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Article

## “Reconstructionism”: A Strategy to Improve Outdated Attempts of Modernist Post-War Planning?

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### Abstract

Recently, Germany has seen a series of inner-city projects that tend to reconstruct pre-war buildings or ensembles lost in the Second World War after demolishing earlier attempts to redefine the place in which they had been located with the means of modernist architecture. While those modernist buildings are often seen as “eyesores” by ordinary citizens advocating their demolition, the newer reconstructionist projects are criticized heavily by architects and planners not only because they often bring along revisionist political attitudes but also lack a profound examination of the achievements of their predecessors and do without the creative possibilities new designs may offer. The article discusses the trend in its historical context starting in the early 1980s and flourishing after the German reunification by presenting four major types of reconstructionism and related case studies, and debates that accompany them. This allows an interpretation of the current trend and places it in the wider German debates about post-modern planning and urban design. It shows that beyond the most prominent examples of reconstructionism such as the reconstructed Frauenkirche church in Dresden and the Palace in the center of Berlin, there are certain parameters that loosely determine the trend. The article ends with recommendations for the ongoing debates on future reconstructions of bombed cities.

### Keywords

post-modern urban design; reconstructionism; retro style; urban repair

### Issue

This article is part of the issue “Bombed Cities: Legacies of Post-War Planning on the Contemporary Urban and Social Fabric” edited by Seraphim Alvanides (Northumbria University) and Carol Ludwig (GESIS — Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences).

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### 1. Introduction

The reconstruction of cities destroyed by disasters has always played a role in urban planning and architecture. Particularly due to the emergence of aerial bombing and the destruction it caused, the issue of urban reconstruction has gained additional importance since the beginning of the 20th century. With the emergence of modern monument protection, questions of urban identity, and the role of outstanding, and historically significant built structures have become very important for the self-image of cities in this context. Especially in Germany after Second World War (WWII), the topic of reconstruction of war-damaged cities played an enormous role in the discussion about urban planning and

urban development, which partly continues until today. Notwithstanding a large number of proxy wars during the “Cold War” period and the destruction they caused, however, international attention to war destruction and the issue of possible reconstruction measures has continued to grow in the context of the armed conflicts following the end of the “Cold War.” Not least, this has to do with “urbicides” (Coward, 2008), the complex destruction not only of material but also of socio-cultural and economic heritage in cities and thus their identity by means of an exchange of elites or large parts of their population and a weakening of the institutional fabric of urban life. The recent wars and armed conflicts in Lebanon, Yugoslavia, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and most recently Ukraine, and the endangerment of UNESCO World Heritage sites

in cities have also brought the responsibility for a possible reconstruction and its conception and implementation into the focus of professional attention.

The involved challenges are manifold and far from over. Some of them are discussed in the other articles in this thematic issue. Using the example of Germany—a country with considerable wartime destruction in WWII as well as extensive and urbanistically complex reconstruction activities in the decades thereafter—this article aims to show how long the topic of reconstruction can be under discussion in an affected country and which related questions arise even after decades, despite basically restored functionality of destroyed city districts (for details see the end of this introductory section). Several developments come into play here. First, a change in the guiding principles of urban planning, which very critically questions the legacies of post-WWII reconstruction, has led to calls for “urban repair” after a “second destruction” through complementary modernist interventions. Second, as a result of aging, buildings of the reconstruction period are entering a phase in which fundamental questions are being raised about their future viability, particularly related to energy, building services, and infrastructural requirements, in conjunction with changed demands for housing, office work, and retail. Third, in the wake of a postmodern critique of post-war architecture and urban development in many places, the question of cities’ built identity has been increasingly raised.

These tendencies have spurred a multi-layered debate on reconstructionism in conjunction with prominent individual projects, in which broad segments of the population participate. The disputes between and among experts and non-experts are sometimes highly controversial and involve diverse arguments from the fields of historic preservation, architectural theory, urban planning, politics, and cultural, social, and historical studies, among others. Advocates of historically motivated reconstructions of war-damaged buildings clash with opponents, who brand such reconstruction measures as falsifications of history. However, due to the broad interest outside the professional world, debates are characterized by both profoundly reflective and very simple arguments. Often, groups of reconstruction-friendly citizens and rejection-minded architects confront each other.

The term “reconstructionism” was chosen as it is occasionally used in the German debate (spelled *Rekonstruktionismus* in German). It is to denote a tendency of “delayed” reconstructions that are attempting to recreate buildings long after their destruction with an appearance as close as possible to the lost original. This article focuses on the occurrence and characteristics of this tendency, and the pejorative tone occasionally attached to the term when it is used in the German debate cannot be traced in detail. A reconstructionist tendency can be observed in many places after the end of the “actual” reconstruction phase from around the

1970s onward, taking into account the main groups of actors and their positions. Central argumentation figures and the strategies associated with them explain which types of solutions were found and how they are to be assessed in the context of current destruction and reconstruction measures.

