

UDK: 378.4

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A Brief History of the Cultural Exchange Program between University of Ljubljana and Tohoku Fukushi University

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Abstract

As a program coordinator at Tohoku Fukushi University, working in collaboration with Dr. Andrej Bekeš at the University of Ljubljana, I review the current status of a cultural exchange program established in 1997 between the two universities. Since 1998 I have taken over this exchange program. Dr. Suguru Araki who joined me in 2002 has been supporting me with the pre-trip training for the participants. In the last twenty years the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology strives to promote the international exchange programs in order to cultivate leaders who can play active roles in the world stage. They are called *Kokusaijin* (internationally minded persons) in Japanese. According to my twelve years' experience, the elements to become a *Kokusaijin* are three-fold: First, students must be willing to gain some major or expertise. Second, students should have confidence to communicate with people of various national origins as they become skillful in specific fields. Third, students need language skills to deliver their thoughts in these fields. This exchange program is designed not only to promote the friendships between the partners and to develop the mutual understanding through the culture and language study, but also to provide opportunities for students to experiment on what they have learned, to broaden their horizons to see things from different angles, and also to promote students' communication ability to become a *Kokusaijin*. The present paper comprises the description of an early stage of the program, a process of recruiting applicants, the activities in Sendai and in Ljubljana, and the students' debriefing of the program.

Keywords: culture, language, confidence, communication ability, *Kokusaijin*.

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1 How the program started

In 1995 Tohoku Fukushi University (hereafter TFU) sent its first group of preliminary investigators to the Republic of Slovenia. This group of ten delegates was led by the Dean of Administration, Sakae Otake. This was just four years after it won its independence from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. In order to introduce the new-born nation to Japan, Slovenia participated in the *8th JAPAN EXPO in Miyagi '97* (web1) at the *Yume Messe MIYAGI*, just 11 km east of Sendai city. The exhibition was hosted by the Miyagi Prefectural Government and the *Kahoku Shimpo* (a major local newspaper) under the auspices of the Ministry of International Trade and Industry. TFU provided the Exposition with the Slovenian House. All the material to build the Slovenian House was shipped over from Slovenia via Malta and the Mediterranean Sea to Japan. The carpenters actually came from Slovenia to build the House at the *Yume Messe MIYAGI*. The exposition attracted 1.06 million visitors over the period of ten weeks between July 19 and September 29, 1997. Slovenia exhibited the Slovenian political system, as well as its economy, population, geography, climate, history, and culture. There was also a folk-art articles exhibition and Slovenian products such as wines, candies, glasses, and ski gear were for sale. At the end of the exposition a Slovenian choir from the city of Maribor congratulated the organizers on their exhibition success with musical performance.

A hefty load of manpower was required to support the two-month long exposition. Those participants came up with the idea of a cultural exchange program between Tohoku Fukushi University and the University of Ljubljana (hereafter UL). They proposed that learning each other's language and culture would promote further understanding and would lead us to more practical and longstanding relationships. Thus, the first cultural exchange program set sail in 1997. Initially, at Tohoku Fukushi University Akio Sugamoto, the then Director of Operation in the Japan-Slovenia Friendship Society (web2) and the current Assistant Dean of Student Affairs at TFU, was in charge of the entire 1997 program. He selected and sent off the TFU delegates to UL in May, and later took care of Slovenian visitors to Sendai in July. Prior to the exhibition, a group of six TFU students remained in Slovenia from May 24 to June 18. Those Japanese participants, selected specifically to work as support staff in the Slovenian booth during the imminent *JAPAN EXPO* were required to quickly absorb as much information as possible about the history and culture of Slovenia during their 26-

day visit to Slovenia. Immediately before the *JAPAN EXPO*, UL sent six students to Sendai. They stayed there over the entire period of the *JAPAN EXPO* and helped run the Slovenian booth successfully. The Slovenian House built at *Yume Messe MIYAGI* in the summer of 1997 was transported off site soon after the *JAPAN EXPO* by an oversized truck. It still stands today on the TFU Second Campus as a symbol of the lasting friendship between the two countries. Most notably, it was visited in July 2008 by His Excellency Miran Čupkovič Skender, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Japan.

2 Introduction

In 1998 I started to work in this exchange program as the program coordinator under the supervision of Prof. Susumu Kimura, Chairman of the Center for International Exchange Programs, who held office till 2002 when Prof. Suguru Araki took over.

When I came to Japan in 1990, I soon found out that some Japanese students appeared to be afraid to speak English to foreigners. For instance, anyone with an average command of English would be somewhat admired. In my opinion any of those who have studied English at high schools should be good enough to carry out basic conversations with foreigners, which should not be a significant deal. Actually, however, students have a complex toward English, which prevents them from learning it effectively. In the last twenty years the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (web3) strives to promote the international exchange in order to cultivate leaders who can play active roles in the world stage. In Japanese they are called *Kokusaijin* (internationally minded persons). It is undeniable that English is currently a dominant international language. If students can speak English, it is one of the most useful tools for them to be *Kokusaijin*.

This program applies a different approach to language learning. In fact, the language ability is not the most important element in this program. The excellent aspects of the program are that it encourages Japanese participants to communicate with foreign partners, even if in Japanese, because our exchange partners are students in the Japanese major at UL. For those Japanese students who do not have confidence in themselves when they face English-speaking foreigners, Slovenian

students studying Japanese seriously to master its basics may be the best partners to share their challenge and to learn from each other. During the program TFU students discover the true reason why they need to learn foreign languages and how to realize the better attitude to learn a language from the UL students. TFU Students are stimulated by their Slovenian friends, and also realize that the purpose of learning a foreign language is to transmit the thoughts regardless of pronunciation or grammar. Some student participants become highly motivated in language learning after they have finished the program. This is definitely one way to help them free themselves from fear to fly.

In the preparation stage before the trip, I urge participants to learn Japanese and Slovenian history and culture as much as possible, and work on topics that they choose to give a talk on at UL. With regard to the presentations most students start from square one, and do a lot of research on their own topics, which is a laborious task. A month of research investigations and tough presentation exercises are extremely significant: The training gives students much confidence that they can achieve anything if they try hard. Other than purchasing air tickets for the whole group from the travel agency, moreover, participants have to stand on their own feet, such as going through customs and immigration processes at the airports, finding ways to read directories and maps when lost in town, checking in and out of hotels. All the above is the most important training menu to be a *Kokusaijin*.

3 Program summary

Table 1 displays a list of participants in this program since its inception in 1997. Over the last twelve years TFU has sent to UL a total of 45 undergraduate students, i.e. 8 males and 37 females. This amounts to 3.75 students/year on the average with a range of one (1999) to six (1997). The University of Ljubljana has delegated to Sendai a total of 55 undergrads, i.e. 6 males and 49 females over the same period. On the average this is 4.58 students/year with a range of one (2001) to six (1997, 1999, 2006). The figures show that there is more enthusiasm, desire and academic expectation on the Slovenian side than on the Japanese side, but to my knowledge there has never been such a long-lived well-balanced exchange program at TFU and I am proud to continue such a cultural exchange program.

	Tohoku Fukushi University	The University of Ljubljana
1997	Aki Taguchi, Chiho Yamaki, Hideaki Kagami, Nobuko Kon, Kanako Sudo, Yumiko Hanawa	Matic Brumen, Iztok Ilc, Branka Klenovšek, Urška Mavec, Sašo Mermal, Alenka Šen
1998	Aki Taguchi, Hiromi Mori, Maki Sakai, Mie Kasuga, Miki Nakayama	Klementina Bovha, Petja Mihelič, Domen Gorenšek, Kinga Varga
1999	Sachiko Murakami	Mateja Verbuč, Alja Krnjec, Lili Jovanovič, Damjan Dobranič, Domen Kavčič, Klara Hrvatín
2000	Atsuo Takahashi, Hiromi Omokawa, Utako Naka, Noriko Harada	Ajda Žemva, Nina Sok, Saša Spacal, Lea Zupanc
2001	Anna Meguro, Hiroyuki Shimoyama, Makiko Chiba, Tomomi Hotta	Jasna Baller
2002	Erina Isono, Minobu Kamata, Yuki Mathuoka, Yoshimi Aoki	Saša Verovšek, Nataša Šavli, Metka Kovačič, Olga Stojanovič, Maruša Gliha
2003	Mayu Fujikawa, Yuka Kimura	Alja Otavnik, Maja Komovec, Tamara Mlekuž, Anja Poženeš, Vanja Rahten
2004	Kotaro Naoi, Mariko Hoshi, Yuka Roppongi, Yuko Suzuki	Vesna Stopar, Anja Živko, Tjaša Rode, Nina Pergar, Nataša Mršnik
2005	Chiaki Sekiyama, Tae Kanaizumi	Katja Valjavec, Barbara Kokot, Melita Pavšič, Maja Kovač, Mateja Žekš
2006	Masahiko Suzuki, Rie Katakura, Satomi Nagayama, Yoshiko Aiba, Yuto Fujikawa	Vanesa Vujanovič, Nina Belingar, Polona Košir, Iva Lačan, Bjanka Mijanovič, Stefani Silli
2007	Kenta Katsumata, Misaki Terashima, Yuki Kikuchi, Yuri Sugawara	Polja Pretnar, Špela Fekonja, Mojca Kajiš, Suzana Gradič, Urška Slana
2008	Chihiro Chiba, Kae Takahashi, Shiori Kida, Tomonari Muraoka	Danijela Ristič, Martina Petrač, Tina Vouk

