

# Influences of The Folk Costume of The Republic of Moldova in Contemporary Fashion

Carolina Ermurachi Machado

PhD Candidate in Fashion Design, Academy of Music, Theatre and Fine Arts, Chişinău, Republic of Moldova

<https://orcid.org/0009-0005-2531-2005>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100700193>

Received: 09 July 2026; Accepted: 14 July 2026; Published: 28 July 2026

## ABSTRACT

The folk costume of the Republic of Moldova constitutes an important component of the country's cultural heritage and continues to play a significant role in contemporary fashion design through the creative reinterpretation of its structural, ornamental, and symbolic characteristics. This study examines the influence of Moldovan folk costume on contemporary fashion and explores its contribution to cultural preservation, creative innovation, and the international development of Moldovan fashion. A qualitative research methodology was employed, combining documentary research, comparative analysis, iconographic analysis, and multiple case studies involving Moldovan and international fashion designers. The findings demonstrate that contemporary reinterpretations extend beyond the literal reproduction of traditional garments, transforming traditional construction principles, embroidery techniques, ornamental systems, natural materials, and symbolic meanings into new aesthetic languages adapted to current social, cultural, and technological contexts. The study further identifies different strategies of heritage reinterpretation, ranging from conservative approaches closely connected to traditional forms to experimental intercultural interpretations. While the influence of Moldovan fashion remains strongest within Eastern Europe, the richness of its cultural heritage provides substantial potential for broader international recognition. The study concludes that the creative reinterpretation of folk costume represents an important mechanism for preserving cultural identity while simultaneously fostering innovation, strengthening the international visibility of Moldovan fashion, and contributing to contemporary discussions on fashion, heritage, and cultural sustainability.

**Keywords:** folk costume; Republic of Moldova; contemporary fashion; cultural heritage; fashion design; cultural identity.

## OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research approach aimed at examining the influence of the folk costume of the Republic of Moldova on contemporary fashion design. The research combines documentary analysis, comparative analysis, iconographic analysis, and case studies in order to investigate how elements of traditional clothing are reinterpreted within contemporary fashion.

The documentary research was based on scientific books, doctoral dissertations, peer-reviewed journal articles, ethnographic studies, museum publications, and official documents concerning the Moldovan folk costume, cultural heritage, and contemporary fashion design. Romanian folk costume was also included given the shared cultural heritage between Romania and the Republic of Moldova. These sources provided the theoretical framework for understanding the historical evolution, structural characteristics, symbolic meanings, and cultural significance of the folk costume.

A comparative analysis was employed to identify similarities and differences between traditional garments and contemporary fashion collections. The comparison focused on the reinterpretation of materials, garment construction, embroidery techniques, ornamental motifs, colour palettes, symbolic meanings, and aesthetic composition. This analytical procedure made it possible to examine both the preservation of traditional elements and their transformation into contemporary fashion language.

The study also incorporates iconographic analysis based on photographs of traditional costumes and contemporary fashion collections. Visual analysis was conducted to identify recurring compositional principles, embroidery placement, decorative structures, chromatic organization, garment silhouettes, and the adaptation of traditional visual codes to contemporary fashion design.

The empirical component of the research consists of multiple case studies involving Moldovan and international fashion designers whose collections demonstrate explicit references to the folk costume. The selected designers were chosen according to the documented incorporation of elements derived from the folk costume of the Republic of Moldova or related Eastern European traditions, namely from Romania, based on their relevance within contemporary fashion design, the diversity of creative approaches to heritage reinterpretation and the availability of reliable documentary and visual sources.

The Moldovan case studies include designers such as Valentina Vidrașcu, Alina Bradu, Angela Guțu, Rodica Nicov, and Karolina Nikolai. These examples illustrate different strategies for integrating traditional elements into contemporary fashion, ranging from faithful reinterpretation of embroidery and traditional garments to experimental approaches based on intercultural dialogue and innovative design.

To contextualize the Moldovan experience within the international fashion system, comparative examples from internationally recognized fashion houses – including Yves Saint Laurent, Jean Paul Gaultier, Oscar de la Renta, Dior, and Prada – were also analysed. These examples demonstrate the growing international interest in Eastern European cultural heritage as a source of creative inspiration.

The analytical process consisted of identifying traditional design elements, examining their transformation within contemporary collections, and evaluating the relationship between cultural preservation and creative innovation. Rather than considering folk costume as a static ethnographic object, this study approaches it as a dynamic source of cultural knowledge capable of generating new aesthetic expressions while maintaining its identity value.

## INTRODUCTION

In contemporary fashion in the Republic of Moldova, there is a growing tendency to valorise cultural heritage through the reinterpretation of traditional elements of folk costume, particularly natural materials, traditional sewing techniques, embroidery, and ornamental motifs. This tendency reflects a broader international movement in which fashion increasingly operates as a vehicle for cultural identity and cultural expression [10, p. 31-32]. As M. Nair observes: "Fashion plays a significant role in shaping and expressing cultural identity, serving as a visual manifestation of cultural values, traditions, and beliefs" [10, p. 32].

The incorporation of traditional elements into contemporary fashion should be examined from a historical and sociocultural perspective, as it reveals the dynamic interaction between tradition and innovation. Over recent decades, the integration of traditional cultural heritage into fashion collections – particularly within haute couture and prêt-à-porter – has evolved significantly, reflecting the creative reinterpretations developed by contemporary designers.

