

50th EDXC Conference in Tampere

Alan Pennington reports from Finland

The 2017 European DX Council (EDXC) conference was held in Tampere, Finland between 18th-20th August, hosted by the Finnish DX Association (FDXA) (Suomen DX-Liitto (SDXL) in Finnish). Local FDXA member club is the Tampere DX-listeners club (TreDXK). Both EDXC and TreDXK, were celebrating their 50th anniversary this year, having been founded in 1967. On 6th December this year, Finland will also celebrate 100 years of independence from Russia. So lots to celebrate!



Helsinki Central railway station.



Risto outside FDXA office in Helsinki

Those delegates staying in Helsinki on the day before the conference started were kindly invited on a short walking tour of some of Helsinki's city centre attractions, led by Risto Vähäkainu of the FDXA, which ended with some welcome local refreshments at the FDXA office in Annankatu.

The city of Tampere is in southern Finland, a 160km 90-minute express train ride north of the capital, Helsinki. It is sited between two lakes which are linked by the Tammerkoski, a 1km channel of rapids whose power was harnessed by the textile industry in the 19th century, and whose heritage red brick mills still line its banks. As a result, the city is often compared to Manchester (UK), but today the old industries have gone, and it is a thriving modern technology and university city, the third largest in Finland with a population of around 220,000. The conference venue was the modern Varala Sports Institute (<https://varala.fi>), sited in a lakeside forest, 3km from Tampere city centre.

Before heading to the conference venue from the railway station, Chrissy, Dave and myself visited two of Tampere's museums: The Lenin Museum <http://lenin.fi/?lang=en> and the Spy Museum <http://www.vakoilumuseo.fi/en/spy-museum/>. Whilst the Spy Museum did have some radio-related exhibits, more impressive was The Lenin Museum, housed in the building in which Lenin first met Stalin in a secret meeting of Bolsheviks in 1905, so claiming to be the birthplace of the Soviet Union. The museum was established in 1946, when Finland and the Soviet Union had close friendship. The exhibits are both serious, balanced and sometimes humorous e.g. take a selfie with Lenin and Stalin on their motorcycle and sidecar! At the museum shop (also online) you can buy Soviet era posters, model Lada cars, Leonid Brezhnev earrings or Karl Marx dolls!

The conference opened Friday afternoon with the traditional flag raising ceremony and welcoming address in the sunshine outside the entrance of the Varala Institute. Around 120 delegates (and some partners) attended the conference over the weekend, some from Finland just on Saturday as the event also doubled as the FDXA's Summer Meeting. Apart from Finland there were delegates from 12 other countries, namely Algeria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Poland, Russia, Singapore, Sweden and United Kingdom.

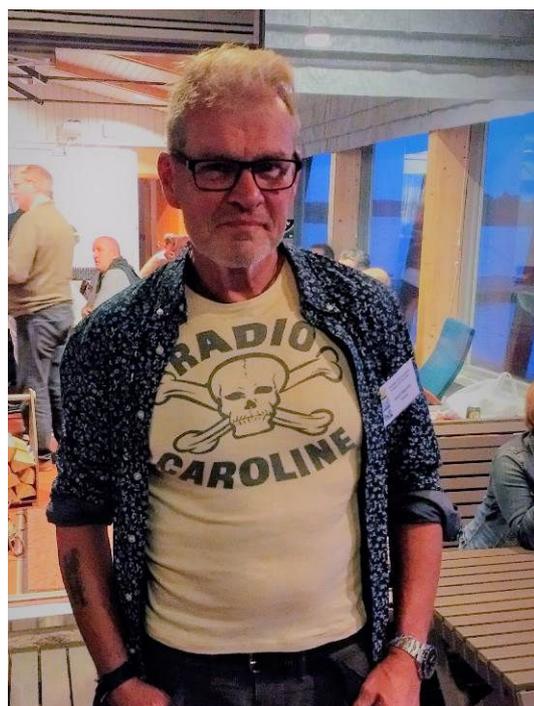
In the first talk in the auditorium, Anker Petersen from Denmark, told of the formation of the EDXC and its early history, illustrated with some photos of the first meeting 50 years ago. The idea for the EDXC originated in Norway, but the EDXC was actually founded in Anker's house near Copenhagen on 4th June 1967 with representatives from Denmark, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden there. Anker was its first Secretary General, to be succeeded by Claës-W. Englund from Sweden later in 1967. At first, each country selected one EDXC representative – this changed to each member club having a representative in 1969. In the heyday of DX clubs, Anker told us there were 116 clubs listed in the 1966 WRTH, though 54 of those were from Sweden! He also described the work of one of the early committees set up in 1968 - the EDXC Reception Report Committee - who sent questionnaires to 50 worldwide radio stations to establish what information the stations found most useful in listener reports, their replies to be the basis of the EDXC Reporting Guide.

