

NEO-CHIVALRIC ORGANIZATIONS AS ACTORS OF SOCIETAL SECURITY: CULTURAL MICRODIPLOMACY IN THE PRACTICE OF THE SOVEREIGN TEMPLAR ORDER SAINT MARTIN

*Aurelian Roland BOIT**

Abstract. *Against a European backdrop of identity fragmentation, social polarisation, and declining public trust, this article analyses the conditions under which a neo-chivalric organisation can contribute to inclusion, community cohesion, and societal security. The theoretical framework brings together the Copenhagen School's perspective, Pierre Bourdieu's theory of symbolic capital, the understanding of Europe as 'a culture of cultures', and the concepts of soft power and cultural microdiplomacy. The research uses a qualitative case study of the Sovereign Templar Order Saint Martin (OSTSM), based on an analysis of institutional documents and cultural, educational, and philanthropic projects. It examines the public recognition of merit, cultural dialogue and transnational cooperation, as well as solidarity and the inclusion of vulnerable people. The analysis indicates that tradition and ceremonial visibility are insufficient to ensure the legitimacy of a contemporary organisation. Legitimacy is built through transparency, congruence between declared values and concrete actions, open cooperation, and verifiable social outcomes. Neo-chivalry can thus be understood as a form of symbolic civil society, and cultural microdiplomacy as a complementary means of supporting societal security.*

Keywords: *societal security; microdiplomacy; neo-chivalry; legitimacy.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The security challenges facing contemporary Europe are not limited to border defence, military capabilities, or economic stability. They increasingly concern how people define their sense of belonging, preserve mutual trust, and manage to live together in societies characterised by diversity. Migration, political polarisation, competing interpretations of the past, and deepening social inequalities can weaken the ties between individuals, communities, and institutions. In a context marked by rapidly shifting social reference points, the need for continuity and stability does not disappear. People seek communities, values, and narratives that give meaning to their experiences and strengthen their sense of belonging. This interpretation builds on Bauman's observation that stable reference points, codes, and rules for orientation are becoming increasingly difficult to find, while individuals are compelled continually to construct their own trajectories (Bauman, 2000: 7-8).

This need can generate solidarity, but it can also foster rigid divisions between 'us' and 'them'. The issue is not the existence of collective identities, but the way in which they are defined and related to one another. An open identity can support cooperation, whereas one constructed through exclusion can turn diversity into a threat. For this

* PhD student, Babeş-Bolyai University, Faculty of European Studies, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Email: aurelianroland@yahoo.com.

reason, societal security does not entail preserving a fixed and immutable identity. It refers to a society's capacity to maintain its cohesion and identity continuity while adapting to change within a pluralist framework, without diversity being perceived as a threat to the community's existence (Wæver et al., 1993; Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, 1998: 119-120). Understood in this way, societal security extends beyond the traditional sphere of defence and encompasses the roles of civil society, cultural heritage, social capital, and community participation.

The subject is particularly important in Europe's border regions. In these spaces, national, ethnic, linguistic, and confessional identities coexist and influence one another against a background of mobility, shared historical experiences, and continuous cultural exchange. A border may separate jurisdictions, but it may also function as a contact zone. Arad is a relevant setting because of its proximity to the Romanian-Hungarian border, its Central European heritage, and its multi-ethnic, multicultural, and confessionally diverse character. These features encourage cooperation, but they also require the continuous cultivation of respect, dialogue, and mutual recognition.

The connection with Arad is also justified by the design of the case study. Although the headquarters of the Sovereign Templar Order Saint Martin are located in France, part of its European activities is coordinated from Arad. The city is mentioned not merely as a geographical reference point; it is analysed as a social environment in which the relationships between heritage, confessional plurality, civic initiative, and transnational cooperation can be observed. This positioning is consistent with the theme of the EuroINCLUS conference, which addresses identity, security, and inclusion in the border regions of South-Eastern Europe within the broader framework of European integration and the experience of Central and Eastern European states.

Public policies and state institutions play an essential role, yet they cannot build community cohesion on their own. Associations, foundations, religious communities, universities, and cultural organisations also contribute to this process. Through their projects and partnerships, they can bring together groups that rarely interact, mobilise resources, and create settings in which differences are encountered through dialogue and direct contact rather than merely managed from a distance (Putnam, 2000: 22-23; Kaldor, 2003). Non-state actors do not replace public authority, but they can complement institutional intervention through relationships based on proximity, continuity, and trust.

