

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

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 ² (peak >5,000/km ²)	1,700/km ² (peak >8,000/km ²)
Park space	32m ² per person	12m ² per person



Study methods & sample characteristics

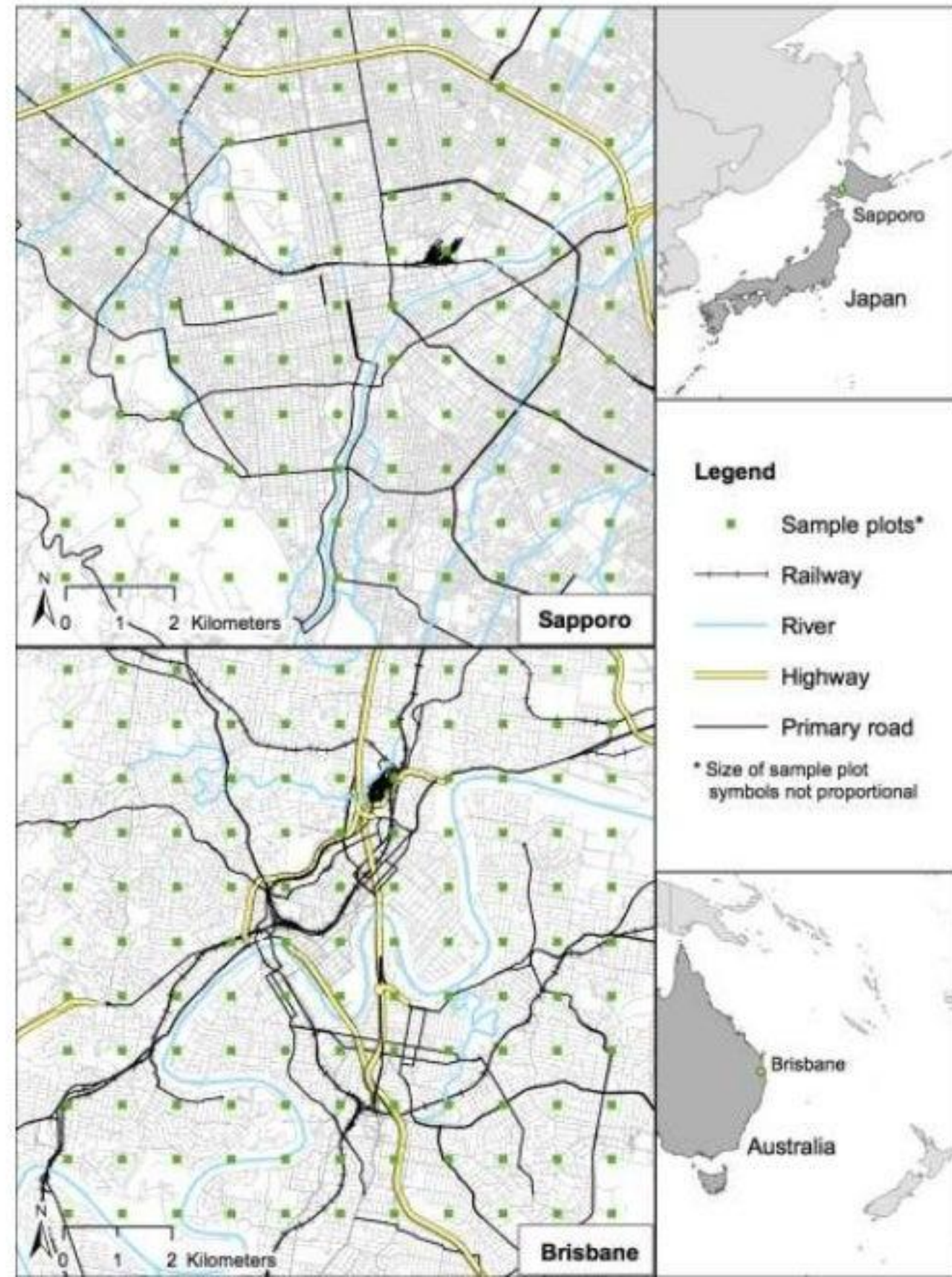
121 sites per city on 10x10km grid

Resident IGS questionnaire

