

Energy-Sensitive Vision-Based Autonomous Tracking and Landing of a UAV

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Abstract

In this paper, we present a robust, vision-based algorithm for autonomous tracking and landing on a moving platform in varying environmental conditions. We use a novel landing marker robust to occlusions to track the moving platform and the YOLOv3-tiny CNN to detect ground-based hazards in an agricultural use case. We perform all computations onboard using an NVIDIA Jetson Nano and analyse the impact on the flight time by profiling the energy consumption of the landing marker detection algorithm and YOLOv3-tiny CNN. Experiments are conducted in Gazebo simulation using an energy modeling tool to measure the energy cost as a function of QoS. Our experiments test the energy efficiency and robustness of our system in various dynamic wind disturbances. We show that the landing marker detection algorithm can be run at the highest QoS with only a marginal energy overhead whereas adapting the QoS level of YOLOv3-tiny CNN results in a considerable power saving for the system as a whole. The power saving is significant for a system executing on a fixed-wing UAV but only marginal if executing on a standard multirotor UAV.

I. INTRODUCTION

Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) are increasingly used for applications such as monitoring, surveillance, transportation of small payloads, and agricultural applications [1], [2]. One of the major constraints of such applications is their limited level of autonomy due to battery limitations. Extending the flying time of a UAV is normally done by having it land in order to replace or charge the battery before continuing the mission. Performing landings autonomously can however be challenging depending on the environment and whether the landing platform is stationary or mobile. Moreover, relying solely on the availability of a Global Positioning System (GPS) signal for autonomous precision landing is not considered safe, since GPS signals can be temporarily lost or even tampered with. As an alternative, in this paper we investigate the use of a novel vision-based autonomous landing system and evaluate its robustness towards environmental conditions such as visual disturbances and wind.

Extension of the flight time can be also achieved by using *energy-sensitive algorithms* that can reduce energy consumption by reducing the Quality of Service (QoS). With this approach, energy-costly computations such as computer vision are adapted by selecting the desired quality of service to match the available energy [3]. By combining energy-sensitive algorithms with autonomous landing capabilities, we aim to increase the total availability of the UAV to perform operations, by extending the flight time and using autonomous recharging when needed.

The main contribution of this paper concerns the experimental study of a robust vision-based algorithm for autonomous tracking and landing in varying environmental conditions. The algorithms are executed on an NVIDIA Jetson Nano companion computer controlling a simulated drone. The vision-based tracking and landing algorithms provide novel capabilities in terms of tolerance to visual disturbance and varying environmental conditions such as wind. Our experiments are based on an agricultural use-case where a multirotor UAV performs visual identification of ground-

58 based hazards while tracking and landing on a moving platform.

59 II. STATE OF THE ART

60 Vision-based autonomous landing on a marker has been extensively
61 studied by many researchers. Key distinctions include whether the marker
62 is on a moving platform, the type of the marker, the algorithms used to
63 detect it, as well as the mounted sensors on-board of the UAV.

64 For stationary platforms, one of the first experiments with vision-based
65 autonomous landing was conducted by Saripalli et al. [4]. Here, a heli-
66 copter with a color camera facing vertically towards the ground would
67 land on an H-shape pattern (similar to ones found on a helipad) using a
68 hierarchical behavior-based control architecture. In physical tests a marker
69 of 122×122 cm size was detected for a maximum altitude of 10 m. A
70 landing marker inspired by a QR code but consisting of three artificial
71 markers is demonstrated by Yuan et al. [5], and was shown to provide a
72 6 –Degree Of Freedom (DOF) pose over an altitude range of 0-20 m. Our
73 work is however focused on the ability to land on moving platforms.

74 Saripalli et al. [6] also demonstrated the use of a Kalman Filter to
75 track a moving platform. However, all the computations were performed
76 offline. Similarly, an ArUco marker was used as a landing marker by
77 Lee et al. [7] to detect a moving platform. The control of the UAV is
78 performed based on the error provided by the vision algorithm but all the
79 computations were performed off-board. Arrar, et al. [8] focus on extending
80 the detection range by using an AprilTag [9] as a landing marker. Again all
81 the computer vision algorithms were also executed off-board. Conversely,
82 a crucial aspect of our application is to perform all the computations
83 on-board, and to evaluate them according to their energy efficiency as
84 a function of QoS.

85 The design of the marker and choice of sensors can facilitate doing the
86 computations onboard. Chen et al. [10] utilized a marker consisting of
87 a circle and rectangles of different colors along with a LiDAR scanning

range finder for height estimation. The marker was detected by performing color segmentation on the incoming image frame. By fusing the height measurement from the LiDAR into the vision measurement, a relative pose of the UAV from the moving platform was obtained. A color segmentation approach was also implemented by Lee et al. [11]. A red rectangle was used as a landing marker while the detection was done by a vertically facing camera with a fish-eye lens. The setup accounted for a successful landing from an altitude of 70 m. In the above two cases an on-board companion computer is used to perform all the computations on the UAV. However, we in this work do not consider a color segmentation approach as a safe option, since for a realistic (outdoor) case it would be difficult, if not impossible, to ensure that the landing marker will be the only object of a specific color in the scene.

