# M.A.K.E C.U.L.T.U.R.E.!: Cooperation between Marche Region and Lipetsk Region Aimed at Institutional Development through Cultural Initiatives[[1]](#footnote-2)\*

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Today, Italy is one of closest partners of the Russian Federation in Europe with established and developing intensive bilateral cooperation practically in all spheres. , The views of Russia and Italy on most world policy issues are either similar or correspond. And interregional ties hold a prominent place in these bilateral relations.

Lipetsk Region has been expanding its multilateral cooperation with Italy’s the Marche region since the 1990s. In November 2002, the Marche representatives in Lipetsk signed a Framework Document on joint cooperation in the following spheres: information and research activity relating to expanded cooperation in economics, institutional exchanges and training, collaboration between universities, cooperation in the field of tourism, and the creation of cultural and humanitarian ties between the regions.

An industrial cluster involved in the production of “white equipment” is developing in the region on the model of Italian industrial districts. With the active involvement of Italian businessmen, the region is forming the Lipetsk industrial production special economic zone. Students of Lipetsk universities are undergoing training at the local Indesit plant, and undertaking internships at the University of Ancona. In 2007, the A.P. Mistyukov Festival of National Creativity was attended by the Italian La Machina ensemble, while several groups from Lipetsk and two young artists from Yelets performed in Italy as part of the Youth of Russia festival.

Such strong multilateral cooperation between the two regions found eventual expression in a new cultural project that will not only reinforce the existing ties, but also make them more imaginative – and more spiritual.

## Project Chronology

### February 2008

In February 2008, it transpired that the joint Make Culture! project beat out more than 150 other contenders to win a European Union grant. The project’s participants included: the Directorate of International Programs and the regions of Lipetsk and the Marche. Project curators arrive in Lipetsk from Moscow and the Marche region on February 28 to discuss the project and sign an agreement with the Lipetsk Region Department of Culture and Art. The delegation’s three-day program included a Lipetsk Region art gallery round table discussion on the joint project’s implementation, the presentation of a grant to help trace the project’s results, and a tour of Lipetsk, Yelets, Zadonsk, Usman and Chaplygin – the proposed venues of project events. **(Photo 1)**

It was also revealed that the Make Culture! project was meant to last two years and be primarily financed by the European Union (the project’s budget standing at 375,000 euros). It will be implemented within the frameworks of Europe’s Tacis program, which was established by the European Commission to help strengthen the Russian market economy and democracy, and to create a strong civil society.

The project provides for a series of 2008-2009 cultural events aimed at strengthening the Russian-Italian cooperation in the field of culture. The most important of the upcoming events includes the Lipetsk Region festival of folklore, the Lipetsk-Marche Regions Film Festival about rural cultural traditions, and an itinerant joint photo exhibition featuring photographs about the two region’s residents.

### *****July 2008*****

The Make Culture! project with the Italian province of the Marche is intended to last two years and has currently progressed from the preliminary phase to the practical one. The Culture Brings People Together folklore festival was held in the Lipetsk Region between July 4 and July 6. It brought two Italian ensembles to Lipetsk – La Machina, which we already know from the A. P. Mistyukov festival, and the Urbanitas ensemble. The opening was held at the L. N. Tolstoy State Academic Drama Theater. The Marche region President Gian Mario Spacca stressed the following in his welcoming address: “I would like to wish that this cultural initiative – which blends perfectly into the format of multilateral Russian-Italian events, enriching them with new knowledge and content – helps to strengthen and expand our ties in the economic and social fields, becoming a harbinger of our future cooperation in new joint projects.”

