

# CYCLOCOSPIRACY HANDBOOK: HOW TO START A VELOURUTION IN YOUR COUNTRY

**-Based on the #salvaiciclisti experience-**



On 28th of April ten thousand people took part to the demonstration "London go Dutch!" in the UK. On the same day roughly fifty thousand bicycle invaded the Fori Imperiali in Rome for the biggest demonstration for the promotion of cycling of the history.

Behind the London's bike ride there was the "Cities fir for cyclists" campaign promoted by the Times and by its powerful organization; behind the Rome's one there was the "#salvaiciclisti" campaign promoted just by a bunch of blogger and few thousand of volunteers spread all over Italy.

Few days ago the ECF claimed: "The Times "Cycle Safe" Campaign in the UK is still going strong. In Italy, "Salvaiciclisti" is going crazy. It may have even eclipsed its sister campaign across the channel."

The obvious question is "how could a group of bike bloggers reach such an amazing result and so quickly?".

The answer is just a matter of strategy, as you will read further.



## How it began

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February the Times launched the “Cities fit for cyclists” campaign publishing the 8 point manifesto addressed to the Parliament in order to improve cyclists’s safety on British roads.

Six days later, a group of 38 bike blogger published simultaneously a letter addressed to the 25 most influential Italian newspaper asking them to reply the same campaign in Italy. The letter contained also a call to action to all the readers of the blogs who has been asked to send an email to the mentioned newspaper and to spread the letter in any possible way.



It was the 8<sup>th</sup> of February, Italian roads were covered by snow due to the coldest winter of the last 50 years and the #salvaiciclisti campaign began.

Within few hours the hashtag #salvaiciclisti entered into the trend topic on twitter and the first journalists started to complain because the mail bombing generated blocked their email servers. Soon the newspapers started to publish articles headlined “the blogger’s revolt has begun”.

Immediately we opened a Facebook group which has been joined by 2.000 people just in the first 24 hours and in less than a week over 140 blogs and website republished the letter addressed to the newspaper.



After three days of campaign the delegates of the campaign have been received to the Italian Parliament in order to write a bill which has been signed by more than 60 senators belonging to all political parties. The bill was simply a translation of the 8 points Times manifesto.

On 23th of February #salvaiciclisti left the path of the British campaign and the bloggers launched a new phase called "Dear Mayor". The letter this time has been addressed to the mayor of the 20 biggest Italian cities asking them to be more aware of the needs of cyclists: 10 points aiming, among others, to reduce the speed limits inside the city centers, to build more cycling infrastructures, to fight against wild parking and to run some communication campaigns to reeducate car drivers.



The logic was the same: the readers were asked to send an email to the mayor of their city and to the ones of the 20 biggest cities, and to widespread the letter in any possible form. The day after the second mail bombing the mayors of Milan and Florence joined the campaign and, within few days, the mayors of Turin, Bologna, Naples and Rome did the same.

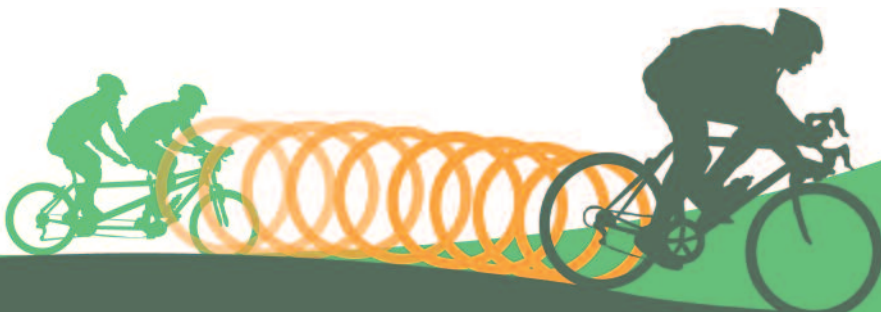
Milan immediately started to address car drivers with messages about cyclists's safety wrote on the traffic information panels : "look at your back mirror before you open the door #salvaiciclisti" and soon other cities like Turin, Taranto and Cremona did the same.



In the next weeks the campaign collect a few small victories like: the invitation to talk at the transport commission of the Parliament about the needs of cyclists and pedestrians for the reform of traffic laws; some decision supporting the campaign taken in big cities; the joining of the Regions, Lombardy, Apulia and Liguria to the campaign; and the letter addressed to the movement by the Prime Minister, Mario Monti.

