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THE PROFESSIONAL INHERITANCE OF TRADITIONAL FIDDLERS IN BUZĂU COUNTY: TYPOLOGIES OF CONTINUITY AND RUPTURE

Stelian FRUNZĂ¹, Simona-Nicoleta VULPE², Cosima RUGHINIȘ³

Abstract

In this study, we examine how the traditional fiddler (Lăutar) profession is passed down through generations among Roma musicians in Buzău County, Romania. We conducted interviews and reconstructed family trees across multiple generations in seven families, combining external analysis with insider perspective from a co-author who is himself a practicing traditional fiddler. Using Goffman's concept of moral career and theories of cultural capital, we analyzed how musical knowledge and professional roles are transmitted within families. Our findings show that musical inheritance follows some patterns: the profession passes almost exclusively from fathers to sons, while daughters are excluded despite talent due to concerns about reputation and safety. Mothers provide support through emotional encouragement and financial investment but are not recognized as educators in this area. Contemporary families adapt to economic pressures by combining traditional performance with other types of work, education, and migration rather than abandoning music entirely. We identified five career paths: traditional heirs who follow family apprenticeships, aspirational modernizers who pursue music strategically, constrained daughters whose careers are blocked by gender norms, economic migrants who perform abroad, and lost heirs who abandon the profession. By combining interview data with the genealogical method, we uncovered transmission patterns across generations, showing both successful continuity and points of breakdown. Professional survival depends on family networks, reputation, and economic support systems. These findings contribute to understanding how cultural professions persist in marginalized communities

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through family strategies that balance tradition with economic necessity while revealing the structural constraints that shape these processes.

Keywords: professional inheritance, fiddlers, gender, moral career, ethnographic interviews.

Introduction

In this article, we aim to examine how the traditional fiddler (Lăutar) profession is transmitted across generations, focusing on the interplay between kinship, gender, and cultural capital. This profession provides a valuable lens to explore cultural inheritance in marginalized communities because of its strong family-based transmission and the exposure to various structural constraints. To achieve this, we conducted ethnographic interviews with seven families of musicians in Buzău County.

Our study is anchored within the centennial reflection on the field research of the Bucharest School of Sociology led by Dimitrie Gusti. We follow the Gustian methodological legacy of combining ethnographic immersion, kinship analysis, and cultural documentation to study a professional community. Our research also extends beyond the Gustian tradition by introducing visual genealogical reconstruction, and applying theories of moral career, cultural capital, and gender to understand the phenomenon of cultural transmission.

Central to our approach is the concept of moral career, developed by Erving Goffman (1961), which we adapt to explore how Romanian traditional fiddlers come to occupy, embody, and reproduce their professional role. According to Goffman, a moral career involves acquiring the skills associated with a role and undergoing a transformation in identity, status, and social location as one internalizes the expectations of that role. A moral career is not simply about learning how to perform a role, but about becoming a certain kind of person through sustained interaction with institutions, authorities, and other individuals that define and reinforce the moral framework of that role.

We pair this with a focus on the gendered structuring of professional transmission, particularly the contrast between sons who are encouraged to perform publicly and daughters who are often discouraged or restricted in this regard. Drawing from the theoretical framework of *doing gender* (West, & Zimmerman, 1987), we explain that the profession of Romanian traditional fiddlers remains structured by gender norms that determine whose musical labor is seen as legitimate and whose is rendered invisible or inappropriate.

Our analysis is also connected to the sociology of occupational inheritance and cultural transmission. Bourdieu's (1984) understanding of cultural capital provides a lens for examining how musical repertoires, stylistic competencies, and embodied

dispositions are transmitted intergenerationally. Bourdieu distinguished cultural capital as a resource that exists in three forms: embodied (internalized dispositions and competencies), objectified (cultural resources like instruments or recordings), and institutionalized (such as formal qualifications). In the context of musical practice, embodied cultural capital is especially significant, as it encompasses the tacit knowledge, stylistic sensibilities, and intuitive feel for music.

In the following sections, we discuss the ethnographic foundations of traditional fiddlers, and the historical legacies of the Gusti School of Sociology. We then present the methodological approach of our study. The results are organized thematically, comprising a typology of professional trajectories. We conclude the paper by synthesizing these findings, and reflecting on theoretical contributions.

The Gusti School and the Ethnography of Romanian Traditional Fiddlers

Our study of Romanian traditional fiddlers and their professional inheritance builds on the methodological traditions established by the Bucharest School of Sociology founded by Dimitrie Gusti. As Bucur (2019) showed, the Gusti School developed a distinctive approach to understanding Romanian society through direct observation, community-based fieldwork, and thorough documentation of social realities. Our research on Roma musicians in Buzău County applies the same principles to study professional transmission in post-socialist Romania.

The profession of fiddler has been extensively studied as a kinship-structured cultural practice, passed down through oral transmission and informal apprenticeship. Beissinger (1991) showed how musical knowledge circulates within extended Roma families through observation, imitation, and shared performance, with the household serving as both training ground and moral space. Inheritance typically follows patrilineal lines, with sons socialized early into public musical roles (Beissinger, 2001, 2018; Rădulescu, 2020).

The Gusti School researchers were among the first social scientists who documented musical life in Romanian communities. Their approach is presented in several articles published in *Sociologie Românească* [*Romanian Sociology Review*]. The work of Constantin Brăiloiu, *Plan pentru cercetarea vieții muzicale* [*Plan for researching musical life*] (1940), established a framework for studying musical life that goes beyond simple folklore collection. Brăiloiu argued that musical research must examine the social reality. He wrote: “Where songs truly live, are born, die, and transform, inseparable from the life of the environment from which they emerged, musical reality will remain incomprehensible without knowledge of social reality” (Brăiloiu, 1940). Furthermore, the ethnographic work of Henri H. Stahl, *Cum a învățat Șerban Butoiu din Ocarină* [*How Șerban Butoiu learned to play the Ocarina*] (1936), documented how a peasant from Bărăgan learned to play the ocarina, tracing his musical development through specific social relationships and local opportunities. Ovidiu Bârlea’s detailed study, *Conservatorul de lăutari din Rociu* [*The Conservatory of Traditional Fiddlers in*

Rociu] (1942), provides one of the closest historical parallel to our own research. Bârlea documented how Fani Lăutaru, a renowned Roma musician, established an informal “conservatory” where he taught violin to both Roma and Romanian students. The study examines teaching methods, payment systems, and the social tensions created when musical knowledge crossed ethnic boundaries.

