

A multi-frequency multi-constellation GNSS development platform with an open interface

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Abstract—This paper presents the GOOSE GNSS open receiver platform. The platform is based on a multi-frequency multi-constellation GNSS receiver which can be deployed either as a fixed PC receiver or as an embedded portable one. The main feature of this platform is to provide to GNSS software developers the possibility to have a deeper control on receiver hardware and to replace all the provided software functionality with their own software modules. This is possible with the open interface protocol called Open GNSS Receiver Protocol (OGRP), which has been developed by Fraunhofer in the same project. The results show how the receiver hardware performs in the different scenarios.

I. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays most of portable handheld devices (smartphones, tablets) feature a Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS) receiver and provide a user position. More and more user applications exploit the receiver data to provide the most heterogeneous type of services. However, the development of third party software exploiting raw GNSS measurement data is slowed down by the receiver limitations.

Commercial Off-The-Shelf (COTS) receivers are often defined as black-box receiver, since they provide no accessibility to internal hardware. Typically only the signal to use and the update rates of the Position, Velocity and Time component (PVT) solution can be configured. This is the case of state-of-the-art receivers like the TR-G3T [1]. A tight coupling of, e.g., inertial sensor data with the GNSS is possible only with the SPAN Receivers from Novatel [2] or with software receivers. The Novatel SPAN Receivers gives no possibility to run third party software on the processor and they provide only proprietary protocols for the data exchange between the receiver and external modules. The software receivers are very flexible but typically cannot deliver real-time performance.

In order to overcome these limitations, open receivers have been developed by the academia. The drawback is that they are often limited to single frequency and single constellation (i.e. GPS). For example, the Namuru Receiver from the University of New South Wales adopts the GP2015 Zarlink chip for Global Positioning System (GPS) L1 and an Altera Field-Programmable Gate Array (FPGA) with a Nios softcore for the digital hardware [3]. The other drawback is that they might provide independent tools to get from a satellite signal to the final PVT solution, but a uniform approach is missing, so

that the users has to fiddle with several aspects which can be beyond their know-how. This is the case of the TUT-GNSS developed by the Tampere University of Technology using an Altera FPGA with the NIOSII soft core [4]. The receiver development was part of the FP7 GRAMMAR project [5].

The approach proposed in this paper has been developed in the GOOSE project. It is meant to be a trade-off between the market black-box receiver model and the academical open one. The idea is that the receiver should offer an open interface which can be directly accessed by the user. In particular, it should be allowed to run user software on the receiver processor. In order to meet the needs of a larger user base, the receiver supports a fixed Personal Computer (PC) deployment as well as a portable embedded one. Both scenarios are characterized by different processor capabilities and software requirements. This way users from different scenarios can make the most of the receiver by this solution. Additionally, this allows developers who want to start with a PC implementation and move then to an embedded one to use the same underlying hardware. The paper describes the challenges related to the support of different deployment scenarios.

The paper is organized as follows. In the first section we describe the hardware components of the open receiver system. Then we present the OGRP. In the following section we report some experimental results. Finally we draw some conclusions.

II. OPEN RECEIVER HARDWARE ARCHITECTURE

The receiver is composed of an analog-frontend board, a baseband board and the processor system. The satellite signal received by the antenna is first processed by the analog frontend. The signal is mixed down to a low Intermediate Frequency (IF) and then converted to a digital signal by an Analog-to-Digital Converter (ADC). The frontend characteristics are described in detail in Section II-A. The modular structure of the system allows users to replace the provided frontends with modules of their own, as long as the digital interface is compatible with the baseband board. The digital signal generated by the frontend is processed in the baseband board. The baseband functionality is implemented partly on hardware and partly on software. The hardware part is based on dedicated GNSS modules mapped on a FPGA. This is explained in Section II-B. These modules are interfaced with

an AXI bus which is controlled by a processor, which runs the software tasks. The main feature of the architecture is the possibility to deploy it in different user scenarios. Therefore a special emphasis was given to the interface between the hardware modules and the software one. This is described in Section II-C.

A. Frontend board

The modularity of the open receiver allows the possibility for the users to develop their own analog frontend with only the requirement being a suitable digital Signal-In-Space (SIS) interface. For the users requiring a complete solution, two separate frontend options, namely the GOOFI board and the GOOFEX board, are provided.

