

## The Big, the Small, and the Ugly

# The Big, the Small, and the Ugly: The Politics of Scale-Making in a Contested Railway Project in Italy

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We recommend an article by [Jacek Łukowski](#) PhD in "Ethnos". The article looks at the disputes surrounding the high-speed railway project in the Italian Alps. Using this example, the author argues that scale in infrastructure 'mega-projects' - their seemingly obvious 'size' - is the result of political processes in which the agency of various actors, from macroeconomic factors to microscopic particles in the air, is negotiated.

### ABSTRACT

This article explores the politics of scale-making in infrastructural development. It argues that 'megaprojects', rather than self-evidently 'big', are constructed and contested across a continuity of scales from the 'global' to the microscopic. Scalar struggles are constitutive of the projects as well as of their contestation. I examine this through a focus on a disputed high-speed railway project in Alpine Italy. First, I examine expert contests over 'big numbers' describing the project. Here, the 'bigness' is discussed on its own terms, but its rationality is disputed. Second, I study a campaign by local mayors who challenge the project by stressing infrastructural needs that could

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be met in their respective towns for a fraction of the railway's cost. Third, I describe controversies over microscopic pathogens released during railway construction. This highlights how the megaprojects' apparent 'bigness' depends on the ability to obviate socio-material relations and actants at other scales.

Link for the article: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00141844.2023.2240541> [3]

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