

The clash of worlds: Competing narratives over the Lyon-Turin high-speed railway megaproject

Giovanni Esposito

gesposito@unior.it

Andrea Terlizzi

andrea.terlizzi@unifi.it

Pichault François

f.pichault@uliege.be

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Abstract

This paper explores the role of policy narratives in the implementation of megaprojects, namely complex, uncertain and conflictual large-scale investment projects involving multiple public and private stakeholders and with a great impact on the economy and the environment. By focusing on the Lyon-Turin high-speed railway megaproject, we investigate how policy narratives developed by proponents and opponents of this megaproject shape controversies in its implementation. While the paper mostly focuses on the role of narratives, it does not neglect the institutional context that might facilitate or constrain policy decisions. In operationalizing the concept of policy narrative, we build on Boltanski and Thévenot’s (1991) justification theory, which provides useful support for interpreting controversies between actors with competing evaluations of reality. According to the authors, justifications are organized into seven logics corresponding to seven different “common worlds”: civic, fame, market, industrial, domestic, inspired and green. Empirical material consists of semi-structured interviews (n=78) and documents (n=80), covering a time period from 1985 to 2017. The paper argues that actors’ competing narratives about the megaproject rest on contradicting understandings and interpretations of the same worlds. In particular, opponents question the degree to which the organizing principles appropriate to a world are being correctly applied by the proponents. Moreover, the article shows how, as an effect of the different institutional contexts, controversies and decisions on implementation have developed in different ways in Italy and France

1. Introduction

Megaprojects play a key role in world economy and are usually defined as large-scale, complex ventures that typically cost \$1 billion or more, take many years to develop and build, involve multiple public and private stakeholders and have long-lasting impact on economy, environment and society (Brookes and Locatelli 2015; Flyvbjerg 2017).

Proponents of infrastructure-based development have long since considered megaproject investments a popular policy measure to stimulate the economy (e.g., Aschauer 1990). Nevertheless, megaproject implementation is extremely complex, uncertain and conflictual (Marrewijk et al. 2008). Complexity derives from the fact that megaprojects require high levels of inter-organizational cooperation across geographical, cultural, institutional, and political boundaries (Jones and Lichtenstein 2008; Orr and Scott 2008). Uncertainty is due to the fact that the development and realization of megaprojects may easily take twenty to thirty years, with multiple rounds of decision making across different levels of authority and with contradicting actors involved in long controversies about the quintessence of a project (Bertolini and Salet 2007). Indeed, uncertain outcomes are often linked to contested information and methodologies produced by community groups concerned with the local impacts of megaprojects on neighborhoods and the environment (Altshuler and Luberoff 2003). Therefore, politicians, civil servants and business managers are required to generate public support, mollify civil society critics, and solve conflict through many years of planning, authorization and implementation (Altshuler and Luberoff 2003).

Because of these conflictual dynamics, megaprojects can be better understood from a dialectical perspective (Garajedaghi 1982, Ford and Backoff 1988, Werner and Baxter 1994, Martin 2007), which brings the focus of the analysis to the multiple interactions between proponents of a given arrangement and parties espousing contradictory arrangements (Hargrave and Van De Ven 2009). Argumentation and dialectical confrontation play a key role in the policy process (Majone 1989). In fact, dialectical dynamics might succeed “in

bringing out unstated assumptions, conflicting interpretations of the facts, and the risks posed by new projects” (Majone 1989: 5). As also argued by Fischer (2017) the adoption of a dialectical perspective of analysis and the recognition of different points of view as essential to policy argumentation make it possible to grasp the dialectical role of conflict. From this standpoint, conflicts between contrasting viewpoints are crucial to the analysis in that it is not possible to understand the perspective of proponents without examining the views of opponents (Hargrave and Van De Ven 2009). As for megaprojects in particular, conflicts between the project team and external stakeholders (e.g. local communities, environmental activists, etc.) are indeed frequent. These conflicts often depend on the divergent views about the effects of a planned megaproject on community life or ways of life, on people’s relation with one another and on how residents perceive and feel about communities and project-related changes (Leistriz and Murdock 1981).

In the context of uncertain, complex, and conflictual policy debates, proponents and opponents engage in a battle over competing stories – or narratives – advocating arguments either in favor or against the policy. These narratives are used strategically by the competing stakeholders to articulate and make sense of that uncertainty, complexity and conflictuality, and to influence the debate and therefore the final policy outcome (Gray and Jones 2016; Roe 1994). In public policy analysis, several studies have turned to the role of narratives – and the discursive practices used by agents in order to convey them – in the policy-making process (Acosta et al. 2019; Béland 2019; Crow and Jones 2018; Eeten 2007; Fischer and Forester 1993; Jones, Shanahan, and McBeth 2014; Roe 1994; Stone 1989, 2012) . This role is strictly intertwined with the role of ideas, knowledge and expertise in shaping public policy (Haas 2004; Radaelli 1995; Yee 1996). Indeed, competing narratives build upon different types of scientific knowledge and they are crucial in the dissemination and articulation of certain ideas and arguments that specify the pro and cons of a certain policy.

Drawing from economic sociology, organization theory, public management, and public policy literatures, this paper aims at explaining how competing policy narratives deployed by proponents and opponents of megaprojects variously co-exist and evolve and shape policy outcomes. In particular, by focusing on the Lyon-Turin high-speed railway, we investigate how proponents and opponents' policy narratives shape controversies in the implementation of megaprojects. While the paper mostly focuses on the role of narratives and the discursive practices through which actors convey knowledge and expertise, it does not neglect the institutional context that is made of laws, norms, and decision-making rules that might facilitate or constrain policy choices and decisions.

