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## ANDRAGOGY – DYNAMIC PAST, CHALLENGING PRESENT AND UNCERTAIN FUTURE: THE EXAMPLE OF SERBIA

### ABSTRACT

*This paper explores the development and current state of andragogy as a scientific discipline in Serbia, with a particular focus on its professionalisation at the University of Belgrade. Despite periods of crisis and societal transitions, andragogy has demonstrated remarkable resilience, remaining relevant and influential in the educational landscape. The current study program at the Department of Andragogy at the University of Belgrade is depicted at the undergraduate, master's, and doctoral levels. By analysing master's and doctoral theses, and published scientific papers, the paper provides insights into the prevalent issues and topics in the field. The findings underscore the impact and relevance of andragogy in Serbia and suggest its future prospects. Upholding its core principles and holistic approach, andragogy can play a pivotal role in bridging the gap between the past and the present, leading to the revitalisation of adult education and shaping the trajectory of the discipline itself in Serbia and beyond.*

**Keywords:** *andragogy, science of adult education, Serbia, professionalisation of adult education*

### ANDRAGOGIKA – DINAMIČNA PRETEKLOST, SEDANJOST, POLNA IZZIVOV, IN NEGOTOVA PRIHODNOST: PRIMER SRBIJE – POVZETEK

*Članek obravnava razvoj in trenutno stanje andragogike kot znanstvene discipline v Srbiji, s posebnim poudarkom na profesionalizaciji andragogike na Univerzi v Beogradu. Kljub kriznim obdobjem in družbenemu preoblikovanju se je andragogika pokazala za izredno odporno, saj je na področju izobraževanja ostala tako*

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*relevantna kot tudi vplivna. Trenutni študijski program na Oddelku za andragogiko na Univerzi v Beogradu je opisan na ravni dodiplomskega, magistrskega in doktorskega študija. Prek analize magistrskih in doktorskih del ter objavljenih znanstvenih prispevkov ponuja članek vpogled v problematiko in tematike na tem področju. Rezultati potrjujejo vpliv in relevantnost andragogike v Srbiji, hkrati pa nakazujejo možnosti njenega razvoja v prihodnosti. Ker obranja svoja osrednja načela in celostni pristop, lahko andragogika opravlja pomembno vlogo pri premostitvi vrzeli med preteklostjo in sedanjostjo, pripelje do revitalizacije izobraževanja odraslih in narekuje usmeritev discipline tako v Srbiji kot zunaj nje.*

**Ključne besede:** *andragogika, izobraževanje odraslih kot znanost, Srbija, profesionalizacija izobraževanja odraslih*

## INTRODUCTION

Adult education, despite all its criticisms and uneven development, is a field that flourishes and finds its place and expression in diverse contexts. In contrast, the science of adult education, particularly as defined through the concept of andragogy, experiences ups and downs. The contemporary era is witnessing a crisis in andragogy that brings back old questions regarding its meaning and the concept of andragogy, thus necessitating an analysis of the factors contributing to this situation. As education is always highly contextualised and global trends are refracted through national or local lenses, this paper focuses on the developmental path of andragogy in Serbia, examining the supporting and hindering factors in its development.

The paper examines the evolution of andragogy in Serbia since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, with a specific focus on the intricate relationship between science, policy, and practice. Particular emphasis is placed on the process of professionalisation, which is deeply interconnected with the science of adult education. A robust scientific foundation provides the knowledge, evidence, and expertise necessary to enhance the quality, effectiveness, and credibility of adult education practices. Professionalisation, on the other hand, supports the ongoing development, recognition, and advocacy of this field. Through professionalisation, the scientific discipline gains status and recognition within the academic community, which is crucial for further advancements in scientific research. Additionally, professionalisation enables the establishment of standards, ethical guidelines, and professional practices that contribute to methodological rigor and the validity of research in the field of adult education. Thus, professionalisation supports knowledge construction, the dissemination of scientific findings, and the advancement of theoretical and practical understanding in the field of adult education.

Hence, the paper provides insight into the potential and influence of professionalisation in facilitating the scientific advancement of adult education in Serbia, as well as the reciprocal impact between the two. Considering the university as a convergence point for both scientific inquiry and professionalisation, the analysis delves into the role of the Study Group and the Department of Andragogy at the Faculty of Philosophy, University

of Belgrade. It aims to elucidate the scientific progression of the field within a dynamic political and economic landscape, providing an understanding of its development.

The study employs a mixed-methods approach, incorporating historical analysis, qualitative data analysis, and literature review. Firstly, a historical analysis of andragogy in Serbia is conducted, tracing its development in relation to the political, social, and economic context. This analysis serves as a foundation for understanding the evolution of andragogy in the country.

Furthermore, qualitative data analysis is conducted, focusing on the work of the Department of Andragogy, including the examination of topics covered in the research work and master's (MA) and doctoral (PhD) theses. This analysis provides insights into the research trends and areas of emphasis within the field, shedding light on the scientific progression of andragogy in Serbia.

