

THE SWOT ANALYSIS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PETROSANI IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC

CODRUTA DURA, IMOLA DRIGĂ *

ABSTRACT: *The paper performs a SWOT analysis during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis regarding the University of Petroșani - a comprehensive higher education centre from Hunedoara County. Among the main strengths uncovered we mention the following: the prominent international dimension of the University, its involvement within the EURECA-PRO Alliance in creating a Virtual European University in the field of responsible production and consumption together with other European higher education institutions; the quality of the didactic staff; the students' entrepreneurial competences and their involvement in activities regarding the implementation of various projects; the quality of the infrastructure supporting the educational and research activities etc. The weaknesses refer mainly to: incomplete education cycle for several domains; the small number of assistant professors; the drop-out phenomenon affecting the undergraduate students; the lack of admission procedures in order to facilitate the disabled candidates' access to higher education; the decreasing trend in the number of ISI indexed articles published by the academic staff etc. The opportunities revealed from the external environment make reference to the level of importance conferred to the education system in the context of the Europe 2020 Strategy; the fast-paced assimilation of the online teaching methods among the didactic staff during the COVID-19 crisis; the possibilities of accessing European funds to fight the phenomena of social exclusion and inequitable access to the education system; the University's traditional involvement in the development of international cooperation in the traditional field of mineral resources etc. Finally, the main threats put forward by our analysis have to do with the low levels of Government financing for higher education and research activities; the lack of interest in an academic career displayed by valuable young people; the unfavourable demographic trend which entailed the decline in the number of candidates for admission to Bachelor's and Master's degree programs; the shrinking of recruitment area for the future students; the low levels of financial potential for the companies operating in the region etc.*

KEY WORDS: *SWOT analysis, University of Petroșani, didactic staff, research activity, strategic plan.*

JEL CLASSIFICATIONS: *I23, M20.*

* Assoc. Prof., Ph.D., University of Petroșani, Romania, codrutadura@upet.ro
Assoc. Prof., Ph.D., University of Petroșani, Romania, imola.driga@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

The University of Petroșani currently represents a comprehensive higher education centre in Hunedoara County, with a significant educational and scientific role at the national level, as well as an intellectual pole capable of maintaining the Jiu Valley among the major academic towns in Romania (www.cjhunedoara.ro).

The recent years have represented for the University of Petroșani a stage of institutional and financial maturation and consolidation, accompanied by a series of successful initiatives regarding the onset and implementation of processes and activities characteristic of higher education institutions directed towards performance (Compagnucci & Sprigarelli, 2020; Dinescu, 2021). Among the most important qualitative increases recorded in recent years, we wish to highlight the following (University of Petroșani, 2021a, 2021b):

- *The internationalization of the University of Petroșani* through the development of actions aimed to support academic progress, to facilitate the interest of foreign students and to initiate/consolidate cooperation with academic and research institutions which have enabled the exchange and implementation of good practices in the field of didactic and research activities. Important achievements in this area reveal the development of the education and training activities within the Erasmus+ program, the opportunities taken by the students and didactic staff to unfold mobilities in the universities and the institutions of EU and non-EU states, the involvement in the organization of prestigious scientific events etc. Recently, the University of Petroșani has joined the European academic elite, as one of the winners of the competition unfolded in 2020 within the “European Universities” program. Along with other prestigious higher education institutions in the country, the University of Petroșani – from this moment on, part of the European university consortium EURECA-PRO – will direct its future actions towards the increase in quality, inclusion, digitalization and attractiveness of European and Romanian higher education system (www.mkor.ro);

- *The improvement of the university curricula through the development of new undergraduate programs and university extensions* - in Deva, Hunedoara and Horezu respectively - the offer regarding Master’s degree programs and postgraduate courses adapted to the requirements of the labour market and the human resource of the university;