Furthermore, ethnographic research highlights the historical and cultural affinities between the traditions of the Republic of Moldova and Romania, demonstrating the existence of a shared cultural heritage that continues to inspire contemporary fashion design.

### Historical and Cultural Influences on Moldovan Folk Costume

The Moldovan folk costume, with all its constituent elements, embodies a rich and diverse artistic heritage resulting from a long process of historical evolution shaped by social, cultural, and economic factors, as well as by successive external influences [11, p. 67]. Among these, Byzantine, Ottoman, and Slavic influences are particularly evident in the ornamentation and visual composition of traditional attire, without compromising its cultural coherence and distinctive identity. Byzantine heritage is reflected in refined ornamental patterns and Christian symbolism, whereas Ottoman influence is expressed with luxurious textiles and vibrant colour palettes. Slavic contributions, in turn, are manifested in the complexity of ornamental compositions and the prevalence of geometric and floral motifs. In this regard, V. Buzilă observes that: "When referring to folk

costume, also known as traditional costume, we mean a clothing ensemble that serves practical, social, and symbolic purposes, through which a community identifies itself in interpersonal, interethnic, and national communication” [2, p. 11].

Similarly, costume is considered one of the principal visual forms through which ethnicity becomes culturally recognizable [5, pp. 2–3]. The Moldovan folk costume performs multiple functions that extend beyond clothing itself, including practical, social, aesthetic, symbolic, and identity-related roles, thereby contributing to the preservation and transmission of cultural heritage across generations [4, pp. 62–63].

The chromatic richness and ornamental diversity of the folk costume reflect complex symbolic systems in which colours communicate cultural identity while also conveying ritual and spiritual meanings [6, pp. 166–170]. Despite transformations in materials and production technologies, the folk costume has maintained its fundamental structural and ornamental features, reflecting a remarkable historical continuity [2, pp. 11–13].

Traditional garments were produced primarily from natural fibres, including linen, hemp, wool, and borangic (natural silk), while cotton was incorporated at a later stage. Linen and cotton were generally used for lightweight garments, whereas wool was preferred for clothing intended for colder seasons. Borangic silk was reserved mainly for festive garments, veils, and ceremonial accessories because of its fineness and prestige [2, pp. 20–29, 43–44, 112]. The traditional chromatic palette was dominated by white, red, black, and blue, while colours such as green, yellow, and purple became more common following the introduction of industrial dyes [3, pp. 10–11].

Depending on the cultural context, each colour carries a range of symbolic meanings (**Table 1**).

**Table 1:** Symbolic Meanings of Colours Used in Folk Costume.

| Colour | Symbolic Meanings                                                   | Cultural and Functional Context                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|--------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| White  | Purity, light, truth, origin, sacredness.                           | The fundamental colour of the textile base. Associated with life-cycle rituals (birth, marriage, etc.) and the beginning of the human life cycle. Functions as a neutral element within the chromatic composition of the garment. |
| Black  | Earth, stability, time, maturity, dignity.                          | Commonly featured in embroidery and traditional garments. Provides visual structure and compositional balance to the decorative design.                                                                                           |
| Red    | Life, blood, fertility, vitality, energy.                           | Typically applied to vital areas of the garment (chest, sleeves, collar, etc.). Performs an apotropaic function, protecting the wearer against evil and misfortune.                                                               |
| Blue   | Sky, spirituality, serenity, harmony, protection.                   | Associated with the cosmic dimension. Frequently used in refined garments and to create chromatic contrast within the composition.                                                                                                |
| Green  | Nature, freshness, renewal, fertility, abundance, growth, maturity. | Closely associated with vegetal motifs (leaves, shoots) and the cyclical rhythms of nature.                                                                                                                                       |
| Brown  | Earth, roots, simplicity, modesty.                                  | Associated with natural materials (wool, untreated fibres, etc.) and traditional craftsmanship. Symbolizes a close connection with rural life.                                                                                    |
| Yellow | Sun, light, energy, joy, abundance.                                 | Widely employed in embroidery and decorative details. Represents vitality and life-giving energy.                                                                                                                                 |
| Gold   | Divinity, sacredness, prestige, spiritual light.                    | Primarily used in festive contexts and ceremonial costumes. Symbolizes luxury, distinction, and spiritual nobility.                                                                                                               |

Source: Author's compilation based on V. Buzilă (2011) [2], I. Raileanu (2011) [11], E. Stănescu-Bătrînescu (1978) [12], Ö. Kaya and S. Romanescu (2021) [6], D. Y. Ermilova (2020) [5], and T. Bîzgu (2025) [1].

The Moldovan folk costume displays considerable typological diversity, shaped by factors such as gender, age, social status, seasonal use, and regional traditions. Despite these variations, it retains a coherent structural and visual identity, while its garment construction, ornamentation, symbolic motifs, accessories, and modes of wearing them collectively communicate cultural values and a sense of community affiliation. Within this framework, it is essential to examine the principal components of both women's and men's traditional attire, and associated accessories.

Women's folk costume is distinguished by its greater decorative complexity. Its principal elements include the embroidered shirt (ie/cămașă), wrap-around apron (catrință), woven belt (bete or brâu), leather or textile vest (pieptar/laibăr), and ceremonial head covering (maramă or broboadă) [2; 3, pp. 19–21].

