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Public Libraries in the Information Ecology System of the Local Community (Focus Group interviews with the Information Ecology Mapping – Approbation of the Method and the First Results)"

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The research under the title "Municipal Public Libraries: Value, Trust and Satisfaction with the Services" is implemented in the framework of the project of municipal public libraries "Father's Third Son" co-funded by the Government of Latvia and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (from January till June, 2009 it is carried out by the Institute of Social and Political Researches under the University of Latvia). The aim of the research is to evaluate the value of services provided by the public libraries in the broader context – in the level of local community. There will be two methods of research used – the opinion survey of the adult population and the focus group interviews with the information ecology mapping. The aim of the focus group interviews is to study the type of information actual in the local community, understand the habits of searching for the information among the population, and define the role of the municipal public library.

There are two library science and information science theoretical models made use of during the approbation process of the method - Ecological Theory of Human Information Behavior by Kiirsty Williamson and Everyday Life Information Seeking (ELIS) by Reijo Savolainen.

The sample includes both the library users and non-users. During the course of discussions in the focus groups the information ecology mapping is performed for each topic, reflecting the place and resources used to search for the information. At the end of the discussion the information ecology map of the local community is developed.

According to the first results obtained, the resources and places to gather information differ from cities to the country, depend on the age group of the inhabitants, their information literacy, the financial position, accessibility to the internet and some other factors.

Keywords: Library and information science research; municipal public libraries, library users and non-users, focus group interviews with the information ecology mapping.