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Methods Review on Working with People with Trauma

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1. Executive Summary

This report, produced within the Horizon Europe MAGnituDe project, identifies key methodological gaps in trauma research conducted in non-clinical fields such as the humanities, social sciences, and political science. It supports the development of the SensArticulate framework, designed to train researchers working with forcibly displaced persons, survivors of conflict-related violence, and communities experiencing intergenerational trauma. Drawing on 156 scholarly sources, the review shows that trauma research still heavily privileges verbal, narrative-based methods. While storytelling is a universal mode of sense-making, its dominance often marginalises non-verbal, embodied, and affective forms of expression. The review highlights critical gaps in how trauma is defined, accessed, and represented, alongside issues such as researcher vulnerability, emotional labour, and the risk of re-traumatisation.

MAGnituDe addresses these challenges by reframing trauma as an affective, relational, and embodied condition that shapes the research encounter. In this project, affect is not treated as background emotion, but as a core analytical lens for understanding research ethics and knowledge production. Building on the identified gaps, we will further explore:

- Re-defining trauma as an affective force that manifests through silence, fragmentation, and intensity, shaping how displaced individuals make meaning of their experiences;
- Recognising non-verbal and affective forms of expression as valid and vital sources of knowledge;
- Developing institutional strategies for emotionally sustainable, care-based research, including training in affective attunement, collective care, and ethical responses to emotional rupture.

The final section outlines preliminary directions for the SensArticulate training programme, which will combine embodied tools, ethical frameworks, and affective skills. It also encourages critical awareness of institutional constraints and epistemic hierarchies. While not claiming to transform the field, MAGnituDe aims to initiate meaningful change by expanding the methodological repertoire. We frame trauma not only as a research object, but as a methodological condition, hence one that requires accountability, humility, and an expanded understanding of what constitutes valid knowledge, ethical engagement, and rigorous inquiry.

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2. Project Abbreviations

HUG	HELP UKRAINE GOTHENBURG -SWEDEN
UPF	UNIVERSIDAD POMPEU FABRA-SPAIN
LSMC	LIETUVOS SOCIALINIŲ MOKSLŲ CENTRAS- LITHUANIA
KKNU	V. N. KARAZIN KHARKIV NATIONAL UNIVERSITY-UKRAINE
UEF	UTA-SUOMEN YLIOPISTO-FINLAND
UG	UNIWERSYTET GDANSKI- POLAND
UGR	UNIVERSITÄT GREIFSWALD -GERMANY
ZAVOD APIS	ZAVOD ZA AVTORSKO PRODUKCIJO IZOBRAŽEVANJE INOVATIVNOST IN SODELOVANJE-SLOVENIA
UGOT	UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG-SWEDEN

3. Introduction

MAGnituDe begins from the recognition that forcibly displaced people, particularly those affected by Russia's war in Ukraine, experience profound disruptions not only to their everyday lives but also to their identities. In such contexts, trauma is not an exceptional circumstance: it is the condition through which memory, belonging, and identity are continuously reshaped. Research into mass displacement must therefore take trauma seriously and not only as a topic of study, but as a force that shapes the ways in which knowledge is produced, shared, and embodied. This report inaugurates MAGnituDe's methodological work by identifying and analysing gaps in current research methodologies for studying identity in the volatile and emotionally charged context of military conflict and mass displacement. While qualitative methods such as interviews, participant observation, and discourse analysis form the backbone of the project, as already laid out in the proposal, this review complements and strengthens those approaches by critically reflecting on their epistemological foundations, emotional risks, and potential blind spots when working in trauma-saturated settings.

The report builds toward the development of *SensArticulate Methods*, a cross-disciplinary methodological framework that attends to the affective, sensory, and embodied dimensions of human experience. These methods are not meant to replace existing strategies but to enrich them by foregrounding often-overlooked forms of knowledge: those communicated through silence, gesture, affect, and artistic expression. In doing so, the report speaks to a broad interdisciplinary audience, including those in anthropology, sociology, memory studies, political science, and migration studies, ie. disciplines where reflexivity and emotional attunement have long been present, though not always institutionally supported. Importantly, the review takes a pragmatic stance. It acknowledges institutional limitations, such as tight deadlines and rigid ethical review protocols, that researchers working in EU-funded settings must navigate. Rather than idealise perfect methodological conditions, we advocate for realistic, yet ethically grounded, methodological awareness that remains sensitive to the emotional toll research can exact on both participants and researchers.

Ultimately, this deliverable supports the MAGnituDe project's broader ambition: to understand how identities are shaped and contested through human encounters in times of war, and to foster democratic participation in societies affected by mass displacement. A trauma-informed, affect-sensitive research design and methodological approach is central to that vision.

4. Method and Source Selection

This review adopts the methodology of a scoping review to identify gaps in trauma research methodologies used in non-clinical, qualitative research settings. Scoping reviews are particularly appropriate when surveying complex and fragmented fields, as they enable researchers to map key concepts, identify existing methodological trends, and highlight underexplored areas without aiming for exhaustive synthesis or quality appraisal (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Levac et al., 2010). In the case of MAGnituDe, the scoping review helps establish the groundwork for the development of *SensArticulate Methods* by offering a broad overview of how trauma is currently approached methodologically across disciplines such as sociology, political science, anthropology, cultural studies, and migration studies.

