

Happy Cities

“The greater good,” but fun.

Kevin Walthall









Hi, I’m Kevin.

I live in Poulsbo with my wife and kids. I like nature AND cities. I love gardening. We have a car. We live in a single-family house with chickens and a mini-orchard.

The moral of this story is not “cars bad” or “houses bad” or any personal choice. It’s about policies that solve the climate and housing crises — and that excite us.

The “Human-Centered City”

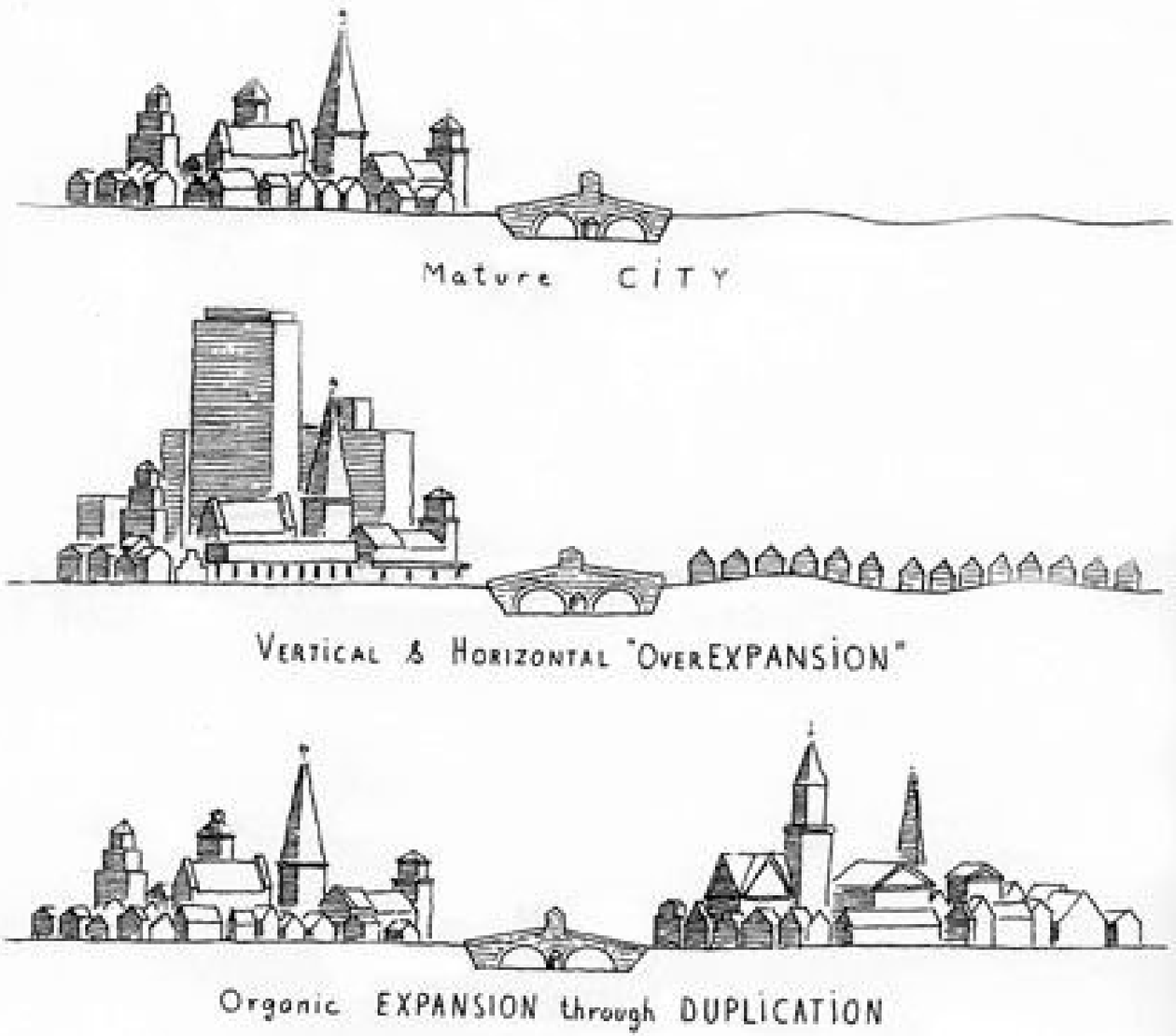
- Humans need other humans.
- Humans need to move their bodies.
- Humans need nature.
- Humans need beauty.
- Humans need opportunity and agency.

KALOS

STRONG TOWNS KITSAP

Strong Towns Concepts









Kalos Communities

Kalos — Classical Greek. Beauty is morally good; moral goodness is sensually attractive.

A beautiful town square that happens to be affordable housing.

Designed by people who will live with it.

“Great places are pizzas, not lunchables.”

“Not growing” isn’t an option.

- For every new household formed in Kitsap, we only add .48 new homes.
- We need 1,372 new units per year across all Kitsap municipalities.

Growth is inevitable –
but what should it feel like?




Google Maps


まつ惣
八百八町
やきとり





For some reason,
we settled on *this*.

(since 1957)



Be able to tell the difference between these.

This *creates* problems.



This *solves* problems.



But there’s also a difference between these.





We agree – like most people – about the problems with sprawl:

- Traffic
- Poor air quality
- CO2 emissions
- Habitat loss
- Isolation
- Mentally unhealthy
- Physically unhealthy
- Unaffordable
- Ugly
- Corporate
- Isn’t city, isn’t country



The problem with this picture isn’t single-family houses. It’s monoculture.

And you could make a lot of logical, ethical arguments about why we should d[illegible]ett[illegible]

- Transportation accounts for [illegible] largest s[illegible] of Wash[illegible]'s gr[illegible]use gas emissions: 40.2%
- 23.3% of Was[illegible]ington emiss[illegible]s c[illegible]e f[illegible]s.
- All buildings, [illegible]mbi[illegible] acc[illegible]t[illegible]% of emissions, and single-family detached home[illegible]quire[illegible]ea[illegible]e[illegible] energy to [illegible]ea per square f[illegible]ot as multifamily apar[illegible]e[illegible]do[illegible]9[illegible] per square foot vs [illegible]00 BTUs per square foot.
- ~2,0[illegible]ac[illegible] Was[illegible]gton fore[illegible]s a[illegible]p[illegible]anen[illegible]lost per year for development.
- Car-d[illegible]ende[illegible] forces w[illegible]ing fa[illegible]ies to purchase a rapidly-depreciating vehicle for em[illegible]oyment and basic errands.
- But he[illegible]e's the thing.

Nobody Cares

People just wanna have a good time, and “The Greater Good” has a buzzkill problem.

