

Concept Paper

Branding, Diplomacy, and Inclusion: The Role of Migrant Cuisines in Cities' Local and International Action

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Abstract: This paper features as its starting point the observation that unprecedented migration flows have made cultural diversity a common feature of most cities across the world. Among the many components of such diversity, gastronomy will be presented as both a primary employment niche for migrants and a valuable resource for many municipalities' intercultural turn aimed at enhancing social cohesion, local economic development, international cooperation, and branding. The paper will then discuss the relationship between diaspora cuisines and their countries of origin in the framework of the expanding field of gastrodiploacy. Thus, the paper will present the increasingly evident distance between most countries' authenticity discourse on national cuisine and the reality of their food scene. Finally, the approaches of cities and nations to gastronomic diversity will be compared, examining the possibilities for overcoming this dualism as the benefits of intercultural approaches become increasingly apparent.

Keywords: migration; interculturality; cultural appropriation; gastronomic diversity; cities; city diplomacy; city networks; city branding; public diplomacy; gastrodiploacy

1. Introduction

Across the world, COVID-19's outbreak forced most cultural venues to close, including theatres, concert halls, cinemas, museums, and art galleries. Although also affected by restrictions of different kinds, restaurants, bars, kiosks, and food trucks have generally been able to continue their activities. Thus, the gastronomic sector remained one of the few, if not the only, expressions of local cultural diversity that residents could continue enjoying. Nevertheless, even before the spotlight provided by these unexpected circumstances, the political, economic, social, and cultural components of gastronomic diversity have been an object of growing attention by municipal and national authorities. Specifically, what began as a spontaneous diaspora activity evolved into a field of action of these two levels of government, albeit with generally different agendas.

The phenomenon of gastronomic diversity will be defined here as the presence, in a given territorial unit, of food and beverages whose ingredients and modes of preparation are partially or wholly originating from foreign contexts or the result of hybridization between different gastronomic traditions. This paper uses such a concept as a lens to observe and assess the interplay between public policies related to migration, social cohesion, and international positioning. To that purpose, a threefold international comparative perspective is deployed: that between municipal governments, that between national governments, and that between such two levels of government. While the paper does not have the ambition to represent a systematic review, it builds bridges between approaches to cultural diversity from different disciplines—urban, cultural, migration, and globalization studies, and international relations. Such sources allow the paper to identify the core social, cultural, economic, and political characteristics of the management of gastronomic diversity at the municipal and national levels and interrogate the reasons behind their divergent priorities.

Two disciplines of a relatively recent formulation are used as theoretical underpinnings to analyze the rationale and the actions of the two layers of government in relation to gastronomic diversity. The scale of cities is analyzed through the angle of city diplomacy, which



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enables municipal governments to join forces internationally to strengthen their respective action on shared priorities while branding themselves and engaging in joint advocacy. The section on cities consequently involves an analysis of multilateral networks of cities whose goals include the promotion of gastronomic diversity, among which a central role is played by the Délice network. The section then concludes with a comparative analysis of three cities belonging to that network and considered by its secretariat as exemplary in terms of action designed to make gastronomic diversity an element of sustainable local development and internationalization, namely Montreal, Tucson, and Malmö.

Subsequently, the extent to which this urban approach to gastronomic diversity constitutes an institutional innovation will be identified through a comparison with national policies. Through the lens of gastrodiploacy—a branch of cultural diplomacy aiming to make gastronomy an element of overseas promotion and national development—the section will question the reasons behind the persistence of tradition and authenticity branding by most national governments. The final reflection on the potential transferability of such practices between the two levels of government presents the possible transcending of the current hiatus between them.

2. Diasporas and Gastronomic Diversity

Certainly, the phenomenon of diversity is particularly visible and impactful in urban settings. The story, the socio-economic and cultural life, and often the physical appearance of urban areas are largely the result of different episodes of international migration. If, indeed, flows of both economic migrants and asylum seekers have reached unprecedented dimensions over the last few years, the process is linked to the history of humanity itself and, more in particular, of cities. Unsurprisingly, urban areas currently host the majority of economic migrants, asylum-seekers, and internally-displaced persons [1–3]. These flows of people, therefore, make cities take on the value of “ethnoscapes” as defined by Appadurai, i.e., “the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live” [4].

This is mainly due to the potential of cities to improve the personal situation of migrants dramatically. Potential benefits concentrate mainly on job opportunities, improved socio-economic conditions, and freedom from all kinds of persecution [5]. Nevertheless, the actual impact on migrants’ lives often diverges from such potential, as migrants in cities worldwide tend to experience a series of obstacles in their full integration into the host society. Migrants with little economic means often face more or less explicit rejection by the majority, which in the job market tends to translate into limited availability of jobs other than precarious, undeclared, and little paid. Although this dynamic is often interpreted as being driven by racism or xenophobia, these concepts may not be sufficient to understand its nature and magnitude. In particular, they fail to justify the difference in social and legal treatment—in terms of national immigration policies—between highly skilled and generally more affluent professionals and their compatriots with less human capital and material means. In this regard, Cortina links the formation of such hostile sentiment to a perceived lack of means of the individuals or groups in question. For this concept, Cortina coined the neologism of “aporophobia” (literally aversion to the poor) [6].

Despite this difference in treatment, infra-diaspora solidarity reveals to be an advantageous asset for those migrants enjoying most obstacles in their integration into the host community’s job market. Diaspora, intended as “the kinship systems whereby peoples displaced from one part of the world to another have maintained their sense of relationship to the place of origin” [7], has played this role throughout millennia. Diasporas’ inner logics and functioning differ widely across the world, being influenced by numerous socioeconomic and cultural indicators in both the country of origin and the host country. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify a series of shared traits, as most diasporas work as social networks, providing newcomers with much-needed guidance and support in finding a place to stay, having a social life, and entering the workforce. This is undoubtedly related to the functioning of the labor market in the gastronomy sector. Restaurants, bars, kiosks, food trucks, drugstores, and market stalls owned by diaspora members tend to

favor the employment of their akin due to the value attributed to personal connections [8]. The food sector offers, in fact, opportunities for low-skilled migrants, such as working as dishwashers or servers, as well as training opportunities to progress as skills are acquired. Social mobility appears as a sector feature as workers transition to better-paid jobs, such as cooks, restaurant managers, or even entrepreneurs.

