

Author's response

Manuscript Number: ARIQ-D-23-01168

Title: Colombia: Unlivable but Happy. Fool's Paradise?

August 6, 2024

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1 Response to Editor

Dear Professor Burger,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a revised draft. We list below in inline format our brief responses to reviewers' comments and attach at the end tracked changes that show precisely the additions and deletions.

Best,
Authors

Changes in general (tracked changes appended at the end):

Overall, we strived to streamline. We have dropped superfluous text and auxiliary ideas. At the same time, we have rearranged and added some text to improve structure and flow.

Notably, we have streamlined introduction focusing on key ideas, and added structure signposts: notably a large one at the beginning: "The paper is structured as follows..." (which also reveals our reasoning)

Likewise, there was much rewriting, reorganization, and also additions in "4 Discussion and Conclusion" section, with 2 added subsections: "4.1 Alternative Explanations and Counterarguments" and "4.2 Take-away for Policy and Practice and Future Research"

We have restructured and shortened abstract and made it reflect better what the paper is about, that its significant parts include contrasts to the West and especially the US; likewise, we added subtitle to the title in this vein.

We believe structure and flow were much improved; still, do note: focus here is unlike most other articles; the article is NOT "standard" structure of lit rev, data, and results; there are at least 2 reasons for our non-standard setup: 1) there is not much of results material: only 2 tables showing and contrasting happiness and livability; and 2) we decided to start with contrasting happiness and livability because this is how the project started, as arguably many others, we were stunned by the apparent chasm between livability and happiness, so this is a starting point for this article

The key contribution is a novel approach to explain the livability-swb chasm using multiple concepts and theories in section 3; in general we cover a wide range of concepts and approaches with 150 references; we also use more livability metrics in table2 than elsewhere in the literature in Colombia.

Reviewer 1 sees many merits in this paper, but signals also several feeble elements, in particular, the lack of a clear contextualization of the Columbian case, the under-representation of a strong and convincing methodological framework, the lack of clear arguments on the Columbian happiness paradox, and a weak Abstract and concluding part. Reviewer 2 appreciates the paper, but raises several critical comments, in particular, the less clear conceptualization of SWB and related concepts, the lack of a clear focus, as well as the lack of a coherent architecture of the paper, and a weak prospective outlook.

see replies to reviewers

2 Response to Reviewer #1

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This is a fascinating study, and it is well-fitted for the special issue.

thank you!

"Colombia: Unlivable but Happy. Fool's Paradise?" examines the paradoxical relationship between subjective well-being (happiness) and objective measures of quality of life in Colombia. The authors argue that despite Colombia's poor performance on various livability indices, Colombians report high happiness levels, suggesting that factors beyond economic prosperity and safety contribute significantly to well-being.

n/a

The following revisions would enhance this interesting work further:

1. The manuscript benefits from a broader and more nuanced theoretical framework that comprehensively integrates existing literature on subjective well-being. This should include discussions on how the Colombian context might differ or align with other global contexts where similar paradoxes are observed. The manuscript should explicitly address how the Colombian case contributes to or challenges existing theories of happiness and well-being.

we have restructured and clarified: theory is more clearly embedded; we make references to latin america, the us, and the west

"how the Colombian case contributes to or challenges existing theories of happiness and well-being"—the main section of the paper, section 3 is mostly devoted to this task

2. While the paper is rich in qualitative descriptions and theoretical discussions, it lacks detailed methodological information about how subjective well-being is measured and compared across different countries. For the paper to have a more robust empirical footing, it would be beneficial to include more details on the survey instruments, sampling methods, and statistical analyses used to assess and compare happiness levels. Realizing this may be hard at this stage, some local empirical studies or information on governance and policymaker instruments could support findings instead.

Subjective Wellbeing (SWB)/happiness is defined in first paragraph of section “1 Happy Colombia.” Livability is defined in first paragraph of section “2 Unlivable Colombia.” And there are signposts to these definitions at the end of introduction

Per “the survey instruments, sampling methods, and statistical analyses used” we clarified: in table 1 caption: “Technical information for WDH is at <https://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl/reports/finding-reports-on-happiness-in-nations/technical-details-to-rank-reports-of-happiness-in-nations-technical-details-to-rank-report-average-happiness-in-nations-2010-2019> and WVS documentation is at <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV7.jsp>.”; in table 2 caption: “For details on each indicator click the link under “Source” column.”

also added in “1 Happy Colombia” actual survey items of WVS/WDH

3. The paper suggests that Colombia's high happiness levels in the face of poor objective quality-of-life measures might challenge the emphasis on economic development and infrastructure in determining well-being. However, it does not sufficiently address potential counterarguments or alternative explanations for the observed phenomenon.

now we have a dedicated section “4.1 Alternative Explanations and Counterarguments”

4. The abstract and conclusion hint at valuable lessons that the world could learn from Colombia regarding happiness and quality of life. The revised manuscript should elaborate more on these lessons, providing specific policy recommendations for Colombia and other countries. This would enhance the manuscript's relevance to policymakers and practitioners in the field of development and well-being.

yes we have re-framed the paper to what are the lessons from colombia, and specifically what other countries can learn, again see “4 Discussion and Conclusion” and “4.2 Takeaway for Policy and Practice and Future Research”

5. The literature review should be updated to include recent studies on subjective well-being, particularly those focusing on Latin America and other regions with similar socio-economic challenges. This will help situate the study within the current state of research and highlight its contribution to ongoing debates.

we have references to mariano rojas, arguably the leading expert on swb in latin america; and use a number of studies from his “Handbook of Happiness Research in Latin America,” (and have several others such as Graham)

also added 1st paragraph in “4 Discussion and Conclusion” on how it fits in the literature and what the contribution is

Minor Revisions: 1. Some sections of the manuscript would benefit from editing for clarity and coherence. Efforts should be made to ensure that the argument flows logically and that key points are articulated. The report could benefit from including tables that summarize essential findings and comparisons, which would help readers better understand the information presented. Additionally, the conclusion section must be improved to summarize the study's key findings, theoretical contributions, and practical implications more effectively.

we edited sections for clarity and coherence
made efforts that argument flows logically and that key points are articulated
we have rewritten and reorganized conclusion section

per “tables that summarize essential findings and comparisons”—there are tables 1 and 2; we do not include “tables that summarize essential findings and comparisons,” which are often used in pure literature reviews and meta analyses—this article is not just a literature review; rather it tries to explain the high happiness and low livability apparent contradiction “fool’s paradise” with theory and literature

2. The concluding section should be strengthened to more directly summarize the study's key findings, theoretical contributions, and practical implications. By addressing these revisions, the manuscript will contribute to the literature on happiness and quality of life, offering insights into the Colombian context and a broader understanding of the factors that contribute to human well-being.

see above

and again, we have a new subsection “4.2 Takeaway for Policy and Practice and Future Research”

3 Response to Reviewer #2

Changes in general (tracked changes appended at the end):

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The key contribution is a novel approach to explain the livability-swb chasm using multiple concepts and theories in section 3; in general we cover a wide range of concepts and approaches with 150 references; we also use more livability metrics in table2 than elsewhere in the literature in Colombia.

The paper explores the "Latin American phenomenon," where Latinos, particularly in countries like Colombia, exhibit high life satisfaction despite challenges such as underdevelopment, social conflict, and poor policy outcomes. The authors argue that traditional measures of livability based on money, consumption, and infrastructure overlook crucial factors. They emphasize that basic commodities are sufficient to satisfy human needs and well-being, while non-commodities like personal freedom and social connections play a significant role. The article suggests that excessive pursuit of commodities, as seen in highly developed nations, may hinder happiness due to overemphasis on unimportant aspects and inhuman environments. The authors propose that Colombia offers valuable lessons for the world and discuss alternative explanations for the apparent contradiction in the country's happiness amid adversity. The possibility of "ignorance is bliss" is also considered. The paper concludes by pointing towards future research directions in understanding this phenomenon.

n/a

Overall assessment and major issues: This paper is of potential added value as their focus is unlike many other articles on subjective well-being (SWB).

yes, thank you, that was one of the goals

While appreciating the effort invested in this paper, in its present condition, I do not consider the manuscript as suitable for publication. Extensive revisions are necessary. Therefore, I recommend rejecting the paper at this time. I encourage the authors to address the outlined concerns and resubmit the revised version for further consideration. I will briefly explain the reasons that lead me to this assessment regarding the quality of the paper.

see below

- The paper briefly introduces various forms of assessing well-being (affective, evaluative, and eudaimonic), referred to as "measurements" by the author. Subsequently, the author mentions sub-concepts such as life satisfaction as an indicator for the evaluative assessment of well-being. The section concludes with, "In this article, we use the concept of subjective WellBeing (SWB) to encapsulate the different accepted metrics in the field. When necessary, we make the distinction between them." (p. 2) As a reader, the relationship between the individual concepts remains unclear. Is SWB synonymous with well-being, and does it encompass all three forms of elicitation (evaluative, affective, and eudaimonic)? The distinction between theoretical concepts and measurement instruments is not apparent, leaving questions about how the theoretical concepts relate to each other. The author notes that "the measurement of SWB has become a relevant component of policymaking" in the introduction. What is the measurement of SWB?

agreed, that part was confusing—we dropped it from the paper, auxiliary points and further discussions are postponed to the appendix; we now have a clear statement on measurement of swb used in first paragraph of "1 Unhappy Colombia," also signaled at the end of introduction

- The terms life satisfaction, subjective well-being, quality of life, and livability of the environment are used interchangeably and inconsistently, causing confusion regarding whether they hold the same theoretical-conceptual meaning and share the same operationalizations. Clear definitions of concepts and their respective measurement tools are needed. This section requires a thorough explanation to understand the later arguments regarding lower levels of SWB.

Subjective Wellbeing (SWB)/happiness is defined in first paragraph of section "1 Happy Colombia." Livability is defined in first paragraph of section "2 Unlivable Colombia." And there are signposts to these definitions at the end of introduction

- The paper lacks a clear objective and does not critically reflect on the paradox of high life satisfaction despite a country's poor livability.

we have rewritten the abstract to better orient the reader; and, again, at the end of intro we have a statement "The paper is structured as follows..." that also signals the objective: to understand an apparent paradox of high happiness despite low livability

there is also added discussion in discussion section

- The promised direction for future research, mentioned in the abstract, is underdeveloped and actually absent in the paper.

Added "4.2 takeaway for policy and practice and future research" section (earlier there was future research section buried in appendix; and future research ideas sprinkled throughout the paper—now integrated in one section)

- The paper's structure is questionable, consisting of 12 pages with an equal number of sections, lacking a coherent thread. It seems more like a compilation of anecdotal evidence, albeit entertaining. The headings are not helpful in conveying the paper's structure. The authors should opt for concise and more informative headings. For instance, it is not clear what the authors mean by "SWB and Development." What type of development is being referred to? Numbering of individual sections is missing.

we have organized better; cut number of sections; have them more descriptive

a sidenote: few pages (12) relative to the number of sections was a bit of an optical illusion: margins were 1cm, font 10pt, and spacing 1.4; now we made it more standard 2cm margins, 11pt font, and 2 lines spacing; and we added some text

While the paper could benefit the scientific community, it requires substantial theoretical embedding, a clear argumentative structure, and explicit recommendations for the research agenda. Currently, the paper is not in a publishable state.

see above; and yes, in this revision we have strived to rewrite in a way to benefit ARIQ reader; we have clarified theoretical embedding; and again improved structure and added future research section

4 Tracked Text Changes

(see next page)

Colombia: Unlivable but Happy. Fool's Paradise?

(No, a Real Paradise, Better than the US)

Tuesday 6th August, 2024 18:28

abstract:

The Latin American phenomenon explains why Latinos are highly satisfied with their lives despite underdevelopment, social conflict, and poor policy outcomes—poor livability of the environment. This mostly theory and review article attempts to understand this apparent contradiction using Colombia, one of the most troubled country in the region. Colombians are happy despite apparently unlivable Colombia—studies apparently quite unlivable but very happy fool's paradise, Colombia, in contrast to apparently very livable but quite unhappy fool's hell, the US, by Western standards—Colombia's poor, corrupt, dangerous, and roads and ports are bad, too. But objective livability We argue that Colombia is not a fool's paradise—genuine happiness is possible in an apparently unlivable environment, because livability tends to be measured mostly in terms of money/consumption/infrastructure misses two points: 1) material comfort, and already very basic commodities are material comfort is good enough to satisfy human needs and produce wellbeing; 2) non-commodities such as personal freedom and social connection not only matter, but also are hampered by happiness. On the contrary, it is the excessive pursuit of commodities. For instance, impeccable organization and physical infrastructure—material comfort, such as that in Singapore or richest parts of the US—not only is unnecessary and insufficient for livability and happiness, but it may actually decrease them—the US, that arguably actually decreases happiness by: 1) having to focus on what's unimportant and overwork, and alienate oneself, and 2) by making an environment and interaction inhuman, sanitized, hospital/airport-like, and alienating. The world has much to learn from a country like Colombia. Yet another possibility that Still, we cannot fully rule out is that ignorance is a bliss—Colombia is a that Colombia is a fool's paradise. We discuss alternative explanations and provide directions for future research.

LIFE SATISFACTION, HAPPINESS, SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING, QUALITY OF LIFE, LIVABILITY, BEST PLACES TO LIVE, COLOMBIA, ALIENATION, DEGROWTH

During the last few decades, academics, governments, and multilateral organizations have produced significant evidence to conclude that economic measures poorly capture social progress (Stiglitz et al. 2009, Lambert et al. 2010). Traditional progress/development measures like income, production, and consumption cannot fully account for people's life experiences, happiness, or emotions. To bridge this gap, the measurement of subjective well-being (SWB) has become a relevant component of policymaking and academic research, informing new directions of policy interventions and promoting broad debates about a better life (Diener 2009). Most of the research and broad debates about SWB concern developed countries' social and economic

~~dynamics. They also reflect the spirit of policies in countries where complex policy problems like violence, corruption, or abject poverty are not the primary policy concern (van Zanden et al. 2020). The dominance of developed countries in the perspective, direction, and practices of wellbeing limit the extrapolation of theories, methodologies, and policy recommendations or emotions (Diener 2009, Stiglitz et al. 2009, Lambert et al. 2020)~~. While acknowledged in theory as inadequate, the predominant focus in world development is still on economy and material comfort. The economic and material comfort champion, the US, offers progress/development lessons to developing countries.¹ At the same time, it is typically overlooked that there are wellbeing lessons from the developing countries. Notably Latin American countries such as Colombia tend to be happier than many developed countries. What can we learn from Colombians?

