

# **From Parameter Tuning to Dynamic Heuristic Selection**

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Metaheuristic-based solvers are widely used in solving combinatorial optimization problems. A choice of an underlying metaheuristic is crucial to achieve high quality of the solution and performance. A combination of several metaheuristics in a single hybrid heuristic proved to be a successful design decision. State-of-the-art hybridization approaches consider it as a design time problem, whilst leaving a choice of an optimal heuristics combination and its parameter settings to parameter tuning approaches. The goal of this thesis is to extend a software product line for parameter tuning with dynamic heuristic selection; thus, allowing to adapt heuristics at runtime. The research objective is to investigate whether dynamic selection of an optimization heuristic can positively effect performance and scalability of a metaheuristic-based solver.

For this thesis, the following tasks have to be fulfilled:

- Literature analysis covering closely related work.
- Development of a strategy for online heuristic selection.
- Implementation of the developed strategy.
- Evaluation of the developed approach based on a synthetic benchmark.
- (Optional) Evaluation of the developed approach with a problem of software variant selection and hardware resource allocation.

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## Abstract

The importance of exploration and exploitation balance plays a settle role while solving the combinatorial optimization problems. This balance is reached by two general techniques: by using a different problem solvers and by setting its proper parameters. Both problems were studied widely in past and the process is not finished up until now. The state-of-the-art studies in field of automated machine learning propose merging both problems, solving them at the design time and later strengthening the results in the run time. To the best of our knowledge, the *generalized* approach for solving the parameter setting in heuristic solvers was not proposed yet. Therefore, the concept of merging heuristic selection and parameter control was not introduced.

In this thesis we propose an approach for generic parameter control in meta-heuristics by means of reinforcement learning (RL). Making step further, we propose a technique for merging the heuristic selection and parameter control problems and solving them in runtime using RL-based hyper-heuristic. The evaluation of proposed parameter control technique on symmetric traveling salesman problem (TSP) revealed its applicability by reaching the performance tuned in off-line underlying meta-heuristic. The concept of merging the heuristic selection and parameter control processes showed its ability to reach a performance of the best underling heuristic with tuned parameters on a subset of smaller TSP instances, however, requires an implementation improvements for tackling a larger cases.



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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Motivation

Traditionally, optimization problem (OP) in general and combinatorial OP in particular may be tackled by a number of different approaches, among which *exact solvers*, *approximate solvers* and *heuristics* are commonly highlighted [14, 43, 63]. When it comes to heuristic solvers, their performance is defined by the provided strength in exploration and exploitation (EvE) and in the exposed balance between them. The EvE balance may be controlled on a several levels. Firstly, one could try to set a proper values of the exposed by an algorithm *hyper-parameters*. This process is formalized under the notion of *parameter settings problem* (PSP), which resolution can be done before running the algorithm (design time), or while it solves the OP (runtime). The former approach is also called *parameter tuning* and can be tackled by numerous universal tuning systems [41, 58, 59, 79, 93]. A key assumption of this software is an expensiveness of the target system evaluation. It is tackled by the creation of a surrogate learning model, which simulates direct evaluations. The later approach, namely, *parameter control* originally was introduced for evolutionary algorithms [66] and nowadays appears in an *algorithm-dependent* manner. However, even a proper parameter setting may not lead to the best results for the problem at hand. This issue was formalized by the *no-free-lunch theorem for optimization* (NFLT) [121], which states that “all search algorithms have the same average performance over all possible optimization problems”. The second way for reaching the EvE balance is a proper algorithm selection. It resolves the consequence of NFLT and was formalized as *algorithm selection problem* (ASP). The commonly used approach for ASP solving is the hyper-heuristic utilization. Depending on the learning time, they may perform low-level heuristic selection before actual problem solving, or at the runtime [22]. To operate in on-line, hyper-heuristics often utilize a reinforcement learning (RL) techniques [84, 86], while for the design time a regular parameter tuning could be used.

The research does not stand still and nowadays the attempts of merging ASP and PSP into the united APSP are actively making. For instance, in an *automatic machine learning* field such union was formalized as the *combined algorithm selection and hyper-parameter optimization* problem (CASH) [112], while for heuristics an explicit studies of APSP merging and solving at the runtime were not found. To tackle ML CASH problem several frameworks based on the existing parameter tuning systems were created [44, 88, 112]. However, those solutions are not applicable in case of heuristics, since they are (1) purely related to ML field and (2) acting at the design time due to ML techniques specifics. Naturally, to solve APSP for heuristics in off-line one may try to follow the ML approach of joining ASP and PSP into united APSP search space and utilizing the same parameter tuning systems. An important characteristic of such spaces appears, prohibiting treating them as a *flat* structures. Since one solver type requires only its specific parameters and prohibits the other, a resulting configuration space happen to be ‘sparse’. Even if the surrogate models of the reviewed tuning systems treat the aforementioned dependencies properly (still, with help of some tricks), the proposed surrogate optimization techniques in an extremely sparse spaces may straggle while searching a good quality configuration. However, when it comes to runtime, the aforementioned struggling may play a settle role and, what is the most important, the universal technique for parameter control in heuristics was not proposed yet.

## 1.2 Research objective

At this point, we would like to define the *goal of this thesis*. Basing on the existing parameter tuning software, use it to (1) perform the parameter control in meta-heuristics on the generic level and (2) tackle both ASP and PSP while solving the optimization problem at hand. In other words, to propose an *on-line* approach for solving *both* PSP and ASP problems for heuristic solvers.

In order to fulfill the defined above goal, the following **research questions** should be answered:

- **RQ 1** Is it possible to perform the algorithm configuration at runtime on a generic level?
- **RQ 2** Is it possible to simultaneously perform algorithm selection and parameters adaptation while solving an optimization problem?
- **RQ 3** What is the effect of selecting and adapting algorithm while solving an optimization problem?

## 1.3 Solution overview

In this thesis we propose the unification of both ASP and PSP into a single problem. For doing so, we firstly introduce a generic runtime PSP solution; secondly we propose joining several PSPs search spaces into united APSP on an algorithm type.

To overcome the sparseness issue we propose a complex solution, which is spread in both search space structure and prediction process. For the APSP representation we propose the usage of data structure, similar to feature trees from software product lines field. Doing so we treat solver type and its hyper-parameters uniformly as a regular parameter, however of the different types (categorical vs numerical). The dependencies between parameters in such search space are explicitly handled in form of parent-child relationship. As a result, the search space could be viewed as a layered structure, where on the first level remain (categorical) parameter defining algorithm type, and on the level(s) below a respective hyper-parameters (categorical and numerical). The prediction process is made level-by-level. Thus, in the united APSP we firstly build a surrogate model for the algorithm type prediction. Afterwards, when the solver type is selected, we filter available information to operate on only relevant to the selected algorithm type data. With this filtered data we build a surrogate for the second level and predict the parameters for selected algorithm. The dependencies among algorithm-related parameters are also treated in form of parent-child relationship, therefore, we proceed the level-wise prediction proceeds until obtaining a completed configuration. In our work we utilize RL techniques solve the underlying OP iteratively on-line. On each step, according to available performance evidences for current optimization session, we select among any-time meta-heuristics (portfolio of algorithms), predict its best-performing hyper-parameters all by means of created for each layer surrogate models. After constructing such configuration, we continue solving the underlying OP to obtain new evidences for the next iteration.

The structure of this thesis is organized as follows. Firstly, in Chapter 2 we refresh the reader background knowledge in the field of optimization problems, solver types focusing on heuristics. We also review the parameter setting and the available solutions for this problem. In Chapter 3 one will find the description of the proposed approach for generic parameter control and APSP problem unification. The structural and functional requirements for the search space representation and the sampling process are also located there. Chapter 4 is dedicated to the review of implementation details, among which a code basis selection, aforementioned requirements realization and a work-flow representation. The evaluation results of the proposed concept and their discussion could be found in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 concludes the thesis and Chapter 7 describes the future work.

## 2 Background and Related Work Analysis

In this Chapter we provide the reader with a review of the basic knowledge in fields of optimization problems and approaches for solving them. A reader, experienced in field of optimization and search problems, may consider this chapter as an obvious discussion of well-known facts. If such notions as a *parameter tuning* and a *parameter control* are not familiar to you or seems the same, we highly encourage you to spend some time reading this chapter carefully. In any case, it is worth for everyone to refresh the knowledge with coarse-grained description of topics, mentioned in this section and examine the examples of hyper-heuristics in Section 2.2.5 and systems for parameter tuning in Section 2.3.2.

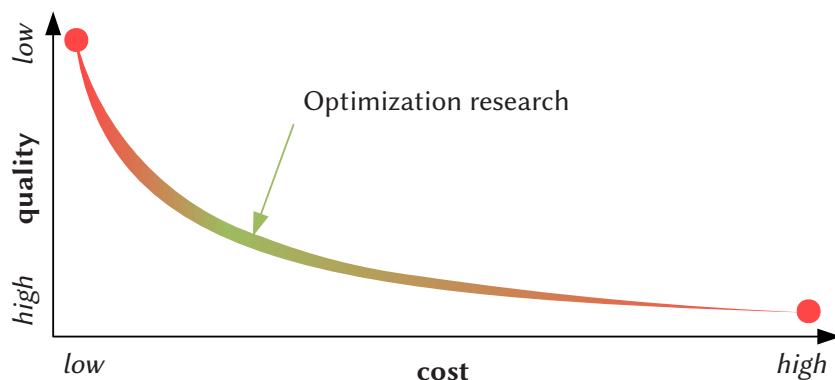
The structure of this Chapter is defined as follows. Firstly, we give an informal definition of optimization problem and enumerate possible solver types in Section 2.1. Secondly, we pay attention to the heuristic solvers, their weak points and *No Free Lunch Theorem* in Section 2.2. Afterwards, in Section 2.3 we discuss the influence of parameter setting and possible approaches to set the parameters. Section 2.4, dedicated to *Combined Algorithm Selection and Hyper-parameter Tuning* problem, is followed by conclusion on the literature analysis outlining the thesis' scope in Section 2.5.

### 2.1 Optimization Problems and their Solvers

Our life is full of different difficult and sometimes contradicting choices. Optimization is an art of making good decisions.

A decision between working hard or going home earlier, to buy cheaper goods or to follow brands, to isolate ourselves or to visit friends during the quarantine, to spend more time for planning trip or to start it instantly. Each decision that we make, has its consequences.

Figure 2.1 outlines the trade-off between a decision quality and an amount of effort spent. The underlying idea of the research in optimization problems solving sphere is to squash this curve simultaneously down and to the left thus, deriving a better result with less cost when solving the optimization problem.



**Figure 2.1** Optimization trade-off.

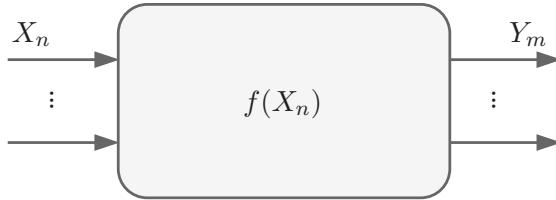
### 2.1.1 Optimization Problems

While the *search problem* (SP) defines the process of finding a possible solution for the *computation problem*, the *optimization problem* (OP) defined as a special case of the SP, focused on the process of finding the *best possible* solution for computation problem [51].

The focus of this thesis is the optimization problems.

Most studies conducted in this field have tried to formalize the OP concept, but the underlying notion is so vast that it is hard to exclude the application domain from the definition. The description of every possible optimization problem and all approaches to its solving are not in the scope of this thesis, while we consider it necessary to present a coarse-grained review in order to make sure that readers are familiar with all the terms and notions mentioned in the thesis.

To begin with, let us define the optimization *subject*. Analytically, it could be represented as the function  $Y = f(X)$  that accepts some input  $X$  and reacts to it, providing an output  $Y$ . Informally, it could be imagined as the *target system*  $f$  (TS), shown in Figure 2.2. It accepts the input information with its *inputs*  $X_n$ , which are sometimes called variables or parameters, processes them performing some *task* and produces the result on its *outputs*  $Y_m$ .



**Figure 2.2** Optimization Target System.

Each (unique) pair of sets  $X_n^i$  and respective  $Y_m^i$  form the *Solution<sup>i</sup>* for computational problem. All possible inputs  $X^i$ , where  $i = 1 \dots N$  form the *search space* of  $N$  size, while all outcomes  $Y^i$ , where  $i = 1 \dots M$  form an *objective space* of  $M$  size.

The solution is characterized by the *objective value(s)* — a quantitative measure of TS performance that we want to minimize or maximize in the optimization problems. We could obtain those value(s) directly, by reading the output on  $Y_m$ , or indirectly, for instance, noting the wall clock time TS took to produce the output  $Y^i$  for given  $X^i$ . The solution objective value(s) form the *object* of optimization. For the sake of simplicity we here use  $Y_m$ , *outputs* or *objectives* interchangeably as well as  $X_n$ , *variables* or *parameters*.

Yevhenii: figure for classification

Next, let us highlight the target system characteristics. In works [2, 14, 32, 46] dedicated to solving the OPs, the authors distinguished OP characteristics that overlap through each of these works. Among them, we found the following properties to be the most important ones:

- **Input data type** of  $X_m$ , which is a crucial characteristic. All input variables could be (1) *discrete*, where representatives are binary strings, integer-ordered, or categorical data, (2) *continuous*, where variables are usually a range of real numbers, or (3) *mixed*, as the mixture of the previous two cases.
- **Constraints**, which describe the relationships among inputs and explain the dependencies in allowable values for them. As an example, imagine that having  $X_n$  equal to *value* implies that  $X_{n+k}$  should not appear at all, or could take only some subset of all possible values.

- **Type of target system**, which is an amount of exposed knowledge about the dependencies  $X \rightarrow Y$  before the optimization process starts. Taking this into consideration, an optimization could be of several types: *white box* – it is possible to derive the algebraic model of TS, *gray box* – the amount of exposed knowledge is significant but not enough to build the algebraic model and *black box* – the exposed knowledge is mostly negligible.
- **Determinism of TS**, which is one of possible challenges, when the output is uncertain. TS is *deterministic*, when it each time provides an equal output for the same input. However, in most real-life challenges engineers tackle *stochastic* systems, the output of which is affected by random processes happened inside TS.
- **Cost of evaluation**, which is an amount of resources (energy, time, money, etc.) TS should spend to produce the output for particular input. It varies from *cheap*, when TS could be an algebraic formula and task evaluation is a simple mathematic computation, to *expensive*, when the TS is a pharmaceutical company, and the task is to perform a whole bunch of tests for a new drug, which may last years.
- **Number of objectives**, which is a size of the output vector  $Y_m^i$ . With regard to this, the optimization could be either single- ( $m = 1$ ), or multi- ( $m = 2\dots M$ ) objective, where the result is one single solution, or a set of non-dominated (Pareto-optimal) solutions.

Most optimization problem types could be obtained by combining different types of each characteristic listed above.

In this thesis we tackle practical combinatorial problems, where the most prominent examples are *bin packing* [82], *job-shop scheduling* [17] or *vehicle routing* [113] optimization problems. All combinatorial problems are *NP-Complete* meaning they are in both *NP* and *NP-Hard* complexity classes[48]. NP complexity implies that the solution is verifiable in the polynomial time, while in the NP-Hard case, the problem can be transformed to other NP-Complete problem in polynomial time, allowing to use a different solving algorithm.

As an example, let us grasp these characteristics for *traveling salesman problem* (TSP) [3] – an instance of the vehicle routing problem [73] and one of the most frequently studied a combinatorial OP (here we consider deterministic and symmetric TSP). The informal definition of TSP is as follows: “Given a set of  $N$  cities and the distances between each of them, what is the shortest path that visits each city once and returns to the origin city?” With respect to our previous definition of the optimization problem, the target system here is a function that evaluates the length of proposed path. The TSP distance (or cost) matrix is used in this function for the evaluation and it is clear that this TS exposes all internal knowledge therefore, it is a white box. The input  $X_n$  is a vector of city indexes as a result, the type of input data is non-negative integers. There are two constraints for the path: it should contain only unique indexes (visit each city only once) and it should start and end from the same city:  $[2 \rightarrow 1 \rightarrow \dots \rightarrow 2]$ . Since the cost matrix is fixed and not changing during the solving process, the TS is considered to be deterministic and costs of two identical paths are always the same. Nevertheless, there exist Dynamic TSP where the cost matrix changes at runtime to reflect a more realistic real-time traffic updates[27]. It is cheap to compute a cost for a given path using the cost matrix therefore, overall solution evaluation in this OP is cheap, and  $n = N!$  is the overall number of solutions. Since we are optimizing only the route distance, this is a single-objective OP.

### 2.1.2 Optimization Problem Solvers

Most of the optimization problems could be solved by an *exhaustive search* – trying all possible combinations of the input variables and choosing the one, which provides the best objective value. This

approach guarantees finding a globally optimal solution of the OP. But when the search space size significantly increases, the brute-force approach becomes infeasible and in many cases solving even the relatively small problem instances takes too much time.

Here, different optimization techniques come into play. Characteristics exposed by target system could restrict and sometimes strictly define the applicable approach. For instance, imagine you have a white-box deterministic TS with a discrete constrained input data and a cheap evaluation. The OP in this case could be solved using the *Integer Linear Programming* (ILP), or a heuristic approaches. But if this TS turned out to be a black-box, the ILP approaches will not be applicable anymore and one should consider using the heuristics [14].

Evidently, there exist a lot of different facets for optimization problem solvers classification, but they are a subject of many surveying works [14, 43, 63]. In this thesis, as the point of interest we highlight only two of them.

- **Solution quality** perspective:

1. **Exact** solvers are those algorithms that always provide an optimal OP solution.
2. **Approximate** solvers produce a sub-optimal output with guarantee in quality (some order of distance to the optimal solution).
3. **Heuristics** solvers do not give any worst-case guarantee for the final result quality.

- **Solution availability** perspective:

1. **Completion** algorithms report the results only at the end of their run.
2. **Anytime** algorithms are designed for stepwise solution improvement thus, could expose intermediate results.

Each of these algorithm characteristics provide their own advantages, having, however, their own disadvantages. For instance, if solution is not available at any time, one will not be able to control the optimization process. On the contrary, if it is available, the overall performance may decrease. If the latter features are more or less self-explanatory, the former require more detailed explanation.

## Solution Quality

**Exact Solvers.** As was stated above, the exact algorithms are those, which always solve OP to guaranteed optimality. For some OP it is possible to develop an effective algorithm that is much faster than the exhaustive search — they run in a super-polynomial time, instead of exponential, still providing an optimal solution. As authors claimed in [120], if the common belief  $P \neq NP$  is true, the super-polynomial time algorithms are the best we can hope to get when dealing with the NP-complete combinatorial problems.

According to the definition in [47], the objective of an exact algorithm is to perform much better (in terms of running time) than the exhaustive search. In both works [47, 120] the authors enumerated main techniques for designing the exact algorithms. Each of these techniques contributes in this ‘better’ independently and later they could be combined.

You may find a brief explanation of them below:

- **Branching and bounding** techniques, when applied to the original problem, split the search space of all possible solutions (e.g. exhaustive enumeration) to a set of smaller sub-spaces. More formally, this process is called *branching the search tree into sub-trees*. This is done with an intent to prove that some of sub-spaces never lead to an optimal solution and thus could be rejected.

- **Dynamic programming across sub-sets** technique could be combined with the branching techniques. After forming the sub-trees, the dynamic programming attempts to derive the solutions for the smaller subsets and later combine them into the solutions for the larger subsets. This process repeats until the solution for original search space obtained.
- **Problem preprocessing** could be applied as an initial phase of the solving process. This technique is dependable upon the underlying OP, but when applied properly, it significantly reduces the running time. A simple example from [120] elegantly illustrates this technique: imagine a problem of finding a pair of two integers  $x_i$  and  $y_i$  in  $X_k$  and  $Y_k$  sets of unique numbers ( $k$  here denotes the size of sets) that sum up to an integer  $S$ . The exhaustive search approach implies enumerating all  $x - y$  pairs. The time complexity in this case is  $O(k^2)$ . But if we firstly consider the data preprocessing by sorting and afterwards, using the bisection search repeatedly in these sorted arrays to find  $k$  values  $S - y_i$ , then the overall time complexity reduces to  $O(k \log(k))$ .

**Approximate Solvers.** When the OP cannot be solved to optimal in polynomial time, the only solution is to start thinking of the alternative ways to tackle it. A common decision is to apply the requirement *relaxation techniques* [100] to derive the approximated solution. Approximate algorithms are representatives of the theoretical computer science. They were created in order to tackle the computationally difficult (not solvable in super-polynomial time) white-box OP. Words of Garey and Johnson (computer scientists, authors of *Computers and Intractability* book [48]) could pay a perfect description of such approaches: “I can’t find an efficient algorithm, but neither can all of these famous people.”

Unlike exact, approximate algorithms relax the quality requirements and solve the OP effectively with the provable assurances on the result distance from an optimal solution [119]. The worst-case results quality guarantee is crucial in the approximation algorithms design and involves the mathematical proofs.

How do these algorithms guarantee on quality, if the optimal solution is unknown beforehand? — is a reasonable question arises at this point. Certainly, it sounds contradicting, but the comprehensive answer to this question requires an explanation of the key approximation algorithms design techniques that is not in the scope of this thesis. Nevertheless, let us briefly describe these techniques.

In [119] the authors provided several techniques of the approximate solvers design. For instance, the *Linear Programming* (LP) relaxation plays a central role in approximate solvers. It is well known that solving the ILP is *NP-hard* problem. However, it could be relaxed to the polynomial-time solvable linear programming. Later, a fractional solution for the LP will be rounded to obtain a feasible solution for the ILP. Different rounding strategies define separate approximate solver techniques [119]:

- **Deterministic rounding** follows a predefined strategy.
- **Randomized rounding** performs a round-up of each fractional solution value to the integer uniformly.

In contrast to rounding, another technique requires building a *Dual Linear Program* (DLP) for given linear program. This approach utilizes the *weak* and *strong duality* properties of DLP to derive the distance of the LP solution to the original ILP optimal solution. Other properties of DLP form a basis for the *Primal-dual* algorithms. They start with a dual feasible solution and use the dual information to derive the primal linear program solution (possibly infeasible). If the primal solution is not feasible, the algorithm modifies the dual solution increasing the dual objective function values. In any case, these approaches are far beyond the thesis scope, but in case of an interest reader could start his own investigation from [119].

**Heuristics.** As opposed to the solvers mentioned above, heuristics do not provide any guarantee on the solution quality. They are applicable not only to the white-box TS but also to the black-box cases. These approaches are sufficient to quickly reach an immediate, short-term goal in such cases, when the finding an optimal solution is impossible or impractical because of the huge search space size.

As in the reviewed above approaches, here exist many facets for classification. We start from the largest one, namely the *level of generality*:

- **Simple heuristics** are the specifically designed to tackle the concrete problem algorithms. They fully rely on the domain knowledge, obtained from the optimization problem. Simple heuristics do not provide any mechanisms to escape a local optimum therefore, could be easily trapped to it [90].
- **Meta-heuristics** are the high-level heuristics that being domain knowledge-dependent, also provide some level of generality to control the search. They could be applied to broader range of the OPs. They are often nature-inspired and comprise mechanisms to escape the local optima but may converge slower than the simple heuristics. For the more detailed explanation we refer to survey [12].
- **Hybrid-heuristics** arise as the combinations of two or more meta-heuristics. They could be imagined as the recipes merge from the cook book, combining the best decisions to create something new and presumably better.
- **Hyper-heuristics** are the algorithms that operate in the search space of *Low Level Heuristics* (LLH). Instead of tackling the original problem, they choose (or construct) LLHs, which will tackle this problem for them [21].

In the upcoming Section 2.2, dedicated to heuristics, we provide more detailed information on each of the approaches mentioned above.

### The Most Suitable Solver Type

“Fast, Cheap or Good? Choose two.”

---

*The old engineering slogan.*

At this point, we have reached the crossroads and should make a decision, which way to follow.

Firstly, we have the exact solvers for the optimization problems. As mentioned above, they always guarantee to derive an optimal solution. Today, tomorrow, maybe in the next century, but eventually the exact solver will find it. The only thing we need is to construct the exact algorithm. This approach definitely offers the best final solution quality however, it sacrifices the solver construction simplicity and the speed in problem solving.

Secondly, we have the approximate solvers. They do not guarantee finding the one and only optimal solution but suggest a provably good instead. From our perspective, the required effort for constructing the algorithm and proving its preciseness remains the same as for the exact solvers. However, this approach outperforms the previous one in the speed of problem solving, sacrificing a reasonably small amount of the result quality. It sounds like a good deal.

Finally, the remaining heuristic approaches. They quickly produce a solution, in comparison to the previous two. In addition, they are much easier to apply for the specific problem — there is no need to build a complex mathematical models or prove the theorems. However, the biggest flaw in these approaches is an absence of the solution quality guarantee.

As we mentioned in Section 2.1.1, this thesis is dedicated to facing the practical combinatorial problems, such as the TSP. They are NP-complete, that is why we are not allowed to apply the exact solvers. In both approximate and heuristic solvers we are sacrificing the solution quality, though in different quantities. Nevertheless, the heuristic algorithms repay in the development time and provide the first results faster. The modern world is highly dynamic, in the business survive those, who are faster and stronger. In the most cases, former plays the crucial role for success. The great products are built iteratively, enhancing existing results step-by-step and leaving the unlucky decisions behind. It motivates us stick to the heuristic approach within the scope of the thesis.

In the following Section 2.2 we shortly survey different heuristic types and examples. We analyze their properties, weaknesses and ways to deal with them. As the result, we select the best suited class of heuristics for solving the TSP problem.

## 2.2 Heuristic Solvers for Optimization Problems

We base our descriptions of heuristics and their examples on the mentioned in Section 2.1.1 traveling salesman problem. The input data  $X$  to our heuristics will be the problem description in form of a distance matrix (or coordinates to build this matrix), while as an output  $Y$  from heuristics we expect to obtain the sequence of cities, depicting the route plan.

Most heuristic approaches utilize the following concepts:

- **Neighborhood**, which defines a set of solutions that could be derived performing a single step of the heuristic search.
- **Iteration**, which could be defined as an action (or a set of actions) performed over the solution in order to derive a new, hopefully better one.
- **Exploration** (diversification), which is the process of discovering previously unvisited and presumably high quality parts of the search space.
- **Exploitation** (intensification), which is the usage of already accumulated knowledge (solutions) to derive a new solution but similar to existing one.

### 2.2.1 Simple Heuristics

As we mentioned above, the simple heuristics are domain-dependent algorithms, designed to solve a particular problem. They could be defined as the rules of thumb, or strategies to utilize the information, exposed by the TS and obtained from the previously found solutions, to control the problem-solving process [90].

Scientists draw the inspiration for heuristics creation from all aspects of our being: starting from the observations of how humans tackle daily problems using intuition, and proceeding to the mechanisms discovered in nature. The two main types of simple heuristics were outlined in [22]: *constructive* and *perturbative*.

The first type aggregates the heuristics which construct the solutions from its parts step by step. A prominent example of constructive approach is a *greedy algorithm*, which can also be called the *best improvement local search*. When applied to TSP, it tackles the path construction simply accepting the next closest city from currently discovered one. Generally, the greedy algorithm follows the logic of making a sequence of locally optimal decisions therefore, it ends up in a local optimum after constructing the very first solution.

