In the late 1980s, just out of graduate school and in our newly established consulting firm, my partner Izy Blank and I received a phone call offering the ultimate business opportunity. The developer on the other end of the line was asking for our services to plan and site 650 single-family homes on the outskirts of Tel Aviv. With little business experience but with freshly minted academic enthusiasm and dreams of planning utopias, we were out to change suburbia. No more cookie-cutter homes, rectangular lots, and standardized street patterns. We envisioned a new type of development, one of continuous interplay between space and people, where boulders, ravines, fauna, and flora were interrelated with the human habitat. The reality of development hit us in the face. Minimum lot sizes, setback requirements, right-of-way regulations, roadway-width standards, fire-truck access codes, maximum-density allowances, and so on could have only one outcome: things would be the same as they had always been.

Persistence and youthful disregard for profit making eventually resulted in small victories. Increased densities, as well as shorter, narrower, and more permeable streets flanked by an array of lot sizes, resulted in a more habitable place. Yet the realization that standards and codes are what drive design outcomes lingered. I became interested in discovering why the design process and built environment had come to depend on these criteria and regulations. My journey of discovery started in two other books, Streets and the Shaping of Towns and Cities (coauthored with Michael Southworth), and the anthology Regulating Place (coedited with Terry Szold). The journey continues with this book. It is by no means the end of the voyage, but another point of departure for those interested in the diverse forces affecting the form and shape of places.

Any product of a long journey owes a great deal to others. In writing this book I have been extremely fortunate in being able to work with friends and colleagues, students and peers of keen intelligence, questioning minds, and
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