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The complexity and potential of Spain's case for Gastrodiplomacy

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1. Introduction

Gastronomy governs the full arc of human existence. “From the cry of the newborn to the last sip that accompanies the dying, food traverses the human experience from beginning to end”, functioning as what Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, the founding figure of modern gastronomy, described in his *Physiologie du Goût* (1825) as the force that "governs our whole life". Food transcends mere biological necessity; it embodies culture, identity, and values, operating simultaneously as sustenance, ritual, and symbol. What we choose to eat, as food scholar A. Trapido observes, expresses "who we are and where we come from," making food an invaluable tool for communicating emotional messages across cultural boundaries (Cited in Reynolds, 2012). Yet food's significance extends far beyond the intimate sphere of the family table or the cultural expression of communities. It functions as a medium through which states project power, nations construct identity, and International Relations unfold.

The strategic deployment of national cuisines within diplomatic frameworks has emerged as a significant yet understudied dimension of International Relations (Li & Mok, 2025). Brillat-Savarin himself noted presciently that "the fate of nations has often been sealed at a banquet" (1970). Yet only in the past two decades has this ancient practice been theorized, systematized, and mobilized as deliberate state policy under the rubric of "gastrodiplomacy."

The concept, broadly defined as the use of food and cuisine as an instrument to expand a nation's soft power among foreign publics, has gained scholarly momentum since Thailand's pioneering "Global Thai" campaign in 2002, when *The Economist* coined the term gastrodiplomacy. Today, more than 22 years later, a substantial and growing body of scholarship examines how nations leverage culinary traditions as tools of public and cultural diplomacy. Li and Mok's (2025) intensive review of the publications on gastrodiplomacy during the last two decades, which has served as a strong standing point of this thesis, reveals that the field remains uneven, repetitive, and critically underdeveloped. They conclude that the research studies the case of mainly Asian developing nations and overlooks European countries. It also fails to account for the multi-actor complexity through which gastrodiplomacy actually operates in practice (Li & Mok, 2025).

This thesis situates gastrodiplomacy within the theoretical frameworks of soft power,

nation branding, and cultural diplomacy while advancing a novel empirical approach focused on Spain as a European developed nation with distinctive characteristics: multi-level governance (state, regional, municipal), internal identity contestation (Catalonia, Basque Country, Andalusia), and an emerging state-orchestrated gastrodiploamacy strategy articulated in the 2026 *Plan Internacional de la Gastronomía*.

2. Purposes and Aims

This study seeks to understand why Spain, despite possessing exceptional gastronomic assets and demonstrating growing political interest in food as an instrument of soft power, has not yet developed and deployed an effective gastrodiploamacy strategy that fully matches its potential as what many describe as “*el país más rico del mundo*”.

The motivation to address this question and study Spain’s gastrodiploamacy complexity and potential stems from the genuine personal curiosity first sparked, during an academic exchange in Thailand, by the discovery of the Global Thai Campaign, a state-led culinary program that implied the intensive training of chefs and the elaboration of exportable menus varying in target market and customer segment. The menus included the emblematic *pad thai*, which was surprisingly invented by the Thai government in the 1930s as an exportable national dish as part of the aforementioned strategy. Even though it was not an organic cultural invention, but deliberately curated, the dish was so effectively popularised that it was eventually adopted by Thai society itself as an authentic part of its own culinary identity. The existence of over 17,000 Thai restaurants as a direct consequence of a state-led campaign, revealed the extraordinary reach that a well-designed gastrodiploamacy initiative can achieve, and opened a broader question: if a country could construct a national dish and export it successfully, what could a country with centuries of genuine culinary depth accomplish?

This question led naturally to the Spanish case. Throughout travels and academic exchanges, the experience of encountering extremely different food cultures made eating one of the most immediate and honest way of connecting with other people and understanding where they come from. Food presents a dimension beyond its biological function, extending to almost every sphere of life. Its connection with International Relations is largely

understudied. Returning to Spain with this newly acquired perspective made the country's gastronomic richness regain a new significance which begged the question of how Spain, with such an excellent gastronomy remain so underrepresented abroad and understudied. This thesis represents an effort to fill part of that research gap and to analyse its assets, past gastrodipomatic initiatives, and its weaknesses that could help the country overcome its limitations, harness its strengths and finally reclaim the position it deserves at the international table.

To address this issue and evaluate both the constraints and emerging possibilities within Spain's complex gastronomic ecosystem, the research is structured around an adapted SWOT framework. This approach highlights the country's culinary strengths while also identifying internal weaknesses and the factors that have limited the international projection of its food culture. By mapping these elements, the study assesses the conditions that have shaped Spain's food-related international presence and derives insights regarding the future feasibility of a more coherent gastrodipomacy strategy. We aim to adopt a multi-actor lens that acknowledges the often-overlooked complexity derived from the wide range of stakeholders engaged in the co-production *and mise en place* of a nation's culinary international image. These actors operate in the spheres of food and dipomacy, meeting at times at their intersection while being guided by individual logics and interests.

At the conceptual level, it aims to respond directly to Li and Mok's (2025) finding that the field of gastrodipomacy remains geographically imbalanced by foregrounding Spain as the main case, aiming to move beyond the Asia-centric focus that has dominated research to date.

The present thesis has three main objectives. First, it seeks to map and systematise the strengths of Spanish gastronomy as a foundation for gastrodipomacy. This includes analysing historical layers (Roman, Arab-Islamic and American), contemporary product diversity and quality, innovation in the agri-food sector and in high-end cuisine, the social practices that organise eating in Spain, and the macroeconomic weight of the broader gastronomic ecosystem. Establishing this baseline is necessary to show that there is an

objective potential that any gastrodiplomatic strategy could mobilise.

The second objective is to reconstruct and divide into different periods the main initiatives that, explicitly or implicitly, have served gastrodiplomatic purposes in Spain. It seeks to do so by tracing the evolution from early branding efforts, through trade promotion platforms and large-scale campaigns. This chronological mapping is used to visualize the progress and the limitations of Spain's case moving towards greater institutionalization and strategic intent.

The third objective is to identify and explain the weaknesses and limitations that hinder Spain's ability to convert its gastronomic strength into consistent soft power gains. Attention is paid to problems of interministerial and multi-level coordination, the formalization of gastrodiplomacy compared with other countries, tensions between national and regional culinary identities and the use of diplomatic infrastructure as a gastronomic platform.

Ultimately, these pursuits are organised around a central research question, the notion of which was hinted at the beginning of this section but which we aim to articulate more precisely here:

How and why has Spain, despite its exceptional gastronomic assets and the recent formalisation of food-related strategies, struggled to articulate a coherent gastrodiplomacy commensurate with its potential, and under what conditions could this gap be reduced?

From this overarching question, several specific research questions follow:

1. What historical, cultural, economic and institutional factors explain the strength and distinctiveness of Spanish gastronomy as a potential soft power resource?
2. How have Spanish public and private actors deployed gastronomy internationally over the last two decades, and how has this deployment evolved from dispersed initiatives to more explicit strategies?
3. What are the main weaknesses, coordination failures and structural limitations that

constrain the effectiveness of Spain's gastrodiplomacy, both internally and in comparison, with other campaign countries?

Finally, a general purpose of this study is to inform more coherent and strategically grounded gastrodiplomacy in Spain. By diagnosing the misalignments between assets, narratives, actors and instruments, it seeks to identify practical levers for improving coordination across ministries and levels of government, for clarifying Spain's culinary narrative and for making better use of gastronomy in diplomatic, commercial and cultural settings. The recommendations, developed in the final chapter, will therefore be rooted in the empirical and theoretical findings laid out here. In this sense, the purposes and aims are mainly focused on advance scholarship on gastrodiplomacy and to contribute to ongoing debates on how Spain can more effectively project itself through the language of food.

3. Methodology

As to address the core research question and the subjacent lines of inquiry, we shall state the sources used in the elaboration of the present work. The research technique used in its production is the compilation and analysis of information that stem a wide range of sources. The data collection has been conducted based on the following types of sources.

a) Primary sources

The primary sources which were consulted for the elaboration of this work can be divided into two categories: official policy documents and original material which was specifically generated for this research in the form of an interview.

The most notable policy documents are the *Guía de Diplomacia Gastronómica*, published in June 2021 by the Secretariat of State for Spain Global within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation (MAEUEC), and the *Plan Internacional de la Gastronomía Española*, published in February 2026 by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAPA). Both texts are analysed and are considered as evidence of the evolution of the field. Other additional documents include official communications and press releases from ICEX, MAPA and the Royal Academy of Gastronomy (RAG), as well as the

KPMG and RAG report that measures the quantitative weight of the agri-food sector in Spain.

The original empirical material is an interview conducted in person in Madrid on 20 February 2026 with Luis Suárez de Lezo, president of the RAG in Spain. It was recorded, transcribed in full, and is included as Appendix A. Given the institutional position of the interviewee and the specificity of the insights obtained, this interview constitutes a privileged and therefore central source for the analysis developed in Chapters 7 and 8.

b) Secondary sources

The secondary sources which were accessed consist of systematic reviews of past literature and other documents. The most relevant source of this nature is Li and Mok's scoping review of the research on gastrodiplomacy over the past two decades, which served as a valuable standpoint for the formulation of the objectives of this thesis. Alongside this document is the work of two pioneer scholars on the field: Rockower (2012) and Chapple-Sokol (2013), who *a priori* defined key concepts as to establish the conceptual framework of gastrodiplomacy.

For the Spanish case specifically, this thesis draws on the scarce but growing body of scholarship reviewed on Chapter 4, which included the studies of Jiménez Molina (2024), Rius Ulldemolins and Martín Zamorano (2014), Muñiz-Martínez and Florek (2023), and Chislett (2014, 2022), as well as the studies on Spain's international image produced by the Real Instituto Elcano.

4. Current State of Research

In the current chapter, we aim to outline the academic literature and research built around the field of gastrodiplomacy, and to explain what it has and has not yet achieved, to identify the space within which the present thesis seeks to contribute. For the writing of this paper, three documents have been of particular utility and deserve an introductory note.

The first and most foundational is the scoping review conducted by Guofeng Li and Kakio Mok. Li is a researcher affiliated with the University of Lisbon whose prior work focused on Chinese gastrodiplomacy in Portugal and Mok is based in Sciences Po in Paris.

Together, they authored "More than two decades of gastrodiploacy: a review of the concept, current characteristics, and future trends", the most comprehensive and systematic analysis of the gastrodiploacy field to date that covers 64 publications and 94 country references published between 2002 and 2024 (Li & Mok, 2025). By mapping out the geographic, methodological and theoretical biases that have defined the research on the field throughout the 21st century, it has outlined the principal gaps and shed light on possible novel approaches. Thus, it has served as the primary standing point of this thesis.

The second and third key documents are two Spanish policy texts which are fundamental primary sources on Spain's gastrodiploacy. The *Guía de Diplomacia Gastronómica*, published in 2021 by the Secretariat of State for Spain Global within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, represents the first formal recognition by the Spanish government of gastronomy as an instrument of soft power that should be systematically integrated into foreign policy (MAEUEC, 2021). The *Plan Internacional de la Gastronomía Española*, launched in February 2026 by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Food (MAPA), extends this into a ten-measure roadmap developed through a participatory process with over 120 stakeholders across the full gastronomic value chain (MAPA, 2026). These sources attest to a significant advance in the strategization and coordination of initiatives and agents, while simultaneously raising empirical questions about their effectiveness, coordination, and reception, that this thesis seeks to address. Both documents are simultaneously objects of analysis in the first section of Chapter 7: *Past and Present Gastrodiploacy Initiatives*.

Having recognised the theoretical bedrock of the present study, this section proceeds in two parts: first, an account of the international state of gastrodiploacy research as reconstructed primarily from Li and Mok (2025); and second, a review of the limited but growing literature specifically on the Spanish case.

4.1 Review of academic literature on gastrodiploacy

The academic study of gastrodiploacy has undergone three distinct phases, since its conceptualization in 2002, which we have discerned for clarifying and analytical purposes. Within the first phase (2002-2012), which was dominated by grey literature such as blogs,

practitioner commentary and opinion pieces, we situate the contributions of Paul Rockower and Sam Chapple-Sokol. These two pioneer scholars ignited research on gastrodiplomacy and laid the preliminary cornerstones of the discipline. Rockower's work (2012), particularly "Recipes for Gastrodiplomacy", made a dissertation about the mechanisms of gastrodiplomacy and popularized the definition of the term as "the act of winning hearts and minds through the stomach". Meanwhile, Chapple-Sokol (2013), added his own definition of *culinary diplomacy* as the "use of food and cuisine as an instrument to create cross-cultural understandings in the hopes of improving interactions and cooperation".

The second phase (2013-2022) registered an increase in peer reviewed publications. The research on gastrodiplomacy started taking shape, mainly through the proliferation of national case studies, which is conceived as the core of gastrodiplomacy literature (Tettner & Kalyoncu, 2016). In this period, Chapple-Sokol's article "Culinary Diplomacy: Breaking Bread to Win Hearts and Minds" integrated gastrodiplomacy in the public diplomacy conversation (2013).

The third and current phase, which began in 2023, reflects both an increase in the number of publications per year, particularly a surge dominated by Indonesian scholarship driven by the establishment of a dedicated gastrodiplomacy centre at Jember University and its institutionalization as a subdiscipline within International Relations. This period also marks a shift beyond macro-state analysis, with the proliferation of studies examining non-state actors, diaspora communities, individual chefs, and influencers (Li & Mok, 2025).

There is a geographical, methodological and theoretical imbalance on the past research on the field. According to the scholarly review, geographically, the field is indisputably Asiacentric: 74% of the cases concern Asian developing nations, with South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Japan dominating. Europe accounts for only 5% of cases and Spain receives only 2 mentions (Jiménez Molina, 2024). Methodologically, case study and secondary literature analysis account for 70% of the methods employed, and interviews, content analysis, and discourse analysis are very rare in the past research (Li & Mok, 2025). White, Barreda and Hein (2019) conducted an earlier systematic gastrodiplomacy literature review which supported this argument with their insight that there was an almost exclusive focus on social and cultural aspects of culinary promotion rather than on diplomatic or

economic outcomes.

