# Experience in realization of the project “Russian-European volunteer restoration camp” within the framework of the Institution Building Partnership Programme: Support to EU-Russia Cultural Co-operation Initiative (IBPP-Culture)

**Vissarion I. Alyavdin**

President of the National Fund for the Rebirth of the Russian Country Estate

The National Fund for the Rebirth of the Russian Country Estate was set up in April 2000 by a group of professionals concerned by the state of affairs in the sphere of preservation of heritage objects. It became the first non-state organisation to set the goal of finding practical ways of reviving monuments of Russian cultural heritage, and above all, unique objects of national culture: country estates.

Among other realized projects the fund became an initiator to set up some volunteer camps in Akhlebinino country estate in Kaluga Region, Batyevo country estate in Ivanovo Region and the first international volunteer camp for the restoration of Voronino country estate in Yaroslavl Region.

Development of volunteer movement for heritage objects is a priority task for the fund as a public organisation. The volunteers do voluntary work and that is the basis of civil society. Construction of civil society is a major task in the development of Russia.

While mastering various methods of preserving cultural heritage objects, the national fund considers the volunteer movement as a real labour resource in the revival of Russian monuments.

We believe that the volunteer movement as a form of consolidating youth on the basis of patriotic and creative principles has a potential of a national project.

Development of the project within the framework of the fund is envisaged in the following directions:

* Formation of a volunteer culture in different audiences;
* Partnership with youth patriotic movements;
* Study and use of foreign experience;

Organisation of volunteer camps for restoration of estate complexes.

Since 2005 the national fund has been realizing the programme for development of volunteer movements in Russia on the basis of historical country estates. In 2005-2007, groups of volunteers worked on the Akhlebinino country estate (Kaluga Region), in Pushkin Mountains (Pskov Region), and on the Batyevo country estate (Ivanovo Region).

A volunteer camp can be both of a thematic and of a complex character, depending on the features and condition of the heritage object. For example:

* Historical-archaeological direction
* Architectural-construction direction
* Biological-dendrological direction
* Ecological direction, etc.

In 2005-2006, a volunteer camp was organized at the Batyevo country estate (Ivanovo Region) together with Ivanovo State University. The camp had a historical-archaeological direction. The purpose of the work was to discover the lost structures of the complex. Then in 2006-2007 a volunteer camp was organized at Akhlebinino country estate (Kaluga Region) with the support of the Kaluga Region administration. The camp had a sanitary-ecological direction. The purpose of the work was to clear the territory of the complex from an accumulation of household and building waste and remove weeds which were destroying the foundations of the country estate’s destroyed structures.

The experience of the organisation of these camps prompted our decision to try and carry out a project on a larger scale. In 2008-2009 the National Fund for the Rebirth of the Russian Country Estate began realisation of the project “Russian-European volunteer renovation camp The Rebirth of Voronino country estate”. The project was realized within the framework of the EU-Russia Cultural Co-operation Initiative and received a European Union grant.

Our plan was that such volunteer camp should promote intercultural exchange through the preservation of the cultural heritage. The project was to become a starting point for spreading the basic principles of European type volunteer camps in Russia, using dialogue between cultures and promoting the development of exchanges between Russian and European heads of camps and project managers.

In realisation of this project, our main partner and adviser was the French non-governmental organisation Union REMPART.

Union REMPART is a leading non-governmental French organisation engaged in the heritage preservation on the basis of developing volunteer movements. It has a partner network throughout the territory of France. In co-operation with volunteer organisations from other countries it provides the opportunity to work on heritage objects worldwide and to become acquainted with the history and culture of these countries.

Since the project was realized in Yaroslavl Region the Department of Culture of Yaroslavl Region Administration became the Russian regional partner.

Within the framework of the project, the Department of Culture has done the following:

* Informed regional mass media about the results of activity of the project;
* Provided support to promote the necessary documentation through establishments of the regional administration;
* Carried out advisory aid for events of the project and support during sightseeing at cultural sights.

The heritage object on which the project Voronino country estate was realized was not chosen by chance. In 2005 the national fund together with the descendants of the owners, the Leontyevs, acquired the property rights to this estate complex of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. It is planned to restore the country estate and use it in the future as a multipurpose cultural and tourist object: the Centre of Russian Country Estate Culture. This Centre should become an original demonstrative platform showing the possibility of public initiatives in the business of preservation and use of heritage objects.

For coordination of events within the framework of the project preliminary seminars were organized in Russia. At those, the following were discussed:

* + Organisation of project events;
  + Format of partner participation;
  + Schedule of project events;
  + Amount of work in organisation of the work camp;
  + Directions of work for volunteers.

For training the camp leaders and exchange of experience with the French partners seminars were organized in France on the basis of REMPART divisions: Associations Adichats and Vieux Chatel.

Within the framework of the seminars issues concerning the activity of the project as well as the general problems of developing volunteer movements were discussed:

* Significance of volunteer camps for the preservation of cultural heritage objects and why they are important for volunteers and organizers;
* Establishing relations with private and state owners of the objects;
* Why and how the state supports volunteer camps.

Before receiving volunteers in the country estate it was necessary to conduct a series of work to enable normal functioning of the camp. As the place had not been adapted to receive a large number of young people, it was necessary to make the entire infrastructure of the camp from scratch and to coordinate each step with the relevant authorities. The following was done:

* The territory received treatment against ticks;
* Water supply and electricity were connected;
* The sewage system was installed;
* Toilet and shower cubicles with hot water heaters were built;
* The platform for the camp and a sports area was set up;
* The dining room and kitchen were equipped with necessary devices;
* The warehouse, laboratory and games room were fitted out;
* The area for seminars, meetings and film viewing was arranged;
* The necessary attendants (doctor, warden, and electrician) were hired.

