

THE BIOGRAPHICAL AND PRACTICAL DIMENSION OF FOLK ARTISANS' ACTIVITY IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA AS HERITAGE VECTORS IN THE CONSERVATION OF THE "IA"

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Abstract

This research analyzes the fundamental role that folk artisans from the Republic of Moldova play in the safeguarding and revitalization process of the traditional blouse. Beyond the intrinsic value of the *ia* as a cultural artifact, the study directs its attention toward the human and performative dimension of this craft, investigating how individual destinies and working techniques intertwine to ensure the transmission of intangible heritage. The methodology used combines ethnographic field research, semi-structured interviews with artisans from various generations, and the documentary analysis of historical sources. The paper examines how contemporary artisans navigate between the rigor of the traditional canon and the pressures of the modern market or mass cultural consumption. Through their efforts to conserve sewing techniques, organize profiles of traditional craft activities, and participate in thematic exhibitions, folk artisans transform the *ia* from a nostalgic object into a living symbol, ensuring identity continuity within the contemporary cultural space of the Republic of Moldova.

Keywords: folk artisans, *ie*, safeguarding, biographical dimension, intangible heritage, Republic of Moldova, cultural identity.

Introduction

In the contemporary cultural landscape, we are witnessing a profound reassessment of traditional clothing identity, a phenomenon decisively driven by the international recognition of its exceptional value. The official inscription of the "Art of the traditional blouse with embroidery on the shoulder (*altiță*) – an element of cultural identity in Romania and the Republic of Moldova" on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2022 represents a turning point, not only for diplomatic and museum discourse but also for practitioner communities. This global legitimization has generated an unprecedented revitalization of civil society's interest in traditional costume, transforming the blouse with *altiță* from an old symbol into an active vector of collective memory and cultural resistance. The reentry of the *ia* into modern daily and festive circuits highlights a fluid dynamic of identity, where the revalorization of textile heritage becomes a form of national and local consciousness manifesting against global cultural and economic standardization.

The central pillar supporting this centuries-old craft is the invaluable worth of folk artisans in the Republic of Moldova and the depth of their experience accumulated over time. For our cultural space, historically marked by identity ruptures and periods of assimilation or

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uniformization, these artisans are not mere technical executors, but true custodians of collective memory and transgenerational bridges. Their experience, often consolidated through decades of discreet apprenticeship, continuous learning, and resilient adaptation to contemporary trends, represents a form of living knowledge that cannot be extracted exclusively from textbooks or specialized literature. Consequently, there is an urgent need to shift the focus of scientific investigation from the finished object to its creator, treating the folk artisan as a "living human treasure".

In a contemporary context where the Republic of Moldova faces the risk of qualitative degradation of folk dress due to excessive commercialization and the invasion of industrial pseudo-models, the experience and moral authority of the artisan become an essential critical filter. They possess not only the technical alphabet of sewing (the morphology of the cut, the alternation of embroidery stitches) but also the spiritual grammar of the *ia*. This encompasses the sacred understanding of signs, regional chromatics, and the ritualistic context in which the blouse comes to life, thereby ensuring the authenticity and survival of textile heritage in our native space.

Starting from these premises, this paper aims to analyze the organic interdependence between the biographical and practical dimensions of the activity of folk artisans in the Republic of Moldova. The act of faithfully conserving the blouse with *altiță* is directly conditioned by the creator's life path: their personal history, the models of apprenticeship they assimilated, and the emotional memory they invest in every needle prick. Investigating how biographical experiences configure technical rigor and the ethics of restoration represents the central stake of this endeavor. Thus, the folk artisan is approached not as a simple craftsman, but as a cultural network node and a strategic vector in safeguarding national textile heritage.

1. Folk Artisans from the Republic of Moldova Practicing the Craft of the Blouse with *Alțiță*. Biographical Profiles and Contributions to the Conservation of the *Ia*

The safeguarding of the blouse with *altiță* in the cultural space of the Republic of Moldova is supported by a network of artisans whose biographical paths and accumulated experiences configure a true pillar of resistance for promoting and conserving traditional dress. These folk artisans, recognized nationally and internationally, active as field researchers, restorers, and mentors, transform the craft into a living art. By strictly practicing this occupation and actively participating in exhibitions, fairs, festivals, or cultural events, they ensure the continuity of tradition while familiarizing the public with traditional dress, especially the

blouse with *altiță*. To highlight the diversity and depth of this activity, a brief analysis of the biographical profiles and technical contributions made by some of the most representative contemporary folk artisans within the local academic framework is required.