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

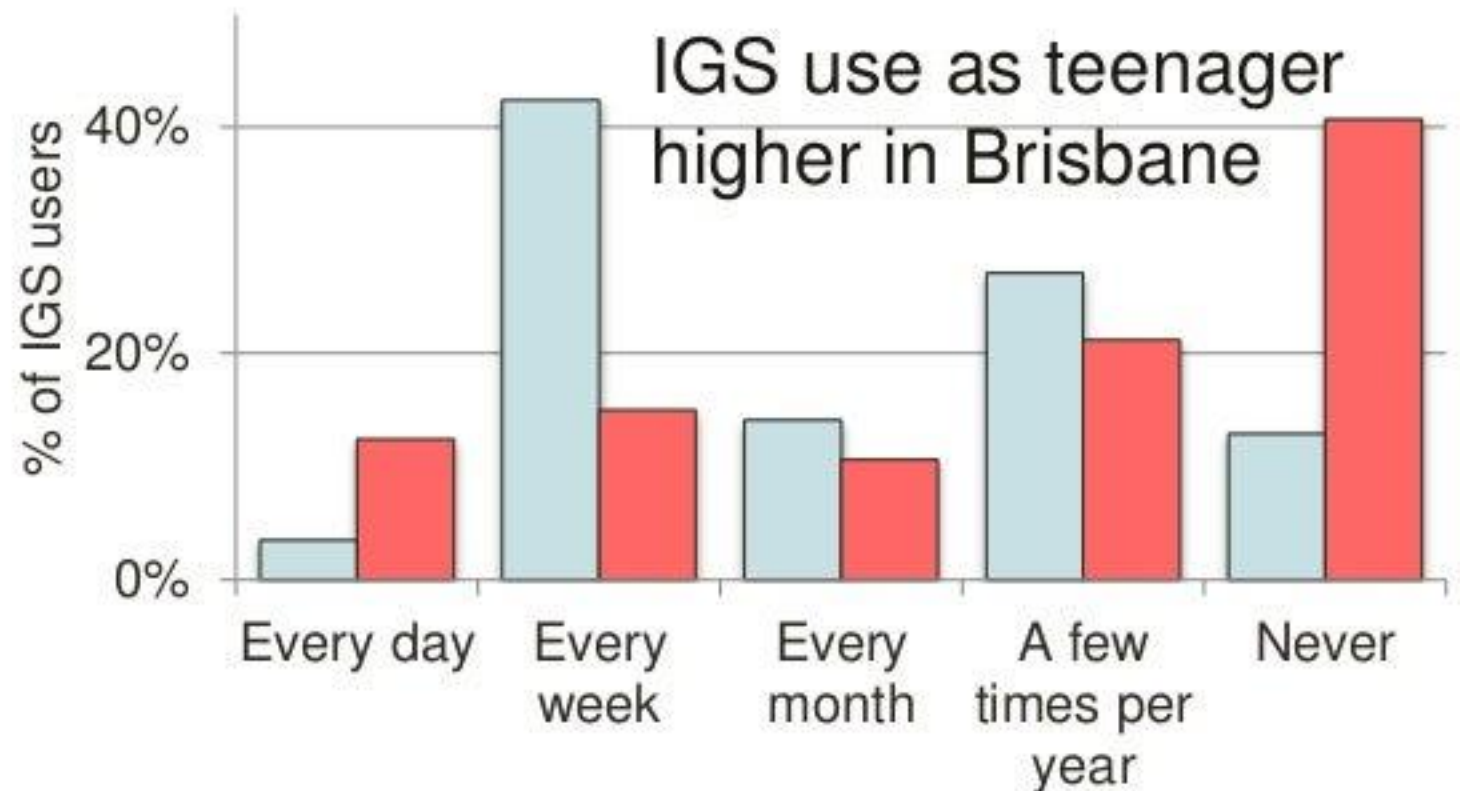
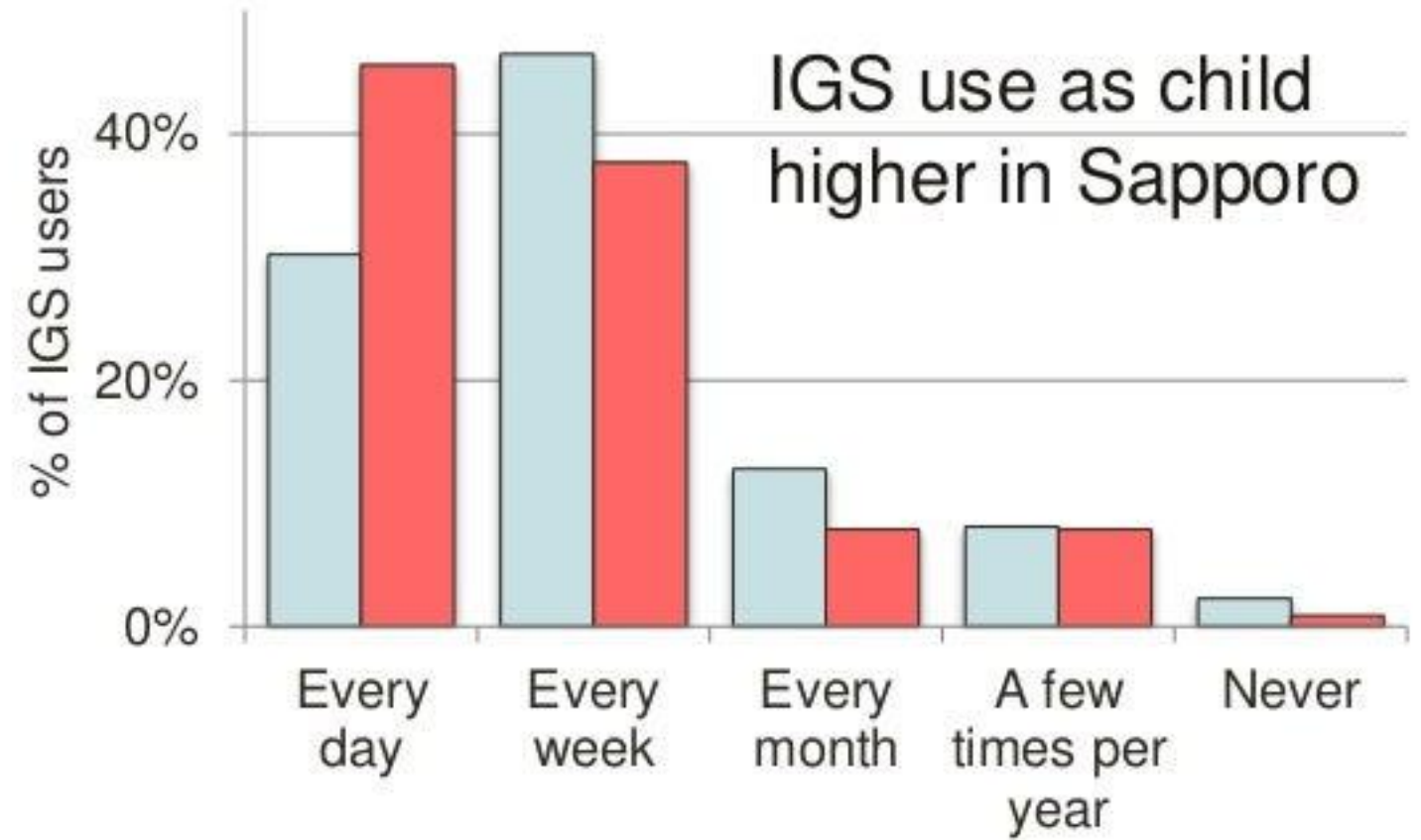
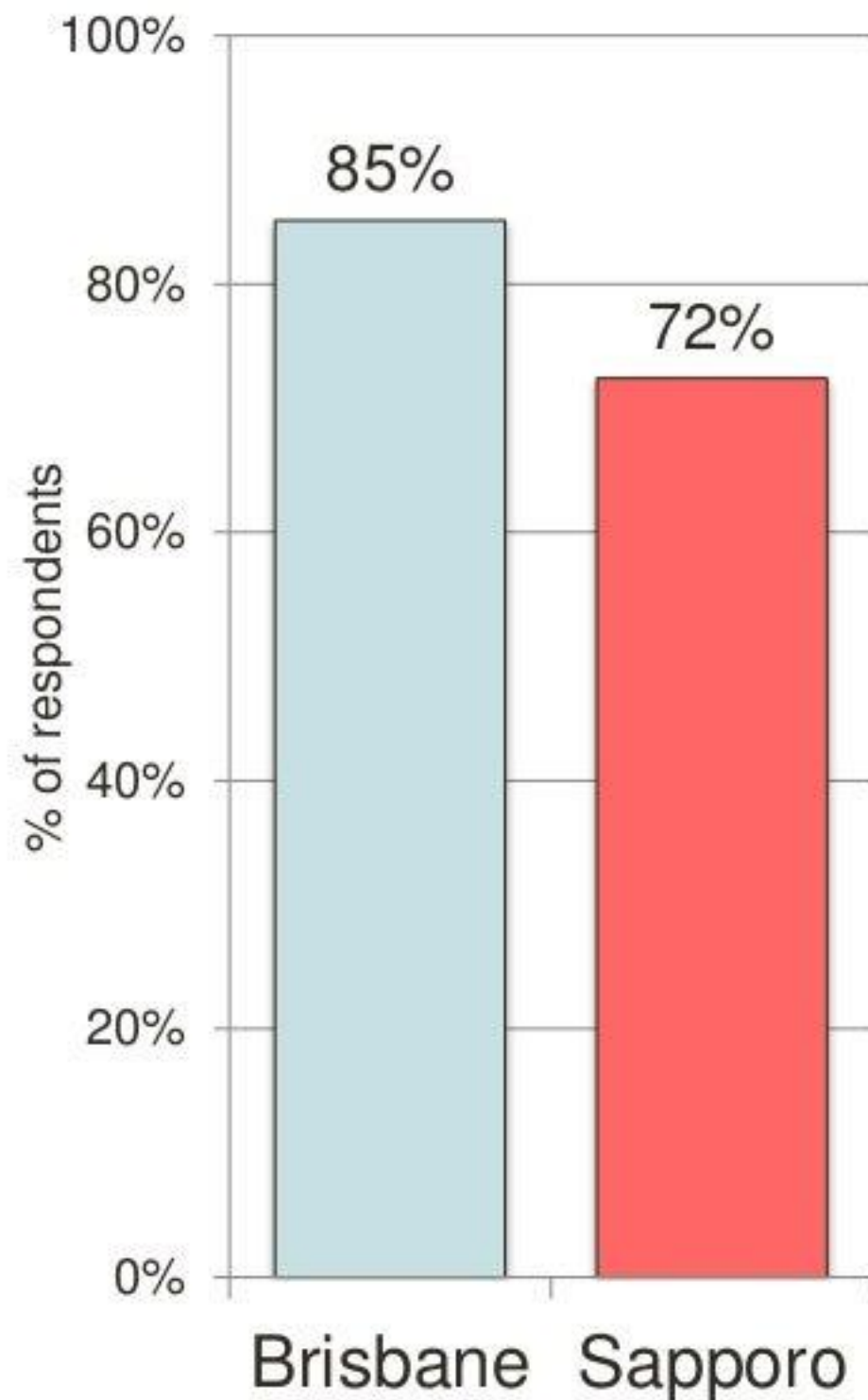
Sample