Additionally, a literature review is conducted analysing articles published in the relevant journals. This review helps to identify and explore the relationship between andragogy as a science in Serbia and the professionalisation and practice of adult education. By synthesising existing research, the study provides a comprehensive overview of the current state and future prospects of andragogy education in Serbia.

Overall, this multidimensional methodology offers a holistic understanding of the historical development, scientific advancements, and the reciprocal relationship between andragogy as a science and the professionalisation of adult education in Serbia.

## ON THE WAVE OF INTERNATIONAL ASCENT

The conceptualisation of andragogy as a scientific field devoted to adult education occurred during a significant surge in the recognition of adult education as a global phenomenon. The inaugural international conference on adult education (CONFINTEA) held in Denmark in 1949 paved the way for this rise, while the second conference in Montreal in 1960 demonstrated the global recognition of adult education as a significant factor in both individual and societal development. Yugoslavia's role in the global political landscape, particularly its involvement in the Non-Aligned Movement and its high international reputation, bolstered this development and thrust Yugoslavia into the forefront of defining the scientific field that would study this phenomenon.

While the international scientific discourse on adult education gradually unfolded, Franz Pöggeler “discovered” the term *andragogy* (coined in Germany in 1833 by A. Kapp and employed in Weimar Germany by W. Picht and E. von Rosenstock) and published *Einführung in die Andragogik: Grundfragen der Erwachsenenbildung* in 1957. Soon after, in 1966, a seminal work titled *Osnovi andragogije* (Foundations of Andragogy; Samolovčev et al., 1966) was published in Sarajevo by the Yugoslav Institute for Textbooks. The publication featured contributions from various Yugoslav authors. In the preface, the authors emphasized that the development of andragogical theory was the result of intensive educational

work with adults over the past decade, vibrant practice, and the emergence of new professionals. They defined andragogy as a distinct area within the general science of education and upbringing, surpassing the previous perception of adult education as a mere extension of formal schooling and somewhat narrow understanding of andragogy as an art, approach and method of teaching adults, as espoused by, for example, M. Knowles (1980).

This new understanding of andragogy broadened the scope beyond the notion of adult education as a mere continuation of formal schooling. It recognised andragogy as a field encompassing both theory and practice, rooted in the comprehensive understanding of adult education. This shift marked a significant milestone in the development of andragogy as an independent discipline and contributed to its establishment as a recognised scientific field on both regional (e.g. Slovenia, Croatia) and international (e.g. Germany, the Netherlands) levels.

The subsequent dynamic development of the country in the 70s brought about an intensification of research and further work on establishing andragogy as a scientific discipline. Numerous studies were published (e.g., Pastuović, 1978; Samolovčev, 1976; Samolovčev & Muradbegović, 1979; Savićević, 1975) and a whole range of prominent individuals in all the republics of former Yugoslavia not only laid strong foundations for andragogy as a science but also spread its fame worldwide. Yugoslavia's international engagement in the United Nations (UN), its organisation for education, science and culture (UNESCO), and the Council of Europe opened up possibilities for popularising and globally disseminating the concept of andragogy – a scientific discipline perceived as distinct from pedagogy, with a diverse system of sub-disciplines. Its specific position in relation to the Iron Curtain in Europe (between East and West, leader of the non-aligned movement, etc.), enabled the expansion of the concept of andragogy both to the East (Russia, Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary...) and to the West (the Netherlands, Germany...), leading to the establishment of chairs and organisational units dedicated to andragogy in various political and economic contexts.

In Serbia, the work of B. Samolovčev was continued by D. Savićević (see the reference list), culminating in the establishment of the Study Group and Chair for Andragogy at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, in 1979. This Chair (later Department) became a breeding ground for professionals and a catalyst for dynamic research, fostering a high level of professional awareness and attracting a large number of dedicated individuals. In doing so, it solidified the scientific discipline of andragogy, providing it with a research foundation and academic dignity.

## **TO THE EDGE AND BACK**

The dissolution of Yugoslavia, accompanied by wars and severe economic decline, posed a significant threat to undermine the advancements made in the discipline of andragogy in Serbia. On the one hand, the scientific foundations of andragogy were at risk due to the collapse of practices and institutions, which jeopardised the credibility of scientific

endeavours. On the other hand, in Europe, there was a tendency to disassociate andragogy from its academic merit, associating it solely with Yugoslavia and with communism – a defunct nation and a discredited ideological system. Consequently, andragogy experienced a significant setback, leading to its decline in many countries. This decline was accompanied by a resurgence of the older concept of the pedagogy of adults, which considers adult education as a research subject within pedagogy. In this perspective, pedagogy becomes an overarching concept and science that encompasses the study of education and learning across all age groups.

