Do Iranian Culinary Enterprises in Foreign Countries Contribute to Iranian Gastro-Diplomacy?

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ABSTRACT

This article is within the same stream as previous research conducted on Iranian gastro-diplomacy. The main aim of the research was to attempt to ascertain if Iranian culinary enterprises in foreign countries do contribute to Iranian gastro-diplomacy. An initial 'baseline' of gastro-diplomacy practices was ascertained from literature. This was then compared to the gastro-diplomacy practices of Iranian culinary enterprises in foreign countries ascertained via sources of secondary data and information, and primary data and information found within (case studies) and from empirical research, online interviews, conducted with Iranian culinary enterprises in 10 countries. The findings provided that to a fair degree Iranian culinary enterprises in foreign countries did provide for Iranian gastro-diplomacy, in a citizen and people to people diplomacy basis, thus contributing to Iranian nation state marketing and branding as well as repositioning the Iranian nation state brand. However, such findings need to be considered within the boundaries of the research, and thus its limitations, and possible inferences to a wider universe. This thus calling for more research to be conducted on Iranian culinary enterprises in foreign countries and their possible contributions to Iranian gastro-diplomacy. Other findings that derived from the research were that gastro-diplomacy as a practice in foreign countries seems to depend on peoples' openness and attitude to find out about Iranian food, culture, traditions and history, for example. It seems that if these matters are present than gastro-diplomacy has a starting point in terms of dialogue. Further it seems from the findings of this research, that Iranian cuisine is not enough to promote and market Iran, there is seemingly a need for a combination of other factors that accompany Iranian cuisine, these being, for example, art, music, poetry, festivities, photos and history. Also, Iranian culinary enterprises seemingly only took a reactive dialogue about Iran, when they were asked, and were not proactively dialoguing not only in terms of the food, but, for example, also on the history of Iran. Also, what emerged from the research findings is that Iranian culinary enterprises do have a 'pull effect' on Iranian agri-food exports via such culinary enterprises sourcing ingredients for food preparation, either directly or indirectly from Iran. Moreover, another interesting finding was that Iranian ethnic culinary enterprises were not mainly family run enterprises.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, Entrepreneur, Enterprise, Culinary, Restaurant, Gastro-Diplomac, Iran , Nation marketing, Nation branding;

Introduction

In previous research conducted on gastro-diplomacy, see Hilmi (2023) and Hilmi (2024), it was ascertained that Iranian culinary enterprises (Iranian restaurants) in foreign countries seemingly contributed to Iranian gastro-diplomacy in a citizen[1] and people to people[2] mode of diplomacy. This

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[1] Citizen diplomacy is defined as private individuals that via their attitudes, motivation and practices influence and effect world affairs (Tyler & Beyerinck, 2016).

[2] People to people diplomacy is defined as private individuals interacting, via various forms of communications, for example, in person, online, etc., on public matters, over and above their private concerns, that potentially can influence national politics and policies, including foreign policy, and international politics (Ayhan, 2020).

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research follows on within the same research stream and goes far more in-depth in specific on actually attempting to better understand if Iranian culinary enterprises in foreign countries do contribute to Iranian gastro-diplomacy.[3] In this regard, this research also attempts to further such research as per Mayer-Heft & Samuel-Azran (2022), who provide that restaurants may possibly contribute to gastro-diplomacy, but 'no definitive evidence was found.'

Hilmi (2023) finds that in the case of Iran, it was seemingly citizen and people to people diplomacy, via Iranian restaurants in foreign countries, that provided to be the mainstay in Iranian gastro-diplomacy. This practice, in fact, was far more intense than what the Iranian public sector was contributing to gastro-diplomacy, for example. Further Hilmi (2024) found that still Iranian restaurants in foreign countries seemingly have a 'pull' effect on Iranian agri-food exports in foreign countries and thus contribute to gastro-diplomacy.

Interestingly, the Iranian public sector does not have a gastro-diplomacy programme that is comparable to those of Thailand and the Republic of Korea, for example (Hilmi, 2023), even though Iran has a very long history of using its cuisine in political and diplomatic matters for well over 2000 years[4] (Lauden, 2015). The public sector, though via its embassies in foreign countries and via its cultural diplomacy organization, the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization (ICRO), does support culinary diplomacy,[5] which has overlaps with gastro-diplomacy, but is usually restricted to smaller audiences i.e. diplomatic audiences. However, the public sector does directly and indirectly support gastro-diplomacy in foreign countries, via its support to Iranian agri-food export trade, with its foreign policy and cultural diplomacy (Hilmi, 2024). Further with its foreign policy and cultural diplomacy, the Iranian public sector also supports domestic private enterprises that export agri-food products, which with their exports, in turn, support directly and indirectly Iranian gastro-diplomacy. Moreover, the agrifood export trade encouragement provided by the Iranian public sector, even though focused mainly on 15 countries for their exports, does support directly and indirectly Iranian restaurants in foreign countries (Hilmi, 2024).

Research aim

The aim of the research was to attempt to appraise, diagnose and ascertain if Iranian culinary enterprises in foreign countries do contribute to Iranian gastro-diplomacy. This implied the objective of attempting to appraise, diagnose and ascertain gastro-diplomacy practices of Iranian culinary enterprises in 10 defined foreign countries.[6]

Methods

This research being in the same research stream as Hilmi (2023) and Hilmi (2024) followed much the same qualitative research methodology. The research was based on a systematic approach that was abductive and was exploratory and descriptive. It used literature, sources of secondary data and information and sources of primary data and information found within, for example, country case studies[7] and also involved empirical research related to semi-structured and unstructured one to one online interviews with Iranian culinary enterprises in 10 countries. The research was subdivided into four stages. The first stage involved the identification of key search terms via the research and review of literature and sources of secondary data and information. The second stage of the research was an in-

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[3] The research focused on ascertaining gastro-diplomacy practices from literature and secondary sources of data and information, and primary data found within, and using such practices as a 'baseline' to compare with possible gastro-diplomacy practices found in Iranian culinary enterprises.

[4] Still Lauden (2015) provides that, for example, the Persian imperial kitchen was one of the main government departments.

[5] Culinary diplomacy, as per Rockower (2020), is typically the usage of food within diplomatic settings, and sometimes, set for wider audiences.

[6] The countries were: Canada, Germany, Italy, Turkey, UAE, Russia, Oman, the Netherlands, United Kingdom and the USA

[7] Twelve country-based cases were found. The countries were Croatia (see Luša & Jakešević, 2017); Republic of Korea; Sudan; Taiwan; Thailand; USA (see Chapple-Sokol, 2013); Malaysia (see Debora *et al*., 2015; Solleh, 2015); Egypt (see Taher & Elshahed, 2020); Peru, Japan,(see Solleh, 2015); France, (see Suntikul, 2017); and Spain (see Parasecoli, 2022a; Parasecoli, 2022b).

depth systematic exploratory and descriptive research and review that used literature, sources of secondary data and information and sources of primary data and information found within, for example, country case studies. The third stage involved empirical research, via one to one online semi-structured and unstructured interviews[8] with Iranian culinary enterprises in 10 countries and the fourth stage involved comparing the findings from stage 2 with those of stage 3.

