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Lauro Snidaro · Jesús García
James Llinas · Erik Blasch
Editors

Context-Enhanced Information Fusion

Boosting Real-World Performance
with Domain Knowledge



Springer

Editors

Lauro Snidaro
Department of Mathematics and Computer
Science
University of Udine
Udine
Italy

Jesús García
Department of Computer Science
and Engineering
University Carlos III
Colmenarejo
Spain

James Llinas
Center for Multisource Information Fusion
and Department of Industrial and Systems
Engineering
University at Buffalo
Buffalo, NY
USA

Erik Blasch
Information Directorate
Air Force Research Laboratory
Rome, NY
USA

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*Dedicated by Lauro Snidaro to his wife
Ingrid and son Luca*

*Dedicated by Jesús García to his family,
friends, and colleagues*

*Dedicated by James Llinas to his wife Sarah
for her unending patience*

*Dedicated by Erik Blasch to his wife Jitka for
her continuous support*

*Dedicated by the editors to the International
Society of Information Fusion (ISIF) from
which the forums, discussions, and ideas
established in this book were crafted*

Preface

This book brings together two topics which themselves are complex and multi-disciplinary: the concepts of “Information Fusion” and “Context” both of which have long histories of research and development. In this Preface, we offer our perspectives on the motivations and rationales for the development of this text, and then provide our thoughts that have led to the particular organizational framework of the book.

History

The concept of *information fusion* can be said to have begun with the writings of Aristotle which acknowledged the integration of the human senses. With the advent of technology, the nature of sensing evolved into an understanding that data were being collected not only by the human (e.g. receptors in the retina) but also derived from physical sensors (e.g. pixels). *Context*, as for information fusion, has its own origins in philosophy. From the early Greeks, there were various debates about the interaction of the human on, within, and outside the world. The mental perceptions and physical senses were a means to integrate the mind–body based perspectives in processes that are similar to those for contextual understanding.

The Role of Context

Three demarcations of context-enhanced information fusion include the contextually influenced functions of perception, information systems, and computing. One of the key issues associated with context is *ecological perception* as defined by Gibson. During the 1950s, there was the notion that the human consciousness constructs perceptions strictly from the senses; however, Gibson challenged this

notion by noting that the mind can directly interpret stimuli from the world in his 1966 work *The Senses Considered as Perceptual Systems*. Additional work included assertions that the world affords actions and ecological perception in which the notion of own-self to the world, i.e. contextual framing, conditions perception; these works constituted a milestone regarding the role of context in perception. In the 1990s, a second milestone included the large-scale physical collections of information from the world from various sensing data including weather, terrain, and roads which has become known as the **Geographical Information System** (GIS). From the large amounts of data being collected, researchers in information began to use this information to improve estimation accuracy. Recently, the methods of **Context-aware computing** demonstrate that global information can be used to modify or augment local estimation processes regarding parameters or states of interest. With the Internet, there are many possibilities enabling distributed processing, cloud-based access to information, and cognitive autonomy. Today, that information is widely available from databases, wireless connections, and cloud technology. Being able to access relevant GIS data and a broad range of other types of data has popularized the ability to use contextual information for an extensive range of applications.

Table 1 brings together these general themes of information community-established milestones. Looking at the general contributions which are rooted in the historical thoughts of the time, there are three developments of concepts and philosophy, mathematics and data integration theory, and architectures and applications. These three areas facilitated the editors’ organization of the material of this book submitted from the top scientists, researchers, practitioners, and leaders in information fusion.

Table 1 Context exploitation capability evolution over time

Information perspective	Time period			
	Ancient times	1960s	1990s	2010+
Fusion	Sensing	Estimation	Multi-sensor	Information
Context	Mind–body	Ecological	GIS	Aware computing
Contextual fusion	Philosophy	Theory	Applications	Architectures

Modern Information System Applications

Modern information fusion systems must consider the specific characteristics of the application domain in which they have to operate, showing robust, and context-sensitive behaviour. Likewise, a system designer must take into consideration different sources of contextual knowledge in addition to immediate sensory data in order to develop an effective, efficient, and useful approach to situation

assessment. For applications in a wide variety of domains, contextual knowledge may include structural models of the scene, known a priori relationships between the entities and the surrounding environment, dynamic scenarios necessary to interpret or constrain the system output, and user preferences, social norms, and cultures when estimating the situations of interest for the domain. Context includes conditions which augment otherwise bounded estimates, and results in estimates of enhanced meaning. This book provides a broad framework of discussion for system designers on the use of contextual information for fusion-based estimation that, to our understanding, has not as yet been offered in the literature.

