

# A Tale of Two Cities: EDXC conference in Bratislava and Vienna

## Part 1 – Slovakia

The 2018 European DX Council (EDXC) conference was held between Friday 31<sup>st</sup> August and Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> September, initially in a forest park just outside the Slovak capital Bratislava at Hotel West, before moving onto Vienna (Austria). 35 participants from 13 countries attended and enjoyed a varied programme of talks, plus radio station and sightseeing tours: 10 from Finland, 5 from Germany, 5 from the UK, 3 from Russia, 2 from Denmark, 2 from Japan, 2 from the USA and one each from Austria, Belgium, France, India, Italy and Poland.

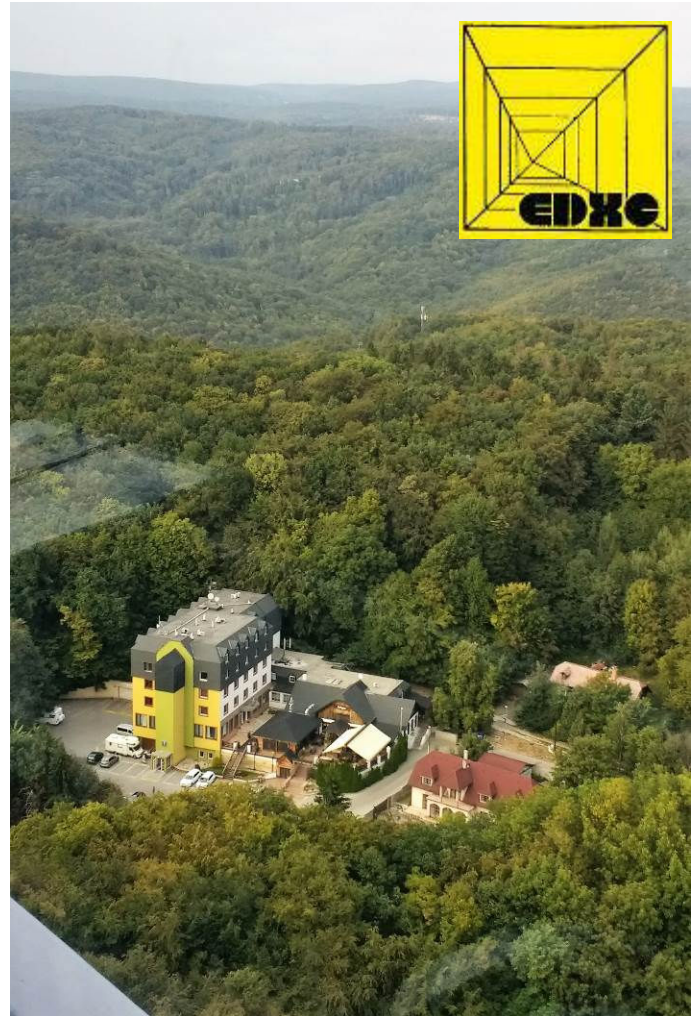
Before even crossing the Slovak border during the 45-minute coach journey from Vienna airport to Bratislava, my portable Philips radio had tuned in 10 Slovak DAB+ stations (surprisingly not listed in WRTH 2018). The multiplex on channel 12C 227.360MHz IDed as Towercom which we were soon to discover transmitted from the landmark Kamzik Tower on the same 439m high hill as (and towering over!) our conference hotel, Hotel West.

*right: Conference hotel from the Kamzik tower*

The hill-top location of our hotel also meant FM reception was possible from Austria (e.g. Radio Wien 89.9 and Ö24 102.5, both Vienna) and Hungary (e.g. Kossuth Radio 87.6 Győr and Dankó Radio 102.3) as well as Slovakia.

Some delegates arrived on the day before the conference started, and we took a 5 Euro taxi trip down into Bratislava that evening to eat and drink, and also meet up with WRMI's Jeff White and wife Thais who were attending the HFCC (High Frequency Co-ordinating Committee) B18 conference, coincidentally also being held in Bratislava. Jeff and Thais would join us at the EDXC conference on Saturday.

