

Magnanimous in his undertakings, he was actively involved in the scientific community as: vice-president of the Specialised Solid State Physics Group (GEFES) of the Spanish Royal Society of Physics (1984–86), member of the Management Committee of the RIS Project (1997–99), vice-president of the Spanish Society of Materials (SEMAT, 1997–2000), and member of the Physical and Engineering Steering Committee of the European Science Foundation (1997–2000). He was also an external evaluator of the Materials Program of the Energy Department of the United States (from 2003) and a member of the advisory committee for innovation and knowledge transfer of the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation (2011–14).

His work was recognised with several distinctions: Fellow of the American Physical Society (1993), Domingo Martínez Foundation Award (1999), “Epsilon de Oro” from the Spanish Electroceramics Society (2005), Honorary Patron of the Foundation for the Development of Hydrogen Technologies in Aragon (2008), and Fellow of the European Ceramic Society (2017).

Víctor always viewed research as a team activity performed by people with complementary skills. Ceramics processing and fuel cells were lines of research that he led for years in the Excellence Group of the Government of Aragon, LPM, Laser Processing of Materials (2003–10), and in the Consolidated Group, ProCaCEF, Processing and Characterisation of Structural and Functional Ceramics (2011–16).

Unanimously voted in as a full member of the Royal Academy of Exact, Physical, Chemical and Natural Sciences of Zaragoza, he read his inaugural address on 14 June 2007, receiving medal number 39 and joining the physics section. This is where he worked, generously and effectively lending his time and experience, until he died on 28 January 2020.

Previously, at the end of 2015, when he turned 65, he retired to pass his baton onto the next generation. However, his scientific activity was not affected as he became *ad honorem* professor of the CSIC. During this last period, his former colleagues were able to continue counting on his generous contributions. It was at this time that, in collaboration with his wife, History Professor and Researcher Pilar Utrilla, he began studying prehistoric pigments using spectroscopic techniques.

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Available online 17 February 2022

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bsecv.2022.02.003>

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Víctor, a good man

Víctor, un buen hombre

“The mouth of the righteous speaks wisdom,
and his tongue talks of justice”
(Psalms 37: 30)

When I first met Víctor, he was on CSIC's Scientific Committee, where he sat in one of the positions appointed by the president among the department's prestigious scientists while I represented the Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences. From that moment on, we developed a friendship in part due to his closeness to the world of humanities. Beforehand, he had been a member himself as the Materials Area coordinator.

I recall that when he spoke a respectful silence filled the room. The minutes recorded by the Scientific Committee adequately reflect the topics that most concerned him. The time we spent together was initially marked by the economic crisis which required a special care to maintain the fundamental elements of scientific life. The first of which were matters that affected personnel in a variety of ways, ranging from hiring increase proposals to providing stability to our dedicated scientists that showed great promise. Víctor also showed interest

in the process of interim tenured scientists, and ensured that candidates received equal treatment as that of public servants.

In addition to his interests around Aragon's economic fabric and the streamlining of management procedures, it was his defense of CSIC that led him to consider the need to improve the policy of the “mixed centers”, the establishment of which must take precedence over the defense of the interests of the body and a suitable scientific project.

Certainly, his time in the Vice-Presidency of Organization and Institutional Relations was cut short due to disease crossing his path (30/11/2005–11/02/2006). During that brief period of time, I was his collaborator as head of the Board of Directors, which raised the need to strengthen the figure of the territorial delegates.

His commitment to CSIC was complemented by his commitment to Aragon, a community in which he brilliantly carried out the responsibility of the Delegation for two periods, supporting numerous initiatives for the development of his homeland: his efforts for the collaboration with the University of Zaragoza (his alma mater), the support of



the SME, his collaboration with the University of San Jorge.

During my time in that same Vice-Presidency, I reached out to Víctor as he was leading the Delegation in the Aragon's Autonomous Community. It turned out to be the best decision I could make as it wasn't necessary to appoint anyone else. His knowledge of the institution, composed speech and elegant manners, which I knew all too well, made any change unnecessary. Having collaborators of that stature guaranteed good management of affairs in that region and frankly, he was the best man for the job.

Unfortunately, some months later cancer reared its head again and he was forced to turn in his resignation. I interpreted this as a sign of his honest character. He felt this situation would be a hindrance and make him incapable of meeting his responsibilities within CSIC. Víctor's mindset was always to serve and not to be served; he wanted me to be free to do without him.

I immediately replied that although this was a magnanimous gesture, I would only consider when he felt that he could no longer continue. I firmly believe that people with such a distinguished service record are fundamental in any workplace and best kept close for as long as you can. I managed to keep him for an additional two months until he reached retirement. It marked the end of a good career for a great man.

I continued to stay in touch and follow up on his disease. We talked when he was in the bubble isolated in hospital. I always admired his composure in the midst of adversity even when he knew it was a lost battle. Our conversations touched on the subjects that were most dear to him: Nature, his beloved Pyrenees, the place he would escape to every year to be with friends; Family, the center of his universe, which at the time had just welcomed a new grandchild; and lastly, the reflection

about his social and vital compromise which had led him to walk the Camino de Santiago.

After his retirement, I would see him on my visits to Zaragoza or we would speak on the phone. I recall that in one of our last conversations he said, in his usual delicate and affectionate manner, "Hello, Vice-President." When I would jokingly remind him I was Ex-Vice President, he quickly countered that I would always be "his Vice-President." I never had the chance to tell him what his words meant to me.

I am not one to follow gruesome TV shows, because I do not like them, nor do I enjoy political intrigues of which I know them perfectly well as they've been the subject of my research for 40 years. I prefer those that highlight human values, solidarity and public service. There is one I have seen recently (Chicago Fire, season 9, episode 15; minute 12:15–12:34), where one of the actresses points out the value of the word "good" when describing people. This word, due to the generalization, seems trivial but in her family, it was the highest degree as it meant that a person had honor, was loyal and brave.

I think long speeches or excessive praises are not necessary to describe a man like Víctor, it is enough to say he was a good man.

José Ramón Urquijo Goitia

CSIC's ex Vice President (9.02.2012–12.12.2017)

Available online 17 February 2022

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bsecv.2022.02.004>

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Víctor M. Orera

Víctor, un buen hombre

Many people understand freedom as the ability to choose. While it is true that self-determination is at the root of liberty, the full power of freedom lies in our ability to create strong and stable bonds with people, ideas and institutions that go far beyond us. Friendship is one of the most important of these links. It begins with a common interest (do not tell me!, you are also crazy about ...) and develops progressively over time as friends share more personal aspects of their lives, visions, fears, illusions and frustrations, while they look for understanding, advice and support. As the intimacy grows, two main features of the bond of friendship are strengthened, namely unselfishness and benevolence. Within this framework, you are able to see and appreciate the beauty in your friend, which acts as a force that pushes you towards better and higher goals.

In fact, we have to be very grateful to our good friends because they make us better persons.

I met Víctor in the last decade of the past century. He was interested in measuring and understanding the mechanical properties of various types of eutectic ceramic materials manufactured in his laboratory. I was interested in how to make strong ceramics tough, particularly for high temperature applications. This common interest in the mechanical performance of ceramics led to a fruitful, interdisciplinary research collaboration lasting more than fifteen years. We met with each other often, exchanged viewpoints, co-authored a good number of papers (a coupled of them stood as "highly-cited" publications), attended conferences, wrote proposals, and dis-

