

## Determining room usage through a multi-sensor system and machine learning

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**Abstract:** In this paper, we present an approach to deduce room usage through a multi-sensor system and an analytical and machine learning component. Various sensor data from a system called sensor cube was recorded within a building of the FH Bielefeld Campus Minden. The sensor data, e.g. temperature, humidity, illuminance, CO<sub>2</sub> concentration, indoor air quality, are used to detect human activity in a room. Ideally, this unlabeled data can be processed in such a way that, with the help of machine learning algorithms, predictions can be made on future room usage. The analysis and predictions are based solely on environmental data, without the use of a tracking system or any other sensor which counts or tracks human presence.

**Keywords:** Smart Home, Multi-Sensor Agent, Machine Learning

### 1 Introduction

As [MDT14] describe, 85% of energy consumption in a building is spent on cooling, heating, and lighting in Europe (UK). This remains a very high value, although the development of smart home systems continues to make great progress. To further reduce energy consumption, the utilization of machine learning techniques promises additional value to smart home concepts, as described in [Mo14]. Such a combined system, comprised of smart sensors and agents, as well as processing machine learning models, can be used to learn and, therefore, predict when and how frequently rooms are used, to make actuators in a heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) system as energy efficient as possible.

In addition to energy efficiency, it is also possible to increase the comfort of users in a smart environment, e.g. in an office setting. Comfortable working areas also increase productivity. For example, ideal working temperature is between 21 and 22°C, and influences concentration and productivity as described in [Le06] and [Sc16]. Another important aspect is the lighting in a room. Lighting influences productivity, employee morale, tiredness, performance, and vitality, as seen in [Fi00]. With this in mind, the actuators could be predictively adjusted to the personal preferences of the users, from the previously collected data.

In order to set up such a system, it is necessary to implement a multi-sensor system, to collect data, and feed the data to an appropriate machine learning model. Ideally, this

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model can extract information from the data to properly create a timetable, which indicates the usage of a specific environment, predict the possible future timetable and room usage, and also control the HVAC system accordingly.

In this paper, we present an approach for a multi-sensor system, which, in the following sections, is referred to as sensor cube, and an analysis of the sensor data with machine learning techniques. This paper focuses only on learning the usage of rooms in a building, and not on the optimal control of the actuators in its system. Furthermore, we will not include the data of the actuators (ventilation, open windows, etc.), but only the raw data collected by the sensors.

Since the data is comprised only of raw sensor inputs, it is unlabeled and, therefore, requires adequate treatment for use with machine learning. After the necessary preprocessing of the data, a clustering method is applied to extract information concerning the inner structure of the data as well as its relations. Using clustering, synthetic labels can be produced and attached to the data. Using proper visualization methods, the labeling process can be verified by a user to check the correct labeling via actual room usage times and working hours. Furthermore, the features and labels can be used to make predictions on new raw sensor data. This makes it possible to predict the future usage of rooms according to their history, and ideally, prepare rooms in advance in regard to e.g. lighting and heating.

## 2 Related Work

In [WWY12], the authors describe a smart building multi-agent system that aims to increase the energy efficiency of a building without reducing the comfort of people working and living in it. Case studies were held in which users of a building entered their preferred indoor climate in a graphical user interface. The data collected from the users was then linked to the multi-agent system to balance energy efficiency and comfort. While [WWY12] focuses on energy efficiency without the loss of comfort, the presented solution only factors in saving energy by predicting when a room is in use. In the future, the sensor cube system could be extended to factor in user comfort as well.

[MCM12] describes a sensor system that predicts how many people are in a room, using machine learning and data from different sensors. In addition, the actual number of people is captured by a tablet application to validate the results and train the artificial intelligence with correct data. In contrast to the solutions presented in [MCM12], the work of this paper attempts to determine the room usage without input or interaction of the people in the room. Only sensors from the sensor cube, which measure environmental factors, are used.

In terms of well-being, the authors of [Sc16] have already described the theoretical foundations for a system, that takes into account various aspects of the indoor climate that ensures a pleasant working environment for the user. The connection between a

comfortable working environment and productivity is analyzed in [Va15]. The author collected environmental, physical, and mental data of the users and correlated it with personal surveys on productivity.

