

---

## ZONING PRACTICES: ENHANCING TOURISTS' EXPERIENCE IN COASTAL RESORTS

Mohammed Yazah Mat Raschid<sup>1</sup>, Roslina Sharif<sup>1</sup>, Nangkula Utaberta<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Design and Architecture, University Putra Malaysia.

[metlesley@yahoo.com](mailto:metlesley@yahoo.com)

---

### ABSTRACT

The zoning in most of the resorts is not only used as a planning tool to enhance the environmental and social experience but also to allow tourist to feel safe in the resort. The purpose of this paper is to identify the spatial characteristics of zoning that assist in promoting environmental and social experience in spaces created by the siting process in the three main resorts which are Malaysia's premier resorts. A physical observation of general pattern of zoning in the three main case study resorts; Berjaya Langkawi Beach & Spa Resort, Langkawi Island, (Northern Region), PangkorLaut Resort, Pangkor Island, Perak (Central Region) and The Avillion Village Resort, Port Dickson, Negeri Sembilan (Southern Region) in correlation with fifteen other resorts in the three case study sites was conducted. Findings show the general patterns of physical data characteristics of the case study resorts indicates the variations across the resorts in terms of the provision of circulation spaces and the arrangement and provision of type of units, open spaces and amenities. This paper exposes few important gaps in conservation of natural environment, accommodating resorts coastal and building setbacks, maximizing view, as quality transitional spaces, transportation and building forms and shapes. The spatial qualities through proper zoning are crucial to control the tourists' movement and activities whilst ensuring they can interact with the particular environment and the local community. The paper concludes that while the basic characteristics such as sizes and building heights is formally regulated by the authority through specific guidelines, they are insufficient to facilitate the experience without taking into consideration of the tourists and local views.

**Keywords:** *Costal Resort, Zoning, Tourism, Siting Strategies, Tourists' Experience, Malaysia*

### INTRODUCTION

Coastal resorts destinations are what is referred to as the „tourists zone of interaction and interpretation“ (Ryan, 2003), where such zones change both temporally and spatial experience of tourists. In this vein, the notion of facilities in the immediate setting and micro environment of the visitor completely define the coastal tourist destinations. Here, the zoning of spaces relies on the manner in which tourists' action are constrained or limited by the physical environment and intention to create an environment satisfactory to the place (resort) temporarily in a fixed and short period of time. The process requires conservation of environment and providing comfortable basic needs for tourists through proper siting process. It is also within the siting practice, the zoning and the interrelationship between each zone where the physical features are located and recognised as an integral part of coastal resorts that could enhance the environmental and social experience. As stressed by the regulators in the previous chapter, these features may be designed intentionally or spontaneously based on the creativity of designer while adhering to strict formal regulation given by the authority. Meanwhile, the physical expression of both kinds of goals [goals of specific activity and goals of divisive

exploration] can be observed in the resorts, where several characteristics are shared (Heath, 1984). The first is the social significance of the place (Heath, 1984) and second the quality of material which influenced users more than the formal qualities or order and interests (Prak, 1977). Yang and Brown (1992) referred the physical design features as the „service scapes“, which relates to the physical comfort of visitors and landscape considered in a design that can be both introduced as aesthetic and functional purposes.

In relation to this, Heath (1984) summarises that the environmental aesthetic concerns with interactions or relations between people and the facilities. It is roughly the perceptual and cognitive abilities of their minds and physical features of things; shapes, textures, colours and patterns. It also depends on the previous experience of the people concerning their roles and expectation as well as their culture. Meanwhile, the way the features are provided is closely associated with the way designers think in the design process. Berlyne (1960) argues that the designers, in simplifying the tasks, classified the design aims into goals of specific activity and goals of divisive exploration. Recalling the concept, it is important to design coastal resorts through the environmental integration that can provoke not only a heightened sense of environmental appreciation but also inspires learning among tourists, host and local community. Here, the resort's facilities role in facilitating the goals is essential. While places are evaluated in terms of their fitness to the activity, the users consider the built environment first of all as an instrument or tool in participating in the activities which are productive depending on the siting state of the facilities (Prak, 1977). Thus, it is through interpreting the siting roles in programming the activities that the attributes of tourists experience can be unearthed.

