

Analysis of Different Human Body Recognition Methods and Latency Determination for a Vision-based Human-robot Safety Framework According to ISO/TS 15066

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Abstract: Today, an efficient and flexible usage of lightweight robots in collaborative working spaces is strongly limited by the biomechanical safety regulations of ISO/TS 15066. In order to maximize the robot performance without contradicting the technical standards and recommendations, a safety framework is introduced, which makes use of state-of-the-art deep learning algorithms for human recognition and human body part identification. Particularly, a generic vision-based method for the determination of the occurring latencies is proposed. To this end, the different latency contributions from the recognition process up to the process of adapting the robot speed to an ISO-conform level are analyzed in detail.

1 INTRODUCTION

In the last decade the field of collaborative robotics received growing interest in industrial research. In contrast to traditional robotic machines, collaboratively operating robotic systems do not necessarily require the installation of safety facilities which physically separate the working environment of humans and robots (e.g. safety fences).

Therefore, collaborating robots are controlled and designed in such a way that potential collisions between human and robots do not cause physical harm. Since these collisions may appear in any (even unforeseeable) situation, it is obligatory to carry out a hazard identification with corresponding risk assessment before installing a robotic system and adjusting its safety related parameters (e.g. robot velocity). The safety requirements for the use of industrial collaborative robot systems are laid down in the technical specification ISO/TS 15066 (ISO/TS 15066, 2016) and describe the maximally allowed transient and quasi-static contact forces and pressures occurring in a collision. These force and pressure limits highly depend on the body region that most likely tends to collide with the robot.

In order to implement these guidelines, it is neces-

sary to determine which body parts might get in contact with the robot in any possible way. The body region with the lowest allowed force and pressure level then defines the maximally allowed robot velocity. This fact is one of the biggest obstacles in using collaborating systems in a flexible and efficient manner. Whenever an essential change of the collaborative use case or the environment occurs, a new risk assessment has to be carried out which possibly means a further adaptation of the maximally allowed robot speed. Thus, it is an important step for the applicability of human robot collaborating environments, if one could dynamically evaluate which human body part will collide with the robot most likely.

In this paper the concept of a dynamic safety framework is introduced which detects the presence of humans in the working environment of a robot system. In the field of vision-based safety monitoring different approaches have been investigated in order to avoid collisions for human-robot-collaboration, e.g. (Tan and Arai, 2011), (Bdiwi et al., 2017), (Ryb-ski et al., 2012) or (Campomaggiore et al., 2019). The presented analysis focuses on different state-of-the-art machine learning algorithms that are applied on RGB-D sensor data. Within the proposed prototypical safety framework, the human body part which is closest to the robot's tool center point (TCP) is determined. This shall enable an efficient exploita-

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tion of robotic facilities and thus a more flexible operation of collaborating systems in changing working environments respecting the relevant safety standards. To ensure reliability, a vision-based method for the determination of the time difference between the recognition of humans, respectively human body parts, within the working environment and the point in time, when the robot control adjusts its speed, is introduced. With the knowledge of the occurring latencies the robot's velocity can be adjusted dynamically in accordance with the ISO standard. All of the presented experimental results were conducted on a KUKA iiwa 7-DOF lightweight robot.

2 HUMAN RECOGNITION

The recognition of predefined objects (e.g. humans) in images has been one of the main challenges in the field of computer vision. Typical object recognition algorithms can be divided into the extraction of object specific features and their classification. In order to assess the collision potential of a specific human body part with a robot, a robust and accurate recognition of the human body is crucial.

2.1 Deep Learning Methods

Though typical methods in computer vision like Haar cascade algorithms (Viola and Jones, 2004) or HOG based approaches (Dalal and Triggs, 2005) are advantageous for human detection because of the low computational effort, they are prone to misdetections, failed and duplicate detections.

In the last few years different deep learning approaches were shown to outperform state-of-the-art image processing algorithms for the task of identifying humans respectively particular human body parts. Within the proposed framework the following approaches are analysed:

- Human body recognition - SSD MobileNet (Huang et al., 2017)
- Human body segmentation - Mask R-CNN (He et al., 2017)
- Human pose estimation - Deep Pose (Toshev and Szegedy, 2014)
- Human body part segmentation - Human body part parsing (Fang et al., 2018).

It is, however, necessary to interpret this 2D information in the 3D context, as discussed next.

