



## TRANSCRIPT

# "GAMES FOR CHANGE"

*A Conversation With Asi Burak*

*Moderator: Maryanne Olson*

### ANNOUNCER:

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### ASI BURAK:

So it was 2004. *GTA, Grand Theft Auto* was-- everything people know about videogames is *Grand Theft Auto* and violence, shallowness, I mean, in-- in the perception of people. And I'm coming with the idea to make not only a peace game, it's about the Middle East. And you can win peace between Israel and Palestine.

I did it actually for the whole duration of my Master's degree. And it became more and more-- with external facing. Because people started writing about it. So it's almost at s-- at one p-- at one-- one-- place, we started almost, like, chasing the headlines.

Like, like, people wrote about it like it's-- it's a done prod-- project. But we have only a prototype. So it's almost like, "Oh, we have to do it." Because it's kind of, (CLAP) you know, it's already out there. And it became a commercial product. We actually started a company out of Carnegie Mellon.

And you know, being one of the first games for change that got a lot of recognition-- very ambitious-- not always on par with the ambition in-- in the execution, obviously. Because you know, it's-- it's almost like-- people expected the city to go into the computer and world peace to emerge. And it was not about that. But it-- it definitely made-- made-- the statement that a game could be compelling, not be about war, actually be about the opposite, and-- actually teach people a lot.

You know, people came out all the time with new lessons. And we'll just show you a

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short video-- from those days. But it would show you a bit how the media perceived it and how it was used in real life, so you get a bit of context-- also, how the interface looks. It was published in 2007.

(VIDEO PLAYING)

## **ASI BURAK (ON VIDEO):**

*Peace Maker* is a game in which you take the role of one of the leaders. You can take either the role of the Israeli Prime Minister or the Palestinian President. You can play both perspectives. And the idea is that, as the leader, you have to react to real-time events happening in the war. You can negotiate with other leaders. But you also have security of military actions that you can take. And by doing so, you have to reach a peaceful solution while in office.

## **REPORTER (ON VIDEO):**

In an Israeli high school, a new computer game called *Peace Maker* was launched today. Children playing the role of Israeli and Palestinian leaders, trying to make peace in a virtual world of suicide bombings and Israeli military strikes.

## **ASI BURAK (ON VIDEO):**

We don't expect to address all issues of the conflict. We don't expect to give all the answers. We're bringing up issues for discussion.

## **FEMALE VOICE (ON VIDEO):**

I think the best aspect of playing this game is that, especially if you're a Palestinian student in the territories, or an Israeli student within Israel, you-- you get a chance to really feel what both sides are thinking and get a better sense of what they can do together to work towards peace.

## **ASI BURAK (ON VIDEO):**

If you look at the videogame industry today, there are so many games out there about violence, about war, about destructions. We said a simple thing. There is certainly a place for one little game about peace.

## **ASI BURAK:**

So this is when I was young and naïve. (LAUGHTER) But seriously, I-- I learned a lot

from it, you know, the idea that you can do something against the-- you know, everybody does videogames in a certain way. And you, as a student, can do something completely different and actually being accepted and getting a lot of-- recognition.

The idea that people can learn from it was clear. I didn't need to do any research. People did-- on-- on *Peace Maker*. But it was so intuitive to see how people respond and what people get out of it. So for example, one thing that happened is that people came to us all the time with the same quote or a very similar quote of, "I learned from your game, playing it for two hours, more than I learned from the news-- watching the news or reading newspapers for years or-- or a month."

And-- and it's not only about our design. It's about videogames. It's about the idea that the videogame connected the dots for people. And they made an action, okay? They were active, right? They were the ones leading the story. They took an action. And they saw the consequences.

And they took another action. And they saw-- rather than what we usually do, which is watching isolated events and having no context. So you know, we hear about the suicide bombing in Afghanistan or in Iraq. Even though we watch a lot of those news all the time, it's very hard for us to make the-- those connections. And the news channels, even though they try, they many times fail in making those connections. What *Peace Maker* did, it was exactly about making those connections.

It was you understood what the stakeholders want. Every action you took, there was-- there were bars that were moving about approvals. And you understood who hates you and who loves you or who is neutral about what you did. And that was the-- the-- the point where it clicked to me that videogames can do something that traditional media cannot.

Other things that happened were very interesting in the journey. One of them is that real politicians played. And in the video, you saw this guy, General Danny Yatom. He was the head of the Mossad in Israel in the past. And at that time, he was running for prime minister-- from the Labor Party. So we're talking about central left.

He played the game. For some reason, he agreed to do it on live TV-- which wasn't, probably, very smart. What happened? Anyone-- anyone has a guess what happened when he tried to beat the game, *Peace Maker*, playing the Israeli leader?

## MALE VOICE #2:

He lost?

## ASI BURAK:

(LAUGH) How long did it take him? I mean, many people lose. It's-- it's-- it's a tough-- especially the beginning. Five minutes. (LAUGHTER) So and it's all on

record. I mean, I can show you the video. But it's-- or send you the video.

