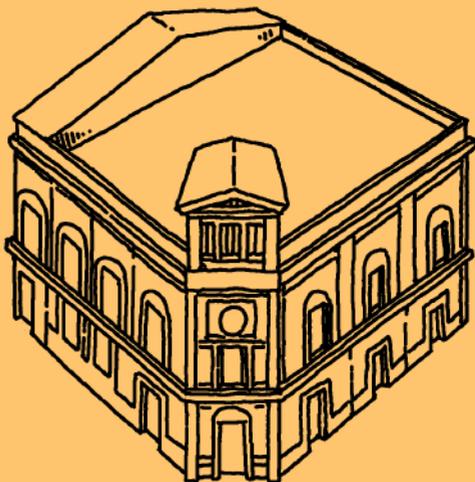


Ateneu la Flor de Maig

A cooperative space for neighbors
from 1978



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Spain

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📘 [ateneu.laflordemaig](https://www.facebook.com/ateneu.laflordemaig)
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In a place that symbolizes the memory and identity of a combative neighborhood like Poble Nou in Barcelona, Ateneu popular Flor de Maig was born as a self-managed neighborhood space that involves its inhabitants to plan and implement social transformation through culture and cooperation.

Built in 1896, the building was the headquarters of “La Societat Cooperativa Obrera d’Estalvi i Consum La Flor de Mayo”, a historic workers cooperative in Spain. At end of the 1970s, after imaginative demonstrations and the occupation of the building by the popular movement of the neighborhood, it became “Ateneu popular”, a place for exchange and the enrichment of the neighborhood where culture and social commitment towards cooperativism, feminism and food sovereignty meet to create an alternative to private speculation.

In recent years, the city has tried to shut Ateneu down several times, but each time the neighborhood has responded in a cohesive and creative way to defend and reopen it.



WHERE

The building was constructed in 1896 to become the headquarters of the "Societat Cooperativa Obrera d'Estalvi i Consum La Flor de Mayo" (Workers' Cooperative Society for Savings and Consumer Goods of La Flor de Mayo). The cooperative had been founded a few years earlier by sixteen workers and had become the largest in Catalonia, with 1,600 member families. During the 1950s, the economic losses and the political context forced the cooperative to sell the building to a private citizen. After being unused for some years, Ateneu La Flor de Mayo was revived at the end of the '70s thanks to the demands of the neighborhood movements that fought to preserve the historical and cultural identity of the Poblenou neighborhood, to stop the decline of the social fabric caused by real estate speculation, to stop privatization and recover the historic and cooperative buildings of the area.

LOCATION

Urban

TYPE OF SPACE

Building

ORIGINAL FUNCTION

Commercial (workers' cooperative society)

YEAR OF CONSTRUCTION

1896

SURFACE AREA

486 sqm

OWNERSHIP

Public

CONCESSION

Capped rent

CONDITION BEFORE ACTIVATION

Vacant

COMPOSITION OF THE SPACE

Lobby
Bar
Concert hall
Meeting room
Library
Kitchen
Mirror room
Storage
Corridor
Bathroom

WHEN

TIME OF DAY USED

Morning 7am - 1pm 10%
Afternoon ... 1pm - 7pm 50%
Evening 7pm - 1am 40%
Night 1am - 7am 0%

Workdays: 90%

Weekends: 10%

OPENING HOURS

Always open to the collectives forming part of Ateneu
Open to public during specific events

AVERAGE USERS PER DAY

20-30

WHAT

Ateneu is committed to the social transformation of its neighborhood, working every day to actualize its cooperative-related history and to build a cultural and social alternative to the capitalist model, inspired by principles such as cooperation, feminism, food sovereignty and culture. Ateneu is a self-managed space open to the participation of all people, in particular the residents and collectives of the neighborhood, who can take part in the social or cultural activities already organized or propose new ones as long as they are in line with the principles of the Ateneu.

SURFACE IN USE

486 sqm

THEMATIC AREAS

Activism and politics
 Commercial
 Culture and arts
 Ecology and environment
 Education and training
 Welfare

In addition to being the headquarters of local associations committed to the defense of the environment and civil rights, Ateneu hosts numerous activities ranging from workshops and yoga courses to singing and music classes, theater workshops, exhibitions, movie nights and meetings regarding environmental, political or neighborhood-related issues.