Table 1: List of participants

4 Advance preparation by TFU visitors

4.1 Recruitment and selection of students on campus

The recruitment of motivated students runs over four months, starting in July and continuing into early in October—just before departure. Students are recruited by

putting up posters on the campus bulletin boards, and by distributing a thousand fliers, mainly through the hands of language class instructors. In addition, pamphlets are handed out in front of the campus cafeteria. On the average year I target approximately ten students. After identifying promising students, I move on to selecting finalists through interviews and writing assignments. Even after the selection has been finalized, it is sometimes difficult to discern who is seriously interested in this program and who is not. If the participants appear to be less than serious or uncooperative during the preparation stage, their participation in the group may be cancelled prior to departure for Ljubljana.

4.2 Presentation of topics and practice sessions

The TFU students who are selected to participate in the program are required to give a presentation about a topic of their choice at UL. The purpose of giving a presentation is to help students achieve the “trivium”, or the three fundamental roads to liberal arts, “grammatica” or the correct use of language; “dialectica” or the logical skill in one-to-one communication; and finally “rhetorica” or the eloquent and convincing presentation in public speech in any language. Students pursuing undergraduate study must realize that obtaining bachelors degrees is commensurate with learning how to communicate their ideas coherently, and eloquently, regardless of the field of study. Dr. Suguru Araki believes in the old aphorism that Liberal education makes the “free man”. Regarding the topics of presentations, students can choose either from their major fields or from elsewhere such as Japanese history and culture. We place great emphasis on preparatory sessions for content development and speech practice, for which all student participants must attend everyday. Throughout this preparation period, each student has a chance to practice their presentations several times, helping them improve their content and gain confidence in speaking in front of an audience.

4.3 Acquiring general information of Slovenia prior to the trip

Prior to departure, we normally spend four weeks learning the basic Slovene. Five days a week during the lunch break former participants volunteer to lead the prospective participants in this crash course. The textbooks we have used so far include (Kanazashi 2001: 1) and (Svetina et al. 2004: 9). Also, we mainly use the

CDs or tapes to learn and practice Slovene pronunciation, and memorize numbers and other minimal Slovene for survival. During the course of this learning process new participants also have an opportunity to absorb information about Slovenia from their seniors who generously disclose their experiences from previous trips. In addition, I recommend the prospective participants to access the website of the Embassy of the Republic of Slovenian in Tokyo (web 4) which furnishes them with valuable information about the political system, geography, history, economy, and language of the country.

4.4 Sightseeing prior to the arrival in Slovenia

There is no international direct flight between Japan and Slovenia, which we do not consider so much a nuisance as it affords an opportunity to fly to Slovenia via one of the European countries. So far we have arranged connecting flights in such countries as the United Kingdom, Italy, Austria, France, and Switzerland. Such conditions give students a number of advantages: they have an opportunity not only to visit museums, galleries, and historical places, but also to experience European culture which can stimulate students toward broadening their horizons.

5 Activities during visits

It is essential to realize at the outset that the fields of study emphasized in the Department of Asian and African Studies at the University of Ljubljana and those at Tohoku Fukushi University are very different. Consequently, it stands to reason that activities of visiting students are also different, depending on the needs and goals of the corresponding curricula. However, the sole objective in this exchange program common to both universities is a significant emphasis on the interest in language and culture of the exchange partners.

5.1 TFU students in Ljubljana

5.1.1 Slovene classes

The TFU students are scheduled to study Slovene twice a week, approximately two hours a day. So far Dr. Andrej Bekeš, Prof. Chikako Shigemori Bučar, Ms.

Kristina Hmeljak Sangawa, and a primary school girl, Miss. Helena Livia Juvančič have taught the TFU visitors the elements of Slovene including greetings, conversations, and vocabulary that they often encounter in daily life. In addition, they also learn some Slovene grammar, such as plural/singular forms and three genders of nouns. Genders of nouns do not exist in Japanese grammar, which poses a challenge to most TFU students. In recent years Prof. Shigemori has taught Slovene grammar while Helena has often covered its pronunciation.

The TFU students have no experience on second language acquisition, whereas they only have foreign language learning experience. According to (Ellis 1994: 11), the difference between second language acquisition and foreign language learning is: the former is a language that learners acquire not only in class, but also by speaking in society or community; for example, foreigners learn and practice Slovene in Slovenia; the latter is a language that learners learn only in the classroom, they do not have the environment to practice what they learn in classes, for instance, English is learned in Japan. TFU students have opportunities to use what they acquire in classes immediately after their classes in Slovene. For instance, they use Slovene to introduce themselves when they give presentations in front of UL students. TFU Students gradually memorize expressions used for placing an order at a restaurant and the vocabulary for food—words for fish, vegetables, meats, and soups. These are extremely practical and useful. Moreover, students use the vocabulary and phrases that they are taught in class to communicate with their host families.

Accumulating such a small effort, frequent use of Slovene can allow them to be more connected with their new friends and host families. It makes their stay more pleasant. TFU Students pick up Slovene that is spoken around them as they are immersed in the native environment. Therefore, they enjoy a rare experience in the difference between less effective foreign language learning in Japan and more effective second language acquisition in Slovenia. Such a valuable experience will have a great impact upon their learning of languages, because back in Japan they do not seem to appreciate the fact that language learning processes are closely connected with using the language, the actions, and experiences associated with it.

5.1.2 Presentations by TFU students

The topics of presentations by TFU students are roughly classified into two categories: those related to their major fields of study, and those introducing the Japanese culture. In recent years Dr. Araki and I have encouraged them to choose more academic topics related to their own majors. So far most participants have majored in the fields of social welfare, social education, psychology, early childhood and primary education, and management for welfare information as they have been the strengths at our university. According to the type of topics they wish to present, professors at the UL assign the relevant departments to host the speakers and try to arrange the right kinds of audience. For example, some students such as Kenta Katsumata and Yuri Sugawara have been given opportunities to give talks in the Faculty of Social Work (*Fakulteta za socialno delo*) in 2007 as their topics fall in the field of Social Welfare. Obviously, if the topics involve cultural aspects, they will be most suitable for presentation in the Department of Asian and African Studies. Other than the above two categories there is an interesting variation that involves TFU students who are asked to participate in a Japanese translation class given to the Japanese language majors in the Department of Asian and African Studies. While a TFU student is giving his or her own presentation in Japanese, a dozen seniors in the translation class are required to take turns to consecutively translate the content of the talk into Slovene so that the lowerclassmen can keep up with the talk in Japanese.

5.1.3 Attending Japanese classes

In Slovenia domestic students have difficulty in finding Japanese people with whom to practice Japanese language. According to the statistics published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, the number of Japanese nationals in Slovenia who are long-term residents with over three months in country, with or without Slovenian permanent residence visa, is 95 (web 5) [out of the total population of 2,025,866(web 6)] as of 2007. This is a scanty 0.005%, or one Japanese to twenty thousand Slovenians. Therefore, TFU visitors are invaluable assistants for educational purposes as they are invited to attend classes as the native guest speakers. In some classes Japanese popular culture is discussed. Although UL students have studied Japanese for only a year, they manage to participate in the discussion with a herculean effort. In some other classes, TFU students are paired

up with UL students as their practice partners, and then UL students interview TFU students about their impression of Slovenia. At the end of the class, UL students will give a talk in Japanese about their interview with Japanese partners. Most TFU students are extremely impressed with UL students' learning attitude and their passion toward Japanese language and culture.