The development of information fusion (IF) systems, to include data-, sensor-, and feature-level fusion, is a necessary engineering process in diverse applications, and new domains require an increasing degree of contextualized solutions and situation-adaptation mechanisms. The potential development of IF systems inclusive of contextual factors and information offers an opportunity to improve the quality of the fused output, provide solutions adapted to the application requirements, and enhance tailored responses to user queries. Contextual-based strategy challenges include selecting the appropriate representations, exploitations, and instantiations. Context could be represented as knowledge-bases, ontologies, and geographical maps, etc. and would form a powerful tool to favour adaptability and system performance. Example applications include context-aided tracking and classification, situational reasoning, ontology building, and decision updating. Contemporary discussions of context are domain and sensor specific for which information fusion enhances performance. For example, context-aided target tracking seeks to determine kinematic movements with domain-constrained sensitivities (e.g. roads), whereas context-aided information fusion solutions utilize not only the road information, but also the social norms of the same geographical information (e.g. traffic rules).

Book Tenets

This book presents the foundational reasoning, theories, and methods for including contextual influences in fusion process design and implementation, along with the most recent results in exploiting contextual information for real-world modern applications. A balance between high- and low-level information fusion problems is highlighted to showcase performance improvements in highly demanding conditions. Holistic approaches integrating research results in different communities, which are relevant for readers outside the information fusion community, have been selected, emphasizing the need to combine different techniques to overcome limitations of a single perspective, legacy computing, or programs traditionally applied to domain-specific data and information fusion problems. Recent advances in information fusion include context exploitation, multi-level fusion performance, and hard/soft fusion. Finally, a selection of representative application domains requiring the injection of contextual knowledge is presented in the book (e.g. vision

systems, harbour surveillance, robotics, and ambient intelligence) to illustrate the process, where sensor-based data and contextual information synergistically yield more robust and informative results.

Book Outline

The book comprises six areas for which we have explored and developed relevant contributions: foundations, concepts, systems philosophy, mathematical theory, hard-soft fusion, and applications:

Fundamentals introduces the necessary terminology and key elements in information fusion and context. The main concepts are conveyed with the support of the JDL/DFIG data fusion model, helping the reader to frame context-enhanced fusion in a well-known setting.

Concepts of Context for Fusion presents central themes and issues for context-aware information fusion. A formalization of context is presented along with topics derived from context-enhanced target tracking, decision support, and threat assessment.

Systems Philosophy of Contextual Fusion discusses design issues and challenges in developing context-aware fusion systems. Several architectures are proposed where a pivotal role is given to a middleware layer dedicated to context access and discovery.

Mathematical Characterization of Context provides mathematical grounds for modelling the contextual influences in representative fusion problems such as sensor quality assessment, target tracking, and text analysis.

Context in Hard/Soft Fusion deals with the fusion of device-generated data (hard) with human-generated data (soft). Context brings together hard and soft data as an emerging topic.

Applications of Context Approaches to Fusion offers an array of applications where the exploitation of contextual information in the fusion process boosts system performance. Application domains include maritime and ground target tracking, surveillance, robotics, and assisted driving.

We hope that the information presented can be useful to various practitioners, researchers, readers, and academics pursuing applications to real-world problems where information fusion offers a solution. We have brought together the leading experts in the field to showcase their techniques of using context to enhance information fusion results.

2015

Lauro Snidaro
Jesús García
James Llinas
Erik Blasch

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Contributors

Myriam Abramson Naval Research Laboratory, Washington, DC, USA

José María Armingol Intelligent Systems Lab, Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, Leganés, Spain

Alex J. Aved Air Force Research Lab, Rome, NY, USA

Giulia Battistello Department Sensor Data and Information Fusion, Fraunhofer FKIE, Wachtberg, Germany

Joachim Biermann SDF, Fraunhofer FKIE, Wachtberg, Germany

Erik Blasch Air Force Research Laboratory, Rome, NY, USA

Domenico D. Bloisi Department of Computer, Control, and Management Engineering, Sapienza University of Rome, Rome, Italy

Genshe Chen Intelligent Fusion Technology, Germantown, MD, USA

Joseph Coyne Naval Research Laboratory, Washington, DC, USA

John L. Crassidis Department of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering, University at Buffalo, State University of New York, Amherst, NY, USA

Jonathan W. Decker Naval Research Laboratory, Washington, DC, USA

Arturo de la Escalera Intelligent Systems Lab, Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, Leganés, Spain

Adam M. Fosbury Space Exploration Sector, Applied Physics Laboratory, Johns Hopkins University, Laurel, MD, USA

Fernando García Intelligent Systems Lab, Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, Leganés, Spain

Jesús García Applied Artificial Intelligence Group, Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, Colmenarejo, Spain

Jemin George U.S. Army Research Laboratory, Adelphi, MD, USA

Antonio Gilliam Naval Research Laboratory, Washington, DC, USA

Geoff Gross Osthus Inc., Melbourne, Florida, USA

Juan Gómez-Romero Department of Computer Science and A.I., CITIC-UGR, Granada, Spain

