

13 The urban pulse of the global South: the case of Cali, Colombia

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Introduction

This chapter provides an insight into life in a traumatized city. It documents changes in Cali, Colombia as an example from the research frontier of cities of the global South and especially cities in the traumatized South.

The chapter highlights and aims to fill at least two gaps. The first is the lack of studies on large metropolitan areas in South America; the lack of data to conduct academic studies on city development is a major issue. Governments invest little into research on urban problems, and most academics do not have the resources to undertake studies of this magnitude. The data available in most of the cases is aggregated, and micro-analysis at a city level is rare. In this study, information combining different sources is presented to provide a detailed picture of a traumatized city that has been trying to overcome a history of violence and drug-trafficking.

Second, the study provides a combination of objective and subjective data that is an uncommon mix. In this analysis, objective data is used to show how the quality of life in Cali has changed over the last years, and comparisons are made with Bogotá and Medellín, the other major cities in Colombia. The analysis also helps one to understand the evolution of two cities that have been heavily impacted by crime and drug-trafficking. During the 1980s and 1990s, Cali and Medellín were famous for their cartel wars, high rates of homicide and the brutality of the drug business. This chapter of recent Colombian history has been portrayed in countless documentaries, books, movies and series. The other story, the one of the evolution of quality of life after such a high rate of violence is less well known to the public.

The analysis also uses subjective data. The main focus here is to portray the levels of life satisfaction or happiness of three distinctive segments of Cali's population. Original – and very uncommon – data are used to show that in Cali every strata of the population, no matter how poor, register happy and satisfied lives. Happiness in Cali contrasts with high levels of crime, poverty and questionable public administration. It seems counterintuitive to expect to have a content population with all the odds against a happy life. This case calls for a revision of our understanding of happiness in traumatized cities.

Searching for heaven's outpost

Glaeser (2011) affirms that cities are the safest, greenest and most attractive places to live in. This was not true in Cali during the 1990s. In one decade, the city had to confront the largest mortgage crisis in the country, economic liberalization and drug-trafficking violence. All these factors combined to weaken local governments and institutions, spread violence to nearby municipalities and make the city incapable of confronting social issues like poverty and equality (Otero, 2012).

Violence was the most serious problem in the city. Generally speaking, in Colombia there are two sources of violence: drug-trafficking, which occurs mostly in urban contexts, and civil armed conflict, which is heavily concentrated in rural areas. Cali has had to deal with both. During the 1990s Cali was amongst the ten most violent cities in the world, with an urban homicide rate of more than 90 per 100,000 habitants per year. This was the result of drug-related violence (Otero, 2012; World Bank, 2002). The armed conflict violence penetrated the city through the permanent influx of displaced populations from the Pacific region. In 1990 the city had about 1.7 million habitants, and by 2015 the population had grown to about 2.4 million. Almost half of the population growth is due to the resettlement of large population groups affected by conflict in rural areas. These migration flows have created social tensions and have widened inequality in the city, as economic opportunities, already scarce, became a privilege for a few. Newcomers had to access the informal economy to earn a living (Poveda, 2011).

During the decades of the 1990s and 2000s, local authorities were unable to manage the city. Three elected majors were recalled due to allegations of corruption or irregularities in the election process. The absence of leadership meant there was little progress towards economic growth and poverty alleviation (World Bank, 2002). On top of this, the 1998 financial crisis hit Colombia hard, and Cali suffered the most. Central government lacked resources to overcome the crisis; then international creditors imposed an austerity plan on the city (Echavarría et al., 2002; World Bank, 2002).

Cali is now overcoming some of these problems. Violence is down to historical lows, public administration has strengthened, and there are important investments in poverty alleviation policies. The economy in the region has also been reactivated (Escobar et al., 2013). In terms of city planning, several revitalization plans, including a mass transit transportation system, territories for social inclusion (*Territorios de Inclusión y Oportunidades*, TIOS) implemented in the most impoverished districts of the city, environmental programs and parks and renovation, are in place (Plan de desarrollo municipal, 2012–2015 – see Alcaldía de Cali, 2012).

