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Reshaping Heritage and Identity through Contemporary Festive Events: Romanian Blouse Day

Abstract: This study examines, from an anthropological perspective, a festive event created in 2013: Romanian Blouse Day (also known as the Universal Day of the Romanian Blouse). Through processes of cultural codification, an item of traditional peasant clothing – the blouse – was transformed into a symbol of Romanian identity, around which a complex social practice has been constructed. The article explores this event both as part of the *pan-European memory-heritage-identity complex* described by Sharon Macdonald, and as a *total social fact*, in the sense proposed by Marcel Mauss. It also analyses the factors that may account for the event’s remarkable popularity: the social imaginary theorised by Charles Taylor, through which large groups of people construct alternative “worlds” by drawing on selected elements from the past, and the concept of *Authorised Heritage Discourse* (AHD) formulated by Laurajane Smith, disseminated by social elites and ethnographers.

Keywords: Cultural Heritage; Identity; Festive Event; Romanian Blouse; Total Social Fact; Social Imaginary; Authorised Heritage Discourse.

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1. Introduction

Romanian Blouse Day (*Ziua Iei*), dedicated to the traditional peasant shirt known as *ie*¹, was established in 2013 as a celebration highlighting Romanian identity through this distinctive symbol. From the very beginning, the event received significant media attention, which helped it gain visibility and eventually culminated in its institutional recognition as an official celebration. This study explores the discursive and symbolic practices of 2013, framing Romanian Blouse Day as a complex social phenomenon that cuts across social, cultural, economic, and political spheres. Since the event activates historical and ethnographic memory, generates economic circulation (artisans, brands, and the cultural industry), involves public and political institutions, mobilises the diaspora, serves to reaffirm identity, and receives extensive media coverage, I consider it a *total social fact*. The concept was theorised by Marcel Mauss in his seminal work *Essai sur le don* (1925), a foundational text of classical social anthropology. For Mauss, a *total social fact* is a social phenomenon that simultaneously

mobilises multiple dimensions of collective life – economic, religious, moral, aesthetic, political, symbolic, and legal – and therefore cannot be reduced to a single function. Such phenomena engage the broader structure of society and activate a wide range of institutions. In this sense, social facts are “total” insofar as they involve the whole social system. In summary, a *total social fact* mobilises multiple institutions and dimensions of social life, producing and reproducing social relations while articulating interconnected symbolic and material functions. The anthropological analysis of Romanian Blouse Day is relevant for understanding social life in contemporary Romania since

the study of festive events is an essential element to understanding social life. This is particularly true where such events acquire the characteristics of total social facts, a penetrating definition coined by Marcel Mauss².

Initially launched as a civic initiative on the social networking platform Facebook, Romanian Blouse Day was quickly endorsed by ethnographic institutions, which reinforced it through Authorised Heritage Discourse. I use the term *Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD)*, as theorised by Laurajane Smith³, to refer to the discourse produced by institutions holding authority in the ethnographic field (ethnographic museums, research institutes in ethnography, ethnology, and folklore studies, etc.), as well as by elites and scholars assumed to generate scientific knowledge in this domain (this concept will be discussed in more detail in Section 3 of the present study).

Simultaneously, the new celebration was embraced by many Romanians both in

the country and abroad, and promoted by various actors from the economic, political, media, artistic, fashion, and entertainment spheres. In 2020, the Commission for Intangible Cultural Heritage within the Ministry of Culture of Romania completed the documentation for “The art of the traditional blouse with embroidery on the shoulder” as an element of the National Inventory of Active Intangible Cultural Heritage, and in the following year experts from the Ministry of Culture of Romania and of the Republic of Moldova prepared the multinational nomination file for UNESCO. The process was completed in December 2022, when “The art of the traditional blouse with embroidery on the shoulder – an element of cultural identity in Romania and the Republic of Moldova” was inscribed on UNESCO’s Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity⁴. In the same year, a law establishing 24 June as Romanian Blouse Day was adopted by the Romanian Parliament⁵. 24 June is the date of an old agrarian celebration in Romanian tradition, known as *Sânziene* (or *Sânzienele*, with the definite article), so that the newly created event finds a strong anchor in this genuine *lieu de mémoire*, in Pierre Nora’s terms. This overlap is by no means accidental; on the contrary, the initiators of the event sought to create the illusion of continuity with an ancient tradition, thereby securing an important source of popularity for the new celebration.