- *The strengthening of the applicability of study programs* through the development of students’ entrepreneurial competences, partnerships with business organizations, the implementation of multidisciplinary projects and practical training systems for students (Ratten, 2020). Also, this development strategy has been supported in terms of funds, logistics and human resources by winning a series of contests for structural funds granted by the POCU program: EU - *Entrepreneur – Increasing the participation of students from vulnerable groups in Bachelor’s degree programs through entrepreneurial innovation*; DYNAMIC – *Optimizing the study offer in the tertiary university system and non-university technical education system to support the employment of disfavoured persons*; Education – *a Chance for the Jiu Valley*, respectively SMART 2020 – *Multidisciplinary system of practical training*;

- *The improvement of the scientific research performance of the didactic staff at the University of Petroșani*, particularly by involvement in the European research networks (within the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation - Horizon 2020); the enhancement of the visibility and impact of the conducted research on the international scientific community. Due to these substantial efforts, the University of Petroșani has been included, for the first time in 2019, in the *Scimago Institutions Ranking* (Data source: SCOPUS), taking the 35th position among all the higher education, research and development institutions in Romania and the 858th position within the international hierarchy, out of 6,459 ranked institutions.

Against this background, the present paper performs a SWOT analysis of the University, during the COVID-19 pandemic - the challenging phenomenon that drove probably the most fast-paced transformation of the educational system in the human history (Obrad, 2020; Obrad & Circa, 2021).

Both scholars and specialists have recognized the SWOT analysis as a strategic management tool which can be successfully applied in order to examine organizations' circumstances and, consequently, to draw up its future strategies (Leiber, et al., 2018). The SWOT acronym denotes Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats; such constituents usually yield from a management diagnostic which highlights a series of internal and external determinants that have a significant impact upon an organization and its performance (Amugenyi, et al., 2019). *Strengths* stand for the internal capacities as well as auspicious attributes which enable the educational institution to achieve its objectives and to proficiently satisfy its clients. At the other pole, *weaknesses* symbolize impediments from the internal environment which potentially decrease organizational efficiency. Hence, both the above mentioned elements fall into the category of internal factors which affect the overall level of performances. *Opportunities* denote components which can fully contribute to the process of harnessing the institution benefits with regard to other establishments from outside. *Threats* address adverse circumstances which are able to obstruct or to delay the fulfilment the institution purposes (Thamrin, H.; Pamungkas, 2017; Vitan, 2017). Therefore, threats and opportunities are judged as external factors which affect the organizational development (Figure 1).

In order to draw up an efficient strategic plan, the decision makers will focus on boosting the strengths from the internal environment while dismantling the weak points revealed by the SWOT analysis. In respect with the external factors, the emphasis will lay on making full use of the opportunities simultaneously as removing or minimizing the threats (Fahim, et al., 2021).

Although this strategic management tool originated in the business management domain, we are witnessing nowadays a considerable widening of SWOT framework applications in various fields such as public health organizations, educational entities, marketing and social media institutions, renewable energy policies etc. (Bejan, et al., 2018; Vlados, 2019).

The reminder of the paper is organized as follows. Significant data regarding the teaching staff, the research activity, the students and the opening of the University of Petroșani towards national and international cooperation are presented in Section 2-4. Section 5 carries out the SWOT analysis of the University of Petroșani during the

COVID crisis, highlighting the main strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that seems to affect its medium and long term plans. Finally, section 6 concludes.

| | | |
|------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| | Helpful in achieving organization's objective | Harmful in achieving organization's objective |
| Internal Factors | Strengths | Weaknesses |
| External Factors | Opportunities | Threats |

Figure 1. The SWOT Analysis Framework

2. THE TEACHING STAFF

The undergraduate and Master's degree programs and the postgraduate courses are unfolded by a **teaching staff** which includes: **142** members with their main teaching load at the University, **10** members with fixed-term labour contract (Table 1), and **63** associated members, of which 11 are coordinators of doctoral theses who do not have their main teaching load within the University (University of Petroșani, 2021a).