Contemporary neo-chivalric organisations may also be included among these actors, although their public functions have received relatively little sociological attention. The relevant literature has focused primarily on the emergence of chivalry, the evolution of medieval and monarchical orders, and the persistence of the chivalric imaginary in modern society (Keen, 1984; Boulton, 2000). Another line of research has highlighted the selective ways in which modern societies relate to the past and the role of traditions in constructing legitimacy and a sense of belonging (Hobsbawm, 1983; Anderson, 1991). Between the historical study of traditional orders and the critical analysis of contemporary organisations, however, an insufficiently explored question remains: what public role can an association that uses chivalric symbols perform today without claiming state authority or uninterrupted legal continuity with a medieval institution?

This question constitutes the starting point of the article. Rituals, titles, and heraldic insignia do not acquire social relevance merely by existing. Ceremonial can strengthen solidarity among members and support their commitment to shared values, but its public value depends on the organisation's openness to society and its connection

to concrete action. Likewise, declaring a philanthropic mission does not in itself demonstrate social impact. Symbolic capital must be assessed in relation to the effects of the organisation's activities on the community: strengthening trust, encouraging cooperation, recognising merit, including vulnerable people, and promoting intercultural and interconfessional dialogue.

The case study focuses on the OSTSM, a non-governmental organisation inspired by Christian and Martinian values and active in the cultural, educational, and philanthropic fields. The research question is as follows: to what extent, and through which mechanisms, can neo-chivalric heritage and symbolic capital be transformed into concrete contributions to inclusion, social cohesion, and societal security? The working hypothesis is that this transformation becomes credible when declared symbols and values are embedded in pluralistic civic networks, transparent institutional procedures, and social interventions whose results can be documented and verified. The article seeks to bring the neo-chivalric phenomenon into the debate on the role of non-state actors and to examine the usefulness of the concept of cultural microdiplomacy for understanding relationships built through culture, hospitality, memory, and solidarity.

2. METHODOLOGY

The research is qualitative and adopts an interpretive-constructivist perspective suited to studying the relationship between symbols, institutional identity, and social action. It is designed as a case study because it examines in depth an organisational actor situated within a specific regional and institutional context. The case study is not intended to support generalisations about all neo-chivalric organisations, but to identify mechanisms through which a symbolic identity can be directed towards activities of community relevance.

The purpose of the research is to understand how neo-chivalric heritage and symbolic capital can be harnessed in forms of civic engagement relevant to inclusion, community cohesion, and societal security. Two objectives were established in relation to this purpose. The first is to examine how the OSTSM defines its identity, status as an association, and public role. The second is to analyse the relationship between its stated values, institutional rules, and the cultural, educational, and philanthropic projects undertaken together with community partners.

The empirical material comprises the organisation's statute, internal regulations, strategic documents, press releases, public presentations, and materials concerning the main projects associated with the OSTSM. These include documents relating to the Arad Community Ball, including the regulations governing the conferment of the *Cross of Merit* at this event, as well as materials relating to the Arad Religious Music Festival, the JAZZAR International Jazz Festival, the conference dedicated to Saint Martin, the Knight-Art events, and the philanthropic initiatives 'Together, We Give Smiles' and the Spring Ball. Information provided by partners concerning beneficiary selection, project continuity, and mobilised resources was also analysed.

The empirical material is processed through a combination of documentary analysis, institutional discourse analysis, and sociological interpretation. The documentary analysis examines legal status, mission, institutional rules, and declared forms of cooperation, while the discourse analysis highlights how the organisation uses notions such as tradition, merit, protection, charity, and responsibility. The sociological interpretation relates these elements to societal security, social and symbolic capital, organisational legitimacy, soft power, and cultural diplomacy. Comparing declared

values with the documented structure and results of the projects makes it possible to examine the transition from internal identity to public benefit.

The case study analysis is organised around the organisation's principal fields of activity: public recognition and support for education, cultural dialogue and transnational cooperation, and solidarity and social inclusion. It examines inter-institutional cooperation, the promotion of merit, relationships developed through festivals, conferences, heritage, and hospitality, as well as projects for children, young people, vulnerable persons, and victims of domestic violence. Within these activities, ritual is examined both as a means of strengthening belonging and as a symbolic resource that can support public visibility and community mobilisation.

A substantial part of the analysed material comes from the documents of the organisation and its partners. Given its qualitative and interpretive character, the study seeks to understand the mechanisms through which declared values are translated into actions of community relevance, without quantitatively measuring social impact. The analysis examines the organisation's public discourse, the justification of its practices, and the relationship between its stated objectives and implemented projects. Data on beneficiaries and resources are used as institutional information and interpreted in relation to the available documents and materials. Accordingly, the conclusions highlight the identified mechanisms and directions of action without constituting an external evaluation of social impact. Future research based on interviews, direct observation, and independent assessments could complement and deepen the study's findings.

