



TRUST

ART THERAPY

*Trauma of refugees in Europe:
An approach through art therapy
as a solidarity program for
Ukraine war victims.*

DISCLAIMERS

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e-book

Erasmus+ KA220 project TRUST

*Building Peace Through Art: A European Art-Therapy
Approach to Mental Health in Conflict Settings*



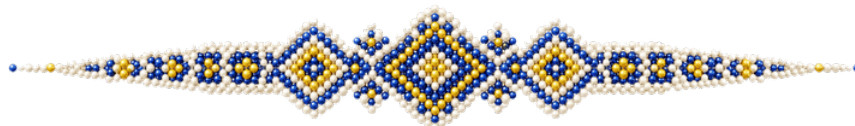
2024-2027



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General preamble to the work (Sequences 1 to 4)

This e-book from the Erasmus+ KA220 TRUST project offers an integrated European perspective on art therapy applied to contexts of war, displacement, and trauma. Designed as a pedagogical, clinical, and political tool, it brings together the theoretical foundations, practical protocols, and contemporary perspectives shaping art therapy in Europe. The book unfolds in four complementary sections, each illuminating a key dimension of healing through art and its integration within psychosocial support systems.

Sequence 1 constitutes the core module. It presents the theoretical foundations (neuroscience, polyvagal theory, the continuum of expressive therapies, attachment), clinical approaches, and evidence-based protocols for supporting war victims and displaced persons. It emphasises inclusion, European cooperation, and professional training to ensure trauma-sensitive interventions.

Sequence 2 delves deeper into two major themes: – the **context of the war in Ukraine**, analysed from its historical, political, and memorial dimensions, to situate individual and collective traumas within their socio-historical reality; – the **guiding principles of the TRUST project** (ethics, inclusivity, replicability, cultural sensitivity) and the mapping of beneficiary groups. This module provides guidelines for adapting protocols to the specific needs of affected populations and contemporary challenges.

Sequence 3 explores the growing role of art therapy in European education systems. It shows how schools are becoming spaces for mental health prevention and support, where art therapy contributes to emotional self-regulation, the inclusion of neurodivergent students, and post-pandemic social reconstruction. It focuses on the structuring of art therapy education in Ukraine. It also highlights the responsible use of digital technologies and AI, as well as the policy challenges related to training, sustainable funding, and equitable access to resources.

Sequence 4 offers a forward-looking perspective: it presents the evolution of art therapy towards a profession fully integrated into European mental health systems. Supported by neuroscience, multimodal approaches, and digital innovation, it is part of hybrid models that strengthen prevention, early intervention, and inclusion. This module positions art therapy as a sustainable pillar of 21st-century mental health policies.

By bringing together these four sections, the book offers a coherent, sensitive, and research-based response to the needs of people affected by conflict. It aims to be a practical tool, a training resource, and an advocacy tool. It promotes recognition of art therapy and encourages sustainable European cooperation in service of war victims.

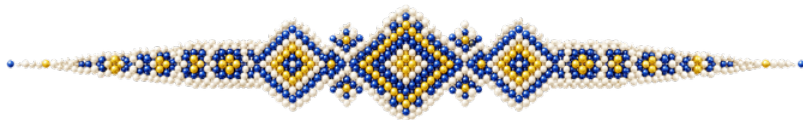


Final aims



Finally, this document is intended as both a field tool and an advocacy resource: it aims to strengthen the quality of interventions, promote recognition of art therapy within mental-health policy, and encourage European cooperation to sustainably support victims of war. By combining scientific knowledge, proven practices, and historical sensitivity, the e-book offers an integrated response to the mental-health needs and social needs of people affected by conflict.







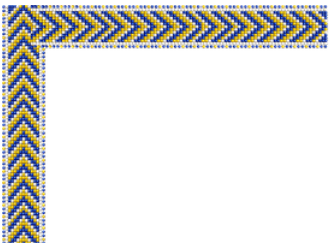
SEQUENCE 1

This sequence presents the e-book of the Erasmus+ TRUST project, which promotes art therapy as a therapeutic tool for war victims and displaced persons. It synthesises the history, theoretical foundations (neuroscience, attachment, polyvagal theory, the Expressive Therapies Continuum), the scientific evidence, and practical protocols (TFAT, TT-AT, multimodal approaches) intended for professionals and researchers.

The text emphasises inclusion, European solidarity, training, cross-border cooperation, and integrating art therapy into mental health policies.

*Healing through
Art: A European
Approach to Art
Therapy for Mental
Health War Victims*





Sequence 1.1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose & Objectives of the e-book

This e-book, part of the Erasmus+ KA220 project TRUST, highlights the transformative role of art therapy in supporting individuals affected by war, displacement, and trauma. It aims to provide mental health professionals, educators, NGOs, and policymakers with practical insights into using art as a therapeutic tool to foster resilience and emotional recovery.

By presenting case studies, methodologies, and theoretical perspectives, the e-book emphasises how creative expression helps individuals process their experiences, regain a sense of self, and build coping mechanisms. Art therapy serves as a bridge between psychological healing and social integration, offering a holistic approach to trauma recovery.

1.2 Target Audience & Relevance

This e-book is tailored for professionals working with war victims, refugees, and trauma survivors, including:

- **Mental health professionals** such as psychologists, therapists, and counsellors who seek alternative methods to support clients.
- **Educators** interested in integrating art therapy techniques in schools to support children affected by displacement and war.
- **NGOs and humanitarian workers** who provide psychosocial support in crisis settings.
- **Policymakers** focused on developing trauma-informed care policies and mental health programs in multicultural societies.

Given the ongoing challenges of war and forced migration in Europe and beyond, this e-book underscores the urgent need for accessible, culturally sensitive therapeutic interventions.

1.3 Art Therapy's Role in Resilience & Inclusion

Art therapy is a powerful, non-verbal medium that enables trauma survivors to process their emotions and experiences in a safe, creative environment. It plays a crucial role in:

- **Fostering resilience:** by engaging in artistic expression, individuals can rebuild their sense of identity, regain control, and develop positive coping strategies.
- **Healing trauma:** art provides an outlet for emotions that may be too difficult to verbalise, offering a pathway to emotional release and recovery.
- **Strengthening social bonds:** group art therapy sessions encourage connection, shared experiences, and mutual support among participants, reducing feelings of isolation.
- **Promoting inclusion:** art transcends language barriers, making it an effective tool for integrating refugees and displaced individuals into new cultural environments.

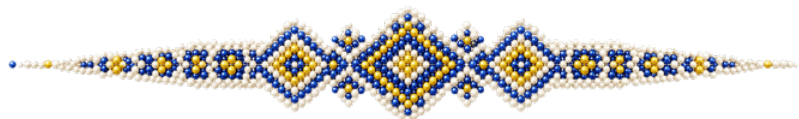
1.4 Integration of European Values



Art therapy aligns with key European values that promote psychological well-being, social cohesion, and human rights:

- **Solidarity:** providing cross-border support to war victims, acknowledging shared responsibilities in aiding trauma survivors, and fostering a collective sense of care and assistance.
- **Inclusion:** ensuring that art therapy is accessible to diverse cultural and linguistic groups, adapting methods to meet the needs of refugees and migrants from various backgrounds.
- **Mental Well-being as a Human Right:** advocating for trauma-informed care policies that recognise mental health as a fundamental right, reinforcing the necessity of psychological support in humanitarian and post-war recovery contexts.

This e-book guides readers in integrating these values into practice, ensuring art therapy remains a meaningful and effective tool for resilience-building and social inclusion.





Sequence 1.2. Understanding Art Therapy

2.1 Brief History & Evolution of Art Therapy

Early pioneers

Art therapy is a therapeutic practice that integrates artistic expression with psychological healing. Adrian Hill first used the term in 1942 to describe the positive impact of painting on his well-being during tuberculosis treatment. The practice developed significantly after World War II, especially in Anglo-Saxon countries and Québec, and remains relatively underrecognized in France.

Art therapy extends beyond psychiatric settings and is now applied in diverse environments such as hospitals (including oncology and Alzheimer's care), prisons, businesses, and private practices. It serves individuals experiencing grief, depression, addiction, disabilities, or life transitions. Art therapy is rooted in the idea that unconscious emotions manifest through images and bodily expressions before they can be articulated in words, making it particularly valuable for individuals with limited verbal communication abilities.

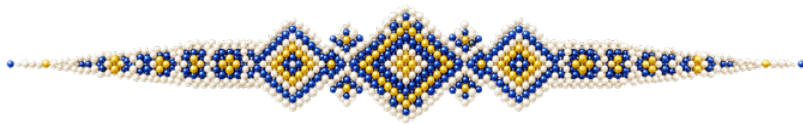
The historical evolution of art therapy shows its connections to ancient healing rituals, religious art, and shamanic traditions. However, in the 19th century, artistic expression was often used in psychiatric institutions as occupational therapy rather than as a means of emotional healing. In the early 20th century, artists and psychiatrists such as **Hans Prinzhorn (1922)** began to recognise the artistic value of patients' works, influencing movements like **Surrealism, Art Brut, and CoBrA**. However, the therapeutic effects of the artistic process itself were not yet fully explored.

In the mid-20th century, art therapy was formally structured into two main schools:

1. **Psychotherapy through Art** (Margaret Naumburg) Influenced by psychoanalysis, this approach views artistic expression as a direct representation of unconscious conflicts. The therapist helps the client analyse their images using free association, similar to verbal psychotherapy.
2. **Art as Therapy** (Edith Kramer) : This model emphasises the **creative process** itself as therapeutic. Artistic creation facilitates sublimation, allowing individuals to channel their emotions into socially constructive expressions.

Later theorists, such as **Elinor Ullman, Lilian Rhinehart, Paula Engelnhorn, and Janie Rhyne**, sought to integrate these approaches, emphasising the importance of the **art-making process** rather than focusing exclusively on the final product or verbal interpretation. Inspired by **Gestalt therapy**, this perspective highlights how artistic creation mirrors psychological processes and enables transformation through self-expression.

Art therapy has since evolved to incorporate elements from **systemic therapy, hypnosis, and positive psychology**, allowing therapists to tailor interventions to individual needs. While some art therapists prioritise free artistic expression, others integrate psychoanalytic interpretation. The choice of approach often depends on the therapist's background, whether in psychology, psychotherapy, or the arts.





Séquence 1.3 Development in Europe

Maria d'Elia's *Art Therapy in Europe* (2015) explores the historical and contemporary development of art therapy across the European continent. She highlights the challenges of defining a unified European approach because of linguistic, cultural, and political diversity. The text outlines the historical roots of art therapy, linking it to moral treatment in psychiatry, occupational therapy, psychotherapy, reform pedagogy, and artistic movements.

Key themes include:

1. **Historical Evolution** – Art therapy in Europe developed from psychiatric and psychotherapeutic traditions, heavily influenced by figures such as Freud, Jung, and Winnicott. It also incorporates elements from anthroposophy and movements like Joseph Beuys's concept of art as "social sculpture."
2. **Linguistic and Cultural Diversity** – Over 100 languages and multiple artistic traditions shape how art therapy is practised. English dominance has led British and American models to influence European training and practice, though independent developments exist in countries such as France and Germany.
3. **Professional Recognition** – Unlike in the UK, where art therapy is a recognised profession, most European countries lack standardised regulations. Some nations, like Switzerland, have developed national certification, while others have seen fragmented professional structures.
4. **Training and Education** – The Bologna Process has standardised university education, promoting accredited master's and doctoral programs. However, disparities exist, with some countries still relying on private institutions.
5. **Identity and Integration** – European art therapy lacks a unified professional body, and differing definitions of art therapy (e.g., art-as-therapy vs art-in-psychotherapy) create tensions. Despite this, academic recognition and cross-border collaboration are increasing.

The chapter concludes that Europe's diversity presents both a challenge and an opportunity for art therapists, emphasising the need for dialogue, research, and standardisation to strengthen the profession.

Growth as a professional discipline & Recognition

Art therapy, as presented by David Edwards (2024), integrates therapeutic and creative processes to engage with the unconscious mind, drawing upon psychoanalysis, particularly in its historical context and evolution in Europe. Edwards emphasises the "inner world" and how past relationships, often marked by unprocessed desires, fears, or losses, influence an individual's emotional state and mental well-being. This inner world, shaped by early relational experiences, can create conflicts and anxieties, often hidden in the unconscious but capable of being externalised and worked through in therapy.

Historically, European art therapy roots lie heavily in psychoanalytic theory, particularly Sigmund Freud's ideas on symbolism, transference, and the unconscious. The psychoanalytic frame provided foundational techniques and

language for understanding creativity's therapeutic effects, as Freud and later psychoanalysts like Winnicott and Klein emphasised play, defence mechanisms, and symbol formation. Winnicott, for instance, identified the importance of "transitional objects," linking childhood creative play to adult mental health and self-expression. In the art therapy setting, the therapeutic frame and the artwork's physical boundaries create a safe environment for clients to explore their inner lives through symbolic representation.

Edwards also reflects on the evolving European critique and expansion of psychoanalysis within art therapy. Figures such as Carl Rogers and feminist critics have voiced concerns that psychoanalytic theory could be overly interpretive or even restrictive. In response, European art therapy has integrated a humanistic approach, emphasising client-centred practices and empowering clients to define their own symbolic expressions. This adaptation aligns with European values around individual autonomy and collective well-being, encouraging a more inclusive and dynamic therapeutic practice that allows clients from diverse backgrounds to engage meaningfully with their personal and cultural identities.

These theoretical frameworks and developments have enabled art therapy in Europe to evolve as a holistic practice, supporting individuals in uncovering and transforming emotional conflicts within a culturally attuned and ethically grounded therapeutic setting.

Paola Luzzatto's *Art Therapy: Theory and Practice* provides a structured overview of the theoretical foundations and practical applications of art therapy. The author traces the origins of art therapy to two major influences: **art and psychoanalysis**, emerging in the 1940s and 1950s in the UK and the USA. Today, it is recognised and organised under associations such as the British Association of Art Therapists (BAAT) and the American Art Therapy Association (AATA).

Luzzatto highlights **three main approaches** in art therapy practice:

1. **Open Studio Model** – A flexible, self-directed space where patients engage with art materials freely, promoting creativity and personal exploration.
2. **Group Art Therapy** – A structured setting where participants share and discuss their artwork, fostering self-reflection and emotional connection.
3. **Individual Art Therapy** – A more traditional psychotherapeutic approach, using art as a medium for self-expression, imagination, and deeper emotional processing.

The **therapeutic relationship** in art therapy is characterised by a **triangular dynamic**: the therapist, the patient, and the artwork. This interaction allows for verbal and non-verbal communication, providing a medium for self-exploration and transformation.

Luzzatto also details **various artistic techniques** used to facilitate expression, such as:

- The Scribble Technique (originating from Winnicott),
- Collage,
- Mandala Drawing,
- Visualisation of Mental States,
- Theme-Based Exercises.

These techniques help patients externalise emotions, access unconscious material, and explore new perspectives.

The author concludes by emphasising the interconnectedness of image-making, emotional elaboration, and the therapeutic relationship, and advocates continuous learning and experience-based practice for art therapists.



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2.2. Theoretical Basis: Trauma, Resilience, Neurobiological Perspective, Attachment Theory, Polyvagal Theory, and Expressive Therapies Continuum

Understanding Trauma from a Neurobiological Perspective

Trauma disrupts **brain function and emotional regulation**, altering structures such as:

- **Amygdala** → Heightened fear responses, hypervigilance.
- **Hippocampus** → Impaired memory processing, difficulty distinguishing past from present (common in PTSD).
- **Prefrontal Cortex** → Reduced impulse control, decision-making, and emotional regulation.

According to Hass-Cohen & Carr (2008), art therapy can **reverse some of these effects** by engaging **neuroplasticity**, helping survivors process trauma non-verbally and restructure maladaptive neural pathways.

Trauma-Informed Care (TIC) in Art Therapy

A **Trauma-Informed Approach** ensures that therapeutic interventions:

- **Prioritise safety and emotional regulation** before deep trauma processing.
- **Use non-verbal, sensory-based methods** to bypass verbal limitations in trauma recall.
- **Facilitate self-agency and empowerment** through creative expression.

Hass-Cohen (2008) emphasises the **CREATE framework** (Connectivity, Relational Resonance, Expressive Communication, Adaptive Responses, Transformation, Empathy), which aligns with TIC principles.

Neuroscientific Evidence Supporting Art Therapy for Trauma

- **Neuroimaging studies** (Kaimal et al., 2019) show that **art-making activates brain regions linked to emotion regulation** and stress reduction.
- **Polyvagal Theory (Porges, 2011)** explains how **art therapy shifts the nervous system from hyperarousal to a calm, social engagement state** through rhythmic, repetitive movements in creative activities.
- **Memory reconsolidation research** (Hass-Cohen & Carr, 2008) suggests that art therapy **modifies traumatic memories** by engaging both sensory and cognitive processing.

Attachment Theory and Relational Healing in Art Therapy

Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1988) highlights that **early relational trauma** affects emotional regulation and self-concept. Hass-Cohen & Carr (2008) integrate this into art therapy by:

- Using **art-making to establish safe, non-verbal connections** between therapist and client.
- Strengthening **secure attachment patterns** through co-regulation in creative activities.
- Repairing **disrupted attachment bonds** via **visual storytelling and expressive art exercises**.

Linda Chapman (2014) expands on this, showing how **early childhood art therapy** can **rebuild attachment through neurodevelopmental processes**.

Polyvagal Theory: The Nervous System and Emotional Regulation

Polyvagal Theory (Porges, 2011) explains **how the autonomic nervous system responds to trauma**:

- **Dorsal vagal shutdown (Freeze Response)** → Trauma survivors may dissociate or struggle with emotional engagement.
- **Sympathetic activation (Fight/Flight)** → Heightened arousal, aggression, or anxiety.
- **Ventral vagal activation (Social Engagement)** → The goal of trauma healing is to **restore this state**, where individuals feel safe and connected.

Art therapy supports **Polyvagal Regulation** by engaging **sensorimotor activities** (painting, sculpting) to **ground the body and calm the nervous system** and by using **rhythmic art-making** (mandala drawing, movement-based expressive arts) to **stimulate the vagus nerve** and shift individuals into a **regulated state**.

Hass-Cohen & Carr (2008) emphasise **relational neuroscience** in therapy, showing how art can **co-regulate clients' nervous systems** through **therapist-client attunement and shared creative experiences**.

Expressive Therapies Continuum (ETC): A Framework for Art Therapy

The **Expressive Therapies Continuum (Hinz, 2019)** provides a **hierarchical model of creative engagement** based on how different art materials and processes impact cognition, emotion, and sensory regulation.

Level	Processing Focus	Art Materials & Techniques
Kinesthetic/Sensory	Body awareness, nervous system regulation	Clay work, finger painting, sand tray therapy
Perceptual/Affective	Emotional expression, trauma externalisation	Watercolours, abstract painting, collages

Cognitive/Symbolic	Meaning-making, narrative integration	Visual storytelling, guided imagery, journaling
Creative	Self-actualisation, transformation	Mixed media, sculpture, personalised artistic rituals

Hass-Cohen (2008) aligns this with **art therapy's neurobiological effects**, showing that **different expressive modalities stimulate distinct brain regions** and aid trauma integration.

Integrating Neuroscience and Art Therapy for Trauma Healing

- **Art therapy is scientifically supported** as a powerful tool for trauma recovery, promoting **neuroplasticity, emotional regulation, and relational healing**.
- **Attachment-based, Polyvagal-informed, and Expressive Therapies models** provide a **structured foundation** for trauma-sensitive creative interventions.
- **Future research should continue bridging neuroscience and art therapy**, advocating for its integration into mainstream trauma care.

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Bowlby, J. (1988). *A secure base: Parent-child attachment and healthy human development*. Basic Books.

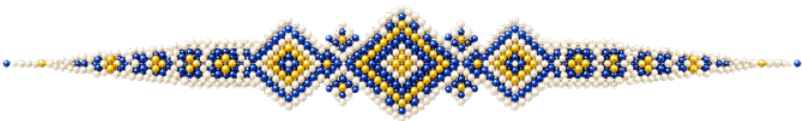
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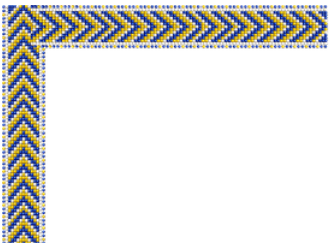
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Sequence 1.4. Key Research & Evidence-Based Practices

The literature confirms that art therapy is a **scientifically validated intervention** for trauma recovery among **war-affected, displaced, and refugee populations**.

1. Doctoral Research in Art Therapy Across Europe (EFAT, 2024)

A comprehensive review by the **European Federation of Art Therapy's (EFAT) Research Committee** compiled 185 PhD dissertations from 19 European countries, covering art therapy applications in hospitals (31%), educational settings (24%), and therapeutic/preventive contexts (19%). The study highlighted a growing trend towards **quantitative and mixed-methods research**, which is crucial for integrating art therapy into national healthcare policies. The review also revealed significant challenges, such as **language barriers and the lack of accessible research databases**, which hinder international collaboration.

Relevance for the E-Book: This review provides essential insights into the **evolution of art therapy research in Europe**, supporting the argument for its recognition as an evidence-based therapeutic intervention for trauma and displacement.

References:

Stanoeva, A., & Rankanen, M. (2024). *A review of doctoral research in art therapy across Europe: A project of EFAT's Research Committee to create a European database for doctoral theses*. *GMS Journal of Arts Therapies*, 6, Doc07. <https://doi.org/10.3205/jat000040>

2. WHO Report on the Role of Arts in Health (2019)

The *World Health Organisation* conducted a major review synthesising over 3000 studies, confirming that arts-based interventions significantly improve mental and physical health. The report demonstrated how creative engagement helps prevent illness, supports trauma recovery, and enhances social integration in refugee and post-war communities. It also recognised art therapy's ability to foster resilience and emotional well-being in individuals affected by displacement.

Relevance for the E-Book: The WHO's findings reinforce the scientific legitimacy of art therapy, providing a solid foundation for advocating its use in humanitarian and clinical settings.

References:

Fancourt, D., & Finn, S. (2019). *What is the evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being? A scoping review*. World Health Organization. <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/329834/9789289054553-eng.pdf>

3. The Proven Efficacy of Creative Arts Therapies (Gray, 2022)

Gray's (2022) report, published by the *Australian, New Zealand, and Asian Creative Arts Therapies Association (ANZACATA)*, presents a meta-analysis of clinical trials and case studies demonstrating the effectiveness of creative arts therapies (CATs). The report highlights how CATs – including art therapy, dance/movement therapy, drama therapy, music therapy, and bibliotherapy – have been proven to:

Reduce **trauma symptoms and PTSD**

Improve **cognitive and emotional regulation**

Facilitate **non-verbal expression of traumatic experiences**

Relevance for the E-Book: This research provides strong empirical evidence for the clinical efficacy of creative arts therapies in treating individuals affected by war, displacement, and trauma.

Reference:

Gray, D. (2022). *The proven efficacy of creative arts therapies*. Australian, New Zealand, and Asian Creative Arts Therapies Association (ANZACATA). <https://www.jocat-online.org/r-24-linnell>

4. Art Therapy and Trauma Recovery (Schouten et al., 2015)

A systematic review of art therapy for trauma survivors found it to be effective in reducing PTSD symptoms, anxiety, and avoidance behaviours. It provided evidence that art therapy helps survivors externalise emotions, process trauma non-verbally, and build coping strategies.

Relevance for the E-Book: This research directly applies to war refugees, survivors of violence, and displaced populations, demonstrating the practical use of art therapy in humanitarian crises.

Reference:

Schouten, K.A., de Niet, G.J., Knipscheer, J.W., Kleber, R.J., & Hutschemaekers, G.J. (2015). *The effectiveness of art therapy in the treatment of traumatised adults: A systematic review on art therapy and trauma*. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, **16**(2), 220–228. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838014555032>

5. Digital Art Therapy and Remote Access (Zubala & Hackett, 2020)

A UK-wide study on digital art therapy during COVID-19 highlighted the potential of online therapy for crisis-affected populations. Findings showed that remote art therapy ensures continuity of care while raising ethical and safety challenges that require further practitioner training.

Relevance for the E-Book: Digital art therapy expands access to displaced populations, especially refugees and conflict survivors in remote areas.

Reference:

Zubala, A., & Hackett, S. (2020). *Online art therapy practice and client safety: A UK-wide survey in times of COVID-19*. *International Journal of Art Therapy*, 25(4), 161–171. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17454832.2020.1845221>

6. Art Therapy with Refugee Youth (Quinlan et al., 2016)

A study evaluating a school-based art therapy program for refugee adolescents demonstrated significant improvements in emotional well-being and reduced behavioural difficulties.

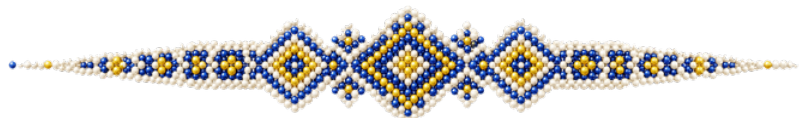
Relevance for the E-Book: This study provides empirical support for using art therapy in education and community settings for displaced youth.

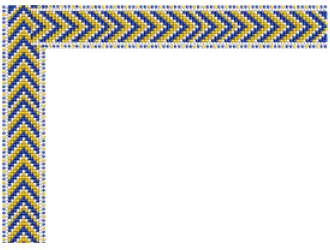
Reference:

Quinlan, R., Schweitzer, R., Khawaja, N., & Griffin, J. (2016). *Evaluation of a school-based creative arts therapy program for adolescents from refugee backgrounds*. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 47, 72–78. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2015.09.006>

Conclusion

This body of research underscores the **transformative power of art therapy** in fostering resilience, emotional expression, and social integration in individuals affected by war and displacement.





Sequence 1.5. Art Therapy for War Victims



3.1 Psychological Impact of War & Displacement

The psychological impact of war and displacement on individuals, especially veterans, is profound and often long-lasting. Combat-related Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is one of the most common disorders faced by individuals exposed to war. PTSD, along with other conditions like anxiety, depression, and dissociation, can deeply affect both the mental and emotional well-being of veterans. Symptoms of PTSD, such as hyperarousal, avoidance, and emotional numbing, are particularly resistant to traditional therapeutic approaches, making the treatment of these individuals challenging.

In addition to the psychological toll, war and displacement also lead to significant social impacts. Veterans may lose their sense of identity and feel disconnected from their former selves or civilian society. This can be compounded by

social isolation, as veterans may struggle to reintegrate into communities that don't fully understand their experiences. Disrupted family structures are another common consequence of war and displacement, as trauma can strain familial relationships, leading to dysfunction and difficulty in rebuilding stable support systems.



Art Therapy: A Valuable Intervention for Combat-Related PTSD

Art therapy has emerged as a promising intervention for combat-related PTSD, offering a means of expression and healing that complements traditional therapeutic methods. Research indicates that art therapy is particularly effective in facilitating the expression and processing of trauma-related emotions. A 2016 randomised controlled trial by Campbell et al. found that integrating art therapy with cognitive processing therapy (CPT) led to improved outcomes for combat veterans compared to CPT alone. These findings underscore art therapy's potential to enhance the efficacy of traditional therapies in treating PTSD.

A 2015 systematic review by Gantt and Tinnin further supports the value of art therapy for traumatised adults. Their research highlighted the importance of art therapy in allowing individuals to externalise and process difficult emotions, which is particularly valuable in addressing the trauma-related issues at the heart of PTSD.

Cathy Malchiodi, PhD, is a leading expert in art therapy and trauma treatment, and her work has greatly contributed to the understanding of how creative practices can support individuals with PTSD. In her book *Trauma and Expressive Arts Therapy: Brain, Body, and Imagination in the Healing Process* (2020), Malchiodi discusses how expressive arts can facilitate trauma recovery by engaging sensory experiences and promoting self-regulation. These approaches are especially useful in the context of PTSD, as they address the need to process traumatic memories and emotions in a safe, non-verbal way.

In her article *Art Therapy: Treating Combat-Related PTSD* (2016), Malchiodi delves into specific strategies for military personnel, including how art therapy can help individuals reconnect fragmented sensory memories with cognitive processes. This is essential for addressing the dissociative and often fragmented nature of traumatic memories, which is a hallmark of combat-related PTSD.

Mechanisms of Art Therapy for PTSD

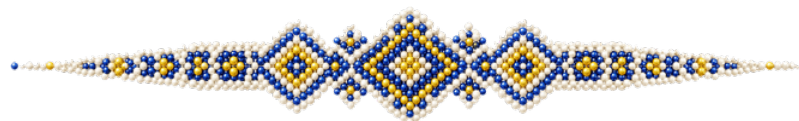
Art therapy offers unique mechanisms that traditional therapeutic methods might not address as effectively. Art therapy allows individuals to externalise and represent their trauma in ways that are less confronting than verbal expressions, helping to reduce emotional arousal. Studies have shown that engaging in creative practices can reduce hyperarousal, a common symptom of PTSD. For example, in a three-stage group therapy model, Collie, Backos, Malchiodi, and Spiegel (2006) demonstrated how art therapy can aid in processing trauma and alleviating symptoms of PTSD. Other research, such as the work by Johnson et al. (1997), has highlighted the effectiveness of art therapy for veterans with severe symptoms, emphasising its potential to help reduce the impact of intrusive memories and nightmares.

Art therapy also plays a significant role in reconnecting implicit sensory memories with explicit cognitive processes, as Malchiodi (2016) suggests. This reorganisation of fragmented memories can lead to a reduction in PTSD symptoms, such as emotional numbing and avoidance, by helping individuals process the traumatic experiences in a safe, controlled way.