In Serbia, andragogy experienced a fate aligned with that of the country. During the latter half of the 1990s, Serbia faced isolation and international sanctions, which had a detrimental impact on both the practice of adult education and the scientific discipline of andragogy. For example, Serbia did not participate in the UNESCO International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V) held in Hamburg. Notably, Slovenia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) sent substantial delegations, while Croatia had a single representative (UNESCO & UIE, 1997). The prevailing political, economic, and social circumstances in Serbia dismantled the existing system, leaving the practice of adult education and andragogy with little chance of survival.

However, andragogy as a scientific discipline managed to sustain itself thanks to the resilience, scientific rigor, and international network established by the Department of Andragogy prior to the 1990s. Through individual channels, information regarding European and global trends in adult education reached Serbia, fostering the exchange of publications and facilitating the exchange of professors and researchers. For instance, in 1996, amidst demonstrations against the ruling regime, influential figures such as Peter Jarvis and Franz Pöggeler visited Belgrade, providing support not only to andragogues but also to the engagement of democratically oriented citizens in Serbia.

This challenging period can be regarded as an unintended experiment, demonstrating the possibility of nearly losing an adult education system within a country while preserving the intellectual rigor of scientific thought. In the context of Serbia, andragogy became a vital link between past achievements and the establishment of a new beginning. It played a pivotal role in the construction of a novel adult education system during the nascent stages of democracy, facilitating a rapid period of reconstruction and the effective application of knowledge that had been acquired by developed European countries in the interim.

## **THE ERA OF NEW HOPE: FROM 2000 ONWARDS**

The agony of the country's disintegration, war, and international isolation came to an end in Serbia in the year 2000. However, until then, the economy, the entire scientific research sector, and the education system, including adult education, had suffered significant devastation. Adult education had been completely marginalised in education policies, and within the legislative framework, it had been reduced to literacy and basic education. The

system of formal education had become almost inaccessible to adults, as a large number of institutions and organisations, programs and activities related to non-formal education and adult learning had been discontinued, and adult participation in education and learning had been reduced to a minimum. This undermined the efforts for the further development of andragogy as a science, as well as scientific research of adult education and learning, particularly the university training of professionals (andragogues) to work in this field.

The period from 2000 onwards marks a significant turning point for andragogy in Serbia. Following a period of isolation and international sanctions, Serbia experienced political changes that opened up new possibilities for the development of adult education and andragogy as a scientific discipline.

With the establishment of a democratic government (*Democratic Opposition of Serbia – DOS*), Serbia embarked on a path of political and economic reforms, which also had implications for the field of education. Efforts have been made to revitalise and enhance the system of adult education in Serbia, recognising the importance of lifelong learning and the role of adult education in personal and societal development. In this endeavour, andragogy has become a necessary partner. The staff – teachers and associates of the Department of Andragogy at the Faculty of Philosophy – saw this as an opportunity for the revitalisation and development of the concept of andragogy, scientific and professional research in adult education, and university training of andragogues for work in this field. There was a clear belief that intensifying scientific production, particularly revitalising and developing the practice of adult education, are fundamental conditions for the revitalisation of andragogy as a science and university discipline.

During this period, several key developments took place. The Study Group and The Department of Andragogy at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, continued to play a central role in advancing andragogical research, education, and practice. The department served as a hub for professionals, researchers, and dedicated individuals, fostering a vibrant and dynamic academic environment. International collaborations and exchanges flourished, enabling the transfer of knowledge and best practices from European and global contexts. The academic community contributed to the advancement of andragogy through research and publications. Numerous studies were conducted, focusing on various aspects of adult education, including instructional methods, curriculum development, civic education, lifelong learning strategies, etc. These research efforts aimed to enhance the theoretical foundations of andragogy and provide evidence-based practices for adult educators. In the period from 2000 to 2004 alone, in addition to a large number of papers published in domestic and international journals, 12 monographs covering various areas of adult education were published (Alibabić, 2002; Bulatović, 2001, 2002; Despotović, 2000; Kulić & Despotović, 2001; Ovesni, 2001; Roeders, 2003; Savičević, 2000a, 2000b, 2002, 2003, 2004). These significant contributions, representing a building upon of the best traditions of andragogy developed in former Yugoslavia, have led to the establishment of the renowned Belgrade Andragogy School. It represents a general,

comprehensive scientific discipline that encompasses all areas and forms of adult learning and education, fostering the development of professionals with a broad range of knowledge and skills, employable across diverse sectors.

