

THE ROMANIAN GEOGRAPHY TEACHERS' OPINIONS ON CONTINUOUS TRAINING

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Abstract

In the first part of the paper, we present the legislation from Romania and the methodologies related to the continuous training of teachers. In order to know the teachers' opinions about their professional development, about the programmes, courses and other training activities in which they were involved and about their needs for continuous training as geography teachers, a questionnaire was applied, and was completed by 170 teachers. The results were analysed and interpreted. These views are important because, based on them, decisions can be made concerning the teachers' continuous training at both ministry level, as well as at the level of various institutions involved in such activities.

Keywords: *training programme, career evolution, professional development, secondary education, Didactics of Geography*

INTRODUCTION

In Romania, the institution that sets the objectives and coordinates the continuous training of the teaching staff from the secondary education is the Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research. Teachers' continuous training is implemented according to national strategies and policies, as a result of the legislative provisions and methodologies related to the law on National Education Law (2011, p. 42).

The continuous training of the teaching staff includes "*the professional development and career progression*" (National Education Law, 2011, p. 42). "*Developments in the teaching career is done through the second and the first didactic degrees, certification exams of various levels of teaching competence*" (National Education Law, 2011, p. 42). According to this law, teacher continuous training is considered as both a right and obligation.

For the implementation of the National Education Law (2011) statements, various methodologies were elaborated, ministerial orders and some notes were issued. These documents are presented on the website of the Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research: *The methodology of continuous training, management, guidance and control, for the teaching staff*, approved by OMECTS no. 5561/2011, as amended and supplemented; *The methodology for accreditation and periodic evaluation of suppliers of training programmes and the programmes offered by these*, approved by OMECTS no. 5564/2011, as amended and supplemented by OMECTS no. 3130/2013 and OMECS no. 5442/10th of August 2015; OMEN no. 3307/2013 concerning the approval of the model "*Certificate of teaching staff's continuous training*" and the model "*Sheet of competences and subjects/themes*"; *The Methodology of the Accumulation, Recognition and Equivalence System of Professional Transferable Credits*, approved by OMECTS no. 5562/2011.

In the scientific literature, there are few studies on the continuous training of geography teachers in Romania. One study aimed at evaluating the geography teachers enrolled at the *Didactics of Geography Course* within the continuous training program "Magister I" organised by the Department of Teaching Staff Training, from Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca (Dulamă and Ilovan 2005). In other studies, the syllabus and methodology for obtaining the second didactic degree were analysed (Dulamă *et al.*, 2013) and the achievement of scientific and methodical papers in order to obtain the first didactic degree (Buzilă *et al.*, 2014). A number of papers were dedicated to the presentation of the geography teachers' competences (Dulamă, 2001, 2005, 2009).

The scientific literature is rich in methodological guidebooks (Mândruț, 2003; Mândruț and Dan, 2015) and didactics of geography

papers (Stan, 2003; Dulamă and Roşcovan, 2007; Dulamă, 2013; Mândruţ and Dan, 2014), which provide important theoretical and methodological guidelines for the professional development of geography teachers. In other papers, teachers find information about designing documents (Mândruţ and Ardelean, 2015) and, in particular, designing lessons (Dulamă, 2010a, 2010b, 2015; Dulamă and Mihalca, 2010).

Given the current legal and methodological framework context and the changes that have occurred in the Romanian society and in the education system from Romania in recent years, we have been interested in Geography teachers' opinions about their professional development, about programmes, courses and other training activities in which they were involved and about their needs for continuous training as Geography teachers. These views are important because, based on them, decisions can be taken on teacher continuous training at both the ministry level and at the level of various institutions involved in such activities.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The research methodology. For collecting data, we used the survey. As a tool for collecting information, we used a questionnaire with nine multiple choice items, related to information about the participants, and 12 items on Geography teachers' continuous training. Five items with dual choice targeted the data collection about: teachers' participation in continuous training courses; the number, the organiser, the costs and duration of the attended courses.

For seven items, we stated several possible answers and we associated a Likert scale to each response, with values from 1 to 5. These items targeted data collection about: the criteria for choosing the courses; the reasons for participation in courses; their efficiency in the professional development at Geography and Didactics of Geography specialisations and of the sources and activities attended; the efficiency of the activities, depending on the teachers' role; the current needs for training as Geography teachers, on fields and topics; the usefulness of some activities for their professional development.

The questionnaire was conducted in *Google docs*. In order to be completed by the teachers, we distributed it in December 2016, in several Geography teachers' discussion groups, on the Facebook social network. We also sent it by e-mail to some Geography teachers. We statistically processed the data collected by means of the questionnaire and we represented it in charts of various types, using Excel.

Participants. The questionnaire was filled in voluntarily and anonymously by 170 Geography teachers. By gender, 73% of the teachers

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are female and 27% are male. By age, 5% of the teachers are under 30 years old, 41% are between 31 and 40 years old, 36% are between 41 and 50 years old and 18% are over 50 years old. Regarding their educational level, 50% of the teachers have a Bachelor Degree, 35% have a Master Degree and 15% have a Ph.D. Regarding their didactic degree, 2% of the teachers are beginners, 13% obtained their final degree for working in the education system, 19% had their second didactic degree, and 66% had their first didactic degree. With regard to seniority in education, 5% are under 5 years, 13% are between 5 to 10 years, 49% are between 11 and 20 years, and 33% are over 20 years. Regarding the type of schools they teach at, 41% of the teachers are working in secondary schools, 34% in secondary schools and in high schools and 25% in high schools. Considering the environment, 72% of the teachers are working in institutions located in the urban environment and 28% in the rural one. Regarding the type of institution where they work, 99% of the teachers are working in state institutions, and 1% in private institutions. The Geography teachers are from 32 counties and from Bucharest (11 teachers). Most of them are from Iași (18), Cluj (16), and Dolj (10) counties.

The research material consists of the responses expressed by the Geography teachers in the questionnaire.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Participation in continuous training courses. All the surveyed Geography teachers stated they participated in continuous training courses. This response enabled us to process correctly all the other responses in the questionnaire.

Number of training courses attended by the questioned Geography teachers. 72% of the teachers participated in more than 5 training courses throughout their activity (Figure 1). It is possible that even the 10% of the teachers who claimed they did not know how many courses they attended, also participated in a large number of courses.

Between 2010 and 2015, 38% of the teachers participated in more than 5 courses (Figure 2). Unlike the percentage of the courses they attended in their entire activity, one notices that, these years, a high percentage (60%) is held by the teachers who attended between 1 and 5 continuous training courses.

The situation is different for year 2016: 43% of the teachers participated in one training course, over a quarter of the surveyed teachers (26%) did not participate in any training courses, and 31% of them attended 2-4 courses (Figure 3). All these results show a great interest for the surveyed Geography teachers for the involvement in continuous training courses both in 2016 and in the period 2010-2015, as well as throughout their entire activity.