The study builds on previous research into the identity of contemporary chivalric orders (Boit, 2025), extending the analysis from the question of historical legitimacy to these organisations' public role and mechanisms of civic engagement. It focuses on how tradition is reinterpreted in relation to inclusion, societal security, and cooperation in a European border region.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1. Societal Security and the Role of Non-State Actors

The theoretical framework of the Copenhagen School extends security analysis beyond state-centred and military concerns to include the political, economic, societal, and environmental sectors (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, 1998: 1-2). In the societal sector, the referent object is collective identity, and insecurity arises when a community perceives certain developments as threats to the existence and continuity of that identity (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, 1998: 119-120). This perspective is useful because it shows that societies can become vulnerable even in the absence of a military attack.

The concept must nevertheless be used with care. If every cultural change is presented as an existential threat, the language of security can legitimise exclusion and intensify polarisation. Migration, confessional plurality, or differences in collective memory do not automatically produce insecurity; their effects depend on public interpretation, institutions, and the quality of intergroup relations. From this perspective, an important contribution to societal security consists in the 'desecuritisation' of difference: moving it from the register of fear and emergency into that of cooperation, negotiation, and ordinary coexistence (Wæver et al., 1993).

In Central and South-Eastern Europe, this issue is visible in border regions and multicultural spaces. Ethnic, confessional, linguistic, and cultural identities coexist, overlap, and are reshaped through mobility. Identity fragmentation, social polarisation, and declining trust among individuals, communities, and institutions can impair the

capacity for cooperation and the maintenance of a common framework. Increasingly fluid relationships and the weakening of stable reference points can heighten the need for belonging and recognition (Bauman, 2000). The democratic response lies not in eliminating differences, but in creating institutions and practices through which identities can communicate without perceiving one another as threats.

Societal security does not depend exclusively on state intervention. Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde show that societies may also respond to identity-related challenges through their own activities or by non-state means (1998: 122-123). Civic organisations, academic institutions, religious communities, and cultural actors can mobilise resources, mediate relationships, and create settings for participation. Kaldor (2003) describes civil society as a space of association, deliberation, and networks that sometimes extend beyond state borders. Such networks are not free of interests or tensions, but they can bring visibility to issues that formal institutions find more difficult to reach.

Social capital explains part of this contribution. Putnam defines it through networks and the norms of reciprocity and trust formed within them. He distinguishes between bonding ties, which strengthen solidarity within a relatively homogeneous group, and bridging ties, which create connections between different groups (Putnam, 2000: 22-23). Both are necessary, but they have distinct effects. An organisation requires internal cohesion to mobilise its members; if it remains exclusively inward-looking, however, it may become self-referential. For inclusion and societal security, the challenge is to convert part of this internal cohesion into external cooperation.

Non-state actors may therefore play a complementary role. They do not provide coercive security or replace the functions of the state, but they can strengthen relations between communities, support participation, and reduce isolation. Their value depends on the accessibility of their projects, the diversity of their partners, the transparency of their procedures, and their capacity to produce observable results. Neo-chivalric organisations can be analysed within this framework: not through their ranks or historical claims, but through their contributions to cooperation, trust, intercultural and interconfessional dialogue, and community inclusion.

3.2. Europe as 'a Culture of Cultures': Symbolic Capital, Soft Power, and Cultural Microdiplomacy

European identity is constructed in the tension between unity and diversity. For Delanty (1995), Europe is not a fixed cultural essence, but a historical construction resulting from boundaries, confrontations, and reinterpretations. This perspective draws attention to the fact that a common identity can become exclusionary if presented as homogeneous and definitive. At the same time, the absence of any common reference point may diminish the capacity for solidarity. Europe's challenge is not to choose between unity and diversity, but to construct a unity that remains open to difference.

The description of Europe as 'a culture of cultures', proposed by Mircea Brie, István Polgár, and Florentina Chirodea, captures this possibility. Common belonging does not require the disappearance of local, regional, national, or confessional identities, but their placement within a space of communication. Diversity and multiculturalism become constitutive features of European identity, while cultural borders can function as zones of contact and cooperation (Brie, Polgár, and Chirodea, 2012: 11-12). This approach is important to the EuroINCLUS theme because it links inclusion to the recognition of identities rather than to their homogenisation.

Cultural heritage participates in this process. The Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society, known as the Faro Convention, links heritage to human rights, democracy, and community participation (Council of Europe, 2005). The emphasis falls on the meanings and uses that people attribute to heritage, not solely on the preservation of objects. A heritage community emerges when people and institutions recognise a legacy that they wish to preserve and transmit through public action. Heritage thus becomes a relational practice rather than merely a collection of symbols.

