

The Identity of Chivalric Orders in Contemporary Europe. A Case Study of the Sovereign Templar Order of Saint Martin

Aurelian Roland Boit¹

Abstract

This study explores the processes through which contemporary chivalric orders in Europe reconstruct and project their institutional identity at the intersection of historical legacy, symbolic continuity, and modern forms of cultural diplomacy. Using the Sovereign Templar Order of Saint Martin (OSTSM) as a case study, the article analyses how a neo-chivalric organization articulates Christian ethics, philanthropic action, and intercultural engagement within a framework of symbolic legitimacy and civic responsibility.

The research follows a qualitative, interpretative-constructivist approach, combining historical, theological, legal, and institutional analysis, supported by SWOT and case study methods. The findings indicate that, despite the absence of medieval juridical continuity, contemporary chivalric organizations derive their public legitimacy from symbolic capital, social action, and ethical coherence, allowing them to function as relevant actors of cultural-philanthropic and moral soft power in today's Europe.

Keywords

Chivalric orders, identity, cultural diplomacy, soft power, OSTSM.

1. Introduction and Methodology

Chivalric orders represent one of the most enduring syntheses of faith, honour, devotion, and service to others in the history of European civilization. Emerging at the intersection of Christian ethos and the politico-military realities of the Middle Ages, these institutions underwent, over time, significant transformations, gradually adapting from clearly defined military and religious functions to predominantly moral, educational, and philanthropic roles in the modern era (Riley-Smith 2008, 112–118).

This capacity for adaptation explains both the symbolic continuity of chivalric orders and the persistence of their institutional relevance across profoundly different historical contexts (Barber 1994, 321–327).

¹ PhD candidate, Babeş-Bolyai University, Faculty of European Studies, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Email: aurelianroland@yahoo.com.

In the twenty-first century, within a European space marked by identity fragmentation, accelerated secularization, and the reconfiguration of spiritual reference points, chivalric orders can no longer be interpreted merely as relics of the past. They increasingly manifest themselves as active symbolic entities that reinterpret tradition in relation to contemporary social needs and new forms of communal solidarity. In this context, these organizations function as points of intersection between Europe's Christian memory and the present-day demands of civic responsibility, intercultural dialogue, and philanthropic engagement (McLeod 2007, 201–209).

The contemporary reinterpretation of chivalry entails a conceptual shift from a military paradigm toward a cultural and symbolic one. From this perspective, chivalry can be understood as a specific form of moral soft power, expressed through transnational networks of philanthropy, civic education, volunteering, and cultural diplomacy. Modern chivalric orders mobilize medieval symbols such as the cross, the oath, and initiation rituals, transforming them into resources of social legitimacy and symbolic capital capable of contributing to European cohesion and to dialogue between religious and cultural traditions (Nye 2004, 5–11).

The purpose of this study is to examine how contemporary chivalric orders construct, preserve, and project their identity within today's European environment through symbolic, philanthropic, and institutional mechanisms, with particular emphasis on the relationship between historical tradition and modern social functions. Within this framework, a case study of the Sovereign Templar Order of Saint Martin is employed to illustrate how a neo-chivalric order inspired by the Templar tradition can operate as a factor of spiritual cohesion, a generator of symbolic capital, and a vector of cultural diplomacy in contemporary Europe.

The research is guided by the general hypothesis that the identity and legitimacy of contemporary chivalric orders are structured primarily through symbolic capital, moral coherence, and social engagement, while the juridical dimension of formal medieval continuity plays a secondary role in processes of public and institutional recognition. This approach is consistent both with sociological theories of symbolic legitimacy (Bourdieu 1991, 163–170) and with recent European scholarship, which emphasizes that the legitimacy of modern chivalric orders is determined more by identity coherence and social functionality than by claims of uninterrupted juridical continuity from the Middle Ages (Heydel-Mankoo 2019, 45–58).

The documentation is based on specialized academic literature from the fields of history, theology, symbolic sociology, and international relations, complemented by legal, canonical, and institutional documents relevant to the case study. From a methodological perspective, the study

adopts a qualitative, interpretative-constructivist approach, combining documentary analysis, discourse analysis, and the exploratory use of the SWOT method in order to identify the main dimensions of potential and vulnerability within the contemporary neo-chivalric phenomenon. The case study of the Sovereign Templar Order of Saint Martin (OSTSM) allows the theoretical framework to be correlated with a concrete institutional example.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The analysis of contemporary chivalric orders is grounded in a multidisciplinary theoretical framework in which contributions from international relations theory, symbolic sociology, cultural diplomacy studies, and historical-theological research converge toward understanding these structures as active symbolic actors in contemporary Europe. The specialized literature indicates that chivalric orders can no longer be interpreted solely through the lens of medieval juridical continuity, but must be analysed as modern institutional forms that produce identity, legitimacy, and collective meaning.