2. The Civic Initiative *La Blouse Roumaine* and the Social Imaginary

The Facebook post published on 21 January 2013 on the *La Blouse Roumaine* page, which later became the manifesto for the creation of the celebratory

event Romanian Blouse Day, constructs a multi-layered discourse encompassing identity-ideological, economic-commercial, and artistic-visual dimensions. The identity-ideological dimension presents the Romanian blouse as an emblem of ancient national traditions. The terms *Romanian blouse* and *tradition* are used as perfect, interchangeable synonyms. At the same time, the Romanian blouse is recontextualised for a new audience (social media users) and for a new purpose: the creation of economic capital (a country brand) and image capital for Romania (the recognition of national heritage on a planetary scale): “The Romanian blouse can become a country brand recognised across the entire planet if we manage to promote together our tradition inherited from immemorial times”⁶. The text is accompanied by a visual element, the 1940 painting *La Blouse Roumaine* by the French painter Henri Matisse. Notably, the same name is adopted by the online community that proposed the creation of the festive event. The visual reference activates the artistic-visual layer of the discourse. Through this discursive strategy, the civic initiative manages to attract diverse audiences spanning a wide range of social and cultural backgrounds.

The manifesto associates the Romanian blouse with antiquity (“inherited from immemorial times”), following the logic that “everything old is original, therefore good”. The application of this type of reasoning is not an isolated case; rather, it characterises imaginaries that are increasingly prevalent in contemporary Europe and that have given rise to a phenomenon known as “memory fever”, “memory mania”, an “obsession with memory”, “the memory craze”, “the memory crisis”, and

“the memory boom”. Aspects of it have also been characterised as a “heritage industry”, “heritage craze” or “heritage crusade” (Macdonald)⁷. This is a relatively recent phenomenon, which emerged as a reaction to globalization and cultural homogenization, through which certain elements regarded as valuable from the past are recycled in order to foreground national identities. As Michi Knecht and Peter Niedermüller noted:

the revitalization of traditions all over Europe go hand in hand with economic globalization and post-industrial modernization. The celebration of newly invented folk traditions as authentic, the display of regional identities and heritages [...], the production of legitimacy through languages and practices of conservation and essentialization and the belief that ‘old’ or ‘original’ is an equivalent for ‘good’⁸.

Moreover, the manifesto employs a strategy of stimulating individual emotion within a collective effort, using the possessive *our* and the appeal to a shared action aimed at promoting national values preserved across generations: “we will succeed in promoting together *our* tradition inherited from immemorial times”. The individual’s affective involvement in the imagined community of Romanians heightens the feeling of national pride and encourages participation. Thus, in just a few lines, the manifesto clearly illustrates what Sharon Macdonald has termed the *memory-heritage-identity complex*⁹: “Dated as gathering pace from the 1970s and escalating further towards the end of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first”¹⁰

this phenomenon is defined by growing interest in heritage and identity, especially in commemoration and preservation of elements selected from the past. This “ongoing memory and heritage boom”¹¹, visible throughout Europe, includes phenomena such as public events that revitalise, re-signify, re-functionalise, and mediatise certain folkloric/traditional elements considered essential to local, regional, or national identity, the transformation of certain traditions into festivals, the invention of new traditions, and so forth. “These elements forming what in Bourdieu’s terms could be called a ‘symbolic capital’ may also acquire rather explicit political or ideological traits”¹².

