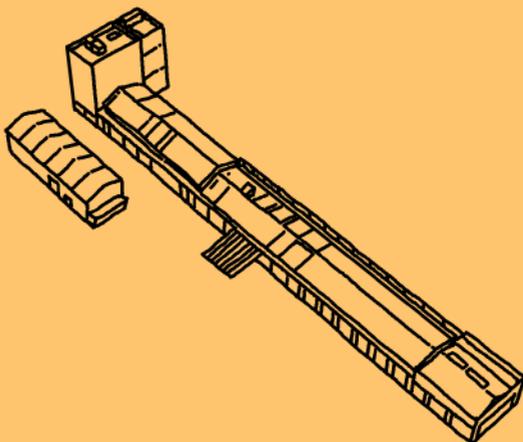


## Ateneu Popular de Nou Barris

Circus and culture for inclusion and social transformation  
from 1977



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The Ateneu Popular 9 Barris is a socio-cultural community center managed directly by the residents and collectives of the neighborhood. The place is the result of the efforts of the residents, who occupied an asphalt factory in 1977 and converted it into a social and cultural center for the neighborhood.

Since its inception, Ateneu's trademark since its birth has been the performance of circus arts, as tools for artistic exploration and social transformation, thanks to training programs and the Social Circus.

True to its origins, Ateneu is today a cultural and social center that is a local and international hub both for training and for the creation of shows in the field of circus arts, in close connection with the territory, promoting participation and social cohesion. The Ateneu Popular 9 Barris is managed by the Associació Bidó de Nou Barris, who inherited the the fighting spirit from the first movements in the neighborhood, in agreement with the local government within the program "Patrimoni Ciutadà," which promotes civic and community management of municipal buildings and public assets.



## WHERE

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The building housing the Ateneu is an old asphalt factory warehouse, built in 1976 to provide material for the construction of the new access roads to Barcelona, in an area classified as forest land. Faced with the refusal to dismantle the asphalt plant, the neighborhood movement initiated a powerful fight against pollution with assemblies, demonstrations, the sabotage of the plant and a 30-hour party that created a new awareness of the space. The increasing political, circus and cultural activities made it necessary to restructure the space: in 1994, after several years of work, it was reopened in a new guise that, while preserving the original volumes, allows experimentation with new possibilities. In 2012, the space underwent a second renovation to improve the facilities and expand the spaces, permanently transforming the Ateneu.

### LOCATION

Urban

### TYPE OF SPACE

Building  
Open space (street)

### ORIGINAL FUNCTION

Industrial (asphalt factory)

### YEAR OF CONSTRUCTION

1976

### SURFACE AREA

1,425 sqm (building)  
Around 1.100 sqm (street)

### OWNERSHIP

Public

### CONCESSION

Free cession

### CONDITION BEFORE ACTIVATION

In use

## COMPOSITION OF THE SPACE

Hall  
Gym  
Bar  
Theater  
Offices  
Two meeting rooms  
Music hall  
Area for theater residencies

## WHEN

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### TIME OF DAY USED

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

Workdays: 80%

Weekends: 20%

### OPENING HOURS

Workdays: always open

Weekends: open only during specific events

### AVERAGE USERS PER DAY

100-120

## WHAT

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Since the end of the 70's Ateneu's focus has been inextricably linked to comprehensive experimentation with the disciplines of the circus world, which became a tool for artistic research and social transformation. The Ateneu organizes experimental workshops in collaboration with artists, creative residencies, productions of performances and national and international programs. Alongside this, there is an intense practice of training and social circus that involves children and young people from schools and the neighborhood, people with intellectual and physical disabilities as well as training future teachers of social circus.

### SURFACE IN USE

1,425 sqm

**THEMATIC AREAS**

Activism and politics  
 Commercial  
 Culture and arts  
 Design, crafts and production  
 Education and training  
 Sport and leisure  
 Welfare

In addition to the many activities related to the Circus, the Ateneu carries out various cultural initiatives such as visual exhibitions, festivals and performances of contemporary and urban theater and dance, concerts, artistic residencies, conferences and workshops.

**USER DEMOGRAPHIC**

The activities are open to everyone, with a special focus on:

Children  
 Families  
 Local community  
 Senior citizens  
 Young people  
 Under-represented people: disabled people

**COLLABORATIONS**

Artists and creatives  
 Associations and collectives  
 Citizens and local community  
 Other commons  
 Professionals and freelancers  
 Public administrations and public authorities

**NETWORK**

Local  
 Regional  
 National  
 International

The Ateneu is part of "Caravan", a network of international youth and social circuses, uniting circus schools from across Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia, and which advocates for the positive impact of social circus on young lives.