In conclusion, art therapy presents a valuable and innovative approach to treating combat-related PTSD. By engaging sensory and symbolic processes, art therapy helps individuals externalise and integrate their traumatic experiences, fostering emotional healing and resilience. Research supports its effectiveness as a complementary treatment to traditional therapies like cognitive processing therapy, offering a holistic and creative path to recovery. As the body of research continues to grow, art therapy is increasingly recognised as an essential component of PTSD treatment for combat veterans and others affected by trauma.

References

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Sequence 1.6. Case Studies & Testimonials from Ukrainian War Survivors, Refugees, and Therapists

Recent case studies and testimonies from Ukrainian war survivors, refugees, and therapists provide valuable insights into the transformative role of art therapy in healing trauma. Various art therapy interventions have shown promising results in supporting emotional recovery, building resilience, and helping individuals rebuild their lives amid crisis.

Article 1: Hibuki Therapy Combined with Art Therapy Techniques

Bryl, M., & Sharon Maksimov, D. (2023). Hibuki therapy combined with other art-therapy methods in group work with school-age children of different inclusive categories during the war in Ukraine. *Neuropsychiatria i Neuropsychologia*, 18(3–4), 152–160. <https://doi.org/10.5114/nan.2023.134151>

This project in Ukraine combined Hibuki therapy with art therapy techniques to support school-aged children, particularly those affected by war, displacement, and trauma. Hibuki therapy involves a therapeutic toy dog, Hibuki, used as a tool for emotional expression and resilience-building. In group sessions, children participated in puppet therapy, creative activities, and storytelling, which helped them process emotions and develop social connections. Observations and parental feedback showed significant improvements in emotional stability, social skills, and self-confidence, with 90% of children reporting positive behavioural changes. Integrating Hibuki therapy with art activities provided an effective, inclusive approach to supporting children in crises.

Article 2: Art Therapy as a Common Language: Psychological Recovery During War

Voznesenska, O. L., & Podkorytova, L. O. (Eds.). (2023). *Art therapy space: The art of restoring mental health during war. Materials of the 20th International Interdisciplinary Scientific and Practical Conference* (March 31–April 2, 2023). Ukrainian Art Therapy Association. Kyiv, Ukraine.

This collection from the 20th International Conference on Art Therapy in Ukraine highlights art therapy's role in fostering resilience and emotional recovery among children affected by the war. Trauma-informed, age-appropriate techniques were used to create safe spaces for emotional expression, focusing on grief, trauma processing, and creating supportive environments for vulnerable children. The findings emphasised that art therapy helped build emotional stability and resilience while also encouraging trust and communication through creative expression.

Article 3: Art Therapy Force Project Ukraine

Saldan, S. O., & Osborne, N. (2023). Art therapy activity in Ukraine within the Art Therapy Force project. In *Art in times of crisis: Teaching and therapy*. Materials of the International Scientific and Practical Conference (pp. 8–14). Ivan Franko National University of Lviv.

The "Art Therapy Force" project integrated art and music therapy into a trauma-informed framework to support Ukrainian civilians and children affected by the war. It emphasised building emotional regulation, preserving cultural identity, and strengthening resilience through multimodal interventions such as rhythm, movement, and art-based

therapies. Early results showed reduced distress, enhanced emotional stability, and improved social cohesion. This project also trained therapists and educators, ensuring trauma-informed practices were applied effectively across communities.

Article 4: Evaluating HyFlex Art Therapy Education Amidst War

Bondar, K., Shestopalova, O., & Hamaniuk, V. (2024). Evaluating transactional distance and student engagement in HyFlex art therapy education amidst the war in Ukraine. *CEUR Workshop Proceedings, 11th Workshop on Cloud Technologies in Education*, 164–185. <https://doi.org/10.52058/ceur-ws.2024>

The study examined how the HyFlex model in art therapy education could support students during the ongoing war in Ukraine. By offering flexible learning formats – both online and in-person – students could continue their education in a way that reduced stress and maintained engagement during the crisis. Integrating digital tools, such as virtual sandplay and therapeutic storytelling, helped foster emotional regulation and skill development in a challenging environment. Students' positive feedback suggested that these flexible learning approaches improved therapeutic outcomes despite the ongoing conflict.

Article 5: Approaches to Restoring Mental Health of War-Affected Populations

Abstract: The study assessed the effectiveness of clay therapy in rehabilitating war-affected veterans and civilians at the Polissya Hub for Recovery and Art Therapy. This non-verbal therapeutic approach focused on tactile interaction with clay to help participants process trauma. Participants showed significant reductions in PTSD symptoms, anxiety, and somatic distress, while reporting improved self-esteem and emotional openness. Group therapy settings also facilitated social integration and collective healing.

Key Insights from Recent Research: Art Therapy Interventions in Ukraine: Evidence-Based Approaches

1. **Hibuki Therapy & Art Therapy** (Bryl & Maksimov, 2023): Combining therapeutic puppetry and art activities for children, this approach resulted in improved emotional stability, social skills, and confidence, with 90% of children showing positive behavioural changes.
2. **Art Therapy for Psychological Recovery** (Voznesenska & Podkorytova, 2023): Trauma-informed art therapy techniques helped children process grief, build resilience, and safely express emotions in a structured therapeutic environment.
3. **Art Therapy Force Project** (Saldan & Osborne, 2023): Using art and music therapy, this project focused on reducing distress, enhancing emotional regulation, and preserving cultural identity among war-affected communities.
4. **HyFlex Art Therapy Education** (Bondar et al., 2024): Flexible, digital learning models offered stress reduction and high engagement, ensuring that art therapy education continued during the war.
5. **Clay Therapy for War Trauma** (Polissya Hub Study, 2024): Clay therapy provided a tactile, non-verbal method of trauma processing, leading to improved emotional and social well-being for participants.

3.3 Effective Art Therapy Techniques for Trauma Recovery

Art therapy interventions often incorporate grounding techniques, symbolic storytelling, and community-based art projects to aid trauma recovery. Some of the most effective methods include:

- **Grounding Techniques:** Sensory-based exercises, such as working with clay, help individuals reconnect with their bodies and emotions, reducing feelings of dissociation and distress.
- **Symbolic Storytelling:** Techniques like visual journaling, guided imagery, and art-based storytelling allow individuals to express their traumatic experiences symbolically, fostering emotional processing.
- **Community Murals:** Group-based art projects, such as collective murals, help rebuild identity, social trust, and a sense of belonging by fostering community cohesion and shared healing.

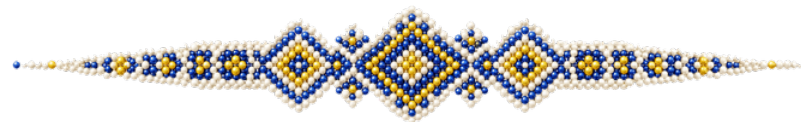
3.4 Addressing PTSD, Anxiety, and Social Reintegration

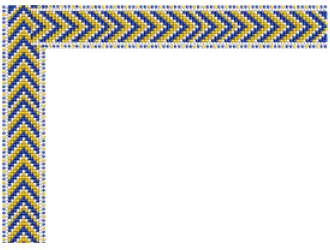
Art therapy plays a crucial role in regulating emotions and rebuilding social trust and self-confidence, particularly for those affected by PTSD and anxiety. Key elements include:

- **Role of Color, Movement, and Tactile Experience:** These techniques help regulate emotions by providing non-verbal outlets for expression and grounding. Colour and movement can evoke emotional responses, facilitating processing and release.
- **Social Reintegration:** Group art therapy offers a platform for individuals to rebuild trust in others, increase self-esteem, and reintegrate into their communities through collective creative expression.

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Sequence 1.7 Practical Guide for Professionals: Provide hands-on strategies for therapists.

4.1 Trauma-Informed Art Therapy Techniques

Working Sheet 1: Suzanne Haeyen et al. (2024) - Trauma-Focused Art Therapy (TFAT)

Summary of Content and Findings:

Objective:

- The study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of a 10-week individual Trauma-Focused Art Therapy (TFAT) intervention for psychological trauma.
- The study follows a multiple-baseline single-case experimental design.

Methods:

- 25-30 participants with psychological trauma.
- Randomised baseline periods (3-5 weeks), followed by a 10-week TFAT intervention and a 3-week follow-up.
- Measures include the Beck Depression Inventory-II, PTSD Checklist-5, Self-Expression and Emotion Regulation in Art Therapy Scale, and qualitative interviews.

Key Findings:

- The intervention is expected to improve self-expression, emotional regulation, self-esteem, and resilience while reducing trauma-related symptoms.
- The study anticipates increased mental health benefits beyond symptom reduction.
- TFAT offers a structured alternative to traditional talk therapies, particularly for those struggling with verbal processing of trauma.

TFAT Protocol Overview:

1. Phase 1: Stabilisation & Symptom Reduction

- Establish safety and rapport.
- Identify trauma memories through creative exercises.

2. Phase 2: Trauma Processing

- Express and explore traumatic memories.
- Use structured art techniques to externalise emotions.

3. Phase 3: Integration & Meaning-Making

- Arrange and reflect on artwork.
- Conclude therapy by reinforcing resilience and coping strategies.

Implementation Tips:

- Tailor interventions to individual needs.
- Use both structured and free-form artistic methods.
- Document progress through artwork and narratives.
- Encourage self-reflection and emotional distancing through visualisation.

4.2 Exercises & Tools for Emotional Expression and Regulation

Worksheet 2: Luzzatto et al. (2023) - TT-AT Trauma Protocol

Summary of Content and Findings:

Objective:

- TT-AT (Trauma Treatment through Art Therapy) protocol was piloted in Zambia, the UK, and Italy.
- Targets six symptom clusters of trauma: emotional regulation, relationships with others, self-concept, trauma awareness, distancing, and resources.

Methods:

- Six structured group therapy sessions.
- Each session addresses one trauma symptom and includes psychoeducation, an art workshop, and free creative time.
- Feedback from participants indicated improved emotional regulation, self-esteem, and hope.

TT-AT Protocol Structure:

1. Session 1: Emotional Dysregulation

- Exercise: "The Body Outline" (identify and contain emotions).

2. Session 2: Disturbed Relationships

- Exercise: "A Positive Relationship Memory."

3. Session 3: Negative Self-Concept

- Exercise: "The Hidden Seed" (growth and inner strength).

4. Session 4: Avoidance & Numbing

- Exercise: "The Sad/Angry Child" (exploring past emotions).

5. Session 5: Re-Experiencing Trauma

- Exercise: "My Life Line" (integrating past and present experiences).

6. Session 6: Present Life Challenges & Resources

- Exercise: "Second Body Outline" & "My Resources."

Implementation Tips:

- Use non-interpretive facilitation; allow optional verbal sharing.
- Maintain a structured yet flexible approach.
- Incorporate psychoeducation to help participants understand their emotions.
- Ensure a safe and supportive group environment.

4.3 Multimodal Approaches (Drawing, Music, Clay, Digital Art)

Working Sheet 3: De Witte et al. (2021) - Mechanisms of Change in Creative Arts Therapies (CATs)

Summary of Content and Findings:

Objective:

- A scoping review identifying therapeutic factors and mechanisms of change in Creative Arts Therapies (CATs), including art, music, dance, drama, and psychodrama therapy.
- Analyses 67 empirical studies.

Key Findings:

- Identifies 19 domains of CATs' therapeutic factors.
- Three core factors unique to CATs:

1. **Embodiment** – Physical engagement with materials.
 2. **Concretisation** – Transforming abstract emotions into tangible form.
 3. **Symbolism & Metaphors** – Utilising imagery to process experiences.
- Change occurs through engagement, expression, reflection, and meaning-making.

Therapeutic Factors to Integrate into Practice:

1. **Embodiment:**
 - Encourage movement and hands-on engagement with art materials.
2. **Concretisation:**
 - Use clay, collage, or painting to externalise emotions.
3. **Symbolism & Metaphors:**
 - Guide clients in assigning personal meaning to their work.
4. **Safe Therapeutic Environment:**
 - Build trust and encourage open expression.
5. **Process-Oriented Approach:**
 - Focus on creative exploration rather than artistic skill.
6. **Interdisciplinary Integration:**
 - Combine CAT techniques with verbal therapy where appropriate.

Implementation Tips:

- Tailor CAT approaches to individual needs.
- Encourage self-exploration through multiple artistic mediums.
- Document and review artwork progression with clients.
- Utilise group dynamics to enhance relational healing.

4.4 Community & Group-Based Art Therapy Practices

Working Sheet 4: Van Lith (2016) - Art Therapy in Mental Health

Summary of Content and Findings:

Objective:

- A systematic review of art therapy approaches for mental health issues.
- Identifies how art therapy is used within the clinical mental health system.

Key Findings:

- Reviews 30 studies categorised into four diagnostic areas: depression, borderline personality disorder, schizophrenia, and PTSD.
- Highlights a need for more standardised approaches and evidence-based practice.
- Suggests that client-centred, flexible models integrating various theoretical approaches are most effective.

Application of Art Therapy for Mental Health:

1. **Depression:**
 - Use psychodynamic and structured art therapy techniques to encourage self-expression.
2. **Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD):**

- Mentalization-based and DBT-informed art therapy can aid emotional regulation.

3. Schizophrenia:

- Structured group art therapy improves social interaction and cognitive processing.

4. PTSD:

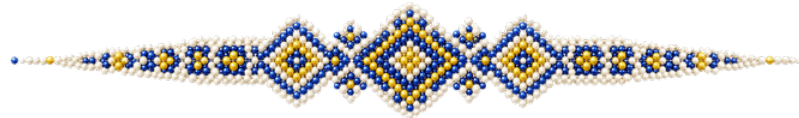
- Trauma-informed art therapy can aid in emotional processing and narrative restructuring.

Implementation Tips:

- Adapt approaches based on diagnosis and individual client needs.
- Encourage the use of non-verbal expression as a therapeutic tool.
- Use evidence-based techniques to enhance therapeutic outcomes.
- Integrate interdisciplinary collaboration for a holistic approach.

References

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Séquence 1.8 TRUST Project. Partner Contributions and Best Practices

- **Italy:** Mental health support in precarious socio-economic settings through the **Fondazione Internazionale Don Luigi Di Liegro, Onlus (FDL)**. This organisation uses art therapy as part of its innovative approach to address mental health challenges in vulnerable populations affected by socio-economic hardships.
➤ Website: www.fondazionediliegro.com
- **Luxembourg:** Social ecology & vulnerable populations, promoted by the **Lekama Foundation**. This NGO advocates for social inclusion through art therapy, empowering marginalised groups to heal emotionally and reintegrate into society.
➤ Website: www.lekama-foundation.com
- **Portugal:** Social integration through art, led by **Associação Europlural Project**. Their focus on inclusive initiatives highlights the power of art therapy to promote mental health and integrate minority groups into society.
➤ Website: www.euopluralproject.org
- **Greece:** Support for caregivers & holistic practices provided by the **Greek Carers Network EPIONI**. EPIONI incorporates art therapy as a complementary approach to stress management and emotional support for informal caregivers.
➤ Website: www.epioni.gr
- **Ukraine:** Education & trauma recovery through the **National University "Yuri Kondratyuk Poltava Polytechnic"**. The university is exploring how to integrate art therapy into educational initiatives to support trauma recovery and mental health awareness in communities.
➤ Website: <https://nupp.edu.ua/page/trust-art-therapy.html>
- **Belgium:** Innovative psychiatric care approaches by the **Centre Neuro Psychiatrique Saint-Martin**. This centre integrates art therapy into its psychiatric care services, focusing on trauma and youth, while promoting reform in mental health practices.

5.2 Insights from Italy, Luxembourg, Portugal, Greece, Ukraine, Belgium

- **Comparative analysis of each country's strengths and challenges:**

Each country brings unique contributions, such as Italy's focus on supporting vulnerable populations in socio-economic distress, Luxembourg's emphasis on social ecology and inclusion, Portugal's use of art for integration, Greece's caregiver support, Ukraine's commitment to educational outreach, and Belgium's reform of psychiatric care practices. These countries face challenges ranging from limited resources to differing cultural perspectives on mental health, but all share a common goal of improving mental well-being through innovative, inclusive approaches.

- **Cross-border knowledge sharing: Best practices & innovations:**

Partners continue to exchange knowledge, with Italy, Luxembourg, and Portugal leading the way in integrating art therapy into social work. Greece and Belgium focus on how art therapy can support caregivers and patients in psychiatric care. Ukraine's educational initiatives serve as a model for other countries seeking to promote trauma recovery in academic settings. By sharing experiences, these countries contribute to a broader, more nuanced understanding of art therapy's role in diverse contexts.

5.3 Digital Resources & Video Integration for Professional Training

- **Online modules & webinars featuring real-world case studies:**

These resources highlight the practical application of art therapy, with case studies drawn from partner organisations in Italy, Luxembourg, Portugal, Greece, Ukraine, and Belgium. Topics such as integrating art therapy into social support systems, caregiver stress management, and trauma recovery in educational settings will be covered.

- **Partner interviews & recorded workshops:**

Through interviews with key figures from each partner organisation, professionals can gain insights into best practices, challenges, and art therapy's impact on mental health. Recorded workshops will allow practitioners to learn directly from experts in the field and explore how art therapy applies across different sectors.

6. Final Considerations & Next Steps

The Essential Role of the Art Psychotherapist in Mental Health: Clarifying Professional Standards for Arts-Based Interventions

6.1 Sustainability & Future of Art Therapy in Crisis Support

As the field of art therapy continues to expand, ensuring its long-term sustainability requires a commitment to policy development and institutional recognition. Key considerations for the future of art therapy in crisis support include:

- The need for structured policies that recognise art therapy as a professional and clinical practice within mental health care.
- Integration of art therapy into humanitarian aid frameworks to support populations affected by crises, including refugees, trauma survivors, and displaced communities.
- Strengthening professional standards and ethical guidelines to maintain the integrity and effectiveness of therapeutic interventions.
- The neuroscientific basis of art therapy, which emphasises its effectiveness in fostering neuroplasticity, emotional regulation, and trauma recovery (Stanoeva & Rankanen, 2024; Van Lith, 2024).

To achieve these goals, it is essential to build partnerships with health organisations, NGOs, and government bodies to ensure art therapy remains a recognised and accessible mental health support resource.

6.2 Policy Recommendations for Inclusion & Mental Health

To solidify the role of art therapy in mental health care, targeted policy recommendations should address:

- **Advocating for art therapy funding in public health systems:** Recognising art therapy as a reimbursable mental health service will expand its reach and ensure it is accessible to those in need.
- **Aligning with European mental health strategies:** Establishing clear standards for art therapists within European healthcare policies will strengthen the profession's legitimacy and encourage its integration into multidisciplinary teams.
- **Protecting the professional title of 'Art Therapist':** Defining and safeguarding the qualifications required to practice art therapy will prevent the dilution of the field and ensure that trained professionals support those receiving care.
- **Emphasising cost-effectiveness and client satisfaction:** Research supports the positive impact of art therapy on both economic and health outcomes (Fancourt & Finn, 2019). Ensuring continued investment in art therapy can reduce long-term healthcare costs while improving mental health outcomes.

Art therapy should be distinguished from general arts engagement initiatives to preserve its clinical relevance. Clear terminology and professional standards will help ensure mental health interventions are delivered safely and effectively.

6.3 Call to Action: Strengthening European Collaboration

A unified approach across Europe will help advance art therapy and its role in crisis support. Key actions to consider include:

- **Encouraging cross-border research and policy integration:** Collaborative research initiatives and shared best practices can elevate the standard of care and ensure art therapy is recognised within international mental health frameworks.
- **Building sustainable training programs for professionals:** Investing in education and professional development for art therapists will strengthen the field and prepare practitioners to work effectively in crisis settings.
- **Establishing interdisciplinary networks:** Creating platforms for collaboration between art therapists, psychologists, medical professionals, and policymakers will enhance the visibility and credibility of art therapy as an essential mental health intervention.

Conclusion

As interest in arts-based mental health interventions continues to grow, it is crucial to recognise art therapy as a distinct, highly specialised practice. While general arts engagement can be beneficial, a trained art psychotherapist offers more than facilitation, providing structured, clinical support that addresses complex emotional and psychological needs.

By implementing long-term policies, securing institutional recognition, and fostering European-level collaboration, art therapy can be positioned as a fundamental component of mental health care. Decision-makers must prioritise sustainable frameworks that protect the profession and ensure individuals receive care from qualified professionals.

By taking these steps, we can secure the future of art therapy in crisis support and beyond, ensuring that those who need it most receive meaningful, professional, and ethically sound therapeutic care.

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Van Lith, T. (2024). What is art therapy? Integrating neuroscience and therapeutic practice.

Bibliography, Useful Art Therapy Websites & Key Institutions in Europe: Additional resources for readers.

International Organizations

- **World Health Organisation (WHO) – Regional Office for Europe**

Reports on the benefits of art in health and promotes its use in care.

» [WHO Report on Art & Health](#)

- **European Federation of Art Therapy (EFAT)**

Federation uniting national art therapy associations across Europe.

[EFAT Website](#) (Explore "ART THERAPY ON THE MAP" for details on each country.)

- **ECArTE (European Consortium of Art Therapies and Education)**

A non-profit consortium of 33 universities from 15 European countries, supporting education and professional recognition of arts therapists.

» [ECArTE Website](#)

- **International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies (ISTSS)** → www.istss.org

Research Centers

- **Arts & Health Research Group – Manchester Metropolitan University (UK)**

A leading European research centre on art and health.

» [Arts for Health Research](#)

- **Centre for Performance Science – Royal College of Music (UK)**

Researches the effects of music on health and well-being.

» [Performance Science Website](#)

- **Research Institute for Creative Arts Therapies (RIArT) – Alanus University (Germany)**. A key research institution focusing on creative arts therapies.

» [RIArT Website](#)

- **Arts & Health Foundation (Netherlands)**

Promotes the use of art in healthcare.

» [Arts in Health NL](#)

- **Chelsea and Westminster Hospital Foundation (UK)**

Charitable organisation that actively supports art and health.

» [Chelsea and Westminster NHS](#)

National Associations

Germany

- **Deutscher Fachverband für Kunst- und Gestaltungstherapie (DFKGT)** The largest professional association of art therapists in Germany.

» [DFKGT Website](#)

- **Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft Künstlerische Therapien (BAG-KT)**

The Federal Working Alliance for Arts Therapies in Germany.

» [BAG-KT Website](#)

United Kingdom

- **British Association of Art Therapists (BAAT)**

Europe's largest professional art therapy association.

» [BAAT Website](#)

- **Research Centre for Arts and Wellbeing – Edge Hill University**

Specialises in integrating health, psychology, and the arts.

» [Research Centre Website](#)

France

- **Fédération Française des Art-Thérapeutes (FFAT)**

Main professional organisation for art therapists in France.

» [FFAT Website](#)

- **Syndicat des Art-Thérapeutes**

French Art Therapists' Union.

» [Syndicat Website](#)

Luxembourg

- **Association Luxembourgeoise des Art-thérapeutes Diplômés (ALAtD)** Represents professionals in various artistic therapy disciplines.

» [ALAtD Website](#)

Belgium

- **BVCT-ABAT**

Organisation for creative therapists, ensuring quality and recognition in Belgium.

» [BVCT-ABAT Website](#)

Italy

- **ApiART**

The main professional association for art therapists in Italy.

» [ApiART Website](#)

- **Art Therapy Italiana**

One of Italy's oldest art therapy organisations, promoting expressive psychotherapy.

» [Art Therapy Italiana Website](#)

Spain

- **Sociedad Española de Arteterapia (SEA)**

A professional organisation promoting art therapy in Spain.

» [SEA Website](#)

Portugal

- **Sociedade Portuguesa de Arte-Terapia (SPAT)**

A scientific non-profit association dedicated to art therapy.

» [SPAT Website](#)

Switzerland

- **Expressive Arts Therapy Association Switzerland (SFKT/ASET)**

National professional association for expressive arts therapists in Switzerland. [SFKT/ASET Website](#)

- **Hôpitaux universitaires de Genève (Switzerland)**

Develops art therapy programs and cultural mediation.

» [HUG Website](#)

Ukraine

- **Ukrainian Association of Art Therapy**

Organisation promoting art therapy in Ukraine.

» [Ukrainian Association Website](#)

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8. Additional Visual & Interactive Elements

Visual Case Studies

- Artists' reflections on their healing journeys.

Interactive Learning Modules

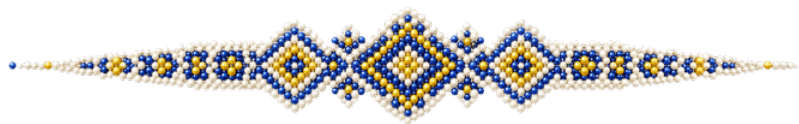
- Online platform for sharing art therapy experiences.

Infographics & Diagrams

- Comparison of different therapeutic approaches in crisis settings.

Art Therapy Activity Sheets

- Printable worksheets for self-guided exercises.
- Templates for trauma-informed art sessions.





SEQUENCE 2

A historical and political analysis that situates individual and collective traumas in their context, showing how memory and historical falsification contribute to social trauma. "The full-scale war that the Russian Federation has been waging against Ukraine since 2014 ... is also a war for control over history."

*Context of the war
in Ukraine and
guiding principles
of the TRUST
project*





Sequence 2-1

Context of the War in Ukraine

INTRODUCTION

History as a weapon: why Russia is fighting for the past

The full-scale war that the Russian Federation has been waging against Ukraine since 2014, which reached its peak in February 2022, is not just an armed conflict in the geopolitical space. It is also a war for control over history. Russia uses the past as one of its main instruments of influence: by falsifying historical narratives, rewriting events, and appropriating the heritage of other peoples, it builds political legitimacy for its current aggression. That is why understanding the historical background of the Russian-Ukrainian war is critically important for both Ukrainian society and the international community.

The next chapter aims not only to reconstruct the key facts of Russia's imperial policy towards Ukraine, but rather to deconstruct the false narratives that have justified this policy and continue to do so. It is a comprehensive exposure of the mechanisms of ideological mystification – in particular, claims about the doctrine of the “unified Russian nation”, which includes Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians, Russia's alleged historical right to Ukrainian territories, the supposed secondary nature of Ukrainian culture and language, and the artificiality of Ukrainian statehood. All these narratives are not only of academic or educational significance – they directly influence how the Russian population perceives this war, how the world sees Ukraine, and, ultimately, how important and sometimes crucial decisions are made on a geopolitical scale.

Why rethinking history is necessary right now

For a long time, Ukrainian history was studied in the shadow of imperial schemes – first Russian, then Soviet. Even after independence in 1991, historical science in Ukraine had to overcome numerous post-colonial distortions that remained in textbooks, academic works, and public consciousness. The war made this process particularly urgent. It clearly showed that a lack of understanding of one's own history, passivity in shaping the national narrative, and a lack of a critical view of the past can have fatal consequences.

History can no longer be solely a matter for the academic community. It must become an effective tool for protecting not only cultural sovereignty, but also state sovereignty. After all, what are terms, concepts and facts for scholars are weapons for empires. Therefore, the point of view from which the past is interpreted becomes decisive for the policies that the state implements in the present and will implement in the foreseeable future.

Reinterpreting history in the public sphere – through education, culture, and international communication – is intended to become not only an element of a new period of Ukrainian national revival, but also the basis for dialogue with the international community. This is not about an emotional opposition of “our truth – your lies”, but about intellectual and moral responsibility: to refute centuries-old imperial lies with facts, criticism, and reflection.

The imperial narrative: continuity through the centuries

This text focuses on the continuity of Russian imperial policy, which has changed form but remained essentially unchanged. From the Moscow tsars to the Soviet leaders, from Peter I to Putin, a single line can be traced: the denial of Ukraine's subjectivity as a separate civilisational, historical, linguistic and cultural reality. At the same time, historical arguments are used selectively, instrumentally, falsely, and sometimes openly invented or completely taken out of context.

The Russian narrative about "shared history", "the unity of three brotherly peoples", and "a single state tradition" is not just an ideologue; it is a project of imperial unification disguised as cultural kinship. That is why analysing the historical sources, terms, symbols, and concepts used by modern Russia is not only an academic task but also an act of demystification. Our task is to destroy the mythological construct that has served as a justification for enslavement, assimilation, and war from the 18th to the 21st century.

Methodological approaches and source base

The next chapter draws on an interdisciplinary approach that combines historical criticism, narrative analysis, decolonial thinking, and political philosophy. Particular attention is paid to terminology: the concepts used in Russia – "Kyivan Rus", "all-Russian people", "Little Russia", "Russian world" – are not only linguistic constructs, but also aggressive instruments of an imperial-colonial ideology that replaces reality with perceptions of it.

In this work, we drew on a wide range of sources: regulatory and legal acts; publications by Ukrainian, Russian, and other foreign historians; and contemporary analytics in memory studies (commemoration), postcolonialism, and ideology. Some material is also based on public statements by Russian leaders, which clearly show how closely history and politics are linked in Russia.

Despite the publication's popular format, we adhere to the principles of scientific integrity and use only proven, verified sources. At the same time, the presentation is tailored to a wide audience so that complex historical and political mechanisms are understandable to anyone seeking to understand the depths of modern warfare impartially.

The war for history is the war for the future. Finally, it should be emphasised that Russia's war against Ukraine is not just a war for territory or resources. It is a war for an idea – who we are, where we come from, and whether we have the right to be ourselves. In this sense, history ceases to be the past and becomes a front line. This front line is no less important than the armed one. Because where the battle for history is lost, the loss of identity, memory and future always begins.

