



# CHOOSING A DIGITAL MAPPING PLATFORM FOR YOUR PROJECT

*A workshop in the “Digital Humanist’s Help Desk” series*

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Follow along with links at: <https://bit.ly/4ofzqkR>

# OVERVIEW

With many options to choose from, picking the right tool for mapping your research in the humanities can be daunting. This session will guide participants through the pros and cons of various free and paid mapping tools and platforms like Google MyMaps, ZeeMaps, Felt, MapBox Studio, Leaflet, and ArcGIS Online. Special attention will be paid to evaluating your own source material, needs, and priorities to find the best tool for you and your project.

## *Learning goals:*

- *Identify what kind of humanities data you have (or want) to create a digital project that incorporates mapping.*
- *Evaluate your resources and constraints relevant to choosing a mapping tool.*
- *Apply this knowledge to planning to create your own projects using the most appropriate tool(s) for your needs.*

# WHO AM I?

## Cynthia Heider



Public Digital Scholarship Librarian

Email: [heider@upenn.edu](mailto:heider@upenn.edu)

Book a consultation:

[www.library.upenn.edu/staff/cynthia-heider](http://www.library.upenn.edu/staff/cynthia-heider)

## What can I help with?

- Digital projects for public audiences
- Digital projects involving community partners
- Choosing the right tool or platform for your digital project
- Working with data in the humanities
- Connecting with digital project resources at and beyond UPenn

## Research Data and Digital Scholarship (RDDS)

- Support across research data & digital scholarship lifecycles
- Encourage thoughtful and informed use of emerging technologies in our fields of expertise
- Aid in the creation & dissemination of traditional + cutting-edge scholarly outputs
- Provide custom workshops, in-class visits, and consultations (one-on-one or team-based).

Website: [www.library.upenn.edu/RDDS](http://www.library.upenn.edu/RDDS)

Email: [LibraryRDDS@pobox.upenn.edu](mailto:LibraryRDDS@pobox.upenn.edu)

Workshop calendar: [bit.ly/RDDS-events](http://bit.ly/RDDS-events)

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# *PRE- PLANNING*

*What materials are you working with? What are your  
ideas for your project?*

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# HUMANITIES RESEARCH DATA

*What does data look like in the humanities?*

correspondence  
estate inventory  
shipping manifest  
diary or journal  
financial ledger  
**photograph**  
drawing or other work of visual art  
burial, birth, or wedding record  
newspaper  
property record or deed  
tax list  
notebook  
memorandum  
telegram  
speech  
material culture item  
genealogy  
recipe or menu  
film, novel, or other cultural artifact

directory  
logbook  
blueprints  
built structure  
price list  
advertisement  
legislation  
government proceedings  
transcript  
interview  
autobiography  
schematic or plan  
diagram or chart  
land survey or map  
polling results  
census  
audio or video recording  
publication

... and more!

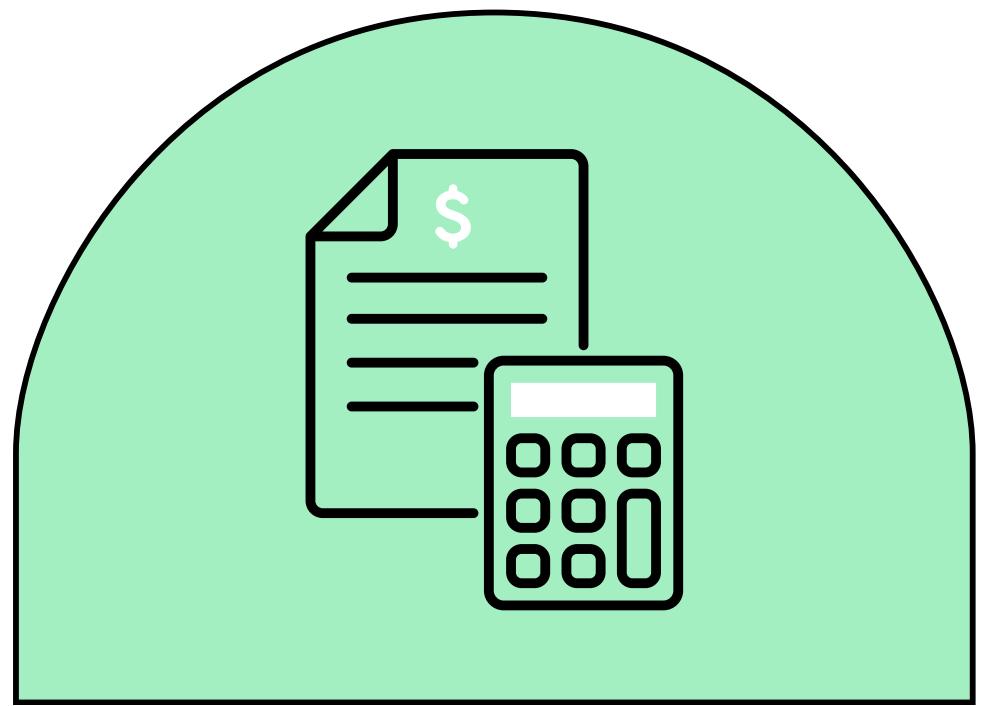
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# *RESOURCE MAPPING*

