

UNIVERSITY OF VERONA

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COMPUTER SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING

Master Thesis

**Towards Process Comprehension of Industrial  
Control Systems: a Framework for Analyzing  
Industrial Systems**

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*“If you spend more on coffee than on IT security, you  
will be hacked. What’s more, you deserve to be hacked”*  
(Richard Clarke)



## **Abstract**

Bla bla bla



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## Introduction

**L**OREM ipsum dolor bla bla bla. Ma dove metto l'abstract? Prova di interlinea che direi posso anche andare bene, ma bisogna poi vedere il tutto come si incastra alla fine, in modo da ottenere un bel risultato alla vista.

### 1.1 Contribution

Lorem Ipsum is simply dummy text of the printing and typesetting industry. Lorem Ipsum has been the industry's standard dummy text ever since the 1500s, when an unknown printer took a galley of type and scrambled it to make a type specimen book. It has survived not only five centuries, but also the leap into electronic typesetting, remaining essentially unchanged. It was popularised in the 1960s with the release of Letraset sheets containing Lorem Ipsum passages, and more recently with desktop publishing software like Aldus PageMaker including versions of Lorem Ipsum.

### 1.2 Outline

The thesis is structured as follows:

**Chapter 2:** provides background on the topics covered in this thesis: Industrial Control Systems (ICSs), Supervisory Control And Data Acquisition (SCADA), Programmable Logic Controllers (PLCs) and other devices, industrial communication protocols.

**Chapter 3:**

**Chapter 4:**

**Chapter 5:**

**Chapter 6:**

**Chapter 7:**

# Chapter 2

## Background

### 2.1 Industrial Control Systems in a nutshell

1 INDUSTRIAL CONTROL SYSTEMS (ICSs) are information systems used to  
2 control industrial processes such as manufacturing, product handling,  
3 production, and distribution [1].

4 ICSs are often found in critical infrastructure facilities such as power  
5 plants, oil and gas refineries, and chemical plants.

6 ICSs are different from traditional IT systems in several key ways. Firstly,  
7 ICSs are designed to control physical processes, whereas IT systems are  
8 designed to process and store data. This means that ICSs have different  
9 requirements for availability, reliability, and performance. Secondly, ICSs  
10 are typically deployed in environments that are harsh and have limited  
11 resources, such as extreme temperatures and limited power. Thirdly, the  
12 protocols and hardware used in ICSs are often proprietary and not widely  
13 used outside of the industrial sector.

14 ICSs are becoming increasingly connected to the internet and other net-  
15 works, which has led to increased concerns about their security. Industrial  
16 systems were not originally designed with security in mind, and many of  
17 them have known vulnerabilities that could be exploited by attackers. Ad-  
18 ditionally, the use of legacy systems and equipment can make it difficult to

19 implement security measures. As a result, ICSs are increasingly seen as a  
20 potential target for cyber attacks, which could have serious consequences  
21 for the safe and reliable operation of critical infrastructure.

22 The increasing connectivity of ICSs and the associated security risks  
23 have led to a growing interest in the field of ICS security. Researchers  
24 and practitioners are working to develop new security technologies, stan-  
25 dards, and best practices to protect ICSs from cyber attacks. This includes  
26 efforts to improve the security of ICS networks and devices, as well as the  
27 development of new monitoring and detection techniques to identify and  
28 respond to cyber attacks.

## 29 **2.2 ICS components**

30 *Industrial control systems* (ICSs) are composed of several different com-  
31 ponents that work together to monitor and control industrial processes.

### 32 **2.2.1 SCADA systems**

33 *Supervisory Control And Data Acquisition (SCADA)* is a system of soft-  
34 ware and hardware elements that allows industrial organizations to [2]:

- 35 • Control industrial processes locally or at remote locations
- 36 • Monitor, gather, and process real-time data
- 37 • Directly interact with devices such as sensors, valves, pumps, mo-  
38 tors, and more through human-machine interface (HMI) software
- 39 • Record events into a log file

40 The SCADA software processes, distributes, and displays the data,  
41 helping operators and other employees analyze the data and make im-  
42 portant decisions.

43 SCADA systems are known for their ability to monitor and control  
44 large-scale industrial processes, and for their ability to operate over long

distances. This makes them well-suited for use in remote locations or for controlling processes that are spread out over a wide area. However, the same features that make SCADA systems so useful also make them vulnerable to cyber attacks.

SCADA systems were not originally designed with security in mind, and many of them have known vulnerabilities that could be exploited by attackers. Additionally, the use of legacy systems and equipment can make it difficult to implement security measures. As a result, SCADA systems are increasingly seen as a potential target for cyber attacks, which could have serious consequences for the safe and reliable operation of critical infrastructure.

To secure SCADA systems, it is important to implement security measures such as network segmentation, secure communication protocols, and access control. Additionally, it is important to monitor SCADA systems for unusual activity and to implement incident response procedures to quickly detect and respond to any security breaches.

### 2.2.1.1 SCADA architecture

According to the *Purdue Enterprise Reference Architecture* (PERA), or simply **Purdue Model**, SCADA architecture consists in **six levels** each representing a functionality [3], as shown in Figure 2.1:

- Level 0 (**Processes**): contains **field devices** (2.2.2), or *sensors*.
- Level 1 (**Intelligent Devices**): includes **local or remote controllers** that sense, monitor and control the physical process, such as **PLCs** (2.2.3) and **RTUs** (2.2.4). Controllers interface directly to the field devices reading data from sensors and sending commands to actuators.
- Level 2 (**Control Systems**): contains computer systems used to supervising and monitoring the physical process: they provide a **Human-Machine Interface** (HMI, 2.2.5) and *Engineering Workstations* (EW) for operator control.



Figure 2.1: SCADA architecture schema

- Level 3 (**Manufacturing/Site Operations**): comprises systems used to manage the production workflow for plant-wide control: they collate informations from the previous levels and store them in Data Historian servers.
- Industrial Demilitarized Zone (DMZ)**: intermediate level that connects the *Operational Technology* (OT) part (levels 0-3) with the *Information Technology* (IT) part of the system (levels 4 and 5). Communication takes place indirectly through services such as *proxy servers* and *remote access servers*, which act as intermediaries between the two environments.
- Level 4 (**Business Logistics Systems**): collect and aggregates data from the Manufacturing/Site Operations level overseeing the IT-related activities to generate **reporting** to the Enterprise System layer. At



this layer we can find application and e-mail servers, and *Enterprise Resource Planning* (ERP) systems.

- Level 5 (**Enterprise Systems**): represents the enterprise network, used for the business-to-business activities and for business-to-client purpose services. At Enterprise Systems level are typical IT services such as mail servers, web servers and all the systems used to manage the ongoing process.

### 2.2.2 Field devices

*Field devices* are the **sensors** and **actuators** that are used to collect data from the process and control it. Examples of field devices include temperature sensors, pressure sensors, valves and pumps.

### 2.2.3 Programmable Logic Controllers

A *Programmable Logic Controller* (PLC) is a **small and specialized industrial computer** having the capability of controlling complex industrial and manufacturing processes [4].

Compared to relay systems and personal computers, PLCs are optimized for control tasks and industrial environments: they are rugged and designed to withdraw harsh conditions such as dust, vibrations, humidity and temperature: they have more reliability than personal computers, which are more prone to crash, and they are more compact and require less maintenance than a relay system. Furthermore, I/O interfaces are already on the controller, so PLCs are easier to expand with additional I/O modules (if in a rack format) to manage more inputs and outputs, without reconfiguring hardware as in relay systems when a reconfiguration occurs.

PLCs are more *user-friendly*: they are not intended (only) for computer programmers, but designed for engineers with a limited knowledge in programming languages: control program can be entered with a simple

and intuitive language based on logic and switching operations instead of a general-purpose programming language (*i.e.* C, C++, ...).

### 2.2.3.1 PLC Architecture

The basic hardware architecture of a PLC consists of these elements [5]:

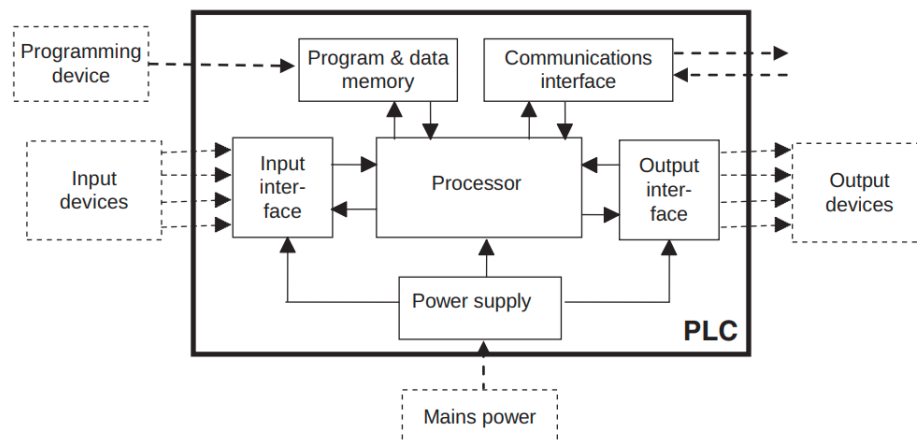


Figure 2.2: PLC architecture

- **Processor unit (CPU):** contains the microprocessor. This unit interpretes the input signals from I/O modules, executes the control program stored in the Memory Unit and sends the output signals to the I/O Modules. The processor unit also sends data to the Communication interface, for the communication with additional devices.
- **Power supply unit:** converts AC voltage to low DC voltage.
- **Programming device:** is used to store the required program into the memory unit.
- **Memory Unit:** consists in RAM memory and ROM memory. RAM memory is used for storing data from inputs, ROM memory for storing operating system, firmware and user program to be executed by the CPU.

- **I/O modules:** provide interface between sensors and final control elements (actuators).
- **Communications interface:** used to send and receive data on a network from/to other PLCs.



Figure 2.3: PLC communication schema

### 2.2.3.2 PLC Programming

Two different programs are executed in a PLC: the **operating system** and the **user program**.

The operating system tasks include executing the user program, managing memory areas and the *process image table* (memory registers where inputs from sensors and outputs for actuators are stored).

The user program needs to be uploaded on the PLC via the programming device and runs on the process image table in *scan cycles*: each scan is made up of three phases [6]:

1. reading inputs from the process images table
2. execution of the control code and computing the physical process evolution

146 3. writing output to the process image table to have an effect on the  
147 physical process. At the end of the cycle, the process image table is  
148 refreshed by the CPU

149 Standard PLCs **programming languages** are basically of two types:  
150 **textuals** and **graphicals**. Textual languages include languages such as  
151 *Instruction List (IL)* and *Structured Text (ST)*, while *Ladder Diagrams (LD)*,  
152 *Function Block Diagram (FBD)* and *Sequential Function Chart (SFC)* belong  
153 to the graphical languages.

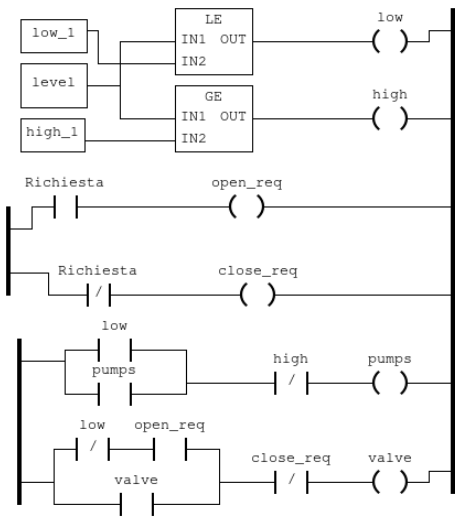
154 Graphical languages are more simple and immediate comparing to the  
155 textual ones and are preferred by programmers because of their features  
156 and simplicity, in particular the **Ladder Logic programming** (see Figure  
157 2.4 for a comparison).

```
PROGRAM PLC1
VAR
    level AT %IW0 : INT;
    Richiesta AT %QX0.2 : BOOL;
    request AT %IW1 : INT;
    pumps AT %QX0.0 : BOOL;
    valve AT %QX0.1 : BOOL;
    low AT %MX0.0 : BOOL;
    high AT %MX0.1 : BOOL;
    open_req AT %MX0.3 : BOOL;
    close_req AT %MX0.4 : BOOL;
    low_1 AT %MW0 : INT := 40;
    high_1 AT %MW1 : INT := 80;
END_VAR
VAR
    LE3_OUT : BOOL;
    GE7_OUT : BOOL;
END_VAR

LE3_OUT := LE(level, low_1);
low := LE3_OUT;
GE7_OUT := GE(level, high_1);
high := GE7_OUT;
open_req := Richiesta;
close_req := NOT(Richiasta);
pumps := NOT(high) AND (low OR pumps);
valve := NOT(close_req) AND (open_req AND NOT(low) OR valve);
END_PROGRAM

CONFIGURATION Config0
RESOURCE Res0 ON PLC
TASK task0(INTERVAL := T#20ms,PRIORITY := 0);
PROGRAM instance0 WITH task0 : PLC1;
END_RESOURCE
END_CONFIGURATION
```

(a) Example of ST programming



(b) Example of Ladder Logic

Figure 2.4: Comparison between ST language and Ladder Logic

158 2.2.3.3 PLC Security

159 PLCs were originally designed to operate as closed systems, not con-  
160 nected and exposed to the outside world via communication networks:

the question of the safety of these systems, therefore, was not a primary aspect. The advent of Internet has brought undoubted advantages, but has introduced problems relating to the safety and protection of PLCs from external attacks and vulnerabilities.

Indeed, a variety of different communication protocols used in ICSs are designed to be efficient in communications, but do not provide any security measure i.e. confidentiality, authentication and data integrity, which makes these protocols vulnerable against many of the IT classic attacks such as *Replay Attack* or *Man in the Middle Attack*.

Countermeasures to enhance security in PLC systems may include [7]:

- protocol modifications implementing **data integrity**, **authentication** and **protection** against *Replay Attacks*
- use of *Intrusion Detection and Prevention Systems* (IDP)
- creation of *Demilitarized Zones* (DMZ) on the network

In addition to this, keeping the process network and Internet separated, limiting the use of USB devices among users to reduce the risks of infections, and using strong account management and maintenance policies are best practices to prevent attacks and threats and to avoid potential damages.

## 2.2.4 Remote Terminal Units

*Remote Terminal Units* (RTUs) are computers with radio interfacing similar to PLCs: they transmit telemetry data to the control center or to the PLCs and use messages from the master supervisory system to control connected objects [8].

The purpose of RTUs is to operate efficiently in remote and isolated locations by utilizing wireless connections. In contrast, PLCs are designed for local use and rely on high-speed wired connections. This key difference

allows RTUs to conserve energy by operating in low-power mode for extended periods using batteries or solar panels. As a result, RTUs consume less energy than PLCs, making them a more sustainable and cost-effective option for remote operations.

Industries that require RTUs often operate in areas without reliable access to the power grid or require monitoring and control substations in remote locations. These include telecommunications, railways, and utilities that manage critical infrastructure such as power grids, pipelines, and water treatment facilities. The advanced technology of RTUs allows these industries to maintain essential services, even in challenging environments or under adverse weather conditions.

### 2.2.5 Human-Machine Interface

The *Human-Machine Interface* (HMI) is the hardware and software interface that operators use to monitor the processes and interact with the ICS.

An HMI shows the operator and authorized users information about system status and history; it also allows them to configure parameters on the ICS such as set points and, send commands and make control decisions [9].

The HMI can be in the form of a physical panel, with buttons and indicator lights, or PC software.

### 2.2.6 Cybersecurity components

*Cybersecurity components*, as seen in section 2.2.3.3 about PLCs security, are used to protect ICSs from cyber threats and vulnerabilities. They can include firewalls, *Intrusion Detection and Prevention systems* (IDP), and *Security Information and Event Management* (SIEM) systems.

## 2.3 Communication Networks

*Communication Networks* are the networks that are used to connect the different components of the ICS and allow them to communicate with each other. Communication networks can include wired and wireless networks, such as Ethernet/IP, Modbus, DNP3 and others.

