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## *AN ASPECT OF HUNGARIAN AND SERBIAN ADULT EDUCATION*

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### **Abstract**

Lifelong learning (LLL) can address key socio-economic challenges such as increasing competitiveness and employment, equal opportunities and quality of life. For LLL to become a reality, adult educators have a crucial role to play (Farkas, 2014). Differentiated activities and competences place specific demands on the professionalism of adult educators, which results in a balancing act between several logics of action when working at the interface. For adult educators to continuously reconcile the economic, bureaucratic, and professional requirements of their daily work, a concept known as "hybrid professionalism" is essential (Noordegraaf, 2015). The aim of this paper is to provide an insight into and comparison of adult education in Hungary and Serbia, and to examine the activities, competences and related professionalism of adult educators who provide professional development for early childhood educators. The research seeks answers to the following questions: What are the main activities and competences developed by adult educators? What are the differences and similarities between the two countries? How can the hybrid professionalism of adult educators be understood? The research included semi-structured expert interviews with a Serbian and a Hungarian adult educator, as well as the analysis of the legal regulations of adult education (Zakon o obrazovanju odraslih, 2013, Felnőttképzési törvény, 2013) as well as the regulation and government decree regulating teacher training courses (Pedagógus-továbbképzési kormányrendelet, 2024). As the education systems of both countries show the basic characteristics of the continental type, many similarities are found in terms of areas, activities and competences. The differences are due to the different economic and governance systems in the two countries. Adult education and training typically encompass a wide range of practices that are interwoven with many other areas. The link between the theory of hybrid professionalism and the practice of adult education is confirmed by the interviewees presented.

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**Keywords:** *adult education; professionalism; competences*

### **Introduction**

Lifelong learning can be a solution to the most important socio-economic problems, such as increasing competitiveness and employment, equal opportunities, and improving the quality of life. To make lifelong learning a reality, adult educators are crucial (Farkas, 2014). The practices of adult learning and education are typically very diverse and intertwine with numerous other fields. This situation leads to a lack of clarity regarding the precise profile of adult educators and their particular behaviours. Furthermore, these factors have a specific impact on the professionalism of adult educators (Breitschwerdt & Guimarães, 2022). Differentiating activities and competences set unique expectations on

adult educators' professionalism, resulting in balancing between several logics of action while working at interfaces. For adult educators to be able to constantly coordinate the various economic, bureaucratic, and professional requirements in their daily work, it requires a "*hybrid professionalism*" (Noordegraaf, 2015).

An important and determining factor in the development of European adult education and training is the constantly evolving society and economy (Németh, 2006). The demand for the transformation of the quality of adult and continuing education is closely related to the extensive transformation of the modern world of work. The professional discourses on the topic focused on the professionalization efforts of adult education, for which social, institutional, and organizational contexts provide the background and framework. Important factors for achieving this direction are market, bureaucratic, and professional principles, i.e. the interconnectedness of functional systems, the integration of research-based new knowledge into education, the aspects of the connections between abstract expertise and concrete practice, ensuring a working environment following the logic of professionalism, which raises the importance of the organization, as well as the professional services, like group work with the independent and fully developed adults who form the target group (Egetenmeyer et al., 2019).

Over time, it became clear to researchers that a multi-level perspective is needed to investigate professionalism. As a background for this, researchers distinguish three levels. On the one hand, the state, society, and institutions determine the laws and rules for adult education policy, which establish, among other things, the guidelines for lifelong learning and the necessary competences and skills. On the other hand, the level of the organizations that will be responsible, among other things, for the training of those working in adult education. Thirdly, the level of teachers and students, which includes both the preparation and needs of professional staff and adult learners, thus, forming the centre of professionalism at this level (Egetenmeyer et al., 2019). The relevance of the topic is also supported by Balázs Németh's view (Németh, 2023) that we need to emphasise the training of adult education professionals, andragogues, who can and are able to effectively educate and train adults in formal, non-formal or informal learning environments.

## **Aims, research questions, methodology, key terms**

The aim of this search is, on the one hand, to provide insight into adult education and compare it in Serbia and Hungary and, on the other hand, to examine the actions, competences, and associated professionalism of adult educators providing professional further education for pedagogues in early childhood education.

