

## Designing the Postmetropolis

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For those in the city-building professions and practically everyone else in the United States, 1956 was a year of extraordinary confidence and optimism. The Fordist boom was reaching its peak, economists and policy makers were proclaiming the American economy's creative conquest of recessionary business cycles, and demand-driven mass suburbanization and spreading home ownership were expanding the middle class and its aspirations to unprecedented levels. Everything seemed possible, making the moment especially ripe for bold thinking about the remaining problems of the modern metropolis, such as the need to tame voracious and often ugly suburban sprawl and spark a renaissance in the poorer areas of the inner city.

It is only against this background that one can understand the enthusiastic and ambitious mood of the meeting of urban minds that took place at Harvard's Graduate School of Design fifty years ago. A remarkably eclectic bunch of architects and landscape architects, city and regional planners, policy makers, and developers gathered to create a pragmatic Americanized version and vision of city building under the evocative rubric of *urban design*. José Luis Sert set the ecumenical tone, specifically defining revitalized urban design as a branch of city planning but one with a deep architectural heritage and perspective. Lewis Mumford's presence also signaled a relevant regional perspective on