

Text written by the first SPBD President, Isabel Palmeirim, and published on the SPBD webpage in 2007.

A Portuguese Society for Developmental Biology is born!

There is not a long history behind the recently born Portuguese Society for Developmental Biology (SPBD). Portugal was pretty naïve in the field thirteen years ago when a course in Developmental Biology was created for the first time, namely in the Faculty of Sciences at the University of Lisbon. This course addressed the causal (genetic and epigenetic) aspects underlying embryonic development and thus complementing the existing courses of Embryology (mainly focusing on descriptive and comparative aspects of embryogenesis). Soon after, and with the support of the Portuguese Foundation of Science and Technology (FCT) and/or the Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian (FCG) / Instituto Gulbenkian de Ciência (IGC), several of us went abroad joining 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 the 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 FCT research unit, Centro Biologia do Desenvolvimento – www.cdb.pt), was also an important contribution to this process.

The SPBD was formally constituted on 29th October 2006. Our statutes were elaborated, a logotype was agreed upon, our webpage has been launched and a board of directors was named, including scientists with diverse institutional affiliations.

The kick-off of our Society was celebrated with the organization of its first meeting held at the Instituto Gulbenkian de Ciência, Oeiras, Portugal, on the 27th and 28th of October 2006 (see meeting report 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 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 Embryo 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, together with our European sister societies, contribute for the sustained growth of this exciting scientific field, Developmental Biology.

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References

Andrade RP, Saúde L. (2007) 1st Meeting of the Portuguese Society for Developmental Biology (SPBD) *International Journal of Developmental Biology*, 51:177-81