#### METHODOLOGY

According to Hanson (2001), the study of pattern and form is crucial in design because it constitutes an essential part of its corpus of the coherent knowledge. For Hanson, the understanding of how buildings and places work socially must be based on: careful studies of how the urban or building morphology is linked; the architect's claim about how their designs are intended to be used; and the detailed studies of how they are actually being used. The physical observation was based on the compilation of three main resorts and fifteen other coastal resorts plans in the Malaysia Peninsula. The three main resorts are: Berjaya Langkawi Beach and Spa Resorts, Langkawi Island; Pangkor Laut Resort, Pangkor Island; and The Avillion Village Beach Resort, Port Dickson while the remaining fifteen resorts are the 3, 4 and 5 stars resorts in the case study sites. In the analysis, the detailed comparative analysis on the planning of resorts allows the identifications of key morphological perimeters that describe the physical spatial characteristics and patterns of both the individual tourism developments and across the selected resorts. The data from each resort will be cross referenced to determine whether if the site constrained and building typology will likely define trends in the spatial and physical characteristic of building that can promote the environmental and social experience in coastal resorts. Hence, the layout of the facilities; movement pattern and circulation, location and shape of the buildings, topography and social and cultural reasons for the siting will be thoroughly investigated.

#### RESULT AND ANALYSIS

This section will elaborate the general patterns of zoning that were summarised in the earlier analysis in the following categories: Zoning in controlling tourists' movements; Zoning for conservation of natural environment; Zoning to accommodate building and coastal setbacks and socially responsible access; Zoning in maximising view factors;

Zoning of open area as transitional spaces. Zoning for transportation; and, Zoning and building form.

### Zoning In Controlling Tourists Movement

The visual analysis on the circulation typologies of the resorts provides important information on the buildings "connectedness" to site conditions and also spatial relationship between facilities made possible by the siting practice. The circulation pattern is the key controlling element of the design and overall development framework. Thus, the way external circulations link all the zones and facilities and control tourists' movement is important considerations in the strategies to enhance the tourists' experience.

As clearly indicated in the resorts' basic forms, the resorts have incorporated single or double parallel line of rectangle, being matrixes (cell-liked arrangement) or courtyard generated forms in the layouts. The forms are dictated by the circulations that connect all the zones. Generally, the planning layouts of the three main resorts are based on radial formations originated from the main building where the central lobby is located. This can be observed both internally and externally where the resort's pattern of movement is closely connected to providing the ease of access for tourists to all resort facilities and for security purposes. In promoting the environmental experience, the three main resorts have allowed for the provision of common spaces or observation areas along the main and secondary circulations – observed to be lacking in many of the other multi storey resorts where the circulation spaces need to be controlled to cut cost.

Externally, the pathways and corridors offer safe and comfortable means of access to other facilities. In tropical climate these features need to be provided with the proper roof to protect tourists from the sun and heavy rainfall which are lacking in there sorts. The security features such as balustrades and ramps for the handicaps are observed to be lacking as well. The analysis demonstrates that the covered circulation is mainly limited to the main building compared to other area such as the accommodation's zone. While the accommodations are located sporadically to maximise the site and topography, they are not linked to the main building with covered pathway.

The zoning is also programmed based on technical considerations to avoid hazardous environmental areas such as steep slopes; and flood and erosion prone areas which are specified as low use tourists' zones. It was observed that the location of the facilities in the three main resorts match the whole resort area contextual shapes and boundaries to make most of the existing zones and path and considering the advantages of the sites natural condition. However, the planning pattern in several resorts also reveals that there are many instances where resorts accommodations primarily the individual chalets are constructed on ecologically fragile zone (Refer to Figure 1 and 2).



**Figure 1:** A chalet on the hazardous slope in The Datai Langkawi as the result of emphasising view towards the sea. Source: Author



**Figure 2:** An example of chalet elevated on stilts at slope area implying the intention of preserving the environment. Source: Author

Clearly, the above situation demonstrates the need of appropriate policies to integrate the tourists' ideologies in the siting of resorts without compromising on the environmental issue. While the formal regulations are created to ensure the safety of tourists, the informal perception of tourists to live in natural environment manifested by constructing the villa on stilt prevailed over the regulation. Similarly in the earthworks, the cutting of slopes for larger building also demonstrates the lack of environmental awareness on the part of regulators and designers in providing the facilities required for the resorts activities. Despite this, the siting of the facilities in several resorts did demonstrated attempts to embrace the environment. To prevent from cutting the slopes, some of the resorts have taken much better approach in designing low rise building stepping down from the hillsides rather than building high-rise buildings on the slopes. This is more appropriate in terms of scale and also integration with the natural environment. The design, however, causes several problems to the resorts operation namely in servicing the facilities especially the accommodation units. It can be concluded that the above scenarios signify that appropriate design measures to compliment the tourists' ideologies can be achieved without compromising on the environmental factors.

