

# Deep Detection of People and their Mobility Aids for a Hospital Robot

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**Abstract**—Robots operating in populated environments encounter many different types of people, some of whom might have an advanced need for cautious interaction, because of physical impairments or their advanced age. Robots therefore need to recognize such advanced demands to provide appropriate assistance, guidance or other forms of support. In this paper, we propose a depth-based perception pipeline that estimates the position and velocity of people in the environment and categorizes them according to the mobility aids they use: pedestrian, person in wheelchair, person in a wheelchair with a person pushing them, person with crutches and person using a walker. We present a fast region proposal method that feeds a Region-based Convolutional Network (Fast R-CNN [1]). With this, we speed up the object detection process by a factor of seven compared to a dense sliding window approach. We furthermore propose a probabilistic position, velocity and class estimator to smooth the CNN’s detections and account for occlusions and misclassifications. In addition, we introduce a new hospital dataset with over 17,000 annotated RGB-D images. Extensive experiments confirm that our pipeline successfully keeps track of people and their mobility aids, even in challenging situations with multiple people from different categories and frequent occlusions. Videos of our experiments and the dataset are available at <http://www2.informatik.uni-freiburg.de/~kollmitz/MobilityAids>.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Mobile robots operating in populated environments need to perceive and react to the people they encounter. Our research is part of the project NaRko, which aims at employing autonomous robots for delivery tasks as well as for guiding people to treatment rooms in hospitals. Hospital environments pose special challenges to autonomous robot operation, because the people interacting with the robot might have very different needs and capabilities. It is therefore desirable for the robot to adapt its behavior accordingly, e.g. by adjusting its velocity and path when guiding a person with a walking frame compared to a healthy person without motion impairments.

Our work targets the detection and categorization of people according to the mobility aids they use. Privacy concerns play an important role in the hospital, which is why our approach is based only on depth data. However, depth data conveys a lot less information than RGB images, which makes the problem more challenging. We propose a perception pipeline which uses depth images from a Kinect v2 camera at 15 frames per second and outputs the perceived class, position, velocity and the tracked motion path of people. Our object

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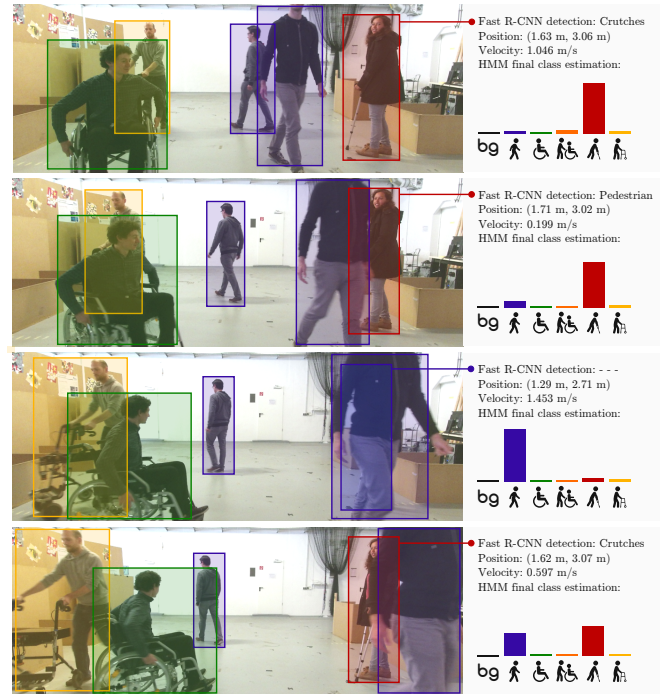


Fig. 1. We present a depth-based perception pipeline that estimates the position, velocity and the class of people, recorded in different populated environments, including a hospital. Top: a person with crutches is detected at the right corner of the image and the class estimation predicts high probability for the respective class. Second and third: the person is occluded by another person and the estimated class switches gradually to pedestrian, while the tracker keeps the track alive. Bottom: the class estimator reflects the ambiguity of the belief about the class of the person. We show RGB images for visualization purposes only.

