Distributed information fusion in multistatic sensor networks for underwater surveillance

Paolo Braca, Ryan Goldhahn, Gabriele Ferri, Kevin D. LePage

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Distributed Information Fusion in Multistatic Sensor Networks for Underwater Surveillance

Paolo Braca, Ryan Goldhahn, Gabriele Ferri and Kevin D. LePage

Abstract—Surveillance in antisubmarine warfare has traditionally been carried out by means of submarines or frigates with towed arrays. These techniques are manpower intensive. Alternative approaches have recently been suggested using distributed stationary and mobile sensors, such as autonomous underwater vehicles (AUVs). In contrast with the use of standard assets, these small, low-power, and mobile devices have limited processing and wireless communication capabilities. However, when deployed in a spatially separated network, these sensors can form an intelligent network achieving high performance with significant features of scalability, robustness, and reliability.

The distributed information fusion (DIFFUSION) strategy, in which the local information is shared among sensors, is one of the key aspects of this intelligent network. In this paper, we propose two DIFFUSION schemes, in which the information shared among sensors consists of: 1) contacts, generated by the local detection stage and 2) tracks, generated by the local tracking stage. In the first DIFFUSION scheme, contacts are combined at each node using the optimal Bayesian tracking procedure. A full validation of the DIFFUSION schemes is conducted by the NATO Science and Technology Organization—Center for Maritime Research and Experimentation during the sea trials Exercise Proud Manta 2012–2013 using real data. Performance metrics of DIFFUSION and of local tracking/detection strategies are also evaluated in terms of time-on-target (ToT) and false alarm rate (FAR). We demonstrate the benefit of using DIFFUSION against the local noncooperative strategies. In particular DIFFUSION improves the level of ToT (FAR) with respect to the local tracking/detection strategies. In particular, the ToT is increased over 90%–95% while the FAR is reduced of two order of magnitude. The problem of communication failures, data not available from the collaborative AUV during certain periods of time, is also investigated. The robustness of DIFFUSION with respect to these communication failures is demonstrated, and the related performance results are reported here. In particular, with 75% of communication failures the ToT is over 90%–95% with a relatively small increase of the FAR with respect to the case of perfect communication.

Index Terms—Collaborative data fusion, antisubmarine warfare, multistatic active sonar, target tracking, underwater sensor networks, autonomous underwater vehicles, real-world experimentation.

I. INTRODUCTION AND MOTIVATION

AUTONOMOUS systems have a wide range of applications [1], especially in the underwater domain where it is preferable or mandatory to avoid a human presence. Autonomous Underwater Vehicles (AUVs) with sensing capabilities are used in different applications, especially when the autonomy in the operations is of the utmost importance. This is typically the case when difficulties in communication hamper the possibility of sending remote commands to the vehicles during their navigation, for instance see [2]–[5].

Submarine detection and tracking, referred to as Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW), is one important surveillance application in which AUVs can be effectively used [6]. There are several approaches to ASW which can be mainly divided in passive and active systems. In active ASW systems the echoes revealing the presence of a target are originated by the reflection of an acoustic waveform produced by the surveillance system itself, while in passive systems sound directly produced by the target is recorded. Even in the presence of active sonars, detection/tracking is difficult since it depends on the complex physics of the underwater channel and can be made more difficult by a careful design of submarine shapes, profiles, materials, and by the use of tactical navigation. Active ASW systems can be classified as monostatic, when the acoustic source and receiver are co-located, as opposed to multistatic systems in which the sources and the receivers are different entities, spatially separated from one another [7]–[9]. The minimum multistatic configuration, consisting of a single source-receiver pair, is referred to as bistatic.

The geometry between source, target, and receiver which yields the best probability of detecting echoes from the target, is referred to as the “glint” geometry, and it strongly depends on the usually poorly known target heading. Moreover, with a monostatic system a clever submarine’s navigation strategy can minimize its sonar cross section with respect to a particular direction, while with a multistatic system this strategy is much more difficult.

Acoustic sources include hull mounted sonars, active sonobuoy sources, towed variable-depth sonars, and fixed sources, while towed line arrays are commonly used as receivers [10]. Traditionally these arrays have been towed by submarines or frigates, however this approach is manpower intensive. More recently, alternative approaches have been suggested in which the system is made of distributed mobile and stationary sensors, such as sonobuoys and

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The authors are with the NATO Science and Technology Organization, Centre for Maritime Research and Experimentation, La Spezia 19126, Italy (e-mail: paolo.braca@cmre.nato.int; ryan.goldhahn@cmre.nato.int; gabriele.ferri@cmre.nato.int; kevin.lepage@cmre.nato.int).
As opposed to the use of standard assets, these small, low-power, and mobile devices have limited on board processing and wireless communication capabilities. Consequently, individual sensors can only perform local computation and, because of the underwater channel limitations, communicate over a short range at low data rates. But when deployed across a spatial domain and properly interconnected, these relatively simple sensors can form an intelligent network achieving high performance with significant features of scalability, robustness, reliability. The concept is to develop autonomous systems providing effective ASW capabilities at a fraction of the cost of traditional assets while providing persistent surveillance of an area. An overview on underwater Wireless Sensor Networks (WSNs) is provided in [1]. This is the solution we have been pursuing at NATO Science and Technology Organization - Centre for Maritime Research and Experimentation (CMRE, formerly known as SACLANTCEN and NURC). In the CMRE underwater network, sensorised AUVs act as autonomous mobile nodes, see Fig. 1. Multistatic sonar systems have the potential to greatly increase ASW coverage and performance. The possibility to use several sources and receivers generates different geometric distributions of source-target-receiver increasing the probability of detection and classification for a target.

However, for an AUV, the ASW scenario is challenging from the tracking point of view. Several clutter-generated tracks may be simultaneously present, with some of them possibly lasting for several pings. In addition, the target may not be observable for some time due to particular sound channel conditions or low probability of detection (e.g. due to a particular aspect angle with respect to the receiver arrays). In addition, in ASW systems based employing AUVs, receiving sensors have limited on board computational capabilities and therefore linear arrays with a conventional (rather than adaptive) beamformer are usually employed. In addition, horizontal line array receivers are cylindrically symmetric; they cannot discriminate if a detected echo comes from the port or from the starboard, i.e., they suffer from Port-Starboard (PS) ambiguity [13]–[15]. Thus ambiguous tracks may be produced by the on board tracker.