Following a break for dinner, Risto Vähäkainu, a former EDXC Secretary-General himself, continued telling us of the EDXC's history. By accident, this 50th conference coincided with the 50th anniversary year as a conference had been held every year since 1967, apart from in 2004. EDXC Secretary-Generals had usually held office for 1-2 years, but Michael Murray from the UK held the office for a 16-year term (1979-1995). A brief history of the EDXC listing all the past conference venues and officials is at: <https://edxcnews.wordpress.com/history>. Finland has hosted the most EDXC conferences in the past 50 years (6) - past conferences were held here in 1971, 1987, 1992, 2002 and 2008. The most well-attended conferences had also been held in Finland, in Espoo in 1987 and in Tampere in 1992, with nearly 300 delegates at each!



Next, top Finnish DXer, Jim Solatie (left) took us on a visual and audio DX journey around the world, accompanied by a rather difficult quiz, having first mixed the audience into teams of three. It disproved the theory three heads are better than one. It did help to have a knowledge of MW DX for the quiz and the winners certainly deserved their prize!

The evening ended in true Finnish summer style, down by the lake, with sauna and lake swimming for those who wanted, and chat until late over beer, wine and barbecued sausages!



I was surprised to see an original 1964 Radio Caroline T shirt being worn at the barbecue, by Antti Marvia (right)

The Saturday morning session in the auditorium focussed on AM listening and was hosted by Ismo Kauppi. He introduced director of SDRplay Ltd, Jon Hudson who presented his company's range of Software Defined Radios (SDRs) to us. SDRs are receivers in which traditional radio components are replaced by software run on your computer. The company currently have three products (they call Radio Spectrum Processors or RSPs): RSP1, RSP2 (photo right) and RSPpro (the latter identical to RSP2 but in a rugged steel case). You just need a computer and antenna to operate. They are true general coverage receivers: RSP1 10kHz-2GHz; RSP2 1kHz-2GHz enabling you to visualize upto 10MHz bandwidth on screen, use brickwall filters, have multiple VFOs, record large bandwidths (upto 10MHz) and record and playback. He said the company had sold around 20,000 RSPs in the past 3 years. The RSPs come with SDRUno software, though they work with all popular SDR software such as HDSDR. Full details on their website: <http://www.sdrplay.com/>



Then active Finnish MW Dixer Tapio Kalmi spoke about AM DXing in the Information Age, introducing us to various data sources useful to AM DXers. One such resource is the KOJE online lists <http://www.tapiokalmi.net/dx/koje/koje1.html> which Tapio edits. KOJE is short for "kuultavissa olevat jenkit" and was a list began in 1978 which has now migrated online showing all North American MW stations (including Greenland and Bermuda) that can be heard in Sweden, Norway and Finland. Similar lists are prepared for Hawaii and Mexico. Tapio's homepage has lots more useful links to tools to aid the MW DXer, such as propagation reports, aurora charts and Greyline map – see: <http://www.tapiokalmi.net/dx/am/> He told how he heard Maldives on 1449kHz in February 2014 aided by the Greyline map. His presentation is online at: http://www.tapiokalmi.net/dx/am/EDXC2017_Tapio_Kalmi_AM_DXing_at_Information_Age.pdf

The final talk on Saturday morning was about Space Weather by Kirsti Kauristie from the Finnish Meteorological Institute. She explained the latest research into the layers in the ionosphere affecting radio reception, looked at solar cycles past and future and why forecasting space weather is so difficult! I have to admit, some of her talk was over my head, but was listened to keenly by the scientists in the auditorium!

After lunch, the Finnish DXers celebrated 50 years of the Tampere DX Club. The still very active TreDXK club has published its Kantoaalto (Carrier Wave) bulletin for 42 years and has a QRM-free DX cabin in Niihama, southern Finland. Matti Karstinen and Jarno Fält received FDXA awards at this afternoon session, especially for work with this DX cabin, which apparently can be accessed remotely. Congratulations to TreDXK on their 50th anniversary!



Above: City of Tampere and lakes, with TV tower, viewed from Pynikki Observation Tower.

Meanwhile, the non-Finnish speakers enjoyed a coach trip to visit some sights in the city of Tampere. We set out in a torrential shower as the coach first took us to a high ridge, where we enjoyed a good view over the city. We then stopped at the nearby transmitter site and tower used by local Pispalan Radio (729 kHz and FM) which we would learn more about in a talk on our return to Varala. The tower was originally used in the manufacture of lead bullets!