We can’t keep haggling to “green-wash” something that’s fundamentally unsustainable.

People don’t engage logically with facts if they fear facts are being used to attack their only vision of happiness. They need a new vision of happiness.

We need a vision of environmentalism — and urbanism — that is happy.

- **Humans need other humans.**
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Good cities aren’t just suburbs, but crowded. They’re a different lifestyle. Happiness looks different.

It isn’t climate control and big screen TVs. It isn’t consumerism and control.

It’s convivial.

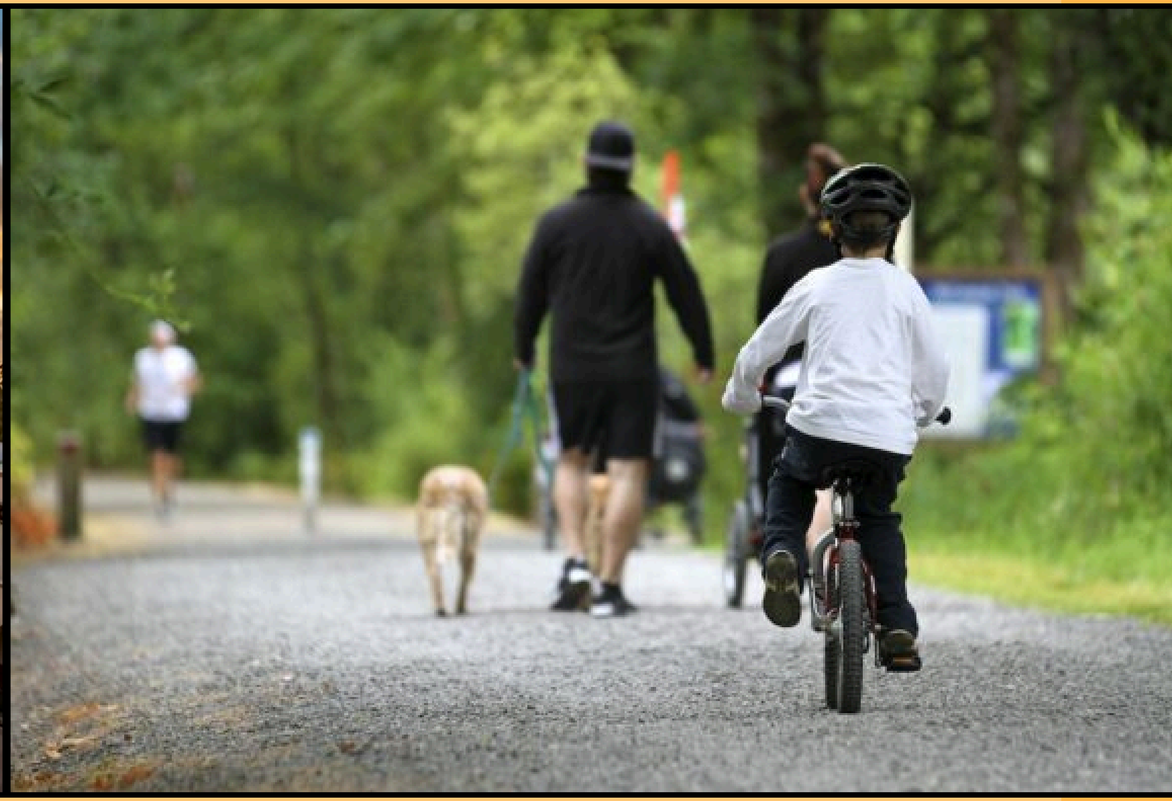




Human presence is a feature, not a bug.

It’s cultivated.

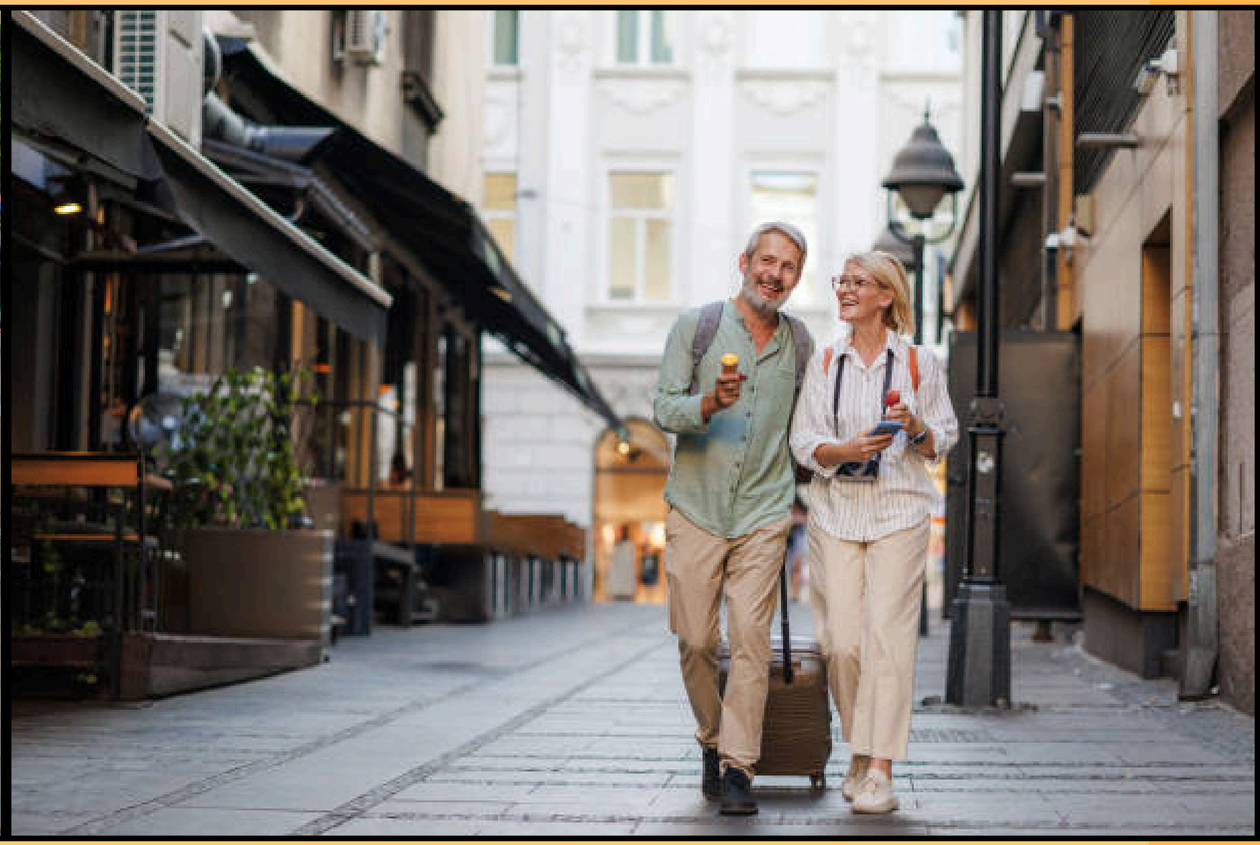




Nature and city are woven together.

