ENHANCING PRODUCTION EFFICIENCY THROUGH VISUAL COMPONENTS SIMULATION IN DIGITAL MANUFACTURING SYSTEMS

Vasile-Dragoş Bartoş [1], Stelian Brad [1], Bogdan Balog [1],
Alexandru Cirlejan [1], Diana Ticudean [1]

[1] Technical University of Cluj-Napoca, Faculty of Industrial Engineering, Robotics and Production
Management B-dul Muncii, No. 103-105, 400641 Cluj-Napoca, Romania
Corresponding author. E-mail: dragos.bartos@muri.utcluj.ro

Abstract: This paper presents a comparative approach to process optimization using traditional techniques and 3D simulation with Visual Components. A woodworking workshop is used as a case study. Results show significant efficiency improvements by addressing bottlenecks and testing workflow scenarios digitally.

Keywords: Production Efficiency, Process Optimization, Industry 4.0, Bottleneck Analysis, Smart Manufacturing.

1. Introduction

In the context of Industry 4.0, production efficiency has become a critical priority for manufacturing companies. Recent studies suggest that optimizing production processes can boost productivity by up to 20% [1]. The adoption of digital technologies, particularly 3D simulation, provides a powerful tool for addressing these challenges, enabling process optimization, reducing production times, and enhancing resource allocation. Faced with increasing process complexity and the demand for rapid market adaptation, manufacturers must adopt advanced simulation and optimization solutions. Studies have shown that combining lean tools such as Value Stream Mapping with simulation and the DMAIC methodology can effectively identify bottlenecks and enhance sustainability in production chains, including in recycling and additive manufacturing contexts [1]. Developments in the field also emphasize the importance of integrating production layout planning with building design using multi-objective optimization frameworks [2].

3D simulation offers the ability to model and analyze complex production systems, serving as a visual platform for identifying and mitigating bottlenecks prior to real-world implementation. This is particularly valuable in contexts where spatial constraints and interconnection topologies play a key role in cost and performance optimization, as demonstrated in the case of subsea production systems [3].

Among the leading tools in this domain, Visual Components – first developed in 1999 and continuously improved – stands out for its intuitive interface, comprehensive library of predefined components, and ability to integrate real-time data for simultaneous scenario simulation. These features make it particularly suited for addressing the requirements of Industry 4.0 and Smart Manufacturing.

Despite significant advancements, challenges remain in fully leveraging 3D simulation for production optimization. For instance, recent research has proposed integrating systematic layout planning (SLP) with simulation as a means to generate and evaluate efficient facility layouts from the conceptual design phase, especially in complex production systems such as greenhouse farming [4]. Other studies [5], [6] have explored diverse aspects of manufacturing simulation but have rarely focused on the end-to-end integration of Visual Components in Smart Manufacturing. This study seeks to bridge that gap by systematically analyzing the impact of 3D simulation on key performance indicators (KPIs) and emphasizing the role of real-time bottleneck identification and resolution.

A distinctive feature of this research is the application of both traditional and digital optimization approaches to the same production environment – a woodworking workshop that manufactures custom furniture components. In such settings, classical optimization techniques like manual time measurements, layout adjustments, and operator feedback are still prevalent. However, these methods often lack precision and scalability. More sophisticated optimization methods have been proposed in recent studies, integrating multiple objectives – including logistics and environmental factors by employing algorithms such as improved Particle Swarm Optimization (PSO) to address the limitations of traditional techniques [7]. Through the digital simulation of production scenarios, it becomes possible to preemptively identify inefficiencies and optimize workflows with greater accuracy and lower implementation risk [8].

The specific objectives of this research are to quantitatively assess the advantages of using 3D simulation in Visual Components, with a focus on reducing cycle times and optimizing resource utilization. The study aims to measure and analyze the impact of Visual Components on production efficiency by applying specific key performance indicators (KPIs). Additionally, it seeks to identify and evaluate production bottlenecks using real-time simulation data. Another goal is to develop a methodological framework for integrating Visual Components into Smart Manufacturing strategies. Finally, the research intends to propose actionable solutions aimed at workflow optimization and operational cost reduction.

