

## Remembering vacant lots:

Residents' use of informal urban greenspace as  
children and teenagers in Japan and Australia

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“When I was a child,  
there were lots of vacant lots  
and it was normal for kids to play there.  
Today most of them are hard to get into.”

Hiroko, 52, female, from Sapporo





# What can informal urban greenspace look like?



Street verge



Gap



Lots



Railway



Brownfield



Waterside



Structural



Microsite



Powerline

## Why use informal greenspace to play?

Play in parks is limited: strict rules, few animals & plants, prescribed activities.

Young people use informal greenspace to avoid rules & find chances to

- Play ball, hide and seek, explore
- Modify the environment (e.g., build huts, tree houses)
- Escape parental oversight (seek privacy)





# IGS as 'unclaimed territory', space of becoming-other

**Adult constructions of childhood**

? Innocence      ? Nature



**Children's real  
experience**

Cloke & Jones (2005):  
Childhood as fundamentally  
'other' to adulthood:  
'disordered spaces'/IGS offer  
territory to be different,  
be a child

Photo removed for copyright reasons:  
It shows a child kicking chairs that  
burn on the lawn between 1960's style  
rental apartment blocks.

Colin Ward (1978) *The Child in the City*

# How to study past experiences? Working with memories

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Memory as methodology:  
important points (Philo 2003, Treacher 2000)

- Memories: window into the past
- Adult imaginations mix with memories of childhood
- Nostalgia: everything was better in the past... or was it?
- Researchers' own experience and memories of childhood
- Researchers' point of view: adults looking at childhood (perception)





## Research questions

1. IGS use, frequency and activities?
2. Reasons for using IGS and not a park or garden?
3. Problems experienced when using IGS?
4. Differences between genders?
5. Differences between culture/geography context?



# Two cities: case study locations

Location	Brisbane	Sapporo
Founded	1824, city status 1902	1868, city status 1922
Population	1,07 mil. (2010) ↗ 1,3 mil. (2031)	1,9 mil. (2011) ↘ 1,8 mil. (2030)
Pop. density	770/km <sup>2</sup> (peak >5,000/km <sup>2</sup> )	1,700/km <sup>2</sup> (peak >8,000/km <sup>2</sup> )
Park space	32m <sup>2</sup> per person	12m <sup>2</sup> per person





