

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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Publisher: [Taylor & Francis Online](https://www.tandfonline.com) [2]

Year of publication: 2023

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

Book/ journal title: Ethos

Original Language: angielski

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

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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