The first stage of the research was exploratory in nature and was set to identify key research terms, using literature and sources of secondary data and information derived from three online databases: BASE, CORE and Google Scholar. This first stage of the research identified the following key search terms: enterprise; enterprise development; entrepreneurship; ethnic entrepreneurship; immigrant entrepreneurship; culinary enterprise; culinary entrepreneurship; culinary business; gastronomy enterprise; gastronomy entrepreneurship; gastronomy business; restaurant enterprise; restaurant entrepreneurship; restaurant business; Iranian entrepreneurship; Iranian ethnic entrepreneurship; Iranian immigrant entrepreneurship; Iranian culinary enterprise; Iranian culinary entrepreneurship; Iranian culinary business; Persian culinary enterprise; Persian culinary entrepreneurship; Persian culinary business; Iranian restaurant enterprise; Iranian restaurant entrepreneurship; Iranian restaurant business; Iranian restaurant ethnic enterprise; Iranian restaurant ethnic entrepreneurship; Iranian restaurant ethnic business; Iranian restaurant immigrant enterprise; Iranian restaurant immigrant entrepreneurship; Iranian restaurant immigrant business; Iranian ethnic culinary entrepreneurship; Iranian immigrant culinary entrepreneurship; Iranian ethnic restaurant entrepreneurship; Iranian immigrant restaurant business; Persian restaurant entrepreneurship; Persian restaurant business; Persian restaurant ethnic enterprise; Persian restaurant ethnic entrepreneurship; Persian restaurant ethnic business; Persian restaurant immigrant enterprise; Persian restaurant immigrant entrepreneurship; Persian restaurant immigrant business; Persian ethnic culinary entrepreneurship; Persian immigrant culinary entrepreneurship; Persian ethnic restaurant entrepreneurship; Persian immigrant restaurant business; small-scale enterprise; small-scale entrepreneurship; family enterprise; family entrepreneurship; family business; Iranian family enterprise; Iranian family entrepreneurship; Iranian family business; Iranian culinary family ethnic enterprise; Iranian culinary family ethnic entrepreneurship; Iranian culinary family ethnic business; Iranian culinary immigrant family enterprise; Iranian culinary family immigrant entrepreneurship; Iranian culinary immigrant family business; Persian culinary family ethnic enterprise; Persian culinary family ethnic entrepreneurship; Persian culinary family ethnic business; Persian culinary immigrant family enterprise; Persian culinary family immigrant entrepreneurship; Persian culinary immigrant family business.

The second stage of the research used the identified key search terms for an in-depth systematic exploratory and descriptive research and review of literature, sources of secondary data and information and sources of primary data and information found within, for example, country case studies. This stage of the research used eight online databases: BASE, CORE, Google Scholar; JSTOR, RefSeek, Research Gate, Semantic Scholar, and SSRN-Elsevier. The publications that derived from the research were selected based on a number of criteria: who collected the data and information; when it was collected; how was it collected; what was collected; peer review process conducted; date of publication; identifiable authors; identifiable publisher; and references used. The main publications found were books and journal articles. As the data and information was coming in it was analysed qualitatively via, coding, categorizing and theming (both deductively and inductively) and in an iterative manner and used as research quality criteria trustworthiness and credibility as per the qualitative stance in terms of reliability, validity and replicability. The identification of gastro-diplomacy practices considered the evident overlaps between gastro-diplomacy and culinary diplomacy and each practice identified was chosen based on it being identified at least three times (triangulation) and as such the gastro-diplomacy practice would be considered as being credible, valid and reliable.[9] The findings that were related to gastro-diplomacy practices were tabulated (see Table 2 below).

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[8] The interviews were conducted in Persian and in English by Amanda Malekazari (MSc.) (psychologist, independent researcher).

[9] The practices found also derived from 12 country-based cases. The countries were Croatia (see Luša & Jakešević, 2017); Republic of Korea; Sudan; Taiwan; Thailand; USA (see Chapple-Sokol, 2013); Malaysia (see

The third stage of the research focused more specifically on Iranian culinary enterprise gastro-diplomacy practices in foreign countries. It was based on literature and sources of secondary data and information and primary data and information found within (country-based cases). As the data and information was coming in it was analysed qualitatively via, coding, categorizing and theming (both deductively and inductively) and in an iterative manner and used as research quality criteria trustworthiness and credibility as per the qualitative stance in terms of reliability, validity and replicability. Each practice identified was chosen based on it being identified at least three times (triangulation) and as such the gastro-diplomacy practice would be considered as being credible, valid and reliable. The gastro-diplomacy practices derived from the literature for Iranian culinary enterprises were tabulated (see Table 3).[10]

However, seeing the scant information derived from the literature implied also empirical work. The empirical research involved online one to one interview[11] that were semi-structured and unstructured in nature. The interviews were conducted with Iranian restaurants found in the following 10 countries: Canada, Germany, Italy, Turkey, UAE, Russia, Oman, the Netherlands, United Kingdom and the USA. Four of the countries chosen for interviews were Turkey, UAE, Russia and Oman, and were selected at random as they were four among the 10 major target countries of Iranian agri-food exports. [12] The other six countries chosen for conducting the online interviews were not major Iranian agri-food export destinations but have been involved in the sanctions regime: Canada, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, United Kingdom and the USA. For each of the 10 countries chosen for empirical research, restaurants to interview were chosen randomly, via an internet search, and three restaurants[13] were chosen to be interviewed per country. Interviews were conducted both in Persian and in English. An interview guide was developed first in English and then translated into Persian. This translation involved taking into account the needed adaptations so as to provide for transfer of meaning. The information that derived from the interviews was written down in interview reports. A report was provided for each of the 30 interviews conducted in total. As the information from the interviews was coming in, it was analysed qualitatively via, coding, categorizing and theming (both deductively and inductively) and in an iterative manner and used as research quality criteria trustworthiness and credibility as per the qualitative stance in terms of reliability, validity and replicability. Each practice identified was chosen based on it being identified at least three times (triangulation) and as such the gastro-diplomacy practice would be considered as being credible, valid and reliable. The findings from the interviews that were related to gastro-diplomacy practices were tabulated (see Table 4 below).

The fourth stage of the research involved comparing the findings from the gastro-diplomacy practices that derived from literature, sources and secondary data and information and sources of primary data and information found within, for example, country case studies (see Table 2 below) and comparing these to gastro-diplomacy practices found that derived from the literature-based country cases more specifically on Iranian culinary enterprises (see Table 3) and the interview findings still from Iranian culinary enterprises (see Table 4). In other words, the gastro-diplomacy practices found in Table 2 were used as a 'baseline' to compare with the Iranian culinary enterprises' gastro-diplomacy practices found by the research. Tables 3 and 4 were first compared to provide a single set of gastro-diplomacy practices found by the research, see Table 5, and then Table 5 was compared with Table 2. Comparisons between Table 2 and Table 5 were done via the same wording found in terms of the gastro-diplomacy practice or words of the gastro-diplomacy practice having a similar meaning. This also

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Debora *et al*., 2015; Solleh, 2015); Egypt (see Taher & Elshahed, 2020); Peru, Japan,(see Solleh, 2015); France, (see Suntikul, 2017); and Spain (see Parasecoli, 2022a; Parasecoli, 2022b).

