

CHANGES IN LEGAL PROFESSION BROUGHT BY AI AND THEIR INTEGRATION IN SERBIAN PRACTICE

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Abstract

This study investigates the application of artificial intelligence (AI) in the legal industry through the transformation of the legal profession in South East Europe (SEE) the case of the Republic of Serbia. The study was conducted on the data, collected through literature review and semi-structured interviews with Serbian lawyers. The data shows that Western law firms used AI extensively, while Serbian lawyers are still at a basic level. This gap is due to a delay in AI tool availability in Eastern Europe. The existing literature on the transformation process offers various potential forms of change, though it remains uncertain whether these will be significant or not. There is no consensus on the overall impact of such transformation. Instead, authors present three different perspectives: pessimistic, optimistic, and moderate. The decision that lawyers must make regarding the adoption of AI is not predetermined. They must individually choose the approaches and tools that best support their practice. In Serbia, many lawyers remain unaware of AI's transformative potential, but this is expected to change as AI adoption increases on local level. This investigation codifies various applications and potential transformations within the legal profession in one place. The lawyers should be better informed to embrace changes and adopt existing best practices in AI. The interviewees identified three principal topics while using AI around which they expect future issues, disputes and legal matters to arise ethical implications and liability, personal data protection and privacy issues and intellectual property.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, legal profession, transformation, Serbia, Serbian practice

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1. Introduction

“The legal profession has remained largely unaffected by new technology for several decades and was overdue for a shake-up.”

(Hodgson, L. Generative AI Lead at Linklaters)

Many issues have emerged with the latest advances and in digitalization and artificial intelligence (“AI”) In fact, AI represents most uncertain technology of our time, provoking feelings of considerable fear and insecurity. On one hand, the business owners and employers are certainly doing their best to exploit and benefit from any new possibility to increase productivity and reduce costs, and on the other, the employees fear from cut-backs and wonder how will these developments affect their jobs and income [18]. For the time being, it seems that AI will become both (i) a new tool, facilitating the execution of work and sometimes even enabling performance of new tasks, and (ii) a reason for termination of some work posts [23].

Effects of digitalization will however vary in different industries [26], and according to some opinions, the legal profession is among the few that are exposed the most [23]. As always with novelties, opinions are divided. One excessively pessimistic, saying that AI will be the end of legal profession and cause massive unemployment, and the other, moderate, upholding the view that AI will assume only some of the functions but never fully replace a well trained professional [10]. There are also few excessive optimists arguing that the disruption caused by AI will actually result in job creation [58].

This paper aims to address these issues from perspective of law firms in Serbia. It explores whatever and how AI can assist (or is already assisting) legal professionals in performing their work more efficiently and productively, and points out the modalities of artificial intelligence applications in which it makes sense to invest. To be more specific, the research was guided by the following questions:

- (a) In what ways, in general, is AI affecting and/or changing the legal profession, and, specifically, what are the most notable changes and transformations in legal profession brought by the AI?
- (b) How law firms and attorneys are responding and how receptive they are in respect to these changes in western markets and in Serbia (e.g. how Serbian law firms and attorneys respond to these changes, are they missing on any opportunities and do they keep up the pace with their peers from bigger markets?

The objectives of the research were:

- To explore to what extent the AI is being applied in legal profession and in what ways and how such application of AI or emergence of AI is changing the legal profession;
- To assess how receptive law firms and attorneys are in respect to all these transformations, both in general and specifically in Serbia; and
- attempt offering some guidance to attorneys and law firms that could help them implement AI into their legal practice.

2. Literature Review

Theoretical Background

“It’s important that lawyers are familiar with AI technology in the same way they are with the internet now. Those that don’t use it will face a bit of an existential risk.”

(Kewley, J., Partner and Co-Chair of the Global Tech Group at Clifford Chance)

It is highlighted that the concept of AI and digitalization is not new in legal practice. On the contrary, the law firms have been flirting with these technical developments and their potential for some time now, as in case – for example – of automated drafting of contracts, billing systems, Skype, Teams, etc. [38]. However, the introduction of ChatGPT has most certainly accelerated these processes and caused a mild panic among law firms [59].

Generally speaking, macroeconomic and technological environment unmistakably points in the direction of digital technology, and legal profession must realize and accept AI reality and adapt to it in an early stage or the lawyers may end up holding a second-tier status and significance [17]. This adaptation does not only mean that the law firms shall simply use new digital tools and technologies in the process in order to replicate existing services in a digital form; it also implies changing business processes, identity, corporate practice and culture and skill sets of attorneys [43]. In contrast to these arguments, other authors suggest that there is a hype present in relation to this topic, as so many law firms initiated processes of AI implementation without much thinking or analyzing effects, some by developing their own AI tools and some by licensing them from big IT companies, such as “Harvey“ or “Cocounsel“ ([48]; [44]; [19]). According to [8], one should be prudent when adopting and applying digitalization and AI on existing practice, as most AI projects fail – as high as 80% of new projects [8]. However, to be fair, not all law firms share the same enthusiasm. According to some authors [41], in some firms attorneys are using AI covertly, without knowledge or approval of their management. Overall, the current literature shows that certain changes and limitations are already underway.