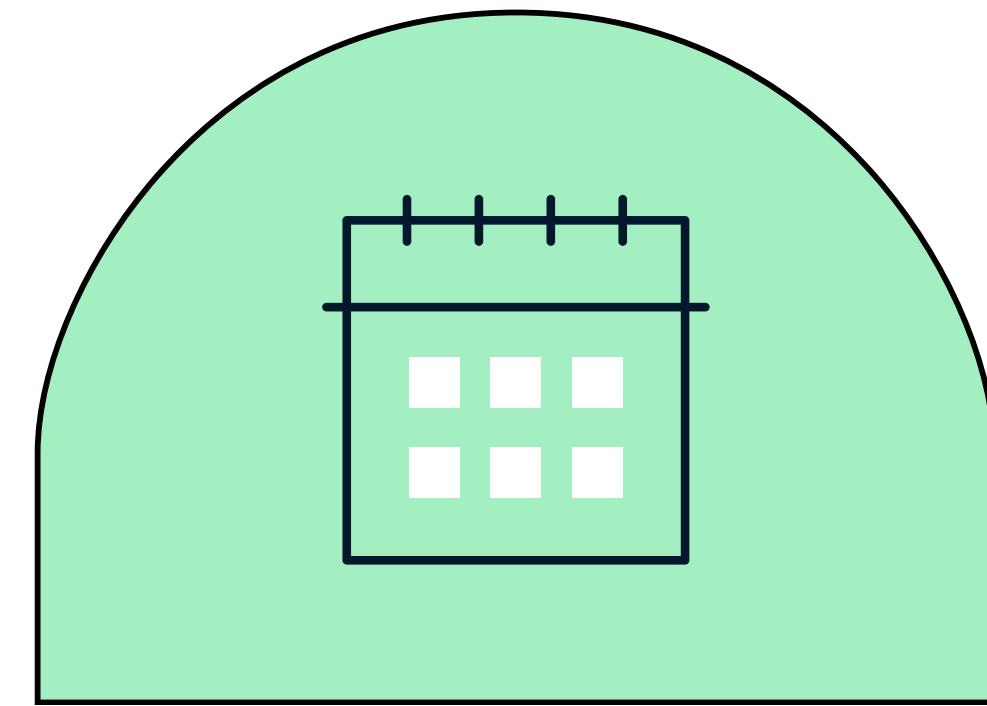
*What resources and limitations do you need to keep in mind as you choose a tool?*