To better understand the current landscape of simulation tools and their applications in smart manufacturing, a critical review of existing literature is presented in the following section. This review aims to contextualize the study, identify existing research gaps, and highlight the unique contributions of the current work.

2. Literature Review

In the evolving landscape of Industry 4.0, simulation technologies have gained significant prominence as enablers of intelligent decision-making and production optimization. Modern manufacturing systems are characterized by complexity, high variability, and the need for real-time adaptability, which necessitate advanced digital tools for process modeling and control. Simulation, especially in 3D environments, is now considered a cornerstone in digital manufacturing strategies, enabling manufacturers to visualize, test, and optimize production workflows prior to implementation [9].

3D simulation offers a unique advantage over traditional modeling techniques by providing an immersive, visual representation of manufacturing systems. Simulation has been shown to reduce production errors by up to 30% and significantly improve layout efficiency [9]. Various platforms such as Siemens Tecnomatix, AnyLogic, and Visual Components are commonly employed in industrial simulation. While Tecnomatix offers strong PLM integration, Visual Components stands out due to its ease of use, modular structure, and compatibility with various industrial standards [10].

Visual Components, developed in 1999 and continuously improved, has become a preferred tool for simulating factory layouts, validating robotic paths, and conducting throughput analysis. The platform offers an extensive library of pre-defined components and allows for custom scripting in Python, enabling tailored simulations. Studies have shown that Visual Components can improve production line efficiency by up to 18% when integrated into early-stage design planning [5]. Furthermore, the platform supports real-time monitoring and the integration of simulation scenarios based on historical or predictive data, aligning well with Smart Manufacturing goals.

A critical aspect of simulation is the identification and resolution of bottlenecks, which are major impediments to throughput and resource utilization. Traditional methods for bottleneck detection often rely on post-hoc analysis of production logs or time studies. However, modern simulation platforms allow real-time analysis during virtual runs, offering proactive insights into process inefficiencies [11]. Several approaches have been proposed, including constraint-based modeling and discrete event simulation, yet few studies have addressed the full integration of simulation with live data inputs.

Recent studies also highlight the importance of integrating IoT systems with simulation platforms to capture real-time shop floor data. This integration allows simulations to evolve from static planning tools to dynamic, adaptive decision-support systems. Despite these advances, a significant research gap remains: most simulation-based optimization frameworks do not incorporate real-time data or advanced analytics, limiting their predictive and prescriptive capabilities [8].

While simulation tools are increasingly used in manufacturing, there is a lack of comprehensive frameworks that detail how platforms like Visual Components can be methodologically embedded into Smart Manufacturing strategies. It has been observed that simulation is often underutilized in strategic planning, remaining confined to isolated use cases rather than being integrated systemically [8].

This review highlights the need for further research in simulation-driven optimization, particularly in combining 3D simulation tools with real-time data sources and scalable frameworks. The current study aims to address these gaps by proposing a methodological integration of Visual Components within digital manufacturing systems, focusing on real-time bottleneck identification and KPI-driven process optimization.

Traditional process optimization methods – especially in small and medium-sized workshops like woodworking facilities – rely heavily on direct observation, manual time tracking, and iterative trial-and-error improvements. These approaches, while accessible and low-cost, often result in suboptimal system-wide decisions due to the lack of integrated data and holistic process visibility. For instance, modifying workstation layouts or reallocating operators based on intuition may temporarily alleviate local issues but create imbalances elsewhere in the process.

In contrast, 3D simulation tools such as Visual Components provide a virtual sandbox where process variables can be manipulated without disrupting actual production. They enable users to test multiple workflow configurations, evaluate production performance using quantitative KPIs, and identify critical bottlenecks through discrete event simulation. Furthermore, once validated with historical data, these models offer predictive insights that are difficult to obtain using traditional methods.