### Zoning and Building Setbacks

The setback is important to maintain a sense of openness, privacy and safety to enhance the environmental and social experience in the resorts. It is also important in creating the sense of openness in the resorts, which is an important consideration in enhancing the tourists' experience. The setback permits provision of certain allowance of open spaces in the siting process. Generally, most resorts are observed to comply with the six meters building setback requirement to the adjacent lots and also one building to another by the local building by-law.

In terms of accessibility, many resorts depend on the access provided by the local authority rather than providing the local access through their premises. Although the locals are allowed to access the beaches through designated public access maintained by the local authority, the readily available access for local via the resorts can be utilized as a more friendly approach in integrating the locals with the resort environment and the tourists and creating a sense of belonging to the community.

Meanwhile, in several resorts, one of the techniques used to separate the locals from resorts area is to ensure that the resorts are constructed higher than the beach front as a marker to the site boundaries. The higher elevation not only indicates clear separation between the resorts and the beach frontage but also have a psychological impact on both the tourists and locals.

In this vein, the demarcation of resort boundaries in a subtle manner as this ensures that tourists feel more secured and locals to automatically identify the area as privately owned premises.

### Coastal Building Setback

The coastal building setback is an important consideration in the siting of resorts "facilities. Constructing the building closer to the setback can result in negative consequences to both the facilities and coastal environment. Several resorts are observed to be located very close to the shoreline. As for The Avillion and several other resorts, the facilities are located close to the water edges. As the result, the beach front spaces have also become too narrow for the public to access or for socio-cultural activities. While tourists prefer the resorts that are located nearer to the shore, the minimal allowance of space inland fronting the beach for tourists and the locals can be considered as not conducive in enhancing the environmental and social experiences (Refer to Figure3 and 4).



**Figure 3:** Loss of beach frontage for public and tourists in Langkawi Island as the facilities move closer to the shoreline. Source: Author



**Figure 4:** Location of chalet in rocky terrain shoreline in Berjaya Langkawi as a way to maximise the land use in less attractive coastal area. Source: Author

The maintenance of views towards the natural features such as the beach and its natural settings are the vital considerations in the siting process. The site planning emphasis on view is a perceptual process.



**Figure 5:** Roof „landscapes“ from upper level deck of The Swiss Garden Resort’s main building obstructing the downward view towards the beach. Source: Author



**Figure 6:** View towards the sea from the main lobby of The Avillion Resort. Source: Author

Meanwhile, in a situation where resorts are located in many attractive natural settings, too much emphasis on creating vistas towards the sea can also be a disadvantage. Over emphasising on a directional view will unlikely promote the other surrounding attractions of the resorts. For example, the accommodations in Berjaya Langkawi were arranged to face directly towards the sea and as the result, tourists in the accommodation do not have the luxury of seeing the majestic backdrop setting of the Gunung Merinchang. However, the emphasis on view has also resulted in many resorts which orientations are arranged with disregard to the climatic consideration. It is interesting to note that many of the resorts facilities, especially the accommodation units are oriented to face the extreme Western afternoon sun as the result of emphasising the view when locating the facilities.

It can be summarized that, while the site context limits the siting of the facilities, the design must consider the climatic considerations as to create a comfortable environment to enhance the tourists’ experience. These observations address the importance of creating the awareness of sustainable principles among the designers and developers. The lack of awareness about the sustainable principles is one reason why the orientation is inadequately considered in the design process. While there are certain improvement can be made to the building which are improperly oriented through the use of screens and shades, these features will incur higher construction cost in the development.

### Open Spaces as the Product of Zoning

The general design patterns of the open spaces based on the observations has led to the discussion on the role open spaces as transitional spaces of building interiors and in accommodating the environmental, social and cultural interactions for tourists.

Many resorts are observed to centralize all the activities in a single common open spaces or courtyards in the site planning. While this type of layout permits better services control, locating the amenities near the open spaces could cause environmental concerns due to numerous concentrations of activities in the space through a gathering of a large group of tourists in a single session peak hours.



