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Case Study of Experience: designing, developing and using learning and teaching spaces in Kosovo higher education

The Case of the AAB College

Xhavit Rexhaj
Adelina Tahiri
Bujar Demjaha

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For further information please contact:

Dr. James Williams
Project co-ordinator

Social Research and Evaluation Unit
Birmingham City University
B15 Bartholomew Row
Birmingham, United Kingdom
B5 5 JU

Tel: +441213315000 / +441213317602

james.williams@bcu.ac.uk

https://www.bcu.ac.uk/social-sciences/about-us/staff/criminology-and-sociology/james-williams
Acronyms:
AAB – Arena of Modern Education (Alb. - Arena e Arsimit Bashkëkohor)
HEd – Higher Education
HEI – Higher Education Institution
KAA – Kosovo Accreditation Agency
KESP – Kosovo Education Strategic Plan
LTSHE – Learning and Teaching Spaces in Higher Education
L&T – Learning and Teaching
MES – Ministry of Education and Science (the name of the ministry responsible for higher education in 2020)
MEST – Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (name of the ministry before 2020)
MESTI – Ministry of Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation (name of the ministry after 2020)
OECD – Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
UNICEF – United Nations Children’s Fund
Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to investigate the AAB policies and practices related to teaching and learning spaces and to identify good practices that will inform a summary report on similar policies and practices. The summary report outlining good practices is to be designed by the academic staff of the consortium members of the Erasmus Plus project of Learning and Teaching Spaces in Higher Education (LTSHE). The AAB College report is one of the nine reports developed by the consortium members.

It is worth pointing out that AAB College is the fastest growing higher education institution in the Western Balkans with the numbers of staff, students, and teaching and learning spaces growing exponentially (more than fivefold) during the last decade alone. This fast growth took place despite a context of negative demographic trends (people leaving Kosovo to work and live in developed western countries), a non-enabling approach by public authorities against private higher education institutions, strict accreditation policies and practices, fast changing new technologies, and a global pandemic (in 2020-2022). All these aspects posed significant challenges to the institutional management to maintain a steady trend of development and, in the concrete case of this report, for the teaching and learning spaces to keep up with the changes and challenges.

The report was based on extensive research – a case study analysing teaching and learning spaces policies and practices at AAB College – that involved four interviews with senior management and seven focus group discussions with key staff and students responsible for teaching, research, quality assurance, administration, management of assets, technical services and logistics, and student affairs. Observation was also carried out of external and internal premises of AAB college. A brief analysis of key policies was also part of the research collected data that served to inform and write this report.

The key findings of this report were that there is not a coherent and systematic policy and legal framework in place in Kosovo, including in higher education institutions, that would regulate the teaching and learning spaces in higher education. A relative exception are the legal acts regulating institutional and programme accreditation in higher education. However, they only tangentially regulate T&L spaces to the extent needed for the purpose of accreditation and thus leave a significant gap in outlining meaningful principles and requirements for the design and use of T&L spaces in higher education. The approach in accreditation regulations does not provide sufficiently either for the organic integration between curricula and didactics and one side and the T&L spaces on the other. This dichotomy does not allow for optimal use of T&L spaces for the betterment of the staff and student performance in higher education.

This report presents the good practices and successes in AAB College in the field of the T&L spaces, together with the challenges and problems identified during the interviews, focus groups and observations, which are presented in more detail below in the report. Firstly, the research found that there was lack of a coherent and coordinated approach by management on one side, and academia on the other in aligning teaching and learning spaces with the curricula trends and teaching didactics in AAB College. Secondly, as elsewhere in Kosovo higher education, there is lack of relevant policies on design and use of T&L spaces in AAB. Thirdly, and as a result missing policies, there was an apparent a deep divide between teaching and learning spaces and the didactics – that existed as two parallel words. Namely, teachers passively expected for the management (the Governing Board) to provide working conditions, whereas the management expected teachers to do their job teaching – both sides without dwelling deeper into the overall organizational mission and responsibilities. This changed during the strategic planning process that coincided with the research for this report and the change is described in the report.
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1. Introduction

This report was designed as part of the Erasmus Plus project Teaching and Learning Spaces in Higher Education with the purpose to analyse and present policies and practices of AAB College in Prishtina regarding the design, implementation and use of L&T spaces. The main focus of the research was to briefly describe the actual situation of the learning and teaching spaces at the institutional level (in all three campuses) and to weigh future / intended arrangements of learning and teaching spaces with a view on (i) the extent of their strategic integration with the didactic approaches and the (ii) readiness of application of digital and hybrid teaching and learning arrangements.

The study of teaching and learning spaces in AAB College, presented in this report, can serve to provide lessons for fast growing higher education institutions in a context of and challenges posed by (i) globalization – reflected concretely in isolation ensuing the Covid – 19 pandemics and (ii) rapid changes brought about by technology and communication advances.

The year 2021, when the research for this report took place, was marked by key development in the higher education sector in Kosovo and at AAB college. Firstly, 2021 was the second year when higher education institutions were faced with the Covid – 19 pandemic, which appears to have forever changed higher education as we have known it so far (in particular in the direction of digitalization of academic provision). Secondly, 2021 and 2021 were marked by the institutional and programme accreditations, which are given critical importance in the Kosovo higher education system. Thirdly, 2021 coincided with the beginning of the new strategic planning cycle (2022-2026) in AAB College. The strategic planning process served as a convenient frame to discuss and introduce profound and meaningful changes in all areas of academic life at AAB. Key among these changes are the more coherent and systematic alignment of the teaching and learning spaces at AAB with the curriculum / didactics dimension. These were further translated in numerous strategic objectives and measures for their effective implementation in practice.

AAB College is the first non-public institution of higher education in Kosovo which was established in 2002. Initially, the institution offered limited study programs in the fields of Mass Communication and Arts. Since its establishment, it has been constantly expanding with new study programs, increased number of students and staff and with new premises only to become the leading academic institution in the country and the Western Balkan region. From the initial two study programmes in 2002, AAB College today organizes studies in 35 bachelor and 21 master programs. Applications have been submitted with the national accreditation body for the accreditation of three doctoral programmes. Study programmes cover social sciences and humanities, computer studies, arts, media and design, and medical studies (radiology, nursing, and stomatology). The college houses three research centres, an Institute of Accounting, a radio and TV Channel (ATV), a Diagnostics Centre (AMD), and a pre-university education institution (loosely affiliated to AAB). During the academic year 2021-2022, around 14.000 active students are attending studies in one of the three campuses taught by over 350 full-time and over 200 part-time teaching staff.

Regarding teaching and learning spaces, AAB is the largest investment in the field of higher education in Kosovo in the last two decades. In the main campus, located in the capital city of Kosovo, Prishtina, there are five buildings totalling over 60.000 m², equipped with up-to-date facilities and technology that allow for creative and effective student learning, as well as enabling quality teaching and research by its academic staff. The head campus is located in the outskirts of Prishtina (Fig. 1), in the area bordering two other municipalities: Fushe Kosova and Gracanica. The campus is located near important highways and roads connecting the capital city of Pristina with other part of Kosovo making for very convenient connection with local and regional transportation for local students and for those commuting regionally.
In addition to the central campus, there are also two additional campuses in the towns of Ferizaj and Gjakova, housing the branches of the AAB College. These two branch campuses feature the same academic and infrastructural standards as those in the central campus in Prishtina. According to accreditation regulations in Kosovo, branch campuses are separately accredited and need to meet the quality standards as any central campus (See Fig 3 and 4).
Ever since the beginning the key motto at AAB has been that “AAB sets new standards in Kosovo higher education.” As such, AAB was the first non-public institution to build its own premises as early as 2003, which dedicated solely to educational activities, unlike other private institutions who had converted housing premises to educational ones. Secondly, any new study programme had to be based on a thorough research of the needs of the market and of aspirations of students for their personal development before being submitted for accreditation. Thirdly, new technologies have continuously been at the core of any new programmes or courses. This was accompanied with significant staff development programmes in order to keep up with new technologies and with the new cohorts of digitally literate students. New technologies were organically coupled with new teaching approaches putting the student at the centre. Last but not least, teaching and learning spaces had to constantly keep up with the new technologies and innovative trends in teaching and learning.

To illustrate the above, forms of online learning and student assessment were applied during the last two decades as a result of technology development - even before the Covid – 19 pandemic that started in early 2020. However, when the complete closure of educational institutions of March 2020 due to the pandemic in Kosovo made online learning the only mode for instruction and staff – student communication, AAB was ready to mitigate negative impact of the pandemic by mobilizing the human and technological resources to online learning.

This shift faced limited hesitancy since students and the teaching staff preferred classes with physical presence to online learning or livestreaming of instruction. However, within two weeks after the closure, all courses and student assessment were being delivered online thanks to pre-existing online platform eProfesori that was combined with Google Meet application. During 2020 alone, with periodic variations depending on level of isolation imposed by the education authorities, AAB staff organized over 12,500 classes of online learning and over 1,250 online exams and tests for the college students in all three campuses.

Notwithstanding that, it appears that the changes in societies and in higher education incurred by the pandemic have been deeper and more sustainable than they seem in the first glance. The pandemic brought about a new understanding of the concept of the teaching and learning spaces. Forms of online teaching, student assessment and communication have become the new ‘lingua franca’ in higher education systems and institutions more than we think. Numerous lead higher education institutions (including Cambridge and Harvard) are opting for fully online learning even beyond the waves of the pandemic. This means that the teaching and learning spaces, together with teaching staff and students, need to adapt to more meaningful application of online and distance modes of teaching and learning experiences in the coming years.

This trend of transitioning towards online learning is evident in AAB College as well. The concepts of hybrid and blended learning, digitalization of services, online teaching and learning, new equipment and technologies, livestreaming of lessons, online assessment, virtual learning and virtual group work are the “new normal” way of working and operating. These aspects and forms of online learning occupy a notable place in the new AAB College Strategic Plan 2022-2026 that was developed and finalized parallel to this Report on T&L spaces at AAB (the Plan is discussed in more detail further in this Report).
2. Theoretical issues

In Kosovo there is little to no literature or scientific research on teaching and learning spaces in higher education. The first notable contribution in this regard was the first report within the LTSHE Project which dealt with Policies and Practices of Teaching and Learning Spaces in Higher Education in Kosovo. That report also included a brief description of policies regarding T&L spaces in three other countries in the region, namely Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia. This situation makes it even more relevant for the LTSHE project to draft and publish principles on design of T&L spaces that would be used by the higher education institutions in Kosovo, the region and wider in Europe.

