Remote Sensing Information Classification
Presentation for HELIX-Israel Kick-Off Workshop April 29, 2008

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The remote sensing data offers a uniform measurement over a large area.

Remote sensing provides direct measurement of various geophysical properties, such as reflectance, emission and absorption of electromagnetic energy.

These geophysical properties are partially controlled by things of interest to epidemiologists, such as vegetation.

The actual remote sensing data can be used directly or ....

- It can be classified.
- It can be integrated into models.
- It can be converted into products.
In practice the bands are correlated and all the available dynamic range is not used. Practically, each pixel has only one of \((2^7)^4\) possible values.

This is merely a very big number.
Classification is a way to reduce the dimensionality and precision to something a human can understand.

Classification changes SCALAR data into NOMINAL data!

The names used come from a FEATURE SPACE.
The names and the feature space are abstractions!

Conversion from scalar to nominal loses information and introduces error.
Start with the scalar geophysical measurement

Classification creates a statistical connection between scalar data and a feature space

How strong is the relationship between the nominal designation (the class) and some "objective" standard?

The "I hope I am right" option

Classification is NOT required
Sources of Classification Error

Most classifications have average errors in the range of 25 – 40%.

Example:
"Forcing a square peg through a round hole."
Only two classes are permitted, plain (low number) or hashed (high number). So pixel (2,3) is what?

Example:
"Variables don’t and constants aren’t."
The measurements always have “noise”. Note the values in pixels (1,1), (1,2) and (2,1).

Note: there is a white rectangle used to clip the diagonal shading.
This can cause some fascinating and entertaining problems.

Example:

The raw satellite data are INTEGER.

Most logical algorithms assume REAL domain input.

This can cause some fascinating and entertaining problems.
Binning ALWAYS creates artifacts

What are the relationships between points C, D and E?

If the data are binned to the values i₂ and i₃ the true relationship are obscured AND spurious information has been added.

Actual function

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In a review of publications applying remote sensing to epidemiology
- most were found to use classification
- none gave any information about the accuracy of the classification.

Therefore, their results
- can only reveal how their health data related to their subset,
- they don't really know what that subset is,
- nor do they know if the subset can be reproduced!

It is strongly recommended that epidemiological studies utilize the full information content of the remote sensing material.
- This means using the full dimensionality or some statistically defensible expression of the total or a derived product.
- The computational burden, which 25 years ago was huge, is now easily handled by ordinary desktop systems.
Contacts & Acknowledgement

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Illustrative Website
http://www.ghcc.msfc.nasa.gov/ follow Applications: Health and Environment link to
http://weather.msfc.nasa.gov/helix/helix_home1.html

Current Significant Public Health Partners
Leslie McClure, University of Alabama, Birmingham
Judith Quaillers, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
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Stan Morain, University of New Mexico

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