The manifesto constructs a narrative about heritage and Romanian identity through an idealised image (the Romanian blouse), which functions as a compensatory micro-universe for a wide range of nostalgias¹³. The personal attachment of a large group of people to this narrative can be interpreted through the lens of the social imaginary of Romanians, in the terms of Charles Taylor’s definition: “the social imaginary is that common understanding which makes possible common practices, and a widely shared sense of legitimacy”; the way in which ordinary people “imagine” their social existence, not in theoretical terms, but through “images, stories, legends, etc.”¹⁴. Such images both draw upon and constitute “a sense of self in history, sometimes creating identity positions that are in contradiction with those of others, occasionally manifesting themselves in large-scale social and political divisions, with significant consequences”¹⁵.

This social imaginary is also shared by Romanians from abroad, who rapidly

reacted to the civic initiative and enthusiastically adopted the newly created festive event. In June 2013, the success of the Romanian Blouse Day was measured by its spread across several continents, dozens of countries, and hundreds of events: “6 continents, 48 countries, 109 localities, 143 events. This was the statistical picture on 22 June 2013, at 10 p.m., two days before *Sânziene*” or, according to another account, “50 countries, more than 100 locations”¹⁶. Romanian associations and cultural centres abroad were also highly active: the Bucovinian Centre of Art from Novoselytsia (Ukraine) organised a “historic cultural event for the Romanian blouse in Bucovina, entitled ‘We are what we wear’”¹⁷; the Romanian Cultural Centre in Dublin celebrated the Romanian Blouse Day¹⁸; the Mihai Eminescu University Association in Geneva and other Romanian associations in Switzerland initiated the campaign “The *Sânziene* dress Switzerland in the Romanian blouse”¹⁹; the Romanian Students Association in Strasbourg celebrated the Universal Day of the Romanian Blouse in Parc de l’Orangerie²⁰; Romanian associations in Brussels organised a photo session with participants dressed in Romanian blouses in the Grand Place of Brussels, Romanian traditional music, a visual arts exhibition, a conference about the Romanian blouse²¹, and so forth.

New media played an essential role in this global success since the idea of declaring 24 June as the Romanian Blouse Day was first launched and disseminated on the social networking platform Facebook. The platform provided an ideal environment for promoting the initiative and facilitating the involvement of Romanians everywhere, allowing the rapid dissemination of

the message (through photographs, events, and invitations) and easy participation. The internet created direct connections with the diaspora, enabling Romanians abroad to celebrate the Romanian blouse as a marker of cultural identity simultaneously with those in the country. The event could be attended by anyone, young or old, from rural or urban environments, from Romania or abroad; the only requirement was having a Facebook account. The removal of social, economic, or territorial barriers through social networks represents an exceptional form of empowerment and an unprecedented democratisation of communication and personal involvement, with consequences that had not previously been anticipated.

Technological development and the accessibility of resources also played an important role. Greater access to smartphones with high-quality cameras and mobile internet enabled people to photograph themselves wearing Romanian blouses and to post these images on social media. This mature digital infrastructure functioned as a catalyst for an identity discourse. The first edition of the event received strong online visibility, although no statistics indicate the exact number of participants. Nevertheless, an online application that allowed users to mark on the Map of the Romanian Blouse Day the location where they were photographed shows check-ins from all corners of the world, including New Zealand, Hawaii, Panama, Indonesia, and North Korea²². Posts focused on the event became viral:

The online community was buzzing. Every minute, photos from all over the world appeared on the map, as

proof that we Romanians possess the power and the will to unite in order to promote authentic values. The result matched the scale of the initiative and was unprecedented. The Romanian blouse “fluttered” like a flag of our country across almost all continents, bringing together Romanians from every corner of the world²³.

