

Self-organising smart components in advanced manufacturing systems

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Abstract—Virtualization of shop-floor components as a way to foster easy access to machine information, collaboration among shop-floor components and task execution on demand are a few key aspects of latest trends related with Intelligent Manufacturing. This concept is being explored in an ongoing European Project called I-RAMP³. The goal is to shorten the ramp-up phase time by turn manufacturing systems self-aware and self-diagnosable, increasing the reliability and responsiveness of production systems, and ultimately to improve the European Industry competitiveness. Closing the existing gap between hardware and software in manufacturing business allows to acquire and develop more insight about the deployed production systems and, as a consequence, generate knowledge that can be used to turn systems more cost-effective.

This virtualization explores a new representation of industrial equipment, such as machines and sensors, called NETDEV (NETwork-enabled DEVICES). Since sensors always have been of significant importance for industrial systems, the main purpose of the present paper is to expose the latest developments on Wireless Sensor Networks applied on industry regarding easy sensor integration, using the PlugThings Framework, device encapsulation using UPnP Architecture, dynamic sensor location and collaboration, sharing communication and online diagnosis capabilities.

Keywords—Wireless Sensor Networks; Intelligent Systems; Manufacturing Systems; Sensor Diagnostics and Validation; Sensor Location System.

I. INTRODUCTION

I-RAMP³, Intelligent Reconfigurable Machines for Smart Plug&Produce, is an ongoing European Project funded by the Seventh Framework Programme of the European Commission. This collaborative project involves both academic and industrial partners from Germany, Portugal, Netherlands, Hungary, France and Greece. Therefore, the vision is to improve the European Industry competitiveness by developing technologies for smart manufacturing systems. To achieve it, the goal is to reduce the ramp-up phase of the shop floor equipment and manage efficiently the schedule and unscheduled maintenance phases, increasing at the same time the efficiency of manufacturing. By virtualizing all shop-floor equipment into an agent-like system, standardized communication skills and a layer of intelligence for collaboration between complex machines and sensor & actuators are introduced, improving also the plug'n'produce concept towards flexible smart factories. In this context, each agent is represented as a NETDEV (NETwork-enabled Device), and, in this context, three variations were considered: Sensor & Actuator (S&A) NETDEV; Device NETDEV; Process Analyzer NETDEV.

The S&A NETDEV is the entity responsible to encapsulate sensors and motes deployed on the shop-floor, with the intent of monitoring the machines' conditions and surrounding environment; Device NETDEV represents the shop-floor machines, such as a Robotic Arm or a Linear Axis; Process Analyzer NETDEV, in contrast to the previous entities, does not encapsulate a physical entity, being instead a virtual instance responsible to monitor machines' behavior and diagnose the sensor networks' health. NETDEVs have a standardized way to communicate with each other using DIL (Device Integration Language), which is a proprietary task-driven language created in I-RAMP³, in order to ease the quick delivery and reception of process information between all the virtualized shop-floor equipment. The transparency of discovering devices in the network and data exchange between them, using publish-subscribe services, is possible due to UPnP (Universal Plug and Play) as a base technology.

Sensor data is extremely important to monitor the machines at the shop-floor level and its environmental surrounding conditions for condition-based monitoring, machine diagnosis and process adaptation to new requirements. The I-RAMP³ technology allows WSNs to become more flexible and agile, acquiring new capabilities that can benefit shop-floor operations, such as sensor group collaboration, which aims for providing to the machine qualitative information instead of quantitative that normally comes in form of raw data. Additionally it allows for dynamic sensor node location, used on sensor collaborations, to detect if sensor nodes are physically near to each other and to the machine, for the correct interpretation of data, and adaptation of its behavior accordingly.

At the present stage, and based on latest advances on WSN communication protocols (as ZigBee and others) and more reliable and long-lasting hardware, in past few years WSNs became to be more explored and applied in several domains. This is mainly due to its feasibility of installation, when it is difficult to use wired solutions, either by harsh location or high number of sensors used, also due to ease of maintenance and reduced costs of cabling [13]. Chen et al. [14] refer as advantages of WSN its large coverage area, fast communication via RF, self-organisation throughout a direct communication between entities and ubiquitous information. As Ruiz-Garcia et al. [15] pinpoint, some of the WSN advantages can be seen in concrete structures or in the transportation sector, where a controlled environment needs to be monitored in run-time. Additionally, Evans [16] present enablers and challenges, along with some contextual applicability of WSN in a manufacturing environment.

