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# SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CULINARY HERITAGE AND ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

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## ABSTRACT

*In specialized literature, culinary heritage is understood as a strategic resource aimed at economic, social, and environmental sustainability, but at the same time, there is very little recognition of it. This study, with a qualitative approach, descriptive scope, and documentary review design, systematizes the research published between April 2020 and December 2024. The documentary analysis shows that the production and preservation of traditional gastronomic practices not only safeguard cultural memory, but also boosts local economies, strengthens collective identities, and promotes responsible management of natural resources. Unlike other reviews, this one establishes that the relationship between culinary heritage and sustainable development presents gaps in public policies and community safeguarding strategies, and proposes lines of action that integrate responsible tourism, heritage education, and sustainable value chains. In this way, the review provides a conceptual and practical basis for guiding interventions by local governments, cultural organizations, and communities, thereby promoting sustainability rooted in food culture. The review concludes that safeguarding and valuing culinary heritage is not only a cultural duty, but also a proven path to generating sustainability in territories, provided that it translates into collective actions that integrate local knowledge, community participation, and the design of intergenerational transmission strategies.*

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**KEYWORDS:** Cultural Identity, Culinary Heritage, Sustainability.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Culinary heritage is a living manifestation of the cultural identity of peoples. Communities preserve their history, connection to their land, and ways of life through traditional knowledge, food practices, local ingredients, and intergenerational techniques. However, in the face of a homogenized global world, this heritage is also in danger of extinction. From a sustainability perspective, it may be relevant to analyze it, as it connects social, economic, and environmental dimensions with positive effects on communities and their spaces.

Academic literature has documented the capacity of culinary heritage as a cultural, economic, and ecological asset. Recent research has highlighted relevant aspects of the potential of traditional cuisines in cultural tourism, in boosting local economies, in natural resource management in terms of sustainable development, and in terms of their effects on food security (Partarakis et al., 2021; Long, 2024). and even international policies have recognized the culinary expressions on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity as instruments for valorization and safeguarding processes. However, there are theoretical and methodological gaps in relation to the combination of this heritage with the principles of sustainability. Although many studies have focused on limited experiences or isolated cases, it remains difficult to develop an integrated approach that can serve as a model for guiding cultural management strategies with a sustainable direction.

Although culinary heritage has been recognized as one of the most significant dimensions of cultural identity, its relationship with sustainability processes has received little attention in most local contexts. This disconnect has been an obstacle to its use as a strategic resource for territorial development, reducing its potential to revitalize local economies, strengthen the social fabric, and promote responsible environmental practices.

A preliminary review of the literature reveals a lack of conceptual frameworks linking culinary heritage and sustainability, a lack of empirical research in rural and urban contexts, and a scarcity of indicators for assessing sustainable impact. This lack of systematization hinders the planning of cultural policies and the implementation of community safeguarding strategies. In this regard, it is pertinent to investigate how this link has been established in recent academic production, with the aim of identifying approaches, conceptual contributions, and lines of research that contribute to the safeguarding and consolidation of gastronomic

heritage from a perspective of comprehensive sustainability.

From this point of view, this study is of academic and social interest, as it proposes a systematization of scientific literature that allows us to understand the contributions of culinary heritage to sustainability in its social, economic, and environmental dimensions. Its importance lies in offering the value of a theoretical and contextualized foundation that can serve as support for drafting public policies, promoting community initiatives, and future research aimed at preserving food heritage. The issue addressed is particularly relevant in light of current challenges associated with food security, climate change, loss of cultural diversity, and the need to promote sustainable and culturally relevant development models.

The contributions that the research aims to make are, first and foremost, oriented toward systematizing the body of recent research that focuses on studying the relationships between culinary heritage and sustainability, in order to move toward the construction of an integrative conceptual framework. Secondly, it aims to identify and systematize the main theoretical and empirical contributions regarding the role that culinary heritage can play in social, economic, and environmental sustainability, in order to make substantive contributions to the design of heritage management strategies with a focus on sustainability.