- 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)

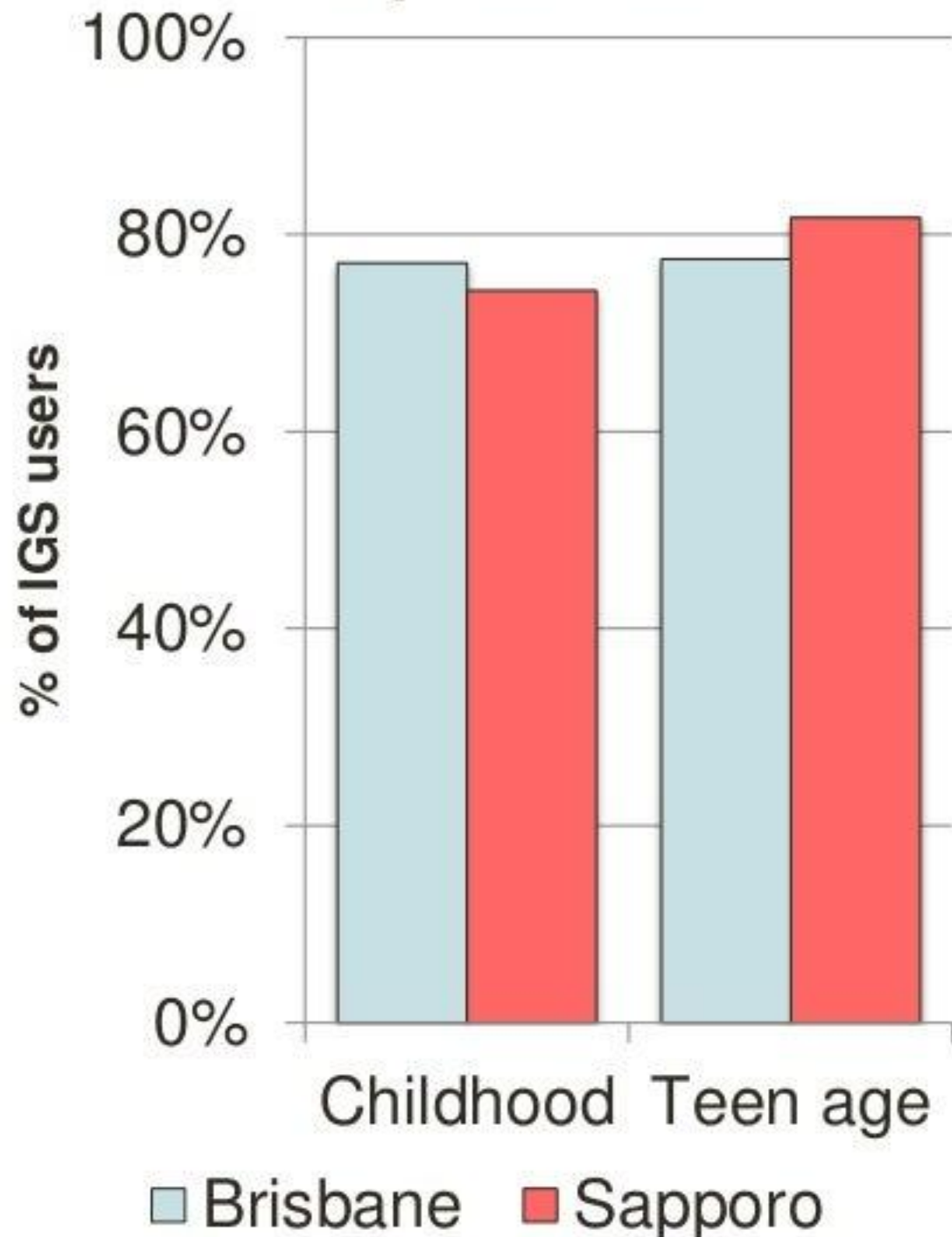


Reasons for preferring IGS over parks or gardens

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

Remembering problems experienced when using IGS

Users who experienced no problems



