
Influence of Transitional Spaces on the Aesthetics of Built Form - A Case of Destination Shopping Malls in Nairobi.

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Abstract

Buildings are constructed to serve specific functions. Within them exist a range of spaces termed transitional spaces. These spaces are not dedicated to any singular purpose but rather act as bridges between functional areas. In Nairobi, the design of public spaces that either have succeeded or fail to feature transitional spaces has demonstrated varying impacts on the built form. This effect is especially pronounced in high-traffic areas like shopping malls. Transitional spaces have not contributed as much to the aesthetic qualities of these built forms. They have instead been used traditionally as a mere means of moving people from one place to another. This has resulted in a conspicuous aesthetic discontinuity as transitional spaces are then hindered from attaining a seamless integration within the overall building form. Grounded in Simper's volumetric theory, Oldenburg's third place theory, Gestalt's theory of perception, and Trance's lost space theory, the research evaluated transitional spaces based on form-making, way finding, visual expression, functional aesthetic value, and user experience. Using an environmental behaviour methodology and qualitative approach, the study examined shopping malls in Nairobi through the case study, observation and sample survey methods. These were supported with interviews and participant observation techniques. Structured interview schedules, pre-coded checklists, photographs, sketches and notes were used as tools for gathering data. The study found out that transitional spaces shape the spatial organization, form, and aesthetics of built forms. The study recommended alignment of spatial organization of built forms with the existing circulation infrastructure, to enhance accessibility and flow within shopping malls.

Keywords: Transitional spaces, aesthetics, way finding, third place.

1. Introduction

There is a weak or absent understanding of the design principles for effective transitional spaces, and their worth when appropriately disposed, in public buildings. This has led to a failure to abstract from them aesthetic value and obtain essential organizational guidance. According to

Arif (2022), the architectural layout, spatial form, and environmental atmosphere of public buildings, the mall in this case, are constantly changing. Nowadays, as society evolves, malls have become the main place for handling business activities. They provide the basis for the social character of dining, entertainment and recreation (Dash 2023). In order to meet this demand for growth and change, they need to be diversified in form and function. Transitional spaces create a ‘spatial opportunity’ for a range of such activities (figure 2), rather than serving a specific function (Murali 2022). Transitional spaces influence the spatial organization of a building (Gosh 2022). They determine the arrangement and flow of interior spaces (figure 1), affecting how users navigate and interact within the structure (Francis, 2017). These spaces contribute to the massing and articulation of a building, defining its architectural character.

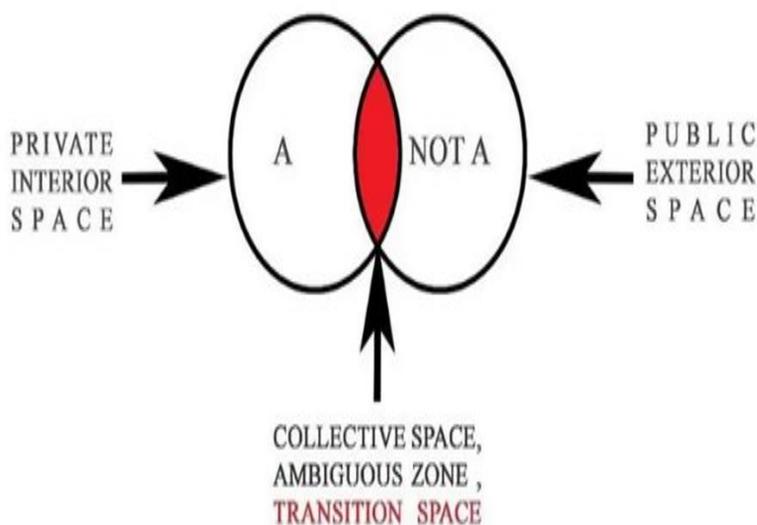


Figure 1 (left): A staircase affecting the arrangement of interior space. Source: Re-thinkingthefuture.com, 2003. Figure 2 (right): Concept of transition spaces and how they translate to different uses. Source: Re-thinkingthefuture.com, 2003.

There apparently has always been evidence of the usage of transitional spaces and elements since prehistoric architecture (Murali, 2022). This study builds on this earlier information by discussing how these transitional spaces can be more than just spaces for moving from one point to another in the mall. This study posits that spatial organisation, functionality and aesthetics of a building form in public buildings can be enhanced by the design and disposition of transitional spaces (Kariyawasam, 2003). It aims to develop guidelines for the design of transition spaces in a way that enhances the spatial organisation, functionality and aesthetic value of spaces and the built form (Sprake, J., et al. 2007).

Thoughts here are well grounded in Simper’s volumetric theory, Oldenburg’s third place theory, Gestalt’s theory of perception, and Trancik’s lost space theory. The research evaluated

transitional spaces based on form-making, way finding, visual expression, functional aesthetic value, and user experience. The study was confined to architectural aspects alone with regards to transitional spaces in public buildings. It probed spatial lack of order, weak functionality and aesthetic discontinuity in public buildings, while seeking out the potential for a reversal through well designed and disposed transitional spaces (Hifsiye, 2005). In doing so, it was be guided by theories in the following areas of design: Spatial organisation, form making, way finding in buildings, visual expression of buildings, place making and user experience

1.1 Exploring the importance of the Problem

The middle- and upper-income class in Nairobi City suburbs have developed a constant need for entertainment and recreation. The mall is one such perfect and unrestricted destination of choice that supports this need. This is evident in a study conducted by Cytton (2018) that shows that destination malls have been found to perform better than normal shopping malls. Consequently, newer malls in Nairobi are more focused at having elements of destination malls. In these centres, dining, leisure and entertainment become core with shopping being an adjunct rather than the key driver activity for the mall. Such malls have their primary focus being the creation of exceptional experiences (Kerri, 2021).

Existing research has discussed space strategies for the sole purpose of obtaining the highest rental prices from tenants. In terms of the convenience of visitors enjoying public places there has not yet been much research (Astarini & Utomo, 2023). With the current rise in real estate rates and leisure culture in Kenya, this study is important for the benefit of tenants who get maximum value for their spaces, and visitors whose experiences would be phenomenal.

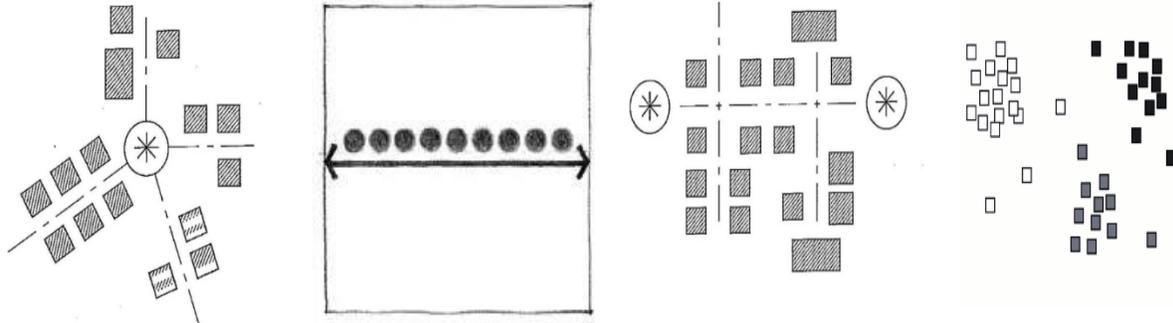
1.2 Relevant Scholarship

1.2.1 Transitional spaces and their classification

- a. *Semi-occupied spaces with secondary uses:* Here, occupants gather for an extended time, and may or may not be attached to a building like balconies, atria, courtyards or a street.
- b. *Entrance areas:* These areas have a strong connection to the exterior, such as a lobby area, entrance halls, foyers or canopies (Tauscher 2024).
- c. *Interior circulation spaces:* These areas refer to all walking areas on all floors of a building used to access a particular location, like corridors and hallways (Vieira,2010).

1.2.2 Character of public building forms

According to UN-Habitat (2018), public spaces are those available to urban residents without any restriction for social, cultural, environmental, economic, and political uses. The character of form is the overall expressive quality, identity, and spatial personality that emerges from the configuration of architectural elements within a built environment. There is a relation between the form of these public building forms and creating a sense of place.



Figures 3, 4, 5, & 6 (from left to right): Illustration of a centralised, linear, axial and clustered characters of form. Source: Ching, 2014, 2021a & b.

Sense of place is the human relationship with space (Nassir 2014), expressed in different dimensions of human life (Basso, 1996). To meet these functional requirements, public spaces can be organised as centralised, linear, axial or clustered built forms (figures 3, 4, 5 & 6).

