

# Capture Cellular Signals

ADVANCED TOPICS IN NETWORKS

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Semester Project

## Introduction

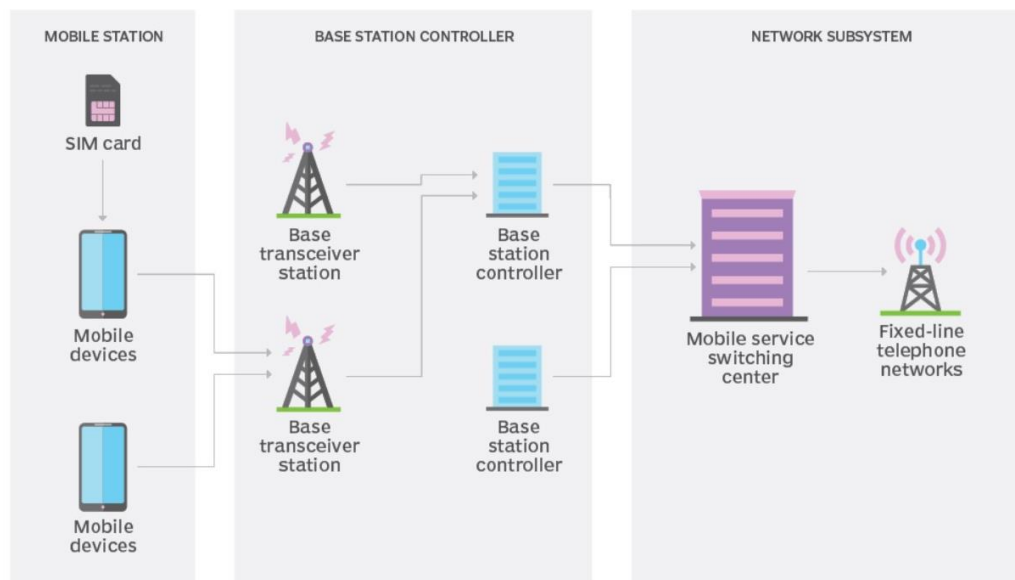
This project is composed of two parts. In the first part, our goal was to capture Cellular Base Station Signals (GSM signals only), decode them and extract information about the Base Stations near the scanned region. This information was inserted in a database and after analyzation, we rendered the Base Stations in a map.

In the second part, we created a check in mechanism using the information from the captured Base Station Signals that keeps track of the time duration that each person stays in the scanned area. In order to capture the Base Station Signals we used the ADALM – PLUTO SDR.

## GSM ARCHITECTURE

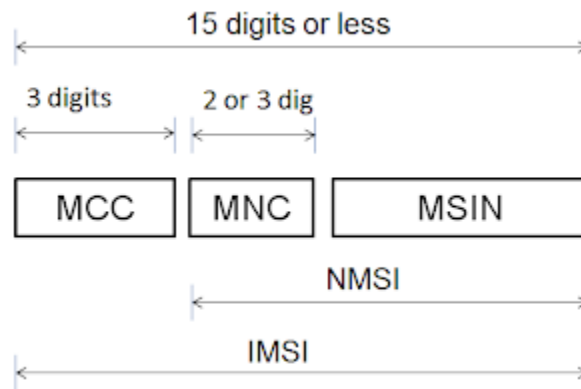
Our project is based on Global System for Mobile Communication(GSM).

### Global system for mobile (GSM) network

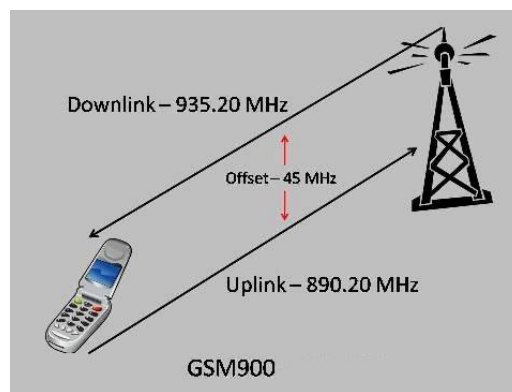


As shown above a mobile phone connects to a base station using its SIM card and exchanges packets. Each SIM card has a unique identifier which is called International Mobile Subscriber Identity ( **IMSI** ) . IMSI is a number that uniquely identifies every user of a cellular network. It is sent by the mobile device to the network. To prevent eavesdroppers from identifying and tracking the subscriber on the radio interface, the IMSI is sent as rarely as possible and a randomly-generated TMSI is sent instead.