## 2 Background and Related Work Analysis

The second type, called a *local search*, implies heuristics which operate on the complete solutions, perturbing them. A simple example of the local search is a *hill climbing algorithm*, also known as a *first improvement local search* [118]. This heuristic accepts a better solution as soon as it finds it, during the neighborhood evaluation. This approach plays a central role in many high-order algorithms however, it could be very inefficient, since in some cases the neighborhood could be enormously huge.

Indeed, since the optimization result is fully dependent from the starting point. The use of simple local search heuristics might not lead to a globally optimal solution. Nevertheless, in this case the advantage will be the implementation simplicity [119].

### 2.2.2 Meta-Heuristics

Meta-Heuristic (MH) is an algorithm, created to solve a wider range of complex optimization problems with no need to deeply adapt it to each problem.

The research in MHs field arose even before 1940s, when the MHs were already actively applied. However, there were no all-embracing and complex studies of MHs at that time. The first formal studies appeared between 1940s and 1980s. Deep and profound research in this field reaches its most active stage in the late 1990s, when the numerous MHs popular nowadays were invented. The period from 2000 and up till now the authors in [107] call the framework growth time, when the meta-heuristics widely appear in form of frameworks, providing a reusable core and requiring only the domain-specific adaptation.

The prefix *meta-* indicates the algorithms to be of the *higher level* when compared to simple problem-dependent heuristics. A typical meta-heuristic structure could be imagined as  $n-T-H$  (template and hook) framework variation pattern.

Yevhenii: do not have a cite since it is more my observation + guess, better to remove?

The template part is stable and problem independent, it forms the core of an algorithm and usually exposes *hyper-parameters*, which could be used for the algorithm tuning. The hook parts are domain-dependent and should be adapted for problem at hand. Later, T operates on the set of Hs to perform an optimization. Many MHs contain stochastic components, which provide abilities to escape from local optimum. However, it also means that the output of meta-heuristic is non-deterministic and it could not guarantee the result preciseness [18].

The meta-heuristic optimizer success on a given OP depending on the *exploration vs exploitation balance*. If there is a strong bias towards diversification, the solving process could naturally skip a good solution while performing huge steps over the search space, but in case of intensification domination, the process will quickly settle in the local optima. The disadvantage of the simple heuristic approaches mentioned above is a high exploitation dominance, since they simply do not have the components contributing to exploration. In the most cases, it is possible to decompose MH into simple components and clarify, to which of competing processes contributes each component. Often, the simple heuristics are used as the intensification component.

In general, the difference between existing meta-heuristics lays in a particular way how they are trying to achieve this balance, but the common characteristic is that the most of them are inspired by real-world processes – physics [117], biology [103], ethology [34, 102, 110], and even evolution [11, 39].

### Meta-Heuristics Classification

When the creation of novel methodologies has slowed down, the research community began to organize and classify the created algorithms.

As an example, [15] highlights the following classification facets:

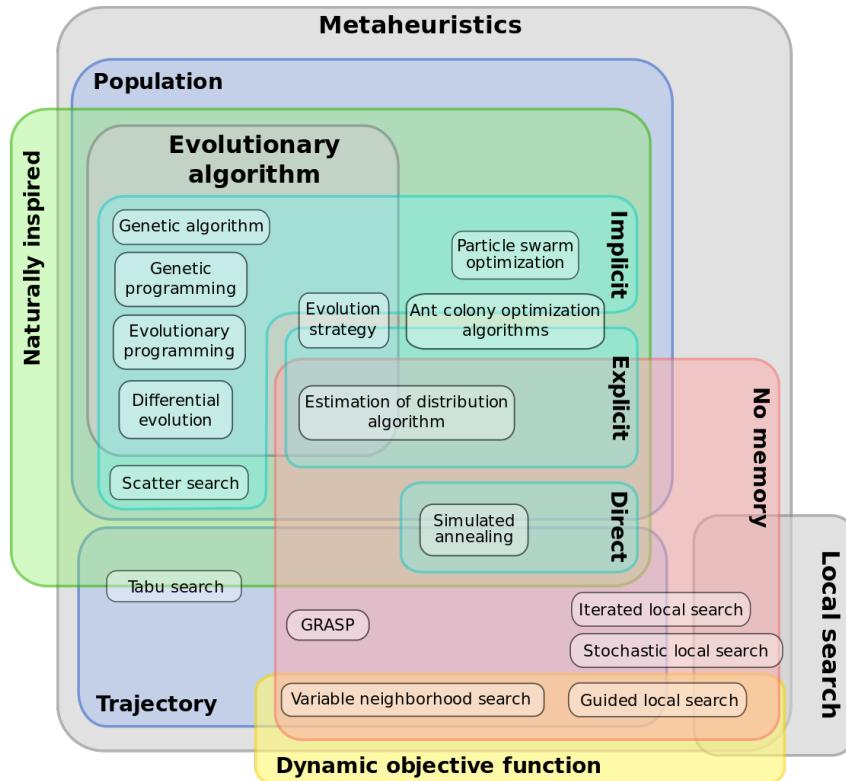
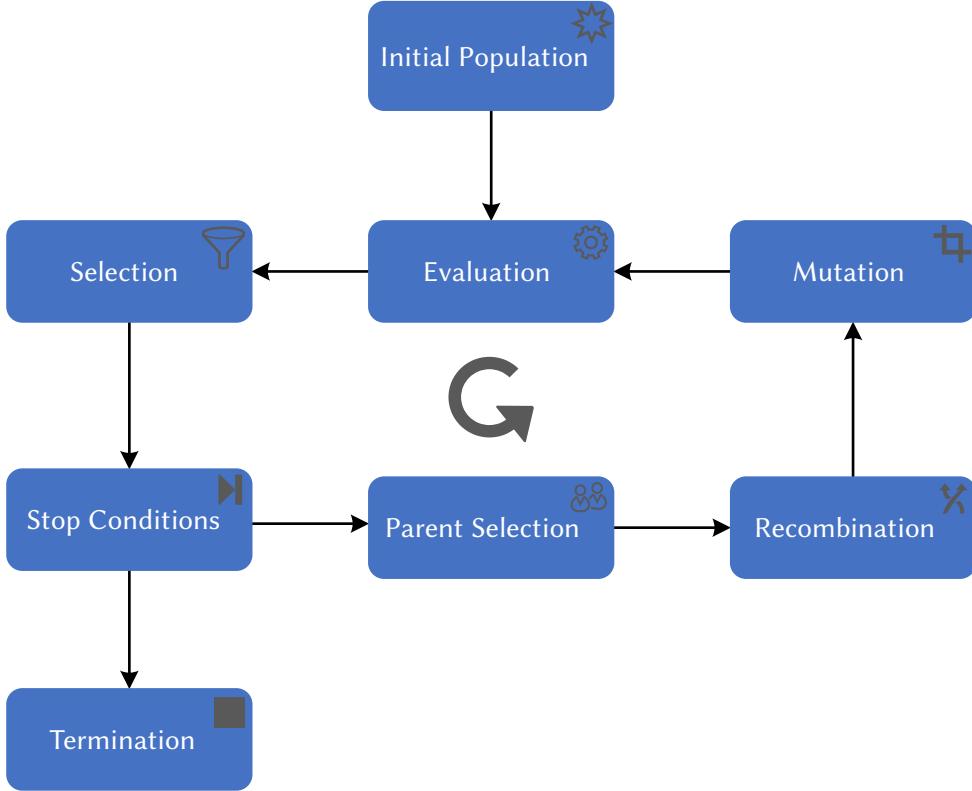


Figure 2.3 Meta-heuristics Classification [36].

- The **walk-through search space method** could be either trajectory-based or discontinuous. The first one corresponds to a closed walk through the neighborhood where such prominent examples as *iterated local search* [81] or *tabu search* [50] do exist. The second one allows large jumps in the search space, where the examples are such MHs as *variable neighborhood search* [54] or *simulated annealing* [69].
- The **number of concurrent solutions** could be either single or multiple. Such approaches as tabu search, simulated annealing or iterated local search are the examples of algorithms with a single concurrent solution. Evolutionary algorithms [39], ant colony optimization [34] or particle swarm optimization [67] are the instances of algorithms with multiple concurrent solutions (the population of solutions).
- From the **memory usage** perspective, we distinguish those approaches which do and do not utilize the memory. Tabu search explicitly uses memory in form of tabu lists to guide the search, but simulated annealing is memory-less.
- The **neighborhood structure** could be either static or dynamic. Most local search algorithms, such as simulated annealing and tabu search are based on a static neighborhood. Variable neighborhood search is an opposite case, where various structures of neighborhood are defined and interchanged while the algorithm solves the OP.

There are many more classification facets, with are not in the scope of this thesis. Figure 2.3 illustrates the summarized classification including some characteristics and well-known meta-heuristic instances we did not mention.



**Figure 2.4** Evolutionary Algorithms Workflow.

### Meta-Heuristics Examples

At this point, let us briefly describe some of the most prominent and widely used meta-heuristics. It is motivated by the later usage of them in our approach, described in Section 4.4.

**Evolutionary Algorithms (EAs)** are directly inspired by the processes in nature, described in evolution theory. The common underlying idea in all of these methods is as follows: if we put a population of individuals (solutions) into an environment with limited resources (population size limit), a competition processes cause natural selection, where only the best individuals survive [39].

Three basic actions are defined as operators of EAs: a *recombination* operator selects the parent solutions, which later will be combined to produce the new ones (offspring); a *mutation* operator, when applied to solution, creates a new and very similar one. Applying both operators, the algorithm creates a set of new solutions – the offspring, whose quality is then evaluated with the TS. After that, a *selection* operator is applied to all available solutions (parents and offspring) to keep the population size within the defined boundaries. This process is repeated, until some termination criteria is fulfilled. For instance, the maximal iterations counter was reached, the number of TS evaluations exceeds the defined maximal value, or the solution with the required quality is found. The high-level work-flow of EA is depicted in Figure 2.4.

The well-known examples of EAs include the *genetic algorithm* [103], *genetic/evolutionary programming* [72], *evolution strategies* [11], and many other algorithms.

*Genetic Algorithm* (GA) is the first of all associated with the Evolutionary Algorithms. GA traditionally has a fixed workflow: given an initial population of  $\mu$  usually randomly sampled individuals, the parent selection operator creates pairs of parents, where the probability of each solution to become a parent

depends on its objective value (fitness, or results). After that, the crossover operator is applied to every created pair with a probability  $p_c$  and produces children. Then, newly created solutions undergo the mutation operator with an independent probability  $p_m$ . The resulting offspring perform a tournament within the selection operator and  $\mu$  survivors replace the current population [38]. Distinguishable characteristic of vanilla GA is the usage of the following operators: bit-string solution representation, one-point crossover recombination, bit-flip mutation and generational selection (only children survive).

*Evolution Strategy* (ES), comparing to GA, is working in a vector space of the solution representation. However, they also use the population size of  $\mu$  individuals and  $\lambda$  offspring generated in each iteration. While the general workflow for all EAs remains the same, they mostly differ in underlying operators. In ES, the parent selection operator takes a whole population into consideration uniformly, the recombination scheme could involve more than two parents to create one child. To construct a child, the recombination operator joins parents alleles in two possible ways: (1) with uniform probability for each parent (discrete recombination), or (2) averaging the weights of alleles by parent solution quality (intermediate recombination). There are two selection schemes, used in such algorithms.  $(\mu, \lambda)$ : discard all parents and select only among offspring highly enriching the exploration, and  $(\mu + \lambda)$ : include also the predecessor solutions into selection, which is often called the *elitist selection* [38]. In many cases, the ES utilizes a very useful feature of *self-adaptation*: changing the mutation step sizes at runtime, which we will discuss in Section 2.3.3.

**Simulated Annealing (SA).** This is the other type of meta-heuristics, inspired by the technique used in metallurgy to obtain ‘well-ordered’ solid state of metal [117]. An annealing technique imposes a globally minimal internal energy state and avoids locally minimal semi-stable structures.

The SA treats the search process as a metal with a high temperature at the beginning and lowering it to minimum while approaching the end. It starts with an initial solution  $S$  creation (randomly or using some other heuristic) and temperature parameter  $T$  initialization. At each iteration, a new solution candidate is sampled within a neighborhood of the current solution:  $S^* \leftarrow N(S)$ . The newly sampled solution replaces the older one, if (1) optimization objective  $f(S^*)$  dominates over  $f(S)$  or (2) with a probability that depends on a quality loss and current value of  $T$ , see Equation (2.1).

$$p(T, f(S^*), f(S)) = \exp\left(-\frac{|f(S^*) - f(S)|}{T}\right) \quad (2.1)$$

At each iteration the temperature parameter  $T$  value is decreased following some type of annealing schedule, which is also called as *cooling rate* [18]. The weak side here is that the quality of each annealing schedule is the problem dependent and cannot be determined beforehand. Nevertheless, the SA algorithms with adaptive parameters do exist and address this problem changing the cooling rate or temperature parameter  $T$  during the search process. Later, we will shortly review these techniques in Section 2.3.3.

### 2.2.3 Hybrid-Heuristics

The hybridization of different systems often provides a positive effect — taking the advantages of one system and merging them with characteristics of the other, getting the best from the both systems. The same idea is applicable in case of meta-heuristics. Imagine you have two algorithms, one is biased towards exploration, the other — towards exploitation. Applying them separately, the expecting results in most cases may be far away from the optimal as the outcome of disrupted diversification-intensification balance. However, when merging them into, for example, repeated stages of hybrid heuristic, one will obtain the advantages of both escaping a local optima and finding a good quality result.

Most of available hybridization algorithms are created with the help of this idea of two heuristics staging combination, one of which is suited for the exploration and other is better for the exploitation.

The methods to construct the hybrids are mostly defined by the underlying heuristics. Therefore, to the best of our knowledge they could not be generalized and classified in an appropriate way. The only one commonly shared characteristic is the usage of *staging approach*, where the output of one algorithm is used as the initial state of the other.

As during the simple heuristics review, here we also introduce examples of performed hybridization in order to provide the reader a better understanding how can be combined different algorithms components and what is the effect on the aforementioned balance.

### Hybrid-Heuristics Examples

**Guided Local Search and Fast Local Search.** The main focus of guided local search (GLS) in this case, lies on the search space exploration and the guidance of process using incubated information. To some extent, the GLS approach is closely related to the frequency-based memory usage in tabu search. During the runtime, GLS modifies the problem cost function to include penalties and passes this modified cost function to the local search procedure. These penalties form a memory that characterizes a local optimum and guide the process out of it. The more time algorithm spends in the local optimum, the higher are the penalties. A local search procedure is carried out by fast local search (FLS) algorithm, where the main advantage is a quick neighborhood traversal. It is done by breaking it up into a number of small sub-neighborhoods. Afterwards, while performing the depth-first search over these sub-neighborhoods, it ignores those, which do not make any improvements. At some point of time, FLS reaches the local optimum and passes back the control in GLS to update the penalties and repeat the iteration [114].

**Direct Global and Local Search.** This hybridization consists of two stages: the stochastic global coarse pre-optimization and the deterministic local fine-optimization. At the first stage, the authors apply one of the two abovementioned meta-heuristics — genetic algorithm or simulated annealing [56]. A transition from global to local search happens after reaching the predefined conditions. For instance, when the number of TS evaluations exceeds a boundary, or when no distinguishable improvement was made in the last few iterations. Then, the pattern search algorithm also known as the direct, derivative-free, or black-box search performs the fine-optimization. The hybrid-heuristic terminates when the pattern search converges to the local optima [109].

**Simulated Annealing and Local Search.** After the brief explanation of previous two hybrids, it is not so difficult to guess, how the next hybridization works. The authors in their work [83] called this method ‘Chained Local Optimization’. Therefore, it is a yet another representative of staged hybridization. Iteration starts with the current solution perturbation, called *kick* in [83], referring a dramatic change of a current position within the search space. Afterwards, the hill climbing algorithm is applied to intensify the obtained solution. After reaching the local optimum, hill climber passes the control flow back to the simulated annealing for acceptance criteria evaluation, which finishes the iteration.

**EMILI.** Easily Modifiable Iterated Local search Implementation (EMILI) is a framework system for the automatic generation of new hybrid stochastic local search algorithms [89]. EMILI is a solver for permutation flow-shop problems (PFSP), also known as flow shop scheduling problems [96]. In PFSP the search of an optimal sequence of steps to create products within a workshop is performed. In this

framework, the authors have implemented both generic algorithmic- and problem-specific building blocks. They also have defined grammar-based rules for those blocks composition and used an automatic parameter tuning tool called IRACE [79] in order to find the high performing algorithm configurations. The workflow of EMILI could be split in three steps: (1) adaptation of the grammar rules to specific PFSP objective representations (makespan, sum completion times and total tardiness), (2) generation of all possible hybrid heuristics for each PFSP representation and (3) execution of IRACE to select the best performing hybrid for each problem.

From our perspective, the described approach of automatic algorithm generation is an example of construction hyper-heuristics, which we describe in the upcoming Section 2.2.5. However, we are not authorized to change the system class (from hybrid- to hyper-heuristic) defined by the EMILI authors.

#### 2.2.4 No Free Lunch Theorem

At this point, an obvious question may arise: “If there already exist excellent and well-performing heuristics, is there any need to put an effort in developing new algorithms instead of using existing ones?” The answer to this question is quite simple — the perfect algorithm suited for *all* OP does not exist and cannot exist at all. The empirical research has shown that some meta-heuristics perform better with some types of problems, but are less-performing with others. In addition to that, for different instances of the same problem type, the same algorithm could result in unexpected performance metrics. Moreover, even at different stages of the same problem solving process the dominance of one heuristic over another could change.

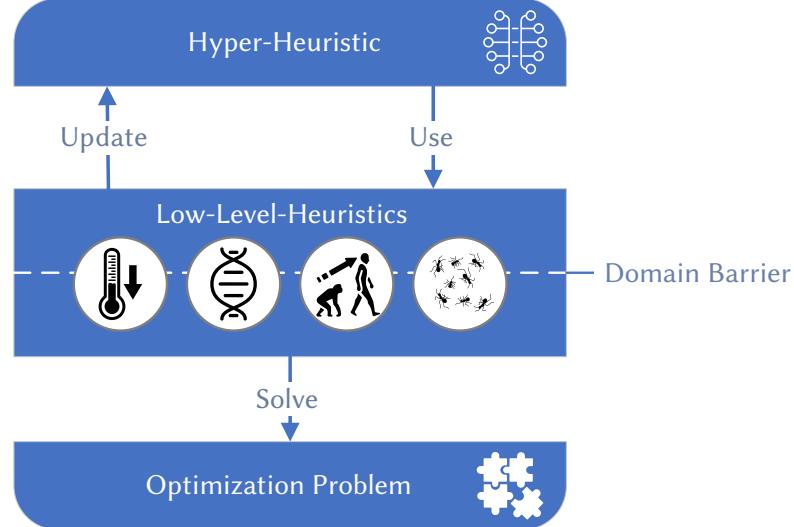
All search algorithms perform exactly the same, when the results are averaged over all possible optimization problems. If an algorithm is gaining the performance in one problems class, it loses in another class. This is a consequence of a so-called *no free lunch theorem for optimization* (NFLT) [121].

In fact, one cannot predict, how exactly one or another algorithm will behave with problem at hand. A possible and the most obvious way is to probe one algorithm and compare its performance to another one during the problem solving process. In this case, simple heuristics and meta-heuristics are out of the competition, since once the optimization problem is solved, one probably would not try to solve it for the second time. Here, the *hyper-heuristics* come into play to intelligently pick heuristics suitable to problem at hand. We will proceed with their description outlining the way they deal with the NFLT consequences in the following section.

#### 2.2.5 Hyper-Heuristics

Many of state-of-the-art heuristics and meta-heuristics are developed in a complex and very domain-dependent way, which causes problems with their reuse. It motivated the research community to raise the question of a generality level at which the optimization systems can operate and still provide good quality solutions for various optimization problems.

The term **hyper-heuristic** (HH) was defined to describe an approach of using some *high-level-heuristics* (HLH) to select over other *low-level-heuristics* (LLH) and apply them to solve the *class* of optimization problems rather than a particular instance. Indeed, scientists report that the combination of different HLH produces better results when applied separately [35]. This behavior can be explained by the way of how the search process evolves in time. When one applies a heuristic, it sooner or later converges to some extreme point, hopefully global optimum. But it is ‘blind’ to other, not visited regions of the search space. Changing the trajectory of investigation by (1) drastically varying the neighborhood, (2) changing the strategy of neighborhood exploration and exploitation could (1) bring one to those previously unreachable zones (2) in more rapid ways. However, usually it is hard to predict how one



**Figure 2.5** Hyper-Heuristics.<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Icons are taken from <https://thenounproject.com/>

LLH will behave in every stage of the search process in comparison to another. In hyper-heuristics, this job was encapsulated into the HLH and performed automatically.

In [86] the authors made an infer that HHs can be viewed as a form of reinforcement learning (RL), which is a logical conclusion, especially if rephrased to *hyper-heuristics utilize reinforcement learning methodologies*.

The new concept, which was implicitly used in meta-heuristics, but explicitly pointed out in hyper-heuristics is the *domain barrier* (see Figure 2.5). As was stated previously, HH do not tackle the OP directly, but use LLH instead. This means that usually HH are minimally aware of the domain details, such as data types, relationships, etc. within a domain. This information is rather encapsulated in LLHs, therefore, HHs could be applied to a broader range of optimization problems.

With this idea, many researchers started to create not only hyper-heuristics to tackle a concrete optimization problem class, but also frameworks with building blocks for their creation.

## Classification

Although the research in hyper-heuristics field is actively going on, many algorithm instances were already created and some trials to organize approaches were conducted in [22, 35, 68, 101].

Researchers in their surveys classify HHs by different characteristics, some of which overlap, but sometimes important features (from our perspective) were not highlighted in all works.

In this section we unite of those important hyper-heuristics classification facets in order to better justify the goal of this thesis.

To begin with, there are two broadest classes, which differentiate HH *routine*, also called *a nature of high-level-heuristic search space* [22, 23, 35]. The first class consist of hyper-heuristics to *select* low-level-heuristic, in other words *selection hyper-heuristic*. Please note, previously in this thesis all discussions of HHs were referencing to this specific type. These algorithms operate in the defined by complete and rather simple low-level-heuristics search space. The task of HLH here is to pick the best suited LLH (or sequence of LLHs) based on the available prior knowledge and apply it to the OP underway. Hyper-heuristics of the second class seek to *construct* LLH following some predefined receipt and using

the atomic components of other heuristics as Lego bricks. The other commonly used name here is a *construction hyper-heuristic*. These approaches often lead to a creation of new and unforeseen heuristics that are expected to reveal good performance while solving the problem at hand.

Next, the distinction in *nature of LLH search space* arises. In other words: “How does the LLH derive a solution for the OP?” The authors in [22, 23, 35] distinguished *construction* LLHs, where the solution creation happens each time from scratch and *perturbation* LLHs, where the new solutions are created from parts of already existing ones.

The other broadly used characteristic is the *learning time*. From this perspective hyper-heuristic can be of type *on-line*, *off-line* or *not learning* algorithm [22, 101]:

- In **on-line** case, the HH derives an information, used to select among LLH, while those LLH are solving the problem.
- In **off-line** case, the learning happens before solving a certain OP. Here one should first train the HH solving other homogeneous problem instances by underlying LLHs (off-line learning phase). After that, the HLH will be able to properly choose among LLHs, therefore, be applicable to problems at hand (on-line use phase). Note that this approach also requires a creation of meta-features extraction mechanism and its application to every optimization problem.
- In the last case **no learning** mechanisms are present. Therefore, HLH here performs to some extent a random search over LLH search space. At the first sight it may seem to be a weak approach, however, there exist meta-heuristics, which are similar to HH and perform well (variable neighborhood search).
- There also exist **mixed** cases, where the learning happens firstly in the off-line and later also in the on-line phase. Definitely, it is a promising (in terms of results quality) research direction, despite its high complexity.

For more detailed analysis, description, other classification facets and respective hyper-heuristic examples we encourage the reader to look into recent classification and surveying researches [21, 22, 35, 101].

### Hyper-Heuristics Instance Examples

**Hyper-heuristic for integration and test order problem (HITO).** HITO [52] is an example of construction HH. LLHs in this case are presented as a composition of basic EAs operators — crossover and mutation forming multi-objective evolutionary algorithms (MOEA). HH selects those components from *jMetal* framework [37] using interchangeably *choice function* (form of weighted linear equation) and multi-armed-bandit-based heuristic to balance an exploitation of good components and an exploration of new promising ones.

**Markov Chain Hyper-Heuristic (MCHH).** MCHH [84] is an on-line selection hyper-heuristic for multi-objective continuous problems. It utilizes reinforcement learning techniques and Markov chain approximations to provide an adaptive heuristic selection method. While solving the OP, MCHH updates the prior knowledge about the probability of producing Pareto dominating solutions by each underlying LLH using Markov chains, guiding an LLH selection process. Applying on-line reinforcement learning techniques, this HH adapts transition of weights in the Markov chains constructed from all available LLHs, updating prior knowledge for LLH selection.

### Hyper-Heuristics Frameworks Examples

**Hyper-Heuristics Flexible Framework (HyFlex).** HyFlex [87] is a software skeleton, built specifically to help other researchers creating hyper-heuristics. It provides the implementation of components for 6 problem domains: boolean satisfiability, bin packing, personnel scheduling, permutation flow shop and vehicle routing problems. Thereby, problem and solution descriptions, evaluation functions and adaptations for set of low-level-heuristics are provided out-of-the-box. The set benchmarks and comparison techniques to other built HHs on top of HyFlex are included into framework as well.

The intent of HyFlex creators was to provide low-level features that enable the users to focus directly on HLHs implementation without a need to challenge other minor details. It also brings a clear comparison among created HLH performance, since the other parts are mostly common.

From the classification perspective, all derivatives from the HyFlex framework are selection hyper-heuristics, however, they utilize different learning approaches. Algorithms, built on top of HyFlex framework could be found in many reviews [35, 85, 101] or on the CHeSC 2011 challenge website<sup>1</sup> (CHeSC is dedicated to choosing the best HH built on top of HyFlex).

Along with HyFlex, a number of hyper-heuristic-dedicated frameworks is growing, some of them are under active development while others are abandoned:

- **Hyperion** [108] is a construction hyper-heuristic framework, aiming to extract an information from the OP search domain for identification of promising components in form of object-oriented analysis.
- **hMod** [116] framework allows not only to rapidly prototype an algorithm using provided components, but also to construct those components using predefined abstractions (such as *IterativeHeuristic*). In current development stage, developers of *hMod* are focusing on creation of development mechanisms rather than providing a set of pre-built heuristics.
- **EvoHyp** [92] framework focuses on hyper-heuristics, created from evolutionary algorithms and their components. Here, the authors enable framework users to construct both selection and generation HHs for both construction and perturbation LLHs types.

#### 2.2.6 Conclusion on Heuristic Solvers

To conclude our review on heuristic approaches for solving optimization problems, we shortly refresh each heuristic level.

On the basic level remain simple heuristics with all their domain-specific knowledge usage and particular tricks for solving problems. Usually, they are created to tackle a concrete problem instance, applying simple algorithmic approach. The simplicity of development and usually fast runtime result in a medium results quality.

On the next level inhabit meta-heuristics. They could be compared with more sophisticated solutions hunters, which could not only charge directly, but also take a step back when stuck in a dead end. This additional skill enables them to survive in new and complex environments (optimization problems). However, some adaptations to understand a specific problem and parameter tuning for better performance still should be performed.