Thus, the dissemination of the festive event benefited from the affordances of technology and mass distribution and became a transnational celebration. Concerning phenomena of this kind, Michael Dylan Foster observes that “conspicuous uses of folklore within popular culture are pervasive, perhaps even more so (or at least more noticeable) with the recent proliferation of new media platforms and other technological advances”, and that “the expressive culture is increasingly influenced by Internet-driven communication, digital media, and global commercial forces”²⁴.

The Romanian print media also promoted the event. In June 2013, several articles described it as an “unprecedented initiative”, “bringing together lovers of Romania from all corners of the world”, and noted that “in order to celebrate the beautiful traditional blouse, the online community *La Blouse Roumaine* has called for mobilisation”. The reactions were described as “overwhelming”, while journalists suggested that “Romanians longed for an initiative that would restore their sense of belonging and national pride”²⁵. Portrayed as a long-awaited mobilising initiative, Romanian Blouse Day had a remarkable impact and quickly established itself, as it succeeded in responding to a psychological need for identity in a symbolic, simple, and

accessible manner, creating a sense of stability and consolation in a present marked by accelerated change and globalisation. Moreover, the new festive event responds to globalisation precisely through its transnational dimension: “The Sânzieni dress the planet in the Romanian blouse” was the slogan of the 2013 edition, expressing a strong sense of national pride in relation to global otherness.

Celebrations dedicated to Romanian folk costumes already existed, but they were either local (the Romanian Blouse Celebration in Cezieni, Olt County, initiated in the 1920s, interrupted at the beginning of the communist period and resumed in 1994) or national (the Romanian Blouse Festival, initiated in 2012 in Chişinău, Republic of Moldova). By contrast, the Romanian Blouse Day involves Romanians across the globe, thereby creating a simple and effective way for them to publicly express their identity and national pride. Addressed to everyone, it becomes *our day*, through the idea of belonging to the imagined community of Romanians everywhere:

When you look at the photos, the feeling these images convey is extraordinary... as if the boundaries of time and space were being erased. It is simply overwhelming! I did not live at the time of the Great Union of 1918, so I cannot know what that moment felt like, when all Romanians dressed in folk costume. But this year’s Sânzieni gave me the feeling of a celebration of unity: Romanians long separated by circumstances – then historical, now economic – finally finding themselves together again²⁶.

This invention (or, in our case, recycling) of emotionally and symbolically charged symbols of belonging to a group is the crucial element of invented traditions, in Eric Hobsbawm’s view: “their significance lay precisely in their undefined universality: The National Flag, The National Anthem and the National Emblem are the three symbols through which an independent country proclaims its identity”²⁷. To this list, we may now add the symbol of the Romanian blouse, together with the festive event celebrated on June 24.

An important feature that contributed to the success of the festive event was its association with femininity, articulated through the empowerment of women. In the manifesto discussed above, the online community *La Blouse Roumaine* addresses women exclusively: “It does not matter whether you live in Romania, whether you are Romanian women living abroad, or simply admirers of Romanian femininity. What truly matters is wearing it with love”²⁸. The iconic images invoked in discourses promoting the Romanian blouse – both in online environments and in face-to-face events – are predominantly female. They range from representations in visual arts (the paintings of Henri Matisse, Theodor Aman, Constantin Daniel Rosenthal, Gheorghe Tattarescu, Nicolae Grigorescu, Camil Ressu, etc.) to emblematic historical figures (Queen Elisabeth, Queen Marie, the aviator Smaranda Brăescu, etc.). Photographic exhibitions organised in 2013 likewise depict only girls and women dressed in the Romanian blouse. On Facebook pages, most of the posted photos show women wearing the traditional blouse; even when men appear, they are significantly fewer and usually accompanied

by a female presence. In this context, the movement for the revival of the Romanian blouse is also interpreted as a manifesto of contemporary womanhood:

Only a strong woman can wear the traditional blouse. [...] The Romanian blouse seems to acquire the dimension of a manifesto – a statement of empowerment for women in Romania, burdened by deprivation and forced by precarious economic circumstances to leave, to endure various forms of humiliation, and to work abroad in order to support their families²⁹.