There are also more informal activities, like aperitifs and dinners with the goal of raising funds for the space, which are open to everyone. One very important activity is the collection and distribution of food for poor and homeless people in the neighborhood.

USER DEMOGRAPHIC

The activities are open to everyone, with a special focus on local community.
 Under-represented people: poor people

COLLABORATIONS

Artists and creatives
 Associations and collectives
 Citizens and local community

NETWORK

Local

Did you know?**Over a century of cooperativism in the neighborhood**

In 1890 some workers, many of them boatmen, founded in Poblenou the “La Societat Cooperativa Obrera d’Estalvi i Consum La Flor de Mayo”, named in honor of a Catalan choral song. A few years later, the historical headquarters of the cooperative was built, which over time grew, always promoting the principles of cooperativism, solidarity and the education of the working classes. The cooperative, which went through difficult times in the 1930s, was dissolved under the Francoist regime, and its properties were confiscated and acquired by private companies close to the regime. Then the building became part of a city plan regarding the “ateneus” as an entity, although it was privately owned and not a public property. At the end of 1978 it became a self-managed space for the neighborhood, with a strong popular and cultural imprint, in which film screenings took place, a school of continuing education was established, as well as a library, but also photography, painting and drawing workshops. Some pioneering experiences were also carried out, such as the “Orgia Artística” (“Artistic Orgy”) with twelve consecutive hours of living culture and multidisciplinary artistic exchange.

WHO

MANAGING ORGANIZATION(S)

1. Ateneu la Flor de Maig (association, 1973)

PEOPLE INVOLVED IN THE MANAGEMENT

10 people

100–150 volunteers

HOW

The governance and management system of Ateneu is coherent with its deeply cooperative philosophy: it is structured in different assembly meetings open to all its members where decisions are made and guidelines are established horizontally through the consensus method.

The General Assembly, which takes place twice a year, involves all the members. The decisions are then managed and developed by four internal commissions (communication, economic, logistics, activities) which meet twice a month in the “Cordinadora” (coordinating assembly) to discuss operational and managerial topics.

NATURE OF THE INITIATIVE

Bottom-up

TYPE OF MANAGEMENT

Horizontal

ECONOMIC RESOURCES

Commercial activities

Membership fees

Self-funded

Other: crowdfunding

TYPE OF ACTIVITIES

100% Free, or “taquilla inversa” (reverse ticket): the spectators decide, after seeing the work, to pay what they consider appropriate and fair.



Watch the video
about the Ateneu la
Flor de Maig



How did your story begin?

The building was privately owned and the city administration paid the rent until 2012, when it stopped for economic reasons. The day after, we launched the campaign “Plataforma Recuperem la Flor de Maig”. After a demonstration in the street with about 200 people, the building was occupied and became a venue for concerts, parties, book presentations, dinners, theatrical performances, and film screenings. The movement also spread to the streets and attracted the attention of the people, the neighborhood and the city, and on the other hand, a rigorous legal defense strategy was conducted.

The property filed a complaint and so La Flor de Maig tried to persuade the city to buy the building. We were successful, and when the city bought the building we wondered whether to accept its interference: from an occupation we would turn into a public building. There were some discussions about how and if we wanted to keep the identity of Ateneu, but in the end pragmatism prevailed, because our goal was to continue our activities there, so we accepted the agreement with the city.

What is the secret ingredient that makes your story unique?

Ateneu Flor de Maig is an iconic building that represents the neighborhood’s cooperative past. It is a heritage of the neighborhood, it is like entering the temple of cooperativism: you see the photos from the 1900s in an amazing space full of history. Ateneu Flor de Maig is like a big family united by the love for this space, by the desire to maintain it, with great respect for the place and for what it was in the past. A past that inspires the present.

“Our defining characteristic is the love for this space: La Flor de Maig. You enter, you see it and it is like entering the temple of cooperativism [...] it is like a big family united by the love of this space, by the desire to maintain it, with great respect for the place and for what it was in the past”.

Interview with: Adrià Menéndez i Molist, Salvatore Cattogno