Along with MHs exist hybrid-heuristics. In short, they simply just took some survival abilities from several meta-heuristics with a hope to outperform and still requiring adaptation and tuning. In some cases this hybridization provides an advantage, but as the time shows they did not force MHs out.

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<sup>1</sup>Cross Domain Heuristic Search Challenge website: [asap.cs.nott.ac.uk/external/chesc2011/](http://asap.cs.nott.ac.uk/external/chesc2011/)

Therefore, we can conclude that the provided balance between development effort and exposed results quality not always assure users to use them.

Finally, those who lead the others, hyper-heuristics are on the upper generality level. Operating by the other heuristics, HHs analyze how good the former are and make a use of this knowledge by solving a specific problem using those best suited heuristics. Imposing such great abilities, hyper-heuristics tackle not only the certain optimization problem but an entire class of problems.

## 2.3 Setting Algorithm Parameters

Most of the existing learning algorithms expose some parameter set, needed to be assigned before using this algorithm. Modifying these parameters, one could change the system behavior and a possible result quality.

When we are talking about the problem of settings the best parameters, following terms should be outlined explicitly:

1. **Target System (TS)** is a subject whose parameters are undergoing changes. In short, it could be a heuristic, machine learning algorithm or any other system.
2. **Parameter** is one of the configuration hooks, exposed by TS. It should be described in terms of its type and possible values.
3. **Configuration** is a unique combination of parameter values, required to run TS.
4. **Search Space** is a set of all possible Configurations for defined parameters.

In this thesis we use notions of *parameter* and *hyper-parameter* interchangeably, since the approaches discussed in this section are generally applicable also in machine learning cases. As an example, consider a neuron network. Hyper-parameters in this case specify a structure (number of hidden layers, units, etc.) and define a learning process (rate, regularization parameters values, etc.). Changing them dramatically affect the network's performance and results.

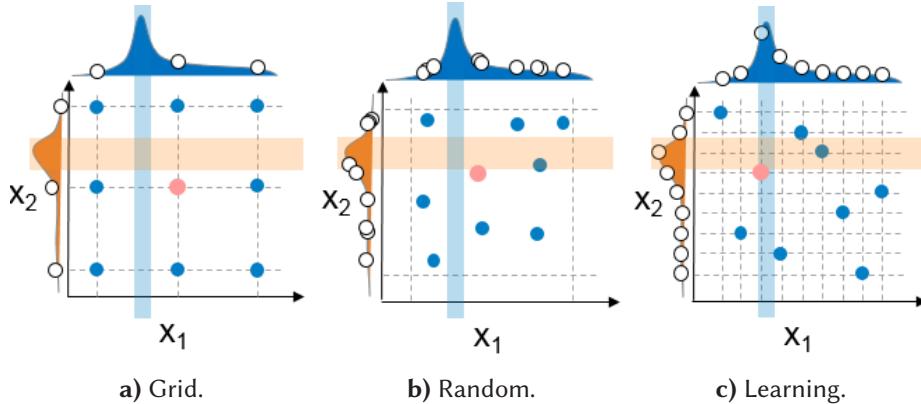
A frequently tackled optimization problem is a **parameter settings problem** (PSP): the process of searching hyper-parameter values that optimize some characteristic of TS. When talking about NN example, PSP could be defined as task of network's accuracy maximization with a given dataset, resulting in a single-objective PSP (SO-PSP). Optimizing a number of TS characteristics simultaneously, such as training time and prediction accuracy, one transforms the SO-PSP into a multi-objective PSP (MO-PSP).

The same applies to heuristics. A proper assignment of hyper-parameters has a great impact on the exploration-exploitation balance and, as a result, on an overall algorithm performance [74].

Up until now, there were formalized many approaches for solving task of settings hyper-parameters. One way is simply to the use intuition and to apply the parameters that seem more or less logical for a particular system and a problem instance. This error-prone technique was quickly abandoned in favor of automatic approaches. It was also motivated by an increasing computational capacities, which gave an opportunity to evaluate more configurations in less time. These automatic methods could be split into two technique families: one is an off-line *parameter tuning*, which is performed at the design time and the other is an on-line *parameter control*, performed at runtime.

### 2.3.1 Parameter Tuning

Roughly speaking, the off-line approach is a process of traversing the search space of hyper-parameters and evaluating TS with these parameters on some set of toy problems. At the end of this process, the best found HPs are reported and later used to solve a new, unforeseen problem instance.



**Figure 2.6** Automated Parameter Tuning Approaches.

In this part of thesis we outline existing automated approaches for parameter tuning, illustrating them in Figure 2.6<sup>1</sup>. In this example, the TS exposes two parameters:  $X_1$  (horizontal axis) and  $X_2$  (vertical axis) values and the subject of optimization along those axes (here the maximization case is depicted). The best configurations found by each approach are highlighted in pink.

**Grid search parameter tuning.** It is a rather simple approach for searching parameters. Here, the original search problem is relaxed and later solved by a brute-force algorithm. The set of all possible configurations (parameter sets) for relaxed problem is derived by specifying a finite number of possible values for each hyper-parameter under consideration. After evaluating all configurations on TS, the best found solution is reported. Hence, this approach could skip promising parts of search space (Figure 2.6a). Moreover, the required time to probe all possible combinations is increasing by means of a factorial complexity.

**Random search parameter tuning.** This methodology relies on a random (often uniform) sampling of hyper-parameters and their evaluation on each iteration. At a first sight, it might seem unreliable to chaotically traverse the search space. But empirical studies show that with a growing number of evaluations this technique starts to outperform grid search [9]. As an example, let us draw your attention to the best configurations (highlighted in pink) found by grid (Figure 2.6a) and random search (Figure 2.6b) techniques. The best randomly sampled configuration is definitely better than the one found by the grid search.

**Heuristic search parameter tuning.** By their nature, heuristic algorithms may be applied to tackle the most black-box search problems. Since the parameter tuning is one concrete type of search problem, it is also often tackled by a high-order heuristic approaches (meta-, hybrid-, hyper-heuristics) [25, 29, 30]. The advantage of heuristics usage lays in their ability to learn during optimization process and use an obtained memory to guide the search more efficiently.

**Model-Based Search Parameter Tuning.** In most cases, the dependencies between tuned parameter values and optimization objective do exist and can be utilized for hyper-parameter tuning. By predicting which parameter combinations lead to better results, model-based tuning could make precise guesses. As

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<sup>1</sup>Original graphics are taken from [70]

it is shown in Figure 2.6c, after accumulating enough information the learning algorithm starts making more precise guesses, which in contrast to previously outlined model-free approaches are desirable and more robust.

Naturally, this optimization problem could be tackled by almost every approach discussed in this thesis. However, taking into account the fact that (1) TS is often a *black-box* we eliminate exact and approximate solvers, (2) the evaluation cost is high, therefore, it is not desirable to apply the aforementioned heuristics directly, since they require performing a high number of TS evaluations to find a good configuration. With this idea in mind, researchers started to (1) create optimization algorithms that traverse the search space of configurations more efficiently and (2) build models that could imitate the dependencies between parameters and objective values, a so-called *surrogate models*. The former direction is nothing else but an enhancement to already existing optimization techniques, which allows accumulating and utilization of more information, obtained during an optimization. The later approach is crucial for problems where TS is expensive to evaluate. It is often used as an enhancement in optimization algorithm, enabling one to simulate evaluation of real system instead of expensive direct evaluations. Still, it is a frequently used approach to combine the previously reviewed search space traversal techniques, such as evolutionary algorithms, simulated annealing, tabu search with the surrogate models for optimization.

### 2.3.2 Systems for Model-Based Parameter Tuning

Parameter tuning is an obligatory task when the maximum system performance is a must-have requirement and should be performed at the design time. Novel tuning approaches are usually built in form of frameworks with exposed hooks for attaching the TS.

Since the target system evaluations here supposed to be costly, parameter tuning frameworks are trying to utilize every single bit of information from evaluations and a creation of surrogate models and using efficient optimization approaches is obligatory.

In this section we review some existing open-source parameter tuning systems from the following perspectives:

- **Conditional parameters support** is a provided to user and handled by tuning system ability to describe conditional dependencies between hyper-parameters. As an example, imagine *crossover type* parameter of genetic algorithm that takes only some specific values: partially mapped crossover (PMX), Cycle Crossover (CX), etc. Binding a certain crossover type, one will require providing parameters for this specific crossover type, as well as to eliminate the respective parameters for other crossover types. This type of dependency could be described in form of a parent-child relationship, however, other types of dependencies also exist.
- **Parameter types support** is one of the basic tuning systems usability requirements. In detail, TS parameters could be not only a numerical (integer or fractional) but also a categorical in form of strings, boolean values, etc. Considering categorical data types, they could be either *nominal*, which depict only possible atomic values, or *ordinal*, which imply also value comparison but no distance notion. For instance, let us refer to genetic algorithm parameters. *Population size* is of numerical integer type in range  $[1..\infty)$ , *mutation probability* is of numerical fractional type in range  $[0..1]$ , *crossover type* is of categorical nominal type with {PMX, CX} choices. Please note, we could also view the population size as a set of finite values {10, 100, 1000} therefore, turning it into the categorical ordinal parameter.
- **Extensibility** is crucial when one would like to try a new promising and intriguing learning algorithm for guiding a search that was not available in the parameter tuning system yet. Practically,

one may need not only new learning algorithm, but some other features like a non-trivial stopping criterion, tools for handling stochastic behaviors, or different strategies for random sampling (which are used to replace a model-based prediction, while the tuning system is learning).

- **Parallel evaluations** required for utilizing available computational resources that could scale horizontally, providing simultaneous evaluation of multiple configurations. This often could speeds-up the learning process.

Among reviewed systems, we could distinguish those, which were created directly to face the parameter tuning problem and the others that are more generic optimizers but still applicable in parameter tuning cases. A specific optimizer will be usable for searching the parameters, if it exposes several features. Firstly, it must consider an optimization function evaluation to be expensive and tackle this problem explicitly. For instance, using surrogate models or the other TS approximations. Secondly, a potential tuner should be able to tackle dependencies and conditions among parameters.

## SMAC

Sequential Model-based Algorithm Configuration (SMAC<sup>1</sup>) [58] is a system for parameters tuning, developed by the AutoML research group (here we review the 3<sup>rd</sup> version of SMAC).

In their research, scientists generalized the process of parameter tuning under the *Sequential Model-Based Optimization* (SMBO) term as the iterations between (1) fitting models and (2) using them to choose the next configurations for evaluation. This term naturally formalizes most of the existing (except MBMO, but we do not tackle multi-objectiveness in this thesis) parameter tuning approaches and may be used as a distinguishing characteristic of optimization algorithms, since they naturally could be applied not only to the parameter tuning problems.

SMACv3 is an extension introducing the learning models and sampling mechanisms to previously existing random on-line aggressive racing (ROAR) algorithm. The authors showed that a machine learning in general and regression models in particular (playing the role of surrogates) are applicable not only to parameter tuning but also to optimize any expensive black-box function.

The development of this system was motivated by the limitations of all existing SMBO approaches. Among them an expanding the applicability to categorical, but not only to numerical parameters. Also, to reduce a variance influence the target algorithm performance optimization may be performed on a number of problem instances (benchmark set), instead of a single instance.

A routine in SMAC could be viewed as an iterated application of three steps: (1) building a learning model, (2) using it for making choices regarding which configurations to investigate next and (3) actual evaluation of TS.

The evaluation (3) here is carried out by the original ROAR mechanism, where the running of each new candidate solution continues until enough data (from benchmark set of problem instances) is obtained to either replace the current solution or reject the candidate. On contrary to model-less ROAR, SMAC at step (1) builds the regression random forest surrogate – an instance of machine learning algorithm [19]. The usage of the regression decision trees is motivated by the fact that they fit well to categorical data and complex dependencies in general. Later, at step (2) an iterative local search (ILS) heuristic is applied in combination with *expected improvement* (EI) evaluation (part of the Bayesian optimization process) [105]. The EI is a measurement of possible solution quality improvement obtained by an underlying configuration, therefore, higher EI means that the candidate is better. ILS starts at the best previously found configuration and traverses its neighborhood distinguishing between configurations using EI and regression model built at step (1). SMAC compares configurations by means

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<sup>1</sup>SMACv3 GitHub repository <https://github.com/automl/SMAC3/>

of the objective value and considers only minimization case. EI is large for those configurations, which have a low predicted cost and for those, with high uncertainty in results, therefore, providing the exploration-exploitation balance [62].

## IRACE

IRACE<sup>1</sup> is a hyper-parameter tuning package [79] as the implementation of *iterated racing algorithm* [16].

The underlying methodology is somewhat similar to the one implemented in SMACv3 and comprise three main steps: (1) sampling new configurations using a prior knowledge, (2) empirically finding the best ones among the sampled using the racing algorithm and (3) updating the prior knowledge to bias future samples towards better configurations. The prior knowledge here is represented as a probability distribution of values for each parameter independently (truncated normal and discrete distributions for numeric and categorical parameter types respectively). During step (3), the probability distributions are build using the best found in step (2) configurations, increasing a promising values sampling chance.

Iterated racing step (2) here is a process of running the target system using sampled configuration on a set of problem instances. After solving each instance, the statistically worse-performing configurations are rejected and racing proceeds with remaining ones. This process continues until it reaches the predefined number of survivals, or after solving a required amount of problem instances (in this case all remaining configurations are considered to be good).

IRACE supports various data types, such as numerical or categorical and the possibility of conditions description as well. While the problem of data types is resolved by the usage of different underlying distribution types, the conditional relationships are handled by the dependency graphs. During step (1), non-conditional parameters are sampled firstly and only afterwards, if the respective conditions are satisfied, the dependent parameters are sampled.

## HpBandSter

A distributed Hyperband implementation on Steroids (HpBandSter<sup>2</sup>) is a realization of BOHB algorithm [41] in the software framework. While SMAC outperforms and partially reuses the decisions made in ParamILS [59], BOHB (Bayesian optimization combined with Hyperband) is the parameter tuning tool that outperforms SMAC and was created by the same AutoML research group.

As it stated in the framework name, the SMBO routines are carried out with mainly two algorithms: learning and configurations sampling is performed by the Bayesian optimization (BO) technique *tree parzen estimator* (TPE), while evaluation of sampled configurations and their comparison are carried out by the Hyperband (HB) algorithm.

The TPE usage instead of naive Gaussian processes-based BO and expected improvement evaluation was motivated by a better dimensional scaling abilities and an internal support of both numerical and categorical parameter types. However, some minor transformations are still required. Unlike vanilla BO, where the optimization is done by modeling the result distributions given the configuration parameters, TPE builds two distributions of parameter values. It splits the configurations into two sets distinguishing their ‘goodness’. During the sampling, it proposes those parameter values, which have a high probability to be in the ‘good’ distribution and simultaneously low probability to be in the ‘bad’ one. For more detailed explanation, we refer to TPE description given in [10].

A central part of BOHB, namely the Hyperband algorithm, is a promising bandit-based strategy for hyper-parameter optimization [77], in which the *budget* for entire parameter tuning session is

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<sup>1</sup>IRACE GitHub repository <https://github.com/Mlopez-Ibanez/irace>

<sup>2</sup>HpBandSter GitHub repository: <https://github.com/automl/HpBandSter>

## 2 Background and Related Work Analysis

defined beforehand and divided between iterations. The role of budget could play any setting that controls the accuracy of a configuration evaluation by TS, where estimation with the maximal budget provides the most precise evaluation, while the minimal budget gives the least accurate approximation of configuration results. The running examples of budget could be a number of iterations in iterative algorithm, a number of epochs to train the neuron network, or a number of problem instances from benchmark set to evaluate. As a result, the requirements in TS arise to expose and support the budget usage as expected in BOHB.

At each iteration, in original version HB samples a number of configurations uniformly at random. The authors introduced an *intensification* mechanism according to which, a number of per-iteration sampled configurations decreases for the later iterations, while the amount of budget given for iteration remains the same. As an outcome, first iterations of HB are full of coarse-grain evaluated configurations, while the later iterations produce a higher number of more precise measurements. Each iteration of HB is split to the number of *successful halving* (SH) procedure executions, which at each execution drop poorly performing configurations (usually  $2/3$ ). As one may expect, since the number of measured configurations in subsequent iterations decreases, the amount of SHs execution drops too, therefore, the remaining configurations are evaluated more precisely.

The binding of Hyperband and Bayesian TPE is made in several places. Firstly, the learning models are updated each time, when new results are available for every budget value. Secondly, at each HB iteration instead of random sampling, the TPE model is used to pick next configurations. Please note that BOHB uses only the surrogate, which was built on the configurations evaluated with the largest budget. This decision results in more precise surrogate models and, therefore, better predictions in the later stages of parameter tuning process.

### BRISEv2

The great part of software potential lays not only in its ability to tackle a problem at hand, but also on the general usability and adaptivity to unforeseen tasks. Here we review the 2<sup>nd</sup> version of BRISE<sup>1</sup> [93], since the very early BRISE versions (major version 1 [94]) were more monolithic and hard to apply for parameter tuning problem at hand.

While designing this system, authors were focused not solely on learning mechanisms for parameter prediction, but on the overall system modularity as well. Being a software product line (SPL), BRISE was designed as a set of interacting components (nodes), each acting according to its own specific role. The system could be viewed from two perspectives. One is a birds-eye view on all available nodes with their roles and the other is a fine-grained description of *main-node* concretely.

Before reviewing each perspective, it is worth justifying the central terms used in the system. Please note that some of them are similar to the one defined above, but they were explicitly implemented in form of interacting entities.

- **Experiment** encapsulates the information about a certain run of BRISE. For instance, within a parameter tuning session it carries such information as BRISE experiment description (a specification of parameter tuning procedure in JSON format), evaluated during session configurations with their results.
- **Configuration** is a combination of input parameter values for TS. It could be run several times to obtain a statistical data, therefore, contains number of *Tasks*. Naturally, the configurations are comparable in terms of the results averaged over performed runs.

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<sup>1</sup>BRISEv2 GitHub repository: <https://github.com/dpukhkaiev/BRISE2/releases/tag/v2.3.0>

- **Task** is a single evaluation of TS under provided configuration for specified in description problem scenario.
- **Parameter** is a meta-description of certain configuration part and a building block for search space. It defines a set or range of possible values.
- **Search space** comprises all parameters and their dependencies and could verify the validity of configuration.

From a birds-eye view perspective, BRISE consists of *main-node* as the system backbone, several *worker-nodes* as target algorithm runners under provided configurations, *event-service* to distribute tasks between available worker-nodes, *front-end-node* to control and report optimization process on a web-page, and non-obligatory *benchmark-node* that could be handy for executing and analyzing a number of experiments.

The main-node is a combination of objects, which interact in terms of queue callbacks. Therefore, when a new configuration is evaluated, the new model is built and used for the next configuration prediction. The intent of introducing aforementioned terms is to use them as a core of the framework, while such components as *prediction models*, *termination criteria*, *repetition management* or *outliers detection* are exposed to client for the variability reasons. Naturally, the developers also created a set of available out-of-the-box implementations for each variability component.

To use BRISE for parameter tuning, one should (1) construct an experiment and search space descriptions in JSON format and (2) add the respective target system evaluation logic in *workers*. All the rest will be carried out by the system.

### 2.3.3 Parameter Control

Generally speaking, the biggest disadvantage of parameter tuning approaches is defined by the fact that they usually require many TS runs to evaluate its performance with different configurations. On the other hand, the parameter control approaches are able to solve this issue but the drawback lays in their universality.

The advantageous characteristic of any system is its ability to adapt at runtime. It could happen so that an algorithm with tuned parameters performs well at the very beginning of a problem solving process, but struggles in the later stages. The other algorithm configuration may result in an opposite behavior. This could be caused by various reasons and it is often hard to tell, which of them the algorithm is facing at the moment.

In contrast to the parameter tuning approaches, where optimal parameters are *firstly* searched and only afterwards are used to solve the OP, the parameter control is an approach of searching the parameters *while* solving the OP. It also could be expressed as a system reaction to the changes in a solving process. Sometimes, it is named an *on-line* parameter tuning. The drawback of this approach lays in a lack of generality, since often a parameter control technique is embedded into an algorithm, therefore, is algorithm-dependent.

The only broad classification facet we were able to distinguish is the *type of control mechanism*, where the *deterministic* and *adaptive* strategies exist. The first type suggests changing the parameters in a predefined schedule, while the second type assigns the parameter values upon received feedback. To the best of our knowledge, the adaptive approaches are mostly dependent on the concrete algorithm instance. Therefore, it is hard to present a generic classification of parameter control approaches for all algorithms. However, this could be done for each particular algorithm family.

## 2 Background and Related Work Analysis

We provide an insight of the parameter control reviewing the examples of proposed strategies for some meta-heuristics. For the more comprehensive review of the recently published strategies we encourage the reader to examine the source paper, used here [57].

### Parameter Control in Simulated Annealing

The most frequently controlled parameters in simulated annealing algorithms are the *cooling rate* (the velocity of temperature decrease) and the *acceptance criteria* (decision, whether to accept a proposed solution, or not).

The control in cooling rate parameter is motivated as follows: if the temperature decreases too rapidly, the optimization process may settle in the local optima, but too low cooling rate is a computationally expensive, since SA requires more TS evaluations to converge. Among deterministic approaches, researchers mainly distinguish linear, exponential, proportional, logarithmic and geometrical cooling schedules. In contrast to deterministic approaches, in [64] the authors proposed an adaptive strategy to change the cooling rate, based on the statistical information, evaluated on each optimization step. Specifically, if the statistical analysis named in research a *heat capacity* shows that the system is unlikely to be trapped in the local optima, the cooling rate is increased. On the contrary, it is decreased if the possibility of being trapped is high.

In [49] the authors propose an adaptation of another hyper-parameter: acceptance criteria. The utilized mechanism is based on thermodynamics fundamentals, such as *entropy* and *kinetic energy*. The authors suggest replacing the standard acceptance criteria (based on the current temperature and the solution quality) with the one based on the solutions entropy change evaluation.

Many researches were made to investigate, which is the best among deterministic and adaptive strategies [5, 31, 60, 80, 111]. In many cases, the authors conclude that the adaptive methods provide more robust and promising results.

### Parameter Control in Evolutionary Algorithms

While searching the parameter control examples in heuristics, one will find dozens of proposed methodologies for the evolutionary algorithms. It is arising from the fact that an idea of changing the algorithm parameters dynamically came from EAs [66]. The motivation for such a number of performed studies lays in a strong dependence of an algorithm's performance on parameter values.

The deterministic and adaptive mechanisms in EAs are extended by the 3<sup>rd</sup> type – a *self-adaptive* approach. It implies an encoding of parameter values in the solution genomes, allowing them to co-evolve with the solutions at runtime [33]. All the proposed strategies could be split into two families: one includes the algorithms proposing to adapt a concrete parameter solely and the other, which includes the approaches to control a group of parameters. In EAs the commonly implicated hyper-parameters are *population size*, *selection strategies* and *variation aspects* (namely crossover and mutation operators). In case of interest, we propose the reader to analyze recently conducted reviews and researches dedicated to parameter control in evolutionary algorithms [1, 33, 66, 106].

There is one rather intriguing parameter control approach proposed for the evolutionary algorithms. In [65] the authors introduce a reinforcement learning (RL) parameter controller, whose goal is to select the EA parameters on-line evaluating a set of simple observables. They include: a genotype diversity, a phenotype diversity, a fitness standard deviation, a fitness improvement and a stagnation counter. The RL in this work adheres the following MAPE-K methodology [20]. On each iteration the observables are monitored, their values are analyzed to build a parameter control plan, which is executed in the next iteration. The letter **k** denotes a central part of this methodology – the knowledge. This set of proposed observables could be split into two logical groups. One is the algorithm specific

with the genotype/phenotype diversities and the fitness standard deviation, while the other is algorithm-independent and includes the fitness improvement and the stagnation counter. We believe the proposed RL approach could be applied to other algorithms, with the only requirement in exposing the observable knowledge. The proposed in [65] parameter control methodology may be one of the first to generalize a parameter control techniques and later in Section 3.1 we use it as a part of our approach.

### 2.3.4 Conclusion on Parameter Setting

At this point, we finalize our review of the parameter settings problems with three conclusions:

1. The parameter tuning area is investigated widely and nowadays the research settles in form of combining different learning models to implement the SMBO algorithms in framework-like tuning systems.
2. The parameter control is actively driven by two motivations. Firstly, the runtime changes in solving process are unpredictable; therefore, the control is believed to better fit them, comparing to the statically defined by parameter tuning techniques. Secondly, the resources spent for off-line parameter settings are high, but they are paid-off by a high quality of algorithm configuration. Therefore, from this perspective, the control approaches are trying to reach the off-line settings quality spending less resources. Unfortunately, nowadays the on-line approach is not generic to be commonly applicable.
3. The decision on concrete technique is use-case specific and is driven by the amount of available resources and the required setting quality as well.

## 2.4 Combined Algorithm Selection and Hyper-Parameter Tuning Problem

The goals of automatic machine learning are quite similar to persecuted by hyper-heuristics. They both operate on search space of algorithms (or their building blocks), which later are combined, with an objective to find the best performing one, and used to solve the problem at hand.

In this section we review one particular representative of automatic machine learning systems. Based on the ML framework Scikit-learn [91], Auto-sklearn system [44] operates over a number of classifiers, data and features preprocessing methods **including their hyper-parameters** to construct, for given dataset, the best performing (in terms of classification accuracy) machine learning pipeline. This problem was formalized as *combined algorithm selection and hyper-parameter tuning problem* (CASH) and presented previously in Auto-WEKA [112] system. Intuitively, it could be rephrased as follows: “For a given optimization problem, find the best performing algorithm and its hyper-parameters among available and solve the problem”.

Please note, to the certain extent Auto-sklearn is similar to HHs, which use LLHs for traversing the search space and solving the OP. However, the automatic machine learning techniques operate on the completion algorithms, the results of which are evaluated at the end of their run. On the contrary, on-line HHs are able to evaluate the intermediate performance of low-level heuristics, since they are anytime algorithms. CASH problem seems to be a combination of problems solved by HHs and parameter tuning approaches. We also found that the architecture search problems [40] (related to neural networks) are nothing else but particular case of CASH.

Turning back to Auto-sklearn, the crucial decisions made here is the combination of off-line and on-line learning, resulted an exceptional performance of Auto-sklearn in classification tasks.

## 2 Background and Related Work Analysis

During the off-line phase, for each of available datasets published by OpenML community [45], search of the best performing machine-learning pipeline was done using the BO technique implemented in the discussed previously SMAC framework [58]. After that, the *meta-learning* was executed to derive the meta-features for each dataset.

The resulting combination of the datasets, machine learning pipeline and meta-features were stored and later used to initialize the on-line phase of pipeline search. The information from the meta-learning phase is used as follows: for a given new dataset, the system derives the meta-features and selects some portion of created during the off-line phase pipelines that are the nearest in terms of meta-feature space. Then, these pipelines are evaluated on a new dataset to initialize the BO in SMAC. This decision results in the ability to evaluate well-performing configurations at the beginning of tuning process.

