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**Josep Luís Sert: Harvard University
Campus Planning and Buildings,
1956-1968**



Leadership roles in the Harvard University Planning Office and the Cambridge City Planning Commission prompted Josep Lluís Sert to adapt the utopian proclivities he formulated as President of the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM) to American social and cultural realities. The Harvard planning report of 1960 in turn provided a theoretical basis for Sert's architectural designs for the university, particularly his firm's Center for the Study of World Religions (1959–61), Holyoke Center (1958–67), and Peabody Terrace (1962–62). All were developed with landscape architects Sasaki, Walter and Associates and built in the campus periphery¹. Although acclaimed in the architectural media, the latter two examples provoked considerable controversy locally, as this account elaborates.

In a lecture of 1944 Joseph Hudnut, Dean of Harvard's Graduate School of Design (GSD), expressed his disdain for the lack of planning behind the ensemble of buildings on the Harvard campus, which he termed a "formless aggregation of anecdotal styles." In contrast he urged: "My university should be a city in itself. Like the mediaeval University of Paris, it should be a city within a city; and it should be a planned city." Maintaining that universities in general "ought to participate in the evolution of a new social order in our cities," he endorsed a conception of the university as "an inseparable, necessary part of the city's pattern" (Hudnut, 1944, pp. 11, 1, 13). Apart from securing the commission for Walter Gropius to design the Graduate Center and Harkness Commons (1948–50) at the northern edge of campus, however, Hudnut had little influence on planning and buildings realized at Harvard during his period as dean.

The installation of Nathan Pusey as Harvard President in 1953, shortly after Hudnut retired from his post, led to the university's first significant effort to address campus planning since the proposal that Shepley, Coolidge, Bulfinch, and Abbott developed in 1922 to accommodate a series of undergraduate "Houses" that were built in 1929–31 to the conservative designs of Charles Coolidge on contiguous sites along the Charles River. Anticipating the need for further expansion of a campus that was increasingly hemmed in by urban development, Pusey established the University Planning Office in May 1956. Charging it with overseeing a more orderly development of the university's physical plant, he appointed Hudnut's successor Josep Lluís Sert as its chief consultant. Pusey was a member of the Citizens' Advisory Committee that the city of Cambridge established the following month, while Sert was simultaneously chairing the Cambridge City Planning Commission, which not only assured a dialogue concerning university and city concerns, but also gave Sert important insights into both the nuances of the Planning Office's task and potential means to effect significant change. He was familiar with Hudnut's aforementioned lecture "Blueprint for a University," directed to the intended replacement of campus facilities for Wayne University

Frontispiece (Fig. 6) Peabody Terrace, aerial view from Charles River
Photo: Lawrence Lowry.

in midtown Detroit. Echoing Hudnut, Sert understood that “[a]n urban campus is a cultural center within a city and should set an example of good planning and good design for the city. It is, in a way, a micro city, and its urbanity is the expression of a better, more civilized way of life,” as he asserted in November 1957 after the University Planning Office had embarked on its task (Sert, 1957a, p. 74).

Sert’s approach to planning for Cambridge derives from a concept he elaborated at CIAM 8 in Hoddesdon, England (1951): “If we want to give our cities some definite form, we will have to classify and subdivide them by sectors. These Cores will act as catalysing elements, so that around them the life of the community will develop” (Sert, 1952, p. 6). In a subsequent lecture at Wayne University Sert (1956a, p. 12) stressed the importance of piecing together discrete urban elements developed without planning and foresight. He envisioned a future in which:

The old pattern of the city would be radically transformed, and the vast expanses and sprawl of today would be replaced by a constellation of well-planned sectors connected by highway networks and separated by green belts. Each sector would be a complete, self-sufficient unit, carried out according to plan; but the good system of communications between sectors would make each of them part of a large city or metropolitan area, so that the people living in such communities could benefit both of the comforts and charm of the smaller towns and the conveniences and attractions that only the larger cities can offer.