To achieve the set goal, we are looking for answers to the following questions in the Serbian and Hungarian context: What are the main domains in adult learning and education? What competences are important for adult educators? What differences and similarities can be found between the two countries? How can the hybrid professionalism of adult educators be understood (Breitschwerdt & Guimarães, 2022)?

In order to answer the research questions, we used two different research methods. First, to make a comparative analysis, we examined the Hungarian and Serbian aspects of

the legal regulations related to adult education. Then, we conducted in-depth interviews with colleagues working in the field of training of early childhood professionals, which increased our knowledge about the personal involvement, competences, and attitudes of adult education professionals. During the research, two in-depth interviews were conducted with professionals working in adult education. We interviewed a professional in Hungary who was in the practical phase of early childhood education training course, and a professional in Serbia who was in the further training of teachers. In both cases, the interview was conducted based on the following structure, along the listed questions: What does your everyday work look like in general, specifically in the practical part of adult education? In which area do you work and what is your main task? How is this area of work structured and organized? How did you get into this position, in this institution? Tell us about your education, work experience, and scope of activity! How much do you like your specific work, what challenges do you face? What different demands do you face in your everyday life? How do you deal with them? What are the situations that pose a challenge? How do you behave in these situations? What competencies and resources are necessary for your work and how do you develop them? How do you stay up-to-date at work? How do you stay informed about current events and developments in your workplace? The interviews were recorded at the professionals' workplaces in February 2023. In both cases, the material was recorded in writing and then examined through text analysis.

The participants in adult education are, of course, the same in both countries. First, we need to clarify who is involved in adult learning, who is learning in this framework and who are the professionals who support this learning. The target group of adult education can be considered to be those people who have been left out of the education system for some reason, or who wish to continue their studies after school (Zachár, 2009). To define the adult student, we will describe Kraiciné's formulation: *"All (state) citizens of compulsory school age who, in addition to their work or in the absence of it, undertake the development of their knowledge, skills, and competences voluntarily or under external motivation, are considered adult students"* (Kraiciné, 2004, p. 51). The participants in the trainings are extremely diverse: they include career starters, career changers, and the unemployed, but also those who want to advance in their profession or acquire new knowledge. The motivations are also diverse: professional development, improving employment opportunities, self-realization or even leisure learning can all be important driving forces.

Those who help adults learn are the teachers working in adult education. This profession is very different from the work of those working in higher education or other formal education. The specialist must be able to build on the work and life experiences, previously acquired knowledge, and competencies of the training participant. The basis of his work is that in this situation the student is characterized by strong voluntary and internal motivation. Competencies play an important role during the training. The output competencies of the training are also determined upon admission. It is essential that the teacher is aware of this, that is, at the beginning of the training, to assess the extent to which the student possesses these. After all, he organizes and differentiates the joint work

that awaits them along this line. Formulation in learning outcomes is a related innovative form (Kóródi et al., 2015).

Nagypál writes about the role of andragogues in his study as follows: "*The andragogue diagnoses with his background knowledge, which diagnosis he responds to in his interpersonal relationships. Adults can and should be offered a number of services, at least for the purpose of their position in the labour market or their integration into the labour market, and at the most for the implementation of Lifelong Learning, as a program of lifelong learning, lifelong renewal, and fulfilment*" (Nagypál, 2014, p. 81). In his opinion, in addition to his professional development, the task of the adult educator is to provide education and help with learning. However, its roles in adult education practice may expand for financial reasons. We need highly qualified instructors who plan the curriculum, professionally organize and document the course of the training, and provide the right environment for learning. In the optimal case, the adult educator is professionally and methodologically prepared, and motivated to transfer knowledge and practical skills, but in Hungary and in Serbia, there are no legally required adult education-related training or continuing education for these professionals (mentors, vocational instructors, trainers) (Nagypál, 2014).

Among the competencies of professionals participating in adult education, Farkas distinguishes the following five groups: professional, andragogic, social, technological, and communication competencies (Farkas, 2013). Distinguishing them in the analysis of the conducted interviews is useful for us.

