

3D URBAN GIS FROM LASER ALTIMETER AND 2D MAP DATA

Norbert Haala, Claus Brenner and Karl-Heinrich Anders
Institute for Photogrammetry (ifp)
University of Stuttgart
Geschwister-Scholl-Straße 24, 70174 Stuttgart, Germany
Ph.: +49-711-121-3383, Fax: +49-711-121-3297
e-mail: Norbert.Haala@ifp.uni-stuttgart.de

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ABSTRACT

Virtual reality applications in the context of urban planning presume the acquisition of 3D urban models. Photo realism can only be achieved, if the geometry of buildings is represented by a detailed and accurate CAD model and if artificial texture or real world imagery is additionally mapped to the faces and roofs of the buildings. In the approach presented in this paper height data provided by airborne laser scanning and existing ground plans of buildings are combined in order to enable an automatic data capture by the integration of these different types of information. Afterwards virtual reality city models are generated by texture processing, i.e. by mapping of terrestrial images. Thus the rapid acquisition of 3D urban GIS is feasible.

1 INTRODUCTION

Airborne laser scanners allow direct measurement of the terrain surface, including objects like trees or buildings which rise from the ground. Three-dimensional points on the sensed surface can be determined dense and well-distributed. Even though for a number of applications a so-called Digital Surface Model (DSM) which represents this surface by an object independent distribution of 3D points is sufficient, further interpretation and qualification of the original height data is necessary in many cases. One example is the acquisition of city models for virtual reality applications, where even small geometrical errors like the non-planar triangulation of a planar facade may easily disturb the impression of looking at a 'real' scene. Another example are visibility computations for mobile communications. In this case, a scene representation with as few as possible faces is advantageous, since this reduces the simulation complexity. In order to obtain a 3D urban model which is more suitable for these applications an abstraction of the surface model is required, i.e. buildings have to be separated from the terrain surface and represented by true 3D CAD models.

The automatic interpretation of DSMs is a very pretentious problem. Especially for urban areas, great efforts at producing DSMs with sufficient spatial resolution and quality have been made. Many researchers nowadays agree that as many as possible supplementary sources of information have to be used to achieve optimal interpretation results. Within the approach presented in this paper the 3D reconstruction of the buildings is supported by given ground plans. This type of information is frequently available from a 2D Geo Information System (GIS). By integrating the ground plans into the processing also the consistency between the already existing 2D GIS or map data and the generated 3D data can be guaranteed.

Often, ground plans of buildings have already been acquired and are represented either in analog form by maps and plans or digitally in 2D Geo Information Systems (GIS). These ground plans are another very important source of information for 3D building reconstruction. Compared to results of automatic procedures these ground plans are very reliable since they contain aggregated information which has been made explicit by human interpretation. For this reason constraints, which are derived from ground plans can considerably reduce the search space when looking for a proper reconstruction and thereby reduce costs to attain a solution. An example for existing ground truth data relevant for building reconstruction is the digital cadastral map, which provides information

on the distribution of property, including the borders of all agricultural areas and the ground plans of existing buildings. Additionally information on the names of streets and the usage of buildings (e.g. garage, residential building, office block, industrial building, church) is provided in form of text symbols. At the moment the digital cadastral map is build up as an area covering data base, mainly by digitizing existing maps or plans. At present it is available for 40% of the area of Germany. Since for our test area this type of data was not available the ground plans were digitized manually from a map of scale 1:5000. Alternatively maps and plans can be digitized automatically (Frischknecht and Carosio, 1997) which also results in information similar to the digital cadastral map.

After discussing the potential of airborne laser scanning for the generation and visualization of urban models (section 2), the 3D building reconstruction from existing ground plans and DSM will be described (section 3). In the last part of the paper (section 4) the processing of terrestrial images for the generation virtual reality city models will be presented.

2 URBAN MODELS FROM LASER SCANNER DSM

2.1 Airborne laser scanning

Figure 1 shows a DSM of our test area provided by the TopoSys laser scanner system (Lohr, 1997). Terrain points were measured at approximately one point each $1 \times 1 \text{ m}^2$ with an accuracy of 0.3 m in planimetry and 0.1 m in height. Similar to a tachymetric data acquisition, the three-dimensional coordinates of terrain points are determined by polar measurement. The central component of the system is a laser sensor which allows the direct distance measurement from the aircraft to the topographical terrain surface by run-time measurement of an emitted and reflected laser pulse. For an area covering data collection, the laser beam is deflected perpendicular to the direction of flight, resulting in a strip-wise acquisition of the terrain surface. The position and orientation of the sensor system during range measurement has to be provided by additional sensors. These components are a NAVSTAR Global Positioning System (GPS) for the positioning task and an Inertial System (INS) for the orientation task.

