**The methodology of maps**

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Perhaps it is easy to forget that any map is actually *designed* andissues from a ‘decision tree’ which accommodates and balances the demands of many competing and often incompatible objectives. The designer has to pick a way through the tree to attain the best result. At each decision point on the tree, the draft map changes and a new array of choices fans out – and sometimes none of these is appropriate, forcing you to step backwards and seek an alternative route.

The decision tree starts with the question of what precisely the map is required to display – what is the core message that it is supposed to convey? Other basic decision points relate to the framing of the geography, the geographical projection used and the scale – all of which are intimately linked with the size of the map – and this has to align with the requirements of the publication medium.

Only then should the designer address the visual aspects of the map, such as figure-ground, balance, emphasis and colour choice and (for statistical maps) the representation of the data, or theme, which may be counts, or rates, or classes.

For this paper, we will be looking at the design decisions involved in the creation of a single map of Europe. Because our objective was to create a template for long-term use and not merely the satisfaction of a single commission, we created and traversed a large decision tree before getting to our publication version.

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