

Author's response

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

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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

2 response to reviewer #3

The article conducts a comparative study between Colombia (seemingly unlivable but happy) and the other areas (seemingly livable but unhappy), and this comparative approach is very novel. It challenges the traditional concept of measuring the quality of life and happiness in terms of material conditions and provides a new dimension of thinking for happiness research. On the one hand, it emphasizes the important role of non-material factors such as social connections, freedom, and cultural traditions in the generation of happiness. This is particularly unique in the context where many current studies focus on the economic and material aspects and help to understand the composition of happiness more comprehensively. On the other hand, the study of Colombia and the United States triggers reflections on different development models. It explores the possible negative impacts of excessive pursuit of economic growth and material comfort, such as alienation and a decrease in happiness, as well as the happiness advantages that a model that focuses less on material development but more on humanistic and social relations may bring.

n/a

However, I think this article still needs further modifications: 1. The article directly presents the situation of Colombians at the very beginning, which is very straightforward. It fails to position the unique academic background and research value of this study from a more macroscopic and research perspective. It does not highlight the significance of the study in the paper. Optimizing the writing of the introduction is recommended. For example, starting from the paradoxical phenomenon of livability and happiness, as well as the discussion and progress of existing research, then raise the research question and the important role of specific cases in answering this question.

We added on literature fit and significance at the very beginning, in 2nd paragraph:

Our study fits in the classic happiness theorizing by Veenhoven 2000, 1995, 2014 and Michalos 2014; with Latin focus following Rojas (2015) and Yamamoto (2016). Further, we complement this traditional line of inquiry with rarely used perspectives in happiness research: folklore theory and Marx's alienation theory. We conclude that happiness and material underdevelopment can coexist, and even that underdevelopment may promote happiness in some ways.

and then we say at the beginning of Conclusion and Discussion section:

The origin of the study has been the apparent paradox in the 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).¹ 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.

2. The article employs multiple theories, such as Veenhoven's theory of quality of life, Michalos's two-variable theory, Marx's theory of alienation, and folklore theory, etc. However, the connection between these theories could be made more smooth. In some parts, the elaboration of the theories is rather rigid, and readers need to spend some effort to understand how different theories jointly support the research topic. It is recommended that when introducing each theory, the author could more clearly point out its connection with other theories and its unique role in explaining the Colombian happiness paradox. At the same time, the analytical dimensions of each theory should be integrated at the beginning to serve as the basis for evaluating and analyzing each case rather than just using the theories for interpretation.

¹In 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 Yamamoto (2016).

We strived to connect the theories more smoothly—for instance, we added few sentences connecting the theory when we introduce it.

We also went through all of the text and made some edits for clarity and smoothness.

3. Although the conclusion part of the article discusses whether Colombia is a "fool's paradise" and puts forward some views, it could be more in-depth. There is insufficient discussion on the universality of the research results and the limitations of the research itself. It is recommended to explore the implications of the research's further results for other countries and regions in the conclusion part, as well as the challenges that may be faced in promoting these conclusions. At the same time, it clearly points out the limitations of the research, such as the limitations of data sources and the possible impact of the complexity of cultural factors on the research results, to provide directions for future research.

You ask to extend conclusion, but then below in #4 you complain that the third part is too long—so we added a section "universality of the research results and the limitations" in online appendix (appended at the end of the article).

4. The overall structure of the article is not reasonable enough. The earlier part is relatively weak, and the third part is rather long. Check and optimize the distribution among chapters. In addition, the logic of the article also needs to be further integrated. There is no unified theoretical perspective and analytical logic running through the whole text, and only the abnormal phenomena are interpreted and analyzed.

The layout still somewhat remains non-standard as the article matter is non-standard—the article is mostly non-empirical and accordingly does not follow the usual intro/literature/theory, data/analysis/results, and conclusion/discussion.

We added to the first part on fit in the literature and significance.

Do note that the last part was mostly extended in last revision in response to reviewers' comments.

At the same time we agree that the last part was little unwieldy and thick, to strike some balance we have moved couple paragraphs and the whole subsection "Alternative Explanations and Counterarguments" to the online appendix (appended at the end of the article).

Overall, the article provides very interesting phenomena and a unique research perspective, but it is necessary to systematically revise the theoretical perspective, discussion logic, and chapter layout.

n/a

References

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