The selection of sources for this review followed a two-phase process: an initial strategic consultation of academic and grey literature databases¹, followed by qualitative curation within the Zotero reference management system. An initial pool of 218 sources was identified through broad database queries and literature tracking. After a first-level screening, 82 sources were excluded for being too general, too clinically focused, based primarily on quantitative methods, or lacking relevance to the research aim of this review. Many of the excluded works addressed trauma in narrowly medicalized terms or were theoretical discussions without empirical or methodological grounding. The final selection consists of 156 sources, which form the empirical and conceptual basis of this review.

The final corpus includes:

- Peer-reviewed articles from journals such as *Qualitative Inquiry*, *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, and *Journal of Refugee Studies*;
- Monographs and edited volumes addressing trauma, memory, displacement, and identity;
- Theses, field reports, and experimental texts situated at the intersection of academic inquiry, creative practice, and activist engagement

Phase One: Strategic Database Search

A targeted desk-based literature review was conducted across the following databases: Scopus, JSTOR, Web of Science, EBSCOhost, CORE.ac.uk, Google Scholar. Boolean keyword combinations were used to capture relevant literature. These included: "non-clinical trauma research", "secondary trauma", "arts-

¹ Grey literature referring to research materials not formally published in peer-reviewed journals, and includes reports by NGOs, policy briefs, doctoral theses, project deliverables, and other forms of knowledge production that fall outside conventional academic publishing.

based trauma methods", "affect and migration", "historical trauma", "embodied research", "sensitive topics in qualitative research", "trauma-informed humanities", "trauma AND qualitative research", "embodied methods AND displacement", "refugees AND participatory action research", "arts-based AND non-verbal trauma", "secondary trauma AND researcher fieldwork".

The inclusion criteria privileged peer-reviewed literature, published in English (except one article in French, selected per recommendation), from 2000 onwards, and with a strong focus on interdisciplinary and practice-based approaches, particularly from the fields of anthropology, sociology, political science, education, cultural studies, and participatory or visual arts methodologies.

Phase Two: Reference Tracing and Cross-Disciplinary Enrichment

In addition to formal database searches, reference tracing ('snowballing') was applied to seminal works already familiar through the author's prior research and teaching practice. This method allowed the review to capture influential but sometimes overlooked sources, particularly in disciplines less visible in indexed databases. Special attention was given to field-adjacent materials that often fall outside mainstream trauma literature, including articles in applied theatre, works on decolonial theory, texts rooted in feminist care ethics, and experimental research in sensory ethnography. These sources contributed to a broader understanding of trauma as an affective, performative, and multisensory phenomenon, aligning with the SensArticulate orientation of MAGnituDe.

Zotero Annotation and Thematic Classification

Each source was reviewed and annotated within Zotero, widely used research management tool to systematically store, tag, and annotate sources during the collection phase. Zotero facilitated collaborative citation tracking and helped maintain an organised, transparent record of the literature review process. While primarily a referencing tool, Zotero also enables thematic sorting and note integration, which was useful in organising the multi-disciplinary materials encountered. Missing abstracts were reconstructed where necessary. To facilitate systematic analysis, a rigorous tagging protocol was developed and applied. Tags were harmonized across three main categories:

- Methodological focus: ethnographic, autoethnography, visual, sensorial, narrative, reflexive, non-verbal, theatre, sound-based, body-mapping, embodied;
- Contextual/Thematic: displacement, war, identity, conflict, intergenerational war trauma, researcher's burnout, non-clinical trauma, collective/historical trauma, trauma narrative, memory work;
- Epistemological orientation: feminist, decolonial, trauma-informed, affect theory

This structured tagging enabled the extraction of thematic clusters and helped identify dominant methodologies, underused approaches, and epistemic silences in the field. Where relevant, the review refers to individual works to illustrate key trends. For instance, Suarez (2016) and Im et al. (2021) are notable for their critique of Western diagnostic models and their advocacy for culturally responsive methodologies in trauma research. Van der Kolk (1994) and Kirmayer et al. (2014) provide valuable transdisciplinary insights that connect neuroscience, narrative theory, and sociocultural frameworks, exemplifying the integrative vision this review seeks to promote.

Personal Reflexivity

The style and narrative approach of this review are grounded in a deeply personal research ethos, reflecting my previous work on trauma-informed pedagogy, intergenerational transmission of violence, and the emotional politics of witnessing. Consistent with this ethos — and with the participatory, embodied nature of SensArticulate methodology — this report refuses to treat methodological discussion as neutral or detached. Instead, it acknowledges the researcher as a vulnerable, situated actor within emotionally and politically charged terrains. This report is both a map and a mirror: it traces where the field has been, signals where it hesitates to go, and reflects back on the researcher's own ethical commitments and vulnerabilities.

