

# The Arts Ecosystem of Iowa City

A research study in conjunction with Public Space One through the University of Iowa Office of Outreach and Engagement.

**Kailee Ammons, Zach Atzen, Rachel Boggs,  
Patrick McLaughlin, Marina Naborowski, Heather Sarahan**

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## **Executive Summary**

Undergraduate students in the honors discussion section of a communication research methods class conducted research for Iowa City arts nonprofit Public Space One. The primary function of research was to discover community perception of art within the Iowa City area. Another goal was to provide Public Space One with applicable data on local attitudes towards artistic engagement, with the hope of increasing efficiency of the organization's future programming. Over the course of a semester, six student researchers formulated survey questions, conducted field interviews, analyzed and coded data, dressed up like elves, and provided the organization with research for use in future surveys.

## **Background:**

Throughout the semester six student researchers worked collaboratively with local arts organization Public Space One to determine artistic engagement levels within the Iowa City area. Primary goal of research was to quantitatively and qualitatively define reception of the local arts ecosystem. The team engaged in interviews with Iowa City residents to determine levels of engagement and perception to both Public Space One and to the local arts community. Another goal of research was to provide Public Space One with information conducive for use in further community research, surveys, and/or grant application.

## **Development of Research Questions:**

Our team constructed research questions after initial discussions with Public Space One. The organization expressed a desire for information regarding their consumer base, which is the local arts community. They hoped to use information collected to increase attendance and participation in their community events and services. Our client also wanted to increase retention of participants after initial exposure so desired to design events synthesizing sustained engagement. For this they wondered what attitudes toward art were in Iowa City. Public Space One is incredibly passionate about providing an artistic ecosystem with accessible resources in the Iowa City area, so determining questions that would articulate these desires was vital.

After discussion with the UI Office Of Outreach and Engagement director Travis Kraus and professor Kate Magsamen-Conrad, our team translated these needs and desires into methodology for research. We formed questions in a semi-structured format to facilitate conversation emphasizing locals attitudes of art. Researchers then conducted in-group interviews to determine if questions sufficiently extracted this desired data. We then spent time interviewing friends and reanalyzed, updating our questions again. We coded our own interviews and determined how specific phrasing can influence path of discussion. All of this led to a final draft of questions we believe are reflective of Public Space One's request.

Further discussion revealed the location and responsive audience of our study. We determined the location best suited to conduct research was an event called "Gallery Walk of Iowa City". This event draws a sufficient population and participants would likely be active in engagement with the art scene, a desired characteristic of Public Space One. To optimize efficiency and increase our sample size during a decentralized event like the Gallery Walk, our

group decided to conduct interviews in three separate locations. We chose event locations Glassando, Ten Thousand Villages, and Public Space One as they were far enough apart to prevent overlap among our participants and would be well populated. After finalizing questions and discussing interview tactics, our group went and collected data at the Gallery Walk.

### **Interview Procedure:**

Even though storms affected participation levels, the field sites of Public Space 1, Glassando, and Ten Thousand Village were successful in the collection of usable data. Our goal during research was to acquire data until saturation was met. This was difficult due to the nature of discussions that regard fluid topics such as “art” and “art scene” that are hard to quantify. We used our interviews to collect for a greater level in depth of information as opposed to number of participants. Our goal was to aim for ten interviews per member of our team. When conducting interviews, we recorded conversations with the locals of Iowa City, asking research questions and engaging in conversation.

### **Listening/Coding Data:**

After the culmination of the event, our group uploaded our audio files and listened to each other’s interviews to gain initial insight into the data we had acquired. This began our analysis of data to determine understanding. Our group coded each audio file multiple times and transcribed and recorded applicable information. The purpose of this was to allow for multiple coders to weigh on the same data, increasing intercoder reliability. An analysis of this data over a four week period of study led to our team deriving data functional for presentation to Public Space One.

### **Findings and Analysis:**

Forty-five total interviews were conducted and analyzed by our research team. Our project’s aim at determining perception of art was a success. Our group also determined other significant data, such as a common misperception of what Public Space One is and the services they offer. Our analysis highlights public perception of art in Iowa City as well as levels of future artistic engagement. We also identified potential barriers for participation, awareness levels of local art events and features, and general dispositions on the importance of art. Our group presentated our findings to Public Space One, and believe that our data is viable for future research and analysis usage.

### **Conclusion:**

Through active engagement with a local arts non-profit, student researchers studied levels of engagement and interest in the arts ecosystem of Iowa City. By formulating research questions, engaging in conversation with local populace, and coding and analyzing the interactions our group extrapolated information viable for answering Public Space One’s identified desires.

## Appendix I – Research Questions

Overarching research question:

How does the Iowa City community define an art scene or artistic ecosystem?

Sub research questions about community:

- What does the Iowa City community have available?
- What artistic interests does the Iowa City community have?
- What does active participation mean to the Iowa City community?
- How does the Iowa City community define an art scene/artistic ecosystem?
- What do Iowa City community members perceive is available for artistic engagement?
- What does active participation in the “art scene” mean to the Iowa City community?
- What are the facilitators and/or barriers of engagement within the “art scene” as perceived by the Iowa City community?
- What is the Iowa City community’s awareness of Public Space 1?
- What does the Iowa City community think Public Space 1 has available for artistic engagement?
- What does active participation at Public Space 1 mean to the Iowa City community?
- What are the facilitators and/or barriers to engagement with Public Space 1?

## Appendix II – Survey

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

#### PS1 Questions

1. Have you ever heard of Public Space 1?
  - i. *If no: Ask if they know PS1?*
  - ii. *If still no – **ASK GENERAL ART QUESTIONS (below)***
  - iii. *If say anything other than no ask:*
2. What's your experience with PS1?
3. *If wishy washy – **move to general art questions (below)***
4. Do you know of any other types of things they have to do there?
5. Did you know about:
  - i. *LIST THE THINGS (after John emails back)*
6. What do you do within PS1? – how frequently?
7. Would you call yourself an active participant at PS1? Why or why not?
8. What keeps you from participating with PS1 stuffs?  
*LOTS OF PROBING (keep in mind facilitator and barriers)*

#### General Art Questions

1. What do you think of as art?
2. What is there to do in Iowa City involving art?
3. When I say “art scene” what does that make you think of?
  - Probes
  - Role of community
  - Attitudes and beliefs of art in Iowa City. Are people receptive to art?
4. Would you call yourself an active participant in the art scene as you've just described? Why or why not?
  - a. If they answer as “viewer” – probe to see if they produce art (doer)
    - i. *Vice versa*
    - ii. Probe for how frequently participate.
5. What keeps you from participating in the art scene in Iowa City?  
*LOTS OF PROBING (keep in mind facilitator and barriers)*

#### END OF INTERVIEW:

6. Last few questions – do you mind sharing your age, gender, race/ethnicity.