

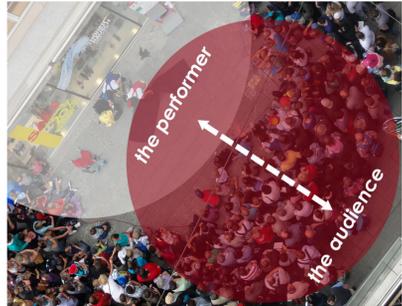
# the world is your **STAGE**

**busking** (v)  
to perform in a public place, often for tips



## ABSTRACT

Busking as a profession has become more of a rarity, often confined to tourist hubs. The potential audiences are less attentive, busier, and more guarded than the audiences of the busking golden age. Designing a space that can better retain audiences could reinvigorate street performing. The design of E street plaza was in response to the success of other public spaces in downtown Davis. Although there is space for street performers, few buskers take advantage of the opportunity. This project will explore how to better design E street plaza to attract and retain audiences for street performers. Designing for a street performer program in the center of downtown could transform E street plaza into the town center that it was supposed to be, capitalizing on the large student population. A successful design would accommodate for the ephemeral nature of street performance, while providing a flexible space for when it is vacant of buskers. City regulations, case studies, and literature reviews will all inform the final design.



## RESEARCH AND BACKGROUND

This project recognizes the challenges of the modern-day audience: shorter attention span, less likely to be outside, and increased pace of life. The modern-day audience of a typical busker is less likely to stay and observe, let alone actually bother to pay attention to a busker. A busker may not have a steady audience for their performance if the space does not facilitate audience retention. A space designed specifically for street performance should be able to seamlessly merge the two spheres: the sphere of the performer and the sphere of the audience. By blending the two spheres, buskers can take over spaces that are conducive to keeping an audience. This could be a start to reviving the art of busking in using landscape design interventions.

In order to create a successful busking space, there are three main requirements that need to be fulfilled:

1. Spatial identity of a stage within the public sphere
2. Being able to capture the attention of a nonpermanent audience
3. Retaining people by high perceived safety and comfort

Another challenge when designing a space for street performers is finding a balance between a constructive space and a flexible space. The impermanence of street performance is a unique characteristic that can easily be ignored when designing a permanent landscape. While there should always be a space waiting for a busker to take over, spaces that are too directed to only be used during a performance can lead to an abandoned installation. Therefore, a successful design should also embrace the ephemerality and individuality of street performance.

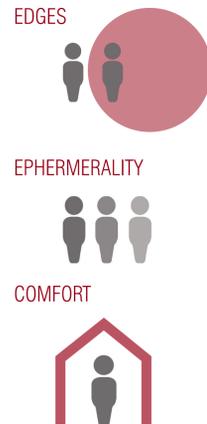
Case studies were analyzed in order to provide a better framework for a successful busking space. San Francisco Fisherman's Wharf, New York Times Square, Inokashira Park in Tokyo, Japan, Hongdae in Seoul, South Korea, and Occidental Park in Seattle, Washington were all case studies that dealt with different aspects of street performance. Policy, people, and form were all studied to inform the final design.

Different types of performances have different ideal conditions:

**Music:** Good acoustics, few neighboring audio disturbances, electrical access for amplifiers and microphones, clean and dry floor that instruments can be placed on

**Dance:** Smooth and nonstick flooring that will not ruin specialized shoes, center marker, electrical access for amplifiers and music player, minimal stage obstructions, lighting

**Theatre:** Good acoustics, ability to change setting, lighting, center marker, lighting



## SITE ANALYSIS- E STREET PLAZA

The City of Davis already advocates for the arts, visual and performing. They are already in the process of creating an inventory of public performance spaces that can be reinforced or reinvigorated (Hartsough, 2017). Some of these spaces are small corners whereas others are formal stages.

In Downtown Davis, buskers often frequent Davis Commons on 1st Street and Central Park on C st. Both sites attract a lot of foot traffic and tend to have people staying for long periods of time. This is due to the adjacent restaurants and their outdoor seating, as in the case of Davis Commons, or because of Farmer's Markets and other crowd-drawing events, as in the case of Central Park. However, only a fire-breathing troupe frequent E-St. Plaza.

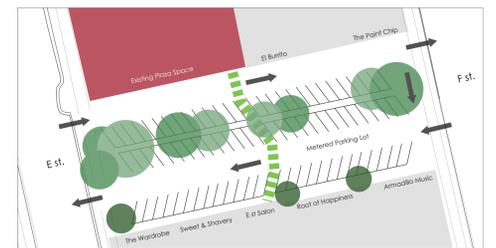
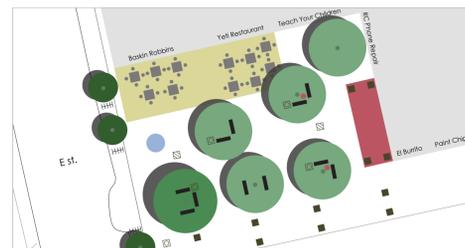
E-Street Plaza falls in the Central Commercial (C-C) zone, which grants more freedoms to the plaza programming and noise limits (City of Davis, 2016). Between 7am and 10pm, the decibel level is at 60, which is like a crowd of conversations like in a restaurant, or non-amplified

background music (IAC Acoustics, 2017). As the zoning suggests, most of the buildings are occupied by food or service related businesses.

