

When the digital assets need to play a bigger role

In 2016 Bømlo municipality was looking into ways of activating citizens through an asset based approach and entered into cooperation with Western Norway University of Applied Sciences and Nurture Development. ABCD (Asset Based Community Development) is an approach to sustainable community-driven development. It builds on the assets that are found in the community and mobilizes individuals, associations, and institutions to come together to realise and develop their strengths. From 2019 kindergarten, schools and the youth council of Bømlo participate in a project within the national public health programme of Norway.

An ABCD-course was scheduled in April 2020. As the pandemic elaborated, rescheduling quite fast changed into remaking. First Nurture Development made an e-learning platform and the ABCD-course needed to be completed with the course holder online and cohorts of 20 participants, following the current restrictions.

The first session in the ABCD-course is all about realizing that building a community should start with what's strong, and not what's wrong, we need to lift away some labels and discover the hidden treasures. One of the most used tools within the ABCD-method helps us reveal the gifts of head, heart and hands of the participants. Traditionally we cover flip overs, walls and tables with post its. With fixed seats and two meter distance this was no longer an option. We started using an interactive tool and thus the word cloud of gifts and assets appeared both to the participants in Bømlo and the course leader in Ireland. After a year of numerous first sessions we now have word clouds showing a fair amount of assets in Bømlo. And we must say that people should eat well in Bømlo, regarding the amount of participants that have a gift of cooking!

A central message in the ABCD-course is that our communities have different sorts of assets that make our projects come true: The skills of local residents, the power of local associations, the resources of public, private and non-profit institutions, the physical resources and ecology, the economic resources and the stories and heritage of local places. What about the digital assets – should we include them in our treasure box? Local practical facilitation, translation and local follow-up of participants in Bømlo and their project ideas were all critical success factors. And also: Our participants being able to meet physically enabled participation civically online and on land in their communities. In other words we didn't create echo chamber in steam we broke across lines, young/old, online/onland, issues/place based. We found ways over these barriers, so that the gifts of young people could be better connected with the assets and possibilities of the wider community and civic life of Bømlo.

Short version:

Due to the pandemic planned courses needed to be redesigned. We found ways over these barriers so digital solutions could become digital assets.