Ecaterina Popescu (Complex "Arta Rustică", Clișova Nouă, Orhei District)

With an experience spanning over three decades in the revitalization of traditional textiles, Ecaterina Popescu represents a model of cultural management of intangible heritage. As the founder of the craft complex in Clișova Nouă, her biographical activity is marked by transitioning from collecting treasure pieces from the Orhei region to their full reconstitution. Her major contribution consists in creating a training center for younger generations, where manual weaving and sewing techniques for blouses with *altiță* are taught based on authentic patterns (*izvoade*), ensuring the conversion of heritage from a museum object into a living community practice.

Maria Cristea ("Casa Cristea", Chișinău)

Folk artisan and designer of traditional wear, Maria Cristea has been active in this field for over 30 years, serving as one of the central figures who maintained the rigor of the cut and manual embroidery during the transition period of the 1990s. Her experience combines academic research of museum collections with their transposition into pieces worn on a large scale by folklore ensembles and cultural personalities. Through her work, Maria Cristea has contributed decisively to the standardization of correct techniques for making the gathered smocking (*încrêț*) and joining stitches (*cheițe*), refusing industrial simplifications and enforcing respect for the chromatics and regional morphology of the Bessarabian blouse.

Antonina Rusu (Folk Artisan, Chișinău)

With an activity deeply anchored in archival research and rigorous restoration, Antonina Rusu has distinguished herself as a fine connoisseur of the ornamental code of traditional costume. Her biographical path reflects a constant dedication to deciphering old patterns and transferring this knowledge to urban sewing communities through practical workshops. Her essential technical contribution focuses on the structural accuracy of the shoulder embroideries (*altițe*) and the use of archaic embroidery techniques, actively campaigning for the preservation of mathematical proportions and sober chromatics specific to heritage pieces from our cultural space.

Elena Lupașcu (Folk Artisan, Criuleni District)

A prominent representative of textile crafts from the central region of the Republic of Moldova, Elena Lupașcu holds remarkable experience in reconstituting traditional blouses with *altiță*, recognized for the rigor with which she reproduces vintage patterns. Her biographical path is closely linked to the research of treasure pieces in museum collections and the transmission of this knowledge within community workshops and traditional sewing circles (*șezători*). Her major technical contribution lies in her mastery of executing archaic embroidery stitches and strictly respecting the plant-based, natural chromatics specific to the Dniester basin. By rejecting synthetic materials and promoting homespun cloth (linen and cotton), Elena Lupașcu stands out as an essential vector in maintaining the structural and aesthetic authenticity of the Bessarabian *ia*.

Olesea Enachi (Folk Artisan, Visual Artist, Founder of "Măiestria", Chișinău)

Representing the new generation of community leaders in the sphere of intangible heritage, Olesea Enachi converted her passion for sewing the *ia* into an expansive platform for cultural revitalization. Her biographical path is structurally amplified by her status as a visual artist; her academic training in visual arts offers her a deep perspective on chromatics, composition, and textile volumetrics. This double professional status allows her to approach the traditional blouse not just as a craftsman, but as a work of pure visual art, understood through the lens of aesthetic rigors and archetypal visual balance. Through the "Măiestria" project, her activity blends the role of a rigorous practitioner with that of a mentor for hundreds of women within the country and across the diaspora. Her major contribution to conserving the blouse with *altiță* resides in the rigorous promotion of traditional canons (sewing exclusively on natural fabric, thread-counting, and refusing modern patterns) and high-quality visual documentation of museum pieces, thereby facilitating general public access to authentic patterns.

Valentina Guțu (Folk Artisan, Gordineștii Noi, Edineț District)

A heritage bearer of profound value for the northern region of the Republic of Moldova, Valentina Guțu distinguishes herself in the cultural landscape through her complex mastery of traditional techniques, standing out as an elite benchmark in weaving, artistic embroidery, crocheting, and knitting. Her biographical path is governed by a constant love for local folklore

and nature—elements she converts into resources of inspiration for her signature pieces: folk costumes crafted entirely by hand. Her specialized contribution to conserving the blouse with *altiță* and traditional dress lies in her rare capacity to blend archaic techniques inherited from ancestors with contemporary aesthetic rigor. Through the meticulous selection of high-quality fabrics and the flawless execution of ornamental motifs (floral and geometric), Valentina Guțu ensures the typological accuracy and authenticity of heritage costumes. Her activity goes beyond the borders of the domestic workshop, as her creations are appreciated nationally and internationally as true living documents of our cultural identity, paying a lasting homage to the safeguarding of intangible heritage.

