

Has the coronavirus affected the Ferran Sunyer i Balaguer Prize?



Manuel Castellet

The Ferran Sunyer i Balaguer Foundation, created in Barcelona in memory of the Catalan mathematician Ferran Sunyer, yearly awards an international prize for a mathematical monograph of an expository nature, presenting the latest developments in an active area of research in Mathematics in which the applicant has made important contributions. The prize, amounting to 15,000 euros, is provided by the Foundation and the winning monograph is published in Birkhäuser's series *Progress in Mathematics*.

Since its first edition in 1993, we have had years with many applications and others with few, but we have almost always had high-quality submissions; only three times did the prize's scientific committee (made up of a local mathematician, two editors of *Progress in Mathematics* and two mathematicians from other countries, all of recognized prestige) proposed to the Foundation's Board of Trustees not to award the prize.

2020 has been unique for two reasons: the extraordinary quality of two of the submitted monographs and the COVID-19 pandemic.

On the one hand, the committee recommended exceptionally awarding two monographs, one on algebraic topology and the other on differential geometry, both of the same value. The authors of the monographs work in four different countries: Belgium, France, Italy and Spain, the four European countries most affected by the coronavirus.

The Board of Trustees met to approve the proposal of the committee on March 12 at 3:30 PM. This was the last academic activity that took place in person in Catalonia; that afternoon at 5:00 PM all events were cancelled and the next day the universities closed.

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We managed to save the award, but could not celebrate the solemn award ceremony normally held in the noble hall of a 17th century building on the day of the feast of Saint George, April the 23rd. This is the day of the patron saint of Catalonia and also the day of books and roses, when the streets are filled with people buying and giving books and roses to their loved ones; truly a unique day.

These facts may be more or less anecdotal, but the most serious and saddest part of this relationship between the Ferran Sunyer Prize and the coronavirus is that, unfortunately, on March 24, Josep Vaquer, one of the first members of the Foundation's Board of Trustees, died at the age of 91 from COVID-19 disease. Josep Vaquer, Professor Emeritus of the University of Barcelona, was the first professor of mathematics that I had at the University, an excellent teacher and a man involved, jointly with his wife, in various social causes, especially teaching the most in need, visiting prisoners and advising and helping women in different very difficult life situations. A great man.



Josep Vaquer



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