The desk research of literature of online sources (on the search items of T&L spaces and digitalization of education) again resulted in studies and reports by international authors and organisations such as OECD [1], Unicef [2], World Bank [3], International University Association [4] that dealt with the impact of the Covid–19 pandemic in Kosovo education from the perspective of online learning (to the extent that online learning presents a form of learning environment). However, these articles focused on pre-university education, with negligible references to the situation in higher education. Similar with the topic of teaching and learning spaces, there is little to no literature sources addressing concepts of curriculum, didactics, and teaching and learning in higher education in Kosovo. A notable exception in this regard is a book on Competence Based Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, a translation from German into Albanian by the University of Pedagogy in Zurich [5]. The book presents a competence based approach in planning and implementation of instruction, as well as organization of formative student assessment in higher education.

Another instance in Albanian language, referring to higher education Albania, who still does not address fully the issue of teaching and learning spaces is an article by Fatos Tarifa in his article about the crisis in Albanian university education [6] who as early as in 2012 saw the importance of digitalisation of instruction and provision in higher education. According to him, digitalization is one of the three key principles in higher education, seen as “knowledge of digital technology, which means knowledge of ways of obtaining information, knowledge of media and new information and communication technologies.”

Teaching and learning in higher education are not at the forefront of intellectual debates on higher education. In fact, in this respect, higher education institutions remain typically conservative and impervious to recent trends in higher education elsewhere in the world. Any attempts to reform teaching and learning is faced with the callas to safeguard academic freedom and the fact that higher education students should engage in “deep academic study” instead of group work and peer learning activities, which are designed primarily for basic education students. Thus, in an earlier study the author of this report found a deep discrepancy between the process and content in higher education in Kosovo, whereby even modern learning theories were taught by dictating to students of the education faculties [7].

Interestingly enough, most of the innovative practices in university teaching and learning are being introduced by higher education institutions in their response to accreditation standards and in efforts to gain accreditation. As will be seen below (See 4.1.1. Accreditation standards and norms), in order to be able to operate in the higher education arena, HEIs in Kosovo need to meet relatively stringent accreditation standards, which have been designed by international experts, approved by the national accreditation body (State Quality Council) and are carefully observed by international external evaluators when assessing applications for (re)accreditation. So, unlike elsewhere in countries with developed higher education, accreditation standards and practices in Kosovo could be seen as top-down ‘agents’ of change. Academia, including the Kosovo Conference of Rectors, are more or less passive onlookers focusing on quality standards on every occasion of institutional or programme accreditation.
3. Methodology

Apart from the desk research of policies and regulations, this research applied mainly qualitative research approaches and methods: focus group discussions, interviews, and observation activities.

Focus group discussions:
Seven focus group discussions were organized with senior and middle management, teaching and non-teaching staff, quality assurance staff, and with students. Over 50 members of AAB staff participated in the focus group discussions. A separate discussion was organized with the members of the AAB Industrial Board regarding further cooperation and needs of the partner organizations for qualified staff in the forthcoming period. Detailed instructions and interview protocols were provided by the consortium. Questions mainly referred to the current situation, needs and suggestions for improvements in the field of T&L spaces seen from the perspective of respective staff or student groups. To analyse results of the focus group discussions the researchers applied thematic analysis of the collected materials.

Interviews:
Apart from focus groups, six semi-controlled interviews were carried out with (i) four architects who designed AAB facilities and oversaw the construction process, and (ii) three senior AAB officials who coordinate all processes at AAB, including activities related to teaching and learning spaces. Interview questions were similar to the focus group discussion questions, but also maintained the specific nature of interviews with more in-depth probing and insights. Four architects and three members of the senior management at the AAB participated in interviews giving out key insights into designs and purposes of the facilities, main issues and challenges of providing customised teaching and learning spaces, and future development in the area of T&L spaces at AAB.

Selection of interviewees: as per clear research protocols, interviewees and participants in the focus group discussions were carefully selected to gain inputs from persons responsible for the issues at stake and who were well-informed and engaged. The selection was guided in a way that covered diverse issues and included representatives from different subject fields (e.g., teachers), different departments / sections / offices (e.g., directors), different study levels (e.g., Bachelor, Master, graduate students), different needs and different expectations with respect to L&T (e.g., community students and students with special needs).

Observation:
The research team also engaged in observation of the teaching and learning spaces at AAB in relation to (i) the new didactic approach, (ii) student and teacher research needs, and (iii) the requirements for accreditation. The observation took place in all three AAB campuses in Prishtina, Ferizaj and Gjakova, and focused on the needs for further improvement of the T&L spaces to better meet the new T&L approaches and regulations at AAB. During the observations a number of brief unstructured interviews were carried out with the staff responsible for various parts of the buildings.

Synergies with strategic planning:
The data collection and research benefited immensely from the strategic planning process that took place at AAB parallel with this research. Parts of the strategic planning, such as parts of the SWOT analysis, analysis of the current situation, collection of data, setting the institutional vision and mission, and partner consultations, to mention a few, helped the collection of data but also served to inform the drafting of the report. In fact, the relation between the two processes (this research and strategic planning) was a give and take relation whereby both processes benefited from one-another.
4. Institutional policy and practice for the design, implementation and use of L&T spaces in AAB College

4.1. Policy and strategy

The legal and policy context for higher education teaching and learning spaces in Kosovo was dealt with in the first Report of the LTSHE Project [8]. Below are presented only the aspects that are relevant for presenting trends, policies, good practices, and key challenges related to teaching and learning spaces in AAB College.

Since 2002 AAB has been engaged in a massive investment programme in its infrastructure and premises in efforts to provide the best possible teaching and learning spaces available to its staff and students. This investment programme took place in a context of deficient legal provisions. This is coupled with insufficient information available locally on the laws regarding teaching and learning spaces in higher education and a visible lack of standards and norms specifically regulating construction and/or furnishing of higher education teaching and learning spaces. It appears that when designing new higher education facilities architects usually refer to general national and international standards of construction and then it remains to their discretion to adapt these general standards to the needs of a higher education institution and community. According to the Head of Infrastructure Department at the Kosovo Ministry of Education and Science, Kosovo uses general architectural Neufert1 standards from Germany and the former Yugoslav standards JUS2.

Key institutions responsible for planning and development of higher education in Kosovo are the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI) and the Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA). According to the Law on Higher Education, MESTI is responsible for designing policies and legal provisions, whereas KAA is responsible for carrying out external evaluation, accreditation and monitoring of higher education institutions, with the purpose of making sure that quality assurance standards and criteria are met and adhered to. The KAA State Quality Council also designs and approves the standards and guidelines for accreditation of institutions and programs.

There is a range of regulations approved in Kosovo by the Ministry of Education that provide for the design, construction and maintenance of school buildings providing general and specific provisions for designing pre-school facilities and school buildings. They serve as basic points of reference for planning and construction and even review of school facilities. However, there are no such regulations in place for the higher education facilities. As mentioned above, when designing higher education facilities, architects and engineers take German Neufert standards and former Yugoslav JUS standards in architecture as points of reference. Beyond that they have to apply their experience and skills and the research they carry out with the leadership of a given institution. This procedure was applied on several occasions when new facilities had to be designed in Kosovo in the last two decades. The same story applies also for the AAB.

The most important provision related to higher education premises is Article 14, of the Law on Higher Education [9] that regulates licensing of private higher education providers. The article more specifically deals with the issue of T&L spaces in its paragraph 4.1. stating that “a provider will be issued a license if it provides adequate facilities and equipment” and if (in paragraph 5.2) it provides “premises and other physical resources which are appropriate to the educational work of the provider, which are safe and fit for purpose and for which the provider has full legal title.” This provision is important since it provides the basis for further elaboration in bylaws of important issues such as appropriateness, purpose, safety, and ownership. This provision is further made operational in the accreditation directives and guidelines.

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1 https://www.academia.edu/21246356/Ernst_Neufert_ARCHITECTS_DATA
2 According to interviewed architects, the other countries in the Western Balkans, in particular former Yugoslav republics, are based on Jus standards, too.
4.1.1. Accreditation standards in higher education:

Teaching and learning spaces are further addressed in more detail by the Ministry of Education and Science (MES)\(^3\) administrative instruction (AI) 15/2018, which is the key legal act regulating accreditation of all higher education providers in Kosovo [10]. Teaching and learning spaces are regulated by two main sections of this AI, namely in Article 25 on Quality Standards for Institutional Accreditation and Article 26 on Quality Standards for Program Accreditation. Article 25, in the section on institutional management and mission in paragraph 1.1.5. foresees that the institution “must prove that it has sufficient human, material and financial resources, as well as the technical and physical infrastructure needed for the fulfilment of the goals stated in its Strategic Plan.” Further below it is provided that the Institution should have sufficient ... facilities and equipment (such as computers, labs, etc.) necessary for the proposed programs. Further in the same Article (Par. 1.2.4.) it is stated that “These resources should be provided and be adequate for the type of educational institution and sufficient for the number of the students foreseen to be enrolled.” Pointing out adequacy of the facilities and equipment is a clear signal on the requirements posed before managements of HEIs regarding the key features of the teaching leaning spaces. This is closely related to the next paragraph (1.7.5.), providing for student services, which states that “The institution should ensure that current and future students have access to counselling and support services during their studies.” In the context of our study, this should mean that teaching and learning spaces should be such that provide maximum support that enable and increase student performance.

The key provision in the administrative instruction with reference to teaching and learning spaces is paragraph 1.8. (sub-paragraphs 1.8.1. – 1.8.8.), which requires that HEIs meet the following basic requirements for accreditation:

- Adequate physical and technical infrastructure;
- Adequate number of students in line with the capacity of the T&L spaces
- Full legal title over premises dedicated solely for educational activities;
- Leasing or renting is allowed only for facilities dedicated for educational activities;
- Libraries with ample books for study programs;
- There should be labs, workshops and other relevant equipment for specific study programs; and
- The institution should make staff rooms and an appropriate working environment available to its staff for their everyday teaching and research activities.