An IMSI is usually presented as a 15-digit number but can be shorter. The first 3 digits represent the mobile country code (MCC), which is followed by the mobile network code (MNC), either 2-digit (European standard) or 3-digit (North American standard). The length of the MNC depends on the value of the MCC. The remaining digits are the mobile subscription identification number (MSIN) within the network's customer base, usually 9 to 10 digits long, depending on the length of the MNC.



For the communication between mobile station and base station two channels are used, the uplink and the downlink, and they differ in frequency.



In Greece, there are two main frequency bands for GSM ( **GSM-900**, **GSM/DCS- 1800**). Each provider has a license to transmit in a specific band as shown in the below tables.

900 MHZ	COSMOTE	925-930	880-885	χωρίς περιορισμούς	30/9/2012	29/9/2027
	COSMOTE	930-935	885-890	χωρίς περιορισμούς	9/9/2002 9/9/2017	08/09/2017 29/9/2027
	WIND	935-945	890-900	χωρίς περιορισμούς	30/9/2012	29/9/2027
	VODAFONE	950-960	905-915	χωρίς περιορισμούς	30/9/2012	29/9/2027
	VODAFONE	945-950	900-905	χωρίς περιορισμούς	6/8/2001 6/8/2016	05/08/2016 29/9/2027

1800 MHz	WIND	1805-1810	1710-1715	χωρίς περιορισμούς	6/8/2001	5/8/2016
	WIND	1810-1820	1715-1725	χωρίς περιορισμούς	6/8/2001	5/8/2016
	VODAFONE	1820-1830	1725-1735	χωρίς περιορισμούς	1/7/2012	31-06-2027
	VODAFONE	1830-1845	1735-1750	χωρίς περιορισμούς	6/8/2001	5/8/2016
	COSMOTE	1855-1880	1760-1785	GSM/DCS (στο τμήμα 1855-1865 MHz και 1760-1770 MHz χωρίς περιορισμούς)	5/12/1995	4/12/2020
	COSMOTE	1845-1855	1750-1760	χωρίς περιορισμούς	1/7/2012	31/06/2027

## SW AND HW TOOLS

As part of the software tools that have been used in our project are:

- GNURADIO-COMPANION – PlutoSDR extension
- Libiio
- Pluto SDR drivers
- gr-gsm module
- IMSI-CATCHER
- Node.js module bscoords
- OpenCellID API
- Folium Map library
- SQLite3
- Docker

The only hardware equipment that has been used is the ADALM-PLUTO SDR.

## PROJECT STAGES FOR PART 1

### 1<sup>st</sup> Stage

- Docker image creation.
- Installation of libiio for interaction with PlutoSDR.
- Installation of GNURADIO-COMPANION and PlutoSDR extension which contains the PlutoSDR source block for capturing signals.

- Installation of gr-gsm module that uses GNURADIO blocks for capturing and demodulation of GSM packets. (**grgsm\_livemon.py**)
- Installation of IMSI-CATCHER module that contains **simple\_imsi\_catcher.py** which decodes the information of GSM packets.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Stage

Adding functionality in **grgsm\_livemon.py** for channel hopping in band frequencies between 925MHz – 960MHz and 1805MHz – 1880 MHz with 0.2MHz step. In this way, we cover the whole spectrum of downlink channels for GSM communications and we are able to capture all the GSM packet transmissions. Also, on each frequency band we scanning for 2 seconds.

```
conn = create_connection("/root/cell_info.db")
cursor = conn.cursor()
try:
    fc_slider = 925400000
    print(int(fc_slider))
    for i in range(int(fc_slider),960400000,200000):
        start_time = time.time()
        tb.set_fc_slider(i)
        print(tb.get_fc_slider())
        end_time = time.time()
        if conn:
            conn.execute(
                u"INSERT INTO observations (freq) " + "VALUES (?);",
                [str(tb.get_fc_slider())]
            )
            conn.commit()
        while(end_time - start_time <= 2):
            end_time = time.time()

    fc_slider = 1805000000
    print(int(fc_slider))
    for i in range(int(fc_slider),1880400000,200000):
        start_time = time.time()
        tb.set_fc_slider(i)
        print(tb.get_fc_slider())
        end_time = time.time()
        if conn:
            conn.execute(
                u"INSERT INTO observations (freq) " + "VALUES (?);",
                [str(tb.get_fc_slider())]
            )
            conn.commit()
        while(end_time - start_time <= 2):
            end_time = time.time()
```

Figure 1: grgsm\_livemon.py channel hopping.

```

for i in range(len(freq_val)):
    #print(i)
    sql_delete_query = '''DELETE from observations where cell is NULL; '''
    cursor.execute(sql_delete_query)
    conn.commit()
print("Records deleted successfully ")
cursor.close()
conn.close()

f = open("/root/.close.txt", "w+")
f.write("1")
f.close()

```

Figure 2: grgsm\_livemon.py deletion empty database entries.

