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# GASTRONOMY AS A DIPLOMATIC TOOL: BAIRRADA'S GASTRODIPLOMACY APPROACH

## GASTRONOMIA COMO EXPRESSÃO DIPLOMÁTICA: DINÂMICAS DE GASTRODIPLOMACIA NA REGIÃO DA BAIRRADA

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### ABSTRACT

The intersection of gastronomy and diplomacy has garnered significant attention, giving rise to 'gastrodiplomacy' as a key concept in international relations. This paper explores the dynamics of gastrodiplomacy within the Bairrada wine region, highlighting its potential for strategic gastronomic branding and the export of agri-food products. While many other cases could serve as future studies, this research focuses on an extensive literature review and qualitative analysis of municipal and restaurant websites. It identifies key stakeholders in regional gastronomic promotion and uncovers patterns in the strategic marketing of food heritage. Results of this case study, underscore Bairrada's substantial potential for effective gastrodiplomacy, advocating for innovative approaches such as people-to-people programs, cultural events, and social media engagement to elevate its gastronomic branding. These findings emphasize the significance of gastrodiplomacy in enhancing national brand "Bairrada" recognition, fostering tourism, and attracting foreign investment.

#### KEYWORDS

Gastrodiplomacy, tourism, Bairrada, food Heritage, online Strategic marketing

#### RESUMO

A interseção entre gastronomia e diplomacia tem despertado um interesse significativo, dando origem ao conceito de gastrodiplomacia como elemento-chave nas relações internacionais. Este artigo explora as dinâmicas da gastrodiplomacia na região vitivinícola da Bairrada, destacando o seu potencial para o *branding* gastronómico estratégico e para a exportação de produtos agroalimentares. Embora muitos outros casos possam ser objeto de estudos futuros, esta investigação centra-se numa revisão extensa da literatura e numa análise qualitativa de websites municipais e de restaurantes. Identifica os principais intervenientes na promoção gastronómica regional e revela padrões no marketing estratégico do património alimentar. Os resultados deste estudo de caso evidenciam o considerável potencial da Bairrada para uma gastrodiplomacia eficaz, defendendo abordagens inovadoras como programas de intercâmbio entre pessoas, eventos culturais e envolvimento nas redes sociais, para reforçar a sua imagem gastronómica. Estas conclusões sublinham a importância da gastrodiplomacia no reforço do reconhecimento da marca nacional “Bairrada”, na promoção do turismo e na atração de investimento estrangeiro.

#### PALAVRAS-CHAVE:

Gastrodiplomacia, turismo, Bairrada, património alimentar, marketing estratégico online

## Introduction

The diplomatic dimensions of gastronomy have been recognized and studied for a long time, giving rise to the term “gastrodiplomacy” which refers to concerted and sustained public relations campaigns and investments by governments, often in collaboration with non-state actors, to increase the

value and positioning of the national brand through gastronomy<sup>1</sup>. In daily life, the concept acts as a bridge, facilitating interactions among cultures and connecting peoples, nations, and identities. It manifests as a two-way interactive public exchange, leveraging personal and social dimensions to exert influence. The resulting relationships extend beyond the realm of food, encompassing the broader tapestry of culture and societal life. In the context of tourism demand, destinations (led by regional entities) must empower the linkage between gastronomy, local food heritage and culture, to meet the visitors' expectations of authenticity and quality.

This research started with an extensive literature review (LR) conducted on the SCOPUS academic database, focusing on the keywords “gastrodiplomacy” and “tourism”, aiming to discover how Bairrada’s municipalities and local restaurants ambassadors build up their gastrodiplomacy strategies. The findings revealed a relatively underexplored area, evidenced by a limited number of scholarly papers—10 in total—emerging between 2019 and 2023. Several authors have made significant contributions to the field of gastrodiplomacy, presenting robust and insightful analyses. Matta (2019) characterizes gastrodiplomacy as a burgeoning trend in international relations and describes it as a set of institutional practices that extend the political uses of food cultures. Nair (2021) links gastrodiplomacy with tourism, emphasizing its enhancement by a nation’s international diaspora, ethnic restaurants, and food festivals. Suntikul (2019) examines the strategic use of cuisine to influence perceptions of a nation. Rockower (2020) situates food at the intersection of foreign policy and international strategic communication. Kennedy (2020) highlights the role of diaspora public diplomacy actors as crucial agents within the realm of foreign policy. Notably, the distribution across disciplines indicated a predominant focus within business and management (35%) and social sciences (25%). This paper seeks to contribute valuable insights to this nascent field. Three main goals were defined:

1. **To identify Bairrada’s endogenous resources**, aiming to integrate local competencies, cultural identity, collective knowledge, and institutional frameworks to drive territorial development from within, fostering a sense of place and community-led growth.

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1 Rockower 2020.