# Study methods & sample characteristics

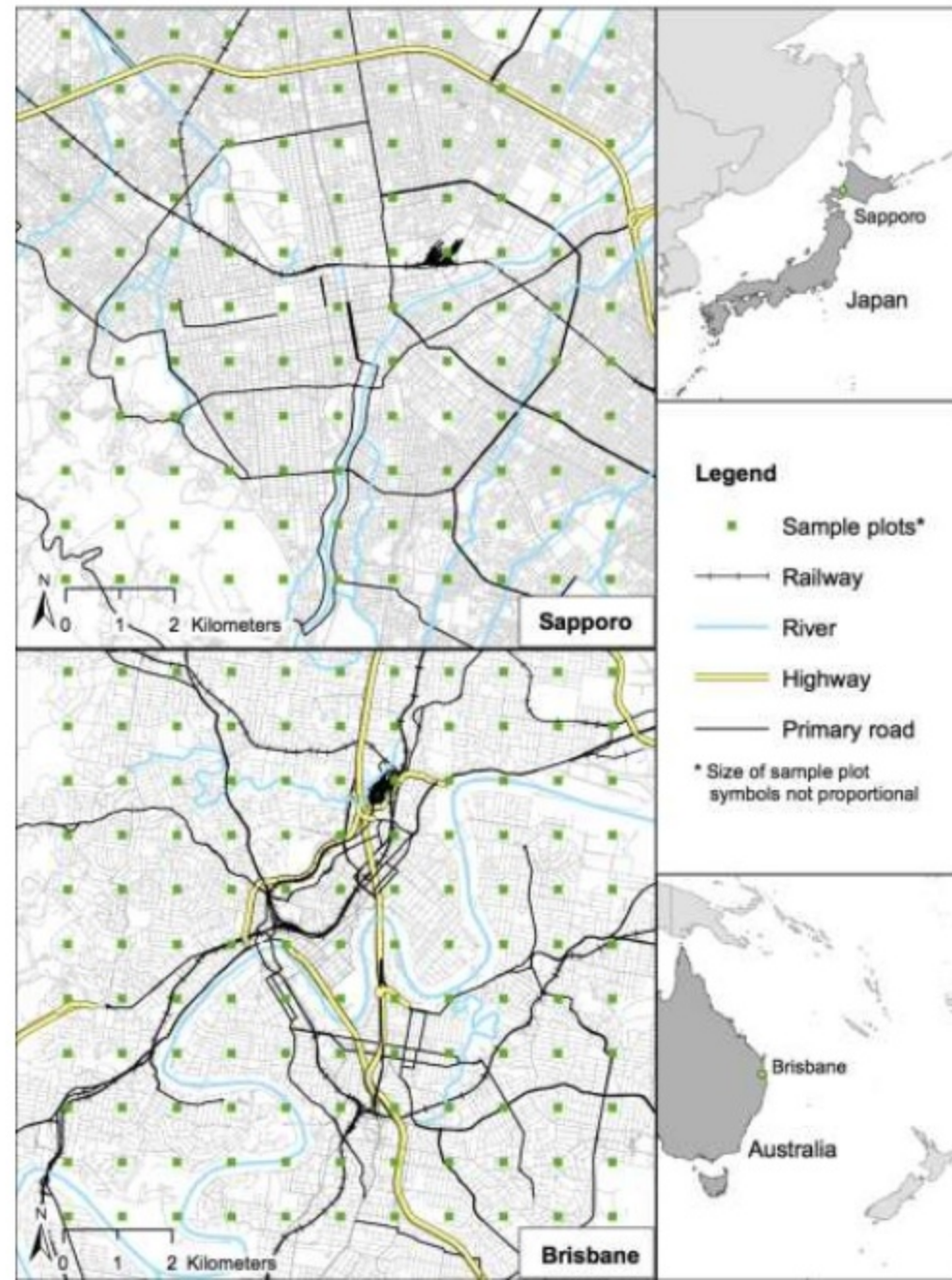
121 sites per city on 10x10km grid

## Resident IGS questionnaire

- IGS use as child or teenager
- Reasons for IGS use
- Problems with IGS use
- Open comments

