

*Eko-skola:  
An interview with a  
member of the local Bicycle  
Advocacy Group (BAG*

*St. Joseph Senior School, Sliema*



# Introduction

*Here you have some info.*

Some briefing info from a website called:  
<https://www.bagmalta.org/>

- As air pollution levels drop 70% thanks to the lack of traffic caused by the Coronavirus crisis, eNGO Flimkien għal Ambjent Aħjar (FAA) and the Bicycle Advocacy Group (BAG) urge the government to add walking and cycling on top of their list of recommended means of mobility.



*Our assistant head found a site too, about how Milan announces ambitious scheme to reduce car use after lockdown.*


*The site:*

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/21/milan-seeks-to-prevent-post-crisis-return-of-traffic-pollution>



- Milan is to introduce one of Europe's most ambitious schemes reallocating street space from cars to cycling and walking, in response to the coronavirus crisis.

- The northern Italian city and surrounding Lombardy region are among Europe's most polluted, and have also been especially hard hit by the Covid-19 outbreak.



*We have managed to interview Mr. Steve Zammit Lupi, a member of the Bicycle Advocacy Group (BAG) in order to learn more about bicycle-use and its benefits.*

A colorful illustration of a landscape. The sky is composed of horizontal wavy bands of blue and white. In the foreground, there are rolling green hills with a brown path. On the left, there is a green tree, a purple flower, and a red bird flying. The text "Now for our questions ..." is written in a brown, cursive font in the center-right of the image.

*Now for our  
questions ...*



**Question 1:** How did the interest of using bikes start?

“My interest in bicycles started at a very young age. At the age of 8 my parents had already bought me a bicycle. Once I turned 12 I started riding my bicycle around my village. Back then, Haż-Żebbuġ was more quiet than today, with less cars and traffic in its streets. This allowed me to ride my bicycle at easy and explore the streets and surrounding countryside.”



## Question 2:

What are the benefits of using a bicycle?

- “The bicycle gives you freedom. It doesn’t take much space and involves physical activity. Riding a bicycle keeps you active and healthy. If you use a bicycle to get around and do errands, it will save you time out of traffic, finding parking and consuming fuel. If more people cycle to work, there will be less traffic and less air pollution too, so the air we breathe comes cleaner. A disadvantage of cycling is that there is no crumple zone like in a car. If you have an accident, you can get hurt easier since you have no protection around you. Yet the bicycle remains a safe mode of transport, and other cities like Milan are investing in bicycle lanes and bicycle infrastructure to make cycling in the city safer. Another disadvantage perhaps is getting sweaty, or the effort to climb hills. Yet today, thanks to technology e-bicycle can help out.”

### Question 3:

Is it pricey to purchase and maintain? (extra keys just in case etc)

“Bicycles in comparison to a car are very cheap. An introduction bicycle would cost a few hundreds of euros. A decent commuting pedelec would cost around €2000. The government offer grants on bicycles too. The return investment pays off after a few months too. Maintaining a bicycle is very low cost.”

### Question 4:

What is the input of electrical bikes on the environment? Do they defeat the purpose of using a bicycle?

“E-bicycles, or pedelecs involve the use of a lithium battery to assist you when peddling. This eases your commute and makes it more comfortable and fast. I think the trade off is much more positive, and there are ways to dispose of the battery. Technology has improved a lot, and the efficiency of the batteries and their life time have improved. Even cars have batteries, and conventional cars pollute. Bicycles leave behind them zero emissions.”

*Question 5: Are you frightened when you travel using your bicycle in the road?*

*“I am not frightened as I’ve learnt the rules of the road and how to cycle on them. Yet there were instances where I wished I felt safer. This is due to the lack of infrastructure for bicycles, most times you end up sharing the road with fast moving traffic. Unless you find alternative routes, like village streets or rural roads to bypass traffic. This is ideal but not always possible.”*

*Question 6: Are our roads adapted for the use of bicycles?*

*“Our roads are not really adapted for bicycle use. Our governments have never invested in bicycles, or believed in their potential. If they did, they would carry out plans like Milan to bring about real change. There is still alot more to do, this is why as citizens we must be vocal and be the change.”*

*Question 7: What safety procedures are you to follow on the road? (highlighted jacket, helmet etc)*

*“When riding, I usually wear a highlighted jacket and a helmet. At night, I make sure my front and back lights are on and working well. I always follow the road code, and all traffic rules including traffic lights. When approaching junctions I take the centre of the inner lane, and use my hands to navigate roundabouts.”*

*Question 8: Is it efficient to use if you need to go shopping/to work etc? (since you need to carry more things)*

*“The bicycle is a very efficient way to do shopping and work. You will be surprised how much stuff you can carry on your bicycle. Today there also exists panniers, and carts to attach to your bicycle to win more space. For the average worker, it's usually a case or a laptop, so space is available.”*

## Question 9: Why do you think people find it hard to switch to bicycle use?


*“People find it hard to switch to bicycle use because they do not even consider it as a mode of transport, because our authorities barely consider it themselves. It is difficult for people to consider a mode of transport, if it is barely available for them to try it out. It’s like asking people to catch a train from Sliema to Valletta, if there is no service. We have seen in cities all over a world that when they invest in bicycle lanes and safe roads for bicycles, people start to cycle more. When people cycle more, even those that keep driving benefit less traffic and more readily available parking.”*

*Question 10: How do you try to bring awareness and encourage others to opt for bicycles or other eco-friendly options?*

*“As a group we lobby with the authorities and politicians to include cycling in their manifestos and political visions. We inspire people to start themselves cycling, so they can transform their lives and the time in their days. We also communicate with the media, so we increase our reach and audience.”*



How is this  
change going to  
be possible?  
Some people  
are lazy to  
drive a bike!

A stylized illustration of a landscape with rolling green hills. In the foreground, there are several layers of green hills in different shades. To the left, there is a tree with rounded green foliage and a small orange bird flying above it. Next to the tree are some purple and pink flowers. A brown path winds through the hills. The background features a blue sky with white clouds.

*“Once you provide safe infrastructure for bicycles, instead of focusing to build larger car parks or wider roads for more car lanes, people will shift alone. Malta is a very small island and the distances we travel to get from A to B are very small, compared to abroad. So the excuses are not really justified, and are based on lack of awareness and opportunities. Over the past months we have seen a small shift towards cycling as a mode of transport. As youths, we must ride the change ourselves to make our communities a less traffic, and less polluted places to live in.”*



*A big thank you goes to Mr  
Steve Zammit Lupi from the  
Bicycle Advocacy Group for  
taking the time to answer  
our questions.*

