

RADIOMETRIC AND GEOMETRIC ANALYSIS OF WORLDVIEW-2 STEREO SCENES

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ABSTRACT:

WorldView-2 (WV-2) is DigitalGlobe's latest very high resolution optical sensor. Launched on October 8, 2009, and fully operational since January 5, 2010, it flies along a sun-synchronous orbit at an altitude of 770km. The sensor is able to acquire panchromatic imagery at 0.46m ground resolution (0.52m at 20° off-nadir) and multispectral images in eight spectral bands at 1.8m resolution. In addition to the four typical multispectral bands (blue, green, red, near infrared), the sensors scans the coastal (400-450nm), yellow (585-625nm), red edge (705-745nm) and near infrared-2 (860-1040nm) bands. Stereo images can be planned thanks to the ability of the sensor to rotate off-nadir up to +/-45°.

This paper describes the preliminary analysis on WV-2 carried out at the EU Joint Research Center (JRC) in Ispra (Italy) by the ISFEREA Team of the Institute for the Protection and Security of the Citizen (IPSC), and in collaboration with the Bruno Kessler Foundation (FBK) in Trento (Italy). The purpose of the study is to evaluate the radiometric and geometric properties of the sensor and its potentials for 3D information extraction. The images used for the analysis are a stereopair over North-West Italy, where ISFEREA is establishing a testfield. The radiometry of the images is evaluated through different methods, including the estimation of the noise level (standard deviation of the digital number) in homogeneous and non-homogeneous areas. The images are oriented with RPC-based approach: using some GCP (ground control points), the given Rational Polynomial Coefficients (RPC) are improved with an affine transformation to compensate residual systematic errors. For automatic 3D information assessment, a Digital Surface Model (DSM) is generated with the SAT-PP software package and 3D building models are extracted semi-automatically with the CyberCity-Modeler (CCM) package. The methodology and preliminary results are described and discussed.

1. INTRODUCTION

WorldView-2 (WV2), the latest satellite in DigitalGlobe's constellation, was launched on 8th October 2009 from Vandenberg Air Force Base, CA (USA) and is fully operational since 5th January 2010.

WV2 belongs to the family of very high resolution sensors, as it is capable to reach a panchromatic ground resolution of less than half meter (up to 0.46m ground sample distance – GSD- at nadir) and a multispectral resolution up to 1.84m, although images are distributed at 0.50m GSD (panchromatic), and 1.84m (multispectral).

The BCP-50000 spacecraft, manufactured by BATC (Ball Aerospace and Technologies Corporation) of Boulder, CO (USA), is 3-axis stabilized using star trackers and solid-state IRU and GPS for sensing. A Control Moment Gyro (CMG) assembly is employed as actuators for highly responsive pointing control. As result, an instantaneous geolocation accuracy of ≤ 500 m is provided at any image start and stop (EoPortal Website, 2010, Figure 1).

The satellite flies at an altitude of 770km along a sun-synchronous orbit with 10:30am descending node and 100 minutes period giving an average revisit time of 1.1days.

The camera, called WV110, was designed and developed at ITT Corporation's Space Systems Division of Rochester, NY (USA). With respect of other very high resolution sensors, WV110 acquires images in 8 multispectral bands: in addition to the four typical multispectral bands (blue, green, red, near infrared), the sensors scans in the coastal (400-450nm), yellow (585-625nm), red edge (705-745nm) and near infrared-2 (860-1040nm) spectral ranges.

The pushbroom sensor consists of a single lens (13.3m focal length) and CCD lines with more than 35000 detectors with 8 μ m size (panchromatic). It scans the Earth in mono or stereo mode in two directions (forward, reverse). Stereo images are collected in a single pass thanks to the ability of the sensor to rotate off-nadir up to +/-45°. The swath width is 16.4km at nadir. Table 1 summarizes the sensor and spacecraft characteristics.