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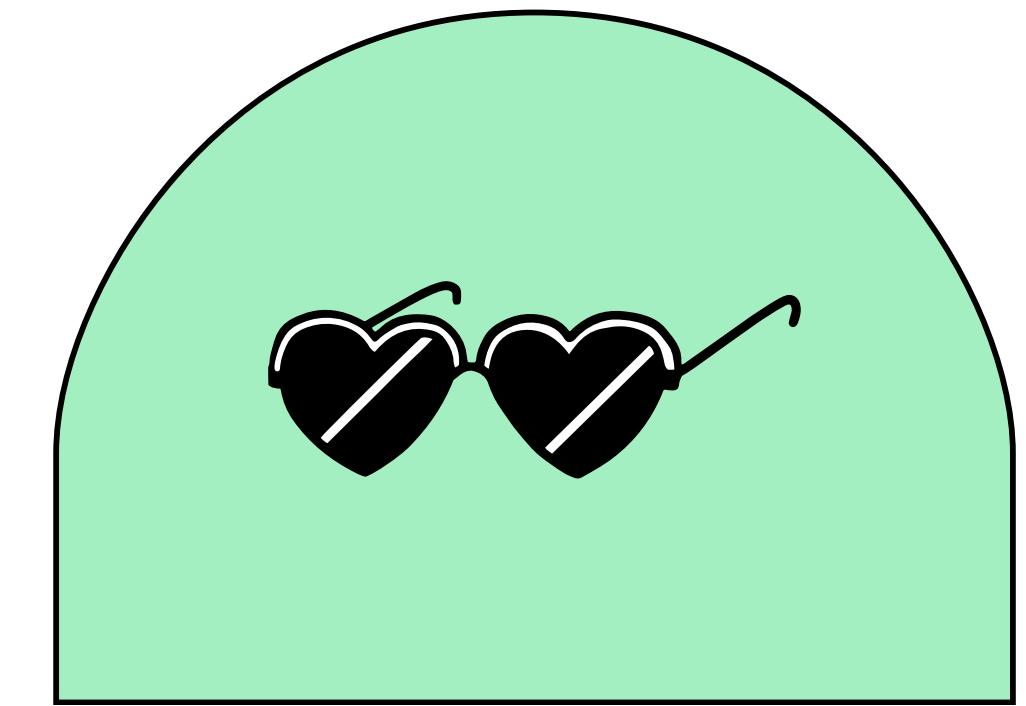
# CHOOSE TWO



*Inexpensive*



*Quick*



*Fancy*

# *EXERCISE: RESOURCE MAPPING*

I have more of...

I have less of...

*Funding*

*Time*

*People/Labor*

*Training or comfort using new tech tools*

*Access to tools or data*

*Readiness of source material*

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# *NEEDS & PRIORITIES*

*What are your top 3 priorities?*

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# *ROUND ROBIN*

*What discipline are you coming from? What is  
your map idea?*

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# *PLATFORM ROUNDUP*

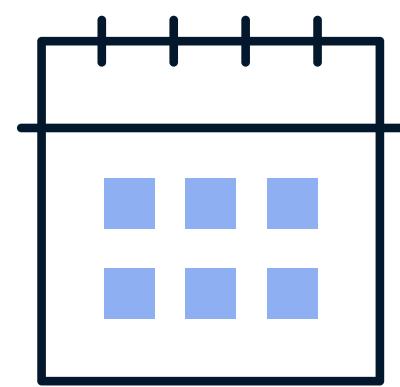
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# GOOGLE MYMAPS

Example: Boston's Black Heritage Trail



*Inexpensive*



*Quick*

google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?mid=1hGDxOjseZI6P2RGF08GC7zLyh8JraPFR&ll=42.3591296316346%2C-71.0671342&z=17

Boston's Black Heritage Tr... ...

Explore Boston's Black Heritage Trail (National Parks Service).  
490 views  
Published on November 2, 2022

SHARE

Sites (Blue=Public, Yellow=Private)

- African Meeting House
- Abiel Smith School
- Smith Court Residences
- 3 Smith Ct
- ... 10 more

Walking Path

Black Heritage Trail

This map was created by a user. Learn how to create your own.

Made with Google My Maps

Map data ©2024 Google Terms 200 ft

Keyboard shortcuts

# GOOGLE MYMAPS

## *Pros*

- Very easy to use
- Easily import and export data in multiple formats

## *Cons*

- Need to sign in with a Google account - which means Google owns your data
- Not particularly flashy or aesthetic
- Limitations on what you can display

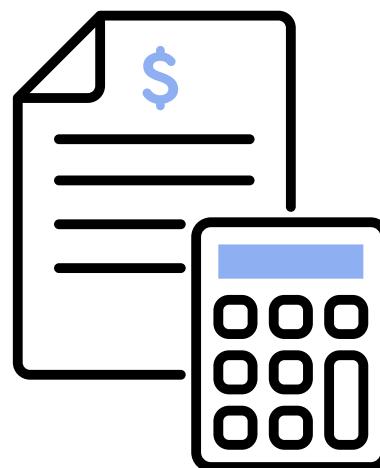
*Use this tool if  
you...*

- Have limited time or budget
- Are mapping for understanding rather than presentation