The use of a hybrid camera system consisting of a fish-eye IR camera and a stereo camera was demonstrated by Yang et al. [12]. An ArUco marker was used to mark the moving platform and a convolutional neural network (CNN) YOLO v3 was trained specifically for marker detection. A similar approach concerning the detection of a landing marker was demonstrated by Nguyen et al. [13] in which a specific CNN was trained to detect a landing marker pattern: successful detection of a $1\text{ m} \times 1\text{ m}$ marker size was demonstrated from a distance of 50 m. An AprilTag marker was used as a landing marker by Kyritsis et al. [14]. The identification of the AprilTag marker was performed through Graphics Processing Unit (GPU). In the above three cases, the researchers have utilized the companion's computer GPU to detect the landing marker. In the agricultural use-case addressed in this paper, the GPU is however needed for a CNN to detect ground hazards, and since the GPU cannot normally run different algorithms simultaneously, the CPU should be used for detecting the landing marker. By doing so, a different QoS can be chosen for each algorithm.

To account for the energy modeling of computer vision algorithms, we considered the work previously carried by Nardi et al. [15]. The au-

thors present SLAMBench, a framework that investigates Simultaneous Localisation and Mapping (SLAM) algorithms configuration alternatives for energy efficiency. In our work, we use `powprofiler`, a generic energy modeling tool [16]. This tool enables measuring the energy impact of different configurations of the ROS-based system implementing the agricultural use-case. The `powprofiler` tool is part of the TeamPlay toolchain, which aims to make tradeoffs between energy and other non-functional properties accessible to the developer. In this paper, we present extensions to `powprofiler` that facilitates the initial exploration of the energy usage of complex ROS-based systems.

Other approaches to energy modeling, such as the mission-based energy models studied by Sadrpour et al. [17], [18], focus mostly on ground-based autonomous vehicles instead of the UAVs. Morales et al. [19] extensively investigated the relation between motion and energy in a robot, but do not account for the energy required for computation. Energy modeling of mobile robots as carried by Mei et al. [20]–[22] has provided the ground for the concept of modeling computation for energy-sensitive algorithm design. Indeed, the approach employed in this paper has evolved from an energy-efficient motion planning technique in [22], a design strategy that allows accounting for motion and computations separately in [21], to an energy-efficient deployment algorithm in [20].

The battery in our system is considered in the context of a drone being able to perform its mission while accounting for the eventuality of a battery shortage; to this end, we investigated the approach presented by Berenz et al. [23], where a battery management mission-based dynamic recharge approach is presented. A set of recharge stations are used, along with self-docking capable robots. Our approach similarly allows landing on a moving platform for recharging, which is in the context of this paper is considered in the proximity of the drone. The actual landing is handled by the proposed algorithm, and we also account for the energy required for executing this algorithm during landing.

150 Taking into account varying environmental conditions and unpredictable
 151 movements of the platform to land on is relevant for the use of landing
 152 in outdoor, mobile scenarios. Regarding wind conditions, an AprilTag
 153 marker was used by Feng et al. [24] with a constant wind speed of 5 m/s
 154 as an external disturbance in a simulation environment. Nevertheless, a
 155 fluctuation in the wind's magnitude and direction is likely to happen in
 156 realistic cases. Concerning estimation of the moving platform's position
 157 and velocity, similar to our approach a Kalman Filter or Extended Kalman
 158 Filter (EKF) has been used for the estimation [8], [24], [25], whereas
 159 Yang et al. [12] constructed a velocity observer algorithm by calculating
 160 the actual moving distance of the moving platform over a period of time.

161 III. ENERGY-SENSITIVE MISSION DEPLOYMENT

162 A. Overall approach

163 The energy-sensitive design is a mission-oriented concept that adjusts
 164 the computations to the mission being performed while taking into account
 165 energy requirements, including energy consumed by actuation, computa-
 166 tion, and the presence of a limited power source. Specifically, in our agri-
 167 cultural use-case, the concept is employed to profile and eventually adapt
 168 the computationally heavy algorithms performing autonomous tracking,
 169 landing, and hazard detection. This adaptation enables energy-sensitivity,
 170 in the sense that QoS parameters can be modified to enable the mission
 171 to be completed at the highest possible QoS level that does not exceed
 172 the available energy budget. Tradeoffs between QoS parameters can be
 173 performed by an end-user, i.e., trading the robustness towards wind during
 174 landing for precision of hazard detection.

175 The energy-sensitive design using `powprofiler` relies on empirical
 176 experiments to measure the actual power consumption on the robot hard-
 177 ware [16]. In this paper, we focus on the initial profiling using of energy
 178 usage of the companion computer, which from the point of view of energy
 179 consumption can be studied independently from the specific drone it is

180 mounted in.