1.2.3 Physical components of public building form

These physical components are the tangible, measurable, and structural elements that constitute the built environment; such as site organization, façade features, massing, and spatial compatibility. These components determine how a form is organized, perceived, and experienced, and together they provide the framework through which transitional spaces and architectural character are expressed. In the words of Harrison & Howard (1980), the physical components of the environment evoke strong images in a great way to observers. These components include:

- a. *Site organisation*: According to Auburn & Barnes (2013), site organization affects development of the concept of place. This is an important component in the development of public spaces-places, directly routed and dependent on their transitional spaces
- b. *Facade features*: The three components of architectural façades include surface complexity, silhouette complexity, and façade articulation. They are believed to have the strongest effect on the determination of compatibility (Groat 1988). The integration of transitional spaces in the overall built form is vital and impactful in the definition of building facades
- c. *Massing*: It influences spatial relationships, visual impact, scale, and functionality, shaping the overall architectural presence and user experience.
- d. *Compatibility*: The building form is perceived with the help of paths which are the channels along which the observer customarily, occasionally, or potentially moves.

1.2.4 Theoretical framework

1.2.4.1 Semper’s volumetric theory of “space as an enclosure”

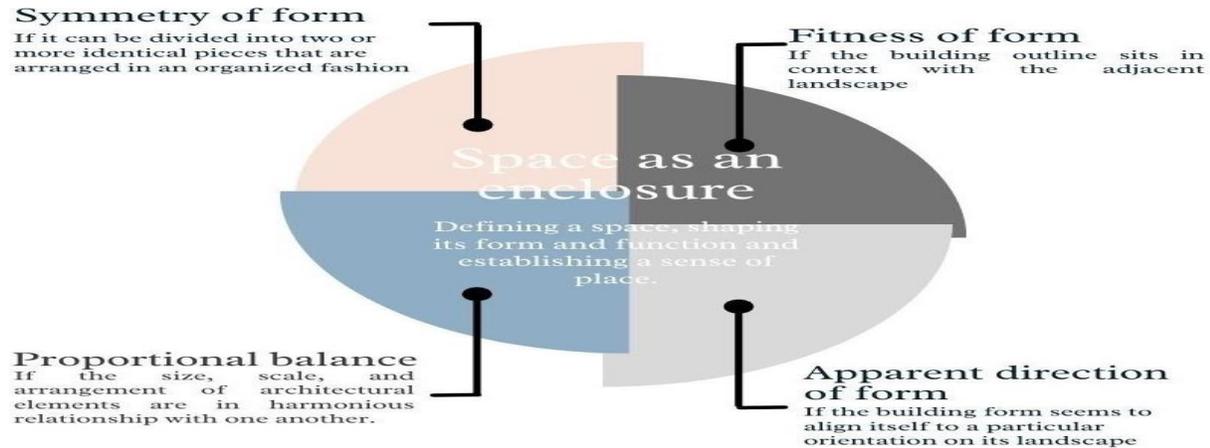


Figure 7: An illustration summary of Semper’s volumetric theory of “space as an enclosure theory. Source: Author¹, 2025.

Semper, (1851) in his theory about the origins of architecture, argues that architecture begins with the concept of enclosure. This theory considers the built enclosure and the separation of interior from exterior space to be the essential aspect of architecture (Schwarzer, 1991). The attributes of symmetry of form, fitness of form, proportional balance and apparent direction of form come (figure 7) out clearly in terms of space enclosure.

1.2.4.2 Oldenburg’s third place theory

Third places are public spaces that host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work (Mehta 2010). They are places where individuals may come and go as they please. In them, none are required to play host, and where all feel at home and comfortable (Oldenburg, 1999). According to (Riccarton, 2018), transitional spaces are potential third spaces. Transitional spaces may be successful third places if they have the following characteristics:

- b. *Relationship to space*: There is a need to connect the constructed environment and outside space. This enables creation of active edges and captivating areas that encourage interaction and involvement with the environment.
- c. *Permeability and legibility*: It should be easy to understand and navigate through the environment.
- d. *People as the measure of success*: A successful space is well used and attracts individuals, whereas desolate and empty locations are not.

- e. *Linkages and sequencing*: A well-designed progression of spaces that provides a unified and integrated experience enhances the overall quality of such a place.
- f. *Multi-functionality and adaptability*: Transitional spaces should support a wide range of activities and adapt to changing user needs.
- g. *Experiential landscape*: The whole experience provided by an area, rather than its aesthetic or functional characteristics, determines its excellence.

1.2.4.3 Gestalt's theory of perception

Gestalt's theory of perception highlights that the whole of anything is different (more) than the sum of its parts (figure 8). It further posits that the attributes of the whole cannot be derived from an analysis of the individual parts in isolation (Wagemans, J. et al., 2012). There are various principles responsible for explaining this theory which include:

- a. *The figure-ground principle*: Objects either stand out prominently in the front (the figure) or recede into the back (the ground).
- b. *The law of continuity*: Human beings tend to organize their perceptions into complete objects rather than as a series of its parts.
- c. *The law of closure*: When looking at missing visual elements, we tend to seek a single recognizable pattern and solve the problem.
- d. *The focal point principle*: Whatever stands out visually attracts and holds the attention of the viewer first. This hierarchy is achieved by colour, direction, size and position.

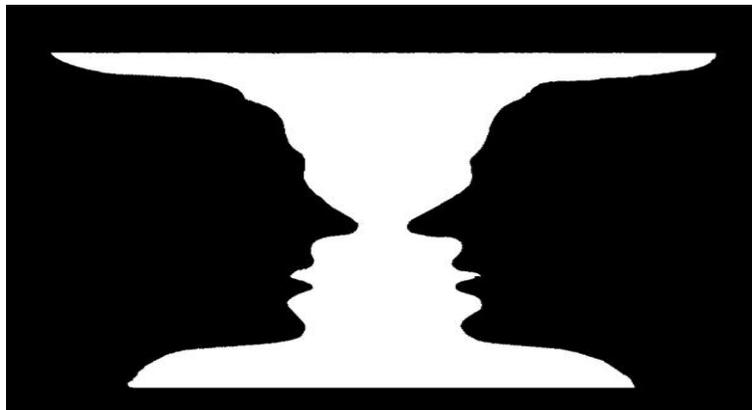


Figure 8: Illustration of cases of the Gestalt's theory of perception. Source Google search <https://psychosl.blogspot.com/>, 2025.

1.2.4.4 Trancik's lost space theory

Urbanism and urban development treats buildings as individual isolated objects on the urban landscape, not as part of the larger fabric. Decisions about growth patterns are made from two-dimensional land use plans without considering the three-dimensional relationships between buildings and spaces and also human behaviour. Consequently, urban space is almost always never thought of as an exterior volume with shape, scale and connection to other buildings. In

most environmental settings, this results to unshaped anti-spaces. This is what Trancik (1986) describes as lost space in his “book finding lost space’. To address lost space, designers should design buildings in context, and the building should define exterior space rather than displace it. Well defined outdoor spaces are as necessary as good buildings. They may reverse the unworkable figure-ground relationships between buildings and open spaces.

1.2.5 Conceptual framework

The study sought to establish the ideal spatial organisational and form fit for select shopping malls within Nairobi with this conceptual framework.

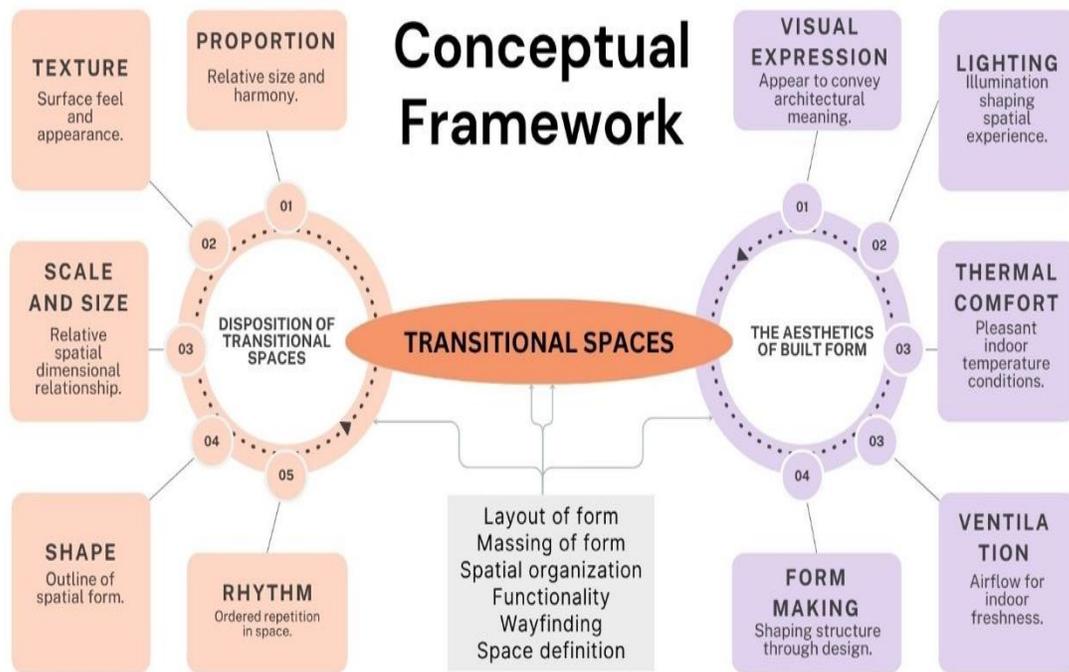


Figure 9: A conceptual framework showing aspects of transitional spaces, spatial organisation, functionality and aesthetics of built form. Source: Author¹, 2025.

