



GASTRODIPLOMACY AND CULINARY TOURISM: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW ON SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the intersection between gastrodiploMACy, culinary tourism, and small and medium enterprise skills development within the tourism industry. Through comprehensive analysis of 295 scholarly articles from the Scopus database spanning 2003-2025, this research investigates how gastrodiploMACy strategies can enhance culinary tourism while developing SME operator capabilities in food and hospitality sectors. The study employs a mixed-methods approach. Findings reveal that gastrodiploMACy serves as a bridge between cultural diploMACy and tourism development, with significant implications for SME capacity building, destination branding, and sustainable tourism growth. The study identifies critical skill areas for SME operators including digital marketing, cultural authenticity maintenance, quality standardization, and international customer service. Results indicate that effective gastrodiploMACy implementation requires coordinated efforts between government policies, tourism authorities, and local SME support systems. This research contributes to the theoretical understanding of gastrodiploMACy's role in tourism development while providing practical insights for policymakers and tourism practitioners seeking to leverage local culinary assets for economic development.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The intersection of food, culture, and diplomacy has emerged as a significant phenomenon in contemporary international relations and tourism development. Gastrodiplomacy, defined as the use of food and culinary traditions as instruments of cultural diplomacy and soft power projection, has gained considerable attention from scholars and practitioners in tourism, hospitality, and international relations (Rockower, 2012). This diplomatic approach leverages the universal appeal of food to foster cultural understanding, promote national identity, and stimulate economic development through tourism.

In the contemporary global tourism landscape, culinary experiences have transcended their traditional role as mere sustenance to become primary motivators for travel decisions. The World Tourism Organization recognizes food tourism as one of the fastest-growing segments of the industry, contributing significantly to destination competitiveness and local economic development (UNWTO, 2017). This evolution has created unprecedented opportunities for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the food and hospitality sector to participate in global tourism markets while preserving and promoting their cultural heritage.

The significance of SMEs in tourism development cannot be overstated, particularly in developing economies where these enterprises often serve as the backbone of local tourism infrastructure. SMEs in the culinary tourism sector face unique challenges including limited resources, technological constraints, skills gaps, and difficulties in accessing international markets (Henderson, 2011). However, gastrodiplomacy initiatives present opportunities for these enterprises to enhance their capabilities, expand their market reach, and contribute to broader destination development objectives.

Gastrodiplomacy represents a contemporary manifestation of cultural diplomacy that utilizes food as a medium for international engagement and cultural exchange. The concept builds upon Rockower, P. S, (2012) soft power theory, which emphasizes the ability to influence others through attraction rather than coercion. Food, as a universal human experience, possesses unique qualities that make it an effective tool for cultural communication and diplomatic engagement.

The theoretical framework of gastrodiplomacy encompasses several key dimensions. First, it serves as a mechanism for nation branding, allowing countries to project positive images and create emotional connections with international audiences. Second, it functions as a catalyst for cultural preservation and innovation, encouraging the maintenance of traditional culinary practices while adapting to contemporary tastes and preferences. Third, it acts as an economic development tool, stimulating tourism, agriculture, and related industries.

Recent scholarship has expanded the understanding of gastrodiplomacy beyond government-led initiatives to include grassroots movements, diaspora communities, and private sector engagement. This broader conceptualization recognizes the role of various stakeholders in shaping and implementing gastrodiplomacy strategies, including SMEs that serve as authentic ambassadors of local culinary culture.

1.1 Culinary Tourism and Destination Development

Culinary tourism has evolved from a niche market segment to a mainstream tourism phenomenon, with destinations increasingly recognizing food as a core component of their tourism offerings. The field has developed sophisticated frameworks for understanding tourist motivations, experiences, and behaviors related to food consumption while traveling.

Research demonstrates that culinary experiences contribute to destination image formation, tourist satisfaction, and loyalty intentions. The authenticity of food experiences emerges as a critical factor, with tourists seeking genuine cultural encounters through local cuisine. This emphasis on authenticity creates opportunities for SMEs that can offer traditional, locally-rooted culinary experiences.

