

Although as a vast subcontinent, Latin America reflects diverse perspectives of life, senses of identity, cultural and spiritual outlooks, its constituting countries share a specific history of resistance against the prevalent patterns of global development. However, Latin America presents newer accounts of development understood as genuine views on human well-being derived from a sense of its own specific identity. In an emerging renaissance emphasizing human flourishing as the ultimate goal, Latin America is shifting gears towards an ethical perspective on global development. Distinct here is an emphasis on philosophy, theology, literature, arts, music, and cinema as fertile terrains depicting how the subcontinent must draw its own unique picture of development. Today, it is undergoing a diverse cultural, philosophical and spiritual growth, and holds exciting potential to be aligned with, and contribute to, the contemporary debates around the ethics of global development.

This book discusses Latin American perspectives against the backdrop of the mainstream view of development, which portrays economic growth as development. It also looks at historical context, cultural diversity, cultural richness and the complex philosophy of life in the Latin American perspective to address the subcontinent's deep cultural heritage, the depiction of its identity, and its philosophy of life. Additionally, this book discusses how the causes of inequality and malaises such as social crime can be eliminated, and more importantly, how the prosperity and economic, social, and human development of the subcontinent (and the world in general) may be improved.

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Latin American Perspectives
on Global Development

Mahmoud Masaeli, Germán Bula
and Samuel Ernest Harrington



LATIN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES ON GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

LATIN AMERICAN CITIES AND HAPPINESS

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this research is to study the relationship between the urban form in Latin American cities and the general well-being and happiness of their citizens. Studies and surveys show that Latin American city dwellers report a paradoxically high level of happiness despite the various shortcomings of most cities in terms of housing, infrastructures, public space and public transportation. The research examines this phenomenon from the point of view of the urban form, considering issues like urban density, mixed uses in neighborhoods, decentralization, housing, mobility, public spaces, community closeness, resilience and gender approaches in urban design. It examines the way in which organic and spontaneous city growth has provided systems that have adapted to the culture and way of living of its inhabitants and provides clues to understanding the challenges, alternatives and contributions of Latin American cities, and its substantial differences from North American urban developments. The results of the study provide a starting point for further research on this subject, in order to develop happiness-oriented guidelines applicable to urban design, neighborhood redevelopment and city growth plans, both in Latin America and in other developing countries.

Keywords: Latin America, Happiness, Urban Planning, Public transportation, gender, urban density

1. Introduction: The Paradox of Latin American Happiness

Happiness has become the subject matter of studies and surveys for several years, from which lists of the most and least happy countries in the world are constantly being published. The variables, indicators and measuring systems vary significantly, considering that this is quite an abstract and subjective concept. Some variables can easily be measured in each country, such as GDP (Gross Domestic Product), the population's level of education, healthcare quality, housing, infrastructure, violence rates, infant mortality, corruption or unemployment.

Each statistician takes all of these variables into consideration by assigning them a greater or lesser relevance, where the outcome is an overview of each country's development level, and these results are equated to the level of happiness of its citizens. Broadly speaking, Nordic and Western European countries tend to be ranked at the top positions. Nevertheless, studies and surveys of a different nature have also been conducted, where the source of information is not focused on the general development statistics of each country, but rather on how citizens perceive their own life, welfare and overall happiness. The results that this second type of study yields differ considerably from those of the first, given that in this second type of study several Latin American and Caribbean countries tend to be ranked at the top positions (Gallup International Association, Forbes, happyplanetindex.com). At first glance, this phenomenon appears to be paradoxical and contradictory. The given indicators on the quality of housing, health, education, employment and security show evident shortfalls in most Latin American countries, which would lead us to assume that the level of happiness that citizens enjoy should not be too high. This paradox has, in turn, become a subject of study and raises innumerable questions and research approaches that are analyzed from the viewpoint of different disciplines, such as psychology, economics, and sociology. In general, studies show the importance of social and family networks in Latin America as a key part of life and a key component in the levels of happiness (Beytfa, 2016; Rojas, 2016).

