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INTERSECTIONS  
Transforming public spaces with learning landscapes  
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(MUSIC)

PITA: Welcome to Intersections, part of the Brookings Podcast Network. I'm your host, Adrianna Pita. As a society, an issue of prime importance is the question of education. How do we provide our children the knowledge and skills to go forth into the world and succeed? On the public policy front, this usually takes the form of policy. It's about teacher pay, school funding, subject matter, and pedagogy. Are our schools equitable? Are they accessible?

But, given that time in school only accounts for 20 percent of a child's waking hours, some researchers are asking -- How do we provide access to learning opportunities outside of the formal school room, and how does this idea fit in with some broader ideas about urban planning and design that call for the transformation of public spaces?

To talk with us about that today are Kathy Hirsh-Pasek, an expert in human development and child psychology. She's the Stanley and Debra Lefkowitz Faculty Fellow with the Department of Psychology and co-director of the Infant and Child Lab at Temple University. And, she's also a Senior Fellow here at Brookings in our Center for Universal Education.

Also with us is Jennifer Vey, a Senior Fellow with the Metropolitan Policy Program, who looks at issues of competitiveness and innovation economies, and placemaking and quality of life in cities.

Kathy and Jennifer, thank you so much for being here today.

HIRSCH-PASEK: Well, thanks for inviting us.

PITA: Absolutely. Kathy, I'm going to ask you if you can start off by talking to our listeners a little bit about this concept of Learning Landscapes. What does that mean, and why do some of these really simple concepts, like having some puzzles at a bus stop, -- how can those make such a difference?

HIRSCH-PASEK: Well, I think they can make a difference because they offer opportunities at places where people normally wait. So, the question I asked is, when is a bench not a bench? I mean, you're going to be sitting there anyway. So, why now be playing with puzzles? Because, if you're playing with puzzles, there's wonderful scientific evidence to suggest that you're actually building pre-math skills.

So, the idea then grew from there to think about all the places that we go, whether it's

walking on sidewalks, sitting at a bus stop, waiting in a waiting room. Maybe, just maybe, all of those could make the everyday moments extraordinary learning moments.

PITA: You talk a lot in your research about the idea of playful learning. What's so important about that?

HIRSCH-PASEK: Well, first of all, I'd have to argue that play is actually learning. We sometimes talk about it as play versus learning, or we put that really funny word "just" in front of it -- oh, you're just playing. But, really, there's a lot of richness in play. Did you know that monkeys play and goats play? And, I am told that even octopuses play. Yeah. There must be something to it if everything out there is playing.

So, we have to ask about the evolutionary bases. And, we're starting to explore that and we're recognizing that in play there's a lot of richness. What you're doing is collaborating with others. You're communicating about the rules of the game. You're learning content. If it's chess, it might be spatial and reasoning. All these things come to life through play. So, skills for learning and skills for a better world, we find them in the sandbox, and they transfer to the boardroom.

Now, you ask a particular question about playful learning. And, in playful learning, what we're talking about is a special type of play. It's play that has a learning goal. Now, it's still child-directed, but there's something in the context that we'd like the kid to get out of it. So, let me give you an example.

PITA: Please.

HIRSCH-PASEK: When you go to a children's museum, you might participate in an activity like low-water activity, and they may have boats, and they may have fans. And, your job is to take the fan to get the boat to the other side of the mini river. When you're doing that, you're actually learning about force and motion. You're actually learning about dynamics, and you're learning physics.

So, our point is that, even in play, if we think just a little bit harder about how to design those contexts, make them more like a Montessori classroom, the kid's the guide. It's still child-directed. But, the adult had in mind something that you could trip on in that context so that you would learn just a little bit more than that about the skills for a better world.

PITA: Jennifer can you talk to us a little bit about how some of these ideas that are focusing on children in particular, how those fit into some sort of broader context of redesigning public spaces for people?

VEY: Sure. I think what's really interesting and unique about this effort around Learning Landscapes is that, while it's very much fundamentally based on children and their learning and improving those outcomes, it's also about creating vibrant spaces that allow children and their family members and others to come together in the public realm in public space.

And, so, in a way, while children are learning, you're also creating these other opportunities for people to gather and to collaborate, and also opportunities to reinvigorate public spaces. I think in some of the examples that are going on now, particularly in Philadelphia, there's a real opportunity to be integrating these kinds of playful learning interventions in spaces that may have been blighted or otherwise underutilized but, as Kathy mentioned, are also in the kinds of spaces that the people are in all the time, whether they be a bus stop or inside another kind of public space, that gives people the opportunity to engage with these kinds of activities on a more regularized basis.