detection pipeline uses the Fast R-CNN method proposed by Girshick [1], which takes an image together with a set of regions of interest (ROIs) as its input and outputs classification scores for each ROI. We propose a fast depth-based ROI proposal method that uses ground plane removal and clustering to generate a set of regions and applies a set of local sliding templates over each region. We compare our method against a dense sliding window baseline and show that our approach is significantly faster and yields improved performance. The perceived class of each ROI as well as its position in the world frame are further processed by our probabilistic position, velocity and class estimator. In addition to tracking the position and velocity of each person in the environment with a Kalman filter, we use a hidden Markov model (HMM) to estimate the class of each track. As depicted in Fig. 1, the probabilistic position, velocity and class estimator resolves occlusions and outputs a probability distribution over the five classes, taking the previous obser-

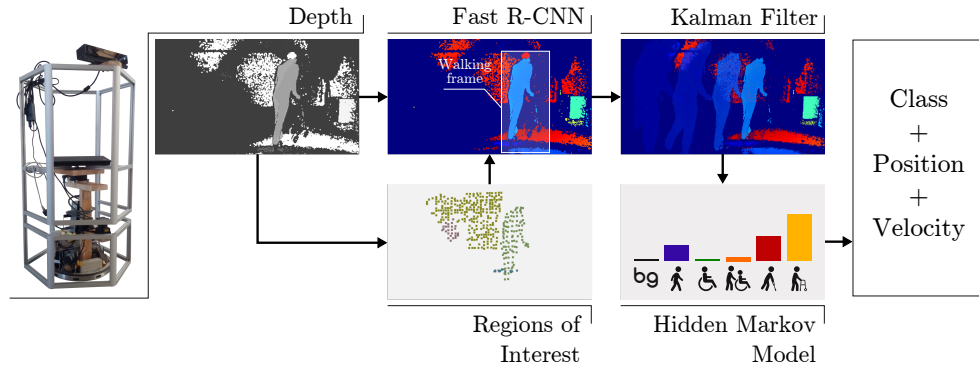


Fig. 2. Our pipeline operates on depth images collected from a Kinect v2 sensor. To achieve a fast runtime we present a depth-based region proposal method that generates regions of interest based on Euclidean clustering, which we feed into a Fast R-CNN detection network. We filter the resulting bounding box detections using a Kalman filter for position and velocity estimation of people. Further, we employ a hidden Markov model for filtering the class predictions over time.

vations into account. This paper further presents our hospital dataset that contains over 17,000 annotated RGB-D images with 960x540 pixel resolution. We collected the dataset in the facilities of the Faculty of Engineering of the University of Freiburg and in a hospital in Frankfurt. The webpage also shows a video of the final results of our approach.

## II. RELATED WORK

People detection and tracking is a widely studied field in both computer vision and robotics. Given the large amount of previous work in this area, we will focus only on approaches that integrate both people detection and tracking in a combined system. Further special emphasis is laid on approaches for mobile platforms that are equipped with vision-based sensors such as cameras or RGB-D sensors.

Ess et al. [2] address the problem of multi person tracking and detection using a stereo vision system mounted on a mobile platform, integrating visual odometry, depth estimation and pedestrian detection for improved perception. Choi et al. [3] propose a method to track multiple people from a moving platform based on a particle filter approach. Several different detectors are used such as upper body, face, depth-based shape, skin color and a motion detector. Recently, extensive frameworks that include several people detection and tracking methods for mobile robots operating in indoor environments have been presented [4, 5]. In comparison to the mentioned frameworks, we focus on a multi-class detection problem and do not only track position and velocity but also the class throughout time. Further, previous approaches rely on manually designed detectors for different body parts while we use a single neural network detector that learns those body features automatically.

Our work is further related to the research area of object detection, which recently is dominated by deep neural network approaches, most prominently by region-based convolutional neural networks [1, 6], which achieve very good results but are not applicable for real-time yet. An interesting extension to the region-based CNN detection approaches is the very recently introduced region-based fully convolutional neural network presented by Li et al. [7],

which increases the test-time speed. Recently Redmon and Farhadi [8] proposed an approach that formulates object detection as a regression problem. It can operate in real-time and achieves very impressive performance on several object detection benchmarks. We also employ a region-based convolutional neural network classifier and, to achieve a fast runtime, we combine it with our depth-based region proposal method. Recent work on multi-class object recognition and detection applied to mobile robot scenarios include a Lidar-based wheelchair/walker detector [9] and a human gender recognition approach [10]. To the best of our knowledge there exists no prior work that presents multi-class people detection applied to service robot scenarios.

