Applied Research in Quality of Life
https://doi.org/10.1007/s11482-025-10518-x

Colombia: Unlivable but Happy?

Adam Okulicz-Kozaryn[1] · **Lina Martinez**[2]

Received: 3 January 2024 / Accepted: 17 October 2025

Abstract
This theoretical and review-based article examines the Latin American phenomenon–the region's unexpectedly high levels of subjective well-being despite low income and persistent structural deficits. We focus on Colombia, a country often perceived as unlivable yet consistently reporting relatively high levels of subjective well-being, and contrast it with the United States, a nation widely regarded as highly livable but with comparatively lower happiness indicators. We argue that genuine happiness is possible even in contexts of limited material comfort, as conventional measures of livability often overemphasize material conditions that may not be essential for well-being once basic needs are met. Conversely, the excessive pursuit of material comfort–as exemplified in the US–may diminish happiness by fostering overwork, alienation, and depersonalized environments. While we cannot rule out the possibility that Colombia's reported happiness reflects adaptive responses to adversity, we critically assess alternative explanations and propose directions for future research.

Keywords Life satisfaction · Happiness · Subjective well-being · Quality of life · Livability · Best places to live · Colombia · Alienation · Degrowth

For a full earlier version see: https://theaok.github.io/docs/colQolSwb.pdf

✉ Adam Okulicz-Kozaryn
adam.okulicz.kozaryn@gmail.com

Lina Martinez
lmmartinez@icesi.edu.co

[1] Department of Public Policy and Administration, Rutgers University, 401 Cooper St, Camden, NJ 08102, USA

[2] Universidad Icesi, Calle 18 No. 122-135 Pance, Cali, Colombia

Published online: 24 November 2025

Traditional progress/development measures like income, production, and consumption cannot fully account for people's life experiences 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.

Latin American countries consistently report higher levels of subjective well-being than most developed nations, despite lower average incomes and persistent structural challenges. This puzzle is recognized in the literature as the "Latin American Phenomenon" (Rojas, 2015, 2019).

Similar to other Latin American countries, Colombia reports high levels of subjective well-being (PNUD, 2023). This outcome often appears paradoxical when contrasted with the nation's enduring challenges. Poverty, inequality, violence, and informality remain widespread, and large segments of the population face precarious working conditions and limited access to social protection (Hurtado et al., 2017). Yet, despite these structural barriers, Colombians regularly report levels of subjective well-being (SWB) that are higher than would be predicted by income or security indicators (Krauss & Graham, 2013). This apparent contradiction between low livability and high reported SWB has made Colombia a case in point regarding the Latin American happiness puzzle (Graham & Lora, 2010; Velásquez, 2016). Scholars have proposed several explanations for this paradox. Research has highlighted the importance of social relationships and relational goods in Colombian society (Velásquez, 2016), the buffering role of social capital in contexts of insecurity and conflict (Wills-Herrera et al., 2011), and the influence of cultural patterns of optimism and expressiveness (Orozco & File-Muriel, 2012; Nasser, 2012; Woods & McColl, 2015). At the same time the average levels of happiness conceal marked inequalities across income groups, regions, and socio-demographic categories (Burger et al., 2021). While Colombians are happy, the distribution of happiness is uneven, and the conditions sustaining it may be fragile. In this article, we seek to contribute to the broader discussion of the Latin American happiness phenomenon by using Colombia as a study case. Colombia can be seen simultaneously as a "real paradise," where social ties and cultural resilience sustain surprisingly high levels of happiness, and as a "fool's paradise," where optimism masks deep structural deficits and inequalities. To contrast this paradox, we draw on comparisons with developed countries. While the US is often portrayed as materially prosperous but socially alienated (Frank, 2012; Manson, 2015), Colombia represents the opposite tension, a country facing significant deficits in livability yet consistently reporting high levels of subjective well-being (PNUD, 2023). This contrast allows us to situate Colombia within a larger debate on how well-being is perceived in societies with very different structural and cultural conditions.

Our study follows 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.

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 ("Happy Colombia" section) despite low livability (high poverty, insecurity, inequality, etc) ("Unlivable Colombia" section). Having established an apparent paradox of high happiness despite low livability we move to the theoretical framework to understand it ("Unlivable but Happy–"Fool's Paradise"?" section): 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 ("Livability Theory: Human Needs" section), folklore ("Folklore's Theory: Colombia's "Good Energy"" section), and Marx's alienation ("Theory of Alienation" section) theories. As a complement to fool's paradise in Colombia we turn to fool's hell (very livable but only moderately happy) in the US ("The US: Fool's Hell?" section). We finish with discussion and conclusion ("Discussion and Conclusion" section). Subjective Wellbeing (SWB)/ happiness is defined in the first paragraph of "Happy Colombia" section. Livability is defined in the first paragraph of "Unlivable Colombia" section.

