

BEYOND THE MALL

RETHINKING RETAIL LANDSCAPES AS
URBAN PUBLIC SPACE



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“Beyond the Mall:

Rethinking Retail Landscapes as Urban Public Space”



Why Does This Matter?

Across cities today, public space is disappearing, making **urban public space** design a critical focus in contemporary architecture and urban design competitions.

Streets are congested, open areas are fragmented, and opportunities for informal social life are shrinking. At the same time, large retail infrastructures like shopping malls occupy vast urban footprints, yet remain inward-looking, privatized, and consumption-driven.

This raises a critical question:

Can spaces built for consumption evolve into spaces for collective urban life?

Designadvance 2026, an architecture design competition for students, invites participants to **reimagine retail architecture as a civic catalyst** - a place where commerce coexists with play, culture, movement, and everyday life.

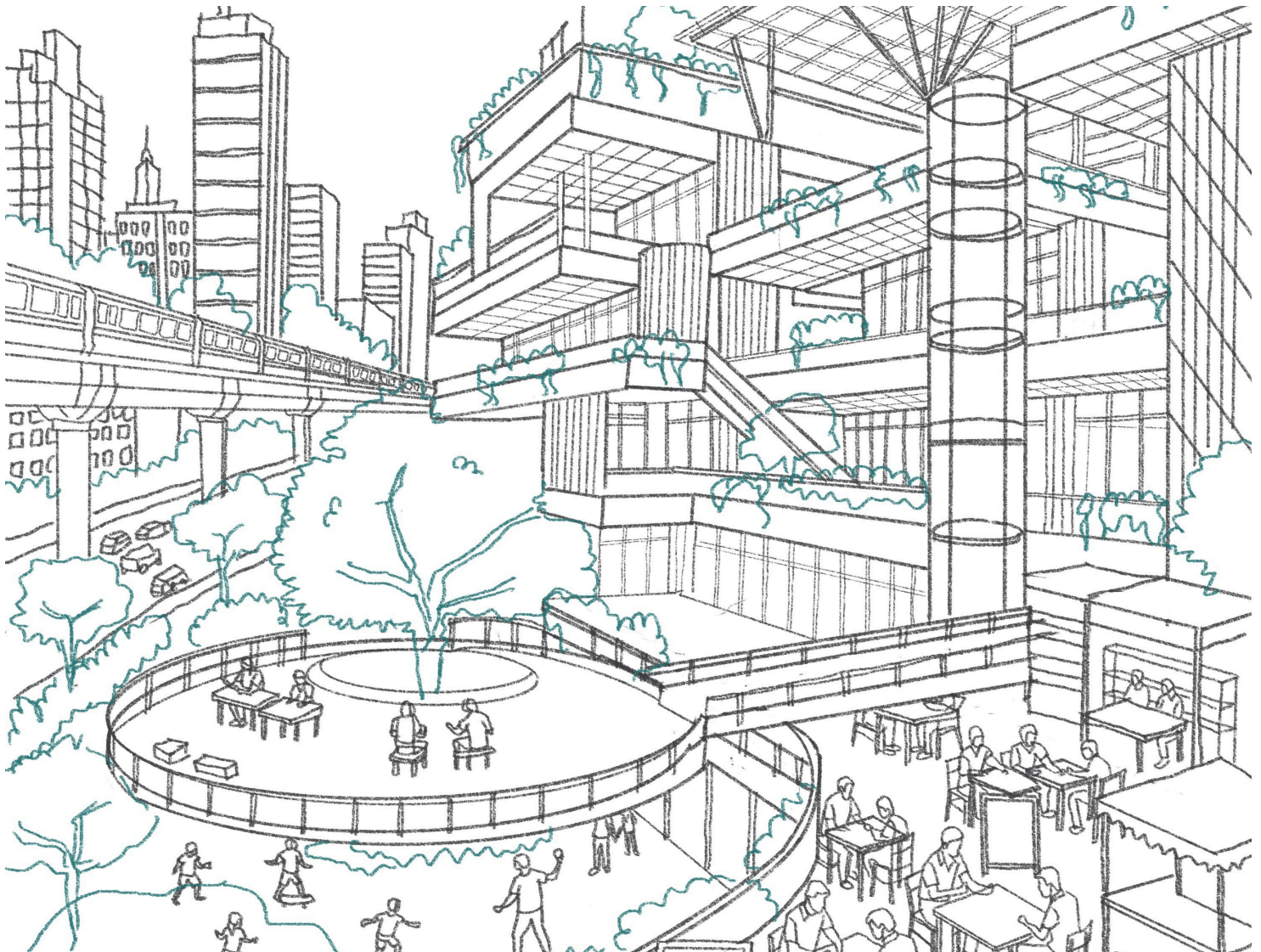


Premise

Public life in dense cities rarely emerges from isolated plazas. It thrives where movement, exchange, and daily routines intersect.