The analysis is based on two research projects commissioned by the German Federal Government, which dealt with the social background of the second wave of reconstruction (Altrock, et al., 2010). A comprehensive web-based inventory of implemented and planned reconstruction projects in German cities after 1975 was carried out and these were further monitored after the projects were completed. To build the inventory, the projects scanned thematic websites related to reconstruction projects and urban regeneration, conference reports, and newspaper articles. A web-based analysis of planning documents, press releases, self-representations of proponents and opponents of reconstruction, and expert interviews with planning participants was conducted to gain more profound knowledge of important cases. For this article, the original inventory was reassessed, limiting focus on completed reconstruction projects that can be traced back to destruction in WWII or its aftermath and that cannot be understood as comprehensive repairs due to still largely existing ruinous enclosing walls. In view of the fact that, in the discussion about reconstruction projects that are as true to the original as possible, proponents from social groups and opponents from the fields of architecture and monument preservation usually confront each other and passionately advocate their position, design, and functional solutions that are difficult to predict prevail in the public discourse according to the local framework conditions and the balance of power between the participants. Moreover, the following factors play an important role: the symbolic significance of the building to be restored, considerations about its meaningful use, the existence of detailed documents about its condition before destruction, the availability of funds for an elaborate restoration of details, and the existence of historical craftsmanship techniques. As a result, four types could be identified according to descending degree of closeness to a faithful reconstruction, which is explained in more detail below. They form the core of the analysis of this article.

## **2. Post-War Reconstruction in Germany in the Context of International Debates on Heritage Conservation**

The discourse on delayed reconstruction projects can only be understood against the background of the development of historic preservation in Germany since the beginning of the 20th century. The professional principles developed at that time, which have remained stable to this day, ultimately caused an informal “ban on reconstruction.” In contrast, the handling of wartime destruction during WWII was understood as a special exceptional situation.

### 2.1. *The Rejection of Reconstructions as a Constituent Element of the Discipline of Monument Preservation*

Modern monument preservation, which emerged in the 19th century, was extremely critical of the restoration practices of the time. In an attempt to restore the construction of a building as perfectly as possible, but often without sufficient knowledge about its history, Viollet-le-Duc (1866) went for the restoration of ideal conditions of buildings that required the destruction of their actual state. Building on Ruskin's (1849) call for the truth to materials and an honest display of the construction of buildings, the foundation had been laid for a widespread demand for "honest" architecture emphasizing contemporary constructive and structural conditions. A rejection of reconstructions or restorations is already derived from this.

In Germany, a similar controversy about appropriate ways of preservation evolved when the reconstruction of medieval manor houses since the 1830s was debated, and the issue of how much "creative" inventions should be allowed in this context (Fuhr, 2002). At the center of the debate was the restoration of Heidelberg Castle, lying in ruins after having been destroyed at the end of the 17th century. In 1905, Georg Dehio's famous position *konservieren, nicht restaurieren* (conserve but do not reconstruct; cf. Hellbrügge, 1991), based on Ruskin, finally prevailed, shaping the scientific preservation of monuments to this day (Hanselmann, 2005).

Since then, the concept of "authenticity" has become central, which:

Refers, however, not only to the authentic materials processed in an authentic technique—the historical substance—but equally to the form and shape as well as to the function of the monument, and this regardless of whether it is an 'original' or an 'evolved' state. (Petzet, 1994, p. 1)

This understanding of authenticity is in line with the international development in the preservation community, especially considering the strengthened role of intangible heritage (ICOMOS National Committees of the Americas, 1996; UNESCO et al., 1994), while the German understanding has a particular focus on the physical substance of objects. If an object is historically proven to be original, it is particularly appreciated. In the field of monument preservation, this leads to values attributed to the intentions of the creator as well as the condition in which a monument is found (cf. Seidenspinner, 2007, p. 1).

### 2.2. *Post-WWII Reconstruction: Debate and Practice*

Wartime destruction has affected European regions to very different degrees (Düwel & Gutschow, 2013). Post-WWII reconstruction generally took place in the context of prevailing auto mobilization and urban architectural modernism and was used in many places as an

opportunity to thoroughly modernize outdated urban structures (Diefendorf, 1990). Nevertheless, it has produced a wide variety of national, regional, and local traditions. They are due to the confluence of factors such as local traditions, path dependencies in cultural engagement with historical heritage, the role of cities as part of national identity, the economically constrained availability of necessary resources, and the political influences of local elites (Blom et al., 2016; Bullock, 2002; Clout, 1999; Couperus, 2015; Dale, 2015; Demshuk, 2021; Diefendorf, 1993; Goldman, 2005; Greenhalgh, 2018; Kopp et al., 1982; McCarthy, 1998; Nasr, 1997; Pendlebury et al., 2015; Silverman, 2013; Tiratsoo, 1990). For example, a more modernist rebuilding practice emerged in the United Kingdom, while in Italy, small-scale contextual additions were made to the existing stock that could unobtrusively integrate modern design elements into traditional urban layouts. In Poland, on the other hand, despite limited economic resources, strongly historicizing reconstructions were carried out over decades, yet mainly related to the detailed restoration of façades, while the inner areas of the blocks were modernized.