Happy Colombia

Subjective Wellbeing (SWB), happiness, wellbeing, and life satisfaction are used interchangeably, and they all refer to the 4th quality of life, the satisfaction of the person (Veenhoven, 2000). Technically, we focus on evaluative or cognitive life satisfaction, as opposed to affective happiness (positive and negative emotions) or eudaimonia (flourishing and functioning). This section relies on evaluative/cognitive life satisfaction data, the only part of the article that uses survey-based happiness indicators. Further details and auxiliary points are provided in the online appendix.

The US Declaration of Independence guarantees not happiness itself, but the pursuit of happiness. In practice, some Americans succeed in this pursuit and others fail, with the result that the US tends to rank below the top quartile in international happiness comparisons (46th of 160 countries in the World Database of Happiness; see Table 1).

By contrast, the Colombian Constitution explicitly establishes happiness and quality of life as responsibilities of the state: "The general well-being and improvement of the population's quality of life are social purposes of the State."[1] Colombians also report substantially higher levels of happiness than Americans. However, existing evidence suggests that this is less an outcome of state action and more a reflection of cultural, social, and relational dynamics (Martínez, 2017; Martínez & Short, 2020). Like other Latin Americans, Colombians consistently report very high levels of life satisfaction, about 8.5 on 1-10 evaluative/cognitive life satisfaction scale, a score much higher than expected given economic, social, and institutional indicators (PNUD, 2023).

Colombia regularly appears among the happiest countries worldwide, both the World Values Survey and the World Database of Happiness rank it among the top

[1] Art 366, https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Colombia_2015

Table 1 10 happiest countries in the world

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

Data from World Database of Happiness (WDH) 2010-2019 out of 160 countries at https://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-in-nations-2010-2019 and WVS documentation is at https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV7.jsp

three (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, and SWB survey items are very similar to that in WVS. Colombia is outstanding at achieving 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 Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) terms.[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 "Livability Theory: Human Needs" section

In sharp contrast to high Colombian happiness, Colombia is not livable or has low objective quality of life (QOL), as measured with objective indicators in Table 2.[3]

Some of the objective indicators of quality of life from Table 2 are remarkably deficient: 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

[2] See https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD and https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.PP.CD

[3] 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 (https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/colombia). World Economic Forum provides indicators, too (World Economic Forum, 2017).

Table 2 Livability/Quality Of Life (QOL): objective indicators

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/col
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/col
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

For details on each indicator click the link under "Source" column

one of the poorest cities in the US, Camden NJ, at 36% (also national benchmark).[4] Median daily PPP per capita income in 2011 was at $7 (the US was at $56). Colombia is in the bottom decile of working conditions: 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 remarkable 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 these deficiencies–insecurity, precarious labor, poverty, and inequality are expected to result in unhappiness. Inequality in Latin America was found to have negative effects on happiness as it signals persistent unfairness (Graham & Felton, 2006)–unfairness seems to be more detrimental to happiness than 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).

Colombia is still being haunted by violence and conflict, much of which is rural (Turkewitz, 2021). 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, ranking 96/210, and quite corrupt ranking 87/180. Rule of law is also problematic below about 2/3 of countries. Crime rates are high: in terms of homicides Colombia ranks in top decile, and by one

[4] https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/camdencitynewjersey

"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.

We agree with Krauss and Graham (2013); Wills-Herrera et al. (2011) that increasing happiness in Colombia should have to do with mitigating vulnerabilities and negative shocks that people face. As elaborated above there is a multitude of problems, some extreme. While, as argued later here, Colombia actually is already quite livable, there are some extreme problems like abject poverty that need to be addressed no matter how happy people may already be.

Unlivable but Happy–"Fool's Paradise"?

In the 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 mismatch or paradox, and spark the debate and 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 the last cell (satisfaction of the person). That is, a livable place should be happy.

Colombia's low livability should result in low satisfaction–it is unexpected for Colombia to be a happy country. Colombia scores mediocre or low on most livability indicators, but tops rankings of satisfaction. 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 livability and SWB can be visualized in a 2x2 matrix in Table 4–expected outcomes are low-low or high-high, but there can also be unexpected low-high "fool's paradise" or high-low "fool's hell."

There are 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 complemen-

[5] Although 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.

