In Memoriam

The passing of Rodolfo Núñez de las Cuevas on May 14, 2024, following an extensive life dedicated to Earth Sciences, signifies for this Foundation the loss of a key figure in the birth and development of Geophysics in Spain during the last third of the 20th century.

This military engineer, who joined the National Geographic Institute (IGN) in 1953 as a geographic engineer, balanced his work there with his teaching career at the Technical University of Madrid in the Chair of Cartographic Representation. In 1974, he was appointed Director General of the National Geographic Institute (IGN), carrying out intensive work to modernize the Center, preparing it for its transition into the 21st century, and leaving behind a continuous period of traditional activities.

As Dr. Núñez de las Cuevas expressed during the recognition ceremony held by this Foundation at the 21st Edition Awards, his geophysical dream began in 1956 during a visit to the Fredericksburg (Virginia) magnetic observatory of the US Coast and Geodetic Survey, coinciding with the activities of the International Geophysical Year. He was able to fulfill this dream years later when he began his tenure as director of the IGN.

His leadership was overwhelming, as he tirelessly showed his support for Spanish participation in the Geodynamic Project, which also included the start of a profound transformation in geophysical observation. Thus, the first advancements began with the installation of new seismic stations with telephone transmission, along with decisive participation in the Seismic Profiles Program in Spain.

Within Terrestrial Magnetism, he promoted the creation of a new reference magnetic observatory in San Pablo de los Montes (Toledo) to replace the traditional Toledo Observatory, which had to be substituted due to electrical pollution. Likewise, during his period as director, the new Güímar Geophysical Observatory in Tenerife was also initiated to replace the one in Las Mesas, which had become inoperative for similar reasons.

Another event of particular importance, with geophysical significance, was the creation of a new branch of observation within the National Astronomical Observatory: the Yebes Observatory in Guadalajara. This observatory marked the beginning of a new vision of astronomy that the National Geographic Institute has developed since then, featuring multiple applications in the geophysical world, such as the observation of small displacements between different tectonic plates. To expand this branch of astronomy, he also promoted a Millimeter Radio Astronomy agreement with Germany and France for the installation of a 40-meter radiotelescope in Loma de Dilar (Granada).

Under his Presidency of the National Commission for Geodesy and Geophysics, Núñez de las Cuevas promoted the National Assemblies of Geodesy and Geophysics, held biennially starting in 1974. This established, for the first time, a national forum for exchange among Geodesy and Geophysics researchers from national universities and research centers. These forums enabled connectivity between different centers, resulting in a breakthrough for research and cooperation in this branch of Science.