## **Adult education and learning in Serbia**

The development of adult education in Serbia builds on the Yugoslav andragogical tradition that emerged at the University of Belgrade during the 1960s and 1970s (Popović et al., 2024). At the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Belgrade, the Andragogy Study Group and Chair of Andragogy were established in 1979, founded on pioneering research and institution-building efforts of Borivoj Samolovčev (Samolovchev, 1978; Samolovčev & Muradbegović, 1979) and Dušan Savićević (Savićević, 1989; 1991). This Chair (later Department) became a centre for developing professionals and advancing research, strengthening andragogy as a recognized scientific discipline (Popović et al., 2024). The wartime period at the end of 1990 adversely affected both the training of adult educators and the institution's scientific activities. Nevertheless, Serbia managed to maintain the structure of the Adult Education Institution and the profession. In 1994, the journal *Andragogical Studies* was launched, followed by the establishment of the *Society of Andragogues* in 2000. The Institute of Andragogy at the University of Belgrade has achieved notable research results and maintains active international collaborations (Savićević, 2010). This demonstrates that andragogy is firmly established in Serbia both as a scientific discipline and as a university program (Milivojevic-Beszédes, 2023).

Serbia's adult learning situation is significantly influenced by its EU candidate status and the associated close cooperation with the European Training Foundation (ETF), the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL), and the Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe (EPALE) Serbia network (ETF, 2024a; UIL, 2022). The ETF actively

supports Serbia in reforming vocational education and expanding non-formal adult education, in line with EU integration objectives (ETF, 2024b). In parallel, according to UNESCO GRALE reports, Serbia has taken steps to improve the quality and accessibility of adult education, such as developing teacher andragagogical training, strengthening the principle of lifelong learning, and recognizing non-formal and informal learning (UIL, 2022).

In the history of the country The Law on Adult Education (Zakon o obrazovanju odraslih, 2013) was the first law that covered the field of adult education. It was adopted by the Republic of Serbia in June 2013 and has been enforced since January 1, 2014. According to the Law on Adult Education (Zakon o obrazovanju odraslih, 2013), adult education is part of the unified education system of the Republic of Serbia, which provides lifelong opportunities for adults to acquire skills and qualifications necessary for their personal and professional development, work and employment, and socially responsible behaviour.

Adult education in Serbia is implemented as formal and non-formal education, as well as informal learning (Beszédes, 2020). Formal education includes general formal education and formal vocational training. General formal education refers to organized teaching and learning processes based on the curricula and lesson plans of primary and secondary education. Although based on general elementary and secondary education concepts, the performance levels of these programs are aligned with the adult population. General formal education aims to increase the performance of basic skills (Zakon o obrazovanju odraslih, 2013). In formal vocational training, programs of other forms of professional training adapted to the needs and possibilities of adults and the needs of the labour market are implemented. Formal vocational training aims to obtain a qualification recognized as an adult. Formal adult education is intended for those who have failed to complete general and vocational school education (Eurydice, 2022). Non-formal education includes organized teaching and learning processes based on special curricula outside the school system. These processes aim at the acquisition of knowledge, values, positions, abilities, and skills that help adults advance their personal development, work, employment, and social activities. Non-formal education does not provide a transition to higher education, but it provides students with the skills, knowledge, and abilities essential for professional development. Non-formal education is for people who have completed a part or all of their formal schooling and who need to improve their skills or re-qualify for another profession (Zakon o obrazovanju odraslih, 2013). Informal learning is the process of independent acquisition of knowledge, values, attitudes, abilities, and skills, which takes place in everyday life, in the workplace, and in the social environment of education.

The following are the objectives of adult education in Serbia, as stated in the Law on Adult Education: improvement of educational structure and employability of citizens; creation of a basis for the socio-economic development of Serbia; increase in professional mobility and flexibility of the working population; providing grounds for the reduction of poverty, social equality, social inclusion, and intergenerational solidarity; improvement of personal and family life standards, along with the social and natural environment;

development of democracy, multiculturalism, and tolerance; integration into the European social, economic and educational frameworks (Zakon o obrazovanju odraslih, 2013). The goals of adult education can be realized through adult education activities.