2.2 Extraction of Depth Information

In order to extract the depth information of the detected humans, the safety framework makes use of an RGB-D camera with infrared stereo depth technology. The software architecture of the camera (Intel RealSense) offers the possibility to align the taken RGB image with the information of the depth sensor, i.e. the corresponding depth information can be assigned to every pixel in the RGB image.

The determination of the body part, which is closest to the camera, follows a very restrictive approach: All depth values within the bounding box or within the semantic silhouette are evaluated and the smallest depth value is extracted as

$$d_{min} = \min d(x,y), \quad (1)$$

with x and y being coordinates in the image plane, and $d(x,y)$ is the depth assigned to the image point (x,y) . Consequently, for human recognition and human segmentation it is only possible to conclude which body point is closest to the robot. On the other hand, human pose estimation and human body part segmentation offer the possibility to determine the minimal distance to the robot for each individual body part. Accordingly, this simple approach can be used for a dynamical adaption of the robot speed depending on the separation distance between human and robot.

3 SAFETY ASPECTS

In the framework proposed in this paper, the speed of the robot is reduced within the pre-collision phase already. The strategy is to adjust the speed according to the distance between robot and human. This may not avoid collisions but rather ensures safe contact conditions (according to ISO/TS 15066) at any time which is key to an efficient operation of the collaborate robotic system. Thus, the information about the identified human body parts and their spatial position must be related to the core points of ISO/TS 15066. The technical specification lays down four different methods of collaborative operation:

- a) safety-rated monitored stop
- b) hand guiding
- c) speed and separation monitoring
- d) power and force limiting.

This paper addresses methods c) and d). According to ISO/TS 15066, when operating in method c), the robot system initiates a stop when the operator is coming closer to the robot than allowed by the prescribed

separation distance. In method d), the robot velocity is limited according to the body part that is nearest to the robot. Neither of both operation methods admits economically efficient human-robot collaboration. Aiming at an economically efficient solution that respects the safety regulations, the concept of a collaboration framework is proposed in this paper combining operation methods c) and d). To this end, the robot velocity is adapted according to the body part closest to the robot TCP (according to method c)) so to ensure the power and force limitations (according to d)).

At first, it is mandatory to guarantee, that the instantaneous robot velocity will not lead to a violation of the force and pressure thresholds of ISO/TS 15066, i.e. to be in accordance with the regulations of method d).

In order to exclude collisions while the robot velocity is decreased to an ISO conform limit, it is necessary to take into account the protective separation distance between the operator and the robot, which is described in method c) as

$$S_p(t_0) = S_h + S_r + S_s + C + Z_d + Z_r, \quad (2)$$

with $S_p(t_0)$ being the *protective separation distance* at current time t_0 . In the following the contributions to the protective separation distance (2) are described in more detail.

The contribution due to the operator's motion is given by

$$S_h = \int_{t_0}^{t_0+t_r} v_h \cdot dt, \quad (3)$$

with t_r being the reaction time of the robot system and v_h being the directed speed of humans within the collaborative environment. Since the velocities of humans (respectively of their body parts) cannot be monitored with the investigated sensor technologies, a constant velocity of 1.6 m/s for separating distances > 0.5 m and 2.0 m/s for distances below 0.5 m according to ISO 13855 (ISO 13855, 2010) are assumed.

S_r is the contribution due to the robot's reaction time, i.e. the distance that arises due to the robot's movement towards or away from the human, starting from the moment when a human comes too close to the robot until the safety control system initializes a stop. In the course of a more generic investigation of the robot's influence towards the separation distance, the planned robot path and the adjusted velocity profile have to be studied more carefully. Whenever a change of maximal robot velocities occurs, the velocity contribution towards or away from the human effects the separation distance. Subsequently, it is mandatory to determine the influence of the veloc-

ity change within the robot's reaction time. The investigated use case does not tend to have large robot movements towards the human and therefore the influence of the robot motion is not studied within the proposed analysis.

In the specification, the expression S_s corresponds to the distance the robot TCP travels after a halt command has been issued until the robot has finally stopped. As the proposed framework only takes into account velocity adjustments and does not consider the stopping of the robot, this term can be omitted in the analysis.

The intrusion distance C is defined in ISO 13855 as the distance a part of the body can permeate the sensing field before being detected. It is formulated as

$$C = 8(d - 14), \quad (4)$$

with d being the sensor detection capacity [mm]. Since no opto-electronic safety light-beam system is used, this expression can be neglected within the framework due to a sensor detection capacity < 40 mm as well.

