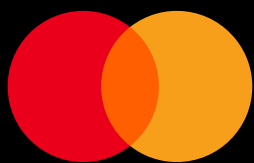




Mastercard Experience Economy Report

EUROPE 2026

The Year of the Human



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FORE- WORD

by **Natalia Lechmanova**
Chief Economist Europe, Mastercard

All over Europe, consumers are placing experiences at the heart of their spending choices. This trend has taken on a new dimension as authenticity, intimacy, and the chance to meet like-minded people feels even more vital in our increasingly digital lives.

The desire to spend money more consciously, on the things that bring joy, has endured despite broader financial challenges. And for many, that money is best spent doing things, rather than simply having things; on making memories. We call this the experience economy.

Since 2020, the Mastercard Economics Institute has analysed global and European consumer spending and economic trends, including on the experience economy, sharing its insights with businesses, organisations, local authorities, and others to help them better respond to the needs and wants of their customers.

This year, Mastercard has seen consumers continue to prioritise spending on travel and live events as people choose to invest in experiences that foster new connections and improved wellbeing¹.

This trend towards authenticity and intimacy is also reflected in consumer spending more broadly. Smaller and more specialised businesses – from florists to specialty food shops – have outperformed larger retailers, benefiting from niche demand but also delivering differentiated offerings that make purchases extra special². Consumers are increasingly rewarding uniqueness, craftsmanship and community-rooted enterprises.

For businesses, this shift presents both challenges and opportunities. Technology remains central – enabling discovery, access, and seamless payment – but there's an undeniable increase in interest in the human dimension of the experience economy; elements that technology can't replicate.

To capitalise on this movement, we believe that businesses should not lose sight of their human touch, recognising the beating hearts that are central to all transactions. Technology can be embraced alongside the designing of experiences that feel personal, authentic and community focused.

¹<https://www.mastercard.com/content/dam/mecomm/shared/news-and-trends/insights/2025/economic-outlook-2026/Economic%20Outlook%202026%20-%20Mastercard%20Economic%20Institute.pdf>
²<https://www.mastercard.com/content/dam/mecomm/shared/news-and-trends/insights/2025/economic-outlook-2026/Economic%20Outlook%202026%20-%20Mastercard%20Economic%20Institute.pdf>

"The Year of the Human sees people drawn to experiences that demand their attention and physical presence."

2026 will be remembered as The Year of the Human

by Courtney Scharf, Trend Hunter

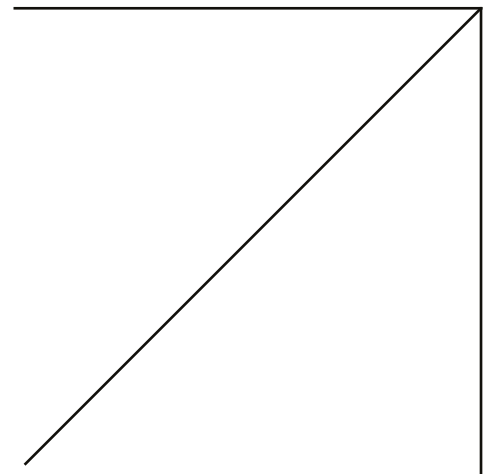
Last year, *Time Magazine's* Person of the Year wasn't a person, but a group of people: 'The Architects of AI', reflecting how the revolutionary technology has become one of the defining forces of our time.

Artificial Intelligence has overnight become embedded in our day-to-day lives – it curates our feeds, drafts our emails, recommends our holidays and edits our photos. But as AI has become ubiquitous, a quiet countermovement has surfaced. It's why we believe 2026 will be remembered as 'The Year of the Human'.

This isn't a backlash against the technology, but a corrective move towards finding a balance that sees us enjoy its benefits in areas like work and ecommerce, while celebrating humanity and real-world connection in our leisure time. People are happy to let AI handle admin, but when it comes to leisure – how they spend their time, energy and disposable income – they are seeking out what feels distinctly, irreplaceably human.

The movement towards reclaiming the human ethos sees people drawn to experiences that demand their attention and physical – not virtual – presence. They're prioritising deeper connection with friends over quick catch-ups, unplugged attention over passive social media scrolling, and group activities over flying solo.

In the experiences they are choosing to invest in, consumers are gravitating toward what technology cannot convincingly replicate. AI can generate responses, but not connection. It can simulate tone and conversation, but it cannot replicate the chemistry of people being together, the feeling of physical engagement, the relief of being emotionally supported, nor the unpredictability of group dynamics.