As Rădulescu (1996) and Stoichiță (2008) emphasized, learning fiddler music occurs through participation, not formal education. Children are expected to absorb the craft by watching and playing alongside older musicians. Stoichiță (2008) described fiddlers as *fabricants d’émotion*, whose value lies in their capacity to evoke feeling through musical finesse and performative presence. This perspective is related to what Brăiloiu (1940) called the “biology of melodies”: how songs live, change, and circulate within specific communities.

Gender plays a foundational role in structuring access to musical labor. In Roma families, boys are generally expected to inherit the profession, while girls, despite talent, are often discouraged from public performance due to moral concerns (Beissinger, 2018). Although some families support their daughters’ formal music education, this is usually framed as private enrichment or a route to non-musical careers.

Rădulescu (1996) noted that female musicians tend to be confined to private or religious contexts and are seldom included in professional fiddler lineages. Decisions about daughters’ musical futures often rest with the father, reinforcing a structure of gendered gatekeeping. West and Zimmerman’s (1987) framework of *doing gender* can be applied here: family practices reproduce gender norms through performance opportunities, access to instruments, and educational support. While aspirations among Roma girls have grown, Beissinger (2018) showed that systemic change remains limited.

Musical knowledge among traditional fiddlers is rarely transmitted through formal notation. Instead, children learn by listening, repeating, and gradually participating in performance settings (Beissinger, 1991; Rădulescu, 1996). The process is nonlinear and highly relational. Stoichiță (2008) extended this view by describing fiddlers as emotional craftsmen, tailoring their performances to audience reactions and developing strategic musical adaptability. Moreover, Beissinger (2001) and Stoichiță (2008) showed how musicians recombine melodic fragments into personal styles through imitation and refinement. Such knowledge is performative and reflexive rather than codified. By connecting these insights to Goffman’s (1961) notion of the moral career, we understand the traditional fiddler not merely as a skilled performer, but as someone undergoing a sequence of socialization, recognition, and moral evaluation.

Post-1989 transformations have destabilized traditional pathways in fiddler music. Rădulescu (1996) noted how the collapse of institutional patronage and rise of market liberalization shifted fiddlers into informal and competitive spaces.

Children of musicians increasingly pursue work abroad or in other sectors, breaking long-standing continuities.

Georgescu (2013) explored a different rupture: conversion to Pentecostalism. For some, faith redefines music as a moral danger, prompting withdrawal from weddings and a reorientation toward religious expression. This shift redefines the meaning of the profession within families, introducing new forms of intra-generational tension.

Beissinger (2001) discussed the symbolic elevation of fiddler music in world music circuits, which does not necessarily translate into local prestige or sustainability. In addition, Stoichiță (2008) explained how weddings have become shorter, more transactional, and emotionally demanding. Musicians must adapt under increasing constraints, while family strategies diversify.

As Bucur (2019) noted, Gustian researchers were particularly concerned with understanding rural and marginalized populations whose social realities were poorly documented by urban intellectuals. Our study of Roma musicians, a community that remains economically and socially marginalized in contemporary Romania, extends this tradition of scholarly attention to overlooked communities. In addition, our methodology reflects what Bucur (2019) described as the Gustian commitment to total social science: understanding social phenomena through multiple analytical perspectives rather than disciplinary boundaries.

We extend the ethnographic lens through visual and analytic tools that help clarify how professional transmission succeeds, adapts, or fails across gendered and generational lines. We also build on earlier work conducted by Frunză and Vulpe (2024), who analyzed the dynamics of occupational transmission among Roma musicians from a life-course perspective. Focusing on father-son relationships and the interplay between formal schooling and informal musical apprenticeship, the analysis highlighted the tensions between traditional expectations and contemporary aspirations. Our current study extends this approach by incorporating a broader range of family configurations to trace continuity and rupture across multiple generations.

Methodology

This study draws on ethnographic interviews conducted in Buzău County in 2024, focused on the intergenerational transmission of the traditional fiddler profession. All data were collected during multiple visits to the homes of musicians and their families. These face-to-face encounters allowed for extended, in-depth interviews, and enabled us to collect data on family dynamics and everyday contexts of musical life. The fieldwork approach was grounded in the tradition of immersive, relationship-based sociology, in continuity with the Romanian field research tradition inaugurated by the School of Dimitrie Gusti a century ago. The

Gusti School's method involved direct observation and thorough documentation of social realities through community-based fieldwork. By conducting face-to-face interviews in the homes of musicians, we applied the same principles to understand professional transmission in this community.

Our data set consists of ethnographic interviews with seven musicians currently or formerly active in Buzău County. Respondents span multiple generations and positions within the profession: young musicians, retired elders, active performers with international experience, and one respondent from outside the Roma tradition. In each case, we reconstructed the genealogical lineage of musical inheritance across at least three generations, using a structured form to assemble and verify family trees. This form included fields for kinship ties, musical instruments played, level of musical schooling, age of debut, occupations outside music, and known instances of discontinuity or rupture in transmission. The process was collaborative and iterative: trees were drawn, discussed, corrected, and annotated during the interviews.

In total, we analyzed seven detailed family trees and corresponding interview transcripts. The sample includes both patrilineal lineages with sustained musical continuity and more fragmented or discontinued trajectories. Most respondents are of Roma ethnicity, reflecting the historical structure of the fiddler profession in the region. One case, deliberately included for contrast, involves an ethnic Romanian musician who entered the profession without prior familial or ethnic affiliation to fiddler networks. His case allows us to explore alternative paths of entry, the role of neighborhood socialization, and the limits of transmission outside kin-based systems.

