

# A small great history of the sister Societies of Developmental Biology in Spain and Portugal

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**ABSTRACT** We revise the historical evolution of the societies devoted to Developmental Biology from the early activities of the *Institut International d'Embryologie* (IIE), founded in 1911, with particular emphasis on the more recent constitution of the Spanish *Sociedad Española de Biología del Desarrollo* (SEBD), founded in 1994, and the Portuguese *Sociedade Portuguesa de Biologia do Desenvolvimento* (SPBD), founded in 2006. We also describe the role played by *The International Journal of Developmental Biology* (IJDB) in the constitution of the SEBD and its projection and support to international Developmental Biology societies and individual researchers in the world, according to its mission to be a non-for-profit publication for scientists, by scientists.

**KEY WORDS:** *Spanish Society of Developmental Biology, SEBD, Portuguese Society of Developmental Biology, SPBD, International Journal of Developmental Biology, IJDB, International Society of Developmental Biologists, ISDB*

## Origin and evolution of Developmental Biology societies in the world

In comparison to other scientific societies belonged to classical disciplines, such as Anatomy or Zoology, Developmental Biology societies are a relatively recent occurrence. Thus, with the exception of the pioneering activities of the *Institut International d'Embryologie*, founded by Ambrosius Hubrecht (1853-1915) in Utrecht (The Netherlands) in 1911 (Faasse *et al.* 1999; Hopwood, 2007; Richardson and Narraway, 1999), who organized some international scientific meetings from 1930 to 1938, albeit of a minor nature (Fig. 1), there were really no real organization with a significant number of members until 1939. In that year, the USA *Society for the Study of Growth and Development* was founded. This society changed its name to the *Society for Developmental Biology* (SDB) in 1965 and continues to be the largest national Developmental Biology society in terms of members and activities to date. The journal associated with the SDB, known as "*Developmental Biology*", first appeared in 1959, although it was not published under its auspices until 1966 onwards. Other national Developmental Biology societies were born after the Second World War (1939-1945), beginning with the corresponding British

society, which is the second most important in terms of numbers. It arose in 1948 as the *London Embryologist Club* and in 1964 changed its name to the *Society for Developmental Biology*, curiously enough the same name chosen shortly thereafter by the previously mentioned USA society. After some debates about the inconvenience of two societies having the same name and with a view to clearly distinguishing both, the British one was renamed as the *British Society for Developmental Biology* (BSDB) in 1969, which is the name it is known by today (see Slack, 2000 for its own history). Its associated publication, the "*Journal of Embryology and Experimental Morphology*" (*JEEM*), first appeared in 1953

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*Abbreviations used in this paper:* APDBN, Asia-Pacific Developmental Biology Network; BSDB, British Society for Developmental Biology; EDBO, European Developmental Biology Organization; ELISO, European Life Scientist Organization; IJDB, International Journal of Developmental Biology; ISDB, International Society of Developmental Biologists; SDB, USA Society for Developmental Biology; SEBD, Sociedad Española de Biología del Desarrollo; SFBD, Société Française de Biologie du Développement; SLABD, Sociedad Latino-Americana de Biología del Desarrollo; SMBD, Sociedad Mexicana de Biología del Desarrollo; SPBD, Sociedade Portuguesa de Biologia do Desenvolvimento.

