

Haenyeo Culture from Jeju Island as an Example of Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Republic of Korea Nationally and Internationally

- The author presents the preliminary results of a survey conducted during a five-month study stay at the National Folk Museum of Korea in 2017 as a part of the International Professional Exchange Programme of the Cultural Partnership Initiative (CPI) of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism of the Republic of Korea and further research conducted independently in 2019, which aimed to study the Korean system for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and its effects on a very specific phenomenon of intangible cultural heritage – the so-called *haenyeo* culture from Jeju Island, i.e. the culture of women divers from Jeju Island – included in UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2016 and the Korean National Intangible Cultural Heritage List a year later.

Keywords: Intangible Cultural Heritage, *haenyeo*, fisheries, Jeju Island, Republic of Korea

INTRODUCTION

This text is my third contribution on safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage in the Republic of Korea in Ethnological Researches. In the first one, I touched on the historical development of the Republic of Korea's ICH Safeguarding Framework, which proved to be very effective, but not without challenges (Dronjić 2017). The second text focused on elaborating on the issue of the functioning of the Framework at the

regional level, using the example of the study of the local version of the puppet play Park Cheomji Nori, which is performed on the outskirts of the city of Seosan, inscribed on the Regional list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Chuncheongnam province (Dronjić 2020). The functioning of the Framework is also addressed in the third paper, but both at the national and international level, using the example of the phenomenon of the so-called *haenyeo* culture from Jeju Island, an ambitious and complex undertaking to safeguard the living culture of women divers from Jeju Island (called *haenyeo*¹, *jamnyeo* or *jamsu*). *Haenyeo* live in most coastal villages on the island (as well as on the neighbouring islets) and are involved in fishing for seafood (such as octopuses, sea urchins, sea cucumbers, oysters, abalones, seaweed, etc.) by snorkelling.

In my paper I present preliminary results of an ethnographic survey on a smaller scale conducted in several stages during 2017, in which I participated as a member of the research team,² of the National Folk Museum of Korea, as well as a shorter independently conducted additional campaign in September 2019.³ The research was based on the method of observation with participation of *haenyeo* and unstructured conversations with them, community representatives, i. e. persons in charge of implementing the plan for safeguarding *haenyeo* culture from Jeju Island in the context of intangible cultural heritage.

Considering the fact that over the last ten years I have focused, among other things, on the research of the effects of *heritagisation* on the topics of Lepoglava lacemaking and the so-called *majdan*, a traditional blacksmith's craft in central Bosnia and Herzegovina, I decided to exploit the opportunity provided by the scholarship and extend the research to the Republic of Korea, a country that started these processes in the middle of the last century. The team of the Research Department of the National Folk Museum of Korea (as the central museum institution for ethnography in the Republic of Korea) accepted the proposal of the topic of my research and with their organisational help I went to Jeju, where I got in touch with a number of local institutions and individuals involved in *haenyeo* culture safeguarding projects, who consequently introduced me to the heiresses themselves – women divers and the members of their families. Irrespective of the fact that I quickly established good relations with them, it is necessary to characterise my research position as an outsider, especially because

1 Today, the most widely used term for these women divers comes from kor. 해 (hae) meaning 'sea' and 녀 (nyeo) meaning 'woman'.

2 Cordial thanks to colleagues from the National Folk Museum of Korea, in alphabetical order: Cheon Jingji, Cho Haein, Choi Eunsoo, Jang Jang-sik, Kim Hyeongju, Kim Jongmin, Koo Mun Hoe, Lee Hyuna, Lee Kwan-Ho, Lee Nan-Young, Lee Yunha, Oh Changhyun, Oh Joonsuk, Park Hyeroung, Park Seonju, Sin Jeong Soo, Woo Seung Ha, Yi Kiwon; and especially Kang Kwon-yong and the colleagues from the Haenyeo Museum who have been very helpful to me with the field part of the research itself. In addition, I would like to thank all *haenyeo* with whom I spoke, for their time, their warm reception and patience during my mastering of the language and cultural barriers.