But it's kind of-- there is a suicide bomb that we put, on purpose, as an inciting incident to show people that this is a game about peace. But it's-- it's challenging, okay? It's a very volatile environment. And-- and it's tough to deal with.

It's all real footage. You saw in the video, this is how the game looks like and the three languages. (THROAT CLEAR) And what happened, when he saw the suicide bomb, he started to take very extreme actions or some of them very-- h-- kind of hard line.

And he-- he narrates as he plays. So he says something like, "Okay, now I'll send Apache strikes. Great success. Woo." And then he goes on to send military units, second action. And then, at some point, the reporter is, "You know, it's kind of *Peace Maker*. Maybe you want to do some diplomacy."

So he goes. And he takes the-- (BEEP) the most-- like, the hard line action in the diplomacy branch, which is demand concessions from the other side. So one-sided, you know, go catch the terrorists. And so in a sense, and-- and then he lost. He got the third Intifada. So the reporter is asking him-- "What do you think about the game?" So he's thinking for a second. And then he says, "The game is completely unrealistic. Because I did all the right things."

So that-- that was-- that was also a moment that we understood that this is not our audience, that that's, like, lost cause. And-- we decided to work with the young generation-- which also, I mean, I've seen some experiences myself that were a big troubling-- in some of the workshops.

So what happened is that-- Peres Center, you know, Shimon Peres-- the former Israeli president, he started-- this nonprofit thing 14 years ago. And-- they bought 100,000 copies from us, obviously, as a discount. But that was kind of a wholesale deal. And 80,000, they put in the newspapers. So people opened the newspaper, both in Eretz in Israel and-- Kurds at the West Bank, same day, a CD gift for free, is waiting for them. It was great. In a small country, you can imagine the-- the impact. But 20,000 of the copies, they kept.

And they use them until this day. So they do those workshops for students. And for this-- this year, for the first time, they tried to do a joint one, which was very tough with the situation. And I was visiting one of those. And-- and they're very interesting. Because especially for your context, because what happened is that I understood that the game is-- is-- is-- I mean, it's cool to see what the game does.

But in a way, it was actually a bridge for conversation. So they don't study those things at school, at least on the Israeli side, that I've seen. It's completely out of the curriculum. They don't want to touch it. So that workshop is almost like the only-- opportunity to speak about it.

And it's-- it provides a safe environment. Because then they start saying things like, "Oh, when I was the prime minister, I did this. Or when I was the Palestinian leader, I-- I thought of doing this." So it's not them. It's like they're role playing.

And-- and a lot of things came up, including complete ignorance to basic facts, you know, geography-- who was-- you know, whose agenda is playing-- really, again, this, on one hand, encouraging that the game can do this, on-- on the other hand, disturbing that that's the baseline.

And it was-- it was the suburb of Tel Aviv in Israel. It wasn't, you know, in some remote, rural area. And it was also one year before the army. We're talkin' about 17 years old. So that-- that-- and-- and this g-- this goes until this day. But now I want to kind of zoom out. So I gave you the story of one of the first games for change ever and talk about Games for Change as a sector.

So this is something I'm-- I'm sure that many of you know, the criticism, right? It's changing a bit. But still, you know, the main-- the-- the perception of the-- of the public stays with the idea that it's-- it's not positive. It's not even neutral. It's really damaging the kids.

Like, "In any moment, I would prefer my kid--" that's not what I'm saying, what they would say, "prefer that my kid would play outside with his friends rather than play those terrible videogames." Then, there is Roger Ebert, late Roger Ebert.

By the way, he star-- he triggered a h-- a huge internet debate on this quote. So he tells us, game creators, "No matter how hard you try, you never get to the level of the masterpieces of film and-- and, you know, literature," which is, obviously, completely wrong in my eyes. But that's kind of, you know, where we start.

And-- same time, you remember the quote. Let's talk about the power, right? \$72 billion-- industry worldwide, if you take software, hardware all together. In many countries, like we talked about, more than ticket sales and sometimes even more than movie industry and music combined.

Any-- any idea where this number is coming from, \$1 billion in three days? That's-- last November, *Grand Theft Auto V* comes out for the first time. By the way, it's not end. It's-- it's continuing. Because now, it comes for PlayStation 4. So they sell, you know, again.

They made, in three days, \$1 billion just by the people waiting for the f-- you know, to buy it immediately. And-- that's the biggest launch in the history of any media product, entertainment product. Not *Avatar*. For *Avatar*, it took three months, I think. (COUGH)

So we're talking about really big numbers. The demographics is changing. This is another thing about the power. It's no longer just teenagers. I mean, people here talked about-- Candy Crush Saga. The devices are changing, you know? And it's-- it's not-- it's not long ago that we started seeing on-- games on Facebook. We're talking about five years, four years.

Mobile, you know, the idea that people play on the smart phone. Look at the subway. I mean, I'm seeing-- I'm always looking over the shoulder, what games they're playing. So we're talking about-- so-- so it's-- part of it is the young generation just growing up, right?

S-- one day, the decision makers in the-- in this foundation will be people that play games. And another thing is that you have s-- just people joining in from, you know-- by the way, on Facebook, more females play games, and much older than even 31-- on average.

