

small efficient cities much more attuned to the needs of modern living.”⁹ *Architectural Record* reported that Sert had countered this by saying, “You cannot disturb the historical pattern of towns.” Sert argued against large-scale dispersion and instead suggested that urban congestion be reduced by building peripheral shopping centers and by providing downtown perimeter parking, with a focus on central city redevelopment, thus setting out the direction of much downtown “urban renewal” for the next few decades.¹⁰

The debate made clear the differences between Sert’s definition of urban design and the Garden City–inspired decentralized planning advocated by Augur and others that had been extensively used under the New Deal. Sert represented Modernist urbanism, developed by Le Corbusier in France and left-leaning German architects in the 1920s, which advocated the replacement of dense, working-class nineteenth-century urban tenement areas with a new pattern of housing and workplaces, which were often sited at the urban periphery. Unlike Le Corbusier and most other CIAM members, however, Sert saw the advantages of pedestrian urban life in what we would today identify as “urban” settings, instead of the more or less suburban, auto-based environments advocated by both CIAM and most New Deal planners. In designing such pedestrian urban spaces, Sert had since 1944 emphasized the use of the “human scale as a module,” an idea that he shared with Le Corbusier. Both thought that the “natural frame of man” had been destroyed in large contemporary cities, and hence these cities had fallen short in “facilitating human contacts so as to raise the cultural level of their populations.” Although similar in function to traditional town squares, the new civic centers advocated by Sert would be “of a new shape and content and in no way reproduce the old ones.”¹¹ Sert and Paul Lester Wiener, his partner in Town Planning Associates from 1941 to 1958, had begun to design such civic centers in projects for Latin America, beginning with their Brazilian Motor City project in 1945. Although the basic planning concept in this project was still based on typical CIAM-type widely spaced slab housing blocks, similar to Le Corbusier’s unbuilt 1934 plan for Nemours in French North Africa (now Ghazaouet, Algeria),¹² in the Motor City project Sert and Wiener added a civic center element that may have been inspired by the contemporaneous work of Eliel and Eero Saarinen for auto-accessed pedestrian civic centers in the Detroit area. Beginning with CIAM 6 in 1947, Sert began to use the Motor City and his subsequent Latin American town planning