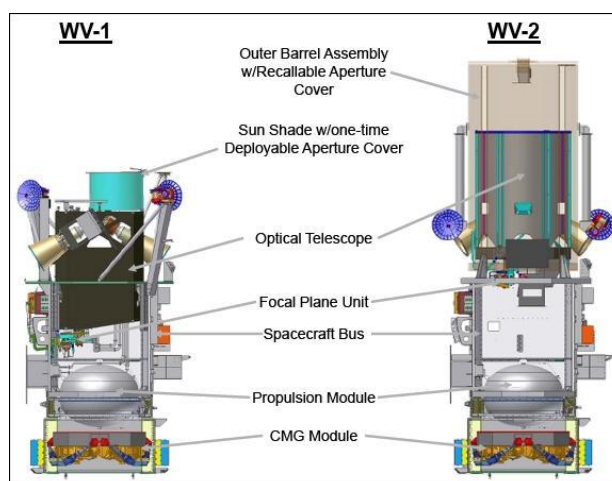


Figure 1. Common spacecraft bus of WorldView-1 and -2 (image credit: DigitalGlobe).

The aim of this paper is to report the first investigation carried out in the ISFEREA Action at the EU Joint Research Center

(JRC) in Ispra (Italy) and in collaboration with the Bruno Kessler Foundation (FBK) in Trento (Italy) on a WV-2 stereopair acquired on January 31st, 2010 over North Italy. The analysis includes the radiometric and geometric characteristics of the images, the automatic digital surface modelling and 3D building extraction. At the time of writing, references to other WV-2 works were not available in literature for comparison.

Table 1. Characteristics of WorldView-2 spacecraft and imaging system.

Launch Date	October 8, 2009	
Launch Site	Vandenberg Air Force Base, California	
Mission Life	7.25 years	
Orbital altitude	770 km	
Period	100 minutes	
Imager type	Pushbroom imager	
Imaging mode	Panchromatic (Pan)	Multispectral (MS)
Spectral range	450-800 nm	400-450 nm (coastal) 450-510 nm (blue) 510-580 nm (green) 585-625 nm (yellow) 630-690 nm (red) 705-745 nm (red edge) 770-895 nm (NIR1) 860-1040 nm (NIR2)
Spatial resolution at nadir	0.46 m GSD (0.52 m at 20° off-nadir)	1.8 m GSD (2.4 m at 20° off-nadir)
Detectors	Si CCD array (8 μm pixel size) with a row of > 35,000 detectors	Si CCD 4 arrays (32 μm pixel size) with a row of > 9,300 detectors
Swath width	16.4 km (multiple adjoining paths can be imaged in a target area in a single orbit pass due to spacecraft agility)	
Data quantization	11 bit	
Geolocation of imagery	≤ 3 m (using a GPS receiver, a gyroscope and a star tracker) without any GCP (Ground Control Points)	
Optics	TMA telescope with an aperture diameter of 1.1 m, focal length = 13.3 m, f/12	
TDI	6 selectable levels from 8 to 64	
FOV	> 1.28°	

2. DATA DESCRIPTION

In the Institute for the Protection and Security of the Citizens (IPSC) at JRC, the ISFEREA Action is establishing a test site in North Italy, in the province of Varese for algorithm validation and sensor performance analysis.

A stereo pair of WV-2 (product level “Stereo1B”) over the test area was acquired on January 31st, 2010, few weeks after WV-2 reached the fully operational state. The first scene, hereafter called “forward”, was acquired at 10:33 am in forward scanning direction with a mean in-track viewing angle of 11.1 deg. The second scene, hereafter called “reverse”, was acquired in reverse scanning direction with a mean in-track angle of -33.9 deg. The available channels are the panchromatic and four multispectral ones: blue, green, red and near infrared. Due to the different viewing angles, the two scenes have different GSD. The forward scene has a mean GSD of 0.51m (panchromatic) and 2.03m (multispectral), while the reverse one has a mean GSD of 0.66m (panchromatic) and 2.65m (multispectral). Examples of differences in resolution and illumination between the two scenes are shown in Figure 4. Due to the large image size, each scene was provided in three tiles

(R1C1, R2C1 and R3C1), with the corresponding metadata and RPC files for each tile (Figure 2). In this paper we report the analysis on R1C1 tiles (Figure 3).