Theoretically, the field clusters heavily around four reference concepts: Nation Branding, Public Diplomacy, Cultural Diplomacy and Soft Power. Michaels DeSoucey's concept of *gastronationalism* (2010) refers to the use of food to create and maintain national identity. Alongside the idea of Constructivism, it considers how food can become a site of contestation over authenticity and ownership - an interconnection which remains underexplored.

4.2 Review of academic literature on the Spanish case

Although research on gastrodiplomacy has expanded significantly over the past decade, studies devoted to the Spain's case are scarce. Among the few that do so, is De Martín Maurer's (2019) undergraduate thesis "Political cooks or cooking politicians: Spain's golden chance for gastrodiplomacy," defended at Universidad Pontificia Comillas. It is a complete, extensive paper that "makes the case" for the creation of a Spanish national gastrodiplomatic strategy, after thoroughly examining the successes of Peru and Israel and the elements of gastrodiplomacy that already existed in Spain.

In 2024, Jiménez Molina published an article where he explored the apparatuses through which gastrodiplomacy achieves soft power in Spain, highlighting its excellent culinary traditions and the role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation (MAEUEC) in promoting Spanish gastronomy as part of the Marca España strategy at both national and regional levels. Culinary diplomacy in Spain has also been examined through events held on national territory to understand how gastronomic experience can contribute to Spain's nation branding. For instance, Özel and Filiz (2024) studied a culinary experience organised as part of an academic exchange programme involving the reception of international participants.

Some studies approach the topic through tourism, which is intimately connected to gastrodiplomacy. In this line, Muñiz-Martínez and Florek (2021/2023) scrutinize the Basque gastronomic ecosystem and describe gastronomy as the core of a holistic "place ecosystem". They map how farmers, fishers, restaurateurs, chefs, public administrations, and cultural institutions together create value, identity and competitiveness for the Basque Country, all around food. In this model, chefs function as "institutional innovators" who connect different

parts of the value chain, while food tourism becomes a key mechanism through which visitors engage with the territory, internalise its narratives and, ultimately, contribute to its international image.

Additionally, there has been some research on Spain's practices of *food diplomacy*, a notion which will be defined in the Theoretical Framework. The 2030 Agenda and international cooperation exhibits how a gastrodipomatic tool can help advance Sustainable Development Goal 2 (Zero Hunger) in the Ibero-American region. Pretell Liñán (2022), in a master's thesis, describes gastrodipomacy as a crosscutting tool along the whole gastronomic value chain that can speed up progress on the 2030 Agenda by supporting sustainable food systems, local development and the fight against hunger through gastronomic tourism, food heritage and international food agreements. Ibero-American frameworks such as the *Plan Ibero-americano de Gastronomía y Alimentación* (PIGA 2030) are spaces where Spain uses its cooperation policies and gastronomic expertise to promote more sustainable and inclusive food transitions. Spanish institutions and cooperation agencies take part in projects that use gastronomy to strengthen regional ties, support local producers and contribute to more resilient food systems in partner countries, which can reinforce Spain's image as both a gastronomic reference and a committed actor on global food issues.

The most recent development in the Spanish case is the development of official policy documents dedicated specifically to gastronomy as a diplomatic tool. Two of these documents stand out as particularly significant and have not yet been examined in academic literature: the *Guía de Diplomacia Gastronómica* (MAEUEC, 2021) and the *Plan Internacional de la Gastronomía Española* (MAPA, 2026). The Guide, published in June 2021, upholds the diplomatic employment of Spanish gastronomy in the ordinary activity of the Representations of Spain in foreign ground as well as in events, cultural and protocolary acts (RAG, n.d.). The Plan, published in February 2026, emphasizes the growing relevance of gastrodipomacy within Spain's international strategy and places the issue firmly on the policy agenda. Their recent publication underscores the timeliness, urgency and importance of the topic and further justifies the purpose of the present study, which seeks to strengthen and expand the available knowledge on Spain's gastrodipomacy present and future.

5. Theoretical Framework

5.1 Gastrodiplomacy in International Relations

Over the past few decades, there has been an increasing amount of research on food in the discipline of International Relations, especially in relation to public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, and nation branding. Traditionally, diplomacy has been perceived as a practice focused on political, military, and economic relations between nations. However, researchers have started to acknowledge the significance of the cultural aspect in diplomacy and its ability to impact foreign perceptions of nations. Gastronomy stands out in terms of being universal, symbolically rich, and capable of transmitting certain characteristics of national culture.

Gastrodiplomacy may be broadly understood as the use of national cuisine for the purpose of public diplomacy designed to enhance the image of the country abroad as well as showcase its cultural values. In contrast to diplomatic practices, which are largely oriented toward political elites, gastrodiplomacy involves efforts to engage foreign publics through cultural means.

The rise in the practice of gastrodiplomacy can be attributed to the changes which have recently occurred in the international order. Globalization has facilitated cross-cultural exchanges, leading to the spread of cultural goods. In this respect, food is among the most globalized cultural products today. The internet, restaurants, food festivals, food-related shows, increased travel, and tourism enable national cuisines to reach global audiences as never before. Consequently, gastronomy has been increasingly viewed as a tool that allows nations to project their culture and distinguish themselves from others in the global competition for supremacy.

Several governments have acknowledged the diplomatic potential of gastronomy and thus integrated culinary promotion into their public diplomacy practices. Thailand is considered a paradigmatic case, as the country with the first such program. The “Global Thai” Project, initiated in 2002, focused on the international promotion of Thai cuisine and the expansion and proliferation of Thai restaurants overseas (Rockower, 2012). As of early 2024, there were 17,478 Thai restaurants across the world (Thailand Public Relations Department,

2024). Many other countries have developed similar initiatives such as South Korea, Japan, and Peru.

The efficiency of gastrodiplomacy is linked to the communicative function of food. Indeed, culinary activities involve emotions and various of the five senses, and they take place in social settings which promote communication and discussion. Beyond the individual experience, in sharing their dishes, people have the chance to exchange cultures informally, thereby establishing relations with other members of society. As Lisa Heldke states in *Exotic Appetites: Ruminations of a Food Adventurer* (2003), the process of eating can stimulate curiosity and empathy towards other cultures, thus acting as a bridge, overcoming cultural boundaries. Because eating produces a direct embodied encounter with other cultures and implies the adoption of a specific attitude or disposition, it is never a neutral practice. In cases where this process is driven by exoticism or a tendency to consume the Other instead of comprehending him, such a process may result in reproducing inequality. This is how gastrodiplomacy acts as a two-way instrument in public diplomacy, which may both encourage mutual intercultural understanding or deepen inequalities.

Gastrodiplomacy cannot but be related to the theory of soft power created by Joseph Nye. *Soft power* is understood as "the ability of a country to affect others by attraction rather than coercion or payments" (Nye, 2004). Culture, including its products, values, and institutions, is considered to increase the capability of influencing others. Food, as a part of culture, can thus be viewed as a powerful means of creating a more positive image of a country abroad. Because it generates admiration, legitimacy and credibility, other societies voluntarily align with a nation's values, policies or culture.

One of the unique characteristics of gastrodiplomacy is the range of actors who are active in practicing it. While governments usually take the lead in promoting their country's food culture, it is sometimes the role of non-state actors like chefs, restaurants, and diasporas to spread the country's cuisine beyond its borders. This means that gastrodiplomacy takes place in networks where government actions and involvement from the private sector create synergies, as is the case for Spain.

To study gastrodiplomacy in the field of International Relations, it is important to

consider the relationship between gastrodiplomacy and cultural diplomacy, as well as the prime theories of International Relations. Understanding gastrodiplomacy will also involve delving into the definition of other concepts that are closely associated with the topic, which will be the endeavour of the during the following sections.

5.1.1 Cultural Diplomacy

Usually, gastrodiplomacy is seen as a form of cultural diplomacy, which involves the use of cultural exchanges and expression to achieve mutual understanding between states and advance the interests of a state's foreign policy. The notion of cultural diplomacy includes various forms of interactions among cultures including artistic exhibitions, educational exchanges, language learning, and other events that have an element of culture. Such actions are meant to foster good relations with the public outside one's borders, thereby providing exposure to the cultural values, history, and heritage of a certain nation (Mark, 2009).

In essence, the importance of cultural diplomacy becomes related to the theory of soft power. Namely, according to Nye (2004), states may attain positive results in international politics either via coercion or economic inducements, or by using attraction. *Soft power* is the nation's projection of influence to achieve desired outcomes through the latter, legitimacy and persuasion. The underlying mechanism is that manifestations of culture likely to inspire respect, interest, and fascination, lead to the inception of a specific image of a country in the collective imagery and the minds of members of other societies (Nye, 2004).

Food, as both a tangible symbol of national identity and a vehicle for shared human experience has historically proven one of the most effective instruments of international affairs. During the Cold War, both the USA and the Soviet Union made significant investments in cultural diplomacy to promote their political ideologies (Luša & Jakešević, 2017). Beyond music and art, food itself became a key arena of ideological competition. As Standage (2009) noted, food took on a role as "an ideological weapon during the Cold War".

This could be attested to the stance that culinary traditions are an excellent manifestation of national culture. First, culinary traditions involve various elements of history, regional diversity, and social values of a state, contributing to the formation of a certain sense of national identity. Second, the promotion of culinary traditions abroad makes

it possible for a country to convey certain messages about its culture. Thirdly, given that food is an essential need for all mankind, and that every nation has, in one way or another, developed its own cuisine, gastronomy proves to be highly accessible. ability to tell stories about national culture using culinary elements. States choose certain dishes or ingredients that reflect a part of their history, geography, or cuisine.

Moreover, culinary experiences usually take place in social settings that promote interaction among people. Dining together with representatives of different cultures becomes an instrument to foster dialogue and communicate in an informal way. Diplomatic banquets, international culinary festivals, and exhibitions may be considered as venues for cultural diplomacy, where the practice of gastrodiploacy becomes possible due to the opportunity to experience a culture's culinary tradition in a concrete and entertaining way.

5.1.2 International Relations & Gastronomy

The study of gastrodiploacy could also benefit from exploring certain theoretical perspectives of International Relations in terms of interpreting the significance of food and culture for global politics. There are three major theories of International Relations that present differing views on the possible role of gastronomy in international politics: Realism, Liberalism, and Constructivism. Realism represents the theory centred on power, security and national interests as the primary factors of international politics. As realists view the international system as anarchic since there is no supranational body regulating relations between independent nation-states, the main interests of each of those states are its own security and survival (Mearsheimer, 2001).

From the perspective of Realism, food plays the role of a strategic resource in the context of national security. Food production, supplies, and markets could have serious implications for geopolitical relationships between nation-states. While Realism rarely deals with cultural diplomacy, food could be involved in diplomatic processes from the standpoint of this theory. For instance, food could play the role of symbolism in state-to-state relationships such as at diplomatic receptions.

International relations theories based on Liberalism, on the other hand, offer an opposing view. Liberalism highlights the importance of collaboration, economic

interdependence, and international organizations that help foster cooperation between states. As per liberal scholars, economic transactions and international organizations can help prevent conflicts because of the creation of common interests between states (Keohane & Nye, 1977).

In the context of Liberalism, food systems and culinary transactions can help strengthen international relations through economic transactions and cultural interactions. Globalization of food systems has led to widespread interdependencies in the food system, involving producers, consumers, and cultures. Culinary tourism, global food festivals, and international restaurant chains all help build connections between cultures and economies.

The concept of gastrodplomacy is also associated with the liberal interpretation of the relationship between culinary promotion and international politics. The liberal approach underlines the value of cultural exchanges in creating mutual cooperation between nations and helping them understand one another. Promoting national cuisine in international markets involves communication between citizens of various countries and allows for building ties based on sharing cultural heritage and generating economic benefits.

Constructivism offers yet another interpretation of the relationship between gastronomy and International Relations. This theory focuses on the role played by ideas, norms, and identities in the process of shaping global politics. As pointed out by constructivist theorists, states act based not only on their material resources but also on cultural beliefs (Wendt, 1999). Hence, food can be viewed as an important symbol helping to build national identity. Various elements of culinary traditions have much to do with history, culture, and geography. In promoting national cuisines, states strive to make their countries better known to others.

Gastrodplomacy proves especially appropriate for the framework of constructivist theory, as it deals with symbolic communication. By engaging in food promotion campaigns and festivals, among other activities, nations weave stories about themselves, their culture, and their history, which become part of a narrative of their national identity and cultural heritage.

5.1.3 Key Terms

There are several terms that relate to gastrodiploamacy and are often discussed in scholarly literature. It is necessary to define those terms to build the theoretical framework of the current research paper. *Gastrodiploamacy* stands for the process of promoting a certain national cuisine to other nations for the purpose of public diploamacy. Another term that relates to gastrodiploamacy is culinary diploamacy. Though it is also used to describe gastrodiploamacy sometimes, culinary diploamacy usually implies the employment of culinary arts during diploamatic relations and events. To be precise, Chapple-Sokol (2013) defines *culinary diploamacy* as the act of employing cuisine for communication purposes among political figures in their interactions. Culinary diploamacy differs from gastrodiploamacy in terms of target audience. Whereas, the first is geared towards elites, heads of state or diploamats, the latter is aimed at the general population.

Nation branding also needs to be considered because it is a technique used by countries to manage their international image. *Nation branding* refers to the practice whereby a country promotes itself as an entity in an effort to attract investors, tourists, and international partners (Anholt, 2007). Nations usually utilize their culture in the form of food, cultural heritage, and values in their nation branding efforts to create unique identities in the international market. The role of gastronomy has been emphasized in recent years in this ground since the cuisine of a nation represents its identity in a tangible form and exhibits elements of creativity and cultural diversity that make up the essence of the national story.

Gastronationalism, named by DeSoucey (2010), refers to how foods become associated with a nation's politics and culture. The term embodies the political importance that food may acquire, transcending cultural and economic significance. Conflicts regarding the authenticity of certain foods, the designation of local products, and the appropriation of culinary practices show how gastronomy relates directly to identity and sovereignty.