The analysis of these biographical profiles demonstrates that the experience of folk artisans in the Republic of Moldova is not a mere accumulation of technical skills, but a conscious assumption of a role as a value filter. By refusing the use of synthetic materials, kitsch elements, and computerized embroidery, these practitioners guarantee that each blouse with *altiță* produced today respects the status of an identity document validated by UNESCO scientific criteria, ensuring the continuity of our space's cultural codes.

2. Transmission of the Craft of the Blouse with *Altiță* through the Lens of Oral History. Case Study: Interview with Folk Artisan Lidia Bojescu

This study capitalizes on empirical data obtained from a specialized journalistic interview conducted by the author with an artisan in the field (Appendix 1). The biographical analysis of heritage bearers reveals that reviving the craft is not a simple act of technical replication, but a form of cultural resistance and personal identity rediscovery. A representative case study in this regard is the activity of folk artisan Lidia Bojescu from Mereni village, Anenii Noi district. As the founder of "Atelier Bojescu", she synthesizes the profile of both field researcher and rigorous practitioner, her professional status being officially recognized through the titles of Folk Artisan and National Prize Laureate.

An analysis of Lidia Bojescu's biographical path highlights a dynamic often encountered among contemporary safeguarders, namely the emergence of passion in childhood and its profound reactivation in adulthood, in response to an existential and professional crisis (losing her job after the age of 50). This biographical rupture triggered a process of identity reconversion, marked by a transition from empirical curiosity to the adoption of scientific canons. Her integration into the "Șezătoarea Basarabia" community, under the coordination of ethnographer Dr. Varvara Buzilă, represented the critical transition from domestic craft to a

conscious practice of conserving national treasure. The workshop in Mereni subsequently became a reference space for documenting the UNESCO file dedicated to the blouse with *altiță*.

Data extracted from the interview emphasize a clear philosophy of creative non-intervention in the archetypal structure of folk dress. In the artisan's vision, "nothing is placed randomly on the blouse [...] we cannot reinvent the wheel," thus affirming the moral and scientific authority of the canons left by ancestors in the face of current trends toward commercial modernization. The practical dimension of Lidia Bojescu's activity reveals a deep knowledge of the sacred and secular morphology of sewn signs, structured as follows:

- **Gender-based Ornamental Syntax:** The men's blouse is governed by rectilinear structures and symbols of strength and stability, such as the "house pillar" (*stâlpul casei*)—positioned on the shoulders as an axis of familial responsibility—the "ram's horns" (*coarnele berbecului*), and the "shepherd's hook" (*cârligul ciobanului*). In counterpoint, the female blouse (with *altiță*) integrates the "Morning Star" (*Luceafărul*) and the "lozenge/rhombus" as marks of fertility and prosperity.
- **The Technical Cosmology of the Sleeve:** The *altiță*, composed of two distinct squares handmade on natural fabric (linen, cotton, or hemp), transcends textile function, symbolizing "the connection between earth and heaven". The artisan describes framing the composition into a piece called *scrânciobel*—a conceptual cradle/swing leaning toward divinity, where the "last heaven" must be geometrically shifted ("raised upward by a finger or two") so as not to symbolically interrupt the celestial vault, a technical detail that historically regulated good manners during traditional community dances (*joc*).
- **Underlying Structure and Regional Functionality:** Below the *altiță* develops the *încreț* (with a numeric length greater than the *altiță* to suggest the infinity of divine light) and vertical vertical rows/streams (*râuri*). In the Bessarabian space, the positioning of the *râuri* is closer to the central axis of the chest—a practical adaptation determined by the daily use of the waistcoat (*bondiță*) in cold seasons, ensuring the visibility of the embroidery. The cut itself respects a sacred geometry starting from the symbol of the cross, refusing modern cutouts and preserving the gusset (*pava*) under the arm for freedom of movement, alongside a pronounced frontal opening historically correlated with the maternal status of the woman.

The transmission of this complex system of knowledge to new generations represents another major dimension of the folk artisan's activity. Through courses organized at the

National Center for Conservation and Promotion of Intangible Cultural Heritage, Lidia Bojescu corrects current trends toward technological simplification. An eloquent example is the restoration of the technique for weaving wrap-around skirts (*catrințe*) using four heddles (*ițe*)—as opposed to the simpler, incorrect two-heddle method—a technical effort necessary to obtain correctly demarcated horizontal bands, avoiding parasitic vertical lines. Thus, through the technical rigor enforced in her own workshop and her educational activity, folk artisan Lidia Bojescu acts as a strategic safeguarding vector, demonstrating that the survival of the *ia* as a living practice directly depends on the correct decoding of its ancestral canons.

