

### REVITALIZATION OF CULTURAL IDENTITY USING SIGNS-SYMBOLS

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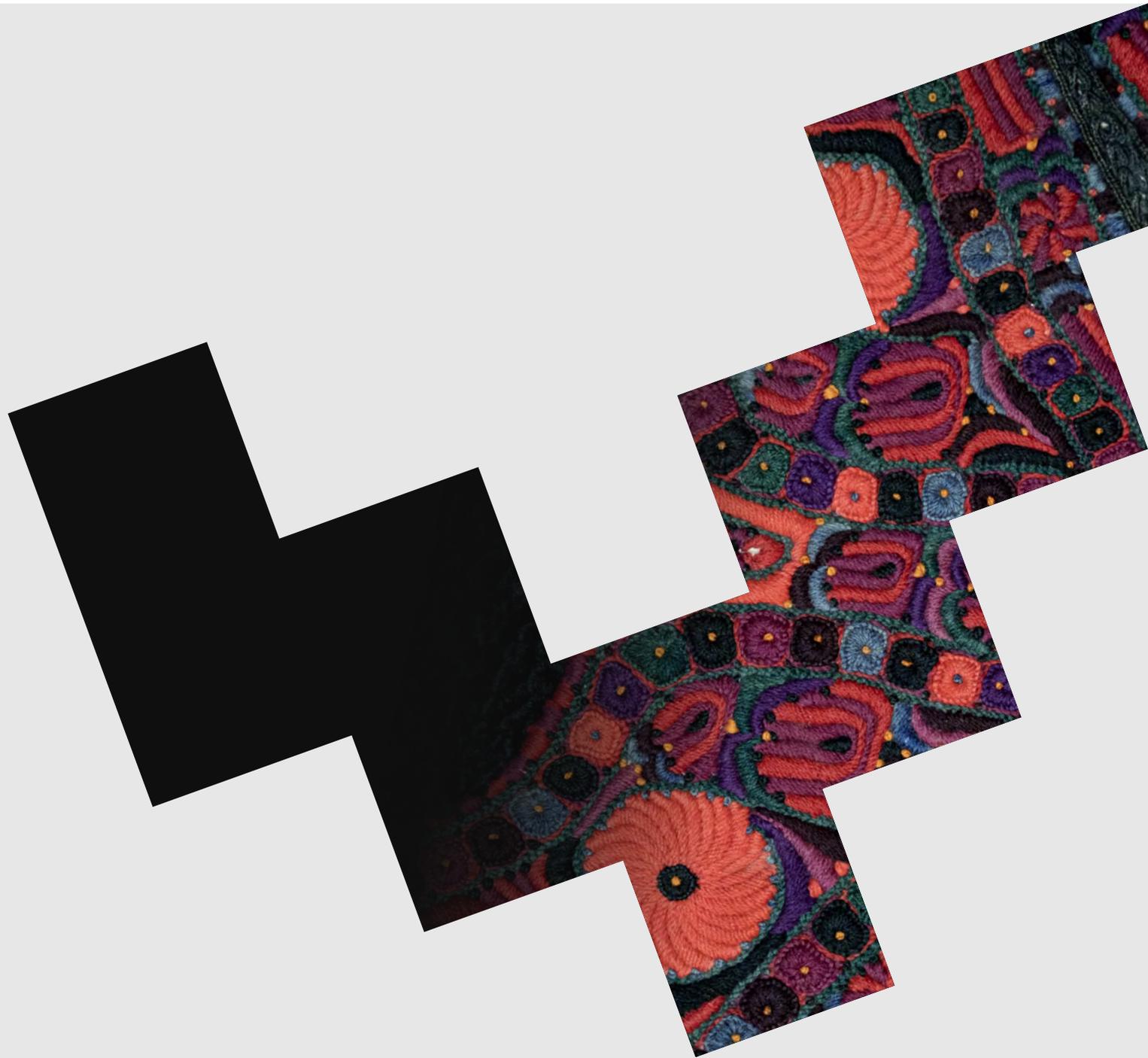
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PORTFOLIO

# REVITALIZATION OF CULTURAL IDENTITY USING SIGNS-SYMBOLS

(CASE STUDY: VĂDASTRA VILLAGE)

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Cornelia Moțăianu, born in Bucharest, Romania, is a visual artist, graphic designer and web designer. In 1999 she graduated from the National University of Arts Bucharest, with a B.A. in Graphic Design.

