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An Official Publication of Bureau for Health & Education Status Upliftment
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Designing Cities, Not Just Buildings: Urban Design as India's New Civic Infrastructure

Ar. Vidushi Singh

Urban Designer | Architect | Co-founder, Ukiyo Habitat | Assistant Professor, Vastu Kala Academy

Email Id: serviceheb@gmail.com

ABSTRACT:

Urban design in India is undergoing a crucial transition—from being viewed as a cosmetic, post architectural gesture to being recognized as an integral part of civic infrastructure. This article explores how public spaces, streetscapes, and transit interfaces, when thoughtfully designed, can foster social equity, climate resilience, and community well-being. In the context of expanding cities and intensifying climate challenges, the paper argues for a paradigmatic shift that centers urban design as both a spatial and policy tool. Drawing from grounded projects such as the Velachery Sponge City prototype and neighborhood-scale interventions, it presents tactical urbanism not as an interim fix but as a mechanism for prototyping participatory futures. The article also explores urban design pedagogy as a platform for systems thinking—training young professionals to approach cities as ecologies of movement, memory, and agency. Through case-based reflections and conceptual frameworks, the article contributes to emerging discourse that situates urban design as fundamental infrastructure, worthy of sustained investment, interdisciplinary engagement, and public trust].

Keywords: Urban Design, Tactical Urbanism, Civic Infrastructure, Sponge City, Walkability, Climate Resilience, Co-design, Urban Commons, Street Culture, Architecture Education, Public Realm, Comprehensive Architectural Services

Access this Article Online	Quick Response Code: 
Website: https://heb-nic.in/cass-hom/	
Received on 07/07/2025	
Accepted on 23/07/2025 © HEB All rights reserved	