The integration of culinary tourism into broader destination development strategies requires coordination among multiple stakeholders, including government agencies, tourism boards, hospitality providers, and local food producers. Successful implementation depends on the development of supporting infrastructure, quality standards, marketing strategies, and human resource capabilities.

1.2 SME Development in Tourism Contexts

Small and medium enterprises constitute the majority of tourism businesses globally, playing crucial roles in service delivery, employment generation, and local economic development. In culinary tourism contexts, SMEs include restaurants, food producers, tour operators, accommodation providers, and related service businesses.

Research identifies several factors critical to SME success in tourism, including access to markets, financial resources, technology, and skilled human resources. Skills development emerges as a particularly important factor, encompassing technical culinary skills, business management capabilities, marketing expertise, and cultural competencies.

The literature reveals significant challenges facing SMEs in accessing training and development opportunities, including cost constraints, time limitations, geographical barriers, and lack of customized programs. These challenges are often amplified in rural or developing economy contexts where culinary tourism SMEs are frequently located.

Despite the growing recognition of gastrodiplomacy's potential and the critical role of SMEs in culinary tourism, there remains a significant gap in systematic understanding of how these elements interact to create sustainable tourism development. Current literature tends to examine these themes in isolation, lacking comprehensive analysis of their interconnections and practical implications for policy and practice (Hall & Gössling, 2016).

This systematic literature review addresses this gap by examining the relationship between gastrodiplomacy, culinary tourism, and SME skills development. The study aims to synthesize existing knowledge, identify research patterns and gaps, and provide insights for future research and practice in this emerging field. An in-depth theoretical review is necessary to understand the theoretical foundations of these three main concepts and how they interact within the context of sustainable tourism development.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This systematic literature review follows Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses guidelines to ensure methodological rigor and transparency. The review employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative bibliometric analysis with qualitative content analysis to provide comprehensive insights into the research domain.

The primary data source is Scopus database, chosen for comprehensive coverage of peer-reviewed academic literature across multiple disciplines relevant to the research topic. The search strategy employed a combination of keywords related to gastrodiploMACY, culinary tourism, and SME development. Initial search yielded 295 relevant articles published between 2003 and 2025, representing a comprehensive sample of scholarly literature in this domain.

Articles were included if they met following criteria: published in peer-reviewed academic journals, available in English language, related to gastrodiploMACY, culinary tourism, or SME development in tourism contexts, and published between 2003 and 2025. Exclusion criteria included non-academic publications, articles not available in English, and studies unrelated to tourism or hospitality contexts.

The analysis employed both quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative analysis included bibliometric examination of publication trends, citation patterns, journal distributions, and geographic coverage. Qualitative analysis involved thematic content analysis of abstracts and key sections to identify recurring themes, theoretical frameworks, and research gaps.

2.1 Search Strategy and Data Collection

The primary data source for this review is the Scopus database, chosen for its comprehensive coverage of peer-reviewed academic literature across multiple disciplines relevant to the research topic. The search strategy employed a combination of keywords related to gastrodiploMACY, culinary tourism, and SME development.

The initial search yielded 295 relevant articles published between 2003 and 2025, representing a comprehensive sample of scholarly literature in this domain. All articles included in the analysis are peer-reviewed publications in English, ensuring quality and accessibility.

2.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Articles were included in the review if they met the following criteria:

1. Published in peer-reviewed academic journals
2. Available in English language
3. Related to gastrodiploMACY, culinary tourism, or SME development in tourism
4. Published between 2003 and 2025

Exclusion criteria included:

1. Non-academic publications (reports, conference proceedings without peer review)

2. Articles not available in English
3. Studies unrelated to tourism or hospitality contexts

2.3 Data Analysis Approach

The analysis employed both quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative analysis included bibliometric examination of publication trends, citation patterns, journal distributions, and geographic coverage. Qualitative analysis involved thematic content analysis of abstracts and key sections to identify recurring themes, theoretical frameworks, and research gaps.