The **simple\_imsi\_catcher.py** decodes the captured GSM packets from **grgsm\_livemon.py** and exports the desired information in an sqlite3 database called **cell\_info.db**.

```

Nb IMSI ; TMSI-1 ; TMSI-2 ; IMSI ; country ; brand ; operator ; MCC ; MNC ; LAC ; Cellid ; Timestamp
1 ; ; ; 202 01 0909376968 ; Greece ; Cosmote ; COSMOTE - Mobile Telecommunications S.A. ; 202 ; 01 ; 2120 ; 41427 ; 2022-02-23T16:34:00.550356
2 ; ; ; 202 01 0924876455 ; Greece ; Cosmote ; COSMOTE - Mobile Telecommunications S.A. ; 202 ; 01 ; 2120 ; 40308 ; 2022-02-23T16:34:15.043042
3 ; 0x01ccae59 ; ; 202 01 0909560541 ; Greece ; Cosmote ; COSMOTE - Mobile Telecommunications S.A. ; 202 ; 01 ; 2120 ; 40268 ; 2022-02-23T16:34:55.451461
4 ; ; ; 202 01 0928094880 ; Greece ; Cosmote ; COSMOTE - Mobile Telecommunications S.A. ; 202 ; 01 ; 2120 ; 40268 ; 2022-02-23T16:34:55.567783
6 ; ; ; 310 410 175736042 ; United States of America ; AT&T ; AT&T Mobility ; 202 ; 01 ; 2120 ; 41448 ; 2022-02-23T16:35:17.380446
7 ; ; ; 310 410 175736042 ; United States of America ; AT&T ; AT&T Mobility ; 202 ; 01 ; 2120 ; 41448 ; 2022-02-23T16:35:17.380776
8 ; ; ; 202 01 0927403122 ; Greece ; Cosmote ; COSMOTE - Mobile Telecommunications S.A. ; 202 ; 01 ; 2120 ; 41448 ; 2022-02-23T16:35:17.697214
9 ; ; ; 202 01 0923894958 ; Greece ; Cosmote ; COSMOTE - Mobile Telecommunications S.A. ; 202 ; 01 ; 2120 ; 41448 ; 2022-02-23T16:35:24.656284
10 ; ; ; 310 260 297996167 ; United States of America ; T-Mobile ; T-Mobile USA ; 202 ; 05 ; 55 ; 19353 ; 2022-02-23T16:37:47.671174
11 ; ; ; 202 05 2930592757 ; Greece ; Vodafone ; Vodafone Greece ; 202 ; 05 ; 55 ; 59563 ; 2022-02-23T16:37:53.274205
12 ; 0xe350c93e ; ; 202 05 2936636843 ; Greece ; Vodafone ; Vodafone Greece ; 202 ; 05 ; 55 ; 59563 ; 2022-02-23T16:37:53.456269
13 ; ; ; 202 05 2967004435 ; Greece ; Vodafone ; Vodafone Greece ; 202 ; 05 ; 55 ; 59563 ; 2022-02-23T16:37:56.752894
14 ; ; ; 214 01 8906612123 ; Spain ; Vodafone ; Vodafone Spain ; 202 ; 05 ; 55 ; 19351 ; 2022-02-23T16:37:56.984435
15 ; ; ; 202 05 2988616899 ; Greece ; Vodafone ; Vodafone Greece ; 202 ; 05 ; 55 ; 19351 ; 2022-02-23T16:39:18.689920

```

Figure 3: IMSI-CATCHER stdout.

The initial schema of the **cell\_info.db** contained the columns:

Timestamp	Tmsi1	Tmsi2	Imsi	Imsicountry	Imsibrand	Imsioperator	Mcc	Mnc	lac	cell
-----------	-------	-------	------	-------------	-----------	--------------	-----	-----	-----	------

The lac and the cell columns are the part that comprise the msin part of the IMSI. LAC is the location area of the BTS and cell is the identification number of the area that an antenna in BTS covers.