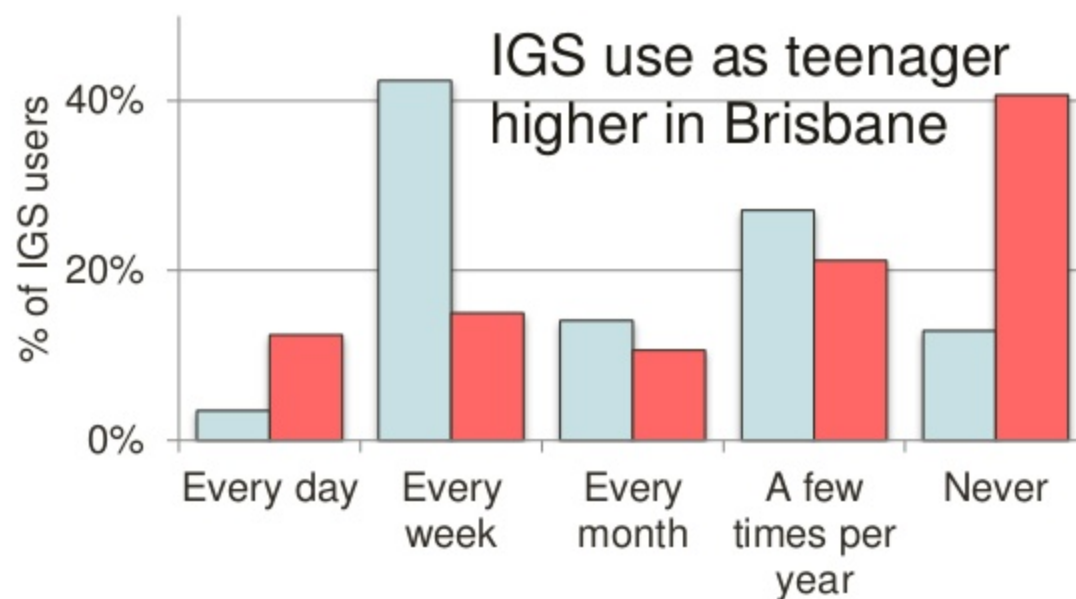
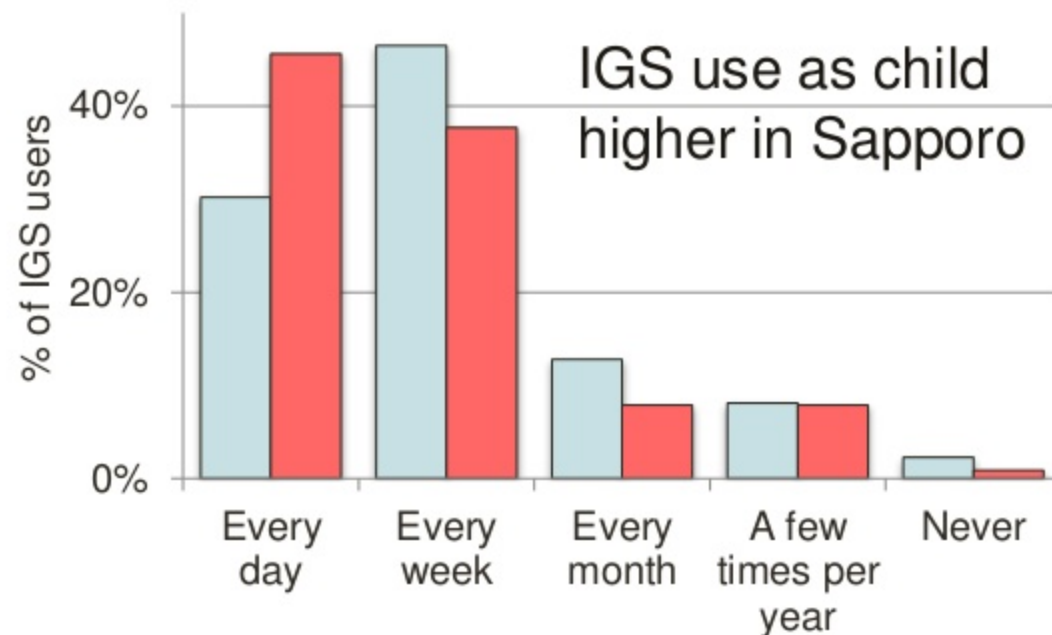
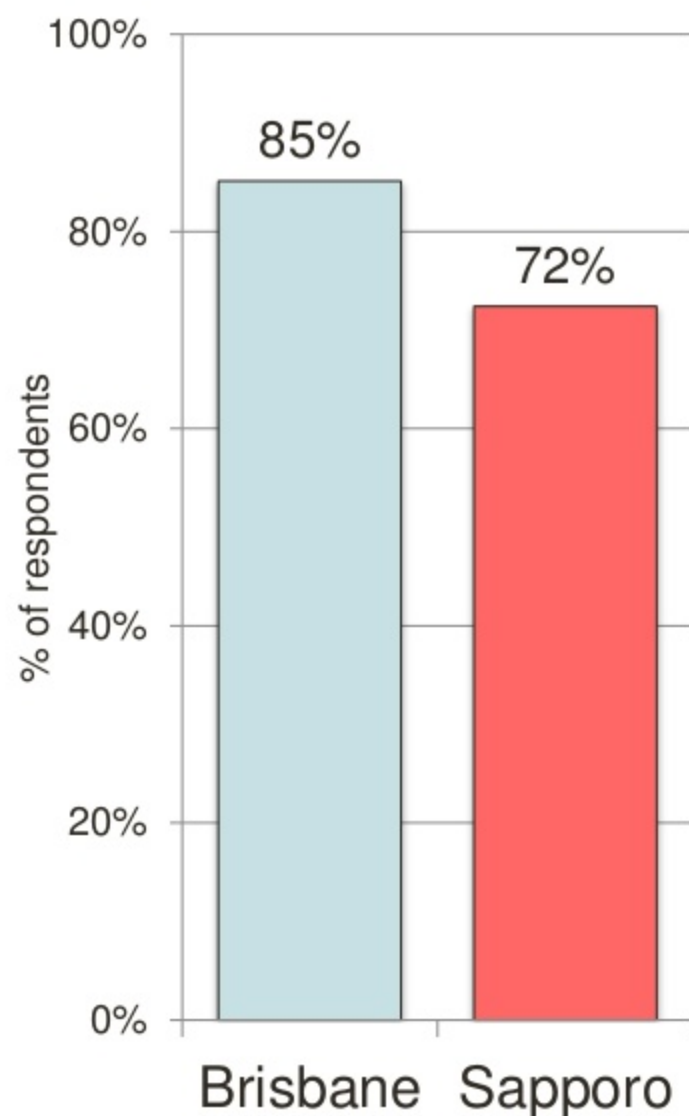
## Sample