Our guide, Risto, then took us a short walk by the rapids in the city centre including the former site of 3NB, Finland's first regular broadcasting station. Tampere Radio made its first broadcast in November 1923, and moved a year later to a wooden cabin sited next to the Tammerkoski rapids, its aerial wire stretched over the fast-flowing waters. Already in 1924, it was heard over 1000km away! Many of the pioneers at Tampere Radio would later work at YLE when they opened their station in Tampere in 1930.

Next stop, Tampere Cathedral, built in the National Romantic style and completed in 1907 where we were able to view its stunning interior with frescos and stained glass by artist Hugo Simberg. Another radio site was our final stop, where we climbed the 26m high Pynikki observation tower, which gave a great view of Tampere city and its lakes. The Pynikki Ridge was the site of Tampere's former YLE's MW station which began broadcasting in 1930. There is a modern guyed communications mast still next to the tower, but sadly it's not a MW aerial nowadays, as YLE Tampere left MW 1421 kHz in the 1970s.

Returning to the conference centre, we heard Pasi Komi, director of Tampere-based Pispalan Radio, talk about his station, which plays old-time Finnish music, much of it from the 1920s and 30s. It broadcasts across Tampere on 99.5 MHz with 100W and also has a MW licence for 729 kHz. Pasi said that it was the first private station in Finland to get a permanent MW licence for 80 years (SWR in Virrat is only part-time). Initially the AM transmitter was radiating 20 Watts and could be heard up to around 100 km, but the transmitter has burnt out and currently there is no money to repair it. The station is run as a hobby but still has to pay royalties, so funding is difficult. When we visited the transmitter site earlier in the Pispalan district of Tampere we could hear the 729 frequency, although it was only audible in close proximity to the tower supporting the aerial - maybe up to 150m away. Programming is automated with IDs between every song. You can listen online at www.pispalanradio.fi - and it has on occasions been relayed on SW.



FM enthusiast Jukka Kotovirta reviewed the 2017 FM DX season in which the best DX openings had been in June when loggings had “sky-rocketed”. Since June, 2017 had been fairly flat, so was only voted an average year in the end (in recent years 2010 was judged the best season, 2014 the worst). June 2017 coincided with 8-10 day DX camps on Utö island (SW Finland-7 DXers) and further east at Poroniemi near the Russian border (3 DXers) which enjoyed openings almost every day to Europe with also “double-hops” to North Africa, Middle East, Russia and even China (double hops increase the distance heard: Yining FM 90.5, China is about 4000km from Poroniemi!). Jukka also told us about the phenomenon of “e-cloud to e-cloud hops” as well as some Sporadic E theories. His entertaining talk had many recordings of DX catches to drool over! There is a blog about the DX camps with photos at: <http://uto-fmdx.blogspot.co.uk/2017/>



Right: Vesa-Jussi Rinkinen and Tapio Kalmi at Poroniemi.

The Saturday session concluded with two quizzes – the first involved IDing some of the best 2017 FM DX catches from audio clips, the second IDing radio-themed songs and their artists from audio snippets. Dave came second in the ID quiz, Alan joint first in the song quiz (though losing on the tie-breaker). So definitely not a case of Great Britain “nul points”!

On Saturday evening the EDXC Banquet began with a welcoming drink and speech from the Mayor of Tampere. The proceedings were expertly compered by Vesa-Jussi Rinkinen and after the excellent meal, traditional FDXA banner awards were presented to their active board member Ismo Kauppi and to overseas DXers Tibor Szilagyi, Toshi Ohtake and Dave Kenny and Alan Pennington. The special award of FDXA (given for extraordinary work for FDXA and the DX community) was awarded to Torre Ekblom, long-time ambassador for DX, living and working in Sweden, Denmark and Holland, who started DXing in 1952 in Helsinki and was a founder of the EDXC. The evening concluded with the traditional fun auction, hosted by Jukka Kotovirta and Jarmo Salmi where some bargain radio-related items, including receivers, aerial wire, novelty radios, coins, books and stamps were sold to the highest bidder!

On Sunday morning, Kari Kivekas (Secretary-General) presented an update on the EDXC, together with Jan-Mikael Nurmela (Assistant Secretary-General). After reading out greetings to the conference from around the world we heard that the EDXC blog now has a new mobile-friendly layout at: <https://edxcnews.wordpress.com/> . The EDXC Facebook page is growing, now with 666 ‘likes’. Historic material has been received from Torre Ekblom (Finland) and Anker Petersen (Denmark), both of whom were at the first EDXC meeting 50 years ago in 1967. This will help in the writing of an EDXC history, but a writer is needed still.