In addition to these Buzău-based cases, we conducted a supplementary interview with Bogdan Simion, a nationally recognized fiddler, cultural historian, and public intellectual. Although not part of the regional sample, his account provides valuable insight into public representations of fiddler music. This interview also adds a reflexive perspective on the symbolic reconfiguration of the profession in post-socialist Romania. His inclusion is intended not to generalize, but to contextualize and expand the interpretive scope of the study.

Our study is focused on Roma musicians, a marginalized community. This focus is a direct continuation of the work developed by the Gusti School. Gustian researchers were interested in understanding rural and marginalized populations. By focusing on a community that remains economically and socially marginalized in contemporary Romania, we extend this tradition of studying communities underrepresented in research.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the interviews. All participants agreed to the use of their real names in this research. When discussing interview results in the text, we refer to respondents by their initials. The genealogical trees we constructed were anonymized. The research was conducted

in compliance with the ethical requirements of the Faculty of Sociology and Social Work, University of Bucharest.

All interviews were transcribed and thematically coded. We paid particular attention to expressions of continuity and rupture, the role of male and female family members in transmission, perceptions of gender and propriety, access to education and instruments, and reflections on how the profession has changed across political and economic regimes. Genealogical data were cross-referenced with narratives to trace both declared and implicit models of professional inheritance. The insider status of one of the co-authors, who is himself a fiddler and part of the genealogical sample, offered critical contextual understanding and introduced a reflexive dimension to the fieldwork.

Results

Voices of Inheritance: Becoming and Remaining a Fiddler

Paths of Entry and Early Socialization

The entry into the fiddler profession, as narrated by the musicians in our study, rarely follows a single script. While several respondents inherited the craft from their fathers in a trajectory of classic occupational reproduction, others entered more informally, laterally, or even by accident. These early experiences show that musical learning is embedded in everyday life, rarely formalized, and always contingent. They also reveal that, although musical competence is frequently inherited within families, it is also shaped by chance encounters, peer networks, bodily limitations, and material availability.

In some cases, initiation followed an organized sequence. One respondent (S.F.) recalled how he was introduced to multiple instruments by his father, beginning with the keyboard: “He told me: ‘first the keyboard, then the accordion, then the guitar, then the drums’... and that’s the order I followed.” He described his entry into wedding performances as a gradual progression – first listening, then accompanying – and noted the importance of being perceived as competent before being allowed to perform publicly.

His father (I.F.), a veteran musician, offered his own perspective on this process. He remembered how his son’s talent revealed itself through informal imitation: “He would watch the boys rehearse in the town center. He would just sit and observe... and when they left, he would pick up the instruments. And the first time I really listened to him I said: ‘he is better than that guy!’”

Other respondents described more improvised forms of socialization. One man (F.I.), who was born blind, explained that he could not learn the violin from his father and instead taught himself the accordion by borrowing his brothers’ instruments. “When they were not home, I would take the accordion and practice by

myself. That is how I learned.” His brothers were also self-taught and uninterested in the instrument preferred by their father. In this family, despite the presence of a musical patriarch, none of the sons followed the formal path laid before them. Instead, they created a shared, sibling-based learning environment, driven by interest rather than obligation.

A particularly distinctive case was that of an ethnic Romanian respondent (M.V.), who had no family tradition of music. He described his initiation into fiddler music as a social experience: “I started with a friend who knew how to play. We did not have instruments at home, but I would go to his place and try things out.” Later, he became part of a group of boys from the neighborhood, many of them from fiddler families, who accepted him as a peer and co-musician. His entry into the profession was horizontal rather than vertical, a product of friendship, local proximity, and gradual apprenticeship through shared rehearsal spaces and events. His inclusion in the profession reflects a degree of permeability, and also marked the limits of transmission: “My kids are not interested, music did not appeal to them. I had no one to rehearse with.” Without family infrastructure, the profession ended with him.

In contrast, a younger respondent (N.) described an intentional and structured process of entry, even in the absence of strong familial pressure. “I got serious around age 14. I treated music like school. I practiced every day, for hours.” He took the initiative to learn not only by ear but also to read music, and later taught his younger brother. His case illustrates a shift toward pedagogical self-discipline and reflexive professionalism.

Taken together, these accounts demonstrate the variety of paths into the fiddler profession, shaped by generational context, family structure, and social location. Across narratives, a shared theme emerges: learning music is a social process of becoming, of joining a world where music is both livelihood and identity. In this sense, the fiddler moral career begins with participation, observation, and the willingness to be taken seriously by significant others.

The non-linear and peer-based learning that we captured in the interviews is a pattern that has historical precedent in Romanian ethnographic research. Similar learning processes were identified by Henri H. Stahl (*Cum a învățat Șerban Butoiu din Ocarină* [How Șerban Butoiu learned to play the Ocarina], 1936), and by Stoichiță (2008), who documented how learning music occurs through participation, not formal education.

Transmission, Constraint, and Rupture: Patterns of Professional Inheritance

Professional inheritance among fiddlers is neither automatic nor uniform. While family lineage plays a central role in structuring opportunities for transmission, various cases reveal particular configurations of motivations, constraints, and turning points. Parents, especially fathers, act as facilitators, instructors, or gatekeepers, while mothers support the endeavor in less visible ways. In some

cases, grandmothers act as inspirational figures. Two of our interviewees mentioned their grandmothers as incredible vocalists who performed only at home and taught them songs during their childhood.

Transmission may be interrupted, refused, or redirected, and such ruptures often reveal the broader forces that shape the fragility of cultural professions under changing historical and social conditions. One respondent (I.F.) recalled how he introduced his sons to music at a young age, but not all of them continued on that path. “I taught them all, one by one, from the age of seven. But not everyone sticks with it. One got sick during the baccalaureate exams, diabetes... the stress, I think. Another one gave up after he got scolded by his brother during rehearsal and never wanted to play the instrument again.”

