

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Kitchin (1998) recognizes that numerous questions need to be answered regarding cyberspace and its impact on societies, economies, global relations, and to what extent cyberspace is an “agent of change” in postindustrial society. He suggests that further research must directly examine the various spatialities of cyberspace (Kitchin 1998). It has not been determined if the Internet alters the role of geography or reconfigures spatial relations. Moreover, at present, it is still unclear how cyberspace is actually affecting new spatialities. This research delved into this arena by examining the geography of nature tourism both in the real world and in cyberspace, specifically investigating the spatial relations between the two realms, and real world motivations, interests, concerns, and governmental policies.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

This research answered the following questions:

1. Are the Internet Web hosting businesses (ICBs) proximate to the actual location of the nature tourism Internet content sponsors (ICSs)

This research clarified the “real” geography of “places” where organizations or companies are located that are promoting or sponsoring nature tourism on the Internet.

The hypothesis was that the ICBs and ICSs would be proximate to each other. I expected that most of these nature tourism operations would be fairly small; and in developing small businesses rural people will most often look to ICB services located nearby to establish an Internet presence.

2. What is the geography of the nature tourism sponsors (ICSs) – are they urban, urban fringe, or rural?

The second hypothesis was that ICSs would be located in rural areas and associated with rural communities. This is because cities do not normally have the extent of natural resource attractions necessary to be considered “nature tourism” and as a result the production of nature tourism attractions takes place primarily in rural areas.

3. Are the nature tourism ICSs located in states that have policies/programs aimed at promoting nature tourism development and facilitation of the use of the Web?

This question addresses whether or not public policies or programs have provided a catalyst for the development of nature tourism via the Web. The original hypothesis was that nature tourism attractions investigated in this research would most often be located in states that have programs promoting or supporting nature tourism development and the use of the Web. This research hypothesized that states with nature tourism policies/programs would have a greater number of nature tourism Web sites than other areas. With this research I clarified the geography of nature tourism businesses/

organizations represented on the Internet and their relationship to rural areas and government policy designed to enhance their development.

4. What are the characteristics of the nature tourism businesses/organizations and how have/do they use the Web?

This part of my research was exploratory in nature. It examined the history, motivations, perceived success and future that these ICS envisioned for their Web sites. Topics to be addressed were divided into nine main categories: (1) What are the characteristics of the nature tourism business/organization? (2) Descriptive information about the businesses/organizations' Web site. (3) What was the process of developing the Web site, from initial motivations to ultimate implementation? (4) How well is the Web site performing – is it worth their time and money? (5) What do they wish the site would do that it doesn't do now? (6) How much did/does the Web site cost in terms of start-up and maintenance? (7) Are these nature tourism ICSs attempting to depict “place” on their Web site, and if so how? (8) Do these ICSs perceive that they are part of a nature tourism community, either on the Internet or in the “real world?” (9) What are the ICSs perceptions and experience with the World Wide Web?