Men's folk costume is generally simpler and more uniform in structure. Its principal elements include a hat or fur cap (pălărie/căciulă), shirt (cămașă), leather or textile vest (pieptar, bundiță or laibăr), leather girdle (chimir), and traditional trousers (ițari) [2; 3, pp. 22–24].

Accessories – including belts, head coverings, footwear, jewellery, and outer garments – form an integral part of the folk costume, fulfilling practical, decorative, social, and symbolic functions while contributing to the overall unity of the ensemble [2, pp. 11–18, 70–73].

These components create a balanced functional and aesthetic system that integrates practical utility with artistic refinement while preserving the structural coherence of folk costumes.

Representative examples of this expressive diversity are illustrated in **Figures 1, 2, and 3**.

**Figure 1.** Folk women's costume from the Republic of Moldova: embroidered blouse, woven belt, and striped skirt.



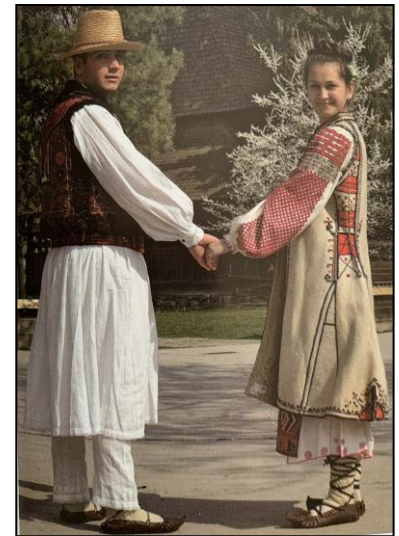
**Source:** BUZILĂ, Varzara, *Retorica vestimentară: cămașa cu altiță*. Chișinău, 2022

**Figure 2.** Ornamental details of the folk costume from the *Romanați* region (Romania).



**Source:** FORMAGIU, Hedvig Maria. *Portul popular din România*. București, Editura Corint, 2021, p. 227.

**Figure 3.** Folk costume from the *Romanați* region (Romania): women's and men's folk attire.



Artisanal embroidery applied to the decoration of folk costumes constitutes a fundamental element of cultural heritage, simultaneously fulfilling decorative and identity-forming functions. Executed using a variety of techniques – including cross-stitch, metallic threads, and borangic (natural silk) embroidery – it enhances the chromatic intensity of garments while providing tactile richness, visual depth, and ornamental density.

The decorative motifs of Moldovan embroidery may be classified into two principal categories: geometric and representational. Geometric motifs – including the circle, triangle, square, and rhombus – primarily convey abstract symbolic meanings associated with order, balance, protection, and cosmic harmony. By contrast, representational motifs depict elements of nature and everyday life, encompassing phytomorphic forms

(flowers, trees, and leaves), zoomorphic forms (animals and birds), and anthropomorphic representations (stylized human figures) [12, pp. 5–12].

The symbolic vocabulary of the folk costume continues to provide contemporary designers with a rich repertoire of visual references, illustrating the continuity of traditional visual language within modern fashion design [7, pp. 142–146].

## TRENDS IN CONTEMPORARY MOLDOVAN FASHION

Contemporary fashion increasingly draws on folk costume as a source of creative inspiration, with traditional ethnic elements being widely reinterpreted in both Moldovan and international fashion collections [8, pp. 191–193; 13, pp. 20–21; 1, pp. 154–156].

For Moldovan designers, the application of folk costume elements – including natural textiles, traditional sewing and embroidery techniques, decorative motifs, and symbolic patterns – plays a central role in expressing the country's cultural and historical identity, extending well beyond their purely utilitarian function. Their reinterpretation constitutes an important source of creative innovation in contemporary fashion design, promoting authenticity, cultural continuity, and innovative design [13, pp. 20–24; 1, pp. 154–158].

Beginning in the second half of the twentieth century, in parallel with the urbanization of Moldovan society, traditional dress gradually shifted from everyday rural use to predominantly urban and ceremonial contexts. Consequently, its symbolic and aesthetic functions became increasingly prominent alongside its practical role, mirroring the broader socio-cultural transformations that reshaped Moldovan society during this period, despite continuing ideological restrictions [1, pp. 60–68].

Following the proclamation of the independence of the Republic of Moldova in 1991 and the collapse of the Soviet regime, the country experienced significant socio-cultural and economic openness, fostering the development of a contemporary fashion industry. Increased exposure to Western fashion trends was accompanied by a renewed appreciation of the national cultural heritage, encouraging designers to reinterpret elements of the folk costume within contemporary fashion and establishing a dialogue between local identity and global design practices [1, pp. 112–119].

Today, the Moldovan fashion industry continues to experience significant growth and increasing international visibility. This development is reflected in the expansion of fashion events, professional platforms, and cultural initiatives that promote Moldovan designers while strengthening the dialogue between national heritage and contemporary fashion [1, pp. 140–146].

Among the most prominent are Moldova Fashion Days (MFD), a biennial event dedicated to presenting seasonal collections; Moldovan Brands Runway (MBR), another biennial platform focused on innovative contemporary fashion with international outreach; and Moldova Fashion Expo (MFE), the country's principal commercial and industrial exhibition for the textile and apparel sector, encompassing multiple segments of the fashion production chain.