Finally, Z_d and Z_r are uncertainty contributions corresponding to the position uncertainty of the operator and the position uncertainty of the robot system. In this paper these uncertainties are not analyzed quantitatively, but rather qualitative statements are given and possible uncertainties of the estimation of the human movement are considered.

Thus, the main focus of this analysis lies on the consequences of the human motion for the needed separation distances for an ISO compatible exploitation of maximal robot velocities. As the specification implies constant human velocities, the main parameter which characterizes the separation distance is the reaction time of the robot system t_r .

4 LATENCY ANALYSIS

The main feature of the proposed framework prototype is the reduction of the robot velocity according to the human body part closest to the robot. Since the robot reaction to a human action will not be executed instantaneously, the appearing reaction time t_r must be characterized carefully. In the following, the terms reaction time t_r and latency t_{Lat} will be used synonymously.

In order to detect possible changes in the environment a sensor system has to be used, which takes some time t_{Cap} to capture recent information from the environment.

Accordingly, the gained information has to undergo some processing steps with total processing

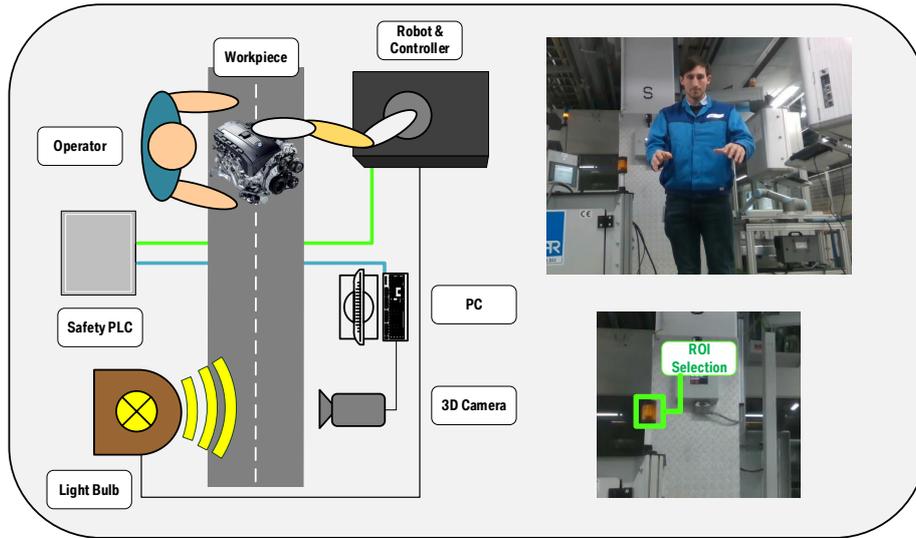


Figure 1: Left: Scheme of the measurement setup used for latency determination. Right: ROI selection before the latency determination is started.

time t_{Proc} in order to evaluate the situation in the context. The total processing time of the analyzed use case can be broken down into the time t_{Alg} which corresponds to the time needed for the identification of humans or specific human body parts and the time needed for determining the depth information t_{Depth}

$$t_{Proc} = t_{Alg} + t_{Depth} . \quad (5)$$

On the basis of the data processing the gained information will be sent to the robot system in order to initiate and execute an appropriate reaction. Thus, the time t_{Adj} to adjust the velocity can be separated into the time needed for the information exchange t_{Com} and the robot reaction time t_{Rob}

$$t_{Adj} = t_{Com} + t_{Rob} . \quad (6)$$

Consequently, the latency t_{Lat} can be introduced as the sum of the above mentioned time periods

$$t_{Lat} = t_{Cap} + t_{Proc} + t_{Adj} . \quad (7)$$

In the following, a method for the determination of the latency within the safety framework is introduced.

4.1 Measurement Scheme

The human detection framework is running on a separate computing system and communicates via a network protocol with the robot controller. Thus, two different system operating clocks would have to be synchronized before determining the latency. In order to overcome this issue, the starting as well as the stopping event are triggered on the robot controller. To this end, the flashing of a light bulb (triggered from the robot controller) is used as a starting signal.

Due to the fact that the camera view is static the position of the light bulb is known. Before the actual human detection framework starts, a rectangular region of interest (ROI) with width w_{ROI} and height h_{ROI} can be selected, which encloses the light bulb. Within the ROI the mean pixel intensity \overline{I}_{ROI} is determined, while the light bulb is turned off

$$\overline{I}_{ROI} = \frac{1}{h_{ROI} \cdot w_{ROI}} \sum_y \sum_x I(x,y) , \quad (8)$$

where $-w_{ROI}/2 \leq x \leq w_{ROI}/2$ and $-h_{ROI}/2 \leq y \leq h_{ROI}/2$. Furthermore, an intensity threshold is introduced as

$$I_{thres} = \alpha \cdot \overline{I}_{ROI} , \quad (9)$$

with a predefined adjustable parameter α . The used setup scheme is shown and explained in figure 1.