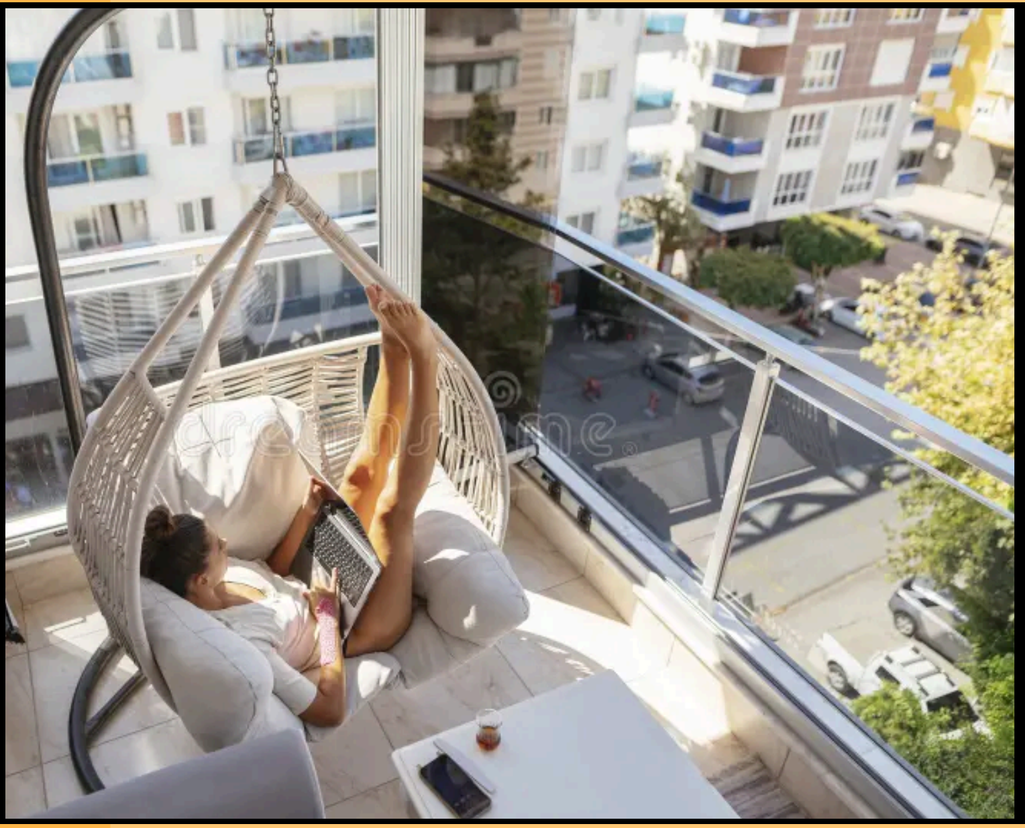
It’s active.





Your commute makes you strong.

It’s contemplative.







Privacy without isolation.

It’s beautiful.







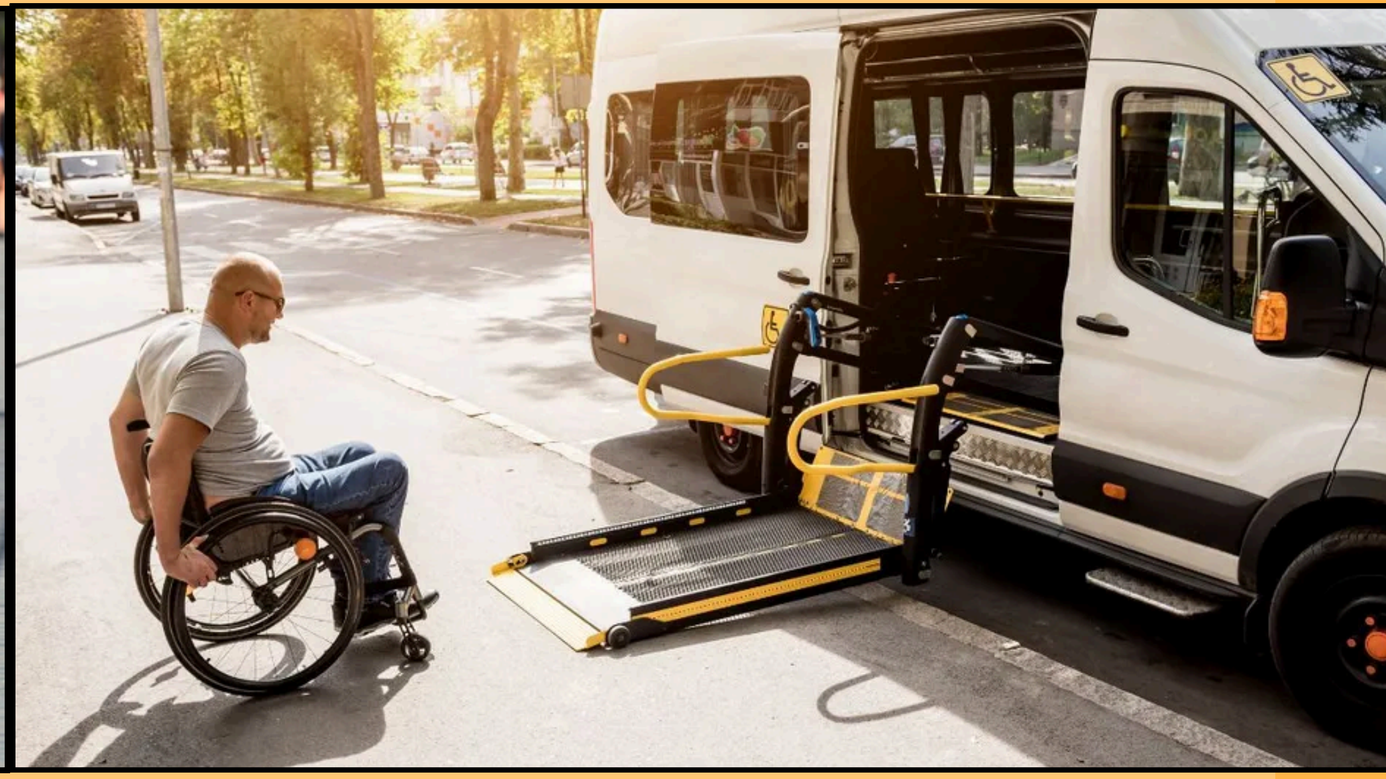


More beauty, experienced together.