### 2.3.1 ICS Communication Protocols

As mentioned in Section 2.1, industrial systems differ from classical IT systems in the purpose for which they are designed: controlling physical processes the former, processing and storing data the latter. For this reason, ICSs require different communication protocols than traditional IT systems for real time communications and data transfer.

A wide variety of industrial protocols exists: this is because originally each vendor developed and used its own proprietary protocol. However, these protocols were often incompatible with each other, resulting in devices from different vendors being unable to communicate with each other.

To solve this problem, standards were defined with a view to allowing these otherwise incompatible device to intercommunicates.

Among all the various protocols, some have risen to prominence as widely accepted standards. These *de facto* protocols are commonly utilized in industrial systems due to their proven reliability and effectiveness. In the following sections, we will provide a brief overview of some of the most prevalent and widely used protocols in the industry.

#### 2.3.1.1 Modbus

*Modbus* is a serial communication protocol developed by Modicon (now Schneider Electric) in 1979 for use with its PLCs [10] and designed expressly for industrial use: it facilitates interoperability of different devices

connected to the same network (sensors, PLCs, HMIs, ...) and it is also often used to connect RTUs to SCADA acquisition systems.

Modbus is the most widely used communication protocol among industrial systems because it has several advantages:

- simplicity of implementation and debugging
- it moves raw bits and words, letting the individual vendor to represent the data as it prefers
- it is, nowadays, an **open** and *royalty-free* protocol: there is no need to sustain licensing costs for implementation and use by industrial device vendors

Modbus is a **request/response** (or *master/slave*) protocol: this makes it independent of the transport layer used.

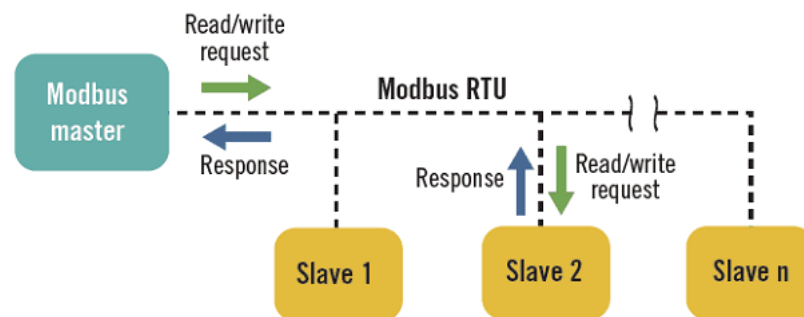


Figure 2.5: Modbus Request/Response schema

In this kind of architecture, a single device (master) can send requests to other devices (slaves), either individually or in broadcast: these slave devices (usually peripherals such as actuators) will respond to the master by providing data or performing the action requested by the master using the Modbus protocol. Slave devices cannot generate requests to the master [11].



259 There are several variants of Modbus, of which the most popular and  
260 widely used are Modbus RTU (used in serial port connections) and Mod-  
261 bus TCP (which instead uses TCP/IP as the transport layer). Modbus TCP  
262 embeds a standard Modbus frame in a TCP frame (see Figure 2.6): both  
263 masters and slaves listen and receive data via TCP port 502.

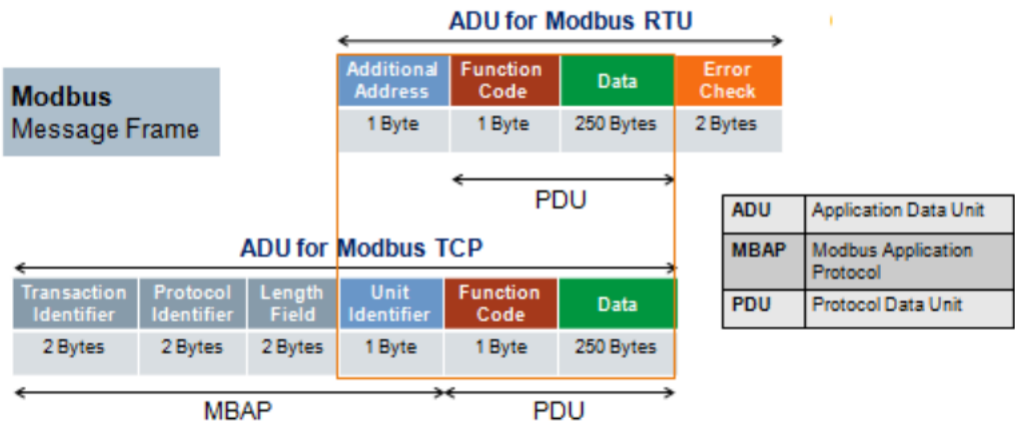


Figure 2.6: Modbus RTU frame and Modbus TCP frame

264 **Modbus registers** Modbus provides four object types, which map the  
265 data accessed by master and slave to the PLC memory:

- 266 • *Coil*: binary type, read/write accessible by both masters and slaves
- 267 • *Discrete Input*: binary type, accessible in read-only mode by masters  
268 and in read/write mode by slaves
- 269 • *Analog Input*: 16 bits in size (word), are accessible in read-only mode  
270 by masters and in read/write mode by slaves
- 271 • *Holding Register*: 16 bits in size (word), accessible in read/write mode  
272 by both masters and slaves. Holding Registers are the most com-  
273 monly used registers for output and as general memory registers.

274 **Modbus Function Codes** *Modbus Function Codes* are specific codes used  
275 by the Modbus master within a request frame (see Figure 2.6) to tell the

276 Modbus slave device which register type to access and which action to  
277 perform on it.

278 Two types of Function Codes exists: for data access and for diagnostic  
279 Function Codes list for data access are listed in Table 2.1:

Function Code	Description
FC01	Read Coils
FC02	Read Discrete Input
FC03	Read Holding Registers
FC04	Read Analog Input Registers
FC05	Write/Force Single Coil
FC06	Write/Force Single Holding Register
FC15	Write/Force Multiple Coils
FC16	Write/Force Multiple Holding Registers

*Table 2.1: Modbus Function Codes list*

280 **Modbus Security Issues** Despite its simplicity and widespread use, the  
281 Modbus protocol does not have any security feature, which exposes it to  
282 vulnerabilities and attacks.

283 Data in Modbus are transmitted unencrypted (*lack of confidentiality*),  
284 with no data integrity controls (*lack of integrity*) and authentication checks  
285 (*lack of authentication*), in addition to the *lack of session*. Hence, the protocol  
286 is vulnerable to a variety of attacks, such as Denial of Services (DoS), buffer  
287 overflows and reconnaissance activities.

288 The easiest attack to bring to the Modbus protocol, however, is **packet**  
289 **sniffing**: since, as mentioned earlier, network traffic is unencrypted and  
290 the data transmitted is in cleartext, it is sufficient to use a packet sniffer to  
291 capture the network traffic, read the packets and thus gather informations  
292 about the system such as ip addresses, function codes of requests and to  
293 modify the operation of the devices.



Figure 2.7: Example of packet sniffing on the Modbus protocol

To make the Modbus protocol more secure, an encapsulated version was developed within the *Transport Security Layer* (TLS) cryptographic protocol, also using mutual authentication. This version of the Modbus protocol is called **Secure Modbus** or **Modbus TLS**. In addition to this, Secure Modbus also includes X.509-type certificates to define permissions and authorisations [12].

### 2.3.1.2 EtherNet/IP

*EtherNet/IP* (where IP stands for *Industrial Protocol*) is an open industrial protocol that allows the *Common Industrial Protocol* (CIP) to run on a typical Ethernet network [13]. It is supported by ODVA [14].

EtherNet/IP uses the major Ethernet standards, such as IEEE 802.3 and the TCP/IP suite, and implements the CIP protocol stack at the upper layers of the OSI stack (see Figure 2.8). It is furthermore compatible with the main Internet standard protocols, such as SNMP, HTTP, FTP and DHCP, and other industrial protocols for data access and exchange such as *Open Platform Communication* (OPC).



Figure 2.8: OSI model for EtherNet/IP stack

**Physical and Data Link layer** The use of the IEEE 802.3 standard allows EtherNet/IP to flexibly adopt different network topologies (star, linear, ring, etc.) over different connections (copper, fibre optic, wireless, etc.), as well as the possibility to choose the speed of network devices. IEEE 802.3 in addition defines at Data Link layer the *Carrier Sense Multiple Access - Collision Detection* (CSMA/CD) protocol, which controls access to the communication channel and prevents collisions.

**Transport layer** At the transport level, EtherNet/IP encapsulates messages from the CIP stack into an Ethernet message, so that messages can be transmitted from one node to another on the network using the TCP/IP protocol. EtherNet/IP uses two forms of messaging, as defined by CIP standard [13][15]:

- **unconnected messaging:** used during the connection establishment phase and for infrequent, low priority, explicit messages. Unconnected messaging uses TCP/IP to transmit messages across the network asking for connection resource each time from the *Unconnected*

Message Manager (UCMM).

- **connected messaging:** used for frequent message transactions or for real-time I/O data transfers. Connection resources are reserved and configured using communications services available via the UCMM.

EtherNet/IP has two types of message connection [13]:

- **explicit messaging:** *point-to-point* connections to facilitate *request-response* transactions between two nodes. These connections use TCP/IP service on port 44818 to transmit messages over Ethernet.
- **implicit messaging:** this kind of connection moves application-specific **real-time I/O data** at regular intervals. It uses multicast *producer-consumer* model in contrast to the traditional *source-destination* model and UDP/IP service (which has lower protocol overhead and smaller packet size than TCP/IP) on port 2222 to transfer data over Ethernet.

**Session, Presentation and Application layer** At the upper layers, Ethernet/IP implements the CIP protocol stack. We will discuss this protocol more in detail in Section 2.3.1.3.

### 2.3.1.3 Common Industrial Protocol (CIP)

The *Common Industrial Protocol* (CIP) is an open industrial automation protocol supported by ODVA. It is a **media independent** (or *transport independent*) protocol using a *producer-consumer* communication model and providing a **unified architecture** throughout the manufacturing enterprise [16][17].

CIP has been adapted in different types of network:

- **EtherNet/IP**, adaptation to *Transmission Control Protocol* (TCP) technologies

- 353 • **ControlNet**, adaptation to *Concurrent Time Domain Multiple Access*  
354 (CTDMA) technologies
- 355 • **DeviceNet**, adaptation to *Controller Area Network* (CAN) technolo-  
356 gies
- 357 • **CompoNet**, adaptation to *Time Division Multiple Access* (TDMA) tech-  
358 nologies

359 **CIP objects** CIP is a *strictly object oriented* protocol at the upper layers:  
360 each object of CIP has **attributes** (data), **services** (commands), **connec-**  
361 **tions**, and **behaviors** (relationship between values and services of attributes)  
362 which are defined in the **CIP object library**. The object library supports  
363 many common automation devices and functions, such as analog and dig-  
364 ital I/O, valves, motion systems, sensors, and actuators. So if the same  
365 object is implemented in two or more devices, it will behave the same way  
366 in each device [18].

367 **Security** [19] In EtherNet/IP implementation, security issues are the same  
368 as in traditional Ethernet, such as network traffic sniffing and spoofing.  
369 The use of the UDP protocol also exposes CIP to transmission route ma-  
370 nipulation attacks using the *Internet Group Management Protocol* (IGMP)  
371 and malicious traffic injection.

372 Regardless of the implementation used, it is recommended that certain  
373 basic measures be implemented on the CIP network to ensure a high level  
374 of security, such as *integrity*, *authentication* and *authorization*.

#### 375 2.3.1.4 Other Protocols

# Chapter 3

## State of the Art

IN TRADITIONAL IT, an attacker aims to understand the behavior of a program through various techniques so as to bring attacks aimed at changing its execution flow, functionalities or bypassing limits imposed by the licensing of such software. These attack techniques include a **preliminary study** of the program: a *static analysis* (i.e., a preliminary analysis of the software without it running) and a *dynamic analysis* (i.e., an analysis performed with the program running).

The result of these two preliminary investigation techniques is a **reverse engineering** of the software, which is useful for identifying any weaknesses or bugs and therefore planning an attack.

In the OT context, however, the concept of *reverse engineering* is also associated with that of *process comprehension*, a term coined by Green et al.'s [20] to describe the understanding of the characteristics of the system and the physical elements of within it, that are responsible for its proper functioning.

Not much knowledge exists in the literature regarding the collection and analysis of information concerning the understanding and operation of an ICS: in Section 3.1 we will look at a quick overview of some of the existing literature on the subject and in the following sections we will focus in particular on one of the papers exposed.

### 3.1 Literature on Process Comprehension

**Keliris and Maniatikos** The first approach presented in this section is by Keliris and Maniatikos [21]: they present a methodology for automating the reverse engineering of ICS binaries based on a *modular framework* (called ICSREF) that can reverse binaries compiled with CODESYS, one of the most popular and widely used PLC compilers, irrespective of the language used.

**Yuan et al.** Yuan et al. [22] propose a *data-driven* approach to discovering cyber-physical systems from data directly: to achieve this goal, they have implemented a framework whose purpose is to identify physical systems and transition logic inference, and to seek to understand the mechanisms underlying these cyber-physical systems, making furthermore predictions concerning their state trajectories based on the discovered models.

**Feng et al.** Feng et al. [23] developed a framework that can generate system *invariant rules* based on machine learning and data mining techniques from ICS operational data log. These invariants are then selected by systems engineers to derive IDS systems from them.

The experiment results on two different testbeds, the *Water Distribution system* (WaDi) and the *Secure Water Treatment system* (SWaT), both located at the iTrust - Center for Research in Cyber Security at the University of Singapore [24], show that under the same false positive rate invariant-based IDSs have a higher efficiency in detecting anomalies than IDS systems based on a residual error-based model.

**Pal et al.** Pal et al. [25] work is somewhat related to Feng et al.'s: this paper describes a data-driven approach to identifying invariants automatically using *association rules mining* [26] with the aim of generate invariants sometimes hidden from the design layout. The study has the same objective of Feng et al.'s and uses too the iTrust SwaT System as testbed.



Currently this technique is limited to only pair wise sensors and actuators: for more accurate invariants generation, the technique adopted must be capable of deriving valid constraints across multiple sensors and actuators.

*Winnicki et al.* Winnicki et al. [27] instead propose a different approach to process comprehension based on the **attacker's perspective** and not limited to mere *Denial of Service* (DoS): their approach is to discover the dynamic behavior of the system, in a semi-automated and process-aware way, through *probing*, that is, slightly perturbing the cyber physical system and observing how it reacts to changes and how it returns to its original state. The difficulty and challenge for the attacker is to perturb the system in such a way as to achieve an observable change, but at the same time avoid this change being seen as a system anomaly by the IDSs.

*Green et al.* Green et al. [20] also adopt an approach based on the attacker's perspective: this approach consists of two practical examples in a *Man in the Middle* (MitM) scenario to obtain, correlate, and understand all the types of information an attacker might need to plan an attack to alter the process while avoiding detection.

The paper shows *step-by-step* how to perform a ICS **reconnaissance**, which is fundamental to process comprehension and thus to the execution of MitM attacks.

*Ceccato et al.* Ceccato et al. [6] propose a methodology based on a *black box dynamic analysis* of an ICS using a reverse engineering tool to derive from the scans performed on the memory registers of the exposed PLCs and network scans an approximate model of the physical process. This model is obtained by inferring statistical properties, business process and system invariants from data logs.

The proposed methodology was tested on a non-trivial case study, using a testbed inspired by an industrial water treatment plant.

456 In the next section I will examine this latest work in more detail,  
457 which will be the basis for my work and thus the subsequent chap-  
458 ters of this thesis.

## 459 3.2 Ceccato et al.'s methodology for analyzing water- 460 tank systems

461 As mentioned earlier, the paper proposes a methodology based on a  
462 black box dynamic analysis of an ICS by identifying potential PLCs on the  
463 network and scanning the memory registers of the identified controllers  
464 to obtain an approximate model of the controlled physical process.

465 The first objective of this black box analysis is to associate the various  
466 memory registers of the target PLCs with a correspondence to the basic  
467 concepts of an ICS such as sensors (otherwise known as measurements),  
468 actuators, setpoints (range of values of a physical variable), network com-  
469 munications, and so on.