The result of this trend is a tremendous increase in gastronomic diversity worldwide [3]. However, the dynamics of influences, fusions, and exchanges between cultural traditions are as old as humanity itself, as highlighted by the growing emphasis of historians on the link between migration and food since the 2000s [9]. This generally resulted in the addition of new foods to a pre-existing diet, thus producing “quite profound alterations in people’s images of themselves, their notions of the contrasting virtues of tradition and change, the fabric of their social life” [10].

Indeed, gastronomy acts as a connector between cultures, offering the local majority the opportunity to experience cultural diversity through taste and smell (the food), sight (staff uniforms and the design of restaurant interiors and menus), touch (tableware), and hearing (national music on speakerphone or played live). Of course, such multisensorial experience, often referred to as “sensescape” [11,12], is—to a large extent—a simplification and an adaptation of the original gastronomic experience. The desire to meet client’s expectations has led most restaurant owners to adapt their menus. Hence, stereotypes are reinforced to create a “controlled” otherness offering a reassuring experience to customers. These expectations, shaped by popular culture—movies for Italian and Thai cuisine [13,14], or porcelain for Chinese restaurants [15]—led to a stereotyped symbolic display of cultural markers including restaurants decorations and a simplified, adapted set of dishes recognizable by the host community.

Alongside these elements, the adaptation of the culinary culture plays an essential role in shaping the identity of the diasporas themselves. First, being a part of the customers (albeit generally not the main one), the culinary expectations of fellow diaspora members also enter into the definition of the menu, thus allowing gastronomy to maintain some level of tradition. Moreover, as noted by Cinotto for the Italian community in the United States, the positive, however stereotypical, and partially made-up ethnic heritage conveyed through restaurants has become part of the diaspora self-perception and acts as a reference for their inclusion in the host society. Parallely, it contributes to branding them with a distinctive, positive set of values and imaginaries to oppose the negative stereotype that might emerge within the majority [13]. Similar dynamics have been identified for the Korean and Latino diasporas in the US [16,17].

Therefore, this adaptation and simplification produce a number of cultural hybrids whose identities are jointly linked to the origins and the present-day life of migrants. Food venues become liminal places where the encounter between new and existing cultures is facilitated by the intercultural competencies migrant owners and staff develop [18]. A concrete example is provided by Fontefrancesco and Mendonce’s article in this issue of *Societies*. Indeed, their study of Bangladeshi vendors in Rome illustrates how migrant entrepreneurship stands to represent an undeniable value of social innovation by simultaneously fostering cross-cultural interactions, integration opportunities of direct stakeholders, and expansion of the local economy [19]. As further discussed below, governments can deliberately target and enhance these outcomes via an intercultural approach.

Moreover, the rising cultural reputation of a number of ethnic cuisines is not only benefiting their community [20] and channeling their cultural positioning [21] but also contributing to the spread of gastronomic diversity itself. This has facilitated the spread of high-end, sometimes luxurious food venues, often complementing an existing cheap and simplified offer. This step often coincides with the arrival of a highly skilled culinary diaspora, proudly asserting their cuisine’s authenticity and lack of adjustments [20] and with the requalification of neighborhoods previously identified with poor and marginalized communities [22].

An elaborate mixing of ingredients, settings, and culinary techniques emerges as a result of these trends. What is perceived by the majority of more established communities as exotic dishes gradually becomes a marker of the neighborhood and, in some cases, of the city itself. The integration of ethnic food into widespread local habits can go as far as to develop a local version of the foreign dish. Notable examples include New York or Chicago-style pizza. Such an adaptation has led some nations to codify recipes and the use of domestic ingredients, as in the government of Italy's successful inscription of Neapolitan pizza on the list of UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2017 [23]. Nevertheless, as highlighted by Alison Smith, "even developed conceptions of national cuisines can shift over time, either by adopting new foods and norms, or by rejecting older ones." International codifications and labels thus appear to serve the intent of preventing cultural appropriations, intended as "the active 'making one's own' of another culture's elements" [24]. While such practice may respond to economic and commercial strategies, it cannot but clash with the highly hybrid and evolutionary nature of gastronomy mentioned above.

A community where multiple cultures meet and mingle into something that speaks both of the origins of ingredients and techniques and the place where they have met is a clear example of such a dynamic dialogue of cultures which aligns with Rogers' definition of "transculturation", intended as a type of cultural appropriation where "cultural elements created from and/or by multiple cultures, such that identification of a single originating culture is problematic" [24]. It is worth mentioning that culinary diversity and hybridization are an age-old phenomenon in communities of all sizes—except for highly isolated ones—as a result of voluntary or forced migration, territorial conquests and colonization, trade, and even religious missions [25]. Thus, analyzing a community's gastronomic diversity offers insight into the local impact of migration and connects the place to a series of crises taking place abroad at different periods—famines, poverty, and even wars [26]. Among the few exceptions is the global spread of American fast food, which is not linked to a diasporic phenomenon but to the expansion of firms abroad [27]. Moreover, the commercial success of some cuisines might lead other diasporas to engage in its preparation. For example, this is the case of the spread of Japanese cuisine abroad, initially led by Japanese entrepreneurs and chefs, but now driven by migrants from third countries—in particular, from other Asian countries—as well as by indigenous restaurateurs [28].

As a result, over the last few decades, the increased arrival of foreign gastronomies contributed to making globalization tangible to urban dwellers in particular, as they experience a "global miniaturization" made of a "babel of national dishes" valued for both their foreign origin and their local availability [21]. Thus, this plurality of cultural traditions has proven its potential to impact the self-identification of a city and become part of international positioning strategies, featuring as a constitutive urban trait what has been traditionally identified as representative of guest cultures hosted in supposedly mono-ethnic neighborhoods such as *Little Italies* and *Chinatowns*.

3. The Rise of a Municipal Intercultural Approach to (Gastronomic) Diversity

Just like migrants, municipalities across the world have to deal with the hiatus between the potential and the challenges of migration. On one side, a correlation has been identified between diversity and a climate of creativity, innovation, and economic growth, as disseminated among local leaders and the general public by renowned Richard Florida's theory of the creative class and Charles Landry's definition of the creative and the intercultural city [29–32].

