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UNDERSTANDING HARD-TO-REACH: MENTAL MODELS BEHIND HOUSEHOLD WASTE PRACTICES

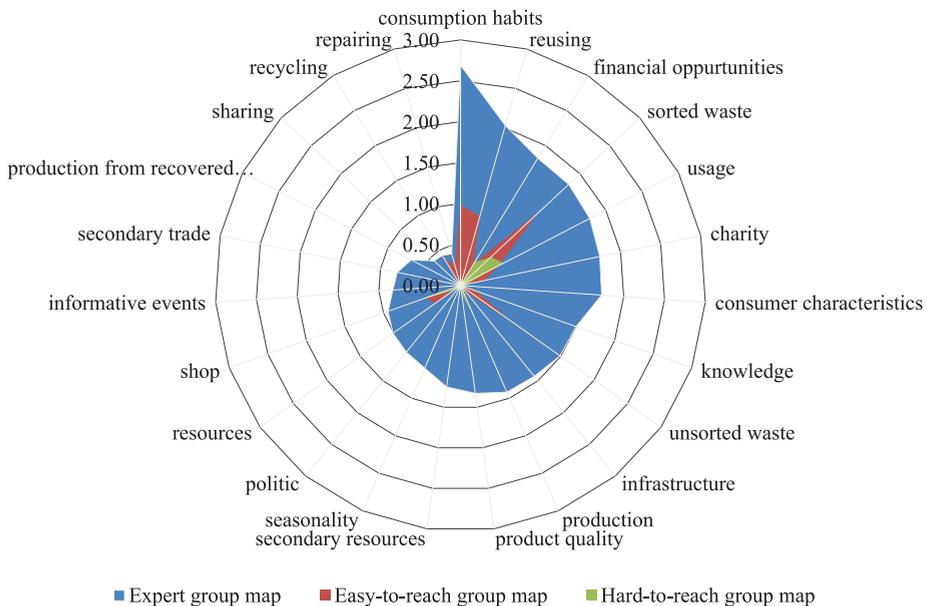
Inguna BREMANE^{1*}, Veronika LIBEROVA², Dagnija BLUMBERGA³, Andra BLUMBERGA⁴

¹⁻⁴ Institute of Energy Systems and Environment, Faculty of Natural Sciences and Technology, Riga Technical University, Azenes iela 12/K1, LV-1048, Riga, Latvia

* **Corresponding author.** Email address: inguna.bremane@rtu.lv

Abstract – An effective transition to a circular economy, including sustainable waste management practices, requires the active participation of all stakeholders, including households. However, a part of the population is often left out of public participation campaigns. This study investigates the mental models of such uninvolved or hard-to-reach groups, comparing them with those of easy-to-engage and expert groups, and analysing what determines their attitudes and actions. The study uses cognitive maps as an analysis tool to reveal the logic of group beliefs and behaviour that influence waste management choices. Using the Mental Modeler tool, the study simulates behaviour under different policy scenarios, highlighting differences in group behaviour. The results reveal a particularly low level of responsiveness of hard-to-reach groups to current waste management strategies. The study offers strategic guidelines for policymaking and adapting behaviour change measures based on understanding differences in group mental models. The conclusions emphasize the need for deeper engagement strategies tailored to each group. This study makes an essential contribution to the field of environmental communication and policymaking, especially with regard to the sustainable transition to a circular economy at the household level.

Keywords – *Circular economy; cognitive mapping; consumer behaviour analysis; scenario analysis; waste management; waste reduction.*



Comparison of concept centrality indicators in group maps.