These initiatives are complemented by culturally oriented events such as IA Mania, dedicated to promoting traditional crafts and the embroidered ia blouse; ArtPodium, a launch platform for emerging designers held within MFE; Fashion Soirée, an event associated with MFD that focuses on resort and cruise collections; the National Folk Costume Day, celebrated annually on the last Sunday of June to promote national cultural heritage through the folk costume; and Innovation Fashion Days, an event linked to MBR that combines fashion, innovation, and artistic performance.

At the regional level, Moldovan fashion has progressively integrated into broader Eastern European fashion networks through participation in events such as Ukrainian Fashion Week, which promotes regional collaboration, including activities held in Chişinău, and Romanian Fashion Week (Iaşi, Romania), a platform for Moldovan designers seeking to expand their international visibility.

Moldovan designers including Valentina Vidrașcu (b. 1955), Alina Bradu (n.d.), Angela Guțu (n.d.), Rodica Nicov (n.d.), and Karolina Nikolai (b. 1979) have made significant contributions to the preservation and promotion of Moldovan folk costume through contemporary fashion collections that respond to current demands for aesthetic innovation, particularly within the fields of haute couture and prêt-à-porter.

Valentina Vidrașcu has developed collections distinguished by the integration of ethno-stylistic elements rooted in Moldovan culture, drawing inspiration from sources ranging from Dacian imagery to contemporary folk traditions. Her creative practice consistently focused on reinterpreting folk costumes through stylistic innovation and the use of natural materials (**Figure 4**).

Alina Bradu, founder of the eponymous brand, is recognized for her in-depth research into traditional Moldovan ornamental motifs, which she reinterprets through embroidered applications on garments and footwear. Her collections are characterized by refined aesthetics that combine ethnic inspiration with delicate contemporary detailing (**Figure 5**).

Angela Guțu, founder of the FLORII brand – whose visual identity is represented by the Tree of Life – specializes in the creation of embroidered ia blouses inspired by Moldovan and Romanian traditions. Her work combines hand embroidery techniques with contemporary textile technologies, producing unique garments of both symbolic and aesthetic significance (**Figure 6**).

**Figure 4.** V. Vidrașcu, *White Corset over a Traditional Shirt*, 2025.



Source:

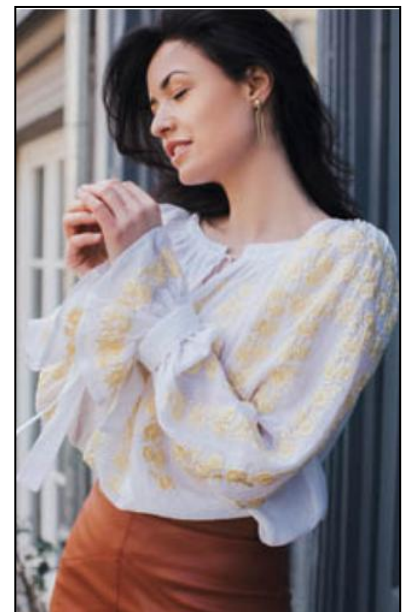
<https://dininima.md/brands/valentina-vidrascu>

**Figure 5.** Alina Bradu, *White Dress*, 2025.



Source: Author's Personal Photograph Collection – Karolina Nikolai.

**Figure 6.** Angela Gutu, *Traditional Shirt, FLORII*, 2021.



Source: <https://vipmagazin.md/florii-top-branduri-2021/>

Rodica Nicov has become one of the leading contemporary fashion designers in the Republic of Moldova through her creative reinterpretation of the national folk costume. Her collections combine traditional embroidery, symbolic ornamental motifs, handcrafted accessories, and natural materials with contemporary silhouettes, creating garments that preserve cultural authenticity while meeting current aesthetic and functional requirements. By integrating elements of the Moldovan folk costume into elegant contemporary fashion designs, her work demonstrates how cultural heritage can serve as a dynamic source of innovation and international cultural promotion (**Figure 7**).

Karolina Nikolai is a fashion designer whose work puts particular emphasis on clothing heritage, promoting cultural identity through embroidery, symbolic motifs, and ethnic elements. In her kimono-inspired collections, she establishes an intercultural dialogue by integrating traditional Moldovan embroidery into Japanese aesthetics (**Figure 8**). In her creations inspired by the traditional catrință, she reinterprets the structural

characteristics of this folk garment while employing artistic embroidery as the principal medium of contemporary expression, thereby demonstrating the innovative potential of indigenous clothing heritage in contemporary fashion design (**Figure 9**).

**Figure 7.** Rodica Nicov, contemporary reinterpretation of the traditional embroidered blouse (*ia*) into a contemporary fashion ensemble characterized by chromatic contrast and a modern silhouette, 2026.



Source:

<https://rodicanicov.com/galerie/>

**Figure 8.** Karolina Nikolai, ethno-inspired kimono integrating traditional Moldovan and Romanian ornamental motifs, handcrafted embroidery, and natural silk into a contemporary fashion composition, 2025.



Source: Author's Personal Photograph Collection – Karolina Nikolai.

**Figure 9.** Karolina Nikolai, contemporary reinterpretation of the traditional *catrință* as a central design element in a contemporary fashion composition inspired by the traditional folk costume, 2026.



Source: Author's Personal Photograph Collection – Karolina Nikolai.