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 ($r = -.25$)

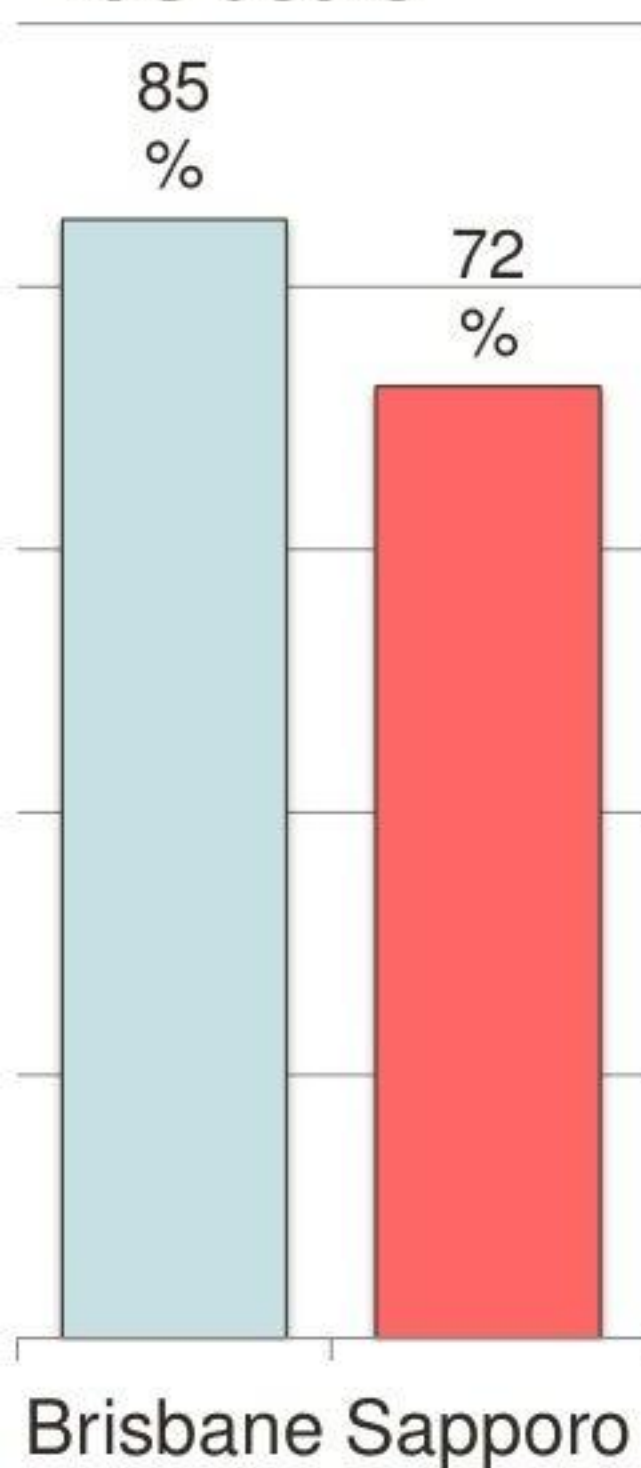
- IGS played a recreational role for respondents of both genders
- Contrast to previous literature reporting larger differences

“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.”