This article provides a new perspective to understand conflicting findings in the literature on SWB in developing countries. In particular, it sheds light on the possibility of high personal happiness despite underdevelopment, social conflict, and poor policy outcomes. We frame our analysis in Latin America, zooming on Colombia as a case study to explore how personal life satisfaction can co-exist in an apparently unlivable environment. The analysis is situated before the pandemic. COVID-19 has significantly increased poverty in the region (World Bank 2022), which deserves an analysis on its own.

Subjective WellBeing

The most general definition of wellbeing refers to people's feelings, experiences, and perceptions of their overall quality of life, including the positive and negative assessments people make of their lives and how they interpret their experiences (OECD 2013). After decades of refining the measurement of wellbeing, three measurements are widely accepted: evaluative, affective, and eudaimonic (OECD 2013). The evaluative measurement is commonly linked to policy-making discussions and uses two metrics: Cantril's ladder of life scale and overall life satisfaction; both measures use a Likert scale (Ferrer-i-Carbonell and Frijters 2004). Affect measures focus

¹With recent backlash from the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia, and the United Arab Emirates) and others, the de-dollarization and trade re-orientation away from the West, and so forth. Still, the West, and especially the US sees itself as the righteous world leader with the lessons to teach to others-the point well made by world development veteran Jeffrey Sachs, see for instance: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rgMPIhBLp1I>.

~~on measuring emotions (positive and negative) that people feel, like happiness~~

~~The article is structured as follows. We start by documenting the Latin American phenomenon (Rojas 2015, 2019) in Colombia: Colombians (like other Latinos) are satisfied with life (sec. 1) despite low livability (high poverty, worry, or depression (Kahneman and Krueger 2006). Eudaimonic measures focus on the functioning and fulfillment of the person seeking to capture elements of wellbeing such as autonomy, learning, goal orientation, or purpose in life (Huppert et al. 2008). In this article, we use the concept of subjective WellBeing (SWB) to encapsulate the different accepted metrics in the field. When necessary, we make the distinction between them: insecurity, inequality, etc) (sec. 2). Having established an apparent paradox of high happiness despite low livability we move to the theoretical framework to understand it (sec. 3): Veenhoven's 4 qualities of life (2000) are used to map happiness to livability, and Michalos 2 variable theory (Michalos 2014) to describe the apparent contradiction as "fool's paradise," which is then explored with livability (sec. 3.1), folklore (sec. 3.2), and Marx's alienation (sec. 3.3) theories. As a complement to fool's paradise in Colombia we turn to fool's hell (very livable but only moderately happy) in Singapore (sec. 3.4) and the US (sec. 3.5). We finish with discussion and conclusion (sec. 4), alternative explanations and counterarguments (sec. 4.1) and takeaway for policy and practice and future research (sec. 4.2.)~~

~~Subjective WellBeing and Development~~

~~Consistently, the vast literature on subjective well-being shows that countries where people have better individual and social conditions report greater subjective well-being. Scandinavians are closest to achieving the best possible life (Cantril's ladder) (e.g., Helliwell et al. 2020). In addition to the individual conditions of high salaries and basic needs covered, Scandinavia is characterized by the strength of its institutions, respect for civil rights, high interpersonal and institutional trust, high social cohesion, low gender gaps, and low inequality (Martela et al. 2020). Likewise, developed countries with higher GDP per capita report, on average, greater subjective well-being.~~

In the measurements of the best possible life (Cantril scale), the evaluations are higher in the wealthiest nations. In these nations, individuals manage to reach the best possible life thanks to the conditions and enablers provided by governments. However, when SWB is measured through affective balance (positive and negative emotions), the correlation between GDP per capita and SWB is moderate only (Rojas 2015, 2019). The frequency of positive emotions experienced by people in the developed nations is not as high as one may expect. People in more developed countries have a greater chance of achieving materially and socially the best possible state of life. However, the positive emotions they experience (such as positive affect and happiness) are often lower than in developing countries, especially Latin America. SWB is not only economic progress. Personal relationships and positive emotions play a significant role (Campbell et al. 1976). Scandinavian countries like Sweden and Denmark, well known for their high living standards and low inequality, increasingly report low happiness. In developed countries in 2020, people report spending only six hours weekly with friends and family, almost half an hour less than in the previous decade. Moreover, Subjective Wellbeing (SWB)/happiness is defined in first paragraph of section "1 in 11 people report not having close friends or relatives to count on for help (van Zanden et al. 2020). Happy Colombia."

Latin America is one region with low GDP per capita (compared to developed countries), but subjective wellbeing assessments are as high as or higher than those reported in developed countries. In measuring subjective wellbeing based on the emotional state of its inhabitants, Latin America shows one of the highest levels worldwide (Beytía 2016). This has been called in the SWB literature "the Latin American phenomenon" where people declare high satisfaction levels despite high poverty, insecurity, inequality, and low wages (Rojas 2015, 2019). Livability is defined in first paragraph of section "2 Unlivable Colombia."

The high level of SWB in the region is supported by a key SWB predictor: strong affective relationships. In Latin America, the strength of the affective relationships of its people and the ties they build in the communities are one of the population's primary sources of happiness and wellbeing. SWB in this region has social and affective foundations (Yamamoto 2016, Rojas 2015). High SWB is also predicted by satisfaction with family relationships and a higher frequency of positive emotions. The quantity and quality of interpersonal

~~relationships are pivotal for the region's high levels of SWB. Relational wealth, which encompasses the strength and abundance of close and warm interpersonal relations with family, friends, neighbors, or colleagues, is a strong cultural characteristic in the region. On average, 85% of Latinos report having someone to count on in times of trouble. In some countries like Venezuela, Panama, Argentina, and Costa Rica, more than 90% of people report having a good social support network (Rojas 2019).~~

1 Happy Colombia

~~High SWB in the region somehow co-exists with poor policy making. People are affected by factors that have been shown to reduce life satisfaction, such as government corruption, violence, and economic hardship (Rojas 2015). Still, like other Latinos, Colombians are very happy, about 8.5 on 0-10 life satisfaction scale, a score much higher than expected given economic, social, and institutional indicators (PNUD 2023)~~ Subjective Wellbeing (SWB), happiness, wellbeing, and life satisfaction are used interchangeably. Technically, we mean evaluative/cognitive life satisfaction as opposed to affective happiness, positive and negative affects/emotions, or Eudaimonia/flourishing/functioning. Evaluative/cognitive life satisfaction is used in measured in this section, the only section that uses happiness data. For elaboration and auxiliary points see online appendix.

Happy Colombia

A revered (or hated) US politician, Newt Gingrich (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PWA4EmeaLgc>), aptly observes that the US Declaration of Independence doesn't ~~g~~uarantee guarantee happiness, neither it binds the government to produce it for you, it merely guarantees its pursuit. Accordingly, some Americans succeed and some fail this pursuit, and the US as a country doesn't even make it to the top quartile of world happiness rankings (46/160 in World Database of Happiness; table 1).

Colombia's constitution, on the other hand, proposes happiness as the ~~g~~overnment government's business—government should work to increase it: "The general wellbeing and improvement of the population's quality

of life are social purposes of the State." (art 366, https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Colombia_2015). And Colombians are indeed very happy, happier than Americans, but arguably not because of the Colombian ~~goverment~~government, rather despite it—in multiple ways Colombian government and outcomes it produces are a failure ([next section: "Unlivable Colombia"](#)).

Like other Latinos, Colombians are very happy, about 8.5 on 0-10 evaluative/cognitive life satisfaction scale, a score much higher than expected given economic, social, and institutional indicators (PNUD 2023)

Colombia is one of a handful of the happiest countries—both World Values Surveys and World Database of Happiness² rank it top 3 in table 1. A World Values Survey (WVS) SWB item reads: "All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days?" on scale 1='dissatisfied' to 10='satisfied'. World Database of Happiness (WDH) is an aggregate of various surveys, but SWB items are very similar to that in WVS. ~~Colombia's happiness typically ranges between 8 and 8.5 on 1-10 scale.~~ Colombia is outstanding at achieving very high happiness at low economic development. Colombia is happier than all other Latin countries in table 1 and about as happy as Mexico, but Colombia is significantly poorer than Mexico, at least 25% poorer either in nominal or PPP terms.³

²We do not use Gallup data because Gallup data are not meant for research but for commerce—Gallup charges \$30,000 (per year) for ~~data~~—access (authors' inquiry). Clearly happiness industry (Davies 2015), not ~~happiness~~—research. In general, private corporations are often making fortune from tax dollars and students tuition—scholars should resist corporatization of academia (Mills 2012a, Cox 2013, Mills 2012b, Catropa and Andrews 2020, Schmidlin 2015), ~~and corporatization of happiness research (Davies 2015)~~. We advocate use of ~~freely available free~~ World Values Survey (WVS) at <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org>.

³See <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD> and <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.PP.CD>.

Table 1: 10 happiest countries in the world. Data from World Database of Happiness (WDH) 2010-2019 out of 160 countries at worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl/rank-reports/satisfaction-with-life; and World Values Surveys (WVS) 2005-2022 [waves 5-7] out of 88 countries at <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>. [Technical information for WDH is at https://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl/reports/finding-reports-on-happiness-in-nations/technical-details-to-rank-reports-of-happiness-in-nations/technical-details-to-rank-report-average-happiness-and WVS documentation is at](https://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl/reports/finding-reports-on-happiness-in-nations/technical-details-to-rank-reports-of-happiness-in-nations/technical-details-to-rank-report-average-happiness-and-WVS-documentation-is-at) <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV7.jsp>.

WDH			WVS		
rank	country	happiness (1-10)	rank	country	happiness (1-10)
1	Denmark	8.2	1	Puerto Rico	8.4
2	Mexico	8.1	2	Mexico	8.3
3	Colombia	8.1	3	Colombia	8.3
4	Switzerland	8	4	Qatar	8.0
5	Finland	8	5	Norway	7.9
6	Iceland	8	6	Nicaragua	7.9
7	Costa Rica	7.9	7	Tajikistan	7.9
8	Norway	7.9	8	Switzerland	7.9
9	Canada	7.9	9	Uzbekistan	7.9
10	Qatar	7.8	10	Ecuador	7.8

Unlivable Colombia

2 [Unlivable Colombia](#)

[Livability is the degree of fit between the environment and human needs \(Veenhoven 2014\).](#) [Livability is measured in table 2 in this section, with further discussion in section “3.1 Livability Theory: Human Needs”](#)

In sharp contrast to superb Colombian happiness, Colombia is not livable or has low [objective](#) quality of life (QOL), as measured with objective indicators in table 2.⁴

⁴ Colombia scores mediocre or low on all indicators in table 2. Still, there are many other ways to measure QOL. UsNews, for instance, ranks Colombia 68/78. World Economic Forum provides indicators, too—see [Supplementary Online Material \(SOM\) online appendix](#).

Table 2: Livability/Quality Of Life (QOL): objective indicators. [For details on each indicator click the link under "Source" column.](#)

Indicator	Value	Source
2019 poverty (national benchmark)	42%	https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.NAHC?locations=CO
2011 median daily income/cap PPP USD	\$7	https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/09/23/seven-in-ten-people-globally-live-on-10-or-less-per-day/
2019 percent on <\$5.5/day	30%	https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.UMIC?locations=CO
2017 R/P 10%	40	https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.DST.10TH.10
2020 unemployment rate	15%	https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.TOTL.ZS?locations=CO
2020 freedom rank	96/210	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-world/scores
2021 corruption rank	87/180	https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021/index/color
2020 political stability, no violence/terrorism pctile	20th	https://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/Home/Reports
2020 rule of law pctile	34th	https://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/Home/Reports
2021 working conditions decile	bottom decile	https://www.globalrightsindex.org/en/2021/countries/color
2018 quality of roads rank	110/137	https://reports.weforum.org/pdf/gci-2017-2018-scorecard/WEF_GCI_2017_2018_Scorecard_EOSQ057.pdf
2021 victims of intentional homicide rank	top decile	https://dataunodc.un.org/dp-intentional-homicide-victims
2023 criminality rank	2/193	https://ocindex.net/rankings?f=rankings&view=List

Some of the objective indicators of quality of life from table 2 are unthinkably grim: About a third of Colombians live on less than \$5.50 a day (2019). Poverty (national benchmark) is at 42%—the whole nation has a higher poverty rate than one of the poorest cities in the US, Camden NJ, at 36% (also national benchmark, census.gov/quickfacts/camdencitynewjersey). Median daily PPP per capita income in 2011 was at \$7 (the US was at \$56). In terms of working conditions, Colombia is in the bottom decile: there are murders and impunity, union-busting and dismissals. R/P 10% is the ratio of the average income of the richest 10% to the poorest 10%—Colombia ranks 3rd out of 70 at a whooping 40—top decile of Colombians makes on average 40x the average of the poorest decile—even greater disparity than in the unequal US at 30. Unemployment rate is at 15%, with informal labor at about 50% of the workforce (Hurtado 2016).

All of that—precarious labor, poverty, and inequality should lead to unhappiness. Inequality in Latin America was found to have negative effects on happiness as it signals persistent unfairness (Graham and Felton 2006)—unfairness seems to be more ~~detrimental~~ than ~~detrimental~~ that inequality (Starmans et al. 2017). Inequality is a stark feature of Colombian life, and it is inequality that has sparked recent mass protests ([International Crisis Group 2021](#)). ⁵ ~~Inequality is a stark feature of Colombian life, and it is inequality that~~

⁵ ~~In Colombia, inequality is related to gaps in rural and urban areas. The perceived well-being in the country is associated with economic circumstances and access to education. However, those in the top and bottom quantiles of SWB value the domains that matter most for their SWB differently. For those in the bottom 20% of life satisfaction, education, income, and employment are the most relevant factors, whereas for those in the upper 20%, standard of living, housing affordability, and civic engagement matter the most (Burger et al. 2021b).~~

~~has sparked recent mass protests (International Crisis Group 2021).~~

Colombia is still being haunted by violence and conflict, much of which is rural (Turkewitz (2021), [hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/colombia](https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/colombia)). Colombia is less stable and more violent than 80 percent of the countries—in table 2 metric “political stability and absence of violence and terrorism” is only at 20th percentile. Colombia is only partly free, ranked at 96/210, quite corrupt at 87/180, and Rule of Law is problematic—below about 2/3 of countries. Crime rates are high: in terms of homicides Colombia ranks in top decile, and by one “criminality” index it ranks as the 2nd most “criminal” country in the world (after Myanmar; out of 193 countries.)⁵

In terms of quality of roads Colombia ranks 110/137—part of the problem is mountains, yet, for example, equally mountainous Ecuador has relatively succeeded in road building. Transport is the blood of the society (e.g., De Vos et al. 2013)—roads are a basis for travel, commerce, and trade, especially that Colombia has no rail.