5. Current Methodological Trends

Dominance of Narrative and Interview-Based Methods

Despite the growing interdisciplinarity in trauma studies, one of the most persistent methodological patterns remains the reliance on verbal, narrative, and interview-based approaches. According to the sources reviewed in this literature analysis, semi-structured interviews, oral histories, life-narrative interviews, and longitudinal storytelling frameworks continue to dominate qualitative studies, while more embodied, creative, and participatory approaches — including body mapping, sensorial ethnography, and forum theatre — are used far less frequently (see Figure 1).

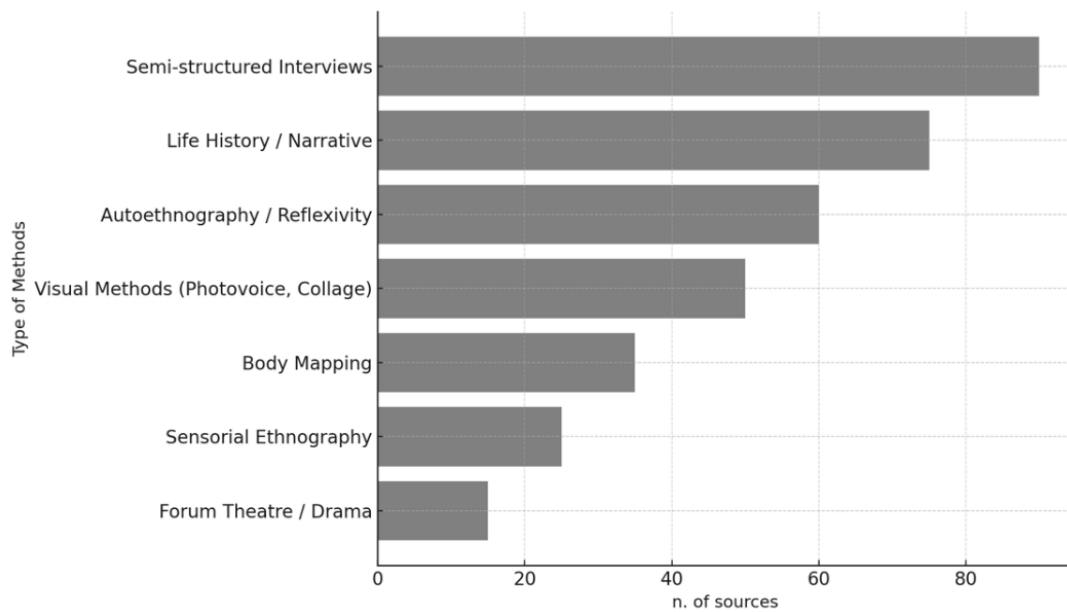


Figure 1: Spectrum of Trauma Research Methods

However, many scholars have begun to critique the limits of this approach — particularly when working with any type of marginalized, vulnerable groups such as refugees, migrants or/and forcibly displaced persons (FDPs), gender-based violence survivors, or children. In many trauma-laden contexts, verbal expression can be retraumatizing or culturally inaccessible (Uehling, 2023). As Kirmayer et al. (2014) argue, assumptions about narrative coherence often reflect Western ideologies more than lived experience. Studies such as Chacón Barrero's (2016) show that participants may resist such narrativisation, communicating instead through gesture, silence, or emotional withdrawal. Yet despite these findings, transcript-based data remains the default, sometimes imposing coherence where fragmentation or silence may be more ethically attuned. Interview-based methods also reflect disciplinary convergence: anthropologists, sociologists, and political scientists alike rely heavily on oral history models, often privileging speech and clarity over ambiguity, bodily knowledge, and silence—reproducing logocentric norms in trauma research.

Reflexivity and the Researcher's Emotional Labour

Once marginal, reflexivity has become a central concern in trauma-informed and feminist research, foregrounding researcher vulnerability, emotional labour, and positionality. Scholars such as Taylor (2019) and Suarez (2016) explore how researchers in conflict-affected or trauma-saturated environments become embodied witnesses, absorbing stories, silences, and tensions that linger long after fieldwork ends. Taylor speaks of the 'long shadows of the field,' emphasizing how unacknowledged grief and emotional residue shape both data collection and interpretation — a reality increasingly acknowledged in feminist approaches that recognize emotional labour not as incidental, but as integral to ethical research.

Terms like ‘vicarious trauma,’ ‘researcher burnout,’ and ‘secondary trauma’ appear with increasing frequency in the reviewed literature, though they are rarely accompanied by institutional mechanisms of care. Several studies draw on autoethnographic reflection (Herlihy; Pearce 2020; Howe 2022; field diaries (Jones 2019; Taylor 2019) or co-authored narratives to document the emotional toll of researching traumatic topics. Yet these techniques are inconsistently applied, often dependent on individual initiative rather than integrated into formal research design. This signals a clear opportunity — and ethical imperative — to embed structured reflexive practices and community-based emotional processing into methodological training.