The GOOFI frontend board is depicted on top of Figure 1. It is based on three reception channels for separate GNSS bands with bandwidths varying between 40 and 68 MHz (Figure 2). The first channel supports GPS L1, Galileo E1, Russian GLObal NAVigation Satellite System (GLONASS) G1 and BeiDou B1, the second one the L2/L2C-band and GLONASS G2 and the third one E5 AltBOC, E5a, E5b, L5 and B2. These signals are down-converted and digitized by the three dual-channel ADCs which run at 81 MSPS sampling rate and 8-bit resolution. The signal gain is controlled through a I2C interface. A dedicated clock generation and distribution chip has been designed to coherently derive all the frequencies required for the Radio Frequency (RF) Integrated Circuit (IC), the ADCs, and the FPGA. The GOOFI frontend is meant to be used with an active antenna, therefore the noise figure depends on the antenna used. The DC power supply for the active antenna is controlled by the baseband board.

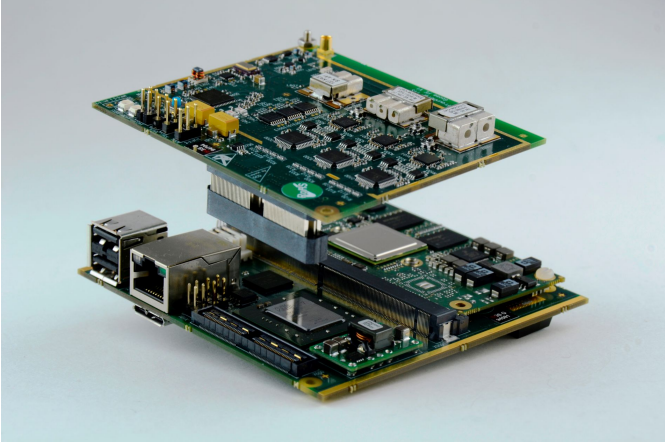


Fig. 1. Single-Board Computer (SBC)-based receiver hardware

The GOOFEX frontend (Figure 3) is meant to provide a more flexible solution to cover also future GNSS signals. It is characterized by a homodyne RF frontend architecture with four independent reception channels, which cover the frequency band from 1.0 GHz to 3.5 GHz, depending on the antenna and the band selecting filter. Each channel has its own Local Oscillator (LO), a SPI interface for gain and LO

frequency setting and a ADC. The LO as well as the ADCs have a common reference clock, therefore the channels are synchronous to each other. Only the phase offset between the channels can change every time the device is powered up. After the initialization the phase offset remains constant. The ADC chosen allows a high linearity of the system with resolution up to 12 bits, but currently we use only 8 bits. The sampling rate of 220 MHz allows a higher resolution of the E5 AltBOC-Code-Tracking and enables the processing of Orthogonal Frequency-Division Multiplexing (OFDM)-signals. The antenna element (without its own Low Noise Amplifier (LNA) and filter) can be directly connected to the RF input of the frontend

B. Baseband board

The baseband board is connected to the analog frontend through a Samtec connector (see Figure 1). It is equipped with a Xilinx XC7K410T FPGA where a dedicated GNSS HW subsystem is implemented. The subsystem is depicted in Figure 4.

