

## **Gastrodiplomacy in the Bairrada wine region (Portugal): Engaging and charming by the Senses**

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**Objectives** | For millennia, cuisine has served as a powerful diplomatic instrument. In more recent times, certain nations have strategically incorporated it into government initiatives, leveraging their culinary richness as a vehicle for cultural expression. The main objective is to allure foreign populations and reshape perceptions of their nation through the tantalizing exploration of diverse flavors and culinary traditions. Studies confirm that eating together builds trust and food has become the new internet, a form of non-verbal communication that connects us globally (Forman & Lejeune, 2023). The diplomatic dimensions of gastronomy and tourism have been recognized and studied for a long time, giving rise to the term “gastrodiplomacy” which refers to concerted and sustained public relations campaigns and investments by governments, often in collaboration with non-state actors, to increase the value and positioning of the national brand through gastronomy (Rockower, 2020). Faced with changes in demand, destinations (led by regional entities) must promote the linkage between gastronomy, local food heritage and culture, to meet the visitors’ expectations of authenticity and quality.

**Methodology** | To enhance our exploration of gastrodiplomacy, we have chosen to initiate a case study focused on the wine-growing region of Bairrada. The methodology employed in this study places a strong emphasis on qualitative analysis. The central inquiry guiding our investigation is: “How do the municipalities of Bairrada construct their gastrodiplomacy strategies?” To address this question comprehensively, we had systematically gathered data from the respective municipal websites, possessing attributes such as appeal, informativeness, engagement, commercial credibility, and the simplification of stakeholder interactions. Researchers assert that the Internet has profoundly altered the entire tourism value chain, impacting its creation, marketing, distribution, and consumption (Minghetti and Buhalis, 2010; Salavati and Hashrim, 2015). In this context, corporate websites play a crucial role in fostering synergies within the realm of wine and gastronomy (W&G). Our approach involves compiling information on the region's abundant natural and cultural resources, upcoming events, and prominent landmarks that contribute to its rich culinary heritage. The research planning started with a deep literature review (LR), collecting

information in the SCOPUS academic database, using "gastrodiplomacy" and "tourism" as keywords. The results showed a little explored topic, because of the small number of scientific papers (10 papers) starting in 2019 (3 papers), 2020 (1), 2021 (2), 2022 (1) and 2023 (3), especially in business and management (35%) and social sciences areas (25%).

Diplomacy can be examined through various lenses, with a distinct dichotomy between "hard power" and "soft power." Diplomacy, specifically Government-to-Government (G2G) relationships, involves the art of persuasion using cultural, values, and ideas—referred to as "soft power." This stands in contrast to "hard power," which relies on military force for conquest or coercion. Nye (2004) contends that "Soft power emerges from our culture, domestic values, foreign policies, and the ability to attract rather than coerce or incentivize. Soft power stems from the appeal of a country's culture, political ideals, and policies.

Public diplomacy and cultural diplomacy represent two branches of "soft power" diplomacy and inside cultural diplomacy we found the gastrodiplomacy. Suntikul (2017, p.2) defines "gastrodiplomacy in tourism" as the comprehensive set of policies and practices undertaken by both government-affiliated and private entities to cultivate favourable associations with a national brand among foreign audiences. To pursue public diplomatic objectives it is critical involving several players, such as: Government (Turismo de Portugal with Strategic Plans for Tourism; Tourism Regions; Municipal Councils); Cultural Ambassadors (Schools, Universities, museums, regional groups), Media (Television programs, radio programs, books & Magazines); Fairs & Events (FITUR, BTL, regional events, popular festivals, others); Associations (gastronomic fraternities, producer groups, Local Development Associations, control and certification entities), Private companies (commercial areas, influencers, chefs, restaurants, etc.).

In Portugal, the Turismo de Portugal serves as the National Tourism Authority, operating within the Ministry of Economy and the Sea. This entity holds the responsibility for the comprehensive promotion, valorization, and sustainability of tourist activities in the country. In the realm of public diplomacy, the overarching objective is encapsulated in the phrase "Raise Portugal's Profile" (TdP, 2017, p.56), involving a meticulous planning and execution of strategies, identifying key markets strategically to maximize impact and outreach and conduct online campaigns to bolster visibility; executing brand actions that resonate with the target audience; undertaking social communication and public relations actions to foster positive perceptions; be represented at international tourism fairs to showcase Portugal's offerings.