- N=99/163 (Brisbane/Sapporo)
- Median age 51/58
- Ages 19-84 (B), 21-90 (S)
- Women 59% (B), 53% (S)



# Results: Remembered use of IGS in childhood

Percent of child/teen IGS users





## Results: Remembered activities in IGS

- Playing games
- Exploration
- Walks
- Observing plants and animals
- Secret hiding place from adults
- Other (contemplation, photography, swimming, taking short cuts, relaxing, solitude)

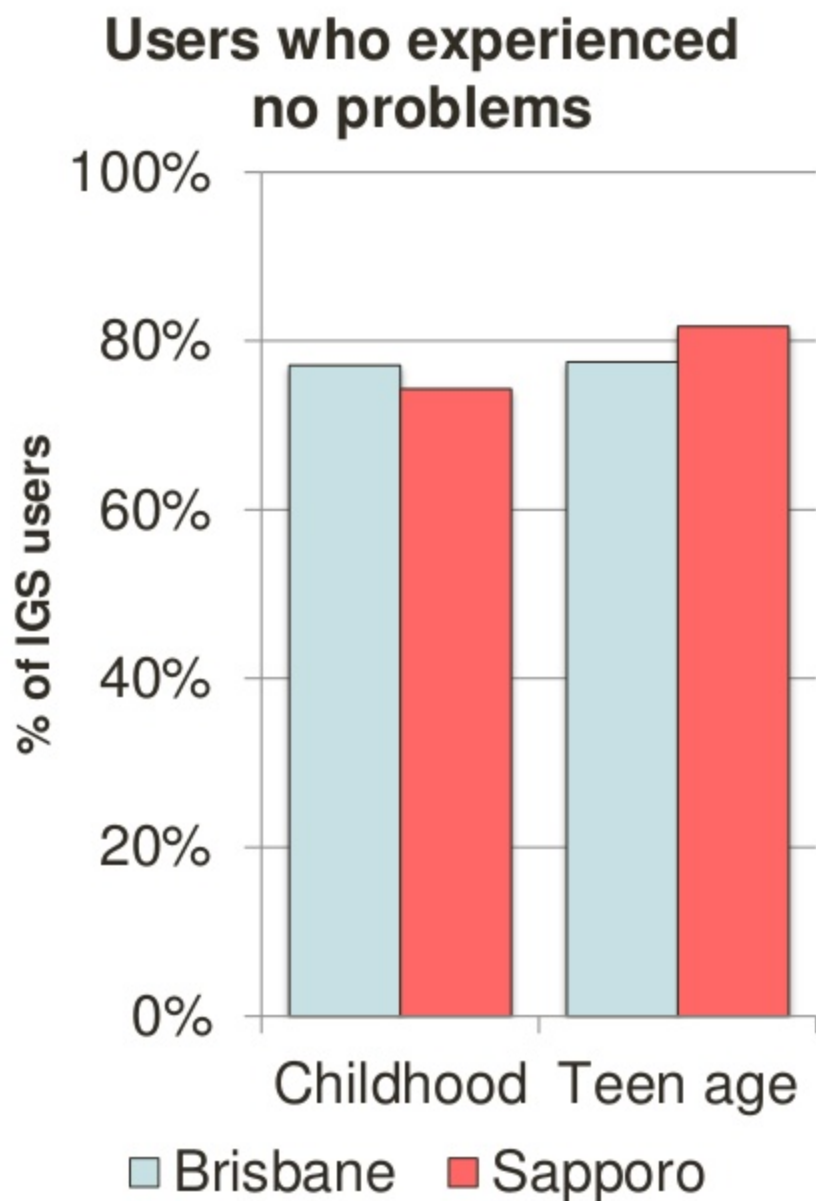


## Reasons for preferring IGS over parks or gardens

	Brisbane	Sapporo
<b>It's near my home</b>	<b>76%</b>	<b>81%</b>
<b>It's wild and exciting</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>31%</b>
It's not crowded	43%	13%
There are more or different animals or plants	21%	17%
It has better privacy (nobody watching)	39%	11%
<b>There are no use restrictions (e.g. no ball play)</b>	35%	<b>31%</b>
It can be used for many things (e.g. gardening)	12%	4%
There are no nice parks near my home	13%	<b>31%</b>