The mobility and the number of the mobile nodes can be used to solve these problems. Their mobility and autonomy can be used to implement data-driven approaches, enabled by the computational power currently available on board the vehicles. Data-driven approaches and autonomous decisions taken by the vehicles can increase the efficiency of missions by deviating from the pre-planned tracklines traditionally used for AUVs in some real world operations [3], [16], [17]. The AUVs can navigate to optimize some metric of interest, such as the signal-to-noise ratio (SNR), the detection probability, or the estimated tracking error over a future horizon [17]–[21] potentially increasing the tracking performance. The nodes can also share locally collected information. For instance, solutions for the PS ambiguity in combination with the data association problem are provided in [13]–[15] where the assumption, that the target of interest is always assumed present, is made.

In this paper we propose a Distributed InFormation FUSION (DIFFUSION) protocol, in which the local information is shared among sensors. We demonstrate that DIFFUSION can bring clear benefits since clutter-generated or ambiguous tracks can be identified and eliminated. On the other hand, tracks originated by targets can be validated and the detection capability of the target can be improved. In particular, we propose and describe two DIFFUSION schemes, in which the information shared in the network consists of i) contacts and ii) tracks.

The final validation of the proposed approach is performed using real data collected during sea trial experiments, conducted by the NATO CMRE in 2012 and 2013. The NATO Research Vessel (NRV) Alliance and CMRE’s underwater network with multistatic sonar system have been used during the experimentation. The results of these underwater experimental campaigns are here reported.

Performance metrics are evaluated in terms of Time-on-Target (TOT) and False Alarm Rate (FAR). The TOT is defined as the percentage of time in which the algorithm correctly estimates the target trajectory. The FAR is instead the rate of false target presence declared by the algorithm and normalized by unit of time and space. See more details about TOT and FAR in [22] and [23]. We demonstrate the benefit of using DIFFUSION against local strategies, such as the local detector and the local tracker on board a single AUV. The robustness of DIFFUSION with respect to communication failures is also demonstrated.

The paper is organized as follows. In Sec. II there is a description of the DIFFUSION architectures while the derivation of the DIFFUSION procedures based on detection and track sharing is presented in Sec. III and Sec. IV, respectively. In Sec. V a description of the experiments and the related results are reported. Finally, in Sec. VI the final remarks are presented.

II. DIFFUSION ARCHITECTURES

One problem of a distributed system is that the information contained in the observed data is only locally available.
and must be shared among the AUVs and the Command and Control (c^2) system using an underwater communication system. Unfortunately, underwater acoustic communication suffers from severe limitation in terms of bandwidth, and for this reason very little information can be shared between platforms. The objective is to share as much meaningful information as possible in order to improve the detection/tracking performance of the individual AUVs.

The standard approach to the target tracking problem can be divided in two main parts: i) detection and ii) tracking [24]. A natural choice for exchanging information is thus to share i) detections (often referred as contacts) or ii) tracks. An overview of the on board signal processing chain is depicted in Fig. 2. The main blocks are the array processing, the detector, and the tracker. The navigation block is used not only to control the AUV trajectory but also to provide the AUV geolocation. The modem block is dedicated to underwater communication.

In this section we present two DIFFUSION architectures, in which the information provided by each AUV is given by: i) detections and ii) tracks. Note that both detections and tracks can be also generated by false targets (often referred as false alarms and false tracks, respectively) or ghost targets because of the PS ambiguity. The PS ambiguity is the impossibility for the AUV to discriminate port from starboard contacts, this ambiguity complicates the detection and tracking algorithms and may severely degrade performance. In [13] and [14] the target is always assumed to be present and a Bayesian tracking approach is proposed to track the target state in presence of PS ambiguity and measurement origin uncertainty (missed detections and false alarms) [24]. The purpose of DIFFUSION is to provide an improvement in terms of the overall capability of detecting the target (quantified in terms of ToT) and in terms of false alarm reduction (quantified in terms of FAR) with respect to the case in which the information on board the single AUV is available.

In the first DIFFUSION architecture, based on detection sharing, at every time scan k each AUV broadcasts its local detections and related covariance matrices to the network and receives the tracks and covariance matrices from other nodes. Each AUV and the c^2 perform a track-to-track association/fusion [24]. Based on the association events a sequential decision rule is used to classify (disambiguate) the local tracks deciding if a track is true or false/ghost. If the AUV geometry is favorable and the target is detected by at least two AUVs this procedure is able to correctly disambiguate the tracks. This architecture is detailed in Sec. IV.

The challenge of DIFFUSION practical implementation is related to the real-time constraint required by the surveillance application. Clearly, as well known in tracking literature, particle filters are among the most demanding techniques in terms of computational effort. For this reason the proposed DIFFUSION particle filtering, which is Bayesian optimal, risks to be unfeasible on low cost AUV technologies. The second DIFFUSION scheme is instead not optimal but very efficient in terms of computational effort.

III. DIFFUSION BASED ON DETECTION SHARING

A network of N_{AUV} AUVs monitoring a certain surveillance region is considered. The objective of the network is to estimate the absence or presence of a target and, in the latter case, its kinematic components at each time scan k.

The target state X_k can be conveniently formalized as a Bernoulli random finite set (RFS) [25]–[27], where X_k = {∅} when the target is absent, or X_k = {x_k} when the target is present with x_k = [x_k, ˙x_k, y_k, ˙y_k]^T, where the two positions are x_k^T = [x_k, y_k]^T and [ ˙x_k, ˙y_k]^T are the corresponding velocities. In this work, when the target is present, we assume a nearly constant velocity model [24]:

\[ x_k = F_k x_{k-1} + v_k, \]

where F_k is the state transition matrix, and v_k takes into account the target acceleration or unmodeled dynamics.

