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## PAST AND PRESENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE PROFESSIONALISATION OF ADULT LEARNING AND EDUCATION IN HUNGARY

### ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this study is to provide a descriptive analysis of the characteristics of adult learning and education as a profession in Hungary, with a particular emphasis on the professionalisation of the profession and its practitioners. In the study, we seek to answer the question of what the main characteristics of adult learning and education are and whether it can be classified as a profession in Hungary according to traditional theories of the profession. The topic was examined in detail along the lines of relevant literature and data obtained from content analysis of primary source documents. The study shows that the legitimacy of adult education in Hungary remains unclear, which is reflected in the context of the social prestige of adult education, its legislative environment, and the professionalisation of adult learning professionals, which have undergone many structural changes over the past nearly seven decades.*

**Keywords:** *adult learning and education, adult learning professionals, professionalisation, training pathways, andragogy, Hungary*

### PRETEKLI IN SODOBNI RAZVOJ PROFESIONALIZACIJE UČENJA IN IZOBRAŽEVANJA ODRASLIH NA MADŽARSKEM – POVZETEK

*Prispevek predstavlja opisno analizo značilnosti učenja in izobraževanja odraslih kot profesije na Madžarskem, s posebnim poudarkom na profesionalizaciji profesije kot tudi izvajalcev. Odgovoriti želimo na vprašanji, kaj so glavne značilnosti učenja in izobraževanja odraslih ter ali je to dejavnost v skladu s tradicionalnimi teorijami o profesijah možno uvrstiti med profesije na Madžarskem. Tematika je bila natančno raziskana prek pregleda relevantne literature in podatkov, pridobljenih na podlagi vsebinske analize primarnih virov. Raziskava je pokazala, da legitimnost izobraževanja odraslih na Madžarskem ostaja nejasna, kar odražajo tudi okoliščine družbenega prestiža izobraževanja odraslih, zakonodaje in profesionalizacije stroke, ki so v preteklih skoraj sedmih desetletjih doživele veliko sprememb.*

**Ključne besede:** *učenje in izobraževanje odraslih, strokovnjaki za učenje odraslih, profesionalizacija, usposabljanje, andragogika, Madžarska*

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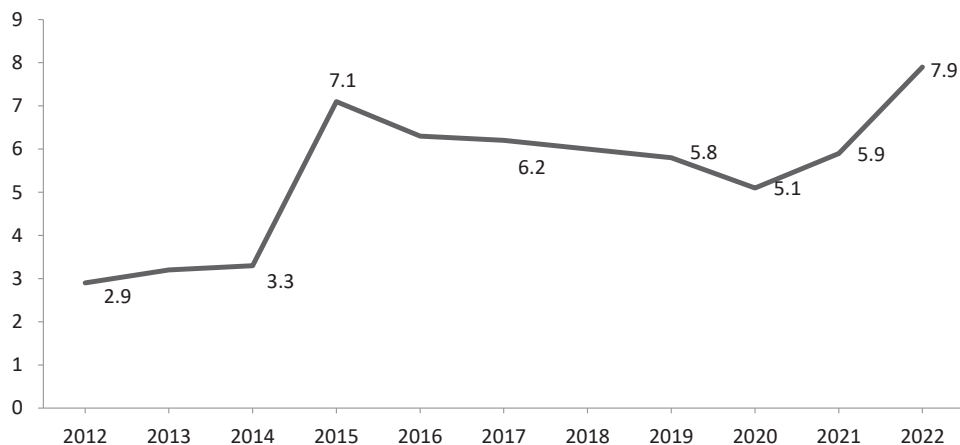
## INTRODUCTION

The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan has set ambitious goals for the upskilling and reskilling of adults, stating that at least 60% of the total adult population in the European Union should participate in training each year by 2030, while the employment level of the population between 20–64 years of age should reach at least 78% (European Commission, 2021). In order to reach these goals, participation in adult learning and education (ALE) must be enhanced significantly; unfortunately, it is already substantially below the EU average in Hungary.

Despite significant reforms and funding, participation in adult learning in Hungary has not improved much over the last decade and has remained well below (at 7.9%) the EU average (11.9% in 2022; Eurostat, 2023; Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

*Participation rate in education and training (last 4 weeks) in Hungary (%)*



Note. Adapted from *Participation rate in education and training (last 4 weeks)*, by Eurostat, 2023 ([https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/trng\\_lfse\\_o1/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/trng_lfse_o1/default/table?lang=en)).

In order to enhance the opportunities for and the scope and level of ALE, improving the preparedness of adult learning professionals<sup>1</sup> is a top priority in ALE policies in Europe. One of the assurances for the quality of adult learning is the participation of qualified, trained and talented educators in ALE. In order to achieve this, apart from the development of educational methodologies and curricula, the member states must also contribute with appropriate investment and other measures to the enhancement of basic and advanced professional training of adult learning professionals (Council of the European Union, 2021).