TRENDS 26



At Trend Hunter, we've identified six key trends within this broader movement:

Analogue Escapism sees people choosing to unplug and be present over screen-based entertainment.

Halcyon Days reflects a longing for a past when digital spaces felt more playful and less performative.

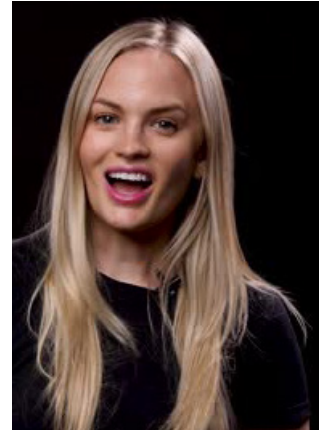
Conscious Connection shows a move toward experiences designed for real conversation and intimacy.

Indie Everything points to a renewed interest in independent venues and community-run spaces where culture feels local and participatory.

Common Ground highlights how hobbies are becoming powerful mechanisms for creating community and belonging.

Communal Coping shows how people are gathering to face life's challenges together.

This report explores why these shifts are accelerating and how they are reshaping spending decisions. As AI advances, unmistakably human experiences are becoming increasingly important.



2026: The Year of the Human,
Courtney Scharf, Trend Hunter

The six trends shaping 2026:

- 1.**
Analogue Escapism –
Choosing unplugged experiences
- 2.**
Halcyon Days –
Mining memory for comfort
- 3.**
Conscious Connection –
Building intimacy through undivided presence
- 4.**
Indie Everything –
Celebrating independence and less polish as
proof of authenticity
- 5.**
Common Ground –
When the experience does the introducing
- 6.**
Communal Coping –
Transforming vulnerability into solidarity
through shared struggle



1-

ANALOGUE ESCAPISM

SLOWING DOWN
ON PURPOSE



TREND 1

"This trend reflects a growing belief that some experiences feel more real and valuable when they can't be replayed, refreshed or reduced to content."

ANALOGUE ESCAPISM

The experience economy is getting a boost from people 'ana-logging-on': choosing experiences that discourage, or ban entirely, device use.

Intentionally offline club nights require phones to be sealed away on entry. Listening bars ask guests to sit silently with vinyl records rather than film them. Balls revive centuries-old dress codes and etiquette, encouraging participants to inhabit another era rather than document it. Medieval LARP (Live Action Role-playing) gatherings stretch over entire weekends, immersing players in handcrafted costumes, physical quests and improvised storytelling where digital interruption would break the spell.

The appeal lies in the relief these events offer. In Germany, 84% of 18-24-year-olds believe they use their phones "too much"³. Digital life has become all-pervasive – work messages bleed into evenings and group chats ping through dinners. It has also made leisure become increasingly performative, filtered and shareable. Analogue escapism offers a temporary reprieve.

There is also a craving for bodily engagement. Activities like dance and role-play require physical participation, generating experiences screens cannot replicate.

In purposefully analogue events, logging off and being present and undistracted with one another becomes the point. This trend reflects a growing belief that some experiences feel more real and valuable when they can't be replayed, refreshed or reduced to content.

63%

of Europeans are interested in taking part in intentionally offline experiences.

17%

have spent money on analogue experiences in the past three months.

33%

expect to spend more money on analogue activities than they did last year.

³ Deloitte, <https://www.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/topics/technology-management/survey-users-admit-to-smartphone-overuse-implement-digital-detox.html>

EXPERIENCES



When unplugging is the experience

Across some of Europe's biggest cities – including Amsterdam, Paris, Barcelona, Berlin, Copenhagen, Milan – **The Offline Club** invites people to join offline hangouts and retreats, and take a relaxing break from screens and digital communication. The goal is to unwind, connect with others, and take part in hobbies you might otherwise not have time for.

For seven days in May, Lübeck's university church, St. Petri, transforms into an analogue island in the middle of the city to host **Offline in St. Petri**. Upon entering the church space, visitors are asked to leave their phone at the entrance, immerse themselves in the present, and engage the senses via physiotherapy workshops and musical performances, both facilitated by students at the University of Lübeck.



"Activities like dance and role-play require physical participation, generating experiences screens cannot replicate."



"Spaces where people are being encouraged to be fully immersed in the experience of listening to music and removing all other stimulus."