181 First, the developer specifies the maximum and minimum QoS level
 182 for each algorithm running on the system. During mission execution the
 183 levels are statically defined: automatic adaptation during different phases
 184 of the mission is currently being investigated and is considered future
 185 work. Then, the developer executes the system to empirically determine
 186 the power consumption. This can be done in two different ways:

187 1) Automatically using `powprofiler` to control the experiment execu-
 188 tion [16]. For a ROS-based system, we assume that the algorithms
 189 are wrapped as ROS nodes, and we require the developer to specify
 190 the QoS parameters using a ROS configuration. We use a config-
 191 uration file in a key-value pair format which is then interpreted by
 192 `powprofiler`, enabling `powprofiler` to iterate through all possible
 193 combinations and empirically sample the energy consumption of each
 194 combination of QoS parameters. Once all combinations have been
 195 iterated through, `powprofiler` automatically combines the energy
 196 consumption data into a complete model.

197 2) Semi-automatically using `powprofiler` to sample energy and com-
 198 bine the results of all experiments, but allowing the developer to
 199 control all aspects of the experiment execution. This approach is new
 200 and is described in more detail later in this section. Basically, a ROS
 201 node interfaces to `powprofiler` and is used by the developer to
 202 start/stop sampling in a given configuration. Once all experiments
 203 have been completed, `powprofiler` is invoked by the developer to
 204 combine the energy consumption data into a complete model.

205 Regardless of the approach, `powprofiler` builds a single model map-
 206 ping QoS to total system energy consumption. Coarse-grained sampling
 207 is employed to reduce the number of experiments, and missing values are
 208 automatically inferred from the others by the means of a multivariate linear
 209 interpolation.

210 In the context of this paper, sampling experiments are iterated in a

211 simulated environment with different configurations. For example, the au-
 212 tonomous tracking allows changing the tracking algorithm QoS in terms
 213 of frequency, the landing algorithm in terms of frequency, and hazard
 214 detection QoS in terms of frequency.

215 *B. Semi-automatic energy profiling*

216 A ROS node has been developed for the purposes of the semi-automatic
 217 approach used in this paper. This node allows automatic generation of the
 218 basic energy models that map time to the instantaneous power consump-
 219 tion. To activate this functionality, the developer simply publishes on a
 220 ROS topic to start the model generation, with `powprofiler` accounting
 221 for the invocation of an asynchronous thread which collects data from the
 222 energy sensors. Similarly, the developer publishes on another ROS topic
 223 to stop the model generation, while `powprofiler` finalizes collecting
 224 data from sensors, builds the basic energy model, and stores it for later
 225 processing.

226 Once all the basic energy models for the desired QoS ranges have been
 227 collected, QoS ranges are specified in a configuration file: the developer
 228 defines what QoS configuration corresponds to which basic model (instan-
 229 tantaneous power consumption as a function of time). Running `powprofiler`
 230 using this configuration file as a parameter generates the complete model
 231 that maps QoS to energy consumption.

232 IV. VISION-BASED AUTONOMOUS TRACKING AND LANDING

233 The vision-based autonomous tracking and landing can be split into
 234 four main sub-problems: detection of the moving platform, navigation,
 235 guidance, and control of the UAV. From an energy-sensitive design ap-
 236 proach, our focus is on the computer vision algorithms used to detect the
 237 moving platform and the parameterization by a QoS influencing energy
 238 consumption and performance, as described in Section IV-A. Furthermore,
 239 the navigation block is designed to increase the robustness and overall
 240 performance of the system, as described in Section IV-B. Last, a model

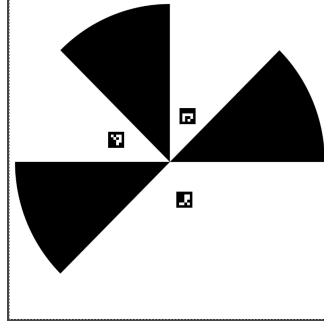


Fig. 1. The landing marker

of dynamically changing wind disturbances is analysed and described in Section IV-C, allowing the system to be tested in a more realistic simulation.

A. Detection of the moving platform

To mark the moving platform a special pattern is constructed, consisting of an n-fold marker [26] along with three ArUco markers [27] with different ids. This pattern will be referred to as the *landing marker* and can be seen in Figure 1. The n-fold marker is primarily used to detect the moving platform from a high altitude, while the ArUco markers are used as extra landmarks in case the marker is partially visible in the image frame.

To evaluate the computer vision algorithm for detecting the landing marker, real images of 640×480 pixel size were captured with an Intel RealSense D435 camera. In the Gazebo simulation a color camera with the same distortion coefficients as the Intel camera is used to output a 640×480 pixel image at 10 frames per second (fps).

To extract the pixel coordinates of the tip of the n-fold marker, a kernel size of 13×13 pixels consisting of a real and imaginary part is created. For every pixel in the image, a convolution is performed with this kernel and the magnitude of the convolution is stored. The pixel with the highest magnitude is considered as a candidate tip of the n-fold marker. For that

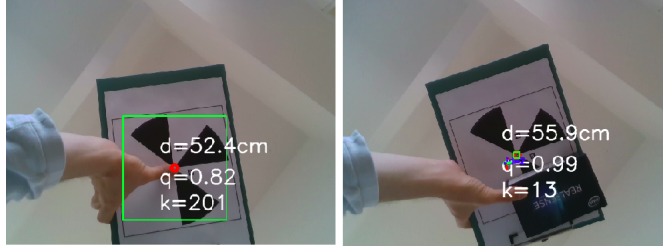


Fig. 2. Detection of the landing marker under different occlusions. On the left an occlusion on the tip of the n-fold marker and on the right an occlusion on a sector of the n-fold marker.