### 1.1. Theoretical Foundations

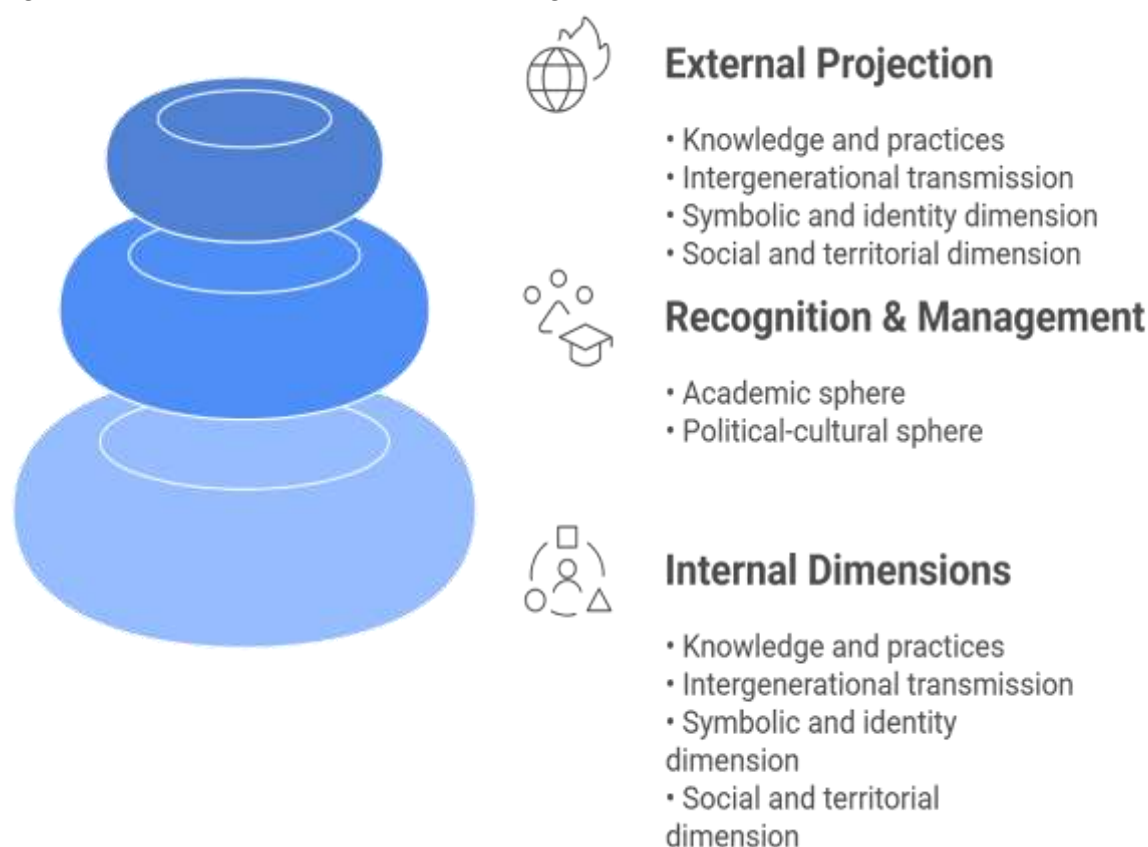
The theoretical framework of this study allows us to understand and interpret the object of study based on the dimensions it offers, the documentary framework that guides the literature review, and which is articulated in three axes: culinary heritage as a cultural construct, sustainability understood from a cultural perspective, and the link between cultural heritage and territorial development. This allows us to develop the concepts of each of the axes that underpin the review without anticipating the findings that emerge from the analysis. Therefore, this section seeks to lay the theoretical foundations necessary to interpret the contributions of culinary heritage to sustainability in a contextualized manner.

### 1.2. Culinary Heritage as A Cultural Construct

Culinary heritage is a manifestation of intangible cultural heritage, as it consists of knowledge, practices, techniques, ingredients, methods of preparation, and its transmission to future generations within communities. This heritage is not

just about food, as it draws on this knowledge in a symbolic, identity-based, and social framework that reveals the history, territory, and values of peoples (see Figure 1). Thus, traditional cuisine is a living

cultural expression that evolves over time without losing its connection to its roots and community dynamics (Iakovleva 2020; Potting, 2024).



**Figure 1: Dimensions And Projection of Culinary Heritage as A Cultural Construct.**

**Note:** The Figure Details the Constituent Dimensions of Culinary Heritage as A Manifestation of Intangible Cultural Heritage, As Well As Its Recognition and Projection Towards Cultural, Economic, And Environmental Sustainability.

From the perspective of (Tan et al., 2020; Li et al., 2024), intangible cultural heritage encompasses traditions, oral expressions, social practices, rituals, knowledge, and techniques that communities, groups, and sometimes individuals assimilate and individualize as part of their own cultural heritage. As a result, culinary practices are given importance, as they embody the knowledge, social customs, and techniques that shape everyday life and form the basis of collective rituals. Food, therefore, carries cultural meanings and becomes a channel for the transmission of identities, memories, and local ways of life.

