

**Notes de discours de Pierre Fortin, directeur général Partenariat du Quartier des spectacles  
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(Seule l'allocution prononcée fait foi)

Ladies and gentlemen,  
Good morning.

First I would like to thank you for this opportunity to tell you about the neighbourhood I work in:  
Montreal's Quartier des spectacles.

The Quartier des spectacles is now an established attraction in Montreal's downtown core.

But you might not have heard of it if you had come to Montreal only five years ago.

Today I will explain:

- how the neighbourhood's revitalisation efforts was built on culture,
- and this is made possible by an ongoing partnership between the public and private sectors.

Montreal has almost 1,9 million residents.

Located only a one hour flight from Boston, New York or Toronto, Montreal is closely tied into the economy of the Eastern coast of North America. Montreal is in the province of Quebec, which is the only francophone of the continent. This location and the particular history makes Montreal feel like it is half way between America and Europe.

Over a hundred years ago taverns, music-halls, theatres, meeting halls and cinemas began setting up shop along St-Laurent Boulevard and Sainte-Catherine Street, historically Montreal's main streets.

Prohibition in the United States during the 1920s turned Montreal into a week-end destination for American thrill-seekers, who flocked to this neighbourhood in particular, making it a very successful red-light district.

Plans in the 1950s and 60s to replace nightlife with the high arts in the area were only partly achieved. The Place des Arts, Montreal's regional performing arts centre, and UQAM, one of our four universities, were built in this period.

Until the late 90s, the area's general state of disrepair and seedier nightlife activities kept real-estate developers at bay. By then, cheap rents had allowed artists to take over former industrial buildings and performance venues. Vacant lots were occupied by outdoor festivals.

The Quartier des spectacles today is located North of Old Montreal,

- between the financial district called the Quartier International,
- the central business district,
- the Plateau (a dense historic residential neighbourhood),
- and the Gay Village.

In the 1 square kilometre area of the Quartier des spectacles, there are:

- 45,000 office workers
- 6,000 residents
- 47,000 students.

Tucked among its shops and apartment buildings are:

80 cultural spaces, including

30 performance venues

for a total of 28000 seats – a concentration equalled only by the area around Times Square in New York City

It is also home to over 40 festivals, of which the 3 largest attract 5 million visitors each summer to their free outdoor shows. This is added to simultaneous ticketed events at a dozen of the area's theatres.

There are 7000 jobs related to these cultural activities in the area alone.

Montreal prides itself in its status as a cultural metropolis. The creativity of Montreal's performers and businesses is recognised internationally. I am sure many of you have heard of Céline Dion, the Cirque du Soleil, or Arcade Fire.

We are a UNESCO city of design.

We have the highest concentration of artists in Canada.

80% of the software used around the world for 3D animation was developed in Montreal.

Creativity is at the heart of Montreal's economic development policy.

Any plan for a city striving to consolidate its position as an international creative destination would have called for the creation of a downtown arts district.

Montreal already had one: the Quartier des spectacles.

It was therefore imperative to ensure that space was kept for culture and creativity in the heart of Montreal's downtown core.

I am certain many of you have heard arguments explaining how culture can be the catalyst for economic development. Culture is an economic engine, directly, because of tickets sold, tourism and entertainment expenditures, and the employment it creates.

As our economy shifts towards knowledge industries, culture is a strong selling point to attract talent. It factors into the choice of a location for many large innovative companies.

Culture can also be an economic engine because of its impact on the neighbourhood.

This is the bet the City of Montreal chose to make: the Quartier des spectacles would be more than a promotion scheme, but also an urban revitalisation project that would combine economic, social and cultural development.

In 2007, the City announced an ambitious plan to transform many of the vacant lots in the Western part of the Quartier into a constellation of outdoor spaces.

The City's objectives were to:

- establish permanent space for the festivals that would be attractive year-round,
- and stimulate real-estate development that would be compatible with these outdoor celebrations.

The plan calls for the construction of 5 public spaces around the western part of the Quartier.

These spaces are specifically designed :

- to facilitate set-up and satisfy technical requirements for festivals and events of different sizes,
- and to make the spaces more user-friendly for the general public.

The Place des Festivals, the project's signature plaza, designed to accommodate stages for large events.

The Promenade des Artistes is outfitted to welcome temporary art exhibits and vendor kiosks.

Le Parterre creates a monumental entrance at the foot of Montreal's recently completed new symphony hall, and is easily set up for large-scale events.

The Clark Esplanade – the last plaza scheduled for completion in 2012 –, will include an underground parking lot and an outdoor skating rink.

Finally, Sainte-Catherine street has been redone in the western half of the neighbourhood. The new paving communicates to drivers that they are crossing a pedestrian zone. The space can easily be closed altogether for events.

120 million dollars in public funds were granted for the construction of these outdoor spaces; which roughly equal to 90 million Euros. This investment was made with the comfort that it would be recovered through the activity generated by new development alone.

Additionally to this, sales and income tax revenue from just three major festivals – who are now guaranteed to stay in the area – generates over 43 M\$ annually in revenue for the federal and provincial governments.

Over billion dollars in construction is also underway in the area.

This includes a few hundred million dollars' worth of residential development in the area, and also new cultural facilities such as a new building for "La Vitrine", the city's cultural information and last minute ticket booth.

In comparison, the Quartier International, just south of the Quartier des spectacles is a recent local example of the development of public spaces as a strategy to stimulate real-estate development.

Constructed between 2000 and 2003, public space projects worth over 90 million dollars have leveraged 770 million dollars in private real-estate investment, with another 300 million under way.