This work contributes to the joint effort to decolonise the view of Eastern Europe. It aims to give voice to the truth silenced for centuries and to show that Ukrainian history is not an offshoot or province of Russian history, but an original and worthy subject of European historical narrative. This is how we win – both in the past and in the future.

History as a weapon: why Russia is fighting for the past

The war that Russia has been waging against Ukraine since 2014, and since 2022 in the form of a full-scale invasion, is not just an armed conflict in the geopolitical space. It is also a war over how the past is interpreted. The Russian Federation has long used history as a tool of ideological influence: by distorting facts, appropriating the heritage of other peoples and artificially constructing narratives, it legitimises its aggression, justifies violence and conceals the colonial essence of its own policies. In this context, *historical mystification* becomes no less of a threat than missiles and tanks.

This chapter of the book was created as an *intellectual and moral contribution* to the joint effort to overcome the consequences of war – not only physical and psychological, but also *symbolic and historical*. We are convinced that to overcome the historical trauma caused by war fully, we must not only work with its consequences but also gain a deeper understanding of its origins. War does not begin with a shot – it begins with a lie. That is why working with historical memory, critically reviewing narratives, and decolonising thinking are important elements of the broader process of *social healing* that the **TRUST project** strives for.

This section aims to *deconstruct the historical manipulations* that Russia has used for centuries to justify its colonial subjugation of Ukraine and, more recently, its armed aggression. We will show how imperial notions of a "single people", "shared history", and "historical right" have become tools for depriving Ukrainians of their voice, history, and agency. These narratives have shaped not only propaganda, but also the perception of Ukrainians in the world, influencing international decisions and support or lack thereof.

Healing from trauma always begins with *calling things by their names*. We call ideological violence against history by its name. We expose how history has been turned into a tool of humiliation, silencing and destruction. And we show that

restoring the truth about the past is not just an academic endeavour, but an active act of resistance and solidarity.

In this section, we combine methods of historical criticism, narrative analysis, decolonial thinking, and the philosophy of memory. We work with clear examples, simple terms, and facts that allow every reader – regardless of academic background – to understand why history has become a front line and why we must hold this front line together.

This text introduces history as part of the trauma Ukraine has experienced, but also as a key resource for healing, recovery, and mobilisation. That is why it logically precedes the following chapters devoted to art therapy approaches, where, through creativity, culture and memory, people can regain their dignity, voice and right to a future.

2. Rus' and Moscow: The Struggle for the Legacy. Rus as the historical state of Ukrainians

One key object of [historical struggle between Ukraine and Russia](#) is the legacy of [Rus, a medieval Eastern European state with its capital in Kyiv](#). In modern scientific understanding, [Rus](#) (an artificial term – Kyivan Rus) is [a state that emerged at the end of the 9th century](#) and covered the territories of modern Ukraine, parts of Belarus and north-western Russia.

Its political, cultural and religious centre was Kyiv – not only formally, but also symbolically: it was here that princely power, church administration and chronicle writing were concentrated.



Fig. 1. Kyivan Rus' in 1237, shortly before the Mongol invasion.

Source: Mnohohrishnyi / Wikimedia Commons. CC0 1.0.



Fig. 2. Saint Andrew prophesying the foundation of Kyiv. Miniature from the fifteenth-century Radziwiłł Chronicle, one of the richly illustrated manuscript traditions preserving the history of Rus'.

Source: Radziwiłł Chronicle, 15th century / Wikimedia Commons. Public Domain.

Ukrainian historiography, based on sources (chronicles, archaeological data, Byzantine and Western European references), [objectively considers Rus as the source of Ukrainian statehood](#), whose successor was not the later Muscovite formations, but first and foremost the [Kingdom of Galicia-Volhynia](#), and, in the long term, the [Cossack Hetmanate](#) and the [Ukrainian People's Republic](#).

However, [Russia claims Kyiv's legacy as the "cradle" of its statehood, without either political or cultural continuity](#). Thus, the history of Rus becomes not a neutral past, but an arena of ideological struggle, where the question of continuity takes on political significance.



Fig. 3. Eleventh-century mosaics of Saint Sophia Cathedral in Kyiv – a major monument of the political, religious and artistic culture of medieval Rus'.

Source: Mosaics of Saint Sophia Cathedral, Kyiv, 11th century. Public Domain. Wikimedia Commons / Google Art Project.

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Muscovy and the Golden Horde: the continuity of despotism

After the fall of Kyiv under Mongol attacks in the 13th century, the political centre in the East Slavic lands shifted. However, instead of natural succession, which logically led to the western Ukrainian principalities (especially the Kingdom of Galicia–Volhynia), Moscow – as a peripheral entity on the outskirts of the former Rus

- began to appropriate its symbolic heritage.

However, Moscovia did not emerge as a continuation of Rus, but as a vassal structure of the [Golden Horde](#). [The Muscovite princes received their titles from the Horde khans, paid tribute, and fought internal struggles for loyalty to the Horde](#). Most importantly, Moscow adopted the Horde's model of centralised, repressive statehood: absolutist power, a lack of representative institutions, and the suppression of individuality. From the Horde, it inherited a rigid vertical power structure, a cult of force, and instruments of control through fear and subjugation.

This cultural and political influence shaped a mental code that differed from that of Kyivan Rus: the Horde's despotism gave rise to the Moscow autocracy, which knew neither democratic traditions nor constitutional freedoms.

Falsification of continuity: how Muscovy tried to appropriate the history of Rus

This process had several stages:

- *Political*: Moscow gradually subjugated other north-eastern principalities and became the centre of a new princely union.
- *Religious*: after the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the idea of the "Third Rome" took shape in Moscovia – as if Moscow were the heir to the Orthodox world after Rome and Byzantium.
- *Ideological*: by adopting the title of "Grand Prince of All Rus" (and later "Tsar"), the Moscow rulers sought to establish themselves as the sole legitimate heirs of Rus.

This was a [deliberate strategy of historical appropriation](#). Its goal was not only to [raise the authority of the Moscow rulers](#), but also to [legitimise their expansion into southern and western lands, particularly the Ukrainian lands](#). [Moscow acted on the principle that if we are Rus, then the rest must "return" to us](#).

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Fictitious terms: “Kyivan Rus”, “Muscovite Rus”, “All-Russian people”, “triune Russian nation”.

Historical appropriation could not be done without *conceptual engineering* – the invention of terms that at first glance sound neutral or even scientific, but in fact are *instruments of ideological mystification*.

- **“Kyivan Rus”** – a term that was not used in medieval sources, but became established in the 18th–19th centuries as a historiographical construct that was actively used in the works of Russian and German historians (in particular, in the works of historians [M. Pogodin](#), [S. Solovyov](#), [V. Klyuchevsky](#), and [A. von Schläzer](#)). It was used to separate the “initia” phase of Rus from “Muscovy” while creating the illusion of continuity between Kyiv and Moscow. In reality, however, these were different civilisational projects with different political systems, languages and cultures.
- **“Muscovite Rus”** is a concept that pretends to be hereditary, but in essence falsifies history: Muscovy was a new entity that sought to become part of “old Rus” only through violence and assimilation.
- **“All-Russian people”** is a concept that asserts the existence of a single historical people – Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians. This idea completely ignores the ethnocultural differences, political separateness and historical evolution of each of these peoples.
- **The “triune Russian nation”** is another version of the same idea that is actively promoted in the 21st century. It is not only scientifically incorrect, but also *dangerous*: under the guise of “brotherly unity”, it justifies occupation, the destruction of national identity, and armed aggression. Similar to the imperial narrative of the “Russian world”, the pseudo-narrative of the “triune Russian nation” is also firmly based on religion, emphasising even in its name the trinity – the “unity” of three tribes in a common Orthodox religion and a seemingly divine indication of this state of affairs.



Fig. 4. The Golden Horde in Eurasia. The northeastern principalities of the former Rus', including Moscow, developed for centuries within the political sphere of the Horde.

Source: Map based on Natural Earth data / Wikimedia Commons. CC0 1.0.

Therefore, these terms are not simply mistakes or anachronisms. They are the *deliberate language of an empire* in which history becomes not a fact but a weapon. They contradict ethnographic and linguistic realities: Slavs are traditionally divided into *three separate branches* – western, southern and eastern. No other branch created the concept of a “single people”. The idea of a unitary “triune nation” within the Eastern Slavs is a political fiction intended from the outset to subordinate Ukrainians and Belarusians to the Russian core of the empire.

Refuting these concepts is not only a historical duty, **but also part of the struggle for Ukraine's intellectual and political independence.**

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The Lithuanian-Ruthenian State and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in Ukrainian history

After the fall of Kyiv and the decline of Rus, [the Grand Duchy of Lithuania played an important role in preserving Ukrainian statehood, culture and legal traditions](#). In the 14th–16th centuries, most Ukrainian lands were part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which preserved many elements of Rus (Ukrainian) legal and administrative traditions. The Rus (do not confuse it with Russian!) language was the official language of administration, and the “Lithuanian Statute Law” was in force, based on the legal traditions of Kyivan Rus. The Orthodox faith remained dominant, and the local nobility was Rusyn in origin and culture.

Later, after the [Union of Lublin](#) in 1569, these lands became part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. This period was controversial: on the one hand, there was active cultural interaction and the development of education (in particular, fraternal schools and the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy), and on the other hand, there was growing Polish pressure, Catholicisation and exploitation of the Ukrainian peasantry, which led to liberation movements and the emergence of the Cossacks as a social and military-political phenomenon.

A key event of this period was the Union of Brest in 1596, which preserved the Eastern rite and Church Slavonic liturgy while recognising papal supremacy. For some Ukrainian clergy and nobility, this was a way to protect the rights of Orthodox Christians within the Catholic state, preserve traditional rites, and gain equal opportunities with Catholics. Russian historiography, however, presented the union exclusively as a “betrayal of Orthodoxy”, stigmatising its initiators and ignoring the complex political and social circumstances that forced them to seek a compromise. In reality, the union was not an unambiguous act of “betrayal” or “victory”; it became part of a broader process of confessional and national self-determination for Ukrainians in the European context of the time.

Russian historiography has traditionally marginalised this period in Ukrainian history or presented it as a “period of Polish oppression”, ignoring the role of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania as the successor to Rus’ and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as the environment for the formation of modern Ukrainian identity.

Instead, a narrative line was established according to which Ukrainians allegedly “returned to the bosom of a single people” after the [Pereyaslav Agreement](#) of 1654. This approach ignores centuries of Ukraine’s state, cultural and educational development outside Muscovy.



Fig. 4. Historical map of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania by Justus Danckerts, late seventeenth century. For several centuries, a substantial part of the lands of present-day Ukraine belonged to the Lithuanian-Ruthenian political space.

Source: Justus Danckerts, late 17th century. Public Domain. Wikimedia Commons.

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Fig. 5. General Map of Ukraine, including the Podolian, Kyiv, and Bratslav Voivodeships, 17th century.

Source: Johannes Janssonius van Waesberge I and Moses Pitt, "Typus generalis Ukrainae, sive Palatinatum Podoliae, Kioviensis et Braczlaviensis, terras nova delineatione exhibens," published between 1660 and 1681. Harvard Library / Wikimedia Commons. Public Domain (PDM 1.0).

In modern Russia, this tradition of falsification continues: Ukrainians' participation in the common European political and cultural space is either ignored or discredited. Therefore, it is important to emphasise that the Lithuanian-Ruthenian state and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth became a bridge between Rus and the modern Ukrainian nation, preserving and passing on traditions that Moscow tried to destroy or appropriate. This era shows Ukraine's close connection with European civilisation: political institutions, civil society, and cultural practices developed here, integrating Ukrainians into pan-European modernisation processes, in contrast to Muscovy's isolated and authoritarian path.

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3. Formation of imperial doctrine: from Peter I to the USSR

From the beginning of the 18th century, the Muscovite Tsardom transformed into the Russian Empire – a new type of state that not only changed its name but also formed an ambitious ideology of imperial grandeur. The renaming was not neutral: the new official name, “Russia”, came from “Rus”, the historical name of the Ukrainian lands and the Kyiv state. In this way, the empire not only claimed Rus's territorial heritage but also appropriated its historical name, seeking to secure its status as the sole “heir” to the Rus tradition.

This period was marked not only by territorial expansion, but also by a consistent policy of destroying the identity of the conquered peoples, primarily the Ukrainians. The imperial project envisaged not only control over the lands, but also control over memory, language, and culture– that is, over the very ability of the people to be themselves.

At the same time, Ukrainians, deprived of political agency, played a prominent role in developing both the empire itself and its cultural space. Among them were people from Ukraine who made careers in imperial structures: [Feofan Prokopovich](#), one of the leading ideologists of Peter I's reforms and architect of church policy; [Alexander Bezborodko](#), Chancellor of the Russian Empire, who influenced foreign policy; [Hryhorii Skovoroda](#), philosopher and travelling teacher; [Dmitro Bortniansky](#), composer and director of the Court Singing Chapel; artists [Volodymyr Borovykovsky](#) and [Dmitro Levitsky](#), whose works adorned the imperial salons and became part of the “golden age” of Russian painting; numerous graduates of the Kyiv–Mohyla Academy, who joined the ranks of the Russian clergy, science and administration.

Their contributions to Russian science, literature, art, education, and the state apparatus often came at the cost of losing their own cultural identity and working to strengthen the imperial centre. Such “integration” was often a form of assimilation, where the talents and resources of the colonised people became tools for asserting power over them.

At the same time, not all figures succumbed to imperial influence: some, such as [Hryhorii Skovoroda](#), remained symbols and bearers of Ukrainian cultural identity. His life and work, filled with motifs of freedom, spiritual independence, and criticism of official dogmas, became [an important foundation for resisting imperial narratives and preserving national traditions even under the difficult conditions of colonial pressure](#).

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Imperial expansion: the destruction of Ukrainian autonomy

At the beginning of the 18th century, Ukrainian lands, which had limited autonomy within the Hetmanate, gradually lost the remnants of their political subjectivity. After the [Battle of Poltava](#) in 1709, which proved tragic for Ukraine's future, Peter I intensified pressure on the Cossack state. Hetman [Ivan Mazepa](#), who opposed the tsar, was declared a traitor, and the very idea of an independent Ukrainian political project was equated with rebellion.

Mazepa's defeat and that of his allies also marked the beginning of the first wave of Ukrainian political emigration. Its most famous representative was [Pylyp Orlyk](#), author of “[Treaties and Resolutions of the Rights and Freedoms of the Zaporozhian Host](#)” (1710), one of the first constitutional projects in Europe, which defined the principles of an independent Ukrainian state. Together with other associates of Mazepa, such as [Andrii Voinarovskyi](#), [Kost Hordiienko](#), and others, he tried to draw the attention of European monarchs and political circles to the Ukrainian question abroad, promoting the idea of restoring Cossack statehood and enlisting support for the liberation struggle.

In 1722, the Moscow authorities established the [Little Russian Collegium](#), an imperial administrative body that effectively subordinated the Hetmanate to the Russian administration. Although the hetmanate formally still existed, it quickly became a decorative position, deprived of electivity and dependent on the will of St. Petersburg. Catherine II's final abolition of the hetmanate in 1764, and the subsequent liquidation of the remnants of the Cossack system, completed the process of political subjugation.

By the end of the 18th century, after the partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Ukrainian lands were divided between two empires: most came under Russian rule, while Galicia, part of Volhynia, and Transcarpathia went to the Austrian (later Austro-Hungarian) Empire. In both cases, this meant integration without the right to political self-determination. In Russia, this process was accompanied by Russification and the destruction of institutional memory, while in Austria it was accompanied by bureaucratic centralisation and control through the Greek Catholic Church. Although the Austrian authorities were more tolerant of cultural autonomy, both empires sought to keep Ukrainians in a subordinate position. Meanwhile, Russia increased pressure on “its” part of Ukraine, seeking to unify Ukrainians under Russian rule with those under Austrian rule under the ideology of a “single Russian people”. This policy created an artificial divide within a single people, eroding common national interests and undermining the preconditions for Ukrainian consolidation.



Fig. 6. Ivan Mazepa, Hetman of the Zaporizhian Host. Engraving published in the early eighteenth century.

Source: Wikimedia Commons. Public Domain.

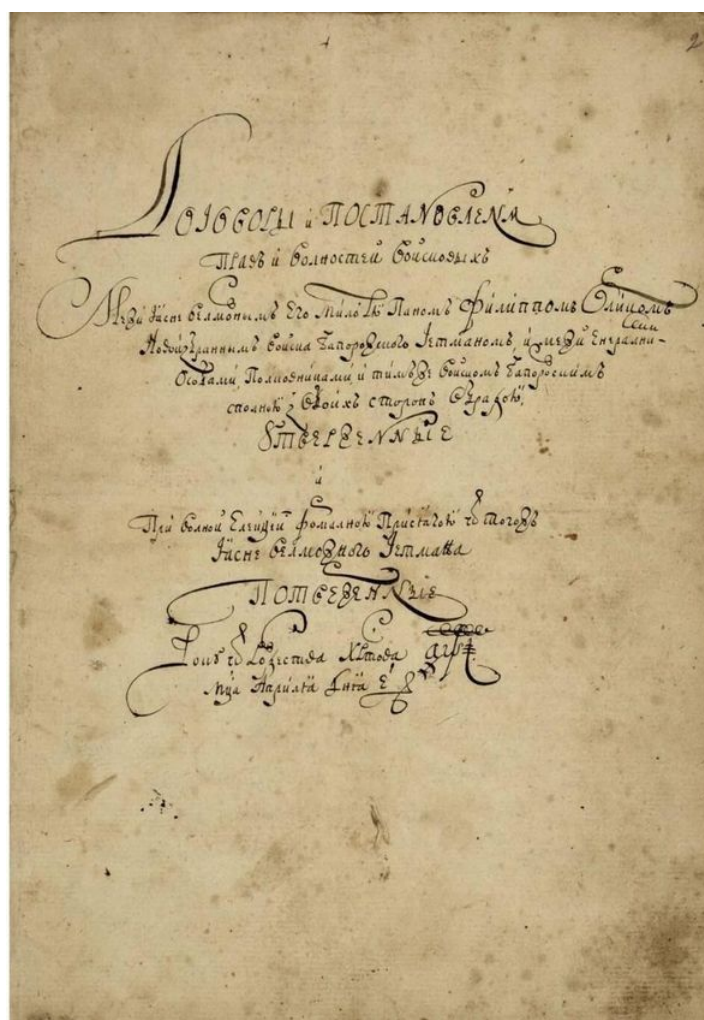


Fig. 7. The Constitution of Pylyp Orlyk, 1710. Original manuscript in Old Ukrainian.

Source: Wikimedia Commons. Public Domain (Public Domain Mark 1.0).

After liquidating the Hetmanate, the Russian Empire began integrating the Ukrainian elite into its administrative and social hierarchy. Some of the Cossack leaders [were rewarded with noble titles and estates, in the hope that their new status would erode their national roots.](#)

However, many of the former officers did not accept the imperial identity, and it was they who later became the core of the autonomist and national movements of the 19th century – from [Vasyl Kapnist](#) and [Yakiv Markovich](#) to members of the [Cyril and Methodius Brotherhood](#). In all of them, one can trace the continuity of the idea of Ukrainian separateness, resistance to assimilation, and the struggle to restore rights.

Meanwhile, in Austrian Galicia, a national revival began in the first half of the 19th century. The leaders of the [“Ruska Triitsia”](#) (Ruthenian Triad) – [Markiyan Shashkevych](#), [Ivan Vahylevych](#), and [Yakiv Holovatsky](#) – laid the foundations for cultural awakening, restoring the prestige of the Ukrainian language and literature. The ideas and publications of the “Ruska Triitsia” reached Russian-ruled Ukraine, inspiring local intellectuals and fuelling the common idea of cultural unity. In the second half of the century, other figures became increasingly involved in these efforts, maintaining contacts between Lviv and Kyiv. Joint cultural initiatives, publishing projects, and the exchange of ideas showed a desire to preserve a sense of unity among the Ukrainian people, divided by the borders of two empires.

Thus, even within the empires, the Ukrainian movement never ceased. Its sources lay not only in folk traditions but also among the educated classes, who, despite Russification and repression, did not lose touch with their own traditions and history.

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Colonial practices in Ukraine in the 18th–19th centuries

Political subjugation quickly turned into a systemic transformation of social and cultural life. The Russian Empire treated Ukraine not as an equal territory, but as a colony – a source of resources and a space for Russification.

This manifested itself in various spheres:

- **The education system** underwent not just “reforms” but deliberate imperial regression. From the high level of the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy and the network of fraternal schools of the 17th century, Ukraine was gradually relegated to the status of a cultural province, where education's main task was to raise subjects loyal to the empire. The Ukrainian language and literature were pushed out of the educational process, and history and culture were presented in a distorted, propagandistic way. Russification was official policy: even primary schools switched to Russian for instruction. **Mykhailo Drahomanov**, in his work *“The Lost Epoch. Ukrainians under the Muscovite Tsardom: 1654–1876”* / *“Propashchyi chas – ukraintsi pid Moskovs'kym tsarstvom* (1654–1876), emphasised that Ukraine's stay under Russian rule was “lost time” – a period when imperial policy systematically restricted and destroyed national schools and education, effectively undermining the spiritual and cultural identity of Ukrainian society.
- **Russification: language as a field of struggle.** Control over language became a key instrument of imperial policy. The Russian authorities consistently restricted, banned and marginalised the Ukrainian language – in everyday life, education, publishing and church life. The most famous examples of this were:
- **The Valuyev Circular** (1863), which banned the printing of Ukrainian books with secular content, stating that “there was no special Little Russian language, there is none, and there cannot be one”.
- **The Ems Decree** or the Ems Ukase (1876), which significantly expanded the prohibitions to include printing, importing, and even theatrical performances in the Ukrainian language.

These documents not only demonstrated a condescending attitude towards the Ukrainian language, but were also part of an overall strategy: to make Ukrainians “Little Russians”, i.e. subordinate components of a single “Russian people”, without the right to a separate cultural and national identity.

The imperial system also controlled **religious life** by integrating the Orthodox Church into its administration. In violation of canonical rules, the Kyiv Metropolis was subordinated to the Moscow Patriarchate as early as 1687, with spiritual and political consequences, as the church became the conduit of imperial ideology for the next 300 years.

In this cultural context, the figure of **Taras Shevchenko** emerges – a poet, artist and thinker who became a symbol of the national revival of the 19th century. His work was a direct response to imperial prohibitions: Shevchenko asserted Ukrainians' right to their own language, history, and culture, and his poetry inspired and continues to inspire generations of freedom fighters. For anti-Russian motifs in his work and his participation in the Cyril and Methodius Brotherhood, he was

arrested and exiled, which only emphasised the danger that the empire saw in cultural self-awareness.



Fig. 8. Ukrainian lands in 1764–1765: political and administrative divisions in the mid-eighteenth century.
Source: Роман Днепр, "1764 Ukraine", Wikimedia Commons, 2016. Licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0.

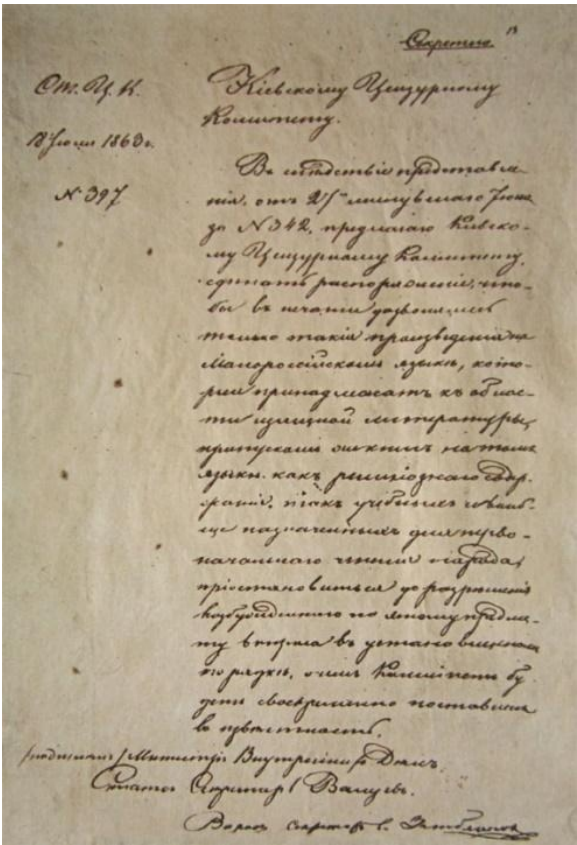


Fig. 9. The Valuev Circular of 1863, which imposed restrictions on publications in the Ukrainian language in the Russian Empire.
Source: Wikimedia Commons. Public Domain.

Thus, Russia’s imperial doctrine is not just a geopolitical strategy. It is systematic violence against the cultural, linguistic and political subjectivity of peoples, in particular the Ukrainian people. During this period, the foundations are laid for myths that will later become instruments for legitimising aggression in the 20th and 21st centuries. Understanding these processes is the key to decolonising historical consciousness and freeing ourselves from the captivity of imperial constructs that still influence perceptions of Ukraine’s past and present.

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4. The Soviet period: modernisation of the imperial model

After the defeat of the Russian Empire in World War I and the monarchy's collapse, the Ukrainian liberation movement gained new momentum. In 1917–1921, Ukrainians made a large-scale attempt to restore their statehood in the form of the [Central Rada](#), the [Ukrainian National Republic \(Ukrainska Narodnia Respublika, or UNR\)](#), Pavlo Skoropadskyi's Hetmanate, the [Directory of the Ukrainian People's Republic](#), and the [Western Ukrainian National Republic \(Zakhidno-Ukrainska Narodnia Respublika, or ZUNR\)](#). Although these struggles ended in defeat, they became an important act of self-affirmation for the Ukrainian nation. They demonstrated not only political maturity but also a willingness to fight for independence, influencing all subsequent generations. This period was the first large-scale attempt at modern statehood on Ukrainian lands and left a deep mark on the collective memory (in an article, [“How Ukraine Built a Modern State 100 Years Ago” by Yaroslav Faizulin](#), you can find an overview of the symbols, borders, statehood and other key elements that were laid down in 1917–1921).

With the advent of Soviet power, under the banner of social justice, Ukraine began its transformation into a “Soviet republic”. However, behind the facade of a supposedly voluntary union lay a modernised imperial model – with new methods but old goals: centralisation, unification, control.

Pseudo-internationalism as a form of imperial centralisation

Soviet internationalism, proclaimed as equality among nations, actually functioned as an instrument of centralised control by Moscow. Although a policy of [“Ukrainisation”](#) was proclaimed in the 1920s, it quickly turned into a tool for temporarily involving Ukrainians in the Soviet project and establishing Bolshevik rule, which had not previously enjoyed widespread support in Ukraine. As soon as the Bolsheviks consolidated their power, Ukrainisation was rolled back, and systematic Russification began under the banner of “rapprochement between peoples”.

Communist ideology was presented as supranational, but in practice Russian culture, language, and history became dominant. Ukrainian institutions were gradually subordinated to the union centre, and authorities suppressed any expression of national autonomy as “bourgeois nationalism”.

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The Holodomor as an act of genocide

The most horrific manifestation of Soviet policy was the tragedy of the Holodomor of 1932–1933 – a [deliberate artificial famine organised by Stalin's regime to suppress the Ukrainian peasantry and break their resistance to collectivisation](#). According to various estimates, between 3 and 7 million Ukrainians died.

The famine was not just an economic crime, but also an instrument of ethnopolitical engineering. It was accompanied by [repression against the national intelligentsia, the liquidation of cultural centres, a ban on leaving the areas affected by famine, and the confiscation of all food supplies](#). It was a blow not only to the people, but also to the continuity of Ukrainian culture, language and traditions.

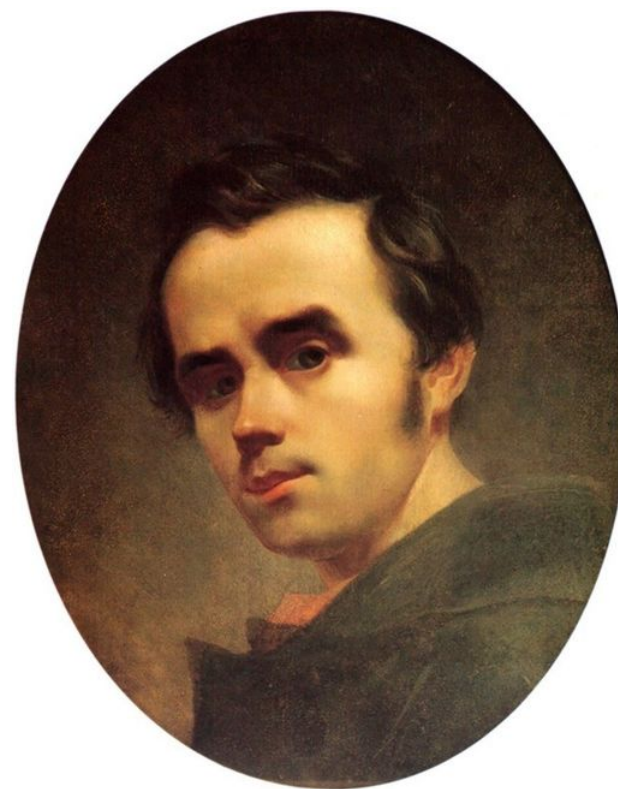


Fig. 10. Taras Shevchenko. Self-portrait, 1840.