Empirical material is drawn from semi-structured interviews to stakeholders proposing and opposing the megaproject and documents – mainly press releases, policy papers, and reports. The method includes qualitative content analysis of text data through NVivo. The article argues that actors' competing narratives about the megaproject rest on contradicting understandings and interpretations of the same worlds. In particular, opponents question the degree to which the organizing principles appropriate to the world are being correctly applied by the proponents. Moreover, the article shows how, as an effect of the different institutional contexts, controversies and decisions on implementation have developed in different ways in Italy and France.

The paper is organized as follows: section 2 provides the theoretical framework, whereas section 3 describes the research design and methods. Section 4 and 5 respectively present the empirical findings and a concluding discussion.

2. Theoretical framework: Policy narratives, controversies, and institutions

Megaprojects are complex organizational fields involving multiple public and private stakeholders with divergent interests and logics (Levitt and Scott 2016, Powell, et al. 2005). Cloutier and Langley (2013) describe logics as bundled sets or ensembles of higher order

meanings, values, norms and or rules that frame how actors make sense of the social world around them. According to their own logics, some actors might have good reasons to either support or oppose a megaproject. This generates contradicting tension between proponents and opponents that may affect change in a megaproject field.

Divergent logics may lead to competing evaluations. Opposing collective entities may present competing claims about the worthiness of a project, and justify them based on different principles. Justificatory arguments are crucial to the policy process in that choices and decisions “must be legitimated, accepted, and carried out” (Majone 1989: 31). Actors convey their logics and justify their claims through policy narratives. A policy narrative is here defined as a set of stories and arguments taken by the parties involved in a controversy that establish and seek to stabilize the assumptions for public policy-making in the face of high uncertainty, complexity and conflictuality (Roe 1994). As Radaelli (1999: 663) bluntly puts it, “narratives represent a form in which knowledge about policy is cast”. So conceived, policy narratives “describe scenarios not so much by telling what should happen as about what will happen – according to their narrators – if the events or positions are carried out as described” (Roe 1994: 36-37). In employing a dialectical perspective, the paper also revolves around the analysis of counter-narratives, namely those stories and arguments that do not conform and run counter the dominant policy narrative (Roe 1994).

In operationalizing policy narratives, we build on Boltanski and Thévenot’s (1991) justification theory, which provides useful support for interpreting controversies between collective entities with competing evaluations. From the authors’ perspective, justifying a megaproject in economic terms, for example, amounts to taking the stand that money is a relevant measure of worth and ought to be privileged when megaprojects are evaluated. However, while the megaproject team may argue that economic considerations should come first, other external stakeholders may take the stand that environmental concerns ought to be prioritized no matter what the cost in economic terms. According to Cloutier and Langley

(2013), Boltanski and Thévenot's theoretical framework¹ allows to investigate the structure and content of the broad-based sets of values and conceptions of the common good that shape competing logics, and therefore to understand the “higher common principles that reflect the degree of legitimacy of certain rules and values in society and define appropriate forms of conduct” (Patriotta et al. 2011: 2). Justifications are in fact organized into seven logics corresponding to seven different “common worlds”: civic, fame, market, industrial, domestic, inspired and green (Table 1). The framework thus provides a “grammar” enabling researchers to understand how proponents' and opponents' contradictory logics co-existing in a certain policy field generate controversies that actors try to shape through justification work.

Therefore, Boltanski and Thévenot offer a precious framework to operationalize the structure of a policy narrative, allowing us to disaggregate the content of the narrative in light of the seven common worlds identified by the authors. For example, engineers and policy-makers may propose a megaproject on the basis of ‘industrial’ (e.g. energy-efficiency improvements and optimization of infrastructural systems) or ‘civic’ justifications (e.g. collective interest and public investment programs decided through democratic processes by elected officials). On the other hand, local communities may oppose it on the basis of justifications coming either from other worlds (e.g. ‘green’ justifications pointing to the disruption of local ecosystems due to the megaproject construction) or from within the same world (e.g. ‘civic’ justifications such as waste of public money and corruption or insufficient public consultations during official approval processes). Criticisms from *within* worlds lead to ‘state-of-worth’ controversies in which actors question the degree to which the organizing principles appropriate to a situation are being correctly applied (Dansou and Langley 2012; Boltanski and Thévenot 1999). Conversely, criticisms *between* different worlds lead to ‘order-of-worth’ controversies in which actors question the appropriateness of the principles proponents apply in a particular situation. Through dialogue, proponents address unfolding

¹ The framework will be later extended by Lafaye and Thévenot (1993), Lamont and Thévenot (2000), and Thévenot, Moody and Lafaye (2000).

Inspired world

The realm of creativity and “art.” In this world, what is most valued is that which is passionate, emergent, spontaneous, and inspired. The creative journey, with its ups and downs, its moments of elation, and its subsequent feelings of doubt and suffering, is what life “is all about”: an adventure, an endless horizon of mystery, and a discovery. The journey is the end, not the means. Moments of “genius” are unpredictable and unexpected: They appear in flashes and sparks. Actors in this world are repulsed by habit and shun routines. They dream, imagine, take risks, and “live.”

Domestic world

The realm of the “family” in its symbolic sense. In this world, what is valued is that which is firm, loyal, selfless, and trustworthy. Hierarchy and tradition play central roles. Superiors are informed and wise, and must care and nurture those who are lower in the hierarchy. Great importance is attached to one’s upbringing, as upbringing and good manners reflect where one “comes from.” The priority of actors in this world is on preserving, protecting, and nurturing the unit (family, guild, group, etc.) to which one belongs, as without this unit, one is nothing.

Fame world

The realm of fame and popularity. In this world, what is valued is that which is visible, famous, influential, fashionable, and recognized. The worth of actors is determined by the opinion of others. To be banal, unknown, or forgotten is shameful. An “undiscovered” genius is a contradiction, as a genius cannot be genial if not known. Any and all means for achieving fame and recognition are sought after and legitimate.