It’s accessible.







For all ages, abilities, and means.

It’s life, spontaneously.







Good things happen when we relax.

It’s access to city AND wilderness.





City gives way immediately to wilderness.

Good cities make us happy.





Remember college? Disney Land? That trip to Europe? Walking down the street, coffee on a sidewalk, making friends, sun on your skin, relaxing in a park?

There’s real science behind these happy times:

Susan Pinker: “Social integration” — casual social interactions — is the best predictor of longevity.

Moderate exercise is good for your health. Casual, spontaneous socializing is good for your brain.

“If you are in a bad mood, go for a walk. If you are still in a bad mood, go for another walk.” -Hippocrates(ish)



Corporations know there’s big bucks in monetizing these needs

Starbucks’ core value proposal is the “Third Place”: the casual, comfortable gathering places that have largely been erased from American towns.

Walt Disney set out to design “The Happiest Place on Earth.” It’s a pedestrian paradise.



If academia and corporations both know these things make us happy and we value them… why are we afraid to say so ourselves?

Personally? Optimism feels vulnerable. Data feels safe.

I'm the worst at this, but we're stronger together.

Tax Value per Acre

$1,563,512

$1,557,820

$1,914,730

$1,136,611

$1,893,571

$1,647,857

Tax Daddies:

$2,08

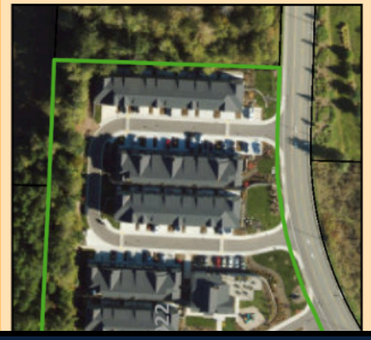
$2,08

$2,45

$2,00

$1,42

Apartment Complex

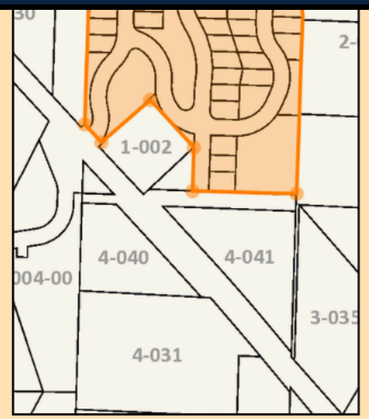


Homes built:
100

Square feet:
~279,655

Linear feet of pavement, pipe, and power the city must maintain (internally):
~4,056

Property tax value per square foot:
$67.03



A chance to
Bremerton k
cars | Opinio

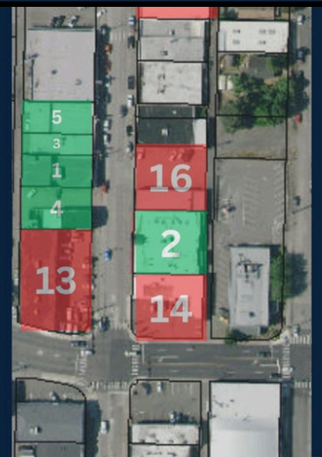
Kevin Walthall Guest columr
Feb. 4, 2025, 8:53 a.m. PT

Seven years ago, Bremer
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two grants.

parking stalls fo
stall for every 8
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average $10,000
over $25,000 pe
assuming a cons

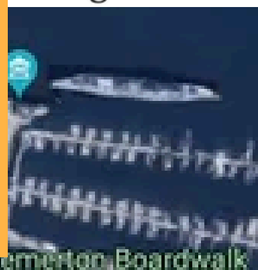
4) $2,085,200 /acre
- 42% building (2 story)

5) $2,003,214 /acre
- 96% building



15) $1,136,611 /
- 41% building

16) $1,007,190 /
- 31% building



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- **Humans need beauty.**
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Pick what speaks to you. Advocate for it.

Don’t tell people to eat their vegetables.

Offer them a feast.

Q & A

Appendices

Clear policy positions: Allow diversity

- Stop actively mandating the single biggest polluter: Remove required minimum parking.
- Form-Based Code: regulate height, width, and setbacks, not density and units. Public experience over abstractions.
- No more exclusionary zoning: “single family houses ONLY.”
- Fund public transportation. Free, frequent, convenient.
- Street trees, parks, and public greenery are essential.
- Complete streets for walkers, bikers, strollers, buses, autos.
- Neighborhood centers with transit in every neighborhood.

(Un)Fun Facts 1:

Home ownership has never been this expensive relative to incomes. In the 80's and 90's, the median home could be purchased for 2.5-3 times the median household income. Today, that ratio is 5.6 times the median income. The price-to-income ratio has gotten twice as bad in the past 40 years.

From 2010-2023, Kitsap salaries have grown by 18% (adjusted for inflation).

From 2012-2022, Kitsap home prices have grown by 86% (adjusted for inflation).

From 2012-2022, Bremerton home prices have grown by 119% (adjusted for inflation).

From 2010-2022, Kitsap rents have grown by 37% (adjusted for inflation).

(Un)Fun Facts 2:

A household needs to make over $82,280 a year to afford the median 2-bedroom apartment without being “rent-burdened” (spending more than 30% gross pay on rent).

The median rent for a 2-bedroom Kitsap apartment is $2,057/month with utilities. A household would need to make over $6,857 per month to afford it.

It would take the median-earning household 22 years to save up a 20% down payment on the median Kitsap house (saving 5% gross income/year). But that mortgage would consume 40% of their gross income.