This chapter examines the relationships that may exist between the levels of happiness experienced by Latin Americans and their urban surroundings. 60% of Latin Americans are estimated to live in cities and, although this may vary between countries, there is a growing trend towards higher concentrations of the population dwelling in urban centers. This trend arises from the harsh economic and security issues that the rural

population faces, and from the continuous pursuit of a better future, which can only be found in migrating to urban centers, whether voluntarily or forcefully.

In a similar way that studies are conducted to assess development at a national level, numerous variables and statistics are used to analyze the level of development in cities (Global Cities Index, CDI City Development Index - UNDP). Among the most notable are transportation and mobility, citizen security, service infrastructure networks and coverage, road network quality and functionality, quantification of public space and green areas, healthcare service accessibility, education and recreation, air quality, noise levels, housing quality and coverage or economic indicators. No in-depth examination of these indicators is necessary to realize that most cities in Latin America have considerable shortcomings in most of these areas. Nevertheless, year after year surveys show puzzling results where most of the inhabitants of these cities consider themselves to be happy and satisfied with their lives.

To understand this phenomenon, one must go beyond the aforementioned measurements and indicators and analyze which aspects of urban life, of the day-to-day lives of residents in cities, are contributing, positively or negatively, to how they perceive their welfare and happiness. The concept of urban form, or the spatial structure of the city, poses a particular challenge given that it is not an issue that can be evaluated in a clear and straightforward way, and it can go unnoticed for most people. The clear majority of Latin American urban dwellers have lived their lives in one, or sometimes several cities that are similar in terms of urban form, and therefore they do not have a point of comparison with radically different environments, as is the case with North American cities. A citizen evaluating the type of city in which he/she lives turns out to be an abstract challenge. It is easier for respondents to provide answers to specific issues, such as how well their method of public transportation works to commute from their homes to their place of work or study, or a positive or negative evaluation concerning accessibility to recreation or sports facilities, or the overall state of public space in their habitual surroundings. Therefore, going beyond traditional urban development indicators is required to analyze the influence that factors of daily life, idiosyncrasy and culture may have on the positive perception that Latin Americans have about their levels of happiness and how these relate to their cities.

2. The Origins of Urban Form

Most Latin American cities have an urban form that originated from the Orthogonal Grid imposed by Spanish settlers, where the *Plaza Mayor* (Town Square) was the predominant central point, and around which squares and the reticular grid were gradually built and urbanized. This scheme was repeated as a hallmark throughout the continent, in a manner that was mostly alien to the topographical, cultural or meteorological specifics of each region. Each urban center grew larger and denser, increasing the checkerboard of colonial cities as was required (Morse, 1984).

In the early twentieth century, with the emergence of urban theories from the modern movement, the city began to be conceived from a radically new theoretical framework. The premises of this movement were based on a rationalist approach to urban design and the issue of housing. Cities and housing should work and be designed like a machine, thus giving priority to the traffic of private vehicles and using large expanses of land for housing, where tall apartment towers surrounded by ample green areas were planned for the outskirts of the city (*Le Corbusier's Plan Voisin or Cité Radieuse*). Urban centers or downtowns were to have the primary concentration of commercial, cultural, recreational and institutional facilities, as well as all the places of work and services (*Le Corbusier, 1933*). Within this modern city scheme, the conservation of historical centers, narrow roads, low-rise buildings, and public space at a much smaller scale were not envisaged. Here, the entire street level would be destined only to unstructured green areas, and to the private vehicle infrastructure. Although the principles of modern-movement urban planning explored models that aimed towards a more egalitarian society, this urban model would have an adverse impact on the contact between its citizens and their socialization patterns. Under these principles, urban redevelopment plans of great importance were performed in European cities such as Amsterdam, Barcelona, Paris or Rotterdam, as well as in cities in developing countries, such as Brasilia or Chandigarh in India.

Although the modern movement had a considerable influence in Latin America in terms of architecture and design, it did not substantially modify the spatial structure of cities, as opposed to most North American cities. In the former, the use of private vehicles continues to dominate up to this day, and the largest percentage of residential areas is located in the periphery, in single-family detached homes and low-density neighborhoods (Dilworth, 2005). This urban form relies completely on the use of the

private vehicle, considering that the low density of the peripheral suburbs makes it economically unviable to implement public transportation systems, due to the fact that the critical mass is insufficient, and the distance between residential neighborhoods and urban centers is much too large.