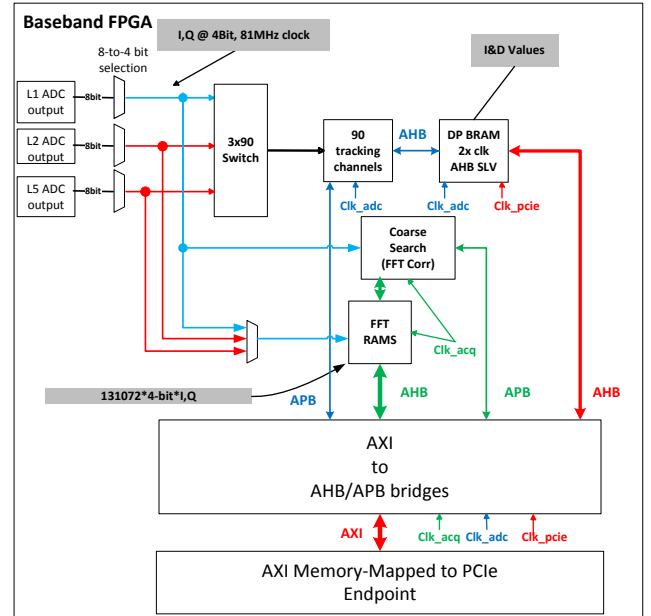


Fig. 4. FPGA baseband block diagram

The baseband subsystem provides the core functionality required in a GNSS receiver using dedicated hardware modules controlled through AMBA/AXI ports. In particular, it provides a FFT-based acquisition core and up to 90 channels for tracking. The acquisition engine supports FFT processing of up to 16K-point blocks and it is used to correlate the incoming signal with locally generated PRN replica signals of the GPS L1CA or Galileo E1b. Each peak in the correlation result indicates the presence of the related satellite signal at the observed frequency. The position of the peak gives an information on the code phase. The procedure is replicated for different frequency values to find out the Doppler of the

incoming signal and then for each supported satellite to find out all present satellites. The Doppler of L2/L5 signal can be estimated from the Doppler of the L1 signal. After a satellite signal is detected, the user can track it using one of the provided channels. Each channel is equipped with 5 complex correlators which combine the incoming signal with delayed versions of the PRN replicas. The result of the correlations is used in a closed feedback loop to keep the signal in tracking. The feedback based on Frequency-Locked Loop (FLL), Delay-Locked Loop (DLL) and Phase-Locked Loop (PLL) is implemented in software. A basic version of the tracking loops is provided within the system, but the users have the possibility to directly access the correlators dumps and replace the existing software loops with their own customized version. The standard system setup features 90 channels. However, since the hardware is implemented on FPGA, the setup can be modified for special user needs. For example, if three instead of five correlator points are used, the number of channels can be increased.

C. Digital Processor Interface

The modules described above have a generic AXI interface to allow control from a general-purpose processor. The processor itself is not integrated on the baseband board. The target of the project is to allow different deployment scenarios, which basically means that the baseband board has to support interfacing to a PC, e.g. a desktop variant, as well as to an embedded computer system. There are only a few standards supported by Xilinx IPs to allow the connection to a standard desktop PC. Since we need to support high data rates (50 Mbps), the choice is limited to high-speed serial protocols like USB or PCIe. In particular, the PCIe was our first choice, since it was already deployed in some of our existing systems. On the other hand, the interface to the embedded processor provides more freedom. The main design choice is whether or not the embedded processor interface has to be compliant with the PC one. For example, a parallel address/data memory interface could be used to connect with an embedded processor, but this would be not suitable for the desktop PC version. In such a case the embedded processor should be integrated on the baseband board and an additional interface should be provided for the desktop PC. This has as drawback that the cost of the single baseband board is higher because of processor and peripherals cost and it is not justifiable for a user which has no interest in the embedded version. The alternative is to design two separate version of the embedded board, one for the PC and one for the embedded processor. This also increases significantly the Non-Recurring Engineering (NRE) costs and is therefore not an option. That's why the final choice was to make a unique processor interface which could be used for both. The processor interface is based on a PCIe core from Xilinx [6]. The PCIe core translates PCIe commands into memory-mapped transactions for the AXI bus. Some core parameters like the link speed and the BAR size have to be set in order to be compatible with the embedded

version. The PC interface is typically more flexible and is compatible with different PCIe speed selections.

The choice of the embedded processor was characterized by these two aspects:

- 1) the support for a Peripheral Component Interconnect Express (PCIe) interface;
- 2) the possibility to get an embedded processor board which could be easily integrated in a compact and portable receiver solution.

Given these requirements, the choice fell on the Freescale iMX.6 dual-core processor [7], which is equipped with a PCI Express (Gen 2.0) dual-mode complex core, supporting Root complex and Endpoint operations. The Freescale processor is provided by several manufacturers in a SBC version based on a standard SMARC [8] form factor. The SMARC standard defines a Printed Circuit Board (PCB) form factor of 82 mm x 50 mm for extremely compact low-power designs. It foresees 314 card edge contacts on the PCB of the module which is plugged via a low-profile connector on the carrier board with construction height of 4.3 mm. For the current deployment a Kontron SMARC-sAMX6i [9] was chosen as target SBC. Kontron provides a Linux Linaro Board Support Package (BSP) to simplify the software development, where the same drivers as in the PC version can be used. Figure 1 shows the embedded version of the receiver with the SBC plugged into the baseband board. In order to allow the interfacing of the baseband board with a PC, a PCIe riser card has been developed to route the signals from the SMARC connector on the baseband board to a standard PCIe x1 connector of a PC motherboard. The target PC Operating System (OS) is Linux Ubuntu. Figure 5 shows the PC version of the open receiver plugged into a PC motherboard.

