

Wikidata vs. custom Wikibases: community history case studies

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Introduction to Wikidata and Wikibase

Wikidata

- Free, collaborative knowledge base
- Operated by Wikimedia Foundation, edited by volunteers

Wikibase

- Free knowledge base **software**
- Originally written for Wikidata, but also used for other projects (e.g., Enslaved.org, Rhizome Artbase, Linked Jazz)

Unique identifier

Make Way for Ducklings (Q85783364)

Multilingual
labels,
descriptions,
and aliases

Sculpture by Nancy Schön

✚ In more languages

Configure

Language	Label	Description	Also known as
English	Make Way for Ducklings	Sculpture by Nancy Schön	
Spanish	No label defined	No description defined	
Traditional Chinese	No label defined	No description defined	
Chinese	讓路給小鴨子	No description defined	
Russian	Дорогу утятам	скульптура в Бостоне	Дорогу утятам (Бостон)

[Fewer languages](#)

Statements

instance of sculpture edit

✚ 1 reference

stated in	Inventories of American Painting and Sculpture
retrieved	6 July 2021

[+ add reference](#)

[+ add value](#)

image edit



Ducklings in the Fall, Boston Public Garden, Boston, Massachusetts.JPG
3,838 x 3,456; 6.29 MB

✚ 0 references

[+ add reference](#)

[+ add value](#)

inception 1987 edit

✚ 1 reference

[+ add value](#)

country United States of America edit

Wikipedia (1 entry) edit

[en](#) [Make Way for Ducklings \(Schön\)](#)

Wikibooks (0 entries) edit

Wikinews (0 entries) edit

Wikiquote (0 entries) edit

Wikisource (0 entries) edit

Wikiversity (0 entries) edit

Wikivoyage (0 entries) edit

Wiktionary (0 entries) edit

Multilingual sites (1 entry) edit

[commons](#) [Category:Make Way for Ducklings, Boston Public Garden](#)

Sitelinks

Statements

Boston Research Center

- Digital community history and archives lab based in the Northeastern University Library
- Projects in partnership with organizations in Chinatown, Roxbury, East Boston, and the South End
- Our role: provide **technical infrastructure** for **local history**



<https://bostonresearchcenter.org/>



Wikidata: Neighborhood Public Art in Boston



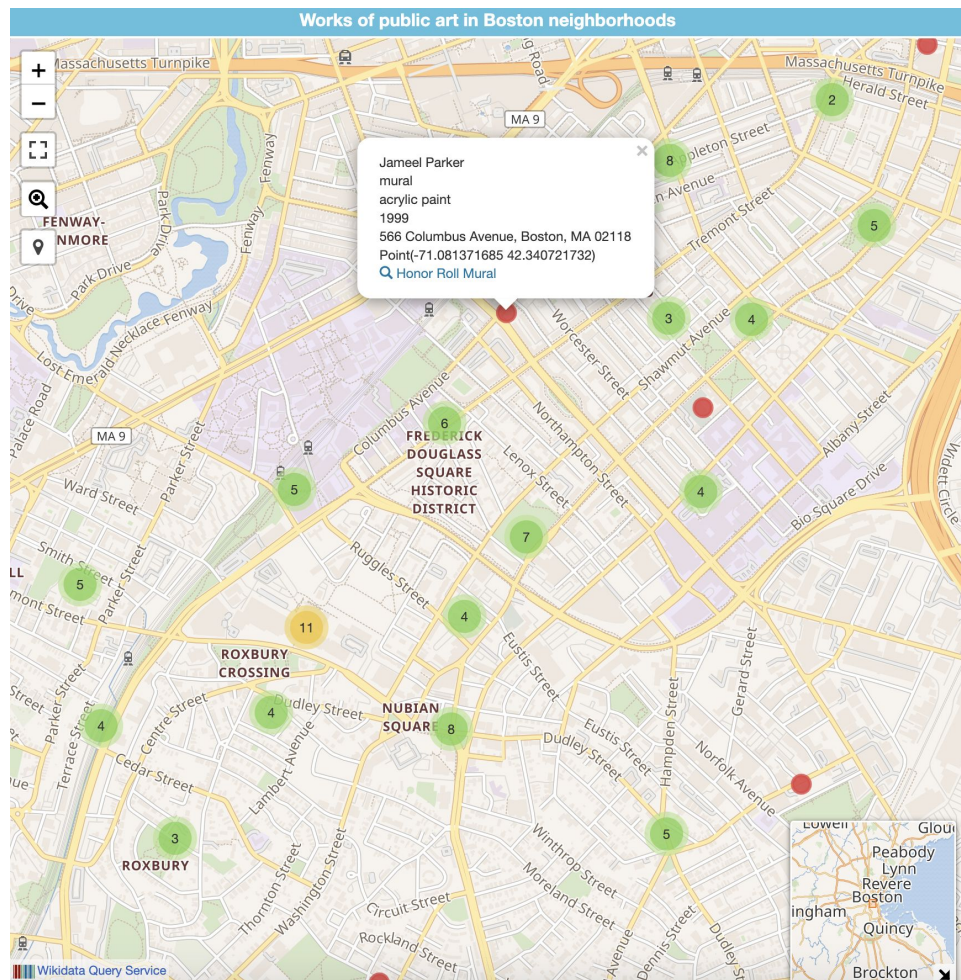
“Community garden mural on the side of a Wollaston's Market off Tremont Street in Boston”, 1997,
<http://hdl.handle.net/2047/d20190365>