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

	Outer qualities	Inner qualities
Life-chances	Livability of environment	Life-ability of the person
Life-results	Utility of life	Satisfaction of the person

Table 4 Michalos 2 variable theory: fool's paradise and fool's hell (Michalos, 2014)

	Low livability	High livability
Low SWB	Real hell [deprivation, unhappy poor]	Fool's hell [dissonance, unhappy rich]
High SWB	Fool's paradise [adaptation, happy poor]	Real paradise [well-being, happy rich]

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)

tary analysis from the opposite side (very livable but only moderately happy): fool's hell in the US.

Livability Theory: Human Needs

Veenhoven's livability/needs theory is a major and ideally fitting happiness theory, specifically about the link between livability and SWB, as conceptualized in the last section in Tables 3 and 4 (Veenhoven & 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:

> 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) (Maslow, [1954] 1987). 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 as elaborated in later section "Theory of Alienation." This 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 indices. 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 and opportunity costs.

Biophilia (Fromm, 1964; Wilson, 2021), a need for contact with nature is a fundamental human need, yet usually forgotten. There is a clear tradeoff between economic

growth and nature abundance and preservation, for instance, the more urbanization, the less natural the human habitat. For instance, in Brazil–the more economic expansion and growth, the less Amazon 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). 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. Per Colombian natural resources use and economic growth see discussion in Rubiano (2022).

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

Social connection is a human need, and a key to happiness (Tönnies, [1887] 2002; Lane, 2000; McMahon, 2006; Putnam, 2001), and there is high degree of social connection in Colombia. Social gatherings, events and festivals are widespread, frequent and long-lasting. 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 primary sources of happiness–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). 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 human need. Colombia scores average on freedom listed earlier as a livability 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, be free from restrictions/impediments, lack obstacles. But there is another kind of freedom: "freedom to" (positive, subjective): be able to choose, control and direct one's own life, and be in charge. On scale 1-10, world's average is about 7; the US scores higher at 7.7, but Colombia scores higher yet at 8 (Okulicz-Kozaryn, 2014, 2015).

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

Folklore theory is an attractive explanation of fool's paradise (Table 4). It is a theory put forth by Veenhoven as a competing explanation to his livability theory as discussed in the last section. The folklore theory states that happiness is a product of cul-

ture–tradition, national character and widely held notions about life determine one's happiness (Veenhoven & Ehrhardt, 1995). Happiness is the reflection of broadly held perceptions about life which are rooted in traditions and the culture of a society (Veenhoven & Ehrhardt, 1995). If a culture has an optimistic outlook on life regardless of circumstances, future generations will remain happy. Thus, a society may be happy, regardless of the socioeconomic situation, because of cultural influences (Veenhoven & Ehrhardt, 1995). In other words, one can wear so called "pink glasses" and be happy no matter the circumstances (or see through dark lenses, have a bleak outlook and be unhappy no matter the circumstances). This is in sharp contrast to livability theory, where happiness is a result of a 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 resembles evolutionary needs; resources to achieve needs are available for everyone; positive, interdependent collectivistic interaction is ingrained in behavior, 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 (livability theory) as tradition and culture fit human needs. This is a key point: while in principle folklore theory is in contrast to livability theory (Veenhoven & Ehrhardt, 1995), in practice, in specific cases, the two theories do not have to be contradictory. If tradition and culture help satisfy human needs, as is the case in Latin America, the two theories are not contradictory.

There is an indigenous concept of "Buen Vivir" (Good Living) (Hidalgo-Capitán & 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 & García-Quero, 2014). Notably, Buen Vivir helps to explain an apparent fool's paradise–economic poverty is relative–it depends on a 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 & 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, proposed a similar concept to Buen Vivir, "Vivir Sabroso," to live in harmony with nature, traditions, and community: "vivir sabroso no es vivir con plata, vivir sabroso es vivir sin miedos" ("living joyfully is not living with money, living joyfully is living without fear.")[6]

[6] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AtpExO2e_0M

The folklore theory is about national disposition/trait/character. It does appear that Colombians have a slow-paced familial/social cheerful/happy disposition, which is conducive for happiness. Colombian happiness is arguably real, however, rather than just being due to cognitive cultural norms. And again, it is not just due to culture on its own, rather due to culture that is aligned with human needs and satisfies them, so that 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 & 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 future research as authors' anthropological and historical expertise is limited–but we discuss below popular explanations for Colombia's happiness–future research can test them properly and systematically.

According to accounts of foreigners living in Colombia, Colombian happiness stems from: family, friends, and optimism ; having less entitlement and appreciating what one has, having joy in small things; not worrying and not expecting much ("tranquilo," "no importa") (Bargent, 2016).

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 and simple a desirable quality? Surface acting (faking emotions that are deemed appropriate) is emotionally draining (Brooks, 2022).