While construction is not yet completed in the Quartier des spectacles, Montreal expects that the new public spaces here will have a similar effect. Instead of business, culture is the neighbourhood's anchor. It is not only event-driven, but also permeates the area's daily life with a unique and distinctive flavour of liveliness and energy.

These new projects have increased pedestrian traffic, and therefore the demand for other services. In the past two years, ten new trendy restaurants have opened, and other businesses are on the way.

The Quartier des spectacles's evolution has not happened overnight.

The Quartier des spectacles Partnership was created in 2003.

It brought together the festivals and performing arts organisations and also education, tourism, business, retail, property owners and residents, and local government representatives. Led by civil society, the group's first mandate from the city was to create a comprehensive vision for the area.

The vision developed was "live, create, and entertain downtown".

*"Live"*

because unlike many other North-American cities striving to attract residents back to their central areas, the Quartier is already a diverse and relatively complete urban neighbourhood.

Our first challenge is to ensure that the development of entertainment or "night" uses does not compromise the delicate balance with residents and workers, to keep the area's authenticity.

*"Create"*

because to be competitive, lively and interesting, Montreal has to continue to express its own character through contemporary cultural works and activities.

It must be a space for artistic exploration, to remain relevant. The Quartier plays a part in broadcasting this creativity to an international market.

And finally *"Entertain"*,

because we want the area to showcase all the wealth of Montreal's cultural sector, and to make it inviting and fun for everyone.

We want the neighbourhood to be an exciting treasure trail of surprising outdoor events that complement a variety of indoor shows.

Light embodies the identity of Montreal's nightlife in the Quartier des spectacles. It was chosen as the medium to communicate the area's vitality.

The first phase launched as a pilot project in 2006. A series of red dots signals the presence of cultural activities.

Architectural lighting schemes – often including dynamic elements– allow each venue to express its individuality.

Coordinated by the Partnership, this Luminous Pathway draws its strength by the geographic concentration of venues. These create a constant visual link through the neighbourhood. Today, more than 20 venues are illuminated, and there are over 700 red spotlights. By 2012, 9 million dollars will have been invested to light the Quartier.

In the past few years, special events have allowed us to develop even more artistic content.

We have played with interactivity, architectural projections and sound and light events transform the city into a canvas for lighting designers and multimedia artists, and we were finally able to explore directional signage strategies as a pilot project 2 years ago.

The lighting plan almost immediately thrust the Quartier onto the international stage, through extensive media coverage and awards.

As of 2008, aware that our newly completed public spaces would draw attention to the neighbourhood, the city wanted to delegate operation of these spaces to a locally grounded entity, with a good understanding of the cultural milieu.

The Partnership was an easy choice for this task.

Since 2009, with the completion of these new spaces, the Partnership now exists in a new paradigm: we shifted from defending a vision to promoting the neighbourhood's many activities and managing public spaces.

First, Welcome events

We manage these outdoor spaces as one would manage a venue.

We work with promoters and the city to ensure booking and scheduling, technical support, maintenance, event management, and visibility. We welcome visitors on-site and promote events in our area. Through internet tools such as a blog, a newsletter, and the website, we keep residents informed of upcoming events and street closures.

Second, beyond welcoming, we support events, providing personalized technical advice, and even funding the production and broadcasting of events.

As our goal is to provide an outdoor theatre for local creators to hold their events, thirdly, the partnership initiates activities.

This allows us to contribute to the balance of activities throughout the neighbourhood, and throughout the year.

Our events seek to complement indoor cultural activities with outdoor events, to encourage people to stay in the neighbourhood after the show.

This approach has allowed us to showcase the region's excellence in multimedia and lighting, while contributing to Montreal's appeal as a cultural city and tourist destination.

How great has our impact been on Montreal's attractiveness as an international destination?

We have few statistics right now, but we are starting to compile close to thirty performance indicators that will allow us to chart the neighbourhood's evolution.

The Partnership is not a formal business improvement association.

In Canada, statutes for these types of organisations would have excluded artists, institutions, and residents, so we would not have been able to include a cross-section of the neighbourhood, let alone legitimacy with the cultural sector.

We are instead a membership-based not-for-profit, which shares its area with other more specifically mandated business improvement and economic development organisations.

Initially, our board was a closed nomination-based group, composed of opinion leaders selected by the mayor. As of this year we have opened up our membership so that anyone or any organisation who shares our vision can join. Our membership fees are purposely kept low to guarantee accessibility.

Members self-identify to elect their representatives to the Board.

As of the end of October, we have over 50 members, and our board now includes 17 members.

While our funding has also traditionally been public, we are diversifying our sources. Revenue from membership and sponsorship is supplemented by cost-recovery charges to outdoor events for technical services.

The renewal project was also set up so that a portion of rental revenues from food services on the Place des festivals will be transferred to the partnership.

While efforts are still underway, it is fair to say that the Quartier des spectacles initiative has successfully revitalised the eastern part of Montreal's Downtown core. Our success is not only in rebranding the area as an international tourist destination, but also in keeping the project neighbourhood-based.

At the heart of Montreal, this area has become its creative laboratory – space for artistic and urban exploration.

The Quartier's ambition is to embody the qualities that make Montreal special, and to easily communicate them to the world.

In turn, the Quartier becomes a vehicle to demonstrate Montreal's innovativeness and excellence on an international stage.

Because we have transformed part of the city's public space into a playground for artists, we have created a living argument to confirm of the city's position as a creative metropolis of international calibre.

Thank you for your attention, and...

À bientôt dans le Quartier des spectacles, à Montréal!