A SIMPLE DEVICE FOR MONITORING CRACKS FROM PHOTOGRAPHS

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ABSTRACT:
The article presents a simple technological solution PMC (PhotoMicrometer Contrast) for monitoring cracks and deformation joints in buildings and structures. The solution is based on the methods of image processing and photogrammetry. The monitoring equipment includes a special marker, a digital camera and specialized processing software. The marker consists of two thin plastic plates where Aruco markers and special measuring areas are printed. There are two types of markers – for monitoring in one or two directions of crack development. While monitoring is performed, two plates are fixed on both sides of the crack or deformation joint. Then the plates are photographed with a digital camera as often as the observation cycle requires. Any conventional modern digital camera is suitable for photographing after successfully passing the distortion effect test described in the article. Image processing in the software includes automatic identification of the marker in the image, binarization of the image, determination of its scale and dimensions of measuring areas in the current observation cycle. For processing images made at large angles of inclination and rotation, a preliminary solution of the resection in space and the images rectification to the found angles is provided. The dynamics of crack development is determined by the results of several cycles of observations collected over period. Our technology ensures the accuracy of the determination of coordinates and deformations at the level of 0.05 mm and higher for photographing distances from 0.3 to 50 m.

1. INTRODUCTION
One of the important tasks of engineering inspection of buildings and buildings construction is to monitor the dynamics of cracks development. In addition to other systems, devices and technologies based on the use of photographs and photogrammetry methods have been significantly developed in recent years. Many researchers pay attention to solving the problems of detecting and measuring cracks (Hampel, Maas, 2009; Rau et al., 2017; Sarke et al., 2017; Valença et al., 2013; Zheng, 2014). Studies on the use of photogrammetry methods for crack monitoring are also being actively carried out (Barazzetti, Scacini, 2009; Nishiyama et al., 2015; Bal et al., 2021). In our opinion, the most effective of them are based upon the use of deformation markers with marks automatically recognized using specialized photogrammetric software (Germanese et al., 2018; Wojnarowski et al., 2019). This approach makes it possible to completely eliminate the “human factor” from the measurement processes and to develop universal crack monitoring technologies, including fully automated ones. In this article, we present probably the simplest device and the technology for monitoring the crack opening value using photographs.

2. METHOD
The monitoring technology assumes using marker, digital camera and PhotoMicrometer C processing software. The marker can be of two types: for one-dimensional (Fig.1) and for two-dimensional (Fig.2) determinations.

2.1 PMC marker and its operating principle

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We are presenting the device and the principle of operation of the marker on the example of a simpler model. The PMC marker (PhotoMicrometer Contrast) consists of two plates made of white plastic with a 0.5-0.8 mm thickness. On both plates, Aruco marks and measuring areas are printed in black. The measuring areas are designated as C1, C2, C3 and C4 in Fig.3.

![Figure 3. Wide and narrow marker plates with the designation of measuring areas.](image)

All areas have the same height. C1 and C2 have the same width also. In this study, the marker with the size of a wide plate 50x90 mm was tested, and the size of areas C1 and C2 was 15 mm. To monitor the crack, the marker is installed as shown in Fig.4.

![Figure 4. Installation of crack monitoring marker.](image)

As can be seen in the picture, the wide plate has slots where the narrow plate is threaded in such a way that parts of the measuring areas C3 and C4 get hidden under the wide plate. Wide and narrow plates are fixed (glued) on different sides of the study.

The principle of operation of the marker is that when the crack width increases (decreases), the width of the visible part of the areas C3 and C4 will change. At the same time, the width of areas C1 and C2 does not change and their dimensions are used as reference. The current position and the size of the measuring areas can be fixed by photographing the marker. Using the known initial sizes of the C1-C4 areas and the dimensions of their images measured in the image, it is possible to determine accurately the current width of the C3 and C4 areas in millimeters, even without resorting to complex photogrammetric calculations.

The vernier scale applied to the PMC-1D marker is additional and expanding the functionality of this device.