Projects like Miyashita Park, Tokyo by Nikken Sekkei & Takenaka Corporation and Salt Lake City Centre, Kolkata by Charles Correa demonstrate how retail infrastructure can transform into multi-layered civic landscapes - where people gather, move, interact, and belong.

Designadvance 2026 this year builds on that idea:
“Retail is not the destination. It is the framework for public life.”





Design Challenge....

Rethinking Retail Architecture as part of Urban Design and Landscape



Reimagine the **shopping mall as a civic-scape** – a porous, multi-layered **public environment** embedded within the **dense urban fabric**, seamlessly flowing into the city.

The **proposal** must transform the mall from an **inward-looking retail box** into an **open, accessible, and socially active urban place**, where **commerce coexists** with recreation, culture, and community life – creating a vibrant and continuous public realm.

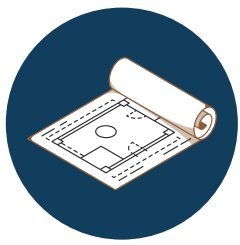
“DESIGN A MALL THAT BEHAVES LIKE A CITY - OPEN, CONNECTED, AND ALIVE.”

The design proposal should:

- **Challenge the conventional mall typology** – rethink its form, organization, and purpose.
- **Make public life the primary framework** – not an afterthought.
- **Create open, usable public spaces** that cities currently lack.
- **Enable continuous activation** – across day, evening, night, and throughout the year.
- **Blur boundaries** between inside/outside and public/private.
- **Integrate movement, pause, and interaction** within the architecture.



This is not about adding a park or plaza to a mall. It is about restructuring the mall itself as public space – where circulation, terraces, roofs, voids, and edges become places to gather, play, and engage.



Site Strategy (Choose One)

Location

The site may be located in **any thriving urban city** across the world, but must be situated within a **dense, active urban context**, supported by clear evidence and a strong justification for its selection. Two possibilities are suggested:

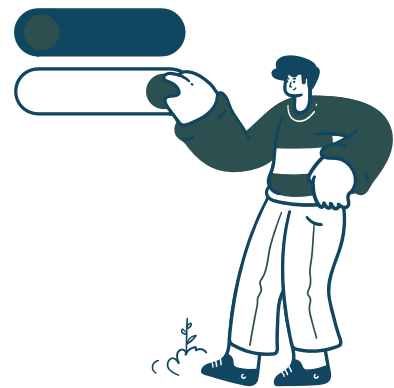
1. Retrofit Approach

Select an **existing, real-world shopping mall** or commercial **complex** (not hypothetical) that is currently underperforming, obsolete, or lacks public engagement.

Criteria for selection:

- Located in a **dense urban context**
- Demonstrates **underutilization** or **mono-functionality**
- Has potential to be opened, connected, or reprogrammed
- Must **NOT** be a **currently successful**, high-performing mall.

This approach **emphasizes adaptive reuse** in architecture and **sustainable redevelopment**.



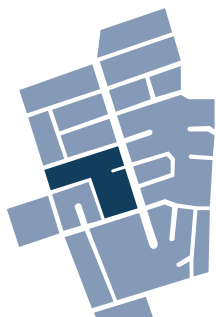
2. New Hybrid Proposal

Propose a **new development** on an underutilized urban site.

Criteria for selection:

- Located in a **dense urban fabric**
- Limited access to quality public space
- Strong potential for **accessibility/connectivity** (streets/transit/pedestrian flows)

Encourages innovative **mixed-use architecture, transit-oriented development** and **future-retail typologies**.



Site Area & Program Guidelines

AREA REQUIREMENTS

Total Area

Site Area: 5–15 acres

Built-up Intervention Area

- Built-up Intervention Area:
Flexible range: **15,000 – 60,000 sq.m** (justify based on concept)
- The specified built-up area applies only to the **mall's built form**. Parks, plazas, public landscapes etc., may be added as per design intent and are **not included within this built-up limit**.

