

Preface

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

profound passion for improving the built environment. Among my colleagues, I am most thankful to Sam Bass Warner Jr. for his long and patient assistance in sorting out my ideas through the logic and directness of his thoughts. In preparing the manuscript, I have found his comments truly welcome, and his encouragement treasured. To Terry Szold I wish to express my appreciation and gratitude for sharing a path of inquiry and reflection while providing me with her indispensable insights. I thank the faculty of the City Design and Development Group at MIT, particularly Dennis Frenchman, Larry Vale, John de Monchaux, Mark Schuster, Anne Spirn, and Julian Beinart, for all of their support, assistance, and countless inspiring conversations. Hiroshi Ishii and the students of the Tangible Media Group of MIT Media Lab, you deserve much recognition for your central role in my work on urban simulation. I am also grateful to Jon Schladweiler, the historian of the Arizona Water & Pollution Control Association, for sharing his vast collection on the history of sewage systems.

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