During the on-line phase, another crucial improvement was introduced. Usually, while searching the best-performing pipeline, a lot of effort is spent in order to build, train and evaluate intermediate pipelines. After each evaluation, only the results and the pipeline description are stored, but the pipeline itself is discarded. In Auto-sklearn, however, the idea lays in preserving previously instantiated and trained pipelines, obtained while solving the CASH problem. Later, they are used to form an ensemble of models and tackle the problem at hand together. This means that the results of this architecture search is a set of models with different hyper-parameters and preprocessing techniques, rather than a single model. This ensemble starts from the worst performing ones (obtained at the beginning of the search) and ends with the best suited model for the respective dataset. Naturally, each ensemble member influence on the final results is weighted.

The potential of off-line phase is derived entirely from the existence of such a dataset repository and depends on the availability of homogeneous datasets. The proposed on-line methodology, which mimics the regression trees, is more universal and could be reused widely.

In general, an empirical investigation of Auto-sklearn's universality would be rather intriguing, since the only cases of Auto-sklearn application we managed to find are the classification tasks but not regression problems [13, 44].

The field of automated machine learning is one of trending research directions, that is why there exist dozens of open-source systems, such as *Auto-Weka* [112], *Hyperopt-Sklearn* [71], *Auto-Sklearn* [44], *TPOT* [88], *Auto-Keras* [61], etc. Among open-source, there are many commercial systems, such as *RapidMiner*, *DataRobot*, Microsoft's *Azure Machine Learning*, Google's *Cloud AutoML*, and Amazon's *Machine Learning on AWS*.

## 2.5 Conclusion on Background and Related Work Analysis

In this chapter we have presented the review of optimization problems, their concrete instances and existing solver types focusing on the heuristics. There exist several levels of generality in heuristic solvers: simple heuristics, meta-heuristics and hyper-heuristics.

The applicability of each algorithm is problem-dependent and derives from the exploration-exploitation balance and strength, revealed in a particular case. It is difficult to guess beforehand, which heuristic will outperform the others in an unforeseen use-case. With respect to this, hyper-heuristics seems to be the most perspective and universal solvers, since they do not tackle the problem directly, but rather select and apply the best suited among controlled algorithms.

From the other perspective, the solver performance is also dependent on the values of its parameters. It turns out, that the parameter setting is also an optimization problem. There exist several ways to solve it: (1) set the values manually, based on experience and intuition, (2) utilize the parameter tuning systems, which find the best values automatically and later use those found parameters, or (3) exploit the parameter control mechanisms. Among all strategies, the last seems to be the happy medium, since

tuning requires lots of expensive algorithm executions to produce a good parameter settings, while manually choosing hyper-parameters is an error-prone process that requires experienced guidance. The analysis of parameter control approaches showed that the existing techniques are heuristic-dependent, therefore, our first research question is defined as follows **RQ 1: Is it possible to perform the algorithm configuration at runtime on a generic level?**

The outcome of no-free-lunch theorem cannot be ignored, according to which no single algorithm can tolerate a broad range of problems equally outperforming other solvers. That is why we cannot set aside hyper-heuristics, which are designed to find the best solving algorithm suited for a particular optimization problem case.

The research in automatic machine learning has made a step further and tends to combine both algorithm selection and parameter tuning problems into a single CASH problem, formalized in [112]. The search space in CASH problem is formed of algorithm variants and their respective hyper-parameters. However, one solver cannot use the parameters of another, thus, the resulting search space happens to be ‘sparse’. In general, the structure of CASH problem is almost the same as regular parameter tuning case. That is why the commonly used solvers for CASH problems are the parameter tuning systems: SMAC in Auto-sklearn and Auto-Weka, Hyperopt in Hyperopt-Sklearn and so forth. Not many surrogate models are able to handle the sparse search spaces: random forest machine learning model and Bayesian optimization approaches with exotic kernel density estimators [75]. Even fewer optimizers are able to perform well in such sparse spaces. The other drawback is that the CASH problem definition is limited to searching the algorithm and its parameters in the off-line manner.

We believe that the solutions of both algorithm selection and parameter setting problems is highly dependent on a problem at hand. That is why a search for the best tool (solver) and its setting (parameters) should be performed in on-line manner, in other words, while solving the optimization problem. Since the generic parameter control concept was not proposed yet, naturally, we were not able to find the techniques to merge and solve both the algorithm selection and parameter control problems in runtime. Therefore, we defined our second research question **RQ 2: Is it possible to simultaneously perform algorithm selection and parameters adaptation while solving an optimization problem?**

As CASH merges algorithm selection and parameter tuning techniques to get the outstanding performance, we found a merge of on-line algorithm selection and parameter control an intriguing and worth-to-try idea. However, the amount of spent resources and the imprecision of surrogates estimations for simultaneous search of both the algorithm type and its parameter values may be discouraging. To explicitly evaluate this, we define the final research question as **RQ 3: What is the effect of selecting and adapting algorithm while solving an optimization problem?**

### **Research objective defined.**

In this thesis we are trying to achieve the best of both on-line algorithm selection and parameter control worlds. The resulting approach should be able to solve an optimization problem, applying *the best suited low-level-heuristic and setting its parameters at runtime*. With this idea in mind, we investigate a possibility of turning existing parameter tuning system into an **on-line selection hyper-heuristic with parameter control in low level heuristics**.

## *2 Background and Related Work Analysis*

### 3 On-line Selection Hyper-Heuristic with Generic Parameter Control

While there exist no universal approach to control the algorithms parameters (Section 2.3.4), our conclusion on the literature analysis was the absence of existing approaches to combine both on-line techniques for the algorithm selection and the parameter settings (Section 2.5).

In this Chapter we propose the approach to resolve this problem, excluding the implementation details. In Section 3.1, we introduce a generic parameter control technique and expand it with the process of algorithm selection. As concluded in Section 2.5, the main weakness of the reviewed approaches to tackle CASH problems lays in the inability of learning mechanisms to fit and predict in sparse search spaces. The same issue arises in case of on-line algorithm selection and parameter settings, and we resolve it on two levels: 1) in the search space structure and 2) in the prediction process. In Section 3.2 we present a joint search space of both algorithm selection and parameter control problems. We outline functional requirements for a such space. Next, we describe a related prediction process in Section 3.3. We decouple the learning models from the search space structure and provide a certain level of flexibility in the usage of different learning models. Finally, in Section 3.4 we direct our attention to the low level heuristics (LLH) — working horses of our approach. We highlight the requirements to LLH that are crucial in our case.

#### 3.1 Combined Parameter Control and Algorithm Selection Problem

The basic idea of parameter control approaches lays in the solver behavior adaptation as the response to changes in the solving process (Section 2.3.3). As we mentioned during the heuristics review (Section 2.2), the algorithm performance is highly dependent on the provided exploration-exploitation balance, which in turn, depends on (1) the algorithm itself and (2) its configuration. The task of parameter control is to find those parameters, which provide the best performance.

In our work, we solve the parameter control problem utilizing a similar to proposed in [65] reinforcement learning (RL) approach for evolutionary algorithms. The underlying idea of RL could be described as a process of performing actions in some environment in order to maximize the reward, obtained after each performed action. To apply this technique onto the parameter control problem, we must define what are those *actions* and how to estimate the *reward*. Thus, for making the parameter control applicable to a broad range of algorithms, we analyze not the solver state itself but the optimization process (in [65], the authors use both algorithm-dependent and generic metrics). To realize the MAPE-K control loop, we must interrupt the solver, analyze the intermediate results, learn the current trend among parameters, configure the solver with the most promising parameter values and continue solving. The number of MAPE-K loop iterations  $i$  define the granularity of learning, where one should balance between *time to control* (TTC) the parameters vs *time to solve* (TTS) the problem. Naturally, the limitation of proposed approach is  $TTS \gg TTC$ , therefore, we restrict to use-cases with large TTS w.r.t. TTC.

To evaluate the gained in iteration  $i$  reward, instead of using the solution quality straightforwardly, we calculate the *quality improvement*, obtained with the configuration  $C_i$ . When the search process converges towards the global optimum, the improvement value tends to decrease, since the amount of

significantly better solutions drops. Using the improvement values directly could confuse the learning models and, therefore, cause the prediction quality to struggle. To resolve this issue, the relative improvement (RI) of solution quality is calculated:

$$RI = \frac{S_{i-1} - S_i}{S_{i-1}} \quad (3.1)$$

In Equation (3.1)  $S_{i-1}$  and  $S_i$  are the solution qualities before and after  $i^{th}$  iteration respectively.

The evaluated  $C_i \rightarrow RI$  pairs in previous iterations are then used to predict a configuration for the next iteration  $C_{i+1}$ . Please note, here we utilize the notion of *sliding learning window* to follow a possibly changing trends of optimization process, therefore, we use only N (pcs., or %) of the latest available  $C_i \rightarrow RI$  pairs. Also, we made two other decisions for the sampling process: (1) hide the search space shape and (2) use the surrogate models for finding configurations that lead to the highest RI.

After sampling the  $C_{i+1}$  configuration, we set it as the solver's parameters. To proceed with the solving process, we initiate the solver with the solutions obtained at  $i - 1$  iteration as well.

When it comes to the algorithm selection problem (discussed in Section 2.2.5), we treat the solver type itself as a subject of parameter control and use the proposed RL approach to estimate the best performing algorithm. However, when we add the solver type as a parameter, the resulting search space becomes sparse and requires a special treatment. Two commonly used approaches for tackling this problem exist. The first [41, 58, 93] requires special type of learning models, while the second [79] suggests the problem transformation in a way of excluding the undesired characteristics.

During the review of model-based parameter tuning approaches (Section 2.3.1), we made a conclusion that most of the reviewed systems follow strictly the first idea. For instance, the surrogate models in BOHB [41] and BRISE [93] use the Bayesian probability density models. Those surrogates could naturally fit to the sparse search spaces (described in the following section), but the proposed approaches are not able to make the predictions effectively, since the most of predicted configurations will violate the dependencies. As an example, imagine after  $i^{th}$  iteration, the surrogate models learn about two superior parameters: one indicates a well-performing heuristic type (genetic algorithm), the other – an effective configuration for another algorithm type (an exponential cooling rate for simulated annealing). In this case, the reviewed systems sampling methods will tend to predict invalid configurations with those two parameter values.

In this thesis we adapt the second approach of problem transformation used in [79] for sampling the valid configurations only. The following section depicts a required preparation step, made in the search space, while Section 3.3 is dedicated to the prediction process.

## 3.2 Search Space Structure

When the time comes to selecting not only the solver parameters but also the solver itself, the united search space can no longer be presented as a ‘flat’ set of parameters since it tends to produce a vast amount of invalid parameter combinations. Let us estimate the number of all possible configurations in comparison to the amount of meaningful ones. Suppose, we have the  $N_s$  number solvers, each exposing the  $N_{s,p}$  number of hyper-parameters with the  $N_{s,p,v}$  number possible values. The aggregated quantity of configurations  $N_c$  in the disjoint search spaces is calculated as a number of possible combinations using Equation (3.2).

$$N_c = N_s \cdot \prod_1^{N_{s,p}} N_{s,p,v} \quad (3.2)$$

However, if we decide to tune (or rather to control) the solver type itself, the resulting quantity of possible configurations is calculated using Equation (3.3).

$$N_c = \prod_1^{N_s} \prod_1^{N_{s,p}} N_{s,p,v} \quad (3.3)$$

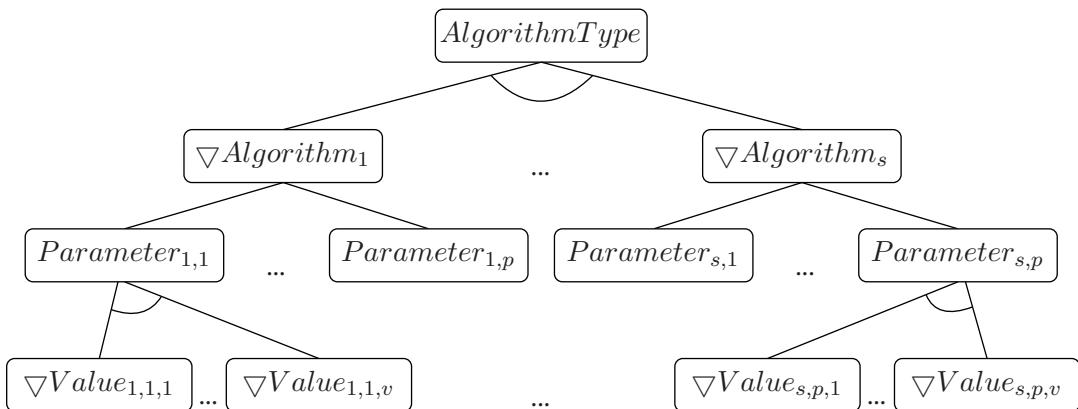
For the better intuition, let's try some numbers. By setting all  $N_s = N_{s,p} = N_{s,p,v} = 3$  (a rather small example), the number of configurations estimated separately for each solver equals to  $N_c = 81$  (Equation (3.2)). However, if we join the parameter spaces of all three solvers, Equation (3.3) shows a significant growth in the search space size:  $N_c = 19683$ . Note, the number of *unique and valid* configurations remains the same; thus, in the joint space it is only  $\approx 0.4\%$ . By setting the  $N_s = N_{s,p} = N_{s,p,v} = 4$ , this number drops to  $\approx 9 \cdot 10^{-8}\%$ . It could decrease even further if the dependencies among hyper-parameters exist. In such case, the predictive abilities of models may straggle.

To overcome this, we utilize a similar to used in IRACE [79] framework idea: *explicitly indicate the dependencies as parent-child relationships among the search space entities, firstly predicting the parent parameter, and the children afterwards*. This gives us an opportunity to treat the algorithm type as a regular categorical parameter, making the search space structure uniform and simplifying the prediction process.

This decision sets the following search space *structural requirements*:

- S.R.1 The **parent-child relationship** must describe dependencies between different parameter types.
- S.R.2 The **uniform parameter type** simplifies the structure and hides the domain-specific intent of each parameter; therefore, algorithm type and its hyper-parameters are treated in the same way.
- S.R.3 The **value-specific dependencies** describe a concrete parent value(s), when the child should be exposed. For instance, the parameter *algorithm type* has a number of possible values, each requiring an own set of hyper-parameters, which should remain hidden for the other solver types.

Figure 3.1 shows an example of such a search space with  $s$  algorithm types, each having  $p$  parameters with  $v$  possible values. The entities with triangles  $\nabla$ , namely, the concrete values of parameters, form the joint-points to which the other parameters could be linked.

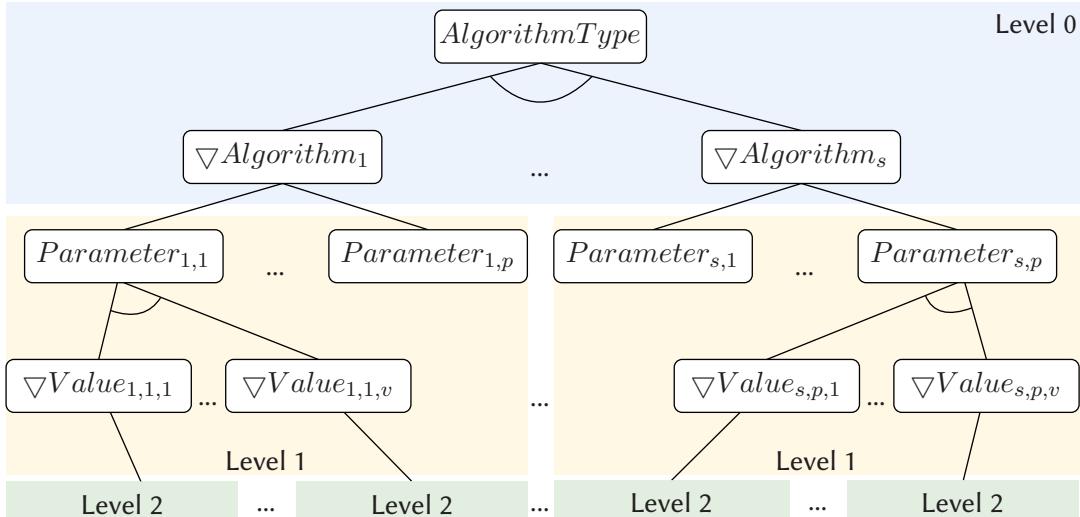


**Figure 3.1** Search space representation.

### 3.3 Parameter Prediction Process

After formalizing the search space structural requirements, let us switch to the prediction process and define the *functional requirements* for both search space and prediction process, which should be fulfilled to decouple the learning models from the complex search space shape.

The idea of this decoupling lays in resolving the value-specific dependencies among the parameters in a step-wise prediction approach. To do so, we firstly predict the parent value, which in case of the hyper-heuristic is a low-level heuristic type (Level 0 in Figure 3.2). Afterwards, the search space must expose the parameters of this solver only, ignoring the others (Level 1 in Figure 3.2). The dependencies among exposed parameters, are then handled in the same way (Level 2 and further in Figure 3.2).



**Figure 3.2** Level-wise prediction process.

The prediction on each level is performed in three main steps: (1) filtering the required for this level information, (2) building the surrogate model and (3) finding the best performing parameters on this level.

While building the surrogates and making the predictions, we ignore the information from levels above and below with the motivation to simplify the overall process and hide the search space structure. Also, when we predict on the parent level, it will not change on the descendant levels thus, we do not need to operate useless static information. While the backward ignorance is clear, the forward data omission puts a restriction on the surrogate models. Cutting off the parameter values from the deeper levels, we may get the data points with the same current level parameters values (also called as *features* in machine learning) but different results (*labels*). Thus, only those surrogate models should be used on such level(s), which will not be confused by the multi-valued dependencies in data (when the same input result in different outputs). During the implementation description in Section 4.3.3 we clarify, which models are the better choice in such cases and implement one of the promising.

Certainly, during the problem solving, the quality trends among parameter values may change. For instance, at later stages the domination of one solver could be declined in comparison to other. Or, the previously best-performing parameter values are not as good and should be replaced by the other. These changes may be caused by the various reasons, which we are not tackling. Instead, the old trends should be left out by some forgetting mechanism.

At this point, let us summarize the functional requirements.

- **In the search space we need:**

- S.F.R.1 The **data filtering mechanism**, which will be used to find out only those feature-label pairs, which can be utilized to learn the dependencies on current level.
- S.F.R.2 The **sampling propagation mechanism**, which will be used to randomly sample the parameter values for the next level taking into account currently available parameter values, which is required to expose the parameters after predicting on current level.
- S.F.R.3 The **parameter description mechanism**, which will provide the information about a type and possible values for the given parameters. This knowledge will later be used by the models for making the parameters values prediction.
- S.F.R.4 The **configuration validation mechanism**, which will find out, whether the parameter ranges are not violated by the selected values (flat validation), and whether for all selected values the dependent (exposed) parameters are selected properly as well (deep validation).

- **In the prediction models:**

- P.F.R.1 The **model encapsulation mechanism**, which should aggregate and hide the level-wise approach of the search space traversal and the feature ignorance as well. On contrary, it should rely on underlying models for making the prediction.
- P.F.R.2 The **model unification mechanism**, which is required for the system variability in terms of the learning and sampling algorithms.
- P.F.R.3 The **information forgetting mechanism**, which is required to follow only the recent trends among the parameter values dependencies.

## 3.4 Low Level Heuristics

As we discussed during the hyper-heuristics review in Section 2.2.5, they are built of two main components — the high level heuristic (HLH) and the low level heuristic (LLH). Note the used *solver type* term in this Chapter is nothing else but the LLH in hyper-heuristic. The previous two sections were dedicated to the search space and prediction models description, which form the logical components of the HLH. No hyper-heuristic could work without LLH, therefore, in this section we discuss the requirements for the low-level heuristics.

The proposed idea of the MAPE-K reinforcement learning application, implies the usage of anytime algorithms (see classification of solvers in Section 2.1.2). They may be implemented in various frameworks or even programming languages, the only requirement is to expose a common interface.

Firstly, we want these algorithms to continue their solving process from the previously found solution but not to start the process from scratch. Before the start, they should accept the predicted by HLH hyper-parameters, and the previously reached solution(s) (possibly, by the other solver).

Secondly, after the algorithm execution, the solution quality should be estimated and reported to the HLH to proceed with the RL.

Both actions should be performed in the implementation independent way, therefore, following a pre-defined shared interface, described above. We discuss it in Section 4.4, dedicated to LLH implementation.

## 3.5 Conclusion of concept

When the requirements, specified for the search space and the prediction process are fulfilled, it provides a certain level of overall system flexibility in the following use-cases:

1. The **parameter tuning** case is possible, if one builds a search space of the single LLH, its hyper-parameters, and disables the solution transfer between the iterations.
2. The **parameter control** case is possible, if one builds a search space of the single LLH, its hyper-parameters, and enables the solution transfer between the iterations.
3. The **off-line selection hyper-heuristic** is possible, if one builds a search space of the multiple LLHs, and disables the solution transfer between iterations. In this case, the LLHs will be used with the static hyper-parameters.
4. The **on-line selection hyper-heuristic** is possible, if one builds a search space of the multiple LLHs, and enables the solution transfer between iterations. In this case, the LLHs will be used with the static hyper-parameters as well but seed with the solutions.
5. The **on-line selection hyper-heuristic with parameter control** is possible by building the search space of multiple LLHs, their hyper-parameters and enabling the solution transfer between iterations.

Please note that the off-line cases estimate the solution quality directly, while the on-line cases use the relative solution quality improvement.

It is worth to mention that the proposed structure of search space representation is similar to the *feature model*, used to describe the software product lines (SPL) [104]. In Figure 3.1 and Figure 3.2 we used the notions from SPL feature models to denote an *alternative* parameter values. The process of configuration construction within a search space can be referred as the *staged configuration* in SPL.

# 4 Implementation Details

In this Chapter we dive into the development description of listed in Chapter 3 requirements.

The best practice in software engineering is to minimize an implementation effort reusing the already existing and well-tested code. With this idea in mind we select one of reviewed in Section 2.3.1 open-source parameter tuning frameworks as the code basis for desired hyper-heuristic. We are also planning to reuse the existing low level heuristics (LLH) implementation from other frameworks. While the LLH-basis may be used almost out-of-box, the HLH-basis requires changes to be applicable in our case.

In Section 4.1 we analyze the parameter tuning frameworks from a perspective of required effort to implement listed in Section 3.3 HLH characteristics. In Section 4.1.2 we conclude the analysis selecting the most suited HLH code basis. Afterwards, we split the HLH implementation description into two logical parts, as we have done during the concept description. In Section 4.2 we discuss the search space development, while Section 4.3 is dedicated to the prediction process. Finally, in Section 4.4 we perform a similar code basis selection for LLH, present a set of reused meta-heuristics, their adaptations and the process of importing them in our system.

## 4.1 Hyper-Heuristics Code Base Selection

Before starting with the framework analysis, let us firstly outline the important characteristics from the implementation perspective.

The first two crucial criteria are the framework *variability* and *extensibility*. The desired HLH should be easily variable in terms of changing such functionality as the learning models or the termination criteria to use a new one. We are also planning to use a possibly different models for the LLH selection and parameters control therefore, the code basis should be variable in terms of different model usage for each prediction level (see Figure 3.2).

The next is support for the *on-line optimization*. It is a bit complex system characteristic, which we are willing to distinguish. As it turns out, many parameter tuning systems require full evaluation of target system, while others are not, but they run evaluations isolated. In case of the desired hyper-heuristic, we treat the configuration evaluation as a trial to improve the problem solution using a particular LLH and tuning its parameters. It implies an important system ability to tackle the optimization problem (OP) using reinforcement learning approaches (Section 3.1).

The final characteristic is the *conditional parameters* support. Since, it is a complex feature laying not only in the search space but also in the prediction process, we pay a close attention to both of them.

### 4.1.1 Parameter Tuning Frameworks Analysis

**SMACv3** We begin our review with the implementation of Sequential Model-based Algorithm Configuration framework, distributed under the BSD-3 license.

The idea of SMACv3 lays in an enhancement of ROAR mechanism with the model-based sampling algorithm.

The ROAR mechanism is a derivative from the FocusedILS algorithm (solver in the parameter tuning framework ParamILS [59]) where each evaluation of a new candidate solution on problem instance

#### 4 Implementation Details

performed sequentially and in isolation. Since the ROAR evaluation strategy is also used in SMACv3, we expect it to require much effort to enable system solving the problem on-line.

As we mention in Section 2.3.2, the underlying surrogate model in SMACv3 is selected statically among random forest or Gaussian process kernel density estimator. Both models could naturally fit complex dependencies among parameters. To sample next configuration, the *one-exchange* neighborhood of the best found so far configuration is traversed using the surrogate model and the expected improvement estimations. An ability of both surrogates to fit a sparse search space is promising, and the usage of expected improvement guarantees to converge the search process to the global optimum given enough time. However, the major drawback in this system is a lack of abilities to include the conditional dependencies between parameters into the sampling process. In fact, the used here search space representation framework ConfigSpace [78] is able to specify the dependencies among hyper-parameters. But, to the best of our knowledge, the one-exchange neighborhood used as sample mechanism in SMACv3, is unaware of the dependencies therefore, violates them during the parameters sampling resulting in illegal combinations. Those cases are controlled and rejected by the ConfigSpace, but we believe that in case of sparse search spaces it could lead to ineffective sampling and struggling in system predictive abilities.

Unfortunately, we did not find any officially published empirical studies of such cases and can only make guesses based on our own intuition, but SMACv3 developers advises for operation in such cases<sup>1</sup> may serve as an evidence to our assumptions correctness. One of the possible solutions here could be the usage of a conditional-aware one-exchange neighborhood definition for sampling process.

**IRACE** This framework implements the iterated racing algorithm to evaluate a set of configurations during the parameter tuning session (Section 2.3.2). The software is distributed under the GNU General Public License with an open source code.

The framework uses a *Friedman test* [28], or as an alternative *paired t-test* for statistical analysis of racing in parallel configuration. As the surrogate models, IRACE uses the probability distributions of those parameter values, which shown to be good during the racing step. The prediction process is defined as the step-wise sampling in previously derived distributions. It elegantly handles the conditions among parameters and illuminates the possibility of invalid configuration appearance. However, we found it to be static in terms of variability and extensibility on the learning mechanisms.

In terms of parallel evaluations, the algorithm utilizes all available resources at the beginning of each racing step, but as the process continues fewer evaluations are executed simultaneously therefore, the available resources are idling and not utilized completely at all steps of IRACE execution.

For the on-line problem solving, let us discuss the racing algorithm. As we described in Section 2.3.2, this step is executed with (1) a set of TS configurations sampled for evaluation and (2) a benchmark set of optimization problems. Afterwards, the TSs are starting to solve the problem set under each configuration, while the racing algorithm terminates worst-performing configurations. In case of hyper-heuristic, it is possible to use a single problem instance and the divided into parts TS running time, which at each pause synchronize the current solutions to proceed with the best found. Doing so, it will be possible to adapt the system for on-line problem solving however, the granularity of parameter control will be reduced. The reason for such reduction is the amount of information obtained after each race: only the best configurations are reported, leaving the performance evidences of the others behind. We believe, this information may be used to create a more precise surrogate models (for instance, TPE).

**HpBandSter** As we discussed in Section 2.3.2, HpBandSter is an implementation of BOHB algorithm, which turns to be a hybridization of Hyperband and Bayesian Optimization approaches.