Source: National Taras Shevchenko Museum / Wikimedia Commons. Public Domain.

Taras Shevchenko: The Making of the National Poet
— GG Grabowicz, 2014

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Fig. 11. Map of Ukraine published in Kyiv in March 1918, during the Ukrainian Revolution and the establishment of the Ukrainian People's Republic.

Source: Cartographic Department of the Main Geodetic Administration, Kyiv, 1918. Central State Archives of Supreme Bodies of Power and Government of Ukraine / Wikimedia Commons. Public Domain

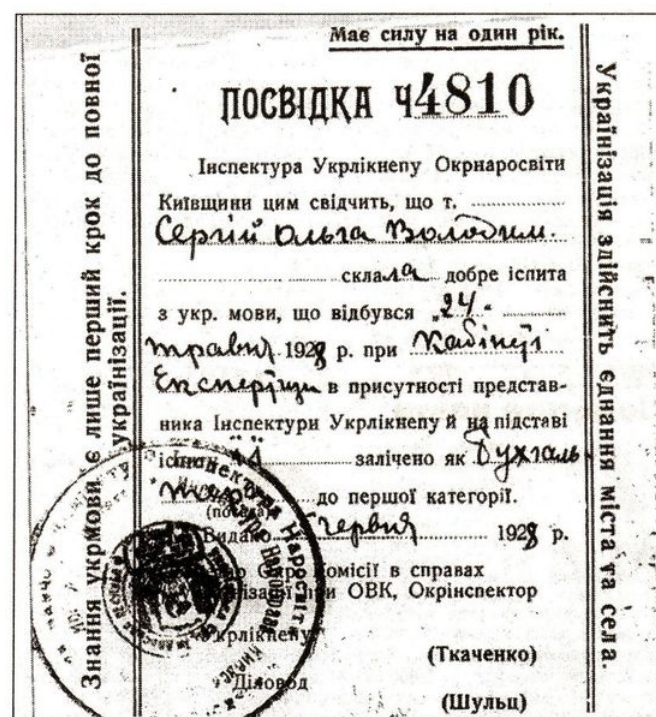


Fig. 12. Certificate confirming the successful completion of a Ukrainian-language proficiency examination during the policy of Ukrainization, Kyiv region, 1928.

Source: Inspectorate of the People's Commissariat of Education of the Ukrainian SSR, 1928 / Wikimedia Commons. Public Domain.

Suppression of the elite and unification of memory

In the 1930s, the Soviet regime deliberately destroyed the Ukrainian elite. Scientists, writers, artists, teachers, priests – anyone who could shape and affirm national identity – fell victim to repression. This period became known as the “executed renaissance” – a generation of Ukrainian cultural figures destroyed as a result of political purges. Among them were **Mykola Zerov**, **Mykola Khvylovy**, **Les Kurbas**, **Mykola Kulish**, **Valerian Pidmohylny**, **Marko Voronyi**, **Hryhorii Kosynka**, and many others. Censors censored their work and kept it out of cultural circulation for decades.

In addition to physical destruction, repression took another form: the moral breaking of individuals. Some artists, such as **Pavlo Tychyna**, were forced to renounce their creative ideals and become mouthpieces for official Soviet ideology. This tragedy of internal breakdown was no less destructive to Ukrainian culture than physical executions.

At the same time, historical memory was completely unified. The history of Ukraine was rewritten within the Soviet paradigm: Kyivan Rus was presented as the common source of the “three brotherly peoples”, the Cossacks as the vanguard of the empire, and the liberation struggles of 1917–1921 as bourgeois nationalism and a hostile anti-Soviet conspiracy.

Fig. 16. Les Kurbas with members of the Berezhil Theatre Studio, 1922. Source: Unknown photographer, 1922 / Wikimedia Commons. Public Domain.

In 1939, the USSR, having concluded the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact and its secret protocols with Nazi Germany, effectively contributed to the outbreak of World War II. As a result of this conspiracy, Soviet troops invaded Poland on 17 September 1939 and annexed Western Ukraine to the Ukrainian SSR. Despite the official rhetoric of “reunification”, the Soviet authorities immediately began repressions against the local intelligentsia, clergy, wealthy peasants, as well as mass deportations to Siberia and Kazakhstan.

During the German-Soviet War, total censorship and mobilisation became priorities; the most widespread repression against Ukrainian society unfolded at the end of the war and in the post-war years (1944–1953). At the same time, in 1939–1941, arrests and deportations took place in the newly annexed territories, and in the summer of 1941, during the NKVD retreat, [mass executions of prisoners took place](#).

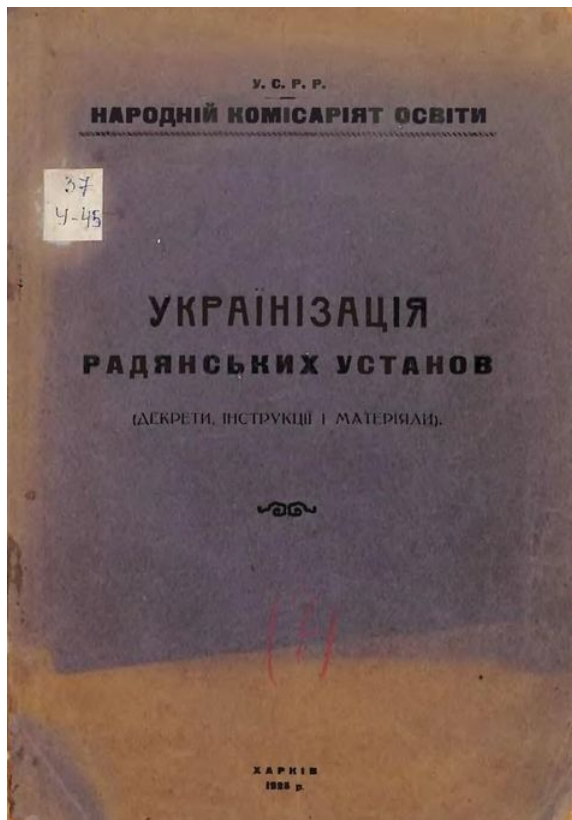


Fig. 13. "Ukrainization of Soviet Institutions: Decrees, Instructions and Materials," published by the People's Commissariat of Education of the Ukrainian SSR, Kharkiv, 1925.

Source: People's Commissariat of Education of the Ukrainian SSR, "Ukrainization of Soviet Institutions: Decrees, Instructions and Materials," Kharkiv, 1925 / Wikimedia Commons. Public Domain.



Fig. 14. Victims of the Holodomor in Kharkiv, 1933. Photograph by Alexander Wienerberger.

Source: Alexander Wienerberger, 1933. Cardinal Theodor Innitzer Collection, Diocesan Archive of Vienna / Wikimedia Commons. Public Domain.



Fig. 15. Ukrainian writers in Kharkiv, 1926. From left to right: Petro Panch, Maik Yohansen, Vasyl Vrazhlyvyi, and Hryhorii Epik.

Source: Unknown photographer, Kharkiv, 1926 / Wikimedia Commons. Public Domain.



After the return of Soviet power, there were "filtration" checks and camps, [Operation West](#) (1947) with the [deportation of tens of thousands of families](#), and large-scale punitive actions against the OUN-UPA resistance. Ukrainians, along with other peoples of the USSR, made a huge contribution to the victory over Nazi Germany, but in the official Soviet narrative, this contribution was dissolved in the myth of the "great victory of the Soviet people", and alternative experiences of the

war were stigmatised.

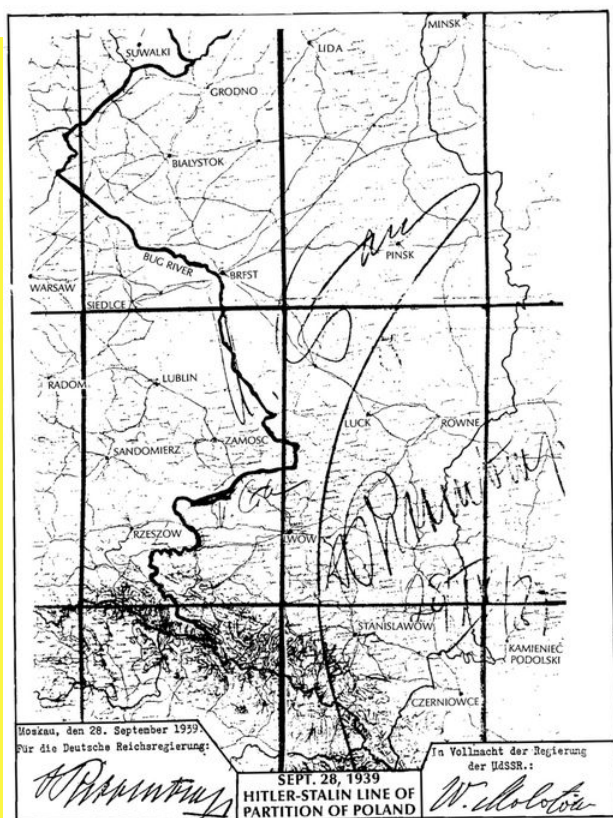


Fig. 17. Map accompanying the German-Soviet agreements on the partition of Poland, showing the new German-Soviet boundary, 28 September 1939.

Source: German-Soviet Boundary and Friendship Treaty, Moscow, 28 September 1939. Map signed by Joseph Stalin and Joachim von Ribbentrop / Wikimedia Commons. Public Domain.

In the post-war period, the Soviet authorities modernised imperial methods of suppressing resistance. In the 1950s–1980s, the fight against dissent became systematic. The new targets of persecution were the [Shistdesiatnyky \(also Shestydesiatnyky; The Sixtiers\)](#), a [generation of young poets, prose writers, artists, and scientists who advocated cultural revival and the protection of national dignity](#). Among them were [Vasyl Symonenko](#), [Lina Kostenko](#), [Ivan Drach](#), [Alla Horska](#), [Mykola Vinhranovsky](#), and [Yevhen Sverstiuk](#). The authorities arrested them and dismissed them from their jobs. The most rebellious were subjected to forced treatment in psychiatric hospitals – one of the “milder” forms of political repression known as punitive psychiatry.

In the 1970s and 1980s, [a new wave of Ukrainian dissidents emerged](#), including [Viacheslav Chornovil](#), [Levko Lukianenko](#), [Ivan Svitlychny](#), [Vasyl Stus](#), [Iryna Kalynets](#), and [Mykhailo Osadchy](#). Their activities included human rights advocacy, journalism, [samvydav](#), and protest actions. For their stance, they were arrested, imprisoned, exiled, and sometimes died in camps.

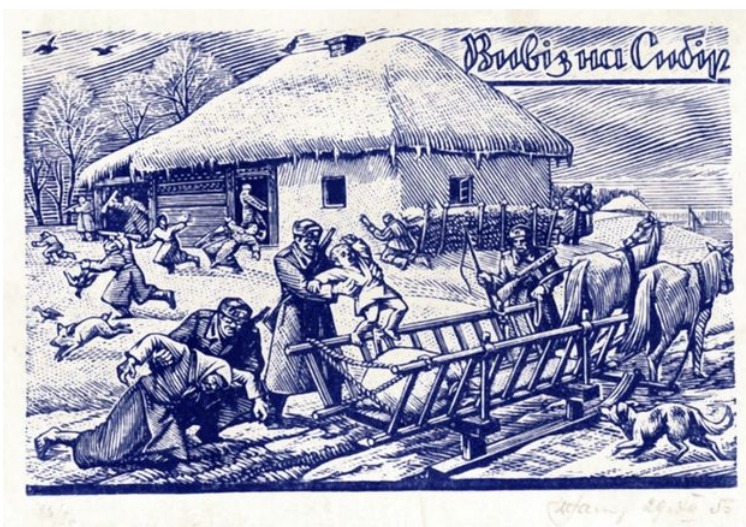


Fig. 18. “Deportation to Siberia” (“Vyviz na Sybir”), a woodcut by Ukrainian artist Nil Khasevych depicting the forced deportation of Ukrainians by the Soviet authorities, 29 December 1950.

Source: Nil Khasevych, “Vyviz na Sybir” [Deportation to Siberia], woodcut, 29 December 1950. Sectoral State Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine.



Fig. 19. Leonid Plyushch (1938–2015), Ukrainian dissident and victim of Soviet punitive psychiatry, c. 1970.

Source: “Léonide Pliouchtch”, photographer unknown, 1970 / Wikimedia Commons. CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain Dedication.

The entire education system, mass media, and culture worked to shape a Soviet, i.e. Russian-centric, identity. Instead of the tsarist army and administration, the party nomenclature and punitive organs took their place; instead of Orthodox Christianity, the communist faith. But the goal remained the same: to break Ukrainian subjectivity and replace it with loyalty to a “common state” from which there was no escape.

That is why the Soviet period cannot be seen as an alternative to the imperial one. It is its continuation – with new technologies of control, but with the same goal: the subjugation of Ukraine as a colony within a new geopolitical project – the USSR.

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After 1991: hybrid restoration of the empire The fall of the USSR as “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe”

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 was an epoch-making event in world history. For most former Soviet republics, it meant a chance to regain independence; for the international community, it meant the end of the Cold War. However, Russian political consciousness perceived it quite differently. In 2005, Russian President Vladimir Putin called the collapse of the USSR “[the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century](#)”. This assessment was not accidental – it reflected the deep imperial complex of the Russian elites, for whom the disappearance of the Soviet superpower was not liberation, but a loss of status, influence and territory.

From the very beginning of Ukraine’s independence, Moscow had a strategic position that this “breakup” was temporary and that the “lost” territories should be returned to Russian control. In the 1990s, this manifested itself mainly in economic and energy pressure, and since the early 2000s, in systematic informational and political work against Ukrainian statehood.

An important element of this period was the nuclear disarmament of Ukraine, which inherited the world’s third-most powerful nuclear arsenal from the USSR. By signing the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, Kyiv renounced nuclear weapons in exchange for security and territorial integrity guarantees from Russia, the United States and the United Kingdom. Subsequent events showed these guarantees were ignored, and disarmament became a key factor in Ukraine’s vulnerability to future aggression.

Harvard’s Wilson Center — розбір меморандуму та гарантій: “Ukraine’s *Territorial Integrity and the Budapest Memorandum*” — аналітичний текст про гарантії безпеки України після 1994 року: [Wilson Center Issue Brief](https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/publication/Issue%20Brief%20No%203--The%20Breach--Final4.pdf?utm): <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/publication/Issue%20Brief%20No%203--The%20Breach--Final4.pdf?utm>

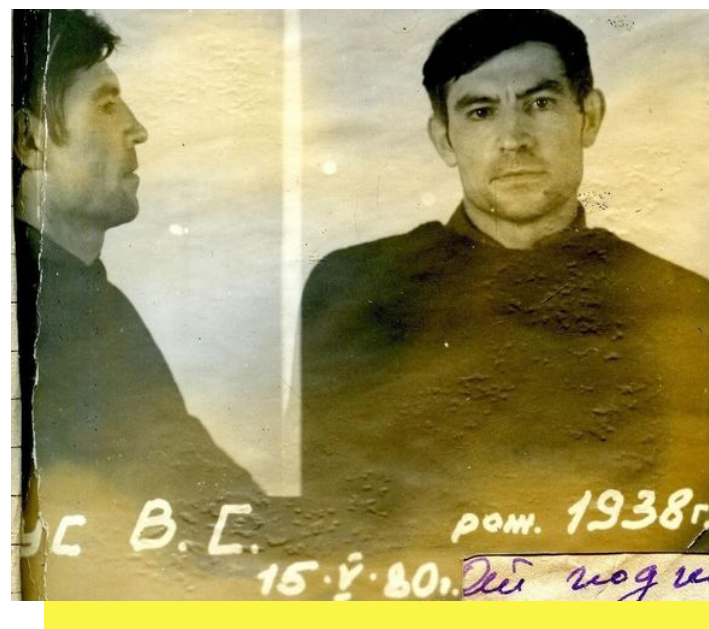


Fig. 20. Vasyl Stus (1938–1985), Ukrainian poet and dissident. Official photograph from his KGB case file.

Source: Official KGB photograph from the Vasyl Stus case file, National Archive of Ukraine / Wikimedia Commons. Public Domain.

The creation of the narrative of a “single people” and the concept of the “Russian World”

Since the mid-1990s, and especially during Putin’s rule, the Kremlin has actively shaped a new imperial ideology: the concept of the “Russian World”. Its main thesis is that Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians are a “single people” with a “shared history” and a “shared spiritual foundation” dating back to Kyivan Rus. In this narrative, Ukrainian identity was presented as a regional variation of “Great Russian” culture, and Ukrainian statehood as a historical accident caused by the collapse of the USSR and external Western influence. The [concept of the “Russian World”](#) had two functions:

ВІДОМОСТІ ПРО РЕЗУЛЬТАТИ ВСЕУКРАЇНСЬКОГО РЕФЕРЕНДУМУ 1 грудня 1991 року													
№ п/п	Автономна республіка, область і міста	Загальна кількість ділянок для голосу- вання	Кількість громадян, які внесли до списків для голосування	Кількість громадян, які подали бюлетені для голосування		Кількість громадян, які взяли участь в голосу- ванні		Кількість громадян, які відповіли «Так, незалежність»		Кількість громадян, які відповіли «Ні, не незалежність»		Кількість бюлетенів визнаних недійсними	
				абс.	%	абс.	%	абс.	%	абс.	%	абс.	%
1.	Кримська АРСР	1,186	1,535,154	1,039,443	67,71	1,036,190	67,50	561,498	54,19	437,505	42,22	37,187	3,59
2.	Вінницька	1,592	1,424,110	1,303,081	91,50	1,301,765	91,41	1,242,244	95,43	39,387	3,03	20,134	1,55
3.	Волинська	1,152	762,872	711,890	93,32	710,989	93,20	684,834	96,32	16,299	2,29	9,856	1,39
4.	Дніпропетровська	1,856	2,877,974	2,358,052	81,93	2,354,169	81,80	2,127,069	90,36	181,529	7,71	45,551	1,93
5.	Донецька	2,636	3,854,440	2,962,092	76,85	2,957,372	76,73	2,481,157	83,90	372,157	12,58	104,058	3,52
6.	Житомирська	1,438	1,105,023	1,001,671	90,65	1,000,425	90,53	950,976	95,06	35,798	3,58	13,651	1,36
7.	Закарпатська	732	856,687	711,974	83,11	710,286	82,91	657,678	92,59	31,891	4,49	20,717	2,92
8.	Запорізька	1,207	1,553,858	1,254,622	80,74	1,252,225	80,59	1,135,271	90,66	91,929	7,34	25,025	2,00
9.	Івано-Франківська	986	1,019,145	976,399	95,81	975,655	95,73	960,281	98,42	10,028	1,03	5,346	0,55
10.	Київська	1,360	1,430,507	1,261,128	88,16	1,259,129	88,02	1,202,773	95,52	36,086	2,87	20,270	1,61
11.	Кіровоградська	978	924,050	815,097	88,21	813,833	88,07	764,053	93,88	35,613	4,38	14,167	1,74
12.	Луганська	1,505	2,085,931	1,685,751	80,82	1,682,344	80,65	1,410,894	83,86	1,225,589	13,41	45,861	2,73
13.	Львівська	2,083	2,011,261	1,917,419	95,33	1,915,597	95,24	1,866,921	97,46	35,671	1,86	13,005	0,68
14.	Миколаївська	918	973,909	819,803	84,23	818,538	84,10	732,179	89,45	66,858	8,17	19,501	2,38
15.	Одеська	1,763	1,882,610	1,416,028	75,32	1,412,228	75,01	1,205,755	85,38	163,831	11,60	42,642	3,02
16.	Полтавська	1,328	1,313,588	1,207,505	91,92	1,206,801	91,87	1,145,639	94,93	44,308	3,67	16,854	1,40
17.	Рівненська	963	814,246	757,713	93,06	757,151	92,99	726,575	95,96	19,369	2,56	11,207	1,48
18.	Сумська	1,130	1,072,639	949,541	88,52	948,278	88,41	878,198	92,61	46,479	4,90	23,601	2,49
19.	Тернопільська	1,173	861,647	837,125	97,15	836,667	97,10	825,526	98,67	6,565	0,78	4,576	0,55
20.	Харківська	1,771	2,377,159	1,802,516	75,83	1,798,977	75,68	1,553,065	86,33	187,631	10,43	58,281	3,24
21.	Херсонська	739	903,891	755,734	83,61	753,843	83,40	679,451	90,13	54,248	7,20	20,144	2,67
22.	Хмельницька	1,563	1,133,350	1,059,750	93,51	1,059,021	93,44	1,019,813	96,30	27,743	2,62	11,465	1,08
23.	Черкаська	1,076	1,154,455	1,042,730	90,32	1,040,971	90,17	999,603	96,03	28,703	2,76	12,665	1,22
24.	Чернівецька	549	668,781	586,671	87,72	586,377	87,68	544,022	92,78	24,226	4,13	18,129	3,09
25.	Чернігівська	1,111	1,068,152	970,519	90,86	969,638	90,78	908,904	93,74	39,774	4,10	20,960	2,16
26.	м. Київ	996	1,913,692	1,540,966	80,52	1,537,585	80,35	1,428,001	92,88	81,246	5,28	28,338	1,84
27.	м. Севастополь	302	307,024	196,600	64,03	195,688	63,74	111,671	57,07	77,091	39,39	6,926	3,54
Всього по Україні		34,093	37,885,555	31,943,820	84,32	31,891,742	84,18	28,804,071	90,32	2,417,554	7,58	670,117	2,10

Fig. 21. Results of the All-Ukrainian referendum on independence, 1 December 1991.

Source: Central State Archives of Supreme Bodies of Power and Government of Ukraine / Wikimedia Commons. Public Domain.

[Russian text – Text in Russian]	
О ГАРАНТИИ БЕЗОПАСНОСТИ В СВЯЗИ С ПРИСОЕДИНЕНИЕМ УКРАИНЫ К ДОГОВОРУ О НЕРАСПРОСТРАНЕНИИ ЯДЕРНОГО ОРУЖИЯ	
Украине свое обязательство в соответствии с принципами заключительного Акта СБСЕ уважать независимость, суверенитет и существующие границы Украины.	
2. Российская Федерация, Соединенное Королевство Великобритании и Северной Ирландии и Соединенные Штаты Америки подтверждают свое обязательство воздерживаться от угрозы силой или ее применения против территориальной целостности или политической независимости Украины, и что никакие их вооружения никогда не будут применены против Украины, кроме как в целях самозащиты или каких-либо иных образцов в соответствии с Уставом Организации Объединенных Наций.	
3. Российская Федерация, Соединенное Королевство Великобритании и Северной Ирландии и Соединенные Штаты Америки подтверждают Украине свое обязательство в соответствии с принципами Заключительного Акта СБСЕ воздерживаться от экономического принуждения, направленного на то, чтобы подчинить своим собственным интересам	
осуществление Украиной прав, присущих ее суверенитету, и таким образом обеспечить себе преимущества любого рода.	
ЗА УКРАЇНУ: ЗА УКРАЇНУ: FOR UKRAINE.	
ЗА РОССИЙСКУ ФЕДЕРАЦИЮ: ЗА РОССИЙСКУ ФЕДЕРАЦИЮ: FOR THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION.	
ЗА СЪЮБЪЕННЕ КОРОЛЕВСТВО ВЕЛИКОГО БРИТАНИИ И СЕВЕРНОЙ ИРЛАНДИИ ЗА СЪЮБЪЕННЕ КОРОЛЕВСТВО ВЕЛИКОГО БРИТАНИИ И СЕВЕРНОЙ ИРЛАНДИИ FOR THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND.	
ЗА СЪЮБЪЕННЕ ШТАТИ АМЕРИКИ ЗА СЪЮБЪЕННЕ ШТАТИ АМЕРИКИ FOR THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.	

Fig. 22. Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances, 5 December 1994, excerpt (points 2–3).

Source:
“Budapestmemorandum1994(2-3)” /
Wikimedia Commons. CC0 1.0 Universal
Public Domain Dedication.

- **ideological** – to legitimise Russia’s “right” to “protect” and “reunite” with its so-called “historic lands”.
- **cultural and propaganda** – to keep the post-Soviet space within Russia’s sphere of influence through language, church, education, mass culture and media.

In Ukraine, this idea was spread through a network of pro-Russian parties, organisations, charitable foundations and religious structures, in particular the Moscow Patriarchate, which cultivated the image of “brotherly peoples” and denied the existence of a separate Ukrainian nation.

Information and propaganda preparation for aggression

Since the early 2000s, Russian special services and state media have been conducting a large-scale campaign to influence Ukrainian society. The main messages were aimed at:

- discrediting the idea of European and Euro-Atlantic integration;
- forming the perception of the Ukrainian state as “artificial” and “controlled from outside” by the West;

- contrasting the “Russian world” with the “decaying West”;
- stoking the themes of “protecting Russian speakers” and “shared historical destiny”.

Through cultural, religious, educational and humanitarian channels of influence, an image of Ukraine as a “younger brother” who must return to the “single family of nations” was formed. To this end, the following were used:

- *television and print media* (ORT and RTR channels, newspapers freely distributed in Ukraine);
- *Internet resources* and later social networks with fake news;
- *cultural and educational programmes* aimed at young people;
- *church structures* of the Moscow Patriarchate as a channel for legitimising Russian narratives.

This hybrid revanchism of the Kremlin combined instruments of “soft power” – propaganda, economic pressure, energy dependence – with a readiness for direct military intervention. The [Orange Revolution of 2004](#) and the [Revolution of Dignity of 2013–2014](#) only intensified these campaigns. The old soft power propaganda [turned into direct preparation for war](#) – with the incitement of hatred, myths about the “fascist threat”, and justification for future military intervention. This process culminated in the [annexation of Crimea](#) and the [war in Donbas](#) in 2014, followed by a full-scale invasion in 2022.

Thus, after 1991, Russia did not abandon the imperial paradigm – it merely adapted it to new conditions, combining Soviet experience of control with modern information warfare technologies.

References:

1. European Council on Foreign Relations. (2024). Late-stage Putinism: The war in Ukraine and Russia's shifting ideology. <https://ecfr.eu/publication/late-stage-putinism-the-war-in-ukraine-and-russias-shifting-ideology/> 2 Ukrainian Studies. (2022, September 6). Russian foreign policy and the origins of the “Russian World”. <https://ukrainian-studies.ca/2022/09/06/russian-foreign-policy-and-the-origins-of-the-russian-world/>



Fig. 23. Euromaidan protesters on Independence Square in Kyiv during the Revolution of Dignity, 21 February 2014.

Source: Amakuha, “2014-02-21 11-04 Euromaidan in Kiev”
/ Wikimedia Commons. Licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0.

The war since 2014: the hybrid phase of the invasion

The annexation of Crimea, the creation of the “LPR” and “DPR”: using historical myths to legitimise aggression

In February–March 2014, the Russian Federation carried out a military operation to occupy and annex the Crimean peninsula, using “[hybrid warfare](#)” tactics – without an official announcement, involving special forces without identification marks (“[little green men](#)”), blocking Ukrainian military units and holding an illegal “referendum” at gunpoint. The operation was accompanied by a massive information campaign that presented the events as the “return of historic Russian land” and the protection of Russian speakers”. Such arguments appealed to imperial and Soviet myths – from “Chersonesos as the cradle of Russian Orthodoxy” to the legend of the “feat of Sevastopol” and “Crimea as a gift from Khrushchev to Ukraine”. [In this way, the Kremlin tried to](#)

[legitimise the annexation](#). The memory of World War II was particularly exploited, with Ukrainian patriots who opposed the occupation being branded as “fascists” and “Nazi collaborators”.

Wilson Center – “Putin’s Crimea Mythmaking” – Аналізує, як після анексії Криму РФ використовує фальсифіковану історію для легітимізації захоплення, зокрема через міфи «історичної російської приналежності»: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/putins-crimea-mythmaking>

At the same time, Russia organised and supported the creation of puppet quasi-states in the eastern regions of Ukraine – the so-called “Donetsk” and “Luhansk People’s Republics” (LPR and DPR). The [mythology of “Novorossiya”](#) was also actively used there – a concept that presents the south-eastern lands of Ukraine as “historically Russian” territories that allegedly need to be “returned”.

Russian propaganda on the international stage (RT, Sputnik)

In parallel with its military actions, the Kremlin [intensified a global information campaign aimed at justifying its aggression and discrediting Ukraine in the eyes of the international community](#). State-controlled media outlets RT (Russia Today) and Sputnik played a key role, broadcasting propaganda messages in many languages. The [main objectives of this propaganda were](#):



Fig. 24. Unmarked armed troops at a military base in Perevalne during the Russian occupation of Crimea, 9 March 2014.

Source: Anton Holoborodko, “2014-03-09 – Perevalne military base – 0162” / Wikimedia Commons. Licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0.



Fig. 25. Armed pro-Russian forces outside the Sloviansk City Council during the outbreak of the war in Donbas, 14 April 2014.

Source: Yevgen Nasadyuk, “2014-04-14 Sloviansk city council – 2” / Wikimedia Commons. Licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0.

- to cast doubt on the facts of annexation and aggression by presenting the events as an “internal conflict” or “civil war”;
- to discredit the Ukrainian government by accusing it of “Russophobia”, “corruption” and “neo-Nazism”;
- to promote alternative “versions” of high-profile events, in particular the downing of flight MH17, the Maidan protests of 2013–2014, and the shelling of peaceful cities in Donbas by Ukrainian armed forces;
- to foster a mood of fatigue with Ukraine and a willingness to “compromise” with Russia in Western countries.