1 In this study, the term adult learning professionals is used as a collective term. It refers to all persons involved in the organisation and delivery of ALE, such as andragogues, adult educators, coordinators, programme developers, etc.

The necessity of and the demand for the professionalisation of adult learning professionals was already articulated in the first strategy for lifelong learning for the period between 2007 and 2013 in Hungary (Ministry of Education, 2006). The 2014 to 2020 strategy states that it is of special importance that adult learning professionals, cultural professionals, and andragogues are prepared for training deviant youths, addicts, and prison inmates (Ministry of Human Resources, 2016). The actions necessary to achieve the goals contained in the strategies were not taken, so Hungary still has a serious backlog to tackle in the area of the professionalisation of adult learning professionals. There have not been favourable policies for training adult learning professionals during the past decade. The argument has emerged several times during the history of this professional area: what do adult educators<sup>2</sup> do, and what is the task of Andragogues<sup>3</sup>? In the middle of the 2010s, during professional debates that flared up as a result of these arguments, the relevance of this professional area was straightforwardly questioned. During the transformation of higher education in 2015 this led to the termination of the bachelor's (BA) degree in Andragogy and the master's (MA) degree in Adult Education Teacher. Professional and political debates regarding the profession of ALE and the training of adult learning professionals continue even today, which is a great obstacle to andragogy becoming an independent discipline in a legal and professional sense, and hinder the stabilisation of the professional status of adult learning professionals.

The aim of the following study is to analyse the current state of ALE as a profession in Hungary. In the study, we seek to answer the question of what the main characteristics of ALE are and whether it can be classified as a profession in Hungary according to traditional theories of the profession. The topic was examined in detail along the lines of relevant literature and data obtained from content analysis of primary source documents.

In the following, the current characteristics of the ALE profession in Hungary will be examined in relation to traditional theories of the profession, with a focus on the legitimacy of the profession and the university-level education of adult learning professionals. The conclusion of the study is that ALE in Hungary cannot be classified among the traditional professions, which is due, among other things, to the lack of professional legitimacy and social prestige, the current legal environment, and the negative development trend of university courses in ALE.

## **PROFESSIONALISATION OF ALE TO GAIN THE STATUS OF A PROFESSION IN HUNGARY**

The professionalisation of an occupation means the public recognition of an occupation as a profession (Adams, 2018), which was regarded for a long time as a linear process consisting of special, well-defined stages. According to Wilensky (1964), professionalisation

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2 Adult educator terminology refers to those who are working as teachers/trainers in direct contact with adult learners.

3 Andragogue is the title of qualification obtained with a BA and MA degree in Andragogy.

starts with the performance of an activity, which is followed by the occurrence of training for the performance of this activity, then the conditions for admission to the profession are defined, and the last step is the establishment of a professional organisation. The last part of the process is to legitimate the profession, in other words, the creation of legal regulations and a professional code of ethics (Wilensky, 1964). This view reflects a traditional approach to professions, whose aim is to explore the distinguishing and/or similar features, making a given profession clearly distinguishable from other professions. Representatives of the taxonomic approach to professionalisation markedly stress specific knowledge and the formal recognition (by universities) of knowledge (Barber, 1963; Freidson, 1989; Greenwood, 1957; Klass, 1961; Wright, 1951). Based on this, the knowledge acquired in higher education fundamentally distinguishes professions from other occupations (Freidson, 1989), because professions can only be performed by those who possess professional knowledge and competences recognised by an established and legitimate body. Representatives of the taxonomic approach, apart from the significance of higher education qualifications, also regarded professional conduct control, entry conditions, and a code of ethics as features of key importance (Ovesni, 2009).

The area of ALE was analysed for a long time with the help of the traditional taxonomic approach (Egetenmeyer et al., 2019), based on which Nuissl (2010) came to the conclusion that Andragogy could not be classified as a profession because of the following reasons:

- (1) lack of special institutional structure and inter-sectoral co-operation,
- (2) lack of admission control,
- (3) lack of compulsory and uniform university education,
- (4) not satisfactory employment conditions,
- (5) different self-definition of professionals, lack of uniform identity.

Based on the traditional approaches, ALE cannot be classified as a traditional profession in Hungary either, and the reasons are discussed in detail below:

- (1) Similarly to pedagogy, andragogy is a discipline of inter-disciplinary character, which overlaps several various areas of other disciplines such as psychology, sociology, social psychology, philosophy, organisational development and management. The profession of Andragogy is not really linked to organisations and has no specific organisational structure. This is so also because the acquisition of learning and studying cannot be tied to a single or definite institution or location. They are available at schools, workplaces, cultural organisations and on MOOC<sup>4</sup> in every form and formal, non-formal and informal context. ALE is regulated by law in Hungary, but anybody, regardless of types of institutions, can perform such activities provided that they satisfy the legal requirements and are in possession of a licence to perform activities relating to ALE.<sup>5</sup>

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4 Massive open online course.

