A key question is “why an international handbook”? Indeed there are a large number of handbooks on career guidance available all over the world. They exist in different languages and are updated regularly. In general, however, most of these handbooks are strongly related to one country or to one cultural or linguistic region (e.g., Brown, 2003; Herr, Cramer, & Niles, 2004). Accordingly they are written from a specific point of view and based upon academic developments, guidance practice and societal situations specific to the readers they target. Beyond any doubt, it is an obvious and appropriate choice but it has one disadvantage. The readership will not be confronted with what is going on in the rest of the world and the global diversity in the field of guidance. Accordingly it is a disadvantage in view of an increasing globalisation and the newly required competencies for professionals. Knowing more about the world-wide diversity will help to uncover better practice examples that may be of use for some specific clients or yield new ideas to adapt existing approaches. It also can help to grasp the new developments in the required competencies for career guidance professionals or to acquire a better understanding of them.

Some of these well known handbooks (e.g., Guichard & Huteau, 2006) respond to this disadvantage and include references to research results, theory development and practice in other countries, mainly the USA. This is certainly an improvement from a global point of view but does it solve the shortcoming? This may solve it to the extent that the handbook reflects on the differences between the situation of the area where the handbook originates and the situation from which the other theories or examples were taken and the impact on the applicability of these foreign models.

The major issue in this perspective is the transferability of theories, research results, measurement instruments and guidance practice from one region to another. For several years a major debate has been opened on the cross-cultural applicability of theories (see, e.g., Leong, 1995). The same is true for instrument development that was, for example extensively debated at the International Association for
Educational and Vocational Guidance and National Career Development Association (IAEVG-NCDA) 2004 International Symposium in San Francisco (Watson, Duarte, & Glavin, 2005). But the topic of the use of career techniques and interventions also received ample attention at this symposium (Feller, Russell, & Wichard, 2005). It can be concluded that sometimes a transfer is possible but that the contextual factors should be taken into account and that in some cases the expected results are not reached. Watson and colleagues (2005) stated that “career counselors and researchers needed to step out of their own reality to consider the reality of clients from other cultural groups” (p. 32).

The number of publications on diversity and cross-cultural issues is increasing rapidly following the influence of these discussions. But in addition, the importance is reflected in more and more journal publications and books that do not have diversity as the main topic of their work. A growing sensitivity to the issue that research findings cannot always be generalised and there is recognition of limitations in applicability of the results is appearing in these publications. Even more it is also generally reflected in the population used for research projects. At the moment it is no longer accepted that theories and methods are developed exclusively on basis of data coming from psychology and counselling students, a research sample that mainly represents the middle-class group of our society. The idea that these results can be applied to the population in general at a national or world-wide level is under pressure.

In vocational psychology and career guidance it is strongly recognised that more attention should go to other social groups (Blustein, 2001; Fouad, 2001). Blustein (2006) considered this issue as key theme and he highlighted the role of social barriers, among which “classism” is central, as creating “inequitable conditions for many people and easy access to wealth and power for some” (p. 194). This author even went beyond the recognition of the need to advance knowledge about the barriers for social groups but stressed how this knowledge can be used to empower these groups and change inequitable systems.

The editors of this international handbook tried to take into account these issues by putting them at the centre of their attention while developing the handbook. In this perspective the decision was made to include a wide range of authors coming from all over the world and not belonging to one linguistic group. These authors, though all well acquainted with international developments in the field of career guidance, will approach their topic based upon ideas and concepts, which are influenced by their national, social or ethnic culture. The influence of the environment(s) on how a situation is interpreted is beyond any discussion. Opting for such a diverse group is a guarantee for a larger diversity in the contributions. This strive for diversity was enhanced because the authors were requested to start with those aspects in their topic they knew best. Implying that they could draw upon their experience and knowledge embedded in their own – national or local – environment. But they also were urged to use results, examples or models coming from other counties and certainly to reflect on the differences. There may be some difference in the amount of this type of reflections in the contributions but this is mainly related to the topic. Some topics offer more possibilities to make this kind of reflection than others.