These provisions set the scene for the kind of requirements higher education institutions in Kosovo need to meet for their licensing and accreditation by the national authorities. A closer inspection, however, reveals that these provisions need to be revised in order to include other important aspects of the T&L spaces such as: access for persons with special needs, facilities and equipment for persons with special needs, personalized spaces, attractive arrangements, areas dedicated to free time and leisure activities, sports areas, small group learning areas, technology and spaces for virtual / online learning and so on. These requirements miss to provide for the need for teaching and learning spaces being in line with the curricular principles and teaching and learning concepts of the institution.

Article 26, which sets out standards and requirements for program accreditation presents to a large extent similar range of requirements as Article 25 on institutional accreditation and as such are not worth repeating. This Article however, makes a few exceptions, as is the case with the student counselling and support services provision (Art. 26. Par. 5.4.3.) which provides that “the HEI should also demonstrate how it meets the needs for (non-academic) leisure time of students.”

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\(^3\) The Ministry of Education and Science is the new term used for what used to be the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology – MEST (2002-2020), or Ministry of Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation – MESTI (February – May 2020). The new title (MES) has been effective since the setting up of the new Government of Kosovo in May 2020.
National accreditation guidelines:
Based on the AI 15/2018, the Kosovo Accreditation Agency developed its accreditation standards and guidelines included in the KAA Accreditation Manual [11]. In more than one way, KAA accreditation standards and guidelines mark one step ahead in setting standards and criteria for the accreditation of institutions and programs, including in the field of design and utilization of teaching and learning spaces. This step forward is featured in the more inclusive policies, in a more human rights-based approach, in promoting a better alignment between teaching and learning spaces and curricula and so on. The KAA accreditation manual provides separate standards for institutional accreditation and program accreditation.

Teaching and learning spaces are mainly addressed in section 10 of the institutional accreditation: Learning Resources and Facilities. This section of standards requires HEIs to provide: sufficient financial resources for T&L (S 10.1), sufficient library resources in Albanian and English (S 10.2), reliable and efficient online databases (S 10.3), adequate facilities for learning resources, including new technologies (S 10.4.), facilities are made available to students and staff beyond normal working hours (S 10.5), an adequate, clean, attractive and well-maintained physical environment of both buildings and grounds, meeting Kosovo health and safety legislation requirements (S 10.7.), facilities and learning resources are made available for staff and students with special needs (S 10.9.), adequate computer equipment is made available to staff and students (S 10.11), and technical support to staff and students using ICT (S 10.12.).

These standards are further translated into performance indicators, such as: annual assessment of the adequacy of resources and services; cooperation agreements in the field of library services; the number of teaching, laboratory and research facilities; food service facilities; cultural, sports and other facilities; accommodation facilities and so on.

Kosovo Education Strategic Plan (KESP) 2017-2021:
One of the key policy documents providing for teaching and learning spaces in higher education is the KESP 2017-2021 [12]. This voluminous document provides one strategic outcome (7.4) and three strategic measures (7.4.1 – 7.4.3.) for ‘the infrastructure and technology in higher education’. The document conveys a static approach to the issue since it sees teaching and learning spaces and technology separated from the curriculum and teaching and learning processes. The KESP measures foresee provision of advanced premises, provision and maintenance of laboratories, provision of new technologies and so on. The measures also include staff development efforts for the use of new technologies and equipment.

4.1.2. AAB College institutional policy framework on L&T spaces
Currently, AAB College does not have a coherent policy framework regulating T&L spaces. For design and construction of new facilities and T&L spaces, AAB architects refer to general architectural standards (Neufert and the old Jugoslav standards) and to the standards of the Kosovo Accreditation Agency. The general standards lack the educational component, whereas the accreditation guidelines lack the targeted and systematic approach to teaching and learning spaces in higher education.

Being in line with the national policies, the current academic policies at AAB do not provide for an integrated approach towards teaching and learning didactics and teaching and learning spaces. As in other higher education institutions in Kosovo didactics and spaces operate in parallel worlds. Cases when these two worlds are aligned are rare and fragmented initiatives, as is the case when a new accreditation policy needs to be implemented.

The Statute of the AAB College and other regulations do not refer tacitly to teaching and learning spaces. Based on the provisions of the AAB Statute [13] and of other institutional regulations, it appears that AAB staff is concerned more with regulating the academic side of operations, whereas working conditions and teaching
and learning spaces remain to be addressed by the College Governing Board. The Statute provides only one provision that refers to T&L spaces seeing them as a precondition for any new study programme.

The first occasion for a more coherent approach appeared with the recent planning process for the AAB College Strategic Plan 2022-2026, which also coincided with the institutional accreditation process.

### 4.1.3. Strategic Planning and teaching and learning spaces at AAB

The research for this report was significantly affected by two important processes that took place simultaneously with the research:

- Institutional accreditation of AAB and
- Drafting of the AAB Strategic Plan 2022 – 2026.

It is worth pointing out that these two processes had a positive impact on the quality of this Report since changes in understanding and practices related to teaching and learning spaces were planned and implemented at the same time with the research.

Institutional accreditation: Kosovo institutions of higher education undergo institutional accreditation by the Kosovo Accreditation Agency every three or five years, depending on the previous accreditation period. AAB obtained its last five-year accreditation in 2015, which was extended for one year due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Institutional accreditation in Kosovo is a very demanding process carried out solely by international external evaluators [14], as per Administrative Instruction on Accreditation of HEIs in Kosovo. According to Agency of Accreditation officials, this is due to the small size of the pool of expertise locally, but also to avoid pressures (read corruption practices) on external evaluators.

The accreditation cycle in Kosovo lasts between six and ten months from the moment of application. However, preparations take even longer. It was these preparations for accreditation that served to inform the research for this report. Most commonly, preparations entail significant investment in facilities, review of regulations (in light of new national accreditation regulations), staff mobilization, report writing and coordination of efforts within AAB, but also with partners outside AAB. Preparations for accreditation also actualised and expedited investments in teaching and learning spaces to meet the more recent accreditation requirements. All these efforts aligned also with the strategic planning efforts.⁴

a) Strategic planning: Parallel with the research carried out on the AAB teaching and learning spaces within the LTSHE project, the AAB College management organized the process of drafting its Strategic Plan 2022-2026⁵. Consequently, there was a dynamic dialogue taking place between the two processes: on one hand, the findings of the research of the LTSHE (including in particular by consortium partners) served to inform the strategic planning (regarding the current situation at AAB and trends in the field of T&L spaces in the regional and European HEIs), and the strategic planning served to inform back the study (Intellectual Output 2 – IO2) about the key concepts and future developments regarding the teaching and learning environment at the AAB campuses, on the other. The desk research, focus group discussions and observations of the research team informed AAB strategic objectives, targets and measures in the field of T&L spaces. Put in other words, the two processes allowed for improved strategic integration of didactics and teaching and learning spaces in AAB.

The findings and recommendations of the LTSHE Reports on national policies and practices (intellectual outputs 1 and 2 of the LTSHE project) in LTSHE member countries served for fuller alignment of the teaching and learning spaces with the teaching, learning and research processes at AAB. This was reflected in the

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⁴ AAB performed very well in the process of institutional accreditation by “fully complying” with 7 standards and “substantially complying” with the remaining four (out of 11) accreditation standards.

⁵ The Plan was approved in the AAB College Governing Board meeting of 17 January 2022.
philosophy of intervention in the various intervention areas of the AAB Strategic Plan in order to better meet the changing realities in higher education, including in the context of the ongoing Covid – 19 pandemics. As will be seen below, a number of concrete measures work to increase the number of: individualized student learning spaces, rooms for student – teacher consultations, classrooms that allow for active student participation and group work, smaller rooms for smaller classes, leisure areas, more facilities for practical – clinical work, classrooms with livestreaming facilities, individual booths for online learning and instruction and so on. It is not to say that these did not exist before, but their numbers significantly increased to fully meet requirements for (i) student-centred instruction and for (ii) independent student work.

There are five intervention fields in the Strategic Plan: (i) teaching and learning, (ii) research, (iii) internationalization and partnerships, (iv) students and staff, and (v) learning environment and T&L resources. As can be seen, teaching and learning environment is one of the key intervention priorities of the Plan. For each of the intervention fields there is a strategic objective and the respective rationale of intervention and they are briefly presented below:

a) Teaching and learning

Strategic Objective 1: To build and consolidate the culture of creative teaching and quality assessment of students based on a student-centred approach and on independent student work.

Philosophy of the strategic intervention:

- The prevailing concept in the field of teaching and learning at AAB is the student-centred teaching and, within it, the approach for independent student work. In the forthcoming phase, AAB will focus even more on the implementation of this concept in teaching, starting from the review of policies and regulations, rearrangement of the teaching and learning spaces, provision of additional space for student collaborative learning, provision of premises for consultations, review of curricula and syllabi, review of practices and applied methodology in the classroom, provision of individualized spaces and so on. Further in the strategic plan, 21 measures are outlined that will bring to fruition the objective for genuine student-centred teaching and learning at AAB. One of the key expected outcomes [15] of this intervention area states that: “Digitalization of teaching has been put in place and the capacities for a qualitative implementation of digitalized teaching have increased.” Two of the strategic measures in this intervention area (see Measures 1.15 and 1.19), provide for digitization of academic provision at AAB. They aim at improving teaching and learning in the post-covid era, facilitating internationalization of provision at AAB, and reaching out to Kosovo students in the diaspora – students who have emigrated to western countries.

b) Science

To create an enabling system for increasing quality of scientific research by supporting staff and students’ engagement in research work, aiming at accomplishing the third mission and contributing to societal development.