Over the years, interest in researching culinary heritage has grown, especially since the rise of cultural studies, gastronomic tourism, and policies that have championed food diversity. (Aktaş and Polat 2020; Mathew 2024) demonstrate that it also has a social and symbolic character, while affirming that eating goes beyond satisfying a simple biological need, as it involves processes of cultural

classification, social differentiation, and the history of “us” and “them.” In this sense, traditional cuisines can be seen as collective narratives that condense historical experiences and different ways of inhabiting the world.

In this way, the recognition of culinary heritage as an object of academic study and cultural policy has led to its inclusion on the public agenda, as can be seen at the local and international levels, as in the case, for example, the inscription of the “Mediterranean diet” or “traditional Mexican food” in the Registers of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, demonstrating an effort to preserve food practices that are in danger of extinction as a result of the standardization created by industrial food systems (UNESCO 2024). In this sense, it is necessary to understand culinary practices as strategic cultural assets aimed not only at building identity, but also at contributing to sustainable development, as they can contribute to this purpose if managed in a conscious and participatory manner.



### ***1.3. Sustainability Understood from A Cultural Perspective***

Historically, the concept of sustainability can be considered from three closely interrelated dimensions: environmental, social, and economic. Thus, according to Shakya and Vagnarelli (2024), sustainable development is development that meets present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. However, various current trends have proposed that there is a fourth dimension: culture, understood as a cross-cutting element that regulates the way in which communities identify, accept, and apply principles of sustainability, according to Järvelä (2023).

The cultural dimension of sustainability manifests itself in the way peoples organize their systems of life, their relationships with the natural environment, their productive processes, and their symbolic expressions. Thus, culture is not only a result of development, but also becomes a structure that shapes sustainable practices and gives meaning to actions. For Assoratgoon and Kantabutra (2023), culture should be seen as the fourth pillar of sustainable development, as it is the basis for building values, behaviors, and ways of relating to others and to nature.

Authors such as Sedita et al. (2022) emphasize that, in the absence of the cultural element, sustainability risks being reduced to a mere list of technical or economic indicators with no connection to the plurality of worldviews that exist in the world. From this perspective, culture is key to ensuring the development of processes that are legitimate, well-rooted in the territories, and respectful of local identities. The introduction of culture into sustainability policies enables the construction of more inclusive ways of doing things that are adapted to the realities of communities.

Culinary heritage requires recognizing and considering traditional food practices as cultural expressions that preserve knowledge and can also be drivers of sustainable models of production, consumption, and resource management. Sustainability, with the meaning given to it in cultural considerations, implies recognizing traditional knowledge, gastronomic traditions, and social relationships that strengthen ties between people, food, and their environment. The link between sustainability and culture thus becomes one of the basic tools when considering comprehensive heritage strategies that have an impact on the well-being of the community and the resilience of territories.

### ***1.4. Relationship Between Cultural Heritage and Territorial Development***

Cultural heritage, in its many forms, has come to be considered a strategic resource in the development of

territories, while also establishing social ties, shaping collective identity, and creating feelings of social belonging. From this perspective, heritage is not limited to a conservationist vision, but rather a property that becomes dynamic in its management to promote economic, social, and symbolic processes in communities. This concept has been taken up by international organizations such as UNESCO (2023), which advocates for integrated development based on culture as a driver of social cohesion and sustainability.

In the case of culinary heritage, its inclusion in territorial development approaches has been linked to cultural and gastronomic tourism. Traditional cuisines have become attractions that, on the one hand, generate employment with local products and boost the economy of the regions. As mentioned by Zocchi et al. (2021), food heritage leaves a mark on collective memory, but it also generates added value for territories through a differentiated offering that draws on authenticity. However, its incorporation into the market creates tensions between conservation, commercialization, and sustainability.

The management of cultural heritage in territories therefore implies the duty to establish comprehensive management in which communities have direct participation in decision-making related to its use, protection, and promotion. (Scaramuzzi et al., 2023; Fiorentino and Vandini 2024) have pointed out that heritage must be understood as a social reality, which means accepting that there are multiple meanings and disputes surrounding it. In this sense, the development of the territory cannot ignore local cultural dynamics, since sustainable development inevitably arises from the relationship between social actors, identities, and resources.

Consequently, the link between culinary heritage and territorial development makes it necessary to rethink good cultural management practices from a broad perspective, i.e., linking identity, participation, and sustainability. Considering heritage as an essential element of development would not only facilitate its preservation, but also make it possible to build resilient, balanced, and culturally significant territories. This type of approach to heritage is fundamental when interpreting the potential of culinary traditions from the perspective of their impact on social resilience and the creation of endogenous development mechanisms.