*The packed Academic Drama Theater hall applauded with equal enthusiasm to both the Lipetsk and Italian folklore ensembles, becoming the best-possible confirmation of the festival’s idea: Culture Brings People Together. The folklore forum’s opening turned into a sparkling celebration. By Russian tradition, the guests where welcomed on the theater’s stage with salt and bread. As is customary of temperamental southerners, the project’s Italian curator Senor Ivan Antonucci did little to hide his emotions: “It is simply wonderful that industry and trade are not the only fields in which the ties between Lipetsk and the Marche are growing stronger. This is the third time that I am here, but I never get tired of being amazed at your hospitality and friendliness. We can do a lot of good in this atmosphere. Today’s concert is only the first act of a great plat. Ahead lies a photo exhibition about village life in our countries, a documental film festival, and much, much more.”*

The public met the stage appearance of the black-clad La Machina men’s ensemble with ovations. For many decades now, these musicians have been seeking out and recording traditional Italian songs. They have 13 albums and a book of folk ballads. A guitar, an accordion, a mandolin, percussion instruments and the singer’s voice – this is the simple key to the audience’s heart.

***La Machina*** *is a folksong ensemble with a 40-year history to its name. It is the Marche region’s only ancient carrier of that enormously rich treasure – oral folklore. The ensemble has published 13 books and a collection called “Folk Culture of the Marche Region.” La Machina is famous for its vivid form of expression, which reflects both the deep historical roots of the Marche residents and the distinctive features of peasant life – which they honor and to which they hold true.* ***(Photo 2)***

In contrast to La Machina’s chamber performance, the Urbanitas collective presented the public with colorful dance numbers. Dressed in amusing costumes from the times of the Napoleonic wars, the artists (young women in bright flower-patterned aprons and kerchiefs, young men in green knickers and red vests) spun around to the accompaniment of national instruments. To the Italians’ credit, they were not at all discouraged by the surprises prepared for them by the organizers. Deftly exchanging his mandolin for a balalaika, one of La Machina’s musicians performed an excellent solo while the dancers managed to repeat the Russian beauties’ movements without nearly missing a step.

*The* ***Urbanitas*** *Cultural and Folkloric Association is well-known and appreciated across Italy. Since 1993, Urbanitas have performed across stages of many cities in the Marche, also taking part in international folklore festivals in Mexico, Egypt and Turkey. The group has 50 members who try to promote the traditions of Italian village culture across the world. The ensemble’s dances are vivid and rhythmic, symbolizing the joys and happiness of life. Its orchestra includes accordions, music boxes, guitars, a harpsichord, base instruments and a triangle.* **(Photo 3)**

The guests looked on with pleasure as the folklore ensembles performed their best numbers. Representing nearly every district in the region, the ensembles included Rossiyanka (Russian Woman), Zorenka (Daybreak), Sudarushka (Fair Lady), Ranenburgskiye Rodniki (Ranenburg Springs), and many other talented ensembles and performers. After having kicked off in the region’s capital, the festival then moved on to the Lipetsk Region’s districts. La Machina went to Usman, Urbanitas – to Yelets. The festival’s closing concert was performed at Terbuny’s recently-opened Olympic Center of Culture and Sports. Here, the Lipetsk and Italian ensembles performed together again on one stage. In addition to concerts, the festival program provided for joint seminars and exhibits of national instruments from other regions. The involvement in these events of a representative from the Castelfidardo Accordion Museum, who showed the work of local craftsmen to the crowd, helped Lipetsk Region residents understand the importance the Marche region places in national traditions.

In the summer of 2008, simultaneously with the folklore festival, two experts from the Lipetsk Region’s Department of Culture undertook an internship in the Marche region’s capital Ancona. They met the heads of the regional department and its staff, learning about the various fields of the department’s activities and getting to know the SVIM (Sviluppo Marche SpA) organization, the mechanisms of the two’s cooperation and task-sharing. They surveyed activities in the fields of tourism and promotion of the region’s cultural heritage, studying the legislation and legislative acts regulating activities in the field of culture.