With over 27 years of experience in advertising, Cornelia collaborates with local and international advertising agencies as a Senior Art Director, developing creative concepts for advertising campaigns, packaging, and corporate and brand identity.

She also created the layout for several books of art and book covers.

Cornelia is currently researching communication through signs-symbols for her doctoral studies at the National University of Arts in Bucharest, where she is also an Assistant Professor at the Design Department. Since 2016 she has taught the Desktop Publishing seminar at the Faculty of Journalism and Communication Studies at the University of Bucharest. Cornelia has been a member of the Romanian Association of Visual Artists, Design Branch, Bucharest since 2006.

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### Abstract

The preoccupation of many scholars to save the Romanian cultural heritage has been a constant topic. Architects, archaeologists, historians, art historians, and designers compete to preserve the image of the past and the spiritual richness of tradition with the help of various modern technological tools. Visual design is increasingly used in cultural projects.

This project of visual design, of revitalizing the cultural identity of a village, wants, not only to bring unknown information about the culture of a place, but is also an invitation to preserve the fascinating value of the identity of the traditional society, represented by the crafts and folk customs that have survived until today.

By synthesizing the essence of traditional patterns inherited from the past, an intuitive system of visual identity represented by signs has resulted, which introduced the interested public to the cultural and historical atmosphere of the researched region.

These signs become symbolic representations of the village's tangible and intangible heritage. A sign-symbol was created for each element of the local tradition, which will be part of the infographic that will concisely present certain cultural processes.

### Keywords

revitalization  
cultural heritage  
identity  
signs-symbols  
infographics

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## INTRODUCTION

My research as a visual communication professional is based on communication through signs in order to reveal the identity of a place with huge historical baggage and forgotten traditional crafts, namely, the Romanian village. Today, many of the historical places, crafts, or traditional costumes are increasingly neglected or forgotten, since modern culture is replacing the spiritual richness of the Romanian village identity.

Still one can notice that a community's identity is Tradition, that is, a collective consciousness based on Memory and Image. And this Tradition, if not continued, will disappear.

In this perspective, this portfolio will present a visual design project to revitalize the cultural identity in the consciousness of a contemporary village community, namely the village of Vădastra.

Vădastra is a village located in the Oltenia region of South-Eastern Romania. Throughout this territory, an exquisite culture flourished during the Middle Neolithic period (5000-4500 B.C.).

But the term "Vădastra culture" defines a larger cultural tradition that existed between the rivers Olt and Jiu, including the south-eastern area of Romania and north-eastern Bulgaria (Logofătu, 2007, p. 8). The Vădastra culture was discovered at the beginning of Romanian archaeology (the second half of the nineteenth century); the first discoveries were made in 1871 in the Măgura Cetate area (Logofătu, 2007, pp. 20-28).

The Vădastra culture is known for its exuberant ceramic art, whose decorative patterns are still present today on a few pieces of ceramics and folk clothing, such as leather coats.



**Figure 1.**  
Leather coat made by  
the furrier Dumitru  
(Mitrel) Liceanu.  
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**Figure 2.**  
Ceramic vases made by  
ceramist Ion Cococi.  
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## THE VĂDASTRA PROJECT

For this project, I started to develop a package of cultural information which includes the identity of the place, the community identity and that of the individual people, and all these identities will synthesize the cultural tradition of the Vădastra village. This sum of identities will be visually transposed into a contemporary representation, using an instrument of contemporary technology of visual communication, namely, the infographic.

An infographic (short for graphical information) is a type of image that combines data with design, helping the transmitter to communicate a concise and clear message to the receiver.

These messages that define an infographic contain complex information that can be consumed quickly and easily understood by the receiver (see Smiciklas, 2012, p. 3). The project contains many types of infographics: the process of making the object, the reuse of the object in the contemporary environment, social actions (traditional events) etc. All these infographics will describe and create an identity package for the recovery of the cultural identity of the Vădastra village.

In this perspective, for the Vădastra project, I have created the term infodigital graph which describes the cultural information represented by graphic signs, accessed through digital technology. The next step was to create symbol signs with which to build interactive infographics in the following stage.