Overall, the theoretical references on which gastronomic heritage is based allow us to understand it as a cultural construct that is complex, active, and strongly associated with the social, identity, and territorial practices of communities. In this sense, implementing a holistic approach means integrating the links established between heritage and the symbolic

value to be socially preserved, as it contributes to the common good and to establishing more equitable development models. Therefore, it is worth reflecting on how traditional culinary practices could be reinterpreted and managed as strategic assets in contemporary contexts.

Thus, it can be said that the three axes analyzed constitute a key interpretive framework for this review of culinary heritage, as they articulate the cultural dimension with the dynamics of sustainability and territorial development. This integrative approach also allows for the construction of lines of convergence between tradition and transformation, which facilitates the search for a proposal to safeguard culinary heritage that also takes into account sustainability expectations. Based on this theoretical foundation, we can proceed to analyze the specialized literature and reflect more rigorously on the social, economic, and environmental consequences of culinary heritage in different contexts.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The research has been designed from a qualitative perspective, as it seeks to understand the meanings, representations, and senses that have been attributed to culinary heritage in relation to sustainability, through the analysis of documentary sources. This gives rise to an interpretative approach to the object of study that scrutinizes its symbolic, cultural, and social dimensions. According to Pivarski et al. (2023), qualitative research focuses on people's lives from a holistic and contextualized perspective. Along the same lines, emphasis is placed on the critical interpretation of academic texts to see how the relationship between culinary heritage and sustainability has been understood and represented in different contexts.

In terms of scope, the research was oriented within the framework of the descriptive method, as it sought to describe the approaches, theoretical contributions, and empirical findings collected in the academic literature on the subject. Following Trung (2024), descriptive studies provide properties of interest of the phenomena under analysis without manipulating them, which leads to an adequate picture of their structure and dynamics. Therefore, the aim is to describe the link between culinary heritage and sustainability in previous studies and to identify regularities, gaps, and new perspectives.

The methodological design is associated with a documentary review, as it is based on the selection, analysis, and systematization of secondary sources from academic literature. The aim was to construct a state of the art on culinary heritage and its relationship with sustainability. In accordance with Panzera (2022) and Carrera et al. (2023), the documentary review is presented as a valid methodological strategy for the

construction of scientific knowledge, given that it enables the conceptual organization of academic production and the derivation of new questions or lines of inquiry. Carrera et al., (2023), the documentary review is presented as a valid methodological strategy for the construction of scientific knowledge, given that it makes it possible to conceptually organize academic production and derive new questions or lines of research; along the same lines, Naeem et al, (2023) argue that academic reviews also allow us to glimpse thematic patterns, research trends, and relevant theoretical gaps.

The research was carried out in three stages, the first of which involved retrieving bibliographic sources in accordance with the PRISMA protocol, which ensured transparency, reproducibility, and traceability in the selection of documents. Academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science (WoS), SciELO, RedALyC, and Dialnet were consulted, and the keywords used were: cultural heritage, traditional cuisine, cultural sustainability, and food identity.

The time frame for inclusion was set as documents published between April 2020 and December 2024. In this regard, priority was given to research articles, systematic reviews, books, and book chapters with thematic relevance and verifiable scientific quality. The implementation of the PRISMA protocol involved the phases of identification, screening, eligibility, and selection of sources, thus consolidating a representative documentary corpus of 58 bibliographic sources aligned with the objectives of the study.

In the second phase, a qualitative analysis of the selected literature was carried out. After reading the documents, a process of categorization by theme was carried out, which aimed to extract the main conceptual approaches, the different lines of argument, and the type of empirical evidence between culinary heritage and sustainability. Content analysis was used as a technique for interpretation, which allowed patterns, tensions, and differentiating contributions to be identified. Based on this analysis, a systematization matrix was formalized, based on the main evidence obtained.

Finally, in the third phase, interpretive guidelines are formulated that reflect the potential of culinary heritage as a strategic element of social, economic, and environmental sustainability. These guidelines are the result of the thoughtful integration of documentary findings and are intended to guide future research, community, and policy actions related to food heritage management. Together, the three phases constitute a critical and well-founded exercise that provides an integrated view of the state of knowledge in the field of study.





Bibliometric analysis reveals the existence of three thematic pillars that allow for the conceptual structuring of culinary heritage sustainability. The social and cultural pillar articulates the preservation of traditional culinary practices, the promotion of culinary tourism as a tool for cultural enhancement, and the protection of the community's cultural identity through traditional gastronomic practices.

The economic foundation consists of activating the creative economy through the promotion of culinary heritage, encouraging gastronomic tourism as a sustainable economic activity, and promoting the appearance of traditional local products in specific markets. Finally, the environmental pillar is based on the conservation of agrobiodiversity linked to food heritage, the application of sustainable food production practices, and the conservation of local ecosystems associated with traditional food culture.