**Figure 7:** View towards the courtyard from the main lobby of Tanjung Rhu Beach Resort emphasising on the inter visibility quality of the spaces. Source: Author



**Figure 8:** Landscape and water feature in Pangkor Laut Spa area to enrich the tourists' experience in the open spaces. Source: Author

In most resorts, the open space can be filled with natural or man-made landscape but more importantly, it also allows certain degree of transparencies from the interior spaces towards the surrounding environment of the open spaces or courtyards. In many resorts, the open spaces preserve the original environment as observed by many tall trees and natural vegetation in the area. Interestingly, several resorts with natural landscaped areas are observed to be dangerous where they can be subjected to vandalism and criminal behaviour due to the low visibility. This is a common pattern in most luxury resorts where the heavy landscapes are used to reflect and enhance the existing tropical setting. However, in the lower rated resorts, the courtyards are usually provided with minimum landscape that is also low in maintenance. Here, their association with the internal spaces are vague due to the lack of visibility and design quality that can attract tourists.

Meanwhile, in several resorts, while landscape is needed for the environmental experience, the spaces created are either too small or too congested for large social gatherings involving the locals. Another important observation in most resorts is that the process of the siting also allows for the identification of area for future resort's expansion which is crucial in the physical enhancement of the resorts to remain competitive in the industry. Here, the undesirable changes in the resort portrayed in the "Destination's Lifecycle" (Butler, 1980) can be facilitated through the initial siting and demarcation of expansion spaces to sustain its operation lifespan.

### Zoning and Social Spaces

Across the main resorts, attempt was made to ensure that the tourists' interaction with the environment also facilitate social relation. The attempt includes spreading the facilities to encourage tourists to walk through the natural environment whilst interacting with each other. The location of the three main resorts in the tropical setting allows tourists to observe the abundant of wildlife in the resorts. This attraction could improve social relation among tourists and the locals either through group learning or appointed guide. This indicates the importance of preserving the natural environment of the coastal area as the main resorts attraction in addition to the facilities arrangement in promoting environmental and social experience among tourists.

The resorts figure grounds analyses identify the main nodes of tourists and locals gathering in the resorts. The open spaces such as central courtyard where the amenities such as swimming pool and landscape are located allow the social interactions to take

place. Tourists' recognition of the zones, the location and nature of the activities in the spaces and the cultural background or specific markings allow the interaction between the tourists, local community and the hosts. This is where the tourists' reflections and ideologies play an important role in the design. While the zoning is a formal approach towards allowing the interactions, the tourists' recognitions of the spaces through their experience are crucial for the process to facilitate. However, there are several weaknesses identified in the way the open spaces manifest their roles as environmental spaces in the resorts.

### Zoning and Cultural Integration

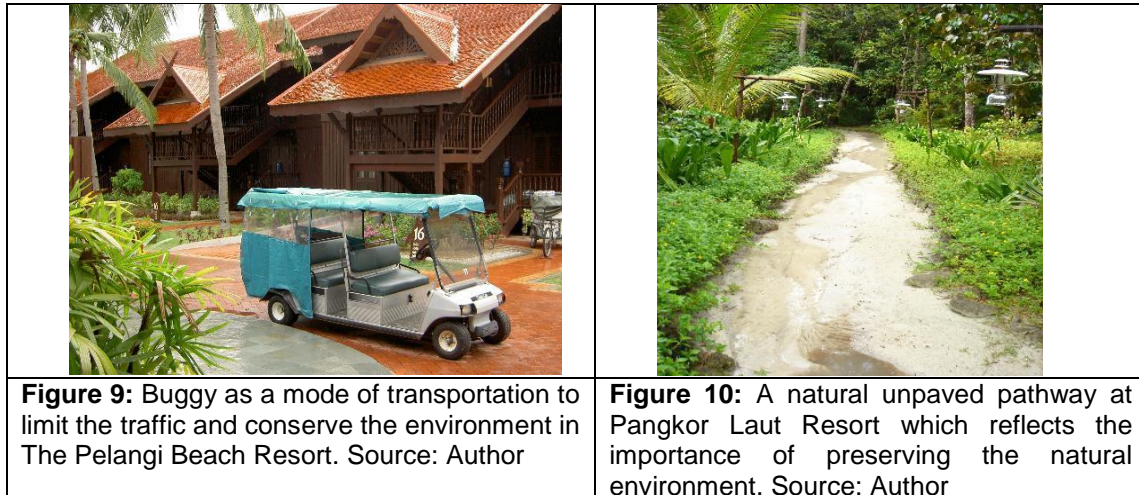
The power of the attraction to capture the visitor's attention and evoke strong emotional response is coined by Pearce (2005a) as an "intrinsic impact". De Botton (2002) uses the term as a "sense of sublime" to indicate human responses towards the natural attraction such as ocean vistas where such places provoke an identifiable feeling that is both pleasurable and morally good. Beer (1990) argues that the spaces that provide an environmental experience are closest to the natural surroundings and attraction rather than the cultural form. However, both are important in the design where the impact of cultural symbols as physical design features can fast track tourist positive experience in the coastal resorts.