The trip resulted in the practical application of the acquired knowledge. For example, the Department of Culture is currently actively engaged in implementing the modern information technology made available by OPAC-Global into the Lipetsk Region’s library system. In the future, this will help to provide access to the endowments of some of the largest libraries in Russia – and, we hope, the European Union – and enable the exchange of library information. In addition, the acquired knowledge helped our experts to act more efficiently in organizing future project events – photo exhibitions and film festivals. **(Photo 4)**

### *****November 2008*****

Within the frameworks of the joint Marche-Lipetsk Make Culture! project, the Lipetsk Region Department of Culture and Art announced a photo competition devoted to the Lipetsk Region’s agricultural traditions. Under competition rules, the photographs must reflect village life: the ways of life and instruments of labor of villagers, scenes involving peasants and craftsmen, agricultural traditions, the folk art and traditional crafts of our region, while at the same time expressing the personal opinion and author’s vision of the declared subject. A diligent search for – and collection of – photographs has now begun in the region’s districts and cities.

### *****May 2009*****

The photo competition continues. Several of the region’s museums became actively involved in the competition’s first stage – historical photographs” these included the Usman, Chaplygin, Lipetsk, Dankov, Stanovoye, Dobrinka and Krasninsky district museums, as well as the State Regional Archive and the Documentation Center of Contemporary History of Lipetsk Region. Looking at these photographs, a person can trace how village life changed over the decades and how manual toil ceded its place to machinery. Pre-revolutionary Lipetsk, the first collective and state farms, the development of agriculture, post-war construction… **(Photo 5).** Frozen on print, the moments tell the story of our countrymen’s lives over all these decades. Together with their pictured heroes, we submerge ourselves into different eras: we revel and we mourn, we take pride and we get upset, and sometimes we simply enjoy recalling a past that happened before our very eyes. At the same time, the competition enters its second stage – contemporary photography.

### *****November 2009*****

The joint international Make Culture! project approaches its end. The project’s closing events in the Lipetsk Region included a Russian-Italian exhibition of historical and contemporary photography, and a Russian-Italian film festival.

On November 17, the Lipetsk Regional Exhibition Hall hosted the grand opening of a historical and contemporary photography exhibition, presenting photographs from both of the region’s archives. Some 150 photo reproductions were displayed in the hall – 50 black-and-white photographs of how the two regions spent the early and middle portions of the past century, and 50 color works about rural life as photographed by contemporary Lipetsk photo artists. The exhibition was opened by Lipetsk Region Department of Culture Director Tatyana Gorelova and her Italian guest Mauro Battistini – Director of the Sest-Luve plant located in Lipetsk’s special economic zone. They talked about how similar our two regions were in terms of their cultural and agricultural traditions, and how vividly this is displayed by the photographs here. Said Tatyana Gorelova: “Today, having looked at the exhibition and met its guests, I can say that we developed in a very similar manner – one could say that it was in parallel to each other. When we once thought that doing the laundry was inherent to Russian women, including the ones from Lipetsk, then now we see that exactly the same photographs exist in the Marche region as well. It is very interesting to trace how life changed here, in our region, and how it changed in the Marche region over these decades. We see our history at this exhibition: how children were brought up, what traditions were followed, what cultural origins lay in our roots.” **(Photo 6)**

The photographs really are remarkably similar in the agricultural labor and village life they express. The size of Italian haystacks is staggering. Judging by the photographs, they reach the height of 10 people. Religious holidays, the gathering of harvests, the handling of stock – had these photographs not been signed and divided into Russian and Italian works, nearly all of them could have been mistaken for our own. Only a few of these reflect the color characteristic of Italian traditions – for example, a portrait of a woman with a pitcher on her head.

The final exhibition, which ran not only in the regional exhibition hall but also in the Lipetsk Region cities of Usman and Lebedyan, was attended by more than 2,500 people. On Novermber 22, the exhibition came to a formal close at the regional exhibition hall. Of the six young photographers whose works were selected for the photo exhibition, three won based on the results of an audience poll. First place went to Oleg Frolov (Lipetsk), second – to Sergei Avilov (Yelets), and third – to Sergei Belykh (Lipetsk). The attending EU-Russia project coordinator Tatiana Bokareva awarded the winners with certificates to attend Italian master classes in January 2010.

