

INTERNATIONAL EXPERIMENT PROVES PACE OF LIFE IS SPEEDING UP BY 10%

London, 25 March 2007 An international study measuring the speed of walking in 32 cities around the world reveals that the pace of life is literally getting faster.

Prof Richard Wiseman (University of Hertfordshire) today announced the results of an international study measuring the speed of life in 32 countries. The work, described in his new book, *Quirkology* and conducted in collaboration with The British Council, involved researchers secretly timing thousands of pedestrians' speed of walking in city centres across the globe, including London, Madrid, Singapore, and New York.

A study carried out in the early 1990s demonstrated that pedestrians' speed of walking provides a reliable measure of the pace of life in a city, and that people in fast-moving cities are less likely to help others and have higher rates of coronary heart disease.

Using identical methods to those employed in the previous work, the present day research teams discovered that the pace of life is now 10% faster than in the early 1990s.

The biggest changes were found in the Far East, with the pace of life in Guangzhou (China) increasing by over 20%, and Singapore showing a 30% increase, resulting in it becoming the fastest moving city in the study.

Prof. Richard Wiseman said: 'This simple measurement provides a significant insight into the physical and social health of a city. The pace of life in our major cities is now much quicker than before. This increase in speed will affect more people than ever, because for the first time in history the majority of the world's population are now living in urban centres.'

Perhaps surprisingly, London ranked outside the top ten, suggesting that many in the capital are now living life in the slow lane. Copenhagen and Madrid proved to be the fastest European cities, whilst the Middle East tended to have the slowest pace of

life. The results also challenge of the notion of the laid back Irish, with Dublin topping the table in the 1990s, and taking fifth place in the present research.

Michael White, Adviser to the British Council Science Department added: 'All the measurements were made on the same day and at the same local time. British Council researchers found a busy street with a wide pavement that was flat, free from obstacles, and sufficiently uncrowded to allow people to walk along at their maximum speed. They timed how long it took 35 men and women to walk along a 60ft stretch of pavement. They only monitored adults who were on their own, and ignored anyone holding a mobile telephone conversation or struggling with shopping bags. Comparing the results with those from the early 1990s revealed that the pace of life is now 10% faster.'

The research teams also visited each of the capital cities within the UK. Londoners are moving the fastest, second came Belfast, third place went to Edinburgh, and the slowest walkers are found in Cardiff.

Moving too fast for your own good?

The following questionnaire helps identify people who might be living life too faster. 5 or more 'yes' responses suggests that it might be time to take your foot off the accelerator and slow down.

- 1) Do you seem to glance at your watch more than others?
- 2) When someone takes too long to get to the point, do you feel like hurrying them along?
- 3) Are you often the first person to finish at mealtimes?
- 4) When walking along a street, do you often feel frustrated because you are stuck behind others?
- 5) Would you become irritable if you sit for an hour without doing anything?
- 6) Do you walk out of restaurants or shops if you encounter even a short queue?
- 7) If you are caught in slow-moving traffic, do you seem to get more annoyed than other drivers?

- ENDS -

For further information or images please contact press officer, Antony Watson, on 020 7389 4872 or email: antony.watson@britishcouncil.org

Professor Richard Wiseman is available for interviews and can be contacted on 07790 905219 or email: r.wiseman@herts.ac.uk

Notes to Editors:

- The British Council is the UK's international organisation for educational opportunities and cultural relations. It operates in 233 towns and cities in 109 countries and territories worldwide. We build relationships and understanding between people in Britain and other countries to increase appreciation of the UK's ideas and achievements overseas with a focus on the three areas of learning, society and creativity. The British Council is a non-political organisation which operates at arm's length from government. Income in 2005/06 was £501m, of which grant-in-aid from the British government was £189 million. We are registered in England as a charity. For more information, please visit: www.britishcouncil.org
- Quirkology is published by Macmillan on 4th May and explores the curious psychology of everyday life, including love, laughter, and lying. For more information, please visit: www.quirkology.com
- Methods and Results: All of the research was conducted between 11.30am and 2.00pm local time, on August 22nd 2006. The overall average time taken to cover 60 feet for the 16 countries involved in both surveys fell from 13.76s to 12.49 s.