Nevertheless, migration also generates a series of challenges for municipalities, starting with the additional population to be supplied with public services and integrated into the labor market. As a consequence, vast migrant inflow in cities experiencing difficult socio-economic situations might lead to overburdening their infrastructures and service delivery. This trend might result in further peripheralizing these cities, broadening their distance from more successful ones, able to benefit from such migration [33]. Such dynamics

are likely to be exploited by populist and anti-immigrant political parties and groups, thus requiring a more proactive intervention of local authorities to ensure peaceful and productive social relations between communities.

From the perspective of municipal policies related to the migration process, they vary greatly, and this is often within the same country. Some researchers have documented examples of a lack of local policies for the integration of migrants [34], as well as of those more or less explicitly aimed at the exclusion of migrants from various kinds of benefits and rights [35]. Indeed, the phenomenon of *gastronativism*, a term coined by Parasecoli to denote “the ideological use of food in politics to advance ideas about who belongs to a community (in any way it may be defined) and who doesn’t, to identify threats, and to propose strategies to fight against them”, finds in local contexts some of its most hardline applications, such as the 2009 decision of the Tuscan city of Lucca to ban kebabs, fast food, and other foreign cuisines from the old town [36]. Other studies have highlighted an opposite trend in cities featuring a neoliberal political and economic approach towards migrant inclusion in urban transformation and global positioning strategies [37,38]. In such contexts, the *globalism* of educated urban elites finds particularly fertile ground. Such an attitude embodies the favor for an aesthetic, and sometimes ethical, experience of consuming ethnic cuisines, especially when presented as authentic and independent from the food service industry’s chains [36,39].

Hence, municipal authorities possess the tools to influence the impact of gastronomic diversity on the urban fabric. For the potential offered by diversity in terms of sustainable socio-economic development and international competitiveness to be fully achieved, it proves essential to provide a clear, city-wide vision, a strategic framework for clearly identifying and communicating this nexus and resources to which migrants do not necessarily have direct access [40].

The most vocal and rapidly spreading municipal approach to empower migrants for these purposes is today the intercultural one, whose primary objective consists of making migration an asset for the whole community. In that, interculturality differs from multiculturalism, as the latter mainly targets ethnocultural minorities in order to increase socio-economic equality [41]. Multiculturalism was the object of wide criticism in the early 2000s, mainly for its reactive, rather than proactive approach resulting in limited impact on inequalities, both between and within groups, and for focusing too much on differences, thus losing focus on commonalities (*ibidem*). These criticisms paved the way for the intercultural approach, which addresses minorities not only as potential victims of discrimination and exclusion but also as actors to empower in a process aimed at generating widespread social, cultural, and economic progress.

By adopting such an approach, municipalities facilitate migrants’ integration into their hosting society, as opportunities are offered for infra-diaspora engagement and solidarity, including assigning buildings and public spaces for this purpose [42]. This approach stands antithetical to the assimilationist one in that it postulates the coexistence of a multiplicity of local identities, as well as their influence on each other. Moreover, this resulting composite municipal identity is understood as additional to those that each resident already possesses, such as those of nation or city of origin, gender, religion, education, political orientation, or profession. However, it is worth noticing that municipal governments acting in this direction might not make explicit use of the term interculturality, preferring to refer to the concept of diversity (*ibidem*) or, in French-speaking countries, “living together” (“*vivre ensemble*”) [43].

The positive impact of interculturality lies in the barrier-breaking, trust-creating nature of direct interaction between diverse actors. This psychological effect was first formalized by Gordon Allport, whose contact hypothesis highlights the role of intergroup cooperation for a common goal in a context of equal status between majority and minority groups as a factor able to reduce prejudice. Such an effect is enhanced when cooperation highlights common interests and humanity between the two groups and benefits from institutional support [44]. From this perspective, gastronomic diversity provides tools not only for

the social integration of migrants but also for building a prosperous community nurtured by the contributions of all its members. Indeed, emphasis by city governments on the diversity of their food scene often reveals explicit marketing and tourism attractiveness purposes, a dynamic that in Europe and North America goes back at least to the 1980s, when it became popular for a new vision of Chinatowns, “reconstructed and conserved as a now desirable object of the tourist gaze” [45]. Today, a growing number of municipal authorities go far beyond the enhancement of what can be called “pitoresque back-drops for consumption” [22]. In fact, it includes a formal acknowledgment by the municipal government of the local cultural identity as composite and varied, promoting its different components without a hierarchical pattern, such as in the case of the social media campaign #MyLondonDish, launched by the Mayor of London Sadiq Khan in 2017 to showcase the diversity of the local culinary scene [46].

Alongside large world cities, such an approach is also observed in intermediary urban centers. Since 2012, the Municipality of Donostia/San Sebastián (Basque Autonomous Community, Spain), a member of the Council of Europe’s Intercultural Cities network (see below), has supported (and, since 2015, also organized) the “Sukaldanitzak” (Multi-cuisine) initiative, with the goal of creating “open spaces for meeting, knowledge, and recognition of the different and diverse cultures that coexist in our city and in this way promote intercultural coexistence” [47]. The event consists of a series of workshops led by representatives of foreign culinary traditions. Each workshop takes place in gastronomic societies (members-only during the rest of the year) and is assisted by around fifteen people (five from the society, ten places open to residents), with a final meal for a total of thirty people. The meal is followed by songs and dances from both local and migrant traditions [48].

Such an approach applies not also to recent diasporas but to historic minorities as well. As an example, the Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw, created by the municipality together with the Polish government and the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute of Poland, organizes annually the TISH Jewish Food Festival, featuring artistic and cooking workshops, exhibitions, urban walks, and conferences. Quite evocatively, the 2019 edition’s central theme was “Home” and intended to foster debate about the feeling of belonging and the concept of community [49].