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

> Money is nice but it's not the most important thing. In general we are a culture that values what you have. [...] Colombians are innocent. They're curious. [...] 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. [...] Colombians have always demonstrated incredible, Herculean and powerful resilience to war, death and to the harsh history of violence and diplomatic failures [...] Colombians feed this resilience through human connections and the communal experience. [...] We live for parties, holidays [...] 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.

Theory of Alienation

From a Western perspective, Colombians appear remarkably connected. Indeed, there is a striking contrast between the high levels of social integration observed in

Latin America (Rojas, 2015; Woods & McColl, 2015) and the patterns of alienation and estrangement often described in Western societies (Scitovsky, 1976; Lane, 2000; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010; Duany et al., 2001; Freud et al., 1930). This contrast resonates with Marx's theory of alienation. Marx defined alienation as the transformation of people's labor into a force that comes to dominate them. It implies separation from the conditions of meaningful agency, typically occurring when individuals lack ownership of the means of production (Horowitz, 2022). The overall alienation consists of alienation from: the product of labor, the activity of labor, one's own specific humanity, and others/society.[7]

In the Colombian context, there is often described a sense of "good energy" and "vitality" (Bargent, 2016; Wallace, 2017) that contrasts with the alienation documented in the West (Freud et al., 1930). It can be argued that the United States and other affluent societies have sacrificed elements of humanity in the pursuit of economic success. Latin America, by contrast, has retained higher levels of reported happiness but has not achieved the same levels of economic power. Fischer (1973, p.233) observed that urban residents pay "the emotional price for economic wellbeing," a dynamic that seems applicable to Americans, and other wealthy societies. Colombians' attitude and approach to life is spontaneous and optimistic –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–in contrast to the West, where anxiety and materialism are widespread (Scitovsky, 1976; Lane, 2000; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010; Duany et al., 2001; Freud et al., 1930).[8]

The US way of life has been characterized as fast paced and oriented toward material achievement (Easterlin, 1973). Busyness–being constantly occupied with work–is socially valued (Gershuny, 2005; Musk, 2018). Yet this lifestyle is also associated with stress, anxiety, and alienation, extending beyond the workplace. Cultural pressures to "keep up with the Joneses" and to strive for perfection amplify these stresses (Frank, 2012; Manson, 2015). This widespread pursuit of perfection and excellence creates competitive "arms race," generating cycles of stress, anxiety, shame, and guilt (Frank, 2012; Manson, 2015).

In highly capitalistic societies such as the US, social relationships also tend to be instrumental and oriented toward business rather than deep personal connection (Horowitz, 2022; Okulicz-Kozaryn, 2020). By contrast, Colombians are often described as spontaneous, closer to human nature, and more authentic in their interactions (Orozco & File-Muriel, 2012; Nasser, 2012; Woods & McColl, 2015). Evidence from Cali, Colombia's third largest city, reinforces this contrast. Annual surveys conducted since 2014 show that family and personal relationships are the most important sources of subjective well-being, while politics, corruption, and other adverse external circumstances are rarely mentioned in self-assessments of life satisfaction

[7] For elaboration see Horowitz (2022) and https://www.marxists.org/subject/alienation.

[8] On the other hand, there may be elements of culture of poverty (Banfield, 1967, 1974) in Latin America. Yet, some culture of poverty may counter-intuitively be desirable in wealthy societies such as the US–see a novel point of view in Manson (2015).

(Martínez, 2017; Martínez & Short, 2020). This helps explain why poor performance on objective livability indicators does not necessarily translate into lower subjective well-being.

The US: Fool's Hell?

The US, the very richest (per capita) country in the world (excluding small countries such as Norway), ranks 46/160 in the World Database of Happiness, not even ranking in the top happiness quartile. Recent evidence underscores the paradoxical nature of American prosperity. While the US economy has grown faster than nearly all other high-income countries since the 1990s, performance on most well-being metrics has deteriorated (Leonhardt & Wu, 2025). This resonates with the alienation framework, where the pursuit of economic dominance may have come at the expense of meaningful social integration and wellbeing.

One would imagine that the US must have top income mobility in the world or at least somewhere near the top. But many other countries have better income mobility, e.g., Norway, Denmark, and 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 & Kasser, 2005; Kasser, 2003; Schmuck et al., 2000; Kasser & Ryan, 1993; Leonard, 2010).

Discussion and Conclusion

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 & Ehrhardt, 1995; Veenhoven, 2014), and Marx's theory of alienation. Our contribution lies in combining these conceptual approaches with Latin American evidence (Rojas, 2015; Hurtado, 2016; Velásquez, 2016; Yamamoto, 2016) to highlight the coexistence of resilience and vulnerability in Latin American context, using Colombia as a case of study. We also combine conceptual and theoretical approaches to offer new insights about high happiness despite apparently low livability in Colombia.