After breakfast the following day (Friday), minibuses took us down into Bratislava to visit Slovak Radio (Slovenský Rozhlas) in their striking "inverted pyramid" headquarters (see photo below), the spacious foyer of which has a nice display of old radio sets (*Tesla Minor 3001B* right) and other historic equipment from 82 years of Slovak and Czech Radio. Plus there's a golden man with his head in a radio set – a 2-metre high version of one of the statuettes awarded to Slovak bands and musicians at Radio\_FM's annual "Radio\_Head Awards".







Our guide around the building was Anca Dragu from Radio Slovakia International's English section, "Slovakia Today" which is just one of the nine government radio stations based there:

S1 Radio Slovensko (National programme on FM and DAB+); S2 Radio Regina (3 regional stations on MW (at night) and FM); S3 Radio Devín (cultural programme on FM and DAB+); S4 Radio\_FM (pop, rock, alternative music station on FM and DAB+); S5 Radio Patria (minorities programme on MW (daytime), FM and DAB+). Plus on DAB+ only: Radio Junior (children's) and Radio Litera (spoken word). SR's website also lists Radio Pyramida, not heard on FM or DAB+, so online and satellite only?

*right: guide Anca Dragu, Alan Roe & Chrissy Brand.*



Radio Slovakia International is carried on FM in Bratislava on Radio Patria 98.9 (transmitted from the roof of the building) in the evening and overnight. RSI's "Slovakia Today" is celebrating its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2018, coinciding with the "Velvet Divorce" which saw Slovakia and the Czech Republic agree to separate from the combined Czechoslovakia in 1993. This followed just four years after the "Velvet Revolution" in 1989 which saw the end of communism.

Construction of the steel-framed Slovenský Rozhlas building was however begun during the communist era in 1967, though not completed until 1983. Built especially for radio's needs, it is



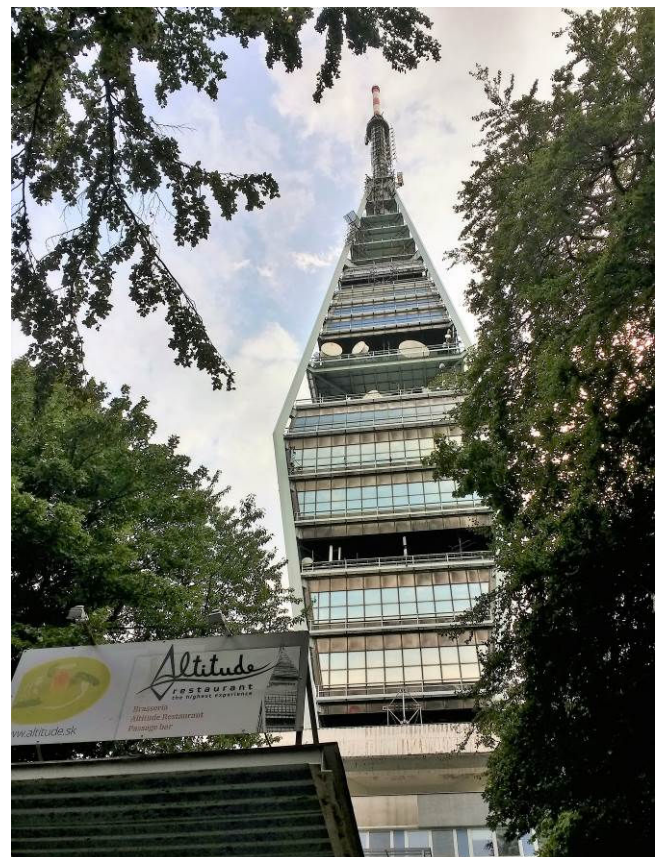
80 metres high (to the tip of its rooftop aerial) and the design was chosen following a competition. It actually consists of two inverted pyramids, one inside the other, with the inner pyramid housing a noise free space for studios, concert halls and production rooms, with the outer pyramid acting as a sound buffer as well as accommodating offices. We visited the impressive 523 seat concert hall which is spring-mounted for excellent acoustics and houses a large 6,373 pipe organ, claimed to be the biggest in Central Europe. Concerts by the Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra plus other classical and pop music concerts are held there, some are free. (No photos were allowed inside the building, but this film <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oetUtpowAqq> from 2013 shows much of what we saw, including two of the radio studios visited in our tour).

