



Participatory media and storytelling projects

Katarzyna Kowalska

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I am a senior lead trainer, non-formal education specialist and co-founder of **Upstream Stories**: an NGO specializing in photography and film-based methodologies for social change.

In my work, I strive to create safe, inclusive spaces where participants can reclaim their voices and digitally express their stories, because I believe that **every story should be heard**.

While my experience and work practice span broader conflict transformation and inclusion frameworks, this portfolio showcases my core speciality: participatory media for youth empowerment and social change.



This photo was taken during a spontaneous trip with my friends which has left me with quite pleasant memories even though it wasn't anything big. We took pictures one by one and sang on the way there. I enjoy being around my friends, it's just going with the flow. The pictures came out great and the scenery was pretty. It's one of my favourite unplanned days.

I spend a lot of time alone, completely by myself (sometimes weird) thoughts. Being alone does not make me feel lonely, it helps me stay connected to my creativity.

On the photo are my two closest friends. We were on our way to a concert, and the photo is kind of chaotic because it was taken quickly. I think that's why I like this photo, I really cherish it. We love spending time with them. We often go to concerts together because we love music. The chaotic energy of the photo perfectly captures the excitement and spontaneity of that moment.

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Creating new narratives

In my projects I teach people how to use simple means of expression - digital storytelling and participatory photography - to share their unique, personal stories with the outside world.

I also develop educational materials (tool kits, online courses) which you can see in the following pages along with examples of films done by my participants and myself.



mental health awareness

"Normal" is a short film I initially wanted to produce to come to terms with my own ADHD diagnosis, but while working on it I felt a very strong need to explain **how my ADHD brain feels like**. In result I created a video that lets the public have a short glimpse into the head of someone with experiencing mental health related challenges.

In 2024 at Upstream Stories we implemented a project called "Diverse Visions" that gave platform to neurodivergent youth to reflect and share their stories.

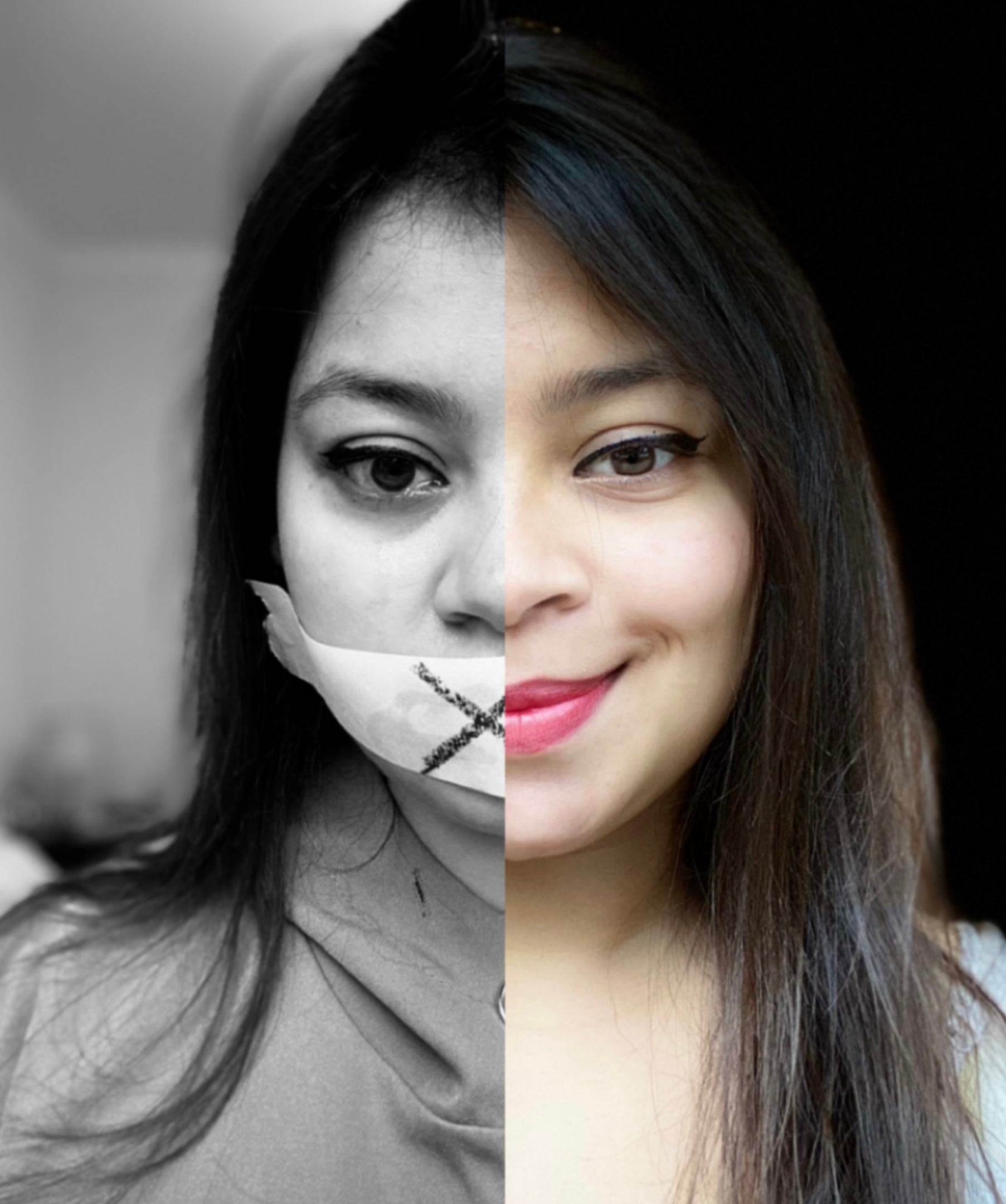
DigiStorID

Exploring how digital storytelling can be used for supporting people with intellectual disabilities to present their unique perspectives and reclaiming their personal stories

Storytelling for people with intellectual disabilities: manual for facilitators

Sagan Min - a film by Sunna





Story Kitchen and EuroMed Stories

Deconstructing stereotypical media narratives by
empowering young people to digitalize and express their
sown stories to share their cultural perspectives

Blumen: a short film by Toprak

EuroMed Stories manual

ARTicipate!

