

Universal Design for Mass Pilgrimage 'Kumbh' at Ujjain, India - Berkeley Prize Teaching Fellowship 2013

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Abstract. This short paper presents universal design studio conducted for undergraduate architecture students at School of Planning and Architecture, Bhopal, India. The studio was conducted under Berkeley Prize Teaching Fellowship-2013 with a theme of inclusive design. The objective of the studio was to identify the environmental challenges for diverse users visiting a historic pilgrimage in India, and provide contextual and inclusive solution for universal usability. This short paper includes the studio overview in brief, whereas the presentation would have few best examples of student designs.

Keywords. Universal design, Design pedagogy, Universal design in India

Introduction

'Kumbh Mela' is a mass Hindu pilgrimage of faith, spiritual connect and devotion, in which Hindus gather to bathe in the sacred rivers in four cities in India. With million plus pilgrims, it is the world's largest religious gathering and conglomeration of diverse population. Ujjain is one of the ancient cities on the eastern bank of the holy river Kshipra in central India, where Kumbh Mela takes place every 12 years. For 'Kumbh', several people visit Ujjain to bathe in the river Kshipra for good health and well-being, this includes a lot of people with disabilities, elderly, children and women. Every year the number of visitors increase manifold with increase in mobility and affordability in India [1]. The festival generates a lot of economic benefits for the city at the same time poses many challenges, like temporary arrangements for pilgrims to stay and perform religious rites; air, water, noise and soil pollution; drinking water and sanitation; garbage disposal; crowd and accident management and many more[1]. The next Kumbh Mela 'Simhastha' in Ujjain will be in the year 2016 in Ujjain and city is expected to receive 50 million floating population, which is almost 10 times of the total population of the city [1]. To accommodate this floating population temporary infrastructure are built by the government and private bodies; this is a regular practice and is done at every Kumbh. Taking the opportunity and challenge of upcoming Simhastha in 2016, a two week intense interclass integral studio on universal design [2-4] was conducted at School of Planning and Architecture at Bhopal, India.

1. Objectives

The students in the integral studio were expected to research about the needs of diverse people visiting Simhastha, investigate associated traditions and rituals, explore site considerations and develop universal design solutions that offer equal opportunity to everyone in the physical environment. The proposed studio explored equal opportunity problems at Simhastha for diverse users, irrespective of age, ability, gender, class, caste, religion, poverty, literacy, urban/rural background. The objectives of the studio were:

- To identify the environmental challenges for diverse users visiting historic pilgrimage.
- To provide contextual and inclusive solution for most visited areas like sacred bath, associated rituals, information and basic amenities provided during Simhastha.
- To develop a detailed proposal for temporary prototype shelters for pilgrims.

2. Methodology

In the studio, multidisciplinary teams of all undergraduate architecture and planning students participated together, every team had students from different semesters and programmes. There were lectures, interactions and discussions from experts of history, culture, theology, archaeology, administration, management, and inclusive design during the studio. The students observed environmental traces and conducted thirty two interviews representing all stake holders including all vulnerable populations in the community. They analyzed the information in teams and refined it for design connect.

3. Results

The students produced about twenty rich and informed solutions for a complex site. The presentation of this paper would include a few examples of student designs where they attempted universal design for the diversity in Indian context. The diversity where people have limitations of several kinds, like affordability, illiteracy, ignorance, unawareness, age, religion and social conditions like abandoned elderly. The design solutions produced were contextual, inclusive and cultural, at the same time modern, futuristic and environmental friendly. Their solutions showed respect for the other disciplines and compassion for the community. It was also realized during the studio that the multidisciplinary inputs from humanities and liberal arts enriched their design thinking. They just not applied problem-solving approach, but attempted a critical, open-minded and open-hearted solution, with collaboration and collective thinking.

References

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