3. The Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD)

The extremely rapid success of the civic initiative *La Blouse Roumaine* would not have been possible had this social imaginary not already been shaped through Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD). This discourse was forged as a cultural form in nineteenth-century Europe by national elites, in tandem with the emergence of nation-states, with the aim of discursively homogenising place as nation. In the words of Laurajane Smith, AHD is based on the Western “national and elite class experiences and reinforcing ideas of innate cultural value tied to time depth, monumentality, expert knowledge and aesthetics”³⁰. It focuses on:

aesthetically pleasing material objects, sites, places and/or landscapes that current generations ‘must’ care for, protect and revere so that they may be passed on to nebulous future generations for their ‘education’, and to forge a sense of common identity based on the past³¹.

Peasant clothing is such an object, both material and immaterial (as it involves knowledge and techniques, values, and symbolic codes of representation). From an artefact with a primarily utilitarian function, peasant clothing was transformed, through the discourse of intellectuals during the period of European nation formation, into *national costume*, closely connected with national cultural heritage and ethnic consciousness. As demonstrated by Joep Leerssen³², transformations of this kind took place throughout Europe in the nineteenth century, since “developing the national costume was one of ways of discovering national identity”, and “ethnic affiliation could be displayed visually by wearing this costume³³”. To this pan-European endeavour were added elements specific to the Romanian context, such as the photographic and pictorial campaign of national legitimation undertaken by the Royal Family through the Romanian blouse and the folk costume. As early as 1885, Queen Elisabeth of Romania wore peasant costume at various official events, and later Queen Marie adopted folk costume as official attire at national celebrations. Thus, “under the patronage of the Royal House, a veritable fashion of folk costume was launched among Romanian women, being adopted as an identity emblem at various receptions and national events”³⁴.

In multiethnic Transylvania at the end of the nineteenth century, women from the Romanian intellectual elite wore peasant costume at events with national stakes, as a marker of ethnic identity. Thus, over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, an Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD) took shape, initiated by intellectuals and supported by the social elite,

in which elements are transformed into objects of ritual and performative remembrance and where [...] symbols are called upon to express guiding values in the present. Representation is the common denominator, and here we can combine the different semantic possibilities of the term: *represent-ing*, *re-presenting*, *re-presenting*³⁵.

During the communist decades (1948–1989), peasant clothing was reappropriated by the Authorised Heritage Discourse as a national symbol. It was endowed with notions of antiquity, authenticity, and ethnic unity, produced in state-controlled handicraft cooperatives, sold in government shops, and worn by school children during national celebrations. In this process, the Romanian blouse was detached from its lived context and reframed as a heritage emblem within the rhetoric of socialist nationalism. After 1990, the traditional blouse remained a symbol of cultural and national distinctiveness, worn on specific occasions such as folk festivals and community celebrations³⁶.

Thus, Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD) has constructed, over the course of two centuries, a unified perspective on the Romanian blouse as an identity symbol. Today, experts within the National Commission for Cultural Heritage, affiliated with the Ministry of Culture of Romania, continue to legitimise this discourse. The *National Inventory of Active Intangible Cultural Heritage Elements*, published in 2020, expresses the same idea:

For Romanians, the blouse with embroidery on the shoulder, associated with the other components of the folk costume,

has been and still is a true identity card through which they can express their territorial and ethnic belonging³⁷.