The UNESCO Culture|2030 Indicators framework adds an evaluative dimension. Culture's contribution to development is assessed through access, participation, knowledge, prosperity, and resilience, using quantitative and qualitative indicators (UNESCO, 2019). The implication for civil-society cultural projects is clear: generic invocations of culture are insufficient. Information is needed on who participates, which groups are included, what partnerships are formed, and whether the results endure. Culture can generate prestige, but public relevance also requires accessibility, reciprocity, and evidence.

Bourdieu's theory of symbolic capital helps explain the difference between symbol and recognition. Symbolic capital is not an intrinsic property of a title, ritual, or insignia; it is a form of capital perceived and recognised as legitimate by others (Bourdieu, 1991: 238). An organisation's prestige therefore depends on the relationship between the signs it uses and the credibility accorded to them by relevant publics. A distinction may confirm internal solidarity, but it acquires public relevance when its criteria are intelligible, the recognised individuals have verifiable contributions, and the procedure is accepted beyond the membership circle.

Joseph Nye's concept of soft power describes the capacity to secure cooperation through attraction, values, and credibility rather than through coercion or payment (Nye, 2004). The term was developed primarily for analysing states, and its application to civic organisations must be proportionate. A local actor does not possess a state's resources and does not project a foreign policy. It can, however, exercise modest cultural and relational influence through reputation, hospitality, credible projects, and sustained partnerships. In the case of a neo-chivalric organisation, soft power does not arise automatically from ceremonial; it comes from the capacity to transform symbols into a public experience recognised as useful.

Cultural diplomacy has traditionally been associated with states, cultural institutes, and diplomatic missions. Recent literature shows, however, that artists, universities, museums, non-governmental organisations, and other non-state networks are increasingly participating in international cultural exchanges (Gienow-Hecht and Donfried, 2010; La Porte Fernández-Alfaro, 2016; Lee and Ayhan, 2015). They can develop long-term relationships, facilitate mutual understanding, and cooperate with public institutions without becoming extensions of them. The legitimacy of their involvement derives from competence, representativeness, openness, and results rather than from an official diplomatic mandate.

In international-relations literature, microdiplomacy and paradiplomacy refer mainly to the external activities of subnational governments, regions, and cities (Duchacek, 1990; Aldecoa and Keating, 1999). The present study uses the notion in a narrower and explicit sense: cultural microdiplomacy denotes the local and transnational interactions through which a non-state actor builds cooperative relationships among individuals, communities, organisations, and institutions by drawing on culture, memory,

hospitality, education, and solidarity. The concept implies neither the exercise of diplomatic authority nor a mandate to represent the state. It describes a small-scale relational practice that complements institutional diplomacy.

This delimitation makes possible a concrete evaluation of initiatives. A festival, conference, ceremony, or philanthropic project acquires a microdiplomatic dimension when it creates relationships among different actors, facilitates cooperation, and produces continuity. The presence of foreign guests or the use of solemn language is not sufficient. What matters is reciprocity, the autonomy of partners, the quality of participation, and the capacity of encounters to generate subsequent ties. Through such practices, symbolic heritage can become a resource for rapprochement in a Europe defined by plurality.

3.3. Contemporary Neo-Chivalry and the Construction of Legitimacy

The history of chivalry encompasses ideals such as honour, loyalty, courage, charity, and service, as well as realities associated with hierarchy, warfare, and competition for prestige (Keen, 1984). Medieval and monarchical orders possessed legal forms and functions specific to the periods in which they emerged; a contemporary association cannot simply reproduce them (Boulton, 2000). The term neo-chivalry is used here descriptively to refer to modern organisations that reinterpret chivalric values, symbols, and practices within civil society.

The distinction between legal continuity and symbolic continuity is essential. A present-day organisation may draw inspiration from the spiritual, moral, and cultural heritage of chivalry without claiming to be the uninterrupted legal successor of a medieval order. Conflating these two levels creates confusion and shifts the debate from the organisation's present role to a genealogy that is difficult to demonstrate. Separating them allows the organisation to be analysed through its contemporary status, its own rules, its relationships with partners, and the results of its activities.

The relationship with the past can be examined through the concept of 'invented tradition'. Hobsbawm describes ritual and symbolic practices organised through accepted and repeated rules that convey values and norms and establish a selective relationship with the past (Hobsbawm, 1983: 1-2). The constructed character of a tradition does not automatically deprive it of value. Rather, it shows that the past is reinterpreted in response to contemporary needs for identity, continuity, and cohesion. The relevant questions become which values the tradition transmits, who may participate, and what effects it produces in the public sphere.