Each of the six language sections of Radio Slovakia International (RSI) (French, English, Russian, German, Slovak and Spanish) has an office. Their daily half hour programmes can be heard on a number of platforms including shortwave (though not from transmitters in Slovakia): in North America via WRMI and in Europe via Shortwave Service Kall, plus locally on FM 98.9 in Bratislava (see <http://enrsi.rtvs.sk/how-to-listen> ). The impression I got from walking round the impressive Slovak Radio HQ that Friday morning was there was a lot of empty space. It has never housed the number of employees it was designed for (around 1500) and today maybe only has half that number. Plus, in today's digital age, radio and studio equipment needs a much smaller space than when it was designed 50 years ago. Today it is costly to heat, light and maintain, with no expense spared in its original construction materials (e.g. travertine tiles). Bratislava's main bus station, built at the same time, is being demolished and travertine from it is being used to renovate Slovak Radio's pyramid. The building was declared a national cultural monument at the end of 2017 meaning it has to be maintained. We left Slovak Radio with goody bags, including a cardboard cut-out model to construct of the building!

Back at our hotel, the afternoon conference session included two interesting talks. After EDXC Secretary-General, Kari Kivekas, welcomed everyone, Jarmo Salmi presented "Small antennas in an Urban Environment", introducing a variety of compact aerials including the PA0RDT mini-whip and MFJ-1024 (outdoor) and MFJ-1022 (indoor) active aerials.

C.K. Raman from Delhi, India gave the delegates an insight into DXing in his country, where DXers are located and what catches can be made across the spectrum on SW, MW, LW and FM. Indian DXers have a net on 7080 kHz for exchanging tips. C.K illustrated his talk with some recordings: e.g. VLF stations JJY on 60 kHz, LW Mongolian Radio on 164 kHz, MW Lao National Radio on 567 and the strongest Japanese station in India, JOGB on 873 kHz.

Later that afternoon we walked up the hill from our hotel to the landmark Kamzik TV tower built on a 437m high hill, part of the Little Carpathian range which overlooks Bratislava. Construction of the 194m high tower began in 1967 and was completed in 1975. The tower is used to transmit FM and DAB+ radio stations, as well as TV. We took the high speed lift up to the enclosed observation deck, 109m above the ground, which also has a bar and gives views on a fine day of three bordering countries as well as Bratislava. Some of us returned later to eat in the Altitude restaurant, which has rotating floor to give diners a 360 degree panoramic view whilst they eat.



The Kamzik tower was hidden in the clouds as we set out in the rain by coach for a sight-seeing tour of Bratislava the next morning, including a walking tour of the city's old centre (*below left*).



A nice surprise then as our coach drove across the border into Hungary and stopped by the medium wave transmitter site near the town of Mosonmagyaróvár, about 15km from the border. This Antenna Hungaria mast (*above right*) transmits Dankó Rádió on 1116 kHz (5kW). The Mosonmagyaróvár mast on 1116kHz before 2013 carried Magyar Rádió regional station from the nearby city of Győr. Dankó Rádió is a Hungarian music station, named after famous gypsy composer Dankó Pista (1858-1903).

Then, after stopping at a huge Tesco hypermarket (!), we enjoyed a lunch of home-made Hungarian soup and beer at Korzó restaurant in the old town of Mosonmagyaróvár itself.

Returning across the border into Slovakia, our coach then headed back to Hotel West for the afternoon talks. Harald Süss of the Austrian DX Board (ADXB) welcomed us (we would travel to Vienna the following day) then gave an interesting illustrated talk on the history of GMT and the Greenwich Meridian (a time measure universally used in our hobby of course).

Next, Jukka Kotovirta reported on the "FM Summer 2018" season in Finland: although the start in June was promising, DXpeditions in Utö and Virolahti were "catastrophic". Best day for Sporadic E reception (E's) was July 12<sup>th</sup>. Historically 2004-2017 (based on number of loggings) June 8<sup>th</sup> has been the best date. Jukka plugged Gabriel EA6VQ's invaluable [www.dxmaps.com](http://www.dxmaps.com) site and told us logs posted on the [www.FMlist.org](http://www.FMlist.org) site automatically fed into DX Maps. Finally, a European record for Tropospheric DX reception? A Polish DXer 30km south of Warsaw heard YLE Puhe 100.7 (inside the Arctic Circle in Northern Finland) – a distance of 1743km!