470 This is performed by analyzing the different types of memory registers as-  
471 sociated with the Modbus protocol and trying to figure out what type of  
472 data they may contain.

473 The second objective is to put in relation the runtime evolution of these  
474 basic concepts.

475 To achieve this, Ceccato et al. developed a prototype tool [28] that per-  
476 forms reverse engineering of the physical system through four phases:

- 477 1. **scanning of the system and data pre-processing:** data gathering is  
478 performed to generate the data logs of PLCs registers
- 479 2. **graphs and statistical analysis:** provides information about the mem-  
480 ory registers using graphs and statistical data derived from the gath-  
481 ered data
- 482 3. **invariants inference and analysis:** generates system invariants and  
483 allows user to view invariants related to a given sensor or actuator

4. **business process mining and analysis:** reconstructs, from event logs, the business process that shows how process is carried out

In Figure 3.1 we have a schematic representation of the workflow related to this work. We will cover all these phases in detail in the next sections of this chapter.

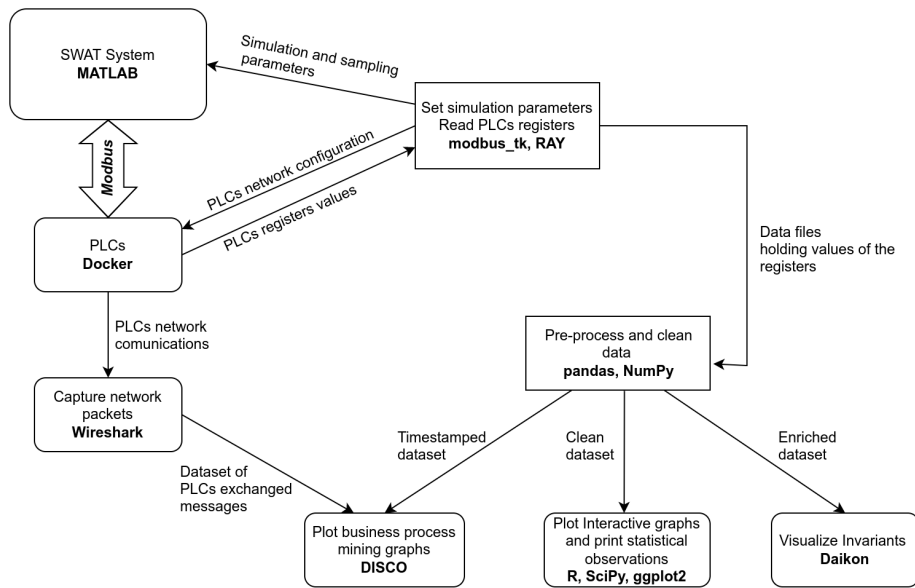


Figure 3.1: Overview

### 3.2.1 Testbed

Before describing the various phases of the methodology, let's take a look at the testbed on which this methodology will be tested. The testbed used to test this methodology is a (very) simplified version of the iTrust SWaT system [29] implemented by Lanotte et al. [30]: in Figure 3.2 we can see a graphical representation of the testbed. This simplified version consists of three stages, each controlled by a dedicated PLC:

**Stage 1** At the first stage, a **tank** with a capacity of 80 gallons (identified by the code T-201) is filled with raw water by the P-101 pump: the

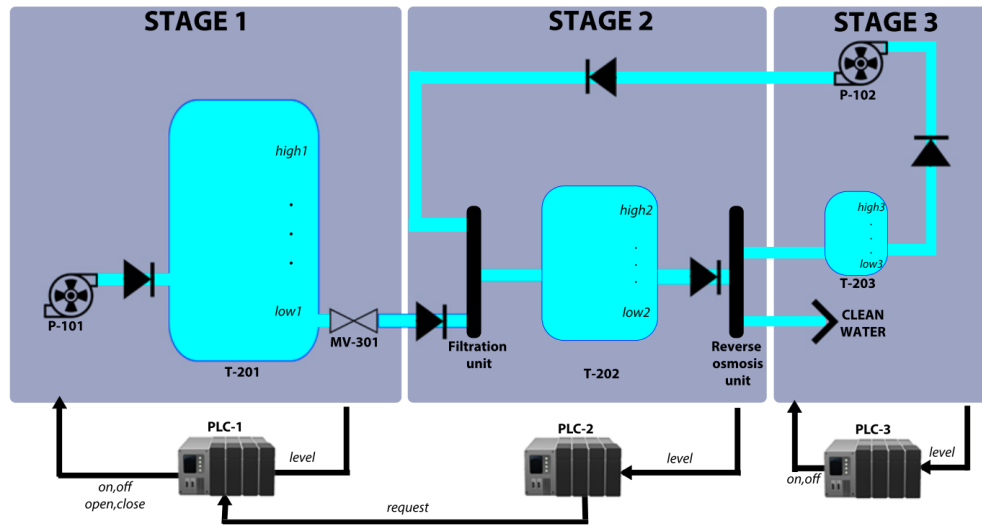


Figure 3.2: The simplified SWaT system used for running Ceccato et al. methodology

508 MV-301 valve (where MV stands for *motorized valve*), also connected  
 509 to the T-201 tank, flushes out the water collected in the tank to send  
 500 it to the second stage, first to the *filtration unit* (here not identified by  
 501 any sensor) and from there to a **second tank**, identified by the code  
 502 T-202 and with a capacity of 20 gallons.

503 **Stage 2** At the second stage, water contained in T-202 flows into the *reverse*  
 504 *osmosis unit* (RO, which in this case also acts as a valve, extracting wa-  
 505 ter continuously: however, it is not identified as a pump) to reduce  
 506 organic impurities in the same water. The water then flows from the  
 507 RO unit to the third and last stage.

508 **Stage 3** At the third stage, the water from the RO unit is divided according  
 509 to whether standards are met: if the water is clean it will be fed into  
 510 the distribution system, otherwise it will go to a *backwash tank*, iden-  
 511 tified by code T-203 and a capacity of one gallon. The water in this  
 512 tank will then be pumped back to the stage 2 *filtration unit* through  
 513 pump P-102.

514 As mentioned, each stage corresponds to a PLC that controls it, PLC1,

515 PLC2 and PLC3, respectively. Let us briefly see the behavior of each of  
516 them:

517 **PLC1** PLC1 checks the level of tank T-201 distinguishing three cases:

- 518 • if T-201 reaches the *low setpoint low1* (hardcoded in memory reg-  
519 isters), pump **P-101 is opened** and valve **MV-301 is closed**, so  
520 that the tank can be filled
- 521 • if T-201 reaches *high setpoint high1* (also hardcoded in the mem-  
522 ory registers), pump **P-101 is closed**
- 523 • in intermediate cases, **PLC1 waits for request from PLC2** to  
524 open/close valve MV-301: if a request to open the valve MV-  
525 301 arrives, water will flow from T-201 to T-202, otherwise the  
526 valve is closed. In both situations, pump P-101 remains closed

527 **PLC2** PLC2 monitors the level of tank T-202, behaving accordingly de-  
528 pending on the level of water in it. Here again there are three cases  
529 to consider:

- 530 • if the water level reaches the *low setpoint low2* (also hardcoded  
531 in the memory registers), PLC2 sends a request to PLC1 via a  
532 Modbus channel to **open valve MV-301** in order to flow water  
533 from tank T-201 to tank T-202. The transmission channel is im-  
534 plemented by copying a boolean value from a memory register  
535 of PLC2 to a corresponding register of PLC1
- 536 • if the water level reaches the *high setpoint high2* instead (hard-  
537 coded in the memory registers as the previous setpoints), PLC2  
538 sends PLC1 a **close request** for valve MV-301
- 539 • In intermediate cases, the valve remains open (closed) while the  
540 tank is filling (emptying)

541 **PLC3** PLC3 monitors the level of the T-203 backwash tank, behaving ac-  
542 cordingly. Here there are only two cases to consider: if the tank

reaches the *low setpoint low3*, pump **P103 is set to off**, so that the backwash tank can be filled: otherwise, if the *high setpoint high3* is reached, pump **P103 is opened** and the entire content of the backwash tank pumped back to the filter unit of T-202.

### 3.2.2 Scanning of the System and Data Pre-processing

**Scanning tool** The Ceccato et al. scanning tool is closely derived from a project I did [31] for the "Network Security" and "Cyber Security for IoT" courses taught by Professors Massimo Merro and Mariano Ceccato, respectively, in the 2020/21 academic year. The original project involved, in its first part, the recognition within a network of potential PLCs listening on the standard Modbus TCP port 502 using the Nmap module for Python, obtaining the corresponding IP addresses: then a (sequential) scan of a given range of the memory registers of the found PLCs was performed to collect the register data. The data thus collected were saved to a file in *JavaScript Object Notation* (JSON) format for later use in the second part of my project.

The scanning tool by Ceccato et. al works in a similar way, but extends what I originally did by trying to discover other ports on which the Modbus protocol might be listening (since in many realities Modbus runs on different ports than the standard one, according to the concept of *security by obscurity*) and, most importantly, by **parallelizing and distributing the scan** of PLC memory registers through the Ray module [32], specifying moreover the desired granularity of the capture. An example of raw data capture can be seen at Listing 3.1:

```
"127.0.0.1/8502/2022-05-03 12_10_00.591": {
  "DiscreteInputRegisters": {"%IX0.0": "0"},
  "InputRegisters": {"%IW0": "53"},
  "HoldingOutputRegisters": {"%QW0": "0"},
  "MemoryRegisters": {"%MW0": "40", "%MW1": "80"},
  "Coils": {"%QX0.0": "0"}}
```

*Listing 3.1: Example of registers capture*

The captured data includes PLC's IP address, Modbus port and timestamp (first line), type and name of registers with their values read from the scan (subsequent lines).

The tool furthermore offers the possibility, in parallel to the memory registers scan, of **sniffing network traffic** related to the Modbus protocol using the *Man in the Middle* (MitM) technique on the supervisory control network using a Python wrapper for tshark/Wireshark [33] [34]. An example of raw data obtained with this sniffing can be seen in Listing 3.2:

```
Time,Source,Destination,Protocol,Length,Function Code,
→ Destination Port,Source Port,Data,Frame length on the
→ wire,Bit Value,Request Frame,Reference Number,Info
2022-05-03 11:43:58.158,IP_PLC1,IP_PLC2,Modbus/TCP,76,Read
→ Coils,46106,502,,76,TRUE,25,,,"Response: Trans: 62;
→ Unit: 1, Func: 1: Read Coils"
```

*Listing 3.2: Example of raw network capture*

**Data Pre-processing** The data collected by scanning the memory registers of the PLCs are then reprocessed by a Python script and converted in order to create a distinct raw dataset in *Comma Separated Value* format (CSV) for each PLC, containing the memory register values associated with the corresponding controller registers. These datasets are reprocessed again through the Python modules for **pandas** [35] and **NumPy** [36] by another script to first perform a **data cleanup**, removing all those memory registers that do not take values and are therefore useless within the system, **merged** into a single dataset, and finally **enriched** with additional data<sup>1</sup>.

This process leads to the creation of two copies of the full dataset: one enriched with the additional data, but not timestamped, which will be used for the invariant analysis; the other unenriched, but timestamped, which will be used for business process mining.

<sup>1</sup>Not all additional data are calculated and entered automatically by the tool: some are manually inserted.

### 601 3.2.3 Graphs and Statistical Analysis

602 The paper mentions the presence of a *mild graph analysis*, performed  
 603 with **R** [37] at the time of data gathering to find any uncovered patterns,  
 604 trends and identify measurements and/or actuator commands through  
 605 the analysis of registers holding mutable values.

606 There is actually no trace of this within the tool: *graph analysis* and *sta-*  
 607 *tistical analysis* of the data contained in the PLC memory registers are in-  
 608 stead performed using the **matplotlib** libraries and statistical algorithms  
 609 made available by the **SciPy** libraries [38], through two separate Python  
 610 scripts (see Figure 3.3).

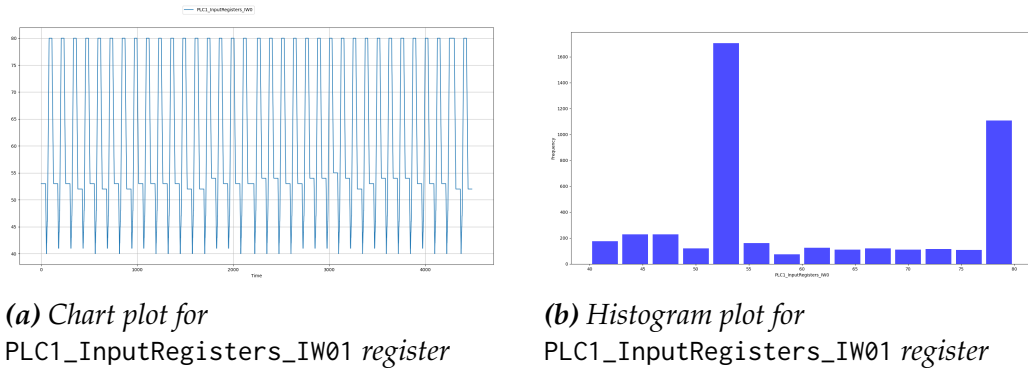


Figure 3.3: Output graphs from graph analysis

611 The first script plots the charts, one at the time, of certain registers en-  
 612 tered by the user from the command line, plots in which one can see the  
 613 trend of the data and get a first basic idea of what that particular regis-  
 614 ter contains (a measurement, an actuation, a hardcoded setpoint, ...) and  
 615 possibly the trend; the second script, instead, shows a **histogram and sta-**  
 616 **tistical informations** about the register entered as command-line input.  
 617 These informations include:

- 618 • the mean, median, standard deviation, maximum value and mini-  
 619 mum value
- 620 • two tests for the statistical distribution: *Chi-squared* test for unifor-  
 621 mity and *Shapiro-Wilk* test for normality, as shown in Listing 3.3:



```

622  Chi-squared test for uniformity
623  Distance      pvalue      Uniform?
624  12488.340    0.00000000    NO
625
626  Shapiro-Wilk test for normality
627  Test statistic  pvalue      Normal?
628  0.844      0.00000000    NO
629
630  Stats of PLC1_InputRegisters_IW0
631  Sample mean = 60.8881; Stddev = 13.0164; max = 80; min =
632  ↪ 40 for 4488 values

```

*Listing 3.3: Statistical data for PLC1\_InputRegisters\_IW0 register*

### 3.2.4 Invariants Inference and Analysis

For invariant analysis Ceccato et al. rely on **Daikon** [39], a framework to **dynamically detect likely invariants** within a program. An *invariant* is a property that holds at one or more points in a program, properties that are not normally made explicit in the code, but within assert statements, documentation and formal specifications: invariants are useful in understanding the behavior of a program (in our case, of the cyber physical system).

Daikon uses *machine learning* techniques applied to arbitrary data with the possibility of setting custom conditions for analysis by using a specific file [40] with a *.spinfo* extension (see Listing 3.4). The framework is designed to find the invariants of a program, with various supported programming languages, starting from the direct execution of the program itself or passing as input the execution run (typically a file in CSV format): the authors of the paper tried to apply it by analogy also to the execution runs of a cyber physical system, to extract the invariants of this system.

```

649  PPT_NAME aprogram.point:::POINT
650  VAR1 > VAR2
651  VAR1 == VAR3 && VAR1 != VAR4

```

*Listing 3.4: Generic example of a .spinfo file for customizing rules in Daikon*

Therefore, Daikon is fed with the no-timestamp enriched dataset obtained in the pre-processing phase (in the paper, the timestamped dataset is erroneously mentioned as input): a simple bash script launches Daikon (optionally specifying the desired condition for analysis in the *.spinfo* file), which output is simply redirected to a text file containing the general invariants of the system (i.e., valid regardless of any custom condition specified), those generated based on the custom condition in the *.spinfo* file, and those generated based on the negation of the condition. When the analysis is finished, the user is asked to enter the name of a registry to view its related invariants.

