





Fellow Report 2024 - Creative Impact in Practice

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Körperkino: An Interactive Toolkit and App Prototype for Collaborative Storytelling









K*rperKino

AN INTERACTIVE TOOLKIT AND APP PROTOTYPE FOR COLLABORATIVE STORYTELLING



CIRCE 2024 Fellowship Report



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1. SUMMARY

Storytelling is a powerful tool that shapes how we see the world, teaching us fundamental lessons about our values, history, and future. However, storytelling is not neutral. It has historically been used as a mechanism of power and control. When we examine who tells the stories, who they are about, and who they are being told to, clear patterns of power and dominance emerge. Stakeholders in the Creative and Cultural Economies (CCE) like Museums, Media Houses, and institutions act as gatekeepers, determining which stories are told and by whom. This gatekeeping reinforces inequalities and restricts the diversity of stories in today's global, capitalist attention economy.

To counter this, I developed the Körperkino methodology, a collaborative storytelling approach that shifts the power dynamics of narrative creation. It challenges traditional storytelling by inviting those whose stories have been marginalized to co-create their own narratives, rather than having stories told *about* them. Through workshops at Deutsche Welle (DW) in Berlin and Bonn, Körperkino was integrated into journalistic storytelling frameworks, where it sparked critical discussions about the ethical implications of media, power imbalances, and the need for more equitable collaborations.

The methodology doesn't just expose these imbalances; it provides a toolkit for change. It helps stakeholders in the CCE—whether journalists, media organizations, or cultural institutions—identify their own Power & Resources, Values, and Impact in storytelling. By doing so, it guides them toward building collaborations that are rooted in shared power & resources, shared values and Impact. This approach reimagines storytelling as a space for healing, collective empowerment, and the co-creation of narratives that reflect a true plurality of perspectives. By inviting storytellers to ask, *What changes when we tell our stories in relation to others?* Körperkino helps create a shared space where stories don't exist in isolation but intersect, resonate, and ultimately, transform all involved.

2. PROBLEM AND EVIDENCE:

THE POWER OF STORYTELLING, THE POWER WITHIN STORYTELLING

Stories have a profound impact on how we perceive the world. They shape our understanding of characters and heroes whose struggles resonate with our own, whether in folklore, literature, films, or mythologies. Through stories, we grasp fundamental lessons about cause and consequence—warnings against greed, the value of kindness, or the importance of community. Stories help us learn about what came before us, passed down through our parents, teachers, and history books. They reinforce the status quo, celebrate the victories of our ancestors, or help us mourn and honor the losses suffered in the fight for liberation. Stories not only preserve our past but also guide our future, helping us learn from collective mistakes and envision new possibilities for what's ahead.

When we consider the three key aspects of storytelling—who is telling the stories, who these stories are about, and who they are being told to —patterns of power and control begin to emerge. Historically and today, examining who has the authority to tell stories reveals how certain groups shape and sustain dominant narratives. As Edward Said (1978) explored, colonial powers didn't merely conquer territories; they crafted narratives that cast colonized peoples as "primitive" or "exotic," representations that justified exploitation and control. By contrast, colonizers were depicted as "civilizers," creating long-standing stereotypes that persist in today's storytelling (Bhabha, 1994). The issue becomes clear when we examine—both historically and in the present—who has the authority to tell these stories and which groups hold the power to shape and sustain dominant narratives.

In the **cultural and creative industries**, these questions are critical. Museums, media conglomerates, studios and publishers decide which stories get the resources to be told, who tells it and who hears them. Gatekeeping within media and cultural industries constrains narrative diversity, perpetuating historical inequalities and reinforcing power structures that marginalize underrepresented groups (Bourdieu, 1993; Hesmondhalgh, 2018; Gray, 2013). Dominant cultural institutions, often controlled by privileged gatekeepers, uphold biases that limit whose stories are told and valued, thereby maintaining the cultural status quo (Ahmed, 2012; Littler, 2017). In the current age of **capitalism and the attention economy**, we must ask: **Who is profiting from**

these narratives? Who is shaping stories to serve a particular agenda? In a time of increasing **political polarization**, which institutions hold the authority to decide which stories are told, who gets to tell them, and whose voices are silenced? Ultimately, we need to question **who benefits** from these power dynamics, and how these interactions continue to shape and limit our understanding of diverse experiences.