During the COVID-19 outbreak, the intercultural methodology provided cities from across the world with additional tools to face unprecedented situations. Best practices collected by international organizations and city networks include the participation of migrant communities in communication campaigns to reach residents not yet fluent in the host city language, the participation of communities in emergency fundraisings and distribution of aid to citizens in need, as well as the production of digital content to continue enjoying dialogue and culture sharing even in times of confinement [50–52]. An example of the latter is represented by the video recipes of migrant cuisines, part of an initiative of Reggio Emilia’s “*Indovina chi viene a cena ... ?*” (“Guess who comes for dinner ... ?”), a project implemented by migrant families with the support of *Centro Interculturale Mondoinsieme*, the municipality’s intercultural center [53].

4. Matching Local Goals to International Cooperation

Approaching the spread of intercultural gastronomy in cities worldwide as the mere matching of human mobility and growing interest in “exotic” cultural experiences would be reductive. In fact, this depiction fails to acknowledge the contribution to the spread of gastronomic diversity by that form of international coordination and partnership among cities known as city diplomacy.

Through this practice, city governments in different parts of the world weave collaborations aimed at addressing common challenges and priorities through knowledge exchange and the joint development of new policies in the wide range of subjects under their purview [54–56]. Alongside bilateral ties, whose best-known format is the twinning agreement, city diplomacy features today hundreds of international city networks, i.e.,

permanent multilateral structures designed to facilitate and enhance coordination and collaboration among municipal governments. Among the global network on the topic in question is the already mentioned *Intercultural Cities*, a program launched in 2008 by the Council of Europe, whose regional scope has been expanded to include cities in Australia, Canada, Israel, Japan, Mexico, Morocco, the United States, and South Korea. This program stems from the clear perception by the Council of Europe that cities are in charge of the concrete application of national policies on human and cultural rights. Effective and efficient access to rights represents, in fact, the first of the three main goals of the program, the others being the definition of positive interactions between diverse communities and fostering a positive impact of diversity in society as a whole [57].

The City of Montreal, a member of Intercultural Cities, hosts the *International Observatory of Mayors on Living Together*, a city network acting as a peer-learning and knowledge platform on intercultural policies at the urban level [58]. Launched in 2015, the Observatory counts in March 2023 55 member cities worldwide and pursues its mission in close cooperation with world-renowned universities and research centers [59].

Another global initiative pursuing similar goals is the *International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable Cities (ICCAR)*, launched in 2004 by UNESCO and composed of eight regional and one national coalitions to fight racism, each featuring a “Ten-Point Plan of Action,” whose signatory cities undertake to integrate into their municipal strategy [60].

Alongside these three thematic networks, interculturality is a common topic in many ‘multi-purpose’ networks, such as the *International Association of Francophone Mayors (AIMF)*, namely through the organization of dedicated conferences, a permanent commission on Living together (chaired by Montreal), and publications (a magazine, *Raisonnement*, and a podcast, *Les Clés de la Ville*) [61].

Mercociudades, Mercosur’s city network, launched in December 2018 a media campaign entitled “*La diversidad que hay en ti*” (“the diversity there is in you”). Aimed at easing tensions linked to the rise of migrant inflow in Latin American countries—mainly originating from Venezuela and Honduras—the campaign invited cities to highlight the contribution of the migrants to social, economic, and cultural progress, in line with the intercultural approach [62].

Smaller cities are involved in such a trend as well: *Cittaslow International*, a network of 287 cities in 33 countries with populations up to 50,000 inhabitants, takes inspiration from *Slow Food* philosophy to assert an urban way of living based on the respect of traditions and the environment, with an accent on social cohesion and inclusion, which represent one of the categories of the network’s annual awards [63].

In the framework of cultural city diplomacy, two networks specifically focus on gastronomy. In the *UNESCO Creative Cities Network* framework, the 39 Creative Cities of Gastronomy (see Figure 1) have identified gastronomy as a tool for sustainable development. Among them, many address migrant communities’ inclusion through gastronomy as a critical local goal and engage other Creative cities in dialogue and knowledge exchange on the topic [64,65].

Emphasis on diversity is also pivotal to the work of the *Délice Network*, created in Lyon in 2007. The network supports its 31 member cities (Figure 1) in their capacity to make food a driver of socio-cultural and economic development [66]. As mentioned in *Délice Network*’s value chart, food and gastronomy are perceived as “instrumental in creating strong social cohesion” [67]. In line with the now increasingly established practice of international collaboration among cities [55], *Délice* member cities gain two types of impetus from this network: the exchange of best practices, carried out as much in the network’s internal communications as at its events, and collective branding targeting both local, national, and international audience. Given the alignment of values and methodologies between the UNESCO Creative Cities of Gastronomy and *Délice Network*, it is unsurprising that three of them joined both networks (Mérida in Mexico, Tucson in the United States, and Zahlé in Lebanon).