Specifically for the industrial domain, Ramamurthy et al. [13] developed a Smart Sensor Platform that applies the plug'n'play concept by means of hardware interface, payload, communication between sensors and actuators, and ultimately allows for software update using 'over-the-air' programming. Cao [17] explored a distributed approach to put closer sensors and actuators in a collaborative environment using WSNs. Chen et al. [14] push this approach forward considering the same approach, but taking into account all the industrial domain restrictions like real-timeliness, functional safety, security, energy efficiency, and so forth. All these industrial restrictions and an overview about the industrial domain was explored and presented by Neumann [18]. In the recent past, Chen et al. [19] tackled the Optimal Controller Location (OCL) in the context of industrial environment.

The paper is composed by five more sections where all the details about the present work is specified. In Section II, an overall description about the I-RAMP³ project is done, specifying the entities used and communication processes. Section III talks about the sensor collaboration functionality where the communication protocols and sensor failing handling is presented. Section IV depicts the WSN location system used to locate the sensors in the shop-floor. In Section V a discussion is made based on company personnel perspective of the system and all the functionalities developed, and finally in Section VI some conclusions and future prospects are presented.

II. INDUSTRIAL APPLICATION OF WIRELESS SENSOR NETWORK

Innovative concepts are being explored in I-RAMP³ related to WSNs and their use on the industrial domain, implementing a higher level of complexity using entity virtualization. With the NETDEV concept, sensors and actuators will be equipped with standardized communication capabilities and intelligent functionalities such as self-aware, self-diagnosis and self-organizing, aiming for a smart sensor approach. Moreover, the system should be flexible enough to allow the integration of sensors from various manufactures, minimizing the effort needed by automating this process. PlugThings Framework [1] is used to integrate sensors on the system and encapsulate them into S&A NETDEVs. It is constituted by 4 main modules: Universal Gateway, PlugThings Server, PlugThings Database and PlugThings App.

As can be seen in Figure 1, each sensor node of the network communicates directly to the gateway node, where the received measurements are processed on an Universal Gateway, converting raw data into readable form. These data is compiled on XML-based format files that are part of the SAAL (Sensor & Actuator Abstraction Language), which is used to communicate with Sensor & Actuator Abstraction Middleware (SAAM), where all the intelligence related to the sensors is implemented. When the SAAM detects that a new sensor node was connected to the network, the corresponding S&A NETDEV is created, letting transparent to all the entities on the network what tasks it can perform. Since a sensor node can have multiple sensors integrated, the corresponding S&A NETDEV will be able to perform different tasks related with the different sensor types of the sensor node. Basically, S&A NETDEVs will

have one task to provide sensor information to other entities per integrated physical sensor in the sensor node (mote). S&A NETDEVs can easily communicate with other NETDEVs on the network using DIL, such as Device NETDEVs that correspond to complex machines on the shop floor, and the Process Analyzer NETDEV, which corresponds to a virtual instance that monitors sensor behavior while in a group collaboration.

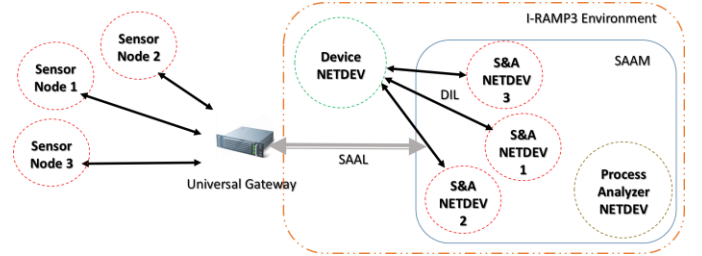


Figure 1 - I-RAMP3 Environment

A. Communication between NETDEVs

DIL is a proprietary language used exclusively to communicate between NETDEVs and it is constituted by four main XML files: NSD (NETDEV Self-Description) describes the device capabilities in form of a range of tasks that the NETDEV can perform, such as goals, conditions, process parameters values and also the physical location of the corresponding sensor node; TDD (Task Description Document) specifies information about a task to be requested, specifying the goals, conditions, process parameters and the period of the task execution or number of task repetitions; QRD (Quality Result Document) describes the result after one task repetition, specifying the quality achieved; TFD (Task Fulfillment Document) is used as an acknowledge document to the end of the task execution.