2. **To investigate the key actors responsible for promoting regional and local gastronomic brands, as well as the role of these “ambassadors.”** It is important to acknowledge the diverse array of influencers who have the potential to convey our gastronomic identity. These include producers such as farmers, fishermen, and artisans, as well as fraternities, ordinary citizens, chefs, and educational institutions. Each group plays a crucial role in shaping and sustaining this cultural collective narrative. The contributions of these players are invaluable and merit thorough examination. This study serves as a foundational step, paving the way for more comprehensive and integrative approaches in future research. By building on this groundwork, subsequent investigations can explore in greater depth the complex interactions and synergies among these various contributors to our gastronomic heritage.
3. **To analyse the online content of the eight municipalities of the Bairrada region and 89 traditional restaurant websites to identify strategic marketing patterns related to food heritage.** Using a mixed-methods approach—combining quantitative analysis (resource count) and qualitative content analysis—this research explores how gastronomy and wine are represented across municipal and restaurant websites.

The discoveries highlighted in subsequent sections underscore the remarkable potential of the Bairrada region in cultivating a dynamic gastrodiploacy. This potential is poised to enhance national brand recognition, ignite tourism growth, and draw heightened foreign direct investment.

## 1. Literature Review

*The ability to persuade through culture, values and ideas, as opposed to ‘hard power’, which conquers or coerces through military might.*<sup>2</sup>

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2 Nye 2004.

Through an extensive Literature Review (LR), focusing on the key-words “gastrodiplomacy” and “tourism,” several pertinent concepts have surfaced, including the distinctions between hard power and soft power. Hard power, stemming from a nation’s military and economic ability, embodies its capacity to coerce others. In contrast, soft power derives from the appeal of a nation’s culture, political principles, and policies. When external observers perceive a country’s policies as legitimate, its soft power is augmented. Different types of soft diplomacy are detailed in the Figure 1: Government to Government (G2G), Cultural Diplomacy (P2P) and Public Diplomacy (G2P).

Government to Government Diplomacy (**G2G**) is a persuasion method, that Governments use to influence the actions of other Governments, through negotiation and dialogue tactics<sup>3</sup>. There are many types of diplomacy (**Public Diplomacy**, Economic Diplomacy, **Cultural Diplomacy**, Science Diplomacy, Cyber Diplomacy, Energy Diplomacy, Regional Diplomacy, Health Diplomacy, Sport Diplomacy, etc...).

This section delves into the realm of Public Diplomacy – **G2P**, which is founded on the dissemination of information, carried out from Governments to non-state actors, interacting with civil society, through: media, scholars, entrepreneurs, and the general public.

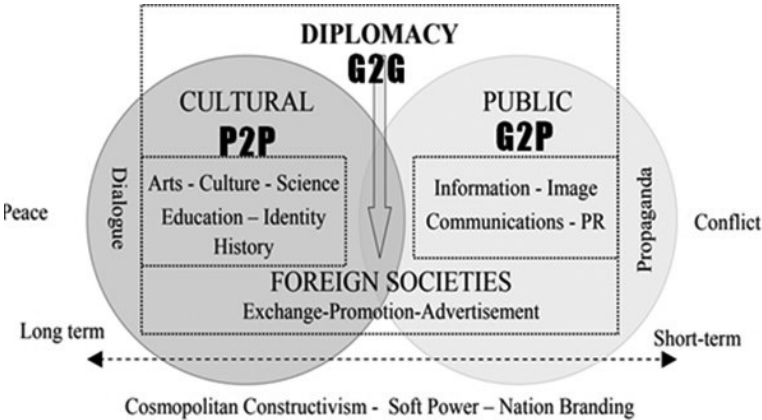


Figure 1 – Soft diplomacy types.  
Source: adapted from Villanueva 2007; Copeland 2010 & Suntikul 2017.

3 Information available at [https://www.culturaldiplomacy.org/index.php?en\\_culturaldiplomacy](https://www.culturaldiplomacy.org/index.php?en_culturaldiplomacy)

To pursue G2P objectives it is critical involving several players, such as: Government (Turismo de Portugal with Strategic Plans for Tourism; Regional Tourism entities; Municipal Councils); Cultural Ambassadors (Schools, Universities, museums, regional groups), Media (Television programs, radio programs, books & Magazines); Fairs & Events (FITUR, BTL, regional events, popular festivals, others); Associations (gastronomic fraternities, producer groups, Local Development Associations, control and certification entities), Private companies (commercial areas, influencers, chefs, restaurants, etc.). In Portugal, the Turismo de Portugal serves as the National Tourism Authority, operating within the Ministry of Economy and the Sea. This entity holds the responsibility for the comprehensive promotion, valorisation, and sustainability of tourism activities in the country. In the realm of public diplomacy, the overarching objective is encapsulated in the phrase “Raise Portugal’s Profile”<sup>4</sup>, involving a meticulous planning and execution of strategies, identifying key markets strategically to maximize impact and outreach and conduct online campaigns to bolster visibility; executing brand actions that resonate with the target audience; undertaking social communication and public relations actions to foster positive perceptions; being represented at international tourism fairs to showcase Portugal’s offerings.

Additionally, it explores Cultural Diplomacy – **P2P** (or People to People interaction) based on the exchange of ideas, values, traditions and other aspects of culture or identity, as an accelerator of the inter-cultural dialogue.

