Optimization
A Journal of Mathematical Programming and Operations Research

ISSN: 0233-1934 (Print) 1029-4945 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/gopt20

Preface in honour of Professor Lionel Thibault

René Henrion, Abderrahim Jourani & Dariusz Zagrodny

To cite this article: René Henrion, Abderrahim Jourani & Dariusz Zagrodny (2026) Preface in honour of Professor Lionel Thibault, Optimization, 75:11, 2737-2738, DOI: 10.1080/02331934.2026.2724766

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/02331934.2026.2724766

Published online: 15 Sep 2026.

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OPTIMIZATION
2026, VOL. 75, NO. 11, 2737–2738
https://doi.org/10.1080/02331934.2026.2724766

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PREFACE

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Preface in honour of Professor Lionel Thibault

This special issue is dedicated to Professor Lionel Thibault, whose remarkable scientific career has had a profound and lasting impact on variational analysis, nonsmooth analysis, optimization, differential inclusions, and optimal control. For more than five decades, he has been among the leading contributors to these fields, producing fundamental results, developing influential theories, and fostering an international network of collaborators and students.

Professor Thibault pursued all his higher education at the University of Montpellier, where he obtained his Ph.D. in 1976 and his Doctorat d'État in 1980. After beginning his academic career at the University of Pau in 1976, where he remained for sixteen years, he joined the University of Montpellier in 1992 as Full Professor, a position from which he continued to shape generations of researchers and contribute to the development of modern variational analysis.

Professor Thibault's scientific work is characterized by exceptional breadth, depth, and continuity. His early contributions already revealed a distinctive ability to combine sophisticated functional-analytic techniques with questions arising in optimization and the calculus of variations. His pioneering work on subdifferential calculus in infinite-dimensional spaces helped establish mathematical foundations that would later become central to modern nonsmooth analysis. His 1979 memoir on subdifferential calculus and the calculus of variations in infinite dimensions remains representative of his early vision and mathematical creativity.

Throughout his career, he has made influential contributions to generalized differentiation, variational principles, subdifferential theory, epiconvergence, set-valued analysis, and the study of differential inclusions. His research has played a significant role in advancing the understanding of prox-regular sets, sweeping processes, differential variational inequalities, and stability questions in optimization. These topics have become central tools in modern mathematical analysis and have found numerous applications in mechanics, economics, engineering, and control theory.

One of the hallmarks of Professor Thibault's work is the fruitful interplay between abstract theory and applications. His contributions to the theory of sweeping processes and differential inclusions have provided powerful frameworks for describing dynamical systems subject to constraints and nonsmooth phenomena. Many of these developments have inspired extensive subsequent research and continue to influence contemporary studies in optimization and control. His recent book, 'Unilateral Variational Analysis in Banach Spaces: Parts I and II, World Scientific, 1628 pages, 2023', is the culmination of his research and will profoundly shape the way we think about variational analysis.

Equally noteworthy is his sustained commitment to the development of the mathematical community. Over the years, he has supervised numerous doctoral students, many of

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whom have gone on to establish successful research careers of their own. Through his collaborations with researchers from Europe, North and South America, Africa, Asia, and Australia, he has helped build bridges between different schools of variational analysis and optimization. His scientific influence is reflected not only in his publications but also in the vitality of the international community that has grown around the subjects to which he devoted his career.

Professor Thibault has also played an important role in the dissemination and promotion of mathematical research through editorial service. He has served as Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Convex Analysis* and has contributed to the editorial boards of several leading international journals in optimization, analysis, and variational mathematics. Through these activities, he has helped maintain high scientific standards while encouraging the emergence of new generations of researchers.

The high esteem in which he is held by the international mathematical community was reflected in the conference *Nonsmooth And Variational AnaLysis (NAVAL)*, organized in Dijon in June 2023 in his honour. Bringing together leading researchers from numerous countries, the conference celebrated both his scientific achievements and his enduring influence on the development of variational and nonsmooth analysis. The present special issue continues that celebration by gathering contributions from colleagues, collaborators, friends, and former students whose work has been inspired by the ideas and research directions that Professor Thibault helped create.

Beyond his mathematical accomplishments, Lionel Thibault is admired for his intellectual generosity, scientific rigour, kindness, and unwavering dedication to research. Those who have had the privilege of working with him know not only a distinguished mathematician but also a mentor, colleague, and friend whose enthusiasm for mathematics remains a source of inspiration.

The papers collected in this volume reflect the diversity and vitality of the fields to which he has contributed so profoundly. It is therefore with great pleasure and deep gratitude that we dedicate this special issue to Professor Lionel Thibault in recognition of his extraordinary scientific achievements and his lasting impact on the international mathematical community.

We extend to him our warmest congratulations, appreciation, and best wishes.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

René Henrion
Weierstrass Institute, Berlin, Germany
Abderrahim Jourani
Université Bourgogne Europe, CNRS, IMB UMR 5584, Dijon, France
abderrahim.jourani@ube.fr
Dariusz Zagrodny
Faculty of Mathematics and Computer Science, University of Lodz, Poland