In [JV12], the authors present a general smart building system model with an implementation which detects a user's intention to enter a room. Most systems have a slight delay, since the user has to have entered the room in order to activate the light e.g. via a sensor. The anticipation is carried out using the mixed-reality space eXperience Induction Machine (XIM), which functions as a multi-person tracking system, as well as Linear Discriminant Analysis (LDA) to predict if the user is about to enter or not. This linear classifier was trained with around 150 data samples, with features, such as the angle of the user and turning magnitude. The LDA manages to remove the delay of 1 second, which occurs when running without the anticipation model. [RJD05] deployed a multi-agent framework in a building including sensors and effectors. An unsupervised real-time learning algorithm constructs a fuzzy rule system, based on the environmental data. That neural networks can be utilized as well, was demonstrated as early as 1998 in [Mo98] with a neural network handling heating and lighting among others, in a system called ACHE.

### 3 Method

#### 3.1 Description of the multi-sensor system

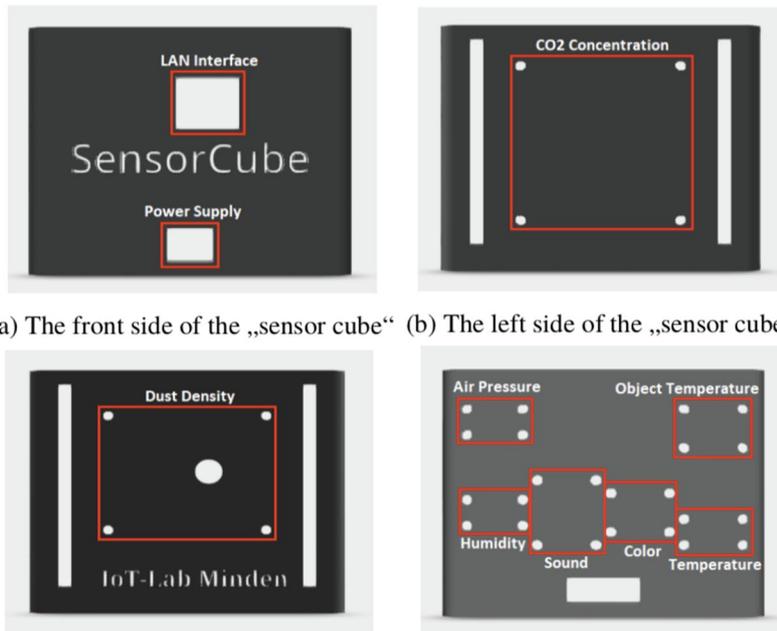
The sensor cube is a multi-sensor system that collects data from several sensors and sends it over the network to a central point. The current version features eight sensors: ambient temperature, temperature, object temperature; air pressure; illuminance, color; dust density; humidity; CO<sub>2</sub> concentration; indoor air quality index; (IAQ) and sound intensity. For the implementation of the sensors and the processing of the sensor data, building blocks of the company Tinkerforge<sup>2</sup> were used. These building blocks are quite small and modular, so a user can easily assemble these elements into a compact design.

The sensor cube is 10x11x11cm in dimensions and has a 3D printed case. Due to its compact size, the sensor cube can be easily placed in various locations within a room. The sensor cube consists of a front side, which features the energy input and a LAN input, as shown in Figure 1a. The left side has two slots for air circulation and is used to hold the CO<sub>2</sub> sensor, which is shown in Figure 1b. On the right side, which can be seen in Figure 1c, are two more slots for air circulation and an opening that is in line with the opening of the dust sensor, that is secured on that side. The back side, which is shown in Figure 1d, is used to secure all the other sensors, some of them are placed outside the sensor (sound, humidity, color, temperature) and some inside (ambient temperature, air pressure, indoor air quality). The back side also features a slot for the cables of the

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<sup>2</sup> Tinkerforge website: <https://www.tinkerforge.com/de/>

outside sensors.



(a) The front side of the „sensor cube“ (b) The left side of the „sensor cube“

(c) The right side of the „sensor cube“ (d) The back side of the „sensor cube“

Fig. 1: Technical drawings of the „sensor cube“



(a) Front view of the „sensor cube“

(b) Back view of the „sensor cube“

Fig. 2: Photos of the multi-sensor system

Each of these sensors are mounted on the so called “bricklets.” These bricklets are modules, that can be connected to special “master bricks,” which can communicate with the sensor modules. The master bricks have four interfaces, where sensor modules can be connected to. To manage multiple master bricks and all the incoming signals, a

special module is needed. This so called “red brick” is a small module, that has a Linux distribution installed on it. With the red brick, processing and communication of the sensor data is possible. A user can upload self-written programs to the red brick that can be used to manipulate data and send it through a network in the desired format.

