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**AL4Life** ↗



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# Report on EU HEIs alumni organizations

An analysis on engagement models, strategies  
and policies

Bologna  
**July, 2023**



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## 1. AN INTRODUCTION TO THE REPORT

The results that will be pointed out in this report, were achieved within the Deliverable D2.1, of which University of Bologna is leader of, titled "Reports on EU HEIs alumni engagement models and policies", part of the Erasmus+ Capacity Building project AL4LIFE. The report will identify best EU practices of alumni engagement and will analyze existing EU policies/strategies in that regard, providing a basis to develop Montenegrin and Kosovo Alumni Strategy. The report will be made available in electronic version, in English and afterwards translated in MNE/SRB/ALB.

In today's world, universities play a crucial role in shaping the future by imparting knowledge, fostering intellectual growth, and nurturing young minds. However, the impact of universities extends far beyond student's academic journey. It is increasingly recognized that the strength of an institution relies in its ability to cultivate a thriving and engaged alumni network, regardless of its structure, because as it will emerge, the scenario of Alumni among European universities is various and heterogeneous. Alumni networks not only serve as valuable resources for universities but also provide a wealth of opportunities for graduates to connect, collaborate, and contribute to their alma maters and the broader community.

This report aims to delve into the landscape of alumni networks among European universities, focusing on their organization, activities, and impact. By exploring these networks, we seek to identify best practices, uncover challenges, and provide recommendations and support for the development of alumni engagement strategies and support to Montenegrin and Kosovo Universities, partners of the project.

Europe, renowned for its rich academic tradition and diverse higher education institutions, boasts an extensive network of universities spread across its regions. From venerable institutions with centuries-old legacies, to modern cutting-edge universities, the European higher education landscape offers a unique and multifaceted context for studying alumni networks. By examining a range of universities, both in terms of size and geographical location, this report aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current state of alumni engagement in Europe. Alumni relations can offer valuable insights and connections to current students, contributing to research and innovation initiatives, mentorship programs, and support to fundraising activities. Moreover, alumni networks provide a space for graduates to connect with like-minded individuals, fostering professional growth, career development, and lifelong learning opportunities.



Alumni networks offer immense potentials that possibly are applicable to all strategies enacted by universities, but of course establishing and maintaining effective networks is not without challenges. Universities must navigate logistical hurdles, adapt to changing communication channels, and strike a balance between nurturing local connections and embracing global alumni communities, starting from analyzing and understand what community of alumni each university has to deal and work with. By examining the strategies employed by the European universities that have been involved, this report aims to shed light on successful approaches and provide recommendations for overcoming common obstacles, that will emerge later in this report.

In conclusion, this report sets out to explore the landscape of alumni networks, investigating their governance model, services and activities, resources and funding strategies, engagement and communication actions. By conducting a comparative analysis, we aim to identify best practices, challenges, opportunities and real experiences gained in the field. Through this examination, we hope to contribute to the advancement of alumni activities in Montenegrin and Kosovo universities, fostering stronger connections within and between universities, graduates, and in general the wider community.

## **1.2 Universities involved**

The selection of universities played a crucial role in ensuring the diversity and representativeness of the sample, enabling a comprehensive analysis of alumni experiences across different institutions, since it was of paramount importance for the purposes of this report.

### **1.2.1 Criteria for Selection**

To ensure a comprehensive and diverse representation, a set of criteria was established for selecting the universities involved in the report. These criteria encompassed various factors to capture a wide range of institutional characteristics and facilitate meaningful comparisons. The key criteria included:



1. Geographical Diversity: Universities from different European countries were considered to represent the regional and cultural variations across the continent;
2. Disciplinary Diversity: Universities offering a broad range of academic disciplines, including sciences, humanities, social sciences, engineering, and business, were included to encompass diverse alumni experiences;
3. Reputation: A mix of universities with varying degrees of reputation and rankings was selected to capture the experiences of alumni from both highly recognized and lesser-known institutions;
4. Alumni Network Strength: Universities with well-established and active alumni networks were considered to ensure a robust representation of alumni engagement and support systems, but moreover it was meaningful to take in consideration some universities with a less structured alumni network.

The determination of an appropriate sample size and composition was crucial for the representativeness and extent of the findings. The specific number of universities included in the report was determined based on resource constraints, feasibility and the aim of capturing diverse experiences rather than achieving exhaustive coverage. The selected universities represented a mix of large and small institutions, ensuring representation across different European regions:

- Alma Mater Studiorum – Università di Bologna (Italy)
- Freie Universität Berlin (Germany)
- Helsingin Yliopisto (Finland)
- KU Leuven (Belgium)
- Leiden University (Netherlands)
- Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (Spain)
- Universidad Complutense de Madrid (Spain)
- Université Paris 1 – Panthéon Sorbonne (France)
- University College of Dublin (Ireland)
- University of Edinburgh (UK)
- University of Oxford (UK)
- Uniwersytet Jagielloński in Kraków (Poland)
- Univerza V Ljubljani (Slovenia)



- Zurich University (Switzerland)

### 1.2.2 Limitations

It is important to acknowledge that the selection of universities for the report may have inherent limitations. The criteria used for selection, though comprehensive, may not encompass all possible dimensions of diversity or capture every nuance of alumni experiences. Additionally, resource constraints and practical considerations influenced the final composition of the sample. As such, the findings should not be interpreted as generalizable and extended to all European institutions, but instead as a snapshot within the context of the selected universities.

It should also be noted that the development of the sample, has also faced some difficulties due to the availability given by the university, in terms of time and type of participation in the study. In this regard, some Universities were only considered in some part of the analysis, as it will be explained later in the report.

### 1.3 Methodology

After having noted the challenges encountered when establishing the sample, this section elucidates the methodology employed to conduct a comprehensive report on alumni networks in European universities. The primary aim of this study was to gather valuable insights into alumni organizations experiences, beginning with understanding their organisational structure and ending with the identification of best practices

To accomplish this, a multifaceted approach was adopted, based on three tools encompassing: benchmarking of university websites, questionnaire surveys, and online interviews. The following pages will outline the systematic process followed during each stage of data collection.

#### 1.3.1 Strategic information

Within the framework of AL4LIFE, some key areas have emerged as relevant strategic information, that appear to be essential in order to identify best strategies and practices. These key information have been divided into four topics:

- Governance, which plays a crucial role in ensuring the effective functioning of alumni networks. This includes understanding the structure of the alumni organization, the decision-making processes, and the involvement of alumni in



governance roles within the network. This specific point will highlight the necessity to take a decision in terms of a strategic policy;

- Communication, vital component in maintaining strong connections with and within alumni networks. It involves developing effective strategies for keeping in touch with alumni and fostering meaningful engagement. Identifying the preferred communication channels of alumni and implementing a comprehensive communication strategy enhances the network's ability to disseminate information, share opportunities, facilitate alumni interactions and increase the members;
- Services and activities, offered by alumni networks. These may include organizing events such as reunions, professional development workshops, or mentorship programs. Understanding the range of services provided and assessing the level of alumni engagement in these activities helps identify successful practices that foster strong alumni relationships and contribute to the network's overall effectiveness, and to strengthen the value of being part of it;
- Resources and funding, essential for sustaining alumni networks. This report seeks to explore various aspects, such as the fees charged to alumni, fundraising initiatives, the dedicated staff responsible for alumni engagement, and the level of support provided by the university. Adequate resources and funding enable alumni networks to provide valuable services and activities to their members.

By exploring these dimensions of alumni networks' operations, this report seeks to identify and disseminate EU policies/strategies and best practices that enhance the effectiveness and impact of these networks. The findings will provide valuable insights from universities and alumni associations across Europe, supporting the development and improvement of their alumni engagement strategies.

### **1.3.2 Benchmarking of Universities/Alumni Websites**

The initial phase of the methodology involved benchmarking the websites of various European universities. The goal was to gain a comprehensive understanding of the information available on these websites regarding the world of alumni engagement, career support, and post-graduation outcomes, focusing on the four strategic



information specified above<sup>1</sup>. A comprehensive list of universities was compiled, representing diverse countries, educational systems, and disciplines, as specified above in the previous section, reaching a total of fourteen<sup>2</sup>.

