



# Villa Javier Project and Mejana Gourmet Project

**Good practice for Sustainable Food  
Systems in a circular economy  
perspective**

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# ✓ Villa Javier Project and Mejana Gourmet Project

#SocialCanteen  
#SocialInclusion  
#CommunitySupport  
#Jobs

📍 Spain  
★ Community-led



## THE CHALLENGE

Since the economic crisis of 2007-2008, social inequalities have increased and, although several entities were working to combat poverty and inequality, it was clear that much remained to be done.

Under this premise, the **Tudela Comparte Foundation** (hereinafter, TC) was born in 2015 in Tudela (37,000 inhabitants) as a non-profit entity. TC is constituted by a group of people belonging to different social, work, and ideological backgrounds.

Without any remuneration, they committed themselves to the implementation of a social project to fight poverty and social inequality through the redistribution of food surpluses, therefore ensuring access to a balanced and healthy diet for people in vulnerable situations.

TC is aware that, although the fundamental responsibility lies with the public authorities, civil society must push and collaborate by implementing services that, in the best case scenario, may end up being assumed by the local government.

## THE CONCEPT

TC began its activity in 2016 with the Villa Javier project, offering services to people with exceptional circumstances of vulnerability and with difficulties in accessing a balanced and healthy diet on a regular basis.

The Villa Javier project offers:

- A reception service aimed at assessing and monitoring the degree of vulnerability of people.
- A soup kitchen program called Villa Javier aimed at adults (based on donations).
- A self-service program called El Capacico with free food aimed at families with underage children or other people dependent on them (based on donations).
- A training program called El Semillero to facilitate the reintegration of the program participants into a social and work life.

In addition, in 2019 the Villa Javier project (food, training, and accompaniment) developed an additional assistance project with the creation of employment opportunities for vulnerable people, especially women.

TC began working on the implementation of a social integration project in the agri-food sector, so that in 2021 this new activity became a commercial company called Mejana Gourmet S.L.U. The company works on two activities: The El Obrador converts raw materials (partly donated and partly purchased) into innovative food products of high organoleptic and nutritional quality, and the Los Huertos de La Mejana that produces local organic products using underutilised land. The land is given to TC free of charge. The agricultural production of Los Huertos de la Mejana supplies the El Obrador, the Villa Javier soup kitchen and El Capacico.

While the initial contact is made due to food insecurity, the people in need working with the Villa Javier project are given the possibility of accessing social reintegration, and to move from a situation of vulnerability to a situation of social and work stability.



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### THE PRACTICE

The Villa Javier project is well known in Tudela and its surroundings, and people in need enter in contact with the project either because they know a participant or because they are referred by other social entities (municipal services, local food bank or Red Cross).

The Villa Javier project is taking place in facilities that have been donated by a religious organization (Jesuitas). All the necessary building modifications are financed by TC through donations from private companies, banks (La Caixa) and public subsidies (through EDER Consortium and other entities).

#### **Reception service for people in need**

Everyone who asks for help is taken care of. The reception service receives, evaluates, and diagnoses the situation of each applicant, then decides the most appropriate support needed. For the diagnosis, in addition to the information provided by the applicant, more information is gathered from municipal social services or other social entities thanks to the cooperation between local social entities.

The reception service team meets weekly and organizes this entire process, deciding of the required discharges, interventions, or support. The municipal social services and the local food bank are informed, on a weekly basis, of the people admitted. These entities share a register of users, which favors the follow-up and avoids duplications of work effort.

The use of services by users is controlled daily by registering documents following a protocol that complies with data protection regulations. The continuity of users in the different services is highly variable, being valued according to the needs of each one and their evolution in the inclusion process through continuous monitoring.

#### **Food product reception and storage system**

Food is donated thanks to the support of collaborators such as local food banks, companies in the agri-food sector, agricultural production of individuals, etc. If at any time there is a shortage of basic food (milk, for example), Villa Javier encourages society to contribute through social networks, which is usually successful. When receiving the food items, their condition and expiration date are reviewed. They are then stored and subsequent periodic reviews are carried out.

With fresh food, the cold chain is always maintained, both in transport and storage, as TC has an isothermal van for collection and transport of food in addition to cold and frozen chambers in the warehouse. In the storage facility, the "halal" food items are identified because there is a high number of Muslim users.