The area covered by R1C1 scenes presents different land use and cover (urban, rural, rivers, lakes) with flat, hilly and mountain terrain, resulting in a height difference between 200m and 800m. 10 control points were measured with GPS.

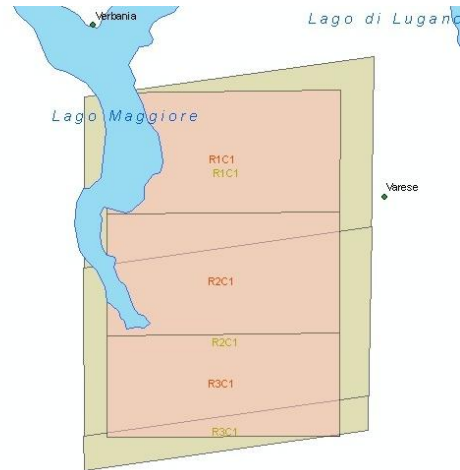


Figure 2. Study area over North Italy and extension of WV-2 image tiles for forward (yellow) and reverse (orange) scenes.

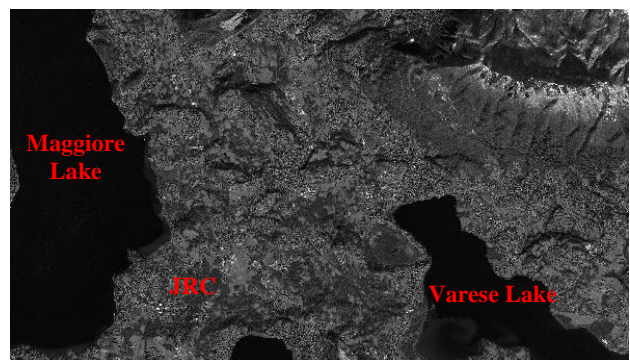


Figure 3. RIC1 tile of WV-2 forward scene.



Figure 4. Scale and radiometric changes between forward (left) and reverse (right) views.

3. RADIOMETRIC ANALYSIS

Operational aspects of the image acquisition have a deeper effect on the homogeneity, or non-homogeneity, of image quality than on the specific radiometric characteristics of the sensor system.

As an example, large changes in image quality and suitability for automated feature extraction are strongly affected by sensor view and sun acquisition angles and by atmospheric conditions. These influences are well-known, but it's not immediate to compensate the effects induced by each component.

Even if data is available at 11-bit, we can easily notice from images histogram that the main information is distributed between 0 and 10 bit (Figure 5).

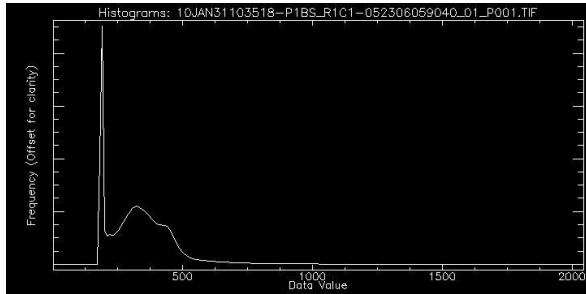


Figure 5. Histogram of panchromatic channel (reverse image).

This distribution can cause problems when we represent the image in an 8-bit mode, leading to saturation effects that false analysis and 3D modeling.

The stretching of the DN distribution in a more uniform 0-255 scale (8-bit) can easily destroy the absolute radiometric accuracy of the image. The “classical linear stretching”¹, then, has to be modified in order to compensate and solve, where possible, saturation problems.

As shown in Figure 6, a linear stretch generates a data value distribution which compresses the information for low DN and consequently saturates pixels with high values. In particular, all the information contained in the DN interval 1-1024 is compressed in 0-128, while the rest of the histogram, which contains only a small part of the data, has the same “quantization” dimension.