Some examples of invariants derived from the enriched dataset may be:

- measurements bounded by some setpoint
- Actuators state changes occurred in the proximity of setpoints or, vice versa, proximity of setpoints upon the occurrence of a regular actuator state change
- state invariants of some actuator correspond to a specific trend in the evolution of the measurement (ascending, descending, or stable) or, vice versa, the measurement trend corresponds to a specific state invariant of some actuator

### 3.2.5 Business Process Mining and Analysis

*Process mining* is the analysis of operational processes based on the event log [41]: the aim of this analysis is to **extract useful informations** from the event data to **reconstruct and understand the behavior** of the business process and how it was actually performed.

Process mining for the system under consideration starts from the event logs obtained from scanning the memory registers of the PLCs and sniffing the network communications related to the Modbus protocol, described in Subsection 3.2.2 and representing the *execution trace* of the system: through

a Java program, information is extracted and combined from these event logs, and the result saved in a CSV format file.

This file is fed to **Disco** [42], a commercial process mining tool, which generates an *activity diagram* similar to UML Activity Diagram and whose nodes represent the activities while the edges represent the relations between these activities: in Figure 3.4 we can see an example of this diagram referred to PLC2 of the testbed.

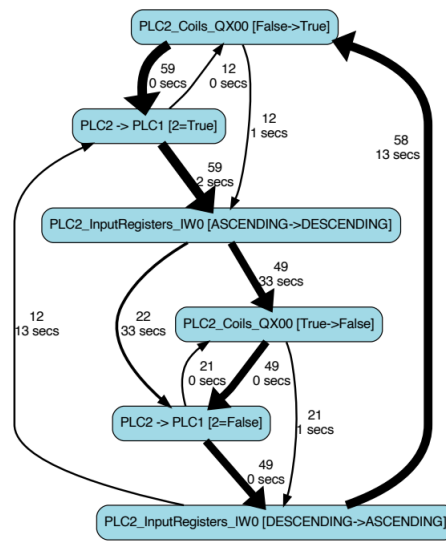


Figure 3.4: An example of Disco generated activity diagram for PLC2

The *business process* obtained in this way provides an **overview of the system** and makes it possible to **make conjectures** about its behavior, particularly between changes in actuator state and measurement trends (i.e., a given change in state of some actuators corresponds to a specific measurement trend and vice versa), and with the possibility of **establishing causality** between Modbus communications and state changes within the physical system.

### 3.2.6 Application

In this section we will see how the black box analysis presented above in its various phases is applied in practice, using the testbed described in

698 Subsection 3.2.1. The methodology supports a *top-down approach*: that  
699 is, we start with an overview of the industrial process and then gradually  
700 refine our understanding of the process by descending to a higher and  
701 higher level of detail based on the results of the previous analyses and  
702 focusing on the most interesting parts of the system for further in-depth  
703 analysis.

704 **Data Collection and Pre-processing** According to what is described in  
705 the paper, the data gathering process lasted six hours, with a granular-  
706 ity of one data point per second (a full system cycle takes approximately  
707 30 minutes). Each datapoint consists of 168 attributes (55 registers plus  
708 a special register concerning the tank slope of each PLC) after the en-  
709 richment. In addition, IP addresses are automatically replaced by an ab-  
710 stract name identified by the prefix PLC followed by a progressive integer  
711 (PLC1, PLC2, PLC3), in order to make reading easier.

712 **Graphs and Statistical Analysis** It is unclear from the paper where ex-  
713 actly the information that follows was derived (graph analysis? Statistical  
714 analysis? Human reading of the dataset?), however, three properties about  
715 the contents of the registers were discovered:

716 **Property 1:** PLC1\_MemoryRegisters\_MW0, PLC1\_MemoryRegisters\_MW1,  
717 PLC2\_MemoryRegisters\_MW0, PLC2\_MemoryRegisters\_MW1,  
718 PLC3\_MemoryRegisters\_MW0 and PLC3\_MemoryRegisters\_MW1  
719 registers contain constant integer values (40, 80, 10, 20, 0, 10 respec-  
720 tively)<sup>2</sup>. We may speculate that they may be (relative) hardcoded  
721 **setpoints**.

722 **Property 2:** PLC1\_Coils\_QX01, PLC1\_Coils\_QX02, PLC2\_Coils\_QX01,  
723 PLC2\_Coils\_QX02, PLC3\_Coils\_QX01 and PLC3\_Coils\_QX03 contain mu-

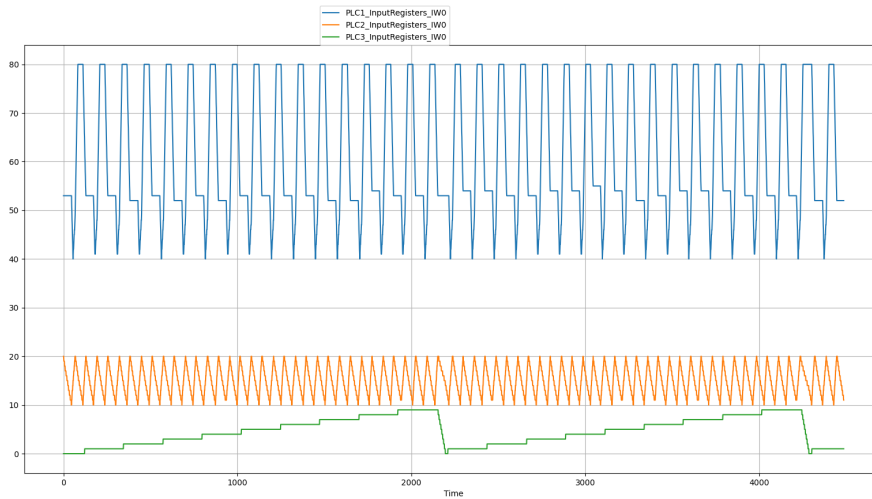
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<sup>2</sup>From my tests on the original tool and dataset, the PLC3\_MemoryRegisters\_MW0 reg-  
ister is deleted during the *pre-processing* phase, as it is recognized as an unused register  
because of the constant value "0" it takes on. This leads me to assume that the properties  
are derived from a human read of the dataset prior to the *pre-processing* phase.

table binary (Boolean) values. We can assume that these registers can be associated with the **actuators** of the system.

**Property 3:** PLC1\_InputRegisters\_IW0, PLC2\_InputRegisters\_IW0 and PLC3\_InputRegisters\_IW0 registers contain mutable values.

*Property 3* suggests that those registers might contain **values related to measurements**: it is therefore necessary to investigate further to see if the conjecture (referred to as *Conjecture 1* in the paper) is correct.



**Figure 3.5:** Execution traces of *InputRegisters\_IW0* on the three PLCs

The graph analysis of the *InputRegisters\_IW0* registers of the three PLCs (summarized in Figure 3.5 with a single plot) not only seems to confirm the conjecture, but also allows the measurements to be correlated with the contents of the *MemoryRegisters\_MW0* and *MemoryRegisters\_MW1* registers to the measurements, which represent the **relative setpoints of the measurements**.

Hence, we have *Conjecture 2* described in the paper referring to the relative setpoints:

**Conjecture 2:**

- 40 and 80 are the relative setpoints for PLC1\_InputRegisters\_IW0
- 10 and 20 are the relative setpoints for PLC2\_InputRegisters\_IW0

743 - 0 and 9 are the relative setpoints for PLC3\_InputRegisters\_IW0

744 Further confirmation of this conjecture may come from statistical anal-  
745 ysis. Indeed, in the example in Listing 3.1, some statistical data are given  
746 for the register PLC1\_InputRegisters\_IW0, including the maximum value  
747 and the minimum value: these values are, in fact, 80 and 40 respectively.

748 **Business Process Mining and Analysis** With Business Process Mining,  
749 the authors aim to **visualize and highlight relevant system behaviors** by  
750 relating PLC states and Modbus commands.

751 Through analysis of the activity diagrams shown in Figure 3.6, drawn  
752 through Disco, we derive the following properties and conjectures:

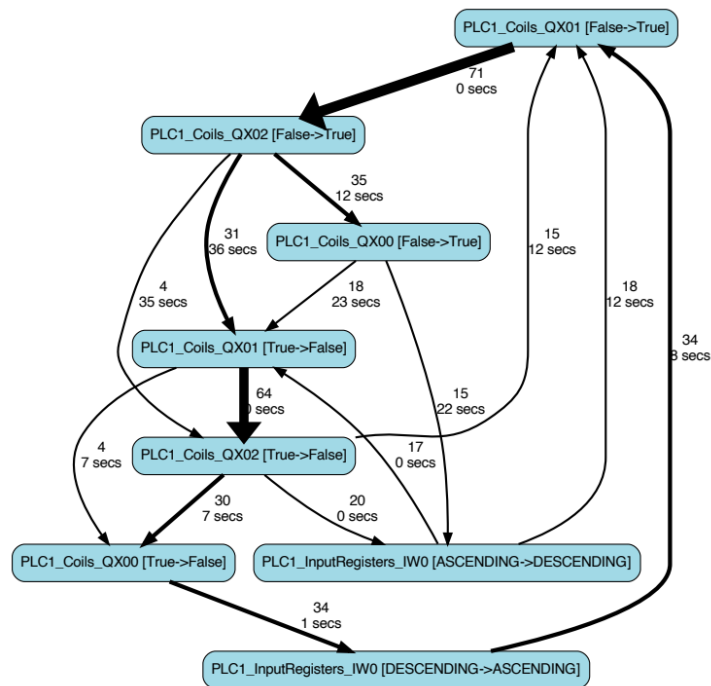
753 *Property 4:* PLC2 sends messages to PLC1 (see Figure 3.6b) which are  
754 recorded to PLC1\_Coils\_QX02.

755 *Conjecture 3:* PLC2\_Coils\_QX00 determines the trend in tank T-202 (Figure  
756 3.6b).

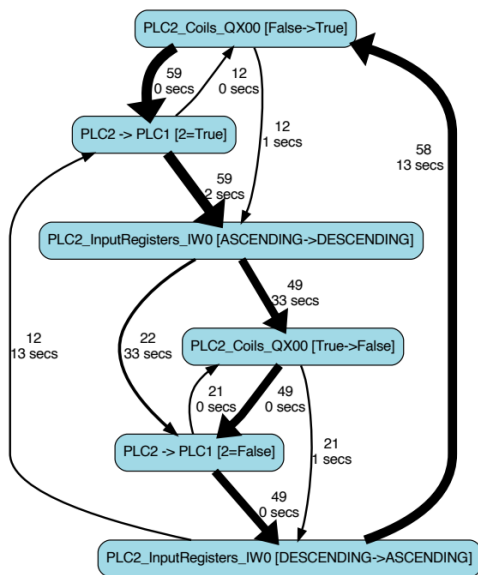
757 When this register is set to *True*, the input register PLC2\_InputRegisters\_IW0  
758 related to the tank controlled by PLC2 starts an **ascending trend**; vice  
759 versa, when the coil register is set to *False*, the input register starts a  
760 **descending trend**.

761 *Conjecture 4:* If PLC1\_Coils\_QX00 change his value to True, trend in tank  
762 T-201, related to PLC1\_InputRegisters\_IW0 and controlled by PLC1,  
763 become **ascending** (see Figure 3.6a)

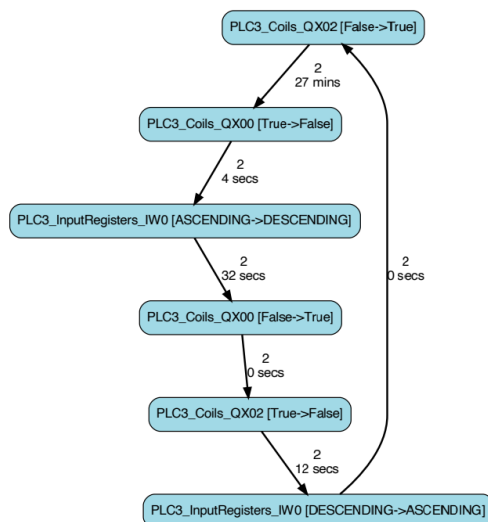
764 *Conjecture 5:* PLC3\_Coils\_QX00 starts a **decreasing trend** in tank T-203, re-  
765 lated to PLC3\_InputRegisters\_IW0 and controlled by PLC3, whereas  
766 PLC3\_Coils\_QX02 starts an **increasing trend** on the tank (see Figure  
767 3.6c)



(a) States in PLC1



**(b) States and Modbus command in PLC2**



(c) *States in PLC3*

*Figure 3.6: Business process with states and Modbus commands for the three PLCs*

**Invariants Inference and Analysis** The last phase of the analysis of the example industrial system is invariant analysis, performed through Daikon framework. At this stage, an attempt will be made to confirm what has been seen previously and to derive new properties of the system based on the results of the Daikon analysis.

To get gradually more and more accurate results, the authors presumably performed more than one analysis with Daikon, including certain rules within the *splitter information file* (see Section 3.2.4 and Listing 3.4) based on specific conditions placed on the measurements, for example, the level of water contained in a tank. Given moreover the massive amount of invariants generated by Daikon's output, it is not easy to identify and correlate those that are actually useful for analysis: this must be done manually.

However, it was possible to have confirmation of the conjectures made in the previous stages of the analysis: starting with the setpoints, analyzing the output of the invariants returned by Daikon<sup>3</sup> reveals that

```

PLC1_InputRegisters_IW0 >= PLC1_MemoryRegisters_MW0 == 40.0
PLC1_InputRegisters_IW0 <= PLC1_MemoryRegisters_MW1 == 80.0
PLC2_InputRegisters_IW0 >= PLC2_MemoryRegisters_MW0 == 10.0
PLC2_InputRegisters_IW0 <= PLC2_MemoryRegisters_MW1 == 20.0
PLC3_InputRegisters_IW0 >= PLC3_MemoryRegisters_MW0 == 0.0
PLC3_InputRegisters_IW0 <= PLC3_MemoryRegisters_MW1 == 9.0

```

i.e., that the MemoryRegisters\_MW0 and MemoryRegisters\_MW1 registers of each PLC contain the **absolute minimum and maximum setpoints**, respectively (*Property 5*).

There is also a confirmation regarding *Property 4*: from the computed invariants it can be seen that

---

<sup>3</sup>The invariants shown here are a manual summary and derivation of those actually returned in output by Daikon. I will discuss this more in Section 3.2.7



797

798 PLC1\_Coils\_QX01 == PLC1\_Coils\_QX02 == PLC2\_Coils\_QX00

799

800 and from this derive that there is a **communication channel between PLC2**  
 801 **and PLC1**, where the value of PLC2\_Coils\_QX00 is copied to PLC1\_Coils\_QX01  
 802 and PLC1\_Coils\_QX02 (*Property 6*).

803 Regarding the **relationships between actuator state changes and mea-**  
 804 **surement trends**, invariant analysis yields the results summarized in the  
 805 following rules:

806 *Property 7:* Tank T-202 level *increases* iif PLC1\_Coils\_QX01 == True. Oth-  
 807 erwise, if PLC1\_Coils\_QX01 == False will be *non-increasing*.

808 This is because if the coil is *True* the condition

809 PLC2\_InputRegisters\_IW0 == PLC2\_MemoryRegisters\_MW0 == 20.0 && PLC2\_slope > 0

810 is verified. On the opposite hand, if the coil is *False*, the condition

811 PLC2\_InputRegisters\_IW0 == PLC2\_MemoryRegisters\_MW0 == 20.0 && PLC2\_slope <= 0 is verified. The  
 812 *slope* is an auxiliary attribute indicating the trend of the measurement: in-  
 813 creasing if > 0, decreasing if < 0, stable otherwise.

814 *Property 8:* Tank T-201 level *increases* iif PLC1\_Coils\_QX00 == True. On the  
 815 other hand, if PLC1\_Coils\_QX00 == False and if PLC1\_Coils\_QX01 ==  
 816 True the level will be *non-decreasing*.

817 *Property 9:* Tank T-203 level *decreases* iif PLC3\_Coils\_QX00 == True. It will  
 818 be *non-decreasing* if PLC1\_Coils\_QX00 == False.

