

Asociación de Vecinos La Boca

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S.O.S

Help Save the Matanza-Riachuelo River Basin

A special English
newsletter from
Assoc. Vecinos La Boca
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For most tourists who visit Buenos Aires, their only contact with Buenos Aires' river (the Rio de la Plata is actually a bay) is during a quick visit to La Boca, where the river plays second fiddle to the colorful drama of *La Caminita*. But La Boca (the mouth) is precisely what it sound like – the point at which the once mighty Matanza – Riachuelo River spills into the sea. Yet if one steps away from the art and music of the La Caminita and heads to the riverfront, it is obvious even to the untrained eye that something is wrong.

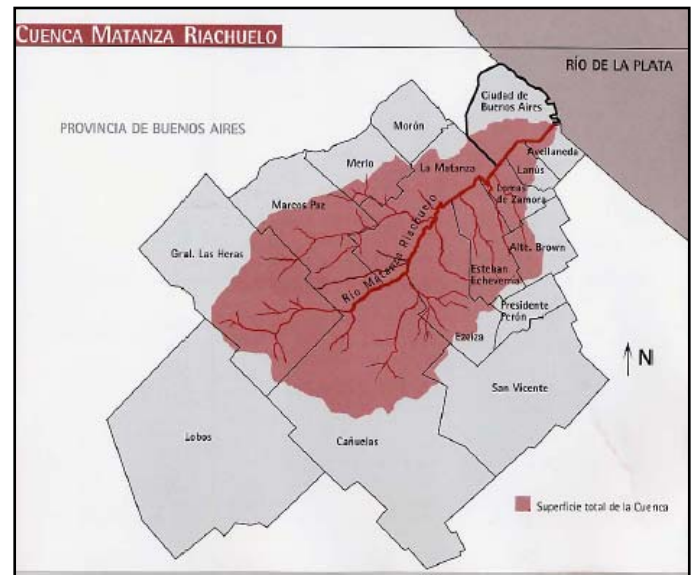
The River is sick. It has been inundated with chemical and biological contaminants, and has exceed its capacity to clean itself.

WHO THIS AFFECTS

The Matanza-Riachuelo River Basin is home to 4.5 million people, one third of the population of metropolitan Buenos Aires, and 13% of the entire nation of Argentina. The river is the border between the Federal Capital District and the *conurbano*, the suburbs that are part of the Province of Buenos Aires. The working-class residents who populate both sides of the river tend to be poorer than their wealthier neighbors to the north, one of the many factors which have led political leaders over the years to promise to clean up the basin, without actually delivering.

SOME HISTORY

The basin, and especially the Riachuelo, play an important part in the history of Buenos Aires. It is where the thousands of boats ferrying new immigrants from Europe landed. From its role as a conduit for the *pampas* agricultural production to the petrochemical plants of Dock Sud, the river basin is the heart of Buenos Aires' industrial and manufacturing base. As it is one of two major dumping grounds for Buenos Aires' sewage (the other being direct dumping into the Rio de la Plata), it is severely impacted by the city's inadequate sewer system.



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WHAT HAS (NOT) BEEN DONE

To many residents of Buenos Aires, it is simply known as the “*limpieza*”. Whereas the wealthy of Buenos Aires began fleeing the flood- and yellow-fever prone basin 150 years ago, politicians have flocked to its side in recent years, with leader after leader promising to have the basin cleaned up within a certain timeframe. To date, no one has been able to deliver on their promises, and the state of the basin remains perilous at best and a significant biohazard in parts.

In an effort to document the condition of the river basin and to develop ideas to fix it, Asociacion Vecinos La Boca worked with local and national NGO's (*Fundación Ambiente y Recursos Naturales & Poder Ciudadano*), a local university (the *Universidad Tecnologica Nacional*) and various government agencies to produce a comprehensive 284-page report, *Informe Especial sobre la Cuenca Matanza-Riachuelo*, on the current state of the basin, including recommendations for cleaning it up. We have also participated in numerous community forums designed to bring attention and fresh ideas to the issue, informing people of the severe health risks that the high levels of chrome, lead, disease and hydrocarbons posed to residents and their families.

WHERE YOU COME IN

There is also a strong connection between the pollution of the basin and the relationship of Buenos Aires to the world. Many of the large-scale polluters are either multinationals or are involved heavily in Buenos Aires' export-based economy; additionally changes in economic policy and the growth of neoliberal thinking and *menenismo* have had a profound effect on the health of the Basin.



Without significant pressure from the outside world,
there is little hope of cleaning up this ecological disaster.

**Help make a difference in the lives of millions of Buenos Aires residents.
Help spread the word about one of the world most contaminated rivers.**

Join us: Distribute this newsletter, and help bring international pressure on the leadership in Argentina. Send us **ideas**, proposals and technical solutions. Make a financial **contribution** to the Association – help us fight to **save the Riachuelo** and the people who call it home.



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