Application of electric field sensing systems in smart environments

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DISSERTATION

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Darmstadt, den 23/12/2013 Andreas Braun

Abstract

Summarize the thesis in 1/2–1 page.

Zusammenfassung

Describe in German in 6–10 pages your thesis. This is compulsory for EN written thesis. Zusammenfassung auf Deutsch.

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1. Introduction

Smart environments are comprised of numerous sensing and computing devices that are supporting a number of users in this environment on performing their tasks. Capacitive sensors are a technology that uses electric fields to sense the presence and certain properties of the human body. In this work I present an overview of this technology, how it can be applied in different relevant application scenarios and based on various prototypes evaluate the particular benefits and limitations of this sensing technology.

1.1. Motivation

In the last decade the way we interact with computing machines has changed in a profound fashion. Today more than one billion people operate a smartphone, enabling ubiquitous access to communication tools, processing power and information. The vision of ubiquitous computing as proposed by Mark Weiser in the early 90s is inching closer to reality [Wei91]. The required technologies of

> "cheap, low-power computers that include equally convenient displays, a network that ties them all together, and software systems implementing ubiquitous applications"

are now existing in the form of smartphones and tablets that are connected to the internet, using high-speed connections such as LTE and web-based services such as Google Now, that combine numerous data sources to provide personalized services.

While the vision and underlying ideas remain similar other names have been used in research, including Pervasive Computing and Ambient Intelligence. The concept has been expanded to not only consider devices that can be directly manipulated, but include determining the situation and reacting based on it. This context-aware computing proposes

> "systems that examine and react to an individual's changing context. Such systems can promote and mediate people's interactions with devices, computers, and other people" [SAW94]

Different forms of context can be distinguished, ranging from location and the actual system state, to different activities or even the current mood of the user. In order to acquire this context, the input-and-output based systems originally proposed by Weiser, are augmented by an ensemble of devices that are very small (dust), coordinate in massive numbers (clay) or are flexible, unobtrusive extensions to everyday objects (fabric) [Pos11]. This devices can be invisibly integrated into our everyday environment and provide sensing capabilities that can be used by sufficiently smart systems. Examples of these devices are microelectromechanical systems (MEMS) or bendable technology, such as OLED screens. The number of computation and sensing devices that we carry with us is growing continuously, yet we want the technology to further disappear, allowing us to focus on the application instead of the underlying technology.

The famous science fiction author Arthur C. Clarke proposed three laws of prediction, the third of which is

> "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic." [Cla62]

Capacitive proximity sensing allows us to measure the influence of the human body (or conductive objects in general) on an electric field. While we would not call this technology magic, a peculiarity of electricity is that humans have no specific sensing organs, thus we generally remain unaware of their presence, unless the field strength is very high. Consequently, when interacting with capacitive sensors there is no awareness of what they are sensing unless it is specifically exposed to the user. The technology is well-understood and varieties have become ubiquitous in some areas, such as touch screens. However, there are numerous other applications for this technology, ranging from industrial fluid level and material detection, to presence detection for cars. A particularly interesting domain for this sensing technology are smart environments that provide services based on unobtrusively acquired information about persons currently acting in this environment. There are numerous sensing technologies that provide similar detection capabilities. Looking at the recognition of simple activities, such as standing, walking and lying, cameras and accelerometers can lead to the same result. Accordingly, in order to discuss the use a sensing technology within a specific domain, it is necessary to provide a benchmark that takes into account abstracted sensor properties and different application domains. In this work we will provide a generic benchmark model for different sensor technologies in smart environments and based on this discuss the use of capacitive proximity sensor technologies in this area. We will establish the most suited application domains and provide prototypes to evaluate different aspects.

1.2. Research Challenges

1.3. Contributions

1.4. Acknowledgments

While many consider writing a PhD to be a mostly personal endeavor there are always various sources of discourse, collaboration, support and inspiration. So in no particular order there are various persons or groups of persons that deserve credit:

2. Related Work

2.1. Electric field sensing

Any electric charge is applying an attracting or repelling force to other charged particles in space. This force has a distinct magnitude and direction for any point in space and thus creates an electric field. The presence of conductive objects is modifying the properties this field. Thus, in its most basic definition electric field sensing allows us to gather information about the field properties at a certain point in space. If we continuously monitor the field we are able to measure the disturbance and associate it to objects that are passing through, allowing to gather information about their specific properties. In this section we will give a brief overview of the development of electric field sensing technology, the physical background, different measuring modes and how to process data acquired by digital sensor devices.

2.1.1. A brief history of capacitive proximity sensing

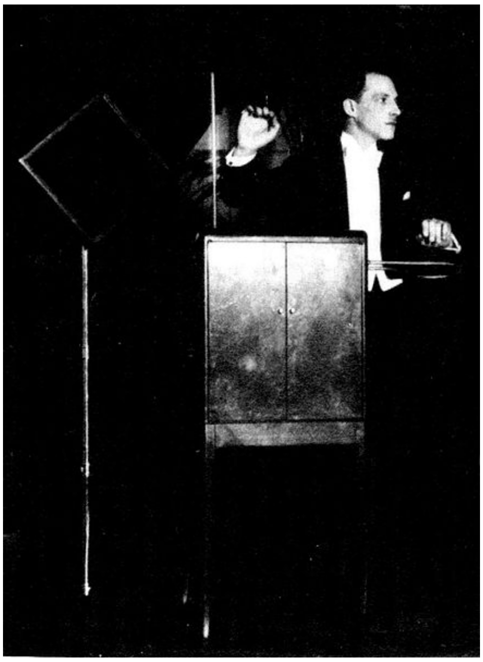

Figure 2.1.: Leon Theremin playing his epnoymous electronic musical instrument [Gli00]

In the last decades of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century a considerable number of inventors and scientists performed research on the application of electric systems, sparking innovations such as electric lighting, electric motors, telegraphy and radio communication. Lev Sergeyevich Termen or Léon Theremin in the American naming was a Russian inventor most famous for designing the theremin. This early electronic musical instrument could be played without touch. One hand is controlling the pitch and the other the volume by changing the distance to an antenna. Initially designed as a motion detector, this device is transferring the influence of the human body on an oscillating electric field to an audible sound [Gli00].

Electric field imaging was a research focus at the MIT in the 1990s. A research group in the Media Lab division including Joseph A. Paradiso, Thomas G. Zimmerman, Joshua R. Smith designed various sensing devices and evaluated various applications in HCI [ZSP*95] [Smi99].

2.1.2. Physical properties

A complete overview about the electrostatic principles of capacitive proximity sensing can be found in the book by Baxter [Bax96], chapters 2 and 6. We will give a very brief introduction to this topic in the following section. The basic setup of a typically used sensor is shown in Figure 2.2. The proximity capacitance C_x can be determined

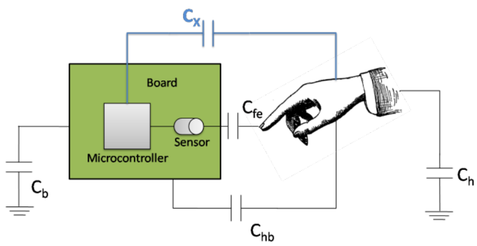

Figure 2.2.: Black box setup of a capacitive proximity sensor

using a combination of serial and parallel circuits of capacitors, resulting in the following equation:

$$C_x = \left(\left(C_{hb} + \frac{C_h C_b}{C_h + C_b} \right)^{-1} \frac{1}{C_{fe}} \right)^{-1} \tag{2.1}$$

Additionally there are parasitic capacitance components, i.e. disturbing capacitance values within the system. Sources are:

- Sensing electrode capacitance
- Capacitance between sensing electrode and ground plane
- Intercapacitance between neighboring traces on the board

The present parasitic capacitances C_{par} amount to values approximately between $10pF$ and $300pF$ and are therefore considerably larger than the value of the proximity capacitance Cx, being between $0.1pF$ and $10pF$. The total capacitance sensed is the sum of parasitic and proximity components.

$$C_S = C_X + C_{par} \tag{2.2}$$

It is obvious that this parasitic capacitance is considerably higher than the capacitance induced by an approaching object. However, this parasitic capacitance is typically static and can therefore be calibrated in a way

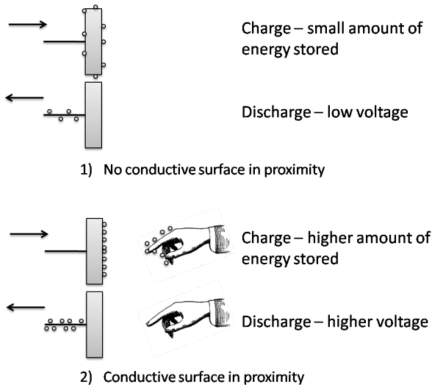

Figure 2.3.: Capacitive sensing procedure

not affecting the measurement. Now we will shortly discuss how we can estimate the capacitance of common objects that approach the sensor. Any object exhibits capacitance in respect to infinity. Surveying simple geometric shapes this capacitance is analytically determinable, e.g.:

$$C = 8\varepsilon_0 rDisk \tag{2.3}$$

$$C = 4\pi\varepsilon_0 rSphere \tag{2.4}$$

ε_0 is the vacuum permittivity and r the respective radius. This free space capacitance is increasing as soon as another object is approaching, caused by the capacitance of this second object, resulting in mutual capacitance. Looking at generic formulas, determining capacitance between parallel plates this behavior can be described analytically.

$$C = \frac{Q}{V} \qquad\qquad C = \varepsilon_0\varepsilon_r\frac{A}{d} \tag{2.5}$$

The capacitance is directly proportional to the plate area A and inversely proportional to the distance d between the plates, with ε_r being the relative static permittivity of the dielectric between the plates. Sensor electronics are grounded with the body acting as ground itself. The sensor plate is continuously charged using a constant voltage V. A higher capacitance allows the system to hold a larger charge. If the system is connected to the ground, the sensor capacitor is discharged through a resistor. The resulting voltage is depending on the available charge, shown in the equation above. Furthermore the required time to discharge the capacitor is increased. This process is symbolized in Figure 2.3.

2.1.3. Proximity sensing versus touch sensing

The most ubiquitous usage of capacitive sensing technology can be found in touch screens. As the trend went from pen-controlled mobile systems to finger controlled devices with the first iPhone in 2007, projected capacitance touch is the most prevalent technology for touch screens. It uses various layers of transparent electrodes or nanowires to detect the mutual capacitance as objects enter the detection area [BO10b]. The commercially available devices have gained additional abilities over the last few years, leading to the development of "floating touch" systems that are able to track fingers in gloves or fingers that are hovering above the surface [Cyp12, Nok12]. Applications are the usage of mobile devices in cold outdoor temperatures or additional

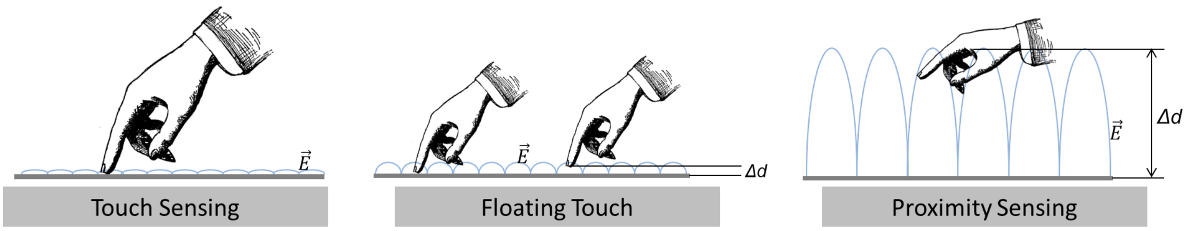

Figure 2.4.: Different projected capacitive sensing methods based on distance

navigation fea-tures based on the hovering fingers. In consequence we can distinguish the three different projected capacitive sensing methods as shown in Figure 2.4:

- Touch sensing - densely distributed sensors are tuned to project a weak electric field in order to detect one or more objects touching the interactive surface. The sensors have to be close to the surface.
- Floating touch - densely distributed high-sensitivity sensors are able to detect both touches and very near objects ($< 2cm$) to enable usage using protective gear or additional navigation feature. The sensors have to be close to the surface.
- Proximity sensing - sparsely distributed sensors create a stronger electric field that propagates into space in order to detect larger objects, such as hands, that are in proximity of the interactive surface. Achievable distances are up to 30 centimeters and the sensors may be applied below thick non-conductive material.

