

Gastrodiplomacy 2.0: culinary tourism beyond nationalism

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Abstract

■ Gastrodiplomacy is a concept with a high potential for different usages in both tourism studies as well as for social sciences and humanities at large. It describes the use of gastronomical and culinary cultures for diplomatic goals. One of those usages is the ways it can inform gastronomical tourism projects that extend beyond gastro-nationalism and foster regional tourism. We discuss the ways the concept of gastrodiplomacy can be taken forward beyond its nationalistic tendencies in a global world. The methodology is composed of literature review and interviews with three prominent figures in tourism and gastrodiplomacy fields. We conclude with a creative visual exploration of how can this reconfiguration titled “gastrodiplomacy beyond nationalism” be used for enhancing regional tourism and cooperation efforts.

Key Words:

Gastrodiplomacy, Culinary Tourism, Gastronationalism, Tourism Potential, Regional Gastrodiplomacy.

Resumen

■ La gastrodiplomacia es un concepto revolucionario cuyas diferentes aplicaciones se extienden no solo a los estudios del turismo sino además a las ciencias sociales y humanidades en general. Se describe como el uso de las culturas gastronómicas y culinarias para objetivos diplomáticos. Uno de estos usos es la forma en las cuales provee información a proyectos de turismo gastronómico que se extienden más allá del gastro-nacionalismo y fomentan el turismo regional. La discusión es sobre las formas como el concepto de gastrodiplomacia puede ser expandido más allá de las tendencias nacionalistas para ajustarse a un mundo global. La metodología se basa en una revisión de la literatura, y entrevistas con tres figuras prominentes en el campo de turismo y gastrodiplomacia. Concluimos con una exploración visual creativa de cómo esta reconfiguración de la gastrodiplomacia sin nacionalismo puede ser usada para intensificar y mejorar el turismo regional y cristalizar esfuerzos de cooperación.

Palabras clave:

Gastrodiplomacia, Turismo Culinario, Gastro-Nacionalismo, Potencial Turístico, Gastrodiplomacia Regional.

Introduction. What is gastrodiplomacy?

■ Since the early years of the new millennium, countries are not only promoting the historical, artistic, and natural beauties of their geographies for tourism. Increasingly, countries have also been promoting their cuisine for their country's brand image. Ethnic cuisines are promoted through sponsored television shows, opening of country-specific restaurants in other countries, holding gastronomic events, and creating awareness campaigns. Additional attempts like sending ambassador chefs, exporting national dishes and food & beverage brands, facilitating the process of finding ingredients in other countries or obtaining official geographical identifications for certain foods and beverages (for example feta cheese, balsamic vinegar, baklava, tequila, champagne and so on.) all play an increasingly important role in the tourism industry (Rockower, 2012; Wilson, 2013; Zhang, 2015).

Through incorporating all those aspects aforementioned; a new concept has emerged; gastrodiplomacy. Gastrodiplomacy refers to planned national practices that have a defined strategy and budget within a country's public diplomacy efforts for the specific aim of promoting its culinary culture and international influence (Rockower, 2012; Nirwandy, 2014). Although gastrodiplomacy is a more developed concept in diplomacy studies and is a relatively new concept in the tourism research, its widespread adoption by many countries highlights its potential influence (Onaran, 2015).

Gastrodiplomacy versus culinary diplomacy and food diplomacy

■ Despite its nourishing features, food has also been a tool of culture, communication, symbolism, and inevitably diplomacy for hundreds of years. Banquets and receptions for ambassadors, sending specific local and rare food items, and the preparation and consumption of specific meals in traditional manners have always played an important role in defining the relationships between countries. The messages that are conveyed through the dining table in terms of who is invited or not invited to a banquet, who accepts the invitation and who does not, who requests changes in the protocol (seating arrangements, types of food served, etc.), where the banquet will be held, what was served, the amount that was eaten, the level of formality, the number of different kinds of food served, and etc. all function as culinary diplomacy (Reynolds, 2012). Paul Rockower (2012) claims that *Gastrodiplomacy* is highly different than both culinary diplomacy and *food diplomacy*. The former is characterized by the hospitality efforts of using food for diplomatic purposes to gratify or convey subtle messages to officials of other countries. And the latter is about sending food aid to countries in need due to a disaster or a crisis. As opposed to those, gastrodiplomacy