At each time scan k a set of contacts are observed by the s^{th} AUV, defined by

\[ Z_{k,s} = \{ z_{k,s,i} \}_{i=1}^{m_{k,s}}, \]

where m_{k,s} is the number of measurements. Given the PS ambiguity problem, z_{k,s,i} in (2) are just the contacts on the port side, since they form a sufficient statistic, because of the deterministic dependence of the starboard contacts on the port contacts [13].

A. Target Presence/Absence

Under the hypothesis of target absence (hypothesis H_0), the contacts are independent from each others and identically distributed with a known clutter distribution. The set density
of the measurements under $\mathcal{H}_0$, at time $k$ and at the $s^{th}$ sensor can be formally written as:

$$f_{k,s}(Z|\mathcal{H}_0) = \mu_c(m; \lambda) \prod_{i=1}^{m} f^{(c)}(z_i),$$  \tag{3}

where $\mu_c(m; \lambda)$ is the probability mass function (PMF) of the clutter cardinality (often assumed as a Poisson PMF with rate $\lambda$), and $f^{(c)}(z)$ is probability density function (PDF) of the clutter location (typically modeled as uniform in the region of interest), see further details in [13], [24], and [28]–[31].

When the target is present (hypothesis $\mathcal{H}_1$), it can be observed with a certain detection probability. This may vary dramatically over the surveillance region, and is in general a function of the receiver array parameters, source parameters, source-target-receiver geometry, and environmental parameters such as bottom scattering strength, water column and bottom sediment density and sound speed, and bottom and surface roughness and reflection loss. Numerical and/or closed-form acoustic propagation models [32]–[34] are then used to calculate the predicted $P_D$. We borrow from [15] an acoustic model to predict the detection probability of the target in any position in the surveillance region, taking into account the relevant environmental acoustic effects. This will be key for enhancing the performance of the tracking algorithm, as well as for the path planning optimization proposed in [20].

The aforementioned acoustic model provides us with a detection probability $P_D(x^{(p)}_k, \mathbf{p}_k, s_k)$, which is a function on the target position $x^{(p)}_k$, of the receiver position $\mathbf{p}_k$, and of the source position $s_k$. In this work we assume a stationary source, then $s_k = s$ and $P_D(x^{(p)}_k, \mathbf{p}_k, s_k) = P_D(x^{(p)}_k, \mathbf{p}_k)$. Since we assume that at most one target is present, all the other contacts are clutter, independent from the target's state. Then, the set density of data under $\mathcal{H}_1$ is given by

$$f_{k,s}(Z|\mathcal{H}_1) = \left(1 - P_D(x^{(p)}_k, \mathbf{p}_k)\right) \mu_c(m; \lambda) \prod_{i=1}^{m} f^{(c)}(z_i) + m^{-1} P_D(x^{(p)}_k, \mathbf{p}_k) \mu_c(m - 1; \lambda) \times \sum_{j=1}^{m} f_{k,j}^{(c)}(z_j),$$  \tag{4}

where $f_{k,j}^{(c)}(z_j)$ is the target-originated PDF with PS ambiguity, see details in [13]. In order to make explicit the relation between the target state and the data, eqs. (3) and (4) can be equivalently rewritten as:

$$f_{k,s}(Z | X_k = \emptyset) = f_{k,s}(Z | \mathcal{H}_0),$$  \tag{5}

$$f_{k,s}(Z | X_k = \{x_k\}) = f_{k,s}(Z | \mathcal{H}_1).$$  \tag{6}

B. Optimal Bayesian Tracking

In Bayesian tracking, the objective is to construct the posterior distribution of the target state $X_k$. Let us denote by $Z^s_{1:k} = [Z^s_1, Z^s_2, \ldots, Z^s_k]$ the aggregate in time of the data up to time step $k$ received by the $s^{th}$ AUV. Let us indicated with $\mathcal{N}_{s,k}$ the set of AUVs able to communicate with the $s^{th}$ AUV. The measurements collected by the $s^{th}$ AUV are $Z^s_k = \{Z_{k,i}\}_{i \in \mathcal{N}_{s,k}}$, which is the aggregate of detection sets received from each AUV $i \in \mathcal{N}_{s,k}$, including its own detections $s \in \mathcal{N}_{s,k}$. The target state posterior of the $s^{th}$ AUV can be thus written as:

$$\mathcal{P}_s(X_k | Z^s_{1:k}) = \frac{\mathcal{L}(Z^s_k | X_k) \mathcal{P}_s(X_k | Z^s_{1:k-1})}{\mathcal{P}_s(Z^s_k | Z^s_{1:k-1})},$$  \tag{7}

where $\mathcal{P}_s(X_k | Z^s_{1:k-1})$ is the prior at time $k$ and $\mathcal{P}_s(Z^s_k | Z^s_{1:k-1})$ is the scaling factor. Since the sensors are conditionally independent given the target state, the likelihood $\mathcal{L}(Z^s_k | X_k)$ can be factorized as:

$$\mathcal{L}(Z^s_k | X_k) = \prod_{i \in \mathcal{N}_{s,k}} f_{k,i}(Z_{k,i} | x_k),$$  \tag{8}

where $f_{k,i}(Z_{k,i} | x_k)$ is the likelihood of the $s^{th}$ sensor at time $k$, given in eqs. (5)-(6). We assume that the AUVs have the ability to communicate not only their local detections $Z_{k,i}$, but also AUV positions $\mathbf{p}_{k,i}$ and orientations. Analogously, we can proceed to update the target state posterior at the $c^2$.

Unfortunately, closed-form solutions of the posterior distribution (7) are seldom available in practice. As a consequence, one should typically resort to some form of approximation that are both accurate and computationally tractable. Specifically, in this work we focus on the powerful technique of particle filtering to obtain a numerically efficient approximation of (7), [28], [35], [36]. The posterior distribution (7) at time $k$ is represented by

$$\hat{\mathcal{P}}_s(X_k | Z^s_{1:k}) = \left\{ \begin{array}{ll}
\sum_{i=1}^{N_p} w_k^i \delta x^i_k(x), & X_k = \{x\}, \\
\hat{\mathcal{P}}_s(X_k | \emptyset), & X_k = \emptyset,
\end{array} \right.$$  \tag{9}

where $w_k^i$ is the weight approximating $\mathcal{P}_s(X_k = \emptyset | Z^s_{1:k})$, $x^i_k$ is the $i$-th sample of the target state, $w_k^i$ is the $i$-th weight approximating $\mathcal{P}_s(X_k = \{x^i_k\} | Z_{1:k})$, $N_p$ is the number of particles, $\delta x^i_k(x)$ is the delta function located in $x_0$.

