
Tourism Diplomacy and the Promotion and Branding of Cyprus as a Destination

Summary

This paper is part of my 2024 PhD thesis on Cyprus's Nation Brand, focusing on Public Diplomacy (PD), Cultural Diplomacy, and Tourism Diplomacy. It explores how these areas have helped Cyprus, a small state, gain international recognition and establish a voice on the global stage. The study builds on the concepts of Soft Power and PD, focusing on Nation Branding, Competitive Identity, and Cultural Diplomacy, leading to an exploration of Tourism Diplomacy. It examines how Cyprus, as a small European state, contributes to the academic discourse on these areas, highlighting that diplomacy is not only the purview of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Rather, Cultural and Tourism Diplomacy may be more structured and impactful in enhancing Cyprus's national image. The research also provides practical insights into how small states can overcome challenges using expanded, creative diplomacy, offering solutions to potential political and economic obstacles. The study innovatively links these diplomatic forms under the umbrella of the National Brand, drawing connections between historical practices and future developments. The research adopts a qualitative, historical / narrative methodology, combining case studies, literature review, archival research, semi-structured interviews, and discourse analysis. This approach focuses on understanding the "why" and "how" behind Cyprus's diplomatic strategies, offering in-depth insights into behaviors, perceptions, and motivations, making it ideal for examining Cyprus's soft power practices. The case study of Cyprus demonstrates that small states can achieve significant diplomatic success through coordinated Public, Cultural, and Tourism Diplomacy. By acting flexibly and with minimal bureaucracy, these states can build a strong, recognizable National Brand using Soft Power. The findings suggest that the success of a state's diplomacy depends not on its size but on its vision and policies.

Key Findings of the paper to be presented:

Tourism diplomacy has become an essential form of diplomacy, providing a more flexible approach than traditional methods. Cyprus's tourism branding, particularly the 'Love Cyprus' slogan, effectively conveys the island's identity, merging destination branding with national branding for greater global visibility. Cyprus's tourism sector is highly adaptive, responding quickly to external factors and global trends. It has pioneered initiatives such as 'Celebrity diplomacy' and the 'Ambassadors in Tourism' Program, demonstrating early adoption of innovative strategies, despite some challenges in implementation. Religious diplomacy has also been successful in Cyprus, with religious tourism combining political, cultural, and tourism elements. Religion plays a vital role in Cyprus's national identity and diplomacy. Additionally, gastronomic diplomacy has strengthened Cyprus's global image, promoting its diverse society and rich culinary heritage.

Introduction

Cyprus's international image, where recognized, is often distilled into a few emblematic elements: the mythological island of Aphrodite, the enduring Cyprus Political Issue, and the globally beloved culinary export—halloumi cheese. The country is also famously known for having Europe's last divided capital, a feature that both defines and complicates its international perception. While these components are widely acknowledged, they represent only a fraction of what Cyprus could offer as a comprehensive and competitive national brand identity—particularly in the realms of tourism, culture, and diplomacy.

The nexus between tourism and international relations is intricate. Tourism and diplomacy share overlapping practices and mutually reinforcing goals, making a strict separation between Cultural and Tourism Diplomacy difficult and often dependent on specific government policies. Despite institutional acknowledgment of their interconnection, skepticism persists in some quarters. A telling metaphor from a former senior official of the Deputy Ministry of Tourism (formerly the Cyprus Tourism Organisation) likened tourism and culture to "fine ingredients" of diplomacy—spices that enrich the flavor of international engagement.¹ Tourism, in this view, provides an accessible and engaging entry point for foreigners to experience Cyprus's people, traditions, and heritage, building familiarity and affinity.

Tourism in Cyprus gained momentum in the post-World War II era, benefiting from Western Europe's economic boom in the 1950s. The island's tourism potential was further unleashed following independence in 1960. The establishment of the Cyprus Tourism Organisation in 1969 (active from 1971) marked the beginning of structured tourism promotion. Between 1960 and 1974, Cyprus emerged as a prime destination—particularly for British tourists—owing to historical connections and favorable conditions.

However, political turmoil, including intercommunal conflict in the 1960s and the Turkish invasion of 1974, dealt a heavy blow to the tourism sector, stripping Cyprus of 40% of its tourism infrastructure and revenues. In response, strategic redevelopment efforts focused on the free coastal areas of Famagusta, Larnaca, Limassol, and Pafos. Despite the lingering effects of political instability, the sector rebounded strongly.

