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# Beyond coordinates: A structured look at food system mapping

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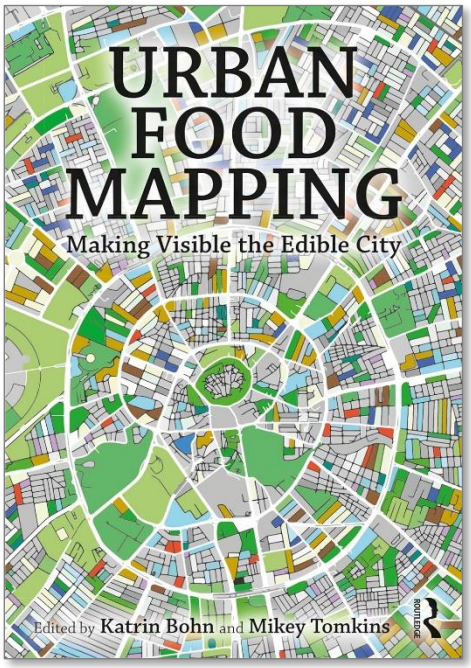


Review of *Urban Food Mapping: Making Visible the Edible City*, edited by Katrin Bohn and Mikey Tomkins. (2024). Published by Routledge. Available as hardcover, paperback, and Kindle; 328 pages. Publisher's website: https://www.routledge.com/Urban-Food-Mapping-Making-Visible-the-Edible-City/Bohn-Tomkins/p/book/9781032402819

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In this era defined by rapid urbanization and increasingly complex, precarious global food supply chains, the essential question of "how we feed ourselves as an urban species" has taken on increased urgency. *Urban Food Mapping: Making Visible the Edible City*, edited by architect Katrin Bohn and researcher Mikey Tomkins, addresses this question by celebrating and systematizing the act of food mapping as an area of research and design practice. The editors assert that mapping is not merely a tool for spatial representation but a necessary methodology for critical inquiry, community empowerment, and, ultimately, effective urban design and policy intervention. This volume establishes urban food mapping as a bridge between the often-abstract theoretical concerns of urbanism and the tangible realities of food systems, offering a rich, multidisciplinary survey that will prove invaluable to scholars and practitioners across the food, planning, and community development sectors.

Bohn and Tomkins provide an *urban food mapping matrix* (Bohn & Edwards, 2020) to systematically organize and review urban food maps. This matrix includes five major themes that guide the organization of this book: food growing sites, food system activities, food produce and culture, food networks and resources, and food stakeholders.

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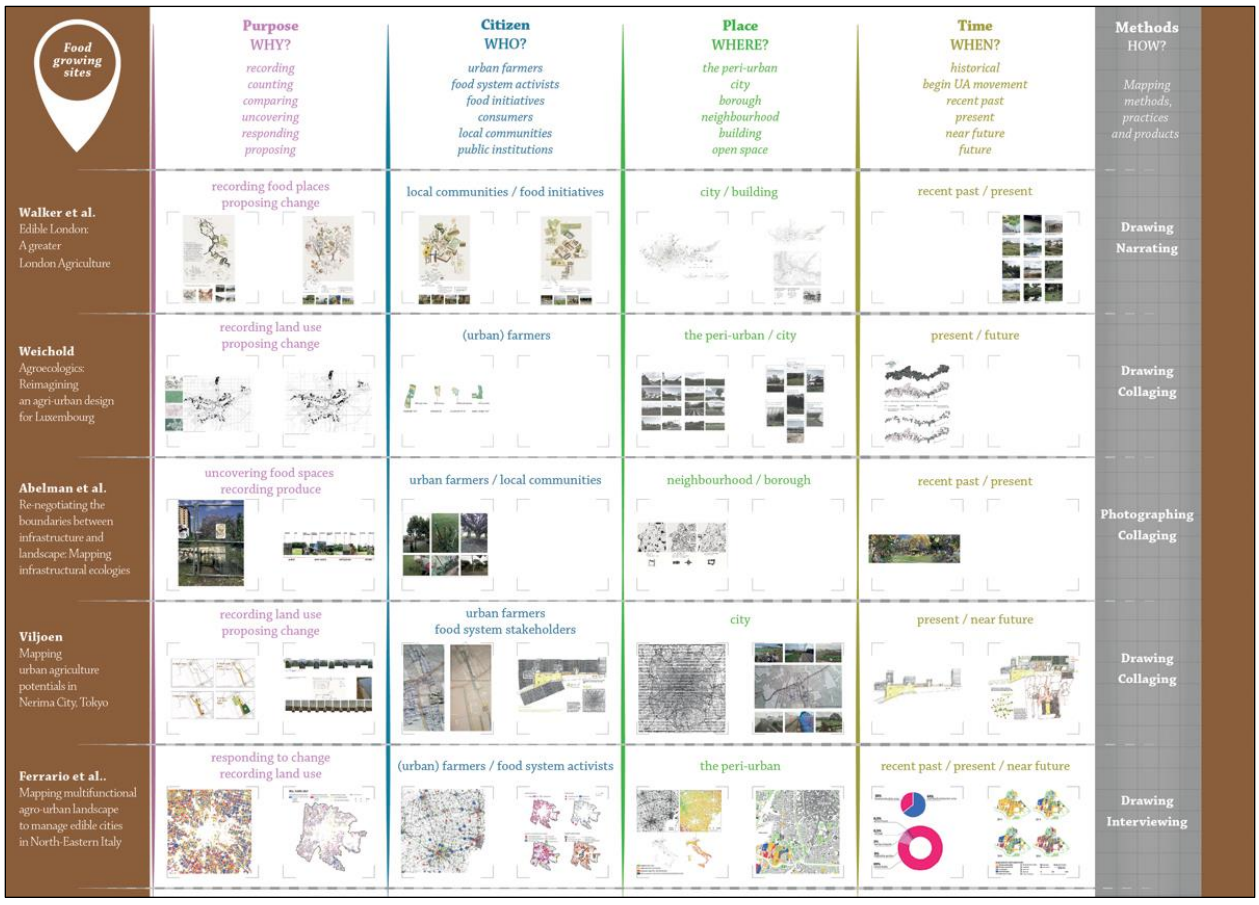
These themes can be categorized into four mapping types that include food maps based on purpose, citizens, places, or time. The matrix is narrowed down to mapping methods, which includes a wide range of methods ranging from drawing to audio recording. Each section is summarized with a visual matrix (see Figure 1).