Algorithm 1 presents the pseudo-code of the particle filter implementation, where $f(x_k|x_{k-1})$ is a Gaussian centered in $F_{x_k-1}$ with covariance given by $Q_{x_k}, U_{Lx}(x; z)$ is a 2-D uniform distribution centered in $z$ with length $L$, $p_0$ and $p_s$ are respectively the target birth and survive probabilities, $N_{Z^s_k} = \sum_{i \in \mathcal{N}_{s,k}} |Z_{k,i}|$ is the total number of contacts at the $s^{th}$ AUV, $\phi_x(\cdot)$ is the RFS transition distribution and $q(\cdot)$ is the importance sampling distribution. Note that the resampling algorithm is standard and given in [37].

C. Detection and Estimation of the Target

In this subsection we describe the estimation procedure for obtaining $\hat{X}_k$ from the posterior distribution $\hat{\mathcal{P}}_s(X_k | Z^s_{1:k})$. As discussed in the RFS literature, see [29], [38], in this work we opt for a two-stage procedure in which first we decide if the target is present or absent and then estimate its state. Given our Bayesian detection framework, the optimal decision rule is formulated as follows [39]

$$\begin{array}{ll}
\mathcal{P}_s(X_k \neq \emptyset | Z^s_{1:k}) \geq p_\gamma, & \text{declare } \mathcal{H}_1, \\
\mathcal{P}_s(X_k = \emptyset | Z^s_{1:k}) > 1 - p_\gamma, & \text{declare } \mathcal{H}_0,
\end{array}$$  \tag{10}
The error in the difference of the state estimates is defined as
\[ \hat{\Delta}^i_k = \Delta^i_k - \hat{\Delta}^i_k, \] (14)
with covariance, under the independence assumption, given by
\[ T_k^i = P_k^{s_1,i} + P_k^{s_2,j}. \] (15)

The decision is based on the testing rule
\[ D_{ij} \triangleq \left( \hat{\Delta}^i_k \right)^T \left[ T_k^i \right]^{-1} \hat{\Delta}^i_k \geq \alpha, \] (16)
where the threshold \( \alpha \) is computed such that \( P(D_{ij} > D_{ij} | H_{ij}) = \alpha \). Exploiting the Gaussian assumption, the threshold corresponds to the \( 1 - \alpha \) point of the chi-square distribution.

Let us consider the case in which there are multiple tracks on each AUV. Therefore, the previous testing rule must be extended as follows. Assume that \( s_1 \) and \( s_2 \) AUVs have a set of active tracks \( T_k^{s_1} \), with \( N_{s_1} = \left| T_k^{s_1} \right| \), and \( T_k^{s_2} \), with \( N_{s_2} = \left| T_k^{s_2} \right| \), respectively. We define the binary assignment variable \( \delta_{ij} \), which is unity if the track \( i \) of \( s_1 \) is associated with the track \( j \) of \( s_2 \), and null otherwise. The list of tracks at each site is augmented with a dummy element, indicated with the null index, to incorporate the case in which the track of one AUV should not be associated with any of the tracks of the other AUV. For instance, \( \delta_{0j} \) represents the case that the track \( i \) is not associated. If we assume that the track association events among different track pairs are independent, then the 2-D assignment formulation finds the most likely (joint) T2T-A hypothesis by solving the following constrained optimization [24]
\[
\min_{\delta_{ij}} \sum_{i=0}^{N_{s_1}} \sum_{j=0}^{N_{s_2}} \delta_{ij} c_{ij} \quad \text{s. t.} \quad \begin{cases} 
\sum_{i=0}^{N_{s_1}} \delta_{ij} = 1, & j = 1, \ldots, N_{s_2}, \\
\sum_{j=0}^{N_{s_2}} \delta_{ij} = 1, & i = 1, \ldots, N_{s_1}, \\
\delta_{ij} \in \{0, 1\}, & i = 0, \ldots, N_{s_1}, \quad j = 0, \ldots, N_{s_2},
\end{cases}
\]
where
\[ c_{ij} = -\ln L_{ij}. \] (17)

For \( i, j \geq 1 \), \( L_{ij} \) is the likelihood ratio of the two tracks being from the same target versus being from two different targets and is proportional to \( D_{ij} \). For \( i = 0 \) (or \( j = 0 \)) \( L_{ij} \) is the likelihood ratio of an incomplete assignment, see further details in [24]. The optimization problem of eq. (17) can be solved using standard procedures, e.g. the Auction algorithm, linear programming by relaxing the integer constraint, etc. Defining \( \delta_{ij} \) the T2T-A pairs, the fusion target state is computed for all the associated tracks, \( \delta_{ij}^* = 1, i, j \geq 1 \) leading

Note that the track estimates \( x_k^{s_1,i} \) and \( x_k^{s_2,j} \) are not independent [24]. However, in this work we use this simplification since the procedure to carry out the dependency would require a higher computational load.