This is-- Jane McGonigal. I don't know many-- maybe some of you saw the Ted Talks of Jane. Jane is on our board. She talks a lot about the idea of the hour, the time, the engagement. And this is a number she got to through research, that people play 3 billion hours a week, worldwide. And she is--

## MEGAN:

Is that the super better (PH) one?

## ASI BURAK:

Yes. And she says-- and she speaks of Games for Change. I'll show you later the festival. And she says, like, "All that time, if we could invest it for good, right, and do s-- or at least let's diver-- make-- make the diet a bit more diverse."

So this is when I think about the responsibility. This is my kid. But you know, all of us have, if not kids, they-- you know, we have nephews and will have kids or whatever. And we're talking about, if this is the most powerful medium, I mean, it must be different than 95% shooters and fighting games.

You know, I went to the Game Awards-- this weekend in Las Vegas. And the-- one of the reasons I went, by the way, for the first time, they didn't talk with us. But they put a Games for Change category. They decided, on their own, to put a Games for Change category. And the winner was a game about World War I-- called Valiant Hearts, actually coming from a commercial company, Ubisoft.

So they made this Games for Change category. And it was-- it was so encouraging that I went to see it. But again, 95% of what I've seen there was the same game dressed in a different-- you know, *The Lord of the Rings* or dressed in-- *Grand Theft Auto* flavor or, you know, really, mostly the same game.

So you know, this is where we also go and say, "Okay, let's learn from our, you know, fathers or-- bigger brothers and how they do it." And-- and you start seeing that, in other media, the concept of fusing-- you know, in games I got a lot. I get it less today. But I got it a lot 10 years ago, "Who is going to buy it," or, "Who is going to enjoy it? I mean, games are about fun. They need to be fun. People want to escape reality."

I mean, no longer-- I don't buy-- I didn't buy it then. But I even don't buy it now, I mean, even more. And-- and when you look at-- at literature, you get it easily, right? You get it. Now people get it when you speak about graphic novels. But remember where it came from, comic books, right?

I mean, it-- it's-- it's a very similar-- place to where games are now. You know, we

had comic books for decades. Nobody called them graphic novels. Nobody thought that they could make-- a comic book about the Holocaust and about their personal story. And now it's like we all understand it.

TV series, you know, I mean, I could give many examples here. I chose *M.A.S.H.*-- *M.A.S.H.*, because it was-- after the last two Super Bowls, it was the most-viewed-- episode in-- in TV history, the last episode of *M.A.S.H.*, and also because of the idea that you don't-- you don't need always to be very earnest in talking about real things.

You can make-- satire. You can do-- something that is actually entertaining in-- in the context that is very serious. You're conveying truth. That was-- that was a big one. Because you know, it was a presentation, end of the day. It was-- it wasn't even-- you know, what we're used to seeing in documentary.

And it brought this topic to-- to attention. And to me, the best example is the Oscars. Because here you talk about a really mature medium, that-- the combination of critical acclaim, financial success, and dealing with very serious issues is just completely understood and, arguably, even giving those movies ad-- advantage.

So look at the winners. I mean, the only one here that is not a winner in the last five years is *The Help*. And that was the year that *The Artist* won. But look at, you know, the-- the heavy issues. And *Argo* could be a movie for change, I mean, in the sense of the real-world context.

So we think that games could be meaningful too. And this I-- this leads us to Games for Change. (THROAT CLEAR) Games for Change is a nonprofit. It started when *Peace Maker* started, more or less. And the-- it's in New York, even though we have-- I'll show you some chapters around the world.

But the whole idea is, how can we change this medium but, obviously, how we can also-- start to see more and more real-world impact coming from games that you can't see in other mediums, or you can enhance other mediums-- other mediums. We do a festival every year. By the way, you know what? Let-- let's stop here for a second, before I do that part. Any-- any questions? Any-- any thoughts? Any-- you-- I thought that you-- (LAUGH)

## QUESTION:

So for the games that are kind of like a bi-person narrative that you guys make, do you ever make games where the main character isn't white or a man or straight?

## ASI BURAK:

Yeah, absolutely. So-- a game that came very recently-- talking about a month-- less than a month ago, and it was a nominee in the Games for Change category. It's called *Never Alone*. Maybe you read about it. Because it got a lot of mainstream coverage, including *The Guardian* and other.



And-- it's a game that was made by one of the companies in our sector, in our community. The guy that leads it was actually on the board of Games for Change in the past. He was the chairman. And-- he-- they went into an equal partnership with the Alaskan tribes, the Native American tribes in Alaska. You-- you know the name of the-- I-- I-- how do--

## MEGAN:

The name of the native-- or the-- the group? They're-- the Cook Inlet Tribal Council. And they formed the studio, Upper One Games. And they plan to make more, like, cultural games after this--

## ASI BURAK:

So-- so in the game, you play, to your-- to your question, you play a Native American girl who is very young and is going on a journey that is completely-- kind of fictional and-- a lot of-- spiritual-- elements from the stories. So it's-- it's really about preserving those stories that the elders were telling.

