

From Culinary Practice to Foreign Policy: Gastrodiplomacy in the Dominican Republic

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Case Report

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Abstract

This article examines how gastronomy is incorporated into Dominican foreign policy as a tool of cultural projection, public diplomacy, and international engagement. Drawing on documentary analysis and semi-structured interviews with three Dominican diplomats and three gastronomy experts, it examines the practical settings in which food becomes part of external action. The Dominican case reveals a form of gastrodiploamacy operating across official hospitality, cultural programming, tourism promotion, product visibility, and relationship-building. Rather than developing through a single national campaign, these practices emerge through overlapping institutional, mission-level, private-sector, and diaspora initiatives. The article argues that gastrodiploamacy can develop through recurrent diplomatic practice before it becomes a formally institutionalized policy. The central policy question is therefore not whether gastronomy is present in Dominican diplomacy, but how dispersed culinary activity can acquire strategic coherence, continuity, and institutional memory. By foregrounding implementation and coordination in a small Caribbean state, the case broadens gastrodiploamacy scholarship beyond the study of flagship national branding campaigns.

Introduction

Food has become an increasingly visible instrument in the international projection of states. Governments use national cuisines in campaigns, diplomatic events, tourism strategies, cultural programming, and nation-branding initiatives because food can translate abstract ideas of identity into an immediate sensory experience. Gastrodiploamacy scholarship has consequently developed at the intersection of public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, nation branding, tourism, and soft power (Rockower 2012; Chapple-Sokol 2013; Zhang 2015; Cabral et al. 2025). Yet the field remains disproportionately shaped by studies of highly visible national campaigns and by Asian cases, leaving less attention to states in which culinary diplomacy emerges through dispersed, recurrent practice rather than through a single flagship program (Li and Mok 2025).

The Dominican Republic offers such a case. Gastronomy is already present in official receptions, diplomatic meals, cultural programming, tourism promotion, diaspora activities, fairs, and product showcases. It also appears in a growing policy environment that includes the publication *Sabor, color y calor para el mundo* by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Dominican Republic (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, MIREX), standardized guidance for Dominican cultural programming abroad, the national *Marca País* strategy, and a 2025–2030 strategic plan for sustainable gastronomic tourism (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de la República Dominicana 2024a, 2024b; *Marca País República Dominicana* n.d.; BCC Innovation 2024). These initiatives show that cuisine has moved well beyond ceremonial hospitality. What remains less clear is how recurring activity becomes connected across institutions and translated into a coherent instrument of external action.

That distinction is central to this article. Recent work in this journal on Colombia maps gastrodiploamacy through nation branding, ProColombia, state dinners, and the foreign ministry's promotional plan

(Castilla-Corzo and Colmenares-Castro 2026). The Dominican case raises a different question. Rather than asking whether cuisine can represent a country, it asks how repeated culinary practices distributed across diplomatic missions, tourism spaces, diaspora networks, and specialist organizations acquire strategic coherence. This shifts the analytical focus from campaign visibility to implementation: who performs gastrodiploamacy, how practice is adapted locally, what institutional resources sustain it, and how those practices connect to foreign-policy objectives.

The article therefore treats gastrodiploamacy as a foreign-policy practice rather than only as a branding technique. This use of “practice” follows a broader turn in International Relations that directs attention to competent, repeated performances through which international action is enacted and reproduced (Neumann 2002; Adler and Pouliot 2011). Applied here, the practice perspective makes it possible to study culinary diplomacy before it has been consolidated into a formal program. The central argument is that gastrodiploamacy can develop through recurrent diplomatic practice before it becomes a formally institutionalized policy. The Dominican case occupies precisely this intermediate space.

Empirically, the article combines documentary analysis with six semi-structured interviews involving three Dominican diplomats and three gastronomy specialists. The evidence shows a flexible but uneven model. Culinary representation already supports identity projection, relationship-building, tourism and economic promotion, and network formation, but implementation remains strongly dependent on mission-level initiative, local partners, available resources, and the ability to adapt Dominican food to host-country settings. The relevant policy problem is therefore not whether gastrodiploamacy exists, but how recurrent practice can be converted into cumulative institutional capacity.

This argument matters beyond the Dominican Republic. Recent reviews call for gastrodiploamacy research to expand geographically, rely more extensively on primary data, and pay closer attention to implementation and actors beyond celebrated national campaigns (Cabral et al. 2025; Li and Mok 2025). A Caribbean small-state case also foregrounds a diplomatic environment in which influence depends heavily on specialization, networks, reputation, and distinctive cultural assets rather than on material scale (Braveboy-Wagner 2008). The analysis that follows develops this contribution through a practice-oriented conceptual framework, an explicit account of the evidence base, three empirical sections, and a discussion of the broader implications for gastrodiploamacy and foreign-policy practice.