### 2.3. *Post-War Reconstruction in Germany: Reconstruction as Exception or Common Practice?*

This diversity can also be rudimentarily traced in the variety of heavily destroyed German cities and their reconstruction after WWII (see Durth & Sigel, 2016, for an overview for further reading). Two essentially different approaches competed with each other. One was the planning of "new cities on old ground" (Lüken-Isberner, 1992, p. 251), in which only a few significant historic buildings were reconstructed. The other was the extensive orientation to the historical model, preserving the urban fabric, but with adaptations to technical developments such as street widening, as well as the use of contemporary building types and the use of new materials. Different assessments are available regarding the dominance of the two approaches or intermediate forms, although stronger deviations from the historic street layout were rare because of the preserved underground infrastructure (Huse, 1984). Even where historicizing reconstruction measures took place, such as in Münster or Nuremberg, façades were significantly simplified. Town halls and parish churches were the most likely to be rebuilt. All in all, more building fabric was destroyed in the first three post-war decades than as a result of the effects of war. This applied not least to stately representative buildings and, in eastern Germany, also to churches. Even the restoration of severely damaged individual buildings with symbolic value, such as the Goethe House or the Paulskirche in Frankfurt/Main, triggered a considerable debate about if those buildings should be reconstructed at all (Falser, 2008). Overall, a wide range of reconstruction approaches were employed, from exact replicas to simplifications with an emphasis on additions and preservation of ruins as memorials

to decidedly counter solutions (Hagen, 2005). Thus, the destruction in WWII put the rejection of reconstruction to a severe test. When they took place, it was necessary to decide which point in the history of the building should be relevant, the lack of documents often being a challenge (Hanselmann, 2005).

#### 2.4. Reconstruction as a Permanent State?

After reconstruction had already been largely completed by the end of the 1950s for infrastructure as well as residential quarters and city centers, a few more complex representative buildings were only tackled in the 1960s, when a stronger emphasis was put on the rehabilitation of city centers (Hanselmann, 2005; von Beyme et al., 1992). Some were only completed in the 1980s. Nevertheless, they were generally accepted by preservation institutions as comprehensive repair of ruined but still existing substance.

At the same time, preservationists again made greater efforts to end the post-war “state of emergency” in which there was a need to rebuild cities quickly and a variety of approaches prevailed, some of them contradicting Dehio’s (1901) call for a “ban on reconstruction.” The international agreement on the rules of the Venice Charter of 1964 played a significant role, adopting a self-commitment of preservation for the future handling of monuments, especially in Europe, in the sense of principles derived from Dehio. Statements on tasks and requirements for restoration (Article 9, Article 11, Article 12) represent a central basis for the architectural treatment of surviving building fabric. The focus is on preserving the values of the monument and respecting the existing features of different eras. Reconstructions or “creative preservation” of older traditions were mostly excluded. When the new wave of reconstructions finally gained momentum, it was echoed by the majority of architects and preservationists in fierce resistance in conferences, book publications, and press articles building on those traditions (von Buttlar et al., 2010).

### 3. “Delayed Reconstructions”: Complex Strategies for Identity Formation and City Repair in German Cities

Post-war reconstruction was completed almost everywhere in West Germany in the 1960s. In East Germany, outstanding historical areas were still characterized by ruins until the 1980s, for example in (East) Berlin (*Unter den Linden*, *Gendarmenmarkt*) or Dresden (Palace ruins, *Neumarkt*). Starting in the 1960s with the student movement and the oil crisis shortly thereafter, a lasting change in urban development principles took place in West Germany, criticizing modernist architecture and urbanism. It provided a breeding ground for citizens’ initiatives that emerged in the 1970s to address urban planning issues (Falser, 2008, p. 307) and, in individual cases, directly advocated the reconstruction of war-damaged buildings (Wagner-Kyora, 2004). A political commitment

to “saving the cities” in the European Year of Monument Protection as well as urban development funding brought a significant boost to the revaluation of historic inner cities from the 1970s onward, finally reflected in a focus on existing buildings. Historic city centers were now increasingly seen as shaping the identity of cities and used for city marketing and tourism. For this purpose, a supposedly “intact” cityscape played an important role. This development has been discussed extensively under the term “festivalization” in the context of strategies to cope with the economic transformations of German cities in times of de-industrialization and neoliberalism (Häußermann & Siebel, 1993). Walter Wallmann, the conservative mayor of Frankfurt/Main in the 1980s, initiating a facelift for the inner-city waterfront with the help of a series of new museums, is seen as one of the forerunners of this trend, crucially being also responsible for one of the paradigmatic postmodern reconstruction projects, the so-called Römerberg Ostzeile (Ronneberger & Keil, 1993). In East Germany, the beginnings of such a change could also be observed, despite mass housing playing a more prominent role until 1990.

Against this background, I will limit myself in the following to the time since 1975 as a period in which reconstruction projects no longer served the immediate restoration of destroyed urban spaces but rather were conceived with a due temporal distance. It is striking that the detailed reconstruction of lost buildings and urban structures was now increasingly demanded in places whose spatial configuration had already been redefined, and in some cases was even implemented after controversial social debates.

I, therefore, refer to projects as “delayed reconstructive rebuilding” that are characterized by the following features:

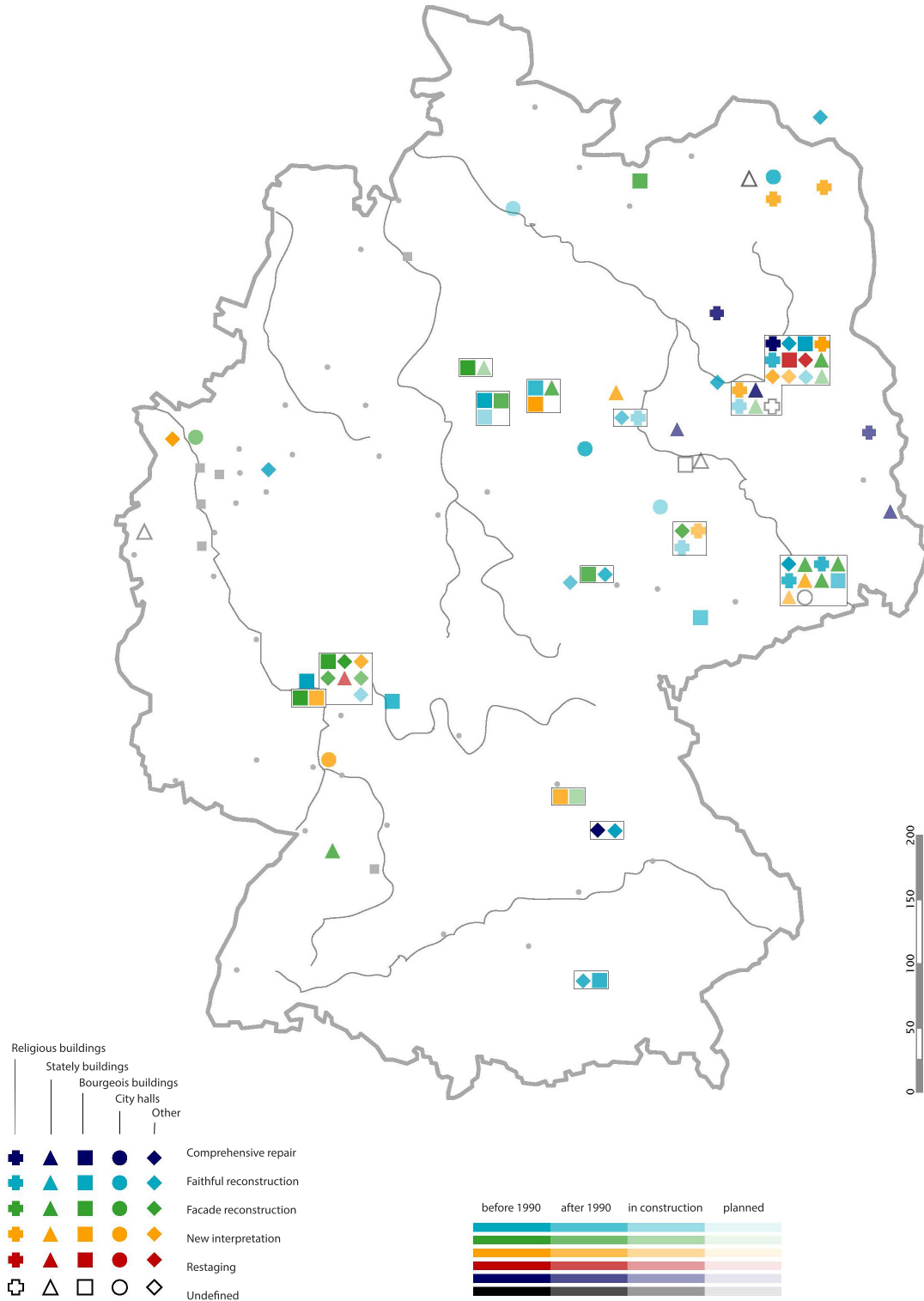
- They refer to a predecessor building that was destroyed in the war and design a new building and use it on the same site.
- Conceptually, this new building and use explicitly refer to the war-destroyed predecessor building.
- However, the site had already been reused once in the first decades after the war. This resulted in either re-development or a deliberate choice for another use. Such other uses included open spaces, transportation areas, or memorials referring to the destruction.
- Through the new building, the legacies of that “first reconstruction” are called into question or destroyed anew.

Looking at the reconstruction projects realized or planned in Germany since 1975 (see Figure 1), a spatial focus in eastern Germany (Berlin, Dresden) is contrasted by two clusters around Hanover and Frankfurt am Main. In terms of time, the focus is on the period after 1990, with the majority of the projects consisting of stately buildings, followed by bourgeois buildings,

strongly represented in the west, and churches in the east, as well as public cultural buildings.

Delayed reconstructive rebuilding often takes place in historic city centers or after partial destruction. Since the centers represent essential places of urban identity, reconstruction projects usually enjoy a very high level of

attention. This is all the more true when the reconstruction erases an earlier post-war building layer. Advocates for its preservation can usually be found. Debates on delayed reconstruction are complex, multi-layered, and highly controversial. Proponents depend on political and societal allies over an extended period of time, shaping



**Figure 1.** Spatial and temporal distribution of reconstruction projects in Germany, 1975–2009. Source: Map by G. Bertram, published in Altrock et al. (2010, p. 27), and translated by U. Altrock.



the controversial discourse to ultimately convince key decision-makers that projects are feasible and favorable. Advocates use different strategies depending on the case in question, and the degrees of reference to historical predecessors differ. In the following, the basic types occurring in this context are discussed (see also Table 1), including short case studies of critical cases that are particularly significant and played a relevant role in the

German debate. In addition to restorations, in which a considerable part of the original substance is still present and which, as comprehensive repairs, do not fall within the scope of the above definition, the following basic types are found: (a) reconstructions intended to be true to the original, (b) façade reconstructions, (c) reinterpretations, and (d) restagings—although the transitions between the types are sometimes fluid.