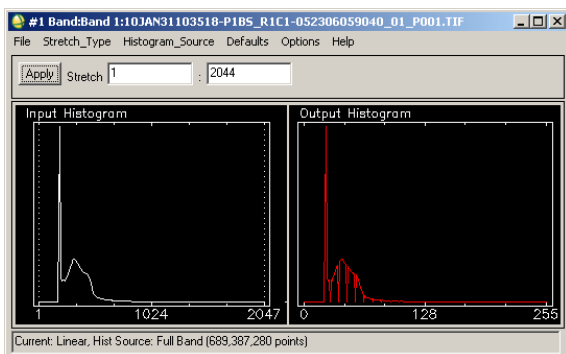


Figure 6. Histogram stretching result for reverse image. Left: 11 bit, right: 8bit.

The result of this procedure leads in many cases to evident problems, as reported in Figure 7. In order to mitigate those problems we have analyzed noise information on the entire

¹ Scaling of the DN using the equation of a straight line: $y=mx+q$ where x is the original DN, y the output scaled one, m is the angular coefficient and q is a constant and corresponds to the minimum scaled DN.

image, identifying “noise-masks” used for a “weighted-linear” stretching filter. With the term “noise”, we are referring to all the anomalies and non-homogeneity that can be found in the image. We have then to distinguish between the “classical” noise effects, like atmospheric and sensor ones, and the non-homogeneity ones. This second case can be easily described as a “filth” analysis of homogeneous areas. From now on, we will commonly group all the anomalies under the “noise” term.

During the analysis of the stereo couple, some acquisition problems (Figure 8) were also found, probably due to sensor saturation.

To define noise characteristics we have examined homogeneous (smooth surfaces) and non-homogeneous areas (i.e. the whole image except homogeneous areas). The use of non-homogeneous areas for image noise evaluation is due to the fact that large homogeneous areas are not always present. In this way, we can analyze the noise variation as function of intensity (noise for CCD-images is not additive but intensity-dependent).



Figure 7. Effects of linear stretching applied to forward scene for 11-to-8-bit reduction. Left: after linear stretching (8 bit), right: before linear stretching (11 bit).

The noise analysis was based on the use of standard deviation, as in (Pateraki, 2005). The homogeneous areas were extracted automatically in 5x5 pixels windows. Small windows are justified since homogeneous areas often show low DN value variations, which would lead to higher standard deviation if it were computed from the whole area. For non-homogeneous areas, a small window is necessary for getting small homogeneous areas between edges.

Each image is divided into 4 bins (0-255, 256-511, 512-1023, 1024-2047) and, for each bin, standard deviation has been computed.



Figure 8. Sensor saturation problems. Left: forward scene, right: reverse scene.

The noise estimation was based on the number of significant samples per each bin with respect to a common percentage. The mean standard deviation \overline{std}_i is calculated as:

$$\overline{std}_i = \frac{\sum_{k=0}^{std_R} k_i \cdot j_{i,k}}{\sum_{k=0}^{std_R} j_{i,k}}, i = 0 \dots nbin \quad (1)$$

According to Eq. 1, we compute the mean standard deviation in each bin i out of the samples j with standard deviation k in the range $[0, std_R]$, where the value $std_R \approx 3$ was empirically estimated.

In this way, homogeneous saturated areas (histogram end), which could lead to too low estimated noise, are considered only if they are numerically significant (more than 100 pixels). This allows finding and isolating error and false alarms (e.g. strong reflector). As an example, if in the last bin large strongly homogeneous areas (\overline{std}_i lower than 2.0) occur, like in Figure 8, they can be extracted and removed from the automatic 3D modeling simply by masking them automatically.

This noise estimation method is quite general and could be applied to any type of image, without the need of on-platform calibration devices or special targets in the image.

The radiometric analysis on RIC1 panchromatic and multispectral tiles led to a noise estimate (mean standard deviation) of 2.77 pixels and 3.36 pixels for forward and 2.75 pixels and 2.74 pixels for reverse scenes respectively.

