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AL4Life ↗



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Report on Alumni Engagement

University of Mitrovica

Kosovska Mitrovica

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AL4LIFE – Western Balkan entrepreneurial university alliances – keeping in touch for lifelong relations

EU – European Union

SWOT – Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities Threats



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 Mitrovica, 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 analysis of the state-of-the-art regarding alumni engagement in the national higher education sector (including 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.

Section 2 of the Report provides a description of the current state of alumni engagement at the University of Mitrovica. It summarizes the so-far made efforts to establish an alumni club, and to build the alumni database.

Detailed analysis of the current state of alumni engagement at every of the ten faculties within the University of Mitrovica is given in the Report Section 3.

Section 4 presents strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing the University of Mitrovica in building its alumni infrastructure and carrying out the alumni-related activities.

Finally, Section 5 of the Report – Conclusions – summarizes all study findings and draws up a foundation for forthcoming activities at the University of Mitrovica within the AL4LIFE project.



1 GENERAL OVERVIEW

Alumni represent a very important community within every higher education institution. They are the ambassadors of the university, a reflection of the quality of the studies offered, and the connection of the university with the outside world and society. Recognizing significance and including alumni in its processes is important for every university, including for the University in Mitrovica.

However, in the national regulations concerning higher education, alumni are still not recognized. Alumni are not specifically mentioned in any relevant national law, nor in the regulations covered by them. For now, alumni are not mentioned even in the national strategies concerning the further development and modernization of the higher education sector. Only in one strategic document, that is the Startup Ecosystem Development Strategy (<https://prosveta.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Strategija-razvoja-startup-ekosistema-RS-od-2021-do-2025.pdf>), the potential of the contribution of alumni in the development of startups has been acknowledged.

To-date, alumni are not encompassed by the documents and guidelines issued by the national body for accreditation and quality control in higher education.

On the other hand, domestic regulations leave sufficient flexibility to engage alumni into various university processes. For example, current Law on Higher Education (https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/zakon_o_visokom_obrazovanju.html) opens a possibility to include into educational process the teachers with whom the permanent employment contract has not been made. Article 80 of the mentioned Law further reads as:

“A higher education institution may engage in the part of active teaching, including lectures and exercises, at the first and second level of study, for a maximum of up to a third of the teaching hours on the course during the semester, a non-employed lecturer who holds a master academic degree at least, and who possesses necessary knowledge and skills in the relevant field and shows a sense for teaching work.

A lecturer without employment contract may be engaged exclusively in professional-applied courses.

Course leaders employed at a higher education institution are responsible for ensuring the quality of teaching that is carried out by lecturers without employment contract.

The method of selection and the time for which an external lecturer is hired are regulated by an independent higher education institution’s act.

With the person referred to in paragraph 1 of this article, a temporary contract is concluded for a maximum of one school year with the possibility of extension, and payments based on that contract are realized from the higher education institution’s own income”.

Although alumni community and the organisations have not been sufficiently promoted by the state so far, a significant number of national universities, i.e., their belonging faculties, have established alumni clubs. Oftentimes, these clubs form part of the career development centres which usually are officially recognised organisational units.

Alumni are present in other organisations as well, e.g. there exist an alumni organisation joining members who previously obtained scholarships from the Studenica Foundation (<http://sr.studenica.org/alumnisti.html>). Some non-governmental, non-profit organisations, such as the Open Belgrade School (<https://www.bos.rs/>), featured their Alumni2Students



program. This program encompassed mentorship, professional practice, and the development of graduation theses in collaboration with alumni.

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.

Several EU-funded projects implemented in the Western Balkans dealt with the upgrade of university alumni infrastructure. One example includes Tempus SIGMUS project (Strengthening Student Role in Governance and Management at the Universities of Serbia, <http://www.sigmus.edu.rs/eng/?c>), where one of the goals was to create alumni network within every participating university. Results of these projects and the experience obtained along the paths to their achievement can be very useful for ongoing AL4LIFE project, just like the analysis of their impact made through time.

The extent of alumni engagement and the scope of their activities significantly varies from one national organisation to another, just like the availability and the depth of disseminated alumni-related information. In general, and based on conducted analysis, the type and scope of alumni engagement found in national frames include:

- Organisation and participation in specific- and general-type university events,
- Involvement in teaching, mentoring and professional practice organisation,
- Involvement in competitions and awarding the best students' works/theses,
- Involvement in university governance bodies,
- Appointing alumni as contact persons between university and industry organisations in which they are employed,
- Involvement of alumni in fund raising,
- Dissemination of alumni's professional successes, through published interviews, newsletters, video broadcast, and the like, and
- Involvement of alumni members in preparing written or video material as regards their experience, achievements, and the like (e.g., publishing of alumni travelogues).