Table 1. Data Analysis

Analysis Type	Method	Purpose
Bibliometric	Publication trend analysis	Identify research evolution patterns
Bibliometric	Citation analysis	Determine influential studies and authors
Bibliometric	Journal analysis	Map disciplinary coverage
Content	Thematic analysis	Identify key research themes
Content	Framework analysis	Map theoretical approaches
Content	Gap analysis	Identify research opportunities

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The bibliometric analysis reveals significant growth in research interest in gastrodiplomacy and culinary tourism over the past two decades. Publication activity shows a marked increase from 2015 onwards, with peak years in 2022-2024, indicating the emerging importance of this research domain. The temporal distribution demonstrates the relatively recent emergence of systematic academic interest in these topics, with approximately 85% of publications occurring since 2016.

Table 3.1 Publication Distribution by Time Period

Time Period	Number of Publications	Percentage	Growth Trend
2003-2010	14	4.7%	Initial Stage
2011-2015	31	10.5%	Slow Growth
2016-2020	142	48.1%	Exponential Growth
2021-2025	108	36.6%	Consolidation

The exponential growth starting in 2016 indicates that gastrodiplomacy and culinary tourism have become mature research areas with significant theoretical and practical

implications. This aligns with findings by Okumus et al. (2018), who stated that culinary tourism has evolved from a niche market segment to a mainstream tourism phenomenon.

Disciplinary Coverage and Journal Analysis

The analysis of source publications reveals interdisciplinary coverage spanning tourism and hospitality management, international relations, cultural studies, and business management. Top-ranking journals by publication volume include Sustainability with 23 publications, Geojournal of Tourism and Geosites with 13 publications, and Tourism Management Perspectives with 9 publications.

Table 3.2 Top 10 Journals by Number of Publications

Rank	Journal Name	Publications	Focus Area
1	Sustainability	23	Sustainable tourism
2	Geojournal of Tourism and Geosites	13	Geographic tourism studies
3	Tourism Management Perspectives	9	Strategic tourism management
4	British Food Journal	9	Food and hospitality studies
5	Foods	7	Food science and culture
6	Tourism and Hospitality	6	Hospitality management
7	Journal of Tourism Futures	6	Future tourism trends
8	International Journal of Gastronomy	5	Gastronomy research
9	International Journal of Tourism Research	5	Tourism research
10	Current Issues in Tourism	4	Contemporary tourism issues

This distribution indicates that gastrodiploMACY and culinary tourism research spans multiple academic disciplines, reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of these phenomena and the need for integrated theoretical approaches.

3.1 Thematic Content Analysis

Content analysis reveals several dominant themes in the literature that can be categorized into five main areas:

3.1.1 Cultural Authenticity and Heritage Preservation

A significant portion of the literature focuses on the role of food in preserving and transmitting cultural heritage. Studies examine how culinary tourism can serve as a mechanism for maintaining traditional food practices while adapting to contemporary market demands (Cohen & Avieli, 2004). This theme is particularly relevant for SMEs that often serve as custodians of traditional culinary knowledge.

Timothy (2016) emphasizes that authenticity in culinary tourism is not only about maintaining traditional recipes but also about preserving the cultural context and social meanings associated with food. This creates challenges for SMEs in balancing tradition preservation with adaptation to modern tourist preferences.

3.1.2 Destination Branding and Marketing

Research extensively explores how culinary assets contribute to destination image formation and competitive positioning. Studies investigate the effectiveness of food-based marketing strategies, the role of culinary events and festivals, and the integration of gastronomy into broader destination branding efforts (Horng & Tsai, 2010).

Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen (2016) argue that local food can function as a powerful destination differentiator, creating unique experiences that are difficult for competitors to replicate. However, this requires effective coordination among various stakeholders, including SMEs, to ensure quality consistency and authenticity.

3.1.3 Tourist Experience and Satisfaction

The literature reveals considerable interest in understanding tourist motivations, experiences, and satisfaction related to culinary tourism. Studies examine factors influencing food tourism participation, the relationship between culinary experiences and overall trip satisfaction, and the impact of food quality on destination loyalty (Kim et al., 2009).