PITA: Does this fit into the group of ideas about urban planning that's called placemaking, and what does that mean in a bigger sense? Like, how is that different from just, oh, urban planning or the way we think about it?

VEY: Sure. Fundamentally, placemaking is really about a principle and it's about a practice of really creating vital communities. And, I think placemaking really occurs at different scales. It occurs at a very small scale in a public space, whether that's inside a laundromat, whether that's inside a pocket park, and it occurs at the streetscape level, of streets really being public spaces, because that's where we all engage with streets in different ways. And, it's about the whole community scale and about all the different spaces within a community that are the gathering places that add up to creating that kind of quality place where people want to be and more people feel comfortable.

PITA: Kathy, you've talked in your work a lot about how this is of particular importance for lower-income children, a lot of these underserved communities that maybe -- where either the kids are already behind when they're getting to school or who have harder times in school.

Can you talk about why that is and how this helps them?

HIRSCH-PASEK: Oh, sure. You know, we have lived with an achievement gap that has been stagnant since 1975. That's just not acceptable. And, the more we've looked into it in the science of early childhood, the more we are seeing that this achievement gap has very early roots.

It turns out that we start to see brain differences by the time kids are age 3. We see language differences and we know that language ability is the single best predictor of your trajectories at the start of school and all the way through school. And, we are seeing stem differences -- science, technology, engineering, and math.

You say, what could that possibly mean when you're talking about 3-year-olds. The ability to rotate pieces and put them into a puzzle, to build big towers, to navigate space -- that navigation of space predicts early math ability. And, we're seeing these gaps appearing early already by age 3.

Now, how can we do something about that? Well, one of the things we can do is to encourage the kinds of interactions between parents and caregivers and kids that will ignite conversations, conversations that are going to then inspire kids to think just a little bit more.

And, sometimes that's easy, just using a broader vocabulary, telling more stories, understanding that even if you speak a language that isn't English, you're offering gold to your child. Children should be bilingual. That's a help, not a hurt. And, when we can give those opportunities and craft spaces so that at placemaking we're actually creating the intergenerational experiences, interactions, relationships that feed later learning, imagine what we could do.

So, Learning Landscape marries placemaking with early learning. And, when you marry those two and we're the only people in the sector doing that, -- we're the only ones living here - - then the possibilities become endless. Imagine sidewalks. In Seattle they're thinking about safe sidewalks to school. Couldn't we put games on those sidewalks? So, as they're walking along, though they may be late for school, but they'd be learning along the way. Not so bad.

Imagine what those bus stops could look like if we introduced something like a hopscotch game, but, really, the hopscotch was based off of a task that we used in the

psychological sciences called the happy-sad task, where when you see one foot, you're supposed to put two, and where you would see two, you're supposed to put one. And, what is it doing? Ah. It's forcing me to have impulse control. And, why is impulse control important? Because, you do better in school when you have better impulse control.

So, putting it all together, I envision a city that offers opportunities for playful learning that in its very architecture, the activities and events of the everyday become magically transposed. So, the city becomes a learning city and a revitalized neighborhood.

PITA: This is probably a good opportunity to talk about a specific example of this. You have a project that, I think, opened up in Philadelphia last year. Is that right?

HIRSCH-PASEK: Yeah.

PITA: The Urban Thinkscapes?

HIRSCH-PASEK: Yeah, October.

PITA: Can you talk to us a little bit about that? What was it and what does it do?

HIRSCH-PASEK: Urban Thinkscapes is this lot that exists in a low-income area of Philadelphia, under-resourced area in Philadelphia. It's a beautiful lot next to a church, and it happens to be a lot on which Martin Luther King made a really well-known speech during the Freedom March.

So, it is a lot that is treasured and cared for by the community. But, it's also a little, teeny lot that is right next to a bus stop. And, our image was that perhaps you could transform a bus stop into a kind of placemaking that would have learning potential, a learning landscape.

So, we thought and thought about it. We called it Urban Thinkscapes, and we went into that bus stop and we designed wall puzzles, and we designed that hopscotch game that I was talking about. We call it Happy Feet. But, it is for -- the big term is executive function skills of attention, memory, and impulse control.