The data generated by such a laser scanner consists of dense point measurements along strips, which is usually processed and resampled to obtain a regular raster. Figure 1 shows the result of

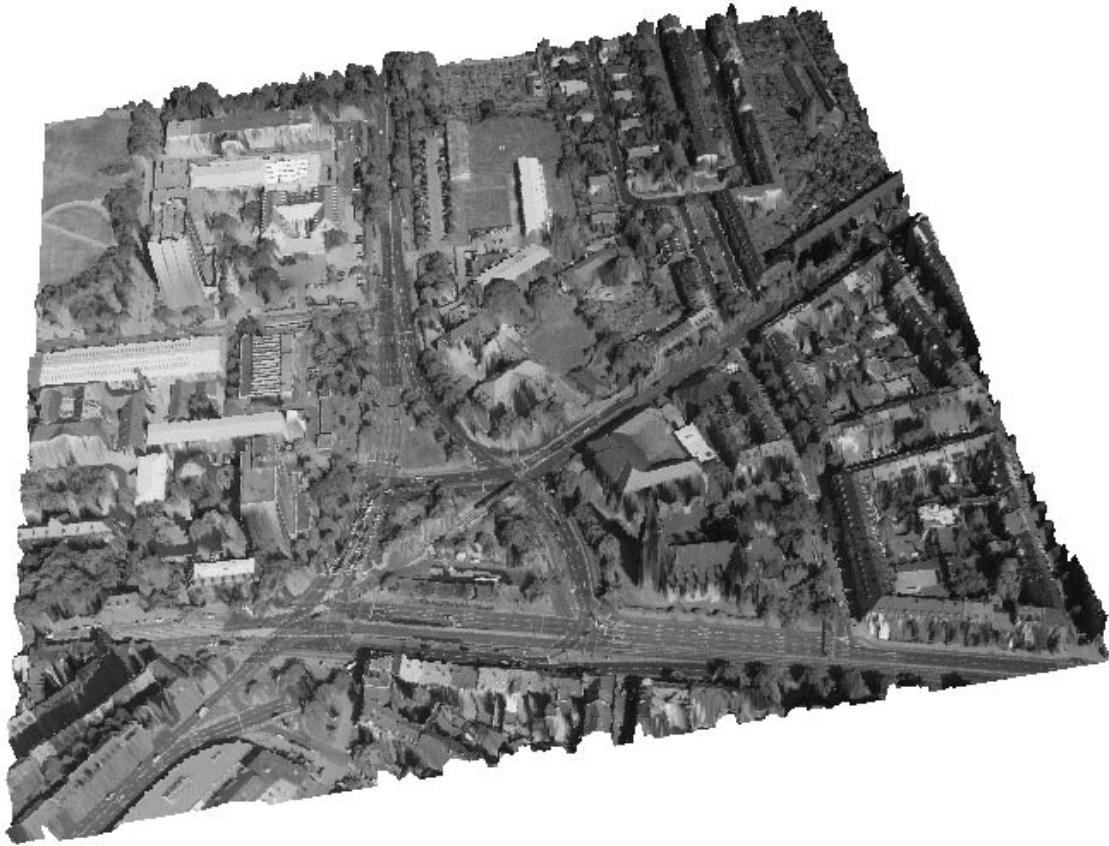


Figure 1: 3D visualization of DSM overlaid with ortho image.

these steps for our test area (part of the city of Karlsruhe, Germany), where an aerial image has been additionally overlaid. This view gives a good impression of the scenery, since the geometry of the surface is represented quite well.