Gender plays a decisive role in shaping transmission patterns. Across the interviews, daughters rarely inherit the profession, even when they show talent or interest. One respondent (M.D.) recalled that one of his daughters had a strong voice and began formal lessons with a well-known canto teacher. Yet she abandoned the profession under pressure from her husband. “He did not want her to go to weddings. He was jealous, he did not like the idea of her being out at night.” In another case, the wife of one of the respondents manifested hesitation: “I was afraid to let them go. It is not like with boys. They would be out until three or four in the morning, and I didn’t want to take that risk.” These accounts reflect a broader cultural logic in which the professional stage is understood as a male space. In this context, the respectability and safety of daughters become sites of negotiation and restriction.

Some families achieve multi-generational continuity with stability. One respondent (F.I.) taught his son from early childhood, despite being blind himself. “I taught him how to play, just like I was taught. He plays now, and I am proud. He is better than me.” However, even when music is transmitted, its centrality may decline over time. Another respondent (S.F.) described his own musical path as increasingly hybrid: “I have always done both. Music and social work, weddings and day jobs. That is how you survive.” His son also balances music with formal education and other opportunities.

Finally, there are cases in which transmission fails to occur altogether because the necessary infrastructure is missing. One respondent (M.V.), who entered the profession without any family background, regrets not being able to pass it on. “My kids were not interested. I did not rehearse with them, and I did not have that kind of home. Maybe if I had grown up in a fiddler family myself, I would have known how to do that.” Transmission depends on situated knowledge. It is related to an embodied sense of how musical life is organized, practiced, and handed down.

Work, Identity, and Cultural Legitimacy: Being a Fiddler Today

The profession has changed significantly across generations. The fiddler identity must now be negotiated in a world of market fragmentation, digital circulation, and shifting public perception. Respondents speak of exhaustion, pride, marginality, and the desire to preserve meaning in an increasingly commodified musical landscape.

Some narratives emphasize continuity and pride. One respondent (M.D.) described how he performed with national ensembles, traveled abroad with a Roma circus, and built a professional reputation over decades. “I sang in Paris, in Spain, in Germany. They would clap for me there. I played the old songs, and they listened. That is what matters. The respect.” His identity as a fiddler is tied to international recognition and the affirmation of Roma culture in transnational spaces. At the same time, he noted the fatigue of constant performance and the loneliness of living far from home.

Younger musicians express a more reflexive stance. One respondent (N.) spoke of his commitment to quality and moral conduct: “I do not do playback. I show up on time. I treat music like a craft. I respect the people I play for, and I expect respect in return.” He described himself as a “band director,” managing both artistic direction and client relationships. His vision of the profession includes ethics of punctuality, reliability, and effort. He contrasts these values with what he sees as the growing superficiality of the field. “Now you see singers with one song, no repertoire, and they get hired. That is not how I was taught.”

Some narratives are more ambivalent. One respondent (S.F.) reflected on the dual identity of being both a fiddler and a sociologist: “I play at weddings, but I also write papers. I teach. I have lived both lives.” For him, fiddler music is not incompatible with academic reflection—it is a source of insight into class, ethnicity, work, and time. He speaks openly about how the profession is often misunderstood, reduced to stereotypes, or dismissed as less than respectable labor. At the same time, he embraces the depth, complexity, and moral demands of the profession. “You learn a lot about people when you play for them. What they sing, what they cry to, what they ask for.”

Others foreground the experience of marginality. One respondent (F.I.), who is blind, recounted moments of vulnerability: “People do not always respect you. They think music is not a real job. They want you to play all night and pay you nothing.” Fiddler music exists in a precarious space: necessary and celebrated, yet undervalued and structurally insecure.

Some respondents commented on the evolution of musical taste and performance contexts. One noted how weddings have changed: “Before, we would play all night, with breaks only to eat. Now, everything is scheduled. They want just the chorus, nothing more. The emotion is gone” (I.F.). Others lamented the dominance of playback and social media performance, where musicianship is less visible than appearance. But among these critiques, there remains a strong sense that the profession still matters socially, symbolically, and emotionally.

Typologies of Professional Inheritance: Continuity, Constraint, and Reinvention

The interviews and genealogical trees together allow us to outline several recurring trajectories through which the fiddler profession is transmitted, maintained, or reconfigured across generations. These are ideal types, simplified models that capture recurring configurations of experience. Each type reflects a distinct moral career, shaped by kinship structure, gender norms, economic pressures, and the meaning attached to musical labor. Respondents sometimes move between types, or straddle them. What unites these paths is their shared attempt to navigate the promise and precarity of an inherited craft.

The first is the traditional heir, a figure who learns from a father or close male relative, often through long-term apprenticeship and early performance experience. This path is marked by strong vertical continuity and a clear role within the family ensemble. The traditional heir typically begins performing before adolescence, absorbs the repertoire by ear, and internalizes the moral expectations of the profession from within. In our study, I.F. and his son, S.F., offer an example of this type, characterized by multi-generational continuity, instrument complementarity, and a strong ethic of musical seriousness.

The commitment of the traditional heir to the profession can be seen as a form of moral labor, as they become the keepers of the profession's honor and continuity. However, the traditional heir navigates an unstable model. Success is dependent on the ability to secure the same limited, local gigs that are now competed for by a wider range of musicians (including those of other typologies). The traditional identity is not just inherited; it is actively maintained through a conscious rejection of alternative paths and a continued investment in a professional model that is no longer dominant. This is a subtle but important distinction from the Gusti School's time, when such a direct inheritance path would have been the norm rather than one of several possible professional trajectories.