From the perspective of international relations, the constructivist approach provides an essential starting point for analysing the identity of non-state actors. Wendt argues that the identities and interests of actors are the result of social norms and interactions rather than of pre-existing objective data (Wendt 1999). Katzenstein situates this perspective within a cultural framework, showing that norms are internalized within specific collective contexts and shape distinct institutional behaviours (Katzenstein 1996). Bourdieu, in turn, complements this approach by explaining how identities constructed in this way acquire social effectiveness through processes of recognition and the accumulation of symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1991). Taken together, these contributions make it possible to interpret chivalric orders as structures whose identity is continuously negotiated through norms, practices, and mechanisms of symbolic legitimation.

This symbolic dimension is central to understanding the functioning of contemporary chivalric orders. From a constructivist perspective, symbols contribute to the internalization of norms and to the consolidation of collective belonging (Wendt 1999). At the same time, Bourdieu shows that they operate as resources of symbolic power, generating prestige, authority, and internal cohesion (Bourdieu 1991). In this sense, elements such as the cross, the oath, the mantle, or ceremonial practices are not mere historical remnants, but active instruments in the production of symbolic capital, whose effectiveness depends on collective recognition and on the moral coherence of the institution.

The link between symbol, identity, and influence is further developed in the literature on soft power and cultural diplomacy. Nye defines soft power as the ability to shape preferences and outcomes through attraction, values, and credibility rather than coercion (Nye 2004). Melissen extends this perspective by showing that such influence is increasingly exercised by non-state actors through cultural diplomacy and trust-based relational networks (Melissen 2005). Anholt complements this view by emphasizing the role of moral reputation and image capital in shaping transnational influence (Anholt 2010). Within this theoretical framework, contemporary chivalric orders can be interpreted as non-state actors of moral soft power, drawing on historical symbols and ethical reference points to foster durable connections between communities, confessional traditions, and cultural spaces.

Historical scholarship introduces a necessary tension into this analysis. Demurger emphasizes the deeply contextual and medieval character of historical chivalric orders, highlighting their dependence on the specific political, military, and canonical structures of their time (Demurger 2009). By contrast, Jaspert nuances this position by showing that the disappearance of the military function does not entail the disappearance of the chivalric ethos, but rather its transformation into a symbolic repertoire reused in modern contexts (Jaspert 2006). This divergence of perspectives allows for a clear distinction between the medieval order and its contemporary reconfigurations, without reducing the neo-chivalric phenomenon to mere historical imitation.

From a theological and institutional perspective, recent research shifts the focus from juridical–canonical succession to moral compatibility and social purpose. Takeda shows that the legitimacy of contemporary orders rests more on doctrinal coherence, ethical integrity, and social mission than on formal continuity (Takeda 2021). This observation converges with Bourdieu’s analysis of symbolic recognition as a source of social authority (Bourdieu 1991). Within this framework, neo-chivalric orders function as associations of believers, foundations, or cultural organizations, integrated into modern legal systems and the dynamics of European civil society.

Considered within a shared theoretical debate, the contributions of Wendt, Bourdieu, Nye, and Melissen suggest that the identity, legitimacy, and influence of contemporary chivalric orders cannot be explained through a single analytical paradigm. These dimensions emerge from the interaction between social norms, symbolic capital, and soft power mechanisms, articulated within a European context marked by cultural pluralism and the redefinition of values.

Although constructivist, symbolic, and soft power approaches explain how identities are produced, legitimized, and projected in the public sphere, they do not fully capture the specifically European way in which plural historical traditions are integrated into a shared cultural horizon. This dimension is addressed by Mircea Brie's theory of European identity as a dynamic system of interacting cultural and symbolic layers.

From a perspective convergent with constructivist and symbolic approaches to identity, Mircea Brie shows that European identity is not built through homogenization, but through the interaction of multiple levels of belonging—local, regional, national, and supranational—which coexist within a common symbolic and institutional framework (Brie 2025, 9–11). Identity thus appears not as a fixed given, but as a dynamic reality, expressed in the public sphere through cultural memory, traditions, values, and forms of collective representation, even in a context marked by globalization and pluralism.

This approach is further developed in the earlier formulation by Brie, Polgár, and Chirodea, who describe European identity as a “culture of cultures,” in which the diversity of historical, symbolic, and religious traditions functions as an active resource for cohesion and dialogue within a plural space (Brie, Polgár, and Chirodea 2012). Within this logic, European unity does not result from uniformity, but from the institutional articulation of symbolic and cultural plurality.