And all she has in her journey is a fox that helps her. Really special game. And the-- they even left the voiceover. So rather than telling you the story in-- you know, in English, they tell you the story in the native language. And you only understand through the subtitles. So that advances the story.

But ag-- even here, you'll probably see some other examples that-- one of them, you're-- one of the games we brought is *Papers, Please*, where you're actually playing-- a fictional east European country, let's say-- that you're sitting in the border control. And you're making decisions who goes in and who-- who doesn't. And it gets to a very-- to places of very tough ethical decisions and really good game, really, really good game.

What else do we have there that-- ah, we have *Half the Sky*. So in *Half the Sky*, that we were producing, actually-- with Nicholas Kristof, you play-- an Indian woman. Obviously, we got great responses. But we got also people that were very upset about the way we-- we present-- even though we worked with NGOs on the ground. And you know, it is what it is. But I prefer to have that then to have another white hero, white male hero. Other questions?

## QUESTION #2:

What's sort of your strategy for market penetration? Are you working primarily with-- schools or-- or education systems?



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**ASI BURAK:**

So-- so I--

**QUESTION #2:**

Or are you looking at commercial--

**ASI BURAK:**

Yeah, so all of the above. And I'll-- I'll leave it more to the case studies. I'll show you some case studies with numbers, so you will see games that did just schools. And you will see games that did consumer facing. And you will see-- games that did much more targeted audience inside consumers, like cancer patients.

**QUESTION #3:**

Do you have any games on the intersection of health and human rights and more focused on--

**ASI BURAK:**

Health and human rights?

**QUESTION #3:**

Do you have anything similar?

**ASI BURAK:**

I mean, in a way, *Half the Sky* was-- was dealing with a range. Because I mean, this is another thing that I'm always fighting, those-- the labeling of disciplines. So there is games for health, okay, for a long time. Now-- now they're actually kind of fading out. But there was a community of games for health.

And it was almost like new games for change don't deal with it, with health-- health. But when you're talking about a lot of the health issues, especially public health issues, it's-- it's completely connected to social norms, right, and culture. I mean, how can you even separate it? So *Half the Sky* deals a lot with-- you know, pregnancy, maternal health-- with-- HIV/AIDS. I think the *Haiti Earthquake* might have--

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**MEGAN:**

Yeah. The *Inside the Earthquake*, you play as-- you know-- first responder--

**ASI BURAK:**

One-- one of the games over there.

**MEGAN:**

Yeah-- to the-- you know, to the earthquake-- victims. And then you also play as, you know, one of the victims themselves to see, like, what exactly they're facing and what services are-- you know, if any, are available to them.

**ASI BURAK:**

And this is also a game that chose to be-- real footage. So it's like a documentary game. And everything is with videos and photos. So yes.

**QUESTION #4:**

Do-- I'm interested as well, like, I-- I was reading sort of the opposite about some games I've never played but that use psych-- psychological profiling on the players to, you know, to make the baddies more scary and-- and-- and whatnot.

And does Games for Change sort of-- incorporate or-- games that aren't maybe about issues but use-- positive learning tools within the games, rather than, like, a neg-- rather than something, like, capturing on my fear and putting it-- more of it on the screen. Would something-- be able to-- show my positive reactions and encourage those?

**ASI BURAK:**

Yeah. So it's a very good question and-- and-- and a deep one in the sense that people do it in different ways. You know, we have people that do games in our community that-- the learning is embedded in something that, you know, doesn't feel necessarily a Game for Change.

They might-- you know, there is a whole organization in the west coast called GlassLab, that they work with commercial companies to take something like *Sim City* and add assessment tools to it and some changes. But it stays mostly the same game to-- to u-- use it in learning.

Some people do-- some teachers do it with *Civilization*, you know, a game that is

completely commercial and was not designed for educational or those-- but the-- the way they present it, the way they work with it in the classroom, is educational. Some people use games for, for example, I'll show you *Fold It, Fold It*, that-- is actually civic labor. It's kind of more about getting a lot of people to help on a problem rather than giving them any messaging or, you know, teaching them.

So yeah, I mean, the-- the-- the-- in a way, the old g-- old school games for change were games on the screen, you know, before mobile, before that. And they were all about, you know, just like we do with documentaries, they kind of did this whole, okay, we will tell you something in a game. And now you see more sophistication in how people are promoting what they want to promote.

So a bit about-- what-- what we do. And when I say we, it's also the community. Because we're much more a community hub than-- we're not a game studio, right? So we have this festival that, over the years, grew-- to be now part of Tribeca, the Tribeca Film Festival. And in terms of professionals, we have 900 on-- on site for three days. And this year, it's going to be again in April-- next year. And-- the-- the date just changed by one day. So it will be 21, 22, 23.

I would be-- I would love to speak with you about those of you who are interested to go. We can arrange it. For the first time, because of Tribeca, we have the chance to do something public. So rather than only talk to the professionals, also do something in the street.

They gave us a whole street in lower Manhattan. It was part of the Family Fair, 300,000 people-- throughout the day. And they do it for many years. So they have ESPN. And they have-- Disney Radio. And suddenly, there was a Games for Change street.

