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## **Social innovation in the cultural market: The Case of Productions Jeun'Est and Prodigium**

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December 14, 2018 13:11

From: Lara

To: Pier Colbert

Subject: meeting yesterday – PJE/Prodigium in Brazil

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Hello Pier,

I hope everything is fine with you. Additionally, I hope you're prepared to hear what I'm going to tell you because it's not good news. The crucial meeting with our sponsor yesterday was very disappointing.

The negotiation that we have been building together with that Brazilian Foundation has completely collapsed due to recent suspicious facts involving their president and executive director. Now, the foundation has a brand-new management team, and this changes a lot for us. One of the major impacts is that they will only receive new proposals: they want to cut off all links with the past. Older proposals are thus incontestably rejected since the new board believes that there might be at least some sort of conflict of interest in regard to the old president and director. Even if our project has nothing to do with these scandals, we are unfortunately touched by this new orientation.

The new president, however, said that he could eventually try to talk to another foundation to see if they would be interested to get on the bandwagon as partners. In my honest opinion, he was just trying to soften the unexpected bad news he gave us with some possibly good future perspectives.

You see, as a representative of an international development agency, I am here to support you for this project. However, my reach is limited, and I cannot sponsor you directly. If from this eventual contact with the new president we can obtain more concrete, feasible evidence, I will be pleased then to look at the project again and make more adjustments, especially in the budget. Otherwise, if no concrete element emerges from this possible new conversation, I regret to say that I need to give up on this project too. I am so sorry to report these unfortunate facts to you. However, if I were you, I would start to look for other partners—even other countries—since the overall political scenario in Brazil is not very inspiring, as you have seen lately.

Sincerely,

Lara

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## Introduction

Reading these few lines from his Brazilian partner deeply discouraged Pier. Production Jeun'Est<sup>1</sup> (PJE) is a social enterprise that provides workforce training in Montréal for young people who have had many difficulties in life. Intrinsically linked to PJE is Prodigium, the commercial arm that offers technical services for major events and venues in Québec and employs most of the apprentices from the PJE program. PJE/Prodigium are distinct brands connected under a single legal entity that has been helping hundreds of excluded young people to enter the labor market. Recently, PJE had been struggling with several challenges, from recruitment, to retention and communication strategies. More than anything, the founder, Pier and the executive director of the social enterprise, Marie-Ève, wanted to find ways to develop a more self-sustainable business model and to diffuse it in different parts of the world.

Since PJE/Prodigium has already achieved a certain level of success and proved that they could provide profitable socioeconomic benefits, Pier and his team believed that diffusing their expertise to other countries might help young people in those countries to find jobs in the cultural market as it has done in Québec. For many years, the organization thought that its methodology – combined with the PJE/Prodigium dual business model – could be physically reproduced in other contexts, which explains some of the efforts that Pier and his team undertook to seize opportunities that appeared to them. PJE is an initiative born in a poor Montreal neighborhood presenting social issues that, despite being quite local, are also very common to other regions throughout the world.

In the beginning of 2018, they had untiringly worked on this Brazilian project by investing time and money in meeting people, and articulating and reframing their model to fit into the Brazilian context. They received a delegation of Brazilians who visited the organization to talk with their employees, participants and business partners, with the purpose of understanding the mechanisms to be replicated abroad. This project was conceived when a Brazilian organization – which provided professional training for excluded young people living in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro – showed interest in “importing” the PJE/Prodigium methodology and business model. The demand for scene technicians combined with the fact that many young people in favelas could be trained and could work in these events seemed to be the perfect conditions to reproduce the PJE/Prodigium methodology in Brazil. Unfortunately, as we now realize from the email reproduced above, this project finally did not find the required funding to be deployed.