Philosophy of strategic intervention:

There are three main elements that characterize the scientific activity in AAB college: output, quality and visibility of research activities. AAB will work in building a sustainable culture of research that will enable a gradual transition of AAB from a predominantly teaching college into a teaching and research institution within the planned five-year period. This intervention area provides for several strategic measures for this purpose, including incentives for engaging in scientific work, review of research regulations, increasing funds for scientific research at AAB, prioritizing cooperation with industry, increased networking in the research community and so on.
c) Internationalization and partnerships

Strategic Objective (SO 3): To build sustainable cooperation with local and international partners in order to advance the quality of teaching and scientific research and increase the presence of AAB in relevant European initiatives, networks and processes (and beyond) in the field of higher education and science.

Philosophy of intervention:

In the field of international cooperation AAB aims to increase networking and presence in the European Higher Education Area and beyond. In addition, international cooperation will be at the service of advancing the quality of teaching, research and the realization of the third mission through partnerships and cooperation programs with industry and community. For this purpose, AAB will support staff to participate in regional and international initiatives in higher education and research, including application in Erasmus Plus and Horizon calls.

d) Students and staff

Strategic Objective (SO 4): To increase participation of students and staff in decision-making in order to improve staff and student performance and to increase employability of AAB students.

Philosophy of strategic intervention:

The main concept in the field of staff and students at AAB is to increase the participation of staff and students in decision-making. This means empowering students and teachers and further decentralization of decision-making processes in AAB. For this purpose, AAB management will review its current policies, provide funds for staff development and will support student initiatives and research and study projects. A number of measures in this intervention area provide for further digitization of administrative services.

d) Resources and learning environment

Strategic Objective (SO 5): To develop an enabling environment for quality teaching, studies and research through the creation of functional spaces, the provision of more advanced material resources and the provision of efficient management of learning spaces.

Philosophy of strategic intervention

Infrastructure and technical and logistical services serve to create the best possible conditions for the teaching process, for scientific research and for cooperation with the community. The key issues identified in the teaching and learning spaces were lack of coordination and communication between various sectors within AAB. This lack of optimal communication affects also planning of interventions and processes in the technical services. To illustrate this, if the academic services sector engages in timely planning of new teaching approaches, technical services can also plan to provide adequate spaces, the right inventory, technology, software and the best conditions for the implementation of respective approaches in teaching. Currently, the key strategic measures in this sector aim to facilitate **student-centred instruction** and **digitalization** of instruction and services.

Expected outcomes in the field of resources and learning environment:

a) Working conditions for academic staff have improved through the provision of space for academic work, consultation and research work (see Measure 5.1).

b) The learning environment is adapted in accordance with the concept of the student at the center (see Measures 5.1., 5.2., 5.3., and 5.6.).

c) Library services for students and staff are further advanced through the provision of suitable environments and electronic resources (see Measures 5.4. and 5.5.).
d) Conditions for laboratory work are created in accordance with the specific requirements of the programs (see Measure 5.7).

e) AAB central database is advanced in accordance with the needs of departments and development trends (see Measure 5.9).

f) Teaching/Learning conditions and environments in all three campuses of AAB (Prishtina, Gjakova and Ferizaj) are advanced and standardized (see Measures 5.10 – 5.11).

g) Conditions for studies and movement of people with disabilities are advanced (see Measure 5.11.). Technological conditions are created for the digitalization of academic, scientific and administrative processes (5.6. and 5.13).

Description of measures

5.1. Providing space for academic staff

AAB already provides several common rooms for academic staff. However, the rapid expansion of the Institution and new measures intended to improve quality require greater staff engagement and reconsideration of their working conditions. In the first place, this means providing additional space for scientific research, mentoring and consultations with students, but also work towards carrying out administrative responsibilities (exams, coordinators of various fields, project design, etc.).

5.2. Provide space for independent student work

AAB is determined to maximize students’ independent work as one of the key principles of AAB’s teaching philosophy. First, the existing spaces on the first floor of AAB in Prishtina will be consolidated and improved. Then similar spaces will be organized on campuses in Gjakova and Ferizaj and, finally, all spaces for independent student work will be readjusted.

5.3. Organize space according to student-centered teaching needs

AAB has decided to work more systematically to standardize and strengthen student-centered approach in all its campuses. This requires a relative rearrangement of learning spaces on all three campuses. The technical sector has already started drafting a study for the adjustment of existing spaces and capacities and/or the quick piloting of typical student-centered teaching/learning spaces. This means (a) providing an inventory that can be easily adapted for student work in groups, (b) providing space for independent student work, whether in groups or individual work, (c) creating resource rooms for teachers and students, and (d) studying opportunities for the use of common spaces for students’ individual or group work in curricular or extracurricular activities (according to the model of leisure room on the ground floor in Prishtina).

AAB will monitor the use of new spaces regularly, and make possible interventions in accordance with the feedback. The AAB Senate and Rectorate will keep close track of the implementation of this transformation of AAB teaching/learning spaces.

5.4. Provide budget for the operation of the library
Aware of the importance of quality library services in enhancing student performance, AAB will be particularly committed to ensuring the best working conditions and quality services for students in the library.

5.5. Increase library space and electronic resources

AAB has decided to provide more library space and resources for students, always with the aim of improving student performance in studies. To this end, physical space and access to electronic resources will be provided in some locations outside of the current library space on AAB campuses.

5.6. Provide licensed software and equipment for specific programme purposes

5.7. Set up laboratories according to specific program requirements

AAB has identified the needs of Faculties for specific laboratories according to the requirements of study programs for the next five-year period. Based on these requirements AAB will provide a supply with computer laboratories (3 laboratories), two nursing laboratories, one for dentistry and radiology, one psychology laboratory, one public administration clinic, one laboratory – center of activities for social science, etc.

5.8. Intervene to achieve the most efficient use of existing spaces

AAB will engage the Department of Architecture in the analysis of the existing situation related to the use of teaching/learning spaces in AAB, and submit a report of its findings. The Report will also take into account the requirements included in the Strategic Plan (offices for teachers, counseling, individualized spaces for students, group work rooms, spaces with flexible design, efficient use of common spaces, amphitheaters and others). AAB will also consider the recommendations of the final study of the Erasmus LTSHE Project (for teaching/learning spaces) when readjusting the spaces in fulfillment of the requirements of the concept of work with the student in the center and student independent work.

5.9. Set up an archiving-database system for agreements and activities

First, AAB will engage a team from the Faculty of Economics and the Faculty of Computer Science to analyze and assess the situation and requirements of the Departments. The Report will then be discussed and approved, and the setting up of the database system will begin.

5.10. Create the same working conditions in all campuses

The Rectorate will appoint a permanent group for the standardization of working spaces and conditions and the quality of use of the digital platform (services) in the three AAB campuses. Measures include the centralized use of laboratories in Prishtina (through en block teaching facilitated by AAB). The group will be assigned the task to analyze the working conditions and draft an annual plan of needs and gaps/differences between the three campuses (Prishtina, Ferizaj, Gjakova).

5.11. Intervene for the arrangement of the external campus of the College

The study of the condition of the existing spaces has found potential for organization and development of the external spaces of the campus in Prishtina. It has been found that more can be done for parking
lots, common areas, bus terminals, spaces for relaxation, green spaces, spaces for physical activities and others.

5.11. Provide services and spaces for people with disabilities

AAB pays attention to the needs of people with disabilities. Flat spaces, special toilets, wider doors, elevators, etc. have been suited to their needs. This topic has been addressed in a special way in the study on spaces under the ETSmus LTSHE Project. AAB will continue to make its space more friendly for people with disabilities. To this end, AAB will conduct a space audit and an intervention plan to further improve working and teaching/learning conditions for people with disabilities.

5.12. Provide accommodation services

AAB has organized teaching on three campuses. This reduces the need to provide accommodation for students and teachers. However, the expansion of exchanges, mobility, use of Prishtina laboratories by the other two campuses, engagement of external lecturers and increasingly frequent organization of regional and international conferences at AAB, has made it necessary to ensure a more sustainable offer for the accommodation of students and staff.

Measure 5.13 Standardization of technological infrastructure

AAB College will pay particular attention to standardizing the technological infrastructure to improve the quality of services in all three branches of the Institution.

Already, during the process of strategic planning, the department of technical services have designed and started supplying classrooms with (over 500) modular desks that are being installed in thirty rearranged classrooms, 10 larger theatres have been divided into smaller rooms allowing for work with groups of up to 30 students, two more spaces have been added to provide for individualised spaces and leisure activities, 10 booths have been added to the existing number of individual and online learning booths in the library and so on. All these have come as part of the strategic planning process, but also as informed by the LTSHE intellectual outputs 1 and 2.

![Modular and movable desks that will replace static desks](image1.jpg)

![Modular and movable desks that will replace static desks](image2.jpg)
Figure 6 & 7: Classrooms that are being downsized and static desks that are being replaced by modular desks

Figure 8 & 9: New desks and new student centred arrangement of the classrooms
4.2. The current teaching and learning spaces in AAB College

AAB has gone through a robust development period during the last decade: the institution tripled in physical space, staff and student numbers between 2011 and 2021 alone. AAB is far above the Kosovo average by the quality of its teaching and learning spaces compared to most of HEIs in Kosovo. It is necessary for the teaching and learning spaces to keep up with the actual development of the institution. During the last two decades in existence, AAB expanded from one study programme in Communication and Journalism to over 25 bachelor and 20 master programmes accredited by the state accreditation agency. Three doctoral programmes are waiting to undergo the accreditation procedure in the coming years. Study programmes cover:

- Social sciences: law, economy, public administration, social science and child welfare, and psychology;
- Languages
- Journalism and communication, including a radio and television channel (the largest in Kosovo);
- Computer sciences;
- Medical studies: nursing, dentistry, radiology, including a clinical and diagnostics Centre; as well as
- Sports and physical education, including the gym and a large recreation area outside of the campus.

For extra-curricular and cultural activities, AAB hosts a professional theatre (the largest in Kosovo) and a chamber theatre within its campus.

Below is a brief analysis of the current situation with the teaching and learning spaces at AAB as seen through the eyes of its teaching staff and middle management. The AAB College operates in three campuses as mentioned above. The head campus, also the largest, that includes the management staff and offices, is located in the capital city, Prishtina. Whereas, two other campuses are located in two big cities of Kosovo, Ferizaj and Gjakova.

