# Seeds of Imagination – Development of Russian – European Cultural Relations by means of Theatrical and Performing Arts

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## About the Project in General

With *Seeds of Imagination* the project partners build bridges between Russia and the EU, particularly Finland, by means of theatre and the performing arts. It targets performing arts professionals including actors, directors, writers, designers, producers, critics, students, translators etc. The project started in March 2009 and continues until end of August 2010. The total budget of the project is 375,000 €, and the funding through the European Commission IBPP-program consists of 300,000 €. The project is led by the Finnish Theatre Information Centre in Helsinki (www.teatteri.org).

In *Seeds of Imagination* The Finnish Theatre Information Centre works together with 10 partners, of which 8 are in Russia and 2 in Finland. In addition to this it has 5 associate partners in Russia, Finland, Sweden and Estonia. Some areas where *Seeds of Imagination* carries out concrete activities are geographically isolated like Siberia. *Seeds of Imagination* not only makes it possible for artists and theatre practitioners from the large cities like Moscow and St. Petersburg, who are already in a situation to engage in dialogue with foreign colleagues, to benefit from the project’s activities but also focuses on regions where such exchange is less common and therefore the actions can have a large impact.

*Seeds of Imagination* offers local audiences the opportunity to engage with foreign influences, be it through the reading of European plays or the presentation of Finnish productions. *Seeds of Imagination* understands itself also as a gateway for Europe to Russia because there is a need to learn not only about current theatrical trends and contemporary working methods but also about social developments in the countries concerned.

### The project’s objectives:

* to establish a strong partnership based on the exchange of skills, experiences and knowledge
* to create opportunities for intercultural dialogue as the basis for future cooperation between Russian and Finnish theatre professionals and institutions
* to promote European values and help shape identities
* to disseminate information and knowledge about Finnish and Russian theatre and to provide access to texts, productions, venues, training and people from Russia and Finland
* to facilitate and encourage mobility across national as well as cultural borders

### The project activities:

The concrete activities of *Seeds of Imagination* are structured in two groups and consist of approximately 25 different actions realized during 18 months. The *Learning & Sharing* activities aim to offer theatre practitioners from both countries the opportunity to enter into dialogue. Like the name suggests, the objective is to learn from each other by sharing experiences and best practices. This happens in artistic master classes, seminars and workshops on playwriting, children’s theatre and opera, translating etc. and in training on networking, international mobility and cultural management. The second strand of activities runs under the heading *Reading & Performing* and includes staged readings of plays and support for Russian-Finnish co-productions, master classes and laboratories held by internationally acclaimed theatre and artistic directors (in alia Dmitry Krymov). The project also contributes to the international playwriting competition New Baltic Drama 2011. The winning texts from participating countries Russia, Finland and Sweden will be presented in Turku, European Capital of Culture in 2011.

## Access to Information:

*Seeds of Imagination* attaches great importance to the dissemination of information related to the project actions but also related to the content discussed in the *Learning & Sharing.* In addition to distributing information through its partners’ websites (in particularly those of the Finnish Theatre Information Centre, the Finnish Cultural Institute in St. Petersburg and the Russian Theatre Union) the project has also set up its own website in Russian and English to make information about the project actions widely accessible (www.seeds.fi). The aim of the website is to provide easy access to information about the project activities and on how to participate in them. Secure pages are a way for the project partners to exchange information and can be used for self-evaluation. Information about the project is also disseminated at international conferences and through international networks of which the partners are members.

The project foresees the publication of an end report bringing together the experiences from the project and the findings of the *Learning & Sharing* actions as well as a publication of Finnish theatre today for Russian readers.

The Networking and Mobility Training Module of *Seeds of Imagination* has used the publication “Moving Art – a guide to the export and import of cultural goods between Russia and the European Union” commissioned by the Delegation of the European Commission to Russia as a springboard for information sheets for EU-Russian theatre mobility. These fact sheets are spread during the project´s training modules organized together with the Theatre Union of Russian Federation and can be used even after the duration of the project. Such a series of information sheets might in future contribute to an expanded publication on performing arts mobility.

## Examples of most popular activities:

A very successful activity has been the writing of a new play called *Winter War* by three Russian and three Finnish young playwrights. The process has been marked by already two readings at theatre festivals in both countries, and a third, staged reading, is going to take place in Moscow at Russia´s foremost theatre festival Golden Mask in March 2010. The project runs under an action called “Unknown History”, and has proved to be an inspiring working method through which the writers of both countries have had the possibility to dive into a time of controversy (1939) and its consequences for the two nations, mostly unknown for the young generation in both countries.

Another example of a successful partnership programme is *The Contemporary Finnish Children Operas for Russian Theatres* –project pursued together with our partner The Finnish Institute in St. Petersburg (please, see information in addition). In Russia there are hardly any examples of theatre or opera for children in the very youngest age groups, while in many European countries it is already an existing tradition. The project has among other activities produced a colourful booklet with a CD consisting of musical excerpts which is disseminated at seminars and workshops held in Finland and Russia. The project is now resulting in the first co-productions of contemporary Finnish operas for children in Russian music theatres.

*Seeds of Imagination* also develops training for trainers and a transferable model for training in networking and mobility and theatre management which can be applied in other contexts and other countries. It also provides the grounds for continuing exchange between translators of drama from Russia and Finland. The Networking and Mobility Training Module along with the Educational Programme in Theatre, Touring and Festival Management are gaining increasing popularity thanks to the organizational help from our partner The Theatre Union of Russian Federation. Seminars have been held in Nizhny Novgorod, St. Petersburg and Omsk, and will be held in Yekaterinburg, Moscow and Novosibirsk. This activity has proven its effectiveness and will certainly be one of the most successful partnership activities continuing even after the project is over.

The flowers and trees the partners hope to see grow from the seeds of this project are lasting cooperation between cultural institutions and other performing arts organisations from all involved countries, increased capacity of performing arts professionals to deal with networking, mobility and management issues, improved access to information, texts, venues, people etc., a new play in Russian and artistic co-productions.

## What is needed for successful partnership?

There are 10 points which we would like to stress:

1. Existing needs for co-operation
2. Genuine desire to work together
3. Active partners
4. Strong project leading
5. Existing infrastructure contributes to a quick start
6. Additional financing support from the partners
7. Good language skills
8. Good networks
9. Understanding of different working methods (=acceptance of cultural collisions)
10. Enthusiasm

## Contacts

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## The Seeds of Imagination project partners:

**Partner 1** Finnish Cultural Institute in St. Petersburg

**Partner 2** Meyerhold Centre, Moscow

**Partner 3** Project Open Stage, Moscow

**Partner 4** Omsk State Drama Fifth Theatre, Omsk

**Partner 5** Baltic International Festival Center, St. Petersburg

**Partner 6** State Saint-Petersburg Drama Theatre “Priut Comedianta”, St. Petersburg

**Partner 7** School of Modern Drama, Moscow

**Partner 8** Theatre Union of the Russian Federation

**Partner 9** Korjaamo Culture Factory, Helsinki

**Partner 10** Turku City Theatre, Turku