Civic world

The realm of duty and solidarity. In this world, what is valued is that which is united, representative, legal, official, and free. Individuals in this world accede to worth by freely joining and being part of a collective, their individual will be subordinated to the general will, that which seeks the common good, the good of all. Leaders are elected and valued because they represent the aspirations of the masses. To place individual interests ahead of collective interests is panacea in this world. One for all, and all for one.

Market world

The realm of money and the market. In this world, what is valued is rare, expensive, valuable, and profitable. The law of the market prevails, and actors deemed worthy are those who know how to take advantage of it and reap its rewards (e.g., wealth). Wealth is an end, and individuals with dignity in this world are “detached from the chains of belonging and liberated from the weight of hierarchies.” This gives them the ability to judge market opportunities objectively, unemotionally, and thus “win.”

Industrial world

The realm of measures and efficiency. In this world, what is valued is precise, functional, professional, productive, efficient, and useful. A world where technological objects and scientific methods take center stage. Optimization and progress are noble pursuits. All forms of “waste” are frowned upon. Actors in this world are professional, hardworking, focused, and thorough. Perfection is to be found in the optimally functioning system (whether mechanical, technological, or human).

Green world

The realm of nature. In this world what is valued is natural, sustainable, ecological and environmental-friendly. A world where nature is respected in its own right, environmental conservation is considered to advance the general good of humanity and biodiversity is preserved, without the need to find social or economic functionality. Worthy objects are ecosystems and worthy subjects fit their way of life to the objectives of nature conservation.

Table 1 – Common worlds description, adapted from Cloutier and Langley (2013) and Lafaye and Thévenot (2000)

criticisms and reduce the uncertainty due to the opponents' competing views. Dialectical practices allow reaching an agreement between contradictory parties in order to leave a critical moment and go back to the ordinary course of action. However, frequently people do not engage in dialogue and just drop the dispute without making new agreements.

In pointing to the role of policy narratives and dialectical confrontation between proponents and opponents, this paper emphasizes the importance of agency. However, in justifying their claims through narratives, actors do not act in a *vacuum*. In fact, policy narratives are conveyed within a certain institutional context. While the former shape the policy controversy, the latter influences the adoption and implementation of a certain decision (see e.g., Béland 2019). Therefore, the theoretical framework also takes into consideration the role of institutions, conceived here as both constraining and enabling structures that might inhibit or facilitate policy implementation (Schmidt 2010). The institutional factors we consider are the inclusiveness of decision-making procedures – in particular, their openness to stakeholder groups outside the proponents' coalition – and the formal rules deriving from the project management framework (Figure 1).

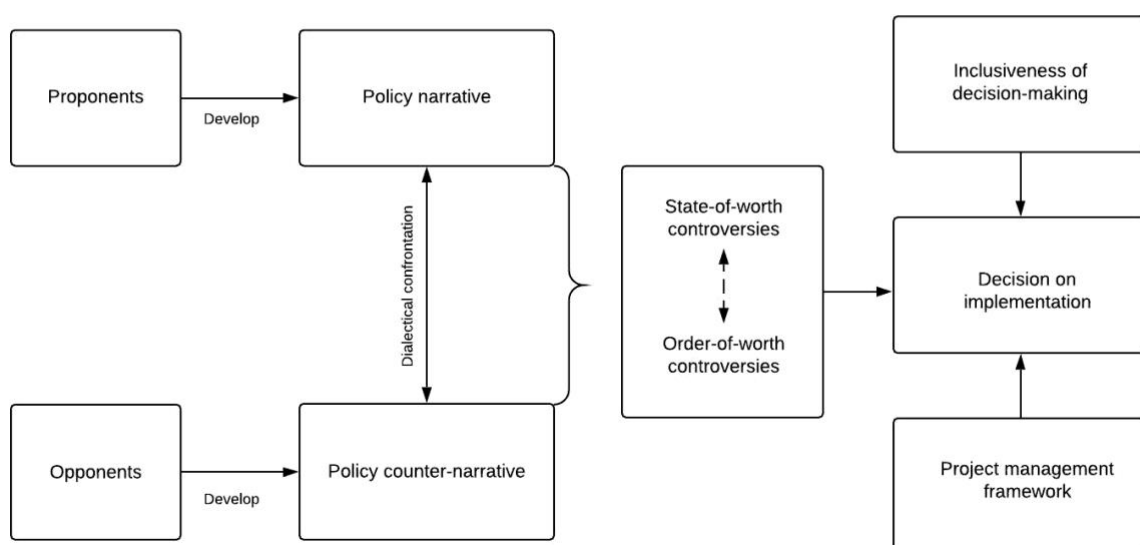


Figure 1 – Theoretical framework: Policy narratives, controversies, and institutions

3. Research design and methods

3.1 The case: The Lyon-Turin high-speed railway megaproject

In 1992, with the approval of the Maastricht Treaty, the European Union (EU) established the Trans-European Network-Transport (TEN-T), an infrastructure policy directed towards the implementation and development of a Europe-wide transport network. The ultimate objective of TEN-T is to close gaps, remove bottlenecks and eliminate barriers that hamper the free movement of people and freight across EU Member States, strengthening the social, economic and territorial cohesion of the EU and contributing to the creation of a single European transport area. The policy seeks to achieve this aim through the construction of new physical infrastructures.

Among planned infrastructures, there is a 270 km high-speed railway line connecting Lyon (France) and Turin (Italy) – financed through public budget jointly by the EU (40%) and by the countries of Italy (35%) and France (25%). The actual work of building the infrastructure is the responsibility of the two national railways infrastructure managers: *SNCF Réseau* in France and *Rete Ferroviaria Italiana* (RFI) in Italy. These companies are subsidiaries of the two state-owned holding companies: *Société Nationale des Chemins de Fer Français* (SNCF) and *Ferrovie dello Stato* (FS) in France and Italy respectively. The rail line is ambitious, requiring the construction of a 57 km tunnel – one of longest in history – piercing the Alps between Susa Valley in Italy and Maurienne in France. This line would replace the existing conventional line thereby allowing heavy freight and passenger trains to travel at a higher speed while simultaneously reducing energy use. Nowadays, almost 30 years after its announcement, the train line is still incomplete, the original forecast cost of 12€ billion has increased to 26€ billion (French Court of Audit, 2012), and the projected completion date has changed three times – with the most recent forecast predicting completion in 2030. The megaproject has been delayed by the opposition of local

communities – in Italy stronger than in France – criticizing proponents’ arguments. The main arguments developed by the opponents revolve around the decreasing traffic between Lyon and Turin over the years, the environmental risks due to the tunnel construction, and the waste of public money.