5 Based on effective legal regulations, an organisation may perform ALE activities if such an intent is reported to the state administrative body responsible for such activities (Pest County Government Office) and the

- (2) In Hungary there is no reliable information available regarding the role, activities, and competences of the organisers of ALE and those of adult learning professionals. In several countries (e.g. Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Serbia) it is required or recommended that professionals working in ALE have qualifications. In Hungary only professional managers responsible for ALE and adult education experts are required to have formal qualifications. However, no minimum competences, terms of experience, or qualifications are defined in the case of other adult learning professionals (designers, developers, organisers, educators, mentors, tutors, etc.) for taking up this profession.

Regarding licensed ALE institutions, Act LXXVII of 2013 on Adult Education (2013) prescribes the employment of a professional manager, who is required to have a higher education qualification in Andragogy, or a teacher's degree as well as three years of professional experience in the area of ALE. The tasks and powers of a professional manager are not defined in the Act, and it is not mandatory that the professional manager is a full-time employee. An andragogy qualification is also determined as a condition for fulfilling the job of adult education experts,<sup>6</sup> together with other professions such as Pedagogy, Psychology, Human Resource Counseling, Cultural Management, etc. Apart from professional qualifications, professional experts are also required to have 5 years of professional experience in (adult) education. Adult education experts conduct a preliminary professional assessment of ALE programmes and they also participate in the regulatory supervision conducted in ALE institutions every four years. Adult education experts are obliged to participate in a minimum 20-hour advanced training programme every two years, which is organised by the state administrative body responsible for ALE, the Pest County Government Office. During the advanced training programmes current issues regarding legal regulations on ALE and expert activities in ALE are covered. Upon completing these courses, the experts are required to pass an exam, which is a condition for continuing their expert activities. If the experts fail to fulfil their obligation regarding participation in advanced training courses, their names are deleted from the expert register and they are banned from conducting expert work. It is clear that currently the activities of adult education experts are the most regulated ones in the ALE system. ALE organisers and adult educators, however, are still not required to have knowledge or experience in ALE, Andragogy or Didactics (Beszédes, 2020b).

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Office has registered the institution. The list of institutions conducting ALE activities can be accessed in the *Adult Learning and Education Data Providing System* (2023). Nearly 13 thousand organisations were listed in the register of ALE institutions in March 2023. Since registration is mandatory for all institutions conducting ALE, economic enterprises conducting internal training exclusively for their own employees are also listed in the register. Organisations that conduct professional training for adults to obtain qualifications recognised by the state or training supported by the state or EU funds need to acquire a licence from the Pest County Government Office. 735 ALE institutions were licensed in March 2023.

6 Those who wish to conduct adult education expert activities as defined by the law on ALE are obliged to report such an intent to the state administration organisation responsible for ALE (Pest County Government Office). The Office registers the list of adult education experts electronically (*Adult Learning and Education Data Providing System*, 2023). Nearly 600 adult education experts were registered in March 2023.

- (3) There was no special curriculum (subject) for the targeted training of adult learning professionals in the general curricula of higher education institutions prior to 2006. In earlier courses for Cultural Manager, Human Resources Counselling and Adult Education, and Cultural Manager majors, only Andragogy studies could be conducted. So representatives of the Andragogy profession welcomed the fact that the BA degree in Andragogy was established in 2006, which was followed by the MA degree in Andragogy and MA degree in Adult Education (Andragogy) Teacher<sup>7</sup> in 2008. At the same time the environment in higher education was not favourable for training adult learning professionals during the following decade, and this area suffered great losses due to the re-structuring of the system of higher education in 2015, when the BA degree in Andragogy and MA degree in Adult Education (Andragogy) Teacher were discontinued<sup>8</sup>.
- (4) There is no reliable information regarding the conditions for the employment of adult learning professionals. Typically, adult educators teach adults as a secondary job while they perform their main jobs. Based on our experience, we can distinguish two major groups of adult educators: teachers who conduct ALE in their free time and those who are recognised professionals in their own professional areas (lawyers, economists, cosmeticians, tourism professionals, shop managers, etc.) and participate in ALE by way of their professional experience and practice. The definition of an adult educator or adult learning professional cannot be found in strategic documents or legal regulations. An andragogy qualification or an obligation to participate in advanced andragogy training courses are not mandatory employment requirements for fulfilling jobs in ALE (except in the case of adult education experts). The employment conditions of adult educators are not clear either. They are employed on fixed-term contracts, generally for the duration of a training course or a teaching module. Because of these features it is impossible to determine how many adult educators are working in Hungary currently (Farkas, 2013).
- (5) To this date, two major Delphi Surveys have been conducted in Hungary, which aimed at exploring the views and identity of adult learning professionals. Feketéné Szakos (2003), among others, came to the conclusion that the knowledge, views and understanding of the professional terminology of adult learning professionals involved in the study show a diverse picture. Farkas (2013) concluded that early-stage professionals were more inclined to regard ALE as an established profession, while more experienced professionals thought that ALE was still in the process of becoming a profession and, in order for it to become a profession, training professionals was of utmost importance (Beszédes, 2022). The examination of Andragogue