attempts can be considered as public policy projects to disseminate widespread information specifically on the culinary culture of a particular country, with the intention to promote an overall positive image of the country (Rockower, 2012). Therefore, gastrodiplomacy programs try to enhance the perception of a country's culinary culture by reaching a broader audience through public events, festivals, TV shows or social media campaigns and therefore reach beyond the high level dignitaries or selected key opinion leaders that traditional diplomacy targets.

The first country to engage in coordinated gastrodiplomacy efforts was Thailand. In 2002 Thailand launched what proved to be a very effective campaign titled "Global Thai Program." Since then, various countries such as Korea, Peru, Malaysia, Indonesia, and others have followed the example by introducing and investing on their own gastrodiplomacy agendas (Wilson, 2013). These strategical programs not only increased the awareness for specific countries but also simultaneously aimed to increase the number of tourists that come to those countries (Rockower, 2012).

Summarizing different gastrodiplomacy strategies

■ Most of the literature about gastrodiplomacy exist in the form of case studies. Various authors have presented analyses of gastrodiplomatic programs and policies as they are pursued by different nation-states. Some examples are studies about gastrodiplomacy programs of Peru (Wilson, 2013), South Korea (Pham, 2013), Indonesia (Rasyidah, 2015), Malaysia, Thailand, Taiwan, and Japan, among others. This section constitutes a summary of different gastrodiplomacy strategies taken by the following countries: Japan, Malaysia, Peru, South Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand. We base this summary on the work of Zhang (2015) as it is a comprehensive review of the literature. Zhang compares the different branding themes, messages, strategies, and tactics of the abovementioned countries. Japan focuses its gastrodiplomatic efforts on its vast history and long-standing traditions, as well as the healthiness of its food. Korea's approach is similar in that it also stresses the old culinary traditions, but also stresses a deep connection with nature. Peru also highlights its rich biodiversity and a sustainable approach, seasoned with its mysticism, not too different from Malaysia that brands itself as a "tropical paradise" relying on exoticism and openness to Muslim travelers. Taiwan presents itself as the meeting point between east and west, while Thailand relies on extravagant cooking styles and lavish food presentations to attract potential customers. To sum up, Zhang's analysis of gastrodiplomacy strategies is based on the following categories: 1. healthiness 2. diversity 3. mysticism and exoticism 4. essential part of culture 5. naturalness and environmentalism and 6. aesthetic value.

Identifying an existing limitation

■ The existing limitation in gastrodiplomacy research that we will focus on lies on the issue that the majority of the publications focus on gastrodiplomacy's relation to the "nation branding" efforts, and how these attempts increased countries' perceived soft powers. In this sense gastrodiplomacy still quite often takes the form of "gastro-nationalism" or "culinary nationalism" (Osipova, 2014; Ranta, 2015) - taking the nation-state as the *de facto* locus of culinary culture and thus, of culinary tourism.

It is important to understand what the historical imperative behind cultural nationalism was. Most gastro-diplomatic initiatives are today in countries which were former European colonies (Japan being the big exception), and thus this is one of the main historical referents to keep in mind. Culinary nationalism in countries in Latin America, Asia and Africa can be traced to the times when it was employed as a strategy to combat colonialism. The imperative was to create a separate, unique and distinct national identity (Forrest, 2009), both from the older empire and from other newly-formed nation-states. Food and culinary culture was an important part of this newly-formed national identity.

Unfortunately the downside of highlighting the autonomy, independence and sovereignty of the specific national identity was that cultural links with other countries or regions were either underrepresented and/or ignored. The inter-relatedness of cuisines was lost, and national cultures, including its culinary traditions, came to be seen as monolithic, cohesive, homogeneous blocks with well-defined boundaries.