Table 1. Dynamics of the academic staff involved in the undergraduate and Master studies programs

| Academic year | Total positions | Of which: | | | Professors | | | Associate Professors | | | Lecturers | | | Assistant Professors | | | Teaching Assistants | | |
|---------------|-----------------|-----------|-----|-----|------------|---|----|----------------------|---|----|-----------|-----|-----|----------------------|----|----|---------------------|---|---|
| | | O | V | T | O | V | T | O | V | T | O | V | T | O | V | T | O | V | T |
| 2015-2016 | 283 | 158 | 125 | 283 | 22 | 4 | 26 | 55 | 1 | 56 | 65 | 114 | 179 | 15 | 16 | 21 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 2016-2017 | 259 | 152 | 107 | 259 | 18 | 2 | 20 | 54 | 1 | 55 | 70 | 96 | 166 | 9 | 8 | 17 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2017-2018 | 243 | 145 | 98 | 243 | 18 | 1 | 19 | 51 | 4 | 55 | 68 | 85 | 153 | 8 | 8 | 16 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2018-2019 | 249 | 144 | 105 | 249 | 19 | 0 | 19 | 52 | 2 | 54 | 71 | 98 | 169 | 2 | 5 | 7 | - | - | - |
| 2019-2020 | 292 | 138 | 154 | 292 | 18 | 2 | 20 | 50 | 5 | 55 | 66 | 125 | 191 | 4 | 22 | 26 | - | - | - |
| 2020-2021 | 289 | 142 | 147 | 289 | 17 | | 17 | 50 | 5 | 55 | 65 | 136 | 201 | 10 | 6 | 16 | - | - | - |

Every academic year, the University of Petroșani establishes the number of the members of the teaching staff needed in order to carry out the didactic process through the elaboration of the *Teaching Positions Chart*; it also offers vacant teaching positions to be occupied through competition with a view to promoting its own teaching staff and attracting highly competitive graduates. All the jobs to be occupied meet the legal stipulations in force; the competition is organized according to the stipulations of the

Regulation regarding the occupation of didactic jobs through competition in the University of Petroșani.

Titular members display the initial professional training and competences in the taught subjects. For each study program, the titular staff fulfil at least one of the following criteria: they have Bachelor degrees in the field of the taught subjects; they coordinate doctoral theses in the field of the taught subjects; the topic of their doctoral theses is included in the field of the taught subjects; they can attest a high number of valuable publications in the last five years on the topics of the taught subjects.

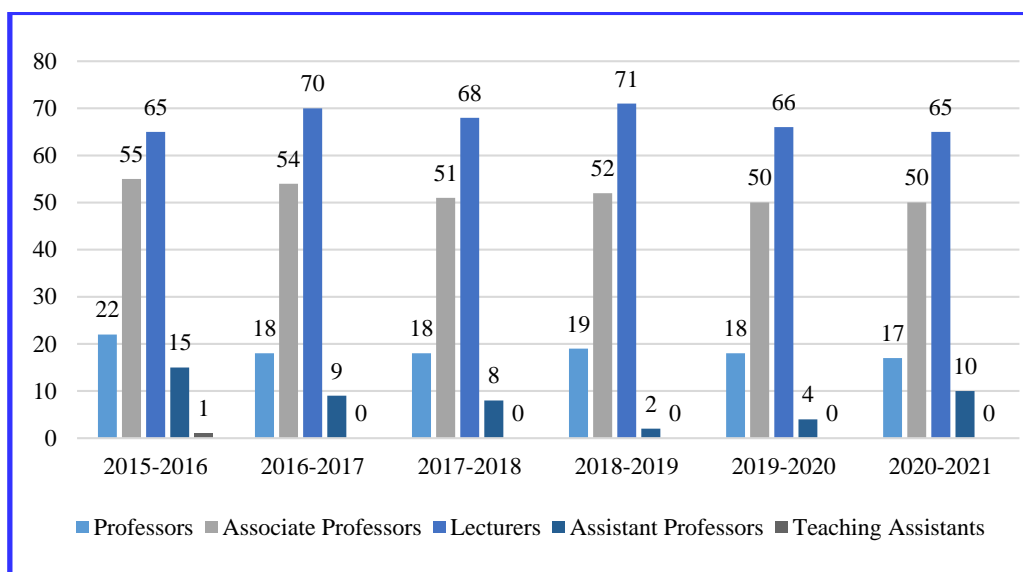


Figure 2. Dynamics of the academic staff involved in undergraduate and master studies programs between 2015-2021