In Table 2 the noise estimation of the panchromatic stereo couple is reported. We can notice that there are small differences in noise values, mainly due to the viewing acquisition angles. The presence of an acquisition error in the reverse panchromatic image (Figure 8) is proved by a non-zero noise value, while in the forward scene there were not sufficient samples (NA in the table). The same conclusions result from Table 2, where noise values for the multispectral channels are reported.

Table 2. Noise estimation for forward (Fwd) and reverse (Rev) panchromatic RIC1 tiles.

Image	0-255	256-511	512-1023	1024-2048
Pan Fwd	2.52	2.72	5.88	NA
Pan Rev	2.51	2.68	3.88	1.93

Table 3. Noise estimation for forward (Fwd) and reverse (Rev) RGB-NIR RIC1 tiles.

Image	0-255	256-511	512-1023	1024-2048
Red Fwd	3.37	2.85	NA	NA
Blue Fwd	3.36	2.85	NA	NA
Green Fwd	3.36	2.85	NA	NA
NIR Fwd	3.36	2.28	NA	NA
Red Rev	2.51	2.70	3.83	1.93
Blue Rev	2.51	2.71	3.82	1.93
Green Rev	2.51	2.71	3.82	1.93
NIR Rev	2.51	2.71	3.82	1.93

As expected, multispectral images exhibit higher noise, due to larger pixel spacing. All the four spectral channels (R, G, B and NIR) had similar noise value.

In non-homogeneous regions, the noise behavior with respect to the spectral image type is generally the same as seen for homogeneous areas, but the noise is intensity dependent, being lower for the first bins, and increasing for higher intensities. In multispectral channels, the noise increases slightly from blue band to NIR one. Even if the noise extent is not considered to be significant for the building reconstruction tasks, we have to consider that 11-bit data are mainly distributed only 8 to 9-bit,

with high noise, and its negative influence on automated processing becomes even more pronounced, if contrast enhancement is necessary.

Different spilling artifacts were also present in the images in addition to their noise content. They are extremely visible in some homogeneous areas, especially after contrast enhancement. In few cases artifacts lead to small grey level variations but, after contrast enhancement, which is often required for automatic image matching, they can lead to erroneous high-contrast texture patterns.

From those analyses we have developed two automatic algorithms: (i) a weighted linear stretching and (ii) a saturation error masking.

Regarding the weighted linear stretching function, we modified the classical approach into:

$$y^i = \alpha^i \cdot \left(\frac{y_{\max}^i - y_{\min}^i}{x_{\max}^i - x_{\min}^i} \right) \cdot x^i, i = 0 \dots nbin \quad (2)$$

where x is the original DN, y the output scaled one and α is the weight derived from a correlation between noise estimation and bin pixel frequency. In this way each bin can be projected into its scaled interval without saturation and compression effects.

Then by correlating the noise value and its pixel frequency it is possible to highlight and isolate areas with saturated values. A mask containing the saturated areas can therefore be generated for the two scenes under investigation (Figure 9).

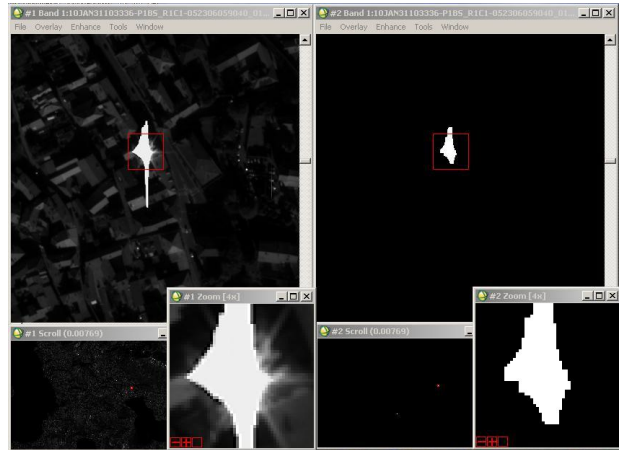


Figure 9. Example of automatic masking of saturated areas in forward RIC1 tile.