This was done in order to identify points of intervention. Each of the concepts within this framework was measured by questions in pre-coded checklists, questionnaires and structured interview schedules during the field inquiry.

1.3 Hypotheses and their correspondence to research design

Alternative hypothesis (h₀): The spatial organisation, functionality and aesthetics of building form in public buildings can be enhanced by the design and disposition of transitional spaces.

Null hypothesis (h₁): The spatial organisation, functionality and aesthetics of building form in public buildings cannot be enhanced by the design and disposition of transitional spaces.

1.4 Specific objectives, primary and secondary investigative research questions

Table 1: Specific study objectives and the corresponding research questions

OBJECTIVE		RESEARCH QUESTION
To determine the character, quality and composition of transition spaces.	1.	What are transitional spaces? What are the elements of transitional spaces? How are these elements assembled together?
	2.	What are the different types and scales of transitional spaces? What are the aesthetic qualities of transitional spaces?
	3.	How do transitional spaces connect primary spaces in a design? How do transitional spaces shape the organisation and structure of space in a design? How do transitional spaces accentuate the function of primary spaces?
To delineate aesthetic qualities of spaces, facades, and built forms	1.	What are the aesthetic qualities of a space?
	2.	What are the aesthetic qualities of building facades?
	3.	What are the aesthetic qualities of a building form?
To determine the relationship between transition spaces and the aesthetics of built form.	1.	How should transitional spaces be designed and ordered to positively affect the spatial organisation and functionality of spaces?
	2.	How should transitional spaces be designed and ordered to positively affect the aesthetics of building facades?
	3.	How should transitional spaces be designed and ordered to positively affect the aesthetics of building form?

Source: Author¹, 2025.

2. Method

The appointed field of study was examined using an environmental behaviour research methodology in alignment with a requisite qualitative research approach that relied much on user perception and observer opinions. The methods used blended case study, observation and sample survey, supported with interviews and direct participant observation techniques. Structured interview schedules, pre-coded checklists, photographs, sketches and notes were used as tools for gathering data (Gill, P., et al. 2008).

The field work was done on the backdrop of a comprehensive review of relevant literature in the subject. This brought out the pertinent variables and queries for inquiry with clarity (figure 9; tables 1 & 2). Dispositions on spatial organisation, form making, way finding in buildings, visual expression of buildings, place making and user experience in the mall were thoroughly interrogated. A detailed analysis was carried out, utilizing data from on user perception of spaces and form in order to pinpoint key alignments with theory and identify both positive and negative profiles or issues that were prevalent in the shopping mall transitional spaces. Additionally, the

transitional spaces within the selected case studies were examined to interpret their impact on the organization, aesthetics and form of the design of the malls. The findings were then compared against a previously established checklist to identify conformity, challenges and areas for enhancement. The insights gained informed recommendations designed to transform malls into more user-centric and experiential destinations.

Table 2: Specific variables in the study and their operational definitions

VARIABLE	OPERATIONAL DEFINITION
Transitional spaces	Spaces that mediate between diverse spatial contexts, offering flexibility, accessibility, and coherence, such as entrance halls.
Built form	Tangible elements comprising buildings and landscapes reflecting design decisions and influencing the functionality and aesthetic character of a place.
Aesthetics	Qualities of a building that evoke sensory pleasure, encompassing elements such as form and composition.
Public Spaces	Areas open to everyone and serving as venues for social, cultural, recreational, and commercial activities.
Destination malls	Large integrated retail centres where the driver of traffic is not shopping but different experiences.

Source: Author¹, 2025.

2.1 Research methods.

In order to improve triangulation and verification of that data obtained, a blend of three research methods was relied upon. This orientation brought together case study, sample survey and observation methods to function in complementation. Their respective range of data collection tools were also deployed sensitively for maximum impact and effectiveness. Different sets of situations and data were therefore obtained with competence.

2.1.1 Case study method and its supporting techniques and tools.

It analysed the operations of these selected malls as case studies and subsequently offered recommendations to enhance efficiency and better align with user needs. Deep probing inquiry of space and form and their aesthetic value was enabled in the setting of case studies and through deliberate well guided observation of buildings and user patterns. Accordingly, visits were made to each of the three case studies to gain insights on the relevant concepts' attributes and elements of the problem under study. These included scale, size, colour, shape, rhythm, proportion, texture, lighting, ventilation, thermal comfort, visual expression and form making. For this, pre-coded observation checklists that meticulously reflected the concepts, attributes and surrogate elements of the conceptual framework were utilised to profile the various elements of the buildings within the shopping malls. Data recording for review and analysis was also made using photographs, annotated sketches and written notes, where situations required more considered review.

2.1.2 Observation method and its supporting techniques and tools.

Structured interview schedules that carried an exhaustive array of considerations for space user needs was put to use to extract detailed perceptual opinions of the three destination shopping mall users. In support of this, data recording for review and analysis was also made using photographs, annotated sketches and notepads, for essential follow up interrogation. Here too, the three case studies were probed using this alternative method for improved understanding of the concept's attributes and elements of the problem under study problem and is identified set of variables. Triangulated information on scale, size, colour, shape, rhythm, proportion, texture, lighting, ventilation, thermal comfort, visual expression and form making therefore ensued. This information was obtained by administering the structured interview schedules to individual user respondents or to focus groups. The schedules, designed in the fashion of Likert and Guttman attitudinal scalograms therefore served well as effective interview guides. They helped measure opinions in an ordinal scale of arbitrary scales of ranked data that was amenable to data analysis.

2.2 Target population

The target population for this study was the middle- and upper-income source markets in Nairobi City suburbs. These constituted the bulk of users found in the destination malls. It is this segment of the population that has developed a constant need for contrived high-investment value entertainment and recreation found at destination shopping malls in the neighbourhoods of Nairobi City County in Kenya. They are able to regularly schedule leisure time and set aside sustainable disposable incomes to afford this indulgence. The middle-income class particularly formed the most critical population in need of and able to easily, repeatedly access such spaces for recreation.

2.3 Sample frame

Shopping malls under study were purposively sampled from the affluent neighbourhoods of Nairobi, to serve as case studies. This choice was guided by the holistic, rich and contextually specificity of the elements relevant to the study objectives that they were able to offer. The choice of the case studies was biased towards shopping malls thought to offer phenomenal experiences for their visitors. These were termed as destination shopping malls. The study interrogated the following three top or the range shopping malls and their transitional spaces: Two-Rivers Mall, Limuru Road; The Village Market, Gigiri; and The Waterfront, Karen.

Participants involved in interviews were selected from the range of visitors frequenting these select destination shopping malls in Nairobi through simple random sampling. A total of 60 respondents were engaged across the three case studies (20 per mall).

Participants were selected through simple random sampling of mall visitors during peak and off-peak hours, ensuring balance. The exercise was guided by an adapted Tippets table of random numbers featured in table 3 (Maringa & Maringa 2025, Nachmias & Nachmias 1996). Participants involved in the focused interviews and requisite key informants were selected using

purposive sampling. The source population for this was the construction industry in Kiambu and Nairobi counties where these destination shopping malls were situated.

Table 3 : Tippet’s table of four digit Radom nombres adapte to a two-number setting.

10	22	24	42	37	77	99	96	89	85	28	63	09
10	07	51	02	01	52	07	48	54	32	29	02	81
29	00	05	91	00	00	69	25	09	91	17	46	92
14	98	34	70	53	76	90	64	08	95	15	15	46
48	93	39	06	72	91	14	36	69	40	93	61	97
12	21	54	53	97	91	58	32	27	33	72	20	57
04	26	04	69	65	57	83	42	56	18	89	62	07
63	28	54	29	52	67	00	68	10	01	25	22	06
81	11	56	05	63	53	88	48	52	87	71	51	52
33	46	33	85	22	05	87	28	04	68	39	25	64
87	62	95	29	73	27	90	18	94	35	33	88	39
06	40	83	33	31	93	20	02	85	97	61	16	42
69	07	10	53	33	03	92	85	08	51	60	94	58

Source : Adapted from Nahmias and Nahmias 1996.

2.4 Ethical Considerations

The study rigorously upheld fundamental ethical principles to protect participant rights by incorporating five key elements: informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality and anonymity, transparency, and accountability. Participants were fully informed about the academic, self-funded nature of the study, and its objectives. This ensured their understanding and comfort throughout interviews and observations. They retained complete freedom to participate or withdraw at any point without pressure. In this way they preserved their dignity and avoided any stigma. To maintain confidentiality, personally identifiable information was not collected; instead, identities were anonymized through coding. Further, data was securely stored with access limited to the researcher and authorized personnel.