There are five main areas of adult education in Serbia. According to the Adult Education Law (2013), the following are activities within adult education: general education, vocational education and specialisation, professional development, assessment and recognition of previously acquired competences, career guidance, and counselling.

General education aims to obtain a primary and secondary education and to acquire the key competences, which are realized within formal education. Vocational education and vocational training are aimed at acquiring or developing the professional competences required for participation in the labour market, which takes place through formal and non-formal education. The goal of professional development is to increase knowledge, activity, and professional abilities through informal and non-formal learning. The prior qualification is recognized by assessing the knowledge, skills, and abilities acquired through education, life, and work experience. The career guidance and counselling activity is aimed at developing career development skills important for successful employment and professional advancement (Zakon o obrazovanju odraslih, 2013).

### **Implementation of adult education and learning in Serbia**

Adult education takes place in lectures, training, courses, seminars, workshops, tribunes, and conferences, as well as other forms of learning and education. Adult training can be conducted through regular teaching, consultative-instructional work, correspondence-consultative education, practical work, distance learning and other suitable methods. Organizers of adult education activities include primary and secondary schools, public companies, employment agencies, business associations, trade unions, associations, professional societies, adult training organizations and cultural and educational centres, etc. Organizers of adult education are implementers of adult training programs (teacher, lecturer, trainer, course leader, instructor; professional colleagues; colleagues and teacher and adult educator assistants. Adult education programmes can be organised in Serbian or in a minority language, depending on the learners' ethnicity (Despotović & Popović, 2014).

### **Competences in Serbian adult learning and education**

Competences according to the Adult Education Law are, is understood as the ability to use acquired knowledge, skills and positions in a wide variety of life situations. The law identifies key competences and professional competences within this (Zakon o obrazovanju odraslih, 2013). *"Key competences represent transferable, a multifunctional package of knowledge and abilities necessary for the individual to achieve personal fulfilment, development, professional mobility and employment. An individual acquires key competences at the end of vocational education and training, and they represent the basis for an individual's lifelong learning"* (European Training Foundation, 2007, p. 6).

Key competences are necessary for personal, social, and professional growth, as well as for continuing education and the capacity to put new information, abilities, and points of view into practice. Standards for adults' key competences in primary and general secondary education are established by the National Education Council and the Institute for Educational Quality and Evaluation. The domains outlined in the EU framework on key competences for lifelong learning are as follows: communication in the mother-, and in a foreign language; mathematical literacy, science and technology; digital competence; learning to learn; interpersonal-, intercultural-, social- and civil competences ; Sense of innovation and entrepreneurship; cultural awareness and expression professional competences (European Training Foundation, 2007).

Professional competences are understood as the suitability essential for carrying out work activities, and the ability to use acquired knowledge, skills and viewpoints. Vocational education and specialisation are directed towards acquiring or improving vocational competences required for participation in the labour market. Standards of vocational competences in vocational education, competences of professional development, and other kinds of adult education are determined by the Council for Vocational and Adult Education and the Institute for the Improvement of Education (Zakon o obrazovanju odraslih, 2013).

## **Adult education and learning in Hungary**

The goal of adult education in Hungary is also to expand knowledge, improve labour market opportunities, support lifelong learning, and develop personal and social competences. The fields and functions of adult education in Hungary can be grouped according to several criteria. In this paragraph we use Zachár's classification. According to this, in addition to training in the school system and training outside the school system, it distinguishes labour market training, in which case the starting point for determining professional qualifications is economic demand and general and language training, which helps to strengthen the employee's position. The largest area of adult education is vocational training outside the school system. This can be felt from the number of participants and the range of qualifications. Continuous or further training helps employees to successfully assert themselves and, in certain areas, stay in the labour market. From an economic point of view, the subsidized training of the unemployed that helps employment is not negligible either (Zachár, 2009).

Based on the data of the last ten years, in Hungary, it can be said that the number of training courses and their participants has increased dynamically, the proportion of state-recognized vocational qualifications is the highest, the age group under 35 is overrepresented in the training courses, and opportunities under 400 hours of training time predominate (Zachár, 2009).