I don't have a garden or similar greenspace	5%	8%
Other	11%	6%



# Remembering problems experienced when using IGS



## Main remembered problems:

- Danger of injury (10-15%)
- Lots of litter (3-9%)
- Parents forbid use (0-6%)
- Hard to access (2-5%)



## Analysis: Gender differences in IGS use

**Almost no differences between genders, except:**

In Sapporo,

**Teenage male IGS users** more likely to

- Use IGS for playing games (OR: 3.1)
- Observe animals & plants (OR: 4.6)
- Experience no problems (OR: 2.8)
- Use IGS because it had more or different animals & plants (OR: 3.8)

**Female IGS users**

- Visited IGS less frequently as teenagers ( $r = -.25$ )

- IGS played a recreational role for respondents of both genders
- Contrast to previous literature reporting larger differences

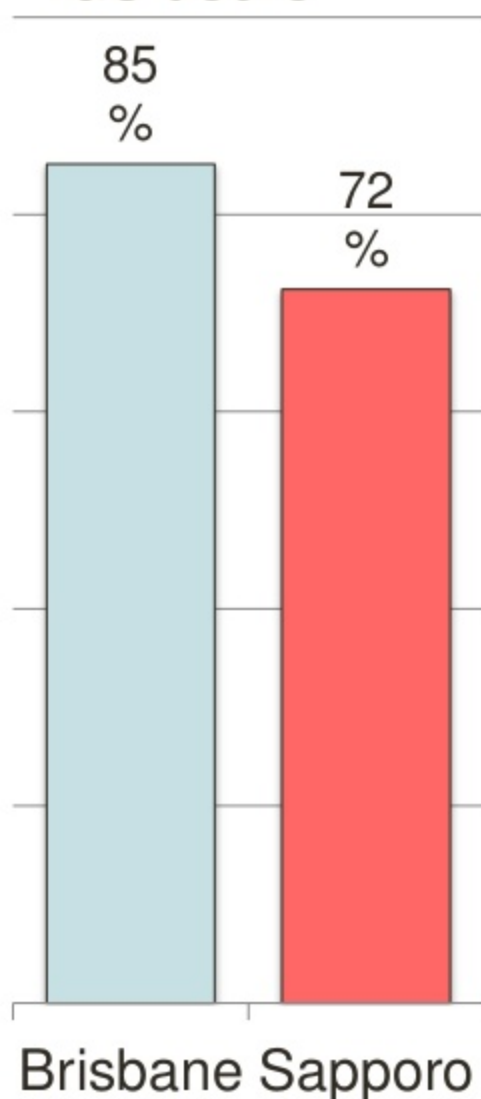
“Finding bugs, playing in grass as high as the kids themselves – what a great experience for children! It certainly was for me. I found bugs that just weren’t there in parks.”