After capturing an image and depth frame, \overline{I}_{ROI} can be determined and is compared with I_{thres} . The light bulb flash is detected when $\overline{I}_{ROI} > I_{thres}$. Within each computation cycle an information block is transmitted to the robot controller consisting of the following entries:

- body region closest to camera [integer value]
- light bulb flash [boolean value]
- computation time of RGB and depth image capturing t_{Cap} [ms]
- computation time of chosen algorithm t_{Alg} [ms] (e.g. human detection, body region segmentation, etc.)
- computation time of the depth estimation t_{Depth} [ms].

On the robot controller side two threads are running in parallel on the following tasks:

- robot movement commands
- start and end trigger for latency determination (i.e. the controller of the light source).

4.2 Experimental Setup

All of the shown experiments have been conducted on a KUKA iiwa 7-DOF lightweight robot and the corresponding KUKA Sunrise Cabinet robot controller. For the capturing of image and depth data an Intel Realsense D435 RGB-D camera has been used. For the sake of processing power comparison, all of the investigated deep learning algorithms have been analyzed on three different computing modules:

- 2 core CPU - standard PC
- 640 core GPU - nvidia GeForce GTX 1050
- 1920 core GPU - nvidia GeForce GTX 1070.

In order to change the velocity of the robot during its motion, the KUKA enhanced velocity controller (EVC) package must be used. With this package it is possible to activate different robot velocity limits in the robot safety control which get activated with safe input signals. For this reason the computing module exchanges the body part information and the information about the light bulb flash with a safety PLC (via OPC UA protocol) beforehand. The PLC is programmed such that these information are transformed into safe output signals and afterwards submitted to the robot controller with a safe communication protocol (ProfiSafe).

The path planning process is executed as a separate process on the robot controller, i.e. the user can adjust an arbitrary path that the robot follows while the latency measurement is being executed.

The latency determination is initiated by the robot controller and can only be activated, when the robot has reached its maximally allowed velocity. Then, the starting trigger activates the light bulb. The first time the message from the computing module indicates a light bulb flash, the robot controller reduces the robot velocity to the allowed minimum and turns off the light bulb. At the same time, the stopping trigger fires and the overall latency can be determined.

In order to investigate the additional computational costs of the analyzed algorithms when humans are present in the sensing field, two testing scenarios are considered - one, where no human is in the sensing field of the camera and one with a human in the sensing field. Each measurement has been conducted

for at least 5 minutes. The number of latency recordings per analyzed algorithm therefore depends of the specific algorithm cycle times.

4.3 Determination of the Maximally Occurring Latency

In order to estimate an upper bound on the latency $t_{Lat-Max}$, the point in time when the light bulb illuminates must be related to the time frame of the image processing. The two extreme cases for the beginning of the light bulb flash are illustrated in figure 2. As shown in scenario A the lamp gets illuminated just before the image capturing process starts. Thereby, the aforementioned process steps are executed only once which leads to the minimal latency possible.

In contrast, scenario B shows the situation when the light bulb flashing is initialized directly after the capturing process. In this case all processing steps apart from the image capturing are carried out twice which leads to the maximal possible latency. The corresponding processing time t_{Proc} is

$$t_{Proc} = t_{Alg1} + t_{Depth1} + t_{Alg2} + t_{Depth2}, \quad (10)$$

where t_{Alg1} and t_{Depth1} are the algorithm dependent processing time and the depth determination time at the first cycle, respectively, t_{Alg2} and t_{Depth2} at the second cycle.

In order to guarantee safe switching of robot velocities under any circumstances, the starting trigger is initiated right after the image capturing process as described in scenario B. Thereby, it is possible to obtain an upper bound $t_{Lat-Max}$ on the latency for the different analyzed deep learning algorithms.

5 EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS

As depicted exemplarily in figure 3, the final results for all analyzed cases show, that the absolute latency values strongly depend on the computing module used. Especially modules with comparably low computational power lead to strong fluctuations for the processing time of the algorithm. This might be explained by a strongly varying usage of the limited computational resources.

