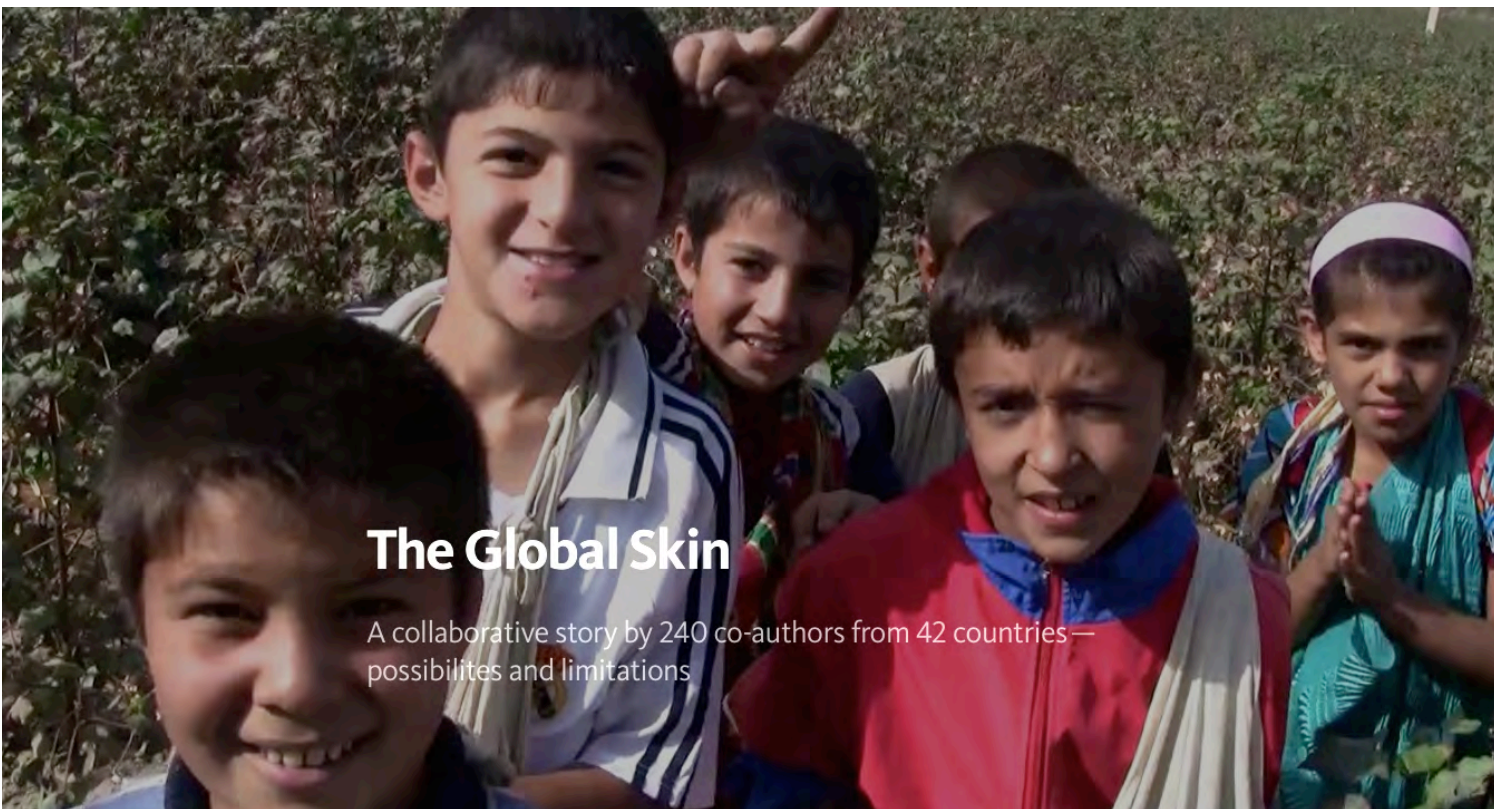**Y7K**

Y7K is a digital agency creating next level web experiences. We combine leading #creative capabilities with deep knowledge of #design and #tech.

Interview

The Global Skin

A collaborative story by 240 co-authors from 42 countries—possibilites and limitations

A Chinese female factory worker smiles for the camera: "Knitting socks isn't that exciting." Jauntily cutting in half colourful fabrics, the African market woman exclaims: "I work because I don't want to depend on my husband." In an Uzbek cotton field a boy picks the fiber with his classmates and knows his teacher will not be satisfied with the meager 8 kilograms he has harvested on this day.

All of these situations are filmed sequences from the crowdsourcing project *the global skin*. An international contest set out to collect videos with the topic 'People and Textiles', weaving them together into one story that transcends across different societies, cultures and countries. The 238 entries submitted from 42 countries, 13 hours of footage in total, are screened on a Google map and in a 20-minute short film. This project is a cooperation between the *The Institute for Theory of the Zurich University of the Arts ZHdK* and the *Center for Storytelling*.