Table 1 below summarizes key differences between the two approaches:

Tab. 1. Traditional vs. simulation-based optimization

Criterion	Traditional Methods	3D Simulation (Visual Components)
Process visibility	Limited (local observations)	High (full-system 3D modeling)
Scenario testing	Manual, slow	Rapid, multiple virtual scenarios
Data integration	Low (mostly qualitative)	High (quantitative, real-time capable)
Accuracy of decisions	Medium (operator-dependent)	High (KPI-driven)
Time & resource requirements	Low to moderate	Moderate to high (initial investment)
Flexibility	Limited	High (easy reconfiguration)

This comparison supports the hypothesis that simulation-based methods offer superior results in dynamic and complex production environments. However, it also highlights the need for investment in software, training, and model calibration. As such, a hybrid approach – combining empirical field experience with digital simulation – may yield the most robust outcomes, especially in traditionally non-digitalized sectors like woodworking.

3. Methodology

The methodology employed in this research was designed to systematically evaluate the impact of 3D simulation using Visual Components on production efficiency. Our approach combined traditional process analysis and digital simulation to ensure both academic rigor and practical relevance. The case study focuses on a woodworking workshop, and the research progressed through four main stages: data gathering, model development, scenario testing, and performance evaluation.

3.1. Research Design and Framework

The methodological framework consists of a comparative analysis between traditional optimization methods and simulation-based modeling. Empirical production data were collected from a small-scale woodworking workshop, including cycle times, workstation sequences, and resource allocation. These inputs formed the basis for both the manual analysis and the 3D simulation model developed in Visual Components 4.3.

The selected workshop produces furniture components using a sequence of operations such as material preparation (cutting), shaping (milling, drilling), finishing (sanding, varnishing), and final inspection. The process flow is illustrated below.

This production line provided a practical environment for applying and comparing optimization methods.

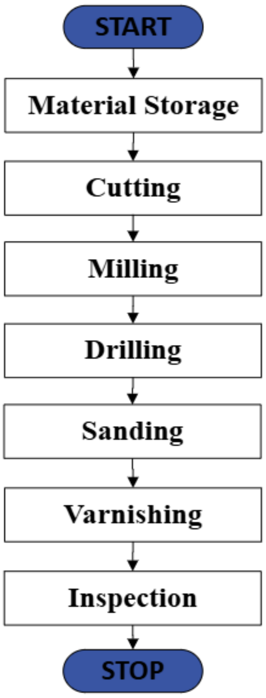

Fig. 1. Production flow.

3.1.1. Traditional Optimization Approach

In the traditional setting, process improvement relied on direct observation, operator feedback, and time-and-motion studies. Measurements were recorded manually using spreadsheets and physical stopwatch timing.

To provide a clear understanding of the product undergoing the simulated workflow, Figure 2 presents the wooden table used in the case study, which passes through multiple production stages such as cutting, milling, and varnishing.

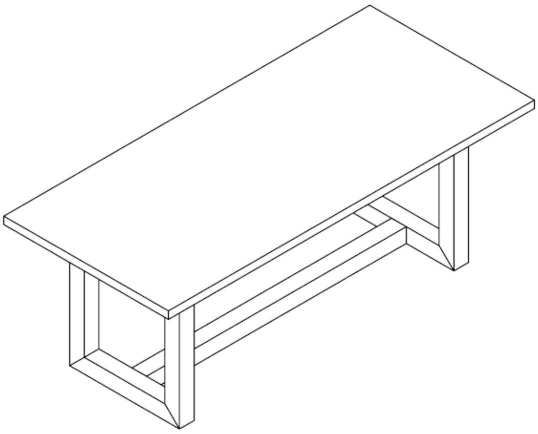

Fig. 2. The product.