From 1980 to 1990, tourism increased by 350%, followed by a further 72% growth between 1990 and 2000. The early 2000s saw stagnation, partially due to global tensions such as the War on Terror.² Nevertheless, recovery began around 2009 and, despite a dip during the 2013 financial crisis, Cyprus welcomed over 4 million tourists in 2024—a testament to the sector's resilience and continued appeal.

¹ Former Senior Tourism Officer of CTO, Interview (9 February 2022).

² Stelios Tsiartas, "The History of Cypriot Tourism and the CTO," InBusinessNews (July 14, 2018) (Available at <https://inbusinessnews.reporter.com.cy/business/travel-tourism/article/190435/i-istoria-toy-kypriakoy-toyrismoy-kai-o-kot>) (Accessed March 31, 2022).

Cyprus's international image—where it is known—is often shaped by a few recurring associations. The island is commonly recognized as the mythical birthplace of Aphrodite, a theme long used in tourism marketing. It is also frequently identified through the lens of geopolitics, known as the home of Europe's last divided capital, a reference to the enduring Cyprus Problem. For culinary enthusiasts, Cyprus is virtually synonymous with halloumi, its iconic traditional cheese. While these elements are familiar touchpoints, they represent only a limited aspect of Cyprus's potential as a national brand. There is vast untapped opportunity to project a more dynamic, multifaceted identity that extends well beyond tourism.

Tourism is deeply intertwined with international relations. It shares a complex and reciprocal relationship with diplomacy, often serving as both a tool and a reflection of a country's soft power. Differentiating between Cultural Diplomacy and Tourism Diplomacy is rarely straightforward, as the two frequently overlap and are typically defined by the orientation of national policy.

Although institutions increasingly recognize the interplay between tourism, culture, and diplomacy, some skeptics remain unconvinced of the depth of these connections. In response, a former senior official from the Deputy Ministry of Tourism (formerly the Cyprus Tourism Organisation) offered a compelling analogy, describing tourism and culture as the "fine ingredients" of diplomacy—spices that enhance its overall flavor. Tourism, they argued, provides an accessible and engaging way for foreigners to experience Cyprus's people, traditions, and history, helping to foster genuine connections with the island.

To fully understand the role of tourism in Cyprus's national identity, it is essential to consider its historical trajectory. The post-war economic boom in Western Europe during the 1950s set the stage for increased international travel. Following Cyprus's independence in 1960, the island began attracting significant interest as a tourist destination—particularly from the British market, due to longstanding colonial ties.

The establishment of the Cyprus Tourism Organisation in 1969, with operations commencing in 1971, marked the beginning of a more structured and strategic approach to tourism development. The period from 1960 to 1974 was characterized by steady growth. However, intercommunal tensions in the 1960s and the Turkish invasion of 1974 dealt a major blow to the industry, resulting in the loss of 40% of Cyprus's tourism capacity and infrastructure.

Despite these challenges, the country rebounded. The government prioritized development in the free coastal areas of Famagusta, Larnaca, Limassol, and Pafos. With coordinated efforts and increasing European demand, Cyprus saw remarkable growth: between 1980 and 1990, tourism increased by 350%, followed by an additional 72% growth from 1990 to 2000.

The early 2000s brought a period of stagnation, influenced in part by global instability following the War on Terror. However, the industry began to recover in 2009, showing resilience even through the 2013 economic crisis. By 2014, Cyprus welcomed over four million tourists,

generating substantial revenue and reinforcing tourism's central role in the island's economy and international profile.

The following sections will discuss 'Branding Cyprus: Tourism, Identity, and International Image', 'Tourism Ambassadors', 'Religious Tourism and Branding', and finally, Cyprus's 'Gastro-diplomacy'.

Branding Cyprus: Tourism, Identity, and International Image

Following the withdrawal of Turkish Cypriots from the government in 1963, the Republic of Cyprus has been governed exclusively by Greek Cypriots. Since then, there has been a sustained effort to enhance the country's international standing both economically and politically. In this context, Cyprus has strategically drawn from its historical and cultural assets—particularly Greek mythology—to shape a positive national image, especially one centered around Greek Cypriot identity.

The Cyprus Tourism Organisation (CTO), in particular, played a central role in this image-building process. Its campaigns aimed to attract tourists while also strengthening Cyprus's cultural presence abroad. Economic growth and heritage promotion were key goals, often intertwined through tourism marketing.