What was interesting about it is that people came and discovered it. So they didn't go to play games on the Family Fair. They didn't even think that they would find games that are different than what they are used to. So it was completely organic. This is, by the way, a game-- it's-- it's a digital-- digital physical game that-- this group did with-- *Sesame Street* that-- kids are controlling their parents.

So the kid is holding a tablet. And he can-- he can basically tell the parent where to go. They-- under the box, beneath the box, they wear headphones. And they would hear, like, the instruction. Go right. Go-- and they need to chase the cookie. (LAUGHTER) And it's really wild.

So-- this was the public arcade. And in terms of speakers, this is something that Games of Change is unique-- about, you know, unlike a game conference, we can bring Al Gore, you know, or Sandra Day O'Connor spoke already in 2008. And many times, when those people come in, they also-- it engages them in projects. So I'll show you later what Sandra Day O'Connor did in the last few years. But this is something that we-- we're trying to do every year, you know? This year, Nicholas Kristof is going to keynote.

And-- and it's also not limited to games. I mean, we want people to kind of hear about social change. Research, relatively new, as we said, one-- like, 10 years, but

becoming more and more important, especially for funders-- to see kind of the-- you know, the deeper thinking on what games actually do and how people learn.

So for example, this book, that-- I really recommend, is one of the fundamental works in the field by Dr. G. He speaks about what you can learn from games that r-- regardless of Games for Change, like, commercial games. And then he says something so-- provocative.

He says, "I wish that our schools would teach kids the w-- as well as videogames teach them." Like, because a des-- if you think about it, a designer, when-- when you need to-- to play a game and beat it, you-- the-- the designer basically created the system with rules that you need to understand.

So when people played *Peace Maker*, they needed to get the designer's, you know, the s-- what's the relationship between the stakeholders, what the system is all about. What happens when they do certain things? And they improved until they got so we-- so good at that that they won the game. But they did it themselves, at their own pace. They enjoyed it, or at least, they were very thrilled. So that's-- that's what he writes about videogames.

And 21st century skills, I'm sure that many of you hear it all the time. But it's something that games are very good at, again, not explicit games for change, I'm teaching you math, but the idea that, you know, it's system thinking, p-- problem solving-- and-- collaboration more and more today with social games. Funders, I mean, this is just a taste. But there's a long list of funders that already came in.

You know, some of them are very conservative. I mean, we get funding from USAID. We get funding from NEA. We get funding from-- the Ford Foundation. But the risk is that it's still very-- kind of fashion based. It's not like sustainable, I'm supporting it like I support documentaries.

It's-- it's still in the-- I'm putting my-- my feet in the water. Let's see what-- what happens. Maybe I won't continue. And so this is something we're trying to change, obviously. I'll skip that. This is-- I told you about the chapters.

It's a very simple idea that people can license. And-- and we have one in Brazil, one in Europe, one in Korea, people that just came in. And-- and I get a lot of those. I mean, you know, let's say once every two months, someone comes with a new territory. (NOISE)

And I just know how tough it is. So many of them don't actually do it. But I-- I even got-- people from Kenya or India thinking about it. And I wish that it would happen. Something we're doing now which might be very interesting for you is that we're doing-- we call it-- we're calling it impact apology.

People do it in media for years on-- on documentaries. But nobody did it-- as we are trying to do it, in games. And we're trying to do it not by-- not by, necessarily, content areas but-- by impact types. So-- so what our claim is that, over the years, it's great that we saw all those examples. But it's very wrong to put all those examples in one bucket.

I mean, and not only that the-- they're in one bucket. There is actually friction. There is-- the people that-- that are in education, (COUGH) they don't see anything else. They're like, "That's what games are, for education," and that's it. And then the people that are in it for awareness, that-- that's only what they see.

So we're trying to say, "Okay, what games could do?" Obviously, they could do many things. But we're trying to consolidate it. And-- and right now, we're with five or six categories. And the other claim is that you need different expertise to aim for those and to assess them, right? Because if it's awareness, you would assess it as a communication tool.

If it's-- an educational game, you would assess it as you would assess educational-- tools and products. If it's behavior change, it might be more on the health or social-- you know, s-- or psychology. And-- th-- this is-- is something that, you know, we saw with *Fold It* and we see more and more when I told you about the crowd gaming. I'm not sure it has ex-- even an equivalent in-- in other media-- media for good.

So this is kind of what people would call gamification. We-- we're not-- we're not fans-- big fans of the term, gamification. But what it really does is augment something that already exists. It just amplifies it. And-- and this is very interesting for us, the-- the idea of civic movements.

*Macon Money* was a very interesting game, where-- there were-- Knight Foundation funded it. And there were two communities in Georgia, one-- mostly white and one mostly African-American. And it was-- it was not really a digital game. It was mostly physical.

They created a new currency. They created those bonds. And they divided the bonds. They-- they cut them in half. And they distributed them in a way that forced people from two communities to come together and use the bonds in local businesses.

