



**HOKKAIDO**  
UNIVERSITY  
EUROPE OFFICE

# Hokkaido University Europe Office in Helsinki

## Newsletter Vol. 1

Spring/Summer, 2021



Helsinki Cathedral in Summer

### 1. Message from the Director of Europe Office in Helsinki

The Europe Office in Helsinki was established in 2012 as the third overseas satellite office of Hokkaido University. We have here decided to publish a newsletter twice a year (Spring/Summer and Autumn/Winter) to widely disseminate information on our activities. The Helsinki Office stands between Hokkaido University and European universities as well as research institutes and provides a base for activities that act as a bridge in the fields of education and research. Our activities include supporting international mobility for Hokkaido University students in the

University's First Step Program, hosting the Hokkaido University Exchange Days with the partner universities and research institutes in Europe, public relations efforts in Europe for the University with various study abroad fairs and providing networking opportunities for our alumni, etc. In our newsletters, we would like to introduce such attempts and efforts with the hope to increase engagement from the public.

More than a year has passed since the COVID-19 pandemic started to spread around the world. The Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games are now being held by and large with no spectators, a measure to prevent the spread of the

coronavirus, from July to September. Unfortunately, new cases of the coronavirus in Japan are on the rise again in the metropolitan areas including the City of Sapporo. Although a side effect of hosting the Olympic Games, the number of newly confirmed cases, is on the rise and the negative aspects of the Olympic Games such as political and commercial issues have been pointed out, I am truly impressed by the passion of the athletes from all over the world, their incredible performance and their wonderful sportsmanship. Of course, there are winners and losers as it is a competition, however, their untiring efforts before the day of the match would perhaps create deep sympathy not only between athletes and spectators but also between athletes regardless of victory or defeat.

Recently, the value of “diversity” has been actively emphasized worldwide. Biological societies are extremely diverse and human societies are also highly diverse in terms of gender, age, race, nationality, religion, culture and values. In the Olympic and Paralympic Games, athletes focus on their own games and compete for skills, physical strength and intelligence while transcending differences in backgrounds. Fostering a sense of solidarity and unity across nationality and race could be a wonderful energy created by sports. The second law of thermodynamics, known as "the law of increasing entropy", tells us that "disorder" and "randomness" tend to increase in nature as time progresses. While thinking in that manner and watching the Olympic Games, I feel that the existence of diversity is a natural process in both biological and human societies, and it is very important to



Marathon entrance of Tokyo Olympic in Sapporo

recognize, accept and respect all diversities as they are. Diversity is ensured in biological societies, which are highly dynamic and highly ordered. In order to sustain diversity in human societies, it is essential to form an order based on mutual understanding. I hope that human societies, which are dominated by uncertainties, shall strive to realize "beautiful diversity" built upon a mutually agreeable order.

It can be noted that diversity has high “flexibility” and quick “resiliency” to respond to unexpected changes. Right now, the world is trying to overcome the coronavirus pandemic by combining our intelligence and technologies. Although the world is being transformed, we can still follow the proverb, “Fortune and misfortune are intertwined as a rope”. When London suffered the great plague epidemic in the 17th century, young Isaac Newton who was a student at the University of Cambridge had to work from home in Woolsthorpe. During the quarantine time, he made the three major discoveries including "Newton’s law of universal gravitation" inspired by the falling apples. This period is later called Newton's "Creative vacation". I understand that this pandemic disaster is giving us an opportunity to cultivate diversity of sensibilities and thoughts by noticing what we never noticed or felt and thinking what we have never thought of before.

To be followed by the Paralympic Games in late August, the Olympic Games which lasts for more than two weeks is just halfway through with hot battles. Various games and matches are broadcasted on TV every day. The marathon game will be held in the City of Sapporo this weekend, and runners will run through our Sapporo campus. Watching the race roadside will not be allowed due to the request from the Olympic Committee, but instead I would like to quietly cheer for wonderful performances of the runners through the TV screen.

Toshiro Ohashi

Professor, Faculty of Engineering, Hokkaido University

Sunday, 1 August 2021, in extreme hot Sapporo

## 2. Featuring Our Alumni - Memory at Hokkaido Uni -

I (Dr. Manish Kumar) spent 9 months in Hokkaido doing research on lignin –based carbon fibers funded by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS) and experiencing a new culture. I'd like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the JSPS for this. I am an Indian citizen and completed my doctoral and postdoctoral studies in Germany and Finland, respectively. When I arrived at the Osaka airport, I was surprised to see the helpful nature of Japanese citizens. Many things are well organized: I received my residence card at the same airport, and the immigration process was very simple. Then I arrived at Sapporo airport, where I was warmly welcomed by a colleague.

I was overwhelmed to find people's politeness in Japan. Soon, I felt very comfortable with people who love science in the embrace of nature. Hokkaido University (HU) is one of the best universities in Japan because of its strong collaborations and superior research infrastructure in the gorgeous campus. Today, I am honored to be a member of the HU alumni association in Europe. I've had the opportunities to witness a variety of natural wonders in and around Hokkaido including a snow festival, a research stay in Tomakomai Experimental Forest, a visit to Noboribetsu onsen and many others. Although the language is a hurdle, the warmth of the Japanese people and their unique culture make it appealing to return to Japan again and again. There are three things I took away from my time in Japan: (1) hard work, (2) sharing, and (3) politeness.



Dr. Manish Kumar



In front of Department, Graduate School and School of Agriculture

Professors are very disciplined and dedicated to their profession. Japanese cuisine is really tasty so it's best to share it with people. I can recommend the fellow student to please visit Hokkaido University.