References:

1. Hellman, M. (2024). Everyday disinformation: RT and Sputnik news coverage. In Media and disinformation in the age of conflict (pp. 45–68). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-58747-4_3
2. Karpchuk, N., & Yuskiv, B. (2021). Dominating concepts of Russian Federation propaganda in the information warfare against Ukraine. Journal of Political Sciences, 13(2), 120–135. <https://www.redalyc.org/journal/6948/694874076004/html/>
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4. NATO Association. (2022, May 15). The myths of Novorossiya: Kremlin reinvents Ukrainian history to justify invasion. <https://natoassociation.ca/the-myths-of-novorossiya-kremlin-reinvents-ukrainian-history-to-justify-invasion/>

Examples of information operations and fakes (2014–2021):

- [“Crucified boy” \(summer 2014, Channel One Russia\)](#). A fabricated story about an allegedly executed child in Sloviansk.

Purpose: to demonise Ukrainian military personnel/activists as “Nazis” and shock the audience to mobilise support for the “defence of Donbas”.

- MH17 (July 2014) – [a conveyor belt of alternative “versions”](#). From “Ukrainian Su-25” to “Ukrainian Buk” and “explosion from within”.

The goal: to blur the responsibility of the Russian Federation/Russian proxies, sow doubt (‘no one knows the truth’), and neutralise the pressure of sanctions.

- [The “Spanish air traffic controller Carlos” \(@Spainbuca, 2014\)](#). [A fake “eyewitness” on Twitter who “confirmed” Ukrainian attacks on civilians and “Kyiv’s special operations” against MH17.](#)

The goal: to create the illusion of an independent source “from within” and replace journalism with “testimonies” from social media.

- Odessa, 2 May 2014 – “the junta’s intentional pogrom”. Systematic presentation of the tragedy as a “planned mass murder” without the context of clashes and provocations.

Goal: to reinforce the image of the “Kyiv junta” and fuel fear and revenge among Russian-speaking audiences in the south/east.

- “Genocide of Russian speakers in Donbas”. Manipulative exaggeration of losses, blurring the distinction between militants and civilians, and the thesis that “Kyiv is bombing its own people”.

Goal: to legitimise the “humanitarian intervention” and the permanent military presence of the Russian Federation.

- [“Novorossiya”](#) and “historic lands”. [Repackaging of the imperial myth about the “originally Russian” south-east.](#)

The goal: to give the aggression a pseudo-historical framework and devalue Ukrainian sovereignty.

- [“Referendum” in Crimea \(March 2014\)](#). Propaganda about “high turnout” and “international recognition”, use of quasi-“observers” from extreme political forces in the EU.

The goal: to create an image of the annexation’s “legality” for an external audience.

- “Humanitarian convoys”. A media showcase of aid, followed by deliveries to the groups, and footage of the “charity” of the Russian Federation.

The goal: to replace the image of the aggressor with that of the “saviour”.

- A series about “national battalions” and the “fascist junta”. Docudramas/talk shows on Russian TV; selective footage of marches, symbols, isolated crimes.

Goal: to shape the “moral right” of the Russian Federation to intervene in external audiences.

- MH17/[Azov](#)/[“US biological laboratories”](#) – long-running narratives from 2015 to 2021. Constant “new facts” on RT/Sputnik, blogger networks and social media. Goal: [to maintain information noise where it is difficult to distinguish truth from fiction.](#)

- External operations to put pressure on Ukraine’s allies. Cases such as the [“Lisa case” in Germany](#) (2016) demonstrated the methodology: emotional fake → political demand to “restore order”.

The goal: to weaken support for Ukraine in the EU and fuel extreme political forces.

These information attacks were reinforced by “troll factories” on social networks, fake “experts,” and loyal politicians and journalists used as “relays” for Russian messages.

References:

1. Cambridge University. (2022, July 28). The failure of Russian propaganda: Key example is the myth of “Novorossiya”. University of Cambridge. <https://www.cam.ac.uk/stories/donbaspropaganda>
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3. EUvsDisinfo. (2024, July 17). MH17: Ten years of Russian lying and denying. European External Action Service. <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/mh17-ten-years-of-russian-lying-and-denying/>

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6. StopFake. (2023, June 29). «За людей нас не сприймають»: українка, яка розповсюджувала фейк про «розп'ятого хлопчика», тепер скаржиться на життя в РФ [“They don't see us as people”: The Ukrainian woman who spread the fake news about the “crucified boy” now complains about life in the RF]. <https://www.stopfake.org/uk/za-lyudej-nas-ne-spriymayut-ukrayinka-yaka-rozpovsyudzhvalo-fejk-pro-rozip-yatogo-hlopchika-teper-skarzhitsya-na-zhittya-v-rf/>

Reaction of the international community

The annexation of Crimea and the start of the war in Donbas sparked a wave of international condemnation. The UN General Assembly adopted [Resolution No. 68/262](#), confirming Ukraine’s territorial integrity and non-recognition of the annexation of Crimea. The US, EU, Canada, Australia, and several other states imposed the first sanctions against Russia, including asset freezes, visa restrictions, and trade restrictions.

At the same time, the reaction was limited: the West tried to combine political pressure with a search for compromises, resulting in the [Minsk agreements of 2014 and 2015](#). These agreements stopped large-scale hostilities, but did not eliminate the occupation entities in eastern Ukraine or restore control over Crimea. Russia used this “frozen conflict” as a tool to exert constant pressure on Ukraine, while continuing to militarise Crimea and increase its influence in the global information and political spheres. International sanctions have held back the Russian economy, but have not changed the Kremlin’s strategic intentions, as became clear during the full-scale invasion of 2022.



Fig. 26. The first Russian so-called “humanitarian convoy” bound for the Donbas, Voronezh, Russia, 12 August 2014.

Source: Insider, “First humanitarian convoy of the Russian Federation to Donbas in Voronezh”, 12 August 2014 / Wikimedia Commons. Licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0.

Full-scale invasion of 2022: ideology as a weapon

“Denazification”, “demilitarisation”, “fight against NATO” – pseudo-arguments

On 24 February 2022, the Russian Federation launched a [large-scale armed aggression against Ukraine](#), accompanied by propaganda rhetoric about “[denazification](#)”, “[demilitarisation](#)” and “protection from NATO”. These claims had no basis in reality and served only to justify the aggression both domestically and internationally. Kremlin propaganda portrayed the Ukrainian government as a “puppet of the West” and [Ukrainian society as “brainwashed by Nazi ideology”](#). The goal was obvious: to justify the occupation, nullify Ukrainian subjectivity, and present the war as a “liberation mission”.

Reference:

RAND Corporation. (2024). The denazify lie: Russia’s use of extremist narratives against Ukraine. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA3450-1.html

Destruction of Ukrainian cities, terror against the civilian population

Massive missile and bomb strikes on cities and villages accompanied the invasion. Mariupol, Bucha, Irpin, Chernihiv, Kharkiv, Mykolaiv and dozens of other settlements were subjected to barbaric shelling. Russian troops carried out mass killings ([the Bucha massacre](#)), torture, rape and abductions of civilians. The destruction of hospitals, schools, energy and transport infrastructure was part of a strategy of terror and coercion to force Ukraine to surrender. These actions are being investigated by the International Criminal Court and other international institutions as war crimes.

Examples of war crimes documented by international investigations:

- **Bucha (Kyiv region)** – [mass executions of civilians](#) documented by the UN, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch; more than 450 bodies with signs of torture and extrajudicial executions were found.
- **Mariupol** – [bombing of the Drama Theatre](#) on 16 March 2022, where, [according to Amnesty International](#), hundreds of people were killed, despite the building being clearly marked with the word “Children”.
- **Izium (Kharkiv region)** – [mass graves of over 440 people](#) discovered after de-occupation; a significant number of the bodies showed signs of torture.

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Torture and abuse of prisoners of war and civilians

In the occupied territories and in places where prisoners of war are held, the [Russian authorities systematically violate international humanitarian law](#). There have been reports of beatings, electric shock torture, mock executions, sexual violence and psychological pressure. International human rights organisations document the practice of holding civilian hostages, journalists, local government officials and volunteers in basements, detention centres and “filtration camps” without any judicial proceedings.

[The crime in the colony in Olenivka \(Donetsk region\)](#), where more than 50 Ukrainian prisoners of war died in July 2022, caused particular outrage. According to the Ukrainian side and several international organisations, [the tragedy was the result of a deliberate explosion organised by the Russian side to conceal the facts of torture and ill-treatment](#). Such actions are a gross violation of the Geneva Conventions and testify to a deliberate policy of terror against both combatants and the civilian population.

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Cultural looting: theft of museum, archive and library collections

The Russian occupation was accompanied by systematic looting of cultural heritage.

2014–2016 (Crimea and part of Donbas)



Fig. 27. Vokzalna Street in Bucha after the withdrawal of Russian forces, 6 April 2022.

Source: Ukrinform TV / Armed Forces of Ukraine, "Bucha main street, 2022-04-06 (0804)" / Wikimedia Commons. Licensed under CC BY 3.0.



Fig. 28. Oleksandr Matsiievskiy (1980–2022), a Ukrainian prisoner of war executed by Russian servicemen on 30 December 2022 after saying "Slava Ukraini!" ("Glory to Ukraine!").

Source: Security Service of Ukraine, "Oleksandr Matsiievskiy", 2022 / Wikimedia Commons. Licensed under CC BY 4.0.

- After the annexation of Crimea, [Rosarkhiv approved a plan to integrate Crimean archives into the State Archival Fund of the Russian Federation](#), which involved changing inventory numbers and rewriting metadata to conceal Ukrainian origin. From the outset, reports emerged of Ukrainian books and textbooks being confiscated and Ukrainian-language education being curtailed.
- Seizure and systematic removal of exhibits from museums in Simferopol, Sevastopol and Kerch.
- [Illegal archaeological excavations](#) in Chersonesos Taurica (UNESCO site).
- Export of [Scythian gold and ancient artefacts to Russia](#).
- Seizure and removal of collections from the Donetsk Regional Art Museum (paintings by Arkhip Kuindzhi and Ivan Aivazovsky).
- [Loss of unique ethnographic collections](#) from the Luhansk Regional Museum of Local History. **2017–2021 – [Institutional integration of the cultural heritage of the occupied territories into the Russian Federation](#)**
- Rewriting of Crimean museum catalogues under the jurisdiction of Russian institutions.
- Organisation of "temporary exhibitions" of Ukrainian artefacts in St. Petersburg, Moscow, and Krasnodar.

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2022–present – full-scale invasion

- [Robbery of the Melitopol Local History Museum](#) – removal of 198 Scythian gold artefacts.
- Theft of icons and church utensils from the 18th–19th centuries (more than 15,000 exhibits in total) from [the Shovkunenko Kherson Art Museum](#). Some of them were found in the Central Museum of Taurida in Simferopol.
- [Destruction and removal](#) of the collections of the Korolenko Mariupol City Library.
- [Seizure of approximately 360,000 archival documents from the Kherson region](#), which became part of more than 5 million documents of Ukrainian origin under Russian occupation.

[This policy](#) has a profound symbolic meaning: to deprive Ukraine of material evidence of its history, erase its cultural memory, and confirm the imperial myth of the “Russian origin” of Ukrainian culture.

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Fig. 29. Kherson Regional Museum after the looting of its collections by Russian forces, November 2022.

Source: Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine, “Kherson museum looted by Russian forces (12)” / Wikimedia Commons. Licensed under CC BY 4.0.

Historical occupation of memory

In parallel with the physical seizure of territories, Russia [launched a campaign to “rewrite” the public space of the occupied regions](#). Streets, squares, parks and cultural institutions were renamed en masse, removing any references to Ukrainian history and statehood. Monuments to Ukrainian heroes—from figures of the liberation struggle to classics of literature and science—were demolished and replaced with monuments glorifying figures from Russian imperial and Soviet history (Catherine II, Alexander Suvorov, Soviet marshals, etc.).

This policy was accompanied by an ideological “cleansing” of libraries and [school curricula](#). Authorities removed Ukrainian-language books, publications on Ukrainian history, and works that shaped national consciousness from public and educational institutions. Instead, they brought in Russian propaganda literature, textbooks, and manuals created in the spirit of a “single cultural and historical space.” In this way, [the occupying authorities seek to erase the collective memory of Ukrainian identity and replace it with the Russian imperial narrative](#), laying the groundwork for the long-term assimilation of the population.

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Examples of the imperial elimination of the cultural space in the occupied territories

Methods of elimination	Examples (2022–2024)	Essence of changes / Action	Goal
Renaming of place names	Heroes of the Heavenly Hundred Street → Soviet Street (Melitopol); Freedom Square → Lenin Square (Kherson, during the occupation)	Replacement of names associated with Ukrainian statehood and the struggle for independence with Soviet or imperial ones	Erase symbols of Ukrainian identity, restore Soviet-imperial symbolic space.
Demolition of monuments	Taras Shevchenko (Henichesk); Lesya Ukrainka (Nova Kakhovka); Soldiers of the Ukrainian People's Republic (Melitopol)	Physical destruction or removal of monuments to Ukrainian cultural figures, historical figures, and figures of the liberation struggle	Remove visual markers of Ukrainian history.
Erection of imperial and Soviet monuments	Catherine II (Sevastopol, temporarily occupied Crimea); Alexander Suvorov (Berdiansk); Marshal Zhukov (Melitopol)	Installation of pedestals to figures who personify Russian conquest and control	Legitimise occupation through “historical continuity”
Destruction of library collections	Removal of Ukrainian-language books from libraries in Melitopol, Kherson, and Berdiansk	Replacement of Ukrainian-language and pro-Ukrainian publications with Russian textbooks and propaganda literature (History of Russia, The Feat of the Soviet People)	Form a pro-Russian informational and cultural paradigm.
Ideological reprogramming of education	Introduction of Russian educational standards in the occupied territories: “History of Russia” instead of the history of Ukraine, removal of sections on Maidan and the current war	Rewriting of history and fostering of loyalty to the Russian Federation among young people	Long-term assimilation of future generations

Deportation of children, destruction of Ukrainian identity in the occupied territories

One of Russia’s most serious crimes was the mass deportation of Ukrainian children from the occupied territories. They were [moved deep into the Russian Federation, their personal data was changed, Russian families adopted them, and they were raised in a spirit of loyalty to Russia](#). At the same time, forced “Russification” was introduced in the occupied territories – Ukrainian school curricula were replaced, Ukrainian books were confiscated, the Ukrainian language was banned from official use, and control was established over the media and religious communities. These are elements of a genocidal policy aimed at destroying Ukrainian identity and transforming the occupied regions into an ‘integral part’ of Russia.

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The geopolitical consequences of Ukraine's defeat

What Russia's victory threatens the world with: a precedent of impunity, the dismantling of international law

Ukraine's defeat in the war with Russia would set a dangerous precedent for the 21st century: an aggressor that violated the UN Charter, the Geneva Conventions and the fundamental principles of international law would go unpunished and even gain territorial gains. This would effectively dismantle the international security system that has existed since the Second World War and undermine trust in institutions such as the UN, the OSCE, and the International Criminal Court. The world would receive a clear signal: the use of force to seize territory and destroy nations can be a successful strategy for states willing to violate international norms openly.



Fig. 30. Russian occupation propaganda in Kherson: a billboard proclaiming "Russia is here forever", July 2022.

Source: "Russian propaganda in Kherson", 18 July 2022 / Wikimedia Commons. Licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0.

Authoritarian revanchism: China, Iran, North Korea as potential allies

A Russian victory would give a powerful new impetus to authoritarian regimes that are already in confrontation with the democratic world. China could see this as a "green light" to forcefully resolve the "Taiwan issue". Iran, having received confirmation that forceful pressure works, could intensify its aggression in the Middle East. North Korea, which is already transferring weapons to Russia and involving its military in direct participation in the Russian-Ukrainian war on the side of the Russian Federation, would strengthen its status in the international isolation niche and could expand its provocations against South Korea and Japan. Such revanchism would finally unite these states into an informal bloc opposed to the West, creating a dangerous 'axis of authoritarianism.'

The revival of imperial policy in new formats

Russia's victory would open the way for the Kremlin to increase pressure on neighbouring countries, which Russian propaganda refers to as "historic lands" or "zones of privileged interests".

- *Moldova* (primarily Transnistria) could become the next target, with a "hybrid" takeover scenario already being worked out.
- *The Baltic states* – despite their NATO membership– face a growing risk of hybrid attacks, provocations at the borders and cyber interference, followed by attempts to test the Alliance's resolve.

- *Former socialist countries* (Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria) would be subject to increased information influence, support for pro-Russian political forces, and energy blackmail.
- *The Caucasus region* (Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan) would find itself under increasing military, political and economic pressure, particularly due to frozen conflicts, which the Kremlin could reactivate to increase its influence.
- *Central Asian states* (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan) would risk losing some of their foreign policy autonomy, becoming subject to blackmail in the areas of security, migration policy, and control over transport and energy corridors.

In its new forms, imperial policy would combine classic territorial revanchism with modern tools: cyberattacks, social media manipulation, financing radical groups, and using migration crises as a means of pressure.

Why is Ukraine's victory key to the security of Europe and the world?

Ukraine as an outpost of democracy

By standing up to one of the world's largest armies, Ukraine is proving that a democratic state can defend its sovereignty and values even under unequal conditions. Ukraine's victory will prove that democratic institutions, freedom of speech, and the rule of law are not weaknesses, but can form the basis for sustainable defence. In geopolitical terms, this will mean strengthening the eastern flank of democracies – from the Baltic to the Black Sea – and creating a “security belt” for the whole of Europe.

Changes in the geopolitical landscape in Europe and neighbouring regions

Ukraine's victory will strengthen the security architecture not only in Europe but also in the post-Soviet space.

- *Moldova* will have a chance to resolve the Transnistrian conflict and carry out reforms without the risk of military intervention by Moscow.
- *The Baltic states* will strengthen their security thanks to the confirmation of NATO's guarantees and the expansion of the Alliance's infrastructure in the region.
- *The Caucasus region countries* (Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan) will receive a powerful incentive to strengthen their sovereignty and reduce their dependence on Moscow as a security or economic partner.
- *Central Asian states* (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan) will be able to expand their foreign policy autonomy in the event of Russia's defeat and intensify cooperation with Turkey, China and the West without fear of Russian revanchism.
- *Former socialist countries* (Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria) will receive strategic confirmation of the correctness of their course towards energy and political independence from Russia, and Ukraine's victory will strengthen their position in the EU and NATO as active initiators of anti-Russian policy. This will create additional opportunities for regional security, joint defence projects and the development of transport and energy corridors that bypass Russian territory.

Global responsibility: combating historical falsification as a military doctrine

Russia uses distorted history as a tool to legitimise aggression: from the myth of a “single people” to denying Ukraine's right to statehood. Ukraine's victory will deal a serious blow to this doctrine, proving that historical manipulation cannot justify war. This will set an international precedent: falsifying history is part of hybrid aggression and, therefore, a threat the

international community must counter.



Fig. XX. The European Parliament in Strasbourg displaying Ukrainian and European Union flags in solidarity with Ukraine, March 2022.

Source: Claude Truong-Ngoc, "European Parliament in Strasbourg displaying the Ukrainian flag", 8 March 2022 / Wikimedia Commons.
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International solidarity and the role of cultural memory

Ukraine's victory is already taking shape thanks to unprecedented military, economic and humanitarian support from its allies. But for lasting peace, this solidarity must be consolidated through cultural memory. International recognition of the Holodomor as genocide, the recording and prosecution of war crimes, and the commemoration of the victims of Russian aggression will all serve as a foundation for preventing new wars. The culture of memory must become a common vaccine against the repetition of crimes, because forgetting always plays into the hands of the aggressor.

Conclusions:

The legacy of imperial continuity in Russian policy

From the Muscovite Tsardom to the USSR and the modern Russian Federation, there has been a continuous line of policy aimed at subjugating and destroying Ukrainian statehood, culture and language. The imperial model has changed forms – from military occupation and violent assimilation to information warfare and hybrid aggression – but has retained its unchanging goal: to deprive Ukrainians of their subjectivity and integrate them into a "single Russian space". The events of the 21st century, particularly the war of 2014–2025+, are not a new phenomenon but a logical continuation of this centuries-old doctrine.

A call for decolonising thinking about Eastern Europe

The history of Ukrainian-Russian relations requires a radical rethinking in both Ukraine and at the international level. For decades, Western historiography and politics have often accepted the Russian narrative as the "norm" and a legitimate lens for interpreting events. Decolonising thinking means rejecting this approach, giving oppressed peoples their voice back, and rethinking Eastern Europe as a region where Ukraine's fight for freedom is key to understanding modern geopolitics.

The scientific and ethical obligation in contrast to centuries of lies

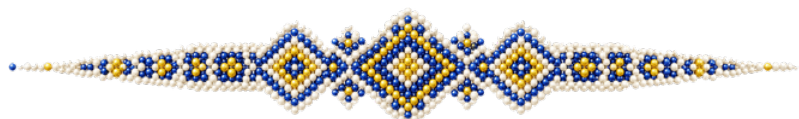
History is not only an academic discipline, but also a moral obligation – especially in times when lies are used as weapons. Within the Erasmus+ KA220-ADU "TRUST" project, the emphasis on truthful historical knowledge takes on special significance: working with the trauma of refugees and war victims is impossible without understanding the roots of this war and the centuries-old system of violence that caused it. In this context, art therapy becomes not only a method of psychological support, but also a tool for restoring historical memory, dignity and a sense of self-worth.

The role of artistic and educational tools in overcoming imperial legacies

The "TRUST" project shows that culture and art can powerfully decolonise thought. Working with refugees, displaced persons, and war victims through visual arts, theatre, music, and literary practices helps not only relieve psychological tension but also restore lost elements of identity. For example:

- Art workshops on recreating visual symbols of Ukrainian culture (embroidery, traditional ornaments) strengthen the connection with national heritage.
- Theatre and choreology trainings allow people to rethink historical traumas and give a voice back to those who were silenced.

In this way, the struggle for historical truth becomes part of psychological healing, and culture becomes not only a sphere of memory but also a living weapon against imperial lies.





Sequence 2-2

Principles: inclusivity, trauma sensitivity, ethics, reproducibility.

Principles and beneficiaries of the TRUST project: guiding principles (inclusivity, trauma sensitivity, ethics, reproducibility) and a mapping of target groups (internally displaced persons, children, people with disabilities, military families, aid professionals). These annexes allow protocols to be adapted to local contexts and specific populations.

The international “TRUST” project implements a series of art therapy practices for internally displaced persons, refugees and communities affected by war. All project activities are based on four key principles: inclusiveness, trauma sensitivity, ethics, and reproducibility.

Inclusiveness is an approach in which all participants in the process (regardless of age, gender, social status, ethnic origin, health, psychological-emotional state, or life circumstances) have equal access to resources, opportunities, and support.

In the context of art therapy classes, the principle of inclusiveness means:

1. Accessibility of classes for different categories of participants (children, people with disabilities, IDPs, veterans, older adults, etc.).
2. A safe space where everyone can freely express their feelings and experiences without judgment.
3. A variety of forms of expression (drawing, music, sculpting, movement practices) so that everyone can find a comfortable way to express themselves.
4. Taking into account individual characteristics (linguistic, cognitive, emotional).
5. Respect for the cultural identities and personal experiences of each participant [Osadchenko].

The principle of trauma sensitivity is an approach in psychological and art therapy practice that takes into account the consequences of psychological trauma and creates conditions in which participants feel as safe and supported as possible and do not experience re-traumatisation.

In practice, this means:

1. Recognising the impact of trauma – understanding that war, violence, loss and displacement leave deep scars on the human psyche.
2. A safe environment – creating an atmosphere where people know they will not be judged or forced to say or do anything they are not ready for.



3. Voluntary participation – participants decide for themselves how actively they engage in exercises or share their experiences.
4. Avoiding triggers – being mindful of topics that may evoke strong emotional reactions (e.g., sounds, images, memories of traumatic events).
5. Respect for personal boundaries – the right to say “stop”, refuse to participate in an exercise, leave or remain silent.
6. Focus on resources – instead of dwelling only on pain and loss, participants are helped to find inner strength, memories of joyous moments and support [Rozumovska; Trauma-informed].

: The ethical principles in psychology and art therapy are adherence to professional and moral standards when working with people, ensuring respect for their rights, dignity, and uniqueness.



In practice, this means:

1. Confidentiality – everything that a participant says or creates (drawings, stories, statements) is not disclosed to third parties without their consent.
2. Voluntary participation – participation in the session is not compulsory; individuals have the right to refuse specific exercises or statements.
3. Respect for the individual – regardless of age, gender, origin, social status, health or experience.
4. Non-violent interaction – the psychologist or art therapist does not pressure the participant, does not force them to take specific actions or give ‘correct’ answers.
5. Professional responsibility – the specialist acts within the limits of their competence, does not harm participants

and constantly improves their level of knowledge.

6. Care for the participant’s well-being – all methods and techniques are aimed at the benefit of the person, not the interests of third parties or institutions.

Ethics is the foundation of trust between the specialist and the participant, guaranteeing safety, dignity and honesty in all forms of interaction [Ethical].

The principle of reproducibility in art therapy sessions means the specialist's methods, techniques, and approaches can be repeated in other conditions and with different groups while achieving similar results.

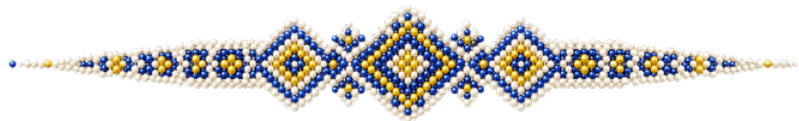
In practice, it involves:

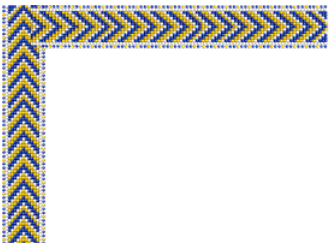
1. Standardisation of methods – using scientifically proven and tested approaches (e.g. neurographics, storytelling, working with metaphorical cards).
2. Documenting the process – describing the structure of the session, exercises, and algorithms so that other specialists can apply the same methods.
3. Training opportunities – training psychologists and art therapists who can replicate the sessions in other communities or countries.
4. Flexibility to context – exercises can be adapted (in terms of complexity, cultural symbols, age of participants) while retaining their therapeutic essence.
5. Reliability of results – the sessions consistently contribute to reducing anxiety and developing resourcefulness and self-expression, regardless of the specific group.



Reproducibility ensures the stable quality and effectiveness of art therapy, enabling methods to be disseminated, scaled up, and applied across different communities. “TRUST” practices are shared through the Erasmus+ network and become available to EU countries working with refugees [Art Therapy; Pasko].

The principles of inclusiveness, trauma sensitivity, ethics and reproducibility make the TRUST project’s art therapy sessions not only a tool for psychological support, but also a model for systemic change in approaches to psychosocial care in both Ukraine and EU countries.





Sequence 2-3

Beneficiaries of the TRUST Project: refugees, educators, mental health organisations, NGOs, policymakers



Beneficiaries of the TRUST project /

The guiding principles of the TRUST project (inclusivity, trauma sensitivity, ethics, reproducibility) and a mapping of target groups (internally displaced persons, children, persons with disabilities, military families, aid professionals) are presented.

These annexes allow protocols to be adapted to local contexts and specific populations.

Beneficiaries: refugees, educators, mental health organisations, NGOs, policymakers

In the context of the art therapy solidarity programme for war victims in Ukraine, implemented across Europe, the term “beneficiary” encompasses a wide range of individuals and groups who receive or may receive support through artistic, psychotherapeutic, and educational initiatives. Beneficiaries include not only individuals who have suffered from the

effects of war by losing their homes, loved ones, or physical or mental health, but also those who are actively involved in supporting other victims by participating in psychological assistance, social adaptation, rehabilitation and recovery programmes, becoming an essential link in the network of solidarity and mutual support. Thus, the circle of beneficiaries includes both conflict victims and mental health professionals working on the front lines.

1. Main vulnerable categories of the population

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) are one of the largest and most vulnerable categories of beneficiaries. They often face disrupted social ties, loss of property and jobs, and reduced access to basic services. Studies show that IDPs are at significantly higher risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression and anxiety disorders [Bogic].

Children who have witnessed violence, lost loved ones or been forced to leave their homes are particularly vulnerable to trauma. Children's minds are highly malleable, but also highly sensitive to stress [Pynoos]. Art therapy is one of the most effective approaches for working with children because it lets them express emotions nonverbally, creates a safe space, and strengthens their inner resources. In particular, UNICEF uses art therapy with children who have survived war to help them express emotions they cannot put into words [UNICEF].



Persons with disabilities, including those who have been injured in combat, face not only physical limitations or loss of functional abilities, but also a range of psychological challenges, including post-traumatic stress disorder, chronic anxiety, depression, and feelings of social isolation. It is also worth paying attention to mothers who are raising children with disabilities, as they face many challenges every day that require significant emotional commitment and constant care for others. Combined with the realities of war, this creates chronic stress and increased feelings of guilt, anxiety and exhaustion. In these conditions, it is essential to allow yourself to experience any emotions, even those that society sometimes considers "negative": fatigue, irritation, fear, or despair. In this context, art therapy can play a key role by providing a space for emotional expression, restoring inner resources, and helping form a new identity that helps overcome both individual and social barriers.