Gastrodiploamacy, Public Diplomacy and Foreign Policy

Gastrodiploamacy is commonly understood as the strategic use of national cuisine to shape foreign perceptions, create familiarity, and support broader national objectives. Rockower (2012) popularized the concept as an attempt to win hearts and minds through food, while Chapple-Sokol (2013) situated culinary activity along a continuum that includes both elite diplomatic dining and public-facing outreach. Pham (2013) emphasized communication, national image, trade, and cultural interaction, and Zhang (2015) compared national campaigns as instruments of contemporary public diplomacy. Although terminology varies, the literature converges around several recurring elements: cuisine as a cultural

resource, foreign audiences as important publics, attraction rather than coercion as a principal mechanism, and some degree of state or state-linked coordination.

Public diplomacy provides one conceptual foundation for this activity. Melissen (2005) describes the “new public diplomacy” as increasingly relational and networked, while Cull (2008) identifies cultural diplomacy and relationship-building as core parts of the public-diplomacy repertoire. Food is particularly suited to such work because it creates direct, social, and repeatable encounters. It can operate as public cultural representation, as elite hospitality, as a tourism asset, and as a platform for commercial promotion. Shared meals also matter as social settings in their own right. Spence (2016), reviewing experimental and social-psychological research on food and decision-making, shows why commensality can influence impression formation, bonding, and interaction even though a meal should never be treated as an independent cause of a political outcome.

Nation branding and national identity add a second layer. Cuisine can differentiate a country, associate it with particular values and experiences, and connect cultural identity with tourism and exports. At the same time, food is not a neutral representation of the nation. Ichijo and Ranta (2016) show how national food is produced through processes of selection, institutionalization, and everyday repetition. This matters for gastrodiploamacy because every “national cuisine” presented abroad privileges particular dishes, ingredients, regions, and historical narratives over others. The question is therefore not only how food represents a country, but whose food and which version of national identity is made internationally visible.

Latin American scholarship illustrates both the promotional and critical sides of this process. Wilson’s study of Peru shows how cuisine became part of a broader culinary nation-brand project, while Matta’s analysis of the Peruvian path toward UNESCO highlights the political and economic choices involved in converting food into globally legible heritage (Wilson 2013; Matta 2016). The more recent Colombian case similarly connects cuisine to nation branding, cultural diplomacy, and state promotion while noting limitations in the representation of marginalized and regional cuisines (Castilla-Corzo and Colmenares-Castro 2026). These cases make Latin America an important comparative setting for understanding how gastronomy moves between identity, tourism, heritage, and foreign policy.

The present article adds a practice perspective to this literature. In International Relations, practice approaches focus on patterned performances through which diplomacy is actually carried out, rather than treating policy only as formal strategy or discourse (Neumann 2002; Adler and Pouliot 2011). This lens is especially useful when a state has recurring activity without a single consolidated gastrodiploamacy program. It directs attention to what missions repeatedly do: selecting menus, sourcing ingredients, choosing partners, translating culinary narratives, hosting counterparts, adapting recipes, mobilizing diaspora networks, and linking events to wider diplomatic agendas.

Four diplomatic functions are used consistently throughout the analysis. First, identity projection refers to the representation of history, territory, cultural mixture, and hospitality through food. Second, relationship-building refers to the use of meals and culinary events to create access, familiarity, trust,

and repeated contact. Third, tourism and economic promotion captures the connection between cuisine, destinations, products, and commercial visibility. Fourth, network formation refers to the partnerships that culinary activity can create among missions, diaspora communities, chefs, tourism actors, cultural institutions, businesses, universities, and producers.

These functions do not require a centralized national campaign to exist. Their cumulative value, however, depends on the degree to which institutions connect them. The article therefore conceptualizes a five-stage practice-to-policy continuum: culinary presence; recurrent diplomatic practice; strategic coordination; institutionalization; and foreign-policy integration. Culinary presence refers to food appearing as hospitality or cultural accompaniment. Recurrent practice begins when missions intentionally and repeatedly use cuisine for diplomatic purposes. Strategic coordination links those practices to shared priorities, narratives, and partnerships. Institutionalization adds continuity, guidance, resources, and institutional memory. Foreign-policy integration is reached when culinary activity is routinely connected to defined external objectives and to mechanisms for evaluation and learning.

Source: conceptualized for this study from the analytical framework and empirical evidence.

A small-state perspective further sharpens the framework. Small states cannot rely on material scale in the same way as major powers, and their diplomatic influence often depends on specialization, networks, reputation, and the strategic use of distinctive assets (Braveboy-Wagner 2008). Gastrodiploacy is compatible with this logic because it can be deployed through embassies, consulates, tourism circuits, diaspora communities, and private actors without requiring the resource intensity of large international campaigns. At the same time, limited budgets and uneven mission capacity can make coordination difficult. The tension between local flexibility and institutional fragmentation is therefore not incidental to the Dominican case; it is central to understanding how small-state culinary diplomacy develops.