2.1 Specific applications of AI in legal practice

Legal profession has been a subject of digitalization for a time now. However, AI seems to be causing a real disruption in the profession. The literature highlights several ways in which AI is utilized by law firms so far:

- *Financial and management software* – usually are used for billing or project management, have been around for a time now [39]. Besides that, we need to take in consideration that a number of law firms still limits IT tools and AI capacities [31].
- *Legal research* - Legal research, as an AI function is novelty brought by ChatGPT, as it possesses extremely robust research capabilities. The greatest applicability potential is in legal research and writing ([19]; [59]; [54]). Some studies though pose the question as to how accurate and trustworthy its output really is, as ChatGPT still tends to manufacture data itself; the phenomenon called “AI hallucination“ ([24]; [58]). There is an already well known case of New York lawyer who admitted to have used ChatGPT when preparing his legal argument and it turned out that AI cited several court cases that did not exist [25]. Furthermore, in some cases the lawyers have already been sanctioned for submitting fake quotes and citations, because of AI use [27]. As – at the end of the day – the lawyers will stand responsible for everything that goes out of their office.
- *E-discovery* – this is one of the specific variations that deserves to be mentioned. Namely, one of quite useful functions of AI is cutting through enormous volumes of electronic data and identifying relevant documents and – usually problematic – information [56].
- *Document review, analysis and drafting contracts/briefs* – this function is similar to legal research, aimed to analyze large volumes of legal documents and identify key information (e.g. case law or specific clauses). This function is widely accepted by many lawyers and discussed by many authors as one of repetitive tasks that will be performed in future by AI ([19]; [58]; [1]; [39]; [66]; [4]). To reiterate, many lawyers see the greatest potential of AI precisely in legal research and writing [54]. It would seem that ChatGPT has already been used to draft contracts. Naturally, the version it produces cannot be used *as is*, an experienced attorney must vet it. Nevertheless, AI proved to be a solid solution for preparing initial drafts, especially of less complex and demanding contracts or memorandums in a matter of minutes ([2]; [39]; [66]; [9]). As for the briefs, the lawyers should be more than cautious there. As already mentioned, the “AI hallucinations“ when citing case law still represent serious and frequent issue ([21]; [24]; [58]). Some research pinpoint cases where lawyers were sued for underperformance due to the non-critical use of AI [64]. Anyhow, it will be expected that AI of the future will become just another tool available to everyone, something like a spell-check tool or a calculator ([54]; [45]). The lawyers must make sure they are competent in using these technologies, understand how to use them and be aware of their limitations and potential biases.

Researchers explore a number of legal industry specific AI products, such as (i) *Lexis+ AI*, developed by *Lexis Nexis* and supported by some large US law firms (Baker McKenzie, Reed Smith LLP and Foley & Lardner LLP), (ii) *Harvey*, built on OpenAI and ChatGPT technology, or (iii) *Bloomberg Law* ([21]; [1]). All these products include all or almost all the functions discussed above, and they are still under further development. However, to be clear, the applicability of these products and AI is still limited. As [16] correctly points out, there is a “technological frontier”, still growing but nevertheless existing, within which – on one hand – AI can complement or replace human work, and outside which – on the other hand – AI output is inaccurate and degrades human work.

In any case, in terms of application, it looks like AI will take over repetitive and standardized tasks, while competent lawyers will provide final touch i.e. review and editing, and – even though AI will not fully replace lawyers – the ones who do not adapt fast enough may be overran by their more adaptable competitors.

The functionality and efficiency of these applications is certainly one of the topics to be further followed up and analyzed, by both academics and practitioners. But it must also be noted that, for the time being, these applications seem to emerge and exist only on the richest markets of the world. Actually, the vast majority of AI products mentioned originates from the US or the British market, meaning it is based on and deals with the common (Anglo-Saxon) and not continental (Roman-based) law. On these markets, the largest law firms develop their own AI solutions, while vendors offer licensing arrangements to small and midsized firms [51]. At the same time, the pressure to use AI and keep up with competitors, one way or another, is rising [13]. Smaller markets, such as SEE and Serbia, shall have their turn only after the larger ones are saturated enough. In addition, this is a gap that needs to be filled not only in terms of products and practice but also accompanying academic works.

There is also the ethical aspect that is unclear. On one hand, there are court and public authorities not too inclined to accept the use of these new technologies in practice [27]. On the other, however, there are positions saying that (need the page where you got this from?) but the lawyers must stay ultimately responsible and liable for the product that comes out of their office ([57]; [19]; [14]; [44]; [56]). This is a very important point to be followed-up and further investigated, both in terms of regulation of AI application and in terms of its entry and acceptance in practice.

2.2 Transformation of legal profession

General observations and the rise of legal portals

Arrival of AI caused certain transformations in the legal profession itself, whereas some of them already have a clear outcome, and some of them are still unclear as they are in initial stages. The attitude of legal industry shows several faces: the moderate one, the pessimistic

one, and the optimistic one.

