At some point in the 1990s, it emerged that a new phenomenon had entered the realm of the broader German debate in the fields of building, conservation, and urban development. Buildings and spaces that had been destroyed in war and shortly thereafter and that had long been considered to have been lost forever were being reconstructed in striking quantity. These reconstructions amounted to a wave, one that was distinctively different from the postwar construction that had gone before, and certainly different from the destructive waves of modernization of the 1960s and 1970s.

With rapidly increasing frequency after 1989, historic landmark and signature buildings destroyed in World War II have been recreated in some way or another—often as replicas, or at the very least in the form of reconstructed façades or parts thereof. The most famous examples, such as the completion of the Frauenkirche (Church of Our Lady) in Dresden and the plans for the reconstruction of the Berlin City Palace, have become internationally known and discussed. In response to the sheer number of such projects, the German Federal Ministry for Transport, Building and Urban Development decided in 2008 to commission a research project on the topic. Conducted by the Department of Urban Renewal at the University of Kassel, the study asked: What is going on with this trend toward the recreation of cityscapes through reconstruction? Is Germany witnessing a newly legitimate reforging of Heimat—“where home is”?2

About 100 projects of this kind have been completed, or are in various stages of the planning process (Figure 12.1). It is a phenomenon visible across Western Europe but particularly in Germany. This wave is highly complex in terms of context, actors and products, motivations, processes and strategies. Before we explore these findings and long-term perspectives regarding German politics, architecture, and planning, let us first specify our terminology. When we use the term re-construction (spelled with a hyphen to distinguish it from the general phenomenon of urban reconstruction after the air war of World War II), we mean projects that undertake...
to build something new on the site of a destroyed structure with conscious reference to what was there before. This endeavor can be approached in various ways, ranging from individual buildings to entire neighborhoods, from painstaking replication via façadism to contemporary interpretation.

In terms of public perception and media discussion, it all seems to have begun with two projects from the mid-1980s (that is, before German reunification in 1989): the re-construction of the Butchers’ Guild Hall (Knochenhaueramtshaus) of Hildesheim and that of a row of buildings on the eastern side of the historic market square in Frankfurt am Main, the Römerberg (Roman Mountain). Each received very different degrees of appreciation.

The perfectionist replica and rich décor of the half-timbered sixteenth-century Hildesheim Guild Hall that employed historic construction technologies throughout the entire building met with great acclaim—all the more so since the post-war town square design with its mediocre modernist hotel dominating the square had been truly desolate. Even many of the arch-critical architectural critics and