Psychological support for military families is no less critical than rehabilitation for veterans themselves. Within the family, trust in life, stability, and the ability to build a future are formed. Former military personnel often return to civilian life with traumatic experiences, leading to isolation, aggression, PTSD, and other mental disorders. Family members are interconnected, and the family's internal balance largely determines military personnel's ability to return to a peaceful life. Art therapy, as research shows, is an effective tool for reducing PTSD symptoms and improving the psychosocial functioning of veterans [Walker].

2. Mental health and social support professionals

Psychologists, psychotherapists, social workers, and volunteers are at the highest risk of emotional exhaustion due to their emotional involvement in dealing with other people's pain, and therefore experience professional burnout. To support their own mental health, art therapy can serve as a form of supervision or emotional relief [Figley].

Teachers working with refugee or internally displaced children play not only an educational role, but also an emotionally supportive one. Involving them in art therapy programmes can help prevent burnout and provide tools for integrating art therapy elements into the learning process.

3. Organisations and institutions

Community and charitable organisations are key implementers of humanitarian and art therapy initiatives. Their participation in the solidarity programme broadens beneficiary reach and strengthens local support. In Poltava, for example, the Caritas Poltava Charitable Foundation conducts art therapy for children and parents as part of a humanitarian protection project, creating an emotionally safe space for families who have survived the war. The

Resilience Centre, supported by the state programme “How are you?”, organises free workshops in clay therapy, painting, and decoupage for IDPs, children, parents, and ordinary city residents. In Rome, the Fondazione Di Liegro plays a similar role: through phototherapy, painting, theatre and music studios, and creative writing groups, the foundation supports people in mental health centres, allowing them to move from institutional isolation into participation in a lively space of solidarity.

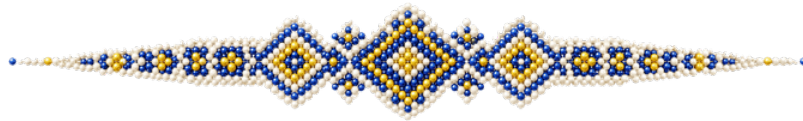


Schools, universities, museums, and galleries can be essential partners in implementing art therapy programmes. They not only provide space, but also professional capacity and the ability to scale art therapy interventions. They can also act as hubs for supervision, research, and professional training.

Thus, the beneficiaries of art therapy programmes for war victims in Ukraine are extensive. This includes both those directly affected, namely internally displaced persons, children, veterans, and persons with disabilities, as well as those who work daily to overcome the consequences of war: psychologists, educators, social workers, volunteers, community and charitable organisations. The importance of comprehensive coverage is underscored by the need to create a systematic, sustainable impact on mental health in humanitarian crises.

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Sequence 2.4

The applications of art therapy in Ukraine

In Ukraine, art therapy is developing rapidly and becoming more professionalised. In the context of prolonged war, social tension and growing psychological stress on the population, art therapy is becoming increasingly popular. Many people, including children, adults, military personnel and displaced persons, face severe stress, trauma and a loss of security, which are often difficult to express verbally. Art therapy offers an environmentally friendly way to express pain, fear, or anxiety through creative forms such as drawing, music, or working with plastic materials. The creative process becomes an essential tool for restoring a sense of control and self-identity, which is particularly valuable in conditions of instability and external threats.

Scientific and practical research closely examines experience gained in Ukraine in using art therapy in wartime conditions. The primary focus is evaluating the effectiveness of individual techniques, the specifics of their implementation in crises, and the results of psycho-emotional support for different population groups [8].

Children who have survived war often depict dark colours, missiles and explosions in their drawings.



Through art therapy, they gradually transition to lighter shades, restore their trust in the world, and learn to verbalise their emotions. For example, the Children's Voice Foundation programme employs serial drawing. This "free" drawing exercise involves the child drawing over 10 sessions, allowing the dynamics of their inner state to be traced [12, 16, 23].

The "Safe Space" programme was developed by psychologists at the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy Mental Health Centre for preschool and school-age children, taking into account internationally recognised scientific recommendations and practical experience working with children, their parents and teachers. It is particularly relevant for children who have been affected by war, forced displacement, loss of loved ones, shelling or other crises. The programme uses a wide range of art therapy techniques, such as drawing emotions, creating a collage called "My

Future", the "My Safe Space" technique, fairy tale therapy with illustrations of one's own story, working with colour as a means of identifying emotional states, and creating masks, mandalas, and associative images. The programme is implemented in collaboration with psychologists, educators, and social workers. It is adaptive and universal, enabling its implementation in both school and extracurricular settings [9].

In addition to visual methods, a physical-sensory approach is also essential. Research by Marina Bril and Daphne Maksimova (2023) demonstrates the successful integration of Hibuki therapy with art therapy techniques in working with

children from various inclusive categories. Using the Hibuki plush dog toy to “contain” emotions, combined with drawing, collage-making, and fairy-tale therapy, has yielded significant positive results. These methods have contributed to a reduction in anxiety, fear and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD); improved communication skills and social interaction; the formation of a sense of security and support; and the development of emotional regulation skills.

The study was conducted in May–July 2023 in Ukraine among schoolchildren of various inclusive categories, including children with special educational needs. The sessions were conducted in groups and combined Hibuki therapy with creative techniques such as drawing, collage, and fairy-tale treatment. Effectiveness was assessed through observations, surveys of participants and their parents, and analysis of the children's emotional state.

The study was conducted during the war with a focus on helping children who are internally displaced persons (IDPs) or live in war zones. The results show a significant improvement in the psycho-emotional state of children, in particular a reduction in anxiety, fear and PTSD symptoms. Hibuki, a soft toy with sad eyes, helped children transfer their emotions to it, making it easier for them to express their feelings. Group sessions strengthened social connections, reduced feelings of isolation, and created an atmosphere of trust and security.



The techniques proved effective for children with different needs, including both neurotypical children and those with autism spectrum disorders or other special needs. Classes using Hibuki and creative approaches, such as creating an image of a “safe place”, allowed children to reflect on their traumatic experiences and to form positive narratives non-verbally. The children projected their fears onto a toy, which helped them feel like “protectors” and reduced their feelings of helplessness. Creative tasks, such as drawing or making collages, stimulated sensory experiences, calmed the nervous system, and promoted emotional regulation.

In addition, these techniques helped to strengthen social interaction, which is especially important for IDP children who have lost connections due to displacement. Working with fairy tales enabled them to create their own stories, which contributed to post-traumatic growth and restored hope [21,

38].

Books by contemporary psychologists and art therapists can significantly improve the psychological and emotional state of children who have experienced war trauma. Among such publications are works by K. Surinon, “An Unusual Situation”; [V. Nazarevych, “Medic Bear”, “I Will Be with You”, “Fear Balls and the Magic Forest, or How the Hedgehog Pops the Fear Balls”](#); and books by OksaNich (Antonina Oksanych), “Extraordinary Stories about Children”. These works are structured as narrative psychotherapeutic stories and feature characters such as Parrot, Bear, and Hedgehog, who, following their own paths, overcome despair, fear, and anxiety, develop strategies for addressing them, and gain the ability to enjoy life. Each story is filled with vivid metaphorical images that represent ways to achieve joy and inner healing. By reading these books with the child and attending to the illustrations, the specialist creates a therapeutic space in which the child can imagine themselves as the hero, experiencing a similar journey of overcoming fears and anxieties. This approach promotes the acquisition of new emotional and behavioural strategies.

An equally important part of bibliotherapy is the child's creative process after reading. This can be a drawing, collage, or object made from plastic materials. A handmade visual product makes healing more tangible and reinforces positive changes, helping the child integrate new experiences into their daily life [26].

In today's digital environment, new forms of self-expression are becoming increasingly important. An innovative and engaging approach to capturing teenagers' attention is using memes as a contemporary medium for art therapy. This

method helps to overcome the collective trauma of war. The author emphasises the importance of memes in the process of psycho-emotional recovery: through creativity and humour, they help reduce anxiety and strengthen solidarity among those who have experienced trauma.

Memes are a symbolic, accessible way to express emotions, leveraging modern digital technologies. They create a safe therapeutic space in the media environment where people can express their experiences through humour. Thanks to their simplicity and relevance, memes not only help individuals cope with stress but also restore collective support. This is especially important during war and social instability.

Thus, media art therapy using memes is an effective tool for psychological support in difficult life circumstances, strengthening unity and promoting emotional healing [14].

In addition to innovative digital practices, classic art therapy approaches remain indispensable in treating deep psychological trauma, such as PTSD. Art therapy is gaining status as a promising method of intervention in cases of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) caused by combat, providing a tool for expression and psychological healing that complements traditional therapeutic approaches. Scientific research shows its effectiveness in helping people express and process emotions related to traumatic experiences [11].

Today, art therapy is actively integrated into education, medicine, social services and rehabilitation, expanding its interdisciplinary potential. Staff from the Institute of Problems of Contemporary Art of the National Academy of Arts of Ukraine and doctors at the National Military Medical Clinical Centre “Main military clinical hospital” collaborated to create an art therapy rehabilitation programme and prepare an analytical note. The document is based on a year of experience implementing the “Drawing with a Soldier” project, which became part of the overall “Art Therapy” initiative [22, 27]. As of May 2024, the program had held nine plein air events, with more than 40 soldiers participating.

The results showed that the beauty of art can promote health recovery and shape perceptions of the world, and that the process of drawing can improve one’s mood on its own. When a person derives pleasure from their work, irritability and inner tension disappear, and an optimistic outlook on life emerges.

In this regard, art therapy plays an essential and unique role in externalising complex emotions, as it provides an opportunity to represent visually and symbolically communicate emotions that are difficult or even impossible to express verbally. This is especially relevant for individuals with severe emotional barriers or dissociative symptoms. By creating artistic images, the patient gains a sense of control and subjective security, as well as an opportunity to construct new meaning from traumatic experiences. This method promotes not only emotional recovery but also neuropsychological rehabilitation: it restores the activity of the areas of the brain responsible for visual and sensory memory, which often remain “blocked” after traumatic events [15].



T. Rozumovska explores the significance of art therapy in the modern context, paying particular attention to its role in helping people who have experienced the effects of wars or military conflicts and have post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In her analysis, the researcher emphasises that art therapy should be considered an essential element of comprehensive treatment, as it can not only reduce symptoms but also stimulate processes of personal reconstruction. This approach enables the development of more adaptive behavioural patterns while supporting the client’s identity and preserving their social functioning [28].

Art therapy effectively reduces emotional stress, helps cope with intrusive memories, contributes to the stabilisation of the psycho-emotional state, increases self-esteem, and facilitates social adaptation. In Ukraine, following the introduction of regulatory documents in accordance with the

Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 307 dated March 18, 2024, “On some issues of mental, sports, physical,

and psychological rehabilitation and professional adaptation of war veterans, their family members and specific other categories of persons”, such activities have become an integral part of comprehensive support for combatants. For this reason, the “Art Therapy” project for war veterans was expanded to include painting, pottery techniques, clay modelling, wood carving, and metalwork. Working with wrought-iron products involved first sketching on paper, then executing the work directly in the forge near the furnace. This approach significantly complicated the creative process while simultaneously opening broader opportunities for self-expression and individual approach [27].

Clay therapy has proven to be a highly effective method of helping veterans and civilians who have suffered loss, stress or combat. It offers a tactile approach to working with trauma that calms the nervous system; provides access to deep emotions without the need to verbalise them; supports internal dialogue and the integration of traumatic experiences; and fosters the creation of new meanings and hope.

The group format of such classes promotes social integration and mutual support, which is essential for overcoming the consequences of war [10].

A study conducted by the [Polissya Hub for Recovery and Art Therapy](#) analysed the effectiveness of [clay therapy in the rehabilitation of war victims](#) – veterans and civilians. This method, which is based on tactile work with clay as a means of processing traumatic experiences, has been shown to reduce symptoms of post-traumatic stress, anxiety, and physical distress. Participants also reported increased self-esteem and emotional openness. Group sessions promoted social cohesion and provided a space for collective healing.

Working with clay helps reduce stress, anxiety, and tension, allowing participants to convey their inner experiences by creating clay figures. This process activates internal dialogue, helps resolve conflicts and encourages deep reflection. Clay therapy also helps awaken so-called genetic memory, allowing participants to delve into a state of recovery and self-discovery, which significantly reduces the symptoms of PTSD.

Group sessions create space for community building, bringing together veterans, their loved ones, and internally displaced persons. This ensures inclusivity and encourages mutual support. This type of therapy teaches people to live in the present moment, strengthens their connection with themselves and their surroundings, and helps them overcome their fear of change, contributing to the restoration of their vital energy.

Tactile interaction with clay calms the nervous system and promotes emotional relief. Shaping figures allows you to express complex feelings, such as fear and grief, silently, which is especially important for people with traumatic experiences. The clay objects created reflect a person’s inner world, helping them comprehend and transform it. This method is universal and suitable for children and adults, as well as individuals with special needs [20, 32].

In addition to visual and plastic techniques, sensory and dynamic methods play an essential role in art therapy. Music, rhythm and movement are used in art therapy to achieve deep psychological relaxation, as these elements influence a person’s subconscious perception. Music can activate the brain’s emotional centres, awakening memories, images, and feelings that are difficult or even impossible to express in words. The rhythmic structures inherent in both music and dance create a sense of stability, security and order. This is especially important for people who have experienced chaotic, traumatic events or losses. In 2024, a facility for the recovery and rehabilitation of defenders, called “MriyaDія,” began operating on the premises of the [Ivano-Frankivsk Regional Clinical Hospital](#). There, concerts for defenders were performed by the bands [“Chorea Kozacky”](#), [“Zhadan i Sobaky”](#), [“Ocheretiany Kit”](#), [“Kozak System”](#), the Military Orchestra of the 50th Regiment of the National Guard named after Colonel Semen Vysochan, [Pavlo Virsky Ukrainian National Folk Dance Ensemble](#), and others [34].

The combination of art therapy sessions with nature therapy (eco-art therapy or land art therapy) creates a powerful synergistic effect, especially for people with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This comprehensive approach combines nature’s healing properties with art’s expressive and transformative mechanisms. Research shows that nature therapy has a significant positive effect on a person’s emotional state, helping to reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety. Interacting with nature relieves mental tension and helps individuals restore inner harmony. In natural environments, people can relax, set aside social roles and constraints, and connect with nature, allowing them to “reboot”



and return to everyday life with renewed energy and inner peace. In particular, since April 2023, [Metta NGO](#) has partnered with other organisations, including [Nomad. Live Tourist Club](#), [FORZA NGO](#), and international partners have regularly organised hikes. These are held both weekly and as long-term events specifically designed for military personnel, veterans, family members of the deceased, and volunteers [17, 18, 25].



One type of eco-art therapy is walk-and-talk therapy. A walk-and-talk excursion in art therapy is grounded in an intermodal approach that alternates sensory modalities during treatment. Walking in the fresh air can be an effective therapeutic tool for overcoming psychological trauma, grief, stress, neurotic disorders and psychosomatic disorders.

Therapeutic walks are highly beneficial for veterinarians because they help them remain present and focus on the present moment. Mindful walking can be particularly effective for this purpose.

Another aspect of art therapy is its ability to support various dimensions of psychological integrity. For many individuals who have experienced trauma, recovery requires complex work to integrate their inner world and social connections. Art therapy can promote the restoration of cognitive, interpersonal, functional, and personal continuity. It operates on a symbolic level, helping process feelings and experiences and promoting harmony among nonverbal

aspects of experience, which can be very difficult to master through traditional verbal psychotherapy [39].



Restoring a sense of *continuity* is fundamental to an individual's harmonious functioning.

Cognitive *continuity* is a person's ability to rationally perceive life processes, understand the logical meaning of events, and predict their development. When this coherent awareness is lost, for example, when an individual is unable to trace the cause-and-effect relationships between phenomena or comprehend the meaning of what is happening, increased anxiety and doubts about one's own mental stability arise. Traumatic situations cause profound cognitive and emotional dissonance, leading to chaos in a person's thinking and behaviour.

Through serial collages, storytelling, and metaphors [3, 5], people can reorder events, establish cause-and-effect relationships, and rethink their experiences. This process reduces anxiety, restores control over one's reality, and builds inner support. People come to understand better what happened to them, why they reacted as they did, and how they can act in the future.



Interpersonal *continuity* is a person's ability to maintain or restore critical social ties with loved ones, friends, colleagues and acquaintances. In the event of forced displacement, these ties are often broken or become unstable, which intensifies feelings of isolation, loneliness and disorientation. Group art therapy is an effective tool for maintaining and restoring interpersonal continuity. It offers a safe space where participants can interact through creative activities, share emotions and life experiences, and feel supported and accepted by others. These practices help create new social ties, develop empathy, and improve communication skills [4, 29].

Functional *continuity* is a person's ability to maintain daily activities that provide a sense of self-fulfilment and integration into social life. For internally displaced persons, disruption of this continuity often manifests as job loss, changes in their usual rhythm of life, deprivation of daily routines, and an inability to engage in activities that please them. This can lead to lower self-esteem, loss of motivation, and feelings of social isolation or "uselessness". Art therapy is an essential tool for restoring functional continuity because it enables individuals to produce tangible outcomes from their activities. By creating art objects (drawings, clay crafts, chocolate candies, advent calendars, or embroidery), a person receives a visible, tangible result of their labour. This restores a sense of activity, effectiveness and creativity. Such creative activities stimulate a feeling of success and control and help people regain role identity through the realisation that "I can", "I create", and "I am useful". By participating in these processes, people can return to an active life position and

restore emotional and social balance [19, 36].



Personal *continuity* is a key aspect of self-perception, providing a sense of stability and integrity of one's identity. This continuity forms throughout life, helping a person maintain an image of their own "I" that unites their values, characteristics, abilities, and inner core. A person needs to remain true to themselves despite changes in external circumstances, losses or crises. However, in situations of forced displacement, people often experience a sense of loss, as if their past life and old sense of self have been left behind. This can lead to profound disorientation, inner chaos and increased anxiety. Art therapy techniques help maintain personal integrity and strengthen identity. Self-awareness and self-expression exercises play an essential role in this process. Among the most effective practices is "My Own Coat of Arms", in which a person depicts their strengths, life principles, dreams, achievements, and sources of support. This exercise helps to realise that identity remains unchanged even in difficult external conditions.



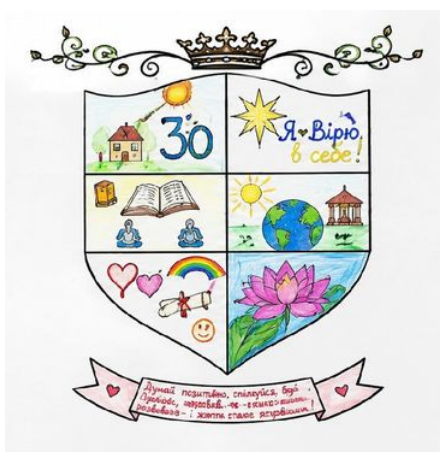
"Self-portrait in colours": a technique aimed at exploring self-perception. Through colour, a person conveys their inner state and dominant emotions and also indicates what has remained constant and what has changed. "Collage of my life": creating a collage using a given sequence of past-present-future. This visual method helps you connect with the past and integrate it into your present experience. These methods help preserve identity even in new living conditions, accept changes that have already occurred, and form new points of reference in personal experience. By restoring a sense of integrity, a person reduces anxiety and strengthens the belief: "I exist, I am real" [31].

Thanks to this model, mental health specialists at the National University "Yuri Kondratyuk Poltava Polytechnic" actively provide support to crisis groups of the population affected by the war. This work is carried out within the framework of the international TRUST project, which aims to promote resilience, improve psychological well-being, and reintegrate children, young people, and adults who have experienced trauma into society [40].

Mental health specialists at the university conduct and continue to organise systematic art therapy sessions to support various population groups. For children attending the University's Education and Care Centre, these sessions help reduce anxiety, develop emotional regulation skills, strengthen feelings of security, and foster a positive self-image. The process involves drawing, kinetic sand, fairy tale therapy, and working with symbols to help children gently process their experiences related to the war.

For Ukrainian youth pursuing higher education under challenging circumstances, art therapy focuses on managing stress and emotional burnout, as well as adapting to the challenges of study and life amid uncertainty. Through art therapy, young people restore their inner resources, develop mutual support within groups, and increase their awareness by mastering self-regulation techniques.

Art therapy workshops for elderly internally displaced persons aim to reduce feelings of loneliness and restore lost social ties. In a safe, supportive environment, participants can share their experiences, reestablish a sense of belonging in the community, and form new relationships.



These meetings help them find new meaning in life, discover hidden resources, and build stability amid uncertainty. Through creative and art therapy exercises, shared conversations, and group activities, older people feel needed, heard, and capable of influencing their own future again [40].



All project participants gradually restore cognitive integrity through structuring and organising events; interpersonal integration by improving communication skills and strengthening relationships; functional stability through involvement in activities; and personal integrity by working on their self-image. Thus, the art therapy model described above is an effective, flexible, and accessible way to work with people who have lost their homes. Many internally displaced persons (IDPs) report psychological trauma caused by the loss of their homes and a significant deterioration in their living conditions, which contrast sharply with their previous comfortable lifestyle. In this context, it is essential to create conditions for their adaptation, helping them focus on the potentially positive aspects of this new stage in their lives. This may include recognising new achievements, developing valuable character traits, taking advantage of new opportunities, establishing new social

contacts and deep friendships [13].

One powerful trend in contemporary art therapy, particularly relevant in Ukraine in 2025, is the use of traditional Ukrainian art techniques. They combine cultural code, symbolism and meditateness, which makes them highly effective

for relieving stress, overcoming anxiety and working with the effects of trauma (PTSD). The most popular and effective traditional Ukrainian techniques actively used in art therapy include:

1. **Embroidery.** This process not only builds fine motor skills but also helps individuals enter a meditative state. Traditional ornaments serve as symbols that can help express a person's inner world.
2. **Pysanka.** Painting pysanky is a therapeutic activity that combines concentration, creativity and symbolism. While creating a pysanka, a person reflects on their feelings, thoughts, and desires [7].
3. **Motanka dolls.** This unique craft not only has cultural significance but also helps to process emotional trauma. Creating a doll serves as self-expression and protection [33].
4. **Petrykivka painting.** This bright, decorative art style supports emotional well-being through work with colour and form and also develops imagination [24].



These techniques serve as an essential bridge between modern art therapy and Ukraine's rich cultural heritage, enabling the integration of traditions with individuals' needs.

Experiencing loss or grief is a profoundly personal and, at the same time, existential process that touches on the most sensitive aspects of our identity. Despite its difficulty, this path always opens up opportunities for personal and spiritual growth. A person undergoes a crisis, experiences it, and emerges transformed.

This is especially true for the families of fallen soldiers, who face the pain of loss not only on a personal level but also on the level of values and deep symbolic meanings. Ambivalent emotions, unresolved relationships, feelings of injustice, and profound inner emptiness often characterise their everyday life.

In these situations, there is room for the subtle, attentive work of an art therapist. Through a creative approach and metaphors, relatives of the deceased can reflect more deeply on their personal narratives and help form new meanings. Collage techniques serve as an effective tool for identifying, structuring, and reconstructing new meanings and senses.

Practical work with clients experiencing loss using art therapy methods, particularly collage techniques, has yielded positive results. It helps clients identify their own coping strategies and navigate the grieving process and the consequences of loss [26].

The art therapy project "Ukrainian Quilt of Memory" became an important source of emotional support and recovery for Ukrainian families who were forced to move due to the war. The project's central concept was to use textile collage and quilting techniques for creative self-expression, reflection on experiences, and strengthening a sense of belonging to a community.

The initiative was implemented in close cooperation with the [Ukrainian HAM Centre](#), located in Cambridge, under the leadership of Ukrainian designer Yulia Palianytsia. Over four workshops, more than 40 Ukrainians participated in creating a joint quilt composition. Each element of the quilt became a symbolic expression of personal stories of displacement, loss,



hope and adaptation. Working with textiles provided a sense of “grounding” and promoted emotional relaxation. The use of colours, patterns, and composition enabled participants to work through complex emotions in a creative, safe environment while fostering deeper connections and mutual support within the community [35].

Today, organisations in Ukraine systematically promote, develop, and implement art therapy, recognising it as an effective method of psychological assistance and rehabilitation. One leader in this field is the All-Ukrainian [NGO “Art Therapy Association”](#). This structure brings together specialists from various fields: psychologists, psychotherapists, art therapists, educators, art historians, social workers, and volunteers. They work with a wide variety of population groups, from children and adolescents to military personnel and victims of war.

The association not only organises educational programmes, training courses, seminars, and conferences, but also actively promotes scientific research in art therapy. Its activities include developing methodological materials and disseminating best practices. The primary focus is on integrating art therapy into psychological support services across education, medicine, social services, and trauma counselling. Thanks to such initiatives, art therapy in Ukraine is gaining professional recognition and becoming increasingly accessible to a broader audience. It is particularly relevant to addressing the psychological consequences of war, loss, internal displacement, and other crises.

Ukrainian specialists are actively participating in international art therapy projects and training courses, collaborating with European professional associations to learn from leading global practitioners.

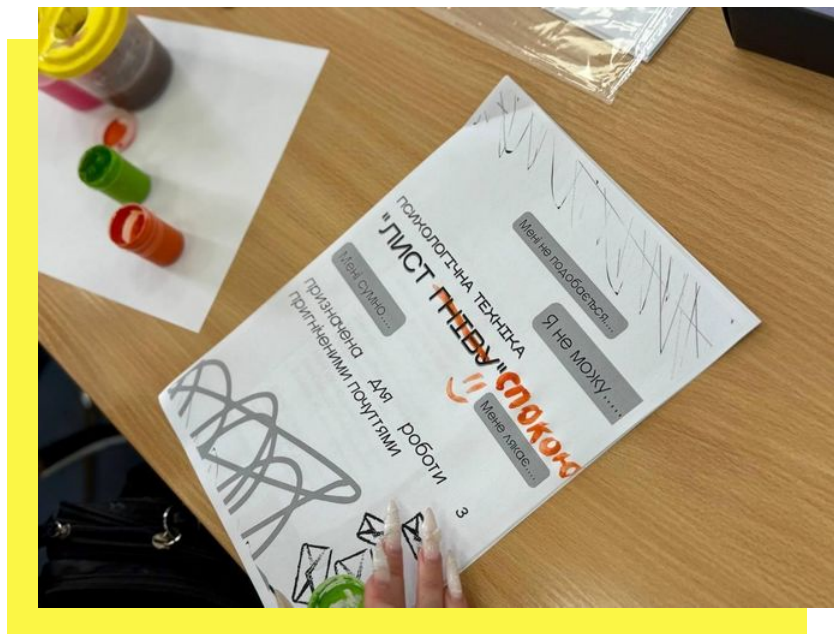
In 2024, within the framework of the [“Art Therapy for Women...” project by the International Ukrainian Charity Foundation “Children of War”](#), a report was presented on the sessions conducted for women and mothers who have lost their husbands in the war or have relatives currently serving on the front lines. The report emphasises that the proposed approach helps reduce anxiety and foster the inner strength to begin a new phase in life. During the classes, metaphorical associative cards titled “Unbreakable in Spirit” and water-painting techniques were used. These methods proved effective for processing emotional experiences, enabling participants to transform their inner states and draw on resources to overcome crises. Thus, the experience demonstrates the importance of a specialised therapeutic approach focused on women with war trauma who belong to the category of war victims [6]. Another example is the Erasmus+ KA220-ADU TRUST art therapy project titled “Trauma of refugees in Europe: An approach through art therapy as a solidarity program for Ukraine war victims”. It includes workshops, therapeutic sessions and the organisation of regular support groups for children, military personnel and displaced persons affected by the war. The main goal of these activities is to help participants express their pain, find inner resources and rethink the traumatic events they have experienced [37].



National University “Yuri Kondratyuk Poltava Polytechnic” presented its experience in implementing art therapy practices at the [University Community Forum as part of the All-Ukrainian mental health programme “How are you?”](#), initiated by the First Lady of Ukraine, Olena Zelenska. Participants highly appreciated the professionalism of the university’s specialists, the innovative art therapy methods used, the systematic approach to working with war victims, and the effectiveness of intergenerational programmes that harmoniously combine psychological support, creativity, and social adaptation [30].

Thus, art therapy is gradually establishing itself not only as an auxiliary approach, but also as a scientifically based psychotherapeutic method, particularly effective in working with psychological trauma. In the context of the war in Ukraine, it has become an essential element of humanitarian and psychosocial support. This practice covers a wide

range of tasks: from stabilising emotional states to restoring identity and rebuilding social connections.



In conclusion, it should be noted that, in general, the effectiveness of art therapy in military and post-war environments is primarily determined by the ability to take into account the unique aspects of individual traumatic experiences, the adaptability of the methods used, and the professional competence of specialists, which requires an ethical approach and conscious promotion of the process of psychological support for those affected by war.

In war and post-war contexts, implementing art therapy programmes faces several significant obstacles that affect the effectiveness and accessibility of this form of psychological assistance. First and foremost, the issue of rapid access to therapeutic services remains critical, especially in frontline areas, temporarily occupied territories, places of concentrated residence for internally displaced persons, and conditions of unstable security. This applies

primarily to children, people with disabilities, older people and women who may face limited mobility or difficult social circumstances.

A promising way to overcome barriers to access to art therapy is to develop high-quality digital content that victims can use independently and with specialist support during remote sessions. This involves creating online platforms, mobile applications, interactive videos, and instructions for art therapy exercises adapted to different age groups and emotional states.

These resources are indispensable for supporting individuals in remote areas or those unable to attend in-person classes. They also help to expand the audience, familiarise users with art therapy techniques in advance, and sometimes prevent secondary traumatising. This allows people to work with their emotions at a time that suits them.