And, we have stories. So, we have these sloped inlets where you can go up and down on the little slopes and up and down the mountains. And, you can then read the different pictures to create a story, to create a narrative. We have a hidden-figures piece which is on four high poles, and you look up and there you see a metal structure, but hidden in the web of that metal structure are pictures which then shine down onto the sidewalk below, so the kids

can try to find the figures.

Now, what we've done with the neighborhood, and with their idea about where it should be located, which bus stop it should be at, what should be on the puzzles, we co-created Urban Thinkscapes. The neighborhood now owns that space. The neighborhood decided what they wanted to revitalize their neighborhood. Over 100 children in that neighborhood helped us build the space, and today it's one of the prides of the community.

PITA: I wanted to ask you a little bit -- and, Jennifer, maybe you can weigh in on some other similar examples that maybe -- not about the Urban Thinkscapes in particular but other planning that has gone on that -- when you're trying to do these sort of community-focused projects and you talk about engaging the community and getting their buy-in, how do you go about approaching that? Are you talking to neighborhood commissions? Are you talking to the local school? Like, how do you actually reach the right people to make sure you're bringing everyone to the table?

VEY: Sure. And, Kathy can certainly talk about exactly what you did in this Philadelphia example, but, generally speaking, I think there's a lot of different ways to engage communities. But, what's important is that it's a meaningful kind of engagement. Often times, we think about community engagement as in somebody creates something and you present it at one meeting on a Tuesday night at 7:00, and, hey, you have the opportunity to show up, but if you don't you might have missed out.

Meaningful community engagement is really about this co-creation. It's not just creating something, presenting it, and offering some modest opportunity for feedback, but it's really starting from the very beginning, to work with the community to design something. And, that's the way that, one, you're going to create far better outcomes, so that you're creating something that the people really recognize themselves in, and also feel an ownership of.

I think one of the things that Kathy had mentioned to me was that, in this example in Philadelphia, they've had no vandalism. And, I think part of the reason for that is because the community feels ownership of that space, and that's why this kind of co-creation is so important. Otherwise, it feels like just another thing that's imposed on the community and that they didn't really feel a part of.

And, at the end of the day so much of this isn't about just what it looks like, the design aspect, but it's really how the space is utilized. And, it's awfully hard to understand how people are going to come together in a space, or what they want out of it, or what they want to see or where they want to see it if you're not asking those kinds of questions right from the beginning.

HIRSCH-PASEK: Yes, I'll just give you a little bit of what it was like, because it was so magical. We went the first day to the neighborhood group that had already been formed. And, we said, what do you want? What do you want for your children? And, we got very clear answers from them. They said, what we want is safe spaces. We want places where our kids could play. We want a space that's going to make our children want to stay in the neighborhood rather than flee it. We want something that's aesthetically beautiful.

And, we heard them. And, we went back to the designer and we said this is what we have to achieve. We have to achieve what the neighborhood really wants, along with putting the nuggets of the science right into the design. And, then we had a second meeting, and we came back and they said, oh, usually six people show up at these meetings. Twenty-eight people showed up at the meeting. The table was way too small and we didn't have enough pizza. But, we rolled out all the designs and we said, okay, guys, what do you think? They went nuts for it.

Some of them had brought their children. And, one guy who was sitting in the corner -- I think his kids were all grown, and he said, ah, I know what you're doing. We said, oh, what are we doing? He said, you're just moving a children's museum out to the bus stop. And, I said, yep, that's what we're doing.

So, it was intuitive, it was beautiful, it was safe. And, then at every decision point, the community leaders helped us with where it went, what it would look like, how the design needed to appear in their community, and, to this day, they're the ones who own this piece.

PITA: I actually was wondering about the practical question of ownership. If something breaks, or if in 3 years the paint needs to be retouched up, or in 5 years the needs of the community are a little different, they want to change a couple of things, who does own that piece?

HIRSCH-PASEK: Yeah. Well, actually, this particular piece of land is owned by the church

that's next door. So, they would have complete ownership. I mean, we built on it, but we no longer even own, as it were, the structures that are there. I guess, technically, we do, but what are you going to do when it's on somebody else's land and it's built into the land?

So, there is room for change. And, there's room for the neighborhood folks to make decisions about where they want to -- I got a call -- I guess this was a month or two ago -- and one of the ladies said, you know, I've been thinking about your design and I really think we need a tic-tac-toe there. So, we're ordering something that'll be a tic-tac-toe.