2.1.4. Measuring modes

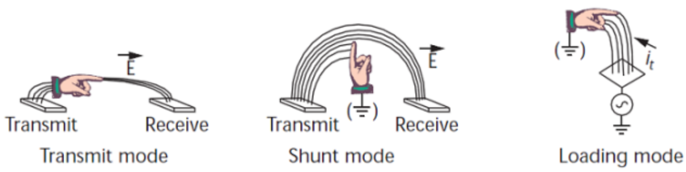

Figure 2.5.: Three measurement modes for capacitive proximity sensing [Smi96]

A classic work in the field of capacitive proximity sensing that will be referenced occasionally in this work is "Electric Field Imaging" by Joshua Smith [Smi99]. One contribution was the introduction of different measurement modes in capacitive sensing, as shown in Figure 2.5. Transmit mode is using a transmitting electrode that is coupled to a conductive object; in case of interaction applications typically the human body. The properties of an electric field generated with respect to a receiving electrode will therefore be dependent on the distance of this body, thus extending the achievable range. Shunt mode similarly uses both a receiving and transmitting electrode generating a static field. However, there is no body coupled and any conductive object will ground the field, thus reducing the energy stored, which is measured. This setup is able to work with various transmitters on a single receiver, enabling a higher amount of virtual sensors using limited hardware. The third measurement mode is called loading mode. An oscillating field is induced on a single electrode measuring the capacitance relative to the environment. Any approaching grounded object results in an increased capacitance that is measured periodically.

2.1.5. Materials and geometry

Two major factors that have to be considered when designing an application based on capacitive sensors are the materials and geometry of the electrodes performing the measurements. The material of the electrode should be picked according to the desired application, i.e. if the interaction device has a flexible surface, conductive thread could be used, if it is solid and opaque, the application of solid metal electrodes is viable. Additionally there are other options for transparent materials. While we traditionally associate solid metals to antennas and electrodes this view can no longer be upheld. Transparent conductive layers have been in use for decades now, e.g. in car windows or solar technology. They typically rely on metal oxide layers, polymer layers or in recent years carbon nanotubes [MPLK05]. The most common technology for usage in displays is projected capacitive touch that uses a multi-layer design of insulated ITO electrodes that are able to detect the movement of several objects close to the surface [BO10b]. However, they are typically tuned to allow operation within a small distance of $1cm$ or less. However, they are typically tuned to allow operation within a small distance of $1cm$ or less. One recent work was evaluating different types of electrode materials in terms of their spatial resolution at different distances between object and electrode [GPBB*13], focusing on larger distance proximity measurements. They benchmarked both ITO and PEDOT:PSS. The first is a thin layer of indium-titanium-oxide, a highly conductive metal layer that possesses good optical properties. PEDOT:PSS is a conductive polymer that has a lower conductivity and slightly less appealing optical properties. In conclusion they evaluated that while copper has still the best properties, at least ITO can be considered a suitable alternative in applications that require optical clarity, as shown in the achievable spatial resolution given in Figure 2.6. The most common technology for usage in displays is projected

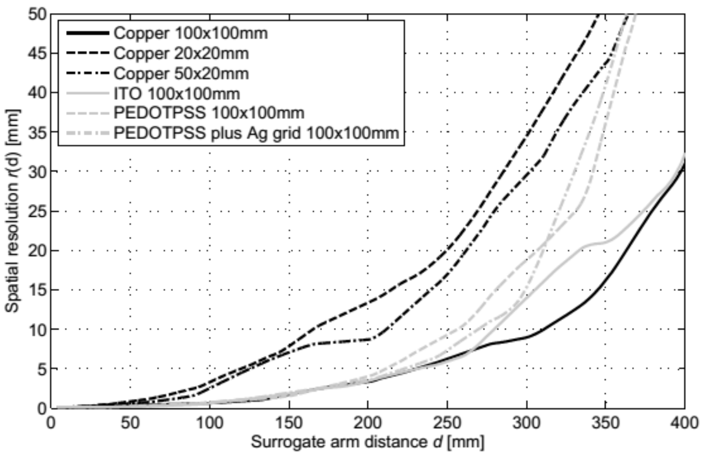

Figure 2.6.: Spatial resolution of different materials at various distances [GPBB*13]

capacitive touch that uses a multi-layer design of insulated ITO electrodes that are able to detect the movement of several objects close to the surface [BO10b]. However, they are typically tuned to allow operation within a small distance of 1cm or less. Another area that is strongly influenced by the intended application is the geometry, whereas the electrode is considered the part of the electronics directly attached to the measurement circuit. This may range from simple straight wires or plate electrodes to complex optimized multidimensional structures specifically designed for a single task. Even though it is aimed at touch or near-proximity sensing we will give a short overview of multi-layer designs for touch screens that have been reviewed by Barrett and Omote [BO10a]. They are designed to measure mutual capacitance, i.e. the resulting capacitive properties between a sending and a receiving electrode that are intersecting. If a sensible excitation and measuring process is used, multiple nearby objects may be reliably detected. A simple example is two layers of perpendicular straight line electrodes - used

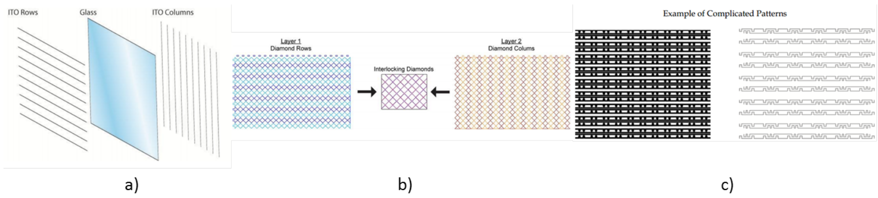

Figure 2.7.: Examples of multilayer layouts for touch screens - grid (a), interlocking diamonds (b) and trademarked complex patterns (c) [BO10a]

by the first iPhone (Figure 2.7 - a). Another example uses an interlocking diamond shape [DL01] to create a good spatial coverage (Figure 2.7 - b). Finally, there are numerous other complex patterns that are often trademarked by the companies that have developed the respective controller. One example is given in (Figure 2.7 - c).

Capacitive proximity sensing applications are typically less concerned about intricate designs, but instead use varying electrode sizes and placement over a larger area. As previously mentioned the purpose of capacitive proximity sensing is the detection of objects and their properties. There are numerous factors that can influence the geometrical layout, but they can be abstracted into the following categories:

- Number of objects
- Object size
- Desired spatial resolution

Going back to our example of touch screens, we have small objects, a higher number of those (usually up to 10) and require a high spatial resolution to select small items on the screen. The result is a fine multilayer grid, using mutual capacitance to simplify multi-object recognition, fine electrode spacing to achieve a high spatial resolution and thin or transparent electrodes to guarantee good optical properties. A similar rationale can be applied to other applications. If we take the smart couch by Große-Puppendahl et al. the aim is to detect the presence and posture of one or more persons on a couch [GePMB11]. This necessitates detecting large body parts such as head, torso or limbs. There is no fine-grained spatial resolution required, allowing a reduction the number of sensors and it was assumed that a maximum of two persons are on the couch. Furthermore the electrodes are placed below the upholstery, thus requiring a reasonable detection distance. The resulting electrode placement can be seen in Figure 2.8. The layout was designed under the additional constriction of using a single sensor kit, supporting up to eight electrodes. Regarding placement it is most important to distinguish two persons and different sitting

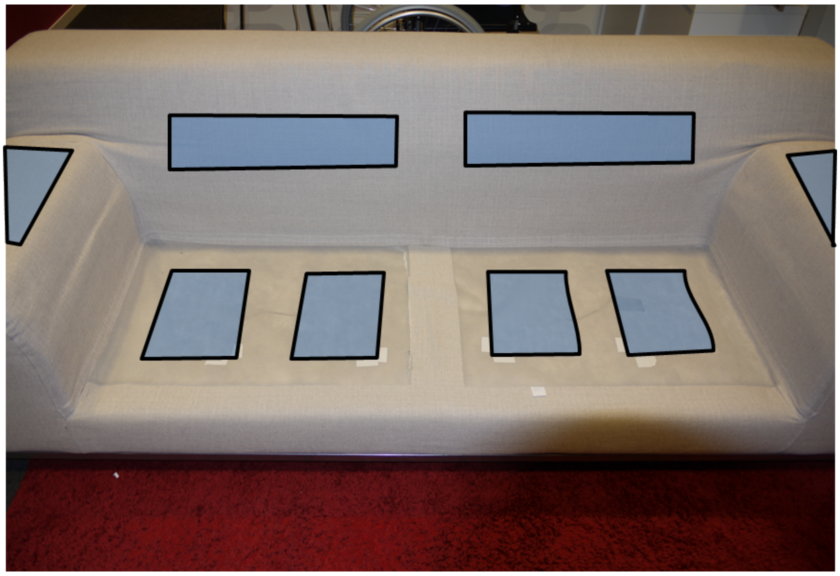

Figure 2.8.: Electrode placement below upholstery [GePMB11]

positions, thus four electrodes are placed below the sitting area. In the back there are two electrodes spread over the entire width to determine the presence of the upper body close to the backrest. The electrodes in the armrests determine a head and are primarily suitable for detecting lying positions. In consequence this setup is suitable for detecting multiple sitting persons, infer information about their sitting position and recognize lying persons. Regarding those postures it showed good results in the prototype's evaluation [GePMB11].

A third and final example for the rationale of electrode placement is the TileTrack system by Valtonen et al, a capacitive person tracking system using floor tiles [VMV09]. It is a transmit mode system that has the transmitting electrodes placed below the floor tiles and the receiving electrodes are placed in the walls of the area. The main goal of the system is the tracking of persons on the surface. Thus the floor area should be mostly covered by electrodes to establish a good transmission link to the bodies. The receiving electrodes should be able to pick up all signals generated by the body. Valtonen et al. picked wire or plate electrodes that went from floor level to a height of 190cm that covers most typical body sizes. While the system has some shortcomings with regard to applicability in larger rooms, the design rationale is appropriate for narrow rooms or when only movement close to walls has to be detected and had a reasonable precision in their evaluation. Looking at the above examples it becomes apparent that the proper selection of materials and geometry is highly depending of the desired application. In consequence it is difficult to give generic guidelines independent of the application. After reviewing the different application domains in the next section we will revisit this topic in section 5.4.

2.1.6. Data processing

In order to acquire usable data from any digital sensor an analog signal has to be acquired and processed. A simplified typical processing pipeline for this is shown in Figure 2.9. This basic structure is also applicable to the processing of capacitive proximity sensor data. The analog signal is the capacitance of an electric circuit that can be digitized using different methods, e.g. by using the quantized discharge time of the circuit. In the following

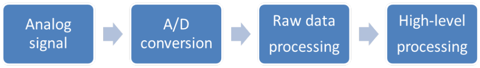

Figure 2.9.: Abstracted sensor data processing pipeline

section some typical steps of raw data processing and high-level processing for capacitive proximity sensors are presented and discussed.

2.1.6.1. Raw data processing

Raw data processing of capacitive proximity sensor data is primarily intended to compensate for sensor noise and environmental influences. Noise is an inherent property of any measurement system and describes random unwanted data that is added to a signal. Environmental parameters can have strong influence on the signal of a capacitive sensor system. These effecting factors include temperature, humidity, composition of the air, or grounded objects in close proximity. There are numerous additional preprocessing steps that can be taken, such as different multiplexing methods that may be required in some hardware settings, or signal quantization that reduces the outgoing data to a distinct set of values in order to simplify post processing of different applications. These will not be further discussed in the scope of this work.

