

## Dr Milica Muminovic (Research)

### WHY DID I CHOOSE JAPAN OVER OTHER COUNTRIES TO STUDY?

There are multiple reasons for choosing Japan for my PhD studies, but first and foremost was my fascination with Japanese architecture, both contemporary and traditional. I am interested in the specific aesthetics and sense for detail, materials and the way in which tradition has been embedded in contemporary architecture. Secondly, when I thought about the prospective of studying in Japan, I was excited as it was something new to discover. As someone from a small European country (Serbia), Japan was a completely new world. This was an important aspect of the learning process for me and it would be challenging.

However, the final decision came down to the same underlying characteristic; that Japan is so profoundly different to the rest of the world. In architecture, it gives that unique approach to space, widely celebrated in academic discourse. Japanese architecture is very interesting as it manages to produce a unique expression, being able to look at tradition through contemporary eyes. Although there is a risk of generalisation, I could say that there is something so different and Japan that unifies the culture, cities and architecture that I am and was fascinated by. That difference has opened my eyes to my own cultural background. For me to view and understand architecture with fresh eyes, and made me more open to other cultures.

I couldn't have ever imagined that I would have had such an opportunity like this, so for me it was quite a change. The opportunity came and I took it.



### BEST EXPERIENCES IN JAPAN

My best experience in Japan was everyday life. Seeing Japan from the aspect of an insider, living in just an ordinary house, working with Japanese colleagues and students. I felt like I was learning something new every day, whether that was on the train, on the street, or in restaurants. Everything was new!

Interaction with people was another important element. Kindness and respect are important in social interaction in Japan. I very much enjoyed the organisation and precision with which everything functions. The kindness of the people. The food. The appreciation of details.



### THE EXPERIENCE IN JAPAN SHAPED ME AND CHANGED MY LIFE

The experience in Japan has had an immeasurable impact on me as a person and an academic. On a professional level, it has changed the way I understand architecture, education and the design process. It has opened my awareness and sensibility to see and analyse my surroundings. On a more personal level, I was impressed with the culture of community and the care that is taken towards one another. These are high moral values that I strive to live by.

My encounter with a fundamentally different and foreign way of thinking has opened my eyes on multiple levels and left me with better self-reflection and openness for new worlds and cultures. It has unlocked the world for me.

This experience has become part of my teaching philosophy and I try to create opportunities for my students to learn through interaction with different cultures. I have continued to collaborate with Keio University and every year I take a group of students to Japan for collaborative projects.

## IF I DIDN'T RECEIVE THE SCHOLARSHIP...

If I didn't receive the scholarship, I doubt that I would have ever had the chance to visit Japan in the way I did. I would have probably continued to work at university in Serbia and do my PhD there. I think that my world would have been more limited. It is different to read and see things online than to experience them firsthand.



## ADVICE TO PROSPECTIVE MEXT SCHOLARS

Be patient. It takes time to learn the ways of a different culture. All four seasons need to pass before you start understanding the ways of everyday life of any place. And that is just the beginning.

Be mindful. Look at details. Enjoy the perfection of form at any level of everyday life. Try not to spoil that perfection.

Be happy. You are there because you chose to be there!

## MY LAST WORDS!

I went to Japan without any expectations. Everything I knew about Japan was related to architecture. I didn't know the language or culture. I did of course do some research before arriving, but I don't think anything would have prepared me. It was hard from time to time, especially the language barrier, but once I went through the intensive language study it became much easier.

If I could send a message to my past self, it would be to relax and take much more time to explore the culture, to go out, to travel more and to make more friends. It is so easy to get caught up with study and it takes all of your time. The important things I learnt were in those extraordinary moments and those are the ones that I remember most vividly now.

Thank you is not enough to express the gratitude that I feel for being given this opportunity in my life. This has changed who I am, and I hope it is for better.

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