Anderson (1991) showed that shared narratives, calendars, and signs help people imagine themselves as members of the same community. The symbolic production of belonging does not in itself amount to falsification. The problem arises when a single narrative appropriates the past, eliminates competing interpretations, or attributes to an organisation authority that it does not possess. Heritage acquires a democratic function when it remains open to dialogue, is presented clearly, and supports relationships with people outside the group.

The theory of organisational legitimacy provides an additional criterion. Suchman defines legitimacy as a generalised perception that an entity's actions are appropriate within a social system of norms, values, and beliefs (Suchman, 1995: 574). He distinguishes pragmatic legitimacy, based on perceived usefulness; moral legitimacy, grounded in an assessment of goals and procedures; and cognitive legitimacy, which arises when the organisation's identity is clear and intelligible. For a neo-chivalric organisation, useful projects support pragmatic legitimacy, fair procedures and an

orientation towards the common good strengthen moral legitimacy, and clarification of the internal organisational nature of its titles contributes to cognitive legitimacy.

Ritual complements this process. Alexander analyses social performance as a relationship between actors, symbols, scripts, and audiences. Its credibility depends on its capacity to make visible the connection between meaning and action (Alexander, 2004). Ceremonial can generate belonging, continuity, and solidarity, but its public value becomes convincing when followed by community engagement. For neo-chivalric organisations, ritual functions as a mechanism for producing belonging, while social relevance constitutes the principal source of contemporary legitimacy.

Neo-chivalric heritage may follow two paths. In a predominantly internal form, symbols strengthen solidarity among members and confirm status within the group. In a relational form, the same resources support public activities, inter-institutional collaboration, and the recognition of civic contributions from outside the order. The former primarily produces bonding social capital; the latter enables bridge-building. The concept of symbolic civil society denotes precisely this possibility of using memory, ritual, and prestige for civic mobilisation, provided that internal identity is linked to responsibility and public benefit.

4. THE OSTSM CASE STUDY: PRACTICES OF CULTURAL MICRODIPLOMACY

Institutional documents present the OSTSM as a non-governmental, non-profit, and apolitical organisation inspired by the Christian values associated with Saint Martin. The organisation does not claim medieval legal continuity, but embraces a symbolic and moral lineage adapted to contemporary civil society. Its titles, ranks, rituals, and insignia have an internal, associative significance and confer neither public authority nor legal prerogatives outside the organisation. This institutional positioning and the distinction between legal continuity and symbolic lineage have previously been analysed from the perspective of the organisation's identity construction (Boîț, 2025: 150-155; OSTSM, n.d.).

The figure of Saint Martin provides the moral core of the institutional identity. The act of sharing his cloak with a vulnerable person is reinterpreted as a model of the transition from warrior to protector and as an expression of active charity. Human dignity, solidarity, education, culture, and support for people in difficulty are presented as contemporary forms of chivalric service. In this logic, neo-chivalric identity is not an end in itself, but a symbolic framework that encourages members' participation and assumption of community responsibilities.

The case's relevance is heightened by the coordination of part of the organisation's European activities from Arad. Located near the Romanian-Hungarian border, the city has a Central European heritage and a multi-ethnic, multicultural, and confessionally diverse profile. In such an environment, identities develop through contact, shared memory, and cooperation. The organisation's activities can be analysed according to their capacity to create ties among institutions and communities that do not necessarily share the same cultural or religious identity.

The analysis of documents and projects reveals a process through which symbolic capital is transformed into concrete social practices. The organisation draws on a recognisable repertoire - the figure of Saint Martin, heraldry, ceremonial, distinctions, and narratives of responsibility - and connects it to educational, cultural, and philanthropic projects. When initiatives extend beyond the membership circle and

include public institutions, academia, cultural organisations, religious communities, and beneficiaries, symbolic identity can become a resource for cooperation.

A. Public Recognition, Education, and Social Capital

The Arad Community Ball is one of the most significant projects through which this mechanism can be observed. Launched in 2015 as the 'Arad Community Supports Achievement' Gala and organised under its current name since 2019, the project brings together philanthropy, education, and the public recognition of merit. Together with the EUROPEANUL Association, the OSTSM performs an organisational role alongside educational and cultural institutions, public authorities, business representatives, and other community partners.

According to the institutional data analysed, more than 2,000 pupils received public awards between 2015 and 2025, and over RON 600,000 was directed towards supporting educational, cultural, and social achievement. The project gives visibility to pupils who excel in academic competitions, young people with outstanding results, teachers, and individuals involved in community life. Recognition includes prizes, diplomas, and connecting beneficiaries to a network of institutions and partners committed to education and achievement.