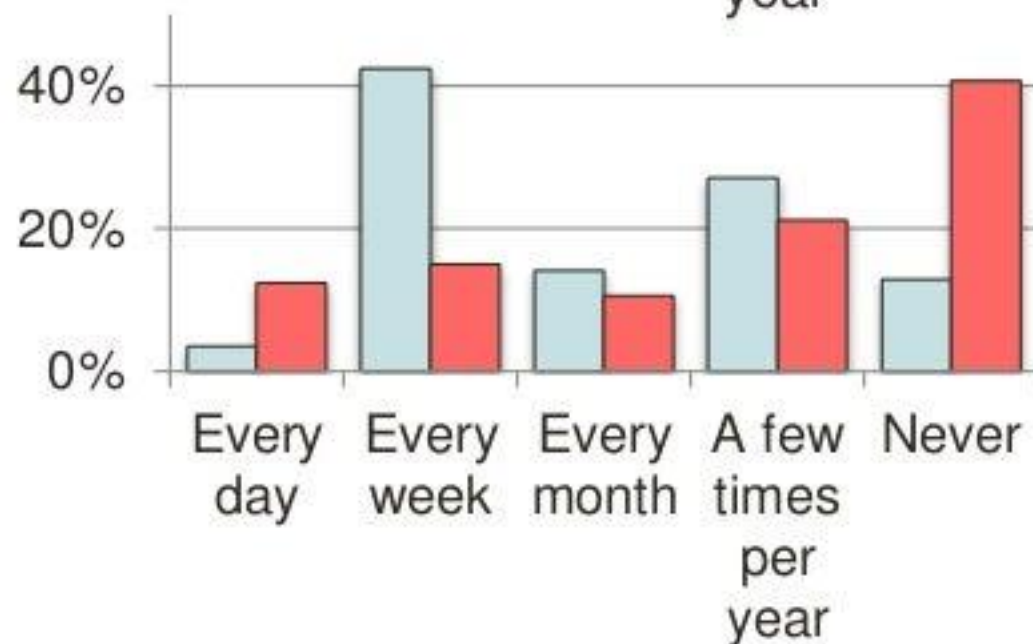
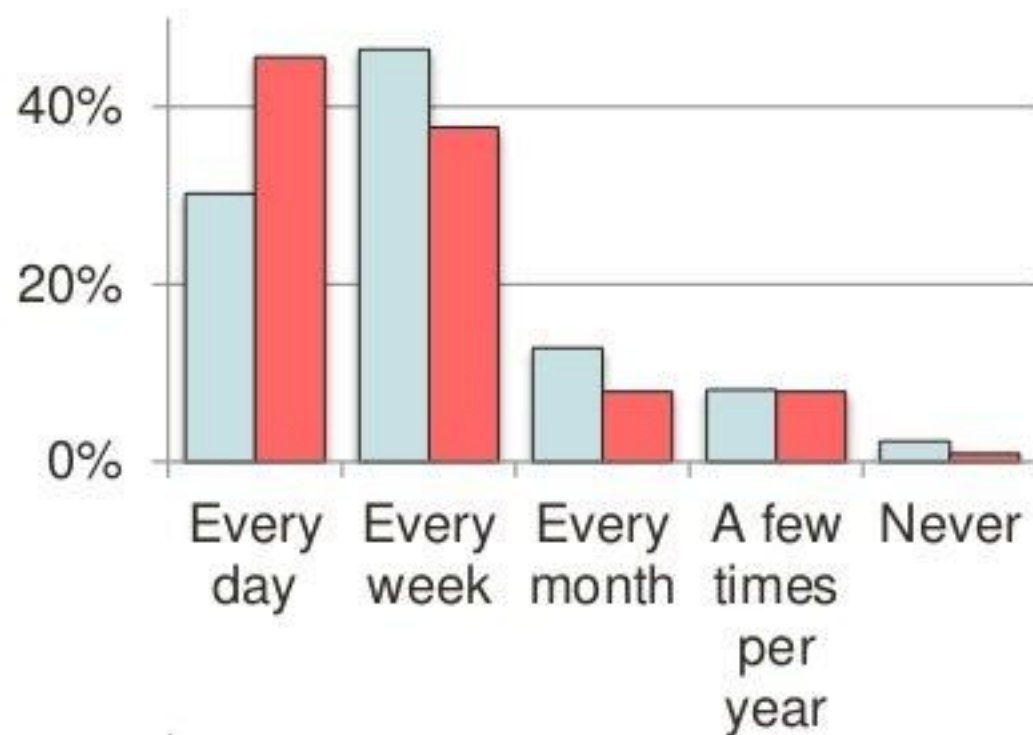
Keiko, 39, female, from Sapporo