In order to find out how storytelling evolves via new methods of participation and where its limitations are, we set out and talked to the project's supervisor Kurt Reinhard, co-founder of the Center for Storytelling.

Can you give us a brief introduction to the Center for Storytelling? What are its goals, tasks and recent projects?

We wanted to explore how a global theme can be approached and narrated through new platforms of participation. As a final result we planned a documentary and online platform with all entries. We decided on the topic textile because it affects every human being in the world. Clothes are being worn everywhere and the textile industry has shaped our workplace fundamentally. It served as a motor of industrialization. The model of division of labour in factories developed along with it into large global manufacturing and distribution networks. Until this day the textile industry is a beacon for globalized and specialized production. Hence the collaborative form of narration was an obvious choice. 240 authors on location in 42 countries were able to offer insights, which would have been impossible to achieve with a conventional film crew.

How did you receive the videos?

The level of attention required for such a project was a massive challenge. We knew this from the start. However, neither did we have wide-coverage on TV, nor a sizeable advertising budget. Instead we focused on network effects with partners who served as multipliers and relied on social media channels. This has proven to be effective. Among others we were able to win *Greenpeace*, the outdoor brand *Vaude*, and *20 Minuten* online news as partners. The social work platform *jovoto.com* for collaborative idea- and design development helped us organize a contest for a video teaser. This teaser was then used for the social media campaign. Ultimately, our Facebook page had more than 5,300 followers. A noticeable fact is a large number of entries arrived from the Arab countries and the Balkans. Additionally, we contacted 400 film-/art- and textile schools and institutions across the world and invited them to participate in the project. Whenever we discovered authors on Vimeo and YouTube in this context, we would reach out to them as well.

What was the motivation for the participants?

The contest and the prizes, e.g. video equipment offered an incentive. But another motivation was to become part of something bigger — a community — and enable this communal piece through one's own creation.

Also, some were interested in drawing the attention of our esteemed jury which, among others, consisted of: Christian Frei, the Academy Award nominated director and president of the Swiss Film Academy, Patrizio di Renzo, an internationally operative portrait- and fashion photographer, the artist Pipilotti Rist, and the SRF presenter and writer Bernard Senn.

Was it difficult to use footage from various creators, some of whom had to be amateurs?

Due to the serious theme and the embedding of the project in the arts and sciences, the amount of poorly produced material we received, was little to none. On the other hand, the criteria reduced the overall number of submitted works. Although the 13 hours of video were tremendously well-crafted, the content diverged greatly in style and form. Each of the 238 pieces is unique. Together, they reveal a multilayered and complex mosaic of associations, which can be explored on *the global skin* map. For the film we anticipated the use of five or ten per cent of all submitted footage. The selection criteria were, in the following priorization: content, technical quality, and style. This means the 13 hours of video could easily shape a 40- or 80-minute feature film. We present all entries on a Google map. They are geographically placed and arranged according to form and content criteria.

What do you mean 'could easily shape' a 40- or 80- minute feature film?

After screening all videos we knew the main theme of the film should be centred around production, from manual work to computer-assisted industrial manufacture. This cinematic journey along the textile production should be supplemented with interviews to new collaborative forms of film production, which we practiced with *the global skin*. Our concept raised interest with Swiss Radio and Television (SRF) and we were invited to present the project at the Solothurner Filmtage festival. Legal concerns expressed by the SRF stopped a possible broadcast of *the global skin*. The decisive factor was the lacking journalistic verification of the works submitted by the community. Since textile production is a controversial issue, the SRF refrained from taking on a risk or potential liabilty. Without the involvement of Swiss TV and a time-slot for broadcasting the documentary feature is hardly fundable. This led us to decide on showing a shorter 20-minute version of our collaborative effort on the Internet.

What are the most important lessons learned from the project?

With *the global skin* we proved it is possible to collect a sufficient amount of topical, high quality contributions — in other words: user generated content — to curate a broader story from. What matters is to which extent a crowdsourcing project can generate awareness. Without reaching a critical

mass via a YouTube channel or a traditional TV station this is nearly impossible. Other hurdles related to the financing and distribution for collaborative productions, which were not distinctly attributable to the originator and therefore difficult to verify journalistically. However, overcoming these hurdles will only be a matter of time. Traditional buttom-up means of production will pose a serious alternative to classic top-down approaches in the next years. We are very much convinced of this.

Kurt Reinhard is a media producer, social entrepreneur, and freelance associate at the Institute for Theory at the Zurich University of the Arts ZHdK. He is the founder and president of jobtv medienwerkstatt and the Center for Storytelling. He develops participatory media projects and researches 'storytelling' as a specific form of communication and narrative strategy. Director for films and TV; Media Studies at School for Applied Linguistics Zurich (SAL); F&F School Zurich.

Project website
http://theglobalskin.org/home-eng.html

global skin map with all entries
http://theglobalskin.org/map.html

Working sketch "the global skin — a collaborative story" (video edit, 20 min.)
https://vimeo.com/106089068

Facebook page
https://www.facebook.com/theglobalskin

http://centerforstorytelling.org/