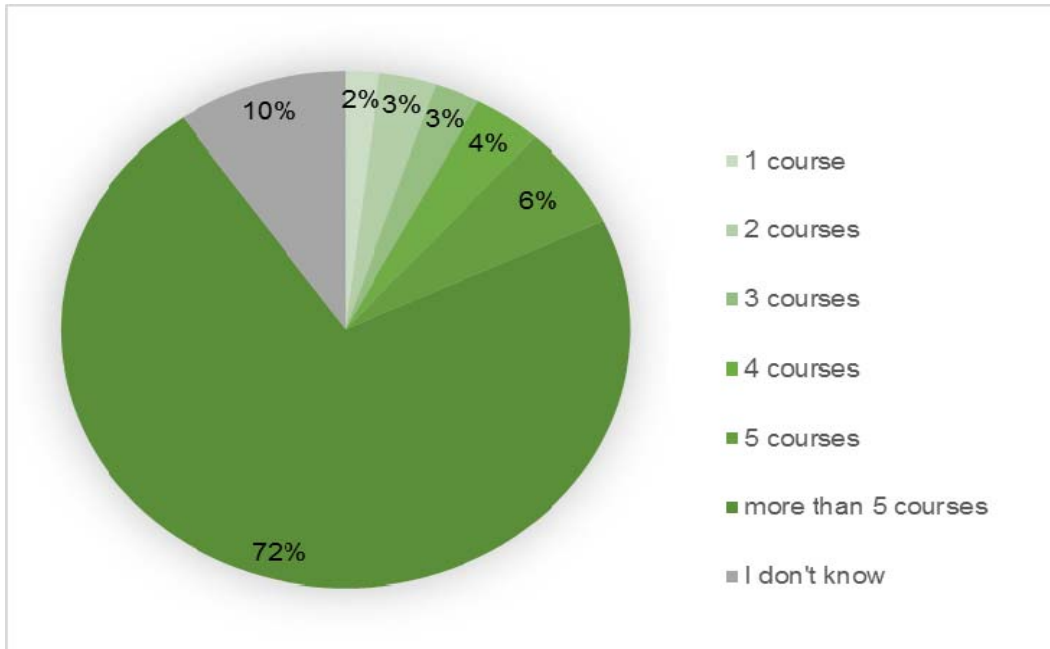


Fig. 1. The percentage of participation in training courses for Geography teachers, in their entire activity



Fig. 2. The percentage of participation in training courses for Geography teachers, between 2010 and 2015

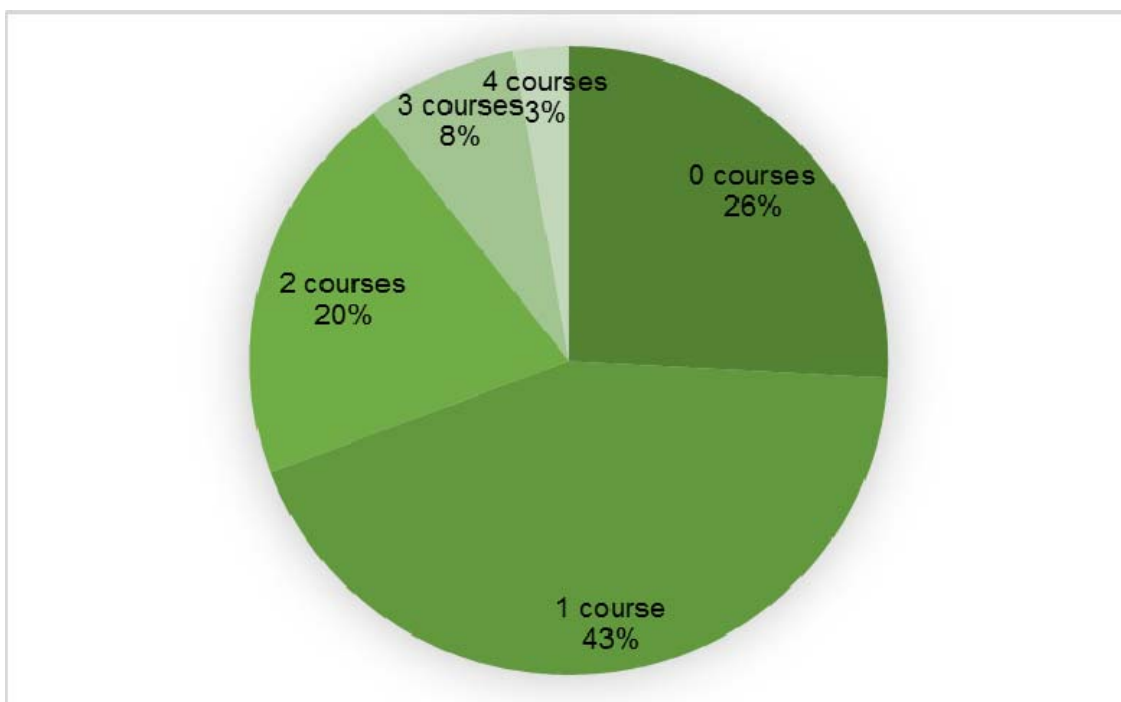


Fig. 3. The percentage of participation in training courses for Geography teachers, in 2016

Organisers of continuous training courses. 150 Geography teachers attended continuous training courses organised by the Houses of the Didactic Personnel (HDP, CCD in Romanian) (Figure 4). Thus these institutions managed to attract, by their offer and facilities, the largest number of Geography teachers, being legislatively and financially supported by the ministry, in organising such activities.

The second place is held by universities, these managing to attract a high number of Geography teachers (108), yet a much smaller number, in comparison with the HDP. Other institutions managed to attract 107 Geography teachers at their continuous training courses.

We are surprised by the fact that the specialised inspectors (in Geography) organised professional training courses, probably not accredited, or organised within the methodical commissions, and 72 Geography teachers attended these. Although the NGOs are interested in continuous teacher training, they managed to attract only 54 Geography teachers in such courses.

The last place in organising and offering training courses is held by the Methodical Club, with only 26 Geography teachers attending their activities. We are assuming that these courses had a small duration and were rather some methodical activities in which teachers shared their professional experience.

