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The Finno-Ugric Cultural Center of the Russian Federation: successful experience in developing the Finno-Ugric cooperation

The Finno-Ugric cultural center of the Russian Federation is a branch of the State Russian House of Folk Arts, GRDNT. It was created in Komi Republic in 2006 on behalf of the President of Russian Federation V.V. Putin to enhance ethnic and cultural interregional and international cooperation, to form a common Finno-Ugric information environment and to implement activities aimed at preserving cultural and linguistic heritage of Finno-Ugric and Samoyedic peoples.

During our 10 year work experience, we have managed to create quite a comprehensive program for various festival, exhibition, cultural, educational, publishing and information related projects that expand the scope of the Finno-Ugric community. New fruitful and creative relationships have been formed and most importantly - the original culture and the art of the Ural peoples is reviving and being developed.

Organization of all of ethnic and cultural activities of Finno-Ugric peoples and long-term projects of international and interregional levels of the Finno-Ugric Russian Cultural Center is held annually with financial support of the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation and the State Russian House of Folk Arts with the participation of coordinators, institutions and partners from Russian regions and Finno-Ugric countries.

As a rule, for the development of international cultural relations the Finno-Ugric Russian Cultural Center focuses on collaboration with such basic organizations like the Finland - Russia Society (Finland), the M. A. Castrén Society (Finland), the Consultative Committee of Finno-Ugric Peoples, the Cultural, Scientific and Information Centre of the Republic of Hungary in Moscow, the Russian Cultural Centre in Budapest (Hungary), Liv Society «Livod It» (“Union of Livs”) in Latvia and “Institution Fenno-Ugria “ in Estonia.

For example, Days of Kindred Finno-Ugric Peoples, which is annually organized by the Finno-Ugric cultural center of the Russian Federation and the Russian cultural center in Budapest, is a worthy add-on to Russian and Hungarian cooperation and makes a significant contribution to the development of international humanitarian cooperation.

Days of Kindred Finno-Ugric Peoples was first held in Finland in 1928 in conjunction with Kalevala Day. Since 1991, the festival is celebrated in the regions of Russia, where various Finno-Ugric activities, such as: concerts, exhibitions, photo exhibitions, seminars and festivals are traditionally held during the second half of October.

By the way, one of the ways of bringing cultures closer to each other, is through festivals. Currently, there is an expanding festival movement in Russia as well as in other parts of the world. Festivals are becoming a part of the cultural life of capital cities, as well as small towns and villages. They stimulate growth of creativity among the participants, while forming a cultural image for the territory and create a positive impact for the economy.

In the long list of festivals of Finno-Ugric cultural center, there are ones that annually take on some new forms of content or expand the amount of participating regions. Such festivals are for example: the **“Finno-Ugric transit” (International Festival of Arts and Popular Traditions)** and the **All-Russian festival of artistic creativity of Finno-Ugric and Samoyedic peoples**. In 2015 our new socially significant ethno-cultural project started, the festival called **“Epics and myths of the forest”** representing epic heritage and mythology of Finno-Ugric Peoples. We decided to address this topic because we understand how important the actual preservation of intangible cultural heritage is nowadays.

Now let me list some of the festival projects that took place in 2015 in the regions of the Russian Federation as an interregional cooperation with organizational and information support by our Center. These are: **International ethno-festival “People of the Forest** (Komi Republic), **Perm Fair, Interregional fair of folk crafts and decorative and applied arts** (Perm region), **Juhannus, the traditional celebration of Ingrian Finns** “(Leningrad region), **Polar Finnougoria” Interregional festival** (Nenets Autonomous District), **Od vij, the national festival of Mordovian songs** (Republic of Mordovia), **Gerber, the Republican National Day** (Udmurtia), **Akan, the international festival of national toy** (Komi-Perm district of the Perm region), **Peledysh Ayo, the inter-regional song festival** (Mari El Republic), **Those who live by the sun, the international festival of Finno-Ugric folk groups** (Khanty-Mansi Autonomous District, Yugra), **Open days of art of Finno-Ugric and Samoyedic peoples of Yamal** (Yamal-Nenets Autonomous District), **Shy Kandra, the interregional festival of traditional Mari dance** (Republic of Bashkortostan), **“Setomaa. Family meetings”, the International festival of the people of Seto** (Pskov region), **Kantele, the International Folk Music Festival** (Republic of Karelia), etc.