The basic idea of adult education in Hungary is that the effective operation of the adult education system is essential for the creation of a knowledge- and work-based society and economy. In 2019, the Hungarian Government decided to renew the adult education system. In the background of this was the focus on the training system that satisfied the economic needs induced by the rapid technological changes. For these reasons, the

development of an adult education system that meets the constantly changing needs of the labour market has become of strategic importance for the Hungarian economy (Borbély-Pecze, 2021). In response to the challenges, strategic steps were taken. This includes ensuring measurability in the career tracking system in connection with the training, reflecting on the real labour market demand, reducing administration, introducing new financing options, and starting training courses that meet the demand and provide usable competencies in order to increase the number of participants, as well as the creation of independent, accredited examination centres. To implement the strategic steps, the guidelines governing the adult education system were also changed (Innovációs és Technológiai Minisztérium, 2020).

### **Implementation of adult education and learning in Hungary**

The topic in the title is an important area of educational science, as it provides learning and development opportunities for the age group beyond compulsory schooling. The forms of adult education are diverse, depending on the framework in which learning takes place. As already mentioned, one of the most significant areas is school-based education, which provides adults with the opportunity to obtain a general or secondary education, or even pursue higher education. These mostly operate in the evening, correspondence or distance learning format, in order to adapt to the time schedule of those who wish to study alongside work and family life. Training outside the school system, on the other hand, is shorter, often modularly structured courses that serve specific professional or competence-development goals. This includes language courses, IT training, company training, as well as various further training and retraining options. Distance, online and blended learning are becoming increasingly common, allowing participants to develop at their own pace and with flexibility (Bajusz, 2011).

Adult education in Hungary is organized by a variety of institutions. The system includes state institutions such as vocational schools, public education centres and various professional training centres, which also provide catch-up and retraining programs. In addition, private training providers and language schools play a significant role, offering courses on a market basis and for a fee. Higher education institutions – universities and colleges – are also active players in adult education, mainly in the form of specialized further training, correspondence courses and graduate courses designed for adults. Civil society organizations also play an important role, providing community learning, cultural and general literacy programs, especially for disadvantaged or low-educated adults.

The implementers include teachers, trainers, lecturers, course leaders, language and practical experts. In many cases they are professionals who do not necessarily work in the traditional institutional system of education. They work with a methodological toolkit that takes into account the specific needs, experiences and motivations of adult learners. In adult learning, practice orientation, interactive learning forms and labour market relevance play a prominent role.

Adult education and training in Hungary is basically conducted in Hungarian, as the majority of programmes are organised by domestic institutions and advertised for

Hungarian-speaking participants. At the same time, linguistic diversity is also evident: numerous foreign language courses are available. In parallel, the teaching of Hungarian as a foreign language also plays an important role, which facilitates the integration of foreigners studying or working in Hungary. The adult education system is therefore open, flexible and diverse, providing the opportunity to learn for all those who strive to acquire new knowledge at any stage of life.

### **Competences in Hungarian adult learning and education**

The competences of teachers working in adult education and training in Hungary form a complex and diverse system, in which professional preparation, methodological awareness, and personal and social sensitivity complement each other and help the successful development of adult learners. According to the educational science approach, the activity of teachers working in adult education is not only aimed at transferring knowledge, but also at guiding, supporting and facilitating the learning process, taking into account the specificities arising from the life situation, experiences and motivations of adults (Kraiciné, 2006).

Among the competencies of professionals participating in adult education, Farkas distinguishes the following five groups: professional, andragogic, social, technological, and communication competencies (Farkas, 2013).

### **Results of the comparative analysis in terms of regulation and competences**

The Serbian and Hungarian adult education and training systems are based on a number of common educational and social policy principles, but they also show noticeable differences in terms of their legal regulation, institutional implementation, financing structure and development priorities. In both countries, adult education is a prominent part of the lifelong learning strategy, which, in addition to increasing economic competitiveness, also serves to promote social equality, labour market reintegration and personal development. The pedagogical approach of adult education in both countries is based on supporting the autonomous learner, encouraging self-directed learning and maintaining learning motivation.