It is known that a visual identity can have a recognizable sign. Starting from the decorative elements of the Vădastra culture, I have created a sign-symbol, which can be present on all the communication materials of the village (i.e., standard materials, panels, websites of local institutions etc.) as well as on all objects made by local craftsmen-artists, along with their signature.

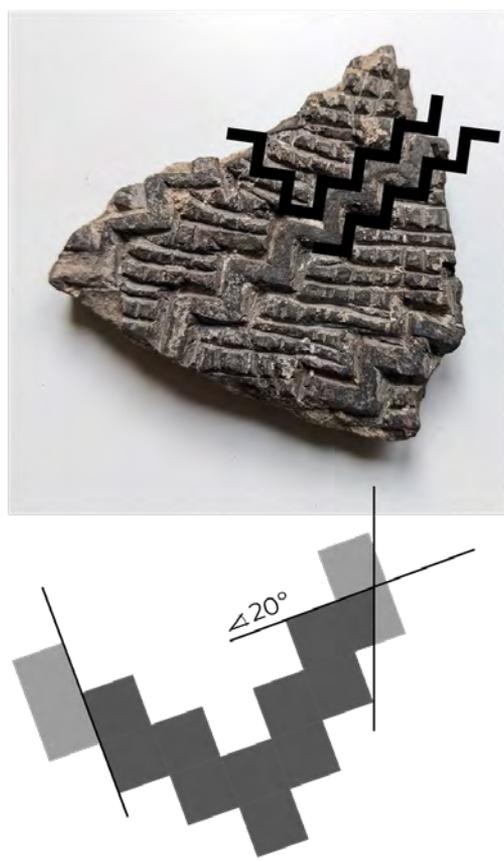
Inspired by the ornamental motifs of the Vădastra prehistoric ceramics, of the coats made in the village generations ago and of the fabric's representative of folk culture, I designed a decorative pattern out of identical squares in a meander form, which suggestively creates the letter 'V'.

**Figure 3.**

Vădastra logo.

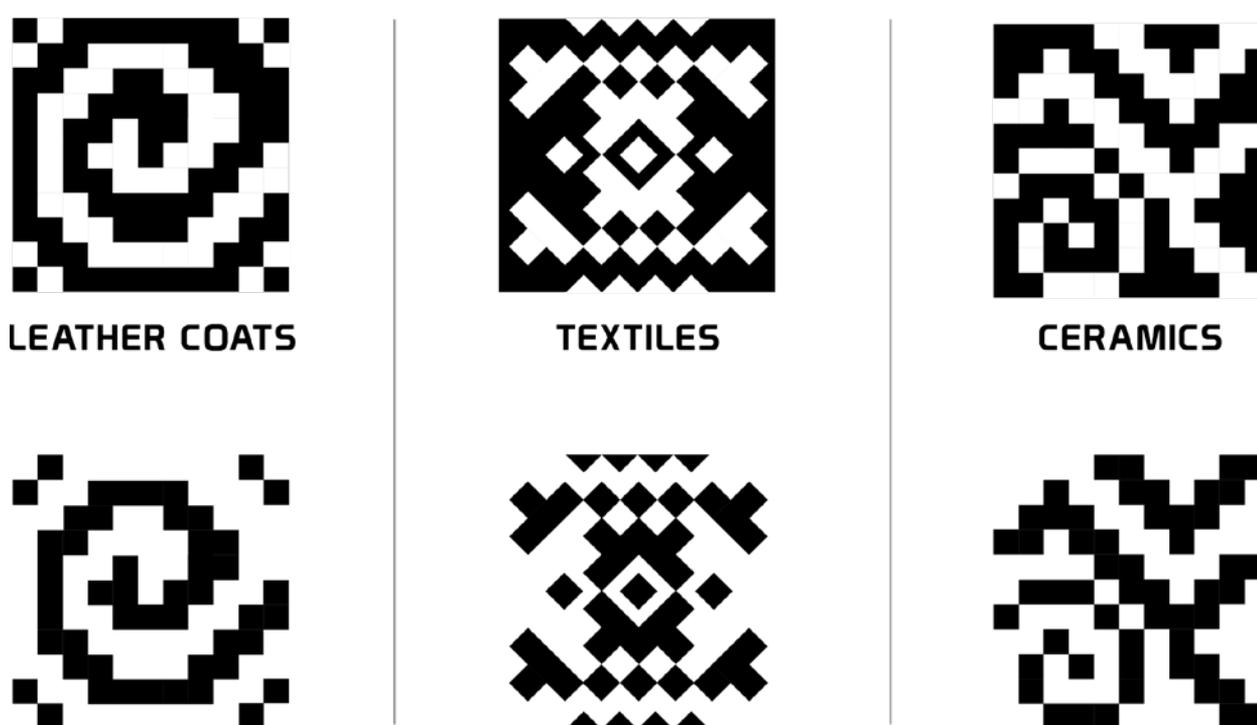
The sign-symbol was created starting from a piece of vessel from the Vădastra culture. Prehistoric ceramics photo and graphic illustrations