Large fluctuations are observed for CPU-based machines, while GPU-based computing modules exhibit small latency fluctuations. Here, the contributions for the algorithm processing mostly remains constant over time and the fluctuations mainly appear due to the varying adjustment time t_{Adj} , which is specific to the particular robot system used. For the used KUKA iiwa robot controller the adjustment time t_{Adj}

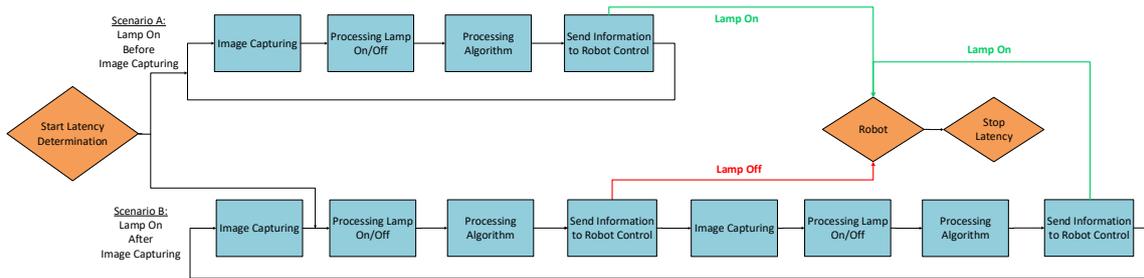


Figure 2: Influence of the point in time when the starting trigger fires. Scenario A: The light bulb flashes before the sensor captures information from the environment - no additional processing steps necessary. Scenario B: The light bulb flashes after the capturing process and is leading to additional processing steps before the information about the flashing lamp can be sent to the robot control. This leads to fluctuations in the data processing time.

Human Body Segmentation - 1920 GPU cores

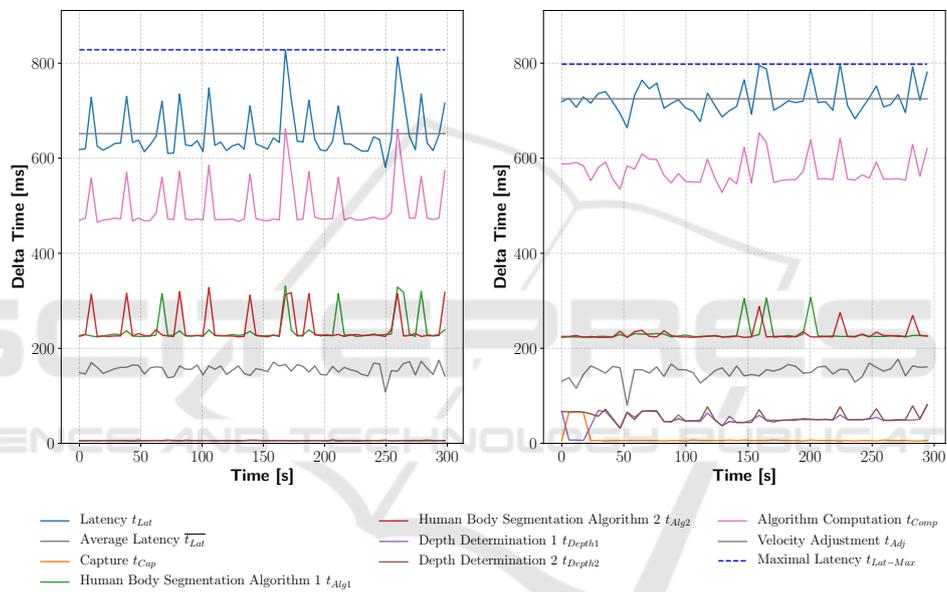


Figure 3: Latency determination for human body part segmentation (computation on 1920 GPU cores). Left: No human within the camera’s field of view. Right: Humans enter sensing field.

is not known and cannot be measured directly. Therefore, it is determined from the difference between the measured latency t_{Lat} and the computational time t_{Comp} which is composed of the capturing time t_{Cap} and the processing time t_{Proc} . From the experiment a mean velocity adjustment time t_{Adj} of approximately 200 ms can be deduced which is expected to be independent from the algorithms analyzed as well as for all computing modules.

The minimally needed separation distance S_h for an ISO-conform switching of robot velocities can be derived from the maximal algorithm dependent latency $t_{Lat-Max}$ (considering the safety premises from section 3). The corresponding results are given in table 1 and show that the computation time strongly depends on the chosen algorithm for human detection,

e.g. segmentation requires much more time than the generation of human body joints. Besides the computational time for the recognition process, the depth determination is also more time demanding for human body segmentation. The latter algorithms achieve a more accurate recognition and depth estimation but because of the large overall latency, they lead to larger human separation distances. However, the computation time scales well with the computation power (number of GPUs). These algorithms will be preferable in the very near future, given the continuous increase of computation power.