It is precisely within this long-established symbolic framework that the recent civic mobilisation around Romanian Blouse Day must be understood. In 2013, Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD) lent credibility to the civic initiative *La Blouse Roumaine* and increased its visibility by organising events dedicated to Romanian Blouse Day. In May and June, a series of ethnographic museums celebrated the Romanian blouse, in many cases in partnership with other cultural institutions. The National Museum of the Romanian Peasant in Bucharest, in partnership with the Peasant's Club and the *La Blouse Roumaine* community, hosted a photo exhibition ("Fotografie cu IE")³⁸; the Ethnography Museum of Braşov organised a temporary exhibition of Romanian blouses featuring items and photographs from the museum's collections; the Dâmboviţa History Museum, part of the National Museum Complex "Curtea Domnească" Târgovişte, celebrated the Romanian blouse through a full programme entitled "Mothers and Daughters"³⁹, and so forth.

Events dedicated to the Romanian blouse reached a particularly significant scale in the Republic of Moldova, where the need to affirm Romanian national identity is especially strong. For centuries, this identity had been suppressed first by the Russian Empire and later by the Soviet state, which promoted a separate, artificial "Moldovan" identity in order to weaken cultural ties with Romania and to construct it as a distinct nation. The promotion of national symbols thus contributes

to strengthening cultural, historical, and political connections with Romania, while also supporting Moldovans' aspirations toward European integration. In this context, the Romanian blouse has become an ethnic symbol with important political stakes. On 24 June 2013, the National Museum of Ethnography and Natural History in Chişinău celebrated Romanian Blouse Day through a wide range of activities: the opening of exhibitions of Romanian blouses and folk costumes from the museum's collections, exhibitions of costumes made by folk artisans, the academic conference "Traditional Folk Costume – Marker of National Identity", and the folk costume parade suggestively entitled "Hours That Reveal Millennia of Tradition", among others. Participants and museum visitors were invited to attend dressed in folk costume or wearing Romanian blouses⁴⁰.

4. Total Social Fact

This brief overview of the events of June 2013 reveals the fruitful encounter between the social imaginary of Romanians and Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD) constructed by experts and by ethnographic and cultural institutions. Both point to an understanding of heritage as a representative and performative practice, through which peasant clothing, as a tradition of the past, is symbolically valorised in the present. This valorisation does not serve solely ethnographic or cultural purposes, but also entails political stakes, a fact made visible through the participation of institutions from the political sphere (Prefectures, City Halls, etc.) in the organisation of festive events. For instance, on 24 June 2013, the Prefecture and the City Hall of

Baia Mare acted as co-organisers of a folk costume parade, followed by the opening of two exhibitions at the Baia Mare Village Museum: one featuring Romanian blouses and traditional costumes from Maramureş County, and another photographic exhibition entitled "The Romanian Blouse: Yesterday, Today, Forever"⁴¹. Diplomatic initiatives likewise fall within the political sphere. The Embassy of Romania in the Kingdom of the Netherlands announced on its official website:

On 24 June 2013, together with the celebration of *Sânziene*, the Universal Day of the Romanian blouse will be inaugurated. Romanians from all over the world will celebrate this special day, on which they will all recall the traditions of Romanian folk costume, the beauty and craftsmanship of the Romanian blouse⁴².

Similarly, the official website of the Romanian Cultural Institute (a Romanian public institution under parliamentary control) notes that "starting with 2013, Romanian Blouse Day has been celebrated on 24 June, together with the *Sânziene*", and that the Universal Day of the Romanian blouse is part of "the multiannual strategy of the Romanian Cultural Institute"⁴³.

Events dedicated to the Romanian blouse organised by institutions within the political and diplomatic sphere externalise an identity and ideological imaginary in which the traditional blouse is used as a symbol of political promotion and of the visual assertion of Romanianness. In the years that followed, the Romanian blouse was increasingly politically instrumentalised by new nationalisms, being worn by

right-wing and radical-right politicians in official and media contexts. Its use as a visual identity marker points to the sustained efforts of politicians to promote and propagate Romanian national identity through the Romanian blouse.