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7 Adult Education (Andragogy) Teacher training was useful for elementary or high school teachers who, in addition to traditional students, also taught adult learners in formal ALE. This program focused on the specifics of adult learning, andragogy didactics, in a practice-oriented way.

8 For a detailed description of the history of training adult learning professionals, see the section entitled "70 years of training adult learning professionals in Hungary".

identity raises several issues. It is not easy to extend the concept and to understand the identity of a professional activity that is permanently changing and which cannot be classified as a traditional profession, therefore policy makers question even the relevance of this profession from time to time. Hungarian study results indicate that the marked features of the development of the professional identity of Andragogy cannot be addressed since this profession continues to undergo new understanding. The pressure to comply with the permanently changing legal-economic-social challenges, the more and more uncertain operational conditions and the negative messages conveyed by policy makers have created hostile professional interest groups with different views and prejudices. This division hinders joint interest representation and makes it gravely difficult to develop professional identity (Farkas, 2013).

Mandatory professional training (or the lack of it) also has a great impact on the development of professional identity. According to researchers in this area, professional identity develops in professional communities (Bimrose & Brown, 2019) and during professional training and practice, which adds great value to the significance of professional preparation (Bierema, 2011; Reischmann, 2010; Wilson, 2001). Apart from enhancing knowledge and competences, professional training contributes to the formation and stabilisation of reflexive views and professional identity (Karm, 2007), which develops by way of environmental interactions and experience (van Dellen & Cohen-Scali, 2015).

As opposed to the taxonomic approach, based on Saks (2012), who articulated neo-Weberian views, the process of professionalisation cannot be regarded as a linear process, because, due to socio-political effects, not every learned occupation gains professional status. The process of professionalisation depends on the existence of formal (legal) regulation of a profession (Adams, 2018; Saks, 2012). Similarly to the above, Despotović (2010) explains the process of professionalisation “as a process of establishing credibility and legitimacy of certain types of work or activity in terms of public recognition, institutional structure and standardization in the management and operation of groups and individuals within” (Despotović, 2010, p. 48). The author conducted his study of the latter regarding the national level of legitimacy and the scientific and professional recognition of ALE. Evetts (2013) confirms that the policy efforts of a given state have a significant effect on the development and shaping of professions because they ensure professional legitimacy and a training system necessary for performing professional activities.

### **Social legitimacy of ALE as an independent professional activity in Hungary**

Based on Despotović (2010), public recognition (legitimacy) of a profession is manifested if it is recognised as an independent professional activity. This can be examined from two perspectives. Is a given professional activity on the list of economic activities recognised by the state or on the list of occupations? In Hungary the Uniform System for Classification of Economic Activities (NACE-TEÁOR; Central Statistical Office, n.d.) contains the list and description of economic activities recognised by the state. ALE is not on this



list as an independent economic activity but appears as part of branches of vocations such as “primary education” and “other forms of education”. The latter also includes various vocational courses for adults, hobby and general and advanced vocational courses for the purpose of self-development, which do not provide formal qualifications (Central Statistical Office, 2021).

In the Hungarian Standard Classification of Occupations (FEOR; Central Statistical Office, 2011), the uniform classification system of occupations recognised by the state, there is no recognised occupation in the area of ALE. At the same time activities relating to ALE occur in the description of several occupations. “Educational managers” plan, manage and co-ordinate training activities, “Educators, teachers in secondary level institutions of education” can also conduct educational activities in ALE and advanced training institutions. “Other specialized teaching professionals” perform training outside the regular school system, “Training and staff development professionals” organise and perform internal training programmes within organisations (Beszédes, 2020a). Occupations mainly relating to ALE within the regular school system appear on the list of occupations. In contrast, Andragogues, ALE organisers<sup>9</sup> and adult educators, who are specialised in ALE and train a significantly higher number of adults outside the regular school system, are not indicated in the system.

Although Andragogy or ALE is not listed as an economic activity or occupation, university level andragogy education is present in Hungary and is described in detail in the next chapter.