Is Colombia "unlivable but happy," a so called "fool's paradise"? The evidence suggests that this label only captures part of the story. Colombia is characterized by severe deficits–poverty, inequality, insecurity, weak institutions–yet Colombians consistently report high levels of life satisfaction (PNUD, 2023). Explanations include strong social and family networks, cultural orientations toward optimism and expressiveness, and adaptive responses to adversity (e.g., Roos 2019; Wallace 2017; Davies 2022; Woods and McColl 2015).

These factors buffer the negative effects of structural deficits, but they do not eliminate them. A key lesson is that traditional metrics of livability and progress–income, infrastructure, material comfort–capture only part of what matters for subjective well-being. Relational wealth, positive freedom, and cultural dispositions also play central roles. At the same time, average levels conceal inequalities across regions, income groups, and social categories (Burger et al., 2021).

In comparative perspective, the contrast with the United States illustrates the paradox. The US is materially prosperous yet often described as socially alienated, with happiness outcomes that are modest relative to its wealth. Colombia, by contrast, is materially constrained yet socially rich. This juxtaposition underscores that material progress is not linearly related to subjective well-being, and that excessive pursuit of growth and consumption may undermine rather than enhance quality of life. The broader conclusion is that Colombia is not simply an anomaly but part of a wider Latin American phenomenon of "high happiness at low income." Colombia shows that happiness and underdevelopment can coexist, and that social connection and cultural resilience can compensate for deficits in material conditions. Yet Colombia also illustrates the limits of this paradox–structural inequalities, persistent insecurity, and fragile institutions constrain the sustainability of well-being.

Takeaway for Policy and Practice

The world has much to learn from the high subjective well-being in regions where economic growth has lagged, yet social relationships, cultural resilience, and adaptive capacities continue to sustain well-being. Our analysis suggests two sets of implications. First, for Colombia and Latin America, sustaining well-being requires addressing vulnerabilities that optimism and social ties alone cannot resolve. Reducing inequality, improving working conditions, and strengthening institutions remain central to the policy agenda (Burger et al., 2021). High subjective well-being in the country should not obscure the urgency of structural reforms.

Second, for developed countries such as the United States, the Colombian case illustrates the importance of relational goods, social connection, and positive freedom–dimensions often neglected in highly individualistic, consumption-oriented societies. Western societies are marked by materialism, consumerism, and the pursuit of status and wealth (Leonard, 2010; Frank, 2012). Although it is widely recognized that material comfort is not sufficient for happiness (Stiglitz et al., 2009), and that spending on experiences and social connection contributes more to well-being than spending on material possessions (Ware, 2012; Van Boven, 2005; Kumar et al., 2014; Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014), the dominant pursuit of economic growth and consumption continues. Some scholars even argue that what may be needed in the West is economic degrowth rather than further expansion (Kallis et al., 2012; Kallis, 2011). The Western consumerist orientation contrasts with–and arguably comes at the expense of–the social connection, positive freedom, and joy often highlighted in Latin America (Orozco & File-Muriel, 2012; Nasser, 2012; Woods & McColl, 2015). However, these lessons must be applied cautiously. Cultural dispositions cannot be transplanted, and resilience in the face of adversity should not be romanticized as a substitute for material security and institutional quality. Colombia's paradox lies not

in being a "fool's paradise," but in showing both the possibilities and limitations of happiness under adversity. It reminds us that subjective well-being is multidimensional, shaped as much by relationships and cultural orientations as by material comfort, and that both resilience and vulnerability must be recognized in order to design policies that foster sustainable human flourishing.

Supplementary Information The online version contains supplementary material available at https://doi.org/10.1007/s11482-025-10518-x.

Author Contributions AOK: Conceptualization, Methodology, Software, Writing-Original draft preparation, Visualization, Investigation, Supervision; LM: Writing- Reviewing and Editing

Funding Rutgers Camden Chancellor's Interdisciplinary Research Collaboration grant. Lina Martinez' research has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program under grant agreement No 101094546. Views and opinions expressed are, however, those of the authors only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Declarations

