

Style Matters?

CARTISTIC Research Project

Informal spatial planning processes are used to explore complex questions, such as the future development of the Zurich metropolitan area, the entire lower Reuss valley, or the Rhenish Mining District (DE). In spatial planning, “future” typically means the coming decades. Such processes often involve dozens of stakeholders – from professional planning teams to local residents who are directly affected. Across a range of discussion formats, development proposals are worked out together.



Public panel discussion with a larger audience: presentation of results from the planning process «Spatial Strategy Rhenish Mining District 2038+» (© Revierknoten Raum, 2022).

Spatial planning is, to a certain extent, “worldbuilding” in the real world. Much like Thomas More in his Utopia, it sketches out ideas of what a desirable living environment could look like. In the same way – as dystopian counterpoints, such as those explored by George Orwell – unwelcome or problematic visions of the future can serve as a lens for reflection.



(Internal) map-based discussions using pen, paper and laptop in small groups: first collaboration workshop in the planning process «Spatial Strategy Rhenish Mining District 2038+» (Revierknoten Raum, Christian Larisch, 2021).

Maps play a key role here. The topic under discussion – ideas about a possible future – is often complex and abstract. By placing these ideas in space and visualising them in a spatial image, they become tangible and open to debate. But this only works if the maps spark the imagination and invite people to think along. The ideas shown must be recognisable as such. This is also what underpins the hypothesis of the ETH research project CARTISTIC:

Certain cartographic styles are better than others at stimulating imagination and discussion.

Help us test this hypothesis!

With direct insight into the assessments so far



Approx. 1 minute

In two interactive experiments, you can independently compare and evaluate map styles. By taking part, you'll help us better understand how map styles influence imagination, idea generation and discussions.