#### **Villa Javier Soup Kitchen**

Daily lunches and dinners and a take away breakfast are served by volunteers. The food is aimed at adults who mostly live alone or are homeless. In some special cases, food is delivered to the users in a reusable container. For the service they are asked for the symbolic amount of € 1 per day as a donation, with exceptions in some cases. The food offered in the soup kitchen is based on a healthy diet, which prioritizes fresh local food and is adjusted to possible health and cultural demands.



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## THE PRACTICE

Evolution of the soup kitchen service:

- In its beginnings, the soup kitchen service had an external catering company from which the food was purchased, and the donated products were distributed only through El Capacico.
- Later, through a cooperation agreement, from Monday to Friday, the food was cooked by the students of the Illundain Foundation cooking school, using both donated and purchased food, while during weekends and holidays the food was purchased from the catering service.
- From January 2021, the catering company and the cooking students were definitively replaced by El Obrador (see section below), allowing all food to be cooked in TC's own facilities, mostly using donated food which is supplemented with purchased food.

The soup kitchen program offers more than food, it is a friendly space of reference at the territorial level. Between meals, users have a space for relaxation as they can read (there is a small library), use the computer with internet access and can interact with other people. This therefore favors an environment that helps the users improve their self-esteem, personal autonomy, and social relationships.



### **El Capacico: Self-service food for families with dependents**

Families with children, instead of being served in the soup kitchen, are served in El Capacico, a self-service system where the food is paid based on points (i.e., basic food is valued at fewer points than non-essential food). Each family is assigned points according to the number of family members after having diagnosed their economic situation. Follow-up services can also change the number of points attributed per family if their situation changes. The food can be taken away and cooked at home.

Each family is assigned one day a week to pick up their food basket, which includes both fresh and packaged food. The family is accompanied during the "purchase" by a TC volunteer who advises them on products and, at the same time, listens to them regarding their situation and needs. In return, families make a symbolic financial contribution per weekly purchase (€ 1), with possible exceptions depending on the case.

The specific objective of El Capacico program is therefore to cover the basic food needs of user families and to promote healthy eating habits among users. The food supply of El Capacico comes entirely from donations made by the Food Bank (main supplier), agri-food sector local companies, supermarkets, and other local companies, as well as contributions from individuals. In addition to food, basic cleaning, and hygiene products are also available. The donations (which can be periodic, sporadic and regular) are mainly collected by TC volunteers. The reception of donated food is always registered by TC through a receipt note indicating the type of product, the amount received and the donor. No economic valuation is available.

Compared to other food distribution programs, El Capacico is unique because it monitors and assesses weekly food quantity, food variety offer (not only packaged) prioritizing fresh and local products and, as far as possible, adapted to the needs and tastes of each family.

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### THE PRACTICE

#### El Semillero: Training project for social and work insertion

In addition, in 2019 the Villa Javier project (food, training, and accompaniment) developed an additional assistance project with the creation of employment opportunities. An extensive training program called El Semillero was therefore launched. This program makes it easier for users to access the job market and make their need of Villa Javier's services temporary. Some of the training offered are Spanish lessons for foreigners, digital skills, domestic management (economy, health, and equality), basic cooking, homemade canned food, agricultural crops, and job orientation.

#### Mejana Gourmet (MG)

Advancing on the path of social inclusion, in 2020 TC launched the first existing social and work insertion company in the town, this company is called Mejana Gourmet SLU (hereinafter MG). It operates in the agri-food sector and its main objective is to promote access to employment for women in situations of social exclusion. TC is the sole partner and administrator of MG. MG operates under three fundamental premises:

- **Inclusive economy:** The priority of MG is the creation of employment especially for women. The technical staff and other employees are selected (if possible) among the vulnerable users of Villa Javier, who must constitute at least 50% of the workforce. The long term goal is that after a maximum of three years of work for MG, the users are able to obtain an ordinary job. MG is therefore a school-company.
- **Circular economy:** Unused resources are recovered. The kitchen takes advantage of the surplus food of the companies (destined to food for the soup kitchen) and grows vegetables on underutilised land. This food is used to feed the users of the food program of Villa Javier and, at the same time, generates employment in MG.
- **Green economy:** The agricultural activity of MG focuses on the organic cultivation of vegetables in several orchards located in an area of agricultural wealth called La Mejana. These orchards were underutilised for years and given for free by their owners to MG. Drip irrigation to reduce water consumption and solar panels to supply energy to the irrigation pump have been installed on the land. In addition, MG uses compostable packaging to reduce the use of plastics and all the organic waste generated is composted. All the electricity comes from renewable energy sources.