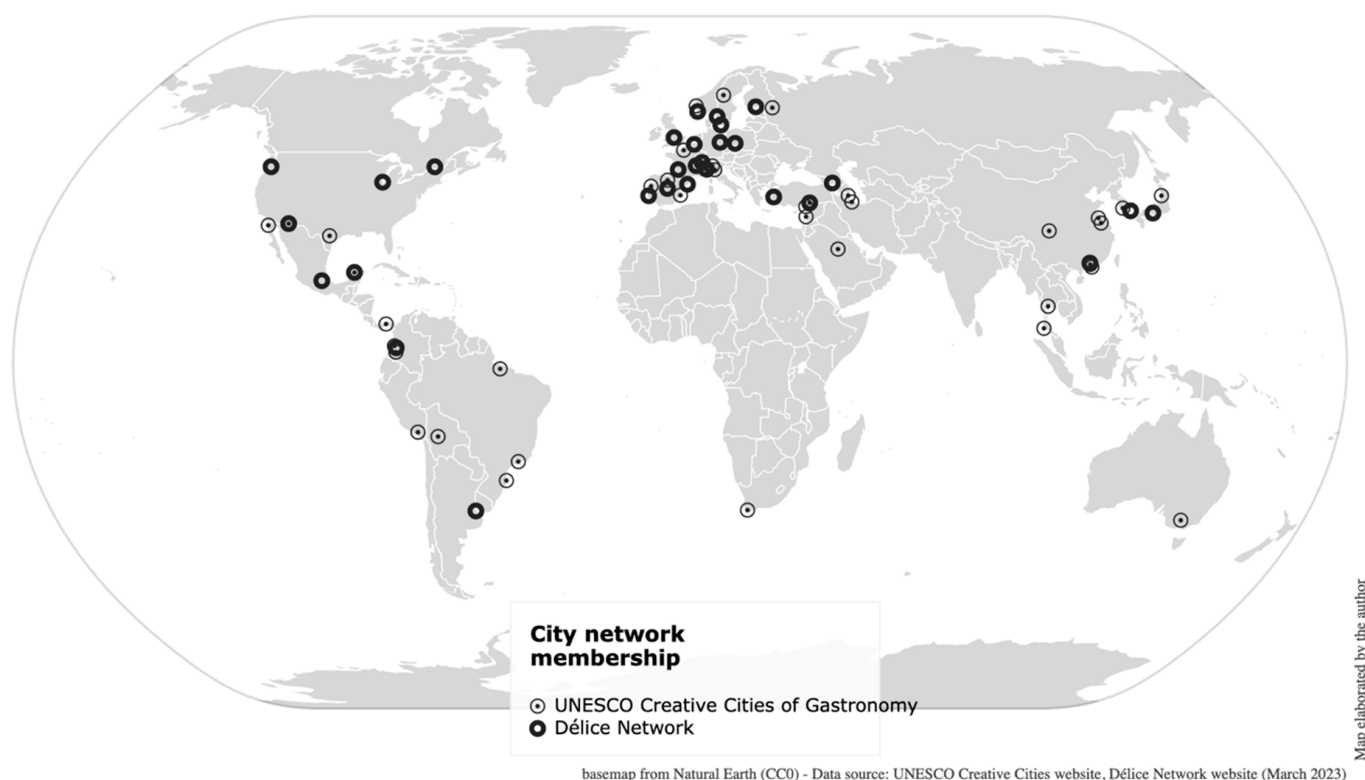


Figure 1. Map of UNESCO Creative Cities of Gastronomy and Délice Network member cities.

Alongside multilateral initiatives, gastronomy and its diversity have been an engine of bilateral partnerships. This is largely connected to the topic of co-development, which consists of development cooperation initiatives in which migrants play a central role [68]. Municipalities engaging their migrant communities in such an approach aim to the dual goal of fostering their inclusion and participation and benefiting from their unique assets regarding their city and country of origin, including the knowledge of challenges, personal connections, and a generally high commitment to supporting the development of such territories.

As an example, dialogue with the Senegalese diaspora in Milan led to identifying specific food security and job-creation needs in the Ndiaye Thioro province. In 2012 the City of Milan sponsored the creation of a bakery school in the province, where local youth could learn both local and Italian baking traditions, thus acquiring valuable skills on the job market. Moreover, the food prepared in the school is sold at a significantly reduced price to complement the dietary needs of the local population [69].

5. City Branding and Gastronomic Diversity

Alongside cooperation, cities compete with each other internationally over a series of scarce assets, namely investments, tourists, talents, and students. Over the last few years, several international city rankings emerged to assess cities' positioning based on competitiveness (such as A.T. Kearney's Global Cities Index or the Global Power City Index by the Mori Memorial Foundation), their relevance in the world's economy [70] or an urban feature, such as sustainability [71,72] or even happiness [73].

The desire to improve their position in these rankings has led a growing number of municipalities across the world to design city branding strategies inspired by the private sector and aimed at enhancing their internal and external perception. Just like companies do with their goods and services, cities involved in such a practice design and communicate a distinctive brand capable of evoking enticing assets and qualities [74]. These brands aim to attract the mentioned scarce resources (economic pull activities) while supporting the export of goods and services produced locally (economic push activities).

Place branding can either feature bottom-up or top-down dynamics. In the first case, it emerges as the result of local stakeholders' action, without the municipality's involvement, at least initially. This is often the case for diverse gastronomy branding, as demonstrated by Marseille's brand as 'merguez capital,' launched as part of a cultural initiative led by local graphic designers and journalists [75], or its KousKous Festival, organized since 2018 by local food and retail actors [76].

Even when the result of top-down imprinting, city branding is increasingly engaging residents and local stakeholders. Cities value local participation in branding processes not only to align with the goals and wishes of residents and stakeholders but also to enhance their engagement in the practical implementation of the brand, as its outcome largely depends on its widespread local adoption. Moreover, brands are not static, and they need to be refreshed and maintained, placing particular care on the emotional impact on local sensibility and on "shifting processes of representation created as people, cultures, societies, and ideas move across and about the space that they inhabit" [77].

As place branding spreads across the world, its application increasingly focuses on the distinctiveness of local creativity, among which gastronomy often plays a central role. A thriving and diverse food scene is considered an asset in attracting gastronomic tourists, as well as highly-skilled professionals—Richard Florida's "creative class", whose national and international relocation depends not only on their career but also on a series of local assets, including diversity, tolerance, and innovation [78].

Today, food branding techniques implemented by municipalities generally feature a combination of tools, including international labels such as those of the gastronomic networks mentioned before and the organization of a calendar of local, national, and international food events. As reported by Berg and Sevón, the cities' food branding can go as far as to re-engineer the cities spatially, changing the way public space is experienced through, for example, the creation of dense culinary spaces such as pedestrian plazas or waterfronts [12]. In terms of content, it usually incorporates what made the city famous internationally, be it a traditional recipe or produce (such as cheesecake in New York, parmesan in Parma, champagne in Reims, Peking duck in Beijing), a culinary technique (New Nordic Cuisine in Copenhagen, *Novoandina* cuisine in Lima) and, as mentioned, gastronomic diversity.