The schema of **cell\_info.db** is altered and **freq**, **scan\_lat**, **scan\_lon** columns are added. Scan\_lat and scan\_lon values are used to classify the entries based on the scanning location. They are taken using google maps' coordinates by the user and are added as command-line arguments in the **simple\_imsi\_catcher.py**.

The freq column corresponds to the channel frequency that PlutoSource captured a specific packet. Because, this value doesn't exist in GSM packets, simple\_imsi\_catcher.py can't access it, so we add a cell\_info.db entry for every channel hop(all columns except freq are empty). In the end of scanning, we delete the empty entries and only preserve the entries that imsi-catcher added.

We execute simple\_imsi\_catcher.py and grgsm\_livemon.py in parallel and every time the cell\_info.db is deleted. We use a file named .close.txt for signaling the simple\_imsi\_catcher.py to close when grgsm\_livemon.py finish the execution.

```
conn.execute(
    u'INSERT INTO observations (stamp, tmsi1, tmsi2, imsi, insicountry, insibrand, insioperator, mcc, mnc, lac, cell, freq, scan_lat, scan_lon)' + "VALUES (?, ?, ?, ?, ?, ?, ?, ?, ?, ?, ?, ?, ?, ?)"
    (now, tmsi1, tmsi2, imsi, insicountry, insibrand, insioperator, mcc, mnc, lac, cell, freq_val, scan_lat, scan_lon)
)
conn.commit()
else:
    sql = ''' UPDATE observations
    SET stamp = ? ,
    tmsi1 = ? ,
    tmsi2 = ? ,
    imsi = ? ,
    insicountry = ? ,
    insibrand = ? ,
    insioperator = ? ,
    mcc = ? ,
    mnc = ? ,
    lac = ? ,
    cell = ? ,
    scan_lat = ? ,
    scan_lon = ?
    WHERE freq = ? '''
    cur = conn.cursor()
    cur.execute(sql, (now, tmsi1, tmsi2, imsi, insicountry, insibrand, insioperator, mcc, mnc, lac, cell, scan_lat, scan_lon, freq_val))
    conn.commit()

if self.mysql_cur:
    print("saving data to db...")
    # Example query
    query = ("INSERT INTO 'imsi' ('tmsi1', 'tmsi2', 'imsi', 'mcc', 'mnc', 'lac', 'cell_id', 'stamp', 'deviceid') VALUES (%s, %s, %s, %s, %s, %s, %s, %s, %s)")
    arg = (tmsi1, tmsi2, imsi, mcc, mnc, lac, cell, now, "rtt")
    self.mysql_cur.execute(query, arg)
    self.mysql_con.commit()
```

Figure 4: cell\_info.db creation and update in simple\_imsi\_catcher.py

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Stage

We create a .js file, which uses the bscoords module, in order to make a request to the Opencellid API that responds back with coordinates of the BTS.

To begin with, we access the cell\_info.db and we select the mcc, mnc, lac, cell , insioperator , freq, scan\_lat and scan\_lon values. In the request to the opencellid API we include the mcc, mnc, lac and cell values and we retrieve the lat and lon values of the BTS.

We create a new persistent database named coords.db with the following schema:

lat	lon	provider	cell	freq	Scan_lat	Scan_lon
-----	-----	----------	------	------	----------	----------

We insert the values that we have in the corresponding columns in cords.db.

For the request we need an API key that we got by signing up in the <https://opencellid.org/> site.

```

'use strict';

const bs = require('../lib/bscoords');
const sqlite3 = require('sqlite3').verbose();

let db = new sqlite3.Database('/root/cell_info.db', sqlite3.OPEN_READONLY, (err) => {
  if (err) {
    console.error(err.message);
  }
  console.log('Connected to my database.');
});

let db_coords = new sqlite3.Database('/root/coords.db', (err) => {
  if (err) {
    console.error(err.message);
  }
  console.log('Database coords created');
});

//db_coords.run('DROP TABLE IF EXISTS coords');
db_coords.run('CREATE TABLE IF NOT EXISTS coords(lat double, lon double, provider string, cell string, freq string, scan_lat double, scan_lon double)');

const services = ['opencellid'];

bs.init({
  apiKey_opencellid: 'pk.6d18b1a25cb511b416c7ebc11b8ddac1',
  'timeout': 3000
});

db.serialize(() => {
  db.each('SELECT mcc,mnc,lac,cell,msioperator,freq,scan_lat,scan_lon
    FROM observations', (err, row) => {
    if (err) {
      console.error(err.message);
    }
  })
});