### 2.2. Digital camera

Conventional modern digital cameras can be used for monitoring with a PMC marker. When choosing a camera for monitoring, an important requirement is the ability to take detailed photos from different distances, so it is convenient to use telephoto lenses with variable focal length and telecompact cameras. The dependence of the photographing distance and the equivalent (in terms of the 36x24 mm frame format) focal length of the camera is shown in Table 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Photographing distance (m)</th>
<th>0.3</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>20</th>
<th>50</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Equivalent focal length of the camera (mm)</td>
<td>18 – 55</td>
<td>40 – 150</td>
<td>≥ 150</td>
<td>≥ 600</td>
<td>≥ 1600</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table is calculated for the marker of the above dimensions and for a camera with a resolution of 15 megapixels. For cameras with a different resolution, the focal length values shown in the table will differ. For example, for a camera with a resolution of 50 megapixels, the corresponding focal length values will be approximately 2 times less. There are also some other criteria that it is desirable to observe when choosing a camera for monitoring (PHOTOGRAMMETRIA, 2022).

In any case, before photographing, the camera must be tested for the effect of distortion as shown in Section 3.1.

### 2.3. The PhotoMicrometer C software

The PhotoMicrometer C software was specially developed to operate with the markers of this design and allows to perform fully automated processing of images from mark measurements up to the creation of monitoring reports. The main functions of the program are as follows:

- uploading a photo(s) taken during the current monitoring cycle and automatically finding the marker image in the photo(s) (Fig.5);

![Figure 5. The Interface of the PhotoMicrometer C software.](image)

- automatic identification of the marker number, automatic recognition of C1-C4 measuring areas using the position of Aruco marks;
- binarization of the C1-C4 measuring areas image and counting the number of black pixels in each area (Fig.6);
coordinates are directly measured and used. Images of PMC markers taken by cameras with medium-focal-length and long-focal-length lenses, as a rule, can be processed in the PhotoMicrometer C software and give high-quality results without entering corrections for distortion.

On the other hand, distortions of the optical system can be easily eliminated – many modern cameras have either a built-in function to eliminate lens distortion or this function has a standard software supplied by the manufacturer with the camera. Nevertheless, when choosing a camera for monitoring, it is important to be able to check the effect of distortion on the results of measurements performed using the PMC system. To solve the task, we offer the following test, which we will demonstrate using the example of a Canon EOS 70D camera with a lens supplied in the kit: Kit EF-S 18–55. To perform the test, it is necessary to take 5 photos of the PMC marker in different parts of the frame (center, left, right, top, bottom) as shown in Fig. 7.

For the experiment, the photographing was performed twice with the extreme values of the focal length \( f = 18 \text{ mm} \) and \( f = 55 \text{ mm} \) at a distance of 0.3 m and 1 m respectively. This camera does not have a built-in distortion elimination function, so the photos were simultaneously saved in two RAW and JPG formats (RAW+JPG menu settings). The photos saved in RAW format were corrected for distortion at a result of post-processing in the standard Canon Digital Photo Professional (DPP) program. And the photos originally saved in JPG format were not corrected for distortion. In order to understand what distortion values we are dealing with, the camera was previously calibrated in a third-party photogrammetric program with the preservation of the camera settings described above. The maximum distortion values obtained from calibration are shown in Table 2.

### 3. TESTS, RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Following criteria were used to test the system functioning:
- the distortion impact onto the measurement results;
- the photographing distance impact onto the measurement accuracy;
- the photographing angle impact onto the measurement results.

#### 3.1 Study of the distortion impact

Unlike the Photomicrometer system developed for 3D monitoring (Wojnarowski A.E. et al., 2019), the presented PMC system does not have a built-in function for detecting and accounting for camera distortion. However, the effect of distortion on measurements and calculations performed according to the algorithm described above and related to the definition and accounting of the image scale turns out to be significantly less than it is in systems where photogrammetric
is understandable – each lens is unique, and the program supports averaged distortion profiles for a lens type. The table also shows that when a focal length is \( f = 55 \) mm the distortion is insignificant.

Thus, as a result of photographing the PMC-1D marker according to the scheme shown in Fig.7 and eliminating distortion in the standard Canon DPP program, we have 4 types of images:

1. From a distance of 0.3 m and \( f = 18 \) mm without the distortion correction.
2. From a distance of 0.3 m and \( f = 18 \) mm after the distortion is corrected.
3. From a distance of 1 m and \( f = 55 \) mm without the distortion correction.
4. From a distance of 1 m and \( f = 55 \) mm after the distortion is corrected.