It was the intention of this inquiry to maintain transparency making available findings and implications openly with participants through open-source publications. Relevant information would also be disseminated to associated institutions similarly. Additionally, the study emphasized accountability by using neutral, non-coercive language. It respected participant autonomy and fostered a balanced dynamic between researcher and respondents. This minimised bias and power imbalances during data collection.

2.5 Data processing

Raw observation checklists and structured interview schedules were carefully scrutinised to ensure that the data was accurate, and consistent with other facts gathered. Numerals were assigned to answers so that responses could be put into a limited number of categories that were

appropriate to the research problem under consideration. Large volumes of raw data were reduced into homogeneous groups, by arranging data in groups or classes based on common characteristics, in order to get meaningful relationships. Raw data was summarised into columns and rows of statistical tables. Pertinent statistics were extracted in order to reduce explanatory and descriptive statements to a minimum and facilitate the process of comparison for further analysis.

2.6 Data processing and analysis.

Thematic analysis was used to interrogate data in themes identified in the theoretical and conceptual frameworks so as to identify the underlying meanings in the data sets (form-making, way finding, user experience, aesthetics). Descriptive analysis (percentages, frequency counts) was used to simplify data structures and identify key information drawing conclusions of the distribution of data. Consequently, detailed descriptions of the major features, relationships and patterns of the data collected were made. Comparative analysis was relied upon to compare various elements in the three case studies mentioned above with an intention to establish their differences and similarities. In all this, the CANVA software and website served as an invaluable tool for analysis and representation of data distribution and patterns.

3. Results and discussions



Figure 10: Illustration of the overall scale of the geographical location of the destination shopping malls under study in relation to the Nairobi city Central Business District. Source: Author¹, 2025.

The study focused on the influence of transitional spaces on the aesthetics of built form, in three local case studies: The Two Rivers Mall, Runda; The Village Market, Gigiri; and The Waterfront mall, Karen (figure 10).

3.1 Disposition of the aspects and attributes of transitional spaces and user perception on the resulting aesthetics of built form.

Discussed here is the poise of the physical environments of destination shopping malls with regard to layout and massing of form, spatial organisation, functionality, wayfinding and space definition.

3.1.1 Socio-economic profiles of respondents.

Over 65% of the visitors are aged 1-30 years of age and are educated above secondary school level. 50% are not married while also earning incomes of uptown Kshs 50,00k/month. It is clear that the majority of the visitors of the mall are the youth aged below 30 (figure 11). This group of the population earns less than the average middle-income class Kenyan. It can therefore be inferred that most visitors to the mall are just below or are middle-income earners. This is despite the malls being located in the affluent neighbourhoods of the city.



Figure 11: The socio-economic profile of respondents Source: Author¹, 2025, field data.

This therefore suggested that there needed to be a well-connected road transport system for improved access to the malls. The shopping malls could otherwise be located close to the middle and low-income neighbourhoods. It can also be inferred that the small upper-income class must be heavy spenders to sustain the economic life of the mall. There should therefore be activities in the mall that favour such heavy spending habits.

3.1.2 Profiles of transitional spaces, user perceptions & building form in all three malls.

In all three shopping malls, all sixteen attributes of the five aspects of transition spaces in the entrance areas and external public spaces recorded a rank score of 1 in the assessment of whether they were provided for. Further, in the Two Rivers Mall these attributes were sufficient in scale, volume and disposition, with a rank score mean value of 2. This status was however different for the other two shopping malls as they registered rank score mean values of 3. This reflected uncertainty about their sufficiency. Suitable design remedies on these attributes. In order to raise their sufficiency of scale, volume and disposition in transition spaces at the entrance areas and external public space of these two malls was clearly necessary.

Five aspects of transition spaces in entrance areas and external public areas were probed here. These were, organisation principals, types of entry areas and external public areas, common facilities, special circulation strategies and character of entrance areas.

Table 4: Associations of the aspects of transition spaces in the entrance areas and external public spaces in all three malls.

		Organising principle	Types of entry areas and external public spaces	Common facilities	Character of entrance areas	Special circulation strategies	
Spearman's rho (rs)	Organising principles	R-value	1.000	.807**	.890*	.260	.731*
		Sig.(2-tailed)		.009	.001	.499	.025
	Types of entry areas and external public spaces	R-value	.807*	1.000	.890*	-.339	.895**
		Sig.(2-tailed)	.009		.001	.372	.001
	Common facilities	R-value	.890*	.890**	1.000	-.035	.874**
		Sig.(2-tailed)	.001	.001		.928	.002
	Character of entrance areas	R-value	.260	.372	-.035	1.000	.246
		Sig.(2-tailed)	.499	-.035	.928		.524
	Special circulation strategies	R-value	.731*	.895**	.874*	.246	1.000
		Sig.(2-tailed)	.025	.001	.002	.524	

**Correlation is significant at the 0.05 alpha (α) error level (2-tailed); ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 alpha (α) error level (2-tailed); Source: Author¹, 2025, field data.

The first four displayed significant strong positive or direct correlations, one with another (table 4). They enjoyed complementation in their influence over the built form of the three destination shopping malls and in other buildings, when appropriately designed and disposed. The sole exception to this pattern was found for the aspect of character of entrance areas. It had weak positive and negative or inverse associations with the other four aspects (table 4). These correlations were also not significant. Concerted design effort was therefore necessary to dispose this aspect better in order for it to complement the other aspects effectively to improve built forms of destination shopping malls.

Remedial interventions would ideally be guided by the attributes of each of these five aspects that they defined and also measured in this inquiry. Organisation principals were defined by the attributes of functionality, flow and accessibility. Types of entry areas and external spaces derived their value from the four attributes of lobby areas, entrance halls, foyers and canopies. Common facilities embraced landscaping, universal access and wayfinding cues. The character of entrance areas emerged from the sense of welcoming, brand identity and user experience. Special circulation strategies comprised of dedicated paths, emergency exits and automation.

On another score, all eighteen attributes of the five aspects of transition spaces in semi-occupied spaces with secondary uses recorded a rank score values of 1 in the assessment of whether they were provided for. In the Two Rivers Mall the scale, volume and disposition of these and attributes was considered sufficient, registering a rank score mean value of 2. For the Village Market and Waterfront malls, no certain verdict emerged on sufficiency, as they registered rank score mean values of 3. It was necessary to bring on board well thought out design intervention on these attributes, that would increase the sufficiency in scale, volume and disposition of the transition spaces in semi-occupied spaces with secondary uses in the two malls.

Next, five aspects of transition spaces in semi-occupied spaces with secondary uses were examined These were, organisation principals, types of semi-occupied spaces, common facilities, character of semi-occupied spaces, and special circulation strategies. All five displayed significant strong positive or direct correlations, one with another (table 5). This denoted their inherent synergy of action as designed to influence built form of all three destination shopping malls and generally in building form when appropriately designed and disposed.

The five aspects were defined and also measured through their respective attributes. Organisation principals were defined by the attributes of functionality, flow, zoning and hierarchy. Types of entry semi-occupied spaces were constituted of the attributes balconies, porches, corridors and courtyards.. Common facilities comprised of restrooms, seating, universal access and wayfinding cues. The character of semi-occupied spaces emerged from head rooms, enclosure level, adaptive use. Special circulation strategies comprised of dedicated paths, emergency exits and automation.

Table 5: Associations of the aspects of transition spaces in semi-occupied spaces with secondary uses in all three malls.

		Organising principles	Types of semi-occupied spaces	Common facilities	Character of semi-occupied spaces	Special circulation strategies	
Spearman's rho (rs)	Organising principles	R-value	1.000	.898**	.881*	.788*	.670*
		Sig.(2-tailed)		.001	.002	.012	.048
	Types of semi-occupied spaces	R-value	.898*	1.000	.939*	.837**	.740*
		Sig.(2-tailed)	.001		.000	.005	.023
	Common facilities	R-value	.881*	.939**	1.000	.917**	.793*
		Sig.(2-tailed)	.002	.000		.000	.011
	Character of semi-occupied spaces	R-value	.788*	.837**	.917*	1.000	.723*
		Sig.(2-tailed)	.012	.005	.000		.028
	Special circulation strategies	R-value	.670*	.740*	.793*	.723*	1.000
		Sig.(2-tailed)	.048	.023	.011	.028	

**Correlation is significant at the 0.05 alpha (α) error level (2-tailed); ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 alpha (α) error level (2-tailed); Source: Author¹, 2025, field data.

In the Two Rivers Mall the sufficiency of the disposition of all aspects and attributes of the interior transition spaces was found to be good and accordingly registered a rank score mean value of 2. The sufficiency of their disposition at the Village Market and Waterfront Malls lacked certainty and in effect therefore reported a rank score mean value of 3. Design measures to dispose these interior transition spaces more sufficiently for better built forms.