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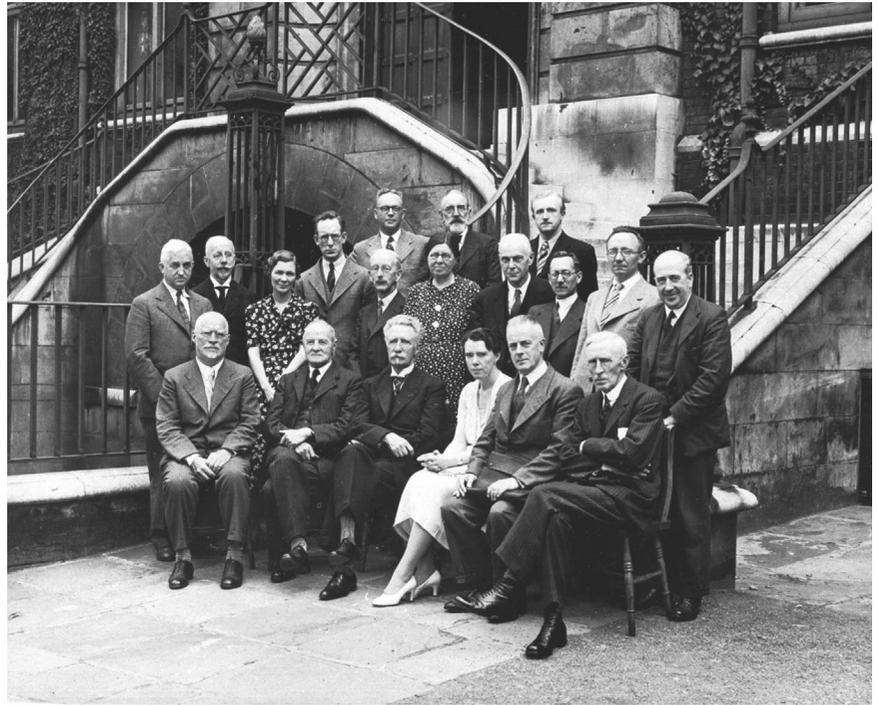
and changed its name to "*Development*" in 1987. Neither the journal "*Developmental Biology*" nor the journal "*JEEM/Development*" are the property of the respective societies, but rather belong to a commercial publisher (*Elsevier*) in the first case and to an academic publisher (*The Company of Biologists Limited, CoB*) in the latter case.

German and Japanese scientists were authentic pioneers in many aspects of what is today considered to be the conceptual body of Developmental Biology (Eguchi, 1994; Trendelenburg and Grunz, 1996; De Robertis and Aréchaga, 2001). It is thus surprising that despite being founders of the first scientific journals in this area, "*Archiv für Entwicklungsmechanik der Organismen*" published from its origin by *Springer Verlag* (which started in 1894 and continues today as "*Development, Genes and Evolution*") and "*Embryologia*" (first published in 1950 and now called "*Development, Growth and Differentiation*", published today by *Wiley-Blackwell*), the corresponding societies (*Japanese Society for Developmental Biology* and *Gesellschaft für Entwicklungsbiologie*) were not formally constituted until 1968 and 1975 respectively. The remaining national societies began to arise subsequently, with the *Société Française de Biologie du Développement (SFBD)* founded in 1976 (see Beetschen, 1990b) being notable among them in terms of number of members and activities. Within the Hispanic world, the first society to be constituted was the *Sociedad Mexicana de Biología del Desarrollo, SMBD* (1992), followed by the *Sociedad Española de Biología del Desarrollo, SEBD* (1994) and the *Sociedade Portuguesa de Biologia do Desenvolvimento, SPBD* (2006). A number of mixed societies have also been formed, essentially together with Reproduction Biology and Cell Biology groups, as in the case in Italy (see De Felici and Siracusa, 2000) and Australia and New Zealand (see Key, 2002).

A very useful directory of developmental biologists all over the world, including addresses, main research areas, book reviews and notices, was published annually by the *Hubrecht Laboratory* between 1949 and 1981 with the name of *General Embryological Information Service* (Fig. 2). The first list of scientists drawn up in 1949 includes 690 names from 245 institutions in 28 countries and the last list to appear at the beginning of the eighties included more than 3,400 scientists from 1,200 centers in 50 countries. During that period, more than 1,500 books were reviewed (Faber and Salomé, 1981). These data show the increasing importance of Developmental Biology during a crucial period of thirty years; but, today, the number of developmental biologists in the world is growing exponentially, so their societies will have a splendid and healthy future.

