

Bringing Cycling Advocacy up a Gear - ECF Training for Cyclist.ie in Ljubljana

Saturday, 05 December 2015

The [European Cyclists' Federation](#) has recognised Cyclist.ie has one of the most effective national cycling advocacy associations of its size in Europe. It is, to use the cliché, punching above its weight and making the voice of the everyday Irish cyclist heard.

It is for this reason that ECF awarded Cyclist.ie 'Leadership Programme' (LP) funding for the last three years – and this support has enabled us to sustain the position of National Cycling Coordinator (NCC), currently held by Dr. Damien Ó Tuama. The ECF support has also taken the form of intensive advocacy training for all of the national associations participating in the LP. In the last week in November 2015, Damien travelled to the lovely city of Ljubljana in Slovenia to join representatives from Iceland, Finland, Sweden, France, Spain, Italy, Greece, Austria, Slovenia and Croatia for the latest training sessions and workshops.

In some ways, the various groups are quite different. For example, the [Swedish member of ECF](#) has a history going back 80+ years, while other national associations (such as the Finnish and Slovenian groups) are brand new. Some, such as FIAB in Italy, are federations of well over 100 local groups, while others are much smaller bodies. Despite these differences, the challenges we face are remarkably similar: all groups are trying to challenge the dominance of the private car in their respective countries, and are working hard to build stronger organisations to enable the bicycle to be brought into the centre of mobility policy. We heard very encouraging news of how the Finnish group conducted a comprehensive study of the changes needed to Finnish traffic law to help normalise safe everyday cycling and how it has achieved a number of successes. Meanwhile in Sweden, the equivalent group to Cyclist.ie is building alliances with other stakeholders so as to leverage its own lobbying power and raise the profile of the bicycle in transport thinking and policy.

As part of the trip, we attended a presentation in City Hall by one of the elected politicians (who was also a professor of transport planning in the local university) on the development and implementation of [Ljubljana's mobility plan](#). The city has a population of 280,000 with a further 140,000 residents in nearby towns many of whom commute into Ljubljana. Over the last seven years or so, cars have been completely removed from the main Medieval part of the city, with a huge underground car park built underneath the town park/square! From a visitor's perspective, what is very striking is the large number of young families out cycling (parents with 7/8/9/10 year olds cycling beside them) – something that is very uncommon in Irish cities. By taming the car, they are making the city centre safe and accessible to cyclists of all ages and abilities (the '8 to 80' age group!).

As well as the more formal workshops and presentations, we had plenty of time to cycle and walk through the city, to socialise and get to know each other a lot better. All this makes it much easier to pick up the phone to our campaigning colleagues all around Europe when we need to pick their brains, and to build stronger cycling advocacy. Sincere thanks to our fabulous Slovenian hosts and to Kevin and Elina of the ECF for the terrific training.

In conclusion, the ECF training is enabling all of our organisations to strategise more effectively, to decide on the right campaigns to run and to radically improve our lobbying skills. Back at home, this will translate into more cycling-friendly policies at local and national levels, and hence to more cyclists on the streets. At this juncture however, it is crucial that Cyclist.ie brings in more funding to support the position of National Cycling Coordinator. The further development and continuation of this post will shape if and how the next government considers cycling as a core part of its transport policy. We call upon the Irish cycling businesses to step up to the mark and to support this work.

For more information, contact Damien Ó Tuama, National Cycling Coordinator, damienuama@antaisce.org, Tel: 087-2840799



All participants at the workshop



Morten (Iceland), Damien (Cyclist.ie), Saskia (FIAB Italy) and Guilia (FIAB Italy)



Nela (our hostess), Slovenian Cycling Network



Bojan (our host), Slovenian Cycling Network and Yalana, Croatian Cycling Association