261 candidate pixel only, an estimation of the orientation/phase of the marker
 262 is made and an overall normalized quality score between 0.0 and 1.0 is
 263 calculated. If the score is above a desired threshold value then the pixel is
 264 accepted as the tip of the n-fold marker. If an n-fold marker is detected,
 265 the result will be the pixel coordinates of the tip of the n-fold marker along
 266 with its orientation/phase.

267 Since a convolution is a computationally expensive process, an increase
 268 in the kernel size would also increase the computation time and therefore
 269 the energy consumption. However, a higher computation time and energy
 270 consumption is preferred over a non-detection of the n-fold marker. To
 271 balance between energy consumption and effective marker detection, an
 272 adaptive kernel selection function is created to ensure the selection of a
 273 proper kernel size based on a threshold quality score value. In Figure 2
 274 an Intel RealSense D435 Depth camera is used to capture the image and
 275 measure also the distance d from the n-fold marker. Based on a desired
 276 quality q , the proper kernel size k is selected. It is seen that an occlusion on
 277 the tip of the n-fold marker results in a significant increase in the selected
 278 kernel size.

279 To detect the ArUco markers the standard OpenCV library is used and
 280 if any ArUco markers are detected, their central pixel coordinates and pose
 281 are stored.

282 The next step is to convert these pixel coordinates into a real-world

relative position $[X, Y, Z]$ according to a local coordinate frame. The origin of the local coordinate frame $[0, 0, 0]$ is defined as the center of the landing marker and alignment according to the North, East, Down (*NED*) frame. The available sensor measurements and sensor fusion algorithms from the flight controller are used in this process. The PX4 flight controller outputs through mavlink messages the altitude and the attitude of the UAV (roll, pitch, yaw). For the Z component, the altitude of the UAV from the flight controller's EKF is used. To obtain the X, Y components, an algorithm is constructed to convert pixel coordinates into real world X, Y coordinates in meters:

- 1) The pose of the camera in UAV's *BODY* frame is calculated by utilizing the roll and pitch IMU data.
- 2) The normalized coordinates of the four image corners, according to the camera's horizontal, vertical field of view and the camera's pose from step 1, are calculated.
- 3) The coordinates of the four image corners (in meters), with respect to the UAV's *BODY* frame, are determined by using the normalised coordinates from step 2 along with the UAV's altitude. The result is a projection plane of the image corners on the ground.
- 4) The perspective homography matrix is calculated between the two planes, the image plane and the world plane from step 3.
- 5) The homography matrix from step 4 is used to convert the pixel coordinates of the tip of the n -fold marker from the image plane, into coordinates (in meters) in the UAV's *BODY* frame.
- 6) The coordinates from step 5 are in respect to the UAV's *BODY* frame. To convert them into the UAV's *NED* frame, the yaw IMU data from the flight controller is used.
- 7) The coordinates from step 6, are converted from UAV's *NED* frame into the landing site's local coordinate frame.
- 8) For ArUco markers only, an offset vector in the x, y axis is added depending on the distance of each ArUco marker from the tip of the

314 n-fold marker. It is assumed that this vector is prior known.

315 The mean measurements from the detected n-fold and/or ArUco markers
316 are used to determine the position and orientation of the landing marker.

317 The result is an $[X, Y, Z]$ relative position of the UAV from the moving
318 platform along with the yaw orientation of the landing marker.

319 *B. Navigation*

320 The purpose of the navigation block is to provide an accurate prediction
321 for the state of the UAV at any given time. This is important because it
322 will allow us to process images at different fps according to a desired
323 QoS. Furthermore, the overall robustness of the system is increased in
324 case the moving platform is not detected in every image frame. A velocity
325 estimator for the moving platform will also be implemented as a part of
326 the navigation block.

327 The variables of interest that describe the state of the UAV for this
328 project are:

- 329 • The relative position of the UAV from the moving platform, x_k ,
330 calculated as described in Section IV-A.
- 331 • The attitude of the UAV $[roll, pitch, yaw]$, obtained from the flight
332 controller's IMUs.
- 333 • the velocity of the UAV, \dot{x}_k , in *NED* frame, obtained from the flight
334 controller's EKF.
- 335 • the acceleration of the UAV, \ddot{x}_k , in *NED* frame, obtained either from
336 the flight controller's EKF or by differentiating the velocities.

337 The altitude, attitude, velocity and acceleration variables of the UAV's
338 state are obtained from the flight controller's onboard sensors and already
339 implemented sensor fusion algorithms (EKF). To fuse those state variables
340 with the obtained position measurements from Section IV-A, a Kalman
341 Filter is implemented. The measurements from the flight controller are
342 used in the prediction step.