### 1.3.3 Questionnaire Survey

To gather quantitative data on alumni experiences and perceptions, a questionnaire survey was meticulously designed and administered. The survey aimed to capture information on various aspects, including academic satisfaction, career progression, organization models, utilization of university resources, and overall engagement with the institution.

The sample consists of eight universities<sup>3</sup> and the questionnaire was disseminated electronically via e-mail. Participants were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses and the questionnaire employed closed-ended, but in some questions the form “others” was used to give space to the participants, facilitating both quantitative and qualitative analysis.

The data collected through the survey was analysed, producing both statistical graphs and qualitative information, providing relevant insights for the purposes of this report. The findings from the survey were subsequently integrated with the results from the website benchmarking and also with the online interviews data, giving a wide point of view, thanks to the differentiation of data collection actions.

### 1.3.4 Online Interviews

Following the questionnaire submission, a qualitative approach was adopted through online interviews with eight alumni organizations<sup>4</sup>. The interviews aimed to delve deeper into the experiences and perceptions of alumni, allowing to provide a better understanding, with a reference to specific experiences of these organizations.

The interviews were conducted using video conferencing platforms (teams), ensuring time flexibility and convenience for participants. A semi-structured interview guide was meticulously developed, focusing on key topics on the line of the four strategic information. The interviews were recorded and automatically transcribed with the

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<sup>1</sup> We would like to specify that the benchmark of the websites of some universities, should be considered as a mere interpretation of the authors, due to the fact that we have not interacted with them directly.

<sup>2</sup> See paragraph 2 in order to see the complete list.

<sup>3</sup> Only a part of the total sample was involved in the questionnaire: Alma Mater Studiorum – Università di Bologna, Helsingin Yliopisto, KU Leuven, Leiden University, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, University of Oxford, Univerza V Ljubljani.

<sup>4</sup> The sample is the same as in the questionnaire.



consent of participants for qualitative analysis purposes, precisely because this information shall be deemed of paramount importance, providing datailes, that could not be otherwise collected.

Thematic analysis was applied to the interview transcripts, identifying recurring patterns, emerging themes, and unique perspectives expressed by the alumni organizations involved. The qualitative findings complemented the quantitative data obtained from the two previous methodologies, providing a more comprehensive and pradgmatic understanding of alumni experience of the universities involved.

### **1.3.5 Data Integration**

The data collected through the benchmarking of university websites, questionnaire survey, and online interviews will be integrated for a triangulated analysis. This involved combining the quantitative results from the survey with the qualitative insights from the interviews to generate a comprehensive report, increasing effectiveness to each methodology applied.

The integrated data analysis followed a systematic process, encompassing the identification of key themes, comparison of findings across different universities, and exploration of relationships between variables. The results be presented presented using a combination of descriptive statistics, charts, tables, and qualitative excerpts, ending with the identification of best practices.



## 2. EXPLORING GOVERNANCE MODELS OF ALUMNI ORGANIZATIONS

Alumni organizations bring together former students, aiming to create a sense of community, and facilitate engagement and support for their alma mater. To ensure effective functioning, alumni organizations require the definition of a governance models that provide a solid foundation for decision-making, strategic planning, and resource management.

This chapter delves into the various governance models employed by alumni organizations, taking into consideration a wide array of data sources. In order to comprehensively explore the topic, we have incorporated statistical data acquired from website benchmarking, questionnaire surveys, and qualitative data from online interviews. By using these diverse information, we aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the different governance models in practice and their impact on the overall effectiveness of alumni organizations analysed in this report.

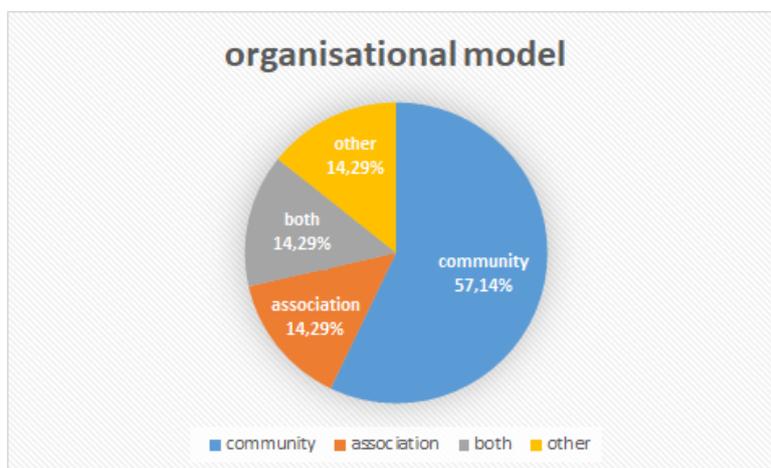
To begin, the quantitative analysis will shed light on the prevalence of various governance models, the size and composition of governing boards, and the allocation of responsibilities among the universities involved in this study, considering as first important information the fact that there is no perfect model, but as it will be shown there is a multiplicity of organizational models.

### 2.1 Organizational models, leading roles, and management of alumni organizations

The findings of the research in terms of statistical data reveal a distinct distribution of organizational models within alumni organizations. The results indicate that 57.14% of these entities operate as communities, managed by central office, proving to be the most used model. Whereas, 14.29% of the organizations adopt an association model, prioritizing formal structures and governance mechanisms to effectively coordinate their activities. An additional 14.29% of the organizations employ a hybrid approach, combining elements of both community and association models, leveraging the respective strengths of each. Finally, 14.29% (two of the universities analyzed) of the organizations fall into the category labeled as "other," representing alternative organizational models that deviate from the specific classifications employed in this research. In this regard, to confirm that different models are present, in one case alumni is perceived as a university service, whereas in the second, alumni is a project that has received funding for that specific purposes. These findings underscore the



diverse nature and adaptability observed within alumni organizations, highlighting the varied approaches taken to fulfill their missions and engage their members.



**Figure 1: Organizational model graph**

After having explored the models, as above described, the focus has shifted on understanding alumni leadership, in terms of decision-making and selection of the management board

The comprehensive analysis conducted on various universities reveals that a majority of the institutions examined have embraced a university-led organizational model. In this prevailing approach, the university assumes a central role in spearheading and overseeing the operations and activities of the alumni organization. This model reflects a structured framework where the university takes on the responsibility of coordinating alumni engagement efforts, strategic planning, and resource allocation, that we could name Hub&spoke model<sup>5</sup>. By assuming a leadership position, the university can leverage its established infrastructure, institutional knowledge, and networks to effectively engage alumni and foster a sense of connection and support. This university-led organizational model demonstrates the universities' commitment to maintaining a strong relationship with their alumni community, leveraging their resources to facilitate meaningful engagement and lifelong connections.

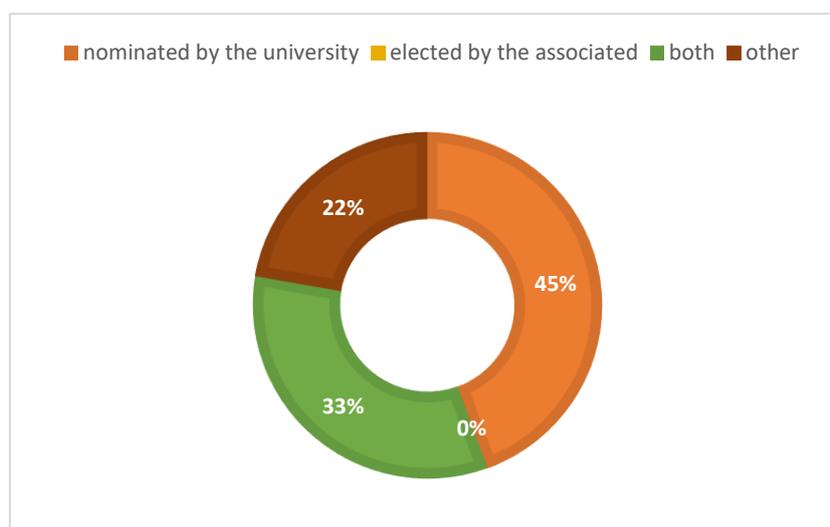
<sup>5</sup> The hub has specific duties, in general coordination roles, whereas spokes have mainly executive roles.