3 Unfortunately, conducting this research has been adversely affected by the typhoon season. Typhoon Lingling devastated Jeju a few days before my arrival, delaying some public events that were the focus of this research campaign and the aftermath of the storm also disrupted daily activities of *haenyeo*, as well as the operation of certain catering establishments run by them. Finally, due to the approaching Typhoon Tapah, I decided to stop field research a few days earlier than I had planned and I returned to Seoul where I dedicated myself to archival research into the material from the documentation of the National Folk Museum of Korea.

of the language and the cultural barrier. Nevertheless, I believe to have managed to “feel the pulse” of the community to a certain extent and thus to have managed to achieve the objective of the research, to outline the issue of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in the Republic of Korea using the example of *haenyeo* culture from Jeju Island, which is also the objective of this paper.

HAENYEO CULTURE FROM JEJU ISLAND

Jeju (kor. *Jejudo*) is the largest island of the Republic of Korea, located about a hundred kilometres from its southern coast. It covers 1,826 km² and has about 670,000 inhabitants, it is recognisable by the imposing Hallasan, a dormant volcano, which at 1,947 meters above sea level dominates the view of the island. On its shores there are typical grey volcanic rocks, formed due to changing tides, sea currents and strong winds. Although in the warmer months Jeju is a favourite tourist destination, in winter the coastal strip of the island could hardly be described as a hospitable place, as shown primarily by the traditional architecture – low ground floor with modest dimensions hidden from the wind within small courtyards surrounded by high walls of dark volcanic stone. *Haenyeo* phenomenon has developed in this environment.

Historiographical sources confirm that the inhabitants of Jeju Island have been diving for food since the middle of the first millennium of the new era at the latest, while the first documents talking about women as divers date back to the 17th century. It is still not entirely clear when and for what reasons diving became exclusively a female profession, but it is certain how it was professionalised during the so-called Japanese colonial rule, that is, between 1910 and 1945 (Hilty 2015: 17-19).

Due to migration processes caused by economic reasons that lasted from the end of the 19th century to around 1970s, *haenyeo* communities lived on the mainland coast, in Japan, China (and the mainland and in Taiwan) and even in Russia. In order to distinguish them from the women who stayed on Jeju Island, they are colloquially referred to as *chalga*⁴ *haenyeo*.

As diving became exclusively women’s economic activity, so many families began to rely on their income, gradually taking on the role of breadwinner that had previously been reserved for men. Consequently, this shift created a specific social structure in which the woman became the head of the household, while the man, based on strict Confucian social norms, continued to dominate the public sphere.

The term *haenyeo* culture includes a set of cultural practices and it is linked with their profession, as well as the space (natural and cultural) in which they live and work. The skill of snorkelling, referred to as *muljil*, has developed through many years of practice and involves achieving lung capacity sufficient to hold your breath for up to two minutes,⁵ as well as the body’s ability to withstand the pressure and cold water.

4 The term *chalga* (chalga) is used as an informal departure greeting, “goodbye”.

5 In addition, when *haenyeo* women rise to the surface, they use a quick exhalation and inhalation technique that also produces a loud whistle-like sound referred to as *sumbisori* (Hilty 2015: 34).

Haenyeo women spend six to seven hours a day diving during the summer months, or four to five hours a day in winter months. On average, they dive about ninety days a year (UNESCO 2016; s.n. 2014: 17-24).

Another striking characteristic is the formation of a mental map of the underwater world, as well as the use of local, traditionally transmitted knowledge about changing tides and powerful tidal currents around Jeju. Most women do not rely on official weather forecasts, but when planning dives, they consult with more experienced *haenyeo* referred to as *sanggun*. Although they are one another's competition, mutual concern is very developed and *haenyeo* always dive in groups almost without exception. With a deep sense of mutual respect, there is great solidarity towards the less physically ready, mostly older *haenyeo*, to whom safer parts of the sea/underwater world are allocated (UNESCO 2016).

An important part of *haenyeo* culture are shamanistic rituals intended for sea gods such as *jamsugut*, performed to ensure safety at sea and an abundant catch. In addition, women pray in the ceremonial places by the sea where *the haesindang* (shrines) are located. In addition to the religious aspect of *haenyeo* culture from Jeju Island, their folkloric expression is also very important, such as *haenyeo norae*, songs sung during rowing from the coast to where the dive begins (UNESCO 2016; s.n. 2014: 41, 49).