![Map 2. AAB College Campuses in the map of Kosovo](image)
![Map 3. AAB Head Campus in Prishtina, in relation to city centre](image)

4.2.1. The University Campuses:
The main campus is located in the outskirts of capital city of Prishtina, roughly 5 km from the city centre, and 4 km from the main city bus station. There are two types of transportation that students use to arrive on campus: university organized bus transportation (as most common option) and personal means of transport. AAB has a fleet of buses that commute every 15 minutes from its campus to Prishtina downtown to provide transport for in excess of 10,000 students in Prishtina campus alone.
The way that the buildings are laid out within the campus, in combination with parking spaces and vehicular routes, results with limited exterior spaces for students. For this reason, upon arrival on campus, students are directly led to the interiors of the buildings, initially in the main common areas, to further proceeding into the classrooms where they attend lectures and exercises. The arrangement and size of exterior spaces at AAB lead to limited student outdoor activities within the campus – in particular when compared to student numbers. This was also brought up during the interviews with student focus group interviews, as they wished for more outdoor green spaces with urban furniture where they could meet and relax. Regarding the interiors of the buildings, according to the discussion with students, TL spaces seem suitable in regards to size and quality. Lecture halls are sufficient for the number of students. However, it would be suitable to provide more spaces for individual students or for small groups to prepare for lectures or work with colleagues when not attending lectures, was stated during interviews with students.

The main library is a common place for students to borrow books and other study materials, as well as a relatively quiet place to read and study and the use of computers. It was highlighted from the staff focus groups that study group areas could be an integral part of the library in the future. The library provides also booths for individual or group online events and exchanges, as well as to use the numerous online library sources (such as J-store, EBSCO, or medical e-libraries) made available to students by AAB. Similar library arrangements are provided in all three campuses of AAB. However, there appears to be a need to standardise quality of library services in the other two campuses with the quality provided at the Prishtina campus.
There is a spacious, well-lit, comfortable, and clean cafeteria providing refreshments and affordable food to students and staff on the first floor and another smaller one on the fourth floor. They are used by staff, students and visitors throughout the day. Apart from the main internal area, there are also two external large porches for students to meet, eat, get together and relax.

There are other meeting places for students throughout the building. There are small spaces that can accommodate individuals, spaces that can sit small groups or spaces for a larger group. These spaces are generally well-lit, with comfortable furniture. However, as it was pointed out during staff interviews, there is a need for more spaces for teachers, where they could work individually for preparation of classes, checking student work and organize student consultations. The key issue seems to be that common and learning areas could be used more efficiently. In fact, with a more careful review numerous spaces could better serve to improve teaching and learning, as well as student interaction and socializing. The space rearrangement and improved management could have a better impact on the process of instruction. It was recommended from...
the staff focus group, that there is an imminent need to rearrange and restructure the areas in line with the stated university mission and purpose, including acoustic and thermal insulation, artificial lighting, heating and ventilation.
4.2.2. T&L spaces for specific needs of study programmes:
The specific needs of a number of scientific disciplines are being addressed adequately (such as nursing, psychology, law, arts and so on), but others some other disciplines that are not keeping up with the technologic and technical advances in the field of medicine and arts for instance, including application of 3D technology and software applications. This situation affects more directly exercises and practical work, while lectures and student consultations can still be implemented within the current arrangements. Certain programmes and courses are directly linked to addressing their specific requirements for learning spaces and technologies (architecture and fashion design, radiology, physical education and sports, and so on).
Figure 28, 29, 30 & 31: Graphic design, art, architecture spaces, and lecture amphitheatre

Figure 32, 33 & 34: AMD clinic facilities, AAB multipurpose sports hall, & Chamber Theatre of AAB
4.2.3. Technology and laboratories:
The technological aspect of the teaching and learning environment gained in its importance during COVID – 19 pandemic that started in early 2020. Besides, a transformation taking place in the TL spaces through the process of digitalization in all aspects of academic and research life, including teaching, learning, student assessment, student support services and administration, information management, logistics and facility management, library and literature and so on. Software applications and digital technologies have gained in importance across all programmes and fields. Online and hybrid learning spaces are lacking on standard and dedicated technology for online learning. For instance, Google meet that was used by AAB, did not meet the requirements for interactive teaching and learning – compared to Zoom that can facilitate quizzes and student group work.

There are currently five labs in the computer science faculty with over 150 PC-s in them at AAB. However, there is a constant need for outdate since the life span of new technologies is getting shorter by the day. The current IT labs lack state-of-the-art hardware and software. Existing technology falls short on some segments, for instance audio and video recording, lack of peripheral hardware (to use in psychology clinics and arts classes), lack of licensed software applications and programs, lack of modern computers customised to the needs of the study programmes and so on. All this is affecting the quality of teaching, student assessment, and student performance.

On the other hand, the T&L spaces are also affected by the large classrooms, large, heavy desks fixed to the floor, a small distance between chairs and desks and as a result, the inability to be seated comfortably during various student learning activities. As illustrated above from the observation within the building, the transformation of these classes is already in process; the classroom set-ups are being replaced with movable and re-arrangeable tables.

**Good practices in the current arrangements:** AAB has done significant investment to improve its physical infrastructure and the teaching and learning spaces in the last decade that has allowed for more attractive teaching, more concrete and experience-based teaching and learning through new equipment and labs in a number of faculties / departments. For instance, in nursing department, new equipment has been installed in classrooms and laboratories; in the Faculty of Law there are new and upgraded Crime Lab and Court-Room; in psychology department there is a psychology lab; furthermore, new computers were purchased for fashion design, architecture and graphic design departments. Additionally, sound system has been mounted in some classrooms across the campus, ventilation – in most of the rooms and offices, video-projection in all classrooms, student Information services were equipped with TV screens and personal computer in all halls and so on. All the above listed recent improvements have allowed for better teaching, learning and communication at AAB.

One important aspect of the teaching and learning environment is also the administration and student services: according to results from all surveys and focus groups with students, the admin staffs are very hardworking in dealing with student needs and requests and in coordinating between teaching staff and students.
Figure 35 & 36: Student’s information booths/centres
5. Stakeholders’ perceptions on the design, implementation and use of L&T spaces in AAB College

5.1. Senior and middle management
There is full commitment in the AAB College senior management to change the concept and restructure organization of teaching and learning spaces in a way that they are more student and teacher friendly, more permissive for attractive and interactive teaching and learning, and more flexible and open to the new trends of digitalization of teaching, learning, student assessment, and research at AAB. As was put during the interview with the Chair of the AAB Governing Board, “AAB has decided to increase investment and redesign its teaching and learning spaces so that they are used in a more efficient way and they contribute directly to improved instruction and research at AAB.” The Rector of AAB, on the other hand, added that Governing Board decisions for more investment and more efficient use of spaces is reflected in the objectives and measures of the new AAB Strategic Plan 2022 – 2026. These measures (see section 2.2. above in this report) include digitalization of services and of teaching and learning processes at AAB. One of the strategic planning meetings was dedicated solely to the (i) setting of the AAB vision for the coming decade and to (ii) ensuring a strategic integration and coherence between the didactic philosophy and the teaching and learning spaces at AAB.

For this to take place the interviewees stated that it is important to draft and implement relevant policies and strategies for improving TL spaces and the learning environment in line with the rapid technology changes. These policies should also provide for decentralization of finances for procurement of technology, equipment and learning materials to the department level.

5.2. Quality assurance staff
The quality assurance staff (the QA director six coordinators) pointed out that AAB has made significant progress in the last years in the field of T&L spaces, moving ahead of all other higher education institutions in this regard. They also maintained that specific needs of the study programmes were being met more seriously than previously there is obvious interest in the senior management to change the concept and restructure organization of learning spaces in a way that they meet the needs for quality performance of individual students and groups. Teaching and learning spaces directly affect student performance.

A large part of the discussion with the QA coordinators focused on changes that need to be introduced or to improve diversity and forms of communication and interaction between staff and students, but also cooperation and collaboration between students. The coordinators agreed that changes would serve to improve teaching, learning, research, and student assessment.

External spaces of the campus: The QA coordinators maintained that the current organization of the campus leads students straight to the classroom to attend lectures and exercises. There is a lack of green and open areas that would serve for leisure, sports activities, and socialization between students. Well planned external spaces could also serve for learning and research activities. Bus terminal should be redesigned to provide better shelter and more information for students, beyond simple information about bus routes. External spaces could provide better signalling between various buildings in the university campus. Corners should be provided that could serve as learning spaces for small student groups.

Internal learning spaces: Two key issues were brought up by the QA staff: utilization of library spaces and the need for more efficient use of common areas and classrooms for learner centred instruction. Regarding the library, respondents thought that the library should serve to provide the facilities for a virtual learning

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6This should take place within the forthcoming drafting process for the AAB Strategic Plan 2022 – 2027.
Environment and for online research, books (including in online format) and areas for reading. More small group work and learning areas should be provided out of the library so that student group is not practiced in the library. One possible solution, according to QA coordinators, would be to redesign common areas for more efficient use for learning purposes. It is worth pointing out that these suggestions were included in the Strategic Plan 2022-2026 and changes have already been introduced to serve this purpose. Another issue pointed out by the QA coordinators was the need to provide for more spaces for teacher since teachers do not have sufficient space for preparation for classes, for checking student work, and for student consultations.

**Classrooms**: The coordinators assessed that the current teaching and learning spaces at AAB are only partially adequate to enable collaborative and sustainable learning among students and for research-based teaching. Large classrooms with fixed desks do not allow for group work and discussion during classes. They instead affirm frontal and teacher-centred teaching leaving most students as passive receivers and outside of the learning process. The QA Coordinators also pointed out that the same was repeatedly found in the student feedback on QA evaluation surveys. Smaller classrooms with easily movable desks would diversify and democratise communication during classes instead of the current frontal instruction. They proposed smaller classes (20 for exercises and 40 for lectures), smaller classrooms (for maximum 30 students) and spaces for individual student learning. They maintained that management positively responded to their initiative to rearrange and restructure a number of classrooms in all AAB campuses.