819 The last two properties concern the **relationship between actuator state**  
 820 **changes and the setpoints**: it is intended to check what happens to the  
 821 actuators when the water level reaches one of these setpoints. From the  
 822 analysis of the relevant invariants, the following properties are derived:

823 *Property 10:* Tank T-201 reaches the upper absolute setpoint when  
 824 PLC1\_Coils\_QX00 changes its state from *True* to *False*. If the coil changes  
 825 from *False* to *True*, the tank reaches its absolute lower setpoint.

826 **Property 11:** Tank T-203 reaches the upper absolute setpoint when  
827 PLC3\_Coils\_QX00 changes its state from *True* to *False*. If the coil changes  
828 from *False* to *True*, the tank reaches its absolute lower setpoint.

### 829 3.2.7 Limitations

830 The methodology proposed by Ceccato et al. is certainly valid and  
831 offers a good starting point for approaching the reverse engineering of  
832 an industrial control system from the attacker's perspective, while also  
833 providing a tool to perform this task.

834 The limitations of this approach, however, all lie in the tool mentioned  
835 above and also in the testbed described in Section 3.2.1. In this section  
836 I will explain which are the criticisms of each phase, while in Chapter 4  
837 I will formulate proposals to improve and make this methodology more  
838 efficient.

839 **General Criticism** The general critical aspects of the application of this  
840 approach are many: the primary one concerns the fact that the proposed  
841 tool seems to be built specifically for the testbed used and that it is not  
842 applicable to other contexts, even to the same type of industrial control  
843 system (water treatment systems, in this case).

844 What severely limits the analysis performed with the tool implemented  
845 by Ceccato et al. is the use of *ad hoc* solutions and *a posteriori* interventions  
846 done manually on the datasets after the data gathering process: I will dis-  
847 cuss this last aspect in more detail later.

848 Moreover, there is the presence of many *hardcoded* variables and condi-  
849 tions within the scripts: this makes the system unconfigurable and unable  
850 to properly perform the various stages of the analysis as errors can occur  
851 due to incorrect data and mismatches with the system under analysis.

852 Having considered, furthermore, only the Modbus protocol for net-  
853 work communications between the PLCs is another major limiting factor  
854 and does not help the methodology to be adaptable to different systems

communicating with different protocols (sometimes even multiple ones on the same system).

Let us now look at the limitations and critical aspects of each phase.

**Testbed** The testbed environment used by Ceccato et. al is entirely simulated, from the physical system to the control system. The PLCs were built with **OpenPLC** [43] in a Docker environment [44], while the physics part was built through **Simulink** [45].

OpenPLC is an open source cross-platform software that simulates the hardware and software functionality of a physical PLC and also offers a complete editor for PLC program development with support for all standard languages: *Ladder Logic* (LD), *Function Block Diagram* (FBD), *Instruction List* (IL), *Structured Text* (ST), and *Sequential Function Chart* (SFC). It is for sure an excellent choice for creating a zero-cost industrial or home automation and *Internet of Things* (IoT) system that is easy to manage via a dedicated, comprehensive and functional web interface. In spite of these undoubted merits, however, there are (at the moment) **very few supported protocols**: the main one and also referred to in the official documentation is **Modbus**, while the other protocol is DNP3.

The biggest problem with the testbed, however, is not with the controller part, but with the **physical part**: first of all, it must be said that although this is something purely demonstrative even though it is fully functional, the implemented Simulink model is really **oversimplified** compared to the iTrust SWaT system, which itself is a scaled-down version of a real water treatment plant. In fact, in the entire system there are only three actuators, two of which are connected to the same tank and controlled by the same PLC, and sensors related only to the water level in the system's tanks: in a real system there are many more *field devices*, which can monitor and control other aspects of the system beyond the mere contents of the tanks. Consider, for example, measuring and controlling the chemicals in the water, the pressure of the liquid in the filter unit, or more simply the

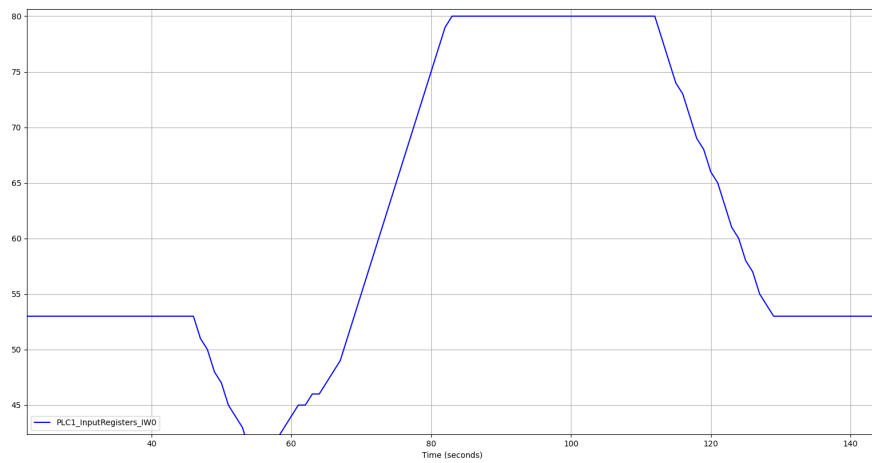
885 amount of water flow at a given point or time.

886 All these must be considered and represent a number of additional vari-  
887 ables that makes analysis and consequently reverse engineering of the sys-  
888 tem more difficult.

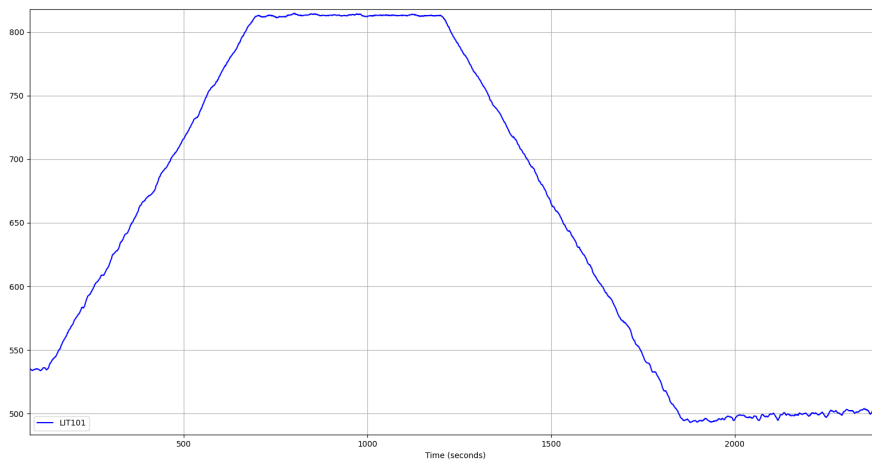
889 The second critical aspect concerns the **simulation of the physics of**  
890 **the liquid** inside the tanks: Simulink does not consider the fact that in-  
891 side a tank that is filling (emptying) the liquid in it undergoes **fluctuations**  
892 which cause the level sensor not to see the water level constantly increas-  
893 ing (decreasing) or at most being stable at each point of detection. Figure  
894 3.7 exemplifies more clearly with an example the concept just expressed:  
895 these oscillations cause a **perturbation** in the data.

896 This issue leads to the difficulty, on a real physical system, of **correctly**  
897 **calculating the trend of a measurement** by using the slope attribute: if  
898 this was obtained with a too low granularity, the trend will be oscillating  
899 between increasing and decreasing even when in reality this would be in  
900 general increasing (decreasing) or stable; on the other hand, if the slope  
901 was obtained with a too high granularity there is a loss of information and  
902 the trend may be "flattened" with respect to reality.

903 In the present case, the slope in the Simulink model was calculated stat-  
904 ically *point-to-point*, thus with a granularity of one second: an averagely  
905 careful reader will have already guessed that this granularity is inappli-  
906 cable to the real system in Figure 3.7b. As we will later see, we need to  
907 **operate on the data perturbations** to be able to obtain a suitable granular-  
908 ity and a correct calculation of the slope and consequently of the measure-  
909 ment trend.



(a)



(b)

**Figure 3.7:** Water physics compared: simulated physics in the Simulink model (a) and physics in a real system (iTrust SWaT) (b). Fluctuations in the tank level in (b), almost completely absent in (a), can be appreciated.

**Pre-processing** In the pre-processing phase, the authors make use of a Python script to merge all the datasets of the individual PLCs into a single dataset, remove the (supposedly) unused registers, and finally enrich the obtained dataset with additional attributes. These attributes are:

- the previous value of all registers

- 915 • some additional relative setpoints named PLCx\_Max\_safety and  
916 PLCx\_Min\_safety (where  $x$  is the PLC number), which represent a  
917 kind of alert on reaching the maximum and minimum water levels  
918 of the tanks
- 919 • the measurement slope, that is, the trend of the water level in the  
920 system tanks along the system cycles.

921 Merging the datasets of all individual PLCs into a single dataset rep-  
922 resenting the entire system can be a sound practice if the system to be  
923 analyzed is (very) small as is the testbed analyzed here, consisting of a few  
924 PLCs and especially a few registers. If, however, the complexity of the  
925 system increases, this type of merging can become counterproductive and  
926 make it difficult to analyze and understand the data obtained in subse-  
927 quent steps.

928 In short, there is no possibility to analyze only a subsystem and thus make  
929 the analysis faster and more understandable. Moreover, a data gathering  
930 can take up to days, and the analyst/attacker may need to make an anal-  
931 ysis of the system isolating a precise time range, ignoring everything that  
932 happens before and/or after: all of this, with the tool we have seen, cannot  
933 be done.

934 Regarding the additional attributes, looking at the code of the script  
935 that performs the enrichment, I observed that **some attributes were man-**  
936 **ually inserted** after the merging phase: I am referring in particular to  
937 the attributes PLCx\_Max\_safety and PLCx\_Min\_safety, whose references  
938 were moreover hardcoded into the script, and the *slope* whose calculation  
939 method I mentioned in the previous paragraph about the testbed limita-  
940 tions.

941 In the end, only the attribute *prev* related to the value at the previous point  
942 of the detection is inserted automatically for all registers, moreover with-  
943 out the possibility to choose whether this attribute should be extended to  
944 all registers or only to a part.

**Graphs and Statistical Analysis** Describing the behavior of graphical analysis in Section 3.2.3 I had already mentioned that only one register plot at a time was shown and not, for example, a single window containing the charts of all registers entered by the user as input from the command line, such as in Figure 3.5.

While displaying charts for individual registers still provides useful information about the system such as the distinction between actuators and measurements and the general trend of the latter, single display does not allow one to catch, or at least makes it difficult, the relationship that exists between actuators and measurements, where it exists, because a view of the system as a whole is missing.

In this way, the risk is to make conjectures about the behavior of the system that may prove to be at least imprecises, if not inaccurates.

On the other hand, regarding the statistical analysis, two observations need to be made: the first is that for the given system, I personally was unable to appreciate the usefulness of the generated histogram, as it does not provide any particular new information that has not already been obtained from the graphical analysis (except maybe something marginal); the second observation is that precisely the plot of the histogram "hides" the statistical informations obtained: these are in fact shown on the terminal from which the script is launched, but to an uncaredful eye or one unfamiliar with the script's behavior they can easily be interpreted as simple debugging output, since at the same time the window containing the histogram plot is shown. In general, however, little statistical information is provided.

**Business Process Mining and Analysis** Concerning the data mining, this is a purely *ad hoc solution*, designed to work under special conditions: first, the timestamped dataset of the physical process and the one obtained after the packet sniffing operation of Modbus traffic on the network need to be synchronized and have the same granularity, in this case one event per second.

976 It is relatively easy, therefore, to find correspondences between Modbus  
977 commands sent over the network and events occurring on the physical  
978 system, such as state changes in actuators, due in part to the fact that the  
979 number of communications over the network is really small (see Section  
980 3.2.1). In a real system, network communications are much more numer-  
981 ous and involve many more devices even in the same second: finding the  
982 exact correspondence with what is happening in the cyber physical system  
983 becomes much more difficult.

984 Since this is, as mentioned, an *ad hoc* solution, only the Modbus proto-  
985 col is being considered: as widely used as this industrial protocol is, other  
986 protocols that are widely used such as EtherNet/IP (see Section 2.3.1.2)  
987 should be considered in order to extend the analysis to other industrial  
988 systems that use a different communication network.

989 The other limiting aspect of the business process mining phase is the  
990 **process mining software** used to generate the activity diagram. As men-  
991 tioned in Section 3.2.5, the process mining software used by Ceccato et  
992 al. is **Disco**: this is commercial software, with an academic license lasting  
993 only 30 days (although free of charge), released for Windows and MacOS  
994 operating systems only, which makes its use under Linux systems impos-  
995 sible except by using emulation environments such as Wine.  
996 For what is my vision and training as a computer scientist, it would have  
997 been preferable to use a *cross-platform, freely licensed open source* software  
998 alternative to Disco: one such software could have been **ProM Tools** [46],  
999 a framework for process mining very similar to Disco in functionality, but  
1000 fitting the criteria just described, or use Python libraries such as **PM4PY**  
1001 [47], which offer ready-to-use algorithms suitable for various process min-  
1002 ing needs.

1003 **Invariants Inference and Analysis** The limitation in this case is princi-  
1004 pally Daikon: this software is designed to compute the invariants of a soft-  
1005 ware from its live execution or from a file containing its execution flow, not  
1006 to find the invariants of a cyber physical system. Since there are currently



no better consolidated alternatives for inferring invariants, however, an attempt was still made to use Daikon as best as possible.

```

daikon version 5.8.14, released October 6, 2022; http://plse.cs.washington.edu/daikon.
Reading splitter info files
(read 1 spinfo file, 1 splitter)
Reading declaration files .aprogram.point::POINT: 1 of 1 splitters successful

(read 1 decls file)
Processing trace data; reading 1 dtrace file:

Warning: No non-obvious non-suppressed exclusive invariants found in
aprogram.point::POINT
Warning: No non-obvious non-suppressed exclusive invariants found in
aprogram.point::POINT
=====
aprogram.point::POINT
PLC2_MemoryRegisters_MW1 == PLC3_MemoryRegisters_MW1
PLC1_MemoryRegisters_MW0 == 40.0
PLC1_MemoryRegisters_MW1 == 80.0
PLC1_Coils_QX00 one of { 0.0, 1.0 }
PLC1_Coils_QX01 one of { 0.0, 1.0 }
PLC1_Coils_QX02 one of { 0.0, 1.0 }
PLC2_MemoryRegisters_MW1 == 10.0
PLC2_MemoryRegisters_MW2 == 20.0
PLC2_Coils_QX00 one of { 0.0, 1.0 }
PLC3_InputRegisters_IW0 >= 0.0
PLC3_Coils_QX00 one of { 0.0, 1.0 }
PLC3_Coils_QX02 one of { 0.0, 1.0 }
prev_PLC1_Coils_QX00 one of { 0.0, 1.0 }
prev_PLC1_Coils_QX01 one of { 0.0, 1.0 }
prev_PLC2_Coils_QX00 one of { 0.0, 1.0 }
prev_PLC3_InputRegisters_IW0 >= 0.0
prev_PLC3_Coils_QX00 one of { 0.0, 1.0 }
prev_PLC3_Coils_QX02 one of { 0.0, 1.0 }
PLC1_Max_safety == 77.0

```

Figure 3.8: Example of Daikon's output

The biggest problem with Daikon applied to the computation of invariants of an industrial system is the difficult reading of the resulting output: the software in fact returns a very long list of invariants, one invariant per line, many of no use and without correlating invariants that may have common features or deriving additional information from them. The process of screening and recognizing the significant invariants, as well as the correlation between them, must be done by a human: certainly not an easy task given the volume of invariants one could theoretically be faced with (hundreds and hundreds of invariants). An example of Daikon's output

1018    can be seen in Figure 3.8.

1019        The bash script used in this phase of the analysis does not help at all  
1020    in deriving significant invariants more easily: it merely launches Daikon  
1021    and saves its output to a text file by simply redirecting the stdout to file.  
1022    No data reprocessing is done during this step. In addition, if a condition  
1023    is to be specified to Daikon before performing the analysis, it is necessary  
1024    each time to edit the .spinfo file by manually entering the desired rule, an  
1025    inconvenient operation when multiple analyses are to be performed with  
1026    different conditions each time.