Methodology

This article adopts a qualitative case-study approach to examine how gastrodiploacy is practiced and progressively institutionalized in the Dominican Republic. The design is interpretive rather than causal. It asks how gastronomy is used in diplomatic work, which functions actors attach to that use, where diplomatic and gastronomic perspectives converge or diverge, and what institutional conditions shape continuity. The principal empirical window is 2020–2025, but the period is treated as an evidence boundary rather than as the conceptual identity of the case.

Two sources of evidence were combined. The first was documentary analysis of academic literature, official publications, legal and policy materials, institutional reports, and documents produced by organizations involved in foreign affairs, tourism, national branding, gastronomy, and diaspora engagement. The core documentary corpus included Sabor, color y calor para el mundo; the Guía estandarizada para la celebración de la “Semana Dominicana”; the Marca País strategy; the Registro Sociodemográfico de los Dominicanos en el Exterior; the Plan Estratégico de Turismo Gastronómico

Sostenible 2025–2030; and the legislative initiative on gastronomic tourism. These documents were selected because they illuminate the institutional settings in which gastronomy is framed, promoted, or connected to external projection.

The second source consisted of six semi-structured interviews selected through purposive sampling. Three participants were Dominican diplomats with extensive experience in cultural diplomacy, international representation, and mission-level programming (D1–D3). Three were gastronomy specialists with backgrounds in culinary practice, research, tourism, institutional leadership, and international promotion (G1–G3). The sample was not intended to be statistically representative. Its purpose was comparative: to place the implementation perspective of diplomats alongside the sectoral perspective of actors who produce, interpret, and promote Dominican culinary culture.

Table 1
Interview sample and selection rationale

Participant group	N	Selection rationale
Dominican diplomats	3	Experience in cultural diplomacy, international promotion, and mission-level programming
Gastronomy specialists	3	Experience in culinary practice, research, tourism, institutional leadership, or international promotion

Interview material was analyzed in Spanish and quotations used in this article were translated into English by the author. The analysis proceeded iteratively. Responses were first organized around recurring themes already present in the interview guide (diplomatic use, perceived effects, resources, coordination, tourism, and institutional development) and were then compared across the two professional groups. The analysis did not use frequency counts as a proxy for importance. Instead, it looked for recurring mechanisms, contrasting interpretations, and negative or limiting cases. The resulting categories were cross-checked against the documentary material so that interview claims could be situated within the wider institutional context.

The research design benefited from familiarity with the institutional environment of Dominican cultural diplomacy, although this proximity also created a risk of interpretive familiarity. The analysis therefore distinguishes participant claims from documented institutional facts, compares diplomatic and gastronomy-sector accounts rather than treating either group as authoritative, and avoids attributing complex foreign-policy outcomes to culinary activity alone.

This caution is especially important for examples in which participants connected meals to diplomatic progress. Such cases are treated as process evidence rather than proof of causation. They show how practitioners understood the role of food within a broader sequence of relationship management, but they do not establish that a meal independently produced a subsequent political, commercial, or administrative decision. The same principle guides the interpretation of tourism and product-promotion claims.

The study has several limits. It does not evaluate every Dominican mission abroad, measure foreign audience perceptions, quantify tourism or export effects, or claim a representative account of all actors involved in Dominican gastronomy. Nor does it reconstruct a full policy history of every institution mentioned. Its contribution lies in using primary qualitative evidence to identify how recurrent culinary practices operate, where professional perspectives align or diverge, and what those patterns reveal about the transition from practice to policy.

Table 2
Core documentary corpus

Document / instrument	Year	Analytical relevance
Sabor, color y calor para el mundo: Gastronomía dominicana	2024	Official culinary narrative and external cultural projection
Guía estandarizada para la celebración de la “Semana Dominicana”	2024	Guidance for recurring cultural programming by missions
Marca País República Dominicana	Current strategy	Links gastronomy with national image, tourism, exports, and cultural influence
Plan Estratégico de Turismo Gastronómico Sostenible 2025–2030	2024 / 2025–2030	Framework for culinary identity, products, talent, sustainability, and value-chain development
Registro Sociodemográfico de los Dominicanos en el Exterior 2025	Published 2026	Scale and distribution of diaspora networks
Proyecto de Ley de Fomento del Turismo Gastronómico	2025	Legislative effort to formalize gastronomic tourism as cultural and economic policy

Source: documentary corpus analyzed in this study.

Gastrodiplomacy in Dominican Diplomatic Practice

The clearest empirical pattern is that gastronomy is already embedded in Dominican diplomatic practice. Diplomats described food not as an occasional add-on but as a recurring component of mission activity. D3 stated that “Dominican gastronomy is incorporated into all of the mission’s activities,” whether in breakfasts, receptions, lunches, dinners, or mixed events adapted to the host country. D2 similarly described efforts to include Dominican elements in both large and small activities, even when venue rules or sourcing constraints limited what could be served. This recurrence matters because it moves the case beyond simple culinary presence and into the second stage of the practice-to-policy continuum: intentional, repeated use.