This identification and characterization of

thematic pillars form the conceptual basis for the development of the next phase of the study, which focuses on a detailed analysis of each pillar and its systemic interrelationship based on information gathered from specialized academic literature.

### 3.2. Results Of the Second Phase

Through analysis of the academic literature, it was recognized that recent studies of culinary heritage tend to fall into three main lines of analysis that shed light on how culinary heritage is understood in relation to sustainability. These lines correspond to the pillars of sustainability: cultural-social, economic, and environmental. Each of these approaches considers culinary heritage not only as part of cultural heritage, but also as a strategy for sustainable development (see Figure 3).



Figure 3: Interrelationship Between Culinary Heritage and Sustainability.

The findings are presented below, grouped according to these three lines, beginning with the cultural and social aspects.

### 3.3. Culinary Heritage as A Cultural and Social Basis for Safeguarding Identity

Various studies have shown that culinary heritage is an expression of identity rooted in the everyday practices of communities. Valuing and preserving this heritage allow us to reclaim a sense of belonging,

but it also fosters the cultural ties that sustain social cohesion (Zahnow 2024; Masmoudi and Jmour 2024). Thus, in rural or peripheral communities, where the latter struggle to resist cultural homogenization, traditional cuisine represents a symbol of resistance and authenticity.

On the other hand, recent academic literature emphasizes that the intergenerational transmission of culinary knowledge contributes effectively to preserving collective memory; it teaches and puts



traditional recipes into practice, not only as an activity associated with food, but also as a form of cultural pedagogy that allows for the continuity of intangible heritage (Carrigan, et al., 2023; Hu, et al., 2024). This also establishes intergenerational dialogue and strengthens emotional and social bonds within families and communities.

The preservation of culinary heritage has also been analyzed in various studies, which link it to the strengthening of community ties by creating collective spaces for gathering around food practices, such as festivals, food fairs, or cultural fairs. These expressions, beyond their recreational nature, fulfill a social function that helps to promote the appreciation and respect of cultural diversity (Carvache-Franco, 2020). In this way, traditional cuisine becomes a link for intercultural exchange and social inclusion.

Furthermore, some research highlights the importance of gastronomic heritage and its role in the recovery of the social fabric in areas that have experienced conflict or disaster. In these cases, traditional food practices can act as mechanisms of resilience, helping to restore community life and well-being (De Araújo Pinheiro, 2023). In this sense, cooking and food as part of culinary heritage not only serve to nourish the body, but also the feelings of the community.

Finally, cultural policies designed to articulate culinary heritage have proven to be a means of safeguarding it, allowing culinary heritage to be practiced at the institutional level. Intangible heritage proposals, national lists, and food education programs are strategies that have enabled the visibility and preservation of these expressions, especially when carried out with the participation of the communities that are the bearers of this knowledge (Jelinčić 2020; Almansouri et al., 2022). Therefore, this way of understanding culinary heritage is accompanied by a recent line of academic research that highlights the need to incorporate the heritage approach into local development frameworks.

### ***3.4. Culinary Heritage as A Factor in Economic Revitalization and Sustainable Opportunities***

Culinary heritage has taken center stage in local economic development processes, especially in communities seeking sustainable, value-added production alternatives. The academic literature reviewed indicates that the revaluation of traditional culinary knowledge can be a very significant source of income, associated with economic dynamics such as gastronomic tourism, artisanal food production, or

the commercialization of native ingredients (Alonso et al., 2020; Mahmudi 2023). Traditional cuisine not only preserves the practices of our ancestors, but also creates concrete opportunities for employment and entrepreneurship.

Gastronomic tourism, in particular, has proven to be an effective tool for promoting regional development through endogenous approaches. By placing the culinary experience at the center of their appeal, many regions have managed to position themselves as tourist destinations with their own identity, generating community cohesion and improving demand for local products and services (Di-Clemente et al., 2020; Dhillon 2024). Likewise, this form of tourism has the capacity to generate economic circuits that favor the activity of small producers and traditional chefs, which in turn revitalizes the economic fabric of the regions (Korkuna et al., 2020).

Another aspect highlighted by the studies consulted is the connection between culinary heritage and circular economy models. Traditional cuisines are often based on the use of local and seasonal ingredients, which has an impact on reducing dependence on external inputs and production costs, and on increasing food sovereignty (Malota 2021; Hamam et al., 2021). Thus, this logic also has an effect on the comprehensive use of existing resources in the immediate environment, as well as on the generation of practices that are less harmful to the environment and the principles of economic and ecological sustainability.

