



NETWORK OF EUROPEAN CAFÉ HOUSES

MANIFESTO & CODE OF CONDUCT

CAFÉ CLOSING CONFERENCE / BUDAPEST / 29 SEPTEMBER 2026



MANIFESTO

This manifesto exists because, until now, no shared document has articulated the cultural role café houses actually play. Each of us has pursued that role separately, café by café, without a common voice. What follows is that voice, written together for the first time.

We are café houses. Old and new, grand and improvised, in global capitals and small towns. We serve coffee and food, and we also host culture as a powerful drive to transform places and communities: readings, debates, exhibitions, concerts, workshops. Cultural activity can also connect local communities across Europe through artist exchanges, shared themes, joint events, storytelling, exhibitions or knowledge-sharing between café houses. This dual role is not new. Café houses have functioned as informal cultural meeting places for generations, well before that role was recognised or supported by cultural policy. We also know what it costs to sustain that role today. Rising prices put pressure on already thin margins. Public funding rarely reaches spaces that are, administratively, classified as hospitality businesses rather than cultural institutions. Historic buildings come with permits that are hard to obtain and regulations that limit what we can do. Audiences are changing: younger generations engage with culture differently, and it can take years for a neighbourhood to recognise that a café is more than a place to have a coffee. Many of us are stretched between running a viable business and sustaining a cultural programme, often without enough staff to do both properly. We named these pressures plainly, together, before drafting this manifesto, because a shared identity that does not account for its own operating conditions would not be a useful one.

This is why we are building a network rather than continuing to operate as separate, disconnected venues.

We believe in inclusivity. A café house should be genuinely open: to different ages, backgrounds, income levels and ways of participating.

We believe in community. We function in relation to the people around us. A café house is, first, a meeting point.

We believe in sustainability. This means economic realism as much as environmental responsibility. A cultural programme that undermines the business supporting it does not serve anyone in the long term.

We believe in openness. We remain curious about voices, formats and disciplines outside our usual programming.

We believe in care. For our staff, our artists, our neighbours and our guests; and for handling difficult situations involving any of them responsibly.

We believe in creativity. Not as decoration, but as a practical resource: the everyday resourcefulness required to keep a small cultural project running.

We believe in trust. Clear agreements, honest communication and consistent behaviour, so that artists, partners and audiences continue to work with us.

We do not see ourselves as nostalgic recreations of an earlier café culture, nor simply as hospitality venues that occasionally host events. We understand café houses as places where heritage and current cultural life meet, where established and emerging artists can share a programme, and where different kinds of visitors can be present in the same space without one group displacing another. We do not require every café house in the network to look or operate the same way. We ask that each one's programming remains grounded in these shared values and accountable to the community it serves.

We acknowledge, rather than hide, the tensions this involves: between cultural mission and commercial viability, between welcoming visitors and protecting local relevance, between experimentation and the stability a neighbourhood may need, between independence and the practical need for external support. We do not treat these as problems to be permanently solved. We treat them as balances each member manages transparently, in their own context.

The purpose of this network is not to standardise café culture across Europe. It is to give café houses (often small, often financially precarious) a shared framework and a collective voice, so that the cultural work they do individually is recognised as part of something larger.

This manifesto is an invitation. Any café house that treats culture as inseparable from its everyday hospitality is welcome to join.

CODE OF CONDUCT

This Code of Conduct sets out what membership in the Network of European Café Houses means in practice. It translates the manifesto's values into commitments every member café house can be held to, and can hold the network to in return.

1. We state our purpose plainly. Every member has to explain, in simple public language, why they organise culture and who it is for.

2. We treat people fairly. Artists, staff, partners and audiences are engaged with clear terms, fair compensation practices appropriate to our means, and respect for their time and work.

3. We keep the door open. Our programming and our house rules do not discriminate. We actively look for ways to reach beyond our usual circle (different ages, backgrounds, budgets and abilities) and we do not work with isolation.

4. We take environmental and economic responsibility seriously. We consider the environmental impact of our programming and operations, and we build financial models that are honest about what culture costs and how it is paid for.

5. We communicate honestly. Costs, access conditions, language and expectations are made clear in advance; to guests, to artists, and to each other.

6. We take conflict seriously. Every member has, or commits to developing, a way of handling disagreement, harassment or exclusion when it arises; among staff, artists, partners or audiences.

7. We share what we learn. Good practices, failures and lessons are documented and shared with the wider network, not held as competitive advantage.

8. We adapt locally without abandoning the core. A café house in a small town, a capital, or a historic centre will apply these principles differently. Local adaptation is expected and welcomed: as long as inclusivity, community, sustainability, openness, care, creativity and trust remain visible in the outcome.

On tensions. We recognise that culture and commerce, experimentation and stability, local identity and tourism, independence and public support, do not resolve into tidy answers. Members are expected to manage these tensions transparently, not deny them, and to be able to explain, if asked, how they are doing so.

Membership is a two-way commitment. In joining, a café house agrees to uphold this Code in its own practice and to engage constructively with the network through exchange, mutual visibility, and shared responsibility for the network's reputation and identity. The network, in turn, commits to supporting members with resources, connection and a collective voice they would not have alone.

SIGNATORIES

Representatives of the café houses

Budapest, 29 September 2026



Co-funded by
the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.