Chang and Mak (2018) developed a comprehensive model of gastronomic image formation from tourists' perspectives, showing that memorable culinary experiences can significantly influence overall destination evaluation and revisit intentions.

3.1.4 Economic Development and SME Participation

There is a growing body of research examining the economic impacts of culinary tourism, with particular attention to opportunities for local business development. Studies investigate how SMEs can participate in culinary tourism value chains, the challenges they face, and strategies for enhancing their competitiveness (Telfer & Wall, 2000).

Henderson (2009) identified that SMEs in the culinary tourism sector face various barriers including limited access to financing, lack of managerial skills, and difficulties in

meeting international quality standards. However, with appropriate support, SMEs can become important drivers of local economic growth.

3.1.5 Policy and Governance

An emerging research area examines the implementation and evaluation of gastrodiplomacy policies, particularly regarding their effectiveness in supporting SME development and achieving broader tourism development objectives (Wilson, 2013).

Poulston and Yiu (2011) highlight the importance of coordination between various government levels and the private sector in implementing effective gastrodiplomacy strategies. They emphasize that gastrodiplomacy success requires a multi-stakeholder approach involving government, tourism organizations, and local businesses including SMEs.

3.1.6 Citation Analysis and Influential Works

Citation analysis identifies several highly influential works that have shaped the field. The most cited studies focus on:

Table 3.3 Most Influential Works by Citation Count

Theme	Top Study	Citations	Key Contribution
Culinary Tourism Theory	Hall & Sharples (2003)	552	Foundational framework for food tourism
Destination Branding	Horng & Tsai (2010)	298	Government role in culinary tourism promotion
Tourist Behavior	Chang & Mak (2018)	245	Tourist gastronomic image formation
SME Development	Okumus et al. (2013)	189	Local cuisine in destination promotion
Gastrodiplomacy	Rockower (2012)	167	Conceptualization of gastrodiplomacy as soft power

The citation analysis presented in Table 3 reveals several important patterns regarding the intellectual structure and theoretical foundations of gastrodiplomacy and culinary tourism research. The most cited work by Hall and Sharples (2003) with 552 citations represents the seminal contribution to culinary tourism theory, establishing the fundamental conceptual framework that distinguishes between the consumption of experiences versus the experience of consumption in food tourism contexts. This foundational work has been instrumental in legitimizing food tourism as a distinct academic discipline and continues to be referenced extensively across diverse tourism studies.

The second most influential work by Horng and Tsai (2010) with 298 citations demonstrates the significant academic interest in understanding government's strategic role in culinary tourism development. Their cross-national analysis of East Asian government websites revealed the varying approaches to culinary tourism promotion and highlighted the importance of coordinated policy interventions. This work has been particularly influential in policy-oriented research and has informed numerous subsequent studies on destination management strategies.

Chang and Mak's (2018) study, with 245 citations, represents a methodological breakthrough in understanding tourist perceptions through the application of repertory grid technique to gastronomic image formation. Their work has been widely cited for its innovative methodological approach and has influenced subsequent research on tourist behavior and destination image studies. The study's emphasis on subjective tourist experiences has contributed to the shift toward more experiential approaches in tourism research.

The work by Okumus et al. (2013) with 189 citations specifically addresses SME participation in culinary tourism, making it highly relevant to the current review's focus. Their research on small Caribbean destinations provided crucial insights into how local businesses can leverage indigenous culinary traditions for tourism development. This study has been influential in establishing the connection between authentic local cuisine and destination competitiveness, particularly for small-scale tourism operations.

Rockower's (2012) conceptualization of gastrodiploacy, despite having the lowest citation count (167) among the top five, represents the foundational work in this emerging field. The relatively lower citation count reflects the nascent nature of gastrodiploacy research compared to the more established culinary tourism domain. However, this work has been pivotal in establishing gastrodiploacy as a legitimate area of academic inquiry and has influenced subsequent research on food-based cultural diplomacy initiatives.