**Table 1.** Overview of completed reconstructions in the recent “wave.”

Location	Object	Completed	Type	Important non-state actors	Local initiative since
Aschaffenburg	Löwenapotheke	1995	Faithful reconstruction	Citizens’ initiative	
Berlin	Hotel Adlon	1997	Restaging	Investor	1989
Berlin	Kommandantur	2003	Façade reconstruction	Private company	
Berlin	Palace	2013	Façade reconstruction	Citizens’ initiative	1992
Berlin	Haus Liebermann	1998	Façade reconstruction	Private company	1993
Berlin	Haus Sommer	1998	Façade reconstruction	Private company	1993
Berlin	New Museum	2009	Façade reconstruction		1999
Braunschweig	Alte Waage	1994	Faithful reconstruction		
Braunschweig	Residenzschloss	2007	Façade reconstruction	Investor	
Demmin	City hall	1998	Faithful reconstruction		1990
Dessau	Meisterhäuser	2014	New interpretation		1970
Dortmund	Adlerturm	1992	Faithful reconstruction	Citizens’ initiative	1983
Dresden	Coselpalais	2006	Façade reconstruction	Citizens’ initiative	
Dresden	Frauenkirche church	2005	Faithful reconstruction	Citizens’ initiative	1989
Dresden	Kurländer Palais	2008	Façade reconstruction	Investor	2000
Dresden	Neumarkt		Restaging	Citizens’ initiative	
Dresden	Quartier VIII	2012	Façade reconstruction	Investor	
Erfurt	Collegium Maius	2010	Faithful reconstruction		1987
Frankfurt	Old library	2005	Façade reconstruction	Citizens’ initiative	2000
Frankfurt	New old town		Restaging	Citizens’ initiative	
Frankfurt	Römerberg east row	1984	Restaging		1978
Frankfurt	Thurn- und Taxis-Palais	2009	Restaging	Investor	
Halberstadt	Ratslaube	2004	Faithful reconstruction	Citizens’ initiative	1993
Hannover	Herrenhausen palace	2012	Façade reconstruction	Philanthropist	
Hannover	Leibnizhaus	1983	Façade reconstruction		
Hildesheim	Kaiserhaus	1997	Façade reconstruction		
Hildesheim	Knochenhaueramtshaus	1989	Faithful reconstruction	Citizens’ initiative	1970
Hildesheim	Umgestülpter Zuckerhut	2010	Faithful reconstruction	Citizens’ initiative	2002
Hildesheim	Wedekindhaus	1986	Façade reconstruction		—
Leipzig	University church	2009	New interpretation	Citizens’ initiative	1968
Mainz	Market, eastern section	2003	Façade reconstruction		
Mainz	Market, northern section	1991	Façade reconstruction		
Mannheim	Stadthaus	1991	New interpretation		1945
München	Thomas-Mann-Villa	2006	Faithful reconstruction	Citizens’ initiative	2001
Nürnberg	Pellerhof	2018	Façade reconstruction	Citizens’ initiative	2005
Pforzheim	Einnehmerei	2003	Façade reconstruction	Philanthropist	
Potsdam	Palais Barberini	2016	Façade reconstruction	Philanthropist	—
Potsdam	Old market		Restaging		
Potsdam	Palace	2010	Façade reconstruction	Philanthropist	
Weimar	Market, northern part	1991	Façade reconstruction		
Wesel	Old city hall	2010	Façade reconstruction	Citizens’ initiative	1986
Wiesbaden	Biebrich palace, east wing	1982	Faithful reconstruction		
Xanten	Middle gate	1978	Façade reconstruction		

#### 4. Faithful Reconstruction

Reconstructions as close to the original as possible are discussed in relation to the loss of key buildings. This applies, for example, to castles, town halls, or historic guild houses. In the first wave of reconstruction, their outstanding sites were often rebuilt differently. The focus was on modernist designs de-densifying the urban space. Those came under criticism later, being vehemently attacked as inappropriate to the site in the context of the critique of modernist architecture and urban design. Influential non-specialists in emerging local debates about townscape and urban repair spoke up against their plain architectural language and open space design. Critics of the earlier reconstructions deliberately made use of an affinity among non-specialists for “beautiful” historic buildings and selectively employed seductive images. Given the common counter-arguments against reconstruction, rejecting true-to-the-original reconstructions as falsifying history, backward-looking, negating contemporary creativity, ignoring the values of the newly erected buildings on site, hardly feasible and excessively expensive in view of long-lost craft techniques and not even possible with any precision, proponents of the new projects, most often citizens’ initiatives or influential conservative individuals, put forward a number of recurring arguments. They argued that only a few buildings of particular relevance to the city identity would be involved, and that an evaluation of historical photographs and building files would allow for faithful reconstruction. They also launched fundraising campaigns using their local networks and founded associations working persistently and collected considerable amounts of donations over several years made available for reconstruction. In conjunction with sustained lobbying, they put pressure on local politicians and, through events, journalistic activity, and graphic simulations of the potential impact of reconstructions in the urban space, communicated opportunities for improving the cityscape. Their political alliances involved influential local figures, often very conservative, and gradually won local decision-makers over to public participation and cost-sharing.

##### 4.1. Case Study 1: Knochenhaueramtshaus Hildesheim

Built in 1529 and rebuilt several times later, the half-timbered house on the market square burned down completely in 1945, along with large parts of the city center, after an air raid. The early controversial discussion about a possible reconstruction finally took an unusual turn when proponents were given the property by the city but failed to raise the necessary funds (Al-Alawi, 2022; Paul, 1979). In the course of the enlargement of the marketplace, a seven-story modern hotel was built in 1962 (Figure 2a), which went bankrupt in the 1980s. In view of the reconstruction and rebuilding of half-timbered houses by the local savings bank in the early 1980s, fur-

ther discussed in public from 1970 onwards by a television editor, plans were finally made to restore the entire façades of the market square to their historical condition. However, fundraising campaigns still proved unsuccessful. It was not until 1985, when the state government of Lower Saxony provided funds, that the significant Knochenhaueramtshaus and its neighbor could be rebuilt in traditional style by 1989, including elaborate carvings on the exposed façades (Figure 2b). Today it houses the city museum. After extensive debate among preservationists (Hubel, 1993; Rüscher, 2018), the two buildings were finally registered as monuments in 2018.