Region of interest (ROI) extraction is often used to speed up the detection process and to reduce the number of false positives. Often employed is the assumption that most objects occur on a dominant ground surface and several methods exist that generate ROIs based on this ground plane assumption [11, 12, 13]. Munaro and Menegatti [11] detect and remove the ground plane, then they apply Euclidean clustering. To overcome the problem of having two or more people in the same cluster they run an additional head detector. Our method is similar, although we use a local sliding window approach with templates that are applied to each cluster instead of a head detector. The people detector of Jafari et al. [14] extracts ROIs by fusing point clouds over a time window to compute a 2D occupancy map. Spinello and Arras [15] also exploit depth information to reduce the number of candidates in a sliding window approach for people detection in RGB-D data. However, their approach is sensitive to false depth readings that can result in very large proposal windows. Chen et al. [16] present a more evolved method to generate ROIs formulating an energy function that encodes informative features such as object size priors, ground plane and depth information. Despite good performance, the algorithm has a computation time of approximately one second. Our ROI extraction approach instead is fast and simple.

Another contribution of this paper is a novel, annotated large-scale dataset for multi-class people detection. In the

literature there are several other datasets that include multi-class labels for people, mostly from the area of human attribute recognition [17, 18] or more specifically gender recognition [10]. Our dataset can be valuable for the robotics community, because on one hand it provides a large number of labeled images and on the other hand it is recorded from a mobile platform. Very recently and most similar to our dataset Sudowe et al. [19] recorded video sequences of people from a moving camera for the task of human attribute recognition.

### III. PEOPLE PERCEPTION FRAMEWORK

Fig. 2 gives an overview of our overall system, which takes as input a stream of depth images, computes a set of ROIs, classifies those proposals and filters the network output over time. Specifically we filter the position and velocity of a person using a Kalman filter and their category using a hidden Markov model. The resulting output of our framework, which contains the class, position and velocity of people, is visualized in Fig. 1.

#### A. Fast Depth-Based Region Proposals Generation

To obtain the regions of interests we follow a sequence of steps. After converting the depth image into a point cloud representation we remove all points belonging to the ground plane, apply Euclidean clustering and slide a set of local sliding templates over the obtained segments, see Fig. 3.

1) *Ground plane removal*: For a fast ground plane estimation we apply Random Sample Consensus to estimate the parameters of the ground plane. After the removal of the ground plane we segment the point cloud by means of the Euclidean clustering method.

2) *Local sliding templates*: People of the five classes have different outlines in the images, because of the different typical shapes. A pedestrian, for example, takes up a rather narrow and tall part while a person in a wheelchair will take up a wider and lower part. To account for the different contours we use five different local sliding templates as shown in Fig. 3. All five templates are projected around the centroid of each computed point cloud segment to compute the ROIs. The first bounding box considers the size of an average pedestrian with height  $h_p = 1.75m$  and width  $w_p = 0.4m$ , this rectangle is our template box  $T_1$  for detecting pedestrians and the front views of the other categories except people using wheelchairs. We stretch  $T_1$  horizontally with a factor of  $1/3$  to each side to obtain the template box  $T_2$  for side views of people using crutches or walking frames. In the same way,  $T_1$  is stretched again with a factor of  $2/3$  to obtain  $T_3$  for the side view cases of people pushing people in wheelchairs. Finally, we obtain the template boxes  $T_4$  and  $T_5$  for people using wheelchairs by reducing the height of  $T_1$  and  $T_2$  by a factor of  $1/4$ .

Note that a candidate in the point cloud might contain only a part of a human body and since we do not have this prior information, we take into account that the centroid of a segment is not always the center of a body. Therefore, we horizontally slide these five proposals to  $l$  different positions

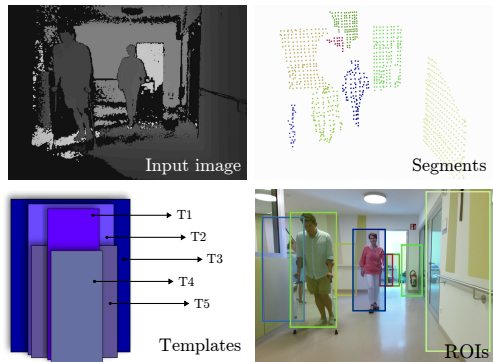


Fig. 3. We obtain regions of interest (ROIs) from depth images, based on point cloud segmentation and the use of templates. For demonstration purposes, we only show the template  $T_1$  applied to each segment in the lower right image.

around the center of the candidate, using a stride of  $n_s$  pixels. Accordingly, we end up with  $5l$  proposals for every segment that will be fed into the Fast R-CNN detector.

