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AL4Life ↗



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Report on Alumni Engagement

University of Donja Gorica

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SUMMARY

The aim of this research report is to analyze identified relevant facts as regards legislation, national and local conditions, plans and practices, and the state at the University of Donja Gorica, concerning the current engagement of alumni, and to draw conclusions, i.e., to set the base of further work within the project AL4LIFE in the context of development of alumni-related infrastructure.

In the first part, the Report deals with the general overview regarding alumni engagement in European and the national higher education sector (including strategies, regulations, practice and projects), identifies gaps, and draws conclusions as regards the type and scope of current alumni inclusion, i.e., as regards the benefits from alumni capacity building to different engaged entities and emphasizes alumni as key drivers in higher education.

Section 3 and 4 of the Report provides a description of the current state of alumni engagement at the University of Donja Gorica. It summarizes the so-far made efforts to establish an alumni network, and to build the alumni database.

Section 5 presents strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing the University of Donja Gorica in building its alumni infrastructure and carrying out the alumni-related activities.

Finally, Section 6 of the Report – Conclusions – summarizes all study findings and draws up a foundation for forthcoming activities at the University of Donja Gorica within the AL4LIFE project



1. General overview

As many studies stated strong alumni relations can be of enormous value to a university and „alumni loyalty can even be called a key factor for higher education institutions’ survival and success. (Snijders at all, 2019; Schlesinger at all, 2016). In those studies, authors emphasized some models and practice in which they provide benefits and strengths regarding alumni-HEI relations- For example:

While US-based alumni often automatically become alumni association members, in European countries such as the Netherlands, Belgium, and Germany, this practice is not common. Following the American example, most Dutch universities nowadays have started to invest in building relationships with former students and regional businesses. Nevertheless, compared to the US, the majority of higher education institutions in the Netherlands still do not have a structured and sustainable alumni policy. (Snijders at all, 2019)

Although multiple definitions have been used in student engagement research in the past years, student engagement can be considered a variety of constructs that measure both the time and energy students devote to educationally purposeful activities, and how students perceive different facets of the institutional environment that facilitate and support their learning, so the many author explores quality of relationship and student engagement as driver that lead to loyalty and key factor for HEI. (Snijders at all, 2019; Kuh, 2001)

On the other side, some authors explore and analyze patterns of alumni commitment in key strategic relationship programmes. (Pedro, I at all, 2020) in which stated that higher education institutions (HEIs) *need to understand their alumni when drawing strategic relationship programmes*. In their study alumni from Portuguese universities asserted recommendations, further training, sharing experiences and giving help as ways to collaborate with HEI, and the the findings provide clues to support strategic relationship programmes based on consistent marketing campaigns, while bringing value to the literature in the European context, where alumni culture requires real insights to evolve. (Pedro, I at all, 2020).

Following the goals of **Lisbon Agenda** there has been a focus on competences-oriented education and innovation in order to strengthen growth and competitiveness, which requires greater openness of higher education institutions to industry and market needs. Over time, HEIs have been considered as starting point for establishing business and academic networks, enabling collaborative opportunities, knowledge transfers and partnerships between business sector and universities.

Furthermore, alumni engagement has become an increasingly important strategic theme for (European) universities. **The European Strategy for Universities and a Commission proposal for a Council Recommendation** on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation are expected to support European universities in their unique position to shape a greener, more inclusive and digital European Union. In point 6. Drivers of Europe’s global role and leadership the Commission offers and recommend to: work jointly with Member States to promote Europe’s higher education offer and international cooperation in higher education in a Team Europe approach:

This means: developing the ‘Study in Europe’ portal to foster international exchanges; strengthening peer-learning among universities and agencies on internationalisation;



*strengthening partnerships with priority regions, such as Western Balkans, based on reciprocity, and **better engaging and relying on alumni networks.*** (European Strategy for University, 2022)

At the Western Balkan level, there exists the Western Balkans Alumni Organisation (<https://www.western-balkans-alumni.eu/>), a regional association of alumni from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Kosovo* and Serbia who have spent part of their studies in the EU member states or third countries associated to the Erasmus+ Programme, either as an EU scholar or EU country scholar, or as a self-funded individual.

