Preface

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The present volume revisits the persistent discussion about societal steering by focusing on current developments in regulatory and legal thinking. The well-rehearsed critique of a narrow 'command and control' approach has led to the emergence and proliferation of de-centred ideas of regulation and reflexive law and gave birth to the new concept of governance. Apart from highlighting the innovative impetus that can be linked to those triggers, our discussion reflects on a number of conceptual and practical problems that have arisen from these new ideas in the realm of planning, shaping and developing modern society. The semantics of governance contain a contemporary description of the exercise of power and its legitimation that has gained a strong prominence during recent decades. To a certain extent, it has turned the scales against law and regulation, which are tightly linked to the nineteenth and twentieth century nation-state, claimed to be an outdated model of societal organization. We however argue in this publication that the perspective of law and regulation can be used fruitfully to conceptualize the relation between the different fields and subsystems of modern society and have collected a number of empirical and conceptual contributions that support this crucial point.

Established in early 2013, the Law and Society Unit at Bielefeld University's Faculty of Sociology, Germany, is dedicated to research and teaching in sociology of law (Bora) and in sociology of regulation (Huber). Key aspects of our work concern sociological theories of law and regulation, the regulation of science and technology (especially technology assessment) and risk regulation. This volume marks major research interests represented at our Unit, which have been shaped by our continuous puzzling about the themes set out above. It also represents the fruit of our long-lasting co-operation and debate with colleagues, and the scholarly environment more generally, interested in regulation and governance across Europe.

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