Riad I. Hammoud BAE Systems, Burlington, MA, USA

Steven A. Israel Raytheon, Chantilly, VA, USA

Anne-Laure Jousset NATO-STO Centre for Maritime Research and Experimentation, La Spezia, Italy

Michael Kandefer Applied Sciences Group, Inc., Buffalo, NY, USA

Wolfgang Koch Fraunhofer FKIE, Wachtberg, Germany; Department Sensor Data and Information Fusion, Fraunhofer FKIE, Wachtberg, Germany

Ksawery Krenc C4I Research and Development Department, OBR CTM S.A., Gdynia, Poland

Eric Leadbetter Naval Research Laboratory, Washington, DC, USA

Ji-Woong Lee Pennsylvania State University, State College, PA, USA

Tatiana Levashova St. Petersburg Institute for Informatics and Automation of the Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg, Russian Federation

Peiyi Li Department of Computer and Information Sciences, Temple University, Philadelphia, USA

Pengpeng Liang Department of Computer and Information Sciences, Temple University, Philadelphia, USA

Haibin Ling Department of Computer and Information Science, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA, USA

Mark A. Livingston Naval Research Laboratory, Washington, DC, USA

James Llinas Center for Multisource Information Fusion and Department of Industrial and Systems Engineering, University at Buffalo, Buffalo, NY, USA

David Martín Intelligent Systems Lab, Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, Leganés, Spain

Michael Mertens Department Sensor Data and Information Fusion, Fraunhofer FKIE, Wachtberg, Germany

Ranjeev Mittu Naval Research Laboratory, Washington, DC, USA

José M. Molina Applied Artificial Intelligence Group, Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, Colmenarejo, Spain

Ira S. Moskowitz Naval Research Laboratory, Washington, DC, USA

Leo Motus Research Laboratory for Proactive Technologies, Tallinn University of Technology, Tallin, Estonia

James Nagy Air Force Research Lab, Rome, NY, USA

Daniele Nardi Department of Computer, Control, and Management Engineering, Sapienza University of Rome, Rome, Italy

Benjamin Newsom Next Century Corporation, Columbia, MD, USA

Vincent Nimier Department of Information Processing and Modelling, ONERA, Châtillon, Palaiseau CEDEX, France

Miguel A. Patricio Applied Artificial Intelligence Group, Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, Colmenarejo, Spain

Shashi Phoha Applied Research Laboratory, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA, USA

Aurelio Ponz Intelligent Systems Lab, Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, Leganés, Spain

Jurgo-Soren Preden Research Laboratory for Proactive Technologies, Tallinn University of Technology, Tallin, Estonia

Asok Ray Department of Mechanical and Nuclear Engineering, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA, USA

Kellyn Rein ITF, Fraunhofer FKIE, Wachtberg, Germany

Francesco Riccio Department of Computer, Control, and Management Engineering, Sapienza University of Rome, Rome, Italy

Galina L. Rogova State University of New York at Buffalo, Buffalo, NY, USA

Stephen Russell Army Research Laboratory, Adelphi, MD, USA

Soumalya Sarkar Department of Mechanical and Nuclear Engineering, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA, USA

Miguel A. Serrano Applied Artificial Intelligence Group, Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, Colmenarejo, Spain

Stuart C. Shapiro University at Buffalo, Buffalo, NY, USA

Dan Shen Intelligent Fusion Technology, Germantown, MD, USA

Xinchu Shi Department of Computer and Information Sciences, Temple University, Philadelphia, USA

Nikolay Shilov St. Petersburg Institute for Informatics and Automation of the Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg, Russian Federation

Ciara Sibley Naval Research Laboratory, Washington, DC, USA

Tarunraj Singh Department of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering, University at Buffalo, Amherst, NY, USA

Alexander Smirnov St. Petersburg Institute for Informatics and Automation of the Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg, Russian Federation; ITMO University, St. Petersburg, Russian Federation

Lauro Snidaro Department of Mathematics and Computer Science, University of Udine, Udine, Italy

Alan N. Steinberg Independent Consultant, Woodbridge, VA, USA

Dirk Tenne Varian Medical Systems, Seattle, Washington, USA

Francesco Trapani Department of Computer, Control, and Management Engineering, Sapienza University of Rome, Rome, Italy

Martin Ulmke Department Sensor Data and Information Fusion, Fraunhofer FKIE, Wachtberg, Germany

Nurali Virani Department of Mechanical and Nuclear Engineering, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA, USA

Ingrid Visentini Department of Mathematics and Computer Science, University of Udine, Udine, Italy

Chun Yang Sigtem Technology Inc., San Mateo, CA, USA