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# REACHING OUT TO AFRICA, LATIN AMERICA

**T**he ISPRS Centenary in 2010 is an ideal opportunity to look back and to look forward. I am nearing the end of my tenure with the ISPRS Council and sitting on the breakline. I am now at a position from where I can look backwards and forwards. In their review of the historical development of ISPRS, Trinder and Fritz (2008) identify three stages in the evolution of the Society to date: The founding years; restructuring and development years; and outreach and positioning years.

I have been privileged to be active in the final stage and have seen ISPRS strengthen its position as a scientific society and engage with international organisations. In 2010, as we enter our second century with a new strategic plan, we must consolidate this position and, in particular, continue our outreach activities to include many more national groups, scientific groups with cognate interests, and more sectors of society including government, non-government organisations, youth and women. In this short perspective, I will look at how we have progressed during the past 14 years since I first

became a Commission President. And I will also peep into the future prospects.

In 1996, photogrammetrists were still wrestling with the transition from analogue to digital photogrammetry and with using the images coming from the burgeoning Earth observation industry. Commission II, of which I was the President, had a major interest in integration. It included integration of photogrammetry with GIS, integration of radar into mapping processes, end-to-end integrated geoinformation production and the introduction of automatic procedures for image analysis.

The report of Commission II in the Archives A of The International Archives of the Photogrammetry, Remote Sensing and Spatial Information Sciences (2000) notes that progress was made on establishing image transfer standards through collaboration with OGC and ISO. It stated that calibration and validation had been advanced through collaboration with CEOS and that progress had been made on promoting knowledge of Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR). Clearly, collaboration was a theme

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of Commission II and I have promoted this aspect of ISPRS work during my term as Secretary General and President.

During the past 10 years, the Commission II which I chaired has disappeared, both the name and the content. Systems for data processing, analysis and representation are no longer a discrete topic for ISPRS. Now, the emphasis is on theory and concepts of spatio-temporal data handling, information and computer vision. At times one looks back at the very set instrumentation and procedures with some nostalgia, but this is pushed away by the excitement and challenges of automation and the potential of promoting photogrammetry to other disciplines such as computer vision. We have not yet achieved this synthesis, but photogrammetrists have found a voice in many other areas.

Larry Fritz, who served as the President from 1996-2000, was very active in getting ISPRS involved with other organisations. These included the International Council of Science (ICSU), the United Nations through the Commit-



*The development of photogrammetric plotting instruments, analogue instruments, Kern PG2, 1960; Analytical instrument from 1980, Wild SD2000, Digital Photogrammetric workstations from 1988.*

tee on Outer Space Affairs (COPUOS) and Regional Cartographic Conferences, and the Committee on Earth Observation Satellites (CEOS). Whilst ISPRS has attended meetings in all of these bodies, it has not been easy to be effectively active. However, during the past five years, we have promoted photogrammetry and remote sensing through participation in conferences and exhibitions, organising workshops and most recently publishing a book on Case Studies on Disaster and Risk Management sponsored by UN Office of Outer Space Affairs.

Our biggest advance has come through involvement with the Group on Earth Observation (GEO) formed in 2005. ISPRS has worked with IEEE Committee on Earth Observation (ICEO) and with the Open Geospatial Consortium (OGC) to organise workshops to promote the Global Earth

Observing System of Systems (GEOSS) and give people in the Africa and Asia an introduction to tools to use Earth observation data. ISPRS has also worked with other GeoUnions with the help of a grant from ICSU, to show how Earth observation data can be used to advance the



*Participants at the First Earth Observation Summit, Washington in 2003.*

*The main challenge for ISPRS in the future is to raise resources to help young people to appreciate and use imagery, to train people in developing countries to use imagery, to support science and publish high quality journals and to take our message to decision makers*

science of health and well being. Stan Morain, former treasurer of ISPRS has played a key role in this activity and has shown that remote sensing is a core discipline within ISPRS.

A key plank of my presidency was to extend the influence of ISPRS within Africa and Latin America. (Asia is well served with the Asian Association of Remote Sensing which has always had close links with ISPRS). A key advance in this has been the appointment of ISPRS Regional Representatives for Africa, Latin America and Asia, approved by the General Assembly in 2008. We have established good relationships with the African Association of Remote Sensing of the Environment (AARSE) and EIS Africa, and taken part in their conferences. In Latin America, ISPRS is sponsoring the Latin American Remote Sensing Conference (LARS) which will be an international conference on photogrammetry and remote sensing to be held in Chile in October 2010.

Another development to increase ISPRS influence



Participants at the official launch of the Group on Earth Observation at Brussels in February 2005.

internationally has been the establishment of the ISPRS Student Consortium. Orhan Altan, current ISPRS President, Manos Baltasvias, former Second Vice President, and Kohei Cho, President of Commission VI from 2004-2008 have all worked to make this possible. The Student Consortium now has members in 66 countries, has a regular newsletter and organises regular meetings at conferences and symposia as well as an annual student conference.

At the end of the outreach and positioning phase of ISPRS, I feel confident that the Society is well positioned in the global community. I have been fortunate, as chair of the Strategic Planning Committee, to be in a key role to fashion future developments. We have produced a new strategic plan for the next decade. The vision is for ISPRS to be the foremost scientific society in its field.

The Strategic Plan sets out the ways in which the sciences of photogrammetry, remote sensing and spatial information can be advanced further. A vital aspect of the plan is the manner in which the vision should be communicated to the spatial information community and to the general public. Not only this, the plan accentuates the point that ISPRS is organised and administered to implement the vision. Implementation of the plan will ensure that the role of imagery is understood and that the available data is used to the best advantage for all of society. This strategy will produce an efficient, professional organisation, ready to meet the challenges of changes to the environment, rapidly developing information and communication technologies and a society which is demanding spatial information to satisfy new demands.

However, there are many challenges, not least how to structure and fund the Society of the future. One of the great joys of working for ISPRS is the companionship which comes from working with a group of dedicated people towards a common aim and what adds to the pleasure is that they do this voluntarily. How long can such a way of working continue? In order to help young people to appreciate and use imagery; in order to train people in developing countries to use imagery; to support science and publish high quality journals; and to take our message to decision makers, requires resources. This is the main challenge for the future. ■

Trinder J and Fritz LW, (2008). Historical development of ISPRS. In *Advances in Photogrammetry, Remote Sensing and Spatial Information Sciences: 2008 Congress Book* edited by Li, Chen and Baltasvias, CRC Press, pp3-20