

The 1956 conference had special historical significance:

1. In it, the phrase *urban design* was used extensively for the first time. Urban design began to be recognized and defined as an important interdisciplinary field focusing on the formation of three-dimensional urban spaces. Urban design was shortly thereafter included in the postgraduate programs of many educational institutions.
2. The conference was a perfect opportunity for José Luis Sert, its host, to transfer to the United States the intellectual and practical foundations of CIAM, which he had chaired and which then was threatened by division and disbandment. The Urban Design conferences subsequently created opportunities for exchanges of ideas between Team 10, representing the generation after CIAM, and American academics. New urban design university programs accepted many students from not only Europe but also Asia, South America, and the Middle East. On returning to their countries, those students began to create centers of study. The development of permanent relationships among such universities through shared conferences has been noteworthy. Moreover, through the use of the city of the host institution as the theme of workshops, such relationships have offered students fresh perspectives on urban design.²
3. In the 1950s, active cross-fertilization was occurring in the United States between academics and architects, city planners, administrators, and developers of cities. Setbacks to the public housing policy actively pursued since the New Deal, the arrival of the Baby Boomers and extensive suburbanization, and the influx of immigrants to inner-city areas were forcing a comprehensive reappraisal of urban problems.

Of the issues highlighted by the conference fifty years ago, two that might be profitably discussed today are the meaning of the central district and of community. I have not said “the revival of central districts” and “the development of communities.” Not only the possibility but also the wisdom of downtown revival and community building are in question today. Problems such as increasing inequality among urban residents and the effect of automobiles on urbanization, already pointed out in the 1956 conference, are behind such doubts.