

# Guest Editorial

## Introduction to the Special Issue on Large-Scale Visual Sensor Networks: Architectures and Applications

**L**ARGE-SCALE visual sensor networks have become progressively an essential part of our daily lives underpinning many technological, financial, and social advancements today, with applications in smart cities, traffic monitoring, environmental pollution control, public safety, and crime prevention.

Sensing technologies have made huge progress in the last two decades, with the emerging opportunity to miniaturize and communicate wirelessly in low-power modalities at the edge.

Motivated by several societal needs, such as security, natural interfaces, gaming, affective computing, and assisted living, there has been an increasing interest in developing visual sensor networks for urban space, smart homes, and environmental monitoring in recent years.

The integration of multiple devices in sensor networks is a hot topic in the scientific community. Thanks to both the decreasing costs of visual sensors and the increasing performance of distributed edge devices, the possibility of performing integration of a forest of both homogeneous and heterogeneous sensors is not only a theoretical study but also a makeable technological solution in a real-world context.

On one hand, the capability of processing data from multiple sensors opens up new scenarios, allowing the realization of large-scale sensor infrastructures. In this way, many social activities can be understood from a new point of view. On the other hand, large-scale sensor networks introduce new challenges, including data synchronization, communications, security, data fusion, real-time processing, and high-level decision making.

This poses several research issues ranging from data storage, wireless communication coverage that allows self-organization of the topology of the networked sensors, to their coordination in terms of optimizing computation and where to focalize sensing and what to sense.

In a sensor network, a key role is played by large-scale visual networks: the decreasing cost of smart devices enables sensor networks to scale to a large number of devices. Adding or removing sensors in a seamless way is an important requirement for sensor network architectures of the future, where everybody should be able to modify the

network architecture without compromising the operation of the network itself. In addition, the impact of deep learning on multi-source big data from distributed networks needs to be investigated. The capacity of managing large-scale sensor networks will become strategic in the coming years for most IT organizations.

Sensor network research was initially driven by expensive military applications such as battlefield surveillance and enemy tracking. Nowadays, the diffusion of more accessible fixed and mobile sensors has changed significantly our daily life, e.g., smartphones. Many applications based on distributed sensing systems for civil applications have been developed. These applications can be classified into habitat monitoring, environment observation and forecast systems, human activity monitoring for health, security, and surveillance. An interesting perspective on how to exploit sensor networks has also emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic: The availability of capillary distributed sensor networks can be exploited for a deep monitoring of specific conditions, in an ideal way at a single-person level, by means of mobile phones specific apps. The availability of such detailed information can be used for massive tracing operations, which can be formally considered as borderline in terms of privacy or human rights, but that can be considered as a possibility in specific critical periods, such as a pandemic.

This Special Issue highlights the latest developments in large-scale visual sensor networks and their applications, ranging from the design and implementation to the processing and understanding of a large amount of video data. It presents contributions on new solutions addressing some of the challenges and difficulties in this field, as well as prototypes, systems, tools, and techniques. It also includes general survey papers predicting future directions of research and technology development.

Lu *et al.* propose an adaptive region proposal scheme with feature channel regularization to facilitate robust object tracking. Tracking is considered as a linear regression problem; an ensemble of correlation filters is trained online to distinguish the foreground target from the background. Authors integrate adaptively learned region proposals into an enhanced two-stream tracking framework based on correlation filters. For the tracking stream, a two-stage cascade correlation filter on deep convolutional features is learned

to ensure competitive tracking performance. For the detection stream, adaptive region proposals have been employed, which are effective in recovering target objects from tracking failures caused by heavy occlusion or out-of-view movement. In contrast to traditional tracking-by-detection methods using random samples or sliding windows, target re-detection over adaptively learned region proposals is performed. Since region proposals naturally take the objectness information into account, the authors show that the proposed adaptive region proposals can handle the challenging scale estimation problem as well. Authors have extensively tested their approach on OTB, VOT, and UAV-123 datasets demonstrating that their method performs favorably against state-of-the-art tracking algorithms.

The contributions of the method proposed by Farinella *et al.* are twofold. First, an approach for the localization of shopping carts in a retail store from egocentric images is proposed. Second, a new database is presented to the scientific community. Addressing the first task allows to infer information on the behavior of the customers to understand how they move in the store and what they pay more attention to. To study the problem, a large dataset of images collected in a real retail store is proposed. The dataset comprises 19,531 RGB images along with depth maps, ground truth camera poses, as well as class labels specifying the areas of the store in which each image has been acquired. The dataset could surely encourage research in large-scale image-based indoor localization; moreover, it addresses the scarcity of large datasets to tackle the problem. Authors perform a benchmark of several image-based localization techniques exploiting images and depth information on the proposed dataset. In this work, authors compare both localization performances and space/time requirements. The results show that, while state-of-the-art approaches allow to achieve good results, there is space for improvement.