The master bricks and the red brick are installed inside the case of the sensor cube. The entire sensor cube, with all the attached sensors, is shown in Figure 2.

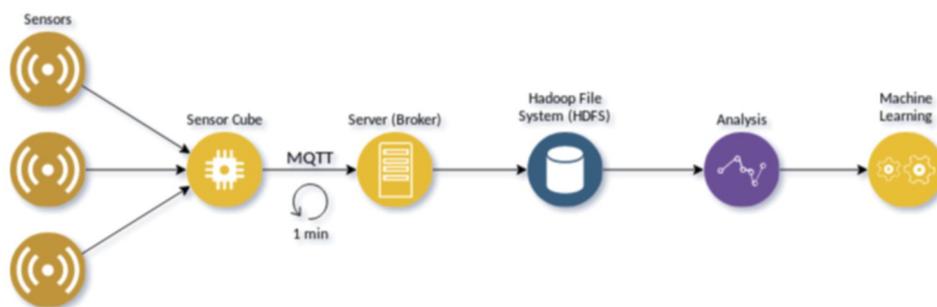


Fig. 3: Schematic representation of the architecture. The sensor cube, which is comprised out of several sensors is collection and sends it via the MQTT protocol over a broker to the HDFS. The data is then used for pre-processing and further analysis. Finally, the data, together with proper feature selection can be fed into a machine learning algorithm.

### 3.2 Data and evaluation tools

The incoming data from the single sensors is processed with the red brick. The red brick transforms the data to a comma-separated-value (CSV) format and pushes the data in a one-minute interval via the MQTT protocol to a server. The one-minute interval was chosen to not flood the database with nearly identical data, but to still notice slight differences. Shorter and longer intervals would also be possible.

The MQTT protocol is a producer/consumer architecture, in which a node in a network can publish (or consume) data under a specific topic. These topics are similar to a directory path and therefore are easy to remember for the user. Additionally, every node that publishes data in a MQTT broker, can have its own topic with a specific identifier. Wildcards for single and multiple characters are allowed as well. The MQTT architecture allows multiple sensor cubes to remain modular, due to the fact that they can push the data to a central point under their own topics. The server receives the incoming messages from the sensor cube and stores them in an Apache Hadoop file system.

The Hadoop file system (HDFS) is commonly used to store big data in a network. The Hadoop architecture is well-suited for big data applications, as it is designed to connect to other Apache products, making it easy to further process the data. The entire data flow, from the data collection to machine learning, is shown in Figure 3.

### 3.3 List of sensors and their applications

In the following section, the sensors, which are connected to the sensor cube, and their applications are described. It is elaborated how the data can be used in order to deduce the presence of people, but also which disruptive factors influence the sensors.

- Air pressure (MS5611-01BA01)
  - The air pressure changes when doors are opened
- Object temperature (MLX90614ESF-BAA)
  - The object temperature is needed to detect possible overheating of the sensor cube.
- Temperature (TMP102)
  - The temperature can slightly change when people are in the room, due to the release of body heat.
- Illuminance/Color (TCS34725)
  - The lighting conditions indirectly influence the energy costs in a room, since one could set the actuators for the light in such a manner, that they can be set to the minimum amount of light required to save energy.
  - Furthermore, the illuminance is a good factor to recognize the usage of a room, because people require light when working indoors.
- CO2 Concentration (SensAir K30)
  - The CO2 concentration increases as soon as people are present in a room due to the release of CO2 when breathing.
  - The quantitative change in the amount of CO2 in a room may also determine how many people are in the room.
  - A problem in determining the CO2 concentration in a room may be that open windows, doors, or ventilation inadvertently affect the CO2 concentration and thus falsify the data. In order to identify these factors, the data of the actuators would be necessary.
- Indoor Air Quality Index (BME680)
  - The indoor air quality index is measured from a volatile organic compounds (VOC) sensor<sup>3</sup>. This index ranges from 0 to 500 in increments of 50, ranging from “good” air quality to “very bad” air quality.

