

several years Harvard would begin one of the first formal degree-granting curricula focused on urban design, and, through that institution's prestige, lend weight to the idea that educating a design professional to become an urban designer was essential for a rapidly urbanizing world.

The proceedings of the 1956 conference reveal two working definitions for urban design, both articulated by Sert, who organized and presided over the conference. Urban design, he stated at one point, "is that part of city planning which deals with the physical form of the city." Here is the idea of urban design as a subset of planning, a specialization that he described as "the most creative phase of city planning, in which imagination and artistic capacities play the important part." At the beginning of the conference he identified a yet more ambitious goal: "to find the common basis for the joint work of the Architect, the Landscape Architect, and the City Planner . . . Urban Design [being] wider than the scope of these three professions." Here is the notion of a new overarching design discipline to be practiced by all those who were, in Sert's phrase, "urban-minded."

Half a century later, these two conceptualizations are still very much in play, and a precise definition for *urban design* has not been broadly accepted. Whether urban design has become a distinct professional specialization or a general outlook that can be embodied in the work of several of the design disciplines dedicated to city making remains unsettled. Nevertheless, few argue about the need for something called urban design.

In a world producing unprecedented kinds, numbers, and sizes of settlements, urban design is an increasingly sought-after (though not always well-recognized) expertise. Expectations are many and myriad for those presuming to know how to design cities, yet there is skepticism about how much such know-how exists. At the same time, it seems presumptuous for any one person to claim overarching knowledge of something as immensely complex as urbanism. It therefore seems prudent to track several territories—spatial and conceptual—in and through which urban designers operate. Indeed, scanning the definitions of the word *territory* in a dictionary eventually gets you past geography to "sphere of action." This I find a particularly useful way of thinking about urban design—as *spheres of urbanistic action* to promote the vitality, livability, and physical character of cities. There are several such spheres of action rather than a singular, overarching way to describe what constitutes the urban design enterprise.