The members of the teaching staff have elaborated courses and other didactic material for the students' use; these materials have been published at CNCS acknowledged publishing houses or are electronically distributed to the Bachelor and Masters' students, an important support in this sense being the *Academis* e-Learning platform.

3. THE RESEARCH ACTIVITY

An essential component of the academic activity at the University of Petroșani is represented by *scientific research*. The research organizational framework includes the departments and the research centres that are part of the university structure. The strategic coordination of the activities in this field is the responsibility of the vice – Rector in charge with scientific research, *The Department of Research, Development and Innovation Management* (DMCDI), and of the specialized commissions on the level of the Senate and the Faculty Boards.

Table 2 displays the inventory of the scientific research activity unfolded at the University of Petroșani between 2016-2020 (University of Petroșani, 2021a).

Table 2. The dynamics of the scientific results obtained within the University of Petroșani between 2016-2020

| No. | Results of the didactic activity and scientific research | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| 1 | Chapters published by international publishing houses (no. of titles) | 5 | 7 | 4 | 5 | 7 |
| 2 | Books published by national publishing houses (no. of titles) | 63 | 34 | 50 | 51 | 49 |
| 3 | Books published by international publishing houses (no. of titles) | 1 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 4 |
| 4 | Chapters published by national publishing houses (no. of titles) | 8 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 1 |
| 5 | Articles published in journals (ISI/ Clarivate Analytics Red, Yellow, White or ISI/ Clarivate Analytics Arts&Humanities, ISI/ Clarivate Analytics Emerging Sources Citation Index o ERIH+ (no. of articles)*** | 15 | 46 | 24 | 62 | 35 |
| 6 | Research papers presented at conferences with ISI indexation: ISI/ Clarivate Analytics Proceedings or IEEE Proceedings (no. of papers)*** | 38 | 81 | 57 | 32 | 16 |
| 7 | Articles published by journals with BDI indexation (no. of articles) | 152 | 119 | 112 | 109 | 120 |
| 8 | Research papers presented at conferences with BDI indexation (no. of papers) | 10 | 19 | 10 | 40 | 39 |
| 9 | Grants, scientific research contracts obtained in international competitions (no. of grants, total value in euros) | 1/ 350000 | 3/ 366470 | 1/ 15400 | 3/ 827158 | 4 / 960093 |
| 10 | Grants, scientific research contracts obtained in national competitions (no. of grants, total value in RON) | 2/ 173352 | 5/ 6225952 | 7/ 6027069 | 8/ 1480475 5 | 15 / 37.768.9 85 |
| 11 | Research/consultancy contracts etc. with economic partners, companies etc. (no. of contracts, total value in RON) | 46/ 505696 | 10/ 659381 | 19/ 652439 | 34/ 755580 | 25 / 722.690 |
| 12 | National and international patents | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 0 |

There is a tendency to increase the funds obtained for research, as well as higher national and international visibility. Also, between 2016-2021, the University of Petroșani has constantly participated in national and international competitions which provide financing from various sources: The HORIZON 2020 Competition; The university grants strategy unfolded within the Project for Secondary Education - ROSE; the Operational Program for Human Capital 2014-2020; The Institutional Development Fund directed towards state universities (FDI) etc. (University of Petroșani, 2021b).

3. THE STUDENTS

The dynamics of the number of students enrolled in the undergraduate programs of the University of Petroșani since the academic year 2015-2016 is presented in Table 3 (University of Petroșani, 2021a).