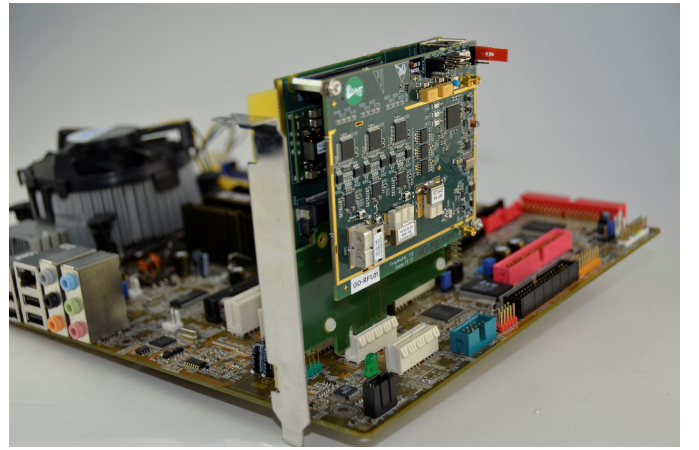


Fig. 5. PC-based receiver hardware

III. OPEN GNSS RECEIVER PROTOCOL

The open GNSS receiver described above is associated to an open receiver protocol called OGRP. The goal of OGRP is to offer a well-defined and self-describing format for the available receiver measurements while remaining at the same

time vendor neutral. One of the challenges of the protocol is to support real-time message exchange between software modules as well as logging of the internal receiver status and measurements. To fulfill these requirements and to guarantee at the same time a human readable format, JavaScript Object Notation (JSON) has been used to implement the protocol. This way several libraries based on different programming languages can be used to parse the data. The usage of JSON simplifies the protocol extension through definition of new message types or extension of the defined ones. The open GNSS receiver provides already an example implementation of GPS L1 and L5 as well as for Galileo E1 and E5a. Further signals like GPS L2C and Galileo E5 AltBOC processing are currently under development. OGRP is currently available in the GitHub Fraunhofer IIS/OGRP branch [10] under a Creative Commons license.

In the GalileoOnline project the support for external loop closure will be provided through the OGRP. New messages to specify correlator results (early, present and late correlations) and feedback for carrier and code NCOs are currently under study. These OGRP messages can be exchanged using an inter-process communication mechanism with other applications running on the same processors. This way it will be possible to implement external tracking loops. In particular, in the GalileoOnline project this feature will be used to implement vector-tracking loops and Inertial Navigation System (INS)-aided loops.

Regarding the inter-process communication, ZeroMQ [11] has been chosen as software infrastructure. ZeroMQ is a distributed-messaging library which provides sockets that carry atomic messages using different transport protocols and communication patterns. The most common transport protocols are supported, among the others Transmission Control Protocol (TCP), inter-process or in-process. The available patterns include request-reply, publisher-subscriber, push-pull. ZeroMQ supports different languages and operating systems.

IV. RESULTS

The GOOSE platform has been tested in a laboratory connected to a roof antenna receiving a real GNSS signal from satellites. Several basic tracking tests with GPS L1 and L5 as well as Galileo E1b and E5a have been performed to check the correct reception of these signals. A series of measurements have been conducted using only GPS L1 to evaluate the autonomous position performance and the Real Time Kinematic (RTK) performance with a zero baseline setup (see Figure 6). For these performance tests the receiver own software developed by Fraunhofer IIS and the RTKLIB [12] have been employed. The RTKLIB has been modified to support OGRP.