Moving on, another five aspects of interior transition spaces were looked at. They included, organisation principals, types of interior transition spaces, common facilities, character of interior transition spaces, and special circulation strategies. They displayed significant strong positive or direct correlations, one with another (table 6). They had synergy of action in influencing the built form in the three destination shopping malls, and elsewhere, when appropriately designed and disposed. Two aspects though had positive, moderate, but not

significant association with each other (table 6) These were the character of interior transition spaces and special circulation strategies. This divergence from the pattern that was manifested by the other three aspects singled out an area for carefully thought-out design focus. By reviewing their respective attributes, common grounds between these two aspects could be identified and manipulated in design in a manner that causes complementation in developing appealing and functional built forms.

Table 6: Associations of aspects and attributes of interior transition spaces in all three malls

		Organising principle	Types of interior transition spaces	Common facilities	Character of interior transition spaces	Special circulation strategies	
Spearman's rho (rs)	Organising principles	R-value	1.000	.916**	.969*	.890**	.761*
		Sig.(2-tailed)		.001	.000	.001	.017
	Types of interior transition spaces	R-value	.916*	1.000	.922*	.843**	.642
		Sig.(2-tailed)	.001		.000	.004	.062
	Common facilities	R-value	.969*	.922**	1.000	.922**	.769*
		Sig.(2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.016
	Character of interior transition spaces	R-value	.890*	.843**	.922*	1.000	.659
		Sig.(2-tailed)	.001	.004	.000		.053
	Special circulation strategies	R-value	.761*	.642	.769*	.659	1.000
		Sig.(2-tailed)	.017	.062	.016	.053	

**Correlation is significant at the 0.05 alpha (α) error level (2-tailed); * Correlation is significant at the 0.01 alpha (α) error level (2-tailed); Source: Author¹, 2025, field data.

As in the previous instances, these five aspects were defined and also measured through their respective attributes. Organisation principals were defined by the attributes of functionality, flow, visibility and connectivity. Types of interior transition spaces comprised of the attributes hallways, lobbies and foyers, stairwells, ramps, mezzanines and skywalks. Common facilities brought together restrooms, seating, universal access and wayfinding cues. The character of

interior transition spaces was defined by head rooms, widths, enclosure levels and adaptive use. Special circulation strategies comprised of dedicated paths, emergency exits and automation.

In the Two Rivers Mall the sufficiency of the disposition of all six elements of the aesthetics of built form that were reflected in transition spaces was assessed to be good. In this respect, that mall registered a rank score mean value of 2. For the Village Market Mall, an uncertain verdict emerged on the sufficiency of their disposition, as they registered a rank score mean value of 3. On its part, the Waterfront Mall displayed a disposition that was rated as not satisfactory, with a rank score mean value of 4. It was necessary to redesign transition spaces in these latter two malls by innovatively contriving the elements of aesthetics of the built form in order to cause improved forms in them.

Another five aspects of transition spaces in semi-occupied spaces with secondary uses were examined. These were, organisation principals, types of semi-occupied spaces, common facilities, character of semi-occupied spaces, and special circulation strategies. (table 7).

Table 7: Associations of the aspects and attributes of transition spaces that impact on aesthetics of buildings in all three malls

		Thermal comfort	Lighting	Ventilation	Texture	Form making	Visual expression	
Spearman's rho (rs)	Thermal comfort	R-value	1.000	.866	1.000**	.500	.500	.500
		Sig.(2-tailed)		.333		.667	.667	.667
	Lighting	R-value	.866	1.000	.866	.866	.866	.866
		Sig.(2-tailed)	.333		.333	.333	.333	.333
	Ventilation	R-value	1.000**	.866	1.000	.500	.500	.500
		Sig.(2-tailed)		.333		.667	.667	.667
	Texture	R-value	.500	.866	.500	1.000	1.000**	1.000**
		Sig.(2-tailed)	.667	.333	.667		.333	.333
	Form making	R-value	.500	.866	.500	1.000*	1.000	1.000**
		Sig.(2-tailed)	.667	.333	.667			
	Visual expression	R-value	.500	.866	.500	1.000*	1.000**	1.000
		Sig.(2-tailed)	.667	.333	.667			

** Correlation is significant at the 2-tailed alpha error (α) level of 0.01; Source: Author¹, 2025, field data.

Thermal comfort and ventilation shared a unique relationship and accordingly displayed a significant perfect correlation (table 7). Texture, form making and visual expression cut a similar profile of a significant perfect correlations one with each other (table 7). This denoted their inherently very strong synergy and common availability as disposed in the destination shopping malls, to influence built form. It serves as an assurance of their value for influencing built form when appropriately designed and disposed. The rest of the relationships were moderate and positive but not significant. It was incumbent on designers to develop firm significant relationships were these were lacking by very specifically deploying these aspects with such an intention in mind.

Thermal comfort, lighting, ventilation, texture, form making and visual expression were relied on as the six aspects of transition spaces that dispose such spaces to impact on aesthetics in buildings. Each aspect was probed using its own unique set of six well targeted queries, to comprise a rigorous examination of the transition spaces with a complete complement of thirty six questions.

Table 8: Associations of form making element of transition spaces in all three malls

		Scale	Shape	Rhythm	Colour	Proportion	Orientation	
Spearman's rho (rs)	Scale	R-value	1.000	1.000**	-.500	1.000*	.500	.500
		Sig.(2-tailed)			.667		.667	.667
	Shape	R-value	1.000*	1.000	-.500	1.000*	.500	.500
		Sig.(2-tailed)	.333		.667		.667	.667
	Rhythm	R-value	-.500	-.500	1.000	-.500	.500	.500
		Sig.(2-tailed)	.667	.667		.667	.667	.667
	Colour	R-value	1.000*	1.000**	-.500	1.000	.500	.500
		Sig.(2-tailed)			.667		.667	.667
	Proportion	R-value	.500	.500	.500	.500	1.000	1.000**
		Sig.(2-tailed)	.667	.667	.667	.667		
	Orientation		.500	.500	.500	.500	1.000*	1.000
			.667	.667	.667	.667		

** Correlation is significant at the 2-tailed alpha error (α) level of 0.01;. Source: Author¹, 2025, field data.

In the Two Rivers Mall, all the six elements (scale, shape, rhythm, colour, proportion and orientation) of form making through transition spaces recorded a rank score mean value of 2 and

as such were considered to be sufficiently disposed. These same elements in the Village Market and Waterfront Malls displayed an unsatisfactory disposition, with a rank score mean values of 4. There was a need to contrive through design, the six elements of form making in transition spaces within these two latter malls so as to achieve improved building forms.

The elements of proportion and orientation attained moderate positive correlations with the rest of the aspects (table 8). These associations though were not significant. The two aspects therefore needed creative design application in the destination shopping malls, to harmonise well with the rest of scale, shape, rhythm, and colour. On its part, rhythm had a modest inverse relationship with all other aspects (table 8). This stance was consistent with design expectations to the extent that excessive or expansive, loud, and complex articulation of the other five aspects would compromise or complicate rhythm. Scale, shape and colour displayed perfect positive correlations with each other (table 8). They had been disposed well in the design of the destination shopping malls, to all work in concert as they should, for effective form making.

3.1.3 Discussions

3.1.3.1 Spatial organisation

Under spatial organisation, the research investigated spaces within a space, interlocking spaces, adjacent spaces and spaces linked by a common space. Public spaces tend to be expansive and with higher human traffic. This required the organisation of spaces in a manner that gives the design a feeling of continuity and flow, enabling different areas to come together to create a unified whole

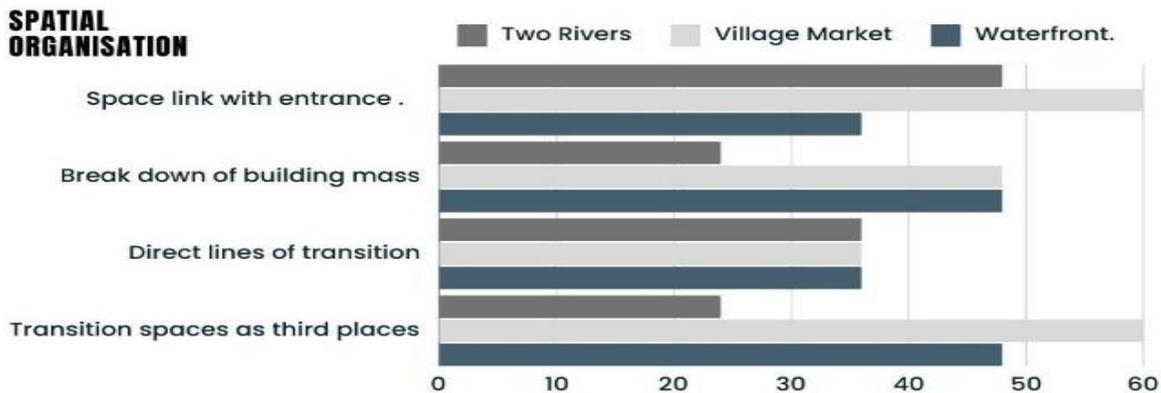


Figure 12: Illustration of the comparison of responses within similar aspects of spatial organisation across the three destination shopping malls. Scores here measured numbers of responses confirming that the aspects were well disposed. The highest possible total was 60 per query. This corresponded to the total number interviewed in each destination shopping mall/case study. Source: Author¹, 2025, field data.

