

Erin Mauffray
Senior, Croft
Thesis Prospectus

ABSTRACT

My project will explore Chilean society's interpretation of the idea of a "seismic culture" and the way this idea manifests itself before, during, and after a seismic event. The project will mainly focus on the earthquake that struck Chile in February of 2010, although some background information on previous earthquakes may be used, as is relevant. The broader goal of the project is to explore the ways societies function in disaster situations, with the hope of suggesting ways to improve the methods of relief. Subjects will be recruited from a broad variety of age groups (over 18) and backgrounds, as I will be using contacts I made while abroad in the country as subjects, and to help me recruit subjects. Subjects will complete questionnaires, one general and/or one specific aimed at collecting information on volunteers. Additionally, subjects will be given the opportunity to give a more extensive account of their experiences and opinions, which may be written statements, as well as oral accounts given through the use of video chat technology. All identifying information of the subjects will be kept confidential. Samples of the questionnaires I will use are attached, and any follow-up interviews will be based upon the information requested in the questionnaires.

PROSPECTUS

The response to the February 2010 earthquake that I witnessed firsthand was a varied response. In some ways, the Chilean people impressed me -- for example, the incredible sense of "solidarity" that seemed to be present throughout the society and bound the citizens together. The slogan of the recovery campaign, "Chile ayuda a Chile" (Chile helps Chile), gives a good, succinct idea of how the Chilean society was supposed to approach the disaster relief. As I talked to different Chileans immediately after the earthquake, I was repeatedly introduced to the term "la cultura sísmica" ("the seismic culture"), that allows Chileans to cope with and move on after seismic disasters such as the 8.8 magnitude earthquake of this year. I was reminded that Chile is a country which must manage the inevitability that every 30-50 years there will be a seismic disaster on a large and/or serious scale.

Further investigation reveals that the general idea of a "seismic culture" is generally, and academically, based upon physical features of an area and its building structures. The Chileans who introduced me to the idea of a "seismic culture" presented it in such a way which led me to believe that the "seismic culture" is just that -- a culture, an intangible feature of the society manifested in the ways in which the citizens of the society approach relief and recovery after seismic disasters. This culture has been presented informally as a social construct, present on the individual, community, and national levels. Both representations of the "seismic culture" may be found faulty. Does Chile have such a culture, structurally and/or socially? It may be argued that such a culture does not exist, or is not fully developed, due to a lack of preparation and a poor response to disaster on the part of governing bodies as well as individual groups.

However, sheer numbers show that, in comparison, the country of Chile has done *something* correctly -- ie: the death toll in the 2010 Haiti earthquake versus the death toll in the Chilean earthquake. Are these differences due to the obvious economic advantages of Chile? Or could this be attributed to some sort of Chilean "seismic culture"?

Thus, my question is this: If such a "seismic culture" exists, how is this feature manifested in Chilean society at the intangible, cultural, social level? Does this compare or coincide with the "seismic culture" as defined academically and architecturally? What political and historical antecedents have provoked Chilean citizens to grasp the idea of a "seismic culture"? Could it be metaphorical? How do different sectors of society interpret the idea? Is there a difference in interpretation between generations? Economic groups? Political organizations? Governmental organizations? Non-governmental organizations? Students? Professionals?

The current plan is to break my thesis into chapters as such: I will begin with an historical and technical review of the seismic "situation" in Chile. The sequence and structure of the following chapters will be determined as I do further research in the most coherent way possible. Ideally, I will be using the questionnaires and interviews, described in the abstract and attached here, as a chapter. I will also be looking into newsprint media, as well as virtual news sources.

Furthermore, I will be examining the Chilean response through outlets on the Internet, blogs, Facebook groups, etc.

As I read and research the material related to the subject, I will have a better idea of the course this project will take. I have several books and papers ready to read, and that is my next step.