## **70 YEARS OF TRAINING ADULT LEARNING PROFESSIONALS IN HUNGARY**

According to Jarvis (2004), the development of ALE as a profession is not comparable with the process of the traditional development of a profession because both ALE and its individual steps lose their value as a result of social development, so the question is not whether this area can or cannot be declared a profession, but whether the individuals working in this occupation can be qualified as professionals. Gorman and Sandefur (2011) say that because of current labour market features and the decreasing responsibility and management position of the state, the old interpretations of professions cannot be applied anymore. From the identification of differences between professions and occupations the focus shifted to making distinctions between activities that require expert knowledge and the ones that do not, bringing the new professionalism approach to the forefront (Egetenmeyer et al., 2019; Evetts, 2013).

Formal qualification in a given professional area is regarded as a fundamental condition of professionalism by Jakimiuk (2020). In this regard, training professionals at university level may be considered as a stage along the road to professionalism (Egetenmeyer & Käßlinger, 2011). Academic studies support significant inter- and intrapersonal

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<sup>9</sup> ALE organiser terminology refers to a person who plans, organises, and monitors the courses that ALE institutions offer to adult learners.



processes, which have an effect on professional values, self-awareness, and the worldview professionals formulate (Karu & Jögi, 2014), as well as the development of professional identity and personal competences (Semrau et al., 2016; Wilson, 2001).

Regarding university degrees in ALE, a general problem is that ALE covers diverse professional areas where the activities of professionals and the knowledge relating to these areas become more and more diversified (Jütte et al., 2011). Training professionals is performed in a peculiar way, which is determined by national and cultural features and the requirements of professional development (Egetenmeyer et al., 2017). A uniform job profile cannot be attributed to those who perform ALE (Lattke, 2016). What is more, there is restricted information available about various different groups of such professionals (Sava, 2011; Zarifis & Papadimitriou, 2020). Due to the diverse nature of this professional area and job profiles, university courses are mainly capable of developing only some parts of the expected job competences (Boffo et al., 2016).

Training cultural and adult learning professionals has a long history in Hungary. Higher education degrees in ALE, which have undergone multiple transformations, changes in name and training structure, have been a matter of focal interest by society and professionals as well as scrutinised by representatives of current educational policies. Even the development of this professional area and the way it became independent – its detachment from a pedagogical role – was not a process without complications since it took long decades for ALE to be regarded as an independent and recognised discipline. During the past few decades, it has always been the current political power that determined the goals and ideology of training professionals. In the communist era, the educational policy directives in the 1950s articulated the significance of training professionals based on the world view of Marxism-Leninism. This approach made it possible for popular education to become a profession (T. Molnár, 2016). Therefore, training adult learning professionals was institutionalised in ALE in Hungary when subjects to train popular educators were launched at the Kossuth Lajos University in 1956 (today the University of Debrecen). Such subjects were launched in 1961 at the Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest (Farkas, 2013).

As a result of a model shift within this professional area in the 1970s, the importance of public culture gained emphasis instead of training popular educators. Political will continued to be a determining factor and cultural policies contained ideological expectations in training, which influenced its social judgement and acceptance. Even the professionals in this area were of diverse opinions and the professional attitude of institutions engaged in training was reflected in the content of the training courses (T. Molnár, 2016).

The changes in the political regime in 1989 brought about renewal in the profession and also in training professionals. As a result of social and economic processes induced by the political changes the profession and, because of it, training professionals also became very differentiated. Following the modernisation of the general curriculum in 1992, as a result of the modernisation of the content of the training course, the new name of the degree at the undergraduate level became “Cultural Management”, while at the postgraduate

university level the new name was “Cultural and Adult Education Manager”. The differentiation of the profession and making the training marketable led to the establishment of new degrees, where the diverse features of the profession occurred. Apart from the Cultural Management degree, a new BA and MA degree in Human Resources Management (which later became the basis for a BA degree in Andragogy) was launched (Cserné Adermann, 2006). These new degrees were very popular with a high number of students. There was great demand for new graduates because masses of unemployed people needed re-training to satisfy the demand in the changed economic environment, and conscious management of human resources gained ever increasing value with enterprises.

The name of the MA degree in “Cultural and Adult Education Manager” was changed to “Cultural Manager” in 2002. The requirements relating to this qualification also changed, as a result of which the content of the training was narrowed, and the ratio of ALE and management studies decreased significantly. The change occurred at a time when the regulation of ALE was elevated to legislation level. European and world trends, the recommendations of the 5<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Adult Education (UNESCO, 1997) and the key messages of the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning (Commission of the European Communities, 2000) significantly influenced the development of the first independent Act CI of 2001 on Adult Education. The scope of the Act covered ALE outside the regular school system. It contained a set of regulations that were well-structured, focussed on the management, set of institutions, content requirements and support system of ALE, and was considered to contain the most up-to-date principles in the European Union. A significant merit of this Act was the legal declaration of the quality and the quality assurance elements of ALE. The accreditation system was built on a verification process based upon self-assessment, which was based on the examination of the existence of preliminarily determined requirements. Its aim was to verify that a given ALE institution, by way of its regulated processes, could meet at high quality level the expectations of adults and other interested partners. Two types of ALE accreditation were developed: accreditation of institutions and programme accreditation. At that time Hungary was one of the few member states in the European Union where quality assurance of ALE was developed. By the end of that decade approximately 1500 institutions undertook to adopt the accreditation process certifying compliance with higher quality requirements, which was a condition for the use of domestic and European Union funds<sup>10</sup> (Farkas, 2013). In the case of accredited institutions and programmes, there were legal regulations with provisions on the professional and qualification requirements of educators; however, special professional knowledge in ALE and experience were not required.