Taken together, these perspectives provide a relevant theoretical framework for interpreting contemporary chivalric orders as institutionalized forms of European cultural memory. They articulate identity and legitimacy through ritual, symbol, and spiritual lineage, rather than through claims of strict juridical continuity. In this sense, chivalric orders can be understood as actors in the construction of European identity, transforming spiritual heritage into a form of civic participation, intercultural dialogue, and symbolic cohesion.

Within this conceptual framework, institutions that activate historical memory, ritual, and religious symbolism acquire a distinct relevance in the process of European identity construction. Contemporary chivalric orders can therefore be understood not as anachronisms, but as institutionalized expressions of Europe's “culture of cultures”, transforming spiritual heritage into civic presence and intercultural dialogue.

3. Typology of Chivalric Orders in Contemporary Europe

3.1. Theoretical Framework and Conceptual Delimitations

The identification and conceptual delimitation of chivalric orders active in contemporary Europe represent both a methodological and a conceptual

challenge, arising from the position of these structures at the intersection of religious tradition, state authority, and symbolic legitimacy. The contemporary chivalric phenomenon is characterized by a plurality of institutional forms that claim different historical filiations and operate within distinct legal frameworks, ranging from orders enjoying canonical or state recognition to modern neo-chivalric associations primarily oriented toward philanthropy, education, and cultural action.

A part of the classical heraldic and genealogical literature, represented by authors such as Guy Stair Sainy, Peter Bander van Duren, and Robert Gayre of Gayre and Nigg, has proposed various models of classification and criteria of legitimacy for chivalric and dynastic orders. Although these contributions do not constitute the primary theoretical framework of the present analysis, they remain relevant from a descriptive and comparative perspective, as they highlight the ways in which contemporary chivalric traditions construct and negotiate their symbolic legitimacy within different historical and cultural contexts. By including these sources, the study seeks a plural and contextualized understanding of the phenomenon, consistent with the principles of scholarly rigor and critical balance.

The analytical approach is grounded exclusively in verifiable academic literature, which allows contemporary chivalric orders to be interpreted as modern institutional forms of identity production and symbolic legitimacy. Established historical research shows that medieval orders functioned as structures integrated into premodern political and religious systems, with clearly defined military, administrative, and spiritual roles (Barber 1994; Demurger 2009). In the modern era, the loss of military functions did not lead to the disappearance of the chivalric ethos, but rather to its transformation into a symbolic repertoire reused in different social and cultural contexts.

From a sociological perspective, the persistence of chivalric orders can be explained through the mechanisms of symbolic capital, which allow prestige and social authority to be reproduced even in the absence of formal juridical consecration (Bourdieu 1991). Cultural scholarship complements this approach through the concept of “invented tradition,” which highlights how the past is re-signified in order to respond to the identity needs of contemporary communities (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). From an anthropological angle, chivalric orders can be understood as symbolic communities, held together by ritual, myth, and ceremonial language (Anderson 1991).

For the analysis of chivalric orders active in contemporary Europe, the study proposes a functional–historical typology based on symbolic filiation, institutional tradition, and present-day social roles. The aim of this

classification is not to provide an exhaustive inventory of all existing structures, but to delineate several coherent institutional families that are useful for understanding identity formation, modes of legitimation, and patterns of public engagement.

On the basis of these theoretical reference points, the contemporary European chivalric phenomenon can be analysed through five major functional categories: *Hospitaller Orders of Maltese Tradition*, comprising structures originating in the Order of Saint John and primarily oriented toward medical, humanitarian, and charitable activities; *Orders of Hospitaller Tradition of Lazarite Affiliation*, including historical or modern structures inspired by the Order of Saint Lazarus, with a focus on social assistance and Christian philanthropy; *Teutonic Orders with a Spiritual-Religious Profile*, which continue or reinterpret the legacy of the Teutonic Order mainly in religious, cultural, and educational terms; *Templar-Inspired Orders (Neo-Templar)*, consisting of modern organizations that claim a symbolic and moral Templar lineage without medieval juridical continuity; and *Dynastic Orders under the Symbolic Patronage of Saint George*, which encompass honorific or charitable structures associated with royal houses or the European noble tradition.

Today, orders of Maltese, Templar, Lazarite, Teutonic, and Saint George traditions continue, in modernized forms, the charitable and cultural mission of the medieval Christian chivalric fraternities that emerged in the context of the Holy Land.

3.2. Examples of Contemporary Chivalric Orders

The five categories identified reflect the main traditions of European chivalry hospitaller, spiritual-religious, Templar, and dynastic, and allow for a balanced comparative analysis without introducing hierarchies or normative judgments. This methodological choice is consistent with recent scholarly approaches, which prioritize the functional and symbolic analysis of modern chivalric orders over debates concerning formal juridical continuity.

