

# Preface

*Building facts and machines is a collective process (...)  
a single person can create theses, dreams and sensations,  
but not facts.*

(Latour 1998, p. 53)

This book is the result of a theoretical inquiry into the nature of a discipline known as spatial planning. It is about, in particular, an opportunity to reframe ethics and norms for planners, in face of an ever more plural, complex and fragmented urban society. By drawing on different, but still complementary, cultural traditions of spatial planning theory—from critical theories to communicative ones—this work outlines how apparently contrasting conceptions of participation in planning practices can coexist, particularly when coordinated locally through action with coordination of practical tasks.

The interdisciplinary character of a theoretical framework as outlined in the following pages enhances, once more within the academic debate, the need for spatial planning to look at “foreign” disciplinary cultures, in search of concepts, tools, and norms able to interpret social, economic, and political events, as structural components of urban transformation processes. This work, in particular, enhances the possibility of drawing even from the Sociology of technology and Science (StS) to get those epistemological tools needed to enter formalized procedures, norms and methods, what we call “black boxes” (Latour 1998). The final aim is to provide an ever more heuristic perspective on how to guide planners to look for joint-action in plural and multi-logical contexts as the participative ones.

Due to its interdisciplinarity, the content of this work has been discussed in conferences and with individual scholars from the administrative science and public management field, to legal science, and other academic fields that are themselves reflected in the need to reconsider, from a trading zone perspective, non-consensual settings for collective decision-making and actions. This major contribution of postdoctoral work on this manuscript was conducted at the Department of Urban

Planning of the Polytechnic School of Turin. The intense multidisciplinary discussions among so many experts have supported a more mature consideration of the findings of our collaborative work that will be helpful in better framing further lines of research.

However, the core of the research work—of which this book is a selective elaboration—has been carried out mainly during a Ph.D. earning period at the Department of Urban Studies of the Polytechnic School of Milan and at the Department of History of Science at Harvard University. For these reasons, a special acknowledgment goes to Prof. Alessandro Balducci from PoliMi for his guidance and fundamental support and Prof. Peter Galison from Harvard, for his generous contribution to the discussion of this research.

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