Nostalgic pursuits

Some events are encouraging analogue escapism by centering around 'old-skool' physical practices and technology. **Backgammon and Wax** events in London focus on two timeless pleasures: playing backgammon and listening to vinyl. Instead of screens, gaming apps or digital playlists, these events invite people to engage with physical game play and listen to vinyl records.

Other spaces are encouraging people to be fully immersed in the experience of listening to music by removing all other stimulus: a pushback against the instantaneous access to music through devices. **'Lie down and listen'** runs events in beautiful buildings and UNESCO heritage sites around the UK and Ireland, where listeners lay back on mattresses and feel the vibrations whilst gazing up at baroque ceilings.

Immersion in past times

LARPing calls for players to fully immerse themselves in another time and place. Stepping into a medieval forest quest, a post-apocalyptic scene, or a fantasy court locates participants in a fully fleshed alternative world: handmade costumes, real landscapes, improvised dialogue, and props. To fully engage in the fantasy, leaving phones behind is essential. In April, for example, Bratislava will be hosting a full-contact **historical medieval combat tournament**. Participants will fight in real steel armour using blunted weapons, in categories including 3 vs 3 combat and longsword duels.

This kind of unplugged historical immersion extends to events like the **Bal de deux Empires** in Paris, an annual ball to benefit the Eugène Napoléon Foundation. Guests are invited to waltz with figures representing Napoleon III and Empress Eugénie and engage in period aesthetics by wearing full formal attire, including optional Second Empire inspired gowns and evening wear.



2- HALCYON DAYS

RE-INHABITING A MORE
HOPEFUL ADULTHOOD



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HALCYON DAYS

Halcyon Days isn't only about nostalgia for old aesthetics; it shows a longing for a recent past that felt more optimistic. Tours by throwback artists like Robyn and Hilary Duff, indie-sleaze fashion, and mid-2010s club nights are resurging, not ironically, but affectionately.

Europe has embraced nostalgia, with 67% of people thinking the world used to be a better place. This is most pronounced in Italy, where 77% think more fondly of the past than the present⁴.

This feeling is summed up by the '2026 is the new 2016' trend that has been one of this year's viral calling cards. That era represents a moment before personal feeds became saturated by third-party content and social media still felt ... social. Revisiting the entertainment and activities from another decade, along with its optimism, brings joy and a chance to step away from the challenges of the here and now.

Halcyon Days experiences act as time capsules, reminding us of the past. When Oasis toured in 2025, fans brought back the haircuts, the parkas, the old friendship groups, and took them to the gigs. Similarly, in celebrating 2016 in 2026, people are reviving the clothes they wore, the way they did their makeup, and the media they consumed during that year. This kind of aesthetic nostalgia lets people briefly step into a time of life that felt lighter. The appeal isn't necessarily the music or visuals themselves, but the emotional place they transport us to.

In uncertain economic and political climates, nostalgia acts as a coping mechanism. It provides reassurance that joy, community, and optimism have existed before and can exist again. Even if only for a night, people are choosing to revisit a time of their lives that felt more joyful.

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⁴ https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/fileadmin/files/BSt/Publikationen/GrauePublikationen/eupinions_Nostalgia.pdf



72%

of Europeans are interested in taking part in nostalgic experiences that are designed to rekindle cultural influences from the past.

37%

expect to go to more retro/nostalgia-based events this year.

41%

expect to take part in more experiences that tap into a sense of nostalgia this year.

Nostalgia on tour

The demand for revisiting times gone by is driving the resurgence of many iconic noughties artists, some of whom are riding the nostalgia wave by going on tour. In September, Hilary Duff embarks on **'The Lucky Me Tour'**, her first full-scale world tour in nearly 20 years, marking a major chapter in her comeback. The set list will include both fan favourites and new material, leaning into nostalgia with La Roux as a support act, whose biggest hits were in 2008 with 'In for the Kill' and 'Bulletproof'.

This summer also sees Swedish pop icon Robyn returning to the stage in support of her ninth studio album, **Sexistential**. For fans who grew up with early 2000s hits like 'Dancing on My Own', this tour carries a strong 'memory-lane' pull. The concerts are guaranteed to be full of adults who first encountered her music in their childhood and adolescence.

Return to the noughties

People are choosing to get down and party to the songs of their youth. This September, for example, the **Nostalgia Milenial Fest** returns to Seville, delighting fans of the music that defined Spain in the 2000s and early 2010s. With sets by noughties icons such as Cascada, the festival blends performance with nostalgia, drawing people together around the songs that shaped their formative years.