In this vein, there are certain cultural markings in spaces created by the siting process that integrate well with the environment and provoke the tourists' positive experience. Interestingly, the integration of cultural elements in the planning layout of the resorts has become the main theme of many resorts in the case study to promote authentic environment. The intention to experience the past was interpreted through introduction of the traditional Malay village surrounding into the planning of chalets not only on land but also above the sea in the three main resorts. The forms are not only considered as unique and aesthetically pleasing but also as functional interpretation of traditional lifestyles. Meanwhile, in several resorts, the practice of putting a cultural figure in the landscapes or on only specific building areas without proper context to the surrounding has resulted in a pastiche design and unfit for the resort identity.

### Zoning and Transportation

As mentioned earlier, zoning is used to control tourists' movement, transportation and traffic in the resorts. Generally, as observed in the planning, the accommodations are separated from the main lobby and amenities area. As resorts located in the tropical settings, the accommodations are extended further into the jungle territory which demand suitable mode of transportations to transfer them back and forth from the drop off points near the main buildings. Most resorts parking areas are located near the main lobby and further away from the accommodations to avoid noise and visual disturbance to tourists. For sloping sites the parking is located on the higher plane as it is easier to construct.





Technically, the location may be suitable for the parking area even though it is simultaneously being considered as a prime area that are more suitable for important facilities such as accommodation units or restaurants due to the commanding view from the top. For example, the lobby of the Avillion Resort is located on top of steep cliff near the main road. Here, the visitors are required to take the elevators or stairs to the lower levels amenities and the accommodation units. This is similar to other resorts where the lobby is located near the parking areas located at the upper levels for ease of earthwork levelling and also to prevent environmental impact during construction. While most resorts employ conventional transportation planning there are also several resorts that utilise buggies or shuttle bus as the means of transportation to control the level of congestion, air and noise pollution within the resort's premises (Refer to Figure9). The use of natural pathway for vehicles can also assist in conserving the environment (Refer to Figure 10).

### Discussion

The coastal resort physical site's observations implies that the resorts have to a certain extent utilized the siting process to promote the environment and social relations in enhancing the tourists' experience in the coastal resorts in West Malaysian Peninsular. However, the fragmentally designed and individually styled resorts in terms of zoning and the physical design features demonstrates that the practice has not only occurred with or without the formal government initiated policies or guidelines but also depends on the informal creativity of designers, in which the product can be both positive or negative. The analysis on the coastal resort's physical data sets, the spatial quality of zoning and the physical design features in the spaces created by the siting process support the statement.

There are common strategies or techniques utilized by the designers in locating and programming of the resorts' facilities to enhance the tourists' experience in the coastal resorts. It has been observed that the practice have occurred with or without the relevant policies and guidelines which concurrently supports the regulators and designers' views. The fragmentally designed and individually styled resorts demonstrate that the practice has not only occurred with or without the formal government initiated policies or guidelines but also depend on the informal creativity of designers. The general patterns of physical data characteristics of the case study resorts indicates the variations across the resorts in terms of the provision of circulation spaces and the arrangement and provision of type of units, open spaces and amenities. The physical observation also exposes few important gaps in the quality of the zoning in controlling the tourists' movements, conservation of

natural environment, in accommodating resorts coastal and building setbacks, maximising view, as quality transitional spaces, transportation and building forms and shapes.

The provisions of common spaces are found lacking along the circulation areas and in many cases the facilities are located in hazardous area without the provisions of socially responsible access along the coastal setback zone. The designs of several resorts are observed as not climatically sustainable due to the overemphasised on the view factors. Meanwhile, in several resorts, the transitional spaces provided are not conducive to tourists and improper size allocation of open spaces does not allow tourists to feel comfortable.

Furthermore, the space for cultural showcase are not properly identified or sized which do not allow for proper interaction between tourists and hosts. Meanwhile, the lack of spaces for expansion indicate the resort's incapability to adapt to any changes in future tourism demand or planned beyond its maturity as stressed by Butler (1980) in his "Destination's Lifecycle" Concept. While adequate transportation systems were planned in the resorts, there are several cases where parking spaces are located at the prime areas. In terms of forms, the use of multi storey buildings in the resort case study sites reflects the weakness in conforming to the scale of regional development.