By contrast, the aspirational modernizer enters the profession with a more reflexive and strategic approach. Often starting later, sometimes outside family pressure, this type pursues music deliberately, as a project of personal and professional development. Aspirational modernizers emphasize quality, self-discipline, and the incorporation of literacy and digital tools into their practice. The aspirational modernizer is someone who is deliberately re-inventing the fiddler moral career to fit a new professional and ethical landscape.

A third figure is the constrained daughter, a recurring absence in the genealogical trees and narratives. Despite visible talent or interest, daughters are rarely allowed to pursue the profession fully. Some begin formal musical education, but later withdraw due to parental fear, reputational concerns, or spousal opposition. These trajectories reflect a gendered structure of non-transmission: the profession is offered to sons, withheld from daughters. This exclusion reflects a historical pattern of women's labor being confined to the private sphere, or to roles deemed

respectable within community moral frameworks. The constrained daughter highlights how cultural capital, particularly its embodied form, is selectively reproduced along gender lines.

The economic migrant musician reflects another adaptation: a fiddler who pursues the profession abroad, integrating it into transnational circuits and often combining it with other forms of labor. While Gustian researchers documented local adaptations, the contemporary fiddler migration illustrates a more profound rupture and re-contextualization of the moral career. It is a strategic response to diminished local patronage and economic instability, and highlights how cultural capital becomes a portable commodity in transnational contexts.

The lost heir is someone who could have inherited the profession but did not, or did so partially only to abandon it. This may happen through conflict, illness, structural marginalization, or the absence of transmission infrastructure. In other cases, sons who were taught early never pursued performance seriously, due to family tension or personal preference. The lost heir represents a failure of transmission, where the embodied cultural capital, despite being present, is not successfully converted into a stable professional identity.

What the Trees Show: Genealogical Evidence of Professional Transmission

The genealogical trees constructed during fieldwork serve as visual syntheses of intergenerational transmission. They allow us to identify recurring structural patterns that may not be fully legible in interview narratives alone. While trees cannot reveal motives, affective dynamics, or internal conflicts, they make visible the contours of professional continuity and constraint: who became a musician, through which line, and with what degree of density or dispersion. They expose both what is passed on and where transmission stops.

Across the trees, the most consistent pattern is patrilineal and male-dominated inheritance. Musical roles are nearly always transmitted from father to son or among male siblings. In multigenerational trees, we see tightly concentrated lines of transmission along the male side, with professional musicianship clustering in certain branches and entirely absent in others. In some cases, multiple male descendants specialize in complementary instruments, revealing a logic of ensemble structuring embedded within the family unit. These musical branches often reflect deliberate intra-family distribution of roles, shaped by functional needs and early socialization.

At the same time, non-musical branches are frequent and patterned. In several trees, daughters' lines contain no musicians, even when they outnumber the sons. These absences align with narrative accounts of constrained opportunities, where girls with musical talent were discouraged from public performance due to safety concerns or reputational norms. While the interviews recover these missed trajectories, the genealogical trees record their outcomes as discontinuity.

Another visible pattern is the coexistence of musical and non-musical paths within the same generation. In several families, one son becomes a full-time musician while others pursue wage labor, sports, small business, or public service. The trees allow us to see this occupational branching clearly, often originating in the third or fourth generation, as families diversify income sources or as the profession becomes less economically stable. This shift is not always a rupture, but sometimes a form of recombination: a family continues to “have musicians” without the profession being hegemonic.

In one case, we observe the presence of a single musician in an otherwise non-musical lineage. This appearance of this figure in the tree, unconnected to any prior musical ancestor, marks the entry point of a profession into a family line. Here, the genealogical form captures the emergence of a new trajectory, one that does not reproduce across generations but remains isolated. The contrast with denser trees highlights the role of kinship as infrastructure not only for teaching but for sustaining the profession over time.

The genealogical tree of one of the families (see Figure 1 below) documents five generations of musicians, with professional transmission occurring exclusively through the male line. The first known musician, active in the early 20th century, specialized in violin and kobza, and passed the craft to three of his sons. These men performed using a range of instruments – violins, cymbalom, and kobza – suggesting a functional diversification within the family ensemble, in which sons specialized in complementary instruments to support the versatility of the group in events.

The third generation (Figure 1) continues the pattern of concentrated male transmission. Among the children of one of the second-generation musicians, two sons became professional musicians while one daughter married into a non-musical family line, confirming the rule that occupational transmission followed a strictly paternal route. No musical transmission occurred through the daughters’ lines; the children did not become musicians, typically because the daughters did not marry fiddlers. This supports the observation that professional inheritance in this family requires both biological and social alignment with the paternal musical line. The male musicians in this generation combined their artistic activity with wage labor in local industry, because of declining opportunities in the traditional fiddler market during the late socialist and early post-socialist periods.

In the fourth generation (Figure 1), two male descendants continue the musical line. Both pursued higher education and held positions in the public sector alongside their musical activities. This marks a significant shift: professional identity is no longer built solely around music but is combined with other occupations, including social work and public administration. The instruments also diversify – accordion, keyboard, drums, guitar – reflecting changing event formats and new demands from clients. The flexibility of this generation illustrates a pragmatic adaptation to the precarity of traditional musical labor.

