

## **IS BRITAIN DIFFERENT?**

**Michelle Harrison, Director, The Henley Centre**

*At Summit 2006 Dr Michelle Harrison from the Henley Centre took a look at trends towards globalisation and localisation in Britain and what implications this has on business in the home market.*

Britain is changing and changing quickly. In terms of disposable income, our society is now 20% better off than it was in 2000. As a result of this increase in net wealth, more of us feel that our material needs are being fulfilled, from half those surveyed in 2001 to 62% in 2005.

But is this making people any happier? In the late 1990s, more than 60% of people said they never had enough time to do all the things they wanted to do. Interestingly, this figure had fallen to 55% in 2005, which perhaps suggests that the extra disposable income is being spent on paying other people to do some of the things they did themselves in the past, such as household chores. Now, energy is deemed the most desired resource, ahead of time, money, space and information.

Household sizes are also changing. The concept of 'boomerang kids' has emerged, describing children who have moved out but are now back with their parents, the reasons for which are many and varied. People tend to living in larger groups, as people are 'growing up' later, and are being thwarted by the steady rise in house prices. However, the decline in marriages has contributed to the number of single person households increasing quite dramatically.

Demographically, the nation is changing. Women are choosing either not to have children or are having them later. In the future, the number of children being born to each mother is expected to be either none or four. This is at odds with the Italians for example, who are far more likely to have just one child. At the other end of the age spectrum, numbers are increasing quickly. In 2005, 16% of the population was over 65, a figure that will rise to 31% by 2021.

Economically, the picture is altering too. Middle class shoppers, feeling more affluent than ever before, are trading up to buy designer goods but are still counting the pennies. So as paradoxical as it may sound, it's not unusual for a shopping trip to include a Prada handbag and some Tesco value toilet tissue.

National identity is extremely important to the British and perhaps even more so for the English. Only 4% of English people saw themselves as primarily European, while 56% of Britons said they thought society was too Americanised. In comparison to other countries, Britain was generally more cynical and less trusting of the media and multi-national companies.

Meanwhile, 'glocalisation' has emerged in marketing strategies, which embraces a global notion but with local execution. And in an increasingly multi-cultural society such as the UK, employing very local tactics, such as Polish foods in certain supermarkets is already proving successful.

One unlikely but potentially profitable marketing opportunity for the future is death. In the US there are already a number of books on how to 'live a good death' and with people living for longer, improving your final years could well be good news for all concerned.