2.2 Surface simplification

One problem with employing surface descriptions by an unqualified, i.e. object independent distribution of points like they are generated by laser scanning is the large amount of data to be computed, stored and displayed. It has been recognized early by the computer graphics community that handling of very large scenes is an important topic. There are several approaches, among them clipping and viewing frustum computations, which are applicable when just parts of the scene need to be rendered for visualization. However, when the entire scene can be seen, for example during a virtual flight which starts from far away and zooms in on some detail, a level-of-detail (lod) approach is more useful. In this case, the exact geometry of the scene is replaced by an approximation consisting of considerable less polygons as soon as the object is far away from the (virtual) camera. It is currently not possible to compute mesh simplifications on-line while rendering the scene. Thus, one traditional approach is to provide multiple level-of-detail representations of the object which are computed off-line. Depending on the distance between object and camera the viewer program then just switches between those representations during rendering. Unfortunately, there can be a visible discontinuities while the viewer program switches between these representations. To this end, approaches like 'continuous meshes' have been developed. This technique does not store a fixed number of models with predefined polygon numbers but the most simple polygonal representation of the object plus a list of modifications (e.g. edge inserts) leading to the most precise representation. During display, the viewer chooses the number of modifications to be applied based

on the objects distance. Another important development is the replacement of per-vertex or per-face color information by texture mapping.

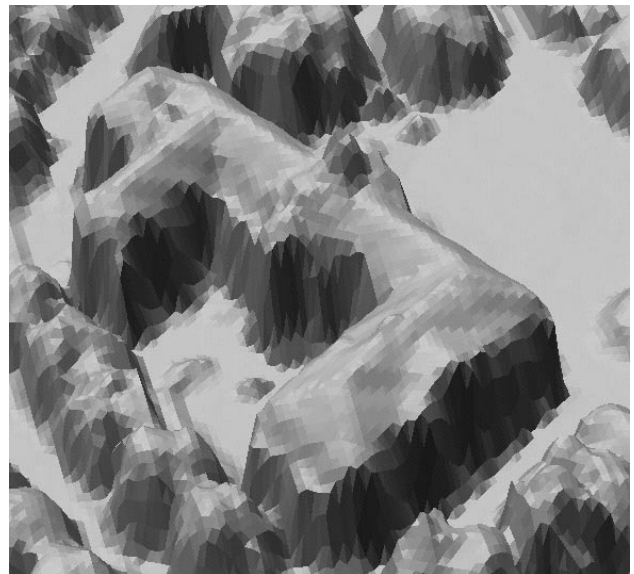


Figure 2: DSM, original resolution

When combining a reduction in the number of polygons with texture mapping, usually a reduction by at least 90% of the original size can be achieved with little visual impact. A good overview on mesh simplification techniques is given in (Heckbert and Garland, 1997). To give an example for a mesh simplification, figure 2 shows part

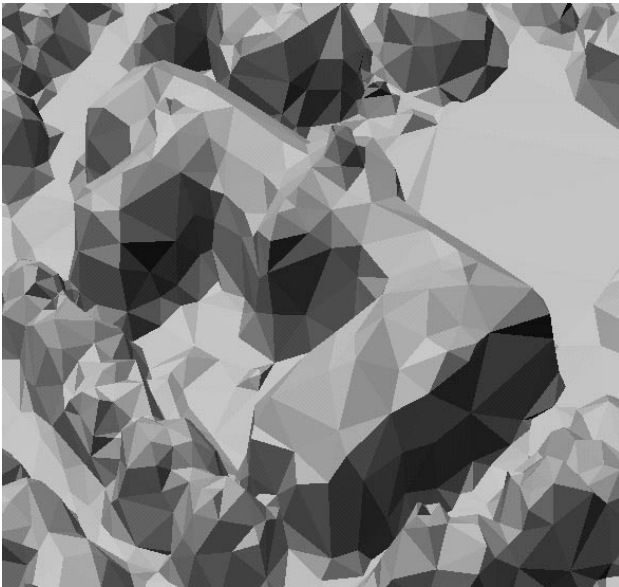


Figure 3: DSM, simplified

of a DSM of our test area which was overall modeled using 607624 triangles. Figure 3 shows the same scene after mesh simplification with only 50000 triangles for the whole test area. Triangle reduction was performed using the POLYWORKS software package (Soucy, 1997).

Although the amount of data can be reduced significantly by these algorithms, many tasks aiming on visualizations or simulations in an urban environment require the further abstraction and interpretation of the surface description. For simulations aiming on the propagation of noise or electro-magnetic waves e.g. knowledge about the surface material is a crucial point. Hence trees or buildings have to be represented separately from the terrain surface. The situation is much like in reverse engineering for industrial parts where the ultimate goal is to find a compact parametric representation rather than dense point clouds.