### **The birth of the BA degree in Andragogy**

In 2006 there was a turning point in the history of training cultural and adult learning professionals. In higher education the Bologna process introduced radical changes to the

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10 Following Hungary's accession to the European Union in 2004, unprecedented amounts of EU funding were made available for ALE, which significantly increased the demand for it.

structure of earlier university-level qualifications. The termination of degrees linked to ALE and culture transfer conducted earlier was on the agenda again. On the one hand, the decision makers in this matter missed the attachment of this area to sciences, and, on the other hand, they also debated whether this field could be fitted to economic requirements. In the wake of policy decisions, it became clear that either there could be a compromise that would result in the development of Andragogy as a new BA degree or all such types of training would be terminated. The risk that ALE subjects might be terminated brought together educators in this profession and a new BA degree in Andragogy was developed as a result of exemplary co-operation of higher education institutions. In its methodology the BA in Andragogy preserved the content of several subjects taught earlier; these were subjects that could not remain independent in the transformation process of higher education. A common feature of subjects taught earlier, which became part of the BA degree in Andragogy in 2006, was that problems relating to Andragogy were highlighted in each of them. These were Human Resources Management and Cultural Management, so it was logical that they continued to exist as specialisations of a BA in Andragogy. At the same time, when a BA in Andragogy was established, another, fourth specialisation came into existence, namely the subject called “Adult Education Organiser”, which provided new opportunities for individuals seeking employment in the ALE market (Cserné Adermann, 2010).

The postgraduate pathway for training adult learning professionals was the 2-year MA degree in Andragogy first launched in the academic year 2008/2009. The BA degree in Andragogy mainly prepared students for the organisation of activities relating to ALE as well as to perform related operational tasks. Graduates of the MA degree in Andragogy, however, were also capable of managing all this and also possessed wider knowledge, special skills and competences necessary for conducting methodological research in their doctoral studies. Apart from obtaining a master's degree in Andragogy, bachelor's graduates in Andragogy could also attend courses such as “Human Resource Manager” and “Cultural Mediator” at the master's level to enhance their knowledge. Higher education institutions develop their training programmes on the basis of learning outcomes-based training and outcome requirements. However, the content of training programmes may vary according to the traditions of the higher education institution, local needs, and available human resources capacity. Beszédes' (2020a) research has shown that the main subject areas in the MA programme are andragogy research and research methodology, adult education theory, social andragogy, legal regulation, training organisation and development, and group leadership and learning/teaching methods.

A significant result of the transformation of teacher training was that a university level course was launched in September 2009 for the acquisition of the qualification of an MA degree in Adult Education (Andragogy) Teacher, which prepared the students attending this course for effectively and efficiently applicable teaching and learning strategies and methods in ALE. This was a quality advancement in terms of enhancing the professional prestige of ALE since earlier it was impossible to obtain a university degree in teaching

in ALE. The fact that there were legal conditions for becoming an Adult Education (Andragogy) Teacher confirmed that the organisation and implementation of ALE was considered a profession, and that professional training and qualifications are needed when dealing with adults.

During the history of ALE and the related profession, it first seemed that everything was in place both in the professional area and in scientific classification. Andragogy degrees were adopted as educational science and the whole vertical structure was created and incorporated into the system of higher education: Andragogy bachelor's and master's degrees (Andragogy MA, Cultural Mediation MA, Human Resources Manager MA) and ALE sub-programmes within the framework of the Doctoral Schools of Educational Sciences. The relevant organisational unit in this field at the University of Pécs was promoted to the rank of Faculty during this period and the Faculty of Adult Education and Human Resources Development was officially established in May 2005. It is very important to mention this because it was the one and only university faculty that referred to ALE in its name.