As represented in Figure 2, DIL is used every time a NETDEV needs other one to perform a task. Normally, Device NETDEVs request the S&A NETDEVs task executions for measurement of a certain environmental variables, during a given number of cycles, by sending a TDD. If the S&A NETDEV is capable of performing such requested task, it will give a positive feedback, answering with QRDs containing the measurement results, during the number of cycles requested. If the S&A NETDEV is not capable of performing the task or it is already busy performing a task for other NETDEV, it will deny the task sending a TFD back to the Device NETDEV.

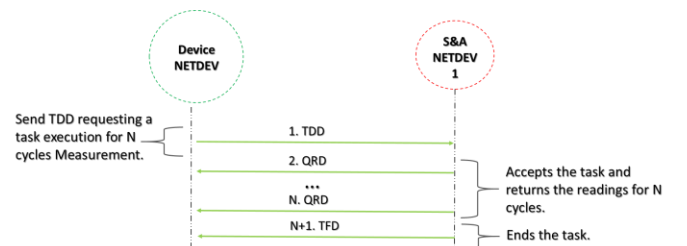


Figure 2 - DIL Communication

B. S&A NETDEV Task Execution

At this stage, S&A NETDEVs can execute two different tasks, both usually requested by a Device NETDEV: *Measurement* and *Group Formation*.

A *Measurement* task is used when the Device NETDEV needs the measurements of a single sensor node. Therefore, it should specify the desired type of sensor to receive the corresponding sensory data, the frequency of the readings, sensor accuracy, coverage radius of the sensor (if applicable) and the number of cycles to execute the task.

A *Group Formation* task is requested when the Device NETDEV aims to collect several measurements at different locations, which means having multiple sensors executing the same task at the same time. In this specific task, the S&A NETDEV that receives the task is responsible to choose possible S&A NETDEVs candidates to join the group - based on the task parameterization and the sensor location - allowing for a more distributed approach in terms of collaboration, rather than a peer-to-peer-like solution, implying a communication with all the S&A NETDEVs from a group instead of only one. Beside the desired type of sensor to receive the specific data, frequency of measurements, sensor accuracy and the number of cycles to perform the task, the *Group Formation* parameterization must also specify the number of sensors intended in the group.

With this collaboration task, there are two main benefits from the task requester perspective. Assuming a Device NETDEV wants to collect and analyze data from multiple S&A NETDEVs, first, it avoids communicating with several S&A NETDEVs at the same time to collect data, since the responsibility to form a group is on the S&A NETDEV, and second, the S&A NETDEVs can process all sensor data and provide a statistical description, passing the data analysis complexity to the group side. This means that the requester does not need to know any statistical technique to process the data from multiple sensor entities on the network.

III. SENSOR COLLABORATION

A. S&A NETDEV Group Formation

S&A NETDEV *Group Formation* is a methodology used to improve the communication performance and reduce complexity between Device NETDEVs and S&A NETDEVs while executing tasks with a sensor collaboration nature. On the shop floor level there can be thousands of sensors, and therefore, the flow of information can be very high when requesting tasks. The group formation methodology is a more distributed approach that allows S&A NETDEVs to provide a more qualitative information when the task requested from a Device NETDEV requires measurements from more than one sensor node. Instead of establish communication with every S&A NETDEV required, the Device NETDEV will have a single point of communication with one S&A NETDEV, which is responsible to form and manage a S&A NETDEVs group.

