Three IEA civic and citizenship education studies (1971, 1999, and 2009) show limited responsiveness of educational systems to rapidly changing social, political and economic contexts that influence students through their school, peers, and family environment. Three important areas in which contextual changes interact with curriculum are: (i) content of civic and citizenship education (ii) the type of competencies considered necessary for an individual to take the role of citizen (iii) the role of student in the process of becoming citizen. Therefore for each study, situating student assessment in civic and citizenship in properly defined context is necessary for policy makers to understand what kind of citizenship might be emerging in the case of a specific cohort and what implications for educational policy it brings.

This presentation focuses on specific problems international studies in this area face when attempting to meet the above postulate, i.e., considerable differences between participating countries and relative instability of contextual variables. Two basic dilemmas to solve are: (i) dilemma of “comparing apples and pears” when including various countries into one study, and (ii) dilemma of investigating trends in constantly changing environment.

The IEA studies in civic and citizenship education show how some of the obstacles can be overcome. Assuring comparability across countries requires minimum common stand, i.e., organization of the society around principles of democracy and free market economy and within it (i) common frame in which curriculum is set (ii) shared interest in assessing comparative standing on selected issues (iii) agreement on needs for specific change. It also requires recognition of differences, i.e., forms of development and advancement of democratic systems, economics and culture characteristics through (i) regional/thematic modules and (ii) national options. Assuring overtime comparisons and relevance to present needs requires (i) linking assessment overtime using the same set of items and restricting changes to design (ii) introduce bridging study when necessary (iii) careful development of framework with maintaining connection to basic constructs.