

**Gastrodiplomacy:**  
**A systematic review of the literature**

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## **1. Introduction**

Gastrodiplomacy as defined by Rockower (2012), exists between the field of public diplomacy, and the culinary arts – a way to win the hearts and minds of people. Rockower further explains that it goes beyond just the promotion of a country's cuisine, and products, taking a more holistic approach to create a better understanding of a countries culture to outsiders. Nirwandy and Awand (2014) further expand that Gastrodiplomacy is used not only to expand cultural understanding but also to strengthen bilateral relations and facilitate economic growth.

Gastrodiplomacy, as a study field, is relatively new in the International Relations (IR), showing sparsely in the literature in the first half of the last decade. Food is an essential part of the human experience, and for millennia it has been used to convey special status and cultural identity (Garnsey, 1999). Multiple gastrodiplomacy programs are being run by several governments around the world (Zhang, 2015), it is then important to understand what's the benefits, and consequences of gastrodiplomacy programs.

In order to explore the advantages and drawbacks of gastrodiplomacy initiatives this literature aims to gain insight into the specific benefits of such programs and to identify potential avenues for future investigation. The review indicates that gastrodiplomacy can increase tourism and enhance a country's soft power, but it also highlights the risk of polarization and the potential for rivalries to arise.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Gastrodiplomacy**

Gastrodiplomacy is part of the broader cultural diplomacy field and is a way to gain favour with audiences using food (Rockower, 2012). As Rockower further explains, gastrodiplomacy differs from general programs of public diplomacy using food, in being a

concerted effort by a national government to increase its nation brand. It's also a powerful tool to increase a nation's soft power, increase economic growth, and improve cultural understanding (Nirwandy & Awang, 2014). A key component in the evolution of gastrodiplomacy is also the fact that key actors no longer only include nation-states, but also non-state actors (NSAs), such as tourist agencies, celebrity chefs, corporations, and individual people (Zhang, 2015).

Although it's important to define what gastrodiplomacy is, it's also important to denote what it isn't. Gastrodiplomacy isn't food diplomacy, "which entails the use of food aid and food relief in the period of crisis or catastrophe" (Rockower, 2012, p. 237). It's also not culinary diplomacy which, according to Rockower, differentiates as using food to achieve diplomatic goals, an aid to formal diplomacy, namely in official functions, such as state visits. The distinction between these terms is then significant. This review solely focuses on gastrodiplomacy and aims to explore its advantages and disadvantages.

## **2.2. Gastrodiplomacy as an entrée for Tourism**

According to Nair (2021), gastrodiplomacy has been found to have positive effects on bringing awareness of a country's cuisine to tourists. The same has been found by Freire and Gertner (2021), who also posit that food is a leading motivator for tourists when deciding on destinations. The authors also found that food related experiences are the most shared activity of tourists in social media. Lertputtarak (2012) too, in an earlier study, found data pointing to food having a positive relation with intentions of revisiting a destination.

## **2.3. Non-state actors, the raw ingredients of the Gastrodiplomacy cake**

States, and state institutions aren't the only ones with a role to play in gastrodiplomacy campaigns. A report from the U.S. Department of State titled "Cultural Diplomacy: The Linchpin of Public Diplomacy" (2005) found the need to increase the

exchange of creative professionals, and to develop partnerships with the public sector, signalling an increased need to involve NSAs in these campaigns. Even before the advent of gastrodiplomacy as a concept, diplomats have used NSAs as tools to increase their nation's soft power. Mazzoli (2021) describes how the positive view American's had of Italians natural agricultural skills helped changing the racist view of Italians as undesirable migrants, to desirable ones during the Age of Mass Migration in the US (mid-19th to early 20th century). A country's diaspora is then a powerful tool that can be wielded to help in the gastrodiplomacy endeavour and can help shape a more effective cultural diplomacy (Trihartono et al., 2020a; 2020b) .

#### **2.4.Increasing soft power – more than a sweetener**

Food and cuisine can be used effectively to highlight national values and culture (Moscato, 2018). Moscato when discussing soft power and the U.S.-Japan relations, does a quick review of recent meetings between the heads of state of these two powers, ending with the diner of Prime-Minister Shinzo Abe with President Obama in 2014 to the famous restaurant Sukiyaabashi Jiro, featured in a documentary. The famous chef Jiro Ono and his restaurant are seen as a great example of Japanese culinary culture as well as the traditional artisan methods embedded in the Japanese culture. Nowadays, Sushi is arguably one of the most famous dishes in the world and has evolved from a form of preservation to a delicacy, and nowadays to a convenience food (Brown, 2012). If the ability for co-opting instead of coercing is the main definition of soft power (Nye, 1990), then Japan's influence is undeniable, having the U.S. support in the dispute with China regarding the Senkakus Islands (Moscato, 2018).

