

ISPRS JOURNAL OF PHOTOGRAMMETRY AND REMOTE SENSING (PRS)

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Annual Report 1997

Editor-in-Chief, Emmanuel P. Baltsavias

1997 was a year of many changes for the Journal. Apart from transferring the News, Calendar, Book Reviews and Event Report Sections to the ISPRS Highlights as from 1 January 1997, a new Editor-in-Chief (EIC) as from 1 July, 1997, and an almost completely new Editorial Advisory Board (EAB) as from 1 January 1998 were elected, a new contract (valid until end of 2000) was signed between ISPRS and Elsevier, and many actions and changes have taken place or are planned. These changes, initiated by the new EIC in close cooperation with ISPRS and Elsevier, aim at improving PRS, and especially its impact, which depends on its quality, timeliness, affordability, wide distribution and easy access. The major points are listed below.

Publication, Statistics

In 1997 PRS was published according to schedule with no delays in delivery. The number of paper pages was as planned (ca. 300), with a small variation between issues (43-56 pages). Altogether 28 papers (out of which two invited ones) and two prefaces to Theme Issues were published, with an average of ca. 5 papers/issue and 10 pages/paper. 49 authors from 16 countries contributed a paper, with ca. 37% of them coming from countries outside Europe and N. America, and Germany, India and USA contributing most of the papers. 51% of the authors were active in Photogrammetry, 31% in Remote Sensing/Geography and the rest in other disciplines (primarily Computer Science). 67% of the authors are active in academia, 16% in research and other public organisations, and 16% in private companies, while ca. 40% are currently active in ISPRS. Topics covered in 1997 focused on aerial photogrammetry (39%), general topics (29%, algorithms, education etc.), remote sensing (21%), while only few papers dealt with Close-Range Photogrammetry, and none with GIS. The major data dealt with were digital aerial images and optical Remote Sensing data, and the major topics were automation in image orientation, DTM/DSM generation, classification, and 3-D positioning/sensor modelling/calibration. The average times T1 and T2 from receipt to acceptance of a paper and from acceptance to publication respectively, were for the three groups: Special Issue and invited papers remaining papers; and all papers (T1/T2) were respectively: 1.1/5 months, 6.6/5.4 months, 4/5.2 months. While time T2 cannot be reduced significantly due to already fast response from Elsevier and short paper waiting list, time T1 could be shortened by speeding up the review process.

Aims and Scope

New, better defined aims and scope were formulated. The PRS objective is to publish high quality, peer-reviewed, preferably previously unpublished papers of a scientific/research, technological development or application/practical nature. PRS will publish papers, including those based on ISPRS meeting presentations, which are regarded as significant contributions in the above mentioned fields. Especially encouraged are papers: of broad scientific interest; on innovative applications, particularly in new fields; of an interdisciplinary nature; on topics that have not been dealt with (or to a small degree) by PRS or related journals; and on topics related to new possible scientific/professional directions. PRS should focus, as explained above, on a high impact on the readers and should not be treated as a means of increasing the publication list of the authors.

To make the appearance and form of the Journal more attractive various forms of contributions will be allowed:

1. Papers (detailed discussions involving new research, technological developments or applications)
2. Brief Papers (as Papers but shorter, mainly technical, focusing on significant or unique concepts, sensors, systems, developments or applications)
3. Review Papers (extensive state-of-the-art surveys of established or emerging topics or application areas)
4. Interactive articles like Panel Discussions and Interviews (on important, new, or contradictory topics; mainly initiated by the Editorial Advisory Board)
5. Tutorial Papers (on new topics, sufficiently broad themes, at an introductory to intermediate level and easy to understand, with main aims education and training)
6. Contributions for special Journal columns (letters to the Editor about the Journal or to authors commenting on previously published papers; new useful ideas and brief pertinent comments of a technical nature; editorials, mainly after an invitation by the Editorial Advisory Board)

Papers in categories 3 - 5 are very important to make the journal more attractive and introduce new topics to non-experts. The maximum length of the papers has been reduced to 15 printed pages, to avoid lengthy, difficult-to-read papers, and allow more papers/topics to be presented in each issue.

PRS issues may be devoted to specific scientific topics of high or increasing importance (Theme Issues), especially in relation to one or more ISPRS Working Groups (WGs) or Technical Commissions (TCs), as well as to special events, geographic regions, professional activities etc. (Special Issues). The number and topics of Theme and Special Issues (limited to 2 - 3 per year) will be such, that the PRS still remains of interest to the majority of its subscribers. TCs are obliged to contribute at least one Theme/Special Issue within their 4 year period. In 1997 two Theme Issues were published on "Automatic Image Orientation" and "Computed Assisted Teaching and Learning", both related to activities of respective ISPRS WGs. For 1998 apart from the Theme Issue "Extraction of Man-Made Objects from Aerial and Satellite Images" due to be published next April, four other Theme/Special Issues have been organised by the EIC and proposals from TCs II and VII have been received.