Intersecting with the political dimension, the event also extends into the religious sphere. Although the official communiqués of the Romanian Orthodox Church from June 2013 mention only the Christian feast of Saint John the Baptist on 24 June (without reference to Romanian Blouse Day), a new phenomenon emerged during that period, namely women wearing traditional blouses to religious services. In 2013, the feast of Saint John the Baptist coincided with the Monday of Pentecost, which resulted in higher-than-usual attendance at the Divine Liturgy. As parades of Romanian blouses took place immediately after the religious service⁴⁴, some women (those who were aware of the online campaign *La Blouse Roumaine*) attended church dressed in Romanian blouses. A phenomenon of promoting the traditional blouse within religious services began, which would expand further in the following years under slogans such as “Wear the Romanian blouse at the Divine Liturgy” (*În ie la liturghie*). Social media networks played a significant role in the dissemination of this phenomenon.

The identity imaginary was also instrumentalised for economic or commercial purposes, a fact already visible in the manifesto-text discussed above, which referred to transforming the Romanian blouse into a country brand. *Country branding* (and *branding* more generally) largely belongs to the sphere of economics and marketing and is defined as “the application of

corporate marketing concepts and techniques to countries, to improve their reputation in international relations”⁴⁵. The way a country brand is constructed and promoted brings into discussion and competition not a concrete status of a country or region, but a status constructed from images whose purpose is to arouse interest and to persuade the potential investor, tourist, or consumer of that country or region⁴⁶. It therefore involves the creation of emblematic images of a country which, based on marketing strategies, are meant to sell as effectively as possible that country’s products – whether commercial, touristic, cultural, and so forth⁴⁷ – in an era of intensified globalisation.

The festive event was also used for purposes related to the promotion of the local economy, the accumulation of image capital for certain companies, or the increase of audience and profit for various spectacles. The direct connection with the local economy is highlighted by the Centre for the Preservation of Bucovinian Traditions in Suceava, where the Romanian Blouse Day formed part of the campaign “Save the Bucovinian Village”, carried out in collaboration with the travel agency “Acces Travel”, aiming to raise awareness among the community and decision-makers of the possibility of achieving economic prosperity through the promotion of local culture⁴⁸.

Some companies also capitalised on image-building strategies. In June 2013, the national air carrier TAROM launched a project to recover one of the traditional Romanian costumes worn by the aviator Smaranda Brăescu and transported five Romanian blouses to five major world cities (Tel Aviv, Dubai, Istanbul, Madrid, and

Frankfurt)⁴⁹. Similarly, the airline Blue Air associated itself with the event by having flight attendants wear traditional blouses and by offering gifts to passengers traveling on domestic flights on 24 June 2013 if they boarded dressed in Romanian blouses⁵⁰.

Alongside this economic dimension, sometimes intersecting with it and at other times developing independently, an artistic and decorative imaginary also emerged, largely shaped by representations of Romanian blouses in visual arts and fashion. The initiators of the festive event explicitly relied on this imaginary when naming their community after Matisse's painting *La Blouse Roumaine*. On 23 June 2013, Galateca Gallery in Bucharest opened the exhibition "Măiastra – the Untold Story of the Romanian blouse", in partnership with the *La Blouse Roumaine* community⁵¹. Around the same time, public figures, artists, and designers were photographed wearing Romanian blouses, while representatives of Romanian culture from various fields participated in visual artist Cătălina Flămânzeanu's exhibition "Fotografie cu IE", hosted at the Romanian Peasant Club in Bucharest⁵². Between 22 and 23 June 2013, the Centre for Contemporary Arts "Alchemia" in Bucharest and the online store "Iiana"⁵³ organised a Romanian Blouse Fair. Founded in May 2013 in direct connection with the *La Blouse Roumaine* civic initiative⁵⁴, the online store "Iiana" promoted handcrafted Romanian blouses. The event was part of the celebrations dedicated to the Romanian Blouse Day and concluded with a Sânziene Party aimed at reviving traditional festive practices⁵⁵. On 24 June 2013, the Bureau for Diaspora Relations in Chişinău, an autonomous

structural subdivision of the State Chancellery of the Republic of Moldova, hosted a styling workshop entitled "How to use the Romanian blouse in a cool outfit"⁵⁶. These layers are interrelated, as economic and political stakes converge with cultural, artistic, and fashion-related ones, while the imaginaries themselves interact. Together, these dimensions illustrate how the Romanian blouse circulates across multiple social spheres, acquiring meanings that go far beyond its original utilitarian function.

