Development of fire automata to simulate real-world fire spread through an image.

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Abstract - *This project presents the development of a fire propagation simulation using a cellular automata-based model. By integrating vegetation type, wind direction, and humidity, the system analyzes wildfire behaviors. Users upload terrain images to identify vegetation and simulate fire spread under real-world environmental conditions. The simulation employs a grid-based approach, where environmental factors influence fire propagation probabilities. Key parameters like flammability, wind alignment, and humidity effects determine the model's behavior. This tool offers applications in academic research, disaster preparedness, and environmental education, providing a flexible and interactive platform for exploring wildfire behavior.*

Keywords - Fire propagation, Cellular Automata, Vegetation Type, Wind Direction, Humidity, Wildfire Behavior, Grid-Based Model, Flammability, Disaster Preparedness and Environmental education.

I. Introduction

Wildfires are a growing global concern, exacerbated by climate change and human activities. They destroy ecosystems, displace wildlife, and pose significant threats to human life and property. Understanding wildfire behavior is essential for devising effective prevention and response strategies. Simulation tools offer a valuable means of analyzing fire dynamics under controlled conditions, allowing researchers and public services to study various influencing factors and predict outcomes.

This project introduces a novel fire propagation simulation tool based on cellular automata. Unlike traditional models, it utilizes image-based input to define terrain properties, incorporating real-world data into the simulation. This feature enables users to process and map vegetation from uploaded terrain images, providing a realistic basis for studying fire spread.

The simulation incorporates three key environmental factors: vegetation flammability, wind direction, and humidity levels. By modeling these parameters, the tool replicates real-world wildfire dynamics with adjustable conditions. The tool provide an interactive interface that allows users to ignite fires manually, adjust settings, and visualize the effects of various scenarios in real-time.

The primary goal of this project is to create an accessible and adaptable platform for analyzing wildfire behavior. Applications range from academic research to disaster preparedness, offering insights into how fires propagate under different environmental conditions.

II. Objectives

General Objective

- To develop a fire propagation simulation tool based on cellular automata for real-world analysis of wildfire dynamics using terrain images.

Specific objectives

- To design a cellular automata model incorporating environmental factors like wind and humidity.
- To enable terrain identification through image processing for vegetation mapping.
- To provide user interaction for parameter customization and simulation control.
- To validate the model's applicability through visual analysis and iterative testing.

III. Methodology

The methodology used to develop this application follows an iterative and modular approach, inspired by prototyping and agile principles. This approach was chosen to align with the goals of the "Advanced Simulation and Modeling" course at Rhein-Waal University of Applied Sciences, focusing on practical problem-solving and tool development.

IV. Requirements for fire spread simulation using cellular automata.

a. Cellular Automata Model:

The fire simulation operates on a 2D grid, where each cell symbolizes a portion of the terrain. Each cell has properties such as vegetation type, flammability, and fire state, all of which influence its behavior in the simulation. Neighboring cells interact dynamically, with fire spread probabilities determined by both local conditions and environmental factors.

The model's core is a Fire_Cell class, implemented in Visual Basic, which encapsulates the essential attributes and visual properties of each cell. For instance, IsOnFire tracks whether the cell is actively burning, while Flammability determines how easily it can ignite. The CellColor property represents the visual state of the cell in the simulation interface.

```
Public Class Fire_Cell
    Public Property IsOnFire As Boolean
    Public Property IsVegetation As
Boolean
    Public Property Flammability As
Double
    Public Property RecSize As Integer
    Public ReadOnly Property CellColor
As Brush
End Class
```

Fig 1: Visual Basic class code showing key cell properties.

b. Terrain Mapping Using Image Processing:

To accurately simulate fire spread, the model incorporates terrain mapping through image processing techniques. Vegetation regions are identified using HSL (hue, saturation, lightness) color thresholds. Brightness values from the image pixels influence the flammability calculation, while predefined base flammability values are assigned to specific vegetation types.

