

Voices through Water

The Creative and Activist Methodologies Toolkit

Project Number: 2023-1-AT01-KA220-YOU-000161835



Co-funded by
the European Union

Funded by the European Union. However, the views and opinions expressed are solely those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or OeAD-GmbH. Neither the European Union nor the OeAD-GmbH can be held responsible.



Voices through water © is licensed under
[Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/)



Creating a Short Documentary Film with a Personal Story

Artistic, Advocacy, Activist



This activity guides participants through the process of creating a short documentary film that combines a personal journey with deeper social themes. Inspired by Stela Joudal's film *3 days* (Film_3 DAYS_My Elections_My EU_Stela Joudal.mov), who created a dual portrait of her journey to Lampedusa contrasted with the story of a young refugee. Participants will learn how to plan, film, edit and distribute their own short documentary film that explores personal experiences in the context of broader social issues.

Objective/aim

- Learn the basics of documentary filmmaking from concept to distribution
- Process personal experiences through artistic expression
- Connect personal stories with broader social themes
- Develop critical thinking and research skills
- Gain confidence in presenting your own work
- Create a meaningful document that can influence perceptions of important issues
- Learn basics of ethical approaches to sensitive topics



Target group

Young adults, anyone interested in documentary filmmaking and social issues

1-8 participants (ideally 3-5 for mutual support and experience sharing)



Time needed

3-6 months total process (flexible depending on the scope of the project):

Planning and preparation: 2-4 weeks

Filming: 1-4 weeks (depending on journey/project length)

Post-production: 4-8 weeks

Distribution: ongoing after completion

Workshop introduction: 3-4 hours

Step by step instructions

Phase 1 - Planning and conception

2-4 weeks

In "My Elections - My EU!" we focused on the topic of climate change and migration. We identified themes and perspectives that interested us most about that topic and then searched for a personal connection to it. We dealt with the question of who we want to connect our story with this topic, in a visual way, storyboard etc. We then documented our experience on the travels to Lampedusa, Zicksee, Brussels and our home countries.

Phase 2 - Preliminary research

1-2 weeks

Then we researched about the topic, got insights from NGO workers, experts on the theme and artists and did interviews with local people.

Phase 3 - Filming

1-4 weeks

- Film long takes - they will be useful in editing
- Document the entire process, including preparations and reflections
- Capture authentic moments and emotions
- Plan B-roll footage (supplementary images)

Phase 4 - In-depth research

2-3 weeks

- Continue research even after filming
- Verify facts and gain more perspectives on the topic
- For sensitive topics, consider ethical aspects of processing

Phase 5 - Editing and post-production

4-6 weeks

The artist then supported participants in editing their material - in short videos, or short documentations.

- Select material and create a rough cut
- Show work-in-progress version to target audience for feedback
- Complete visual and audio post-production
- Create a final version of the film

Phase 6 - Distribution

ongoing

- Identify suitable venues for screening (festivals, schools, premises of NGOs)
- Prepare a film presentation and a topic discussion
- Use social media and online platforms



Environment

Varied – part of the work takes place outdoors during filming, part at a studio, with access to computers with editing software (post-production). For workshops/presentations, a suitable room with projector and video playback capability is needed.



Tips for the trainer

- Emphasise importance of ethical approaches, especially when working with sensitive topics
- Encourage participants to have confidence and not be afraid to experiment
- Remind that long takes are better than short ones – you will appreciate the choice in editing
- Help participants find balance between personal story and broader context
- Emphasize importance of thorough research – people will expect expertise from them
- Encourage seeking mentors or more experienced filmmakers
- Prepare participants that the process will be long and demanding, but very enriching
- Film long takes – they will be useful in editing



Comment

This activity is particularly effective for young people who are looking for ways to make sense of their experiences through film. By combining a personal story with a wider social issue, authentic and powerful documents are created. Participants often find that the process of making films helps them to process their own experiences and gain a deeper understanding of complex issues. It is important to prepare participants for the fact that a good documentary film requires time, patience and thorough preparation. The success of Stela Joudal, who was honoured at her first festival, shows that authentic stories can reach both audiences and professionals.



Materials

Equipment

- Recording device (smartphone, camera with video function, or professional camera)
- Microphone for quality audio (external or built-in)
- Stabilizer or tripod (optional)
- Sufficient storage/memory cards
- Quality vs. practicality

Software

- Editing program
- Computer with sufficient performance

Other

- Notebook for planning
- Internet access for research



Alternative

- Collective version: Group of participants creates a film together, each contributing their personal story
- Online version: Film can be created solely from home, without travelling
- Shorter version: Instead of long documentary, create a series of short videos for social media
- Thematic variants: Focus on other social topics (climate change, social inequalities, technology)
- Workshop format: One-week intensive workshop with a fast process from concept to rough cut



Source

Inspired by Stela Joudal's experience filming a documentary within the "My Elections – My EU!" project, combined with principles of documentary filmmaking and ethical storytelling