However, this disappointment did not prevent Pier from looking for new opportunities abroad. Subsequently, Pier established some connections with Oxfam Québec, which led him to spend a week in Peru meeting partners in an attempt to reproduce the methodology there, but this project also collapsed. Later, he also developed contacts in Argentina, where the ministry of Education demonstrated an interest in exporting the PJE/Prodigium methodology to develop a project in collaboration with an important theatre venue. Again, this project just collapsed. Recently, Pier received a visit from a Chinese sound engineer who in collaboration with Cirque du Soleil in China, wanted to reproduce the PJE/Prodigium methodology and business model in Hangzhou. The idea was to set up a training school for young people who had finished their two-year military training and wanted to acquire skills and to develop a career as scene technicians. As in many other

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<sup>1</sup> “Jeun'Est” is a wordplay contracting “youth” and “East” (French for *jeunesse* and *Est*), indicating the people that the organisation wants to work with.

regions, China has a huge demand for professional expertise in the market. Up until now, this project has not yet commenced.

If exporting the PJE/Prodigium model for other countries is part of an altruistic view that Pier and his team have, it may also be seen as a strategic move towards the future of the organization. Succeeding in an international endeavor might generate positive externalities for the organization, such as further legitimating its relevance, gaining new clients and grounding further strong foundations in Quebec. Even if recruitment is one of the more immediate issues that they strive to overcome, Pier knows by experience that thriving abroad oftentimes helps to bring the fame and publicity that, in his opinion, may position the company at another level that can help to both solve the recruitment issues and generate more possibilities to attract people to engage PJE/Prodigium for prosperity.

At that moment, they understood that they needed to revisit their business model to be able to thrive in Montreal's competitive market and to understand better how to diffuse this business model elsewhere. In the next days, they set themselves to a task: develop a business plan detailing the company's mission, key activities, key partners, an overview of its general costs, sources of revenues, its customers and the relationship they have established with them, the channels and, more importantly, its value proposition, both commercial and social.

### **How it all began: merging two contrasting yet close worlds**

In the 1990s, poverty and social exclusion levels in the East side of Montreal, the Hochelaga-Maisonneuve neighborhood, were high after the closure of many factories (see Exhibit 1 for more information about the context). With the purpose of countering the poverty phenomenon, at least 80 community associations started to work together<sup>2</sup>. In 1995, the government of Quebec created the *Carrefours Jeunesse-Emploi* (CJE) aiming at helping the existing community associations by leveraging human and financial resources throughout the Province of Québec. The initiative not only helped the existing players to fight against poverty and exclusion but also created a favorable environment for the rise of new initiatives, paving the path on which PJE/Prodigium would grow.

If factories on the East side of Montreal were shutting their doors, in contrast, the cultural sector in Montreal – especially the circus – was starting to flourish<sup>3</sup>. The early 1980s witnessed the arrival of two major players in the development of the performing arts scene: the National Circus School, the first institution to offer circus classes in North America, which enabled the democratization of this form of art, and Cirque du Soleil<sup>4</sup>, which has paved the way for the worldwide recognition of other independent circus companies, such as Cirque Éloize, DynamO Théâtre, Les 7 doigts de la main, and Cavalia.

Working with these two different worlds – social exclusion and the circus – motivated Pier Colbert to act. Pier was himself an employee of Cirque du Soleil from 1995 to 2005. At the same time,

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<sup>2</sup> Laberge, Yvon, 1993. « La planche de salut d'Hochelaga-Maisonneuve : son réseau communautaire ». La Presse, Saturday 20th February, page A4.

<sup>3</sup> Bouvet, B. (2005). Un tremplin pour l'insertion des jeunes. La Croix : Économie et Entreprises, lundi 18 avril 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Acknowledging that there would be many hidden and unknown talents practicing in the streets and concerned about social issues involving youngsters at risk, in 1996, the Cirque du Soleil therefore created the Cirque du Monde project. It was an initiative combining circus techniques' training and educational social intervention to help young people to eventually develop an artistic career. This initiative also spread over a wider international area, favoring the creation of another Cirque du Soleil project, the Social Circus, with more than 2000 participants in 25 countries. Source: Bouvet, B. (2005). Un tremplin pour l'insertion des jeunes. La Croix : Économie et Entreprises, lundi 18 avril 2005.