5.1.4 Visiting social service facilities

Most TFU students who participate in this program major in the following fields: social welfare, social education, psychology, early childhood and primary education, and management for welfare information. Visiting social service centers are considered as a valuable opportunity for students majoring the above fields. Further, they can conduct a comparative study of the same field in the two countries. Depending on the participants' requests, the professors at the UL can make arrangements to facilitate TFU students' projects. So far TFU students have visited a rehabilitation center, Ljubljana School for the Deaf (*Zavod za gluhe in naglušne Ljubljana*), a mental hospital, an association for the disabled, an elderly care facility, a kindergarten, the Rihard Jakopič Elementary School (*Osnovna šola Riharda Jakopiča*), and a high school.

5.1.5 History and Geography of Slovenia

Dr. Andrej Bekeš teaches the Slovenian history and geography to the TFU visitors four times during their one-month stay. Each year TFU students gain much knowledge of Slovenian history from Dr. Bekeš' classes. Students learn about the peoples who have lived in the region — from the Celtic settlements to the Roman provinces, the Huns, Germanic tribes, and the arrival of the Slavs. His classes range from the prehistory in Slovenia to the Slovenian independence from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Throughout its history, Slovenia experienced occupation, control, and influence from Romans, the Holy Roman Empire, the Hapsburg dynasty, and the Austrian Empire in its various forms.

We acknowledge a couple of obvious facts that Slovenia has undergone great political changes under the control of big empires, and nevertheless, that it survived these changes and became independent in 1991. Its independence is

attributed to the three important factors: geography, economic development, and language.

In the 3rd and 4th centuries the Romans built the following three towns: Emona (Ljubljana), which is today's capital of Slovenia, Celeia (Celje), and Poetovio (Ptuj). The area around the three towns lay at the low elevation of the Alps, which has enabled people to travel over this region since the Roman Empire built three towns. Moreover, the Romans constructed trade and military roads that ran across the Slovene territory from Italy to Pannonia. Blessed with its geographical conditions, Slovenia strengthened the foundation of economy based on the above three towns. Slovenia had been controlled by the Germanic peoples for over a thousand years. Although there were just around a million Slovenians at the beginning of 19th century, they were not assimilated into Germanic peoples such as Austrians (Chida 2000: 181). The reason is that the Slovenians preserved their mother tongue in spite of its long history of being forced to speak German under the yoke of the great empires. The Slovene language played a significant role in letting Slovenians realize that they are Slovene nationals even though they faced the difficulty to state openly that they are Slovenians. The notable Slovenians in history who consolidated the basis of the Slovene language have been commemorated in various ways in gratitude for their achievement in establishing the firm foundation of the Slovene language.

In 2004 Slovenia joined the European Union and NATO. In 2007 it joined the European Monetary Union and adopted the Euro as its currency. In my opinion this may symbolize a coming of age for a culture that has survived foreign occupation over centuries. It is also significant for TFU students, because they have a role in the continuing exchange relations with a member state of one of the greatest political unions in human history.

According to a lecture on Slovenian geography by Dr. Andrej Bekeš, Slovenia has three types of climate: the Mediterranean climate, the Alps climate, and the Continental climate. The Mediterranean climate on the Adriatic Sea coast is warm in winter, dry in summer, and produces plenty of vegetables, including olives and fish. In the Alpine region it snows heavily and stays extremely cold in winter, but farms are scattered over the foot of the Alps. There is much less snow in these more preferred locations, and the inhabitants can be food self-sufficient. Regions with the Continental climate enjoy mild to hot summers, but there are cold winters on the plateaus and in the valleys to the east. Because of the rapid change of the

temperature between day and night, the area is suited for the cultivation of apples, pears, plums, and grapes in these regions. Grapes have been grown there for two thousand years. Immediately beyond the Trieste Bay the coastal scenery drastically changes to that of characteristic gray limestone stretching up to the Vipavska Valley 20km to the east—the famed Karst region. The name Karst was derived from the region “Kras” in Slovene.

5.1.6 Homestay

Homestay is the most exciting and the most enjoyable part of the program. TFU students have a chance to stay with families of faculty, staff, or students. This is inevitably a rewarding experience, and students can attain a new level of maturity and awareness.

5.2 UL Students in Sendai

The first few years were the experimental stages in which not only the coordinator but also the instructors were put to test since they were asked to evaluate the courses and teacher performance as some instructors lacked experience in their course management. In fact, these instructors made a judgment according to the expectation of very ambitious UL students. UL students were very enthusiastic and excited about being in Japan. They were excited to learn the language, culture, and history of Japan, and whatever else they could grasp during such a short stay. Their hungry spirit and eager attitude to learn drove me to make a sincere effort to satisfy their needs. UL students' straightforward comments helped me improve the program. In addition, there is a campus club called *Fujiyama*, which represents a group of students who are interested in interactions with foreigners. Supported by its members, the present exchange program has become animated. The *Fujiyama* club members play a significant role in helping run the program smoothly and effectively. For instance, these club members help UL visitors get accustomed to their new environment. They become their language partners, and make their stay comfortable and memorable. Significant friendships have grown out of such collaboration between the two organizations.

5.2.1 Japanese lessons

(Krashen 1997: 43) states that environment is very important for learning languages “Students in the Foreign Language situation lack opportunities for using the language outside the classroom, because native speakers are not available.” Since UL students come to Japan to learn Japanese, their Japanese lessons are mostly focused on putting the grammar and vocabulary that they learn at the UL to practical use. According to (Krashen 2004: 3), in the process of learning language “The path of pleasure is the only path. The path of pain does not work for language acquisition.” It means that in the second language acquisition environment the learners can enjoy using real language, participating in the conversation at the moment they understand its content. Thus, during a lesson several TFU students volunteer as the practice partners for the UL students. In order to maximally motivate the visitors to teach themselves Japanese with or without help from Japanese partners, I arrange as many field trips as possible. Lessons in Japanese with an excellent textbook (文化外国語専門学校編 2007:41) are conducted four days a week, two hours a day, including how to introduce oneself, expressions for inviting people and declining invitations, writing diaries and thank you letters, New Year’s cards, writing compositions, wearing Kimono, and comprehending the lyrics of Japanese songs, and preparing UL students for a weekend homestay by showing useful expressions at Japanese homes, traditional way of life, and food varieties. Apart from the cultural programs, UL students have two project assignments consisting of interviews and presentations.

Regarding the interview projects, first, the students choose their own topics and make up their own questionnaires. Next, using the question forms they have made, they interview a number of people, conduct a poll, and analyze and summarize its result. Finally, they make a poster presentation of the result.

One of the most popular events is a presentation given by UL students. The TFU students are treated to a wide variety of subjects, such as Slovenian history, literature, economy, politics, and sports. For UL students this is the most challenging project, because they must use a foreign language in which it is extremely hard to make themselves understood. At the beginning UL students seem unwilling to do the presentation, and sometimes they suggest that they prefer to do it in English, because their Japanese is not good enough to survive the

presentation. I understand how stressful it is to be asked to give a talk soon after they arrive in a foreign country and everything is still unfamiliar.

For those who fear to give such a presentation, I try to emphasize that the exercise is done purely for an educational purpose, and that it is a precious opportunity to improve or brush up their language ability. In fact it is the students' event and nobody is going to evaluate them. In addition, Japanese teachers and students will help them with their Japanese and are willing to assist them until they feel comfortable standing in front of people. In order to achieve the above purpose, however, we need some time to build up the friendship and trust among all those involved in the event. Once UL students have agreed to do the difficult job, they are extremely conscientious. They always try their best on their performance, and often focus on pronunciation. On the day of the presentation you can see how serious they are, and occasionally they have even room to entertain the audience. Even though UL students have studied Japanese for only a year or two, they are able to do an excellent job. In any learning process as educators we should not let students give up simply because the task is extremely hard to accomplish. But, we should encourage them to overcome their fear of assuming that it may be impossible.

As for the audience of a few hundred TFU students, they have been impressed by the UL students' language ability. Their presentation may deliver a powerful message to TFU students that learning language is to act. For some students, moreover, it may be the first step to get to know the country of Slovenia.

5.2.2 Japanese History

In his lecture on Japanese history Prof. Hiroshi Yoshii has adopted an excellent textbook (西村繁男 1985: 6). It is illustrated with the pictures. Beginners especially can enjoy the pictures while they learn Japanese History. The book covers the most interesting information from the Jomon and Yayoi era to the modern period when the nation was embedded with Imperialism.