**Online forms of instruction**: Critical in diversifying communication, according to the QA coordinators, is the organization of hybrid and online forms of instruction and interaction. For this, it is very important to build the processes, provide new technologies, and implement teacher training programmes in various forms of online learning. They insisted that AAB should become an institution that readily implements online learning throughout the academic year leaving in the discretion of the teachers and students about the when and how they would be using online learning to maximise student performance. In this context, it is critical to introduce forms of online student assessment (tests and quizzes) that would allow for enhanced and more frequent application of formative assessment.

Forms of online and blended learning can serve very well to improve engagement of students in research, be it in research projects, collection of data, organization of surveys, data processing, group consultations, collaborative projects and so on. For this purpose, coordinators affirmed the need to continue efforts for building a virtual learning environment that could serve learning needs of AAB students attending classes physically at AAB, but also the needs of the increasing number of students emigrating to other countries. A virtual learning environment could also serve for further internationalization of services at AAB College, they insisted.

In the end QA coordinators insisted that there is a need to:

- redesign course syllabi to be more aligned to student centred learning,
- decrease number of students per class;
- improve technology that allows for more diverse forms of student work;
- provide equipment that allows for student collaborations outside of lecture hours; and
- improve learning conditions but also common areas to make them more attractive and more useful for learning.

5.3. **Teaching staff**

The interviewees agreed that methodology of instruction and TL spaces are intrinsically related, both regarding their quantity and quality stating that sufficient teaching space is critical and that overcrowded rooms do not allow for quality instruction. A pleasant working environment on the other hand, together with a functional external campus are critical for sound academic processes at AAB. There was unanimous
agreement among the interviewees that while technology is becoming critical for teaching in the post-pandemic world, it is also important to build teachers’ skills to use the same.

**Laboratories:** The teaching staff and middle management agreed that the health clinic (that at the time of interviews was still not open) should be made available for the large number of students and staff at the AAB. In fact, the AMD clinic opened in October 2021 and is fully at the disposal of the staff and students of medical study programmes. Its medical examination and diagnostics services are available to all AAB staff members and their families. On the other hand, the interviewees stated that the AAB Theatres, the ATV Channel, and the sports gym should be used more to improve teaching and learning since they are critical for practical, relevant and sustainable learning, as well as for increased and more active student participation. They referred to AAB experience from 2020 when the provision of a sufficient number of labs in the Nursing Department significantly increased quality of instruction and student performance. Consequently, the interviewed teaching and managerial staff insisted on further investments in laboratories and clinics in the following fields:

a) Medical programmes: anatomy, physiology, a telemedicine room for real time distance learning with guest and invited professors, and a functional MRI for brain activities;

b) Languages: translation and language lab;

c) Law: simulation room in law;

d) Psychology: a clinical psychology lab

e) Public administration: a public administration clinic;

f) Social science: psychological tests for education and learning purposes, and a model classroom for teaching methodology;

g) Computer science: four state-of-the-art computer labs; advanced computers; change of computer technology by rotation every three years.

![Medical Spaces](Figure 37, 38, 39 & 40: Medical Spaces)
Arrangement of classrooms and theatres: On the other hand, the staff agreed that the organization of classrooms should change substantially to turn into smaller classrooms with movable desks and chairs to fit the purpose of interactive teaching and learning with student groups of not more four-five students. For this purpose, AAB must renew and redesign the inventory and equipment in the classrooms. The current organization of spaces in the library could serve as a model for organization and digitalization of services and for interactive (but also individualized) teaching and learning areas. AAB should also invest more significantly in technology that allows for livestreaming of classes for students who for various reasons are not able to attend classes.

More efficient use of technology available – a resource room (including digital media corner) needs to be allocated and a person responsible for the use of appliances must be appointed to coordinate and manage learning resources. This facility should also provide for teacher and student assistance for the use of new technologies and applications. AAB needs to provide the physical and software infrastructure for online student assessment, building on the pilot implemented before and during the pandemic.

Structure of premises:

Three more issues were brought up during the focus group discussions: the reception area, the deans’ offices, and teachers’ rooms.

a) Reception and photocopying services, according to the interviewees, should be rearranged to allow for smoother and more efficient functioning. For this purpose, AAB needs to increase capacity of the reception areas and to separate them from the photocopying and printing services.

b) Regarding the deans’ offices, participants thought that they should be moved from the ground floor, where they are currently located, to some other floor. Currently, the deans are overloaded with all types of services and work due to their vicinity to the student administration floor: “Create a physical distance for the deans’ offices to avoid high circulation in the deans’ areas and to limit referral of students by the administrative staff to deans.” This would separate pure student administrative services from more academic services provided by the deans’ offices. The vice-deans and coordinators could remain on the ground floor to deal with their respective duties. The participants agreed that the Faculty of Nursing should use the second reception (Facility 6 and the policlinic, facility 7) for services related to their field of study.

c) Regarding the teaching staff, the interviewed staff and managers stated that “Full time teaching staff should be provided with ‘full time working conditions’” by allowing for rooms to serve for individual or group student consultations, for teacher preparation for teaching and student assessment, preparation and delivery of online instruction, and so on. In the end, it was discussed and agreed that “the same standard of teaching and learning spaces should be provided in all three campuses (Pristina, Ferizaj, and Gjakova).”

5.4. Non-teaching staff

Based on the focus group discussions with the non-teaching staff, responsible for finance department, administration and student services, there were three key areas and trends that need to be taken in consideration: specific requirement for LT spaces depending on department type, inefficient space arrangement and usage, and the constant financial push for upgrade and improvements.

According to the group interview, learning and teaching spaces play a great role in education. The parameters of these spaces are usually required or set from teaching staff and are fully supported from management and administration. Specifics such as size of classes, type of class setups for small or big group are constantly evolving, depending on various departments. Some departments are more relied on practice part and need
more physical spaces with their specifics such as courtroom, nursery practice spaces and laboratories, and computer labs. The space for student group work is limited; there are spaces for students to work in groups, but they might need to be managed more efficiently. There was a suggestion for setting up software where student can reserve a room for study groups, and possibly add more spaces of this type as they seem to be popular. In addition, the lack a space for academic staff to use for their work preparation and consultation with students is considered crucial; and need to be addressed as soon as possible.
The overall LT spaces are considered to be satisfactory for the education process; as there is always room for improvement. Spaces are arranged in various ways depending on the class type, depending if they are lecture oriented, or discussion oriented where the student is on the centre.
The medical department, such as dentistry in particular, always demands for additional equipped working spaces; the English department demands for additional simultaneous translating booth.
The hybrid classes have been a great success. Initially their setup was a challenge and that is overcome. More sophisticated technologies may further help to ease the process. There is continuous improvement on the layout and organization of the LT spaces aiming to align with innovative and interactive teaching and learning approaches. The most recent such development is the innovative lab established within AAB.
The administration and management staff are very supportive of these changes and the dynamic working environment. There are sometimes difficulties regarding funding of innovative facilities and approaches; they state that they are constantly lobbying to increase the financial support for innovation because they consider it necessary. Online testing is the next future objective to be launched. It will take a while as more classrooms need to be equipped with computers and each student will need to have easy access to a computer for taking an online test. In return, this process will be paperless and more time-efficient in terms of grading the test.

5.5. Students

Based on the focus group discussions with the students, there were several key issues raised that need to be taken in consideration: sufficient room for LT spaces, in particular for the departments and courses that have practical instruction, updated technology equipment, and the last but not least the need to improve student transportation.

Students believe that the quality of T&L spaces is directly linked to the quality of the learning process. Spaces at AAB, according to interviewed students, are considered acceptable, but need improvements.

If there are not enough spaces for practical work in departments such as nursery, the students will not be able to acquire the expected practical skills and knowledge. The same applies for other departments such as graphic design, where they need up-to-date computers with state-of-the-art software. Furthermore, the feedback from the education department is similar, stating that the practical part of their studies requires well-equipped classrooms. The also think that there are some issues that need to be addressed regarding transport arrangements for students. The current campus bus stop location needs to be designed to a bigger waiting area for the students; and the schedule of the bus departure and arrival to be kept consistent with GPS bus tracking which would avoid overcrowded buses. In addition, the hygiene inside the buses needs improvements, due to the large number of users and the fact that buses appear also to be used by persons who are not AAB students.

In some cases, the classes are big, but maybe not sufficient for the number of the students attending the class. In regards to medical departments more mannequins for practical work were suggested. In general, the quality of projectors should be improved in the classrooms along with the computers in the labs.

They consider that the common (multi-purpose) spaces are very beneficial for students. Within the art departments students share spaces and they find this way of getting and exchanging information very innovative. Innovative lab, spaces for collaborative work, and library are considered as some of best spaces on campus. Theatre is considered an additional, recreational and cultural space, for student activities beyond their curriculum activities.
5.6. Discussion and analysis of the results

Based on the focus group discussions with the senior management, teaching and non-teaching staff, middle management, students, administrative staff, and the staff responsible for QA, there were four key areas and trends that need to be taken in consideration when deciding about teaching and learning spaces in the near future: alignment of T&L spaces with didactics, technology developments, demographic trends, and trends in higher education demand by the labour market.

A gap of expectations between academic and management functions in AAB College

Conceivably, in efforts to safeguard academic freedom in AAB College, there is a gap of expectations between the two key groups and functions at AAB College, namely academic staff and management, regarding teaching and learning spaces and their alignment with the curricula and didactic aspects of the academic and research process. During the interviews, a tendency is almost omnipresent among the teaching staff, quality assurance staff and the Senate members to expect from the management (primarily the College Board and finances department) to provide working conditions for the staff. This attitude is coupled with an awareness that the management should know or knows already (‘we have sent several requests, even in writing’ some would say) that they must meet the requested needs. In a way, there is an impression among academic staff that the leadership is solely to create working conditions. On the other hand, the senior leadership posits that the staff are there mainly to teach, to come on time, to be punctual and to maximise student performance. The same impressions came up during the SWOT analysis for the strategic plan: the management was pointing to the swift institutional development and technology changes and the difficulties to keep up with the same, whereas staff were referring to the need for more rooms for staff and for more programme-specific labs and software.

