

INTERVIEW WITH
GIOVANNI PINTOR

ELABORATED BY
CARLOTTA INSERRA

ADVOCACY RULES

The WHO may have declared COVID-19 as no longer representing a 'global health emergency', yet there is one silent epidemic that continues to pervade our cities and regions: each year, **road safety crashes take the lives of 1.35 million people across the globe.**

And while European roads may be the safest in the world, last year alone they still stole the lives of around 20,600 people, marking a 10% decrease since 2019, but a 3% increase since 2021. Progress is underway — but if we are to achieve the set goal of halving road deaths by 2030, one thing is for certain: it is not happening fast enough.

Within this context, it is also essential to reflect on who is affected the most. In almost all European countries, road crashes are the major cause of death for young people aged 18-24, giving them the highest mortality rate out of all age groups. Moreover, across the EU, 52% of road traffic fatalities occurred on rural roads versus 39% in urban areas, making them the most vulnerable areas.

Looking at this data, it becomes evident that the sustainable urban mobility agenda can no longer afford to ignore the important role youth can and must play in achieving road safety, not just in major cities but also in those rural areas that do not always get a seat at the table. If we are to make Vision Zero a reality, its narrative must be fostered among policymakers and society at large, in a co-creative process that raises young people's voices and involves them as part of the solution.

In this regard, some youth have already begun to take matters into their own hands. Giovanni Pintor is the founder of '#AdessoBasta', ('That's enough' in Italian), a not-for-profit organisation based in Nuoro, Italy, made by youth for youth to promote road safety in the region, through cultural events centred around music, art, and sports. We sat down with him to learn more about his story, how his approach to road safety has paved the way for safer road infrastructure in his hometown, and what cities can learn from young people and their advocacy efforts.





*Hip hop concert at #AdessoBasta's
'NEPO 2022' event*

Austinu D'Antonio



Giovanni Pintor

Founder | Strategic Partnerships
Consultant | EDD Young Leader
#AdessoBasta NGO | UNRSF

POLIS: Could you tell us a little bit more about what you have been working on with your NGO, #AdessoBasta, and why it was so necessary for you to give rise to such an organisation yourself? What are your plans for the future?

Giovanni Pintor: It was Christmas Day, 2017. My cousin was driving me and my two brothers, Francesco and Matteo, to my mother's village for the Christmas family gathering. I was in the front seat. Francesco and Matteo were in the back.

I could have never imagined that Christmas would have been my brothers' last — all because of a very dangerous curve on the road that made my cousin lose control of his car, which drifted, switched lanes, and crashed into the safety barrier. The latter, instead of absorbing the impact, literally penetrated the car, killing Matteo and Francesco. We were not drunk. We were not speeding. It was that curve — that very curve — that caused my cousin's drifting.

A month after that crash, I launched the hashtag “#AdessoBasta”, meaning “that's enough” in Italian, to raise my concerns about what happened. My brothers' friends and mine then came in and helped me adopt a creative approach involving hip-hop concerts, street basketball tournaments, and art shows, to demonstrate how young people can be agents for change. We shifted from a hashtag to an NGO and we started advocating.

Over 5 years, we managed to lobby the Italian government to re-construct the curve where my brothers lost their lives, for an intervention worth over €4 million. Today, I work as a Partnership Consultant at the [UN Road Safety Fund](#), and I plan to expand #AdessoBasta to reach more people, in Italy and beyond.

POLIS: At the [European Development Days 2022](#), where you were selected as a Young Leader, you interestingly mentioned that you are in a 'fight to reframe road safety as something attractive'. Why would you define it as a fight?

Giovanni: My 'fight' stems from the fact that, despite the staggering numbers, road safety still does not make it to the headlines. It is glaring — both from the number of financial resources invested in safer roads globally and from the lack of progress towards the EU and UN's goal to halve the number of global deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents by 2030.

Road safety is a complex issue that involves a wide range of entities, including governments, policymakers, transport authorities, vehicle manufacturers, and the rest of us, the road users. The reason for this lack of commitment or interest in the topic is even more complicated and manifold: firstly, investments in road safety infrastructure are often long-term and expensive.

Secondly, there is still a blame-based discourse that focuses on blaming drivers for crashes, contrary to the [safe system approach](#), which recognises that road safety is a shared responsibility and that the road transport system must be designed to accommodate human error. With the former, blaming drivers becomes a good excuse not to invest in safer road infrastructure — even when data shows that safer infrastructure can accommodate human error, or, simply, it can save lives. As a result, it is challenging to gain public support and political will for road safety initiatives.

To make road safety attractive, it is essential to reframe it as a positive issue, highlighting its benefits and the positive impact it can have on society. The reason why I call my efforts in this regard a 'fight' is that I want to emphasize the significant barriers that need to be

overcome to change people's perceptions and attitudes towards road safety, helping to bring a shift from a blame-based approach to a safe system approach. People are more likely to engage with and support initiatives that are perceived as positive or beneficial and, why not, even fun! By rebranding road safety as an attractive and desirable goal, I hope to increase public support for measures that promote safety on the roads.