A. Autonomous position performance tests

To test the autonomous position performance of GOOSE, the receiver has been connected to a roof antenna as depicted in Figure 6 (a)). The data of the internal PVT of the receiver application are logged and evaluated. Additionally an

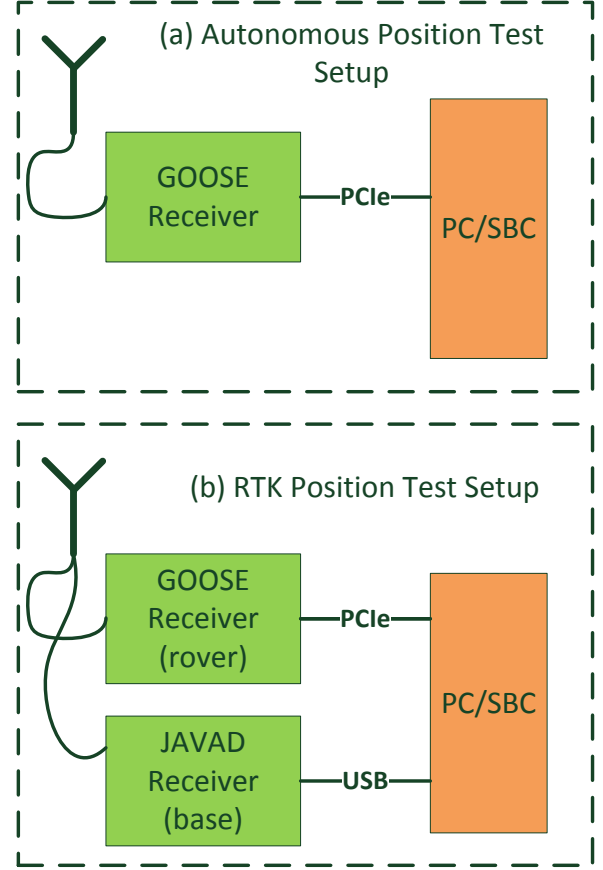


Fig. 6. Test setups for the evaluation of GOOSE receiver performance

evaluation with RTKLIB was made to obtain the Dilution of Precision (DoP), in particular the Geometry Dilution of Precision (GDOP) and Position Dilution of Precision (PDOP). The PDOP gives information about the impact of the satellite constellation on the position quality. To take account to different satellite constellations, several automatic tests have been performed with PC and embedded version (SBC). Table I show the evaluated standard deviation (1 sigma) and the maximum error against the known position of the roof antenna for four different measurements, two with the PC and two with the SBC platform. The values of RTKLIB are in brackets. The position accuracy of the internal PVT and RTKLIB are similar and varies between approx 5.20 m and 12.95 m in the different tests. The precision is about 1.77 to 3.38 m. The main reason for the low accuracy could be that the carrier-assisted DLL is not enabled in the current implementation of the receiver software. In a carrier-assisted DLL approach the code NCO is mainly controlled by the output of the PLL, which is less noisy than the DLL. The DLL output is only used with a low bandwidth (approx. 0.1 Hz) to compensate the offset between carrier and code Doppler. This method reduces the noise on the code phase measurement and therefore on the

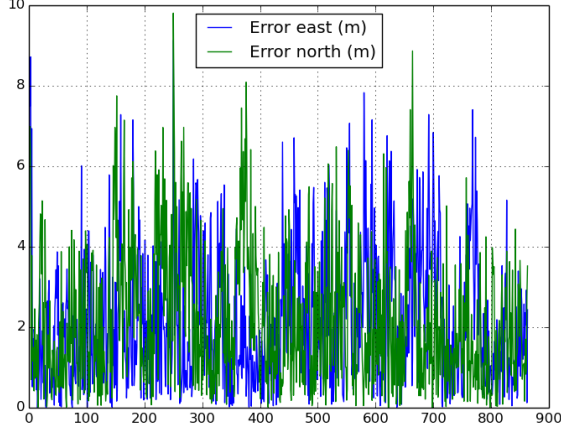


Fig. 7. Position error in East-North with PC platform (Autonomous position test 1)

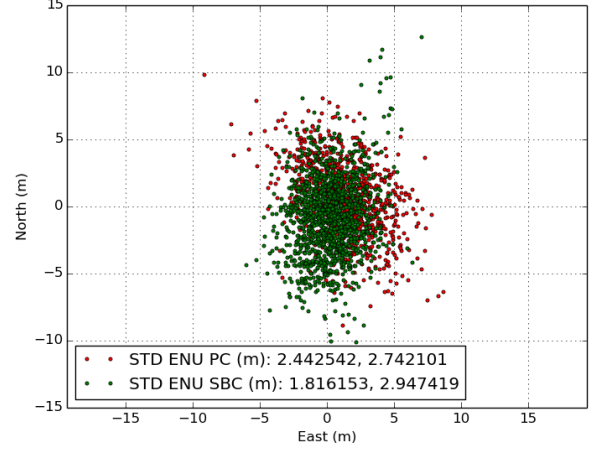


Fig. 9. Position in East-North with PC and SBC platforms (Autonomous position test 1 and 3)