[10] The practices found derived from these following four country-based cases: Canada (see Kamal & Chung, 2022); the Netherlands (see Khademi *et al*., 2022); UK (see Satterzadeh *et al*., (2023) and USA (see Mobasher, 2007).

[11] The interviews were conducted in Persian and in English by Amanda Malekazari (MSc.) (psychologist, independent researcher).

[12] According to the Ketab-Marja Information Institute (2023), in the period 2021 to 2022, the 10 main agricultural export destinations for Iran were: China, Iraq, Turkey, UAE, India, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Oman, Indonesia and Russia.

[13] This was done so as to provide for triangulation which would enhance the credibility, validity and reliability of the interview findings.

considering that gastro-diplomacy practices may be implied and not expressed directly in interviews as per Iranian culture.

Interviews were conducted with Iranian restaurants found in the following 10 countries: Canada, Germany, Italy, Turkey, UAE, Russia, Oman, the Netherlands, United Kingdom and the USA. However the literature and sources of secondary data and information and primary data found within, covered 12 country cases that were as follows Croatia (see Luša & Jakešević, 2017); Republic of Korea; Sudan; Taiwan; Thailand; USA (see Chapple-Sokol, 2013); Malaysia (see Debora *et al.*, 2015; Solleh, 2015); Egypt (see Taher & Elshahed, 2020); Peru, Japan,(see Solleh, 2015); France, (see Suntikul, 2017); and Spain (see Parasecoli, 2022a; Parasecoli, 2022b) as well as other four country cases related to the UK (see Satterzadeh *et al.*, 2023), the Netherlands (see Khademi *et al.*, 2022), the USA (see Mobasher 2007), and Canada (see Kamal & Chung, 2022). This meant that in total 22 country cases were covered, both by the interviews and by the literature and sources of secondary data and information and primary data found within. However, there were countries that were considered more than once as per the findings in the sources of secondary data and information and primary data found within and in the empirical research. Even though the cases found were diverse, it still meant that such country-based cases had more 'weight' in terms of the analysis and relative findings. In this regard three cases were found on the USA and two cases each for Canada, The Netherlands and the UK. Thus, this meant that in reality the country cases covered in total were 13, taking account of country cases 'duplications' as per the findings.

Indeed, some of the countries that were covered by the empirical research were also found in the literature and sources of secondary data and information and primary data found within, these being, as provided previously, Canada, The Netherlands, the UK and the USA. Particular in the literature and sources of secondary data and information and primary data found within, the cases on the USA were found twice. This meant that in the analysis these matters were considered and in comparative analysis of Table 2 to Table 5 these matters were also considered and factored in. For example, the USA having 3 cases, two from the   literature and sources of secondary data and information and primary data found within, and one case from the empirical research, would have more 'weight' thus this was considered in the analysis. Canada, The Netherlands, and the UK also had the same matter as respectively each had two cases, one from the   literature and sources of secondary data and information and primary data found within, and one case from the empirical research, thus also implying these having more weight. Such matters were also considered in the analysis as provided previously.

Background
Entrepreneurship

An enterprise is an organization that is created by an entrepreneur with his or her own entrepreneurship (Savoiu, 2010). As provided by Lowe & Marriott (2006), an enterprise is 'the art or science of not standing still.' It is guided by the competencies of the entrepreneur who acts and thus demonstrates the specific characteristics of entrepreneurship (Savoiu, 2010). In the words of Westhead & Wright (2013)' entrepreneurship is about what entrepreneurs do'. Bridge *et al.*, (1998) provide that enterprise can have on the one side a narrow meaning and on the other side a broad meaning, and in between such opposite ends a range of meanings emerge. The narrow meaning is that of the enterprise as a business and as such starting a business, growing a business and consequently being entrepreneurial in terms of entrepreneurship (Bridge *et al.*, 1998). The broader meaning of enterprise refers to having 'a positive, flexible, and adaptable attitude to change' (Bridge *et al.*, 1998), an entrepreneurial character, which is not necessarily involved in business. As provided by Lowe & Marriott (2006) this being 'enterprising and becoming more independent and self-reliant throughout life, by gaining the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes.' Buttler (2020) adds that entrepreneurship can be seen in 'one of three ways: as a particular kind of business, as a specific occupation, or as a special kind of mindset that some people possess.'

In terms of enterprises as a business, these diverge wildly in terms of their size, organizational form and structure, development and growth potential, profitability and culture (Longenecker *et al.*, 2017). However, the most commonly found enterprise as a business is usually micro or small in scale, being, but not always, defined by the number of employees, 10 people or below (Hatten, 2012). An enterprise, entrepreneur and entrepreneurship are influenced by society, culture, religion, local community and groups within, for example, and how the overall environment may be conducive or not,

to being enterprising (Bridge *et al*., 1998). As pointed out by Lowe & Marriott (2006), differing cultures found in the world 'influence the prevalence of entrepreneurship in various countries, because of different attitudes to self-employment rather than employment in large organizations, attitudes to risk, bankruptcy and starting again after a failure.'

However, whatever the size of the enterprise and the various influences of its surrounding environment, the enterprise, the entrepreneur and entrepreneurship can have a predicative logic, which considers entrepreneurship in a linear and logical process of steps, thus predictable and/or the enterprise, the entrepreneur and entrepreneurship can have a creation logic, where the future is not predictable, and thus he or she cannot shape the future, but can work along with it (Neck *et al*., 2018). Indeed, and as provided by Hatten (2012) entrepreneurship is about understanding opportunities, taking risks, and building an organization around such opportunities, in attempts to gain, but at the same time, working with what the future holds (Neck *et al*., 2018).

Enterprise, entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship all have some similarities in terms of, for example, characteristics, behaviours, ways of doing, etc., but there are commonly also differences. For example, entrepreneurship practiced by a farmer will have some distinctive characteristics that differ from more traditional entrepreneurship (Sullivan, 2017). In fact, on this point, Lans *et al.,* (2017), provide that defined elements of entrepreneurship are seemingly universal and context independent, for example, but other elements may be more dependent on the type and context of entrepreneurship. Thus, it can be inferred that enterprise, entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship may differ by sector of operation, being, for example, the food sector, construction sector, etc. Further, entrepreneurs, their entrepreneurship and enterprises can be based on such characteristics as being necessity, opportunity, growth, habit, part-time, gender, age, family, origin and social-based (Neck *et al*., 2018; Scarborough & Cornwall, 2016; Morrison *et al*., 1999), for example.

In specific to the origin of entrepreneurs, their entrepreneurship and enterprise, Buttler (2020) provides that ethnic and immigrant entrepreneurs are seemingly natural entrepreneurs: having moved from one country to another, they have faced numerous challenges, risks, uncertainties and changes, without having, usually, but not always, social and family relations and networks in such a destination country. Further moving from one country to another, also demonstrates willingness, ambition and courage and once within country, they tend to see the host country differently, and thus may identify opportunities (Buttler, 2020). In fact, such entrepreneurs may be more propense to test out solutions that challenge the prevailing environment (Buttler, 2020) and consequently national and local business conventions.