Additionally terrestrial images have to be mapped onto the vertical faces of the buildings to achieve photo realism for the generation of walk-throughs; the resolution and viewing direction of an aerial image, which was e.g. used to produce figure 1 is no longer sufficient at a large scale. For this purpose point correspondences have to be established between the terrestrial images and the data set used to represent building geometry. Since nodes and vertices of buildings can be identified easily in terrestrial images, they should also be represented explicitly in the geometric database. All those arguments vote for an explicit representation of building geometry and topology by 3D CAD models.

3 BUILDING RECONSTRUCTION

In order to separate buildings from the terrain surface and represent them by true 3D CAD models, ground plans are used in addition to the DSM data. For the reconstruction first appropriate building models have to be defined, which are fit to the observed data in the second step.

3.1 Building models

Object recognition or reconstruction, in general, presumes knowledge about the perceived objects by some kind of object model. A model used for building reconstruction should be able to describe buildings of different complexity and it should permit the representation of geometric constraints during the reconstruction. Object

models can be treated as abstractions of real world objects. The most important role played in model definition is the proper balance between the correctness and tractability, i.e. the results given by the model must be adequate both in terms of the solution attained and the cost to attain the solution.

In order to deal with the large architectural variations of building shapes, the utilized model should be as general as possible. In our approach a building is represented by a general polyhedron, i.e. it has to be bounded by a set of planar surfaces and straight lines. Generally, the interpretation of real world data presumes much a priori knowledge or in other words constraints. This can be achieved by applying a very rigid building model, i.e. a model with only a few parameters. Nevertheless, this limits the number of possible building types which can be represented by a single model. We provide the required constraints by the assumption that the coordinates of the given ground plan are correct and the borders of the roof are exactly defined by this ground plan. This supplies sufficient restrictions to enable the reconstruction of buildings without losing the possibility to deal with very complex buildings.

Two approaches to represent the reconstructed buildings are feasible, boundary representation (BRep) and constructive solid geometry. The boundary representation (BRep) is probably the most widespread type of 3D representation and already many algorithms are available for computing physical properties from that representation. Spatial objects are defined by their bounding elements, e.g. planar faces; nodes and edges are defined by intersection of the bounding planes. The topology is additionally captured by a set of relations that indicate how the faces, edges and vertices are connected to each other. In constructive solid geometry (CSG) simple primitives are combined by means of regularized Boolean set operators. A CSG representation always results in valid 3D objects, i.e. in contrast to a BRep no topological check has to be performed in order to guarantee that the object surface is closed. CSG also enables a very compact object representation. Since a CSG can be transformed into a BRep, there are no complete solutions available in the opposite direction. This motivated us to use CSG as primary representation and to generate a BRep on demand e.g. for visualization purposes. Thus the advantages of both representations can be combined.

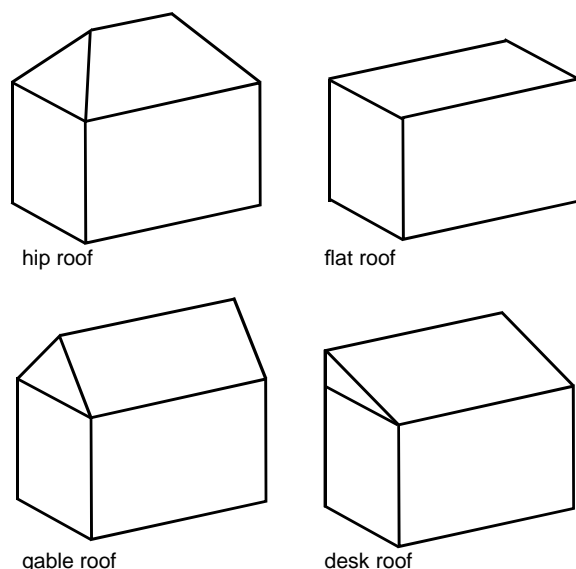


Figure 4: Building primitives used for reconstruction.

Similar to (Englert and Gülch, 1996) we utilize a CSG representation which describes each building by a combination of one or more basic primitives. The set of four basic building primitives used for

that purpose is shown in figure 4. Each building primitive consists of a cuboid element with different roof types flat roof, pent roof, gable roof and hip roof.

