European Heritage Awards / Europa Nostra Awards (2025)
905-Heritage Champions 5. Heritage Champions

Varvara Buzilă

rGRGwyRK

Entry details

General information

Main country of application	Republic of Moldova*
Name of nominated individual, group of people or organisation.	Varvara Buzilă
Nominator	Gaspar, Baltasar & Melchior Association/Piscu School / Romania
Is the nominee an individual, group of people or an organisation?	Individual

Brief description of the nominee

> Growing up near Orheiul Vechi archaeological site, immersed in cultural heritage, Varvara Buzilă embraced early the "luminous path of heritage", as she calls it today. Over 45 years of research across archives, libraries and 850 Moldovan settlements resasearched in the field, were subject of her tireless efforts to safeguard cultural heritage as a foundation of national identity. Through recording, classification, legislation, writing, promotion at all levels — culminating in UNESCO recognition — she revitalizes local traditional culture for present and future. Her work cements her status as a landmark of Moldovan today's society and earns her reputation of "encyclopaedia of the nation".

Facebook page of the nominee, if any	https://www.facebook.com/varvara.buzila

Contact details - Heritage Champions

Name of the nominee (or contact person for the nominee in case the nominee is an organisation)	Varvara Buzilă
Nominee's position	

Head of Ethnography Section at the National Museum of Ethnography and Natural History of the Republic of Moldova

Organisation of the nominee	National Museum of Ethnography and Natural History of the Republic of Moldova

Address of the nominee

> 35, A. Şciusev Street, app.9, Chişinău
> Republic of Moldava

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Telephone of the nominee (fixed line)	+37322245409
Telephone of the nominee (mobile number)	+37369642755
Name of the nominator	Adriana Scripcariu
Nominator's position	President of Gaspar, Baltasar & Melchior Association/Piscu School, Romania; winner of Europa Nostra Award for Education, training. Skills 2022
Organisation of the nominator	Gaspar, Baltasar & Melchior Association/Piscu School
Email of the nominator	adriana.scripcariu@gmail.com
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Concise summary - Heritage Champions

Concise Summary

> Varvara Buzilă, b.1955 in Trebujeni/Moldova, near by Orheiul Vechi site (UNESCO's Tentative List today), grew up immersed in cultural heritage. Volunteering in archaeological excavations during school holidays and influenced by her peasant roots, she developed a lifelong passion for heritage, later on, along with her husband, architect, ethnologist and museographer Eugen Bâzgu. For over 40 years, Varvara has been a scientific researcher at the National Museum of Ethnography and Natural History in Chișinău, dedicating her career to safeguarding, promoting and revitalizing Moldova's cultural heritage.
> Going through the challenges of the decades after the fall of the Soviet Union, constantly advocating with the tools of the ethnographer for the knowledge of the national identity - ideologically undermined during the Soviet period - she made it her mission: to reveil cultural heritage in the heart of the community, at all levels. Her work spans field research in over 850 of Moldova's 1400 localities and other 82 in Romania and Ukraine. She has published author volumes, scientific articles and many cultural heritage popularization materials. She developed university courses (since 2000), supervised master degree theses and took part in PhD comissions. She has participated as a scientific coordinator in TV programs such as Tezaur on Moldova's national television (since 2013) spreading awareness on

traditional culture, celebrating and encouraging "Living Human Treasure" bearers, introducing this concept in the society.
As President of the National Commission for Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2009–2019), she contributed to the drafting of key legislation (Law on the Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage -2011, Law on the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage -2012). She also led efforts to publish Moldova's National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage (volume 1). Under her coordination, Moldova prepared five nomination files for UNESCO, with four successfully inscribed on the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage.
In addition to her academic and legislative achievements, Varvara has curated original heritage projects including exhibitions - localy and internationaly showed -, and represented Moldova in international professional organizations, symposia and group publications. Since 2012, she has spearheaded a grassroots movement reviving traditional sewing, mentoring groups of women across Moldova. This identitary craft moovement contributed to the inscription of the objectiv in UNESCO.
Starting her 70, Varvara is celebrated as a beloved cultural icon all over Moldova, known for her tireless mission to ensure Moldova's cultural treasures are recognized, preserved, and revitalized for future generations. She is still working and planing for the future.

