

NEWS & EVENTS > Winners of the first-ever Russia-wide acceleration programme for cultural leaders announced

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Out of more than 800 projects, experts picked the best ideas that are prone to change Russia's cultural landscape in the next few years.

"Cultural Initiative / Leadership in Creative Industries" is the first-ever acceleration programme launched by [Universal University](#) and [Senezh Management Lab](#) to support creative enthusiasts who want to reshape the cultural scene of their region, inspire new "third places", and usher in new opportunities for the communities living beyond Moscow.

About the accelerator

The open call for the programme “Cultural Initiative / Leadership in Creative Industries” was announced on the 13th of August, 2019 by Universal University, the first independent university for creative industries in Russia. By mid-October, 857 projects were submitted by 1770 individual applicants from 63 regions. The program included public lectures as well as online and offline mentorship sessions held in October and November that culminated in the public pitch event on the 11th of December 2019.

In total 34 teams from Moscow, Saint Petersburg, the Republic of Tatarstan, Sverdlovsk Oblast, Samara Oblast, Tyumen Oblast, Khabarovsk Krai, and other regions, pitched their projects to industry professionals, businesses, and government officials.

The jury shortlisted 15 winning projects across five nominations:

- The place of power
- Event-driven regional development
- Local community development through creative and arts education
- Cultural tourism
- Digital-project for culture

Vast majority of the projects sought to boost cultural tourism in their region as a driving force for urban development, creating new jobs and enabling top talents to stay and contribute to their communities. As [the study](#) published by Financial University in September 2019 revealed, one-third of the surveyed people aged 18–30 are planning to leave their small town for a bigger city — usually Moscow and Saint Petersburg. The top 10 Russian cities most often abandoned by young professionals include Tolyatti, Omsk, Barnaul, Chelyabinsk, Volgograd, Magnitogorsk, Kemerovo, Lipetsk, Ulyanovsk, and Naberezhnye Chelny. During the final pitching, some representatives of these localities got a chance to hit the stage and compete for the grant.

And the winner is...

Among the winning projects that got awarded with 2 million rubles' prize (roughly 14,000 euro) are *DerevnyaStyle*, the interactive art festival about country life in the Republic of Tatarstan, and *Salty Ear*, the national tourist trail in the Perm Territory.

The group *DerevnyaStyle* (“CountryStyle”) was initiated by three couples living in a small village in the Republic of Tatarstan. The enthusiasts wanted to engage in a family-friendly activity that would brighten up their everyday lives and inspire local development. Their annual interactive art festival called *Selo* (“Village”) represents the country life, offering rustic craft workshops, lectures “on a bench”, wild competitions, and authentic services.

Azat and Elena the Valievs, the leaders behind *DerevnyaStyle*:

“We started with a rough idea; three couples wanted to improve living conditions for their kids and their neighbors. Now, after the acceleration program, we’ve got a clear concept and a firm project implementation plan.”

The Perm Territory lies in the western piedmonts of the Ural Mountains and boasts scenic natural beauty: cliffs, waterfalls, rivers, lakes, and forests. But despite the dense highway network, the region lacks touristic infrastructure — parking spots, cafes, viewpoints, and hotels where tourists could stay overnight and then continue trekking on the next day.

Two young architects from the architect firm *Ad Hoc Architecture*, when initiating the project *Salty Ear*, ventured to create several pieces of architecture that would fit the surroundings and help preserve the natural landscape. Eventually, the trail got the shape of an ear and was dubbed “Permyak Salty Ears” — the traditional nickname given to the inhabitants of the Perm region that used to live on salt making. Legend has it that the workers who used to carry bags of salt on their shoulders would have their ears saturated with salt and thus were given the nickname “Permyak Salty Ears”.

Stanislav Subbotin and Daria Kirillova, *Salty Ear*:

“Cultural Initiative” allowed us to take a fresh look at what we were doing. In the nearest future, we are going to establish a working project development schedule. Hopefully, in a year, everyone will get a chance to come to the starting point of our trail, sense the power of the place, and “get to the bottom” of it.”

[Universal University](#) awarded its special prize — 100 000 rubles’ scholarship — to the members of two teams: *Artnagrada*, the online aggregator for competitions, grants, and awards in the arts sector, and the unnamed project for launching an IoT-themed platform. The winners can

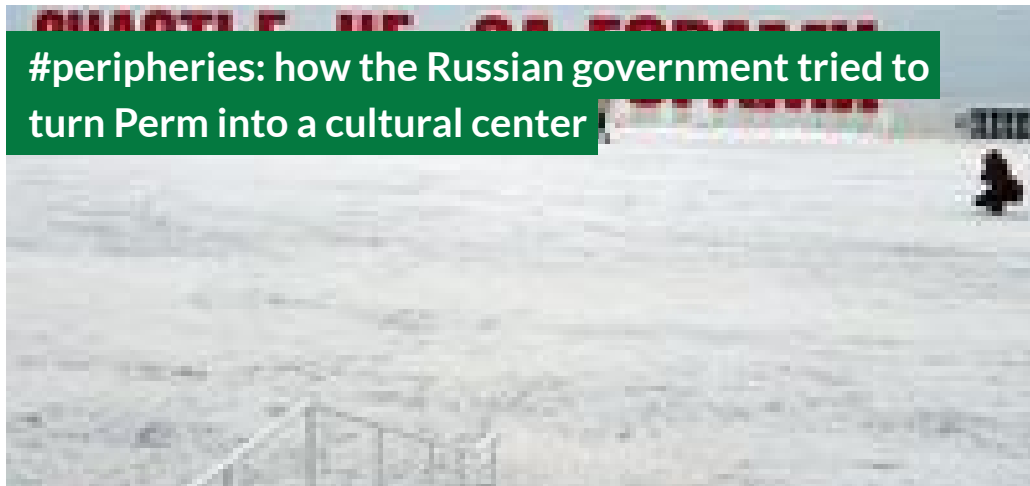
use the scholarship to cover the costs of studying at any program of their choice within the University.

Other special prizes were introduced by the accelerator's partners — [KudaGo](#), the Russian online events discovery service, and [Design Factory FLACON](#) in Moscow.

The full list of winners is available in Russian at [cultureleaders.ru](#)

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