~~Unlivable but Happy—“Fool’s Paradise”?~~

3 ~~Unlivable but Happy—“Fool’s Paradise”?~~

In previous two sections we have established that Colombia is happy, but unlivable. Hence, it could be labeled a “Fool’s Paradise,” a happy paradise, yet a fool’s paradise, because it is unlivable and so there is no reason to be happy.

Now we will examine this apparent contradiction. The goal of this study is to try to explain this apparent massive mismatch or paradox, and spark the debate/future research.

It is instructive to start with Veenhoven’s 4 qualities of life (2000) in table 3. Life chances as an outer quality in first cell (livability of environment) should in theory correspond with life results as an inner quality in last cell (satisfaction of person). That is, a livable place should be happy.

⁵Although it is probably an overstatement in terms of how crime affects an average person—this “criminality” index weighs heavily organized crime networks: <https://ocindex.net/report/2023/02-about-the-index.html>.

	outer qualities	inner qualities
life-chances	livability of environment	life-ability of the person
life-results	utility of life	satisfaction

Table 3: Veenhoven's 4 qualities of life (2000)

Colombia's low livability/QOL should result in low satisfaction/happiness—it is unexpected for Colombia to be one of the very happiest countries in the world. ~~The goal of this study is to spark the debate and provide directions to explain this massive mismatch or paradox.~~ Colombia scores mediocre or low on most livability/QOL indicators, but tops rankings of satisfaction/happiness. In other words, it appears to be unlivable but happy, a so called “Fool’s Paradise,” a place where people are subjectively happy, despite objective misery (Michalos 2014). An intersection of QOL and SWB can be visualized in a 2x2 matrix in table 4—expected outcomes are lo-lo or hi-hi, but there can also be unexpected lo-hi “fool’s paradise” or hi-lo “fool’s hell.”

	lo livability	hi livability
lo SWB	real hell [deprivation, unhappy poor]	fool’s hell [dissonance, unhappy rich]
hi SWB	fool’s paradise [adaptation, happy poor]	real paradise [wellbeing, happy rich]

Table 4: Michalos 2 variable theory: fool’s paradise and fool’s hell (Michalos 2014). Cummins classification is shown in square brackets (Sirgy 2002, p.61). For other examples of fool’s paradise and fool’s hell see Okulicz-Kozaryn and Valente (2019).

There is a number of theories and explanations for high happiness despite low livability. The remainder of this paper is devoted to these: first two happiness theories (livability and folklore), second Marx theory of alienation, and finally a complementary look from the opposite side (very livable but only moderately happy): fool’s hell in Singapore and the US.

Livability Theory

3.1 Livability Theory: Human Needs

A major and ideally fitting happiness theory, specifically about the link between livability and SWB, is Veenhoven’s livability/needs theory (Veenhoven and Ehrhardt 1995, Veenhoven 2014). Humans, like all animals, have needs, as those on the Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow [1954] 1987)—the more the needs are satisfied, the more happiness—places or societies that satisfy human needs well are livable or have high QOL:

Societies are systems for meeting human needs, but not all societies do that job equally well.

Consequently, people are not equally happy in all societies.

Improvement of the fit between social institutions and human needs will result in greater happiness.

(p. 3645 Veenhoven 2014)

The apparent Colombian chasm between livability and happiness may point to the limitations of livability theory. But we argue that, counter-intuitively, the livability theory may mostly hold true because: 1) Mediocre or even moderately poor development (physical and institutional infrastructure) is already good enough to satisfy most basic human needs and make a place livable; 2) Physical and institutional infrastructure mostly serves only first two steps of Maslow's pyramid (physiological and safety). ⁶ Human physiological needs are simple and easily satisfied without much economic or institutional development. 3) Higher needs such as personal freedom and social connection that are critically important for livability are rarely properly captured by livability metrics. ⁴⁾ Given always limited resources and attention, there is an opportunity cost. Excessive pursuit of money or consumption at person level, or economic growth at community or society level sacrifices non-commodities such as personal freedom and social connection notably through overwork and alienation ⁶ as elaborated in later section "Theory of Alienation."

~~A notable human need~~ This last point, # 4), is an important mechanism that we cannot overemphasize, and it is often overlooked. Next we provide examples of human needs that are overlooked by livability/QOL indices ~~is biophilia~~ . These are human needs—they do count towards livability. In the examples we focus on Colombia, and also provide contrasts to the developed countries, and indicate trade-offs/opportunity costs.

Biophilia (Fromm 1964, Wilson 2021), a need for contact with ~~nature—"nature is nature is a fundamental human need, yet usually forgotten. "Nature is~~ not a place to visit. It is home" (Gary Snyder). There is a clear tradeoff between economic growth and nature abundance and preservation, for instance, the more urbanization, the less natural the human habitat. Or next door in Brazil—the more economic expansion and

⁶ ~~Human physiological needs are simple and easily satisfied without much economic or institutional development.~~

⁶ ~~As elaborated in later section "Theory of Alienation."~~

growth, the less Amazon rainforest~~rain forest~~. Climate change is a critical challenge for human needs as it endangers the very habitat of homo sapiens (Pachauri et al. 2014), and again, the more economic growth, the worse the environmental degradation (e.g., Klein 2014), indeed a reasonable course of action is to de-grow the economies (Hickel 2020, Kallis 2011), especially the rich and carbon intensive ones such as the US.⁶ Per Colombian natural resources use and economic growth see discussion in Rubiano (2022).

Related to biophilia and climate change is biodiversity,~~which also~~. Biodiversity improves happiness (Adjei and Agyei 2015, Prescott and Logan 2017). Nature is extraordinary in Colombia. Colombia has 2nd largest biodiversity after Brazil, despite being 7x smaller in area. Colombia has just about any type of natural amenities. Exposure to nature (as opposed to cities) is the key ingredient for happiness (Pretty 2012, Tesson 2013, Thoreau 1995 [1854]).

Another Social connection is a human need, and a key to happiness is social connection (Tönnies [1887] 2002, Lane 2000, McMahon 2006, Putnam 2001), and there is plenty of social connection in Colombia. Colombians are extraordinarily social, friendly, outgoing and spontaneous—social gatherings, events and festivals are widespread, frequent and long-lasting. Again, there is a tradeoff, the more focus on money, the longer the work hours, the less social connection.

And it is not just wide spread but also deep social connection. The high level of SWB in Latin America, including Colombia, is supported by a key SWB predictor: strong affective relationships. In Latin America, the strength of the affective relationships of its people and the ties they build in the communities are one of the population's primary sources of happiness and wellbeing—SWB in this region has social and affective foundations (Yamamoto 2016, Rojas 2015). High SWB is also predicted by satisfaction with family relationships and a higher frequency of positive emotions. The quantity and quality of interpersonal relationships are pivotal for the region's high levels of SWB. Relational wealth, which encompasses the strength and abundance of close and warm interpersonal relations with family, friends, neighbors, or colleagues, is a strong cultural characteristic in the region. On average, 85% of Latinos report having someone to count on in times of trouble. In some

⁶~~Recommendations about Colombian economic growth and development are beyond the scope of this study, but see some discussion for instance in Rubiano (2022).~~

countries like Venezuela, Panama, Argentina, and Costa Rica, more than 90% of people report having a good social support network (Rojas 2019). This is in contrast to developed countries where people report spending only six hours weekly with friends and family, almost half an hour less than in the previous decade (van Zanden et al. 2020).

Freedom is a great human need, perhaps worth dying for.⁶ As a movie character Scottish warrior William Wallace put it:

Fight and you may die. Run, and you'll live...at least a while. And dying in your beds, many years from now, would you be willing to trade all the days, from this day to that, for one chance—just one chance—to come back here and tell our enemies that they may take our lives but they'll never take our freedom! (imdb.com/title/tt0112573)

Colombia scores average on freedom listed earlier as a QOL metric in table 2, but that is one kind of freedom: “freedom from” (negative, objective): be no slave, live in a free country, have no coercion, free from restrictions/impediments; lack of obstacles. But there is another kind of freedom: “freedom to” (positive, subjective): be able to choose, control and direct one’s own life; presence of control. On scale 1-10, world’s average is about 7; the legendary land of the free, the US, scores higher at 7.7, but Colombia scores higher yet at 8 (Okulicz-Kozaryn 2014, 2015). Surely, the US does have many freedoms, but Colombians (and Mexicans, too) actually do feel more free than people in the US. Again, arguably Arguably one reason for lower feeling of freedom in the US is too much focus on work, money, and consumption. The idea is further elaborated in “Theory of Alienation” section.

~~Folklore's Theory: Colombia's "Good Energy"~~

3.2 Folklore's Theory: Colombia's "Good Energy"

⁶As a movie character Scottish warrior William Wallace put it: Fight and you may die. Run, and you'll live...at least a while. And dying in your beds, many years from now, would you be willing to trade all the days, from this day to that, for one chance—just one chance—to come back here and tell our enemies that they may take our lives but they'll never take our freedom! ()

Folklore theory is an attractive explanation of fool's paradise. The folklore theory states that happiness is a product of culture—tradition, national character and widely held notions about life determine one's happiness (Veenhoven and Ehrhardt 1995). Happiness is the reflection of broadly held perceptions about life which are rooted in traditions and the culture of a society (Veenhoven and Ehrhardt 1995). If a culture has an optimistic outlook on life regardless of circumstances, future generations will remain positive. Thus, a society may be happy, regardless of the socioeconomic situation, because of cultural influences (Veenhoven and Ehrhardt 1995). In other words, one can wear pink glasses and be happy no matter the circumstances (or see through dark lenses or have bleak outlook and be unhappy no matter the circumstances). This is in sharp contrast to livability theory, where happiness is a result of person's experience, satisfaction of her needs.

A Peruvian social psychologist specializing in happiness argues that the origins of Latin happiness can be traced to:

the minimalist well-being lessons of Andean and Amazonian small traditional communities which constitute the grounds of Latin American happiness, a life style that mimics the ancestral environment, the deep nature where the happiness brain wiring occurred; a physical and social environment that naturally activates the brain pleasure circuits. Culture resemble evolutionary needs; resources to achieve needs are available for everyone; positive, interdependent collectivistic interaction is ingrained in behaviour, supporting, working, competing, and sharing. (Yamamoto 2016, p.45)

Then Colombian happiness is due to tradition and culture (folklore theory), but notably at the same time happiness stems from satisfying one's needs as tradition and culture fit human needs (livability theory). This is a key point: folklore theory is in sharp contrast to livability theory, but of tradition and culture help satisfy human needs, the two theories are not contradictory.

There is an indigenous concept of "Buen Vivir" (Good Living) (Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo-Guevara 2017), similar to Aristotelian "Eudamonia"—both emphasize harmony and community. Buen Vivir is also about environment and food sovereignty, and it arguably contributes to SWB in Colombia, as it does in Ecuador

(Guardiola and García-Quero 2014). Notably, Buen Vivir helps to explain an apparent fool's paradise—economic poverty is relative—it depends on specific way of life. For instance, households that grow their own food and are in an indigenous community depend less on money to be happy (García-Quero and Guardiola 2018). Likewise, kibbutzniks (Morawetz et al. 1977) and Amish (Surowiecki 2005) are able to be happy despite being poor. Francia Marquez, an indigenous Colombian vice president, came up with a similar concept to Buen Vivir, “Vivir Sabroso,” to live in harmony with nature, traditions, and community. ~~Vivir Sabroso also has an activist/political angle to free and emancipate blacks and indigenous folks to live life fully with dignity and without fear.~~ “vivir sabroso no es vivir con plata, vivir sabroso es vivir sin miedos” (“living tasty is not living with money, living tasty is living without fear.”)

The folklore theory ~~a less known happiness theory, defines happiness in terms of the reflection of broadly held perceptions about life which are rooted in traditions and the culture of a society (Veenhoven and Ehrhardt 1995)~~. ~~For example, if a culture has an optimistic outlook on life regardless of circumstances, future generations will remain positive. Thus, a society may be happy, regardless of the socioeconomic situation, because of cultural influences (Veenhoven and Ehrhardt 1995).~~

~~The folklore theory~~ is about national disposition/trait/character. It does appear that Colombians have slow-paced familial/social cheerful/happy disposition, which arguably is conducive for happiness. Colombian happiness does appear very real, however, rather than just being due to cognitive cultural norms, wearing pink glasses. And again, it is not just due to culture in itself, rather due to culture that is aligned with human needs and satisfies them, so the environment is livable (livability theory).

Colombians celebrate over 3,000 festivals or carnivals in small towns or large cities and have about 20 holidays per year. Folklore and carnivals are part of the festive character of the country. The government uses them as tools to promote reconciliation and build social fabric and identity (Gutiérrez and Cunin 2006). In Colombia, following a robust pattern in Latin America, collectivist values are ingrained in the culture (Mensing 2002). Family is at the center of collective values, close friends follow, and in the exterior layer are neighbors and the community. This interdependent collectivism is at the core of Latin American happiness (Yamamoto

2016).

Proper treatment of the folklore theory is left for the future research as authors' anthropological and historical expertise is limited—but we discuss below ~~some~~ popular explanations for Colombia's happiness—future research can test them properly and systematically.

~~We start with authors' personal observations, an anecdotal evidence. In Colombia there is human factor, good energy that we have lost in the West (Freud et al. 1930). It arguably does appear that the US (and the West) has given up some humanity to win the economic race. Colombia (and Latin America) gave up less humanity, remained happy, but lost the economic race hasn't dominated the world economically. Fischer (1973, p.233) put it well in large metropolises urbanites pay "the emotional price for economic wellbeing"—likewise, we argue, so do Americans, Singaporeans, and other rich. Colombians' attitude and approach to life is spontaneous unbridled joy similar to what Marcuse and Fromm postulated (Marcuse 2015, Fromm 2013, 2012, 1964, [1941]~~

⁶ also reminiscent of Nietzsche's ideal of a child—curious, spontaneous, creative, and innocent (Nietzsche 1896). It is present time orientation—not living in the past or worrying about future, happy-go-lucky free spirit without shame or guilt—in sharp contrast to the West, where anxiety and calculating attitude prevail.⁶ The US way of life is unnaturally fast and mostly about money (Easterlin 1973), aka “busyness” (being busy with work all the time is very desirable) (Gershuny 2005, Musk 2018). The US way of life is also full of stress and anxiety even outside of work and money pursuit. Another source of stress and anxiety may be the constant drive to excel in everything, be perfect, and keep up with the Joneses (Frank 2012, Manson 2015) so well portrayed in “American Beauty” and “Crash” movies.⁶

~~Yet another source of stress and anxiety is quantity and quality of social relationships in the US, a capitalistic society, social relationships are about business, not about actual meaningful social contact (Horowitz 2022, Okulicz-Kozaryn~~

⁶ Marcuse (2015) contains many valuable insights as per freedom, alienation, and wellbeing much of which is a critique of Western or especially the US way of life, and much of which seem to materialize in Colombia.