\[ \text{Algorithm 1 Diffusion Particle Filter} \]

\begin{algorithm}
\caption{Diffusion Particle Filter}
\begin{algorithmic}
\STATE \text{IMPORTANCE SAMPLING}
\STATE Draw \( x_k^i \sim f(x_k|z_{k-1}^i), \forall i=1,\ldots,N_p; \)
\FOR {\( j \in N_z \)}
\STATE Draw \( N \) new samples \( x_k^{N_p+n} \) from \( \mathcal{U}_i(x;z_{k-1,ji},n) \) \( \forall n = 1,\ldots,|Z_{k,ji}|; \)
\ENDFOR
\STATE \text{UPDATE}
\FOR {\( i=1 \) to \( N_p+N \) \( Z_k^i \)}
\STATE \( x_k^i = \left\{ x_k^i \right\}, \quad w_k^i = \mathcal{L}(Z_k^i|X_k) \phi(x_k^i|x_k^i)_{q(x_k^i|x_k^i)_{q(x_k^i|x_k^i)}} w_k^{i-1}; \)
\ENDFOR
\STATE \text{NORMALIZATION}
\STATE \( w_\tau = w_\tau^0 + \sum_{j=1}^{N_z} w_j; \) \{Total weight\}
\STATE \( w_\tau^0; \quad w_k^i = \frac{w_k^i}{w_\tau}; \quad \forall i=1,\ldots,N_p; \)
\STATE \text{RESAMPLING}
\STATE \( N_{eff} = \left( \frac{N_p}{\sum_{j=1}^{N_z} w_j^2} \right)^{-1}; \) \{Effective sample size\}
\IF {\( N_{eff} < N_p \tau_\delta \)}
\STATE resampling;
\ENDIF
\end{algorithmic}
\end{algorithm}

where \( p_\gamma \) is named as target probability threshold. The estimator is then given by
\[ \hat{x}_k = \begin{cases} \hat{x}_k, & \text{if decided } \mathcal{H}_1, \\
\emptyset, & \text{if decided } \mathcal{H}_0, \end{cases} \] (11)
where \( \hat{x}_k \) is the estimator of the target state. A convenient choice for the target state, optimal in terms of mean square error, is the posterior mean \( \hat{x}_k = \mathbb{E}[x_k|Z_{1:k}^i] \), where \( \mathbb{E}[\cdot] \) is the posterior mean operator.

IV. DIFFUSION BASED ON TRACK SHARING

In this section the diffusion, based on the T2T procedure, is detailed and discussed. The T2T procedure is performed in two steps: the T2T association (T2T-A) and the T2T fusion (T2T-F) [24]. A local tracker, running on each AUV, is available. At the AUV \( s \), the tracker is fed sequentially by the local detections at each time scan and provides a number of tracks, denoted by \( \left\{ x_{k|k}^i \right\}_{i \in T_k^s} \), and their related covariance matrices \( \left\{ P_{k|k}^i \right\}_{i \in T_k^s} \), where \( T_k^s \) is the set of active tracks at AUV \( s \).

The T2T-A is a procedure which associates the tracks of AUV \( s_1 \), to those of the AUV \( s_2 \). Let us begin assuming that just a single track is active at each AUV: \( x_{k|k}^{s_1,i} \) at \( s_1 \) and \( x_{k|k}^{s_2,j} \) at \( s_2 \). The true target states are respectively \( x_k^i \) and \( x_k^j \) for \( s_1 \) and \( s_2 \). Let us define:
\[ \Delta_k^{ij} = x_k^{s_1,i} - x_k^{s_2,j}, \quad \Delta_k^i = x_k^i - \bar{x}_k. \] (12)

The same target and the different target hypotheses, namely \( \mathcal{H}_{ij} \) and \( \tilde{\mathcal{H}}_{ij} \), are formulated as
\[ \mathcal{H}_{ij} : \Delta_k^{ij} = 0, \quad \tilde{\mathcal{H}}_{ij} : \Delta_k^{ij} \neq 0. \] (13)
to higher accuracy than the individual state estimates. For all
the unassociated tracks the fusion system is equivalent to
the single sensor.

A. Sequential Decision Based on the T2T-A Events
Because of the PS ambiguity problem, the set of tracks \( T^s_k \) at each AUV is constituted by true tracks and ghost tracks. Let us assume that a true track, say \( i' \), is generated by port side contacts then the tracker likely would generate a ghost track, say \( i'' \), by using the symmetric contacts, in terms of bearing, on the starboard side. In principle, by using a linear array there is not a procedure able to disambiguate without a sharp maneuvering of the AUV [13]. Here we propose the T2T-A events as decision statistic to disambiguate.

In general two ambiguous tracks \( i' \) and \( i'' \) cannot be both true at the same time, unless there are two true targets in exactly the same location relative to the array. In other words one of them is always ghost. Let use define the sets of ambiguous tracks \( \left\{ \tilde{T}^i_k, \tilde{T}^i_k \right\} = T^i_k \) with an index operator

\[
i'' = g_k(i') \in \tilde{T}^i_k, \ \forall i' \in \tilde{T}^i_k.
\]  

(19)

Define a sequential score function \( l_k(i) \), \( \forall i \in T^i_k \) for each track, initialized to zero. If track \( i \) is associated with one track of the other AUVs (\( \delta_{ij}^s = 1 \)), then we update the sequential score function as follows

\[
l_k(i) = l_{k-1}(i) + 1, \]

\[
l_k(g_k(i)) = l_{k-1}(g_k(i)) - 1.
\]  

(20)

(21)

When a positive threshold \( \gamma \geq 0 \) is reached the track is declared to be disambiguated or correct, otherwise when a negative threshold \( \gamma^- < 0 \) is reached the track is declared ghost.

V. DIFFUSION EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS
In this section the full validation of the DIFFUSION schemes is provided using real data from experiments conducted by NATO CMRE during the sea trials Exercise Proud Manta 2012 (EXPOMA12) and Exercise Proud Manta 2013 (EXPOMA13). Specifically, DIFFUSION based on detection sharing is tested using the EXPOMA12 dataset, while the DIFFUSION based on track sharing is tested using the EXPOMA13 dataset.

In EXPOMA12 we simulate the presence of communication failures, in which an AUV does not receive information from its collaborator. In the case of perfect communication, the AUVs, as well as the \( c^2 \), perform equivalently because they use the same data. In EXPOMA13 we use the data correctly received at the \( c^2 \) during the experimentation. Coherently, we define the communication error rate (CER) as the percent of communication failures.

In the next subsections we briefly describe the experiments conducted during EXPOMA12 and EXPOMA13 and the technical details of the main research equipments (see Fig. 3) which constitute the CMRE cooperative ASW multistatic network schematically depicted in Fig. 1. Then, we report the results obtained by adopting the DIFFUSION schemes.

