

UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR CULTURAL INTERFACE IN THE SACRED SITE OF UJJAIN

BACKGROUND: Globally Universal Design has become a worldwide movement and Universal Design courses are found in universities all over the world (Welch, 1995). However, in India Universal Design Education finds little space in the curriculum of design schools, as there is lesser awareness, weak government policies and lesser career opportunities to back universal design (Balaram, 2002). The School of Planning and Architecture (SPA), Bhopal, an autonomous institution of Ministry of Human Resource and Development, Government of India, is committed to produce socially responsible architects and planners and thus has embraced Universal Design as one of its priority research areas. Supporting its Charter to be a socially responsible institution, a multidisciplinary Center for Human Centric Research (CHCR) is housed at SPA-Bhopal. The center functions in four major areas, identification of research priority areas and networking, education and training, research and design development and dissemination.

In accordance with its objectives, the CHCR proposes a design studio for Berkeley Prize Teaching Fellowship on 'UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR CULTURAL INTERFACE IN THE SACRED SITE OF UJJAIN'. The studio will focus on equal access to achieve Universal design for a culturally rich site. The students will research needs of diverse users, investigate heritage issues, explore site considerations and develop universal design solutions that offer equal opportunity to everyone. The Teaching Fellowship will be led by Dr. Ajay Khare, full time Professor in the Department of Architecture, Chairperson of CHCR and Director of SPA-Bhopal.

CONTEXT: Rich in cultural, historic and religious landscape, Ujjain is a city of faith, spiritual connect and devotion. Located 180 km away from Bhopal in the Malwa region of Madhya Pradesh, the city was established in 4th century BC and called Ujjayini in ancient times. Situated on the eastern bank of the Kshipra river, it was known as Avanti during the lifetime of Buddha, and became an important center of Buddhism. The defining event for Ujjain is the Kumbh Mela (a religious festival) 'Simhastha' that takes place every 12 years. Kumbh Mela is a mass gathering of Hindu pilgrims in four Indian cities to bathe in the sacred rivers, Ujjain being one. It is estimated that 50+ million people gather in Ujjain for the Kumbh Mela, and large portion of them have disabilities. There are also elderly, children, women, families with rural background unfamiliar with urban life, poor and unschooled. Many universal design questions will make up studio investigation for the information area, sacred bath, sacred circumambulatory path and temporary shelter: What facilities exist for the Ujjain pilgrims and how they support equal access and usability? Holy places offer a unique mindset about 'charity' and 'assistance' to older, disabled and poor people, and how that perspective frames universal design of facilities in Ujjain? While universal design's 'independence for all' focus is well grounded in western lifestyle of people living independently, what role does universal design play in India's inter-dependent society where most people live with others? There are good examples of universal design in new construction; how universal design can be implemented to culturally rich heritage site?

OBJECTIVES: The next Kumbh Mela at Ujjain will be held in the year 2016 and, therefore a comprehensive strategies and series of projects are taken up 2011 onwards in the city (CDP, 2011). Taking this opportunity and challenge, we propose to do one year design studio (from July 2013 to July 2014) with universal design (UD) focus for Berkeley Teacher Fellowship. The proposed studio will explore equal opportunity problems at Ujjain, with an overall aim to focus on 'user centered approach' to design for diverse users, irrespective of age, ability, gender, class, caste, religion, poverty, urban/rural background. It will also offer training in universal design through academic courses entrenched in designing for diversity, involving users and those servicing them. The objectives of the studios include: 1) Identify the environmental challenges for diverse users visiting historic pilgrimage site. 2) Identify universal design opportunities with focus on diversity in the Indian context. 3) To create enabling designs for most used facilities for everyone, like information area, sacred bath, sacred circumambulatory path and temporary shelter. 4) To develop innovative and contextual research tools to investigate design problems in India and employ practice-based approaches to social inclusion in guidance of universal design and heritage experts. 5) Publish educational process and outcomes for the universal design teaching community in India.