The *moderate opinion* is that AI brings enhancements to personal productivity of attorneys, but does not seem to bring any transformational change to comprehensive workflows. In other words, AI did not change the industry, it just made the lawyers faster by replacing some of the grunt work performed by juniors and enhancing the overall performance of experienced lawyers who still have to supervise the process and the outcome ([20]; [50]; [63]).

The *pessimistic position* argues that the rapidly developing AI technology poses significant risk to individuals and society ([29]; [30]; [40]; [12]). According to this perspective, even a plain simplification of work and time savings could disrupt the industry and put the junior lawyers' work at risk [4], as AI could potentially replace them. Even in case the junior lawyers are not replaced but instead only need to evolve and become experts in *AI prompt engineering*, a great deal of people would be affected as many of them would not have necessary skills to keep up with the changes [49].

According to the *optimists*, such as [57], AI will not lead to job losses; it will result in job creation. Further, [15] argues that historically “worker displacement from innovation is typically offset by new job creation”. He further argues that this is not the first time the technology is creating more efficiency in legal work and that it was happening for decades (emails, electronic documents and submissions, online conference call, etc.), and that “if history informs the future, the long-term economic impact of innovation will be growth”. They admit nevertheless that upskilling in AI related competencies will be necessary and that practitioners who understand how to use it well will have an advantage.

Whatever the answer to the previous discussion, the future is expected to somehow blend AI and human “functionalities”. There is a very interesting view offered by [16] regarding different modalities or approaches of use of these new applications. According to this article, there are “two distinctive patterns of successful AI use by humans along a spectrum of human-AI integration”. One is called “Centaur” – where consultants (or lawyers) act as “half-horse/half-humans” by dividing and delegating their solution-creation activities to the AI or to themselves, and the other “Cyborg” – where people integrate their task flow with the AI and continually interact with technology without any clear boundary in delegated activities. It may be presumed that some kind of *best practice* will emerge from all these different approaches, whereas such *best practice* would be an interesting topic for further research by again both practitioners and academics.

Delivery of legal services through digital platforms existed for a time now on large markets, such as Chinese or European [38]. These online services went from: (i) just putting a potential client in touch with the lawyer with appropriate expertise to (ii) providing software with automatic design of legal documents, such as contracts. However, lately these portals seem to have been entering the lawyers' domain in a more serious way that might

even endanger and drastically change the future of the legal profession. The recent literature discusses a number of these portals, such as *FreeLawChat.ai*, *Law ChatGPT* and *LegalZoom*, whereas the authors express mainly affirmative positions on the subject ([51]; [28]; [32]; [54]).

Reportedly, the portals do not offer legal advice and do not replace lawyers, but rather “provide user-tailored information on basic issues” (e.g. “on the waiting period for divorce, the advantages and disadvantages of limited liability companies” and the like). However, “when it comes to determining the best course of action for an individual in a complex situation, the legal advice of a licensed attorney is essential” [52].

For the time being, the profession is trying to protect itself and some of these portals, such as *LegalZoom* and *Parsons Technology*, have been used on multiple occasions for violating unauthorized practice of law rules [33]. The most often argument aiming to justify their existence is help to poor and underprivileged people, who cannot afford to hire a real lawyer. This way, allegedly, the justice is made more accessible to them (Goth, 2024; [32]; [54]) Anyhow, it looks like the portals are here to stay.

Legal Tech Lawyers

The literature further implies that the AI gave birth to another important and fundamental change, a completely new breed of lawyers – “legal tech lawyers” – with different identity and culture, and playing a completely different game ([37]; [47]; [46]; [43]; [3]). These lawyers wear t-shirts instead of suits and use more colloquial language, they occupy open-spaces (similar to small IT firms) instead of expensive offices or have no space at all [38], and – obviously – they use technology. Finally yet importantly, they see themselves as business-people, not lawyers, newcomers in the profession. It appears to be quite difficult for an experienced traditional lawyer to jump ship; there are even articles testifying to internal conflicts and “identity splits” experienced by traditional lawyers trying to deliver an “online gig” [65]. So consequently, this sector will grow as more and more young lawyers chose to become this kind of animal.

However, even though it is a characteristic of “legal tech firms” to incorporate both law and technology and employ not only lawyers but also IT and AI experts, engineers, and analysts [7], it must be noted that recently traditional law firm started to act in the same way. All these changes in the job landscape even lead to a changed law school curricula at the University of Liverpool, now including modules on legal tech tools [3].

Changes in profession paradigm, internal environment and pricing

“AI removes the excuse of hour’s spent, so private practice lawyers will have to change the way they measure their contribution.”

(Winfield, M. Global Director of Commercial, Legal and Digital Risks at Buro Happold)

According to [38], in the near future legal profession will require lower level of knowledge intensity and professionalization of workforce, as technology will allow certain simplifications, as well as higher level of capital intensity and dependence, due to necessary investments in technology. More importantly, according to some authors, soon, legal services will have to be provided in a much cheaper and more convenient way ([60]; [31]). And this to such extent that the very paradigms of legal profession will be changed, for example (i) “one to one” service will become “one-to-many” service, (ii) print base will become – and is already becoming – IT based legal systems, (iii) reactive service will become proactive service, etc.