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<sup>3</sup> Data-sheet of the VOC sensor: [https://ae-bst.resource.bosch.com/media/\\_tech/media/datasheets/BST-BME680-DS001-00.pdf](https://ae-bst.resource.bosch.com/media/_tech/media/datasheets/BST-BME680-DS001-00.pdf)

- This sensor can be used as a support to the CO<sub>2</sub> sensor to detect the presence of people in a room, since the human body derives specific gases as described in [Ka13].
- Humidity (HDC1080)
  - The humidity in the room changes due to the presence of people due to respiration and sweating.
- Sound
  - Through the volume in a room, it can be seen whether people are in the room and whether it is a smaller or larger group of people.
  - One problem with detecting volume is that people behave differently in the room. Some groups of people are talking loudly, others are working quietly.
- Dust density (GP2Y1010AU)
  - The dust value can be used to figure out when the sensor cube needs to be cleaned. However, it is not helpful for determining the number of people in a room.

Through the combination of the sensor data, conclusions can be drawn on the usage of a room and the number of people in it. This can be validated by machine learning.

### 3.4 Experimental setup

In order to collect data that can be analyzed via machine learning, the sensor cube was placed on a table in an occupied room. It is a good practice to place the sensor cube far away from doors, so disruptive factors such as incoming air does not affect the data. It is also necessary to place the cube at a socket, since it is not battery powered.

For this purpose, a room was chosen that is used by small to large groups of people. These groups use the space for studies and work. The dimensions of the room are 6.54 x 8.37 meters, as shown in Figure 4. If the sensor cube is placed in bigger rooms, it should be placed in the middle of the room, otherwise changes of conditions in one area of the room might not get measured.

Although the room has windows, these cannot be opened and remain closed. The only air supply is through the door or the ventilation system. In general, this room is well suited for the experimental setup, since disruptive factors, such as open windows, direct daylight, and permanent background noise, are not present.

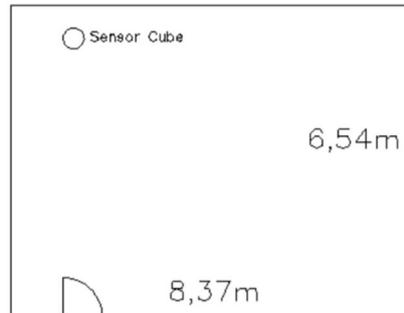


Fig. 4: Schematic of room in experiment's setting

## 4 Data Analysis and Machine Learning

Literature offers various approaches to incorporate machine learning techniques in the field of smart systems, ranging from simple or complex rule definitions to complex trained models, which utilize multi-class classification, clustering, or regression. The data gathered from the sensor cube contains raw sensor data input with no further explanation or assessment. To detect the inner structure of the data and create artificial labels, a clustering method is necessary.

The gathered data from the sensor cube is saved in a raw CSV file format without a header. The data requires adequate preparation in the form of multiple alterations and cleaning steps. The timestamps are converted to US format and also made sure to be .NET compatible for further handling by Azure Machine Learning Studio<sup>4</sup>. Apart from the timestamps, the data columns containing the sensor values have the data type floating point.

The measurements began on 05/28/2018, at 07:50:44 and ended on 06/10/2018 at 23:58:44, which results in 14 days. A measurement is recorded every one minute. In total, there are 17,877 measurements for 13 different features.

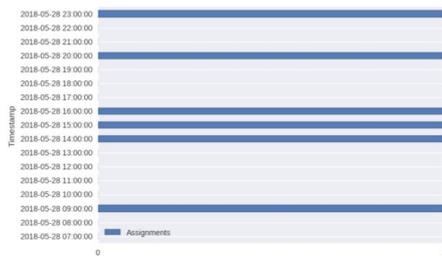
The prepared data is then further analyzed. For this process, the sensor measurements are aggregated in 15 minute and one-hour intervals. For the intervals, the mean, sum, standard derivation, as well as minimal and maximal values, are generated. In order to yield a more meaningful insight into the data, the values are normalized via the z-score normalization method. A z-score normalization method was preferred over min-max normalization due to its better handling of outliers.

A smaller set of data was recorded and processed in the same manner from 06/16/2018 to 06/22/2018, encompassing 6,249 measurements. An additional set utilizing the VOC

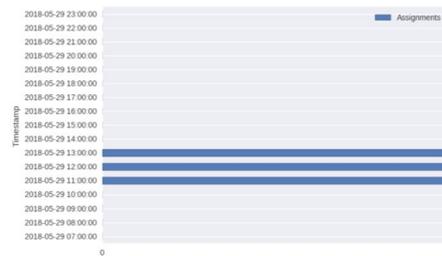
<sup>4</sup> Microsoft Azure Machine Learning Studio: <https://studio.azureml.net>

sensor was collected between 06/25/2018 and 07/06/2018.