At the same time, qualified psychologists, art therapists, and methodologists must develop such content exclusively, in strict compliance with ethical and methodological standards. In this regard, creating open educational programmes for specialists working with digital art therapy tools will help raise the overall level of professional training and ensure a more sustainable system of psychosocial support in the country.

Art therapy is already demonstrating not only therapeutic but also socially consolidating potential, forming a new culture of psychological support in Ukraine. In the future, it is essential to continue integrating art therapy approaches into healthcare, education, and social protection systems, thereby fostering a stable psychosocial environment in which everyone affected by the war can find support, recovery, and a new foothold.

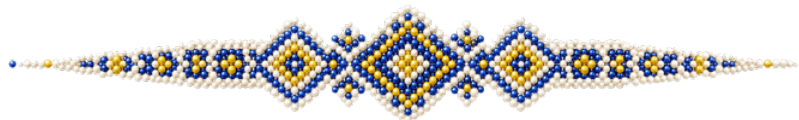
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SEQUENCE 3

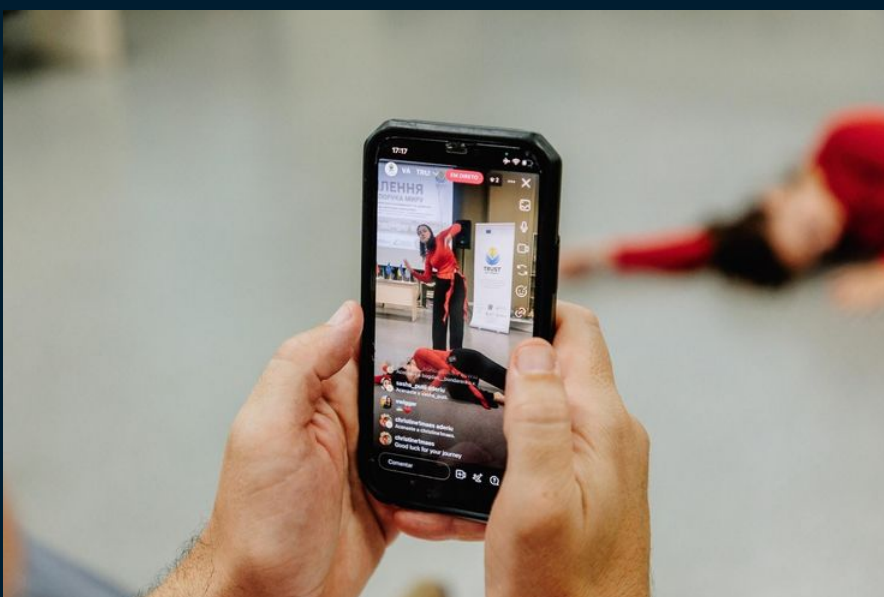
The text presents a forward-looking vision of art therapy in Europe, shaped by digital transformation, AI integration, and evolving public policies. Tele-art therapy, hybrid models, virtual reality, and digital platforms expand access to care and enrich creative modalities, while raising essential ethical considerations.

In educational systems, art therapy is becoming a key tool for emotional regulation, inclusion of neurodivergent students, and trauma processing, positioning schools as genuine mental-health ecosystems. In clinical settings, art therapy is expanding within hospitals, community mental-health services, and preventive programmes, particularly for chronic illnesses and neurodegenerative conditions. The text emphasises the need for European harmonisation of training pathways, unified professional standards, and sustainable funding. It concludes that art therapy, supported by neuroscience and technological innovation, is poised to become a central component of mental-health care in the twenty-first century.

*Towards an
Enhanced
European Art
Therapy: Digital
Innovations,
Educational
Frameworks, and
Clinical Practices*



Sequence 3.1. Digital Transformation and Artificial Intelligence in Art Therapy



The digital transformation of mental health services is reshaping contemporary art therapy practices across Europe. Tele-art therapy has emerged as a crucial modality for individuals who cannot attend in-person sessions due to

geographical, mobility, or health-related constraints. Hybrid models that combine studio-based work, synchronous and asynchronous online platforms, secure cloud-based storage of artworks, and interactive digital environments offer unprecedented flexibility while maintaining therapeutic integrity. These approaches, however, require clinicians to develop robust digital literacy and to master the ethical use of online modalities.

Digital media and immersive virtual environments are expanding the creative and therapeutic possibilities available to clients. Virtual reality (VR) enables the construction of symbolic, controlled spaces that support trauma processing, identity exploration, graded exposure to anxiety-provoking stimuli, and collaborative creative projects. Digital tools also enhance visual journaling, interactive storytelling, and dynamic feedback processes, which can be particularly engaging for children, adolescents, and neurodivergent individuals.

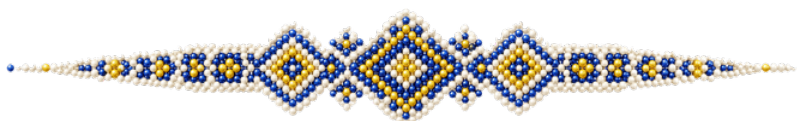
Artificial intelligence is increasingly integrated as a complementary resource within art therapy. Emerging applications include automated pattern recognition in artworks—such as colour use, line quality, or compositional features—linked to affective states; AI-generated adaptive creative prompts; data-driven monitoring of therapeutic progress; and early identification of psychological distress. While AI does not replace clinical interpretation, it can enrich therapeutic decision-making, especially in high-demand or resource-limited contexts.

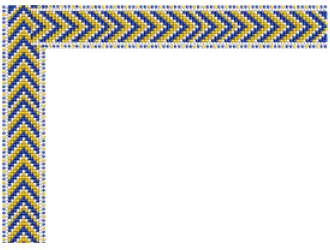


The digital evolution of art therapy presents both opportunities and risks. Expanded access for underserved populations, enhanced clinical monitoring, and integration within broader digital mental health ecosystems represent significant advances. Conversely, concerns persist regarding data privacy and compliance with European regulations, overreliance on digital tools at the expense of relational depth, unequal access to technology, and potential emotional dysregulation when containment strategies are insufficient. Future practice will require carefully designed ethical guidelines and rigorous clinical supervision to balance innovation with safety.

Integrating digital tools and AI also requires updated ethical and regulatory frameworks. Key considerations include informed consent tailored to digital environments, secure management of digital artworks, transparency

regarding AI use, protection of minors and vulnerable individuals, and cultural-linguistic sensitivity in digital interventions. Professional organisations and European regulatory bodies are beginning to develop standards to support responsible digital art therapy.





Sequence 3.2 Art Therapy in Educational Systems

Across Europe, educational institutions are increasingly recognised as pivotal environments for early mental health intervention. Art therapy is gaining prominence within schools as a complementary modality that supports emotional development, social competence, trauma recovery, and inclusive learning. As educational systems evolve toward holistic mental health ecosystems, art therapy supports prevention, resilience-building, and psychological well-being.

Art therapy fosters emotional regulation through sensorimotor engagement, symbolic expression, reflective processes, and the development of self-soothing strategies. Regular, structured sessions within school settings can strengthen long-term resilience and enhance adaptive capacities in children and adolescents.

Trauma-informed practices are becoming more prevalent in European schools, and art therapy plays a central role in this shift. Creative methods provide safe relational spaces, somatic grounding techniques, and group-based activities that reinforce belonging and social cohesion—particularly for refugee and migrant students or those exposed to adverse experiences.

Educational art therapy also supports neurodivergent learners, including students with autism spectrum disorder, ADHD, learning disabilities, language impairments, or emotional and behavioural difficulties. It contributes to individualised education plans and promotes equitable access to emotional support. Digital platforms further expand participation for students with physical or communication challenges.

Group-based art therapy interventions enhance cooperation, empathy, conflict resolution, and peer relationships. In the aftermath of the pandemic, these approaches have become essential for rebuilding social engagement and strengthening community ties among young people.

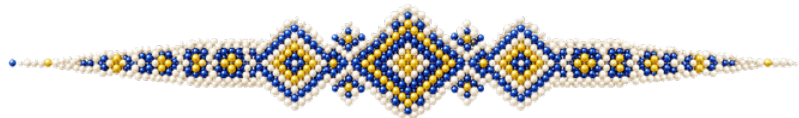
Digital tools, such as tablets, online creative platforms, VR environments, and AI-assisted emotional detection, are increasingly integrated into school-based art therapy. While these technologies improve accessibility and engagement, they require strong ethical oversight, digital literacy, and protective protocols.

Future school-based art therapy programmes must address key ethical considerations, including confidentiality for minors, cultural and linguistic sensitivity, secure management of digital artworks, and prevention of bias in AI-supported tools. Policymakers should fund art therapy positions, standardise professional training, integrate art therapy into school



mental health frameworks, and support research on its effectiveness.

Art therapy is poised to become a foundational component of European educational well-being initiatives, promoting resilience, inclusion, and emotional development for future generations.





Sequence 3.3. A focus on Ukraine and the formal teaching of art therapy

Implementation of art therapy practices in formal education in Ukraine

The full-scale war against Ukraine has radically changed the conditions of the education system, transforming it from a traditional tool for academic learning into one of the key mechanisms for supporting the mental health of children, adolescents and students. Within the New Ukrainian School concept, the development of inclusive education and the introduction of a competency-based approach have made psychosocial support an integral part of educational policy. Art therapy, based on an individual's creative potential, self-regulation mechanisms, and symbolic interpretation of past experiences, is gradually being integrated into the educational process at all levels, from kindergartens to higher education institutions [4, 17, 29].

Scientific and methodological research by Ukrainian scientists such as T. Tkachuk, N. Bocharina, V. Gorodyska, S. Potyuk, O. Zhosan and others confirms the multifaceted role of art therapy in the educational environment. In particular, it performs diagnostic, developmental, corrective, and educational tasks, promoting emotional stability, creativity development, increased motivation to learn, and social adaptation in children and young people [2, 6, 7, 19].

In this section, we will focus on formal and informal education in Ukraine, exploring how art therapy approaches are already being applied or can be integrated into the following levels of education:

- pre-school education (pre-school education institutions – PSIs);
- general secondary education (primary, basic and senior school);
- higher education institutions (bachelor's and master's programmes, as well as additional certification courses).

Contemporary Ukrainian research emphasises that art therapy in preschool education is perceived as a progressive technology. It is designed to promote emotional development, reduce anxiety, overcome adaptation difficulties and ensure the mental well-being of children aged 3 to 6 [4].

Implementing art therapy in preschool educational institutions as an integral part of the general aesthetic therapy programme aims to support the child's harmonious development. Its significance lies in fostering the child's creative individuality, stimulating imagination and empathy, and ensuring a basic sense of security.

Art therapy is used both individually and in group activities, organically complementing traditional educational methods. It not only improves non-verbal communication and self-expression but also supports social adaptation. This is particularly important for children who have difficulty expressing their emotions verbally.

Art therapy methods are highly effective in reducing anxiety and overcoming fears in preschool children. Of particular note are the preventive and corrective possibilities of creative techniques such as drawing, modelling, fairy tale therapy,

and other forms of artistic activity that contribute to children's emotional well-being and development.

3.3.1. Forms of integration into the educational process of preschool educational institutions

Modern approaches to implementing art therapy in preschool education offer several models. In particular, the following approaches can be highlighted:

1. Integration of art therapy elements into everyday activities. This approach includes:

- The use of various creative practices, such as drawing, appliqué, modelling, and music and movement exercises, as a means of emotional release for children during integrated classes;
- Introducing creative tasks that allow freedom of choice of materials and topics. Modern research and analysis of practices in preschool education institutions confirm the effectiveness of this approach [10].

2. Conducting specialised art therapy classes. This format includes:



- Thematic cycles of classes, for example: "My mood in colours", "My home, my family", "Me and the world of war", which are aimed at working with negative emotions such as fear, loss and separation;
- The use of natural materials such as sand, water, and clay in combination with visual arts tasks, which is an important element of nature therapy for harmonising children's inner state [4].

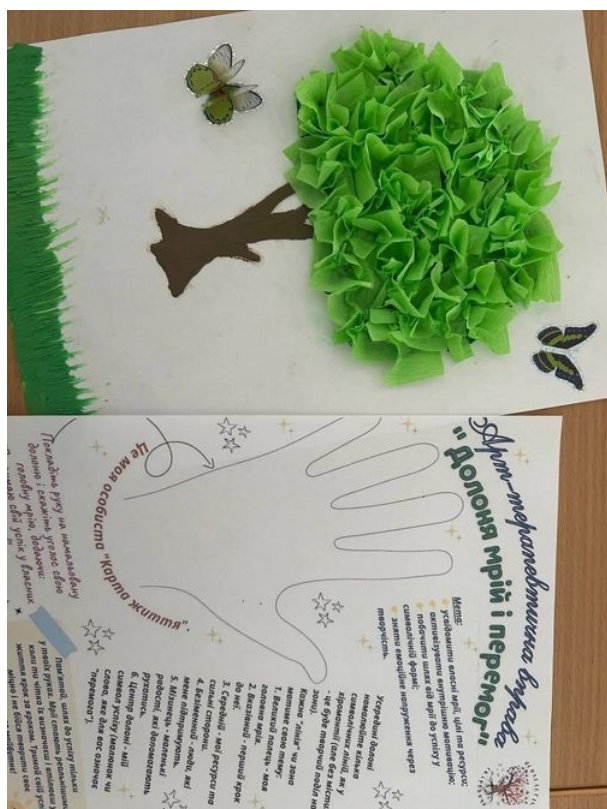
3. Working with children with special educational needs (SEN) and internally displaced children (IDPs) includes:

- Using art therapy as an effective tool for inclusive support. Joint creative activities help reduce tension in mixed groups of local children, IDP children, and children with SEN. This helps to create an atmosphere of mutual understanding and acceptance.
- The use of simple sensory techniques such as colouring, monotype printing or finger painting. This provides an easy and accessible means of self-expression that supports emotional well-being and promotes creativity [19].

4. Working with parents

- Organising joint art therapy workshops for parents and children, which help to strengthen emotional bonds within the family.
- Involving parents in creative "homework" assignments, such as creating family collages or illustrated stories.

Modern teaching aids on art technologies for preschoolers (for example, by O. A. Sorochynska) should directly emphasise the importance of art therapy for reducing anxiety, adapting to new conditions (moving, war, changing groups), and supporting children's emotional well-being [4].



Thus, experience with art therapy in preschool education provides a basis for further development and adaptation in the general secondary education system, where the complexity of psycho-emotional challenges and social interactions is increasing.

3.3.2 Art therapy practices in general secondary education In the general education environment, art therapy plays a multidimensional role, serving as an important component of psychological support, a tool for inclusion, and a key element in implementing innovative educational approaches. Scientists and practitioners emphasise that art therapy is a more natural and accessible form of communication for students than verbal counselling methods. It provides a safe space to express a range of emotions, such as anxiety, aggression, guilt, or shame, helping harmonise the child's inner state [3, 18].

In his article, S. Potyuk thoroughly covers the use of art therapy techniques in working with children with special educational needs in primary school. The author details the structure of classes that include elements of art therapy, emphasising that they retain the pedagogical logic of a traditional lesson. At the same time, such classes are supplemented with carefully selected creative tasks aimed at visualising emotions, creating story pictures, making collages, fairy tale therapy and other activities [19].

The activities of practical psychologists and social educators include:

- Conducting individual and group art therapy sessions for children who have suffered losses, been through shelling or experienced evacuation.
- Working on issues of self-esteem, aggression, and bullying using creative methods such as drawing, collage, or comics.
- Using art therapy in programmes aimed at preventing post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety and depression in adolescents [25].

Inclusive education for children with special educational needs (SEN) involves implementing effective corrective and developmental teaching methods, particularly through art technologies. Using such tools in foreign language teaching, art disciplines, or primary school classes not only develops the child's creative potential but also facilitates adaptation to the learning environment.



Pay particular attention to organising joint creative activities, such as drawing, modelling, mask making, or collage. These artistic activities can effectively build mutual understanding and emotional connection between the teacher and the child with SEN. This approach emphasises the importance of an individualised approach and helps create a comfortable environment for the student's development and learning [1, 5].



Working with children who are internally displaced persons or have been affected by hostilities:

- Use of special techniques aimed at transforming traumatic memories by creating alternative scenarios using comics, graphic stories or collages.
- Organising group art therapy support sessions that help strengthen the sense of belonging to the community and reduce the level of social isolation.

Support for teachers is an important component in today's context. In particular, on 13 August 2025, an interactive session on "Art therapy as a method of coping with stress" was held at Sumy Secondary School No. 15 of the Sumy City Council. The SpivDiya Dity team organised the event, during which teachers painted plaster figures and shopping bags, communicating and gaining new self-help tools for wartime.

The UNICEF project "Improving the learning outcomes and well-being of children and adolescents by overcoming educational losses and providing psychosocial support, taking into account gender and age characteristics in the Kharkiv

and Sumy regions" is being implemented with the support of the SpivDiya Charitable Foundation in partnership with the MriyDiy Educational Foundation. The Government of the Republic of Korea funds this important project.

Although there is currently no separate state standard for "art therapy in schools," art therapy practices are naturally integrated into current educational policy trends.

In particular, in inclusive education, which involves adapting teaching methods to students' individual needs, including their psycho-emotional characteristics, art therapy is becoming increasingly important. Art therapy approaches also support mental health in education. All-Ukrainian forums and programmes directly point to these practices as an important tool for promoting inclusion and building resilience.

Currently, art therapy in general secondary education is mainly being implemented through the initiative of practical psychologists, creative teachers, and innovative schools. However, it is gradually acquiring a methodological and scientific basis, which allows us to talk about a trend towards its systematic integration.



Thus, in the general secondary education system, art therapy primarily serves as a means of psycho-emotional support, prevention of maladjustment, and the creation of a safe educational space for children and adolescents in a state of heightened vulnerability. It helps stabilise emotional states, develop self-expression skills, and build basic psychological resilience.

In higher education institutions, however, the role of art therapy is undergoing a significant transformation. Here, it is gradually moving from an auxiliary support to a full-fledged component of professional training for future specialists—psychologists, educators, social workers, medical psychologists, and other specialists in auxiliary professions. Art therapy is integrated into educational programmes as an academic discipline that combines theoretical understanding of psychotherapeutic approaches with the

development of practical skills needed to work with trauma, stress, and crises.

3.3. 3 Art therapy in higher education institutions

One of the most striking indicators of art therapy's introduction into formal education is its integration into the educational and professional programmes of higher education institutions. Yakovishina notes that art therapy courses are already included in psychology training programmes. She also justifies introducing similar disciplines for future primary school teachers who work with children with special educational needs [30].

Several Ukrainian universities offer comprehensive art therapy programmes. These programmes cover topics in detail, including the history and theoretical foundations of art therapy, methods of its use, the specifics of group art therapy, and the specifics of working with different population groups, including children, adolescents, families, and older people.

The syllabi of Ukrainian higher education institutions demonstrate a wide range of approaches to teaching courses related to art therapy, each with its own focus and level of complexity:

- The State Pedagogical University offers a course entitled "Art Therapy" at the bachelor's level. The main objective of this course is to develop a deep understanding of theoretical principles and master practical skills for conducting art therapy work with representatives of different age groups. This allows future psychologists to grasp the basic aspects of this methodology and prepare to apply it in their future professional activities [23].
- The S. Kuznets Kharkiv National University of Economics offers an elective course in Art Therapy for students of all specialities. This 5 ECTS course includes lectures, practical classes, and a significant amount of independent work. This

allows students from different fields of study to learn the basics of art therapy and its application in various areas [28].

- Ukraine University includes the course "Psychology of Creativity. Art Therapy" in its master's programme, where students have the opportunity to study theoretical concepts of stress and creativity, as well as to master art therapy techniques in practice. This innovative approach helps students develop professional skills while also showing the connection between psychological health and creative self-expression [24].
- Yuri Kondratyuk Poltava Polytechnic provides its students with the opportunity to take the course "Art Therapy Practices in Psychological Assistance," which focuses on working with the consequences of military conflicts, psychological trauma, stressful conditions, and problems of social maladjustment. The course's practical focus helps students develop skills to provide real help to people in crisis and post-crisis situations [15].



The implementation of art therapy in higher education institutions is not limited to the speciality of "Psychology". Its elements are integrated into **teacher training** programmes (especially for primary school teachers, inclusive education, and arts disciplines) [30], and into the training of social educators and social workers through art therapy modules in the courses "Methods of Social and Pedagogical Work" and "Psychocorrectional Technologies" [22].

Another important area is implementing art therapy approaches in the training of future doctors, medical psychologists, rehabilitation specialists, and psychiatric nurses, which is a key direction in modernising medical education. In the current conditions of war, medical education in Ukraine is rapidly adapting to the specific needs of patients with combat injuries, suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety and depressive disorders, as well as patients who have suffered serious life losses. Art therapy is becoming an essential complementary method in clinical practice, helping to reduce stress levels, improve emotional regulation and increase motivation for the therapeutic process.



In the educational programmes of many medical universities in Ukraine, elements of art therapy are being introduced into courses such as Medical Psychology, Psychosomatic Medicine, Psychotherapy, Clinical Psychology, and Rehabilitation Technologies. Future specialists learn basic art therapy techniques used as psycho-emotional support for patients in neurology, oncology, palliative care, and psychiatry departments, as well as in rehabilitation centres and military hospitals. Particular attention is focused on the application of this method in the comprehensive rehabilitation of military personnel and patients with traumatic brain injuries, amputations, burns and other serious conditions, as well as in working with children who have experienced psychological trauma.

Medical universities in Ukraine, such as Bogomolets National Medical University, Danylo Halytsky Lviv National Medical University, the Medical Institute of Sumy State University, Poltava State Medical University, and others, are gradually introducing simulation classes and interdisciplinary training [8]. These activities allow students to practise creative techniques as a tool for empathic communication, reducing patient anxiety and increasing the effectiveness of the treatment process. As a result, art therapy methods in medical education in Ukraine contribute to the humanisation of medical services, improved interaction between doctors and patients, the development of resilience in difficult situations, and higher overall quality of medical care.

Thus, Ukrainian higher education institutions are actively integrating art therapy into their curricula, giving students both a deep theoretical understanding of the discipline's methods and practical experience applying them in professional settings.

As a result, students gain not only a theoretical foundation in art therapy, but also practical skills that they can apply in schools, preschools, rehabilitation centres, community organisations, and international programmes such as the TRUST project.

The rapid growth of interest in art therapy research is evident in the increase in coursework, bachelor's, and master's theses devoted to various aspects of its use. In particular, one of the key topics being actively researched is the use of art therapy techniques in working with children who have experienced difficult traumatic situations, as this practice helps to restore their psychological balance and interaction with the world. Considerable attention is also paid to studying the impact of art therapy on reducing anxiety, manifestations of aggression and improving emotional regulation in the therapeutic process. In addition, researchers are actively exploring ways to combine art therapy with other modern approaches, such as nature therapy, music therapy, or digital art, to enhance its effectiveness. An important and promising topic remains the role of art therapy in teachers' professional training, especially in their interactions with students in inclusive settings, as this contributes to a more sensitive, flexible, and productive educational environment for all participants in the learning process.

In this context, Ukrainian higher education institutions are becoming an important centre for creating and accumulating knowledge that can and must find practical application in educational activities at the level of schools and pre-school institutions. This knowledge can also be integrated into international educational programmes and projects, promoting the exchange of experience and raising the overall level of education both nationally and globally.

The experience of the TRUST programme, as presented in the testimonies of its participants, can become part of the curricula of higher education institutions. It can serve as an example for the disciplines of "Art Therapy", "Psychology of Trauma", and "Psychosocial Support in War Conditions". This experience can also be integrated into the school curriculum by creating adapted modules for teachers and practising psychologists.

3.3.4. Interaction between formal education and informal and international initiatives

In the context of full-scale war, informal education has become one of the key mechanisms for responding to the psychosocial challenges faced by the educational and psychological community in Ukraine. Its importance has grown primarily due to its flexibility, speed of adaptation and ability to quickly implement new knowledge and practices in response to the trauma of war, mass internal displacement of the population, professional burnout of teachers and psychologists, as well as the growing need for psycho-emotional support for children and adults. Unlike formal education, the informal education sector is not constrained by rigid standards and bureaucratic procedures,

allowing it to quickly transform programme content, integrate international experience, and test innovative art therapy approaches.

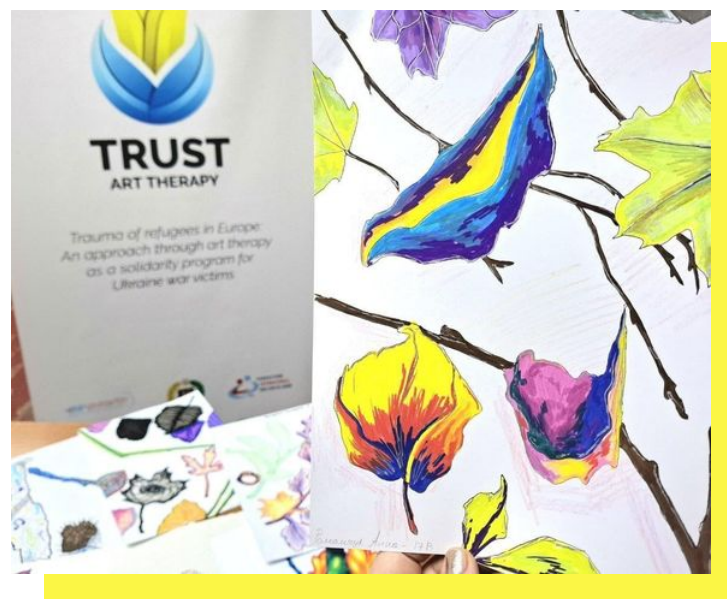
One key area of interaction between formal and informal education is the organisation of professional development courses, training sessions, and workshops for teachers, psychologists, and social workers to master art therapy techniques. Such events complement the formal training of specialists, providing them with practical tools for dealing with stress, anxiety, trauma and emotional exhaustion in their professional activities. Regional and national forums on



inclusion and mental health also play an important role, where art therapy is presented as an effective means of building psychological resilience and social cohesion. The participation of Ukrainian educational institutions and specialists in international programmes and projects, such as the TRUST project, which uses art therapy practices to work with people affected by war, plays a special role in this process. Such initiatives promote not only the exchange of experience, but also the integration of Ukrainian practices into the European and global educational and psychotherapeutic space.

Modern informal educational platforms offer a wide range of learning opportunities, from short-term webinars and mini-courses to multi-month certification programmes aimed at practising specialists and a wider audience. They are characterised by flexibility and rapid modernisation of content: the rapid inclusion of topics related to war trauma, working with IDP children, resource development, inclusive education, family art therapy, as well as new areas such as digital art therapy and nature-oriented practices (Land Art, rock balancing, driftwood art, etc.) [31].

At the same time, informal education plays an important role in forming professional communities. Training programmes often include intervision and supervision groups, group workshops, case studies and reflective sessions. This creates conditions for developing professional culture, adhering to ethical standards, and supporting one another, which is particularly important when working with traumatic experiences.



Key trends in the development of informal education:

1. Large-scale online platforms and educational schools

Examples of powerful modern resources: The Art Therapy School is Ukraine's largest educational project in art therapy [16]. Olga Nazarevich's educational programmes ("Nazarevich Art") [13, 14]. International Professional Association of Psychologists and Art Therapists (IPAPT) [11]. These projects offer everything from short-term webinars to multi-month programmes lasting up to two years. They are accessible, systematic and focused on the practical mastery of techniques.

2. Flexibility of learning and rapid modernisation of content Informal education quickly incorporates new topics: art therapy for working with military trauma; stabilisation practices for internally displaced children; art therapy in inclusive education; natural forms of art therapy (Land Art, driftwood art); digital art therapy. As a result, the programmes respond to society's current challenges.

3. Formation of professional communities through training Most programmes include intervision groups, supervision, group workshops, and online communities. This contributes to the growth of professional culture, ethical standards and mutual support among future and current art therapists.

A significant direction for the spread of art therapy is its integration into professional development systems for teachers and psychologists. Government agencies and non-governmental organisations offer short-term programmes that meet postgraduate education requirements. The availability of officially approved training modules lasting 6 and 15 hours (0.2–0.5 ECTS credits) indicates the gradual institutional recognition of art therapy techniques in education and mental health care.

The focus of such programmes on educators is due to high levels of professional burnout, chronic stress, and an increase in the number of children with psychological difficulties as a result of traumatic events. Art therapy methods effectively prevent emotional exhaustion, build stress resistance, and develop emotional competence. Integrating them into the school education process helps create a supportive environment and implement innovative practices to support mental health.

Thus, the professional development system is not only a channel for developing the professional competencies of teaching and psychological staff, but also a mechanism for legitimising art therapy as an important component of modern psychological and pedagogical practice.

Art therapy is included in the system of official professional development for educators, making it a recognised and legitimate practice in education and psychological support.

An example of institutional support is the state-funded international training course organised by the Institute for Modernisation of Educational Content (IMEC): The training course "Art Therapy Practices: Education, Inclusion and Mental Health" (2026) includes 6–15 hours (0.2–0.5 ECTS), which meets the requirements for the professional development of teaching staff [9].

In the context of war, there has been a sharp increase in the need to prevent teacher burnout, support children with increased anxiety, develop teachers' emotional competence, and create a resourceful educational environment. Art therapy provides tools to create a safe, emotionally supportive space in educational institutions.

Certificates issued as part of professional development are strong evidence of professional training and contribute to the legalisation of the method in educational institutions, the introduction of art practices into the educational process, and the development of innovative approaches to mental health in schools.