Emergence of Embodied and Affective Approaches

An important shift is emerging: recent trauma research, influenced by feminist theory, affect studies, and sensory ethnography, highlights how trauma resists verbal articulation and instead surfaces through embodied, affective, and non-verbal expressions such as gesture, atmosphere, and emotional resonance. As van der Kolk (1994) and Kirmayer et al. (2014) argue, trauma may be stored in the body in ways that defy conscious recall or coherent narration. As a result, researchers are increasingly encouraged to attune to embodied cues, atmospheric shifts, and emotional contagion in the field. Silence and affective rupture are now recognised not as disruptions, but as data in their own right. These perspectives have led to the adoption of arts-based and embodied techniques such as body mapping, emotion journaling, rhythm-based storytelling, participatory drawing, and movement exercises, which surface trauma that cannot be spoken (e.g., Arfaoui 2021; Martikainen and Hakoköngäs 2023; Brown 2008).

Despite these innovations, embodied methodologies remain underutilised in mainstream science. In disciplines like political science and migration studies, there remains a strong bias toward rational, speech-based data collection — marginalising trauma expressed through silence, somatic cues, or relational presence, and reinforcing epistemic injustice toward those for whom trauma is stored in the body. This recognition underpins the design of the SensArticulate methodology, which takes embodiment not as metaphor, but as method: an invitation to listen with the body, observe through relational presence, and attend to what trauma does, not just what it says.

Expanding Participation: Co-Creation, Action Research, and Ethics

Another notable trend in trauma research methods is the move toward co-creation, participatory action research, and community-based methodologies (Moosa-Mitha 2021; Kia-Keating & Juang 2022; Hearn et al. 2022). This shift responds to long-standing critiques of extractive practices in postcolonial and forced migration research, where communities are often studied without control over how their experiences are interpreted or represented. Participatory methods aim to redistribute epistemic

authority, positioning participants not as subjects but as co-researchers or citizen-scientists. In the context of the MAGnituDe project, this approach also carries political significance — affirming experiential knowledge while fostering civic engagement and democratic participation. In the reviewed literature, participatory methods appear in diverse forms, with some examples listed here:²

- Visual & Expressive Arts Methods (Lenette & Boddy 2013; Vacchelli 2018; Weber 2019);
- Embodied & Movement-Based Methods (Henry 2006; Brown et al. 2011; Walkerdine, 2013; de Jager et al 2016);
- Performance & Theatre-Based Methods (Boydell 2011; De Smet et el. 2019);
- Interactive & Group Participatory Methods (Cruz 2016; Moosa-Mitha 2021);

Many projects describe themselves as participatory, but on closer examination, involvement is often confined to early consent or final-stage dissemination (e.g., Chen et al., 2010; Vaughn & Jacquez, 2020). The deep co-creation of methods, questions, analysis, and ethics — where participants shape the research from within — remains rare. In WP1 of the SensArticulate methodology, we aim to confront this gap directly — identifying the structural barriers (power imbalances, institutional constraints, short timeframes) that hinder deep collaboration, while also exploring its transformative potential. The issue is not researcher disinterest or lack of awareness, but structural: short-term funding cycles, institutional timelines, and academic productivity pressures limit the slow, trust-based engagement that participatory work requires. Taylor (2019) notes that time for repair and relational accountability is rarely built into institutional designs, while Kia-Keating and Juang (2021) stress that without systemic change, decolonial and participatory research remains difficult to operationalise. This disconnect between ethical intention and logistical reality reinforces the need for methodological training that not only introduces participatory techniques, but also equips researchers to adapt these methods within existing institutional constraints. Rather than idealising full co-creation, researchers in the MAGnituDe project will be encouraged to work within current requirements to the best of their capacity — negotiating timelines, advocating for reciprocity, and carving out space for care and shared authorship wherever possible.

² A full table categorizing methodological groups and techniques, along with corresponding authors from the reviewed sources, will be made available to participants as part of the training materials on SensArticulate methods.

6. Identified Methodological Gaps

Over-Reliance on Verbal and Logocentric Methods

One of the most persistent limitations across the reviewed literature in non-clinical trauma contexts is the continued over-reliance on verbal, interview-centric methods that privilege coherent storytelling, verbal expression, and individualised testimony. Despite growing recognition that trauma often defies linear narration, these approaches remain dominant across disciplines — including anthropology, sociology, and political science — reinforcing logocentric assumptions about memory, coherence, and disclosure. Yet, as several studies in the corpus show, trauma frequently emerges in fragmented, embodied, or culturally mediated forms that do not conform to these expectations (e.g., Zarowsky 2004; Henry 2006; Connolly & Reilly 2007; Chacón Barrero 2016). Scholars emphasize the substantial loss of data that occurs when researchers focus solely on the spoken narrative, overlooking gestures, silences, pauses, and other non-verbal cues through which trauma is communicated. Eastmond (2007) critiques the demand for narrative closure in refugee storytelling, arguing that such expectations distort the open-ended, emotionally complex nature of trauma. Herlihy and Turner (2007) similarly challenge the assumption that coherent autobiographical memory equates to truth, noting how trauma disrupts memory and expression — particularly in asylum contexts. This verbal bias aligns with institutional norms of data production, funding, and evaluation, reinforcing extractive relationships and narrowing what is considered 'rigorous.' Non-verbal, sensory, or co-performed expressions of trauma are often marginalised — not due to their lack of insight, but because they fall outside dominant academic grammars of legibility and credibility.