---

<sup>1</sup>Visit SMACv3 repository <https://github.com/automl/SMAC3/issues/403>

A role of Hyperband in this duet is the configuration evaluation and comparison, while the Bayesian Tree Parzen Estimator (TPE) suggests which configuration to evaluate next. The idea behind this combination lays in elimination of weak sides in each algorithm with strengths of the other. For instance, in original Hyperband the configuration sampling is made uniformly at random, which results in a slow converge of an optimization process. As for the BO TPE, a drawback here lays in a configuration evaluation. Naïve Bayesian optimization approaches do not take into account the early evidences about the TS performance. Thus, even when the proposed configuration results in a poor starting and intermediate TS performance (which may be an evidence of a weak final performance), BO still continues TS execution. These facts motivated authors to merge those two algorithms to create one for parameter tuning with strong anytime (HB) and final (BO) performance. The resulting hybrid effectively uses available computational resources in parallel (HB) in combination with scalable and robust learning mechanisms (BO).

Let us discuss the process of handling the conditions between hyper-parameters. SMACv3 and HpBandSter as well use ConfigSpace framework for search space representation. As we discussed in SMACv3 description above, ConfigSpace naturally allows to encode the dependencies and conditions among parameters. The TPE learning models are also able to fit somehow these dependencies by means of the *impuration* mechanism[75]. Shortly saying, when fitting the surrogate models, the disabled parameters (or their values) are replaced with their default values. Later, while building the surrogate models those default values are ignored therefore, the probability densities still represent a proper parameter values distributions. However, consider an appearance of two configurations families:  $C_1$  and  $C_2$ , such that some parameter  $P_i$  is forbidden in  $C_1$  but is required in  $C_2$ . On contrary, the other parameter  $P_j$  is required in  $C_1$  but forbidden in  $C_2$ . If these configuration families are turn to be superior, the resulting probability densities will be biased towards  $P_i$  and  $P_j$  values. As a consequence, the proposed prediction mechanism will sample non-default parameter values for both  $P_i$  and  $P_j$ , which results in the configurations with violated parameter dependencies. The sparser the search space, the more harming an effect will be in a prediction performance. One possible treatment here is to change the sampling process introducing an intermediate layer, which will perform a parameter prediction in level-wise approach suggested in Section 3.3.

**BRISEv2** BRISEv2 is a software product line (SPL), created with an aim at solving the expensive optimization problems in general and for the parameter tuning in particular (Section 2.3.2).

The advantage of BRISEv2 over other systems comes from its *main-node* modular design. It is a set of cooperating core entities (Experiment, Search Space and Configuration) with other non-core entities, exposed to user for variability. The prediction models, termination criteria, outliers detectors, repetition strategies, etc. are representatives of these non-core and variable components. A number of implementations are provided out-of-the-box for all variable entities, but we focus our attention only to the implemented sampling process. The reason of such a greedy review is that the underlying search space representation is carried out by the same ConfigSpace, while the provided surrogate models are ridge regression model with polynomial features and Bayesian Tree Parzen Estimator (TPE). We are not going to repeat ourselves reviewing the ConfigSpace + TPE combination, but we have to put a few words about the ridge regression.

Ridge is the machine learning linear regression model with regularization [55]. Being a linear model, its abilities to fit a sparse search spaces is poor therefore, the machine learning community are suggested to treat such cases with *conditional linear regression models* [24]. The underlying idea is to split the search space into sub-search spaces and build a separate regression model there. But, to the best of our knowledge, this approach is not built-in into the used in BRISEv2 ridge regression model.

As for the on-line problem solving support, the routine of an optimization process, implemented in

## 4 Implementation Details

BRISEv2 is nothing else than a reinforcement learning. After each new obtained evidence (configuration), a new surrogate model is built to react on the learning process by predicting the next configuration. This makes the on-line parameter tuning approach, presented in Section 3.1 embedding into BRISEv2 much easier.

### 4.1.2 Conclusion on Code Base

The most among reviewed parameter tuning systems share the same SMBO approach for problem solving. They utilize a rather similar techniques for building the surrogate models and making the predictions however, the different system architectures are implemented.

To sum up our review, we use a term *quality* to aggregate both (1) the provided out-of-the-box desired characteristic support and (2) the required effort to adapt it, if necessary. For the visual representation, we collect the reviewed characteristic qualities in each software framework into Table 4.1.

The quality estimates are quantized into three ordinal values:

1. **Poor** quality means the weak characteristic support and much effort required to improve it.
2. **Average** quality means the weak characteristic support and requires less amount of effort to provide it.
3. **Good** quality means a good out-of-the-box characteristic support, and requires minor or no changes at all.

**Table 4.1** Code basis candidate systems analysis.

Characteristic	SMACv3	IRACE	HpBandSter	BRISEv2
Variability & extensibility	Average	Poor	Average	Good
On-line optimization	Average	Average	Average	Average
Conditional parameters	Poor	Good	Poor	Poor

Among the reviewed software systems, the majority were created as an implementation of some concrete algorithm (or a combination of algorithms), which results in the reduction of the system flexibility. Every reviewed framework requires much adaptation effort and preparation steps, which we will discuss in upcoming sections. Between such features as a proper support of conditional parameters vs variability and extensibility, the former plays a settle role in our case. Thus, from our perspective, BRISEv2 is the most promising candidate for the hyper-heuristic with parameter control creation.

## 4.2 Search Space

Previously, in Section 3.2 we presented a set of structural requirements for the search space representation: parent-child relationship should be presented explicitly, supporting different parameter types in a values-specific approach. To support the prediction process, in Section 3.3 we listed the functional requirements in a form of mechanisms: data filtering, sampling propagation, parameter description and configuration verification.

In this section we (1) analyze the available ConfigSpace framework, how it fits to our requirements and (2) decide whether to use it or to set it aside to perform our own search space representation implementation.

### 4.2.1 Base Version Description

From the structural point of view, in ConfigSpace<sup>1</sup> the parameter coupling is made implying parent-child relationship, which fit into our requirements. The set of parameter types suite the most of use-cases and the value-specific dependencies are supported as well. Thus, the structural requirements S.R.1, S.R.2 and S.R.3 are perfectly met.

When it comes to the functional requirements, ConfigSpace samples random configurations in a completion approach. In other words, there is no step-wise configuration construction, but only the final and valid ones are produced. To the best of our knowledge, there is no straightforward way to expose the underlying parent-child dependencies among parameters to distinguish a non-dependent, which is required for the prediction models, except of carrying them on a side and evaluating manually. As a consequence, the data filtering mechanism should be implemented on a side and the sampling propagation as well. The framework exposes an ability to validate a fully created configuration but not a set of parameters (flat validation). It worth mo mention that the configuration in this case turns to be a proprietary class. As for the parameter description, the amount of exposed knowledge is satisfying. Here we conclude that the functional requirements, except S.F.R.3, are not met.

As the conclusion, we decided to set aside the 3<sup>rd</sup> party ConfigSpace framework. The reason for doing so is the amount of adaptation effort and the usage of foreign dependencies, more concretely: (1) it requires much adaptation effort and implies its usage as a core entity in BRISEv2, (2) it obligates us to replace the other core entity — Configuration, (3) it forces us to use a third proprietary entity — Hyperparameter.

### 4.2.2 Search Space Implementation

From the structural requirements we know that the parameters in search space should be treated uniformly. The desired feature tree shape is perfectly handled by the *composite* design pattern. With this idea in mind, we construct the search space as a composite *Hyperparameter* object with four possible hyper-parameter types: integer and float as numerical, nominal and ordinal as categorical. This fulfilling S.R.2, specified in Section 3.2. An implemented class diagram could be found in Appendix.

Yevhenii: add class diagram in appendix

In the code snippets provided through the explanation we highlight signatures of implemented methods, which fulfills our requirements specified in Chapter 3.

**Search space construction.** The S.R.3 implementation is performed by adding a construction method `add_child_hyperparameter` in the Hyperparameter class (Listing 4.1). It should be called on a parent object, specifying the activation value(s) (`activation_categories` argument) of parent hyper-parameter which are exposing the child.

```

1 class Hyperparameter:
2     ...
3     def add_child_hyperparameter(self, other: Hyperparameter, activation_categories: Iterable[
4         CATEGORY]) -> Hyperparameter:
5         pass
6     ...

```

**Listing 4.1** S.R.1 implementation.

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<sup>1</sup>ConfigSpace GitHub repository: <https://github.com/automl/ConfigSpace>

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Note, currently we support a composite construct only by means of categorical parameter types therefore, requiring a list of activation categories. We postpone a composition on numerical ranges enhancement for the future work, while our current needs do not include such cases.

**Search space role in prediction.** Imagine a number of configurations were already evaluated. For making the prediction in tiered approach, the parameter values on a current level should be selected before moving to the next one. For it, we firstly filter data, which fits to this level by means of S.F.R.1. The filter accepts already chosen parameter values and iterates over the available configurations. At each iteration it finds out, whether the already chosen parameter values (*base\_values*) form a sub-feature-tree of the parameter values under comparison (*target\_values*). It is implemented in form of hyper-parameter instance method *are\_siblings*, presented in Listing 4.2. As the outcome, this method decides, whether should this particular configuration be included into the dataset or not. For instance, if the selected LLH type in *base\_values* is not the same as one in *target\_values*, the result will be negative.

```
1 class Hyperparameter:  
2     ...  
3     def are_siblings(self, base_values: MutableMapping, target_values: MutableMapping) -> bool:  
4         pass  
5     ...
```

**Listing 4.2** S.F.R.1 implementation.

After data filtering, the time comes to find out, which parameter values we must predict. For doing so, the search space, must expose the current level parameters by means of S.F.R.2 implementation in *generate* method in Listing 4.3. Since we always interact with a search space root object, the call to *generate* is executed recursively. If a callee finds itself in *values* argument (which depicts the current *parameter name → random parameter value mapping*), it redirects a call to all *activated* children. If it does not, it adds itself a to the *values* and terminates the recursion.

```
1 class Hyperparameter:  
2     ...  
3     def generate(self, values: MutableMapping) -> None:  
4         pass  
5     ...
```

**Listing 4.3** S.F.R.2 implementation.

A randomly sampled for the current level values are then used for getting a description of current level and using it to (1) cut-off the data from levels above and below (simply selecting the required key-value pairs from the parameter mapping), (2) build the surrogate models and (3) make the prediction.

To build the surrogate models we require an available data (parameters) description. Thus, the S.F.R.3 implementation is performed in method *describe* presented in Listing 4.4. This is once again a recursive call, which terminates when the parameter object can not find the activated children or himself in the provided *values*.

The resulting description contains a mapping from parameter name to its type and the range of possible values: either a set of categories for categorical, or lower and upper boundaries for numerical types.

```
1 class Hyperparameter:  
2     ...  
3     def describe(self, values: MutableMapping) -> Description:  
4         pass  
5     ...
```

**Listing 4.4** S.F.R.3 implementation.

This description is then used by the prediction models for building surrogates and making the predictions, which will replace a randomly sampled parameter values obtained after *generate* method call.

The described above process is controlled by S.F.R.4, implemented as method *validate*, presented in Listing 4.5. The control occurs in two places. Firstly, before starting a new loop of *filter* → *propagate* → *describe* → *predict*, we check whether the construction process is finished (deep validation), meaning all parameter values were chosen, and we have a valid configuration. And secondly, after making the prediction by models (flat validation). In the later case, if the conditions are violated, the predicted values are discarded and sampled randomly. Since the sampling process implemented in hyper-parameters guarantees to provide valid parameter values, after maximally  $N$  mentioned above loops, we derive a new and valid configuration, where  $N$  is a maximal depth in the defined search space.

```

1 class Hyperparameter:
2 ...
3     def validate(self, values: MutableMapping, recursive: bool) -> bool: pass
4 ...

```

**Listing 4.5** S.F.R.4 implementation.

## 4.3 Prediction Process

The next step is an investigation and planning of prediction logic adaptation. In Section 4.1.1 we learned that BRISEv2 provides two learning models: Bayesian tree parzen estimator (TPE) and ridge linear regression. Both models could be used as surrogates within a tiered parameter values sampling however, this process should be generalized.

P.F.R.1 implies the addition of entity, which will encapsulate the prediction process, described in Section 4.2.2. We also make this entity responsible for the forgetting strategy therefore, fulfilling P.F.R.3. Both requirements are not yet fulfilled in BRISEv2, so we must implement them from scratch.

As for P.F.R.2, the current implementation of BRISEv2 already provides some level of model unification using a required interface, which, however, is too coarse-grained and implies binding of three logical steps: data preprocessing, surrogate models creation and optimization with surrogates to predict a next configuration.

The following parts of prediction logic description are dedicated to (1) P.F.R.1 + P.F.R.3 implementation in form of *Predictor* entity and P.F.R.2 in form of decoupled data preprocessing mechanism and the prediction models. Note, the current implementation does not solve the problem of binding surrogate models creation and optimization over them. We postpone the solution for future work. Instead, we implement a simple random search over the surrogate models since as mentioned in Section 2.3.1, given enough evaluations, the random search results becomes comparable to model-based algorithms. We are allowed to do so, since the evaluations over surrogate models are cheap.

### 4.3.1 Predictor Entity

In addition to previously listed logic during the search space description, a role of predictor is also to decouple learning models from (1) feature tree shaped search space and (2) other core entities such as Configuration. Besides the static search space, the input to predictor is the available in a moment data (evaluated configurations), while the desired output is a configuration. Listing 4.6 provides a pseudo-code of predictor implementation.

To implement the information forgetting mechanism, we refer the idea similar to mentioned in [42] *sliding window*. According to it, the predictor should use specified in a settings number of the latest

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configurations as information for surrogate models creation. We modify this logic, allowing user to specify not only a static number, but also a percentage of the latest configurations (line 3), which fulfills the P.F.R.3. Naturally, more exotic approaches may arise such as the statistical analysis to estimate a required configuration number or the other type of meta-learning, but we leave it out of this thesis scope.

The next question is a decoupling of prediction models from the search space structure by means off fulfilling P.F.R.1. As we discussed in Section 4.2.2, to predict a parameter values on each level, the models should be built on only related to this level information. For doing so, after filtering the data (line 6), predictor propagates the prediction from previous level to a current one (line 7), removes the parameters values from other levels and derive a description for the obtained parameters (line 9). Independently, we instantiate a specified in the predictor settings surrogate model for this level and fit it with the related information (lines 11-13). Afterwards, we make a prediction and check if the search space boundaries are not violated (lines 16-17). If either model can not properly fit the data, or the prediction is invalid, we keep the parameter values sampled randomly (lines 18-20).

```

1  class Predictor:
2      def predict(measured_configurations):
3          # P.F.R. 3
4          level_configurations = trim_in_window(measured_configurations)
5          prediction = Mapping()
6
7          # Deep validation
8          while not search_space.validate(prediction, recursive=True):
9
10             # Filtering the data
11             level_configurations = filter(search_space.are_siblings(prediction, x), level_configurations)
12
13             # Propagate the prediction
14             randomly_generated = search_space.generate(prediction)
15
16             # Derive the level description
17             full_description = search_space.describe(randomly_generated)
18             level_description = trim_previous_levels(description, prediction)
19
20             # Cut-off data and build models
21             data = trim_accodring_to_description(level_configurations, level_description)
22             model = get_current_level_model()
23             model.build(data, level_description)
24
25             # Level prediction and flat validation
26             if model.is_built():
27                 level_prediction = model.predict()
28                 if not search_space.validate(level_prediction, recursive=False):
29                     level_prediction = randomly_generated
30             else:
31                 level_prediction = randomly_generated
32
33     return Configuration(prediction)
```

**Listing 4.6** P.F.R.1 + P.F.R.3 implementation pseudo-code.

For the sake of simplicity we omit some minor implementation details and provide the description of (1) data preprocessing and (2) available surrogate models in the Sections below.

### 4.3.2 Data Preprocessing

The data preprocessing concepts may be split into two complementary parts: an obligatory data encoding and optional data transformation. The first is required to make the underlying model compatible with the provided data. Imagine the parameters values to be a simple strings. Having a surrogate model, which is constructed as the probability densities of parameter values (TPE), one should first derive a numeric data encoding those string parameter values. The second concept is applied on a data, which is already suitable. This is usually done to improve an available surrogate model accuracy by reducing the bias, variance or both. An example of encoding could be a simple indexing of all possible string values. It is performed as a replacement of strings by their indexes during the data preprocessing. On a contrary, for the transformation one may try to add the polynomial features to already available data with an aim to disclose more complex dependencies.

The decision of which encoding to use is often defined by the learning model as a choice among several applicable variants. On contrary, the decision on data transformation is carried out by user and depends on the concrete use-case and experience.

In all reviewed parameter tuning systems, the data preprocessing is implemented only by means of an obligatory for underlying learning models encoding and omitting the possible data transformation. In most cases, it is implemented as a simple label enumeration and not encapsulated at all (as an example, check ConfigSpace's Configuration method `get_array`<sup>1</sup>). Being the most straightforward approach, this encoding may introduce a non-existing patterns in categorical data. For instance, having 3 possible LLH types: genetic algorithm, simulated annealing and evolution strategy, the label encoding will encode such parameter values to numbers 0, 1 and 2 respectively. When such data is passed to the surrogate for learning, some models may interpret it as the GA is closer to SA than to ES within a search space. To prevent this, the other preprocessing should be used for instance, binary encoding.

In any case, the intent of this discussion is to provide the reader with an insight of data preprocessing importance, but the discussion of possible cases and their influence are out of this thesis scope. Here instead we decided to gain a certain level of flexibility by providing a uniformed wrapper for the preprocessing routines implemented in Scikit-learn machine learning framework [91].

We omit the details of wrapper implementation since it is a single object decorator, instantiated with the provided scikit-learn preprocessing unit. The wrapper is executed each time before the actual surrogate performs learning and after making the prediction to inverse the transformation.

To make models and preprocessing units interfaces compatible we store the level information in form of DataFrames – tabular data representation in Pandas framework<sup>2</sup>. In Listing 4.6 line 21 denotes a step of configuration objects transformation to DataFrame, keeping only the current level features.

### 4.3.3 Prediction Models

As a derivative from predictor implementation, the underlying prediction models should expose a unified interface and behavior. Due to per-level prediction process implementation, the surrogate models are acting on a search space levels without forbidding dependencies. This enables us to use in addition to previously discussed surrogates a vast range of other learning algorithms, for instance, linear regression models. In fact, the previously used in BRISv2 ridge regression with polynomial features is nothing else then a combination of data preprocessing step from the Section above with the ridge regression model from Scikit-learn framework. Later in this Section, we discuss an implementation of unified wrapper for Scikit-learn linear models.

---

<sup>1</sup>ConfigSpace documentation <https://automl.github.io/ConfigSpace/master/API-Doc.html>

<sup>2</sup>Pandas Github repository <https://github.com/pandas-dev/pandas>

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As a step further, we also add the implementation of multi-armed bandit (MAB) selection strategy proposed in [4]. This is motivated by a great reported performance of the selective hyper-heuristics built on MAB as HLH. It is worth to mention that MAB is applicable only to categorical parameters types.

We also decouple the previously available in BRISEv2 Bayesian TPE from the data preprocessing logic however, no other major changes except refactoring are required. Thus, we do not find a reason for the detained presentation of TPE implementation here.

### Scikit-learn Linear Model Wrapper

Scikit-learn is one among the most popular open-source machine learning frameworks. As a consequence of flexible architecture ( $H \leq T$  framework design pattern), Scikit-learn often plays a central role in other products providing implementations for numerous building blocks for machine learning pipelines. These advantages in combination with a comprehensive documentation result into a large and active framework community<sup>1</sup>.

All available in Scikit-learn linear regressors are implementing the same interface and usage routines. For instance, before making a prediction, the regression model should be trained on a preprocessed data, providing separate sets of *features* and *labels*. Afterwards, one may use model to make a prediction for unforeseen features and the surrogate will produce a corresponding label according to the learned dependencies. This implies that to find the best parameter combination, one should still solve the optimization problem but with the reduced evaluation cost.

To reuse the available in framework surrogate models we create the wrapper as an object decorator, implementing the required in *Predictor Model* interface. The pseudo-code of this wrapper is presented in Listing 4.7.

During the model creation, we firstly instantiate features and labels preprocessors, and transform the input data (lines 4-6). The underlying process of model building includes also a verification step, which is performed by means of cross-validation: splitting the set of data to  $k$  disjoint folds, training  $k$  model each time excluding one fold for accuracy verification (line 9). If the potential model accuracy is less than predefined threshold — the model is considered to be not accurate enough therefore, we reject it (line 15), forcing the predictor to use the random parameter values. However, if the model is able to perform well, we train it on an entire dataset and store for further usage (lines 12-13).

Later, for making the prediction (if the model was built successfully) we firstly sample features values from this level uniformly at random (line 20). Afterwards, we transform them using the same preprocessing steps, as we applied during the train creation (line 21). Then, using the regression model, we make a prediction for sampled features and transform those predictions back into original labels (lines 23-24). Finally, we select the best feature by means of predicted labels, transform it and return to *Predictor* (lines 26-27).

---

<sup>1</sup>Scikit-learn GitHub repository <https://github.com/scikit-learn/scikit-learn>

```

1 class SklearnModelWrapper(Model):
2     def build_model(features, labels, features_description):
3         # Data preprocessing
4         features_processors, labels_processors = build_processors()
5         transformed_features = features_processors.transform(features)
6         transformed_labels = labels_processors.transform(labels)
7
8         # Model accuracy validation
9         score = cross_validation(model, transformed_features, transformed_labels)
10        if score > threshold:
11            # Training on all available data
12            model.fit(transformed_features, transformed_labels)
13            model_is_built = True
14        else:
15            model_is_built = False
16        return model_is_built
17
18    def predict():
19        # Solving a reduced optimization problem with help of surrogates
20        features = random_sample(features_description)
21        features_transformed = features_processors.transform(features)
22
23        labels_predicted_transformed = model.predict(features_transformed)
24        labels_predicted = labels_processors.inverse_transform(labels_predicted_transformed)
25
26        prediction_transformed = select_by_labels(features_transformed, labels_predicted)
27        prediction = features_processors.inverse_transform(features_transformed_chosen)
28
29    return prediction

```

**Listing 4.7** Scikit-learn linear model wrapper pseudo-code.

## Multi-Armed Bandit

Originally, the multi-armed bandit (MAB) problem was introduced in [98] and defined as follows: for a given set of choices  $c_i$  with unknown stochastic reward values  $r_i$ , which are distributed normally with variance  $v_i$ , the goal is to maximize the accumulated reward, selecting several times among available choices  $c_i$ . The problem obtained its name as an analogy to one-hand slot machines in casino and tackles the well-known exploration vs exploitation dilemma.

In most of the times, MAB is solved by RL approaches, which analyze the already available evidences before performing each next step. In [4] the authors proposed the Upper Confidence Bound algorithm as an intuitive solution: in iteration  $k$ , among available choices select one with a maximal UCB value. The UCB for each category is calculated according to Equation (4.1), where first component  $Q$  is a quality of category under evaluation and represents the exploitation portion of UCB. The second component estimates the exploration portion balancing the number of time each category was selected. The multiplier  $C$  is a balancing coefficient.

$$UCB = Q + C \cdot \sqrt{\frac{2 \log \sum_1^i n_k^i}{n_k}} \quad (4.1)$$

In this work we implement a proposed in [76] Fitness-Rate-Average based MAB (FRAMAB) with two reasons: (1) it is an intuitive and robust approach, (2) according to the benchmarks in [42] it outperforms the other MAB algorithms. In FRAMAB,  $n_k^i$  denotes the overall number of categories, while  $n_k$  is a

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number of times the category under evaluation was selected. The quality estimation  $Q$  in FRAMAB is the average improvement, obtained by the underlying category.

As for the balancing coefficient  $C$ , the authors in [42] were evaluating a range of values between  $10^{-4} \dots 10^{-1}$ . The dominance of  $C$  values for various problem types were different, therefore we expose it to user for configuration.

In addition to the statically defined  $C$  value, we propose a mechanism for  $C$  estimation by means of standard deviation among improvement. The motivation for this is as follows: if there exists an uncertainty in category domination the deviation will be high and therefore, encouraging the exploration portion of UCB values. We do not provide a pseudo-code for this model implementation since it straightly repeats the provided above algorithm description.

### 4.4 Low Level Heuristics

When our HLH is ready to solve an OP, the time comes to provide the tools for solving. A role of LLH in our hyper-heuristic (HH) may play everything from a single heuristic algorithm to the meta-heuristic (MH) or even other HH. As we discussed in Section 2.2.2, nowadays the MH research is referred as the framework growth time. Therefore, we are able not only to reuse a single heuristic but to instantiate a set of underlying heuristics among available in framework. Thus, in this Section we present a review of several toolboxes (meta-heuristic frameworks) with an intent to select the best suited one, implement a facade for framework usage and use the available algorithms as LLHs in our hyper-heuristic.

Before diving into description of available frameworks we briefly outline the LLHs characteristics with respect to which we analyze each framework:

1. **Set of meta-heuristics**, which we will be able to use as LLHs in our HH.
2. **Exposed hyper-parameters**, which are required for LLH tuning. We point it out explicitly, since it happens so that the parameters of an algorithm are exposed not fully.
3. **Set of supported optimization problems**, which will define the applicability of our HH. The wider this set, the more use-cases developed HH is able to tackle. Among them we also separately distinguish the required in our case TSP.
4. **Warm-startup**, which is required to continue the problem solving from previously reached solution. The underlying LLH should not only report finally found solution(s) but also to accept them as the starting points.
5. **Termination criteria**, which is reviewed to control the intermediate results of optimization process by HH. In our system we use the wall-clock time or number of target system evaluations termination to stop the LLH and report the results.

#### 4.4.1 Low Level Heuristics Code Base Selection

We distinguish the following frameworks as the LLH code base: Solid<sup>1</sup>, mlrose<sup>2</sup>, pyTSP<sup>3</sup>, LocalSolver<sup>4</sup>, jMetalPy<sup>5</sup> and jMetal<sup>6</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup>Solid GitHub repository <https://github.com/100/Solid>

<sup>2</sup>mlrose GitHub repository <https://github.com/gkhayes/mlrose>

<sup>3</sup>pyTSP GitHub repository <https://github.com/afourmy/pyTSP>

<sup>4</sup>LocalSolver website <https://localsolver.com>

<sup>5</sup>jMetalPy GitHub repository <https://github.com/jMetal/jMetalPy>

<sup>6</sup>jMetal GitHub repository <https://github.com/jMetal/jMetal>

**Solid.** A framework for a gradient-free optimization. It comprises wide range of MH skeletons with exposed hyper-parameters: genetic algorithm, evolution algorithm, simulated annealing, particle swarm optimization, tabu search, harmony search and stochastic hill climbing. The support of warm-startup is not provided and requires changes in each algorithm as a consequence of the base class absence. As for the termination criteria, algorithms in this framework support the termination after maximal number of TS evaluations and after reaching the desired quality but not a time based. Once again, to add a new termination criteria, one should modify the core of all algorithms. The framework does not provide the problem instances, nor domain-dependent parts of algorithms therefore, to use this framework one will need to carry out not only a domain-specific framework adaptation but also the problem description.

**mlrose.** A framework with implementation of various well-known stochastic optimization algorithms such as: naïve and randomized hill climbing, simulated annealing, genetic and mutual-information-maximizing input clustering (MIMIC) algorithms. Each listed solver is implemented as a separate function with exposed set of hyper-parameters. It is possible to control an initial state, which is handy in our case. As for the implemented OPs, the framework comprises a large set of different types: one max, flip-flop, four and six peaks, continuous peaks, knapsack, traveling salesman, n-queens and max-k color optimization problems. The proposed termination criteria are represented only by one criterion controlling the number of TS evaluations. As in the previous framework, here the algorithms are not sharing the same code basis therefore, it may require much effort for their adaptation in general and to introduce a new termination criteria in particular.