However, in order to fully comprehend many of the culinary cultures of the nations that engage in gastro-diplomacy, *relational quality of different cuisines* should be acknowledged even if they come from the somber history of colonialism. Sam Chapple-Sokol lists several dishes from around the world that are testament to the lasting effects that this historical era produced (Chapple-Sokol, 2015). For example the *Banh Mi* sandwich from Vietnam that displays the culture of French Indochina in the form of a French baguette stuffed with local Southeast Asian ingredients like pickled *daikons*, spicy peppers and cilantro. Entire regional cuisines also show the traces of colonialism. The food from Goa such as pork vindaloo, an Indian curry that is derived from the Portuguese *carne de vinha d'alhos* (meat marinated in wine-vinegar and garlic) is a perfect example of this, combining elements from the Portuguese colonizers' cuisine with Indian spices and herbs (Civitello, 2011). Without the conceptual capacity to deliberate on these greater socio-cultural topics, one could not make sense of the *Banh Mi* or of the *Goan Vindaloo*. The complexity of these interactions becomes apparent when one takes a more relational and ecological approach to culinary culture, one that transcends the logic of nationalism.

Similar situations took place in nation-states that emerged after the dissolution of greater political entities like empires and joint countries. Examples would be the commonalities and differences between Turkey and former Ottoman protectorates and provinces that are sovereign states today. Or the relationship between Russian culinary culture and that of neighboring countries that were part of the Union Republics of the Soviet Union (USSR).

Later on, in the years after the end of the cold war, the situation was slightly different. A lack of overarching global order created a scramble for recognition and legitimacy that pushed small to medium sized countries that do not rely on magnitude or military power to find alternative channels of influence. Without the overarching narrative of the Cold War, regions and even nation-states developed the capacity to pursue their own diplomatic programs, outside of the influence of the United States of America and the USSR. For example Turkey became a regional influence, pushing for a diplomatic and cultural program based around Turkic identity that it claimed to lead (Onaran, 2016). The International Organization of Turkic Culture, based in Ankara, includes countries such as Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and North Cyprus and was founded in 1993, shortly after the fall of the Berlin wall. This situation has marked a new trajectory of diplomatic developments and cultural alliances.

In the three historical settings to keep in mind, post-colonialism, dissolution of empires and joint states and the emergence of a post-bipolar world order, the logic of the nation-state has prevailed (MacKenzie, 2014). Gastro-nationalism has been both a symptom and a manifestation of this situation. This has been a huge limitation because gastro-nationalism does not accurately reflect the interactions between culinary culture: Territorial borders of nation states in most cases around the world were drawn arbitrarily and do not necessarily correspond to the historical geographic locations of cultural or ethnic groups (Slattery, 2003). Even if the argument is accepted that the nation-state can be a multi-ethnic unit of political action in today's globalization world, culturally there is too much that stands outside of it: Immigration, trade routes, wars, natural catastrophes and climate change are a few of the aspects that contribute to cultural evolution that are outside the national scope (Onaran, 2015).

In the case of culinary cultures, gastro-nationalism means leaving untouched many historic, geographic and political dimensions of food culture that do not make sense with a nationalistic scope. Culinary cultures operate, on the most part, *in relation with one another*, and focusing on a single one paints a very limited picture. For example traditional Spanish food makes heavy use of pork, a fact that would remain not fully understood unless analyzed in comparison to the cuisine of neighboring Morocco, and the cuisine of Sephardic Jews, for whom eating the pig is forbidden. After the reconquista of the Iberian Peninsula

from Islamic control, and the expulsion of Jews from Spain during the inquisition, the newly-formed national identity used the eating of the pork as a way to mark its distinct quality. Spanish cuisine is the way it is through its interactions, its relations, with the other peoples and their cuisines around it.

Deliberately neglected processes and aspects of culinary cultures are not trivial for gastrodiplomacy and therefore for culinary tourism – they are central and constitutive of their respective functional workings and of their resulting properties and characteristics. Culinary cultures have been and continue to be in a process of mutual transformation and evolution that both reflects *and helps to co-produce* other sociological and political phenomena. Therefore, in as much as gastrodiplomacy remains a concept married to the nation-state and to the ideology of nationalism, it remains conceptually limited to a poor, archaic and outdated understanding of culinary cultures and the nature of their socio-cultural existence.