Little deeper exchange became apparent during the interviews that would address the key issues in this dichotomy of expectations – until the start of the strategic planning process. In fact, the strategic planning process brought the two groups and their respective expectations in a faceoff that started the much-needed dialogue that finally led to better coordination and collaboration. The dialogue started with the quality assurance staff insisting on creating a permissive learning environment for a genuine student-centred approach in teaching and learning in the College. It started a more meaningful discussion on the concepts (see 4.1.3. above) and the rationale of intervention in the key intervention areas. The dialogue and the definition of the key concepts helped the management better understand the needs and trends in higher education and
research, while the academic staff moved in the direction of coming up with more efficient initiatives to meet the same needs for quality instruction. So, the teaching and learning spaces cannot be promoted to best serve the staff and students’ interest unless there is full coordination and collaboration between the Senate and the College Board, the academic and management/finance staff, and between HE didactics and T&L spaces. This new understanding is engrained in most of the strategic measures of the Strategic Plan 2022-2026.

T&L and didactics:

All focus group discussions focused around the necessity of adapting teaching and learning spaces to more student-centred instruction that would be permissive of and lead to student independent work and collaboration. Frontal instruction does not yield the wanted results in addressing complexities of the modern life in today’s society. Besides, democratization of human relations of the modern century has made one way instruction in higher education obsolete and ineffective. Student awareness has grown to demand for more interactive communication in the classroom. Only through interactive teaching and learning, active student participation, and relevant work-based learning experiences can the graduates of any given higher education institution successfully compete in the ever more demanding labour market. Likewise, any higher education institution must change its internal dynamics in a way that changes the role of students, teachers, and the institutional management in order to be able to survive and compete in the market of higher education providers. The teachers participating in the focused discussions insisted that “We must decrease number of students per class to improve learning conditions and to increase student engagement in the class. … We must also rearrange common areas to make them more attractive and more useful for student learning.” The new approaches in teaching and learning normally ask for a rearrangement of teaching and learning spaces, not only inside the classroom. These considerations have also found their way into the AAB College Strategic Plan for 2022-2026 (see chapter 1.2. above). One of the quality assurance coordinators insisted that “Teaching and learning spaces must include also other spaces outside the classrooms and outside even of the college campus, and I do not mean here the practical work. I am referring to the need to transfer learning onto other contexts outside of the campus.” This new understanding of the teaching and learning spaces allows for more creative instruction and for a new perception of the interactions in the higher education institution - student – industry triangle.

Technology: Keeping up with the latest technological developments is an essential pre-condition for relevant teaching, interactive learning, and for access to and application of full and relevant information by students during their studies. Students learning with outdated technology will not be able to build relevant competences for successful performance in the workplace. During the discussions with teachers, a number of ideas were presented and discussed in similar lines: “We need to install technology that allows for more diverse forms of student engagement and interaction. … We must also provide equipment that allows for student collaborations outside of lecture hours.” Technological developments (but also the Covid - 19 pandemic) have led to an increase in the importance and topicality of distance and online learning provision. Nowadays, the learning environment in higher education (including in particular the virtual learning space) has become as important as the academic and scientific aspects of higher education provision.

Recently there is an ever-growing trend of staff work from home but also remote provision of services (such as call-services, IT services, designs in architecture, research and data analysis and so on) without physical presence in the workplace. The learning environment therefore must be adapted to meet the new requirements and to also develop skills of students for such provision of services. The training may include building technological and digital skills, working with media, using new communication channels and so on. Likewise, the learning environment must adapt to reflect the new approaches to build these skills. It must
adapt also to the new demands arising from changes occurring in the external context as a result of technological, demographic, cultural and environmental changes.

**Demographic trends:** Today the student population is more mobile than ever. In Kosovo there is an increasing tendency of population movement towards western European economies. For many reasons (such as lack of knowledge of the local language in the host country, employment, inability to meet the requirements for registration, lack of financial conditions, non-recognition of Kosovo diplomas in host countries and others), these young people may lose the opportunity to register studies in the host countries or to continue the studies they started in Kosovo. Or as was put by a member of the management: “a growing number of our students is already in Europe. They keep writing to me asking about exam sessions and if they can come to take exams for a few days or if they can take exams online …”

Higher education institutions need to think of ways to provide study opportunities to their former, current or future (migrated) students regardless of the student's location. It goes without saying that these forms of study must be accompanied by a reviewed and consolidated quality assurance system and the respective measures that would warranty for the full accountability and achievement of the set learning outcomes. The same considerations apply to internationalization of provision and outreach of the AAB College towards students from other countries, primarily in the Middle-East and African countries.

**Higher education demand:** In Kosovo there is a decline in demand for studying in higher education in general, but also a decreasing interest to enrol programmes which were on high demand until recently (such as economics, law, public administration and social sciences). It seems that the higher education system in Kosovo has met the needs for higher education studies and qualifications of persons who had missed on opportunity to study during the last decade of the last century. For this reason, there is now an increased interest in study programmes in assistance services (nursing, midwifery, social worker, etc.), new technologies (computer science, programming, design, media), in applied sciences and in shorter professional studies. Also, the interest of the potential students has moved towards shorter and professional programs which offer safer and faster employment opportunities. This new tendency will most certainly affect the organization and content of the teaching and learning spaces, too.

6. A strategic SWOT analysis on the design, implementation and use of L&T spaces in AAB College

AAB’ working groups engaged in the analysis of the situation in AAB through the application of SWOT Analysis. To this end, 30 participants were divided into five groups. Three groups analysed strengths, threats and opportunities (with each group focusing on one theme) respectively, while two groups focused in analysing institutional weaknesses at the time of planning. After working in groups, each group reported to the plenary meeting to discuss group’s findings and analysis. The following is an analysis of the situation according to the four main elements of the SWOT. The discussions focused on design, implementation, and use of the L&T spaces in AAB. Below are briefly presented results of the SWOT analysis:

6.1. Strengths

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7 The then Serbian government imposed a martial law in Kosovo, cut all financing to higher education with instruction in Albanian and expelled Kosovo higher education students and staff from their buildings between 1991 and 1999.
The working group reported (approximately 15) achievements and strengths identified in the field of L&T spaces. The Group's findings were presented and discussed in the plenary session. The key strength of AAB College referring to the design of premises is that (unlike most of the facilities of private and some public higher education institutions) all AAB College buildings and facilities are originally thought and designed as premises dedicated to organization of teaching, learning, and research. Participants also agreed that AAB had undertaken a series of transformations, despite the difficulties created mainly by the COVID-19 pandemics in the last two years of the previous strategic planning period (2017-2022). Another important development is the increasing awareness on the close correlation between T&L spaces and didactics.

During this period AAB has specifically:
- doubled the physical teaching spaces (constructing over 30,000 m² of new teaching and learning spaces),
- doubled the qualified academic staff as required by KAA (thus exceeding the 80% requirement of regular academic staff)
- maintained and increased the number of students,
- started the implementation of online teaching/learning and assessment of students of all programs,
- accredited a number of new and high-quality programs (especially in the field of medical sciences),
- tripled the number of laboratories and clinics
- Significantly increased students’ practical training and work-based learning hours,
- digitalized the administration and teaching process (number of digitised services increased by over 70% in the last three years alone)
- provided dozens of individualised learning and leisure spaces for students;
- significantly improved student cultural and extracurricular life (two professional theatres, one international theatre festival, dozens of sports and socialization events);
- increased opportunities and numbers of staff and student mobility by signing/implementing five mobility agreements with European HEIs;
- increased the number of online libraries for students and staff, and commenced application of Turnitin to evaluate student papers and staff publications,
- four new urban buses have been purchased to improve student transport services;
- supported research projects, scientific conferences and staff and students’ scientific publications, and more.

As a result of these measures, AAB has significantly improved its image in society by becoming the first choice for enrolment for the majority (70%) of students enrolled in first year. The fast growth of AAB has placed high demands on the technical and infrastructure services. More teachers meant that more space need to be provided for teacher preparation, student consultation, and research. Similar to teachers, increased number of students and accreditation of new study programmes, meant more classrooms, clinics and labs, more leisure areas and common spaces, more student services, more space for canteens, improved bus and transport services, and an increased administration (parallel with digitalisation of services). In the area of the learning environment, AAB has improved teaching methodology, student-teacher interaction, practical training quantity and quality, selection of students in the first year, quality and internal organization of

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8 Applicants for higher education studies most commonly try to enrol in public higher education institutions first (partly because they do not charge for tuition and partly for better quality). AAB has increasingly been the first choice in the recent years.
outcomes, including classrooms and educational technology, diversity of teacher evaluation by students, number and quality of student projects, and so on.

Finally, AAB has established and put in operation a number of institutes (such as Accounting Institute), two pre-university educational institutions (British School and Vivienne Academy), the Medical Diagnostic Centre, and the Centre for Professional Development and Innovation for its staff, that will further diversify provision, improve working conditions and will improve staff and student performance.

6.2. Weaknesses

During the situation analysis workshop, unlike the other analyses, two working groups worked to identify AAB’s weaknesses in order to address them in the forthcoming strategic period. The groups identified, presented and discussed in the plenary session about 40 internal weaknesses related to institutional functioning. Weaknesses mainly concerned the following:

- internal communication and information, including communication with students,
- teaching spaces according to the specific program requirements (such as medical programs);
- support for teacher development (conferences, publications, personal advancement);
- supporting students to improve performance, but also securing conditions for students with special educational needs;
- creating a fully online learning environment and accreditation of online study programmes;
- cabinet spaces for academic staff and consultations with students;
- full implementation student-centred teaching and learning;
- coherence between management and academic functions at the College
- keeping up with new educational technologies, especially new software programs and applications;
- more laboratories and clinics for specific programmes;
- the external spaces in the AAB campuses;
- efficiency of the use of the T&L spaces and a new understanding of the learning environment;
- the need for better quality organization of work-based learning and practical learning experiences, and so on.