The work on revitalising the practice of adult education also involved the active participation of teachers and associates from the Department of Andragogy in shaping a new national policy in this field, as well as engagement in various state bodies, commissions, working groups, national and international projects. This engagement encompassed diverse areas, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Diverse areas, types of engagement and activities by teachers, staff, and associates of the Department of Andragogy, Faculty of Philosophy*

Field of engagement	Types of activities and achieved results
Creation of a relevant strategic framework for the development of adult education	During the period from 2001 to 2012, three strategies for the development of adult education (2001, 2007, 2012) were adopted, which projected the goals for the development of adult education in Serbia, along with the necessary measures and activities to achieve them. These strategies treated adult education as a key instrument for socio-economic development and created the necessary foundation for scientifically and professionally grounded adult education, as well as the overhaul of the existing legislative framework.
Overhaul of the legislative framework	The first step in constructing a relevant legislative framework was the adoption of the overarching Law on Non-University Education and the subsequent adoption of the Law on Adult Education. The initial version of the law was adopted in 2013, providing systematic regulation of the organisation and implementation of various types and forms of adult education. Based on this law, a number of sub-legal acts were enacted, among which those governing the activities of publicly recognised education providers and the procedure for the recognition of prior learning are particularly important.
Promotion of adult education and professional strengthening	Within various civic initiatives and the establishment of non-governmental organisations, the Adult Education Society was founded in the year 2000, marking the "beginning of a renaissance of professional association and networking" in the field of adult education (Savićević, 2006, p. 328). Over the course of more than 20 years, the Society has organised a vast number of activities, including seminars, consultations, conferences, diverse training programs, scientific and professional gatherings, study trips, book publications, and more. Particularly significant were the activities aimed at popularising andragogy and adult education, such as the Education Festival, which the Adult Education Society has consistently organised and supported for two decades.

Field of engagement	Types of activities and achieved results
Engagement in international activities	<p>The exchange of experiences and the affirmation of the Belgrade Andragogy School and adult education at the international level, as well as the implementation of European and international practices in Serbia, have been key aspects. This includes participation in CONFINTEA conferences, membership and active engagement in organisations such as the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) and the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE), exchange programs for professors, students, and researchers with numerous European universities, and more. These international activities have played a significant role in fostering cross-cultural learning, sharing best practices, and enriching the field of adult education in Serbia.</p>
Implementation of applied projects	<p>After the year 2000, several complex EU projects in the field of adult and vocational education were successfully implemented in Serbia. Through these projects, the practice of adult education in the domains of basic and non-formal vocational education was established and enhanced. Key achievements include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The establishment of a fundamental institutional framework for the development and management of vocational education for adults. This framework includes bodies such as the Council for Vocational Education and Adult Education, the Center for Vocational Education and Adult Education, the Agency for Qualifications, and the Qualifications Council, among others.</li> <li>• The development of a functional system for basic adult education, non-formal vocational education, and recognition of prior learning. Standards were developed for institutions, educators, adult education programs, and procedures for the recognition of prior learning. As a result, a significant number of schools and other organisations (500) were able to engage in the field of adult education.</li> </ul>

Numerous projects have enabled the swift and direct application of scientific knowledge in practice, the validation of theoretical approaches and concepts, and have provided material for numerous research studies and publications, both scientific and professional in nature.

Until the 1980s, science in Serbia led the practice of andragogy (Savićević, 2006) and maintained a strong collaborative relationship with it, even playing a salvaging role during the challenging period of the 1990s. However, since 2000, there has been a shift, with practice taking the lead over science. This shift indicates a significant interdependence between andragogy as a scientific discipline and the practical field of adult education, which holds great importance for this relatively young field of study.

Numerous periods of crisis, ups and downs, albeit reluctantly, have expanded the range of problems that adult education in Serbia has had to address. These experiences have



further solidified the perception of andragogy as a comprehensive scientific discipline, avoiding reductionism and fostering the exploration of new research areas to address emerging issues.

Despite the challenges posed by transitional periods and the need for continuous adaptation, the scientific discipline of andragogy in Serbia has demonstrated resilience and determination. Through the collective efforts of scholars, practitioners, and policymakers, andragogy has managed to overcome many obstacles and remain a relevant and influential discipline in the educational landscape.

## **ANDRAGOGY AND PROFESSIONALISATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF BELGRADE**

The professionalisation of andragogy is intricately linked to its advancement as a scientific discipline. This relationship assumes crucial significance, especially considering that andragogy emerged relatively late. In Serbia, there exists a strong bond and profound interdependence between the science of adult education, andragogy, and the professionalisation of the field. This bond has facilitated progress, even in highly challenging social circumstances. Thanks to its international connections and the aforementioned interdependence, andragogy enjoys a commendable social reputation and holds significant academic prestige within the university. In fact, its members are often selected for high positions within the university structure.

Furthermore, andragogy has established a reputable presence in the public sphere and enjoys recognition from various stakeholders. For instance, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development has long recognised the importance of adult education, as evidenced by the dedicated position of an Advisor for Adult Education within the Ministry. Additionally, many andragogues hold important social roles and positions in various institutions such as the National Employment Office, National Academy for Public Administration, and National Council for Vocational Education. Moreover, the Department of Andragogy continues to expand and currently comprises over 20 academics.

Since its establishment in 1979, the Department of Andragogy kept all three academic levels: undergraduate, master's, and doctoral. The Andragogy study program offered at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade is unique in Serbia, representing the only full undergraduate program in Andragogy across the former Yugoslavia region.