#### B. Detection using Fast R-CNN

The input of the Fast R-CNN network is a color-encoded depth image together with a set of ROIs and its output are both softmax scores for each ROI and bounding box coordinates from a regression layer. We use the deep network architecture proposed by Mees et al. [20], which contains 21 convolutional and six max pooling layers (GoogLeNet-xxs).

1) *Training*: Fast R-CNN jointly optimizes a multi-task loss that contains a softmax classifier and a bounding box regressor. We build the set of ROIs for the training stage by applying a dense multi-scale sliding window approach using our five template bounding boxes previously described ( $T_1, \dots, T_5$ ). We slide them at different scales all over the image, which produces a set of dense ROIs containing more than 29'000 bounding boxes for a single image, from which we sample during training. For every sampled ROI, we compute the overlap with a ground-truth bounding box. This overlap we measure in terms of Intersection over Union (IoU). A sample with IoU greater than 0.6 is considered a positive training example of the class contained in the ground-truth bounding box. Samples with IoU below 0.4 are instances of the background class. We run stochastic gradient descent SGD for 140,000 iterations, using a learning rate of 0.001 and momentum of 0.9.

2) *Test-time detection*: Fast R-CNN outputs scores  $s_m^r$  for each class  $m \in \{1, \dots, M\}$  and each proposal  $r$ . The class  $c^r$  corresponding to each proposal is the one with the highest score:

$$c^r = \operatorname{argmax}_{m=1}^M s_m^r \quad (1)$$

Since we manage  $5l$  different proposals (local sliding templates) for the same candidate segment, we will have several proposal classes  $c^r$  for one segment. We assign the final class of the segment as the class with the highest number of appearances for all associated proposals. Note that this procedure assumes that each segment contains not more than

one person, and in practice this assumption works reasonably well. Two segments corresponding to the same person or very close segments in the point cloud might result in overlapping detections. We overcome this problem by applying non-maximum suppression (NMS) as a final step. NMS chooses a subset of the remaining  $c^r$ , which is the final output  $c$  of the Fast R-CNN detector. The corresponding position  $(x_c, y_c, z_c)$  of the person in camera coordinates is obtained from the bounding box coordinates, which are also provided by the Fast R-CNN network, and the distance of the segment from the camera.

### C. Probabilistic Position, Velocity and Class Estimation

The detection stage provides us with a set of coordinates for each bounding box containing a person of the form  $(x, y, z, c)$ , where  $(x, y, z)$  is the detected pose of the person transformed from camera coordinates into the world frame and  $c$  is the perceived class. The world frame transformation requires knowledge of the robot’s position in the environment, which we obtain from its odometry. Our position, velocity and class estimator computes the belief  $\text{Bel}(\mathbf{x})$  of the person state  $\mathbf{x} = (x_x, x_y, x_{\dot{x}}, x_{\dot{y}}, x_c)$ , where  $(x_x, x_y)$  represent the person’s true position and  $(x_{\dot{x}}, x_{\dot{y}})$  the true velocity on the ground plane and  $x_c$  represents the true class.

Each person has one Kalman filter and one HMM associated to it. The Kalman filter uses a constant velocity motion model, where the motion and the observation noise are obtained experimentally by analyzing the labeled ground truth trajectories and the corresponding Fast R-CNN detections of people in the training data set. We solve the data association problem between frames using the Mahalanobis distance

$$d_{ij}^2 = v_{ij}^T(t) \hat{S}^{-1}(t) v_{ij}(t) \quad (2)$$

$$\text{with } v_{ij} = z_i(t) - H(t) \hat{x}_j(t) \quad (3)$$

$$\text{and } \hat{S}(t) = H(t) \hat{P}(t) H^T(t) + R(t), \quad (4)$$

where  $\hat{x}(t)$  and  $\hat{P}(t)$  are the predicted state mean and covariance at time  $t$ ,  $z(t)$  is the observation,  $H(t)$  the observation model and  $R(t)$  the observation noise of the filter. The observation and filter indices at time  $t$  are  $i$  and  $j$ . We use the Hungarian algorithm to assign tracks to observations, according to the pairwise Mahalanobis distances. If the distance is larger than a threshold, the observation is not paired to a track. Instead, a new Kalman filter is initialized. If there is no observation for a track, we perform a prediction without observation update.