The practice is nevertheless highly adaptive. D3 emphasized that culinary representation must be adjusted to the audience rather than imposed unchanged: strong seasoning, sweetness, allergies, ingredient availability, and local expectations all influence menu design. In Austria, for example,

Dominican dishes were paired with Austrian wines and local cheeses while keeping the broader meal recognizably Dominican. This adaptation does not necessarily dilute authenticity. It shows that diplomatic cuisine is a form of cultural translation in which recognizability and reception must be balanced.

Diplomats and gastronomy specialists converged strongly on the importance of narrative. G3 put the point directly: “For me, the narrative is the most important thing.” A plantain, cassava bread, cacao product, or sancocho becomes more than a menu item when its history, geographic origin, cultural mixture, or production story is explained. D3 described using short explanations of a dish’s origin or region as a way to discuss geography, history, and even geopolitics. This supports the identity-projection function identified in the conceptual framework: food becomes diplomatic communication when it is made intelligible as part of a wider national story.

The interviews also reveal that professional quality is part of diplomatic credibility. D2 warned that a poorly prepared or badly handled product is “an enormous risk,” both for the health of guests and for the image of the country. Yet the same participant described a practical reality in which missions sometimes collect food from community members’ homes because local Dominican caterers lack transport or staff. Her summary was blunt: “Gastrodiplomacy is worth it, but it is difficult.” Such evidence exposes the logistical layer hidden by polished diplomatic events. Culinary diplomacy depends on procurement, food safety, service, transportation, and skilled labor as much as on symbolic narratives.

Diaspora participation helps missions bridge some of these constraints. Participants described Dominican cooks, restaurants, entrepreneurs, and community members as sources of recipes, labor, ingredients, and local knowledge. D2 noted that community members sometimes reduced prices or contributed voluntarily to embassy activities. This participation does more than solve logistical problems: it places diaspora actors inside the production of national representation. Given a Dominican population abroad of more than three million, diaspora engagement is therefore part of the infrastructure of gastrodiplomacy rather than simply an auxiliary resource (Instituto de Dominicanos y Dominicanas en el Exterior 2026).

The gastronomy specialists, however, were more critical than the diplomats about the institutional regularity of these practices. G3 explained that support for embassy events occurs “when an embassy requests it” and “is not done regularly.” G1 likewise observed that many institutions, associations, ministries, and embassies are already working with Dominican cuisine, but that “there is no institution that truly unifies” those efforts around a common objective. This is an important point of divergence. Diplomats tended to describe a practice that is active and usable at mission level; specialists more often saw the same activity as fragmented, intermittent, and insufficiently coordinated.

The Dominican case therefore demonstrates a form of gastrodiplomacy that is empirically substantial but institutionally uneven. If the benchmark were only the existence of a branded national campaign, much of this activity would remain invisible. A practice perspective instead reveals repeated performances with identifiable diplomatic purposes. The analytical problem is not whether gastronomy

is used, but why the knowledge generated by those uses—menus, partners, narratives, formats, suppliers, and lessons—remains difficult to accumulate across missions.

From Cultural Promotion to Foreign-Policy Objectives

Culinary activity becomes diplomatically significant when it performs functions beyond cultural display. Across the interviews and documents, four functions recur consistently: identity projection, relationship-building, tourism and economic promotion, and network formation. They overlap in practice, which helps explain why a single reception, festival, or dinner can serve several external objectives at once.

Identity projection is the most immediate function, but the interviews reveal competing ways of defining what should be projected. G1 foregrounded iconic dishes such as mangú, la bandera, and sancocho, arguing that their diplomatic value lies in connecting recognizable food to stories of origin and evolution. G2 took a broader view, emphasizing that Dominican cuisine reflects Indigenous, Spanish, African, Caribbean, and later migratory influences and arguing that this wider diversity should be represented. The contrast is analytically useful: gastrodplomacy requires selection, but selection can easily harden a varied culinary landscape into a small exportable repertoire.

This problem is not unique to the Dominican Republic. Work on food and national identity shows that “national cuisine” is constructed through choices about which foods and traditions become representative (Ichijo and Ranta 2016). Matta’s (2016) study of Peru likewise demonstrates that heritage-making can privilege particular actors and narratives even while invoking cultural diversity. For Dominican gastrodplomacy, the implication is not that iconic dishes should be avoided, but that institutionalization should preserve room for regional cuisines, African and Caribbean inheritances, migrant influences, and local production systems rather than reducing the national story to a fixed culinary catalogue.

