Benefits of urban greening for children

Agnes van den Berg 27 September 2016
How children lost the right to roam

**Mother:** Vicky aged eight in 1979 was allowed to walk to the swimming pool alone half a mile away.

**Son:** Ed, now eight is only allowed to walk on his own to the end of his street (300 yards).

**Grandfather:** Jack aged eight in 1950. Able to walk about one mile on his own to the woods.

**Great-grandfather:** George aged eight in 1919. Allowed to walk six miles to go fishing.
Causes

Stranger Danger
“Nature deficit disorder”
Social inequity in nature deficit

Little nature deficit
- Privileged background
- Garden at home
- Family trips to nature

High nature deficit
- Deprived background
- No garden at home
- No family trips to nature
Solutions

Green ➔ children
“greening”

Children ➔ green
“green care”
Evidence

Added value of engaging with green space for children’s health and well-being
Added value green space for children

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Factsheet

Green space as activity space
Green space as space for relaxation
Green space as healthy living space
Green space as activity space

Parks and other natural play areas encourage physical activity and stimulate children to play more creatively. This supports children’s motor development and reduces the risk of overweight and obesity.
Van den Berg, Koenis & Van den Berg, 2007

Playing in a natural playground (7-9 yrs)

More creative (constructive, dramatic, exploratory) play in natural playground than in indoor sports hall.
Greening of schoolgrounds encourages moderate to vigorous physical activity

Before

After

Preliminary results: Physical Activity

Wesselius, Maas & Hovinga, 2015
Motor development (5-7 years)

Fjortoft, 2004
Green space as space for relaxation

Natural environments are a powerful source of fascination. Flowers, butterflies and other natural elements automatically draw attention without taking up all resources. This makes children feel happy, and it may also lead to better concentration, more self-control, and improved mental health.
Attentional performance of children with ADHD (8-12 years)

Van den Berg, 2011
Nature experience program (7-9 years)

Van der Waal, Van den Berg, & Van Koppen, 2008
Green space as healthy living space

Children who grow up in a green living environment tend to have less mental and physical health problems. They are also more likely to develop a bond with nature that has life-long positive impacts on their quality of life.
Vitamine G research program
Positive relationships between green space and health

Groenewegen, Van den Berg, et al., 2012
Long-term effects

1. children
   - contact nature

2. adults
   - connectedness to nature

3. adults
   - sustainable & healthy lifestyle
Connectedness to nature (9-10 years)

Children consider themselves more part of nature after 4-day nature program

Liefländer et al., 2013
We could never have learned to LOVE the Earth so well, if we had had no childhood in it.

~George Eliot
The end – thank you for your attention
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