



# The Access City Awards 2010-2015 – An Evaluation

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## The European Disability Forum (EDF)

EDF is the European umbrella organisation representing the interests of 80 million persons with disabilities in Europe. The mission of EDF is to ensure that persons with disabilities have full access to fundamental and human rights through their active involvement in policy development and implementation in Europe. EDF is a member of the International Disability Alliance and works closely with the European institutions, the Council of Europe and the United Nations.

### Introduction

EDF was happy to start the Awards together with the European Commission back in 2010 in order to raise awareness and increase visibility of accessibility in urban environments. The initiative has successfully attracted many applications and allowed the exchange of good practices. Considering that the Awards have now existed for five years, this is the ideal moment to reflect on what has been achieved and how the Award process could be strengthened. The purpose is also to reflect on EDF's own involvement in the Awards and to stimulate a dialogue with members about this.

### About the Awards

The first edition of the Access City Awards was launched in 2010 following an initiative by the Spanish presidency of the Council of the European Union. 66 European cities from 19 EU Member States participated in the first competition; the first winning city was Ávila (Spain), followed by Salzburg (Austria) in 2011, Berlin (Germany) in 2012, Gothenburg (Sweden) in 2013 and Borås (Sweden) in 2014. In the first years the number of participant cities was on the rise (114, 99, 102...) but has shown a slight decline since then.

Once the call for nominations is launched, cities with a population of more than 50 000 can submit their applications via an on-line platform. Before going to the European jury there is a pre-selection on national level with a separate national jury which suggests up to three national finalists<sup>1</sup>. After the national pre-selection, the finalists' applications are sent to the European jury that makes the final decision.

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<sup>1</sup> Access City Awards, Rules of participation for the 2014 edition, [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/events/access-city-award-2015/files/participation-rules-and-registration\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/events/access-city-award-2015/files/participation-rules-and-registration_en.pdf) (retrieved on 18 March 2015)



All juries, both national and European, are composed of a representative of a Disabled Persons' Organization (DPO), an accessibility expert, a representative of the national public administration and a representative of an Older Persons' Organization. This is an excellent example of direct involvement of DPOs in a Commission initiative.

The Award covers four main aspects of accessibility that all have to be taken into account to show a coherent, overarching approach to accessibility: the built environment and public spaces, transport and related infrastructure, information and communication (including new technologies (ICTs)) and public facilities and services.<sup>2</sup> There are a first, a second and a third price but it is also possible to designate a "special mention" for applicants that have shown a special commitment or distinguish themselves by an innovative practice in a specific area.

The Award ceremony usually takes place as part of the programme of the European Day of Persons with Disabilities on 3 December.

## **EDF's experience of the involvement in the Awards**

EDF has been involved in the setting up and organizing of the Access City Awards since the very beginning. EDF's main task is supporting the Commission's contractors in the dissemination of the call to make sure as many cities as possible are reached as well as identifying possible contact persons for the national juries. The cooperation with the different contractors (Mostra and ProPager) usually went relatively smooth and was limited to contact by e-mail. EDF is also represented in the European jury. During the award ceremony, EDF has so far not participated actively but this could be changed.

After the first edition of the Awards in 2011, EDF consulted its members and the experts that had participated in the national juries. We received some useful feedback mainly on the organizational aspects of the competition. The main criticisms were the short deadlines for the juries to assess the applications, the unclear timeline and an initial problem with the on-line platform.

While some issues, such as troubles with the online platform, have been solved, others remain. The guidelines for the jury, for example, are still relatively vague. Since the national juries communicate mainly via e-mail and there are usually no site visits, the jury members

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<sup>2</sup> European Commission, DG Justice, Access City Awards 2015, [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/disabilities/award/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/disabilities/award/index_en.htm) (retrieved on 18 March 2015)



rely on local DPOs to confirm the accuracy of the information in the application. This can be difficult because local DPOs rarely cover all disabilities and may therefore miss out on very essential design requirements for ensuring accessibility for persons with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities for example.

EDF repeated this consultation in 2015 in preparation of this paper and the feedback reconfirmed the initial points, adding some others: the impact of the Awards is difficult to measure and there is need for more publicity and communication around the initiative, especially on national level. This was also confirmed by the City of Gothenburg, the winner of the 2013 edition of the Awards. A need for better involvement of different stakeholders and interest groups could be beneficial in this context. A broader focus on non-physical barriers was also mentioned, as this could introduce an additional dimension to the Awards.

In addition to the EDF membership, AGE Platform Europe also participated in the consultation and contributed valuable information, both from the national as well as the European jury members. The comments mainly supported the EDF analysis while also adding the dimension of suggesting more synergies with different projects and initiatives that tie in well with the theme.

Concerning the potential applicants it has been remarked that the minimum size of a population of 50 000 is limiting, especially in smaller countries. While there is a possibility for two administrative entities to apply jointly this remains a hindrance. However, this has also been considered before and it was decided not to lower the minimum size because it would deprive the Award of its purpose if the candidate cities are not comparable at all.

## Recommendations to the European Commission

To reinvigorate the Access City Awards and to ensure further success in the future, EDF would like to make recommendations to the European Commission.

### 1) Reconsider the application criteria

Even though we agree that the candidate cities still have to be at least roughly comparable, we suggest finding other ways to open the competition also for smaller cities in order to attract more applications. It could for example be an option to have a separate category for smaller cities or for dedicating a “special mention” that is awarded irrespective of size. To broaden the scope of the Awards why not include



additional aspects such shops, train stations, etc. and reward each category separately. This could also alternate every year. Furthermore, other aspects of accessibility could be taken up: especially the “invisible barriers” for persons with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities as well as Alzheimer’s deserve to be focused on more.

## 2) Ensure better dissemination and creating a legacy

From what EDF has seen in the past five years, the winning cities have usually used the Award to promote their city and the accessibility measures they have taken. This means that there has been some exchange of good practices but this could be improved. So far, this has been limited to several publications<sup>3</sup> of the Commission but other means of exchange could be envisaged, such as seminars or study visits.

It should be clear that winning the Access City Awards is not just important for the one day of the Award ceremony but also encourages other cities to follow the example and that it has a longer lasting effect. One way would be for example to link the winning city each year to the process for awarding the following year’s awards. For example the winning city one year could host the announcement event for the following year’s winner, including streaming the event live for everyone to follow. In addition, this could go hand in hand with a seminar on accessible urban planning.

It would be interesting to have a follow-up study to see if winning the Awards and making the city more accessible has for example had a positive impact on tourism, citizens’ participation, etc.

## 3) Clarify the Award’s selection procedure

Right now, the jury does a very important and difficult job but how this is done is not clear. There are no terms of reference available on the website and the jury is not publicly known. Clearer guidelines, longer deadlines and more cooperation in the planning procedure could solve this. This goes hand in hand with a simplified application procedure for the candidates, which can also help to increase the number of participants. Persons with disabilities themselves should also have the opportunity to participate directly in a ‘people’s jury’, both at national level and European level.

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<sup>3</sup> For example: “Access City Award 2014 – European cities responding to the accessibility needs of ALL citizens” [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/events/access-city-award-2015/files/access-city-award-2014-brochure\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/events/access-city-award-2015/files/access-city-award-2014-brochure_en.pdf) . Retrieved 15 June 2015



## Conclusion

The Access City Awards have been a successful means of raising awareness of accessibility. It is an initiative which demonstrates good practices at national and regional level. We would like to stay involved but suggest a few improvements to maximise the impact of the Awards and to make them relevant also for the future.

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## Acknowledgments

This position paper has been prepared in consultation with EDF members and experts as well as AGE Platform Europe.

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