City differences: stronger decline in Sapporo IGS use

Child/teen IGS users

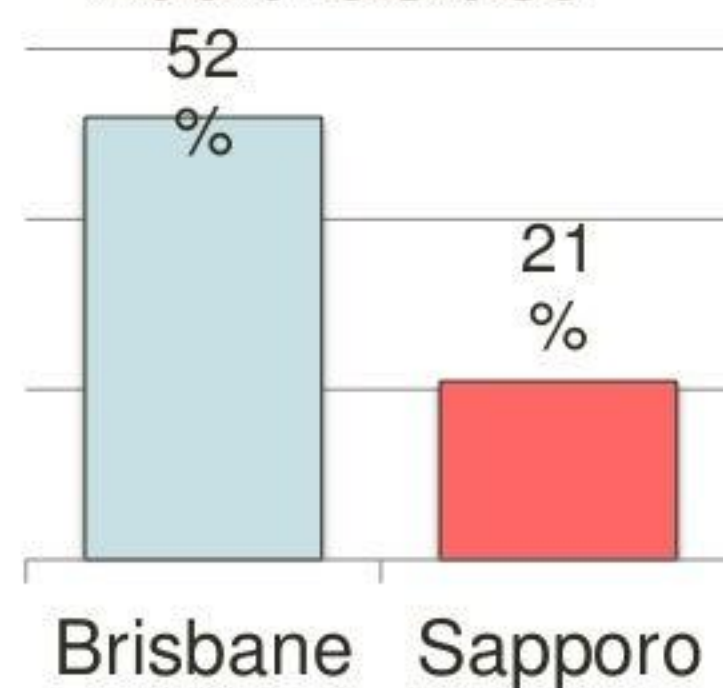


Use frequency as children



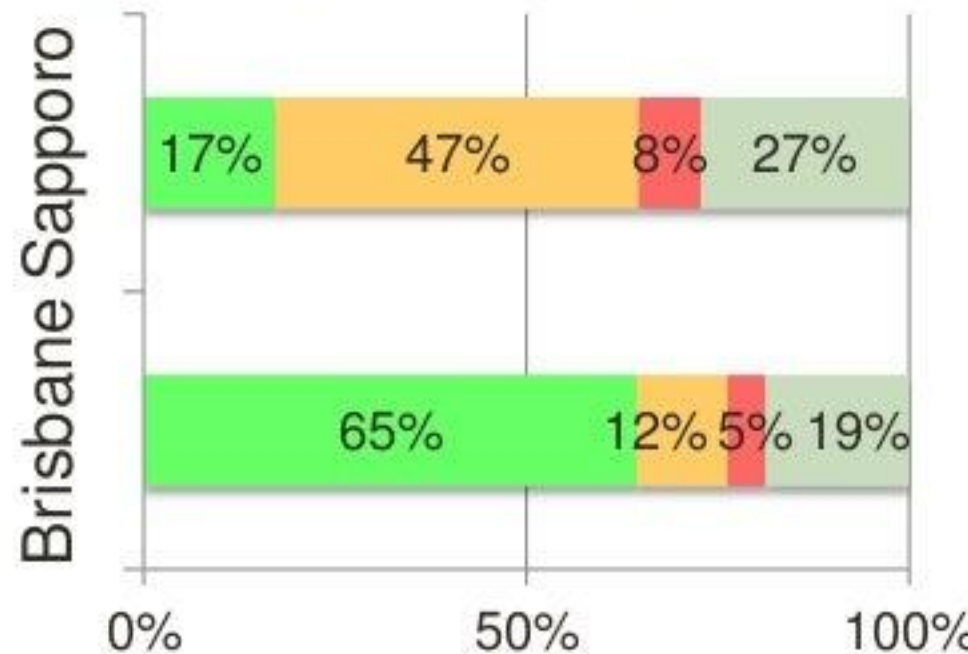
Use frequency as teenagers

Adult IGS use

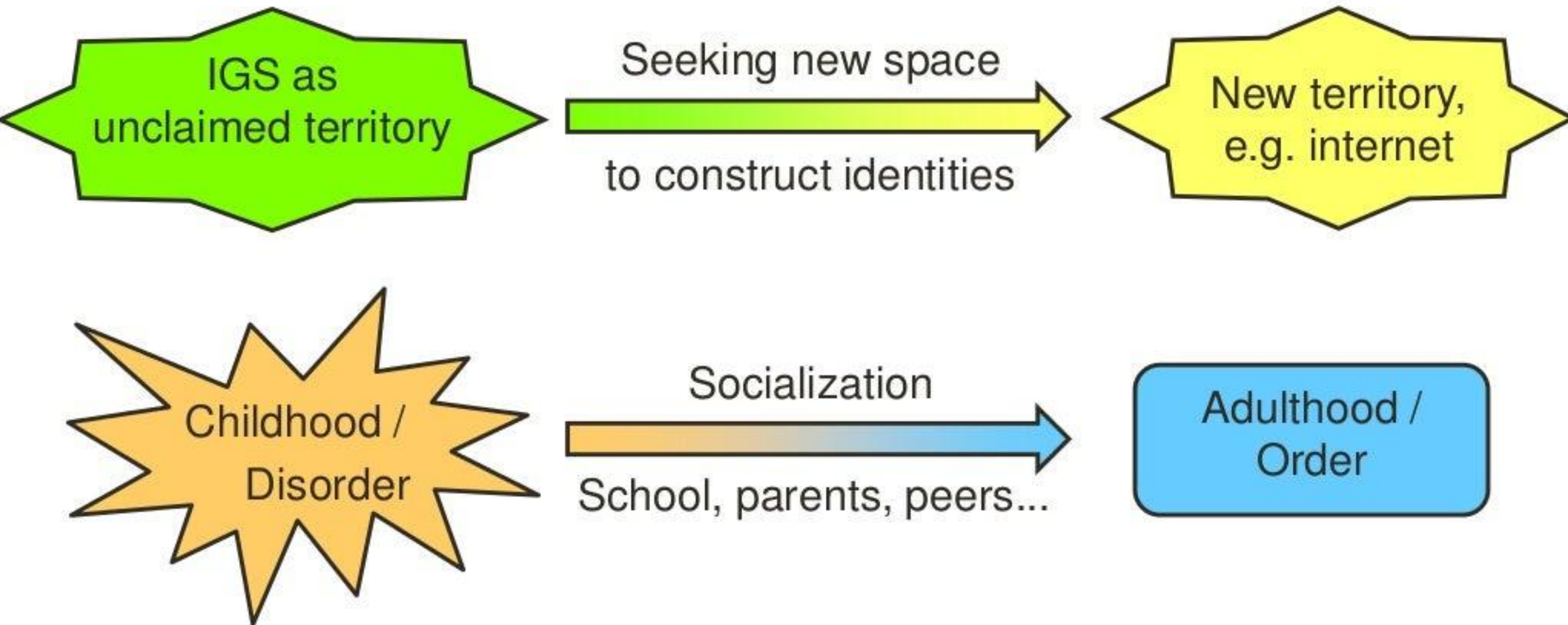