The following code demonstrates a function to detect vegetation in an image by analyzing color properties. Only pixels that fall within specified thresholds for hue, saturation, and brightness are marked as vegetation.

```
Private Function IsVegetation(color As
Color) As Boolean
    Dim hue As Double = color.GetHue()
    Dim saturation As Double =
color.GetSaturation()
    Dim brightness As Double =
color.GetBrightness()
    Return hue >= 60 AndAlso hue <= 210
AndAlso saturation >= 0.09 AndAlso
brightness >= 0.05
End Function
```

Fig 2. Visual Basic function code to get the vegetation from the loaded image.

c. Environmental Factor:

Several environmental factors influence the fire's behavior, making the simulation more realistic:

i. **Wind Direction and Strength:** Wind significantly biases fire spread probabilities. Cells aligned with the wind direction experience a higher spread probability, while opposing cells are less likely to ignite. The code below calculates wind alignment to adjust probabilities dynamically:

```
Private Function GetWindFactor(fromCell As Fire_Cell, toCell As Fire_Cell) As Double
        Dim windOffset = GetWindDir()
        Dim dx = toCell.Row - fromCell.Row
        Dim dy = toCell.Col - fromCell.Col

        ' Calculate alignment with wind direction
        If dx = windOffset.Item1 AndAlso dy = windOffset.Item2 Then
            Return 5.0 ' Stronger influence in the exact wind direction
        ElseIf (Math.Sign(dx) = Math.Sign(windOffset.Item1) AndAlso Math.Sign(dy) = Math.Sign(windOffset.Item2)) Then
            Return 2.5 ' Diagonal or near wind direction
        ElseIf dx = 0 AndAlso dy = 0 Then
            Return 1.0 ' No movement, no wind effect
        ElseIf Math.Abs(dx - windOffset.Item1) <= 1 OrElse Math.Abs(dy - windOffset.Item2) <= 1 Then
            Return 1.2 ' Slight boost for neighboring cells
        Else
            Return 0.8 ' Reduced probability for opposing wind direction
        End If
    End Function
```

Fig 3. Visual basic function to calculate wind effects on fire spread.

ii. **Humidity:** This factor dampens fire spread by proportionally reducing ignition likelihood. The formula incorporates user-adjustable humidity levels:

```
Dim humidityEffect = (100 - lHumidity.Value) / 100
```

Fig 4. Humidity effect implemented in Visual Basic.

iii. **Flammability:** Each cell's flammability depends on vegetation type and pixel brightness, calculated as follows:

```
Private Function GetFlammability(pixelColor As Color) As Double
        Dim brightness As Double = pixelColor.GetBrightness()
        Dim baseFlammability As Double = CType(cbFlammabilityType.SelectedItem, KeyValuePair(Of String, Double)).Value
        Return Math.Max(0.0, Math.Min(1.0, brightness * baseFlammability))
    End Function
```

Fig 5. Flammability calculation function.

d. Fire Spread Simulation

The core simulation logic updates the fire state of each cell based on calculated probabilities. In every step, the algorithm evaluates all actively burning cells and their neighbors, determining whether fire spreads to adjacent cells. The key factors include:

- **Base Probability:** Derived from vegetation flammability.

- **Wind Factor:** Amplifies spread in wind direction.
- **Humidity Effect:** Dampens spread likelihood.

```
Private Sub SpreadFire()
    For Each currentCell In ActiveFires
        Dim neighbors =
GetNeighbors(currentCell)
        For Each neighbor In neighbors
            If neighbor Is Nothing
OrElse Not neighbor.IsVegetation OrElse
neighbor.IsOnFire Then Continue For
            Dim spreadProbability =
CalculateSpreadProbability(currentCell,
neighbor)
            If Rnd() <
spreadProbability Then
newFires.Add(neighbor)
        Next
    Next
End Sub
```

Fig 6. Spread fire function showing propagation rules.

```
Private Function
CalculateSpreadProbability(fromCell As
Fire_Cell, toCell As Fire_Cell) As
Double
    Dim baseProbability =
toCell.Flammability
    Dim windFactor =
GetWindFactor(fromCell, toCell)
    Dim humidityEffect = (100 -
slHumidity.Value) / 100
    Return Math.Max(0.0, Math.Min(1.0,
baseProbability * windFactor *
humidityEffect))
End Function
```

Fig 7. Function to compute spread probability.

V. Application design and simulation implementation

a. Tools and Frameworks

The application is developed using Visual Basic.NET within the .NET Framework, utilizing WPF (Windows Presentation Foundation) for an intuitive GUI design and seamless visualization of the fire simulation. The combination of these technologies ensures a robust and responsive application capable of handling dynamic updates and user interactions.

Key components of the implementation include:

- **DispatcherTimer:** Manages the timing of simulation steps, allowing fire spread updates at controlled intervals to maintain a smooth visualization.
- **Bitmap Processing:** Handles the mapping of terrain image pixels to corresponding grid cells, enabling the assignment of vegetation and flammability properties based on image data.
- **Canvas Rendering:** Dynamically visualizes the simulation by displaying fire propagation and terrain states in real time. The Canvas element ensures flexibility for representing grid cells and fire states visually.

b. Key Features

The application includes a range of features to enhance usability and functionality, providing users with a comprehensive and interactive simulation experience.