### Grouping of national Developmental Biology societies and shared activities with other scientific societies

The increasing number of developmental biologists over the years, as well as the inexistence of specific societies in many



**Fig. 1. Group photograph of participants at the last international meeting organized by the *Institute International d'Embryologie* (London, August 2-5, 1938), organization created under the stimuli of Ambrosius Hubrecht (1853-1915) in 1911 in Utrecht, The Netherlands. The prestigious Portuguese histologist and embryologist Augusto Celestino da Costa (1884-1956) is the third from the right, in the middle row. The remaining participants were H. M.W. Woerdeman, H. Bluntschli, J. Floriant, G.L. Streeter, K. Peter, K. Jones Hill, J.T. Flynn, E.S. Goodrich, E.A. Fraser, W.H. Lewis, P. Gérard, H. Woollard, O. Grosser, J.F. Wilson, J. Boeke, G. Levi, H.B. Fell, D. de Lange, J.P. Hill. (Courtesy of the Hubrecht Laboratory, Netherlands Institute for Developmental Biology).**

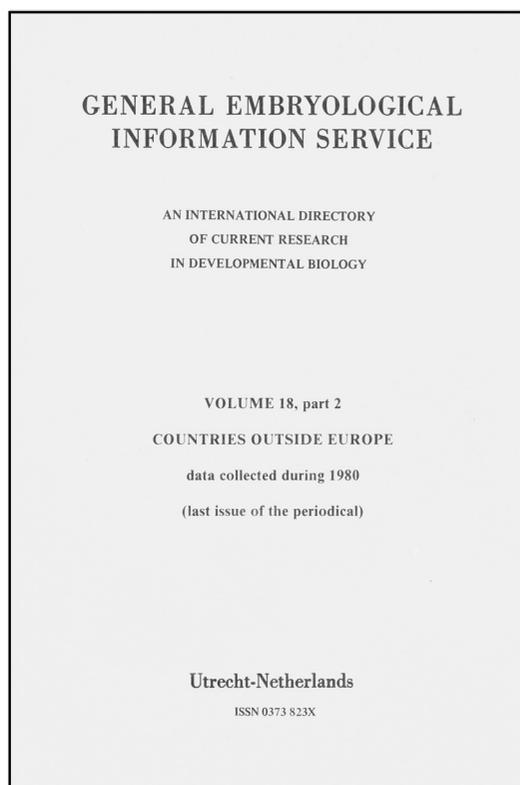
countries, contributed to the appearance of multinational organizations which provided a type of association covering for both constituted societies and/or individual members from different countries. Thus, the General Assembly of the *Institut International d'Embryologie* renamed itself as the *International Society of Developmental Biologists (ISDB)* on September 6, 1968, admitting only individual members (not societies) until 1997 and continued keeping its headquarters at the *Hubrecht Laboratory* in Utrecht, The Netherlands. Some time later, in 1978, the *European Developmental Biology Organization, EDBO* was created by grouping several European societies (not individual scientists) and had also its base at the *Hubrecht Laboratory*. The *Sociedad Latinoamericana de Biología del Desarrollo (SLABD)* started in 1997 and, more recently, the *Asia-Pacific Developmental Biology Network (APDBN)* was organized in a mixed situation: they include both personal and society members. The fundamental activity of all these multinational organizations mainly consists in organizing international conferences and congresses.

The multidisciplinary nature of Developmental Biology has also facilitated the existence of reunions together with other societies (*i.e.* the *BSDB* regularly celebrates one of its two annual meetings with the *British Society of Cell Biology, BSCB*). In a similar manner, the celebration of joint society meetings is becoming more common among European societies (*i.e.* the 2003 *SFBD/BSDB* joint meeting in Nice, France, the 2008 *SEBD/BSDB*

joint meeting in Seville or the next 2009 *SFBD/SEBD* joint meeting in Toulouse) and American societies (*i.e.* the *First Panamerican Congress in Developmental Biology*, between the *SMBD*, the *LASDB* and the *USA-SBD* in Cancun, Mexico in 2007).