Adult IGS perception

■ 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

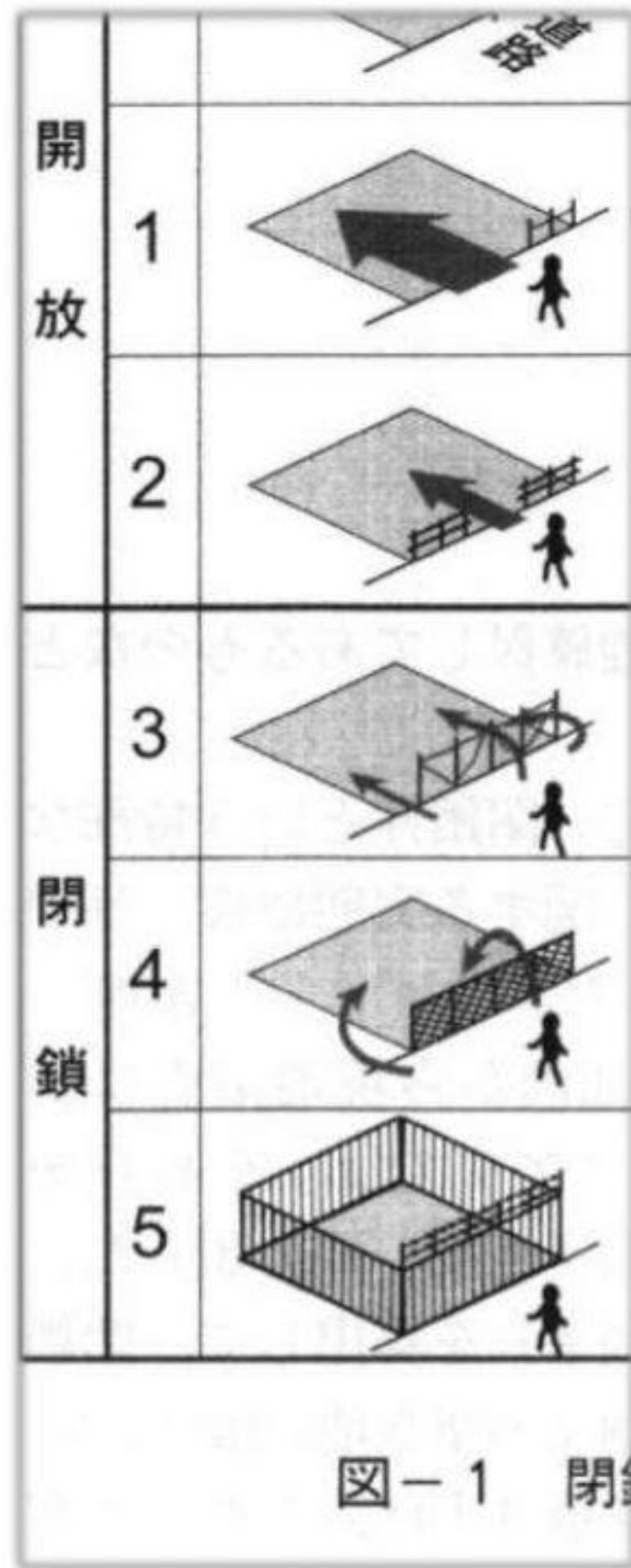
IGS play: safety vs. adults' convenience



- 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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