

First Orienteering Championships of Western Sahara

Translation from Portuguese article By Maria Silvia Viti

The Saharawi refugee camp of Wilaya of Boujdour was the scene at the beginning of November for the first Orienteering Championships of Western Sahara. This was an event that was a milestone in a growing project developed with the precious help of Alfonso Bustillo, main mentor and instigator, in the framework of the program Artifariti 2014 - International Art Encounters and Human Rights in Western Sahara – that took place on 8th November last year.

A very simple event with a mass start for teams and free route choice with 15 control points; this was the challenge for 80 Saharawi children who joined a dozen adults of various nationalities.

Born in Logroño in 1979, with a degree in Physical Education and a career as a professional firefighter, Alfonso Bustillo has been orienteering since he was 16. He is the key worker in a project that is not just concepts and goals, but has as its initial aim to come in contact with the reality of the refugee camps in the former Spanish colony. This idea was not just for observation and knowledge; Bustillo wanted to take something with him, something that would be understood as valid and that could provide a base point for the future. "If I was a doctor or engineer I would certainly instigate other things, but I am an orienteer and took them a little of what I know," he says. For preparing the trip and participation in Artifariti 2014, a Friends Association of the Sahara in Seville initiative, Alfonso Bustillo had the support of his club, Club Riojano of Orientación en la Naturaleza. He obtained enough resources to be able to offer 20 controls, 20 compasses, some books and sports equipment and even some money that was donated to local institutions.

In the end the objectives were fully achieved: introducing orienteering to Physical Education teachers, and producing a map for future events.

This was just the beginning of the project, and Bustillo dreams of returning next year. "The contacts with the sports authorities, local teachers and the Boyador Scouts allowed me to perceive local peculiarities, and I can now develop more specific and more suitable project work," he says. Working with teachers interested in producing a map of the whole camp (totalling 10 sq. km.) is the next step. There is much work to do, and as a means of sharing knowledge and experiences, he also has an ambition: "I would like to see an orienteering event organized annually, called the Sahara Marathon, which would add a new and challenging competition to the sporting life of the camps," says Alfonso Bustillo.