One of the most prominent symbols used was the goddess Aphrodite. Since its establishment, the CTO adopted a logo incorporating elements of ancient Greek art, positioning Cyprus as the birthplace of Aphrodite to appeal to Western audiences familiar with classical heritage. This approach sought not only to draw tourists but also to cultivate political goodwill and alliances by emphasizing shared cultural values with Europe and the West.

Campaigns such as 'Love Cyprus' and 'Cyprus in Your Heart' highlighted the island's romantic and mythological appeal, promoting both emotional and experiential tourism. While these campaigns helped establish a recognizable identity, earlier branding efforts often lacked consistency. Aphrodite, though iconic, proved to be a challenging symbol to integrate across all tourism sectors and audiences, leading to mixed results in terms of coherence and long-term strategy. For many years, Cyprus relied heavily on the 'Sun and Sea' model—an approach that offered little differentiation from other Mediterranean destinations. This overlooked Cyprus's unique geographical and cultural assets, such as its mountainous landscapes, rich archaeological heritage, and year-round activities. The 'Cyprus in Your Heart' campaign eventually aimed to address this by promoting the island as a land of contrasts—where visitors could enjoy both beach and mountain experiences in close proximity.



Logos of Cyprus Tourism Organisation (CTO).

However, the tourism sector's vulnerability was exposed during the 2013 economic crisis. Tourism declined, and the government lacked a specific crisis communication strategy, responding instead with fragmented and reactive measures. This missed opportunity underscored the need to more effectively harness Cyprus's strengths and adapt to shifting global tourism trends.

In response, a renewed communication strategy was introduced in 2015 to restore Cyprus's international image. Continuing with the 'Cyprus in Your Heart' slogan, the strategy explored new directions in tourism branding. A public competition was launched to develop a fresh identity for Cyprus's tourism sector, culminating in 2016 with the Spanish firm 'THR Asesores en Turismo' being tasked with devising a comprehensive tourism strategy and national brand.

Despite ongoing challenges, Cyprus achieved notable recognition—ranking 12th in the Good Country Index (2020), which evaluates countries based on their global contributions. Yet, its reputation suffered a setback in 2021 with the 'Cyprus Papers' scandal, involving controversial foreign investments and political corruption, which tarnished its image abroad.

Nevertheless, the commitment to tourism branding persisted. In 2019, another public competition was launched to develop a new visual identity. However, the process was suspended in 2020 due to issues of non-compliance among bidders. As a result, the Deputy Ministry of Tourism opted to evolve the existing 'Love Cyprus' brand, originally established by the CTO.



The formal, the reverse and the outline version of the logo of the new identity of the Deputy Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Cyprus (former CTO) (Available at www.visitcyprus.com).

In 2021, a new tourism logo was unveiled. Designed to convey values of love, hospitality, and cultural diversity, the logo employed a vibrant color palette reflecting Cyprus's sun, sea, nature, and heritage. It was also designed with adaptability in mind—suitable for digital platforms and modern promotional tools. The overarching goal was to present Cyprus as a year-round destination that offers a blend of cultural depth and natural beauty.

Meanwhile, in 2022, a new national identity emerged—this time focused on Cypriot products. The 'Cyprus Made' or 'Κυπριακής Προέλευσης' emblem was launched to represent authentic Cypriot goods and enhance their global competitiveness. Led by the Ministry of Energy, Commerce, and Industry, the campaign used the slogan 'Unique by Origin' (or 'Μοναδικά αυθεντικό' in Greek). The logo followed a 2020 study assessing the export potential of key Cypriot products and was intended to serve as both a quality mark and a safeguard against counterfeiting.

The 'Cyprus Made' emblem is set to appear on a wide range of products, from pharmaceuticals and cosmetics to electronics, crafts, and PDO/PGI-certified goods. Future plans may extend this branding to wine, agriculture, and services.



'Cyprus Made. Unique by origin' logo
(Available at www.meci.gov.cy) (Accessed 3.1.2022).

Unique by origin.

The design of the logo symbolizes Cyprus as a mosaic of unique elements, with geometric volumes pointing in all directions to represent the global reach of Cypriot products. The two central volumes form a checkmark (✓), symbolizing quality assurance. The color scheme draws inspiration from the Cypriot flag and coat of arms, while the slogan emphasizes authenticity and origin.

That said, the logo and its messaging raise important questions. For external audiences, particularly those aware of Cyprus's political situation, the symbols and territorial implications may inadvertently suggest division. Moreover, the proliferation of logos and slogans—across tourism, exports, and sub-brands like wine and gastronomy—risks diluting the clarity and effectiveness of Cyprus's overall brand identity.