Lastly, *food diploamacy* is an approach to international politics that uses food assistance and agricultural support as foreign policy tools. Food aid programs and agricultural collaboration strategies enhance diploamatic ties and foster development in partner nations. Food diploamacy tackles humanitarian and security objectives, for example, eradicating hunger and ensuring food security. On the other hand, gastrodiploamacy seeks to create soft power and enhance the image of the country abroad, but both approaches highlight the

potential of food as a foreign policy instrument.

5.2 Gastronomy

According to the Oxford Dictionary, gastronomy can be defined as "the art and science of delicate eating" (Oxford, 2026). Its Cambridge counterpart adds an explicit reference to the process that precedes eating, defining it as "the art and knowledge involved in preparing and eating good food" (Cambridge, 2026). This emphasis is given full and exclusive prominence by the Spanish Official Dictionary, which deems it "the art of preparing good food" (RAE, 2026). Its etymological origins lie in the Ancient Greek *gastér* (stomach) and *nómos* (laws that govern).

We can thus derive the etymological definition of gastronomy as the 'rules of the stomach'. However etymologically accurate the definition of gastronomy as 'the laws that govern the stomach', a wide range of fields acknowledge how gastronomy's governance extends far beyond pure biology. Numerous scholars, across different historical periods, have affirmed that food transcends its role as mere sustenance, and it can be a profound social symbol that reflects cultural values, social hierarchies, and collective identities (Patra, 2012). Gastronomy thus constitutes far more than the mere act of eating; it stands as a cultural symbol that defines us as human and can be as much an object of communion as it can be of controversy. It embodies a living representation of each people's idiosyncrasy, intrinsically linked to specific societies, manifesting in cultivation practices, local products, culinary techniques, and the rituals surrounding the serving or consumption of particular dishes (FustéForné, 2016).

The Spanish Ministry of Agriculture, Fishery and Food (2026), defines gastronomy as the:

set of knowledge, practices and cultural expression related with the art of preparing, enjoying and understanding food. It comprehends the elaboration of dishes as well as the use, traditions and values associated with the act of eating, proper of a community or territory. (p. 42)

Luis Suárez de Lezo, president of the Royal Academy of Gastronomy of Spain, (personal communication, February 20, 2026) (*see Appendix A for the full interview*)

transcript) explains that from the institution's perspective, such discipline must be understood in a much broader and comprehensive sense than how it is commonly conceived by society. As he notes, when one asks an average person what gastronomy is, the response will most likely refer to eating, enjoying good food, or spending pleasurable moments with family and friends. For many, gastronomy represents one of the best occasions to share and "*hacer vida conjunta*". Conversely, Suárez de Lezo (personal communication, February 20, 2026) points out that such a notion, while valid, remains vague and incomplete. The "rules of the stomach" are present in almost all spheres of life and should be hence envisioned as a holistic and dynamic phenomenon that interconnects multiple sectors of social life and national identity.

In his view, Gastronomy in a developed country, comprehends tourism, economy and employment, health, education, sustainability, innovation, and research. This enumeration underscores the transversal character of said art and its practices, which manifests itself both in the individual and collective spheres. By integrating it into domains such as education and health, gastronomy becomes a tool for learning, awareness, and wellbeing. Through its link to sustainability, innovation, and research, it situates itself at the core of social and technological progress, acting as a driver of economic development, cultural capital, and Spain's international projection (L. Suárez de Lezo, personal communication, 20 February, 2026).

According to its president, it is therefore one of the Academy's missions to liberate gastronomy from the narrow place it occupies in Spain's collective imagination (Suárez de Lezo, 2026). Its multidimensionality, he emphasizes, is "something we cannot say of any other discipline". Yet he laments that much of society, continues to overlook its true significance. This neglect, he argues, prevents a full recognition of gastronomy's potential as an integrative, economic, and cultural force and, as a result, discourages meaningful investment in its development (L. Suárez de Lezo, personal communication, 20 February, 2026). In this work we seek to acknowledge Spain's gastronomy in all its flawed, multi-faceted, but extremely rich complexity as to shed light on the past, present and future trajectory that Spain's gastrodiplomacy, beginning from the standing point of Spain's gastronomic strengths.

6. Strengths of Spanish gastronomy

The culinary culture of a nation constitutes, in its broadest sense, a system of values, practices and knowledge transmitted across generations and shaped by geography, history and collective identity. In this regard, Spain's gastronomy represents a paradigmatic case and stands today as the result of the convergence of many forces. Namely, its exceptional products, a rich and diverse agriculture, a tradition constructed over centuries, innovation throughout each sector of the food industry, state and non-state actors such as producers, chefs, restaurants, universities, and entities such as the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Alimentation (MAPA), the Royal Academy of Gastronomy, ICEX and Turespaña.

In this chapter, we aim to examine the pillars where the strength and potential of Spanish cuisine sit upon, through the multiple spheres where gastronomy is “cultivated,” “cooked” and “served”, from the producer, the kitchen and the house and restaurant table. The institutional and state domain will be examined in greater detail in the *Initiatives* section in Chapter 7 which discusses how the efforts of actors from the public and private sector materialize through campaigns and projects.

6.1 The taste of time in Spanish gastronomy

To echo the famous proverb, "you reap what you sow", the first and most foundational strength of contemporary Spanish gastronomy lies precisely in what was sowed across centuries of civilizational encounter. According to the RAG, "Spain's geographical location, the different civilizations that have inhabited its lands, and the various social changes that have taken place there have all had a strong influence in shaping and developing a Spanish culinary identity" (Garcia & Diaz Yubero, n.d.).

The historical layering of the contributions of the civilizations that inhabited the Iberian Peninsula, constitutes one of Spanish gastronomy's most distinctive competitive advantages. For instance, the Roman period bequeathed to contemporary Spanish cuisine olive oil and wine, two of its most iconic products. During Roman rule, the province of *Baetica*, modern-day Andalusia, was the fundamental source of olive oil of the Roman Empire, exporting an estimated 30 million vessels of olive oil to Rome and its territories (Olive Oils from Spain, 2019). The olive tree had originally been introduced to the Iberian

Peninsula by the Phoenicians around the 11th century BC, yet it was pioneer Roman agriculture that built a large-scale industry around it (Pena Cervantes, as cited in BBC Travel, 2022). These past contributions enable Spain to become the world's largest exporter of olive oil, accounting today for over 35% of the world market share, (TradeImeX, 2026).

From the 8th to the 15th century, the Arabs inhabited the Iberian Peninsula and introduced sophisticated irrigation networks that enabled the cultivation of crops previously incompatible with the arid conditions of large parts of the peninsula, most significantly rice, eggplant and a wide range of citrus fruits (Mentta, 2025). Rice, introduced during this period, is today the basis of *paella valenciana*, the most internationally recognized Spanish dish. Saffron, cumin, cinnamon and coriander, defining flavours of Spain, were all brought to Iberia through Arab trade (St. Lawrence University, 2003). The Arab legacy includes *escabeche* pickling, derived directly from the Arabic *assukkabaj*, and a rich tradition of almond based sweetened pastries that persist as celebrated elements of the national culinary repertoire (Adamson, 2004; Roden, 2011).

The third historical layer that “nurtured” contemporary Spanish gastronomy was the encounter with the Americas at the end of the 15th century. Spain's role as the primary conduit of the Columbian Exchange introduced tomatoes, potatoes, peppers, corn and chocolate (Garcia & Diaz Yubero, n.d.). The *tortilla de patata*, widely regarded as Spain's national dish, depends entirely on the potato, which was carried across the Atlantic by Spanish explorers following their colonisation of the Andean region in 1532 (WJCT News, 2021). The Andalusian *gazpacho* and *salmorejo*'s main ingredient is the tomato, was first described as suitable for sauces by the head gardener of the botanical garden of Aranjuez during the rule of king Philip II of Spain (University of Michigan, 2019). The *pimentón* that defines chorizo and the peppers of Navarra also derive from the “New World”. Spain's eagerness and capability to integrate the heritage of other societies to build its own has constituted a great strength for its gastronomy. This case shows how ingredients, techniques and agricultural systems of other civilizations, can be so absorbed into regional culinary identity as to be mistakenly deemed entirely native and autochthonous.

6.2 Products: The most valuable asset of Spanish gastronomy

In contrast to other European countries like Germany and France, the Spanish competitive advantage is not rooted on its industry or technology. Spain invests 1.4% of GDP in R&D, which is considered significantly less than the EU's target of 3% (OECD, 2024). Nonetheless, it manages to be competitive in fields like agriculture, energy, engineering, and tourism. As ICEX-Invest in Spain affirms, "the agri-food industry in Spain is one of the leading powers at European level by turnover". Spain ranks as the fourth agri-food power in Europe and the tenth in the world (ICEX, 2025).

The important role of producers in the industry lies in their knowledge of a specific variety, technique and territory perfected and developed over generations. Spain's gastronomic success is built upon a history of anonymous actors whose work forms the indispensable first link in a chain of excellence. A contemporary example of this dynamic is Casas de Hualdo, a family olive estate in the province of Toledo, whose extra virgin *Picual* olive oil was awarded Best of Show at the Los Angeles International Extra Virgin Olive Oil Competition in 2019, widely regarded as the world's most competitive evaluation in the sector (Fernández Guadaño, 2019). The estate's oil is the favourite of the Spanish-American chef José Andrés (as cited in Fernández Guadaño, 2019).

Spain may not rank among the wealthiest nations in financial or industrial terms, but the richness of its culinary repertoire constitutes a form of national abundance. As Suárez de Lezo observed, the most compelling narrative Spain can offer the world is not so much one of Michelin stars or fine dining establishments, but of product authenticity: "we have the best products, a wonderful culinary landscape, a fascinating diversity of products, and one can have a lamb or a sea bream from here, not brought from a thousand kilometres away" (Suárez de Lezo, personal communication, 2026).

This diversity is the result of Spain's geographical and climatic heterogeneity; there are five climatic zones across the more than 500,000 square kilometres. The difference in the humid Atlantic coastline of Galicia and the Basque Country, the arid plains of Castile, the volcanic Canary Islands or the Mediterranean littoral of Catalonia and Andalusia, makes for an opportunity to cultivate an extraordinary range of products, which would be inconceivable within a more uniform territory (OECD, 2023). Each region has, over centuries, developed a culinary identity, what Suárez de Lezo describes as "many small gastronomies within each

zone" (Suárez de Lezo, personal communication, 2026). In his comprehensive study of Spanish food culture, Medina (2005) argues that this regional diversity constitutes one of the most structurally distinctive features of the Spanish culinary system, differentiating it from the more centralised gastronomic identities of France or Italy.

Spanish wine constitutes a further dimension of this product richness that merits attention. Spain is the world's third largest wine producer by volume and holds more vineyard surface area than any other country on the planet, with over 930,000 hectares under vine (International Organisation of Vine and Wine [OIV], 2025). Its denominations of origin span the red wine of La Rioja and Ribera, the white wine of the Rías Baixas, the wine of Jerez, the Cava of Catalonia and the indigenous varietals of Priorat, Toro and Bierzo, among dozens of others (MAPA, 2025; KPMG & RAG, 2025). This combination of viticultural diversity, combined with an increasing commitment to the recovery of ancient native grape varieties and traditional, more natural winemaking, positions Spain as one of the most exciting and internationally regarded wine producing nations in the world (OIV, 2025; ICEX, 2025).

The way to protect and institutionalise the quality and authenticity of the Spanish producers, has been the European framework of Protected Designations of Origin (PDO) and Protected Geographical Indications (PGI). Under the PDO scheme, better known in Spain as *Denominación de Origen*, a product must owe and refer its quality to its geographical environment, both its natural and human factors, and must be produced, processed and prepared exclusively within its designated region (Administración General del Estado, 2026). Spain holds one of the highest numbers of PDO and PGI certified products in the EU, such as olive oils, wines, cheeses, cured meats and fresh produce. This certification serves three purposes: it guarantees the consumer a certain level of quality, it recognizes the role of producers and the first stages of the product cycle and preserves the regional traditions and landscapes these products represent.

6.3 Innovation in the fields and in the culinary field

One of the primary strengths of Spanish gastronomy is the capacity of its agri-food sector to create and innovate. The scale of Spain's agri-food innovation activity has been documented over time. During the 2014-2020 European Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)

programming period, Spain was the EU member state with the largest number of innovative projects (Anafric, 2024). In terms of intellectual property, Spain ranks as the fourth European country in agricultural technology patents, with the Polytechnic University of Madrid and the University of Almería standing among the top twelve European institutions submitting patent applications in digital agriculture (Tridge, 2025). Many areas of the country suffer from severe water stress (BBVA Research, 2024), making smart farming techniques fundamental to reduce inputs of water, fertiliser and pesticides (ICEX, 2025). By optimizing the crop yield due to necessity, the agricultural sector in Spain has become highly competitive compared to other countries (personal communication, February 20, 2026).

Creativity and invention extend also to the kitchens in Spain, making it a worldwide reference regarding radical food innovation. Ferran Adrià is a world-renowned Spanish chef based in restaurant El Bulli in Cala Montjoi (Girona) whose food innovation methods originated from the 1990s and are generally based on science. Using a revolutionary and extremely innovative process, Adrià came up with the processes of spherification, culinary foams and thermal gelification which would subsequently be introduced to the curricula of chefs all over the world (Sanz et al., 2014). The restaurant El Bulli had three Michelin stars since 1997 and was given the World's Best Restaurant award from 2006 to 2010 five times in a row. Until the voluntary closing of his restaurant in 2011, he had already established himself as one of the best Spanish chefs (Britannica, 2025). Post closing, Adrià re-focused El Bulli's efforts and intellectual property towards a research organization called *elBullifoundation* (ElBulli Foundation, 2024).

Such an approach to the food was adopted not only by Ferran Adrià but many other Spanish cooks. One of them is Juan Mari Arzak, who together with his daughter Elena developed such a technique as *Nueva Cocina Vasca* at restaurant Arzak in San Sebastián in the late 1970s and 1980s. It involved applying the ideas of French *nouvelle cuisine* to the identity of Basque cuisine (Sanz et al., 2014). Andoni Luis Aduriz experimented with boundaries between edible and non-edible at restaurant Mugaritz in Errenteria (Basque Country) (Mugaritz, n.d.).