Nevertheless, relations between members and societies have not always been easy or comfortable and various conflicts have arisen. Such discrepancies gave rise to the creation in 1971 of the *International Society of Differentiation (ISD)* and its journal *Differentiation* (currently published by *Elsevier*) in 1973. More recently, they promoted the eclipse, to term it euphemistically, of the *EDBO*, an event that merits an additional commentary on behalf of the *SEBD*, which was directly affected by this matter.

Let us begin by recalling that at the *ISDB* board meeting celebrated in Snow Bird (Utah, USA) during the *ISDB* congress of 1997, it was decided that the *EDBO* would enter into a «*dormant state*» and that it would remain as a «*token organization*» (a strange situation indeed and a denomination without any specific meaning!). From then up to now, the *ISDB* does not admit individual members and evolved into an «*umbrella organization*» of national societies of Developmental Biology of the world. But the problems with the sudden decision of 1997 were the following: a) it was taken without prior consultation of the national societies who made up the *EDBO* and paid regularly their fees, b) the *EDBO* funds was transferred immediately to the *ISDB* in the same way and c) neither event was contemplated in the Statutes of the *EDBO*, or approved by the constitutive national societies. Despite this, in the summer of 1999, the *EDBO* board met in Oslo (Norway) during the last *EDBO* conference (*EDBOC, 1999*) and one of us attended this meeting in his capacity as representative of the *SEBD*. During that meeting, it was proposed that Professor Antonio García-Bellido will be the President-Elect of the *EDBO*, as successor of the late Professor Anne McLaren (1927-2007), and the organization of the next *EDBO* conference was adjudicated to the *SEBD* for the year 2003 (*EDBOC, 2003*). Indeed, this nomination had been proposed by the Spanish society at the *1995 EDBOC* at Toulouse (France). A few months later, the *Board of the SEBD* decided that the said conference would be celebrated in Bilbao (Spain), with the Secretary of the *SEBD* and *The International Journal of Developmental Biology* as organizers of the event. In the same manner, that is, without informing any of the affected, the following meeting of the *ISDB* board took place in 2001 at the *ISDB* Tokyo congress, but... more surprises were in store. The following *ISDB Congress* was brought forward 2 years (it had heretofore been celebrated every 4 years) and that it was going to be jointly celebrated with the *SDB* in Boston (USA) during the summer of 2003. Simultaneously, the recently constituted *European Life Sciences Organization (ELSO)* announced that it was organizing, also during the summer of 2003, a macro-congress in Dresden (Germany). This confluence of dates with that of the *EDBOC, 2003* in Bilbao rendered the latter an unviable venture, due to the heavy forecasted economic losses associated with reduced participation. The then organizer of 2003 *EDBOC* meeting in Bilbao tried on innumerable occasions to find out what had gone on behind the scenes, by contacting the management of the *ISDB* and the *EDBO*; however, no explanations were forthcoming and simply no response to these complaints was offered by anyone. This fundamental lack of respect for the *SEBD* and as a consequence, for all the other European societies, could not have been more apparent.



**Fig. 2.** Cover of the last issue of the “*General Embryological Information Service*” (1981). An annual international directory of developmental biologists and their research subjects, which also included book reviews and news, published by the Hubrecht Laboratory of Utrecht, The Netherlands, between 1949 and 1981.