Noise Reduction In order to deal with noise, some sort of filtering is typically applied. Filtering describes a set of methods that attenuate the parts of a signal that are relevant in a given application. In capacitive proximity sensing we are dealing mostly with high-frequency noise that is added to the signal. Therefore, low-pass filtering can be used to deal with this influence. The most typical examples are average filters that take various samples and calculate an average value, and median filters that are sorting a set of samples and select the median element. Each of those filters has a plethora of potential adaptations that are not too specific to discuss in this limited space. Some adaptations are discussed in the specific prototype sections.

Table 2.1.: Baseline calibrations terms and methods

Name	Description	Application
Initial calibration	First set-up of baseline at system start, e.g. by taking the average over various samples	Required for any application
Static baseline	Baseline that does not change at run-time	For static environments
Dynamic baseline	Baseline that changes over time	For non-static environments
Drift	Change of system response to environmental factors at run-time	-
Drift compensation	Methods to account for occurring drift, by changing the baseline value	Non-static applications
Recalibration	Change of the baseline value at a specific point in time given a set of rules	Non-static applications

Baseline Calibration A very important aspect of capacitive raw data processing is signal calibration. The generated electric field is subject to changes over time, if either intrinsic parameters change or the environment is modified. Some specific examples include the electronic components heating up, the environmental temperature changing, or objects being moved in and out of detection range. Therefore it is essential to have a well-calibrated and adaptive baseline; that is the sensor signal generated in the environment without the presence of any object that we want to detect. Again, there are numerous methods to adapt and configure the baseline. We have collected a few common terms and methods and give some pointers regarding their application. The results are shown in Table 2.1. If a dynamic baseline is used, a set of rules will have to be defined that determines at which points

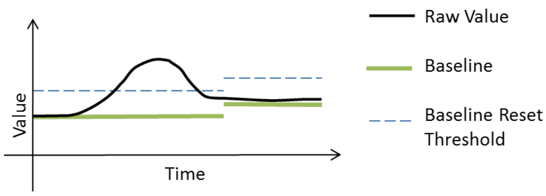

Figure 2.10.: Example of baseline reset using a threshold rule

in time the baseline has to be recalibrated, what specific methods should be used and the set of parameters that control the methods. One simple example is to define a threshold level that triggers a baseline calibration, as shown in Figure 2.10. The raw signal is above the threshold, indicating the presence of a detectable object. Afterwards, it falls back down below the threshold, yet stays for a certain time above the baseline. This triggers a reset of the baseline after a certain amount of time.

2.1.6.2. High-level processing

High-level processing assumes that we already have calibrated (and possibly normalized) sensor values that are used in further steps. The goal of any capacitive sensing application is the acquisition of information about a detectable object, e.g. its current position, the material used or the shape. In order to get this information we need to use knowledge about the object and intrinsic properties of the sensor system. In this section we will discuss methods to combine data from various sensors using the system properties, how to track the position of an object using different methods and how to recognize specific features. An overview of the methods in abridged form is given in Table 2.2.

Sensor data fusion Sensor data fusion in its most general terms describes "the theory, techniques and tools which are used for combining sensor data, or data derived from sensory data, into a common representational format" [Mit07]. Using the combined information from various capacitive proximity sensors we are able to generate high-level information that exceeds the capabilities of a single sensor. We can distinguish uniform fusion that uses the information from all involved sensors in one common way or heterogeneous fusion that combines groups of involved sensors that serve multiple purposes, yet are attached to a single system. A simple example for the latter would be a single large electrode sensor that detects the presence of a hand from a farther distance and then a combination of various small electrodes that track single fingers. Sensor data fusion often requires taking into account some additional information we possess about the system. A classic example is the precision or bias of the sensor. Various methods, e.g. the class of Kalman filters, use weighted information from several sensor sources [WB95]. If we know how that a certain sensor is only half as precise as another one working in collaborating, the weighting factors can be adapted accordingly.

One of the most important additional information we use when fusing data of capacitive proximity sensors, is the geometric layout of the system. This describes position and size of all electrodes that are integrated. Using

Table 2.2.: Overview of high-level processing methods for capacitive proximity sensors

Name	Description
Sensor data fusion	Combining sensor data into a shared representational format
Uniform fusion	Sensor data fusion that combines all data into a single common format
Heterogeneous fusion	Sensor data fusion that combines groups of data to serve multiple purposes
Object tracking	Continuous identification of an object within the systems range
Single object tracking	Methods to realize object tracking for a single detectable object
Multiple object tracking	Methods to realize object tracking for multiple objects
Feature recognition	Identifying certain parameters of an object within the system range

this information is crucial when trying to localize an object. A simple example would be applying a weighted average algorithm on a set of sensors. In order to determine object location relative to the plane a weighted average algorithm is used. The linear object location $\bar{x}$ is calculated using the sums over sensor positions x_i and sensor values v_i as weight:

$$\bar{x} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n} v_i x_i}{\sum_{i=1}^{n} v_i}$$

Using similar methods we are able to determine the location of multiple objects or additional dimensions of the position. However, it is possible to use other information in the fusion process as well. The electrode material may result in a different response and thus should be treated differently in a fused data representation and can be weighted. Another example is the shape of the electrode that may result in different responses. How to apply sensor data fusion is strongly depending on the application and the desired common representation that is most suitable for subsequent calculations.

Object tracking In the previous section about sensor data fusion we have shortly discussed a method to determine the linear position of a single object using a linear array of capacitive proximity sensor. This is a basic example of a group of methods associated to object tracking. In computer vision applications they can be defined as “the problem of estimating a trajectory of an object in an image plane as it moves around a scene” [YJS06]. The analogy to capacitive applications is viable if we consider a 3D scene and a distinct interaction space instead of a scene. Capacitive proximity sensors allow the detection of conductive objects within their range. However, as this presence is determined indirectly using the influence on an electric field it is not possible to get a direct association between the actual distance between sensor and object and the resulting sensor value. The created electric field is only analytically descriptive for very specific, theoretic classes of objects [Bax96]. Nonetheless, we are able to get a relative distance measurement. If we combine this proximity value using geometric information about the electrode location we can infer the relative position of an object in the sensing area. The weighted average method presented in the previous section is one option for relative positioning. Another method is trilateration, similar to many radio-based localization applications, that uses the known location of three or more points and the known distance to the position to be determined. In case of capacitive proximity sensing this position is determined relative to the electrodes as there is no absolute distance measurement. A more complex example for direct calculation was presented by Smith, who formulated the issue of detecting multiple objects as a forward problem and used numerical methods to estimate the position and orientation of two hands [Smi99]. A

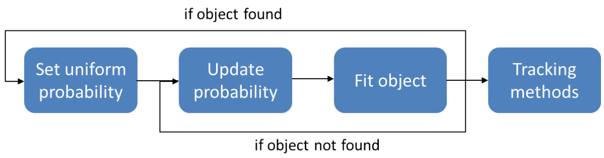

Figure 2.11.: Generic pipeline of probability based methods of capacitive proximity sensing

second class of methods to track objects is not relying on direct geometrical calculations but instead formulates a numerical solution to a probability distribution. The initial assumption is that the probability of an object to be at a certain point in the detection area is uniform. The methods then follow a few basic steps, as shown in Figure 2.11. At first the probability is updated based on the current sensor readings and a priori knowledge that we have about the system. Afterwards we try to fit the objects into the resulting probabilities. This step may or may not work, meaning that it may result in no object found. In the latter case the process will have to start at the beginning. If an object is found the probability update may use the current object location in the update algorithm, thus starting with a non-uniform probability distribution. One example for probability-based object recognition using capacitive proximity sensors was presented by Grosse-Puppendahl et al. [GPBKK13]. Using a model suggested by Smith the basic idea is using the assumption that an object may be present anywhere, remove regions where no objects can be present and then fit an object into the remaining space. This method additionally uses particle filters to track object locations over time. This also allows tracking multiple objects. Throughout the years various methods have been suggested for supporting multi-object tracking using capacitive sensors. Touch screens often use inversion of the sender signal to reliably detect the positions of multiple points; however, this method can't be used in proximity applications [WF07]. Some of the previously presented methods support the tracking of two or more objects. There are still various limitations, particularly if not only the object location but also various other features such as rotation should be tracked. This is still an area of ongoing research, leading to the next area of high-level processing - feature recognition.

Feature recognition Feature recognition is primarily used as a term in image processing, traditionally in computer-aided design applications to recognize specific geometric properties of an object but also picture analysis, e.g. in facial recognition [HPR00] [BHK97]. In the domain of capacitive proximity sensing, feature recognition can be defined as the acquisition of non-location information from any detectable object. An important feature in industrial applications is the material of an object [Bax96]. With regards to recognizing additional features a system was presented by Wimmer et al. - Thracker [WHKS06], a prototype augmenting a regular monitor with capacitive proximity sensors. In addition to recognizing hand position the system is able to detect grasp gestures, which can be used to select items on the screen and perform pick and drop operations. Capacitive sensors can also be used to distinguish between persons and a children's seat on the passenger side of a car [GZBB09]. The methods to recognize the features can be divers, ranging from typical machine learning algorithms, to model-based approaches. An incomplete list is given in Table 2.3. In order to keep this work contained we refrain from a deeper discussion at this point.

Table 2.3.: Feature recognition methods

Name	Description
Data-driven methods	Directly associate input data to output features using various methods, e.g. machine learning and training data
Model-driven methods	Input data is manipulating a pre-defined model of the system that is latter mapped to the output
Neural networks	Computational models using a network of neuron-like objects that are often used in machine learning
Pattern recognition	Methods that look for certain patterns in a set of input data
Semantic mapping	Methods to realize object tracking for a single detectable object

2.2. Capacitive proximity sensing applications

- NEC passenger seat - Paradiso/Smith - Wimmer - Touché - Swallowing - Hamburg Gruppe - Finnland Anwendungen

2.3. Sensor systems in smart environments

-

2.4. Application domains in smart environments

2.4.1. Indoor localization

3. Application domains for capacitive proximity sensors

3.1. Overview of application domains in smart environments

3.2. Evaluation model

3.3. Discussion and selection

This chapter describes what do you want to do better :)

4. Prototypes

4.1. CapFloor

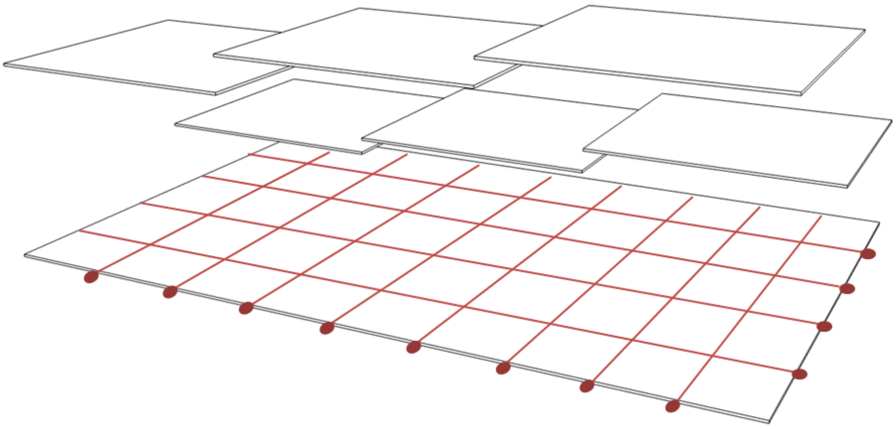

Figure 4.1.: CapFloor sketch - grid layout of electrodes is placed below a floor layer with sensors attached on the sides

CapFloor is a capacitive system for indoor localization and fall detection that is based on a grid array of sensing electrodes placed below a floor covering [BHW12]. A sketch of the system is shown in Figure 4.1. The grid is comprised of insulated wires that are placed orthogonal to each other. Sensors are placed on two sides of the room. Each sensor is performing loading mode measurements. The system is intended to act as both indoor localization system and fall detector. CapFloor can be placed below any non-conductive material, like wood, tiles and PVC, if the distance between the wires and the floor surface is not too high. It can discriminate between a foot being above an electrode or a whole body. Combining this information from various sensors we are able to get a reliable detection of lying, sitting and standing persons. Using only two sides of the room for sensors it is possible to cut the wires without considerably affecting the signal; allowing easy installation in non-rectangular rooms. Accordingly CapFloor is able to be used in various application scenarios. Indoor Localization in the home domain can be useful in energy saving and fall prevention by appropriately activating and deactivating the environment lighting. It can also be used in security-restricted areas to detect unauthorized movement. The fall detection should be used in a system that has various levels of escalation. E.g. it is not easy to distinguish between a person doing exercises on a floor and a person that has fallen down. Accordingly the system should query if the person is well and not autonomously call for outside help.