Chefs like Dabiz Muñoz at DiverXO (Madrid) integrate Spanish, Chinese, Japanese, Indian, and Southeast Asian cuisines into one menu without necessarily falling into any

specific national or regional culinary category (Elle, 2023). This represents culinary globalization rather than identity-driven Spanish cuisine. Chefs Oriol Castro, Eduard Xatruch and Mateu Casañas, all alumni of elBulli restaurant, create a different technique each season in Disfrutar restaurant in Barcelona, named The World's Best Restaurant in 2024 (The World's 50 Best Restaurants, 2024).

Spain's gastronomic culture increasingly establishes itself via the formal infrastructure of cooperation between universities and the gastronomic world which has transformed the above innovation into an exportable academic model. The Basque Culinary Centre (BCC), created in 2009 in the city of San Sebastián thanks to the initiative of Mondragon University in collaboration with some of the best Basque chefs such as Juan Mari Arzak, Martín Berasategui and Pedro Subijana, is known to have founded in Spain the first Faculty of Gastronomic Sciences, providing officially recognized university degrees (Basque Culinary Centre, n.d.). Furthermore, the Universidad Pontificia Comillas and IE University have started teaching gastronomy in combination with food culture as part of their programs, through Madrid Alimenta Culinary Campus (MACC, n.d.), a gastronomic education centre with the participation of Ferran Adrià and Andoni Luis Aduriz.

6.4 The Spanish way of eating

Spain's gastrodiploacy potential derives not only from the quality of its products but from the social role that eating plays in Spanish life. In Spain, the act of eating is not an individual or purely nutritional one, but a collective and social practice. This distinction is often invisible to those within the culture and becomes legible precisely through contrast and opposition to other social and national philosophies. In the interview conducted for this thesis, Suárez de Lezo recalled being invited by the King of Sweden to deliver a speech to 300 guests at the Royal Palace in Stockholm specifically about the Spaniards' way of socializing via food. The king explained that Swedish people "drank and ate alone, confined to their own homes" (2026). He remarks how Spaniards often only notice and value the peculiarity of the social aspect of eating in their own country when they are abroad or interacting with people from other cultures.

This social aspect of Spanish gastronomy is articulated around a set of specific

cultural practices that have no direct equivalent in many other national traditions. According to Trapiello (2022), in his essay on the metaphysics of the *aperitivo*, the ritual and social act of having a pre-meal drink and food (ICEX, 2022), symbolises the way Spaniards conceive social interaction, as being comprised of pleasure, conversation and sharing meals.

Another crucial element in this regard is the concept of *sobremesa*, defined as the period people spend sitting at the table and conversing after they have had their meal, and where there is no urgency in leaving (BBC, 2018). The word has no direct translation in English, French or German, indicating a clear cultural difference in terms of this custom. This activity is considered improper if rushed in Spain, and if it occurs in formal settings such as a business lunch, it is part of the culture and thus is many times part of business negotiations (GWU Study Abroad, 2024). Spanish gastronomy is not just a cultural heritage but also an important economic factor. As noted by Big Think (2023), the phenomenon of *sobremesa* reflects a system of values whereby people's interactions come before any considerations of efficiency, contrary to the logic of time management prevalent in the eating behaviours of many countries in Northern Europe and North America. From the standpoint of gastrodiploacy, *aperitivo* and *sobremesa* are both unique features associated with Spanish national identity that are readily recognizable to foreigners visiting Spain.

Within this broader social framework, the element of Spanish gastronomic culture that arguably most clearly communicates the country's identity is the *tapa*. The *tapa*, which takes the form of leisurely dining, has become an indispensable part of Spanish food culture that both the locals and tourists are aware of. According to the RAG, through in its dedicated programme *País de Tapas*, the *tapa* is "one of our most representative gastronomic traditions, a symbol of the Spanish way of life" that encapsulates the country's capacity to transform the act of eating into a social and cultural experience (Real Academia de Gastronomía, n.d.). As documented in soft power indices and tourism surveys, Spain is associated with notions such as outgoing, lively, pleasurable and informal and the *tapa* could well represent this. Foods & Wines from Spain (2026) notes that the culture of eating out, of sharing small dishes across a bar counter or a terrace table, remains one of the most distinctive and internationally attractive features of Spanish social life, drawing millions of visitors who come not merely to eat but to participate in eating as conceived in Spain as a social act, a way of being together.

Accordingly, the social character of Spanish eating culture has a direct and measurable relationship with the country's tourism sector, which is one of the pillars of its national economy. Spain received 94 million international tourists in 2024, ranking as the second most visited country in the world, and gastronomy constitutes one of the primary motivations cited by visitors (Doblemente, 2025). Tourists attracted specifically by gastronomy spend on average 30% more on food-related experiences than the average tourist, including visits to restaurants, wineries, local markets and gastronomic events (Doblemente, 2025). International tourists who visited Spain spent more than 17 billion euros on gastronomy in 2023 (La Vanguardia, 2025). More broadly, the gastronomic ecosystem contributed approximately 375,000 million euros to the Spanish economy in 2023, equivalent to 27% of national GDP, and supported 7.2 million jobs, representing 37% of the Spanish labour market (Real Academia de Gastronomía, 2025; La Vanguardia, 2025). These figures exhibit how Spanish gastronomy is not only a cultural asset but a fundamental engine of its economy.

7. Analysis of the Spanish Gastrodiplomacy case

Spain's gastrodiplomatic strategy has emerged over the last decades more as a loose constellation of informal, uncoordinated, sporadic initiatives driven by a multitude of public and private actors than a premeditated strategic plan directly aimed at projecting a positive image of its gastronomy and nation brand. Chefs, regional governments, foreign trade promotion agencies, tourism boards and cultural institutions have each pursued their own projects, but these efforts have often lacked a shared narrative, clear division of roles or explicit strategic objectives (Jiménez Molina, 2024).

Spain's path contrasts with the model "campaign countries" of the gastrodiplomacy literature (Li & Mok, 2025), where various central governments have launched their own highly branded, timebound programmes such as Thailand's "Global Thai" or Peru's "Marca Perú", designed from the outset to use cuisine as a coherent tool of public diplomacy and nation branding. In the case of Spain, only very recently have documents such as the *Guía de Diplomacia Gastronómica* (2021) and the *Plan Internacional de la Gastronomía Española* (2026), started to retrofit this dispersed ecosystem of actors and interests into an explicit unified state strategy.

7.1 Past and Present Initiatives

This section identifies and analyses the efforts that have, with different degrees of intentionality, served Spanish gastrodipomatic purposes. For analytical clarity, these initiatives are presented in chronological order, which aim to depict the gradual process of greater organization, further alignment of different stakeholder interests, and more coordination among multi-level actors.

7.1.1 Early nation branding (2005-2013)

The first phase agglomerates symbolic and branding oriented initiatives that positioned Spain and its gastronomy abroad before gastrodipomacy was formally conceptualised. One of the earliest initiatives was carried out in 2005, when the Foro de Marcas Renombradas Españolas (FMRE) created the Honorary Ambassadors of Marca España award. This prize publicly recognized Spanish individuals or companies that had contributed to strengthening the brand, coupling the disperse role and interests of individuals with the projection of a positive image of Spain (FMRE, 2023). Among the recipients are the Roca brothers (Joan, Josep, and Jordi Roca), founders of El Celler de Can Roca, a three Michelin star restaurant named the Best Restaurant in 2013, and Carme Ruscalleda, a Spanish chef. Also, in other sectors: tennis player Rafa Nadal, world badminton champion Carolina Marín, Ana Botín, president of Banco Santander, and actor Antonio Banderas (The Diplomat, 2023). Among these promotional actions, is the later promotional video *Spain Everywhere, España en todo el mundo* (2017), produced by TVE for Marca España under High Commissioner Carlos Espinosa de los Monteros, showcased "made in Spain" products and the global presence of Spaniards (Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, 2017).

In 2010, a landmark for Spain as a gastronomic power was the inscription of the Mediterranean diet on the UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. It followed the drafting of a preliminary text in Andalusia (González, 2009) and the joint proposal submitted in September 2008 with Morocco, France and Italy. In the words of Luis Planas, Spain's Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the Mediterranean diet served as Spain's "passport" to present healthy and safe foods to the world (MAPA, 2020).

The first comprehensive nation-branding plan of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was the Marca España, conceived as a hallmark to promote Spanish companies and assets abroad. To contextualize this modern initiative, it is relevant to note that its conceptual underlying core—the idea that the origin of a product can constitute a key component of its value—has much older roots. Greek and Roman artisans, for instance, already marked their products to differentiate them and capitalise on perceived quality. Nevertheless, the contemporary notion of a marca país or country brand is relatively recent. Johansson and Nebenzahl's first pointed out in 1986 how identical Honda cars were rated more favourably when labelled as made in Germany than when labelled as produced in Japan or the United States (Casilda & González, 2002).

The launch of Marca España in 2013 proposed a roadmap for nation and spanned multiple economic sectors prioritizing those in which Spanish capabilities were regarded as global benchmarks. Furthermore, the initiative was solidified through institutional cooperation between public and private actors: the Forum of Renowned Spanish Trademarks (FMRE), as the public-private partnership of more than one hundred Spanish international companies and brands, together with key public actors such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Tourism, ICEX Spain Trade and Investment and the Chamber of Commerce (Rius Ulldemolins & Martín Zamorano, 2014).

7.1.2 Trade promotion and digital tools for agri-food exports (2013-2017)

The next phase reveals a transition from general branding to specific economic tools targeting agri-food exports and professionals from the sector. ICEX Spain Trade & Investment, the Spanish Government agency dedicated primarily to encouraging and supporting the internationalisation of Spanish companies, created the brand Foods & Wines from Spain. It maintains a website targeted mainly at food and wine sector professionals, featuring specialised gastronomic content such as product glossaries, wine glossaries and Spanish recipe books, alongside news and articles. The site also includes a 'Doing Business' section where users can access information on Spanish exporting companies, trade regulations and production standards (FWS, 2026).

The first such public-private alliance between a Spanish institution and Amazon to

boost food exports was the partnership launched in 2017: the "Foods & Wines from Spain" online store, available initially on Amazon.es, Amazon.de and Amazon.co.uk, which enables over 170 Spanish SMEs to sell more than 1,500 gastronomic products, such as olive oils, cured meats, conserves, prepared dishes and wines, directly to international consumers. ICEX harnessed Amazon's logistics network to boost Spanish food exports and support its commercial strategy (Ministry of Economy, Commerce and Business, 2017).

7.1.3 Formalisation of gastrodiplomacy as foreign policy (2021)

The 2021 publication of the *Guía de Diplomacia Gastronómica*, marks a point of inflection in the process towards the intentional articulation of a gastrodiplomatic strategy. The Secretariat of State for Spain Global within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union, and Cooperation (MAEUEC) present the guide, conceived to integrate gastronomy into Spain's foreign policy (MAEUEC, 2021). It can therefore be deemed as the first formal recognition and embracement of the concept of gastrodiplomacy made by the Spanish government, understood as the intentional instrumentalization of gastronomy for the projection of soft power, which is a key target of the Ministry. Throughout its extent, the guide defends the premise that gastronomy is one of the key assets for Spain's international image and reputation and that, in addition to its economic significance, it constitutes a key element of national soft power and should be regarded as such (MAEUEC, 2021; Tortajada, 2021).

The guide highlights the diversity of regional cuisines strongly influenced by the Mediterranean diet, its leadership in exports of products such as olive oil, fruits, and vegetables, and the weight of the gastronomic sector, which in 2021 was estimated at around one third of GDP (MAEUEC, 2021; Radio Madrid Cadena SER, 2021). On this basis, it has a pragmatic approach and proposes equipping gastrodiplomacy with clearly defined instruments, actors, and lines of action (MAEUEC, 2021).

The Guide's stated objective is twofold: on the one hand, to promote gastronomy as a structural element of Spain's international projection and, on the other, to establish a channel for coordination and action among the numerous public and private actors involved (MAEUEC, 2021). Its operational objectives are ambitious: to map existing actions by the

General State Administration and other stakeholders; to coordinate efforts and create synergies, particularly abroad; to disseminate a unified narrative based on the strengths and opportunities of Spanish gastronomy; to reinforce diplomatic action stemming from protocolary and cultural activities; and highlight the international recognition of Spanish gastronomy through multilateral diplomacy (MAEUEC, 2021).

In terms of lines of action, the Guide organizes the initiative into four main areas: protocol and cultural events, multilateral diplomacy, opinion leaders, and communication and public diplomacy (MAEUEC, 2021). In the area of protocol, it proposes strengthening the use of Spanish cuisine in the daily activities of embassies and consulates, increasing its presence at receptions, high level visits, and cultural events, and carefully selecting products and menus as a showcase for the country (Royal Academy of Gastronomy, 2021; Gastronomía & Cía, 2021). In multilateral diplomacy, the Guide proposes leveraging the inclusion of the Mediterranean diet on UNESCO's List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity and other nominations as a reputational asset, as well as using international forums to highlight Spain's contribution to debates on sustainability, health, and food systems (MAEUEC, 2021; Gastronomía & Cía, 2021).

Its chapter on opinion leaders is remarkably relevant from the perspective of contemporary gastronomic diplomacy, which is executed through a diaspora of actors. The Guide emphasizes the importance of identifying the professionals and groups capable of acting as informal ambassadors for Spanish gastronomy, such as chefs, sommeliers, critics, journalists, influencers, cooking schools, industry associations, etc. and establishing stable relationships with them to facilitate coherent narratives and coordinated actions in different markets (MAEUEC, 2021).

From the communication perspective, the Guide proposes the creation of a culinary calendar to coordinate specific campaigns (MAEUEC, 2021). It stresses the need to promote a unified narrative that highlights culinary diversity, the talent of chefs, the quality of products, and the connection to the Mediterranean diet, avoiding scattered or contradictory messages among stakeholders (Tortajada, 2021; Royal Academy of Gastronomy, 2021).