Zhang *et al.* propose an approach based on Siamese networks; these have been successfully introduced into visual tracking, which matches the best candidate and a target template via a couple of networks with shared parameters. However, most Siamese network-based trackers (SNTs) are tailored to best match the canonical posture of the template and the search-region images, resulting in inferior performance when the target objects have large-scale pose variations. Besides, SNTs fail to accurately discriminate distractors because they only leverage high-level semantic features as target representations that cannot well tell from different targets of the same category. To address these issues, the authors introduce an efficient and effective SNT that is based on feature alignment and aggregation networks. An effective feature alignment network module to calibrate the search-region image is designed. This module results in a more reliable matching response that is robust to severe target pose variations. Then, an effective shallow-level and high-level feature aggregation network module to complement the feature characteristics is developed. This way, the learned feature representation not only well differentiates the target from distractors but also introduces robustness to target appearance

variations. Afterward, a channel-attention mechanism to further strengthen the discriminative capability of the aggregated feature representation is employed. Finally, both the alignment and the aggregation modules are seamlessly integrated into the Siamese networks for robust tracking. Extensive evaluations on a variety of benchmarks including VOT-2017, OTB-100, UAV123, and GOT-10k demonstrate the favorable performance of this tracker against state-of-the-art ones with a speed of 60 fps.

Fang *et al.* introduce an approach for future frame prediction in the video, a traditional problem in computer vision, useful for a range of practical applications, such as intention prediction or video anomaly detection. However, this task is challenging because of the complex and dynamic evolution of the scene. The difficulty of video frame prediction is to model the inherent spatio-temporal correlation between frames and pose an adaptive and flexible framework for large motion change or appearance variation. The authors construct a deep multi-branch mask network (DMMNet) which adaptively fuses the advantages of optical flow warping and RGB pixel synthesizing methods. In the procedure of DMMNet, a mask layer is added in each branch to adaptively adjust the magnitude range of estimated optical flow and the weight of predicted frames by optical flow warping and RGB pixel synthesizing, respectively. In other words, a more flexible masking network for motion and appearance fusion on video frame prediction is provided. Exhaustive experiments on Caltech pedestrian and UCF101 datasets show that this model can obtain favorable video frame prediction performance compared with the state-of-the-art methods.

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**Hamid Aghajan** received the B.S. degree from the Sharif University of Technology, Tehran, Iran, in 1989, and the M.S. and Ph.D. degrees from Stanford University, in 1991 and 1995, respectively, all in electrical engineering. After gaining industry experience in Silicon Valley from 1995 to 2002 in the fields of semiconductors, wireless and optical communications, and genetics, he established and served as the Director of a research lab on wireless sensor networks and ambient intelligence at Stanford University, in 2003, where he supervised the research of numerous students and international visitors until 2013 on topics involving methods and applications in smart homes, multi-camera networks, behavior, smart transportation, and elderly monitoring. He served as the Founder and a Steering Committee Member for the International Conference on Distributed Smart Cameras from 2007 to 2019. He co-founded *Journal of Ambient Intelligence and Smart Environments* in 2009 and has been serving as its Co-Editor-in-Chief. He has been associated with the Department of Telecommunication and Information Processing, Gent University, Belgium, since 2009, and with the Department of

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**Shaogang Gong** received the D.Phil. degree in computer vision from the Keble College, Oxford University, in 1989. He has been a Professor of visual computation with the Queen Mary University of London, since 2001. He has published more than 400 research articles and seven books on topics, including *Person Re-Identification*, *Visual Analysis of Behavior*, *Video Analytics for Business Intelligence*, *Dynamic Vision: From Images to Face Recognition*, and *Analysis and Modeling of Faces and Gestures*. He is the inventor of 42 international patents. His research interests include computer vision, machine learning, and video analysis. He is an elected fellow of the Institution of Electrical Engineers, a fellow of the British Computer Society, a member of the U.K. Computing Research Committee, and a Turing Fellow of the Alan Turing Institute. He served on the Steering Panel of the U.K. Government Chief Scientific Advisor's Science Review. He won the Institution of Engineering and Technology 2020 Achievement Medal for Vision Engineering, for outstanding achievement and superior performance in contributing to public safety.



**Amy Loutfi** received the Ph.D. degree in computer science, with a research topic in machine perception, in 2006. She is currently a Professor in information technology with Örebro University and also leads the research group - AASS Machine Perception and Interaction Laboratory. Specifically, she researched how gas sensors could be integrated onto robotic platforms and how these robots can interact with humans in order to solve a range of problems that required sensing and perception. Since, she has broadened her research interests to include general research directions within machine perception, where AI methods, such as Machine learning are used for the interpretation of sensor data. She also has broadened her research in the area of human–robot interaction, where she has studied HRI in various platforms that include fully autonomous robots, but also teleoperated robots. She has a long experience working with industry and the public sector on research projects dealing with AI, robotics, and human–robot interaction.



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