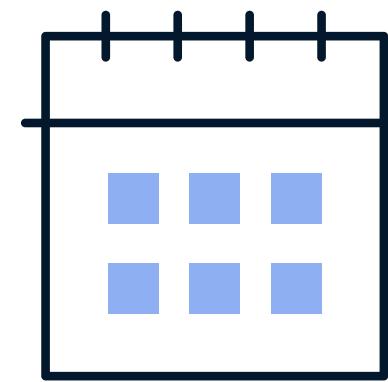
# ZEEMAPS

## Example: World Map of Recipes

*Inexpensive*



*Quick*



# ZEEMAPS

## *Pros*

- Crowdsourcing capability
- Easy data import
- Data privacy measures (HIPAA compliant)

## *Cons*

- Free up to a point
- Export not possible
- Limited functionality

*Use this tool if  
you...*

- Have limited time or budget and want an alternative to Google products
- Need data privacy
- Would like to crowdsource

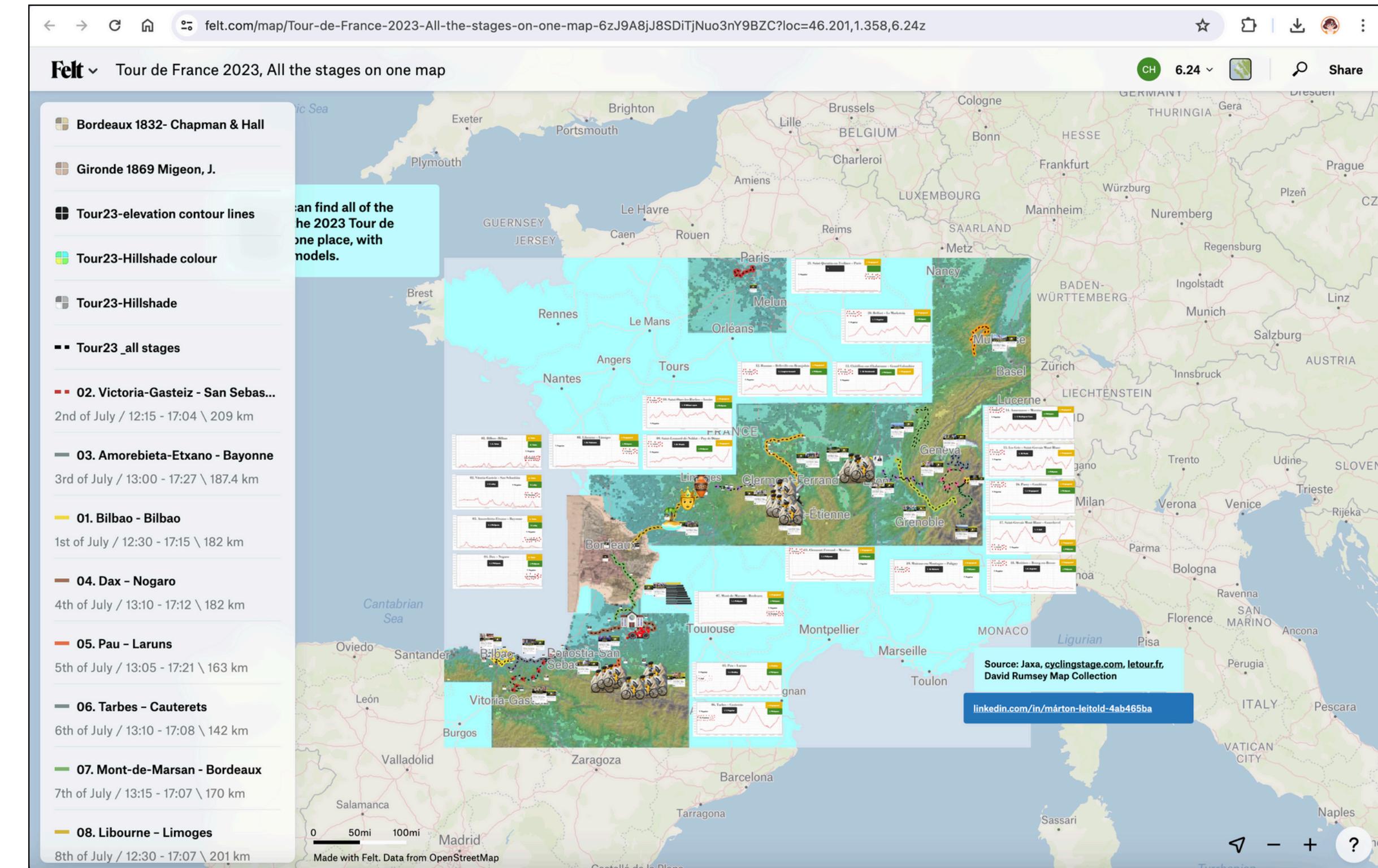
# FELT

## Example: Tour de France 2023

*Inexpensive  
(for some)*



*Fancy*