Diving suits play a particularly significant role for *haenyeo* culture from Jeju Island, especially in the context of heritage for the reason that it has changed over time. *Mulot*, the traditional wetsuit, consisted of three elements made of cotton: pants-like item (*mulsojunggi*), jacket-like top (*muljeoksan*) and hair wrap (*mul sugun*). The wetsuit has very specific side openings that made it easier to put it on, even to pregnant women. Nevertheless, in the 1970s rubber (later neoprene) wetsuits were introduced thanks to which *haenyeo* were able to spend a long time underwater (Fig. 1), which led to an increase in productivity and consequently income (Kang and Kwon 2014). Around the same time, goggles that have been used since the 19th century have been replaced by diving masks. As for the equipment, women use *tevak* (a floating aid, both for *haenyeo* during swimming and for the retention of *mangsari*, nets with collected seafood, on the surface), weights and a number of hand tools for harvesting purposes such as:

“...‘bitchang,’ or flat prying tool akin to a heavy dull knife blade or chisel, for lifting abalone from rock; the ‘jonggae-homi’ or small sickle for cutting seaweed; the ‘seonggekal’ or broad-bladed knife for removing sea urchins; the ‘gol-gaengi’, a small hoe for pulling creatures from crevices in a reef, turning over small rocks in search of shellfish, and moving oneself slowly along the reef by pulling on its crags for propulsion; the ‘homaengi’ or ‘kkakkuri’, a long hook; and the ‘jaksal’ or spear. The latter two, for catching cephalopods and fish, respectively, rather than gathering shellfish or seaweed, are not in regular use today; the gol-gaengi is the most multipurpose tool.” (Hilty 2015: 32)

Bulteok is the place where *haenyeo* rest and keep warm, prepare for a dive and change after the work is done. In the original context, these are smaller drywall structures without a roof in the middle of which fire is lit. However, since the mid-1980s, some of them have been replaced by modern facilities with showers and heating, while there

are currently about 70 traditional buildings on the island (s.n. 2014: 37). In addition to practical purpose, they are intended as a symbolic space embedded in the coastal landscape that represents the presence of *haenyeo*. Moreover, modern versions of *bulteok* are very colourful and easily noticeable, thanks to frescoes depicting scenes from the underwater world dominated by women diving.

The significance of *haenyeo* culture at the community level is huge and diverse, which is evident in their impact on the development of the island (comp. Hilty 2016: 66). The income generated by women in specific parts of the sea through collective work was often used for communal projects such as school construction. The spirit of solidarity between *haenyeo* and their communities has created the image of the strong and independent woman in Korean society, otherwise very male-centred, and more recently they have become a symbol of gender equality as a result (comp. UNESCO 2016). *Haenyeo* culture from Jeju Island is also a remarkable example of sustainable development, thanks to which, with all of the above, it is a perfect example of the UNESCO concept of intangible cultural heritage:

“Thanks to the eco-friendly foraging methods, the diving work of Jeju *haenyeo* promotes sustainability. The human desire for a big catch is counterbalanced by each individual’s limited capacity to remain underwater without the aid of breathing equipment. The community as a whole decides the number of days for diving each year, regulates working hours and the minimum size of the catch and prohibits the use of some technology to avoid excessive fishing. (...) There is a symbiotic relationship between Jeju *haenyeo* and their catches. They weed the intertidal zone regularly to help the marine species grow well and call the sea their ‘underwater field.’” (UNESCO 2016)

SAFEGUARDING ON HAENYEO CULTURE FROM JEJU ISLAND

Currently, there are about 4,500 *haenyeo* on Jeju Island and they are organised in 102 village fishing cooperatives (called *eochongye*) to which the authorities of Jeju Special Self-Governing Province grant exclusive rights to exploit nearby “underwater” or “sea” fields (sea areas located near the settlement) in accordance with specific regulations. *Haenyeohoe* Associations (referred to as *haenyeohoe*), associated with rural fishing cooperatives, are voluntary organisations that act as citizens' associations and as collectives for economic production. *Haenyeohoe* discuss diving season dates, regulate working hours, the minimum catch size, as well as methods and seabed maintenance dynamics, to name a few. In most cases, decisions are made by consensus of the members.