## INSIGHT

As it has already been said, every alumni organization must adapt to the context, as proof of this Helsinki Alumni works differently from other organization analyzed. There is a central office led by the university, and then there are many associations affiliated that cannot be controlled and are totally independent. This because Finnish system provides full independence, allowing the associations not to be ruled by someone else, in this case the university.

With regard to the selection of the management board, the results show that the majority of universities decide to nominate the management board, another good percentage (33%) opts for a combination of members elected by the university, plus a part elected by the associates, but no organization chooses the election by the associates. Once again it is curious to see the section other: Helsinki Alumni, yet again, at a central level does not have a management board, but then all the association, since they are totally independent, they can choose their functioning model, in terms of management board. Similarly, also Leiden University does not have a management board, but they describe their organization as an open network, therefore the decision-making is transformed in the drafting of strategic activities.



**Figure 2: Management board election and composition**



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## INSIGHT – LEARNING FROM FAILURES

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The Alumni Association of the University of Bologna can be taken as an example with regard to the management board. Established in 2021, in the first place consisted of a majority of members elected by the associated and only one member, directly nominated by the University of Bologna. This condition could have possibly led to a management direction very distant from the plan of the university. To avoid this, in 2022, the organization was reviewed and the management board composition was changed. As of today, four components are nominated directly by the Rector, two are elected and one spot is reserved to the former president.

Overall, these research findings underscore the rich diversity and adaptive nature of alumni organizations, each selecting an organizational model that aligns with its vision, mission, history (in some cases the association were born before the establishment of a centralized office) and member needs. This nuanced understanding of the various models contributes to a comprehensive comprehension of effective strategies for alumni engagement and organizational success.

### 2.2 Alumni organizations: structure and aggregation criterias

The structure of alumni organizations encompasses various forms of aggregation, including chapters topic groups, and other organizational units, that play a pivotal role in facilitating effective engagement and collaboration among alumni. These subunits are essential components within the broader framework of alumni organization, enabling targeted initiatives, focused discussions, and specialized networking opportunities. By dividing alumni into chapters, topic groups, or other, the organization can cater to the diverse professional affiliations, interests and geographical locations of the associated members, fostering a sense of community, and providing tailored support to specific contexts, aiming to expand the number of associates. In this manner, this paragraph aims to delve into the data collected from the organizations analyzed, highlighting the most frequently used models.

Furthermore, the division of alumni organizations into chapters, topic groups, and other forms of aggregation allows for efficient management and allocation of resources. Chapters, often based on geographical regions, enable localized engagement and facilitate in-person events, such as reunions, networking gatherings, and professional development activities. This geographical segmentation acknowledges the diverse alumni spread across different regions and ensures that



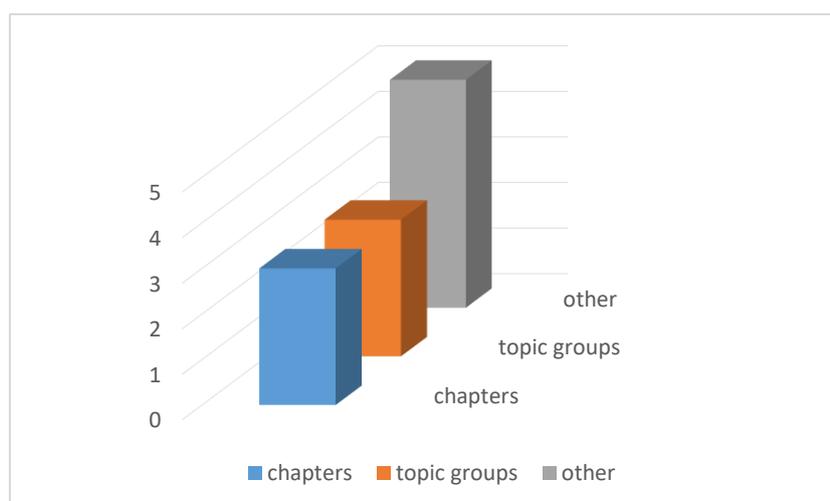
engagement efforts can be tailored to meet the specific needs and interests of each chapter, therefore a sectorial communication will be preferred.

Similarly, topic groups provide a network for alumni with shared professional or personal interests to come together and collaborate on specific areas of expertise. By forming these specialized communities, alumni can exchange knowledge, share experiences, and forge valuable connections within their respective fields.

In addition to chapters and topic groups, alumni organizations may employ other forms of aggregation, such as affinity groups based on common affiliations like sports teams, cultural backgrounds, or academic disciplines. These groups create spaces for alumni with similar backgrounds or shared experiences to connect and engage, fostering a sense of belonging and providing opportunities for alumni to support and uplift one another.

We will now delve into the analysis of the data collected, both static and qualitative information concerning the structure of alumni. Both chapters and topic groups seem to be the most used and functional modalities. However, it must be noticed that in this case more than ever before, we can notice that different ways of organization are present:

- The University of Leiden avoids this segmentation, defining only an open network, which carries out activities and initiatives;
- At University of Ljubljana, each faculty/academy has its own alumni club



**Figure 3: Structure of the organizations**



From these results it can be understood how even if there are some standardized and frequent structures (chapters and focus groups), it is also true that every alumni organization adapts to the context, organizing in different forms and modalities.

Upon conducting the analysis above mentioned, we will now place notable emphasis on the delineation of aggregation criteria. This point aims to ascertain the methods for collecting and classifying alumni aggregation criteria, as for instance fields of study, year of graduation, territorial area and many others. Therefore, the participants have been asked through the questionnaire survey to indicate how the alumni aggregation is organized and established.

As shown in the graph related to the aggregation criteria, there are four main answers in terms of aggregation:

- Fields of study, ranking first among the criteria chosen by alumni organizations. This is widely spread, in many universities in fact chapters are organized based on the field of studies, using an based on faculty or department;
- A further criterion widely shared, is the area of interest, term by which is understood activities not strictly connected to the field of studies. Just to name some examples: management, entrepreneurship, finance, art, music etc.;
- Territorial area ss placed on the top positions among the criteria, especially for those universities that have an international outlook (University of Oxford);
- Sports interest, seems to be a great and widely spread purpose to gather alumni. Along with this, the trend of aggregation based on activities like sports, book clubs, learning and travels.

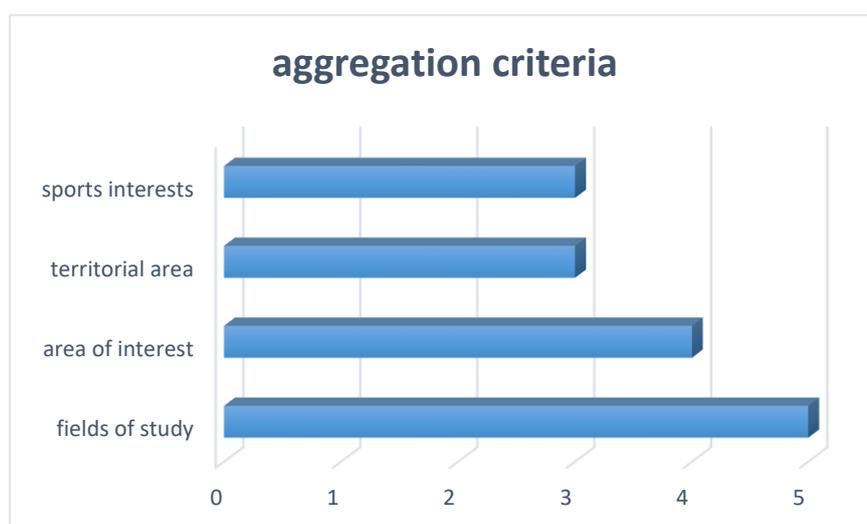


Figure 4: Aggregation criteria



## 2.3 Findings

In conclusion, the analysis of governance models in alumni organizations reveals a diverse landscape, with community, association, hybrid, and alternative models being employed. The prevalent university-led organizational model demonstrates the universities' commitment to actively engage alumni and leverage institutional resources for effective alumni support. The selection of the management board varies, with nominations by the university being the most common approach. The study highlights the adaptability and individualized approaches taken by these organizations, allowing them to align with their mission and member needs.