The formulation of goals for undergraduate, master's, and doctoral studies reflects a commitment to ensuring the continuous development of professionals in the field. These goals encompass the increasing complexity of competencies and the fostering of independence for practical and research work, as well as engagement in various areas of practice and study. The undergraduate program aims to provide students with the knowledge, abilities, values, and skills necessary for professional work in the field of education and adult learning, while also preparing them for further education and professional development. Building upon the foundation of the undergraduate program, the master's level curriculum is designed to develop both general and specific knowledge, abilities, and skills

required for the independent performance of andragogical tasks and research work in the field of adult learning and education. At the doctoral level, the program aims to equip students with the knowledge, skills, and competences necessary for theoretical-analytical, critical-research, and innovative-practical action and work in the field of adult education, as well as the practice of adult learning and education (Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, 2023a).

Through its comprehensive and progressive program structure, Andragogy at the University of Belgrade continues to evolve and address the emerging challenges in the field, contributing to the development of competent professionals capable of advancing the theory and practice of adult education. The study curriculum of Andragogy at the University of Belgrade encompasses various andragogic subdisciplines that address both general and specific issues in adult education. At the undergraduate level, the program incorporates content from related disciplines such as psychology, philosophy, sociology, history, and others. Collaboration with colleagues from different departments within the Faculty of Philosophy allows for the integration of these disciplines into the program, offering mandatory and elective courses that provide students with a solid foundation in understanding andragogy and the broader scope of social sciences and humanities. This integration reflects the theoretical and conceptual diversity within the field (Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, 2023a).

Examining the master's and doctoral study programs across three accreditation cycles (2009, 2014, and 2021) showed that elective courses from other departments, primarily psychology and philosophy, were included in the earlier cycles. However, in the 2021 program, the courses at both levels focused exclusively on andragogy. This shift in orientation towards specific andragogic areas of study and practice after the undergraduate level aligns with the decision to enhance the expertise within the study group of andragogy. The decision was supported by the increased capacity of the staff and the expansion of the areas of study within the group, which has reached a mature stage of development. The curriculum for undergraduate studies was developed based on job descriptions and feedback from employed andragogues. Key professional roles were identified, competencies were defined, and the study program contents were formulated accordingly. The master's program ensures vertical and horizontal continuity from the undergraduate level, while the doctoral program primarily focuses on scientific development and innovative thinking in the theory and system of adult education.

During the development and accreditation of study programs, significant attention is devoted to conducting a comparative analysis of related programs in Europe and worldwide. Notable examples include the Otto Friedrich University of Bamberg in Germany, the Faculty of Arts at Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic (specifically, the Study Program of the Department of Adult Education and Personnel Management), and the Faculty of Arts at the University of Ljubljana in Slovenia (Studies in Pedagogy and Andragogy). The analysis of these programs aims to capture essential trends, explore theoretical and methodological issues, conduct in-depth studies of specific areas within

adult education, and cultivate a high level of professional competence required for work in this field (Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, 2014/2021).

Considering the cited sources, emerging scientific trends, and the demands of contemporary society, the Andragogy program at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade has introduced specific domains that are crucial to the profession of andragogue. These domains were not previously included in the curriculum but are now offered as compulsory or elective subjects. Examples of these new subjects include Analysis of the Needs for Knowledge and Skills, Philosophy of Adult Education, Leadership and Management in Adult Education, Curriculum Development in Adult Education, Career Guidance and Development of Adults, Education of the Elderly, Activism and Civic Education in Adult Education, Counselling in Adult Education, University and Lifelong Learning, and Environmental Adult Education.

A survey conducted in 2020 among andragogues who completed undergraduate, master's, or doctoral studies at the Department of Andragogy of the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade (Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, 2023b) revealed high ratings (on a Likert-type scale) for the quality of these programs, with scores above 4 for all three levels. The programs received the highest ratings for their contribution to critical and analytical thinking, problem-solving skills, clear communication of ideas, and preparation for independent work. The acquisition of practical knowledge and the applicability of acquired knowledge in practice received the lowest ratings. Master's-level andragogues gave slightly lower grades, while PhDs in andragogy expressed the highest satisfaction. Although the sample size included 36 out of 60 invited respondents, these results indicate the need for better integration with the professional field during the course of studies. In response to these needs, the introduction of mandatory practical experience in the master's program in the latest accreditation (2021) aligns with the expressed expectations of andragogues in practice. The high satisfaction expressed by PhD students with their studies, combined with the overall contentment of all respondents regarding the development of critical thinking and general knowledge, likely stems from the doctoral program's emphasis on critical reflection and an innovative approach to the adult education system (Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, 2023).

In the wake of significant socio-political changes, the growing recognition of the role of andragogues and adult education in Serbia can be attributed to recent legislative developments, such as the Act on Adult Education and the National Qualifications Framework, as well as reforms within the adult education system and improved employment prospects. The continuity of the Andragogy study program at all three levels of education has played a crucial role in fostering this recognition.