Relationship-building is the second function and the one for which the interviews provide the strongest process evidence. D1 described gastronomy as a way of “connecting at the human level” and argued that shared meals can create the trust needed to advance a wider bilateral agenda. The participant recounted a difficult relationship with a Caribbean government minister that began in a tense official meeting and later changed through repeated personal engagement, including a dinner at the diplomatic residence where “the food and being at the table played an important role.” The same official subsequently occupied a transport portfolio and later approved direct air links with the Dominican Republic. The sequence cannot establish that dinner caused the aviation decision, but it demonstrates how the participant understood hospitality as part of a longer relationship-management process.

D2 offered a similar interpretation from a multilateral setting. A culinary event involving a group of ambassadors was described as a setting in which professional relationships became more personal: “it helps you forge personal relationships with people; everything changes.” Another meal among women diplomats created space for discussion about women’s leadership at the United Nations. Again, the

significance lies in the mechanism rather than in a claim of causation. Food created a socially distinct setting in which contact, trust, and political conversation could occur. This is consistent with Spence's (2016) review of how shared food environments can affect social bonding and interaction.

Tourism and economic promotion form the third function. G1 argued that international visitors can become informal "ambassadors of Dominican cuisine" when they encounter credible local food experiences. The same interview stressed that traditional, street, rural, coastal, and everyday cuisines remain central to what makes Dominican food distinctive, even as contemporary chefs reinterpret them. This perspective complicates a purely export-oriented view of gastrodiploamacy: the international projection of cuisine also depends on what visitors encounter inside the country.

The institutional context increasingly reflects that connection. The Plan Estratégico de Turismo Gastronómico Sostenible 2025–2030 aims to position the Dominican Republic as a gastronomic reference in the Caribbean and organizes action around culinary identity, local products, training, sustainability, and value-chain development (BCC Innovation 2024). The national Marca País strategy also explicitly presents gastronomy as one component of the country's external image (Marca País República Dominicana n.d.). A legislative initiative on gastronomic tourism further illustrates the movement of cuisine from promotional activity toward formal policy consideration (Senado de la República Dominicana 2025). These instruments do not constitute a single gastrodiploamacy policy, but they create domestic policy infrastructure that missions can draw upon.

The fourth function is network formation. Culinary events repeatedly bring together missions, tourism agencies, cultural institutions, gastronomy organizations, universities, chefs, hotels, producers, diaspora actors, and sponsors. G1 described the current landscape as one in which many actors "are all doing work" involving Dominican cuisine, even if their efforts remain disconnected. That fragmentation can be a weakness, but it also reveals the breadth of the network already available for institutionalization. Gastrodiploamacy in this case is not produced by a single ministry; it emerges from an ecosystem whose diplomatic value depends on coordination.

The distinction between event and function is therefore essential. A reception is an event; identity projection and relationship-building are functions. A tourism fair is an event; destination visibility, product promotion, and network formation are functions. Treating the number of culinary events as a proxy for impact would obscure this difference. The more relevant question is whether a given activity is designed around a clear function and whether its relationships, narratives, and lessons accumulate over time.

Table 3
From culinary activity to diplomatic function in the Dominican case

Diplomatic arena	Primary function	Empirical manifestations	Foreign-policy relevance
Official receptions and diplomatic meals	Identity projection; relationship-building	National-day receptions, residence dinners, official lunches	Creates settings for identity projection, access, hospitality, dialogue, and informal contact
Cultural and diaspora programming	Identity projection; network formation	Dominican weeks, community events, tastings	Connects foreign publics and diaspora networks to national narratives
Tourism and promotional spaces	Tourism and economic promotion	Tourism fairs, hotels, resorts, culinary demonstrations	Links cuisine to destination visibility, visitor experience, and product exposure
Fairs, festivals, and specialist events	Network formation; tourism and economic promotion	Food festivals, hospitality congresses, multilateral cultural events	Builds partnerships with chefs, institutions, businesses, producers, and media

Source: developed from the interview and documentary evidence analyzed in this study.

Institutional Coordination and Strategic Consolidation

The strongest area of agreement across the two professional groups concerns the need for greater continuity, but the language used to describe that problem differs. Diplomats focused on the constraints of implementation: limited budgets, ingredient availability, venue restrictions, specialist labor, and the practical difficulty of maintaining quality. Gastronomy specialists focused more heavily on institutional fragmentation. G2 characterized current policy as “isolated cases,” while G1 argued that separate institutional efforts produce results but often remain “personal or institutional achievements” rather than parts of a common strategy.

This distinction helps reframe institutionalization analytically. The evidence does not point simply to an absence of policy; it reveals a gap between recurrent practice and institutional memory. Missions learn how to adapt recipes, identify reliable cooks, source products, build local partnerships, and select narratives that work with particular audiences. Yet those lessons are difficult to transfer across postings and institutions. When personnel rotate or local partners change, part of the capacity can disappear. Institutionalization therefore concerns the preservation and circulation of practical knowledge as much as the creation of new programs.