4.1.1. Data processing

Using long wire electrodes may result in considerable noise and influence from outside electric fields. Therefore CapFloor requires preprocessing to reduce the noise and achieve a more robust high-level data processing. The localization uses the weighted average algorithm that has been presented previously. The fall detection is using

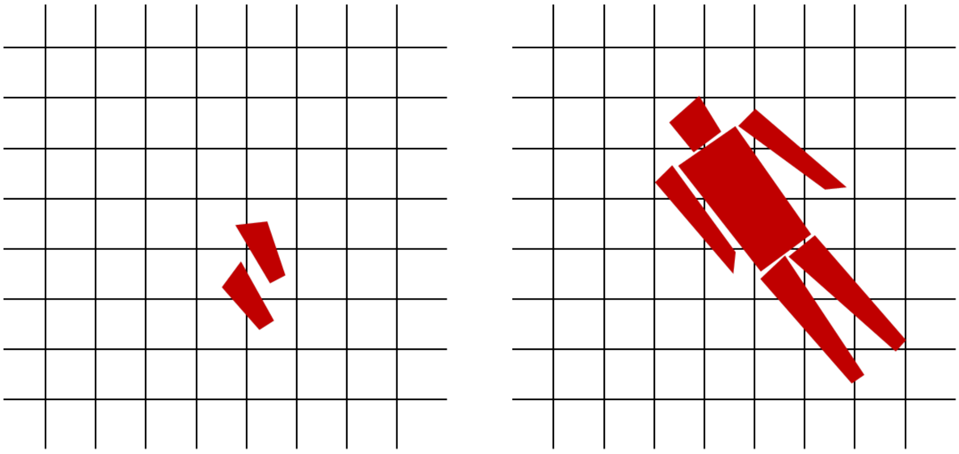

Figure 4.2.: Shapes of a standing and lynig person on top of the CapFloor grid

a time-series analysis of the aggregated values of the sensors that are currently detecting an object. This method is using the assumption that the overall sensor response is roughly equivalent to the shape of the object that is closest to the surface, resulting in a higher capacitance of the overall system, similar to the plate capacitor model. This effect is shown in Figure 4.2. The sum s of all n sensor values r is the closest equivalent to the system capacitance and therefore a viable measure. If the overall value is beyond a certain threshold v_l we can consider a lying person p_l.

$$s = \sum_{i=0}^{n} r_i \quad , \quad p_l = \begin{cases} 1, & s \geq v_l \\ 0, & s < v_l \end{cases}$$

In order to increase the robustness this threshold has to be exceeded for a certain amount of time t_m. In consequence a fall f is detected if the following equation is 1.

$$f = \prod_{j=0}^{t_m} p_{l,t_j}$$

4.1.2. Evaluation

The CapFloor system was evaluated in the scope of the Indoor Localization Track of EvAAL 2011, where it participated out of competition [CK12]. In Figure 4.3 we can see a picture of the demonstration setup installed in the living lap using the system integrated into different mats that are placed in the environment. The system was tuned to detect a single person and was able to perform this reasonably in the areas covered. The resolution of the system is strongly depending on the given density of electrode wires. While there is a certain measure of proximity, it is not possible to detect objects that are more than a few centimeters away from the wires. Later iterations of the system are using higher voltages and shunt mode measurements to improve the tracking reliability and enhance the fall detection.

Figure 4.3.: Floor mats with integrated CapFloor system used at the EvAAL 2011 competition [BHW12]

4.2. Smart Bed

The Smart Bed is a regular bed frame that has been equipped with capacitive proximity sensors in order to determine occupation, posture and sleep phases [BH12] [DBM13]. A sketch can be seen in Figure 4.4. The electrodes are comprised of copper foil that is attached to the flexible wooden panels of the slatted frame. This allows the electrodes to be sensitive to both proximity and applied pressure, resulting in a superposed combined sensor value that is considerably higher as opposed to proximity measure on its own. The electrodes are equally distributed, with four being on both sides of the two person bed. The system is able to determine different sitting and lying postures of one or two persons, including less regular lying positions such as diagonal or orthogonal to the long side of the bed. Using an analysis of the movement gathered by variation in the sensor signal the sleep phases can be analyzed, similar to accelerometer-based systems that are popular for smartphones [KJJ11].

The Smart Bed can be used for various purposes. A main application is connecting the occupation detection to a home automation system and timer in order to activate ambient lighting if the person is get-ting up in the night, presumably to find the way to the restroom. Accordingly, in a single person household the lights in unoccupied rooms could be turned off in order to conserve energy. In the domain of personal health the Smart Bed is able to give the user a feedback on sleep quality based on the sleep phase measurement performed in the night. Another potential application is to use the acquired pressure distribution as indicator for back-friendly lying positions that may be harmful over a longer period of time [HB10]. The occupation and posture detection relies on a simplified body model to approximate the pressure distribution and sensor values to a certain posture [BH12].

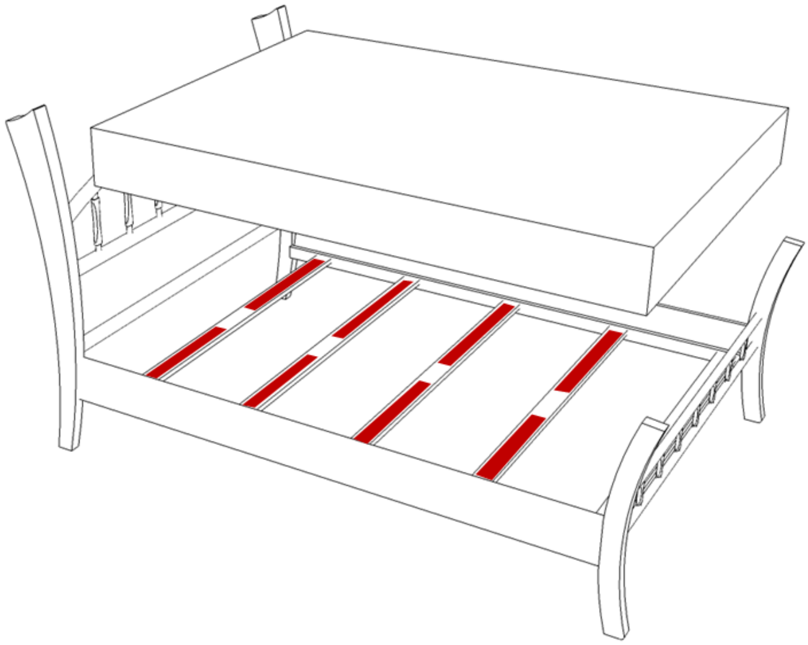

Figure 4.4.: Smart Bed sketch - flexible plate electrode are attached on spring board

4.2.1. Data processing

The different components of the Smart Bed data processing are shown in Figure 4.5. Raw sensor data is distributed to three different modules, the calibration which is determining the initial parameters for the sensor data fusion, the drift compensation that alters those parameters according to long term trends and finally the sensor data fusion module that processes the data and does feed it to the occupation & position detection. Calibration and drift compensation follow the previously presented model [BH12]. Occupation and position detection is performed by dividing the two person bed into left and right and individually calculating for each side the total sensor values, assumed center of pressure using weighted average and the standard deviation (Figure 4.6). The same calculation is done between the two sides to distinguish where is activity or if one person is lying diagonally. Using these six intermediate values we can now map various poses. If all activity is on one side and the horizontal deviation is low, we can assume that one person is sitting. We can additionally use the intermediate values to calculate more information, e.g. the exact location a person is sitting at. The data processing for the sleep phase recognition is based on detecting the sensor data variations in order to analyze movement. Discriminating between sleep phases using movement is a common approach that has been used in the past [SL86]. Using a sparse set of sensors it is possible to detect movement by comparing subsequent sensor readings and associate it to different sleep phases using different activity profiles. The system is based on the same prototype as the posture recognition system [DBM13].

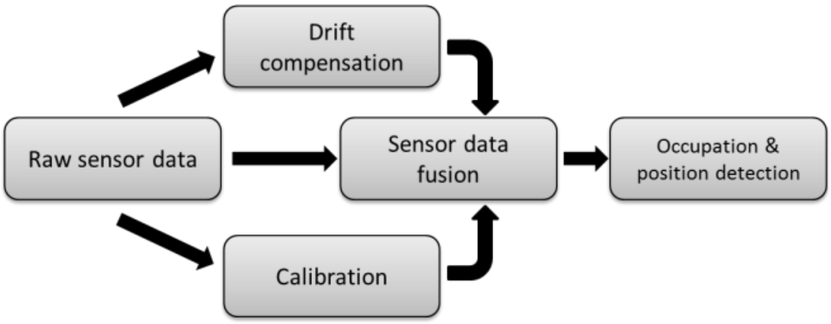

Figure 4.5.: Data processing components [BH12]

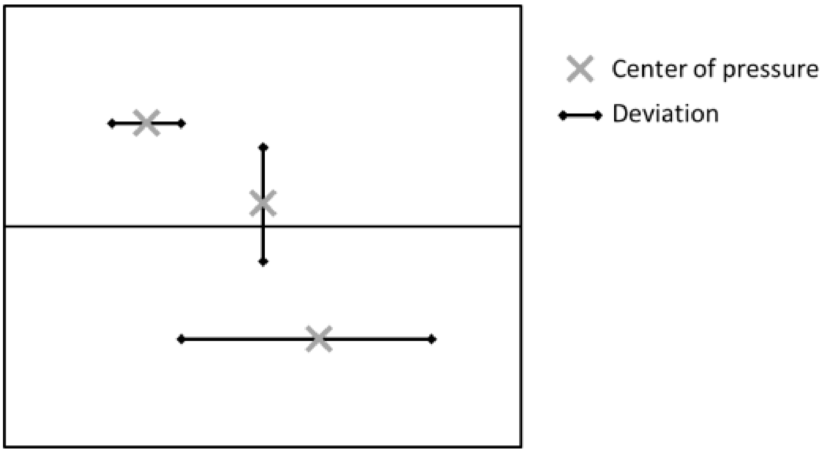

Figure 4.6.: Calculating centers of pressures and deviation [BH12]

4.2.2. Evaluation

The Smart Bed posture recognition is able to successfully distinguish eight typical sitting and lying states. Using adaptation of the intermediate values it is possible to fit the state to an actual position on the bed, e.g. a *person sitting on the right side of the bed* state can be modified to any location on that specific side of the bed. Regarding the detection of sleep phases there has been an evaluation and benchmarking of three nights [DBM13]. The Smart Bed was able to achieve a comparable performance to smartphone applications that detect sleep phases based on accelerometers. Figure 4.7 gives an example of movement recordings using the capacitive proximity sensors over one night. The activities are grouped into distinct chunks that are later associated to the sleep phases. Currently breathing rate detection is added to the Smart Bed that can be used to improve the sleep phase detection and also can potentially detect anomalies that may be indicative of a certain health risk.