Marginalisation of Non-Verbal Approaches

Recent scholarship increasingly recognises trauma as a multisensory and embodied experience. Yet in practice, methodological norms remain heavily skewed toward verbal, written, and disembodied forms of inquiry. While arts-based, performative, and sensory methodologies are acknowledged as promising, they are often relegated to the margins of mainstream research in the social sciences and humanities. This reflects not only disciplinary preferences, but deeper epistemic hierarchies — where what counts as credible knowledge is still largely defined by what can be spoken, transcribed, and linguistically analysed.

Appuhamilage (2021), for instance, calls for a 'sense-based epistemology' that foregrounds the body, movement, and sensory perception in trauma research. Her work with survivors of gender-based violence demonstrates how trauma manifests in textures, gestures, and spatial relations that resist verbal capture. Similarly, Zarowsky (2021) critiques the dominance of extractive, logocentric methods and calls for 'attunement over extraction' — urging researchers to use slower, relational, and sensory

methodologies that are more responsive to participants' modes of expressing experience. While MAGnituDe does not focus on trauma as its central subject, it engages directly with people who have experienced displacement and potentially trauma-related disruptions. In this context, the critique of logocentric methods remains highly relevant. Our methodological design takes this into consideration — not to elicit trauma, but to create space for expression that is attuned to affective, embodied, and relational dimensions of experience.

Institutional bias plays a key role in the marginalisation of non-verbal approaches. Arts-based and embodied methods, such as movement, breathing, image theatre, and visual storytelling, are frequently seen as less rigorous by funders and review boards. Even when included in studies, they are often confined to preliminary exercises or final-stage reflection, rather than integrated into the core of the research design. Researchers using such approaches face disproportionate scrutiny to justify their validity — a burden not equally applied to those employing conventional interviews or text-based methods. This bias discourages methodological innovation and perpetuates a gatekeeping logic where trauma must conform to verbal norms in order to be seen, recognised, or believed.

Emotional Risk and Lack of Researcher Safeguards

Despite growing attention to participant wellbeing, the emotional vulnerability of researchers remains under-theorised and largely unsupported, even as they face risks of vicarious trauma, emotional burnout, and cumulative affective strain. Trauma-informed research must also account for how researchers themselves are affected by prolonged exposure to narratives of violence, displacement, and injustice. Several studies highlight this gap with both personal and methodological urgency. Howe (2013) explores how, in bearing witness, researchers may become secondary sites of trauma transmission, absorbing emotional residue in ways that blur the boundary between listening and experiencing. Goodkind and Deacon (2004) similarly note that many researchers enter the field without training in trauma-sensitive interviewing, emotional regulation, or post-fieldwork recovery. This absence of preparation not only compromises researcher wellbeing but also undermines the ethical quality of the research itself, leading to fatigue, disengagement, or ethical slippage.

Across these accounts, institutional responsibility is notably absent. Most universities and research organisations treat researchers' trauma as a private concern, with few offering trauma-informed supervision, structured debriefing, or collective accountability mechanisms. This gap becomes especially urgent in research involving forcibly displaced persons or survivors of gender-based violence, or other contexts where researchers may also carry intersecting vulnerabilities. Without appropriate safeguards, these encounters risk becoming not only ethically precarious but personally destabilising.

Culturally Insensitive and Western-Centric Frameworks

Although critiques of logocentric and narrative bias are growing, many trauma frameworks still rely on culturally specific, yet often Western, assumptions about individual suffering, verbal disclosure, and psychological recovery. These approaches often obscure collective, embodied, or spiritually mediated responses to trauma that fall outside clinical taxonomies. Im et al. (2021), for example, challenge the use of PTSD as a universal diagnostic framework in work with forcibly displaced populations. Drawing on cross-cultural research, they argue that trauma must be understood through local idioms of distress, cultural values, and relational worldviews, not mapped onto Euro-American clinical norms.

Scholars such as Appuhamilage (2021) and Kia-Keating and Juang (2021) call for culturally grounded, embodied approaches that recognize trauma's embeddedness in history, spirituality, and social relationality. These methods shift focus from internalised psychological states to affective, environmental, and communal dynamics. Such critiques reflect broader decolonial concerns: trauma studies often reproduce classificatory logics where whiteness, secularism, and Western psychology are treated as universal, while other knowledge systems are marked as alternative or supplementary. This epistemic flattening risks misdiagnosing suffering, undermining participant trust, and constraining what can be asked or understood in research encounters.

To counter this, scholars advocate for participatory and culturally responsive methodologies that position trauma as historically situated and collectively experienced. These include co-creative tools, embodied and visual methods, and community dialogue that are not merely translated linguistically, but reimagined conceptually. Rather than assuming universality, such approaches begin from epistemic difference, allowing communities to define the meanings, timelines, and terms of trauma and healing for themselves.