From a stylistic perspective, the integration of folk costume elements into contemporary Moldovan fashion also develops along a continuum between minimalism and maximalism. Minimalist approaches are characterized by simplicity, a restrained ornamental vocabulary, and the creation of functional, versatile garments intended for everyday wear. In contrast, maximalist approaches emphasize ornamental richness through elaborate embroidery, vibrant colour palettes, and the use of luxurious materials, with the objective of producing garments of strong visual and symbolic impact. Ceremonial, evening, and bridal gowns represent significant examples of this aesthetic direction.

### Folk Costume as a Source of Inspiration in Global Fashion

The creative potential of the folk costume continues to inspire contemporary fashion design, with traditional motifs and techniques being reinterpreted in collections by both Eastern European and international designers [9, pp. 63–65].

From a comparative perspective, the traditional dress of Eastern Europe is distinguished by the diversity of its decorative compositions, the richness of its ornamental vocabulary, and the embroidery techniques incorporated into garment construction, reflecting the region's diverse historical and cultural contexts.

Compared with the Moldovan tradition, Romanian traditional costume is characterized in certain regions by more elaborate garment construction and denser ornamentation. Ukrainian dress is distinguished by extensive embroidery on the sleeves and chest, Polish costume by the predominance of lace, heavier textiles, and robust decorative compositions, while Russian traditional attire is notable for its highly elaborate ornamentation shaped by both Byzantine and Asian influences.

Drawing upon the rich cultural diversity of Eastern Europe, several internationally renowned fashion houses – including Jean Paul Gaultier, Oscar de la Renta, Yves Saint Laurent, Dior, Prada, Valentino, Gucci, Louis Vuitton and others – have incorporated elements inspired by the traditional cultures of the region, including

those of Romania, into their collections. Their work demonstrates the enduring creative relevance of Eastern European clothing heritage and its capacity to generate new aesthetic languages within contemporary fashion.

Jean Paul Gaultier (b. 1952) reinterpreted characteristic elements of the Romanian ia by incorporating traditional embroidery, loose silhouettes, gathered sleeves, and ornamental compositions into prêt-à-porter collections, translating the visual language of folk costume into a contemporary fashion context while preserving its distinctive ethnic identity (**Figure 10**).

Oscar de la Renta (1932–2014), particularly in his Autumn–Winter 2008 collection, drew inspiration from the refined aesthetics of the Romanian ia, integrating embroidered blouses, richly decorated accessories, and traditional ornamental motifs into elegant contemporary garments. Rather than reproducing the traditional costume, his designs transformed its decorative vocabulary into sophisticated luxury fashion, highlighting the artistic value of Romanian textile heritage (**Figure 11**).

Yves Saint Laurent (1936–2008) presented an Haute Couture collection called La Blouse Roumaine (Autumn–Winter 1981) which is widely regarded as one of the most significant tributes to Romanian cultural heritage in international fashion. Inspired by the traditional Romanian ia, the collection preserved the characteristic embroidered sleeves, loose construction, and balanced ornamental compositions while reinterpreting them through the refined aesthetic language of haute couture. The collection established a dialogue between traditional craftsmanship and high fashion, contributing significantly to the international recognition of Romanian folk costume as a source of artistic inspiration (**Figure 12**).

Collectively, these collections demonstrate how Romanian folk costume has become an internationally recognized source of inspiration for contemporary fashion design. Owing to the close historical and cultural affinities between Romania and the Republic of Moldova, this growing international recognition also creates opportunities to enhance the visibility of Moldovan clothing heritage within the global fashion system. More broadly, the increasing interest of internationally renowned fashion houses in Eastern European traditions illustrates the creative potential of the region's cultural heritage, inspiring the reinterpretation of traditional references in fashion collections, garments, accessories, and luxury products while strengthening cultural identity and enriching the diversity of contemporary fashion.

**Figure 10.** Jean Paul Gaultier, *Prêt-à-porter*, Spring-Summer, 2006.



Source:

<https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/spring-2006-ready-to-wear/jean-paul-gaultier>

**Figure 11.** Oscar de la Renta, *Prêt-à-porter*, Autumn-Winter, 2008.



Source:

<https://anothercoolro.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/oscar-true.jpg>

**Figure 12.** Yves Saint Laurent, *Haute Couture*, Autumn-Winter, 1981.



Source:

<https://anothercoolro.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/y-s-laurent.jpg>

In 2023, the House of Dior invited the Romanian artist Mircea Cantor (b. 1977) to reinterpret the iconic Lady Dior handbag as an exclusive work of art. Mircea Cantor created a unique version entitled Garden of Paradise,

inspired by traditional ornamental motifs from western Romania (**Figure 13**). A further example is illustrated by Prada, which drew inspiration from the traditional opinci – a handcrafted leather shoe recognized as an important symbol of Romanian cultural identity. Its contemporary reinterpretation demonstrates how traditional heritage continues to inspire innovative fashion design while increasing the international visibility of regional clothing traditions (**Figure 14**).

