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## IDENTITY AND ECONOMIC DIMENSIONS OF CONTEMPORARY FASHION DESIGN IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA: FROM TRADITION TO NATIONAL BRAND

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*This paper analyses the phenomenon of revitalization of traditional textile heritage within the contemporary fashion industry of the Republic of Moldova. In a context of heightened globalization, local designers – such as Alina Bradu, Maria Cristea and Valentina Vidrașcu – reinterpret archaic symbolism and the aesthetics of “Cosânzeana” to create clothing products that go beyond their utilitarian function, becoming vectors of national identity. The article explores the dual nature of this phenomenon: on the one hand, the preservation of geometric motifs and craft techniques as carriers of cultural memory; on the other hand, the economic importance of supporting local production and consumption. The study argues that the integration of traditional elements into contemporary design should be understood not merely as a marketing strategy, but as a form of cultural and economic sustainability that contributes to the consolidation of a national brand and to the valorisation of high-value local goods.*

**Keywords:** fashion design, national identity, symbols, cultural heritage, local brands, economic sustainability.

### INTRODUCTION

In recent years, fashion design in the Republic of Moldova has undergone a visible transformation, shifting from the imitation of global trends toward the reinterpretation of local cultural heritage. Elements once confined to household dowries, festive costume, or museum collections increasingly appear in contemporary garments, public events, and designer collections [1, 2]. This development indicates that traditional dress is no longer perceived as a static relic of the past, but as a dynamic resource for contemporary visual culture.

The use of traditional elements in fashion is not simply an aesthetic preference. In a globalized environment, it also functions as a mechanism for preserving national identity [3, 4]. The traditional women's blouse (ia), together with embroidered motifs and hand-crafted details, operates as a visual archive of collective memory [5]. When such motifs are incorporated into contemporary garments, historical symbols are reactivated and translated into forms of everyday social communication.

This reinterpretation does not imply the loss of tradition; rather, it reflects its adaptation to contemporary expectations of comfort, functionality, and stylistic versatility. Moldovan designers draw on embroidery, geometric ornament, natural materials such as linen and cotton, and hand-crafted details in order to create garments that remain culturally recognizable while responding to present-day



design requirements. In this context, local brands demonstrate that tradition can be reformulated as innovation rather than treated as a limitation.

Supporting the local market is an act of economic patriotism. The phenomenon also has an economic dimension. Supporting garments produced by Moldovan brands strengthens local creative industries, encourages short production chains, circular local production models create jobs and reduce the ecological impact of mass fashion and increases the visibility of local craftsmanship because every purchase from a local brand that uses traditional elements is an investment in preserving our culture. Consequently, the revival of traditional aesthetics in contemporary fashion should be examined not only as a cultural process, but also as a contribution to local economic development and nation branding.

### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the contemporary reinterpretation of traditional Moldovan dress by local fashion brands and to highlight the cultural and economic value of this process. The analysis adopts a qualitative interpretive approach based on selected examples from Moldovan fashion design and relevant scholarly sources. Special attention is given to the symbolic role of ornament, the preservation of cultural identity, and the economic implications of supporting local production in relation to mass-market alternatives.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

One of the defining elements of the Moldovan national costume is embroidery. It is not merely decorative; its complex ornamental structures encode symbolic meanings that connect clothing with cosmological, social, spiritual ideas.

**Symbols and Meanings.** Geometric ornaments in Moldovan embroidery function as meaningful signs rather than as neutral embellishment. The rhombus, one of the most widespread motifs, is commonly associated with fertility, abundance, and the union of heaven and earth; in archaic interpretations, it may also signify sacred or cultivated land. The eight-pointed star, often understood as a guiding or solar symbol, suggests light, orientation, continuity, and regeneration. The Tree of Life, frequently stylized as a column or a sequence of overlapping triangles, represents continuity between generations and the connection between earth and sky. In recent cultural usage, this motif has also been adopted as a visual marker within the country-brand initiative "Moldova Trevel". The serpentine line or zigzag is associated with water and the flow of time, while the triangle may express balance, duality, fertility, or fire, depending on its orientation. The column or ladder motif, finally, suggests spiritual ascent and the aspiration toward transcendence.

**Contemporary reinterpretation.** Designers such as Alina Bradu (<https://alinabradu.com/>), Casa Cristea (<https://casacristea.md/>) and Valentina Vidrașcu (<https://www.facebook.com/ValentinaVidrascuOficial/>) do not use these motifs exclusively for decorative purposes. In contemporary collections, traditional signs are recontextualized so that garments communicate protection, belonging, and continuity with the past. In this sense, clothing becomes a medium through which cultural memory is visually articulated.