5.2.3 Japanese dietary culture

In his lecture of Japanese dietary culture, Prof. Hiroshi Meguro talks about the dissimilarities between Japan and European countries. It is the essential point of his lecture that major staples in European countries are meat and milk while those in Japan are rice and fish. Therefore, the method of production in Europe is stock farming while that in Japan is paddy plowing.

5.2.4 Japanese culture

In order to get them involved with as many activities as possible, I also arrange that the UL students take part in campus club activities. These include calligraphy, flower arrangement, the tea ceremony, archery, visiting the Serizawa Keisuke Art and Craft Museum, taking part in the Museum workshops, singing the *Warabeuta* (songs for children) in music class, and attending the pottery class. Moreover, they visit *the Shoden-ji* Temple in the city of *Yokote* in *Akita Prefecture*. The master of the temple is Atsuo Takahashi who took part in the Slovenia program in 2000, and who wants to offer UL students an opportunity to experience the life in a temple so as to boost the program.

6 Assignments and impressions: debriefing

6.1 TFU Students

This section deals with impressions and opinions of TFU students and UL students. Their evaluations and comments add an incentive to maintain the momentum of this program. One of the TFU students who visited Slovenia was Yuto Fujikawa. He majored in social welfare and went to Ljubljana in 2006. He was extremely impressed by the Slovenian psychiatric hospital system. The Fujikawa family also has a strong connection with the Slovenia program, and they have volunteered as a host family for seven years, so far.

In 2007 three females and one male student were sent by TFU. Kenta Katsumata majored in Social Welfare, and he gave a talk on the social inclusion and exclusion in the Department of the Social Work at the UL. He was particularly curious about what sort of social problem today's Slovenian society has been

facing. He was curious to know why homeless people ended up on the street. Through his friends' interpretation, he found out that most of the homeless people were foreigners. They have immigrated from neighboring countries, and they could not even speak Slovene.

Next, I will summarize the opinions expressed by Yuki Kikuchi, Yuri Sugawara, and Misaki Terashima concerning how UL students struggle to improve their Japanese. According to them, there are four useful tips for UL students on Japanese learning. First, do not be afraid to make mistakes. Second, be eager to make an effort. Third, talk to oneself in Japanese as much as possible. Fourth, download Japanese contents from the Internet, such as drama, and anime, and imitate useful Japanese expressions that appear in media.

Yuki was moved by the fact that a primary school girl, Miss. Helena Livia Juvančič, has taught the TFU visitors the elements of Slovene for the last three years in a row. Yuki says that she cannot imagine Japanese elementary school students having enough confidence to teach basic Japanese to foreign college students.

Yuri comments that in Japan people are not frequently fond of discussion and arguments in daily life, whether constructive or not. Basically, they try to avoid expressing different opinions, because they are more concerned that it might hurt other people's feeling to confront others by clearly stating opposing or contradictory opinions. Yuri witnessed her host family in Ljubljana discuss everything at their dining table, even if their opinions differed. But it did not cause any trouble between the family members. She learned not to hide her feelings, but to communicate with others openly. She realized that open communication is crucial way to understand each other. It is also the most difficult thing for Japanese students to accept.

Misaki describes that she was impressed by Ana Novogradec, her roommate in Ljubljana, who showed her extraordinary enthusiasm about learning Japanese. From Ana's daily life Misaki realized that Ana's language learning strategy involves not only learning language itself, such as memorizing vocabulary and studying grammar, but also getting crazy about Japanese culture, such as evidenced by the fact that even her whole room is decorated in Japanese style. In my opinion, generally speaking, international exchange programs are very popular in Japan as a whole, mainly because there is a gap between western culture and

Japanese culture. Misaki participated in TFU's exchange programs three times, twice at University of Washington in the United States, once at University of Ljubljana in Slovenia. Through all her experiences she came to the conclusion that in order to be a *Kokusaijin* you have to have the confidence to communicate with people regardless of national origin. Misaki as well as (Fujiwara 2005: 143) states, the internationally minded person is not necessarily equivalent to someone who has the ability to speak English. Fujiwara takes the example of three famous people who went to visit the US in the Meiji era: Yukichi Fukuzawa, Inazo Nitobe, and Kanzo Uchimura. They did not know anything about western culture and language, but they were welcomed and respected by American people, solely because they had essential understanding of Japanese Classic Literature, and the Samurai Spirit. All in all, it is most important to know your roots.

6.2 UL students

Among the UL students who visited Sendai in 2006 were Iva Lačan, Stefani Silli, and Polona Košir. Iva Lačan was impressed with a Japanese hot bath (*Ofuro*) in the campus dormitory. It gave her peaceful moments at the end of her busy day.

Stefani Silli was in her second-year when she was at TFU, and she was apprehensive about her Japanese ability to keep up with her classes and communicate in Japanese, because she had studied Japanese only for one year at the UL. In the end her anxiety did not cause any problems because she had plenty of help from new friends and teachers. In addition, she pointed out that the core of the program was not academically but culturally oriented. She enjoyed Japanese culture fully through the program. In the end she comments that both the interview and presentation projects were a little too heavy for a second-year student.

Polona Košir had a desire to visit Japan when she was a child, and she says that the real experience differed from just reading the books, or watching something on television about Japan. She remarks that regarding the cultural aspects, both countries were very different, and she suggests that people would need to see Japan with their own eyes. She loves eating Japanese food such as *soba* (Japanese noodles), *curry and rice*, *ramen* noodles, *katsudon*, *okonomiyaki* (Japanese Pizza), *sukiyaki*, *sushi*, and so on. She never said "no" to all the kinds of food that she tried in Japan.

In 2008 Martina Petrač, Tina Vouk, and Danijela Ristić were in Sendai. Upon arrival, Martina Petrač was enchanted with the Japanese culture, and she experienced traditional customs at the *Shoden-ji* temple in Akita and modern Japanese culture through homestay and *karaoke*. Tina Vouk comments that the homestay was the best part of the program, which helped her understand Japanese life. Besides, she suggests that it would be better if the teachers used only Japanese during the classes.

Danijela Ristić met a lot of people, experienced different culture, and also discovered another part of herself in one month. All the activities she did in Sendai, and her preference was for the presentation that she gave at TFU. She thinks that it was the best way to learn and practice the new Japanese expressions and public speaking. Moreover, she really appreciated that the Terashima family welcomed her to their house, and she exchanged opinions with her host family about their own culture so as to shorten their distance and deepen their understanding. As stated elsewhere, the core of this exchange program is the cultural experience away from home. Most students give good comments as they find out ways to connect their experiences with what they have learned in classes.

All the students, Slovenian and Japanese, are from a variety of backgrounds, so the ways they perceive things differs from one another. Reading through the students' powerful messages, I realize that the environment itself is an incredible lesson for students. They see things through their eyes, and learn from their peers. These learning processes through a variety of experiences are much more significant than those available through classrooms and books.

7 Conclusion

In the last twenty years cultural exchange program has been popular in Japan; therefore, most universities have International cultural exchange center on campus in Japan so as to cultivate the *Kokusaijin*. According to Japanese dictionary *Kojien* (Shinmura 1998: 937), the meaning of *kokusaijin* is someone who is active in the world stage.

As a coordinator, I have been working for this exchange program for twelve years. Generally speaking, the students who participate in the exchange program do not have a confidence on themselves when they have to speak English.

Moreover, they are afraid to make mistakes and to give their opinions in public. In order to be a *Kokosaijin*, I think that students have to be equipped with some major or expertise and for instance it can be one of the Japanese cultural aspects. Once students become knowledgeable in a topic, they will have confidence to speak out their opinions regardless of the places. In addition, students need an instrument to convey their thoughts—that is languages. It can be Japanese, Slovene, English, French or German. Students should not lose their confidence because they cannot speak English. Without English they can also be the *Kokusaijin* if they have their special skills and confidence.

This exchange program provides opportunities to exercise what they have learned, and to broaden their horizon to see things from different angles. During the exchange program, students may start to identify themselves as Japanese or Slovenian, and where they are from. They also started to realize that how much they do or do not know their own country, their own culture, and their own history. In the preparing stage, participants have to choose the topic to give the presentation at UL. I put heavy weight on the presentation, and also push them to go as far as they can. This is also an opportunity for them to confirm what they study, and to help students find what they are interested in. The unique feature of this program is that TFU students are relatively introverted, or not good at communicating and learning language, whereas UL students are extremely demanding to themselves, and highly motivated in the language learning. In this point, UL students not only play a role model for TFU students, but also send the powerful message to TFU students that learning language is to act. All in all, the exchange program between the University of Ljubljana and Tohoku Fukushi University is a platform for young generations to get access to the world stage.