THE CONDUCT OF THE STUDIO: The Five Year Architecture Undergraduate Degree Program at SPA-Bhopal has ten semesters of six months each. One full semester design studio consists of three academic credits out of the ten academic credits allocated for a semester. For the design studio, two design problems are assigned, of which one twelve week design exercise is class-focused and the other is an intense inter-class design exercise of two weeks (integral studio). The integral studio is held for all semesters together, where all undergraduate architecture students work together in multiple teams on one design problem. The Berkeley Teacher Fellowship will involve third year undergraduate students (5th and 6th semester) and all design problems offered would be very different from each other in scale and content (please refer enclosed site plan). The table below provides an overview of the conduct of studios:

	Design Exercise	Duration	No. of Students	Semester	Credits
Regular Studio Exercise-I	Interpretation Center at Ujjain with Universal Design (UD) Focus	12 weeks	75 students (of third year)	From July 2013 to December 2013	2+1=3 Credits
Integral Studio Exercise-I	Temporary Shelters for Diverse Visitors (<i>yatri</i>) during Kumbh Festival	2 weeks	225 students (of all years)		
Regular Studio Exercise-II	Redevelopment of Shipra River Front (<i>ghats</i>) for Universal Usability	12 weeks	75 students (of third year)	From January 2014 to July 2014	2+1=3 Credits
Integral Studio Exercise-II	UD for Sacred Circumambulatory paths (<i>parikrama</i>) at Kumbh	2 weeks	225 students (of all years)		

MODES OF LEARNING: Clearly, the user centric approach with engagement at various levels of research and design is the best strategy to teach universal design (Khare & Khare, 2012). This strategy rarely fails in any context. Hence modes of learning will involve a user-focus in teaching methods like field trips, on-site surveys, environmental observations, trace studies, users' interviews, and users' feedback. Diverse and non-standard users like people with disabilities and the elderly will be involved in the learning about users as a lowest common denominator in the design studios, as well as consultants. Students will be provided with the resource material like books, print and online journals, articles, reports, websites and readings for literature and precedence study, to make their designs user-oriented. Universal design and heritage experts will be invited to offer special lectures and to steer the studios to think about universal design in cultural context. Local government and non government organizations working with people with disabilities and elderly will be involved to inculcate better understanding of the users and possible interventions to the heritage sites. Existing discussion forum '*SPAbol*' at SPA will be employed to organize group discussions and conduct student debates on universal design for cultural sites.

OUTCOMES (soft): 1) Education in universal design of cultural sites. 2) Faculty training in development of universal design teaching material and instruction. 3) New contextual research methods for UD investigation in India. 4) Body of research information related to UD of heritage sites. 5) New methods of design practice for design of cultural sites. 6) UD community building in India.

OUTPUTS (hard): 1.) Teaching resources (course outlines, project statements, design brief) for UD education in India. 2) Publication(s) to disseminate learning and UD teaching strategies in India. 3) A travel exhibition to at least four schools of design across India to share the UD teaching experience.

REFERENCES:

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- Khare, R., Khare, A. 2012. Teaching Universal Design through Student Design Competition, SPANDREL Journal, Issue IV- Spring, School of Planning and Architecture, Bhopal, India
- City Development Plan for Ujjain. 2011. Ujjain Municipal Corporation, India