5. Conclusion

This article has explored the discourses and symbolic practices through which, in 2013, a symbol drawn from the Romanians' idealised past was activated as a cultural, political, and economic resource for the present. Particular attention was given to the convergence of imaginaries and interests originating in highly diverse and seemingly incompatible social domains. The analysis has shown that Romanian Blouse Day functions as a nodal point where cultural economy, symbolic politics, collective emotion, heritage strategies, and other stakes intersect. The event cannot be reduced to a single function – cultural, political, or economic – but simultaneously mobilises diverse institutions, produces and reproduces a social order, and unfolds through a strong symbolic and affective dimension. It is precisely this capacity to "concentrate" a significant portion of society within a performative moment that justifies the use of the concept of the *total social fact*.

The study has also shown how an ethnographic symbol – the Romanian blouse – is recycled and re-signified within

contemporary identity-ideological, economic-commercial, and artistic-visual imaginaries. The analysis has highlighted both the event's inscription within the *pan-European memory-heritage-identity complex* described by Sharon Macdonald and the layered nature of the phenomenon, in which economic, political, artistic, and other social dimensions intersect.

In conclusion, Romanian Blouse Day emerges as a complex socio-cultural product that can be examined from multiple perspectives and that signals a broader paradigmatic shift. This shift is shaped, among other factors, by globalisation, new media, and developments in information technology, which increasingly influence socio-cultural expressions and processes worldwide.

Nevertheless, Romanian ethnological scholarship has not yet produced sustained

studies of festive events of this type. Folklore studies in Romania have tended to focus primarily on traditional celebrations preserved mainly in the memory of older generations, in line with the paradigm of national ethnology, while devoting comparatively little attention to recently created festive events. Romanian Blouse Day represents a festive phenomenon that selectively recycles elements of the past and reactivates them in the present across multiple domains of social life, thus exhibiting the characteristics of what Marcel Mauss termed a *total social fact*. The success and expansion of such events suggest that Romanian folklore studies and ethnology require new methods, theoretical concepts, and analytical tools suited to the dynamics of this emerging paradigm, in order to address contemporary festive phenomena and not exclusively traditional celebrations.

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NOTES

1. The Romanian word for the traditional blouse is *ie*; with a definite article, the word is *ia*.
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5. Law No. 184 of 21 June 2022 for the establishment of 24 June as Romanian Blouse Day: <https://legislatie.just.ro/public/DetaliiDocument/256611>, accessed September 09.2025.
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8. Michi Knecht, and Peter Niedermüller, "The Politics of Cultural Heritage. An Urban Approach", in *Ethnologia Europaea* 32 (2), 2003, p. 89.
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10. *Idem*, p. 3.
11. *Ibidem*, p. 2.
12. Alessandro Testa, *op. cit.*, p. 93.
13. In another study I have demonstrated that nostalgia may be regarded as a psychological driving force behind the construction of such festive events: "Within a global context marked by cultural homogenization, nostalgia operates as a psychological force of reconnection to one's roots, transforming the past into a usable cultural resource and providing coherence to the present through the rewriting of tradition." Eleonora Sava, and Simona Alboi, "When Nostalgia Goes Viral: The Universal Day of the Romanian Blouse", in *Philobiblon*, vol. XXX, 2025, no. 2, p. 421.
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 21. <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=389952511123089&set=a.378996425552031>, accessed September 09.2025.
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