I think we might have used a bad name for this value. It currently overlaps with the estimated position of the UAV relative to the landing target.

These values are also described on the next page.

Prediction Step:

$$\hat{x}_k = F \cdot \hat{x}_{k-1} + G_k \cdot u_k \quad (1)$$

$$P_k = F \cdot P_{k-1} \cdot F^\top + Q_k \quad (2)$$

where $\hat{x}_k \in \mathbb{R}^2$ is the position of the UAV, and F is a 2 by 2 identity matrix. The input matrix and the associated control input is given by:

$$G_k = \begin{bmatrix} \Delta t_k & 0 & \frac{\Delta t_k^2}{2} & 0 & -\Delta t_k & 0 \\ 0 & \Delta t_k & 0 & \frac{\Delta t_k^2}{2} & 0 & -\Delta t_k \end{bmatrix},$$

$$u_k = \begin{bmatrix} \dot{x}_k & \ddot{x}_k & \dot{x}_k^l \end{bmatrix}^\top$$

343 The initial covariance matrix P_0 is a 2 by 2 unit matrix and the process
344 noise Q_k is a 2 by 2 unit matrix multiplied with $\Delta t_k \cdot \sigma_{\text{IMU}}^2$.

Is this the right word?

- 345 • x_k is the position of the UAV in the landing site's local coordinate
346 system (aligned with NED frame),
- 347 • Δt_k is the time interval the PX4's EKF outputs the v_x, v_y data, usually
348 around 33ms,
- 349 • \dot{x}_k is the linear velocity of the UAV in NED frame, estimated from
350 the PX4's EKF,
- 351 • \ddot{x}_k is the linear acceleration of the UAV in NED frame, estimated on
352 the companion computer from differentiating the velocities.
- 353 • \dot{x}_k^l is the linear velocity of the moving platform in NED frame,
354 estimated from the velocity estimator for the moving platform,
- 355 • σ_{IMU}^2 is the variance of the velocities based estimated by the PX4's
356 EKF.

357 In the correction step the observed measurements from the downward
358 looking camera will be used to correct and update the predicted X, Y
359 position of the UAV. However due to the computation time needed to
360 detect the landing marker, that incoming measurement will be delayed by
361 some time dt_{obs} . During that time dt_{obs} the UAV will be relocated by an
362 interval $(dx_{\text{obs}}, dy_{\text{obs}})$. To compensate that extra displacement, the interval
363 $(dx_{\text{obs}}, dy_{\text{obs}})$ is calculated and added to the observed measurements.

Correction step:

$$e_k = z_k - H_k \cdot \hat{x}_k \quad (3)$$

$$S_k = H_k \cdot P_k \cdot H_k^\top + R_k \quad (4)$$

$$K_k = P_k \cdot H_k^\top \cdot S_k^{-1} \quad (5)$$

$$\hat{x}_k = \hat{x}_k + K_k \cdot e_k \quad (6)$$

$$P_k = (I - K_k \cdot H_k) \cdot P_k \quad (7)$$

where:

$$z_k = \begin{bmatrix} x_{obs} + dx_{obs} \\ y_{obs} + dy_{obs} \end{bmatrix}, \quad H_k = \begin{bmatrix} 1 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 \end{bmatrix}, \quad R_k = \begin{bmatrix} 1 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 \end{bmatrix} \cdot \sigma_{obs}^2$$

$$dx_{obs} = vx_{mean_{obs}} \cdot dt_{obs}, \quad dy_{obs} = vy_{mean_{obs}} \cdot dt_{obs}$$

364 A velocity estimator is also constructed to determine the magnitude
 365 and direction of the moving platform's velocity vector. The magnitude is
 366 calculated by differentiating two sequential X , Y positions of the tractor,
 367 obtained by detecting the n-fold marker from the vertically facing camera
 368 as explained in section IV-A and taking into consideration the UAV's
 369 NED velocities according to the PX4's EKF. A low-pass filter is used to
 370 provide a smooth estimation of the velocity's magnitude by filtering out
 371 high frequency noise. High frequency noise can be caused by oscillations
 372 of the UAV along with a fast update rate in the landing marker detection
 373 algorithm.

374 In the agricultural use-case the moving platform is likely to change its
 375 direction up to 180 degrees. Furthermore, it is assumed that the moving
 376 platform is a nonholonomic system, like a tractor. To compensate for
 377 sudden turns, the moving platform's yaw orientation will be taken into
 378 account. Based on the velocity's magnitude and moving platform's yaw
 379 orientation, the moving platform's velocity (\dot{x}_k^l) in NED frame can be
 380 obtained.

381 C. Wind Disturbances

382 The exact and accurate estimation of the applied wind forces on a body
 383 is a complex matter studied by the field of fluid dynamics. We use a
 384 simplified approach, as follows. We assume that the wind will be applied
 385 on an area of 0.09 m^2 . Such an area is emulating a UAV with extra payload
 386 attached on its frame. Two different wind speeds of 8 m/s and 12 m/s will
 387 be used to calculate the applied wind forces on that area. The wind forces
 388 are considered to be applied on the center of gravity of the UAV with
 389 direction parallel to the ground.

