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Life after Japan: the Danish Case

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1. Introduction

I am happy to read many letters about the experiences of IEICE members residing in Japan; most times, these letters put a smile on my face as I also found the experience memorable. This is the reason I felt compelled to write about an aspect foreigners face sometimes: life after Japan. I lived in Japan from 2006 to 2011, first through a Japanese Society for Promotion of Science scholarship and hosted by Osaka University, and then at Hitachi Central Research Laboratory. I never learnt as much as I did during this period, surrounded by brilliant people who mentored and took a personal interest on me.

In late 2011, I joined the Technical University of Denmark, where I am currently an Associate Professor in the area of Photonic Communications. And against the odds, I have found ways to stay in touch with Japan. I will explain how in the next sections.

2. Denmark and Japan

I first need to describe Denmark a bit; Japanese people know Denmark mainly because of the pastry shops (Andersen), cutlery (Royal Copenhagen) and toys (Lego). However, there is more than this. Denmark is a main supplier to Japan of high quality pork, shrimps and cheese, diabetes drugs and off-shore wind mills. Minimal in size in comparison with other western countries, this presence is huge when considering Denmark has a population of 5.5 million people (think Hokkaido with half the space). This good relation has been identified and is nurtured in Denmark. For example, the Copenhagen Business School [1] offers a Bachelor in Asian Studies specialized in Japan: students in this program study Japanese language to a business level, along with culture, economics and sociology. Aarhus University offers not only the bachelor, but also a Master program specialized in Japan.

The academic presence of Japan is not only limited to tertiary education. Young graduates from high school in Denmark can spend time in Folk High Schools such as Bosei, a formerly Japanese boarding school under Tokai University, and now focusing on teaching youngsters through Japanese fine arts and sports.

3. Bringing Japan to Denmark and participating

This interest for Japan translates in many events and networks with a Japanese flavor happening in Copenhagen. Every year, the Sakura festival [3] is organized next to the Little Mermaid, and it includes demonstrations of ikebana, tea ceremony, traditional

dances, mochi making and serving, haiku, martial arts and even karaoke.

Local city halls often dedicate season long cultural activities about Japan (see Japansk Forår in Gladsaxe Kommune [4]).



Fig. 1 Events related to the Sakura Festival next to the Little Mermaid.

4. Scientific opportunities – a way to stay in touch

The European Commission already identified and financed joint projects in the area of ICT during the FP7 (2007-2013), and has laid out a roadmap of joint activities in the framework of Horizon2020 [5]. For the last years, the EC in liaison with the NICT has launched twin calls in the area of optics and photonics, enabling the possibility to jointly tackle scientific challenges. Beyond research activities, also education had found its way through Erasmus Mundus Master programs – last year I had the chance to spend a month at Osaka University as MAPNET Scholar. MAPNET is a Master of Photonics provided by different top European universities and Japanese industrial actors [6].