Ethical approval Complied

Conflicts of interest None declared

References

Adjei, P.O.-W., & Agyei, F. K. (2015). Biodiversity, environmental health and human well-being: Analysis of linkages and pathways. *Environment, Development and Sustainability, 17*, 1085–1102.
Banfield, E. (1967). *The moral basis of a backward society*, Free Press.
Banfield, E. (1974). *The unheavenly city revisited*. Brown Boston: Little.
Bargent, J. (2016). Here's what we can learn from Colombia–the happiest nation in the world, *Washingtonpost, 15 January 2016*.
Bhattacharjee, A., & Mogilner, C. (2014). Happiness from ordinary and extraordinary experiences. *Journal of Consumer Research, 41*, 1–17.
Brooks, A. C. (2022). Meetings are miserable. One of the most straightforward paths to happiness at work is to fight against the scourge of time-consuming, unproductive meetings at every opportunity. *The Atlantic*.
Brown, K. W., & Kasser, T. (2005). Are psychological and ecological well-being compatible? The role of values, mindfulness, and lifestyle. *Social Indicators Research, 74*, 349–368.
Burger, M., Hendriks, M., & Ianchovichina, E. (2021). Happy but unequal: Differences in subjective well-being across individuals and space in Colombia. *Applied Research in Quality of Life*, 1–45.
Corak, M. (2004). *Generational income mobility in North America and Europe*. New York NY: Cambridge University Press.
Corak, M. (2011). Inequality from generation to generation: The United States in comparison. *The Economics of Inequality, Poverty, and Discrimination in the 21st Century*.
Corak, M. (2013). Income inequality, equality of opportunity, and intergenerational mobility. *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 79–102.
Davies, F. (2022). Colombia–home to the World's happiest people. *motodreamer.com*.
De Vos, J., Schwanen, T., Van Acker, V., & Witlox, F. (2013). Travel and subjective well-being: A focus on findings, methods and future research needs. *Transport Reviews, 33*, 421–442.
Diener, E. (2009). *Well-being for public policy*. New York NY: Oxford University Press.

Dittmar, H., Bond, R., Hurst, M., & Kasser, T. (2014). The relationship between materialism and personal well-being: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 107*, 879.
Duany, A., Plater-Zyberk, E., & Speck, J. (2001). *Suburban nation: The rise of sprawl and the decline of the American dream*. New York NY: North Point Press.
Easterlin, R. A. (1973). Does money buy happiness? *The Public Interest, 30*, 3.
Economist, T. (2012a). For richer, for poorer. *The Economist, 13 October 2012*.
Economist, T. (2012b). True progressivism. *The Economist, 13 October 2012*.
Economist, T. (2013). Having your cake; Less inequality does not need to mean less efficiency. *The Economist, 12 October 2012*.
Fischer, C. S. (1973). Urban malaise. *Social Forces, 52*, 221–235.
Frank, R. (2012). *The Darwin economy: Liberty, competition, and the common good*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.
Freud, S., Riviere, J., & Strachey, J. (1930). *Civilization and its discontents*, Hogarth Press London.
Fromm, E. ([1941] 1994). *Escape from freedom*. Holt Paperbacks.
Fromm, E. (1964). *The heart of man: Its genius for good and evil*, vol. 12, Taylor & Francis.
Fromm, E. (2012). *The sane society*. New York NY: Routledge.
Fromm, E. (2013).*To have or to be?*, A&C Black.
García-Quero, F., & Guardiola, J. (2018). Economic poverty and happiness in rural Ecuador: The importance of Buen Vivir (living well). *Applied Research in Quality of Life, 13*, 909–926.
Gershuny, J. (2005). Busyness as the badge of honor for the new superordinate working class. *Social Research: An International Quarterly, 72*, 287–314.
Graham, C., & Felton, A. (2006). Inequality and happiness: Insights from Latin America. *Journal of Economic Inequality, 4*, 107–122.
Graham, C. L., & Lora, E. (2010). *Paradox and perception: Measuring quality of life in Latin America*. Rowman & Littlefield.
Guardiola, J., & García-Quero, F. (2014). Buen Vivir (living well) in Ecuador: Community and environmental satisfaction without household material prosperity? *Ecological Economics, 107*, 177–184.
Gutiérrez, E., & Cunin, E. (2006). Fiestas y carnavales en Colombia. La puesta en escena de las identidades, *Medellín: Universidad de Cartagena. Institut de Recherche pour le développement, la Carreta Editores*.
Hickel, J. (2020). *Less is more: How degrowth will save the world*. Random House.
Hidalgo-Capitán, A. L., & Cubillo-Guevara, A. P. (2017). Deconstruction and genealogy of Latin American good living (Buen Vivir). The (triune) good living and its diverse intellectual wellsprings. In *Alternative pathways to sustainable development: Lessons from Latin America* (pp. 23–50).
Horowitz, A. (2022). March 1 - Marx's Theory of Alienation. *AS/POLS 2900.6A Perspectives on Politics 2010-11*.
Hurtado, D. A. (2016). Socioeconomic disparities in subjective well-being in Colombia. In *Handbook of happiness research in Latin America* (pp. 343–356). Springer.
Hurtado, D. A., Hessel, P., & Avendano, M. (2017). The hidden costs of informal work: Lack of social protection and subjective well-being in Colombia. *International Journal of Public Health, 62*, 187–196.
International Crisis Group (2021). *The pandemic strikes: Responding to Colombia's mass protests.*, Latin America Report N.90.
Kallis, G. (2011). In defence of degrowth. *Ecological Economics, 70*, 873–880.
Kallis, G., Kerschner, C., & Martinez-Alier, J. (2012). The economics of degrowth. *Ecological Economics, 84*, 172–180.
Kasser, T. (2003). *The high price of materialism*. MIT Press.
Kasser, T. (2016). Materialistic values and goals. *Annual Review of Psychology, 67*, 489–514.
Kasser, T., & Ryan, R. (1993). A dark side of the American dream: Correlates of financial success as a central life aspiration. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 65*, 410.
Klein, N. (2014). *This changes everything: Capitalism vs. the climate*. Simon and Schuster, New York NY.
Krauss, A., & Graham, C. (2013). Subjective wellbeing in Colombia: Some insights on vulnerability, job security, and relative incomes. *International Journal of Happiness and Development, 1*, 233–260.
Kumar, A., Killingsworth, M. A., & Gilovich, T. (2014). Waiting for merlot anticipatory consumption of experiential and material purchases. *Psychological Science*, 1924–1931.
Lambert, L., Lomas, T., van de Weijer, M. P., Passmore, H. A., Joshanloo, M., Harter, J., Ishikawa, Y., Lai, A., Kitagawa, T., Chen, D. et al. (2020). Towards a greater global understanding of wellbeing: A proposal for a more inclusive measure. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 10.
Lane, R. E. (2000). *The loss of happiness in market democracies*. New Haven CT: Yale University Press.

