

Preface

The choice of France for this second special issue of *The International Journal of Developmental Biology* devoted to developmental biology in different countries has been a source of both satisfaction and concern for the editor. Experimental embryology has been developing in France for a century, although it has become a prominent discipline only during the last 40 years. Among its pioneers, two eminent scientists, Etienne Wolff and Louis Gallien, played a leading role as organizers, before their students and collaborators themselves branched out into various specialties, mostly concerned with amphibian and avian embryos. A network of local research centers developed later from migrating trained embryologists. Still more recently, international exchanges have led to new biological models being introduced in other centers.

Developmental biology in France thus appears to be largely diversified. Due to this situation, the selection of topics and authors was rather difficult, and a few of the scientists originally selected were not able to accept our invitation to prepare articles in the stipulated time. However, I do hope that the present issue will succeed in presenting a progressive series of long-lasting research, starting with oocyte maturation and early developmental stages, then leading to various cell and organ differentiation processes. Specific original topics also have been presented. On the other hand, molecular biology studies might appear to be understated in this series of articles: this is a situation that actually corresponds to a delay in this type of approach, but many laboratories are now engaged in such research strategies and should be contributing original findings within the next few years. The large number and the diversity of topics in France looks quite promising in this respect. Indeed, we must not forget that general interpretations cannot be fully obtained from single – albeit convenient – model systems, and comparative studies will always be necessary since they enable us to establish fundamental rules by discarding particular characteristics.

Finally, it is a pleasure to thank the authors who have agreed to devote valuable time to writing excellent reviews and collecting documents. All of us are greatly indebted to Juan Aréchaga, whose decision and helpful suggestions for the second volume of this series have provided the opportunity to present this selection of articles.

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