In her book "The Death and Life of Great American Cities" (1962), Jane Jacobs harshly criticizes the modern movement's city ideal, at a time when it was the generally accepted theory for urban design. Jacobs, not being an academic, an architect or an urban planner, carried out an analysis of how cities work from the perspective of an average citizen, initially driven by a civil resistance movement which emerged from an imminent project in New York City, her adoptive home. This project would have torn down the traditional Washington Square Park to make way for private vehicle infrastructure. Through her publications, citizen committees and by mobilizing the people of the neighborhood, Jacobs confronted the legendary Robert Moses, the city's leading real estate developer at the time (Flint, 2009). The concepts put forward in the book, although in contrast with the dominant ideas at the time, in addition to being coined by a woman, and one who had received no formal education, still continues to be a current and ever more relevant touchstone for urban planning, not just in North America but throughout the world.

One of the main ideas explored by Jacobs underlines the importance of diversity and variety within the social and architectural grid within urban neighborhoods as the most reliable way to build structural and economic resilience. A neighborhood that grows organically in time, where old buildings coexist with new projects; where there are young families, students and elderly residents; where services and retail are varied, has a bigger chance to adapt, survive and thrive in time. This vision opposes the strategies often suggested by modern movement plans, in which large urban areas were to be completely wiped out and designed from scratch. Thus, each neighborhood and each square should have the greatest possible diversity in terms of use, building age, population, types of businesses, and size of homes. Moreover, she defends local-scale small businesses at the street level. The main premise is that both the fabric of each neighborhood and public space must have multiple roles, at all times of day and every day of the week, in order to promote contact between the inhabitants and users of the sector and provide safer environments. Thus, windows and people, density and activity, are basic elements to deter crime and foster citizen security. In the traditional American suburban, low density type of development, the streets are mainly used by the private

vehicle, and only as a network that allows motorized transit from one place to another. This sub-utilization of the public space allows unseen criminal activities and inhibits pedestrian, recreational or social uses in entire neighborhoods.

As for public spaces of contemplation, such as parks and green areas, she harshly criticizes the modernist model that proposed large green spaces between multifamily apartment blocks (Jacobs, 1961). In this model, population density is focused on high-rise apartment blocks that appear to be floating over green areas with no character of their own, and that are not really used by citizens in their daily life. Jacobs defends neighborhood-scale parks where there is always something happening, and have more than merely a contemplative purpose, to become activity nodes of the neighborhood itself. They are a place for recreation and socialization for children, the elderly, and the youth; in short, they are living spaces that contribute to weaving the fragments of the city, rather than separating or isolating spaces and people, as was the idea at the time. She defends small-scale space interventions that provide enormous benefits to the urban life of neighborhoods, rather than having the energy focused on large-scale public space or infrastructure operations that ultimately prioritize private vehicle transportation and segregate the city into isolated sectors and in so doing, the very continuity of the underlying physical and social tissue is broken. The idea was to shift away from road-capacity oriented street planning to a focus on a finer grain urban fabric.

The importance of urban density in terms of the sustainability of businesses and services is also noteworthy: to the extent that each neighborhood has a sufficient fixed or floating population, there will be a greater possibility for a diversity of businesses, services and cultural offerings to be viable. This model encourages the effects of agglomeration economies through proximity. In the case of North American cities, where density in the suburbs is markedly low, the only viable scheme for local businesses is the suburban shopping mall, where a certain number of commercial facilities operate in a type of artificial centrality for the suburbs. However, due to their size, the type of road network and the great distances, access to these malls is usually possible only by driving a private vehicle (Glaeser, 2011).

In most North American cities, residents are forced to choose between living in the suburbs, away from the city center and relying on a private vehicle for mobilization, or living in the city center, in much smaller spaces, where fewer services and spaces suitable for raising a family

(parks, schools or places of worship) are available. Also, living in the downtown areas (except in cases such as New York, San Francisco, Boston or Washington) was until recently considered the only alternative for the poor, the minorities and the marginalized sectors of the population. This trend has reversed during the past few years, but the tendency to prefer the independence of isolated homes over living in co-ownership in multifamily models remains in the collective unconscious, where North American culture and lifestyle frame it. The phenomenon of urban sprawl and the distances that suburban commuters have to cover on a daily basis has been widely studied, as well as its negative effects on individuals and the social fabric as a whole (Putnam, 2000).