The effect of this limitation for culinary tourism is that gastrodiplomacy then can only be used for tourism initiatives and projects which re-enforce or reproduce a nationalistic understanding of culinary culture. Nevertheless, gastrodiplomacy needs to be broadened as a concept from its gastro-nationalistic current state, both to make the concept more in tune with the socio-political realities of culinary culture, as well as to allow for innovations and creative approaches that enable gastrodiplomatic-influenced tourism as a tool for cultural dialogue and mutual understandings, beyond national borders.

Moving gastrodiplomacy beyond nationalism

Exploration through in depth interviews - methodology

■ As a way to understand how gastrodiplomacy can be used outside of the framework of nationalism and how it can relate to tourism initiatives, we interviewed three people with different perspectives: Dr. Burak Onaran is a lecturer at Mimar Sinan University in Istanbul and the author of a book on the political history of the culinary culture of Turkey and the Ottoman Empire. Mr. Sam Chapple-Sokol is a chef and a consultant on culinary diplomacy, and one of the first researchers to write on gastrodiplomacy. Mr. Teoman Alemdar is the director of the School of Applied Sciences at Ozyegin University in Istanbul and one of the pioneering figures of Tourism Studies in Turkey. All informants were interviewed according to their convenient preferences through pre-arranged formal meetings. The in-depth interviews ranged around one hour and they were conducted, recorded, and transcribed. All the interviews began with the

question of how could gastrodiplomacy move away from gastronationalism and continued with questions that explored the in depth meaning of gastrodiplomacy and the possible actors that could take part in a supra-national gastrodiplomacy efforts. Interviewees were encouraged to answer the questions through their expertise and highlight the topics that were most important and germane according to them.

Findings from the interviews

■ All three interviewees agreed that gastrodiplomacy could be a powerful tool to advance culinary tourism, yet nationalism is a limitation to understanding culinary culture, and that the main reason food and culinary culture is linked to nation-states is because of the power and influence they wield in crafting cultural policies. To their understanding, the logic of nation-states pushes them to a narrow, simplistic and self-serving framing of culinary cultures. This thinking leads to a kind of “ontological politics” (Mol, 1999) where the questions of whether the Dolma, the stuffed grape leaf, is a Turkish, Armenian or Azerbaijani dish constitutes a legitimate point of contestation between these countries. This state of being is precisely the one we want to move away from, and according to the responses of the three people we interviewed, they all agreed on the ideal merits of food being a source of cooperation rather than competition between countries. Nevertheless, they also expressed the difficulty of such collaboration in reality under the current political arrangement. As long as gastrodiplomacy is the work of nations, a certain kind of gastronationalism will be in place.

Their solution to this situation was stated as such: Dr. Onaran and Mr. Chapple-Sokol suggested that civil society initiatives like non-governmental organizations (NGOs), governmentally organized non-governmental organizations (GONGOs), cultural organizations and trade organization that are supra-national ought to take a position that balances that of nation-states. Moreover, Mr. Chapple-Sokol proposed the potential of increased transactions for some international for-profit companies from possible regional gastrodiplomacy projects.

“Non-governmental and supra-governmental organizations can be more active. Tourism boards of cities, chambers of commerce, non-profits and for-profits such as major grocery chains, produce manufacturers, banks, and regional transport companies can take part in regional gastrodiplomacy projects. . . . In 2013, Bolivia and Peru were co-sponsors of the United Nations International Year of Quinoa without claiming to have a better quinoa, so it is possible to cooperate” (Chapple-Sokol, 2016).

In the interviews, the possibility of organizations such as fisheries and agricultural conglomerates to promote common fish and common plants, grains, legumes and

produce like the quinoa example were discussed. The potential for trading blocks and regional chambers of commerce to produce campaigns based on shared economic interests were common ideas that came up in all interviews. As a first step, it was discussed as a smarter step to begin with promoting more neutral commodities rather than dishes that has been the source of conflict.