**Figure 13.** The Lady Dior Handbag designed by Mircea Cantor, 2023.



Source: <https://www.utv.ro/stiri/viral/un-roman-a-creat-pentru-dior-o-geanta-din-colectia-lady-dior-cine-este-mircea-cantor-16109>

**Figure 14.** Prada, *Opinci*-inspired shoes featuring Romanian ethnic elements, 2025.



Source: <https://www.aquarelle.md/casa-de-moda-prada-a-lansat-pantofi-care-seamana-izbitor-cu-opincile-traditionale-val-de-controverse-pe-online-93881>

These international examples demonstrate that traditional clothing heritage is increasingly recognized not merely as an ethnographic legacy but as a valuable source of innovation capable of generating new aesthetic languages across diverse cultural contexts. Their growing interest in Eastern European traditions confirms that folk costume possesses universal creative potential extending beyond its original geographical boundaries. For the Republic of Moldova, this international recognition highlights the opportunity to strengthen the global visibility of its own clothing heritage by promoting its distinctive ornamental vocabulary, artisanal techniques, and cultural identity through contemporary fashion design.

## CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE GLOBALIZATION OF MOLDOVAN FASHION

The integration of modern technologies, particularly computer-assisted digital embroidery, has enabled new approaches to the preservation and aesthetic reinterpretation of traditional folk costume elements, facilitating both the documentation of traditional techniques and their creative application in contemporary fashion design [14, pp. 227–234]. In this context, technological innovation and collaboration between artisans, brands, and designers have become increasingly important in promoting Moldovan fashion nationally and internationally.

An illustrative example is Karolina Nikolai, whose handcrafted earrings, designed according to her own original concepts and inspired by the ethnic motifs and ornamental elements of the traditional folk costume, have become distinctive accessories in both her own collections and collaborative projects with other designers (**Figure 15**).

**Figure 15.** Karolina Nikolai, Application of handcrafted earrings as fashion accessories. Collaboration with the *Hyperborean Folklore Project*, Iraidă Florea and Master Artisan Vlad Dumitru, 2026.



*Source:* Author's Personal Photograph Collection – Karolina Nikolai.

A significant milestone occurred in 2022, when UNESCO inscribed the Art of the Blouse with Embroidery on the Shoulder (Alțiță) – element of cultural identity in Romania and the Republic of Moldova – on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. This inscription recognizes the traditional knowledge and practices associated with making and wearing the *ia cu alțiță*, a distinctive form of the Romanian and Moldovan traditional blouse that represents a shared symbol of the cultural heritage of both countries.

At the same time, it is important to emphasize the need to strengthen education and professional training in fashion design, while fostering closer cooperation among schools, universities, museums, public institutions, and the private sector. Equally essential is continued investment in the research and documentation of ancestral practices associated with the Moldovan folk costume, as the accumulated knowledge embodied in these traditions faces an increasing risk of disappearance.

In this context, particular attention should be given to the *șezătoare* – a traditional form of community gathering dedicated to textile production, social interaction, and the transmission of intangible cultural heritage – which has been reinterpreted today as a valuable instrument for education, social cohesion, and the promotion of cultural identity. Historically, these communal gatherings played a fundamental role in educating younger generations in local cultural values, transmitting embroidery, weaving, and sewing techniques, and ensuring the continuity of traditional knowledge and craftsmanship.

At the global level, contemporary fashion increasingly incorporates elements of folk costume through creative reinterpretations that promote cultural diversity and facilitate the circulation of ethnic references within the international fashion system [8, pp. 191–193]. For the Republic of Moldova, preserving the authenticity of the folk costume alongside its creative reinterpretation offers opportunities to enhance its cultural visibility and recognition within contemporary international fashion. The international projection of Moldovan culture and its folk costume therefore depend on maintaining this authenticity, while creative reinterpretation contributes to the visibility and international recognition necessary for its appreciation and sustainable valorisation.

Additional factors that are essential for supporting this process of internationalization include the development of strong, coherent, and clearly defined fashion brands; the expansion and promotion of Moldovan fashion events abroad, particularly within the European context; the strategic use of mass media and social media to enhance international visibility; the creation and consolidation of digital platforms dedicated to Moldovan culture, folk costume, and its constituent elements; and the effective use of European funding programs that support international partnerships, particularly within the broader framework of the Republic of Moldova's European integration process.

Collectively, these measures would strengthen the international competitiveness of Moldovan fashion while ensuring the long-term preservation and sustainable transmission of its clothing heritage.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the Moldovan folk costume continues to function not merely as an ethnographic artifact but as a dynamic source of creative knowledge for contemporary fashion design. Rather than reproducing traditional garments literally, contemporary designers reinterpret their structural principles, ornamental vocabulary, symbolic meanings, and artisanal techniques in ways that respond to current aesthetic, technological, and social contexts.

One of the most significant observations emerging from this research is the coexistence of different strategies for heritage reinterpretation within contemporary fashion. Some designers remain closely connected to traditional forms by preserving embroidery techniques, materials, silhouettes, and symbolic motifs with relatively limited modifications. Others adopt more experimental approaches, combining traditional references with contemporary tailoring, innovative materials, intercultural influences, or digital technologies. These diverse creative directions demonstrate that preserving cultural identity does not necessarily require the literal reproduction of historical garments but may instead be achieved through the reinterpretation of their fundamental design principles.