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I used in the creation of the symbols only black and white colours, these being specific to the Vădastra prehistoric ceramics whose black incised surfaces were filled with white calcium.

Following the documentation about the crafts and significant local cultural activities (see Logofătu, 2007, pp. 97-107), and after talking with villagers, I have gathered information about the specific categories that define the material and intangible heritage of this village, which helped me design the signs-symbols for three of the most important crafts that define the identity of the Vădastra village's material culture: ceramics, decorated leather coats, and textiles.



**Figure 4.**  
Signs-symbols for crafts  
(decorated leather coats,  
textiles, ceramics).  
Graphic illustrations  
© 2022 Cornelia Moțăianu

The geometric shape used to create these signs is the square, and its angular geometry and the lack of curved lines or circular shapes are intentional and justified, because, in the current digital technology, any image is made up of pixels.

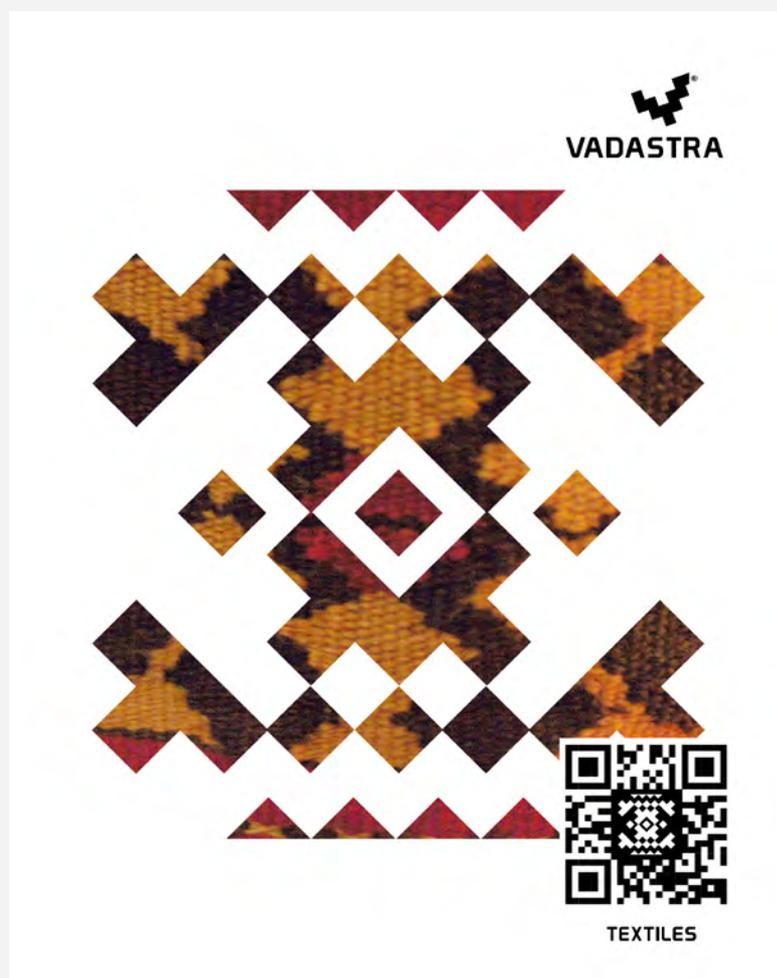
Digital technologies use pixels to display images on the screens of various devices such as TVs, computers, tablets, and smartphones, including digital cameras, and in this way tradition and modernity will be put together and cohabit peacefully.