Cultural Diplomacy may best be described as a course of actions, which are based on and utilize the exchange of ideas, values, traditions and other aspects of culture or identity, whether to strengthen relationships, enhance socio-cultural cooperation, promote national interests and beyond. Cultural diplomacy can be practiced by either the public sector, private sector or civil society.<sup>5</sup>

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4 TdP 2017: 56.

5 Nye 2009 in [https://www.culturaldiplomacy.org/index.php?en\\_culturaldiplomacy](https://www.culturaldiplomacy.org/index.php?en_culturaldiplomacy)



The gastrodiploamacy is inside this cultural branch and Suntikul<sup>6</sup> considered this concept as the scope of policies and practices through which both actors linked to governments and private actors seek to conceive positive associations with a national brand among foreign audiences, using several channels through which tourists or potential tourists come into contact with national cuisine.

Tourism connects peoples and nations and build national identities<sup>7</sup> and Gastronomy is not only limited to cuisine, food and beverage but also has historical, cultural, economic, and political dimensions<sup>8</sup>.

Explorers, travellers, traders, teachers and artists can be all considered living examples of “informal ambassadors” or early “cultural diplomats”. As depicted in Figure 2, food transcends mere sustenance, embodying culture, heritage, and the essence of a place.

It serves as a powerful conduit, fostering connections among individuals, communities, and nations, while also shaping identities. Engaging with diverse culinary traditions facilitates profound cultural exchanges across various domains, including tourism, arts, sports, literature, music, science, business, economy, and beyond. From the rituals of dining to the intricacies of culinary practices, the realm of food and wine extends far into the tapestry of human experience. In the realm of gastronomic tourism, many Portuguese destinations showcase their rich wine and culinary traditions on online platforms, although not all possess a distinct brand recognized by consumers. Hence, the development of a comprehensive online and offline communication strategy becomes imperative to significantly enhance Portugal’s visibility and bolster its reputation in both domestic and international markets.

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6 Suntikul 2017: 2.

7 L’Etang 2006.

8 Morgan 2012.

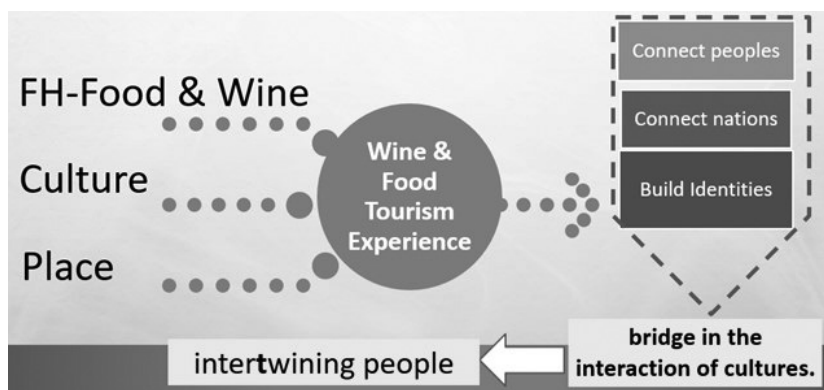


Figure 2 – Gastrodiplomacy in tourism.

Source: Own production.

Unlocking the gastrodiplomacy potential involves a multi-faceted approach, integrating both online and offline strategies across various domains: online (Website Optimization, Social Media Engagement and Digital Campaigns), offline (Culinary Events, Tourism Initiatives and Diplomatic Engagements), Collaborative Partnerships (Public-Private Partnerships, Industry Collaboration and International Cooperation), Educational Outreach (School Programs and Culinary Training) and Sustainability Initiatives (Environmental Stewardship and Community Involvement).

## 2. Methodology

In order to answer “How Bairrada’s territory promote their traditional Wine and Food Heritage identity and notoriety?”, we choose a case study, for the wine-growing territory of Bairrada, located at the Centre of Portugal.

In compliance with Article 2 of DL 301/2003 dated December 4th, the Bairrada geographical production area for DOC (Controlled Designation of Origin) was created with 8 municipalities, 39 parishes, and integrate a wine route (Rota da Bairrada) aiming to invigorate, promote, and enhance the Bairrada Food Heritage. The geographical production area of the Bairrada wine is detailed in the Figure 3.

