

## The popular consumption basket in Buenos Aires at the end of the 19th century

### *La canasta de consumo popular en la ciudad de Buenos Aires a fines del siglo XIX*

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#### ANALYTICAL SUMMARY

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The study aims at improving our understand of the living standards of workers in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Buenos Aires. First, we assess the consumption basket by comparing similar baskets used in historical contexts. Then, and by comparing wages, we can proxy living standards and their evolution throughout the century. The methodology follows the one employed by Robert Allen, who reconstructed a basket based on minimum food needs (set at 1,941 daily calories per adult male), as well as estimated consumption of the whole household and other non-food items. In this way, a *Welfare Ratio (WR)* can be estimated.

Our research is based on historical sources that contemporaries used to elaborate baskets. Compiled from popular sectors in Buenos Aires, this information allowed us to establish a criterion. From the same sources, we also obtained wages which led to the estimation of the *WR*. Importantly, we used not only the remuneration of construction workers but also of other occupations. Although this approach has limitations, we sought to adapt it to the context without altering its essence.

The most relevant finding is that wages did not cover, or only partially covered, the minimum consumption of a household of 2 adults and 2 children, which was comfortably achieved until 1875, but showed a downward trend since 1850. To supplement household income, other members, such as the wife and/or the eldest son/daughter, had to contribute. Equally, we observed alterations in consumption patterns over time, which represented adjustments to the diet based on changing preferences and prices. The decrease in meat consumption, for example, is related to its high cost and cultural changes that diversified the diet. Our study also contributes to our understanding of the process that led to wage-labor in Buenos Aires as wages gradually became the main source of income.

The article aims to stimulate further research in this area. Specifically, we encourage the estimation of living standards during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with other sources. We also suggest conducting studies over the short-term, that span no more than 10 years, especially for a society that was undergoing change.

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