In Vienna, **electronica club The Loft** hosts regular nights devoted to tunes from the 2000s and 2010s, with set lists including house, techno and club music from the recent past. Musical eras like 'indie-sleaze' and 'electro-pop', with their carefree and eclectic party scenes, are bridging Gen Z nostalgia with millennial experiences.

Childhood relived

People are seeking out experiences that make them nostalgic forrecreate the fun of their childhoods, whenre choice was taken away and organised fun made things simple. E.g. **Stoke Summer Camp** is one example -, the first summer camp for adults in Europe.

Organisers have created a carefree paradise, where you adults are invited to play with childish abandon until yourtheir faces hurts (yes from all the laughing), and, where theyour one and only job is to wake up and have a good time. Campers are invited to bBreak free from the shackles of the 9-5, forget your their phones and leave theyour grown-up stresses at the door. It's about trading responsibility for freedom, work for adventure, and duty for fun.You won't be needing them on this action-packed holiday of non-stop adventure, sports and nature activities for fun-loving grown-ups.

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3- CONSCIOUS CONNECTION

FROM PRODUCTIVITY
TO PURPOSE

**“Despite it being easier
to contact other people
than ever, social isolation
is a growing challenge.”**



TREND 3

✓ 72%

of Europeans are interested in taking part in activities which involve meeting up with friends and family to learn a new skill.

✓ 31%

expect to do more activities such as skill-sharing workshops this year than in 2025.

✓ 58%

expect to take part in more joint activities that can be experienced with friends, family or like-minded people this year.

"Friends are planning their interactions in advance and choosing experiences that allow them to slow down and really connect."

CONSCIOUS CONNECTION

Conscious Connection represents a move away from quick coffees, surface-level catch-ups, and digitally driven interactions towards spending intentional, extended time with friends and like minds. It reflects how people are increasingly structuring their social lives around depth this year.

Instead of "What's new?" meetings squeezed between life's obligations, there's a growing preference for structured cultural outings, group hikes, shared workshops, reading circles, and creative classes. These formats create time for conversation to slowly unfold.

This reflects a commitment to camaraderie and a renewed focus on those we're with. It is about the value we place on spending quality time with others. Despite it being easier to contact other people than ever, social isolation is a growing challenge. 13% of Europeans report feeling lonely all the time, with 35% feeling lonely at least some of the time⁵.

Digital life has fragmented our presence, but conscious connection restores it. Friends are planning their interactions in advance and choosing experiences that allow them to slow down and really connect.

There's also a growing desire for emotional sincerity. Shallow updates risk feeling transactional but intentional gatherings allow space for vulnerability and genuine interactions. Four hours hiking together, or a night spent gossiping in a sleeper train compartment, reveals far more than a 40-minute café meet-up ever could.

Conscious connection is about recalibrating the focus of our attention. People still text, doomscroll, and stream in their own time – but increasingly, meaningful social time is being curated deliberately.

⁵Joint research centre, https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/projects-and-activities/survey-methods-and-analysis-centre/loneliness/loneliness-prevalence-eu_en



Friendship holidays

When it comes to leisure, the definition of 'time well spent' is shifting. People are increasingly deliberate about how they spend their time off work, with consideration given not just to their surroundings but who they will be surrounded with, as well as what sort of tempo they want for their break.

The UK-based [Book Nook Retreats](#) hosts curated reading getaways for people who love books, quiet spaces, and genuine connection. Rather than a typical holiday with packed itineraries, these retreats are built around the simple joy of reading at your own pace, with like-minded company. There's no pressure to finish your book – the goal is to be present, savour literature, and connect with others who share a love of reading.

Community living rooms

Designed to overcome social isolation and assist with the cost-of-living crises, these safe, free, non-judgmental spaces are opening up in places like churches, libraries, and community centres. Participants have reported increased social connections, better mental health, and reduced financial worries.

Shai Space is one such example: a community-rooted venue in South East London that centres on deep listening, connection and intentional presence rather than passive entertainment. Founded in 2024, it blends the intimacy of a listening room with the warmth of a cultural living room, inviting people to slow down, share space and experience music and creativity in a grounded setting.

Making journeys meaningful

The shift in emphasis from productivity to purpose entails a slowing down, a zooming out, and a realisation - that liminal spaces and moments can be opportunities for deeper, more authentic connection. Finding the joy in the in-between.

Sleeper Trains for friends is a new take on European night rail travel, designed not just to move from point A to B, but to foster connection along the journey itself. Recognising the uniquely bonding experience of rail travel, **The European Sleeper** offers compartments for friends, couples and small groups to travel together overnight, whether that's between Amsterdam and Prague, Brussels and Berlin, or other major cities linked by the service.