In as far as understanding the location and spatial organisation of destination shopping malls, it emerged that (figures 12 & 13):

- a) The ideal location for a destination shopping mall was in an affluent neighbourhood.
- b) Existing circulation infrastructure influenced the spatial organization of a mall.
- c) Entry and exit points were clearly visible and easily accessible.
- d) Entrances were big enough, for the anticipated traffic.
- e) The forms of entrances to buildings were perceived to be welcoming.
- f) There were oblique approach circulation paths to the mall.

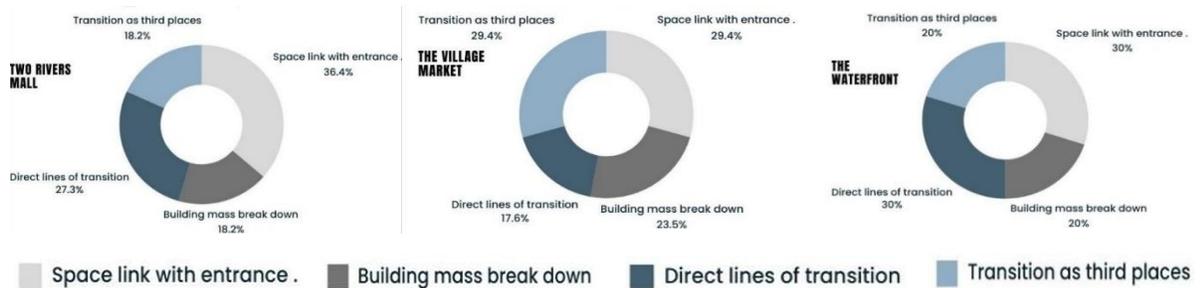


Figure 13: Illustration of the comparison of different aspects of spatial organisations in individual destination shopping malls captured in relative (percentage) form of total respondents with positive responses per mall. This measure identified a hierarchy of dominance among the four aspects measured in each destination shopping mall. Source: Author, 2025, field data.

3.1.3.2 Character of form

There is a relation between the character of public building forms and sense of place, and this. The character of the Two Rivers Mall was recognisably dominated by an axial form blended considerably with the centralised form. A small proportion of it reflected a linear form. The clustered form only featured here extremely marginally.

On its part, form in the Village Market Mall was visibly predominantly linear in character with equal sprinklings of axial and centralised forms and a minimal reflection of the clustered form. The Waterfront Karen Mall featured an overwhelming character of axiality in form that was balanced with the clustered form. The linear form also found expression here at a low key and with a very weak showing of the centralised form (figures 14 & 15).

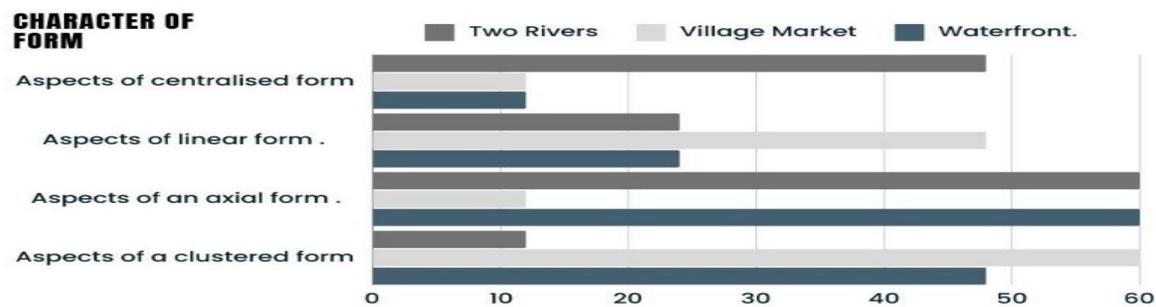


Figure 14: Illustration of the comparison of responses within similar aspects of the character of building form across the three destination shopping malls. Scores here measured numbers of responses confirming that the statements applied. The highest possible total was 60 per query. This corresponded to the total number interviewed in each destination shopping mall/case study. Source: Author¹, 2025, field data.

This sense of place evolves through personal experiences and defines how people view, interpret, and interact with their world (Russ et al., 2015). Regarding functional requirements in public spaces, their forms and spaces, it was confirmed that there were the following elements that organised the entire form (figures 14 & 15):

- a) Axial arrangement proved better for large scale developments.
- b) Sprawling arrangement was used.
- c) The forms of building entrances were perceived to be welcoming.
- d) There were oblique approach circulation paths of to the mall.

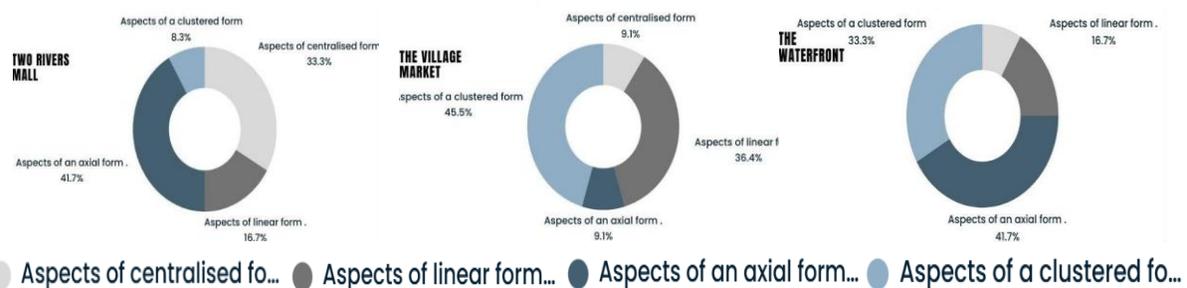


Figure 15: Illustration of the comparison of different aspects of the character of form in individual destination shopping malls captured in relative (percentage) form of total respondents with positive responses per mall. This measure identified a hierarchy of dominance among the four aspects measured in each destination shopping mall. Source: Author, 2025, field data.

3.1.3.3 physical components of form

The Two Rivers Mall was well composed in respect of site organisation and façade features that are obtrusive and easily discerned. Compatibility though was challenged, while building massing seemed totally compromised. The other two destination malls showed a balanced, fairly equal mix of all four physical components of form. Public spaces tended to be expansive and with higher human traffic (figures 16 &17).

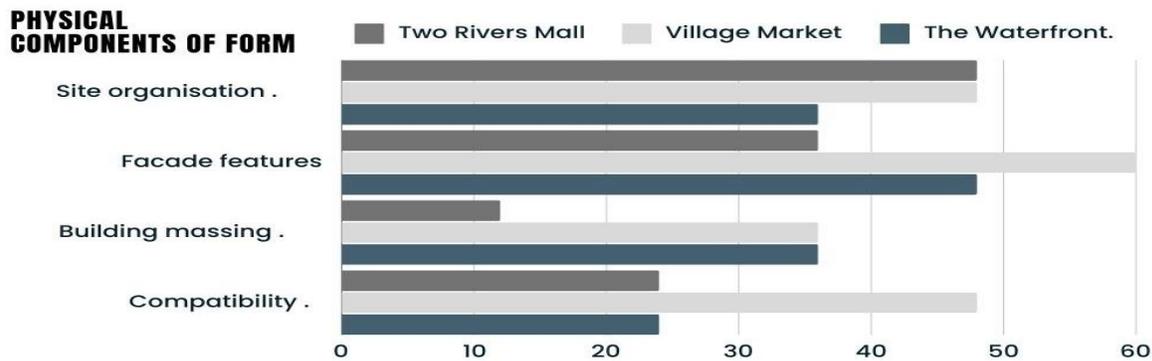


Figure 16: Illustration of the comparison of responses within similar physical components of form across the three destination shopping malls. Scores here measured numbers of responses confirming that the statements applied. The highest possible total was 60 per query. This corresponded to the total number interviewed in each shopping mall/case study. Source: Author¹, 2025, field data.