3.2 Decomposition of ground plans

First the complete building is split up into these basic structures. This step can be realized fully automatic by the analysis of the given ground plan. Figure 5 shows the automatic decomposition of a complex ground plan into rectangular structures. Each of these rectangles defines one building primitive. Since position, orientation and horizontal extension of each cuboid is already defined by the rectangle, only the height of each cuboid as well as roof type and roof slope have to be determined as remaining parameters of each building primitive. The parameters of the building primitives are estimated by a least squares adjustment which minimizes the distances between the DSM surface and the corresponding points of the building primitive, i.e. the building primitives are fit into the DSM surface. In order to apply the least squares adjustment first the appropriate model has to be selected. Additionally roof regions which do not fit to the selected model have to be excluded from the least squares adjustment to avoid gross errors of the estimated parameters. Both tasks can be solved by a segmentation of the DSM into planar surfaces.



Figure 5: Ground plan decomposed into rectangular parts.

3.3 Segmentation and parameter estimation

The segmentation is supported by introducing ground plan information. Of course the given ground plan restricts the extension of the DSM area which has to be examined. More important, the implemented segmentation within each ground plan area can be based on the direction of the surface normals of the DSM, since possible orientations of planar surfaces to be extracted are predefined by the outline of the building. This is motivated by the observation that the direction of the unit normal vector of a possible roof plane emerging from an element of the ground plan has to be perpendicular to this segment. Hence, the different segments of the ground plan polygon are used to trigger the segmentation of a planar surface with a projected normal vector perpendicular to this element. For reasons of simplicity this step is discussed using a building, which can be represented by a single CSG primitive.

In figure 6 a ground plan provided by the digital cadastral map is projected to the corresponding section of the ortho image. The

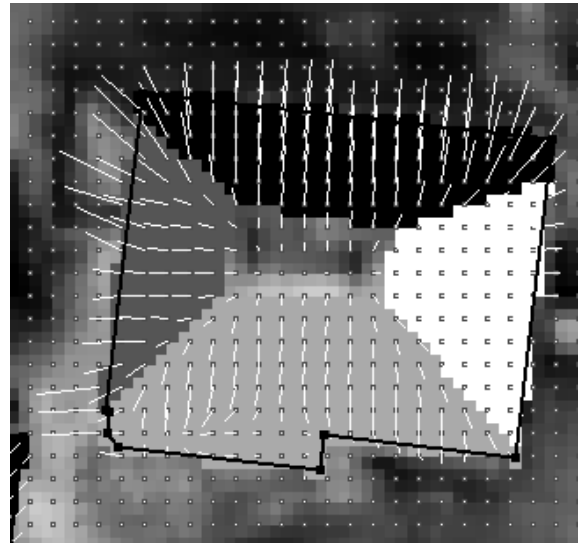


Figure 6: Building ground plan (black), DSM surface normals (white) and segmented planar surfaces.

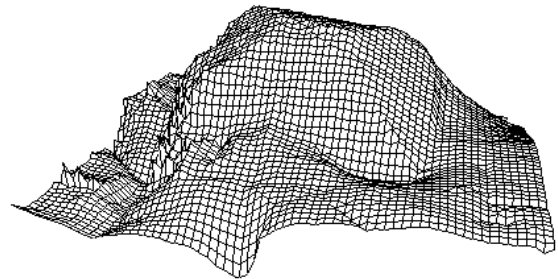


Figure 7: 3D view of DSM.

corresponding DSM is shown in figure 7. The implemented segmentation is based on the direction of the surface normals of the DSM, which are represented by the small white lines in figure 6. Since direct numerical differentiation tends to amplify noise and obscure signal content, a local least squares fit is computed within a small window around each element of the DSM. The derivatives of the continuous function then can be determined analytically at the corresponding discrete DSM points in order to calculate the surface normals.

The distribution of the surface normal directions corresponds to the four major axes of the ground plan. Even though these directions can also be calculated by analyzing the histogram of the surface normal directions, they are obtained by parsing the given ground plan, which is much more reliable. All points with a surface normal corresponding to the examined ground plan direction are combined to a region. This results in the segmentation represented by the shaded regions in figure 6. The result of the segmentation process can be used to define so-called compatibility regions for the estimation of each roof, i.e. only DSM segments with a direction of the normal vector compatible to the ground plan segment are utilized while estimating the parameters of the corresponding roof plane. The segmentation of figure 6 triggers the reconstruction of a building with hip roof, since this model (roof consisting of 4 faces) is the only one which fits to the result of the segmentation process.

For the more complex building shown in figure 5 the segmentation is presented in figure 8. Figure 9 shows the building primitives which are reconstructed based on the ground plan decomposition and the segmentation discussed above. Figure 10 gives the result of the automatic 3D building reconstruction for the complete test



Figure 8: Segmented roof regions, original ground plan (white) and interactively added ground plan segment (black).