A final objective of this project is to help to develop participatory tourism by organizing local cultural events, open to the public, with the help of the Vădastra City Hall and local craftsmen. The tourist can visit the houses of craftsmen, being able to actively participate in the technological processes of making traditional objects.

The houses of local craftsmen open to visitors will be signposted by panels containing a specific sign-symbol of the craft presented.



**Figure 5.**  
Outdoor information panel. Craft:  
Decorated leather coats.  
Graphic illustration © 2022 Cornelia Moțăianu



**Figure 6.**  
Outdoor information panel.  
Craft: Weaving and Sewing.  
Graphic illustration © 2022 Cornelia Moțăianu



**LEATHER COATS**



**TEXTILES**



**CERAMICS**

**Figure 7.**  
Personalized QR codes for craft categories.  
Graphic illustration © 2022 Cornelia Moțăianu



Figure 9.

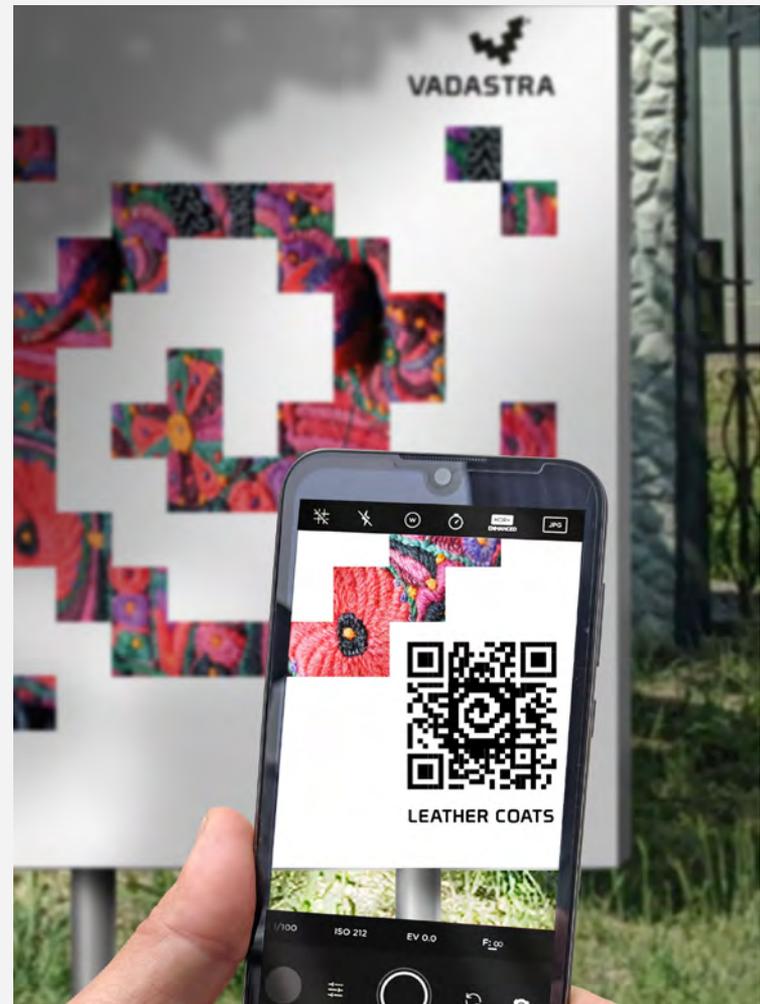
Dissemination. Outdoor information panel.  
Graphic illustration © 2022 Cornelia Moțăianu

Figure 8.

Outdoor information panel.

Craft: Pottery.

Graphic illustration © 2022 Cornelia Moțăianu



Additionally, the panels will contain QR codes, which will lead to a website dedicated to the Vădastra Cultural Heritage, which will provide the visitor with supplementary information about the traditional local crafts, such as filmed interviews, practical demonstrations, cultural events, and exhibitions.

For me, the Present represents the New and the Past represents the Memory. The visual design could connect the Past and the Present, thus keeping alive the cultural memory of the authentic Romanian village. Through this project of revitalizing the identity of Vădastra village, I want to change the outdated perception of the Romanian village, bringing to light the traditional crafts of the place and turning them into true sources of inspiration for the next generations.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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