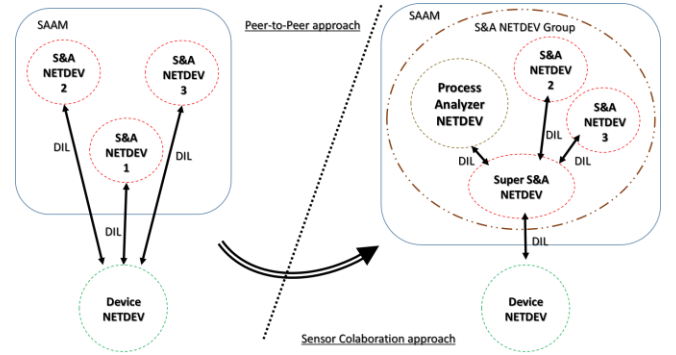


Figure 3 - Group Formation Schema

The main premise for the *Group Formation* is that every S&A NETDEV is capable of forming a group. When a Device NETDEV requests a S&A NETDEV to form a group with a certain number of sensors, this S&A NETDEV is responsible to search in the network, communicating via DIL, for available S&A NETDEVs that are capable of performing the task and the corresponding sensor nodes are located nearby. If the requested number of S&A NETDEVs has joined the group, the S&A NETDEV responsible to form it becomes the group leader, called Super S&A NETDEV, and the group is formed. Internally in the group, each S&A NETDEV will collect measurements during the requested number of cycles and the Super S&A NETDEV is responsible, not only to gather all sensor data, but also process them to a more meaningful value, to be sent afterwards to the Device NETDEV. When task execution has ended, the Super S&A NETDEV will terminate the communication with the Device NETDEV and release the S&A NETDEVs from the group, which become available to execute other task requests.

An additional NETDEV entity represented in Figure 3 is the Process Analyzer NETDEV, which is created by the Super S&A NETDEV when the group is created. As previously said, this entity is virtual, not representing any device on the shop-floor, and is responsible to apply the Spatial Correlation technique [11, 12] to assess the health of the group based on the sensor data generated. This entity collects the sensor data from each element of the group and compares the data sets, looking for the most devious dataset. If the deviation is greater than a predefined threshold, then the sensor node is classified as probably malfunctioning, so the Process Analyzer reports to the Super S&A NETDEV, via DIL, the existing of a malfunctioning group member at that time so it can make a decision about the faulty sensor node(s) and maintain the group as consistent and reliable as possible.

B. S&A NETDEV Group Formation Fail

Having one single point of communication to interact with all S&A NETDEVs for a task execution is a good way to reduce complexity and increase the performance of communication. On the other hand, relying only on one single point of communication increases the vulnerability, in case the task execution fails on that point. There are two failing scenarios on a group: 1) The Super S&A NETDEV fails or 2) S&A NETDEV from the group fails.

If the Super S&A NETDEV fails, the single point of communication supporting the interaction between the Device NETDEV and S&A NETDEVs from the group is lost. There will be no more conditions to continue with the task execution, so the task stops and the group is disaggregated. In the termination process, the Super S&A NETDEV is responsible to change the process state of the remaining group members, so they can stop executing the measurement tasks for the group, becoming available to perform new tasks upon request from other NETDEVs.

If a S&A NETDEV from the group is failing, the Super S&A NETDEV is still working correctly, so the group isn't in danger of collapsing and the communication with the Device NETDEV is still normal. In this case, the Super S&A NETDEV is responsible to replace the failing S&A NETDEV for a new one able to join in. While the replacement process occurs, the collected data from the group will be less accurate, because the results sent to the Device NETDEV don't contemplate all the requested NETDEVs, due to a temporary deficit of one S&A NETDEV. Figure 4 depicts the process when the S&A NETDEV 3 fails and is replaced by S&A NETDEV 4.

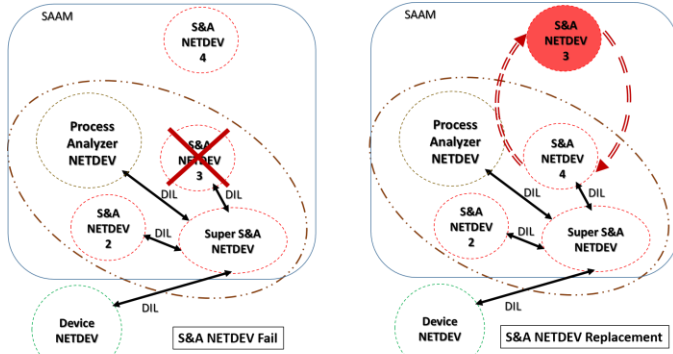


Figure 4 - Group Formation - S&A NETDEV Failure

IV. WSN LOCATION SYSTEM

WSNs applied on industry are used to monitor different production cells on the shop-floor, consisting on spatially distributed sensor nodes, which are equipped with several sensors to monitor the environmental conditions surrounding the cells where it is located. If a machine, located in one of the production cells, needs information about e.g. the luminosity conditions surrounding the cell, to execute a given task, the machine may require from available sensor nodes placed in that location valuable information for process parameterization.

On the I-RAMP³ context, the Device NETDEV that is requesting the task, should search on the network for available S&A NETDEVs, which can describe capabilities for, e.g., luminosity measurements and, consequently, for luminosity group formation. Facing a request for a group formation task from a Device NETDEV, the S&A NETDEV will only accept the task if its capabilities meet the parametrization of the received task and it is located on the same area as the machine that requested the task in the first place.