"Sleeper Trains for friends is a new take on European night rail travel, designed not just to move from point A to B, but to foster connection along the journey itself."



"Indie spaces also restore the possibility of discovery. Instead of being served what an algorithm predicts, people can encounter what a community values."



4- INDIE EVERYTHING

CHOOSING INDEPENDENCE
AND COMMUNITY

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INDIE EVERYTHING

A quiet rebellion is underway against hyper-polished mainstream culture. People are tiring of the same faces, same aesthetics, and same touring line-ups. In response, they're gravitating toward independent music venues, flea markets, self-published zines, local fashion, and community-run spaces.

The UK's 'Independent Venue Week' in 2026 featured 700 gigs across 236 independent venues, a 10% increase from 2025⁶ – reflecting the growing interest in events happening at smaller, local venues.

2026 audiences want culture that feels personal and participatory. DIY gigs in basements, pop-up galleries in disused shops, and local craft fairs thrive because they feel grounded and imperfect. They offer proximity to art and creators, not distance.

Indie spaces also restore the possibility of discovery. Instead of being served what an algorithm predicts, people can encounter what a community values. The thrill of stumbling upon something unexpected – a new band, a handmade object, a micro-scene – feels rare in this age of over-sharing and all the more special for it.

61%

of Europeans are interested in taking part in experiences with rough edges, small venues, lo-fi visuals or imperfect story telling.

53%

prefer experiences from small and medium-sized businesses because they consider them more rare, while 55% feel they are more creative.

⁶NME - <https://www.nme.com/news/music/independent-venue-week-2026-kicks-off-with-over-700-shows-across-the-uk-3925539>



Handmade with love

Hamburg's **IndieCon** is a three-day celebration of independent publishing in September 2026. This festival brings together independent magazine makers, book artists, zine creators, illustrators, printers, podcasters and online editors from around the world to share work, exchange ideas, build networks and explore the vibrant creative energy of indie media.

Similarly, Berlin's street food market **Markt Halle Neun** platforms independent talent, in this case chefs with no restaurant of their own, but an abundance of ideas, attitude and skills. Since 2013, 'Street Food Thursday' has shown that Berlin can do more than currywurst and kebabs. Initiated by Kavita Meelu, Anna Lai and Tobias Bürger, this was the first market of its kind in Germany - and has since left its mark on an entire city.

Off the beaten track

Travel is another area in which consumers prize independence. It's not about ticking off highlights - there's a real appetite for raw and rare travel experiences. People want to go somewhere different and bespoke, away from the same old Santorini views as everyone else. This is where operators like **Journeyious** are changing the game with curated, once-in-a-lifetime trips, for those who crave more than surface-level travel.

Broadcast radio is diversifying from the mainstream too. In Brussels, independent radio platforms like **Kiosk Radio** are reimagining broadcast in urban spaces. Operating 24/7 from a wooden kiosk in the heart of Parc Royal, what started as a meeting point for Belgium's underground has succeeded in turning radio into a live, community-led gathering that champions local and underground DJs.

Storytelling with food

Group cooking experiences like **Nonna's**, in which participants across Italy and France are invited to make homemade pasta, embody a return to deeply personal, intergenerational food culture. In these spaces, cooking becomes an act of sharing and storytelling. Instead of polished, chef-driven dining, guests step into the lively warmth of real Italian grandmothers' kitchens, learning regional recipes passed down through generations and experiencing hospitality rooted in family tradition.

The growing shift towards participatory food culture is also reflected in community kitchens, like the UK's **Made in Hackney**. Here, people cook, host and eat together, rejecting polished restaurant experiences in favour of local, community-led hospitality.



5- COMMON GROUND

CREATING COMMUNITY
VIA SHARED PASSIONS



TRENDS 5

"Common Ground is about making participation in hobbies possible and creating community and belonging along the way."

COMMON GROUND

Finding community through hobbies isn't new. What's new is the cultural reframing of who those hobbies are for.

For years, many activities have come with preconceptions attached around who takes part – whether that's the 'typical' football fan, swimmer, or raver. Now, a new wave of communities is actively broadening that picture, designing hobby spaces where more people feel welcome and can see themselves reflected.