concerned with the social and economic conditions of the young people of his neighborhood in the East side of Montreal, Pier was also actively working for a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting social inclusion for young people. He realized that there was an opportunity to create a bridge for these excluded young people to enter the circus industry. At that time, the National Circus School already provided the circus market with artists, such as acrobats and clowns. He thought there would be a demand for new technicians to work backstage. Due to his experience, Pier knew that working as a technician in the live performing arts requires precision and discipline, as well as a great deal of adrenaline and passion. Moreover, routine is a word that is seldom pronounced in this métier. By filling this gap between the need for new technicians in the field and an abundant and latent workforce, Pier understood that he could make a difference and, together with Suzanne Desbiens and other colleagues, they created Productions Jeun’Est (PJE) in 1996.

**Two different names, one single mission: the PJE/Prodigium business model**

In its beginning, PJE’s mission was to develop a concerted engine that would tackle two issues at once: the delivery of technical training for excluded young Montreal residents and the provision of technical services for clients and partners. PJE therefore engaged in both activities until 2005, but up to that time, the technical services provided for commercial clients did not represent a substantial source of revenue (see Figure 1). In fact, the commercial clients wavered at contracting PJE services because there was a perception that these services were performed by students instead of trained professionals. With the intention to end these rumors and send a clear message to the market, the technical services branch was officially named “Prodigium” in 2006. This decision was made to separate into two distinct “brands” the training program from the technical services, ultimately enabling the company to address different customer segments.

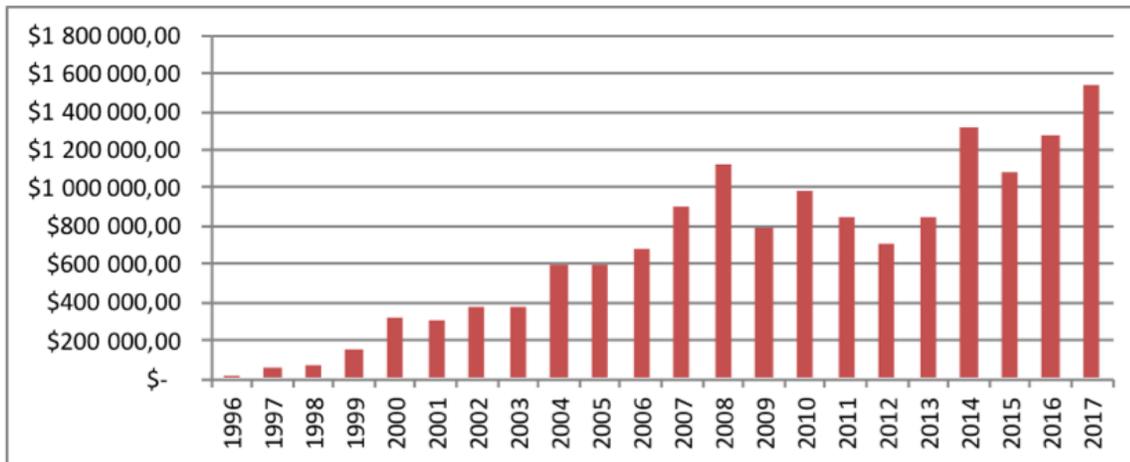


Figure 1 – Technical services provided by PJE (until 2005) and Prodigium (from 2006 on).

With the implementation of business-oriented services of Prodigium, the image of a ‘coin with two sides’ best describes the nature of PJE/Prodigium: a social enterprise with a single legal entity working in the cultural market. PJE, the social side of the organization, is responsible for providing young people the training needed to become professional stage and scene technicians. Prodigium is the business-oriented side of the organization: a supplier of technical services for several clients, from the arts and entertainment to the sports and health fields. Put simply, the profits generated by Prodigium’s business activities are invested in PJE’s training program. Although the organization has two different brands, its mission is unique: to seek the integration of young Montreal residents

facing social difficulties by training them and offering them job opportunities. Considering that opportunities and conditions are not equal for all but nevertheless that everyone has a role to play in society, the motto of PJE/Prodigium is "training for success", envisioned as an antidote to tackle school dropout rates and unemployment.