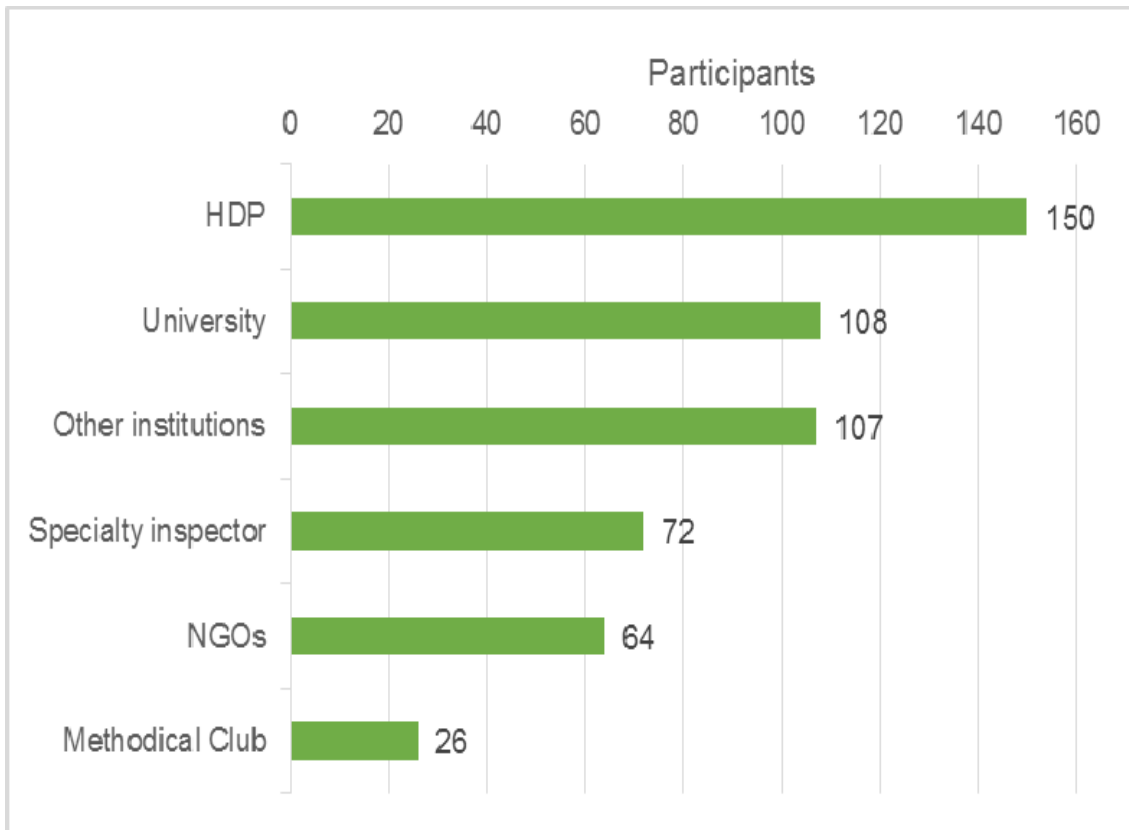


Fig. 4. Organisers of continuous training courses attended by Geography teachers

Costs of continuous training courses attended by Geography teachers. The first place is held by free training courses, attended by 139 teachers (Figure 5). The second place (131 teachers) is held by training courses organised and conducted within POSDRU projects. Fewer Geography teachers (99) attended courses paid from their own budget. The last place is held by the courses with prizes for the participants, only 30 teachers benefiting from such training.

Duration of continuous training courses attended by Geography teachers. Between 2010 and 2015 (Figure 6), all the Geography teachers attended training courses, even if their duration was short. 78% of the teachers attended courses that lasted more than 25 hours (over 3 days).

In 2016 (Figure 7), 20% of the Geography teachers did not attend training courses, which we consider as being a negative aspect. It is pleasing that 59% of the Geography teachers attended this year Geography courses lasting more than 25 hours, indicating their interest for professional development activities.

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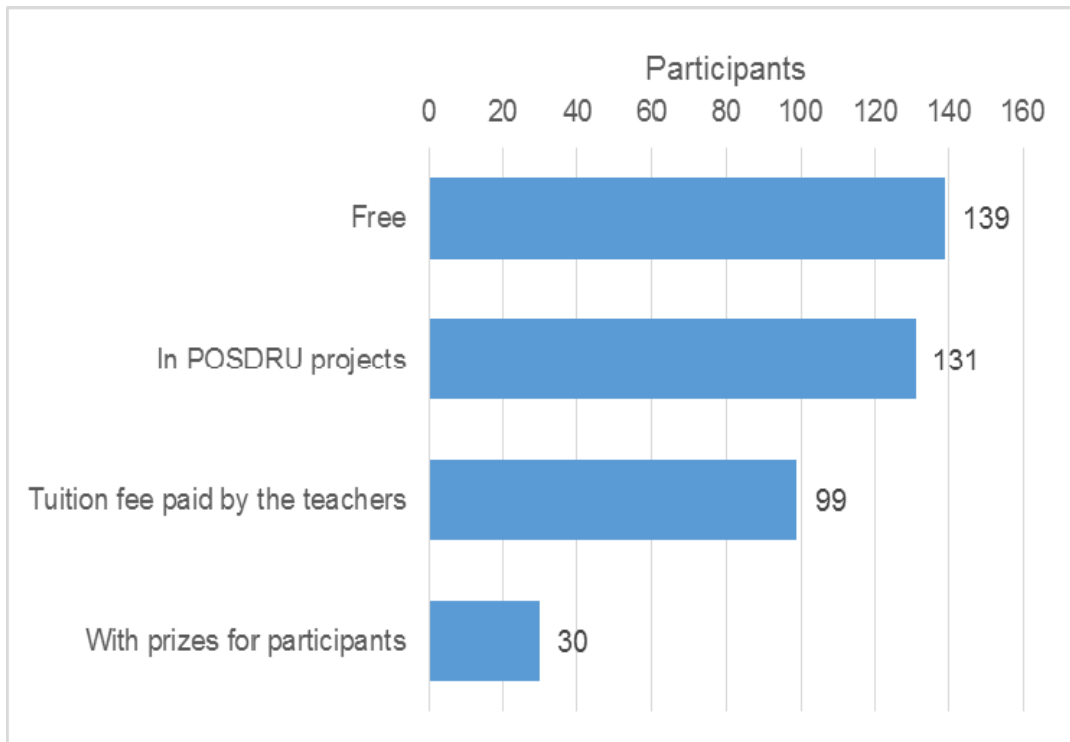