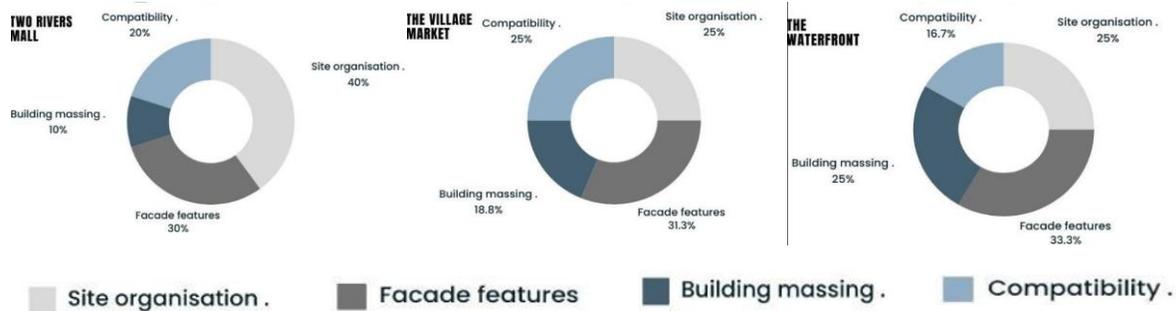


Figure 17: Illustration of the comparison of different aspects of the physical components of form in individual destination shopping malls captured in relative (percentage) form of total respondents with positive responses per mall. This measure identified a hierarchy of dominance among the four aspects measured in each destination shopping mall. Source: Author, 2025, field data.

This required spaces to be organised in a manner that gave the design a feeling of continuity and flow, enabling different areas to come together to create a unified whole. Findings related to understanding the location and spatial organisation of destination shopping malls confirmed the following (figures 16 & 17):

- a) The organisation of buildings on site was around major spaces.
- b) Buildings were better arranged with circulation paths in mind.
- c) Design was done in resonance with pre-existing site landscape.
- d) Artificial landscaping elements like water features were used.
- e) Articulation of transitional spaces was expressed on building facades.
- f) Façade colours and textures blended with the local environment.
- g) Transitional spaces were used to break down the overall building mass.

3.1.4 Interpretation of observed spatial and form profiles within respective shopping malls

3.1.4.1 Two rivers shopping mall.



Figure 18 (left:) Illustration of the Mall main access axis. Source: Author, 2024. Figure 19 (right:) Illustration of the Two Rivers Shopping Mall development and how it was connected to the various access points. Source: Google earth, 2024.

Two Rivers Mall was strategically located on Lemur Road, approximately 10 kilometres north of Nairobi's Central Business District (CBD). This is a major circulation thoroughfare that connected it conveniently to the northern bypass and other parts of Nairobi. The entrance was marked by a grand gateway that has an oblique approach. The design prioritized convenience and accessibility, with ramps and walkways leading seamlessly from the parking areas to the mall's interior (figure 19).

There was a main circulation axis that spans the length of the building. It had a primary walkway with clear sight lines (figure 18). Way finding signage was strategically placed along the route,

guiding visitors to various sections of the mall. The design and disposition of transitional spaces in supporting the spatial organisation of building form in this case was therefore considered successful. The most common spatial relationship was interlocking spaces and spaces linked by a common space.

The development adopted an overall axial spatial organisation, with the commercial centre serving as the focal point (figure 18). In this case, there were combined aspects of both centrality and linearity. Each unit appeared to expand outward creating a sense of cohesion and connectivity through the entire development. In terms of site organisation, the landscaping patterns and circulation pathways contributed considerably to the spatial definition of the built areas of this mall. This mall had a lot of open circulation space, with clearly designated pathways that connect different parts of the building.

Transitional spaces were integrated in the overall built form façades. Atria, balconies and terraces define most of the building elevations (figure 21). They too had shaped the volumes and massing (figure 20). Their interplay enhanced visual harmony and guided movement patterns which consequently influenced the architectural character of the building.



Figure 20: Illustration of the Two Rivers Shopping Mall massing with partly dominantly taller masses creating a hierarchy. Source: Author¹, 2025, site photograph..

There was a relation of the interior spaces and outside environment, enabling the creation of captivating areas. The shopping mall was permeable and legible; inviting to individuals and porous. As such it was therefore easy to navigate through. It was also easy to see different spaces from any point within the building. (figure 22)



Figure 21 (left): Relation of balcony to outdoor environment, Figure 22 (right): Permeability and legibility of spaces as a measure of successful third place. Source: Author¹, 2025, site photograph.

The outdoor verandahs and adjoining terraces close to the water feature attracted a lot of people which was an indication of successful spaces. However, there were third places that were not as active, especially on upper floor levels (figure 23).



Figure 23: Illustration of the terraces with people as a measure of a successful third place. Source: Author¹, 2025, site photograph..

The mall had multifunctional transitional spaces that adapted to changing user needs. For instance, the wide corridors (figure 24) had been repurposed to an Art Café coffee shop. This maximised use of these spaces as third places.



Figure 24 (left): Illustration of a multifunctional corridor space with an art café. Figure 25 (right): An experiential landscape including water features, bridges and even viewing decks as a measure of successful third place Source: Author¹, 2025, site photographs..

Further, there were experiential natural and artificial landscapes at the mall that enhanced the quality of spaces for a greater human experience (figure 25).

3.1.4.2 The Village Market

The Village Market is located in Gigiri, an upscale suburb of Nairobi, Kenya, along Lemur Road, approximately 8 kilometres north of the city centre. It is near diplomatic missions, the UN (UNEP & HABITAT) office, and close to the neighbourhoods of Runda and Muthaiga.



Figure 26 (left): Illustration of the Village Market Shopping Mall main entrance area, gate A. Figure 27 (right): The overall scale of the Village Market Shopping Mall development from the entrance along Lemur Road. Source: Author¹, 2025.

There are two main access points on Lemur road (figure 27). The form of the main gate was contrasting heavy looking columns and light canvas roofing (figure 26). It featured spacious courtyards that opened into a large airy atrium. The design prioritized convenience and accessibility, with ramps and walkways leading seamlessly from the parking areas to the mall's interior. There were secondary circulation paths weaving through landscaped gardens and outdoor plaza that created a scenic leisurely experience.

Staircases and elevators were strategically located at proximal vantage points within the courtyards to ensure seamless connection between different floor levels. This mall adopted an overall clustered spatial organisation, with the food courts serving as the focal points (figure 28). The linear nature of the site also informed the apparent arrangement of forms along a line. Each unit appeared to expand outward from the centre, creating a sense of cohesion and connectivity through the entire development.



Figure 28: General axial character of form at The Village Market. Figure 29: The façades showing how openings had been used to define interior transitional spaces Source: Author¹, 2025. Source: Author¹, 2025, site photographs.

There was a deliberate use of different base planes and levels in landscaping, taking advantage of the slope on site. The main organising element for the mall was the courtyard. Façade features at the Village Market were definitely affected by transitional spaces. The curvilinear openings on the masonry walling facades defined the interior circulation spaces and enhanced the natural day lighting conditions (figure 29).

The interior spaces were well connected to the outdoor areas. Balconies and terraces overlooked courtyards at vantage points (figure 30). It was easy to see different spaces from any point within the building. The shopping mall was porous, with numerous double volume corridors and courtyards that enabled easy navigation (figure 30). Third place transitional spaces (courtyards, corridors, balcony seating, terraces) at the Village Market attracted a lot of visitors. Wide corridors were repurposed to provide extra seating spaces.



Figure 30: Relation of balconies to outdoor environment. Source, Author¹, 2025, site photographs.

Transitional spaces supported a wide range of activities and were adapted to changing user needs. Both the natural and artificial landscapes at the mall enhanced the quality of spaces for a greater human experience. The terrain had greatly influenced the aesthetics of the circulation paths. A mini golf course had been efficiently included to create more functional, usable third places for the mall visitors.

3.1.4.3 The Waterfront

The Waterfront is strategically located at the intersection of Langata Road and Ngong' Road, approximately 15 kilometres southwest of Nairobi's CBD. It is conveniently connected to the southern bypass and other notable landmarks such as the Karen Blixen Museum. The mall was ordered in two storey levels, with the anchor tenants occupying the ground floor (figure 31). Most spaces were organised around one major central courtyard. Some activities were linearly ordered by ramps and walkways leading seamlessly from the parking areas to the interior of the mall. The design and disposition of transitional spaces in supporting the spatial organisation of building form were successful. This was seen through well-defined and legible building entrances (figure 31).

There were also functional adjoining verandahs. These served as semi-occupied spaces with secondary uses. Additionally, there were highly porous and permeable internal circulation spaces arranged around a courtyard. The most common spatial relationships were spaces within a space and spaces linked by a common space. The development adopted an axial character of form (figure 32).



Figure 31: The Waterfront Shopping Mall development and how it was connected to the various access points. Source: Google earth, 2024.

This aligned well to the site configuration which was an apparent triangle. The arrangement of forms on site extended outward from a point at the intersection of Langat and Karen Road.



Figure 32: Illustration of the centralised character of form at the Waterfront Shopping Mall. Source: Author¹, 2025.

In as much as there was an overall centralised built form character, parts of the overall master plan had localised focal points. The artificial water feature on site had also been used as an organising feature which the main building form curved around.