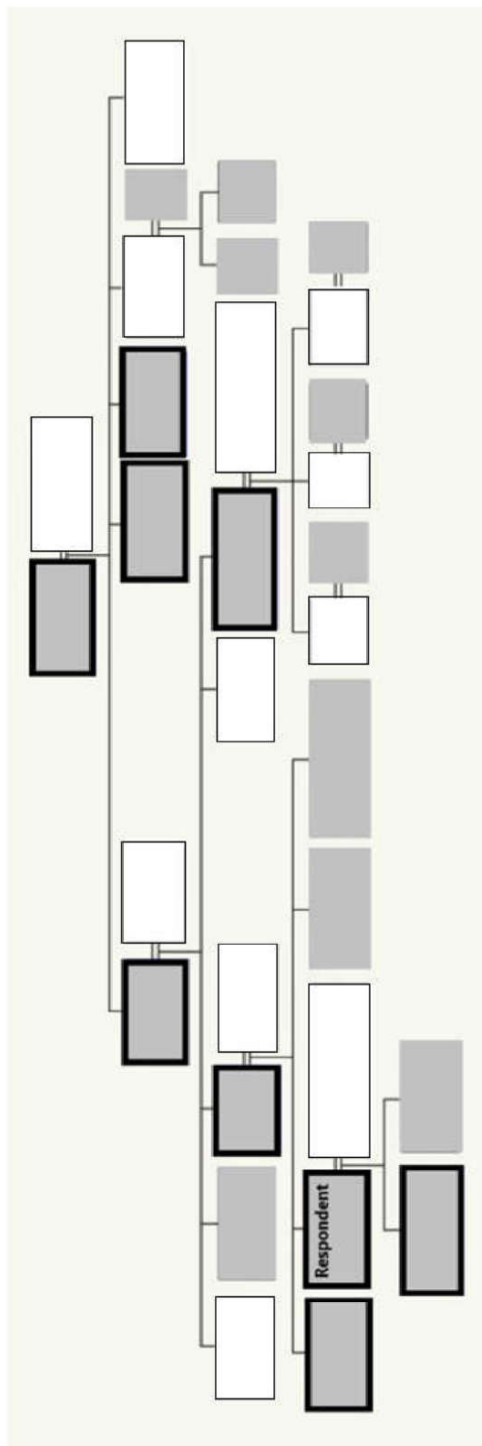


Figure 1. The genealogical tree of F.S. Grey shapes indicate women; white shapes indicate men; white shapes indicate men; white shapes indicate men. A thick black border marks individuals with fiddler status.

The fifth generation (Figure 1) includes one adolescent male who is already active as a musician. His path reflects both continuity and change: he inherited the profession patrilineally, yet he does so in a context where music is one of several possible futures, rather than a prescribed vocation.

The genealogical record of another extended family (Figure 2) reveals a dense and diversified network of musicians, spanning six documented generations. The first known practitioner, a male vocalist in the first generation, passed the profession to his son, who specialized in the cymbalom. From the third generation onward, the lineage branches out into a wide array of musical paths, primarily concentrated among male descendants. At least six men from this generation became professional musicians, specializing in instruments such as violin, accordion, and cymbalom. Their children continued the tradition selectively, with several sons and nephews entering the profession, while others pursued unrelated occupations such as construction, sports, or small business.

The fourth and fifth generations (Figure 3) exhibit a shift toward differentiation and occupational branching. While the family maintains a strong musical core, producing accordionists, keyboard players, and nationally recognized cymbalom players, it also includes a significant number of non-musicians. Musical inheritance appears concentrated in specific nuclear subunits, often facilitated by fraternal transmission, lateral mentoring (uncle to nephew), or informal apprenticeship within extended kin networks.

Gendered patterns are stark (Figures 2 and 3). Despite the presence of many female family members, only one is documented as having practiced professionally (as a percussionist, later turned entrepreneur), and even that case appears transitional. The rest of the women are absent from the occupational lineage, regardless of talent or interest. This confirms a persistent cultural logic that excludes women from the public, mobile, night-time labor involved in musical performance, even in otherwise music-rich families.

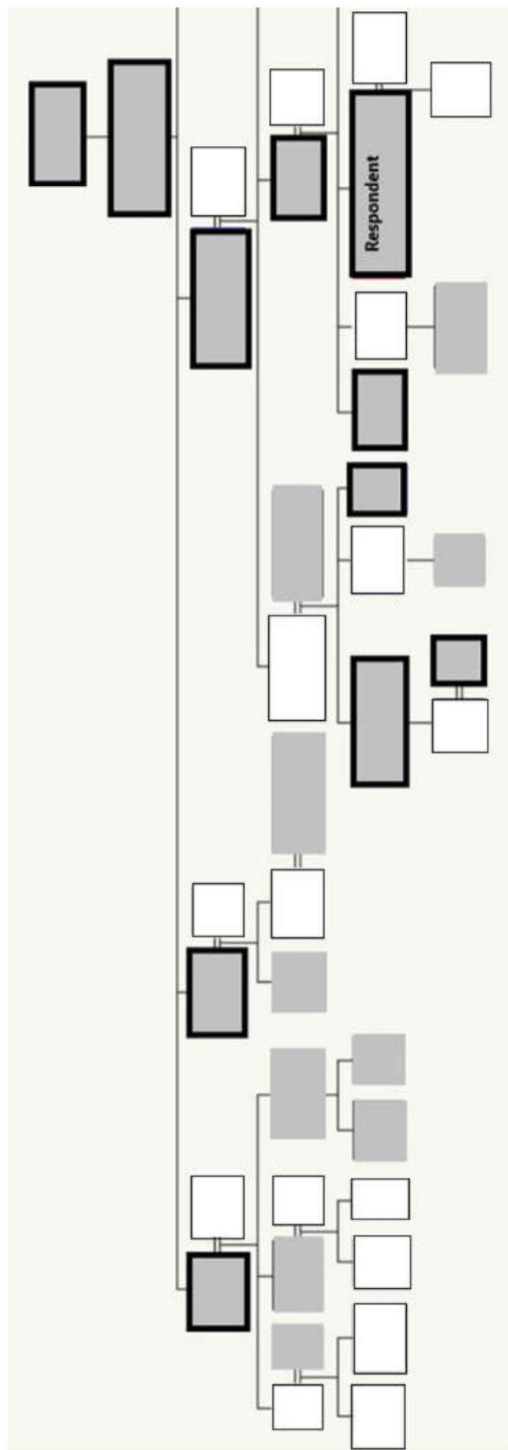


Figure 2. The genealogical tree of E.M. (part 1). Grey shapes indicate men; white shapes indicate women. A thick black border marks individuals with fiddler status