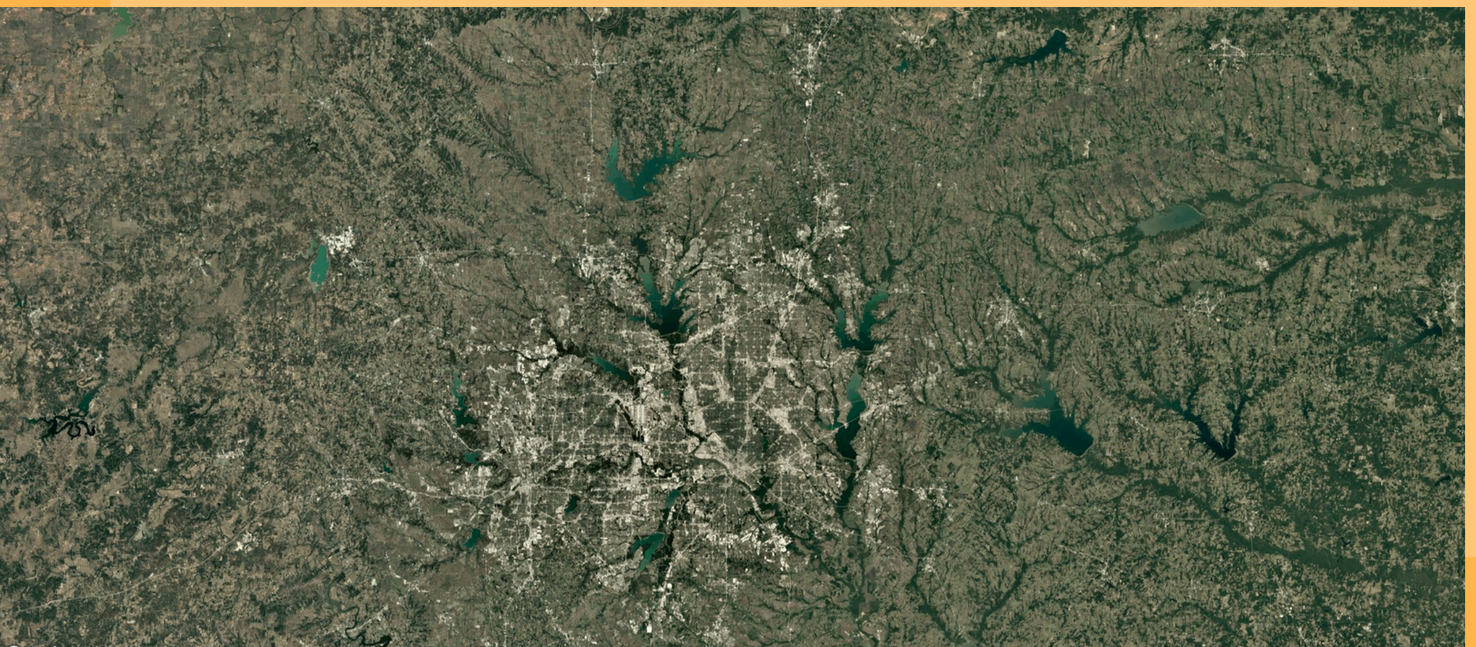
It would take the median-earning household over 46 years to save up enough cash down for the median house without being burdened by the mortgage.

(Un)Fun Facts 3:

The median household income in Kitsap is $104k, meaning the median-earning household can only afford ~$2,600/month for housing. For buying a house, that means a 42% ($242,760) down payment is required for the median earners to purchase the median house.