Despite North American culture having a growing influence in Latin America, the model of compact cities still prevails, where transportation systems are combined, and where infrastructure and road networks adjust to the city's growth. In most cases, urban peripheral growth happens organically and spontaneously, and the basic services, access roads and public transportation are managed subsequently. To some extent, many of Jacobs' approaches conceived around the middle of the century to improve North American cities are elements of urban forms that have occurred spontaneously, albeit sometimes chaotically, in Latin American cities, mostly in an unplanned manner.

When comparing the metropolitan urbanization phenomenon in Latin America with the predominant city model in European countries, the main difference lies in the fact that the growth of the latter has been taking place and adapting for many centuries. Urban form, building, and infrastructure typologies have grown at the pace of the population, and with more stringent control and planning on the part of the public administration. Many cities experienced major interventions in the urban fabric in the mid-nineteenth century, as is the case of the Haussmann Plan in Paris, or the Ensanche District in Barcelona. By contrast, the growth and development of Latin American cities have taken place in a significantly shorter time span, in such a way that the rapid population increase and often lack of control in planning and administrative matters has led to large metropolitan areas with a patchwork of ever-growing fragments. Private building development has always come before a well-thought-out and planned public space network, and also before the infrastructure that supports said growth.

3. Neighborhood Life: A Cultural Approach

The urban form, although perhaps not a highly perceptible factor, is a determining element in the daily lives of all of the city's inhabitants. Urban form establishes the predominant type of housing, how movement from one place to another takes place, the type of available public spaces, the distances that must be covered to have access to healthcare, education or recreation services. Beyond these matters, urban life influences how inhabitants relate to one another, both individually and collectively.

Latin American idiosyncrasy has particular elements that are in contrast with lifestyles in other parts of the world. Identity has been forged with the passage of time in a melting pot of origins and races, and the result has been a culture in which priority is not given to personal fame or purchasing power, but rather to family, social relationships, and building support networks between people, which is in contrast with the more individualistic approach of Anglo-Saxon culture. This is evidenced in the way in which cities are experienced and, at the same time, the city itself is influenced by these cultural traits. Neighborhood life and a closer spatial relationship between households are the principal means by which inhabitants build relationships and networks of sharing and socialization.

As mentioned above, and due to the centrifugal pressure exerted by the real estate industry on all urban cores to a greater or lesser degree, most of the urban core areas in Latin American cities have a high to medium density pattern. Thus, there is always physical closeness between homes, and the surrounding public space is used intensively and in a shared manner that weaves the public and the private spheres. It is commonplace to see the street used as an extension of the home. Here, a significant share of social interactions take place, such as conversations with neighbors, children at play or group sports. As neighborhoods take shape and become denser, points of interest and relevance to the community begin to appear, such as churches or places of worship, sports fields, corner stores, health posts, schools or markets. These nodes, together with the network of public space, gradually build dynamics upon which the daily lives of people unfold. In most cases, these uses of space dynamics take place with little to no intervention from the public administration, especially in neighborhoods with the lowest socioeconomic status.

It is often the case that the precarious lives of many large-city dwellers make it crucially important to have a network of support and trust, which is largely comprised of neighbors. Although the overall urban quality of

neighborhoods may have evident shortcomings, having a network of support and close relations surrounding each family's living space can prove to be a decisive element in how families perceive happiness and well-being. That is, regardless of the difficulties or challenges that each individual may face, having such a network becomes an intangible asset, whether to sort out family, domestic, or work emergencies, to share events of daily life, such as watching a football game at the store, chatting with others while making a purchase, or seeing close or distant friends on the way to work. Although these may appear to be insignificant events, they can truly make a positive difference for individuals in terms of happiness and rootedness. Daily life is full of mishaps in these settlements: public utility outages, structural damages in homes due to flooding or landslides, medical emergencies, logistics issues (i.e. missing work is out of the question, so the help of neighbors tends to be decisive, especially when dealing with children and the elderly), cash-shortage moments, assistance in domestic work (plumbing, electricity, miscellaneous repairs), and so on. All of these situations underscore the importance of community and closeness.