3. THE JOURNEY: KÖRPERKINO THE METHODOLOGY

For the past five years, I have been grappling with a fundamental question: **How can we rethink and innovate the way stories are told**? In response, I have developed **Körperkino**— a **collaborative storytelling methodology** in partnership with what I describe as **individuals and communities carrying the weight of othering and intergenerational trauma**. This methodology emerged from a deep engagement with people whose voices are often marginalized or excluded from mainstream narratives.

In 2022, I began by teaching this approach at the Albert Ludwig University of Freiburg, introducing it as a means to collaborate and tell stories with communities rather than about communities. This year, with the support of the CIRCE fellowship, I made a conscious effort to extend the reach of this methodology beyond academia by traveling and sharing it with diverse audiences. This allowed me to test its adaptability and effectiveness across various contexts, and gather invaluable feedback that continues to shape and refine its application. This practice is designed to be flexible—one that evolves based on who is using it and how it fits into their unique storytelling journey. It's a methodology meant to transform and grow with those who engage with it, enabling a space where storytelling becomes a tool for collective healing, mutual understanding and resilience.

3.1 The methodology

This methodology is grounded in a set of core pillars that inform the Körperkino approach. Among them, the first is **Collaborative Storytelling**, which enables a shared narrative space where individuals explore the intersection of their stories, emphasizing mutuality, agency, and authorship. The second pillar, **Embodiment and the Role of the Body in Storytelling**, highlights the body as an active agent of narrative expression, using movement, hapticity and

performative elements to deepen understanding of intergenerational trauma and shared histories. The third pillar, **Liminality and Queering the Storytelling Space**, challenges fixed narratives and identities, embracing fluid, non-binary expressions and the complexity of lived experiences.

3.1.1 The Storytellers

In my research with storytellers across various mediums—film, journalism, documentaries, academic writing, and reportage—focused on underrepresented and marginalized perspectives, I observed distinct patterns in the collaborative mechanisms behind how such narratives are constructed. From these findings, I identified three key roles or perspectives that consistently shape storytelling structures:

> The Overlooked Underdog:

Individuals with lived experiences of existing on the margins of society—often from disadvantaged backgrounds—whose perspectives have historically been spoken for, rather than by themselves. They possess powerful narratives that have remained untold or underrepresented.

> The Privileged Ally:

Those who have access to **networks**, **mentorship**, **resources**, **and platforms** that shape which stories are told and how they are shared. They hold the power to amplify voices and influence the storytelling ecosystem, playing a pivotal role in either reinforcing or challenging dominant narratives.

> The Powerful Megaphone:

Institutions with the **power and resources** to uphold, gatekeep, and shape cultural narratives on a larger scale. They determine which stories receive visibility and funding, ultimately influencing what gets told and heard. These institutions play a crucial role in dictating which perspectives are amplified or silenced within the broader cultural landscape.

3.1.2 The Parameters

Furthermore, I identified three key parameters that define how each storyteller operates within their storytelling endeavors:

1. Power & Resources:

Each storyteller individual has a unique set of power and resources that stem from their **positionality** within social, cultural, and institutional structures. This determines their ability to shape and influence narratives.

2. Values:

Shaped by **lived experiences, cultural backgrounds, and personal histories**, these values inform their perspectives and storytelling approaches, adding depth and authenticity to their narratives.

3. Impact:

The reach and influence of their storytelling are rooted in the **communities they belong** to and engage with. Their impact is defined by their ability to connect with and uplift these communities, creating resonance and creating meaningful change.

The methodology helps you identify the key elements—Power & Resources, Values, and Impact—within each storytelling stakeholder. Once these elements are understood, it guides you in finding collaborators based on the **mutuality** between your parameters.

3.2 The Workshops

This year, I've been actively facilitating workshops to engage participants with my methodology, beginning in Poland in May 2024 and expanding across various regions in Europe. Each workshop was tailored to resonate deeply with the specific audience, adapting both the approach and focus to the unique dynamics of each group. For instance, in Poland, I worked with professionals working in non-profit and civic society work across Europe, focusing on themes of **power of collaborative storytelling** in creating democratic practices. In Bulgaria, I facilitated sessions with youth groups aged 13 to 21, centering around **future dreaming**. Furthermore, each iteration of the workshop that I facilitated from thereon built on the last, continuously refining the methodology to meet the needs and aspirations of diverse storytellers and communities that I encountered.