Cultural industries are emerging and playing a central role in the reconstruction of a broader identity of the city. Cali, is the “world capital of salsa music” and no other city in Colombia has being able to create as distinctive a characteristic as the

salsa culture. Through this cultural identity Cali has been able position itself as cultural hub within a modern and globalized society (Wade, 1995; Waxer, 2010). With tropical weather and countless cultural venues for salsa music there is a new economic resurgence, an increase in security and urban renovation. Cali is being rebranded as “heaven’s outpost” in the global South.

Improving quality of life

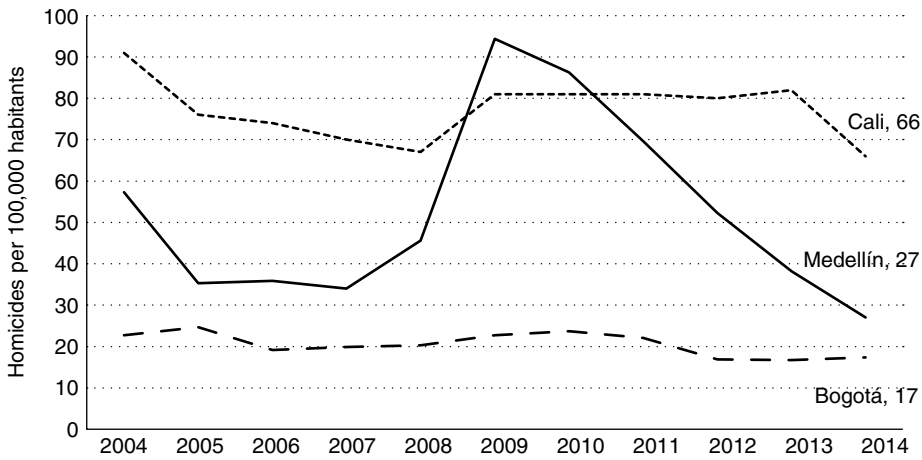
Seventy-six percent of the population of Colombia live in urban areas (World Bank, 2014). Bogotá, Medellín and Cali are the three major cities and their combined population is more than 12 million inhabitants (DANE, 2015). Over 34 percent of the total urban population live in these cities.

Bogotá is the capital and largest city in the country. Twenty-four percent of total GDP in 2012 was produced in the capital (Banco de la República, 2013) and 38 percent of the working population resides there (DANE, 2015). Cali and Medellín are similar in size and economic activity. Both cities have a population of about 2.4 million inhabitants. In 2012, the regions where Cali and Medellín are the capitals (Valle del Cauca and Antioquia) contributed to 4.1 and 4.3 percent of total GDP, respectively. Besides sharing similar economic and demographic characteristics, Cali and Medellín suffered the drug trade violence of the 1980s and 1990s. The cartel wars created high homicides rates, unemployment, poverty and weak institutions (Rocha, 2000; Vargas, 2005).

The decade of the 2000s provided the opportunity for Cali and Medellín to overcome a deep economic crisis and rebuild the cities to make them more equitable and livable. During this time there was an uneven resurgence of both cities despite their similar conditions. Three dimensions provide a picture of how these cities have advanced (or stagnated) in institutional strengthening and quality of life over the years: security, social investment and fiscal performance. The numbers show that urban development is not a homogenous story across the country.

Security

Cali and Medellín are the most violent cities in Colombia. During the decade of the 1990s and the early 2000s they were amongst the most violent places in the world (Llorente, 2005; Restrepo and Osorio, 2011). Even though security has significantly improved due to the interventions of central and local governments, it has proved challenging to reducing crime to the average levels of cities with similar characteristics in the South. Two factors explain this difficulty. On the one hand, the competition for control over drug markets generates high homicide rates in urban areas. On the other hand, the growth of criminal activity (related with drug-trafficking) has taxed the limits and abilities of law enforcement institutions (Gaviria and Vélez, 2001).



Sources: Cali Cómo Vamos (2014), Medellín Cómo Vamos (2014), Bogotá Cómo Vamos (2014).