Hospitaller Orders of Maltese Tradition

Orders of Maltese tradition are distinguished by the continuity of the hospitaller ethos and by their predominantly humanitarian orientation. The Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of St John of Jerusalem, of Rhodes and of Malta (SMOM) represents the unique case of a chivalric order recognized as a subject of public international law, its legitimacy being grounded in historical continuity, juridical recognition, and institutionalized philanthropic action. Alongside it, the Most Venerable Order of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem, a modern British chivalric order under royal patronage, operates exclusively within the charitable and medical sphere,

without claims to sovereignty, and is fully integrated into the civic framework of the United Kingdom. Other structures, such as the Knights of Malta Federation of Autonomous Pories (KMFAP) and the Sovereign Hospitaller Order of St John of Jerusalem (SHOSJ), function as civil or ecumenical organizations that employ hospitaller symbolism for educational, cultural, and humanitarian purposes, their legitimacy being primarily moral and functional rather than juridical. The Ordine dei Cavalieri di San Giovanni di Gerusalemme – Gran Priorato d'Italia similarly belongs to this category as a structure embedded within contemporary Italian civil society.

Hospitaller Orders of Lazarite Tradition

Ordine di San Lazzaro di Gerusalemme (Ordre de Saint-Lazare de Jérusalem) represents a distinct hospitaller tradition, originally associated with the care of lepers and today reconfigured as an international humanitarian and ecumenical network. Its contemporary activities are focused on medical and social projects, with continuity being primarily symbolic and charitable rather than juridical or institutional.

Teutonic Orders with a Spiritual–Religious Profile

Orders of Teutonic tradition illustrate the transformation of chivalry from a military structure into a spiritual and cultural community. The Deutscher Orden constitutes the paradigmatic example of this evolution, functioning today as a Catholic religious order engaged in pastoral, educational, and charitable activities. In parallel, structures such as the Teutonic Order of Holy Mary in Jerusalem – Grand Priory of Europe, the Ordo Equestris Teutonicus (OET), and the Order of Teutonic Knights in Romania operate as cultural or ecumenical organizations that draw on Teutonic symbolism for philanthropic, educational, and heritage-preservation purposes, without asserting medieval juridical continuity.

Orders of Templar Inspiration (Neo-Templar)

Neo-Templar orders represent the most dynamic category of contemporary chivalry, characterized by institutional pluralism and symbolic reinterpretation. The Ordo Supremus Militaris Templi Hierosolymitani (OSMTH) stands out through the international visibility conferred by its consultative status with the United Nations ECOSOC. The Ordre Souverain et Militaire du Temple de Jérusalem (OSMTJ) and the Ordo Militiae Christi – Templar Knights International operate primarily in the philanthropic, educational, and spiritual domains, without claiming medieval juridical continuity. Within this field also belong structures such as the Ordine dei Cavalieri Templari di San Bernardo di Chiaravalle, which combines Templar symbolism with Cistercian spirituality, and L'Ordre Souverain des Templiers Saint-Martin (OSTSM), which advances a European model of neo-chivalry grounded in the Martinian tradition, cultural diplomacy, and social solidarity.

Dynastic Orders under the Symbolic Patronage of Saint George

Dynastic orders associated with Saint George combine the symbolic dimension of chivalry with the historical legitimacy of European noble houses. The Sacred Military Constantinian Order of Saint George and the Imperial Order of Saint George function as dynastic orders with charitable and cultural missions, while structures such as the Royal Order of Saint George for the Defense of the Immaculate Conception and the Szent György Vitéz Lovagrend operate today as honorary and cultural organizations without state-order status, yet endowed with strong identity and symbolic significance.

3.3. Defining Elements of the Identity of Contemporary Chivalric Orders

The identity of contemporary chivalric orders is structured around a reinterpreted symbolic continuity that translates the medieval ethos into the language of modern, universal values. Historical scholarship emphasizes the enduring role of symbols such as the cross, the oath, and the mantle as vehicles of collective memory associated with honour, discipline, and service (Demurger 2009; Jaspert 2006). These elements do not merely preserve a historical legacy but function as active markers of belonging and moral orientation within contemporary chivalric communities.

From a sociological perspective, the concept of symbolic capital provides an explanatory framework for the persistence and public relevance of these orders across different historical and political contexts (Bourdieu 1991). Symbolic resources accumulated through ritual, visual identity, and ethical reputation enable chivalric organizations to generate credibility and authority even in the absence of formal juridical recognition. At the same time, cultural studies highlight the role of re-signified tradition in shaping collective identities within a Europe marked by pluralism and globalization (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983).

This interpretive framework is further strengthened by Mircea Brie's conception of European identity as a dynamic system of interacting cultural and symbolic layers. Brie argues that European identity is not built through homogenization, but through the coexistence and interaction of multiple levels of belonging local, regional, national, and supranational, within a shared symbolic and institutional horizon (Brie 2025, 9–11). In this perspective, historical traditions and symbolic repertoires remain active components of identity construction rather than residual elements of the past.