2. Overview on national level

On the national level, importance of alumni engagement in HEI were theme in several strategies and documents:

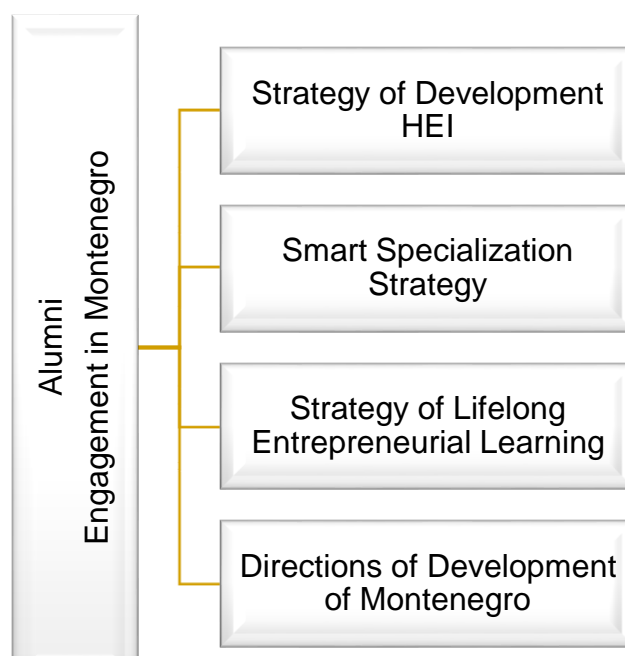


Figure 1 Alumni Engagement State

- **The National Strategy for development of HEI draft version 2021-2025** identify several main goals: aligning strategies with Europe Strategy 2020 and aligning with EU standards and guidelines, aligning education with labour market needs, strengthening the links between science, education and economy, strengthening innovation. Also, in **The Strategy for the Development of HE of Montenegro 2016**, issued by the former Ministry of Education in 2016, identified in objective 1: Improving the quality of higher education and creating competitive human resources activity 1.3.4 Establishing mechanisms for analysing student progress one of the recommendation contribution to the implementation of this activity may be provided through establishing alumni clubs at all higher education institutions in Montenegro, which would represent an important factor of quality control, as well as their networking with a view to creating a high-quality database and intensifying cooperation between different higher education institutions on one hand, and higher education institutions, graduates and employers on the other hand.



- **The Smart Specialisation Strategy of Montenegro 2019 – 2024** issued by Ministry of Science Montenegro and has identified three strategic goals, namely: Development of human resources and research capacities; Improving international cooperation and networking; and strengthening synergy between science and economy. The strategic directions confirm the country's orientation to development based on knowledge, environmental protection, high employment level, productivity and social cohesion, with a focus on three interrelated development goals: smart growth, sustainable growth and inclusive growth. The Strategy identify higher education as one of twelve main pillars of competitiveness - Education and knowledge creation and point out the measure Support to innovative activities in the business sector which leads to Support for engagement of university graduates in the business sector in S3 priority domains: Sustainable agriculture and food value chain, Energy and sustainable environment, Sustainable and health tourism and ICT as horizontal priority.
- **The Strategy for Lifelong Entrepreneurial Learning (2020-2024)** the strategy in include commitments across areas key to the development of entrepreneurial learning, such as curriculum, learning outcomes and practical entrepreneurial experiences, including education-business co-operation and teacher education. It creates important routes to building education-business co-operation and entrepreneurial career pathways, ensuring government and stakeholder engagement linked to economic development, as a vital element of the entrepreneurial ecosystem. Linked to economic development, strategy highlight the importance of entrepreneurial skills as an area of action, supporting national smart specialisation strategies.
- **The Directions of Development of Montenegro 2018 - 2021** issued by Government of Montenegro, defined strategic direction Smart development and identify following goals: science and higher education which lead to aligning enrollment policy with labour market, increase of graduates with HE, increase of funding in science and research.

Apart from the national regulations, in the report of the evaluations of nine higher education institutions in Montenegro by the Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) of the European University Association (EUA), in the framework of the “Higher Education and Research for Innovation and Competitiveness” (HERIC) project, implemented by the Government of Montenegro and financed from a World Bank loan, the general recommendation for all HEI institutions were:

Improve student feedback by a) including questions on the learning process and allowing some modification of questionnaires for individual disciplines; b) evaluating the learning environment (e.g. library, registrar functions, student support services, etc.); c) exploring alternative models of collecting feedback (e.g. student focus groups); d) informing students about the use of the results; e) establishing alumni tracking mechanisms and engagement.