Fig. 5. Costs of continuous training courses attended by Geography teachers

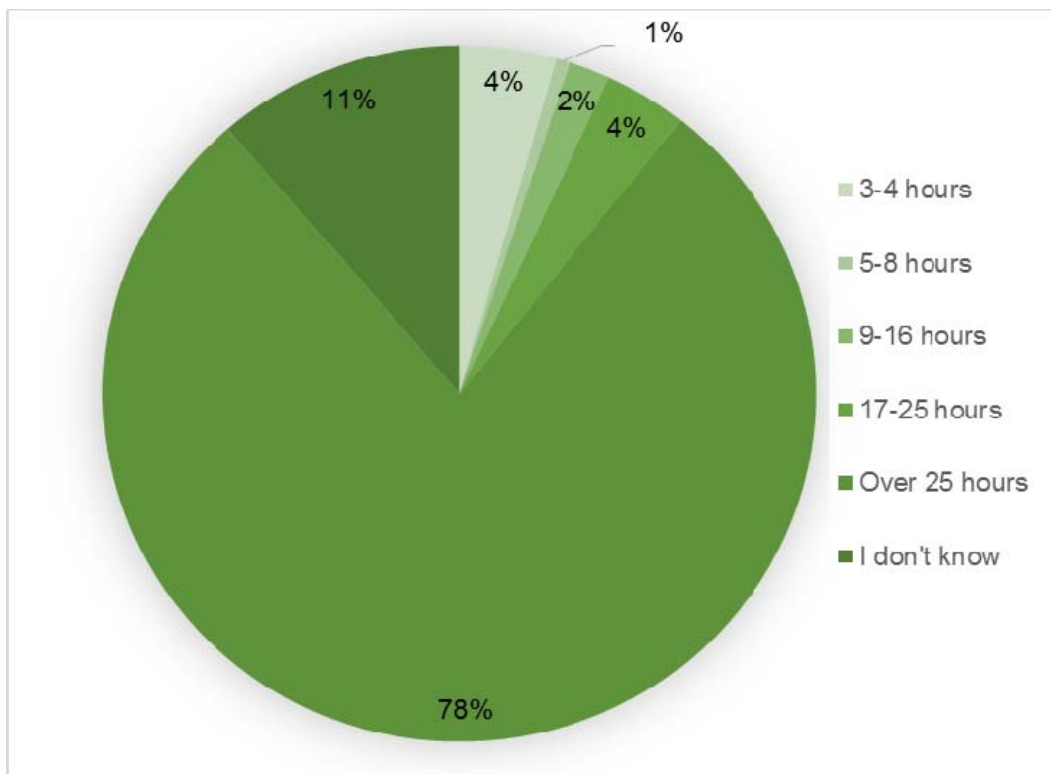


Fig. 6. Duration of continuous training courses attended by Geography teachers, between 2010 and 2015

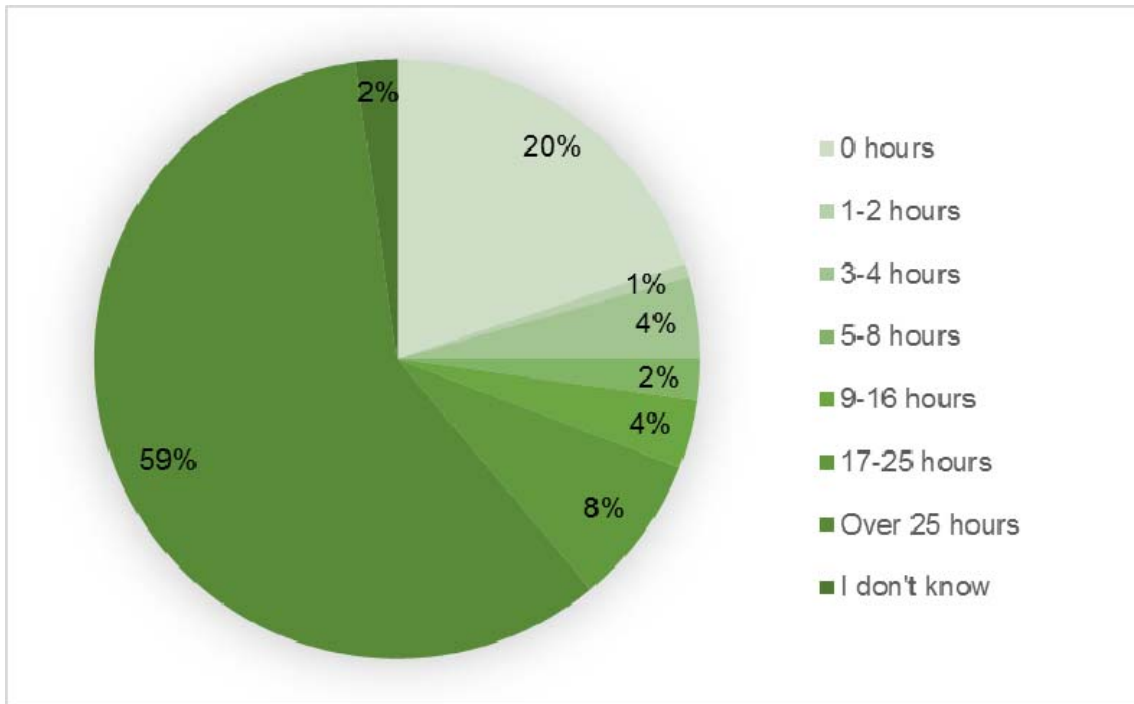


Fig. 7. Duration of continuous training courses attended by the Geography teachers, in 2016

Criteria for choosing courses/training programmes by Geography teachers. The most important criteria in choosing the courses were the topics, the accreditation status, and the number of credits allocated to a training programme. This choice can be explained also by the fact that teachers from secondary education, according to article 245, paragraph 6 of the National Education Law (2011) "are obliged to undergo periodic training programmes so as to accumulate, with every consecutive 5 years, considered from the date of passing the exam for completion in education, a minimum of 90 transferable professional credits" (p. 43).

The other criteria (organiser of the courses, venue, duration, costs) were considered less important. We were surprised that the Geography teachers considered less important the costs of these programmes, the trainers and participants in these activities, taking into account that, for us, these criteria are also important.

Geography teachers' reasons for attending training courses. The first places in the hierarchy of reasons were held by the inherent ones: learning new things and clarifying some issues and deepening some themes (Figure 9).

The Geography teachers claimed they were motivated to attend the courses also for the credits obtained, result explained by the fact that they needed to obtain high scores in various evaluation contexts (reducing activity, merit gradations, transfer to another school, etc.).

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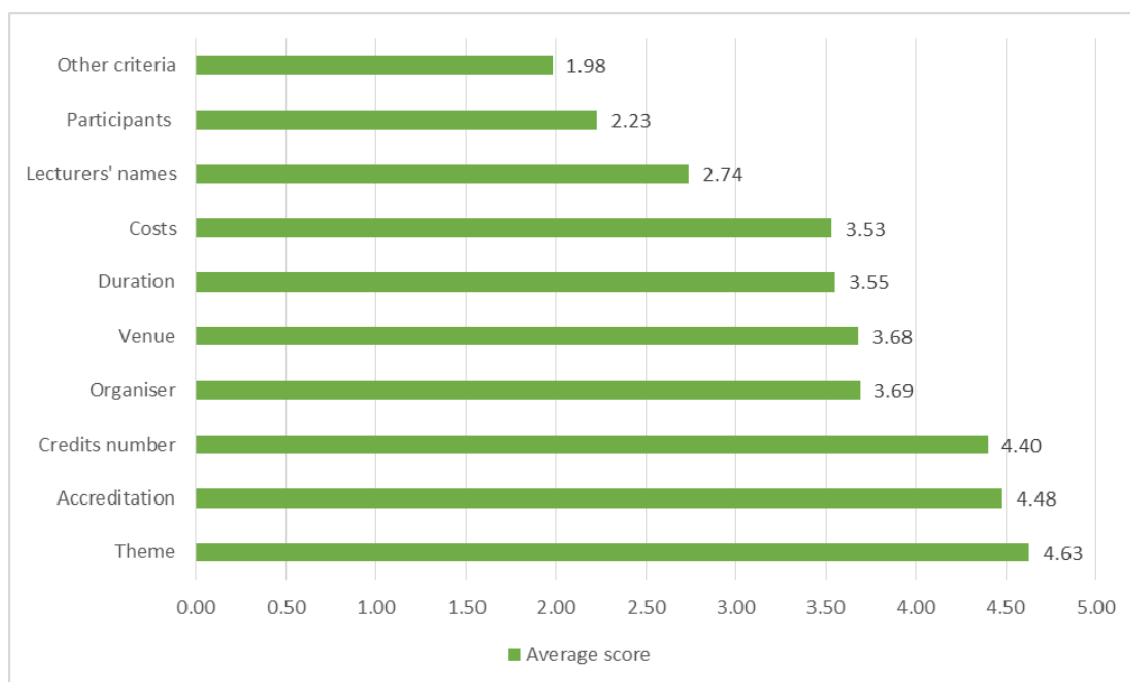


Fig. 8. Criteria for choosing training courses by Geography teachers

Two reasons related to colleagues were situated on close hierarchical positions, be it by participating together with other colleagues in these courses, which indicates co-operation, or getting higher scores than the classmates at a variety of evaluations, indicating competition. Teachers claimed that they chose to participate in certain courses based on recommendations from colleagues, which we consider an important aspect because we find out that they take into account other participants' opinions about training.