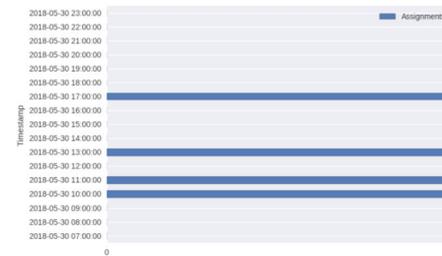
To create synthetic labels for the data, the K-means++ clustering method was selected, using Euclidean distance. Due to the nature of this method, normalization is advisable to increase the clustering results. A selection of possible centroids was done, ranging from 2 to 10, with 500 iterations. The Davies-Bouldin Index was selected as a metric to measure clustering results. Although a higher score for more than 2 clusters was found, 2 clusters were ultimately selected, due to a proper interpretation of the results and ignoring outliers. The purpose is to identify assignments, which indicate human presence (e.g. due to a higher level of CO<sub>2</sub>, sound intensity, temperature, or air quality (VOC)). Even though CO<sub>2</sub> is better suited to detect human presence (usually higher amounts of CO<sub>2</sub> concentration is related to larger numbers of people inside a room) than VOC, we measured the air quality via the VOC sensor as well, to identify possible correlations and to find stronger evidence of human presence.



(a) Assignments for the 05/28/2018, Monday.



(b) Assignments for the 05/29/2018, Tuesday.



(c) Assignments for the 05/30/2018, Wednesday.



(d) Assignments for the 06/02/2018, Saturday.

Fig. 5: Cluster results using K-means++ with two centroid (2 classes). A dark blue row indicates possible human activity. The classification is applied in one hour steps. Feature selection is only sound intensity. Figure (d) shows a Saturday and correctly classifies no hour with 1. Figure (b) classifies possible human activity from around 11:00 AM to 01:00 PM. Figure (c) from 10:00 AM to 11:00 AM and again at 05:00 PM. Figure (a) has possible human activity at 09:00 AM, 02:00 PM to 04:00 PM, and oddly at 08:00 PM and 11:00 PM. These outliers could derive from a local peak in sound intensity, as it is shown in Figure 6.

Clustering was applied on the larger dataset (05/28/2018 until 06/10/2018) and to test the quality of the selected method and the data, only sound intensity was selected as a feature. The results of these experiments are shown in Figure 5.

## 5 Results

The analysis of the data brought up a series of considerations. In Figures 6 to 9, two working days (06/21/2018, 06/27/2018) and two weekend days (06/17/2018, 06/30/2018) are compared to each other. In the building, and especially the room in which the sensor cube was stationed, no human activities occur during the weekends. Therefore, the data looks different compared to a regular working day. Under the pretext that the aim is to identify human activity and, therefore, a form of 'room usage' prediction, the data from these examples should identify features which most likely indicate human activity and which most likely do not. The most promising indicators are illuminance (people need adequate lighting when they work in a room), temperature (body temperature increases average temperature), humidity (due to breathing), CO<sub>2</sub> (due to exhalation), and sound intensity, when you consider that people in groups usually talk or produce some kind of noise while working. More data needs to be gathered and analyzed to make a final statement concerning the VOC sensor.

The plots in Figure 6 and Figure 7 show that a difference in sound intensity is clear on a weekend and working day. Due to the normalization, a visible relation between the different measurement units becomes clear. The sound intensity is significantly lower during the weekend, which can be used as an indicator of reduced or a lack of human activity, while it is generally higher on a working day. Furthermore, CO<sub>2</sub> is a good indicator of room usage, as expected.

The factor, illuminance, is stable during both dates. Although it should be less during the weekend, the impact of the daily hours of sunshine distorts the results in such a fashion, that the indoor lights play only an underpart.

Temperature behaves in the same manner as it showed in the un-normalized analysis and is mainly a product of the ambient temperature. The same applies to the factor humidity.