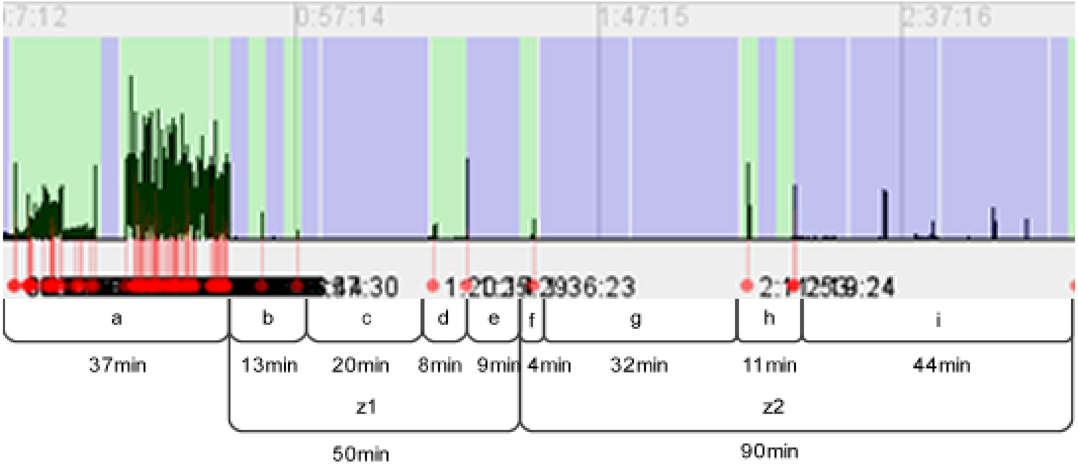

Figure 4.7.: Sleep movement data over three hours in one night [DBM13]

4.3. The Capacitive Chair

The Capacitive Chair is a regular office chair equipped with eight capacitive proximity sensors that can detect different sitting postures and work-related stress levels by examining movement and breathing rate [BF13]. Seven solid copper electrodes that are placed below the covering are augmented by a single conductive thread electrode that is placed in a mesh on the backrest. In the past smart chairs have used pressure sensors to infer posture and occupation [TSPM01]. Combining presence and proximity sensing it is possible to directly infer postures where parts of the body do not touch the surface, e.g. if the body is arched towards the front, or if an arm is raised from the armrests. Additionally higher area electrodes in the backrest allow detecting the breathing rate by measuring the movement of the chest.

The Capacitive Chair aims at providing different services to a typical office worker and office managers. Using the occupation detection it is possible to advise for some type of physical activity, if the time spent in front of the screen was too long. The system can also advise the user to change to a more back-friendly posture or regularly switch the stance to achieve a more general workout. Using the breathing rate detection we are able to get some sort of measure of the current stress level associated to the given working situation. By adapting the environment it is possible to improve the working atmosphere and reduce stress. The Capacitive Chair uses a multifacetted data processing approach. A machine learning algorithm is associating the sensing data to one of nine different typical sitting positions, inspired by a recent study of sitting positions for modern device usage [Inc13]. An adaptive body model that is fitted to the current sensor values allows for fine grained adaptation of those postures. Finally a combination of Fourier and data variation analysis is calculating the current breathing rate [BF13].

4.3.1. Data processing

In Figure 4.9 we can see a screenshot of the Capacitive Chair debug application. On the left side we see a 3D model that is fitted to a chair model according to the current sensor values, in the middle the results of the machine learning module and the recognized posture and on the right side the currently running breathing rate detection as both Fourier analysis and signal deviation analysis. All processing methods work on filtered and normalized sensor data. The difference in shape, material and size of the electrodes necessitates slight adaptations

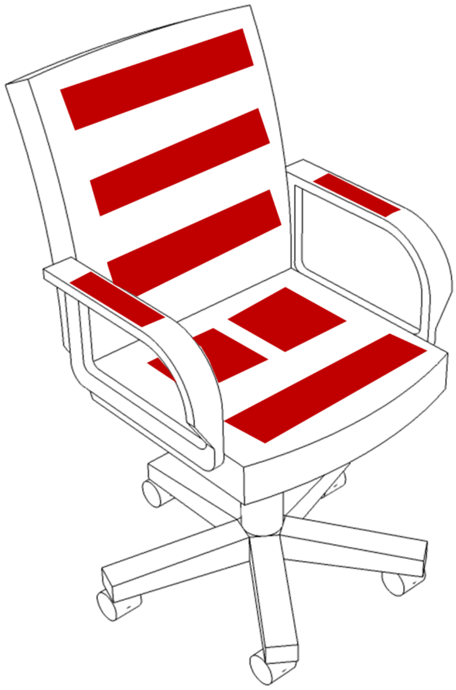

Figure 4.8.: Smart office chair sketch - eight electrodes three in backrest, three on seat and two in armrests

to noise filtering and data processing. As an example only the conductive thread backrest electrode is used in the breathing rate detection. The 3D model is using a simplified human joint model comprised of 13 connected components. Based on the current sensor readings, single parts or groups of components are fitted to the virtual chair. The process is a mix of posture mapping as found in the smart bed and modification of the dynamic links between the single components [BF13]. We use a simple RBF neural network and training data collected by two different persons to match the input from eight sensors to nine potential output postures that are associated to different working situations. An early observation is that certain postures are difficult to distinguish given the limited number of sensors and the similarity of the postures on the rigid chair. Either a higher number of sensors or a more versatile chair could be used that allows gathering additional information required to distinguish the different poses more reliably.

The breathing rate detection is operating on a single electrode that is integrated into a mesh on the backrest using conductive thread. The setup is shown in Figure 4.10. Consequently the surface of the electrode is large and able to pick up the chest movement. Two different methods of data processing are used and fused to get the final breathing rate. Using a fast Fourier transformation the signal is transformed into the frequency space. We are looking for significant signal portions in frequency areas that can be associated to breathing, between $0.2Hz$ and $10Hz$. The second method is to look for zero-crossings of the sensor signal through an adaptive baseline. If a person is breathing in the sensor value will decrease resulting in the signal dropping below the long-term average, and rise above when the person is breathing out. Accordingly the breathing rate can be calculated by counting the zero-crossings.

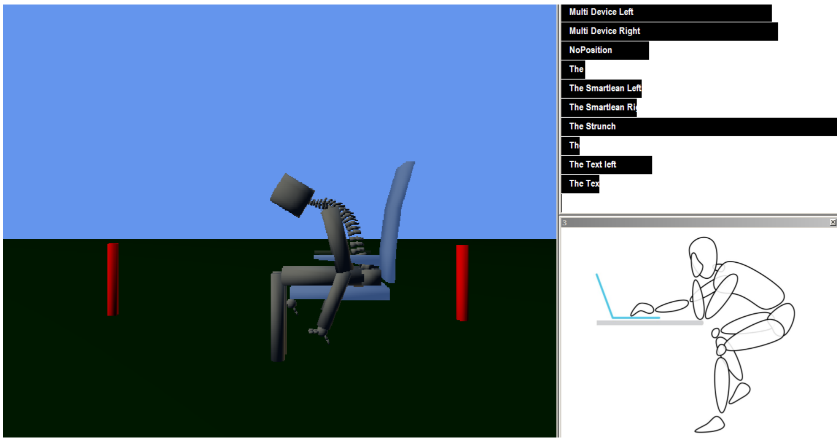

Figure 4.9.: Screenshot of the Capacitive Chair application showing the fitted 3D model on the left, posture detection on the upper right and the recognized posture on the lower right

4.3.2. Evaluation

4.4. Active Armrest

The Active Armrest is a prototype to demonstrate unobtrusive gestural interaction in the domain of automotive applications [74]. The interior of modern cars can be considered a smart environment as it includes an ensemble of sensors and actors that adapt the system behavior according to user preference.

Many cars use touch screens or jog dials to control primary and secondary car functions [SDKS10]. Capacitive proximity sensors allow integrating interactive areas into different existing surfaces of a car, e.g. an armrest. The Active Armrest is using a set of eight sensors that are separated into two different groups. There are two larger electrodes in the back of the armrest that are dedicated to recognizing the presence of an arm. In the front of the armrest there is an array of six small electrode sensors, in order to register finger gestures, as shown in Figure 4.11. The basic idea is to disallow interaction when the arm is resting and enable it once it's lifted. The Active Armrest supports swiping gestures of a single finger and static holding gestures of two fingers. This allows controlling various typical automotive applications, e.g. a navigation application, whereas holding is zooming in and out and swipe pan through the maps. Similar applications, such as multimedia features and comfort settings can be controlled in a similar fashion.

4.4.1. Data processing

As we already mentioned, the Active Armrest electrodes are put into two groups. The data processing for both groups is distinctly different. In order to detect the presence of the arm using the two-electrode group a simple threshold on the accumulated values is used. The six sensor array in the front (touch area) is using the presented weighted average method to calculate finger positions. Additionally a threshold is used to distinguish one and two fingers. Overall there is a data processing pipeline as shown in Figure 4.13. The finger tracking and gesture recognition will be inactive until it is ensured that no arm is present.

Figure 4.10.: Screenshot of the Capacitive Chair application showing the fitted 3D model on the left, posture detection on the upper right and the recognized posture on the lower right

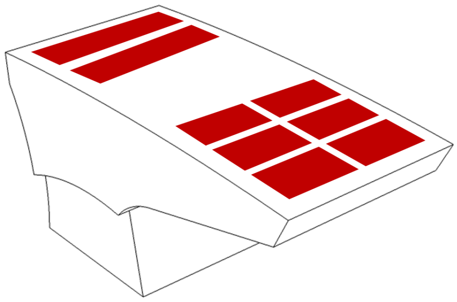

Figure 4.11.: Active armrest sketch - six electrodes for finger gesture detection in front, two for arm detection in back

4.4.2. Evaluation

In order to evaluate the Active Armrest we have built the prototype shown in Figure 4.13. An aftermarket armrest was equipped with an OpenCapSense toolkit. The demonstration application is based on the SenseKit debug software supplied with the toolkit. As of now there is a simple USB connection to a nearby PC. Figure 4.14 shows a screenshot of the finger tracking application on the left, with a two-finger touch registered on the upper left part of the touch area. It is interfaced with a TUIO [KBBC05] based maps application using OpenStreetMap [HW08] data. The map is moved around using simple swipe movements of the finger that are directly associated to pan-features of the demonstration application. Zooming is activated by two-finger hold gestures on the upper or lower part of the touch area. We have used public displays of this prototype to get an idea of how easily unaffiliated persons learn to use the system. While the majority agreed on the potential of the application, there have been some reservations regarding the current gesture set, particularly that a closer relationship to smartphone touch screen gestures would be welcome.

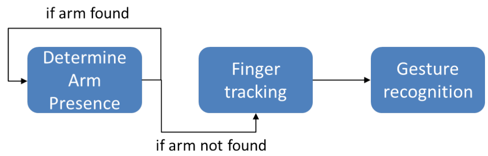

Figure 4.12.: Data processing pipeline of Active Armrest

Figure 4.13.: Active Armrest prototype, left - outside view, right - detail view of electronics

4.5. Magic Box

The so-called MagicBox was our first attempt to create an interaction device based on capacitive proximity sensing. It is using an array of six individual wireless capacitive sensors that communicate to a central station [BH11]. The electrodes are using a large surface area and are made of aluminum foil. A sketch is shown in Figure 4.15. The system is able to track the position of a single hand in three dimensions up to a distance of approximately 20*cm*, and uses different methods to infer gestures from the hand movement. It is designed to be a generic interaction device that can potentially be hidden below non-conductive surfaces. As it can be used without touching it is also applicable in sterile environments. A suite of demonstration applications has been created that showcase typical scenarios for the MagicBox. This includes multimedia applications, like image viewer and media player but also a 3D object viewer intended as demonstrator for potential medical applications, allowing a surgeon to check MRT or CT images in a sterile environment without touching any surface.

