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Exploring reasons for residents use and appreciation of informal urban greenspace in Sapporo and Brisbane

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Informal urban greenspaces (IGS), such as vacant lots, street verges and river banks are an important new topic in urban recreation and landscape studies. At last year's JpGU 2013 I showed that residents in Sapporo (Japan) and Brisbane (Australia) use and appreciated IGS as adults and during their childhood. But two important questions remained: (1) What role does IGS play for residents in comparison to formal green space, such as parks?, and (2) Why do residents in Brisbane evaluate IGS more positively than in Sapporo? This presentation reports preliminary answers to these questions.

To examine the first question, I used a GIS analysis to compare the amount of formal greenspace within 500m of the sites where the questionnaire on IGS use and perception was distributed to Sapporo and Brisbane residents. A negative correlation between formal greenspace area and IGS use would imply residents indeed use IGS as a substitute for parks. But the results showed no correlation. This suggests residents deliberately choose to use IGS. IGS therefore plays a unique role in residents' recreation - different from formal greenspace.

But why did residents in Sapporo feel IGS made their daily life both better and worse, while residents in Brisbane felt IGS had a mostly positive impact on their daily life? Looking for potential reasons for this difference in IGS appreciation, I measured IGS quantity, accessibility and vegetation structure in both cities. The type of IGS (e.g. lot, street verge, brownfield, railway, gap space, powerline, waterside etc.) was determined using a IGS typology. Accessibility of IGS was categorized in three levels: accessible, partially accessible and not accessible. Vegetation structure was recorded by measuring coverage of four strata: tree, bush, herb and ground cover.

The results show IGS makes up a surprisingly large percentage of city land use in both cities (˜5% of total surveyed land use), but there were differences in the amount of IGS types and vegetation structure. We analysed the questionnaire data and field survey data, and found these different IGS types and vegetation structure could explain why residents evaluate IGS differently. Understanding how residents appreciate IGS may in turn help us to unlock the potential of IGS for recreation.

Keywords: urban geography, recreation, wildscape, urban planning, naturalness, spontaneous vegetation