# FELT

## *Pros*

- Aesthetic and interactive
- Allows for multiple data sources and types
- Annotatable maps (add pins, drawings, polygons, text, photos, docs, and video)

## *Cons*

- Very limited free tier; most features are paid (if you are an instructor, you can get verified for a free higher tier account)
- Takes a little practice to get the hang of it

*Use this tool if  
you...*

- Are an educator and can get premium features for free
- Have some time and want to learn more about GIS

# MAPBOX STUDIO

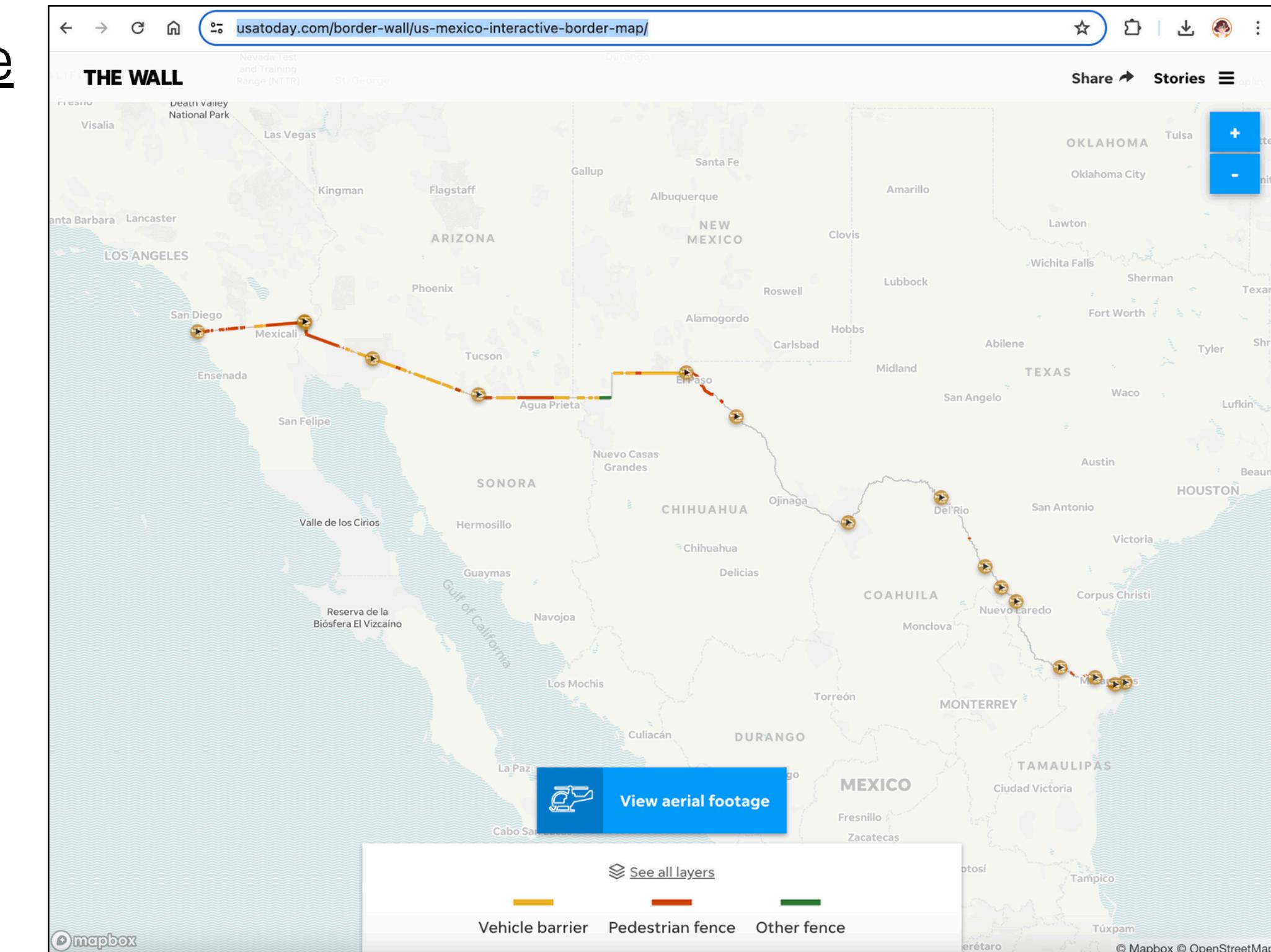
Example: USA Today “The Wall” interactive map