Table 3. Dynamics of the number of undergraduate students, Master’s degree students and doctoral students between 2015-2020

| Academic year | Undergraduate students | | Master’s degree students | | Total number of undergraduate and Master’s degree students | | | Doctoral students |
|---------------|------------------------|------------|--------------------------|------------|------------------------------------------------------------|------------|-------|-------------------|
| | State funded | On tuition | State funded | On tuition | State funded | On tuition | Total | |
| 2015-2016 | 2006 | 366 | 431 | 367 | 2437 | 733 | 3170 | 150 |
| 2016-2017 | 1905 | 350 | 438 | 295 | 2343 | 645 | 2988 | 157 |
| 2017-2018 | 1926 | 407 | 428 | 264 | 2354 | 671 | 3025 | 162 |
| 2018-2019 | 2043 | 337 | 477 | 306 | 2520 | 643 | 3163 | 170 |
| 2019-2020 | 2171 | 361 | 520 | 352 | 2691 | 713 | 3404 | 148 |
| 2020-2021 | 2191 | 501 | 518 | 382 | 2709 | 883 | 3592 | 162 |

Due to the demographic decline, the decrease in the number of high school graduates and the offer of competing universities, the opportunities of selection of future undergraduate and master degree students have diminished, and the University of Petroșani displays for all the study programs during the academic year 2020-2021, a number of 3,754 undergraduate students, master’s degree students and doctoral students.

Of the total of 3,754 students, 294 (almost 8%) are foreign students, the majority from the Republic of Moldavia, but also from other countries: Turkmenistan, Israel, Palestine, Syria, Cameroon, France, Australia, Austria, U.S.A., Nigeria, Bangladesh.

This number is enhanced by 365 students and participants in the postgraduate professional development programs, reconversion programs, the students enrolled in the psycho-pedagogical programs and the teachers in the pre-university system registered for didactic degrees at the University of Petroșani.

During the academic year 2020-2021, as a consequence of the non-EU young persons’ growing interest in the study programs provided by the University of Petroșani, a new program emerged within the Faculty of Science, *Preparatory Course of Romanian for Foreign Students* – aimed at teaching Romanian to the foreign students who wish to attend university courses in the Romanian language.

The statistical data regarding undergraduate and Master’s degree students between 2015-2020 illustrates the high adaptability and flexibility of the University of Petroșani to revise the offer of study programmes according to the preferences expressed by the candidates before the entrance exam: a part of the undergraduate and master degree programs have been gradually suspended due to the decreasing number of candidates (e.g.: *Economic Engineering for Construction Work* – The Faculty of Mines, undergraduate studies; *Instrumentation and Data Acquisition* – The Faculty of Mechanical and Electrical Engineering, undergraduate studies; *Didactic Mathematics* –

The Faculty of Sciences, master degree studies); new study programs have been introduced in the fields which display a visibly growing demand (e.g.: *Public Administration* in Deva, The Faculty of Sciences, undergraduate program; *Electromechanics* in Horezu – The Faculty of Mechanical and Electrical Engineering, undergraduate studies; *Public Administration and Community Development* – The Faculty of Science, master degree studies). A positive tendency can be noted in the increase of the number of students enrolled in undergraduate and master degree programs at the University of Petroșani between the academic years 2018-2019, and 2019-2020 respectively, despite the unprecedented fluctuations caused by the outburst of the COVID-19 pandemic (University of Petroșani, 2021a).

There are three student organizations at the University of Petroșani – *The University of Petroșani Students' League*, *The University of Petroșani Students' Union* and *The Bessarabian Students' Association*. The university management team cooperates with students in order to adopt decisions which involve the following: their didactic and scientific activity; the organization and operation of dormitories and other services for students; the promotion of the University and similar activities; the student representatives are active participants in all management structures of the faculties and the university. The students' rights and responsibilities as members of the academic community are stipulated in the Code of students' rights and responsibilities, elaborated and approved by the University Senate.