4.5.1. Data processing

The first data processing step of the MagicBox is the planar localization of the hand, following the weighted average algorithm previously presented. In order to calculate the distance of the hand from the plane we are using a piecewise linear interpolation, that resembles the response curve of a single sensor [BH11]. An addition of the MagicBox was a generic gesture recognition module based on methods similar to mouse gesture recognition [BDK13], albeit adapted for three dimensional locations. The developed debug software allows defining an

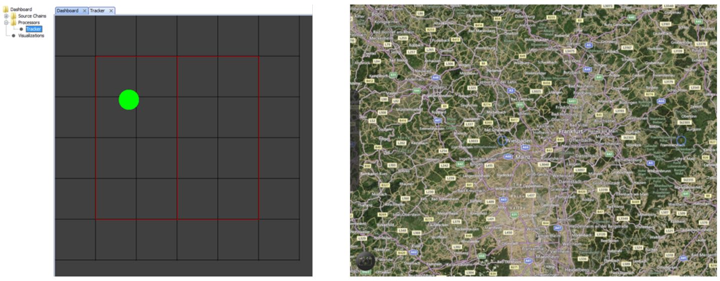

Figure 4.14.: Active Armrest demo software, left - finger tracker, right - OSM based navigation application

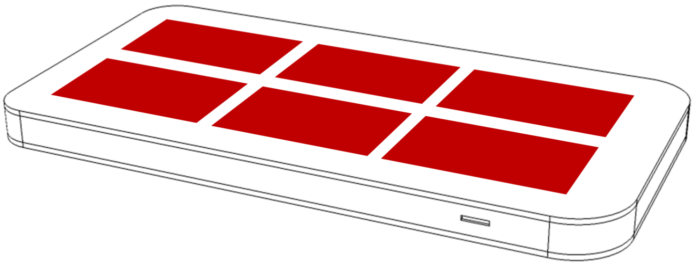

Figure 4.15.: MagicBox sketch - six electrodes uniformly distributed below surface

arbitrary set of potential gestures and adding training data, as shown in Figure 4.17. The module is looking for matches based on the most recent set of locations.

4.5.2. Evaluation

The MagicBox prototype is based on the Cypress First Touch starter kit [Cor13] and combines six capaci-tive sensors communicating wirelessly to a single base station, that are put together with a USB-rechargeable power supply into a casing. A concep-tual rendering showing the interaction area and a detail view of the prototype electronics are shown in Figure 4.18. The different iterations of the MagicBox have been evaluated in conjunction with various demon-stration applications. A usability study with 18 per-sons led to general approval of the system [BH11]. Two of the applications used in this study are shown in Figure 4.19. On the left is a 3D object viewer that has to be controlled by a combination of menu and direct manipulation of the screen content. On the right side there is an image viewer that was controlled by gesture to trigger the next/previous images or perform zooming operations. The most common positive remarks gathered in this study can be roughly put into three groups:

- The device very intuitive to use
- The idea of interacting this way is novel and interesting
- It is easy to control applications with those gestures

Likewise we identified three main groups for negative comments about the prototype:

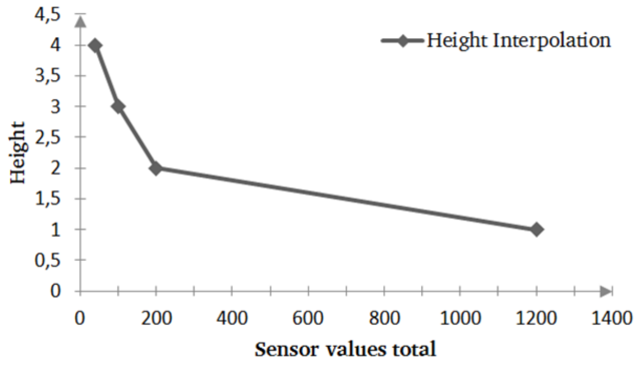

Figure 4.16.: Piecewise linear hand distance estimation [BH11]

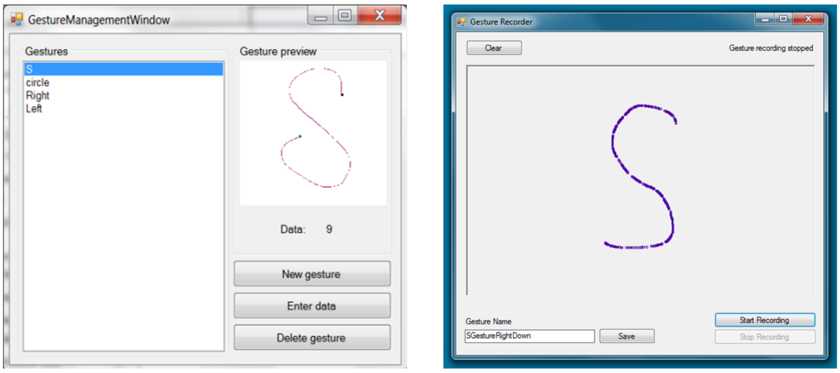

Figure 4.17.: Gesture overview module (left) and gesture recorder (right)

- The device is not very precise
- The interaction speed is slow
- It can be tiring for the arm

Later iterations have been trying to improve some of the weaknesses presented above, e.g. by using a more sophisticated gesture recognition system and faster sensor refresh rates. Accordingly there were fewer complaints about interaction speed and precision [BDK13]. However, the final complaint about the device being tiring for the arm, requires a different approach, that we are investigating in the final prototype to be presented in this system.

4.6. CapTap

The CapTap is a large area interaction device unobtrusively integrated into a living room table. It is comprised of 24 capacitive sensors and a single sen-sor for knock detection that supports selection events within the demon-stration applications [80]. In the domain of free-air gestural interaction there are two prevalent challenges. The

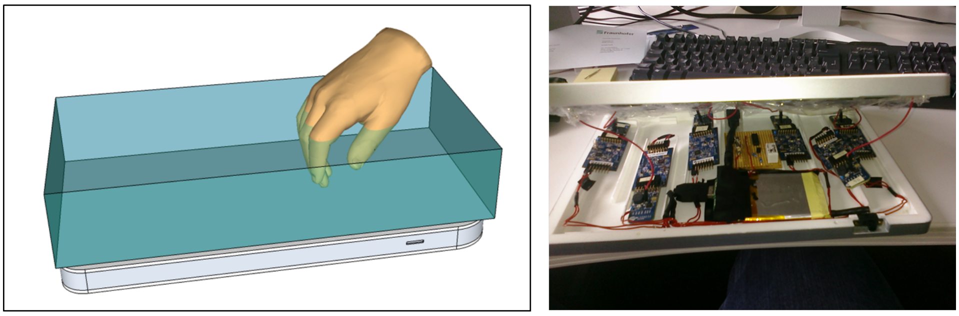

Figure 4.18.: MagicBox conceptual rendering (left) and detail view of electronics (right) [BH11]

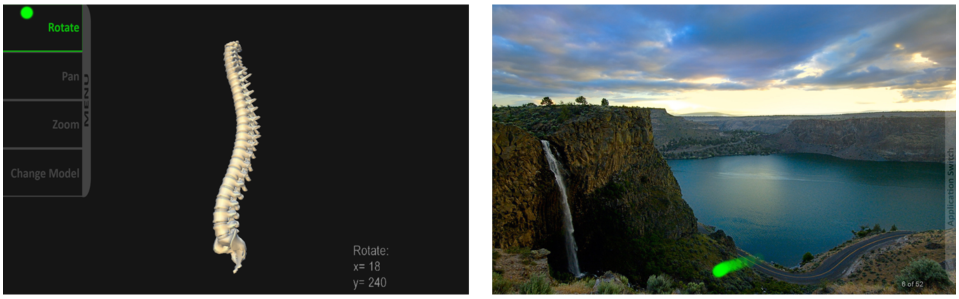

Figure 4.19.: MagicBox demonstration application - 3D object viewer (left) and image viewer (right) [BH11]

physical demands of pro-longed interaction with such systems is high [81], [82]. Additionally it is difficult to adapt selection events to gestural input. The latter is typically real-ized using time- or position-based gestures [81], [83]. There is no trivial solution to these challenges and any approach has to take into account the specific application scenario covered. Several systems are trying to provide specific GUIs, while others include additional input devices assisting the interaction [84], [85]. CapTap presents an approach to improve the interaction speed of invisible input devices based on capacitive proximity sensors. We have developed a method to unobtrusively detect knocks on a table equipped with a hand tracking system based on capacitive proximity sensors that allows emulating selection events that would typically require an additional time- or movement-based gesture.

4.6.1. Data processing

The hand location of the CapTap is similar to the methods presented for the MagicBox. We add the additional component of knock detection to provide selection events when touching the surface. Figure 4.20 shows a sketch of the knock detection system. The table has a glass plate that is suspended on some rubber supports. In the center of the table we attach a small peg (enlarged in sketch) that creates a connection between the glass plate and a piezo sensor. If the glass plate starts vibrating from a touch we can measure this using the piezo sensor [BF13]. If a notable vibration is measured we are collecting the next 50 samples, resulting in a window of 250 milliseconds. To distinguish single and double knocks we calculate the weighted average within this window to get a measure for the distribution of sensor values within. If the average is closer to the beginning of the window the resulting event should be a single knock, and a double if the average is closer to the end of the window. Hand localization and knock detection are working independently and are combined later in the

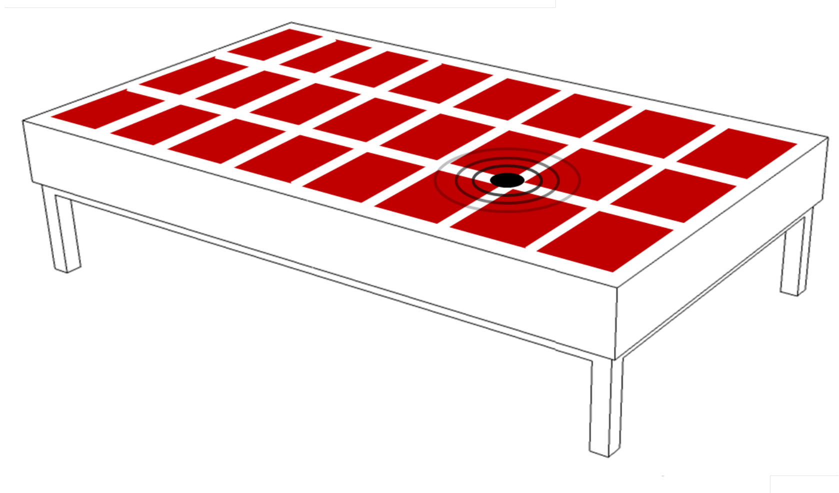

Figure 4.20.: CapTap sketch - 24 electrodes placed under table surface

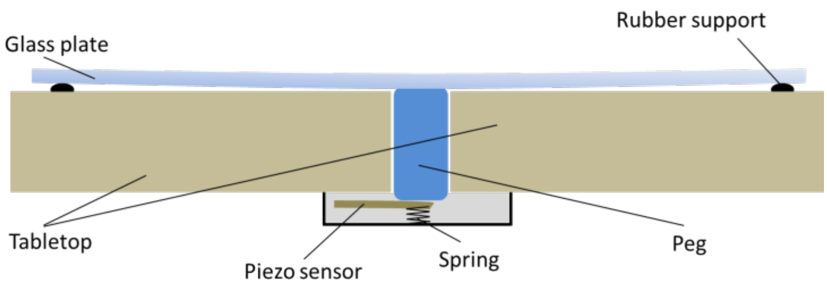

Figure 4.21.: Suspended peg knock detection system for CapTap [BF13]

software. It is reasonable to combine this, e.g. to ignore knock events that are occurring without a hand present. They may be indicative of a person doing a strong step close to the table.