The structure of alumni organizations incorporates various forms of aggregation, such as chapters, topic groups, and affinity groups. These subunits play a crucial role in facilitating targeted initiatives, specialized networking, and efficient resource management. Territorial chapters enable localized engagement and events, acknowledging the diversity of alumni across different regions, providing the opportunity to alumni abroad to create a club, encouraging also social integration. Topic groups foster collaboration among alumni with shared interests or expertise, while affinity groups cater to common disciplinary affiliations. The data analysis indicates that chapters and topic groups are frequently employed, although some organizations opt for alternative structures or open networks based on their specific contexts and goals.

Furthermore, this chapter emphasizes the significance of aggregation criteria; fields of study, areas of interest, territorial areas, and sports interests are prominent aggregation criteria used by the organizations surveyed. These criteria enable tailored engagement, networking, and support opportunities for alumni based on their academic backgrounds, personal interests, geographic locations, and extracurricular activities.

Overall, research findings underscore the importance of governance models, structural considerations, and aggregation criteria in shaping the effectiveness and success of alumni organizations. By understanding the diverse approaches and strategies employed by these organizations, educational institutions can enhance alumni engagement, foster a sense of community, and facilitate lifelong connections among their graduates.



### 3. COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES IN ALUMNI ORGANIZATIONS: BETWEEN ENGAGEMENT, COMMUNICATION CHANNELS AND PROMOTION

This chapter aims to explore the realm of alumni engagement, focusing specifically on the communication channels and strategies employed by European universities to foster meaningful relationships with their alumni. We will explore how these universities effectively promote their alumni organizations, engage graduates, and develop comprehensive communication strategies to ensure a consistent and meaningful connection with their alumni community.

#### 3.1 Communication strategies

This section will outline the results of our research on how universities promote the Alumni organization to establish and maintain a vibrant alumni network. This section examines the key methods employed, such as online platforms, social media, email marketing, and many more. We will explore the methods employed by the universities in reaching out to diverse alumni segments and encouraging their active participation in the university's alumni community.

The participants have been asked whether they have a communication strategy to inform Alumni in regard to the results obtained by the University. We have found out that the majority do have a strategy, but those who do not have one are still a good percentage, as it can be seen in the graph below. Overall, to have a communication strategy seems to be relevant in terms of effectiveness and effort.

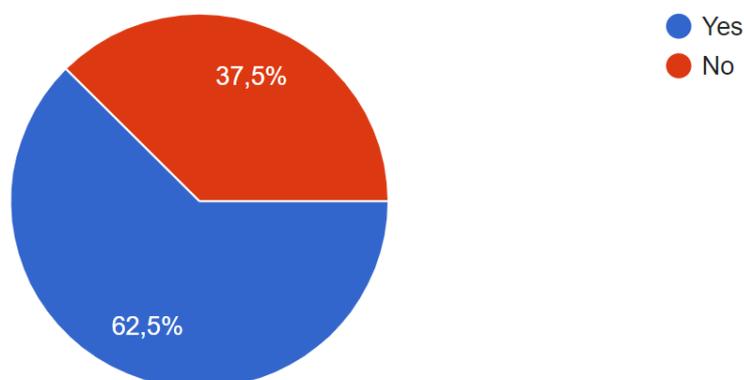


Figure 5: Graph regarding communication strategies



Moreover, from what we have learned from the interviews, it is also very relevant to establish a sectoral communication, therefore raising the interest of the alumni on certain specific topics, rather than giving too many information. By doing this, the leakage of information regarding events and activities is avoided, precisely because a precise communication is suggested.

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### INSIGHT

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In this regard, the University of Oxford for instance prefers to target its communication, also in terms of events, therefore this allows them to have a higher response rate from their alumni. In this perspective, they try to identify the possible target audience for a certain information/event, and this enables them not to waste time and resources, maximizing the results. This analysis requires a big investment in terms of time and resources.

### 3.2 Engagement strategies and communication channels

Very close to the topic addressed in the previous section, this one will explore the key alumni engagement strategies and most used communication channels, that universities are using to bridge the gap between alumni and their university. In order to understand this, we presented this issue to the universities involved in the questionnaire survey.

We have noticed that contacting alumni through personal e-mail is the main and only shared practice by all participants. A big issue is how to acquire the updated contacts, therefore some universities contact former students through their university credential, asking to update personal contacts<sup>6</sup>.

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It seems to be relevant to notice that the Uniwersytet Jagiellonski in Kraków has decided to develop its alumni project using the platform of LinkedIn as the main space for alumni to interact and receive information, rather than opting for a website, or closed platform as many other universities do.  
(Please be aware that this information is based on the benchmark analysis and the following interpretation, made by the authors).

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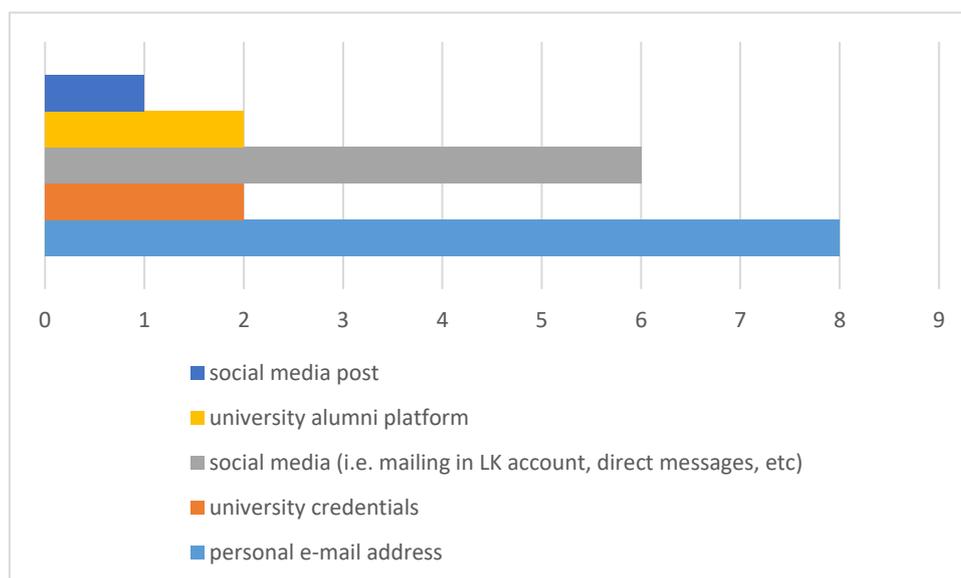
<sup>6</sup> In reality, from what we have learned through the interviews, this is a very challenging action, due to the fact that after graduation it is difficult to encourage former students to use the university e-mail address.



Another significant trend concerns the use of direct messages in social media, such as for example LinkedIn, well known for its potential on the business side. From our survey it seems that using direct messages is functional in order to engage alumni. It seems less effective to rely on posts on social media, which are instead used to inform alumni about events or activities promoted by the organization, as it will be explained later.

Beside the use of social media, there is still a high proportion of organizations using university credentials, even considering the issues abovementioned. In reality, from what we have learned through the interviews, this is a very challenging action, due to the fact that after graduation it is difficult to encourage former students to use the university e-mail address and persuade them to update it.

A same percentage declares to have and employ an alumni platform, that apart from the fact that this can be developed by the university or bought with a license, these platforms are used as a place for interaction between the members, but also to inform members and communicate with them.



**Figure 6: Communication channels**

In order to gather a wide range of information regarding the communication sphere, we have asked the participants to indicate the channels employed to share alumni events and activities. When it comes to alumni activities and events, leveraging various channels can greatly enhance the reach and engagement of these initiatives.



Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, offer an excellent avenue to connect with a vast network of alumni. By creating dedicated alumni groups or pages, universities can share updates about upcoming events, highlight success stories of alumni, and foster a sense of community among former students.

Email remains a reliable and personalized communication channel for reaching out to alumni. Universities can send regular newsletters or event invitations directly to alumni's inboxes, ensuring they stay informed about the latest happenings. Platforms specifically designed for alumni networking and engagement, offer a centralized space where universities can showcase events, facilitate networking opportunities, and enable alumni to connect with each other.

Once again we have a wide variety of approaches, sometimes very distant from each other. For example, the University of Leiden, finds e-mail much more effective than other channels, whereas other universities, such as Helsinki University and KU Leuven prefer to rely on closed platforms, whose access is restricted only to alumni members. In contraposition to this approach, other universities use open channels, such as social media and university platforms.

Embracing a combination of social media, email, dedicated platforms, and the university website allows for a multi-channel approach that caters to diverse preferences and maximizes the visibility of alumni activities and events. By leveraging these channels effectively, universities can foster a strong alumni community, promote engagement, and provide opportunities for former students to reconnect with their alma mater and fellow alumni. From this perspective, yet once more, it is shown that the alumni world is made of different approaches and methods, that are designed according to the unique context.

Before heading to the section related to activities and services, we must analyze the action implemented by alumni organizations to promote their network/community. As it is shown in the graph, university websites are a shared practice among all universities analyzed in our study. Every university has a specific website or some webpages dedicated to alumni. This space is being used for informational purposes and as a point of reference for all alumni. Moreover, the participants declare to use



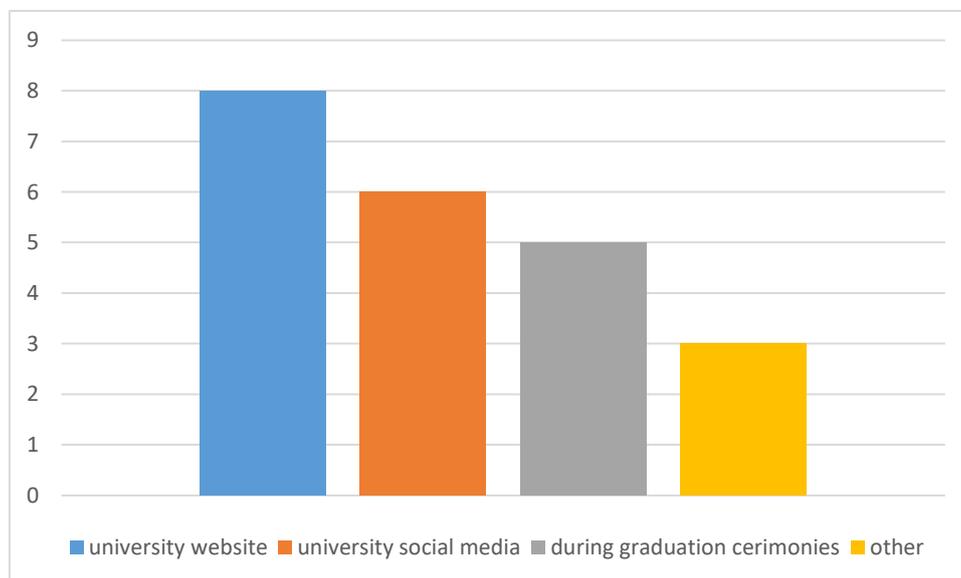
social medias as a tool to promote activities and services offered, that due to their essence are created and function to communicate to a wide public.

### INSIGHT – BEST PRACTICE

The University of Oxford, in order to promote the alumni community, organizes an annual event for graduating students, called “Leavers Fair”. This event allows the alumni staff to meet the student of the final year, engaging them, and helping to create a community of alumni since the very end of their studies.

In addition, a considerable number of universities tend to promote the alumni network/community during graduation ceremonies. It is widely believed that this is a pivotal moment in order to involve former students, as the last moment to have a direct interaction with them. During the ceremony, the university is able to show how the alumni organization work, what are the services and activities offered and how to get involved.

As has already been found, the section other, provides interesting insights:



**Figure 7: How alumni organization promote themselves**

### 3.3 Findings

In conclusion, effective communication strategies play a crucial role in promoting alumni organizations and fostering meaningful engagement with alumni communities. The use of various communication channels, such as social media platforms, email,



dedicated platforms, and university websites, enables universities to reach and connect with alumni in diverse ways.

Social medias offer a broad reach and enable universities to create dedicated alumni groups or pages, facilitating updates on events and success stories while nurturing a sense of community. Email remains a reliable and personalized channel for direct communication, ensuring alumni to stay informed about the latest happenings. Dedicated alumni platforms provide a centralized space for networking, event showcasing, and communication among alumni members.

The findings reveal that universities employ a range of approaches, tailored to their specific contexts and preferences. Some prioritize email communication, while others rely on closed platforms restricted to alumni members, or open channels like social media. Embracing a multi-channel approach allows universities to cater to diverse alumni preferences and maximize the visibility of alumni activities and events.

University websites serve as an essential hub for alumni information, acting as a reference point and providing a dedicated space for alumni engagement. Additionally, enhancing graduation ceremonies as a strategic moment to promote the alumni network and showcase services and activities proves effective in involving former students at a pivotal moment of interaction.

Overall, the research highlights the diverse approaches and methods employed by alumni organizations, emphasizing the importance of tailoring communication strategies to suit unique contexts and alumni preferences. By effectively utilizing various communication channels and platforms, universities can foster a strong alumni community, promote engagement, and provide opportunities for alumni to reconnect with their university and fellow graduates.



## 4. ACTIVITIES AND SERVICES IN ALUMNI ORGANIZATIONS

This chapter explores the diverse activities and services offered by alumni organizations, highlighting the crucial role they play in fostering engagement, personal growth, and professional development. From networking events and mentorship programs, to career services and philanthropic initiatives, these organizations strive to empower their alumni, create opportunities, and build a sense of community.

In this chapter, we aim to get into the activities and services offered by alumni organizations, examining their significance and impact on the lives of their members. By highlighting stories and success anecdotes, we aim to showcase the transformative power of alumni networks, celebrating the value of lifelong connections and the enduring bond between individuals and their alma maters. To do so, we will relay on different data collected during our analysis, along with experiences gained by the different organizations that have been taken in consideration.

### 4.1 Activities, services, events and engagement strategies,

Within the realm of alumni organizations, a rich amount of activities, services, and events awaits members, offering a wealth of opportunities to connect, engage, and grow. This section delves into the myriad offerings that characterize these organizations, shining a light on the vibrant landscape of alumni involvement. From professional development workshops and educational seminars to social gatherings and community service initiatives, alumni organizations foster an environment where individuals can expand their horizons, forge meaningful connections, and leave a lasting impact.

At the heart of alumni organizations lie an array of enriching activities designed to cater to the diverse interests and aspirations of their members. Professional development workshops form an integral part of their repertoire, equipping alumni with the latest industry trends, essential skills, and strategic insights necessary for career growth and adaptability.