In London, Swim Dem Crew has built a thriving swimming culture by putting community, confidence and cultural connection at the centre of the experience. In Amsterdam, Queer Football Club brings LGBTQ+ fans together around a shared love of football. And in Copenhagen, Winter Island hosts 'sauna raves' that fuse rave culture with wellness, giving people a new way to stay connected to nightlife culture while embracing health-centred lifestyles.

In these cases, the activity isn't new – the shift lies in who the activity is presented as being for.

These communities work because they eliminate the risk of participation. When you remove the fear of being the "only one" involved, the hobby feels accessible.

Common Ground is about making participation in hobbies possible and creating community and belonging along the way. The shared interest acts as common ground, but the deeper draw is safety and belonging.

64%

of Europeans are interested in taking part in trips that are inspired by something they are a fan of.

30%

expect to take part in more fan conventions, meet-ups, fandom communities or fandom travel than last year.

Self inclusion

Inclusivity is one of the buzzwords of our time, but there are still spaces which feel unwelcoming or out of reach for some groups. Socially minded organisers are stepping up to make hobbies and activities accessible to those who have broadly been excluded from them.

We can see this in [Swim Dem Crew](#), a London-based swimming collective built around community and inclusivity.

In Amsterdam, [The Queer Football Club](#) is making football a space where LGBTQ+ people can connect and belong without the fear of exclusion that still lingers in many mainstream sporting environments. TQFC offers something different: a place to be a fan where everyone feels welcome, safe, and supported regardless of identity.

Wellness meets rave culture

[Copenhagen's Winter Island](#) hosts events which reimagine rave culture by blending it with wellness. Traditional raves often centre around illicit substances, and many people who once treasured the culture and social world of the scene eventually drift away as their priorities shift towards sobriety and health. Winter Island's approach welcomes those individuals back into the fold by reframing the rave experience wellness around, presence and community.

Similarly, in cities across Europe – including [Berlin](#), [Dublin](#), and [Barcelona](#), 'coffee raves' are offering rave culture without intoxication. These are daytime or early-evening dance events where the bar swaps alcohol for espresso, matcha, or kombucha, making rave culture accessible to people who may otherwise feel excluded.

Music across the generations

Proving music has no age limits, the folk scene is resurging in Norway. This is largely spurred on by the reclamation of the genre by Gen Z, thought to be attracted by the sense of rootedness in an uncertain world. Playing a central role in the revival is [Tuvas Blodklubb](#), a monthly event at Riksscenen, the national centre for traditional folk music and dance in Oslo, which attracts hundreds of people every month including traditionally excluded groups like younger people and the LGBTQ+ community.

Sweden offers another shining example in the shape of [DJ Gloria](#), an 81-year-old DJ breaking down age-based barriers around nightlife. Playing the country's hottest nightclubs with special gigs for crowds over the age of 50, her sets primarily draw women who just want to get down and boogie.

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6- COMMUNAL COPING

SHARED STRUGGLE
AS SOCIAL GLUE



☑ **58%**

of Europeans are interested in taking part in gatherings that acknowledge that life is hard and tackle challenges.

☑ **33%**

expect to take part in more communal activities to tackle lifestyle challenges this year than in 2025.



"Coping is made possible because everyone is in it together".

TRE

COMMUNAL COPING

Communal Coping reflects a cultural move toward acknowledging life's difficulties together rather than managing them alone. People are creating and joining spaces where challenges are shared and vulnerability is normalised – from body doubling evenings to power through admin, grief cafés to connect and heal, community repair workshops, to groups of fathers learning how to do their daughters' hair together.

These groups are about the recognition that life can be hard, and pretending otherwise is exhausting. There's a sense of relief that comes from not performing.

An unfortunate reality is that 10% of Europeans say they don't have any close friends⁷. All of us "know" more people than our ancestors ever did, but the pace of modern life can make it hard to form and maintain strong bonds.

These 'let's tackle this together' groups can help provide emotional support that some people may not have due to a lack of close relationships. Mending a broken toaster alongside your neighbours doesn't just fix the appliance; it can rebuild connections within communities. Female rage workshops create supportive environments where women can safely release and transform repressed anger. Body doubling sessions embrace neurodivergence, something which has historically been misunderstood or stigmatised, to encourage connections, helping others with tasks simply by being with them.

What makes these spaces powerful is the group dynamic. Coping is made possible because everyone is in it together.

Rather than isolating problems as personal failures, communal coping reframes them as shared realities. In doing so, it provides a sense of solidarity and of restored community spirit, not through grand ideology, but through the simple act of gathering, listening, and doing together.