Each Kalman filter has one HMM associated to it for estimating the class  $x_c$  of the tracked person, according to

$$p(x_{c,t} | c_{1:t}) = \eta p(c_t | x_{c,t}) \sum_{x_{c,t-1}} p(x_{c,t} | x_{c,t-1}) p(x_{c,t-1} | c_{1:t-1}). \quad (5)$$

Eq. 5 models the probability of the tracked person to belong to a given class  $x_{c,t}$ , given the past observations  $c_{1:t}$ . Here,  $x_{c,t}$  is hidden, since we only get measurements  $c_t$  for it. The measurement model  $p(c_t | x_{c,t})$  connects the hidden with the observed variable for time step  $t$ . The HMM further

assumes that the class  $x_{c,t}$  can randomly change from one time step to the next, represented by the transition model  $p(x_{c,t} | x_{c,t-1})$ . In a hospital, a possible transition could be person with crutches  $\rightarrow$  pedestrian  $\rightarrow$  person in wheelchair for a patient who has just finished physiotherapy and hands over his crutches to return to his wheelchair. We need to further specify the class prior  $p(x_{c,1})$  for the initialization of the HMM.

The output of deep neural network classifiers like Fast R-CNN can be interpreted as  $p(x_{c,t} | c_t)$ , since it represents a probability distribution. However, training with one-hot encoded labels results in very peaky distributions and overconfident estimates. Therefore, we will not employ the network scores  $s_m^r$  directly for our HMM. Instead, we analyze our training data to determine the underlying probability distributions statistically. To this end, we first generate and label all proposals for each frame in the validation set of our data, given by our ROI generator and obtain a classification output for each ROI. The percentage of labels for each class determines the class prior  $p(x_{c,1})$ . The measurement model  $p(c_t | x_{c,t})$  is determined by the amount of detections for each class, given a certain label. As a side note, the measurement model corresponds to the classifier’s confusion matrix. The transition model  $p(x_{c,t} | x_{c,t-1})$  is given by the amount of transitions from one class to the other with respect to the total number of transitions.

Due to the limited amount of examples in the validation set, we might not observe all class transitions, even if they are possible. Therefore, we assign small probabilities to all unobserved but possible transitions and misdetections, using a Dirichlet prior. The data association for the HMM is given by the Kalman filter. If a tracked person is in the field of view of the camera and there is no observation  $c_t$  for time step  $t$ , we treat it as a background detection in the HMM. If the track is outside the field of view, we apply the transition model to the previous state estimate without considering an observation. The position, velocity and class estimator removes tracks with a standard deviation in position above a threshold. Furthermore, tracks which are estimated as background with a probability above a threshold are deleted.

## IV. EXPERIMENTS

In this section we evaluate the performance of the two submodules Fast R-CNN object detection and Kalman filter tracking. Additionally, we present quantitative results for the combined perception pipeline. For these experiments we used our hospital dataset. Finally, we present a real-robot scenario where the robot uses our perception pipeline in order to give special assistance in a person guidance task.

### A. Dataset

In order to train and evaluate our pipeline we annotated our hospital dataset. Images were collected in the facilities of the Faculty of Engineering of the University of Freiburg and in a hospital in Frankfurt using a mobile Festo Robotino robot, equipped with a Kinect v2 camera mounted 1 m above



TABLE I  
OBJECT DETECTION PERFORMANCE IN TERMS OF MEAN AVERAGE PRECISION (MAP) USING SOLELY FAST R-CNN.






						MAP
Ours	73.0	89.6	39.5	66.9	54.9	<b>64.98</b>
DSW	70.6	86.9	42.0	69.4	49.5	<b>63.67</b>

TABLE II  
PERFORMANCE ON INOUTDOORPEOPLE [20] TEST SEQUENCE 4.