For the report compiled by the Harvard Planning Office, *Harvard University 1960: An Inventory for Planning*, Sert and his team envisioned Harvard/Cambridge as such a sector, relating the interests of the university not only to those of its immediate urban environs and Boston, but also to certain realities of the broader metropolitan region, including its transportation networks and residential distribution. The team evaluated land use patterns, local transport systems, urban renewal areas, zoning, and related issues for the city of Cambridge as well as the university’s planning history, building uses, parking needs, and anticipated growth. In addition to positing various means of accommodating increases in student population and facilities, the inventory singled out the need to address affordable housing for its staff and students and the associated increase in automobile traffic and parking requirements, among other concerns.

Maintaining that “Harvard has developed throughout the 300 years of its existence a plan without planning” Sert (1963, p. 191) subsequently explained: “The University did not want a rigid master plan; it only requested guidance and coordination in its development so that its land and resources would be efficiently put to the best use.” Treating planning as an ongoing, open-ended process, the inventory identified potential sites for the institution’s future growth and development as

well as means to link the various parts of the campus with the existing urban infrastructure, emphasizing the role of pedestrian routes and “malls” (i.e. patios or plazas), consistent with Sert’s planning work in Latin America with Paul Lester Wiener (1941-59). In its report the Harvard team noted correspondences between the university’s historic planning efforts and its subsequent building campaigns and recommended elaborating upon the network of linkages envisioned in the most effective of these earlier proposals. Accordingly they proposed an extensive network of quadrangles, urban squares, and pathways threading throughout the campus and adjoining commercial areas, as Sert (n.d. a) later explained: “The green spaces, or quadrangles, were not only extended but linked by green pedestrian lanes, making a continuous pedestrian path system or network of the whole” (Fig. 1).

The Harvard report reflects an adaptation of urban principles Sert elaborated at CIAM 8 to American cultural values. Gone are the strictly pedestrian inner zone and separation of civic and commercial functions that Sert associated with the urban core, yet he deemed certain CIAM provisions to have relevance for the North American context, particularly the notion of planning as a social problem, invested in “uniting the people and facilitating direct contacts and exchange of ideas that will stimulate free discussion” (Sert, 1952, p. 8). Toward that end he asserted the value of mixed-use development, the importance of pedestrian circulation, and the associated role of landscaping in harmony with the architecture. Other aspects of Sert’s CIAM proclamation would also play a vital role in his architectural commissions for Harvard, namely the need to enrich the visual qualities of modern architecture by varying its massing and using color and texture creatively.

Just as *Harvard University 1960* reflects Sert’s evolving approach to urban design and planning, so its specific recommendations had bearing on his numerous architectural contributions to the campus and the city. During Pusey’s first decade as Harvard’s president, the university developed thirty-three new campus buildings, including Sert, Jackson and Gourley’s Center for the Study of World Religions, Holyoke Center, Peabody Terrace, Everett Street Garage (1968-69; no longer extant), and Science Center (1969-73). The committee suggested potential sites for anticipated projects, and its report included perspectives or model photographs of Sert’s preliminary proposals for the Holyoke Center, Married Students’ Housing, and Biological Sciences Building, a variation on which was subsequently realized on another site as the undergraduate Science Center.

While work on the Harvard inventory was underway, Sert was commissioned to develop the modest and inward focused Center for the Study of World Religions, part of Pusey’s efforts to reinvigorate religious studies at Harvard and expand the world-view of the Divinity School. Owing to the university’s Puritan origins, Harvard had a tradition of religious buildings starting with Holden Chapel (1744), yet