Detailed description - Heritage Champions

History and description of the nominee's dedication and civic engagement in favour of the safeguard and enhancement of cultural heritage in Europe

Over more than four decades as a scientific researcher at the National Museum of Ethnography and Natural History in Chișinău, Varvara Buzilă has been a tireless advocate for cultural heritage, benefiting communities and professionals alike. Holding a PhD in philology with a specialization in folklore from Babeș-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, she has trained generations of heritage professionals in Chișinău, imparting not only knowledge but also a vision for safeguarding cultural heritage.
Varvara has held leadership, decision-making, and advisory roles in numerous public institutions, emphasizing that researchers must actively apply their expertise for the immediate benefit of heritage and the community. As President of the National Commission for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2009–2019), she oversaw the successful inscription of four Moldovan files on UNESCO's Representative List.
A founding member of the Society of Ethnology in Moldova, which she has led since 1992, and a board member of international organizations, including the International Association for Semiotic Studies in Vienna, Varvara has contributed significantly to academic and cultural discourse. She also coordinated student camps and interdisciplinary expeditions on cultural identity and alterity, fostering dialogue and understanding among participants.
Beyond academic circles, Varvara has maintained strong connections with local communities, periodically visiting villages to engage with residents. Through campaigns such as "Go down in history by donating an object to the Museum!" (2004–2008) and long-term collaboration with Teleradio Moldova, she enriched museum collections and raised public awareness. Since 2013, her work on the Tezaur program has reached audiences across the republic, producing over 600 shows that bring cultural heritage into homes, strengthening community pride and participation. (https://www.youtube.com/@tezaurstudio)
Varvara’s efforts continue to impact both professionals and the public, ensuring Moldova’s cultural heritage is preserved and celebrated.

Time span of nominee's dedicated service to heritage.

It would not be wrong to say that Varvara Buzilă has been dedicated to cultural heritage naturally, since childhood. Playing around an unprotected archaeological site and assisting archaeologists during her school years directed her studies toward this field—the lifelong passion to which she has fully devoted herself. In the summer of 1978, she participated in her first field research as a student. By 1980, she began working as a specialized ethnographer, a role she continues to this day. Thus, she has 45 years of professional experience and over 20 years of growth and training in the cultural heritage environment.

Results and impact achieved

She increased public access to different categories of heritage—museum, intangible, and built—through extensive research, publication, recontextualization, and promotion. By raising the social prestige of heritage bearers and cultural heritage as a whole, she enhanced understanding of national cultural specifics, generated by more than 600 TV shows (300+ hours of emission) and hundreds of interventions in mass media and academic environments.
Her efforts increased social cohesion by changing the perception of intangible cultural heritage, now understood as an essential landmark of cultural identity. She initiated and proposed to communities over time more than 200 festivals, fairs, local celebrations, and workshops.

She significantly expanded the tools that ensure the functioning of cultural heritage in society, benefiting both specialists and the general public. She enriched scientific literature by authoring 9 monographs and 75 scientific articles, and organized forums, juries, and festivals. Since 1991, she has been the founder and president of the Society of Ethnology of the Republic of Moldova.

Since 1983, she has made cultural heritage—especially intangible heritage—accessible to new audiences, particularly children and young people, through programs at the National Museum of Ethnography and Natural History. She connected young generations with elderly bearers of cultural heritage, involving them in 5 files for Living Human Treasure candidates.

She enriched museum collections with more than 1860 artifacts through public donation campaigns, initiating and coordinating two public awareness campaigns regarding heritage protection and the entrustment of artifacts to museums. Her initiatives have directly benefited communities by fostering appreciation, participation, and preservation of cultural heritage.

Official recognitions received, if any

Distinctions at the national level – a selection:
Honorary title ”Om emerit”/"Meritourious Person" (2009) awarded by the Presidency of the Republic of Moldova
The "Glory of Labor" Order (2015) awarded by the Presidency of the Republic of Moldova
Order of the Republic (2021) granted by the Presidency of the Republic of Moldova
The „Ștefan Ciobanu” Award - cultural field and museography - awarded by the Ministry of Culture 2014
Romanian Television Award in the Republic of Moldova (2015)
Honorary diploma awarded by the Government of the Republic of Moldova (2019)
ICOM Moldova Trophy (2019)
UNESCO Prize for the elaboration of the volume "Bessarabian Carpets", at the International Book Fair, Chișinău, 2013
Diploma of Excellence for promoting the values of the Romanian culture, 2020, awarded by the Romanian Cultural Institute, Chișinău branch.