Apart from benefiting from knowledge transfer, the involvement of distinguished alumni will encourage the interest in and loyalty to the HEI, its promotion, deployment of capacities and talents, recruitment of students, provision of scholarships, encouraging additional support to the institution and contributing to its funding. University spirit and experience is best preserved and further expanded through the instituted alumni and entrepreneurs network unity.

In the next part of report will be presented state of currently engagement of Alumni of the University of Donja Gorica.



3. Engagement of the University of Donja Gorica

University of Donja Gorica is a research-entrepreneurial university. That is why developing research and entrepreneurship among students is one of the priorities of this University. Potential for innovation and research-entrepreneurship orientation of University were recognized by the Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) of the European University Association (EUA), in which they stated (IEP - the European University Association (EUA, 2018):

UDG has shown potential for innovation. The team praises UDG for the emphasis attached to entrepreneurship, its capacity to respond to stakeholders' needs, its outreach to high schools (even if these could be construed as marketing outreach), and its developing roster of company partnerships.

University of Donja Gorica (UDG) is a university whose primary aim is to awake its students. That means for students to emerge and awake from mechanical life, everyday routine, machine-like behavior... To become conscious! To become aware of themselves, the world around them, to become aware of their responsibilities in the world around them, and, above all, to become aware of their developmental possibilities and their talents.

As Dalaj Lama pointed out, education is the most important factor for changes in the modern world. And it is the idea of a student's change that UDG has been founded on and led by! This idea is embodied in UDG motto: *"The History of Future" – sowing the seeds of different thinking, behaviour, and understanding of the world by students, and investing in spiritual strength of their beings, which will enable the seeds to grow and develop within themselves throughout all their lives.*

According to this student is centered oriented at UDG model of studies represented through Professor's Equation $S=z \cdot i^2$ is oriented to individual competences and individual *ability of each graduated students - graduated student which will be "expert for uncertainty"*, who will be able to recognize potential problems in the world around him/her and who will have the character to take responsibility and solve it. Thus, the market is the only valid criteria which enables us whether we achieved this goal.

We have established UDG organization and management, which turns to a higher level of generating new initiatives and innovations and growing entrepreneurial-innovative and creative independence of every part and every individual at UDG. This is seen as a *development of entrepreneurial-innovative model of management*. The key indicators of UDG management efficiency are the following:

1. A satisfied student;
2. Quality of knowledge;
3. International networking of UDG, especially through mutual research projects and student and teaching staff exchange;
4. Intensive cooperation with elementary and high schools and international companies.

Students' satisfaction is measured by:

1. Evaluating the levels of positiveness, creativity and everyday energy of UDG students;
2. Survey among students during the studies and after graduation;
3. Occasional conversations with earlier graduated students.



The quality of knowledge is indirectly monitored by : (a) how fast they are able to get a job; (b) how fast their career advances; (c) conversations with employers; (d) success that UDG students make at other Universities outside Montenegro.

Importance of Alumni and graduate students engagement has been identified in **UDG Almanac of Studies** - the mental framework, principles and agenda of all the engaged teachers and students at UDG. The Almanac of studies try to answer the core goal of UDG studies: How to understand that human capability, not the cash capital, represents the key component of human development? *The guiding idea of this Almanac is to answer the question on how can UDG “produce” capable individual:*

At UDG, we promote success and successful people. We promote happiness and fun! We support creators! Innovators! Entrepreneurs! We support hard workers! We support humanity! We promote student and his intellectual and spiritual power.