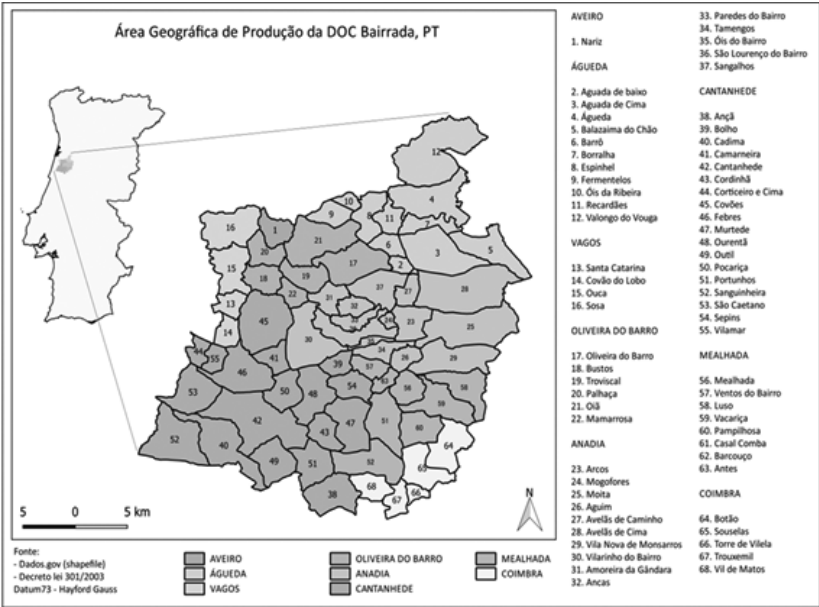


Figure 3 – Bairrada’s Wine region and Municipalities.  
Source: Andrade & Santos 2021: 179.

Of the 341 grape varieties listed in Portaria No. 428/2000 of July 17<sup>th</sup> (p.3271)<sup>9</sup>, the Bairrada region uses 26 in DOC production bearing the designation ‘Bairrada’ in the categories of VQPRD (quality wine produced in specified regions) for white, rosé, and red wines, and VEQPRD (quality sparkling wines produced in specified regions) for sparkling wines and marc brandies. The Bairrada Route Association, headquartered at the Bairrada Wine Commission, in the parish of Arcos, city and municipality of Anadia, was established following Announcement No. 1338/2007 by deed dated November 25, 2006.

Its purpose is to promote and enhance the viticultural activity of Bairrada and related aspects perceived as a cultural and touristic product of

9 According Decreto-Lei No. 83/97, of April 9th, in its article 2 provides that, by order of the Minister of Agriculture, Rural Development and Fisheries, the rules to be observed in the planting and cultivation of vines will be established, whatever the category of their use, based on Council Regulation (EC) No 1493/99 of 17 May. It adopts the principle that Member States will classify the grape varieties intended for wine production, determining that only these may be planted, replanted and grafted.

the region <sup>10</sup>. In terms of W&G the Bairrada Route promote their food Heritage patrimonies.

Being a region primarily reliant on agriculture, it is natural that gastronomy and many of its customs have their origins here. Prepared with secrets and refinements, Suckling Pig reigns supreme. Lamb and goat meat are also appreciated, notably in the splendid Chanfana, and in the traditional sausages or ‘negalhos’ and ‘maranhos’. From the sea, the region offers Codfish ‘à Lagareiro’, and eels prepared fried, in stew, or with suckling pig sauce. To conclude the feast, desserts arrive: aletria (a type of sweet pasta), rice pudding, crème brûlée, ‘nun’s bellies’, ‘heaven’s bacon’, pastries from Águeda, and the ‘loves’ of Curia, just to name a few.<sup>11</sup>

The methodology adopted for this study emphasizes quantitative and qualitative analysis, which involves gathering data from 8 municipalities and analysing content from 89 restaurant websites. In this context, corporate websites play a crucial role in fostering synergies within the realm of Wine and Gastronomy (W&G).

Researchers assert that the Internet has profoundly altered the entire tourism value chain, impacting its creation, marketing, distribution, and consumption<sup>12</sup>. Attributes examined include appeal, informativeness, engagement, commercial credibility, and the facilitation of stakeholder interactions. Our approach involves compiling information on the region’s abundant natural and cultural resources, upcoming events, and prominent landmarks that contribute to its rich culinary heritage.

### 3. Main Results and Contributions

Food is a place symbol, a matter of business, a political representation, a phenomenon that unites citizens and nations, playing an important role

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10 *Diário da República*, 2. serie — Nr.º 40 — February 26th 2007.

11 <http://www.rotadabairrada.pt/territorio/?title=territorio&idioma=pt>

12 Minghetti & Buhalis 2010; Salavati & Hashrim 2015.

in the construction of national identities<sup>13</sup>. Studies confirm that eating together builds trust and food has become the new internet, a form of non-verbal communication that connects us globally<sup>14</sup>. For millennia, cuisine and commensality has served as a powerful diplomatic instrument. In more recent times, certain nations have strategically incorporated it into government initiatives, leveraging their gastronomic richness as a vehicle for cultural expression, transforming lay people in important local brand ambassadors.

In the Bairrada case study, we identified diverse gastronomic brand “Ambassadors” who play crucial roles in both Public Diplomacy (G2P) through entities like Turismo de Portugal and Municipalities, and Cultural Diplomacy (P2P) represented by Restaurants, Lay People, Wine Tourism farms, Wine routes, chefs, Gastronomy websites & Blogs, gastronomic events, menus, Wine & Food activities, TV shows, and culinary books.