Jeff White from WRMI next told us that as well as being General Manager of WRMI, he is Chair of HFCC and Chair of NASB (National Association of Shortwave Broadcasters). He had last attended an EDXC conference in the 1980s he said and told us a little about HFCC which aims to co-ordinate shortwave spectrum usage amongst broadcasters. 85% of shortwave broadcasters participate in HFCC and the conference in Bratislava had 72 attendees from 40



organisations. HFCC was founded in 1990 when broadcasters first met in Bulgaria. Its founder, Oldrich Cip, sadly passed away on 27<sup>th</sup> July this year. His son Vladislav, is secretary of HFCC. Future HFCC meetings are scheduled for Tunis (A19), Buenos Aires (B19), Hainan, China (A20) and Sydney Australia (B20). You can read more on the HFCC website at <http://www.hfcc.org/group.phtml>. NASB is an association of private shortwave stations in the USA (plus overseas associate members). Their last meeting was at the former HCJB technology centre in Indiana.

Jeff (*photo right*) then gave us a brief history of his station WRMI from its founding in 1989, when it hired airtime (e.g. on Radio Clarin). In 1994 it went on air from its own transmitter, near Miami for the first time. It used this site for 20-odd years until being asked in 2013 if they wanted to take over the Okeechobee site used by Family Radio which had just closed. The site of 1 square mile is owned by a cattle ranch. On December 1<sup>st</sup> 2013 the Miami site closed and WRMI started transmissions from Okeechobee. Jeff gave us a summary of organisations which currently rent airtime on WRMI and said the operation has 10 staff and is largely automated, though there is one person in the control room 24 hours. He said the European antennas had suffered hurricane damage and were not yet repaired. Also that a month-long test was being made in September for Radio Marti on 5950 kHz. Jeff added that various DX programmes aired on WRMI, but there was currently no European DX report. Jeff's wife Thais, then kindly made a prize-draw for various WRMI souvenirs.



Saturday evening saw the traditional EDXC banquet in Restaurant Schoppa next to our hotel with a very filling Slovak meal of bryndzove halusky: potato dumplings, cheese & crunchy bacon.

The final conference session on Sunday morning began with an illustrated talk by former EDXC Secretary-General, Risto Vähäkainu on his trip to USA, calling at Iceland (including RUV) en route, then attending the SWL Fest in Pennsylvania and also visiting shortwave stations WRMI in



Okeechobee FL and WINB in Red Lion PA. We then watched a 17-minute film about the "New Life Station", KNLS, with studios and headquarters in Franklin TN, USA and shortwave transmitters in Anchor Point, Alaska & Madagascar.

Secretary-General Kari Kivekäs (*photo left at the banquet*) closed the conference with an update on "EDXC Topics". He read out

greetings from around the world to the conference and gave an update on the EDXC blog <https://edxcnews.wordpress.com/> and Facebook page. The EDXC is in a sound financial position with 14 member clubs in Europe (and 2 Observer clubs) plus 7 individual members. The venue for the 2019 conference is yet to be confirmed, but Andorra had been suggested as one possible venue. Kari concluded the proceedings by saying he and Jan-Mikael (Assistant Secretary-General) had been in office now for six years – who's next?



Checking out of Hotel West, we then travelled west by coach to Vienna (see *Part 2!*).



Above: (most of) the EDXC delegates at Hotel West, Bratislava



"Radio Heads" statue (Slovak Radio HQ)



Kamzik radio & TV tower

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## Part 2 – Vienna, Austria

After three great days at the EDXC conference in the Slovak capital Bratislava, Sunday afternoon (2<sup>nd</sup> September) delegates sped westwards by coach to the Austrian capital, Vienna. The two capitals are less than an hour apart by road and once in Vienna, we picked up organiser Harald Süss of the Austrian DX Board (ADXB) who described a few of the sights of the city as we drove slowly towards our hotels.

After a meal at a local Pizzeria (where the ubiquitous Wiener Schnitzel was also on the menu!) there was a chance to check the Viennese airwaves before our radio station visits the next day. As was the case in Bratislava, the local DAB+ multiplex in Vienna is not yet listed in the WRTH. Inside Hotel Zeitgeist, close to the main railway station, 14 DAB+ stations registered on my Philips DA1200 portable from CityMux Wien II (ch 11C 220.352 MHz) though, as we were to learn the following day, ORF and major commercial broadcasters are absent. The DAB+ transmitter is on the tallest skyscraper in Austria, the DC Tower 1, north east of the city centre.