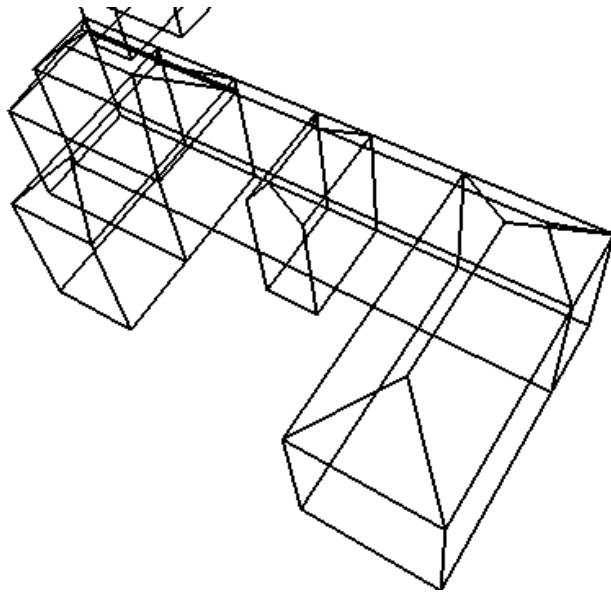


Figure 9: Reconstructed primitives.

area. For visualization the reconstructed buildings were put on the map of scale 1:5000, which was used to digitize the ground plans.

3.4 Interactive refinement of initial reconstructions

In our approach the reconstruction is constrained by the assumption that

- all walls defined by the ground polygon lead to a planar roof face of variable slope and
- all eaves lines have the same height.

These assumptions are fairly general. However, one must keep in mind that any roof construction based on this approach provides incorrect results if the roof structure inside the ground polygon does not follow the cues that can be obtained from the ground polygon. This can e.g. happen if more than one plane emerges from a single



Figure 11: Reconstructed building and DSM surface.

polygon element or if parts of the building which are contained in a roof surface like a bay are not represented by the ground plan.

Figure 11 shows the reconstructed building with the original DSM surface overlaid. The difference between the DSM surface and the corresponding points at the roof planes provide a reliable test on the quality of a reconstruction. For this reason RMS values are calculated for each building and its sub-parts. Remaining regions, which are incompatible with the final reconstruction give an additional hint, if manual interaction is required for further refinement. Since these regions are determined by the previous segmentation, they can be visualized together with the calculated RMS values in a final operator based evaluation step.

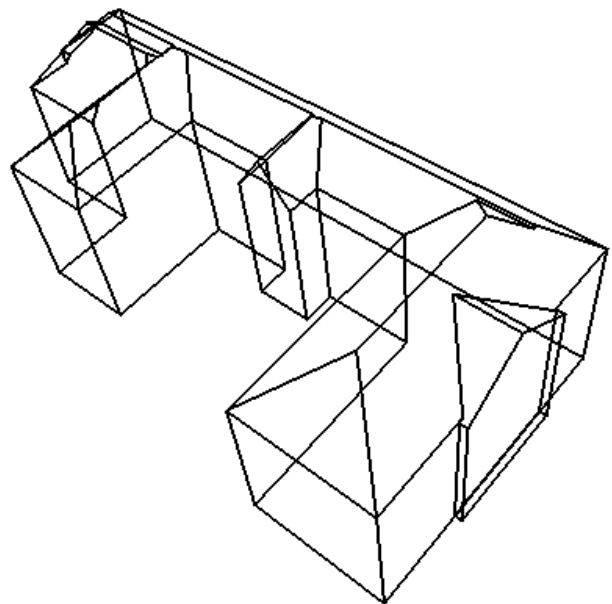


Figure 12: Boundary representation of the refined reconstruction.

Up to now all buildings were reconstructed fully automatically. The ground plans used so far were digitized merely from the map. No

