

# Review of: "Working on the Root System of Social Connections in a Community"

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**Potential competing interests:** No potential competing interests to declare.

Thank you for the opportunity to review this article. The findings reported from Deventer and Rotterdam are useful examples of the more conceptual portions of the paper, and of its focus on connections as relevant for community development (especially asset-based community development).

However, I think the article's presentation is unfortunately lacking on several fronts. First, the framing of the arguments often appears simplistic, such as in the claim that "the vast majority of socioeconomic interventions and policies in Western societies are mile-wide, inch-deep, which is to say they are so general and spread so thin that while they may create waves at national, regional, or city scales". This (uncited) framing seems to discount progress made in previous initiatives, and it is so broad as to be unbelievable, especially when the suggested solution is to move from "having" modes to "being" modes, which appears somewhat vague.

Second, some concepts are introduced without much clarity. There are discussions of the neighbourhood effect and the honeycomb effect, but unfamiliar readers may struggle to understand these ideas based on the text. For example, the neighbourhood effect is simply framed as an "inch-wide, mile-deep approach"; surely not any inch-wide, mile-deep approach would count? Defining these terms more clearly (possibly with examples) would help the reader. As well, ABCD is mentioned throughout, but it should be written out and defined when first discussed in the article. In addition, the authors mention social capital, which is a dense and widely-contested concept, but there is no definition of how the authors understand it, or how/whether it differs from social connections, associational life, etc.

Third, the figures in the article could be better integrated. For an English publication, a translation of the Dutch text in one image would help, as would text to clarify why it is included (i.e., what does the image demonstrate?). The system diagram of multiple circles around "community" is also unclear; are the circles intended to connect to the layers mentioned in the article? If so, this could be more clearly noted in the text. I am also unsure how much the honeycomb diagram adds to the reader's understanding.

Fourth, while the field data from Deventer is interesting, there is no description of its collection or analysis, which would be expected in a research paper. There is also mention of findings from Rotterdam, but how these two data are connected is unclear. For international readers, some context about Rotterdam and Deventer (general locations, sizes, character) would help.

Fifth, there are several fields of research that connect quite strongly to this article, and situating the work in the broader

field would help demonstrate what is unique about this piece. For instance, similar ideas about overlapping/nested networks have been famously discussed by Christopher Alexander, and ideas of community engagement clearly link to Arnstein's ladder of participation, or to the broader fields of transactive planning or communicative planning.

Lastly, as an aside, there are some grammatical errors remaining in the manuscript which should be resolved, and there appear to be some works which are mentioned but not cited in the text or the reference list.

The use of metaphorical language can be very helpful in communicating ideas. The concept of a root system seems helpful as an image of how community connections are relevant for long-term sustainable community development. In my view, this article presents interesting ideas, but it seems necessary to better organize and clarify those ideas before publication.