The selection procedure links the ceremonial dimension of public recognition to official data and institutional assessments. The Arad County School Inspectorate supplies the official records of results achieved in academic competitions, while specialist clubs are consulted in assessing sporting performance. Representatives of the EUROPEANUL Association and the OSTSM, together with representatives of the Arad County School Inspectorate and independent public figures, analyse the nominations and results in each field. This assessment forms the basis for selecting the recipients of prizes, diplomas, and distinctions and for the nomination submitted to the Embassy of France in Romania for the 'Prix d'Excellence de l'Ambassade de France en Roumanie'. Since 2018, the Embassy of France in Romania has granted its High Patronage to the event.

This mechanism gives recognition a community dimension. Schools provide data on educational achievement, sports clubs confirm results, civic organisations ensure the selection framework, the business community contributes resources, and cultural and public institutions provide visibility. Repeated cooperation around the same project can strengthen trust among actors and generate bridging social capital, because participants contribute to a common objective without being required to share the same organisational identity (Putnam, 2000: 22-23).

Within the Arad Community Ball, the *Cross of Merit* complements the mechanism of public recognition. Its regulations include professional merit, civic responsibility, and philanthropic involvement among the assessment criteria, while the council reviewing nominations also includes figures from outside the OSTSM (OSTSM, n.d.). The public conferment of the distinction helps translate declared values into concrete and visible community reference points. By recognising the merits of people active in education, culture, academia, and civil society, the organisation's symbolic capital is connected to achievements and contributions extending beyond its own membership.

From the perspective of cultural microdiplomacy, the Ball creates links among a local initiative, educational institutions, the cultural sector, economic actors, and the French diplomatic mission. This influence is not political and does not entail a

representative mandate. It is expressed through the capacity of a local network to circulate values such as merit, responsibility, and solidarity and to build lasting relationships around them. The ceremony becomes the visible component of a broader process of identification, selection, support, and recognition.

The project's continuity is relevant because it transforms a one-off gala into a community infrastructure of recognition. Repeated collaboration enables the accumulation of institutional experience and increases the predictability of relationships among partners. At the same time, the clear publication of criteria, explanations of selection decisions, and monitoring beneficiaries' subsequent trajectories could make the long-term impact more visible. On the basis of the available materials, the project illustrates the transition from ceremonial prestige to concrete support for achievement and the construction of social capital.

B. Cultural Dialogue and Transnational Cooperation

The Arad Religious Music Festival is a form of cultural microdiplomacy based on spiritual heritage and interconfessional dialogue. The participation of choirs, religious communities, and cultural institutions from different backgrounds transforms confessional diversity into a shared artistic experience. Each participant retains the identity of the tradition represented while simultaneously becoming part of a common audience.

The festival's sociological relevance is not limited to its artistic dimension. Encounter through music creates a space in which confessional differences are known through direct contact and are not presented as sources of separation. In Arad, characterised by religious and cultural plurality, such initiatives can contribute to mutual recognition and to a community climate in which diversity is experienced as a resource. This logic is compatible with understanding Europe as 'a culture of cultures', in which unity does not imply uniformity, but communication among distinct identities (Brie, Polgár, and Chirodea, 2012: 11-12).

The JAZZAR International Jazz Festival extends cooperation into the artistic and transnational sphere. The project brings together artists, students, cultural institutions, and audiences from different national contexts and draws on Arad's urban heritage. Through improvisation, listening, and artistic dialogue, jazz offers a language accessible beyond linguistic and institutional differences. The relationships formed among guests, organisers, and audiences transform the city into a space of cultural hospitality.

The festival's soft-power dimension belongs to the local network that makes it possible, not to any single organisation. Influence is built through the quality of the experience provided, the continuity of contacts, and a reputation as an open and reliable partner. In this sense, microdiplomacy operates on a small scale through personal and institutional relationships that can prepare the ground for subsequent artistic and educational collaborations. Hospitality is not merely protocol, but a means of reducing the distance inherent in a first encounter and creating the conditions for cooperation.

The international conference 'Saint Martin, Forerunner of the Christian Chivalric Orders' introduces chivalric heritage into an academic and interdisciplinary space. The event brings together researchers and representatives of cultural institutions, public administration, and civil society around the relationship between history, European identity, and community responsibility. Through the presentation and publication of research, tradition enters into dialogue with history, sociology, theology, and international relations.

This openness performs an important function for the organisation's legitimacy. The university environment contributes to analysing and contextualising its identity narrative. The participation of specialists from outside the OSTSM, the interdisciplinary nature of the contributions, and the publication of the papers can turn the conference into a space for European reflection. Heritage is not presented as an authority sufficient in itself, but as a starting point for knowledge, dialogue, and the critical exchange of arguments.