In the workshops, I guide participants through an experiential, cyclical process. They begin by selecting a story with personal resonance and explore telling it collaboratively. By drawing from one's own embodied and experiential knowledge and finding mutuality with

another's lived narrative, the story then transforms into a third medium. Through **haptic** exercises, film, and audiovisual materials, participants engage in a simulated collaborative environment that mirrors real-world interactions, allowing them to navigate the dynamics of co-creation. This immersive space invites participants to experience **negotiations**, where stories **interweave and transform**.

3.3 The Toolkit

As I designed more workshops, I encountered a key challenge: the methodology could only be experienced through my direct facilitation. To decentralize the process and make the methodology accessible to a wider range of stakeholders in the cultural and creative sectors, I decided to create a toolkit that would capture these insights digitally—a portable version of the in-person workshop experience. This process was a collaborative effort with **Mithra Nehzad**, who served as the **strategic designer** of the prototype. While working on the backend with Mithra, I refined the methodology into several core components, including key characteristics, parameters, a cyclical approach, and essential guiding questions.

The prototype allows users to create a profile by identifying as one of three storyteller types: *Underdog, Ally, or Megaphone*. Based on this, the toolkit guides users through a tailored questionnaire, prompting self-reflection on key parameters: **Power and Resources, Values, and Impact**.

In future iterations, I plan to incorporate audiovisual content, including videos and podcasts, as pedagogical elements within the toolkit. In the long run, I envision the toolkit serving two primary functions:

- 1. Providing a framework to "**Stop, Look, and Reflect**" on one's storytelling practices, supporting the adoption of ethical, collaborative practices.
- Acting as a collaborator-finding platform, where users are matched with potential partners for ethical, collaborative storytelling based on their responses to the questionnaire.

4. IMPACT OF THE PROJECT

I began the fellowship with a strong focus on two major storytelling institutions, HKW (Haus der Kulturen der Welt) and DW (Deutsche Welle)—two influential organizations that have the power to shape cultural memory and contemporary perspectives on a global scale. HKW (Haus der Kulturen der Welt): HKW is a cultural institution in Berlin that explores contemporary issues through exhibitions, performances, and interdisciplinary events, focusing on global perspectives and intercultural dialogue. DW (Deutsche Welle): DW is Germany's international broadcaster, providing news and information across multiple platforms on global topics from a German and European perspective. Over the past six months, while discussions with HKW are ongoing to determine the most effective way to introduce the methodology into their work environment, I successfully conducted two workshops at Deutsche Welle's Berlin and Bonn offices. At DW Berlin and Bonn, I integrated the Körperkino methodology into their journalistic storytelling framework, testing its practical application and identifying key challenges in real-world media settings.

4.1. Workshop 1: Deutsche Welle Bonn (September 18th, 2024) - Mindspiration Days Conference

At the Mindspiration Days conference in Bonn, I co-facilitated a workshop with **Nusrat Sheikh**, a staff member at Diversity, Equity and Inclusion team at DW Bonn, for a diverse audience that included journalists and representatives from DW Akademie. It was an explorative workshop designed to introduce collaborative storytelling methodology and assess its potential integration into their existing workflows. During the post-workshop reflection session, one participant noted that the workshop helped them understand why they were drawn to certain topics, providing clarity on their personal motivations as a journalist. Another participant acknowledged the power dynamics involved in their collaborations, particularly how South Asian partners often submit to the authority of DW's editorial process.

Several participants reflected on the ethical implications of their role as journalists. One expressed concern about the imbalance in storytelling, saying, "What do I get out of collaboration? This question used to haunt me because I realized I was portraying people as backward in my journalistic stories. I did not ever think what they get in return working for me?"

They admitted to feeling uncomfortable with the exploitative nature of journalism, where reporters use stories for their own gain without considering the impact on the people involved. The methodology encouraged them to rethink this dynamic.

Another participant added, "Journalists benefit from these stories, but the people we feature often don't. This is my takeaway, and as a lecturer, I will emphasize this more. Here at DW, we operate within a certain framework." This reflection highlighted the material and ethical imbalance in their work.