From an analytical standpoint, the Guide to Gastronomic Diplomacy represents an

attempt to move from *de facto* gastronomic diplomacy, based on scattered initiatives by ministries, autonomous communities, companies, and chefs, to *de jure* gastronomic diplomacy, equipped with a strategic framework and a certain narrative coherence (Tortajada, 2021; Medina, 2021). This aligns with Suárez de Lezo's mention of a proposed law that would obligate Spanish institutions operating abroad (embassies, Instituto Cervantes, trade offices) to actively promote Spanish cuisine (L. Suárez de Lezo, personal communication, 20 February, 2026).

Another key insight of the Guide is the explicit appreciation of the complexity of the Spanish gastronomic ecosystem, as it lists a network of public and private actors, underscoring that this richness only becomes a diplomatic advantage if agendas, narratives, and actions are synchronized (MAEUEC, 2021). Another relevant aspect is the commitment to aligning gastronomic diplomacy with global trends, such as health, sustainability, innovation, so that the image of Spanish cuisine does not only focus on enjoyment but engages with development issues such as the Sustainable Development Goals or urban food policies (MAEUEC, 2021; Medina, 2021).

7.1.4 Large-scale campaigns and economic diplomacy (2020–2025)

The next phase features highly noticeable campaigns that connect gastronomy with economic diplomacy, help Spain repair its reputation after the pandemic, and shape a domestic narrative. Following initiatives include, Spain Food Nation, which is currently one of the Spanish government's main tools for economic diplomacy. It is carried out through a long-term agreement between the MAPA and ICEX Spain Export and Investment (MAPA & ICEX, 2025). The program was launched in 2020, during the pandemic, with the immediate goal of revitalizing the international image of the Spanish agri-food sector, which had been severely impacted by the health crisis and trade disruptions (ICEX, 2024a; MAPA, 2024). It was integrated under the institutional brands Alimentos de España and Foods & Wines from Spain and was conceived as a communication and promotion campaign aimed at positioning Spain as a country of quality food and gastronomy (ICEX, 2024a; MAPA & ICEX, 2025).

Despite that, since 2020, several editions have taken place (Spain Food Nation I

through VI), involving a cumulative investment amounting to more than 21 million euros, the general format remains the same. Both MAPA and ICEX constitute to the budget but ICEX is responsible for implementing the defined actions in the target markets (ICEX, 2024a; MAPA & ICEX, 2025; MAPA, 2025).

Official documents and ICEX communications group the objectives into four main pillars: consolidating the reputation of the Spanish agri-food industry; reinforcing the sustainability, diversity, quality, and excellence of products; strengthening alliances with professionals; and supporting the internationalization of the business sector by expanding and diversifying markets. A significant element is the shift in focus: in the early phases, the need to internally assert the excellence of Spanish food following the pandemic dominates, while Spain Food Nation V and VI adopt a market approach, focusing on repositioning the industry in key markets, the use of market intelligence, and the diversification of geopolitical and commercial risks (ICEX, 2024a; ICEX, 2023; MAPA & ICEX, 2025).

The fifth edition, Spain Food Nation V (2023–2025), had a budget of 5.71 million euros and focused precisely on improving of the food sector in in a set of markets which were considered preferential (ICEX, 2024a). This phase was structured around the following lines of action: events targeting end consumers; exhibitions including tastings and seminars directed at professionals, presence at major international trade fairs, and the production of digital content (ICEX, 2024a; ICEX, 2024b). Priority markets include the United States, Mexico, the United Kingdom, Germany, Switzerland, Morocco, and various Asian countries, with a special focus on China and Japan (Gourmets, 2024). One of the distinctive aspects of this edition was that market intelligence became the issue of utmost importance and accordingly, advisory councils and forums were installed in strategic countries (ICEX, 2023).

In 2025, the agreement for Spain Food Nation VI was signed, bringing the total investment to 8.443 billion euros through September 2026, which reinforced both the country brand aspect and the direct support to the core sectors of the food chain (MAPA & ICEX, 2025; MAPA, 2025). The objective of this edition seeks was to continue the pre-existent strategy initiated in 2020 and to assist sectors like animal husbandry, fishery, and industrial sector seeking to have a multiplier effect on the entire agri-food value chain (IPacuicultura, 2025; MAPA, 2025). Moreover, it consolidated efforts in consolidating markets in the

Americas, Europe, and Asia and incorporates emerging markets such as Algeria and Serbia to diversify trade dependencies (MAPA & ICEX, 2025; Vinetur, 2025).

The sixth edition of the campaign was dedicated to the quality of Spanish products, integrating consumer targeted initiatives such as “Eat Spain, Drink Spain” with the activities of the restaurant sector at international trade fairs (MAPA, 2025; Vinetur, 2025). These actions consisted in various presentations, show cooking, product tastings and introductions at major trade fairs, such as SIAM in Morocco and Natural Products Expo West in the USA (IPacuicultura, 2025; MAPA & ICEX, 2025).

Spain Food Nation directly correlates with other institutional narratives such as “El País Más Rico del Mundo”, a communication initiative by the MAPA as part of the Alimentos de España strategy, designed to strengthen pride in and social appreciation of Spanish agri-food products and the productive sector that makes them possible (MAPA, 2020a). It was launched in November 2020 as a nationwide institutional campaign, with an initial budget of 2.3 million euros for 2020 and 2021, targeting consumers and the entire agri-food and fishing sectors (Europa Press, 2020). The slogan “*el país más rico del mundo*” deliberately plays on an idea of wealth not associated with financial indicators, but rather with the diversity, quality, and creativity of Spanish food and gastronomy (MAPA, 2020a; ASAJA Jaén, 2020).

According to the ministry itself, the purpose of the campaign was to help “consumers appreciate the excellence and diversity of our products” (MAPA, 2020a). The description of Spain as “the richest country in the world” signifies an attempt to effectively recognize the diversity of all foods and beverages produced within the national territory, from the Cantabrian coast to the Canary Islands, while simultaneously linking tourism and gastronomy to the origin of food (Grupo Cajamar, 2021). This also denotes how wealth does not stem solely from the final product, but from the people who make up “the great Spanish pantry”: farmers, ranchers, fishermen, industry, and distribution (MAPA, 2020a; Grupo Cajamar, 2021).

In the first phase of the campaign, the ministry selected chef José Andrés as its ambassador and spokesperson (Europa Press, 2020). José Andrés is a Spanish chef who

emigrated to the US and popularized *tapas* there through opening renowned restaurants like the 2 Michelin starred minibar Jaleo and is also known for his humanitarian work, mainly the foundation of World Central Kitchen in 2010 after the earthquake in Haiti (José Andrés Group, 2026). The video, aired on television and digital media, features the chef's own narration, presenting Spain as the place in the world where food is the "most delicious" thanks to the variety and quality (YouTubeMAPA, 2020; ASAJA Jaén, 2020).

Igniting in 2022, the slogan "*El país más rico del mundo*" remains as an umbrella, but a second campaign phase presents the new generations of farmers, livestock breeders and fishers, who appear in the adverts as the real faces of the country's food richness (MAPA, 2022a). This second part aims to create synergies with other soft power domains, particularly sports and national football teams. The ministry leveraged major 2022 sporting events, such as the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, to link the *Alimentos de España* brand with the men's and women's national teams (MAPA, 2022b).

Cultural and artistic dimensions were also a part of the campaign as the short film titled *Carácter*. Directed by Jaime Dezcallar it featured flamenco dancer María Pagés dancing over a table filled with Spanish natural ingredients (MAPA, 2023) and received the 2023 Prix Multimedia from the International Academy of Gastronomy. The overall "El País Más Rico del Mundo" initiative was awarded Best Campaign 2023 at the Elle Gourmet Awards and earned the distinctions at the New York Internationalist Awards as the most efficient and innovative international campaign (MAPA, 2023).

7.1.5 Measuring the gastronomic ecosystem: KPMG & RAG report (2025)

Another step towards strategic consolidation is the production of expert knowledge and metrics that measure gastronomy as an economic ecosystem and support treating it as a strategic asset. This is where we situate the joint publication "Spanish Gastronomy: Impact and Trends of a Key Ecosystem for the Economy," prepared by the Big Four consulting firm KPMG in collaboration with the Royal Academy of Gastronomy (RAG). The report has the explicit objective of quantifying "what the gastronomy sector means for Spain," understanding gastronomy not as an isolated subsector, but as an ecosystem that connects the primary sector, the food and beverage industry, the food retail sector, and the hospitality

industry (KPMG & RAG, 2025).

From a quantitative perspective, the report estimates that in 2023, the gastronomy ecosystem contributed a total of 374.575 billion euros to the Spanish economy, equivalent to 27% of the national Gross Value Added (GVA). In terms of employment, the gastronomy value chain generated and sustained 7.2 million fulltime equivalent jobs, accounting for 37% of total employment in Spain. The study also shows that gastronomy has recovered and even surpassed its economic relevance compared to the pre-pandemic period, recording several consecutive years of double-digit growth in GVA and employment since 2021. These figures allow the RAG to argue that gastronomy is not only a cultural asset but also a macroeconomic driver whose evolution “has a direct impact on the country’s own development.”

The report also provides a highly detailed structural analysis of the “gastronomic ecosystem”. It identifies nearly 750,000 companies directly linked to one of the links in the chain – either agriculture, livestock, and fishing, the food and beverage industry and retail and the hospitality sector). representing around 21% of Spain’s business sector. The document also underscored gastronomic excellence as a valuable Spanish asset, noting the existence of 291 Michelin-starred restaurants, 762 with Repsol Suns, 377 quality designations (PDO, PGI, and GI), and 36 wine tourism routes spread across the country (KPMG & RAG, 2025).

Another key component of the report is the analysis of the gastronomic ecosystem’s international potential and reach. According to the report, the average annual growth rate of the Spanish agri-food sector was 6.5% and it accounted for 17.4% of total national exports, making food and beverages the country’s third largest export sector. These sales were directed to 168 markets, complemented by foreign investment exceeding 24 billion euros channelled through 2,855 subsidiaries of companies abroad, particularly in the United States, Portugal, Argentina, Mexico, and Italy. In addition, the Restaurants from Spain initiative were included for the first time as part of this ecosystem: by the end of 2024, there were 443 certified restaurants in 48 countries, acting as culinary embassies for Spanish cuisine in strategic destinations.

The relationship between gastronomy and the tourism sector is the focus of another

section. KPMG and the RAG showed that in 2023, international tourists' spending on gastronomy in Spain exceeded 17 billion euros, 24% more than before the pandemic, with an average per capita expenditure of 202.3 euros. Gastronomy is thus positioned as a key driver for attracting tourism and enhancing the traveler's experience. This can create the following virtuous cycle: Spanish cuisine attracts visitors, who increase their spending on dining and local products, and upon returning home, become advocates for Spanish gastronomy and food in their countries of origin. (KPMG & Real Academia de Gastronomía [RAG], 2025).

7.1.6 A national roadmap: Plan Internacional de la Gastronomía (2026)

The most recent phase culminates with possibly the most comprehensive effort to make gastronomy a strategic pillar of Spain's foreign policy and international outreach to date: the 2026 *Plan Internacional de la Gastronomía*. The document is explicitly presented as a "national roadmap," unique and revolutionary in its scope and ambition. It was developed through dialogue with more than 120 professionals in the gastronomic ecosystem and designed to transform the prestige accumulated over the past decades into sustained leadership over time. At the official presentation, the MAPA emphasized that this opens "a great opportunity to give continuity to the culinary revolution that placed Spain at the global forefront" (MAPA, 2026).

These ten lines of action are divided into four blocks. The first one is called "Talent, training and knowledge" and includes promotion of international training hubs, annual creativity meetings and talent networking. The second one is "International presence and market", which aims at making Spanish products more international, professionalizing Spanish SMEs and supporting international trade. The third block is titled "Tourism, culture and heritage" and remarks the *tapa*'s UNESCO candidacy. Lastly, the last block focuses on establishing a consistent image abroad, introducing gastronomy in diplomacy and connecting gastronomy and state policies (MAPA, 2026).

In order to enrich the plan with a holistic and complete vision of the variety and interests of gastrodiploacy stakeholders, implementation required the involvement of MAPA leaders working with ICEX and Turespaña, who formulated their plan through

consultation with more than 120 parties and designed it based on yearly programs and objectives. Hence, the Plan was developed through an innovative collaborative methodology involving an open and participatory process that incorporated input from all actors spanning the entire food value chain (production, agri-food industry, distribution, hospitality, journalism, training, institutions, etc.). Held from September 26 to December 5, 2025, it received around 50 contributions, mostly from associations, federations, interprofessional organisations and regulatory councils of patent and quality schemes in the agri-food sector. Universities and other academic entities, restaurants and gastronomy related firms, foundations and specialized individuals also contributed.

These sessions brought together chefs and restaurant entrepreneurs, producers, agri-food industry owners and executives, journalists, hotel and communications managers, as well as academics and consultants, to foster open, plural and informal exchange of ideas where experts could freely share their views. This methodology tackled one of the main challenges of gastrodiploacy: integrating diverse stakeholder ideas to forge a single, unified strategy.

Overall, the description of the initiatives and campaigns supporting Spanish gastrodiploacy during the 21st century developed throughout this section, has reflected a tendency towards a more coordinated, strategic action. While they began as sporadic, uncoordinated efforts by individual state and non-state actors they progressively evolved toward greater institutionalisation and cross-sectoral collaboration. Having previously described the intrinsic value and potential of Spanish gastronomy and the activities undertaken to project it internationally, it is fundamental to reiterate the central question of this thesis: how and why has Spain, despite its exceptional gastronomic assets and the recent formalisation of food-related strategies, struggled to articulate a coherent gastrodiploacy commensurate with its potential, and under what conditions could this gap be reduced?

In order to successfully respond to the issue at hand, the following sections identify the weakness of the gastrodiploacy Spanish model and evaluate its effectiveness. This begins by analysing the inherent flaws of the Spanish gastrodiploacy model in Section 7.2, followed by a consideration of the broader structural constraints that limit the success of any

gastrodiplomacy initiative, regardless of institutional arrangements, in Section 7.3.

