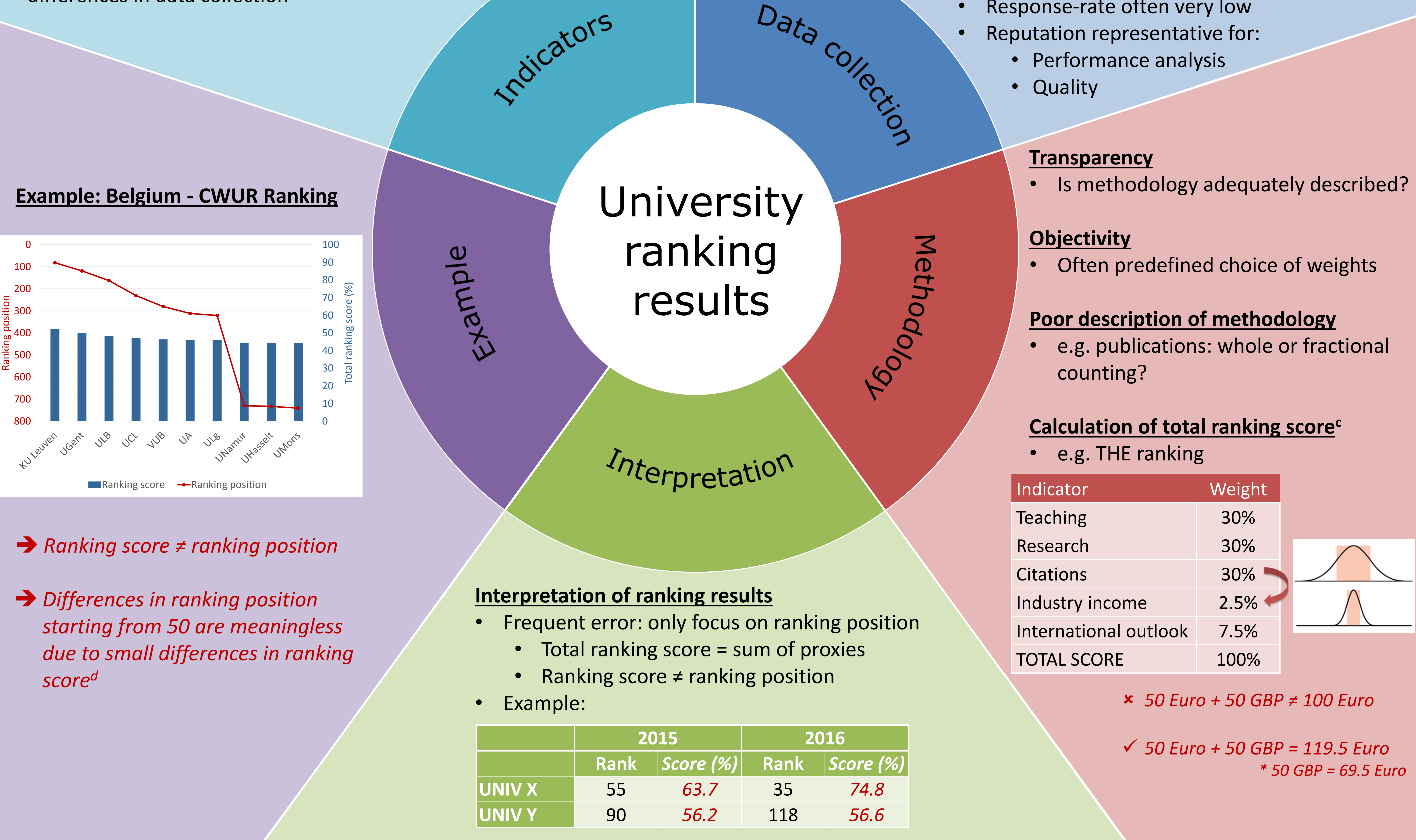
- e.g. THE ranking

Indicator	Weight
Teaching	30%
Research	30%
Citations	30%
Industry income	2.5%
International outlook	7.5%
TOTAL SCORE	100%