So, to the extent that we have the funds to do it, we will work with the neighborhood in anything, to really be responsive. I think, so often for families who live in struggling areas, they feel as if somebody imposes something on them, and then they're out of there. And, I think if we really mean it, we need to be true partners.

PITA: That was actually going to be another question that I had. I'm glad you brought that up. There is often a principle in trying to adapt spaces. There's a principle of lighter, quicker, and cheaper, which is great, because a lot of times you are. You're trying something and maybe it doesn't work, so you don't want to have poured a ton of money or made a permanent edifice if it's not quite right.

So, how do you transform things from being this kind of experimental phase and trying to do things inexpensively for the good of the community but then make it into something that is going to have a long-lasting life that will continue to be there?

VEY: I think there's a couple of things, actually, embedded in that. I mean, one thing that lighter, quicker, cheaper does, sure, it absolutely gives you a chance to sort of test or prototype something. But, sometimes that can be an end in and of itself, too, right? I mean, you can have the type of interventions that actually don't cost a lot. Maybe it's a few benches someplace, or an art installation, or something that doesn't come with a very high price point but can actually have a pretty transformative kind of effort, even if it's more permanent. But, at the same time, it could be an opportunity to be testing something out that they need to take to scale.

So, maybe your prototyping, which is part of what they were trying to do here with the Thinkscapes project in Philadelphia, -- to be able to say, all right, what's working, what's not,

what tweaks can we make in this place, and then how do we take this and adapt it to other types of environments, and maybe at different scales as well, so that you'll have something that comes in that's maybe at a certain price point or it's a certain level of intervention.

But, then you can start playing around with saying, all right, if we're going to scale this, what does that really mean, given the resources that we have? How many places do we take this to? Are there ways that we could be doing it "lighter, quicker, cheaper? And, maybe there are ways that we build on this to do bigger, more expensive interventions that may even have bigger transformative effects.

I think that overarching point is that sometimes we tend to think about revitalization of places as the big-ticket, expensive items. And, those are important. Certainly, you know, public transportation is important. Revitalizing streetscapes is important, all those big kinds of investments. Certainly, when you talk about education, health care, and all of the things in our system that really impact our lives, all are really important.

But, it's just as vital to recognize that's there's other thing that we can be doing that could have an impact, and we just need to sort of recognize what they are, play around with them a little bit, and understand how we can take new ideas and adapt them to a variety of communities and environments to have the greatest effect.

PITA: So, we've been talking about one model of Learning Landscape that's based in this public-space area, like a park or a bus stop. Kathy, you've also written about some other experiments that you've tried in businesses, so like in supermarkets or in laundromats. And, as you said, other places where people go and are for a decent period of time in their day. Can you talk a little bit about some examples of those sorts of interventions?

HIRSCH-PASEK: Sure can. In Supermarket Speaks, we had this really fun idea, which was really another Learning Landscape idea. Maybe, just maybe, since you have to go to the supermarket anyway, you could have some fun opportunities in the supermarket that would get people talking with one another. So, it turns out that many people in my field talk about the 30 million word gap.

And, the 30 million word gap really refers to the difference in the sheer number of words that pass the ears of a child in more struggling communities versus more affluent

communities. And, given that language is built upon how much you hear and interact with another person, especially the quality of that interaction, and that language is the single best predictor of how well you are going to do at the doorstep of school and beyond, we thought, what if you could put in signs that kind of prompted conversations in supermarkets. So, we tried it.

We went to a supermarket in North Philadelphia, again, in an under-resourced area, and we just had prompts, like, I'm a cow. I know this is going to sound very mundane. And, it was even a bad picture of a cow. Okay. But, I'm a cow. I have milk. What do you think can be made with milk? And, then, we wanted to see if people started talking about yogurt and cottage cheese.

Now, the question was whether this would do anything. Honestly, I really wasn't sure. But, 3 weeks later, my students came back and said you kind of won't believe what happened. We got more conversation when the signs were up than when the signs were down. In fact, we got 33 percent more conversation between parent and their kids when the signs were up rather than down. And, what's also interesting is, in middle-income environments, you do not get that same jump, because you already have those numbers of words passing the ears of a child.

So, I think the entire intervention cost us \$65. It was something like that. And, then we did a slightly more extensive one in Tulsa with real artists as opposed to students just putting pictures of cows on pieces of paper. But, the point is that some of these are lighter and quicker and cheaper.