3.2 Data collection

Empirical material is drawn from semi-structured interviews (n=78) – conducted between 2014 and 2016 – and documents (n=80). The latter include press releases, international agreements, policy papers, third-parties studies and reports covering a period from 1985 to 2017. Interviewees’ profiles were selected through snowball sampling and include actors from Italy, France and EU institutions and agencies (Table 2). These are: (1) project promoters from both government administrations and railway companies; (2) concerned public institutional actors from both political (MPs, MEPs and non-elected members of parties) and administrative (parliamentary staff and public officials) organizations; (3) lobbyists from associations promoting and defending the megaproject; (4) local communities and organized groups from Italy (Susa Valley) and France (suburbs of Lyon, the Lower Dauphiné region, the Avant-Pays Savoyard and the Maurienne region) opposing the megaproject. Interview questions were concerned with individual functions, organizations’ roles and the overall system of project governance.

Typology of actors	Jurisdiction	N° Interviews	
Project Promoters	EU	5	18
	IT	5	
	FR	8	
Public institutional actors	EU	11	19
	IT	6	
	FR	2	
Lobbyists	EU	5	7
	IT	1	
	FR	1	
Local communities	IT	23	34
	FR	11	
			78

Table 2 – Overview of interviewees

3.3 Data analysis and coding

In order to make sense of the longitudinal process of justification we firstly analyzed interviews and fieldwork notes to build a chronicle of key events and identify the main turning points of the controversy². Second, through document analysis, we quantified the common worlds contained in the documents by looking at key actor groups and their evolution over time.

Documents have been analyzed through qualitative content analysis using N-Vivo. The coding frame was structured according to the common worlds described by Boltanski and Thévenot (2006). As for the coding strategy, we followed Patriotta et al (2011) and initially developed a preliminary list of semantic descriptors based on the seven common worlds. This allowed us to identify the presence of a given world in the text. We then inductively expanded the list through an in-depth reading of the sample texts – e.g., by adding synonyms as well as other terms that were systematically deployed in the text to refer to a particular world. The semantic descriptors, and the additional words in the list, were translated in the

² For a detailed overview of the empirical material see Esposito (2018)

three languages of our sample – i.e. English, French and Italian. We systematically coded the utterances embedding the semantic descriptor by using the seven worlds. Consistently with Boltanski and Thévenot (2006), when an utterance referred to multiple worlds, it was assigned to more than one code. We finally assigned each document to one typology of actor, jurisdiction (France or Italy) and time period (1990s, 2000s and 2010s).

In order to ‘quantify’ the common worlds, we systematically counted the number of coded passages mentioning a given common world. We then divided it by the total number of codes. These data provided us with the relative weight of each common world within the total amount of coexisting worlds. We used these data to quantify the frequency of each common world in the controversy over the Lyon-Turin high-speed railway megaproject (hereafter, LT) (Figure 2). We found that the most popular forms of justification mobilized in the LT controversy were based on the industrial and civic worlds (cited in 38% of the coded utterances). The green and market worlds were used to a lesser extent (respectively 9% and 7%), while the fame (3%), domestic (2%) and inspirational (2%) were very rarely mobilized. We thus focused our analysis on the first two groups of worlds – (1) civic and industrial worlds, and (2) green and market worlds.

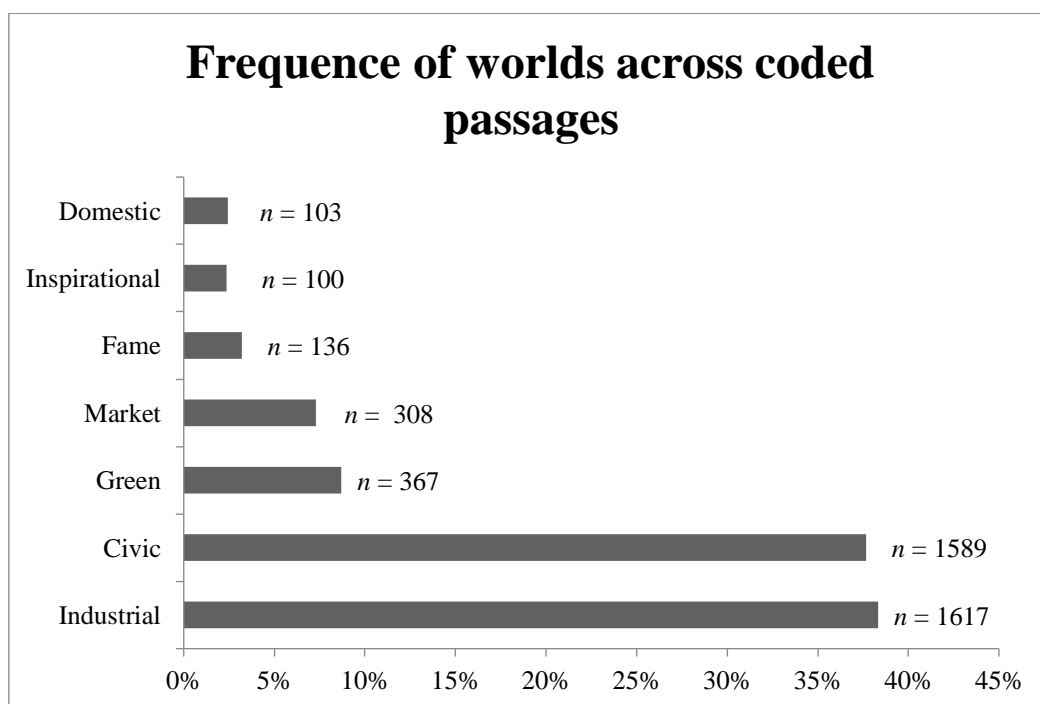


Figure 2 – Coded passages across worlds (% values)

