

## Marketing Innovations for Sustainable Destinations

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# 13 Assessing the International Image of an Urban Destination: the Case of Milan

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## Introduction

In today's highly competitive tourism marketplace, destinations have to work hard to build an effective positioning strategy and to differentiate themselves from their competitors. Thus, an appealing image is a fundamental asset for the repositioning process of an urban destination, both in terms of extensive knowledge of tourist behaviour and the development of effective marketing strategies.

From the beginning of the 1970s, several authors and scholars centred their studies on the issues of destination image formation, management and assessment, and the role it plays in the process of destination selection and evaluation made by tourists (Beerli and Martín, 2004a, b; Pike, 2002). In particular, studies on destination image mainly concentrate on leisure tourism, with a focus on pleasure tourist perceptions and the determinants of leisure destination image. On the contrary, the issue of the formation of business destination image – where travel for attending meetings, exhibitions and incentives play a relevant role – is less explored. However, some authors who contributed to this field (Hankinson, 2005) highlight how theoretical models proposed in studies centred on leisure destinations cannot be applied to business tourism. In fact, the latter presents some distinctive characteristics due to the business-to-business relationships which affect the process of image formation and assessment.

Moreover, in the large variety of contributions on destination image, only a few focus on international urban tourism and, consequently, on the international image of urban business destinations (Bramwell, Rawding, 1996; Calantone et al., 1989; Grabler, 1997; Suh and Gartner, 2004). Thus, in the literature much room has been left for further explorative studies on the determinants of the image of destinations with a business vocation. This chapter aims to contribute to the filling of this gap with an explorative analysis focused on Milan, an urban destination mainly visited by business tourists. The case study is then put in the context of the existing literature on destination image definition and measurement.

## Literature Review

Starting from the 1970s, contributions from several authors on the brand and image of tourism destinations have faced numerous issues with significant theoretical and mana-

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