According to literature, internal organization, structure and processes in law firms are changing as well, in more than one way. More and more – law firms introduce non-lawyer CEOs to run the company, and allow possibility of external ownership over company shares [38]. What is also interesting is that the time necessary for a junior lawyer to become partner is getting shorter and shorter, as technology is eliminating loads of repetitive work that juniors were usually performing during their first years on the job [3]. Some authors argue that these new technologies will upgrade the life balance in legal profession, by reducing the amount of hours associates need to bill in order to meet their quotas and at the same time get a comparable revenue. Apparently, the burnout rate in legal profession is higher than in any other industry [4].

The pressure on hourly rates is not a new thing in legal industry [6]. The literature shows that well before the serious digitalization and AI development, the client has hated hourly rates and demanded predictability in legal costs [61]. According to [5], by applying hourly rates the lawyers expect the clients to suspend the rules of basic economics, consumer and price psychology, to turn their eye blind and “hand-over a blank check“. Nowadays, this pressure increases, as clients expect law firms to integrate AI tools and thus increase efficiency and reduce costs, along with billable hours and invoices ([59]; [39]; [56]). Further, new approaches to provision of legal services caused by digitalization and AI resulted in new billing models, such as value-based pricing, differentiated pricing, volume discounts, etc. ([36]; [37]; [59]).

2.3 New legal matters and receptiveness

Digitalization projects and AI use for various purposes and in various industries, such as self-driving cars, application of AI in medicine, and global e-trading solutions, open various legal issues [38] that primarily concern security, personal data protection, confidentiality, and intellectual property ([39]; [48]). These issues stem from the feed to and use by the AI of sensitive (personal or confidential) information of – for example – consumers, clients or employees ([45]; [42]) and the problems with maintaining the privacy and confidentiality of such information once fed to AI.

Another area of law that is already affected by application of AI are intellectual property (“IP”) rights. One interesting example discussed in the literature is the issue of whether AI-assisted inventions or author’s work should be protected as IP rights. For example, in some jurisdictions, US, for the time being, the competent authorities require that in case AI was used in the process of creation of invention or a work of art, a human being must provide “significant contribution” in the process; whereas – for example – constructing a prompt “in view of a specific problem to elicit a particular solution from the AI system” should be acknowledged as such significant contribution. On the other hand, Indian Government took a different stand, that there will be no specific rules regarding the AI generated work and that an “author” of such computer-generated work is the person who causes the work to be created, without any specific requirements whatsoever (such as “significant contribution”). Consequently, we can very easily imagine a situation where an AI generated patent, or a copyright is allowed to be registered in India but denied in the US.

Finally, 2024 seems to be the year of birth of many AI regulations throughout the world. The most important one in Europe is certainly the *Regulation (EU) 2024/1689 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024* (the “AI Act”) [67], the first-ever legal framework on AI that addresses the risks of AI, on one hand forbidding certain applications of AI and on the other limiting and strictly regulating some others. The emergence of AI Act, as well as the other similar regulations, shall for sure generate considerable amount of new work for the lawyers.

Considering everything above, it should be mentioned that – even though the legal industry is falling behind the general consulting profession in identifying and establishing digitalization and AI as specialization niche [43] – it is becoming uncontestedly clear that law firms will and already are creating highly specialized AI lawyers and departments [48].

In general, the literature says that the legal industry has always been slower than others in accepting technological disruptors ([4]; [9]; [17]; [36]; [11]). According to [58], there is a pattern in law firms’ reactions to technological advancements: they usually start with skepticism and resistance, pass on to denial and finish by reluctant adoption. Something like the Kübler-Ross’ *five stages of death*.

However, even though this process is usually very slow ([53]; [19]; [43]), it looks like ChatGPT changed everything, in the sense that everybody picked up speed and want to participate in the new game ([62]; [9]; [4]; [13]; [28]). According to [4], “for the first time, the legal industry is in the lead in adopting new technology, and that’s creating disruption like never before”. Numerous (law) firms are already employing AI in many ways ([19]; [24]; [36]; [37]; [56]), sometimes even giving it too much credit and confidence [25]. What is interesting is that both big law and small law firms are equally eager to implement AI, although they meet different impediments on that road: (i) big law firms have their large legacy infrastructure that is difficult to move, while (ii) smaller firms meet investment requirements often exceeding their financial capabilities [39].

However, they are also aware that they must be cautious especially after the affair in New York with the made-up cases [34]. So AI is mostly used as a tool, whereas the results it generates are (or should be) closely monitored. In other words, AI is still not a replacement for the sound judgment of an attorney as it can generate incorrect content [45]. However – nevertheless – it looks like everybody will have to use it – one way or another. There are traces of acceptance of AI by judges; a judge in Texas started instructing the acting lawyers to disclose whether they are using AI in their briefs and arguments [28]. Further, many law schools grapple with its use on exams and essays, whereas some of them permit AI use while the others prohibit it [58]. Therefore, it will be interesting to follow up on how new coming lawyers and students will conduct research and be trained in the years to come.