The 1960s were considered as the Golden Age, followed by a long period characterised by a constant decrease in the number of active *haenyeo*. For example, in 1966 there were 24,268 divers, and this number dropped sharply to 14,143 in 1970. The reasons certainly lie in the so-called *Saemaul udong*, the government's reconstruction and development programme at the time that influenced the change in economic policy of Jeju Special Self-Governing Province, which resulted in a sharp shift in focus from agriculture and fishing to tourism. The decreasing number of *haenyeo* women has

become relatively stable since the 1980s, to about 1,000 women per decade. In 2016, there were 4,005 active women divers, while 5,495 of them suspended their economic activity and were listed as retired.⁶ If the number of active *haenyeo* women is divided into age groups, it is clear that around 57% of them are older than 70. However, in the context of safeguarding *haenyeo* culture from Jeju Island, the fact that according to several-year-old data, only 12 divers are in their 30s and 46 in their 40s is rather concerning (Hilty 2015: 19; JSSGP 2017a; UNESCO 2016).

Among *haenyeo* women there is a strict hierarchy that structures according to many years of experience and skill level. The most skilled women are referred to as *sanggun* and they are often the leaders of associations. Middle skilled are referred to as *junggun* and lower skilled as *hagun*. Since the *eochoongye* (village fishing cooperative) has exclusive rights to exploit the sea and underwater world near their villages, anyone wishing to dive must join them and contact the relevant *haenyeo* association. In other words, *eochoongye* and *haenyeohoe* are primarily responsible for transferring *haenyeo* culture from Jeju Island to younger generations. Diving skills are usually passed down among women within the family, from mothers to daughters and from mother-in-law to daughter-in-law. *Haenyeo* women can gain insight into diving skills by observing more experienced women and eventually improve their own skills with active exercise. However, since diving is the main source of family income, *haenyeo* women frequently refuse to disclose certain elements of their knowledge that are necessary to achieve a higher level of expertise (UNESCO 2016).

After the 1970s, a person's choice to become *haenyeo* in a professional sense becomes a conscious choice, not a course of events based on local/family traditions. Nevertheless, the *haenyeo* community in each village still plays the role of a vocational school for the new candidate. In 2008 Hansupul *haenyeo* school in Hallim (Jeju City) joined in this initiative, where diving skills are taught in a more systematic way (UNESCO 2016).

In addition to the *haenyeo* community, Jeju Provincial Government has implemented a number of safeguarding measures. In 2002, women were included in the no co-payment health insurance scheme (JSSGP 2015) and in 2017 the Ordinance came into force allowing women over the age of 70 to receive 200,000 KRW (approximately €150) of permanent monthly financial support “to prevent accidents and preserve income” and 500,000 KRW (approximately €370) for people currently in the scheme training or have just completed training and are under the age of 40 (JSSGP 2017b). The adoption of the aforementioned regulation can be attributed to the establishment of the Provincial Committee for Safeguarding Jeju *Haenyeo* Culture in 2011, which also devised the first five-year safeguarding action plan (from 2011 to 2015) (UNESCO 2016).

Haenyeo culture from Jeju Island or some of its elements are included in several lists of intangible cultural heritage – Korean (regional and national) and international. *Haenyeo* song (in terms of musical folklore expression) was inscribed in 1971 as the first item on the list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Jeju Province (Regional list of

6 The latter information needs to be carefully considered because there is no official mandatory retirement age for *haenyeo* women. Some women dive into their 80s, i. e. as long as physical fitness and health allow them to do so (UNESCO 2016).

intangible cultural heritage of the Republic of Korea) in 1980. The Ritual *Yeongdeunggut* was included in the Korean National Intangible Cultural Heritage List under the number 71 and in 2009 it was included in the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Moreover, the wetsuits and accessories used by women during diving were protected as regional folklore heritage in 2008.⁷ A particularly interesting moment is the fact that international recognition preceded that at the national level, i. e. *haenyeo* culture from the island as a cultural phenomenon was included in the UNESCO Representative List in 2016. It was included in the national list a year later under the number 132 (JSSGP 2017a).