Keiko, 39, female, from Sapporo

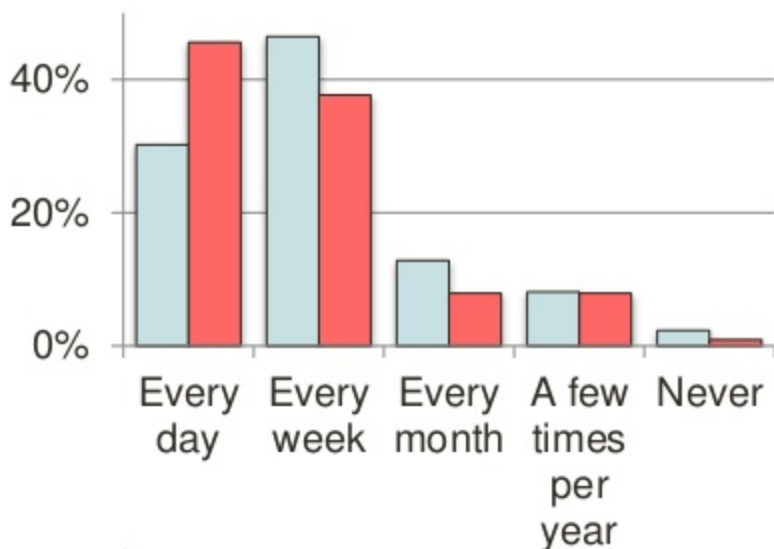


# City differences: stronger decline in Sapporo IGS use

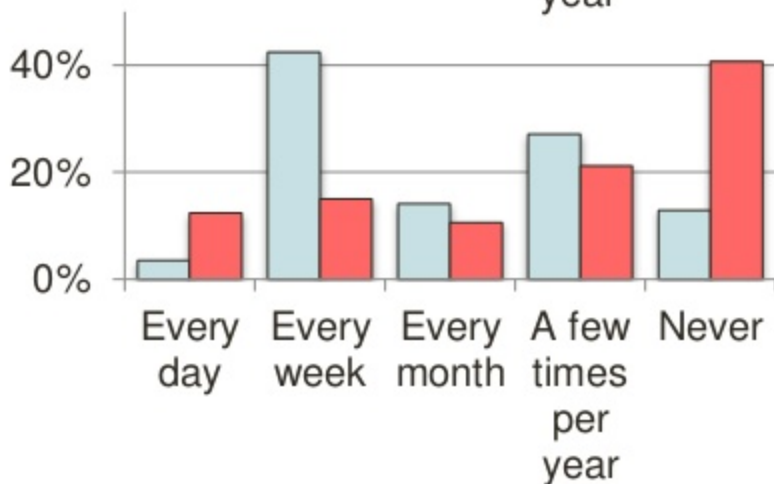
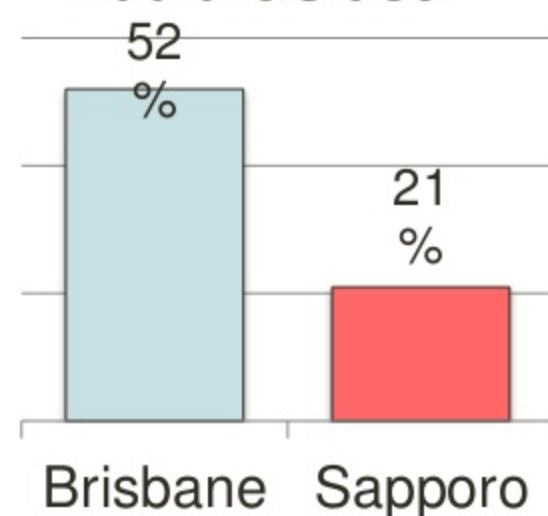
## Child/teen IGS users