⁶ But see Banfield (1967, 1974) it could be also culture of poverty that results in poor development. Yet, not caring too much can be actually what is needed for much of a society in the West—see wonderfully refreshing Manson (2015).

⁶ Excellence is pervasive, e.g., Plano TX, has on its official logo “City Of Excellence.” But excellence or perfection is not human, on the contrary, to err is human. Pursuit of perfection/excellence generates arms race and constantly raises the bar, creating even more stress and anxiety in a vicious cycle, and ultimately by definition creates mass failure—humans by definition are not perfect, and there can only be one or a handful of winners in any race (Frank 2012, Manson 2015). In addition to stress and anxiety, shame and guilt are arguably created as well.

~~As compared to calculating and fake Americans, Colombians are spontaneous, innocent, closer to human nature, and more real. Colombians do not pay much attention to economics and politics. Life is more about family, friends, and fun.~~

~~In Cali, the third largest city in the country, SWB has been measured annually since 2014. Through face-to-face surveys, over 1,200 residents are surveyed each year about what matters for their SWB. Consistently, Caleños are very happy (on average 8.5 on 0-10 scale)–and what matters the most for their wellbeing are family and personal relations. Very few consider politics, corruption, or other adverse external circumstances in their inner wellbeing assessments (Martínez and Short 2020).~~

~~Finally, let's move to popular media/popular culture explanations. Two popular media articles are informative: [Bargent \(2016\)](#), [Wallace \(2017a\)](#)~~ [Bargent \(2016\)](#) and [Wallace \(2017a\)](#).

According to an Englishman living in Medellin these are the things that make it happy in Colombia (Bargent 2016): putting most importance on family, friends, and fun–bravado and blind optimism may help, too; having less entitlement and appreciating what one has, having joy in small things, e.g., cheap coffee/alcohol are just fine; not worrying and not expecting much ("tranquilo.")

Bargent (2016) observes: "Colombia violence and cruelty became frighteningly routine"—indeed people can get used to just about anything (Brickman et al. 1978), and again, even though the violence is frequent, it used to be even more prevalent in the 80s and 90s—and happiness can be produced through relative advantage or improvement (Michalos 1985).

Bargent (2016) wonders further that in Colombia emotions change seamlessly and effortlessly between shame and pride, despair and hope, sorrow and happiness—but shouldn't they? Isn't being natural, simple, and easy-going a good thing? As opposed to the US, where one is supposed to pretend to just be perfect, happy, and busy working as in "American Beauty" movie. "Surface acting" (faking emotions that are deemed appropriate) is emotionally draining (Brooks 2022).

Wallace (2017a) offers many illustrative quotes by Colombians and about Colombians:

~~"~~

Money is nice but it's not the most important thing.⁶ In general we are a culture that values what you have,⁷ and "We love people and music."⁸ Colombians are innocent. They're curious.⁹ [..] Colombians have become indifferent to situations of war. In other words, if the problem does not touch me directly, I must feel grateful, satisfied, optimistic, lucky.¹⁰ [..] Colombians have always demonstrated incredible, Herculean and powerful resilience to war, death and to the harsh history of violence and diplomatic failures.¹¹ [..] Colombians feed this resilience through human connections and the communal experience.¹² [..] We live for parties, holidays, and fill the void with a fanaticism for sporting events and beauty pageants and entertainment.¹³ [..] The dance frees you. It is a way of expression and feeling. Here the music is carried in the blood, in the veins, in our heart. It's a great passion we carry throughout our lives.¹⁴

Davies (2022) adds few happy Colombian traits: warm and polite, deeply affectionate among friends, and kind to strangers; loves to party, reveres, and adores their family, and is so enthusiastic about life. Moreno (2013) lists some intriguing hypotheses as to happiness predictors that could be used in the future research: biodiversity, climate diversity, plenty of festivals/holidays, healthy lifestyle and food, dancing.

Theory of Alienation

7

3.3 Theory of Alienation

"Alienation is the transformation of people's own labor into a power which rules them" (marxists.org/subject/alienation). Alienation means separation of a person from the conditions of meaningful agency—a

⁶ Wallace (2017a) further explains: "Colombian salsa, as opposed to other forms, is denoted by faster syncopations that match the people's natural energy. It's an egalitarian genre, accessible to everyone, and it seems to make the entire country happy. But is it a different experience than in other countries, like, say, with Brazilians and samba?" "I think there are several differences [...] Our dance is much more sociable. It's necessary to dance salsa as a couple or in a group. There is a more direct connection. For these reasons, it's been gaining importance in the world." "Salsa is a refresher of human dignity. It overshadows inequity and discontent with sharp rhythms and the madness of love. It closes social distances because it requires people to embrace each other in a moment of eye contact, the feel of the skin, bringing them together with movement, helping them to know each other and see the best in each other. It has a long cultural heritage of peace."

⁷ The Marx's concept seems close to a more modern psychological concept of dissociation—see SOM.

typical situation is when a person does not own means of production—such a person is only an appendage of a machine (Horowitz 2022). The overall alienation consists of alienation from: the product of labour, the activity of labour, one's own specific humanity, and others/society.~~For elaboration see Horowitz (2022) and~~

7

In Colombia there is human factor, good energy that we have lost in the West (Freud et al. 1930). It arguably does appear that the US (and the West) has given up some humanity to win the economic race. Colombia (and Latin America) gave up less humanity, remained happy, but lost the economic race (hasn't dominated the world economically). Fischer (1973, p.233) made an useful observation on large cities: urbanites pay "the emotional price for economic wellbeing"—likewise, we argue, so do Americans, Singaporeans, and other rich societies—as elaborated in "the US: Fool's Hell?" and "Singapore: Fool's Hell?" sections.

Colombians' attitude and approach to life is spontaneous unbridled joy—similar to what Marcuse and Fromm advocated (and what has been lost in the West) (Marcuse 2015, Fromm 2013, 2012, 1964, [1941] 1994), also reminiscent of Nietzsche's ideal of a child—curious, spontaneous, creative, and innocent (Nietzsche 1896).

It is present time orientation—not living in the past or worrying about future, happy-go-lucky free spirit without shame or guilt—in sharp contrast to the West, where anxiety and calculating attitude prevail.

On the other hand, perhaps Latin culture simply could be just culture of poverty (Banfield 1967, 1974) that leads to poor development. Yet, not caring too much can be actually what is needed for much of a society in the West—see wonderfully refreshing Manson (2015).

The US way of life is unnaturally fast and mostly about money (Easterlin 1973), aka "busyness" (being busy with work all the time is very desirable) (Gershuny 2005, Musk 2018). The US way of life is also full of stress, anxiety, and alienation even outside of work and money pursuit. Another source of stress and anxiety may be a need to keep up with the Joneses, and the constant drive to excel in everything, be perfect (Frank 2012, Manson 2015)—so well portrayed in "American Beauty" and "Crash" movies. Excellence is pervasive, e.g., Plano TX, has on its official logo "City Of Excellence." Rutgers University is a place "where

⁷For elaboration see Horowitz (2022) and marxists.org/subject/alienation. The Marx's concept seems close to a more modern psychological concept of dissociation—see online appendix.

excellence is earned" (rutgers.edu/excellence.)

But excellence or perfection is not human, on the contrary, to err is human. Pursuit of perfection/excellence generates arms race and constantly raises the bar, creating even more stress and anxiety in a vicious cycle, and there can only be one or a handful of winners in any race (Frank 2012, Manson 2015). In addition to stress and anxiety, shame and guilt are arguably created as well.

Yet another source of stress and anxiety is quantity and quality of social relationships—in the US, a highly capitalistic society, social relationships are about business, not about actual meaningful social contact (Horowitz 2022, Okulicz-Kozaryn 2020). As compared to calculating and fake Americans, Colombians are spontaneous, innocent, closer to human nature, and more real. Colombians do not pay much attention to economics and politics. Life is more about family, friends, and fun.

In Cali, the third largest Colombian city, over 1,200 residents are surveyed each year since 2014 about what matters for their SWB (Martínez and Short 2020). What matters the most are family and personal relations. Very few consider politics, corruption, or other adverse external circumstances in their inner wellbeing assessments (Martínez and Short 2020). Then while in some ways livability is poor, it filters less into happiness.

Colombians appear to be full of agency in contrast to alienated Americans. For instance, in Colombia, pull over from the road and right there on a roadside you get a friendly personal cup of coffee. In the US, you can go to a Starbucks that feels like hospital or a hospital or an airport—robotic and inhuman.⁸ Starbucks workers (not to mention McDonald's and other fast foods) do seem to be alienated both from the product and the activity—they have no freedom, autonomy or latitude over the product and almost none over labor (there are strict procedures that must be followed).

Same holds for other chains that dominate the US, and could be extended to other businesses, delivery for instance. US Amazon drivers have cameras and motion detectors in a truck, and to meet the quota sometimes

⁸If you are from a developed country, you probably protest the proposition and think that Starbucks is friendlier, warmer and cozier etc, than a hospital. Then you should go to a developing country, non-tourist destination (no Cartagena, no Cancun, etc) and hang out spend time with locals for several at least few months.

~~they~~ have to pee in the bottle (Moyer 2022). Similarly in warehouses, workers are wearing a bracelet with GPS, and to meet the quota sometimes have to restore to painkillers that are freely available from dispensaries throughout the warehouse (Streitfeld and Kantor 2015, Guendelsberger 2019). What else could be a better example of a loss of humanity or de-humanization than a human wearing a bracelet with GPS eating painkillers and working alongside robots in a giant warehouse? ⁹ Movie fiction is becoming reality—see "Elysium" ([imdb.com/title/tt1535108](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1535108)). Of course, not all workers suffer in such dire conditions, but this is arguably the trend. If innovative and efficient Amazon does it, others are likely to follow, or be out of business. In Colombia, on the contrary, much of delivery is informal—often a guy on a motorcycle who has plenty of autonomy and freedom over execution of his job. In fact, about half of the Colombian economy ~~is informal~~ informal labor is at about 50% or more of the workforce (cited in Hurtado 2016) or more is informal (cited in Hurtado 2016)

⁹
~

And there are two other types of alienation: from oneself and society—if one performs highly specialized task in a repetitive fashion for long hours (~~much~~ most of the US workforce), one becomes alienated from herself and the society. This can be easily observed after working hours—the US workers are like ghosts without much life in them and without much interaction (Putnam 2001, Duany et al. 2001). Colombians, on the other hand, are not alienated—their life is about family, friends, and fun, not about money—less money orientation, less alienation (Okulicz-Kozaryn 2020).

As per livability theory (Veenhoven 2014), society is a system to satisfy human needs, but there are multiple serious discontents of the Western society and many human needs are suppressed and not satisfied (Freud et al. 1930). Notably highly capitalistic societies, such as the US, serve to satisfy the capitalists, rather than the working people (Marx [1867] 2010).¹⁰

⁹ Movie fiction is becoming reality—"Elysium"—()

⁹ ~~Colombia has a high prevalence of informal work above 50% and workers~~ Workers in informal sector are less happy (Hurtado et al. 2017). This would contradict alienation hypothesis, but it doesn't take into account confounders such as lower pay, lack of benefits, ~~etc and instability~~.

¹⁰ ~~To be fair, so far alternatives to capitalism such as communism did have failed spectacularly say as in Soviet Union and continue to fail in Venezuela and elsewhere. But what about fully automated luxury communism (Bastani 2019)? Furthermore, to be fair, there are many great things about the West and especially the US: vibrant international melting pot—Colombia may be a microcosm of Latin America, but US may be a microcosm of the World; relative lack of (crude) corruption; working independent courts; un-corrupt law enforcement; abundance of goods and services (not that need that much for livability); and arguably the~~

Yet so far the alternatives to capitalism such as communism did have failed spectacularly say as in Soviet Union and continue to fail in Venezuela and elsewhere. Still, what about fully automated luxury communism (Bastani 2019)?

There are many great things about the West and especially the US: vibrant international melting pot–Colombia may be a microcosm of Latin America, but the US may be a microcosm of the World; relative lack of (crude) corruption, working independent courts, un-corrupt law enforcement, abundance of goods and services (not that need that much for livability), and arguably the biggest advantage: some of the highest wages in the world.

Still, the bottomline is that alienation is not worth the money, unless perhaps it's millions of US dollars in annual salary. But even well paid jobs, so called "6 figure salary jobs" (100k-1m USD) are arguably not worth it as argued by many who quit such a job and became much happier without the good paycheck but without alienation—for example see one such persuasive account (from Singapore, fool's hell):
[youtube.com/watch?v=S_D4yJavp8M](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S_D4yJavp8M)

Singapore: Fool's Hell?

3.4 Singapore: Fool's Hell?

An useful counterexample to Colombia's "fool's paradise" is a "fool's hell"—a place that has high objective quality of life or livability, but low subjective wellbeing or life satisfaction.

Singapore, Switzerland of Asia, is impeccably clean, extremely stable/predictable/disciplined and safe (de Veyra 2022, Clydesdale 2022). Singapore, by many standards, is one of the best, if not the best place in the world. It has world's 3rd highest (after Qatar and Luxembourg) Gross Domestic Product per Capita Purchasing Power Parity adjusted (IMF 2017). It has also 3rd highest (after Monaco and Japan) life expectancy (Central Intelligence Agency 2017), 2nd highest economic freedom (Heritage 2017). Singaporean children score highest on educational tests (Coughlan 2017), it is making greatest progress in health (Fullman et al. 2017), has the biggest advantage: the highest wages in the world. ~~But arguably if you do not make a lot of money, the US is not the best place to be—alienation is not worth little money.~~

world's fastest internet (McSpadden 2015), and 2nd best roads (World Economic Forum 2017). It even has world's strongest passport (Chandran 2017). In short, one could say that Singapore is one of most livable places in the world, if not the very most livable ~~in the world~~. Singapore's life satisfaction rank is 68/160 (WDH). Again, Colombia is ranked 3/160.