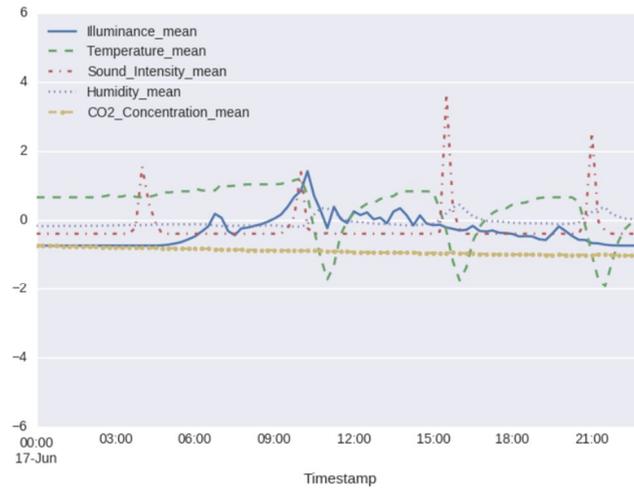


Fig. 6: Z-score normalized changes in illuminance, temperature, sound intensity, humidity, and CO2 concentration from the 06/17/2018. Sunday, weekend.

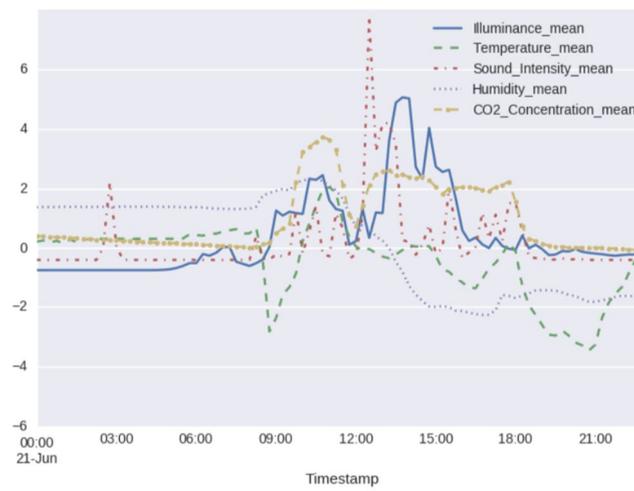


Fig. 7: Z-score normalized changes in illuminance, temperature, sound intensity, humidity, and CO2 concentration from the 06/21/2018. Thursday, workday.

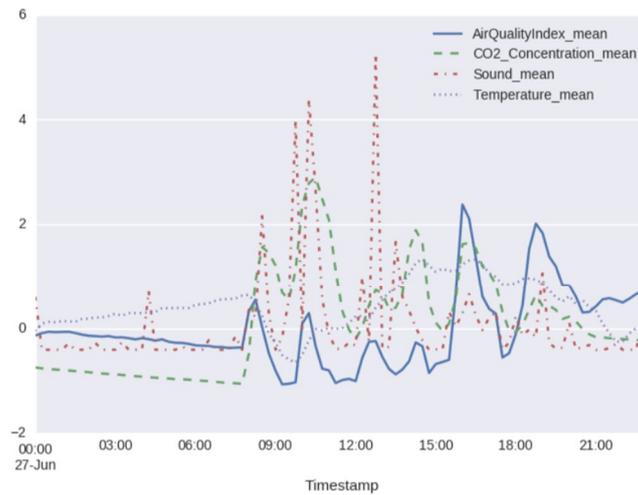


Fig. 8: Z-score normalized changes in temperature, sound intensity, CO2 concentration, and indoor air quality from the 06/27/2018. Wednesday, workday.

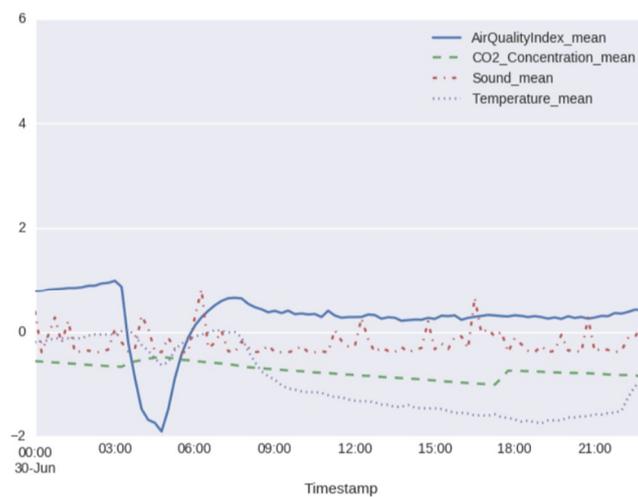


Fig. 9: Z-score normalized changes in temperature, sound intensity, CO2 concentration, and indoor air quality from the 06/30/2018. Saturday, weekend.