Applied to contemporary chivalric orders, this approach allows them to be understood as institutionalized expressions of Europe's "culture of cultures", in which historical memory, ritual, and spiritual lineage are

mobilized to articulate belonging, legitimacy, and ethical purpose in a pluralistic context (Brie, Polgár, and Chirodea 2012). Chivalric identity is thus not grounded in juridical continuity but in the capacity to integrate symbolic heritage into meaningful forms of civic presence and intercultural dialogue.

Taken together, these perspectives indicate that the identity of modern chivalric orders is neither a static survival of medieval structures nor a purely invented tradition. It emerges from the dynamic interaction between historical memory, symbolic practices, and contemporary social engagement, allowing these institutions to function as relevant actors in the cultural and civic landscape of today's Europe.

3.4. SWOT Analysis of Contemporary Chivalric Orders

The application of the SWOT analytical framework makes it possible to evaluate, in a structured way, the institutional and symbolic dynamics of contemporary chivalric orders within European society. Rather than serving as a managerial tool, SWOT is employed here as an interpretative device that helps clarify how these organizations position themselves in relation to legitimacy, identity, and public relevance.

From the perspective of **strengths**, modern chivalric orders benefit from a rich reservoir of symbolic memory and cultural tradition, which provides them with a distinctive historical depth and narrative continuity. Their coherent visual and ritual identity, expressed through heraldry, ceremonial practices, and symbolic language, supports internal cohesion and external recognition. These elements are reinforced by sustained philanthropic engagement and by the existence of relatively stable transnational networks, which enable them to operate beyond local boundaries. Taken together, these features create a significant potential for cultural diplomacy, allowing chivalric organizations to function as carriers of moral and symbolic soft power in the European public space.

At the same time, a number of **structural weaknesses** limit the public and institutional impact of these orders. Most contemporary chivalric organizations lack formal canonical recognition, which can affect their credibility in ecclesiastical contexts. Institutional fragmentation, caused by historical schisms and the proliferation of parallel obediences, further complicates their visibility and coherence. These factors contribute to ambiguous public perceptions regarding their legitimacy and seriousness, while limited financial and human resources restrict the scale and sustainability of their projects.

The contemporary European context also offers significant **opportunities** for chivalric organizations. The growing role of non-state actors in areas such as cultural diplomacy, civil society, and social cohesion

creates new spaces for meaningful engagement. Partnerships with public institutions, universities, museums, and religious organizations can enhance both legitimacy and outreach. Moreover, the expansion of transnational educational programs and the increasing demand for intercultural and interconfessional dialogue provide chivalric orders with a favorable environment in which to articulate their ethical and symbolic missions.

These opportunities, however, are counterbalanced by a set of **threats** that shape the wider neo-chivalric landscape. The proliferation of pseudo-orders and commercially oriented groups that exploit chivalric symbolism undermines public trust and creates confusion about what constitutes an authentic institution. The commodification of symbols, combined with forms of religious or ideological polarization, risks distorting the spiritual and ethical foundations of chivalric identity. In such a context, identity confusion and reputational risks become permanent challenges for serious organizations seeking to maintain credibility and moral authority.

Synthetic Conclusion of the SWOT Analysis

The SWOT analysis indicates that contemporary chivalric orders operate within a delicate balance between symbolic continuity and institutional vulnerability. Their principal strength lies in their ability to preserve and activate a historical and spiritual heritage that continues to generate meaning, belonging, and public credibility. Symbols, rituals, and sustained philanthropic activity provide these organizations with a distinctive form of symbolic capital, allowing them to remain visible and socially relevant within a European space shaped by pluralism and ongoing identity transformation.

At the same time, the absence of canonical or state recognition, internal fragmentation, and dependence on limited resources constrain the institutional stability of many modern orders. These limitations do not invalidate their social role, but rather orient their legitimacy away from formal authority and toward ethical practice, civic engagement, and community recognition.

From this perspective, opportunities associated with cultural diplomacy, cooperation with academic and public institutions, and the development of transnational educational programs can strengthen the position of chivalric orders as actors within European civil society. Conversely, the spread of pseudo-orders, the commercial exploitation of symbolic heritage, and the risk of identity confusion underscore the need for transparency, moral coherence, and clear institutional boundaries.

Overall, the analysis confirms that the contemporary chivalric order is not a relic of the past but a specific mode of institutionalizing European

memory and values, whose relevance depends on its capacity to transform tradition into civic commitment and to convert historical symbolism into an active resource for cohesion and intercultural dialogue.