## Use frequency as children



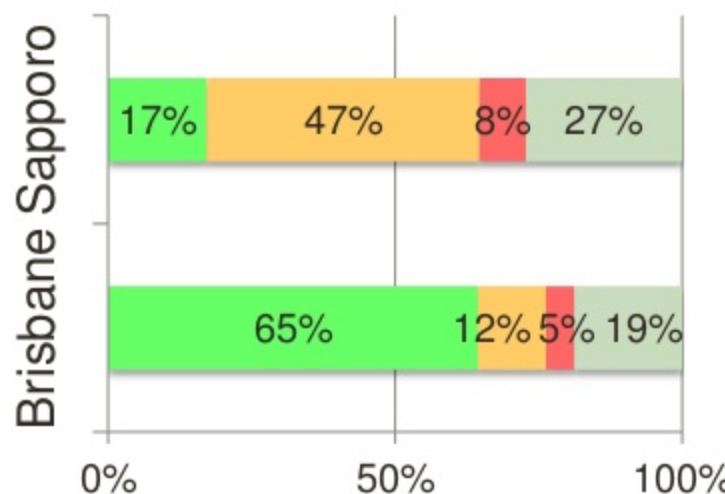
## Adult IGS use



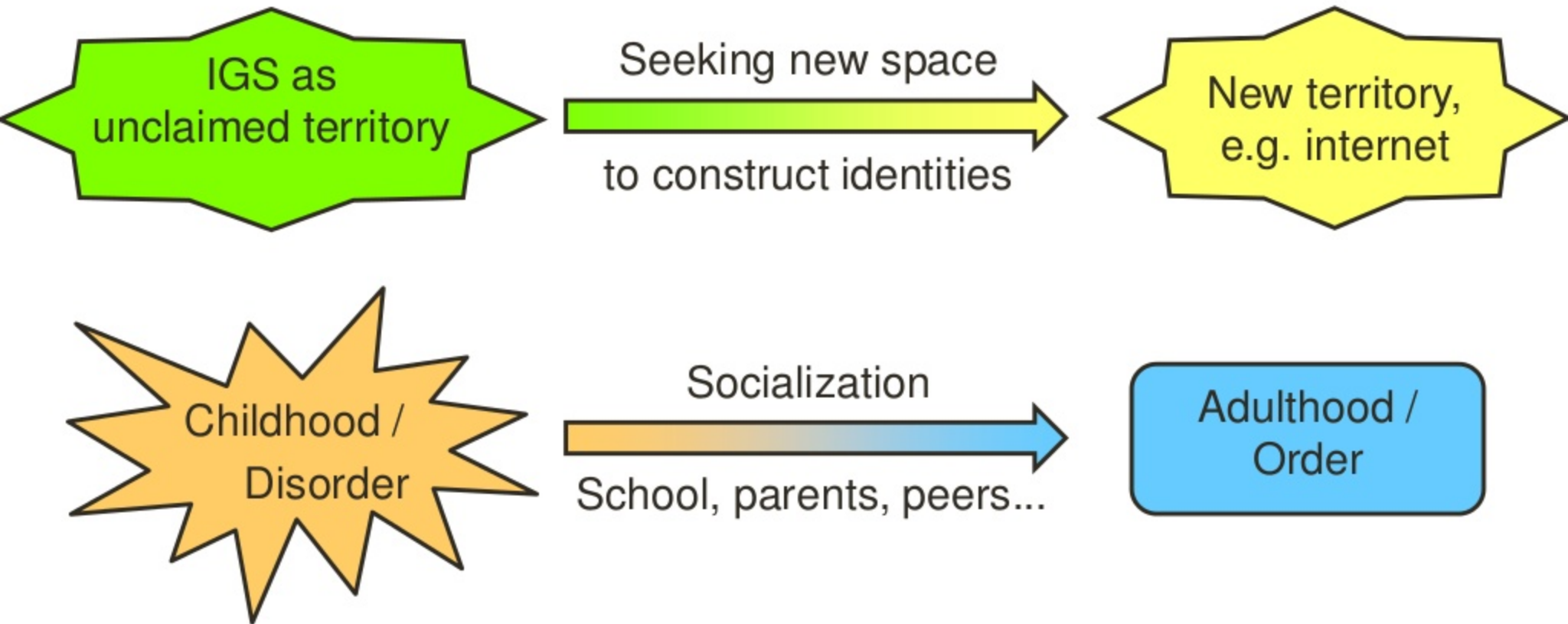
## Use frequency as teenagers

## Adult IGS perception

■ Better ■ Both ■ Worse ■ Neutral



## Analysis: Reasons for declining IGS use?



“Today, there’s no place for young teenagers to go other than hanging out in front of convenience stores.”