4.6.2. Evaluation

The CapTap prototype is integrated into a common living room table. Some photos can be seen in Figure 4.22. On the left side we see the 24 electrodes made of non-etched circuit boards. A sensor is attached to each. The knock detection box with fixation, housing and piezo sensor is shown on the right side. The overall abstracted layout of the prototype is shown in Figure 4.23. The capacitive sensors are con-trolled by three OpenCapSense boards; the knock detection is performed on an Arduino Uno microcontroller board. The data fusion is outsourced to a Mini-PC that can be placed in the table. Various evaluations have been performed with the CapTap. We have benchmarked the hand localization against the Leap Motion, concluding that the algorithm works reasonably precise in most parts of the interaction area. The next study was a quantitative study of the percentage of correctly recognized knocks, resulting in considerable misattribution of single and double knocks,

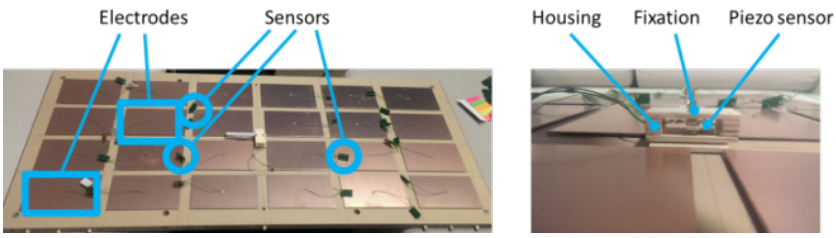

Figure 4.22.: Detail views of the prototype system: left - electrode and sensors, right - knock detection box [BF13]

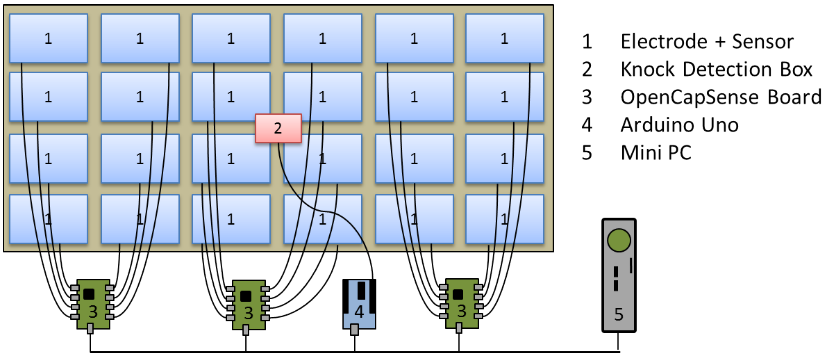

Figure 4.23.: Abstracted view of CapTap prototype including capacitive sensing electrodes and knock detection sensor [BF13]

due to strongly varying knocking styles. However, the presence of any knock was detected with a precision of about 90% [BF13]. Our main evaluation of the system was concerned with the influence of our knock detection on the overall interaction speed of the system. The results concluded that merely adding the knock detection is not enough but that additionally the interfaces have to be adapted towards capacitive systems [BF13].

5. Classification of capacitive proximity sensors in smart environments

Chapter description

5.1. Classification of capacitive proximity sensors

Classification

5.2. Comparison to other sensing technologies

Table 5.1.: Add caption

Name	Application Domains	Environmental Influences	Detection Range	Processing Complexity	Unobtrusiveness
Capacitive proximity sensing	indoor localization, smart appliances, physiological sensing, gestural interaction	electric fields, conductive objects	near distance (< 100cm)	Few high dynamic range data sources	invisible integration possible
Capacitive touch sensing	smart appliances, physiological sensing, gestural interaction	electric fields, conductive objects	touch	Few binary sensors	thin cover above electrodes
RGB cameras	indoor localization, smart appliances, physiological sensing, gestural interaction	occlusion, external lights	far distance (> 10m)	Complex image processing based on resolution	pinhole lenses
Infrared cameras	indoor localization, physiological sensing, gestural interaction	occlusion, external infrared light	medium distance (< 5m)	Complex image processing based on resolution	infrared source and camera
Ultrasound sensing	indoor localization, smart appliances, gestural interaction	acoustic occlusion, absorbing materials	medium distance (< 5m)	Few low dynamic range data sources	emitter and senders with exposed pinhole speaker, microphone
Microphone arrays	indoor localization, smart appliances, physiological sensing	environmental noise, absorbing materials	medium distance (< 5m)	Very high dynamic range data sources	exposed pinhole microphones
Radiofrequency sensing	indoor localization, smart appliances, gestural interaction	other RF devices	far distance (> 10m)	Few low dynamic range data sources	hidden emitters and senders possible

In order to properly place capacitive proximity sensing in the smart environment domain it is neces-sary to include a comparison to other sensing tech-nologies. We have chosen systems that have a broad applicability and have been used in various smart environment applications. A short overview can be found in Table 7. We have included a comparison of application domains, environmental influences, de-tection range, processing complexity and unobtru-siveness of the technology. Capacitive touch sensing, as opposed to capacitive proximity sensing relies on an electrode being touched instead of an object being in proximity and is ubiquitous in touch screen applications. RGB cameras are a class of image sensors operat-ing in the same frequency domain as the human eye. They are capable of processing different colors. Infrared cameras operate in near light frequencies that are invisible to the human eye. This allows for application in dark environments and we can project infrared light into the scene without disturbing the user. Ultrasound sensing is using a low frequency range just above the audible limit of human hearing. The waves propagate similar to sound signals and we can perform reflection measurements or time-of-flight methods. Microphone arrays detect signals in the range of human hearing, and thus work with audible signals, such as human speech. Radiofrequency (RF) sensing uses signals in a range between several hundred kHz up to 5GHz, typically used for wireless communication. Commonly the signal strength or time of flight is used to gather information about the environment. Most technologies are capable of supporting mul-tiple application domains. Some non-intuitive exam-ples include WiSee that enables whole-body gestural interaction using WiFi signals [86] or MoGees that uses a single microphone to enable gesture interfaces on various surfaces [87]. Capacitive sensors are disturbed by conductive objects and electric fields, whereas cameras struggle with occlusion and additional light sources. Occlusion is a weak point, and a line of sight is required. Sound sensors are prone to dampening materials and environmental noise interfering with the signal. RF signals usually propagate well through most materi-als and only external sources may be an issue. The detection range of the technologies varies strongly. RF ranges before light, sound and electric fields. However, this again strongly depends on ap-plication and layout of the sensing devices. It is not easy to find a good measure about the processing complexity associated to a different sensing technology. We are using a simplified model, taking the dynamic range of a sensor and the number of sensors typically required. Dynamic range is the difference between the smallest detectable value and the largest detectable value. Microphones have a high dynamic range measuring over a larger frequency scale, whereas touch sensors only have two different states. Finally capacitive sensors and RF sensors can be applied completely invisible. Cameras, microphones and ultrasound need a direct connection to the out-side world. However, there are very small variants available that are barely visible to the naked eye.

5.3. Discussion

In the previous sections we have presented back-ground information on capacitive proximity sensors and various prototypes of this technology in different application domains within smart environments. In the following section we are building on the collected information to perform a meta-analysis of the acquired data, discussing benefits and limitations of the technology, compare it to competing technologies and give some guidelines to parties interested in developing further applications in this domain.

5.3.1. Limitations

Despite the potential that has been described in the previous sections there are various limitations of capacitive proximity sensing that we can put into the different groups of environmental influence, physical range and object detection that will be described in more detail in the following section. A short overview is given in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2.: Overview of capacitive proximity sensing limitations

Name	Examples
Environmental influence	Static electric fields, dynamic electric fields, temperature, humidity, conductive objects
Physical range	Small differences in capacitance, reduction due to influences, physical limitations
Object detection	Small number of data points, a priori knowledge

5.3.1.1. Environmental Influence

One of the main limitations of capacitive proximity sensors is their sensitivity towards environmental influences. Any factor that modifies an electric field will also affect the measurement of a capacitive sensor. The current environmental parameters, like temperature and humidity are having a considerable effect on the atmosphere in which the electric field propagates. However, those changes are usually over a longer period of time and can be compensated using a factor for drift, as described in the previous sections about noise reduction. A more challenging factor is the other electric devices in the environment that emit stronger electromagnetic fields. While persistent sources, such as permanent electric installations can usually be countered using a galvanic isolation there are other non-obvious challenges. E.g. we noticed that certain plasma TVs are able to disturb the measurement and increase noise levels consider-ably. This change is even varying according to screen content. A minor effect is the presence of high-frequency fields that are getting more prevalent in modern IT equipped environments. Instead of the 2.4GHz and 5GHz ranges that are often used in wire-less communication, capacitive proximity sensors can operate in the range of a few kHz to one MHz. An additional issue might arise when placing sensors close to each other. The created electric fields may disturb the measurement if some electrodes are charged and create fields to adjacent electrodes while they are discharged for measurement. Consequently, specific charge-discharge cycles or multiplexing methods have to be used to counter this effect. A major challenge is dealing with conductive objects that are permanently placed in the immediate sensing environment. It is difficult to distinguish the object we want to detect from a disturbing object, if their influence on the electric field is similar. Long term data analysis may help in performing a successful detection. The CapFloor prototype is affected by environmental influences the most, given the small size of the electrodes relative to the interaction area and the changing environment on top of the floor. We are using a strong noise reduction algorithm and drift compensation to create a more stable result while reducing the detection range.

5.3.1.2. Physical Range

The physical range of the generated electric field is one of the main limiting factors of capacitive proximity sensing. In order to detect objects that are further away we have to increase the electric field strength sufficiently. This is easier the larger the electrode is, as its potential capacitance is higher. However, this also leads to distant objects having an ever smaller influence on the overall capacitance, and we need more precise measurement circuits and longer measurement times to improve the signal-to-noise ratio. Additionally, looking at smaller objects the angular resolution will decrease as shown in Figure 5.1. This makes it more difficult to get a precise localization as the immanent noise leads to an angular error. While this can be compensated using more sensors, the far distance would require us to use large electrodes that have to be placed further apart resulting in a huge

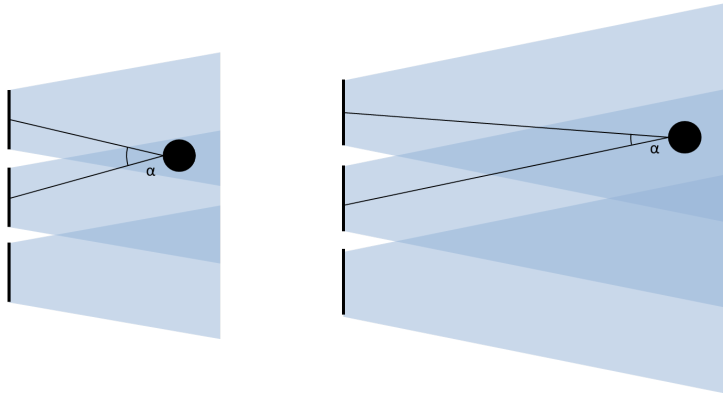

Figure 5.1.: Reduced angular resolution on smaller, distant objects

area that would have to be equipped with sensor electrodes. In general the achievable resolution is not comparable to vision based system and has to be taken into consideration when designing the specific application. A balance between electrode size, physical range and achievable resolution has to be found. The MagicBox size does not allow an integration of very large electrodes. Instead we are optimizing the available space in order to achieve a detection that lets us detect hands in a distance between 15 and 20 centimeters.