At the moment, the Facebook group can count on 19.000 people who discuss and plan how to go on with the campaign, the string "salvaiciclisti" has 400.000 matches in Google and it's impossible to tell how many cities already joined the campaign.

What happened in Italy was a miracle, but not an accident: it was the result of a planned strategy that gave voice to a sleeping majority.



# The strategy behind the success:

The **Digital Critical Mass**: The bike bloggers, instead of fighting for a few clicks decided to get together creating a media network broadcasting the same message. All the visitors of the blogs have been turned into a booster in order to spread the message. Like on the roads, also on the web only a critical mass is visible.

The **amplification system**: the message (aiming to reach the Parliament and the politicians) has been sent first to the newspapers to amplify it and to increase the force behind the message. The politicians got hit indirectly but very hardly, when they could not refuse anymore to ignore the campaign.





**The message:** the broadcasted message was easy, positive and not vague. The request to the politicians were punctual, technical and in many cases measurable. Italian politicians are particularly keen to make empty promises, that's why the requests of the campaign tried to avoid this attitude. Easy messages are easier to remember.



The **journalists**: the biggest allies of the campaign were the journalists. Many of them are cyclists themselves and were more than happy to support it. Crucial was the presence of journalists working for news agencies.

The **competition**: The *cities fit for cyclists* campaign was backed by only one newspaper. #salvaiciclisti has been backed strongly by at least three national newspapers plus local ones and radios. If you are a source of news, everybody will fight to cover you.

**VIPs**: Musicians, anchormen, actors, writers, many of them are cyclists and share the same perspective of the campaign about the need of action to avoid fatalities on Italian streets.



**Numbers:** Journalists love them. The initial great kick of the campaign was due to a comparison of the number of deaths among cyclists in the UK and in Italy in the last ten years: 1.225 vs. 2.556. These numbers are facts and talk. Only Germany and Poland have a higher figures.

**Social Media:** If #salvaiciclisti reached so many people in so few time is just through the intensive use of Facebook and Twitter. Facebook has become the main source of news for many people; journalists and politicians (in Italy) love twitter. The name itself says everything about it.



**Money:** Bringing 50.000 people on the streets in Rome on April the 28<sup>th</sup> was much easier than you might think: if your message is clear and people's commitment is strong, you don't need much money for advertising. 593,44 euro is what has been spent for traditional advertisement by #salvaiciclisti: posters and fliers.

**Not only for cyclists:** #salvaiciclisti repeated like a mantra: "we are not cyclists we are citizens who want or who would like to use the bicycle". #salvaiciclisti is not a campaign run by a category of people, but a fight for civil rights.



**Inclusion:** #salvaiciclisti could reach a huge audience because the message aimed to reach everybody: if you run a campaign pro cyclists, ask yourself if also pedestrians, handicapped people and environmental association might benefit from your campaign. If the answer is positive, ask them to join the campaign.

**The enemy:** If you have to fight, you need to know who is your enemy. #salvaiciclisti was clear from the very first day: the enemy are not car drivers but politicians who refuse to commit themselves in order to improve cyclists's safety.

**Experience:** #salvaiciclisti was a new campaign focused on bike safety, but it could not go anywhere without the support of all those people who committed themselves for years for the promotion of cycling: the national and local cyclists's associations. Most of the times, these associations just lacked of marketing and communication skills to break through, but their technical knowledge is unreachable. If you work together, you can go far.



**Hierarchy:** As a movement, #salvaiciclisti has no leader. The grassroots organization made it possible to give everybody a sense of responsibility about the results of the campaign. This does not mean that there are no charismatic figures; it just means that everybody is entitled to decide for #salvaiciclisti.

**Flash mobs:** In order to capture the attention of traditional media, #salvaiciclisti organized many flash mobs: in front of the obituary, in front of Prime Minister's office. Just remember to involve the press before any action.

**Out of the web:** Isolation is the main problem caused by working just on the web: it's necessary to meet in the real world. #salvaiciclisti called for a blind date: on May 20<sup>th</sup> all supporters of #salvaiciclisti has been asked to go in front of their city hall in order to meet with each other and organize local groups. Despite the earthquake it worked.



**How to start:** The biggest issue is how to begin: it might take months before you and all the bloggers agree on the content of the first communication to launch. Why don't you use the Times's 8 point Manifesto? It might be a bit unsuitable for your country, but it's a first step for launching the first digital Critical Mass. The next steps will come by themselves.



<http://www.salvaiciclisti.it>

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