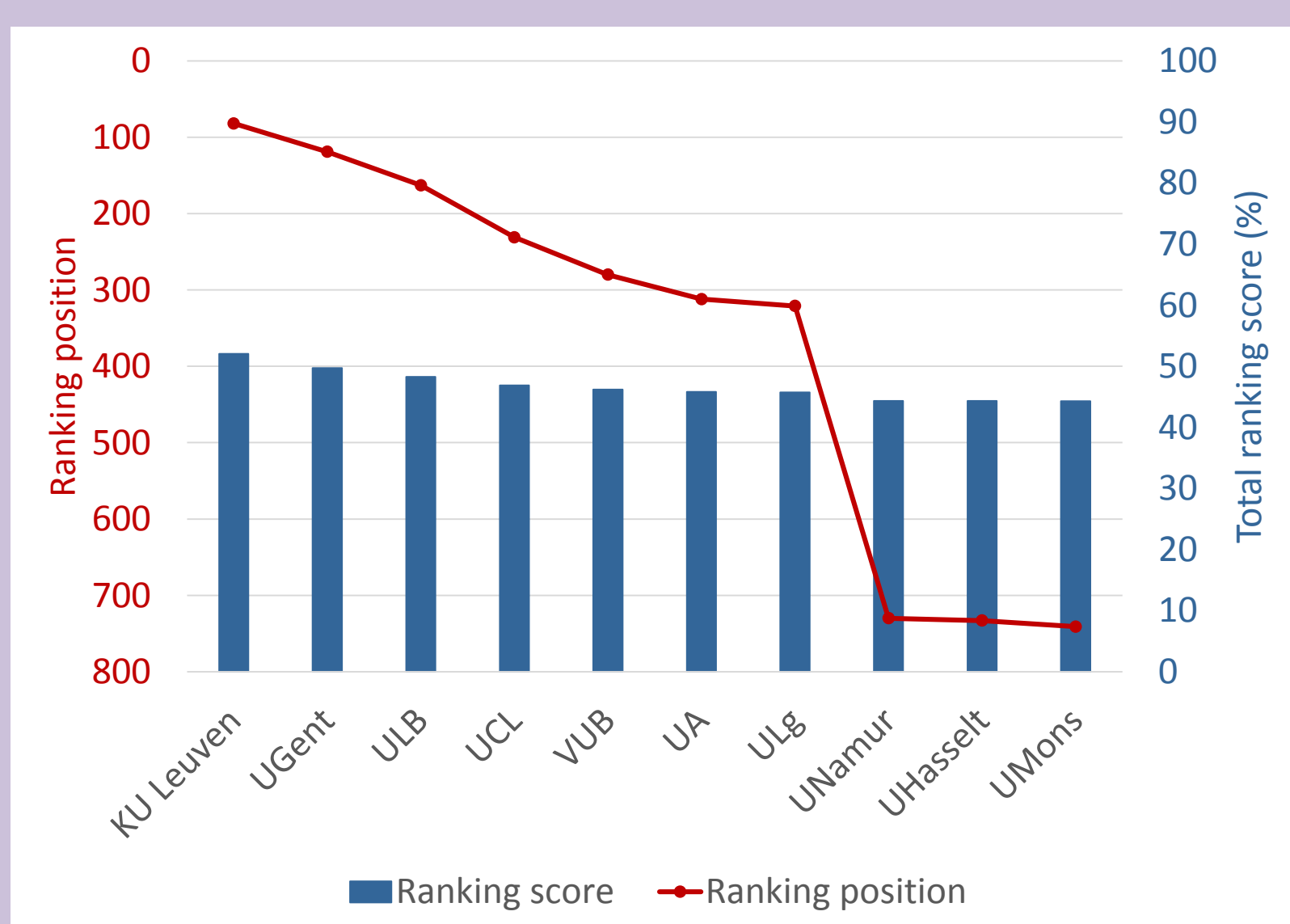


✗ 50 Euro + 50 GBP ≠ 100 Euro

✓ 50 Euro + 50 GBP = 119.5 Euro
* 50 GBP = 69.5 Euro



Example: Belgium - CWUR Ranking



➔ Ranking score ≠ ranking position

➔ Differences in ranking position starting from 50 are meaningless due to small differences in ranking score^d

Interpretation of ranking results

- Frequent error: only focus on ranking position
 - Total ranking score = sum of proxies
 - Ranking score ≠ ranking position
- Example:

	2015		2016	
	Rank	Score (%)	Rank	Score (%)
UNIV X	55	63.7	35	74.8
UNIV Y	90	56.2	118	56.6

Guidelines: How to interpret ranking results

- What are the objectives of the ranking?
- What is the target audience?
- Which indicators are used?
 - Do indicators take into account the context, mission, disciplines of a university?
 - To what extent are the indicators representative?
 - To what extent are the indicators objective?
- Are the indicators and the used methodology semantically described in full detail?
- How is the data collected and calculated?

References

^aPoelmans, H., Vancauwenbergh, S. (2016). Over interpretatie en misinterpretatie van universitaire rankings. *Tijdschrift voor onderwijsrecht en onderwijsbeleid*, 2-3, 146-154.

^bRauhvargers, A. (2013). 'EUA Report on Rankings 2013: Global University Rankings and Their Impact II', European University Association.

^cSoh, K. (2013). Misleading university rankings: cause and cure for discrepancies between nominal and attained weights, *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 35(2), 206-214.

^dSorz, J., Wallner, B., Seidler, H., Fieder, M. (2015). Inconsistent year-to-year fluctuations limit the conclusiveness of global higher education rankings for university management. *PeerJ* 3:e1217; DOI 10.7717/peerj.1217