What we do

We keep cultural life close to everyday life. We make access real, not as a slogan but as daily practice: a welcoming environment, easy ways to walk in and join, informal invitations, and time to arrive without having to prove you belong.

We host people who would not otherwise meet. We bring neighbours together across languages, classes, migration histories, neighbourhood identities, and political views.

We respond to conflict by creating the conditions for dialogue, safety, and repair. When tensions rise, we help prevent escalation. When harm has happened, we support peacebuilding and the long work of societal reconciliation.

We make space for reflection, shared struggle, shared joy, and the slow rebuilding of dignity. We offer ways to express yourself and feel part of something, without needing the right words, background, or status.

Much of this work looks ordinary from the outside. That is why it works. It is built through repetition: familiar faces returning, relationships deepening, and small repairs that stop a community from splintering further. It is the kind of value you notice only when it is missing.

Communities do not live in funding cycles

A cultural centre does not begin when a grant begins. It does not end when a reporting period ends. Communities move through seasons, school years, care responsibilities, migration, conflict, rising costs, public health crises, sudden shocks, and long recoveries.

Short-term funding with tight rules collides with long-term socio-cultural work. The first thing to vanish is the time for developing relationships, the slow work of trust, return, and belonging. Then staff stability. Then continuity. After that, the centre becomes a patchwork of de-contextualised projects instead of a place people can rely on.

This is also where the contradiction becomes visible: the workload grows, while the conditions for connection shrink. The result is not sustainable, not for communities and not for the people doing the work. We feel it in our bodies and our teams: underpaid work, burnout, brain drain, constant improvisation, and the quiet disappearance of people who cannot keep carrying the load.

What we are, and what we are not

We are socio-cultural centres: places where culture is part of everyday life. We work with communities as they are, not as audience segments. We build public space in practice: rooms people can enter without having necessary vocabulary or credentials, and without already belonging.

We do more than run events. We keep a place stable and welcoming, week after week.

We are not a stage that exists only when a programme is funded.

We are not a venue rental economy.

We are not a service provider delivering predefined tasks to satisfy a call.

We are not a marketing instrument for city branding.

What is missed

Funding and evaluation systems keep asking to prove the impact of our work in the easiest formats: headcounts, publicity, numbers, and reports. Those can be useful, but they miss most of what matters.

They do not show trust forming between people who arrived suspicious of each other. They do not show reduced prejudice. They do not show someone remaining engaged instead of disappearing. They do not show a neighbourhood learning how to speak to itself again.

Because these measures dominate, they shape what becomes possible. Time shifts away from people and toward paperwork. Programmes bend toward what fits a form. Organisations learn to prioritise what can be reported, even when it is not what is needed for real, lasting impact.

We are asked to prove value in ways that steal time from the work that creates it.

We are not a social policy tool used to patch gaps or compensate for failures elsewhere, while being funded as a "nice cultural extra".

We are not here to culture-wash unrelated policy agendas or initiatives that have little to do with culture, community, or care.

We are not a talent pipeline built on unpaid labour, exhaustion, and constant uncertainty..

What we refuse

We refuse the idea that value begins only when it becomes visible to a funder.

We refuse a system where the best work disappears from the record because it cannot be reduced to numbers.

We refuse to compete for scraps while being told we share the same public mission.

We refuse to normalise burnout as a professional standard.

We refuse "project logic" where continuity and stability are treated as a luxury, even though continuity is how trust is built.

We refuse the fiction that accountability equals paperwork.

The invisible work that holds the visible work together

We build trust through repetition. We keep showing up. We stay long enough for people to return organically and deliberately, without being chased or marketed to. We bridge communities that do not naturally meet, until contact becomes real.

We use culture as a shared language when other languages fail.

We build with and for people. Ownership grows when responsibility is shared.

A large part of our impact is preventative and reparative: we help tensions cool before they become crises, and we help people reconnect after things break down

Funding pays for programmes, but rarely for the day-to-day work that sustains them. The result is unpaid labour, burnout, and instability.