*Inexpensive*



*Fancy*



# MAPBOX STUDIO

## *Pros*

- Easily import and export data in multiple formats
- Lots of customization options - many use a simple interface
- Great tutorials and product support for learning the platform

## *Cons*

- Free up to a point
- Combining multiple data sources and types can be challenging and may require data cleanup/normalization beforehand
- Learning curve

*Use this tool if  
you...*

- Need to use multiple formats of data
- Have some time to learn the ins and outs of the platform

# LEAFLET

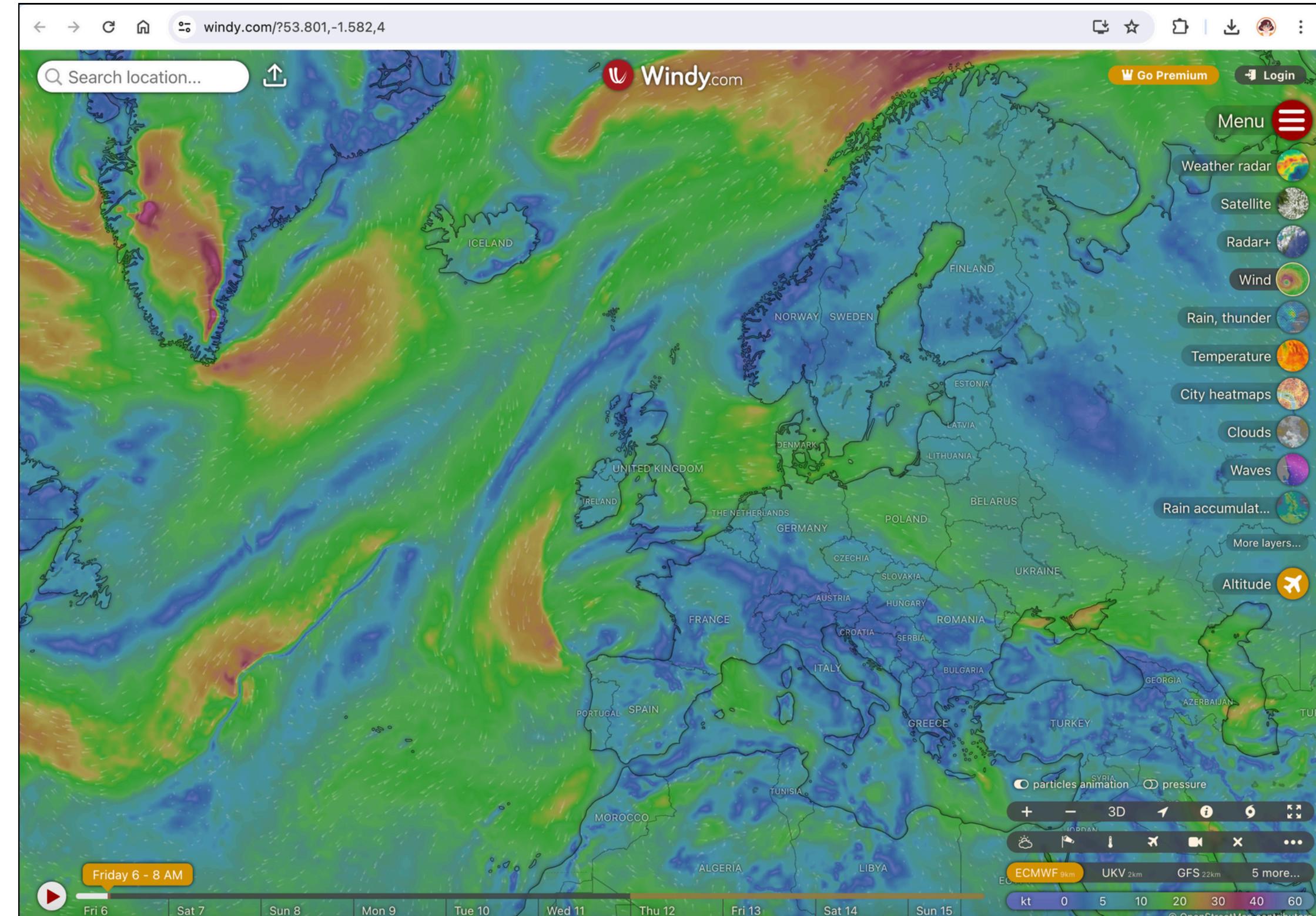
Example: “Windy”



