

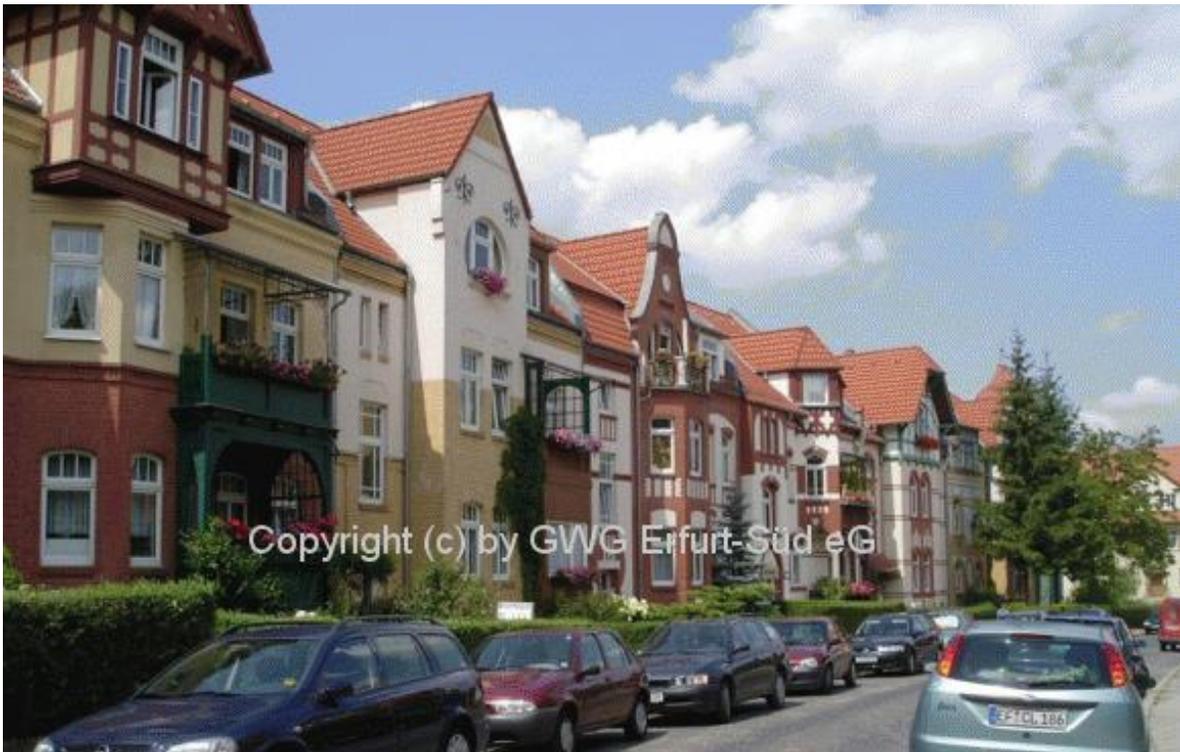
# The New York Times

## Anguish of East Germans Grows With Property Claims by Former Owners

By STEPHEN KINZER, Published: June 5, 1992

This town in the former East Germany seems like a nice place to live. Houses are sturdy and handsome, trees line every street, and downtown Berlin is only 40 minutes away by train.

But Zepernick is facing a social and political crisis. More than half the houses here have been claimed by former owners - or their descendants - who now live in western Germany. Many residents are depressed and angry because they threatened with losing the properties that have their homes for decades.



The conflict has already had tragic results. In March, a man whose home was claimed by a former owner hanged himself as an act of desperate protest. But the prospect of losing his house, he wrote in a suicide note, "leaves me with no other possibility than public death."

A month after this suicide, a second resident hanged himself. The police said the man, was about to be evicted from his small house to make way for the former owner, a woman from western Berlin.

More than half the families in town are afraid of losing their homes.

Since reunification in October 1990, more than two million claims have been filed by people wanting the return of property in eastern Germany. About half the claims are for private houses. Many of those are claimed by children or grandchildren of those who lived there before the division of Germany in 1945. Many others are claimed by people whose property was taken by the Communist Government after they fled to the West.

During the Hitler dictatorship, many German Jews were stripped of their property. That property was given to Germans who were not Jewish. German leaders agree that those Jews or their children and grandchildren deserve to get their property back.



But some officials feel differently about homes abandoned by people who fled communist East Germany 40 years ago. Communist leaders routinely took the property of anyone who fled. In addition, they took land, houses and businesses from many people thought to be unfriendly to the Communist cause.

Most of the people who were put in those houses paid very low rent, often just a few dollars a month, to a state-run agency.

Under the 1990 treaty that united East and West Germany, people whose land or homes were taken by the Communists can reclaim their houses and evict whoever is living in them.

Adapted from article: <http://www.nytimes.com/1992/06/05/world/anguish-of-east-germans-grows-with-property-claims-by-former-owners.html>

Zepernick homes photo:

[https://images.search.yahoo.com/search/images; ylt=AwrB8plqvmlTZn4Aq5GJzbf; ylc=X1MDOTYwNjI4NTcEX3IDMgRiY2sDZDdudDh2OTItY2xjMCUyNmIIM0QzJTl2cyUzRHVkbGZyA3lmcC10LTkwMQRncHJpZANnNEJEQ0hmZIJmRzg3eF83aldBT1NBBG10ZXN0aWQDbnVsbARuX3N1Z2cDMARvcmlnaW4DaW1hZ2VzLnNlYXJjaC55YWhvby5jb20EcG9zAZAEcHFzdHIDBHBxc3RybAMEcXN0cmwDMTMEcXVlcnkDWmVwZXJuaWNrIGd3ZwR0X3N0bXADMTM5OTQzOTA2NzE3MAR2dGVzdGkA0kyMDY-?gprid=g4BDCHffRfG87x\\_7jWAOSA&pvid=zQcQXzY5LjHT36j6U2ZVgAjvNzIuMQAAAABFxRYo&p=Zepernick+gwg&fr=yfp-t-901&fr2=sb-top&ei=utf-8&n=60&x=wrt#](https://images.search.yahoo.com/search/images; ylt=AwrB8plqvmlTZn4Aq5GJzbf; ylc=X1MDOTYwNjI4NTcEX3IDMgRiY2sDZDdudDh2OTItY2xjMCUyNmIIM0QzJTl2cyUzRHVkbGZyA3lmcC10LTkwMQRncHJpZANnNEJEQ0hmZIJmRzg3eF83aldBT1NBBG10ZXN0aWQDbnVsbARuX3N1Z2cDMARvcmlnaW4DaW1hZ2VzLnNlYXJjaC55YWhvby5jb20EcG9zAZAEcHFzdHIDBHBxc3RybAMEcXN0cmwDMTMEcXVlcnkDWmVwZXJuaWNrIGd3ZwR0X3N0bXADMTM5OTQzOTA2NzE3MAR2dGVzdGkA0kyMDY-?gprid=g4BDCHffRfG87x_7jWAOSA&pvid=zQcQXzY5LjHT36j6U2ZVgAjvNzIuMQAAAABFxRYo&p=Zepernick+gwg&fr=yfp-t-901&fr2=sb-top&ei=utf-8&n=60&x=wrt#)