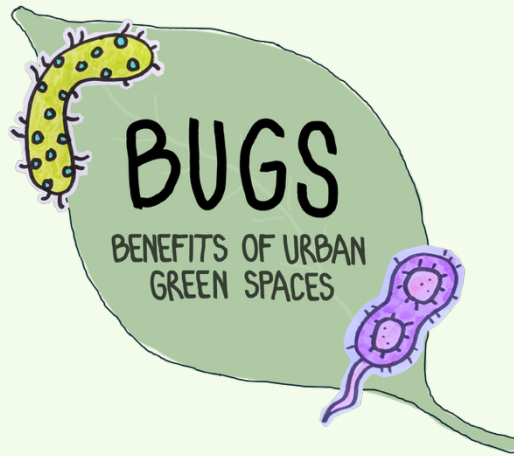




BUGS workshop

“Designing City Parks”

Adult Session

2 July 2025



What did we do?

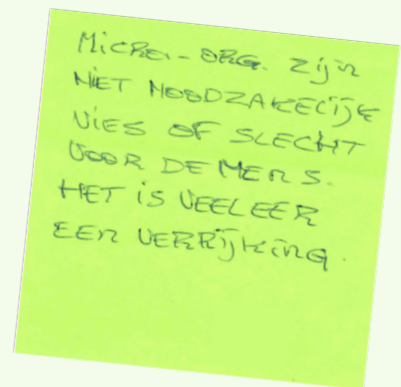
The adults began the workshop with a presentation and discussion about microorganisms in parks and their potential health benefits. Afterwards, they were invited to ask questions and share their views. In the second part of the workshop, we held a presentation and discussion on the broader health benefits of urban green spaces and the inequality in access to them: not everyone has equal access to safe, well-designed parks.

What did we learn?

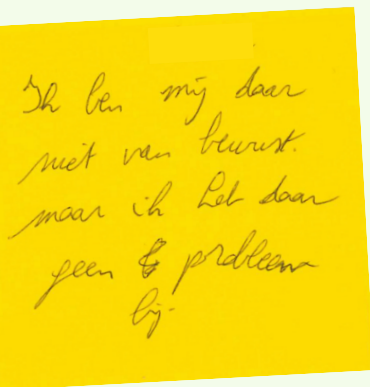
The workshop revealed a clear and genuine interest in microbiology. Core concepts such as the

human microbiome and the biodiversity hypothesis sparked curiosity and meaningful discussion.

Participants asked critical and well-thought-out questions and contributed to the conversation with their own experiences.



Micro-organismen zijn
niet noodzakelijke
vies of slecht
voor de mens.
Het is veel meer
een verrijking.



Ik ben mij daar
niet van bewust.
maar ik heb daar
geen probleem
bij.

A striking topic was the impact of modern hygiene habits on the microbiome and immune system. Practices such as showering daily, throwing away dropped sandwiches, or living in an “overly sterile” environment were openly discussed—often with humour and recognition. **These exchanges showed an intuitive understanding of the importance of microbial exposure, in contrast to dominant views on cleanliness and hygiene.**

Although the benefits of contact with natural environments and their microbes were generally acknowledged, there was also space for doubt and critical reflection. Questions were raised about the actual extent of the health benefits, the role of causality, and possible risks of being exposed to nature such as tick bites and infections. This critical stance is valuable. Scientific insights are rarely straightforward, and finding a well-informed balance between benefits and risks requires nuance. The exchange illustrated the importance of keeping an open dialog in science communication—not as a one-way transfer of knowledge from expert to public, but as a shared thinking process. **By making room for**

doubt and lived experience, a more horizontal form of knowledge exchange emerges, in which scientific understanding can grow and be refined.

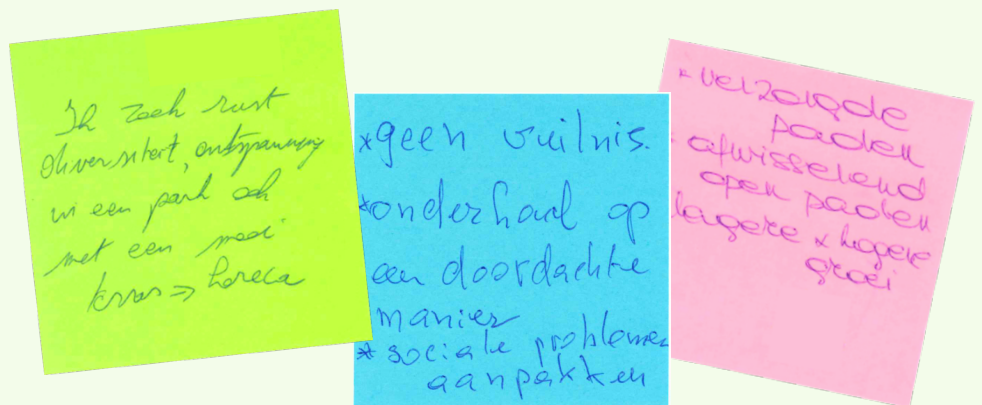
Insights on parks

While ranking photos of different parks, participants **consistently preferred environments with visual variation, mature trees, and a more “natural” appearance**. Photos without visible buildings, with layered vegetation and a sense of “wildness,” scored the highest. In contrast, an image of the recently opened, award-winning Zuidpark ranked surprisingly low. The main reason was perceived “monotony” and the lack of established greenery. This challenges the assumption that newly designed parks are automatically perceived as more attractive.

The topic of safety in public spaces was also widely discussed. Most participants agreed that perceived safety is less related to the physical design of the

park itself and more determined by the social context and the reputation of the area. At the same time, the classic design strategy of creating more openness and visibility to enhance safety was questioned. This conflicted with the strong appreciation for denser vegetation and visual layering. It points to a tension between biodiversity and manageability, and shows that **safety cannot be defined in a single way—it is shaped by cultural, social, and personal factors**.

Finally, the role of distance and time was discussed. Parks are generally appreciated, but **frequent visits were strongly dependent on proximity and availability in daily life**. Practical barriers such as time pressure limited use, even when attitudes were positive.



Reflection

This workshop clearly showed that both in the design and use of parks, a constant balance needs to be found. On one hand, there are benefits: relaxation, beauty, peace, social interaction, and even microbial exposure that may support health. On the other hand, there are risks: the chance of getting sick or feeling unsafe in densely vegetated or poorly lit areas. These tensions are not obstacles, but invitations to design better spaces together. **Listening to local residents—the people who actually use these parks—can help create balanced designs that reflect real needs and perceptions.**