Conclusions

This research has highlighted that safeguarding and revitalizing the traditional blouse with *altiță* in the contemporary space of the Republic of Moldova cannot be dissociated from the biographical and practical dimensions of folk artisans. The inscription of this element on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2022 confirmed a reality deeply documented within this work: the folk artisan is not a mere craftsman or an inert technical executor, but a true "living human treasure," a field researcher, and a strategic custodian of national collective memory.

The analysis of the biographical profiles of reference figures such as Ecaterina Popescu, Maria Cristea, Antonina Rusu, Elena Lupașcu, Olesea Enachi, and Valentina Guțu demonstrates that the creator's existential path directly leaves its mark on the ethics of restoration and technical rigor. Whether operating in rural craft centers, coordinating urban communities, or expanding revitalization platforms (including across the diaspora), these practitioners act as a critical value filter against the risks of globalization, excessive commercialization, and the invasion of mass-produced industrial pseudo-models. The case study dedicated to folk artisan Lidia Bojescu, capitalized through the lens of oral history, offered an invaluable empirical perspective on how a personal biographical crisis can convert into a conscious act of cultural resistance.

From a practical point of view, the research demonstrated that the survival of the *ia* depends on strict adherence to a true "technical cosmology" and an archetypal "spiritual grammar". The structural elements analyzed—ranging from the sacred morphology of the *altiță* (as a link between earth and heaven reflected in the *scrânciobel* piece), the infinite length of the *încreț*, gender-based ornamental syntax (masculine rectilinear symbols versus feminine cosmic ones), to regional functional adaptations (the placement of Bessarabian *râuri* or the

geometric cross-cut with a gusset)—confirm the validity of the non-intervention philosophy summarized by the axiom: "nothing is placed randomly on the blouse".

In conclusion, the educational and mentoring activity carried out by folk artisans in the Republic of Moldova, through the transfer of knowledge within sewing circles, community workshops, and specialized courses, ensures the critical transition of the *ia* from the status of a nostalgic museum object to that of a living community practice. By refusing synthetic materials and computerized embroidery, these heritage vectors guarantee that each blouse with *altiță* made today remains a valid identity document, ensuring the continuity of ancestral cultural codes within the contemporary European space.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

SACRED AND SECULAR SYMBOLS IN THE EMBROIDERY OF TRADITIONAL BLOUSES. INTERVIEW WITH FOLK ARTISAN LIDIA BOJESCU

In Mereni village, Anenii Noi district, the tradition and art of weaving folk dress are preserved with devotion thanks to the efforts made by folk artisan Lidia Bojescu. In her workshop, known as *Atelier Bojescu*, the artisan produces homespun cloth, manually sews traditional blouses and wrap-around skirts (*catrințe*), respecting old techniques and models, thus contributing to both the conservation of intangible cultural heritage and the reaffirmation of local cultural identity. The objects she crafts are not mere garments, but living documents of a tradition passed down from generation to generation, reflecting the symbolic and aesthetic value of folk attire. In this interview, we explore Mrs. Bojescu's personal journey, her methods of work, the motivations behind choosing this craft, and her role in promoting and transmitting centuries-old national textile traditions.

Interviewer / Respondent	Transcript
Anatol Fornea:	From when does your passion for this craft date?
Lidia Bojescu:	This passion has been around all my life. I took it up more seriously after turning 50, when I was passing through a more difficult period. I lost my job. I started studying traditional blouses and how they are correctly sewn. Our ancestors put nothing randomly on blouses. I decided to find out what is correct and what is not. I joined the "Șezătoarea Basarabia" community, where I was guided by Mrs. Varvara Buzilă. I discovered the secrets of a blouse, and then I started sewing according to books and canons.
Anatol Fornea:	To what extent have the canons changed over time?

Interviewer / Respondent	Transcript
Lidia Bojescu:	Nothing is placed randomly on the blouse. What goes where, how, and why, came down from our ancestors. We cannot reinvent the wheel.
Anatol Fornea:	What meanings are attributed to the ornamental symbols present on traditional blouses?
Lidia Bojescu:	On men's blouses, we place the "house pillar" (<i>stâlpul casei</i>). There are two pillars on the shoulders, because the man holds the family up. The man carries the entire weight of the family. A beautiful angle is made. Harmony has always existed on the blouse. We do not add elements just because we like them or want to. That is not correct. On blouses, we put the "Morning Star" (<i>Luceafărul</i>), the "lozenge/rhombus" (a symbol of fertility, prosperity, and well-being), the "shepherd's hook" (<i>cârligul ciobanului</i>), and the "ram's horns" (<i>coarnele berbecului</i> —a strong sign for men). For women, it is a different layout. Women's holiday blouses are the ones with <i>altiță</i> . The blouse with <i>altiță</i> entered the UNESCO file. A part of the filming for the file was done right here in our workshop. It would be a shame not to make the blouses correctly.
Anatol Fornea:	What are the main technical and creative stages involved in the process of making a traditional blouse?
Lidia Bojescu:	Regardless of whether it is sewn by hand or on a sewing machine, the shoulder pieces (<i>altițe</i>) are made separately. They are two squares. The <i>altițe</i> symbolize the connection between earth and heaven. They are framed in the <i>scrânciobel</i> , that cradle which swings toward God. The last "heaven" layer is made, and it must be shifted upward. When a young lady went