Being impeccably clean, extremely disciplined and safe can hamper positive freedom (Singapore scores 7 v Colombia's 8 in WVS) and ultimately happiness. For instance, no smoking in Singapore—but cigars help a great deal in struggle of life (Freud).¹⁰ No marijuana, no gum chewing, and a list of prohibitions continues (de Veyra 2022, Clydesdale 2022).

the US: Fool's Hell?

3.5 the US: Fool's Hell?

The US, the world-renowned “best country in the world,” home to the American dream, notably the very richest (per capita) country in the world (excluding tiny ~~oil-producing~~ countries such as Norway), ranks 46/160 in WDH—the “best country in the world” doesn’t even make it to the top happiness quartile. This sounds like fool’s hell, the opposite of Colombian mismatch of QOL and SWB. Except that, also as in Colombia’s case, there is arguably better match between QOL and SWB than expected, because there are non-commodity components such as personal freedom and social connection that need to be taken into account. Colombia is actually quite livable and so it is happy, and the US actually is not that livable, and hence not that happy.

One would imagine that the US must have top income mobility in the world or surely somewhere near the top, it is after all the country of American Dream where hard work results in success better than elsewhere.

But many other countries have actually “more realistic dreams” than the US—for instance, it is easier to make

¹⁰ “Smoking is one of the greatest and cheapest enjoyments in life, and if you decide in advance not to smoke, I can only feel sorry for you,” “[Cigars have] served me for precisely fifty years as protection and a weapon in the combat of life ... I owe to the cigar a great intensification of my capacity to work and a facilitation of my self-control.” Per Freud see <https://www.freud.org.uk/2020/04/22/freud-and-his-cigars/> and Elkin (1994). Of course, as with everything, moderation should be exercised, for instance, smoking more than 2 cigars a day increases probability of health problems much more than smoking ~~less than~~ 2 cigars ~~per day or fewer~~, and while some studies find no health effects of smoking ~~less than~~ 2 cigars ~~per day or fewer~~, some studies ~~do~~ find negative effects (e.g., Chang et al. 2015).

it in Norway, Denmark, or Finland (Corak 2004, 2011, 2013, Economist 2013, 2012b,a). In terms of mobility, the US is somewhat like a Fool's Paradise—people and especially immigrants think it is a paradise—you work hard, and you go to the top, but it is actually easier in other countries.

In the US, pursuit of money and pursuit of happiness are about the same thing (Easterlin 1973). But we know that a lot of money does not buy much happiness, and if anything, excessive pursuit of it, such as that in the US, may actually decrease happiness (Kasser 2016, Dittmar et al. 2014, Brown and Kasser 2005, Kasser 2003, Schmuck et al. 2000, Kasser and Ryan 1993, Leonard 2010). Arguably the major culprit is consumerism—in the US one can make a good living, make good salary, the problem is people spend it on stuff they don't need and end up on the hamster wheel.

Discussion and Conclusion

4 Discussion and Conclusion

Colombia appears to be a striking ~~The origin of the study has been the apparent~~ paradox in the social indicators field. ~~Colombia scores poor or mediocre on objective quality of life indicators, but it is an extremely happy country~~ data of high happiness despite low livability. Conceptually and theoretically the article has followed and built on Veenhoven's 4 qualities of life (2000) and Michalos 2 variable theory (Michalos 2014), livability and folklore theories (Veenhoven and Ehrhardt 1995, Veenhoven 2014), and Marx's theory of alienation (~~marxists.org/subject/alienation~~)¹¹. The contribution has been to combine the above conceptual and theoretical approaches to offer new insights about high happiness despite apparently low livability in Colombia. In the process, we have contrasted Colombia against the US and West to learn happiness lessons from Colombia for the US and West.

Is Colombia “unlivable” but “happy,” a so called “fool’s paradise”? Arguably not.

Colombia is a genuinely wonderful deeply familial/social place as many locals and travelers would at-

¹¹~~In terms of specific happiness literature in Latin America we have especially built on “Handbook of Happiness Research in Latin America” by Rojas (2015) with chapters by Hurtado (2016), Velásquez (2016), Yamamoto (2016).~~

test (e.g., Roos 2019, Wallace 2017b, Davies 2022) (e.g., Roos 2019, Wallace 2017a, Davies 2022). Colombians don't seem to be weighted down by civilization and its discontents (Freud et al. 1930), or ghosts of the past (Pile 2005b,a, Pile et al. 1999).

The world has much to learn from Colombia how to be happy.¹² This paper argues that Colombia is one of the very best countries to visit, and it may even be one of best places to live.

The conclusion is that Colombia is not only one of the happiest countries, but also arguably quite livable. Surely many QOL metrics point to Colombia's real and serious problems, notably such as poverty and inequality, but at the same time Colombians enjoy great advantages such as positive freedom and social connection.

In sharp contrast to Colombia there is the great American alienation—a key point is that most Americans don't even seem to realize at all, don't give it the slightest thought and don't question the status quo and current way of life—until perhaps when it's too late and one is on a deathbed wishing to have been less alienated (Ware 2012)—indeed travel to a place like Colombia may be necessary to open one's eyes. For instance, it is clear from figure 1 that Philadelphia is built for big business and Cali is built for people.¹²

Getting out of the city's main transportation hub. (Zoom in to see the details.)

Colombia is mostly a real paradise, not fool's paradise—the point is that in the West, and especially in the US, materialism and consumerism are so extremely rampant and widespread that they are not even noticed (Okulicz-Kozaryn 2020, Ware 2012)—equating happiness with money is a norm (Easterlin 1973). So then it is unthinkable that not a wealthy country such as Colombia can be happy. For instance, Graham and Pettinato (2002) and Graham (2012) wonder about paradox of happy peasants v frustrated millionaires—but is it that unexpected? Graham argues adaptation—the poor have adapted to their miserable lot and are happy with little they have. But so do the rich adapt: “the more one has the more one wants, since satisfactions received only stimulate instead of filling needs” (Durkheim [1895] 1950), or “wealth is like sea water; the more we drink, the thirstier

¹² Note that the arguments and results presented here likely generalize to some degree to other Latin countries, perhaps especially the Caribbean there may be “Caribbean energy.” Ecuador's energy, for instance, seems more flat.

¹² Figure 1 contrasts Cali main public transit station with Philadelphia main public transit station. In Cali it is much easier to sit, buy food or catch a local bus. It is getting worse in Colombia, however—notably the urban landscape is getting littered with commercial centers “centro comercial” (Western-like malls). Villages are still spared.

~~we become; and the same is true of fame" (Schopenhauer).~~¹²

~~There is plenty of theory why a peasant would be happy (notably contact with nature) and there is empirical evidence, too (e.g., Miñarro et al. 2021). There is actually less theory arguing that a millionaire would be happy only neoclassical economic theory would predict that only money matters and always the more the better (Rayo and Becker 2007, Autor 2010).~~

~~The reasoning is also that there must be something wrong with happiness measure (e.g., Deaton 2013, Stevenson and W~~
~~, or again, with Colombians (fool's paradise). It simply seems wrong that with little money there may be great happiness. But again, we actually do know that a lot of money is neither necessary nor sufficient for happiness, and indeed excessive pursuit of money, such as that prevalent in the US, may kill happiness.~~

Only apparently great happiness is somehow possible in unlivable conditions. ~~Table 2 points to unlivable conditions, problems in terms of We enumerated earlier Colombia's unlivable conditions (table 2), metrics~~ that are mostly economic, some legal/institutional, and physical infrastructure. But these things are not the only things that matter—there are other things that matter for human flourishing or happiness. Despite all the problems with poverty, roads, corruption, etc, ~~as enumerated in table 2,~~ Colombia arguably is a quite livable place.¹² ~~And, again, in fact the more And important and often overlooked point is that given very basic level of economic development and material comfort has already been achieved, the further focus on money ,the and material comfort can actually be counterproductive and result in a less human friendly the placeisplace.~~ Colombians have a wonderful, joyful, stress-less, and spontaneous way of life, and they feel free and are socially connected. ~~We can learn from Colombia, but before turning to Colombian lessons for happiness, we take a step back and examine counter-arguments.~~

¹² Still, adaptation (Brickman et al. 1978) can help explain at least a part of the Colombian paradox of high subjective well-being despite objective problems such as poverty and crime—humans are able to adapt to just about anything (Brickman et al. 1978). Perhaps, Colombians have adapted, at least to some degree, to poverty, inequality, and even violence having suffered through recent civil war and breakdown of the state—now that things are better than they used to be just few decades ago, Colombians are making best out of the conditions. In other words, the sources of Colombian happiness may be resilience, positive outlook, ability to make out most of little.

¹² As long as the problems are not extreme, and in Colombia they sometimes are. For instance, mediocre or relatively poor road condition does not hamper human flourishing much, but extremely bad condition such as falling bridge does create great unhappiness. Same with poverty—one can live happily on very little, indeed be poor by western standards, without hot water, without car, etc, but abject poverty such as malnutrition does create great unhappiness. There is considerable abject poverty in Colombia, and no amount of nature, festivals, or cheerfulness can help with it.

~~Still, the-~~

4.1 Alternative Explanations and Counterarguments

~~The~~ proposition of “fool’s paradise” in Colombia may have some merit. The ~~concept of “fool’s paradise” is related to the concept of “ignorance is a bliss.” Likewise, perhaps Colombia is more about hedonia than eudamonia—see online appendix for discussion.~~

~~The~~ survey data does show that Colombians living in Colombia and making Colombian salary are ~~happy very happy on average~~. But would they still be happy if they knew life, salary, and opportunities in the West, say in the US. Would they stay in Colombia if they could easily move? Is ignorance a bliss? Is it paradise only because people don’t know any better?

~~The concept of~~

~~We argue that livability is mostly good enough in Colombia, but this is with a caveat—as long as the problems are not extreme, and in Colombia they sometimes are. For instance, mediocre or relatively poor road condition does not hamper human flourishing much, but extremely bad condition such as a falling bridge does create great unhappiness. Same with poverty—one can live happily on very little, indeed be poor by western standards, without hot water, without car, etc, but abject poverty such as malnutrition does create great unhappiness. There is considerable abject poverty in Colombia, and no amount of nature, festivals, or cheerfulness can help with it. If the malnourished in abject poverty among rampant crime are even only moderately happy, this is indeed “fool’s paradise” ~~is related to the concept of “ignorance is a bliss,” and there may be a grain of truth there.~~¹² ~~(Still, such extreme un-livability is not typical of Colombia; it is minority).~~~~

Colombians, especially those in poor and isolated areas, may not know about good/comfortable life, may not realize the possibilities and opportunities in the West (or any rich area such as Singapore). For instance, inhabitants of poor municipalities in the Choco are happy to know only that environment in which they were born and raised, but when they know and live in other municipalities with greater socio-economic development

¹² ~~Likewise, perhaps Colombia is more about hedonia than eudamonia—see SOM for discussion.~~

their demands and expectations increase (Muñoz-Cardona 2018). Many poor may be relatively segregated and isolated into their neighborhoods, not knowing better, and thus being satisfied with little what they have. Similarly, poor women in rural China were happy, and only became unhappy once they became exposed to higher standard of living (Rosenthal 1999).

Furthermore, resilience Resilience may be reinforcing fool's paradise. Curiously, Martínez and Short (2020) reports that in Cali residents in the poorest districts were satisfied with their lives, and speculates that it may be so due to the high resilience of this population being affected by crime, poor health, and insufficient provision of public goods. It may be similar at country level, Colombia was ravaged by largest civil conflict in Latin America and drug-trafficking related violence in 80s and 90s (Martínez and Short 2020), and now while still poor and unsafe as compared to the West, it is much better than 30-50 years ago, and the terror it went through might have made it resilient.

Adaptation (Brickman et al. 1978) can help explain at least a part of the Colombian paradox of high subjective wellbeing despite objective problems such as poverty and crime—humans are able to adapt to just about anything (Brickman et al. 1978). Perhaps, Colombians have adapted, at least to some degree, to poverty, inequality, and even violence having suffered through recent civil war and breakdown of the state—now that things are better than they used to be just few decades ago. Colombians are making best out of the conditions. In other words, the sources of Colombian happiness may be also resilience, positive outlook, ability to make out most of little.

In the West, and especially in the US, materialism and consumerism are so extremely rampant and widespread that they are not even noticed (Okulicz-Kozaryn 2020, Ware 2012)—equating happiness with money is a norm (Easterlin 1973). So then it appears unthinkable to the Westerners that not a wealthy country such as Colombia can be very happy. For instance, Graham and Pettinato (2002) and Graham (2012) wonder about paradox of happy peasants v frustrated millionaires—but is it that unexpected? Graham argues adaptation—the poor have adapted to their miserable lot and are happy with little they have. But so do the rich adapt: “the more one has the more one wants, since satisfactions received only stimulate instead of filling needs”

(Durkheim [1895] 1950), or “wealth is like sea-water; the more we drink, the thirstier we become; and the same is true of fame” (Schopenhauer).

There is plenty of theory why a peasant would be happy (notably contact with nature) and there is empirical evidence, too (e.g., Miñarro et al. 2021). There is actually less theory arguing that a millionaire would be happy—only neoclassical economic theory would predict that only money matters and always the more the better (Rayo and Becker 2007, Autor 2010).

The reasoning is sometimes, especially among the economists, that there must be something wrong with happiness measure (e.g., Deaton 2013, Stevenson and Wolfers 2013, 2009, Glaeser et al. 2014, 2016), or with Latinos (paradox of happy peasants, fool’s paradise, etc). It simply seems wrong that with little money there may be great happiness. But again, we actually do know that a lot of money is neither necessary nor sufficient for happiness, and indeed excessive pursuit of money, such as that prevalent in the US, may kill happiness (Kasser 2016, Dittmar et al. 2014, Brown and Kasser 2005, Kasser 2003, Schmuck et al. 2000, Kasser and Ryan 1993, Le

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While degrading SWB to a commodity item in utility function probably only makes sense to economists: “happiness is a commodity in the utility function in the same way that owning a car and being healthy are” (Becker and Rayo 2008, p. 89), still, happiness is not everything. Then Colombia may be as well happier than the US, but the utility be higher in the US (as there are more commodities). And this could help explaining how people vote with their feet—it is Colombians (and Latinos) who flock to the US (and the West), and not the other way round. Although recently there is a significant movement in the other direction—see online appendix for a brief discussion.