The Dominican policy environment already contains partial building blocks. MIREX has produced both a national gastronomy publication and standardized guidance for Dominican cultural programming abroad (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de la República Dominicana 2024a, 2024b). The Marca País

strategy connects gastronomy to national image, tourism, exports, and cultural influence (Marca País República Dominicana n.d.). The 2025–2030 gastronomic-tourism plan provides a domestic framework for culinary identity, products, professional training, and value-chain coordination (BCC Innovation 2024). Meanwhile, the gastronomic-tourism bill introduced in 2025 sought to place culinary heritage more explicitly within tourism policy (Senado de la República Dominicana 2025). The institutional question is how these instruments relate to diplomatic implementation rather than whether relevant policy activity exists at all.

The interviews suggest that strategic coordination would require a limited set of connective mechanisms rather than a large new bureaucracy. G1 called for a structure capable of integrating sectors and creating common protocols, while G3 emphasized that existing interministerial and public-private mechanisms have not been fully activated. Diplomats, by contrast, stressed the need for usable resources: access to chefs, reliable suppliers, adaptable formats, and the ability to work with local communities. Taken together, the two perspectives imply that coordination must be both horizontal and operational. A strategy that aligns institutions but does not help missions execute events would remain symbolic; mission-level improvisation without common priorities would remain fragmented.

This is where the five-stage continuum becomes useful. The evidence places the Dominican Republic beyond culinary presence because missions repeatedly use gastronomy for explicit diplomatic purposes. It also shows elements of strategic coordination through standardized cultural guidance, tourism planning, country-branding initiatives, and recurring partnerships. What remains incomplete is institutionalization in the stronger sense: mechanisms that routinely transfer knowledge, align actors, stabilize access to expertise, and connect mission activity to institutional learning. Foreign-policy integration would go one step further by linking culinary programming to defined external objectives and evaluating whether the activity generated relevant relationships, visibility, partnerships, or follow-up.

The continuum also clarifies why institutionalization should not mean uniformity. D3's account of adapting Dominican food to Austrian audiences demonstrates that effective culinary diplomacy depends on local judgment. D2's experience with diaspora cooks in Belgium and Luxembourg shows that local community infrastructure can be decisive. A centralized system that prescribed identical menus or formats would undermine precisely the flexibility that makes the practice workable. The policy problem is therefore how to standardize purpose, quality, and learning without standardizing every culinary performance.

The question of representation becomes more important as coordination increases. Institutionalization inevitably privileges some dishes, products, chefs, regions, and historical narratives because official programs cannot present everything at once. G2's emphasis on the multiple cultural sources of Dominican cuisine and G1's defense of everyday local cooking both caution against a model built only around a small number of polished national symbols. A strategically coherent gastrodiploamacy should therefore be capable of using iconic entry points while rotating regional, African-derived, Caribbean, rural, urban, and migratory elements into the national story.

Seen in this way, proposals for recurring events, chef networks, diaspora partnerships, product promotion, and evaluation are not merely recommendations. They are evidence about the institutional conditions required for a practice to move along the continuum. Recurrence creates familiarity; coordination links otherwise isolated activity; institutionalization preserves knowledge and capacity; foreign-policy integration gives the activity a defined place within external action. The Dominican case is analytically valuable because those stages can be observed simultaneously rather than only after a mature national campaign has already been established.

Discussion

The Dominican case contributes to gastrodiploacy scholarship by showing that practice can precede policy. A state may accumulate a substantial repertoire of culinary diplomatic activity before it develops a named national campaign, dedicated budget, or fully coordinated strategy. This matters because campaign-centered research can obscure forms of gastrodiploacy that are already institutionalizing from below through repeated mission-level performances, sectoral partnerships, and diaspora networks.

A practice perspective makes this intermediate condition visible. Neumann (2002) and Adler and Pouliot (2011) argue that international politics is constituted not only through formal decisions and discourse but through patterned performances. In the Dominican case, menu selection, adaptation, sourcing, storytelling, hosting, relationship management, and partner mobilization are not background details. They are the practical actions through which gastrodiploacy exists. The empirical contribution is therefore not simply that Dominican cuisine appears abroad, but that repeated culinary performances already form a recognizable diplomatic repertoire even in the absence of a single consolidated policy.

This perspective also clarifies the difference between the Dominican and Colombian cases. Castilla-Corzo and Colmenares-Castro (2026) examine a Colombian configuration in which nation branding, ProColombia, state dinners, and the foreign ministry's promotional plan provide visible institutional anchors. The Dominican case is more dispersed. Missions, tourism actors, specialist organizations, diaspora communities, and cultural institutions participate in culinary projection through overlapping but uneven channels. Neither configuration is treated here as a benchmark for the other. The comparison instead demonstrates that gastrodiploacy can take different institutional forms within Latin America.