In Hungary, the legal framework of adult education is defined by Act LXXVII of 2013 on Adult Education (Felnőttképzési törvény, 2013), which uniformly regulates the licensing, quality assurance and registration system of training. The legislation establishes the main areas of adult education, including formal adult education, which enables the acquisition of general and secondary education, non-formal vocational training aimed at developing labour market competences, and non-formal and informal forms of learning that support personal development, skills development and cultural learning. All of these areas are closely linked to labour market needs, state education policy priorities and social inclusion programmes. In Serbia, the Law on Adult Education (Zakon o obrazovanju odraslih, 2013), adopted in 2013, establishes similar principles, but places greater emphasis on supporting non-formal learning and lifelong competence development, as well as on validating knowledge and experience. The main areas of adult education in the

Serbian system include formal education (school-based studies), non-formal training (courses, short courses), and a system of recognition of informal learning, which allows for the recognition of knowledge acquired through work experience and self-education.

Funding is based on a mixed model in both countries. In Hungary, state funds, EU grants and private contributions play a role. Grant-based programs, especially those financed from the European Social Fund, are of particular importance. Funding is centrally managed and strictly regulated, aiming to strengthen quality assurance and accountability. In Serbia, funding is more decentralized, with a greater role for local governments and regional development centres, but state support is often project-based, which ensures less long-term sustainability. At the same time, more flexible resource allocation allows for the development of training offerings that are better suited to local needs (Borbély-Pecze, 2021).

In terms of resources, the development of human and infrastructural capacities is decisive in both countries. In Hungary, a wide network of accredited training institutions, vocational training centres and adult education providers ensures access, while in Serbia the network of adult education centres is gradually being built up, mainly in urban areas. The challenge for both systems is to reach rural and disadvantaged areas, as well as to develop digital infrastructure and forms of distance learning. Quality assurance is bound by legal frameworks in both countries, but with different emphases. In Hungary, the operation of a quality management system, the application of programme requirements and examination regulations, and state registration are mandatory for licensed trainers. The Serbian system provides institutions with greater autonomy: quality assurance is primarily based on self-assessment, external professional evaluation and the measurement of learning outcomes. In Serbia, special attention is paid to the validation of non-formal learning, which is even less developed in the Hungarian system.

In both countries, the tasks of teachers working in adult education extend beyond the transfer of professional knowledge to supporting, motivating and assisting students in their self-directed learning. In Hungary, teachers primarily fit into state-defined training programs, and their main tasks include organizing and evaluating the learning process and integrating competence development. In Serbia, teachers and trainers work with greater methodological autonomy, and the development of personalized learning paths and the validation of learning outcomes play a more prominent role. Both systems expect teachers to have a reflective, developmental approach, the application of interactive, practice-oriented learning methods, and the conscious use of digital tools can be assumed along the lines of hybrid professionalism (Breitschwerdt & Guimarães, 2022; Noordegraaf, 2015).

As for competencies, they can be similarly grouped into key, professional and personal competencies. The key competences of an adult education teacher include, above all, teaching and supporting learning, i.e. the ability to encourage students to engage in an independent, reflective and goal-oriented learning process. This is complemented by communication competence, which helps to establish empathetic, partnership relationships and maintain motivation. Social and intercultural competence enables teachers to sensitively and acceptingly deal with the diverse social and cultural

backgrounds of adult learners, as well as with learning difficulties arising from potential disadvantages. Digital competence is also of particular importance, as it enables the effective use of modern learning environments – the previously mentioned online and blended forms – and the use of digital tools and teaching materials for pedagogical purposes. Key competences form the basis of pedagogical work, as they determine the success of teaching and learning in every adult education situation (Barta et al., 2005)

Professional competences encompass the knowledge and skills of adult education teachers that are based on their scientific, professional and methodological preparation. This includes in-depth knowledge of the field taught, the transmission of content that is up-to-date and meets the needs of the labour market, and the planning of relevant learning paths for adult learners. Professional competences also include the ability to plan and evaluate teaching, i.e. to develop methods, tasks and assessment procedures that are aligned with learning objectives. This also includes the ability to differentiate, as the heterogeneous background, life paths and motivations of adult learners require flexible educational solutions. One of the defining elements of professional competences is openness to methodological innovation, i.e. the conscious and reflected application of new teaching strategies, learning organisation forms and digital tools (Barta et al., 2005).