The business side of PJE – Prodigium – progressively became an official supplier of technicians for the Cirque du Soleil. This partnership with the Cirque du Soleil attracted new customers and businesses, which helped to attain job placement rates close to 80% once participants finished their training program. The idea behind having a business brand in a social enterprise was to reinvest its profits in its mission, creating a sustainable way to pursue the social activities. Indeed, the PJE methodology is at the heart of the Prodigium business model. Together they have managed to create an ecosystem where stakeholders are engaged as business partners committed to social development through interacting with the cultural market. As partners, they contribute physical resources (money, equipment, places), knowledge and methodological tools. Through the Training Measurement Program (MFOR<sup>5</sup>), *Emploi Québec* funds the organization from one-sixth to one-quarter of its budget.

Although the organization may rely on government grants, Pier and Suzanne acknowledge that they constantly strive to reduce their dependence on public funds. The subsidy that *Emploi Québec* annually provides to PJE is conditional on the company having a minimal critical mass of participants: less than 15 individuals per year may result in a grant reduction for the forthcoming year. *Emploi Québec* funds other social and professional programs throughout the province, and PJE is aware that the ministry needs to account for its investments. Within this perspective, PJE competes for scarce resources with other training programs throughout Quebec. As Suzanne stresses:

*“We depend on Emploi Québec grants to keep our physical infrastructure. We know them all there, they do love us, our work. However, this is not enough: we do need to have sufficient people to train in order to justify the work we do, and the money we get.”*

Fortunately, 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018 were great years for Prodigium. Due to the popularity of Robert Lepage’s first two plays of his tetralogy in 2015, *Pique* and *Coeur*, audiences lined up around the blocks for tickets at La Tohu, where Prodigium was the official technical supplier. Such demand from the public helped Prodigium to significantly increase its revenues as a service supplier. Indeed, this demand has emerged at an appropriate time: since the rise of the Liberal Party in Québec in 2013, there have been many cuts in government funds for cultural, education, health and social services. In periods where governments adopt austerity measures to control public spending, such big events help cultural organizations to thrive in the short term.

In addition to financial resources, technical suppliers are critical for providing the equipment used by PJE instructors to teach participants the basics of sound engineering, lighting, rigging, and video. The largest PJE/Prodigium partner and client so far is Omnison, an enterprise offering technical services for large clients, such as the Formula 1 Grand Prix du Canada and a handful of well-known major players in the venues field. Event venue partners, in particular Le TAZ, La Tohu and Théâtre d’Outremont, offer space for stage assembling-disassembling activities. The win-win formula also applies to this business relationship with venue partners: these suppliers offer their

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<sup>5</sup> Mesure de la Formation de la main d’oeuvre. For more information, visit the following : <http://www.emploi.quebec.gouv.qc.ca/entreprises/investir-en-formation/programmes-de-developpement-de-la-main-doeuvre/mesure-de-formation-de-la-main-doeuvre/> .

space to carry out training that cannot be performed at PJE/Prodigium because of structural physical limitations and, in return, they receive free services. For example, La Tohu offers its spaces for simple activities, such as wiring and stage maintenance, to be performed by PJE apprentices. Once again, these services are provided at no cost.

Most of the costs (around 70%), such as the continuous training for instructors and the communication and promotion for both recruitment and technical services, are covered by revenues generated by Prodigium. To make ends meet, the remaining costs of its training activities, i.e., part of the instructors' salaries and infrastructure, come from *Emploi Québec* and business partners.

Over the years, PJE has developed its training methodology in parallel with Prodigium and created this unique business model that links the social economy and the cultural & entertainment markets, attracting the attention of other organizations overseas.