So they had this whole network of local businesses that were-- that bought into the program. So the whole idea was local economy, but mostly, get the two communities to co-- to collaborate. Do we have time for the case studies? I'll-- I'll do-- I'll do them quickly. Or do you prefer that we'll go to the-- to the games? What do you think?

## MEGAN:

Maybe a quick on these and then the games. Yeah, I think that should work.

## ASI BURAK:

So very quickly, just to-- and-- and I don't want to confuse you. Because it's not in line, necessarily, with the games. It was a different way of choosing them. Those, I'm choosing because I have metrics. And-- and they have strong-- evaluation and data.

Those were chosen sometimes because it's easier to access. And immediately, you

can get into that. Sandra Day O'Connor, I mentioned, 2008. She says, you know, "My first project after I retire is videogames." Everybody's skeptical. Videogames, Sandra Day O'Connor? She's 82 years old. What are you talking about?

But that's what she did. She started a nonprofit called iCivics. She chose an amazing developer that became only better. And over the years, they-- they did something like 20 games. And if you go to iCivics, most of them, you can get for free. And you can play the president. You can have a game around the court system. You can have a game around how a law becomes-- we have *We the Jury*? No, we don't have it--

## MEGAN:

No, not (UNINTEL)--

## ASI BURAK:

We had it this weekend. This weekend, we did-- an arcade at the Smithsonian in DC. And *We the Jury* was one of them that you understand the process. Numbers, so this is really a selection. They did a much more robust evaluation. But the idea that they reach 1.2 million players, 50 states.

And the evaluation is good on the teacher side, on the student side. The teachers, many of them say, I mean, the 80% say that w-- they will use it again, that they see the benefit. One of two students actually played it at home without-- with-- it's not homework, just because it was-- (LAUGHTER) it was compelling enough. But again, the idea of better understanding.

And-- and she comes from a place, like I told you about *Peace Maker*, this ignorance. You know, there is this-- peer report that-- 2/3 of Americans can't even-- name the three branches of government. So and-- and by the way, with the (UNINTEL), it's even worse. Because something like-- civic education is going to the bottom. So that's what she's concerned about. And that's why she did this project.

So this is-- this is learning. Now let's talk about awareness. I'm-- I actually chose something here that is kind of provocative. And-- and we just got the numbers recently. So the-- the metro in Melbourne, okay, like the MTA style, goes to an ad agency and says, "We want to do a campaign that-- talks about safety and mostly that people are not falling into the, you know, tracks. And-- and they're being more aware that the trains are coming."

They go with something that would never pass in New York City called *Dumb Ways to Die*. Did you hear about it? It has-- it has-- it has an app that was very successful on-- on the-- iPhone and Android, a game, basically, but also-- a video clip that was watched by dozens of millions. I'm not exaggerating.

Look at the numbers: 70 million players, 1.32 billion play sessions-- and the views of the clip, 91 million. Huge success. Now, they're-- they're even-- kind of in-- in--

suddenly challenged by their own success. So I mean, people ask them, "Can you show proof what happened?" And they're starting to try to-- to get the understanding.

But think of what it does to the brand of-- of an organization like MTA and the awareness of the topic and-- how the young generation suddenly is so much more engaged in what they're trying to say. So that was-- that was the example in terms of a communication campaign.

Direct social action-- I'm giving you a very old example. But it-- to me, it's like the foundation of this trend, the idea that people started to break the boundaries between, "I'm playing a game on a screen, and I'm doing something in real life." *Free Rice, Free Rice*, look at the numbers. That's the UN, by the way. The the United Nations funded *Free Rice* in 2005.

8 million page views a day. It's still going. 45 million grains of rice-- a day to feed 2,500 people. So you might say, "But what-- why not give the money directly? Why-- why do we need this mechanism?" But that's the beauty of it, that the sponsors are there.

The-- the UN brings the sponsors. The cause is there. And the players feel that they're part of something. I mean, it's easy to be cynical about it and say, you know, it's like the click-- and donate-- economy. But there's something-- very powerful in the idea that people are spending a lot of hours, going back to Jane McGonigal.

But those hours, rather than just play for entertainment, are actually they believe that-- that they-- they actually help the cause. The power of the many, I already mentioned *Fold It* a few times. The idea here is, those of you who didn't hear about it-- I'm not a scientist.

So you know, it's-- I-- I just-- I'm scratching the surface here. It's about folding proteins. And folding proteins in science leads to answers to many of the core questions in-- you know, disease research, like HIV/AIDS-- cancer. And-- it's-- it's a pretty creative process.

Until now, they used super computers. So scientists were using those super computers for years. Super computers are good at doing multiple calculations but not at being creative. So they-- so-- one scientist, not a game designer, decided to make this game, *Fold It*.

He put it online. Players-- started to be interested in those puzzles. And then he decided to put a s-- a certain problem that was very famous that computers couldn't deal with for 15 years or 10 years. He decided to put it for players to solve. How long did it take for them to solve it? 10 days.

And it became-- published in *Nature*. And on the (UNINTEL) line, it's *Fold It* players. This is from *Time* magazine. You know, only 10 games. "U.S. gamers unlock the structure of an-- AIDS-related enzyme the scientific community has been unable to unlock for a decade."