Underdeveloped Participatory Ethics and Institutional Barriers

Across disciplines and contexts, researchers report a shared tension between institutional deliverables and the relational demands of participatory work. Rigid timelines, short funding cycles, and procedural ethics boards often preclude the slow, iterative engagement that meaningful collaboration requires (Block et al., 2013; Moosa-Mitha & Wallace, 2010; De Smet et al., 2021). Several sources emphasize the emotional and ethical cost of superficial participation. When communities are invited to 'have a say' but given little real influence, the result can be disillusionment, retraumatisation, or a breakdown of trust. Researchers, too, may feel complicit in this dynamic, caught between institutional expectations and their ethical commitments to care and reciprocity (Hearn et al., 2018; Vacchelli, 2018).

As previously noted in the discussion of emotional risk, researchers operating in fragile, participatory contexts often lack institutional preparation or trauma-informed training. Without collective

frameworks of accountability or care, the ethical burden of participatory research falls heavily on individual researchers. Participatory research, when reduced to a label, risks becoming a performative gesture. Yet when grounded in relational and affective practice, it offers a powerful framework for ethical engagement. Rather than idealising participation or romanticising ‘community voices,’ we must attend to its frictions, failures, and negotiations, advocating for structurally aware, emotionally literate, and politically accountable approaches to collaborative trauma research.

7. Toward the New Research Culture: Implications for Innovating ‘SensArticulate’

Addressing the Gaps

The methodological gaps identified in the literature call not merely for the technical innovation, but a reorientation of research culture. The goal is not simply to diversify methods, but to encourage and transform how research relationships, knowledge production, and emotional responsibility are conceived in contexts shaped by displacement and trauma. MAGnituDe responds directly to the identified gaps by designing a training framework that will consolidate and mainstream arts-based, sensory, and co-creative practices. The ‘SensArticulate’ approach aims to cultivate a more relational, inclusive, and responsive research culture, especially for those working with trauma-affected and forcibly displaced populations. New approaches to working with trauma-affected populations should consider the following components, which will guide the development of our training modules:

1. Re-Defining ‘Trauma’

Trauma should no longer be understood solely as a clinical diagnosis or an individualized psychological condition, but as a relational and embodied presence that can shape every stage of the research process, from recruitment to data interpretation. In the context of MAGnituDe, we do not set out to study trauma directly, yet we work with populations, such as forcibly displaced people, whose experiences are often shaped by traumatic histories and systemic marginalisation. For this reason, trauma remains an important analytical frame, not as a fixed object of inquiry but as a methodological condition that demands attentiveness to silence, fragmentation, and emotional dissonance. Developing research practices that are responsive to how participants themselves interpret and express these experiences, even when indirectly, is essential for ethical and meaningful knowledge production.

2. Non-Verbal Cues as Valid Data

Reconceptualising trauma also requires expanding what counts as legitimate data. Non-verbal, symbolic, and sensory expressions (such as gesture, withdrawal, visual metaphors, and bodily disorientation) must be treated not as supplementary, but as central to understanding trauma-affected lives. The literature

reviewed shows that verbal data collection can be retraumatising or inaccessible, particularly when trauma disrupts narrative coherence. SensArticulate will embed set of alternative approaches such as image theatre, body-based exercises, and participatory visual storytelling as core testing/piloting methodological tools.

3. Positionality

Methodological innovation must go hand-in-hand with reflexive awareness. Researchers working with displaced and marginalised communities must be trained to interrogate their own positionality, including the cultural, political, and institutional power they carry. MAGnituDe will emphasise decolonial and intersectional frameworks that encourage self-location and ethical attunement. Practical tools such as reflexive diaries, role-swapping exercises, and body mapping of researcher presence will be introduced to cultivate relational accountability and mutual recognition in the field. Rather than passive extractors of data, researchers will be trained as co-witnesses embedded within power-laden encounters.

4. Adjusting the Institutional Constraints

Too often, care, creativity, and participation are treated as idealistic extras—optional additions to rigid timelines and deliverables. This report confirms that institutional and funding structures continue to marginalise arts-based and participatory practices by demanding ‘proof’ of their scientific legitimacy. MAGnituDe acknowledges these systemic barriers and incorporates practical training on how to navigate them. Our modules will include strategies for advocating for sensory and participatory methods during ethics approval, aligning care practices with administrative cycles, and planning realistic, scalable participatory activities. SensArticulate does not ignore institutional constraints—but equips researchers to work within them creatively and ethically.

From Technical Skills to Ethical and Affective Practice

Based on the literature review, we can outline preliminary ideas on three concrete areas that researchers should be trained in to effectively adopt innovative approaches. They can serve as a framework to guide us in preparing the training for piloting and innovating new methods.

Technical Skills

1. Non-Verbal and Arts-Based Methods

- *Body Mapping & Sensorial Ethnography*: Participants learn to create and interpret body maps to surface non-verbal expressions of trauma (Macal 2021) and conduct sensorial walks that attend to atmosphere, texture, and affect (Appuhamilage 2021).

- *Visual Storytelling*: Training in photovoice, digital collage, and collective drawing, as co-created in De Smet et al. (2021), to enable participants to express trauma in multimodal forms.

- *Drama/Theatre*: Facilitated exercises based on diverse community theatre methods, as highlighted by Zarowsky (2021), where participants enact scenarios of trauma to generate collective reflection and insight.

2. Adapted Verbal Methods

- *Trauma-Informed Interviewing*: Techniques for paced, consent-centred interviews that honour silences and non-linear narration (Herlihy & Turner 2007).