### 3.1 Government to People (G2P) relationships, or Public Diplomacy

#### 3.1.1 Turismo de Portugal

When related with tourism, our government define strategic plans to promote their regions. In Portugal, Turismo de Portugal is the National Tourism Authority, integrated in the Ministry of Economy and the Sea, being responsible for the promotion, valorisation, supervision and sustainability of tourist activity. The current plan for tourism “Tourism Strategy plan 2027” vision terms of W&G, aim Differentiating Assets (connecting hosts and visitors by the power of W&G history, culture, traditions, legacy of traditions, legends, usages and customs); Qualifying Assets (Food & Wine, leveraging Enotourism and highlighting the traditional cuisine, being well represented by renowned chefs and various restaurants with Michelin stars).

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<sup>13</sup> L’Etang 2006.

<sup>14</sup> Forman & Lejeune 2023.

In terms of public diplomacy, the buzz word is “Raise Portugal’s Profile”<sup>15</sup>. This involves a multifaceted approach, encompassing targeted market selection and the execution of various initiatives. These initiatives include online campaigns, brand activations, social media engagement, public relations efforts, representation at international tourism expos, and support for Portuguese enterprises in overseas promotional endeavours.

The primary objective is to enhance Portugal’s international reputation as a premier destination for tourism, investment, residence, and education. Simultaneously, there’s a strategic focus on positioning domestic tourism as a key driver of national economic competitiveness. Embracing inclusivity, the aim is to cater to diverse tourism markets and segments, promoting accessibility for all. Moreover, the ambition extends to positioning Portugal as a global hub for conventions, cultural exhibitions, and sporting spectacles. This entails active participation in international organizations and fostering collaborations on the global stage<sup>16</sup>.

To pursue public diplomatic objectives it is critical involving several players, such as: Government (Strategic Plans for Tourism; Tourism Regions; Municipal Councils); Cultural Ambassadors (Schools, Universities, museums, regional groups), Media (Television programs, radio programs, books & Magazines); Fairs & Events (FITUR, BTL, regional events, popular festivals, others), lay people (as emigrants who carry their culture, practices and traditions with them); Associations (gastronomic fraternities, producer groups, Local Development Associations, control and certification entities), Private companies (commercial areas, influencers, chefs, restaurants, etc.). Tourism is involved in several ways in these campaigns, and it is necessary to know the different angles of focus to develop synergies, both in theory and in practice. Many nations have implemented gastrodiploamacy campaigns over the past decade to increase their cultural influence abroad. In summary, the overarching strategy is to amplify Portugal’s presence on the world stage, leveraging its unique attractions and

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15 TdP 2017: 56.

16 Campanhas de promoção turística (turismodeportugal.pt), <https://www.turismodeportugal.pt/pt/o-que-fazemos/promover-destino-portugal/campanhas-promocao-turistica/Paginas/default.aspx>

offerings to cultivate a compelling global identity and drive sustainable economic growth.

### 3.1.2 Bairrada's Municipalities

The analysis of content on the websites of municipalities within the Bairrada parish reveals a total of 172 references to endogenous resources related to Wine & Gastronomy (W&G) traditional cuisine (Table 1). The breakdown of these references across the eight county websites is as follows: Cantanhede (63), Águeda (50), Aveiro (17), Mealhada (14), Vagos (11), Anadia (7), Oliveira do Bairro (6), and Coimbra (4). These figures highlight the prominence of traditional food in the region's online presence.

Montanari (2006) define traditional cuisine as a historical and cultural construct that is continually evolving while maintaining a connection to the past, emphasizing the importance of local ingredients and culinary techniques. Bessi  re (1998), considers the traditional cuisine the use of local and natural resources, reflecting the geographical and cultural identity of a region, and is preserved through cultural transmission within communities.

Traditional cuisine differs from one territory to another due to a combination of factors that are unique to each region<sup>17</sup>. These factors include geographical conditions and available natural resources, because the availability of local ingredients significantly shapes traditional dishes. Regions with different climates produce different crops, livestock, and fish, which in turn influence the local diet.

Also, the type of farming and agricultural techniques employed in a region determine the variety of food produced and consumed). In terms of cultural influences, as historical trade routes, migrations, and conquests introduce new ingredients and cooking methods, which become integrated into local cuisines.

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<sup>17</sup> Montanari 2006; Bessi  re 1998.

# DIAITA: Food&Heritage 2025

Table 1– W&G Bairrada by Municipality resources (number of references)

County	Wine & Gastronomy	nº references
Águeda	Regional sweets	15
	Typical side dishes	3
	Typical cod dishes	4
	Typical meat dishes	6
	Typical Chanfana Dishes	2
	Typical eel dishes	1
	Typical lamprey dishes	2
	Typical Leitao Dishes	2
	Typical fish dishes	5
	Typical soup dishes	4
	Wines	1
	Sparkling wines	2
	cornbread	2
	bread	1
Águeda (total)		50
Anadia	Regional sweets	3
	Typical meat dishes	2
	Typical Leitao Dishes	1
	Typical-negalhos dishes	1
Anadia (total)		7
Aveiro	charcuterie	1
	Regional sweets	7
	Typical meat dishes	3
	Typical eel dishes	2
	Typical Leitao Dishes	1
	Typical fish dishes	3
Aveiro (total)		17
Cantanhede	charcuterie	3
	Regional sweets	8
	Typical side dishes	2
	Typical cod dishes	4
	Typical tripe dishes	2
	Typical meat dishes	5
	Typical Chanfana Dishes	1
	Typical cooked dishes	1