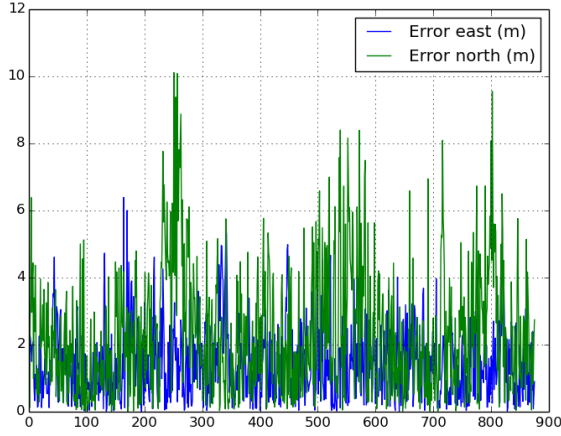


Fig. 8. Position error in East-North with SBC platform (Autonomous position test 3)

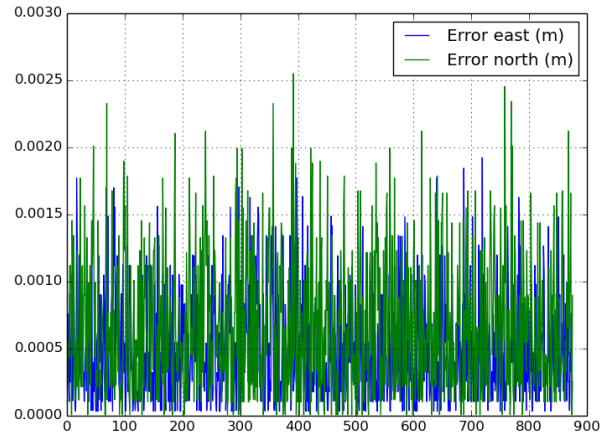


Fig. 10. Position error in East-North with PC platform (RTK position test 5)

position calculation. It was not employed because it led to artifacts in the pseudoranges due to an insufficient code NCO resolution. If this problem is solved, a higher autonomous position accuracy could be reached.

Figures 7 and 8 show the errors over time for one of the measurements made respectively with the PC platform and the SBC platform. Figure 9 shows a comparison of the East-North position calculated with the PC platform and the SBC platform. There is no significant difference between PC and SBC solutions.

B. RTK performance with a zero baseline tests

A GOOSE receiver (rover) and a commercial JAVAD receiver (base) are connected to the same roof antenna to evaluate the RTK performance with a zero baseline test (see Figure 6, block diagram (b)). The position is calculated with an OGRP capable RTKLIB. Also in this case several automatic

tests have been performed. An extracts of the measurements are shown in Table II. Figures 10 and 11 show the errors over time for two of the measurements made respectively with the PC platform and the SBC platform. Figure 12 shows a comparison of the East-North position calculated with the PC platform and the SBC platform.

In this case, the results are more homogeneous than the autonomous position tests. The results show a maximum 6.4 mm position error and on average a 1 mm precision. There is no significant difference between the PC and the SBC platform, which means that users can first develop their own software on the PC environment and then move to the embedded one without expecting any loss of performance.

