

Preface

In publishing the special issue of EJEAC Conference 2021 in Kagawa

EJEAC (European Japan Experts Association) is a non-profit organization established in 1995 by the Japan-Germany Center Berlin and holds forums to promote partnerships and cooperation in R & D between Europe and Japan. In recent years, EJEAC conferences were held in Stockholm, Sweden (April 2018) and in Graz, Austria (September 2019). This time, in October 2021, EJEAC - in commemoration of its 25th anniversary - held the first international conference in Japan jointly with Kagawa University as a co-organizer.

Interpersonal encounters often bring about new opportunities and create new bonds. The first important encounter occurred on November 7, 2018, when Japan-German Society Kagawa (President: Mr. Sakae Tadano) took the lead to arrange for Mrs. Sabine Ganter-Richter, President of the German-Japan Society Bonn, and Mr. Marco Invernizzi to visit Kagawa University. She and her colleagues soon made their second visit to Kagawa University on April 2, 2019, whereby they introduced the GRANITE (German Research Ambassadors Network for Industrial Technology Endeavors) project. GRANITE aims to create a sustainable Japanese-German network mainly in the IoT field through the formation of networks among German and Japanese companies, researchers, local governments, etc., and to promote joint research and development together with technology transfer. In response to this development, Kagawa University decided to form a cooperative team led by International Office and the Faculty of Engineering and Design. Substantial exchanges were initiated at the Japan-Germany Networking Meeting that was held on October 10, 2019, at the Faculty of Engineering and Design. Since Mrs. Sabine is simultaneously a member of EJEAC Executive Committee, she extended an invitation to Prof. Yoshiro Imai, Professor of Faculty of Engineering and Design, Kagawa University, to participate in the EJEAC conference “Human-Centered Digitalization: How to Develop Next Generation of Humans and Robots for a Secure, Harmonic and Prosperous Future of Europe and Japan?” which was held at Graz University of Technology in Austria on September from 20 to 21, 2019. In due of the active participation by Kagawa University in GRANITE, EJEAC offered Kagawa University the opportunity to host its conference in Kagawa on suitable days of October 2021, and Kagawa University accepted the offer.

The members of the EJEAC Executive Committee and the members of Kagawa University Committee formed the joint Conference Executive Committee to discuss the scopes and directions of the conference. The joint Committee decided on the theme “International Conference on Human-centered Sustainability and Innovation for an AI-assisted Future: New Interdisciplinary Education & Research for the Next Stages in Japan and Europe”. In addition to the two original organizers (EJEAC and Kagawa University), not only the Institute for Security and Development Policy (ISDP) but also the Fraunhofer Institute for Applied Information Technology FIT were officially asked to hold this conference as co-organizers. Moreover, 13 sponsors kindly supported the EJEAC Conference 2021 in Kagawa.

At Kagawa University, the Steering Committee for the EJEa Conference 2021 in Kagawa was formed, whose members were appointed from 6 faculties of Kagawa University to share the roles to prepare for the conference. Initially, this conference was planned to be held in a face-to-face manner. The program was to include keynote lectures, workshops, poster presentations, company exhibitions, company visits, excursions to cultural sites, and receptions. However, due to the prolonged outbreak of COVID-19, the Steering Committee decided to hold the conference online. Except for poster presentations which were demonstrated in a face-to-face manner at the Olive Square Multipurpose Hall, Kagawa University, all activities were conducted online. The Steering Committee also invited high school students to participate in the session of poster presentation, in which four presentations had been carried out by high school students among other university students.

The total number of presentations was 80: namely, 1 invited lecture, 7 keynote lectures, 60 oral presentations in 8 workshops, and 12 poster presentations. The number of registered participants was 197 from 13 countries (145 in Japan and 52 from overseas). In all previous EJEa conferences, participants mainly came from EU countries and Japan. At this EJEa Conference 2021 in Kagawa, however, had many participants from Asian countries such as Bangladesh, India and Brunei Darussalam including a foreign student from Africa.

The opportunity to hold this conference originated from the close partnership between the Japan-German Society Kagawa and the German-Japan Society Bonn. This partnership acted as a catalyst for Kagawa University and Fraunhofer Institute for Applied Information Technology FIT to collaborate with the GRANITE project. This collaboration led to the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the two institutions on March 1, 2021. With that foundation, Kagawa University and Fraunhofer Institute for Applied Information Technology FIT decided to hold the EJEa Conference 2021 in Kagawa as co-organizers. Symbolically, the EJEa Conference 2021 in Kagawa was also held to commemorate and celebrate the 160th anniversary of Japan-Germany Partnership.

On behalf of Kagawa University, I would like to thank EJEa and the other 2 co-organizers, 4 organizations for their financial support, and 9 organizations for their support which gave Kagawa University the great opportunity to hold this prestigious conference.

Finally, on a sad note, we learned of the unfortunate demise of Mr. Marco Invernizzi. He had been instrumental in creating the opportunity for all of us to hold this conference. We would like to dedicate this volume to his memory.

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