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Acknowledgements

When I decided to embark on writing a paper on a brief history of the present cultural exchange program between the UL and TFU, I had already realized that I would not have enough time to finish it in time. Because of the support from many people, however, I will be able to accomplish the task. I would like to express my deepest appreciation to Dr. Suguru Araki for his encouragement, especially for spending an enormous time on reading through my paper. My students, Misaki, Yuki, and Yuri, for staying up for several days in my office to look for necessary information, to contact all the past participants, and to discuss problems with me. Deep thanks are due to Iva, Stefani, Polona, Martina, Tina, Danijela, Tae, Yuto, and Kenta for taking their valuable time to make valuable comments on this exchange program.

Appendix: Comments From Six TFU Students

(金泉多恵、2005)

私は、2005年にリュブリャナ大学との交換留学プログラムに参加しました。私にとっての初めてのヨーロッパへの旅、そして初めて訪れる国ということで出発する前は不安と緊張が渦巻いていました。しかし、スロベニアの人々と触れ合うことで、私のスロベニアでの日々は大変充実したものになりました。スロベニアは長い歴史を持ち、独自の文化も育んでいます。そして、豊かな自然にも囲まれた素晴らしい国です。その中に身を置けたことで、この旅を通して様々な刺激を受け、自分自身と向き合う貴重な機会を得ることが出来ました。しかし、その中でも私が最も強い印象を受けたのが、スロヴェニアの学生の物事に対する真剣な姿勢とスロヴェニアの人々が持つ深い優しさです。

私は、この旅でたくさんの学生と交流する機会を得ました。どの学生も、自分が専攻している分野や興味・関心があるものに対して真剣に向き合っている印象を受けました。そして、そのような姿勢に大変感銘しました。印象的なエピソードが、いくつかあります。一つ目は、私が日本から準備していったプレゼンテーションを日本語学科の1年生に対して発表した時の出来事です。日本語学科の1年生は、日本語を学び始めて日が浅く、私の日本語のプレゼンテーションの内容を理解するのは困難な状態でした。そこで、日本語学科の4年生が内容をスロベニア語に翻訳してくれました。発表に関しての打ち合わせは、お互いのスケジュールの関係もあり1回しか行うことが出来ませんでした。プレゼンテーションの内容は、主に日本の文化と仙台についてでした。私としては、他の国の文化に関することを1回で理解するのは難しいと思っていたので、正直彼らの翻訳が上手くいくのか不安でした。しかし当日になってみると、彼らはきちんと翻訳をしてくれ、1年生もプレゼンテーションの内容を理解することが出来ました。そして、この発表は大成功に終わったのです。翻訳を担当してくれた4年生達は、発表当日までに練習を重ねたと思います。しかし私の受けた印象としては、この成功は数回の練習ではなく、日々の鍛錬が産み出したものだと思うのです。日本語を学び始めてから日々努力した結果、4年経った頃には日本語の内容を理解し、それを母語に訳すまでの力が培

われたのだと思います。日本では、中学 1 年生から英語を学び始めますが、中学・高校と 6 年間学んだとしても英語を習得している学生は本当に少ないです。しかし、スロヴェニアの学生は、4 年間で他言語である日本語を習得しているのです。これは、日本語を学ぶことに真剣に取り組んだ結果だと思います。この姿勢は、日本の学生に欠けているものであり、私達が彼らから学ぶべきことだと強く思いました。二つ目は、小学校でプレゼンテーションを行った時の出来事です。私は日本語学科の教授の計らいで、小学校においてプレゼンテーションを発表する機会を得ました。その時に、日本語学科の 2 年生の学生 7 名が同行し、彼らも日本の文化に関するプレゼンテーションを発表しました。小学生にとっては未知の文化に関する内容だったので、最初のうちはクラスの雰囲気はとても静かでした。スロヴェニアの学生は発表の中で写真をたくさん見せたり、黒板を使ってレクチャーをしたり、冗談も交えながら分かり易く説明していました。そのお陰で、小学生の表情は徐々に柔らかくなり、最終的には質問も飛び交う活発な雰囲気になりました。そして、小学校での発表も大成功に終わったのです。私は、スロヴェニアの学生が自分の興味や関心がある事柄に対して強い情熱を持ち、それを表現したことがこの成功に繋がったのだと思います。つまり、彼らは日本に対して強い興味や関心を持ち、その思いを他者とも共有したいと思っていたのでしょう。他者と分かち合いたいという情熱が、彼らのプレゼンテーションを素晴らしいものにしたのだと思います。さらに、自分の関心ある事柄に情熱を持ち、真剣に向き合っている姿勢が小学生にも伝わり、クラスの雰囲気も変化していったのでしょうか。日本の若者は、物事に対する情熱を表現することに恥じらいを持っていると思います。そのため、様々な事柄に対して冷めた態度を示す傾向があります。しかし、そのような態度は彼らの人生に決してプラスのものを与えないと思います。自分の興味・関心がある事柄に強い情熱を持ち、それを周りの人達と共有するために表現すること。そうすることで、周囲の人達から新しいアイデアを得ることが出来、自分の考え、さらには人生が豊かになっていくと思うのです。私は、このことを小学校で一緒に発表を行った 7 名の学生から学びました。スロヴェニアに行く前の私は、自分が興味・関心を抱いている事柄に真剣に取り組むということが少なかったと思います。「面白そうだ」「やってみよう」と思うだけで、実際に取り組む

ことが出来ていませんでした。スロヴェニアの学生達と接したことで、物事に対して真剣に向き合い、自分の想いを表現することの素晴らしさに気付くことが出来ました。このことは私の人生にとって、大きな収穫となりました。

また、スロヴェニアの人々が持つ深い優しさにも感激しました。スロヴェニアの人々の優しさは、特にホストファミリーとの交流から感じました。私のホストファミリーは、私を家族に一員として受け入れてくれました。彼らが常に私のことを気にかけてくれたお陰で、私は1ヶ月間何も心配することなく生活することが出来ました。ホストファミリーは、時間を見つけてはスロヴェニアのあちこちに私を案内してくれたり、郷土料理を振舞ってくれました。ホストファミリーと過ごす時間は、どの瞬間もとても楽しく、私は本当に充実した日々を過ごすことが出来ました。両親はフルタイムで働いていたので、私が滞在した1ヶ月間は大変忙しかったと思います。それでも私を受け入れてくれ、私が充実した1ヶ月を過ごせるように常に気にかけて、行動してくれたことから彼らの優しさや愛情を感じました。私がスロヴェニアでの日々を何不自由なく過ごせたのは、ホストファミリーのお陰です。心から感謝しています。また、スロヴェニアの学生との交流からも、彼らの深い優しさを感じました。学生達は、一度話ただけで私を友達として受け入れてくれました。そして、授業が終わればカフェに誘ってくれたり、映画館に連れて行ってくれたり、何か困り事は無いか気にかけてくれました。私は知り合いもない初めての場所で緊張していたので、彼らが親しみを持って接してくれることが大変嬉しかったです。日本人は、相手に対する親しみを示すのに時間がかかる傾向があります。そのため、初めての場所では知り合いが出来なくて、寂しい思いする場面が多々あります。しかし、スロヴェニアの人々と接して、相手に対する思いやりや愛情を素直に表現することで、短い間でより深い関係性が築けることを学びました。相手に対する愛情を内に秘めるだけでなく、相手に表現していくことの素晴らしさに気付けたことも私にとって大きな収穫でした。

私は、スロヴェニアのプログラムに参加した後も何度か海外へ行く機会がありました。海外へ行く度に感じることは、その国の歴史や文化に触

れることも重要ですが、それ以上に重要なのは現地の人と交流することで自分の価値観に大きな変化が生まれるということです。多文化の世界で生活して、自分と違った考えを持つ人と接するという事は、自分自身の視野が一段と広がる体験になると思います。スロヴェニアでの日々は、私にとって自分の価値観が大きく変化した体験そのものでした。ここに挙げた、物事に対して情熱を持ち真剣に取り組むことの重要性や、周りの人に対する思いやりや愛情を素直に表現することの素晴らしさを学べたことは、私自身の内面を豊かなものとしてくれました。この体験ができたのは、ベケシュ先生を中心とした先生方のプログラムに対する尽力のお陰だと思えます。福祉大学とリュブリャーナ大学との交換留学プログラムを発足し、今日まで継続することに力を注いで下さったベケシュ先生に大変感謝しています。私はこのプログラムが今後も続いていき、さらに多くの学生が素晴らしい交流をすることを心から願っています。

(Yuto Fujikawa, 2006)

I have known Slovenia since I was a high school student, because my family had been hosting exchange students from Slovenia for several years. In December 2005, I had great experience with Slovenian student as a freshman at the Tohoku Fukushi University, and started thinking of going to Slovenia. In 2006, when I went to Slovenia for the first time, I met so many nice students who were eager to learn Japanese language, including my best host family and my best friend Jan Rome. I had great time with them. I am still in contact with many of those who I met in Slovenia and who came to TFU before.