In most cases, current literature treats these topics separately from each other; for instance, only the application modalities. In addition, different changes in profession are discussed in different articles. On the contrary, this paper represents an attempt to encompass and, in a way, “codify” various aspects of change in one place and possibly point out their interconnection. It explores simultaneously the changes in day-to-day work and practice caused (or yet to be caused) by AI, the changes in the nature and organization of legal profession and law firms, along with changes in service-charging-modalities and increasing number of new legal matters brought by AI applications. Finally yet importantly, the paper introduces perspective of continental and smaller markets, as opposed to Anglo-Saxon and English-speaking markets, and alludes to the slower development and smaller level of AI application on the former compared to the latter.

3. Methodology

3.1 Secondary data collection

Given that AI has entered the legal profession some time ago, some experiences have settled already, and there is a number of examples of its use in both the practice and academic articles. Secondary data, collected from the latest literature treating these matters, the AI applications are many. The legal profession is undergoing certain transformation(s) already, there is a number of new legal topics and matters stemming directly or indirectly from AI’s existence and application, while the level of acceptance of AI application among lawyers is quite high.

3.2 Primary data collection

Researchers employed semi-structured expert interviews. The interviews were carried out with attorneys working in small and mid-size law firms from Serbia, finding themselves at the very beginnings of AI application. Around one third of the interviewees are at the level of partners in their respective firms, while the rest of them are senior associates and mid-

level associates. Data were collected through individual interviews in English, in written form, and participants' identities remained anonymous.

3.3 Respondents

There were fifteen interviewees in total, of different ages, positions and experience (in the table below). Majority of them (eleven) practice various areas of business law, while four of them specialize in litigation.

No.	Sex	Age	Position	Experience	Education	Area of Law
R1	Male	47	Partner ⁵	18	LLM	Business Law
R2	Male	46	Partner	18	LLB	Litigation
R3	Male	45	Partner	17	LLM	Business Law
R4	Male	46	Partner	17	LLB	Litigation
R5	Male	44	Partner	16	LLM	Business Law
R6	Male	41	Senior Associate	15	LLB	Business Law
R7	Male	36	Senior Associate	12	LLB	Business Law
R8	Male	34	Senior Associate	11	LLM	Business Law
R9	Female	34	Senior Associate	10	LLB	Business Law
R10	Female	31	Senior Associate	8	LLB	Business Law
R11	Female	32	Senior Associate	8	LLM	Business Law
R12	Female	31	Senior Associate	7	LLB	Business Law
R13	Female	32	Junior Associate	6	LLB	Business Law
R14	Male	28	Junior Associate	4	LLB	Litigation
R15	Male	28	Junior Associate	4	LLB	Litigation

Table 1: List of participants

*created by authors

Themes emerged from thematic analysis of interviews mostly coincide with the themes identified in the literature review. Such a tie between literature review and interview results

⁵ 1“Partner” is an attorney who owns interest in the law firm and receives a share of the profits. In other words, he or she is a co-owner of the business at hand (in this case – legal practice), in a same way a shareholder is a co-owner of a company.

is not accidental, naturally, but rather stems from the questions that served as basis for interviews, which more or less follow the themes and subjects identified in literature review.

3.4 Limitations

In terms of limitations of this research, its principal flaws stem from the shortfalls of interviews as research method. The most important one is that interviews cannot be free of bias. According to [22], p162, “people are inherently biased, both the interviewer in formulating and interpreting, and interviewees in providing answers”. On the other hand, the interviewee cannot avoid incorporating his/her biases into answers, or – even worse – will not be 100% honest, bearing in mind that the interviews cannot really be fully anonymous. Finally, the interpretation of data is perhaps the most tricky and sensitive part. [36] point out the data analysis as one of the most sensitive moments of qualitative research and call attention to the risk of accusations of manipulating and interpreting data in a way that supports the interviewer’s personal agenda.

Another limitation worth mentioning is that this research is of rather limited reach. As the primary data will be collected from only fifteen attorneys practicing only on the Serbian market, the conclusions and recommendations stemming from this paper cannot be generalized. On the other hand, they could probably be of some help to small and mid-sized law firms practicing on South-East European markets. It will in any case provide a better picture of AI application on legal markets that are less developed than the US and the Western European. The researchers leave the extent to which this investigation’s findings apply to other situations in this sector in SEE and beyond to the readers in those situations that is referred to as reader or use generalizability highlighted by Merriam 1998 as cited in [35]. Even more, it will provide a rather clear picture of how these less developed markets will look like soon, as the secondary data stemming from the literature in its vast part describes the situation and circumstances existing “at the West” that are yet to come “to the East”.

4. Results and discussion

4.1 General perspective and receptiveness

When asked about the general situation in economy in terms of AI applications, some 20% of interviewees were not familiar, 30% were somewhat familiar, and 50% were quite familiar with current events and circumstances. Lawyers from the latter group were even able to elaborate, to offer a few examples from practice and specify industries that are most affected by change.