However, after talking about the peace-fostering potential of having a joint gastrodiplomacy efforts of different regions, Dr. Onaran also mentioned that such collaboration might create a bigger scale of competition, which is not very far away from the individual nationalistic approach.

“Then the situation can be regions vs. regions and it’s not super far from the nationalistic approach, but it is a smart move. Similar strategy, but a softer form of nationalism in collaboration. . . . Against a nationalist characteristic of a culinary culture, we can define regional characteristics by focusing on the familiarity in a non-conflict way” (Onaran, 2016)

Recurrently, all the interviews also focused on the potential of gastrodiplomacy as a sustainable, long-term, and holistic strategy to planning, developing, operating, and marketing tourism services and businesses. Mr. Alemdar especially highlighted the importance of geographic nature that is devoid of national borders for culinary culture and the potential of promoting common dishes of a region to attract more allocentric travelers (Plog, 2001).

Our interviews indicated that at the current moment, there are no significant regional gastrodiplomacy efforts in a large scale. Therefore, there is an immense potential for creating gastrodiplomacy efforts beyond the nation-state, in any of the aforementioned supra-national forms: Trading blocks and economic unions, chambers of commerce, cultural organizations, NGOs and private businesses can all engage in significant ways with gastrodiplomacy. Since do not yet exist, in the next section we provide a creative example of how a tourism poster may look like in the future, using gastrodiplomacy beyond nationalism.

Interpretation and discussion of regional gastrodiplomacy and fostering tourism between countries

■ In this paper, the potential of gastrodiplomacy to go beyond culinary nationalism and to support regional tourism were examined. Although still fairly under-utilized or mostly utilized in a nationalistic sense, gastrodiplomacy efforts are aimed to function as a tool to boost the food tourism and the overall tourism of a particular country. This is because food is the only digestible cultural activity that represents the identity

of a country or a region. (Yeoman, 2012). Moreover, as eating is universal, a strategy that incorporates promoting common ingredients and culinary practices of certain regions would enhance the perceived accessibility for all segments of traveler ranging from psychocentric to allocentric (Park, 2011).

Tourism has a close relationship with gastronomy and the travelers are found to have an increased interest in local cuisines. According to Vukic et al, Y-Generation, the next big consumer spending group, are traveling more frequently and seeking more *experiences* from their explorations, unique and authentic experiences instead of replicable, standard all-inclusive resort type of tourism experiences (2014). New generation travelers have longer vacation periods and they try to explore as much as possible in terms of leisure, culture, and food. Yet, political stability is one aspect that is highly influential on their travel destinations and conflicts between regions impact their travel decisions negatively. Furthermore, during recent years alternative tourism activities (gastronomy, health, culture, sports, religious pilgrimages) are gaining momentum as opposed to mass tourism activities that were mostly about sea, beach, and sun among all types of travelers from different age groups (Cömert, 2014).

As mentioned above, gastronomy of a particular country cannot be thought separately from the region it belongs. Therefore, a collaborative gastrodiplomacy effort might increase regional tourism as more tourists might cross borders to have a better understanding of the inter-related cuisines (such as döner for Turkey, gyros for Greece, shawarma for Syria or dolma for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Greece or hummus for Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine). This would be valid for travelling multiple countries in one vacation or for re-visiting the region. Thus, regional gastrodiplomacy efforts that encompass neighboring countries or the countries with a common history can have the potential to promote peace and foster tourism between regions. By accepting the shared origin of ingredients and dishes, the conflicting culinary elements can be used as a means for conflict resolution and attract more tourists to the region by sharing the cost of marketing common aspects. In any case, there will always be the element of *terroir* that serves to differentiate the local source due to territorial interactions with the surrounding environment. Although a dish would be shared among different countries, the difference between Turkish or Greek style dolma or the Peruvian and Bolivian quinoa will remain to be tasted by the travelers and enthusiasts (Çalışkan, 2013). In 2013, when Peru, Bolivia, Argentina, Chile, Colombia, and Ecuador partnered to promote quinoa, their joint efforts resulted in lots of collaborative efforts and the recognition level of the grain increased immensely world-wide. This type of an approach would also be helpful to tackle the challenge of converting the tourism destination territory into a culinary landscape (Global Report on Food Tourism, 2012).