Monday morning, our first visit was to private radio station KroneHit, the most listened to commercial station in Austria. Their studios in Daumegasse were just half an hour's walk from our hotel, though most delegates used the public transport network in Vienna.

We were met by KroneHit's Programme Director for the past ten years, Rüdiger Landgraf, who gave us an introduction to his station and commercial radio in Austria in

general as well as answering our questions. KroneHit is the only commercial station with nationwide rather than just regional coverage: The FM List website shows 168 transmitters across the country for KroneHit! It targets a young and mainly female audience with a Top 40 format plus some specialist music shows and a slogan "Wir sind die meiste music".



*Above: KroneHit Programme Director Rüdiger Landgraf explains their on-air studio operation.*

However, commercial radio came very late and reluctantly to Austria, first becoming legal in 1998 and only spreading across the country in 2004. Prior to that, cross-border commercial stations could be heard in Vienna, such as Radio SiTy from Slovakia. Or pirate stations also were an alternative to ORF – Rüdiger worked for one such pirate in Vienna, “103.3”, before his career in licensed commercial radio began in 1991.

Nowadays, KroneHit itself can be heard in neighbouring countries e.g. in western Hungary on 102.9 MHz from the 1523m high Sonnewendstein site above the Semmering Pass. Rüdiger told us that some Austrian radio stations are subsidised such as non-commercial Radio Orange (“the only Free Radio in Vienna”) which receives grants from Vienna city and the EU. Orange’s schedule includes Radio Afrika International, who some remembered being heard via Radio 1476’s evening broadcasts from the ORF MW site at Bisamberg, which was reactivated in 1997 but closed in 2008.

It was clear Rüdiger is no fan of DAB when asked why KroneHit was not on the DAB+ multiplex in Vienna. He said it was too late to adopt DAB and quoted the example of Norwegian stations such as NRK P3, who have lost many listeners by migrating from FM to DAB. So, as we had noticed already, there are no major commercial or public ORF stations on DAB in Vienna. His

station KroneHit, prefers streaming online or through smart speakers or via its “KroneHit Smart App”. It also operates quite a number of online only digital stations.



Above: (left to right) Alexander Beryozkin, DJ Christian Mederitsch and Fredi Hahn.

We then split into two groups for a tour of the KroneHit studios with Rüdiger and colleague, Fredi Hahn. On air in the studio for the mid-morning slot was DJ Christian Mederitsch (*photo above*) who took time out to chat whilst tracks were playing. KroneHit has different regional networks of



transmitters, which can carry different advertising breaks, but all carry the same national programme on FM.

A short walk then U-Bahn train ride took us to the home of national public service radio, Österreichischer Rundfunk, ORF Funkhaus in Argentinierstrasse, in the Wieden district near the city centre. The Funkhaus (Broadcasting House) was erected between 1935 and 1938 for the original state public broadcaster, RAVAG. The original plans for the building by architects Aichinger and Schmid were taken over by Clemens Holzmeister resulting in the monumental art deco frontage, little changed in the past 80 years.

#### *Funkhaus in 1937*

RAVAG however was dissolved after the Anschluss to Nazi Germany in 1938, replaced by German-controlled Reichsender Wien. In early 1945, the broadcasting house was damaged by Allied bombing and Reichsender Wien made its last broadcast on 6 April



1945. A new Radio Wien was founded with a temporary transmitter on the roof of the Funkhaus as the retreating Germans had blown up the transmitter at Bisamberg. The Funkhaus however was in the Soviet occupied sector of Vienna whilst other areas of the country had their own radio stations set up by their occupying Allied forces. The Funkhaus was designated a listed building in 1999. One appropriate more recent addition in front of the Funkhaus is a 4-metre high colourful sculpture by Johann Garber of an ear, *Das Ohr*, added in 1997 (photo right).

Our guide met us in the foyer and she first took us to one of two large music studios (Studios 2 & 3) whose tall walls are beautifully decorated still with romantic painted scenes from the 1930s. These studios (and the Grosse Sendesaal below) are trapezium shaped to improve acoustics.