So here is another case, very, very innovative, of breaking the boundary between, "I'm



just playing a game that is a simulation of something," versus, "I'm actually solving something in reality by spending all that time." This started a huge trend of things that are similar.

Now you can see EyeWire and other things that are dealing with. MIT is doing projects and many, many dif-- and Ebola, I think that they started recently as well. Ebola-- so this one, I'm going to skip. But just the idea, quickly, is that people are speaking not only about youth playing games but youth making games.

So just like you would think about kids writing or kids drawing-- or-- kids-- you know, needing to do a creative thing, people start to understand. Making games, and sometimes not by coding but using those kind of midway, you know-- platforms that are very, very good-- like Scratch (PH) and others that the kids are learning. Just like we talked about, they design a system. Think-- about the process of taking something from real life that is very complex and crystalize it to a much more simple model that others playing.

And you get feedback from the players. There's something very powerful about it. There is-- believe it or not, a White House challenge. And it started three years ago, a National STEM challenge. Scholastic added it to one of their categories. So this-- and by the way, we are-- one of our programs is to do, with the s-- with the Department of Education of New York City, to do a challenge next year.

We have partners, like the Museum of the Moving Image. And the whole idea is to do a city-based challenge with the public schools of the DoE and-- and a big-- presentation at the end of the process. Last one, the most ambitious one, behavior change.

*Re-Mission*, Hope Lab, they are in Silicon Valley. And Hope Lab made the game in 2005. Now they already made *Re-Mission II*. Cancer patients, young cancer patients. And they're amazing. Because as much as they invest in the product, they invest in research. They go very far, randomized trials, you know, health-- health wars, the trials. And-- and-- they got amazing results with the game. The game kind of took shooter mechanics and actually-- made-- the idea of how you fight-- you know, what the disease is about and how you fight it.

And you kind of go into the body. And-- they actually proved, from the-- from the evaluation that the kids that played the game, versus the-- the kids that didn't, were much more consistent in their treatment. So it wasn't about understanding.

It was much, much-- beyond that in the sense that they took their trials. They listened to the doctors. I mean, the idea that they played the game made them, (SNEEZE) you know, better patients in that sense and have a better chance to fight-- fight cancer.

They also do-- this is really the beginning of the beginning. But they also do some brain research-- at-- Hope Lab and in other places that starts to understand what is activated when you play a videogame versus reading a book or a brochure or-- you know-- having someone giving you-- a teacher giving you a lecture, versus you being, you know-- which is a good segue to you playing the games.

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And I put-- that's why I always put it at the end, which is, like, you know, next year when I come, there's al-- already will be-- (LAUGH) a game funded by you in-- in the deck. Any questions before we move to the-- to the games?

## QUESTION:

Do you have any plans to do outreach with-- and I-- I don't quite remember the name. It's like-- I think it's-- Twine or something like that, where it's, like, community based that are creating games or like--

## ASI BURAK:

Twitch? Or Twine?

## QUESTION:

I think it's-- Twine, which is--

## ASI BURAK:

The text-- the text and images platform?

## QUESTION:

Right.

## ASI BURAK:

So some people in our community are using that platform. One of the games that was very famous-- did you hear about GamerGate? So one of the games that was very famous was a game by Zoe Quinn, called-- *Depression Quest*. And it was on our website for a long time. And it was made with Twine.

So actually, it's an example of a tool that gets people that are not necessarily coders, you know, a very easy way to tell their story and a very personal story. There's something, arguably, in the platform that even pr-- encourages a more serious, personal approach.

Now, we-- we are kind of platform agnostic in a sense. So obviously, when we recognize something, we will highlight it. And we actually talked about maybe a Twine panel in the festival. But-- other than that, we're you know, you-- you could see people developing for consoles. You can see people making text ba-- text games.

## QUESTION #2:

Quick question. 'Cause I'm trying-- I'm trying, like, as you were doing the presentation-- I was trying to also think of-- of existing overlaps and how can this-- can this be-- sort of-- a step towards a collaboration. Other than sort of funding and development of a game, what other ways of collaboration do you see with the foundation? And-- and also, if you can talk a little of w-- your-- an example of the collaboration you did with the Ford Foundation, since there's an overlap between--

## ASI BURAK:

So Ford Foundation is-- is an example, actually, that they funded-- *Half the Sky* big time, the project. They took the risk, one of the first ones that, you know, went for it and said, "You know, a game will be part of this package." Was it-- was-- it was not easy to get people-- convinced. That was actually a project.

But-- but it's an interesting example, because it's a very high-profile project. That's why we produced it. So as the community hub, we decided to actually put our-- roll up our sleeves and-- and do it. Because it was such an opportunity, you know?

It's like you have already a best-selling book and a high-profile project and a documentary. So I could see doing another one of those in the future. But I think that-- that, more to your question, more appropriate, would be probably to speak about what could build-- in a region or in a community, what could build this-- this impact and, you know, like a challenge, like what we're doing with the DoE with students. (NOISE)

But we did many challenges with game developers. I mean, I never did one in the developing world. And I wish we-- we-- we'll do one day, you know, like, people that come from dir-- rather than America and all European developers making games for India, let's see Indian developers-- you know, compete for a prize.