Workshop participants also made an analysis of the causes to identify and address the key problems. The main causes of the weaknesses presented during plenary discussion of identified issues was the lack of coordination and coherence between academic and management processes and functions. Namely, academic and management functions often operated as two separate entities with little coordination between them. Other causes identified in the discussion had to do with the COVID-19 pandemic, swift changes in technology and communication, AAB’s rapid institutional development and expansion, the often-unpredictable processes of program accreditation (in particular during the Covid – 19 pandemic), and the low motivation of teachers and students for quality research work. While a lot appeared to have been done in the internal teaching and learning spaces, it was agreed that a lot more remains to be done for the external space of the campuses, in particular green areas, leisure areas, spaces for external sports activities and so on. The discussion of weaknesses also served to identify the main strategic objectives in the field of teaching and learning spaces, which were also discussed during the planning process (for more see 4.1.3.d. above).

6.3. Opportunities
The planning process participants discussed first in groups and then gathered in the plenary session to analyse the opportunities that open up for AAB as a result of the trends and external factors in Kosovo society and beyond. In the age of globalization (think of the Covid pandemics) and digitalization, external factors have gained weight in terms of their impact on the development of each institution, including AAB as a higher education institution. The main external trends and factors with a potential to open up opportunities for AAB included:

- digitalization and technology development trends that have brought to the fore new professions and unlimited opportunities for persons endowed with competitive knowledge;
- facilitated communication as a result of new technologies, applications, online platforms, and social media;
- internationalization processes in higher education, taking especially into account AAB’ s capacities and geographical position;
- European integration trends and European funds in the field of higher education and science (Erasmus plus, Horizon, etc.)
- funds and investments of local authorities and other international partners in the field of higher education and science;
- the general social and economic development of Kosovo and especially the development of industry and potential AAB partners;
- the interest of the youth and population for quality programs and qualifications in higher education;
- increased market and employer demands for qualified professionals
- the growth and consolidation of the Kosovar diaspora;
- the labor market expansion trend in the country, region and beyond, and others.

All these external trends and factors create a potential environment for the development of such programs and modules that help the Kosovar population and also candidates from Kosovo living in other countries (but also foreign students) to develop competencies and skills relevant to a global market and a digitalized world. During the four years of implementing the previous strategy, AAB started building capacities to respond effectively to the globalization, higher education internationalization, and digitalization trends. Thus, AAB has strengthened the Office for International Cooperation and Partnerships, the Project Office, Centre for Professional Development and Innovation, Quality Assurance Office, Career Counselling Office, the Marketing Office, the Alumni Office and other services. At the same time, staff capacities in foreign languages, research, modern teaching methods, communication/presentation and other areas have been developed. Consequently, the new AAB development Strategy for 2022-2026 includes a series of measures that build on opportunities opened in the external environment and the national and international context.

6.4. Threats

This higher education in Kosovo in the recent years has been inundated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which intermittently resulted in periods of full isolation and interruption of academic activities. The pandemic has in fact substantially affected the understanding of the teaching and learning spaces and of the learning environment in higher education. In the first place, online and distance teaching/learning and student assessment is being implemented to a much greater extent than before the pandemics. As a matter of fact the pandemics has affected permanently also the communication and interaction during the teaching and learning with physical presence due to numerous restrictions, such as distance-keeping, wearing masks, and keeping hygiene.
The next important external factor, which continues to be a challenge for AAB and higher education institutions in Kosovo, consists in the tendency of the population in Kosovo to emigrate to western developed countries (with or without a work permit). This, along with the declining interest among younger people in higher education (partly due to the prospect of uncertain future) creates significant challenges that need to be addressed by any higher education institution, including AAB. The ensuing discussions found that online and hybrid learning are viable options to address the issue of migration of population.

The working groups also identified other threats that are beyond the control of the institution, such as the poor quality of pre-university education in Kosovo, lack of financial support for private institutions through public funds, economic crisis caused by the Pandemic, unfair competition etc. All these threats are addressed in the Strategy measures, and Risk Assessment Framework developed by the participants in the planning process.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

7.1. Conclusions

The project Teaching and Learning Spaces in Higher Education has had a significant impact in the approach of AAB management and staff towards T&L spaces. The project came at the time of institutional and programme reaccreditation and during the process of institutional strategic planning for the period 2022-2026. All these together (the LTSHE project, accreditation, and strategy) took place in the wider context of the Covid – 19 pandemics, which unfathomably affected the very substance and our understanding of higher education and of the learning environment, which is the object of this report. The exchanges and good practices with the LTSHE partners had an important impact on the quality of accreditation and on the strategic planning – they are both more successful and more relevant as a result of the learning that took place during the LTSHE project.

AAB College presents a fast changing and a very dynamic learning environment – the fastest growing higher education institution in the Western Balkans during the last decade in the public and private sector. In the last five years alone, teaching and learning spaces have increased in size in average by 20-30 % a year to reach at over 60.000 m² in 2021 – financed solely by own funds. It also displays most modern teaching and learning spaces and technology in Kosovo and wider. At least five or six new study programmes (between 10 and 15 % of the total number of programmes) are accredited every year and many more undergo regular reviews and re-accreditation. Student numbers have also been increasing by more than 10 % every year, reaching at 18.000 students in the 2021/2022 academic compared to about 2000 students in 2011. The swift development in all aspects, however, makes it also very difficult for various sectors to keep up with the changes. The research with focus groups has found that despite impressive achievements more remains to be done in the following areas:

- Improved strategic integration and coherence between teaching and learning spaces and the overall didactical concept in teaching and learning;
- improving conditions in the external part of the campus,
- teachers could benefit from more adequate accommodation that would facilitate communication with and providing support for students,
- online and hybrid learning environment
- building of staff capacity in the use of new technologies and learning processes;
- programme specific laboratories, clinics, and practical work opportunities need to be provided for students;
- participation of staff and students in decision-making regarding T&L spaces and resources;
- longer term planning of investment in T&L spaces for predictability in implementing new approaches and so on.
In this context, below are presented several key recommendations for the AAB management and staff to observe for a more sustainable development in teaching and learning spaces and for improved student and staff performance in teaching / learning and research.

### 7.2. Recommendations: Teaching and learning spaces fit for purpose

Nowadays, perhaps more than ever, the teaching and learning spaces need to undergo a process of deep transformation to best adapt to the fast-changing and ever evolving context and to meet the needs of the students and teaching staff for quality higher education.

There is a deficient legal and policy framework in Kosovo when referring to principles of design of T&L spaces in higher education. Our research [8] has shown that there is similar situation in this field in other countries in the region, too. In fact, a significant gap remains between the general architectural standards (Neufert and JUS) and the standards of the Accreditation Agency currently applied to regulate aspects of teaching and learning spaces in higher education. Therefore, it is very important for national education authorities to provide coherent design principles and standards for teaching and learning spaces in higher education. This becomes seven times more important in the context of the post-Covid period in the European Higher Education Area. The current LTSHE project can give a significant contribution in this regard.

On its part, AAB management and staff need to engage in the following key areas in the field of the T&L spaces:

- **Participate and contribute in development and implementation of the new LTSHE design principles**

  AAB management and experts should continue to liaise and collaborate with the LTSHE consortium partners in drafting new design principles and standards on T&L spaces in higher education that could be used by HEIs in the countries in the region and in Europe. As a relatively young and fast developing institution, AAB College could also actively engage in dissemination and piloting of new approaches and design principles. Being a private higher education institution, AAB is more flexible to implement new approaches, including in the field of T&L spaces. Beyond the development of the new principles, the current LTSHE consortium could coordinate efforts in applying those principles in the near future after the completion of the current project.

- **Improve communication and collaboration between various functions and sectors within AAB**

  More coherence needs to be provided between various functions within AAB. Namely, finances, academic services, management, technical services and so on need to collaborate closely in order to enable a coherent and systematic development of all processes in AAB. A good practice in this regard is the recent strategic planning process that engaged different functions in a close and dynamic dialogue in identifying key issues and solutions to the same within AAB.

- **Develop coherent policies on T&L spaces:**

  Despite the lack of national policies and standards on design of teaching and learning spaces in higher education, AAB needs to develop a systematic and coherent set of policies and guidelines for integration of teaching and learning spaces and didactics. A key input in this direction will be the new guidelines and principles for the design of teaching and learning spaces in HEd, to be developed through the LTSHE Project. The aim is to build a routine whereby changes in teaching and learning concepts are agreed jointly and accompanied by respective changes in T&L spaces. This is even more important when thinking of designing the learning environment in online teaching and learning – an online learning environment that allows for more interaction and collaboration between teachers and students and, even more importantly, among students themselves.

- **Invest in creating an online learning environment**
The learning environment in the new circumstances (including the post-Covid period) must be complementary to the new technologies and trends in higher education. So, while lectures can be delivered online and in distance learning forms, the learning environment must be arranged in such a way to allow for the more attractive and interactive delivery of other aspects of the process instruction (exercises, learning activities, lab work, clinical learning, out of campus learning experiences and so on). Consequently, physical and virtual learning spaces must be provided that allow for socialization, group work, student projects, periodic seminars, online exams, online discussions in pairs and groups and more. This approach should develop the infrastructure for hybrid learning forms, for online research and study, including aspects of laboratory, practical and demonstration learning. Then, through complementary solutions, spaces on campus or in industry and other organizations would be used to enable concrete on campus or workplace learning experiences.

- **Apply the learner-centred understanding of the learning environment**

Investments in teaching and learning spaces should focus in promoting a new understanding of the teaching and learning environment, including a more flexible understanding beyond classroom learning. This could include providing a more attractive physical environment with advanced technologies, small classrooms adapted for group work for up to 20 to 30 students, personalized spaces, but also with spaces for socialization and interaction in a regular or periodic basis, as well as with virtual environments that enable online exams, communication, and pair and group work. Such an approach reduces the number of amphitheatres and larger classrooms and requires changes of the concept of the library areas, in terms of providing attractive environments and virtual communication spaces. Expanding the concept of teaching and learning spaces to include the online learning environment, out-of-classroom spaces, independent student learning, work-based learning, research and project-based learning will contribute to improved student interest and performance in their studies.

- **Work to create a more advanced AAB virtual learning platform**

This multidimensional platform (containing teaching, learning, research, assessment, enrolment, quality assurance and other modules) should build on the existing eService and eProfesori to cater for AAB students in Kosovo, for Kosovar youth living and emigrating to western countries, and for potential students from abroad as part of the internationalization of provision. This would also require accreditation of online study programmes with the Kosovo Accreditation Agency.
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