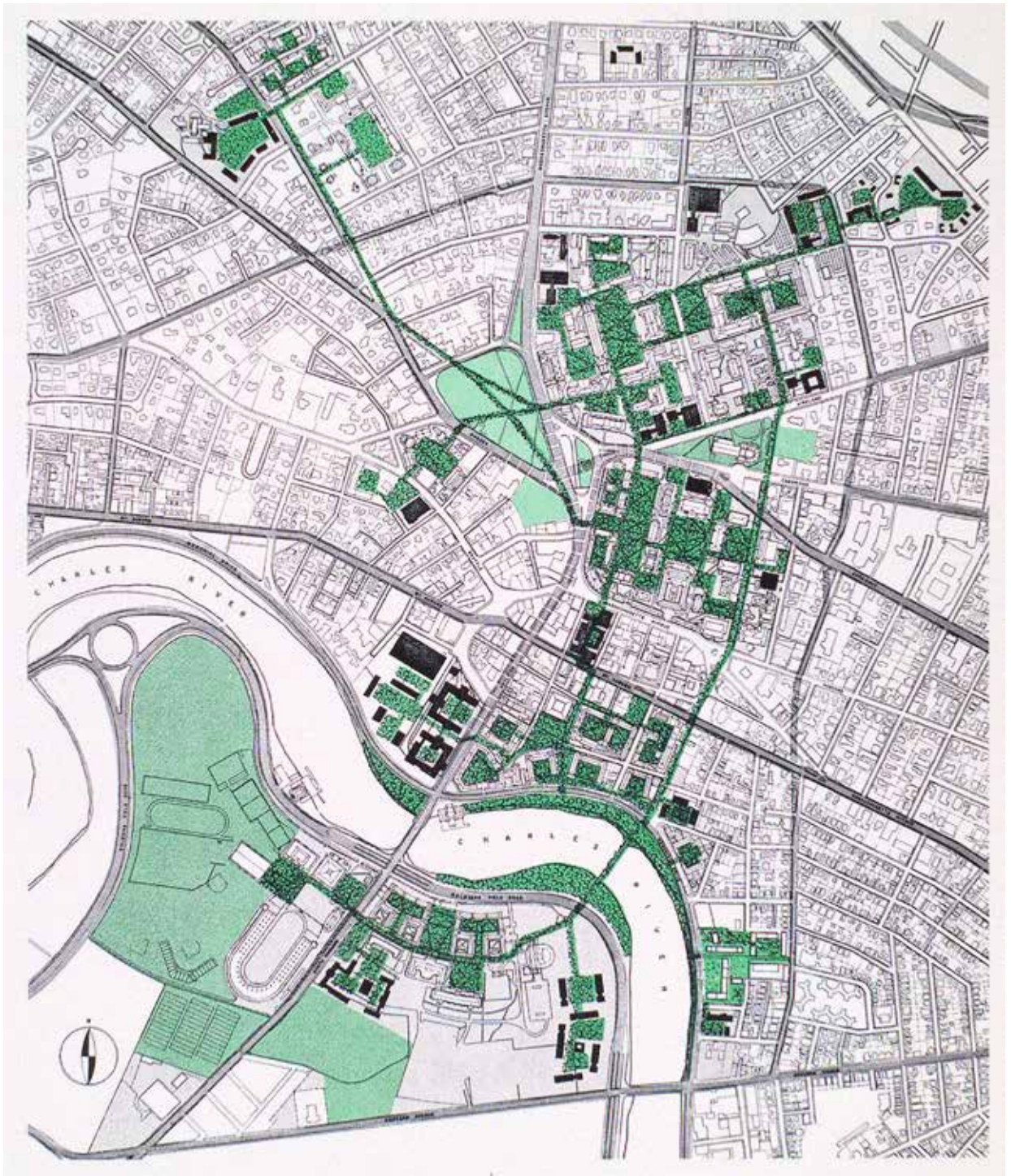


Fig. 1 "Proposed development of yards and open areas," Harvard University, 1960.

the Divinity School faculty had dwindled to three professors. Upon assuming the office of president Pusey launched a major funding initiative, enabling the school to build upon its depleted faculty and facilities and expand its curricular offerings beyond its liberal Christian origins and American orientation by hiring a range of new professors and erecting a new library. The Center for the Study of World Religions played a particular role in this series of undertakings: as a facility in which graduate students of various faiths would live collectively, fostering awareness of diverse religious and cultural traditions. Robert Slater, Professor of World Religions and scholar of Buddhism, devised the building program and enlisted Sert for the commission, while Sert suggested the site on university property situated amid single-family residences. Because the building configuration was constrained by the narrow, mid-block site, Sert developed his “patio” concept as a shallow demi-cloister, bounded on three sides by the building. It includes communal facilities, offices, a director’s residence, and nineteen apartments for students and visiting scholars, ranging in size from studios to two bedrooms, capped by a “meditation room without ornamentation” for group or private use, all arranged around a simple, verdant courtyard (Torroella, 1961, p. 4). In deference to its context, red brick infill panels span the structure’s reinforced concrete frame, while the tall, austere volume of the meditation space receives natural light from a translucent clerestory window and ventilation from narrow operable windows to either side (Fig. 2).