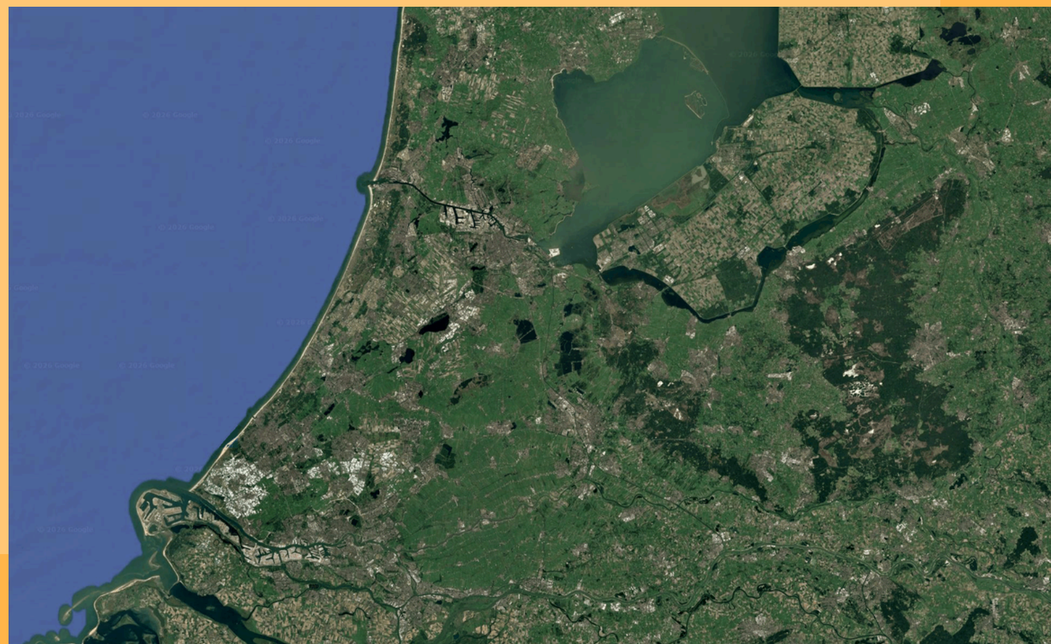
Dallas-Fort Worth Metro

8.48 million people



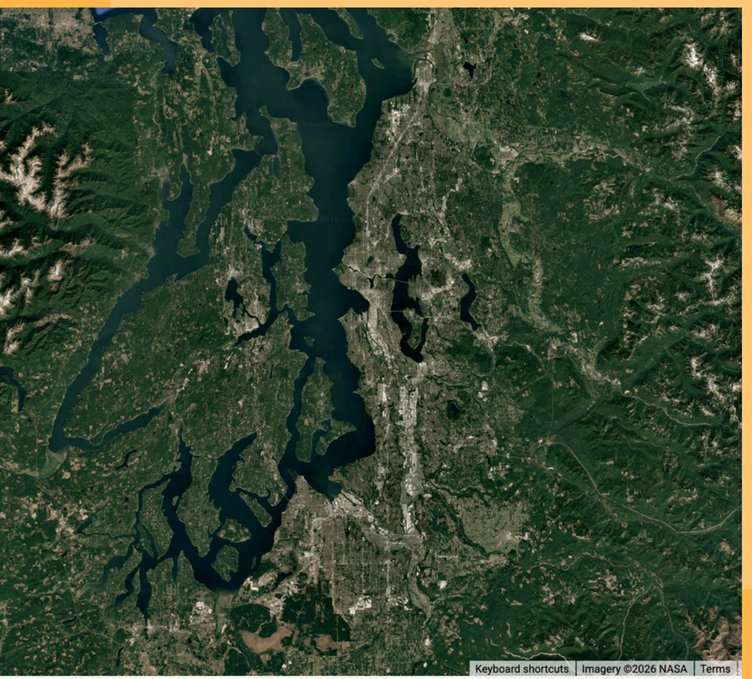
Randstad (Amsterdam) Metro

8.3 million people



Seattle Metro

4.16 million people



Barcelona Metro

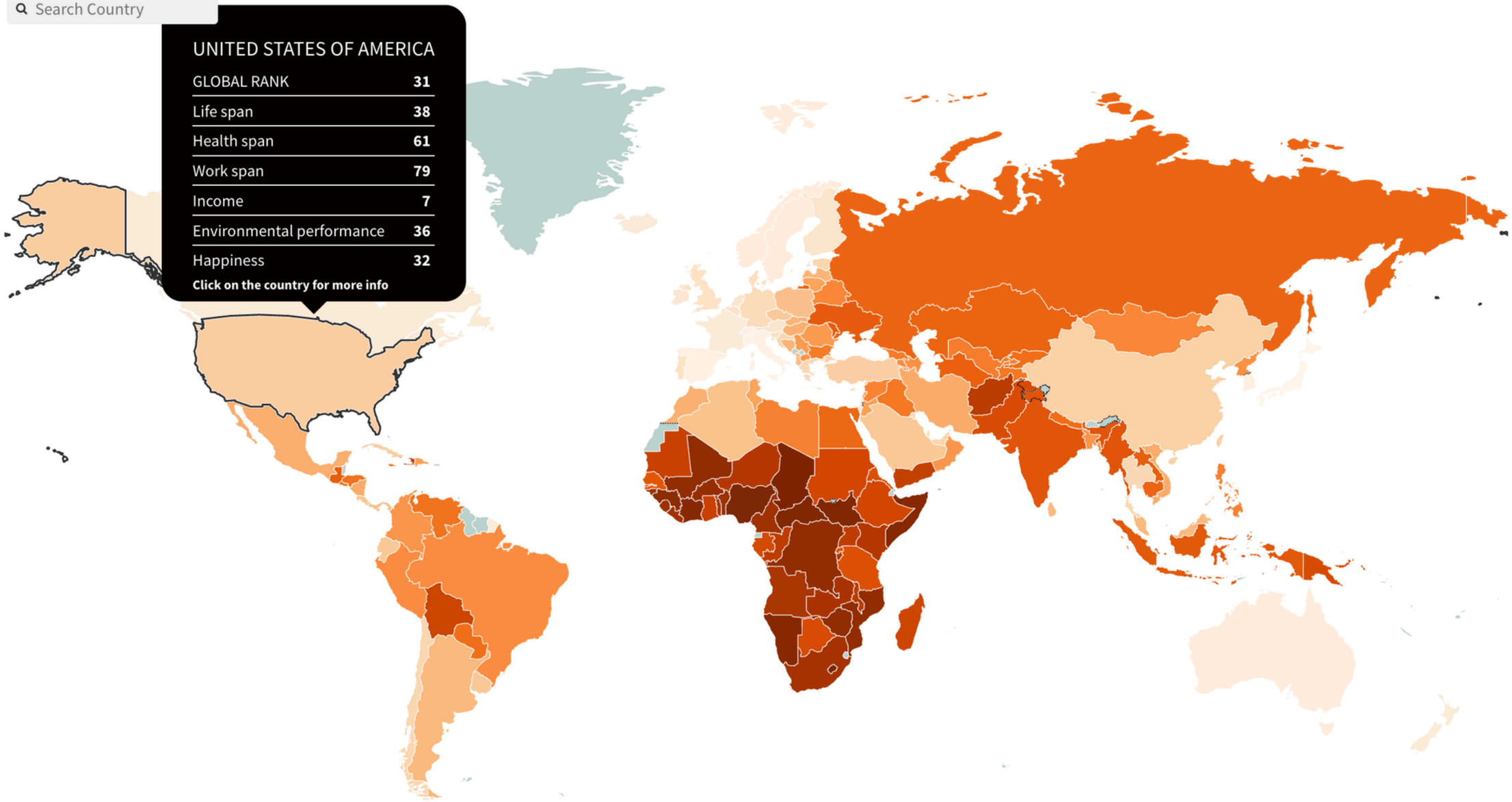
5.75 million people



METRIC: Global rank | **Life span** | Health span | Work span | Income | Environmental performance | Happiness