## DIAITA: Food&Heritage 2025

	Typical Piglet Dishes	3
	Typical-negalhos dishes	1
	Typical fish dishes	3
	Typical sardine dishes	1
	Typical Sarrabulho Dishes	1
	Typical soup dishes	4
	lupine	1
	wine-liqueur	2
	Wines	20
	cornbread	1
Cantanhede (total)		63
Coimbra	Regional sweets	3
	Typical meat dishes	1
Coimbra (total)		4
Mealhada	Regional sweets	5
	Others not specified	1
	Typical side dishes	1
	Typical cod dishes	1
	Typical Chanfana Dishes	1
	Typical Piglet Dishes	2
	Typical-negalhos dishes	1
	Typical Sarrabulho Dishes	1
	Wines	1
Mealhada (total)		14
Oliveira do Bairro	Typical meat dishes	2
	Typical Piglet Dishes	3
	Sparkling wines	1
Oliveira do Bairro (total)		6
Vagos	Typical side dishes	1
	Typical meat dishes	3
	Typical eel dishes	1
	Typical Piglet Dishes	1
	Typical fish dishes	5
Vagos (total)		11
Grand Total		172

Source: Own production based on Bairrada county's website content analysis.

On other hand, dietary laws and religious practices can influence what is eaten and how food is prepared). The historical events, such as wars and migration or colonization events can lead to the exchange and adaptation of culinary practices.

Another important fact are social practices, considering social customs and communal activities, such as shared meals during festivals, weddings, and other gatherings, reinforce the culinary traditions of a region. Because of all of these facts we can found different dishes' names, diverse ways of preparation and techniques, various food symbols and unique social customs and communal activities.

A thorough examination reveals 172 resources associated with Gastronomy and Wine, with a notable emphasis on meat dishes, followed by fish dishes, regional sweets, and wines (Figure 4). These categories highlight the rich diversity and importance of traditional culinary elements within the region.

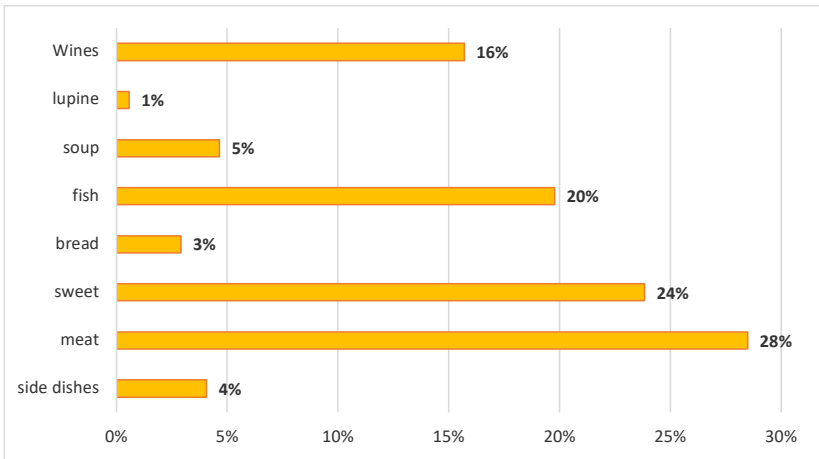


Figure 4 – Bairrada most popular wine & dishes types.  
Source: own production.

When exploring the meat dishes, the weight of the suckling pig and the chanfana becomes evident (Figure 5).

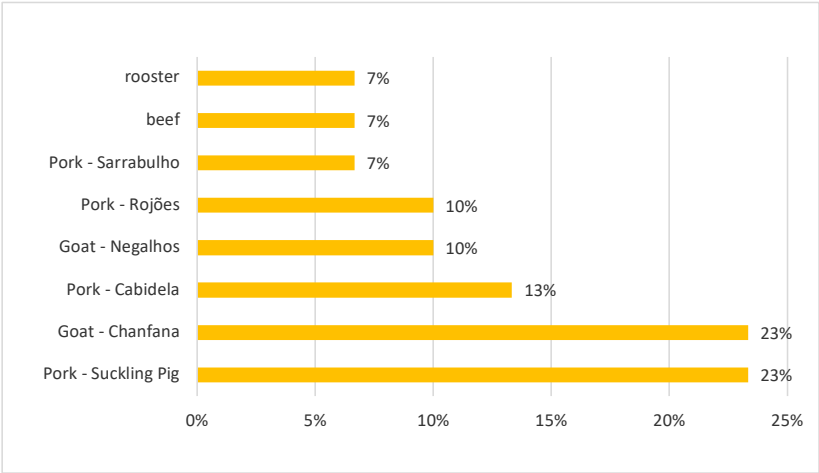


Figure 5 – Bairrada most popular meat dishes types.  
Source: own production.