Leonard, A. (2010). *The story of stuff: How our obsession with stuff is trashing the planet, our communities, and our health-and a vision for change*. Simon and Schuster.
Leonhardt, D., & Wu, A. (2025). The U.S. economy is racing ahead. Almost everything else is falling behind. *The New York Times*, February 4.
Manson, M. (2015). *The subtle art of not giving a fuck*. Harper One.
Marcuse, H. (2015). *Eros and civilization: A philosophical inquiry into Freud*. Boston MA: Beacon Press.
Martínez, L. (2017). Life satisfaction data in a developing country: CaliBRANDO measurement system. *Data in Brief, 13*, 600.
Martínez, L., & Short, J. R. (2020). Life satisfaction in the city. *Scienze Regionali*, 417–438.
Maslow, A. ([1954] 1987). *Motivation and personality*. Longman, 3 ed.
McMahon, D. M. (2006). *Happiness: A history*. Grove Pr.
Mensing, J. F. (2002). *Collectivism, individualism and interpersonal responsibilities in families: Differences and similarities in social reasoning between individuals in poor, urban families in Colombia and the United States*. Berkeley: University of California.
Michalos, A. C. (2014). Quality of life, two-variable theory. In *Encyclopedia of quality of life and well-being research* (pp. 5307–5309). Springer.
Morawetz, D., Atia, E., Bin-Nun, G., Felous, L., Gariplerden, Y., Harris, E., Soustiel, S., Tombros, G., & Zarfaty, Y. (1977). Income distribution and self-rated happiness: Some empirical evidence. *The Economic Journal*, 511–522.
Musk, E. (2018). A person needs to work 80-100 hours per week to 'change the world'. *LinkedIN Pulse*.
Nasser, M. R. (2012). Feminized topographies: Women, nature, and tourism in Colombia es Pasión. *Revista de Estudios Colombianos, 40*, 15–25.
Nietzsche, F. W. (1896). *Thus spake Zarathustra: A book for all and none*. New York NY: MacMillan and Company.
Okulicz-Kozaryn, A. (2014). 'Freedom from' and 'freedom to' across countries. *Social Indicators Research, 118*, 1009–1029.
Okulicz-Kozaryn, A. (2015). Freedom and life satisfaction in transition, society and economy in Central and Eastern. *Europe, 37*, 143–164.
Okulicz-Kozaryn, A. (2020). *The top regrets of the dying: "I Wish I Hadn't Worked So Hard"*. But Not For Human Wellbeing: Greed Is Good For Economy. Unpublished.
Okulicz-Kozaryn, A., & Valente, R. R. (2019). Livability and subjective well-being across European cities. *Applied Research in Quality of Life, 14*, 197–220.
Orozco, R. & File-Muriel, R. J. (2012). Colombian Spanish at the Turn of the 21st Century, *Colombian Varieties of Spanish.-(Lingüística iberoamericana; v. 50)*, 11–20.
Pachauri, R. K., Allen, M., Barros, V., Broome, J., Cramer, W., Christ, R., Church, J., Clarke, L., Dahe, Q., Dasgupta, P. et al. (2014). *Climate Change 2014: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, IPCC.
PNUD (2023). *Informe sobre Desarrollo Humano para Colombia, cuaderno 2. Percepciones y bienestar subjetivo en Colombia: Mas alla de indicadores tradicionales.*, https://www.undp.org/es/colombia/publicaciones/informe-desarrollo-humano-colombia-cuaderno-2.
Prescott, S. L. & Logan, A. C. (2017). *The secret life of your microbiome: Why nature and biodiversity are essential to health and happiness*, New Society Publishers.
Pretty, J. (2012). *The earth only endures: On reconnecting with nature and our place in it*. New York NY: Routledge.
Putnam, R. D. (2001). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
Rojas, M. (2015). *Handbook of happiness research in Latin America*. Springer.
Rojas, M. (2019). *Well-being in Latin America: Drivers and policies*. Springer Nature.
Roos, D. (2019). Colombia, Not Finland, May Be the Happiest Country in the World. *howstuffworks.com, 26 March 2019*.
Rubiano, M. P. (2022). How Colombia plans to keep its oil and coal in the ground. *BBC, 16 November 2022*.
Schmuck, P., Kasser, T., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). Intrinsic and extrinsic goals: Their structure and relationship to well-being in German and US college students. *Social Indicators Research, 50*, 225–241.
Scitovsky, T. (1976). *The joyless economy: An inquiry into human satisfaction and consumer dissatisfaction*. Oxford U Press, New York NY.
Sirgy, M. J. (2002). *The psychology of quality of life*, vol. 12, Springer.