Gastronomic diversity branding usually includes a heritage component, advocating for the recognition and promotion of multiple and often ancient gastronomic traditions. In its *Guidelines for the Development of Gastronomy Tourism* (2019), the World Tourism Organization states: "It is not possible to talk of gastronomy tourism without also talking about the culinary identity of the *terroir* as a distinguishing feature. The territory is the backbone of gastronomy because a destination's landscapes, culture, products, techniques, and dishes define its culinary identity and are the foundation of, and should be part of, the DNA of the tourism experiences offered to visitors". However, this element is generally complemented by the one linked to the presence on the territory of traditions originating from distant cultures, which traveled with the migrants and became part of the local food scene. Such a component of the "commodification of cultural features" [79] allows cities to brand themselves on the global tourism market as cosmopolitan and able to offer exotic experiences. Research has identified the deliberate choice of municipalities to spread this phenomenon in Europe, the United States, Canada, and Australia [79–81]. Moreover, municipal government action in this regard goes beyond a simple reaction aimed at exploiting the interest of international tourism by making multicultural quarters "objects of place-consumption" [22] to implement a political vision of participatory and inclusive development of urban society. As with other urban policies, food branding also featured the transition from multiculturalism to interculturality. Previous migrant food initiatives, such as fairs and festivals, tended to showcase diversity without accentuating the creation of local synergies between migrant minorities and the majority of the population. This sometimes ended up being counterproductive, as their tangible impact sometimes reinforced cultural stereotypes—especially when a simplified version of the foreign culture

was offered. Moreover, even when the didactic component of these events could effectively share information on foreign cultural practices, the interaction between communities remained often limited. A cause of failure in diversity branding has been reported in the lack of knowledge and sensitivity for ethnocultural particularities, especially when coupled with top-down processes with little engagement of residents and communities [38].

The acknowledgment of such limitations seems to have shaped the commitment of municipalities to the active involvement of the migrant food sector in food branding, which generally features goals of local and international scope. Local goals generally include social cohesion and empowerment of migrant communities, thus fighting stereotypes and racism. Simultaneously, such an approach to local food branding targets international recognition of a thriving and diverse culinary destination, thus attracting additional gastronomy tourism, investments, and talents.

In line with the intercultural approach of fostering inclusion without generating accusations of favoritism—potentially leading to a backlash in anti-immigrant sentiment—most cities enacting this approach tend today to involve the whole food scene, including by fostering interactions and cooperation between local and migrant cuisines. The most notable example of such a partnership is the *Refugee Food Festival*, launched in 2016 by the French NGO *Food Sweet Food*. Except for 2020, for obvious reasons, the festival occurs each year around World Refugee Day (June 20) in several cities across Europe, the United States, and South Africa, featuring partnerships with the local municipalities [82]. The event takes place in a series of local restaurants opening their cuisines to professional refugee chefs for a week. The initiative's success has proven instrumental in hosting cities' food branding, local restaurants' visibility, and refugee chefs' employability—59% of involved chefs received at least one job offer [83]. While migrant chefs' success does not represent *per se* a novelty in gastronomy's history, so does the connection between the personal stories and a broader migration framework encompassing communities.

An interview conducted with Délice Network coordinator allowed for the identification, based on information shared by member cities with the network, of three municipal governments that stand out for policies aimed at promoting the respective intercultural nature of the local gastronomic scene: Malmö, Montreal, and Tucson [84]. Albeit separated by geography, history, and size, the three cities share a number of policies related to gastronomic diversity. Interviews conducted with the three cities' representatives in the network identified that this position is first and foremost related to the awareness that the increased level of cultural and, consequently, gastronomic diversity is a typical feature of today's cities. This immediately clashes with the greater homogeneity present in rural areas and smaller towns, as illustrated by the city of Montreal: "Montreal politicians have realized that their own urban society is quite different from that of Quebec at large" [85]. This observation finds its validity both ethnically and politically, as shown by the better scores of progressive parties in the city than in the rest of the province. The same dynamic is present in Tucson, a liberal city in a conservative state. With regards to the Swedish city, since 2016, there has been an alignment between the mayor of Malmö, traditionally in the hands of the Swedish Social Democratic Party, and the governor of Skåne County.

Second, the three cities' action on gastronomic diversity rests on a participatory approach. Interviewees shared the observation that gastronomic diversity has emerged independently due to the dual phenomenon of the presence of different cultures in the area and the economic success of diversity in the food scene, which residents widely appreciate. No city claims sole ownership of this dynamic, but rather, in Tucson's words, that of leveraging and bringing visibility, purposes embedded as much in local actions as in those conducted within the Délice Network itself. Indeed, the cities leverage the local initiatives and actors involved in this dynamic. Examples include partnerships with companies offering guided tours to discover the three cities' gastronomic diversity and support to non-for-profit or social enterprises working on gastronomic diversity, such as *Botildenborg–Sustainable Innovation Center* in Malmö, *Santropol Roulant* in Montreal and the *Southern Arizona Arts & Cultural Alliance (SAACA)* in Tucson.

The three cities see such collaborations as instrumental to a strengthened tourism offering based on a specific destination identity characterized by the diversity of gastronomic offerings. In Tucson's words, the joint efforts of the local government and the city's food sector have enabled the city to become a gastronomic destination on a domestic and international level [86]. Indeed, the gastronomic dimension is considered by city administrators as fully integrated into the local tourism offer and is promoted as such. In all three cases, this strategy revolves around the presence of places where to consume such diversity (bars, restaurants, kiosks, spice shops) and through festivals that celebrate it. Among the most prominent manifestations of this dynamic include Malmö's *International Falafel Award*, *MTLaTABLE* and *Montréal en Lumière*, and *Tucson Meet Yourself*.

However, it should be pointed out that, in the three cases, tourism and economic development purposes are not the unique drivers of this approach toward gastronomic diversity. Indeed, Malmö, Tucson, and Montreal interpret their intercultural emphasis as aligned with the generalized cultural sensibilities of their citizens. Such an approach is explicitly intended to reproduce the gastronomic preferences of city residents, who are seen as overtly global and open to new forms of cultures and cuisines. The resulting local policies thus reveal economic development purposes targeting local businesses mixed with social ones linked to dialogue and the valorization of different cultural identities in the area. Alongside these similarities, the three interviews made it possible to identify a prominent difference in the identification of the concept of gastronomic diversity. While Malmö and Montreal emphasize the existence of a diverse "authentic" gastronomic scene—as illustrated by the decision to conduct guided tours to discover different traditions and the International Falafel Award in Malmö, or Montreal's pride in offering all kinds of traditional ingredients and recipes from its migrant communities, Tucson places a particular emphasis on the blending of different gastronomic traditions on its territory, resulting in a "hybrid" gastronomy with a unique nature. Evidence of this dynamic is the concept of "Sonora" gastronomy, a fusion of gastronomic influences from the broad Sonoran Desert region (Spanish: *Desierto de Sonora*), spreading across the United States (States of Arizona and California) and Mexico (States of Sonora, Baja California, and Baja California Sur), and the related existence of a heated local debate on the boundaries between cultural appropriation and appreciation.