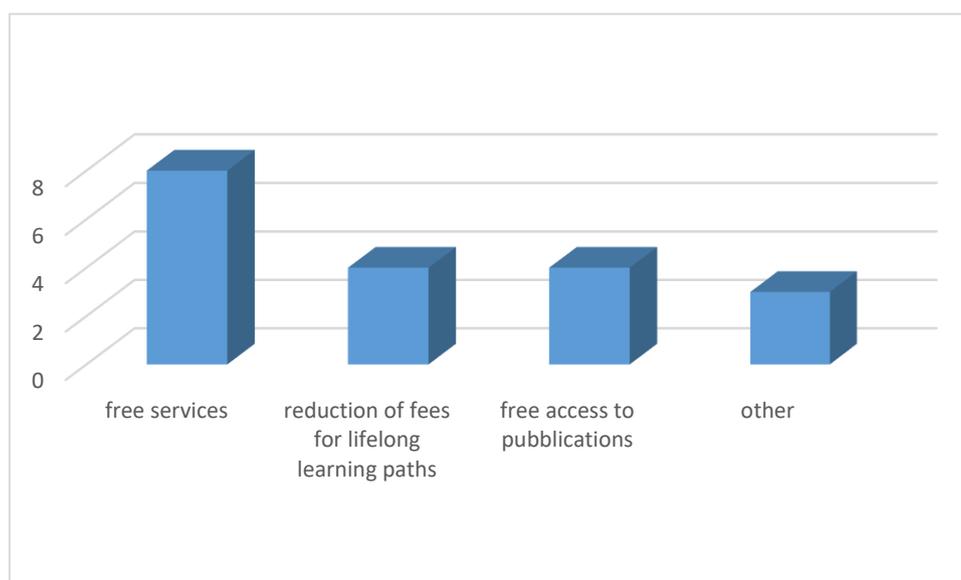
In addition to professional development, alumni organizations recognize the importance of fostering social connections and creating opportunities to improve network. Through a wide range of social events, such as homecoming celebrations, alumni mixers, and reunions, these organizations facilitate an atmosphere of fellowship, and shared experiences. These events serve as a platform for alumni to reconnect with each other, build new relationships, and nurture a sense of belonging to their alma mater's extended community. By creating these social bonds, alumni



organizations not only provide a space for networking but also contribute to the overall well-being and fulfillment of their members.

While it is true that there is an enormous amount of activities and services offered to alumni, it is also true that it is very difficult to engage and attract them. To understand the kind of issues these organization have to go through, we have investigating what are the strategies adopted in order to avoid these issues. First of all, the first shared practice is offering free services. This does not mean that all the services offered are free, but this can be a strategy to attract alumni. Another consistent number of organizations, choose to reduce the fees for lifelong learning paths, and the same percentage also give free access to publications. Therefore, it is shown that some services may be free of charge, whereas other may have a cost.

As already happened, the section other, provides a very interesting space for organization to explain what they do, and for us to understand the differentiation of activities. Some universities, organize events, as a first contact with alumni, aiming to foster this relationship. Other universities, adopt completely different strategies, offering free services in almost every activities organized, such as: carrer support, free library access, discounts to local business and sport benefits.



**Figure 8: Alumni attraction strategies**



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## INSIGHT

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The University of Leiden unlike other institutions, charges a fee for events and activities, not for economic purposes, but to avoid no-show. In fact, when events are free of charge, this is a risk that it should be considered. The Universities of Leiden, therefore, charges a small fee.

The University of Bologna does it too, indeed, for events like reunions, there is fee, aiming to make emerge the value of these opportunities.

After investigating the engagement strategies, it was necessary to understand what activities and events alumni organizations provide to their members. The most popular events organized in the alumni framework are:

- Career development
- Talks and conferences on specific topics
- Networking events among alumni
- Mentoring and job shadowing
- Reunions

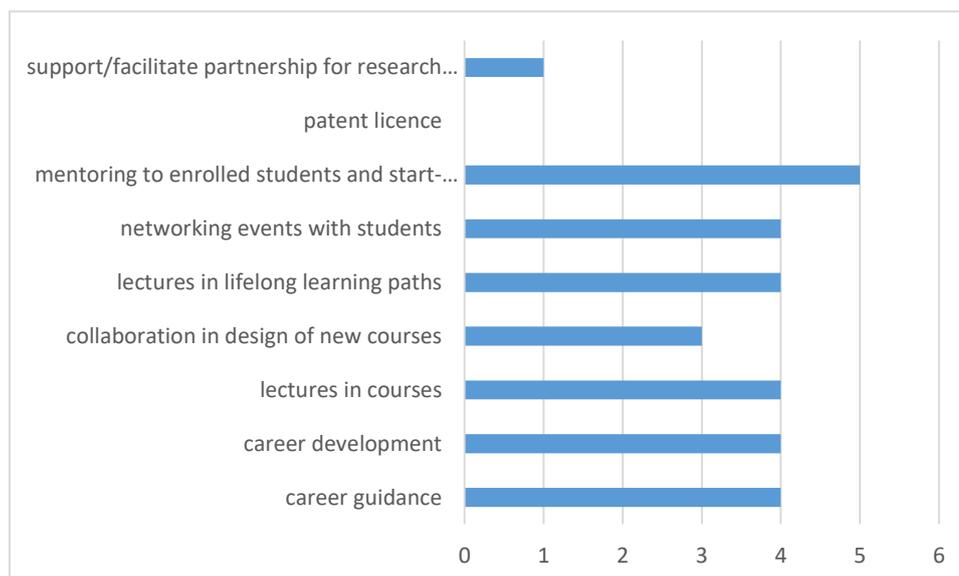
Less frequent are events like dinners, that are most of the time organized by the single chapters and association, and therefore are not mapped by the central office of the alumni organizations.

Alumni members are certainly the beneficiaries of activities and services offered by the university, but at the same time are valuable resources for every alumni organization. In fact, alumni are engaged in many other activities not merely directed to them, but to students or to young alumni and these services are very important and supportive for universities, in order to achieve the goals in terms of placements and career strategic plan. Alumni organization therefore offer to students or young alumni some services, activities and events thanks to the participation of alumni members, such as, among the most frequent and significant:

- Mentoring programs/events
- Networking events with students
- Career development
- Career guidance



- Lectures in lifelong learning paths



**Figure 9: Activities in which alumni are engaged**

Alumni have a pivotal role in events and activities in universities, providing invaluable support and guidance to current students. Their involvement in activities such as career guidance, mentoring programs, and lectures holds significant importance, as it has been said above. First of all, alumni bring real-world experiences and expertise to these events, offering students valuable insights into different professions and fields. Their knowledge, generated by their experience, can be helpful to students in terms of taking informed decisions about their career paths and provide the right guidance, and learning from the experts. In addition, alumni are mentors, sharing their personal journeys and providing encouragement and advice to current students and recent graduate students. This mentorship fosters a sense of community and allows students to learn from the successes and challenges and sometimes failures faced by those who have walked similar paths.

Another possible commitment for alumni, is the collaboration in designing new courses; because as graduates who have successfully navigated the academic landscape and then entered the professional world, they possess a unique understanding of the skills and knowledge requested by the business world. Their involvement in course design ensures that the curriculum is up-to-date, relevant, and competitive, therefore helping to align with the evolving needs of the job market. Moreover, their



input can help to bridge the gap between theory and practice, very often claimed to be a problem within the universities.

Lastly, by contributing through lectures and talks given by alumni, students are exposed to diverse perspectives, emerging trends, and innovative ideas, widening their horizon beyond the lectures and improving their human and educational experience at the university. In this perspective, by engaging with alumni, students can benefit from their experience, network, and suggestions, enhancing their university journey and getting ready for their future.

## 4.2 Findings

In conclusion, alumni organizations play a vital role in university events and activities, offering a wide range of services and opportunities for both alumni and current students. These organizations foster engagement, personal growth, and professional development through their diverse activities and services. Alumni involvement in career guidance, mentoring programs, and lectures provides students with real-world insights, guidance, and role models, helping them make informed decisions and navigate the professional world successfully. Furthermore, alumni collaboration in designing new courses ensures that the curriculum remains relevant and practical, addressing the changing needs of the job market. Alumni engagement also extends to social events, networking opportunities, and philanthropic initiatives, fostering a sense of community and lifelong connections. By actively involving alumni, universities create a mutually beneficial relationship, harnessing the expertise, experience, and networks of their graduates for the benefit of the entire academic community.

Moreover, beside the direct benefits to students and the university, alumni involvement in events and activities holds broader significance. Alumni serve as ambassadors and advocates for their alma mater, contributing to its reputation and standing in the larger community. Their success stories and achievements reflect positively on the university, attracting prospective students, donors, and potential industry partnerships. By recognizing and harnessing the power of alumni, universities can create a vibrant and interconnected ecosystem that benefits students, graduates, and the institution as a whole.