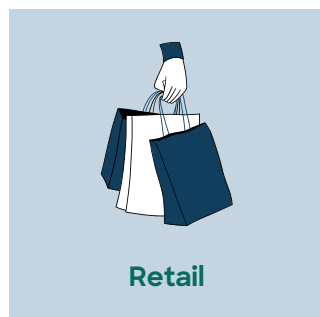


Key Principle:

Public space should not be residual. It must be **integrated across all spatial layers (horizontal + vertical)**.

PROGRAM MIX

(Indicative)



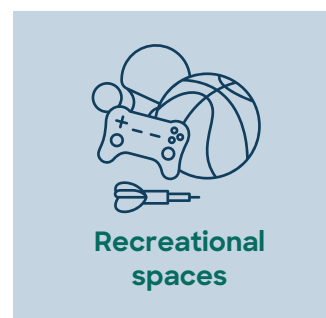
Retail



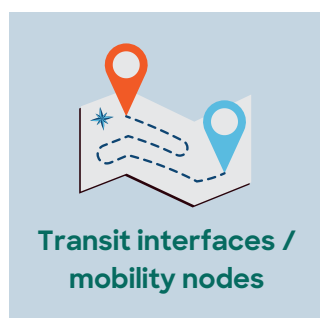
Public spaces



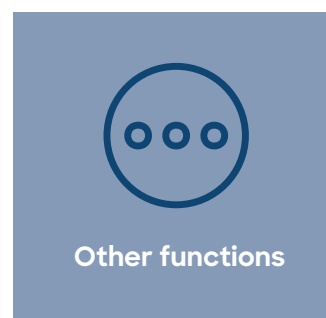
Cultural / Community functions



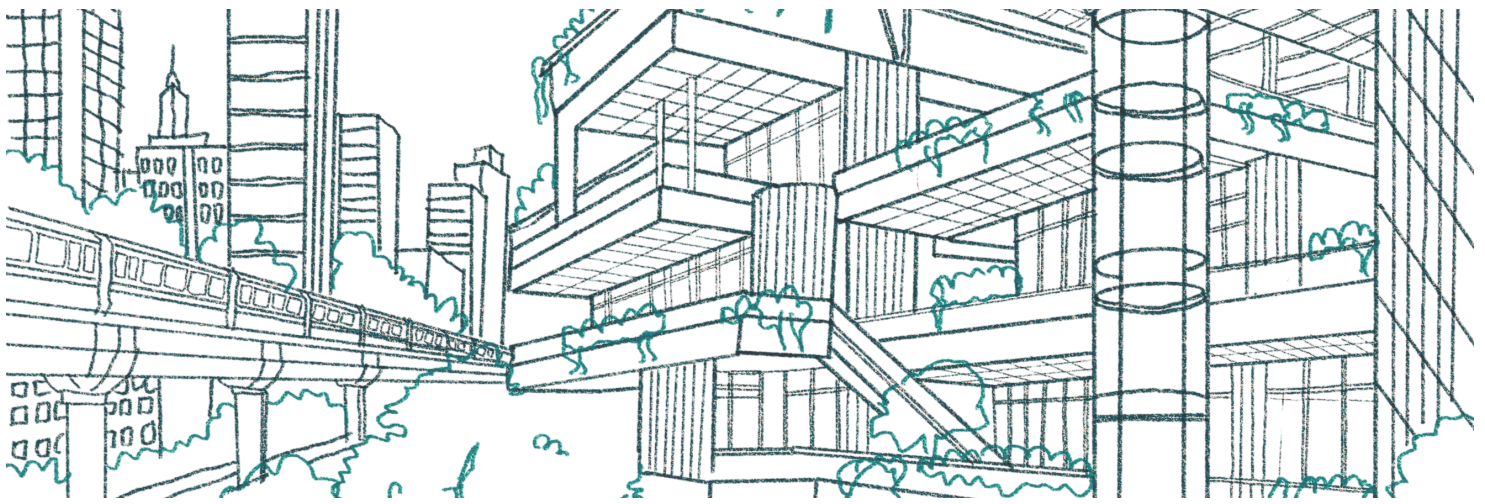
Recreational spaces



Transit interfaces / mobility nodes



Other functions



Design Intent

The proposal should explore how architecture can **create meaningful public spaces within dense urban environments**, where access to parks and open areas is limited.

The design should **embed public life throughout the project** – across levels, edges, and connections – making it an integral part of the architecture and urban design.