### **PJE/Prodigium: a distinctive methodology to overcome social exclusion**

The annual program developed by PJE provides technical skills formation to approximately 20 people during 1341 hours of training over 10 months. To be eligible to the program<sup>6</sup>, participants must be young adults between 18 and 35, unemployed, living in an underprivileged area of Montreal, have completed at least the third level of secondary studies, and who are willing to enter or return to the labor market and to create a personal career in the cultural field. PJE targets participants struggling in their academic and professional life, particularly those who have dropped out of school or who may have difficulty in finding or keeping a job. In their words, they search for "young adults, economically troubled, who do not find their place in the labor market but have the willingness to develop their independence and live a positive experience in the arts in general, and more specifically, in professions related to cultural production."<sup>7</sup>

The selected recruits participate in a training program divided into four sections. The first is the *socio-professional* aspect that deals with everything that is connected to the reality of the stage technician's work, as well as how to engage in job search activities. This training is provided in collaboration with the CJE of Mercier and guided by a PJE employee. The other three sections are more technical and are administered by PJE employees, who are often from the PJE program and are currently active in the cultural market: *lighting and sound, rigging and video*.

The purpose of the *socio-professional* section is to stimulate the participants' motivation and give them educational support for achieving success by organizing regular individual and group meetings where, supervised by instructors, the participants self-evaluate their performance and exchange experiences. The training is organized in four subparts or steps. The first is a 40-hour training called "learning to learn", where participants develop cognitive skills, learning strategies for memorization, generalization, and abstraction, among others. Additionally, during those first 40 hours, trainers can better detect specific needs within the group and identify the best educational approach to awaken the competencies of each participant.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> It is *Emploi Québec* who defines the eligibility conditions.

<sup>7</sup> Source : Productions Jeun'Est, (2012). Working document, 13 pages.

<sup>8</sup> PJE works with the *Centre des Ressources Éducatives et Pédagogiques* (CREP) from the *Commission Scolaire de Montréal* (CSDM), which expands the evaluative aspect of the socio-professional level by providing the appropriate educational and pedagogical tools, support for job search, etc.

In the second step of the *socio-professional* phase, basic themes such as regulations, security, financial management, professional attitude, and CNESST<sup>9</sup> rules, are addressed, as well as self-knowledge and interpersonal communication. Meetings are held in small groups, allowing the participants to exchange ideas among themselves and with the instructors, with the objective of allowing the participants to understand the realities of the business while at the same time also motivating them. These two steps are carried out before the period of experimentation internship begins.

Once the internship is completed, the last two steps address job search activities and are conducted in collaboration with the *Carrefour Jeunesse-Emploi* of PITREM<sup>10</sup>. During individual meetings, a CJE agent along with a PJE socio-professional agent establish an assessment of the needs of each participant in terms of a job search: they simulate interviews and develop business cards and resumes. This support aims at preparing the participants to face the market at the end of the training.

The technical sections have three levels: basic, intermediary and specialization. The first two levels form the common basis for a general technician and are held in 15 weeks each. At around the middle of the second level, an experiential five-week internship is offered for each participant, at one of the partners like Cirque du Soleil, La TOHU, Théâtre d'Outremont, and during the Formula 1 event. Thanks to this internship, the participants visit different venues and take part in different cultural activities, helping local technical teams in different tasks, experiencing and having an idea of the functions they will perform in the real life<sup>11</sup>.

If learning comes by touching both theoretical and practical aspects of any profession, combining class teachings and hands-on internship encourages participants to absorb knowledge by observation, experimentation, trial and error. These moments allow participants to contact professionals, to be introduced to their potential future workplace and to better understand the technical operations and the mechanisms of the sector. For participants already motivated, these working visits may ignite in them the desire to successfully complete their training, since they can see firsthand how much the competent and conscientious work of stage technicians contributes to the success of a performance. At the end of the 30-week period, the participants pass an exam to evaluate both their theoretical and practical skills. Then, finally, in the last ten weeks of training they move to the third level (the specialization), the participant chooses a specific discipline—lighting, sound, rigging or video.

At the end of the 10-month training, participants who have completed the whole training organize a great event, held at one of the locations of a PJE business partner. The graduates invite their families and friends to celebrate and witness the granting of their professional certification. The graduates become part of the list of Prodigium's freelance technicians and can immediately start working for either for Prodigium partners/customers or even for another company. They are key players in the dynamics of the business model of PJE/Prodigium. Although Prodigium would

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<sup>9</sup> Commission de l'équité, la santé et de la sécurité du travail. For more information, visit the following site: <https://www.csst.qc.ca/Pages/index.aspx> .