We then visited the studios of ORF's "alternative mainstream" station FM4,



which targets a youth audience with alternative music and with many programmes in English. Set

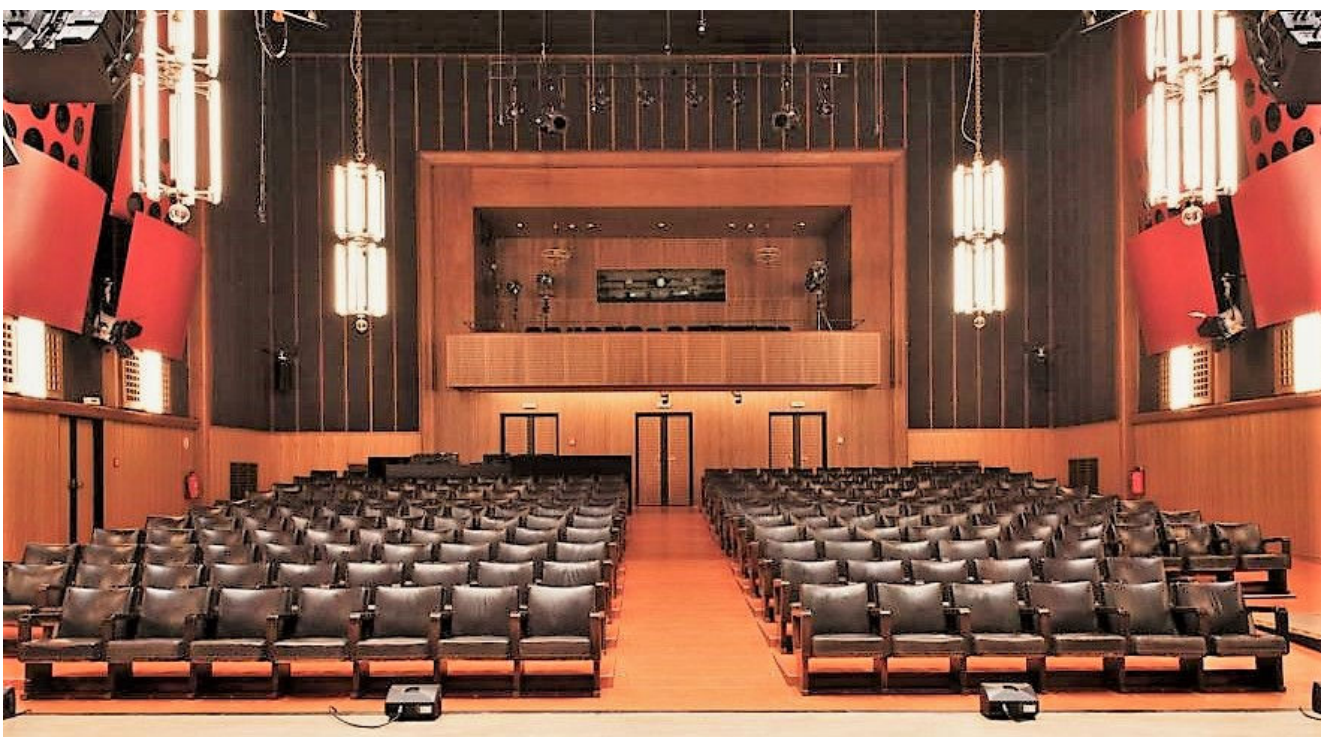


up in 1995, FM4 originally was only broadcast evenings and overnight as it shared frequencies with English language Blue Danube Radio (which had been established for the United Nations community in Vienna). The two stations merged in 2000 (hence the English programming) and FM4 became 24/7. On air presenter during our visit was Riem Higazi (*right*), originally from Egypt, who also does voice-overs and is a producer at the station, and she chatted to us in the rather crowded and warm studio while music was playing out.



ORF Funkhaus is currently also home to national Österreich 1 (Ö1), regional station Radio Wien and the ORF Radio Symphony Orchestra. The

orchestra often plays live concerts in the impressive Grosse Sendesaal (large broadcasting hall) which we saw next, whose large stage is backed by a huge pipe organ (reminiscent of, and equally impressive as, the one seen at Slovak Radio in Bratislava three days previous). The original leather seats are still in situ, fixed, not hinged so as to create no disturbance during concerts. (*view from the stage below*)





Two smaller studios completed our tour, including fixtures for making sound effects during radio dramas such as closing doors and gravel for walking on.

