

## **THE FEAR OF BEING LEFT BEHIND DRIVES BEIJING**

The image of Beijing on the eve of the Olympic Games speaks of a city worried about the great test awaiting it but one which at the same time wants to show the whole world its liveliest and most dynamic image in its truest form. It is an image of a people, who will not allow themselves to be bogged down and oppressed by anxiety and uncertainty; instead it derives strength from its troubles to face the challenges that await it.

This is the image of Beijing which emerges from a Censis survey on global fears in 10 world cities, which will be presented on the occasion of the Fondazione Roma's World Social Summit, from 24 to 26 September.

The survey, carried out at the end of June and the beginning of July on a representative sample of Beijing residents, shows a euphoric city, confidently awaiting a grand event.

When asked to indicate their current feeling about life and future prospects, 36.2% of the residents of Beijing stated that they were optimistic. Ranking second, 29.2% of them went on to say they were enthusiastic, while 17.4% simply expressed confidence. Altogether 82.8% of citizens, the highest percentage among the capitals surveyed, expressed positive feelings. Only in 17.2% of the responses the dominant feeling was negative, with 12.4% saying that their frame of mind was uncertain, 3.4% saying they did not care about their own lives, both now and in the future and 1.4% saying they were afraid.

And yet, when we go into depth, analysing the strains on a people at the centre of world interest, and therefore more vulnerable to possible problems, we discover a city that is more fearful than it wants to admit.

People are especially fearful that events that have taken place recently could happen again. 71.2% of Beijing's citizens said that they are afraid that there could be a natural disaster, like the earthquake that struck the country recently. This fear was felt most keenly among women and older people. In second place, there is the fear of being a victim of a terrorist attack or of violence or physical aggression (61,8% of the sample), followed by the fear of being a victim of food poisoning or a mass epidemic (58,4%), like the SARS epidemic a few years ago.

Parallel to the external fears, a result of actual existing risks, or the result of personal or indirect experience, there are other fears related to the high degree of dynamism, entrepreneurship and dominance of the local system of production.

In the capital of a Country that is making the whole world afraid, because of its competitiveness and great strength in all sectors, there is a fear that "the dream will end". The members of society at various levels fear that they will not manage to remain anchored to the engine that is pulling them. 57% of Beijing's citizens say that they are afraid that they will not be able to take advantage of the opportunities for economic and social growth that exist today, and are afraid of being "left behind".

Though far from being strong enough to set in motion processes to slow down development or cause an escape to the illusory defence of what has been painstakingly conquered, this feeling of fear is an important contributor to the city's vitality. In order to improve their own future, an almost existential value for the city's inhabitants, Beijing's residents are even willing to risk the certainties of the present.

It is a striking fact that 73,6% of the capital's residents state that what counts in life is to work to continuously improve your own condition, rather than being content with what you have, an opinion expressed by only 26,4%, a minority of residents. This factor pushes a majority of residents (69% of the total) to consider that risk, when working, as an investment. It is an uncertain situation which, under certain conditions, can offer good opportunities to obtain



advantages, rather than an unforeseen danger from which one should defend one's self (31%).

Putting ones' self continuously to the test, accepting the risks that every change brings, inevitably leads to constant re-thinking, aiming higher and higher. And this ability is probably the truest characteristic of this people.