GEERT TEN DAM (UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM, THE NETHERLANDS):
ISSUES IN MEASURING YOUNG PEOPLE’S CITIZENSHIP: AGE-RELATED CITIZENSHIP
PRACTICES AND SOCIAL DESIRABILITY.

Abstract
The results of a nationwide study of the citizenship competences of adolescents in the Netherlands are presented. Citizenship competences are defined as the knowledge, skills, attitudes and reflection needed by young people in a democratic and multicultural society to adequately fulfill social tasks that are part of their daily lives. The Citizenship Competence Questionnaire (CCQ) was administered to 16,000 adolescents in either sixth or ninth grade. The results differ in some remarkable ways from the findings of the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study. I will discuss these differences in the light of our ´situated operationalization´ of citizenship competences. In the next part of my presentation I will focus on the issue of social desirability. Insight into the citizenship of students is typically gained via surveys (e.g. ICCS, CELS, CCQ). However, social desirability always plays a role in self-reporting. There is a risk that students judge themselves more positively due to an inclination to respond in a socially desirable manner. The relationship between social desirability and citizenship, however, is multi-interpretable. The two concepts have a substantive affinity to each other as in both cases social norms which call for the display of behaviour desired by the environment play a role. For “good citizenship,” this means that one behaves in a social desirable manner in addition to having a critical-reflective attitude. Viewed from such a perspective, a higher degree of good citizenship is associated with a higher degree of social desirability. On the basis our empirical data on the citizenship competences of students from Dutch primary and secondary education, I will answer the question of whether social desirability plays a role in the responding of young people when asked about their citizenship and, if so, how this association of citizenship by social desirability can best be understood.