1. **User Interface:**

   The user interface offers controls to customize the simulation environment. Key elements include:

   - **Wind direction control:** Users can set the wind direction, which biases fire spread probabilities accordingly.
   - **Humidity Adjustment:** A slider allows users to adjust environmental humidity

levels, which influence fire propagation.

- **Cell Size Configuration:** The cell size can be changed dynamically, enabling simulations with varying levels of detail.

Additionally, users can interact directly with the grid to ignite or extinguish specific cells, providing a hands-on approach to testing fire behavior.

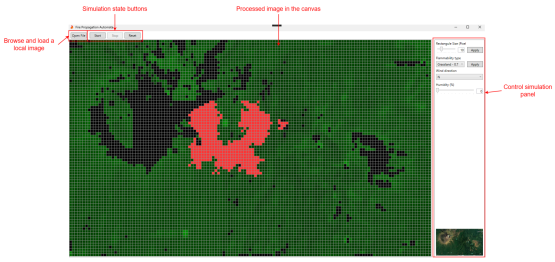

Fig. 8: Fire propagation application interface

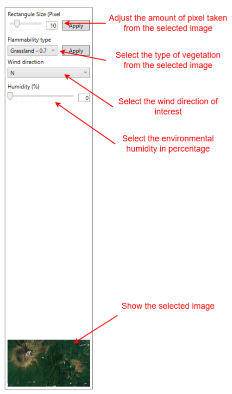

Fig 9: Control simulation panel description

2. **Image Processing:** The application processes uploaded terrain images to map vegetation regions and assign flammability values. This is achieved through the ¨LoadImageOnBoard¨ function (line 165), which extracts pixel data and applies brightness and color thresholds to identify vegetation types. These properties are then translated into the cellular automata model to simulate realistic fire behavior.
3. **Simulation Control:** Users can control the simulation flow with options to start, pause, or reset the fire propagation model. The simulation updates dynamically in response to user-defined parameters, ensuring real-time feedback on the effects of changes like wind direction or humidity levels.

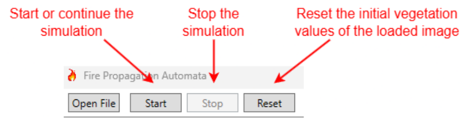

Fig 10: Simulation state control buttons description

4. **Performance Optimization:** To handle larger grids efficiently, the system implements optimization techniques by focusing computational resources only on active fire cells during each simulation step. This approach minimizes the processing load while maintaining accuracy in fire spread modeling.

VI. Result

The simulation successfully modeled fire spread under varying environmental conditions.

Key findings included:

- **Wind Influence:** Fire propagation was significantly faster and more directed along the wind vector, confirming the wind factor's effectiveness.
- **Humidity Effect:** High humidity drastically reduced fire spread rates, demonstrating the dampening effect's accuracy.
- **Vegetation Flammability:** Grassland and shrubland regions exhibited rapid fire spread due to higher flammability values, while urban areas showed minimal propagation.

A series of tests validated the simulation's sensitivity to user-defined parameters. For example, reducing cell size provided finer detail but increased computational load, while larger cells improved performance but reduced granularity.

VII. Discussion

Strengths

- **Realistic Integration:** The use of image-based terrain mapping allows for realistic and adaptable simulations.
- **Customizability:** The interactive interface enables users to experiment with various environmental factors, enhancing the model's flexibility.

Limitations

- **Flat Terrain Assumption:** The model does not account for elevation, which significantly affects real-world fire behavior.
- **Simplistic Wind Modeling:** The current wind factor does not simulate complex wind patterns like turbulence.
- **Resolution Dependence:** Image resolution impacts the granularity and accuracy of terrain mapping.

Future Improvements

- Allow the user to use Geo Images with tri spectral information to detect with a better precision what is a vegetation.
- Improved Visualization: Enhancing graphical representations of fire intensity and spread dynamics.

VIII. Conclusion

This project demonstrates the utility of cellular automata for modeling fire propagation, combining image-based terrain mapping with user-defined environmental factors. The simulation effectively captures the influence of wind, humidity, and vegetation on fire spread, providing a valuable tool for research and education. Future iterations aim to incorporate more complex dynamics.

IX. Reference

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