# Chapter 4

## A framework to improve Ceccato et al.'s work.

1027 **I**N CHAPTER 3, I presented the state of the art of *process comprehension* of  
1028 an Industrial Control System (ICS) focusing later on the methodology  
1029 proposed by Ceccato et al. [6][Section 3.2], explaining what it consists of,  
1030 its practical application on a testbed, and most importantly highlighting  
1031 its limitations and critical issues (see Section 3.2.7).

1032 In this chapter I will present **my proposals to improve the methodol-**  
1033 **ogy** presented in the previous chapter, overcoming (or at least trying to do  
1034 so) the criticalities mentioned above by almost completely rewriting the  
1035 original framework, enhancing its functionalities and inserting new ones  
1036 where possible, while keeping its general structure and approach: the sys-  
1037 tem analysis will in fact consist of the same four steps as in the original  
1038 methodology (Data Pre-processing, Graph and Statistical Analysis, Busi-  
1039 ness Process Mining and Invariants Inference), but each of them will be  
1040 deeply revised in order to provide a richer, clearer and more complete  
1041 process comprehension of the industrial system to be analyzed and its be-  
1042 havior.

1043 As it may have already been noted, my proposals do not involve im-  
1044 proving the data gathering phase: this is due simply to the fact that the  
1045 novel framework will not be tested on the same case study used by Cec-  
1046 cato et, al. (Section 3.2.1), but on a different case study, the ITrust SWaT

1047 system [29], of which (some) datasets containing the execution trace of  
1048 the physical system and the network traffic scan are already provided by  
1049 iTrust itself. For more details about this case study, see Chapter 5.

## 1050 4.1 The novel Framework

1051 The implementation of the novel framework for ICSs analysis starts  
1052 from several assumptions:

- 1053 1. it must be implemented in a **single programming language**
- 1054 2. it must be **independent of the system** to be analyzed
- 1055 3. It must provide greater **flexibility and ease of use** for the user at  
1056 every stage

1057 In the following, these three points will be discussed in more detail.

1058 **Single Programming Language** The original tool was implemented us-  
1059 ing various programming languages in each of the different phases:  
1060 from Python up to Java, passing through Bash scripting.  
1061 In my opinion, this heterogeneity makes it more difficult and less  
1062 intuitive for the user to operate on the tool: moreover, the use of  
1063 multiple technologies makes it more difficult to maintain the code  
1064 and add new features, particularly if only a single person is manag-  
1065 ing the code (he/she might be proficient in one language, but little  
1066 of the others).

1067 For these reasons, I decided to use a single programming language,  
1068 to ensure homogeneity to the framework and ease of use and main-  
1069 tenance of the code for anyone who wants to manage it in the future:  
1070 I chose to use Python, because of its simplicity and easy readability  
1071 combined with its versatility and powerfulness: moreover, Python  
1072 can count on a massive number of available libraries and packages  
1073 that meet all kinds of needs.

**System Independence** One of the biggest limitations of Ceccato et al.'s tool that I highlighted in Section 3.2.7 is the fact that it is **highly dependent on the testbed used**: that is, it is *not* possible to configure any of the tool's parameters to analyze different industrial systems. To overcome this issue and make my framework independent of the system to be analyzed, also eliminating all references to hardcoded variables and values present in the previous tool, I decided to use a **general configuration file**, named *config.ini*, in which the user can, at will, customize all the parameters necessary to perform the analysis of the targeted system.

**Flexibility and Ease on Use** The lack of flexibility and ease of use in a tool can be a significant disadvantage, limiting its effectiveness and making it challenging for the user to get the desired outcomes. The original tool suffered from these limitations, with users having to run scripts from the command line, with little to no options or parameters available to customize the analysis. As a result, the tool was not user-friendly and lacked the flexibility to adapt to specific user needs.

To settle these issues, I enhanced the command-line interface in the novel framework by adding new options and parameters. These new features provide the user with greater flexibility, enabling to specify parameters and options that allow for more in-depth analysis and focused results analyzing data more effectively and efficiently. With these enhancements, the framework has become more user-friendly, reducing the learning curve and making it more accessible to a wider range of users.

This, in turn, makes the framework more valuable and useful, increasing its adoption and effectiveness across a range of industries and applications.

Moreover, with new options and parameters users no longer have to rely solely on the command line interface, which can be challenging and intimidating for those with limited technical expertise. Instead,

1106 users can now access a range of customizable options and parame-  
 1107 ters, making the tool more intuitive and user-friendly.

1108 Overall, the enhancements made to the framework represent a significant  
 1109 step forward in making it more effective, efficient, and user-friendly.

### 1110 4.1.1 Framework Structure

1111 The structure of the novel framework mostly follows the structure of  
 1112 the original tool: it is divided into four main directories each representing  
 1113 the different phases of the analysis (data pre-processing, graphs and sta-  
 1114 tistical analysis, process mining, and invariant analysis), and containing  
 1115 the relevant Python scripts that perform the analysis, as well as subdirec-  
 1116 tories and any input/output files necessary for the proper behavior of the  
 1117 framework.

```

1118 .
1119 |--- config.ini
1120 |--- daikon
1121 |   |--- Daikon_Invariants
1122 |   |--- findActuators.py
1123 |   |--- infoAct.py
1124 |   |--- runDaikon.py
1125 |--- network-analysis
1126 |   |--- data
1127 |   |--- export_pcap.csv
1128 |   |--- export_pcap_data.py
1129 |   |--- swat_csv_extractor.py
1130 |--- pre-processing
1131 |   |--- mergeDatasets.py
1132 |   |--- system_info.py
1133 |--- process-mining
1134 |   |--- data
1135 |   |--- process_mining.py
1136 |--- statistical-graphs
1137 |   |--- histPlots_Stats.py
1138 |   |--- runChartSubPlots.py
  
```

*Listing 4.1: Novel Framework structure*

Ahead of these directories there is the most important part, that allows the framework to be independent of the industrial control system being analyzed: the *config.ini* file. Here the user can configure general parameters and options, such as paths to read from or write files to, or related to individual analysis phases.

The file is divided into sections, each covering a different aspect of the configuration: each section contains user-customizable parameters that will then be called within the Python scripts that constitute the framework. Sections of *config.ini* are:

- **[PATHS]**: defines general paths such as the project root directory and some source directories for datasets
- **[PREPROC]**: contains some parameters needed for the pre-processing phase
- **[DAIKON]**: defines parameters needed for invariant analysis with Daikon
- **[DATASET]**: defines settings and parameters used during the dataset enrichment stage and possibly in further phases
- **[MINING]**: contains parameters used during the process mining phase
- **[NETWORK]**: Contains specific settings for extracting the data obtained from the packet sniffing phase on the ICS network and converting it to CSV format. It also defines the network protocols that are to be analyzed

#### 4.1.2 Python Libraries and External Tools

Since the framework has been entirely developed in Python, I have tried to make use of external tools as little as possible, with the idea of integrating all the various functionalities within the framework and making it independent of further software: the only external tool remaining from the old Ceccato et al. tool is Daikon, precisely because there is currently

no better alternative or Python packages that performs the same functionalities.

Instead, large use of Python libraries is made for handling functionality and input data: the fundamental libraries upon which the framework is based are:

- **Pandas**, also used in the previous tool for dataset management, but whose use here has been deepened and extended
- **NumPy**, often used together with Pandas to perform some operations to support it
- **Matplotlib**, for managing and plotting graphical analysis
- other scientific libraries such as **SciPy**, **StatsModel** [48] and **NetworkX** [49], for mathematical, statistical and analysis operations on the data
- **GraphViz**, for the creation of activity diagrams in the process mining phase

Having now seen the structure of the framework, in the next sections we will go into more detail describing my proposals and what I have done to improve the various stages of the analysis.

## 4.2 Analysis Phases

### 4.2.1 Phase 1: Data Pre-processing

*Data Pre-processing phase* is probably the most delicate and significant one: depending on how large the industrial system to be analyzed is, the data collected, and how it is enriched using the additional attributes, the subsequent system analysis will provide more or less accurate outcomes.



The previous tool has many limitations, especially at this stage: it is not possible to isolate a subsystem (either on a temporal basis or on the number of PLCs to be analyzed - the system is considered in its whole), and many of the additional attributes were actually added manually: moreover, for those automatically entered, there is no way to specify which register type to associate the additional attribute with.

All this, combined with the fact that in the tool code many references to attributes and registers are hardcoded, makes the analysis of the system much more difficult and the obtained results less accurate in terms of quantity and quality.

In the novel framework these problems have been overcome by introducing the possibility, starting from the datasets of individual PLCs obtained from data gathering process, to select a subsystem from the command line both on a temporal basis and of the PLCs to be considered; I have also redesigned the whole process of enrichment of the resulting dataset, eliminating the manual entry of additional attributes and giving the user the possibility to be able to decide which type of additional attribute to associate with a given register. In addition to this, at the end of the pre-processing operation, it is possible to perform a brief preliminary analysis of the obtained dataset in order to estimate which registers are connected to actuators, which to measurements, and which represent hardcoded relative setpoints or constants: this operation also makes it possible to be able to refine the enrichment step by setting the relevant parameters in the *config.ini* file

In the next sections we will look in more detail at what has been accomplished.

### 1218 4.2.1.1 Subsystem Selection

1219 In the previous tool, the datasets in CSV format referring to each single  
1220 PLC are placed in a fixed directory (hardcoded in the script) from which  
1221 the dedicated script later perform merge and enrichment of them all, re-  
1222 sulting in a single dataset representing the entire process trace of the in-  
1223 dustrial system as an output. As mentioned, the script makes no provision  
1224 to choose the individual PLCs to be analyzed, nor to decide on a temporal  
1225 range over which to perform the analysis: in fact, it may happen that dur-  
1226 ing the period of scanning and data gathering there is a so-called *transient*,  
1227 i.e., a general state in which the industrial system is still initializing before  
1228 actually reaching full operation; or, more simply, there is the need to ana-  
1229 lyze the process of only a specific part of the industrial system in a certain  
1230 period of interest: whatever the motivation, the lack of elasticity and op-  
1231 tions to provide to the user makes the analysis much more complex than  
1232 it might be, affecting even the later phases, as the number of variables to  
1233 be analyzed becomes enormously higher.

1234 In addition, it is not possible to specify an output CSV file where to save  
1235 the resulting dataset: at each dataset creation and enrichment operation,  
1236 therefore, the resultant file will be overwritten. This is very awkward  
1237 when making comparisons between two different execution traces, for ex-  
1238 ample, unless the files are renamed manually.

1239 Let's see how all these issues were solved in the novel framework I  
1240 developed: first of all, in the general *config.ini* file there are some general  
1241 default settings about paths, and among them the one concerning the di-  
1242 rectory where to place the datasets of the individual PLCs to be processed.  
1243 In addition to this option, there are other ones that define further aspects  
1244 related to the operations performed in this phase. Listing 4.2 shows the  
1245 settings in question:

```
1246 [PATHS]  
1247 root_dir = /home/marcuzzo/Univr/Tesi  
1248 project_dir = %(root_dir)s/PLC-RE  
1249 input_dataset_directory = %(root_dir)s/datasets_SWaT/2015
```

```

1250     net_csv_path = %(root_dir)s/datasets_SWaT/2015/Network_CSV
1251
1252     [DEFAULTS]
1253     dataset_file = PLC_SWaT_Dataset.csv # Default output
1254     ↪ dataset
1255     granularity = 10 # slope granularity
1256     number_of_rows = 20000 # Seconds to consider
1257     skip_rows = 100000 # Skip seconds from beginning

```

*Listing 4.2: Paths and parameters for the Pre-processing phase in config.ini file*

Concurrently, the same options can be specified by the user via the command line of the new Python script (named mergeDatasets.py and contained in the directory pre-processing of the project) and will override the default ones found in *config.ini*. These options are:

- **-s or --skiprows:** seconds to jump from the beginning of the file. This option is useful in case the system has an initial transient or to start the analysis from a certain point in the dataset
- **-n or --nrows:** reference temporal period in seconds (rows) for the analysis from the beginning of the dataset or from the point specified in the **-s** option or in the corresponding setting in *config.ini*. This option makes a **selection** on the data of the dataset.
- **-p or --plcs:** PLCs to be merged and enriched. The user can specify the desired PLCs by indicating the CSV file names of the associated datasets with no limitations on number. This option makes a **projection** on the data of the dataset.
- **-d or --directory:** performs the merge and enrichment of all CSV files contained in the directory specified by user, overriding the default setting in *config.ini*. It is in fact the old functionality of the previous tool, maintained here to give the user more flexibility and convenience in case he wants to perform the analysis on the whole system. This is also the default behavior in case the **-p** option is not specified.

- 1279 • **-o** or **--output**: specifies the name of the file in which the obtained  
1280 dataset will be saved. It must necessarily be a file in CSV format.
- 1281 • **-g** or **--granularity**: specifies a granularity that will be used to cal-  
1282 culate the measurement slope during the dataset enrichment phase.  
1283 We will discuss this later in Section 4.2.1.2.

#### 1284 4.2.1.2 Dataset Enrichment

1285 After a step in which a function is applied to each PLC-related dataset  
1286 that eliminates its registers that have not been used within the system (this  
1287 is especially true if the Modbus register scan has been performed, in which  
1288 ranges of registers are scanned: it is assumed that unused registers have  
1289 constant value zero), the **dataset enrichment operation** is performed.

1290 This operation differs from the previous version not only in the fact that  
1291 it is performed on each individual dataset and not on the resulting dataset,  
1292 but also in the additional attributes: not only are they greater in number,  
1293 but they are automatically calculated and inserted by the `mergeDatasets.py`  
1294 script into the dataset and, most importantly, it is possible to decide through  
1295 the parameters in the `config.ini` configuration file under the [DATASET] sec-  
1296 tion to which registers these attributes should be assigned.  
1297 In Listing 4.3 we can see the list of additional attributes and how they  
1298 should be associated with the registers of the dataset:

```
1299 [DATASET]
1300 timestamp_col = Timestamp
1301 max_prefix = max_
1302 min_prefix = min_
1303 max_min_cols_list = lit|ait|dpit
1304 prev_cols_prefix = prev_
1305 prev_cols_list = mv[0-9]{3}|p[0-9]{3}
1306 trend_cols_prefix = trend_
1307 trend_cols_list = lit
1308 trend_period = 150
1309 slope_cols_prefix = slope_
```

```
slope_cols_list = lit
```

*Listing 4.3: config.ini parameters for dataset enriching*

Following is a brief explanation of the parameters just seen:

**timestap\_col** indicates the name of the column that contains the data timestamps. This parameter is used not only in this phase, but is also referred to in the Process Mining phase. In the previous work, this parameter was hardcoded and not configurable (and thus causing errors if the system being analyzed changed)

**max\_prefix, min\_prefix, max\_min\_cols\_list** refer to any relative maximum or minimum values (*relative setpoints*) of one or more measures and that can be found and inserted as new columns within the dataset. The first two parameters indicate the prefix to be used in the column names affected by this additional attribute, while the third specifies of which type of registers we want to know the maximum and/or minimum value reached (several options can be specified using the logical operator | - or).

If, for example, we want to know the maximum value of the registers associated with the tanks, indicated in the iTrust SWaT system by the prefix LIT, we only need to specify the necessary parameter in the *config.ini* file, so `max_min_cols_list = lit`.

The result will be to have in the dataset thus enriched a new column named `max_P1_LIT101`.

**prev\_cols\_prefix, prev\_cols\_list** refer to the values at the previous step of the registers specified in `prev_cols_list`. It is possible to specify registers using *regex*, as in the example shown. It may be useful in some cases to have this value available to check, for example, when a change of state of a single given actuator occurs. The behavior of these parameters is the same as described in the point above.