Another thing is the impact report. You know, I'm-- I'm trying to find partners. And right now, I have my-- my initial funder, Packard Foundation, that, you know, went with it. And I'm still, you know, trying to get other foundations, which, in documentaries, you-- you usually have a coalition of, like, five, you know? So this is another example of something that really builds the sector, but it's not a game game. What else do you-- you can think about, Megan (PH)?

## MEGAN:

Contributing to, like, ex-- the exposure of these kinds of games. Like, are-- like, you know, things like bringing the arcades into, like, a more public space, like, you know, in a museum or, like, how we were at the Smithsonian this weekend.

And-- you know, 'cause we can, you know, kind of reach out to our community. We know a lot of the developers really well. And we have a pretty wide selection of

games to pull from. So if you have, like, a sp-- specific theme in mind, we can cater to that, for sure--

## ASI BURAK:

So-- so that's-- that's a very good point, that-- a lot of those developers are making great things. But they don't have audiences. So it-- it's-- could be digitally. Or it could be physically. So we started doing those arcades. And we did the Smithsonian. We did one for USAID and Frontiers in DC.

We did the-- we did the public arcade with Tribeca. And-- and we're trying to think, can you make it into a product that someone could just-- and it looks better than that. But that's the-- it comes from the idea of playing those games. And-- can you make it alm-- almost like a pop-up that someone can license and, you know, start in school or in a museum? So this is something we're trying to--

## QUESTION #2:

One thing we briefly talked about earlier that I still have in mind is-- is-- how much space there is, for example, to collaborate on translating some of the guidebooks we have into a game, for example, what-- you know, the right to dissent. I'm with the Human Rights Initiative. And the right to dissent is one of the focus areas of ours.

So we-- we produce all these guidebooks and-- and fun workshops-- that, frankly, very few, especially youth, very few of them read the guidebooks. But I-- I'm thinking if it can translate into a game of-- of, you know, of what it's like to organization and dissent and (UNINTEL) keep in mind whether it's digital-- security, surveillance-- whether it's police brutality, all of that. Can that-- do you-- is that realistic and sort of--

## ASI BURAK:

Absolutely. And someone told me today that if-- if we could have a game about the police brutality in the U.S., it would probably be a huge-- you know, it will get a lot of attention right now. Absolutely. We can probably find a few that already started touching.

## MEGAN:

Yeah. There's-- one developer who started developing a game basing around-- based around, like, framing the situation. Like, literally, I think you're going through the game and taking pictures and how, like, whether you're taking protester or, you know, police-friendly photos. I mean, it's still, like, a prototype-- and a demo.

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Because it's-- you know, it's very ambitious to make a game that can capture that succinctly and-- in a sensitive way.

## ASI BURAK:

And there were also, in the-- in the past, in the very beginning, when *Peace Maker* came out, I think we mentioned-- I mentioned it to you-- *A Force More Powerful*. And then they made *People Power*. It was the-- nonviolence-- n-- nonviolent conflict something in DC, a nonprofit.

And-- and it was all about starting movements and-- without, you know, kind of protest without violence. But how do you organize? It can definitely lend-- lend itself into a game. When you talk about the brochure, it's-- it's actually-- a lot of the thinking behind *Half the Sky* was, "Can I convert something from traditional media to a new media and get new audiences for it?"

## QUESTION #2:

Exactly, expand it.

## ASI BURAK:

Because-- it will be-- yeah, it will just get to people that otherwise wouldn't pick a nonfiction book, you know, around women empowerment. Other things? Did you change your mind about games a bit?

## QUESTION #3:

I just had a quick question. So if you're looking at the ideal challenge that you may develop into a game, what elements do you look for? What are some things that would kinda spark your interest?

## ASI BURAK:

I mean, I-- in Games for Change, we are actually more on the-- belief that anything could ch-- could almost turn into a game in the sense that, you know, most of what we're dealing with, they are systemic problems. Or they have the sys-- you know, they're not-- in the sense that they're not chaotic, you know? They're not irrational.

I mean, I-- I mean, I believe that even the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, that many people would claim is crazy and random, it's not. You know, there are forces at play. So I would say-- almost anything could turn into a game. To me, it would be more interesting where you're not coming-- when-- when people come to us, and they're

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not coming with the black and white-- you know, (BANGING) "I want people to get this."

So they think about it like they're thinking about teaching and, which, arguably, you shouldn't think about teaching. But that, you know, they want people to get this message. And they'll preach it. I think that games are very good at actually walking on gray areas in the sense that you can understand tradeoffs. And you can understand why certain things have a cost that they have.

And-- so these-- these things are-- are more interesting, that yeah, clearly, you-- you-- there is a good way that you're trying to-- but you do it in-- in a way that's much more sophisticated. And I think people understand it-- as part of a system and not just-- you know, "I'm hitting you on the nose with something."

\* \* \*END OF TRANSCRIPT\* \* \*