Similarly, recognition of the knowledge and skills involved in traditional cooking has also led to a revaluation of the work of farmers, gatherers, artisanal fishermen, and popular cooks. Various studies show how culinary heritage can dignify these historically undervalued trades, integrating them into value chains that strengthen the local economy and promote better working conditions (Shariff et al., 2024; Vuksanović et al., 2024). Thus, the economic component of culinary heritage lies not only in its commercial potential, but also in its ability to generate inclusion and equity.

In this vein, it has been shown that promoting gastronomic heritage can be aligned with sustainable rural development strategies, as it promotes income diversification and mitigates the economic vulnerability that communities may suffer from extractive or globalized dynamics. Thus, some agricultural and agri-food promotion programs have seen the integration of heritage components as a strategy to strengthen short marketing circuits, farmers' markets, and solidarity networks of

production and consumption (Cvijanović et al, 2020; Mishra et al, 2023). These experiences reinforce the idea that traditional cuisine can be an engine of development from the local level and with a sustainable approach.

### **3.5. Culinary Heritage and Environmental Sustainability of Food Systems**

Based on a review of the literature, one of the most important contributions of culinary heritage to sustainable development relates particularly to the environmental dimension, which is linked to food systems. Several studies agree that traditional culinary practices tend to include native or locally produced products, which promotes agricultural biodiversity or a smaller ecological footprint produced by food transportation or industrial processing (Singh 2024; Mahmood et al., 2024). This territorial approach to food reinforces the relationship between communities and their ecosystems.

Similarly, it has been proven that many traditional recipes are based on the comprehensive use of food, with the express purpose of making rational use of natural resources. Unlike industrial food models, which are responsible for high levels of waste, traditional cuisine makes use of all the edible parts of its ingredients, valuing even those that are often discarded in urban or globalized contexts (Koryakina et al., 2021; Koval et al., 2021). This logic of utilization responds to a more ecological worldview, where food not only nourishes, but also reflects an ethic of care and respect for the environment.

Literature has also documented that traditional culinary practices promote healthier or more balanced diets compared to those offered by the ultra-processed food industry. Research agrees that dietary patterns based on homemade, fresh, and minimally processed foods promote not only individual well-being but also collective sustainability (Carey et al., 2023; Yıkmaş et al., 2024). In this sense, culinary heritage is consolidating itself as an alternative to global food trends that have contributed to the increase in problems such as malnutrition, the extinction of knowledge, and environmental degradation.

In addition, some studies highlight that reviving ancestral culinary practices can support processes of adaptation to climate change. This is because communities that maintain a deep understanding of natural cycles and local foods are better prepared to face food or climate crises, as they have more resilient production and consumption systems (Wood et al., 2023; Chao 2024). Food resilience, in this context, is

not built solely on technology, but also on the cultural wisdom incorporated into traditional cuisines.

In light of these findings, it is reaffirmed that culinary heritage not only represents a cultural expression, but can also become a strategic axis for strengthening sustainable food systems. This environmental dimension, which is often overlooked, should be given greater prominence in future research and institutional actions, given its potential to facilitate the transition to responsible, ethical, and ecologically balanced food models.

### **3.6. Results Of the Third Phase**

As part of the third stage of research, an interpretative exercise was carried out that sought to integrate the documentary findings on the contribution of gastronomic heritage to sustainability, in order to establish interpretative guidelines to guide future research, community actions, and public policies. This integration is based not only on the theoretical approaches that have been reviewed, but also on a critical view that recognizes the potential, as well as the tensions and contradictions that exist in the field of culinary heritage. From this perspective, the analysis led to the construction of different interpretative guidelines that consider gastronomic heritage as a strategic cultural resource for influencing different components of sustainable development, provided that its management is conscious, participatory, and situated.

One of the main emerging aspects in the analysis is understanding culinary heritage as a living social practice because, in addition to preserving collective identities, it generates community ties and strengthens the community. This social function of culinary heritage translates into intergenerational knowledge produced through the transmission of culinary practices, the reproduction of food rituals, and the creation of community meeting spaces centered around food. Studies such as those by Taheri (2021), Weiss (2022), and Loy (2024) agree that these culinary practices acquire an educational, emotional, and cultural function in the construction of collective memory. However, it is not only a matter of valuing traditional cuisine in a symbolic or identity-related sense, but also of promoting its implementation beyond the academic and research world, so that local knowledge ceases to be a subject of research and becomes a living way of building community. In this way, it would make sense for cultural policies related to the safeguarding of culinary heritage to be carried out through

participatory practices in which the community can be considered as the subject of the management of its cultural legacy, and not as a mere passive recipient of external policies.