And, just to give you another one from Urban Thinkscapes, when jump out of the business or what -- I guess you taught me about trapped spaces, Jen, -- sidewalks, right. We just got an invitation from Seattle, to work with their team in their neighborhoods, to put these games on sidewalks. Now, there's two interesting things about it. First, it's cheap, and secondly, -- and this is a big deal when you think about scaling -- they're going to do sidewalks anyway, all right? And, people in cities have budgets, and the budgets take care of the bench that is broken, and take care of the bus stop that's going up at a certain street corner.

So, you only need philanthropic dollars once for a Learning Landscape idea. And, then you can launch it. It becomes part of the city budget or the store's normal budget anyway.

And, wouldn't it be cool if you went into a city and there was some app that told you where the kid-friendly places were? And, you could use the supermarkets that were going to have kid-friendly activities. And, you could go on the sidewalks that got you to school safely and that had kid-friendly games, learning landscapes along the way. That would just be a remarkable city.

PITA: That would be. And, I had -- maybe I'm cynical -- a little bit of doubt about where cities would prioritize that sort of thing. We've seen a lot of cities. They're not even filling the potholes on the street. Or, at the bus stop, the little frame that's supposed to have the timetable, that's been empty for a year.

HIRSCH-PASEK: Yeah.

PITA: Do we have examples of -- if you build it they will keep it up, because they realize that it's important? Or, how does this fit into priorities for cities in where they're spending the money, and how do you emphasize that? Like, all right, I know we've walked away the (Inaudible) first put it in. You have to pick up the ball now and run with it to make this work.

VEY: Sure. Well, I think part of this is about how you make the case that this is important for cities and that there are good outcomes to come out of it. There's plenty of work that Kathy and all of her colleagues have done that show the value of these kinds of learning landscapes, and I think they're continuing to test a lot of these concepts out.

And, as they continue to do that and continue to build that case to say, look, there's great outcomes for children, there's great outcomes for communities by creating the kinds of spaces that diverse groups of people can gather, and that ultimately there's an ROI here and that this isn't just something kind of nice and fun to do, but it really should be part of the essential business of cities, as they're making, again, some of these investments anyway.

Benches, bus stops needs to be replaced. So, when that happens, what are the opportunities to add a little bit more to that environment, again, often at a pretty low price point, to just make it a more welcoming place and to create that kind of space where children can be learning while they're waiting.

And, that's what scaling ultimately means, that this isn't just an extra thing that's being done by one group of people and in a very limited fashion, but it's sort of, like, picked up and

embraced by cities, by the private sector -- if we talk about grocery stores, for example, -- and by others so that it just becomes what you do. And, maybe we start to see these kinds of activities everywhere, and they become far more ubiquitous in the public realm.

HIRSCH-PASEK: Mm-hmm. And, I'd say most of our public leaders, they want to do right by kids. They know that our children are our greatest natural resource, and they will be the citizens running those cities tomorrow. And, you're starting to see vast support for things like early childhood education.

I mean, it's something like 85 percent of all people recognize the value of doing things for young children across this nation alone and across the world. You are seeing huge investments in high-quality accessible child care and preschools. You're seeing universal preschool coming down the market everywhere. Now, let's ask our city leaders -- do they know that even a child who's spending full-time in a high-quality preschool will only have 20 percent of her waking time in that preschool. That is not to say it's unimportant. It is very important we should invest in preschools.

But, I could make the case today to you that the other 80 percent can augment what's going on in those preschools and also reach the kids who are zero to three who are going to see brain development at that time which is going to affect the trajectories all the way through school and beyond. So, if you put those pieces together, it is to the city's advantage to repair those holes and to make it just a little bit better, have the learning potential and make it evidence-based.

PITA: We've been talking a lot about some of the experiments that you've done Kathy.

HIRSCH-PASEK: Yeah.

PITA: Who else is doing some of this, whether in the U.S. or around the world? Who else is experimenting with this? What are some other ideas that you've seen that maybe you'd love to enact yourself or see happen here?

HIRSCH-PASEK: Oh, there are a lot of ideas happening. I mean, there's Global Cities movement that really Jen knows better than I do. But, I've seen some cool stuff. I've seen games put in the streets in London. I love it. I have seen street lamps. I think they're in Rotterdam. I may be wrong about that. But, as you go through the streets, you can actually

pull them down and up. People are doing marvelous stuff with park spaces, public spaces, and I think there's even more that we can do.

