

Fundación Raíces and Alnitak pick up 1st Jesús Serra Ecosocial Awards presented by Fundación Occident

- **Fundación Raíces**, in **youth social action**, and the **Alnitak** project, in the **blue economy**, have been recognised by Fundación Occident which hosted the 1st Jesús Serra Ecosocial Awards ceremony at its Madrid site on Tuesday.

In this first edition, over 220 projects were formally submitted in the first round from a total of **320 registered applications**, tripling the Foundation's initial target of 80 entries. These awards look to do more than just furnish one-off funding and instead enable strategic cooperation with organisations working on the ground.

The Foundation has thus pledged sustained backing to the selected projects of up to **€50,000 per year for at most three years** (up to €150,000 per project). This call for proposals is designed to cement Fundación Occident's role as a strategic partner for the winning projects as its funding accounts for at least **60% of each project's total budget**.

This financial help is paired with **personalised support, mentoring, shared learning spaces and ongoing monitoring**. The call is part of the Foundation's commitment to children and young people (aged 0-24) and environmental sustainability, especially in the blue economy.

In the environment and the blue economy (a sustainable economic model geared towards responsible use, management and conservation of marine and coastal resources), Alnitak's **'Blue Oasis' project** has been commended as a way to bring Mediterranean artisanal fisheries right up to date with biodegradable gear and precision technology tailored to the micro-scale in the Balearic Islands.

This initiative addresses structural challenges including marine pollution, ghost fishing and a lack of sustainable traceability. The project provides a technically viable and affordable solution for small boats.

"Blue Oasis is not just a technical initiative," said spokesperson Lluís Ballell. "Rather, it is an agreement for sustainability which pragmatically reconciles upgrading the traditional fishing industry with marine conservation goals. The project is anchored in cooperation between fisherfolk and scientists to achieve balanced and mindful resource management.

"This prize brings technical endorsement for what we are doing and validates the vision we advocate for the future of the blue economy. The financial injection is crucial to fast-track the operational implementation and roll-out of activities at sea. The support and mentoring delivered by the Fundación Occident are assets which will enhance the project's impact and help scale up its solutions."

About Fundación Occident

Fundación Occident, formerly Fundación Jesús Serra, is a private non-profit entity, created in memory of Jesús Serra Santamans, a renowned businessman and patron, who was the founder of GCO (Grupo Catalana Occidente). Its activity consists of developing and supporting initiatives in the fields of research, business and teaching, social action, sport, and promotion of the arts, with a common objective: responsible commitment to society.

Meanwhile, in Social Action (Children and Youth), the Fundación Raíces' **'Conscious Employment' project** has been recognised for its model of social and labour market inclusion for young people without family protection (aged between 16 and 25) which flips the traditional paradigm on its head by first offering stable, supported employment and then on-the-job training. It also includes legal, social and financial assistance until the people it helps have become fully self-sufficient, i.e. until they start earning their first wages, with follow-up lasting at least one year.

"This award from the Fundación Occident is a huge boost to the holistic support we deliver every day to hundreds of children in Spain who have no family protection and find themselves on the streets when they reach adulthood with little education, no work experience and no support whatsoever," commented Lourdes Reyzábal, chair of Fundación Raíces. "The prize will enable us to keep up our efforts in 'Conscious Employment' as a solution to the plight of hundreds of children in Spain who are left to fend for themselves when they turn 18 through our all-round support in partnership with businesses offering them job opportunities which enable them to learn and live independently."

"The idea is not to fund individual projects but instead engage with real transformation processes," added Laura Halpern, chair of Fundación Occident, at the event. "We seek to be strategic partners for organisations by building long-term relationships grounded in listening, shared responsibility and mutual learning."

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