Sert’s patio concept also underlies two of his major Harvard projects, the Holyoke Center and Peabody Terrace. Both were widely acclaimed in American and European architecture journals but aroused considerable controversy among the local populace. As they were sited outside the main campus, their development involved extensive coordination with the Cambridge Planning Commission. Sert conceived of both examples as integral aspects of their particular milieus, where they introduced a new scale to their respective urban environments in a manner that emanated directly from his urban theories.

Sert, Jackson, and Gourley’s design for the Holyoke Center embodies the urban principles articulated in the Harvard inventory, particularly the need to amplify building density while integrating high and low-rise structures in a contextual manner and establish linkages between university functions and the commercial sectors of Harvard Square. The first phase of the four-stage construction process was already underway when the committee issued its report. The program for Holyoke Center included university health services, publications, offices for planning, finance, and administration, and a subterranean parking garage, while commercial uses were to occupy a central arcade running the length of the building and along its side streets. The design consists of a pair of high rise slabs, parallel to and set back from Massachusetts Avenue and Mount Auburn Street respectively, and linked by a third transverse slab rising over the

Fig. 2 Founding director Robert Slater shows visitors the courtyard of the Center for the Study of World Religions, c. 1960.
Photo: Bradford F. Herzog, Harvard Divinity School bMS/131.9



Fig. 3 Holyoke Center from Mt. Auburn Street
Photo: Phokion Karas.



arcade. Three-story elements along the side streets are interrupted by automobile and service access drives. Owing to its fragmented massing, devised to maximize usable space allowed by the building code while minimizing its sense of magnitude, the Holyoke Center is perceived only incrementally from the surrounding streets, reflecting an aspiration Sert (1952, p. 13) expressed at CIAM 8 to attain “a greater freedom of plasticity” for modern architecture (Fig. 3). He also applied this principle to the façade designs. Reacting against the ubiquitous curtain wall, which resulted in endless “facades of anonymity,” he sought “a more varied architectural vocabulary,” one more representative of both the human scale and the vitality of urban life (Sert, 1962, p. 132). He varied the facades according to a rational system in which modular panels of clear and translucent glazing are distributed according to interior needs, while multi-colored horizontal bars reflect multiples of the module. Precast concrete fins separate the panels and protrude to a greater depth at the fifth and uppermost floors, imparting textural variety to the facades’ compositional diversity. Sert alleviated the heavy appearance of the poured-in-place concrete structure by inseting its

first two floors and providing a repetitive band of glazing on the fifth level, where the complex rises above its neighboring buildings. These aesthetic proclivities reflect not only his rejection of the formal qualities associated with orthodox modernism – an attitude Sert voiced at CIAM 8 in calling for “a greater architectural expression, a richer plasticity, a more sculptural quality” – but also a response to the widespread criticism of the extreme abstraction of Gropius’s Graduate Center (Sert, 1952, p. 14). Commenting wryly on his exposed concrete structure dappled with splashes of color adapted from the palettes of his friends Joan Miró and Fernand Léger, Sert (cited in Canty, 1967, p. 69) maintained: “in the jungle it is good to see a parrot next to an elephant.”

Sert (1963, p. 192) described the Holyoke Center as “a bridge between the educational buildings and the student dormitories or houses on the Charles River,” and it serves this function literally as well as programmatically, as a means of passage between the two realms. Reflecting Sert’s civic preoccupations, plazas fronting Massachusetts Avenue and Mt. Auburn Street are linked by the arcade that aligns with Harvard’s Wadsworth Gate (1857) and leads indirectly to the undergraduate “Houses” to the south (Fig. 4). Conceiving of this covered passage as a public zone, opening directly to Harvard Square and its transportation systems, he anticipated not only that “this arcade will be the most animated area of the block” but also that it “could set a pattern for other similar developments around Harvard Square” (Sert, 1962, p. 134; n.d. c, p. 4). Although Sert had the arcade and its ground floor commercial spaces paved in brick to amplify their intended character as extensions of the sidewalk and introduced natural light through a clerestory level facing southeast, the public qualities of the volume were not readily apparent, owing in part to the relatively low proportions of its entrances in relation to the building as a whole. As a result mid-block pedestrian traffic was insufficient to insure the economic viability of its independent commercial venues, and the spaces that lined the



Fig. 4 Holyoke Center arcade
Photo: Phokion Karas.

passage were soon associated primarily with university functions. Thus, although the arcade was originally open to the sidewalk, it essentially functioned as a university precinct, an identity reinforced by its subsequent enclosure.

