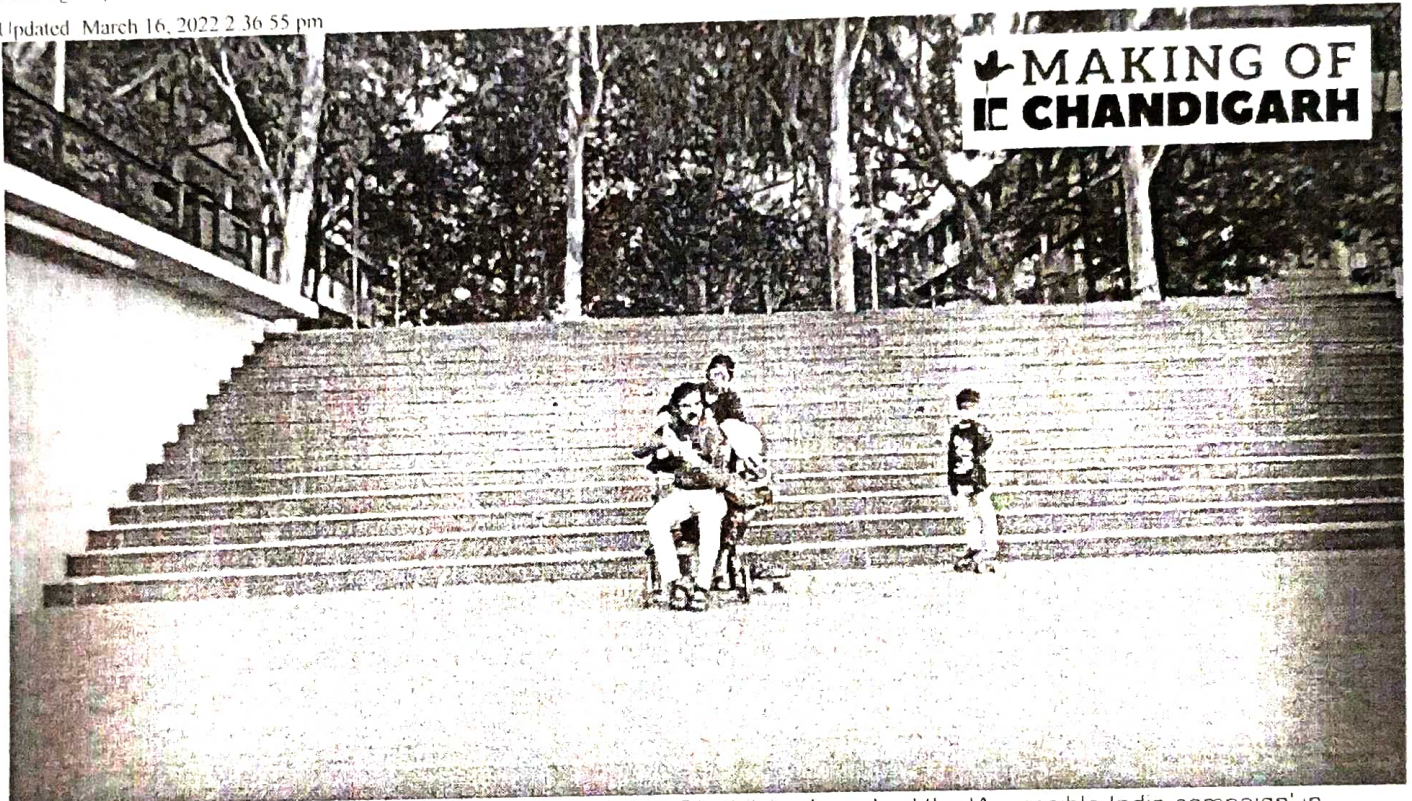


Making of Chandigarh: An overview of accessibility for disabled in the City Beautiful

The concept of accessibility generally means an inclusive society for all; it is a human right and a development concern. Accessibility is best defined as the provision of flexibility to accommodate each user's needs, preferences and ease of movement regardless of any disability.