Starmans, C., Sheskin, M., & Bloom, P. (2017). Why people prefer unequal societies. *Nature Human Behaviour, 1*, 1–7.
Stiglitz, J., Sen, A., & Fitoussi, J. (2009). Report by the Commission on the measurement of economic performance and social progress. Available at www.stiglitz-sen-fitoussi.fr.
Surowiecki, J. (2005). Technology and Happiness: Why getting more gadgets won't necessarily increase our well-being. *Technology review*.
Tesson, S. (2013). *Consolations of the Forest: Alone in a Cabin in the Middle Taiga*. London UK: Penguin.
Thoreau, H. D. (1995) [1854]. *Walden*. Mineola NY: Dover Publications.
Tönnies, F., & ([1887] 2002). *Community and society*. Mineola NY: Dover Publications.com.
Turkewitz, J. (2021). Five years after peace deal, Colombia is running out of time, experts say. A treaty with rebels in 2016 called for the end of a decades-long war. But that is not the same as achieving peace, and the window for doing so may be closing. *The New York Times, 26 September 2021*.
Van Boven, L. (2005). Experientialism, materialism, and the pursuit of happiness. *Review of General Psychology, 9*, 132–142.
van Zanden, J. L., Rijpma, A., Malinowski, M., Mira d'Ercole, M. et al. (2020). How's Life? 2020: Measuring well-being.
Veenhoven, R. (2000). The four qualities of life. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 1*, 1–39.
Veenhoven, R. (2014). Livability theory. *Encyclopedia of Quality of Life and Well-Being Research*, 3645–3647.
Veenhoven, R., & Ehrhardt, J. (1995). The cross-national pattern of happiness: Test of predictions implied in three theories of happiness. *Social Indicators Research, 34*, 33–68.
Velásquez, L. (2016). The importance of relational goods for happiness: Evidence from Manizales, Colombia. In *Handbook of happiness research in Latin America* (pp. 91–112) Springer.
Wallace, C. (2017). The world's happiest country? *BBC, 30 March 2017*.
Ware, B. (2012). *The top five regrets of the dying: A life transformed by the dearly departing*. Hay House, Inc.
Wilkinson, R. G., & Pickett, K. E. (2010). *The spirit level: Why equality is better for everyone*. New York NY: Penguin.
Wills-Herrera, E., Orozco, L. E., Forero-Pineda, C., Pardo, O., & Andonova, V. (2011). The relationship between perceptions of insecurity, social capital, and subjective well-being: Empirical evidences from areas of rural conflict in Colombia. In *Subjective well-being and security* (pp. 177–196) Springer.
Wilson, E. O. (2021). Biophilia. In *Biophilia*. Harvard University Press.
Woods, S. & McColl, R. (2015). *Colombia*. Bradt travel guides.
World Economic Forum (2017): The travel & tourism competitiveness report, World Economic Forum. https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_TTCR_2017_web_0401.pdf.
Yamamoto, J. (2016). The social psychology of Latin American happiness. *Handbook of happiness research in Latin America*, 31–49.