Owing to Sert's apparent disregard for the severity of New England winters—a criticism frequently leveled at the windswept arcade—critics associate much of Sert's work in Cambridge with his Mediterranean roots; nevertheless it was his social understanding of open space that derived most explicitly from Spanish and Latin American urban precedents. In "The Neighborhood Unit: A Human Measure in City Planning" (c. 1951-53), Sert cited such examples in which "the city-block was the container of a social structure." Pointing to the patio typically found at the center of Latin American urban *cuadras* he maintained: "This patio was used by the community of neighbors and it served as a gathering place for young and old, functioning as a recreation area, play lot, and public park or community club" (Sert, 1951-53, p. 1). This understanding of the social role of the patio undoubtedly influenced Sert's idea for the plaza fronting Massachusetts Avenue – a more effective vehicle than the arcade for achieving his civic objectives (Fig. 5).

Fig. 5 Holyoke Center and Forbes Plaza from Massachusetts Avenue.
Photo: HUV 95 (7-4), Harvard University Archives



Sert conceived of Forbes Plaza as a means to forge a connection across the busy thoroughfare to the Harvard campus. In preliminary notes for a lecture of March 1956, he commented that Harvard Yard and Harvard Square "are as different as heaven and hell" (Sert, 1956b, p. 3). He reiterated this point at the GSD's first urban design conference the following month by comparing the two spaces: "In Harvard Yard the buildings are harmonious, dignified and well-scaled. The relationship to the open spaces they define is correct—Beyond the gate there is only noise, disorder, lack of visual balance, and lack of harmony" (Sert, quoted in *Urban Design*, 1956, p. 97). Yet as William Wurster (1959, p. 167) subsequently observed: "What makes the Harvard Yard

successful, at base, is the interesting, meaningful pattern of buildings, open spaces, and circulation, and the fact that it is an integral part of the surrounding town.” With his design for Forbes Plaza, Sert sought to augment the relationship between the campus and the broader urban milieu and mitigate the differences in character of these two types of space, yet he also understood the distinct social function each was intended to serve. His experience as president of CIAM had given Sert a utopian vision of civic meeting spaces, as he maintained at the eighth CIAM Congress (1951): “organised community meeting places could establish a frame where a new civic life and a healthy civic spirit could develop” (Sert, 1952, p. 8). His Forbes Plaza design gave Harvard Square, previously legible primarily as a busy vehicular intersection, a new spatial definition. He divided the space into two primary zones, linked by a gridded pattern of brick paving: an open space fronting the arcade and a square plot of greenery toward the intersection, planted densely with four maple trees and yew hedges, set in a carpet of grass, and bounded by pedestrian walkways. A second linear planter along Dunster Street containing a pair of maple trees and yews provided a visual buffer to the ensemble, while linear benches adjoining each planted area afforded the option of sitting in a sheltered spot facing the greenery or engaging more directly in the open civic space. Sert (n.d. b, p. 1) envisioned Forbes Plaza as “an oasis in the middle of noisy crossroads” and cited it as an example of the social principle “that universities should educate the people to ways of better living in our communities” – reflecting an elitism that would problematize public reception of his university buildings. In keeping with the differences in his social aspirations for Forbes Plaza and the garden-like space fronting Mt. Auburn Street, Sert used a related planting scheme – a small open lawn, yew hedges, and a single maple tree – to effect a more intimate ambiance, while a bench to one side would encourage passersby to pause in their urban perambulations. In addition to their diverse civic functions these landscape insertions were intended as palliatives for the stresses associated with contemporary urban life.