Regional gastrodiplomacy practices can be achieved through different ways. The first way can be creating supra-national organizations that are much like intergovernmental organizations or agencies that promote regional economies or multi-national development projects such as South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) or the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC). Cultural organizations such as the Arab League or the International Organization of Turkic Culture can engage in gastrodiplomacy efforts to focus on shared cultural heritage that transcend national borders. Secondly, non-governmental, not-for-profit actors like NGOs interested in fostering regional unity and dialogue can use gastrodiplomacy as part of their efforts. NGOs, GONGOs or educational institutes could foster regional gastrodiplomacy with initiatives like Slow Food Movement or Euro-Toques. Also, private businesses that

have profits from such potential regional collaborations such as airlines that fly to destinations with similar cuisines can take part in campaigns that highlight the commonalities as a profit-generating activity. Other regional transport or cargo companies, banks, big chain hotels, oil and other energy companies, ingredient suppliers, major grocery chains, kitchenware companies, travel agencies, international cooking schools, real estate or car rental companies, financial services corporations, online marketplaces, travel websites can create initiatives. Lastly, partial or full collaboration of the aforementioned parties, i.e. NGOs, government, and private sector collaborations could initiate and sustain long-term projects (Table 1. Governmental and non-governmental actors and actions that can be taken to foster regional gastrodiplomacy efforts).

Table 1 Governmental and non-governmental actors and actions that can be taken to foster regional gastrodiplomacy efforts

Governmental Actions	Non- Governmental Actions	
Being part of supra-national organizations	For Profit Actors that can sponsor or create projects	Not For-Profit Actors that can sponsor or create projects
Allocating budget for regional efforts	Transport companies (airlines, busses, car rentals, etc.), international hotel chains, real estate companies, financial services corporations, online marketplaces, travel websites, banks, energy companies, ingredient suppliers, major grocery chains, kitchenware companies, travel agencies, international cooking schools	NGOs
Promoting their cuisine responsibly		GONGOs
Not accusing other countries of culinary plagiarism		University initiatives
Ministries of agriculture, food, culture, tourism, and forestry	Chambers of commerce	
Public and private cooperation		

Source: Prepared by the authors.

