Looking at a glass half-full: the asset approach in public health
- Impressions from the ETC Summer Course 2017 in Alicante, Spain -

From 16th – 28th July 2017, Janine Bröder participated in the Concha Colomer Symposium and the annual Summer Course on ‘mapping and mobilizing public health assets’ organised by the European Training Consortium in Public Health and Health Promotion (ETC-PHHP). The ETC-PHHP, established in 1991, aims to promote the development of practical and theoretical tools to enhance health promotion strategies in Europe by bringing together interdisciplinary public health professionals and researchers.

What is a public health asset?
Broadly, any factor (or resource), which “enhances the ability of individuals, groups, communities, populations, social systems and/or institutions to maintaining and promoting health and well-being and to help reduce health inequities” can be considered a ‘health asset’ (Morgan & Ziglio, 2007). Any network, connection, interest group, association in the community, the resources of public, private and third sector organization, or physical and economic resources can be an asset for well-being if they are accessible for the members of the community (Foot & Hopkins, 2010).

Why is the asset-based approach useful?
Instead of looking at the deficits, problems, and needs of individuals and communities, the asset based approach is a health promotion strategy (Whiting et al. 2012). It shifts the focus towards a resource-oriented perspective with regards to health and well-being by drawing on strengths and capabilities. It proposes to answer the salutogenic question of “how health can be established at personal and societal level” by valuing and mobilizing the capacity, skills, knowledge, connections and potentials in a community. The asset approach values citizens and communities as co-producers of health and well-being, rather than as recipients of (public) services. An aim is to promote effective participatory, people-centred decision-making at local level through empowering individuals and local communities. The community assets and the citizenship that evolve need to be regarded as complementary and, hence, not replace structural public services and investments for tackling health inequalities.

How to implement it into practice?
Applying the asset approach involves discovering and mobilizing assets in the community by using participatory community building methods, for instance the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) model. The ABCD model suggests to start with (1) mapping or locating the assets, skills and capacities of residents, citizens associations and local institutions (Kretzman & McKnight 1993, see Figure 1), (2) building relationships between community members, organisations, (3) mobilizing assets by fostering community driven development and enabling the community to take up ownership of their assets. While there are many effective case examples of asset-based projects, the evidence base is still scarce. One major challenge is to adopt available and established evaluation methods and assess their effects and input measures.

Further details and information online:
www.uni-bielefeld.de/zpi/

For requests send an email to:
zpi@uni-bielefeld.de