Difficulties encountered and how these obstacles were overcome

Faced with a lack of specialized literature, Varvara Buzilă committed to filling these gaps through continuous research and writing. She also tackled the generational disconnect affecting the transmission of cultural heritage by collaborating with mass media. Programs like ”Cinel-Cinel” , ”Go into history by donating an object to the museum”, and ”Tezaur”, bridged generations and raised awareness.
The aging and destruction of heritage assets prompted her to conduct extensive field research, enriching museum collections, including photographs, videos, and interviews. These efforts preserved irreplaceable elements of Moldova’s cultural legacy.
Recognizing the lack of understanding of intangible heritage realities, Buzilă leveraged the ratification of the UNESCO Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage (2006). From the leading possition, she developed the National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage, led the preparation of four UNESCO files, organized forums connecting heritage bearers with stakeholders, and published articles showcasing heritage viability.
To address the absence of a legislative framework, she mobilized experts, organized symposia, and facilitated collaboration. This resulted in the approval of Moldova’s laws on protecting movable (2011) and intangible (2012)

cultural heritage, creating a foundation for effective preservation and safeguarding practices. Through these efforts, Buzilă overcame significant obstacles, leaving a lasting impact on Moldova's cultural heritage.

Measures taken to ensure the sustainability or viability of the nominee's work.

To ensure the sustainability and viability of her work, Varvara Buzilă initiated over 500 agreements with individuals and cultural communities—beyond those required by UNESCO nomination files—to strengthen and preserve heritage elements. She distributed copies of UNESCO certificates to participating communities, reinforcing their role in heritage preservation. She consistently provided specialist consultancy to practitioners of traditional culture and rural tourism providers, ensuring continuity and ethnographic accuracy in cultural practices.
Her extensive documentation is reflected in several monographs (to objectivs UNESCO listed today), as well as catalogues, articles, and field research showcasing good practices. Contributing to the training of young specialists, she taught courses on ethnology, folk arts, semiotics, and cultural heritage at leading universities.
By generating public discussions, she elevated the social prestige of cultural heritage. She also stimulated working groups to practice cultural elements—such as women's groups engaged in traditional sewing and weaving—maintaining authentic forms connected to museum heritage.

Contribution of the nominee towards sustainability (environmental, social, cultural and economic) and any climate action related activities.

Since 1992, Varvara Buzilă has provided scientific consultancy to the Union of Folk Craftsmen from the Republic of Moldova, promoting the use of local, ecological raw materials in crafting. She advises cultural tourism providers on green building practices and offering sustainable, local products. Her contributions shaped Moldova's tourism development strategy, emphasizing connections to cultural heritage and the natural environment in partnership with the National Association of Rural, Ecological, and Cultural Tourism.
Buzilă coordinated the publication Nature and Health in Folk Traditions (2007), exploring links between health and environmental protection, and documented traditional resource-use practices. She encourages communities to develop small businesses based on local cultural products, integrating them into everyday life. By involving vulnerable groups, such as housewives and people with health challenges, in heritage-related activities like sewing and weaving, she enables them to access techniques with economic potential, fostering sustainability through cultural and economic empowerment.

Innovative aspects (economic, social, technological, environmental or legal) of the nominee's activities.

Varvara Buzilă has introduced innovative approaches to cultural heritage preservation across economic, social, technological, and legal domains. She developed vector boards to guide individuals practicing traditional crafts, such as creating the blouse with embroidery on the shoulder, ensuring authenticity and accessibility. Women were encouraged to conduct sewing tests on museum-preserved fabrics, bridging museum heritage with community practice.
She compiled a repertory of ritual bread forms, using plasticine for field demonstrations during interviews, offering a creative and portable solution for documenting traditional practices. Buzilă initiated campaigns encouraging communities to donate cultural artifacts to museums, leveraging mass communication to foster participation and enrich collections.
A pioneering approach involved formal agreements with heritage holders, local authorities, and NGOs, assigning shared responsibility for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List. These strategies blend innovation with practical application, ensuring the sustainability and active preservation of Moldova's cultural heritage.

Nominee's interaction with the community and the urban or landscape context.

Interacting with communities is one of Varvara's strengths.Located in Chișinău, by the Museum yet one would be surprised to find her all over Moldava, wherever cultural heritage is alive or even possible to revive. She has a great gift in communicating with simple people – coming from her deep affection and respect. In time she earned respect and trust from their part, real keys for her long term research. Concentrating in towns on the activities of the local museums, aiming to stimulate their activities and to enlarge their public, she also encouraged foundations of small

village cultural settlements around traditional cultural heritage and more than everything the involvement of children in the heritage events. Varvara trained the heritage-bearer communities to inventory local intangible cultural heritage elements, in order to draw up inventories, to draw up UNESCO nomination files, to discuss the viability of the elements within the Intangible Cultural Heritage Forum.

Knowledge gained by the nominee and how it has been shared and disseminated with both the heritage community and non-traditional audiences.