Ethnic entrepreneurship

Ethnicity, which is not endogenous to a country, is seen by, and interpreted by, the wider society and the actual minority within, to have a common origin, background, culture and community (Volery, 2007), for example, which provides for an identity and distinctness of such an ethnic minority. Honig (2022) provides that such communities are more prone to being entrepreneurial as per such matters as being, usually, but not always, for example, risk takers, their educational and career background not being recognized in the host country, having differing perspectives and preferences on the host country, thus may provide for differing practices, and may be innovative. Lowe & Marriott (2006) point to a number of pull and push factors in terms of ethnicities in a host country being more enterprising. In terms of the push factors, these can be, for example, seeking for a better financial position, more personal control, better use of work experience, and want for independence (Lowe & Marriott, 2006). The pull factors involve, for example, low paid work, labour and social discrimination and unemployment (Lowe & Marriott, 2006). Drinkwater (2018) also considers a series of influences on entrepreneurship, based on ethnic group and immigrant experiences, for example, 'gender, age, labour market experience, education, marital status, family, geography, discrimination in the labour and credit markets.' [14] Further Lowe & Marriott (2006) consider that the possible hostile environment, the challenges faced, and the numerous barriers found, imply determination, resilience and survival, which go hand in hand with being enterprising. Also, and as provided by Frederick *et al*., (2016), it can be

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[14] However, Drinkwater (2018) does caution that such factors will have differing effects and impacts on differing ethnic and immigrant people, and thus have differing effects and impacts on ethnic and immigrant entrepreneurship.

that simply being disadvantaged can make people more enterprising as they feel and live marginality. Moreover, living in closed and networked ethnic communities, makes reliance on family and friends labour a natural outcome[15] (Ram *et al*., 2012), for example, thus implying family-based enterprise, entrepreneur and entrepreneurship.

Some ethnic groups were targeted by defined countries, for importing labour, so as to take advantage of lower wage expectations, and so as to fill the labour gap where nationals of a defined country were unwilling to do such jobs (Honig, 2022). Further globalisation has also provided for large, medium and small-scale enterprises to outsource labour to other countries, hence creating work expertise in such countries that can be 'exported' (Honig, 2022). Moreover, increasing internationalization and globalization, has incremented also the relationship between migration and entrepreneurship (Honig, 2022).

Ramadani *et al*., (2019) consider ethnic entrepreneurship as a process carried out by individuals who are prone to opportunity identification, act on such identified opportunities, with innovation and in challenging contexts, in attempts to ensure a future for the entrepreneur and his or her family, including society as a whole. Volery (2007) considers ethnic entrepreneurship as a network of regular interactions among people which have a shared ethnic and national background, which can also include recent immigrants to a country.

Farmaki & Altinay (2017) provide those ethnic enterprises, that are most often small and medium in size, tend to dominate the independent restaurant sector. Commonly when the ethnic enterprise is a start-up it tends to rely on marketing to co-ethnic markets and on ethnic networks, which are comprised mainly of family and friends (Farmaki & Altinay, 2017). Further ethnic networks relate back to country of origin, making many ethnic entrepreneurs in reality transnational entrepreneurs, who have good knowledge of two (or more) geographical locations, for example, their host country and their country of origin (Ratten *et al*., 2017). The market characteristics that ethnic entrepreneurs operate in, commonly, but not always, portray the need for little start-up capital, are small-scale in nature, labour intensive, have low entry barriers, and high rates of competition (Volery, 2007). This leads to considerable fluidity in such markets as there can be a good deal of start-ups, but also a similar degree of enterprise failures (Volery, 2007). However, Fairlie & Lofstrom (2013) point to much existent literature demonstrating the overall 'positive net contributions by immigrant entrepreneurs. In fact, ethnic enterprises, entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship do provide, for example, for: employment creation; have a pull effect on country of origin exports; demonstrate to others in their communities and not only, that ethnic minorities and immigrants can 'make it' within a country; entrepreneurs themselves can be seen as community leaders and business experts; and can provide to increase and expand consumer choice in terms of products and services (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2013; Kloosterman & Rath, 2003).

Many ethnic enterprises may be found in ethnic communities themselves (Ram *et al*., 2012) within host countries, but can also be found elsewhere, and as Kloosterman & Rath (2003) point out can 'add vitality to particular streets or even neighbourhoods in cities.' Further, Kerr & Kerr (2016) provide that there is plentiful research-based evidence that, in such countries, as, for example, Australia, Canada, UK and USA, general rates of enterprise ownership is higher among the foreign born. In fact, ethnic entrepreneurs 'can be instrumental in giving certain sectors a new lease on life' (Kloosterman & Rath, 2003). Moreover, Ratten *et al*., (2017) provide that ethnic entrepreneurship encourages and fosters international trade as well as social connections.

Family enterprise

Commonly, enterprise, entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship are seen as undertakings that are based on individuals, but the reality is that, usually, enterprising individuals develop enterprises with family members (Howorth & Hamilton, 2012). Poza (2010) provides that entrepreneurial enterprises become family enterprises when the founder is joined by the family offspring as the nature of the enterprise inevitably changes as per the inherent family influence. Neck *et al*., (2018) define a family enterprise as a business that is active for more than one family generation and is owned and managed

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[15] On this matter, still Ram *et al*., (2012) point to the fact that a 'prominent characteristic of ethnic minority businesses is the use of family and co-ethnic labour.'

by a number of family members. Basco (2024) defines a family enterprise as when a family owns, governs and /or manages the enterprise via its decision making. Family enterprises can be both publicly and privately held companies (Basco, 2024) and family enterprises are the most common form of businesses found globally (Frederick *et al*., 2016).

Family enterprises are most often small-scale, and as such, business and family matters are inherently interlinked (Howorth & Hamilton, 2012). In fact, at the core of a family enterprise is what Frederick *et al*., (2016) term 'familiness' which means a set of distinct resources that derive from the interactions between the individuals that compose the family, the family per se and the business. Indeed, these matters, include such matters, as, for example, family influence on the enterprise's resources, the family entrepreneurial mindset, the family entrepreneurial motivation and determination, contextual factors (social, economic, cultural, etc.,) and the family enterprise's performance (financial, economic, social, etc.) (Frederick *et al*., 2016). Further, Howorth & Hamilton (2012), add that the history of the family, its relationships and values will influence how the family enterprise functions, is organized, managed and what the enterprise culture is. Typically, in family enterprises there are one or two generations of family working in it (Basco, 2024) and what makes a family enterprise enterprising is the entrepreneurial types and stances that each generation brings to the business so as to enable such to progress (Neck *et al*., 2018).

However, not all family enterprises are the same as there are differing typologies, this deriving from, according to Basco (2024), as being family demography and the 'lifecycle stage of each of the entities (ownership, governance, and management).' Success in family enterprises is based on: 'optimism, loyalty, vigilance, competitiveness, innovativeness, commitment, and legacy' (TFFI, 2014).