#### 5. Façade Reconstructions

If the goal is to produce an original appearance with similar motivations as above, a façade reconstruction can also be the consequence, primarily when there has been no broader movement toward reconstruction, but an opportunity for it to take place. In certain cases, façade reconstructions are used by investors for a commercially used new building to eliminate possible resistance to their projects in an image-enhancing way as a contribution to the improvement of the cityscape. These were threatened, for example, by the creation of new retail space in competition with an existing center. Façade reconstructions integrate functionally optimized building complexes into a historic environment without risking incompatibility for the cityscape, and avoid the difficult search for sufficiently adapted contemporary architectural solutions accepted locally. They seem to allow for innovative architecture behind the reconstructed façade and, with this linking of “old” and “new,” avoid the reproach of preventing a contemporary design solution with the historicizing approach.

##### 5.1. Case Study 2: Braunschweig Palace

Built in the early 18th century on the edge of the historic old town and rebuilt after a fire, the residential palace of the dukes of Brunswick was severely damaged in WWII. Despite voices in favor of reconstruction, the ruin was finally demolished with a narrow majority in the city council against public protests in 1960 due to a lack of funds. In its place, the palace park was extended. The surrounding area, separated from the old town core by the “Bohlweg” thoroughfare, also housed a department store. Stronger transformations of the inner city reduced commercial demand and pedestrian flow in this area in the 1990s, and the park became a meeting place for socially disadvantaged groups. In the early 2000s, ECE, the biggest German operator of shopping centers, considered building an inner-city shopping center there. The city decided to commission an expert examination of the suitability of the site. The controversial result indicated that a deconstruction of the Bohlweg could make the downtown area more interconnected and thus more attractive for pedestrians. Moreover, the reorganization





(a)



(b)

**Figure 2.** Hotel, 1962 (a) and reconstructed Knochenhaueramtshaus (b). Sources: (a) Förderverein Berliner Schloss e.V. (n.d.) and (b) Wikimedia Commons (2005).

of moving traffic allowed for a better urban integration of the parking garages concentrated on site. ECE offered to integrate parts of the palace salvaged during demolition into an elaborate copy of the historic palace façade (Figure 3). Despite opposition from retailers fearing new competition, a citizens’ initiative campaigning for the preservation of the palace park, and national criticism of the associated “Disneyfication,” that is, the physical simulation of a glorious past by rebuilding a spectacular

building despite the loss of its original content, the city sold the property after a narrow council decision, and the shopping center finally opened in 2007, housing a palace museum in one wing since 2011 (Altrock et al., 2010).

### 6. Reinterpretations

When local activists advocate reconstruction strongly, this does not always shake the convictions of local



**Figure 3.** Reconstructed Braunschweig Palace. Source: Kudalla (2007).



coalitions that reject historicizing reconstruction in line with architects' and preservationists' rather skeptical views. Reinterpretations only roughly based on the structural design of the original building significant for the urban identity can be the result of the related controversial debates on a significant lost building. This form of pacification of local conflicts over reconstruction projects dampens initiatives for historicizing solutions that fail to provide the necessary resources and alliances. It is a symbolic reconstruction in the broader sense.

### 6.1. Case Study 3: Leipzig University Church

Leipzig's Paulinerkirche, which has existed since the 13th century, was rebuilt several times and integrated into the local university as a multi-purpose space (Figure 4a). It was demolished in 1968 as part of the reorganization of the war-damaged Augustusplatz for the university, which had been planned since the early 1960s. After reunification, plans for a redesign of the campus ruled out a reconstruction. The so-called Paulinerverein founded in 1992 based on similar activities around the Frauenkirche in Dresden, campaigned for a reconstruction supported by New York-based Nobel Prize winner Günter Blobel in the face of unconvincing com-

petition designs from 2002, but without committing itself to a strictly original reconstruction and without a clearly approving echo in the secularly oriented city. The association met with the university interested in functionally usable spaces, and the city, led by politicians skeptical about reconstruction. In 2003, the new Saxon state government, owner of the university, was more responsive to the reconstruction efforts and took a position that was in conflict with the one taken by the more reconstruction-critical city. In subsequent arbitration proceedings, accompanied by media campaigns, a compromise was reached with the help of a revision of the competition designs available up to that point: The now preferred design by the Dutch van Egeraat combined contemporary material with the silhouette and Gothic style elements of the lost church, executed in 2008–2017 (Figure 4b), taking into consideration the space demands of the university (Altrock et al., 2010; Mayer, 2016; Topfstedt, 2000).