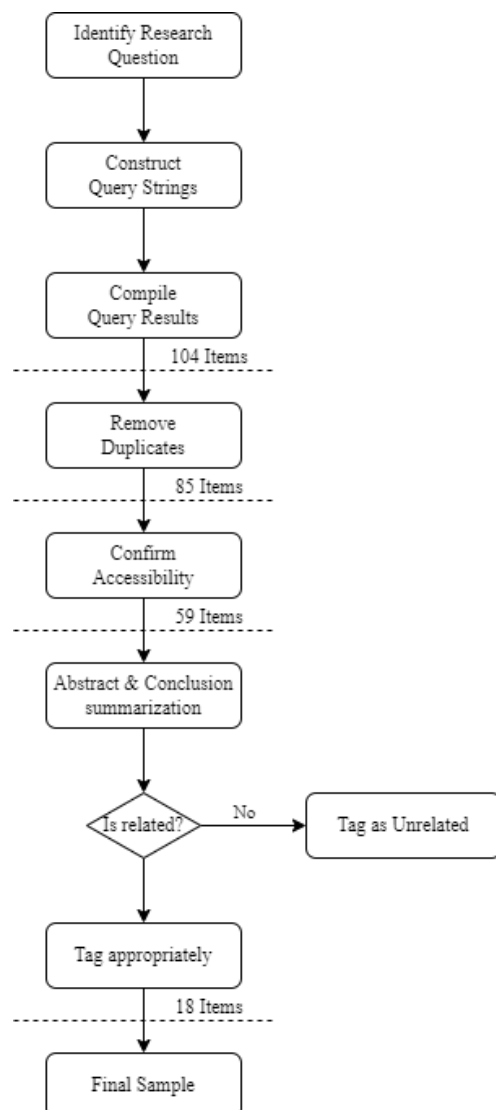
### **2.5.The sour taste of Gastrodiplomacy**

Despite all the positive relationships found in the literature, it's also of note that gastrodiplomacy efforts can be a source of rivalry. Since the 1990's the Turkish government has been trying to turn Turkish cuisine into a "world cuisine", with state and non-state actors working in tandem trying to accomplish this goal (Karaosmanoğlu, 2020). Karaosmanoğlu goes on to explain that in these efforts, Türkiye had multiple issues over multiple foods and it's been an official concern of Ankara.

This is also what Lee and Kim (2021) found when Singapore made a solo bid for UNESCO recognition of Hawker culture. Malaysian officials objected to the bid, arguing that Hawker culture is originated, and is more prevalent in Malaysia. The authors explain that when the chairman of Penang's Tourism Development and Heritage Committee, Yeoh Soon Hin, proposed a joint nomination, he was met with criticism in his home country of Malaysia, and further entrenchment of the Malaysian society into the field that Malaysia should have a solo bid herself before "Singapore beats Penang to it" (p. 8). Fact is that UNESCO's list allows for multiple nations to be listed in the bid, like it was the case in 2010 when Spain, Greece, Italy and Morocco initially inscribed Mediterranean Diet as a shared heritage, and in 2013 expanded to also include Cyprus, Croatia, and Portugal. Singapore's sole purpose, the authors continue, was not just to bring awareness to the cultural heritage, but also to use it as nation branding. Further examples of rivalries are given in the context of food and national identity, like South Korean and North Korean distinct bids over Kimchi, and Armenia and Azerbaijan's distinct bids over flatbread. The former was resolved with two distinct recognitions by UNESCO, and the later after intense negotiations with a joint bid of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Iran, Türkiye, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan.

### 3. Methodology

To address the goal of the review, a systematic literature review was conducted. As a research method, a systematic literature review involves a thorough, and structured search for relevant literature, followed by a critical analysis and synthesis of the findings. Not only does it allow for the consistent replication, but it also aims to reduce bias as much as possible, and summarizes the knowledge base of a whole subject that can, at times, be overwhelming (Köhler & Cortina, 2019; Petticrew & Roberts, 2006). Gastrodiplomacy is a relative new field, but as Petticrew and Roberts note, a systematic literature review can help guide new research, pointing that known facts are based on limited data.



**Figure 1:** Literature review protocol (adapted) from Page et al (2021)

To achieve the final goal, the protocol created is based on PRISMA guidelines and checklist proposed by Page et al (2021).

The first step to was to conduct a document search in two databases, Scopus<sup>®</sup> and Web of Science<sup>®</sup>. These two databases were used because of their large, and growing data sets, and their effectiveness and relevance in evaluating research activities across different scientific disciplines (Zhu & Liu, 2020).

The keywords used are “gastrodiplomacy”, “public diplomacy”, “culinary”, “public diplomacy” and “food”. The range was all documents between 2000 and 2022, given that the first known reference to the term being used is from a 2002 article in *The Economist*.