V. CONCLUSION

This paper describes the GOOSE open-interface receiver. The receiver is designed to be deployed in different user

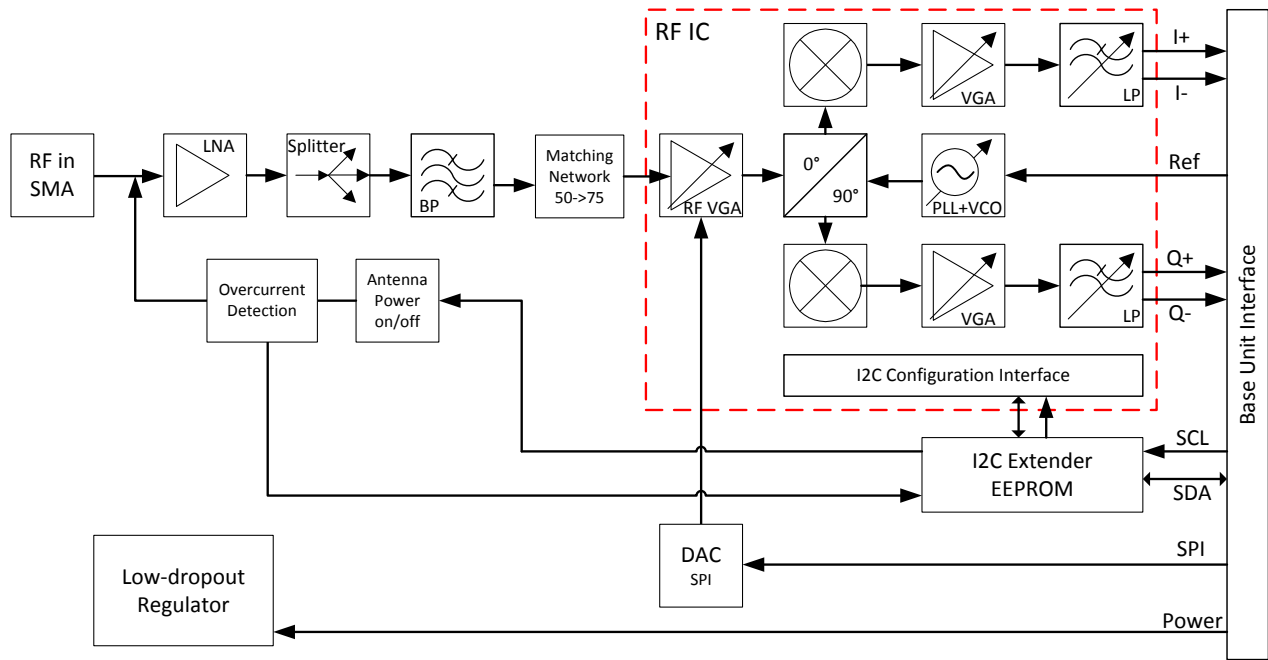


Fig. 2. Block diagram of GOOFI frontend

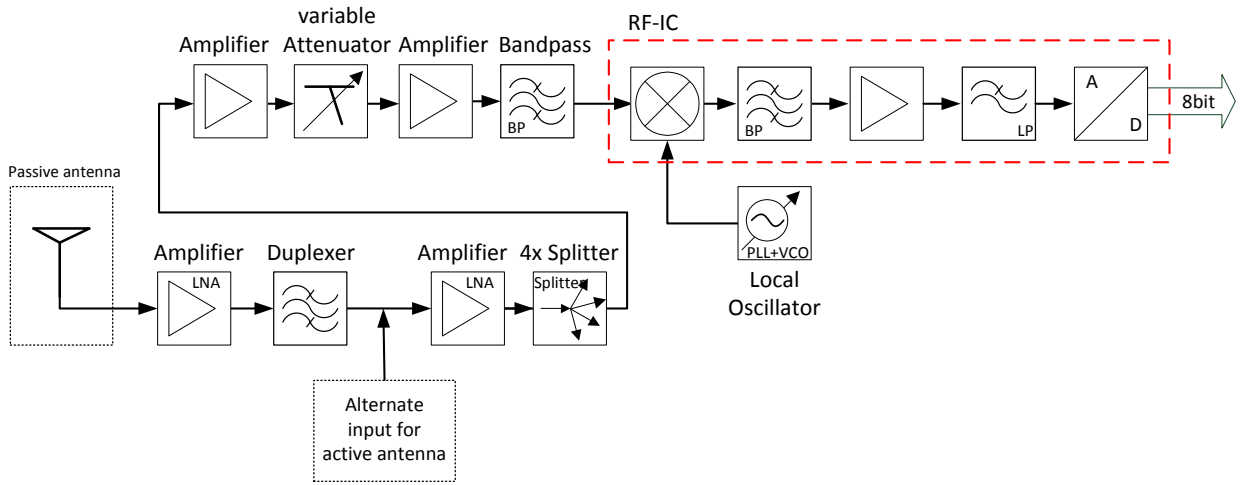


Fig. 3. Block diagram of GOOFEX frontend

Test Number	Platform	1 sigma E (m)	1 sigma N (m)	max error E (m)	max error N (m)	GDoP	PDOP
1	PC	2.44 (2.24)	2.74 (2.40)	9.12 (7.93)	9.80 (9.73)	1.9	1.7
2	PC	1.77 (1.59)	3.38 (3.74)	5.20 (5.47)	12.95 (12.01)	1.8	1.6
3	SBC	1.81 (1.82)	2.94 (2.82)	7.07 (7.42)	12.64 (13.61)	2.0	1.8
4	SBC	1.90 (1.78)	2.84 (2.55)	6.54 (5.59)	11.45 (10.18)	2.2	1.9

TABLE I
EXTRACT OF MEASUREMENT CAMPAIGN FOR THE AUTONOMOUS POSITION TESTS

Test Number	Platform	1 sigma E (mm)	1 sigma N (mm)	max error E (mm)	max error N (mm)	GDoP	PDoP
5	PC	0.63	0.84	1.92	2.55	2.4	2.1
6	PC	0.94	1.55	5.90	6.44	2.2	2.0
7	SBC	0.60	0.78	1.99	2.66	2.4	2.1
8	SBC	0.87	1.26	3.00	5.10	2.0	1.8

TABLE II
EXTRACT OF THE MEASUREMENT CAMPAIGN FOR THE RTK POSITION TESTS

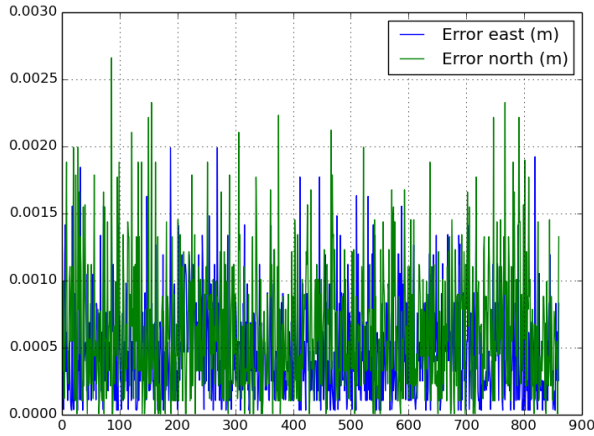


Fig. 11. Position error in East-North with SBC platform (RTK position test 7)

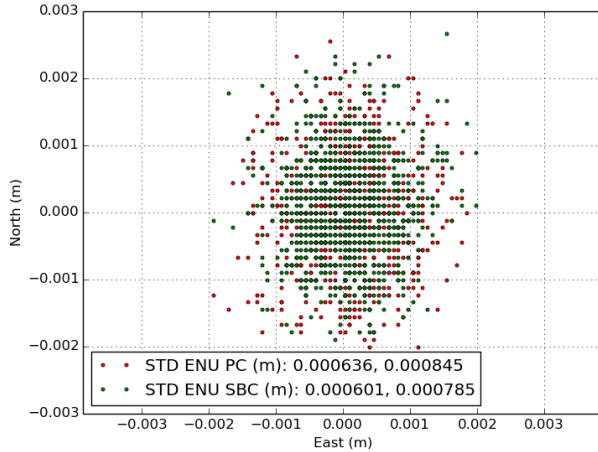


Fig. 12. Position in East-North with PC and SBC platform (RTK position test 5 and 7)

environments and to provide to the user a full access to the hardware features and the real-time measurement data. This open hardware interface is based on a protocol called OGRP which was developed in the GOOSE project. The protocol allows also to close the PLL / DLL / FLL tracking loops in an external user application which runs on the same host system. In the project GalileoOnline this feature will be exploited to implement external INS-aided and vector tracking loops.

The results described in this paper show that the autonomous position requires still improvements on the algorithmic, but the RTK solution has a 3 mm position error and approx 1 mm precision, which is comparable with the ones provided by commercial receivers. The results show no significant difference for the PC and the SBC platform, which guarantees that the GOOSE receiver can be used as a reliable development chain.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The GOOSE and the GalileoOnline project are funded by the "Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Energie" (German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy) which is gratefully acknowledged.

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