The opening of Haenyeo Museum in 2006 is considered as a significant step forward in safeguarding practices (JSSGP 2006). The facility is located on the east side of the island, in the settlement of Gujwa-eup, consisting of two buildings with three permanent collections, children's museum, projection room and concert hall and space for educational activities. The Museum is located in a settlement where there is a successful and a very active *haenyeo* community and in addition to research, documentation, exhibitions, educational programmes and the activities in connection with intangible cultural heritage, since 2007 annual Haenyeo festival has been held striving to “improve self-esteem and affirm worth among women divers” (UNESCO 2016).

During my research, I had the opportunity to visit the Haenyeo Museum, where I spoke with Kang Kwon-yong, a member of the community and heir to *haenyeo* culture from the island of Jeju, who was a curator at the time. In addition to being an avid researcher, Kang was one of the leading figures in the process of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in connection with the elements of the *haenyeo* phenomenon and one of the main persons behind its inclusion in the UNESCO Representative List and the National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Republic of Korea.

The main topic of our discussions were the challenges facing the community, as well as the future of *haenyeo* culture on Jeju Island. It is clear that the main challenge in preserving this phenomenon of intangible cultural heritage is the constant decrease in the number of *haenyeo* women, which is closely connected with the question of whether diving can be a viable profession. The current projections show the continuation of the negative trend, i.e. that in 2030 there will be about 2,000 active divers. The interest in this profession is currently rather low, there are between 30 and 40 new *haenyeo* women divers at an annualised level. Concerning the (self)sustainability of *haenyeo* culture from Jeju Island in the context of economic activity in connection with heritage, one of the main challenges is a relatively low average income (about 1,000,000 KRW⁸ per month) and most women or are not sufficiently educated (mainly primary school level) or are too old to be involved in business projects that would increase the income margin. Nevertheless, some *haenyeo* women run small family restaurants, such as Park Sok-hui in the village of Gujwa, whose owner I had the opportunity to meet

7 More about the concept of folklore heritage as categories in Korean intangible cultural heritage safeguarding in Dronjić 2017: 12-13; Yim 2005: 1; Kim et al. 2012: 22.

8 Around €750.

and ask her a few questions. She emphasised the correlation between low income and low interest in this profession, stating that those who run restaurants – like her and her 34-year-old daughter, one of the youngest *haenyeo* women on the island – are in dire need of long-term sustainable financial stabilisation. She also pointed out that while the community is proud of the international recognition achieved by being included in the UNESCO list, better educated young women see their future in tourism and the related services sector, far from the difficult and dangerous life typical for divers.

Ae Duck Im, a sociologist at Jeju National University, conducted a study aimed at identifying opportunities to achieve long-term sustainability of the profession by re-evaluating the work of divers and concluded that a number of steps is needed to establish diving as a viable profession in the modern context:

"First, professional *haenyeo* theory and practice text condensed into "Haenyeology" should be written to educate the novice *haenyeo*. Second, every *haenyeo* community should establish a *Haenyeo* school to train the novice *haenyeo* in their own community. Third, a *haenyeo* school also should empower *haenyeos* about their right, professionalism, management skill, social security and corporation management skills through community. Fourth, the *haenyeo* community should be reformed into a *haenyeo* corporation social enterprise. Fifth, the *haenyeo* community should empower themselves to establish a *haenyeo* social security system through a *haenyeo* corporation social enterprise." (Im 2014: 59)

Local authorities took concrete steps in this direction by adopting the *Haenyeo* Culture Promotion Ordinance in 2014. In order to increase the value of *haenyeo* culture, while striving to contribute to the local economy, thereby increasing the quality of life of the local population, the intention of the regulations was to provide the necessary conditions for its promotion and support both in the heritage/cultural context, as well as in the context of economic activity. In this way, the local government recognised *haenyeo* culture as a legitimate stakeholder in the economic branches related to the exploitation of marine resources and put in place a number of measures such as financial subsidies to develop and promote their products in broader national, as well as foreign markets (JSSGP 2014).