```

Figure 5: Creation of coords.db and access of cell\_info.db in coords.js.

```

    if ((row.mcc != '') && (row.mcc != null)) {
      console.log(row);
      bs
        .opencellid(row.mcc,row.mnc,row.lac,row.cell)
        .then(coords => {
          console.log(coords);
          db_coords.run('INSERT INTO coords(lat, lon, provider, cell, freq, scan_lat, scan_lon) VALUES (?, ?, ?, ?, ?, ?, ?)',
            [coords.lat,coords.lon,row.msioperator,row.cell,row.freq,row.scan_lat,row.scan_lon], function(err) {
              if (err) {
                return console.log(err.message);
              }
            });
        })
        .catch(err => console.log(err));
    }
  });
  db.close((err) => {
    if (err) {
      console.error(err.message);
    }
    console.log('close the database connection.');
```

Figure 6: Retrievement of BTSs' coordinates and insertion in coords.db in coords.js.

#### 4<sup>th</sup> Stage

We created a map\_render.py file in which we render the BTS locations and the scanning locations in a map which is hosted in the localhost IP.

Our implementation is based on the folium map library. Using the lat and lon values for every entry in cords.db we create the markers for the BTS locations. We present the provider, cellid and freq values for every BTS in a pop-up label.

The scan\_lat and scan\_lon values are used to group the BTSs by scanning locations and each group has a specific colour.



```

conn = create_connection(database)
with conn:
    print("2. Query all tasks")
    rows = select_all_tasks(conn)
    scan_coors = select_scan_coors(conn)
    scan_coors = tuple(set(scan_coors))

    print(scan_coors)
    lat_list = []
    for lat in scan_coors:
        lat_list.append(lat[0])

    print(lat_list)

colors = ['red', 'blue', 'green', 'purple', 'orange', 'darkred', 'lightred', 'beige', 'darkblue', 'darkgreen', 'cadetblue', 'darkpurple', 'white', 'pink', 'lightblue', 'lightgreen', 'gray', 'black', 'lightgray']

# create a folium map
data = (np.random.normal(size=(100, 3)) *
        np.array([1, 1, 1]) +
        np.array([48, 5, 1])).tolist()
folium_map = folium.Map(location=[39.36345892631218, 22.948074885711076],
                        tiles = "Stamen Terrain")
# add data to folium map
# dict = dict((y, x) for x, y in rows)
# tuple(set(rows))
for row in tuple(set(rows)):
    counter = 0
    for lat in lat_list:
        if (lat == row[5]):
            break
        counter += 1
        if (counter == 19):
            counter = 0

    if (row[2] == ""):
        provider = "Unknown"
    else:
        provider = str(row[2])

```

Figure 7: Map creation and retrieval of coordinates for rendering in map\_render.py.

```

folium.Marker(
    location=[row[0], row[1]],
    popup=folium.Popup('<b>provider=</b>' + provider + '<br>'
                      + '<b>cellid=</b>' + str(row[3]) + '<br>'
                      + '<b>freq=</b>' + str(row[4]), min_width = '500%', max_width='500%'),
    icon=folium.Icon(colors[counter])
).add_to(folium_map)

counter = 0
for coords in scan_coors:
    folium.Marker(
        location=[coords[0], coords[1]],
        popup=folium.Popup("&<b>scan_location_%d </b>" % (counter)),
        icon=folium.Icon(colors[counter], icon='home')
    ).add_to(folium_map)
    counter += 1

```

Figure 8: Markers and pop-up placements in map\_render.py

### 5<sup>th</sup> Stage

This is the last stage of part 1 .We created a wrapper for part 1 named wrapper\_part1.sh.

```
cd /root/IMSI-catcher

if [ $# -gt 1 ]
then
    xterm -e "bash -c 'python /root/grgsn_livemon.py' &
    python3 simple_IMSI-catcher.py -s -w /root/cell_info.db -l $1 $2
else
    xterm -e "bash -c 'python /root/grgsn_livemon.py' &
    python3 simple_IMSI-catcher.py -s -w /root/cell_info.db -l 39.36044374110071 22.949124812591084
fi

cd /root/node_modules/bscoords/test/

node test.js

cd

python3.8 map_render.py &
sleep 15
killall -e python3.8
```

*Figure 9: wrapper\_part1.sh script.*

### 6<sup>th</sup> Stage

For part 2 of our project we used the already developed grgsn\_livemon.py and simple\_imsi\_catcher.py in stage 2.