The productive activity of the company MG includes an industrial dimension and an agricultural dimension, two interrelated business activities:

#### 1) El Obrador (MG's industrial kitchen activity)

The industrial kitchen uses a "multiprocessor" plant (artisanal plant of 250 m<sup>2</sup>) to take advantage of the surpluses of companies and shops with which it prepares a variety of healthy dishes, made with local products, without additives or coloring and as far as possible of organic origin.

The kitchen therefore produces artisanal products of high quality that complies with the food safety rules. In addition, this activity, through its use of food surplus, aims to fight against climate change and to move towards zero food waste and zero emissions.



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## THE PRACTICE

The food produced in the industrial kitchen is destined to:

- The soup kitchen Villa Javier using raw materials from the donations and from Los Huertos de la Mejana (explained later)
- Be sold to the public at affordable prices (in this case, everything is cooked with purchased raw material). The dishes are sold at a price between € 3.5 and € 4.5 per unit, this allows generating income for the survival of the company. The sale is made in the facilities of El Obrador.

The daily menu is published on social networks and orders are made through WhatsApp. The buyer is notified when the order is ready to be collected. Entities or groups can also pass an order for specific celebrations and home deliveries. In this case, the food can be home delivered. The design of the label is done using ecological ink and easily removable glue. In addition, containers are plastic free and can be given back to El Obrador or can be composted.

### 2) Los Huertos de La Mejana (MG's agricultural activity)

Traditional vegetables of the area are grown in several underutilised orchards of La Mejana (local organic farming activity). These orchards have been given free of charge by their owners to MG. The company can therefore provide work and agricultural training for excluded people.

The agricultural production of Los Huertosde La Mejana supplies the self-service El Capacico and El Obrador which, at the same time, supplies both the Villa Javier soup kitchen and the shop for the public.



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### ACTORS

For the implementation of Villa Javier it was very important to have a coordinator and a group of volunteers with a high degree of commitment. In 2022 there were 4 full-time and 3 part-time salaried persons, in addition to the volunteers (7 of them are users) who regularly participate in the different services offered: 116 volunteers in the dining room, 24 volunteers in El Capacico, 26 volunteers in training programs, 9 volunteers in services- psychology, toy library, hairdresser, as well as 1 volunteer in cleaning and 34 volunteers responsible for deliveries. The number of salaried staff and the number of volunteers has increased according to the evolution of the project, with a temporary decrease during the two years of the pandemic (2020 and 2021).

In addition, the project has a solid network of collaborating entities, companies and individuals that have generated collaboration networks consolidated throughout the evolution of the project. These entities contribute both with product donations, and offer economic support as well as their services free of charge. Since the beginning, the Villa Javier project has been well received by local society, which actively participates in the promotion and consolidation of the project. For economic management, it relies on external consulting and auditing.

### REGULATORY ASPECTS



There is no specific regulation in Spain that determines the procedure and conditions of delivery or receipt of donations to non-profit entities. There are general regulations on food safety in production and distribution processes, which are strictly complied with.

The Tudela Comparte Foundation is legally constituted as a charitable and non-profit association, it is an entity of public utility and general interest. The Foundation is constituted under current legislation and may be part of confederations or associations of non-profit entities, provided that the applicable laws authorize it. The Villa Javier Project is aligned with the social responsibility of the surrounding companies (CSR).

The company MEJANA GOURMET S.L.U. (MG) is an instrumental company of the Tudela Comparte Foundation, its sole partner and administrator. MG was created in 2020 and is registered in the Mercantile Registry and in the Industrial Registry. The Navarre Employment Service has recognized it as a company of socio-labor insertion, the first company of its kind in the city of Tudela.

The current data protection regulation is also strictly complied with.

### GEOGRAPHIC COVERAGE



The TC Foundation gives geographical coverage in Tudela that has a population of 37,000 inhabitants, Tudela is a city that acts as the head of the region of the Ribera de Navarra that has 27 villages that, together with Tudela, reach a total of 116,000 inhabitants. TC's facilities are located in the city of Tudela, but the initiative is widely known throughout the region and in neighboring regions, therefore enhancing its social impact. The donor companies are mainly located in La Ribera de Navarra area.