One journalist wondered aloud, "What do my collaborators in Kathmandu get from this?" while another pointed out the financial inequality in their industry, noting, "We pay freelancers very little. How can we talk about collaboration when material needs aren't met?" This raised broader questions about power in media development, with participants agreeing that addressing these issues is a significant challenge, especially within DW's existing framework.

The workshop sparked important conversations about the need for more equitable collaborations and greater mindfulness of their positions as journalists working from a privileged space in Germany.

4.1.1 Challenges

However, certain challenges emerged that are worth noting, particularly around **time constraints**. DW journalists expressed that the heavy demands of their work often leave them with limited time to deeply engage with the stories they cover. This limitation directly impacts their ability to fully apply collaborative methods, as they are often pressured by tight deadlines.

4.2. Workshop 2: Deutsche Welle Berlin (October 14th 2024)

In Berlin, I conducted a workshop with a group of journalists and storytellers from the DW Berlin office made possible by **Joanna Gottschalk**, senior journalist at DW. While they echoed many of the concerns raised in Bonn, additional insights surfaced around the **collaborative structure** between DW and its freelance journalists.

4.2.1 Resource Allocation and Quality Control

One recurring theme was the **dual-layered collaboration** between DW and its freelance producers. Journalists expressed that while freelance producers gather material and record stories on the ground, DW ultimately controls the narrative through editorial decisions. This raises questions about the equitable distribution of creative power and resources in the storytelling process.

Moreover, concerns were raised regarding the **quality standards** required for broadcast. DW journalists felt that the content provided by freelance producers sometimes failed to meet their storytelling and technical standards. This disparity has led to tension in maintaining both the **authenticity of local narratives** and the high-quality production values expected by DW. As a result, there is limited **negotiation** between DW and freelancers regarding the final product, with DW exerting the final editorial authority.

4.3 Power, Values, and Collaborative Impact

Through these workshops, an important conversation around **power dynamics** emerged. DW journalists acknowledged that their institutional power allows them to shape narratives and drive important stories—particularly those related to climate action and other global issues—by leveraging their global audience and resources. However, they also recognized the need for greater empowerment of local journalists and producers. Strengthening **trust** in local freelancers and creating opportunities for more meaningful collaboration could lead to richer, more authentic stories that resonate both locally and globally.

During discussions on shared values, participants raised questions about the feasibility of developing a unified set of values and expectations that could guide collaborations with freelance journalists. The consensus was that while DW's editorial standards are essential, there is room for greater **value alignment** between DW and its local collaborators. This could ensure that stories maintain their local authenticity while meeting DW's quality expectations.

Additionally, there is a distinct power imbalance in the storytelling process at DW. While stories are recorded by freelance journalists on the ground in say somewhere in South Asia, they are ultimately shaped, synthesized, and broadcasted by the DW editorial teams based in their

offices in Germany. This **distance**—both physical and editorial—creates a sense of detachment from the local context in which the stories originate. Freelancers capture raw narratives, but final decisions regarding the framing and dissemination of the story rest with DW headquarters. This raises concerns about whose voice and perspective truly dominate the storytelling process.

4.4. Proposed Solutions: Handbook for Shared Values and Collaborative Practices

One practical outcome from the Berlin workshop was the proposal to develop a handbook or playbook outlining shared values, expectations, and best practices for collaboration between DW and freelance journalists. Such a resource could serve as a guide to create clearer communication, establish mutual trust, and ensure that all parties involved in the storytelling process are aligned in their goals and methods. This would not only improve the quality of the stories produced but also enhance the impact of DW's journalism by creating more cohesive and empowered storytelling teams. This idea inspired me to reimagine the toolkit as a foundation for building a personalized playbook for collaborative practice. By working through the questionnaire, one can create a unique playbook tailored to their specific approach. In the next iteration of the prototype I would like to add this function.

