

## **Provocation Statement by Sarah D. Phillips, IU Anthropology**

On March 30 - 31, 2006, IU will host an international conference entitled "Public Spaces." This event is based on the University's annual "Roundtables on Post-Communism," which in the past seven years have comparatively examined the political left, social inequalities, nationalism, and cultural dissent in Eastern Europe, Russia, and China since 1989. The heavy symbolism of public spaces and the centrality of such places to the transformation of social-cultural practices and public policies make this a fruitful topic to examine in a comparative perspective.

The conference will bring to campus prominent scholars from around the world, who will speak on various panels. Presenters will give position statements in response to a question sent out by each panel coordinator. These materials will be available on this web site electronically two weeks before the event, enabling the discussion to take a roundtable format. A commentator will initiate the discussion for each panel.

The speakers will consider broadly the nature of post-communist spaces—what is interesting about spaces and their transformation at this historical juncture? They will briefly sketch out the theoretical approaches to space that drive their own work, and then discuss how those theoretical commitments set in motion particular research methodologies.

Within these broad discussions, some provocative questions such as the following will be answered:

What is significant about shifting distinctions between public and private, and public and official in post-socialist or late-socialist societies? What methodologies allow us to track these distinctions?

What impacts have major political and social changes had on people's experiences of space and spatial conventions of behavior? Alternatively, how do changing narratives and behaviors affect the shape and meaning of space?

How is space used discursively to index and initiate social change?

How do post-socialist and late-socialist public spaces reflect intersections of the national and supranational, and globalizing processes in general? What marginalizing processes become apparent?

How are spaces coded (as feminine/masculine, private/public, etc.), and how are class and gender being reconfigured through the changing demarcation of space?

What consumer practices contribute to or emerge from the reconfiguration of particular types of spaces (public, domestic)? How does space become commoditized and attached to certain consumer practices?

What urban-rural differences are apparent in the transformation of public spaces?