We then looked at the justifications developed by the various stakeholder groups involved in the controversy. We counted the occurrences of each stakeholder’s voice in the documents, identifying 4220 passages corresponding to a stakeholder expression of a justification based on a given common world. Our analysis suggests that the project promoters – that we call ‘proponents’ – and the local communities and organized groups – that we call ‘opponents’ – played a dominant role in the LT debate. In fact, 71% of the 4220 coded passages come from one of these two groups: 1529 (36%) express the views of local communities *opposing* LT, whereas 1462 (35%) correspond to the views of project promoters *proposing* LT (Table 3). We thus give particular attention to these two stakeholder groups to explore the development of policy narratives.

Proponents and opponents mainly mobilized the industrial and civic worlds to frame their justification work (Table 4). They also mobilized the green world, though to a lesser extent. The market world was instead mainly present in the discourse of French proponents only.

	1990s	2000s	2010s	<i>Total rows</i>	<i>% rows</i>
Local communities	338	422	769	1529	36%
Lobbies	16	205	106	327	8%
Project promoters	118	970	374	1462	35%
Public institutional actors	340	255	307	902	21%
<i>Total columns</i>	812	1852	1556	4220	
<i>% columns</i>	19%	44%	37%		

Table 3 – Coded passages across stakeholder groups and time

		Civic	Industrial	Market	Green	<i>Coded passages for selected worlds / Coded passages for all worlds</i>	
Proponents	FR	30%	42%	8%	7%	87%	84%
	IT	36%	40%	1%	5%	83%	
Opponents	FR	59%	26%	2%	9%	96%	90%
	IT	33%	38%	4%	12%	88%	

Cell color legend
$40 \leq X$
$30 \leq X < 40$
$20 \leq X < 30$
$10 \leq X < 20$
$5 \leq X < 10$
$X < 5$

Table 4 - Common worlds across groups and context (all years)

4. Empirical evidence

4.1 Dialectical confrontation and the worlds' saliency: Change in narratives through time and space

The dialectical confrontation between proponents and opponents influences the content of the LT debate over time and the prevailing worlds mobilized to justify the megaproject construction vary across Italy and France (Figure 3). In France, the LT is initially justified through civic, industrial and, to a lesser extent, market and green arguments . Subsequently, as an effect of the unfolding controversy, the saliency of the civic and green worlds particularly increases whereas that of the industrial and market worlds particularly decreases. Instead, in Italy, the LT is initially predominantly framed within the industrial world. Subsequently, as an effect of the unfolding controversy, the saliency of the industrial world decreases whereas that of the civic world increases. Contrary to France, the over-time saliency of the green world is more stationary.

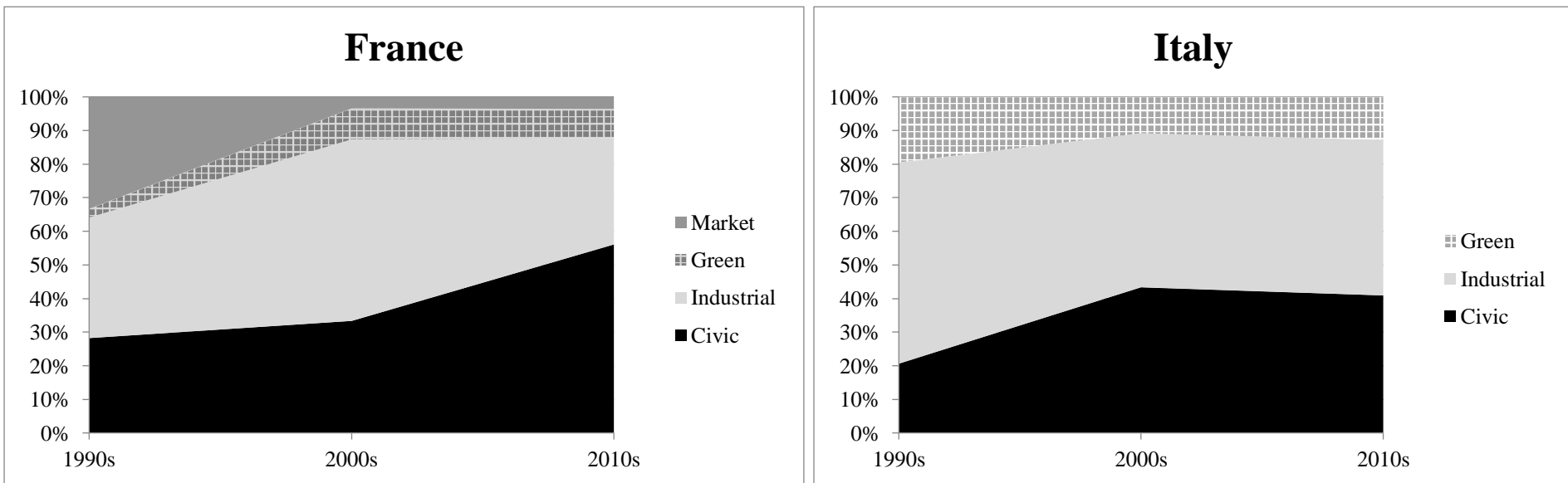


Figure 3 – Saliency of worlds across time and space (% of coded passages)

4.1.1 France

In the 1990s, the French railway company launches a plan for a new high-speed connection between Lyon and Turin. The narrative developed by the proponents is structured around the industrial world. In fact, the project is justified on the basis of two technical shortcomings affecting the existing line: (1) low capacity due to the small loading gauge; (2) the gradient line that is three times higher than the recommended value, imposing strong limitations on operation and higher additional power costs. To a lesser extent, the proponents also mobilized the market and green worlds. They argue that the new high-speed connection will improve the quality of transportation services by reducing the journey time and, doing so, will attract new traffic demand from roadways and airways: “by offering a better journey quality, high-speed will make the railway more competitive than other transportation modes. [...] It will profoundly improve the French railway supply; it will considerably reduce the journey time of customers.” (SNCF National Master Plan of TGV Lines - 1992). Moreover, by shifting balance between transport modes, LT will reduce CO2 emissions since railways are greener than cars and planes in terms of CO2 impact.