7.2 Weaknesses of Spanish gastrodiplomacy

The mismatch between Spain's gastrodiplomacy potential and relative underdevelopment raise a fundamental analytical question: despite such robust foundations and a proliferation of promotional activities, why does Spain's gastronomic image remain less distinctly recognised or strategically leveraged on the global stage compared to paradigmatic cases like Thailand's "Global Thai" programme or Peru's "Marca Perú"? Why have fewer governmental efforts towards gastrodiplomacy have been formally launched in Spain? What structural limitations, coordination obstacles and persistent weaknesses continue to constrain the efficacy of Spanish gastrodiplomacy? The following sections examine these challenges systematically.

According to many scholars, there can be a case made for the incompetency or ineffectiveness of Spain to effectively promote its image, in contrast to the successful strategies of other nations. According to Noya (2002), from the Real Instituto Elcano de Estudios Internacionales y Estratégicos, Spain has a "serious image problem" and despite major efforts by public institutions responsible for cultural and economic projection, the country's external image is still not aligned with its economic, political and cultural reality or potential. Noya (2014) argues that this misalignment generates a scenario of "*ignorancia pluralista*" in which the country's real standing is more positive than domestic elites assume, but public policies are nonetheless designed from a defensive, low expectations mindset (Real Instituto Elcano, 2021).

William Chislett (2015), a senior English investigator for Instituto Elcano, defended that Spain persisted in its trouble to portray a serious image beyond its stereotypes of bulls, flamenco, *siesta* and party. Today, a recent survey published in February 2026, whose respondents were primarily from China, Japan, South Korea, India and Indonesia - regions that represent a significant share of Spain's international tourism - indicated that these stereotypes are gradually disappearing and being substituted by other aspects related to football or tourism.

However, the study reveals a high ignorance of respondents towards Spain, as roughly one third of the sample were discarded due to their complete lack of knowledge of the country. In addition, all the countries included in the sample perceived their own living conditions as better than those in Spain. The greatest gap between these countries and Spain is observed in China, the country with the highest level of self-assessment (González Enríquez & Gijón Torres, 2026). This also served to remark the urgency and importance of Spain gaining more internal appreciation and projection and visibility abroad.

Additionally, Chislett (2021) suggests that this persistent gap is reinforced not only by external stereotypes but also by a domestic tendency toward self-criticism, which makes Spaniards more pessimistic about their country than foreign observers. In his article *Why do Spaniards have a lower opinion of their country than foreigners? A survey of 24 countries provides empirical evidence of this stance through the discrepancy of Spain's external reputation score of 73.1, which places it among the most positively European countries, ahead of Germany, France and the United Kingdom and their lower domestic rating of 71.9. There is an even starker contrast in evaluations of governance and institutions. Spaniards rate their country 15 to 20 points lower than foreign respondents do. Carmen Enríquez Gonzalez from the Elcano Observatory clarifies that issues that generate drama and debate within Spain, attract very limited attention and interest internationally. While corruption scandals and political conflicts strongly polarize the Spanish public, they scarcely damage its international image.*

This domestic self-underestimation is incongruent with objective indicators. In 2021, Spain's public health system ranked 7th according to the World Health Organization and life expectancy reached 83.5 years, compared with 81.2 years in the UK (Chislett, 2021). These achievements, that could transit into national confidence, rarely did so as Spaniards remained unaware or underestimated them.

Data from the 9th wave of the Barómetro de la Imagen de España (2021) also conducted by specialists from Instituto Elcano, supports this idea showing that Spaniards consistently rated the international image of their country more negatively than foreign respondents did. Similarly, Chislett (2022) argues that education and political polarization contribute to this gap, leaving younger generations ignorant of Spain's democratic and economic progress since

1975, which marked the beginning of the transition to democracy. Hierro and Rico (2019) experimentally confirmed that past crisis have propagated narratives which continue to suppress national pride in Spain, even when there Spain has experienced objective recovery and progress.

This weakness of Spanish self-perception can severely undermine Spain's soft power, an idea closely linked to the International Relations Theory of Constructivism, since it reveals how ideas and the collective imagery can act as the main ingredient and constituent of global politics in opposition to material power. The aforementioned vulnerability could be metaphorically understood as the idea of Spain looking itself through a concave mirror that bounces back a reflection where jarring features are accentuated. Subsequently, this self-image is projected internationally, even if it does not correspond with fact. This idea is similar to 20th century Spanish writer Valle-Inclán's *esperpento*: a literary conception of the concave mirrors through which Spain looks at itself and sees "a grotesque deformation of the European civilization" (1924). The fact that this critic metaphor was formulated as early as 1920, represents how this pessimistic Spanish attitude towards the own nation is far from new.

According to Chislett (2021), Spain's self-esteem problem has a history dating back several centuries. The decline of the Spanish empire, the tumultuous 19th and 20th centuries marked by military coups, civil war, and constitutional uncertainty, the horrors of the Spanish Civil War, and the prolonged dictatorship of Francisco Franco left their mark on the collective psyche of Spain.

In combination with the political divide within Spain, this has led to the formation of what Chislett terms a self-made "black legend," reminiscent of the distorted and widespread negative narrative of Spain as a cruel, intolerant, colonial state propagated by rival powers. Spaniards tend to "sell their country short", downplaying successes such as the successful post-1975 transition to democracy and the transformation of Spain into a relatively rich society from a mere middle-income one. Chislett notes that Spaniards are some of the worst critics of their country and among the few societies that are more critical and sensitive to international criticism of their society than others.

In this case, it is Spain itself which internalises a false negative narrative and inadvertently propagates it abroad, making it a structural problem that in the current increasingly globalized world, proves difficult to resolve. Greater mobility and frequent international travel, appoint citizens themselves, consciously or not, with a higher responsibility for how their country is perceived abroad. In a context where information circulates rapidly, states hold little centralized power over the opinions formed about them, individuals living, travelling, studying, or working in other countries often act as informal “ambassadors” of their country and culture. When domestic narratives reproduce negative stereotypes, these individuals unavoidably transmit such unfavourable perceptions in their interactions abroad. The result is a self-reflection of magnified flaws and concealed achievements: a limitation to Spain’s cultural diplomacy.

Such a critical point of view in Spain extends to national food, which is one of the most valuable parts of their culture from economic, social, and cultural perspectives, and thus, there is a great contradiction. Luis Suárez de Lezo argues that although Spanish people have high-quality food, the greatest chefs and a sublime gastronomy, most of them are incapable of appreciating this valuable aspect of their culture. By not taking pride in their country and gastronomy, Spain and its people fail to promote their best products and virtues and fails to represent its country to the world.

In this context, the obstacles against which gastrodiplomacy initiatives must operate are twofold: foreign stereotypes that reduce Spain to “flamenco, bulls and fiestas” or rather ignore it completely as a country, and an internal narrative that doubts the country’s capacity to project a positive image, both of which Chislett identifies as key factors in the enduring gap between Spain’s image and its contemporary economic and social reality (Chislett, 2014, 2015).

Now, when analysing Spain’s case from a comparative perspective, it can be argued that Spain came relatively late to the explicit formalisation of gastrodiplomacy compared with other countries. Zhang’s cartography of contemporary campaigns maps a “global frenzy” structured around a small club of Asian and Latin American “campaign countries”, among which Spain is conspicuously absent despite its Michelin-star density and export strength (Zhang, 2015). Whereas other nations launched their programs in the early 2000s, Spain only

began to systematically integrate gastronomy into its diplomatic strategy in the 2010s and especially the 2020s (Jiménez Molina, 2024).

The timeline shows Spain lagging behind pioneering countries. Thailand launched its “Global Thai” program in 2002 (Rockower, 2012), South Korea followed with “Korean Cuisine to the World” in 2009 (Pham, 2013) and Peru developed an integrated gastrodiplomacy model in the late 2000s and early 2010s, where the state collaborated closely with chefs such as Gastón Acurio (Matta, 2016). By contrast, Spain, despite its gastronomic assets and potential, did not articulate a coherent state strategy. Instead, gastronomic promotion was subsumed under broader Marca España and sectoral policies, which arguably diluted its visibility as a distinct strategic field.

The country’s multi-level territorial structure, which can in the other hand be presented as a strength and opportunity, can become a central obstacle when gastronomy is converted into a foreign policy instrument. Competences in agriculture, culture, tourism and even external promotion are dispersed across ministries, agencies and 17 autonomous communities, each of which develops its own gastronomic and tourism branding with varying resources, priorities and ideological frameworks (Rico, 2023). As Suárez de Lezo notes, in practice “there is no relationship” between key portfolios such as Health, Agriculture, Tourism and ICEX when it comes to designing joint strategies around the Mediterranean diet or the internationalisation of Spanish products, and when autonomous communities are added to the equation the result is often “a guerra de guerrillas” in which each actor finances isolated actions within its remit without regard for the surrounding ecosystem (L. Suárez de Lezo, personal communication, 20 February 2026). The 2021 *Guía de diplomacia gastronómica* explicitly recognises this coordination failure by listing an extensive network of public and private stakeholders and warning that their plurality will only become a diplomatic advantage if agendas and narratives are effectively aligned (MAEUEC, 2021).

A related weakness lies in the tension between the desire to project a unified Marca España and the internal diversity, and politicization, of regional culinary identities. Rius Ulldemolins and Martín Zamorano (2014) assert that the Marca España project has tended to instrumentalise a homogeneous and simplified cultural image, subordinating regional brands

to a centralised narrative that privileges certain symbols and representations while marginalising others. Applied to gastronomy, this risks either diluting the specificity of powerful regional cuisines (Basque, Catalan, Galician, Andalusian, etc.) into a generic “Spanish food” label or, conversely, encouraging autonomous communities to opt out of joint campaigns in favour of their own tourist gastronomic brands, fragmenting the external message.

DeSoucey’s concept of gastronationalism helps to illuminate how food can become a site of contestation over authenticity and ownership, both within and between states, suggesting that Spain’s internal debates over sovereignty and recognition are likely to complicate any effort to present a seamless culinary narrative abroad (DeSoucey, 2010). The absence of a consensual answer to the apparently simple question “what do we want to sell?”, which Suárez de Lezo identifies as a pending task even in the latest strategic plans, thus becomes a substantive obstacle to coherent gastrodiploamacy (L. Suárez de Lezo, personal communication, 20 February 2026).

Operationally, Spain also suffers from a chronic underutilisation and, at times, misuse of its diplomatic body as a gastronomic platform. Spanish diplomatic institutions have rarely incorporated national cuisine strategically in embassies, official receptions or cultural promotion abroad, revealing a gap between Spain’s gastronomic prestige and its diplomatic deployment. Spanish chefs in embassies are rare and procurement rules often lead to serve medium-high quality Spanish products as wine, in stark contrast to France’s norm of deploying grand flagship wines like Château Margaux in state banquets as an emblem of national excellence (L. Suárez de Lezo, personal communication, 20 February 2026). These practices, or lack thereof, reveal a bureaucratic reluctance to treat gastronomy as a strategic asset rather than an expendable protocol cost, often driven by the fear of media criticism about “wasting taxpayers’ money”. The Royal Academy’s proposal is a formal law in defence of gastronomy, which seeks precisely to address this governance vacuum by creating a legal framework that obliges ministries and public institutions, such as embassies, Instituto Cervantes, commercial offices, to renovate the role of gastronomy in Spain as an instrument of soft power and nation branding. This law remains a project to date, but will be further discussed as an opportunity in the section offering recommendations (L. Suárez de Lezo,

personal communication, 20 February 2026).

Another weakness of the field of Spanish gastrodiplomacy is the certain ambiguity caused by message overload that can hinder its distinctiveness in an increasingly crowded international arena. Campaigns such as Spain Food Nation or “El País Más Rico del Mundo” have achieved significant visibility and awards, but their primary logic is commercial and reputational support for the agri-food sector, not necessarily the long-term cultivation of foreign publics that lies at the core of gastrodiplomacy (MAPA, 2020). The KPMG and RAG report powerfully quantifies gastronomy’s macroeconomic weight, yet it can misleadingly accentuate the temptation to reduce gastronomy to an economic lever, overshadowing its potential as a transversal soft power tool connecting identity, health, sustainability and culture (KPMG & RAG, 2025).

7.3 Limitations to Spanish gastrodiplomacy

Beyond the internal weaknesses identified above, Spain’s gastrodiplomacy faces a series of structural limitations that constrain what can realistically be expected from any culinary strategy, no matter how well designed. First, gastrodiplomacy is, by definition, a soft-power instrument whose effects are diffuse, long-term, and difficult to isolate from other drivers of a country’s image, which structurally limits its capacity to “correct” reputational or geopolitical problems on its own. Most existing work on gastrodiplomacy remains descriptive and rarely demonstrates clear causal links between culinary campaigns and measurable changes in foreign public attitudes, which complicates both policy design and evaluation (Li & Mok, 2025).

White, Barreda, and Hein reach a similar conclusion in their systematic review of 32 articles: while food-based initiatives may enhance visibility and tourism, empirical evidence of their diplomatic or political outcomes is scarce, suggesting that expectations about what gastrodiplomacy can deliver in hard indicators such as foreign policy alignment or investment flows must remain modest (White et al., 2019). In Spain’s case, this implies that even the most ambitious initiative such as *Plan Internacional de la Gastronomía* cannot compensate, by itself, for macro-factors such as economic crises, corruption scandals or polarized domestic politics that continue to shape the country’s broader soft-power

environment (Noya, 2002; Chislett, 2014, 2015).

A second limitation can be characterized as methodological. Both the international literature and Spain's own policy documents lack standardized tools to measure gastrodiplomacy's impact beyond intermediate outputs such as media coverage, social-media engagement or tourist arrivals. Efforts such as Spain Food Nation, "El País Más Rico del Mundo" or Restaurants from Spain compile figures on investment, audience reach and export volumes, but do not yet provide systematic evaluation frameworks connecting these indicators to changes in foreign perceptions of Spain's reliability, modernity or political weight (ICEX, 2023; KPMG & RAG, 2025).

Third, gastrodiplomacy as a policy tool is intrinsically dependent on intermediaries and audiences over which the state has only limited control, which constrains Spain's room for manoeuvre even if internal problems were fully solved. Reynolds' notion of "diplomatic gastronomy" as a prestige-based power form highlights that much of the symbolic work of food occurs in settings, banquets, restaurant experiences, mediated images, where the state can set the stage but cannot fully script and condition interpretation (Reynolds, 2012).