4. THE OPENING OF THE UNIVERISTY OF PETROȘANI TOWARDS NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

The last years determined fundamental changes in the approach to the University - outer environment relation. Continuous learning represents a valid alternative of using the competences and resources within the academic space; on the other hand, applied research meant to find solutions to the real issues of the economic environment represents the direct way to exploit scientific research. Opening collaboration based on agreements and contracts with national and international companies is done through the implementation of complex training and research activities (University of Petroșani, 2021a):

- The development of training activities through postgraduate continuous training and professional development courses, postgraduate courses of professional conversion, organized according to the needs of the companies, public institutions and the quality of the didactic process;
- Development of students practical training programs within organizations, both in companies (S.C. Energy Holding Hunedoara S.A., Mining Division Petroșani, INCD INSEMEX Petroșani, S.C. Termofication S.A. Petroșani, Transilvania Bank, BRD-Groupe Société Générale, Bancpost S.A., Petroșani City Hall, HAPPY TRAVEL SOLUTIONS S.R.L. Petroșani etc.), and in non-profit institutions and organizations (Policino House Petroșani, “Caritas” and “Save the Children!” Organizations, Reach Association);

- Development of joint projects, in cooperation with companies and public institutions, in the framework of undergraduate, master and doctoral works and thesis;
- Involvement in the advancement of POCU grants aimed at supporting the integration of University graduates and other socio-professional groups on the labour market: “EU - Entrepreneur – Increasing the participation of students from vulnerable groups in the Bachelor programs through entrepreneurial innovation; DYNAMIC – Optimizing the study offer in the tertiary university system and non-university technical education system to support the employment of disfavoured persons; “Education – A Chance for the Jiu Valley”, “SMART 2020 – Multidisciplinary system of practical training;
- Organizing meetings with employers in Hunedoara County in order to correlate their exigencies with the structure and requirements of skills acquired through completion of undergraduate and graduate university study programs; (events like “Entrepreneurship in mountain tourism”, “BT – a Bank for the Future”; European Policies for Students, Entrepreneurs and Researchers” etc.).

In order to integrate the University of Petroșani in the European Higher Education Area, it was targeted the compatibility of study programs with the similar ones from European universities, initiating and developing relationships with many universities in the country and abroad and/or international bodies, consequently reaching to partnership conventions and protocols with a number of over 100 foreign universities.

Also, the University of Petroșani has always displayed an active presence on the map of higher education institutions which were involved in international programs facilitating students’ mobility to foreign universities through scholarships or practical training. The statistical data available shows an ascending dynamic of the Erasmus+ mobilities for students and the didactic/non-didactic staff, displaying a significantly higher number of *outgoing mobilities* as compared to the *incoming mobilities*. On the other hand, 456 outgoing mobilities for students and 50 mobilities for the staff members show participants’ growing interest in acquiring valuable professional experience in the international environment. Also, by translating the entire curriculum into English and publishing it on the official site of the university, we aim to attract even more incoming students. Between 2016-2020, the number of *incoming* mobilities shows an increasing trend, attested by the presence of incoming students in our campus from higher education institutions based in Poland, Spain and Turkey.

In May 2020, the Erasmus+ Office applied for the acquisition of the new ECHE Charter for the Erasmus+ 2021-2027 program and obtained at the end of 2020 the accreditation to unfold the program in the following period, a sine qua non condition for the organizing mobilities. To intensify and develop institutional internationalization – a strategic objective of the University of Petroșani – the Erasmus+ Office applied for the first time in 2020 for the financing of mobilities with partner countries of the Erasmus program which are not part of the European space (the Erasmus K107 component). Consequently, there are 58 inter-institutional agreements with Erasmus partner universities, including those from states recently included in the K107 program: Albania, India, Egypt, Ukraine, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo and the Republic of Moldavia.

