

# The Place of Stone Altars: Mapuche community-based tourism that empowers In Curarrehue, Chile

A SENIOR THESIS BY JACK ANDREONI. ENVS 400

## Thesis Statement:

Although Mapuche community-based tourism excludes some members from participating, overall tourism in Curarrehue has caused the revaluation of Mapuche culture that creates a space for economic survival and cultural strength.

### Research Motives :

To understand the deeper meanings of these interactions between tourists and 'local' places, by listening to the stories of community members and their allies, explore issues of accessibility, development, cultural representation, and community control.

### Who Are The Mapuche?

The Mapuche, the largest recognized indigenous group in Chile, comes from a history of racial prejudice, environmental injustice, and poverty (Bengoa). Neoliberal Multiculturalism has opened spaces for development with cultural identity, including Mapuche tourism (Krell, Palomino). However, many Mapuche still struggle for cultural recognition and control of their territories (Haughney, Richards, Vergara and Parraguez).

### Research Methods:

Fieldwork: participatory observation, formal and informal interviews conducted with the following groups:

- 1) Mapuche Entrepreneurs
- 2) Mapuche who do not participate in tourism
- 3) Non-Mapuche allies of tourism development

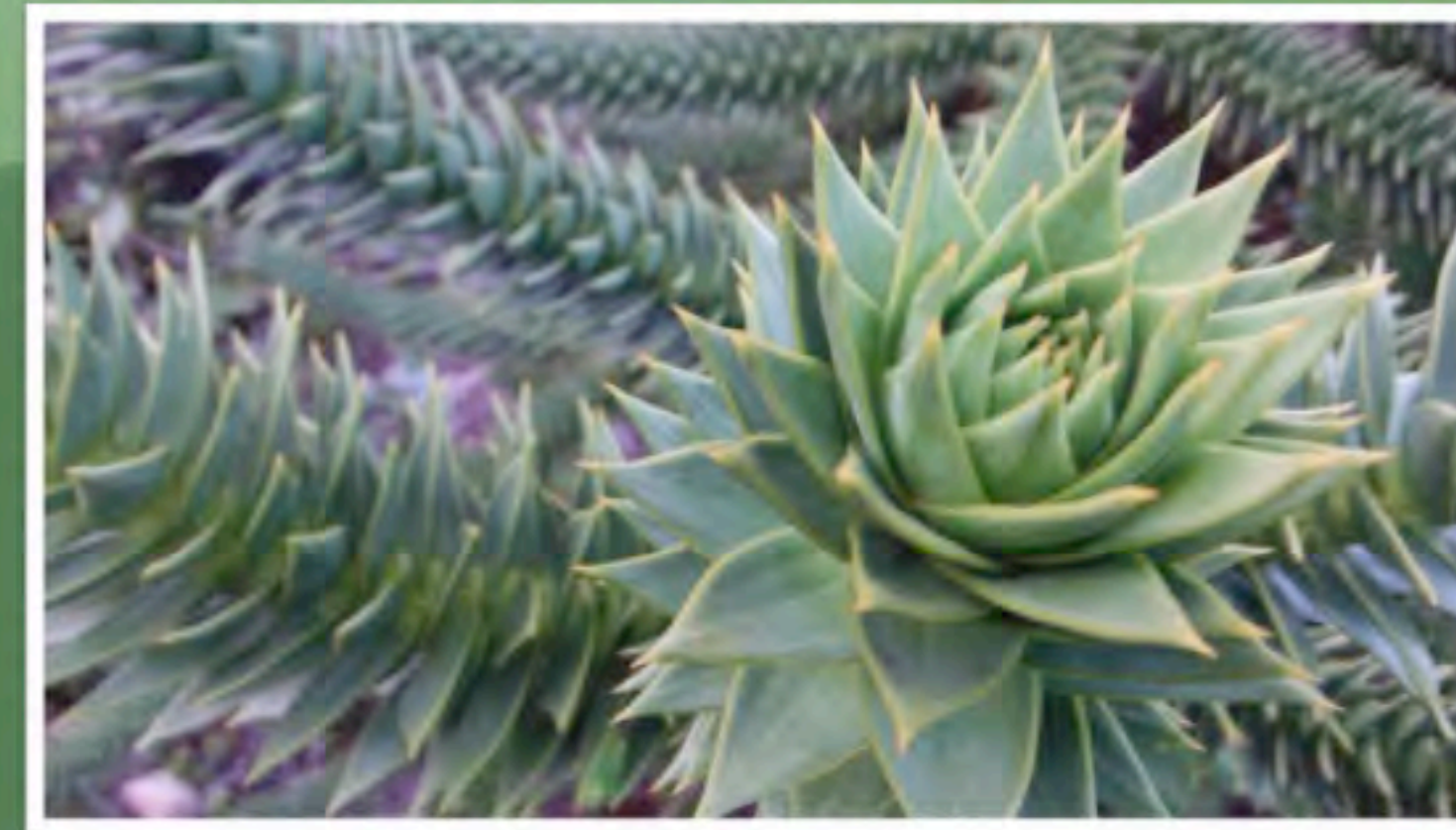
### Mapuche Entrepreneurship:



Within the rural municipality of Curarrehue, Chile many businesses have opened in the past decade that present Curarrehue as a destination strongly rooted in its indigenous heritage: (Mapuche restaurants, Mapuche artisan shops, Mapuche guide services). Together they have formed the organization: *La Asociación feria Walung*, which serves as a local network of support.

Controversy does exist around the idea of "selling culture" as there is a need to meet the expectations of tourist gaze (Urry, Salazar). However, this controversy does not discredit the efforts of Mapuche entrepreneurs. Through community-based organization of the Mapuche involved are also using tourism as an opportunity to distribute wealth and re-valorize their cultural heritage.

### Mapuche Community:



Within this community-based tourism network, Mapuche families have opened up their homes to tourists who come to live and work with families in the communities of Curarrehue to learn about the Mapuche culture.

Tensions regarding *who* gets to be involved in tourism do exist (Salazar). However, both families that practice tourism, and those that do not, agree that tourism adds value to cultural traditions. Community members understand Mapuche identity in different, and sometimes conflicting, ways. Although identity expression through tourism does not expose these tensions, this does not dismiss how tourism fosters ownership of a culture that is globally recognized (Ruiz-Ballesteros, Ramírez).

### Global Connections:



A proposal has been submitted to construct a hydroelectric dam in Curarrehue. This project is one of many being proposed in the zone, and its construction may threaten the livelihoods of the Mapuche and the health of this community-based tourism industry.

The construction of Curarrehue as a tourist destination has created space for global connections that form a 'glocal' network of resistance (Massey). When controlled by the community, tourism can be used to help other Mapuche communities achieve the same goal.

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