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MĂRȚIȘOR AS A CONTEMPORARY VESTIMENTARY ADORNMENT BRIDGING HERITAGE AND SUSTAINABILITY

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The mărțișor transcends the simple image of the red-and-white thread, constituting a symbolic universe that spans time and space. In 2026, in the Republic of Moldova, this tradition remains alive, manifested through fairs, exhibitions, and museum workshops, exemplified by the Târgul Meșterilor in Chisinau. The study analyzes how the mărțișor is reinvented as a contemporary wearable adornment through generative design, sustainable materials, and the integration of traditional techniques with current aesthetics. The research explores mărțișor classifications and the impact of kitsch on authenticity, highlighting the coexistence of collective memory, individual creativity, and cultural responsibility.

Key words: mărțișor, contemporary wearable adornment, generative design, sustainability, contemporary jewelry/adornment.

INTRODUCTION

At a superficial glance, the red-and-white string may seem banal, almost insignificant. However, once we stop to consider it, we discover a subtle complexity, an amalgam of symbols, rituals and aesthetics. In the Republic of Moldova, the mărțișor marks the beginning of spring and functions as an indicator of cultural identity, a status consolidated by UNESCO's recognition in 2017 as an intangible heritage [1]. In the urban environment, the object predominantly fulfills an aesthetic role, constituting a contemporary clothing ornament, but the relational function – offered, received and exchanged – remains alive, strengthening community cohesion. In a society in constant change, traditions evolve. Fairs, exhibitions and museum workshops propose new forms, innovative materials and unexpected combinations. Thus, the central question emerges: how can an object that is apparently so small, subject to the challenges of contemporary creativity, remain authentic?

PURPOSE

The article aims to analyze how the mărțișor, a traditional symbol of spring in the Republic of Moldova, transforms into a contemporary decorative and cultural form, maintaining authenticity through the integration of generative design, sustainable materials, and digital technologies, while exploring classifications, forms, and materials, as well as the impact of the kitsch phenomenon on preserving the symbolic and identity significance of the object.



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The two-colored cord remains the most constant element of the mărțișor: white and red symbolize life and death, fertility and regeneration, light and darkness. The two twisted threads suggest that the oppositions are not necessarily conflictual. Traditionally, the cord was made of hand-spun wool or cotton [2], but modern variants include recycled materials and sustainable fibers. Even industrialized, the cord remains immediately recognizable.

The 21st century requires a multifaceted approach: the mărțișor no longer functions only as a ritual talisman, but intersects cultural heritage, contemporary design and creative industries [3]. The evolution of the object can be traced in three directions: traditional – maintaining the archetypal structure and manual techniques; reinterpretative – preserving the chromatic code and introducing formal stylizations and modern techniques (fig. 1); and conceptual – emphasis on the cultural message, going beyond the figurative register. Contemporary functions include: seasonal symbol, clothing accessory, identity object or cultural souvenir [4, p.49].

Production defines distinct typologies: artisanal mărțișor – handmade, unique pieces; designer mărțișor – with a recognizable visual imprint and close to contemporary adornment and fine jewelry (fig. 2); industrial mărțișor – large series, synthetic materials, accessibility and large-scale consumption.

From a morphological point of view: 1) two-dimensional – medallion; 2) three-dimensional – mini-sculptural or modular; 3) transformable – adaptable, can be positioned differently on the body without being completely reused [5, p.31-35]. The raw material defines additional categories: traditional – wool, cotton, wood, ceramics, straw (fig. 3); metallic – stainless steel, silver; industrial/alternative – reused textiles, recycled paper, plastic, resin, modern alloys; sustainable – recycled or eco-friendly materials (fig. 4). Sustainability thus becomes a defining criterion, integrating ecological responsibility and creativity.



Fig.1
Reinterpretative mărțișor, 2026. Author: Maia Tihon.



Fig. 2 Author mărțișor, 2020. Folk artisan, Costru Rodica.



Fig.3
Handcrafted mărțișor, 2026. Folk artisan, Parlui Victoria.



Fig.4 Mărțișor made from recyclable materials, 2025. Author, Nedelcu Victoria.



Fig.5 3D-printed mărțișor, 2025. Author, Pasat Marina.

Functionally, the contemporary mărțișor serves multiple roles: acting as a seasonal symbol, a clothing adornment integrated into personal style, a cultural identity object, or a souvenir for tourists. Modern technologies – including 3D printing, QR codes, hybrid displays, and digital representations – add an extra



dimension, reflecting the creative language of the 21st century and the evolving practices of contemporary art.