4. Case Study: The Sovereign Templar Order of Saint Martin (OSTSM)

4.1. Identity Genesis, Spiritual Foundations, and Symbolism

L'Ordre Souverain des Templiers Saint-Martin (OSTSM), hereafter referred to as the Sovereign Templar Order of Saint Martin, is an international neo-chivalric organization inspired by the Templar tradition and grounded in Christian values and the Western heritage of chivalry, reinterpreted within a contemporary framework. The Order does not claim medieval juridical continuity, but explicitly assumes a symbolic and moral lineage, adapted to the current European context, in which philanthropic, cultural, and educational functions prevail over any form of formal historical authority.

The spiritual core of OSTSM's identity is shaped by the figure of Saint Martin of Tours (316–397), venerated in Catholic, Orthodox, and Anglican traditions and regarded as one of the earliest *milites Christi*. His founding gesture—the sharing of his cloak with a poor man—has become an archetypal symbol of active charity and of the transformation of the warrior into a protector. OSTSM draws directly on this Martinian model, interpreted as a precursor to the establishment of Christian chivalric orders, and defines its mission around active compassion, moral discipline, and service to the vulnerable.

This paradigm of the “warrior transformed into protector” constitutes the spiritual axis of the Order. Initiation rituals preserve classical elements of chivalry—such as the cloak, the sword, and the oath—but these are reinterpreted exclusively in ethical terms, as moral commitments rather than symbols of coercive authority. The red patée cross bearing the monogram *SM* (*Sanctus Martinus*) visually expresses the synthesis between Martinian spirituality and chivalric ethos.

This identity construction must also be understood within the context of post-secular Europe, where religion no longer functions as a dominant normative authority but continues to provide meaningful symbolic and moral reference points. In this sense, OSTSM operates within a logic of selective recovery of Christian memory, not as a means of asserting confessional power, but as a way of articulating an ethical discourse compatible with contemporary cultural and religious pluralism.

4.2. Organizational Structure, European Outreach, and Civic Action

From an institutional perspective, OSTSM operates as a non-profit, non-political international organization under civil law. Its internal structure is organized into General Territorial Governances, National Grand Priorities, Regional Bailiwicks, and Local Commanderies, an architecture designed to ensure both doctrinal coherence and operational flexibility within a diverse European environment.

The Order's network is active in Romania, France, Germany, Hungary, Slovenia, Greece, and Cyprus. In each of these settings, OSTSM conducts its activities under the umbrella of the *Knight-Art* concept, its own instrument of cultural diplomacy that integrates heritage, artistic expression, tradition, volunteering, and philanthropy. *Knight-Art* events (Arad, Corfu, Kolossi) function as platforms of symbolic and civic dialogue, bringing together members of the Order, supporters, clergy, and representatives of academic, cultural, and community institutions.

The educational dimension is strengthened through the program "The Young Templar Guards of Saint Martin" (in Romanian: *Tinerii Străjeri Templieri Sfântul Martin*), addressed to children and adolescents and focused on character formation, discipline, and civic responsibility. Inspired by European scouting models and adapted to Christian and chivalric values, this initiative contributes to the transmission of a shared moral culture across generations.

Through its educational and cultural projects, OSTSM operates as an actor of informal civic education, complementary to classical institutional systems. The transmission of values through ritual, symbol, and community practice fosters a specific form of cultural capital in which discipline, responsibility, and solidarity are internalized through experience rather than through normative discourse alone.

4.3. Legitimacy, Symbolic Sovereignty, and Doctrinal Compatibility

The symbolism of OSTSM serves a dual function: internally, it reinforces identity and cohesion; externally, it structures public representation. Heraldry, the mantle, the ceremonial sword, and ritual language are embedded in an internal moral code that regulates the ethical conduct of members. In Pierre Bourdieu's terms, these practices can be understood as forms of symbolic capital, generating moral authority and public credibility that depend on the congruence between discourse and action.

OSTSM's legitimacy is not juridical or canonical, but moral, spiritual, and cultural, deriving from its philanthropic, educational, and community-

oriented activities. The Order respects the principles of the 1983 Code of Canon Law concerning the right of the faithful to associate, operating as a private association of believers with a multiconfessional profile, without claiming ecclesiastical jurisdiction.

The use of the term “*sovereign*” requires a clear conceptual distinction. In international law, sovereignty implies territory, diplomatic capacity, and the exercise of state prerogatives—criteria that OSTSM neither fulfills nor claims. In this context, OSTSM’s sovereignty must be understood exclusively as symbolic sovereignty, expressing internal autonomy and the capacity for identity-based self-regulation. This usage differs fundamentally from the model of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta (SMOM), the only contemporary chivalric institution with internationally recognized state sovereignty.