**pyTSP.** A system, specially designed to tackle a traveling salesman optimization problem. Together with visualization techniques, it also provides a wide bunch of different algorithms. Here they are divided into four groups: (1) construction heuristics with the nearest neighbor, the nearest insertion, the farthest insertion and the cheapest insertion algorithms, (2) a linear programming algorithm, (3) simple heuristics among which a pairwise exchange, also known as 2-opt, a node insertion and an edge insertion, and finally (4) a meta-heuristics, represented by the genetic algorithm. As one may expect, the only supported problem type here is the TSP, moreover the representation of problem does not follow a broadly used in research community manner. The other drawbacks of this framework is a partial hard-coding of hyper-parameters and an absence of exposed termination criteria. Also, the construction heuristics by their nature do not expose the possibility to feed them with the initial solutions. However, in some other algorithms the functionality to specify the initial solution is present.

**LocalSolver.** A commercial optimization tool with free academic license. It is implemented in C++, but the API is exposed to such programming languages as Python, C++, Java and C#. The software implements a local search programming paradigm [7, 8] therefore, the algorithm itself and its parameters are not exposed. It is required from the user to provide a solver-specific problem description. Thanks to a detailed documentation, the desired TSP example could be found among the number of other problem instances. Two possible termination criteria are exposed: a wall-clock time and a number of solver iterations. Also, the framework supports a possibility to set an initial solution for the solver therefore, it looks like a good candidate for the LLH. However, our trial to use the tool showed up that the provided academic license could not be easily used within BRISEv2 containerized architecture. A possible work-around is to deploy a license server on a host machine and force workers to register themselves, but we found this to be an expensive implementation task from the perspective of required effort.

**jMetalPy.** An open-source meta-heuristic framework for multi- and single-objective optimizations. Among the provided single-objective algorithms one will find genetic algorithm, evolution strategy, local search (hill climber) and simulated annealing. Even if the list of proposed heuristics is not the largest in comparison to other reviewed frameworks, every implemented algorithm exposes its hyper-parameters for tuning. We also found the code well-structured therefore, in case of required changes they could be made with less effort. A functionality to warm-up the solving process by already obtained solutions is available out-of-the-box. The various termination criteria are ready as well, among which based on the wall-clock time and the number of TS evaluations. The list of supported single-objective optimization problems consists of knapsack, traveling salesman and four synthetic problems: one max, sphere, Rastrigin and subset sum.

**jMetal.** A meta-heuristic framework implemented in Java is an alternative to previously reviewed Python-based jMetalPy. This framework also provides meta-heuristics for multi- and single-objective OP. For later, jMetal developers implemented following algorithms: naïve and covariance matrix adaptation evolution strategies (CMA-ES), genetic, particle swarm (PSO), differential evolution and coral reef optimization algorithms. It is worth to mention that among this list, not all algorithms are universally applicable to wide range of OPs. For instance, CMA-ES, PSO and differential evolution can be applied only to OPs with continuous numeric input such as synthetic mathematical problems. In contrast to implemented in Python brother, jMetal supports only one termination criterion based on number of TS evaluations, and do not support algorithm warm-startup at all. Also, the drawback here is an absence of a proper termination criteria abstraction therefore, the adaptation should affect a framework core.

To sum up our discussion, we aggregate the described characteristics in Table 4.2, which is similar to Table 4.1, presented during the HLH code basis selection. Once again, the characteristics qualities are scored into three ordinal values: poor, average and good with respect to provided functionality and required effort for adaptation.

**Table 4.2** Meta-heuristic frameworks characteristics.

Characteristic	Solid	mIrose	pyTSP	LocalSolver	jMetalPy	jMetal
Set of heuristics	Poor	Poor	Good	N/A	Average	Good
Exposed hyper-parameters	Good	Good	Poor	Poor	Good	Good
Provided OPs	Poor	Good	Poor	Good	Average	Average
Warm-startup support	Poor	Good	Poor	Good	Good	Average
Termination criteria	Average	Poor	Poor	Good	Good	Average

Our ultimate goal is not to reach the best performance in provided solution, but to investigate, whether a proposed concept to solve the problem of algorithm selection and generic parameter control simultaneously using the reinforcement learning is able to outperform the baseline performance measures. Thus, while selecting LLH, the quality of provided heuristics and their hyper-parameters are playing a crucial role. There is no perfect candidate among the reviewed systems since every system requires some sort of adaptation. For our experiments we decided to use three LLH: two MHs from Python-based jMetalPy (simulated annealing and evolution strategy) and one from Java-based jMetal (evolution strategy).

#### 4.4.2 Scope of Low Level Heuristics Adaptation

The selected frameworks propose many algorithm implementations. Since the same people are leading the development process, the overall architecture of both frameworks is somehow similar. Nevertheless,

the proposed features are slightly different. For instance, jMetal does not provide time-based termination, nor warming-up the solver by initial solutions. Therefore, we split the adaptation of frameworks on two parts, one is dedicated to jMetalPy and in the other we discuss jMetal.

**jMetalPy.** During the analysis above, we found out that the provided features are greatly fit our requirements. Even if the lists of implemented MHs and supported OPs are not that wide, we could simply reuse the provided out-of-box implementations. To do so, we implement a framework wrapper (see Listing 4.8), which according to the received task creates a desired instance of the optimization problem type and instantiate the MH solver with provided hyper-parameters (line 3). Later, this wrapper will be called to start a solver execution and report the results in a framework-independent way (line 6). To prevent an expensive problem instances loading during within one run, we cache it in memory (lines 10-11). Also, we cache an expensive I/O introspection calls, which are used to find framework components: algorithms, termination criteria or different algorithm operators such as mutation, selection, crossover, etc. (lines 13-17).

```

1 class JMetalPyWrapper(ILLHWrapper):
2
3     def construct(hyperparameters: Mapping, scenario: Mapping, warm_startup_info: Mapping) -> None:
4         # Constructing meta-heuristics initialization arguments, attach initial solutions
5         pass
6     def run_and_report() -> Mapping:
7         pass
8
9     # Helper methods
10    @lru_cache(maxsize=10, typed=True)
11    def _get_problem(problem_name: str, init_params: HashableMapping) -> Problem:
12        pass
13    @lru_cache(maxsize=10, typed=True)
14    def _get_algorithm_class(mh_name: str) -> jmetal.core.algorithm.Algorithm.__class__:
15        pass
16    @lru_cache(maxsize=10, typed=True)
17    def _get_class_from_module(name: str, module: object) -> Type:
18        pass

```

**Listing 4.8** jMetalPy framework wrapper pseudo-code.

While experimenting with the framework, we found several implementation flaws in listed algorithms. The fixes for these bugs were submitted as contributions<sup>1 2</sup> to implemented open-source framework.

**jMetal.** On contrary to jMetalPy, this framework is implemented in Java therefore, we can not perform the software instantiating in a straightforward way. Note, BRISEv2 workers are based on Python. There are several libraries which allow to execute a Java code within Python: JPype<sup>3</sup>, Py4J<sup>4</sup> or PyJNIus<sup>5</sup>. The usage of one among listed modules enables us to build the same framework wrapper, as we did in previous case. Since currently we are planning to use only one meta-heuristics, the implementation of such wrapper will be unreasonable. Thus, to use a provided in jMetal ES, we pack it into an executable file with exposed parameters and call it from worker script, providing a hyper-parameters settings and warming-up solutions.

---

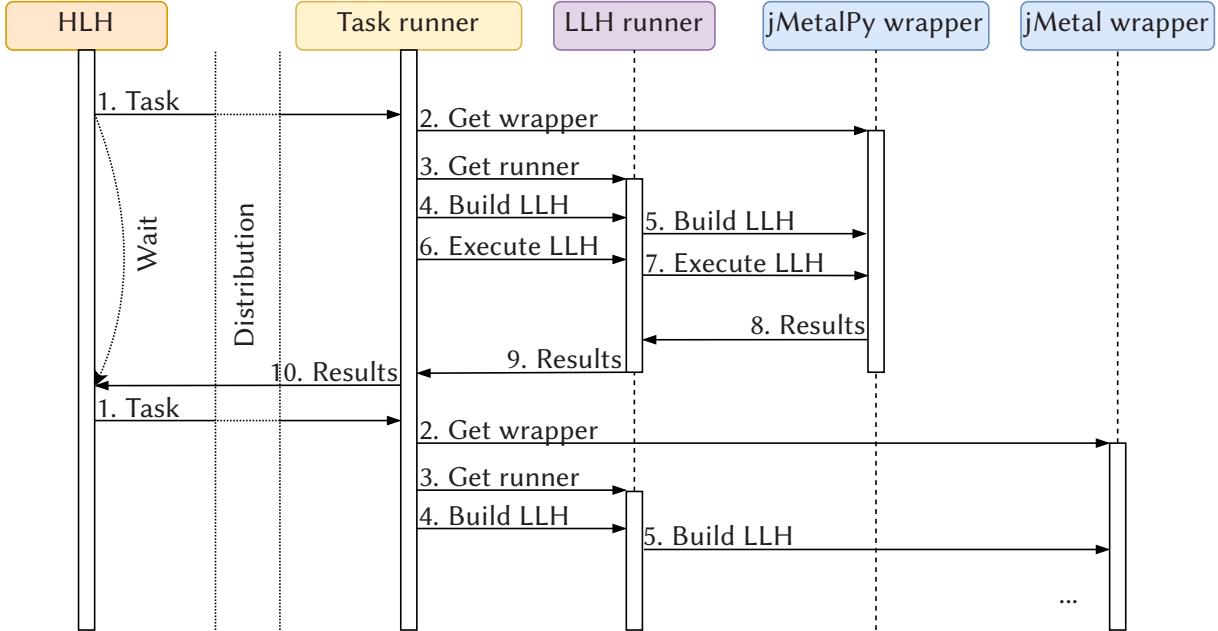
<sup>1</sup>jMetalPy PR 1: <https://github.com/jMetal/jMetalPy/pull/67>

<sup>2</sup>jMetalPy PR 2: <https://github.com/jMetal/jMetalPy/pull/80>

<sup>3</sup>JPype GitHub repository: <https://github.com/jpype-project/jpype/>

<sup>4</sup>Py4J GitHub repository: <https://github.com/bartdag/py4j>

<sup>5</sup>PyJNIus GitHub repository: <https://github.com/kivy/pyjnius>



**Figure 4.1** The low-level heuristic execution process.

#### 4.4.3 Low Level Heuristic Runner

When the MH wrappers are ready, we use them as different execution strategies of low level heuristic with unified `ILLHWrapper` interface. To operate these wrappers we implement a separate entity: *LLH runner*, which forwards the construction and execution commands to the wrapper, tracks the state, make general information logging and pass the results after execution. This enables us to easily scale workers horizontally since they are homogeneous and state-less (not taking into account the caching mechanisms). The resulting process of LLH execution from the worker perspective is represented as a sequence diagram in Figure 4.1. Please note, with an implemented approach the meta-heuristics are reinitialized at each external iteration (between each arrived task). Thus, such algorithms as simulated annealing are ‘restarting’ between tasks dropping such internal parameters as temperature (in SA) to its initial state.

## 4.5 Conclusion

The performed implementation of proposed in Chapter 3 concept was done reusing the existing frameworks. The hyper-heuristic is mostly based on the modular BRISEv2 framework for parameter tuning. We utilize BRISEv2 prediction models in form of reinforcement learning as a HLH, while several homogeneous workers are carrying out the optimization process using LLH. For the LLH implementation we reuse the existing meta-heuristic frameworks jMetalPy and jMetal. Despite the selected code basis, the proposed approach could be implemented in the majority of parameter tuning systems following SMBO approach however, requiring the adaptation according to our review in Section 4.1.

In this particular case, we were forced to set aside the previously used search space representation and add our own to handle the configuration sparseness issue. The intermediate entity *predictor* was added to decouple the search space shape from the learning-prediction process. It allows us to extend the previously available models with the several others: fitness-rate-average based multi-armed bandits for categorical parameter selection and linear regressors from Scikit-learn framework as surrogates

#### *4.5 Conclusion*

models. We also decoupled data preprocessing step and reused the respective tools from Scikit-learn framework.

We believe the proposed implementation will serve well not only as a hyper-heuristic, but also as old good parameter tuning framework.

#### *4 Implementation Details*

# 5 Evaluation

The concepts, proposed in Chapter 3, implemented in Chapter 4 of search space representation, prediction process and based on this generalized parameter control approach, selection hyper-heuristic and the hyper-heuristic with parameter control should be broadly evaluated. The experiments may be performed in number of investigation directions, starting from the developed RL performance evaluation with respect to system configuration and ending with the scalability to different problem sizes.

The structure of this Chapter is as follows. We start with the optimization problem presentation in Section 5.1, a short environment description in Section 5.2 and parameter tuning of low-level heuristics in Section 5.3, which will be used later through our tests. The evaluation process of the proposed concept could be divided into two main parts.

The first part is dedicated to the developed concept analysis in comparison to the baseline and is presented in Section 5.4. We start the concept evaluation with experiments planning in Section 5.4.1 and proceed firstly reviewing the baseline in Section 5.4.2, afterwards the generic parameter control is presented in Section 5.4.3, followed by selection hyper-heuristic with static hyper-parameters in low-level heuristics review in Section 5.4.4 and finally, the selection hyper-heuristic with parameter control in low-level heuristics review is presented in Section 5.4.5.

In the second part of evaluation we investigate an influence of hyper-heuristic with parameter control settings on its performance in Section 5.5. For doing so once again we firstly perform the experiment planning in Section 5.5.1. Afterwards, in Section 5.5.2 we investigate the influence of a learning granularity on a HH-PC performance, in Section 5.5.3 we perform changes of a learning models configurations and in Section 5.5.4 we check the influence of possible changes in LLH behavior.

Finally, Section 5.6 concludes our discussion of the obtained results.

## 5.1 Optimization Problem

Through this thesis we are tackling a vehicle routing problem — the traveling salesman OP, which explanation could be found in Section 2.1.1. Nevertheless, as a reminder we repeat its short definition here. We also include the other details, related to the benchmarks.

“Given a set of cities and the distances among them, find the shortest path, which visits all cities”. It is a combinatorial OP with a number  $n = N!$  of possible solutions. For the benchmarks we use several instances of symmetric TSP (distances  $x_i \rightarrow x_j$  and  $x_j \rightarrow x_i$  are equal) from a publicly available and broadly used benchmark set TSPLIB95<sup>1</sup>. The advantage of choosing this benchmark set lays in a broad compatibility of solvers and frameworks with the proposed standardized problem instance description (including used jMetal and jMetalPy). The TSP in this case is defined as a set of city coordinates therefore. Thus, before starting to solve a problem, the distance matrix should be built, calculating Euclidean distances between cities. For more detailed explanation of TSPLIB95 problem instance files refer to [95].

For our benchmarks we select four problem instances from a simpler case harder they are: *kroA100*, *pr439*, *rat783* and *pla7397* of sizes 100, 439, 783 and 7397 cities respectively. The optimal tours for each of these problem instances were previously obtained by exact solvers and reported in aforementioned

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<sup>1</sup>TSPLIB95 website: <http://comopt.ifii.uni-heidelberg.de/software/TSPLIB95/>

library. While presenting our evaluation results, we refer to them therefore, we present the optimal solution results in Table 5.1.

**Table 5.1** TSP instances optimal tour length.

TSP instance	Optimal tour length
kroA100	21282
pr439	107217
rat783	8806
pla7397	23260728

Please note that the goal of this thesis and the evaluation in particular is not to beat the exact solvers in any case, but to investigate the applicability of proposed generic parameter control concept.

## 5.2 Environment Setup

To run our experiments we use an enhanced by our approach BRISEv2 and deploy it in Docker containers on a single host machine with following characteristics:

- **Hardware:** Fujitsu ESPRIMO P958 computer with 64GB 2667MHz RAM (16GB \* 4 pcs), Intel Core i7-8700 CPU @ 3.2 GHz (6 cores \* 2 threads) and Samsung 1TB SSD.
- **Software:** GNU/Linux Fedora 29 host OS and installed docker version 1.13.1.

We deploy 6 homogeneous BRISEv2 workers with LLHs on the same host machine to carry the problem solving process. We run each experiment 9 times for 15 minutes to obtain the statistical data.

## 5.3 Meta-heuristics Tuning

As we conclude in Section 2.3.4, the goal of parameter control is to reach at least the quality of parameter tuning approaches. Therefore, before running the major set of evaluation experiments, we have to perform a parameter tuning for the underlying LLHs.

### 5.3.1 Parameter Tuning System Configuration.

As a tuning system, we used our the implemented concept but in the tuner mode. As we described in Section 3.5, to enable the parameter tuning mode, we built a search space based on the singe LLH with its parameters. In our particular case it were three search spaces for each underlying meta-heuristic respectively. We also disabled the solution transfer between each configuration, forcing LLH to use the OP each time from scratch.

For each LLH we run the tuning for 8 hours on 10 deployed worker nodes and three minutes for task evaluation. The underlying prediction mechanism was configured to use TPE with 100% window size. We also disabled the repetition strategy (*repeater* entity), leaving each configuration evaluated only once (with one task). We do so since our preliminary experiments have shown that the variance among evaluations is negligible. As one may expect, since the repetition strategy was disabled, outliers detection was turned off as well.

### 5.3.2 Target Optimization Problem and Search Space of Parameters.

The role of target optimization problem was played by one of evaluated TSP instances: *rat783*. We selected this instance because, it is a middle size problem, comparing all the used through evaluation OPs.

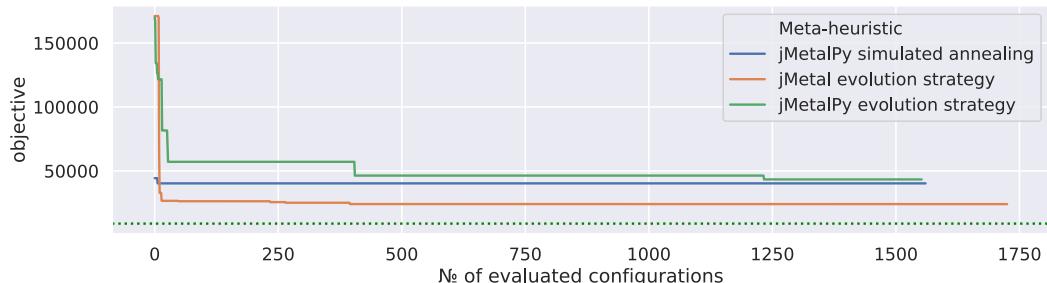
**jMetalPy evolution strategy.** This meta-heuristic is implemented in a framework as naïve evolution strategy however, we found an important recombination mechanism missing therefore, the heuristic is performing mostly by means of the mutation operations. As a configuration, this ES implementation requires providing several hyper-parameters. Integer  $\mu$  (*mu*), which denotes the number of parents in the population, while integer  $\lambda$  (*lambda*) defines the number of offspring. We tune both parameters in ranges [1..1000]. Boolean *elitist* defines the selection strategy, which true value enables elitist selection ( $\mu + \lambda$ ), while false disables the elitist selection ( $\mu, \lambda$ ) (more details in Section 2.2.2). Also, the framework proposes two possible *mutation types* for combinatorial OPs: permutation swap and scramble mutation, which we use for tuning. The respective mutation probability is tuned in range [0..1].

**jMetalPy simulated annealing.** In this meta-heuristic authors defined the solution neighborhood by means of the same mutation operators, mentioned above. Thus, we use them and the same mutation probability range for tuning the SA. Unfortunately, the authors did not provide other but exponential cooling schedule and did not expose parameters temperature or alpha. This is the reason of such tiny parameter space for this MH.

**jMetal evolution strategy.** The set of exposed hyper-parameters is almost the same, as we described for the Python-based MH implementation. The only difference that the mutation is represented only by one type, therefore we exclude it from the parameter space but leaving the mutation probability. All the other parameter ranges are the same as for the defined above ES.

### 5.3.3 Parameter tuning results.

The process of parameter tuning is depicted in Figure 5.1. During the session each MH was probed with at least 1.5k configurations.



**Figure 5.1** The low level heuristics parameter tuning process.

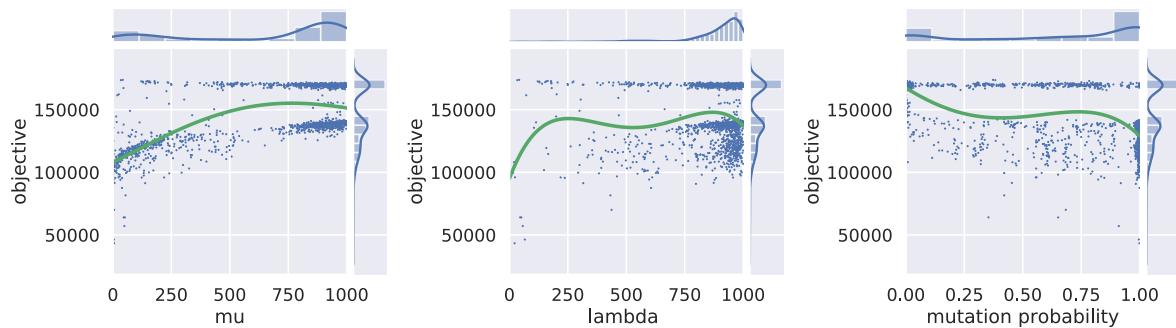
In the figures below we propose a visual analysis of the parameter tuning results. For each meta-heuristic we separately present the numerical and categorical parameters.

The numeric hyper-parameters are showed as scattered points of parameter value (*x-axis*) and the respective objective function result (*y-axis*), obtained for configuration with this parameter value. Although such an isolated approach to analyze data in some cases may be error-prone, still it enough to

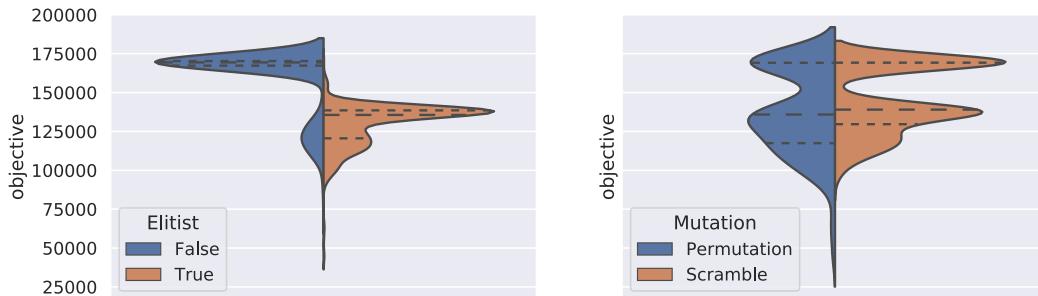
## 5 Evaluation

get a birds-eye view on the existing dependencies. To represent trends among numeric parameter values we draw the regression line ( $4^{th}$  degree) in green. At the top and to the right of the graph presented also the axis value densities. Thus, the density on a right side shows which objective values and how often were obtained, changing the underlying parameter, while the density on the top shows which parameter values were selected more often.

As for the categorical parameters, we plot their values as violin plots. It is a combination of box plot with the addition of a kernel density plot on each side. Since in our case, all categorical parameters of underlying algorithms have only two values, each violin plot shows which results of an objective function and how often were obtained. Using colors we depict different value of underlying parameter, while the shape of violin shows an expected result value and its probability. Inside the figure we also draw three dashed lines. A middle line with long dashes is a median, while lower and upper lines with short dashes show first and third quartiles respectively.



**Figure 5.2** jMetalPy evolution strategy numeric parameters values.



**Figure 5.3** jMetalPy evolution strategy categorical parameters values.

**jMetalPy evolution strategy parameters.** Looking on the Figure 5.2, one will see an explicit dependency between the number of parents (Figure 5.2 parameter  $\mu$ ) and the objective function: less amount of parents are tended to produce the better results. However, the dependency is such clearly observable for the number of offspring (Figure 5.2 parameter  $\lambda$ ). We may see that a high number of offspring does not tend to provide good results, but the number of performed estimations for low  $\lambda$  is not enough to be strongly ensured that this value is better. Yet, even with small amount of observations we may make a guess that low  $\lambda$  is a good parameter choice. With respect to the mutation probability, it may be observed that the higher mutation rates tend to produce a better results.

As for the categorical parameters, one may see a strong bias towards bad results when using non-elitist algorithm version (Figure 5.3 parameter  $elitist$ ). When concerning the mutation type, the dominance is not an obvious, but permutation version of mutation is slightly outperforms scramble type (Figure 5.3 parameter  $mutation$ ).

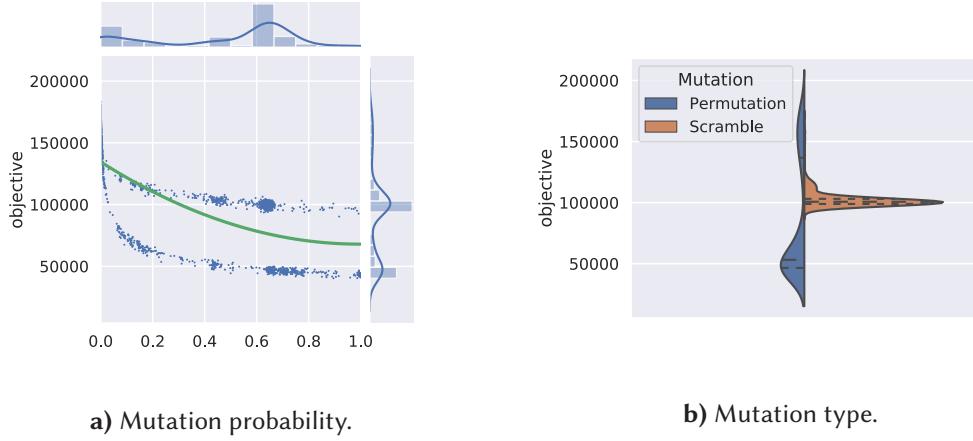


Figure 5.4 jMetalPy simulated annealing parameters.

**jMetalPy simulated annealing parameters.** This heuristic were tuned by means of only two parameters: categorical mutation type, which results are presented in Figure 5.4b and numerical mutation probability with graphs in Figure 5.4a. One may see a strong dominance of permutation mutation type, while scramble produce an average but stable results. The mutation probability trends are also clear: higher parameter values produce better results. Indeed, the dependency on mutation probability is obvious, since the underlying algorithm is performing the search space traversal by means of solution mutation. The two lines of results that could be viewed on the Figure 5.4a are correlated with the mutation type: lower corresponds to usage of permutation, while upper to scramble mutation.

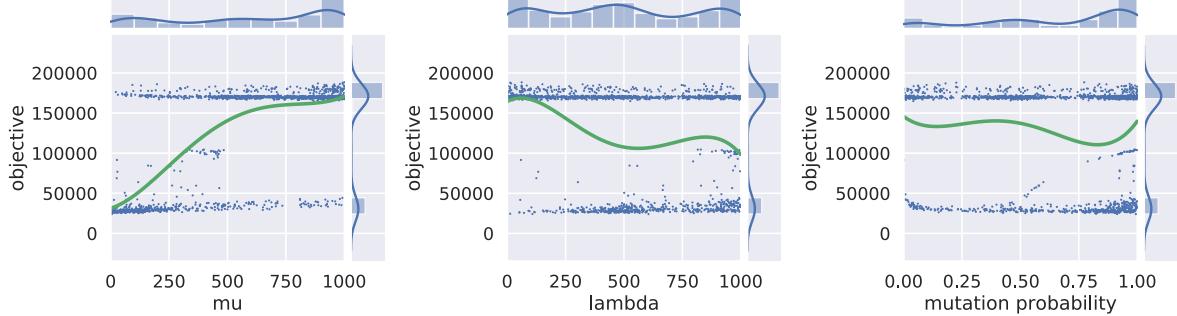


Figure 5.5 jMetal evolution strategy numeric parameters values.