We noticed that teachers were less motivated to participate at training for obtaining the first, the second and the final didactic degree, and for the tenure contest. Those results are also explained by the fact that such courses were rarely offered. Last place in the hierarchy of the reasons was obtaining money or object prizes, probably also due to the lack of offers.

Efficiency degree of sources and activities used in the continuous training of Geography teachers at the subject Geography. For their continuous training at the subject Geography, the highest efficiency degree was attributed to the printed books and journals (Figure 10). The following places, considering the efficiency degree, were held by online sources: scientific literature (books, reviews, papers, etc.), tutorials, videos, PowerPoint presentations. These results can be explained by the fact that, at the subject Geography, it is required the continuous updating of information and the use of rich illustrative material, the online environment offering a variety of sources. During their professional training, the practical field activities and the writing of scientific papers (articles, books, additional curriculum, textbooks, etc.) were also efficient.

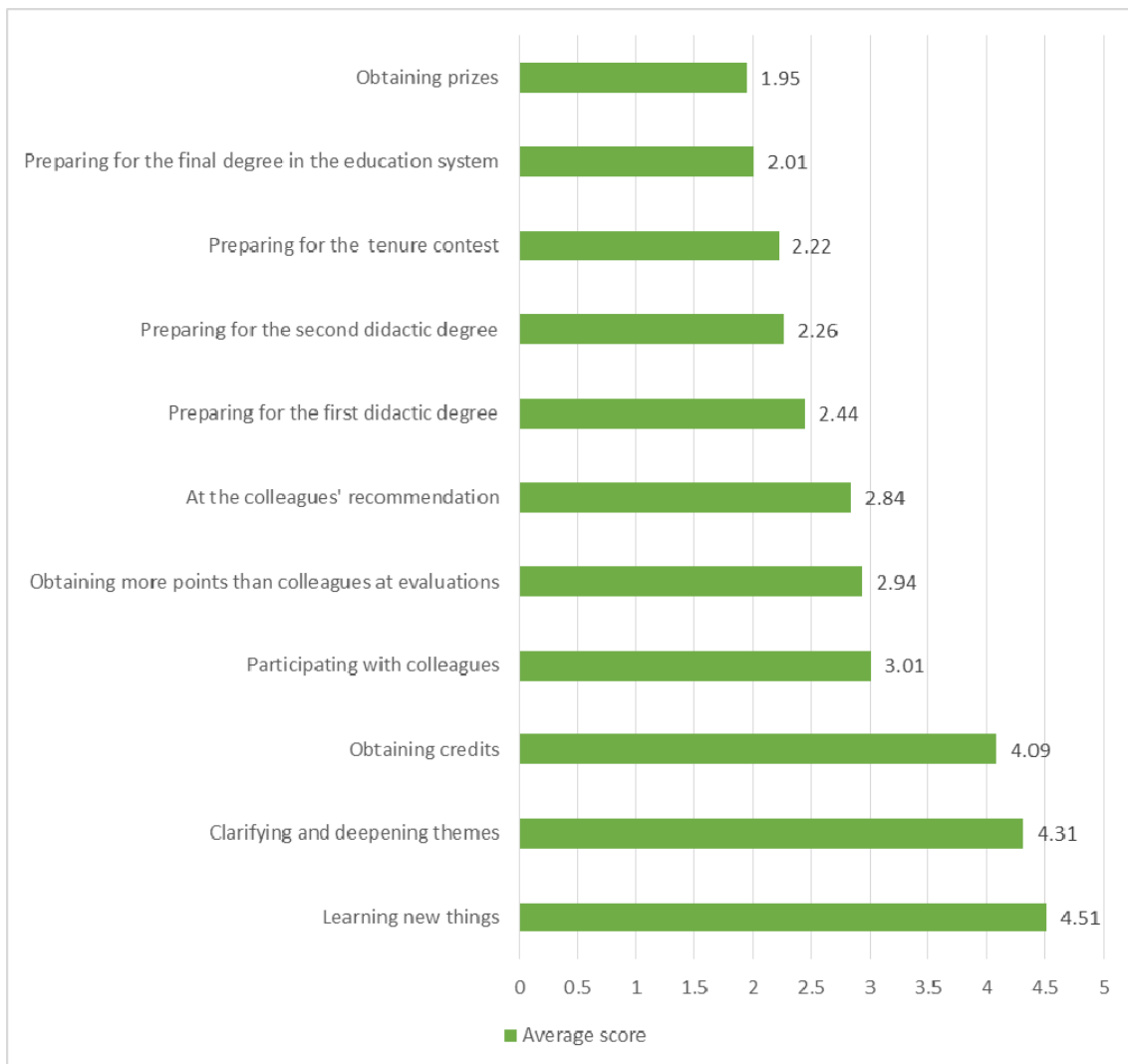


Fig. 9. Geography teachers' reasons for attending training courses

Other activities: lectures from the training courses, conferences, and symposia, the practical activities from the Geography lab, scientific discussion groups, and the Methodical Club activities were considered with a lesser degree of efficiency. The smaller efficiency of these activities is explained either by the fact that the teachers played a passive role, being listeners to lectures, "spectators" for demonstrations, and text readers, sent via discussion forums, or were not involved in such activities.

The fact that the penultimate place in this hierarchy is held by online courses can be explained perhaps by the fact that these Geography teachers did not participate in such courses, this manner of professional development being rarely used in Romania. The positioning of social networks in the last place as efficiency degree is due to the fact that the teachers do not perceive them and use them in order to learn, but rather as a way to share information and communicate with other teachers. We note, however, that

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on Facebook there are many discussion groups started by geographers (Geographers and teachers; SOS Geography School; Scientific Geographic Events; Geographic Publications; Geographers in Bacău County; Geography Tenure, etc. [all the above with the original names in Romanian]) and, within them, various materials useful in teaching are distributed.