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# VOLUMES / OUTCOME / IMPACT GENERATED/ QUANTIFICATION



**SOUP KITCHEN:** Daily service aimed at adults with economic need.

SOUP KITCHEN VILLA JAVIER	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Number of people occasionally /per year	118	113	116	125	68	62
People served in continuity / per year	218	137	104	117	104	87
Number of people served / per year	336	250	214	242	172	149
Number of meals served / per year	21.670	15.369	15.050	16.481	15,423	14,922

**EL CAPACICO:** Self-service supermarket for people with children (or dependents).

EL CAPACICO	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Total number of people served per year	133	422	522	455	507	568
Under 18 years of age per year		221	281	229	262	285
Nº Families served per year	30	108	136	122	141	161

### ORCHARDS: agricultural activity

5 plots (a total of 13,500 square meters (1.35ha)) have been recovered. The most important vegetables produced are (based on the volume of harvest) artichokes (53%), chards (16%) and onions (13%) which are typical products of the area.

### EL OBRADOR: industrial kitchen activity

Two-thirds of the raw material needed to prepare the menus is purchased, and the same proportion of the dishes produced are sold. The other third of the raw materials come from surplus food donated by companies and individuals, as well as those grown by MG. In this way, it contributes to reducing food waste and supplying the soup kitchen of Villa Javier.

### FOOD DONATION RECEIVED

DONATED FOOD (packaged and fresh)	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Nº of food products	6,400	119,248	136,698	159,324	170.366	153.901
Nº kilos delivered	4,380	58,739	73,917	81,881	80,776	70.863

CAPACICO: MAIN FOOD DONORS (YEAR 2020)	Kg.	%
Local Food Bank	42.773,85	39.05%
Companies	62.648,26	57.19%
Individuals	3.172,48	2.90%
MG orchards	953,3	0.87%
TOTAL	109,547. 89	100%



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### BARRIERS TO PRACTICE IMPLEMENTATION

No significant barriers were mentioned by the team of Villa Javier. However, they mention the importance of having a network of cooperators with a high degree of commitment.

In this case, in addition to coordinator and volunteers, a growing number of companies and local entities have been directly involved through different collaboration formulas: some of them collaborate occasionally and others regularly, some contribute with donations in cash or products, and others contribute with their professional services.

### WINNING ASPECTS OF THE PRACTICE

The good methodological functioning has been the result of the coordination effort that has been carried out in several aspects: internal coordination of the organization, coordination with the rest of social entities that work in the region around poverty and exclusion, and forming a network of agreements with numerous companies in the area, most of the agri-food sector, who have become food suppliers for El Capacico (complementing the Food Bank), as well as economic donors in some cases. Within the entity's governance model, special importance has been given to transparency, accountability and both internal and external communication.

The communication capacity since the beginning of the project and its gradual improvement have been key to generating an image of the project in society. That is why it is worth highlighting the importance of good communicative work, a fact that allows to publicize the existing social reality, the actions that are being developed by Villa Javier and the results that are being obtained. Communicating and disseminating are essential to raise awareness and make the project more sustainable at a social level.

Villa Javier has mobilized mainly mature people, with experience and availability who collaborate altruistically. The collaboration with Villa Javier has contributed to a sense of community. Employees have favorable expectations to continue doing so, laying the foundations for a stable community of committed people. The people who work in Villa Javier – salaried or volunteers – provide quality work and care and therefore contribute to the entity being considered as a reference in the field of "good treatment", "attention" and "dignification" of people in situations of social exclusion.

It is also worth mentioning the strong commitment that Villa Javier makes to sustainability (social, economic, and environmental) by carrying out a recovery of people, strengthening the dynamics and social integration in the territory, and incorporating elements of circular economy linked to food in its different phases.

The communication and transparency of the project has allowed to disseminate the principles and values that characterize the spirit of Villa Javier, which is valued very positively, both by people and by companies, making it have greater capacity for permanence, resilience, and durability.

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### CONTACT DETAILS

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The Transparency section (website) contains all relevant information since 2016 (activity and results reports, annual accounts, bulletins, and economic and social impact assessments).

### SIMILAR PRACTICES IN OTHER TERRITORIES

- [EL COLETERO](#)
- The BP on the social grocery of the Municipality of Halandri
- The BP on the Neighbourhood Food Hub project in Milan

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