### **The fall of the BA degree in Andragogy**

There was great interest in a BA degree in Andragogy even before the first academic year. Based on the number of applicants, it was among the 20 most popular higher education programmes. 18 higher education institutions offered BA degrees in Andragogy. Between 2006 and 2011 the number of applicants for full time training programmes was around 4,000 and a total of 750–850 applicants were accepted each academic year. Approximately an average of 47% of the admittees attending this course received state funding for their studies. In 2011 the number of applicants for this subject was still high, however, the number of admittees was only 569, and state funding for students decreased significantly (Higher Education Admission Information [HEAI], 2022). The Government that came to power in 2010 brought a new turn in the whole system of higher education. With the adoption of a new act on higher education in 2011, a reform was launched in higher education. Aversion to Andragogy gained strength again and the labour market role and the relevance of this subject in higher education was questioned by policy makers. As a result of this, in 2012 the educational policy significantly decreased the number of applicants who could be admitted to study this subject. In 2013 various Government measures made admittance to study Andragogy practically impossible. In 2013 and in 2014 the number of applicants for full time training decreased by 86% compared to the number in 2010. In the academic year 2014/2015 only 70 applicants (9% of the number in 2010) were admitted in the whole country to a BA in Andragogy and only 5 higher education institutions out of 18 could launch the training programme (HEAI, 2022). It is quite clear that 18 training institutions are not capable of providing the same quality of education. At the same time, however, the quality indicators of higher education institutions should have been considered when measures were taken to decrease the number of Andragogy students. The number of applicants and admittees for correspondence training, during which all the training costs were mainly covered by adult students, was more or less the

same between 2007 and 2011. In 2012 both the number of applicants and that of the admittees decreased significantly. The obligation of passing an advanced level maturity exam at secondary schools, which was mandatory even for those who passed their maturity exams<sup>11</sup> prior to the introduction of the two-level maturity exam system (2005), and which was made a condition for application and admittance for correspondence training in Andragogy in 2013, made it almost impossible for applicants to study this subject at university level.

In 2015, as a result of an unprecedented measure taken by the Government in the history of the profession and professional training, the BA degree in Andragogy was terminated together with the MA degree in Adult Education (Andragogy) Teacher that was also deemed unnecessary. This measure sealed the fate of the previously mentioned Faculty of Adult Education and Human Resources Development, which was also terminated in the year of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its establishment.

Political will overrode professional arguments and considerations again. In the middle of the 2010s new expectations and professional requirements emerged again since parallel with the termination of the BA degree in Andragogy, the relevant Government administration responsible for higher education created the BA degree in Community Coordination with three different specialisations: Cultural Community Coordinator, Youth Community Coordinator, and Human Developer. This latter course “inherited” the professional subjects linked to ALE.

On the whole, however, the ratio of ALE studies decreased significantly again, the results achieved until then levelled off, and the recognition of educational science, which had been achieved as a result of hard efforts, was questioned again. The profession of ALE was not supported by an independent BA degree anymore. However, the MA degree in Andragogy remained in place, creating an opportunity for students to attend relevant sub-programmes offered by doctoral schools. In the absence of a BA programme, recruitment for MA courses is problematic. 31 students joined a master’s programme in Andragogy in Hungary in 2022 (HEAI, 2022).

Besides traditional university level training courses, specialised postgraduate training courses are available for the professional development of adult learning professionals. The specialised postgraduate training courses are built on higher educational degrees, however, they do not provide higher levels of qualification. The duration of the courses is at least two or a maximum of four semesters, and students completing such courses obtain

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11 The two-level secondary school leaving examination was introduced in 2005, which makes it possible for students to take the secondary school leaving examination either at an ordinary (intermediate) or an advanced level in each of the four compulsory subjects (Hungarian language and literature, Mathematics, History, and a foreign language). Students are allowed to select the fifth subject, which can also be a vocational subject in upper secondary vocational schools. In 2022, 3% of the pupils passed the secondary school leaving exam at the advanced level in Hungarian language and literature, 7% in Mathematics, 12% in History, 41% in English, and 21% in German. The ordinary and advanced level secondary school leaving certificates are classified as level 4 of the European Qualifications Framework.

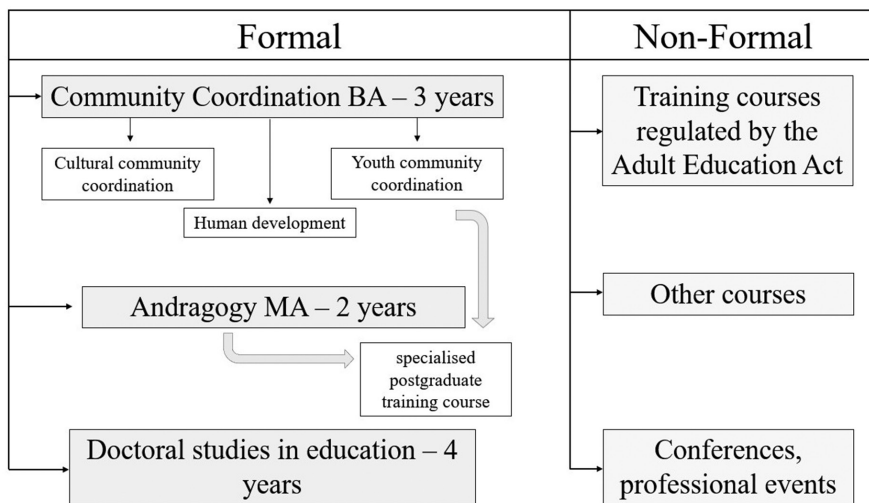
diplomas certifying special professional qualifications. In the 2022/2023 academic year, five specialised training courses were offered by higher education institutions,<sup>12</sup> but data on the number of participants in these courses are not available.