We created a check\_in.py file in which we access the cell\_info.db and retrieved the stamp, timsi1, timsi2, imsi and cell values. We also created a persistent database named check\_in.db with the following schema:

First_check_in	imsi	cell	status	counter
----------------	------	------	--------	---------

In the imsi field we assign either the imsi, or timsi1 or timsi2 whichever exists in this order.

In the first\_check\_in field we assign the date of the first occurrence of this imsi entry in the check\_in.db.

Our goal is to determine if an imsi subscriber has either “active” and “offline” status. We achieve this by using the counter value.

If subscriber’s imsi exist in the cell\_info.db after the scanning, subscriber is present, counter is set to 3 and status is “Active”.

If subscriber’s imsi doesn’t exist in the cell\_info.db after the scanning, subscriber is missing and counter is reduced by 1.

If counter > 0 subscriber is still “Active”, else if counter is 0, subscriber’s status is set to be “Offline”.

```
def sqlite_file(filename):
    try:
        sqlite_con = sqlite3.connect(filename)
    except Error as e:
        print(e)

    sqlite_con.execute("CREATE TABLE IF NOT EXISTS subscribers(first_check_in datetime, imsi text, cell integer, status text, counter integer);")
    return(sqlite_con)

def select_all_tasks(conn,name):
    cur = conn.cursor()
    cur.execute("SELECT * FROM %s" % (name))

    rows = cur.fetchall()
    # for row in rows:
    #     print(row)
    return(rows)

if __name__ == "__main__":
    sub_conn = sqlite_file("/root/check_in.db")
    obs_conn = sqlite3.connect("/root/cell_info.db")

    subs = select_all_tasks(sub_conn,'subscribers')
    obs = select_all_tasks(obs_conn,'observations')
```

Figure 10: Connection and retrieval of entries of check\_in.db and cell\_info.db in check\_in.py.

```

flag = False
imsi = 0
for row in obs:
    if(row[3] == ''):
        if(row[1] == ''):
            if(row[2] == ''):
                continue
            else:
                imsi = row[2]
        else:
            imsi = row[1]
    else:
        imsi = row[3]

    if len(subs) == 0:
        sub_conn.execute(
            u"INSERT INTO subscribers(first_check_in, imsi, cell, status, counter) " + "VALUES (?, ?, ?, ?, ?);",
            (row[0], imsi, row[10], "Active", 3)
        )
        sub_conn.commit()
    else:
        for sub in subs:
            if(imsi == sub[1]):
                flag = True
                break
            else:
                continue

```

Figure 11: IMSI selection and insertion of subscriber's entry in check\_in.py.

```

subs = select_all_tasks(sub_conn,'subscribers')

print("      First Check In      |      IMSI      | Cell-ID | Status | Counter ")
print("-----")
for sub in subs:
    if(len(sub[1]) < 17):
        print ("%s | %s | %s | %s | %s" % (sub[0],sub[1],sub[2],sub[3],sub[4]))
    else:
        print ("%s | %s | %s | %s | %s" % (sub[0],sub[1],sub[2],sub[3],sub[4]))

print("\n")

```

Figure 12: Output formation of IMSI subscribers in check\_in.db in check\_in.py.

## 7<sup>th</sup> Stage

This is the last stage of part 2 . We created a wrapper for part 2 named wrapper\_part2.sh.

```

cd /root/IMSI-catcher

if [ $* -gt 1 ]
then
    xterm -e "bash -c 'python /root/grgsn_livenon.py'" &
    python3 simple_IMSI-catcher.py -s -w /root/cell_info.db -l $1 $2
else
    xterm -e "bash -c 'python /root/grgsn_livenon.py'" &
    python3 simple_IMSI-catcher.py -s -w /root/cell_info.db -l 39.36044374110071 22.949124812591084
fi

cd /root/node_modules/bscoords/test/
node test.js
cd
python3 check_in.py

```

Figure 13: wrapper\_part2.sh script.

## RESULTS OF THE PROJECT

In this section we present the results of both part1 and part2 as shown in the figures below.