5. LEARNINGS AND CONTRIBUTIONS FOR CIRCE

The workshops at Deutsche Welle provided critical insights into the application of the collaborative storytelling methodology. While the methodology was well-received, the challenges related to power imbalances, resource distribution, and quality control were significant. Addressing these issues—through initiatives like developing a shared set of values and expectations—could lead to more effective and empowering collaborations between DW and its freelance journalists, ultimately enhancing the **impact** of their stories. One question I reflected on, and hoped the journalists would consider more deeply, is: **Who is the true audience for their stories? Who are they really creating these narratives for?** In honestly answering this, they might confront the standards they are upholding and who those standards are serving. It's also crucial to consider the audiences of their collaborators in different countries—how can their perspectives enrich the stories being told, and how can the perspectives shared by DW enhance their audiences' understanding in return? Can this exchange happen

without falling into a feeling that the people in the third world needs to be saved from themselves? Can it be done in a truly collaborative and equitable way?

I strongly believe that I could facilitate a deeper discussion on this topic using the toolkit with additional workshop sessions. This could help address whether it's possible to engage in more equitable, collaborative storytelling without falling into a savior complex, and how to enable a true exchange of perspectives between different audiences.

5.1. Shared Power, Resources, Values, and Impact: A Framework for Collaborative Storytelling

Insights from the DW workshops were instrumental in refining the digital toolkit experience specifically for *megaphone* storytellers. For instance, working with Deutsche Welle revealed the complex, multi-layered nature of collaboration within their journalistic processes. At DW Asia, Africa desk, a story—whether a report or a short documentary—is typically initiated by a producer in Bonn or Berlin, who pitches a concept focused on people and communities in Asia or Africa. The story is then brought to life on the ground with a local reporter who engages directly with interview partners. Once the footage or interview is done, editors back in Berlin or Bonn package and finalize the work for broadcast or publication. To address such a multi-stakeholder process, I focused on chain of collaboration, scrutinizing each stage through the parameters of my methodology. Recognizing the many layers and hierarchies within their collaborative processes helped me design targeted questions within the toolkit, encouraging users to reflect on the diverse roles and dynamics among their collaborators. This approach allowed for a closer evaluation of how the methodology's principles could support more ethical and mutual storytelling practices across different roles and responsibilities.

1. **Power**: Creative institutions and media organizations often hold significant editorial and narrative power. They decide which stories are told, how they are framed, and who gets the platform to share them. By recognizing their position of power, these institutions can begin to shift toward a model where power is shared more equitably. This might involve co-creating stories with local communities, allowing those who are most affected by a narrative to play a central role in its telling. For example, a media outlet like DW could partner with local journalists or community leaders to co-author stories, ensuring that the

- final narrative reflects a diversity of perspectives and is not merely filtered through the lens of an external institution.
- 2. Resources: Institutions often have access to resources—financial, technical, and human—that local communities and freelance journalists may not. Identifying these resources and finding ways to share them is key to empowering marginalized voices. This could involve providing training, access to equipment, or even offering editorial support that helps local journalists improve their craft while maintaining ownership of their narratives. Instead of simply hiring freelancers to gather material, institutions like DW can work to build capacity within local communities, equipping them with the tools they need to tell their own stories effectively.
- 3. Values: Every storyteller operates within a framework of values, shaped by their cultural background, personal experiences, and institutional mission. Identifying and reflecting on these values is essential for ensuring that storytelling is aligned with the principles of equity and inclusion. For institutions working in cross-cultural contexts, it is important to ensure that their values do not unintentionally reinforce harmful stereotypes or perpetuate a savior complex. By engaging in a dialogue with local collaborators, institutions can find common ground on shared values and develop storytelling practices that respect cultural differences while emphasizing solidarity and mutual respect.
- 4. Impact: The impact of a story extends beyond its immediate audience to the communities it represents. Institutions must consider the long-term effects of their narratives on both local and global scales. Are these stories reinforcing existing power imbalances, or are they helping to create new, more equitable forms of representation? By evaluating the impact of their stories, institutions can ensure that they are not simply using communities as subjects for content but are actively contributing to their empowerment and visibility in meaningful ways.

While insights from the workshops at DW allowed me to delve deeper into how different aspects of collaborative practices for *Megaphone* Storytellers could be refined to enable more mutual and ethical storytelling. In the broader context of the Creative and Cultural Industries, the question lies in how key players wielding power—media institutions and cultural organizations can identify their own power, resources, values, and impact, and how they can share these equitably with the communities they work with.