Research conducted on the professional self-identity of individuals working in adult education in Serbia, including interviews with both andragogues and professionals without formal andragogy education, indicates that pursuing a university program in andragogy "leads to a stronger professional self-concept" (Staab, 2019, p. 19). Studies on professionalisation in adult education in Serbia by Ovesni (2018) highlight that

the discrepancy in the perception of the elements of one's own profession between andragogues and andragogic personnel is primarily traced to basic university education, along with the standardization of professional performance and continuing professional education through mechanisms determined by professional associations. (p. 25)

The enduring presence of undergraduate studies in andragogy serves as a crucial foundation for further professional growth and supplies the necessary professional workforce for driving reform processes and upholding the quality of adult education practice. This aspect holds particular importance for the construction of professional identity and the recognition of andragogues, both from their own perspective and within the labour market and research communities, in Serbia and beyond its borders.

## **RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN ANDRAGOGY AND RESEARCH AT THE UNIVERSITY OF BELGRADE**

As one of the possible sources for extracting indicators and sets of information to understand the development of the andragogy science in Serbia, we have chosen defended master's theses, defended doctoral dissertations (both defended at the Department of Andragogy of the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade), and published scientific papers from the period of 2000 to 2022 (University of Belgrade, Faculty of Philosophy Archive and Library, 2023). The analysis encompassed: 68 master's theses; 18 doctoral dissertations from the field of andragogy; the journals *Andragoške studije*, *Nastava i vaspitanje*, and *Inovacije u nastavi*, totalling 59 articles; 19 conference proceedings with 114 contributions relating to adult education and learning, published by the Institute for Pedagogy and Andragogy as a scientific unit of the Department; and 31 monographs also published by the Institute (Institute for Pedagogy and Andragogy, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, 2023). As sequences for analysis, we selected issues related to adult education that are addressed in the works. For master's theses, master's papers, and articles in journals, we added an additional sequence, which includes the target adult groups associated with the analysed issues.

### **Most prevalent areas, issues, and topics in the analysed works**

We will present the results of the conducted analysis in a tabular format first, depicting the identified areas, issues, and topics (Table 2). Afterward, we will elaborate on the fundamental characteristics of the papers, based on the categories they belong to.

**Table 2**

*Most prevalent issues and topics in the analysed sample of works from the Department of Andragogy, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade*

Areas	Issues and topics
Learning in adult and older age	Educational needs across different age categories of adults; Various types of learning: self-directed learning, informal learning, transformative learning, e-learning, intergenerational learning, intercultural learning; Transfer in learning; Learning effectiveness; Cognitive efficiency; Cognitive capacities; Learning and the aging process; Barriers to participation in adult education.
Teaching adults	Didactical and methodical approaches; Blended teaching; Online teaching; Teaching in a computer-based classroom; Film as an educational medium in instruction; Multifunctional learning programs; Improvisation as a teaching method; ICT in adult learning and education (social networks, video games...); Training process; Strategies for teaching adults.
Adult education staff and professionals	Competencies of staff in adult education; Professionalisation of the field of adult education; Professional development of staff (teachers, trainers...); Roles of teachers in adult instruction; Management staff in the field of adult education; Transitional periods in professional development; Different systems and models of professional development.
Learning and education for diverse adult target groups	Adults; Employees (including professionals engaged in adult education); Participants in adult education (both learners and instructors); Parents; Students; Women; Members of specific professional groups; Different adult age groups; Directors; Managers; Individuals with physical disabilities; Formerly incarcerated individuals; Military and police personnel; Economically disadvantaged adults; Adult migrants and immigrants...
Adult education policy and system	Global adult education policy; European adult education policy; Regional adult education policies; Institutional and organisational foundations of adult education; Adult education strategies; Adult education system; Legal regulations of adult education; Ideology and adult education; Financing of adult education.
Adult education and the world of work	Learning society; Competencies and key competencies; Lifelong career counselling and guidance; Organizational subculture; Business performance; Entrepreneurship; Employment and unemployment; Labor market trends; Negative effects of work; Influence of organisational culture on learning; Human resources (a range of subtopics).
The role of learning and education in different domains and contexts	Different preferences and behaviours in adulthood; Family (family planning, parental support to children); Sustainable development, Environmental activism; Health; Health literacy, Participation in recreational activities; Democratic citizenship, Global citizenship, Activism; Power relations in adult education; The technology of self; Liminal space and adult education.

Areas	Issues and topics
Different aspects of quality related to adult learning and education.	The impact of education on quality of life; Quality of leisure time and education; Quality system in adult education; Relevance of educational programs; Efficiency and effectiveness of adult education; Evaluation of education; Learning achievements...
Specific areas	Historical topics; Contemporary social trends and adult education; Comparative analyses; Methodology related to different types of research in andragogy; Epistemological foundations of adult education.