Furthermore, the results show that the algorithm dependent recognition time is not influenced by humans present in the sensing field. Interestingly, the fluctuations of t_{Alg1} and t_{Alg2} have a much bigger im-

Table 1: Results obtained from the latency measurements using different methods for human detection and human body part recognition. The mean latency, the maximally allowed latency as well as the deduced separating distance are all analyzed in the presence and absence of humans in the sensing field of the camera.

Detection algorithm	\bar{t}_{Lat} [ms]	\bar{t}_{Lat} [ms]	$t_{Lat-Max}$ [ms]	$t_{Lat-Max}$ [ms]	S_h [m]	S_h [m]
2 core CPU	without Human	with Human	without Human	with Human	without Human	with Human
Bounding box	1043	802	1806	1531	2.89	2.45
Human pose estimation	1287	1167	1656	1412	2.65	2.26
Human body segmentation	12576	11091	14430	12798	23.09	20.48
Human body part segmentation	20860	18620	22091	20860	35.35	33.38

Detection algorithm	\bar{t}_{Lat} [ms]	\bar{t}_{Lat} [ms]	$t_{Lat-Max}$ [ms]	$t_{Lat-Max}$ [ms]	S_h [m]	S_h [m]
640 core GPU	without Human	with Human	without Human	with Human	without Human	with Human
Bounding box	557	561	637	642	1.02	1.03
Human pose estimation	318	342	347	392	0.56	0.63
Human body segmentation	922	1051	1085	1198	1.74	1.92
Human body part segmentation	1661	1770	1758	1847	2.81	2.96

Detection algorithm	\bar{t}_{Lat} [ms]	\bar{t}_{Lat} [ms]	$t_{Lat-Max}$ [ms]	$t_{Lat-Max}$ [ms]	S_h [m]	S_h [m]
1920 core GPU	without Human	with Human	without Human	with Human	without Human	with Human
Bounding box	273	301	311	326	0.50	0.52
Human pose estimation	198	223	224	249	0.36	0.40
Human body segmentation	415	499	461	552	0.74	0.88
Human body part segmentation	650	717	828	806	1.32	1.29

impact on the average and maximal latency estimation than the computational time for the depth computation. This is the reason why sometimes higher latency peaks can be observed when no human is in the sensing field of the camera compared to the case when humans are positioned within the camera's field of view.

Because the overall latency and thus also the separation distance strongly depend on the available computation power, human recognition processes can only be processed with suitable GPU systems. By using a standard 2 core CPU system, separating distances of about 30 meters would be required.

The results show that real-time human segmentation tasks can only be implemented by using computational systems with high GPU power, while for human detection and body pose recognition the computation power is not the limiting factor.

As the segmentation methods prove to be much more robust and accurate than any other investigated algorithm, separating distances below 1.5 meters between human and robot would be required. While this is already in an acceptable range to allow ISO-conform velocity switching, it will certainly be reduced in future given that the performance of the recognition procedure scales well with the number of GPU's.

6 CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE WORK

This paper proposes a prototype for a safety framework, which can be used for the dynamical adjustment of the maximal speed of a collaborative robot so that it does not violate the regulations of ISO/TS 15066. To this end, different deep learning algorithms are investigated in order to detect humans respectively their body parts in RGB-images. As a figure of merit for the collision potential, the distance from the robot's TCP to the closest body part is chosen.

In order to guarantee a safe robot velocity switching, a generic method for the determination of the occurring latency is proposed. The contributions of different sources for latency are analyzed in detail on three different computation modules for the cases when a human is present or not. As demonstrated by the results, the needed separating distance for a safe adaption of robot speeds scales inverse to the number of GPU cores used (i.e. to the computational power). Therefore, the increasing performance of today's graphics cards will soon enable a real-time identification of human body parts.

By introducing the framework in combination with a safety-rated sensor technology, the proposed

concept allows a dynamical risk assessment and eventually enables a more flexible and efficient usage of collaborative robot machines. Still there are several open questions, which have to be studied more carefully before operating such a safety-framework in a production environment:

- functional safety in connection with deep learning algorithms
- handling of false identifications
- uncertainties in predicted positions
- unseen field of the sensing system and occlusion.

Eventually, it is anticipated that future safety regulations will embrace the functionalities of future online scene assessment methods as presented in this paper.

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