



Information Sheet for Participants Study Amsterdam South-East

This information sheet provides an overview of a research study in which you have indicated interest in participating. This study is part of the NATURELAB project. NATURELAB seeks to increase the recognition, promotion, and use of green and blue spaces (i.e. land and water) as care providers. NATURELAB does this by exploring the benefits of nature-based group activities. Such activities strengthen health and well-being by bringing people in contact with nature in their local environment. NATURELAB focuses on different natural environments: i) forests and protected areas, ii) urban parks and iii) horticulture and gardening contexts. NATURELAB works at various experimental sites located in five countries: Peru, Portugal, Greece, Germany, and the Netherlands.

For the Netherlands this research study is being conducted by the Vrije Universiteit (VU) and GroenplaatVormZuidOost (GpVZO). Please take your time to read the following information and ask the person who invited you if there is anything that is not clear to you.

What is the purpose of this study?

To measure the effects of group activities in nature on the health and wellbeing of children (10+ years) and adults. We are particularly interested in the effects on your mental wellbeing.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you would like to participate in our study, you will be asked to complete an intake to determine whether you meet the selection criteria and whether the group activities can benefit you. This intake consists of two steps: 1) Completing a short online questionnaire. If you meet the selection criteria, you will be asked to provide your contact information and indicate your preferred day/time to schedule a phone call (or in-person visit). 2) A follow-up interview with a member of the research team. This interview will last about 15 minutes. During this interview, you will be asked several questions to help determine whether you are eligible to participate in the study. This is also an opportunity for you to ask questions about the study. If you meet all the selection criteria, you will be invited to participate in the next phase of this study. If you can and want to participate in the next stage, the research team will randomly assign you to one of two groups:

- *Group A* will participate in 5 sessions of group activities in nature at various locations in Amsterdam South-East over a period of 12 weeks (one session every other week; about 2 hours per session; total 10 hours). Additionally, this group receives a list of local community-based activities, which they may participate in, in their own time.



- *Group B* will participate in 12 sessions of group activities in nature in Brasapark over a period of 12 weeks (one session per week; about 2 hours per session; total 24 hours).

Both groups will be facilitated by trained facilitators and take place at days and times convenient to the group. You can participate with your own parent or child, if you both meet the selection criteria. If so, you can be placed in the same group. Any travel costs, from your home to the location(s), can be reimbursed up to a certain amount. If you have young children and need childcare to participate in the group sessions; we offer free childcare, involving outdoor activities, for children of participants during the sessions.

Participants in both groups will be asked to complete various surveys at five time points over a period of 6 months. It will take 15 to 40 minutes to complete these surveys at each time point (max 3 hours total). Also, we will measure the blood pressure of all participants at five time points, before and after group sessions. Most assessments can be completed by yourself through a digital weblink. If you need any support in completing these assessments, someone of the research team is available to help.

To evaluate this study, we will also ask several participants to be part of individual and group interviews. This evaluation takes place at the end of this study (6 months after the start of the first session or activity). Further information about participation in this evaluation will follow end 2026.

Do you have to take part?

No. Participation is completely voluntary. It is your choice to participate in this study or not. You can withdraw from this study at any point without giving reasons and without any disadvantage to you. If you withdraw, you will not be asked to complete any more assessments. Data that has already been collected up to the time of withdrawal will be used for the purposes of this study, unless you specifically request for all of your data to be fully anonymised or be completely deleted.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

If you decide to take part, you may benefit by experiencing improvements in your health and wellbeing. Also, you will contribute to science and knowledge of the effects of nature-based activities.

What are the possible disadvantages?

Previous research has shown that nature-based activities are not associated with any medical risks. That said, you might feel overloaded by participating in this research study, including the related sessions, activities and assessments. Also you may feel uncomfortable about certain assessment questions; you can always skip such questions. Some people may feel insecure being part of a group



programme. The group facilitator is trained to ensure everyone in the group feels at ease. You do not need to share anything you do not feel comfortable with other group members or the facilitator. As a group, there will be the agreement that what is shared within the group will not be shared outside the group; however, we cannot guarantee this.

In rare cases where there is a risk that you pose a danger to yourself or others, we are obligated to take steps to ensure your safety. Should this happen, we will always discuss it with you first. If necessary, we will refer to other support services. In step 2 of the intake, we will assess this risk.

What about confidentiality?

All information collected about you will be kept strictly confidential. All your personal data (e.g. name, contact details) will be labelled using a code. No one but the research team at the VU will be able to access this personal data or the personal codes. Your answers to the assessments (e.g. answers to various surveys) are therefore confidential. For safety and logistical reasons, your name and contact details will also be shared with your group facilitator, and, if you make use of the free childcare option, with the childcare provider.

All data will be securely stored on data platforms at the VU Amsterdam. Answers to assessments and personal data will be stored on different data platforms. Data will be stored for a period of ten years, following the policies of the VU Amsterdam. Your answers to the assessments may be shared with other researchers of the NATURELAB project to answer additional research questions. Personal data (like your name or contact details) will never be shared.

After the project is finished, data will likely be fully anonymised (this means that personal codes will be removed and cannot be traced back anymore to your answers to the assessments). This anonymized dataset will be made openly accessible and available for third-party reuse – only this way are we respecting the EU FAIR data management guidelines. These guidelines say that data should be Findable, Accessible, Interoperable (i.e. exchange and use of information) and Re-usable – or FAIR. There are confidentiality risks associated with the collection, storage, use and transmission of data (e.g. the possibility of identifying the person concerned). These risks cannot be completely ruled out; however, the research team will do everything possible to always protect your privacy and confidentiality. If there has been a data leakage, you will be informed as soon as possible. The privacy statement on this study contains further information on this topic.

What will happen to the findings of the study?

We will share what we have learnt from this study with other organisations that are part of the NATURELAB project as well as with other relevant organisations and individuals in the Netherlands.



Results from the study may be published in scientific journals or reports. Such results will never include your name or any other personal information.

Who has approved the study?

This study has been reviewed and approved by an ethics review board of the Faculty of Science of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. This study has been approved on the 7th of August 2025 by the Committee (reference: 2025-028).

Who should I contact for further information?

If you have any questions, you may ask us now or later, even after participation. If you would like to receive more information regarding our study, or if you would like to discuss your rights regarding participation in this study, please contact one of the following researchers:

Aniek Woodward, VU Amsterdam, a.woodward@vu.nl (Dutch and English)

Caroline Meier zu Biesen, VU Amsterdam, c.meierzubiesen@vu.nl (English only)