The Russian-Italian film festival opened within the frameworks of the joint Make Culture! project with a November 19 press conference held at the Regional Center of Culture and Folk Art, which was attended by representatives of all the regional media. **(Photo 7)** According to Lipetsk Region Department of Culture Director Tatyana Gorelova, who opened the press conference, the film festival is the last Lipetsk Region event to be staged within the frameworks of the two-year project. It will showcase Russian and Italian films (including full-length features, shorts and animation), as well as Lipetsk Region documentaries and children’s studio films – which might not be professional, but which are nevertheless noteworthy because of their ability to reflect their own unique takes on life. The attending Social and Cultural Initiatives Foundation Vice President Tatiana Shumova, who also heads the International Programs Department, noted that “cooperation with the Marche region has been performed in the past three years within the frameworks the Young Russian Culture in Italy state project,” which has traditionally also involved Lipetsk Region ensembles. She also reported that Social and Cultural Initiatives Foundation President Svetlana Medvedeva had sent a greeting in honor of the film festival’s opening.

The Marche region project coordinator Manuela Pagliarecci thanked all the project participants for their cooperation and support in organizing the event, adding that she feels at home in Lipetsk – after all, this not her first visit here. “Over these years, we have enjoyed the unique opportunity to get to know the folk art of the Lipetsk Region,” she said. “And young artists of Russia and Italy got to know each other as well. In essence, this personal interaction in the field of culture and exchange of artistic potential was the very goal of our project. The event involved thousands of people from both sides.”

*The Marche region project coordinator Ivan Antoniozzi added for his part: “Our partnership has borne more serious fruit than we could have expected. Despite the language barrier that stands between us, we still managed to organize all the main project events. This is the most important thing. I hope that it will become the starting point of another, presumably theatrical, project.”*

The Russian-Italian film festival gathered more than 8,000 residents of 10 Lipetsk Region cities and districts. It showcased 13 Italian and 10 Russian feature films, including the film festival’s winner, Radiant Angel, which was patronized by Svetlana Medvedeva. The film festival program was composed in a manner that allowed Lipetsk Region residents to get to know the creative film works of the Marche itself. The authors, directors, actors and musicians of the Italian films all come from specifically that region. The Russian half of the film festival was set up to make the main selection of films based on one primary criterion – the advocacy of traditional ethical values, movies that bear the good, enlightenment and spirituality.

In the course of the film festival, Lipetsk Region was visited by Russian actors and directors, project partners from the Marche region, the Directorate of international programs and the Social and Cultural Initiatives Foundation, as well by European Commission cultural project coordinator Tatiana Bokareva. Like the project’s preceding cultural events, the film festival was aimed at demonstrating the distinctive national character of two region’s cultures, as well as their common values.

On January 22, the Marche region city of Osimo staged a press conference marking the conclusion of the two-year joint Make Culture! project between the Lipetsk the Marche regions. The meeting – called Cultural Cooperation Between the Marche and Russia: Results and Future Prospects – was attended on behalf of the Russian party by: Social and Cultural Initiatives Foundation Vice President Tatiana Shumova, Deputy Head of the Lipetsk Region Administration Lyudmila Kurakova, Director of the region’s Department of Culture and Art Tatiana Gorelova, and Lipetsk Region Department of Culture project coordinator Tatiana Dolgova. The Italian representatives of the meeting included the Marche region President Gian Mario Spacca, Osimo City Mayor Stefanono Simoncini, Head of the Regional Department of Culture Tourism and International Relations Raimondo Orsetti, SVIM agency (which oversees the Marche region’s development) Director Gianni Giaccaglia, Italian side project coordinator Ivan *Antonucci,* Manuela Pagliarecci and other representatives of the Marche region administration, heads of creative teams and associations, as well as reporters.