In conclusion, alumni involvement in events and activities fosters a culture of giving back. Many alumni organizations organize philanthropic initiatives and fundraising campaigns that benefit current students through scholarships, grants, and other forms



of financial aid. By participating in these initiatives, alumni contribute to the accessibility and affordability of education, ensuring that deserving students have the opportunity to pursue their dreams. In regard to this, we will explore into more details in the next chapter, on topics concerning resources and fundings.

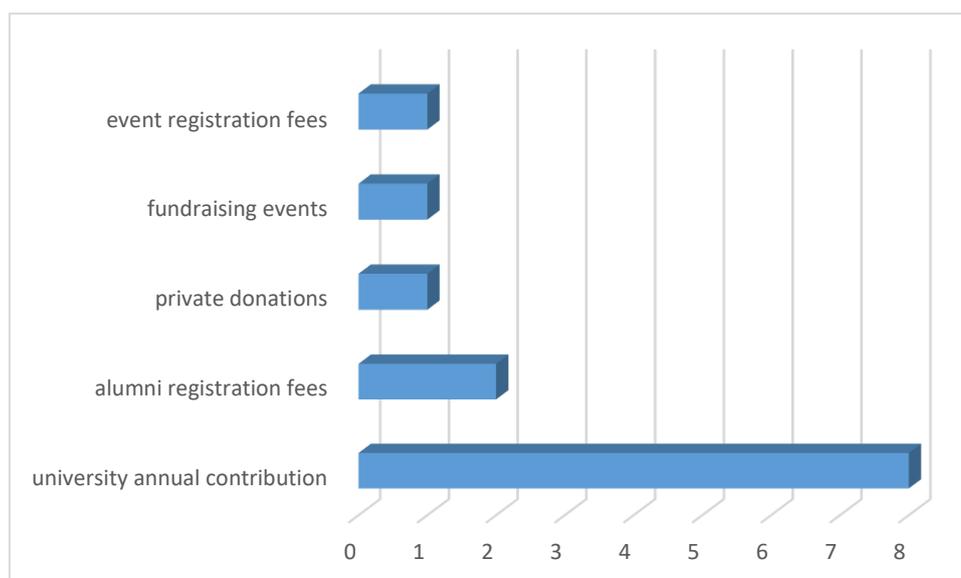


## 5. RESOURCES AND FUNDINGS IN ALUMNI ORGANIZATIONS

To sustain their operations and fulfill their mission, alumni organizations actively seek funding from various sources. Alumni often make monetary contributions to support their alma mater and its initiatives. These contributions can take the form of annual donations, endowments, or contributions towards specific projects. Additionally, alumni organizations may engage in fundraising campaigns, events, and initiatives to generate funds. Such efforts often involve reaching out to corporate sponsors, foundations, and philanthropic individuals who share a vested interest in supporting education and fostering alumni engagement. The funds raised by these organizations are typically allocated towards scholarships, grants, and fellowships for current students, as well as the organization's administrative costs, event planning, and community-building activities. The availability of adequate funding enables alumni organizations to create impactful initiatives, sustain their operations, and contribute positively to their alma mater and the broader alumni community. Therefore, in this chapter we will investigate how these organization find and receive funds, and how these are allocated.

### 5.1 Funding strategies

Alumni organizations rely on effective funding strategies to sustain their operations and fulfill their mission of supporting alumni and the university. In order to provide valuable resources, organize events, and contribute to various initiatives, these organizations employ several funding strategies. This section explores some of the key strategies employed by alumni organizations, including university annual contributions, alumni registration fees, private donations, fundraising events, and events registration fees. By implementing these strategies, alumni organizations not only ensure their financial stability but also create opportunities for alumni to stay connected, enhance their professional growth, and make a positive impact on the university and the wider community.



**Figure 9: Funding strategies in alumni organizations**

**University Annual Contribution**, as it can be seen in the graph, is the most common funding strategy employed by alumni organizations. This contribution functions as a baseline funding source that supports the organization's regular operations, administrative costs, staff costs and core initiatives. The university recognizes the value of fostering alumni engagement and understands the importance of maintaining a strong relationship with its graduates. By allocating a specific budget for the alumni organization, the university demonstrates its commitment to supporting alumni programs and activities, ensuring their sustainability and growth. This policy is widely shared by all organizations analyzed, and it is therefore considered the foundation of every alumni organization, precisely because, donation, fundraising and other forms that have emerged, are not always simple, available and effective. Therefore, having a structural fund to rely on, is vital, because even if for example there is a registration fee, this will never be the main funding policy adopted by alumni organizations.

**Private donations** from alumni, individuals, or foundations who have a strong affinity for the educational institution, play a crucial role in funding the initiatives of alumni organizations. These donations can be made as one-time contributions or as recurring gifts. Alumni organizations often establish relationships with potential donors and cultivate a culture of philanthropy among their alumni community<sup>7</sup>. They may organize targeted fundraising campaigns to highlight specific projects or causes, such as

<sup>7</sup> Even if this is true, from our analysis it emerges that it is really difficult to establish those relationships, and it must be understood that it is a long process.

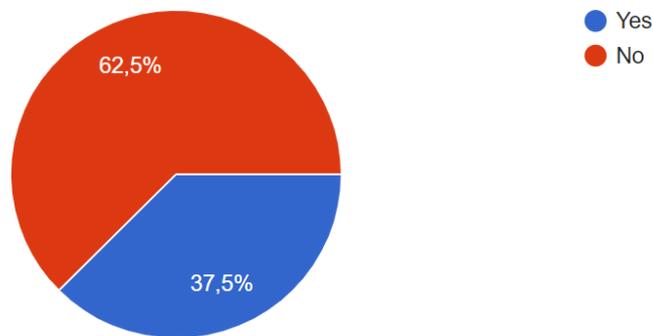


scholarships, mentorship programs, or infrastructure improvements. By showcasing the impact that private donations can have on the institution and its alumni, these organizations inspire individuals and philanthropic entities to contribute financially and make a lasting difference in the lives of current and future students.

**Fundraising events** serve as both a means to generate funds and a platform for alumni engagement. Alumni organizations organize various events with the specific purpose of fundraising. These events often leverage the participation and support of alumni, community members, and corporate sponsors who share a common interest in supporting education and the alumni community. The funds raised from these events can be allocated to specific projects or initiatives that align with the organization's goals. Fundraising events not only generate financial support but also create opportunities for alumni to come together, network, and celebrate their shared experiences while contributing to a meaningful cause.

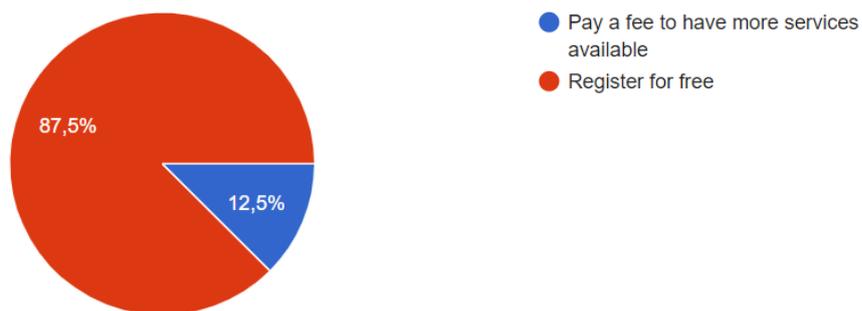
**Events registration fees:** In addition to fundraising events, alumni organizations may organize various events throughout the year that require attendees to pay registration fees. These events can range from professional development workshops and industry conferences to social gatherings and reunions. The registration fees contribute to the organization's funding and help cover the costs associated with event planning, venue rentals, guest speakers, catering, and logistics. By offering engaging and valuable events, alumni organizations not only generate revenue but also provide opportunities for alumni to connect, learn, and build relationships within their professional and social circles. Moreover, asking a fee in order to participate to an event, can ensure the organization a more certain participation, as we have highlighted before when addressing to the case of the University of Leiden.