In the summer of 2008-2009 more than 160 volunteers worked at the camp. They were schoolchildren from senior classes, students of architectural, historical, art and other high schools age 15-28 from Moscow, Moscow Region, Yaroslavl, Rostov, Kaluga, Tula Region, Ivanovo, St. Petersburg, Novgorod, Pskov, and also Paris, Lyons, Bordeaux, Marseilles and Nantes.

Before volunteers started working it was necessary to acquaint them with the rules and methods of how to handle heritage objects. Learning the techniques and methodology of conducting work became an obligatory part of life in the volunteer camp.

Moreover, within the framework of the volunteer camp’s work practical and seminar classes were organised for which experts in the history of country estate culture, history of the region, ethnography and folklore were invited. During each shift 8-10 seminars and practical classes as well as two sightseeing excursions to noteworthy places in the region were organized. Volunteers visited Rostov Velikiy, Uglich, Myshkin, Yaroslavl, Pereslavl-Zalesskiy, Borisoglebsk, the Troitse-Varnitskiy monastery and Karabikha memorial estate.

In their spare time children organized bilingual performances based on Russian and French classics, concerts and classes acquainting each other with the culture and history of Russia and France.

Volunteers participated in folklore holidays in Rostov Region and the town of Myshkin. During the holidays volunteers had the opportunity to become acquainted with traditional Russian national clothing, music and national crafts; to learn traditional Russian national dances and games: “Streamlet”, “Round Dance”, “Runaway Bride”, “Little Rope”, “Wall on a Wall” and others; to take part in a performance of folklore chorus and to learn the rules and take part in national games: lapta and tipcat.

Moreover, a significant part of the camp’s life was the tradition of creative days, subsequently growing into a series of independent creative country estate projects. This included master-classes of artists, masters of folk art and other creative people. Under direction of a French expert on medieval gardens a medieval garden based on a small estate kitchen garden was set up in Voronino. Together with a group of Yaroslavl land artist volunteers, the first art object was created in the country estate, thus as we hope laying the basis for creative development of the estate. Inspired by this experience, children organized their own competition of land art objects.

The work to revive the country estate with the help of volunteers was of quite a wide range and as the restoration work was only beginning this work was mainly of a preparatory and prospecting nature.

Nevertheless, a significant amount of work has been done:

* The basement of the main house was completely cleared of debris. More than 400 cubic metres of earth were removed;
* The arches of the cellars were cleared from the most recent plastering;
* The foundations of the west, east and new wings were revealed and cleared;
* The foundations of a small greenhouse were revealed and cleared;
* The path of the main yard, paths in the park and smart court yard were cleared;
* Works revealing the locations of other lost or destroyed constructions were conducted;
* Clearing of the necropolis began;
* The clearing and restoring of the drainage system of the territory of the park began;
* Over seven hectares of the park’s territory were freed from weeds and overgrown vegetation;
* Volunteers helped experts with strengthening the foundations of the main house.

During the survey carried out with the participation of volunteers, a great number of artefacts were collected:

more than 4,000 fragments of kitchen and table ceramic utensils, flower pot dishes and flower pots from the 16 and 17 centuries; more than 100 fragments of iron hardware (nails, building brackets, tools, etc.); over 70 fragments of windowpanes made by archaic technology, etc. Three construction periods of the main house of the country estate were revealed. The earliest period is from the 17 century. A monument to Lyubov Nikolaevna Leontyeva, née countess Zubova, the granddaughter of count A.V. Suvorov was discovered, returned and underwent preliminary processing. In researching the main house, more than 100 tiles from 8 fireplaces of the 17-19 centuries were found.

Despite the social and educational orientation of the project we have no more doubts in the business efficiency of such camps. During the two years of working at the Voronino country estate, the savings on expenses for carrying out work on the monument has exceeded expenses for the upkeeping of the camp by more than 150%.

Developing mechanisms of organisation and carrying out volunteer camps on the basis of Voronino country estate with the corresponding administrative and financial support will lead to the organisation of similar projects on other heritage objects in different regions of Russia. The project is envisaged to be developed on the basis of international principles of volunteer activity and in co-operation with European organisations operating in this sphere. The practice of European volunteer movements shows positive tendencies not only in the wide scope of objects taken under trusteeship by volunteer organisations but also in the qualitative change of the attitude of society and the authorities towards culture heritage .

The project has already been widely covered in the mass media, in the National Fund’s magazine “Life in a Country Estate” and on the Internet with the purpose of active distribution of positive results from the project.

We propose:

1. Providing within the Russian Culture federal target programme for 2011 events directed towards the support and popularisation of the volunteer movement for heritage objects in a separate part of the programme.
2. Jointly with public non-commercial organisations and with the involvement of authoritative experts to create a coordination council under the aegis of the Russian Culture Ministry for coordination of activity in this area, including work of volunteer camps. To develop methodical guidelines for the organisation of volunteer movements for cultural heritage objects. To develop technology for support of volunteer camps at various administrative and regional levels.
3. Development of the volunteer movement for heritage objects is a new social reference point and the basis of civil society. Volunteering in the sphere of revival of heritage objects turns a person into a citizen and patriot because his voluntarily chosen work is connected with the history of the country, its cultural heritage and historical memory. The volunteer movement will provide an influx of new staff to the heritage sphere. By now many public organisations have already had certain experience of setting up volunteer camps on various heritage objects. These organisations, with a governmental support and in co-operation with public organisations of Europe are quite capable of transforming this direction into an effective tool of cultural policy and heritage management.