**jMetal evolution strategy parameters.** The final heuristic under investigation is the Java-based implementation of viewed above ES. Even if at the first glance the regression lines are not looking the same, the overall trends are similar: lower values of  $\mu$  parameter result in better objective, while the mutation probability should be kept high. On contrary to Python-based ES, here the middle-range values of parameter  $\lambda$  produce the best results. It may be explained by the fact of performance straggling in Python-based version: with large offspring number, the computational effort, required to accomplish the iteration increases, while Java-based version could handle it. A dominance of elitist version of algorithm is non-obvious, but this could be seen from a distribution first quartile.

We collected the best performing configurations of each meta-heuristic and presented them in Table 5.2. We also highlight here the default parameter values, which were selected with motivation of being in the middle of the values ranges.

**Table 5.2** Static hyper-parameters of low-level meta-heuristics.

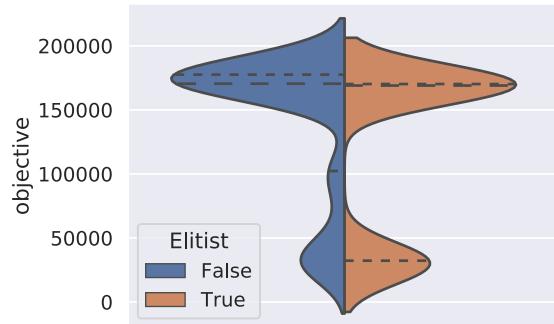
Hyper-parameter	Default value	Tuned value	Estimated range
jMetalPy evolution strategy			
$\mu$	500	5	[1..1000]
$\lambda$	500	22	[1..1000]
<i>elitist</i>	False	True	True, False
<i>mutation type</i>	Permutation	Permutation	Permutation, Scramble
<i>mutation probability</i>	0.5	0.99	[0..1]
jMetalPy simulated annealing			
<i>mutation type</i>	Permutation	Permutation	Permutation, Scramble
<i>mutation probability</i>	0.5	0.89	[0..1]
jMetal evolution strategy			
$\mu$	500	5	[1..1000]
$\lambda$	500	605	[1..1000]
<i>elitist</i>	False	True	True, False
<i>mutation probability</i>	0.5	0.99	[0..1]

## 5.4 Concept Evaluation

### 5.4.1 Evaluation Plan

To evaluate the performance of developed approach we firstly need to define the base line. In most cases it is the single meta-heuristics, which are solving the OP using static hyper-parameters. However, to evaluate the parameter control feature we must make a closer look on the performance of each separate heuristic with static and dynamic hyper-parameters. For selection hyper-heuristic analysis we compare the performances of all underlying MHs running separately and together within a hyper-heuristic. Note, in this case the hyper-parameters are statically defined. And last, but not least, to evaluate a selection hyper-heuristic with enabled parameter control we compare it to separately running underlying meta-heuristics with parameter control and to selection hyper-heuristic.

In order to organize the evaluation plan, we distinguish two stages. At the first stage the LLH selection occurs, while at the second one we chose hyper-parameters for the selected LLH. At each stage we may use different prediction approaches, which description could be found in Section 4.3.3. To select the LLH, apart from random and static selection we also use FRAMAB (see Section 4.3.3) and Bayesian ridge regression model implementation from Scikit-learn framework (see Section 4.3.3). Note, for the Bayesian ridge regression model we use a default parameters, which could be found in the framework documentation<sup>1</sup>. To select the hyper-parameters for LLHs, apart from static default and tuned variants we also use random selection, available in BRISEv2 TPE and the mentioned above Bayesian ridge. The

**Figure 5.6** jMetal ES elitist parameter.

<sup>1</sup> [https://scikit-learn.org/stable/modules/generated/sklearn.linear\\_model.BayesianRidge.html](https://scikit-learn.org/stable/modules/generated/sklearn.linear_model.BayesianRidge.html)

set of used techniques is presented in the Table 5.3.

**Table 5.3** Prediction techniques used for the concept evaluation.

LLH selection	LLH parameters selection
1. Random 2. Multi-armed bandit 3. Bayesian ridge regression 4.1. Static jMetalPy.ES 4.2. Static jMetalPy.SA 4.3. Static jMetal.ES	1. Default 2. Tuned beforehand 3. Random 4. Tree Parzen Estimator (TPE) 5. Bayesian ridge regression (BRR)

Using this table, we now could pick a prediction technique to form a desired system configuration. For instance, mentioned above baseline could be encoded into configurations starting from 4.1.1 for the evolution strategy from jMetalPy framework, running with default hyper-parameters and ending with 4.3.2 for evolution strategy from jMetal framework, running with tuned beforehand parameters.

Our benchmark plan for the concept evaluation looks as a set of following experiment groups:

- **Meta-heuristics (MH).** The baseline. We evaluate each used meta-heuristic separately with default and tuned hyper-parameters: 4.1.1 and 4.1.2 for jMetalPy evolution strategy; 4.2.1 and 4.2.2 for jMetalPy simulated annealing; 4.3.1 and 4.3.2 for jMetal evolution strategy respectively.
- **Meta-heuristics with parameter control (MH-PC).** The set of experiments dedicated to verify an impact of the generic parameter control on meta-heuristics performance. A selected set of experiments looks as follows: 4.1.3, 4.2.3, 4.3.3 to investigate the influence of random parameter allocation; 4.1.4, 4.2.4, 4.3.4 to check TPE-based parameter control and 4.1.5, 4.2.5, 4.3.5 to probe Bayesian-ridge-based parameter control.
- **Selection hyper-heuristic with static parameters (HH-SP).** These benchmarks are dedicated to an investigation of the implemented on-line selection HH performance. It implies the LLHs usage with static parameters therefore, we evaluate HH-SP performance with default and tuned beforehand LLH parameters. Experiment codes are following: 2.1, 2.2 for FRAMAB-based HH-SP and 3.1, 3.2 for Bayesian-ridge-based HH-SP.
- **Selection hyper-Heuristic with parameter control in LLH (HH-PC).** This is a final set of benchmarks for concept evaluation. By this we evaluate an influence of simultaneous on-line LLH selection and parameter control on system performance. The respective experiment set is following: 1.3, 2.4, 2.5, 3.4, 3.5.

The aggregated concept benchmark plan is presented in Table 5.4. The required running time of this experiment set is approximately 9 days and 18 hours on a single machine.

#### 5.4.2 Baseline Evaluation

As we discussed previously, our results comparison should be done against the defined baseline. Therefore, this section is dedicated to review of the meta-heuristics performance out-of-the-box on different problem sizes and parameter settings. For visibility reasons we plot the intermediate and the final performance evidences for each problem instance separately, since they naturally imply different result ranges.

Since we are tackling a set of TSP instances, which were previously solved by other exact solvers, we also present an optimal solution, available for each instance as a green dotted line.

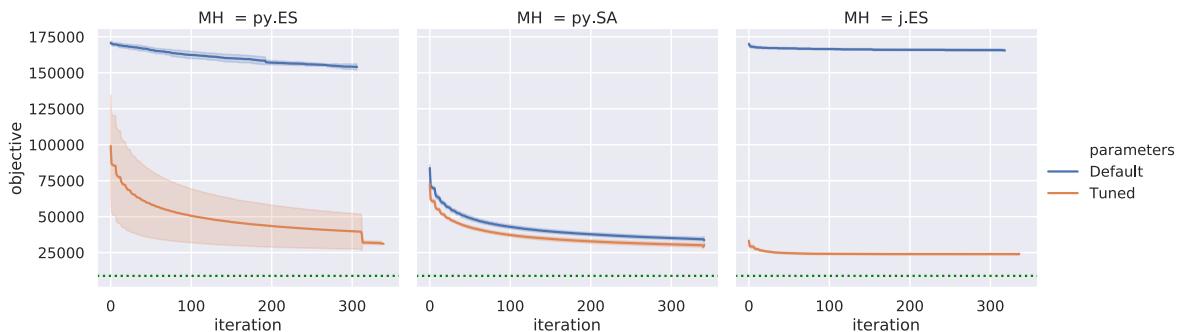
**Table 5.4** Concept benchmark plan.

Experiment group	Related codes
MH	4.1.1., 4.2.1, 4.3.1 4.1.2, 4.2.2, 4.3.2
MH-PC	4.1.3, 4.2.3, 4.3.3 4.1.4, 4.2.4, 4.3.4 4.1.5, 4.2.5, 4.3.5
HH-SP	1.1, 1.2 2.1, 2.2 3.1, 3.2
HH-PC	1.3 2.4, 2.5 3.4, 3.5

**kroA100 and pr439 TSP instances.** Both TSP for 100 and 439 cities are a relatively small problem instances. Therefore, all underlying MHs reach a local optimum after few first external iterations. The difference between the external and internal iteration is following: the first one happens, when the main node selects configuration and sends it to the worked node, which carries out the LLH (MH) execution (see detailed description in Chapter 4). On a contrary, the internal iteration occurs inside LLH itself, since it is an any-time algorithm. Thus, while the MHs reach a local optimum, there is no reason to spend much time for such cases review. We put a visual representation of benchmarks for kroA100 and pr439 into the thesis appendix (Appendix A.1.1).

The only worth to mention observation is a worse SA results with tuned parameters, in contrast to default values on kroA100 TSP instance. It is explained by the fact that for algorithm tuning we used a different problem instance (rat783). It only confirms a motivation of the parameter control approaches: tuning is not problem-instance-universal technique.

**rat783 TSP instance.** This is an average size problem among reviewed in the thesis. In contrast to previous instances, a behavior of solvers in this case changes slightly. For instance, ES from jMetal framework (j.ES) with default parameters is performing extremely slowly on a problem, however, while using an optimized hyper-parameters it quickly reaches a local optima (after 50 iterations) with the best produced results among other heuristics (Figure 5.7). Analyzing performance evidences of Python-based solvers, we may conclude that they almost reached a local optima in a given 15 minutes, therefore, their final results are slightly worse than the produced by j.ES (Section 5.4.2).

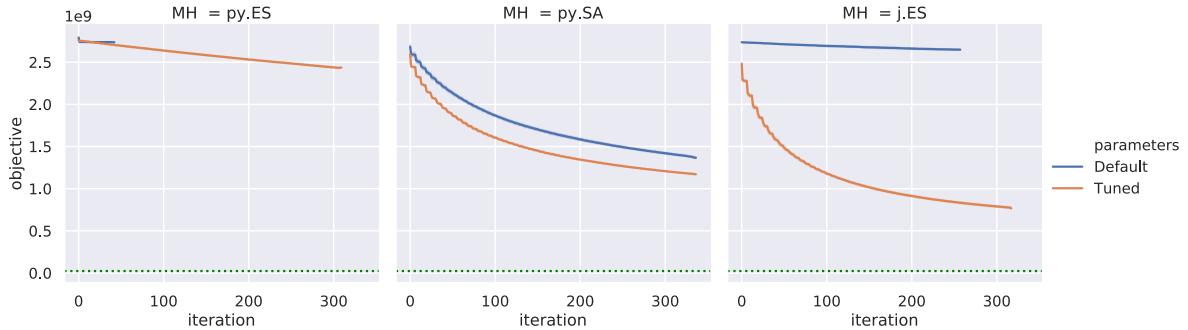
**Figure 5.7** Intermediate results of meta-heuristics with static parameters on rat783.

**Please note,** the perturbation of trends in the end of tuned py.ES run is caused by the difference in number of iterations among all runs (left figure in Figure 5.7, tuned parameters). The software<sup>1</sup>, used in this thesis for results presentation estimates an average and the result deviation at each iteration. Thus, if one (or several) experiment execution(s) managed to perform more iterations than the majority of others, the average among and their deviation will be changed respectively. The number of such external iterations varies, since as a termination criterion we used the wall-clock time. Unfortunately, this perturbation appear in most of the *progress charts*, therefore the comparison of final results is done by means of presented separately box-plots.

The bold lines in Figure 5.7 is a statistical mean of all 9 experiment runs with default parameter values (blue line) and tuned parameter values (orange line). A shadow around these lines is a confidence interval. One may observe how differently the parameter setting affects MHs: in evolution strategies the changes in performance is dramatic, while simulated annealing is almost not affected (Section 5.4.2). We also observe a decreased stability of tuned jMetalPy ES meta-heuristic (py.ES). It is reflected in a large confidence interval not only of the intermediate results, but also in a statistic of final solution quality.

**pla7397 TSP instance.** The largest investigated here TSP instance for 7.4k cities is, however, referred as a middle-size OP in used TSPLIB95. In this case the performance evidences changed the most, therefore, we discuss each MH behavior separately.

Python-based version of ES provide the worst results with both default and tuned parameters. Note the number of performed iterations by this MH with default parameters in a given 15 minutes is less 50. It is affected by a several reasons. Firstly, the amount of time required to perform an internal iteration increased dramatically. Thus, with specified 15 seconds for one task run, it actually takes much more time (up to 1 minute) to accomplish the task. We have a several guesses, what caused such a behavior. Firstly, it is a general Python performance issues, in most of the times caused by a global interpreter lock (GIL) usage. The explanation of GIL is out of this thesis scope, but roughly speaking,



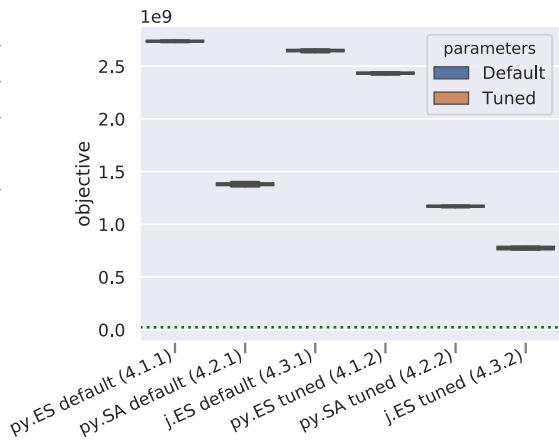
**Figure 5.9** Intermediate results of meta-heuristics with static parameters on pla7397.

<sup>1</sup>Python Seaborn framework <https://seaborn.pydata.org/>

a multi-threading in Python causes struggle in comparison with single-threaded execution. Secondly, it may be caused by the algorithm code basis implementation, performed in jMetalPy framework. To implement a generic termination criteria (and some other features) the authors utilized a push-observer design pattern [6] according to which the underlying algorithm (ES in our case) triggers its observers after finishing each iteration. Therefore, stopping criteria may be evaluated only after finishing this internal iteration, which in case of running py.ES with TSP instance for 7.4k cities, may take a while depending on the algorithm configuration. For instance, with parameters  $\{\mu=5, \lambda=10\}$  the algorithm will terminate in time, while setting  $\{\mu=500, \lambda=500\}$  the algorithm will perform a higher number of computations on arrays of 7.4k integers long and as a result, may struggle. We observed the ES algorithm termination after a very first internal iteration. This also causes a poor solution quality improvements. Naturally, there is also an overhead in the results sending through the network, but as we observe on the Java-based ES performance with default parameter values, this overhead caused the decrease only in 20 external iterations. We also eliminate the possible issue in a required time for problem loading (building the TSP distance matrix), since with caching implemented in jMetalPy wrapper (see Section 4.4.2), the worker node does it only once and stores its cached version. In any case, this issue requires deeper investigation that we postpone to the future work. Running jMetalPy ES with tuned parameters fixes the issue with task reporting delays and therefore, results in higher number of external iterations, but the solution improvements are still weak (see left picture on the Figure 5.9).

As in the previous case, jMetalPy simulated annealing produce good quality improvements at each external iteration, least depending on the hyper-parameter values. Even with a default configuration, py.SA outperforms the final results of py.ES after the first 50 external iterations. Setting the tuned parameter values, the performance of algorithm increases, but not dramatically. A resulting progress curve, presented in the middle of Figure 5.9 shows that py.SA requires more time to converge than was provided and is still far from its potential local optima.

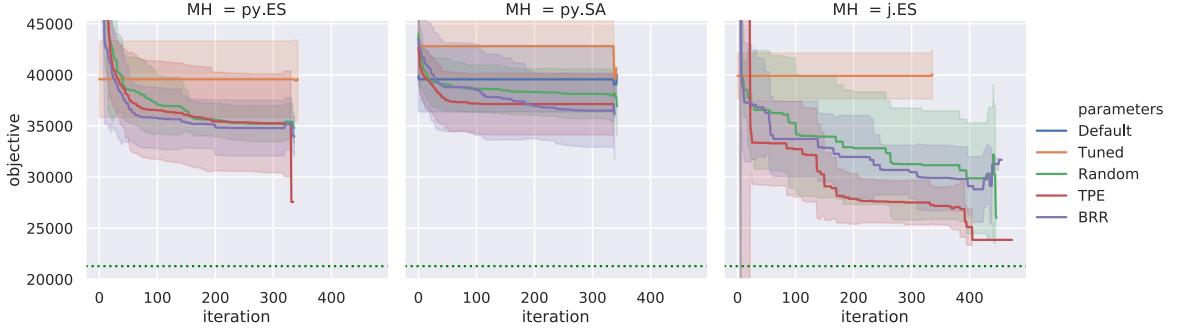
jMetal evolution strategy is a perfect candidate to show, how important is a parameter setting. With default configuration j.ES is struggling in making improving steps and can not compete with other algorithms. Our guess here is the same as for the Python-based version: the number of internal iterations is extremely low for making a good search space traversal. However, a tuned version of j.ES outperforms all other solvers (see Figure 5.9 and Section 5.4.2 respectively).



**Figure 5.10** Final results of meta-heuristics with static parameters on pla7397.

**Discussion.** The observed results of meta-heuristics execution confirm the algorithm parameter setting problem importance, discussed in Section 2.3. An effect of proper parameter selection is different among algorithms. In our case, the performance of two out of three solvers are highly dependent on the hyper-parameter settings. Thus, an application of the proposed in Chapter 3 generic parameter control approach to these algorithms is rather intriguing and may partially reveal the overall methodology benefits.

From the other side, we observe of only one algorithm domination among the others with static



**Figure 5.11** Intermediate results of meta-heuristics with parameter control on kroA100.

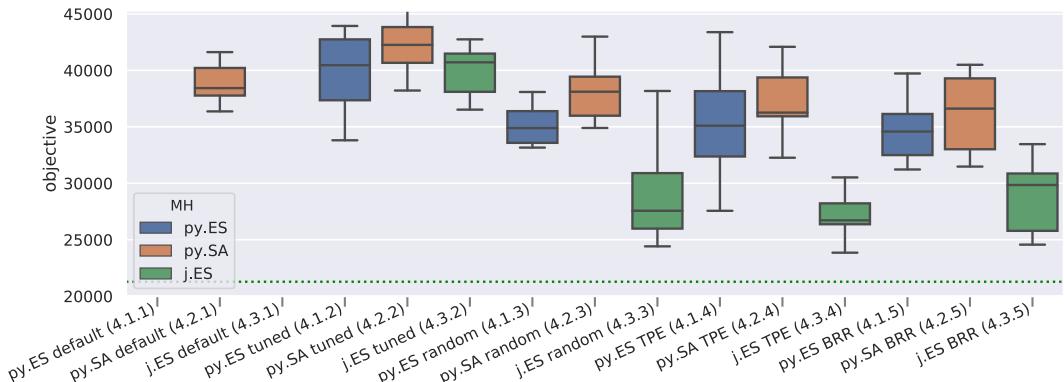
parameters. See how all MHs were solving each TSP instance with default parameters: in each case SA outperforms two other ES. The usage of all three MHs in a selection hyper-heuristic with static hyper-parameters will reveal the implemented approach applicability. In this case we expect to observe the results close to provided by pure SA. On a contrary, when we switch to tuned parameter usage, j.ES is preferred. We see it clearly when the MHs are applied to the biggest TSP instance with tuned hyper-parameters. Thus, we expect to observe such a behavior of selection hyper-heuristic.

#### 5.4.3 Generic Parameter Control

As we discussed in Section 2.3.3, the goal of parameter tuning lays in adaptive changing of underlying algorithm parameters with to optimize some performance measurement. In our case, we apply the proposed in Section 3.5 methodology to set the parameters of meta-heuristics in a runtime. Here is a brief reminder: at each RL step HLH is analyzing the past performance evidences of solver depending on its configuration to choose the parameters values, which hopefully lead to the higher solution quality improvements. Afterwards, we run the solver with sampled parameters for a predefined time (15 seconds) to get new evidences, attaching the previously best obtained solutions. Please note, according to our setup, we have 6 simultaneously running and reporting workers.

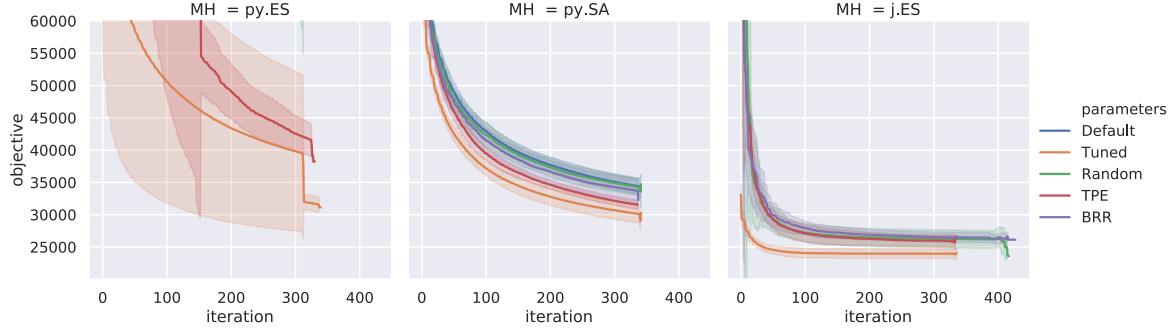
In this part of evaluation we compare the performance of algorithms with statically defined default and tuned hyper-parameters to dynamically changing parameter values by means of RL control.

**kroA100 TSP instance.** Comparing to the baseline, parameter control in a small problem instance was able to reach and even outperform the results of MHs on static parameters after first 50 iterations (Figure 5.11). We may observe that even random changes of the heuristic parameters in a runtime results



**Figure 5.12** Final results of meta-heuristics with parameter control on kroA100.

## 5 Evaluation



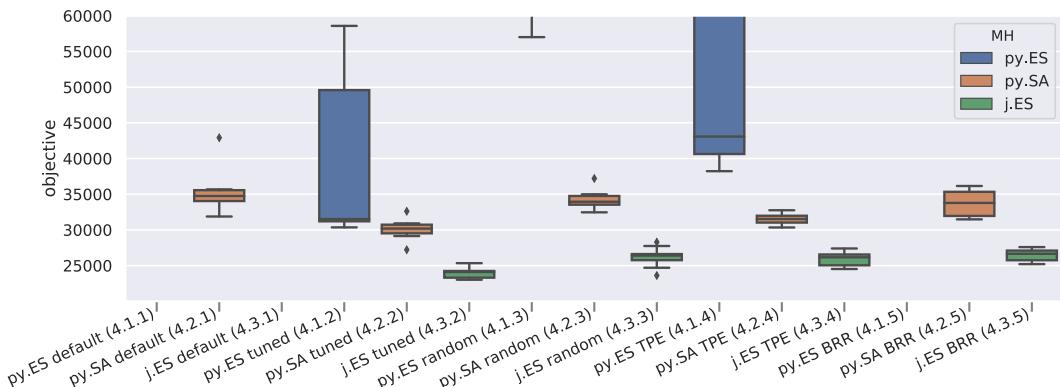
**Figure 5.13** Intermediate results of meta-heuristics with parameter control on rat783.

in finding a better solutions comparing with statically defined case (Figure 5.12). It is caused by the changes in a neighborhood definition (mutation type) and traversal process (mutation probability). In most cases, given enough time the learning-based parameter assignment outperforms random allocation.

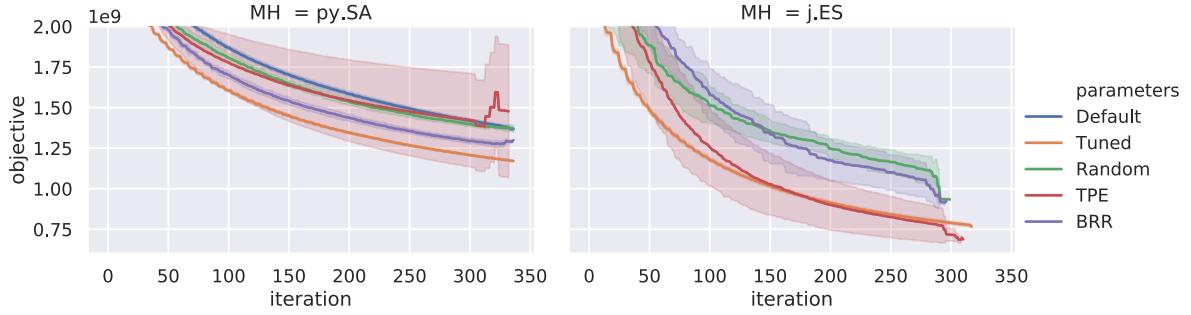
Note the amount of configurations (iterations) performed by jMetal ES, which could be seen in Figure 5.11. According to our plan, a given time for MH run is 15 minutes, 15 seconds for running one configuration on 6 available workers. Thus, in the most optimistic case, the number of iterations should be  $\frac{15 \cdot 60 \cdot 6}{15} = 360$  but, we observe even more than 400. After an investigation, we came to conclusion that it is caused by an implementation flaw an insight of which is following. jMetal MHs provide only iteration-number-based termination criterion, which is not encapsulated how it is done in jMetalPy. For our needs we added also a time-based but did not remove the previously existing. For the iteration counter used a regular integer number, which we set up to its maximal value when using a time-based criterion. Given a specific ‘light’ algorithm configuration (low  $\mu$ ,  $\lambda$  and mutation probability), with this OP MH is able to reach the maximal number of iteration in less than 15 seconds therefore, terminating early and triggering a new parameter control iteration. Certainly, it is our implementation flaw, which should be fixed in a future work.

**pr439 and rat783 TSP instances.** In this two cases, the behavior of solvers were similar, therefore, we decided to join their discussion and present only the plots for a larger instance (rat783). Still, the graphical representation of intermediate and final performance on pr439 TSP instance is presented in Appendix A.1.2.

When the parameter control is applied to a larger problem, it is starting to require more evidences for finding a good-performing settings of jMetalPy evolution strategy. Concretely, only the TPE-based parameter control was the closest in approaching the solution quality of tuned parameters. All techniques



**Figure 5.14** Final results of meta-heuristics with parameter control on rat783.



**Figure 5.15** Intermediate results of meta-heuristics with parameter control on pla7397.

produced highly unstable intermediate and final results: please, draw your attention to the left side of Figure 5.13, and filled with blue boxes in Figure 5.14 respectively.