The comparative analysis also reveals that Moldovan fashion follows a broader international tendency in which traditional cultural heritage increasingly serves as a source of innovation. International fashion houses such as Yves Saint Laurent, Jean Paul Gaultier, Dior, Prada, and Oscar de la Renta illustrate how traditional cultural references can acquire new meanings within global fashion systems. Nevertheless, important differences remain. While international brands frequently employ ethnic references primarily as aesthetic resources, Moldovan designers generally approach folk costume as an expression of cultural continuity and national identity. Consequently, the relationship between fashion and heritage in Moldova extends beyond stylistic inspiration and assumes an important role in preserving cultural memory.

The study further indicates that contemporary reinterpretation occurs along a continuum between preservation and innovation. Minimalist collections frequently simplify traditional ornamentation while maintaining symbolic references through proportions, colour palettes, or garment construction. Conversely, maximalist approaches emphasize elaborate embroidery, rich decorative compositions, luxurious materials, and expressive visual narratives. Both directions demonstrate that innovation in fashion does not imply abandoning tradition but rather transforming traditional knowledge into new contemporary aesthetic languages.

Another important finding concerns the increasing role of technology in heritage preservation. Digital embroidery, computer-assisted design, and advanced textile production techniques provide new possibilities for documenting, preserving, and reinterpreting traditional decorative systems. At the same time, these technological innovations do not replace artisanal knowledge but instead complement traditional craftsmanship, enabling new forms of collaboration between designers, artisans, museums, and cultural institutions.

Finally, this study highlights the strategic importance of cultural heritage for the international positioning of Moldovan fashion. In an increasingly globalized fashion industry characterized by strong aesthetic homogenization, the preservation and creative reinterpretation of national cultural identity constitute significant competitive advantages. The originality of Moldovan fashion therefore derives not only from technical innovation but also from its capacity to transform cultural heritage into contemporary creative value capable of communicating both locally and internationally.

Overall, the findings confirm that the creative reinterpretation of Moldovan folk costume should be understood not only as an artistic practice but also as a sustainable strategy for preserving cultural identity while fostering innovation within contemporary fashion.

## CONCLUSION

The present study demonstrates that the folk costume of the Republic of Moldova remains one of the most valuable sources of inspiration for contemporary fashion design. Its aesthetic, structural, symbolic, and technological characteristics provide designers with a rich repertoire of creative resources that support both cultural preservation and innovation.

The analysis confirms that contemporary reinterpretations extend far beyond the simple reproduction of traditional garments. Instead, designers selectively transform constructive principles, embroidery techniques, ornamental compositions, chromatic systems, natural materials, and symbolic meanings into contemporary fashion languages adapted to present-day social, cultural, and market realities. These creative processes illustrate that tradition and innovation should not be understood as opposing concepts but rather as complementary dimensions within contemporary fashion design.

The comparative perspective adopted in this study further demonstrates that Moldovan designers share broader international tendencies in the creative use of cultural heritage while simultaneously maintaining distinctive national characteristics rooted in local traditions. This balance between global fashion influences and regional cultural identity contributes to strengthening the international visibility of Moldovan fashion and reinforces its potential as a cultural ambassador within the global fashion industry.

In terms of its development, Moldovan folk traditions, including folk costume and its constituent elements, continue to exert a significant influence on contemporary fashion design within the Republic of Moldova. This is evidenced by the continuous growth in the number of fashion events, runway shows, cultural initiatives, and professional platforms dedicated to promoting Moldovan fashion and cultural heritage. Although the international impact of Moldovan fashion remains relatively limited, its influence is increasingly visible within neighbouring Eastern European countries, particularly Romania and Ukraine, where important historical and cultural affinities exist. Nevertheless, the richness of Moldova's cultural heritage and traditional costume provides substantial potential for further international development. As demonstrated by the growing global recognition of Romanian fashion inspired by traditional heritage, the creative reinterpretation of Moldovan folk costume offers promising opportunities to strengthen the international visibility, competitiveness, and cultural identity of Moldovan fashion within the contemporary global fashion system.

From a practical perspective, the findings underline the importance of strengthening collaboration between designers, artisans, museums, educational institutions, and cultural organizations in order to preserve traditional knowledge while encouraging contemporary creative experimentation. Continued investment in research, documentation, digital technologies, and international cultural promotion will play an essential role in ensuring the sustainable development and global recognition of Moldovan fashion.

This research also presents certain limitations. The study is based primarily on qualitative analysis, documentary sources, and selected case studies. Future research could expand this approach through interviews with designers, artisans, museum specialists, and consumers, as well as comparative investigations involving additional Eastern European countries and quantitative analyses of public perception regarding the reinterpretation of cultural heritage in contemporary fashion.

Ultimately, the study demonstrates that the folk costume of the Republic of Moldova should be understood not only as an important element of national cultural heritage but also as a dynamic system of knowledge capable of generating innovation, strengthening cultural identity, and contributing to the sustainable international development of contemporary fashion.

## REFERENCES

1. **BÎZGU, T.** Evoluția artei vestimentare în Republica Moldova. Ph.D. Thesis. Universitatea Liberă Internațională din Moldova, Chișinău, Republic of Moldova, 2025.
2. **BUZILĂ, V.** Costumul popular din Republica Moldova. Ghid practic. Chișinău: Editura Reclama, 2011. ISBN 978-9975-10-560-6.