Figure 3 illustrates the physical layout of the woodworking workshop, serving as the initial configuration for both the traditional optimization and digital simulation scenarios.

Bottlenecks were typically addressed reactively, after repeated delays were observed. No predictive capacity was available, and process reconfiguration required halting production. While such methods were simple and low-cost, they offered limited system-wide insight and scalability.

Layout adjustments were performed incrementally, based on the production manager's intuition.

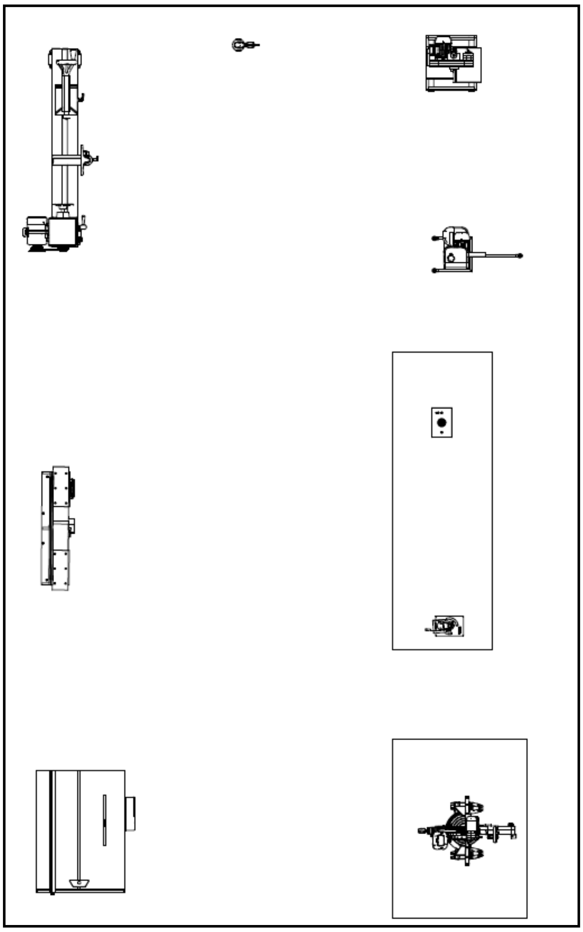

Fig. 3. Production layout.

[Cutting: 10 min] → [Milling: 15 min] → [Drilling: 8 min] → [Sanding: 12 min] → [Varnishing: 14 min] → [Inspection: 6 min]

3.2. Data Collection and Model Development

Quantitative data were gathered from three months of workshop activity. Key metrics included average cycle times per station, operator assignments, and daily production volume. Additionally, layout drawings and equipment specifications were used to replicate the real workshop in Visual Components.

The model was developed using standard components from the software's library and enhanced via Python scripting for task logic and timing control. Model calibration ensured simulation output remained within ±5% of real-world performance.

3.3. Scenario Testing and Analysis

Four scenarios were created:

1. Baseline (current layout, no optimization)
2. Traditional optimization (manual adjustments from field data)
3. Simulation-driven optimization (via Visual Components)
4. Stress scenario (25% increase in demand)

Tab. 2. Key simulation scenarios and focus

Scenario	Focus	Optimization Method
Baseline	Real workshop layout	None
Traditional Optimization	Manual time balancing	Time studies
Simulation Optimization	Layout + resource reallocation	Visual Components
High-Demand (Stress Test)	Load increase, resource stretch	Digital simulation only

Each simulation was executed over a virtual production period of 5 days. Key performance indicators were monitored, including throughput, cycle time, workstation utilization, and idle time.

3.4. Performance Analysis and Limitations

The analysis focused on key performance indicators (KPIs) that directly influence production efficiency, such as cycle times, throughput rates, resource utilization, and system flexibility. Bottleneck analysis played a central role, using real-time simulation data to identify and quantify production constraints. This detailed analysis provided actionable insights for improving the current system and suggested areas for future enhancements.