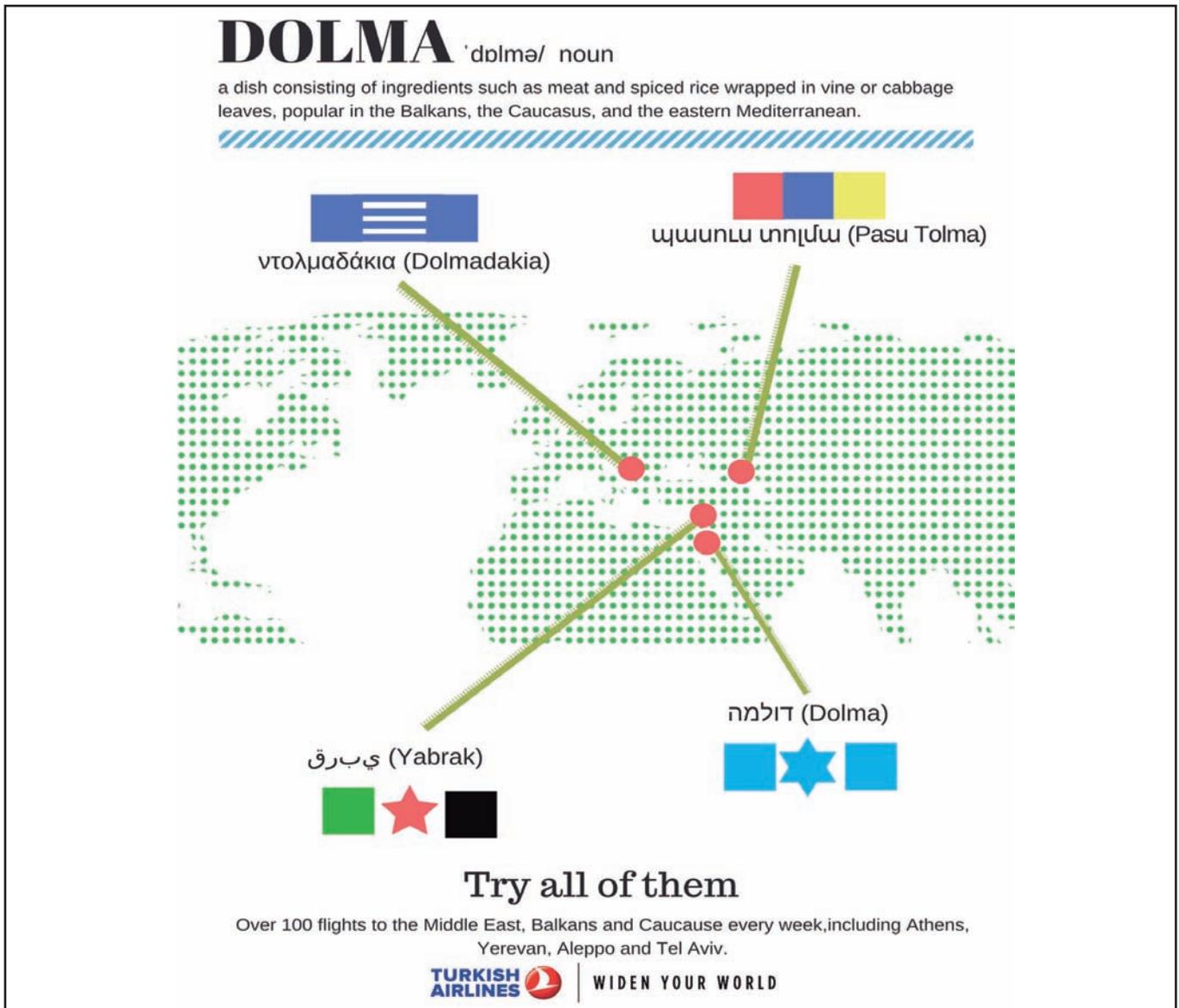
A creative example

■ The shift in gastrodiplomacy offers very interesting possibilities for tourism and for future research work. For tourism, it means that tourism campaigns that focus beyond nationalism on greater cultural arenas are possible. In this section we show you how a post-nationalist gastrodiplomacy tourism poster may look like.

Conclusion and directions for future research

■ The culture of food, including the cultivation of the ingredients, preparation of the dishes, and traditions associated with the practice of eating it, are sources of incredibly rich cultural heritage. They have the potential to bring people together and create meaningful dialogue. Unfortunately the field of using food for cultural reasons has mostly focused on nations and how nations can use

Figure 1 A creative example of a post-nationalist gastrodiplomacy tourism poster



Source: Prepared by the authors.

their cuisines to foster a positive brand image. Against this limitation we propose that gastrodiplomacy explores ways that it can exist without nationalism. In this way tourism that uses culinary cultures for the purposes of fostering meaningful dialogue would be possible. It would involve people traveling to discover a new culinary culture and through this process of discovery enrich the possibility of dialogue with the other. These actions would count as ethnographies of food culture, and would be exercises of translation between two or more cultures.

We interviewed three prominent figures of the field of gastrodiplomacy on how to exactly move forward on this process, and analyzed their responses. Then we discussed some possible avenues of work that such a transformation

of gastrodiplomacy would allow. We concluded with a conceptual work of art, a tourism poster that represents the realm of possibility that gastrodiplomacy informed tourism can become. In the last part, we discussed the larger implications of having a more ecological approach to culinary culture and to gastrodiplomacy. These are ways to practically explore the ways different cultures relate to one another, as well as the general characteristic a cultural eco-system has.

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