<sup>10</sup> Programme d'information sur le travail et la recherche d'emploi de Montréal. For more information, visit the following site: <https://pitrem.org> .

<sup>11</sup> The venues visited include La TOHU, TAZ, Cirque du Soleil, National Circus School, Festival International de Jazz de Montréal, Fête de la St-Jean, Fête du Canada, Festival Montréal Complètement Cirque, Festival Juste pour rire, Boîte à Musique, le Lion d'Or, Cirque Hors-piste, convention centers, houses of culture, etc., as well as technical equipment providers, such as Solotech and Omnison.

prefer to keep the best recent graduates on its own team, they often “lose” some good technicians to big companies such as Cirque du Soleil or Cirque Éloize, since these organizations offer highly competitive salaries and benefits that Prodigium may not be able to beat.

In the past few years, PJE used to recruit around 25 participants per cohort and the dropout rate would be approximately 25%, fulfilling PJE *Emploi Québec*’s condition for their grant to provide full training to at least 15 individuals. Intermittently, participants leave by their own choice, and occasionally PJE invites some participants to leave the program based on their motivation feedback. Nevertheless, this procedure has recently become an issue for the organization, among other challenges that we describe in the following sections.

### **Recruiting became a herculean task**

Even if 15 participants may not look like a lot, to recruit them is a herculean task for Pier and his Joint Director, Marie-Ève. In past lean years, PJE struggled to reach this aim, which, according to Suzanne, “disappointed” *Emploi Québec* to some extent. Pier and Suzanne fear that if this annual threshold is not reached, the government may reconsider the grants or even cut them completely.

With the purpose of boosting their recruitment rates, Pier and Marie-Ève have been trying to modify their strategy. For instance, they are no longer exclusively focused on recruiting people in the Hochelaga-Maisonneuve area; otherwise, they would definitely not be able to find enough people. They also articulate strategies to attract a wider spectrum of clientele. Employment agents at *Centre Local d’Emploi* (CLE) have a myriad of job offers to present to people looking for work. Therefore, PJE’s team visits many CLE facilities, always making impressive presentations with the intention of demystifying the job of a stage technician. These presentations aim at making employment agents aware of the training program at PJE so that they will refer PJE to young job seekers.

Another challenge related to recruitment is that the stage technician work is not as popular as one may think. When looking for work, Pier argues, people seemingly tend to search for the stability of a full-time job rather than for free-lance contracts. Moreover, the sector is also vulnerable to changes in tax assistance in the form of tax credits given to creative production companies and, consequently, a high number of jobs in the field are precarious or part-time. To counteract this perspective, Pier and Marie-Ève present the other side of the coin: even if permanent jobs for technicians are rare, currently, there is a considerable shortage of workers in the workforce. This implies that technicians have enough flexibility to create their work schedules according to their own availability or even to work hard during a specific season of the year and allow themselves some months to travel abroad.

The final challenge is related to finding good channels to meet the right people. For the first years, they used to advertise in some Montréal newspapers and this worked well: at least 100 people would come for the selection round, claiming that they had seen the ad in the *Voir* newspaper. However, it has been a while that barely one or two candidates per year affirm they have come through this channel. More recently, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube have been the main channels where recruitment campaigns are deployed. Therefore, another challenge for PJE is to constantly rethink their communication strategy to reach new candidates through the use of social media.

## **Disclosing or withholding the social mission**

Disclosing or withholding the social mission may apparently provoke different perceptions among different stakeholders. As Prodigium's workforce comprises formerly disadvantaged young people, the overall market perception was of an enterprise with low-quality services; therefore, the company was viewed as supplying services that were cheaper. However, according to Pier, this was an incorrect perception, as he states the following:

*“We can't go cheaper. The services cost us the same amount of money as they cost anyone else. We do not want to pay 15 dollars per hour for our employees, instead of 18. You know, fair trade coffee is more expensive; but it's not everybody who is willing to pay the price. Basically, people want to spend less money.”*

Although considered an apparently convincing and attractive strategy, showing off the company's social mission has also been a double-edged sword. To avoid the overall perception that Prodigium provides cheap services, the challenge becomes how to present that concept differently and put forward social inclusion as an asset or even as a competitive advantage in the eyes of the cultural market.

