

**HAVING FUN: POPULAR CULTURE, IDENTITY AND REPRESENTATION  
TRANSDISCIPLINARY KNOWLEDGE TO INVENT NEW IMAGINARIES TOGETHER**

**Curatorial proposal for the II Global Youth Culture Forum in Jeju  
By Rosa Pera**

Traveling to remote lands is an activity that became popular in the past century, once the great European expeditions in the world had already happened: to the American continent to find unknown lands, to Asia through the Silk Road or to Antarctica looking for the end of the world. The scientific interest and the opening of new commercial routes gave way at the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the oceanic crossings for pleasure for the well-to-do classes.

Although they were temporarily transfigured into exile routes after the World Wars, recreational routes have been growing again for decades as one of the main leisure activities of developed societies. Thus, they are routes that are offered in the form of tour packages available to the middle classes from all over the world, which also travel by air with successful low cost airlines. The tourism industry is today one of the largest economic sectors of the world economy, and therefore, the main source of development and wealth of countless cities and towns around the world. This is so, mainly because the tourism industry embraces several sectors that depend on it, because its purpose is to solve the needs of travelers. For example, hotels and restaurants, transport companies, stores for goods such as clothing, handicrafts and souvenirs. But most of the profits come from the intersection of the tourism industry and one of the most powerful contemporary industries: the entertainment industry.

Beyond acting as a form of economic growth, it is worth asking what consequences tourism produces in a given territory to other aspects instead of the economy, such as cultural or natural heritage, and what processes of social transformation it generates. And, furthermore, it could be asked if cultural systems are fully involved in the tourism models of territories, and if those models include a cross-cutting approach to key issues of sustainable development such as cultural rights, creativity and diversity, gender perspective, education, environment and climate change, social inclusion or urban planning.

In the nineteenth century, when intercontinental travel and expeditions began to proliferate, it was the thirst of Eurocentric "discovery" that drew the first routes. Once the explorers arrived in unknown lands, they proceeded to study the flora and fauna and came into contact with the indigenous communities. In broad strokes, the first consequences in which these trips derived were the exploitation of the autochthonous resources and the imposition of models of production and behavior to the population. Colonialism was established, opening a process still active today of supplanting and dissolving cultural codes into a new status quo based on political, moral, social and economic conflict.

Nowadays the model that underlies these routes piloted by the tourism-entertainment binomial is global and is imposed not only through economic operations and infrastructures, but also (overlapped with them), through globalized popular culture. Globally recognizable images occupy the most hidden corners



of the leisure routes, welcoming tourists who experience their dreams and recognizing themselves on ways of living through resorts and theme parks specially designed for them.

How does this model affect the autochthonous culture? Where do local imaginaries circulate? How do they coexist with global imaginaries? Have they been overlapped? Have they been assimilated? Have they disappeared? Is it possible to build new collective imaginaries together?

In the II Global Youth Culture Forum of Jeju we propose to approach the forms of contemporary leisure through culture and the arts, with a transdisciplinary approach (art, design, architecture, history, literature, etc.). The starting point will be to observe in the particular context of Jeju, how local knowledge and imaginaries coexist with popular culture driven by the powerful gears of the global tourism and entertainment industries. The objective: to ask ourselves if other epistemologies are possible, other ways to know, to live and to articulate society, through inventing other models of fun designed for Jeju. To do so, we will combine heritage, memory, diversity and creativity in participatory projects that invite the citizens of Jeju to take an active role in the development phase of the proposals that arise.

Thinkers like the Portuguese Boaventura de Sousa contemplate critically the hierarchy that Western thought has established against the other peoples of the world. Thus, what he defines as an "epistemicide" has been produced, that is, the eradication of local knowledge by a single way of thinking and living, which is hegemonic and totalitarian. Sousa came to this consideration after studying different Latin American contexts, where local knowledge and imaginaries have been ignored. What degrees of similarity and difference can we establish between these considerations and the reality in Korean culture, and more specifically in Jeju?

To counteract the processes of epistemicide, Boaventura de Sousa proposes to apply an "ecology of knowledge(s)", that is, a sustainable way of confronting a single and hegemonic model of principles, of understanding and organizing the methods of human knowledge; He therefore proposes to do it through plurality and diversity of knowledge(s). Thus, applying an ecology of knowledge, as he says, "implies renouncing any general epistemology. All over the world, there are not only very diverse forms of knowledge of the subject, society, the way and the spirit, but also many and very diverse concepts of what counts as knowledge and the criteria that can be used to validate it."<sup>1</sup>

In Korean mythology, heroes are usually celestial emperors who merge with nature, taking the body of deer, hawks or dragonflies. They are beings of divine origin with superpowers, such as flying or transfiguration, who star in trips and adventures between magical animals and rituals that are related to Taoism, esoteric Buddhism or Shamanism. Thus, myths, as in many cultures, are cosmogonic visions that narrate the formation of the world and the animal, social and magical order that govern it. In addition, myths give also an explanation to the appearance of the divine, the evolution of humans and their relationship with nature and the unknown.

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<sup>1</sup> Boaventura de Sousa Santos (20ti7): Justicia entre Saberes: Epistemologías del Sur contra el epistemicidioti Madrid: Ediciones Morata, ppti 24titi [Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide]



In these myths, the recondite places and hermetic and impenetrable places for humans and for birds and wild animals are frequent, while fantastic creatures appear that are born from rocks, rivers or the ocean, or especially from mountains, and they are a great influence in the life of humans. For example, Chuhyak, “imaginary animal that protects people from official lawsuits and defamation, and at the same time helps the birth of ministers and high officials in a family”, the white tiger, which facilitates that “children grow smart and come to be ministers of kingdom, and so that the daughters grow virgins, marry and become virtuous ladies” or Jionmu, “animal that symbolizes the god of the energy of the water of the North, so that it protects of material losses and riches, although you can spend whatever you want.”<sup>2</sup>

Strongly represented in popular culture, there are legendary beings that can be born of inert and abandoned objects stained with human blood, like Dokkaebi; they are malicious, pranksters and possessors of magical objects that challenge travelers. In addition, crossing the limits of the fantastic, Dokkaebi are the emblem of the Korean soccer team. Among other heroes and fantastic beings, they all compete in Jeju with Captain America, Mazinger Z and Teddy the Bear, even though the museums that have been dedicated to the Marvel and Disney characters on the island.

Evasion is usually one of the main objectives of activities for fun, but paradoxically is in turn a mirror of the real world and the desires and values of society. Creating and living in other worlds through imagination and fantasy is a powerful form of representation and therefore of identity. In the II Global Youth Culture Forum in Jeju we will make the trip back: to detect, know and imagine new critical and reflective identities (from the past, present and future) with the active participation of young artists, city residents and visitors, to invent other worlds in which to live in diverse and peaceful ways through art and popular culture.

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<sup>2</sup> Pegang Juang (2002): “Asinmguk, de apellido Songhyo”, *Mitos coreanos*. Madrid: Verbum, pag. 223. [“Asinmguk, Songhyo surname”, *Korean Myths*].