A. CMRE Cooperative ASW Multistatic Network
As the acoustic source, we used the Deployable Experimental Multi-static Undersea Surveillance System DEMUS [40]. The source is bottom-tethered and was not moved during the experiments. The source transmitted a hyperbolic frequency modulated (HFM) sweep with 48 s ping repetition rate. The DEMUS source was equipped with a modem to enable remote activation via underwater acoustic communications, and a radio buoy to allow wireless activation.
and monitoring of the source, as well as GPS synchronization for timing and accurate position estimates.

The vehicles used as receiving nodes of the multistatic network were two Ocean Explorer (OEX) AUVs (shown in Fig. 3(d)). These vehicles are approximately 4.3 m long and 0.53 m wide. They can reach a speed of 1 m/s with a maximum operating depth of 300 m. The OEX AUVs are both deployed with the BENS slim towed array SLITA [11]. The arrays are deployed approximately 3.5 m behind the vehicle. In the experiments both vehicles suffered from PS ambiguity, as discussed before.

AUVs communicated between each other and with the $c^2$ centre acoustically. Each vehicle was equipped with a 7/17 kHz Evologics [41] low-frequency modem. The adopted channel access method is the Time Division Multiple Access (TDMA).

To communicate from $c^2$ centre with the vehicles a gateway buoy is deployed. The gateway buoy has a radio link with the $c^2$ centre and is equipped with an acoustic modem. Starting from EXPOMA13, a Waveglider autonomous surface vehicle [42] has been used in the network as an additional gateway. The Waveglider’s mobility is used to position it in favorable locations to improve the communication with the vehicles. With this configuration, four nodes are present in the communication scheme and the used TDMA frame was 54 s.

The vehicles usually send messages containing navigation data and information related to their operative state. When contacts and/or tracks are present, the AUVs try to send them in a message containing the five highest SNR contacts and in a message containing the three longest tracks produced by the tracker. Given the available bandwidth and the messages to be sent, when present, these two messages are sent with a maximum delay of one TDMA frame (in the frame later to their production).

All the assets were deployed from the NRV Alliance. The vessel acted as the $c^2$ centre during the experiments. The discussed datasets were collected by using an echo-repeater (ER) as a target.

The ER was towed by the NRV Alliance, and recorded the waveforms received following the DEMUS transmissions, then re-transmitted the recorded signals with a user-specified amplitude gain after a user-specified delay.

During the experiments described in this work, the echo repeater re-broadcast the incoming sonar signal with a tunable gain over the received level. This gain serves as a substitute for the target sonar cross-section or reflectivity.

1) AUV Control System: The AUV control system is based on the “backseat-driver” paradigm: a backseat computer executes the processes managing the mission and produces commands for a frontseat computer in charge of the low-level vehicle control [43].

The software architecture running on the vehicles is based on MOOS-IvP [43]. MOOS-IvP is an open source C++ framework for providing autonomy to robotic platforms, in particular marine vehicles. MOOS-IvP is based on the publish/subscribe paradigm: a community of processes subscribe to receive and publish variables from/to a database (MOOSDB). For the management and control of vehicles, the MOOS framework works according to the backseat-driver and fits with the described hardware: MOOS processes managing the mission run on the backseat computer receiving data from/issuing commands to the frontseat computer. The IvP Helm is a MOOS application that enables behaviour-based autonomy [43]. A behaviour is a self-contained vehicle control law that achieves and/or maintain goals [44]. Behaviours can run simultaneously and can be grouped into behaviour sets, which are active based on certain conditions. The IvP Helm is able to reconcile the different active behaviours outputs by using interval programming technique. It combines the objective functions generated by the different active behaviours to produce the commands for the frontseat controller, specifically speed, heading and depth commands. The different behaviours offer a set of navigation primitives, such as waypoint navigation, racetracks or collision avoidance. These are the building blocks to create the AUV missions.

In the MOOS framework, the signal processing software is run [6], [45]. At each ping, $pProcessSlitaBB$, a MOOS front-end to the active sonar signal processing algorithm libraries, receives the acoustic data coming from the array and acquired by the frontseat computer, and produces the contacts (range and bearing data). In particular, it executes the beamforming, matched filtering, normalization and finally creates the contacts. Contacts are fed to the on board tracker process, in this case the CMRE multi-hypothesis tracker (MHT) [46]. The tracker processes the contact data, first geolocating them using the source location and the array location/heading angle. Then it combines (spatially) related contacts over time, generating tracks.

During the two described experiments, pre-planned racetracks were executed by the AUVs. Pre-planned tracklines assure coverage of the area with the area coverage timing computable prior the experiment. These features were important to fulfill the mission requirements.

B. Exercise Proud Manta 2012

The EXPOMA12 was held in the Mediterranean Sea off the coast of Sicily, Italy during February-March 2012. The setup of the experiment is reported in Figs. 4–5, where we depict the location of the DEMUS source (yellow diamond), position of AUVs, Harpo (blue square) and Groucho (green square), and the trajectory of the target (black dashed line). The ER towed by the NRV Alliance is used in the experiment as a reproducible and controllable target.

The DEMUS is located at (12.3 km, 23.2 km). The target sails from the location (16.5 km, 16.9 km) to (17.2 km, 9.8 km) and then goes to (11.3 km, 15.8 km). The AUVs sail south-east of the source position and the target trajectory. The duration of the experiment is approximately 2 hours. Further details about the experimental setup are also available in [13].

A key element of this procedure is that the SNR, and consequently the detection probability at each AUV, depends on the geometry of the bistatic system and on the environment, e.g. multipath time spread, reverberation, bathymetry, sound speed, see further details in [13], [15], [19], and [20].
The detections of each AUV are combined by using DIFFUSION, defined in Sec. III. The DIFFUSION is implemented by a particle filtering strategy derived in Sec. III-B.

In Fig. 4, we report the behaviour of DIFFUSION in which the detection probability of each AUVs is not constant over the surveillance region. Fig. 4(a)-(b) (right-side) show the so-called blanking region between the AUV and the source and also the degradation of the detection probability ($<0.3$) near the edges of the surveillance region. However, note that the target is mostly moving in the region where the detection probability is high ($\approx 0.7 - 0.9$).