Most of interviewees stated IT and technology sector, marketing, healthcare and finance as

the sectors which are affected the most. But they also mention trade (retail and e-commerce), banking, gaming, logistics and transportation, HR, legal industry, and creative occupations (such as web design, copywriting, industrial design, graphic design, etc.).

Significance, acceptance and effects of AI in legal industry of Serbia

As for legal industry, all interviewees agree that AI brings change. One half believes that the AI is bringing important if not revolutionary changes that will increase efficiency by automating routine tasks and save their time left and right in performance of their daily duties, such as document review, translations, legal research, and document analysis. The other half of interviewees demonstrated certain level of skepticism regarding the reach of AI, for various reasons. What is interesting, the skeptical ones seemed more up to speed with the topic and offered some sound arguments for their position, as follows:

- One of the interviewees doubted that legal industry will be affected as much as the others, and pointed out that AI can be used only on certain terrain e.g. in certain aspects of legal services:.. *“I see them more linked to the advisory sector of the legal industry, rather than being fully applicable to traditional services such as litigations, which often involve in person hearings”*.
- Another insisted on importance of human aspect in provision of legal services: *“...the legal profession remains inherently people-centric, requiring not only technical knowledge but also understanding human psychology and social norms”*.
- Finally, few interviewees observed that the AI application will have much more to offer in jurisdictions and legal systems built on common law (as opposed to continental / Roman law): *“...especially for countries whose legal systems are based on precedent law, as it includes a lot of researching and looking at the previous judicial cases”*.

However, the interviewees apparently saw and discussed AI as a tool only, aimed at increasing the efficiency of their work. They did not recognize and acknowledge the transformation potential of AI. They concentrated mostly on application modalities of AI and loss of work, seemingly unaware of deeper processes and transformations elaborated in literature. However, the lawyers from both groups acknowledged both positive and negative effects of AI in the future.

On the one hand, one-fifth of the respondents do not seem very interested in adopting new practices, let alone specializing in AI-related issues. Such a position was expressed by several senior lawyers, mostly partners. They would *“prefer that younger colleagues take over this part of business knowledge”* or – at best – to *“know the basic rules and be familiar to the extent that they can give advice”*.

The rest of interviewees are open to adopting new practices and knowledge and show high awareness that *“AI increasingly changes the legal industry”*, and that *“there is a growing*

need for professionals who understand both law and technology”. Even though their position is prevalently positive, there are two general impressions that emerge out from these interviews:(i) there does not appear to be any hype yet in relation to this topic, as described by some authors in reference to the Western markets, and (ii) there is likely to be resistance towards full outsourcing and entrusting work to AI, as rightfully noticed by [55].

All interviewees except one see the AI as useful tool, they only do not agree on significance i.e. level of such usefulness. Even though a few of them raised the issues regarding the privacy, confidentiality and accuracy concerns, they mostly believe that AI will make their work easier, not replace them; at least not instantly (on the short run). However, they do believe that in near future AI will bring certain troubles, especially for younger generations as *“the work that was so far reserved for trainees and junior lawyers will be more and more completed by AI tools”*.

When asked about a longer-term AI perspective, however, the negative opinions multiplied. One half of them still believed that the negative effect of AI will be limited and that AI will perform only certain repetitive day-to-day tasks, such as document review and legal research, *“while lawyers will focus on more complex tasks that require human judgment”*. Overall, this group does not see considerable reduction in the number of lawyers in the coming years.

Another group, a bit smaller than one-half of respondents, fearing that negative effects will be of greater significance. These respondents believe that, in time, positions such as trainees, assistants, paralegals and junior lawyers will be reduced while *“the future will be bright for partners of law firms”*. Thus, mostly younger attorneys expressed fear. One interviewee that showed a distinctly negative attitude argued that *“considering human influence and their potential abuse, creating unfair competition in the market as well as giving advantage to rich and large law offices that will be able to apply the mentioned tools first”*..... *“AI will cause huge changes in the market, going so far as to replace the work of people”*.

The two darkest views shared by respondents predict a negative outcome for the legal profession, and state the following:

- *“At the end, I believe that the attorneys will be a dying profession. Revolution will happen, and the AI will be able to provide better legal analysis, draft a better agreement, perform more thorough research, etc. than any human being ever could. This will all mean that the world will perhaps still need attorneys, but twenty times less attorneys than it needs right now.”*
- *“The future of the legal profession in light of the aforementioned changes does not seem too optimistic to me. It will definitely lead to certain adaptations, but time will tell whether these adaptations will be enough to continue make a living from the practice of law as a primary means of earning.”*

This darker perspective can also find support in literature, among the pessimists, saying for example that AI will be the end of legal profession and cause massive unemployment [10]. Finally, it should be noted that there were no excessively optimistic interviewees, believing that AI may result in job creation, as argued by [57] or [15].

4.2 Specific applications of AI in Serbia

Most of the interviewed lawyers, roughly 80%, confirmed that they used the AI (e.g. Chat GPT) one-way or another for: legal research, drafting of legal documents and other functions.

