

pointcloudset: Efficient analysis of large datasets of point clouds recorded over time

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Summary

Point clouds are a very common format for representing three dimensional data. Point clouds can be acquired by different sensor types and methods, such as lidar (light detection and ranging), radar (radio detection and ranging), RGB-D (red, green, blue, depth) cameras, photogrammetry, etc. In many cases multiple point clouds are recorded over time. E.g., automotive lidars record point clouds with very high acquisition frequencies (typically around 10-20Hz) resulting in millions of points per second. Analyzing such a large collection of point clouds is a big challenge due to the huge amount of measurement data. The python package pointcloudset provides a way to handle, analyse, and visualize large datasets consisting of multiple point clouds recorded over time. pointcloudset features lazy evaluation and parallel processing and is designed to enable development of new point cloud algorithms and their application on big datasets.

pointcloudset builds on several well established python libraries and packages for data processing and visualization, such as dask ([Dask Development Team, 2016](#); [Rocklin, 2015](#)), pyntcloud ([Pyntcloud Development Team, 2021](#)), open3D ([Zhou et al., 2018](#)), plotly ([Plotly Technologies Inc., 2015](#)), and pandas ([McKinney, 2010](#); [The pandas development team, 2020](#)).

Statement of need

Considering recently emerging, promising lidar technologies, such as micro-electro-mechanical systems, optical phased array, vertical-cavity surface-emitting laser, single-photon avalanche diode etc., combined with large efforts invested in particular by the automotive industry ([Hecht, 2018](#); [Thakur, 2016](#); [Warren, 2019](#)) to further develop low-cost lidar systems, lidar sensors have the potential to enable a new cost-efficient way to perceive and measure the environment. This will not only have a strong impact on automotive applications but bears also large potential for other research fields and application domains, such as robotics, geophysics, etc. Already today, state-of-the-art lidar sensors designed for automotive applications, such as the Ouster OS-1 (<https://ouster.com>) or the Velodyne Ultra Puck (<https://velodynelidar.com>), offer many advantages compared to previous lidar systems used for e.g. 3D surveying or terrestrial laser scanning: automotive lidar sensors are small in size, light in weight, robust, have a low eye safety class, and support high scanning speed. The expected substantial decrease in costs and increase in performance in the upcoming years will open up many new application areas for lidar systems.

Apart from the progress in the lidar sector, technological improvements, as well as size and cost reduction can also be observed for other 3D sensing technologies, such as radar and

41 RGB-D cameras. This will additionally open up new possibilities and application areas for 3D
42 sensing methods and increases the importance of python packages that are able to process
43 large amounts of point cloud data.

44 Other python packages for point clouds, such as open3D and pyntcloud, focus on processing
45 single point clouds. ROS (robot operating system) ([Stanford Artificial Intelligence Laboratory
46 et al., 2018](#)) provides a way to store, access, and visualize multiple point clouds stored as
47 rosbags. However, these rosbags are meant to be accessed only in a serial fashion, which
48 is not ideal for post processing and not well suited for extracting subsets of the point cloud
49 dataset.

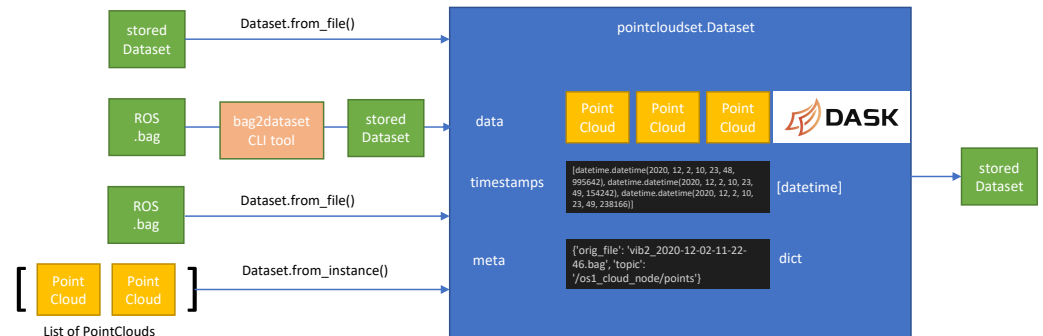


Figure 1: Dataset object with main properties and ways to read and write data.

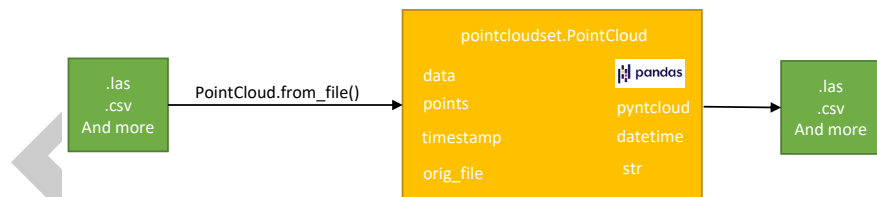


Figure 2: PointCloud set with main properties and ways to read and write data.

50 [Figure 1](#) illustrates the structure of the Dataset class including import and export possibilities.
51 A Dataset consists of many PointCloud objects which can be accessed like list elements
52 in Python. Alternatively, a PointCloud object can also be created directly from files, as
53 illustrated in [Figure 2](#).

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