Table 1 describes in greater details the query strings for each of the two databases. Considering the novelty of the field, the primary aim of the initial search was to capture a substantial amount of content. This initial search returned 104 items that were then compiled into a single spreadsheet and duplicate items were removed, with a total of 85 unique items remaining. After assessing accessibility, the number of available items was lowered to 59.

In order to identify what content to consider all abstracts and conclusions were summarized and each item was attributed one of five distinct tags: definition, positive effects, negative effects, related without effects, and unrelated (see table 2). Upon the completion of this classification, a total of eighteen papers were considered for this review.

**Table 1:** Query Strings for Scopus and Web of Science databases

Database	Query String
Scopus	( TITLE-ABS-KEY ( {gastrodiplomacy} ) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ( {public diplomacy} AND {culinary} ) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ( {public diplomacy} AND {food} ) ) AND PUBYEAR > 1999 AND PUBYEAR < 2023 AND ( LIMIT-TO ( LANGUAGE , "English" ) )
Web of Science	Results for gastrodiplomacy (All Fields) OR public diplomacy AND culinary (All Fields) OR public diplomacy AND food (All Fields) and English (Languages)

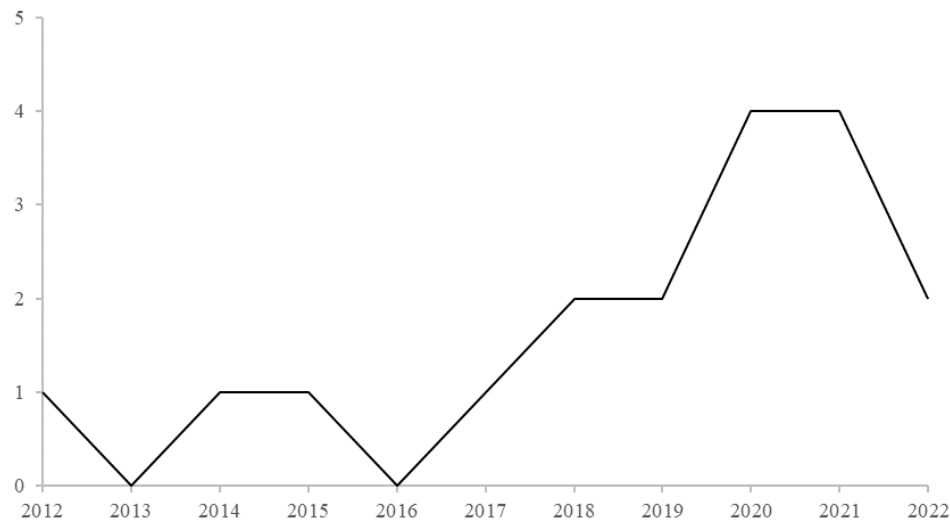
**Table 2:** Content analysis criteria

Tag	Definition
Definition	Content that covered the definition of gastrodiplomacy and its history.
Positive Effects	Content that had found positive effects from gastrodiplomacy campaigns
Negative Effects	Content that had found negative effects from gastrodiplomacy campaigns
Related w/o Effects	Content that talked about gastrodiplomacy but did not mention finding any effects.

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Unrelated	All content that didn't mentioned gastrodiplomacy, or used the term for either food diplomacy or culinary diplomacy
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**Figure 2:** Number of Gastrodiplomacy Articles 2012-2022

#### 4. Results

This section presents the review results, after analysing eighteen papers, as detailed in Section 3.

The results show how little literature exists on the subject. Gastrodiplomacy has been in the public discourse at least since 2002 when *The Economist* published an article about Thailand, and it's Thai Kitchen of the World program. However, the first scientific article on the subject appears 10 years later when Rockower (2012) tries to create a working definition of what gastrodiplomacy is, and has important, what it isn't.

Data suggests an increase interest in the topic as of late, with a moderate increase in the numbers of papers published, specially in 2020 and 2021 (see figure 2). However, it might still be too soon to define this increase as a trend, or simply outliers in the number of papers on the topic.



More so, research is still needed to better understand the impact gastrodiplomacy programs have, both inside and outside the borders of countries with said programs. Of the analysed papers, only about 50% used empirical data, which leaves a gap in the knowledge.

## 5. Conclusion

Although PRISMA was used to write this review, the sparse number of works on the subject, together with limitation on the availability of papers, leaves this work with a very limited number of papers to analyse. The field is under studied as figure 2 shows, but there is already some evidence that when applied correctly gastrodiplomacy programs can lead to economic gains in tourism.

A limiting factor of the field is the broad definition of what Gastrodiplomacy is and how it applies to public diplomacy. The term is widely used interchangeably with food diplomacy and culinary diplomacy. A more broadly acceptance of a definition needs to be adopted and defined in future research.

Future research should also evaluate the impact these programs have not only in tourism but also in exports and cultural acceptance.

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