This reflects a broader challenge: the overlap between destination branding and nation branding. For many countries, tourism remains the most visible expression of their national image. In Cyprus's case, efforts to brand its tourism sector often serve as de facto national branding. These efforts rely on familiar tactics—slogans, visual symbols, and cultural narratives—aimed at both domestic and international audiences, and focused on promoting the country's most communicable and positive attributes.

Ambassadors in Tourism

In the field of Tourism Diplomacy in Cyprus, a noteworthy initiative began in 2010 that closely resembles what is known in diplomatic literature as 'celebrity diplomacy'. 'Celebrity diplomacy' refers to the involvement of prominent personalities who lend their support to a specific cause, whether through international organizations or on behalf of a state, aiming to raise awareness about particular issues, positions, or topics to the public.

There are many examples in the literature of celebrities engaging in this role, such as UNICEF and the UN Refugee Agency, which employ 'Goodwill Ambassadors', like Angelina Jolie, and the United Nations, which has 'Messengers of Peace', like George Clooney. Notable figures also include Mia Farrow, who worked to bring international attention to the Darfur conflict, and Bono from U2, who advocates for the prevention and treatment of AIDS.

Professor A. Cooper, a specialist in diplomacy, highlights the significance of this practice, emphasizing that celebrities can play an important role in advancing critical issues through various methods. These include promoting campaigns, influencing public opinion, and intervening in diplomatic circles. He mentions the 'Bonoization' of diplomacy, stressing that personalities like Bono can impact decision-making centers by mobilizing global public opinion.³

However, some critics question this approach. Kellner, for instance, argues that celebrity diplomacy oversimplifies the complexities of international diplomacy and may exploit less valuable initiatives⁴.

In Cypriot context, the most notable Cypriot personality, widely known abroad was probably President and Archbishop Makarios, and this is a case study on its own. In Cypriot public service, the importance of 'celebrity diplomacy' was recognized early on by an unexpected institution: the Cyprus Tourism Organization (CTO). Although Cyprus was not the first country to adopt this practice, this particular initiative by the CTO called 'Ambassadors in Tourism' stands out as an intriguing example. Much like other countries or cities, such as Hiroshima, which looks for 'Tourism Ambassadors' regardless of nationality or background, Cyprus attempted to adopt a similarly open approach. More specifically, in Hiroshima, the title of 'Miss Hiroshima' was

³ Andrew F. Cooper, 'Taking Celebrity Diplomacy Seriously in International Relations' (Sep. 2009) (Available at <https://www.e-ir.info/2009/09/14/taking-celebrity-diplomacy-seriously-in-international-relations/>) (Accessed 14.1.2022).

⁴ D. Kellner, 'Celebrity diplomacy, spectacle and Barack Obama', *Celebrity Studies*, 1:1 (2010), pp. 121–123.

rebranded in 2001 as the 'Hiroshima Goodwill Ambassador'.⁵ These ambassadors were tasked with promoting the city's tourism and participated in tourism-related events. Additionally, in 2008, the 'Certified Tourism Ambassador' program was introduced to train and certify individuals who would take on this role.⁶

In Cyprus, one notable relevant example mentioned in an interview with a former Senior Tourism Officer involved efforts in Austria. Travel agents who had participated in familiarization trips to Cyprus—benefiting from complimentary accommodation, transportation, and tours—were named Sonner Kinder (Sunny Children). These agents effectively served as informal ambassadors, promoting Cyprus within Austrian tourism circles and symbolizing Cypriot hospitality abroad.

The CTO also formally launched the Ambassadors in Tourism program (2010–2016), with the goal of enhancing Cyprus's image in the international conference tourism sector. This initiative involved both prominent public and private sector figures, aiming to build Cyprus's reputation as a desirable destination for international events and conventions.

Despite its promising start, the program faced several setbacks. As noted by former CTO Board President Angelos Loizou, certain participants attempted to exploit the initiative for personal gain, undermining its credibility and effectiveness. These shortcomings led to the program's eventual suspension and reevaluation by the Ministry of Tourism.⁷

In response, the Ministry pivoted toward modern digital marketing strategies, turning to social media influencers to promote Cyprus globally. A notable example is the collaboration with Matthew Zorbas, whose work aimed to refresh and modernize Cyprus's image abroad. Although the effectiveness of influencer marketing remains a topic of debate, many view it as a potentially impactful tool in engaging younger and more diverse audiences.⁸

Ultimately, Cyprus's experience with celebrity diplomacy highlights the need for careful planning, coordination, and ethical oversight. While the CTO's centralized efforts did not fully achieve their objectives, similar strategies continue to be implemented at the local level. A case in point is the Municipality of Ayia Napa, which honors repeat visitors as informal ambassadors in an effort to foster loyalty and enhance the city's touristic appeal.⁹

⁵ 'Hiroshima Goodwill Ambassadors' (Available at <https://www.hiroshimacvb.jp/en/tourism/ambassador.html>) (Accessed 9.1.2023).