**slope\_cols\_prefix, slope\_cols\_list** are related to the calculation of the slope of a specific register (usually a measure), that is, its trend. The

slope can be ascending (if its value is greater than zero), descending (if less than zero) or stable (if approximately equal to zero). I will discuss the slope calculation in more detail in the next paragraph, as it is related to the attributes `trend_cols_prefix`, `trend_cols_list` and `trend_period`

Initially, the parameters for registers to be associated with each additional attribute may be left blank, assuming that we do not know the system at all and therefore do not know which registers may be actuators, which measures, and which further. This information can be obtained from the **brief analysis** following the datasets merging operation: this analysis, performed at the user's choice, indicates which may be likely sensors, which actuators, and further information of various kinds: these indications allow the user to be able to set the desired values in `config.ini` file and hence refine the enrichment process by re-launching the `mergeDatasets.py` script again.

**Slope Calculation** The *slope* is an attribute that indicates the trend of the measurement we are considering and is useful, in our context, during the inference and invariant analysis phase in order to derive information about this trend given specific conditions: this trend can be, in general, increasing (slope > 0), decreasing (slope < 0) or stable (slope = 0). Normally, the slope is calculated through a simple mathematical formula: given an interval  $a, b$  relative to the measurement  $l$ , the slope is given by the difference of these two values divided by the amount of time  $t$  that the measurement takes to reach  $b$  from  $a$ :

$$slope = \frac{l(b) - l(a)}{t(b) - t(a)}$$

In the novel framework as in the old tool, this time interval (also called **granularity**) can be either long or short, depending on the accuracy desired on the slope: the lower the granularity, the more the slope will reflect the actual measurement trend; the higher the granularity, on the other hand, the more the slope data will be flattened. Each time interval into

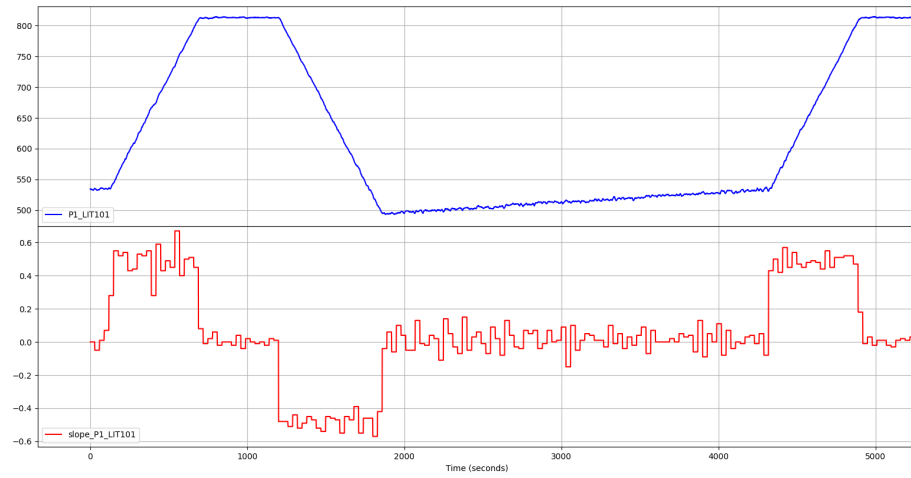
which the measure is divided corresponds to a slope, the set of which inserted as an additional attribute in the dataset will later be used to define the trend of the measure itself in specific situations.

Calculating the slope directly from the raw measurement data may be an acceptable solution for those systems whose measurements are not significantly affected by **perturbations** (such as the oscillations of the liquid inside a tank during the filling and emptying phases, leading to fluctuating level readings): in this case, granularity can be kept low and thus obtain a very accurate overall trend calculation close to the actual measurement trend. This is the case, for example, with the tanks of the testbed used by Ceccato et al.

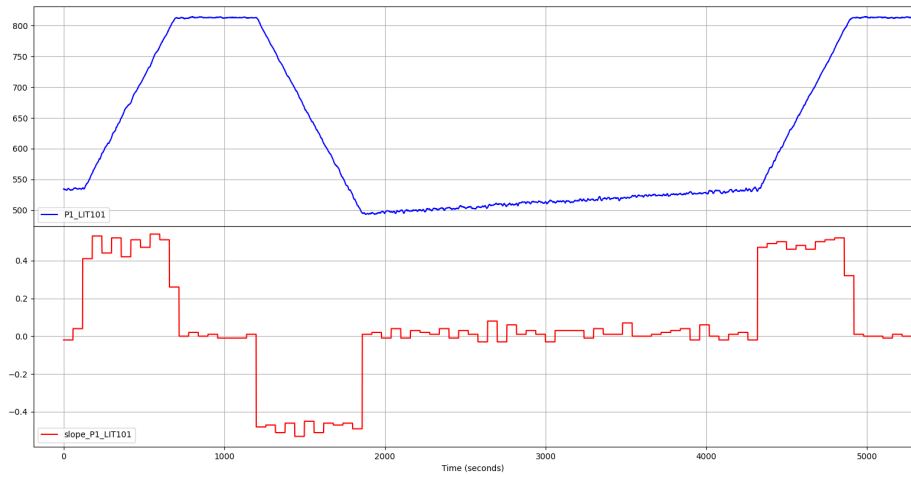
However, in the case where these perturbations significantly afflict the detections on the measurement, the slope calculation on the individual time intervals of the measurement may lead to an erroneous result in trend definition, regardless of the granularity used.

Figure 4.1 demonstrates this assertion: the measurement, in blue, refers to the LIT101 tank of the iTrust SWaT system; in red, the slope calculation related to the measurement with three different granularities: 30 (Figure 4.1a), 60 (Figure 4.1b) and 120 seconds (Figure 4.1c). It can be seen that in addition to the flattening of slope values as the granularity increases, in the time interval between seconds 1800 and 4200 the level of LIT101 has a generally increasing trend, but the slope values vary from positive to negative: the result is that in the invariant analysis the general increasing trend will not be detected thus losing the information.

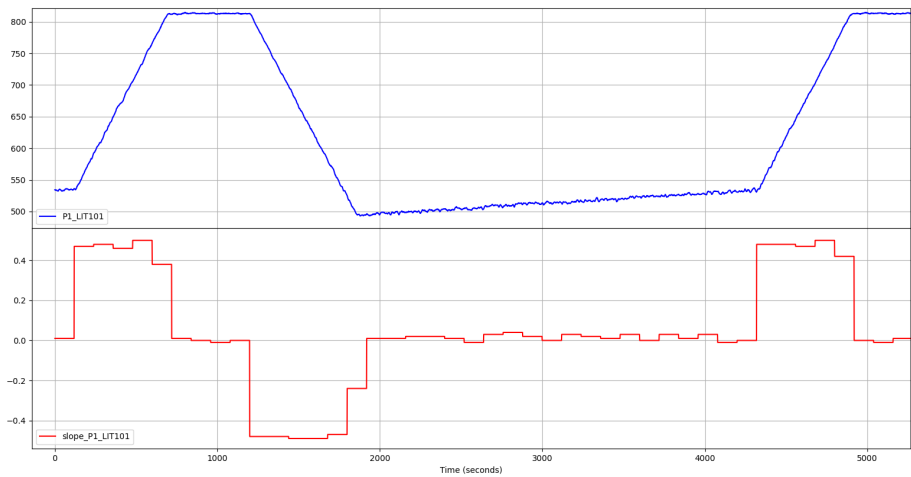
The possibility of a having (strongly) perturbed data was not considered in the previous tool, so I was faced with this issue to solve.



(a)



(b)



(c)

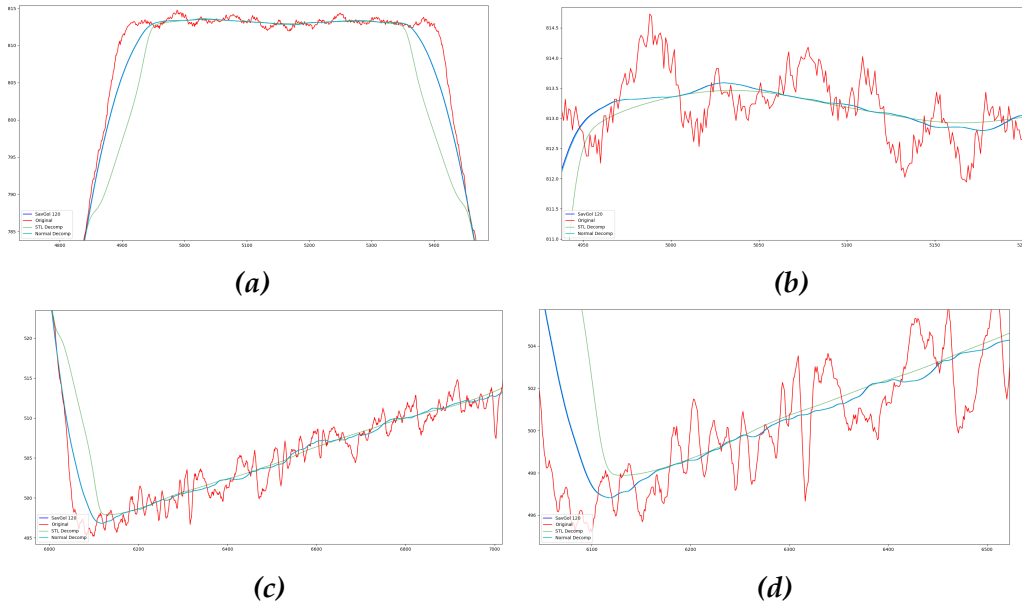
**Figure 4.1:** Slope comparison with granularity 30 (a), 60 (b) and 120 seconds (c)



The solution to this problem is trying to remove as much "noise" as possible from the data, in order to get a more linear trend in the curve representing the measurement and consequently be able to calculate slopes more accurately.

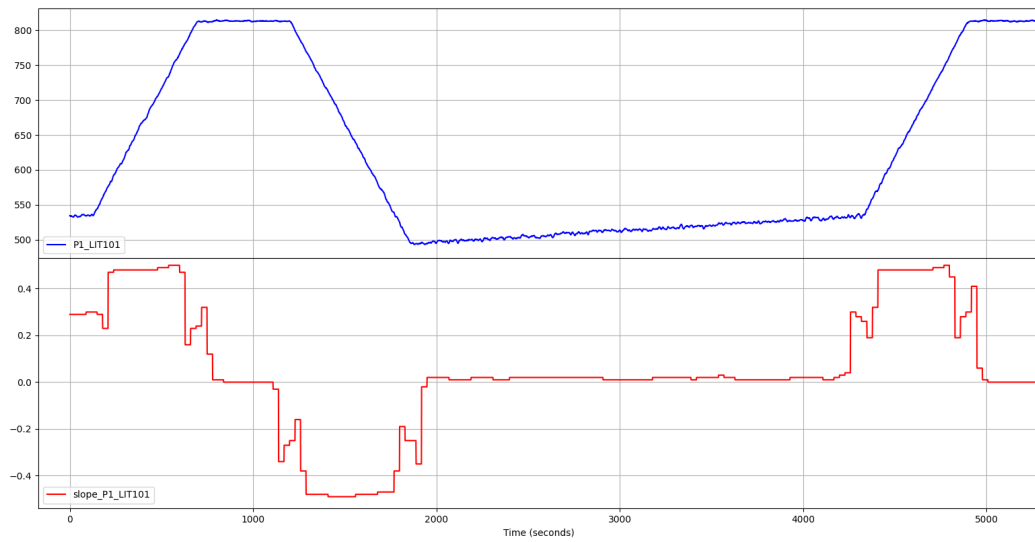
There are several ways to smooth out the noise, but two of them seemed to me to be the most suitable and that I considered and evaluated: using **polynomial regression**, thus creating a filter on the noise, or a **seasonal decomposition**, and more specifically the part concerning the **trending**. With regard to polynomial regression, I evaluated the *Savitzky-Golay* algorithm [50], and with regard to seasonal decomposition, I evaluated *Seasonal-Trend decomposition using LOESS* (STL) [51].

For reasons of the length of this paper I cannot describe these two solutions in detail (for this, I refer to the bibliographical notes): Figure 4.2, however, shows a quick graphical comparison of them compared with the original data. The solution chosen is the STL decomposition, which is more effective in attenuating noise than the Savitzky-Golay filter although at the cost of more delay (still present in all algorithms of this kind) in some parts.



**Figure 4.2:** Savitzky-Golay filter (blue line) and STL decomposition (green) comparison

1411 The application of the STL decomposition results in a significant im-  
 1412 provement in slope calculation even when using low granularity: in Fig-  
 1413 ure 4.3 it can be seen that, with the same granularity used for the example  
 1414 in Figure 4.1a, the slope values, although with unavoidable fluctuations,  
 1415 remain within the same trend, corresponding to the trend of the data curve  
 1416 net of the introduced lag caused by the periodicity set for the decomposi-  
 1417 tion.



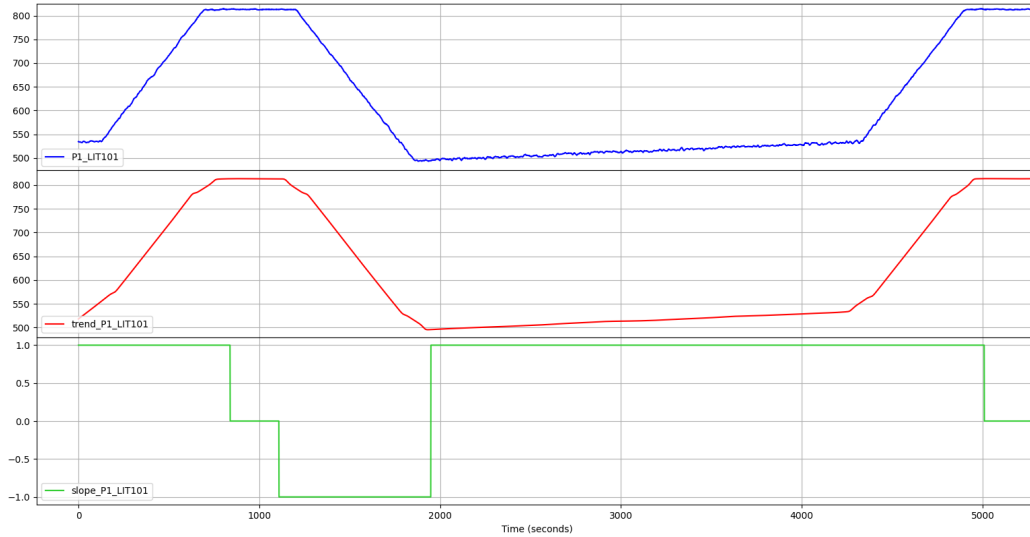
*Figure 4.3: Slope after the application of the STL decomposition*

1418 This periodicity, which indicates the sampling time window for de-  
 1419 composition and thus the level of noise smoothing, can be set in the *con-*  
 1420 *fig.ini* configuration file in the *trend\_period* directive.

1421 The slope calculation will then be performed on the data from the addi-  
 1422 tional measurement trend attributes specified in the *trend\_cols\_list* di-  
 1423 rective in the configuration file, and no longer on the original unfiltered  
 1424 data.

1425 Finally, to enable Daikon to correctly interpret the slope data, the deci-  
 1426 mal values corresponding to each calculated slope are converted into three  
 1427 numerical values -1, 0, and 1, which correspond to the decreasing (if the  
 1428 slope is less than zero), stable (if it is equal to zero), and increasing (if it is

greater than zero) trends, respectively. In Figure 4.4, the new slope can be seen, along with the curve obtained from the STL decomposition:



**Figure 4.4:** The new slope representation (green line) and the smoothed measurement data obtained with the STL decomposition (red)

#### 4.2.1.3 Datasets Merging

In this step the individual datasets are merged, obtaining two new distinct datasets: one without the enrichment and that will be use in the process mining phase, and the other, containing the additional attributes but with the timestamp column removed, intended for inference and invariant analysis.

The first of the two datasets obtained will be saved in CSV format by default in the `$(project-dir)/process-mining/data` directory while the second one in the `$(project-dir)/daikon/Daikon_Invariants` directory (both paths are however configurable via `config.ini`).

The dataset name is specified in `config.ini` or via the `-o` command-line option: in the case of the dataset intended for process mining, the script will automatically add a `_TS` suffix to the filename, indicating the fact that the dataset includes the timestamp.