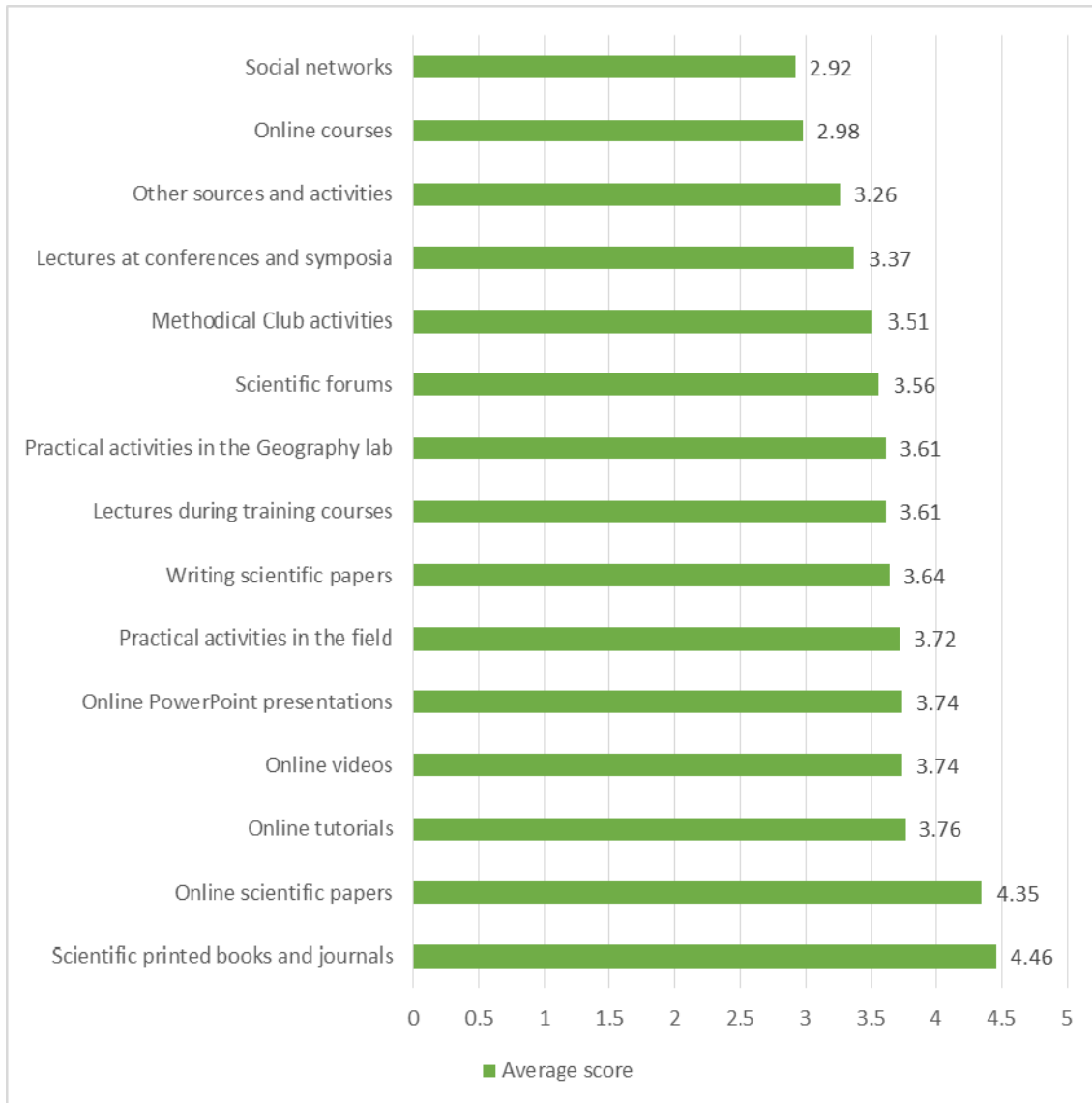


Fig. 10. Efficiency degree of sources and activities used in the continuous training of Geography teachers at the subject Geography

Efficiency degree of sources and activities used in the continuous training of Geography teachers at the subject Didactics of Geography. For their continuous training in the Didactics of Geography, the highest efficiency degree is held by the printed books and reviews followed by the scientific

literature existing in the online environment (books, reviews, papers, etc.) (Figure 11), similar results regarding the professional development in the subject Geography.

Unlike teachers' professional training at Geography, in which teachers appreciated and considered as efficient the online sources, in the professional development for the Didactics of Geography, teachers felt that the applied activities were efficient. They felt that the practical activities of training courses were highly efficient, the practical activities in the field, and the online tutorials. However, teachers felt listening to lectures during training courses had a high efficiency degree, which indicated their need for clarification of issues relating to learning Geography.

The teachers appreciated that high efficiency in their training at Didactics of Geography was held by the practical activities, activities from the Geography laboratory, the writing of scientific literature (articles, books, additional curriculums, textbooks, etc.), the theoretical and practical activities from the Methodical Club where they belonged, PowerPoint presentations and online videos, specialised forums, attending lectures at conferences and symposia. The efficiency of these activities may be explained by the fact that teachers have the opportunity, in this context, to share their experience and to exchange didactic materials and information. The Geography teachers considered that their professional development in the Didactics of Geography was the least influenced by online courses or social networks.

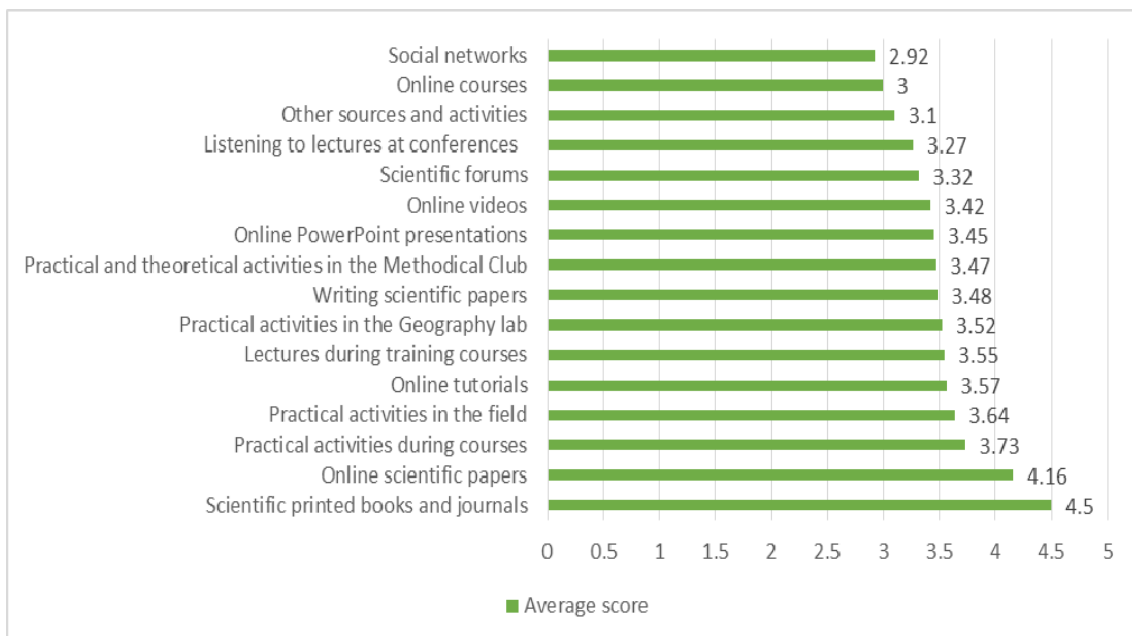


Fig. 11. Efficiency degree of sources and activities used in the continuous training of Geography teachers at the subject Didactics of Geography

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Efficiency degree of activities in the continuous training of Geography teachers, depending on the role they had in the respective activity. We are surprised by the fact that the role of excursionist developed them the most as Geography teachers (Figure 12). This situation is probably explained by the Geography teachers' interest to visit new places and to establish, in this way, relations between theoretical and practical knowledge. The scientific literature underlines the concern of the Geography teachers from Romania to participate together with students in various trips both in Romania and in other countries (Iosof *et al.*, 2015).