Perhaps, one reason for lower life satisfaction in the US (v Colombia) is that there are more regrets as there are more opportunities (the pond is bigger and it’s more difficult to be a big fish)—similarly as urban (v rural) life tends to result in more regrets (Okulicz-Kozaryn 2024). Likewise, expectations or aspirations may be higher in the US v Colombia, and they decrease happiness as per equation: $happiness = experience \text{ or } achievement - expectation$. Colombians’ happiness seem to depend less on economics, politics and external affairs in general; rather it is

about family and personal relations (Martínez and Short 2020).

4.2 Takeaway for Policy and Practice and Future Research

The world has much to learn from Colombia how to be happy. This paper argues that Colombia is one of the very best countries to visit, and it may even be one of best places to live.

In a contrast to Colombia, we have set forth a number of criticisms about the West, and especially the US, notably alienation. We think that this is a key lesson and area for improvement. The US and West needs to realize its alienation and learn from Colombia about what has been lost in the West (alienation is due to mass industrialization and rampant capitalism that are relatively recent, several generations).

In sharp contrast to Colombia—there is the great American alienation—a key point is that most Americans don't even seem to realize at all, don't give it the slightest thought and don't question the status quo and current way of life—until perhaps when it's too late and one is on a deathbed wishing to have been less alienated (Ware 2012)—indeed travel to a place like Colombia may be necessary to open one's eyes—when you change place, you change optics. For instance, it is clear from figure 1 that Philadelphia is built for big business or capitalists and Cali is built for people. Figure 1 contrasts main public transit stations. In Cali it is much easier to interact, relax, sit down, buy food, catch a local bus or taxi.¹² This is a specific lesson for the US from Colombia: to reorient its physical infrastructure from made-for-business, formal, and awe-inspiring to made-for-people informal, practical, cozy, friendly, and relaxed. Do note that many people would actually say (before reading this eye opening article) that progress/development is to make Cali more like Philadelphia! The mainstream Western ideal is Plano TX, Singapore, Dubai, etc: impeccably clean, organized, and excellent with perfect, formal, and awe-inspiring physical infrastructure. It is like proposing a golden cage for a lion, but no matter the amount of gold, lion is still happier in its natural environment that fits its needs (livability theory).

Related, there is great Western materialism, consumerism, and obsession with status, money, and stuff

¹²It is getting worse in Colombia, however—notably the urban landscape is being Westernized with commercial centers "centro comercial" (Western-like malls). Villages are still spared.

Figure 1: Getting out of the city's main transportation hub (Google Maps). (Zoom in to see the details.)

(a) Philadelphia 30th st station



(b) Cali's terminal de transporte



(Leonard 2010, Frank 2012). In theory we know that material comfort is not everything (Stiglitz et al. 2009), that spending on experience such as social connection contributes more to happiness than spending on stuff (Ware 2012, Van Boven 2005, Kumar et al. 2014, Bhattacharjee and Mogilner 2014), and indeed what may be needed in the West is economic degrowth, not growth (Kallis et al. 2012, Kallis 2011). This Western materialism, consumerism, and obsession with status, money, and stuff is in contrast to and arguably at the expense of social connection, positive freedom, and unbridled spontaneous joy that characterize Colombia. This is another lesson from Colombia.

Note that the arguments and results presented here likely generalize to some degree to other Latin countries, perhaps especially the Caribbean—there may be “Caribbean energy.” Ecuador’s energy, for instance, seems more flat. So perhaps a part of the Colombian happiness magic mixture is climate and topography—one direction for future research.¹³

This paper argues Colombian and possibly wider Latin American effect on happiness. Future research can disentangle what it actually is about Colombia that results in happiness. We have hypothesized a number of factors, notably social connection and positive freedom. Moreno (2013) lists various hypotheses as to

¹³There are studies on climate and happiness (e.g., Rehdanz and Maddison 2005), and some topographical features such as body of water (White et al. 2013), but we need more.

happiness predictors in Colombia that could be used in the future research: biodiversity, climate diversity, plenty of festivals/holidays, healthy lifestyle and food, dancing. Furthermore, future research could disentangle happy Colombians from unhappy Colombians—despite very high average happiness of 8.5 out of 10, some Colombians are unhappy—who are they and what makes it miserable in the paradise?

And how much it is about a person and how much about environment? For instance, are Colombian immigrants in the US happy? Does it help if they live in a Colombian enclave? And the other migration side—are Westerners happy in Colombia, and does it hurt if they are mostly around other Westerners?¹⁴

A big question and an elephant in the room remains. If Colombia (and Latin America) are so great, why Colombians and Latinos flock in the droves to the West, notably the US? And those who stay—is ignorance a bliss, are they wearing pink glasses?

A preliminary short answer we offer is that people simply don't know any better, both Colombians and Latinos flocking to the West, and Westerners staying away from Colombia and Latin America.¹⁵ The West is overrated and Colombia and Latin America are underrated—people overvalue stuff and undervalue experience at a cost to their happiness. Be happy, come to Colombia.

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¹⁴ There are studies on happiness and migration, notably by David Bartram (e.g., Bartram 2014, 2013, 2011), but need more on Latinos and Westerners including their living environment.

¹⁵ We discuss more in online appendix. Also note that as we argue "people simply don't know any better"—the goal of this paper is both to educate and to spark more research and debate.

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ONLINE APPENDIX

1 ONLINE APPENDIX

for convenience appended here [but note: this section will NOT be a part of the final version of the manuscript, but will be available as online appendix instead]

dissociation

2 Subjective Wellbeing Defined; And Explored Across Countries

Again, the body of the paper have used evaluative/cognitive life satisfaction as opposed to affective happiness, positive and negative affects/emotions, or Eudaimonia/flourishing/functioning. But here we offer an extended discussion and auxiliary points.

The most general definition of wellbeing refers to people's feelings, experiences, and perceptions of their overall quality of life, including the positive and negative assessments people make of their lives and how they interpret their experiences (OECD 2013). Three measurements are widely accepted: evaluative, affective, and eudaimonic (OECD 2013). The evaluative measurement is commonly used in policy-making discussions and typically uses overall life satisfaction (or Cantril's ladder of life) on a Likert scale (Ferrer-i-Carbonell and Frijters 2004). Affect measures focus on measuring emotions (positive and negative) that people feel, like happiness or worry (Kahneman and Krueger 2006). Eudaimonic measures focus on the functioning and fulfillment of the person seeking to capture elements of wellbeing such as autonomy, learning, goal orientation, or purpose in life (Huppert et al. 2008). In this article, we use the concept of *subjective WellBeing (SWB)* to encapsulate the different accepted metrics in the field.

The words in this section could be used as measures.

2.1 Affective v Cognitive; Hedonia v Eudamonia

Amnesia <-> c("how did I get here", "brain is on autopilot", "when did I get changed", "where did this come from", "they say they know me", "they said they know me", "I don't recognize them", "stressful events causing memory loss", "I don't think I lied", "I know I didn't lie", "what did I do earlier", "gaps in my memory", "memory lapse", "lapse in memory", "who am I", "what were we talking about", "what are we talking about", "coming to", "I can't remember", "I cannot remember", "I don't remember", "I do not remember", "frustrated with my memory", "I wish I could remember", "I want to remember", "I look different", "I don't remember attempting suicide", "I don't remember hurting myself")

Daydreaming <-> c("inner self dialogue", "inner dialogue", "unable to recall the conversation", "confusing dreams with reality", "did that really happen", "or was it a dream", "the world ceased to exist", "nothing

~~around me matters~~, "my daydreams feel real", "my fantasies feel real", "confusing my imagination with reality", "staring off", "not knowing time had passed", "talking to myself aloud", "talking to myself out loud", "spaced out", "spacey", "floating off", "drifting off", "I'm scattered", "I am scattered", "my mind is scattered", "my brain is scattered", "scatterbrained", "I'm all over the place", "mentally all over the place", "mentally all over", "I'm not focused", "I am not focused", "I can't focus", "I cannot focus", "my mind wandering", "I forgot my plans", "I forgot to do chores", "I forgot", "I forget", "daydreaming", "daydreams", "blocking my memories", "blocked memories")

Highway Hypnosis ↪ ("zoning out while driving")

Absorption ← c("I lost all awareness", "stuck in a trance", "unaware of my surroundings")

Derealization ← c("nothing is real", "nobody is real", "no one is real", "I am not real", "I feel strange here", "everything seems unclear", "brain fog", "going within to protect myself", "going within", "retreat within to protect myself", "retreat within", "turning within to protect myself", "turning within", "ground falling beneath me", "ground falling out under me", "suddenly everything seems strange", "suddenly everything seemed strange", "suddenly everything was strange", "everything seems foreign", "everything seemed foreign", "everyone seems foreign", "everything seemed foreign", "I'm back at that place", "reliving that moment", "reliving what happened", "flashbacks are debilitating", "debilitating flashbacks")

Depersonalization ← c("debating myself", "their voice in my head", "familiar voice in my head", "their voices questioning me", "other's voices nagging me", "looking at myself as another", "disconnected from myself", "feeling outside of my body", "watching myself from the outside", "I don't recognize myself", "who is in the mirror", "this body isn't mine", "my body isn't mine", "body doesn't belong to me", "I couldn't feel the pain", "ignore the pain", "I don't feel like myself", "I don't act like myself", "it was unlike me", "I'm beside myself", "I am beside myself", "I'm not myself", "I am not myself", "I lost myself", "let go of myself", "why did I do that", "what could've possessed me", "I wasn't myself", "I was not myself", "can't reveal my true self", "out of my mind", "out of my head", "out of my skull", "being with myself", "my body isn't real", "my body is not real", "I am speaking another's words", "why did I say that", "these thoughts aren't

~~mine", "thoughts that aren't mine", "I'm not all there", "I am not all there", "feeling empty and painfully alone", "feeling empty", "feelings of emptiness", "felt empty", "painfully alone", "feeling alone", "felt alone", "I feel like a machine", "I feel like a robot", "I'm going through the motions", "going through the motions", "I feel detached", "I felt detached", "I'm feeling detached", "I am feeling detached", "I was feeling detached", "detached from myself", "why can't I move", "I feel paralyzed", "I felt paralyzed", "I watch myself", "I'm watching myself", "I am watching myself", "I watched myself", "I was watching myself", "going through the motions", "watch myself going through life", "watched myself going through life", "watching myself going through life", "watched myself complete daily tasks", "watch myself completing daily tasks", "watching myself complete daily tasks", "my mind is empty", "my mind was empty", "my mind is blank", "my mind was blank", "blank stare", "staing blankly", "stared blankly", "I seem gone")~~

Identity Fragmentation ← c("mental conversations with myself", "conversations with myself", "inner back-and-fourth dialogue", "internal dialogue", "I am two different people", "I'm two different people", "I was two different people", "like I was someone else", "the voices in my head", "I'm at war with myself", "at war with myself", "fighting a war within", "I'm struggling with myself", "I am struggling with myself", "struggling with myself", "that wasn't me", "that was not me", "nobody knows the real me", "myself on the inside", "the real me", "know the real me", "talking things over with myself", "talking with myself", "this feeling isn't mine", "this feeling is not mine", "feeling doesn't belong to me", "child's voice in my head", "another personality taking over", "another personality controlling me", "why did I think that", "why would I think that", "random thoughts", "intrusive thoughts", "sadness out of nowhere", "strong feelings out of nowhere", "filled with pain", "resist the urge", "these urges aren't mine", "urges are not mine", "feeling split or divided", "feeling split inside", "felt split inside", "feeling divided inside", "feel divided inside", "felt divided inside", "is this really me", "is this who I am", "inability to keep friends", "I can't keep friends", "I cannot keep friends", "I feel different than normal", "I felt different", "I'm feeling different than normal", "was different than normal", "I feel weird", "I felt weird", "I'm feeling weird", "I was feeling weird", "I feel strange", "I felt strange", "I'm feeling strange", "I am feeling strange", "I was feeling strange", "I feel odd", "I felt odd", "I'm feeling odd", "I'm feeling odd")

~~"I am feeling odd", "I was feeling odd", "voices saying to hurt myself", "the voices say hurt yourself", "my head is too loud", "my head is so loud", "my head was so loud", "inside my head is loud", "inside my head was loud", "screaming inside my head", "screams inside my head", "yelling inside my head", "noise inside my head", "angry out of nowhere", "why am I angry", "filled with anger", "I have multiple personalities", "I have many personalities", "I don't feel whole", "I do not feel whole", "I am not whole", "I'm not whole", "part of me is missing", "missing a part of myself", "racing thoughts", "my thoughts are racing", "my thoughts were racing", "racing mind", "my mind is racing", "my mind was racing", "can't stop racing thoughts", "cannot stop racing thoughts", "thoughts won't stop racing", "thoughts will not stop racing", "I can't stop thinking", "I cannot stop thinking", "I want to stop thinking", "struggling with my identity", "struggling to find my identity", "struggling with who I am", "figuring out who I am", "acting like another person", "I am not that person", "I'm not that person", "unlike myself", "protective voice in my head", "helpful voice in my head", "soothing voice in my head")~~

~~Affective v Cognitive; Hedonia v Eudamonia~~

~~"It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool, or the pig, are a different opinion, it is because they only know their own side of the question."~~ John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism (1863)

Overall Subjective WellBeing (SWB) can be broken down into components. Notably, there is affective happiness (feel happy) v cognitive life satisfaction (perceive/evaluate life as satisfying).

The two would overlap/correlate moderately but they are conceptually different—e.g., I am happy at the moment because I see blue sky and eat a tasty burger, but I am dissatisfied with my life because I have no friends, no money, and bad health. Or I can be satisfied with my life as a whole because I have many friends, excellent health, and great job, but I am unhappy now because the weather is bad and my lunch is not tasting good.

Likewise, a typical Scandinavian, say from Iceland, looks grumpy, cold, unfriendly, and rather sad, doesn't talk much, doesn't smile, yet Scandinavians consistently report very high life satisfaction. Latinos report quite high life satisfaction, and are extremely happy: warm, cheerful, friendly.

Another notable distinction is hedonia: more joy and fun than pain and misery (Bentham) v eudamonia: good life, realizing one's potential, becoming who you are (Aristotle, Nietzsche). Perhaps Colombia is more about hedonia than eudamonia. For discussion see Diener (2009), Weijers (2011), Weijers and Jarden (2013), McMahon (2006), Ryff (2014).