The figure 6 presents 11 (eleven) iconic product/gastronomic events, promoted by municipalities: Boiled or stew snails (similar to French escargots); Goat & sheep meat/ stewed in clay pots, cooked in a wood-fired oven all night, until the flesh falls from the bones; roast suckling pig; stuffed goat stomachs with goat, pork aromatic herbs; 3 feet iron pot; soaps festival; baked potatoes in the sand and grilled sardines on a tile; fava bean party; honey fair; Lupin or lupine fair are the yellow legume seeds. They are traditionally eaten as a pickled snack food and Wine & Food Fair.

In terms of W&G two icons are highlighted inside the Bairrada territory, the roast suckling pig and sparkling wine. Roast suckling pig has a very complex cooking process. It is served with boiled potatoes and pairing with sparkling wine (100% grape variety Baga). Baga is the predominant red grape local variety. The introduction of Baga in Bairrada is a result of powdery mildew, as this variety is resistant to the fungus<sup>18</sup>. The creation of sparkling wines (100% Baga) took place in 1890 by Eng. Tavares da Silva, using the Champagne method (classic method of bottle fermentation).

<sup>18</sup> Matias 2003.



Figure 6 – G2P diplomacy examples in Bairrada region.  
Source: Websites' municipalities.

## 4. Cultural Diplomacy – P2P - Restaurants as Gastronomic “Ambassadors”

### 4.1 Restaurants – Online information

Analysing 89 restaurants in Bairrada with an online presence, our research unveils intriguing insights. Surprisingly, 4.5% of these establishments operate without a website, while 1% rely solely on corporate

websites. Meanwhile, a significant portion (53.9%) actively engages on Facebook, and 41.6% maintain a dual presence, leveraging both a website and a Facebook page. Notably, 59.6% of these companies provide online menus, boasting a rich array of 161 culinary offerings.

Of particular interest is the fact that 59.6% of these establishments provide online menus, showcasing a diverse array of 161 delectable dishes. The menus are predominantly in Portuguese (89%), with an additional 13% available in English, catering to a wider audience. Delving into the menu content, meat dishes (31%) and desserts (25%) take the spotlight, closely followed by fish (15%) and wines (14%). Among the meat dishes, specialties such as suckling pig (23%), Chanfana (23%), Cabidela (13%), Negalhos, Rojões (10%), and Sarrabulho, beef, and rooster (7%) are highly recommended. As for seafood, Cod (55%), eels (36%), and sardines (9%) are the top choices. The dessert selection is equally attractive, featuring delights such as Morgado do Buçaco, alongside classics like crème brûlée and rice pudding.

These findings underscore how the digital presence of these restaurants not only showcases their offerings but also serves as a platform to promote the rich culinary heritage of the region. In the realm of social media, word-of-mouth stands as a vital communication tool, wielding significant influence over a restaurant's reputation and customer behaviour, thereby fuelling its enduring success.

Through the consistent delivery of exceptional cuisine and service, restaurants can cultivate satisfied patrons who morph into passionate advocates, igniting a cascade of word-of-mouth endorsements that propel business growth. Over time, a restaurant possesses the opportunity to etch its identity, garnering renown for signature dishes, an unforgettable ambiance, or unparalleled customer care. About word-of-mouth, some authors<sup>19</sup> set a list of key benefits: Trust and Credibility; Customer Acquisition; Repeat Business; Online Reviews and Social Media; Cost-Effective Marketing; Quality Assurance; Community Engagement; Feedback Loop; Differentiation and Building a Brand. So, the word-of-mouth matters in restaurants, because it can shape a reputation, influence customer behaviour, and contribute to its long-term success.

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19 Kivela et al. 1999; Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006.

#### 4.1.1 Word-of-mouth – Customer Feedback

Some restaurants in Bairrada sets a remarkable standard, offering not only exceptional cuisine and first-class service but also fostering a culture where delighted customers naturally evolve into passionate advocates. Around 8000 piglets enter the ovens every year and the wine list contain more than 3500 references, half from Bairrada. This dynamic transform satisfied customers into enthusiastic ambassadors, igniting a chain reaction of positive word-of-mouth referrals that continually propel the restaurant's business forward.

The best marketing strategy for a restaurant is to consistently deliver excellent food and service, because customers are happy and become the brand ambassadors. No amount of advertising, Public Relations, or marketing can replace the power of a personal recommendation from some customers, friends and celebrities, who trust on you. So, in this regard some customers posted on social media their opinions:

Customer 1 – “The offer is vast, with differentiated products, and best quality”;

Customer 2 – “Portugal has these things, specific products and gastronomy, for which you travel, if necessary, 150 km to go eat. Bairrada is the piglet's sanctuary, a savoir faire has been created, a way of working this product and the gastronomy is fantastic”;

Customer 3 – “You come to Portugal and you don't come to a restaurant in Mealhada? It's a destination where you have to stop and eat, it just keeps getting better. Coming here is a pleasure; it's part of the tradition”;

Customer 4 – “stopping (in the restaurant...) to rest and replenish energy at the table is an old habit”;

Customer 5 – “fantastic and distinguished service, the friendliness of the people, the professionalism”.