390 The magnitude of the applied force, corresponding to a certain wind
 391 speed is calculated by the following equations [28], [29]:

$$\begin{aligned} F &= p_d \cdot A \\ p_d &= \frac{\rho \cdot v^2}{2} \end{aligned} \quad (8)$$

392 where F is the force, p_d is the dynamic pressure, A is the area of the
 393 applied pressure, ρ is the density of the air (around 1.2 kg/m^3), v is the
 394 wind velocity in m/s .

395 By solving the above equations the applied force on the UAV is found to
 396 be 3.45 N for an 8 m/s wind speed, and 7.76 N for a 12 m/s wind speed.
 397 The wind forces will be applied on the UAV in Gazebo simulation, to test
 398 the performance of the whole system. This will be done by constructing
 399 a program that will apply the wind forces on the virtual UAV.

400 To simulate a wind pattern the wind direction and magnitude must be
 401 defined. The wind direction is assumed to remain the same for the whole
 402 duration of the experiments. That direction vector is defined as $[0.8, 0.2]$
 403 according to Gazebo's (x, y) axes. The magnitude of the wind is calculated
 404 as follows:

- 405 • An initial wind force of either 3.45 N or 7.76 N is chosen.
- 406 • An update cycle of 5.5 s is chosen between two different applied
 407 forces.

408 • A random float number between 0.9 and 1.2 is chosen at every update
 409 cycle. This number is defined as *Random_noise*.

410 • The applied wind force is calculated as:

$$412 \quad force_x = -x_{norm} * force * Random_noise$$

$$413 \quad force_y = -y_{norm} * force * Random_noise$$

414
 415 where $x_{norm} = 0.8$, $y_{norm} = 0.2$

416 For an altitude of 6.0 m and above, $force = force_{init}$ where $force_{init}$
 417 is either 3.45 N or 7.76 N

418 • For a UAV altitude of 6.0 m and below, the wind force decreases as:

$$419 \quad force = force_{init} * (altitude/6.0)$$

420 • For a UAV altitude of 3 m and below, $force = 0.5N$.

421 This model is created to simulate different scaling in the wind's magnitude
 422 and will be used for all simulated tests.

423 V. EVALUATION

424 We evaluate our approach in terms of the quality of the overall func-
 425 tionality and the energy efficiency of the algorithms. All algorithms are
 426 executed on an embedded companion computer interfaced to a simulation
 427 running on a standard computer.

428 A. Use-case: agricultural safety

429 We evaluate our approach based on a simulated use-case where a multi-
 430 rotor UAV identifies hazardous objects around a moving platform, and
 431 lands on the moving platform to recharge. No communication link is
 432 considered between the moving platform and the UAV and no GNSS
 433 positioning is assumed to be available. The system can thus be considered
 434 as a fallback for fault-tolerance.

435 Object detection and classification is performed by feeding the input
 436 image from the downward facing camera into a *YOLOv3-tiny* CNN [30]
 437 implemented in ROS [31]. Four different classes are selected: cars, humans,



Fig. 3. On the left, a top view of the Gazebo scene. On the right, a view of the UAV attempting a landing on the moving platform

tractors, and cows. Based on the CNN’s predictions and onboard sensors, the UAV maps the detected objects onto a 2D map.

A simulated field is created in Gazebo with objects placed in random positions and orientations as seen in Figure 3.

Pre-trained weights for *YOLOv3-tiny*, were initially used but the performance on detecting objects from a downward facing camera was not satisfactory. Since a dataset for detecting the above four classes from a top view was not available, we created an artificial dataset based on the Gazebo models. The dataset consists of 1200 images, 300 for each class. We trained the *YOLOv3-tiny* by its default training parameters for 5000 epochs, for an input image size of 416×416 pixels.

B. Experimental setup

All experiments are performed in Gazebo simulation under Ubuntu 18.04 and ROS Melodic on a i7-8550U 1.8GHz (4.0GHz Boost), 8GB DDR4 laptop. The *PX4* Software In The Loop (SITL) Firmware v1.10.2 is used as the flight controller and the *IRIS* quadcopter is used as the UAV platform. A vertically facing RGB camera is placed on the UAV providing a 640×480 pixel image at 10 fps. An *Nvidia Jetson Nano* with Ubuntu 18.04 and ROS Melodic is used as the UAV’s companion computer. All the computer vision, guidance, and control algorithms execute on the *Nvidia Jetson Nano*, similar to how they would be deployed if the Nano was a companion computer in a physical drone. Energy profiling is performed

460 directly on the *Nvidia Jetson Nano* using `powprofiler` as outlined in
 461 Section III-B.