~~Happiness v Life Satisfaction~~

2.2 [Happiness v Life Satisfaction](#)

Colombia is one of the happiest countries in the world, or indeed the happiest (Roos 2019). Colombia scores in top decile in terms of life satisfaction (Scandinavia often (not always) tops the rankings). Yet in terms of emotions and daily life experience: smiling and laughter, respect, enjoyment, worry, sadness and anger: positive daily experiences and emotions, the top countries are: Colombia, El Salvador, and Guatemala. Of the 10 countries that rank highest on positive experiences, 7 are Latin American (Roos 2019). Colombians seem to have warm, welcoming, and unshakable spirit; and they appear resilient–grateful, satisfied, optimistic, lucky, and even innocent (Wallace 2017b)(Wallace 2017a).

~~Purchasing Power in Colombia Not That Different From The West~~

2.3 [High Cognitive/Evaluative Life Satisfaction in Scandinavia, and High Affective Happiness in Latin America](#)

Countries where people have better individual and social conditions report greater subjective wellbeing–Scandinavians are closest to achieving the best possible life (Cantril's ladder) (e.g., Helliwell et al. 2020). In addition to the individual conditions of high salaries and basic needs covered, Scandinavia is characterized by the strength of

its institutions, respect for civil rights, high interpersonal and institutional trust and social cohesion, low gender gaps and inequality (Martela et al. 2020). Likewise, other high income developed countries tend to have high life satisfaction. People in developed countries have a greater chance of achieving the best possible life and be satisfied with their lives.

However, when SWB is measured through affective balance (positive and negative emotions), the correlation between GDP per capita and SWB is moderate only (Rojas 2015, 2019). The frequency of positive emotions experienced by people in the developed nations is not as high as one may expect. The positive emotions (such as positive affect and happiness) are often lower in developed countries than in developing countries, especially Latin America. SWB is not only about economic progress. Personal relationships and positive emotions play a significant role (Campbell et al. 1976). Scandinavian countries like Sweden and Denmark, well known for their high living standards and low inequality, increasingly report low happiness. In developed countries in 2020, people report spending only six hours weekly with friends and family, almost half an hour less than in the previous decade; and 1 in 11 people report not having close friends or relatives to count on for help (van Zanden et al. 2020).

3 Purchasing Power in Colombia Not That Different From The West

For all of the US economic might, Purchasing Power is not that different—on a minimum wage in Colombia of 1,300 pesos, can rent a studio for 400; and can have a very good meal: soup, meat with starch and salad and juice for 7.

In the US, minimum wage comes out to about the same number but in US dollars: \$1,300. But in the US probably cannot rent a studio for \$400, only a room; and definitely cannot have a good meal at a restaurant for \$7. Housing is the main expense for most people, and food is a critical commodity.

Still, many things are relatively cheaper in the US, for instance a gallon of gas is about \$3; in Colombia it is about 10 pesos. And while restaurant food in the US is expensive and unhealthy, it is possible to buy cheap

basic and healthy food at a store.

But the difference in purchasing power is not very large for many commodities and services, which is surprising for all the rhetoric about the US as the best country in the world, and the richest country.

~~Existing Limited Research~~

4 Existing Limited Research

There is economic research focusing on SWB and inequality in Latin America (Graham and Felton 2006) and Colombia specifically (Burger et al. 2021a), but it doesn't address livability-happiness paradox.

The top 1% of the income distribution accounts for over 20% of total income in 2010—the rich Colombians are mostly rentiers and capital owners. (Alvaredo and Londoño Vélez 2013) Yet, regardless of the income level, Colombians are optimistic about their mobility (Londoño Vélez 2011).

Adaptation is strong in Latin America, for instance poor people such as peasants can be happy because of adaptation; crime and corruption decrease happiness, but less so when they are more prevalent—again people adapt (Graham 2009).

Then there is a useful volume on happiness in Latin America: “Handbook of Happiness Research in Latin America” making two relevant points about SWB in Colombia. In the poorest income quintile life satisfaction was above 8 on a 10-point scale (Hurtado 2016). Family is the most important relational good, main social support—family is the meaning of life—the end that justifies efforts (Velásquez 2016).

In conclusion—there is still very little research on happiness in Colombia, and the exiting research is rather indirect and tangential only to our topic, and hence, we also included some anecdotal evidence to explain high happiness amidst low livability.

A look over time

5 A look over time

First we have observed a paradox across space (v other countries) of happiness amongst un-livability. Another paradox is within Colombia and over time. There is Easterlin's Paradox—PCGDP went up 50% but SWB remained flat.

We use GDP per capita, PPP (constant 2017 international \$) in thousands <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.PP.KD?locations=CO>— Colombian GDP went up by 50% over 1997-2018. Colombians happiness and feeling of freedom are among the highest in the world, but they did not change over 1997-2018. In Colombia, GDP has no relationship with SWB, i.e., the Easterlin Paradox holds.

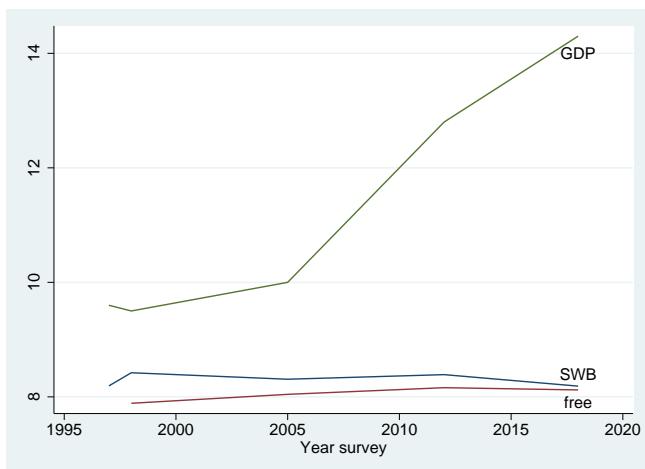


Figure 2: Easterlin's Paradox

Other metrics improved, too—Gini dropped from 59 in 2000 to 51 in 2019 <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI/?locations=CO>. About a third of Colombians live on less than \$5.50 a day in 2019, but strikingly, that's a progress, it is down from about 2/3 of Colombians in 2000.

~~The US v Colombia in Pictures: More and More Expensive Stuff, Less Happiness~~

6 The US v Colombia in Pictures: More and More Expensive Stuff, Less Happiness

It is recognized even by some economists that not only commodities matter for wellbeing (e.g., Stiglitz et al. 2009); yet few seem to notice that Latin America shines on non-commodity dimension and that the West should learn from Latin America. Notably social relations, quantity and quality, are arguably the best in the world in Latin America.

World development is typically about dollar amounts and physical stuff: more income, less poverty, more and better roads, more labor force participation and less unemployment and so on. But such focus produces an outcome of a “Lion in a Golden Cage.”¹⁶ The idea is that we focus on the cage, making it expensive and pretty, but we forget about the lion—and no matter how fancy and expensive is the cage, lion won’t be happy in it.

The point is that the apparent economic or even livability superiority of the US over Colombia actually is mostly economic. And more expensive physical infrastructure doesn’t make it more livable and actually can make it less livable.

It is often overlooked point that something less developed economically and cheaper is actually better (happier).

The US infrastructure is great for business or making money, but it is bad for living there. It could be a difficult tradeoff to solve: economic growth v wellbeing, except that a very convincing argument has already been made that we do not need any more economic growth (Kallis et al. 2012, Kallis 2011, Van den Bergh 2011).

The US has this strange obsession with excellence/perfection and productivity, also in terms of built environment apparently thinking that the more ordered, organized, and man-made, the better. But the thinking was not always this way. Thoreau, for instance, was an American (Thoreau 1995 [1854], 1993).

¹⁶I am grateful for this idea to Mariano Rojas at ISQOLS 2023. Any misinterpretation or misunderstanding is mine. Inspiration also comes from Quercia (2014)—the idea is that what matters when traveling is not only speed and distance.

The following are one of the authors own subjective/anecdotal opinions. Note: when picking images I dropped the Google's yellow man more or less randomly only given rural, urban, suburb, toll, etc and took first useful image. I tried to avoid to cherry pick positive and negative imaginary. Comments welcomed! Contact the corresponding author. For best results zoom as much as screen allows.

In fig 3 obvious difference is width, 6 v 2 lanes, and economically 6 beats 2–can move more stuff faster, but assuming the same traffic per lane, it is more interesting and fun or joy to ride on smaller roads.¹⁷ The other less obvious difference is vegetation—around I-95 it is pedigreed nicely trimmed man made fake nature; around 25 it is real wild nature—more happiness there too. In figure 3 the US appears more boring, robotic, and fake (alien-like); all that matters is to get from A to B.¹⁸.

Figure 3: A major road/highway in the middle of nowhere.

(a) US I-95 rural MD, couple miles N of Susquehanna River



(b) Colombian 25 (Pan Americana), between Cali and Popayan



In fig 4 here we are passing through towns—on 295 through Cherry Hill, but who would have noticed looks the same as I-95 in previous picture, whether rural or urban, there's the same fake nature on the side.¹⁹

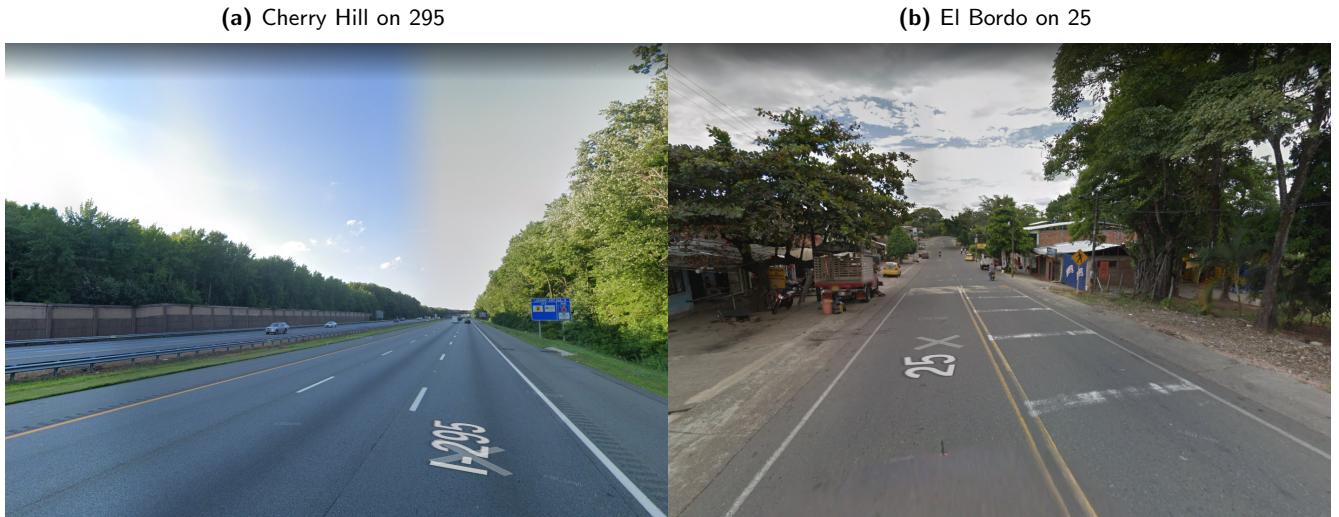
In fig 5 we are approaching toll (Del Mem Br)—looks unwelcoming, like an entrance to minimum security

¹⁷ And adding more lanes does not automatically mean less traffic, often on the contrary, people decide to drive more—adding more lanes for traffic is like loosing your belt for obesity (e.g., Duany et al. 2001).

¹⁸ And why not more fun highway, say from rural mountainous Tennessee? Because the contrast is for the flat, dense, developed and wealthy North East—that's where economic productivity thrives. As a side note, keep in mind that 25 is not some small rural road—it's perhaps the most major road in the Americas, the Pan Americana. Picking less major road in the US and less major road in Colombia would not change the contrast much

¹⁹ 295 not NJ Turnpike, to be conservative, NJ Turnpike is even more fake.

Figure 4: Passing through a town.



prison–can't pull over, rest, eat, or relax. Toll (peaje) on 25 looks better, again natural wild vegetation, can pull over and rest a bit, buy an organic orange.

Figure 5: Approaching toll.



In fig 6 even toll booth looks little more friendly and welcoming in Colombia.

Last but not least let's hang out in a city in fig 7. Say you are a weary traveler arriving at 30th st station in Philly. You get out of the station, and it's a desert–nowhere to hangout, have to keep walking. You arrive to terminal de transporte in Cali, get out of the building and plenty of places to buy food, drinks, and sit down.

Figure 6: Paying toll.

(a) Del Mem Br

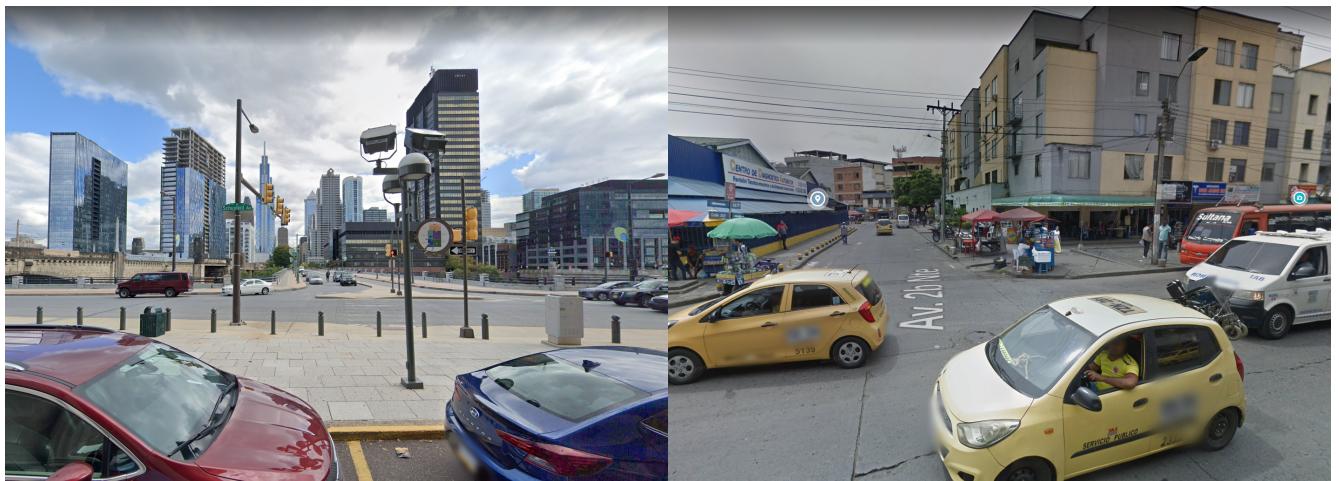
(b) Peaje on 25 south of Cali



Figure 7: Getting out of the train station and bus terminal. (Note: no trains in Colombia.)