Teachers claim that a high efficiency degree had the situations with the role of participants in training courses. We are surprised by the fourth place in the hierarchy of the role of member in an evaluation committee for the students' results, probably at the high school Bacalaureate, school Olympics, and other competitions for students (*Terra*).

Teachers claim that they learn as authors of papers (scientific papers, books, additional curriculums, textbooks, etc.). Among these works, it is possible for teachers to consider writing dissertation papers and developing their thesis for obtaining the first didactic degree. A low efficiency degree is held by the role of presenter of a scientific paper (articles, books, additional curriculums, textbooks, etc.).

The teachers claimed they developed too little in the roles of participants at the activities for obtaining the first didactic degree, at the exam for obtaining the final degree in the education system, at the exam for obtaining the second didactic degree, at the tenure contest, stages in the evolution of the teaching career or ways of professional development stated by the legislation and rewarded by salary payments.

These results can be explained perhaps by the fact that the topics the teachers have to study do not correlate properly with the curriculum of secondary and high schools which they should deepen to increase the quality of teaching and students' learning. These findings should generate reflections on how to obtain the final and didactic degrees in the secondary education.

Other roles have lesser efficiency degree: M.Sc. student, reviewer of scientific papers, trainer, and member of an evaluation committee for teachers' results, editor of a journal or collective volume, didactician, and specialty inspector. These results can be explained by the fact that a small number of Geography teachers had such roles.

Usefulness of some activities in the future continuous training of Geography teachers. If in the previous training both at Geography and at the Didactics of Geography, on the first place of the hierarchy stood reading books and printed scientific journals, we underline that, for the future professional development the teachers, the first place is held by: participation in training courses themed for Geography and Didactics of Geography, practical activities in the field and during training courses (Figure 13). These activities could be organised at a higher quality level by the academic representatives. We also underlined the need for training aimed at specific

practical activities in Geography, whilst, the secondary education is predominantly theoretical when it comes to the Geography subject.

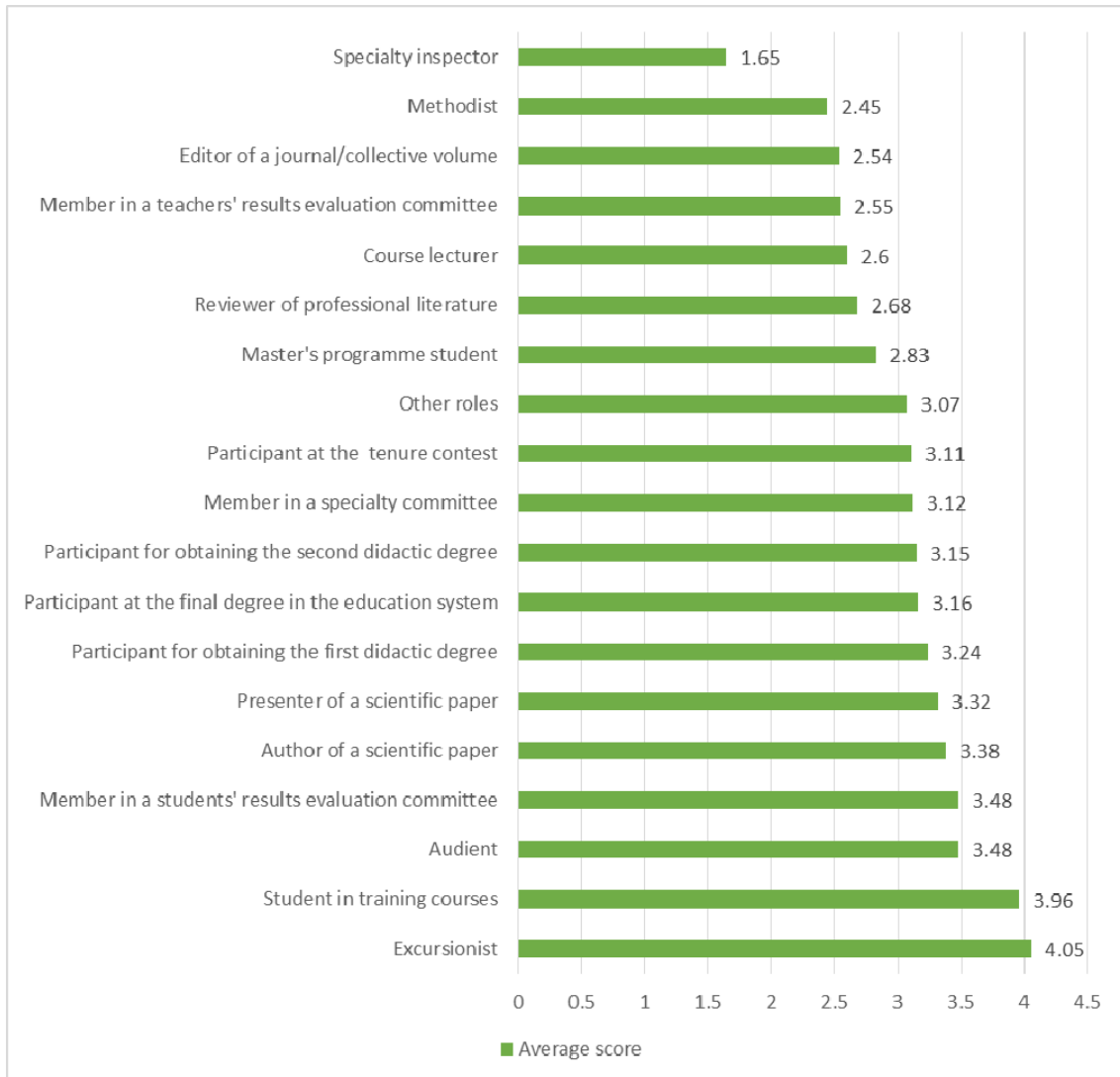


Fig. 12. Efficiency degree of activities in the continuous training of Geography teachers, depending on the role they had during the respective activity

The Geography teachers further appreciate and believe that reading printed scientific books and journals, scientific documents/sources available online (books, journals, papers, etc.) are valuable in their training. They also appreciate their participation in training courses face to face, discussions with experts in Geography or in the Didactics of Geography and consider useful their advice. Universities could create such contexts to meet the professional development needs of Geography teachers, but preparing a training programme for accreditation is very complicated and the issue of the teachers' financial resources is also brought into discussion.