During the research, further development of tourism has emerged as a great possibility, but also the most difficult challenge of the future. Since the *haenyeo* sea is considered in the same way as the farmer's field, clashes with tourists ensued. For example, my interlocutors pointed out that numerous quarrels were reported with individuals who went spearfishing in waters operated by a certain *eochoongye*. Kang Kwon-yong emphasised that making a connection between visitors and the local community is about reconciling traditional and modern worldviews. In his opinion, mutual understanding and respect is something that needs to start being built from the local level, within communities. As a possible solution, he proposes a pilot project to establish an eco-company that would act as a platform for communication in both directions.

Furthermore, a permanent decrease in the number of divers is a challenge. In Kang's opinion, the increase of the number of *haenyeo* women in any long-term respect will

depend on the promotion of *haenyeo* culture from Jeju Island in the heritage context within the communities themselves. A kind of “iconisation” of divers was only one step of the action plan, which has thus far proved successful. The inclusion on the UNESCO Representative List has made significant progress in building identity and a sense of self-esteem, both for the divers and their communities as a whole. The effects of prestige of international recognition affect even *chulga haenyeo*,⁹ as shown by the increasing visibility of *haenyeo* communities permanently inhabiting the coastal area of the mainland of the Republic of Korea.

Haenyeo women became the symbol of Jeju Island. In addition to the previously mentioned painted objects used by the divers themselves, in the public space *haenyeo* women have been presented on murals in the centres of cities and villages, as well as through numerous stylised sculptures not necessarily exclusively of a memorial character. In other words, many of the sculptures do not represent a particular *haenyeo* woman, but are dedicated to all the *haenyeo* women in the community and serve as a kind of visual reminder both of their presence and the significance for the inhabitants of Jeju Island (Fig. 2). In addition to the recognisable visual motifs of the island – *dol hareubang* sculptures,¹⁰ indigenous to horse breed (*Jejuma*) and black pig e (*Jeju heukdwaeji*) and tangerines – *haenyeo* are starting to dominate visually on the souvenir range, e. g. on postcards (Fig. 3), magnets, canvas bags, etc. These are mainly stylised illustrations depicting women in the contemporary context, in neoprene wetsuits, the main visual characteristic of which is the inability to define their age. In addition, it is interesting to note that during my research in 2017, these souvenirs could be found only sporadically, while only two years later, in early autumn 2019, I noticed them at every turn – from the arrivals at the airport, to souvenir shops on the outskirts of Jeju City. In other words, the effects of the heritage of *haenyeo* culture from Jeju Island quickly became evident in the public sphere as a result of the change in cultural policies and related action plans after the inscription in the UNESCO Representative List and the Korean National Intangible Cultural Heritage List.

After the first five-year plan met its objectives, its continuation reflected on the improvement in the safeguarding framework.¹¹ Its objectives are designed to ensure successful medium and long-term preservation of *haenyeo* culture from Jeju Island as a living culture and promoted its heritage value nationally and internationally. The promotion of this cultural phenomenon is intended to be based on its reaffirmation in the modern world by the local communities, which needs to be achieved by increasing

9 During my visit to Busan in 2017, I had the opportunity to briefly interview members one of *haenyeo* cooperatives “in situ”, in a makeshift beach restaurant run by them. They emphasised their pride to be recognised on a global scale, as well as a strong sense of belonging to *haenyeo* culture of Jeju Island, even though they had permanently settled in Busan half a century ago.

10 Large sculptures made of volcanic (basalt) rock showing gods that, according to local beliefs, provided protection and fertility. They were placed in front of the entrance to the estates to deter demons, which is why some of them are up to three meters high and their faces are often shaped into grotesque grimaces.

11 The plan I designed for the period from 2017 to 2021 and the proposed budget level for all the five years was an impressive 108,302,000,000 KRW (about €81,000,000) (JSSGP 2017a: 43-51). By comparison, the budget of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism of the Republic of Korea for 2019 was 6.48 trillion KRW (about €4.65 billion), i. e. about 10% of the total state budget (Anderson 2019).

promotional/educational activities for the general public, but also for the islanders themselves. In addition, the plan evokes the need to establish an organisation that connects all the communities and associations to improve the status of intangible cultural heritage at the national level, since the absence of direct support from the central government is mainly due to a lack of one such entity to serve as administrative and operational support. Furthermore, some measures include conducting additional research and building a knowledge base, laying the groundwork for understanding and protecting heritage sites related to marine ecological resources (the link between intangible cultural heritage and ecology as the basis for sustainable development), activating international exchange, building a brand and developing business models that would ensure a stable source of income and in order to improve the quality of life for *haenyeo* in the long term (in other words, it is necessary to create a sustainable connection between *haenyeo* culture and, figuratively speaking, *haenyeo* fishing industry) (JSSGP 2017a).