- *Semi-Structured Guides with Reflexive Prompts*: Tools for integrating reflexive check-ins (Taylor 2019) and cultural idioms of distress (Im et al. 2021) into interview protocols.

3. Participatory Co-Design

- *Workshop Facilitation*: Methods for collaboratively designing research questions, data collection tools, and analysis frameworks—drawing on co-creation principles in Kia-Keating & Juang (2021).

- *Ethical Photo-Elicitation & Mapping*: Step-by-step guidelines for involving participants in selecting, discussing, and interpreting images or maps of trauma-impacted spaces (Block et al. 2013).

Ethical Practice

1. Trauma-Informed Consent & Safeguarding

- *Layered Consent Processes*: Introducing ‘dynamic consent’ models that allow participants to revisit and revise their participation at multiple stages (Goodkind & Deacon 2004).

- *Safeguarding Protocols*: Checklists and flowcharts for responding to distress, crisis, or disclosure, inspired by Howe (2013) and institutional best practices.

2. Decolonial & Intersectional Reflexivity

- *Power Mapping Exercises*: Activities to map researcher-participant power dynamics, authority structures, and potential cultural blind spots (Andermahr 2021).

- *Epistemic Accountability Sessions*: Group reflections on how methods privilege certain forms of knowledge, guided by Macal (2021) and decolonial critiques.

3. Group Accountability

- *Feedback Loops & Co-Authorship*: Strategies for iterative feedback on emerging findings and for co-authoring dissemination outputs with participants, following De Smet et al. (2021).
- *Respectful Exit & Reciprocity Plans*: Planning templates to ensure participants receive tangible benefits (e.g., workshops, resources) and opportunities for continued engagement.

Affective Competencies

1. Researcher Self-Care & Debriefing

- *Structured Reflexive Circles*: Regular group debriefs after field sessions, using prompts from Taylor (2019) and Goodkind & Deacon (2004) to process emotional impact.
- *Body-Based Grounding Practices*: Short exercises—breathing, movement, tapping—to help researchers regulate affect during and after field encounters (Appuhamilage 2021).

2. Emotional Literacy & Containment

- *Affective Mapping*: Tools for documenting and sharing one's emotional responses to fieldwork, inspired by Howe (2013), to build collective awareness.
- *Peer Coaching Pairs*: Pairing researchers to support one another in recognising signs of vicarious trauma and seeking help early.

3. Institutional Advocacy Skills

- *Negotiating Timelines & Scope*: MAGnituDe will develop template negotiation letters, talking points, and 'elevator pitches' (e.g., "Why we need time for care") to support researchers in advocating for ethical flexibility during grant writing, ethics review, and project planning. These materials will be co-created during the training workshops and pilot-tested by researchers in live institutional contexts. A feedback loop will allow us to iteratively refine the tools based on real-world use, ensuring they are adaptable to different institutional settings and national funding requirements (Moosa-Mitha & Wallace 2010).
- *Building Support Networks*: Guidance on forming researcher support groups and connecting with institutional counselling or supervision services.

Table 1: Core Components of SensArticulate Methodology

Dimension	Key Training Components	Sample Tools/Techniques (from Literature Review)
Technical Skills	body mapping, visual storytelling, forum theatre	drawing, movement journaling, photo-elicitation
Ethical Practices	trauma-informed consent, safeguarding, reflexivity	dynamic consent, power-mapping, feedback loops
Affective Skills	emotional literacy, self-regulation, peer support	reflexive circles, coaching pairs, debriefing tools

Embodied, Participatory, and Reflexive Pedagogies

Methods are not neutral tools to be transferred. SensArticulate Training will be rooted in pedagogical practices that embody the values the methods aim to uphold: presence, collaboration, vulnerability, and accountability. In this way, the training environment itself becomes a laboratory of ethical relationality, preparing researchers not just to *know about* trauma-informed methods, but to *inhabit them*. The pedagogical foundations of SensArticulate will be drawn from three intertwined traditions:

1. Embodied Learning

Participants will engage in physical, sensory, and affective exercises that foreground the body as a site of knowledge and memory. This includes, for example

- body scans, grounding, and posture awareness as preparatory rituals before field engagement;
- drama/theatre exercises to explore relational dynamics and affective responses (used in fieldwork by De Smet et al. 2021);
- body mapping and movement journaling, which allow researchers to reflect on their own emotional terrain and to experience firsthand the communicative power of non-verbal methods (Macal 2021);

This pedagogical strategy trains researchers to ‘listen with the body’ (and later ‘collect data with the body’), cultivating somatic attention as both a research and care tool.

2. Participatory Pedagogy

In alignment with the co-creative logic of the methods themselves, participants will not be passive recipients of knowledge but as co-designers of the learning process. In the training, this could be realized in the form of collaborative reworking of research scenarios (participants bring field dilemmas which are collectively explored through simulation and theatre); peer-led exercises and rotating facilitation roles, to practice democratic learning; collective ethnographic walks and co-interpretation (pairs or small groups co-create meaning from shared embodied observation, disrupting individualistic knowledge

hierarchies). Such participatory pedagogy mirrors the fieldwork ethic SensArticulate promotes: slow, situated, and dialogic engagement.

