

Object Analyst

Object Analyst is an add-on package for Geomatica that provides tools for segmentation, classification, and feature extraction. Object Analyst includes an all-in-one interface within Geomatica Focus that is designed to guide you through segmenting your imagery, extracting features, creating training sites, classification (including creating custom rules for classification), reforming shapes, and performing an accuracy assessment.

Researchers have more recently considered that a pixel is not a true geographical object, and it is not the optimal spatial unit for mapping a landscape. Moreover, the traditional pixel-based image-analysis algorithms showed their inability to cope with high-resolution imagery; that is, imagery with resolution typically finer than 5 meters per pixel. These factors have contributed to the shifting of the model to and the wider use of object-based image analysis (OBIA).

OBIA does not analyze a single pixel, but rather a homogeneous group of pixels — image objects. An object, contrary to a pixel, provides richer information, including spectrum, texture, shape, spatial relationships, and ancillary spatial data. In turn, spatial context can be exploited to emulate a human analyst, who intuitively identifies various objects in an image, rather than individual pixels, by considering various properties, such as size, texture, shape, and the spatial arrangements of these objects to understand the semantics.

The fundamental objective of OBIA, therefore, is to use segmentation to reduce complexity of image data, and to use the extracted image objects and their corresponding attributes (features) to develop strategies for thematic classification. With OBIA, images are segmented to make image objects from various groups of pixels to represent meaningful objects in the scene. Ontologically, this provides more accurate and reliable identification and extraction of real-world features and at more appropriate scales. Moreover, it provides the opportunity to divide map data into homogenous objects of various spatial scales.

Module Prerequisites

Object Analyst is an add-on to Geomatica Core or Geomatica Prime.

Workflow

A simple process flow for object-based image analysis (OBIA) is shown in Figure 1. After preprocessing, a typical OBIA analysis starts with segmenting an image into primitive objects. You then further group the objects together into classes of interest by exploiting their spectral properties, shape measures, context, and so forth.



Figure 1: Workflow of object-based classification

The preprocessing steps involve operations such as orthorectification, radiometric enhancement, removing shadow, detecting outliers, or creating a new layer(s) such as vegetation indices, texture channels and so forth, so that the data is suitable for image segmentation and feature extraction before classification.

Image segmentation is the first step in OBIA. The objective is to partition an image into statistically homogenous regions or objects (segments) that are more uniform within themselves and differ from their adjacent neighbors.

Each segment is characterized by a variety of attributes (features), including spectral properties (band statistics of a segment), shape, texture, context, and so forth. The segments, however, do not have the thematic information at this stage and need classification to assign class (group) membership to each.

Object Analyst in Geomatica Focus

Object Analyst can be accessed through the **Analysis** menu. The interface includes a Process Canvas, which guides users through process steps that can be run separately or, once properly defined, automatically.

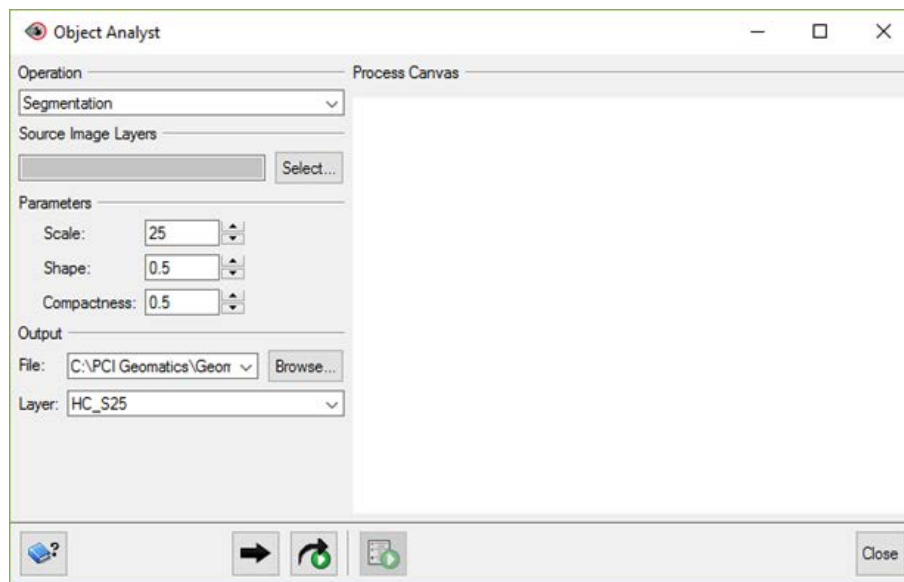


Figure 2: Object Analyst's Process Canvas interface

The process steps are listed here and described below:

- Segmentation
- Feature Extraction
- Training Site Editing
- Classification
- Rule-based Classification
- Reform shapes
- Accuracy Assessment



Segmentation

Segmentation is the process of extracting discrete regions of image objects. This is achieved by stratification of an image. These image-objects are used further as the basic unit of analysis for developing image-analysis strategies, including classification and change detection.

The underlying segmentation algorithm in Object Analyst is a hierarchical step-wise region grown by using random "seeds" spread over the entire image. This method can be classified as a "bottom-up" optimization routine that starts with a pixel and ends with segments that are groups of like pixels. The criteria that define the growth of a region can be based on the difference between the pixel intensity and the mean of the region. The algorithm assesses the local homogeneity based on the spectral and spatial characteristics. The size of the object is controlled with the value for scale, which you specify. The larger the scale, the larger will be the output object. Other homogeneity criteria are based on shape and compactness.

The result of the segmentation process is as follows:

- An initial abstraction of the original data
- Creation of a vector (polygon) representation of the image objects

The results of segmentation can be exported as a vector data set and viewed in third-party software.

Feature Extraction

The term feature, in Object Analyst corresponds to an attribute representing some information of the image objects. Different characteristics of image objects are referred to as features, or attributes, of a segment. You can compute two types of features:

1. Statistical features - Statistical features are computed based on the image pixels under an object (polygon). Features are computed for each of the selected image bands and added to the attribute table of the vector segment layer as new fields (attributes).

The features that can be collected include:

- Minimum value of the pixels beneath an object in a selected band.
- Maximum value of the pixels beneath an object in a selected band.
- Mean value of the pixels beneath an object in a selected band.
- Standard deviation value of the pixels beneath an object in a selected band.

2. Geometric features - Geometric features are computed by analyzing the polygon boundary created during segmentation, so raster information is not required. Object Analyst computes many commonly used shape descriptors such as:

- Compactness - A measure to indicate how closely packed a shape is. A circle is the most compact.

Compactness = $\text{Sqrt}(4 * A_s / \pi) / O$, where A_s is the area of the object, and O is the perimeter of the object (outer contour).

- Elongation - The ratio of the height and width of a rotated minimal bounding box. In other words, rotate a rectangle so that it is the smallest rectangle in which the object fits, and then compare its height to its width.

Elongation = Major Axis Length / Minor Axis Length

- Circularity - The circularity ratio represents how like the object's shape is to a circle. Circularity is the ratio of the area of a shape to the perimeter of the shape's square.



$C = A_s/O^2$, where A_s is the area of the shape, and O^2 is square of the shape's perimeter.

- o Rectangularity - How rectangular a shape is; that is, how much it fills its minimum bounding rectangle.

$R = A_s/A_R$, Where A_s is the area of a shape, and A_R is the area of the minimum bounding rectangle.

Training Site Editing

Before you can perform a classification or an accuracy assessment, you must have ground-truth data. In remote sensing, ground truth refers to information collected on location. With ground-truth data, image data can be related to real features and materials on the ground. By collecting ground-truth data, remote-sensing data can be calibrated, which aids in the interpretation and analysis of what is being sensed.

With supervised classification, the ground-truth data acts as a training set, which is used by the learning algorithm to generate a classification model.

In Object Analyst, you collect training samples for both the supervised classification and accuracy assessment in the same window. Primarily, you will use on-screen interpretation in the viewer and select segments of various classes.

Classification

Classification is systematic grouping of objects into sets or classes based on their similarities. The goal in Object Analyst is to group extracted image objects or segments into appropriate classes that a human analyst can identify intuitively.