Chefs, restaurateurs, journalists, influencers and tourists appropriate and reframe Spanish culinary symbols according to their own commercial, artistic or political logics, which may amplify or dilute official narratives but cannot be seamlessly aligned with them (Melissen, 2011; Ichijo & Ranta, 2016). For Spain, whose gastrodiplomacy relies heavily on star chefs and a dispersed diaspora restaurant network, this dependence on semi-autonomous actors is both a strength and a limitation: it multiplies "culinary embassies" but also means that the state can rarely dictate how "Spanish cuisine" is represented, priced, or combined with other identities (for example, "Mediterranean," "Latin," or "European") in foreign markets.

A fourth limitation arises from the increasingly saturated and competitive global gastrodiplomacy field. Gelibterman estimates that around 30 countries now possess some form of state-level gastrodiplomacy strategy or programme, ranging from middle powers such as Peru, Mexico, Thailand and the Republic of Korea to large powers like the United States, China, India and France (Gelibterman, 2025). In this crowded arena, many states mobilise similar value propositions making it harder for Spain to carve out a distinctive niche

solely on the basis of generic Mediterranean values or claims about product excellence (Medina, 2021; Li & Mok, 2025).

Moreover, Spain competes directly with other Mediterranean culinary powers (Italy, France, Greece) whose cuisines enjoy entrenched symbolic capital and whose diplomatic services have a longer tradition of integrating gastronomy into protocol and cultural policy (Morgan, 2008). Other Mediterranean and European countries “sell” the same messages, like sun, conviviality, olive oil, wine or the Mediterranean Diet, making it harder to articulate a truly differentiated narrative if campaigns remain anchored in generic claims of quality, diversity and enjoyment rather than in a sharper definition of what uniquely Spanish gastronomy contributes to global conversations about food and society (Li & Mok, 2025; Medina, 2021). This structural competition increases the need for sharper, more original positioning, precisely at a time when internal debates over what should be prioritised (haute cuisine, everyday tapas culture, health, sustainability) remain unresolved (L. Suárez de Lezo, personal communication, 20 February 2026).

Finally, a structural limitation to the field concerns the present advancement of technology. The digital transformation of gastrodiplomacy introduces new constraints that Spanish policymakers cannot fully control. Recent work on digital gastrodiplomacy documents an explosion of online culinary content and shows that digital strategies can significantly boost nation brand equity and tourism recovery. It also warns of “implementation disparities” strongly correlated with a country’s digital infrastructure and institutional capacity (Gelibterman, 2025; Digital Gastrodiplomacy, 2025).

A. Y. Chang and H.C. H. Chang (2025)’s analysis of Taiwanese gastrodiplomacy on social media demonstrate that algorithmic moderation and changing platform rules can suppress or distort the visibility of food-related content when it is intersected with politically sensitive topics, ultimately undermining soft-power objectives even when campaigns are high-quality. Gastrodiplomacy operates within global communication ecologies that are increasingly shaped by corporate and technological logics, which Spain can navigate but not fundamentally redesign.

Even if Spain were to resolve its internal weaknesses, which we have found to be

ineffective marketing, late arrival, coordination failures, under-use of diplomatic infrastructure, its gastrodiploacy would still be constrained by the structural properties of soft power, measurement challenges, intermediary dependence, intense international competition and the volatility of digital platforms. With this analysis, rather than undermining the case for gastrodiploacy, recognising these limits helps to situate it realistically as one complementary component of a broader foreign-policy and nation-branding portfolio.

8. Conclusions

This thesis sought to explore how and why Spain, despite possessing an exceptional gastronomic heritage and growing political interest in food as an instrument of soft power, has struggled to articulate a gastrodiploacy strategy proportionate to its potential. Addressing this enquiry has been endeavoured through an adapted SWOT analysis and grounded in the theoretical pillars of soft power nation branding, cultural diplomacy and constructivism, as an effort to trace the full arc of Spain's international projection through food.

The first finding is that Spain's gastronomic capital is objectively outstanding and can be internationally competitive. Spain's culinary repertoire is the receptor of the legacy built along the encounter of various civilisations such as Roman, Arab-Islamic, the Columbian Exchange, and which has derived in a tremendously rich and deep landscape of ingredients and recipes. Spanish gastronomic agents have the privilege to enjoy and create, reinvent, and consume this heritage of centuries-old tradition and products. This value is also boosted by the gastronomic diversity resulting from the climatic and geographical differences in the Iberian Peninsula, which other countries such as France or Italy do not present. That is why we can deduce that Spain's present and potential competitive advantage lies not in the proliferation of restaurants or in quantity but rather in quality, and hence this should be the core of the Spanish pantry's label to the world.

The second major finding concerns the trajectory of Spain's gastrodiploacy initiatives with ranging levels of intentionality and public-private collaboration. The research has identified four separate phases. Firstly, the early nation-branding period (2005-2013)

encompassed symbolic actions such as awards and the 2010 UNESCO inscription of the Mediterranean diet, that directly connected Spain's food to health, quality and minimal processing. The second phase (2013-2017) mobilised commercial tools and closer cooperation between state entities and companies such as Foods & Wines from Spain platform and the ICEX-Amazon partnership. In 2021 began a phase of formalisation triggered by the publication of the *Guía de Diplomacia Gastronómica* by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which meant an unprecedented instrumentalization of Spanish gastronomy as a means of foreign policy. The most recent phase (2020-2026) is defined by campaigns with a larger scale. We situate within it the recent publication of the *Plan Internacional de la Gastronomía Española*, a ten-measure national roadmap developed through a participatory process connecting stakeholders along the full value chain of the agri-food sector, which auspices higher collaboration at the multi-actor level.

The third major finding is the obstacles and intrinsic limitations encountered in this route of gradual formalisation. This study has found the chief weaknesses to be a chronic coordination deficit of actors, the relatively late arrival of Spain at explicit gastrodiplomacy, and what Chislett (2022) and Noya (2004) identified as an enduring domestic underestimation. We must develop that the primary difficulty is that competences in agriculture, tourism, culture, trade promotion and foreign affairs are dispersed across multiple ministries and 17 autonomous communities. Even though, a consistent thread across this trajectory is the almost universal consensus among stakeholders regarding the exceptional quality of Spanish products, the technical excellence of its culinary sector and the sector's macroeconomic weight, this does not imply the elimination of the tension that arises from the inherently divergent and self-serving logics that govern each stakeholder.

The interests of actors are varied. For instance, chefs may pursue international recognition and creating a legacy, ICEX seeks to promote trade and the internationalisation of the Spanish agri-food sector, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs aims at leveraging gastronomy as a means for soft power and diplomacy. Diaspora Spanish restaurants widespread internationally strive to be economically viable. Producer may prioritise the recognition and differentiation of their specific goods and regions of origin. Each autonomous community strives to bring forwards its unique differentiated advantages and

assets.

Crucially, however, these divergent logics do not systematically pull in opposite directions, and each contribute, even if inadvertently, to the broader projection of Spain's image and influence abroad. That is why it is why Spain's gastroplomacy should focus on identifying stakeholders, considering each of their interests and understanding that they operate, rationally and legitimately, in accordance with their own ambitions and timelines, generating a decentralised, desynchronised ecosystem of gastrodiplomacy. A poignant challenge is rooted in creating awareness for actors of their capability to both nurture and benefit from a virtuous cycle. If actors collaborate and create a common strategy to "manufacture" and "sell" a unified, positive image of Spain abroad, they will most probably profit from the reception of the subsequent beneficial inflow, each in the currency they seek, be it clients', tourists, revenue, diplomacy, political or cultural influence.

The present work exhibits a key limitation that the field of gastrodiplomacy would benefit from should the future scholarship would seek to address it. As Li and Mok (2025) observe, the field of gastrodiplomacy more broadly suffers from an almost complete absence of studies that explore the relationship between culinary promotion campaigns and measurable changes in foreign public attitudes, trust, or behaviour. The present analysis on Spain's potential and complexity has studied actors, institutions, and policy outputs, but has not measured the reception of these, or how they are interpreted by the foreign audiences they target. Therefore, future research on the Spanish case would profit enormously from audience-side studies that could survey data or involve interviews with foreign diaspora restaurants or actors on the reception and interests that attract people to Spain and its gastronomy.

Spain finds itself at a significant juncture in its gastrodiplomacy. Possessing an objective gastronomic capital that is, by most international benchmarks, among the most formidable in the world. Yet this capital has not maximised its soft power returns. Until there are real efforts of coordination and a willing state-led strategy, such as the law proposed by Suárez de Lezo, that involves and instigates the participation of stakeholders in the agri-food system, Spain will remain a gastronomic reference almost by accident when it could be one by design. The development and implementation of a gastrodiplomacy strategy could aid the country unlock

its potential, which is not a matter of reinventing its gastronomic identity. What Spain needs is the institutional and political will and strategic clarity to tell that story with confidence and coherence. Only then will Spain reclaim the position it has long earned at the international table.

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10. Appendix

Appendix A – Transcript of Interview with Luis Suárez de Lezo, president of the Royal Academy of Gastronomy in Spain.

Blanca Sanz: Quería empezar de una manera más amplia. ¿Cómo entiende la gastronomía, qué cree que gobierna y cuál es el papel que tiene en la vida de las personas y en la sociedad?

Luis Suárez de Lezo: Nosotros como Real Academia entendemos la gastronomía de una manera muy amplia. A cualquiera que le preguntes qué es la gastronomía, te dirá: comer, incluso disfrutar, pasarlo bien con la familia, con los amigos, o sea, es uno de los mejores momentos para poder hacer vida conjunta. Nosotros lo que hacemos es ampliar ese término en el sentido de que forme parte de casi todos los ámbitos de nuestra vida, porque la gastronomía también es cultura, también es turismo, la economía y empleo, la gastronomía también es salud, educación, sostenibilidad, innovación, es investigación. Por lo cual, forma parte de una manera muy relevante de casi todos los ámbitos de nuestra vida.

Y yo creo que eso no lo podemos decir de cualquier disciplina, ¿no? Y sobre todo, no lo podemos obviar. La gran mayoría de la gente lo obvia, la mayoría de la gente, incluso con responsabilidad. Entonces nuestra labor es hacer ver a la gente que la gastronomía es un sector estratégico del país, porque en el resto del mundo no hay esta incidencia tan importante en el resto de cosas. El resto de los países que no tienen una dieta mediterránea como tenemos nosotros, que afecta nuestra salud directamente, e incidiendo en eso podríamos reducir, por ejemplo, nuestro coste sanitario muchísimo, nuestra sanidad podría ser mucho mejor. En el resto de los países no tienen unos productores de este nivel de calidad con los que puedes hacer investigación, donde además están, o que están haciendo investigación, están mejorando los cultivos sin agua, o sea, hay un montón de innovaciones que hacen que sean muy competitivos.

En el resto de países no pueden vender un producto como el nuestro para los cien millones de turistas que a nosotros vienen. Cien millones de personas; ¿qué manera tan bonita de contarles lo que significa la gastronomía para nosotros? En el estudio en el que hicimos un informe para ver qué incidencia tenía en la economía y en el empleo, con KPMG, o sea, supone el 27% del PIB, o sea, el 77% del empleo. La cantidad de gente cuyo trabajo tiene

algo que ver de manera directa o indirecta con la gastronomía. Entonces, por supuesto, encima tenemos los mejores cocineros, unos restaurantes buenísimos, y además nos encanta salir y disfrutar, con lo cual la parte social, familia, relacional, es brutal en España.

Cogiendo todo eso en la coctelera, lo que tratamos de decir es que esto es un ámbito muy relevante en nuestra vida y que tenemos que cuidarlo y tenemos que analizar muy bien qué retos tienen para tratar de resolverlos para que siga siendo un ámbito muy importante en nuestra vida, porque si alguno de los eslabones se cae o va fallando, va a afectar al resto de los eslabones. Entonces, deberíamos de ser más conscientes de la necesidad de defenderlo e incluso mejorarlo, si es posible.

B. S.: Acorde a la gran dificultad que proyectar mediante la gastronomía una idea uniforme de nuestro país, porque no solo estás contando con la diversidad sino también que la dispersión de los actores, ¿cómo se coordinan las “pequeñas gastronomías” y los actores para lograr una narrativa cohesionada y cómo son las relaciones formales e informales que tienen este fin?

L. S. L.: Es enormemente complejo, porque si estamos de acuerdo que esto afecta a tantos ámbitos tan diferentes, tenemos que generar los mecanismos para que las estrategias sean conjuntas entre todos esos ámbitos diferentes. Entonces, eso ahora mismo no ocurre. No hay una relación del Ministerio de Sanidad con la agricultura para vender la dieta mediterránea.

Hasta la presentación de Plan Internacional de Gastronomía del otro día, Turismo no hablaba con la agricultura para ver qué mensajes podíamos lanzar a nuestros visitantes. El ICEX no hablaba con Turismo para ver nuestras empresas allí, si podían hacer actuaciones concretas, que no solo vendieran, sino que pudieran hacer más cosas. O sea, esta interrelación realmente no existe.

Y si además consideras a las Comunidades Autónomas, incluyes a otro actor más que tiene su propia estrategia y que va para otro lado, con lo cual hay todavía menos coordinación. Entonces, aquí en general, como se ha venido trabajando, es una “guerra de guerrillas”, donde cada uno en su competencia establece una acción que paga con sus presupuestos, sin contar con el entorno más inmediato. Con lo cual, eso es un error evidente, o sea, es un fallo del sistema muy evidente.

Coordinar es muy difícil. Y una de las cosas que nosotros, la Academia, estamos proponiendo para evitar que eso sea una decisión de determinadas personas, técnicos o políticos, que deciden coordinarnos y a hacerlo conjuntamente. Es, al fin y al cabo, una decisión personal pues cada uno decide colaborar o no.