5.3.1.3. Object Detection

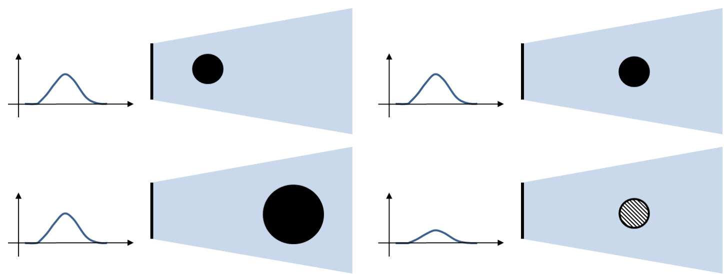

Figure 5.2.: Same response to differently sized objects (left), different response to varying materials (right)

Object detection using capacitive sensors can be partially compared to object detection using camera systems, with a single sensor being equivalent to a single photo sensor. The light intensity measure is comparable to field intensity and likewise we can't distinguish if the measurement is caused by a weak source in close proximity or a strong source at a further distance. As a practical example the capacitive sensor can't decide if one hand is close to the sensor or two hands are a bit further away. This effect makes it challenging to provide object detection and we usually have to combine the information from various sensors to get a good idea about object shape and size. Due to the presented challenges in physical range and electrode size, capacitive proximity sensing systems do not have the same level of scalability as opposed to cameras, where millions of photo sensors can be placed in very small areas. Additionally, the effect of an object on the electric field is not always closely correlated to the object dimensions, but instead based on conductivity, material and other factors. We may get the same response to different objects at different distances or get a varying on similarly sized objects made of different materials, as shown in Figure 5.2. The Active Armrest has gestures for one and two fingers that are distinguished using a simple threshold. If another object is entering the field or the person has larger fingers the system will fail to properly differentiate gestures. Accordingly some other compensation methods should be used.

5.3.2. Benefits

Table 5.3.: Overview of capacitive proximity sensing benefits

Name	Examples
Versatility	Flexible electrode design, scalability, different sensing methods
Unobtrusiveness	Invisible application, non-disturbing frequency range
Processing Complexity	Small number of sensors, variable dynamic range

After discussing the various limitations of capacitive proximity sensing, the following section will give an overview of the benefits. Similar to the previous section we have three groups, namely versatility, unobtrusiveness and processing complexity. Some examples within these groups are shown in Table 6.

5.3.2.1. Versatility

A main benefit of capacitive proximity sensing is the versatility in which they can be applied. The flexibility of electrode materials, size and geometry allows specifically creating highly individual applications. Example electrodes include transparent metal oxide layers, woven conductive thread, copper wires, PCB boards or simple aluminum foil. The sensors systems are also highly scalable. By choosing appropriate voltages and frequencies it is possible to add a high number of sensors to a single object. Using smart measurement windows and different multiplexing methods, sensors can be placed close together and electrodes may act as both sender and receiver. The different sensing methods presented - loading mode, shunt mode and transmit mode enable a variety of different sensing patterns. The human body can be used as both sender and receiver and smart electrode layouts allow using a smaller number of processing units. In conclusion, it is possible to add capacitive sensing to most everyday objects to enable different forms of interaction, create natural interfaces and smart objects. Our prototypes are using different electrode materials, flexible or solid electrodes, conductive thread, wires, shielded or non-shielded layouts.

5.3.2.2. Unobtrusiveness

Electric fields are not usually perceived by persons, unless they are of exceptional strength. Furthermore they propagate through many materials that we are typically using in our environment, including most plastics, wood or tiles. This allows us to invisibly apply capacitive proximity sensors without a strong effect on the measurement. Application below several centimeters of covering is possible, if the electrodes are designed properly for sensing in this distance. The frequency range in which the sensors are operating is usually not in an interval that disturbs other electronic systems. Thus it is feasible to use capacitive sensing even in environments, where

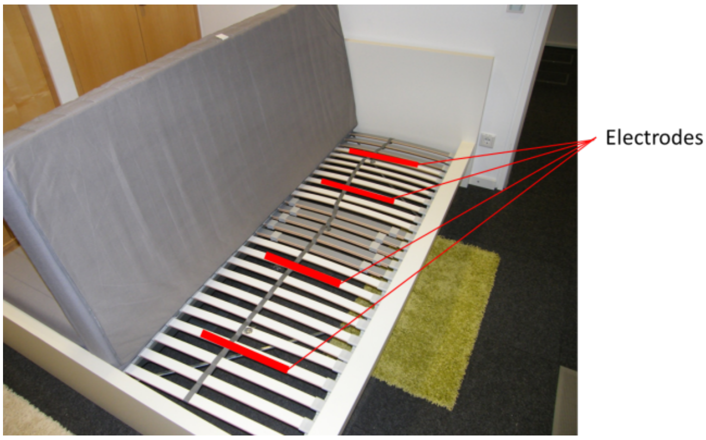

Figure 5.3.: Electrodes and sensors hidden below mattress of Smart Bed

non-disturbance is a main requirement. Additionally the used frequencies are not considered to be biologically active, and good results can be achieved using small currents. It is possible to equip most conductive objects directly with capacitive proximity sensors and hide them below non-conductive objects with minimal spatial requirements. Our Smart Bed and Active Armrest prototypes are using sensor sets that are completely invisible from the outside and communicate wirelessly to a PC only using a power supply. Figure 5.3 shows the electrodes and sensors hidden below the mattress of the Smart Bed.

5.3.2.3. Processing Complexity

An appropriate analogy of capacitive proximity sensors is a single photodiode. As opposed to a light intensity we are measuring capacitance. While the information we can gain from such a measurement is limited, the processing required to analyze the signal is also low. Performing signal analysis on an array of 16 capacitive sensors is comparable to processing the image of a 4x4 pixel camera. Therefor it is easy to create highly integrated systems with very low-power devices for performing any subsequent data analysis. While it is possible and in many cases beneficial to use complex data processing algorithms for object detection it is in most cases still possible to replace them with simpler methods for a comparable result. In many applications it is even viable to opt for a quantized capacitance measurement. In the case of a touch sensor a single binary measure is sufficient. However, it is also possible to select various different levels and reduce the dynamic range to an easily computable value that is 4 or 8 Bit long. Depending on the chosen algorithm this dynamic range reduction can occur either in pre-processing or high level processing. With the exception of the Capacitive Chair our prototypes are using simple data processing methods that can be easily applied on embedded systems. A preferred method for object localization is the weighted average algorithm. Regarding model-based data processing, even very simple cylindrical models, such as the one used for the Smart Bed, are capable to reliably predict numerous postures that are relevant in real world applications. In general, the low requirements for data preprocessing, allows dedicating more resources to high level data processing algorithms if the specific application is resource con-strained. The OpenCapSense toolkit that is the base for most of our prototypes has a fairly powerful micro-controller that is able to implement all of the processing steps - thus enabling highly integrated, low-power capacitive proximity sensing prototypes that can be used in smart environment applications.

5.3.3. Guidelines

After discussing the limitations and benefits of capacitive proximity sensors, the final section of this chapter will give some general guidelines on their application. The first step of this process is a decision if capacitive sensors technology is suitable for the given application. This part should be driven by three questions. What do I need to measure in my application scenario? Capacitive proximity sensors can measure the presence and properties of conductive, grounded objects. This includes the various application scenarios shown in the previous sections. However, if the application requires measuring properties of unsupported objects that are non-conductive, a different technology should be chosen.

What sensing technologies are supporting the required measurements?

It may be the case that multiple technologies sup-port the measurements required in this specific applications. Cameras often can provide similar recognition as capacitive sensors, e.g. in indoor localization applications. In this step all potential sensing technologies should be collected. Are capacitive proximity sensors beneficial for my scenario? An evaluation of the different candidates is the final step and should lead to a decision about the most suitable sensing technologies. If the distance is too high for capacitive proximity sensors or enough processing power is available and lighting conditions are static, cameras might be more suitable. This should be driven by the different benefits and limitations of the technologies. If there is a decision in favor of capacitive sensors the next step is to design the specific electrode layout. Similar to technology selection we can use a few basic questions to get an idea of what layout to use.

How many sensors are required to get the measurement?

The number of sensors required is depending on the area we want to cover, the specific object parameters that have to be determined and the desired resolution. The electrodes are inherently limited in size, as a single sensor can only charge and discharge to a specific maximum capacity. Therefore, if a large area has to be covered more electrodes and sensors are necessary. If we just want to measure the presence of a hand a single electrode may suffice. If orientation and position are interesting we need to combine measurements from various sensors.

What should be the size and geometry of the electrodes?

This is closely related to the previous question. If the application is not restricting the available space, the electrode should be approximately of the same size as the object that is to be detected. This generates the highest difference in capacitance when the distance is changing.

What is the best electrode material to use?

Copper is always a good first choice to create electrodes. If elasticity is necessary we can use copper foil and solid copper if that is of no concern. For transparent electrodes we will have to use one of the previously presented materials, such as ITO. If electrodes have to be integrated into cloth, conductive thread is a good candidate. Any conductive material will act as an electrode, thus the application and budget should be the primary driver of this decision.

Does my application require any shielding?

Shielding allows detecting only objects approaching from a certain direction. If the application re-quires this additional hardware, because it is anticipated that other objects might disturb the measurement, shielding should be used. Finally, if the hardware is designed as desired the different variations of data processing have to be chosen and configured according to the application. Using baseline calibration is beneficial in the vast majority of applications. Having a distinct starting point simplifies all further steps of high-level data processing, such as normalization and setting different thresholds. This step may only be omitted in very stable environments and if the system has sufficient a priori information to operate on raw data. Drift compensation should be handled in a similar fashion. The common methods are not computationally expensive and having a stable baseline over time allows the same algorithms to be applied in a more robust fashion. The method and configuration of noise reduction are strongly depending on the specific case. Some form of noise reduction might be required in most applications. Yet, according to the type of noise different methods can be used. If outliers are an issue a median filter is appropriate; if a smoother signal is desired an average filter can be used. Regarding high-level data processing there are manifold variations of methods. Data-driven machine learning algorithms are a good method if we have a small set of potential outcomes of our applications, e.g. the different postures that could be recognized on a chair or couch. If our application has many different potential outcomes, e.g. the thousands of potential locations in a hand tracking system, it is typically beneficial to use a model-driven approach. However, these models may be supported by data-driven algorithms, such as particle filters. One example is the Swiss-Cheese object tracker by Grosse-Puppendahl et al. [GPBKK13]. The data processing examples shown in the previous sections give an idea of the decision rationale in various application domains. We can say in conclusion that capacitive proximity sensors are a viable, or even, ideal solution for a considerable number of different applications. However, a certain level of preparation is required in the design process to create a system that benefits from the technology.

6. Indoor localization in smart environments

6.1. Background

6.1.1. Technologies

6.1.2. Smart Environment applications

6.2. AmbiTrack

6.2.1. EvAAL

6.2.2. System Design

6.2.3. Prototype

6.2.4. Evaluation

7. Conclusions and Future Work

This chapter summarizes what a great job you did and what could be done if you could do as a second PHD thesis :)

A. Publications and Talks

The thesis is partially based on the following publications and talks:

A.1. Publications

1. publication 1
2. publication 2
3. ....
4. publication x

A.2. Talks

1. talk 1
2. ...
3. talk n

B. Supervising Activities

The following list summarizes the student bachelor, diploma and master thesis supervised by the author. The results of these works were partially used as an input into the thesis.

B.1. Diploma and Master Thesis

1. Große-Puppendahl, Tobias - Multi-hand Interaction Using Custom Capacitive Proximity Sensors - MSc TU Darmstadt 2012
2. Berghöfer, Yannick - Human-Machine-Interfaces in Automotive Environments using Capacitive Proximity Sensors - MSc TU Darmstadt 2013
3. Krepp, Stefan - Unobtrusive Surface Touch Recognition using Acoustic Tracking - MSc TU Darmstadt 2014

B.2. Bachelor Thesis

1. Fischer, Arthur - Unterstützung von zielbasierter Interaktion durch gestenerkennende Zeigegeräte - BSc TU Darmstadt 2012
2. Majewski, Martin - Visual-aided Selection of Reactive Elements in Intelligent Environments - BSc TU Darmstadt 2012
3. Neumann, Stephan - Automotive interfaces using an interactive armrest - BSc TU Darmstadt 2014

C. Curriculum Vitae

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2010 –	Researcher, Competence Center Interactive Multimedia Appliances, Fraunhofer Institute for Computer Graphics Research, Darmstadt, Germany, Focus: HCI applications in smart environments
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