

International Conference on Desertification in memory of Professor John B. Thornes

From 16th to 18th of September 2009 took place in Murcia (Spain) the International Conference on Desertification in memory of Professor John B. Thornes.

The main objectives of the conference were two: i) to be a forum where several researches from different countries to discuss different aspects of desertification in order to update knowledge and propose actions or follow-up action on priority research. ii) to pay tribute to the figure of Professor John B. Thornes, who died in July 2008, who dedicated most of his life to the study of desertification processes, being a pioneer on field instrumentation and process modeling. His research was not only developed in the Mediterranean Europe, but also in South America, South Africa and China.

Professor Thornes (1940-2008), professor of Physical Geography and head of the Geography Department at King's College, University of London, was an exceptional researcher and Physical Geographer. He had a very special relationship with Spain throughout his life. In 1967 he developed his PhD Thesis in the Upper Duero and since then he carried out numerous researches and projects, especially in the Mediterranean area. Several institutions and universities from different countries have distinguished him with honours, including scientific societies, universities and research centres in Spain. So in 1998 the Geomorphology Spanish Society named him "Honor member" and in 2006 the University of Murcia also named him "Doctor Honoris Causa".

The theme of the conference and the figure of Professor Thornes attracted scientists from various countries around the world (Spain, Belgium, France, Greece, Holland, Hungary, India, Iran, Israel, Italy, Mexico, Portugal, United Kingdom, Romania and Sierra Leone). The conference was well received by the international scientific community, a good evidence of this is the 161 contributions submitted, 42 were presented in oral mode and 119 in poster format.

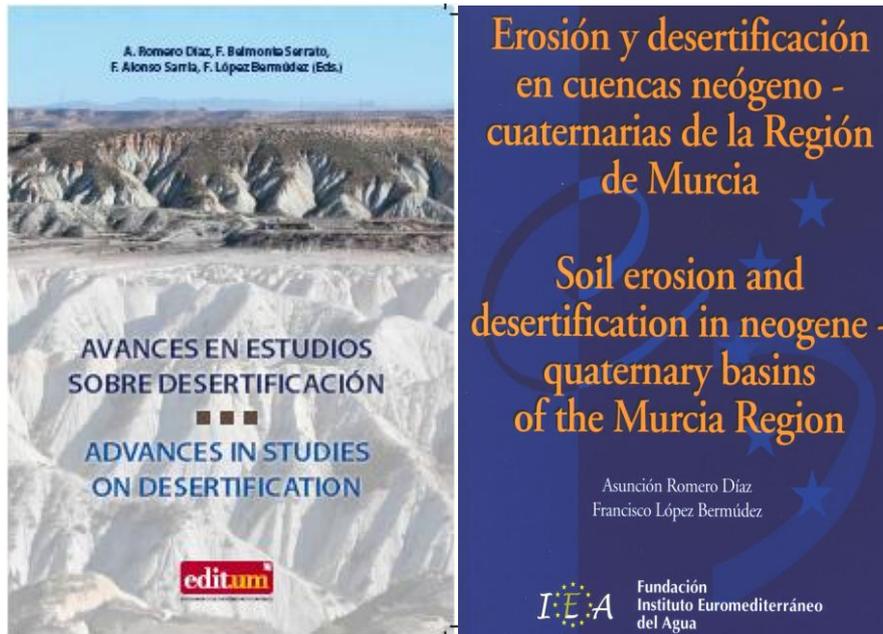
The conference was organized by the Area of Physical Geography at the University of Murcia and the Spanish Society Geomorphology. It was sponsored by several institutions: University of Murcia, Seneca Foundation, Euromediterranean Water Institute, Ministry of Regional Policy of the Autonomous Community of Murcia, Municipality of Murcia and Tragsa Group. And there have been numerous collaborating organizations: European Society for Soil Conservation (ESSC), Spanish Society of Soil Science (SECS), European Network for Research on Desertification (DESERNET), World Association of Soil and Water Conservation (WASWS) and the Commission for land degradation and desertification (COMLAND).

The invited presentations were made by well reputed researchers who were personal friends of Professor Thornes as well. Professors Mike Kirkby, Anton Imeson, Jose Maria Garcia Ruiz and Juan Puigdefábregas. Professor Kirkby, University of Leeds (UK), gave a presentation titled "*Desertification: The broader context*". Professor Imeson, University of Amsterdam (The Netherlands), titled his lecture "*Responding to soil erosion in Spain: From Charles Darwin to John Thornes*". Professor Garcia-Ruiz, Pyrenean Institute of Ecology (CSIC, Zaragoza), talked about "*Methods and scales in soil erosion studies in Spain: Problems and perspectives*". Finally, Professor Puigdefábregas, Arid Zone Experimental Station (CSIC, Almería), titled his lecture "*An ecosystemic approach to land degradation assessment and its application to the Iberian Peninsula*".

Simultaneous translation was provided during the scientific sessions that were also recorded and broadcasted live over the Internet through the website of the University of Murcia. The conference ended with a field trip to the Mula and Guadalentín basins.

The Faculty of Arts and the University of Murcia wanted to show its appreciation to Rosemary Thornes, widow of Professor Thornes, and in the closing dinner the Rector of the University of Murcia gave him a commemorative plaque.

Contributions to the conference have been published in a book by Editum (University of Murcia), with the title "*Advances in studies on Desertification*", edited are A. Romero Díaz, F. Belmonte Serrato, F. Alonso Sarria and F. López Bermúdez. This book is also available at the web site of the University of Murcia (<http://congresos.um.es/icod>). Another book, whose authors are A. Romero Díaz and F. López Bermúdez, entitled "*Erosion and Desertification in Neogene-Quaternary basins of the Murcia Region*" is the scientific field trip guide and has been published by the Euro-Mediterranean Water Institute.



The Spanish journal "Quaternary and Geomorphology" is to publish a special issue with some of the contributions submitted to conference. Possibly an international journal is also to publish another special issue.

More information, including some of the pictures collected during the events, is available at the web site of the conference:
<http://fobos.bio.um.es/thornes/doku.php>.