The passage of time invariably facilitates a more objective perspective on events. Some years later, the circumstances that motivated the above-mentioned «bullying» operations are now more apparent to us. In our opinion, they were more or less the following: a) the pressure of the aggressive commercial publisher *Elsevier*, which aimed to enhance the impact of, and number of subscriptions to its journal “*Mechanism of Development*” (*MOD*), which continues to be the official journal of the *ISDB*, whereas the official journal of the *EDBO* was “*Roux’s Archives of Developmental Biology*”, published by *Springer*; b) the advanced gestational stage of an unusual developmental, cell and molecular macro-organization called the *European Life Sciences Organization (ELSO)*, supported essentially by centre-European scientists and with an apparent aim to absorb the *EDBO*, as unfortunately it had already done before with the *European Cell Biology Organization (ECBO)*, which was eliminated by the *ELSO* little time earlier; c) the traditional skepticism of the British towards supranational European organizations (see Slack, 2000); do not forget in this regard that the *BSDB* is the biggest European Developmental Biology society. The incongruence that the *ISDB* and the *EDBO* were operated from the same place and managed by the same persons facilitated the «narcoleptic» operation directed against the *EDBO*, by means of a soporific cocktail of outside interferences. Overall, a sad episode which should be rectified in some way for the good of European Developmental Biology - maybe it is time to wake the *EDBO* from its coma!



**Fig. 3. Memories of the first six meetings of the Spanish Society of Developmental Biology (SEBD) held respectively in Leioa (1996), Barcelona (1999), Malaga (2001), Santander (2004), Alicante (2006) and Seville (2008). The latter was a joint meeting with the British Society of Developmental Biology (BSDB). A poster of the forthcoming joint meeting of the Spanish and French societies (SEBD-SFBD) (2009) in Toulouse is also included.**

### The International Journal of Developmental Biology (IJDB) and the Spanish Society of Developmental Biology (SEBD)

The birth of the Spanish society occurred in a manner that was precisely the opposite of that which occurred for the USA and British societies, and more in line with that which took place in the case of the German and Japanese societies. Thus, in Spain, we start modernizing a national journal, which had been published

exclusively in Spanish before, and, when this had created adequate brewing conditions, we commenced the task of creating a national Developmental Biology Society.

The origin of *The International Journal of Developmental Biology* goes back to 1952 when it bore the name *Anales de Anatomía* (Annals of Anatomy). It was founded by José Escolar (1913-1998) at the University of Granada (Spain) and principally covered the area of Neuroanatomy, a discipline with a great tradition in Spain due to the heritage of Santiago Ramón y Cajal

(1852-1934). From 1960 onwards, the journal changed its name to *Anales del Desarrollo* (Annals of Development) under the direction of Miguel Guirao (b.1924), only a year after the foundation of the USA journal *Developmental Biology*, and began to limit its scope to Embryology and Teratology. Later, in 1989, and modeling ourselves largely on the recent superb example of the prestigious British journal *Development*, edited then by Chris Wiley (which had only two years earlier been reshaped), the journal took a quantum leap, change its name to *The International Journal of Developmental Biology* and re-defined its mission as being truly international in outreach and was published in English under the direction of Juan Aréchaga. Since then, the journal publishes original works of research, giving priority to those papers that report frontier research using state of the art techniques oriented towards the modern tendencies of the discipline. Today, the journal is among the leading and most attractive journals in the field worldwide and it competes with others published by some of the most omnipotent multinational publishers (its 2006/JCR *Impact Factor* reaches the value of 3.577, which was less than 0.3 units behind the journal *Mechanisms of Development*!). In this regard, we have always firmly believed that, in the area of science publishing, language is subordinate to scientific quality; what matters first and foremost is the quality of the science, not the language in which it is expressed. Only when a community has consolidated its identity as a producer of excellent science, should it consider the possibility of encouraging the adoption and promotion of its own language within its sphere of activity. Giving priority to language rather than to quality of science is little more than a dictatorship of philologists and/or politicians. As far as the Spanish language is concerned, it has been forecasted by the English linguist David Graddol that Spanish has good chances of displacing English into international communications within around 50 years (Graddol, 2006). Nevertheless, in the sphere of science, this would only be possible when the Hispanic countries would have developed a solid tradition of professional and competitive science publishing, evidently mostly written in English, until then.