For instance, the organization participated in 2014 in a social-economic program named *L'Économie sociale, j'achète!* which was a special program to facilitate the interaction of big potential buyers – such as the city of Montreal – with social economy businesses initiatives. PJE/Prodigium participated in this program for almost a year, meeting approximately 10 large potential buyers, which turned out to be a valuable opportunity for making contacts and presenting the company as a dual-purpose organization doing business in the cultural and social economy markets.

Hence, the organization decided to put forward the social mission of PJE/Prodigium, strongly believing that the social mission does – or at least it should – create value instead of simply cheapening things. If companies have usually just one website and one chance to make a first impression on visitors and clients, the challenge becomes how to balance narratives relating to social impact and the company's commercial value proposition. What communication strategies should be deployed in relation to customers, within which segments and through which channels? These are other tasks to be constantly approached by the organization.

## **The need for alternative sources of revenue**

If both recruitment and strategic communication constitute key challenges for PJE/Prodigium, these elements are also related to revenue generation. Marie-Ève Dagenais, the Joint Director, expressed the organizational intention to develop a diverse portfolio of revenue sources and not to depend on public funds. Even if *Emploi Québec* only funds from one-sixth to one-quarter of the whole organization, still that portion is crucial for the functioning of the company's activities. Therefore, thinking about alternative sources of revenues is always welcome, and the organization always tries to foresee new funding opportunities that may arise.

For instance, an asset that the organization intends to further capitalize on is related to its methodology. The technical training that PJE delivers is the result of an extensive work of extracting raw information present in technical manuals, translating it to French, combining it through the tacit expertise of the team and shaping it as a didactic material that has been constantly adapted, updated and performed over the time. For many years, the organization thought that this

methodology – combined with the PJE/Prodigium business model – could be reproduced in other contexts.

The organization also envisages an opportunity to spread it virtually. As previously mentioned, recruitment is one of the major challenges for PJE. This is partially due to the strict eligibility requirements asked by *Emploi Québec* – unemployed young adults in the province who have dropped out of school. Those who are above 35 years old or who are already active workers desiring to update their technical skills or, more importantly, those who are not Quebec citizens are not currently eligible to attend the classes.

Thus, in 2019, the organization decided to engage in a project in which videos were created and made available online for individuals who would subscribe on a web-based platform. After following the virtual classes on a specific topic, for instance, audio or video, the online students could complete their training and receive a certificate after following an internship with a partner (a venue, a theatre, or a technical supplier) that would validate the theoretical knowledge acquired by the student. By using internal resources, PJE would produce these videos in French, which would address a language gap for French-speaking technicians, since most online tutorials are available in English. In addition, this may represent new revenue streams for the organization; however, it is still unclear how it will be translated into numbers.

Another asset by which PJE/Prodigium wants to generate new revenues is related to its future facility. One of the major restrictions of the building that PJE/Prodigium occupied for many years was the height of the ceiling. Teaching and performing rigging activities requires a considerable vertical space, and PJE had previously asked some partners (La Tohu, TAZ, etc.) to use their spaces in order to provide this training for participants. In 2019, PJE/Prodigium was forced to move, as the *Commission Scolaire de Montréal* wanted to recover the building – a former children’s school – they had occupied since 2000<sup>12</sup>.

After struggling for three months to find a place that suited their needs, PJE/Prodigium ended up by establishing a partnership with *Le Cap Saint-Barnabé*, a charitable organization that since 1991 has provided different services for homeless people (housing, food and an affordable grocery shop) in a former church. The partnership that PJE/Prodigium developed involves the renovation of the church’s nave, rood screen and the sacristy and renting these areas for over 15 years. PJE/Prodigium will share the same roof with *Le Cap Saint-Barnabé*: while the former will teach young people in the nave, the latter will continue to deliver its services to homeless people in the basement. With this new physical structure, PJE/Prodigium will have enough space to fully provide training on rigging and other activities.