When I was in Slovenia, Professors at University of Ljubljana, tried very hard to find places we can visit. We went to many places such as a kinder garden, a junior high school, a high school, and a nursing home. Among all the places we visited, the psychiatric hospital had the strongest impression. The psychiatric hospital was very different from ordinal psychiatric hospitals I know in Japan. The hospital was used to be a castle built in 14th century and it is named for protected building from Slovenian government. The hospital had the strongest impression not only with its appearance, but also with its system. I saw very few patients who were staying in their rooms. Doctors explained us that patients are supposed to

attend program and not supposed to stay in the room during the day. I found that Slovenia has much further advanced system to take care of people with mental sick that we should also have in Japan.

There is so much more to say about my experience in Slovenia, but all in all, I truly believe I learnt a lot through this exchange program. Thank you very much for providing me with this wonderful opportunity, Prof. Bekeš.

(勝又健太、2007)

去る2年前の11月、私は東北福祉大学の代表として3人の仲間と共にスロヴェニアのリュブリャナ大学に短期留学をしてきた。現地では日本語学部の学生との交流やホームステイを中心に過ごして来たが、初めてのヨーロッパ留学はとても刺激的で得るものが多くあった。中でも路上生活者へのインタビュー調査を通じてヨーロッパの社会の実情を目の当たりに出来たことは一番の学びである。

滞在中、現地の友人の力を借りリュブリャナ市内中心部を歩いて周り、路上生活者に了承を得た上でインタビューに応じてもらう機会を得ることが出来た。インタビューに行き着くまでに何人かの路上生活者に声をかけたが、驚いたことにその多くがクロアチアやアルバニア、ポーランドとスロヴェニア国籍の人ばかりでなく、ヨーロッパ各地から流入してきている人であった。その方たちの中には英語だけ出なく、現地の言葉を解せないままにスロヴェニアに来ている方もいた。

私はこの時、これほどまでに移民の往来が激しくあるヨーロッパの社会に驚きを隠せなかったと同時に、それらの移民の多くが社会から排除され路上で暮らさざるを得ない状況にある現実を思い知った。現在、スロヴェニアが加入するEUでは移民を社会で受け入れるためにソーシャルインクルージョン(社会的包摂)という社会政策が掲げられている。しかし古くから土地の争いや移動を繰り返して領土を獲得してきたヨーロッパの歴史を見ると、そこに人種だけでなく、民族や宗教の問題も色濃く関わっていることがわかる。そのため「社会的包摂」「共生社会」と一言で述べてみても、その実情は一概に判断しがたいことを学んだ。

近年日本でも国際化の進展に伴って外国人が増えるにつれ、不法滞在の問題や地域に暮らす外国人と日本人でのトラブルや事件が取り沙汰されてきている。そのような昨今においてこの短期留学にてヨーロッパの社会の実情を目の当たりにして、これらことは、今後の日本の社会福祉の方向性を考える上でも非常に良い機会となった。

(菊地由貴、2007)

私は 2007 年度にスロヴェニア研修に参加した。私はスロヴェニア研修で、スロヴェニアの学生の学ぶ姿勢、海外ではどのような振る舞いをすべきか、言葉は文化だという 3 つのことを学んだ。

私は主に日本語学科 1 年生の会話のアシスタントと 4 年生の通訳の授業に参加し、彼らの勉強のモチベーションの高さに驚いた。彼らは 1 年生のときから一週間でカタカナ、ひらがなを覚えてから、漢字を 1 年で約 500 字覚える。私たち日本人も漢字は 9 年かけて習うのでスロヴェニアの人たちにとって漢字学習は根気や体力が要る作業だと思った。さらに、自分たちで日本のドラマ、漫画、アニメをみて日本語らしい表現を覚えて、バンバン日本人に話しかける。恥ずかしさや失敗するという恐怖を飛び越えて、とにかく日本語で話す。最終学年になると彼らの日本語は私たちのプレゼンテーションを通訳できるまでに上達する。日本語会話学校に通うでもなく、自分達の努力で日本語を身につけているという事実と同じ大学生として本当に感動した。

私たちはリュブリャナ大学で日本語学科関連の授業とは別にスロヴェニア語の授業も受けた。スロヴェニア語を学んだことで、言語がその国の文化を表すものだということがわかった。例えば、ごちそうさまでした、失礼します、お願いします、いってきます、ただいまという表現がスロヴェニア語にはない。つまりそれらの言葉を使う文化がないのである。日本語の様に敬語の表現も複雑ではないので、スロヴェニアでは先輩と後輩に厳しい上下関係がないこと、日本ではその逆ということがわかる。このことから言葉というのは各民族の思想や文化を反映しているということを学んだ。だからこそ言語を学ぶには、その国の文化、考え方も学ばない

と上達しないと感じた。スロヴェニア語の授業はヘレナという当時小学校5年生の女の子が担当した。彼女は3年連続で日本語を福祉大の学生に教えている。よく考えてみると、日本の小学生が外国の大学生に日本語を教えるということはとても想像できない。日本の小学生が外国人に対して自信をもって、壁を作ることなく接することはできないだろう。私は彼女にとっても感心した。

このプログラムの要はホームステイだと思う。ホームステイをしたことで、外国人と付き合うには、自分の意思を素直に表現しなければ生きていけないということがわかった。ほとんどの日本人は、和を乱さないように、常に回りの空気を考えて、相手が何を考えているかを考慮した上で自分の意見をいう性質が身についている。さらに「遠慮」と言う行為がしみ付いている。私もそのうちの一人なので、自分の感情、特に否定的な感情を出すことに苦労した。たとえば、私は自分が疲れて寝たくても、今日は寝たいといえなかった。自由に冷蔵庫から自由にものをたべていいと言われても、遠慮の気持ちが働いて食べることができなかった。何をしたいとか、これについてどう思う、といったささいなことでも周りに合わせる習慣が染み付いているので、なんでもいいといった、どうでもいいような回答をしてしまうことが多かった。ホストファミリーの Simon は他人行儀な態度をとる私に、スロヴェニア人の付き合い方を教えてくれた。スロヴェニア人は正直に疲れた、食べたくない、わからない、できないという風に否定的な内容もきちんと伝える。相手が自分の意見と違ってなんとも思わない。それがその人だから仕方がない。私は彼の指摘から、外国人は日本人のように相手の行動を見ない。だからきちんと自分を表現せず、黙っているだけでは相手は何もわからない、友達もできないということに気づいた。彼らは、人間が相手に合わせきれないこと、変えることが出来ない部分がある事、みんな自分以外の何かになるのは不可能だという事を知っている。だからこそ相手を受け入れることができ、自分の考え、意見を表現できるのだと思う。彼らのこの点は本当に素晴らしい部分だとおもった。

(菅原侑里、2007)

私が学んだことは、スロヴェニアで滞在し、学生と交流したからこそわかることで、1週間程度の旅行では絶対学べないことです。この研修は、日本とスロヴェニアの文化、両国の人間性がわかる素晴らしいプログラムだと思う。私は日本とのギャップに戸惑いながらも、ホストファミリーのみなさん、リュブリャナ大学のみなさんのおかげでホームシックにならず、実りある研修ができた。本当に感謝しています。福祉大生もスロヴェニアの学生もぜひこの研修に参加し、視野を広げてほしいと心から思っています。最後に、このような機会を与えてくださった東北福祉大学、リュブリャナ大学の日本語学科のみなさん、本当にありがとうございました。