Entonces, nosotros lo que estamos pidiendo a la Administración Central, al Gobierno de España, es que haga una ley aprobada por el Consejo de Ministros que defina cómo se tienen que hacer esas asignaciones, que establezca un plan estratégico donde todos los ministerios tienen que trabajar ya coordinados. Pues es una ley que viene de arriba, es decir, no es una instrucción ministerial o una recomendación de los ministros, sino que es el Consejo de Ministros, presidente del Gobierno que dice: “señores, ministros, esto es un sector estratégico, tenemos que trabajar todos en la mano, y os ponéis a trabajar todos, decidís quién es el interlocutor y que se pongan a trabajar en conseguir estos objetivos que vamos a marcar con un plan estratégico concreto”. Igual yo creo que ahí se podría mejorar algo más en esa parte de coordinación. Además, hay que contar con las Comunidades Autónomas, hay que hacer cosas muy generales, lo suficientemente generales para que cuando baje este plan a las comunidades autónomas, ellos puedan, de alguna u otra manera, participar de esos proyectos, de recoger esos proyectos.

B. S.: Y, ¿el énfasis en algunas cocinas frente a otras, como la catalana o la vasca, puede generar tensiones políticas o de representación en la proyección exterior?

L. S. L.: Más que ocasionar tensiones, yo creo que uno de los grandes valores de nuestra gastronomía es precisamente esa diversidad de las gastronomías que tenemos en cada zona. Y eso es riqueza en sí misma. Tenemos la suerte de poder tomar un pescado en Cataluña, como decías, y el mismo pescado de una manera diferente que en Andalucía ni en Galicia. Personalmente, me parece una suerte y una riqueza. Forma parte de nuestra riqueza gastronómica. Eso no quiere decir que cuando contemos nuestra gastronomía, si la dispersamos mucho, es mucho más difícil de contar.

Entonces, a lo mejor el mensaje es, reconocer que tenemos una diversidad maravillosa que pueden venir a disfrutar cambiando de región y bajando unos kilómetros hacia abajo y dentro del mar. Me refiero a la riqueza de gastronomía que tiene que ver con la cultura de cada zona,

la temperatura y el clima que han tenido durante cientos de años, que hace que tengamos muchas pequeñas gastronomías dentro de cada zona. Eso es riqueza. Pero tenemos que ser capaces de contarlo de otra manera, porque vamos a llegar mucho más lejos si somos capaces de hacer una unidad más global como gastronomía española, siendo la mejor del mundo. “Tienes que venir a conocerla y a partir de ahí vas a conocer los detalles de esa gastronomía”. Ahí está la diferencia. Si cada uno va contando la suya de manera particular, nunca puedes hacer un todo. Y al no poder hacer un todo, creo que pierdes llegada al mundo que hay tanta gente a la que puedes dirigirte.

B. S.: ¿Y cuál es la idea que se está intentando proyectar? ¿Qué imagen crees que se proyecta de España a través de su gastronomía?

L. S. L.: No se ha hecho esa labor. De hecho, una de las cosas que nos pedimos, y en el plan más o menos viene, es qué es lo que queremos vender. Lo mejor que se ha hecho sin duda es el país más rico del mundo, que lo hizo el ministerio, y es una campaña maravillosa. A mí esa me parece una buena idea y línea. Tenemos los mejores productos y además tenemos los mejores cocineros, pero no podemos vender restaurantes. Vender restaurantes en el caso de España no tiene sentido, porque en todos lados hay buenos restaurantes. París tiene un restaurante buenísimo, pero en Italia también hay restaurantes. Nosotros lo que tenemos que decir es que tenemos los mejores productos, además el mejor talento, un paisaje culinario maravilloso, porque tenemos una diversidad de productos fascinante, y puedes tomar un cordero y un besugo de aquí, no traído de a mil kilómetros, sino que de aquí.

Y luego además está el hecho de que nuestra gastronomía es salud, que esa parte de cercanía del producto y la forma de cocinarlo, utilizando aceite de oliva, beneficia nuestra salud, y que además no hay otro sitio en el mundo donde se disfrute y nos relacionemos tan bien a través de la gastronomía. Los bares, las terrazas, las tapas, esto que a lo mejor es muy largo para hacer un anuncio o un *claim*, es lo que tenemos que ser capaces de mostrarle hasta el momento. Ahí está la dificultad. Y estamos en ese momento de hacerlo. Por eso está muy bien que la gente como tú haga estas cosas, y seguro ayudará.

De todas maneras, se habla mucho de gastronomía, pero aquí no se habla de gastrodiplomacia, y yo me quejo mucho porque creo que perdemos una oportunidad

buenísima de mostrar nuestro país al mundo y de utilizar una herramienta maravillosa para conseguir beneficios para nuestro país. Tal es así que no hay cocineros españoles en las embajadas, no tenemos los mejores productos en nuestras embajadas, en las recepciones oficiales no se cuida qué es lo que vas a dar de comer o de beber, hasta el punto del detalle más tonto. Cuando los franceses reciben a todos los que hemos estado, ponen un *Château Margaux* para beber, uno de los mejores vinos del mundo. Los españoles ponemos un vino que nadie sabe cuál es y de medio pelo, y yo hablando con ellos, dicen que en Francia si no ponen un *Château Margaux* y ponen un Protos francés, salen los periódicos diciendo que “qué vergüenza”, que “cómo es posible que no utilicemos nuestro mejor producto para enseñar al resto de mandatarios lo importantes que somos en este mundo”. Aquí, por ejemplo, si pones un Vega Sicilia, habría el riesgo alto de salir en la prensa diciendo que “están malgastando dinero de los contribuyentes”. No es tan evidente ese uso de la gastronomía para la diplomacia por la propia idiosincrasia. Debemos utilizar nuestros mejores productos o nuestras mejores virtudes para enseñar al mundo. Y cuando viene alguien importante, hacerlo.

No utilizamos los recursos. Y por eso queremos hacer una ley de defensa de la gastronomía como sector estatal. Por esa ley hay que trasladar eso y en todos los puntos de fuera, el Instituto Cervantes, embajadas, oficinas comerciales, embajadas de la gastronomía española y decir que tenemos que utilizarlos para vender nuestra marca país.

Vender marca país fuera te va a terminar beneficiando en general. Nuestras empresas van a vender más fuera, van a venir más turistas, o por lo menos un nivel mayor de turistas que identifica a nuestro país con esa imagen. Los grandes eventos mundiales se van a fijar en España porque como es el sitio donde todo el mundo quiere ir por su comida, por su clima, pero todavía más y más pensado, con más estrategia y más fondo detrás. Entonces ahí sí que hay una oportunidad. Ponerlo en el lugar que merece. Y empezar a trabajarlo en esa parte de diplomacia. Por lo final la diplomacia la hacen los diplomáticos. El Ministerio de Estados Exteriores no se presta mucha atención a la gastronomía española.

La gastronomía debe ir por un cauce especial. Tenemos que darle una relevancia tanto jurídica como de gobernanza que permita actuar, especialmente porque este sector es estratégico y es una oportunidad del país.

B. S.: ¿Cómo progresa el impulso de esta ley?

L. S. L.: Esa es una idea de la Real Academia que con el modelo actual es imposible. No solo porque no se puedan aprobar leyes en general sino porque es difícil meter este tema en un momento político difícil.

B. S.: Ahora que estamos, no en tiempos de guerra, pero, desde luego, en tiempos de no-paz, existe un consenso general sobre que el poder blando, donde se enmarca la gastrodiplomacia, no tiene cabida, ¿qué piensa usted?

L. S. L.: Yo entiendo eso para los grandes temas geopolíticos. Pero yo creo que esta parte de poder blando relacionada con la gastronomía es una inversión de largo plazo. Y ese posicionamiento es fundamental. Lo que es difícil es que tú decidas ser Mozambique y querer utilizar tu gastronomía como poder blando. Se deben buscar otros activos que se quieran vender y utilizarlos. Lo que es raro es que el mejor del mundo en esto no lo haga.

Por una suerte de... porque es elitista o porque es difícil o porque no se le da la importancia que merece. Por lo que sea, lo que no hacemos. Eso no hay. Puede haber un término medio. Digo, puedes por lo menos empezar a tener en tu estrategia como país alguna herramienta para utilizar esto para conseguir algunos objetivos o algunos fines. Eso es lo que por lo menos debería de pasar. Lo bueno de esto es que no perjudica nunca al país. Elegir una cosa u otra no va a determinar. Nosotros hemos ido muy bien sin haber hecho nada. Somos más o menos una referencia a la gente. Si lo hiciéramos, seríamos todavía mejores. No pasa nada por no hacerlo, pero hacerlo a largo plazo, aunque ahora mismo el mundo se esté yendo por el desagüe. Siempre la gente a la vuelta la gente va a decir que el sitio donde tiene que ir es España. Es donde está lo mejor de lo mejor. Ya solo es la influencia de la cantidad a nivel mundial me parece fantástico.

B. S.: ¿A qué países debe ir dirigida la venta de la Marca España?

L. S. L.: Ahí la manera correcta de hacerlo es elegir los países en función de los mejores turistas que recibamos. Y además donde nuestras empresas vendan mucho producto. Pues, juntándonos a los dos. Esos deberían de ser los países prioritarios para hacerlo. Que al final son... Estados Unidos, Japón, la parte de China, la parte más alta, por supuesto, todo Europa.

Entonces, estas son para mí las dos variables que tenemos que elegir para priorizar donde empezamos todas las campañas frente a otro.

Porque no tiene ningún sentido ser los líderes que Senegal y Mozambique de tal si no va a venir nadie porque no viene nadie de allí. Y si no compran nuestros productos, pues no compran nuestros productos. A eso les termina llegando por los Osmosis por los otros.

B. S.: ¿Y qué crees que podemos aprender de las estrategias de otros países y qué pueden aprender ellos de las nuestras?

L. S. L.: Perú lo hizo fenomenal y Francia. Luego Italia lo hace, pero de otra manera. Italia lo tiene tan culturalmente integrado que lo trasladan casi sin necesidad de hacerlo, aunque los restaurantes lo han hecho muy bien. ¿Y qué podríamos aprender de todos?

Por ejemplo, la Academia La Cucina Italiana, que es lo mismo que somos nosotros, es una herramienta del Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores. Y lo manejan desde el Ministerio y les van llevando a donde el Ministerio tiene que empezar. Pues mira, esa es una buena manera de hacerlo.

Hay una multitud de iniciativas que se están haciendo fuera, y de las que podríamos aprender. Y luego, nosotros influiremos en los demás. Yo creo que la mejor manera es que tenemos la suerte de que cómo vivimos el acto social de comer con tanta naturalidad.

A mí, por ejemplo, me invitó el rey de Suecia a dar una charla en su Palacio Real de Estocolmo, puesto que le conocí en París. Me llegó una invitación para ir. Y me dijo, “quiero que hables 300 personalidades de nuestro país y quiero que hables de gastronomía”.

“Esto es inmenso, ¿de qué quieres que hable?”. Y me dijo: de cómo os relacionáis a través de la gastronomía. Porque nosotros bebemos solos, compramos vino y lo bebemos solos en casa. Primero porque está nevando todo el día y no pueden salir. Las familias son muy reducidas. Hay mucha gente sola. Nosotros no nos relacionamos a través de la comida.

Nosotros, los españoles, hacemos lo contrario. Nosotros no hacemos casi nada que no sea a través de la comida. No importe lo que hagamos, siempre va a haber algo de beber o algo de comer donde estemos. Entonces, te das cuenta de que esa percepción, en el fondo, sí la

terminan de tener en todos lados. Pero no tenemos que dejar de subestimarlo, que hasta que te vas a otro país y ves el contraste, no... Echamos mucho las cosas de menos cuando no estamos. Y ahí nos damos cuenta de lo importante que es la gastronomía. Pero cuando estamos aquí, incluso la gente lo desprecia. No debemos darlo por hecho.

B. S.: Muchas gracias Luis.

ANEXO: Declaración de uso de herramientas de IA generativa

Nombre Grado/Máster:	ADE y Relaciones Internacionales (E-6)
Nombre Alumno:	Blanca Sanz Muñoz
Coordinador/a TFG/TFM:	Analilia Huitrón Morales
Nombre Director/a de TFG/TFGM:	Ana Trujillo Dennis

Declaro que para la elaboración del presente Trabajo Fin de Grado / Trabajo Fin de Máster se ha utilizado inteligencia artificial generativa como herramienta de apoyo.	SÍ x	NO
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Uso de la IA Generativo

Si tu respuesta ha sido SÍ, contesta a las siguientes preguntas. Si has contestado NO, pasa al apartado 2.

Uso ético

	SÍ	NO
¿A la hora de usar la herramienta IA, en los <i>prompts</i> utilizados has incluido datos de carácter sensible o de carácter personal (fotos de personas reales, datos personales, etc.)? <i>Si tu respuesta es afirmativa especifica cuáles.</i>		x
¿Has orientado tu uso a suplantar tu trabajo personal sin hacer una revisión crítica de la extraído en la herramienta IA? <i>Si tu respuesta es afirmativa especifica cuáles.</i>		x
¿Has tenido en cuenta las recomendaciones académicas que te han hecho específicamente en el Grado/Máster sobre lo que está permitido o no con la IA?	x	

Uso técnico realizado:

¿Qué herramientas has utilizado (ChatGPT, Copilot, Claude, Nano Banana....)? Especifica la versión o tipo de licencia.

Marcar lo que corresponda:

- Generación de texto (*Especificar qué herramientas*) →
- Reformulación (*Especificar qué herramientas*) → ChatGPT /Perplexity
- Traducción / corrección (*Especificar qué herramientas*) → ChatGPT/Perplexity

- Sugerencia de estructura (*Especificar qué herramientas*) → ChatGPT/Perplexity
- Apoyo metodológico (*Especificar qué herramientas*) → ChatGPT/Perplexity
- Buscar o citar bibliografía (*Especificar qué herramientas*) → Perplexity
- Generar contenido audiovisual (videos, infografías, audios, imágenes, gráficos. *Especifica en concreto qué contenidos has generado con IA además de citarlo correctamente en el trabajo.*
- Otros (*Especificar qué herramientas*) → Generar Índice, buscar fuentes - ChatGPT /Perplexity/Claude

X Confirmando que el contenido final ha sido revisado, corregido y validado íntegramente por mí como autor/a y asumo la plena responsabilidad académica del mismo.

La utilización de la IA no ha sustituido el análisis crítico, la reflexión personal ni el trabajo intelectual propio exigido en un TFG/TFM.

Firma: Blanca Sanz Muñoz