

The ISPRS Foundation Travel Grant - Feedback Report

XXV ISPRS Congress 2026, Toronto, Canada | 4-11 July 2026

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Contribution: ID 1945 - Oral presentation, session WG III/8F: Remote Sensing for Agricultural and Natural Ecosystems

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It is a great pleasure to share my experience of the XXV ISPRS Congress 2026 in Toronto, and to express my sincere gratitude to The ISPRS Foundation for the TIF Travel Grant that made my participation possible.

I am a PhD student at Beijing Forestry University, China, currently undertaking joint doctoral training at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) in Umeå, Sweden, where I work on forest remote sensing. My research uses UAV-based multispectral and hyperspectral imagery for the early detection of European spruce bark beetle infestations, a problem of growing urgency for forests across Europe.

I would like to be open about why this grant mattered so much to me. Joint doctoral training, valuable as it is, can leave a student in an unusual administrative position: abroad, my enrolment status at home places me outside the schemes through which doctoral students are normally supported, while at my host university I am a visiting doctoral student rather than a formally employed researcher. Neither status carries eligibility for conference travel funding. This reflects no shortcoming on the part of either institution; joint arrangements of this kind simply sit between the categories for which existing funding rules were written. There is a quiet irony in it: a student who goes abroad precisely for the sake of academic exchange can find the international meetings where such exchange actually happens the hardest thing of all to reach.

The Travel Grant changed that. Thanks to the Foundation, our contribution, "Evaluating the Transferability of Machine-Learning Models for Pre-Emergence Bark Beetle Detection Using Multispectral and Hyperspectral UAV Data Across Europe" (ID 1945), was presented as an oral contribution on 11 July 2026 in session WG III/8F: Remote Sensing for Agricultural and Natural Ecosystems, and our full paper will appear in the ISPRS Archives. Sharing work built on datasets from Sweden, Finland, Italy and Czechia with an international audience, and hearing their questions, was the most rewarding moment of my doctoral studies so far.

My strongest impression of the Congress was its sheer breadth. Over the week, sessions and keynotes on hyperspectral imaging, deep learning and Earth Observation for forestry and agriculture showed me where the discipline is heading, and let me see my own narrow problem as part of a much larger effort. The Congress was also remarkably well organised, and contributing as a volunteer gave me an additional perspective on what an event of this scale requires.

The benefits to my work have been immediate and concrete. The questions and comments raised around our presentation identified points that we are now addressing in the camera-ready version of our paper, and pointed to methodological directions - particularly in hyperspectral feature selection and cross-site validation - that will shape the next stage of my doctoral research. Beyond that, I was able to establish contacts with several outstanding research groups in remote sensing and geoinformatics, including teams from Politecnico di Milano, the University of Waterloo, the University of Toronto, East China Normal University and Wuhan University. We discussed complementary approaches in UAV and satellite remote sensing, benchmark datasets, and concrete possibilities for joint validation studies. These are conversations that cannot be replicated by email, and several may well grow into future collaborations.

For my career, the value is harder to quantify but no less real. Presenting at a congress of this standing, and being received as a colleague by researchers whose papers I had only read before, has given me both confidence and a clearer sense of where I might contribute.

To The ISPRS Foundation, I would simply like to say thank you. This grant did not only cover the cost of a trip.

For a young researcher without institutional backing, it opened a door that would otherwise have stayed closed, and it carried a message that our community makes room for students regardless of the funding situation they happen to be in. I hope one day to be in a position to pass that same opportunity on to the next generation.