



# green map system



Intro



Maps



News



Participate



Youth



About Us

[About Us](#)
[STORE](#)
[About Greenhouse](#)
[New Space](#)
[Support Green Maps](#)
[Board & Advisors](#)
[Staff](#)
[Partners](#)
[Supporters](#)
[Guestbook](#)
[Our History](#)
[What People Say](#)
[Credits & Thanks](#)
[Copyright Info](#)

## From New York City to Havana

*This talk was given by GMS Founding Director Wendy Brawer at the **Ethics & Culture of Sustainable Development** symposium in Havana, Cuba in May 1999. The symposium was co-sponsored by the **American Friends Service Committee, UNESCO** and **Felix Varela Center** (Havana).*

I bring you greetings from the small island nation where I live and work, Manhattan, the most international part of the US. So much about New York City inspires my work as a designer, and I am part of a network of urban ecologists that believes our efforts to transform NYC to a more sustainable place will have geometric impact in large cities everywhere.

I started looking for signs of eco-positivity around 1990, when I decided to focus my creative energy on something important. Home was burning as I was fiddling around, so I put down my old art & design toolbox and started learning to work with a new green one. Since then, my work has revolved around promoting ecological stewardship to urban-dwellers, especially New Yorkers, and encouraging people to work together to create a better common future...here are some of the things I found, right at home:

Images from:

- **Community Gardens:** Neighbors take over unused city land growing whatever they wish, for the social and biological benefit of all.
- **Greenmarkets:** Only locally grown produce is sold, by the people who grew it.
- **Recycle A Bicycle:** School-based project teaches kids to repair and maintain old bikes, how to ride safely, and develop cooperative skills.
- **Bicycle Police:** NYC has over 1,000 cruising on their own power.
- **Workbikes & Pedicabs:** The Hub's bike-powered transport help us meet NY State's 2% zero emission vehicle law.
- **Recycling Center:** We have the largest municipal program of any city of more than a million people in the US.
- **Composting Drop-off Site:** Drop off food scraps in the Greenmarket so worms can turn the waste to rich soil for city plants.
- **"Deposit Bank":** I designed these self-emptying recycling bins for Times Square so people could easily collect and redeem the deposit on drink containers).
- **Info Centers:** Helping us understand the waterways that surround us, how to be energy efficient, appreciate indigenous cultures, have healthier schools, etc.
- **Economic developments:** include green stores and other sustainable businesses and services, many organic cafes, natural health practitioners, etc.
- **Mass Transit:** NYC has 40% of the USA's mass transit. New "smart cards" give transit riders free rides, too.
- **Parks:** we have 500 of them, including 60 on the waterfront, helping us relax and connect with the environment that supports all.

I wondered how I could help everybody see these places that challenged the prevailing image of NYC, and decided to make a map of all the good green places. Maps are resource efficient, universally understood and have a powerful way of connecting people and place. We hoped our Green Apple Map would provide a fresh perspective of this city, and encourage personal discovery of the small and large eco-resources there. We charted the environmentally significant projects and places, and added sites of cultural importance that help make our city special, along with the challenging toxic hot spots--and in 1992 the first Green Apple Map was completed. Lots of people wanted to make such a map for their cities after seeing the impact it had on New

Yorkers, urban-dwellers not usually thought of as environmentalists.

The idea of creating a freely adaptable Green Map framework that could be shaped to fit any city's needs started growing. Right from the start, the concept was that each locally produced Green Map would be culturally specific and different in focus, format, media, design, narrative, etc. But we could dramatically increase the influence of each city's greening initiatives if all Green Maps had a common visual language, a set of symbols to indicate the various kinds of green sites. This language of Green Map Icons needed to be globally designed to have validity and we needed some citizens to be pioneers. So in early 1995, I brought the project to an international meeting with eco-design colleagues in the O2 network. People there were enthusiastic about Green Mapmaking, plus I learned about the Internet, and how we could use it to shape the Green Map System collaboratively. Despite the lack of funding (other than what my company contributed), the Green Map System was launched.

