Fylkesråd for kultur, miljø og folkehelse Hild-Marit Olsen
Norsk-russiske kulturdager
Norwegian-Russian cultural on regional level in the High North
Petrozavodsk, Russland, 21. september 2012

Dear Minister of Culture of The Republic of Karelia, Representatives from the Government, Regional representatives and participants.

First of all, let me tell You how much I appreciate to be here. It is my first visit to Petrozavodsk and Karelia. But I can assure You – it will not be my last.

It was an impressive and generous program yesterday, with a lovely joint venture musical with participation from Russian and Norwegian musicians and ballet artist. Also good to see the International Youth Club performs “Who am I” and “Solveig”. And I must say that every time I meet and see the young generation, I see the future of our two countries, and I feel a great optimism and hope of a good and prosperous cooperation. Thank You also for the lovely meals and receptions. I already feel that we are good friends and partners.

The Russian – Norwegian cooperation in the field of culture and arts is important. And I am glad we can meet in Petrozavodsk and take our cooperation even further.

Russia and Norway are neighbours. And in the northern part of Norway we have a long tradition in cooperation with Russians that goes centuries back in time. In modern days, Nordland County’s formal cooperation with Leningrad Oblast started in the late eighties, and this year we celebrate our 25th anniversary of this cooperation.

When we celebrated our famous author Knut Hamsun three years ago, it was natural to invite our Russian friends to participate in Nordland, and to arrange Hamsun finale in St Petersburg and Leningrad Oblast. Through Hamsun finale there was a festival in St Petersburg in which a lot of our cultural institutions participated. Nordland Visual Theatre showed the play Hunger, there was several concerts with Norwegian and Russian musicians, there where an art exhibition with artists from Northern Norway, film shows and a book and photo exhibition in collaboration with the Russian National Library in St Petersburg. The exhibition toured the libraries in Leningrad and St Petersburg. To explain the variety of our cooperation, I would also like to mention the literature research conference during Hamsun Finale hosted by Hamsun Centre and The Norwegian University Centre in St Petersburg.

The year after a group of national and regional cultural institutions from Russia where invited to Norway and Nordland to meet with colleagues from similar institutions and to join us at the opening of the exhibition at the Hamsunsenter in Hamarøy and to discuss more intensive about the literature heritage.

Several of the municipalities in Nordland cooperate with municipalities in Russia. As an example I’d like to mention the friend cities Petrozavodsk and Mo i Rana.
The Barents cooperation is known to be good and strong. Our counties now know each other quite well, and cooperate smoothly and easy. We share knowledge, and networks. We are regional colleagues crossing borders. And our colleagues on each side of the borders are only a mail or a telephone away. We may work in different ways, we speak different languages. But when we know each other, these are not obstacles, but rather possibilities.

Today we meet within the frames of the Agreement of Cultural Cooperation signed by the Russian and the Norwegian Ministers of Culture. The formal agreements have been a strong fundament to build on. Networks between Cultural institutions, artists and Non-Governmental organizations have been made. And today our experts will discuss important examples on how to work together in real life.

Our experience is that when we bring institutions and experts together, new ideas will grow and new ways of making projects and joint ventures will emerge. Before I mention examples of different projects, I would like to spend a few minutes to tell you just a little about the cultural cooperation between Nordland, Troms and Finnmark Counties in Northern Norway.

The Northern Norway Cultural Agreement is unique in several ways. Through this agreement we cooperate on a broad level. We even own and finance several cultural institutions together. Several of the directors of these institutions are here today, and many of you know them already through several joint Russian-Norwegian projects: Our joint musical institutions: Musikk I Nordland – with the MiN Ensemble; Scene Finnmark with Ensemble North and LINK; Kultur i Troms with Arctimus, Fotefar and Sami song; og Nordnorsk Jazzsenter. Our joint festival: The Arts Festival of North Norway. Our dance institution Dansearena Nord.

In our current agreement, we have decided to concentrate on three main themes of strategic importance: Film, music and visual arts.

Why do the three Northern counties cooperate in this way? We have common challenges in many ways. We live in the Arctic; we live in huge scarcely populated areas with several small cities and villages. We are convinced that by joining efforts, money and resources, we will gain in every aspect. We will gain by building strong artistic institutions and networks; we will gain in opportunities to give our inhabitants a broad variety of artistic performances on a high level; and we will gain economically by joining forces.

In our modern world we think global and act local. For the young generations and for our artists and cultural institutions international cooperation falls natural. International cooperation is nothing extra – it is a part of basics!

I would like to show some examples of our Norwegian Russian Cooperation.