The book, comprising 25 chapters and over 200 visual mapping images, follows the five thematic sections that delineate the primary subjects of urban food mapping, providing a comprehensive framework for the field. The first section, Food Growing Sites: Reimagining Land Use, focuses on the material potential of the city, exploring how mapping can highlight existing urban agriculture spaces and reveal latent opportunities. For instance, the chapter detailing the mapping of urban agriculture potentials in Nerima City, Tokyo, employs collage mapping to explore how vacant lots could be better integrated into a neighborhood. The second section, Food System Activities: Recording Economies, Patterns and Crises, shifts the focus to flow and vulnerability, detailing how visualization methods can track market dynamics. A case study in this section maps food geographies during COVID-19 in Hannover, Germany, utilizing collaborative auto-ethnographic methods to document shifts in food procurement and distribution during the onset of the pandemic. The next two sections delve into the social and cultural dimensions of food. Food Stakeholders: Proposing Change for Communities emphasizes participatory and political mapping practices, demonstrating how co-created maps empower communities. In one notable effort to map seeds of freedom, the organization Red de Huerteros Medellín used participatory asset and relationship mapping to promote food sovereignty and local knowledge

**Figure 1. Example of the Urban Food Matrix**




Source: Bohn and Tomkins, 2024, pp. 16–17.

retention. Food Produce and Cultures: Uncovering the Special in the Everyday uses mapping as a form of storytelling, capturing cultural significance through methods like qualitative narrative mapping utilized in work on participative food culture mapping in polarized urban districts to foster inclusion. Finally, Food Networks and Resources: Connecting People and Places examines the infrastructural and relational aspects of urban food. This section showcases projects that map resource sharing, illustrated by a chapter documenting the practice of sharing and mapping historic foodscapes in Lisbon that relies on drawing and listening methods. Throughout these chapters, the editors successfully synthesize contributions from geographers, architects, urban planners, artists, and community activists, solidifying the claim that urban food mapping is a truly interdisciplinary endeavor that demands diverse methods combining theoretical analysis, practical applications, and methodological experimentation.

Bohn and Tomkins' volume is timely reading, particularly for its focus on visualization as a tool for democratic action and cross-sector planning. The book's greatest strength is its embrace of the participatory and political nature of mapping. Many contributions move beyond static cartography to employ dynamic, narrative, and even performative mapping techniques that engage citizens in defining their own food realities, particularly by reframing maps from authoritative documents to instruments of collective knowledge generation. Chapters exploring initiatives like mapping food networks in Delft, South Africa, or visualizing edible spaces in London illustrate the potential of mapping to expose inequities, foster social cohesion, and build localized food sovereignty.

The sheer breadth of global examples and disciplinary approaches presents the book's primary challenge. While the editors succeed in defining "mapping" as an overarching category, the term "map" itself encompasses everything from high-level, GIS-based spatial analysis (such as Bohn's own Continuous Productive Urban Landscape, or CPUL, Opportunity Mapping Method) to highly personal, hand-drawn narratives of a single market visit. While this diversity is enriching, it occasionally leaves the reader seeking greater synthesis or a clearer methodological guide for scaling these disparate, localized efforts into cohesive city- or region-wide food strategies. The book's success in systematizing the field lies less in providing a single unified theory and more in offering a robust, globally sourced taxonomy of contemporary practice.

A specific theoretical contribution is the consistent link drawn between spatial representation and governance. The book clearly demonstrates how making the "Edible City" visible forces food issues into the planning and policy spotlight, often serving as a precursor to securing land rights for urban farming or integrating food infrastructure into municipal master plans. The case studies effectively demonstrate that, without a map, food remains an "invisible" system in the eyes of many planning departments, which has been a historic observation (Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 2000).

*Urban Food Mapping: Making Visible the Edible City* is more than a compendium of case studies; it is an essential read for the power of visual communication in driving food system change. By defining the "map" as a generative, political, and participatory tool, Bohn and Tomkins have created a foundational text for the emerging field of urban food studies. The volume offers critical insights and practical methodologies for anyone concerned with creating more equitable, resilient, and beautifully designed urban foodscapes.

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