
In memory of Paolo Mazzetti

It is with deep sadness that the International Society for Digital Earth has learned of the passing of our colleague and friend, Paolo Mazzetti.

Paolo gave many years of service to ISDE as a Council member, Chair of the European Chapter, scientist and advocate for international cooperation in Digital Earth. He brought serious scientific thinking to that work, together with a generous willingness to give his time, ideas and energy to the people and institutions that make international collaboration possible.

Our Past President, Dr Alessandro Annoni, who worked closely with Paolo over many years, has spoken of his selfless commitment, scientific curiosity, and the human and intellectual qualities he brought to ISDE. Alessandro recalls their stimulating conversations and the gracious way Paolo offered his advice. Those reflections will resonate with many across the Society who experienced the same generosity and thoughtfulness.

Paolo's contribution to Digital Earth extended well beyond ISDE. Through the National Research Council of Italy, he worked at the interface of information science, Earth observation and environmental science, with a particular interest in making complex data, models and knowledge interoperable and useful. His engagement with the Group on Earth Observations (GEO), including work associated with the GEO Programme Board and GEOSS infrastructure, helped connect Digital Earth with the wider international Earth observation community. He also contributed significantly to the *International Journal of Digital Earth* and to the scientific literature of our field.

I particularly remember Paolo from the 11th International Symposium on Digital Earth in Florence in 2019, where he served as Symposium Manager and local organiser. It was an exceptional gathering, bringing together around 400 members of the international Digital Earth community to mark twenty years since the first Symposium in Beijing.

The opening day remains one of my most vivid memories of any ISDE event. The opening plenary was held in the magnificent Salone dei Cinquecento in Florence's Palazzo Vecchio, a setting that seemed almost uniquely suited to the occasion. The great hall, shaped by Giorgio Vasari's sixteenth-century decorative programme, is surrounded by monumental scenes of Florence's wars with Pisa and Siena and carries within its history one of the most intriguing episodes of the Renaissance. More than five centuries earlier, Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo had been commissioned to create rival battle scenes for these same walls, Leonardo's *Battle of Anghiari* and Michelangelo's *Battle of Cascina*. Neither survives there today.

To gather the international Digital Earth community in that room in 2019 had a particular resonance. It was the 500th anniversary year of Leonardo's death and the twentieth anniversary of the first International Symposium on Digital Earth in Beijing. In a hall so closely associated with Renaissance attempts to observe,

interpret and represent the world, we were meeting to consider how new forms of science, technology and shared knowledge might allow us to understand the Earth in very different ways. It was an extraordinary setting for that conversation and an unforgettable opening to the Symposium.

The President of the Tuscany Region and the Mayor of Florence both spoke about Digital Earth and its relevance to the future, giving the occasion a civic as well as scientific significance. The Salone dei Cinquecento also provided the setting for the soft launch of the *Manual of Digital Earth*, then approaching publication. Paolo's own research was already part of the body of work on which the *Manual* drew, including his contributions to GEOEssential and the development of knowledge infrastructures connecting Earth observation with policy and decision-making.

Looking back, there is something especially poignant about that moment. None of us gathered in that magnificent room could have imagined how widely the *Manual* would travel. Today Springer Nature records around 1.39 million accesses from an international readership. For me, that reach reflects something Paolo himself cared deeply about, making scientific knowledge interoperable, accessible and useful beyond the institutions in which it was created.

That first day ended more informally in the courtyard of Palazzo Vecchio, drinking Prosecco and sharing conversations with ISDE colleagues from around the world. Paolo was among us all, attentive, welcoming and clearly enjoying the occasion. It was quite an opening to a Digital Earth Symposium, and it remains a particularly special memory of Paolo in his element. Paolo combined serious scientific purpose with an easy collegiality and an instinct for bringing people together. I met him at other ISDE events and always encountered the same curiosity, measured judgement and quiet commitment to the Society.

Those who worked alongside Paolo over many years in Italy and Europe, particularly Alessandro Annoni, Stefano Nativi and his colleagues at CNR, knew him in ways that many of us in the wider international community could not. Their memories of his friendship, scholarship and everyday collegiality are an important part of remembering him. From my own perspective, both personally and as President, I know that ISDE has lost not simply a respected scientist and leader, but a kind and generous colleague who was genuinely liked by those around him.

Earlier this year, Paolo stepped down as Chair of the European Chapter when the demands of his role as Acting Director of CNR's Institute of Atmospheric Pollution Research meant he could no longer give the Chapter the time and attention he felt it deserved. Even then, his instinct was to help. He offered his full support for the transition and made clear that, although stepping back from the formal role, he wanted to remain actively involved with ISDE.

That was characteristic of Paolo. He gave generously to the Society, through his expertise and ideas, but also through his time, energy, encouragement and willingness to contribute wherever he could. His warmth and enthusiasm helped create the sense of international community that has always been central to ISDE.

His passing is a profound loss. What we will miss most is Paolo himself, his kindness, generosity, curiosity and the warmth he brought to those around him. He had a natural way of making colleagues feel welcome and valued, and he gave his time, expertise and friendship freely. Those memories will stay with us. The ideas and contributions he gave to ISDE will endure, but it is the person behind them whom we will remember with the greatest affection.

On behalf of the ISDE Council, Bureau and wider international community, I extend our sincere condolences to Paolo's family, his colleagues at CNR, and his many friends and collaborators in Italy, Europe and around the world.

We remember Paolo with affection, respect, gratitude and great sadness.



Richard Simpson
President
International Society for Digital Earth