Tromsø International Film Festival – in short called TIFF - is an important meeting point for filmmakers from the North, including Russia. In this festival filmmakers show their films in the main programme Film from North, they have workshops and they discuss ideas and new projects. TIFF is not only an important regional meeting place. It has become the most important meeting place in Norway for high quality art film. The festival brings together filmmakers, experts, and the inhabitants of Northern Norway.
In the Northern Youth Film Festival, NUFF, young filmmakers to be come together and make films together under guidance of professional filmmakers. In this way they learn and make friends and contacts for life. Another youth festival based on the same principles is The Barents Youth Film Festival in Bodø in Nordland.

During the last years there has been a strong connection between Petrozavodsk and Mo I Rana – especially within music. The project Petrozavodsk meets Mo i Rana in a Melting Pot is developing as I speak. Three musicians from Petrozavodsk and three musicians from Mo I Rana are meeting these days in here in Petrozavodsk to make a concert with elements of classical music, Karelian and Norwegian folk music, jazz and blues. Through tradition with modern creativity and musicality they will make new music – never heard before. Opening night of this project will take place in Mo I Rana under the festival Smeltedigelen or Melting Pot in the end of October this year.

The local communities and cities in our two countries have friend cities. Through this cooperation there is a broad cultural exchange which first of all involves ordinary schools, cultural schools and different organisations like quires, bands, theatre groups and folk artists.

As an example I would like to mention the cooperation between Knut Hamsun School in Hamarøy, Nordland and School no 8 in Kirisji in Leningrad oblast. The two municipalities Tysfjord and Kirisji have cooperated since 1992. In 2010 the two schools signed a mutual agreement and this year they made a theatre play together based on a story by Knut Hamsun. 8 young actors played on the same stage in Russian and Norwegian making an old story about love, jealousy and common attitudes come alive and applicable for our youths of today.

The cultural cooperation functions on a national, a regional and a local level. On its best it functions at all three levels at the same time. Representatives of the Norwegian National Opera and Ballet are with us to day.

Through the cooperation there is established a unique cooperation between The Mariinskij Opera and Ballet Theatre and the Northern Lights Festival in Tromsø.
The current program for the Norwegian Russian Cooperation, states that it is important to save our cultural heritage. At the same time it states the importance of development and to strengthen the friendship between our people.

I think these aspects are vital. We live in the tension between heritage and the future -between our valuable old traditions and old knowledge on one hand; and modern inventions on the other. And just in this span between the old and the new you find the force of creativity.

One of our playwriters used to say that: “You never write an entirely new play. You just rewrite the best of the old ones”. Everything has been said or written, but we do it in new words and in new ways.

I would like to mention one of our programmes in Nordland: Den verdifulle kystkulturen - The Valuable Coastal Culture. Through this programme we sustain and develop local communities by investing in projects based on cultural heritage. It started with Vega World Heritage Area, and the traditions in these islands.
In this picture you see the Vega archipelago. It is situated on one big and thousands of small islands out in the ocean. Vegas history goes ten thousand years back in time. Through the programme a lot of new companies have been established. Some make products based on traditional crafts, others tasteful foods made of local commodities. One of the famous traditions of Vega is the special bond between the eider ducks and the local people. Through centuries people have built homes and nested the ducks and sheltered them from danger – from mink and eagles. In return they gained the valuable eider downs to use in pillows and duvets.

Today the fishing industries and the tourism are the main industries in Vega. I believe we have common challenges in how to combine culture and arts with tourism, and how to develop a sustainable tourism based on our beautiful nature and our cultural heritage. I am glad this is one of the themes of this conference, and I am looking forward to going to Kizhi Island on Saturday.

But also within the arts I am happy that so many representatives of artists and cultural institutions are here. I am delighted that artists take the necessary initiatives, and form their projects based on genuine artistic ideas. Artistic projects must develop from within and find their form within a mutual cooperation between the participants. I am looking forward to see what kind of projects that will emerge from the discussions and networks within the Norwegian Russian Cooperation.

We are still in the beginning of this conference. But I would like to use this opportunity to invite you all to Nordland next year. We are happy to host the Russian-Norwegian Cultural Forum in 2013. Next year our intention is to invite you to Lofoten to join the cultural forum under the Lofoten International Art Festival in September. I hope you will enjoy the combination of wild nature, hospitable people, and modern art.

We have a saying in Norway and in Russia: Action speak louder than words. The Norwegian Russian Cooperation is a good example. Its actions speak about a good cooperation. I am looking forward to learn more during these days, to hear more about our projects and to see the new projects in the future.

At the end, I would like to show you a short video from Dansearena Nord in Hammerfest in Finnmark. Dansearena Nord provides producers and premises for dance groups that would like to go there to develop their dance projects. They also provide Artist in Residency for dancers and choreographers. Their main focus is Northern Norway and The Barents Region.

Thank you - and all the best to our hosts and the participants.