POLIS: [#AdessoBasta](#) uses a unique approach of bringing together youth for road safety through cultural events centred around music, art, and sports. How can that help? What are some of the main lessons learned from your activities or practical advice that you would like to share with cities?

Giovanni: Nuoro, my home in Sardinia, Italy, is a small town of around 35k people. The perception of road safety before [#AdessoBasta](#) was founded was almost non-existent — especially among the youth. Apart from the usual advocacy and awareness-raising efforts put forward by the police and the schools, nobody spoke about road safety, despite road fatalities hitting the community often.

After the road crash that changed my life in 2017, my brothers' best friends and mines naturally concluded that to gather attention, we needed to make that road a political opportunity: our objective was to bring justice and attention to the issues. This is why we decided to host concerts, basketball tournaments, and art shows. We knew nobody could ignore thousands of young people gathering in the same place all for the same cause. And we were right.

**Giovanni Pintor at the 2022
European Development Days**

European Commission



POLIS: One of the key pillars of Vision Zero is the importance of fostering collaboration between a diverse group of stakeholders, not just between policymakers and transport professionals but also with local communities. How do you envision cities doing this? Based on your experience, how could young people and their communities help local and regional authorities fulfil their road safety responsibilities, and how can they become more involved in road safety decision-making?

Giovanni: I think that fruitful collaboration only happens when each stakeholder is truly convinced of the benefits that stem from such a union. That is why I am convinced that communities should be given the resources to understand why safer roads are an investment worth making. This is only achievable through information, advocacy, and awareness-raising campaigns. In our case, concerts, sports events, and art shows are and were just a means to an end, namely a platform for young people to make road safety an opportunity to spark progress. Such platforms help citizens voice their concerns while authorities can better understand the needs and priorities of residents and design policies and interventions that address their specific challenges.

In terms of becoming more involved in road safety decision-making, cities can create opportunities for youth engagement through youth councils, advisory committees, and other formal and informal mechanisms for youth participation. These mechanisms can provide young people with a platform to voice their opinions and ideas, contribute to the development of road safety policies and programs, and hold decision-makers accountable for their commitments to road safety. By involving young people in road safety decision-making, cities can ensure that their policies and programs reflect the needs of the next generation of road users.

POLIS: When people think of road safety, they might often think of populous, metropolitan areas where there is high traffic density, making road accidents more likely to happen. Yet research shows that rural roads are where more than half all traffic fatalities and injuries occur. In your view, and as someone from a rural town yourself, how do we bring rural road safety specifically to the forefront of government's agendas, particularly in Europe?

Giovanni: Unfortunately, action often sparks from tragedies like mine. I think the solution lies in investing in multimodal and capillary connectivity. Sardinia, for example, has no highways, but a wide and fragmented network of secondary rural roads, and only one main artery connecting the northern and southern parts of the island. It is not surprising that the majority of crashes happen on rural roads rather than in cities.

Rural areas often lack the necessary road infrastructure and proper road maintenance, which can increase the likelihood of crashes. Of course, governments should invest in upgrading rural infrastructure to improve road safety and expand the existing networks to connect the main mobility hubs, such as airports and ports. But most importantly, they should invest in alternative, greener, and safer means of transport, such as railways.

Indeed, investing in trains as a solution to the road safety crisis is not only promising, but essential for the future of transportation. Trains have a proven track record of reliability, efficiency, and safety, providing passengers with a comfortable and secure means of travel. Unlike road transport, trains have the advantage of operating on dedicated tracks, minimizing the risk of accidents and collisions with other vehicles or pedestrians. Moreover, trains can transport large numbers of passengers and goods, making them an ideal choice for both individuals and businesses. In addition to their safety benefits, investing in trains can also stimulate economic growth by improving connectivity and creating job opportunities in the transport sector. Overall, prioritising train transport is a necessary step towards creating a more sustainable and efficient future for both rural and urban communities.

*Basketball tournament at
#AdessoBasta's 'NEPO 2022' event*

Austinu D'Antonio



POLIS: What kinds of action should be taken to ensure authorities can support road safety victims from the beginning until Vision Zero becomes a reality?

Giovanni: For a systemic shift towards greener and safer mobility the only recipe is to provide everyone with the element to understand the complexities of road safety. Even if sometimes they are underestimated — advocacy and awareness raising are key to this.

Indeed, while politicians play a critical role in shaping policies that promote safer and greener mobility, they are not the only key players. Influencers, particularly young people, have the power to drive change by pushing authorities to make safe and green mobility a cross-cutting issue. Young people are often more open to new ideas and technologies, making them ideal candidates to lead this shift. Additionally, they have a stronger online presence, which can be used to spread awareness and engage in advocacy efforts.

It is important to note that changing the status quo is not an easy task. However, the efforts put in place today will undoubtedly impact future generations positively. Thus, it is necessary to engage everyone, including young people, in advocacy efforts that promote safe and green mobility. By doing so, we can create a safer and healthier future for all.