The Knight-Art Arad and Knight-Art Corfu events complement this dimension by integrating ceremonial, local heritage, art, pilgrimage, and transnational encounters. For members, rituals and symbols construct belonging and continuity. For guests, visits to heritage sites, cultural moments, and hospitality create settings for closer contact and mutual understanding. The OSTSM's role is that of partner, host, and intermediary in these relationships, without replacing diplomatic institutions or claiming religious or political authority.

Ritual performs a dual function here. Within the organisation, it helps strengthen *bonding social capital* and provides members with a shared language of commitment. Externally, this cohesion can support bridge-building towards other groups - *bridging social capital* - when events are open to partners and the community and heritage is harnessed through joint projects. The public relevance of a symbolic organisation depends on the balance between maintaining a recognisable identity and the capacity to work with outsiders without making their participation conditional on membership or full acceptance of the organisation's narrative.

Taken together, the projects embody complementary forms of cultural microdiplomacy. Religious music supports interconfessional dialogue, jazz encourages transnational artistic cooperation, the conference dedicated to Saint Martin connects heritage with academic research, and the Knight-Art events draw on hospitality and ceremonial to create community experiences. Their common element is the facilitation of relationships among people, communities, and institutions that can cooperate without relinquishing their own identities.

C. Solidarity, Protection, and Social Inclusion

The 'Together, We Give Smiles' programme directs the organisation's stated values towards children and young people in vulnerable situations. Educational, cultural, and support activities give beneficiaries access to community experiences and opportunities for participation. In this context, philanthropy is not merely a transfer of resources, but a mechanism through which people at risk of isolation can be included in social and community relationships.

From the perspective of societal security, exclusion undermines trust and the sense of belonging, while participation in educational and cultural activities can help restore these ties. The programme's relevance lies in the proximity it creates among volunteers, institutions, beneficiaries, and the community. Martinian charity is thus reinterpreted as active solidarity and responsibility for the dignity of the person receiving support.

The Spring Ball, organised by the OSTSM Arad Commandery together with Lions Club Arad, extends this logic to supporting people affected by domestic violence. The resources mobilised are directed to the AREIS Association in Arad, which assists victims. Partnership with a specialist organisation connects public solidarity to the

expertise of professionals who understand beneficiaries' needs and can provide appropriate forms of support.

The project also proposes a contemporary reinterpretation of the chivalric idea of protection. Protection is no longer associated with the exercise of force or a paternalistic relationship, but with mobilising the community to defend the dignity and safety of vulnerable people. The event brings a social problem to public attention, creates connections among donors, civic organisations, and professionals, and transforms solidarity into concrete intervention. In this configuration, the OSTSM does not replace specialist services, but contributes to mobilising resources and public attention.

These initiatives show that philanthropy can contribute to inclusion when it is oriented towards participation, autonomy, and continuity. In the case of children, young people, and victims of domestic violence, maintaining confidentiality, protecting beneficiaries' image, and working with specialist organisations are integral to the intended social outcome. A beneficiary is not merely the recipient of generosity, but a person with dignity, rights, and the capacity to participate in community life.

Cultural microdiplomacy is also visible in these projects, albeit in a register different from that of festivals. It operates by mediating among environments that use distinct languages and resources: donors, professionals, civic organisations, institutions, and the public. Culture and ceremonial assist mobilisation, while partnerships translate this mobilisation into support. The relational dimension consists in building shared responsibility around a community issue.

The analysed documents include information on the number of beneficiaries, the resources mobilised, the duration of interventions, and the continuity of the support provided. These data make it possible to highlight the scale and continuity of the projects and provide a documentary basis for assessing their community relevance. The periodic and structured presentation of results can increase their visibility and facilitate verification. For an organisation that uses powerful symbols, transparent and responsible communication of results strengthens the connection between symbolic capital and the common good.

5. DISCUSSION

The case study indicates that the OSTSM can be analysed as a form of symbolic civil society and as a complementary actor of societal security. The organisation does not provide security in a coercive sense and does not replace the responsibilities of the state. Its contribution lies in building ties among institutions, organisations, and communities, mobilising resources, and creating contexts for recognition, dialogue, and solidarity.

The analysis highlights three principal mechanisms. The first is public recognition, through which educational, professional, and civic merit gains visibility, while the people who embody it receive recognition and support. The second is cultural mediation, undertaken through festivals, conferences, and transnational encounters that bring confessional, artistic, and academic environments closer together. The third is community solidarity, through which symbolic and relational resources are directed towards education, participation, and support for vulnerable people. Ritual supports these mechanisms by providing a shared framework of identity and commitment.