Exploring how participatory art based practices can be used for supporting and empowering adult learners with vulnerabilities.

A digital story by Theodoros

Participatory photography workbook

Digital storytelling workbook



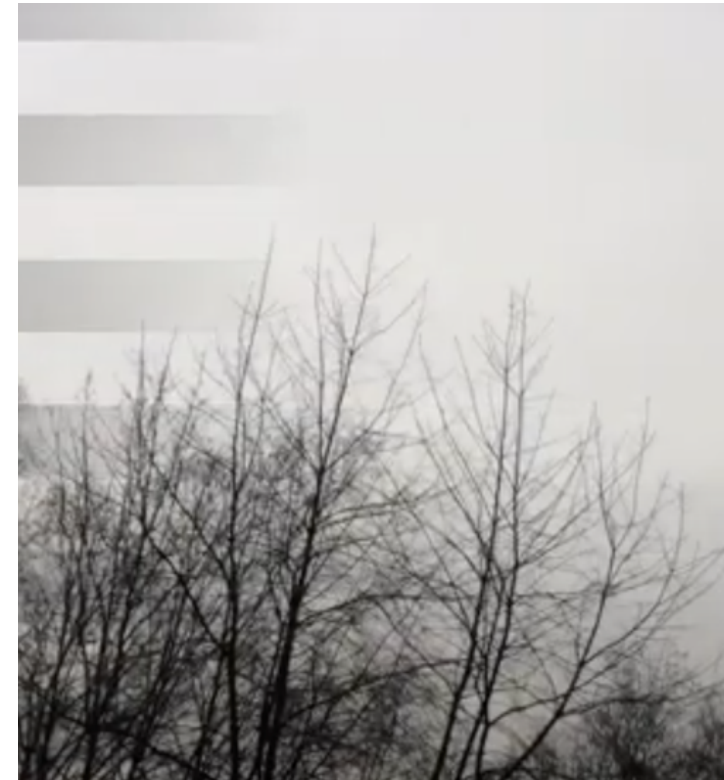
Giving voice to those whose stories are unheard



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Kano Cards

While leading workshops, it is crucial for me to always provide space for participants to reflect on their learning process and the feelings connected to it. Over the years I realized that the seemingly simply question “How do you feel?” is a challenge for many of my learners who struggle with finding words describing their emotions. This inspired me to co-create Kano Cards - and educational tool that uses visuals to support people in reflection.

Erasmus+ funded participatory media projects:

- The Power of Stories (Poland, 2026)
- Hear Me Out (Poland, 2026)
- Roots and Borders (Poland, 2023 - 2026)
- Sharing Stories (Poland, 2025)
- Drawn Together (Poland, 2025)
- Diverse Visions (Denmark, Poland, 2024)
- Picture the Change (Denmark, Armenia, 2023-2024)
- ARTicipate! (Denmark, Finland, Spain, Greece, Slovenia, 2023-2025)
- Sharing Stories-Building Bridges (Germany, 2022)
- Visual Youth Work (Poland, 2022)
- Digital Participation (Poland, Denmark, Italy, 2020-2021)
- Tell Me About You (Denmark, Moldova, 2019-2020)
- Hitchhikers Guide to the Digital Galaxy (Georgia, 2019)
- Creative Countryside (Germany, 2019)
- Picture It! (Poland, 2019)
- Every Pixel Tells a Story (Poland, 2019)
- Once Upon a Story (Portugal, 2018)
- Digital Dialogue (Georgia, 2018)
- DigiTale (France, 2018)
- Everyone Has a Story to Tell (Armenia 2017)
- Digital Storytelling for Intercultural Dialogue (Armenia, 2016)
- Digital Storytelling for Youth Inclusion (Armenia, 2015)

Anna Lindh Foundation grants:

- Story Kitchen (Germany, 2022)
- How I See You - EuroMed Stories (Poland, Egypt, Jordan, 2022)

Projects funded by other donors:

- Far Away So Close (MEET UP! German-Ukrainian Youth Encounters, 2020)
- Digital Storytelling for Promoting Dialogue (Creative Force by Swedish Institute, Georgia, 2019)
- Youth Work 3.0 (Creative Force, Swedish Institute, Armenia, 2017)

Conference speeches and guest lectures:

- **Guest Speaker (2025) | NGO Multiperspectives (Metz, France)** - Art based tools for reflection and self-expression for Art'Emo & University of Lorraine students
- **Online Guest Speaker (2023) | Organization for European Expertise and Communications** – "The Power of Vulnerability" for the Eastern Partnership young leaders program.
- **Guest course Instructor (2023) | University College Freiburg (Germany)** Digital storytelling for liberal arts students
- **Online Guest Lecturer (2023) | University of Economics and Human Sciences in Warsaw (Poland)** – Introduction to digital storytelling.
- **Guest Speaker (2022) | AL SHARQ FORUM (Turkey)** – "How are narratives shaped, amplified, and transformed into instruments of influence?" at the Strategic Civic Leadership retreat
- **Online Masterclass Instructor (2022) | Forum ZFD / Academy for Conflict Transformation (Germany)** – Digital storytelling for conflict transformation