Although Holyoke Center was widely praised in professional journals, local reception of its aesthetic qualities was not as consistently positive. In addition to the failure to render the public aspects of the building sufficiently legible, the internal circulation system in which separate elevator cores are not connected at several levels led to confusion in traversing from one part of the building to another. Other problems emerged over time, particularly the lack of flexibility in the structural system, which made it difficult to adapt the building to changing spatial norms. Student reactions to Holyoke Center ranged from condemnation on aesthetic grounds to general praise from GSD students, who understood it as a manifestation of Sert’s urban principles. *The Harvard Crimson* launched a campaign against Sert’s building before it was even completed, when a student reporter commented: “Holyoke Center’s massive concrete face is in jarring

contrast with all of the structures around it. Seen from Storrow Drive it dominates the Harvard skyline; from the yard it is a towering eyesore. (Harvard has, of course, constructed dozens of eyesores, but none before were visible from all over Cambridge.)” (Wxsl, 1963). In response to such criticism architecture student Roy F. Knight (1966, p. 4) called the Holyoke Center “one of the most controversial unfinished buildings ever” but praised its “remarkable fitness for helter-skelter Cambridge.”

While Holyoke Center was still under construction, the university commissioned Sert to address the problem of housing, an aspect of Harvard’s growth that Pusey’s wife Anne deemed of particular importance for the institution. Sert, Jackson and Gourley’s design for Peabody Terrace, the married student complex developed for a site on the Charles River, has an intricately interwoven formal organization, reflecting the need to increase density while respecting the residential character of its Riverside neighborhood. The Harvard-owned property, previously devoted to light industry, was part of an area that the Cambridge City Planning Commission had recommended for redevelopment, and the city gave the university permission to close two local streets to consolidate the six-acre site while keeping their routes open as pedestrian walkways. These connect the elementary school directly to the east with the riverfront park to the west and a city-owned playground to the north. To avoid creating a barrier between the neighborhood and the riverfront, a problem Sert associated with Harvard’s undergraduate Houses, he created an open system of courtyards and buildings of various heights to mediate between the 500-unit complex and the scale of the neighboring buildings, dominated by three-story wood frame structures.

As was the case with Holyoke Center, Peabody Terrace reflects the urban principles Sert asserted at CIAM 8 as well as those advocated in the Harvard planning report. The inventory’s stipulation (Cambridge, 1960, p. 4:20) concerning the appropriate response to the riverfront had particular bearing on Sert’s design:

With the growth of the University and the development of the Charles River bank there is no doubt that the open space system should find a design climax around the open space provided by the river. High rise [sic] buildings logically belong there and they will require plenty of open spaces between them. They should not be clustered like the downtown office buildings but widely spaced like the bell towers of the old churches. Between high buildings, lower walk-up structures with sunny courts can maintain the scale of the old Cambridge neighborhood unchanged.



Fig. 6 Peabody Terrace, aerial view from Charles River. Photo: Lawrence Lowry.

In applying the patio concept that he developed in his planning work in South America to the mixed-height complex of Peabody Terrace, Sert intended the spaces between buildings to play social as well as aesthetic roles (Fig. 6).

The program for the 500-unit complex included meeting rooms, shops, a cooperative childcare center, playground, and auditorium, as well as parking for 350 cars, as required by local building codes. Sert distributed the apartments among three 22-story towers and a series of lower slabs of three, five, and seven floors that step down in height and are linked by aerial bridges at the fourth and sixth floors that provide access to their upper level units from elevators in the towers. He subsequently emphasized two significant aspects of the design process in general: the initial phase, “the conceptual promenade,” in which the designer “conceives as a mental vision the volumes and spaces and their links” to determine the “backbone” of the scheme; and the skyline, which “should be lively and take advantage of modern technology and equipment to allow for accessible roofs” (Sert, 1981, pp. 1, 3). As was the case with Holyoke Center, Sert positioned the lowest elements of the complex toward the neighborhood and distributed the high-rise structures away from the streets where they are “widely spaced like the bell towers of the old churches,” making their height most apparent from the riverfront. The broad pedestrian route that descends from the Houghton School westward to the Charles River Park—the “spine” of the scheme—was originally lined with maple trees. It adjoins the partially submerged three-story parking structure and connects three open courtyards of distinct character: a broad lawn for protected children’s play that opens to private outdoor spaces for the ground-floor apartments; a paved central court bounded by communal facilities, including a shop, meeting room, and laundry facilities; and an open lawn facing the river, which originally featured a shallow fountain. A playground for small children [since modified] occupied a peripheral court to the south, where neighbors might have direct access; it operated in counterpoint to the city’s Colonel Burns Playground to the north, where Sert sited a small lot for guest parking (Figs. 7-8).