Culinary entrepreneurship

Eating outside of the home has a long history (Walker, 2014) and still today many billions of people in the world eat outside the home. For example, street food vendors serve 2.5 billion people daily (FAO & WHO, 2022). Demand for outside-the-home food is high and thus attracts naturally many culinary entrepreneurs. In this regard, for example street food vendors are an estimated two billion globally (Elbeyoğlu & Sirkeci, 2020), which gives a good idea also of how competitive the culinary sector is.

Culinary enterprises are mostly micro and small sized (Lee-Ross & Lashley, 2009; Getz *et al*., 2004) and come in a large range of typologies, for example: independent, franchise and chain restaurants; quick service restaurants; theme restaurants; family restaurants; street food restaurants; fine dining restaurants; and ethnic restaurants (Ramos-Rodriguez *et al*., 2012; NRA, 2011). Culinary enterprises, however, can cover more than one typology of enterprise, for example an enterprise can be an ethnic restaurant that also provides fine dining. Further culinary enterprises can be commercial and non-commercial: commercial enterprises are, for example, chain restaurants, while non-commercial restaurants are, for example, school and university cafeterias (NRA, 2011).

Entrepreneurs that operate culinary enterprises are seen by   Ramos-Rodriguez *et al*., (2012) as being 'humanistic entrepreneurs' as they like to interact with people and are concerned for their employees. Lee-Ross & Lashley (2009) add further that operating in the hospitality sector[16] does also imply welcoming strangers, being altruistic and providing a sense of security and safety. Indeed, in terms of hospitality, there is a strong cultural component, and this provides for varying degrees of hospitality, but also enables culinary enterprises to distinguish themselves on this fact and thus be different from other culinary enterprises that may be in the same community (Lee-Ross & Lashley, 2009). Further, the culinary entrepreneur, being within his or her own realm of hospitality culture, renders him or her more confident (Lee-Ross & Lashley, 2009) and thus enables more competencies in their culinary entrepreneurship.

Such cultural diversity clearly provides for competitive advantage, as for example, this can be observed in many capital cities globally, where there are a wealth of ethnic restaurants (Lee-Ross & Lashley, 2009) and Getz *et al*., (2004) also provide that internationally ethnic based restaurants are a popular enterprise for ethnic entrepreneurs. Further ethnic culinary entrepreneurs create their niche markets as per their 'protected ethnic' diversification strategy (Lee-Ross & Lashley, 2009). However,

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[16] Hospitality is defined as the services that customers receive and use when such customers are not at home (NRA, 2019).

the culinary market is changing and morphing, as for example in the USA, the advent of the digital world and related food order applications, enables consumers to access and obtain the food that they want, but also when they want it and especially where they want it (NRA, 2019). Such implies, still for the USA, for example, that this increase in off-premises meals is transforming the restaurant sector (NRA, 2019). Further Yulistiyono *et al*., (2023) point to the matter that as per such technology changes, among other changes, such as for example, the need for sustainable practices, culinary entrepreneurs have had to become also digital entrepreneurs.

Gastro-diplomacy

Food is nothing new to diplomacy as it can be considered not only strength and power, but also and importantly influence (Nau, 1978). But the real game changers with food on the international scene, and thus in the foreign affairs of nation states, have been the enhanced transport and storage technologies (Nau, 1978). In this regard, gastro-diplomacy, as defined by Sonenshine *et al*., (2016), is the 'nexus of food and foreign policy and how countries communicate their culture through food.' It is, as per Sonenshine *et al*., (2016) 'the flag following the fork.' Pham (2013) defines gastro-diplomacy as a public sector-based activity, with the intent of exporting a nation's culinary heritage, within the realm of public and cultural diplomacy, in attempts to create good will towards a nation, enhance a nation's brand, foster trade and provide for relation-based cultural and personal interactions. For Rockower (2020) gastro-diplomacy is a part of public diplomacy, in the form of programme campaigns, that amalgamates cultural and culinary diplomacy, in attempts to increase a nation's brand and awareness about a nation, via its culinary and cultural heritage.

Gastro-diplomacy is thus part of public diplomacy and cultural diplomacy. Public diplomacy is a nation's attempt to influence foreign publics via 'appealing over the heads of those governments to the people with influence upon them' (Berridge, 2015). Cultural diplomacy is 'the use of creative expression and exchanges of ideas, information, and people to increase mutual understanding' (Schneider, 2006). Such diplomacies are based on what is termed soft power. Soft power is inherently linked to the power of influence, attraction and persuasion of a nation to reach its aims (Nye, 2008). Thus, it uses such 'tools' as, for example culture, and an inherent part of the culture of a nation is food and its culinary heritage. For example, countries like Thailand and the Republic of Korea have publicly guided and funded gastro-diplomatic programmes and policies (Craver-Carter, 2024), and CPD (2015), for example, points to eight nations that have gastro-diplomacy programmes and policies in place: Australia, Japan, Malaysia, Nordic Food Movement (Denmark, Norway, Sweden), Peru, the Republic of Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand.

However, public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy and gastro-diplomacy are not set at the nation state level only, but also at the people-to-people level (Snow, 2009). In fact, in terms of people-to-people diplomacy within gastro-diplomacy, Suntikul (2017), Zhang (2015) and Rockower (2012) all point to the fact that the people element in gastro-diplomacy is paramount and provide that numerous actors are involved in such, for example, citizens, chefs, private sector restaurants, supermarkets, etc. Indeed gastro-diplomacy 'embodies a powerful medium of nonverbal communication to connect disparate audiences, and thusly is a dynamic new tactic in the practice and conduct of public and cultural diplomacy' (Rockower, 2014).

Gastro-diplomacy though is seemingly not the same as culinary diplomacy and food diplomacy. For example, Rockowear (2020) provides that culinary diplomacy is food used in diplomatic settings and functions and food diplomacy is basically set around food aid and relief. Chapple-Sokol (2012) makes a difference between culinary and food diplomacy in much the same way as does Rockowear (2020) and Taher & Elshahed (2020) also consider culinary diplomacy to be different from gastro-diplomacy and food diplomacy but consider culinary diplomacy to have also a strong people to people diplomacy element in it. Sonenshine *et al*., (2016) also provide for much the same in terms of culinary diplomacy and its citizen level of diplomacy. Thus, there are evident overlaps between gastro-diplomacy and culinary diplomacy. Importantly though gastro-diplomacy has the ability to produce interactions, connection and relations between nation states and people and is set on long term engagements (Sonenshine *et al*., 2016). For example, people, via eating at a foreign restaurant in their country, and engaging with the restaurant's owners, enable both to ascertain a better and deeper understanding of their respective cultures (Sonenshine *et al*., 2016) in a peaceful manner that is naturally open to dialogue and relationships.