On the other hand, an integrated analysis of the literature consulted shows that culinary heritage has great potential as an economic driver for local communities. The revival of traditional food practices has proven to be an effective way to reactivate community-based economies, create jobs, promote short marketing channels, and foster sustainable enterprises (Divarkarla et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2022; Fibri et al., 2022; Yasmeen and Fischer 2024). Despite this, this economic capacity can also be subject to commodification processes that trivialize or decontextualize culinary expressions, turning them into commodities for tourist or global consumption. It is therefore advisable to consider the balance between economic valuation and cultural preservation, given that a truly sustainable strategy must highlight the symbolic value of traditional culinary practices and promote ethical, inclusive, and culturally respectful business models. Hence, the suggested interpretive guidelines should articulate economic aspects based on principles of equity, social justice, and environmental sustainability.

In the environmental sphere, traditional cuisines are bearers of ecological wisdom that manifests itself, on the one hand, in the rational use of resources, respect for natural cycles, and the comprehensive exploitation of food, according to (Akbar et al., 2020; Chatterjee 2021), the traditional diet promotes the conservation of seed diversity, the reduction of food waste, and the development of more resilient food systems. This localized knowledge, often passed down orally and assumed in everyday life, represents a real alternative to the industrial food models that are currently hegemonic. In this vein, culinary heritage can be considered one of the cultural dimensions that encompasses environmental knowledge, the preservation of which could be an important aspect in the transition to more responsible production and consumption models. It is therefore suggested that culinary heritage be linked to environmental education, agroecological planning, and adaptation to climate change, recognizing that ecological sustainability is not only built on technological innovation but is also possible through the revaluation of traditional knowledge.

In this sense, it is essential to forge an integrative perspective that overcomes the logic of thematic fragmentation and, at the same time, positions gastronomic heritage as a multidimensional field where identity, economy, and ecology converge.

These interpretive guidelines, formulated from the dialogue between scientific literature and critical reflection, show that culinary heritage cannot be managed in a fragmented or instrumental way. Its transformative potential is only activated if it is treated from a culturally relevant perspective that seeks to root it in the territories and sustain it through the active participation of its bearers. In this way, this study proposes moving toward management models that favor the sustainability of its three dimensions, aligning ancestral and traditional knowledge with current demands, which can contribute to the formulation of more sensitive, inclusive, and transformative public policies.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The results emerging from this review reaffirm that culinary heritage should be considered a link between culture and sustainability, as argued by Tan et al. (2020) and Potting (2024), who view it as a living cultural construct that preserves meanings, identities, and community ties. However, beyond a simple description of practices and experiences, the documentary analysis suggests that the true potential of culinary heritage lies in its ability to generate social, economic, and environmental transformations, provided that it is guided by inclusive and participatory criteria. The literature analyzed shows that, although there is a theoretical link, there are still gaps in implementation, particularly in contexts where development models are disconnected from local realities.

In the sociocultural sphere, findings suggest that traditional culinary customs act as a tool for social cohesion and as disseminators of intergenerational knowledge, coinciding with the findings of Carrigan et al. (2023) and Zahnow (2024). This function not only establishes belonging, but also plays a role in the community resilience of environments that have experienced processes of cultural homogenization or conflict (De Araújo Pinheiro, 2023). However, the continuity of these practices requires cultural policies that consider them as strategic resources, avoiding relegating them to folkloric traditions distanced from development processes.

On the economic front, the studies reviewed show that culinary heritage is a driving force that boosts local economies, especially through gastronomic tourism and the promotion of short production chains (Dhillon, 2024; Korkuna et al., 2020), but it can also be a risk if it is overly commercialized, which can trivialize culinary expressions and strip them of their cultural meaning, as Yasmeen and Fischer (2024) warn. This duality leads to a need for balanced

strategies that combine profitability criteria with principles of equity, social justice, and environmental sustainability.

From an environmental perspective, traditional cuisines reveal ecological knowledge that translates into the responsible use of resources, waste reduction, and the conservation of agricultural biodiversity (Singh, 2024; Koryakina et al., 2021). These findings are consistent with the findings of Akbar et al. (2020) regarding the potential of ancestral practices to strengthen resilient food systems. Therefore, the continuity of traditional cuisines is threatened by industrialized food models and the decline of native ingredients, which requires the implementation of actions that link environmental education, agroecological planning, and actions to protect agrobiodiversity.

The analysis also highlights tensions and contradictions between discourse and practice, since although UNESCO (2023, 2024) and other international organizations promote the safeguarding of culinary heritage, practices reveal weaknesses in the interrelationship between communities, governments, and productive sectors. These gaps limit the effectiveness of policies and generate inequalities in access to the benefits derived from the valorization of culinary heritage. On the other hand, Sedita et al. (2022) warn that, without an active cultural dimension, sustainability can be reduced to technical indicators that lack community legitimacy.

