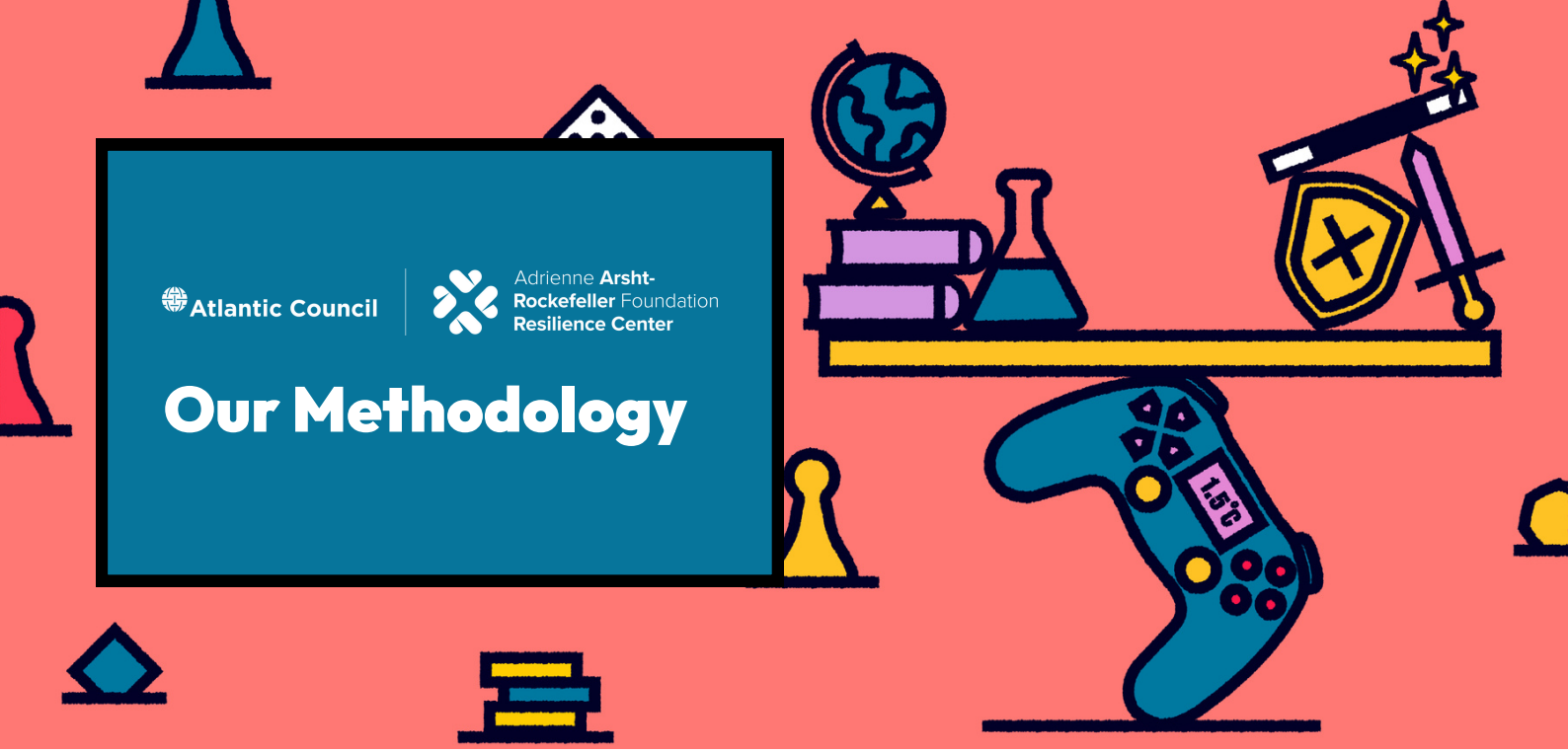

This report is a critical resource for the game industry, bringing qualitative research to bear with a robust examination of actual development practices. The research was conducted by a multidisciplinary team that deeply understood both game development and research. Their methodology is outlined here.

We're a team custom built for the purpose of this project, integrating game design and ethnographic research expertise so that we could ask the right questions of our participants and robustly analyze our findings.

We set out to learn how climate game development teams decide which climate themes to integrate into their projects, which audiences to target, and which design and development methods to employ toward their goals. We wanted to understand how and where developers might value additional support, and how teams were able to measure the reach and impact of their games. Ultimately, we wanted to discover any common practices that have worked well for teams in the past, as well as identify any specific gaps or challenges where additional support could better allow teams with similar goals to make yet more successful climate games in the future.

In other words, we set out to learn how great climate games are made, so that we might discover ways to empower interested development teams to make more climate games that further push the boundaries of successful, impactful work.

Leveraging the International Game Developers Association Climate Special Interest Group's Climate Game Database (that's quite the title), a general call for study participants online and in-person at Game Developers Conference, and Arsht-Rock's existing relationships, we recruited the heads of fifteen climate game projects from across nine countries and five continents. These represented projects covered a varied twelve climate-related topics and targeted nine release platforms, and operated at various budgets and scales. Participants were confidentially interviewed, and the resulting discussions were inductively coded to find meaningful themes across projects. This report is the result of our findings.

On questions around responsibility, we wanted to avoid a "yes or no" question; the notion of responsibility is more complicated than that. Instead, we asked participants whether they saw their work as an opportunity, a responsibility, or somewhere in between. We deliberately chose terms that are open to interpretation to elicit a range of responses and reflections.

This project uses the term "climate game" to cover games that are simply created in response to environmental concerns or, also, with the intention of positively intervening in environmental matters, especially as such matters relate to the climate crisis. This might seem like a really big category (because it is a big category), but we're going to argue that we have to widen the discussion to this large of a scale. The more you pull on the threads of environmental issues, the more you start to see how all of these issues are interconnected. The whales can be worth saving on their own merits, and they fertilize phytoplankton which mitigate global warming, and the crude-oil lubrication that replaced whale oil carried its own serious environmental consequences.

The global game industry can meaningfully help transform the world into one that's more climate resilient and environmentally conscious, and the global game industry is responsible for more carbon emissions than many small countries. If we're going to get any meaningful work done here, we're going to have to embrace uncomfortable complexity, one step toward a better world at a time.

This report is the first of its kind, bringing qualitative research to bear with a robust examination of actual development practices, conducted by a multidisciplinary research team that deeply understood both game development and research. That said, we also need to acknowledge upfront that our research has clear limitations. First and foremost, while we were fortunate to reach developers across the globe, the research was conducted in English, which meant that we were not able to reach development teams who didn't have a lead comfortable communicating in English. Future research efforts should be conducted to inclusively address this gap.

Second, we need to acknowledge that our participants do not represent a simple random sample of climate game projects around the world. Rather, our participants represent projects that have reached the level of success required to be visible internationally, which is no small feat. In other words, if we didn't know a climate game project existed, we couldn't ask anyone on the team to participate in our research. While this may seem obvious, this does mean we've needed to critically reflect on how survivorship bias may have impacted our findings.

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