In the examples of Délice Network's members, as well as of the cities hosting the Refugee Food Festival, diverse gastronomy is addressed as a field for intercultural policies and a tool for city branding. Moreover, it emerges as a connector between two seemingly opposed municipal strategies, namely international cooperation and competition, by creating partnerships of cities pursuing their social, cultural, and economic goals jointly. This approach appears to be a feature of the international relations of the three cities examined, being visible as a criterion for their choice of city networks. Alongside Délice Network, Tucson is a UNESCO City of Gastronomy, while Malmö and Montreal have joined the *Strong City Network* devoted to fostering social cohesion and counter violent extremism. Moreover, Montreal is an Intercultural Cities member and is dually involved in the topic of living together via the Observatory and AIMF's permanent commission mentioned before.

6. The Nation-State Perspective: Towards Intercultural Gastrodiploacy?

As mentioned, municipalities are not the only public institution addressing gastronomy as a diplomatic and branding tool. Today, a growing number of national governments from across the world are deploying public diplomacy campaigns centered on it.

Historically, gastronomy has constantly figured among the diplomatic tools on account of the widespread desire to harness the conviviality potential inherent to sharing a meal with counterparts and thus easing negotiations. Among the most notable examples of such a practice are the lavish receptions hosted by Talleyrand during the Vienna Congress (1814–1815) to support his claim that France, the former enemy, should not be excluded from the Concert of Europe [87]. Nevertheless, it is only over the last three decades that governments have explicitly identified cuisine as a means to influence foreign

public opinions. Therefore, these activities take place mainly abroad, with generally limited participation in the domestic food scene—with the exception of celebrity chefs [88]. *Gastrodiplomacy*—a term introduced by *The Economist* in 2002 to describe Thailand's initiatives in this field [89], is today a fully-fledged public diplomacy policy implemented by many nation-states worldwide. Although there is still a lack of data concerning the economic impact of gastrodiplomacy campaigns, preliminary studies suggest that its deployment has improved countries' cultural image and economic fortunes while widening the definition of *haute cuisine*, a term once reserved, as its origin suggests, to French cuisine [20].

Gastrodiplomacy mainly consists of two typologies of campaigns taking place abroad: those aiming at multiplying and certifying national restaurants—the choice made by Thailand, Taiwan, Japan, and both Koreas—and the organization of food events—as in the case of France's and Italy's annual celebrations taking place in numerous foreign cities [90–94].

In both scenarios, gastrodiplomacy is mainly implemented by the diplomatic and consular service and allows national governments to pursue a plurality of goals, usually including the global positioning of the country, fostering gastronomic tourism, increasing the export of domestic food products, attracting foreign investments in their food industry, and supporting their diaspora.

The latter is, in fact, an issue of growing interest for nations worldwide. While official interactions have always happened via embassies, consulates, and cultural institutes, the growing diaspora engagement by national governments is documented by the creation of ministries dedicated to diaspora affairs by more than 30 countries or administrative units within the governments by 40 percent of United Nations members [7]. Such diaspora engagement by a nation is known under the term “diaspora diplomacy” [7,95]. While the practice might alarm public and private actors concerning the foreign country's potentially nefarious deployment of their diasporas for political or economic purposes, gastrodiplomacy's explicit goals are generally perceived as harmless. A known exception is North Korea, whose limited geographic scope (Asia—mainly China—Russia, and the United Arab Emirates) [92] is likely to be determined by the opposition of foreign countries to host its state-run restaurants, which might represent a violation of the UN sanctions on the country [94]. Gastronomy is generally among the best-accepted forms of foreign cultural production, to the point that cuisine (contrary to foreign produce competing with a domestic one) is generally not hindered by protectionism. Discussion about cultural globalization generally focuses on audio-visual products (film, tv-series, music), a market widely dominated by the US. This widespread acceptance of ethnic cuisine happens despite the fact that the restaurant industry generates far higher revenues than the audio-visual one (in the US, \$560 billion and \$40 billion, respectively, in 2017) [96]. Moreover, as Waldfogel remarks, “cuisine trade patterns contrast rather sharply with the patterns for audio-visual products,” with Italy, Japan, and Mexico featuring the largest cuisine surplus (*ibidem*).

In terms of content, countries have appeared much less prone than cities to include their own diversity in branding campaigns. In gastrodiplomacy, private partners, including diaspora's restaurateurs and food industries, are often chosen based on their adherence to a more or less defined notion of authentic national cuisine, often including labels, rankings, or lists awarded by the government, such as Thailand's “Thai Select” and “Thai Select Premium”, Japan's “Japanese Food Supporter Store”, or the “*Passaporto del Gusto*” (“*Taste Passport*”) published between 2016 and 2019 by the Italian Consulate in Paris to list the selection of Italian restaurants and drugstores involved in the Week of the Italian Cuisine Abroad.

Such codification appears in line with the notion of cultural homogeneity upon which most nations are built. Even Mahatma Gandhi reportedly referred to the creation of a national diet as instrumental to political unity in India [25]. Hence, this practice can be seen as a manifestation of shared *gastronationalism*, a practice connecting the foods' social and cultural attributes to politics in order “to demarcate and sustain the emotive power of national attachment, as well as the use of nationalist sentiments to produce and market

food” [97]. The practice can go as far as to brand dishes as national. Such a controversial operation often has limited historical grounding, as cuisine—just like the other forms of cultural expressions—is generally the result of exchanges and contaminations, sometimes dating back to centuries or millennia, well before the formation of most modern nation-states. Notable examples of disputed ownership over dishes include *hummus*, whose creation is claimed by Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Israel, or the dispute over *dolma* by Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey [98]. Such an approach sometimes extends to the UNESCO Intangible Cultural List, namely in the form of dual inscriptions for coffee (2013 for Turkey, 2015 for Arab countries) and kimchi (2013 for South Korea, 2015 for North Korea). In terms of gastronomy, nation-building has often included a selection of local culinary traditions to raise to the stance of national [99–101]—albeit local identifications might perdure, including in the name of the recipe.