3. **DELIU, A. M.** Dincolo de Poveste: The Identity of the Romanian and Moldovan Folk Costume. Bachelor's Thesis. National College of Art and Design, Dublin. Online. 2023. Available at: [https://thesis.ncad.ie/T6386\\_Dincolo%20de%20Poveste\\_The%20Identity%20of%20the%20Romanian%20and%20Moldovan%20Folk%20Costume\\_Deliu\\_Anna%20AD228%2022-23.pdf](https://thesis.ncad.ie/T6386_Dincolo%20de%20Poveste_The%20Identity%20of%20the%20Romanian%20and%20Moldovan%20Folk%20Costume_Deliu_Anna%20AD228%2022-23.pdf) [Accessed June 25, 2026].
4. **ANDRIEȘ, D.** Valoarea și funcțiile costumului popular moldovenesc. In: Conferința Tehnico-Științifică a Colaboratorilor, Doctoranzilor și Studenților. Chișinău: Universitatea Tehnică a Moldovei. Online. 2013, pp. 62–63. Available at: [https://ibn.idsi.md/en/vizualizare\\_articol/184145](https://ibn.idsi.md/en/vizualizare_articol/184145) [Accessed July 12, 2026].
5. **ERMILOVA, D. Y.** Costume as a Form of Visualization of Ethnicity: From Tradition to Modernity. Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities. Online. 2020, 12(6), pp. 1–14. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349541071\\_Costume\\_as\\_a\\_Form\\_of\\_Visualization\\_of\\_Ethnicity\\_From\\_Tradition\\_to\\_Modernity](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349541071_Costume_as_a_Form_of_Visualization_of_Ethnicity_From_Tradition_to_Modernity) [Accessed July 6, 2026].
6. **KAYA, Ö.; ROMANESCU, S.** An Analogical Approach to Colors and Symbolism in Romanian and Turkish Folk Art. Art-Sanat. Online. 2021, 15, pp. 161–181. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26650/artsanat.2021.15.0007>. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/352530772\\_An\\_Analogical\\_Approach\\_to\\_Colors\\_and\\_Symbolism\\_in\\_Romanian\\_and\\_Turkish\\_Folk\\_Art](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/352530772_An_Analogical_Approach_to_Colors_and_Symbolism_in_Romanian_and_Turkish_Folk_Art) [Accessed July 16, 2026].
7. **KAYA, Ö.; CUCIUC ROMANESCU, L. S.** Romanian Folk Symbols in Contemporary Fashion Design. New Design Ideas. Online. 2021, 5(2), pp. 135–149. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/358190557\\_ROMANIAN\\_FOLK\\_SYMBOLS\\_IN\\_CONTEMPORARY\\_FASHION\\_DESIGN](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/358190557_ROMANIAN_FOLK_SYMBOLS_IN_CONTEMPORARY_FASHION_DESIGN) [Accessed July 16, 2026].
8. **KAYA, Ö.; CUCIUC ROMANESCU, L. S.** Representation of Ethnic Diversity in the Collections of Fashion Brands (2005–2020). Învățământ, Cercetare, Creație. Online. 2022, 8(1), pp. 191–199. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/368779694\\_Representation\\_of\\_Ethnic\\_Diversity\\_in\\_the\\_Collections\\_of\\_Fashion\\_Brands\\_-2005-2020](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/368779694_Representation_of_Ethnic_Diversity_in_the_Collections_of_Fashion_Brands_-2005-2020) [Accessed July 16, 2026].
9. **MOCENCO, A.; OLARU, S.; POPESCU, G.; GHITULEASA, C.** Romanian Folklore Motifs in Fashion Design. Annals of the University of Oradea. Fascicle of Textiles, Leatherwork. Online. 2013, 14(1), pp. 63–68. Available at: <https://textile.webhost.uoradea.ro/Annals/Vol%20XVno%20I/Art.%20nr.%2012%2C%20pag%2063-68.pdf> [Accessed June 30, 2026].
10. **NAIR, M.** Fashion as Cultural Expression: Exploring the Intersection of Identity, Society, and Style. Shodh Sagar Journal of Language, Art, Culture and Film. Online. 2024, 1(1), pp. 31–35. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36676/jlacf.v1.i1.6>. Available at: <https://jlacf.shodhsagar.org/index.php/j/article/view/6/6> [Accessed June 22, 2026].
11. **RAILEANU, I.** Etno Moldova. Chișinău: Editura Cartea, 2011. ISBN 978-9975-977-22-7.
12. **STĂNESCU-BĂTRÎNESCU, E.** Broderia românească aplicată. București: Editura Tehnică, 1978.
13. **SYMAK, A.; BABINA, Y.** Fashion Trends in Moldova – Through the Prism of the Creativity of Young Designers. Art and Design. Online. 2018, 3, pp. 20–29. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30857/2617-0272.2018.3.2>. Available at: <https://artdesign.knutd.edu.ua/index.php/artdesign/article/view/99> [Accessed July 10, 2026].
14. **ZAHARIEVA-STOYANOVA, E.; BOZOV, S.** Digital Modeling and Visualization of Embroidery Techniques. In: Digital Presentation and Preservation of Cultural and Scientific Heritage. Vol. 15. Sofia: Institute of Mathematics and Informatics – Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, 2025, pp. 227–236. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/395332909\\_Digital\\_Modeling\\_and\\_Visualization\\_of\\_Embroidery\\_Techniques](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/395332909_Digital_Modeling_and_Visualization_of_Embroidery_Techniques) [Accessed July 16, 2026].