	AP
Ours	70.0
DSW [20]	<b>71.6</b>
Upper-body detector [14]	69.1

the ground and capturing images at 15 frames per second. The robot was controlled by a notebook computer running ROS (Robot Operating System).

The dataset is subdivided into subsets for training, validation, and evaluation of the pipeline. We use two test sets to evaluate the performance of the pipeline. Test set 1 is used to evaluate the Fast R-CNN detector, whereas Test set 2 is used for the overall evaluation of the pipeline and its ground truth labels consider also occluded objects. Test set 1 is used also as validation set to design the hidden Markov model (HMM) and the tracking algorithm. Fig. 4 shows the number of instances for each class contained in the set.

### B. Detection using Fast R-CNN

In order to evaluate the object detection performance, we use the standard mean average precision (MAP) metric. We compare the final detection performance using proposals from a dense sliding window method against our fast depth-based region proposal method. In order to create the set of dense sliding window proposals, we applied our templates on the implementation of Mees et al. [20]. Tab. I compares both approaches at an IoU of 0.5. Our depth-based proposal method performs better than the sliding window baseline method.

We also compare the runtime of both methods on a computer with 12-Core CPU and a GeForce GTX TITAN X with 12GB of memory. Following the dense sliding window algorithm, the set of ROIs for a single image contains approximately 29,000 bounding boxes, while our approach generates an average of 450 proposals. By using dense sliding window (DSW), a single frame is classified in 297 ms, whereas our algorithm requires 43 ms. Our approach is therefore a better choice for employment on a real-world system. We also evaluated the classification performance by means of a confusion matrix where the three most noticeable confusions correspond to 26.8% of people using crutches that were confused with people pushing other people in wheelchairs, 31.7% of people using walking frames that were classified as pedestrians and 23.8% of people using crutches classified as pedestrians. Qualitative detection results are shown in Fig. 6.

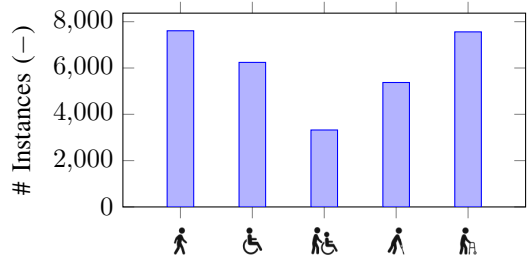


Fig. 4. Number of instances per class in our dataset.

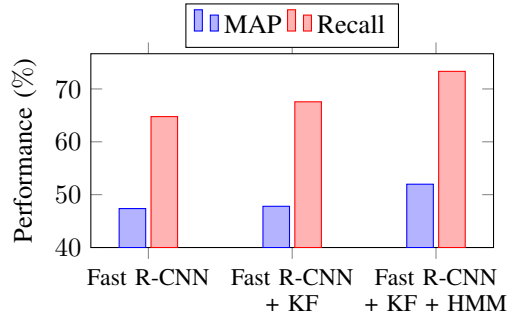


Fig. 5. Object detection performance evolution with respect to stand-alone Fast R-CNN. Addition of the two modules KF and HMM to the Fast R-CNN baseline improves overall MAP and recall.

Further, we compare our detector on the InOutDoorPeople dataset [20] against a dense sliding window approach and an implementation [5] of the depth-based upper-body detector by Jafari et al. [14]. This dataset only contains labels for pedestrians. Therefore, all class predictions of our network are counted as detections of pedestrians. Table II shows that our approach outperforms the upper-body detector but achieves slightly worse results than the DSW baseline. We hypothesize that our detector would improve if trained solely on pedestrians. For all experiments we use the same network that we trained on five classes, without retraining.

### C. Multi-Tracking using Kalman Filter

To evaluate the performance of the tracking algorithm we use the CLEAR MOT metrics proposed by Bernardin et al. [21] which considers the Multiple Object Tracking Precision (MOTP) and the Multiple Object Tracking Accuracy (MOTA). We obtained a MOTP of 70.60% and 62.19% of MOTA.

### D. Framework Evaluation

We further aim to evaluate our complete pipeline in order to assess the contribution of different stages such as classification, tracking and class estimation in the overall detection performance. In this experiment, we challenge the overall system to estimate the position and class of temporarily occluded people. We compare the performance of the pipeline in terms of MAP and recall. Results were obtained using our Test set 2 that contains four sequences. Each sequence was evaluated independently and at each frame we use Intersection over Union and the Hungarian algorithm to



Fig. 6. Qualitative object detection results obtained using our trained Fast R-CNN network. Left: positive examples. Right: cases of failure with missed detections and wrong classifications. We show the RGB image only for demonstration purposes.