In these urban settlements, the family home tends also to be a place of work (small businesses or workshops on the first floor) and a source of additional income (part of the house is leased, whether by rooms or by floors). Families that manage to procure a parcel of land and build their homes are thus deeply rooted in the neighborhood and the community, given that it is not merely an individual's place of residence but also the means of sustenance for the family.

In more developed countries, where the welfare state provides individuals with all the necessary tools for their personal development, the culture of individualism is established, where each individual looks after themselves without relying on anyone else. At first glance, this may seem desirable in any scenario; yet losing the importance of social cohesion gives rise to feelings of loneliness and isolation. In Latin American cities, both the fact that citizens keep closer family ties, and the fact that a compact city enables family members to move easily between households, contribute to resilience and a sense of well-being. This is a point of particular significance to women, who traditionally play a set of roles within the family that require this urban, social and physical interconnection. These factors have been widely studied (Leyden, 2003) and the conclusions seem to point out the devastating effects that loneliness and spatial isolation have on the general well-being of urban dwellers that lack physical connection and a strong social network in their daily lives.

This scheme of urban neighborhood life mainly applies to dwellers with a low or medium purchasing power. Nevertheless, as the middle class grows and as the pressure on urban land increases, the general tendency shows that families are slowly changing their traditional scheme for multifamily buildings. This type of housing loses some of the traditional neighborhood characteristics, given that commercial use is often restricted, and the activities and uses that would have emerged spontaneously in adapting to the needs of the inhabitants are now limited to what the housing complex and city planning rules permit.

4. The Contemporary Latin American City

The dynamics of the compact or semi-compact Latin American city structure, although it adapts to cultural and socioeconomic changes over time, also maintains a deep structure. Whatever the type of housing may be or whatever the purchasing power of citizens, the urban fabric enables living in the city without relying on the use of a private vehicle. There is generally a mix of transportation systems: bus, subway, rail, bicycle, and pedestrian mobility, where the formal and informal come together. Overall, mobility is highly chaotic and disorganized, but it adapts to the actual needs of each city as a system, one way or another. Thus, even the most peripheral sectors of the city seem to self-organize and self-regulate in such a way that mobility is possible regardless of owning a private vehicle, by using any combination of the means of transportation available. Therefore, living in a city with the wide array of situations and needs that appear in everyday life is done by walking its streets, using public space and public transportation. Consequently, this fosters personal encounters, sharing with others and being an active part of the whole, which contributes considerably to the personal well-being of all citizens (Spinney, 2009). The fact that residents can find this to be a determining factor in how they perceive happiness and well-being is a hypothesis that could be studied further.

Urban form, understood as a continuous and dense fabric, with its mix of uses, building types and population diversity becomes a buffer of sorts for the inherent social inequality in Latin American societies. Public space and its shortcomings, mass transportation with all the chaos and traffic that seems to grow day after day, the state of road infrastructure, sidewalks, parks and green areas, air quality and sound pollution, among others, all become factors that impact the entire population equally. There are of course privileged sectors that hire private security, have private

recreational spaces, and so forth., but this situation is common to any city in the world. However, as noted earlier, the main tendency, at least from an optimistic perspective on the possible evolution of our cities and society, points towards a growing middle class and urban centers that renovate themselves and become re-densified with a diverse population (in terms of age, household composition, socioeconomic levels). This shared space, the collective creation that cities embody, become ever more democratic.

At a metropolitan level, and due to the absence of robust administrative control, certain dynamics are created spontaneously in Latin American cities. An example of this is what happens around large facilities such as universities, hospitals or public buildings. A commercial and service-oriented use of space begins to emerge in an unregulated manner (restaurants and cafés, office supply stores and small businesses, hostels and boarding houses, etc.), yet they manage to work and strengthen over time due to the fact that they play the part of a kind of logistics support for the users of said facilities. This dynamic also includes the informal economy, street selling and the unregulated use of public space. These phenomena must be regulated in order to avoid a negative impact on the city, but from a citizen's standpoint, these dynamics may offer a set of services that enable them to carry out certain basic activities efficiently, which can be a positive factor to the benefit of users and a driver for various economic activities.