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⁷ OECD - https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/social-connections-and-loneliness-in-oecd-countries_6df-2d6a0-en.html



EXPERIENCES

Communal screaming

The company of others and a safe, demarcated space can be helpful when it comes to processing difficult feelings. Across Europe, women are gathering to collectively support one another by providing spaces that facilitate the release of rage and intense emotions, to help women move beyond social conditioning that tells them to be quiet and amenable.

On International Women's Day, the 8th of March, [Fem Rage co.](#) hosted a 'fem rage paint sesh' to bring women together in Northampton to rage, release, paint, and journal in a cathartic, collective celebration of womanhood.

Communal productivity

Body doubling is a productivity technique which sees people work on a task separately but alongside one another. It's particularly popular with and helpful for people with ADHD, for whom the presence of another person acts as an accountability anchor, making it easier to concentrate and stop procrastinating. **The Dutch Language Cafe** in The Hague hosts regular body doubling co-working afternoons, where people bring a task to finish in the 90-minute work slots and then share what they've achieved.

Having originated in Amsterdam, **'repair cafés'** are now popping up all over Europe, including in cities like **Lille, Valencia, Dusseldorf,** and **Prague**. These are community-run gatherings where people bring broken items and fix them together with the help of volunteers. At these meetings, shared effort reduces consumption and often reestablishes a sense of community in the process.

Parental solidarity

The old saying "it takes a village to raise a child" rings especially true today, with so much parenting taking place at a considerable distance from the wider family. Community groups, both formal and informal, have become a vital part of the mix, offering families practical support as well as emotional solidarity.

A non-profit event designed to support Dads and connect them with one another, **Pints & Ponytails** London-based events see groups of fathers gather around mannequin heads and learn how to style their daughters' hair with pint in hand. But more than that, it's an opportunity to connect with other girl dads and support each other through their shared parenting challenges.



Statistic 1: 51% of Europeans will consciously look to book experiences through small and medium-sized businesses.

Statistic 2: 57% would pay more for experiences that directly benefit their community or support local businesses.

Statistic 3: 61% expect to get more curated services from small and medium-sized businesses.

Statistic 4: 58% expect experiences bought from small and medium-sized businesses to be more sustainable.

Statistic 5: 52% expect small and medium-sized businesses to provide higher-quality experiences.

Statistic 6: 54% of consumers would travel further to visit a store that offers unique experiences.

HOW SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED BUSINESSES CAN USE THESE INSIGHTS:

If 2026 will be remembered as a year in which we put a human stamp on our leisure time, then the takeaway for businesses is straightforward: offer experiences that people want to show up to by tapping into these qualities.

Europeans are choosing real-world experiences over material things because they're craving something technology can't quite deliver – atmosphere, eye contact, the unpredictability of interpersonal dynamics. They want the feeling of being part of a community, of sharing something that isn't filtered or optimised.