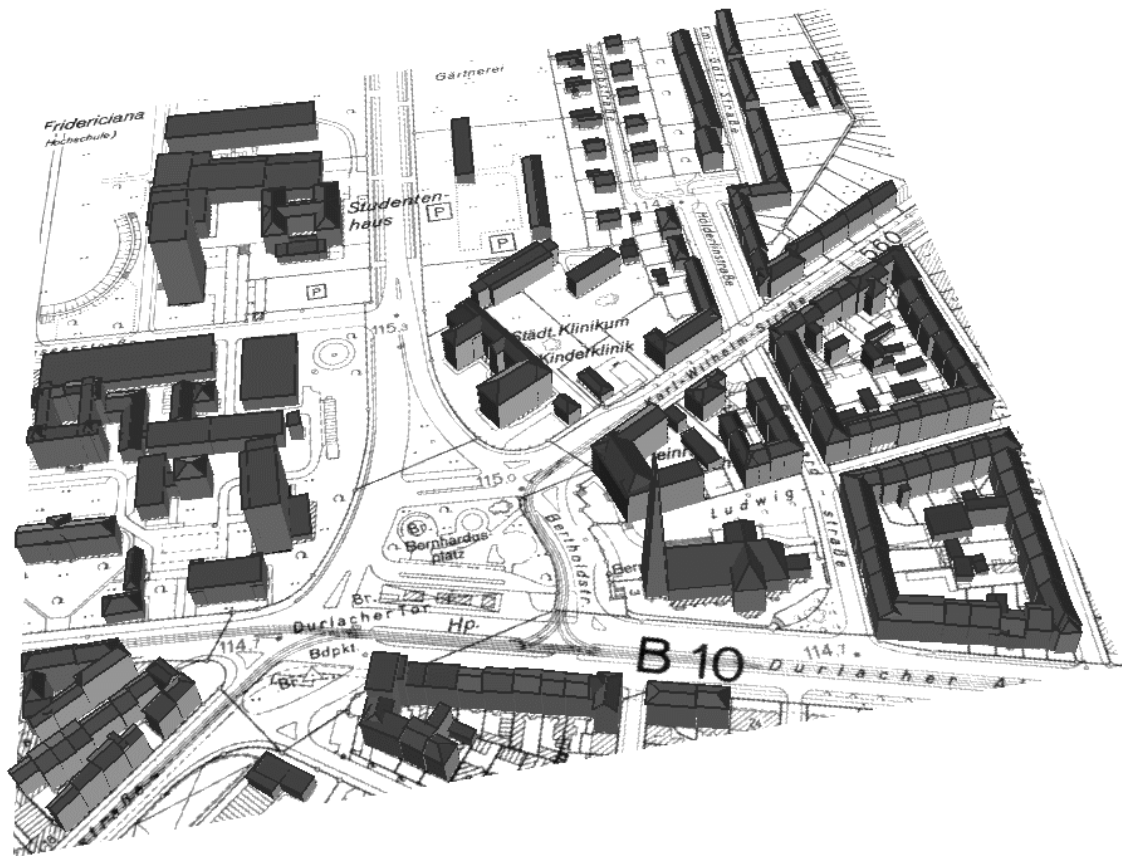


Figure 10: Reconstructed buildings projected on map 1:5000 used for ground plan acquisition.

care has been taken to digitize the ground plans with respect to the reconstruction algorithm. Even though the reconstruction is sufficient for many levels of detail, due to the problems of the algorithm mentioned above a further improvement of the reconstruction can be necessary for very complex buildings. This can be obtained if the initial reconstruction is analyzed in order to refine the capture of ground plans. Figure 8 shows the original ground plan and the segmentation of the DSM into planar regions. For this example the two segmented regions contained in the black rectangle are incompatible to their surrounding roof plane and therefore are not used to reconstruct the parameters of the corresponding building primitive. Based on this information the black polygon was generated interactively by an operator. This rectangle then automatically triggers the reconstruction of an additional building primitive, which represents the bay of the roof. The result of the final reconstruction is shown in figure 12. For this visualization the CSG representation was transformed to a boundary representation of the building. This step is required for all buildings if wire frames have to be presented adequately. Therefore the union of the set of CSG primitives has to be computed. Within this process the primitives are intersected, coplanar and touching faces are merged and inner faces or parts are removed.

The size of object parts which can be reconstructed is of course limited by the available density of DSM points, i.e. details smaller than approximately 1 m can not be captured. For virtual reality applications this problem can be avoided by texture mapping of real imagery as a substitute for geometric modeling, since the use of photo realistic texture enhances the perceived detail even in the absence of a detailed geometric model.