The citation patterns reveal a clear theoretical hierarchy, with foundational tourism theory receiving the highest recognition, followed by policy and management perspectives, methodological innovations, SME-focused research, and finally the emerging gastrodiploacy concept. This distribution suggests that the field has evolved from broad theoretical foundations toward more specialized applications, with gastrodiploacy representing the newest frontier in this research domain. The substantial citation differences also indicate varying levels of theoretical maturity across different sub-domains, with culinary tourism theory being well-established while gastrodiploacy research remains in its developmental phase.

3.2 Skills Development Framework for SMEs

Based on the literature analysis, this study proposes a comprehensive skills development framework for SMEs operating in gastrodiploacy and culinary tourism contexts:

Table 3.4 SME Skills Development Framework

Skill Domain	Specific Skills	Priority Level	Expected Impact
Culinary Technical Skills	Traditional cooking methods, food safety, quality control	High	Product quality and authenticity enhancement
Business Management	Financial management, operational planning, human resources	High	Operational efficiency and business sustainability
Cultural Competency	Heritage knowledge, authenticity maintenance, intercultural communication	High	Cultural preservation and authentic experiences
Quality Assurance	Service standards, customer feedback, continuous improvement	High	Customer satisfaction and reputation
Marketing Communication	Digital marketing, storytelling, customer relations	Medium	Market reach and brand awareness
Technology Integration	Digital platforms, online booking systems, social media	Medium	Operational efficiency and market access

The SME Skills Development Framework presented in Table 4 represents a comprehensive synthesis of skill requirements identified through the systematic literature review, categorized by priority levels and expected impact areas. This framework addresses the critical gap in understanding specific competency needs for SMEs operating within gastrodiplomacy and culinary tourism contexts.

The four skill domains classified as "High Priority" reflect the fundamental capabilities that directly influence SME success in culinary tourism markets. Culinary Technical Skills emerge as the foundational requirement, encompassing traditional cooking methods that preserve authentic culinary heritage while meeting contemporary food safety standards and quality control measures. The literature consistently emphasizes that authenticity represents a core value proposition for culinary tourism experiences, making traditional cooking competencies essential for SME differentiation (Timothy, 2016). Simultaneously, adherence to international food safety standards becomes crucial as SMEs engage with diverse tourist populations with varying health and safety expectations.

Business Management capabilities represent the second high-priority domain, addressing the fundamental operational competencies necessary for sustainable enterprise

development. The literature reveals that many SMEs in developing tourism destinations lack basic financial management skills, leading to cash flow problems and business failure (Henderson, 2009). Operational planning skills enable SMEs to manage seasonal fluctuations typical in tourism markets, while human resources management becomes critical as businesses scale to meet tourist demand. The high priority assigned to this domain reflects its direct impact on business viability and growth potential.

Cultural Competency emerges as a uniquely important skill domain for gastrodiploacy contexts, encompassing heritage knowledge that enables SMEs to serve as authentic cultural ambassadors. This competency involves not merely knowing traditional recipes but understanding the cultural narratives, historical contexts, and social meanings embedded in culinary traditions. Intercultural communication skills become essential as SMEs interact with international tourists from diverse cultural backgrounds. The literature emphasizes that successful gastrodiploacy requires genuine cultural exchange rather than superficial cultural display (Cohen & Avieli, 2004).

Quality Assurance represents the fourth high-priority domain, addressing the systematic approaches necessary for maintaining consistent service excellence. This includes establishing service standards that meet international tourist expectations while preserving local authenticity. Customer feedback systems enable continuous learning and adaptation, which the literature identifies as crucial for SME competitiveness in dynamic tourism markets. The emphasis on continuous improvement reflects the iterative nature of service quality enhancement in hospitality contexts.

The two medium-priority domains, while important, are positioned as secondary development areas that can be addressed once foundational high-priority skills are established. Marketing Communication skills, including digital marketing and storytelling capabilities, enable SMEs to reach broader markets and communicate their unique value propositions effectively. The medium priority reflects the availability of external marketing support through destination marketing organizations and the possibility of collaborative marketing arrangements among local SMEs.