Since its remodeling in 1989, *The International Journal of Developmental Biology* has been faithful to the ideas expressed in its inaugural *Editorial Statement* (Guirao and Aréchaga, 1989) and in this regard has understood the concept of Developmental Biology in a very wide sense, from the conceptual and methodological points of view, in both health and disease. Additionally, the journal has always aimed to be international in scope and purpose. Thus we also produce *Special Issues* which, as in the present case of one devoted to *Spain and Portugal* (Aréchaga and Palmeirim, 2009), aim to promote greater knowledge and awareness among the international community of the tradition and activities in the area of Developmental Biology in the following countries until now: *Finland* (Lehtonen, 1989), *France* (Beetschen, 1990), the former *Yugoslavia* (Svajger, 1991), *Belgium* (Van Gansen, 1992), *Japan* (Eguchi, 1994); *Sweden* (Heby, 1995), *Germany* (Trendelenburg and Grunz, 1996), *Russia* (Mikhailov and Vassetzky, 1997), *United Kingdom* (Smith, 2000), *Italy* (De Felici and Siracusa, 2000), *Switzerland* (Hafen *et al.* 2002), *Australia and New Zealand* (Key, 2002) and *Poland* (Kloc *et al.* 2008). Other *Special Issues* of IJDB were dedicated to know in deep the historic and present significance of relevant research centers focused on Developmental Biology, like the *Hubrecht*

*Laboratory* in Utrecht, the Nederland (Durstun, 1999) or the *Nogent Institute* in Paris, France (Dieterlain, 2005). Finally, other group of *Special Issues* were dedicated to research topics which are currently of great interest and transcendence for the scientific community as *Developmental Aspects of Neoplasia* (Damjanov and Martínez-Hernández, 1993), *Odontogenesis* (Ruch, 1995), *Developmental Biology of Urodeles* (Malacinski and Duhon, 1996), *Vertebrate Development In vitro* (Cockroft, 1997), *Developmental Genetics of Drosophila* (Ghysen, 1998), *Stem Cells and Transgenesis* (Hammer and Behringer, 1998), *Nephrogenesis* (Sariola *et al.* 1999), *The Spemann-Mangold Organizer* (De Robertis and Aréchaga, 2001) *Mammalian Reproduction and Development* (Hogan, 2001), *Limb Development* (Hurlé and Izpisua-Belmonte, 2002), *Teaching Developmental Biology* (Malacinski and Duhon, 2003), *Evolution and Development* (Baguñà and García-Fernández, 2003), *Skin Development* (Dhouailly, 2004) *Eye Development* (Piatigorski and Grainger, 2004) *Invasion in Cancer and Development* (Mareel and Aréchaga, 2004) *Plant Development* (Micol and Blázquez, 2005) *Morphodynamics* (Gordon and Belousov, 2006), *Ear Development* (Giraldez and Fritsch, 2007), *Fertilization* (Wassarman and Vacquier, 2008), *Epigenetics and Development* (Khochbin and Nonchev, 2009) and *Pattern Formation* (Richardson and Chuong, 2009). The present state of health of the journal, its success as an academic not-for-profit publication and the fact that several journals in the field have imitated (but never surpassed!) IJDB Special Issues, would suggest that our strategies over all these years have not been entirely unfounded.

The *Spanish Society of Developmental Biology (SEBD)* was formally constituted on the 10th February 1994 thanks to the support and stimuli of *The International Journal of Developmental Biology*. During this meeting, a draft of *Statutes* were elaborated, a provisional *logotype* was presented and a *Board of Directors* was proposed, including scientists from diverse areas of knowledge (Biochemistry, Genetics, Cell Biology, Anatomy, Physiology, Zoology, Plant Biology, Pathology and Veterinary Sciences) and diverse institutional affiliations (National Council for Scientific Research, Universities and Hospitals, with distinct geographical distributions). The composition of the first board of directors of the *SEBD*, kindly accepted unanimously by all proposed members, was the following:

|                |                                 |
|----------------|---------------------------------|
| President:     | Antonio García-Bellido (Madrid) |
| Secretary:     | Juan Aréchaga (Leioa)           |
| Treasurer:     | Manuel García-Sanz (Leioa)      |
| Board Members: | Jaume Baguñà (Barcelona)        |
|                | José Becerra (Málaga)           |
|                | José P. Beltran (Valencia)      |
|                | Salvador Climent (Zaragoza)     |
|                | Jordi Domingo (Barcelona)       |
|                | Fernando Giraldez (Valladolid)  |
|                | Juan Hurlé (Santander)          |
|                | Roberto Marco (Madrid)          |
|                | Julio Navascués (Granada)       |
|                | Angela Nieto (Madrid)           |
|                | Luis Puelles (Murcia)           |
|                | Jaime Renau (Valencia)          |
|                | Juan Represa (Valladolid)       |
|                | José Vilches (Cádiz)            |

Organization  
Secretary: Nuria González de Ubieta (Leioa)

Around this time, an intense campaign was initiated to capture scientists to join the *SEBD*. As a consequence, membership increased spectacularly to 220 founding members. This response filled us with satisfaction, since it indicated that the creation of the *SEBD* was a need amply felt by the Spanish scientific community. The presence of founding members from other countries also added prestige to the *SEBD*, and their association was and continues to be very positively regarded. The promoters of the *SEBD* requested immediately the integration of the Society into the *EDBO*, which took place officially on 12th July 1995, and involved, from 1997, its inclusion in the *ISDB*.

The *First Congress of the SEBD* was celebrated in Leioa (Biscay, Spain) between the 9th and the 12th December 1996. During the Congress, the founding members met at the first *General Assembly* on 11th December, and ratified the *Statutes*, *logotype* and *Board of Directors* of the Society. Invited speakers who participated in this first Congress included Peter Gruss (the then president of the *ISDB*), John Gurdon, Nicole Le Douarin, Martin Evans (recent 2007 Nobel Prize winner), Antonio García-Bellido, Allan Bradley, Wolf Reik, Marc Mareel, Ivan Damjanov, Leo Sachs and Mieke Van Lijsebettens. An international workshop on *Developmental Approaches to Cancer Biology* was organized after the Congress. We had in total 150 inscriptions, resulting in 124 oral communications with simultaneous poster sessions. Spanish and English were the official languages of the meeting. A 316 pages Supplement to Vol. 40 of *The International Journal of Developmental Biology* was published under the form of short contributions (Aréchaga, 1996). Subsequently, the *SEBD* has celebrated scientific meetings (Fig. 3) in Barcelona at 1999 (Baguña, 1999), Malaga at 2001 (Becerra, 2001), Santander at 2004 (Hurlé *et al.*, 2004), Alicante at 2006 (Micol, 2006; Baguña, 2007) and Seville at 2008, as a joint meeting with the British *BSDB* (González-Reyes and Castelli-Gair, 2008; Hidalgo and Martín-Bermudo, 2009). Next meetings are planned for Toulouse (November, 2009) and Badajoz (September, 2010) and it is our intention to celebrate them together with the French *SFBD*, the first one, and with the Portuguese *SPBD* the second. Perhaps, it could be a good way to wake up the sleeping *EDBO*! More information about the *SEBD* can be found at the following web address: <http://www.sebd.ehu.es>