Figure 13.1 Homicides rate per 100,000 habitants 2004–2014

Figure 13.1 shows the trend of homicide rates. During the past decade Cali was the most violent city in the country, with an average of 77 homicides per 100,000 habitants every year. From 2009 to 2013, the trend has remained stable. Medellín also reported high rates, but the average over the same period is lower, 52 homicides per 100,000 habitants per year. During the period 2008–2010 Medellín experienced a serious increase of violence due to wars within illegal armed groups fighting to control territory for drug-trafficking (Cotte, 2011; Medina et al., 2011). Bogotá presents homicide rates similar to other major cities in the region, averaging 21 homicides per 100,000 habitants per year (Cotte, 2011). In all cases 2014 was a year of historically low homicide rates.

Homicide rates have declined over the past years. Nevertheless, streets assaults and thefts have increased in all major metropolitan areas in the country. In Bogotá petty crime is soaring: between 2008 and 2014 this indicator increased by 40 percent. Cali and Medellín also present a similar but less accentuated trend. Street assaults and petty crime have become the most sensitive issue in major cities. During the past years, the perception of unsafety has increased and citizens declare themselves to feel more insecure walking in the streets (Bogotá Cómo Vamos, 2014; Cali Cómo Vamos, 2014; Medellín Cómo Vamos, 2014). In Cali, 31 percent of individuals surveyed declared that one family member or friend of the interviewed was assaulted or was a victim of street theft during the past year (CaliBRANDO, 2015).

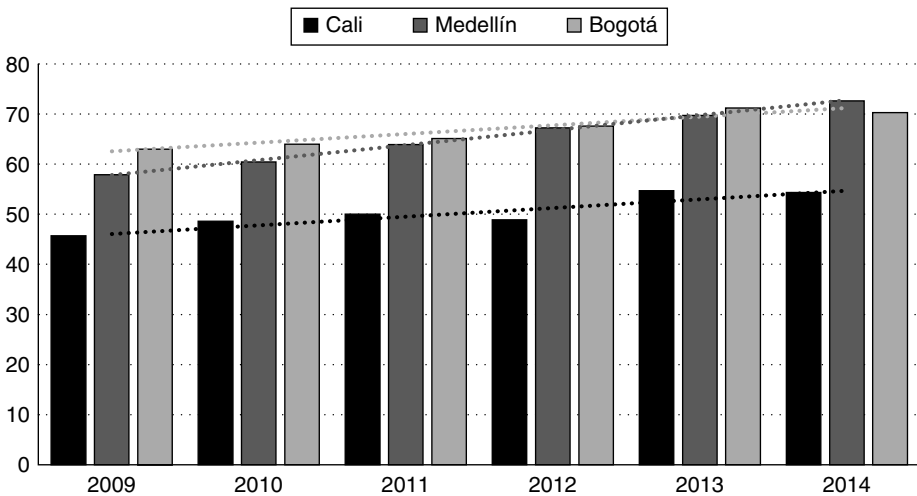
Given the dimension of crime activity, local governments have to divert an important share of public resources into making cities safer, particularly in Cali, a much more violent and unsafe city than Medellín and Bogotá. Despite all the efforts and resources invested in security, the improvement over the years has been modest, at least when compared to Medellín.

Social investment and progress

Poverty, lack of accumulation of human capital, stagnated economic growth and scarce employment opportunities are amongst a larger list of factors associated with violence in urban settings (Fajnzylber et al., 1998; Tadjoeeddin and Murshed, 2007). Crime and violence are identified as the major public policy topics in Colombia. Central government and, particularly, local governments in Medellín and Cali have had to incur many public costs related to policing, prevention, criminal justice and prison systems. This has a direct effect on what government is able to do on other fronts like city planning, economic growth and social intervention (Soares and Naritomi, 2010). Scarce resources are diverted to security.

Although Cali and Medellín have, generally speaking, similar characteristics and problems, Medellín invests a higher proportion (and with better outcomes) on social policies than Cali. Figure 13.2 presents the evolution of the index of society progress, which is a composite measure of how cities are doing in terms of education, poverty reduction, health and wellbeing, affordable housing, safety, environment, social inclusion, water, sanitation and democracy. This index classifies cities from low to high. Compared to Medellín and Bogotá, Cali has stagnated, and the progress made over the past years is minimal.