The design proposal should operate as an **urban connector** enabling:

- **Social interaction & informal gathering**
- **Play and recreation (all age groups)**
- **Cultural expression & community use**
- **Seamless movement through and across the site**

Think of the project as:

- A **vertical public landscape**
- A **continuous urban experience**
- A **place to pass through, pause, and participate**

Retail should function as **one layer within a larger public ecosystem**, not the primary focus. Ultimately, the project should act as a **civic anchor** – a place that connects people, supports everyday life, and contributes meaningfully to the urban fabric while redefining the future of retail architecture and public space design.





Design Considerations

1. URBAN POROSITY & PUBLIC ACCESS



Design the project as a **permeable, open system** that invites entry rather than restricts it. Enable multiple access points, visual transparency, and seamless pedestrian connections, allowing the site to function as a natural **extension of the surrounding urban fabric**.

2. EDGE ACTIVATION & URBAN ENGAGEMENT



The building must actively engage its context. Strengthen relationships with adjacent streets, neighborhoods, and movement networks through **activated edges, spill-out spaces, and continuous ground-level interfaces**, ensuring the project contributes meaningfully to the public life of the city reinforcing placemaking strategies in **architecture and urban design**.

3. REIMAGINING RETAIL TYPOLOGY



Challenge the conventional inward-facing retail model. Develop **inclusive, non-hierarchical, mixed-use spatial systems** where retail is interwoven with civic, cultural, and recreational programs shifting from a consumption-driven format to an **experience-driven public environment**.

4. SECTIONAL COMPLEXITY & VERTICAL URBANISM



Move beyond the ground plane and design in sections. Stack, interlock, and connect programs to create a **vertically distributed public realm**, where atriums, terraces, roofs, and voids form a continuous, multi-layered public landscape.

5. CIRCULATION, USER EXPERIENCE & UNIVERSAL ACCESSIBILITY



Enable social life within circulation systems - stairs, ramps, corridors, and connectors supporting movement, pause, interaction, and recreation, with efficient crowd flow and safe entry/exit. Ensure **universal accessibility** through ramps, elevators, tactile navigation, and inclusive, barrier-free design for all users.



Design Considerations

6. TEMPORAL ACTIVATION & PROGRAMMATIC FLEXIBILITY



Ensure the project remains active beyond retail hours. Incorporate **flexible, reconfigurable spaces** that support diverse uses - events, performances, markets, and everyday informal activities allowing the retail architecture to adapt to **changing needs across time**.

7. CLIMATE RESPONSIVENESS & ENVIRONMENTAL STRATEGY



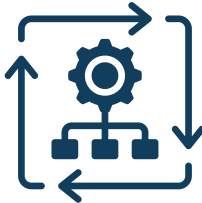
Shape form and space in response to climate. Integrate passive strategies: shading, natural ventilation, daylighting, and thermal mass along with **green landscapes, parks, and open spaces** to create comfortable public environments while reducing energy dependency and promoting sustainable urban design.

8. CULTURAL GROUNDING & ARCHITECTURAL IDENTITY



The design should respond to the **local cultural context and community needs**, emerging as a contemporary **urban landmark**. It must accommodate **diverse user groups and patterns of use**, balancing **global appeal** while remaining strongly rooted in local identity.

9. SYSTEMS, TECHNOLOGY & PERFORMANCE



Use digital design tools and smart systems to enhance **spatial performance and user experience**. Leverage BIM, environmental simulations, and intelligent infrastructure such as smart lighting, wayfinding, and data-driven systems to enable **efficient, safe, and responsive environments**.

10. CONSTRUCTABILITY & INTERVENTION LOGIC



Demonstrate clarity in **structure, materials, and construction logic**. Design interventions especially in retrofit scenarios must be **practical, implementable, and context-sensitive**, ensuring the proposal is grounded in feasibility and realistic execution.



Eligibility

Designadvance 2026 is open to **Undergraduate** and **Postgraduate** students, as well as **recent graduates** and **young professionals (below 30 years of age)** from the fields of **Architecture, Planning, Civil Engineering, and Design** globally based on below rules.

*Participants cannot be older than 30 years of age at the time of submission



Team Composition

- A **maximum of 3 members** per team is permitted.
- Participants may make teams across **different academic years, colleges, or disciplines** (UG/PG).
- At least one team member must be from **Architecture background** (student or practicing architect)
- **All the team members** must be under **30 years of age** at the time of submission.



