



Finland: Japan's partner towards sustainable and well-aging society



Pekka Orpana

Ambassador of the Republic of Finland to Japan

Pekka Orpana graduated in 1979 from the University of Helsinki with a Master of Laws degree and joined the Finnish foreign service in 1982. Since then he has served in various posts in eight countries. Before starting in Tokyo in September 2018, he had served as an Ambassador also in Serbia and in Peru as well as the Senior Advisor on Energy External Relations and Climate Change Policies at the MFA of Finland.

Standing at the top of many international rankings i.e. in education, innovation, happiness and equality only encourages us to continue developing our strengths. Our strengths are also creating excellent business ecosystems for i.e. ICT, forestry, health and wellbeing, startups and smart and sustainable energy solutions. If the question is “with who”, the answer is probably Finland.

If you ask a Japanese person the first thing that comes into mind from the word “Finland” I am pretty sure it will be either education, Moomins, Aurora Borealis, equality, Santa Claus or sauna. We are very happy for the positive resonance our country and culture receives in Japan and delighted that tourism as well as cultural exchange between our countries is very frequent. From my perspective, what is even more encouraging is the increasing number of Japanese companies and organizations that have found Finnish partners and solutions for whatever challenges they may face. And it certainly doesn't hurt that Helsinki is connected to four Japanese cities with 41 flights operated both by Finnair and JAL this summer – in Europe, only Paris has more direct weekly flight connections.

In 2019, we are celebrating 100 years of diplomatic relations between Japan and Finland which provides a perfect opportunity to establish or develop further also business relations between us.

Education as the main key

Our path from a poor agrarian society to an excelling

innovation hub was based especially on one factor: education. Our free, inclusive and high-quality education system guarantees that everyone has an equal chance to academic success and the possibility to contribute to the society regardless of their socio-economic background.

Today, Finnish universities have over 100 agreements with Japanese counterparts and they are developing together the next generations of problem-solvers. Besides this, our research institutions are collaborating actively.

What is special about Finland is that we have a long history of fluent public-private cooperation between companies, universities, research institutes and public sector to find the best ways to keep up with the ever-changing world. We are true believers in teamwork.

Tomorrow: digital, sustainability and health

In general, Finland is eager to be a testbed for global solutions from autonomous ships to basic income. This is



Finland-based startup event Slush gathered 6000 bright minds in February to Tokyo. Picture: Ari Honkanen

only possible via the aforementioned close public-private partnerships and innovativeness. It is no coincidence that the world's second biggest startup event Slush – a world-known party of ideas, investment and visibility – was born in Finland. And today, Finland has more digital startups per capita than any country and our ecosystem is a popular reference for other countries, like Japan as JETRO has selected Helsinki as one of its global startup hubs.

In the health sector, Finland is especially well known in the fields of genomics, digital health and senior care, and in general delivering cost-effective patient outcomes. Our population-based biobanks, innovation-friendly legislation, comprehensive and digital healthcare registers create unique opportunities for targeted drug discovery and clinical research.

Actually, the law on secondary use of health data was passed earlier this spring that increases research and innovation opportunities in health and wellbeing, disease prevention, and personalized medicine. In 2020, Finnish as well as foreign companies can access our national data through the Findata service which was again a result of a close public-private cooperation.

Sustainable and smart energy solutions are leading the way towards carbon-neutral future and tackling the climate change. Already, our energy market is among the smartest in the world allowing also testing of new solutions in real life context. Our recently appointed government has perhaps the world's most ambitious energy and climate policy, which means that the energy sector will be in focus in the coming years as well. Achieving carbon neutrality by 2035 requires unforeseen policy and technology. Smart Otaniemi is one of the leading testbeds in this regard.

Business Finland as your guide

Finnish business ecosystem and legislation is supportive of entrepreneurship and very open to international companies. Company tax (20%) is below the EU average, and Business Finland also facilitates foreign companies to start operations in Finland via multiple methods varying from financial support to guidance.

In international competitiveness comparison, Finland

ranks high in education, technology, health and environment. World Economic Forum's Global Competitive Index 4.0 ranked Finland as 11th among 140 countries, being at the very top in macro economic stability, intellectual property protection and skills.

Already over 130 Japanese companies have realized their opportunities to grow and develop their solutions in Finland. Perhaps the most visible major investment this spring has been MUJI, one of the leading design companies in the world, which decided to build their European flagship store in Helsinki. Also, ITOCHU has just partnered up big time with Metsä Group to develop wood-based textile fibers in Ääneskoski. Murata Manufacturing is expanding their already existing factory in Vantaa and many smaller scale investments are on their way.

Metsä Pavilion in Tokyo Olympics

One concrete – or wooden to be precise – example of our trade enhancing efforts in Japan is Metsä Pavilion that will host Finnish Olympic and Paralympic teams as well as provide Finnish companies a unique platform to demonstrate their products and services from June to December 2020. This one of a kind project is – you guessed it – another example of public-private partnership from Finland. 🍷



Metsä Pavilion will be the hub for Finnish know-how from the Tokyo 2020 Olympics until the end of the year. Picture: H&Co

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