Let me express my deep appreciation and gratitude to all my colleagues who took part in organizing Finno-Ugric projects: The ministries and departments of culture and national politics, ethno-cultural institutions and folklore houses of Russian regions, the Association of Finno-Ugric Peoples of Russian Federation, Volga region center of cultures of Finno-Ugric Peoples, Guild of inter-ethnic journalism, Center for indigenous peoples of the Leningrad region, and many others. Our business and companionship are continually expanding their borders, and joint activities are logically being arranged into what has long been called “successful Finno-Ugric cooperation.”

Next, I want to note that festivals are of great importance in preserving the Finno-Ugric peoples’ languages. Nowadays, different interpretations of folklore material, which for centuries were created by nations, are becoming more meaningful. Contemporaries are looking for new forms of preserving the song traditions and trying to get the best sound samples of folk song culture under real conditions. That is why there were modernly processed folk songs and pop music pieces as a special program of the Finno-Ugric Transit festival.

Thus, we use the festival platforms for promoting the mother tongues through performing arts and folk art and we believe this is one of the criteria for their preservation. This form, as it turned out, is quite appreciated by the specialists of musical and pedagogical universities and by musical ethnologists.

In the field of languages’ functional issues, special attention is paid to literature and book reading by the younger generation. It is well known that young readers pay more attention to electronic resources. Therefore, today the literary works should be presented not only in paper form but also in electronic one.

One of the options for placement of Finno-Ugric writers’ works in the global network is a **LOGOS section** on the Center’s website, finnougoria.ru. Prose, poetry, drama, children's literature in Finno-Ugric and Samoyedic languages are regularly uploaded there. A Translations heading is highly significant for development of modern national literature. Mutual translations are published there containing translations of classics and contemporaries into other languages. The website also publishes information about new books, which enables publishers to promote new projects.

Today LOGOS comprehensively reflects the literature of Finno-Ugric peoples in Russia regularly replenishing the materials. Unfortunately, placing works of Finno-Ugric writers from countries like Hungary, Estonia and Finland is problematic mainly due to issues with proprietary rights.

We also have another joint project with Interregional Laboratory of the Functioning of the Finno-Ugric Languages operating at Komi Republican Academy of Public Service and

Administration. Together we created a **video tutorials on installing and using of a software developed by the above mentioned laboratory** including keyboard layout, electronic dictionaries, spell-checking system. These video algorithms are placed on the Internet and in social media in accessible form helping users of all ages to use the electronic programs, thus enhancing functioning of the Finno-Ugric languages in cyberspace.

In general, in our time it's impossible to exercise ethno-culturalism or any form of activity without the most important aspect, the information sphere. Finno-Ugric cultural center of the Russian Federation is actively developing this information sector and has gained good results in this field, launching new projects in online environment.

After the VI World Congress of Finno-Ugric Peoples in 2012, the Finno-Ugric Cultural Center of Russian Federation directed its development activity towards **integration of cultural and art institutions, NGOs and Finno-Ugric media in order to enhance information exchange**.

The Center systematically provides **information support to major ethno-cultural events** that are taking place in different regions of Russia and Finno-Ugric countries, which allows creating **a common information field for larger ethno-cultural events**.

In order to enhance the information exchange, particularly among the young people, **the Center maintains its social network pages** such as VKontakte and Facebook. This allows active promotion of projects and receiving prompt feedback from users. It also enables promoting information about cultures and traditions of the Ural peoples more freely, compared to our official online resources.