The evidence also complicates the conventional distinction between gastrodiploacy and culinary diplomacy. Public-facing events, elite residence dinners, tourism fairs, and community programs repeatedly overlap in audience and purpose. An embassy reception can simultaneously involve officials, business actors, media, diaspora leaders, and members of the public. A tourism event may generate both destination visibility and bilateral contacts. A private dinner may support a relationship that later matters in institutional cooperation. The analytical value of the four functions—identity projection, relationship-building, tourism and economic promotion, and network formation—is that they travel across these event types more consistently than rigid public/private categories.

The small-state dimension is equally important. For a Caribbean state with uneven mission resources and a large diaspora, a networked model may be more realistic than a heavily centralized campaign. Small-state diplomacy often relies on specialization, reputation, and the selective mobilization of networks (Braveboy-Wagner 2008). The Dominican case suggests that gastronomy can become one such specialization because it is portable across diplomatic, tourism, commercial, and community settings. Its weakness is the same feature that gives it flexibility: when capacity is dispersed, continuity can depend heavily on individual initiative.

A more critical reading concerns national representation. Gastrodiplomacy scholarship can become celebratory when it treats “national cuisine” as a coherent asset waiting to be exported. The interviews show instead that representation is selective and contested. One specialist prioritized emblematic dishes, another emphasized a much wider history of Indigenous, African, European, Caribbean, and migratory contributions, and another stressed the importance of everyday local cooking over highly stylized cuisine. This tension mirrors broader research on food and nationhood, in which state-backed culinary narratives can create visibility while also narrowing the range of identities that receive recognition (Ichijo and Ranta 2016; Matta 2016). Institutionalization therefore raises not only an efficiency question—how to coordinate—but a representational one—what version of Dominican cuisine becomes official.

The practice-to-policy continuum synthesizes these findings. Culinary presence describes food appearing as hospitality or accompaniment. Recurrent diplomatic practice begins when missions repeatedly use cuisine for defined diplomatic purposes. Strategic coordination links those practices to common narratives, partners, and priorities. Institutionalization adds continuity, guidance, resources, and mechanisms for transferring knowledge. Foreign-policy integration connects culinary activity routinely to external objectives and institutional learning. The Dominican Republic demonstrates extensive recurrent practice, clear elements of strategic coordination, and emerging but incomplete institutionalization. The framework is intended as an analytical continuum rather than a universal sequence; states may advance unevenly across dimensions or institutionalize some functions more fully than others.

Practical implications

The framework has direct implications for diplomatic practice. Culinary activity should be designed around a defined function rather than assessed primarily by the number of events organized. A residence dinner aimed at bilateral relationship-building requires a different audience, narrative, menu, partner mix, and follow-up strategy from a public food festival, a tourism activation, or a product-promotion event. Making that purpose explicit can help missions distinguish ceremonial presence from strategically useful practice.

The evidence also points to coordination mechanisms that strengthen continuity without overcentralizing implementation. Central institutions can provide common objectives, narrative resources, quality guidance, access to culinary expertise, partner databases, and simple evaluation tools,

while missions retain discretion over local adaptation. This balance is particularly important where ingredients, audiences, diaspora capacity, budgets, and regulatory environments vary widely across postings.

A third implication concerns institutional learning. Short qualitative debriefs can capture which audiences were reached, which partners were mobilized, what products or narratives generated engagement, and whether follow-up relationships emerged. Such information is unlikely to prove that gastrodiploacy caused a policy outcome, but it can prevent practical knowledge from disappearing when personnel rotate and can allow successful formats to be adapted elsewhere.

Finally, coordination should preserve representational breadth. Iconic dishes and products offer useful entry points, but a mature strategy should rotate regional cuisines, African and Caribbean inheritances, migratory influences, producers, and everyday culinary traditions into international programming. Strategic coherence need not mean culinary uniformity.

Limitations and future research

The study has several limitations. Its six participants constitute a purposive expert sample rather than a representative cross-section of all Dominican missions or gastronomy actors. The evidence is concentrated in selected diplomatic experiences and specialist perspectives, and the documentary corpus is designed to illuminate institutional context rather than to provide an exhaustive policy archive. The study does not measure foreign audience perceptions, quantify tourism or commercial effects, or establish causal links between culinary activities and bilateral outcomes.

The interview material also reflects retrospective interpretation. Participants may attribute significance to memorable events in ways that cannot be independently isolated from other diplomatic, political, or commercial factors. For that reason, the analysis treats such accounts as evidence of mechanisms and practitioner understandings rather than as causal proof. A single-researcher qualitative design also means that the thematic organization of the material was interpretive rather than the product of inter-coder reliability testing.