In Tulsa, they're building something called the Gathering Place that I think is just wonderful, and I worked with them to ask could we make that not just a gathering space but also a wonderful, playful learning space. And, such simple things make the change.

So, for example, in the Tulsa example, they had the world's best playground designers come, and, my gosh, is it going to be beautiful. And, I suggested to them, you know, if you just put hatchet marks on the poles, that's all it would take. Hatchet marks on the poles. Instead of saying, oh, look, I climbed up the pole, you could be saying, oh, I climbed up 5 feet. Now, that may seem little, but using number words actually builds cognitive cache. So, those little tweaks to what you're already doing is one way to go.

Kidsburgh in Pittsburgh is absolutely gorgeous, and they've created a whole city with all their community organizations aligned, so that they have play throughout the city. What we're doing that's different is we're not just suggesting to have a playful environment, which we think is important, but to augment it even more by putting the science in the architecture, putting the science -- embed it right in the activity, so that you get an extra bump, especially for kids from low-resource environments, so that they can have the learning potential in every moment. And, it's not hitting them over the head, it's au naturel.

PITA: Jennifer, I wanted to ask you a little bit about some of the work that you and your colleagues have done, looking at some of these placemaking ideas. A lot of it is often based around the idea of, like, innovation hubs, and, so, you're looking at making transformations in areas that are already high-concentration areas of transportation, unemployment. There are places where the city may already be thinking about or actually doing the -- concentrating some of their redevelopment efforts.

How do you help get some of these more creative redesigns to some of these more underserved neighborhoods that either -- they certainly aren't in one of these innovation hubs, and they may not even be very well near it -- how do you help make that happen again when it's not something where a city's already going, yeah, that's the neighborhood that I need to be investing in?

VEY: Part of this comes down certainly to resources and finding the kind of resources that are out there, whether they're philanthropic resources or public sector resources or even private sector resources that can be brought to bear in these communities. And, it's working with the community groups. Again, coming back to this issue of engaging the communities, which are already there, I think we don't want to make assumptions that these communities are all low capacity.

There are social networks in these places. There are assets like churches. There are other community assets, community-based groups that can be brought into this process, and I think by pairing them with the right kind of resources and certainly the right kind of knowledge that's coming from folks like Kathy, that's how you can start to bring these kinds of interventions into these areas.

PITA: We're looking ahead to a time when more and more of the human population is going to be in cities. I think the UN is projecting something like 75 percent of the population will be urban-based by 2050. When you look at -- again, whether it's specifically Learning Landscapes or, again, more creative ideas about urban design, where do you think we are in terms of progress on it? Is it something that cities -- you're seeing lots of cities start to pick up the ball, start thinking about it, starting to make changes, or is this something that's kind of lagging behind? Like, where are we on that urgency scale, I guess, is my question.

VEY: Sure. And, I could probably speak more to -- most of my work is focused more on this country than abroad. But, look, we've seen a lot of change in cities, even over the last couple of decades. We're seeing population growth in a lot of cities. If you think back to the middle and earlier part of the 20th century, we were seeing the opposite of a lot of that movement out of cities for a whole variety of reasons. And, more recently, of course, we've seen that bump and that move back to more urbanized environments, and that's for a whole host of reasons.

Millennials are part of that driving force. It's clearly a big demographic. It's a diverse demographic. And, they've had some preference to living a more dynamic and walkable kind of environments. I think the key here in where Learning Landscapes can maybe be part of this is, there's a lot of questions about, well, -- what happens is those millennials age, which they are

as they're approaching their later 30s, mid-to-later 30s, they're having children of their own.

What are the opportunities to keep them in more urban areas, particularly for people who may want to stay but feel that with children they don't have the right educational opportunities, there maybe isn't the right housing in some neighborhoods, and maybe they feel like they don't have the overall right kind of family-friendly environment, perhaps, in the neighborhood they're in or in the city that they're in? And, those at least who have the resources to make other decisions may make them and leave the city.

So, I think there's an opportunity here when we think about the playful-cities concept as a whole of how do we just make our cities generally more family-friendly? And, again, that means everything from the big things to what does this mean for our educational systems, what does it mean for our housing and affordability issues? But, it's also how do we make our spaces engaging for families in new and creative ways?