私のスロヴェニア研修は、ホストファミリーJanさんとの空港でのハグからはじまりました。このハグは、スロヴェニアでは至るところで見られる光景ですが、日本にはハグをするという習慣がありません。それまでの私も、家族とさえも一度もしたことがなく、恥ずかしいという気持ちがありました。しかしスロヴェニアへ来て、ハグには、頑張って、ありがとう、嬉しい、楽しい、色々な意味が込められていることを知りました。ハグは自分の感情を表す一つの方法だけれども、私は何か言葉以上にジーンと温かい気持ちになりました。そんな私のスロヴェニア研修は本当に人の温かさに包まれた1ヶ月間でした。

スロヴェニアで私たちのプレゼンテーションを通訳してくれたのは、日本語学科の4年生。私たちのプレゼンテーションは社会福祉、教育、政治哲学に関係しており、通訳をすることはかなり難しかったに違いありません。しかしながら、彼らは、電子辞書を片手に、一文一文私たちの言葉をスロヴェニア語に通訳してくれました。練習の時には15分ほどのプレゼンテーションを何時間もかけて通訳してくれました。大学生が他国の言語を通訳し発表することは並大抵のことではありません。スロヴェニアの学生の自分に対しての要求の高さ、勉強姿勢に、私も頑張らなくてはと深く思わせられました。

そして私のホストファミリーは、日本語を勉強している Jan さん、お母さん、そして Jan さんの友達の Maja さんでした。Jan さん家族は、私が学校で習ったスロヴェニア語や歴史のことを話すと、私の理解を二倍に増やしてくれます。そして、家族の中で議論をし合うということは日常茶飯事です。私は、日本にいるとき、人と意見をぶつけ合うということ避けがちでした。それは、相手を傷つけてしまうのではないか、自分の意見が間違っているのではないか、いろんなことを考えてしまい結局いつも何も言えなくなってしまうのです。しかし、Jan さん家族は自分の意見を決してごまかしたり、あいまいにしたりすることはありません。いつでも自分のことを包み隠さず話してくれます。それは、相手のことを知り、分かり合う上でとても大切なことだと思いました。言葉や文化が違うからこそ、自分の殻をやぶって、ありのままを出してみる。Jan さん家族は、その大切さを私に教えてくれました。

(寺嶋美咲、2007)

スロヴェニア研修では、1 ヶ月間日本語を勉強する学生の家にホームステイをした。海外で、しかも同世代の学生と長く時間を共有することは私にとって初めての経験であり、ホームステイ先の学生から多く学ぶことがあった。その中でも、ホームステイ先学生の外国語習得の姿勢や、日本人の性質について考えたことを、述べていきたい。

私は、クロアチア出身の Ana という学生のアパートで 1 ヶ月間を過ごした。Ana の日本文化に対する興味の深さと行動力は私の想像以上のものであり、心から驚かされた。例えば、日本の好きな歌手の CD や洋服を日本から輸入したり、日本のテレビで放送されるバラエティやコマーシャルをインターネットからダウンロードをしたりして、自分が興味を持ったものは徹底的に集めていたのだ。従って、Ana の部屋は日本の物で埋め尽くされており、私は自分が日本にいるかのような感覚になった。また、彼女は私と不自由なく日本語で話せるくらい日本語が流暢だったので、どのようにして日本語を習得したのか尋ねてみた。Ana は、「私は何をするときでも日本語でしゃべっているのよ。料理でかき混ぜるときは、“カシャカ

シャ”とかね。」と私におしえてくれた。自分自身を含め、私はこれほどまでに他国の文化に熱中し、心酔している人は見たことがなかった。彼女との生活から、私はいかに言語の習得と文化への知識と興味が相互に影響しあっているのかを認識した。文化と言語は磁石のようにくっつき合い、どちらかが前に進むと、片方もそれに引かれて前進するのだ。Ana にとって言葉の勉強は授業で行うだけのものではなく、彼女の生活全てにおいて学び、試すものなのだ。

また、彼女との生活を続ける中で、日本人の特性や海外で出会う人々との関係の持ち方について確信を深めていったことがある。日本人は控えめであること、遠慮することが美德であると考え、人との間の争い事や不和をできるだけ避けようとする。従って、日本人はできるだけ相手に迷惑をかけないようにと常に思っている。しかし、何回か海外で現地の人と接するようになって、そのような日本人の常識が海外では通用しないことが段々と身にしみてわかるようになってきた。日本人はその性質を改めなければならない。そして、国際性を身に付けなければ、決して国際交流はできない。では、国際性とは何か。国際性とは、ただ単に英語が話せる、世界に対する知識が豊富であるというようなことではない。一人の人間として、どのような環境に置かれても堂々と自分を表に出せることが、国際性を持つということなのだ。そのような理由で、遠慮するということは自分の意に反した行為であり、海外の人の目から見れば、日本人は自信がないように映る。

このようなことを理解できたからこそ、私はホームステイ先やスロヴェニアで知り合った人々に対して過度に遠慮するということを避けた。その結果、自分でも居心地が良いし、Ana にとっても気持ちが良くて、迷惑をかけないことであると感じた。そして、自分の意思や気持ちを表現して、彼女とのコミュニケーションを欠かさないようにした。このことは、どのようにして初めて知り合った人と 1 ヶ月間良い関係を作りだせるか自分で考えたことであり、日々積み重ねていったものである。今でも彼女とは連絡を取り合う仲になれたので、このことが自信になり、自分の全ての感情や意思を相手に伝えれば誰とでも打ち溶け合えると気づいた。

日本人は、遠慮をする性質が身につけていて、社会に適応していくにはその性質を備えていないと生きていけない。しかし、日本国外ではその常識が通用しないこと、そしてその理由を改めて気づいた上で、国際交流においてはその場での相応しい考え方・行動を取らなければいけないと考える。

Comments From Six Ljubljana Students

(Iva Lačan, 2006)

Three years ago I participated in the Exchange Programme between my University and the Tohoku-Fukushi University. It was one of the best experiences in my life. It was my first trip abroad, well by abroad I mean not in Europe.

Because I am a »mamma's girl«, it was stressful for me to go to the place, where the sun itself rises and starts its day. Do you know how important that country is? Getting to Sendai from Tokyo was the most stressful part of my journey, but it's quite easy actually, especially if one has the best company in the world, as I did. Once you get to Sendai the fun begins. It's hard to describe how I felt there. The teachers we interacted with were very well organized and helpful. They gave us so much information about the language and the culture with so much enthusiasm and skill. The students that we socialized with were also great. We had so much fun together.

I think that the exchange programme is a great experience. If nothing else, it teaches you to manage new situations by your self. But for me, it was so much more. It also teaches you about the differences between cultures. The thing that surprised me the most, even though I've heard much about it before, was the Japanese bathroom and ofuro. The way of taking a bath in Japan, it's like a ceremony of cleaning the body as well as the soul. Stepping into the ofuro is like entering a world of peace and quiet, where there are no worries and trouble. I loved it!

I met some wonderful people, and I found some new friends, who are very important to me, even though I don't see them every day. I had fun sightseeing with them. By sightseeing I mean sightseeing in the daytime and at night. One

must also learn to party in Japanese. I am thankful to all the teachers and students for taking such good care of us, and mostly for having fun with us.

Sendai and the people I met there have a special place in my heart.

(Stefani Silli, 2007)

In December 2007, I was one of the six students that went on a one-month exchange programme to Sendai's Tohoku Fukushi Daigaku. That was my first time that I've visited Japan. During that time I was just at the beginning of my second year in college, studying Japanese language and culture. Now, when I remember the time that I've spent there, I must say that it was one of the best experiences in my life and I warmly recommend it to everybody to go and experience that for themselves. When I came to Sendai, I didn't really know what to expect. My main worry was that I wouldn't be able to understand the classes and that I wouldn't be able to communicate well with other students and teachers because of my knowledge of Japanese. But that wasn't the problem at all. Although the majority of classes we had was held in Japanese language, there were always with us the students from T.F.D. who helped us during the class, if for example we couldn't understand something, they would explain to us in English or in simpler Japanese. The classes were really fun and enjoying, where we learned a lot about Japanese culture and lifestyle. The teachers were always helpful and if we had any problems, they would always help us.

I think that the strongest point of this programme is that it's more culture orientated, meaning that it gives exchange students a first-hand insight on some aspects of Japanese culture, like calligraphy, tea ceremony, ceramics, warabeuta, fan making, from which we had classes. We also did a home stay for one weekend, which I think is a great opportunity to experience how is it to live with a Japanese family and to be a part of *katei*. We even went on field trips, visited temples and shrines, which was all already paid for us, so I really appreciated that.