Each of these variants contains 5 photos taken in accordance with Fig. 7. The results of these photos processing in the Photomicrometer C software are shown in Fig.8. - Fig.11. in tabular and graphical form.

As can be seen in Fig. 8 a distortion of 160 pixels and more leads to a maximum spread of X-values equal to 0.259 mm between the images taken on the left and right. At the same time, the average value of X counts is \(-4.337 \) mm, and the RMS deviation of the counts is 0.083 mm.

As can be seen in Fig. 9 after the distortion is corrected, the residual limit distortion of 17.8 pixels leads to a maximum spread of X values equal to 0.048 mm. The average value of X counts is \(-4.298 \) mm, and the RMS deviation is 0.016 mm.
As can be seen in Fig.14, totally 19 photographs were taken in this study. The top row shows one photo made perpendicular to the plane of the marker. The second row shows photos taken at different values of the horizontal angle in increments of 10 degrees (from 10 to 60 degrees inclusively). The third one presents photos with different values of the angle of inclination, also in increments of 10 degrees (from 10 to 60 degrees). And in the fourth row, photos with different angles of rotation in the plane of the wall are presented in a similar way. The photographing was performed from a distance of 2 m with Canon EOS 70D camera. An EF 70-200 lens and a focal length \( f = 135 \) mm were used.

The software Photomicrometer C allows you to perform calculations in two ways:

- Binarization and counting of black pixels are performed on the original image, then calculations using formulas (1) and (2) are performed;

- The resection in space is solved beforehand and the image is rectified to the found Eulerian angles. In this case, the rectified image is processed according to the algorithm described above.

The interfaces of these solutions for the image with an angle of inclination 50 degrees are shown in Fig.15, on the left - the solution according to the original image, on the right - after prior image rectification:

![Figure 15. Interfaces of solutions for the image with an angle of inclination 50 degrees: on the left - according to the original image; on the right - after prior image rectification.](image)

The results of processing all the images without prior rectification are shown graphically in Fig.16.

![Figure 16. A graph of the results of image processing without prior rectification.](image)
The following graph (Fig.17) shows the results of processing the same images after performing their prior rectification.

![Graph of the results of images processing after prior rectification.](https://example.com/graph.png)

**Figure 17.** Graph of the results of images processing after prior rectification.

As it is shown in the figure, the use of image rectification to angles obtained as a result of solving the resection in space, leads to a decrease in the systematic influence of horizontal angles and generally improves the results (the amplitude for all values was 0.060 mm, the RMS deviation was 0.012 mm).

The systematic errors shown arise due to differences in the image scales at the region of reference areas C1 and C2 (Fig.3.) caused by the horizontal angle of the camera rotation. The magnitude of errors caused by the different scales of the image also depends on the photographing distance: the greater the distance, the smaller the differences in scales and the smaller the error data. As our studies have shown, at photographing distances of more than 5 meters, errors caused by the different scale of the image are practically not noticeable. There are a couple more important points related to the quality of manufacture and installation of the marker, which affect the ability to correctly process images taken at large angles of inclination and rotation. Firstly, the slots on the outer plate of the PMC-1D marker should be made with a bevel so that the outer plate does not cover the inner (areas C3 and C4) at large horizontal photographing angles. Secondly, the marker must be manufactured and installed so that all measuring areas C1 – C4 geometrically represent parallel regular planes, as far as possible.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Thus, as a result of the research carried out, the following conclusions can be formulated:

1. The PMC system allows to monitor cracks remotely at photographing distances from 0.3 to 50 meters.
2. There is no need to use car towers and other lifting devices to perform accurate measurements in hard-to-reach places.
3. Depending on the type of marker used, PMC allows to track deformations along one or two coordinate axes.
4. High accuracy of determining deformations is provided - 0.05 mm and higher. The results of the measurement accuracy assessment are given in the report generated by the program.
5. The high level of automation of the system minimizes the influence of the "human factor" on the results of observations.
6. The system allows to track the dynamics of the development of cracks up to 2 cm.
7. When photographing in different temperature conditions, the system allows you to take into account the temperature correction.
8. Permanent monitoring systems can be developed based on the PMC system and video surveillance cameras.

**REFERENCES**


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