

19/8 2020

Concerning the Danish folk high school

To whom it may concern,

We are writing this letter, as it has come to our attention that a Japanese group named IFAS has applied to register two Japanese words for “folk high school” as trademarks. We, the Association of Folk High Schools (Folkehøjskoler) in Denmark (FFD), would like to share our position in this matter.

Background

The core idea and original purpose of the Danish folk high school originates from and is inextricably linked with the ideas of its founding father, Nikolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig (1783-1872) – the Danish clergyman, hymn-writer, historian, lecturer, linguist, educationist and in the days of the first Danish constitution also an active politician.

During the 1830s, Grundtvig began working on his plans for a school for adults. If democracy was to work, Grundtvig argued, people had to be enlightened about life, about the world they lived in, and about what it meant to live together and to understand and accept other ways of thinking. Grundtvig created the folk high school concept as an alternative to the state schools – because, in his opinion, those schools taught children primarily “dead knowledge”, such as Bible studies, rather than having people’s actual lives as the underlying basis.

The first folk high school in Denmark was established in Rødding in 1844 and many more came. Denmark introduced a unique dual system whereby state education and “free” school education came to be regarded as equal partners, not competitors. Today there are 70 folk high schools in Denmark. The Danish folk high school is regulated by the folk high school law and is subsidized by the Danish state. To this day, free schools and state schools’ function as complementary and often mutually supportive systems.

A core anchor of the Danish folk high schools is the great freedom in values, content and methodology. The only regulation by law, is that the schools must provide fellowship and teaching in courses with the primary aim of advancing life enlightenment, popular enlightenment and democratic education.

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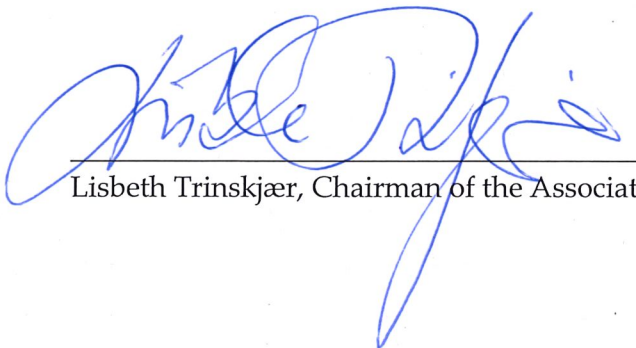
The folk high schools in Denmark are characterized by a great deal of plurality - there are quite religious folk high schools, atheist folk high schools, conservative folk high schools and liberal folk high schools. And we welcome the plurality and the diversity in the folk high school movement, in order to maintain our relevance - not only to a limited part of the population, but to the people at large.

FFD's position

We are familiar with IFAS and highly appreciate their dedication and work with the folk high school concept in Japan. Nevertheless, it is not our (Association of Folk High Schools in Denmark), recommendation that any given group in Japan or any other place should monopolize the concept. It is simply not in line with the fundamental idea of the folk high school - which is a free school for people's enlightenment.

We support IFAS in their effort to unite and strengthen the folk high school movement in Japan, via a joint summit with diverse fractions of groups inspired by the Danish folk high school. In this regard, we consider the attempt to monopolize the concept would indicate an unfortunate signal to other movements/fractions.

Please feel free to contact us, should you have any inquiries into this matter.



Lisbeth Trinskjær, Chairman of the Association of Folk High Schools in Denmark