INSTEAD OF A CONCLUSION

The concept of *haenyeo* culture from Jeju Island includes a set of cultural practices in connection with a specific form of maritime traditional economy: fishing for mollusks, bivalves and other marine organisms using the method of snorkelling involving only women, some of whom are in advanced age. These practices include the knowledge, skills and techniques necessary to carry out physically demanding and often dangerous dives, as well as the so-called *gut* (rituals)¹² that invoke good catch and safety at sea and folklore forms, that is, songs that *haenyeo* sing when going to the sea. The material dimension of *haenyeo* culture from Jeju Island is inseparable from its intangible counterpart and it is manifested through specific diving equipment and accessories for hunting/collecting seafood and the related architectural elements of utilitarian or ritual purposes. The process of transferring knowledge and skills takes place in families, schools, village fishing co-operatives, *haenyeo* associations and the Haenyeo Museum. *Haenyeo* culture from Jeju Island represents the character of the island and the spirit of the local population and contributes to improving the position of women in the community and promotes environmental sustainability primarily thanks to ecological methods and active community involvement in the management of fishing practices (UNESCO 2016).

Due to the size of the community (in terms both of space and population), as well as the fact that there is almost no person on Jeju Island who is not in one way or another directly related to *haenyeo* (as family members, fellow residents, acquaintances, etc.), *haenyeo* culture represents a very specific cultural phenomenon. From the position of a researcher who has been dealing with topics from the domain of intangible cultural heritage for many years, especially the phenomena that are closely linked with the traditional economy, during the preparation for the research I had already noticed that

12 Kor. 굿 (*gut* or *kut*) is a ritual performed by a shaman with singing, music and dancing offering deities a sacrifice in the form of food. More in: Lee 1981; Chung et al. (ed.) 2013.

in this case there is a minutely thought-out approach to preserving intangible cultural heritage that conceptually approaches the community as a fundamental stakeholder in cultural policies in the spirit of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003), focusing primarily on the modernity of the cultural phenomenon. Indeed, the heritage aspect and the aspect of the living culture have been placed conceptually in balance, which is evident from certain elements – poetically, a bridge was made over the so-called *wonhyeong*.¹³ For example, the conceptual balance can be seen in the relationship between the “past” *haenyeo* (heritage aspect), dressed in traditional cotton bathing suits, which are monumentalised or rather musealised within certain monuments and museum exhibitions and the “contemporary” *haenyeo* (aspect of living culture) in neoprene wetsuits that are ubiquitous in public spaces and represent the symbol of Jeju Island. In other words, the heritagisation of *haenyeo* culture from Jeju Island is not achieved based on “archetypes”, but on the everyday life and real or the existential needs of the community members. The existing *haenyeo* are certainly a particularly sensitive group for a number of reasons: because of advanced average age; due to the dangers to which they are exposed during each dive, but also occupational diseases resulting from lifelong exposure to variable pressure and the cold of seawater; due to the fragility of the ecosystem, which is under increasing strain due to climate changes and the negative consequences of the development of modern tourism on the island, among others.

Tourism, in the context of the sustainability of *haenyeo* culture from Jeju Island, appears in diametrically opposed roles, as a great opportunity and a great challenge. On the one hand, all the efforts by local government representatives to ensure optimal conditions for its preservation (through legislation, social, infrastructure and operational programmes) are more or less intertwined with tourism policies, which is largely met with community approval. For example, irrespective of whether they sell their products in markets, makeshift restaurants on beaches or own small family restaurants, most of the *haenyeo* I spoke with are aware of the importance of developing tourism to achieve stable incomes in the long term and welcome the increase in tourist capacities that would ensure a larger market. On the other hand, the interests of large capital in the tourism sector have an adverse effect on the long-term sustainability of the fragile ecosystem, while sharing the tradition of the established right to the sea, i. e. “sea fields” with tourists provokes conflicts not only between *haenyeo* and visitors, but also within members of small communities.