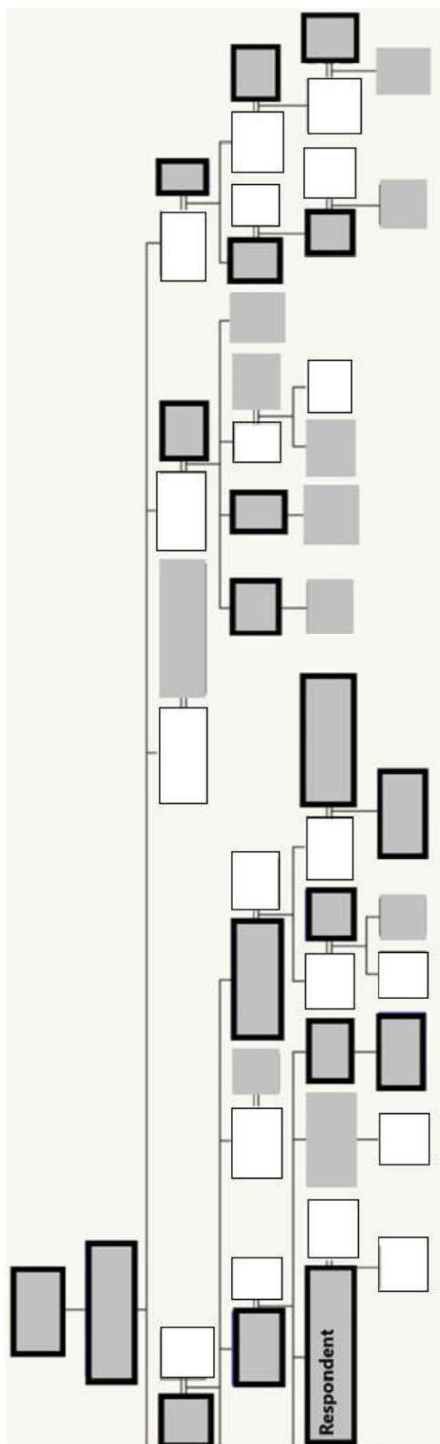


Figure 3. The genealogical tree of E.M. (part 2). Grey shapes indicate women; white shapes indicate men. A thick black border marks individuals with fiddler status.

The genealogical tree in Figure 4 documents three generations of male musicians, with the profession transmitted through the paternal line but reshaped by constraints and improvisation. The first generation includes a father who played the violin but was unable to transmit his skill directly to his son because of the son's visual impairment. The respondent, a blind musician, nonetheless became a professional accordionist and later a teacher of the instrument.

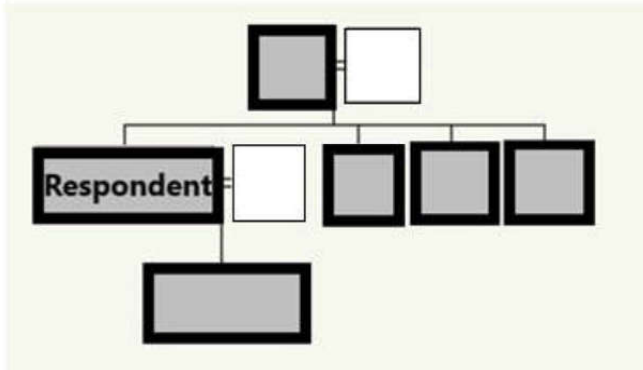


Figure 4. The genealogical tree of I.F. Grey shapes indicate men; white shapes indicate women. A thick black border marks individuals with fiddler status.

The second generation (Figure 4) includes three brothers, all of whom played the accordion and had minimal formal education. Their entry into the profession was also autodidactic, showing a horizontal diffusion of musical practice among siblings, independent of parental instruction. This pattern deviates from the more typical father-to-son pathway observed in other fiddler families, which suggests that in the absence of strong paternal transmission mechanisms, fraternal learning networks sustain and replicate the profession. The lack of formal schooling did not prevent professional development, although it may have limited broader occupational mobility.

In the third generation (Figure 4), the son of the respondent studied piano and completed secondary education. His professional status is not fully documented, but his musical trajectory indicates a partial continuation of the lineage, shaped by formal instruction and institutional schooling. This trajectory suggests a transition toward mixed models of transmission, combining family-based learning with school-based musical socialization.

The genealogical case in Figure 5 stands out as an exception to the dominant pattern of familial transmission observed across fiddler lineages. The respondent, a male of ethnic Romanian background, is the only musician in his family. His father was not a fiddler, and neither of his children has continued the profession. His entry into music occurred through proximity: he was raised in a neighborhood

with several fiddler families and became close friends with a group of boys who were already involved in music.

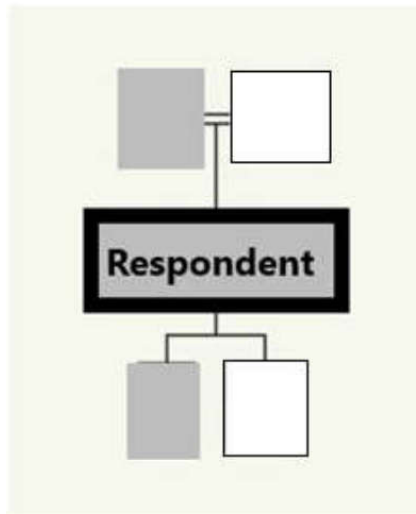


Figure 5. The genealogical tree of M.V. Grey shapes indicate men; white shapes indicate women. A thick black border marks individuals with fiddler status.

This case illustrates an alternative pathway into the fiddler profession, one based on peer group socialization rather than inheritance. His inclusion in this musical group reflects the permeability of the profession under certain conditions, especially during adolescence, when time, proximity, and shared cultural practice allow for lateral forms of learning.

At the same time, the case highlights structural limits. Unlike his fiddler peers, the respondent did not benefit from a family ensemble, accumulated musical capital, or a kin-based professional reputation. The profession stopped with him. Neither of his children took up music, and the absence of a supporting family tradition likely contributed to this discontinuity. From a sociological perspective, the case points to the importance of kinship not only in transmission but in long-term professional stability.