At 10am, delegates stood for a minute’s silence in memory of those killed and injured during the attack in the Finnish port of Turku on Friday 18th August. The Finnish flag outside the conference venue was flown at half-mast also, in common with flags across the country.

Further EDXC topics also discussed included the proposed EDXC radio programme, the future management of the EDXC (Kari and Jan-Mikael have been in their roles since 2013), a DXers’ ‘Hall of Fame’ and the venue for the 2018 conference – suggestions were Vienna/Bratislava, San Marino and Monaco. Member clubs were asked to consider these topics and respond to Kari.

Mika Mäkeläinen next gave an enlightening talk on “How to get a QSL from a Chinese station”. This considered the best source for addresses and email addresses of stations in China, how to trace website registrants, Foreign Affairs Offices in China and social media in China (Weibo and Wechat).

He showed us a QSL he’d received in the mail from Hengyang PBS, actually in a wooden box (see below)!

And Mika (left) made video contact with friend Liu



Hengyi at Anhui Radio (936 kHz) on his mobile 'phone so audience members could see her and ask questions! Remember Mika has an excellent article on "How to Identify Chinese radio stations" online at: http://www.dxing.info/articles/identifying_Chinese_radio_stations.dx

Dan Goldfarb then updated us on progress on his impressive project documenting all medium wave masts around the world (with transmitters >1kW), including their coordinates. There are two very detailed spreadsheets for active and inactive (or closed) transmitter sites. The project, now in its 6th year, of course relies on reliable input from DXers around the world. There is a Yahoo Group: <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/mwmasts/info> and the main website from where you can access the spread sheets is: <https://mwmasts.com/>

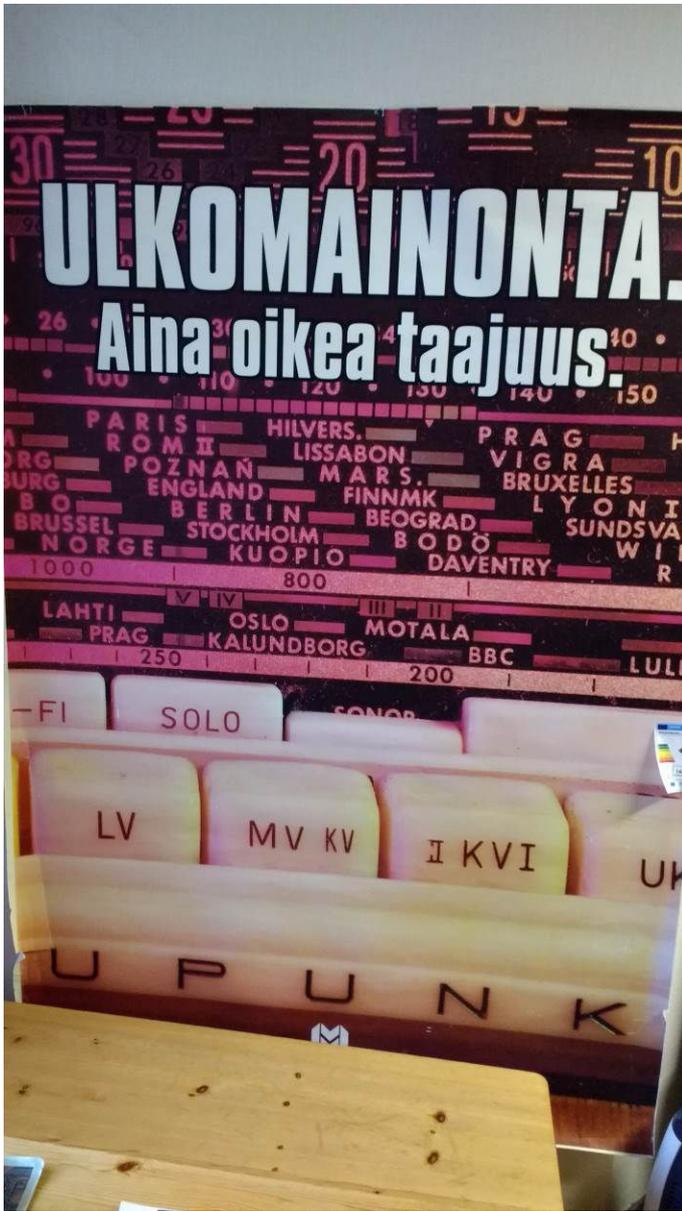
Toshi Ohtake from the Japan SW Club (JSWC) gave a very informative talk on Radio Listening in Japan: Past Present and Future. Toshi, born in 1937, began his radio listening in the 1950s and his talk included details of the "BCL Boom" in the mid-1970s and early 1980s in Japan. Today the JSWC has 350 members, but peaked at around 1600 members during this boom. The club is the 2nd oldest in the world and celebrates its 65th anniversary this year. It was interesting to see the club's DXpeditions in local parks, where members make great DX catches in electrically quiet locations reachable by public transport, but still not far from home.