Over more than four decades of documenting Moldova's cultural heritage—conducting fieldwork in over 850 localities and researching in archives and libraries—Varvara Buzilă has accumulated vast knowledge and ethnological expertise, earning her the affectionate title of "encyclopedia of the nation." Her extensive documentation underpins efforts in archiving, classification, legislation, accessibility, and revitalization.
Buzilă coordinated five UNESCO nomination files, four of which were yet successfully inscribed. Her knowledge has been widely shared across various audiences:
• Academia: Through monographs, scientific articles, and lectures at four universities, she has shaped academic discourse and trained new professionals.
• Local Communities: She engaged village communities, craftsmen, and Living Human Treasure holders, emphasizing heritage preservation.
• Women's Groups: Labor socials empowered women to preserve and practice traditional crafts.
• General Public: Over 600 episodes of Tezaur and numerous popular articles introduced heritage to audiences of all ages and backgrounds.
She expanded museum audiences through events, workshops, and innovative approaches, engaging non-traditional audiences in cultural heritage. Her efforts connect generations and social groups, ensuring her work reaches beyond specialists to the broader public, promoting the relevance and sustainability of Moldova's cultural heritage.

European and international dimension

European significance of the project/initiative/nominee.

She has thoroughly investigated and assessed Moldova's cultural heritage, successfully promoting its internationalization through UNESCO, with four files inscribed on the intangible heritage lists and one on the tentative list. She fostered collaboration with specialists from Romania, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Belarus, and Sweden, uniting efforts to explore heritage's social, economic, educational, and touristic potential. By integrating European values and UNESCO standards into local understanding, she created a bridge between Moldovan heritage and European cultural frameworks, engaging heritage bearers, society, and younger generations. Collaborating with European organizations, she raised awareness of Moldova's intangible heritage status and challenges. Her contributions include five English-language publications on intangible cultural heritage, alongside translations of other scientific works, ensuring accessibility for the international academic community. In an era of redefining local identities, her research and publications provide valuable insights into the processes of cultural landmarks and identity formation within both European and global contexts.

Additional information

How would winning the European Heritage Award / Europa Nostra Award benefit you, your project and/or your organisation?

Winning an Europa Nostra Award would mark the first recognition of this kind for a person or project from Moldova. This achievement goes beyond personal acknowledgment, offering Moldova a new gateway to Europe. Recently, Moldova embedded its commitment to joining the European Union in its Constitution, following a challenging

> referendum. This award would symbolize not only recognition but also an honor for all Moldovans dedicated to preserving intangible heritage.

In case this submission is the winner of the Grand Prix, what will the monetary award be used for?

> Republic of Moldova is not eligible for the Grand Prix.

In case this submission is the winner of the Grand Prix, who will be the recipient of the monetary award?

> Republic of Moldova is not eligible for the Grand Prix.

How did you find out about the European Heritage Awards / Europa Nostra Awards?	Word of mouth
Is this the first time that this entry has been submitted to the European Heritage Awards / Europa Nostra Awards?	Yes
On a scale of 1-10, how satisfied are you with this online submission form?	✓ 10

Do you have any comments on the application form or suggestions that you would like to share with us?

> Comparing with 2021, it is far better. Maybe I would create space for a short description of the photos (30) along with each photo, not in a separate document. Really confortable to allowd changes until the deadline, even after submiting the project.

By submitting your data, photographs and other material to the European Heritage Awards / Europa Nostra Awards you agree to the processing and sharing of your data in accordance with Europa Nostra's	Privacy Policy	. Please check the box to indicate you agree with the Privacy Policy.	✓

Log in to european-heritage.awardsplatform.com to see complete entry attachments.



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Varvara_heritag... 3.1 MiB



Varvara_recupe... 4.8 MiB



Varvara_on the ... 2.9 MiB



Varvara_field re... 666 KiB



Varvara_guidin... 931 KiB



Varvara_home i... 94 KiB



Varvara_receivi... 984 KiB



Varvara_with he... 6.4 MiB



Varvara with he... 1.3 MiB



Varvara_wellco... 360 KiB



Varvara_at festi... 2.5 MiB



Varvara_intervi... 1.6 MiB



Varvara_at Mol... 298 KiB



Varvara_Buchar... 337 KiB



Varvara_book_l... 672 KiB



Varvara_field re... 3.6 MiB



Varvara_docum... 5.5 MiB



Varvara_in Tra... 5.5 MiB



Varvara_Confre... 2.6 MiB



Varvara_sewing... 585 KiB



Varvara_prepari... 1.6 MiB



Varvara_docum... 5.7 MiB



Varvara_docum... 3.1 MiB



Varvara_at pro... 8.4 MiB



Varvara at Chisi... 683 KiB



Varvara_weavin... 5.0 MiB



Varvara_docum... 2.3 MiB



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