Beyond everyday coexistence and transportation in urban space, other elements are of crucial importance concerning the possibility of meeting and convening, both at neighborhood and metropolitan levels. The city's public space is where the population gathers to celebrate, as well as protest, demand changes, debate on what their needs are, and ultimately self-organize to carry out various initiatives, ideas and projects. It is also the medium that enables entrepreneurship, collective cultural creations, play, musical and religious expressions, and ultimately, all things that are in the common sphere. Urban density, closeness and the possibility to move in space promote and particularly allow for these gatherings, organizations and movements. In most Latin American cities, except those that are farther from the equatorial area, a pleasant and fairly unchanging weather is an additional element that encourages using the streets and making use of public space all year round.

The importance that has been given to communities in the development and urban planning agendas in the past decades is worth noting, where the

particular needs, concerns and valuable contributions of the inhabitants of different sectors start becoming concrete citizen participation projects. The outcome of this bottom-up approach is a number of spatial and administrative interventions that, although coordinated through urban planning, are inclusive and democratic, and promote a sense of belonging and relatedness in the city's inhabitants.

In sum, one can see that due to the type of urban growth and socioeconomic dynamics in Latin American cities, these possess a set of positive resources and urban solutions that solve many daily needs in terms of mobility, urban density, mixed-use and social integration, although they may emerge haphazardly and spontaneously.

5. Challenges, Alternatives, and Contributions of the Latin American City

It is evident that each city must focus its efforts, resources and available land to enhance, update, or begin to implement improvements concerning mobility and transportation, quantity and quality of public space, basic services networks, collective facilities (cultural, sports, education, health), protect the environment and implement sustainable practices, and generally drive the urban whole towards achieving increasing resilience, competitiveness and economic development. Nevertheless, it is important to consider the economic and social processes that are common in cities in developing countries whereby, as certain areas in the city are subject to successful urban renewal plans, the gentrification phenomenon begins to appear. This phenomenon tends to roll out as follows: as demand for a certain recovered neighborhood grows, people with a higher economic capacity seek to invest in it, thus adjusting the market and creating a spike in land value. While the neighborhood undergoes a housing boom and a recovery in terms of real estate and status within the city, the original inhabitants of these centrally located areas end up being pushed towards the periphery, and so the existing community is dispersed, social cohesion is lost, and the least fortunate are relegated to the periphery, forced to spend large amounts of time commuting to work every day. In this regard, reevaluating and balancing urban renewal strategies is necessary if the goal is to increase the welfare and happiness of all citizens. Several case studies have addressed the phenomenon of gentrification seen in cities in developing countries, from which Latin America could learn about both successful strategies and the negative effects of segregation on the most vulnerable sectors of the population (Paton, 2014).

These issues bring up multiple questions regarding the efficiency and efficacy of development plans that aim to increase land value and productivity aspects of the city that are solely economic. When implementing urban renovation plans and projects, all variables must be considered; this includes economic variables, but also long-term social, cultural and environmental variables. Moreover, the role of an urban planner must not be understood as that of a sole organizer of the territory, but rather as a catalyst and manager of the real needs of the community that inhabits the territory. Efforts must include grassroots movements and must empower citizens in such a way as to find a balance between citizen rights and obligations.

Therefore, it is important to find a balance between control and domination. An example of this is how trail layouts are created in rural areas, where the traffic of people and animals have taken place intuitively and repetitively over the years, whereby trails become consolidated over time and become a part of the definitive layout of the territory. The layout tends to follow the most logical and effective path to connect one point to another, despite not being externally planned or designed. On many occasions, patterns and networks designed by planners, following a certain theoretical or aesthetic idea for the city, appear to be imposed on the territory and its inhabitants, failing to acknowledge the specific geographical, cultural or historical characteristics of the site.