Evaluation Criteria

- Site Selection & Contextual Understanding
- Challenging Conventional Shopping Mall Format
- Vertical Urbanism, Flexibility & Temporal Activation
- Circulation, User Experience & Universal Accessibility
- Sustainability & Environmental Stewardship
- Smart Infrastructure & Digital Integration
- Innovation, Creativity & Constructability

FOR DETAILED EVALUATION CRITERIA, [CLICK HERE!](#)



Submission Requirement

Concept Narrative (PDF)



- A **one-page (A4) PDF** explaining the core idea and design approach, including how the mall is reimagined as a public, porous, multi-layered urban space integrated with the city.
- File to be **named** in the format **<code_statement>**

Presentation (PDF)



- **5-7 sheets (16:9, landscape, 200-300 DPI)** clearly communicating the design proposal. Drawings must be at a legible architectural scale (as its ONLINE submission) and include north direction on all sheets.
- Compile all 5-7 sheets into a single PDF file of a maximum of 15 MB in size and upload it on the website.
- File to be named in the format **<code_presentation>**

Important Note: To understand the ideal composition of your entry and the architectural drawings expected within the 5-7 sheet submission - [CLICK HERE](#)

(Includes: Site Analysis & Justification, Master Plan, Site Plan, Floor Plans, Sections, Elevations, Visual Representations, Program & Spatial Strategy, Environmental Responsiveness, Technical Drawings, etc.)



Video Presentation (via G-Drive)

- Submit a **recorded video presentation** (under 5 minutes) explaining the project.
- Do not upload the video directly. Share it through a **Google Drive link**, added as a **clickable hyperlink and a backup QR code**, placed clearly on the last (8th) page of the PDF presentation.
- Ensure the **Google Drive link** has **open access** and is set to “**Anyone with the link can view**” to make sure the jury has easy access.
- The **video file** on the drive must **not display** or mention any **name/identity details**.
- ☒ Double-check: The link works, access is open, and the file name follows the required format.
- **Name the video recording file** as **<code_video>** & then upload it on the (your) drive.

Letter of Declaration (PDF)

A letter of declaration signed by the participant(s) shall be included. To download it, check the attachments section at the end of the registration page or [CLICK HERE](#)

Name the PDF as **<code_declaration>**



All entries shall be **scrutinized for evidence of plagiarism**. Acknowledge references and design ideas that have been adapted from sources in the submission.

It is recommended, though not mandatory, that drawings/graphics be developed using **Open BIM tools**. The sheets may include plans, sections, elevations, 3D views, joinery details, Dynamo scripts, and anything else that would help communicate the idea better.

Participants' names must not be mentioned anywhere, only the **submission code** as provided has to be mentioned in the **top-right corner of all the documents**.



How to Submit

For the step-by-step submission process, [CLICK HERE!](#)

Important Dates



Registrations Open: May 06, 2026

Registrations Close: October 23, 2026

Submission Deadline: October 29, 2026

Awards



Cash Prize

for the top three winners



₹ 75,000/-



₹ 50,000/-



₹ 25,000/-

- **Top 10 entries** to be published on our website.
- **Top 3 winners** get free entry to **ARKANCE IN BIM** for Design Program (120 hours) worth Rs. 80,000/-
- **All participants who have submitted the entries** will get a discount voucher of 40% on the BIM for Design Program.
- **E - Certificates** for all participants who have submitted competition entries.



Knowledge Resources

All **Designadvantage 2026** registrants will get access free of cost to online Self-Learning Modules and Webinars by experts in sustainability, Industrialised Construction, BIM, energy simulation, and building innovations, conducted at regular intervals. This will help the teams understand concepts and best practices for high-performance design and construction in architecture competitions and academic projects. For more info, stay tuned at our Social Media Handles: [arkancein](#) & [ethosempowers](#)



Reading References

- Case Studies:

Miyashita Park, Japan / Takenaka Corporation + Nikken Sekkei

The Open Mall – City Centre – Salt Lake by Charles Correa

K11 MUSEA, HONG KONG / KPF + RLP

- Others:

Reinvent or Die: The Transformation of Malls Under The New Economic/Urban Paradigm

Ten Principles for Rethinking the Mall



Contact Us:

- For any queries related to the **Designadvantage 2026**, feel free to reach out to us on:
- Email ID info@ethosempowers.com
- WhatsApp **+91-8369141413**