According to UDG Almanac of Studies, the engagement of alumni is an important tool for achieving some of the strategic goals of the University, such as to enhance international cooperation and cooperation with the business sector, and establish the conditions for better employability of its graduated students, and their own business creation. Thus, with principles in UDG Almanac of studies it is identify importance of involvement of alumni in drafting strategic documents, in revision of existing and development of new study programmes, in lifelong learning programmes, in projects preparation and implementation, in teaching process, etc. All of these lead to UDG mission: **UDG student - Responsible citizen of a global world!**

Furthermore, Almanac indicators, i.e. criteria for evaluation of efficiency at UDG which represent operationalization of the idea and philosophy of Almanac of Studies at UDG identify one of the indicator that is *Market valorization* on base score for each Faculty unit is made based on the following criteria:

- Employability of graduated students of the Faculty;
- Number of new business opened by students of the Faculty;
- Number of students of the Faculty who continue family business;
- Number of students of the Faculty employed in the companies employed by UDG students;
- Number of students of the Faculty employed in international companies in Montenegro;
- Number of students of the Faculty employed in government institutions in Montenegro;
- Number of students of the Faculty employed in international institutions (EU, World bank, IMF, OECD);
- Number of students of the Faculty employed at universities in Montenegro;
- Number of students of the Faculty employed at universities out of Montenegro
- Number of students of the Faculty who enrolled PhD studies out of Montenegro (and the region);
- Number of students of the Faculty who speak more than three foreign languages
- Number of students who enrolled PhD studies;

Besides the UDG Almanac of Studies, another strategic document that emphasize importance of involvement of Alumni *is UDG Development Cascade* presented in Figure 2. such as enhancement of international cooperation and cooperation with the business sector, and



establish the conditions for better employability of its graduated students – research oriented, creative, entrepreneurial which lead to creation of new market – own business and companies.

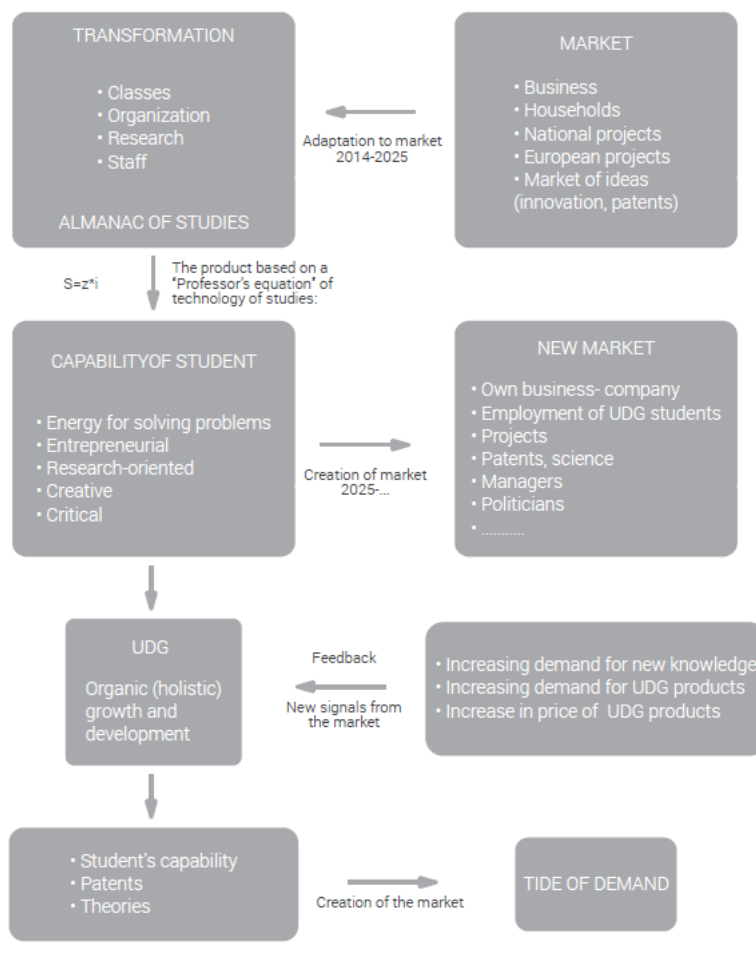


Figure 2 UDG Development Cascade

Furthermore, **UDG Internationalization Strategy 2021-2026**, is another important document. The University of Donja Gorica strives to be regionally and internationally recognized for its quality of education, values, and student experience. As a small private university, it aims to achieve better international visibility and competitiveness by making internationalisation a priority in the coming period. It has been engaging in internationalisation for a number of years but so far it has been evolving spontaneously in response to the needs and opportunities as they arise. Now, it has reached a point where it should engage in a strategic reflection on the future development of internationalisation. It strives for a greater openness towards different regions in terms of mobility and scientific cooperation, while at the same time focusing on internationalisation at home by fostering purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students within domestic learning environment.