A large part of the current layout of Latin American cities is the result of unplanned processes resembling the example above, which often work and adapt to the territory in an ideal way. These organic growth dynamics, when positively adapted to the city's growth instead of being wiped out (as Le Corbusier's plans set out to do in many cities), become elements that contribute to the collective memory, the cohesion of the city's fragments, and the enhancing of the urban form itself.

It is important to emphasize that in order for large Latin American cities to be able to provide basic services and solve the current issues of mobility, public space, facilities, and environmental problems, it is necessary to reconsider the centralized model that still prevails in most capitals. The scale of many metropolitan areas, such as Buenos Aires, Sao Paulo, Mexico City or Bogotá require decentralization policies, where each sector of the city should aim to be an autonomous system in as many variables as possible: schools and universities, hospitals and healthcare facilities, retail, markets and business sectors, administrative and banking customer services, parks and recreational areas, cultural centers, and so forth. This

would greatly contribute to the well-being of citizens, reducing the need to travel long distances to carry out their main activities, and also reducing overall traffic. That is, interventions and investments in facilities and networks are due both at a metropolitan level but also at a local scale, which is the immediate environment where most of the daily lives of citizens ultimately take place. This model of “cities within the city”, or the “polycentric” city (Ungers, Koolhaas, Riemann, Kollhoff and Ovsaka, 2013) is increasingly relevant as we address large metropolitan areas where demographic growth and the expansion of the urban limits have led to peripheral municipalities being engulfed by the metropolitan areas. Spontaneous centralities that already exist in the various neighborhoods of today’s Latin American cities are the starting point to strengthen this scheme, thus favoring what already exists to enhance future development plans.

Another key aspect that must be considered is that, so far, urban planning has been approached from an androcentric perspective. Transportation systems, the types of public space, sidewalk design, lighting and green areas and ultimately all public planning and design aspects have lacked a gender approach where women’s needs, desires and concerns are taken into account. This discussion has begun to be raised in several European countries (Ana Bofill, Zaida Muxi, Colectivo Punto6), and there is a considerable archive of experiences and studies on this matter, which must be leveraged by local administrations in Latin America by way of including them into development plans (Muxi, 2006). Some of the key issues in inclusive city design with a gender approach have to do with security; appropriate street, public square and park lighting, avoiding dead-end alleys or road sections with no activity (continuous walls, fences and enclosures), among others. Another indispensable issue is mobility. In the traditional family model, the man generally commutes from home to work and back in a linear fashion. Women, on the other hand, having more diverse activities such as taking children to school, looking after the elderly in their families, doing grocery shopping, taking the children to the doctor, and so forth, have varied routes and needs and also face additional challenges, such as pushing strollers, shopping carts, or wheelchairs. If we observe the design of mass transportation means, such as subways or bus networks, and the state of sidewalks, ramps and street crossings, it is clear to see that all these needs are circumvented, which greatly impoverishes women’s well-being and quality of life. In that respect, there is a great diversity of actions on the urban environment that, although being design and functional details that are not too visible, would mean a considerable increase in women’s quality of life.

There are multiple examples of gender-focused actions that are already being implemented. In Toronto, the Request Stop System operates during night time in such a way that public transportation buses must stop, not at the bus stops used during the daytime, but where the passengers request, allowing them to get off the bus closer to their homes and thereby reducing the risk of being the target of violent attacks on their way home. In Mexico D.F., an exclusively female carriage has been implemented on the subway as a measure to provide a space where women can feel safe. In El Salvador, a type of Urban Facility called *Ciudad Mujer* (Woman City) has been implemented, where daycare centers, gender violence protection office and sexual health clinic services are provided, among others. In cities like Berlin and Vienna (*Frauen-Werk-Stadt*), efforts are being made towards having every neighborhood offer the possibility of pedestrian access to businesses, daycare centers and medical care centers, in addition to improving parks and green areas, so that mothers will not have to travel long distances or use a private vehicle to access said spaces. All of this aims to close the gender gap from the standpoint of urban design. As mentioned above, the current Latin American city model already possesses some aspects that work positively to address these specific needs, arising from necessity rather than urban planning.