Compared to Bogotá and Medellín, Cali has the highest rates of poverty (19%), informal economy (46%) and unemployment (11%) for 2014.



Source: Aranibar et al. (2015). Índice de Progreso Social.

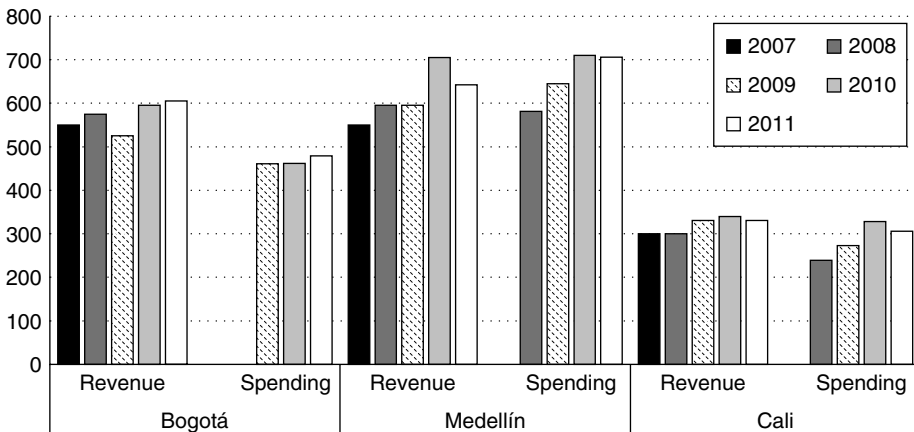
Figure 13.2 Index of society progress 2009–2014

Fiscal performance

In 2002 the World Bank provided technical assistance to Cali's local government aimed at designing a "city development strategy." One of the major conclusions of this assistance was that Cali lacked the fiscal and human resources to execute many of its policies (World Bank, 2002). One of the reasons for this claim was the inability of the city to collect local taxes and profit from public companies such as sanitation, water supply and telecommunication companies, which are one of the main sources of revenue for local investment. Figure 13.3 presents data on government per habitant revenue and spending during the period 2007–2011. Surprisingly, Medellín is the city with the highest revenue per habitant amongst major cities in Colombia, even above Bogotá. Spending per habitant is also the highest, amounting to US\$660 per habitant during 2007–2011. Likewise, Medellín is the city with major investment in poverty reduction, education and urban development, which reflects a responsible fiscal policy as well as the ability to capture central government resources for developing projects (Muñoz, 2013).

It is important to stress that Cali and Medellín are very similar in terms of size and economic dynamic. Moreover, they share a similar history of the violence and institutional corruption that made Colombia infamous during the 1990s. The important differences between Cali and Medellín on fiscal performance and social investment are an issue understudied in the literature.

Cali reports the lowest per habitant revenue and spending, even lower than mid-size cities (fewer than 400,000 habitants) in the country. Two factors explain the



Note: *Calculated on an exchange rate of 2000 pesos Colombian to 1US\$.

Sources: Revenue per habitant: Muñoz (2013, Figure 1). Spending per habitant: Redes ciudades como vamos, informes de calidad de vida Bogotá, Medellín y Cali.

Figure 13.3 Revenue and spending per capita in US dollars* 2007–2011

poor fiscal performance of the city. First, one of the revoked elected majors outsourced local taxes collection in 2005 to a third party. This contract became a permanent basis for corruption claims (El Tiempo, 2012). Second, Emcali, the public services company (which is the main source of local revenue), came close to bankruptcy in 2000 and central government intervened for 13 years (El País, 2013). By 2013, a new administration tried to recover public finances. Collection of local taxes and control of Emcali allowed the city to improve fiscal performance (El País, 2015).

Poor and rich equally happy?

The objective data presented in this analysis shows that Cali has stagnated compared to the two other large cities in the country. Lack of improvements made over the past years in safety, social investment and fiscal performance indicate that the city is struggling to catch up with the demands of modern cities. There have been some improvements over the last administration, but it is too early to detect a major change. Cali has not been able to overcome its violent past as Medellín has done, despite sharing similar problems and economic dynamics.