## CONCLUSION

This paper discusses the findings in morphological analysis and on-site physical observations of eighteen coastal resorts in the three case study sites in the West Coast of Malaysian Peninsula. This morphological analysis on the other hand, investigates the existing practice of the siting and to what extent it has been shaped by the relevant policies and regulations in enhancing the tourists' experience. The morphological analysis identifies the spatial characteristics of zoning in promoting environmental and social experience in spaces created by the siting process. The findings begin with the general patterns of resorts physical characteristics, followed by the zoning as well as building forms analysis. The discussion revolves around the integration of sustainable development principles in the design of coastal resorts through siting practice. It will not only assist in identifying the positive attributes of the tourists' experience but also support the other findings in the methodological approaches utilised in this study that can further assist in the recommendation of more comprehensive siting strategies.

## REFERENCES

- Beer, A.R. (1990) *Environmental Planning for Site Development*. E & F.N. Spon: London.
- Berlyne, D. (1960) *Conflict, Arousal and Curiosity*. In: *Aesthetics and Physio-biology*, Appleton, Century Croft. McGraw-Hill: New York.
- Butcher, J. (2006) *Natural Capital and the Advocacy of Ecotourism as Sustainable Development*. In: *Journal of Sustainable Development*, 14 (3), pp. 238 – 254.
- De Botton, A. (2002) *The Art of Travel*. Pantheon Books: New York.
- Emalgalfa, A., Hassan, A.S., and Ku Hassan, K.A. (2009) *Sustainable Housing Development in Malaysia: Learning From the Resort Architecture*. In: *Proceeding Papers of International Conference of Sustainable Housing*, Penang. University Sains Malaysia, pp. 310 – 317.

- Hanson, J. (2001) Morphology and Design. Reconciling Intellect, Intuition and Ethics in the Reflective Practice of Architecture. In: Proceedings, 3rd International Space Syntax Symposium: Atlanta.
- Heath, E. and Wall, G. (1992) Marketing Tourism Destinations: A Strategic Planning Approach. John Wiley and Sons: New York.
- Heath, T. (1984) Method in Architecture. John Wiley and Sons: Norwich, UK.
- Kay, R. and Alder, J. (2005) Coastal Planning and Management. Taylor and Francis: New York.
- Lawson, F. R. (1995) Hotels and Resorts: Planning, Design, and Refurbishment. In: The Architectural Press: Oxford.
- Mohamed, B. (2002). The Development of Ecotourism in Malaysia - Is it really Sustainable? In the Proceeding Paper of Regional Conference on Community-Based Ecotourism in Southeast Asia (3-7 March, 2002), Chiang Mai, Thailand.
- Pearce, P.L (2005a) Tourist Behaviour: Themes and Conceptual Scheme in Aspects of Tourism 27. Channel View Publications: Ontario Canada, p. 14.
- Pearce, P.L. (2005b) The Role of Relationships in the Tourists Experience. In: W. Theobald (ed.) Global Tourism 93<sup>rd</sup> Edition). Butterworth Heinemann: Oxford. pp. 12 – 17.
- Plog, S. (2005) Targeting Segments: More Important than Ever in the Travel Industry. In: W.F. Theobald (ed.) Global Tourism (3rd Edition). Elsevier Butterworth Heinemann: New York, USA. pp. 271 – 283.
- Prak, N. (1977) The Visual Perception of the Built Environment. Delft University Press: Delft.
- Ryan, C. (2002) From Motivation to Assessment in the Tourists Experience. Continuum: London, pp. 58 – 77.
- Ryan, C. (2003) Recreational Tourism: Demand and Impacts. In: M. Hall and D. Timothy (eds.) Aspects of Tourism 11. Channel View Publications: Ontario, Canada, p. 324.
- Ryan, C. and Trauer, B. (2005) Aging Populations: Trends and the Emergence of the Nomad Tourists. In: W.F. Theobald (ed.) Global Tourism (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition). Elsevier Butterworth Heinemann: New York, USA, pp. 510 – 524.
- Tan, H.B. (1994) Tropical Resorts. Page One Publishing Ltd.: Singapore.
- Thomas, R. and Granham, T. (2007) The Environments of Architecture. Environmental Design in Context. Taylor and Francis: New York.
- Yang, B.E. and Brown, T.J. (1992) A Cross Cultural Comparison of Preferences for Landscape Styles and Landscape Elements. In: Environment and Behaviour 24 (4), pp. 471 – 507.