Number of countries ranked, colour coded from best to worst: 1 — 152

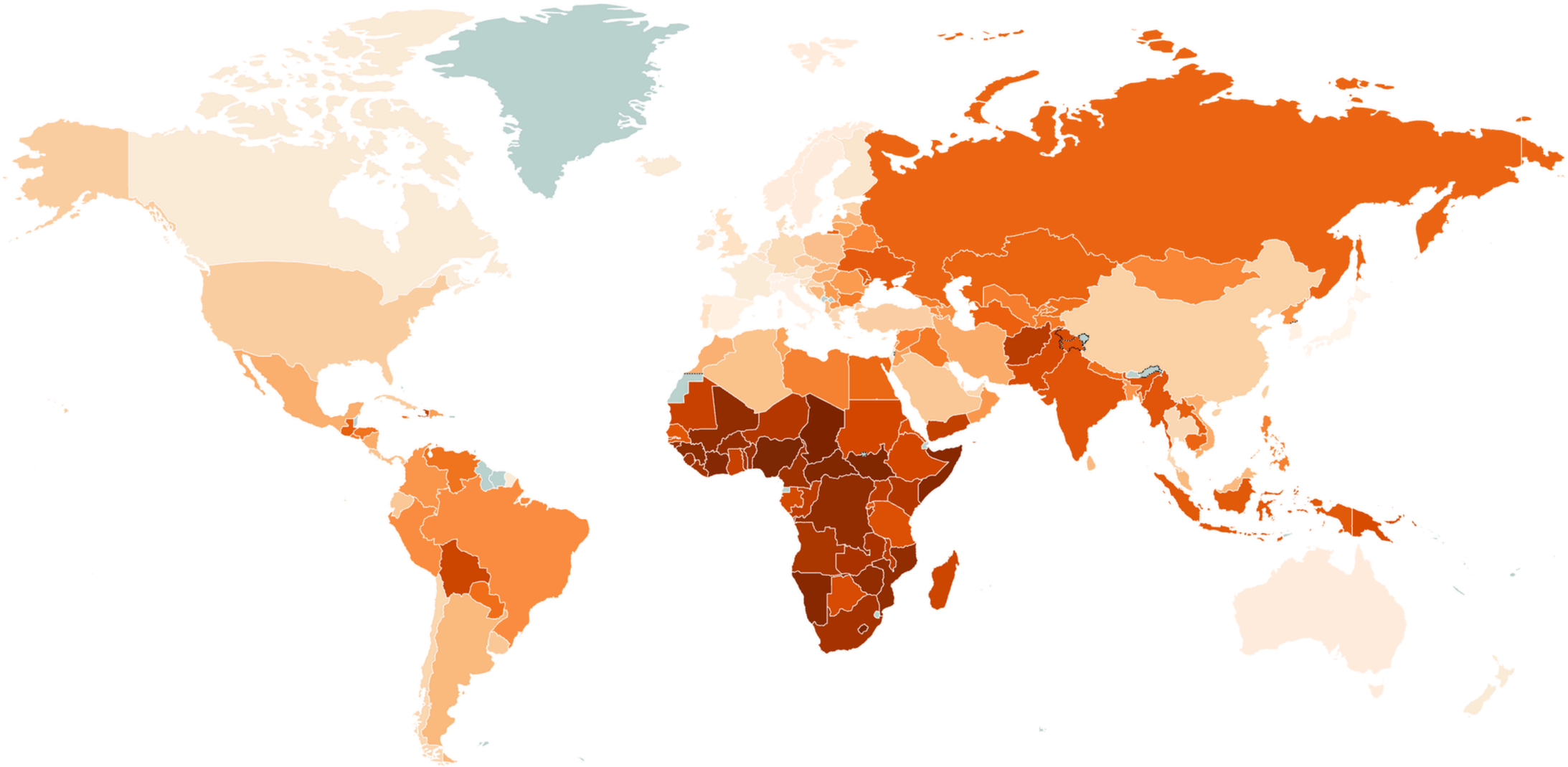
Search Country



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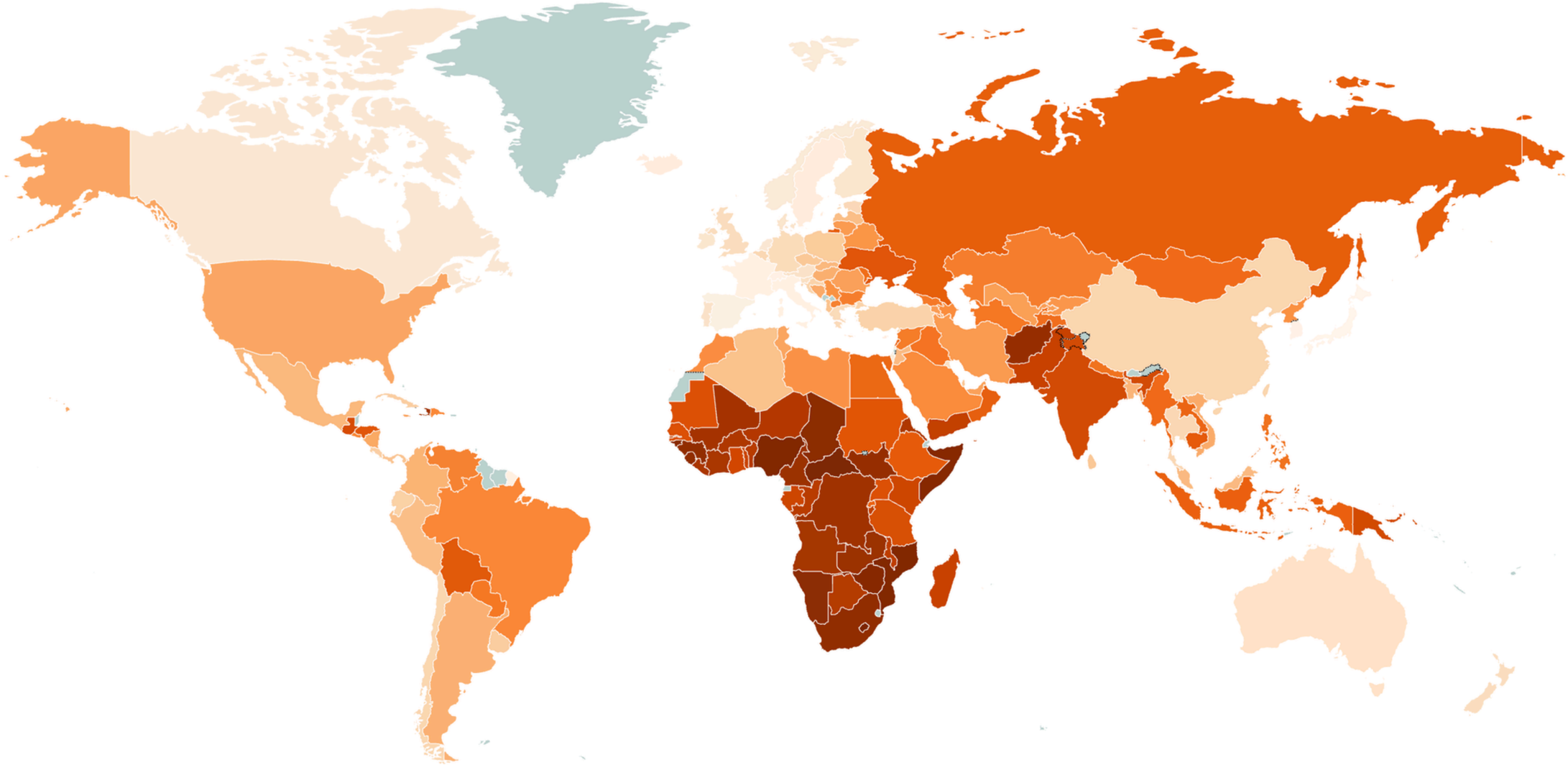
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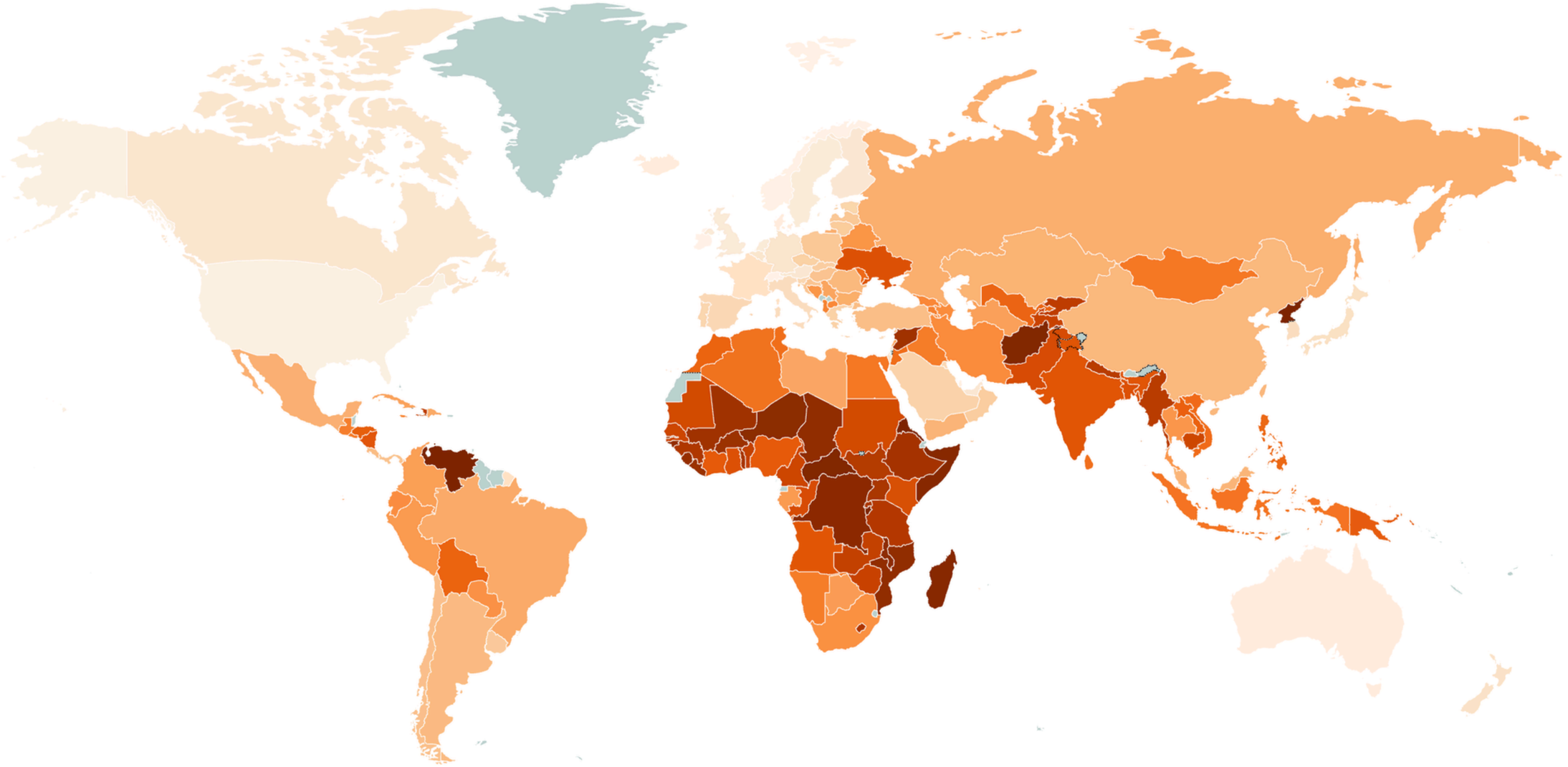
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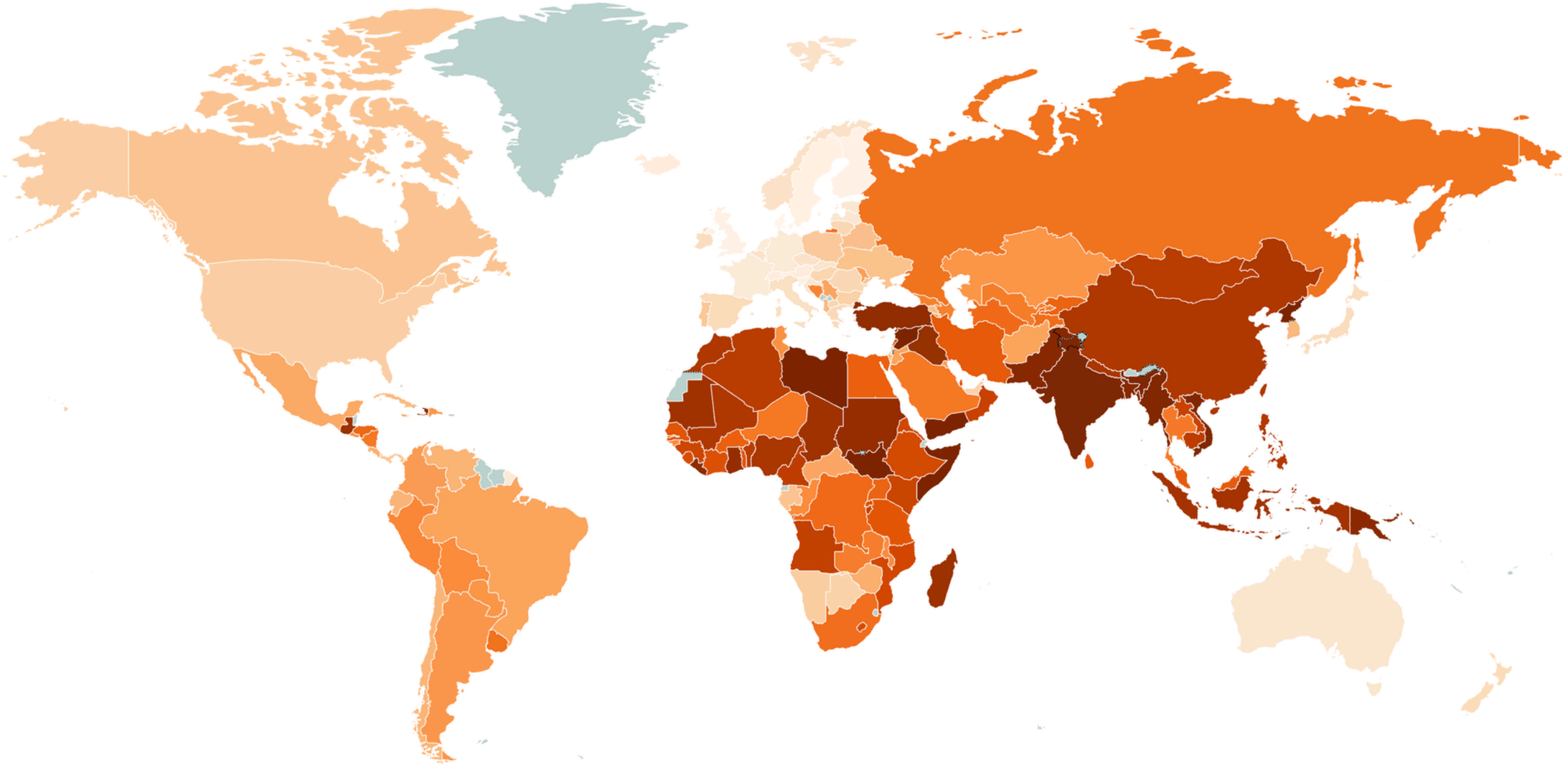
Search Country



METRIC: Global rank | Life span | Health span | Work span | Income | Environmental performance | Happiness

Number of countries ranked, colour coded from best to worst: 1 148

Search Country



METRIC: Global rank | Life span | Health span | Work span | Income | Environmental performance | Happiness

Number of countries ranked, colour coded from best to worst: 1 144

Search Country