Guidelines for Guest Editors have been prepared by the EIC, while Calls for Papers for such Issues have been published in the Journal and on the WEB.

Editorial Advisory Board (EAB)

Out of the 41 old EAB members six were kept and 20 new members were added, as from January 1, 1998. A reduction of EAB members was felt necessary in order to have a smaller, more flexible body, that could fulfil new responsibilities. While the previous EAB was mainly concerned with reviewing, the new one, although still contributing to reviews, will also advise the EIC on the definition of aims and scope, editorial policy, content of the PRS, especially content of Special and Theme Issues, and any topics related to major PRS issues and future changes. They may act as Guest Editors, be responsible for specific PRS columns, or provide articles for them. Additional colleagues, particularly those recommended by TCs and WGs, will further contribute to reviewing. The new EAB members have a very good geographic (19 countries) and thematic distribution, and one third of them work at big research organisations or private companies, bringing thus valuable input and experience from non-academic institutions. The average age of EAB members has been decreased. The percentage of women members, although it more than tripled, is a mere 2 out of 26, but I am hoping of an improvement for the next EAB in 2001.

Quality of Papers and Review Process

Some of the papers are of rather low standards (hastily written, not enough new material, bad English and structure). Corrections to the submitted papers occasionally do not follow the remarks and proposals of the reviewers. On the other hand, some of the reviews are very short, general, not critical enough, and do not provide the authors with helpful advice. These critical remarks are not meant to decrease the excellent contribution of several authors and EAB members, but to point out topics where improvement is needed. To improve paper quality a more pro-active soliciting of good papers has started to be established by the EIC. This process will be strengthened with the help of the new EAB. Concrete measures have been decided in the Joint Council/Technical Commission (TCP) meeting last September, such as appointing for each event, persons responsible for selecting and proposing good papers to the EIC, sending the proceedings to the EIC etc. Efforts will be made in cooperation with the new EAB to increase the quality and speed of the reviewing process. Regarding speed we will encourage use of electronic means in the exchange of papers and information. In cooperation with Elsevier so called "fast track" papers will be established. These are good papers whose publication should be sped up by using electronic means in the submission and reviewing process.

Subscriptions

There is a trend in reduction of journal subscriptions. This trend, called 'erosion' by publishers, amounts on the average to a 5% yearly decline over the last few years. PRS had a slightly larger decline in 1997 (data as of June 97) as compared to 1996, mainly in personal subscriptions. The majority of the subscriptions are institutional, while only 4%-6% are personal, with a clear decreasing tendency. USA, Canada, fourteen Western European countries, Australia, Brazil and Japan, ie. 19 countries, account for 82% of the 1997 subscriptions. This worrying fact is in accordance with other data (publication of papers, participation in conferences, R&D output) that show an

increasing gap between developed and poorer countries. In Africa there are only 2 subscriptions, if South Africa is excluded, and in South America, excluding Brazil, only 6. Russia, a national society with over 800 members, has zero subscriptions, while there are subscriptions in only 5 out of 15 Eastern European countries. Many other countries in Central America and Asia also do not have any subscriptions. The action of ISPRS Council to finance free subscriptions for all National Members in 1994-95 did not bring any result. Today many National and Sustaining Members do not subscribe to the Journal. PRS subscriptions are currently limited to 53 countries, although ISPRS has 99 National Members. These numbers show that the Journal does not reach all people it should, but also a potential for increasing subscriptions, particularly in Eastern Europe, India, China, Japan, as well as middle and large companies, and public organisations. The National Members and the ISPRS Council should seriously consider measures to stop this negative development.

To help increase personal subscriptions the 70% reduction offered to all individual members of national societies was also extended to all employees of ISPRS Sustaining Members. New promotional material is under preparation and will be distributed particularly at ISPRS events, while national societies will be asked to provide free advertising for PRS in their journals. Free copies of Theme/Special Issues will be distributed to selected persons mainly for promotion, as it has been already implemented for the Theme Issue on Automatic Image Orientation. New abstracting/indexing services have been added to increase distribution of information on the PRS contents. Our aim is to stop the erosion and possibly gain new subscriptions. However, drastic changes in subscriptions should realistically not be expected. I believe that the great step towards a significantly wider distribution of the Journal will be its availability in electronic form (see below) through distribution by libraries or personal subscriptions at a reduced rate.