Akiko, 39, female, from Sapporo

“I have grown up and don't use it any more.”

Robert, 68, male, from Brisbane



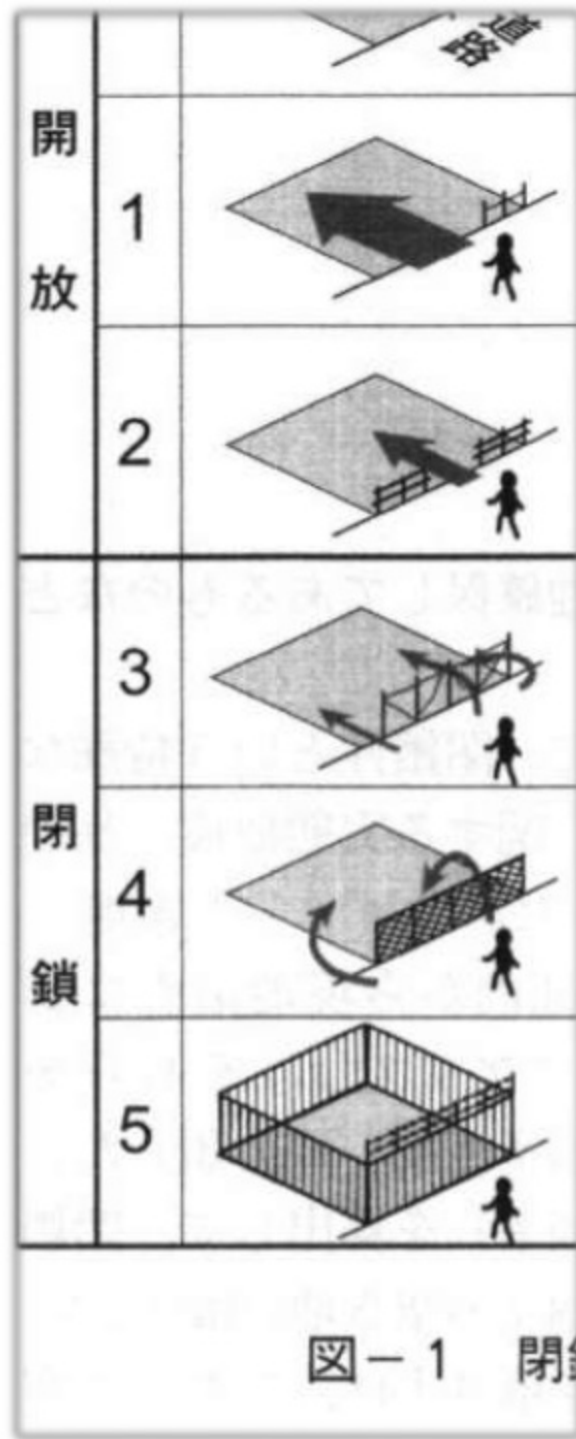
## IGS play: safety vs. adults' convenience



- No evidence that IGS is more dangerous today
- “Culture of threatened litigation” (Cloe & Jones 2005) →
- Parental safety concerns vs. freedom to roam & play

In IGS-related child literature, (Mugford, 2012)

***the ‘parent’ constitutes a barrier to children’s access to challenging places & experiences***



Hayashi 1999



## Conclusions

1. Most respondents used IGS as children & teenagers
2. Most IGS users experienced **no problems**
3. IGS use declined from childhood to adulthood
4. Safety concerns may limit children's IGS access today





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# Thank you for listening!

## Questions?

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