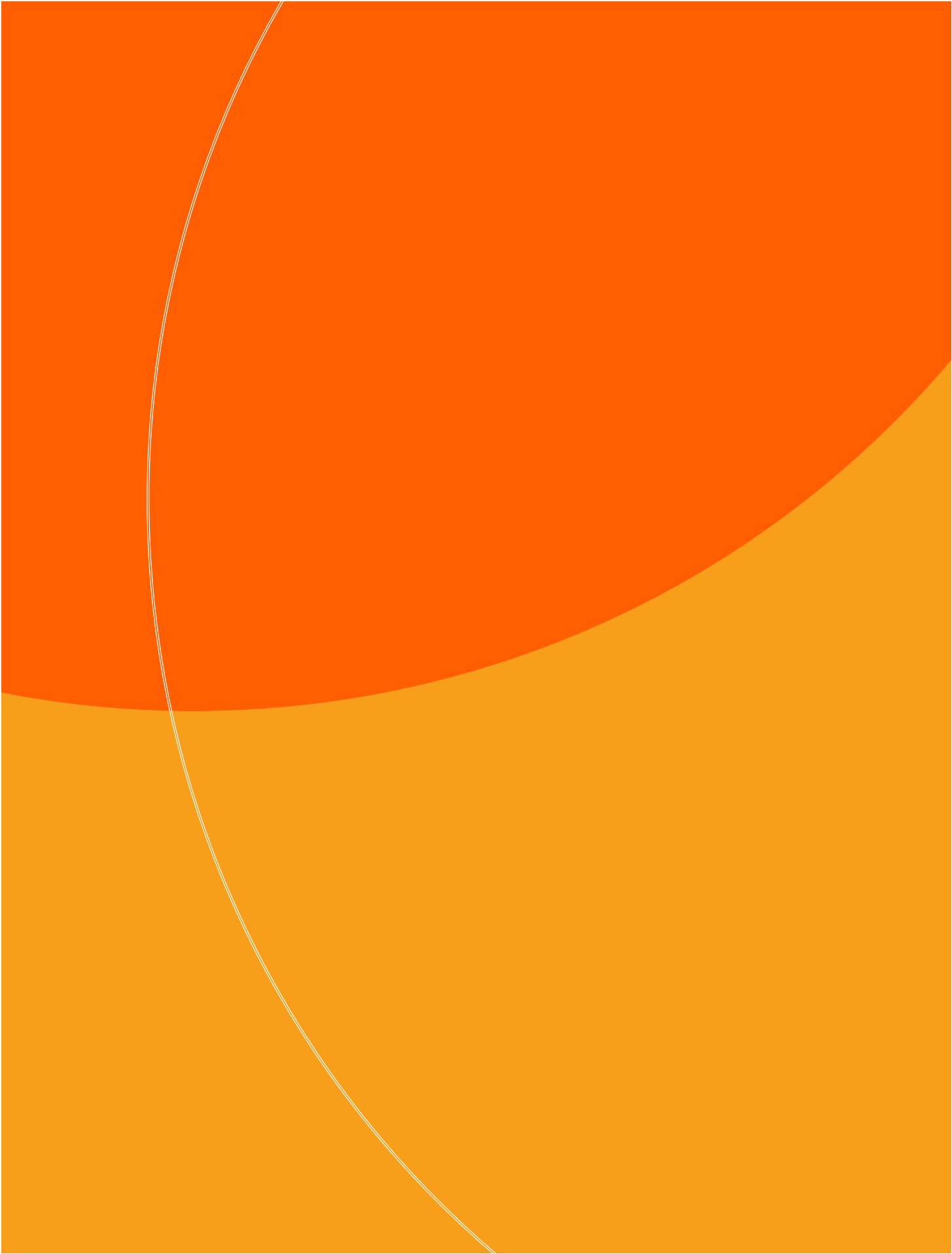
So, what does that mean in practice?

It means that bigger doesn't always mean better. With a widespread desire for intimacy and connection, a 30-person workshop where guests speak to each other holds a cultural value and will travel further by word of mouth than a 300-person spectacle where everyone films from the back. This matters because word-of-mouth is becoming more powerful again, especially when 64% say they seek out human recommendations over AI.

It's also important to remember that perfection and over-production isn't the goal. Not every surface needs branding. People want soul and personality, not slick but stark polish. Whether it's a hand-written menu, a space that hasn't been renovated in a while, or a DJ playing crackling vinyl instead of a pre-programmed set – these details tell people they're somewhere real. They make them feel like they're experiencing an event with a pulse.

Most importantly, build participation in. People don't just want to watch anymore – they want to do. The experiences that stick are the ones that call for participation, and when people engage and have fun, they tell others.

Offering experiences that are refreshingly personal and attracting those who are digitally disillusioned is not only good practice, but it matters commercially: 64% say they spend more freely when they're out enjoying an experience, and 61% believe experiences make more personal and authentic gifts than material goods. Here small local businesses can shine, making their customers feel seen by using their knowledge to tailor to them better.



Methodology

Mastercard conducted a survey with its research partner 3Gem, to understand the shift in consumer preferences towards experiences. The fieldwork took place in February 2026.

The survey sampled 27,000 respondents across 28 countries, collecting data from Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain, UK, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland and Ukraine.

Note to editors

Mastercard is a longstanding partner to dozens of Europe's most renowned entertainment and sports institutions and events, including the BRIT Awards, McLaren Mastercard Formula 1 Team, the UEFA Champions League, Roland Garros, Festival de Cannes, Berlinale Film Festival, The Open Championship and hundreds of Live Nation concerts across multiple European markets.

About Mastercard Economics Institute

The Mastercard Economics Institute provides insights into global and local economic trends using advanced analytics and Mastercard's proprietary data assets. Established in 2020, MEI supports businesses, governments and policymakers with economic monitoring services and timely analysis on economic themes including consumer spending, retail and travel trends and other local and global barometers of economic performance. MEI offers valuable perspectives to inform decision-making and promote sustainable growth worldwide through our thought leadership series and through Mastercard's specialised product offerings.

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