Future research could compare Dominican missions with different resource levels, examine foreign audience responses, and test the five-stage continuum across other Caribbean and small-state cases. Longitudinal work could track whether recurring culinary programming creates durable changes in networks, destination associations, product visibility, or institutional routines. Comparative research could also examine which cuisines, regions, and communities become more or less visible as gastrodiploacy becomes formalized.

Conclusion

The Dominican case shows that gastrodiploamacy need not begin with a national campaign. It can emerge first as a repertoire of recurrent diplomatic practices: serving national cuisine, adapting it to host-country contexts, using meals to build relationships, connecting food to tourism and products, and mobilizing diaspora and specialist networks. Those practices can already be understood as performing identifiable foreign-policy functions even when they remain unevenly coordinated.

The five-stage continuum developed here—culinary presence, recurrent diplomatic practice, strategic coordination, institutionalization, and foreign-policy integration—provides a way to analyze that transition without assuming that formal policy must come first. In the Dominican Republic, the evidence points to extensive recurrent practice, growing coordination, and partial institutionalization. The central challenge is not to replace local flexibility with a single rigid program, but to create enough continuity, knowledge transfer, and shared purpose for repeated activity to accumulate rather than disappear with individual events or postings.

The case also demonstrates that institutionalization is not only a managerial process. It is a representational one. Decisions about which dishes, products, regions, histories, and communities embody the country abroad shape the national story being projected. A strategically coherent gastrodiploamacy therefore requires both institutional capacity and cultural breadth.

The Dominican case ultimately suggests that the strategic value of gastrodiploamacy lies less in the occasional visibility of national cuisine than in the institutional capacity to turn repeated culinary encounters into accumulated diplomatic relationships.

Declarations

Competing Interests

The author is employed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Dominican Republic, an institution discussed in the manuscript. The views expressed in the article are those of the author alone and do not represent the official position of the Ministry or the Government of the Dominican Republic.

Author Contribution

R.A.G.F. conceived and designed the study, conducted the documentary research and semi-structured interviews, analysed the data, and wrote, reviewed, and revised the manuscript.

Data Availability

The data supporting this study consist of documentary sources and semi-structured interviews conducted with Dominican diplomats and gastronomy experts. Publicly available documentary sources

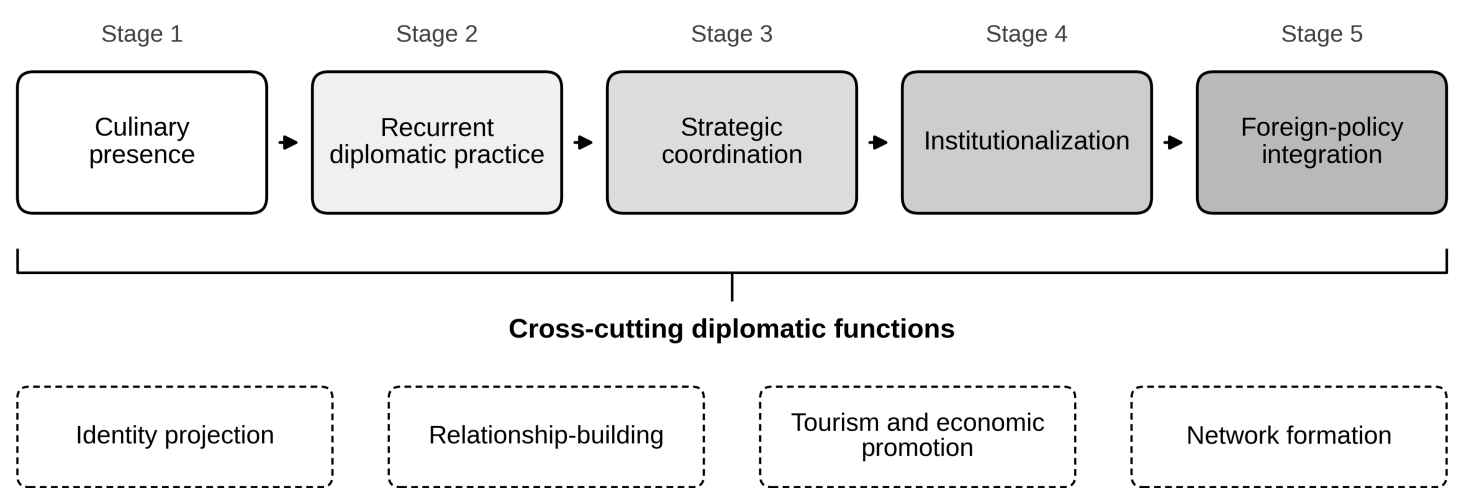
are cited in the article. Interview materials may be made available by the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to applicable confidentiality and consent considerations.

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Figures



Analytical continuum: practices may develop unevenly across functions; the stages are not assumed to be automatic or strictly sequential.

Figure 1

Practice-to-policy continuum for gastrodiplomacy