With the support of regional and national authorities, between 1992 and 1993, the civic world enters the policy narrative developed by the railway company, which organized a public debate to inform local communities of the value of “the socio-economic opportunity linked to the construction of the Lyon-Turin” (Interview with a project manager, French railway company). As highlighted by a member of a local opposition group, “during these meetings [the promoters] presented the different aspects of the project: there were very interesting studies. We could express our concerns, such as the noise that the new line would have produced” (Interview with a Member of the French opposition group in Chambéry).

Throughout the 2000s – while Jacques Chirac is President of the Republic and Dominique de Villepin is Prime Minister –, the public inquiry prior to the official approval of the project starts. The Public Inquiry Committee (*Commission d’Enquête Publique*) – composed of

independent experts – is asked to consult local citizens, collect their opinions about the project and write a report to inform the government that in turn will decide whether declaring LT of public utility and, therefore, authorizing the project construction. During these consultations local citizens from Villarodin-Le Bourget – a small town in the Maurienne region – bring attention on proponents’ civic and green justifications while overlooking market ones. They thus engender a state-of-worth controversy within proponents’ green and civic worlds. . They do so by casting doubt on the public utility of LT and manifesting concerns about the pollution of local water sources and the risks associated with the storage of the excavation material. As a civil servant commented, “the opposition of Villarodin-Le Bourget forced us to do a new public inquiry in this municipality. We had to clarify the [environmental] impacts of the project on this area. Afterward, a new prefectural order was approved to complement and complete the decree of public utility we had already approved”. With the new round of consultations accomplished, in 2007 the railway firm completes the preparatory works for the tunnel construction.

Throughout the 2010s, two events contribute to deepen the state-of-worth controversy within the civic world while opening a new one within the industrial world. This is due to two key factors: (1) the disclosure of new information by an independent administrative authority; and (2) the participation of new qualified actors in the public consultations. In 2012, the French Court of Audit releases a report that questions the realism of the costs estimates and traffic forecasts of proponents. Intrigued by this report, Daniel Ibanez – an experienced business consultant – decides to delve into the LT dossier. He finds that another report of the Civil Engineering General Council (*Conseil général des Ponts et Chaussées*) – an independent administrative authority supervising public, civil engineering works in France – casts doubts on the socio-economic advantages of the planned line. Reports in hand, he participates in the 2012 public consultations taking place in the departments of Rhône, Isère and Savoie. Here, he accuses the public inquiry commissioners and the railway managers of

securing the support of local citizens by swindling them through the use of misleading information during the public consultations. As stated by Daniel Ibanez himself, “during the public enquiry, the project promoters showed us some graphs with increasing transport flows from France, Switzerland and Austria to Italy [that] justified the construction of a new tunnel [...]. When we decided to take the same data and disaggregate them [...], we noticed that while Swiss and Austrian flows increased, French flows dramatically decreased since 1988” (Interview with Daniel Ibanez). Thanks to Daniel Ibanez, local opposition groups grow in number and ask to stop the project while, in parallel, launching a new public debate where procedures are enacted on more transparent bases. Proponents consider these requests incompatible with the implementation status of the project which has already gone through many EU decisions and international agreements, duly ratified by the Parliament. Therefore, in 2013 the Ministry declares of public utility the preparatory works for the construction of the access line to the base tunnel. In the meantime, the railway company files a claim for defamation against Daniel Ibanez. However, upon reaching the court the lawsuit is dismissed on insufficient legal ground.

4.1.2 Italy

Unlike France, in the 1990s the Italian railway firm has no plan for the construction of a new high-speed connection between Lyon and Turin. The project is proposed by a group of industrialists from Turin which set up an association named ‘High Speed Committee’ (*Comitato per l’Alta Velocità*) that rapidly succeeds to convince public authorities – and later the railway firm – to construct a new line. The main arguments rest upon the industrial and civic worlds, emphasizing the need to improve the energy-efficiency of rail freight transportation in the name of national and European interests. As highlighted by a member of this group, “the reason to support this project is very simple. The slopes of the existing line are very high and require a lot of energy to transport freight to the other side of the mountain.

This is a line that was built 150 years ago so it is anything but a modern line. [...] It is crucial not only for the Italian infrastructure policy, but more broadly for the entire European Union. We go beyond the national vision to encompass a European one.” (Interview with a staff member of the *Comitato per l’Alta Velocità*). To a lesser extent, green justifications are also mobilized: “rail is central to EU’s transport infrastructure investment policy since it is considered an environmentalist mode of transport” (interview with Civil Servant 2 of Piedmont Region).

As soon as rumors spread in the local areas concerned by the project, citizens organize discussion groups about the project. They rapidly grow in numbers by including railway experts and professionals, medical doctors, factory workers and university lecturers. After studies and discussions that lasted a few years, they express a negative view of the project and start a protest campaign that engenders two state-of-worth controversies in the industrial and green worlds. Indeed, their core argument is that LT is technically useless – because of decreasing traffic flows - and extremely impacting for the environment of the valley.