**Main Results and Contributions** | | In compliance with Article 2 of DL 301/2003 dated December 4th, the Bairrada geographical production area for DOC (Controlled Designation of Origin) encompasses 8 municipalities, 39 parishes, and integrate a wine route aiming to invigorate, promote, and enhance the Bairrada wine-growing activity. The municipalities websites content

analysis, exposes a total of 1702 endogenous resources encompassing natural, material, and immaterial heritage. Exploring the intangible heritage aspect, this analysis reveals a total of 269 resources connected to Cultural and Recreational Events, 21 resources associated with Animation Events, and 2 resources attributed to Business Events. Additionally, a nuanced examination uncovers 130 resources intricately tied to Gastronomy and Wine, comprising 69 Typical Dishes, 27 Regional Sweets, 23 Wines, and 11 Other culinary elements not explicitly specified. The most iconic product/gastronomic events in Bairrada region were: Boiled or stew snails; Goat & sheep meat/ stewed in clay pots, cooked in a wood-fired oven all night, until the flesh falls from the bones; roast suckling pig; stuffed goat stomachs with goat, pork aromatic herbs; 3 feet iron pot; soaps festival; baked potatoes in the sand and grilled sardines on a tile; fava bean party; honey fair; Lupin fair are the yellow legume seeds. They are traditionally eaten as a pickled snack food and Wine & Food Fair.

Examining the 89 Bairrada restaurants with online presence, we found that 4.5% lack a website entirely, while 1% solely maintain a corporate website. Additionally, 53.9% are active on Facebook, and 41.6% maintain a dual presence, with both a website and a Facebook page. Of particular interest is the discovery that 59.6% of establishments feature an online menu, encompassing a substantial 161 food references. Menus are predominantly in Portuguese (89%), with an additional 13% available in English. In terms of restaurant offerings, the menu showed meat dishes (31%) and desserts (25%), followed by fish (15%) and wines (14%). The most frequently recommended meat dishes include suckling pig (23%), Chanfana (23%), Cabidela (13%), Negalhos, Rojões (10%), and Sarrabulho, beef, and rooster (7%). As for fish dishes, Cod (55%), eels (36%), and sardines (9%) are the top choices. The desserts encompass Morgado do Buçaco, along with crème brûlée and rice pudding. So, the restaurants websites promote the regional food heritage. Another important communication tool is the word-of-mouth, because it can shape a restaurant's reputation, influence customer behavior, and contribute to its long-term success. By consistently delivering excellent food and service, restaurants can encourage customers satisfaction to become enthusiastic advocates, ultimately driving more business through word-of-mouth recommendations. Concerning word-of-mouth, several authors (Kivela, Inbakaran & Reece, 1999; Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006) have delineated a comprehensive array of advantages. So, word-of-mouth is a crucial communication and promotion tool, including the establishment of trust and credibility, increasing customers acquisition, fostering business repetition, getting positive online reviews, amplifying social media attention, ensuring quality assurance, achieving community engagement, creating feedback loops, acquiring differentiation, and construct a strong brand identity. As time progresses, a restaurant has the potential to carve a niche for itself, becoming renowned for specific dishes, a distinctive ambiance, or exceptional customer service.

**Limitations** | A limitation of this work is the focus given to only one wine region (Bairrada) and the in-depth study of only 3 types of gastrodiploamacy ambassadors.

**Conclusions** | Gastrodiploamacy, depicted as a form of soft power operates as a strategic tool to effectively "sell" a particular policy, encompassing aspects of culture, values, ideology, and gastronomy. Rooted in persuasion, marketing, public relations, advertising, and peer-to-peer engagement, this approach transcends mere culinary promotion. In daily life, the concept acts as a bridge, facilitating interactions among cultures and connecting peoples, nations, and identities. It manifests as a two-way interactive public exchange, leveraging personal and social dimensions to exert influence. The resulting relationships extend beyond the realm of food, encompassing the broader tapestry of culture and societal life. In this regard, Bairrada wine region must come up with creative ways of raising its region-branding status: by creating greater awareness about its unique wine & culinary culture; by empower its citizens to conduct gastrodiploamacy through more people-to-people programs. Gastrodiploamacy will impact on raising the nation-brand recognition, creating broader tourism and more foreign-direct investment.

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