Findings

Gastro-diplomacy practices derived from literature and sources of secondary data and information

In terms of gastro-diplomatic practices, Rockower (2020), identifies, eight best practices: enabling and facilitating soft-loan financing for the setting up as well as the expansion of restaurants; enabling and facilitating access to authentic ingredients for such restaurants; fostering chef participation in cultural diplomacy and exchanges and institutionalizing chefs in formal diplomatic processes and protocols; including cuisine in cultural diplomatic events; fostering and enabling educational programmes in cuisine; attempting to have the United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) recognition of specific dishes or national cuisine as a whole as a national heritage; focusing on interactions with national as well as international non-sate actors; and fostering people to people diplomacy. These can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Gasto-diplomacy best practices

Enabling and facilitating soft-loan financing for restaurants
Access to authentic ingredients
Chef participation in cultural diplomacy
Cuisine in cultural diplomatic events
Educational programmes in cuisine
UNESCO recognition
Interactions within non state actors
People to people diplomacy

(Source: Rockower, 2020)

As per Rockower (2020) the research also identified practices, but more in general and not as best practices only. In the identification of practices, what was also considered were the evident overlaps between gastro-diplomacy and culinary diplomacy and thus this fact was also considered in the identification process of gastro-diplomatic practices. The gastro-diplomacy practices were identified via content analysis of literature and sources of secondary data and information, including within, for example, country case-studies. Each practice was chosen based on being identified at least three times (triangulation) and as such the practice would be considered as being credible, valid and reliable.

The literature and sources of secondary data and information, including primary data and information, found within, for example, such as country-based cases,[17] identified 78 gastro-diplomacy practices. These can be found in Table 2.

Table 2: Identified gastro-diplomacy practices

No.	Gastro-diplomacy practices
1	Informing
2	Awareness building
3	Influencing
4	Persuading
5	Attracting
6	Innovating
7	Facilitating mutual understanding
8	Impressing
9	Building prestige
10	Elitism
11	Sharing
12	Exchanging

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[17] Twelve country cases were found as follows: Croatia (see Luša & Jakešević, 2017); Republic of Korea; Sudan; Taiwan; Thailand; USA (see Chapple-Sokol, 2013); Malaysia (see Debora *et al.*, 2015; Solleh, 2015); Egypt (see Taher & Elshahed, 2020); Peru, Japan,(see Solleh, 2015); France, (see Suntikul, 2017); and Spain (see Parasecoli, 2022a; Parasecoli, 2022b).

13	Building dialogue
14	Communicating social, cultural, historical and flavour values
15	Fostering long term relations
16	Interacting socially and culturally
17	Fostering emotions
18	Enabling sensory experience
19	Citizen and people to people diplomacy
20	Belonging
21	Fostering partnership
22	Fostering community aggregation
23	Identification
24	Distinctiveness
25	Authentication
26	Tradition
27	Heritage
28	Nationalism
29	National imaging
30	National reputation
31	Nation marketing
32	Nation branding
33	Destination marketing
34	Destination branding
35	Communications
36	Two-way communications
37	Cross-cultural communication
38	Messaging
39	Mass media usage (TV, Radio, Newspapers)
40	Internet and social media-based communications
41	Publicly financed promotional campaigns
42	Promoting food to large audiences
43	Promoting national and local foods
44	Promoting religiously based foods
45	Cultural origin of food preparation
46	Social origin of food preparation
47	Geographic origin of food preparation
48	Culinary styles and styling
49	Purchasing national ingredients
50	Fostering national employment opportunities
51	Developing culinary professionals
52	Encouraging inbound investments
53	Cooking lessons and programmes
54	Cooking competitions
55	Food presentation
56	Serving styles of food
57	Symbolism
58	Event organization
59	Ceremonies
60	Chef exchanges
61	Promoting culturally based products
62	Facilitating distribution of cultural products
63	Blending of food cultures (fusion food)
64	Recognition of national foods
65	Public diplomacy
66	Cultural diplomacy
67	Soft power

68	Negotiation support
69	Decision making support
70	Public sector practice
71	Private sector practice
72	Social sector practice
73	Developing culinary ambassadors and diplomats
74	Interaction of state with non-state actors
75	Enabling public-private partnerships
76	Entrepreneurial stance
77	Culinary (restaurant) enterprise development
78	Culinary (restaurant) enterprise financing

(Sources: Muhammad & Adilbekova, 2023; Mayer-Heft & Samuel-Azran, 2022; Parasecoli, 2022a; Parasecoli, 2022b; Ayora-Diaz, 2021; Taher & Elshahed, 2020; Rockower, 2020; Luša & Jakešević, 2017; Suntikul, 2017; Sonenshine *et al.*, 2016; Spence, 2016; Tettner & Kalyoncu, 2016; Debora *et al.*, 2015; IGCAT, 2015; Solleh, 2015; Zhang, 2015; Rockower; 2014; Chapple-Sokol, 2013; Pham, 2013; Reynolds, 2012)

The gastro-diplomacy practices found in Table 2 were used as a 'baseline' to compare with the possible gastro-diplomacy practices found by Iranian culinary enterprises.

Iranian emigration

According to MDP (2024) and referring to the year 2019, there were an estimated 169 million migrant workers internationally, representing 4.9 percent of the global workforce. The ILO (2021) estimates also for 2019, that international migrant workers represent nearly five percent of the global workforce, and circa two thirds of these international migrants are concentrated in high income countries. Still in terms of global international migrants, IOM (2024) estimates, for the year 2020, that there were 281 million international migrants, equating to 3.6 percent of the world population. The IOM (2024) provides that there are three main reasons for such international migration: work, family and study. However, some international migrants also leave their countries, for such matters as, for example, conflict, persecution and disaster (IOM, 2024). Over the decades, since the 1970s, there has been a marked increase in international migrants: according still to the IOM (2024) in 1970 international migrants were circa 84 million people, while in 2020 they were 281 million. Thus, and overall, international migrant workers are an important part of the global economy (ILO, 2021).

The Iranian population is, according to UNPF (2024), circa 89.9 million. Over the past decade, Iran, has seen an increase in urbanization, aging of the pollution and continual fluctuations in the economy (World Bank, 2023a). There has been an increase in disparities and circa 10 million Iranian people, over the decade 2011-2020, have fallen into poverty (World Bank, 2023a). This general contextual situation has also contributed to emigration of Iranian people, and more in specific there are several main reasons for such emigration: the cultural revolution after the 1979 revolution; the Iran-Iraq war; a struggling economy; sanctions; lack of job prospects; lack of career advancement; earning prospects in different countries; encouragement of other countries towards Iranian emigration; freedom of expression matters; climate change; food insecurity; mismanagement of the economy; informal payments; weakening infrastructure; and Iran's isolationistic stance in foreign policy (IOM, 2024; Mahmoudi, 2021). Iranian emigrants are commonly well educated, for example, scientists, scholars, writers, and other intellectuals, and over the past decades their emigrant numbers have fluctuated (Mahmoudi, 2021).   In terms of Iranian emigrant population, the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2021) provides that there were over 4 million Iranians living abroad. The main countries of Iranian emigration destination being, in rank order, for example, are the USA, Canada, the UAE and Germany (Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021). Rezaei *et al.*, (2017) provide that Iranian immigrants can be found all over the world, but preferred destinations are the USA, Germany, Canada, Sweden, UK, Israel, the Netherlands, Australia, France and Denmark. Rostamalizadeh & Ardahaee (2016) found that from the 1960s to 2013 the emigration rate has been constantly high, and Iran's emigrant population was at the time 1,604,750. Still Rostamalizadeh & Ardahaee (2016) also find that Iranian emigrants tend to choose mainly two types of countries: high revenue countries that have potential for trade with Iran and developed countries. In terms of remittances to Iran in 2016, these derived mostly from the UAE, the USA and Germany (Rostamalizadeh & Ardahaee, 2016). In 2023, according to the World

Bank (2023c), in the middle east region, Iran was ranked the eighth remittance receiver among the top remittances receiving countries.