By explicitly distancing itself from unverifiable genealogical claims and from pseudo-chivalric structures, OSTSM strengthens its public credibility and reduces the risk of institutional confusion.

4.4. The Suppression of the Templar Order and the Rise of Neo-Chivalry: A Theological Perspective

The canonical analysis conducted by Rev. Sorin Sevcicu (2025) offers one of the most balanced theological interpretations of the contemporary neo-chivalric phenomenon. His approach starts from the historical reality of the suppression of the Templar Order in 1312 and emphasizes that, although the juridical structure disappeared, the Templar moral and symbolic ethos survived and was re-appropriated in the modern era.

Over the last two centuries, more than one hundred chivalric organizations inspired by Templar spirituality have emerged, differing widely in structure and in their relationship with the Churches. This proliferation reflects a contemporary need for moral, symbolic, and communal reference points rather than an attempt to claim direct historical continuity. While the Catholic Church recognizes only those orders that possess historical succession, it does not prohibit pastoral cooperation with lay structures that respect Christian moral principles.

Within this framework, multiconfessional orders such as OSTSM cannot receive universal canonical recognition. Their legitimacy, however, remains civil, moral, and spiritual, grounded in the conformity of their activities with Christian doctrine and in voluntary cooperation with clergy from various confessions, without generating ecclesiological tensions.

4.5. Comparative Positioning, Challenges, and European Potential

When compared with other contemporary neo-Templar structures, such as OSMTH and OSMTJ, OSTSM is distinguished by its internal

stability, doctrinal coherence, and its explicit distancing from disputable genealogical and historical claims. OSMTH benefits from greater international diplomatic visibility, yet it is affected by internal fragmentation, while OSMTJ continues to be marked by long-standing historical schisms. By contrast, OSTSM stands out through a more compact organizational structure and a clearly articulated identity that is currently undergoing institutional consolidation.

At the same time, the Order operates in a European environment characterized by institutional fragmentation, the proliferation of pseudo-orders, and competition for symbolic legitimacy. International expansion entails challenges related to the standardization of rituals, the training of local leadership, and the preservation of a unified identity within a transnational network. Like any NGO, OSTSM also depends on volunteer dynamics and variable financial resources, which may influence both the pace of its projects and its degree of public visibility.

From this perspective, OSTSM's activities may be interpreted as forms of moral soft power, in which influence is exercised not through institutional authority or material resources, but through ethical credibility, symbolic continuity, and the capacity to generate trust in the public sphere. The cultural diplomacy practiced by the Order functions as a diplomacy of meaning, oriented toward dialogue, reconciliation, and community cohesion.

Overall, the OSTSM case study demonstrates that the contemporary chivalric order can no longer be approached as a relic of the past, but rather as an adaptive institutional form situated at the intersection of memory, identity, and civic action. Its relevance lies not in historical claims, but in its ability to transform tradition into an active resource for contemporary Europe.

Conclusions

The analysis of contemporary chivalric orders, with particular emphasis on the case study of the Sovereign Templar Order of Saint Martin (OSTSM), demonstrates that modern chivalry cannot be reduced to a symbolic survival of the Middle Ages. Instead, it represents a dynamic process of cultural and spiritual re-signification adapted to the social and normative conditions of twenty-first-century Europe. The identity of these orders is constructed at the intersection of tradition, civil society, and democratic values, within a framework in which legitimacy is no longer derived from juridical continuity or canonical authority, but from moral coherence, symbolic capital, and social impact.

The research shows that contemporary chivalric orders function today as non-state actors in the European public sphere, active in philanthropy,

civic education, cultural diplomacy, and interconfessional dialogue. This evolution reflects a fundamental transformation of the chivalric ethos: from the medieval warrior and defender of the faith to the modern cultural mediator, promoter of solidarity, and agent of civic responsibility. Chivalry is no longer defined by the exercise of force or by sacralized authority, but by ethical commitment, volunteerism, and the capacity to generate shared meaning and social trust.

Within this framework, OSTSM emerges as a relevant example of functional neo-chivalry. Its clearly articulated identity, its explicit distancing from unverifiable genealogical claims, and its integration into the logic of European civil society distinguish it from many other neo-Templar structures. The Martinian spiritual foundation, interpreted as a precursor to the establishment of Christian chivalric orders, enables the Order to avoid both medieval nostalgia and the instrumentalization of religious symbols, offering instead an ethical model oriented toward active compassion, moral discipline, and service to others.

From a theoretical perspective, the study confirms the value of an integrated analytical framework combining social constructivism, the theory of symbolic capital, and the concepts of soft power and cultural diplomacy. Through this lens, chivalric orders appear as institutionalized producers of identity and legitimacy, in which symbols, rituals, and organizational practices operate as resources of moral and cultural influence. The inclusion of the theological-canonical perspective proposed by Rev. Sorin Sevcicu further clarifies the distinction between formal ecclesiastical recognition and doctrinal compatibility, helping to avoid frequent confusions present in non-academic discussions of the neo-Templar phenomenon.