(a)

(b)



Below are links with geographic coordinates to all pictures so that the reader can locate each of the places discussed above and explore more.

fig 3:

https://www.google.com/maps/@39.6003437,-76.0444379,3a,75y,249.22h,83.1t/data=!3m7!1e1!3m5!1s0wpnM0Yc9KK6YD6ZhdgiJQ!2e0!6shttps:%2F%2Fstreetviewpixels-pa.googleapis.com%2Fv1%2Fthumbnail%3Fpanoid%3D0wpnM0Yc9KK6YD6ZhdgiJQ%26cb_client%3Dmaps_sv.tactile.gps%26w%3D203%26h%3D100%26yaw%3D150.322%26pitch%3D0%26thumbfov%3D100!7i16384!8i8192

https://www.google.com/maps/@2.7886904,-76.5521276,3a,75y,177.41h,100.48t/data=!3m7!1e1!3m5!1sDBBN1UaixNJL9uUrult5g!2e0!6shttps://2F%2Fstreetviewpixels-pa.googleapis.com%2Fv1%2Fthumbnail%3Fpanoid%3DDBBN1UaixNJL9uUrult5g%26cb_client%3Dmaps_sv.tactile.gps%26w%3D203%26h%3D100%26yaw%3D259.4146%26pitch%3D0%26thumbfov%3D100!7i13312!8i6656

fig 4

https://www.google.com/maps/@39.9151715,-74.9812986,3a,75y,355.06h,94.72t/data=!3m7!1e1!3m5!1svjTItcXHUAahWEkdG9iXbg!2e0!6shttps://2F%2Fstreetviewpixels-pa.googleapis.com%2Fv1%2Fthumbnail%3Fpanoid%3DvjTItcXHUAahWEkdG9iXbg%26cb_client%3Dmaps_sv.tactile.gps%26w%3D203%26h%3D100%26yaw%3D108.39489%26pitch%3D0%26thumbfov%3D100!7i16384!8i8192

https://www.google.com/maps/@2.1191142,-76.9827811,3a,75y,29.76h,78.92t/data=!3m7!1e1!3m5!1sLImUajMcEKyf6eLxRirjGw!2e0!6shttps://2F%2Fstreetviewpixels-pa.googleapis.com%2Fv1%2Fthumbnail%3Fpanoid%3DLImUajMcEKyf6eLxRirjGw%26cb_client%3Dmaps_sv.tactile.gps%26w%3D203%26h%3D100%26yaw%3D155.053%26pitch%3D0%26thumbfov%3D100!7i13312!8i6656

fig 5

https://www.google.com/maps/@3.1520675,-76.460229,3a,75y,181.56h,83.61t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1s27q_DTIQZ3Tc67jRNy0XxQ!2e0!7i13312!8i6656

<https://www.google.com/maps/@39.6962957,-75.5445256,3a,75y,284.53h,94.14t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1s6XzK4mx61AETyWhNf0IzMg!2e0!7i16384!8i8192>

fig 6

same as above just move ahead

fig 7

<https://www.google.com/maps/@39.9556825,-75.1809809,3a,75y,98.3h,91.96t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1sx0T6m0Tfk7frupGVN0pczg!2e0!7i16384!8i8192>

<https://www.google.com/maps/@3.4656412,-76.5213045,3a,75y,89.77h,81.78t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1sWYCkArtZNxDNuKTxgS8hQ!2e0!7i13312!8i6656>

~~Future Research and Questions that Remain~~

7 Who Would Move Where?

Much further research needed, especially in terms of systematic and deeper approaches—here the goal was to paint a broad picture.

A big question remaining is who would move where, ie if a person had reasonable information and opportunity to chose a place to live—would a better choice be the West, e.g., the US, or Latin America, e.g., Colombia. Ideally actual moving should be measured, not self-reported plans or ideas as it is likely to be biased especially if a person haven't actually experienced life in both countries.

There is obviously large migration from Latin America to the US, and surely more people want to come to the US than leave it, but this doesn't mean that the US is the best place to live—people mostly come to the US for the money, not necessarily for quality of life.

Indeed recent media reports argue the opposite—people are leaving the US for Latin America for better quality of life there, eg Californians and others are moving to Mexico; and anecdotal evidence—many westerners fall in love with Colombia.

So while presumably many Colombians would like to move to the US, and not many Americans would like to move to Colombia, it should be noted that indeed many Westerners, from better objective conditions, do move to Colombia.

To provoke discussion and spark research, these are only speculations so far.

~~World Economic Forum report 2017~~

8 World Economic Forum report 2017

World Economic Forum (WEF) indicators are in figure 8.

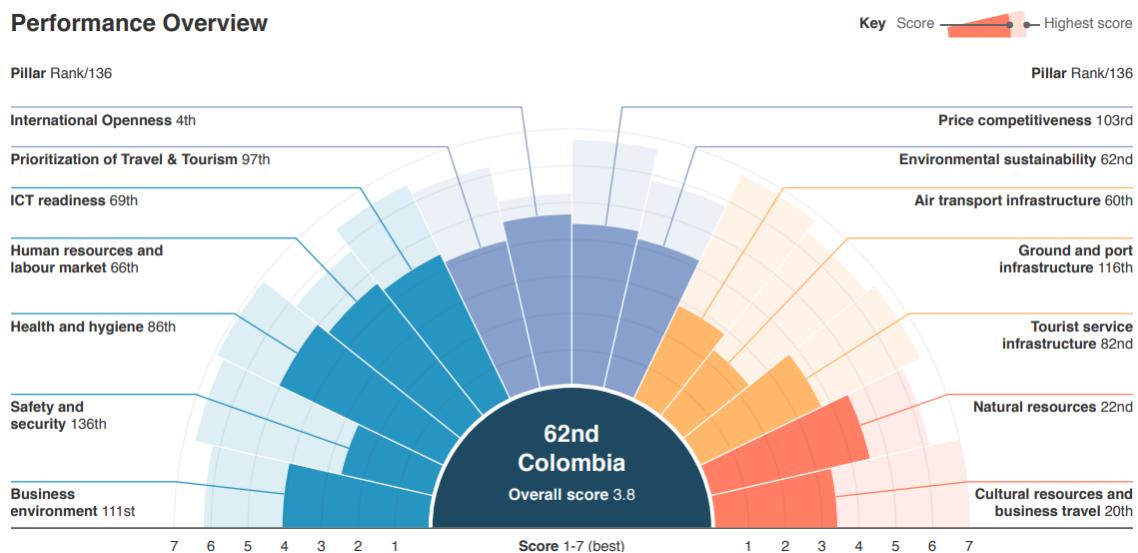


Figure 8: World Economic Forum report 2017 from https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_TTCR_2017_web_0401.pdf.

Colombia has everything: Pacific, Caribbean, jungle, desert, mountains, you name it, like Latin America in one country. So it is striking that according to WEF in terms of Prioritization of Travel & Tourism Colombia ranks 97th out of 136 countries (World Economic Forum 2017). Its air transport infrastructure is good, 60th, but Ground and Port Infrastructure is poor, 116th. But the worst is Safety and Security, 136th/136. Surely Colombia should work to improve safety, but much progress has already been done, and it is important to point out that much of the country is safe, and dangerous Colombia is more of a stigma of the past than present reality.

USNEWS measures QOL as: A good job market, Affordable, Economically stable, Family-friendly, Income equality, Politically stable, Safe, Well-developed public education system, Well-developed public health system—see <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/colombia>.

~~Freedom is Even The National Motto (Liberdad y Orden)~~

9 Freedom is Even The National Motto (Liberdad y Orden)



Figure 9: *Liberdad y Orden*.

In the US despite all the hype about freedom, the motto is “In God We Trust.” Or the older version, “E pluribus unum” refers to being united, not necessarily free.

10 Dissociation

The words in this section could be used as measures.

Amnesia < -c("how did I get here", "brain is on autopilot", "when did I get changed", "where did this come from", "they say they know me", "they said they know me", "I don't recognize them", "stressful events causing memory loss", "I don't think I lied", "I know I didn't lie", "what did I do earlier", "gaps in my memory", "memory lapse", "lapse in memory", "who am I", "what were we talking about", "what are we talking about", "coming to", "I can't remember", "I cannot remember", "I don't remember", "I do not remember", "frustrated with my memory", "I wish I could remember", "I want to remember", "I look

different", "I don't remember attempting suicide", "I don't remember hurting myself")

Daydreaming < – c("inner self dialogue", "inner dialogue", "unable to recall the conversation", "confusing dreams with reality", "did that really happen", "or was it a dream", "the world ceased to exist", "nothing around me matters", "my daydreams feel real", "my fantasies feel real", "confusing my imagination with reality", "staring off", "not knowing time had passed", "talking to myself aloud", "talking to myself out loud", "spaced out", "spacey", "floating off", "drifting off", "I'm scattered", "I am scattered", "my mind is scattered", "my brain is scattered", "scatterbrained", "I'm all over the place", "mentally all over the place", "mentally all over", "I'm not focused", "I am not focused", "I can't focus", "I cannot focus", "my mind wandering", "I forgot my plans", "I forgot to do chores", "I forgot", "I forget", "daydreaming", "daydreams", "blocking my memories", "blocked memories")

Highway Hypnosis i- ("zoning out while driving")

Absorption < – c("I lost all awareness", "stuck in a trance", "unaware of my surroundings")

Derealization < – c("nothing is real", "nobody is real", "no one is real", "I am not real", "I feel strange here", "everything seems unclear", "brain fog", "going within to protect myself", "going within", "retreat within to protect myself", "retreat within", "turning within to protect myself", "turning within", "ground falling beneath me", "ground falling out under me", "suddenly everything seems strange", "suddenly everything seemed strange", "suddenly everything was strange", "everything seems foreign", "everything seemed foreign", "everyone seems foreign", "everything seemed foreign", "I'm back at that place", "reliving that moment", "reliving what happened", "flashbacks are debilitating", "debilitating flashbacks")

Depersonalization < – c("debating myself", "their voice in my head", "familiar voice in my head", "their voices questioning me", "other's voices nagging me", "looking at myself as another", "disconnected from myself", "feeling outside of my body", "watching myself from the outside", "I don't recognize myself", "who is in the mirror", "this body isn't mine", "my body isn't mine", "body doesn't belong to me", "I couldn't feel the pain", "ignore the pain", "I don't feel like myself", "I don't act like myself", "it was unlike me", "I'm beside myself", "I am beside myself", "I'm not myself", "I am not myself", "I lost myself", "let go of myself",

"why did I do that", "what could've possessed me", "I wasn't myself", "I was not myself", "can't reveal my true self", "out of my mind", "out of my head", "out of my skull", "being with myself", "my body isn't real", "my body is not real", "I am speaking another's words", "why did I say that", "these thoughts aren't mine", "thoughts that aren't mine", "I'm not all there", "I am not all there", "feeling empty and painfully alone", "feeling empty", "feelings of emptiness", "felt empty", "painfully alone", "feeling alone", "felt alone", "I feel like a machine", "I feel like a robot", "I'm going through the motions", "going through the motions", "I feel detached", "I felt detached", "I'm feeling detached", "I am feeling detached", "I was feeling detached", "detached from myself", "why can't I move", "I feel paralyzed", "I felt paralyzed", "I watch myself", "I'm watching myself", "I am watching myself", "I watched myself", "I was watching myself", "going through the motions", "watch myself going through life", "watched myself going through life", "watching myself going through life", "watched myself complete daily tasks", "watch myself completing daily tasks", "watching myself complete daily tasks", "my mind is empty", "my mind was empty", "my mind is blank", "my mind was blank", "blank stare", "staing blankly", "stared blankly", "I seem gone")

Identity Fragmentation < - c("mental conversations with myself", "conversations with myself", "inner back and fourth dialogue", "internal dialogue", "I am two different people", "I'm two different people", "I was two different people", "like I was someone else", "the voices in my head", "I'm at war with myself", "at war with myself", "fighting a war within", "I'm struggling with myself", "I am struggling with myself", "struggling with myself", "that wasn't me", "that was not me", "nobody knows the real me", "myself on the inside", "the real me", "know the real me", "talking things over with myself", "talking with myself", "this feeling isn't mine", "this feeling is not mine", "feeling doesn't belong to me", "child's voice in my head", "another personality taking over", "another personality controlling me", "why did I think that", "why would I think that", "random thoughts", "intrusive thoughts", "sadness out of nowhere", "strong feelings out of nowhere", "filled with pain", "resist the urge", "these urges aren't mine", "urges are not mine", "feeling split or divided", "feeling split inside", "felt split inside", "feeling divided inside", "feel divided inside", "felt divided inside", "is this really me", "is this who I am", "inability to keep friends", "I can't keep friends", "I cannot keep friends", "I

feel different than normal", "I felt different", "I'm feeling different than normal", "was different than normal", "I feel weird", "I felt weird", "I'm feeling weird", "I was feeling weird", "I feel strange", "I felt strange", "I'm feeling strange", "I am feeling strange", "I was feeling strange", "I feel odd", "I felt odd", "I'm feeling odd", "I am feeling odd", "I was feeling odd", "voices saying to hurt myself", "the voices say hurt yourself", "my head is too loud", "my head is so loud", "my head was so loud", "inside my head is loud", "inside my head was loud", "screaming inside my head", "screams inside my head", "yelling inside my head", "noise inside my head", "angry out of nowhere", "why am I angry", "filled with anger", "I have multiple personalities", "I have many personalities", "I don't feel whole", "I do not feel whole", "I am not whole", "I'm not whole", "part of me is missing", "missing a part of myself", "racing thoughts", "my thoughts are racing", "my thoughts were racing", "racing mind", "my mind is racing", "my mind was racing", "can't stop racing thoughts", "cannot stop racing thoughts", "thoughts won't stop racing", "thoughts will not stop racing", "I can't stop thinking", "I cannot stop thinking", "I want to stop thinking", "struggling with my identity", "struggling to find my identity", "struggling with who I am", "figuring out who I am", "acting like another person", "I am not that person", "I'm not that person", "unlike myself", "protective voice in my head", "helpful voice in my head", "soothing voice in my head).