Throughout the 2000s, proponents’ and opponents’ justification work relocates the project from the industrial and green worlds into the civic world. This happens because, in the early-2000s – with Silvio Berlusconi as Prime Minister –, the Parliament passes a law (the so called Target Law, *Legge Obiettivo*) enabling the government to approve the project by majority and to authorize the preparatory works for the construction of the base tunnel without any obligation to consult local citizens. As a civil servant commented, “the ‘target law’ introduces a fast-lane authorization procedure. All key phases in the decision-making process – such as planning, localization and environmental impact assessment – are centralized in the hands of central government administrations” (Interview with Civil servant 1, Piedmont regional administration). As a result, the railway firm sends expropriation letters to acquire the local lands and sets the construction site to start the works in 2004, but locals mount a strong public protest campaign led by the “No High-Speed Train” (*No Treno ad Alta*

Velocità, NOTAV) movement – with 30,000 people assembled near the construction site. They claim that LT is not of public interest. It is technically useless and environmentally-risky. They thus ask the national government to stop the works and to open a public debate about the public value of the project. The government cedes and pre-construction work is stopped and public consultations are opened with both government and railway firm representatives. The consultation about the public worthiness of the project continues for 6 years, during which proponents' and opponents' manifest diverging opinions on the forecasting methodology and the variables to be used in the estimation of the traffic flows between Italy and France

Throughout the 2010s, proponents' and opponents' dialectical confrontation leaves the realm of dialogue and shifts towards a coercive logic of action based on military power. This happens because between the late-2000s and the early-2010s, notwithstanding local opposition, the EU's project management framework creates pressures on proponents to timely accomplish planned preconstruction works. In 2007, the European Commission releases several reports expressing concerns about “the delicate situation in the Susa Valley and its potential impact on the project timetable (Progress Report 2007: 6³) and envisages the possibility “to redistribute support from projects that were delayed to those which were performing well” (Final evaluation of the TEN-T MIP 2007: 36⁴). In 2010 the European Commission decides to cut approximately €9.2 million in funding to the railway firm while extending the remaining part (approximately €662.6 millions) stipulating completion of the preparatory work in Italy by the beginning of 2011. Under pressure from the EU, in 2011, the Italian government publishes a press release stating that if local activists want to continue to be involved in public consultations, they must explicitly declare their support for the

³ European Coordinator (2007) Progress Report On Priority Project No 6 Lyon-Turin-Milan-Trieste/Koper-Ljubljana-Budapest. European Commission, 19 July.

⁴ European Commission (2007) Ex-post/Final evaluation of the Trans-European Transport Network Multiannual Indicative Programme 2001-2006. DG TREN Contract TREN/06/ADM/S07.67266 2006 Final Report – November 2007

megaproject overall. NOTAV representatives refuse, stop the consultations, and go on with the protest campaign.

With the support of the government, the railway firm resumes the work and, in response, the opponents occupy the construction site again. In response, the government passes a law that enforces EU-level conditions by directing the Italian army to seize the construction site and, doing so, prevent future occupations that could further delay the megaproject implementation. With the military protection of the State, the firm restarts the preliminary works in 2011, completing them in 2017. Because of persistent local opposition, in 2018 the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport decides to delay the beginning of works and to run new cost-benefit analysis of the overall megaproject. In February 2019, the results are released and indicate a negative return on investment. A month later – in March – when further delays would have threatened the EU funding of the project, the Italian government agrees to the publication of a call for tender to start the tunnel construction on the French side. As of May 2019, construction on both sides of the megaproject has not commenced yet.

4.2 Common worlds and justification work: The structure of the competing narratives

Table 5 provides a sample of the most relevant quotes from the coded material exemplifying how proponents and opponents mobilized the different worlds. In a nutshell, the common worlds around which proponents and opponents construct their arguments constitute the structure of their narratives.

Worlds	Proponents	Opponents
Industrial	<p><i>The objective of this new infrastructure is to promote the free movement of people and goods. It will improve connections on the European continent and will transfer traffic from road to railways. [...] Most of the studies conducted in these years indicate that the current road and railway infrastructures will be saturated between 2015 to 2020. (LTF general manager, declaration to the press - 2006)</i></p>	<p><i>Promoters' assertion that the existing line will quickly become saturated is completely groundless and contrary to the facts. Both rail and road traffic through the entire western Alpine arc - therefore between Italy and France as well - is in drop or stagnant for the last ten years. (University professor and transport expert of the NOTAV movement, public declaration to the press - 2012)</i></p>
Green	<p><i>The Turin-Lyon network is a keystone to transfer gradually traffic to railways and to reduce the pollution of the environment. (Press release, Italy-France Summit on Lyon-Turin - 2001)</i></p>	<p><i>The 42.5 million cubic meters of material extracted for the total construction of the 270 km line [...] will be dug by gigantic milling machines driven by electric motors. Similar machines will be used to shatter millions of cubic meters of rocks to be kneaded with 15 million cubic meters of cement, to which must be added iron. All these processes consume a lot of energy. (NOTAV movement, pamphlet with 150 reasons against the Lyon-Turin high-speed line – 2012)</i></p>
Civic	<p><i>This project is respectful of men and their living conditions. Before implementation, as for all major infrastructure projects, a consultation phase is conducted with the general public, administrations and local communities. This phase precedes the declaration of public utility. (LTF dossier for the press – 2014)</i></p>	<p><i>When we look at the official approval and implementation of large infrastructure projects we see patterns of land management and behavior towards social claims. Governments seem at the service of great economic and financial, national and supranational, interests. [...] They completely ignore the opinions, the argument and feeling of concerned populations. This represents, in the heart of Europe, an extremely serious threat to the essence of the rule of law and democracy. (NOTAV and French opposition groups, Permanent Peoples' Tribunal communication – 2015)</i></p>

Table 5 – Sample quotes in proponents' and opponents' documents

4.2.1 Proponents

In order to justify the construction of the LT, French and Italian proponents primarily mobilized the industrial world, encompassing the values of performance and effective functioning. The megaproject is indeed presented as crucial to the future trans-European

transport network. In fact, by closing the gaps between Member States' transport networks and by removing the bottlenecks that still hamper the smooth mobility of people and freight in the EU, the LT constitutes the missing link promoting and strengthening an effective and seamless trans-European transport system.