Interviewer / Respondent	Transcript
	to the community dance (<i>joc</i>), the young man had to place his thumb in this raised fold. He was not allowed to place his hand directly on the last heaven layer. This represents the life we are meant to live. Because it is set in a cradle structure (<i>scrânciobel</i>), the last heaven must be higher by a finger or two, but it should not reach the very edge of the band, because otherwise the cradle swinging toward God flies off into the celestial vault and its end cannot be seen.
Anatol Fornea:	What materials do you use for making the traditional blouse?
Lidia Bojescu:	I work exclusively on natural fabric. I do not use synthetics. I use only linen, cotton, and hemp. These represent the most suitable cloth for blouses. The cut begins from the symbol of the cross. It is not done like nowadays, where they cut into the sleeves. They are rectangles, and a gusset (<i>pava</i>) is placed under the arm to give freedom to the hand. Below the collar line, no embroidery row (<i>râu</i>) is placed; instead, an opening is made. The larger the opening was, the more children the woman had. The opening could reach down to the waist. The embroidery streams (<i>râuri</i>) are made in pairs. In our Bessarabia region, the streams were made closer to the center because in spring and autumn people wore a waistcoat (<i>bondiță</i>), so this allowed the ornament to remain visible.
Anatol Fornea:	To what extent has practicing this craft offered you a distinct status socially or professionally?
Lidia Bojescu:	I hold the title of Folk Artisan, and I am a National Prize Laureate.

Interviewer / Respondent	Transcript
Anatol Fornea:	During which periods or days is the specific activity of practicing this craft paused?
Lidia Bojescu:	We do not work on Imperial/Major Religious Holidays. On other days, sure, if a client wants the blouse quickly, we bend the rules a bit. You know how it is, there is a saying: "God does not get upset with hardworking people, He gets upset with the lazy ones."
Anatol Fornea:	Are there young people interested in practicing this craft? How do you ensure the conservation and transmission of the authentic character of the techniques and traditions specific to this craft?
Lidia Bojescu:	Very many. Just recently, at the National Center for Conservation and Promotion of Intangible Cultural Heritage, we have been doing weaving lessons—weaving with four heddles (<i>ițe</i>), because lately wrap-around skirts (<i>catrințe</i>) started being woven with two heddles because it's easier, but it is not correct. We must make them with four heddles so that the top and bottom bands appear as if they were added supplementary. This prevents the vertical lines and stripes from running all the way down. Even here, there is a rule.
Anatol Fornea:	What are the elements, techniques, practices, or criteria that ensure the conservation of authenticity in traditional dress pieces?
Lidia Bojescu:	The canons. For example, with us, to this very day, the tradition has been preserved that if someone passes away, an <i>altiță</i> is placed above the entrance door. Nowadays, some

Interviewer / Respondent	Transcript
	people put bath towels. In the past, when I was younger, woven towels (<i>prosoape</i>) were used. Back in my grandmother's day, <i>altițe</i> were put up. The <i>altiță</i> parts were joined together, two squares were basted, sewn, and placed above the door. Below the <i>altiță</i> comes the gathered smocking (<i>încreț</i>), which is done in different styles, but the main symbol on the <i>încreț</i> is the lozenge/rhombus—the symbol of fertility, well-being, and prosperity. The "ram's horns" were also added—a powerful sign, as we also raised livestock here. The <i>încreț</i> is made one or two fingers longer than the <i>altiță</i>, because light comes down from heaven. It is made between 3 cm and 5 cm wide and it recedes into infinity, with no visible end. For this reason, it is longer than the <i>altiță</i>. Below the <i>încreț</i> come the vertical embroidery rows (<i>râuri</i>), which must stop short of the very edge by one or two fingers. These streams run horizontally along the length. They are called rivers (<i>râuri</i>) because when we move, the waters ripple.
Anatol Fornea:	Thank you for the interview!

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