In the Evaluation Report and the Follow-up Report, which among other areas evaluated internationalisation of the University, the IEP has found the following:

“Internationalisation has become a high priority for UDG, as a way of improving the overall quality of the university, specifically by providing its students with the possibility



to develop global understanding and its staff with professional development opportunities.”

Adopting and implementing the Internationalisation Strategy is expected to bring higher quality of learning and teaching, to foster the employability of graduates, and to make the system more inclusive within the aspect of mobility. Also, UDG Student Council understands that internationalization is crucial for the global recognition of UDG and one of the main reasons for high school students interest in UDG and their later enrollment. Students would, in Student Council opinion, be interested in a short term internship, but in order for them to be successful, internships in companies from Montenegro should be provided as a “training” for international experience.

Within the priority area 2 Objective 2.1. Improved quality and quantity of scientific research one of the actions for reaching that goal is 2.1.1. Intensify international cooperation through bilateral scientific projects and 2.1.2. Encourage applications to projects within available international calls which involves engagement of alumni in both bilateral cooperation and projects application.

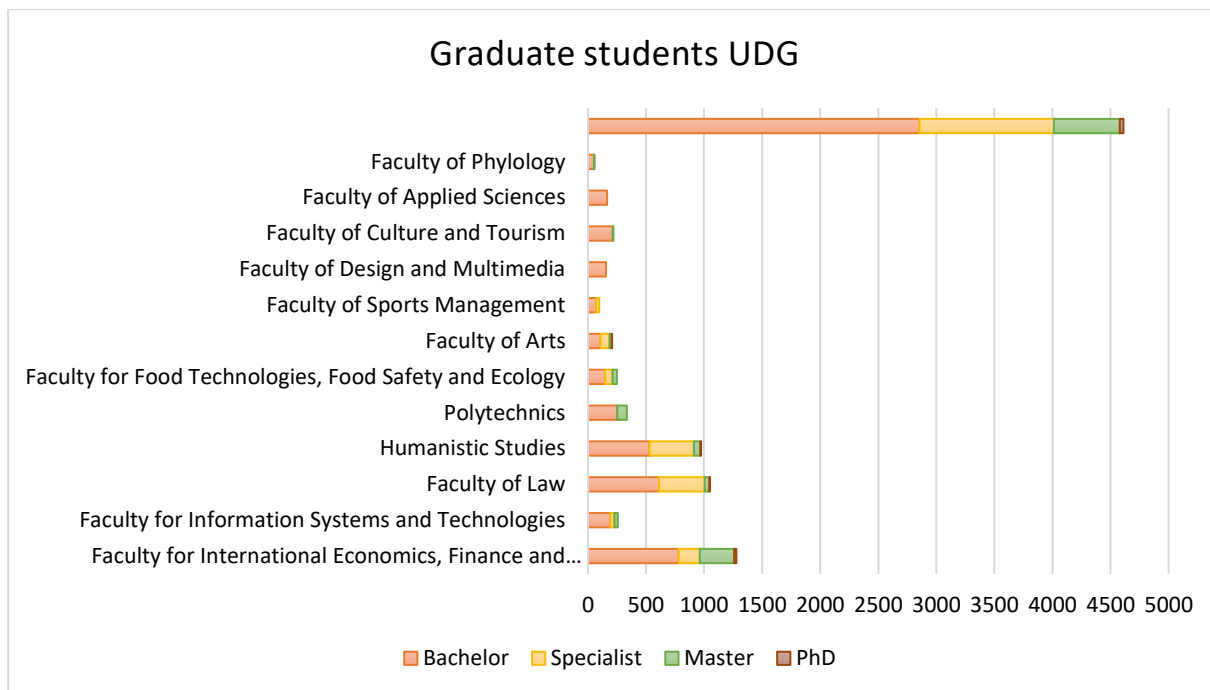
In practice, UDG has already made some noticeable efforts and results in encouraging internationalisation at home and incorporating internationalisation into the curricula of its study programmes and connection with business, mainly the following:

- Close university-business cooperation (suggestions from businesses regarding student skills requirements that are desirable in the global market);
- Launching new study programmes with advice from business representatives and academics specialised in internationalisation (Faculty of Polytechnics, Faculty of Food Technology, Food Safety and Ecology);
- Encouraging students to participate in international conferences organized at UDG, and visiting lectures by guest speakers from abroad

Within the priority area 3 Internationalization at home – objective 3.3.3 Set up International Club, Book Club etc. that involves both domestic and international students and in cooperation with Student Business Club UDG and one of the goal is to establish at least 4 such clubs.