Classification of the mărțișor is not strictly linear; a single object can belong to multiple categories at once, demonstrating cultural flexibility and the ability to adapt without losing its symbolic core. Attached elements have evolved over time, taking on spherical, discoidal, rhomboid, or anthropomorphic forms [5]. Generative design and digital technologies now allow creation of modular and complex mărțișoare. Symbolic codes remain intact, while forms become dynamic, and the string can be incorporated into algorithmically generated three-dimensional structures, later printed or combined with natural or recycled materials.

Openness to digital forms encourages a reconsideration of materiality and cultural responsibility. Integration of sustainable materials - such as recyclable wool, handmade paper, or recovered textile threads – protects the environment while conveying a coherent cultural message. In this way, the mărțișor transcends its decorative function, becoming a “vehicle” of cultural responsibility, and learning experiences for children or museum visitors reinforce values of continuity and respect for heritage. Cultural events in the Republic of Moldova reflect this evolution of the mărțișor, combining tradition with contemporary design and sustainable materials. Workshops and fairs allow communities to experiment, learn, and engage directly with these traditions. A notable example, the initiative “Art and Tradition! Give the Celebration,” organized at the Regional Ethnographic Museum – Plovdiv on February 27-28, 2026, brought together mărțișor traditions from the Republic of Moldova and Bulgaria’s Baba Marta, fostering intercultural dialogue and celebrating the symbolism of spring.

Between March 1–12, 2026, Chișinău hosted the 60th edition of the “Mărțișor” International Music Festival, symbolically marking the arrival of spring with concerts, recitals, and cultural projects. At the same time, the “Mărțișor Across the Country” program featured over 40 regional events – workshops, exhibitions, and craft fairs – creating a shared community cultural experience.



Fig. 7 Mărțișor workshop, 2026. Source: photo by Matcan-Lisenco Inga.



Fig.8 The travelling Mărțișorul călător. Source: photo by Matcan-Lisenco Inga.



Fig.9 Mărțișor crafting workshop. Source: photo by Matcan-Lisenco Inga.

Under these conditions, the martisor may risk losing its ritual and identity function, transforming into a simple commercial, seasonal object without cultural depth. Industrial production weakens the connection with authentic craftsmanship and with the meanings transmitted by generations, and tradition is often reduced to an aesthetic ornament. However, its value does not depend only on the materials used. Reuse and recycling become relevant when they are harmoniously integrated



into a coherent aesthetic and a well-thought-out sustainable approach. Essentially, what makes a contemporary mărțișor valuable is the combination of the concept, the way it is made, and the cultural context in which it is part of.

CONCLUSIONS

The mărțișor remains a living symbol that balances tradition with innovation. Cultural events in 2026 showed it is possible to stay authentic while exploring new forms, including generative design. Using sustainable materials, engaging the community, and blending traditional with modern techniques helps prevent kitsch and keep the tradition alive. Contemporary classification highlights its versatility: traditional yet modern, artisanal or commercial, symbolic and aesthetic. The red-and-white string remains the recognizable visual signature, while its typological variety reinforces cultural and aesthetic relevance.

Looking forward, augmented reality and digital technologies can strengthen intangible heritage and inspire younger generations, supporting the mărțișor as a contemporary clothing adornment.

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МАЦКАН-ЛІСЕНКО І., САВІЦЬКА-БАРАГІН Я.

МАРЦІШОР ЯК СУЧАСНА ПРИКРАСА ОДЯГУ, ЩО ПОЄДНУЄ СПАДЩИНУ ТА СТАЛИЙ РОЗВИТОК

Марцішор виходить за межі простого образу червоно-білого шнурка, утворюючи символічний всесвіт, що простягається крізь час і простір. У 2026 році в Республіці Молдова ця традиція залишається живою, проявляючись через ярмарки, виставки та музейні майстерні, зокрема на Ярмарку майстрів у Кишиневі.

Дослідження демонструє, що марцішор переосмислюється як сучасна прикраса-аксесуар через генеративний дизайн, використання сталих матеріалів та інтеграцію традиційних технік із сучасною естетикою. У роботі також розглядаються класифікації марцішора та вплив кітч на автентичність, підкреслюючи співіснування колективної пам'яті, індивідуальної творчості та культурної відповідальності.

Ключові слова: марцішор, сучасна носима прикраса, генеративний дизайн, сталий розвиток, сучасні ювелірні вироби / прикраси.