⁶ 'Certified Tourism Ambassador' (Available at <https://ctanetwork.com/>) (Accessed 9.1.2023).

⁷ Angelos Loizou, Interview (November 19, 2021).

⁸ 'Matthew Will Become the New Face of Cyprus', *Avant Garde* (September 23, 2021) (Available at <https://avant-garde.com.cy/articles/nea/o-matthew-tha-ginei-neo-prosopo-tis-kyproy>) (Accessed December 10, 2021).

⁹ 'Tourism Ambassadors', Municipality of Ayia Napa (Available at <https://www.agianapa.org.cy>) (Accessed October 21, 2022).

Religious Diplomacy and Tourism in Cyprus

The first President of the Republic of Cyprus, Archbishop Makarios, through alternative methods, tried to build international relationships that had both external and domestic significance. Among these alternative methods, cultural and religious diplomacy featured prominently and attracted considerable attention during his time—both internationally and within Cyprus.

In the years following Makarios' death, the convergence of political and religious diplomacy has persisted in Cyprus. However, it has increasingly taken the form of religious tourism rather than traditional diplomacy or actions led directly by the institutional Church, even though these coexist.

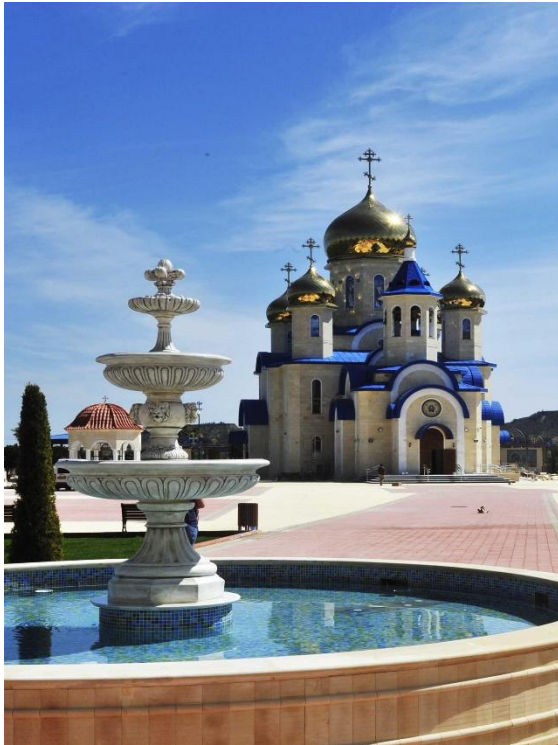
For example, as shown in the following picture, in April 2018, a significant event took place at the Archbishopric of Cyprus. Then-Archbishop Chrysostomos hosted a luncheon for the diplomatic community in Cyprus. The event brought together more than 30 ambassadors, religious leaders, and prominent figures, including the Mufti of Cyprus, the Armenian Archbishop, and the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative in Cyprus. This gathering exemplified the continued blending of diplomacy, religion, and international dialogue.



Meeting of the late Archbishop of Cyprus with foreign diplomats and religious leaders at the Holy Archbishopric of Cyprus (Available at www.ekklisiaonline.gr/nea/archiepiskopi-kyprou-synantisi-ke-gevma-thriskeftikon-igeton-me-diplomatiki-kinotita/) (Accessed 8.9.2022).

Another key illustration of this intersection is the construction of the Russian Orthodox Church in Episkopeio, completed in 2017. Funded by donations from Russian investors living in Cyprus, the church symbolizes the enduring ties between Cyprus and Russia—not only historical but also contemporary. The project received support from both religious and political authorities, as well

as from the broader Cypriot and Russian communities. It stands as a testament to the ways in which diplomacy, religion, culture, tourism, and investment converge on the island.



Russian Church of St. Andrew and Russian Saints in Episkopio (Available at <https://www.philenews.com/eidiseis/topika/article/367923/thyranoixia-toy-entyposiakoy-rosikoy-naoy-eikones>) (Accessed 17.1.2023).

