

the principle of the “neighborhood unit,” a walkable area centered on schools and other local public facilities, to counteract the emerging “sprawl” of American cities. The neighborhood unit concept had been developed by English and American architects by the 1920s and was being widely advocated in the United States in the 1930s by figures such as Lewis Mumford and Eliel Saarinen. It was normally applied in the planning of new suburban developments, as it often still is. Sert’s importance is that although he accepted this planning framework, he also began to advocate the cultural and political importance of urban pedestrian life at this time, right at the moment when many businesses and the federal government saw the movement of the white middle class to the suburbs as both desirable and inevitable. Out of this combination of the earlier CIAM effort to redesign cities “in the general interest” with a new focus on pedestrian urban “cores,” Sert eventually developed the discipline of urban design. Thus, it, like Team 10 but in a different though related way, also emerged out of CIAM in the mid-1950s.

“Urbanism versus Suburbanism”: The Emergence of Urban Design

The phrase *urban design* was introduced to Harvard and the general public by Sert and Giedion in the early 1950s. Sert seems to have first used it publicly in a 1953 lecture, “Urban Design,” given shortly after he was appointed dean at Harvard. The venue was the Regional Conference of the AIA-Middle Atlantic District in Washington, D.C., where Sert spoke in a series of AIA seminars, “The Architect and Urban Design and Urban Redevelopment.”⁴ Organized by Washington planner Louis Justement, the seminar was to include speakers George Howe, George Holmes Perkins, Henry Churchill, and former Tennessee Valley Authority planner Tracy Augur, by then director of the Urban Targets Division of the Federal Office of Defense Mobilization.⁵ Sert seems to have been a last-minute addition. His talk began with praise of Washington’s “architecturally planned center,” where one could “appreciate the importance of the civic in architecture, of having buildings related to one another and to the open spaces around them, conceived and built in a planned environment.” He then criticized the “last generation of planners” for “turning their backs on what we can call the *city proper*,” because of its “inhuman scale, the traffic congestion, the air pollution, the overcrowding, etc.” The