[Chandigarh]

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(Written by Nirmal Kaushik, Siddharth Mahajan)

The concept of accessibility generally means an inclusive society for all; it is a human right and a development concern. Accessibility is best defined as the provision of flexibility to accommodate each user's needs, preferences and ease of movement regardless of any disability. Hence, the design of any space, physical or virtual, must be easily and equally approachable, understandable and interactive with persons having disabilities.

According to United Nations (Post 2015 Development Agenda), accessibility is a bridging tool between the special needs of persons with disabilities and a country's social, cultural, and economic inclusion. In India, the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities launched the 'Accessible India campaign' in 2015 as a nation-wide campaign to achieve universal accessibility for persons with disabilities, which provides a mandate to ensure

accessibility in all public buildings, transportation systems, Information and Communication Technology services and other services provided by the government. Under this scheme, around 44 government buildings were identified in Chandigarh to convert to fully accessible buildings. These include E-Sampark Centres, Police Stations and Government Hospitals along with some other Government public buildings.

As reported by WHO, about 15 per cent of the world's population lives with some form of disability, of whom two to four per cent experience significant difficulties in functioning. In India, 2.1 per cent of people are living with some disability.

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The City of Chandigarh was the result of the most significant urban planning experiment of the 20th century, designed by the renowned French Architect-Planner, Le Corbusier. Chandigarh's city planning is based on the 'grid-iron pattern', defined by a road network of seven types of roads based on traffic movement. An effort to design ease of accessibility becomes evident when one tries to understand the interrelationships of public and private areas. For instance, since the V7 layout gradually decreases the traffic volume and speed as one enters into the sectors, it makes the core residential areas safe and improves accessibility for all. Similarly, the planning of V2 and V3 has been done so that no building entry is directed through these roads. But even though these design considerations are observed in the city, Chandigarh can benefit from introducing design solutions and technologies available today to make the city comfortable for more people of the society.

Sensory signage can be provided at the crossways for persons with disabilities.

It has been observed that spaces, streets and junctions of roads are currently not friendly for the disabled. It is possible to retrofit them according to universal design principles. Pedestrian facilities need to be maintained, and a curb cut can be provided at the intersection of roads. Sensory signage can be provided at the crossways for persons with disabilities. Gentle slopes for the wheelchair and tactile flooring on pavements and marketplaces must also be provided. Provision for wheelchair parking with demarcation needs to be designed in public spaces. Signages and maps that have been placed along the roads can be made more interactive. Pathways in parks need to be free of any obstructions to allow space for those accessing the space on a wheelchair. Chandigarh parks are well maintained and equipped and through small interventions like tactile tiles leading towards public facilities, audio guides and provision of railings at strategic locations, accessibility can be ensured for people with disabilities.

The city has been actively using underpasses and subways. One can understand the difference in approach to designing a subway in the past and present in relation to accessibility comparing the recently designed Sector 17 underpass that connects with Rose garden, to the older underpass that connects Sector 17 to Sector 22. The new one has followed universal design principles which includes a provision of a ramp along with the staircase wide enough to accommodate the movement of a wheelchair. On the other hand, the older underpass does not have a ramp, making it completely inaccessible for the disabled. The government is definitely making headway in incorporating the principles of universal design in the upcoming projects but as a society, we still are yet to fully understand the needs of the specially-abled and design spaces to make their lives easier.

According to an interview carried out on-site with a person trying to navigate his wheelchair in the Sector 17 to Rose Garden underpass, it was noticed that the person found it extremely difficult to move up the ramp as it was too steep. As there was no handrail to use as support, the task became harder.

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(The article has been edited by Saumya Sharma, Assistant Professor, Chandigarh College of Architecture. The authors: Nirmal Kaushik is Assistant Professor and Siddharth Mahajan is a student of the ninth semester in Chandigarh College of Architecture. This article is a part of the series of fortnightly articles by the students and faculty of CCA on the Making of Chandigarh for LCPJ forum.)