HIRSCH-PASEK: Yeah, I think everybody's thinking about it now, and I think we're now at the point of sort of brainstorming and putting ideas on paper and then going out and testing them. It's so very exciting, and I agree with you, Jen, that, you know, cities are not so family-friendly right now. We have rushing traffic and we're constantly telling our kids don't put your phone in the street.

And, there are cities trying to deal with that. Like, I saw a beautiful experiment recently in Iceland, where at the crosswalk they painted this -- looks like a 3D structure. You should look it up. It's so cool. And, when people are approaching it in their car, it's like, oh my gosh, I don't want to run over a 3D structure. So, they go slower.

In Minneapolis, another group -- loved this one -- they put a bubble machine on a corner, and when the bubble machine was on the corner, all of a sudden the gangs decided not to come, because they didn't want to be associated with bubbles. And, the cars slowed down to look at the bubbles. Now, we have been talking about places that are largely low-resource, but, you know, this is universal, that cities have to be safer, better, have more opportunities for kids.

There are so many cities where you have to walk a long way to find a playground. If you start making play opportunities and they don't have to be in a playground, the whole city

comes alive. I would also suggest it's not just about kids. There's a movement that Itai Palti has started called the Conscious Cities Movement. He's an architect out of London who is also part of the steering committee for Learning Landscapes and who was the architect for Urban Thinkscapes. And, he has even dreamed about what would it mean to have more piazzas, places where older people can gather, so that they feel like they belong and they're not alone all the time. You know, the old piazza was a wonderful idea.

I remember when I was in Morocco, I saw this public space where -- well, it turned out it was mostly women, but I thought it was so cool -- where women would all come to bake their bread. They would all come to a central location. But, that also meant they saw each other every day when they went to bake their bread. And, they took their kids and their kids saw other people when they went to bake their bread.

So, I think as we rethink what we need in a highly digital, highly rushed-around society, we're going to have a lot of ideas that will make cities more family-friendly and will maybe get our heads out of the cell phone and back into the eyes of another human being.

PITA: All right. Jennifer, did you have any last thoughts that you wanted to add? And, Kathy, too. I think we've had a wonderful conversation here, but I want to maybe bring us to the -- what do you think is the main takeaway for us?

VEY: Sure. One of the things at least that I found really interesting in my engagement with this project is really how it's bringing together two different fields that really haven't probably spent a whole lot of time talking with one another.

So, you've got this whole field around child development, and this whole world of placemakers and planners.

And, this has really opened up a very interesting dialogue, among the people who are involved in this effort, around all these issues that we're talking about, of how you're creating these kinds of learning opportunities while at the same time you're creating these kinds of new spaces that are bringing children together, bringing their families together, in new ways, and at the same time just offering opportunities to reinvigorate and revitalize communities.

And, so, I've certainly taken a lot away from these conversations today, and I'm really looking forward to this continuation of meshing a lot of these ideas together.

HIRSCH-PASEK: Mine will be quick. It's just that I'm learning so much from people like you Jen, and it is such an honor to work with people who dream differently, or maybe have the same dreams but a different toolkit.

PITA: Yeah, coming at them from a different place.

HIRSCH-PASEK: Yeah, and I think together -- and I think we welcome all of the listeners out there who have ideas about this, to let us know what your ideas are, because there's a lot of room for the city of the future, and right now dreamers can have a say on that big white page that's still empty.

PITA: Kathy, do you have any next big projects coming up that people should look at from you? Urban Thinkscapes have a new location yet?

HIRSCH-PASEK: Well, we actually have a couple really cool ones. The one I'll talk about is Parkopolis, which is the life-size human board game. And, we're going to be putting it, as a start for testing purposes, in the Please Touch Museum in Philadelphia, which is a marvelous children's museum.

But, it's a game that actually breeds mathematics and scientific reasoning, and the dice have been refashioned. So, no longer do you have one to six and one to six, but you have one to six,  $1/4$ ,  $1/2$ ,  $3/4$ , and a whole. So, you can roll a  $6 \frac{3}{4}$  and then see which card you pick out.

PITA: Well, that sounds really exciting. We will have links to Urban Thinkscapes and a bunch of all your various works that our listeners can go read more about them. Thank you both very much for being here today.

And, thank you to our listeners, as always, and to remind them they can follow us at Policy Podcasts for more content from the Brookings Podcast Network.

HIRSCH-PASEK: Thank you.

VEY: Thanks so much.