1445 The opportunity for the user to specify a different filename for the output  
1446 each time allows the user to save the execution trace of the selected sub-  
1447 system without overwriting the previous ones and thus to use all of them  
1448 in the subsequent phases of the analysis.

#### 1449 4.2.1.4 Brief Analysis of the Obtained Subsystem

1450 At the end of the datasets merging and saving step, the user is asked  
1451 whether to perform a brief optional analysis of the final resulting dataset  
1452 to extract preliminary data, with the purpose of obtaining basic informa-  
1453 tion about the (sub)system and possibly refining the enrichment.  
1454 If the user responds affirmatively to the request, `mergeDatasets.py` launches  
1455 within it a further Python script located in the same  
1456 `$(project-dir)/pre-processing` directory, called `system_info.py`. This  
1457 script, using a combination of Daikon and Pandas analysis, performs a  
1458 quick analysis of the dataset contents trying to **recognize**, however roughly,  
1459 **the register types**, with possible maximum and minimum values and hard-  
1460 coded setpoints. In addition, using the additional attribute `prev_`, it is ca-  
1461 pable of deriving measurement values in correspondence with state changes  
1462 of individual actuators.  
1463 Listing 4.4 shows an example of this brief analysis elated to PLC1 of the  
1464 iTrust SWaT system (for brevity, only one measurement is reported in the  
1465 analysis of actuator state changes):

```
1466 Do you want to perform a brief analysis of the dataset? [y  
1467 ↪ /n]: y  
1468  
1469 Actuators:  
1470 P1_MV101 [0.0, 1.0, 2.0]  
1471 P1_P101 [1.0, 2.0]  
1472  
1473 Sensors:  
1474 P1_FIT101 {'max_lvl': 2.7, 'min_lvl': 0.0}  
1475 P1_LIT101 {'max_lvl': 815.1, 'min_lvl': 489.6}  
1476  
1477 Hardcoded setpoints or spare actuators:
```

1478	P1_P102 [1.0]			
1479				
1480		P1_LIT101	P1_MV101	prev_P1_MV101
1481	669	800.7170	0	2
1482	1850	499.0203	0	1
1483	4876	800.5992	0	2
1484	6052	498.9026	0	1
1485	9071	800.7170	0	2
1486	10260	499.1381	0	1
1487	13268	801.3058	0	2
1488	14435	498.4315	0	1
1489	17423	801.4628	0	2
1490	18603	498.1567	0	1
1491				
1492		P1_LIT101	P1_MV101	prev_P1_MV101
1493	677	805.0741	1	0
1494	4885	805.7414	1	0
1495	9079	805.7806	1	0
1496	13276	805.1133	1	0
1497	17432	804.4068	1	0
1498				
1499		P1_LIT101	P1_MV101	prev_P1_MV101
1500	1858	495.4483	2	0
1501	6060	497.9998	2	0
1502	10269	495.9586	2	0
1503	14443	495.8016	2	0
1504	18611	494.5847	2	0
1505				
1506		P1_LIT101	P1_P101	prev_P1_P101
1507	118	536.0356	1	2
1508	4322	533.3272	1	2
1509	8537	542.1591	1	2
1510	12721	534.8581	1	2
1511	16883	540.5890	1	2
1512				
1513		P1_LIT101	P1_P101	prev_P1_P101
1514	1190	813.0031	2	1
1515	5395	813.0031	2	1
1516	9597	811.8256	2	1

1517	13776	812.7283	2	1
1518	17938	813.3171	2	1

*Listing 4.4: Example of preliminar system analysis*

1519 From these results we can see that:

- 1520 • the probable actuators are P1\_MV101, which assumes three states iden-  
1521 tified by the values 0, 1 and 2, and P1\_P101, which instead assumes  
1522 two states identified by the values 1 and 2
- 1523 • there are two probable measures: P1\_FIT101 whose values range  
1524 from 2.7 to 0.0, and P1\_LIT101 whose values range from 815.1 to  
1525 489.6. One conjecture could already be made about the topology of  
1526 the system: P1\_LIT101 represents a tank
- 1527 • apparently there are no related *hardcoded setpoints*, but a probable  
1528 spare actuator, P1\_P102, whose value is always 1. From this data,  
1529 another conjecture can be made: the value 1 is the close state for that  
1530 particular type of actuators, while 2 represents the open state
- 1531 • from the analysis of state changes, in summary, we derive some *rela-*  
1532 *tive setpoints*: for example, we know that P1\_P101 changes state from  
1533 value 1 to value 2 when the level of P1\_LIT101 is about 813, while it  
1534 changes from value 2 to 1 when the level of P1\_LIT101 is about 535.  
1535 We can deduce that P1\_P101 is responsible for emptying the tank

1536 The information obtained here can be used, as mentioned above, to  
1537 refine the enrichment of the dataset by setting directives in the [DATASET]  
1538 section of the *config.ini* file, should this be empty or only partially set, or to  
1539 make the first conjectures about the system, as we have just seen.

1540 The *system\_info.py* file can also run in standalone mode if needed:  
1541 it takes as command-line arguments the dataset to be analyzed, a list of  
1542 actuators, and a list of sensors. For analysis related to state changes, the  
1543 dataset must mandatorily be of the enriched type.

## 4.2.2 Phase 2: Graphs and Statistical Analysis

The new *graph analysis* arises from the need to give the user an overview of the (sub)system obtained in the previous pre-processing phase, identifying more easily the typology of the registers and grasping more effectively the relationships and the dynamics that may exist between the registers controlled by one or more PLCs, confirming the initial conjectures if the brief analysis described in the previous section has been performed, or making new ones thanks to the visual graph support.

In the previous tool, as already pointed out in Section 3.2.7, it is possible to view the chart of one only register at a time: this certainly makes it possible to identify, or at least to hypothesize, the type of that register, but it makes it very complicated to be able to relate it to the other components of the system and thus to derive conjectures about the behavior of the latter, conjectures to be possibly confirmed in the later phases. Hence the need to create a tool that was better than the previous one and that provided more information in an easier way.

The first thing I thought was that an approach similar to Figure 3.5, with all the graphs contained within a single plot, might be the most suitable one: unfortunately, I quickly realized that this solution presented several issues, which are highlighted in figure 4.5.

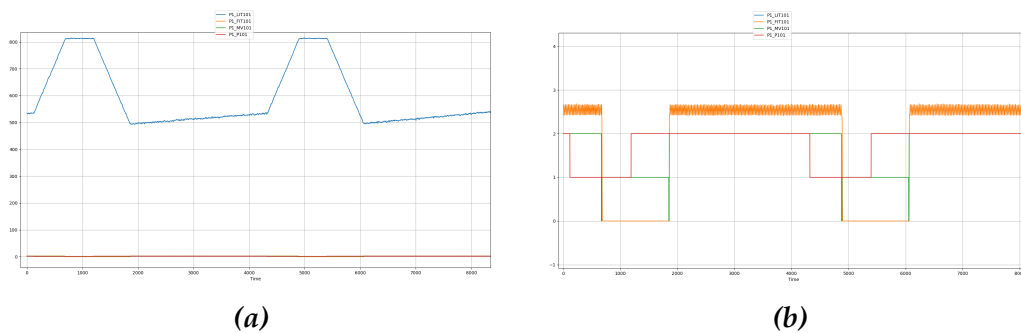
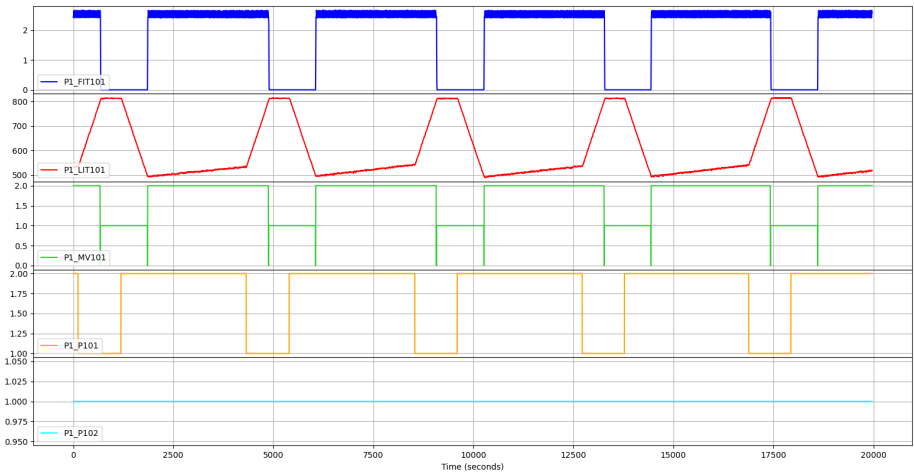


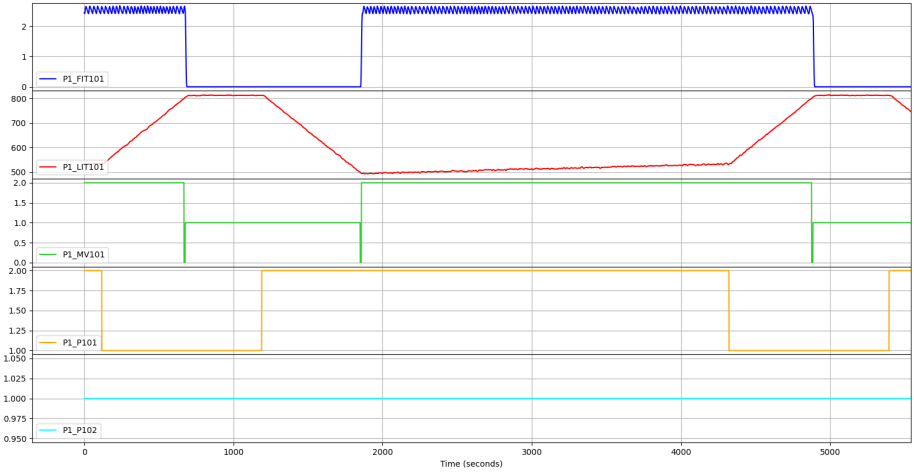
Figure 4.5: Plotting registers on the same y-axis

In figure 4.5a it can be seen that the biggest issue is the use of the same y-axis, related to the values of the individual registers, for all charts: if the

1566 range between register values is wide, the risk of some charts resembling a  
1567 single flat line, or at any rate being in fact indistinguishable and very diffi-  
1568 cult to read immediately; furthermore, as shown in Figure 4.5b, if registers  
1569 have similar values to each other, the respective graphs may be confusing  
1570 to each other, making them more difficult to understand.



(a) Example of plotting charts of a PLC registers using subplots



(b) Zooming on a particular zone of the charts

Figure 4.6: Example of the new graph analysis

1571 The solution to this problem is as simple as it is effective, and it is the  
1572 **use of subplots**: each register corresponds to a chart subplot, which shares  
1573 with the other subplots the temporal axis (the x-axis) while keeping the y-



axis of the values of each register independent: this allows us to maintain the readability and comprehensibility of the charts shown and at the same time to be able to grasp with immediacy the relationships between them. Furthermore, thanks to the sharing of the time axis, it is possible to zoom in on a particular area of one of the subplots and automatically the other ones will be zoomed in as well so that no information and no connection between registers is lost. Figure 4.6 illustrates more clearly what has just been explained: the charts refer to the PLC1 registers of the iTrust SWaT system.

To demonstrate the behavior and effectiveness of the new graph analysis process, we observe in particular, Figure 4.6b: we can already have some validation on the conjectures made in the brief analysis from the previous step:

- the chart of P1\_FIT101 seems to confirm that this register can be associated with a **measurement**; moreover, we can see that the trend of this register is closely related to the periods in which P1\_LIT101 has an increasing trend and to the evolution of P1\_MV101. Its values, between about 0 and 2.5, are too narrow to say that this register represents the tank, and the general trend also leads in that direction: we can therefore assume that it is a **pressure or flow sensor**
- P1\_LIT101, because of the above, would therefore seem to **represent a tank**, as already assumed in the brief analysis
- P1\_MV101 assumes value 2 at the beginning of the ascending trend of P1\_LIT101, while it has value 1 in correspondence with the *plateau* that is seen when the measurement is about 800 and when the trend of it is descending. Thus, we can have a confirmation of the initial conjecture: 1 represents the OFF state of the sensor, 2 the ON state, and P1\_MV101 is the **actuator responsible for the rising level** of P1\_LIT101
- P1\_MV101 switches and stays in the 0 state for a very few seconds and acts as a kind of "transient" between states 1 and 2. It can be assumed

1605 that that is the period of time it actually takes for the actuator to  
1606 change state

- 1607 • P1\_P101 assumes value 2 at the beginning of the descending trend of  
1608 P1\_LIT101, after the *plateau*, and returns to value 1 at the change of  
1609 slope of the (likely) tank increase: taken by itself this fact is not very  
1610 clear, so it needs to be compared with P1\_LIT101 and P1\_MV101 to un-  
1611 derstand its behavior: it can be seen that when P1\_101 and P1\_MV101  
1612 are in state 1 the water level remains stable, whereas, when P1\_P101  
1613 changes to state 2 the level of the measurement drops rapidly; when  
1614 P1\_MV101 then also returns to state 2, the level of the measurement  
1615 slowly starts rising again and then has a sudden rise at the change  
1616 of state of P1\_P101 from 2 to 1. We can therefore infer that P1\_P101 is  
1617 the **actuator responsible for emptying** the (presumed) tank: state 1  
1618 represents the OFF state, while state 2 represents the ON state
- 1619 • P1\_P102 seems to play no role in the system, since its state remains at  
1620 1 all the time. It seems improbable that it could be a relative setpoint,  
1621 so it can be assumed, according to the brief analysis, that it may be a  
1622 **spare actuator**

1623 As you have probably already noticed, the vast majority of the graphs  
1624 shown in the previous sections and chapters were generated precisely us-  
1625 ing the new graph analysis script.

1626 The script that performs the new graph analysis is `runChartsSubPlots.py`,  
1627 located in the `$(project-dir)/statistical-graphs` directory, which is writ-  
1628 ten in Python and makes use, like the previous one, of the *matplotlib* li-  
1629 braries to generate the graph plots.

1630 The script accepts the following command-line parameters:

- 1631 • **-f** or **--filename**: specifies the dataset, in csv format, from which to  
1632 read the data. The dataset must be located within the directory con-  
1633 taining the enriched datasets for the invariant analysis phase. If sub-  
1634 sequent parameters are not specified, the script will show all regis-  
1635 ters in the dataset, except for additional attributes

- **-r or --registers:** specifies one or more specific registers to be displayed
- **-a or --addregisters:** adds one or more registers to the default visualization. This option is useful in case an additional attribute such as slope is to be analyzed
- **-e or --excluderegisters:** excludes one or more specific registers from the default visualization. This option is useful to avoid displaying hardcoded setpoints or spare registers

This script, like the previous ones, is designed to provide the maximum flexibility and ease of use for the user, combined with greater power and effectiveness in deriving useful information about the analyzed system.

**Statistical Analysis** A brief mention of the statistical analysis part: after careful evaluation, I decided **not to include this aspect** of the previous tool within my framework, because I saw no real practical use for it. The actual statistical information can be easily integrated into the brief analysis immediately following the pre-processing phase, while the histogram has relative utility and, in my opinion, is outdated by the new graph analysis I implemented.

However, the Python `histPlots_Stats.py` script remains in the directory, essentially unchanged from the one developed by Ceccato et al., in case future use is needed.

## 4.2.3 Phase 3: Invariant Analysis

### 4.2.3.1 Invariants Generation

## 4.2.4 Phase 4: Business Process Analysis



# Chapter 5

## Case study: the iTrust SWaT System



# Chapter **6**

Our framework at work: reverse engineering of  
the SWaT system

## **6.1 Pre-processing**

## **6.2 Graph Analysis**

### **6.2.1 Conjectures About the System**

## **6.3 Invariants Analysis**

### **6.3.1 Actuators Detection**

### **6.3.2 Daikon Analysis and Results Comparing**

## **6.4 Extra information on the Physics**

## **6.5 Business Process Analysis**





# Chapter 7

## Conclusions

### 7.1 Discussions

### 7.2 Guidelines

### 7.3 Future work



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