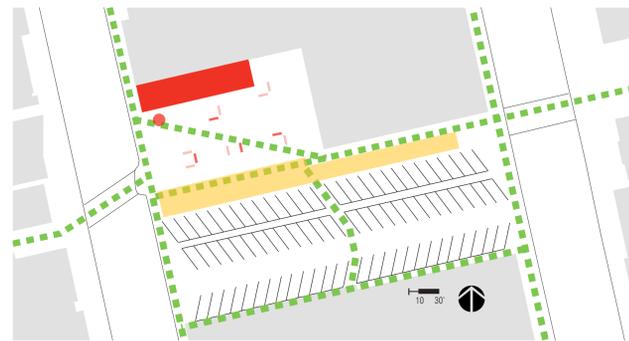
Over a span of three weekends I would sit in the plaza, recording people's behavior. I intentionally only collected data during peak hours to observe the best-case scenario. Observations were taken during the day, between 10am to 1pm, during the months of March and April.

Some important findings were:

1. many indicators showing known discomforts of the seating
2. inaccessibility because of uneven pavement
3. lack of a need for more parking in that area, drop off/loading zone preferred
4. plaza rarely an end stop for plaza visitors



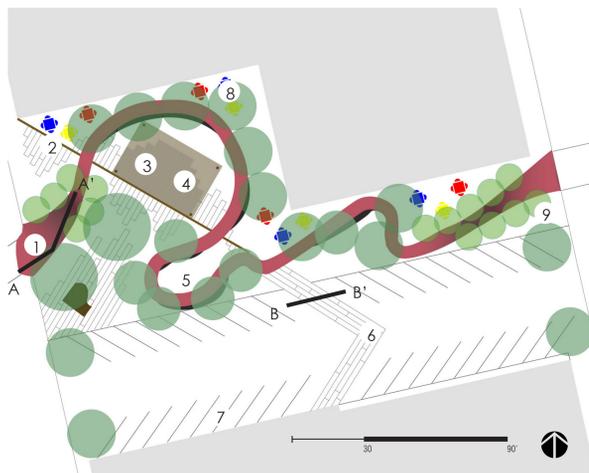
Above: Site Inventory; Right: Site photos of plaza and parking lot; Below: Behavior Map



Legend - Behavior Map  
Pedestrians High use Medium use Low use Stalled cars

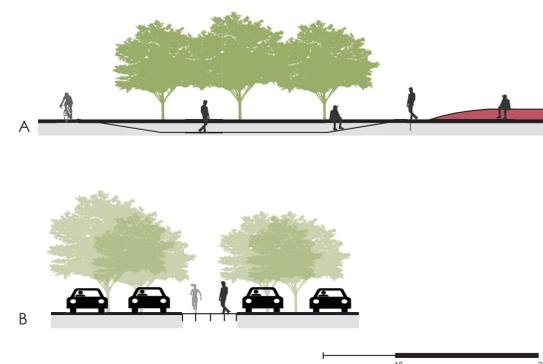


## DESIGN

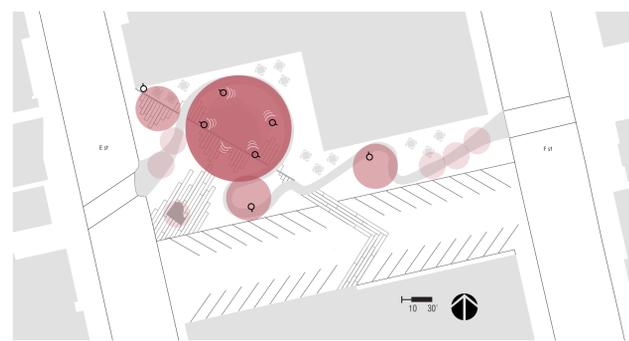


### PLAZA ELEMENTS

1. Sinusoidal seat wall
2. Slot drain with concrete slabs flush to the drain
3. Raised concrete stage with stage lighting and speaker system
4. Steel roof pitched towards the slot drain
5. Entire plaza paved in smooth grey concrete
6. Concrete slabs identical to the ones along the slot drain, parking lot crosswalk
7. Asphalt parking lot, as existing
8. Flexible seating placed outside eating establishments
9. Planting; crape myrtles, fruitless Chinese pistaches and trident maples, valley oak trees



Above: Perspective of seat wall; Left: Section A shows a recessed section of the seat wall into the ground while Section B shows the parking lot crosswalk



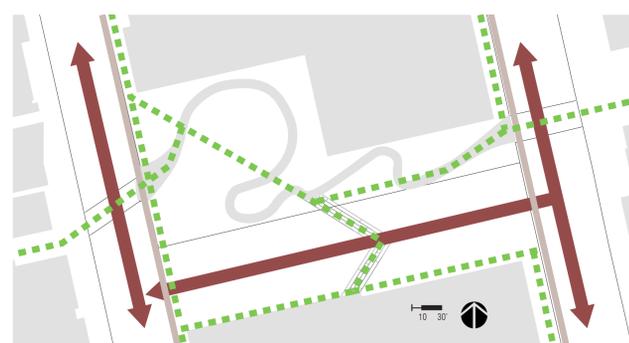
Legend - Diagram of Hierarchy of Stages  
Macro Micro Minute Buildings/Soundwave  
Outlets Speakers

### HIERARCHY OF STAGES

**MACRO**  
the large central stage access to a speaker system can be reserved in advance

**MICRO**  
within the sinusoidal seat wall each cove has electrical access personal amplifiers can be used

**MINUTE**  
recedes into the groundplane near the periphery non-amplified sound space



Legend - New Circulation Map  
Pedestrians Cars Bike Buildings/Soundwave

### MULTIFUNCTIONAL LOT

One third of the lot will be converted to plaza space. Most of the existing circulation paths will be maintained, if not reinforced due to the shape of the seat wall.

The remaining metered lot can be used for large events, closed off to cars. On the flip side, food truck events can attract large crowds to the plaza to feed the busking atmosphere.

Student groups, busking troupes, and amateur street performers are all accommodated in the space, allowing for large programs and impromptu acts.