The academic contribution of this article lies in its conceptual clarification of the legitimacy of modern chivalric orders, in its interdisciplinary interpretation of the phenomenon, and in its demonstration that contemporary chivalry is relevant not only for historical or theological inquiry, but also for European studies, international relations, and symbolic sociology. The OSTSM case study serves as a heuristic device for understanding broader processes of identity reconstruction in post-secular Europe.

The practical and societal relevance of the findings is equally important. Contemporary chivalric orders complement official diplomacy through forms of participatory cultural diplomacy grounded in heritage, art, education, and philanthropy. OSTSM's initiatives, ranging from the *Knight-Art* programs to youth-oriented educational projects, illustrate how a neo-chivalric organization can build transnational networks of cultural cooperation and contribute to shaping Europe as a space of dialogue and

solidarity. In this sense, modern chivalry operates as a form of moral soft power suited to a pluralistic and fragmented European environment.

At the same time, the research acknowledges its limitations. The qualitative and interpretative nature of the analysis, uneven access to internal organizational documentation, and the difficulty of systematic comparison among multiple neo-Templar groups require caution in generalizing the results. These limitations do not undermine the conclusions, but rather indicate promising directions for future research, including sociological surveys on public perceptions of chivalric legitimacy, comparative European studies, and systematic evaluations of the educational and cultural impact of chivalric youth organizations.

In conclusion, contemporary chivalry should not be seen as a relic of the past, but as an emerging form of European symbolic capital. Through the synthesis of tradition and innovation, spirituality and education, ritual and social action, modern chivalric orders assert their relevance as actors of moral cohesion and intercultural dialogue. Consistent with Mircea Brie's understanding of European identity as a dynamic "culture of cultures," built from overlapping historical, symbolic, and spiritual layers rather than from homogenization, contemporary chivalric orders such as OSTSM can be interpreted as institutional expressions of this plural European memory, transforming heritage into civic presence and dialogue (Brie 2025). In a Europe confronted with identity fragmentation and crises of meaning, reinterpreted chivalry offers not a nostalgic refuge, but a symbolic language capable of articulating solidarity, responsibility, and civic commitment in a form that remains intelligible and credible in the contemporary public sphere.

Bibliography

- Anderson, Benedict (1991). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Anholt, Simon (2010). *Places: Identity, Image and Reputation*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Barber, Malcolm (1994). *The New Knighthood: A History of the Order of the Temple*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre (1991). *Language and Symbolic Power*. Edited by John B. Thompson. Translated by Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Brie, Mircea (2025). "Inclusivity. Vision, Mission, Goals, and Perspectives." *Inclusivity* 1: 7–14.
- Brie, Mircea, István Polgár, and Florentina Chirodea (2012). *Cultural Identity, Diversity and European Integration: Introductory Study*. *Annals*

- of the University of Oradea, International Relations and European Studies*, Supplement.
- Codex Iuris Canonici (1983). *Codul de Drept Canonic*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
- Demurger, Alain (2009). *Les Templiers: Une chevalerie chrétienne au Moyen Âge*. Paris: Seuil.
- Gayre of Gayre and Nigg, Robert (1971). *The Heraldry of the Knights Templar*. Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd.
- Heydel-Mankoo, Rafal (2019). *Orders of Chivalry and Merit in Europe: Continuity, Legitimacy and Identity*. London: Burke's Peerage & Gentry.
- Hobsbawm, Eric, and Terence Ranger (1983). *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jaspert, Nikolas (2006). *Die Kreuzzüge*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.
- Katzenstein, Peter J. (1996). *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- McKnight, Sean (2013). *Orders of Chivalry and Knighthood in the Modern World*. London: McFarland.
- McLeod, Hugh (2007). *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Melissen, Jan (2005). *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Murray, Alan V. (2011). *The Crusades: An Encyclopedia*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO.
- Nye, Joseph S., Jr. (2004). *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. New York: PublicAffairs.
- Paravicini, Werner (2010). *Die ritterlich-höfische Kultur des Mittelalters*. Munich: Oldenbourg.
- Riley-Smith, Jonathan (2008). *The Crusades, Christianity, and Islam*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Seviciu, Sorin (2025). *Sfântul Martin – Precursor al Creării Ordinilor Creștine Cavaleresti*. Vol. 1. București: Editura Eikon.
- Takeda, Hiroshi (2021). "Contemporary Chivalric Orders and Religious Legitimacy." *Journal of Church and State* 63 (3): 421–440.
- Wendt, Alexander (1999). *Social Theory of International Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.