Quality of Life And Subjective Wellbeing In Colombia

Wednesday 26th April, 2023

1 Background work already accomplished

Happiness is not only a fleeting emotion, but also a goal of human development as recognized by the United Nations, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and others (Stiglitz et al. 2009, Diener 2019, 2009, Fleche et al. 2011).

I have a long standing interest in subjective wellbeing (SWB) and quality of life (QOL) since around 2006, when I started working on my dissertation on the topic. Since then almost all of my publications are on the topic.

But it was not until several years ago, when in one paper I have noticed Colombian excepionally high subjective wellbeing despite low (objective) Quality Of Life (Okulicz-Kozaryn and Altman 2019, p. 1059):

> But there are also outliers. For instance, Colombia (CO) is happy and energy efficient, but poor. In general, Latin America poses a puzzle for SWB researchers. Latin Americans are relatively poor but happy.

We have already started some collabartion with Lina in this area during my 2022 Fall sabbatical which I spent in Colombia. We have 3 papers at draft stage:

- `https://theaok.github.io/junk/linaCommute.pdf`A New Stop for Unhappiness. Bus Stop Proximity is Related to Lower Life Satisfaction in Cali, Colombia

- `https://theaok.github.io/junk/swbColCitReg.pdf`Happy Colombia, Unhappy Bogota

- `https://theaok.github.io/junk/colQolSwbS.pdf`Colombia: Unlivable but Happy. Fool's Paradise?

However, to really get this research going without waiting for another sabbatical in 2026, this grant would be instrumental. About two thirds of the grant will be spent on travel, for me to go to Colombia and work on research there, and for Lina to come to Camden and present the research here.

2 Rationale / Intellectual merit (importance of the project to the field) / Broader impact (importance of the project to the larger society-including the campus)

Latin America is one of the greatest puzzles of the broadly understood social indicators field, and one of the key areas for current and future research. Colombia is often overlooked despite being 3rd largest country at about 52m, after Brazil (214m) and Mexico (127m); and slightly larger than Argentina (46m). Colombia is also 4th largest country of the continent in terms of area, the only country of the continent with both Pacific and Atlantic (Caraibean Sea) cost, and the 2nd most biodiverse country in the World (after Brazil).

In addition, it is commonly lamented that much of social scientific research is done on WEIRD people, i.e., Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich and Democratic. If not entirely WEIRD, the bias is commonly in favor the Global North. SWB research is not an exception–vast majority of SWB research has been done in Global North.

Another limitation/gap of SWB research is that almost all the research is done at one of the following levels: person, society/nation, or region/province level. Virtually all SWB research analyzes person level data that are

representative of (or nested within) society/nation level, and/or sometimes at region/province level. Research at neighborhood/community level is remarkably rare.[1] The present research aims to fill both of these gaps. To our best knowledge the only SWB dataset representative of neighborhoods/communities in Global South (except China) is CaliBRANDO (Martínez and Short 2020, Martínez 2017).

MV somewhere There is interdependence: difficult and suboptimal to conduct research on a place without collaborator from that place.

The proposal is interdisciplinary: lina is at b school; im at public policy; and especially im in camden, lina is in colombia–different yet complementary persoectives on the same topic and much potential for synergistic collaboration

3 Project goals and objectives / Methods

The overreaching project goal and objective is to contribute to the solution of the Latin happiness paradox of high happiness despite few resources.

The plan is to utilize 2 common datasets: WVS and caliBrando. WVS is useful as it is representative of Colombia, and caliBrando is representative of neighborhoods of a major colombian city. Again, we already have such papers at draft stage:

- `https://theaok.github.io/junk/linaCommute.pdf`A New Stop for Unhappiness. Bus Stop Proximity is Related to Lower Life Satisfaction in Cali, Colombia

- `https://theaok.github.io/junk/swbColCitReg.pdf`Happy Colombia, Unhappy Bogota

Method is usual Oridinary Least Square regression of happiness on key variable of interest and known predictors of happiness as in the above drafts.

4 Student engagement in the project / Grad student / teaching

I am also teaching a happiness class at Rutgers Camden and was able to generate substantial interest among the students ion the topic. And hence, I propose to spend about third of the grant on hiring a student to assist with the research.

Last but not least, there could be another syndergistic activity–I have applied for teaching abroad program to provide experientail learning component to my happiness class `https://theaok.github.io/swb` in Colombia. Colombia offers lessons for happiness. Despite poverty, corruption, and poor infrastructure, Colombia is one of the happiest countries in the world, happier than the US, and especially happier than Philadelphia and New York City, some of the least happy places in the US.

Integrating travel experience with the course material is easy in case of happiness. Happiness is readily felt and experienced as one changes environment. Indeed, happiness is "in the air", and so is unhappiness–one can readily exprience doom and gloom.

5 Plans for disseminating the outcomes of the project

This is precisely where the grant will help–it will allow AOK present the research in Colombia, and LM to present it in the US, including Camden.

Otherwhise research will be presented at the conferences such as ISQOLS and ERSA, and finally published in academic journals such as Cities or JOHS

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[1]Nationally representative datasets sometimes ask about certain community/neighborhood characteristics (e.g., US GSS or German SOEP), including in Latin America, e.g., ISSP (Gandelman et al. 2012), but the data are typically not identifying actual communities/neighborhoods, and if they do (e.g., restricted version of US GSS), the data are not representative of communities/neighborhoods. There are only a handful of exceptions, and all of them in Global North (and China): Ma et al. (2017), Helliwell et al. (2018), Ziogas et al. (2020), Mouratidis (2017, 2020b,a), Mouratidis and Yiannakou (2022), Weckroth et al. (2022), Anon (2021), Pfeiffer et al. (2020), Ciorici and Dantzler (2019), Du et al. (2017), Ala-Mantila et al. (2017), Wang et al. (2019).

6 Potential for extramural funding, including identification of a targetfunder/program

There is potential at least from two main sources: foundations, especially private ones such as Templeteon (private?) or Gates foundation–foundations typically want to 'save the world' or at least improve it, and happiness is one of the outcomes to maximize. Second, there is interest in the topic by governments and global organizations such as the UN and OECD, and these organizations may be potential funding sources. Last but not least, Colombian government (as many governments around the World) has interest in happiness, and so do local governments in COlombia, for instance mayor of Bogota–yet there are little resources in Colombia.

7 Budget

Total: $14,326

- $7,000 Camden graduate student compensation
- $3,400 PI Adam Okulicz-Kozaryn travel to Cali Colombia: 2 trips
    - $2,000: 2 ∗ $1000 Return Flight Airfare
    - $1,400: 2 ∗ $700 (14 days hotel at $50 per night)
- $3,926 Co-PI Lina Martinez travel to Camden
    - $1,000 Return Flight Airfare
    - $2,100 14 days hotel at $150 per night
    - $826 14 days M&IE per diem rate at $59

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