Technology Integration, while increasingly important in contemporary tourism markets, is classified as medium priority due to the availability of external technical support and the rapid evolution of digital platforms. However, the literature suggests that technology adoption becomes more critical as SMEs mature and seek to expand their market reach beyond immediate geographic boundaries (Getz et al., 2014).

The framework's design reflects a capacity-building approach that recognizes resource constraints typical of SME operations. By prioritizing skill development areas, the framework enables targeted training interventions that maximize impact given limited resources. The expected impact categories provide measurable outcomes that can guide program evaluation and continuous improvement of skills development initiatives.

This framework contributes to both theoretical understanding and practical application by providing a structured approach to SME capacity building that aligns with gastrodiploacy objectives. Theoretically, it bridges the gap between cultural diplomacy concepts and practical business development needs. Practically, it offers policymakers and

development organizations a roadmap for designing effective SME support programs that contribute to broader gastrodiplomacy and tourism development goals.

3.4 Research Gaps and Future Directions

The systematic review identifies several significant gaps in current literature that present opportunities for future research development and theoretical advancement:

3.4.1 Limited Integration between Gastrodiplomacy and SME Development

While the literature extensively covers culinary tourism and separately examines SME development, there is limited research explicitly connecting gastrodiplomacy initiatives with SME capacity building. This gap represents a significant opportunity for future research. The existing literature treats gastrodiplomacy primarily as a top-down governmental strategy focused on international relations and soft power projection, while SME development research concentrates on bottom-up economic development approaches. However, the intersection of these domains remains largely unexplored.

Future research should investigate how gastrodiplomacy policies can be designed to specifically benefit local SMEs, rather than merely using them as instruments of cultural diplomacy. This includes examining the mechanisms through which national gastrodiplomacy strategies filter down to local business levels and how SMEs can be empowered to participate actively in cultural diplomacy initiatives. Research questions should address: How can gastrodiplomacy frameworks be structured to ensure equitable SME participation? What are the optimal policy mechanisms for translating diplomatic objectives into tangible SME benefits? How do SMEs perceive and respond to being positioned as cultural ambassadors?

Additionally, research should explore the development of integrated theoretical frameworks that recognize SMEs as both economic actors and cultural agents within gastrodiplomacy systems. This could involve developing new models that bridge international relations theory with entrepreneurship and development economics to better understand the multi-level dynamics of gastrodiplomacy implementation.

3.4.2 Insufficient Attention to Skills Development

The review reveals limited systematic examination of specific skills required for SME success in gastrodiplomacy and culinary tourism contexts. Future research should investigate skill requirements, training needs, and effective development strategies through comprehensive skills gap analyses. Current literature provides fragmented insights into various competency areas but lacks holistic understanding of how different skills interact and which combinations are most critical for success.

Research should employ mixed-methods approaches to identify skill priorities across different contexts, including comparative studies across various cultural and economic settings. Future investigations should include: longitudinal studies tracking the impact of specific skills training on SME performance in culinary tourism markets; experimental research designs testing the effectiveness of different training methodologies; and

cross-cultural studies examining how skill requirements vary across different cultural contexts and tourism market conditions.

Furthermore, research should explore the development of standardized competency frameworks that can be adapted across different cultural contexts while maintaining local relevance. This includes investigating how traditional knowledge transfer mechanisms can be integrated with formal training programs and how digital technologies can enhance skills development accessibility for remote or resource-constrained SMEs.

3.4.3 Geographic and Cultural Bias

The literature demonstrates geographic concentration in developed countries and Western contexts, with limited representation of developing economies where SME-based culinary tourism may have the greatest development potential. This bias limits the generalizability of research findings and may not adequately address the unique challenges and opportunities in diverse global contexts.

Future research should prioritize studies in developing economies, particularly in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, where SME-based culinary tourism represents significant economic development opportunities. Research should examine how cultural values, economic structures, and institutional frameworks in different regions influence the effectiveness of gastrodiploacy and culinary tourism initiatives. Comparative studies across different development contexts could reveal important insights about scaling and adaptation strategies.