While religious diplomacy is typically viewed as a subset of cultural diplomacy, this study approaches it through the lens of Cyprus's tourism strategy—specifically religious tourism. This perspective acknowledges the blurred boundaries between culture and politics in a country where religion continues to shape personal and collective identities. Religious diplomacy has proven influential in international relations, particularly in contexts where religious affiliations play a key role in shaping conflict dynamics and peace-building efforts.

Although some argue that religious diplomacy and religious tourism should remain distinct, this research posits that religious tourism can also serve as a tool for interfaith dialogue. Events such as conferences, joint publications, and collaborative projects provide platforms where cultural understanding and religious coexistence can flourish. Religious tourism includes visits to sacred sites, monasteries, churches, festivals, and locations of historical spiritual significance.

Globally, religious tourism represents a substantial market. According to the UN World Tourism Organization, it accounts for roughly 25% of global tourism. In Cyprus, estimates indicate that more than 100,000 visitors yearly in the past decade have been drawn to the island for its cultural and religious sites. Cyprus offers a rich and diverse spiritual heritage, with Orthodox Christian, Muslim, and even ancient pagan landmarks.

While religious tourism represents a smaller segment of the island's broader tourism industry, its growth potential is significant. Experts emphasize the importance of careful and respectful promotion, ensuring that the cultural and spiritual value of religious sites is preserved. Furthermore, religious tourism can foster intercultural understanding, support local communities, and offer social and economic benefits.

Institutionally, religious tourism has been on the Cypriot government's agenda since 2006. Recognizing its comparative advantage, Cyprus has hosted international conferences and produced publications to promote its religious heritage and sacred travel routes. In the post-pandemic era—where tourists are increasingly seeking wellness and meaningful cultural experiences—religious tourism is poised to expand, with Cyprus emerging as a key player in this niche yet impactful sector.

Gastrodiplomacy and Its Role in Cyprus: A Growing Tool for National Branding and Cultural Exchange

Food, as a key cultural element with significant political resonance, often plays a central role in national identity and diplomacy. Many national cuisines have taken shape amid struggles for independence, resulting in disputes over ownership of iconic dishes—such as hummus between Israel and Lebanon, falafel between Israel and Palestine, and baklava between Greece and Turkey. The European Union has recognized the significance of food heritage through certification schemes like Protected Designation of Origin (PDO), Protected Geographical Indication (PGI), and Traditional Specialties Guaranteed (TSG). These protections underscore Rockower's idea that 'to taste is to love us'—that by experiencing a country's cuisine, one is more likely to feel affection for it.¹⁰

While academic literature on gastrodiplomacy remains relatively limited, there is growing consensus on the strong connections between food, tourism, and national branding. Culinary identity is a powerful reflection of local culture and lifestyle and can serve as a strategic tool to position a country on the global stage. Okumus, for instance, observed that local cuisine could enhance a nation's image abroad.¹¹ From ancient banquets to contemporary state dinners, gastronomy has long been intertwined with diplomacy. Nye's concept of 'winning hearts and minds' is echoed in Rockower's definition of gastrodiplomacy as 'winning hearts and minds through the stomach'.¹² This sentiment is also shared by the Club des Chefs des Chefs, which asserts that 'whilst politics can sometimes divide people, good food always brings them back together'.¹³

¹⁰ Paul S. Rockower, 'Recipes for Gastrodiplomacy', *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 8:3 (2012), pp. 235-246 (238).

¹¹ S. Chapple-Sokol, 'American Food 2.0: Culinary Diplomacy at Expo 2015' (February 2014).

¹² Paul S. Rockower, 'Recipes for Gastrodiplomacy', *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 8:3 (2012), pp. 235-246.

¹³ 'Our Values', *Le Club des Chefs des Chefs* (Διαθέσιμο στο <http://www.chefs-des-chefs.com/values/>) (Ανακτήθηκε 27.1.2022).

Historically, prominent diplomats such as Talleyrand and Lord Palmerston emphasized the significance of dining in international negotiations, believing good food could ease tensions and foster agreements.¹⁴ In modern diplomacy, public attention to official menus further blurs the boundaries between public and behind-the-scenes diplomatic practice.

Despite its small size, Cyprus holds significant potential for successful gastrodiploacy. The establishment of the Hellenic Institute of Cultural Diplomacy–Cyprus in 2021 marked a step toward promoting Greek and Cypriot culture, including its culinary traditions. Renowned Cypriot chef Evi Chioti has been an outspoken advocate for leveraging Cyprus's rich Mediterranean cuisine to elevate the island's global image. She emphasizes the importance of preserving traditional recipes, proper cooking techniques, and using embassies as platforms for culinary promotion—all highlighting a need for greater coordination at the national level.