**Did you know?****The communitarian management of Ateneu**

The management of Ateneu is strongly communitarian and provides spaces for participation, decision-making and discussion organized into the following committees and thematic organizational areas:

**Assembly.** It is the main space for the general definition of the project. It is held to facilitate decision-making and validation. The assemblies are held between three and four times a year. In these sessions the project lines are defined from an ideological, political, strategic, economic and territorial impact point of view.

**Management.** It is the governing body of the Ateneu, a representative space of the different areas of the project that implements the decisions made by the assembly. Its main focuses are dialogue and political representation, and executive and organizational management.

**Commissions.** They have the power of the assembly and the autonomy to achieve their goals in coherence with the global project. They are divided as follows: Training and Social Circus, Programming, Artistic, Communication, and Technical. Working Groups. These are thematic workspaces with a project focus. There are currently four working groups: culture, community management and solidarity economy, territory, care.

## WHO

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The management of the Ateneu de Nou Barris is entrusted to Bidó de Nou Barris, a non-profit organization that manages the Ateneu with the formula of "community management" and develops economic activities within a social economy framework. Anyone can serve on internal working committees, but commitment to and consistency with the values of the Ateneu is required. To economically support the Ateneu, in line with the idea of social economy, the association Bidó de Nou Barris provides a list of services such as equipment rental, show production, catering, workshops, and training.

1. Bidó de Nou Barris (association, 1999)

### PEOPLE INVOLVED IN THE MANAGEMENT

12 full-time employees (technical equipe)  
100 formal and 450 informal volunteers

## HOW

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### NATURE OF THE INITIATIVE

Bottom-up

### TYPE OF MANAGEMENT

Horizontal

### ECONOMIC RESOURCES

50% Public grants  
5% Rental income  
40% Tickets and entrance fees  
5% Other: services

### TYPE OF ACTIVITIES

60% Free  
40% Paid  
Other: pay what you want 15%



Watch a circus performance



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## How did your story begin?

The history of Ateneu Popular 9 Barris began when the locals fought to reclaim an old asphalt plant and turn it into a socio-cultural center. The asphalt plant was producing a lot of pollution in the neighborhood so, after protests from residents, on January 9<sup>th</sup>, 1977, around 200 people broke into the asphalt plant and shut down its operation, destroyed the machinery and occupied the space to give it a socio-cultural use. After a period of occupation, the local government decided to close it and purchased the building in the 1990s. In 1999 the Association Bidó de Nou Barris was formed to manage the former asphalt plant as a cultural center. Currently, the city council owns this space and the Bidó de Nou Barris association manages the project thanks to a pioneering community management agreement. Since then, Ateneu has been bringing social and artistic activities to the people and it has become a model for the whole city of Barcelona.

## Is there a practice or value that represents you and you think may be an inspiration to others?

I really like the project Generació Zirc (Circus Generation), a circus training for teenagers where we offer several disciplines such as acrobatics, aerial activities (trapeze and fabrics), juggling, unicycle and balancing on objects (ball and cable). It works as an open group, so its main purpose is not only circus, but building relationships: we work with the themes of gender and diversity. This project culminates with the creation of a show for the Erràtik Festival, a self-managed festival which serves as a meeting point between various cultural projects for the younger generations (which also includes international exchanges). This project is geared toward teens and young people from the Nou Barris neighborhood, and its objective is raising awareness through the practice of circus and healthy habits on a physical and social level.

“Ateneu’s work has become a model for the whole city of Barcelona. The secret tool for this type of work is great compromise with the community and co-responsibility with the people who participate... it is not secret, but necessary!”

## What is the secret ingredient that makes your story unique?

The secret tool for this type of work is great compromise with the community and co-responsibility with the people who participate...it is not secret, but necessary! Working with a large community of people may generate tension, but this is part of the process. We try to overcome these difficulties with five thematic commissions that are designed to manage the development of the activities. These commissions are open to everyone (even non-associated people), apart from the Management Commission, which is in charge of making important decisions about the future of the Ateneu, so it is important to know the overall project very well. The commission’s participants are usually individuals, and the commissions are put into action when needed. It is a space of interaction and participation in future activities.



*Interview with: Naroa Gómez*