Objective data only allows the presentation of a partial picture of societal progress. An important dimension of urban policy is how satisfied or happy are the people who inhabit the space (Florida et al., 2013; Goldberg et al., 2012). Cali may not come first in terms of government performance, but its inhabitants are as happy and satisfied with their lives as residents of Bogotá and Medellín. The national quality of life survey showed that in 2014 a large share of Cali's residents declared that they were satisfied or very satisfied with their lives (85 percent); in Medellín and Bogotá the proportion is very similar, 89 percent and 86 percent, respectively (DANE – ECV, 2014).

To portray happiness and life satisfaction in Cali, data from three distinctive groups in the city was used, waste pickers, street vendors and the general population, who were asked to rate, on a scale of 1 to 10, how satisfied they were with their lives. Results show that in Cali, socioeconomic conditions, even for the poorest, are not determinants of living a happy and satisfied life.

Data for the general population comes from CaliBRANDO (2015), a population survey statistically representative for gender and socioeconomic strata of the city (n = 1,206). Information for street vendors comes from a direct survey of informal vendors in downtown Cali in 2014 (n = 527). The numbers for waste pickers comes from census data on trash collectors in 2015 (n = 3,109). Information on these three groups was collected for different purposes, but the question of life satisfaction was formulated in the same way. To capture the levels of life satisfaction the following question was asked of the three groups: “on a scale of 1 to 10 how satisfied are you with your life?” When the score was lower than 10, the survey inquired “what do you need to have a completely satisfied life?” Table 13.1

Table 13.1 Characteristics of waste pickets, street vendors and the general population

	Waste pickers	Street vendors	General population
Age (years)	44.0	41.9	38.2
Educational level – higher education (%)	1.5	6	41.9
Lower SES (%)	97.5	82.7	51.0
Married or living with a partner (%)	44.2	51.9	43.5
Number of children	3.1	2.9	2.2
Age first child	21.0	21.1	23.1
Income – less than minimum wage* (%)	87.3	40.8	24.2
Observations	3,109	527	1,204

Note: *Less than US\$322,175.

Sources: General population: CaliBRANDO, 2015 database; Street vendors: socioeconomic profile of street vendors of Cali, 2014 database; Waste pickers: census of waste pickers of Cali, 2015 database.

presents socioeconomic information. Waste pickers are poorest. Eighty-seven percent earn less than the minimum wage, 97 percent live in the most deprived and violent areas of the city¹ and only 1.5 percent have been able to study any type of post-secondary education.

Despite clear differences between them in terms of income, education and the quality of the neighborhood where they live (measured through SES), all of them report living happy and satisfied lives. Figure 13.4 shows the results. For all groups, people declared being very happy with their lives. As expected, waste pickers are the least satisfied, but more than 50 percent of them rate their life satisfaction over 8 (on a 1–10 scale). There are no differences between street sellers and the average Caleño, despite the clear gap in several other domains of urban life.

The burgeoning literature on happiness and life satisfaction (Alesina et al., 2004; Bok, 2010; David et al., 2013; Delle Fave, 2013; Easterlin, 2001; Layard and Layard, 2011; Van Praag and Ferrer-i-Carbonell, 2008) has led to three main conclusions: 1) rich people are, generally speaking, happier than poor people; 2) people tend to declare that more money would make them happier; and 3) individuals tend to be less happy when inequality is high.

In Cali a different pattern is found for at least one of these findings. Generally speaking, the data on life satisfaction shows that there is a linear relationship with income and life satisfaction, which adheres to the body of research that claims that people get happier as their income increases. However, a caveat is necessary: all of them report high levels of satisfaction, at least higher than levels reported in developed countries.



Sources: General population: CaliBRANDO, 2015 database; Street vendors: socioeconomic profile of street vendors of Cali, 2014 database; Waste pickers: census of waste pickers of Cali, 2015 database.