Taking into account all available alumni-related fact on the national level, a comprehensive list of benefits from developing the alumni infrastructure at the university can be derived. These benefits are given in Table 1.

Table 1: Benefits from alumni capacity building to different engaged entities

Entity	Benefit
For universities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased reputation • Development of collaboration between universities and organisations where alumni are employed. • Diversification of university activities • Contribution to the openness of the university towards industry and society in general • Modernisation of study programmes



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oftentimes, contribution to the internationalization, having regarded that the significant number of alumni from the WB HEIs are living and working abroad
For teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience exchange • Development of multi-dimensional perspectives as regards teaching subjects • Modernization of teaching process • Networking and collaboration in the fields of education and research
For alumni	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion of personal achievements • Participation in university bodies • Development of multi-dimensional perspectives as regards engagement subjects • Upgrade of professional skills through the engagement in teaching process and the university research activities • Networking within and outside of an alumni organisation • Staying up to date with the alma mater
For students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased motivation • Career guidance • Creation of links with potential employers • Acquisition of new knowledge and skills, and a more practical approach to problem solving • Acquisition of entrepreneurial skills • Assistance in tasks execution • Scholarships



2 ENGAGEMENT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MITROVICA

For more than 50 years of its existence, the University of Mitrovica has spawned in continuity the thousands of professionals from various scientific fields who now live and work in different parts of the Balkans, Europe, and the world. Not a small number of the alumni from the University of Mitrovica 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.

Several years ago, the University of Mitrovica has initiated some actions as regards the alumni community, but the strategy as regards alumni infrastructure development has not been brought to-date. In 2017, the University has drafted a plan to establish its alumni club as a part of the Career Development Centre. The goal was to form a network consisted of graduated students, teachers, students, and other interested individuals, in order to establish and nurture mutual connections and communication, and to build collaboration modalities. The office of the club has been envisaged within the Career Centre, i.e. within the University Library, though no employee has been officially put in charge of this office to-date. More importantly, no decision on the establishment of the university alumni club has been brought to-date.

As a part of initiative to build alumni infrastructure within the University, an effort has been made to establish electronic registration portal. Entry to the portal is nested at the front page of the university website, at the address: <https://pr.ac.rs/alumni-klub/> (Figure 1).

Философска 66, 38220 Косовска Митровица | +381 28 422 340 | rekisrat@pr.ac.rs | YouTube | Facebook | Instagram | WebMail | English

Универзитет | Факултети | Студије и студенти | Наука и пројекти | Међународна сарадња

Ажурирано: 09. априла 2021. године | Home

Алумни клуб

Циљ формирања Алумни клуба Универзитета у Приштини је умрежавање наших свршених студената, професора, асистената, сарадника у настави и других заинтересованих, а у сврху успостављања и неговања повезаности и комуникације, као и изградње узајамних односа сарадње.

Уколико сте један од академица који је стекао диплому нашег универзитета, позивамо вас да постанете члан Алумнија, останете део заједнице Универзитета у Приштини са привременим седиштем у Косовској Митровици и још више допринесете развоју ове високошколске установе. Искуства која сте стекли кроз живот и ваш успех у професији којом се бавите могу бити од драгоценог значаја за све нас.

Регистрација у алумни клуб Универзитета

ПОМОЋ

Основни подаци | Додатни лични подаци | Приватни контакт подаци | Подаци о запослену | Верификација

Име *

Презиме *

Пол *

Датум рођења *

Место рођења

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Figure 1: Appearance of the entry to the alumni registration portal at the website of the University of Mitrovica (<https://pr.ac.rs/alumni-klub/>)

Portal offers alumni to insert their data as regards basic personal information, contact detail, and the information about their employment. Inserted and submitted data are stored in the university base, however the system does not provide an option of making submitted alumni information publicly visible, nor it allows for internal interaction between the members. So far,



there are 78 alumni registered over the electronic portal. Several faculties within the university have posted the link to the alumni registration portal at their websites, but the responsiveness has been weak so far.

Furthermore, starting from the 2017, and up to the 2021, care was taken to collect data from the university graduates. Formed database so contains information obtained from the faculties for the mentioned time frame (February 2021 was the last month of storing the data). The base counts data on 4293 graduates from the University of Mitrovica. Of total number, the base counts the following categories of graduates:

- Graduates from bachelor and integrated studies: 2510,
- Graduated masters: 1522,
- Doctors: 4, and
- Graduates who finished studies in pre-Bologna system: 257.

No events nor any public activities engaging alumni have been organised at the university level so far at the University of Mitrovica. In fact, there has so far been only one occasion involving alumni, organised from the university level in 2021, and that was the survey aimed to investigate the satisfaction of graduates as regards the quality of education and the competencies obtained during the studies. Questionnaire was sent to all valid addresses of the alumni, taken from the alumni database. The results of this survey (from 170 respondents) helped the University management to better calibrate its plans for the near future, although not in the context of alumni infrastructure building.