**Alumni registration fees:** Alumni organizations often implement a membership structure that includes registration fees. These fees may be one-time payments or recurring annual dues paid by alumni who wish to be active members of the organization. The registration fees contribute to the organization's overall funding and enable it to provide resources and services to its members. This revenue stream helps to cover a part of the costs of organizing events, creating networking opportunities, maintaining databases and directories, and facilitating ongoing communication and engagement with alumni. Alumni registration fees not only provide financial support but also encourage alumni to maintain their connection with their alma mater and participate in the activities organized by the organization.



**Figure 10: Percentage of organization with registration fee for alumni**

We have also investigate wheter it is possible to choose among different fee categories, such as basic or golden for example, and it is indeed an option. Moreover, we have asked what the majority of people do, therefore if they register for free or decide to pay a fee. The results show that only a small percentage choose to pay the fee, as shown in the graph below:



**Figure 11: What they majority of alumni decide to do: Free registration or payment of the fee.**

Overall, a combination of funding strategies is often employed by alumni organizations to ensure financial sustainability and support their initiatives, but it must be noticed that the main income in the majority of cases comes from the university. This is also given by the fact that fundraising and donations are a really long and impervious process, that needs time and adaptation to the context. There are indeed some



countries in which fundraising is a well-known practice, and others where it has difficulty to stick. This is why, as it has already been said, there is no perfect strategy, but any action in alumni organizations must be adapted to the context.

## 5.2 Staff composition and cost

To effectively run these organizations and maintain a vibrant alumni network, dedicated staff members are often employed. The composition of staff in alumni organizations can vary widely, with some being members of the university and others serving as temporary staff or external professionals.

University alumni organizations frequently have a mix of full-time and part-time staff, with some positions filled by alumni themselves who have a deep understanding of the institution's culture and values. These alumni employees bring a unique perspective and are often passionate, but this happens most of the time more in chapters and associations, on a central level there is university staff.

In addition to alumni staff, temporary or contract staff members might be hired during peak periods or to handle specific projects. These individuals could be professionals with expertise in event planning, marketing, or fundraising, brought in to supplement the core team's skills and efforts. They inject fresh ideas and specialized knowledge into the organization, enhancing its overall effectiveness.

In general, as

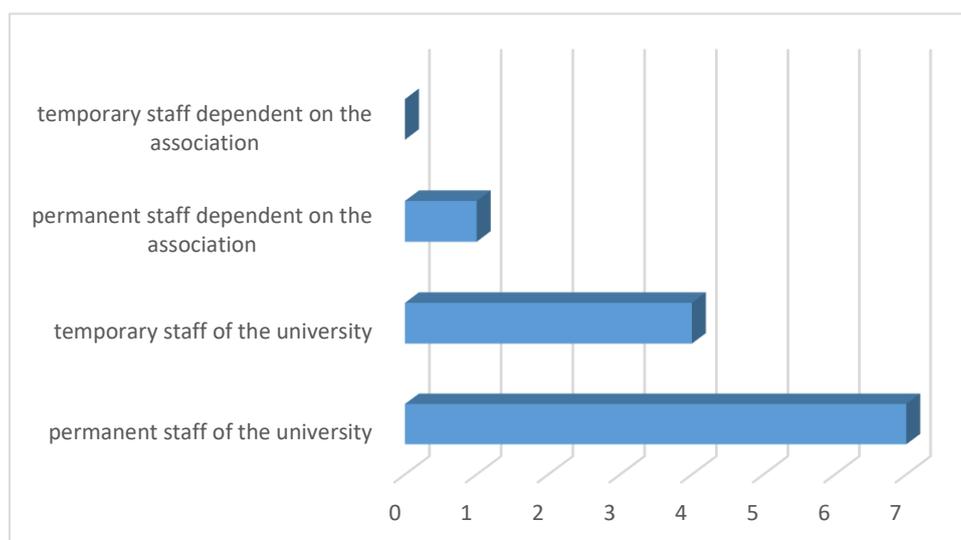


Figure 12: Staff composition



In general, all institutions analyzed have declared that the University provides annual funding for operational and staff costs of the alumni organization, showing once again that the main resources come from the university itself.

In conclusion, the staff of alumni organizations comprises a blend of university-affiliated individuals and temporary professionals, all dedicated to nurturing the bond between alumni and their alma mater. The provision of annual funding by the university underscores the significance of alumni engagement, ensuring these organizations can continue to thrive and make a positive impact on the lives of graduates long after they have completed their studies.

### 5.3 Conclusions

In conclusion, alumni organizations rely on a diverse range of funding strategies to sustain their operations and fulfill their mission of supporting alumni. The most common funding source is the University Annual Contribution, which provides a foundational financial support to cover administrative costs, staff salaries, and core initiatives. Private donations from alumni and philanthropic individuals play a crucial role in funding specific projects and programs that benefit current and future students, but are limited<sup>8</sup>. Fundraising events and registration fees for various events also contribute to generating revenue while fostering alumni engagement and community building.

While funding strategies are essential, the composition and dedication of staff within alumni organizations are equally vital. These organizations often employ a mix of full-time and part-time staff, which is most of the time hired by the university. Additionally, temporary staff may be hired to handle specific projects, adding specialized expertise and fresh perspectives to the organization's efforts.

One consistent theme observed across various alumni organizations is the provision of annual funding by the university for operational and staff costs. This financial support underscores the university's commitment to alumni engagement and demonstrates the recognition of the importance of maintaining a strong relationship with its graduates. While other funding sources and strategies are valuable, this support serves as a pillar for the sustainability and growth of alumni organizations.

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<sup>8</sup> This can be experienced in organizations that have a long history in alumni, such as for instance, the University of Oxford.



Through strategic funding initiatives and a dedicated staff, these organizations create impactful programs and initiatives that benefit both alumni and the university community as a whole. As the landscape of alumni engagement evolves, ongoing adaptation to the context and creative approaches to funding will remain essential to ensure these organizations can continue making a positive impact on the lives of alumni and their alma mater.



## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the analysis of governance models, structural considerations, communication strategies, and funding mechanisms in alumni organizations provides valuable insights for universities aiming to establish successful alumni engagement initiatives. The diverse landscape of governance models, including community, association, hybrid, and alternative models, underscores the importance of tailoring the organizational approach to suit the specific needs and objectives of each university.

To cultivate a thriving alumni network, universities should focus on fostering a sense of community through tailored aggregation criteria, such as specialized chapters, topic groups, and affinity groups. By creating subunits based on fields of study, areas of interest, territorial areas, and sports interests, alumni organizations can offer personalized engagement opportunities that resonate with the diverse interests and backgrounds of their graduates.

Effective communication strategies play a pivotal role in promoting alumni organizations and sustaining meaningful connections with alumni communities. A multi-channel approach that utilizes various platforms, including social media, email, dedicated alumni platforms, and university websites, can help universities reach a broader audience and cater to diverse alumni preferences. Leveraging the power of social media fosters a sense of belonging and community, while personalized email communication ensures direct engagement with alumni on a more personal level. Dedicated alumni platforms provide a centralized space for networking, event showcasing, and communication among alumni members, facilitating ongoing connections and interactions, and can therefore be considered as a space helpful to foster the connection within alumni.

Moreover, active alumni involvement in university events and activities enriches the academic experience for both alumni and current students. By providing career guidance, participating in mentoring programs, and collaborating in designing new courses, alumni contribute invaluable real-world insights and experiences to the university community. This collaborative approach ensures that the curriculum remains relevant and aligned with the changing demands of the job market, preparing students for successful careers.

Furthermore, universities should embrace philanthropic initiatives and fundraising campaigns that benefit current students through scholarships, grants, and financial aid



programs. Encouraging alumni to give back to their alma mater fosters a culture of support and gratitude, ensuring that deserving students have access to quality education and opportunities for personal growth.

In pursuing these recommendations, universities can establish a strong and interconnected alumni ecosystem that benefits not only individual alumni but also the institution as a whole. Active alumni engagement serves as a testament to the university's commitment to its graduates, attracting prospective students, donors, and potential partnerships. By recognizing the diverse needs and preferences of their alumni and implementing effective strategies, educational institutions can build vibrant alumni organizations that facilitate lifelong connections and create a lasting impact on the academic community.