

SWOT ANALYSIS ON INTERNATIONAL STUDENT MOBILITY AT VSB - TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY OF OSTRAVA

Andrea Samolejov¹ and Zdenek Toman²

Abstract - As the title outlines, the paper attempts to analyse and observe current strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats of essential element in international activities at VSB - Technical University of Ostrava (TUO)- student exchange and international student mobility from and to university at all. VSB - TU Ostrava, alike other universities, approaches international collaboration with necessary attention and respect. For the last eleven years of democratic conditions, Czech academic scene made a substantial step toward to building new linkages and contacts abroad and our university has been among the most active ones in this sense. But still, there are several aspects to be improved and student mobility is one of them. The paper therefore, uses the SWOT analysis to highlight both strengths and weaknesses and consecutively to expose opportunities and threats of student mobility at VSB - TU Ostrava because it is necessary to know all of them to take an appropriate action aiming to a further development of the international student mobility.

Index Terms - student mobility, international collaboration, SWOT analysis

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, globalization rules and affects happenings in each sector of modern society. As universities are expected to perform as a movement factor of development in each sense, they should head the process of globalization and international collaboration in the sense of convergence of scientific, research and educational activities behind borders.

Student mobility organized by universities guarantees a long-term and firm exchanges of knowledge and experiences on international level.

Main factors affecting a student mobility and actually, any university component, can be divided into two groups: **external and internal**.

The external factors are those which cannot be changed and improved by university itself, which simply have to be accepted. A university should adapt its acting to them.

Internal factors, unlike, are under university control and main subject to any intended modification and improvement towards university goals.

Factors affecting student mobility at VSB - TU Ostrava can be recognized and sorted through so called SWOT analysis although the analysis is rather made among companies or institutions for which a competition rules everything. Nevertheless, after the Velvet Revolution in 1989, after establishment of new Czech democratic republic, universities are forced to compete for students more with every year as curricula are so strictly same and mandatory as before, so students are choosing from many possibilities and universities are now financed by our Ministry of Education according to number of students.

SWOT ANALYSIS

SWOT Analysis is a very effective way of identifying Strengths and Weaknesses, and of examining the Opportunities and Threats any company or institution faces. Carrying out an analysis using the SWOT framework helps to focus its activities into areas where it is strong, and where the greatest opportunities lie.

To carry out a SWOT Analysis it is necessary to write down answers to the following questions. Where appropriate, it is possible to use similar questions:

Strengths:

- What are your advantages?
- What do you do well?
- What do other people see as your strengths?

It should be considered from author's point of view and from the point of view of the people he deals with. Being modest is not recommended - jus being realistic. If the authors has any difficulty with this, he should try writing down a list of all characteristics. Some of those will be strengths for sure.

Weaknesses:

- What could you improve?
- What do you do badly?
- What should you avoid?

Again, author considers these from an internal and external basis - do other people seem to perceive

¹ Andrea Samolejova, VSB - Technical University of Ostrava, Dept. of International Affairs, 17. listopadu 15, 708 33, Ostrava-Poruba, Czech Republic, andrea.samolejova@vsb.cz

² Zdenek Toman, VSB - Technical University of Ostrava, Vice-dean at Faculty of Metallurgy and Material Engineering, 17. listopadu 15, 708 33, Ostrava-Poruba, Czech Republic, zdenek.toman@vsb.cz

weaknesses that you do not see? Are competitors doing any better? It is best to be realistic now, and face any unpleasant truths as soon as possible.

Opportunities:

- Where are the good opportunities facing you?
- What are the interesting trends you are aware of?

Useful opportunities can come from such things as:

- Changes in technology and markets on both a broad and narrow scale
- Changes in government policy related to your field

Threats:

- What obstacles do you face?
- What is your competition doing?
- Are the required specifications for your job, products or services changing?
- Is changing technology threatening your position?
- Do you have bad debt or cash-flow problems?

Carrying out this analysis will often be illuminating - both in terms of pointing out what needs to be done, and in putting problems into perspective.

Author of an analysis can also apply SWOT analysis to his competitors - this may produce some interesting insights.

All the questions above are applicable to companies aiming to profit rather than to institutions of non-profit sector. But still... why not to apply it also to a university?

VSB – TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY OF OSTRAVA

The TUO is the fourth biggest Czech university. Nearly fifteen thousand students both at pregradual and postgradual study programmes visit its six faculties. The university has a privileged position in the Czech Republic due to some technical disciplines taught only there and due to its long history and tradition. Unfortunately, interest of students in such traditional branches as metallurgy, mining and geology in which TUO has this advantage has been decreasing for already several years.

Since Czech universities are financed by Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports according to numbers of their students, universities are forced to compete with others as for an attractiveness of its programmes, actually, one could say that an attractiveness at all.

There are many university activities to be considered as a criterion of an attractiveness for new students thinking of a university for further educating. Let's mention only few of them: attractiveness of study programmes, success of its graduates in labour market, location of the university and an opportunity of a short study stay abroad. The last one is basically reflected in a

level of student mobility and exchanges. Many students are checking an availability of such stays before submitting their applications to the university. And in today world of no borders especially for educated and qualified people are graduates with good knowledge of foreign language and with experiences abroad preferred to those without such experiences.

