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## London: The Information Capital: 100 Maps and Graphics that will change how you view the city

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## BOOK AND ATLAS REVIEWS

**LONDON: THE INFORMATION CAPITAL: 100 MAPS AND GRAPHICS THAT WILL CHANGE HOW YOU VIEW THE CITY**, by James Cheshire and Oliver Uberti, Particular Books, London, 2014, 240pp., ISBN: 9781846148477, £25.00 (hardback)

This book offers a unique view on London, although not necessarily because the topics behind the maps and diagrams are special. They deal with themes like history, census data, commuting, crime and entertainment. Rather, it is unique because of the data behind the maps and diagrams. It is open data – and there is a lot of data, big data if you want – tapped from new technologies like *Twitter* and GPS devices. The authors have split tasks while preparing the book; James Cheshire did the number crunching and Oliver Uberti was responsible for the final designs. This combination of author capacities has resulted in an innovative view on London.

The book is structured by five different themes: ‘Where we are’, ‘Who we are’, ‘Where we go’, ‘How we’re doing’ and ‘What we like’. In the section ‘Using this book’, the authors claim:

This book is not an atlas. We have not sought to present a single, definitive picture of the city. Instead, we have selected 100 or so facets based on two simple questions: do we find it interesting and do we think you will too?

However, one could easily claim that it is an atlas. Atlases are intentional combinations of maps or data sets, structured in such away that specific objectives are reached. It is structured around London, its objective is to inform about the London of today and its narrative provided by its organization, following five different themes. Many (thematic) atlases follow similar approaches, starting with the physical environment followed by sections on the social environment. The only atlas characteristic that is missing is the option to compare themes; partly because of the mapped topics and partly because of how the topic are mapped. But this last part is the strength of this book: the great diversity in graphic representations, most of which would be unconventional in an atlas. This makes the book a treasure and source of inspiration. The authors also state: ‘the structure is non-linear and the graphics stand alone, so jump around the book as you might on a day out in the city’.

It is impossible to describe all the individual maps, so I followed the authors’ advice and picked five topics I liked, one from each section. In ‘Where we are’, the map on page 62 depicting the *blitz* is an example of how design has been used to recreate the atmosphere of the event. The map

background is black with housing in grey and houses affected by the *blitz* in bright yellow. From ‘Who we are’, I selected page 76 which shows the DNA of the city based on the 2011 census. It displays a matrix of 207 variables in 649 wards using value to depict the intensity of the variables; incorporating 3.27 million households.

Interesting patterns are explained in more detail. The ‘Where we go’ section has lots of interesting maps and diagrams based on all kind of movement data gathered by, for instance, *Oyster* card usage and cycle hire patterns. These are mostly origin-destination maps. However, for this category I selected four maps (pages 154–157) showing the GPS tracks of 7000 runners, split into morning, afternoon, evening and weekend runs. The last map also distinguishes between different times during the weekend. The ‘How we’re doing’ section is dominated by diagrams. Here, I selected the ‘How cyclists get hit’ graphic on page 190. It shows 26 different examples of collisions between cyclists and other modes of transport – with those with lorries being the most dangerous. Finally, from the section ‘What we like’, the map on page 206 depicts the locations of over 1.5 million photos taken and posted on *Flickr* by over 45,000 users between the beginning of 2008 and mid-2013 – distinguishing whether the captured moment was at day or night, indoors or outdoors.

Each map is well explained and, in the notes section at the end of the book, the data sources are given. Did my view of the city – a vibrant metropole with an international flavour and a definite Britishness – change after reading this book, as the subtitle suggests? Not necessarily. However, it has enriched my view with many facts while explaining patterns across the city. We should not forget the workload behind each map. Try to do one of the graphics on your own, processing the big datasets and producing a good design. Doing so would heighten respect for the work the authors have done here. Interested in London? Read this book.

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**DESIGNING BETTER MAPS: A GUIDE FOR GIS USERS**, by Cynthia Brewer, 2nd edn., Esri Press, Redlands, 2015, 250 pp., ISBN: 9781589484405, \$59.99 (approximately £41.00) (paperback)

This collaboration between a leading map designer and a software provider is lavishly illustrated with colour examples