5.2 Körperkino: Embodied Cinema as the future of Storytelling

In 2022, when I conceived the concept of *Körperkino*, it was a reimagining of *Kopfkino* (head cinema). This insight emerged from understanding that the stories we inhabit are not confined to the mind; rather, they unfold within the body— as embodied stories. *Körperkino* captures that "aha" moment, when one truly grasps another's perspective and finds a point of mutuality within the embodied experience of the other. It is this transformative recognition, felt rather than intellectualized.

From the numerous workshops that I facilitated, some of my strong observations were that Körperkino- methodology facilitates a space where people can discover mutuality in their stories. This process begins by exploring shared intentions—starting with understanding why you want to tell your own story, and then examining how your narrative can intersect with others through shared resources, values, and impact.

At its core, Körperkino facilitates a form of collaborative storytelling that is about **telling your own story** with the agency and authorship you'd like to be told to the communities that you'd like to tell it to. And when that alone isn't enough, it's about **telling your story in relation to someone else's**, finding the places where your experiences and perspectives connect.

Building from this foundation, I strongly believe that *Körperkino* as both a methodology and a practice holds potential for application across diverse contexts. Its ability to bring embodied stories into focus—bridging gaps of perspective and fostering shared understanding—makes it adaptable and impactful for various collaborative settings and fields—from education to empowerment, from connecting with collaborators to finding resources, and from building networks to creating resilient communities through shared narratives. For instance, I sincerely hope that

- The Underdog Storytellers would find a space for Transformation and Healing
- The Privileged Ally has Space for Learning and Co-Creation
- The *Megaphone* Storytelling Institutions build a Space for nurturing Plurality in perspectives

I am confident that as I share the digital toolkit with other *Megaphone storytellers*, it will facilitate a pathway to ethical, collaborative storytelling. This methodology, also tailored for stakeholders like CIRCE—who act as intermediaries between researchers and major institutions, including other *Megaphone* storytellers—can also facilitate:

- **Building Resilient Communities**: Stories can connect communities and build resilience, helping people collectively navigate crises and uncertainties.
- Embracing Plurality: Collaborative storytelling encourages a culture of openness and inclusion, ensuring we don't isolate ourselves into identity silos or echo chambers, and that we resist the urge to cancel or censor each other.
- Navigating Ambiguity Together: In an uncertain world, collaborative storytelling provides a way to embrace ambiguity, adapt, and prepare for unpredictable futures together.

When you tell your story in relation to others, **what changes**? What transformations take place when our narrative is intertwined with someone else's? Körperkino is the concept I use to describe that -aha moment when we find mutuality in the embodied narrative of someone else, when we can relate to the embodied cinema of someone else's living experiences. In that shared moment, if we can commit to creating something together, collaborative storytelling becomes a powerful space where our stories no longer exist in isolation. Instead, they connect, resonate, and create a lasting impact—together.

This report was enhanced with the assistance of AI-based editing support from ChatGPT, which was used to refine grammar, structure, and clarity of the text. The content, ideas, and conclusions presented in this report are the author's original work.

6. REFERENCES

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7. ANNEX

I.

Körperkino Prototype:

The **Körperkino** toolkit is currently in its prototype stage and serves as an interactive questionnaire designed for storytellers who identify as one of the three key roles: the *Underdog*, the *Ally*, or the *Megaphone*. The questionnaire guides storytellers through a tailored experience, helping them identify their strengths and challenges within the collaborative storytelling process. The ultimate goal of the toolkit is to find collaborators and facilitate ethical, meaningful collaborations between storytellers.

Using responses from the questionnaire, the backend algorithm identifies potential collaborators, creating connections that foster authentic, equitable storytelling partnerships. This matching process is guided by the **Körperkino** methodology, ensuring that each collaboration is built on finding mutuality on the basis of shared values, impact, power and resources.

In addition to the interactive platform, the toolkit will feature a range of audiovisual materials currently in pre-production. These will include short videos, podcasts as well as written texts and testimonials. These resources will provide further insights into the methodology and offer real-world examples of how it has been applied in different contexts, making the toolkit an indispensable resource for storytellers seeking to engage in transformative, collaborative work.

II

Here are a collage of images from the workshops conducted at DW Bonn and Berlin offices



photo credit: arjunraj

DW BONN

Stills from Collaborative Storytelling Workshop Mindspiration Days Conference 18th September



photo credit: Joanna Gottschalk

DW BERLIN

Stills from Collaborative Storytelling Workshop 14th October