In 2013-2014, the Center's film crew's emphasis was to **create video materials dedicated to the low-numbered Finno-Ugric peoples**. Following movies were created: *Livs - Legends of the Seaside*, *Izhora - Overcoming Oblivion*, *Vod - Homecoming*, *Ingrian Finns - Flashes of Memory* and *Mansi - The Way of Wrade*. Today there are already 13 ethnographic films about cultures, customs and traditions of the Finno-Ugric peoples in our collection. It is fine that the films were granted a considerable number of awards at various competitions and festivals of film art. All this, of course, inspires us to start new projects. Our near future plans include going to the Republic of Crimea where in August 2016 we are going to celebrate Days of cultures of the Finno-Ugric peoples and also start shooting a film about Estonians in Crimea. Simultaneously in the Udmurt Republic a new production is coming, a film about Besermyans.

In 2015, we have modernized our online portals, which included expanding technical capabilities of www.finnougoria.ru portal. We have also upgraded modules and improved options according to software settings of electronic devices and data storage devices that are relevant nowadays. Moreover, we have updated the historical and ethnographic section "The Peoples" through cooperation with scientists, anthropologists and experts in the Finno-Ugric field.

New emphasis of publishing activities has emerged. A digest called "Finno-Ugric and Samoyedic peoples in the ethnocultural diversity of Russia" was reissued. Also, an informative booklet **about the Summer University for young philologists** was issued. It is a long-term project supported by the M.A. Castren Society and the State Russian House of Folk Arts. After the Gala Concert of the International festival of arts called *Finno-Ugric Transit: Kindred Meetings*, a CD was released with musical compositions of the Finno-Ugric and Samoyedic peoples as well as a DVD with a film about the festival.

Another of our new publishing projects is **an interactive game called "Mythical Heroes and Fairy Tales of Russian Finno-Ugric peoples"** targeting a very young audience. The electronic edition contains images of famous characters with brief background information about them. The user is asked to paint a picture, select appropriate attributes of the hero and complete a puzzle containing all the heroes of the game.

For the World Congress in Lahti and in honor of the 10th anniversary of the Finno-Ugric Cultural Center of the Russian Federation we have released a new presentation booklet and a video of our institution, its achievements and joint activities. In the nearest future, until the end of 2016, we are going to publish the next issue of cultural and ethnographic magazine "Finnougoria. Ethnic Comfort."

According to our exhibition program we annually present traveling exhibitions of our partners and ones from our archive at various venues in Russian regions and abroad. One of the new exhibition projects is an international photo and media exhibition "A Living Time Thread". During 2015, it was successfully demonstrated in Russian regions among various ethnic and cultural projects. Now it is represented in the cultural program of the VII World Congress of Finno-Ugric Peoples in Lahti. We have also received a proposal from Finland - Russia Society to demonstrate the exhibition in Finland during this year. Thus, new pages will be added to the history of our long cooperation with this institution in implementation of the Finnish-Russian project "**The Role of NGOs in preserving the Finno-Ugric languages and cultures**".

The "The Living Time Thread" exhibition connects our past and present by invisible thread allowing you to experience a lively connection of times and generations. You'll be introduced to traditions and customs of Finno-Ugric and Samoyedic peoples who for millennia have interacted with other peoples which became a basis for diversity in their original creativity. They have made a significant contribution to the development of the world cultural heritage giving the world eposes of Kalevala and Mastorava, special samples of ethno-choreography and folk music, a variety of national cuisine, original works of art and crafts, unique traditional clothing and a folklore with inimitable colour.

Saving and enhancing this precious asset is the main goal of the Finno-Ugric Cultural Center of the Russian Federation, and we have been pursuing it for the past 10 years.

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GRDNT branch "Finno-Ugric Cultural Center
of Russian Federation"