4. ORIENTATION AND DSM GENERATION

For the geometric processing of WV-2 stereo scenes the commercial software SAT-PP (SATellite image Precision Processing) by 4DiXplorer AG was used. The images were oriented by estimating the correction of the available RPC using ground control. By applying a shift, systematic errors were present in the residuals of the check points. Through an affine transformation with 4 well distributed ground control points, we compensated the systematic errors in the RPCs and obtained a final RMSE of around half pixel in planimetry and height for the 6 check points.

The next step was image matching and DSM generation. SAT-PP performs the image matching with an advanced approach based on a course-to-fine hierarchical solution with an effective combination of several image matching methods and automatic quality indication (Zhang and Gruen, 2004, Zhang, 2005). To improve the conditions for feature extraction and matching, the

images were pre-processed using a Wallis filter. To start the matching, few seed points were measured in the epipolar images in stereo mode. The DSM was generated with a regular grid space ca 4 times the image GSD, which leads to 2m

(Figure 10 left). No further editing was applied on the surface models.

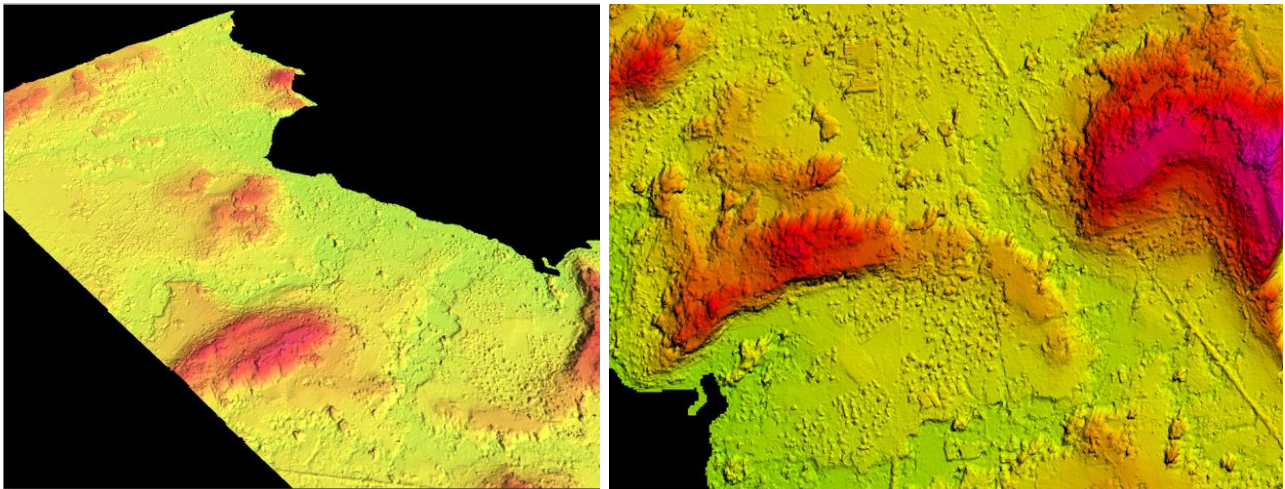


Figure 10. Overview of WV-2 DSM (left) and zoom (right). Grid space: 2m.