The site shape and access roads had contributed a lot to the spatial arrangement of the built areas of this mall. The main circulation paths were located along the edges of the site to link up with the access points (figure 33). The secondary paths and building forms were also organised around the artificial water feature (figure 33). Transitional spaces had been integrated into the overall built form. They were impactful in the defining the facades of the buildings. Surfaces of the walls at the Waterfront were mainly treated with paint, some of which was textured (figure 33).



Figure 33: The interplay of solid walls and fenestrations. Source: Author¹ 2025

Facades showcasing extensive structural expression with elements such as columns dominating the building facades (figure 31). Balconies and terraces defined most of the building elevations. The Waterfront was generally a low-rise sprawling building mass with two story levels (figures 31 & 33). The fenestrations and a courtyard served to break the scale of the building (figure 33). The form of the building allowed for interaction between the main third places and adjacent indoor or outdoor spaces (figure 33). The Waterfront was a popular destination. Often, visitors could be seen enjoying ‘adrenaline’ games. The transitional spaces at the Waterfront supported a wide range of activities and were adapted to changing user needs. The verandahs were used as cafes, while the wide corridors had been repurposed to provide extra seating spaces. There was an events garden by the side of the water that provided an experience for the visitors (figure 33).

4. Conclusions

Against this general backdrop, the findings from the research offer significant insights on destination shopping malls in several areas of design as elaborated here below:

4.1 spatial organization

The spatial organization of public spaces in shopping malls is pivotal due to the high volume of human traffic they attract. Malls should be located in affluent neighbourhoods where the demographic of such an immediate hinterland can support such developments. Existing

circulation infrastructure significantly influences how spaces are organized within the mall, ensuring that entry and exit points are easily visible and accessible. Entrances must be sufficiently large to handle anticipated traffic and designed to be welcoming.

4.2 character of form

The character of form in public buildings, particularly shopping malls, plays a vital role in creating a sense of place. An axial arrangement is particularly effective for large-scale developments, while sprawling arrangements ought to also be utilized. Building entrances should be designed to be inviting. Oblique approach paths contribute to the overall welcoming nature of malls.

4.3 physical components of form

It is necessary that the physical components of form in shopping malls are designed to handle expansive public spaces with high human traffic. Buildings should be organized around major spaces, with circulation paths considered integral to the layout. The design needs to harmonise with the pre-existing site landscape, incorporating artificial landscaping elements like water features to enhance the aesthetic appeal. Transitional spaces should be articulated on building facades. These transitional spaces also help break down the overall building mass, creating a more human-scale and approachable environment.

5. Recommendations

5.1 design and development of destination shopping malls

Based on the findings discussed above, it is recommended that designers, planners and policy makers as well as investors reference the following considerations:

- a) Prioritize selecting locations in affluent neighbourhoods to ensure a conducive environment for high-end retail.
- b) Integrate the spatial organization of malls with the existing circulation infrastructure to enhance accessibility and flow within malls.
- c) Design entry and exit points to be clearly visible and easily accessible to facilitate smooth movement and improve user experience.
- d) Ensure entrances are large enough to handle the anticipated traffic, preventing bottlenecks and ensuring efficient flow.
- e) Utilize organizing elements to create a cohesive and unified form, enhancing the overall aesthetics and functionality of malls.
- f) Implement an axial arrangement for large-scale developments to facilitate better organization and movement.
- g) Consider using sprawling arrangements in the planning stages to accommodate different functions and enhance user experience.
- h) Reinforce the welcoming nature of building entrances through thoughtful design and placement.

- i) Design the mall buildings around major spaces to ensure a logical and functional layout.
- j) Design the mall in harmony with the pre-existing site landscape, leveraging natural features to enhance aesthetic appeal.
- k) Use artificial landscaping elements such as water features to create visually appealing and serene environments within malls.
- l) Express transitional spaces on building facades to enhance visual interest and break down the building mass.
- m) Choose façade colours and textures that blend with the local environment, ensuring the malls complement their surroundings.
- n) Design transitional spaces to be human scale, creating a more approachable and inviting atmospheres for visitors.

5.2 Implications of findings to theory and practice

The recommendations that are suggested in this study are practical and easy to realise. The attributes and concepts of a destination shopping mall identified in this study, contribute significantly to the following crucial areas:

5.2.1 Implications for Theory

5.2.1.1 Expanded Definition of Aesthetic Value

The study findings propose that aesthetics should not be confined to the building envelope or façades alone. Transitional spaces; corridors, atriums, lobbies, and others such, play a critical role in shaping user perception and emotional response to built form. This expands the theoretical lens of aesthetics to include spatial sequencing and experiential quality.

5.2.1.2 Reinforcement of Human-Centered Design Theories

The research supports theories that priorities user experience in architectural design. By highlighting how movement through transitional spaces influences perception, this study aligns with and reinforces phenomenological and experiential approaches in architecture.

Semper's volumetric theory is expanded by demonstrating how enclosure is not only an architectural necessity but also a tool for integrating transitional spaces into coherent spatial sequences. The study found out that atria, courtyards, and lobbies function as volumetric enclosures that shape circulation patterns while also contributing to the perceived order and architectural identity of the complex.

Oldenburg's third place theory is reinforced by showing that transitional spaces in malls can evolve into vibrant social nodes beyond their circulation function. The study findings illustrate how corridors, food courts, and terraces as transitional areas can act as "third places," fostering informal gathering, leisure, and cultural exchange. Through Gestalt's theory of perception, the study demonstrates how users intuitively interpret transitional spaces in malls via continuity,

closure, and figure-ground principles. Well-articulated circulation paths and façade elements, for instance, enhance legibility and way finding, while poorly resolved spatial sequences in other malls confirm how lapses in Gestalt principles diminish user orientation and aesthetic continuity.

Finally, Trance's lost space theory is validated by identifying residual, underutilized areas in Nairobi's malls that fail to support activity or aesthetic flow. Upper-floor terraces at Two Rivers Mall illustrate how transitional spaces risk becoming "anti-spaces" when divorced from pedestrian movement and experiential landscapes. Conversely, the successful integration of verandas and courtyards in The Waterfront demonstrates how lost spaces can be reclaimed into meaningful, user-centered environments.

5.2.1.3 Bridging Functionality and Form

This study theoretically grounds the idea that function and form are not mutually exclusive; transitional spaces can serve utilitarian functions (circulation, access, transition) while simultaneously contributing to the aesthetic and emotional narrative of the architecture.

5.2.2 Implications to practice

5.2.2.1 Designers to Prioritize In-Between Spaces

Architects and urban designers are encouraged to intentionally design transitional spaces not as afterthoughts but as core components of spatial identity and visual cohesion. These areas can offer moments of pause, orientation, and engagement that elevate the overall user experience.

5.2.2.2 Aesthetic Continuity and Branding

Transitional spaces can serve as visual and thematic bridges between distinct programmatic zones. This has practical application in developing architectural branding, where spatial language and materiality are used consistently across primary and secondary spaces.

5.2.2.3 Reimagining Circulation

The research advocates for rethinking circulation routes as opportunities for aesthetic intervention; through lighting, material choice, proportion, and interaction with adjacent spaces. This influences how buildings are experienced in motion, and not just in stasis.

5.3 Comparison with previous research:

This study extends previous research by deepening the understanding of how theoretical frameworks surrounding destination shopping malls and the aesthetics of built form can be applied in practice. Its distinct contribution is evident in the following ways:

5.3.1 Focus of Inquiry

Much of the existing architectural literature has explored aesthetics primarily through façade design, building form, material expression, and iconic elements. Transitional spaces have largely been examined from a functional or circulation-based perspective. This research elevates transitional spaces to subjects of aesthetic and experiential significance; especially in public buildings like malls.

5.3.2 User Experience and Human Perception

Phenomenological theorists like Johan Pallasmaa and Christian Norberg-Schulz have emphasized sensory experience and existential space, but these often address primary spaces like chapels, homes, or urban squares. Commercial spaces, the mall in this case, are seldom treated with equal theoretical depth. This study introduces an essential focus on destination shopping malls.

5.3.3 Contextual Application

Studies in the Kenyan context (and wider East African region) often focus on affordability, function, and climate responsiveness in architecture. Where aesthetics is addressed, they are typically surface-level or stylistic. This study brings a context-specific and layered analysis to transitional spaces in Nairobi's urban malls, showing how local user behaviour, economic aspirations, and spatial design intersect.

5.3.4 Architectural Programming and Design Strategy

In commercial architecture, most studies emphasize maximizing let table space and tenant satisfaction, often sidelining the spatial quality of lobbies, corridors, and in-between zones. This study argues for an integrated design strategy, where there are aesthetic and social buffers, contributing to the character of the building and offering identity to the in-between.

5.4 Areas for further study

This study identified the following areas for further research:

- a. Impact of location on success of malls: An investigation of how the socio-economic status of a neighbourhood affects the success and sustainability of destination shopping malls.
- b. Design elements and user experience: To explore the relationship between specific design elements and user experience.
- c. Integration of natural and artificial landscaping: To analyse the benefits and challenges of integrating natural and artificial landscaping elements within shopping malls.

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