Politicians, entrepreneurs and football coaches recommend and acclaim the restaurant quality and service.

An enchanting tale unfolds, featuring the revered Pope Francis. During a visit by a Portuguese member of the Papal

entourage to the esteemed restaurant the proprietors graciously sent a bottle of their finest olive oil to His Holiness. In return, a warm and heartfelt greeting arrived from Pope Francis, accompanied by two blessed rosaries, the esteemed owners of the restaurant.

Word-of-mouth is like wildfire in the restaurant industry. It spreads quickly, and its impact can be extraordinary. In the age of social media, every customer has the potential to be an influencer.

## Conclusions

W&G are deeply intertwined with culture, and leveraging Gastrodiplomacy is pivotal to unveiling Bairrada's full potential to tourists and global communities. To harness the gastronomic diplomacy inherent in this region, it's imperative to implement a holistic strategy that seamlessly integrates online and offline initiatives across various platforms and sectors. This approach involves establishing collaborative partnerships, disseminating educational content, and championing sustainability actions.

In terms of online presence, tourism visitors' opinion amplification can be achieved through several means:

- **Website Optimization:** Enhance the Bairrada wine region's website to serve as a comprehensive hub for information on wine varieties, culinary traditions, local events, and tourism opportunities.
- **Social Media Engagement:** Actively interact with audiences on platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and others to showcase the region's gastronomic offerings, share user-generated content, and engage with followers.
- **Digital Campaigns:** Launch targeted digital marketing campaigns to raise awareness of Bairrada's culinary culture among specific demographics, utilizing strategies such as search engine optimization (SEO), pay-per-click (PPC) advertising, and partnerships with influencers.

Offline engagement is equally crucial and can be accomplished through:

- **Culinary Events:** Organize food and wine festivals, cooking events, pairing workshops, and cultural exhibitions to offer immersive experiences for visitors and locals.
- **Tourism Initiatives:** Collaborate with tour operators and travel agencies to amplify distribution channels capillarity, to develop specialized culinary tours and packages that highlight Bairrada's gastronomic heritage.
- **Diplomatic Engagements:** Host diplomatic receptions, embassy events, and cultural exchanges showcasing Bairrada wines and cuisine to foster connections with international diplomats and dignitaries.

Collaborative partnerships are fundamental and can be fostered through:

- **Public-Private Partnerships:** Forge partnerships between local government, businesses, educational institutions, and cultural organizations to jointly promote Bairrada's gastrodiploamacy initiatives.
- **Industry Collaboration:** Work closely with wineries, restaurants, culinary artisans, tourism animation companies and hospitality providers to showcase their offerings and create synergistic experiences for visitors.
- **International Cooperation:** Establish collaborative agreements with foreign counterparts, such as wine-producing regions or gastronomic associations, to exchange knowledge, promote cultural exchange, and expand market reach.

Educational dissemination plays a pivotal role and can be facilitated through:

- **School Programs:** Develop educational programs for schools and universities that incorporate lessons on Bairrada's wine and culinary traditions, fostering a deeper appreciation among students and future generations.
- **Culinary Training:** Offer training workshops and certification programs for aspiring chefs, sommeliers, and hospitality professionals, equipping them with the skills to effectively represent Bairrada's gastronomic heritage.



Sustainability initiatives are integral and encompass:

- Environmental Stewardship: Implement sustainable practices in wine production, culinary tourism, and hospitality operations to preserve Bairrada's natural resources and support eco-friendly initiatives.
- People-to-People Exchanges: Organize cultural tours, wine tasting events, cooking workshops, and culinary festivals to allow locals and visitors to interact directly and experience Bairrada's culture first-hand.
- Community Involvement: Engage local communities in conservation efforts, sustainable agriculture practices, and cultural preservation projects to inspire a sense of ownership and pride in Bairrada's gastronomic heritage.

By leveraging these strategic online and offline domains, Bairrada can unlock its gastrodiploacy potential, showcasing its rich culinary culture to a global audience while fostering connections, promoting economic growth, and preserving cultural heritage. Same limitation can be addressed on this work, such as: the research is limited to the Bairrada wine region, which may not fully capture the broader dynamics of gastrodiploacy in other regions of Portugal or internationally. As a case study, the findings may not be directly transferable to other regions with distinct culinary traditions or wine cultures. The analysis of online presence and offline engagement strategies might not fully capture the complexities of integrating these two domains effectively. The impact of digital engagement strategies (e.g., social media and digital campaigns) may vary significantly across different audience segments and could require more extensive, data-driven exploration. The research touches on the cultural aspects of gastronomy and wine but does not deeply address the social impact of gastrodiploacy on local communities, particularly in terms of empowerment, cultural exchange, and identity preservation. Future research could address the limitations outlined above and extend beyond the Bairrada region, incorporating other prominent wine regions in Portugal and internationally. By offering a comparative analysis of gastrodiploacy strategies and evaluating their effectiveness across various cultural contexts, such studies would contribute to a deeper understanding of how local gastronomy and wine cultures can be promoted on a global scale.

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