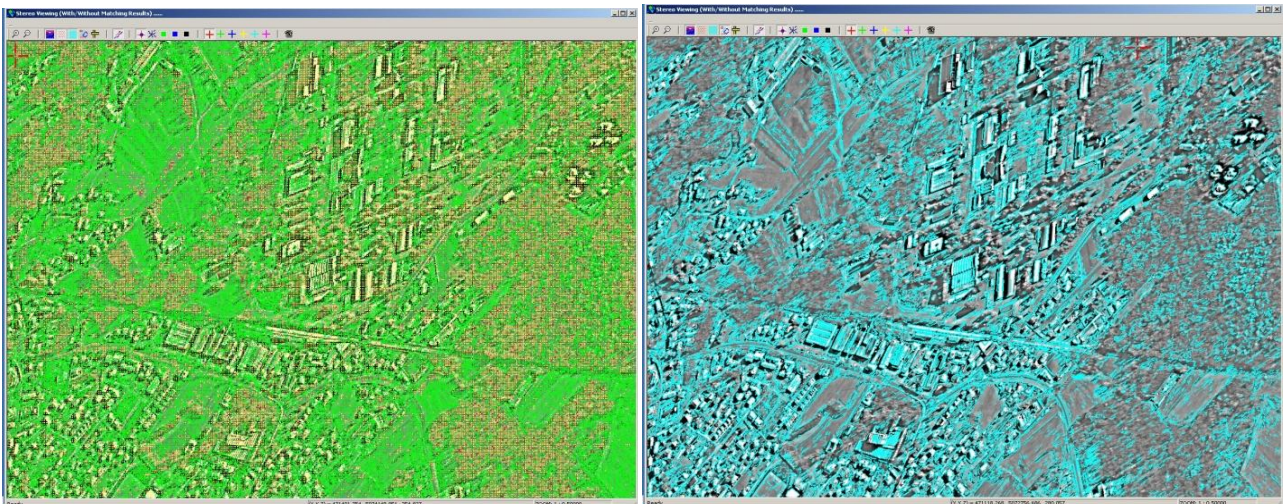


Figure 11. Feature and grid points (left) and edges (right) successfully matched in WV-2 stereo scenes. Visualization on forward scene.

5. DSM ANALYSIS

The matching output in Figure 11 shows that features are very densely matched in WV-2 stereo scenes; in particular edges well describe buildings, resulting in a detailed surface reconstruction. From the visual analysis of the DSM we can see that houses and bigger streets are well outlined (Figure 10 right). We also observed few local blunders in correspondence of those radiometric effects, like spilling and saturation on roof faces, deeply investigated in Section 3. In correspondence of other problematic homogeneous areas, like shadows, the software responds well.

For the quantitative analysis, a reference DSM from aerial data (Lidar or aerial photogrammetry) is still missing. Therefore we compared the DSM with a surface model generated using an in-house software where image matching is based on a generic cross-correlation approach. We first co-registered the two DSMs with three shift parameters to remove possible offsets between the two datasets and computed the Euclidian distances between the two DSMs to be used as residuals. For these operations we used the software package LS3D (Least Squares

3D Surface Matching, Gruen and Akca, 2005).

The histogram of the results in Figure 12 shows the normal distribution of the residuals and that systematic errors are not present.

The residuals still shows large discrepancies in correspondence of vegetation and homogeneous or saturated areas where the two software had very different response. We can also observe that some buildings are not detected by the second software. Finally in non-problematic areas there is a general agreement between them with differences in the order of $(-2, 2)$ pixels.

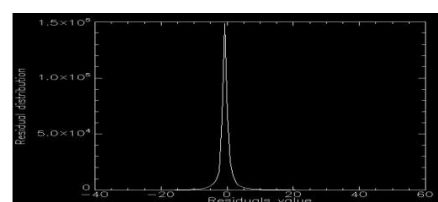


Figure 12. Histogram of the Euclidean differences between the two DSMs over the study area.

6. 3D BUILDING MODELLING

The aim of this part of the work was to test the potentials of WV-2 for man-made features identification, measurement and modelling. We focused the analysis on buildings and worked with the CyberCity-Modeler™ (CCM). The software allows the generation, editing, management and visualization of 3D city models from aerial images, laser scanner data and satellite images in a semi-automatic mode (Gruen and Wang, 2001). As input for the modelling, the relevant roof points were measured 3-dimensionally with the stereo tool available in SAT-PP, following specific rules given by the modelling strategy. The roof points are then imported in CC-Modeler module and the roof faces are automatically generated. The building walls result from the vertical projection of the roof eaves onto the Digital Terrain Model, previously measured. The geometry of the 3D models was checked in the module CC-Edit and, when necessary, improved (e.g. right angles, parallel lines, planar faces, correction of overlays and gaps).