Figure 8 and 9 show examples of the measurements which utilize the VOC sensor. The data shows a typical working day and a weekend day. The focus is mainly on the indoor air quality index, and how it correlates together with CO2 and the temperature. The data was treated and processed in the same manner as the other data. An air conditioner, which could be a possible candidate for the origin of the sound source, creates a spike in

sound between 3 AM and 6 AM, has a significant impact on the indoor air quality during the weekend, and to a lesser, smoother degree on the working day.

The clustering of the data was of mixed quality and required manual correction for specific holidays which fell into the measurement time series, as well as weekends. The data is not large enough to find a proper generalization for model training.

## **6 Conclusion**

The experimental setup worked successfully and a functioning work-flow was established. The data is successfully broadcasted from the sensor cube, and the developed multi-sensor system can be used efficiently for further research and developments. Furthermore, trends, issues, and correlations in the sensor data were found. The indicators that showed the largest likelihood of human activity were CO<sub>2</sub> concentration, as well as sound intensity. This becomes especially visible when comparing working days to weekends. As mentioned earlier, more data must be gathered to evaluate the VOC sensor properly. Several issues occurred during the experiments: in order to establish a meaningful correlation between human activity and sensor data, more data is necessary. Most of the illuminance, as well as temperature values e.g., can be traced back to the sun-hours of the respective days and their average temperatures. In an ideal scenario, data from multiple months up to a year are needed to encompass the entire temperature range, so that seasonal implications become comprehensible. Real-time outdoor temperature data would allow for a more precise calculation of the indoor temperature. These calculated values could show the implications of the other factors (especially the people) in a room.

## **7 Future Work**

Our work can be used as a basis to not only deduct human activity, but also to estimate the intensity of human activity, such as group size. With the used features, a clustering method can be applied on a larger set of data, and ultimately, a model can be trained to predict room usage in the future, from which conclusions can be drawn concerning energy saving and comfort, e.g. determining if a specific room is a good choice for a specific use or if a different room is more suitable. A possible solution would be multi-class classification, rather than a binary model, which only classifies general human activity or no human activity. The risk of labeling a time stamp with no human activity by missing out a single individual who is working quietly and therefore hard to detect could be a problem as well.

To tackle the problems which occurred during the experiments, a series of solutions were identified which should be realized in the future:

1. In order to create a model that can predict future room usage, significantly more data is necessary. Therefore, measurements must continue. This will allow the tackling of seasonal changes better, as well as holidays or events that occur out of the ordinary, to allow a wider generalization effect. An increase in data and analysis will also benefit the modeling process and allow several improvements for future works:
  - a) Clustering is used to create artificial labels. Currently, these labels are faulty due to a very low level of generalization. E.g. it is necessary to manually correct the labels for certain times and dates (e.g. holidays). More data should make such implications more obvious and create better clustering results and therefore a better model.
  - b) A better dataset with generally more correct labels allows the re-thinking of the modeling process. Binary classification (human activity, i.e. room usage true or no human activity, i.e. room usage false) or a regression task (how likely it is, that a room is occupied or used at time X) are possible methods that require proper evaluation.
2. Correlations between features require a more detailed approach, which will also benefit from more data.
3. The idea to incorporate weather information to remove the distortion of the temperature sensor by the ambient temperature should be considered. This would allow the identification of the changes in the rooms without the effect of the weather. An increase in data will also generalize the seasonal effects in general.

The majority of these issues and ideas can be tackled by utilizing more data, which requires longer periods of sensor measurement. The time tables for rooms for an entire semester can also be used to verify the data or use it as hand-made labels. Although the danger of incorrect labeling still exists, due to short-term room changes.

Another case could be the labeling of the data while recording. In this scenario, a person in a room can use a tablet or some other form of interactive device, to rate the current temperature, lighting level, and other factors. Depending on the person, the recorded values in that range receive a specific label, such as comfortable or uncomfortable. Done by multiple people, such a system aims to recommend an acceptable compromise to please more than a single person. A similar experimental set-up has been described in [MCM12], where the authors use the input of the number of persons through a tablet to label the data.

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