

ATLAS of Interdependence

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Interdependence Day (ID) is a research, communications and participation project centred on taking a fresh tone and approach to issues around environment, development and globalization. ID is politically explicit, but frank about its experimental and uncertain status. It has revolved around a distinctive mix of public events, publications, art practice and academic/policy seminars. These activities have started to probe the potency of the concept of interdependence for public understanding of – and responses to – environmental change at a moment when the density of relations between the ecological, the social and the political are so evident.¹

The scale and complexity of the challenges facing us today can seem beyond the reach of everyday life. The intersection of bio-geo-physical changes and economic and cultural globalization provokes us to prepare ourselves both practically and imaginatively for changes of state that are inherently unpredictable. Over the next century we are likely to see even more rapid physical change, displacement of people and other living things than we have ever seen before in the history of settled human habitation.²

There is therefore a need for responses to environmental change, development and globalisation that give attention to issues of participation, decision-making, and the hospitality that this demands on a volatile planet. The ID project has been informed by work in human geography that addresses the ethical and political implications of ‘thinking space relationally’.³ Considering the geographies of responsibility along with the ecologies of architectural thinking and practice has prompted inquiry into the existing categories, assumptions and systems of the way we live. In the current context in which the social economic and ecological, or more broadly, the ethical impacts of the development of cities are under question the ID project has identified the more provisional projects that have been able to test larger themes through a more immediate engagement with intentions, desires, site and audience.

The ID project has purposefully sought a tone that turns away from a disempowering litany of impending disaster that ‘knowing about climate change’ tends to carry with it, or the often technocratic drive of sustainable development literature and instead represents an invitation to participate in ‘making new maps for a mobile planet’. This strapline for the Interdependence day project invites participants to explore the current state of global interdependence and the demands of dwelling on a dynamic planet with an air of experiment and creativity and to contribute to a politics of change.

The ATLAS of Interdependence will be generated over the next two years as both an evolving web presence and a book publication (Renata Tyszczyk, Joe Smith, Melissa Butcher and Nigel Clark, eds., Black Dog, 2012). It will continue the work of the ID project and bring together the various components of ID events in forms that will allow further exploration of the overriding themes of the project. The ATLAS aims to provide a rich and stimulating interdisciplinary resource, but with an ironic inflection, that plays on the traditional claims of an atlas to be ‘capturing the world’.



Fig 1. The ATLAS of Interdependence website

The ATLAS is characterised by thinking across scales: planetary, urban, human. It comprises a collage of ideas, art based projects, expert witness, stories and scientific responses to global environmental change, settling somewhere between the Whole Earth Catalog's unruly mix of local and global ecological fixes and Borges' Atlas of the Impossible. It does not attempt to compete with more recent inheritors of the Whole Earth's mantle or to act as a comprehensive or exhaustive reference guide to environmental change. Instead it asks afresh what 'tools for access' might be needed by diverse groups with completely different means of participation in the issues.

The ATLAS maps out and probes the demands posed by a dynamic planet for those people tasked with designing, constructing and maintaining relatively enduring structures on the earth's surface. These are challenges that include but also exceed the scope of projects of sustainability and development, by putting the stress on transformations whose contours, direction and magnitude defy prediction. Serving as a kind of *Whole Earth Catalog* for an unprecedented present and an unpredictable future, the ATLAS aims to pre-empt desperate or survivalist measures by exploring creative, experimental and ethical responses attuned to rapidly changing terrestrial conditions.

One characteristic of the invited contributors is a commitment to practically relevant but critically and theoretically informed research. In different ways they have engaged directly and collectively with the activities pursued during the last five years of the Interdependence Day project, have encouraged new contributions to the project and have helped to foster new networks of cultural knowledge and dissemination. The ATLAS will therefore continue to offer a selection of propositions that act as guides to, and prerequisites of, social change. The ID project seeks to both make and map the world differently.

Acknowledgements

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ATLAS: <http://www.atlas-id.org>

The Interdependence Day project: <http://www.interdependenceday.co.uk>

The Bigger Picture: <http://thebiggerpicture2009.org>

nef, the new economics foundation: <http://www.neweconomics.org>

Open Space Research Centre: <http://www8.open.ac.uk/researchcentres/osrc/>