As for specific functions, most of interviewees (around 80%), mentioned initial legal research as a most notable function of AI. Out of these 80%, one third emphasized that the Anglo-Saxon legal systems will be much more affected e.g. that the AI contribution there will be much more significant, due to the use of precedents. On the other hand, the interviewees demonstrated awareness that AI outputs still tend to be inaccurate and thus demonstrated a high level of vigilance. When asked to what extent they personally use it for these purposes, some 60% (out of all interviewees) confirmed that they do – but more as a guideline than a source. Thus, it may be concluded that relying on AI is still much less important among Serbian lawyers than it is in the western hemisphere.

Around half of interviewees stated drafting of legal documents as important contribution and confirmed that they used it for this purpose. Furthermore, most respondents stated that, in terms of the type of document, they use AI for creating simple agreements, and not at all for creating briefs to be submitted to courts and other public authorities. Hence, the interviewees' positions coincide only partially to the literature review. On one hand, the literature also sees AI as a good solution for preparing initial drafts of less complex and demanding contracts or memorandums ([1]; [39]; [66]; [9]), which goes hand in hand with the interviewees' answers. On the other hand, the respondents do not use it for litigation related purposes, as do the western lawyers (according to the literature).

One fourth of interviewees (mostly partners), in one way or the other, considered organization and management as the field in which AI will be of help. In any case, the number is not impressive. Apparently, not many lawyers and law firms in Serbia use AI for these purposes. Perhaps only the few big ones. This is probably due to a small market and the absence of real corporatization of law firms. Only one or two interviewees mentioned document analysis, E-discovery, and predictive outcome analysis as functions they thought of. When presented with these options, the respondents mostly agree that AI “could be useful” in that way too. However, legal software and applications on the Serbian market are still in the initial development stage. Therefore, features like these will have to wait a bit more before they enter the practice. This is also the reason for discrepancy between the literature and the interview results.

In principle, the respondents still use the AI on a basic level, the results they get are still not quite impressive, and that is very well reflected in the answer one of them has given: *“The ChatGPT products were very useful in terms of time-saving, but not complete and ready for distribution to clients. It did require my additional work on any and all documents before having them ready for the clients.”*

As for the specialized AI tools for lawyers, around half of interviewees expressed awareness that specialized AI solutions are already used to a great extent at the USA, England and some countries of EU, while small countries still work with Chat GPT. Only one attorney mentioned a local law firm using a certain specialized AI solution, but only because it belongs to a network concentrated around a big Anglo-Saxon law firm (and the specialized AI solution at hand is built on basis of Anglo-Saxon legal system) It should be noted that, the incorporation of AI features into existing legal software solutions and applications on the Serbian market underway.

4.3 Transformation of legal profession in Serbia

One fourth of interviewees has no formed opinion regarding the changes that will transform the legal profession in one way or another; they do not seem neither impressed nor particularly worried. Nor aware, for that matter. More than half of interviewees see the changes only in terms of increased efficiency and productivity of individual attorneys, which may have positive and/or negative effects. They do not show awareness regarding the possibility that the profession itself may be transformed at its very roots. This corresponds to the moderate viewpoint presented in the literature review, pleading that AI brings enhancement in productivity but does not recognize transformational changes of the profession.

Only two respondents demonstrated some understanding of a possible transformed future, and they were both pessimistic. However, their perspective was mostly concentrated on changes in terms of negative effects of AI in the future and gravitated more toward operational change, rather than appearance of true transformational effects within the profession. Their perspective was captured in the two following quotes:

- *“Traditional methods still dominate, and AI tools are generally viewed as supplementary. However, there is a growing awareness of the potential for AI to reshape the legal landscape, particularly in areas like document review, legal research, and client interactions.”*
- *“The nature of work will be significantly changed because certain jobs will be automated, the number of people (lawyers and especially interns) will be reduced, and the impact on prices will be that certain services will be canceled and/or will not be charged for, which will be compensated by increasing the price of services that will not be performed using AI tools.”*

As it may be seen, the Serbian lawyers are still mostly unaware of possibility that the profession may be substantially changed (theoretically) in the coming years. Further, specifically, none of the interviewees was aware of appointment of non-lawyer CEOs, nor external ownership of shares in Serbian law firms, as opposed to the trends depicted in the literature [36]. Actually, as they explained, external ownership of shares in law firms would not even be possible under Serbian laws. There were however some opinions on legal portals, “legal tech lawyers”, and changes in pricing methodologies.

The interviewees were not aware of any real portal for the provision of legal services on the Serbian market. Few of them referred to certain internet sites existing on the local market that provide templates of legal documents that may be downloaded by the visitors. However, in reality, this “online service” is far even from even the simplest services and functions described in the literature.

Legal portals as discussed in literature are still not present in Serbia. Hence, the overall picture is not very impressive and the AI application in legal profession is still scarce. However, it must be noted that lawyers are still in the situation to use only Chat GPT and not a specialized programs and applications, such as “Harvey“, “Lexis+ AI“ or “CoCounsel“. It may therefore be argued that there is no lack of interest and that the level of application may only rise once the specialized applications arrive to the market.