We modeled some buildings in the JRC area. Figure 13 shows the measured buildings overlapped on the forward WV-2 scene. Thanks to the very high resolution, the roof shape was well recognizable and internal roof edges could be distinguished. Some difficulties in the measurements were due to shadows. Figure 14 shows the final 3D models of some JRC buildings together with some geometric parameters automatic calculated (height, area, volume, face inclination, etc.).

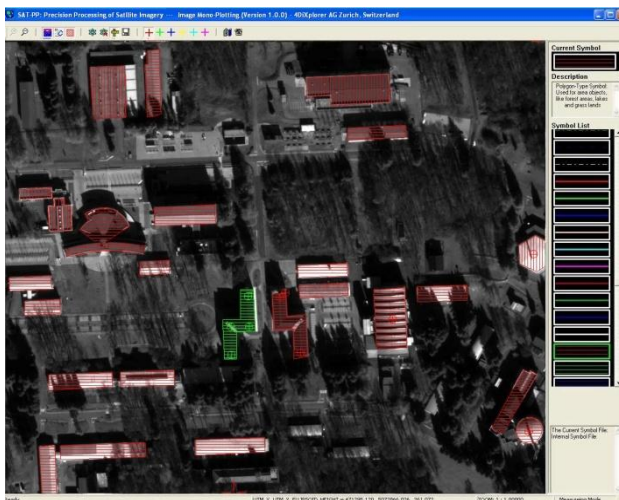


Figure 13. Some of the buildings measured in WV-2 stereo scenes visualized on forward scene.

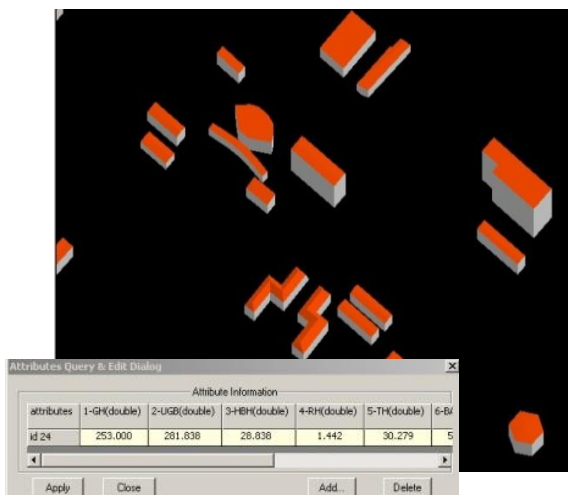


Figure 14. 3D models of some JRC buildings.

7. CONCLUSIONS

WorldView-2 (WV-2) is the DigitalGlobe's latest very high resolution optical sensor. Launched on October 8, 2009 it is full operational since January 5, 2010. The sensor is able to acquire panchromatic imagery at 0.46m ground resolution (0.52m at 20° off-nadir) and multispectral images in eight spectral bands at 1.8m resolution. In this paper we conducted some investigations on a WV-2 stereopair acquired on January 31st, 2010 in the morning over North Italy to evaluate the sensor's radiometric and geometric characteristics. The first results are presented.

Concerning the radiometry, we evaluated the noise level on homogeneous areas and the presence of spills or saturations that affect the automatic surface modelling. Then the images were oriented with sub-pixel accuracy and digital surface models were automatically extracted using commercial software packages. Finally some buildings were modelled semi-automatically. These first results, despite some radiometric problems, are encouraging and demonstrated the high potential of WV-2 scene for feature extraction and modelling.

Our future work include (i) the integration of masks automatically generated in saturated areas for the DSM extraction to avoid blunders due to no texture, (ii) the quality evaluation of WV-2 DSMs with a reference surface with higher resolution (Lidar, aerial photogrammetry) and (iii) the evaluation of building modelling on urban areas.

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