Even though the University does not yet have a strategy engaging alumni in its functioning, there exist several adopted documents that are compatible with the goals of the project AL4LIFE. These include:

- Strategy of Internationalisation of the University of Mitrovica (https://pr.ac.rs/wp-content/uploads/strategija_internacionalizacije-1.pdf);
- Strategy and the Action Plan on Quality Assurance (https://pr.ac.rs/wp-content/uploads/strategija_obezbedjenja_kvaliteta.pdf; https://pr.ac.rs/wp-content/uploads/akcioni_plan.pdf);
- Plan to Achieving and Promoting the Gender Equality at the University of Mitrovica (https://pr.ac.rs/wp-content/uploads/plan_za_ostvarivanje_i_unapredjenje_rodne_ravnopravnosti.pdf);
- Regulation on Awarding Recognitions at the University of Mitrovica (https://pr.ac.rs/wp-content/uploads/pravilnik_o_dodeli_priznanja.pdf); and
- Statute of the University of Mitrovica, namely articles 85 and 143 concerning career guidance and the functioning of the Centre for Career Development (https://pr.ac.rs/wp-content/uploads/STATUT_2020.pdf).



3 ENGAGEMENT OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL UNITS IN CREATING ALUMNI CLUBS

The University of Mitrovica counts ten organisational units – faculties in its structure (<https://pr.ac.rs/fakulteti/>). These are: Faculty of Economics; Faculty of Medicine; Faculty of Agriculture; Faculty of Law; Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics; Faculty of Teacher Education; Faculty of Sports and Physical Education; Faculty of Technical Sciences; Faculty of Arts; and Faculty of Philosophy.

Figure 2: Presentation of the faculties of the University of Mitrovica at the main webpage (<https://pr.ac.rs/fakulteti/>)

The current state at the faculties of the University of Mitrovica, as regards alumni engagement, is the following:

At the **Faculty of Economics** (<http://ekonomski.pr.ac.rs/fakultet/about-us/>), alumni club is not established yet. Alumni are not engaged in educational, promotional nor other activities of the Faculty. The Faculty has a modest alumni database counting 55 members so far.

At the **Faculty of Medicine** (<https://med.pr.ac.rs/>), established alumni club functions as an organisational unit without legal status. Registration to the alumni club is possible online, at the address <https://med.pr.ac.rs/fakultet/alumni-klub/>. The Faculty also has a database of alumni, and it currently counts 33 members. Alumni are partially included in educational, promotional, and other Faculty's activities.

At the **Faculty of Agriculture** of the University of Mitrovica (<http://agr.pr.ac.rs/>), alumni club does not exist as an organisational unit. There are no activities engaging alumni.

At the **Faculty of Law** (<https://pra.pr.ac.rs/>), there exists informal alumni club with 25 members. Likewise, informal alumni club has been set at the **Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics**, and registration has been enabled online (<https://www.pmf.pr.ac.rs/alumni>). Currently, the club counts 19 members who participate in



Faculty promotion and assist teachers in educational and research activities, especially in relation to the field work organisation and study programmes accreditation.

Faculty of Teacher Education of the University of Mitrovica provides a more comprehensive information as regards its alumni club (<https://uf-pz.net/>), and offers a possibility for online registration. The Faculty has defined their Day of Alumni, and it is the 8th of November – the Teachers' Day.

At the **Faculty of Sports and Physical Education**, there exists the officially established alumni club, representing an organisational unit without legal status. On its website, the Faculty has published an invitation to alumni club to its ex-students, and a portal for registration has been posted (<https://fsfv.pr.ac.rs/alumni-klub/>).

At the website of the **Faculty of Technical Sciences**, there exists a link to the University list of registered alumni (<https://e-alumni.pr.ac.rs/klub/>), otherwise the Faculty does not have its club. In the past, the Faculty carried out several activities engaging its ex-students. For example, for the occasion of the 50-year anniversary, the Faculty invited the first generation of its students and gifted them the so-called golden students' books. Next to that, at the departments of Architecture and Electrical Engineering, alumni are assisting teaching staff in organising students' professional practice and participating in various students' exhibitions, design competitions, etc.

The **Faculty of Arts** (<https://www.art.pr.ac.rs/>) is currently drafting the plan to establish officially its alumni club, hence, to solidify connections between alumni, as well as between alumni and the Faculty. Otherwise, informally, the Faculty nurtures its links with ex-students many of which are now recognised artist professionals active all over the globe.