Several interviewees showed the interest in becoming a “legal tech lawyer”. But nobody from the interviewed attorneys is taking any steps in that direction yet. Moreover, none of them actually had in mind the meaning of that term as described in the literature – a whole new breed of lawyers with different identity and culture, and playing a completely different game compared to traditional lawyers ([37]; [47]; [46]; [43]; [3]). The respondents meant more on specialists in AI matters. Only after a short explanation, they fully understood the idea, but they also mostly agreed that it might be a bit late to change approach in such a profound way.

Only few interviewees demonstrated a vague interest in becoming „legal tech lawyers“. And all of them were young, which matches the claim from the literature that *“usually, these “legal tech lawyers“ seem to be newcomers in the profession. And it appears to be quite difficult for an experienced traditional lawyer to jump ship. So consequently, this sector will grow as more and more young lawyers choose to become this kind of animal”*.

The interviewees identified three principal topic around which they expect future issues, disputes and legal matters to arise:

- Ethical implications and liability stemming from misuse or mistakes made while using AI;
- Personal data protection and privacy issues, and
- intellectual property related cases that will arise from situations in which AI fully or partially generated some kind of creative work that might (or not) be protected

by copyright or similar intellectual property rights.

As for the legal matters, the interview results to a large degree match the literature. They both singled out the same concerns: (i) security, (ii) personal data protection, (iii) confidentiality, and (iv) intellectual property. The only discrepancies between the two are the lack of awareness among Serbian lawyers that AI may cause discrimination if used in HR proceedings and low expectancy of any relevant quantity of work to be generated by new AI legislation.

6. Conclusion

The first comprehensive law to legally regulate artificial intelligence - the EU Artificial Intelligence Law (*Regulation (EU) 2024/1689*) [67], was adopted in 2024, with its phased implementation commencing in 2025. The legal framework governing artificial intelligence in Serbia is currently undergoing transformation. In 2019, Serbia became the first country in SEE to adopt the National Strategy for the Development of Artificial Intelligence for the period 2020-2025 (*“Official Herald of the Republic of Serbia“, No. 96/2019*) This initiative positioned Serbia as one of 11 countries globally to include AI at a state level, according to the UNESCO report (2021). In 2021, it founded the first Artificial Intelligence Institute, and in 2022, it became part of the Global Partnership for Artificial Intelligence (GPAI, 2024). Finally, on January 10, 2025, the Government of the Republic of Serbia adopted the Strategy for the Development of Artificial Intelligence for the period 2025-2030, based on Article 13. Law on the Planning System of the Republic of Serbia (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, no. 30/18).

There is no doubt that there will be many more applications of AI in legal industry in the years to come. Academia must follow up what are the new emerging ways of employment of AI in legal industry, as well as to what extent are the existing models further developed and perfection, and how will this affect the profession.

According to interview results, Serbian lawyers are still much closer to basic rather than advanced level of using AI. This primarily due to delay in development and arrival of specialized AI tools on Eastern European markets. Once these tools arrive to Serbia, they will already be tuned and used in accordance with best practices, so consequently the Serbian legal practice hopefully won't have to go through the same mistakes the western practices did.

Along the same lines, the claim that the legal industry (in general) is in lead in adopting AI in its practice, does not really stand in Serbia. Given that the specialized AI tools are not even on the market yet, at this point the legal profession's position in Serbia may only be anticipated (with some level of probability) Bearing in mind that most interviewees demonstrated a moderately positive opinion regarding the AI application, an guess would be that the AI tools will be well accepted once they enter application. Even though some of

the respondents showed a certain level of fear – especially the younger ones, due to the possibility that, they might be replaced – it is also the younger ones who are open to accepting new knowledge and practices. Hence, the change will probably be carried out by young lawyers and new generations.

Finally, it should be noted that, the incorporation of AI features into existing legal software solutions and applications on the Serbian market underway.

Regarding the transformation process, the current literature only offers an insight into several possible forms (or ways) of transformation that could turn out to be important.

There are authors advocating three different points of view: pessimistic, optimistic and moderate. Namely, the choice to be made by lawyers regarding the adoption and application of AI is not preordained [33]. It appears that all make individual choices regarding various approaches and products developed to support their practice. As for the Serbian lawyers, we have seen that they are mostly unaware of transformative potential of the AI. In addition, this is something that will probably change as the use of AI starts to grow on the local market.

Overall, it is very important to continue monitoring this change and the relationship between the two approaches to lawyering (traditional and modern), in order to anticipate further developments and the final outcome. This is most certainly the topic deserving further attention from academia. At the same time, practitioners must stay vigilant in respect to this topic in order to survive.

Further, the functionality and efficiency of AI applications is certainly one of the topics to be further followed up and analyzed, by both academics and practitioners. This paper reflect only the situation at the time of its creation, while the number and variety of innovative practices and business models will certainly continue to grow and without doubt deserve further attention. Smaller markets, such as Balkans and Serbia, shall have their turn only after the larger ones are saturated enough. Consequently, the smaller markets could win the most from this as well as from any following academic work dealing with this subject, as they would be able to learn from experiences analyzed in such works that took place on larger markets.

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