Iranian culinary entrepreneurship in foreign countries

Over the past years, the popularity of Iranian cuisine has increased considerably, according to FoodExIran (2023). The growth is attributed to a number of reasons: the growth of Iranian culinary entrepreneurs; the usage of social media; innovation; the fusion of Persian cuisine with other international cuisines, but also, and at the same time, preserving traditional Persian cuisine (FoodExIran, 2023). According to Taste Atlas (2024), and its ranking of the best 100 cuisines in the world, Persin cuisine ranks at the 23rd place for the period 2023-2024.

Indeed, and as per the above, it seems that globally, Iranian culinary enterprises, entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship may have contributed to the growth in Iranian cuisine's popularity. Rezaei *et al*., (2017) provide that in general Iranian immigrants are active in entrepreneurial activities. Ashourizadeh (2017) further adds to this point in that entrepreneurial competencies are found to be higher in immigrant Iranians. In this regard, most Iranian enterprises in foreign countries tend to rely on diverse networks to do business, but also rely on relational networks, such as for example, family, friends, etc., to do business (Rezaei *et al*., 2017; Schøtt, 2017; Cheraghi & Yaghmaei, 2017).

However, in terms of the literature and sources of secondary data and information, including primary data and information found within, the research provided scant results that were specific to Iranian culinary enterprises, entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship related to gastro-diplomacy practices in all the 11 countries of interest for the research. From four country cases, related to the UK, the Netherlands, USA, and Cananda, what was found was the following:

- In terms of the UK, and in particular to London, Satterzadeh *et al*., (2023) provide of how Iranian restaurants can be important for people who want to explore the culture of a country, in this case Iran. Satterzadeh *et al*., (2023) point to authenticity and sensory experiences in dining, and define that authenticity has both tangible and intangible aspects to consider in the sensory experience and include the fact that it is the customers' willingness to explore an ethnic culture in particular and thus gain knowledge about such a culture that is also important.
- In terms of the Netherlands, Khademi *et al*., (2022) provide a case on a Persin-Afghani Restaurant. Among the many objectives of the culinary enterprise, one of them was to re-introduce Persian and Afghani culture in a different light than that which was commonly perceived about both countries in the Netherlands (Khademi *et al*., 2022). Most customers of the restaurant are Iranian and Afghani, but this did not create an enclave as there were concrete efforts to reach out to Dutch clientele via using traditional food decorations and introducing the sale of wine (Khademi *et al*., 2022).
- In the USA, Mobasher (2007), provides that Iranian restaurants are social, cultural and economic institutions that have an important role in Iranian communities. Such enterprises function as arenas for social exchanges, information about community events and also to discuss business matters (Mobasher, 2007).
- Kamal & Chung (2022) provide a case from Vancouver, Canada, where the Iranian community is active in advocating and promoting Iranian cuisine. Further there is also a 'mixing' of Iranian cuisine with other cultural events, such as, for example, songs, dance, etc., (Kamal & Chung, 2022). Moreover, there is also a drive within the community to promote more Iranian culinary culture and related events, and also preserving Iranian culinary cultural traditions via 'community partnerships and sustainable sourcing of food ingredients' (Kamal & Chung, 2022).

From the above, 20 Iranian culinary enterprise gastro-diplomacy practices were identified[18] and can be seen in Table 3.

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[18] Each practice was chosen based on being identified at least three times (triangulation) and as such the practice would be considered as being credible, valid and reliable.

Table 3: Iranian culinary enterprise gastro-diplomacy practices derived from literature-based country cases

No.	Gastro-diplomacy practices
1	People to people diplomacy
2	Cultural diplomacy
3	Cultural representation
4	Repositioning country image and reputation
5	Cultural fusion
6	Authenticity
7	Sensory experiencing
8	Social exchanges
9	Dialoguing
10	Relations
11	Partnerships
12	Community building and development
13	Institutionalization
14	Promoting
15	Cultural culinary and artistic event organization
16	Advocacy
17	Traditional practices
18	Adaptation
19	Culinary fusion
20	Sustainability

(Sources: Satterzadeh *et al*., 2023; Kamal & Chung, 2022; Khademi *et al*., 2022; Mobasher, 2007)

Gastro-diplomacy practices derived from Iranian culinary enterprises in foreign countries

As per the scant findings from the literature, this implied conducting empirical research, interviews, in the countries of interest to the research: Canada, Germany, Italy, Turkey, UAE, Russia, Oman, the Netherlands, United Kingdom and the USA. The interviews were conducted in Farsi or in English, online, with Iranian culinary enterprises in the 10 countries indicated previously. For each country three culinary enterprises were interviewed, for a total of 30 interviews. From the interviews, 45 Iranian culinary enterprise gastro-diplomacy practices were identified[19] and can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4: Iranian culinary enterprise gastro-diplomacy practices derived from the interviews

No.	Gastro-diplomacy practices
1	Informing
2	Awareness building
3	Two-way communications
4	Cross-cultural communication
5	Dialogue building
6	Reactive dialoguing
7	Interaction
8	Sharing
9	Exchange
10	Advocacy
11	Inclusiveness
12	Fostering community aggregation
13	Fostering long term relations
14	Hospitality
15	Usage of social media
16	Citizen and people to people diplomacy

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[19] Each practice was chosen based on being identified at least three times (triangulation) and as such the practice would be considered as being credible, valid and reliable.

17	Cultural diplomacy
18	Public Diplomacy
19	Exposure to culture
20	Food culture
21	Cultural origin of food preparation
22	Social origin of food preparation
23	Cultural event celebrations
24	Sensory experiencing
25	Social and cultural celebrations
26	Geographic origin of food preparation
27	Food presentation
28	Culturally based ambient, design and décor
29	Identification
30	Distinctiveness
31	Authentication
32	Tradition
33	Heritage
34	Traditional practices
35	Uniqueness
36	Symbolism
37	Cuisine combined with art, poetry and music
38	Nationalism
39	National imaging
40	National reputation
41	Nation marketing
42	Nation branding
43	Private sector practice
44	Export promotion
45	Cuisine similarities

The gastro-diplomacy practices identified by the research in Tables 3 and 4 are in some cases identical and in some cases are similar. In comparing Tables 3 and 4 it was possible to ascertain the total amount of gastro-diplomacy practices identified by the research. The gastro-diplomacy practices identified as provided by culinary enterprises were 53 and can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5: Iranian culinary enterprise gastro-diplomacy practices derived from the research

No.	Gastro-diplomacy practices
1	Informing
2	Awareness building
3	Two-way communications
4	Cross-cultural communication
5	Dialogue building
6	Reactive dialoguing
7	Interaction
8	Sharing
9	Exchange
10	Advocacy
11	Inclusiveness
12	Fostering community aggregation
13	Fostering long term relations
14	Hospitality
15	Usage of social media
16	Citizen and people to people diplomacy
17	Cultural diplomacy