Provided that the concept of gastronomic immutability can be disputed, its persistence in gastrodiploacy echoes the hierarchization of local cultures, a political discourse that offers a political dividend in polarized societies. As observed in a European context by Porciani, such “heritage-making” is a response to anxieties, which include “the fear of globalization and mass immigration”, and is used by populist parties against migrants to ridicule them for their food [102].

Today, only a few nations integrate diversity into their gastrodiploacy, deploying its social inclusion potential alongside economic development and global positioning. This group of nations includes mainly those who experienced significant migration and trade inflows, coupled with the lack of an established national brand of cuisine—such as Canada, Malta, and Singapore [3,103]. Another exception is countries aiming at highlighting, alongside their culinary traditions, their innovative culinary scene characterized at least in part by cross-contaminations, such as in the case of *Nikkei* cuisine in Peru [104]. These exceptions appear in line with the growing visibility offered to gastronomic diversity by international rankings of restaurants such as *The World’s 50 Best Restaurants* and the *Michelin Guides* [20]. Both rankings provided global celebrity to numerous chefs mixing techniques and ingredients (such as Mitsuharu Tsumura in Lima), including those who migrated (Argentinian Mauro Colagreco in Menton, France, Indian Gaggan Anand in Bangkok), thus contributing to the brand of their cities and nations of residence.

Parallely, a number of countries’ gastrodiploacy is shifting from the supposed monolithic gastronomic identity to the promotion of local gastronomies, often designed and implemented in cooperation with local authorities. Italy and France’s primary annual gastrodiploacy campaigns—the Week of the Italian Cuisine in the World and Good France/Goût de France—feature a recurrent accent on local and regional gastronomic traditions. As an example from the former, in November 2019, Tours and Parma celebrated their 50th anniversary with a series of cultural events in Tours in the framework of the Week, thus showing the possibility of structured synergies between municipal cooperation and branding on one side, and national gastrodiploacy on the other. This trend is paralleled by the joint diplomatic efforts put in place for the inscription of several local culinary practices in UNESCO’s Intangible Heritage list, including *Gingerbread craft from Northern Croatia* and the *Arts of the Neapolitan “Pizzaiuolo”*, inscribed in 2010 and 2017, respectively. Furthermore, some early signs of openness toward intercultural gastronomic branding appear to be adopted even by countries previously known for their strict definitions of domestic culinary traditions. This is, for example, the case of the 2022 “*Année de la gastronomie française*” (Year of French gastronomy), when the French government committed to financially supporting “multicultural exchanges” alongside the enhancement of local traditions. Such a call made it possible, for example, to sponsor the holding of the fifth edition of the KoussKouss Festival in Marseille mentioned earlier [105].

These two trends might lead, in the next future, to more inclusive definitions of national gastronomies, allowing for gastrodiploacy’s alignment with the reality of domestic food scenes and further synergies between nation and city branding.

7. Conclusions

The paper has presented gastronomic diversity as an asset for the diaspora, cities, and nations worldwide. A relatively accessible professional field for both trained and unskilled migrants, a diverse food scene is actively leveraged by a growing number of municipalities with the purpose of fostering social cohesion, economic development, and the international positioning of the city. The case studies of Montréal, Tucson, and Malmö in such a field demonstrate the ability of municipal governments to make themselves the agents, with the political and technical support of international city networks created for this purpose, of a strategic and comprehensive vision of sustainable development. These cities thus confirm their role as engines of innovation, as best described by Bauman: “cities have been sites of incessant and most rapid change throughout their history; and since it was in cities that the change destined to spill over the rest of society originated, the city-born change caught the living as a rule unawares and unprepared” [106]. Hence, it seems justified to argue that the gastronomic diversity angle adopted by this paper allows identifying a far greater propensity of city governments than national ones to manage their local and international actions according to a dynamic reconceptualization of culture “not as a bounded entity and essence but as radically relational or dialogic” [24]. This practice transcends models of cultural hierarchy and appropriation, going beyond the simple acknowledgment of present-day demographics, as well as the mere exploitation of a leisure industry’s interest for “exotic” experiences.

The innovative character of municipalities’ intercultural approach lies in its capacity to target all local cultural expressions while fostering innovative and creative practices of cross-cultural contaminations. Basically, cities applying such an approach are far from discouraging the sense of local attachment and belonging to a place but advocate for its adaptation to reality, with the consequent appreciation of the contributions of minorities. Cities thus demonstrate their capacity to open to a “dynamic sustainability” in Castell’s definition of “both conservation and improvement leading to an enhanced quality of life including social justice (so that what is sought as sustainable is not only given by the expansion of human needs and aspirations)” [107]. In the terminology of Lazarus adapted to local politics by Tomaney, urban intercultural policies aim at fostering ‘local cosmopolitanism’ with no necessary contradiction between the universal, the local, and the national [108,109].

However, despite some exceptions in countries with less established national cuisines and a tradition of sustained and consistent migrant inflows, most national governments currently refrain from integrating the cultural impact of globalization into their gastrodiplo-macy campaigns. Nevertheless, the recent opening of one of the countries with the most established cuisines, France, in favor of gastronomic diversity leads to reflection on the conditions for an evolution of the current situation towards a gradual narrowing of the hiatus between gastrodiplo-macy and city diplomacy in intercultural gastronomic branding.

It seems fair to expect that the global diffusion conveyed by city diplomacy of the intercultural approach will spread awareness of its advantages in harnessing the full potential of gastronomy, as defined by the United Nations: “a cultural expression related to the natural and cultural diversity of the world, [. . .] all cultures and civilizations can contribute to and are crucial enablers of sustainable development” [110]. However, to date, there is an evident lack of indicators to assess and quantify the impact of gastronomic diversity strategy, as are the criteria for the transferability of good practices from an urban to a national territorial scale. A significant contribution may come in this from future research. Through a qualitative and quantitative approach, future multi-disciplinary research in the fields of urban, cultural, migration, and globalization studies will make it possible to demonstrate and communicate not only the criteria for effectively deploying the economic, social, and cultural potential of the intercultural approach to gastronomy on a given territory but also to prospect its application on the national scale. This would create the conditions for bottom-up multilevel knowledge transfer and coordination between layers of government.

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