4. Engagement in creating UDG Alumni Club

Since its foundation at University of Donja Gorica (UDG) from 2010, approx. 4.200 students have graduated from all levels of studies, which is shown in the following graph 1.



Graph 1 UDG Total number of graduate students since 2010

The highest number of graduated students comes from the Faculty for International Economics, Finance and Business (1.278) and Faculty of Law (1.050), followed by the Humanistic Studies (974), but UDG's former students who represent future alumni could be found in all spheres of Montenegrin and international society.

Within the Higher Education and Research for Innovation and Competitiveness project, implemented by the Montenegrin Government, a tracer study was carried out in 2017, encompassing 3.632 i.e. 62,5% of recently graduated students from Montenegrin HEIs. According to Tracer Study¹ related to Montenegrin graduates, carried out by the Ministry of Education of Montenegro, UDG students pointed out a positive attitude towards experiences and information gained after completing their studies. Some of the points made in the Study are the following:

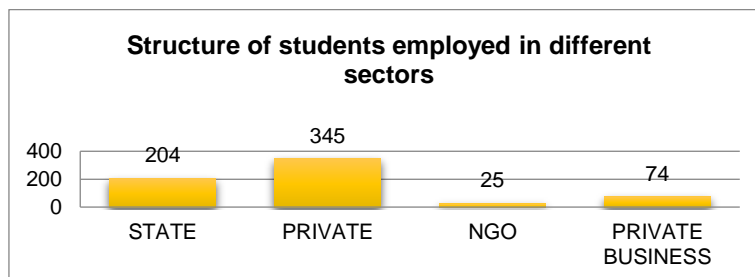
- The highest percentage of satisfied students was recorded among students who graduated at the faculties of the University of DonjaGorica (96.3%),
- At the University of DonjaGorica there were no graduate students who gave a grade 1 (not satisfied) with study programe they finished,
- The highest percentage of graduates (2013) who are employed has completed the University of DonjaGorica (85.2% of the total number of graduates is currently employed).
- Students who graduated at University of DonjaGorica gave the highest grade to the link between the workplace and completed studies (4.0 (in scale 1 to 5)
- Out of total number, 70% of graduate students from University of Donja Gorica are satisfied with the monthly income.

The result of continuing improvement of teaching and adopting it to global trends is reflected through the employability of UDG students. On a sample of 734 students (up to 2016 year) we

¹http://www.heric.me/sites/heric.me/files/tracer_study_data_analysis_september_2017.pdf



gathered the information in order to track them after their graduation and possible employment. The data collection was done in 2017 and include period until 2016 - by means of a standard procedure of student tracking via email, telephone and the Internet. Out of the total number of students surveyed, 88% got a job soon after the graduation, and are currently working, 5% has no job, and 7% of the students continued their full time postgraduate studies abroad. The graph below shows the structure of students employed in different sectors (state, private, NGO sector, private business).



Graph 2 Structure of students employed in different sector

During project implementation AI4Life next data collection will be made and will include those who graduate from 2016 – 2022 with detail analysis.

From 2019, at UDG has created Alumni PhD club with main aims:

- to create a business-professional network, which can be important for their further development and advancement;
- that students, based on their experience, make suggestions for improving the organization of work and studies, both PhD studies and overall studies;
- to be engaged in research and applications for projects proposals, especially on international level;
- To support UDG students in connection with companies in order to search for "student projects", in cooperation with the Student Business Center (SBC);
- To support research projects of the UDG Students' Forum for their activities, primarily for examining some student questions, bringing guests, organizing student seminars, lectures etc.
- To create and spread research and entrepreneurial network of UDG students;
- To support of creating and developing UDG Alumni Master and UDG Alumni Clubs at all levels.

Beside mentioned above, *UDG Alumni students* are actively involved in activities within UDG Entrepreneurial Nest. Idea of Entrepreneurial nest is for a student to go through process of education at University, specially designed workshops and lectures to reach the possibility of developing their own business, implement new projects and start up ideas. Some of the goals including Alumni in UDG Entrepreneurial Nest:

- To strengthen culture of innovation and entrepreneurship through Integration of innovation and entrepreneurship perspectives into education, research and dissemination and increase the visibility of successful innovators and entrepreneurs.



