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Ghent Fights to Preserve Its Cinema Heritage.

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Once home to cinemas in nearly every neighbourhood, Ghent has seen most of its movie theatres disappear over the past decades. Yet the city decided to continue to invest in film culture, preserving historic venues while planning for a new cinematic future.

From the 1980s onward, neighbourhood cinemas gradually disappeared as multiplexes reshaped movie-going habits. The opening of Decascoop, now Kinopolis, accelerated the decline, while iconic venues found new purposes. The Capitol became a theatre for musicals, concerts and comedy, former cinemas in shopping streets were converted into retail stores, and a block of cinemas near 'de Zuid' was demolished to make way for a shopping centre (now also closed). Despite these changes, Ghent remains a city with a strong connection to cinema, hosting Film Fest Ghent each October and offering higher education in film studies.

Independent cinemas continue to play a vital cultural role. Earlier this year, Studio Skoop narrowly escaped closure after the takeover by Lumière and receiving support the City of Ghent, allowing the beloved arthouse cinema to reopen following renovation works. Meanwhile, Cinema Sphinx, the city's oldest operating cinema, will close from March 2027 until autumn 2028 for extensive modernisation, with a temporary pop-up cinema planned during the works. The future of Cinema Rex remains uncertain. Closed since 1982, the last surviving Art Deco cinema has fallen into disrepair despite plans to transform it into a "House of Cinema." Funding for the project has yet to be secured.

Ghent's cinematic heritage reflects both the decline of traditional movie theatres and the determination to preserve film culture for future generations. While some historic venues have found new life and others await restoration, the city continues to recognise cinema as an essential part of its cultural identity.

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Redaktioneller Programmdienst:
European News Agency

Annette-Kolb-Str. 16
D-85055 Ingolstadt
Telefon: +49 (0) 841-951. 99.660
Telefax: +49 (0) 841-951. 99.661
Email: contact@european-news-agency.com
Internet: european-news-agency.com

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