SWOT ANALYSIS AND PUBLIC RELATIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION. CASE STUDY

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Abstract: In the last decades, higher education systems in Europe have been going through major transformation, influenced by national and international changes: fluctuation in the number of students, decrease in public financing, the growing importance of research and innovation in the global knowledge-based economy and a wider competition between institutions of higher education. The impact of the Bologna Process has become one of the key factors that triggered the change.

In the Romanian higher education system, the new trends recorded and globalization have caused major changes, too. These have imposed the universities to reposition themselves in the economic and social environment, to rethink the policy regarding the educational domain in such a way that there will be a correlation between the ever developing labor market and the types of qualifications provided by the higher education system.

In order to formulate strategies and directions for improvement of performances in the higher education system, the universities need to conduct complex analysis. These analysis aims to identify and resolve current and potential problems, as well as the trends which generate malfunctions in the future.

An effective method of strategic planning used in order to understand the strengths and weaknesses, as well as the threats and opportunities that the university comes in contact with is the SWOT Analysis. This is an important tool that any campaign run by the Public Relations department of a university should be based on, in order to improve the image and external perceptions on it.

Keywords: higher education, transformations, diagnostic analysis, SWOT Analysis, public relations

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analysis aims to identify and resolve current and potential problems, as well as the trends which generate malfunctions in the future.

1. „Petru Maior” University of Tîrgu-Mureș at the beginning of the millennium

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Over the years "Petru Maior" University of Tîrgu-Mureș had a complex evolution, marked by the events of the historical period that has crossed it and is defined as a university for the community, open to cultural pluralism on a philosophical plan, ideological and academical studies. As an institution of education and scientific research, it cultivates science, technology and culture values [11].

"Petru Maior" University of Tîrgu-Mureș through its programs, specialties and services aims to be an institution of national competitiveness, flexible and adaptable to changes in the socio-economic environment.

2. SWOT Analysis of the current state of the "Petru Maior" University of Tîrgu-Mureș

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The strategy of “Petru Maior” University of Tîrgu-Mureș must be built on a objective assessment of its current state in which to identify, detached and objective, skills and organizational capabilities, knowledge and actions that support the existence of the university, but also unfavorable aspects such as failures and weaknesses that obstruct change and
institutional development. An analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of “Petru Maior” University reveals the following:

A. Internal forces favorable to the development of a sustainable strategy

- The educational offer of “Petru Maior” University of Tîrgu-Mureș, adapted to the Mureș region and environment, is rational in content and form of specialization: bachelor, master, postgraduate, doctorate, frequency, part time learning [3] and distance learning [4] or continuous training systems.
- We completed the implementation of the ECTS credit transfer system across all curricula so that the students participating in ERASMUS mobility activities can benefit from the recognition of their activity in other European partner universities.
- By diversifying funding sources for education and research, "Petru Maior" University of Tîrgu-Mureș is making extra income by approximately 40% of total revenues.
- Further promoting national and international cooperation. Currently the "Petru Maior" University of Tîrgu-Mureș has over 80 cooperation agreements with universities in Europe, Asia, Africa and America.
- The existence of a mature management team, promoting responsible principles of autonomy, democracy, participation and accountability [2], seeking to streamline their teaching and research.
- The implemented administrative management is effective in supporting the teaching and research activities, on campus facilities being an argument in attracting within the university young people from other regions of Romania.
- University "Petru Maior" from Tîrgu-Mureș is an important Internet node being included among the five regional network nodes RoEduNet which serve academic institutions in Romania. Equipping the university with computers and communication is up to European standards, thus facilitating documentation and assimilation of new scientific knowledge.
- The university library contains books and up to date and valuable specialty magazines. It should be noted that full university courses of teachers from “Petru Maior” University can be found in books, lithographed lectures, CDs and educational websites available to students.
- Within the organizational structure of “Petru Maior” University were created specialized departments for international relations, public relations and a professional counseling
center with specific and pragmatic objective in relations with the internal, external and international environment [10].

▪ University promotes an ongoing and sustained policy in the selection, training and promotion of teachers.
▪ Students and student bodies are stimulated and ask specific social activities and academic management activities.

**B. Internal shortcomings (weaknesses) that should be the objectives for the university concerns**

▪ There is still failure in disseminating and receiving information thereupon the detection of the needs and priorities at all functional levels are hampered.
▪ At the level of the teaching staff there is still a reluctance in assuming responsibilities in research and other teaching related activities.
▪ The institution’s cultural organization is not clearly defined and the fundamental values have not been acquired properly.
▪ Specialty practice is an area that can be improved even if an organizational framework is properly implemented: practical guidance, tutoring, contracts with businesses [5].
▪ Some students of the “Petru Maior” University of Tîrgu-Mureş are demotivated, the causes of this condition can be intuited but are insufficiently investigated; this phenomenon must be analyzed and monitored properly.
▪ Students' knowledge assessment systems remain mostly in a classic shape based on quantitative accumulation especially during the examination session.

**C. Opportunities of the external environment which support the effort of the "Petru Maior" University of Târgu-Mureş to materialize their mission and goals**

▪ The economic environment in Mureş County is in full restructuring but with obvious trends to stabilize and develop so that the need for specialized education can be structured and forecasted, data which leads to a dynamic approach towards the higher education offer [8].
▪ "Petru Maior" University of Tîrgu-Mureş can become a pole of innovation and implementation of European experience in most areas such as social, economic and industrial.
An increased interest in continuing vocational education can be observed, a sector in which “Petru Maior” University of Tîrgu-Mureş will have to strengthen its formative structures and also its adult educational offer [9].

Numerous industrial and lucrative bodies are interested in establishing partnerships in education with the "Petru Maior" University of Tîrgu-Mureş, interest which may be evidenced by a favorable policy to ensure jobs for university graduates

There is a genuine demand for research contracts from the economic environment to which "Petru Maior" University of Tîrgu-Mureş must respond more promptly and malleable.

**D. Threats and demands which the external environment manifests upon the university strategy**

- The educational offer of some higher education private institutions from Tîrgu-Mureş identifies with “Petru Maior” University’s offer and because of this, future strategic development [7] must take in account the existence of competition in such fields as engineering, computer science, economics, law.
- The teaching methods have diversified and the tendency is to promote some formative methods alongside the professional cognitive training. These formative methods are meant to help the graduate integrate faster in the productive activities.
- Elaboration at ministerial level of some qualitative criteria that quantifies the financing of higher education.
- There is a danger that the educational message and the involvement of the university in the social life of the region may not be adequately perceived by the citizens and local or national bodies, either because typical university conservatism or educational marketing promoted by the university [6].
- Specific higher education legislation is still incomplete and unstable therefor there is a danger of destabilizing the university strategy on the educational level, academic curricula, payroll, extra budgetary funds etc.

**3. Conclusions**

University "Petru Maior" of Tîrgu-Mureş, a higher education institution accredited with the "high degree of confidence", promotes quality education and is committed to
contribute to society and to meet the training needs of all categories of citizens, respecting the rule of law and human rights.

REFERENCES