Although still emerging in Cyprus, gastrodiploacy has gained traction globally. In 2012, then–U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton launched the Diplomatic Culinary Partnership, emphasizing food as a timeless diplomatic tool.¹⁵ Similar initiatives have been championed by hospitality institutions and political leaders, such as France's Jean-Pierre Raffarin and the EHL Hotel School.¹⁶ Cyprus has also taken important steps to protect and promote its culinary identity. The Ministry of Agriculture has actively pursued certifications like PDO and PGI for iconic products including halloumi and loukoumi. These efforts aim to increase the competitiveness of Cypriot products, protect their authenticity, and promote local production and consumption.

To support this, several branding initiatives have been introduced. The 'Cyprus Breakfast' program, with the slogan 'Kalimera', aims to promote local flavors in tourism establishments. The 'Taste Cyprus – Delightful Journeys' certification ensures quality and authenticity in restaurants and shops offering traditional Cypriot cuisine and products. These standards also apply to local production units.¹⁷

Further reinforcing these efforts is the certification of Cypriot wines, particularly those produced in villages associated with Commandaria, Cyprus's famous sweet wine. The "Wine Routes" program encourages visitors to explore Cyprus through its wine-making traditions, integrating culture, heritage, and tourism. However, these certifications are only one piece of a broader strategy, which still faces challenges related to government coordination and long-term vision. In support of cultural tourism and culinary heritage, the "Craft and Wine-Gastronomy Workshop

¹⁴ Đana Luša, Ružica Jakešević, 'The Role of Food in Diplomacy: Communicating and "Winning Hearts and Minds", through food', *Media Studies*, 8:16 (August 2017), pp. 99-119.

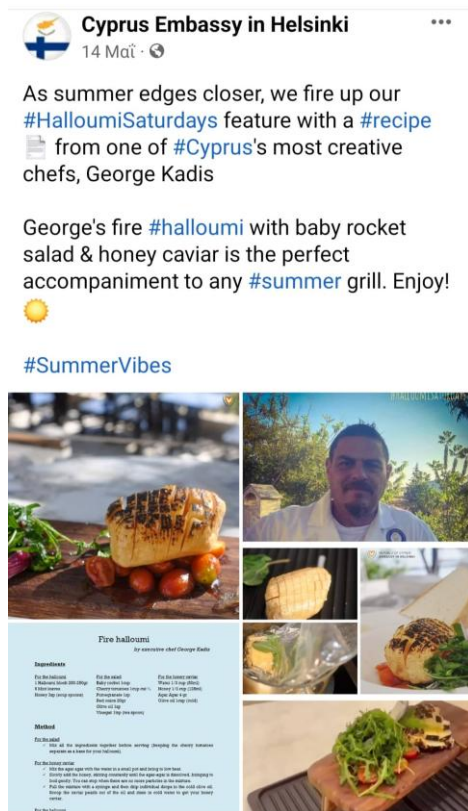
¹⁵ Dana Hughes, 'Winning Hearts and Minds Through Food', *ABC NEWS* (September 2012) (Available at <https://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2012/09/winning-hearts-and-minds-through-food/>) (Accessed 27.1.2022).

¹⁶ Đana Luša, Ružica Jakešević, 'The Role of Food in Diplomacy: Communicating and "Winning Hearts and Minds", through food', *Media Studies* 8:16, (August 2017), pp. 99-119 (p. 106).

¹⁷ 'Taste Cyprus – Delightful Journeys', Deputy Ministry of Tourism (Available at <https://www.visitcyprus.com/index.php/el/product-labels/taste-cyprus-delightful-journeys>) (Accessed January 25, 2022).

Grant Scheme” has funded nearly 3,000 free workshops, primarily in rural areas. These workshops serve to preserve tradition, promote tourism, and revitalize local economies.

The Ministry of Energy, Commerce, and Industry has also introduced a bill to support ‘Home Crafts’, encouraging traditional entrepreneurship and offering financial support to small businesses. These businesses allow tourists to directly experience local culture and crafts, further enriching their connection to Cyprus.



Screenshot about #HalloumiSaturdays from the Facebook Page of Cyprus Embassy in Helsinki (Summer 2022).

One notable example of successful Cypriot gastrodiplomacy is Michelin-starred chef Andreas Mavrommatis, whose restaurant group in France showcases Cypriot cuisine on an international stage. In 2022, he became the first recipient of the “Taste Cyprus – Delightful Journeys” certification awarded abroad, symbolizing the global reach of Cypriot gastronomy.