The identified areas, issues, and topics indicate a wide range of coverage. Their diversity suggests that adult learning and education are examined in various contexts, taking into account numerous elements and aspects.

### The main characteristics of different categories of the analysed works

Examining the works of the department's staff based on their respective categories has allowed us to highlight their specific characteristics within each category.

The first group of works consists of *master's theses*. Although master's theses may not fall strictly within the category of scientific papers, they are nonetheless the result of intensive work with a mentor and serve the purpose of strengthening the research competencies of andragogues who are still at the early stages of their professional development. Both the identified research problems and the target groups covered in the domain of master's theses indicate the diversity of themes and issues, as well as the relatively even representation of multiple andragogical disciplines. It is worth noting that the final selection of problems and target groups represents a compromise between the students' interests at this level of study, guidance from mentors, and the availability of target groups for research.

The topics explored in *doctoral dissertations* indicate a higher level of complexity in the research problems examined. Due to their comprehensive and intricate nature, the research problems addressed in these dissertations transcend the boundaries of individual disciplines within andragogy. In fact, the innovative approaches and valuable findings they yield are welcomed and embraced by various disciplines, contributing to the enrichment of andragogy as a whole. This enrichment is primarily a result of the intricate contextual framework in which the research problems are situated and the conceptual constructs they are associated with.

*Monographs* point to the continuity in the expansion of knowledge within specific domains of andragogy. They encompass diverse areas such as the historical development of andragogy as a science, general andragogy, the theories of adult education organisation, comparative andragogy, the philosophical foundations of andragogy, the methodology of andragogical research, basic adult education, vocational education for adults, university education, and more. The topics and problems explored in these analysed monographs directly contribute to the further advancement of andragogical disciplines. The authors delve into numerous constitutive elements that fall under the broad umbrella of adult learning and education.

*Edited collections* demonstrate a desire to respond to social events or trends in the field of (adult) education. Recent years (2020–2022) have been marked predominantly by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has been strongly reflected in the selection of issues related to adult learning and education. Two noticeable trends emerge from the analysis: the first relates to examining the impact of the crisis on adult education and the role of adult education in overcoming its effects, while the second focuses on exploring the potential roles of information and communication technologies in adult learning and education.

By analysing articles published in three chosen *journals*, it is possible to identify several trends related to the theoretical and empirical efforts of authors in studying specific topics and issues relevant to andragogy. The identified categories based on the prevalence of research problems within the articles indicate that articles delve thematically, more so than other types of works, into the processes of adult learning and teaching, often providing examples of good practice. When it comes to the teaching process, the focus is primarily on the personnel responsible for its implementation and organisation. A significant number of articles are dedicated to exploring the relationships between adult learning and education and various theoretical constructs.

Although the conducted analysis has its limitations due to several factors, primarily because the analysed problems and target groups are determined by the objectives and/or thematic choices of the journals and edited volumes, especially those associated with scientific conferences and research projects, this analysis provides valuable insights into current trends in theoretical and empirical studies within the framework of the Belgrade Andragogy School.

### **The research corpus characteristics and trends**

The analysis of scientific production reveals both the abundance of published works and the richness of the covered topics and issues related to adult education. Important characteristics of this research corpus can be described as follows:

- Complexity – with regard to the selected contexts and the encompassed and developed concepts (doctoral dissertations and monographs).
- Ability to thematically correspond to current social events and trends in adult education (master's theses and contributions in edited volumes).
- Openness to linking theoretical constructs and concepts with practical developments (esp. articles in journals).
- Inclusiveness of diverse research, encompassing both fundamental and applied, traditional and modern studies.
- Encompassing a wide range of interdisciplinary research and studies that strengthen the legitimacy of andragogy as a science.
- Methodological diversity, including historical, comparative, empirical, and theoretical research.

## IN CONCLUSION: ANDRAGOGY IN THE CROSSHAIRS – BATTLING IDEOLOGIES AND PERSPECTIVES

The future development and prospects of andragogy as a scientific discipline in Serbia are heavily influenced by European and global trends. The trajectory of its further advancement will shape both the field of adult education practice and the discipline of andragogy itself, which seeks to study and understand this domain.

Among local factors, the uncertain path of Serbia in European integration processes holds crucial significance. While Serbia, as a typical hybrid regime, aligns itself with European policies, recommendations, and trends, it often does so at a declarative and rhetorical level, rather than implementing them in practice (Popović & Maksimović, 2023). Economic decline and setbacks in democratic processes can have detrimental effects on the development of any scientific field, including andragogy, making it unlikely for it to undertake a role similar to the one it played in the 1990s – bridging the gap between the past and present and leading to the revitalisation of the adult education system. Another symptom that can have a detrimental effect on further scientific development is the massive loss of scientific young talent due to brain drain, which leaves the entire country without a significant number of young, educated, and promising professionals.

