

Preserving the Past, Designing the Future: A New Paradigm for Design Education and SDG Alignment

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As environmental degradation, globalization, and cultural homogenization continue to reshape societies, there is an urgent need for the preservation of cultural heritage as well as fostering sustainable practices. This research examines how integrating cultural heritage into design curricula can serve as a foundation for sustainable and inclusive design, ensuring alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) while safeguarding indigenous knowledge systems and craftsmanship. By bridging tradition and innovation, design education can equip future designers with the skills to develop environmentally responsible, socially inclusive, and culturally rooted solutions.

This study explores how vernacular materials, traditional techniques, and indigenous crafts can be embedded into SDG-focused design education to enhance sustainability and inclusivity, by including strategies such as experiential learning, craft-based collaborations, digital heritage documentation, and circular economy principles as tools to merge historical knowledge with contemporary innovation.

Using a case study of one of the courses at Pearl Academy, this paper evaluates the impact of heritage-driven design education on students' creativity, sustainability awareness, and community engagement. The authors suggest that integrating cultural heritage into sustainable design frameworks preserves traditional knowledge, fosters design innovation, and promotes localized sustainability solutions. However, challenges such as scalability, policy integration, and industry collaboration must be addressed for long-term effectiveness.

This research advances the discourse on inclusive innovation in design education, demonstrating how cultural heritage and sustainability can shape a new generation of socially responsible and forward-thinking designers capable of addressing global challenges.

Keywords: Cultural Heritage, Design Education, Inclusive Innovation, Responsible Design, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

About the Authors:

Puja Anand, Interior Designer and Professor at Pearl Academy, New Delhi, has 25+ years of experience in academia and the design industry. She holds a Master's in Higher Education and a Post Graduate Certificate from Nottingham Trent University, UK, and has also taught at NID Ahmedabad.

Specializing in craft heritage and contemporary design, she has led craft research projects and mentored students in award-winning craft-based interior products. A prolific researcher, she has published extensively on crafts, heritage, and sustainability, contributing through product development and academic initiatives.

She is the General Secretary of ADI, Delhi NCR Chapter, fostering design excellence and collaboration. Puja has been conferred the title of "GUS Fellow" by the Board of GUS Institute, Global University Systems, at the GUS Academic Summit 2024, London, for a three-year term starting from March 12, 2024.

Alok Bhasin, an Associate Professor at Pearl Academy, is an Architect, Interior Designer, and educator with 28 years of experience, both in India and overseas. He holds a Master's in Landscape Architecture and remains committed to continuous learning and professional growth.

An External Jury member for Architecture and Design Schools in Delhi-NCR, Alok's impact extends beyond academia. His diverse portfolio includes residential, commercial, institutional, retail, and hospitality projects, showcasing his expertise as a practicing architect and interior designer.

A prolific researcher, he has authored papers on Design Education, Crafts, Sustainability, and History & Culture. His interests span Design History, Literature, Traditional Crafts, Heritage, and Sustainability, reflecting his passion for innovation, interactivity, and holistic design.