Within the limits of the material analysed, the findings support the working hypothesis. The transformation of symbolic capital into public contribution becomes credible when projects are based on pluralistic networks, transparent procedures, and

results that can be documented. The Arad Community Ball provides the clearest example of the transition from symbol to procedure: official records of educational achievement, consultation with sports organisations, the work of the joint committee, the participation of independent public figures, and cooperation with the Embassy of France in Romania demonstrate that the ceremony is the visible dimension of a broader process of selection and recognition. The festivals and conference extend this mechanism towards cultural dialogue, while the social projects direct it towards solidarity and inclusion.

Within this framework, cultural microdiplomacy is neither a form of official diplomacy nor a source of diplomatic status for the actors involved. The concept denotes the local and transnational level at which a non-state actor facilitates relationships through culture, heritage, hospitality, education, and solidarity. Its relevance can be observed when encounters lead to cooperation, partnerships acquire continuity, and projects remain open to individuals and institutions outside the organisation. In this sense, cultural microdiplomacy becomes a relational practice based on proximity and the gradual accumulation of trust.

The study also contributes to understanding inclusion in border regions. The analysed activities do not seek to homogenise religious, historical, or local identities, but to integrate them within a framework of cooperation. The Religious Music Festival draws on confessional diversity, JAZZAR and Knight-Art create transnational contacts, and the philanthropic projects connect the resources of institutional and private actors with beneficiaries' needs. This model corresponds to an understanding of Europe as 'a culture of cultures': identities remain recognisable, but are oriented towards common values and actions (Brie, Polgár, and Chirodea, 2012).

The OSTSM's legitimacy can be understood as a process rather than an attribute acquired through the age of its symbols. In Suchman's terms, the usefulness of projects supports pragmatic legitimacy, an orientation towards dignity and inclusion contributes to moral legitimacy, and the clarity of the organisation's status as an association and the intelligibility of its public role strengthen cognitive legitimacy (Suchman, 1995). Ritual can make the organisation's commitment visible, but its credibility depends on congruence with public activity. Social relevance thus becomes a central criterion of contemporary legitimacy.

Consistent with the qualitative character of the research, the findings provide a relevant documentary basis for understanding institutional mechanisms and how stated values are translated into activities of community relevance. The organisation's and its partners' documents reveal the structure of the projects, the relationships of cooperation, and the continuity of interventions. This perspective could be deepened through future research based on interviews with beneficiaries, partners, and participants from outside the organisation, direct observation, and comparisons with other European neo-chivalric organisations. Continued transparency in presenting criteria, the systematic and periodic publication of results, and monitoring project continuity can strengthen academic evaluation and make the congruence between declared values and undertaken actions more visible.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis shows that contemporary neo-chivalry cannot be reduced to the mere symbolic survival of the Middle Ages. It is a process of reinterpretation through which chivalric memory, values, and rituals are adapted to the conditions of European

civil society. In the case of the OSTSM, an identity inspired by Saint Martin provides a moral language of charity, dignity, and responsibility, while cultural, educational, and philanthropic projects constitute the means through which these values are translated into the public sphere. This identity foundation, previously examined in relation to the organisation's symbolic legitimacy (Boiț, 2025: 150-155), is analysed in the present study from the distinct perspective of societal security, inclusion, and cultural microdiplomacy.

The Arad Community Ball, at which the *Cross of Merit* is also conferred, the Religious Music Festival, the JAZZAR International Jazz Festival, the conference dedicated to Saint Martin, the Knight-Art events, and the solidarity projects illustrate different forms of the same process of transformation. Symbolic capital is harnessed to recognise merit, support intercultural and interconfessional dialogue, develop transnational cooperation, and assist vulnerable people. Through these mechanisms, ritual and tradition can move beyond the organisation's internal sphere and become resources for community participation.

The concept of cultural microdiplomacy makes it possible to understand the relationships constructed at this level. The OSTSM exercises no diplomatic authority and holds no official representative mandate, but as a non-state actor it can contribute to bringing people, communities, and institutions closer together. Its influence is cultural and relational, based on hospitality, trust, the continuity of partnerships, and the capacity to bring diverse actors together around shared values and projects.

The central conclusion is that tradition and ceremonial visibility are not in themselves sufficient to ensure the legitimacy of a neo-chivalric organisation. Contemporary legitimacy is constructed through transparency, congruence between declared values and concrete action, open cooperation with institutions and the community, and verifiable social outcomes. Under these conditions, neo-chivalry can function as a form of symbolic civil society and as a complementary means of supporting inclusion, cohesion, and societal security in a Europe defined by unity in diversity.

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