The personal competences of teachers working in adult education provide the emotional, attitudinal and self-awareness basis for professional functioning. Empathy, tolerance and the ability of teachers to develop authentic, supportive and trusting relationships with students are of paramount importance in this area. Motivational competence helps teachers to recognize and strengthen students' internal motivation to learn, especially those returning to education after a longer learning break. Reflective thinking and a commitment to self-development are also crucial, as in the rapidly changing, flexible environment of adult education, teachers must continuously develop their own knowledge, methods and approaches. Stress tolerance, flexibility and personal example-setting are model values for adult learners and contribute to strengthening trust and commitment to learning (Barta et al., 2005).

Overall, the competencies of teachers in adult education and training form a three-fold structure: key competencies ensure the overall success of the learning process, professional competencies ensure the content and methodological quality, while personal competencies guarantee the teacher's credibility, supportive role and human quality. The close unity of these three areas creates the pedagogical foundation on which adult learners become capable of expanding their knowledge, self-development, and strengthening their active social and labour market participation (Nagypál, 2014; Kóródi et al., 2015).

## Summary analysis of interviews

As part of the research – to answer the research questions – semi-structured interviews were conducted with colleagues involved in adult education. Our questions focused on main tasks, competences used and expected activities, challenges, and the current situation and regulation of adult education. In both cases, we found a strong sense of vocation and commitment. According to our interview partners, in this job, it is important

to be able to accurately assess learning needs and plan training accordingly (Research voor Beleid, 2010).

Our interviewees emphasized that in their daily work, they are faced with various needs, which must be constantly coordinated. Because of the resulting challenges, they love their work the most, because it never bores them, and they can always improve. Noordegraaf's (2015) model of "*hybrid professionalism*" here is clearly shown. They react to the heterogeneity and diversity in the group by applying different learning methods, which they learned based on their various training and experiences. They respond to different needs with good organizational and communication skills, patience, and resilience.

The interviewees were unanimous in saying that the right professional qualifications, digital competencies, as well as social and communication skills, openness to needs, and, of course, friendliness should not be lacking on either the teaching or the student side. It was pointed out that humour should not be left out either, as it facilitates many things, even in the courses. The answers to the questions show that it is important for students' input requirements to be able to make independent decisions and to take responsibility for these decisions. This is consistent with the characteristics of adult learners mentioned earlier and with the characteristics expected of adult educators.

Among the challenges they face, they clearly highlighted the diversity of students, the differences in students' backgrounds, attitudes, knowledge, and why they chose this particular course. It is very important for the respondent to be able to build on the existing knowledge and competencies of students with different backgrounds.

In response to our research question, we can say that the same main areas of practice and the same main activities and competences are important for adult educators in Serbia and Hungary. Differences are mainly in the challenges of the professional field taught.

## Conclusion

It's important to note that adult education is a dynamic field, and policies and programs may evolve over time in response to changing needs and priorities. Additionally, the specific experiences of individuals in these countries may vary widely depending on their location, socioeconomic status, and personal circumstances.

The comparison of Serbian and Hungarian adult education shows that, despite the different legal and institutional frameworks and the differences in the emphasis on teacher competences, the principles of learner-centredness and lifelong learning play a central role in both countries' systems. In future developments, both countries could benefit from strategic cooperation based on the exchange of experiences, the adaptation of good practices and the strengthening of the recognition of non-formal learning.

At the same time, the study draws attention to the need for further research, especially on measuring the development and effectiveness of teacher competences, the effectiveness of learning organisation forms applied in different areas of adult education, and the impact of legal and financing structures on student outcomes. Such research can contribute to the continuous development of adult education systems, the professional support of teachers and the successful lifelong learning paths of students.

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