462 Two groups of experiments are conducted. The first group evaluates the
 463 energy consumption and QoS of the *tracking* mode and the second group
 464 evaluates the energy consumption and QoS of the *landing* mode. For both
 465 groups, the experiments start with the tractor moving at a constant speed
 466 of 0.3 m/s, according to a square path similar to that of a plowing tractor,
 467 and the UAV taking off and hovering at an altitude of 25 m. After reaching
 468 the desired altitude, the UAV starts searching for the landing marker in the
 469 image frame. Once the landing marker is detected, the UAV commences
 470 its actions.

471 In *tracking* mode, the UAV will follow the moving platform at a fixed
 472 altitude and use its vertically facing camera to map the environment,
 473 while in *landing* mode the UAV will follow the moving platform and
 474 gradually lower its altitude until it lands on it. Both *tracking* and *landing*
 475 modes are tested under three different cases of no wind disturbances, wind
 476 disturbances of 8 m/s and wind disturbances of 12 m/s according to the
 477 wind model described in Section IV-C.

478 C. Results

479 The first group of experiments was conducted to test the *tracking* mode
 480 and evaluate its energy efficiency and QoS. For the energy evaluation,
 481 eight tests were executed for different fps rates for the *YOLOv3-tiny* ROS
 482 node (4fps, 1fps, 0.5fps, 0.1fps) and the *landing marker* detection ROS
 483 node (10fps, 0.5fps) as seen in Figure 4. For a 4fps update rate for
 484 *YOLOv3-tiny*, a power consumption of 6.30 W is observed while for a
 485 1fps and 0.1fps update rates, the power consumption drops to 4.8 W
 486 and 3.9 W accordingly. By reducing the update rate for *landing marker*
 487 detection, from 10fps to 0.5fps, a further power saving of 0.15 W- 0.19 W
 488 is achieved.

489 For the QoS evaluation, twelve tests were executed for different fps

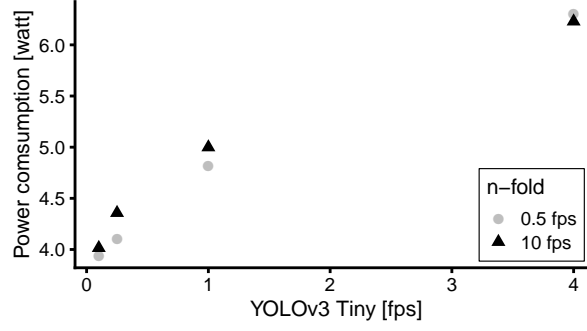


Fig. 4. Power consumption during tracking mode. YOLOv3 Tiny fps: 0=0.1fps, 1=0.5fps, 2=1fps, 3=4fps.

490 rates for the *YOLOv3-tiny* ROS node (4fps, 0.1fps) and for the *landing*
 491 *marker* detection ROS node (10fps, 0.5fps) under three different cases
 492 of wind disturbances. The QoS is determined as the number of correctly
 493 detected objects. An object is considered to be correctly detected if it is
 494 detected within a distance of 2 m from the its actual position and classified
 495 with the correct class. The detection results can be seen in Figure 5. The
 496 best results were obtained for a high fps update rate in *YOLOv3-tiny* and
 497 *landing marker* detection, under no wind disturbances, since 28 out of the
 498 32 objects were detected. Nevertheless, for the same high fps values but
 499 with a wind speed of 12 m/s, only 18 out of 32 objects were correctly
 500 detected.

501 The second group of experiments was conducted to test the *landing*
 502 mode and evaluate its energy efficiency and QoS. For the energy evalua-
 503 tion, eight tests were executed for different fps rates for the *landing marker*
 504 detection ROS node (10fps, 2fps, 1fps, 0.5fps) using two different cases.
 505 In the first case, the kernel size remains fixed at 22×22 pixels and in the
 506 second case an adaptive selection kernel size algorithm is used. The landing
 507 time is also taken under consideration as seen in Figure 6. The largest
 508 difference in the power consumption is 0.14 W and is observed between
 509 the 0.5fps and the 10fps update rate for the *landing marker* detection.

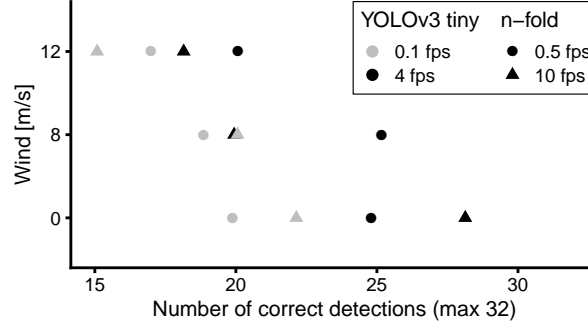


Fig. 5. Number of correctly detected objects under different conditions. Grey color denotes a 0.1fps and black color denotes a 4fps update rate in *YOLOv3-tiny* ROS node. Circles denote a 0.5fps and triangles denote a 10fps update rate in the *landing marker* detection ROS node.

510 However the landing time is reduced by 30 s when using the 10fps update
 511 rate. The adaptive kernel size in most cases outperforms the fixed kernel
 512 size by 0.11 W. Furthermore the adaptive kernel size can compensate for
 513 marker occlusions which will increase the overall robustness of the system.