The forte of the internationalization strategy of the University of Petroșani in the following years is directed towards maintaining the funding for the EURECA-PRO consortium which consists of 7 European universities and 24 associated partners from Austria, Germany, Greece, Spain and Poland. Also, as an additional measure which enables the effective operation of this consortium, the University of Petroșani has contributed to the acquisition of funds for the implementation of a new Horizon 2020 project (named RE-EURECA-PRO), aiming at the development of specific cooperation activities between the 7 partner universities.

5. THE SWOT ANALYSIS

Over the past few years, higher education domain underwent impressive technological, organizational and financial transformations. The main factors that triggered such dynamics refer to the globalization trends, the spectacular progresses in IT&C and e-Learning tools and the mechanisms of accessing governmental resources which brought about various new issues to be solved by the decision makers in higher education institutions (Benzaghta, et al., 2021). Subsequently, the SWOT analyses became used on a large scale in order to substantiate the strategic planning process (Stancu, 2018; Ardelean, et al., 2015).

Under these circumstances, we have summarized, in the content of table 4, the main pillars of the SWOT analysis performed within the University of Petroșani, by taking into consideration the managerial diagnosis carried out employing the data presented in section 2-4.

Table 4. The SWOT Analysis of the University of Petroșani (2020)

| Strengths | Weaknesses |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ The major role played by the University of Petroșani, as the most important education institution in the Jiu Valley and Hunedoara county, in the social, economic, cultural and institutional development of the region; ✦ The prominent international dimension of the University, due to intense mobility programs, respectively, substantial grants and research-and-development programs unfolded with external partners in the past years (2016-2020); ✦ The participation, within the EURECA-PRO Alliance, in creating a Virtual European University in the field of responsible production and consumption with other prestigious higher education institutions in Europe - Montanuniversitaet Leoben (Austria), Freiberg University of Mining and Technology (Germany), | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ The existence of several specializations which do not have a complete education cycle (Bachelor-Master-Doctoral studies); ✦ The small number of incoming students mobilities, unfolded within the Erasmus+ program; ✦ Regarding the structure of the academic staff, in terms of didactic positions, the small number of Assistant Professors reflects the insufficient capability of the system to attract young persons interested in an academic career; ✦ The occurrence of the drop-out phenomenon within undergraduate students, accompanied by the postponement of final exams within certain study programs. The young students'/ graduates' tendency is determined by a series of objective factors, of economic, social and personal nature |

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| <p>Technical University of Crete (Greece), University of León (Spain), Silesian University of Technology (Poland), University of Applied Sciences Mittweida (Germany);</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ The University consists of a valuable didactic staff, displaying attested competences in their field, capable of promoting modern, student-centred learning. Also, the University organizes doctoral programs in the following domains: Mines, Oil and Gases; Industrial Engineering; System Engineering and Engineering and Management, on topics directed towards sustainable development; ✦ The number of students representing the three study cycles (Bachelor's degree, Master's degree, Doctoral studies) displays an ascending trend, as compared to the previous academic years, despite the restrictions and limitations determined by the outburst of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020; ✦ The purchase of the e-Learning platform has enabled the removal of the digital discrepancy, enhancing the access of students from different social strata to qualitative higher education – the main prerequisite for ensuring a modern and flexible educational process; ✦ The study programs display high applicability through the development of the students' entrepreneurial competences, the partnerships with business organizations, the implementation of multidisciplinary projects and practical training systems for students; ✦ A consolidated infrastructure of the University, totally self-owned, permanently developed in order to ensure adequate learning conditions and social services for students; ✦ The efficient collaboration with students' associations in order to ensure the adequate development of the educational process and of high impact social, cultural, and educational projects. | <p>which are difficult to quantify and resolve on the short or medium term;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ The small number of candidates for the places unfunded by the state budget within undergraduate programs, with mandatory tuition fee, respectively; ✦ The insufficient promotion of the competences of our research teams in the economic and social environment; ✦ Some of the technologies resulting from research contracts signed with the economic environment are still not implemented in the productive activity; ✦ The lack of admission procedures which would facilitate the disabled candidates' access to higher education, as the University has only begun to draw up a set of articulated measures to support this particular category of vulnerable persons; ✦ The number of articles published in ISI journals (Clarivate Analytics Red, Yellow, White or the ISI / Clarivate Analytics Arts & Humanities, ISI/ Clarivate Analytics Emerging Sources Citation Index or ERIH+) has decreased in 2020 as compared to the previous years. |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