Our demands

We want socio-cultural centres to be treated as civic infrastructure. We want funding and governance that match reality, not paperwork.

We ask the EU and Member States to: create a dedicated budget line for community cultural centres; require multi-year operating support as a standard option; cap reporting burden proportionally to grant size; and recognise mediation and community-building as eligible costs.

1) Recognition

We want socio-cultural centres to be recognised as civic infrastructure at the EU level, and that recognition carried into national and municipal practice.

Recognition means that:

- Socio-culture is named accurately in policy and budgets;
- Small centres count, not only flagship institutions;
- Invisible work counts, not only headline events;
- Networking and relationship-building time is treated as legitimate work.

2) Funding that matches reality

We want three kinds of funding:

Core support

Multi-year operating support that covers rent, equipment, staff time, maintenance, coordination, and relationship work.

Micro-grants

Simple micro-grants for experimentation and local initiatives, with reporting requirements proportional to size, so that funding does not go mainly to the best project writers.

Programme funding

Project funding has a place, when it sits on stable foundations rather than replacing them.

We want a dedicated, accessible funding stream for socio-culture, including grassroots and migrant-led centres.

3) Proportional accountability and real learning

We accept oversight. We reject box-ticking.

We want:

- Reporting requirements scaled to grant size and capacity;
- Learning from practice treated as a legitimate result;
- Evaluation focused on what shifted, what was learned, and what communities carried forward.

Here is what change looks like: people return and bring others; participation grows; neighbours interact, with fewer assumptions and less fear; dignity and self-recognition appear; partnerships form; communities carry programmes forward.

4) Working conditions

We want the work to be possible without personal collapse.

We demand:

- Properly funded staff time, including coordination and relationship work;
- Multi-year contracts that match the long-term nature of socio-cultural work;
- Mentorship and capacity-building for younger cultural workers;
- Support for mobility and exchange as structured learning.

5) Cooperation and shared capacity

We want conditions which enable us to stop being competitors and become collaborators and contributors to shared values.

We demand:

- Funding criteria that reward collaboration across centres, neighbourhoods, and groups;
- Support for shared tools, shared staffing models, shared spaces, and peer exchange;
- Protected time for networking and relationship-building.

6) Governance and feedback loops

We want policy that stays in contact with reality, shaped by local knowledge, lived experience, and what we learn from practice over time.

We demand:

- Funded, regular dialogue between decision-makers and socio-cultural centres;
- Local knowledge treated as core input;
- Reflection and alignment time funded as legitimate work.

The shift we need

Less micromanagement, more trust-based funding and proportional accountability.Sustainable and consistent multi-year support, with a dedicated budget line for socio-culture. Stop rewarding the best reports; allocate resources to the best work. Recognise socio-culture for its own value, not only as a tool for other policy goals.

We do not ask for perfection. We ask for conditions that make our work possible. We refuse a system that replaces stable funding and professional work with unpaid labour, and we ask to be treated as legitimate workers providing public value.

We do not ask for more paperwork. We ask for more time with people.

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Folding instructions:

A Manifesto from Socio-Cultural Centres

FULCRUM

From projects to infrastructure: fund community cultural centres as a public service

Socio-cultural centres help preserve local memory, make room for difference, and create places where people can gather and organise without credentials or fear. In a time when crises pile up and trust breaks down, we are not an optional extra. We are part of the infrastructure that makes civic life possible.

We keep the doors of our centres open while everyday life gets more expensive, more polarised, and more exhausting. People arrive with isolation, grief, anger, confusion, and a pressing need to find themselves in a place that feels truly human. We do not meet communities in ideal conditions. We meet them as they are, in the conditions that actually exist.

We do not work after the crisis. We work inside it.

how to sustain civic life.

a manifesto from socio-cultural centres

Keep doors open
Make access real
Pay for continuity
Stop project logic
Fund the best work
Fund relationship time
Fund civic infrastructure
Paperwork is a tax on trust

Support socio-culture.
Read the full manifesto.

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