Finally, alumni club at the **Faculty of Philosophy** functions without official establishment decision. Alumni database is being update regularly, and the registration of new club members is enabled online, at the address <http://fifa.pr.ac.rs/alumni-klub/>. The same web page offers a comprehensive description of the alumni club, and lists its goals exhaustively. Alumni from the Faculty of Philosophy are voluntarily involved in various promotional activities.

Table 2: Summary of current alumni engagement at the faculties of the University of Mitrovica

Faculty	Alumni engaged in faculty activities	Alumni club exists	Number of alumni in the database/club
Faculty of Economics	No	No	55
Faculty of Medicine	Yes	Yes, formally	33
Faculty of Agriculture	No	No	0
Faculty of Law	No	Yes, informally	25
Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics	Yes	Yes, informally	19
Faculty of Teacher Education	Yes	Yes, informally	13
Faculty of Sports and Physical Education	Yes	Yes, formally	54
Faculty of Technical Sciences	Yes	No	0
Faculty of Arts	Yes	No	0
Faculty of Philosophy	Yes	Yes, informally	116



4 SWOT ANALYSIS

Application of the AL4LIFE project foresees the following achievements for the University in Mitrovica in relation to alumni infrastructure strengthening:

- Development and adoption of **alumni strategy** for the period 2024-2029, with supporting documents, **including action plan and the policies** that allow to integrate alumni into university structures and teaching. Strategy will encompass general principles and issues, overall mission, vision, and strategic goals of alumni engagement, while the action plan will provide planned activities, deadlines, responsible actors, and contingency actions for achieving strategy's goals, education processes, etc.;
- 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 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.

In relation to these achievements, the following strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats were identified and presented in Table 3.



Table 3: SWOT aspects of the AL4LIFE achievements for the University of Mitrovica

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A large number of university alumni from different disciplines • Experience in events organisation • Recognised need to engage alumni, at larger part of faculties, and at the university level • Alumni employed within the organisation • Well-developed network of collaboration with other universities in the country and abroad 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of experience in alumni engagement at the university • Lack of human power to assign alumni coordinators/officers, and research chair and alumni scholarship club staff, as separate posts • Modest motivation of university staff to engage in collaborative activities with the alumni • Limited available financial funds for sustainable maintenance of built alumni infrastructure and for carrying out the alumni-related activities in continuity
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University alumni living and working throughout the Balkans, Europe, and the world • Collaboration with other alumni organisations • AL4LIFE project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alumni community not officially supported in national frames • Unfavourable political situation • Travel-related difficulties • Uncertain external schemes of financing the alumni-related activities • Lack of alumni's motivation and responsiveness to engage in collaborative activities with the university

To interpret findings from the above SWOT table, however, and to draw conclusions, the Table 1 of this Report – Benefits from alumni capacity building to different engaged entities – should also be taken into consideration.



5 DISUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Domestic regulation and guidelines for higher education neither stimulate nor limit the inclusion of alumni into university processes. The space for alumni engagement, therefore, exists, but it must be properly shaped and stimulated. The benefits of alumni inclusion, as presented in this study (Table 1), must be accented on all occasions and inserted in strategic documents and action plans that the University of Mitrovica will develop in the frames of the AL4LIFE project.

At the University of Mitrovica, the engagement of alumni, i.e., the collaboration between alumni as well as between alumni and the University staff and students, is modest so far. This is due to current scarce initiatives as well as due to the lack of a functional and well-developed electronic platform that would significantly facilitate communication, networking and promotion. Thanks to the project AL4LIFE, such a platform is planned to be introduced at the University.

Alumni clubs are officially established at two faculties – Faculty of Medicine and Faculty of Sports and Physical Education. At the Faculty of Arts, the establishment of alumni club is currently under preparation. The remaining seven faculties do not have official decisions on established alumni clubs yet. At the University level, an alumni club exists, but it has not been officially introduced yet. There is a need to further build alumni clubs at the faculties and the alumni association at the University level in accordance with the AL4LIFE plan and objectives.

It appears from the analysis, however, that the faculties' activities engaging alumni overpass the existence of alumni clubs, as at seven faculties of the University of Mitrovica there exists some kind of collaboration with the alumni. In most cases, however, this collaboration results from individual initiatives and motivation. On the other hand, there is an overall lack of organized actions engaging alumni, both at the level of the university and the faculties. In AL4LIFE strategies and action plans, therefore, a way that will secure stable and sustainable alumni-related actions within the University must be well elaborated.

The conditions should be created in a way that alumni become sincere friends of the University. 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.

The University needs to find a proper solution to appoint persons who will safeguard built alumni infrastructure and manage the organization of alumni-related activities and events continuously.

Having regarded current identified threats from the SWOT analysis, as well the fact that University alumni work all over the globe, the option for intensification of online alumni-related activities should be explored.

All alumni data should be treated very carefully, by respecting data protection rules and protocols.



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