Despite its strengths, the methodology encountered certain limitations. The reliance on historical datasets, rather than real-time IoT data, limited the ability to capture dynamic system behavior. Furthermore, some simplifications were necessary in modeling complex processes to maintain computational efficiency. These limitations were carefully documented and considered in the interpretation of results.

To track and analyze key performance indicators throughout the simulation process, Visual Components provides a dedicated statistics interface, as shown in Figure 4.

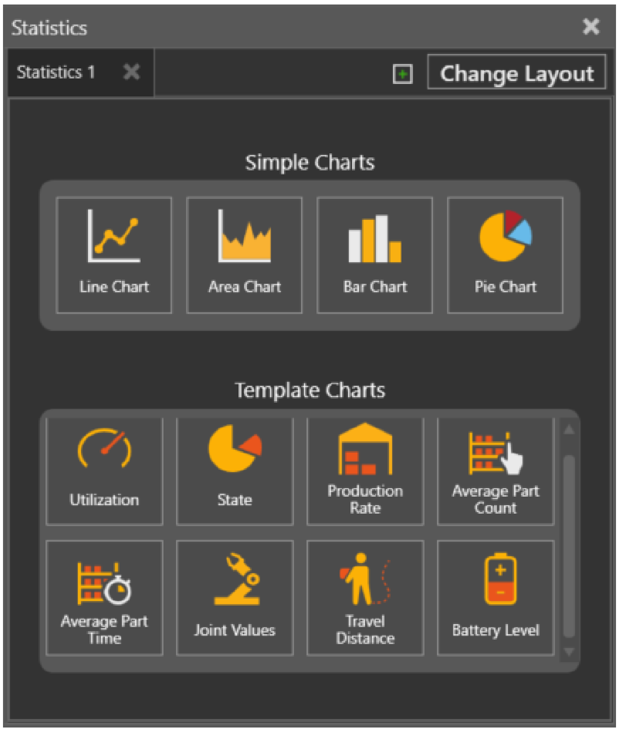

Fig. 4. Visual components – statistics interface.

The absence of live IoT connections posed a particular challenge, restricting the validation of the model against real-time production data. However, this limitation highlighted opportunities for future research, especially in integrating IoT systems and developing more sophisticated simulation models. By maintaining a balance between model complexity and practical utility, the study generated meaningful insights while ensuring the model's applicability as a tool for production optimization.

4. Results and Discussion

The baseline scenario served as a benchmark for evaluating the current state of production. Simulation results revealed inefficiencies such as extended cycle times, uneven resource utilization, and bottlenecks at specific workstations, particularly in assembly and inspection. These constraints significantly reduced overall throughput, confirming the necessity of targeted interventions to optimize the production process.

Adjustments in resource allocation, including operator assignments and machine utilization, led to notable improvements. Compared to the baseline, cycle times decreased by 15%, and resource utilization became more balanced across all workstations. This scenario also reduced downtime by 12%, enhancing overall system reliability. These results highlight the effectiveness of optimizing resource deployment for improving production efficiency.

Figure 5 shows the utilization levels of different workstations during the simulation period, revealing the impact of optimization strategies on workload balancing and system efficiency.

By reconfiguring the sequence of production steps, the process reconfiguration scenario achieved a 20% increase in throughput and shortened queue lengths at bottleneck stations. The enhanced synchronization between workstations facilitated a smoother material flow, demonstrating the potential of strategic process adjustments to enhance system performance.

The high-demand scenario tested the scalability of the production system by simulating a 25% increase in production volume. Despite the increased workload, the optimized workflow maintained stable performance, with only a 5% increase in cycle time. This demonstrated the system's capacity to handle higher demand without significant efficiency losses, though resource utilization neared its upper limit, suggesting the need for future capacity enhancements.