4 GENERATION OF VIRTUAL REALITY MODELS

The creation of a 3D city model for virtual reality applications usually consists of a geometric building reconstruction followed by texture mapping to obtain a photo realistic model representation. In principle, terrestrial imagery is sufficient to provide the required information for both tasks. Nevertheless, especially the terrestrial acquisition of the building geometry by architectural photogrammetry proves to be a time-consuming process that has to be carried out interactively for each building. The basic idea of our approach is to speed up the time consuming process of virtual city model creation by using DSM and ground plans for geometric processing and terrestrial images only for texture mapping. Since the vertices of the 3D building models which are generated from ground plans and laser data provide sufficient control point information, the texture mapping from the terrestrial images is simplified considerably. Therefore the generation of virtual reality models is more efficient compared to standard architectural photogrammetry, where a number of tie points has to be measured in multiple images.

The goal of texture processing is to provide a rectified image for each visible building face. Hence for each image the corresponding facade polygon has to be selected from the 3D city model generated in the previous processing step. For this purpose the wire frame of the reconstructed buildings as well as the indices of the faces are projected to the aerial image (see figure 13). If the view-points were sketched into a map or an ortho image during the terrestrial image acquisition, this representation allows a simple interactive definition of the corresponding face index for each terrestrial image.

For texture mapping the image has to be correctly positioned, oriented and scaled to represent its associated surface. In our approach an image section representing a planar surface is rectified by applying a projective transformation. The 7 parameters of the



Figure 13: Reconstructed building projected into stereo image.



Figure 15: Faces mapped to corresponding 3D surfaces

projective transformation are determined by a minimum number of 4 points in 3D world coordinates on a plane (in 3D space) and their corresponding image coordinates. Of course, this approach can only be used with sufficiently planar structures. After the selection of the corresponding 3D building face based on the visualization presented in figure 13, at least four tie points between the face polygon and the terrestrial image have to be determined. For this purpose the nodes of the face polygon have to be identified and measured in the terrestrial image. Since the points have to be positioned very precisely, the displayed texture can be scaled to any desired resolution.



Figure 14: Original terrestrial images with points measured for rectification

Figure 14 shows an example for terrestrial imagery which was taken for texture mapping. The images were acquired with a Kodak DCS 120 digital camera. The points measured for the rectification are marked by white dots. If a node of the face is hidden by an obstacle, the corner point can be alternatively calculated from points measured at the edges of the facade. The rectified image sections then can be assigned to their corresponding faces in the 3D model. In order to control the correct assignment of the texture, the 3D buildings are displayed in a viewer which allows all basic transformations to the model (translation, rotation, scaling) immediately after the texture mapping (see figure 15).

For the final visualizations (see figures 16 and 17) the ortho image as well as artificial trees are added to the virtual model.

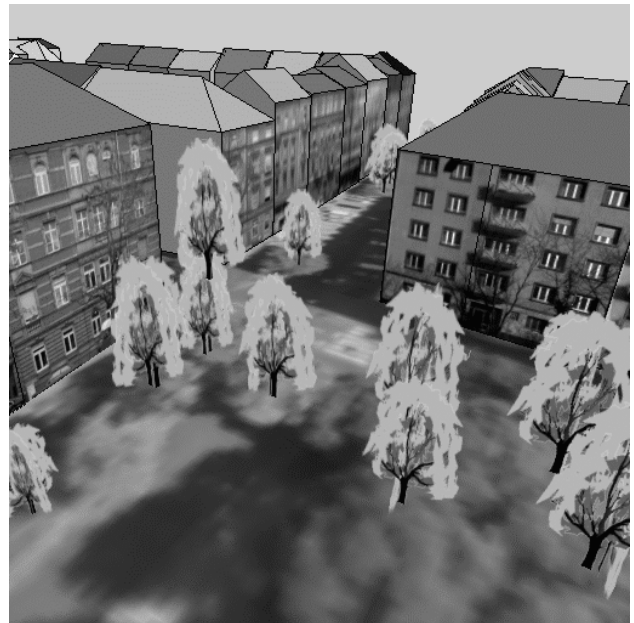


Figure 16: 3D visualization of virtual city model.

5 CONCLUSION

Recent advances in three-dimensional displays, real-time texturing and computer graphics hardware as well as the increasing availability of rendering and animation software tools have resulted in an increased demand for photo realistic 3D virtual reality city models. In our opinion this demand can only be satisfied by a highly efficient capture of urban scenes, which presumes the integrated use of multiple data sources. We have presented an approach, which uses 2D ground plans and a laser DSM to derive 3D building geometry automatically, whereas texture is taken from terrestrial photographs. Thus, model acquisition time was reduced considerably compared to a pure terrestrial approach.



Figure 17: 3D visualization of virtual city model.

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