Multiple global initiatives are conducting theoretical research, but also practical fieldwork, to address well-being and happiness from an urban environment perspective, defining urban design and the practices and adoption of public policies to this end. Among these is the Happy City Lab, run by Charles Montgomery, author of *Happy City, Transforming our Lives Through Urban Design* (2013). Montgomery proposes a basic recipe for urban happiness, or what a city should accomplish after it has met the basic needs of food, shelter and security. This recipe includes these main topics:

“The city should strive to maximize joy and minimize hardship. It should lead us toward health rather than sickness. It should offer us real freedom to live, move, and build our lives as we wish. It should build resilience against economic or environmental shocks. It should be fair in the way it apportions space, services, mobility, joys, hardships, and costs. Most of all, it should enable us to build and strengthen the bonds between friends, families, and strangers that give life meaning, bonds that represent the city’s greatest achievement and opportunity. The city that acknowledges and celebrates our common fate, that opens doors to empathy and cooperation, will help us tackle the great challenges of this century.” (Montgomery, 2013, p. 43)

Mobility and transportation are of paramount importance throughout most of the studies currently available (Gatersleben and Uzzel, 2007). To this regard, it is important to highlight the fact that the main transportation networks must be improved, extended and updated to respond to each city's growing needs. As mentioned above, the systems that already exist in Latin American cities are the key ally for the necessary mass transportation systems update, and they are an asset that must be reinforced and replicated as an indispensable component for the well-being and happiness of city dwellers.

6. Conclusion

In an ideal city scenario, the situations that could make an enormous difference in the daily lives of its citizens, and foster their well-being and happiness, can be summarized into the following examples: Citizens do not require investing in a private vehicle and its maintenance, provided that the city offers multiple means of transportation. They do not require a larger home in order to socialize because the city is endowed with parks, public squares and walking paths where it is possible to carry out many of these activities. Being disabled or caring for the disabled does not necessarily have to impoverish their quality of life or their mobility, or become an additional economic burden for the family, given that the city is adapted to be functional for all types of disabled citizens. Large investments do not have to be made in terms of finding private activities or recreational areas for children because the city is equipped with spaces to cover this need. They do not need to be concerned with living in a home surrounded by alarms, fences or other security devices, because the city is safe, and the neighborhood environment acts as protection for and by all. Travelling long distances to re-connect with nature is not necessary since the city has environmental reserves and metropolitan parks for the leisure of its citizens. Long daily hours are not required for transportation because the city is decentralized, and all the neighborhoods and sectors cover the necessities for the daily lives of their inhabitants. In short, conceiving the city must become an inclusive endeavor, where experiencing its space is possible for all and all are taken into account; men and women; adults, children and the elderly; the disabled, rich and poor; employees and entrepreneurs; workers and students; the traditionally urban population and the new arrivals; and the formal and informal economy. The Latin American social, economic and cultural complexity is both a source of positive urban information and experiences and a laboratory where it is possible and necessary to implement new ways to approach urban issues,

with the purpose of continuously increasing the levels of happiness and well-being of its citizens.

The criteria to assess the level of happiness that an urban environment brings to its citizens must include both traditional aspects of urban development and the more subjective criteria that have been discussed, such as the possibilities for social interaction that space can bring, the strengthening of communities, and a sense of belonging. Urban design must be understood as a catalyst for the development and autonomy of every individual. Accordingly, feeling you are a part of someone else's support system is equally important; being useful to the community and being part of a whole is also a key aspect that gives meaning to life.

The city must be a place that allows aimless walks, exploring, roaming and discovering, and unexpected encounters (Borja and Muxi, 2000). It must be an environment that feels like our own while being shared, safe and inclusive, as opposed to cities where private transportation prevails, where we go from one point to another without experiencing the urban environment and where we go through it without touching it, thereby making it alien, dangerous and undesirable. It is important to bear in mind the preservation of historical heritage and the urban memory of the city as elements that reinforce a sense of belonging and collective self-esteem concerning cultural identity. Moreover, it is important to support local citizen enterprises, creativity and innovation in local development plans. The greater the sense of appropriation and belonging to the city, the more each citizen will defend and look after the collective space because it is perceived as their own.

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PART III:

LATIN AMERICAN ALTERNATIVES FOR DEVELOPMENT