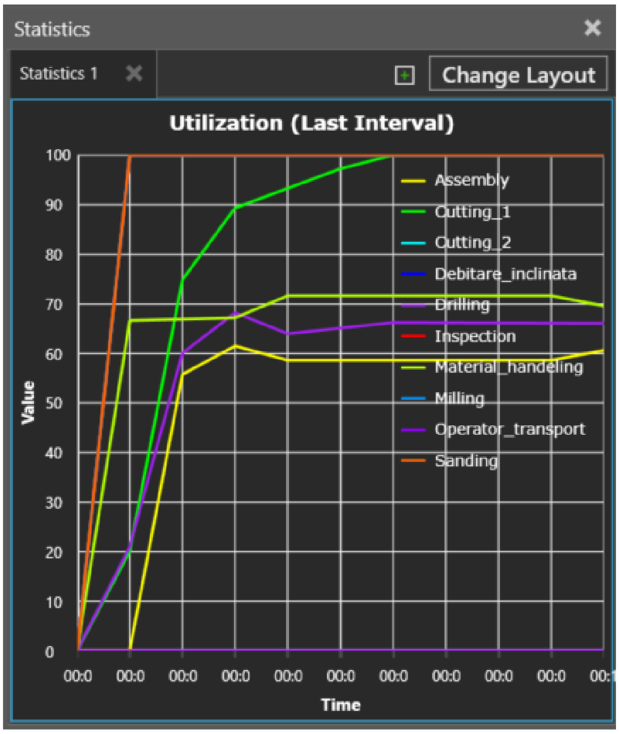

Fig. 5. Production flow.

Bottleneck analysis identified critical delays in the assembly and inspection stages under the baseline scenario. Through optimization, these bottlenecks were significantly mitigated, contributing to the observed reductions in cycle times and throughput increases. Real-time data from Visual Components simulations provided valuable insights, enabling precise identification of constraints and their resolution.

The results underscore the value of Visual Components as a versatile tool for optimizing production processes in digital manufacturing environments. Improvements in KPIs across all scenarios validate the software's effectiveness in addressing bottlenecks, enhancing resource allocation, and improving workflow efficiency.

This study extends prior research by providing a comprehensive framework for integrating Visual Components into Smart Manufacturing strategies, demonstrating its applicability in real-world contexts. However, the reliance on historical data and the absence of real-time IoT integration limited the dynamic adaptability of the simulation. Future research should explore deeper integration with IoT systems and more sophisticated real-time modeling to further enhance simulation accuracy and predictive capabilities.

5. Conclusions

This study has demonstrated the significant potential of 3D simulation, specifically using Visual Components, in optimizing production processes within digital manufacturing environments. The research revealed substantial improvements in key performance indicators, including cycle time, throughput, and resource utilization, across various simulated scenarios. By addressing critical bottlenecks and enhancing workflow efficiency, the study highlights the practical benefits of integrating Visual Components into Industry 4.0 and Smart Manufacturing strategies.

The findings provide clear evidence that strategic use of 3D simulation can lead to tangible gains in production efficiency. The optimized resource allocation scenario reduced cycle times by 15%, while the process reconfiguration scenario increased throughput by 20%. Furthermore, the high-demand scenario demonstrated the system's scalability, maintaining stable performance under increased workloads. These results underline the software’s versatility in addressing diverse production challenges.

Despite these advancements, the research identified several limitations, such as the reliance on historical datasets and the absence of real-time IoT integration. These constraints suggest opportunities for future research, particularly in developing more sophisticated models that incorporate live production data. Enhanced IoT integration could further refine the simulation's predictive capabilities and provide dynamic system adaptability, enabling more accurate real-time decision-making.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on the application of 3D simulation in modern manufacturing. It provides a practical framework for utilizing Visual Components to optimize production processes, improve efficiency, and adapt to evolving market demands. Future studies should aim to overcome the identified limitations and explore new avenues for integrating 3D simulation with emerging digital technologies to further advance Smart Manufacturing practices.

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