Journal Form

As from 1998 the Journal pages have increased from 300 to 360 (20%) without a price increase. A proposal to change the format to A4 was not adopted due to technical problems. The cost of colour figures starting from 1998 has been reduced by more than 50%, thus easing the use of colour which is necessary in certain cases, and giving PRS an advantage over journals in similar areas. The Table of Contents (ToC) will be published on the back cover for easier reference. ISPRS will have a more prominent presence in the Journal (list of ISPRS Officers in the inside cover, gratis ads for Congress and Symposia, as well as Call for Papers for Theme/Special Issues). The short version of the instructions for authors has been improved, while a full version will be published in the first issue of each year. A list of reviewers has been published, starting in 1997, in the last issue of each year together with the subject and author indices. An attempt was made to find a new figure for the front cover. The three proposals sent were evaluated by the ISPRS officers. The conclusion was that none was particularly good and significantly better than the present cover. The search for a new cover will be continued with the help of the new EAB.

WWW

Apart from a page in the ISPRS WWW site, the main Journal pages are administered by Elsevier at <http://www.elsevier.nl/locate/isprsjprs>. Elsevier recently changed the form of all its WEB pages. Currently, the Journal pages provide information on aims and scope, audience, abstracting and indexing, editorial board, manuscript status, instructions for authors, form for ordering sample copies (from late 1998 an on-line electronic sample copy will be available), Table of Contents (ToC) for issues since 1995, list of Special Issues, journal dispatch dates, registration form for ContentsDirect (see below), ordering information and order form, news on PRS, earth and planetary sciences or other areas including general news, conferences, call for papers etc., advanced search facilities (currently the whole earth and planetary sciences, where PRS belongs, has to be searched), links to ISPRS Homepage and Calendar, other relevant journals and neighbouring scientific areas etc.

ContentsDirect is an e-mail alerting service which delivers the table of contents of PRS or other Elsevier journals providing information on soon-to-be published papers, as well as calls for papers, calendar of events etc. As of December 1997, 150 people had subscribed for the ToC of PRS. The manuscript status system OASIS is new and allows authors to obtain password-protected information on the status of their paper from submission of final paper to Elsevier to scheduled publication date. Other possible improvements have been discussed with Elsevier, such as on-line subject and author indices, inclusion of keywords and abstracts, and for few single papers full text in the ToC, search facilities only within PRS, inclusion of call for papers and conference announcements for ISPRS events in the bulletin of the WWW pages etc.

Electronic Form

Elsevier, being the largest scientific publisher in the world, is pioneering new electronic forms for publication, distribution and subscription of its journals. Several hundred journals are already available in electronic form, while the potential is there for all of its 1,200 journals, including PRS, to be converted to electronic form. On one hand, electronic subscriptions of journal packages are offered to libraries, thus permitting electronic access to all their members. On the other, personal electronic subscriptions, usually parallel to a hardcopy, are offered. The electronic form permits search facilities, free colour, more images and data than in the hardcopy, clickable paper references with additional information, cross-references to other sources and many more options. A nice example can be viewed at <http://www.elsevier.nl/journals/eps1>. PRS being a small journal, is probably not in the first priority list to become electronic. However, both the EIC and Elsevier will keep an open eye on these developments and try to implement them for PRS with the first possible opportunity.

Administrative Matters

A new contract between EIC and Elsevier was signed. The contract, among many new positive changes, gives the EIC advisory rights on a series of important topics that were previously at the solely discretion of Elsevier. A new questionnaire for the reviewers, guidelines for Guest Editors of Theme/Special Issues, and guidelines for TC and WG activities related to the Journal have been prepared. The cooperation with Elsevier on various issues and production details has been excellent, while some

problems regarding electronic communication and promotion still remain. Cooperation with ISPRS Council, TCPs and WG Chairs is good and frequent, while through regular meetings (ca. once per year) with Council/TCPs, and Elsevier detailed exchanged of ideas can be achieved and decisions taken.

There are many more tasks to be completed. It must be realised that no matter how well the EIC and the EAB do their job, major improvements cannot be achieved without the contribution of each individual member active in ISPRS. It is particularly at the TC and WG level that the Journal should be in the mind of all colleagues, including taking initiatives to support submission of good quality papers, proposing topics, making suggestions for improvements, promoting the Journal and attracting new subscriptions etc. The Journal should be an integral part of the programme related to any of the scientific activities within ISPRS. Remarks and criticism from readers and other colleagues are more than welcome.

With this opportunity I would like to thank former Editor-in-Chief David Tait for his support and help during my work as Associate Editor of PRS and his efforts for a smooth transition, as well as the old EAB members for their valuable contribution in running the Journal affairs and reviewing papers. With the help of the new EAB, a good cooperation with the ISPRS Council and Elsevier, and most importantly, the active support from the TCs, WGs, and all active individual members I am confident that more improvements will be realised in 1998.

Scientific and technical manuscripts may be submitted in triplicate to:

E.P. Baltsavias, Institute of Geodesy and Photogrammetry, ETH-Hoenggerberg, CH-8093 Zurich, Switzerland, tel./fax +41-1-6333042/6331101, manos@geod.ethz.ch

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