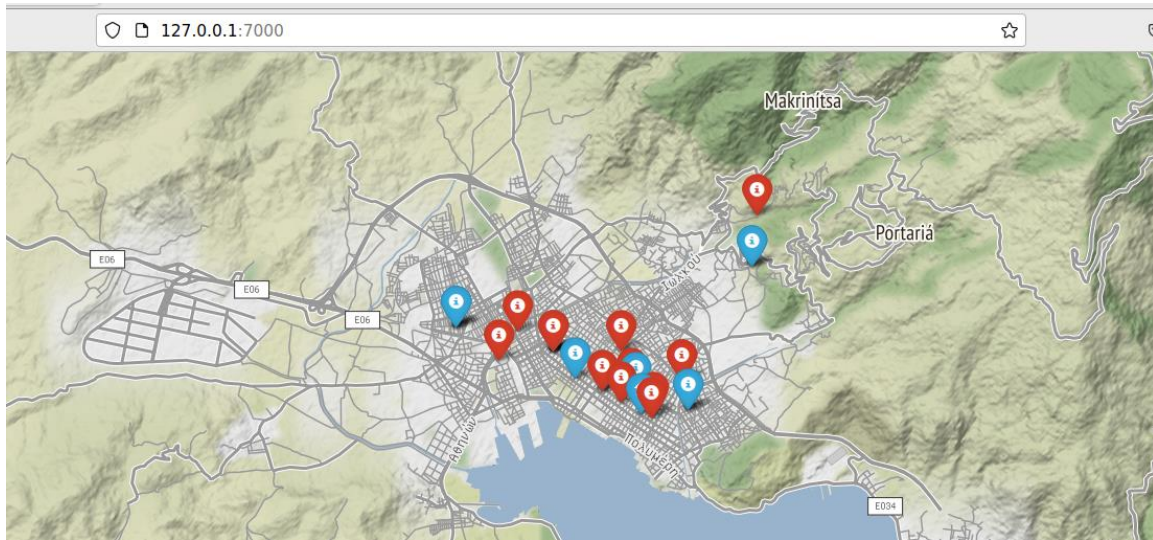


Figure 14: Map with BTS locations as a result of part1's project.

```
root@ubuntu2004:~# python3 check_in.py
```

First Check In	IMSI	Cell-ID	Status	Counter
2022-02-15 00:12:41.664118	202 01 0922638500	52008	Offline	0
2022-02-15 00:12:41.942549	0xcb04050f	52008	Offline	0
2022-02-20 18:17:45.192027	202 01 0915493630	41427	Offline	0
2022-02-20 18:18:19.138191	202 01 0926193754	40258	Offline	0
2022-02-20 18:18:19.251674	202 01 0911063644	40268	Offline	0
2022-02-20 18:18:34.166237	202 01 0924583711	40268	Offline	0
2022-02-20 18:20:30.991404	202 09 1200115407	34473	Offline	0
2022-02-20 18:21:26.449773	202 05 2936566550	10473	Offline	0
2022-02-20 18:21:27.497675	208 10 3793365024	11602	Offline	0
2022-02-20 18:21:30.386405	202 05 2933557923	19353	Offline	0
2022-02-20 18:21:41.429789	202 05 2967930138	19351	Offline	0
2022-02-20 18:23:02.169930	202 05 2937499762	19351	Offline	0
2022-02-15 00:12:41.942549	202 05 2967329171	52008	Offline	0
2022-02-23 21:02:37.161252	222 01 3104336236	00000	Active	3
2022-02-23 21:02:46.498127	202 01 0922525746	40308	Active	3
2022-02-23 21:02:46.523334	202 01 0928011579	40308	Active	3
2022-02-23 21:02:47.340196	202 01 0927803952	40308	Active	3
2022-02-23 21:04:56.969903	202 10 0242533888	34473	Active	3
2022-02-23 21:06:14.872293	0x807bde75	11602	Active	3
2022-02-23 21:06:18.396981	202 05 2970338096	11602	Active	3
2022-02-23 21:06:18.560105	202 05 2966526303	11602	Active	3
2022-02-23 21:06:28.752449	284 01 3160943528	19351	Active	3
2022-02-23 21:14:13.003114	206 01 8070166946	61575	Active	3
2022-02-23 21:14:18.956255	0xd9308f16	61575	Active	3

Figure 15: check\_in.db for connection status as a result of part2's project.