*Inexpensive*



*Fancy*



# LEAFLET

## *Pros*

- Free and open source
- Very customizable

## *Cons*

- Requires some knowledge of HTML, CSS, and JS
- Need your own web server to host maps, site, and data

*Use this tool if  
you...*

- Have some experience building websites or the budget to hire someone who does
- Want complete control over the data and design of your map

# ARCGIS ONLINE

Example: Morningside Heights Historic District Explorer



*Inexpensive  
(for some)*



*Fancy*

nyclpc.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer3d/index.html?id=abd5f6ae90f049bd9359681c9ac1402d

**Morningside Heights Historic District Explorer**

This 3D web map allows users to learn more about the Morningside Heights Historic District, which the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission designated on February 21, 2017.

Click on any building in the district to activate a popup window with a **building history**, a **designation photo** and a historic **New York City tax photo**. Within the 3D environment users can pan, zoom, and rotate around the Morningside Heights neighborhood and focus on specific areas of interest within the historic district. The boundary of the historic district is represented by a purple line. For map instructions and an overall history of the district users can click on the information icon on the bottom left corner of the screen.

**Period of Construction**

Older	Pre-1900	1900 - 1909	1910 - 1919	1920 - 1929	Post-1929	Newer

The buildings within the historic district have been assigned a color according to the period of their construction. The color range below illustrates the color assigned to each period ranging from the late nineteenth century to the twentieth century.

OK

NYC OpenData, State of New Jersey, Esri, HERE, Garmin, GeoTechnologies, Inc., USGS, EPA | Source: Airbus, USGS, NGA, NASA, CGIAR, NLS, OS, NMA, Geodatasyrelsen, GSA, GSI and the GIS User Community

Powered by Esri

# ARCGIS ONLINE

## *Pros*

- Aesthetic
- Lots of support for learning and creating (online and through the Penn Libraries)
- Robust capabilities

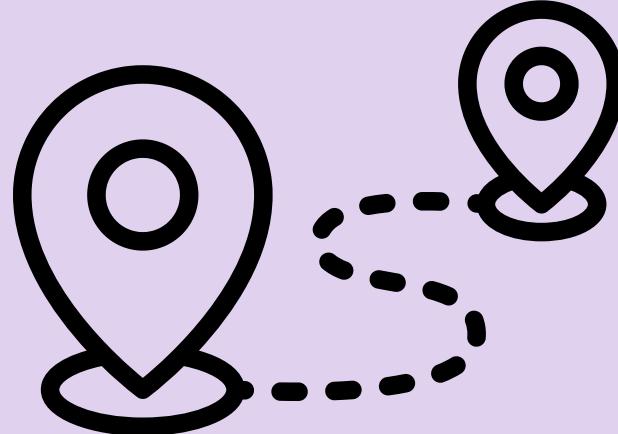
## *Cons*

- Requires an expensive subscription, like the one offered by Penn
- Learning curve can be steep depending on complexity of features you want to use

*Use this tool if  
you...*

- You want something that looks really good
- You have a lot of time or a budget
- You want to jump into the deep end of GIS and mapping

# MORE RESOURCES



## Penn resources

[GIS & Mapping Resources Research Guide](#)

[Schedule a consultation](#)

Email support or create an Esri/ArcGIS account:

[LibraryGIS@pobox.upenn.edu](mailto:LibraryGIS@pobox.upenn.edu)

[Penn GIS Day event \(November 19\)](#)

## General resources

[“Beyond Esri” resource guide](#)

[Spatial Humanities Workshop by Lincoln Mullen](#)

[Other GIS Day 2025 events and resources](#)

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*QUESTIONS*  
  &  
*COMMENTS*

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