We began building a network of people who wanted to take on the creative responsibility of being the Green Mapmakers for their hometowns. Simultaneously we would help create the Green Map Icons, a set of tools and a website we all could use. It took about a year to make the 100 Icons, which we are continually adding to -- I hope our workshop in Cuba will lead to more new categories of urban green sites to add to the Icon set -- and to get the basics together. By then, several people had decided to officially volunteer to lead the project in their cities, and make maps that help people discover new ways to participate in a sustainable lifestyle everyday.

Today, we're up to 83 Green Mapmaking teams in 22 countries. The project became truly global a year ago, when Araxa Brazil joined us, and now every continent is involved. We have 8 world capitals, larger regions, many small towns, and one whole US state (tiny Rhode Island) involved. Mapmakers include grassroots organizers, city agencies, students, designers and artists, tourism boards, planners and geographers; all are welcome to see how this framework can be adapted to fulfill local needs with a global linkage. The people inform the officials about what they value, and the Green Maps are being used to make an inventory of today's eco-resources and a visioning tool for tomorrow's. Kids are Green Mapping their neighborhoods, sharpening their powers of observation, and showing adults how they view the environment. Ideas are being transferred from city to city, and all kinds of people are seeing how to support the growing movement toward community sustainability.

Today the first 9 beautiful, culturally informed Green Maps have been published:

Copenhagen Denmark was first, published in time for the big Organic Expo in the summer of '96. Published in Danish & English versions, it has informative text about how "organic" is defined there, describing unique bicycle services, etc. It even uses the Icons as graphic elements, a concept we had not foreseen!

Soon it was followed by 2 web-based Green Maps from Holland. Gouda's is quite interactive with city center and larger views, a scrollable Icon Key and in-depth text on each green site. It was completed in under 4 months, and the whole process of making it is posted on our website.

Montreal's is the first in 2 formats, both print and web mediums. The McGill University Urban Planning students who created it also have developed a community college curriculum around it. This summer, 12 teams are creating an in-depth database "that will be used by government and business, as a tool for understanding economic efficiencies to be gained" (Douglas Jack, Eco-Montreal team). The webmap starts with the watersheds of North America, gradually zeroing in on their island city, and the print map is very cool and "pop".

Malmo Sweden has both city and countryside views for day trips. The '98 edition has a special focus on the central business district, and there's one of the special trees in progress, too. The city sponsors a bus to take people to see several key green sites, such as 3 urban farms, ecological puppet theater, biogas plants, etc.

The latest Green Apple Map was published collaboratively between Metropolis magazine and my company, Modern World Design. This map is proof that NYC is improving...our first Green Map had only 143 sites, this third edition has about 700 green sites, plus 100 other eco-resources. We hear from people all the time about how

it changed their relationship with the city. Thanks to NYC Environmental Fund and Interface, it's free, there are copies available here. The web-version is underway, too, and we're planning for a June debut for our database driven website, so please visit the Green Apple virtually this summer.

Kyoto's Green Map has a wonderful design charting about 500 sites, which of course, includes the historic environment, so important to Kyoto's sense of place. It's the first one published in Asia. It debuted during December's United Nations climate change summit. They did their own workshop, global exhibit and tour in parallel with UN COP3.

Maps are in progress in Wellington NZ (web), Adelaide AU (print) and Pforzheim DE (print). In Argentina, parts of Buenos Aires and La Plata have been Green Mapped, too. The Icons have been translated into 7 languages, including Spanish! Several Mapmakers are self-organizing into regional hubs for promoting the project.

Obviously, no city is a biological paradise, but the mix of culture and nature in urban ecologies has its own special charms. I'd like to encourage you to promote these sorts of actions in your city by putting them on your own map, and hope that we can now discuss how you might begin the Green Mapmaking process.



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