### 7. Restaging

In restagings, the effect or symbolic meaning dominates reconstruction considerations. No exactness is consciously pursued, but in contrast to reinterpretations,



(a)



(b)

**Figure 4.** Paulinerkirche (a) and reinterpreted university church (b). Sources: (a) Wikimedia Commons (n.d.) and Wikimedia Commons (2012).

the appearance of originality is maintained. The situation is similar to the delayed reconstructive rebuilding of larger ensembles or entire streets. If a faithful reconstruction of an individual building is already rejected, the restoration of larger structural contexts raises additional critical questions in professional discourses around the projects. For reasons of practicability, it can often only be realized at great expense, for example, if public spaces and plot structure have been significantly altered in the first reconstruction phase due to changed use requirements and as a result of reallocation procedures. Only in selected individual cases does the opportunity for “urban repair” arise later on when larger post-war buildings are no longer considered suitable for refurbishment, or when a re-densification of less densely built-up structures from the post-war period is sought. Redefining the urban context, those projects are discussed controversially and with great attention. At times, architects seeking a contemporary reinterpretation and laypersons advocating reconstruction are at odds. For these contexts, the so-called *Leitbautenstrategie* (I will refer to it as “guiding buildings strategy” in the following) had emerged in Dresden after the 1970s, in which a few very distinctive or urbanistically striking individual buildings were to be reconstructed as faithfully as possible and were to determine the structure of the neighborhood (Marek, 2009). The remaining buildings were then integrated into the urban context in more or less contemporary architecture. In this way, a lack of detailed documentation of the less significant lost buildings could be dealt with, avoiding speculative reconstructions. In this context, it is controversial how many of the buildings

in an ensemble should actually be faithfully restored. Lengthy public discussions and detailed planning procedures lead to a struggle among stakeholders to determine the appropriate number, and proponents of historicizing reconstructions use this to push through as many as possible.

#### 7.1. Case Study 4: New Old Town Frankfurt/Main

Restaging has been implemented most spectacularly near Frauenkirche ruins at Neumarkt in Dresden, at the Old Market in Potsdam, and in the old town of Frankfurt/Main. There, the opportunity arose to restage an important part of the identity-forming old town to overcome low density and unattractiveness of post-war reconstruction. A guiding buildings strategy played a special role in the implementation, and the orientation to the historical city layout to be restored required a fundamental redefinition of the use and ownership structure in order to make the expenditures for the reconstructions feasible. In Frankfurt, the controversies of the German debate on reconstruction culminated as perhaps in no other case. The war-damaged old town was already the subject of intensive consideration for reconstruction in the early post-war period (Rose, 2016). In addition, a heterogeneous conglomerate of buildings in a wide variety of styles emerged, with residential rows and administrative buildings, a modernist Technical City Hall (Figure 5a), the Römerberg East Row with reconstructed half-timbered houses, and a new postmodern art hall. The need to renovate the Technical City Hall spurred the idea to demolish it and to rebuild the northern part



**Figure 5.** Technical City Hall (a) and part of the reconstructed old town (b). Sources: (a) König (2008) and Simsalabimbam (2018).



of the Old Town more densely in continuation of the Römerberg reconstruction. The winning design in the 2005 competition, unconvincing in terms of design and not respecting the original layout of the city, met with resistance from the urban community. The Old Town Friends association and parts of the city council then proposed a referendum. As a result, a wide range of planning considerations were put forward by professionals and the citizenry. In the disputes, the position of reconstructing outstanding historic individual buildings true to the original won great support, right up to the Mayor, while designs offered a wide range of styles for about 35 individual buildings to be reconstructed. In further planning workshops, the orientation to the historic city layout prevailed, and the reconstruction of four “lead buildings” was decided. By the end of the 2000s, their number gradually increased when private investors were willing to fund reconstruction. In 2010, the city passed a design statute and secured the reconstruction of eight buildings, and after several competitions for the individual sites, another seven reconstructions were awarded to private investors. The appearance of historic squares gained considerably in importance, and in retrospect, the idea of “guiding buildings” appears only as a temporary legitimization strategy to overcome opposition (Figure 5b). Although the result achieved in the late 2010s ultimately achieved broad approval, critics point to the considerable cost of the project and the exclusivity of the resulting residential buildings (Guratzsch, 2015; Hansen, 2008; Kurth, 2022; Oswalt, 2018).

## 8. Explaining the Origin and Success of Reconstructionist Initiatives

In the context of the wave of reconstruction that has been observed in Germany since 1990, positions that tend to contradict the architectural and monument preservation debate are being advocated in public discourse in many places. In this context, non-experts not infrequently advocate the restoration of lost buildings and, in particular, their historical appearance. This is rejected by preservationists as falsifying history, and architects also insist that design solutions should be developed on the basis of contemporary considerations rather than historical ones. Thus, the new wave of reconstruction in Germany sometime gives the impression that a retro trend driven by amateurs is undermining expert principles on a broad front. Such an assessment fails to recognize, though, how small the share of reconstructions is in German inner cities. These are limited to a few projects outstanding for the townscape. In view of the elaborate processes, some of which take decades, and the diversity of the results, the implementation of reconstructions is extremely demanding. Influential factors are discussed in the following.