Kshipra River Front

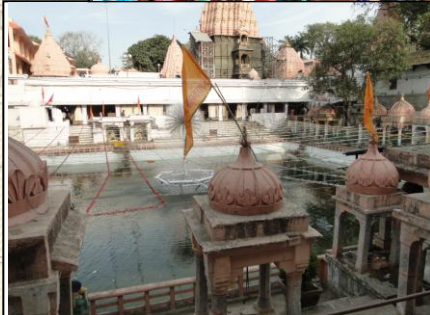
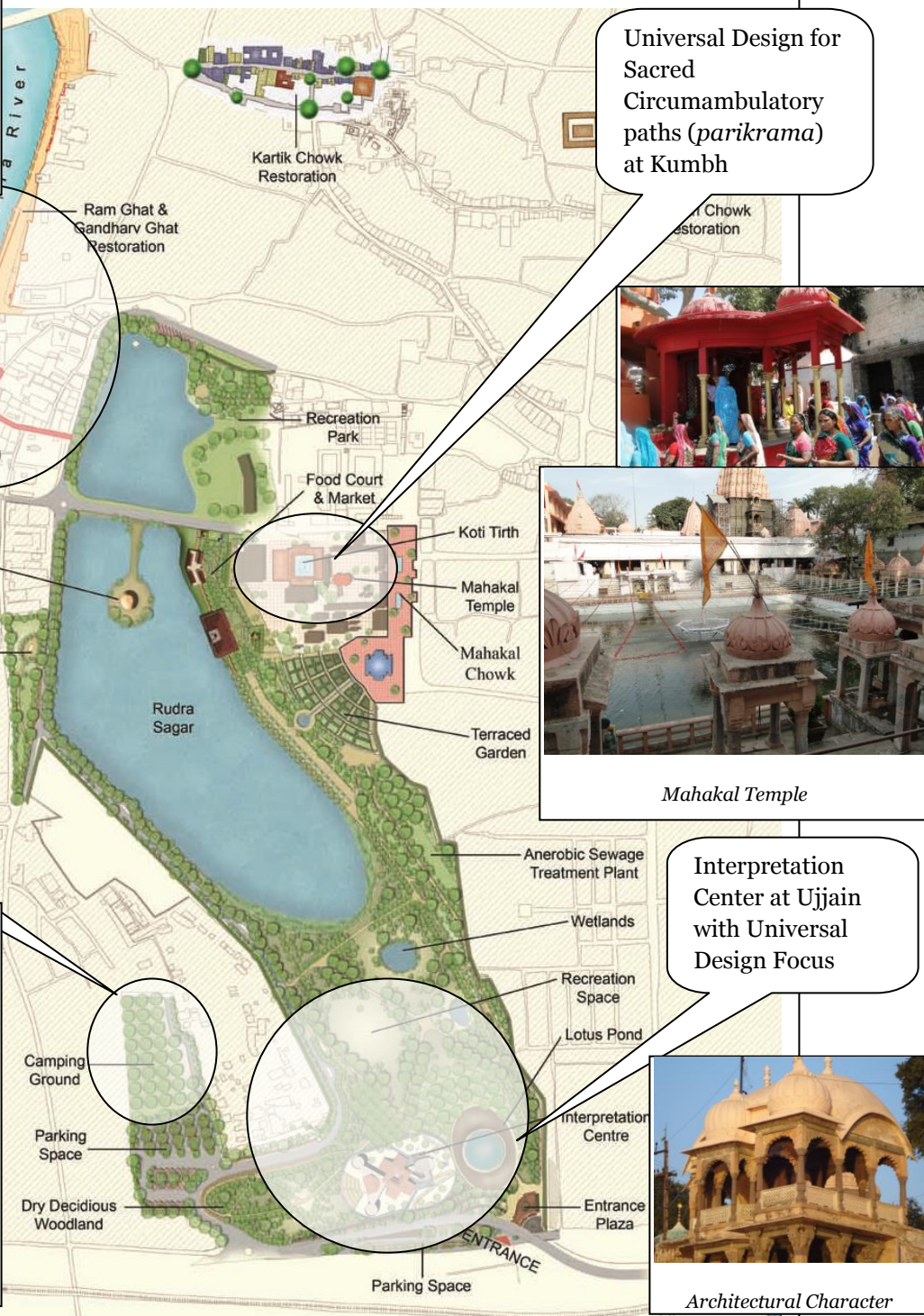
LOCATIONS OF PROPOSED SITES OF DESIGN STUDIO

Re-development of Shipra River Front (ghats) for Universal Usability

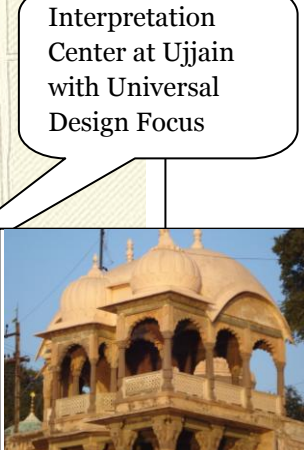
Temporary Shelters for Diverse Visitors (yatri) during Kumbh Festival



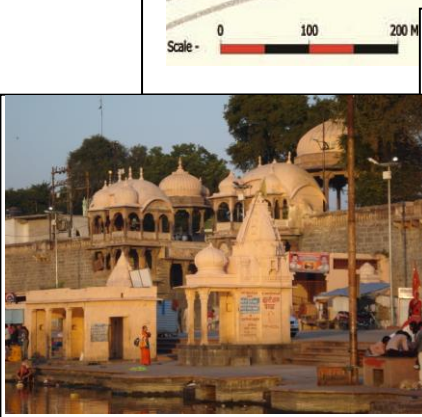
Old Street in Ujjain



Mahakal Temple



Architectural Character



Sacred Bath at Kshipra River Front