However, this new facility represents a rise of approximately 50% in the company’s rental costs in comparison to the previous building. To cover this rise in costs, PJE/Prodigium must find alternative sources of revenue.

## **Challenges ahead**

The singular synergy that PJE/Prodigium balances between business-oriented services for the cultural and entertainment markets combined with social inclusion – and the fact that their

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<sup>12</sup> From 1996 to 2000, PJE/Prodigium used to rent offices in *Centre-Jeunesse du Mont-St-Antoine*. At that time, the *Commission Scolaire de Montréal* had several empty buildings available to rent for very low costs; therefore, the organization decided then to occupy the former children’s school. Now there is a strong shortage of educational structures in the city.

organization has already benefited more than 500 people – has attracted the attention of different international organizations aiming to develop this business model overseas. However, PJE/Prodigium currently faces some local challenges to maintain its dual mission: recruiting participants, communicating their social mission and getting alternative sources of revenue. The organization is highly creative in adapting its methodology to tackle social exclusion, but it wants to find new ways to disseminate its model to increase its financial independence. In other words, the management team assumes that an international reputation would improve the visibility of the company in general, which would increase demand for its services, increase its recruitment pool and, above all, attract new partners and new revenue. Somehow, these ingredients are equally necessary to assure the organization’s longevity. Pier clearly describes their most cherished wish:

*“We don’t have the intention to franchise our services; instead, we have the ambition to ‘reapply’ our social mission elsewhere.”*

During the entire weekend, Pier and Marie-Ève will meet with a group of business students to elaborate a business plan with the idea that it could be reapplied to different contexts. They want to revise all the past trajectories of PJE/Prodigium, putting together all the crucial elements in a business model. Up to now, the unsuccessful diffusion projects were initiated through Pier’s personal contacts. However, experience has shown that if an organization wants to effectively diffuse its model, either locally or internationally, it needs to invest in prospecting new markets. Which opportunities and partners abroad could PJE/Prodigium count on to engage in transferring their innovative model to other regions? What processes and key elements of the PJE/Prodigium model could be adaptable to another culture? And, more critically, how should this internationalization process be planned and structured? The weekend promises to be tiring but inspiring.

### **Exhibit 1 – The context of Hochelaga-Maisonneuve neighborhood<sup>13</sup>**

Historically, the East area of Montreal has always had a working-class background. Decades ago, several large companies settled there and hired non-specialized general labor that was abundant in the area. However, when the early 1980s recession forced many companies to close—whether by economic failure or by urgent need of adopting new technological innovations—this non-specialized labor ended up in front of a gaping hole. Workers were terminated and were unable to find jobs in the neighborhood. After many years of systematic layoffs, factory closures, and an aging population, the result was predictable: high rates of unemployment, school dropouts, criminality, prostitution, etc., causing damage for decades forth.

In the 1990s, the Hochelaga-Maisonneuve neighborhood was known as one of the most critical underdeveloped areas in the city, presenting worrying statistics: 38 % of its inhabitants were unemployed, 70 % were tenants, and at least one out of three families were single-parent families. Dealing with such harmful social conditions does not help to empower and improve the self-esteem of the population. In addition, it is commonly said that after having been unemployed for about three years, people seemingly tend to give up on looking for a job.

Indeed, in 2019, it is still said that some children in the neighborhood have never seen their parents go out for work. These circumstances are not good for the middle-aged population, and the outlook for youngsters is not rosy either. For young people aged between 15-24, it was estimated that

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<sup>13</sup> Source : Trottier, É. (1990). La gangrène de la drogue atteint Hochelaga-Maisonneuve ; un tissu social à refaire. La Presse, samedi 25 août 1990.

during the mid-1990s, almost 44% were out of school (in comparison to 32% in the overall Montreal city) and that 20% were unemployed<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> René, J.F., Bisson, L., St.-Pierre, A., Bussièrès, D. (1999). Le modèle d'intervention du Carrefour jeunesse-emploi Hochelaga-Maisonneuve. CJE Hochelaga-Maisonneuve, 32 pages.