### A Portuguese Society for Developmental Biology is born!

There is not a long history behind the recently born Portuguese Society for Developmental Biology (*Sociedade Portuguesa de Biologia do Desenvolvimento, SPBD*). Portugal was pretty naïve in the field thirteen years ago when Professor Eduardo G. Crespo (a scientific son of Professor Sacarrão and scientific grand-son of Professor Celestino da Costa) created, for the first time, a developmental biology course in the Faculty of Sciences of the University of Lisbon. This was an important step for several of us that by then, with the support of the *Portuguese Foundation of Science and Technology (FCT)* and/or the *Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian (FCG) / Instituto Gulbenkian de Ciência (IGC)*, went abroad joining to many of the more famous Developmental Biology

laboratories all over the world (for example, Christine Mummery's, Claudio Stern's, David Ish-Horowicz's, Eddy De Robertis's, Jim Smith's, Juan Carlos Izpisua Belmonte's, Julian Lewis's, Larry Zipursky's, Nicole Le Douarin's, Phil Ingham's and Rob Krumlauf's laboratories). The return of these young developmental biologists to Portugal started a few years ago, reinforcing the local developmental biology community and leading to a great deal of enthusiasm that has been further boosted with the creation of *SPBD*. The concentration of several of these recently formed research groups in the Lisbon area, mainly at the *IGC* that led to the generation of a *FCG* research unit, *Centro Biologia do Desenvolvimento* ([www.cdb.pt](http://www.cdb.pt)), was also an important contribution to this process.

The *SPBD* was formally constituted on the 29th October 2006. Our Statutes were elaborated, a logotype was agreed upon, our webpage has been launched ([www.spbd.org](http://www.spbd.org)) and a board of directors was named, including scientists with diverse institutional affiliations. The composition of the first board of directors of the *SPBD* is the following:

#### Direction:

Isabel Palmeirim (President)  
António Jacinto (Vice-President)  
Raquel Andrade (Treasurer)  
Élio Sucena  
Rui Martinho  
General Assembly Committee:  
Domingos Henrique (President)  
Hélia Neves  
Solveig Thorsteinsdottir

#### Fiscal Committee:

Carlos Plancha  
António Cidadão  
Leonor Saúde

The kick-off of our Society was celebrated with the organization of its first meeting (Fig. 4) held at the *Instituto Gulbenkian de Ciência*, Oeiras, Portugal, on the 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> of October 2006 (see meeting report in Andrade and Saúde, 2007). In this launching event we were honoured with the presence of Julian Lewis and Claudio Stern, who kindly presented the opening and closing seminars of this meeting, respectively. In an environment of friendship and enthusiasm, the first 75 Portuguese members of the *SPBD* demonstrated that Portugal already has significant critical mass in the Developmental Biology field and also harbours scientific work with very high quality. Presently the members of the *SPBD* are spread across six Portuguese research institutions from the upper north to the sunny south of Portugal: *Life and Health Sciences Research Institute (ICVS)* - University of Minho, *Instituto Gulbenkian de Ciência (IGC)*, *Instituto de Medicina Molecular (IMM)* and *Faculty of Sciences*, both from the University of Lisbon, *Veterinary Faculty* from the Technical University of Lisbon and *IBB/ Centro Biomedicina Molecular e Estrutural*, University of Algarve.

The expectations and prospects arising from the creation of the *SPBD* are ambitious, ranging from promoting the work of Developmental Biology researchers from Portuguese institutions, to increasing the interaction with foreign developmental biologists, and to promoting the Developmental Biology field



**Fig. 4.** Poster and participants in the First meeting of the Portuguese Society of Developmental Biology (SPBD) in Oeiras (Portugal) (2006).

within Portuguese society. Apart from several significant developments towards fulfilling these promises, new scientific challenges are surfacing. Among other activities, we presently organize a monthly *Embryology Club* that gathers most of us and provides a unique setting to exchange new ideas and establish collaborations. *SPBD* is also committed to the organization of joint meetings of our Society members with other Portuguese organizations devoted to parallel scientific areas, aiming at promoting and facilitating research in border-line scientific domains. Furthermore, joint meetings with other European Developmental Biology Societies are being planned and we also hope to foster many more. We are looking forward to motivate young people to generate knowledge and innovation and contribute to the sustained growth of this exciting scientific field, Developmental Biology.

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