The desire for reconstruction has a long history in experiences of loss, perceived painfully when reconstruction has significantly changed the historical identity of a

city, even more so when key buildings were demolished after the war against local resistance (Altrock et al., 2010; Bertram & Fischer, 2014). In the initial reconstruction phase, reconstruction plans met limited resources and planning principles of car-oriented modernism. The fact that proponents of reconstruction can sometimes dominate the discourse and convince decision-makers in unfavorable environments despite the reconstruction-critical interpretation of the Venice Charter speaking against them can be explained to some extent by the multiple streams approach (Kingdon, 1984). Thus, there have been different visions for the recovery of historical sites over a long period of time, but it takes a window of opportunity for the idea advocated by proponents to take hold. Occasions such as the commercial, cultural, or technical questioning of buildings from the initial reconstruction phase trigger a perception of the problem in urban politics in the first place. In addition, conservative key figures sometimes act from the outside in favor of reconstruction, drawing on excellent networks. In view of the historical environment of identity-forming buildings, reconstructions do not promise easy economic profit. Nevertheless, the symbolic significance promises a strong image gain for philanthropists or private companies. In other cases, broadly based fundraising campaigns elaborately demonstrate the overriding importance of a building to city politicians over a longer period of time. In the case of large buildings such as castles, the success of such an approach depends on the development of a sensible functional concept. Here, political (parliament, public administration) or cultural (museum or similar) initiatives play an essential role, but are limited to a few outstanding buildings. A key to the occurrence of a delayed reconstruction project is thus the coincidence of a number of factors. It can be observed particularly if a certain occasion for “repairing” an area rebuilt in the first reconstruction wave, but strongly criticized towards the end of the 20th century, is met with local initiatives able to mobilize a public debate on the significance of a lost building even against a widespread “professional reconstruction taboo,” thereby convincing skeptical politicians that it is worth the effort and that the expected costs can be borne thanks, for instance, to donations or endowments.

The diversity of the resulting forms of reconstruction reflects the local constellations of actors and the tension between the call for contemporaneity and the affiliation with local identity. Both a contemporary and harmonious expression of an old town is difficult to imagine for non-experts given their experience with modern architecture. In this dilemma, they refer to the “quality” of reconstructions they can measure in terms of the degree of fidelity to the original. This makes reconstructions tempting but also improbable due to the high costs and the necessary documentation of the original state. It is striking that the political convictions of decision-makers are not fixed from the outset, but are shaped by the “framing” of discourse and the climate for a

decision; “undecided” debates can be strategically occupied. Proponents frame discourses in open proceedings and, under favorable circumstances, organize majorities all the way into politics. They benefit from the negative stigmatization of (modern) buildings of the first reconstruction phase and the perceived arbitrariness of ideas presented by architects, which do not constitute convincing “projects” for the reoccupation of historic spaces.

A closer look at the realized delayed reconstructions reveals that façade reconstructions dominate and reinterpretations are rare. The former prevail because faithful reconstructions entail a high level of effort in the revival of historic craft techniques, and new utilization concepts and technical regulations permit a close orientation to the original only to a certain extent. In contrast, reinterpretations are more often found in connection with the repair and addition of heavily destroyed buildings or ruins, where, in the spirit of the Venice Charter, newly added components are deliberately set off from the surviving building parts or ruins, representing the results of intense debates about an “appropriate” design.

Façade reconstructions and restagings are realized by investors, philanthropists, or citizens’ initiatives, sometimes used in a romanticizing, touristic manner, or to cultivate one’s own “image,” criticized as history-falsifying, *kitsch* in the experience society (Falser, 2008; Schulze, 1992; von Buttlar et al., 2010). This also includes attempts by conservative-minded sections of society to hark back to a supposedly heroic past and thus materially anchor a patriotic, idealized image of history, directed against the German tradition of critical *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coming to terms with the past) and meeting massive criticism (Oswalt, 2018).

## 9. Conclusions

The reconstruction wave makes national headlines and gives the impression of a revisionist-minded redefinition of urban policy. This is the case only to a limited extent—local “friends of the old town” have been acting for decades. The emergence of the reconstruction wave requires the coincidence of a wide variety of conditions. Causes can be found in alienation and the search for identification and home in a globalized society marked by uncertainties, a cultural devaluation of the products of modernity, but also the postmodern play with outdated forms, and a retro trend in the experience society. Where spatial concepts of late architectural-urban modernism are trusted only to a limited extent, a social group that argues outside the professional discourse gains in importance, and assumes the right to interfere. It can rely on the dissemination of images through local newspapers as well as initiatives through the Internet in the fight against expert solutions that are no longer recognized. The aim is usually to create an identity through important individual accents that have a plausible memory function. Whether these are historical “fakes” does

not seem important at first. They promise a particular “fit” in historic city centers.

The path of outright reconstruction is sought by social group movements choosing key sites, feeling helpless against commercial architecture and contemporary architecture elsewhere. The high symbolic significance of reconstruction projects allows populists to propagate reconstructions for external presentation and tourist marketing. Important prerequisites for the success of social group alliances are rapid and semi-professional mobilization and self-presentation via the Internet and the acceptance by politicians. Funds from private companies, foundations, and donations can significantly influence them.

With a view to the upcoming deliberations on the reconstruction of cities that have only recently been destroyed, further conclusions can be drawn. First of all, the persistence of activists’ fights even under adverse conditions, is remarkable, even when historic buildings have long been lost. Strikingly, belated reconstruction approaches criticized as distorting history are rare in cities whose first wave of reconstruction efforts after WWII sensitively referred to, and rather carefully modernized, the historic urban fabric. From this can be derived both an appeal to develop future reconstruction strategies of destroyed cities from the outset with sensitive inclusion of important structural-spatial identity bearers and in a broad dialogue with diverse social forces. However, it is also important to appreciate the architectural values of most diverse periods as legitimate parts of the complex history of our cities and not to lightly sacrifice them for an uncritical retro-style urban repair.

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## Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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