Those very same days also saw the staging of two closing cultural events – the Russian-Italian film festival, and Peasant Culture of the March and Lipetsk Regions photo exhibition – similar to the one held in the Lipetsk Region at the end of November 2009. And at the very same time, three young Lipetsk Region photographers who won the earlier photo competition were serving their photography internships in the Marche region. At their Osimo meeting, the project participants not only assessed the positive experience gained over the course of the project’s implementation, but also shared their ideas about new cooperation.

## Project Results

The main project results are as follows:

* the project was set up in a manner that allowed the culture of the two regions to be showcased in its different aspects – folk art and folklore, photography and cinematography. This enabled a deeper cultural collaboration between two regions’ representatives, and recognition that despite our geographic remoteness, language barrier and separate historical characteristics, our peoples have a common and unifying source;
* the acquisition of experience by the project’s participants in organizing events with foreign partners, the establishment of the necessary contacts, ties and trust – experience that in the future could form the foundation of new cooperation. The consolidation and development of human resources, enriching their ability to manage Lipetsk Region culture and art, and to promote cultures at the local and international levels;
* the involvement of a considerable body of people in preparing project events – freelance artists, musicians, photographers and the staff of museums, archives, clubs, houses of culture and so on. The involvement of the youth in project events, young people who are an active part of society and whom the project helped discover the importance of the region’s cultural heritage, their own values and roots;
* the project gave impulse to other lines of the Lipetsk Region’s cultural management: the consolidation of cultural institutions’ material and technical foundation, work involved in creating tourism and recreation zones in the region, and the promotion of region’s cultural heritage;
* the creation of more efficient mechanisms of coordinating activities aimed at managing the cultures of neighboring regions – Voronezh, Tambov and Belgorod; the enhancement of methods of operating with institutions responsible for culture, with municipal institutions of culture, and public organizations;
* films, photographs, songs and dance – these have all spread across the world and they all speak a common language that can be used to showcase the characteristic traits of a particular culture, to underscore the diversity of cultures and the affinity of values. These joint events provided the ideal opportunity to create grounds for efficient joint collaboration in the field of cultural development, and to advance relations between the Marche and Lipetsk regions to a new and higher level;
* the publication of information about the Make Culture! project’s implementation in the print and electronic media, and the simultaneous launch of a separate section about the project on the Lipetsk Region Department of Culture website, not only raised public awareness but also led to the Lipetsk Region Department of Culture’s receipt of new proposals on international cooperation;
* the extension of cooperation in the field of culture is having a general positive effect on the development of bilateral relations between Russia and Italy: these include the expansion of special economic zones and the attraction of Italian investments in the economy and other fields. In early December 2009, a sixth round of Russian-Italian international consultations at the highest level of government was held in Rome. The delegation also included the Head of the Lipetsk Region Administration Oleg Korolyov, who noted that the Make Culture! project represented another vivid page in the history of multilateral cooperation between the regions of Russia and Italy.

The Make Culture! Project’s implementation found expression in new cooperation:

* with the Social and Cultural Initiatives Foundation – Lipetsk Region creative ensembles’ involvement in such festivals as Young Russian Culture in Italy, and the Winter Garden of Art, which was held in Bari; in terms of joint initiatives – the annual staging of the Lipetsk Region’s Echo of the Radiant Angel film festival;
* a new cultural project with the Marche region and the Republic of Poland has been submitted for European Union review.
* at the end of January, 50 actors, directors and reporters from various nations celebrated the 150th Anniversary of A. P. Chekhov festival in Yelets. Together with the city’s Benefit (Benefis) Theater, they developed a festival program that included readings of Chekhov, a concert, a scientific conference and a play.
* several new proposals concerning future cooperation between the Lipetsk and the Marche regions have already been prepared: a historical photo exhibition called 20th Century History in Pictures: Italy-Russia; and a proposal for the Lipetsk Region’s Theater of Touch to create an art gallery for the blind, and to create a joint theater project for children.

1. \* Materials from “Lipetsk Newspaper”, “Lipetsk News” Agency, “City 48” and URL http://www kultura48.ru were used to prepare this article. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)