Toshi's talk was sadly the final one of the conference and the ceremony to lower the flags and bid farewell to everybody followed. A wonderful 50th EDXC conference had ended, with thanks due to all the organisers from FDXA, TreDXK and EDXC in Finland. The FDXA website now includes some of the conference presentations and the programme, with history of Radio Tampere etc. Plus some conference photos, at: <http://sdxl.fi/edxc/>

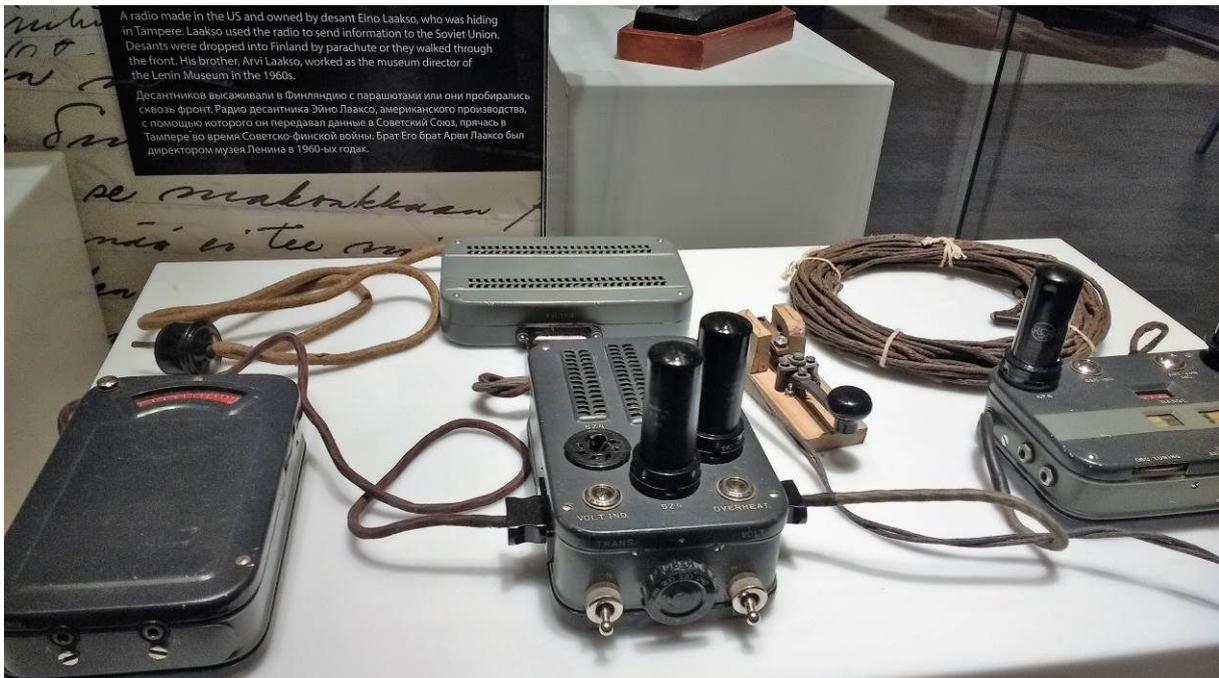


Above: Delegates outside Varala Institute at the close of the conference.

Twelve of us then began our 5-day road trip north in three cars, through Finland, Sweden and Norway, with most northerly point reached, Nordkapp above the Arctic Circle. Our first destination on this road trip north was Scandinavian Weekend Radio's studios and transmitter site, near Virrat, a two-hour drive north of Tampere (see photos front and back pages).



Left: Radio dial poster (FDXA office, Helsinki). Right: Tower supporting Radio Pispalan aerial, Tampere.
Below: USA-made radio owned by communist Eino Laakso when hiding in Tampere (Lenin Museum).





Above: Toshi Ohtake, Japan SW Club.



Right Pynikki Observation Tower, Tampere.

Below: "Suomi 100" banner (and AP), Helsinki



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