3. Reflexive Practice

One of the most important aspect of the training will be regular space for critical self-reflection, focusing on questions of:

- Positionality (Who am I in this research? Whose language am I using?)
- Affective saturation (What am I carrying from the field? What is stuck in my body?)
- Power and privilege (Where do I impose, and where do I listen?)

Participants will use diaries, pair coaching, and facilitated group debriefs to articulate how power, identity, and affect operate in their research relationships. This echoes Taylor's (2019) call for structured practices to acknowledge and metabolise the "long shadows" cast by fieldwork in trauma-affected communities.

Preparing Researchers for Emotional and Institutional Realities

To be effective, trauma-informed methodologies must operate not only at the level of technical design or ethical reflection but also within the emotional, cultural, and institutional terrains where research unfolds. SensArticulate's training thus extends beyond methodology to prepare researchers to navigate the real-world conditions of trauma research: emotional precarity, intercultural complexity, and institutional constraint.

Emotional Preparedness

Researching trauma-affected communities inevitably generates emotional spillover, not only in participants but in researchers. Yet few academic training programmes address secondary trauma (Howe 2013; Taylor 2019), ambiguous researcher-participant boundaries in participatory contexts (Goodkind & Deacon 2004) and researcher exhaustion and affective disorientation, particularly in prolonged fieldwork. SensArticulate must introduce tools for emotional regulation, collective decompression, and care planning, not as private coping, but as a shared responsibility within research teams and institutions.

Cultural and Epistemic Agility

Cultural adaptation is often reduced to translation or tokenistic reference to "local context." The training instead develops researchers' capacity for epistemic humility, engaging participants in exercises that surface implicit assumptions about what counts as evidence or truth; explore epistemic dissonance when trauma is expressed in forms unfamiliar to Western psychology (e.g. gesture, ritual, or silence), and promote decolonial awareness and community-grounded negotiation of research frames

(Im et al. 2021; Appuhamilage 2021). Researchers should be encouraged not only to adapt to cultural differences but to co-develop research logic with participants.

Institutional Literacy and Negotiation

Finally, the training must recognize that even the most reflexive and well-prepared researchers face *institutional barriers*: fixed project timelines, pressure to publish, and misalignment between ethical aspirations and deliverable-driven funding structures. We will co-develop advocacy strategies to negotiate flexible deliverables and participatory pacing; write care-based timelines for ethics committees and funders, and aim to build peer support and mentorship circles for emotional and professional sustainability. This components draws on real-world insights from Moosa-Mitha & Wallace (2010) and Block et al. (2013), who argue that trauma-informed research cannot be sustainably practiced without structural change.

8. Conclusion

This literature review began with a pragmatic task: to identify gaps in existing trauma research methodologies across the humanities and social sciences. What it revealed was far more uncomfortable, way beyond methodological absences. It revealed epistemic habits, institutional constraints, and ethical compromises that continue to shape how trauma is approached, contained, or excluded. Across disciplines, we found abundant ingenuity and no lack of innovation: researchers developing body-based techniques, piloting arts-informed interviews, co-designing methods with survivors and displaced persons. And yet, this innovation often exists at the margins, isolated from institutional training, relegated to ‘creative supplements,’ and rarely formalized into the methodological canon. What persists instead are verbal, linear, Western-centric methodologies that assume trauma is something that can be “told,” “transcribed,” and “analyzed.” These approaches are epistemically limiting, but more dangerously, they risk re-traumatizing participants or disregarding meaningful modes of expression altogether. Silence, gesture, withdrawal, symbolic resistance: these are not absences of data. They are data.

The review also confirmed what many of us already know but hesitate to name: the academic system itself is often structurally hostile to trauma-informed, participatory work. Projects are accelerated, deliverables are fixed, emotional labour is invisible, and ethical depth is negotiated under pressure. Researchers are left managing the cost, often silently, often alone.

What, then, is needed? The answer is not another set of tools. It is a methodological reorientation, one that redefines not only how trauma is researched but how researchers are prepared to hold it. In this way, innovating SensArticulate approach will not be a *plug-and-play* solution. It needs to call to slow down, *to feel more*, to stay longer with discomfort. It must insist on embodied, sensory, and co-created

knowledge. It assumes that the researcher is never neutral, and that care is not peripheral to research but central to it. This does not mean abandoning rigour. It means redefining what rigour looks like when working in trauma-laden settings. It means being rigorous in our reflexivity, in our accountability, and in how we negotiate meaning across epistemic divides. It means training researchers not only in 'methods,' 'tools' but in the emotional, cultural, and political literacies that make such work possible, survivable, and perhaps: transformative.

Above all, this review underscores that trauma research must begin by acknowledging its own complicity. We cannot extract stories, validate our frameworks, and leave behind shattered relationships. We cannot claim inclusion while privileging institutional timelines over community rhythms. And we cannot train researchers to "do no harm" if we do not first interrogate the architectures of harm that surround our practice.

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10. Annexes

FULL LIST OF REVIEWED SOURCES

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