Every NETDEV is characterized by its task execution capabilities (NSD) and the area on the shop-floor where the correspondent equipment is located. The location on S&A NETDEVs, can be calculated dynamically by a sensor node location system, which uses the incoming Xbee signal strength of the sensor node on several beacons for position estimation (at least the S&A NETDEVs corresponding to sensor node that are using Xbee communication protocol). Beacons are physical entities located in known strategic positions of the shop-floor, mainly in the limits of shop-floor sections like cells or production lines and are responsible, by receiving messages from sensor nodes, assess their signal strength and position, to be assigned the current relative location to S&A NETDEVs.

A. Methodology

Location systems on WSN is a very active research area and there is no universal solution for this topic. The main goal is to identify the physical location of a sensor node on the WSN. Each approach of node location is fitted to a specific operating environment, such as indoors or outdoors spaces like urban areas, forests or even underwater. On the industrial context, estimating the node positions in meters is not important, being the main goal to find in which section on the shop floor are located the nodes.

The algorithms for node location are characterized in two main components: 1) Estimation of distance or angle between two nodes and 2) Calculate the position of a node. First, the distance or angle between two nodes must be estimated to be used on the calculus of the node position related to one or more anchor node (node with a previously known location - beacon). Then, the information about the distance and the position is used on an algorithm to determine the node's location.

For distance estimation between the sensor node and the beacons, the RSSI method (Received Signal Strength Indicator) is used [2, 3, 4], which is a method that estimates the distance between two nodes based on the strength of the signal received on the gateway and a propagation model of the signal, and the Free Space model [8, 9] is used to convert the signal strength into distance. Since the accuracy provided by RSSI is enough for what it's pretended in this scenario, this is the cheapest method to be implemented compared to time delay and time difference based methods or signal angle/direction estimation methods, because measuring the signal strength doesn't required any extra hardware. E.g. transmitters and receivers of ultra-sounds, like in the TDOA - Time Difference of Arrival [3] or specific antennas, like in AOA / DOA - Angle of Arrival / Direction of Arrival [6, 7], and no need for clock synchronization on the nodes, like required on TOA / TOF - Time of Arrival / Time of Flight [5].

The radio signal is highly susceptible to noise [10] caused by reflection, refraction, diffraction, scattering, fading, inter-symbol interference and shadowing. Consequently, there will be distance deviations in the end. This can be minimized by filtering the signal using a moving average to better approximate to the path loss logarithmic curve. The path loss coefficient is determined dynamically using path loss log-distance model using measurements of RSSI between beacons, using (1), where $P(d)$ is the RSSI in dBm, $P(d_0)$ is the RSSI

at a fixed reference distance from the transmitter d_0 , n is the path loss coefficient, X_σ is a Gaussian variable used to modulate, d is the distance in meters between transmitter and receiver, P_{TX} is the transmission power and A is the signal attenuation. Manipulating the formula, first it is calculated the path loss coefficient using (2), where the RSSI and distance are between beacons. Then, (3) is used to calculate the distance between a sensor node and a beacon.

$$P(d) = P_{TX} + A - 10n \times \log\left(\frac{d}{d_0}\right) + X_\sigma \quad (1)$$

$$n = \frac{|P(d_0) - P(d)|}{10 \log d \times 2} \quad (2)$$

$$d = d_0 \times 10^{\frac{|P(d_0) - P(d)|}{10n}} \quad (3)$$

The node position is calculated using the distance estimation of three anchor nodes closest to the sensor node with the Bounding box method [2]. Bounding box is a variation of the trilateration, which use the position of three anchor nodes, with known positions and distances between them, to calculate the position of the sensor node. The position of the node is calculated by the interception of three circles, each one is centered on the anchor node and with radius equal to the distance to the unknown position node. With Bounding box, calculation complexity is reduced because the method replaces the circles by squares. The intersection of the different squares results on a rectangle, where the center is the estimate position of the node.

V. DISCUSSION

As discussed several times throughout the present paper, the use of WSN is referred as a key element on the I-RAMP³ Project and it has been explored as a benefit for the today's Manufacturing Systems, pushing forward the plug'n'produce concept and taking advantages of the latest technologies to do so. This plug'n'produce concept is achieved using the NETDEV virtualization of shop-floor equipment that can readily describe and detail their own capabilities and announce themselves into the network to other NETDEV components. This virtualization allows NETDEV entities to collaborate and execute shop floor tasks on demand, and therefore deliver an easy and flexible solution for the industrial domain.