Figure 13.4 Life satisfaction for general population, street vendors and waste pickers in Cali

People tend to declare that more money will make them happier (Bok, 2010). This is also true in Cali for all groups. To the question “what do you need to be completely satisfied with your life” it is found that money, or the things money can buy, is the missing piece to be completely happy. Twenty-five of waste pickers declared that they will be completely happy if they own a house, 17 percent consider that they need a stable job and 11 percent would like to have better health conditions. Street vendors have similar preferences: 20 percent would like to have more money, 11 percent want a better job and 5 percent want to improve their health. The average Caleño looks for more money (11 percent), better employment (5 percent) and house ownership (5 percent). It is very interesting to find that preferences are quite similar despite their conditions. This may suggest that in Cali, rich and poor are stuck on a hedonic treadmill (Bok, 2010).

One major finding in the literature of life satisfaction is that individuals tend to be less happy when inequality is high (Alesina et al., 2004; Graham and Felton, 2006). Cali is a very unequal city and the opportunities are not equally distributed within the population. If even the poorest declare themselves happy, it is due to other types of factors different from income and the consumption of durable goods. It could be that social relations, family and personal factors may be more relevant when explaining what makes people happy (Rojas, 2011).

On the surface, it seems that everyone is getting a high share of happiness in Cali. However, there is a limit. A recent analysis conducted in the city shows that behind the general perception of content there are important differences by gender. Women, at a much higher rate than males, are negatively affected by several issues like mental health, perception of poverty and job instability.

Moreover, this analysis reveals that compared to personal subjective wellbeing, satisfaction with city government performance is much lower (Martínez and Short, forthcoming).

There is little information on how crime and poverty can affect the perception of happiness. However, there are studies conducted in Colombia showing how crime can negatively affect life satisfaction. In Medellín, for instance, it was found that homicides and robbery negatively affected perceptions of life satisfaction (Medina and Tamayo, 2012). Nevertheless, the effect was not even across all residents, and some types of crime (i.e. robbery, homicide, home burglary) had a different effect on life satisfaction. In Bogotá the perception of insecurity seems to be more relevant for life satisfaction. This perception increases with the many cases reported in the media of petty crime and home burglary, rather than households' direct victimization (Romero, 2014).

Life satisfaction has been extensively studied, and the literature on developed countries abounds. However, little is known of this dimension in the global South, particularly in terms of its connections with crime and victimization given that Latin America is one of most violent regions in the world (Luhnow, 2014).

Development in this area is necessary. The increase of criminal activity in the global South and the limits that violence imposes on government performance call for a more active research agenda in the region.

Conclusions

Colombia as a whole is a very violent country. More than 50 murders per 100,000 inhabitants per year have been reported during most of the last 25 years. In other countries in the region the rate is below 10 homicides (Gaviria et al., 2010). Cali is the most violent city in a violent country. During the 1980s and 1990s Cali and Medellín were quite similar; in both cities the drug-trafficking, and violence related to this business, penetrated and corrupted all social and political institutions. Nowadays, Medellín has been able to manage building a better place to live for their habitants, while Cali has stagnated.

Objective data presented in this chapter shows how the quality of life of the three largest cities in country has evolved in the recent past. Compared to Medellín (a similar city), Cali has shown shallow progress. Nevertheless, Cali is trying to become a global city. There is a new coherence in the city that constructs new narratives, including greener spaces, better urban planning and better governance.

The people in the city are happy, no matter how poor they are. Waste pickers, street vendors and average individuals show similar levels of life satisfaction. On the surface it seems that happiness is equally distributed.

This work attempts to start building a body of research on urban life in the global South. There are so many issues that make cities in this region unique cases: violence, poverty, informal jobs and happy people. Cali fits in this profile. The analysis presented is original in different ways. It combines objective and subjective data at a city level. Most of the literature focuses only on objective or subjective data and analyses are conducted at country level.

NOTE

¹ Socioeconomic strata (SES) is calculated using geographical information. Cities in Colombia are divided into 6 socioeconomic strata, 1 is the poorest, 6 is the richest. Lower SES comprises people living in neighborhoods in 1 and 2 of the socioeconomic strata.

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