

Cinéma Beaubien

A neighbourhood theatre transformed into a collective project and cultural hub through social economy

A Collective Initiative with a Lasting Impact

The 2001 revival of Cinéma Beaubien illustrates how a community can tackle a local challenge with an innovative and, transformative solutions. Grounded in social economy principles, the project saved a cultural venue at risk of closing, while enhancing local engagement, cultural accessibility, and citizen involvement.

Cinéma Beaubien is not a universal model but showcases the diverse forms social innovation can take: a collective response to a shared need, driven by citizen mobilization and supported by a committed ecosystem.



Photo credit: Chantier de l'Économie Sociale Trust, Cinéma Beaubien Corporation

The path to transformation

1937–2000: Prosperity, Decline, and Closure

- The Cinéma Beaubien opened in 1937 becoming Cinéma Dauphin in 1967 under the Odéon Group.
- The Rosemont neighbourhood faced significant decline during the 1980s.
- With a dwindling in attendance, the Odéon Group announced the cinema's closure in 2000.

2001: A Citizen Mobilization to Save the Cinema

- The Rosemont-Petite-Patrie Community Economic Development Corporation (CDEC-RPP) led and developed a revitalization plan.
- A survival committee was created, bringing together local business owners, residents, and community stakeholders.
- A non-profit was established to purchase the cinema, with \$1.2 million in combined public subsidies and loans (including mortgage financing and patient capital) from institutions such as Investissement Québec and the Fiducie du Chantier de l'économie sociale.

2001–Present: Thriving Through Social Economy

- The cinema underwent gradual renovations and expansion, with new screening rooms, modern equipment, and a transition to digital projection
- Social values were integrated : scholarships for student employees, increased accessibility, and partnerships with local community organizations.



Photo credit: Cinéma Beaubien, Montreal, 1937. BANQ Vieux-Montréal, La Presse Collection (06M, P833, S3, D211). Photographer unknown.

A Transformative Citizen Movement

When the cinema's closure was announced in 2000, a mobilization united local residents, business owners, community organizations, and elected officials from the neighborhood. The CDEC-RPP organized a survival committee and coordinated the revitalization efforts. A nonprofit was created, to ensure democratic governance and a mission focused on the collective good. The cinema's purchase was enabled by a financial arrangement of government subsidies and private partnerships. This citizen-led revival revitalized the venue, asserting a vision of culture as a common good — accessible and deeply rooted in its community.

A Social Innovation That Transforms a Neighbourhood

The Role of Cinema in Urban Revitalization

The cinema revitalized Beaubien Street, increased local foot traffic, and stimulated nearby businesses.

Social Cohesion

The effort to save the cinema strengthened residents' sense of belonging. Today, it serves as a true gathering place.

Cultural Accessibility

Inclusive programming, technologies for the hearing impaired, reduced ticket prices — ensure culture is accessible to all.

Economic Impact

240,000 annual spectators, job creation for students and permanent staff, and support for the local economy.

Today

Cinéma Beaubien stands as a leading example of accessible culture, democratic governance, and the social economy. More than just a movie theatre, it represents a vibrant, collective, and resilient project deeply rooted in its community and neighbourhood.

References

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Produced by : Sonia Tello-Rozas, Éliane Brisebois, Mathilde Courtemanche, Marc D. Lachapelle, Julie Rijpens and Hugo Roy, March 2025.