STRENGTHS OF STUDENT MOBILITY AT TUO

Trying to discover and highlight strong factors of student mobility at TUO we may attempt to answer clearly the questions above and to highlight the most important factors:

What are your advantages? What do you do well?

- We have experienced a remarkable boom of new cooperation with universities in developed and other countries in the last 10 years. Today, we have mutual agreements with more than 100 universities from Germany, Austria, the United States, Finland, Poland, United Kingdom, Taiwan and so on.
- We have signed for so called Bologna Declaration which aims toward one and only three-level system of higher education.
- We are deeply involved in programmes of European Union supporting international student mobility such as SOCRATES/ERASMUS, LEONARDO da VINCI, TEMPUS and also in other programmes: Ceepus, Aktion and so on.
- We react to each opportunity and offer by our Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports which could support the mobility. In the last two years we have applied and got finances from a new programme: Student mobility, which enabled more than 30 students to spend about 3-6 months at foreign university we have cooperated with.
- Within few last years, our university campus has turned to the most attractive one in the Czech Republic. Everything – halls of residence, university canteen, 3 sport halls (one is brand new with 3 tennis courts...) and lecture rooms - is situated in one place apart of city centre but still accessible by all mean of transportation (about 20 minutes from city centre, train station and so on). Also university buildings were completely renovated and the whole campus looks like a very modern and attractive complex now.

WEAKNESSES OF STUDENT MOBILITY AT TUO

Let's mention weak sites of student mobility at TUO by answering to some of the questions:

What could you improve? What do you do badly? What should you avoid?

- There is no doubt, that without wider offer of study programmes taught in English we can attract some international students. In past, in time of communistic Czechoslovakia, we have had foreign graduates but 99 percent of them had studied fully in Czech language. They were student from China, Korea, Vietnam and other Asian and African developing countries who studied Czech language in our country at first and later were able to study for a degree at our universities. But those times are gone and we cannot afford to pay for their education anymore. We need to open courses in English, but most of our faculty do not speak English good enough to do so. And as they are mostly above 50 they are not even willing to begin with studying of either English or German language.
- Due to very low entry salaries, we have lack of young, educated and dynamic people – meant teachers - who could flexibly respond to requests and interests of international students, and first of all whose knowledge of a foreign language is much higher than of the older teachers. This factor causes that we have only very few study programmes in English and so foreign students are not willing to come and study at TUO. Therefore, mutual agreements usually „die“ after few years because student exchanges work only the way from us to abroad.
- City of Ostrava is not very popular city among young people due to its long distance from Prague and Brno – cities with „richer„ labour markets, its low salaries and wrong label of a city with strong pollution. Ostrava has been an industrial town with the largest metallurgical plants and many mines in the last 50 years, but during the last 10 years it has changed dramatically for better. Still, people remember it like city of pollution and it is being changed only slowly.

OPPORTUNITIES OF STUDENT MOBILITY AT TUO

Opportunities appear if we think of our strengths and of weaknesses of other universities competing with us.

Where are the good opportunities facing you? What are the interesting trends you are aware of?

- The strong international collaboration and good relationships with our partner universities should be maintained and developed also in future. We should keep and treasure fruitful partners and if possible extend a frame of such cooperation.

- On the other site, we should find agreements which have expired or are not working and deal and face reasons for it.
- Ph.D. graduates should be motivated and attracted to stay at university both by a promise of appropriate salary and by promise of carer growth.

THREATS OF STUDENT MOBILITY AT TUO

In fact, there are not many serious threats within student mobility at TUO except that we could lose the agreements and cooperation we gained during the boom after opening borders to post communistic countries. We could lose our good name if we do not get on the „train“ soon. It has been already 12 years from the upheaval of policy which is plenty of time for taking necessary steps. I am afraid that we could have done more in the field of creating a curricula in English.

Several Czech universities are doing much better in the field of student mobility. But it is hard to compete Charles University or any Prague university knowing it is a city of foreigners and tourist and historical beauties.

CONCLUSIONS

Student international mobility belongs among factors that create quality level of a university in eyes of undergraduates who are deciding about university for their further education.

TUO realizes the fact and has been doing some steps toward development of the mobility but this is not enough. This simple compiled SWOT analysis enables TUO university management to maintain and develop strengths, to find weaknesses and take some measures to reduce them. The highlighting of the strengths and the weaknesses gives a chance to describe opportunities, as advantages that can be better used and deepened and weak sites which could be improved by some measures and this way considered as opportunities. On the other hand, there are some threats, which can be deduced also from weaknesses, for example: low salaries at TUO (and any university in fact, compared with salaries private sector) can cause that young teachers would leave for better money and so courses in foreign language would disappear soon too... no foreign students would be coming to TUO... and partner universities would prefer cooperation with other universities which can offer more...our students would lose a chance to study abroad....

However, it is necessary to do something for improvement instead of seeing just negatives. TUO has been paying strong attention to international student mobility and will be also in future.