Regarding the language class, the only negative remark I have is that they should have taken into consideration that we exchange students were all at the beginning of the second year, and that maybe they could have adjusted the programme so that it would be more suited to us second year students; interviewing students on campus about our desired theme, doing question-poles

and presentation about the chosen theme was a bit troubling and stressful for me, although we all did really well in the end with the help from our language teacher and T.F.D. students.

In the end I would just like to say that this exchange programme is a great opportunity to get to know Japanese culture, people and it's life-style while enjoying and having fun.

(Polona Košir, 2007)

Since I was small I always wanted to visit Japan and I was really happy when I went to the student exchange in Sendai. To actually come to Japan is very different then just reading about it, or watching something on television. I have never been to a country where people were so friendly and helpful and I was really surprised when they started talking to us on the train, because I was once told that Japanese people don't like to talk to strangers, but it seems like times are changing. But I've seen that it also depends on where you are, in Tokyo they talked more and in Sendai the people were more looking at us then talking, maybe it's because they're not used to see 6 foreign girls walking down the street, or so I think. Well when we came to Sendai we were taken to the University by car, I knew that in Japan, like in England, they drive on the right side of the road, but still it was funny not having a steering wheel in front of me. I wanted to ask Lee sensei if I could try and drive the car, but then I thought its better not to. I didn't have my driver's license with me.

On the exchange we have seen and done a lot of different things (Kyudo, Judo, Sado, and so on) and it would take me at least a week to write about everything. We had classes every day and I believe we learned a lot of things. One of the funny things was when we went to Lee sensei's English class and we needed to pretend that we didn't know the Japanese language at all, so we spoke just in English. At the end Lee sensei told the students that we do speak Japanese, the girls who were talking to me were maybe a little bit upset by this. We also took part at a tea ceremony, the tea was bitter, but I liked the taste and I never knew that the ceremony doesn't end until the main guest or the guest of honor leaves, so it depends on him/her. And we also had a lecture about Japanese food and how the rice came there. The food we ate there was just great. I knew I would taste as much Japanese dishes as I could, because it's natural that if you visit a new

country you try their dishes as well. In Yamadera we ate Soba, it's one of the best things I ever eaten in my life. Yamadera was one of the first places we visited and the countryside there was very beautiful and we had a lot of fun in the pottery shop. To stay at the food topic, mostly we ate in the Universities cafeteria and there were a large variety of dishes, from Curry, Ramen, Katsudon, and so on. One night we went out to sing Karaoke, but before that we went to an Okonomiyaki restaurant and it was a challenge to cook it yourself, at the end the "Japanese pizza" looked a little bit funny, but the taste was amazing with all the different ingredients, I wouldn't mind having such a restaurant here. What I really must write about is the home stay we had there. Bijanka, a fellow student, and I were at Misaki's place, but before we got there we went to eat Sushi with her father. Her father is one of the nicest and funnies guys I have ever met and at the Sushi bar he challenged me to eat 10 plates of different Sushi. I did win but I was hardly breathing after that. After that we went shopping for tea and other souvenirs we brought home. And then we met Misaki's mother, a really nice woman and had a nice evening and we ate Sukiyaki, we did a little bit of learning and watching Japanese shows on Television, which are quite different then the ones we see here in Europe. To put it short the whole culture is different, you just can't compare it to ours, and it's something you just have to see for yourself.

At the end of our stay we had a presentation about Slovenia, I was up first, and well someone has to be. At that time I was really nervous, we practiced a lot, but still it's kind of hard to have a presentation on front of more then 100 people. My topic was about Slovenia in general, where it lies, which are her neighbor countries and I explained about the flag of Slovenia. What all the symbols mean in it. I think it went well and we all did a good presentation and I hope we spread some more interest in Slovenia as well. In the evening we had a Sayonara party and as we were the guests in Sendai for almost a month we prepared speeches. Again I was the first to go. I will stop here because I could explain on and on and on. To put the exchange in short, it was one of the best times I had in my life and I certainly will go back to Japan and Sendai in particular, because I made some good friends there.

(Martina Petrač, 2008)

The first thing I feel I have to say is that I enjoyed my stay in Japan immensely. Though I did expect it to be an unforgettable experience, it exceeded all of my expectations by far. I think it was just a combination of everything that thrilled me so much. The culture and lifestyle had me enchanted the moment I set foot on Japanese land. It got even better when we arrived to Sendai, where you arranged us schedules that enabled us to experience Japan in a way we could never ever experience any other way. The month we spend there was rich with various experience, from the most traditional Japanese customs (like the trip to Akita or the kyudo classes) to the modern everyday Japanese lifestyle (like home stay and karaoke). But as if all of that weren't too much already, I have also met some incredible people who treated us better than we could ever deserve. These friends I made are what I will remember most from my trip to Japan, because if it weren't for them (for you!), all the things we saw and learnt would have been impossible.

(Tina Vouk, 2008)

During our stay in Sendai, I had a lot of new and interesting experiences. Because of the varied program of the university, I could experience a lot of different aspects of the Japanese culture- I learned Japanese children songs, how to wear a kimono, how to do zazen, how to properly sit at a table and so on, so I really liked the fact that our days were very busy because doing something related to Japan everyday, I could immerse myself in the Japanese way of life more easily. Probably the best part of the program was the home stay because living with a Japanese family really deepened my knowledge of the Japanese way of life- it helped me understand when Japanese usually eat, how much they eat, when they usually go to sleep, how Japanese communicate with each other, how Japanese houses look like inside and so on. On the other hand, I also appreciated the spare time we had and that our schedule wasn't too tight, because we could go to the center of Sendai and explore what we wanted to see in Japan or we could do what we wanted to do. Even when we went out to eat or when we went shopping with our Japanese friends, we could learn something new about Japan- for example, how to behave when eating, how Japanese shop assistants behaved towards costumers, how to order in restaurants etc. What I didn't like so much about the program is that we didn't have a lot of chances to speak Japanese ourselves so in

this aspect maybe some activities that are specially designed for making us speak the language would really help. I liked very much the Japanese classes we had with Mushiake sensei but maybe also adding some extra classes where we would be forced not to use English would be good.

(Danijela Ristić, 2008)

I participated in a student exchange program from November 24 to December 24, 2008. I decided for this challenge not only because I study Japanese and train karate, which is why I wanted to improve my knowledge of Japanese culture, customs and language, but also because it was my dream to see Japan for a long time. I had my own ideas about what Japanese people and their life are like, but I wanted to see for myself if my expectations are correct.

When we arrived to Sendai station my first positive impression was the warm welcome we received from Lee sensei and 2 students and later the welcome party they prepared for us in our house. The first weekend we stayed in a temple, where we meditated and learned a lot about Japanese tradition. This was one of the best experiences in my life, and I am very grateful for the chance to experience a monk's life.

I was surprised and honoured at the same time that the program for us was that well prepared and organized on a very high level. Our schedule was full of interesting events, meetings, trips which helped me to get know and understand Japanese people better, not only their history but also their modern lifestyle.

Another amazing experience was to present our country in front of Tohoku Fukushi University students and teachers. It was not easy at all to speak about Slovenian geography, culture, food, music, famous people in Japanese, but it was a good way to learn new Japanese words and to practice speaking in public.

I also cherish the memory of the day got to wear beautiful Japanese traditional costumes, kimonos. It made me feel like a real Japanese.

It was unforgettable experience to be accepted by Japanese people, especially my host family. I was happy to be part of a Japanese family and to learn things from them. They were not just formal and polite, like I expected, but they allowed me to enter in their life by showing me videos from their wedding and other personal things. This was the biggest gift I could get! We were all exchanging our

opinions and experience about our own cultures and learning from each other without limits or prejudices. The only bad thing was that we did not have more time to spend together.

In just one month I learned and discovered many precious things about life in Japan and Japanese traditions, I made a lot of friends from different cultures, and I also discovered a lot about myself, because these unforgettable moments have taught me about others and myself at the same time. And all this experiences cannot be learned just from books or by being at university all the time. It is really important for us to have contact with the culture, the language of which we are studying, especially when both sides forget their prejudices, open their hearts and express themselves honestly.

In the end all I can say is thanks a million times to everyone, Slovene and Japanese, who created this exchange program and who participated in the organization of this amazing one month adventure, which I will remember my whole life.