Conclusions

In this study, we examined professional inheritance among traditional fiddlers in Buzău County through ethnographic interviews and genealogical reconstruction. Our findings reveal that musical transmission operates through structured yet fragile mechanisms that reflect broader patterns of social reproduction in marginalized communities.

The genealogical evidence documents consistent patrilineal inheritance patterns. Musical roles pass almost exclusively from fathers to sons, with daughters systematically excluded despite demonstrated talent. This gendered gatekeeping operates through family-level decisions about safety, respectability, and appropriate female behavior. Even in families with strong musical traditions, daughters who begin formal training often withdraw under spousal or parental pressure. The profession thus reproduces itself through what we term *constrained transmission*, inheritance that is simultaneously enabled and limited by gender norms.

Professional continuity depends on more than skill acquisition. We identified a typology of five moral career paths: traditional heirs who follow structured apprenticeships; aspirational modernizers who pursue music strategically; constrained daughters whose careers are preempted; economic migrant musicians who adapt the profession transnationally; and lost heirs who abandon or never fully embrace inherited opportunities.

The role of mothers emerges as central, although it often remains invisible. While fathers serve as instructors and gatekeepers, mothers provide material support, emotional sustenance, and mediation between traditional expectations and modern schooling. The genealogical method captures formal inheritance lines but obscures the reproductive work that makes transmission possible.

Economic transformations since 1989 have altered but not eliminated professional inheritance. Families now pursue hybrid strategies, combining music with wage labor, formal education, or migration. The profession adapts through diversification rather than abandonment. Musicians develop dual careers, learn new instruments, and incorporate digital technologies while maintaining core repertoires and performance practices.

Through our methodological approach, building on the Gusti School tradition, we demonstrate the value of sustained fieldwork in understanding cultural transmission. The combination of ethnographic interviews and genealogical mapping reveals how professional inheritance operates across multiple generational scales. Single interviews or brief ethnographic encounters would miss the long-term patterns of continuity and rupture that characterize cultural professions in marginalized communities.

The case of the non-Roma musician who entered the profession through peer networks rather than family lineage highlights the permeability and limits of occupational boundaries. While lateral entry is possible under specific social conditions, long-term reproduction requires kinship infrastructure. The fiddler profession persists through adaptive strategies that balance tradition with economic necessity, family expectations with individual aspirations, and ethnic identity with mainstream integration. However, this persistence remains precarious, dependent on family-level decisions that can interrupt transmission across generations.

Our study is anchored within the legacy of the Gusti School of Sociology. Following the tradition of Gusti and his collaborators, we ground our research

in immersive fieldwork, attention to under-documented communities, and we document cultural practices in their social context. At the same time, we extend this methodological tradition by integrating contemporary theories of moral career, cultural capital, and gender, and by introducing genealogical reconstruction as a systematic tool for the study of cultural professions.

Original Contributions

Our systematic reconstruction of family trees across multiple generations extends the methodological approaches used in previous fiddler studies. While Beissinger (1991, 2001, 2018), Rădulescu (2020), and Stoichiță (2008) relied on participant observation and individual interviews, we added genealogical mapping to trace transmission patterns across extended family networks. This approach allows for comparison between families and identification of structural patterns that may not be visible in single-generation studies.

The typology that we propose - traditional heir, aspirational modernizer, constrained daughter, economic migrant musician, and lost heir - offers one way to organize the varied trajectories through which individuals engage with inherited cultural professions. Previous studies tended to focus on successful transmission or general patterns of change. Our framework captures some of the intermediate positions and partial engagements that characterize contemporary cultural work in this profession.

While earlier research noted that daughters rarely inherit the fiddler profession, our study provides more systematic documentation of how this exclusion operates in practice. The combination of genealogical evidence and interview data reveals specific family-level decisions and cultural justifications that structure professional opportunities by gender. The concept of *constrained transmission* describes how inheritance can be simultaneously offered and withheld within the same family system.

We also document the role of female family members who support musical careers, but are rarely recognized as involved in professional transmission. This addresses a gap in existing literature, which has focused primarily on father-son relationships in musical inheritance. By examining roles of mothers and grandmothers, we contribute to understanding how cultural reproduction depends on multiple forms of family labor.

The inclusion of a co-author who is himself a fiddler adds an insider dimension to the research that complements external sociological analysis. This approach provides access to family dynamics and cultural meanings that might not be readily visible to outside researchers.

By documenting transmission across four to six generations, the study provides a longer temporal view than most existing research on fiddlers. This perspective reveals both persistence and change across different historical periods, political

systems, and economic conditions. This contributes to understanding how cultural practices maintain continuity while adapting to macro-level social transformations.

Limitations and Future Research

We focused on currently or recently active musicians, which may introduce selection bias toward families where transmission has been relatively successful. Families where musical traditions have been completely abandoned or where discontinuity occurred generations ago are not represented in our sample. This limitation affects our understanding of the full range of factors that lead to professional discontinuity.

The retrospective nature of genealogical reconstruction relies on respondents' memories and family knowledge, which may be incomplete or inaccurate for earlier generations. Some transmission patterns, particularly the roles of extended family members or informal mentors, may be difficult to reconstruct through interviews alone. The method also privileges male lineages, since these are more readily remembered and documented in family accounts.

Future research could address these limitations through several approaches. Studies that include families where musical traditions have been abandoned would provide better understanding of the factors that lead to professional discontinuity. Research focused specifically on the experiences of daughters in musical families could document the mechanisms of gendered exclusion systematically and explore cases where these patterns have been disrupted.

In addition, research that incorporates economic analysis could better document the material conditions under which cultural transmission succeeds or fails. Understanding the financial costs and benefits of musical careers, both for families and individuals, would contribute to in-depth analyses of professional reproduction in marginalized communities.

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