Additionally, research should investigate indigenous and traditional knowledge systems that may offer alternative approaches to culinary tourism development. This includes examining how traditional governance structures, community-based management systems, and indigenous culinary practices can be integrated into contemporary tourism development frameworks while maintaining cultural integrity and community ownership.

3.4.5 Policy Implementation and Evaluation

There is inadequate research on the implementation and evaluation of gastrodiploacy policies, particularly regarding their effectiveness in supporting SME development and achieving broader tourism development objectives. Current literature focuses predominantly on policy formulation and conceptual frameworks but provides limited empirical evidence about implementation challenges and outcomes.

Future research should employ longitudinal research designs to track policy implementation processes and outcomes over time. This includes developing robust evaluation frameworks that can measure both quantitative outcomes (economic impact, business growth, employment generation) and qualitative outcomes (cultural preservation, community empowerment, authenticity maintenance). Research should investigate the factors that influence successful policy implementation, including institutional capacity, stakeholder coordination, resource allocation, and monitoring mechanisms.

Additionally, research should examine the unintended consequences of gastrodiploacy policies, including potential negative impacts on local communities, cultural

commodification concerns, and environmental sustainability issues. Comparative policy analysis across different countries and contexts could reveal best practices and identify factors that contribute to successful gastrodiploMACY implementation.

3.4.6 Theoretical and Practical Implications

This systematic review contributes to theoretical understanding by identifying the interconnections between gastrodiploMACY, culinary tourism, and SME development. The analysis reveals that these phenomena operate within an integrated system where cultural diplomacy initiatives can catalyze tourism development while simultaneously building local business capabilities.

The findings have significant implications for policymakers, destination management organizations, and SME support agencies. The research demonstrates that effective gastrodiploMACY requires coordinated approaches addressing multiple intervention levels including policy-level government strategies, destination-level tourism organization recognition, and enterprise-level targeted SME support.

The review suggests the need for new theoretical frameworks that explicitly recognize SMEs' roles as cultural ambassadors and economic actors in gastrodiploMACY initiatives. Such frameworks should acknowledge the multi-level nature of gastrodiploMACY, encompassing government policies, destination management strategies, and grassroots business activities.

4. CONCLUSION

Summary

This systematic literature review provides comprehensive insights into the emerging field of gastrodiploMACY and its relationship with culinary tourism and SME development. The analysis of 295 scholarly articles reveals a rapidly growing research domain with significant theoretical and practical implications.

Key findings include rapid growth in research since 2015, interdisciplinary nature spanning multiple academic disciplines, central role of SMEs as cultural ambassadors and economic actors, comprehensive skills development needs encompassing technical, business, marketing, and cultural competencies, and significant research gaps in understanding the integration of gastrodiploMACY with SME development.

This study contributes to theoretical understanding by mapping the evolution of gastrodiploMACY and culinary tourism research, identifying interconnections between cultural diplomacy and tourism development, proposing integrated frameworks for understanding SME roles, and highlighting the need for multi-level theoretical approaches. Practical contributions include identifying critical skill areas for SME development, providing evidence for policymakers on gastrodiploMACY effectiveness, offering insights for destination management organizations, and proposing frameworks for SME support program design.

Recommendations

Based on the research findings discussed, several recommendations can be formulated. Future research should address identified limitations while pursuing research gaps including longitudinal studies of gastrodiplomacy policy implementation and impacts, comparative analysis of SME development outcomes across different cultural contexts, development and testing of integrated theoretical frameworks, investigation of technology's role in enhancing SME capabilities, and evaluation of skills development program effectiveness.

For practitioners, it is recommended that governments develop integrated strategies that align gastrodiplomacy objectives with tourism development and SME support policies, tourism organizations recognize culinary assets as core components of destination competitiveness while ensuring local SMEs have the capacity to deliver quality experiences, and SMEs require targeted support to develop capabilities necessary for participation in gastrodiplomacy and culinary tourism initiatives.

The intersection of gastrodiplomacy, culinary tourism, and SME development represents a significant opportunity for sustainable tourism development and cultural preservation. Success in this domain requires coordinated efforts among government agencies, tourism organizations, academic institutions, and local businesses.

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