Currently, I am a senior researcher at the Institute for Solid State Physics (IFP), University of Bremen, Bremen, Germany. I'm in charge of electrochemical and biochemical sensor development. This includes photoelectrochemical sensors based on group III-nitride nanowires and hybrid nanostructures. I'm also investigating the GaN-based electrolyte-gate field-effect transistors for cardiac electrical activity detection as enzyme-modified transistors. My present research focuses on the immobilization of biomolecules (such as various enzymes) on the surface of semiconductor devices, as well as their electrical characterization. I am interested in "Green materials" for energy storage and biomedical devices.

Dr. Manish Kumar  
University of Bremen, Bremen, Germany

## 3. Latest News from Finland/Helsinki

### 3.1 Budget for Scientific Research after COVID-19

The Finnish National Broadcasting Company, YLE, reported that the discussion held within the Finnish Government in the spring of 2021 on its future budget planning includes phased budget cuts for scientific research starting on 2023. The

Government has made deep budget cuts and implemented large reduction in staff and teaching posts several years ago which particularly affected major universities such as Helsinki University. According to this new plan, the Government is aiming to cut the budget for the Academy of Finland, the largest research funding organization in Finland, by 35 million euros starting on 2023 (In 2020, the Academy of Finland granted 5 billion euros to various groups and individual research projects).

The planned cuts have resulted from worsened financial situations due to the COVID-19, which affected the revenue from state-operated gambling. The Academy of Finland explains that the revenue from the gambling industry was down more than 400 million euros due to the pandemic and the Government aims to compensate the loss by cutting the budget for scientific research.

### 3.2 Finnish Universities in Next Academic Year

Finnish universities are starting a new academic year between mid-August and early September, which marks the second academic year since the pandemic broke out. In the autumn of 2020 they tried to keep in-person classes as long as possible particularly for first-year students but were forced to move to almost entirely to online learning with campuses closed down again from the end of October until the end of the academic year in May 2021. Unlike the last spring when the national lockdown was suddenly imposed, university entrance exams and interviews were carried out in-person without confusion at large-scale venues.

As of August 1st, 67% of the entire population had their first vaccine jab and 34% are fully vaccinated. With the hope that the situation will get better, Finnish universities will reopen their campuses and partially resume in-person classes starting in August, and are planning to fully return to in-person classes in January 2022 so long as the situation does not worsen. While the Finnish Government strongly recommends continuing online learning until the end of 2021, universities

are willing to continue to lift restrictions including for in-person events on the campus in an attempt to reduce mental and time burden on students and teaching staffs.

### 4. Latest Activities and Upcoming Events from Europe Office in Helsinki

#### 4.1 Latest News about Finland from the Helsinki Office

The Helsinki Office has been offering latest news from Finland monthly to a radio program “FIKA” on FM Hokkaido “Air G” (on Sundays, 7:30-8:00) since the summer of 2019. The radio program introduces Nordic (particularly Swedish) music and culture and features the news from the Helsinki Office on the last Sundays of the month. The latest news is not only about the Helsinki Office but also includes topics on the Finnish society, culture, and politics.

You can read the past news after aired on the “FIKA” website (<https://www.air-g.co.jp/fika/>) as well as on the website of the Helsinki Office (<https://www.hokudai.fi/>).

#### 4.2 A Research Paper Borne out of Program by the Helsinki Office

Since 2018, the Helsinki Office has been offering opportunities for Japanese exchange students (including those from Hokkaido University) to visit a primary school in Helsinki to learn about Finnish school life and differences between Finnish and Japanese classrooms. Prior to the pandemic, this program has attracted approximately 15 students annually who have interests in pedagogy, linguistics, language



Inside of Helsinki office

education, and social welfare. Based on this experience, one student who participated in this program in early 2020 with other researchers has co-authored a paper on comparison between Finnish and Japanese special support education in primary school.

The paper was published in the *Otemon Gakuin University Bulletin of Sociology* (No. 15, March 2021) with the title “A Study of Teacher’s Education Program in Finland and Japan: Focusing on Special Support Education-”.

#### 4.3 Two Hundreds and Thirtieth Anniversary of the Return of Daikokuya Kodayu to Hokkaido, Japan, in 2022

The year 2022 marks the 230th anniversary of the return of Daikokuya Kodayu to Hokkaido (in the current city of Nemuro) with Adam Laxman, emissary of the Russian Empire. As is well known in Japan, Daikokuya Kodayu and some Japanese landed after drifting on the island Amchitka of the Russian Empire. The Botanist Kiril Laxman took care of Daikokuya and other castaways in Irkutsk and brought them to Saint-Petersburg, where they met the Empress Ekaterina II to ask for the permission to go back to Japan. The Empress assigned Kirill and his son, Adam, to bring Daikokuya to Japan for trade negotiations.

Kirill Laxman was born in a Swedish aristocrat family in the eastern Finnish city of Savonlinna (at that time in the territory of the Kingdom of Sweden) and later moved to Saint-Petersburg, where he worked as botanist. In Finland, he is regarded as a Finnish aristocrat researcher of the 18th century.

In cooperation with the Embassies of Japan in Finland and Russia as well as the Hokkaido University Russian Office in Moscow, the Helsinki Office is planning anniversary events about Kodayu, Kirill and Adam Laxman, the important figures that connect Finland, Russia, and Hokkaido.

#### Hokkaido University Europe Office in Helsinki Newsletter Vol. 1, Spring/Summer, 2021

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Date of issue: Wednesday, 25th August 2021

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A riverside park in Helsinki