514 For the QoS evaluation, twelve tests were executed for different fps
 515 rates for the *landing marker* detection ROS node (10fps, 2fps, 1fps, 0.5fps)
 516 under three different cases of wind disturbances. The QoS is determined
 517 as the mean squared error (MSE) between the predicted position of the
 518 moving platform, from the navigation block, and the moving platform's
 519 actual position. Four different altitude bins were used as seen in Figure 7.
 520 A large MSE of around 3 m^2 is observed for an altitude greater than 20 m
 521 for a 0.5fps rate, while an MSE close to zero is observed for an altitude of
 522 less than 5 m for an update rate of 10fps. Furthermore, wind disturbances
 523 do not seem to have an influence on the MSE. We believe the larger MSE
 524 for the y coordinates compared to the x coordinates is caused by a sudden
 525 change of the moving platform's direction on the y axis.

526 D. Discussion

527 The experiments show that both tracking mode and landing mode are
 528 supported by the system, in a simulated environment with a moving plat-

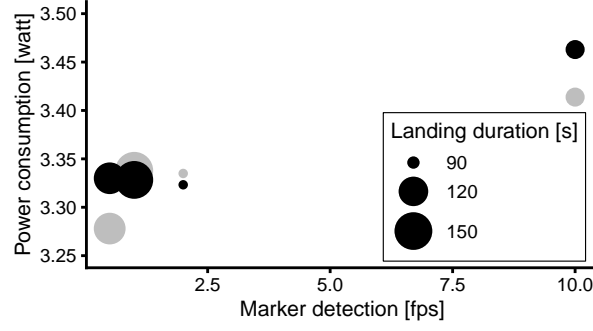


Fig. 6. Power consumption during landing mode. The black circles denote a fixed kernel size while the grey circles denote an adaptive kernel size.

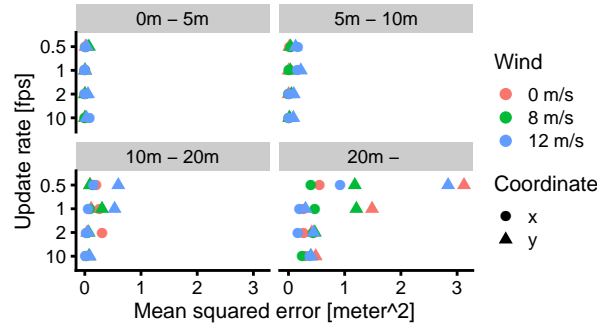


Fig. 7. Position error during landing and how it depends on the marker detection rate at different altitudes and wind disturbances. Circles denote errors in the x direction and triangles errors in the y direction.

form and random wind conditions. Moreover, the performance of both modes is sensitive to the QoS, with a high success rate of both modes at high QoS levels, and significantly lower performance at lower QoS levels.

The potential energy savings from having an energy-sensitive algorithm that can adapt its QoS by changing the fps values for the *YOLOv3-tiny* and *landing marker* ROS nodes should be seen in relation to the total energy consumption of the UAV. As a concrete example, consider a DJI Phantom 4 multirotor and a Sky-Watch Cumulus fixed-wing (the fixed-wing would

need to circle while tracking and would need VTOL capabilities to land, but we nevertheless include it for comparison). We estimate¹ that the Phantom uses roughly 140 W while cruising whereas the Cumulus uses roughly 40 W while cruising. The maximal saving gained from changing the *YOLOv3-tiny* rate is $6.30\text{ W} - 3.9\text{ W} = 2.4\text{ W}$ whereas the maximal saving gained from changing the *landing marker* rate is 0.2 W. For the Cumulus, there is thus a 6.5% potential energy saving, whereas the potential energy saving only is 1.9% for the Phantom. For the Cumulus this saving is considered large enough to significantly impact the flying time of the drone, with a total energy saving of 23.4 kJ. For the Cumulus, the potential saving from adapting the *landing marker* QoS is however only 0.5%.

For the tracking mode, changing the *landing marker* rate provided a minor saving of 0.14 W, but at the cost of increased landing time. Therefore, although the higher-QoS computer vision algorithm is marginally more expensive by 0.14 W, the UAV will overall save energy because of a reduced flight time.

VI. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

In this paper we presented a robust, energy-sensitive, vision-based algorithm for autonomous tracking and landing in varying environmental conditions, by experimentally executing all the necessary algorithms on the *Nvidia Jetson Nano* companion computer. Our experiments show that the proposed computer vision algorithms for detecting the moving platform can be run at the highest QoS level with only a marginal energy overhead, whereas adapting the QoS level of *YOLOv3-tiny* CNN results in a considerable power saving for the system as a whole. This power saving is significant if the system was executing on a fixed-wing UAV, but only marginal if executing on a multirotor UAV.

¹From information on the respective product pages regarding battery capacity and maximal flight time.

In terms of future work, we are interested in automatically adapting the QoS level to the available battery, and in testing this approach on a physical drone.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This work is supported and partly funded by the European Unions Horizon2020 research and innovation program under grant agreement No. 779882 (TeamPlay).

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