Using the proposed procedure we are able to correctly estimate the target trajectory and to reject most of the ghost and false contacts, see Fig. 5. In Fig. 6 the posterior target presence probability is depicted. It is worthwhile to note that for $25 < k < 40$ the target is erroneously considered absent, this is caused by the fact that there is a mismatch between the expected AUV detection probability and the true one. This problem can be overcome using an adaptive tracking strategy developed in [48] and [49]. In Tab. I we report the
performance of the DIFFUSION scheme in terms of TO\(\text{T}\) and FAR. The detector on board of AUVs is able to correctly declare the target presence 78\% (TO\(\text{T}\) of Harpo) and 53\% (TO\(\text{T}\) of Groucho) of the overall target time at the cost of FAR = 7.5 \(\cdot\) 10\(^{-5}\) (Harpo) and FAR = 9.1 \(\cdot\) 10\(^{-5}\) (Groucho). The use of the DIFFUSION collaboration among AUVs is able to sensibly increase the performance reducing the FAR of two order of magnitude and increasing the TO\(\text{T}\) over the 90\%. Specifically when there is a perfect communication (CER = 0) the TO\(\text{T}\) for both AUVs is 94\% with FAR = 2.5 \(\cdot\) 10\(^{-7}\) while when the communication is affected by remarkable issues, CER = 75\%, the DIFFUSION exhibits still good performance, TO\(\text{T}\) = 95\% and TO\(\text{T}\) = 91\% for respectively Harpo and Groucho, but at the price of an increase of the FAR, 5.8 \(\cdot\) 10\(^{-7}\) for Harpo and 6.7 \(\cdot\) 10\(^{-7}\) for Groucho.

C. Exercise Proud Manta 2013

The EXPOMA13 was held in the Mediterranean Sea off the coast of Sicily, Italy during February-March 2013. The ER towed by the NRV Alliance is used in the experiment as a reproducible and controllable target. We have two trajectories
of the target, each of them is about one and a half hour. In the first trajectory the target sails from the location \((7 \text{ km}, 12 \text{ km})\) to \((11 \text{ km}, 17 \text{ km})\) and finally goes to \((10 \text{ km}, 16 \text{ km})\), in the second one the target sails from the location \((10 \text{ km}, 15 \text{ km})\) to \((12 \text{ km}, 18 \text{ km})\) and finally goes to \((8 \text{ km}, 13 \text{ km})\).

The DIFFUSION based on track sharing is adopted here, in which the tracks collected by AUVs during the experiment are combined at the \(c^2\) on board of the NRV Alliance. The CER of the AUVs observed at the \(c^2\) was quite good, around 10% for Harpo and 30% for Groucho.

In Fig. 8 we report the behaviour of the DIFFUSION scheme. In time scan \(k = 86\), Fig. 7(a), only two active tracks from Harpo are available, consequently DIFFUSION tracks are the same of Harpo with a null score. The DIFFUSION ID is taken by the set of Harpo ID in this case. In time scan \(k = 87\), Fig. 7(b), two tracks are provided by Groucho. An association event between ID = 212 of Harpo and ID = 533 of Groucho is observed. Given that ID = 212 and ID = 533 have ambiguous tracks respectively ID = 212 and ID = 532 the association event entails that \(l_k(212) = 1\) and \(l_k(217) = l_k(532) = -1\).

In time scan \(k = 90\), Fig. 7(c), and \(k = 93\), Fig. 7(d), the same association event is observed leading finally to \(l_k(212) = 3\). In time scan \(k = 90\) the track ID = 217 is substituted by track ID = 249, then finally at scan \(k = 93\) we have \(l_k(249) = -2\), \(l_k(532) = -3\).

Using DIFFUSION we are able to correctly estimate the target trajectory and to reject most of the ghost and false contacts, see Fig. 8. In Tab. II a comparison is reported in terms of TOT and FAR among the DIFFUSION scheme and the tracker on board the vehicles. In this case we report an increment of the TOT (\(\gamma = 0\)) from the local tracker 83 – 70% (Harpo and Groucho) to 92% reducing the FAR from 1.2 – 1.6 \(\times\) 10\(^{-5}\) to 0.9 \(\times\) 10\(^{-5}\). Increasing \(\gamma\) we reduce the FAR of two orders of magnitude by decreasing the TOT to a level of 82% and of three orders of magnitude by decreasing the TOT to a level of 78 – 72%.

**VI. CONCLUSION**

In this paper we report recent advances in anti-submarine warfare applications using a multistatic network of AUVs. In particular we propose two distributed information fusion (DIFFUSION) schemes, in which the information in the form of contacts and tracks is shared among the AUVs and the command and control.

A full validation of the DIFFUSION schemes using real-world experiments conducted by the NATO Science and Technology Organization – Centre for Maritime Research and Experimentation, during the sea trials *Exercise Proud Manta 2012-2013*, is reported. Significant performance improvements of DIFFUSION schemes are observed in terms of both TOT and FAR against the use of a single AUV asset. Specifically, the TOT is increased over 90 – 95% while the FAR is reduced of two order of magnitude. The robustness of
DIFFUSION with respect to communication failures is also demonstrated, and the related performance results are reported in this paper. Specifically, with 75% of communication failures the TOF is over 90 − 95% with a relatively small increase of the FAR.

Possible directions for future studies include the adaptive AUVs deployment and dynamics, exploiting techniques like dynamic programming and stochastic control. Considering the shallow water environment the tracker can be also enhanced using optimization strategies to maximize the target detection probability. Another future work involves the use of a bandwidth efficient fully distributed target tracking collaborative strategy.

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Paolo Braca (M’14) received the Laurea (summa cum laude) degree in electronic engineering and the Ph.D. (Hons.) degree in information engineering from the University of Salerno, Salerno, Italy, in 2006 and 2010, respectively. In 2009, he was a visiting Scholar with the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering, University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT, USA, working with Prof. P. K. Willett. In 2010, he was a Senior Engineer with D’Appollonia S.p.A., Rome, Italy. From 2010 to 2011, he was a Post-Doctoral Associate with the University of Salerno.

