

"Virtual Landscapes of Northwest Indiana"
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This paper reports on continuing research into the virtual geography of Northwest Indiana and seeks to explain the contrasts between the real and virtual landscapes of the region. The "real" region is characterized by high levels of uneven development and segregation. The stunning beauty of the natural landscape of the Indiana Dunes and the charm of small towns contrasts with the smokestacks of decaying industrial and urban areas and rampant suburban sprawl. The virtual region is likewise characterized by stunning natural beauty and charming small towns. Unlike the "real" region, however, cyberspatial smokestacks are absent, urban areas are vibrant sites for investment, and new homes in ideal communities are plentiful. Methods include systematic qualitative content analysis of web sites related to the region as well as preliminary analysis of interviews with creators of websites about the region. Place promotion efforts as well as the tendency for people producing websites about the region to live, work, and play in more affluent suburban and rural areas may explain the contrasts between the virtual and the "real" Northwest Indiana. Processes of uneven development and segregation may in fact contribute to the lack of their own representation in cyberspace.