**The economic argument: sustainability and economic patriotism.** Within a globalized economy strongly shaped by fast-fashion models, the choice of local Moldovan brands can be interpreted as a strategic component of sustainable development. First, local production typically relies on shorter supply chains than



international mass-market systems, which may reduce the environmental burden associated with transport, storage, and large-scale industrial distribution. Second, contributing to domestic capital circulation: every monetary unit invested in a locally designed product remains in the national economic circuit. This supports the wages of artisans, finances small and medium-sized businesses and contributes to the state budget through taxes, thus stimulating an organic growth of the creative sector within the domestic economy, supporting artisans, workshops, and small and medium-sized enterprises while contributing to tax revenue and to the development of the creative sector. Third, consumption acquires a cultural dimension: purchasing garments with identity value transforms the consumer into an active participant in the preservation of traditional craft practices and in the economic viability of local workshops.

**Semiotic argument: ornament as text and collective memory.** From a semiotic perspective, the reinterpretation of traditional clothing should be understood as a complex form of non-verbal communication rather than as a purely aesthetic exercise. In archaic culture, individual stitches and motifs performed a narrative function. A rhombus, for example, may be read not only as a geometric form, but also as a sign that conveys fertile land, fertility, and protection. When such signs are incorporated into a contemporary dress, the designer is not merely decorating the garment, but reactivating a symbolic language inherited across generations. Motifs such as the eight-pointed star or the Tree of Life can therefore be interpreted as units of cultural information that have survived historical change. Their continued presence in contemporary fashion helps preserve this symbolic code and allows garments to function as carriers of moral, social, and spiritual meaning.

**Comparative perspective: artisanal design and mass-market production.** Comparative analysis highlights the contrast between industrial efficiency and cultural depth, providing a solid basis for supporting local brands.

First, while mass industry prioritizes immediate profit by exploiting resources and cheap labour, artisanal design in Moldova invests time – the resource that confers prestige and rarity to the product. Handicraft transforms the garment from an ephemeral good into a cultural investment.

Second, artisanal production functions as a form of cultural resistance to the homogenization of products at a global level. By using techniques passed down from generation to generation, local designers offer an ethical alternative that responds to the growing need of consumers for authentic and meaningful products.

Third, artisanal fashion has a social dimension. Unlike industrial production systems in which machinery dominates the process, artisanal work preserves the role of human knowledge, manual skill, and creative judgment. In this way, the fashion sector can support local communities while strengthening the material expression of national identity.

## CONCLUSIONS

The return of traditional ornament to contemporary Moldovan fashion should not be interpreted as nostalgia alone. Rather, it reflects a deliberate effort to connect cultural heritage with present-day design practice and market realities. Each reinterpreted motif inserted into a contemporary garment resists visual standardization and reaffirms the relevance of local symbolic systems.

At the same time, the promotion of local fashion brands demonstrates that



national identity can function as an economic resource. The use of traditional motifs in contemporary design supports local production, encourages sustainable consumption, and increases the visibility of Moldovan cultural specificity within a competitive market environment.

The analysis therefore suggests that choosing Moldovan fashion brands is a multidimensional act: it has cultural value through the preservation of symbolic language, economic value through the support of domestic production, and ecological relevance through the potential reduction of long supply chains. Contemporary fashion design in the Republic of Moldova thus emerges as an important field in which tradition is transformed into a living resource for national branding and sustainable development.

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#### СКРИПЧЕНКО А.

#### ІДЕНТИЧНІСТЬ ТА ЕКОНОМІЧНІ ВИМІРИ СУЧАСНОГО ДИЗАЙНУ МОДНОГО ОДЯГУ В РЕСПУБЛІЦІ МОЛДОВА: ВІД ТРАДИЦІЇ ДО НАЦІОНАЛЬНОГО БРЕНДУ

У роботі проаналізовано феномен відродження традиційної текстильної спадщини в сучасній індустрії моди Республіки Молдова. В умовах посиленої глобалізації місцеві дизайнери, такі як Аліна Браду, Марія Крістія та Валентина Відрашку, переосмислюють архаїчну символіку та естетику «Косанжеани», щоб створювати одяг, який виходить за рамки своєї утилітарної функції, стаючи векторами національної ідентичності. У роботі досліджується подвійна природа цього явища: з одного боку, збереження геометричних мотивів та ремісничих технік як носіїв культурної пам'яті; з іншого боку, економічне значення підтримки місцевого виробництва та споживання. У дослідженні стверджується, що інтеграцію традиційних елементів у сучасний дизайн слід розуміти не лише як маркетингову стратегію, а й як форму культурної та економічної стійкості, що сприяє консолідації національного бренду та валоризації високоцінних місцевих товарів.

**Ключові слова:** дизайн одягу, національна ідентичність, символи, культурна спадщина, місцеві бренди, економічна стійкість.