

NESsTERS in Action: Travel Logs from the Field

Former NESsTER Kenan Jiang travelled to the south of Chile with NESsT staff to hold workshops for organizations that had been severely struck by the February 27, 2010 earthquake that devastated the country.

Travel Log : Impressions of Tirúa, Concepción, Temuco

By Kenan Jiang

My trip to the south of Chile was defined by charming villages, dramatic weather, and a healthy dose of the non-profit organizations NESsT works with. It began on a Sunday overnight bus when we left the bustling, congested Santiago bus stop en route to Temuco. Here in the south, the green gives way to more green, and the mountains suddenly jut out from the distance to give the appearance of a lush, beautiful region. It rains for a while, stops and then vigorously starts again.

We held our first workshop on self-sustainability at the Foundation Chol-Chol, in the curiously-named town of Chol-Chol, close to Temuco. We gave the NESsT presentation to six organizations, each with 2 or 3 representatives in attendance. Afterwards, we jammed into a small pick-up truck, braving the rain, rocks, and mud for the two-and-a-half hour journey to Tirúa

Our hostess, a woman named Veronica, was there to greet us as we arrived in our pension. She was incredibly warm and friendly and informed us about what it's been like to live in Tirúa for her entire life. She lamented the downtrodden condition of Tirúa with its obvious lack of infrastructure and investment. "We are just waiting for someone to come in and invest in us," Veronica told us over dinner. She emphasized that they were "people of the sea" and that while young talent continues to move out of Tirúa, she is content to stay with her family in the countryside where they have lived for many generations. Her "*pension*" is a converted home where she rents a few rooms to people who are passing by Tirúa on their journey to other places.

In Tirúa, where Mapuche tradition runs deep, the economy is based on resources from the sea, artisanal craftsmanship, and simple agriculture. We spent the next two days with [Relmu Witral](#), a non-profit dedicated to preserving indigenous cultures in the region by selling their traditionally woven products. The workers at Relmu Witral told us that the women are all indigenous weavers who are farmers first, but weave when they can to supplement their income.

We leave Tirúa towards **Concepción** Wednesday night and meet Jorge Tagle, the founder and president of [TPH Concepción](#), one of the organizations NESsT supports through its [Levantando Chile Fund](#). From Jorge's car we saw the damage of the earthquake and the serious infrastructure adjustments that need to occur before it returns to a state similar to before the earthquake.

We visited some of TPH's partner organizations and artisans. One of them was Ramon, a frail old man who is in the leather making business. He explained that his leather making is under threat from rapid manufacturing and he struggles to compete with cheaper imports. He talked about the challenges of selling in the Concepción region and said wanted to establish his craft in Santiago. However, it would be too difficult for him to travel to Santiago given the limitations on how many goods he can carry at one time. Thus, he wanted to expand his selling via TPH offering his goods through the Manos del Bio Bio stores.

In Concepcion, where there was once life, there is now a wetland of dirt and spare driftwood. The streets are full of potholes and cracks and many buildings are closed until further renovation. However, it is a determined place, much like the entire country. Although the earthquake was the most popular topic on people's minds as we passed through towns, people proved their resiliency by doing the best with what they have left and being fiercely proud of their livelihoods.