With regard to the transferability of results, it can be observed that, although the principles linking culinary heritage and sustainability are based on common foundations, the way in which they are applied may depend on the socioeconomic, political, and cultural conditions of each territory. In a rural context of poverty, traditions are generally more deeply rooted and related to subsistence, which facilitates their inclusion in more sustainable strategies. In high-income or highly urbanized regions, the recovery of culinary heritage may face barriers associated with the availability of ingredients, the loss of crafts, and the prioritization of globalized consumption models.

The elements that determine this transferability include the degree of industrialization of food, the importance of public policies, the organizational capacity of communities, and the social importance of traditional knowledge. Authors such as Shakya and Vagnarelli (2024) and Scaramuzzi et al. (2023) note that the sustainability of heritage means having inclusive governance frameworks that allow knowledge holders to participate in the decision-

making process and adapt strategies to local realities. Thus, the reproduction of successful experiences cannot take place through simple transfers but through processes of contextualized adaptation.

In practical terms, the results of this review suggest that culinary heritage management should be oriented toward collaborative models that bring together local communities, the private sector, academic institutions, and public administrations. This implies the design of policies that promote responsible tourism, the strengthening of local value chains, and heritage education, in line with authors such as Jelinčić (2020) and Alonso et al. (2020). At the same time, these policies must integrate criteria of environmental sustainability and social justice to prevent the valorization of heritage from excluding its own bearers.

The interconnection of the three dimensions social, economic, and environmental requires us to move beyond separate visions. As Assoratgoon and Kantabutra (2023) point out, culture must be seen as a cross-cutting pillar of sustainability. This means that protecting culinary heritage not only protects recipes and techniques, but can also contribute to a more inclusive, resilient, and culturally meaningful model of development.

In short, this review reaffirms that gastronomic heritage, when managed in a conscious, participatory, and context-appropriate manner, is a strategic resource for comprehensive sustainability. However, its potential can only be realized if synergies are established between tradition and innovation, and if the capacities of local communities are strengthened to face the challenges arising from globalization and climate change. Future research could address comparative methodologies that enable the evaluation of the effects of safeguarding projects in different contexts, as well as help formulate a global framework for the sustainability of culinary heritage.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

This systematic review has led to the conclusion that culinary heritage is much more than a vestige of the past: it is a strategic resource capable of articulating identity, economy, and environmental sustainability within the same horizon of action. The comprehensive analysis of academic literature and documented evidence between 2020 and 2024 has shown that, if managed consciously and participatively, culinary heritage can be an instrument for social and territorial transformation that safeguards ancestral knowledge and strengthens communities' capacities to face the challenges

brought about by globalization.

In social, economic, and environmental terms, culinary heritage is a driver of cohesion and development. In the social dimension, it protects culinary memory and forges links between generations; in the economic dimension, it activates economic circuits and generates sustainable employment and entrepreneurship opportunities; and in the environmental dimension, it connects ancestral knowledge, promoting biodiversity and appropriate resource management. The combination of these dimensions shows that food culture can offer adapted and legitimate responses for territories, but only if it is articulated with development strategies.

Based on the findings, specific actions are proposed for different stakeholders. Public policy makers should begin designing regulatory frameworks that recognize the strategic importance of culinary heritage and actively involve communities in its management. Educational and training institutions should incorporate heritage and environmental education into their programs to enable new generations to combine tradition and innovation. The productive and tourism sectors must adopt ethical business models that balance profitability with cultural preservation. Finally, communities that are the bearers of knowledge must be strengthened as protagonists of the various

safeguarding strategies.

The gaps that emerged from this review open up future lines of research, including comparative studies between regions with different income levels, the development of indicators to measure the sustainable impact of culinary heritage, and the evaluation of public policies that have incorporated the cultural dimension as a pillar of sustainability. It is also worth exploring participatory methodologies that include the perspective of communities that are bearers of culinary knowledge in all phases of the design and implementation of valorization strategies.

The analysis carried out allows us to understand that culinary heritage has a transformative potential that goes beyond cooking and introduces the construction of a more just, egalitarian, and culturally meaningful future. Therefore, it can be concluded that managing it with a strategic approach is not a nostalgic act, but rather an investment in social resilience, economic prosperity, and environmental balance. The challenge lies in understanding that, just as we preserve traditional culinary practices and knowledge, we also safeguard an essential component of humanity's cultural identity and diversity. Consequently, the path is open to truly sustainable development.

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