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Fig. 13. Geography teachers' opinion on the usefulness of some activities for their future continuous training

The Geography teachers consider that it would be useful in their future professional development to watch documentaries, to use tutorials from the Internet, followed by practical activities in the laboratory or in the Geography lab, to do theoretical and practical activities within the Methodical Club, to write scientific literature (papers, books, additional curricula, textbooks, etc.).

The teachers assign a smaller interest and role in their professional development to the participation in pedagogy and psychology training courses, to personal or to other people's presentations of papers (papers, books, additional curriculum, textbooks, etc.) in various contexts, attending lectures at conferences, symposia, discussions with pedagogy and psychology experts, attending lectures during the training courses, counselling from experts in psychology and pedagogy.

On the last places there are some activities that can take place in the online environment: participation in training courses online, discussions in scientific forums and social networks. Perhaps the teachers do not get visible professional results as a consequence of these discussions.

Geography teachers' needs for training. We notice the interest of the teachers for their professional development in organising extracurricular activities (Figure 14), for the conflict management and classroom management and for the development of didactic communication transversal competences.

We appreciate as a positive aspect the fact that the teachers are interested in geographical research, probably because they want to carry out such research either with their students or with other teachers. It is interesting that teachers claim they need training programmes in the Didactics of Geography (6th place in the hierarchy), but that they are less interested in doing Didactics of Geography research (12th in the hierarchy).

Regarding the branches of Geography, we see that the teachers are most interested in Environmental and Regional Geography and on lower hierarchical positions lies their professional development need for Human Geography and Physical Geography. These differences are explained by the fact that in Romania, at present, society faces many environmental problems and by the fact that teachers are concerned about local environmental knowledge, but also for other regions, hence the Regional Geography.

The teachers claim they need professional development on some topics such as training/development and evaluation of competences, computer assisted instruction, training differentiation and individualisation, teaching methods, although in recent years many training programs, focusing on these issues, were implemented.

We notice, as a negative aspect, the fact that on the last places of the hierarchy lies evaluation, learning, and didactic planning. We believe that all

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the competences associated with these topics are very important for a Geography teacher.

Based on lesson observations and on the manner of knowledge evaluation and level of development for the Geography related competences in Romania, we believe that, in fact, there is a strong need for training in didactic planning, learning, and evaluation.

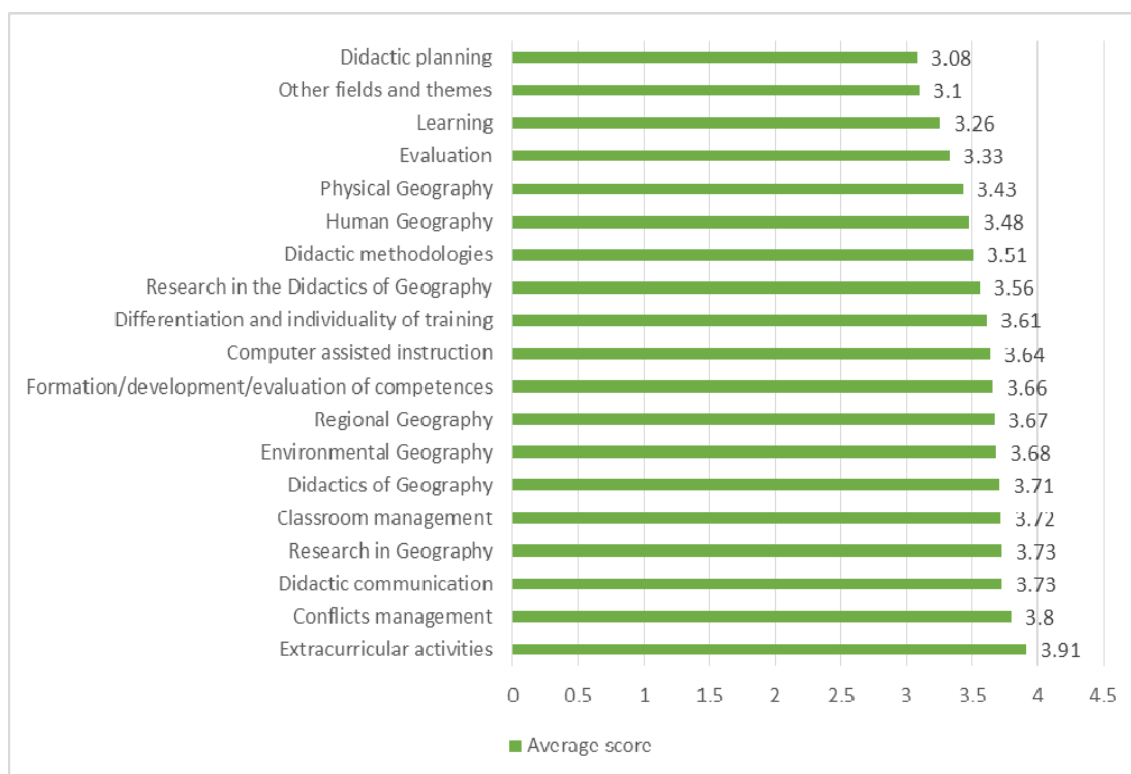


Fig. 14. Geography teachers' needs for training, on fields and topics

CONCLUSIONS

All the surveyed Geography teachers claim they have participated in continuous training courses, most of them participating in more than five continuous training courses throughout their entire activity. High percentage (over 70%) had: the continuous training programmes organised by the Houses of Didactic Personnel, the free training courses, the courses lasting more than 25 hours (over 3 days).

The most important criteria for teachers' choosing courses were the topic, the accreditation and the number of credits allocated to a training

programme. Other criteria (organiser of courses, venue, duration, costs) were considered less important.

In the hierarchy of reasons for choosing courses, first places were located by intrinsic reasons (learning new things, clarifying some issues and deepening themes), followed by some extrinsic reasons (obtaining the necessary credits).

For their continuous training at the subjects Geography and Didactics of Geography, the highest efficiency degree was held by the printed scientific books and journals, followed by the online scientific literature (books, reviews, papers, etc.). Unlike the teachers training at Geography, situation in which the teachers appreciated and considered as efficient the online sources (scientific papers, tutorials, videos, and PowerPoint presentations), in their professional development at the Didactics of Geography, the teachers considered as efficient the activities with applicative profile, but also attending lectures during training courses.

The teachers claim they developed professionally the most as excursionists, participants at training courses, members in evaluation committees for students' results, evaluators, and that they least developed as participants at the activities for obtaining the first and the second didactic degree, their final degree, the tenure contest, the forms of professional development stated through legislation and rewarded by salary payments.

For their future professional development, teachers place at the very top: the participation at Geography and Didactics of Geography training courses, practical activities in the field and from the training courses as well.

As fields and themes, the first places for their future professional development are held by: the organisation of extracurricular activities, conflicts and classroom management, the development of didactic communication transversal competences, and the research in Geography and in the Didactics of Geography.

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