The spread of art therapy is largely due to the implementation of projects aimed at supporting various categories of the population – children, parents, displaced persons, military personnel, families who have experienced loss, etc. War trauma-related areas are especially important.

Projects that bring together artists, art therapists, psychologists, and social workers play an important role in providing psychological support to vulnerable groups. They help specialists gain practical experience, stimulate interdisciplinary cooperation, and integrate art therapy techniques into group and family work formats. Such initiatives not only popularise this approach but also help to create an evidence base for its effectiveness. Reports, reviews and analytical materials developed by participants are a significant contribution to the development of contemporary Ukrainian art therapy practice.

Social and rehabilitation projects aimed at supporting vulnerable groups of the population – children, mothers, internally displaced persons, military personnel, and families who have experienced loss – play a special role in the spread of art therapy. Such initiatives combine the work of art therapists, psychologists, artists, and social workers, ensuring access to psychological support, building practical experience for specialists, and accumulating evidence of the effectiveness of art therapy methods.

The National Academy of Arts of Ukraine, M17, and the Art Support Fund's comprehensive 4-month art therapy rehabilitation programme is an institutionally supported interdisciplinary initiative aimed at the psycho-emotional recovery of people affected by the war. The programme combines art therapy practices, psychological support, and art education, creating a safe space to process traumatic experiences through creativity [9].

Within the programme, participants attend regular classes in painting, graphic art, ceramics, collage, and other forms of visual art, combined with art reflection, group discussions, and individual psychological consultations. This format helps to reduce anxiety, restore a sense of control over one's emotional state, develop resource strategies for coping with stress, and gradually integrate traumatic experiences into life experience.



An important part of the programme is its analytical and research component, and participation results are recorded as reports, reflective materials, and expert assessments. This allows not only evaluation of the effectiveness of art therapy interventions, but also the development of an evidence base for further implementation of similar programmes in education, culture, and psychosocial support. Thus, this programme is not only a rehabilitation initiative, but also an important platform for gaining professional experience and developing Ukrainian art therapy practice in wartime

conditions.



Participation in international training courses, online forums, and conferences involving specialists from England, Belgium, Sweden, Lithuania, Scotland, and the USA is valuable and significant for Ukraine, demonstrating the inclusion of Ukrainian art therapy in the global professional context. International events promote the exchange of professional experience, the introduction of evidence-based approaches, the implementation of foreign standards for training specialists, the preparation of joint grant projects, and improved quality of psychotherapeutic care in Ukraine.

International cooperation also stimulates the development of new areas, in particular digital art therapy, inclusive art practices, and the use of art in the rehabilitation of veterans, children, and families affected by war.

Thus, international partnerships not only expand the competencies of Ukrainian specialists, but also contribute to

the formation of long-term professional relationships, raise the status of art therapy, and set the direction for its further development.

International cooperation is important for introducing global standards and expanding professional opportunities.

Examples of international events and partnerships:

International training course "Art Therapy Practices: Education, Inclusion and Mental Health"

Participation of specialists from England, Sweden, Lithuania, the United States, Belgium, and Scotland

Cooperation with international foundations and associations

The most important reference source is the website of the International Federation of Art Therapy (IFA-T) [12].

Its significance lies in defining global standards for training art therapists; standardising training programmes; distinguishing between art therapy and creative activity; and regulating the ethics and competencies of specialists.

Advantages of international conferences: access to research and modern methods; expanding professional networks; the possibility of joint grant applications; increasing the international recognition of Ukrainian specialists; adaptation of global practices to Ukrainian realities.

A significant trend is the spread of natural and alternative forms of art therapy – Land Art, rock balancing, land art mandalas, driftwood art, and painting on stones. These areas combine creativity, the natural environment and psycho-emotional regulation, making them accessible and attractive to a wide audience. Programmes in the Carpathians and other natural locations combine creativity with recreation, increasing their effectiveness in reducing stress and promoting emotional recovery.

At the same time, digital art practices, which are increasingly integrated into international educational events, open new opportunities for remote therapy, work with large groups, and the use of technology in educational settings.

In summary, informal and international education play a key role in developing art therapy in Ukraine, providing space for innovation, professional growth, and rapid response to the challenges of war. They complement the formal education system by providing flexibility, interdisciplinarity, and access to contemporary practices. Through the interaction of these educational levels, a comprehensive system for training specialists capable of effectively working with the psycho-emotional consequences of war is formed. This creates the conditions for the further institutionalisation of art therapy and its sustainable development as an important component of Ukraine's educational and psychosocial policy.



3.3 4. Challenges and prospects for systemic implementation Despite noticeable progress, the integration of art therapy practices into Ukraine's formal education system faces significant systemic challenges:

1. **Uneven implementation** Art therapy methods are used more actively in certain regions, higher education institutions, and innovative schools, while in rural communities and many pre-school education institutions, their use remains rare.
2. **Human resources** Most teachers and psychologists lack sufficient training in art therapy. There is an urgent need to develop professional development programmes, create supervision groups and conduct standardised training for specialists.
3. **Regulatory and methodological framework** The lack of clear government recommendations on implementing art therapy as a psychotherapeutic tool in educational institutions creates uncertainty. Clear safety guidelines are needed for using art techniques, especially when the teacher has no clinical training.
4. **Ethical and safety aspects** Working with military trauma requires a high level of specialised competence. At the same time, it is important to clearly distinguish pedagogical art therapy and art pedagogy from clinical art therapy to avoid potential risks for participants.



Despite the challenges facing modern education, the prospects for developing art therapy in Ukraine look extremely optimistic. The prospects presented below outline the main directions for the growth of art therapy as a professional field and a tool for public support.

1. **Strengthening the role of informal education in professional training**

Informal education is becoming the main channel for accessing art therapy knowledge because of its openness, efficiency, and ability to respond to social challenges. Its importance is growing for several reasons: the accessibility and scale of online courses, webinars and author schools; the flexibility of training programmes, which quickly adapt to the demands of the times (war trauma, working with children, stress resistance, inclusion); a pragmatic focus that allows students to apply techniques in practice immediately; the

formation of professional communities through intervision, supervision and workshops.

Thus, informal education is becoming a key platform for training a new generation of art therapists, especially in regions with no official training centres [20; 21].

2. **Institutionalisation of art therapy in education and integration into professional development systems.** A particularly important area is the systematic introduction of art therapy practices into education. This is reflected in the following trends: the inclusion of art therapy in professional development programmes for teachers, giving it official status; the development of state and interdepartmental training courses aimed at working with stress, emotional burnout and the mental health of educators; expanding opportunities for teachers and psychologists to use art methods in inclusive classrooms, secondary schools and pre-school institutions. This process is a step toward officially recognising art therapy as a necessary technology for supporting students, teachers, and families, especially under prolonged martial law.
3. **Development of art therapy practices in social work, rehabilitation and crisis interventions.** In the context of war and mass traumatic experiences, art therapy is becoming one of the key tools of psychosocial support. Its effectiveness is growing in the following areas: rehabilitation programmes for children and mothers who have experienced loss, stress or displacement; projects for veterans, military personnel and their families; group and family art therapy for IDPs, people with PTSD and chronic anxiety; work with artists, educators and social workers who have experienced psychological exhaustion. Thus, art therapy is becoming not only a method of correction but also an important component of modern systems for restoring the population's mental health.
4. **Expansion of international cooperation, participation in grant programmes and professional associations.** The international activity of Ukrainian art therapists is creating new trajectories for the field's development. Prospects include: exchange of experience with specialists from different countries, integration of global practices; participation in grant programmes of the EU, international foundations, humanitarian organisations; access to professional standards developed by leading global associations; expansion of international mobility, as well as the opportunity

for Ukrainian specialists to speak at global conferences. These partnerships contribute to the professionalisation of the industry and increase international confidence in Ukrainian art therapy.

5. Formation of national professional standards and development of ethical competence. The expansion of art therapy practices creates a need for clear professional requirements. Prospects in this area include developing training standards for art therapists in line with international norms; establishing uniform ethical rules governing specialists' work; introducing a system of certification and supervision; and promoting evidence-based approaches while rejecting untested, pseudoscientific practices. This will ensure the professionalism and safety of art therapists' work and strengthen the industry's authority.
6. Popularisation of natural and ecological art practices as a new therapeutic niche. There is growing interest in combining art therapy with nature therapy and ecological art. Prospects for the field: development of Land Art, rock balancing, land art mandalas, driftwood art as means of emotional regulation; integration of natural practices into Carpathian recreational programmes, tourist routes, psychological recovery camps; increasing opportunities for group, family and children's therapy in the open air; strengthening ecological thinking and creative self-expression. This direction is becoming an alternative to classical techniques and meets modern needs for soft and nature-oriented approaches.
7. Development of digital art therapy as a response to the needs of remote interaction

The digitalisation of society has led to the emergence of a new branch of art therapy – online and digital art therapy. The prospects include: the use of graphics tablets and digital editors in therapy; the creation of virtual art workshops; the integration of digital tools into remote work with children and adolescents; the development of teletherapy formats for regions where face-to-face support is not possible; the emergence of new techniques, such as digital collage, VR art practices, and interactive art platforms. Digital art therapy significantly expands access to assistance and increases the inclusiveness of practices.

The experience gained during wartime, especially through the TRUST project, offers unique opportunities to develop art therapy further. The collected data and developments form a valuable methodological base that can be adapted and used in educational systems not only in Ukraine but also in European countries. This contributes to creating modern, high-quality standards for art therapy approaches in education.

Thus, art therapy already demonstrates great potential and promises to become not only an important tool for emotional support, but also a new qualitative step in reforming educational practices.

The testimonies of TRUST project participants in the previous sections give these processes deep human meaning: they clearly show how children, adolescents, and adults in the educational environment move from experiencing trauma to a certain level of integration through art. In view of this, further development of Ukrainian education in the context of the European space is impossible without fully implementing art therapy practices as important tools for recovery, increasing resilience, and strengthening social cohesion.

Thus, art therapy in Ukraine is gradually moving from fragmentary use to systematic educational practice, covering all levels of education, from pre-school and general secondary to higher, postgraduate and informal. In preschool and school education, it primarily serves as psycho-emotional support, adaptation, and prevention of maladjustment, while in higher education institutions it is becoming a component of professional training for future specialists in auxiliary professions. Non-formal and international education, in turn, provides flexibility, innovation and rapid response to the challenges of war, complementing the formal system and promoting the professionalisation of art therapy practices. Together, these educational levels form a comprehensive model of training and support focused on maintaining mental health, building resilience, and strengthening social cohesion. Thus, art therapy emerges not only as a separate method, but as an integrated tool of Ukraine's modern educational and psychosocial policy in the context of war and post-war recovery.

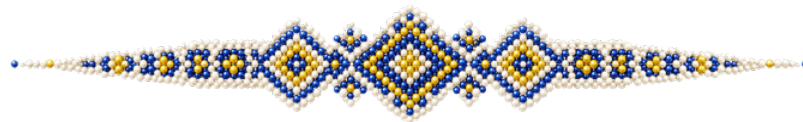


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3.4 Clinical Orientations for the Future of Art Therapy



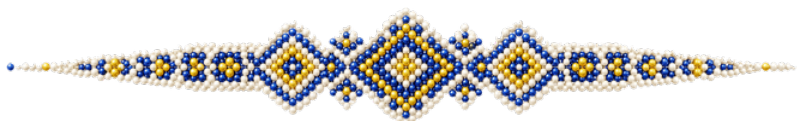
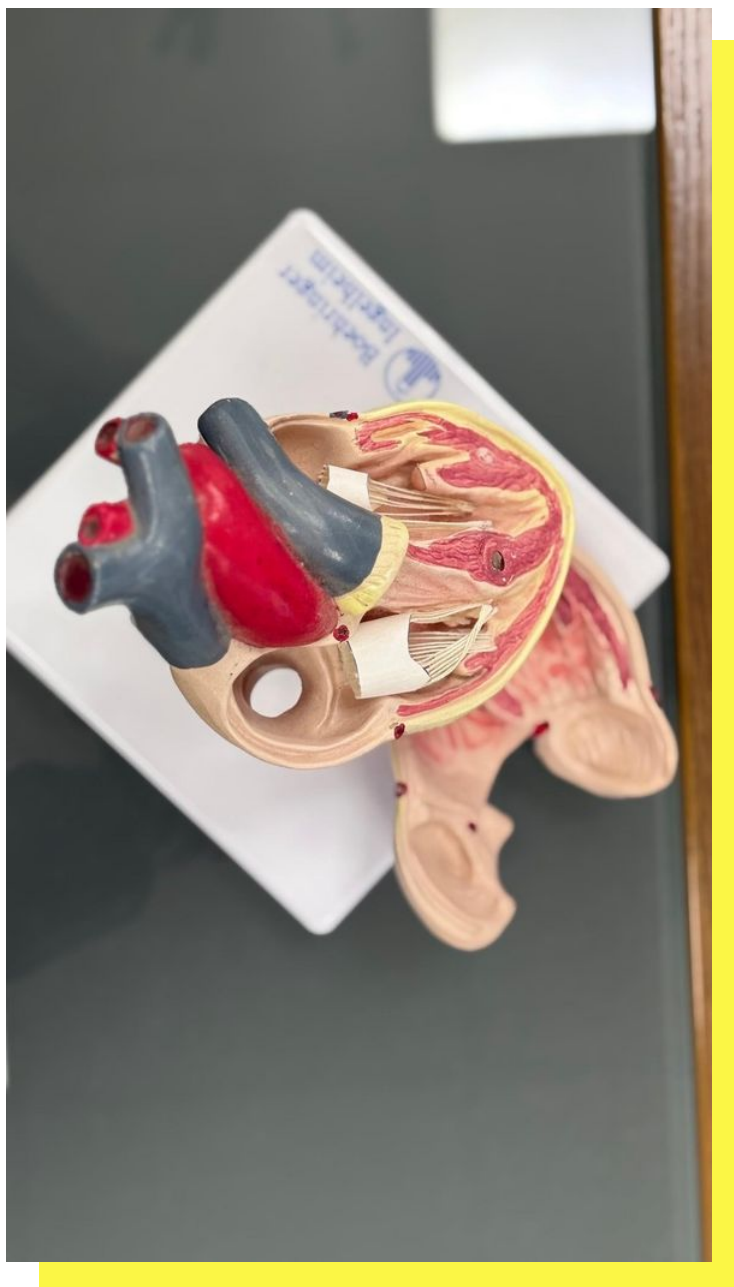
Hospitals remain central sites for clinical art therapy practice. Future developments include deeper integration within psychiatric services, general hospitals, and specialised trauma units. Multidisciplinary collaboration, with psychiatrists, psychologists, nurses, occupational therapists, and other health professionals, will continue to strengthen the therapeutic impact of art therapy. Hybrid and digital modalities will support continuity of care during patient absences or periods of restricted access, such as public health emergencies.

Structured programmes targeting depression, anxiety, psychosis, and post-traumatic recovery are expected to expand, supported by evidence-based approaches and standardised outcome measures. Art therapy will also play a growing role in community mental health services, offering accessible, low-cost interventions that promote social reintegration and early support for mood disorders, trauma, and neurodevelopmental conditions. Greater recognition of art therapy as an essential mental health resource will require standardised training and formal professional status across Europe.

In chronic illness, pain management, and neurodegenerative conditions such as Parkinson's and Alzheimer's disease, art therapy is increasingly valued for its capacity to improve mood, reduce anxiety, enhance quality of life, and support cognitive functioning. Digital technologies, VR environments, and AI-assisted monitoring are likely to become integral

components of future interventions.

Interdisciplinary collaboration will define future mental health care. Art therapists will work alongside digital mental health specialists, case managers, speech therapists, and social workers to deliver holistic, personalised care. Preventive and population-level mental health strategies will increasingly incorporate art therapy, particularly in programmes targeting trauma, social isolation, stress, and early identification of psychological difficulties.



Sequence 3.5, Training, and Policy Evolution



The future of art therapy in Europe depends on harmonising regulatory frameworks across countries. Unified training standards, professional licensing systems, and official recognition within public health structures are essential for strengthening the discipline. Cross-border recognition of professional titles will facilitate practitioner mobility and support a coherent European art therapy landscape.

Standardised competencies for future art therapists will include trauma-informed practice, knowledge of neuroscience and psychotherapy, digital literacy and AI integration, ethical and cultural sensitivity, and research skills necessary for evidence-based practice. These competencies aim to ensure consistent clinical quality across Europe.

Research priorities include randomised controlled trials, longitudinal studies, investigations into the neurobiological

mechanisms of creative expression, evaluations of digital and AI-assisted interventions, and intercultural research across diverse European populations. Strengthening the scientific foundation of art therapy will support its integration into health policies and clinical guidelines.

Sustainable growth of the discipline requires public and private funding, policy initiatives that embed art therapy within mental health systems, and strategic inclusion in school, community, and hospital programmes. Art therapy is increasingly recognised as a vital component of integrated mental health care, contributing to resilience, social cohesion, and emotional well-being.

5. Discussion

Several converging developments shape the future landscape of art therapy in Europe. Advances in neuroscience continue to validate the therapeutic mechanisms underlying creative expression, while trauma-informed and somatic approaches are becoming central to both clinical and educational practice. Digital technologies and artificial intelligence are expanding practitioners' available modalities, offering new tools for assessment, engagement, and continuity of care. At the same time, pedagogical integration is strengthening the role of art therapy within early intervention frameworks, particularly in schools and community settings. Political support and professional recognition further contribute to consolidating art therapy as a major clinical discipline.

Long-term trajectories suggest that art therapy will evolve into a fully regulated profession across Europe, with hybrid, digital, and immersive interventions becoming standard components of practice. Preventive, educational, and

community-based programmes will continue to expand, supported by evolving ethical frameworks that address the challenges posed by AI and digital technologies. As mental health ecosystems become increasingly integrated, art therapy will serve as a bridge between emotional experience, cognitive processes, and creative engagement.



Ultimately, art therapy is positioned to play a pivotal role in future mental health systems, functioning as a preventive tool in educational and community contexts, a complementary modality in hospital and outpatient care, and a catalyst for social cohesion, resilience, and well-being.

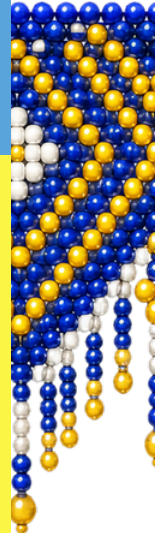
Conclusion

Art therapy in Europe is entering a period of profound transformation. Supported by developments in neuroscience, technological innovation, and evolving public policies, the discipline is poised to become a central component of integrated mental health care. Its unique combination of creativity, embodiment, symbolic expression, and relational depth makes it particularly well suited to address contemporary challenges such as trauma, anxiety, depression, and social fragmentation.



The expansion of art therapy within educational settings further strengthens its role in early intervention and emotional development, without diminishing its clinical orientation. The discipline's future success will depend on rigorous research, professional standardisation, interdisciplinary collaboration, and robust ethical governance. Thoughtful integration of digital tools and artificial intelligence will be essential to ensure both innovation and safety.

In this emerging landscape, European art therapy is positioned to become a cornerstone of culturally responsive, technologically informed, and preventive mental health care for the twenty-first century.



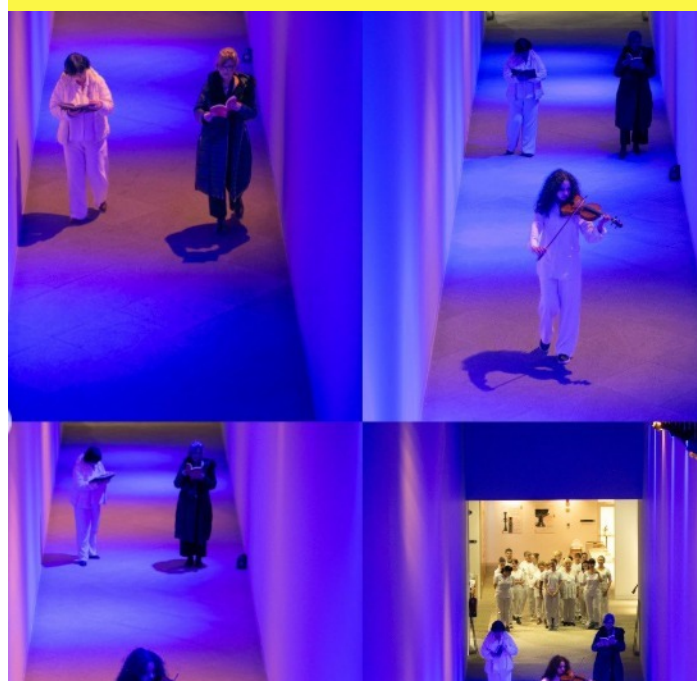
SEQUENCE 4

Introduction

Art therapy in Europe is undergoing a profound transformation driven by the integration of digital technologies, evolving clinical practices, expansion into educational settings, and the gradual development of regulatory frameworks. This evolution occurs against a backdrop of rising mental health needs and growing recognition of creative approaches as effective supports for emotional regulation, resilience, and trauma treatment. The present text argues that art therapy is positioned to become a central component of future mental health ecosystems.

Conclusions and Perspectives

Perspectives of Art Therapy for Mental Health Care in Europe





Sequence 4

Perspectives of Art Therapy for Mental Health Care in Europe

4.1. Digital Transition as a Therapeutic Catalyst

Digital technologies are redefining how art therapy is delivered. Remote art-therapy services, collaborative online platforms, and immersive environments expand access to care for individuals who are geographically isolated or have limited mobility. Virtual reality (VR) offers particularly promising applications by enabling controlled symbolic environments that facilitate trauma processing, graded exposure for phobias, and identity exploration. Artificial intelligence (AI), when combined with VR and biofeedback, can support real-time modulation of emotional states and may enhance neuroplastic mechanisms relevant to trauma-focused interventions. These technological advances present substantial opportunities while also raising ethical concerns about the authenticity of creative processes, the therapeutic relationship, and protecting sensitive data in digital contexts.

4.2. Art Therapy in Educational Systems

European schools are increasingly recognised as critical sites for early mental health intervention. Integrating art therapy into educational settings aligns with a holistic vision of schooling in which emotional well-being is central to learning. Digital tools—such as tablets, creative platforms, and VR environments—facilitate emotional expression, symbolic narrative, and engagement among pupils with neurodevelopmental differences or emotional difficulties. Trauma-informed art-therapy approaches provide safe spaces, somatic grounding techniques, and nonverbal modes of expression that are particularly relevant for refugee, migrant, or violence-exposed students. Moreover, adaptive digital platforms can support inclusion by tailoring interventions to neurodivergent learners' needs, enhancing communication, participation, and collaborative creation.

4.3. Integration of art therapy into Ukrainian education

The war has transformed Ukrainian schools into spaces for psycho-emotional support, with art therapy playing a central role. In preschools, it helps children express their emotions, reduce anxiety, and adjust through activities such as drawing, modelling, and storytelling. In schools, it supports students affected by loss, displacement, or stress, and fosters inclusion through individual or group creative activities.

In higher education, art therapy is emerging as a structured discipline integrated into psychology, education, social work, and medical curricula, preparing future professionals to address war-related trauma. Non-formal education complements this trend through rapid, innovative training programs that foster active professional communities.

Thus, art therapy is establishing itself as a key tool for resilience, inclusion, and mental health support across the entire Ukrainian education system.

4.4. Evolution of Clinical Practice and Interdisciplinary Integration

Clinical practice in art therapy is shifting toward hybrid models that combine in-person and digital modalities to ensure continuity of care. Art therapy is increasingly embedded within hospital settings and community mental health services, contributing to quality of life, mood regulation, and cognitive functioning among patients with chronic or neurodegenerative conditions. The field increasingly needs evidence-based practice, including randomised controlled trials, longitudinal studies, and standardised outcome measures, to strengthen its empirical foundations. Multidisciplinary collaboration among psychiatrists, psychologists, occupational therapists, and social workers enhances the integration of art therapy within broader care pathways and supports early intervention for mood disorders and neurodevelopmental conditions.

4.5. Professionalisation and Public Policy

Harmonisation of regulatory and training frameworks across Europe is essential to ensure consistent quality of practice, facilitate practitioner mobility, and secure formal recognition of art therapy within public health systems. Professional standards should incorporate competencies in neuroscience, digital literacy, trauma-sensitive practice, and research methodology to meet contemporary clinical and systemic demands. Priority research areas include elucidating neurobiological mechanisms, evaluating digital interventions, and conducting intercultural studies to consolidate the scientific basis for policy integration. Strengthening these domains will support the inclusion of art therapy in evidence-based mental health policies.

Conclusion

Art therapy is expanding and poised to occupy a central role in integrated mental health care in the twenty-first century. Positioned at the intersection of emotion, cognition, and creativity, the discipline, supported by advances in neuroscience, technology, and public policy, offers a versatile response to contemporary challenges such as trauma, anxiety, depression, social isolation, neurodiversity, and inequities in access to care. Its future contribution will be grounded in prevention, inclusion, resilience, and the preservation of symbolic expression and therapeutic relationship as core elements of human-centred care.

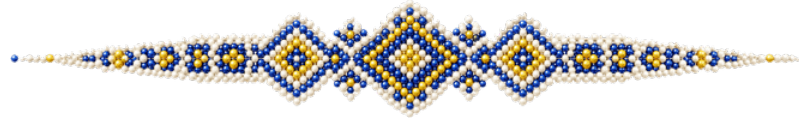
In this context of profound transformation in mental health practices, the TRUST project stands out as a strategic lever that can demonstrate, through innovation and scientific rigour, the added value of art therapy for vulnerable populations across Europe. By combining creativity, emerging technologies, and trauma-sensitive approaches, TRUST directly helps shape tomorrow's standards.

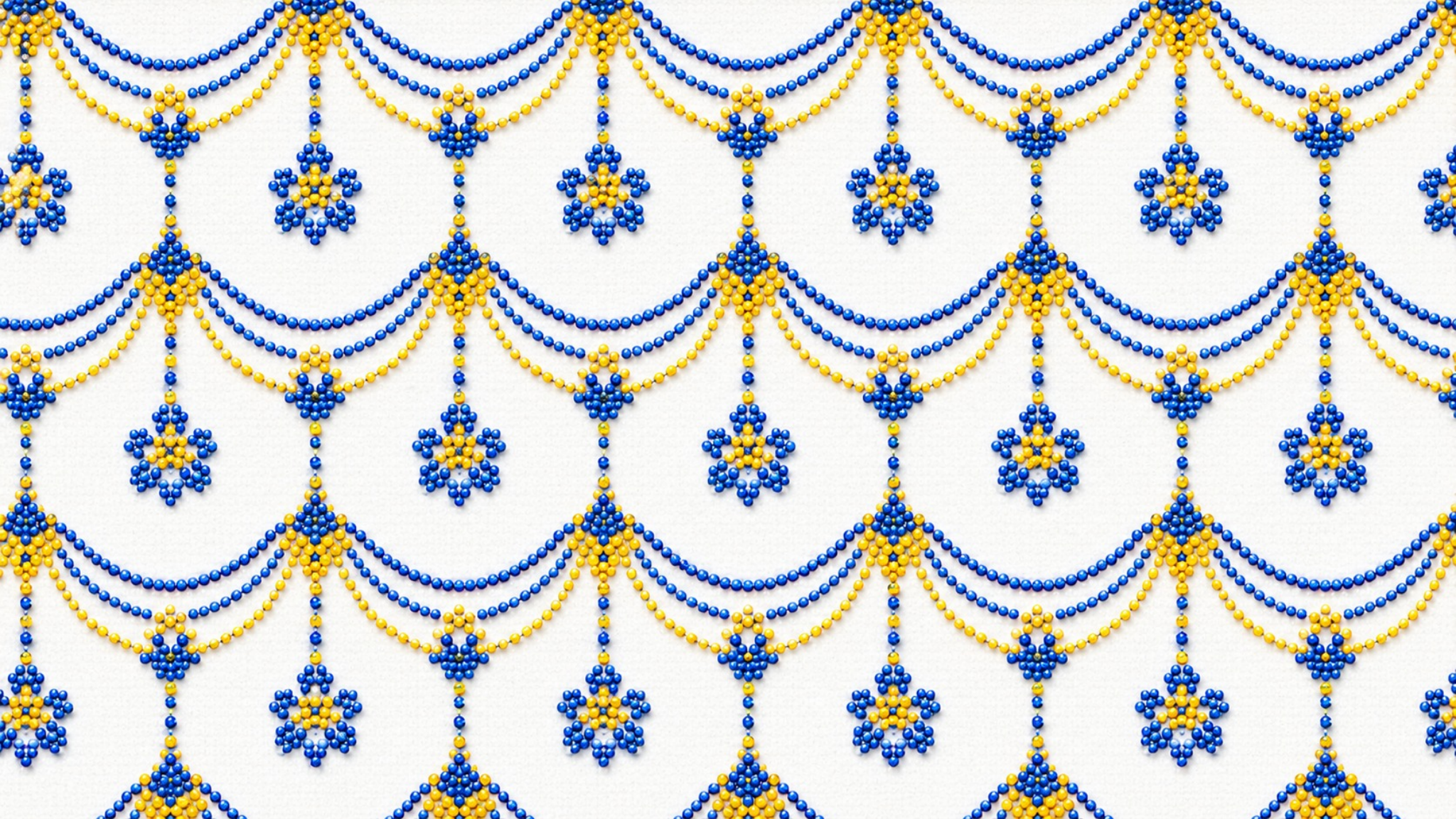
The project thus embodies an ambitious European response, driven by innovation, resilience, and equitable access to care for the most vulnerable populations.

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