We thanked our guide and then met Professor Wolf Harranth in the impressive Funkhaus foyer. He would take us on a walking tour of some of the sights of central Vienna. No time for a coffee in the Radio Café and sadly the ORF shop is now online only <https://shop.orf.at/en> for those who wanted a retro-radio moneybox or testcard design umbrella!

Wolf Harranth is known to many of us as the presenter of Radio Austria International's weekly DX programme, Austrian Shortwave Panorama from 1975, is also a radio amateur and is now curator of the DocuFunk QSL archive (see below). In the Funkhaus foyer, he lambasted the decision by ORF in 2016 to sell the historic broadcasting house we were stood in, and we had to agree it seemed strange to have sold such a historic and cultural landmark. Despite protests from some ORF staff together with musicians, writers and others, the building has been sold to the Rhomberg Group, although ORF will somehow retain the use of the Radiokulturhaus concert halls. The aim of the move is to consolidate ORF in one centre at Königlberg on the outskirts of Vienna. The move to ORF Zentrum is criticised as it is remote from the cultural heart of the city and with buses the only public transport to the site. The move is still to take place, maybe with ORF staying in the Funkhaus at least until the end of 2021.



Wolf is very knowledgeable about Vienna and its architecture and his tour took in the magnificent St Charles Church, the semi-circular colonnade erected as a war memorial for the Soviet Red Army losses in capturing Vienna in April 1945, the Vienna concert hall and St Stephens cathedral.

Having expressed an interest in the **DokuFunk QSL Archive**, Wolf Harranth very kindly offered to take Dave Kenny and myself to see it at first hand. Located in a large industrial warehouse on a trading estate in the southern suburbs of Vienna, it took around an hour to reach from central Vienna, involving a busy suburban train followed by a short bus connection and walk. At the entrance door sits a large mast base from the Bisamberg MW transmitter site, built in 1933 but demolished in 2010.

DokuFunk was set up 25 years ago as the International Foundation QSL Collection, an archive to research and document the history of radio communications, originally run entirely by volunteers. It covers international broadcasting and amateur radio as well as Austrian broadcast history.

DXers may have heard of it as a place to donate their precious QSL collections where they would be archived forever. However, Wolf told us that they had been inundated with amateur radio QSL collections. By comparison there were far fewer broadcast QSLs being left to the collection. And although more amateur cards were not really wanted, they continued to arrive in vast quantities - there was a huge backlog in processing them.





Nowadays much of DokuFunk's principle work is involved in archiving both audio and printed archives, from the Austrian public broadcaster ORF. These include periodicals and scripts from the early days of Austrian radio when no recordings exist.

However, ORF wanted to take over the warehouse (which it owns) for storing vehicles, so DokuFunk was having to move premises, a monumental task. Space has been allocated to them at another location, but the task of cataloguing and relocating the entire archive seems overwhelming. In the basement we saw crates of documents which were awaiting processing, and with documents continuing to arrive all the time there was quite a backlog. Upstairs archivists steadily scan and catalogue the historic material, all of which is stored digitally. DocuFunk has a website (with English option) at: <http://dokufunk.org/> with explains on the home page what donations of cards etc they would accept. And there is a video about DocuFunk (in German but with English subtitles) at <https://vimeo.com/222005450> in which Wolf Harranth proudly states: "Everything that is here, would not exist anymore, if it was not here". Thanks to Wolf for taking time out to show us around DocuFunk!

**Below, some QSL cards from the Dokufunk, Vienna archives:**

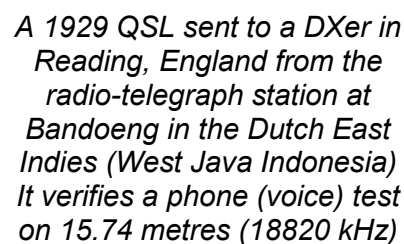


1930s QSL from  
CR7AA  
in Lourenço Marques,  
Portuguese East Africa  
(now Maputo  
Mozambique)

*A Radio Nederland PCJ  
QSL from the late 1940s  
showing the remarkable  
wooden rotating beam  
aerials at Huizen. (They  
were constructed in 1937  
and demolished in 1940)*







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