18	Public Diplomacy
19	Exposure to culture
20	Food culture
21	Cultural origin of food preparation
22	Social origin of food preparation
23	Cultural event celebrations
24	Sensory experiencing
25	Social and cultural celebrations
26	Geographic origin of food preparation
27	Food presentation
28	Culturally based ambient, design and décor
29	Identification
30	Distinctiveness
31	Authentication
32	Tradition
33	Heritage
34	Traditional practices
35	Uniqueness
36	Symbolism
37	Cuisine combined with art, poetry and music
38	Nationalism
39	National imaging
40	National reputation
41	Nation marketing
42	Nation branding
43	Private sector practice
44	Export promoting
45	Cuisine similarities
46	Repositioning country image and reputation
47	Cultural fusion
48	Culinary fusion
49	Sustainability
50	Partnerships
51	Community building and development
52	Institutionalization
53	Adaptation

Discussion

Table 5 was compared with Table 2. What was found was that out of the 78 gastro-diplomacy practices identified in Table 2, culinary enterprises provided for 41 gastro-diplomacy practices that were the same or similar. These can be found in Table 6.

Table 6: Culinary enterprise gastro-diplomacy practices that were the same or similar to gastro-diplomacy practices found in the literature

No.	Gastro-diplomacy practices
1	Informing
2	Awareness building
3	Two-way communications
4	Cross-cultural communication
5	Dialogue building
6	Sharing
7	Exchange
8	Fostering community aggregation
9	Fostering long term relations

10	Usage of social media
11	Citizen and people to people diplomacy
12	Cultural diplomacy
13	Public Diplomacy
14	Exposure to culture
15	Cultural origin of food preparation
16	Social origin of food preparation
17	Cultural event celebrations
18	Sensory experiencing
19	Social and cultural celebrations
20	Geographic origin of food preparation
21	Food presentation
22	Identification
23	Distinctiveness
24	Authentication
25	Tradition
26	Heritage
27	Traditional practices
28	Symbolism
29	Cuisine combined with art, poetry and music
30	Nationalism
31	National imaging
32	National reputation
33	Nation marketing
34	Nation branding
35	Private sector practice
36	Export prompting
37	Repositioning country image and reputation
38	Cultural fusion
39	Culinary fusion
40	Partnerships
41	Community building and development

However, and interestingly, there were 12 practices identified by the research that were not found in the 78 practices derived from the literature as provided previously in Table2. These gastro-diplomacy practices can be seen in Table 7.

Table 7: Culinary enterprise gastro-diplomacy practices that were not found in the literature

No.	Gastro-diplomacy practices
1	Reactive dialoguing
2	Interaction
3	Advocacy
4	Inclusiveness
5	Hospitality
6	Food culture
7	Culturally based ambient, design and décor
8	Uniqueness
9	Cuisine similarities
10	Sustainability
11	Institutionalization
12	Adaptation

From Table 7 above some of the gastro-diplomacy practices found are different from those identified in the literature, for example hospitality, food culture, and culturally based ambient, design and décor, but there are some similarities with gastro-diplomacy practices found in the literature.

Thus, from the 41 gastro-diplomacy practices found by the research in Table 6, these represent 53 percent of the 78 gastro-diplomacy practices found in the literature (see Table 2). This giving evidence that to a fair degree, Iranian culinary enterprises in foreign countries do contribute to Iranian gastro-diplomacy, based on a citizen and people to people diplomacy basis. Further if adding the gastro-diplomacy practices identified that were not directly found in the literature-based gastro-diplomacy practices, the gastro-diplomacy practices are 53. This representing, if compared to the literature-based gastro-diplomacy practices identified, 68 percent.

From the interviews, some further interesting findings arose. In terms of the 30 culinary enterprises interviewed, they only provided for reactive dialoguing, in other words, would inform customers, for example, about the food, its ingredients, the foods cultural heritage, specific geographic origin within Iran, and the culture of Iran and its history, only if asked by the customers. This is interesting as the culinary enterprises were not taking a proactive dialogue with customers, but only reactive. Also, another finding was that it was the customers' openness and attitude to find out about Iranian food, culture, traditions and history, for example, that was the facilitator and enabler for commencing dialogue and thus the first step in gastro-diplomacy. This, for example, is also provided by Satterzadeh *et al.*, (2023), in that it is the customer's openness and willingness to explore, find out and gain knowledge about another ethnic culinary culture that is important. This, as provided before, thus seemingly implies that gastro-diplomacy hinges on a foreign country's peoples' openness and willingness to explore a diverse ethnic culinary culture which diverges from their own culinary culture.

Another interesting finding that derived from the interviews, was that 27 culinary enterprises claimed that food alone could not promote Iran. They claimed that other factors were needed, like interior design, art, music, poetry, festivities, history, geography, photos and explanations by staff, for example. Most, however claimed that Iranian food was a good starting point for promoting Iran. Iranian cuisine was seen as a facilitator and enabler for dialogue. Further what also emerged was that the culinary enterprises sourced food ingredients directly and indirectly from Iran, which has a 'pull effect' on Iranian agri-food exports. This also having been found in Hilmi (2024). Moreover, not all culinary enterprises were family run, but run by individuals. Out of the 30 culinary enterprises interviewed only 10 were family run, while 20 were run individually. This is interesting as commonly the literature on ethnic enterprises in foreign countries and culinary enterprises mostly provides that such enterprises are family run.

Conclusions

The aim of the research was to attempt to appraise, diagnose and ascertain if Iranian culinary enterprises in foreign countries did contribute to Iranian gastro-diplomacy. From the research evidence what emerged is that Iranian culinary enterprises in foreign countries do contribute to gastro-diplomacy by a fair degree. Thus, via private sector enterprise initiatives and via citizen and people to people diplomacy, Iranian culinary enterprises do contribute to Iranian nation state marketing and branding as well as contributing to the repositioning of the Iranian nation state. However, the finding needs to be considered within the boundaries of the research, its limitations and possible inferences to a wider universe. As such, further research on Iranian culinary enterprise contribution to gastro-diplomacy is needed.

Interestingly though, gastro-diplomacy as a practice in foreign countries seems to depend on peoples' openness and attitude to find out about Iranian food, culture, traditions and history, for example. It seems that if these matters are present than gastro-diplomacy has a starting point in terms of dialogue. Further it seems from the findings of this research, that Iranian cuisine is not enough to promote and market Iran, there is seemingly a need for a combination of other factors that accompany Iranian cuisine, these being, for example, art, music, poetry, festivities, photos and history. Also, Iranian culinary enterprises seemingly only took a reactive dialogue about Iran, when they were asked, and were not proactively dialoguing not only in terms of the food, but, for example, on the history of Iran. Also, what emerged from the research findings is that Iranian culinary enterprises do have a 'pull effect' on Iranian agri-food exports via such culinary enterprises sourcing ingredients for food preparation,

either directly or indirectly from Iran. Moreover, another interesting finding was that Iranian ethnic culinary enterprises were not mainly family run.

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