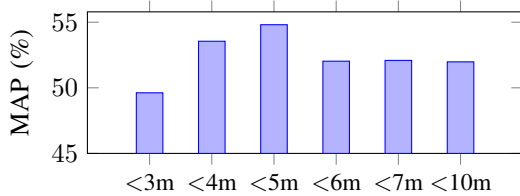


Fig. 7. Variation of the performance with respect to the distance.

find ground truth detection pairs. Hypotheses outside of the field of view of the camera were not considered. Test set 2 is especially challenging because of occlusions, which explains the drop in MAP compared to Test set 1. As can be seen in Fig. 5, the addition of the Kalman filter and the HMM improves the performance of the overall pipeline. The MAP improves by 4.6% from 47.37% to 51.98% compared to the raw Fast R-CNN output. Recall increases from 64.77% to 73.33%.

We also assess the variation of the performance with respect to the distance from the sensor. For a given distance  $d$ , this experiment considers detections and ground truth bounding boxes up to  $d$  meters only. Fig. 7 shows that our method performs best when detecting people up to five meters, achieving an MAP of 54.81%. The performance decreases to 51.98% MAP for larger distances and also notably for very short distances.

### E. Person Guidance Scenario

To show the applicability of our framework to a real-world service robot task, we test our system in a person guidance scenario. The robot’s task is to guide visitors to the professor’s office in our lab, building 80 at the Faculty of Engineering of the University of Freiburg. The professor’s

office is located at the first floor, opposite the staircase at the main entrance. An elevator is available at the other side of the corridor for people with walking impairments.

Our robot uses a laptop computer with an 8-Core CPU and a GeForce GTX 1080 with 8GB of memory in order to process data at approximately 15 frames per second. We use the ROS navigation stack<sup>1</sup> for the navigation parts of the experiment. We select the initial waiting pose of the robot close to the main entrance as well as two goal poses, see Fig. 8. The robot observes an area of interest 3 m in front of it and within  $\pm 20^\circ$  from its center. Once it detects a person in this area, it waits for 4 s and until the confidence for one category exceeds 90% before navigating to one of the two goals. For pedestrians, it navigates to the goal by the stairs; people with mobility aids are guided to the elevator. In addition, the robot adjusts its velocity according to the perceived category of the person. Once it reached its goal, it returns to the waiting position and waits for the next visitor. The robot further uses predefined speech commands to ask the visitors to follow it and inform them how to proceed to the professor’s office once its navigation goal is reached.

We tested thirteen guidance runs with different people from our lab. Each category was tested twice, except pedestrian for which we tested five runs. In all of the runs, the robot perceived the correct category and successfully navigated the person to the correct location. However, in some runs, the people had to adjust their positions to trigger the navigation, because they were too close to the robot or outside of the observed area. The experiment confirms that our approach can be applied on a real robot. Further, it shows how our framework can be used to give appropriate assistance to people, according to their needs.

<sup>1</sup><http://wiki.ros.org/navigation>



Fig. 8. We use our framework to provide assistance in a person guidance experiment. The robot’s task is to guide all pedestrians to the nearest staircase (left image) and all people with mobility aids to the elevator (right image). We told the test subjects to approach the robot at the initial position and then follow the robot’s predefined speech commands.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

We proposed a perception system to detect and distinguish people according to the mobility aids they use, based on a deep neural network and supported by tracking and class estimation modules. Our experiments show an increase in performance by the addition of these two modules to the pipeline. Moreover, we demonstrated that our approach for the proposal generation can speed up the classification process by a factor of up to seven compared to a dense sliding window baseline while achieving better performance. Additionally, we introduce an RGB-D dataset containing over 17,000 annotated images. In our person guidance experiment we showed that our detection pipeline enables robots to provide individual assistance to people with advanced needs. In the future, we plan to use sensor data from multiple sources to improve our pipeline such as using laser range finder readings to increase the accuracy of the proposal generation at larger distances. We will further examine how the additional information provided by our framework can improve the behavior of robots in populated environments, for example during autonomous navigation.

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