To summarise, there are four levels for professional development in ALE at university level in Hungary available in 2023 (Figure 2):

- BA in Community Coordination (launched in 2017) together with a human development specialised course that provides andragogy-didactic training,
- MA in Andragogy (from 2008),
- Doctoral Programmes in Educational Science (from 1993),
- Specialised postgraduate training courses.

**Figure 2**

*Training pathways for adult learning professionals in Hungary*



*Note.* Adapted from "A felnőttnevelési szakemberek formális képzési útjainak komparatív vizsgálata Magyarországon és Szerbiában" by V. Beszédes, 2021, p. 153.

Non-formal (further) training pathways include in-company training, short-term training courses organised by non-profit organisations and projects (e.g. organised by the Tempus Public Foundation, 2018), conferences (e.g. Durkó Máttyás Adult Education Conference, 2022; MellarN Conference, 2023, EPALE Conference, 2023) and Erasmus+ mobility programmes (European Commission, 2023) to enhance the knowledge of adult learning professionals.

<sup>12</sup> Trainer in ALE; Development in ALE; Competence Development in ALE, Teacher in Andragogy, ALE Specialist (Oktatási Hivatal, 2023).



## Scientific background of andragogy

The existence or lack of scientific research, research centres, scientific journals and professional associations are also determining factors in the professionalisation of ALE (Despotović, 2010). There is a Doctoral School of Educational Science at five universities in Hungary, but there is an Andragogy sub-programme only at the Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest. Andragogy is also present at the University of Debrecen in a sub-programme named “Adult Education, Vocational Education and Training and Cultural Education”. There are no Andragogy or ALE sub-programmes within doctoral schools at other universities, but they accept research topics related to adult learning. Reviewing the curricula of doctoral schools in the area of educational science, we can see that – except in the case of the curriculum of Eötvös Loránd University – they rarely or do not offer courses in Andragogy/ALE (Beszédes, 2020a).

Data referring to PhD dissertations can be found in the database of the Hungarian National Doctoral Council (2023). Research (Beszédes, 2022) has shown that only 34 PhD dissertations out of all the PhD dissertations defended in the field of education between 2001 and 2020 focused on a topic related to andragogy. In addition, there is a low number of topics relating to ALE on the list of doctoral thesis topics. The results suggest that research problems related to andragogy are not a focal point of scientific interest in Hungary. The lack of scientific research has a hindering effect on laying the scientific foundation for the epistemology and further development of this scientific area (Beszédes, 2022).

Another hindering factor is that the profession of ALE has no scientific journal<sup>13</sup> and no innovative professional forums at present.

## CONCLUSIONS

The profession of ALE in Hungary has not been able to develop to be a profession in the classical sense and has never been able to be proactive. Although ALE is considered a legitimate professional activity, there is no state-recognised profession specialising in ALE (such as andragogy), which requires specific knowledge and skills at the university level. The field of ALE was always determined by political interests in Hungary: it was not the profession that constructed the pillars of regulation, but the regulations that created the pillars of the profession.

It is widely known and it is the painful reality that social support for Andragogy, ALE and even adult learning professionals continues to decline significantly, as evidenced by the partial dismantling of academic professionalisation pathways. In addition, the current social and political environment does not favour initiatives that aim to elevate domestic ALE to the European level.

13 The following journals were available earlier: *Andragógia* (Andragogy) 1983–1989, *Felnőttképzés* (Adult Education) 2003–2011, *Felnőttképzési Szemle* (Adult Education Review) 2007–2016, *Andragógia és művelődéstudomány* (Andragogy and Theory of Education) 2013–2014.



Solutions to the problems of training professionals must not be expected from the state educational system only. The professional community in this scientific area can do a lot for the cause of training professionals. By co-operating in the form of a “public body”, the professional organisations can develop quality indicators for adult educators and elaborate a professional qualification system (conditions) for professionals working in the area of ALE. The qualification system of a professional area – if it is generally accepted – may be more profound than any state-elaborated system.

However, in order to do this, professional self-organisation, collective efforts, cohesion, co-operation based on common principles, clear professional objectives, and permanent and substantial discussions between the stakeholders are needed. If we can achieve all this, then maybe policy makers will have a more favourable attitude towards our objectives and will support us in achieving them.

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