The European Union also lacks effective mechanisms to expedite integration processes and guide them towards democratic goals and the practical implementation of best approaches in adult education. Moreover, there is a significant question regarding what the European Education Area will bring to the science of adult education. The term and the concept of *lifelong learning* have almost entirely replaced *adult education*, thereby significantly limiting the potential for further scientific conceptualisation and the development of a dedicated scientific discipline to study this field. While lifelong learning holds value as a concept and philosophy, it fails to delineate a specific sector of education, resulting in a lack of clear research focus and hindering the further professionalisation of this field (Popović, 2021). As this trend of replacing adult education with lifelong learning is embraced by the United Nations (also included in the Sustainable Development Goals; SDGs), there is a risk of losing the professional identity of the field and the scientific discipline, fuelled by global trendsetters.

This trend is further intensified by the tendency to reduce the importance of professional preparation for many jobs, which has detached entry into and engagement in professional sectors from the necessary scientific knowledge and preparation. The previously valued interdisciplinary approach has now blurred the boundaries between sciences, presenting a significant challenge for emerging scientific disciplines. In the context of andragogy, this has led to a decreased formal requirement for highly skilled andragogy professionals and limited opportunities for training semi-professional staff. This process of de-professionalisation and reduced requirements for engagement and employment in the adult education sector can have adverse consequences for andragogy as a scientific discipline, rendering it marginalised within the field of practice and undermining its foundational principles.



Furthermore, the firm definition of scientific disciplines and adherence to high professional standards face challenges due to the prevailing postmodernist discourse entering even the scientific community and academia (e.g., Bloom, 1987; McCallum, 1996; Polemics, 1994). This discourse tends to relativise science, reducing it to one among many paradigms, eroding scientific authority, deconstructing scientific rigor, and disregarding clarity, standards, and methodological grounding. These tendencies, driven by a desire to challenge power structures and outdated scientific models, undermine the prospects of andragogy as a scientific discipline. Instead of scientific principles, they favour subjective reflection and activist principles, introducing arbitrariness into the field. The deconstruction of science and science-based paradigms, driven by postmodernism, has an impact especially on social sciences, including andragogy. Coupled with national and international policies driven by pragmatism, it indicates a regression to a pre-modern era. While this may lead to dynamic yet chaotic development in adult education practice influenced by less visible yet potent interests and power dynamics, it is unlikely to support the scientific reflection of andragogy.

Additionally, neoliberal trends have similar effects on the field (Bowl, 2017; Fleming, 2016; Kopecký, 2011). Alongside the positivist discourse and emphasis on pragmatism, the neoliberal agenda prioritises the applicability of knowledge in the workplace, thereby narrowing the goals and scope of universities. This reductionist approach reduces the role of social sciences and constrains the development of emerging scientific disciplines. In the context of andragogy, neoliberalism poses a significant threat as it may lead to the subjugation of its scientific discourse to practical considerations and vocational training. In Serbia, this trend stands in contrast to the broader, more balanced, and holistic concept of andragogy, which seeks to integrate diverse knowledge and skills, maintain a robust scientific foundation, and uphold fundamental values.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a detrimental impact on andragogy as well (Alibabić, 2021; UNESCO, 2021). The profound redefinition of learning and education during this period has significantly influenced adult education practices. The widespread shift towards informal and non-formal learning, particularly in online and virtual settings, has relegated adult education to the periphery of formal education systems. These temporary solutions, driven by the influence of educational technology companies, tend to become permanent, undermining efforts to establish adult education as an integral part of the education system. As a result, the responsibility for adult education policies is diminished, placing the entire sector at the mercy of individual enthusiasm, motivation, and even caprice. Within this framework, the need for scientific deliberation, planning based on research insights, and evidence-based practices is diminished.

It is indisputable that every practical domain of human action, encompassing all areas including adult education, deserves to be included within the realm of scientific analysis. These crucial domains require theoretical grounding, systematic reflection, and research-based guidance. Andragogy has already demonstrated its high capacity for fulfilling this important task. Critics of andragogy have primarily voiced their concerns from political discourses and activist perspectives, with less emphasis on substantial

scientific critique. While debates about its exact position within the system of scientific disciplines may exist, the necessity of andragogy as a scientific discipline remains unquestionable. However, what does the future hold for the realistic development of andragogy today?

In light of these challenges, the realistic perspective for the development of andragogy lies in its ability to navigate prevailing trends, maybe even to resist them. Andragogy in Serbia is actively countering these trends by emphasising the concept of adult education instead of lifelong learning and asserting itself as a scientific discipline – an approach that has demonstrated remarkable resilience thus far, although future perspectives remain challenging ones. Efforts are underway to further define and professionalise the field, encompass a wide range of knowledge and skills, maintain a holistic scientific approach, and preserve its core values. Given the high degree of uncertainty in current times, the ultimate outcome of this clash of paradigms remains unpredictable.

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