| Opportunities | Threats |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✧ The great importance conferred to the education system in the context of the Europe 2020 Strategy has determined the University to play a key-role in supporting the efforts of improving the competences of the population in the region and the increase in the employment rate and work productivity; ✧ The SARS-CoV-2 pandemic brought about the rapid assimilation of the online teaching methods and techniques and the professional training of the didactic staff in distance teaching-learning-assessment technologies, ensuring the prerequisites for the resilience of the educational process at the University of Petroșani; ✧ Considering the severe social problems and the diminished quality of life for the majority of population in the Jiu Valley, there is a possibility of accessing European funds to fight the phenomena of social exclusion, poverty, inequitable access to the education system etc.; ✧ The opportunity to capitalize European programs and research priorities (including sustainable development as a focal point of interest) according to the collective interests of the didactic staff of the University of Petroșani; ✧ The interest displayed by young people from various countries, within and outside the European region, in attending the Bachelor's degree, Master's degree and doctoral programmes at the University of Petroșani; ✧ The University's involvement in the development of international didactic and scientific cooperation in the traditional field of mineral resources; ✧ Enhancing the interest of the beneficiaries from the business environment and public organizations in the postgraduate educational programs within the University; ✧ The possibility of participating, in cooperation with the local authorities, in the elaboration and implementation of the | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✧ Government financing for higher education and research has been situated in recent years below the desired limit; ✧ The quasi-exclusive transfer of the didactic activities in the online system, due to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, causes negative effects on the processes of unrestricted learning and student interaction, disabling the customized support for the special needs students, the monitoring of the learning rate, the feedback which attests to the acquisition of knowledge, individual counselling etc.; ✧ The SARS-CoV-2 pandemic has determined, in 2020, the postponement of scientific events organized by students, which had become traditional at the University of Petroșani, and the specific socio-cultural activities. ✧ The sudden decrease of the number of students, didactic and administrative staff who benefited from <i>Erasmus+</i> mobilities due to the restrictions applied to international travelling during the medical crisis, a phenomenon which displays negative effects on the development of professional careers; ✧ The lack of interest in an academic career displayed by valuable young people, considering the more attractive opportunities in the business environment and the efforts required to obtain a doctoral degree and to meet the superlative employment exigencies characteristic of the higher education system; ✧ The unfavourable demographic trend, recorded both on the national and regional level, determines the gradual decrease of the number of high school graduates and, consequently, the decline in the number of candidates for admission to Bachelor's and Master's degree programs; ✧ The reduced recruitment area of potential students caused by the competition from other higher education institutions and the population's growing poverty after the disappearance of traditional economic activities; |

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| <p>development strategies of the Jiu Valley and Hunedoara county.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✧ The inexistence of a strategy of economic development for the mono-industrial regions (like the areas in Hunedoara county and its neighbouring regions) affects the availability and attractiveness of jobs for university graduates; ✧ The limited financial resources of the companies in the region which restrict the development of ample research programs. |
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6. CONCLUSION

For the period 2020-2024, a Strategic Plan has been conceived, which covers the mandate of the Rector and whose objective is to combine the preoccupation for quality educational processes with the concern for scientific research and for developing permanent relations with the economic and social environment. At the same time, the faculties of the University elaborated and implemented their own strategic plans and yearly operational plans that display the manner of carrying out the objectives and the strategic measures at an institutional level.

Meanwhile, the increase of the University's internationalization approaches and the assuming of an active part within EURECA PRO Alliance for the creation of the European Virtual University in the responsible production and consumption domain represent the main coordinates of the Strategic Plan meant to individualize and strengthen the University both at the national and international level.

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