During my visit to the island of Jeju in 2019, I found myself in an interesting situation in one of the most frequent tourist attractions in the Jeju City area, on a beach near the popular attraction Yongduam Rock (a dragon's head-shaped rock) where local *haenyeo* run a makeshift restaurant (Fig. 4). When I approached one of the older women with the intention of asking her for a seat at some of the few tables (which one usually has

13 In the context of intangible cultural heritage, i. e. Korean Conservation System *wonhyeong* (archetype) represents a specific form of a particular phenomenon considered historically authentic, original and unchanging and its elaboration of the grounds for its inclusion on the national or regional list of the intangible cultural heritage. More in: Dronjić 2017, 2020; Yang 2003, 2004; Lee 2012.

to wait for), she immediately noticed the camera on my shoulders and forbade me to take photographs in a commanding tone. I immediately apologised and stressed that this was a misunderstanding, that I did not come to film them but to have lunch, asking a few questions. She accepted my apology right away and after I sat down and was served, she apologised by explaining to me that many Yongduam visitors come to the beach just to take photographs of them and the restaurant, which she finds unacceptable (rude) behaviour and bad for the business. During our brief conversation, my interviewee dissuaded several other people from trying to take photographs, in some cases not refraining from using insults.

The issues of heritage creation in the context of *haenyeo* culture from Jeju Island were touched on by Lee Inhye, an anthropologist at the National Folk Museum of Korea. Starting from the dilemma of heritage conceptualisation – whether heritage is a common property or a basic means of achieving economic profit – it has critically set itself up according to the effects of heritage creation, concluding that the process of attention in the case of the phenomenon of *haenyeo* culture from Jeju Island nevertheless affects the identity of the community by creating spaces of contention (Lee 2019). It is important to note that its critical analysis corresponds with the results of numerous studies¹⁴ on the effects of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage conducted around the world over the past two decades.

Finally, one needs to ask oneself whether *haenyeo* culture from Jeju Island is an example of stable safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage of the Republic of Korea both at the national and international level? If one strives to answer the latter question by assuming the criterion of subjective impression of its members as relevant (comp. Dronjić 2020: 31), several key views stand out. On the one hand, the prestige of national and international recognition played a major role in mobilising the community and forming a sense of pride, belonging and continuity. Moreover, most *haenyeo* welcome the addressing of unsolved social issues (such as health insurance and the right to retirement), stressing that the path to financial stabilisation is the main prerequisite for the long-term existence of the profession. Interestingly, several women have also highlighted dissatisfaction with these steps, arguing that financial assistance is to some extent counterproductive because it affects their entrepreneurial spirit and transforms them into tourism professionals and extras in public events such as Haenyeo Festival, etc. On the other hand, as a criterion of stable preservation of intangible heritage, one can also highlight the stabilisation of the decline in the number of active *haenyeo*, that is, achieving a sustainable level. Although the numbers are improving, they are far from ideal, however I am personally of the opinion that it is quite illusory to expect a reflection of the effect of the safeguarding process on the total number of *haenyeo* in any non-long-term perspective.

In any case, since many unresolved issues remain to be addressed, I find it extremely ungrateful to try to provide more concrete analyses of the future of safeguarding *hae-*

14 For example: Smith and Akagawa, ed. 2009; Smith and Akagawa, ed. 2019; Hafstein 2018; Hamrešak et al., ed. 2013; Adell et al., ed. 2015, etc.

nyeo culture from Jeju Island, especially considering the still immense consequences of the global pandemic of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which will surely leave its mark on cultural and tourism policies in connection with heritage. Furthermore, at this point, I think it would be necessary to further investigate the effects of the second five-year plan and to detect new challenges that are formulated throughout its implementation. Finally, it is quite certain that Halfstein's idea that safeguarding heritage necessarily represents the preservation of the community and its everyday life (Halfstein 2018: 164) can be a guiding thread in this situation.

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