In French proponents' justification work, the industrial world co-exists with the market one. In this world, the law of the market prevails, and actions deemed worthy are those who know how to take advantage of it and reap its rewards. LT is indeed presented as a new high-speed railway connection that will considerably improve the quality of transportation services between Italy and France and that will attract new transport demand from airway and road competitors. The market world is less mobilized in the Italian proponents' discourse. In fact, since the beginning, the Italian railway company has considered rail transportation as a universal public service rather than a commercial one (European Conference of Ministers of Transport 2005, Drew and Ludewig 2011).

Additionally, proponents in both Italy and France consider rail to be a 'green' mode of transport, at least 'greener' than cars and airplanes in terms of relative impact on carbon emissions and climate change. The argument is that the LT can lead to an annual reduction of carbon gas emissions amounting to around 3 million tons. Particularly, thanks to the relocation of 1 million lorries from the road to the railway, the LT can have a positive impact on the environment.

By mobilizing the civic registers of representativeness, legality and officialdom, in both national contexts, proponents deem the LT of collective interest. The project is in fact presented as the result of a democratic process approved through official procedures - involving ministries, parliaments, regional assemblies and municipality councils - paving the way to construction.

4.2.2 Opponents

Opponents in both countries challenge proponents' discourse from within industrial, green and civic justifications. They thus center their opposition strategy on state-of-worth – rather than order-of-worth – controversies. As for the industrial world, they question the degree to which the scientific and empiricist principles hold true for the LT. They do so by arguing that there is no empirical or scientific evidence demonstrating the need for a new infrastructure. Their core argument is based on counter-studies demonstrating that the LT is useless because traffic flows between Italy and France are in fact declining.

As far as the green world is concerned, while not denying the importance of the modal shift to decrease CO₂ emissions, opponents argue that the narrow focus on CO₂ emissions as a unique category of the LT environmental impact is misleading. They claim that the impact assessment should consider not only the emissions related to the operational phase of the infrastructure (i.e. a comparison between saved emissions from less car traffic and released emissions from train transport), but also the overall life-time impact of the LT, including construction and maintenance phases.

Because of above-mentioned industrial and green concerns, opponents come to the conclusion that the LT is not of public interest and it is a waste of public money (civic world). They thus call for a new public debate where the unveiled environmental and industrial inconsistencies should be duly addressed on the basis of more transparent and democratic decision-making procedures.

5. Discussion and conclusions

The aim of this article has been to investigate how policy argumentation and dialectical confrontation between proponents and opponents of the Lyon-Turin high-speed railway megaproject have shaped conflicts and controversies over time. In answering this question, there has been a significant cross-fertilization between economic sociology, organization

theory, public management, and public policy literatures. The theoretical framework has mainly revolved around the importance of policy narratives, defined as sets of arguments taken by the parties involved in a controversy that establish and seek to stabilize the assumptions for public policy-making in the context of high uncertainty, complexity and conflictuality. In order to empirically investigate policy narratives, we have turned to Boltanski and Thévenot's justification theory, which allowed us to operationalize the structure of the narratives and disaggregate their content in light of the seven common worlds identified by the authors: civic, fame, market, industrial, domestic, inspired and green. In pointing to the role of policy narratives, the article has also emphasized to the role of institutions in policy implementation. In particular, we have focused on the inclusiveness of decision-making procedures, namely, their openness to stakeholders who are outside the proponents' coalition, and the formal rules set by the project management framework.

Our findings provide evidence that policy implementation can hardly be conceived as a linear and straightforward process. It is rather a non-linear process which does not follow a pre-established sequence and which dialectically unfolds over time in an unpredictable way as a result of actors' conflicting and competing logics. In this vein, our paper corroborates the value of adopting a dialectical perspective in policy analysis. In particular, in showing how dialectical confrontation develops over time, the article points to the relevance of state-of-worth controversies – namely controversies that develop within worlds – between proponents and opponents of a given arrangement. Our findings show that there can be different interpretations of the same worlds and actors may variously appeal to them to justify their positions. In this sense, actors' justification work may exhibit contradictory logics within the same worlds. To put it differently, our work shows that opponents of the LT have mainly challenged proponents' positions on the same grounds – “world by world” – developing counter-narratives that have questioned the scientific validity, sustainability and civicness of proponents' narratives backing policy measures.

As an effect of the different institutional elements - i.e. inclusiveness of national decision-making procedures and project management framework-, controversies and decisions on implementation have developed in different ways in Italy and France.

Implementation of LT goes more smoothly in France than in Italy - in the sense that the French proponents succeed to achieve planned objectives more easily than the Italian ones - because Italian local oppositions to implementation are stronger in Italy than in France. This difference might be explained by the fact that in Italy, differently from France, local civil society organizations have no legal right to participate in the decision-making of large infrastructure projects like LT. Therefore, Italian civil society stakeholders are institutionally excluded from the megaproject decision-making and might be left with no other opportunity to defend and promote their interests that overtly opposing implementation.

Our analysis indicates that, in the context of the LT project, supra-national techniques of project management exert great influence on the national executive powers, certainly greater than the influence exerted by local citizens and civil society organizations. We see that despite the mass popular protests against the project, the Italian government prefers to conform to the EU's project management requirements. It thus goes ahead with the implementation of LT to the point of appealing to military and judiciary powers to restrain local dissent and to comply with the funding agreement of the European Commission.

In a nutshell, this paper thus suggests that, beside agents' competing narratives, (supra-)national institutional structures also play a key role in the shaping of policy processes. Therefore, agency and structural embeddedness are in constant tension and synchronically affect policy change.

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