This is achieved through object-based classification. Classification of a segment can be achieved either by labeling a segment as a selected class and assigning a color to it, or by adopting more advanced more advanced computational procedures.

With Object Analyst, you can perform either of two types of classification:

1. Supervised - Supervised classification is a process to find a model, or function, by analyzing the features of a data set of which the class memberships are known. This function is then used to predict the class memberships for target population.

Essentially, supervised classification is a two-step approach.

- o The first step is to build a learning model to describe predetermined classes for a data set. The construction of the learning model is based on the analysis of data items or concepts for which class memberships are predetermined or known: data items known collectively as training samples.
- o In the second step, the learned model is applied to new (target) data items to predict their class membership. The supervisory component of this procedure is in the training phase, which provides the classifier with a way to assess a dependency measure between features (attributes) and classes.



Object Analyst provides two algorithms for supervised classification:

- Support Vector Machine (SVM)
 - Maximum likelihood classifier (MLC)
2. Unsupervised - Object Analyst provides unsupervised classification based on the k-means clustering algorithm. Clustering algorithms search for generic data patterns among the feature [variable] spaces. No target variable is identified, as such. Clustering algorithms search for patterns among all the input features related to objects and group them into relatively homogeneous clusters.

The goal of clustering is normally descriptive and to discover new categories. Therefore, this strategy learns from observation rather than examples, and hence does not require a prior hypothesis or training set. The core objective is finding the natural boundaries in feature space for the number of clusters you specify.

Rule-based Classification

With Rule-based Classification, you can define a custom classification rule based on a specific property (feature), or properties, of a segment. You can define a rule to either assign a class to segments that meet the requirements of the rule or remove the segments from the class.

Object Analyst provides two methodologies for creating these rules or conditions:

1. Object Analyst Condition Builder window

In this window users can define a condition for rule-based classification. The condition can be based on up to two features (attributes). That is, you can construct a maximum of two conditions per rule. Both conditions can be based on a single attribute, or on two different attributes linked by a logical AND or OR operator.

For example, one could specify a two-part condition where i) classification occurs on an area attribute with a value of greater than 100800 and ii) less than 109800 for the same area attribute.

2. An alternative to creating a condition in the Object Analyst Condition Builder window is to use feature visualization. In the Feature Visualization window, you can dynamically select the vector objects (polygon segments) or update the existing selection in the vector layer based on a given feature (field) and its value range (filter).

You select the field you want, and then define the range. The polygon segments in that range are then selected in the viewer. Changing the range value reapplies the filter and update the selection set. You can immediately see the effects of the selected filter, and experiment to select the one most suitable.



Reform Shapes

As a post-classification step, users may need to merge two or more polygons or split one or more polygons. You can do so by using either of two methods:

- Reforming shapes by using automatic dissolve
Automatic dissolve, merges two adjacent polygons based on class membership; that is, segments belonging to the same class and that are adjacent to each other are dissolved to create a bigger object. The internal boundaries of such segments are removed. The output will exclude all the attribute fields, except the field that contains the class-membership information. It is this field that is used to dissolve the segments.
- Reforming shapes by using interactive edits
An alternative to reforming shapes with Automatic dissolve is to use Interactive edits. To do so, you must select a layer that contains one or more polygons with class information. Object Analyst provides you with some basic tools to select and edit the polygon data.

Accuracy Assessment

You can evaluate the overall accuracy of a supervised classification by running Accuracy Assessment. This operation compares a reference field, generated by an analyst using training sites editing tool, and a classification field, generated by running a classification.

The reference field and the classification field must be of the same segmentation file. When a segmentation file contains several reference and classification fields, it is a good practice to compare a classification with the reference field used to create it.

This process generates an assessment report that includes:

- Sample Listing – Report includes all assessed samples, described with georeferenced position, image coordinates, classified value/name, and reference value/name are displayed.
- Error (Confusion) Matrix – Matrix of all classes between reference data and classified data is displayed.
- Accuracy Statistics – Various accuracy statistics, such as overall accuracy, kappa coefficient, and their confidence intervals are displayed.

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