Taking into account WSNs, all this flexibility and readiness is achieved making use of all the functionalities presented in previous sections. As described, the collaboration between sensors by means of *Group Formation* task available at the S&A NETDEV entity is, not only a way of reducing the communication entropy when several measurements from neighbor sensors need to be collected, but it also provides higher information about a set of sensors. Additionally, the Process Analyzer NETDEV provides feedback about the health of the WSN making use of Sensor Validation techniques already explored in the literature and tested in manufacturing environments. Since all these functionalities refer to the software level of abstraction as a way of closing the loop for a

ready solution to be used, also the hardware level was considered by means of location device functionality. This allows to know, with a certain degree of precision, the location of sensors in a restricted area, influencing and guiding how sensors should organize and collaborate among themselves, ensuring the system reliability and effectiveness.

Considering now a user perspective like Manufacturing System Designers or Technical Personnel of a Manufacturing company, there are benefits that should be highlighted. Based on the fact that, most manufacturing environments are currently using wired sensors instead of WSN, revealing that complexity and savings in terms of time and cost can be reduced. This means that no sensors need to be connected to a PLC or Machine Controller, which many times can be tricky due to the amount of sensors used and harsh locations. Additionally, the easiness of integrating of a new sensor into the system is only made by switching on a mote, and it is automatically recognized as an S&A NETDEV becoming ready to use. This is referred as the plug'n'produce concept, that allows to rapidly react to any foreseen and unforeseen event, like sensor replacement, sensor addition for redundancy purposes in critical environment or in the case of sensor removal when disassembling a Production Line.

Another advantage of this approach is related with all the functionalities already available to use that the user does not need to be concerned about, namely sensor collaboration and data processing. It only needs to take care of sensor integration assuming as a baseline the S&A NETDEV template solution, and from that point, information can be easily accessed, monitored and diagnosed. Thus, it is not required for the final user to know in detail, and mainly, to implement from scratch a WSN diagnostics system, but instead, it can focus on what to do when a certain malfunction has occurred and how to relate sensor group information with the product life-cycle in terms of process parameterization. This point is enhanced with the automatic process of forming, deforming and reacting to sudden changes in a sensor group, based on a certain task parameters and sensor location. Since the communication between NETDEV entities is based on a standardized task-driven XML language – DIL – it's very easy to implement a system capable of triggering and take advantage of all these functionalities.

The main advantage of this process automation is a build up a self-reconfiguration capability when facing sudden sensor breakdown. Assuming the breakdown is diagnosed by the Process Analyzer NETDEV, it is embedded in the S&A NETDEVs communication protocol a resolution for this case, as described in the *Group Formation Fail* sub-section. In a real manufacturing environment situation, the shop-floor operator only needs to look for the broke sensor (information already provided by the Process Analyzer NETDEV) and replace it by a new one at the same location as the broke one, and automatically the sensor group will reconfigure itself to take on board the new sensor, not needing to write or rewrite any lines of code or to disconnect and connect wires.

These functionalities together with the automated process for diagnosing and logically organize a sensor group, and adding the fact of a standardized communication language is

used, are the cornerstones for intelligent WSN in the factories of the future.

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE WORK

Innovative intelligent systems have driven technology for years, and industry has followed this track as a way to improve reliability, responsiveness when facing requirements changing from customer side or due to production downtime, efficiency to minimize costs and effectiveness to increase production quality.

All these characteristics make the guidelines for the S&A NETDEVs developments, with functionalities to share information, self-organize, collaborate as a sensor group by using a location system for identifying the positioning of motes at the shop-floor level. Therefore, taking advantage of these functionalities can greatly influence the decrease of ramp-up, scheduled maintenance and unscheduled maintenance phases time, resulting in a competitive advantage in current harsh and fluctuating markets.

The main functionalities presented throughout the paper depict that, in terms of WSNs applicability in industry, there are open opportunities to explore, and much can be done to improve the current used systems. Despite all functionalities presented in this paper, the clear benefits it can bring to the shop-floor and all the experience acquired from I-RAMP³, the acceptance of WSNs into industrial context needs to be worked out, by performing more pragmatic and real test-case demonstrators. The present work is a clear step forward into a reliable and flexible approach for industrial WSNs, aiming for paving the way into more intelligent manufacturing systems.

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