He joined the Centre for Maritime Research and Experimentation, NATO Science and Technology Organization, in 2011, as a Scientist with the Research Department. He is involved in developing signal processing techniques for different kinds of sensor network technologies, including low-power radar sensor network (X-band and HF surface wave), sonar AUV network, and transponder-based satellite/terrestrial sensors. A special emphasis is given to the study of distributed and autonomous signal processing techniques applied to networked systems. Typically, these techniques are scientifically validated and tested during NATO experimentation in the field of maritime security and antishubmarine warfare.

Dr. Braca has co-authored over 70 publications in international scientific journals, conference proceedings, and NATO technical reports. He is currently an Associate Editor of the IEEE Signal Processing Magazine (E-Newsletter) and the Journal of Advances in Information Fusion, and a Reviewer for several scientific journals and conferences. He has been a Co-Organizer with Prof. P. K. Willett of the special session Multisensor Multitarget Tracking at the European Signal Processing Conference in 2013. He was a recipient of the Best Student Paper Award (First Runner-Up) at the 12th Conference on Information Fusion in 2009.

Ryan Goldhahn received the B.A. degree from Dartmouth College in 2004, and the M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in electrical and computer engineering from Duke University, in 2007 and 2010, respectively. Since 2010, he has been with the NATO Centre for Maritime Research and Experimentation, CMRE, La Spezia, Italy, in model-based underwater acoustic signal processing. His current research interests include autonomous vehicles and distributed sensor networks.

Gabriele Ferri (S’06–M’08) received the Laurea (Hons.) degree (M.S.) in computer engineering from the University of Pisa, Pisa, Italy, in 2003, and the Ph.D. degree in biorobotic science and engineering jointly from Scuola Superiore Sant’Anna, Pisa, and IMT Advanced Studies, Lucca, Italy, in 2008. From 2003 to 2005, he was a Software/System Consultant Engineer with WASS, a Finmeccanica group company, Livorno, Italy, developing a new system of control and guidance for a light-weighted torpedo. In 2007, he was a Visiting Researcher with the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, Woods Hole, MA, USA. He was involved in the Dustbot FP6 European project developing the navigation system of urban autonomous land robots.

After a period as a Post-Doctoral Investigator with Scuola Superiore Sant’Anna, where he worked as a Project Leader of the HydroNet FP7 European Project, in 2012, he won a position as a Research Scientist with the NATO Centre for Maritime Research and Experimentation, La Spezia, Italy.

His research interests include multi-robot systems for littoral surveillance, robotic systems for environmental monitoring/exploration, control theory, and robot navigation topics.

He is the Technical Director of Student Autonomous Underwater Vehicle Challenge Europe (SAUC-E) and the euRathlon 2014 and 2015 robot competitions.

Kevin LePage received the B.S. degree in naval architecture and marine engineering from Webb Institute, in 1983, the Ph.D. degree in ocean engineering from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), in 1992, and the M.S. degree from MIT in 1987. He was a Naval Architect with DTNSRDC, Cabin John, MD. He joined CMRE in 2008, where he has been the Project Leader for the Concepts for Littoral Surveillance Project within the Cooperative ASW Programme from 2010 to 2012, and the Programme Manager for that programme since 2013. In this time, he has worked on the development and deployment of an autonomous active ASW prototype based on the concept of AUVs acting as receivers in a multistatic active ASW network. This demonstrator has been taken to sea seven times since 2008, and most recently has been deployed in national experimentation with the Italian Navy twice (2011 and 2013) and twice during NATO ASW exercises (POMA12 and 13). He was a Research Physicist with the U.S. Naval Research Laboratory, Washington, DC, USA, from 2002 to 2008, a Senior Scientist with the SACLANT ASW Research Centre from 1997 to 2002, and a Scientist and later a Senior Scientist with Bolt Beranek and Newman, Cambridge, MA, USA, from 1992 to 1997. He has expertise in reverberation and scattering modeling, multistatic ASW, Arctic and global scale acoustics, and structural acoustics and vibration. He is a fellow of the Acoustical Society of America.
Abstract

Surveillance in antisubmarine warfare has traditionally been carried out by means of submarines or frigates with towed arrays. These techniques are manpower intensive. Alternative approaches have recently been suggested using distributed stationary and mobile sensors, such as autonomous underwater vehicles (AUVs). In contrast with the use of standard assets, these small, low-power, and mobile devices have limited processing and wireless communication capabilities. However, when deployed in a spatially separated network, these sensors can form an intelligent network achieving high performance with significant features of scalability, robustness, and reliability. The distributed information FUSION (DIFFUSION) strategy, in which the local information is shared among sensors, is one of the key aspects of this intelligent network. In this paper, we propose two DIFFUSION schemes, in which the information shared among sensors consists of: 1) contacts, generated by the local detection stage and 2) tracks, generated by the local tracking stage. In the first DIFFUSION scheme, contacts are combined at each node using the optimal Bayesian tracking based on the random finite set formulation. In the second DIFFUSION scheme, tracks are combined using the track-to-track association/fusion procedure, then a sequential decision based on the association events is exploited. A full validation of the DIFFUSION schemes is conducted by the NATO Science and Technology Organization—Centre for maritime research and experimentation during the sea trials Exercise Proud Manta 2012–2013 using real data. Performance metrics of DIFFUSION and of local tracking/detection strategies are also evaluated in terms of time-on-target (ToT) and false alarm rate (FAR). We demonstrate the benefit of using DIFFUSION against the local non-cooperative strategies. In particular DIFFUSION improves the level of ToT (FAR) with respect to the local tracking/detection strategies. In particular, the ToT is increased over 90%–95% while the FAR is reduced of two order of magnitude. The problem of communication failures, data not available from the collaborative AUV during certain periods of time, is also investigated. The robustness of DIFFUSION with respect to these communication failures is demonstrated, and the related performance results are reported here. In particular, with 75% of communication failures the ToT is over 90%–95% with a relatively small increase of the FAR with respect to the case of perfect communication.

Keywords

Collaborative data fusion, antisubmarine warfare, multistatic active sonar, target tracking, underwater sensor networks, autonomous underwater vehicles, real-world experimentation.