Background and goals

- Project goals
 - Gather and preserve information about works and artists in Boston
 - Create public art walking tours around neighborhoods and themes
- Lots of people/organizations tracking data about public art in Boston
 - City of Boston
 - Arts organizations
 - Journalists, researchers, enthusiasts, etc.
- Can't/shouldn't centralize all of this work into one organization's database
 - Different local needs
 - Questions of ownership

Why Wikidata?

- Community participation!
 - Make what we have accessible
 - Invite people to contribute knowledge
- Handling complex information and building connections between items
- Visualization tools bundled with the Wikidata Query Service
- Established practices for modeling public art (see: [WikiProject Public Art](#))



[Example map visualization produced with WDQS](#)

Project status

Work so far

- Added or modified items for 200+ works, 100+ artists
 - Uploads from spreadsheets via OpenRefine
 - Manual edits
- Created [WikiProject page](#) to document work
- Hosted edit-a-thons

Work to come

- Implement custom visualizations that pull in data from Wikidata
- Connect Wikidata items to photos of works in university repository
- More edit-a-thons and classroom activities



Wikibase: Chinatown Collections Survey



“Mural on Oak Street in Boston's Chinatown”, [ca. 1976-2008], <http://hdl.handle.net/2047/d20180779>

Background and goals

- Initial meetings between BRC and community organizations in Chinatown
 - Lots of digital history projects already happening in community
 - BRC could help make those more findable
- Sent out survey to people and organizations around Boston asking about any collections or materials they have related to Boston's Chinatown
- Project goal: create **searchable** and **browsable multilingual directory** of collections

Database needs and nice-to-haves

Needs:

- Multilingual capabilities—represent all field names and values in both English and Chinese
- Represent collections, people, organizations, and the relationships between them

Nice-to-haves:

- Lightweight/easy to implement
- Editing interface that allows project participants to add/edit data directly
- Flexibility in schema to expand project scope, deal with idiosyncratic entities

Why Wikibase over Wikidata?

- Not all of the items are appropriate for inclusion in Wikidata
 - Notability guidelines
 - Privacy concerns
- More control over modeling practices
 - Don't have to inherit Wikidata modeling efforts that don't make sense in local context
 - Can add properties specific to our usage
- More control over editing access
- (Pilot project for broader use of Wikibase in the library)

Project status

- Still processing and following up on survey responses
- Have Wikibase Suite deployed on AWS
- Copying over labels, descriptions, and aliases of Items and Properties in Wikidata as needed
- Creating local Items and Properties
- To do:
 - Finish populating Wikibase
 - Hire someone to translate content
 - Build interface to display information from Wikibase in a more user-friendly way

Takeaways

Wikidata = part of larger community

- External services using Wikidata
- Editors outside your organization
- Existing work to build off of and add to

Wikibase = more control

- Over software
- Over data models
- Over editing access
- Over data usage

Thank you!