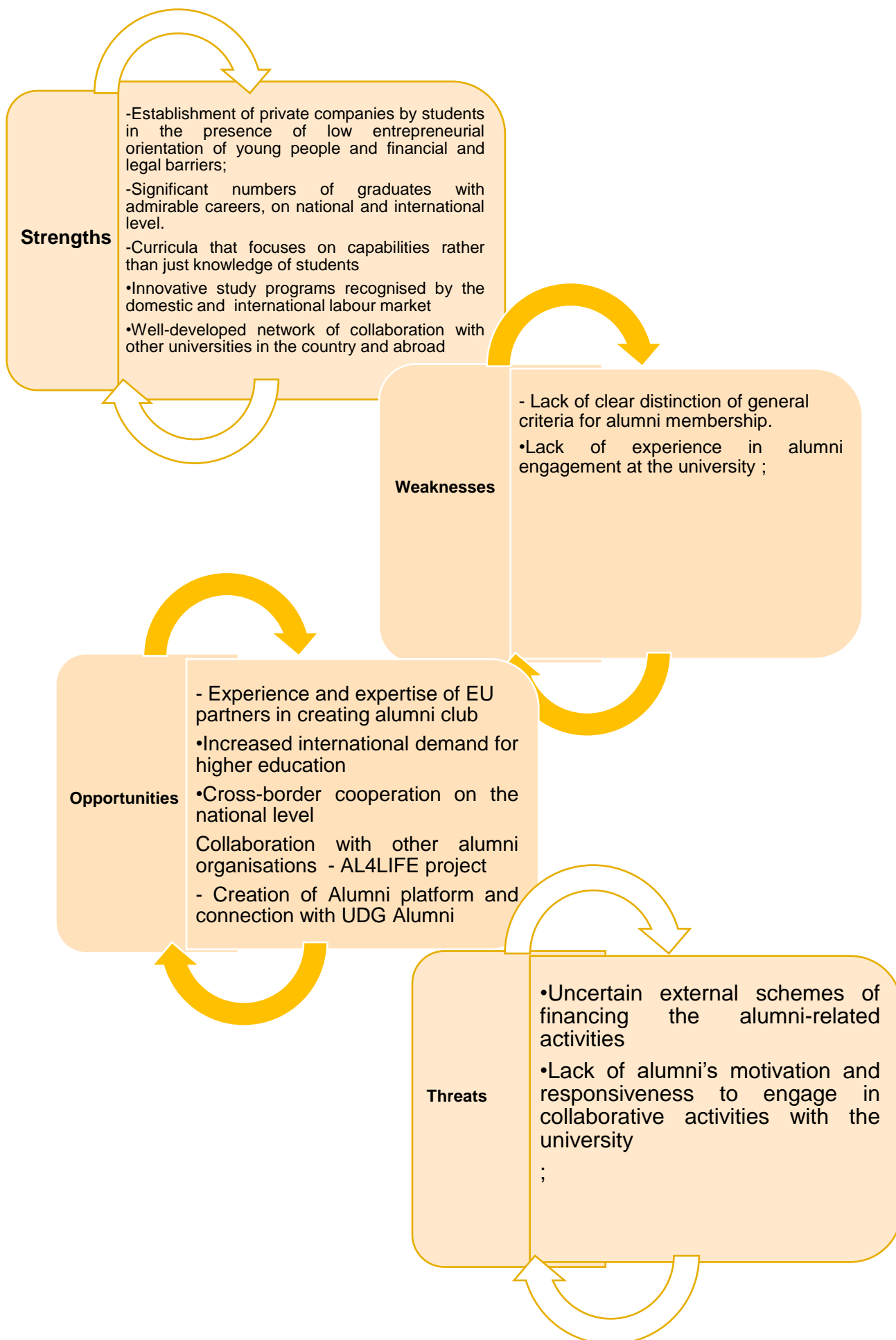
- To strengthen collaboration on innovation and entrepreneurship internally, and with business and industry, the public sector and business through development of existing cooperation and establish binding strategic partnerships with institutions and organisations locally, nationally and internationally, involving individuals with innovation and entrepreneurship expertise from other sectors in education, mentoring and formulating applications.
- To increase innovation activity and its facilitation of entrepreneurship and commercialisation. Strengthen collaborative work (academia, business, industry) on various forms of process innovation. Facilitate increased commercialisation of research findings, including increasing the number of business start-ups.