Fig. 7 Peabody Terrace, central courtyard
Photo: Hutchins Photography.

Fig. 8 Peabody Terrace, children’s playground
Photo: Hutchins Photography.



The precast concrete structures of Peabody Terrace exhibit many of the aesthetic qualities found in Holyoke Center. The modular façades have numerous private balconies with adjustable louvers to control solar penetration and augment compositional variety, while narrow ventilating strips provide bright splashes of color. Limiting the ceiling heights to 7'-6" and using flat slab construction enabled Sert to minimize the height of the tallest structures, and he varied their profiles by including laundry rooms in the tower penthouses, affording the tenants access to expansive views across the paved and planted rooftops of the complex to the river. The internal circulation system is complex; it includes skip-stop elevators – a cost-saving measure that enables units on floors above and below to have through ventilation – and bridges at the fourth and sixth floors that provide access to the lower slabs. The precast concrete construction system is based on a standardized unit three floors high and three bays wide, with a single-loaded corridor in the middle and stairways leading up and down to units on adjoining levels. Although these features facilitated economic savings and shortened the construction schedule, they also led to confusion in wayfinding within the complex and contributed to a modular rigidity that has limited potential changes over time – issues that also plagued Holyoke Center.

The courtyard signifies Sert's focus on the spaces between buildings, an aspect of urban thinking he considered neglected by modern architects: the problem of "buildings that stand alone, unrelated to their environment" (Sert, 1963, p. 188). President Pusey (1966, p. 3) echoed this thought, arguing that "[a] building can no longer be thought of ... as an entity in itself" and calling for architects "to show more concern for the social significance of buildings." Sert accordingly viewed the courtyard as a vehicle not only to achieve a formal interrelationship of building volumes and their intermediary spaces but also to foster a sense of community among the occupants and their neighbors. Like Holyoke Center, Peabody Terrace also reflects his vision of the relationship between city planning and architecture, as Sert (1957b, p. 6) elaborated in a lecture of 1957:

Let us suppose we have determined the basic diagram of a city, operating from the larger scale. We should then proceed to build up from the opposite end, from the types and groups of cells that will finally determine the sector units which can be distributed along the basic lines of the basic diagram, linking the whole.

For Sert the permeable landscape of Peabody Terrace was a means to realize his "patio concept," linking the building complex and its immediate environs, while its pedestrian routes to the neighborhood and the university provided essential connections to the sector as a whole. Identifying the primary contribution of the complex with its qualities as a discrete locale, Sarah Williams Goldhagen (2005, p. 289)

maintains: “Part of Peabody Terrace’s success is that it both serves as a distinctive visual marker in the neighborhood and offers multiple and visually distinct frameworks in which various kinds and categories of ‘meaningful’ social action can occur.”

So long as residence in Peabody Terrace was limited to married students, a degree of social cohesion pertained among its occupants, particularly those with children, but when the university gave all graduate students the right to live in the complex, such cohesion was diminished. As is the case with Holyoke Center, moreover, Peabody Terrace raises issues of so-called public space that is privately owned and controlled and the means by which public access is signified architecturally and understood symbolically. Sert’s motivation in opening the Peabody Terrace landscape to the neighborhood reflects his idealism concerning the social potential of architectural design, an idealism that was ultimately thwarted both by aspects of the design and by subsequent changes the university made to the complex.

One problem arose from both the site tactic and the use the university made of the commercial space included in the original building program. To limit vehicular access to the site, the parking structure rather than the commercial venue faces the neighborhood to the east. Although Sert intended its blank wall facing Putnam Avenue to serve as a billboard for neighborhood events, it does not seem to have been used in this way, and planting has made this function obsolete. Although Houghton School students would traverse the pedestrian routes to use the city-owned playground, the university soon closed the small sandwich shop on the central plaza, giving neighbors little reason to “trespass” on what is clearly university property. Moreover the openness that characterized the initial landscape design has been modified by subsequent alterations in which the outdoor spaces adjoining the ground floor apartments have been fenced in for added security, and the same ubiquitous wrought-iron fencing has replaced the original hedge along Memorial Drive, further depleting the legibility of the external spaces as a public sequence.

