



JEJU

PILOT PROVINCE • CULTURA 21

Pilot Province of Agenda 21 for culture,
United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)

THE CRITICAL CONTRIBUTION OF THE PROVINCE AND ITS CULTURAL STAKHOLDERS TO THE DRAFT OF THE NEW AGENDA 21 FOR CULTURE

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During my stay in Jeju, there were several meetings with different cultural actors and stakeholders on the island. The seminar organised by the Province was very useful to get a picture of the cultural situation, thanks to the presence of academics, directors of cultural institutions, ONGs, cultural experts, artists, the Province's director of culture as well as members of Jeju Province. I also had the unique opportunity to meet several *Haenyeo* (women divers), experts in Jeju's cultural and natural heritage, anthropologists, the island's chief Shaman - the Jeju Chilmeoridang Yeongdeunggut skill holder - several artists engaged in important projects, and last but not least, the founder of the *Olle* trail. All of them are actively involved in culture and all were able to exchange with me at length on their involvement in culture and sustainable development and their projects for the future.

Three contemporary elements of Jeju culture all emanating from civil society were particularly striking and deeply committed, in one way or another, to culture and sustainable development:

1. THE BINJIP (EMPTY HOUSE) PROJECT

An artist's collective – The *binjip* (empty house) project

Today a collective of young artists, they originally were visual artists from Seoul who came to Jeju to attend the *Haenyeo* school of women divers – and discovered that there was less and less abalones and conch along the Jeju shores and more and more glass and plastic bottles, etc.. So they got together and imagined a project, using the diving skills they had learnt from the *Haenyeo* to pick cans and bottles instead of shellfish, and transform them into artworks – with the intention of making people aware, through art, of the dangers of pollution and waste – the *Beachcombing* project.

They immediately involved a network of other artists – many of them from mainland Korea and especially Seoul - to make their action known through their different networks – musicians, poets, actors and theatre directors. Very soon, the musicians began to make and play instruments from the picked garbage, and so on... This year the collective sent glass collected from the Jeju sea to Seoul to be used by other artists. They also sell their artwork in retail shops all over the country.

The collective works from a converted garage in a small village, and it not only carries out many workshops with children, but also with adults from the city and the surrounding villages, for example, making furniture from collected floating wood.

2. THE OLLE TRAIL

This outstanding culture and sustainable development project was brought about by an exceptional woman, Suh Myung-suk. She almost single-handedly changed the way islanders or tourists today discover the natural and cultural beauties of the island. Jeju is known as the “honeymoon island”, and for many years, tourists flew over to be by the sea for 2-3 days, stayed in holiday resorts and shopped in the supermarkets and malls. She created a 26-day hiker's trail along the coast connecting more than 100 villages and 422 km of paths. *Olle* - meaning a narrow pathway between houses - began 7 years ago with just Suh Myunk-suk and her brother. She used her small amount of retirement money and her important network as an ex-journalist in the culture and creative industries sector to build a sustainable experience for “people sharing nature, culture and memories together » that she also calls « green experiencing » with beautiful natural scenery, farmer food markets, and cultural performances by local artists. Just

in the year 2013, more than 1 million people walked the trail. The *Olle* trail is now connected to a network of trail systems across the world. Suh Muyunk Suk, who also created the *Olle* Foundation, is particularly proud that, thanks to her initiative, the specific Jeju language came back into use, the *Olle* trail has revived local farmer markets, and young people have moved back to the island because of new job opportunities linked to her vision of sustainable tourism – among them quite a number of artists. Her wish for the future is to help create even more links between culture and sustainable development and the hope that the villagers will get a return and a form of redistribution out of this new influx of riches – a Jeju way of thinking very reminiscent of *Haeyneo* culture.

3. JUNG EUNHAE

Jung Eunhae is an artist working on social and psychological healing in families through art in the heart of a village. She is an art therapist but her work goes well beyond – it is a way of showing that art is at the centre of social healing processes, but as we are in Jeju, strongly linked to how we can use nature and culture as healing elements. She works with adolescents who no longer communicate with their parents, a scourge of our modern societies, and of course with the parents who no longer know how to talk to their children or adolescents. For this she has created astonishing artistic programs that link nature and natural elements to children and parents, collectively making beautiful works of art. The artwork and the therapeutics are very convincing and her method and innovative way of working is interesting institutions responsible for culture, youth, health and family life. She herself is very sensitive to developing her engagement with an explicit link between culture and sustainable development and integrating that vision into her work.

All the artists and personalities involved in creative Jeju I exchanged with are already engaged in a cultural and sustainable development outlook, and they all expressed their interest and hope that the Agenda 21 for Culture would bring recognition for their work, that has often spanned over decades. What is also striking about the island's cultural life is that almost all the projects I saw and talked about are connected through world networks.

Jeju is an outstanding example on how nature blends with culture to make a good practice case on the relationship between culture and sustainable development, and how the unique culture of Jeju integrates the principle of culture as the 4th pillar of sustainable development alongside social, economic and environmental questions, all intrinsic to the Jeju outlook on life.