Besides those, UDG graduate students and successful entrepreneurs, managers and CEO are Board Members of Junior Achievement of Montenegro developed by UDG current students. Junior Achievement Montenegro is part of the Junior Achievement Europe (<http://jaeurope.org/about.html>) with the aim of experiential learning in entrepreneurship, work readiness and financial health.

Not a small number of the alumni from the University of Donja Gorica have become recognised professionals, and the pride of the University, to that end, to-date has been focused on the quality of education provided. However, the links between the University and its alumni are insufficiently built. The potential of alumni for the University, and vice versa, is yet to be explored.

5. SWOT Analysis

Through the SWOT analysis we shall try to establish the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that determine our future strategic activities in the field of UDG Alumni strategy. The strengths and weaknesses are internal factors and therefore, controllable, while the opportunities and threats are the external fac





According to the AL4LIFE project foresees the following achievements for the University of Donja Gorica in relation to alumni infrastructure strengthening:

- Development the identification of the appropriate model for engagement of alumni and establishment of alumni operational structure - alumni club at UDGs' organisational units and alumni association at the university central level.
- Development and Installation and continuous use of **alumni management software** with embedded **alumni database**;
- Development and adoption of **university-alumni communication plan**. This plan serves to set the actions and activities which foster interactive liaison among the university and alumni, with the coordination and support of the university alumni association. University-Alumni relations and close cooperation are contingent on successful branding and visual identity, to efficiently support development and expansion of organization's goals, as well as strengthen the ties between the alumni, the community, and the university;
- **Adaptation of teaching materials and courses catalogues**, with the assistance from alumni with distinguish professional experience and achievements in specific industry sectors. This action is designed to enhance students' learning by increasing its relevance through the provision of real-world context in the core of curricula;
- Development and adoption of the **action plan for integration and cooperation of career centre** (Student Business Center and UDG Entrepreneurial Nest) **and alumni association**. This plan will anticipate what kind of activities the career center and alumni association will perform with an aim to contribute to the better employability of students. It will also define the rules and methods of integration of alumni association into the existing and the future newly established activities of the career center (i.e., support the organization of joint events and activities). Operational/action plan will be adopted/revised annually, envisaging concrete events and activities, their number, schedule and organizational details. The plan will define/assign organizational roles and responsibilities;
- Organization of **events dedicated to students' skills, entrepreneurial awareness, matching with alumni and enhancing opportunities for employment**. Each event will serve for professional development of students, enabling interactive relations between alumni and students, enhancing the quality of education, competences and employability of graduates. Establishing alumni support will be beneficial to developing necessary professional/work skills and knowledge that will prepare students for the labor market. National events will be organized in national language;
- Dissemination-related activities, including activity in social media accounts, media promotion, development of and update of alumni webpage, preparation of semi-annual e-magazine, etc.



6. CONCLUSION

The University of Donja Gorica is aware that in today's age of global knowledge and technology, placing more importance on Alumni engagement is essential to educating graduates who have international, foreign language and intercultural skills and who are capable of interacting in a global setting. Providing students with an research-entrepreneurial oriented curricula, equipping them with skills for a globalized world and encouraging their development as open-minded members of our society, is something that UDG has always been striving to do through our concept of studies, but has reached a time to develop a more systematic approach which will be done through AL4Life project.

The successful implementation of the all activities and Alumni engagement is dependent on several factors, and it should be monitored closely. Implementation of the objectives, measures and indicators must be done systematically. The conditions should be created in a way that alumni become sincere part of the University already emphasized in University principles and strategies. This also means that the University needs to nurture its relations with alumni continuously. The effects of proper, fair and transparent management of relations with the alumni can only grow in a positive way with time.

There is a need for strong promotion of the foreseen alumni-related actions within the University. A way must be found to inspire all included into alumni-related actions to get engaged.

With this report and all implemented activities within project, the University of Donja Gorica shall create general conditions in which the alumni engagement can unfold in the best way possible.



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