Sert (cited in Giedion, 1966, p. 27) considered Peabody Terrace to be his best design, envisioning it as a model for redevelopment along the river. Architects admire not only the architecture of Peabody Terrace but perhaps more importantly, as Lee Cott (2003, p. 21) observes, “the *idea* of Peabody Terrace:” the social idealism of the era; the attempt to forge a sense of community among temporary occupants from diverse cultural backgrounds and the neighborhood residents; and the intricate resolution of interlocking volumes and spaces to achieve a degree of formal integration with its context². Nevertheless Peabody Terrace has aroused considerable negative reaction that extends beyond the aesthetic issue that Sigfried Giedion (1958, p. v) raised in 1958 of “the tragic conflict between the general public and the really creative artists, architects, and planners that has existed for more than a century.” Although its neighbors generally condemn the complex on

aesthetic grounds, it stands more significantly as a symbol of Harvard's expansionist policies. At the time of its construction the university had razed some eighty-four houses in the Riverside neighborhood to construct its undergraduate Houses; indeed, one purpose of the Harvard planning inventory was to enable the institution to develop "an effective land acquisition program" (Cambridge, 1960, n.p.). Moreover, the Cambridge Planning Commission had slated Riverside's zone of run-down residential properties for urban redevelopment. Thus, as Giedion (1966, p. 26) recounted, the complex was "deliberately planned, from the start, to become an integral part of the City of Cambridge as soon as the slums by which they are partly surrounded have been cleared." Nevertheless by the time Peabody Terrace was under construction, a growing awareness of the disastrous social consequences of urban renewal had resulted from the publication of Jane Jacobs influential book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961).

Sert (n.d. c, p. 4) cited the "promenade in Peabody Terrace linking the Houghton School to the Charles River bank [as] another example of University/City joint work." Although the project was carried out through careful coordination with the Cambridge City Planning Commission, Peabody Terrace reflects the social mores of a period in which security was valued over civic-mindedness, a situation exacerbated by social differences between the graduate students and the working class inhabitants of the neighborhood, who comprised an underprivileged and less organized public and came to be seen as a threat by the Harvard students and their families. To isolate children from vehicular traffic, the mega-block layout supplanted the street – a public medium of significant social exchange – with pedestrian walkways through what is clearly university property, contributing to the internalized quality of the grounds (Vale & Murray, 2003, p. 38). Thus, contrary to Sert's aims, the community interpreted Peabody Terrace as a barrier to the Charles River esplanade, which had come to be viewed as a neighborhood amenity.

Despite the involvement of Pusey and Sert in Cambridge city planning efforts, the university planning team failed to distinguish between the interests of the Cambridge City Planning Commission and those of the Riverside community, a problem that planning student Ronald Lee Fleming noted in the GSD student publication *Connections* upon the project's completion. Seeking "to encourage Harvard both to explore more creative planning alternatives and to involve the surrounding community more directly in this searching process," Fleming argued that "the present planning process – by making an inadequate effort to discover community interests and reconcile them with its physical program – does not adequately recognize the quasi-public function of a large university in urban life" (Fleming, 1966, pp. 24-25). The problem was unabated, however, as the university continued to purchase residential properties in the neighborhood and renovate

them for student use, while rising property values displaced many of the original Riverside occupants. The issue revolves around the means by which the university might engage members of the community in conversation and strive to address civic interests while meeting its own needs for physical expansion, for example by including a range of commercial venues at the periphery of such housing complexes and simultaneously developing housing for median income workers employed by Harvard or the city. Such efforts would ultimately benefit both the university and the Cambridge communities, building upon Hudnut's notion of the university as "an inseparable, necessary part of the city's pattern."

- 1 → I am extremely grateful to Inès Zalduendo, Special Collections Archivist and Reference Librarian of the Frances Loeb Library, Graduate School of Design, Harvard University, for assisting in my research for this article.
 2 → As Sert's Science Center (1969-73) is sited within the campus precinct, it falls outside the purview of this study.
 3 → Cott's firm, Bruner/Cott has been responsible for sensitive renovations of both Peabody Terrace and Holyoke Center.

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