Other grassroots initiatives have also played a role. The #HalloumiSaturdays campaign by the Cyprus Embassy in Finland exemplifies how food can serve as a cultural ambassador. Cypriot entrepreneur Lefteris Gavriilidis has played a key role in introducing Cypriot products—especially halloumi—to the Finnish market, becoming an informal ambassador through culinary exchange.¹⁸

Ultimately, tourism diplomacy has become the most visible and multifaceted form of diplomacy practiced by Cyprus today. As traditional diplomacy often focuses on intricate political details, tourism diplomacy—encompassing national branding, cultural exchange, and economic growth—sets the broader framework. This is reflected in earlier discussions on Cyprus’s tourism identity, the role of tourism ambassadors, religious tourism, and now, gastrodiplomacy.

Conclusion

In this paper, a brief introduction was made to the history of Cypriot tourism and the initial elements that were emphasized within this context to promote it. These elements were none other than Hellenocentrism and the prominent figure of the goddess Aphrodite. Since 2006, the sector has used the dynamic brand ‘Love Cyprus’, with some variations and adaptations in recent

¹⁸ Natasha Christoforou, ‘The Cypriot Who Taught Finland to Eat Halloumi’, *PhileNews* (December 10, 2022) (Available at <https://www.philenews.com/koinonia/eidiseis/article/1614017/o-kyprios-poy-emathe-ti-finlandia-na-troei-challoymi>) (Accessed January 9, 2023).

years, as a statement of what the island represents or would like to represent. As observed, in the case of a small country like Cyprus, destination branding often coincides with national branding, as it represents the most distinctive, if not the only, image of the country abroad.

Furthermore, as highlighted in this paper's analysis, the tourism sector tends to be more agile and responsive than other public sectors due to its close interaction with the private sector. Its dynamic nature demands swift adjustments to changing global conditions, as it is inherently and unavoidably influenced by external events. This constant exposure to international developments compels the sector to be more innovative and proactive in its responses. As a result, tourism often adopts practices that traditional diplomacy only embraces later. For instance, initiatives like 'celebrity diplomacy'—a relatively recent concept in official diplomatic circles—had already been implemented in Cyprus's tourism diplomacy through earlier campaigns such as 'Sonner Kinder', 'Ambassadors in Tourism', and 'Friends of Cyprus'. However, while these initiatives were conceptually effective, their implementation was sometimes marred by inconsistencies, lack of coordination, and amateur execution.

Another key focus of the analysis is religious tourism, which in both theory and practice closely aligns with the principles of religious diplomacy. The Cypriot context offers several successful examples, including organized conferences and familiarization trips for international participants, pointing to the sector's strong potential if handled strategically. Remarkably, in Cyprus, the intersection of politics, diplomacy, religion, culture, and tourism is so deeply intertwined that even local festivals—often with religious significance—serve as microcosms of this broader convergence. This unique overlap reinforces the argument that religion can be a powerful pillar in the effort to develop a cohesive and inclusive National Brand for Cyprus.

The final area explored is gastrodiploamacy, which is framed as a valuable tool in Cyprus's public, cultural, and tourism diplomacy—particularly in shaping and promoting its National Brand. Recent examples demonstrate that Cypriot gastronomy is gaining recognition for its vitality and potential to thrive both domestically and internationally. This sector stands out as a promising ambassador for the Cypriot identity, capable of contributing meaningfully to the national image. Importantly, it is a domain with minimal regional exclusion, a trait that is often lacking in other branding initiatives. Nonetheless, the political dimensions of gastrodiploamacy should not be overlooked, as they can influence both perception and execution on the global stage.

In summary, the trajectory of Cyprus's tourism development underscores the intricate relationship between destination branding and national identity, particularly within the context of a small and geopolitically nuanced state. From the early reliance on mythological symbolism and Hellenocentric narratives to the more contemporary, multifaceted initiatives encompassing diplomacy, religion, culture, and gastronomy, Cyprus has demonstrated both creativity and adaptability in shaping its external image. The dynamic interplay between these sectors offers valuable opportunities for advancing a cohesive and compelling National Brand. However, it also highlights the pressing need for greater strategic coordination, consistency, and professionalism in implementation. As Cyprus continues to navigate an increasingly competitive and interconnected global environment, a holistic and carefully managed branding approach will be

vital to enhancing its international standing and projecting an authentic, inclusive national identity.

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