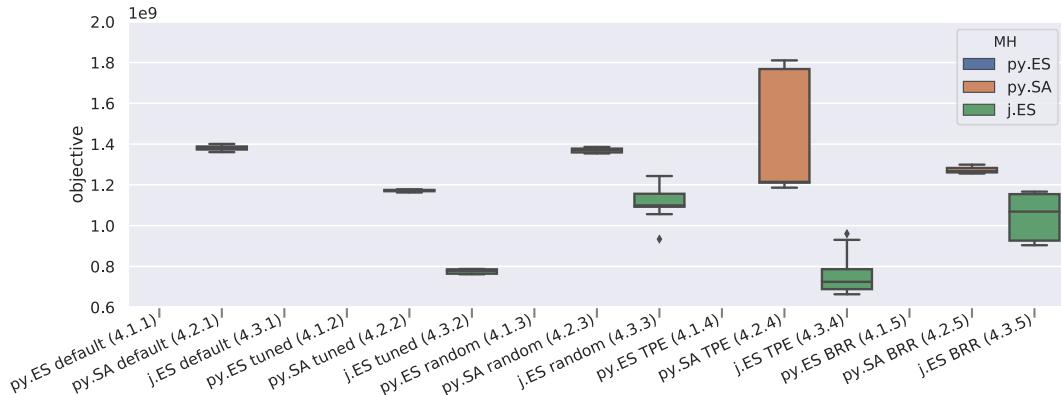
The results of parameter control application to less sensitive py.SA are following: randomized parameter sampling settled on the level of default parameters quality. BRR-based parameter control yielded a slightly better results, but not such stable, while TPE model approached the quality of tuned parameters (Figure 5.14).

On contrary, applying generic parameter control to j.ES MH leads to a comparable with the quality of tuned parameters (Figure 5.14). Note, as for previous problem instance, even a random-based parameter sampling outperforms default parameters.

**pla7397 TSP instance.** For the final problem instance we omit the parameter control results of py.ES, since it did not manage to perform even slightest improvement in comparison to the default parameter values, presented in a baseline description. It is caused by a fact that in early stages our approach acts as a random search, since not enough evidences were obtained to build a prediction models. Thus, is case of py.ES, the MH was running with badly performing configurations and as we explained in Section 5.4.2, did not manage to perform enough iterations to improve solution in a given 15 minutes.

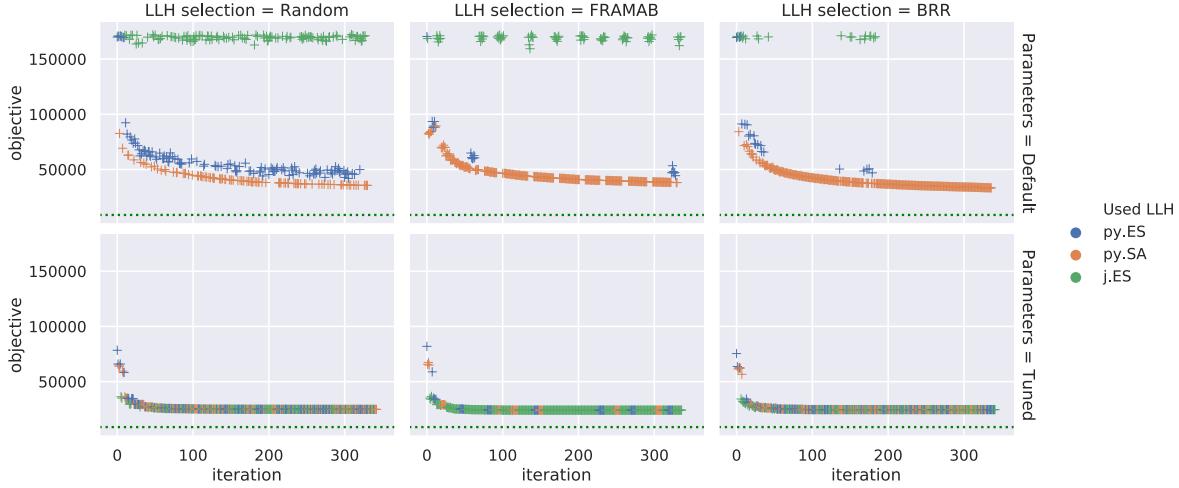
As in previous cases, the least parameter-settings-sensitive py.SA shows an ability to perform almost equally with any parameter settings (Figure 5.15). Neither among available control techniques was able to outperform tuned beforehand algorithm configuration in the final results quality (Figure 5.16). Among used models, only the BRR shabbily settled in the middle between default and tuned parameters quality.

As for j.ES, model-based approaches are outperforming the randomized parameter values allocation, not even talking about default parameters. Moreover, TPE-based control outperformed even the results



**Figure 5.16** Final results of meta-heuristics with parameter control on pla7397.

## 5 Evaluation



**Figure 5.17** Intermediate performance of HH-SP on rat783 (single experiment).

of tuned beforehand hyper-parameters.

**Discussion.** In general, the review of meta-heuristic performance on different problem instances showed that the proposed generic parameter control approach is applicable and able to yield not only the near-tuned parameters quality, but in sometimes even outperforming results: all MHs with kroA100 TSP instance jMetal evolutionary strategy with pr439 and pla7397.

Taking into account the results with random parameter allocation we are making two conclusions. Firstly, even a randomized parameters changes are able to improve a potentially bad static hyper-parameter setting (j.ES case). Secondly, the learning mechanisms should and must be improved further by means of different surrogate models usage and proper technique for surrogates optimization to more resize parameter search. Leaving the improvement steps to future work we conclude that the proposed generic parameter control concept is able to produce better results while solving an unforeseen problem on-line.

### 5.4.4 Selection Hyper-Heuristic with Static LLH Parameters

The second mode of developed approach and at the same time a main goal of this thesis is a process of dynamic heuristic selection. It was implemented in form of RL-based on-line selection hyper-heuristic, described in Section 3.5. Here we use three available LLHs (mentioned above py.ES, py.SA and j.ES) with static parameter (default and tuned) into selection hyper-heuristic (HH-SP). Three approaches to select the LLH were investigated: randomized, FRAMAB- and BRR-based HLH.

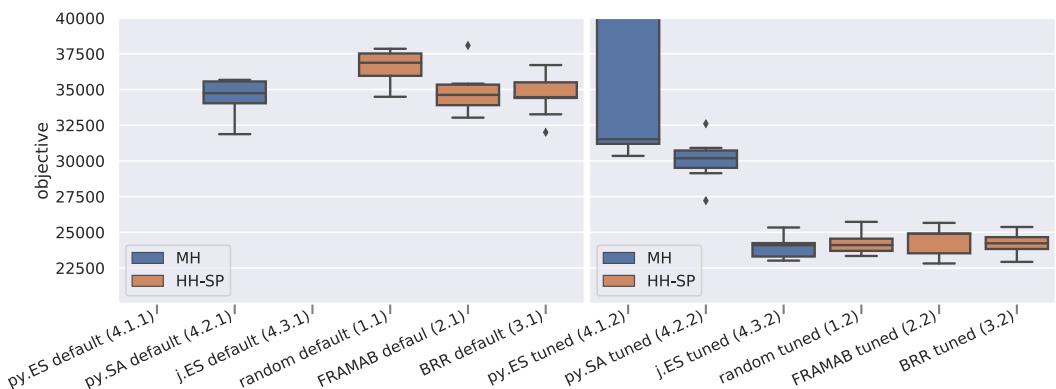
We present the problem solving process in two forms. Firstly, we distinguish the selected at each iteration LLH and the results, which it gave. For doing so, we took only the first repetition (out of 9 available). Secondly, we present the final results of all runs in form of box-plots, comparing them to the underlying LLHs performance. The left group of box-plots presents the final solution quality, obtained with the default parameter values, while on the right site the results of tuned beforehand LLHs are outlined.

**kroA100, pr439 and rat783 TSP instances.** Once again, we are grouping relatively small problem instances, on which the implemented HH-SP performs similarly. For the analysis we selected the largest instance among them: rat783. Nevertheless, the figures depicting kroA100 and pr439 TSP instances may be found in Appendix A.1.3.

Firstly, we would like to draw the reader's attention to HH-SP cases, in which the LLHs are used with the default parameter values (upper row in Figure 5.17). We do so, while according to the presented earlier baseline evaluation, there is only one algorithm with a strong performance dominance: py.SA. Thus, in Figure 5.17 we may observe a high frequency of py.SA sampling by both learning-based selection strategies. One may distinguish a repetitive pattern in LLH allocation with FRAMAB (middle column). It is caused by a deterministic essence of the algorithm. When it reaches the critical point of changing the favor of utilizing py.SA and exploiting other heuristic, the FRAMAB's exploration mechanism fully guides a selection. Due to the usage of a similar time-based LLH termination, all workers are starting the next round in bunches. Thus, when a new round starts, FRAMAB operates on static information and allocates all next configurations with the same LLH, which turns to be the second best performing LLH: j.ES. Therefore, in such a setup we conclude FRAMAB behaves slightly inertly. One may argue this will cause a performance struggling, which is rather a logical conclusion, but it requires a further investigation, which we are forced to postpone for the future work due to a lack of time. In case of BRR usage (right column in Figure 5.17), the bias is strongly shifted towards j.ES, which in some cases may cause performance issues due to lack of exploration. According to presented in Figure 5.18 final results statistics, given at least one dominating LLH (default parameters values case), even a random LLH selection could utilize enough times to obtain a good solution quality, however, it may require more time to converge. The model-based LLH selectors produce a better results quality.

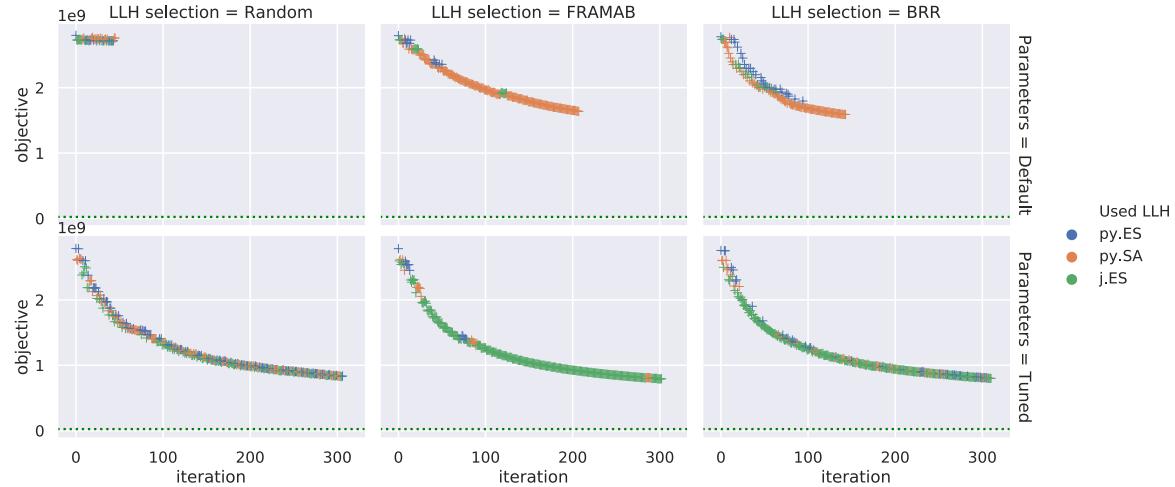
The next setup is a set of LLHs with tuned parameters (lower row in Figure 5.17). According to the baseline evaluation, all among available LLHs are able to tackle the problem and produce a similar solution quality, however, the light difference in a dominance present and is as following (descending): j.ES, py.SA, py.ES. As a consequence, FRAMAB HLH frequently utilizes the best j.ES (see middle of lower row in Figure 5.17). On contrary, BRR HLH, similarly to random-based, samples all LLH types almost evenly. We may conclude that BRR is not as sensitive to performance evidences and was 'confused' since the process quickly converged into a local optima. The quality of final result presented in Figure 5.18 of all HP-SP versions with tuned LLHs are at least as good, as the solution quality provided by the best underlying LLH due to its fast convergence (see Figure 5.7).

**pla7397 TSP instance.** Our observations of different MH heuristics on the largest tackled in this thesis problem are as following. During the baseline evaluation py.ES with default parameters had the worst performance and not able to accomplish external iteration in time, while the tuned algorithm version was able to outperform only default j.ES. On contrary, j.ES with tuned parameters produced the best results, outperforming both middle-quality py.SAs. The best performing meta-heuristic with default parameters was py.SA. According to this information, we observe an expected behavior of HH-SP with



**Figure 5.18** Final results of HH-SP on rat783 (statistic of 9 runs).

## 5 Evaluation

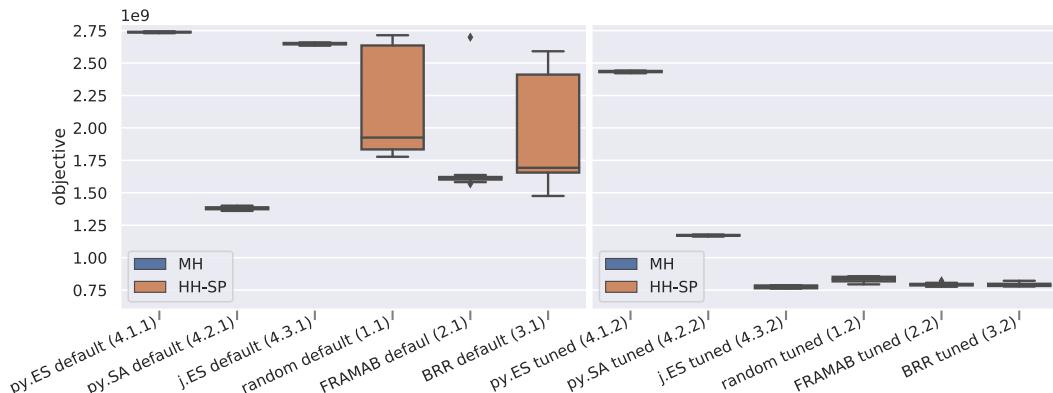


**Figure 5.19** Intermediate performance of HH-SP on pla7397 (single experiment).

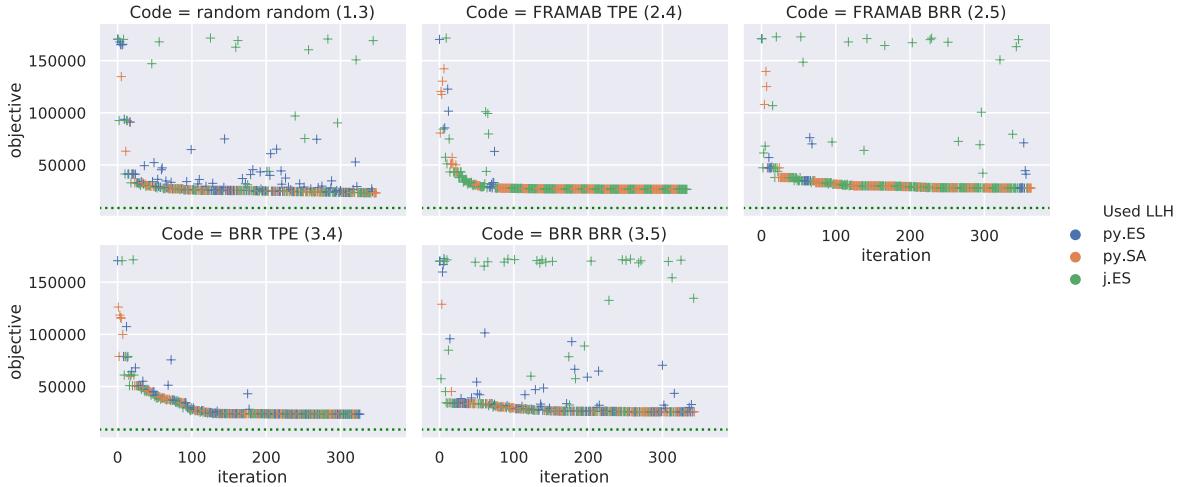
default LLHs (upper row in Figure 5.19): the most frequently sampled by learning-based HLH was py.SA. However, the number of py.ES usages is suspiciously high in BRR case. According to baseline evaluation, the optimization process was not able to advance in a search using the py.ES (which we observe in a random-based sampling case, upper left cell in Figure 5.19). Till the present time we do not have a comprehensive explanation of this behavior. Referring to the final results, presented in Figure 5.20 we observe a high diverse in quality when py.ES is allocated frequently (codes 1.1. and 3.1.), which is an expected behavior, taking into account the performance of py.ES with default parameters.

Talking about the tuned LLHs case, we observe almost equal performance of all LLH sampling approaches, comparable to the best available LLHs final results. The solution quality of random-based HLH is slightly worse, in comparison to the results of FRAMAB- and BRR-based HH-SP due to their frequent usage of j.ES (see right chart in Figure 5.20).

**Discussion.** According to our observations of the developed selection hyper-heuristic performance we conclude that the proposed concept implementation operates as expected: HH-SP exposes similar performance to the best available underlying LLH. Two implemented selection HLH are performing slightly differently when reaching a local optimum. We claim the FRAMAB is a more perspective HLH, since it starts to balance between previously seeing good performing LLH exposing a good exploration abilities. On a contrary, BRR continues to utilize only the best performing heuristic. In case when the advantage of one LLH changes to another, BRR may need more time to learn this. Nevertheless, our



**Figure 5.20** Final results of HH-SP on pla7397 (statistic of 9 runs).



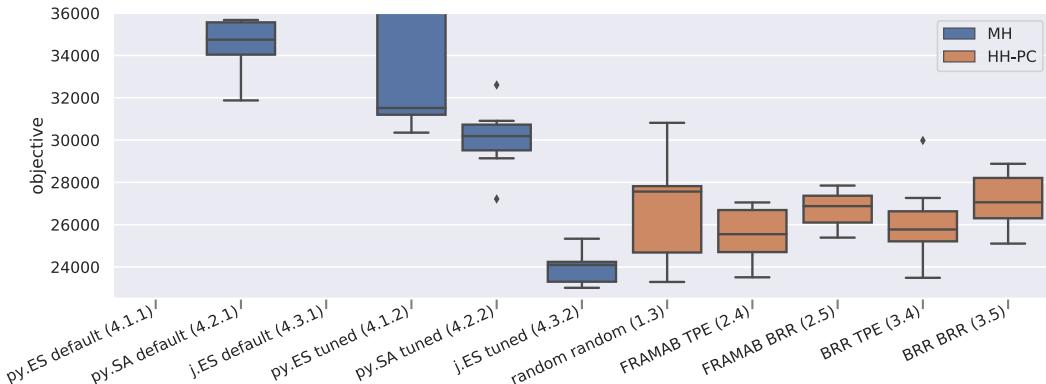
**Figure 5.21** Intermediate performance of HH-PC on rat783 (single experiment).

guesses require more evaluation proves.

The observed issues call for not only a thorough investigation (pla7397 code 1.1, 3.1), but also a generic approach to handle a potential flaws in LLH implementation that may cause struggling of overall HH-SP execution. The implemented system should be evaluated by means of HLH configuration influence on the performance. Also, a further investigation of adding several new LLHs should be evaluated by means of required computation effort for finding a good LLHs vs pure performance of these LLHs.

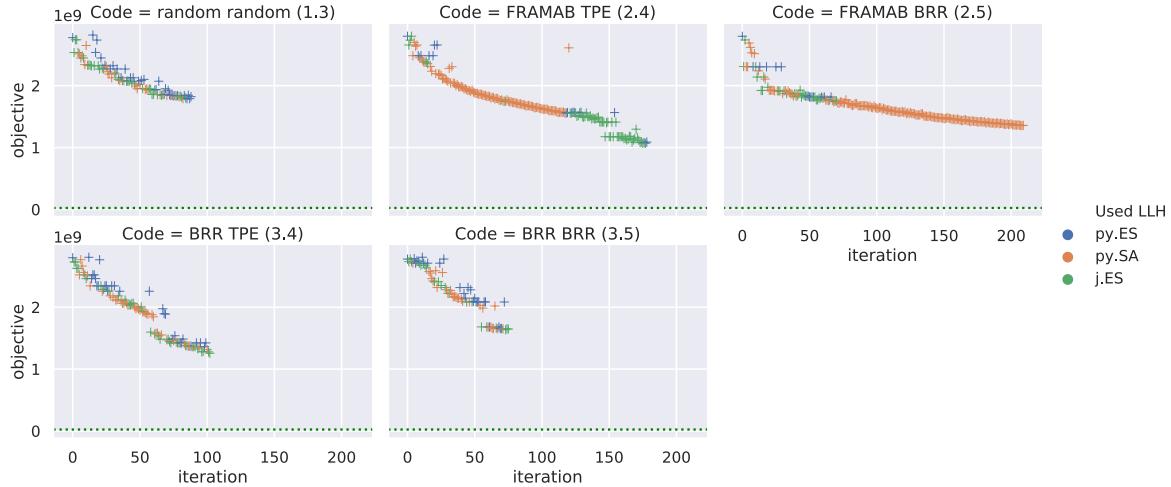
#### 5.4.5 Selection Hyper-Heuristic with Parameter Control

The final evaluation is dedicated to performance analysis of the suggested approach of merging the selection hyper-heuristic with the generic parameter control technique. A minimal goal is to obtain a performance of the best underlying LLH algorithm with tuned hyper-parameters. In this evaluation set we follow a similar to used for HH-SP method of intermediate results review distinguishing allocated LLH types at each iteration for one repetition and comparing the quality of final results over all repetitions with a baseline. As specified in the evaluation plan (Section 5.4.1), for the LLH selection we use three approaches: random, FRAMAB and BRR sampling, while for LLH parameter control we use the random, TPE and BRR sampling.



**Figure 5.22** Final results of HH-PC compared with MH on rat783 (statistic of 9 runs).

## 5 Evaluation



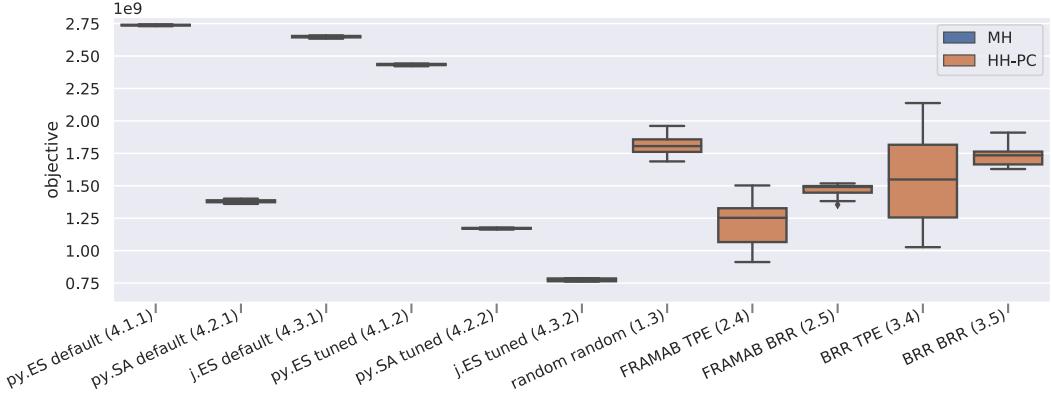
**Figure 5.23** Intermediate performance of HH-PC on pla7397 (single experiment).

**kroA100, pr439 and rat783 TSP instances.** The decision to join all three TSP instances is motivated by a similar to mentioned in HH-SP discussion reasons: the system intermediate and final performance are rather similar among problem instances, therefore, here we review only a single (rat783) case. The results for all other problems may be found in Appendix A.1.4.

During the solving process a similar to HH-SP patterns of algorithm allocation may be observed for both FRAMAB-based (codes 2.4, 2.5) and BRR (codes 3.4, 3.5) HLHs. However, in this case the intermediate results are slightly differing, since the parameter control has started to search for good LLHs settings (Figure 5.21).

Let us firstly draw the reader's attention to HH-PC with FRAMAB for LLH and TPE for parameter sampling (code 2.4 in Figure 5.21). At the beginning of solving process, j.ES was performing extremely well, for this reason FRAMAB was sampling it with a higher frequency. When a solving process reached its local optima (nearly 50<sup>th</sup> iteration), FRAMAB started exploration of the other heuristics. The appeared 'noise' in the results of both j.ES and py.ES heuristics is caused by a boolean parameter *elitist*, which defines the selection strategy and may result in the solution quality degradation (a more detailed description of ES parameters could be found in Section 2.2.2). From an absence of noise in later stages of 2.4 and 3.4 its may be seeing that TPE has found *elitist=False* parameter value to be perspective in both ESs. On a contrary, BRR-based parameter controller did not find these parameters and glancing on the quality of final results (Figure 5.22) we conclude the BRR statistically finds worse performing parameters, comparing to TPE on rat783 problem instance. Also, we must not ignore the fact of early reaching a local optimum by the search process (see shapes of progress curves in Figure 5.21). In such case, the parameter search should be biased towards exploration. For that we need to introduce other progress metrics, such as stagnation detection (which is used in EA parameter control in [65]) and perform multi-objective RL optimization, maximizing improvement and minimizing stagnation. We postpone this enhancement for a future work due to a lack of time.

In Figure 5.22 we clearly see the dominating j.ES MH with tuned parameters (code 4.3.2). The quality of final solution, produced by the proposed concept implementation is statistically slightly lower the best performing tuned j.ES. This may be explained by a lack of time for parameter control to find a good performing setting, since the optimization reached its local optima too quickly to find good parameters for the underlying j.ES.



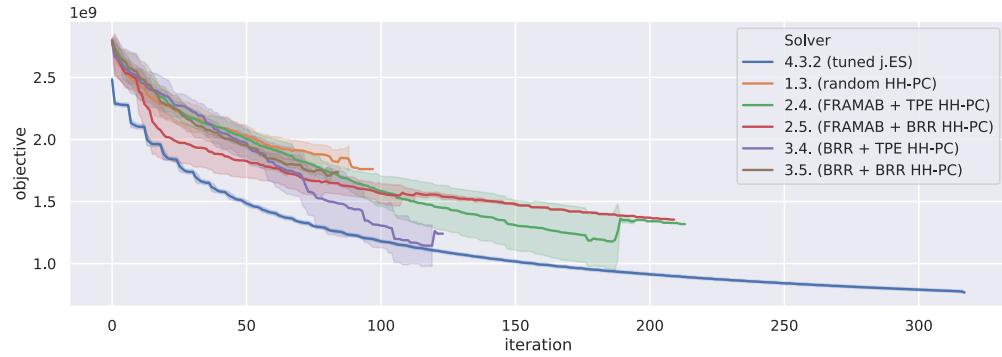
**Figure 5.24** Final results of HH-PC compared with MH on pla7397 (statistic of 9 runs).

**pla7397 TSP instance.** As we observed in previous experiments, py.ES with non-tuned parameters causes struggling in hyper-heuristic performance (see Figure 5.9 and the discussion below Figure 5.15). That is why during these benchmarks py.ES made a crucial change in the overall number of iterations where it was used many times (codes 1.3, 3.4, 3.5 in Figure 5.23). While the case of fully randomized HH-PC (code 1.3) is clear, a BRR LLH selection did use this LLH frequently because it may have produced a good solutions quality as a result of parameter control behavior. On a contrary, FRAMAB LLH selection in combination with TPE parameter tuning (code 2.4) managed to find good parameters for py.SA, therefore, utilized it most often. When the FRAMAB's exploration component weight reached exploitation's, the other LLHs usage was triggered and as a result, HH-PC switched to j.ES usage. This switch gave a dramatic result improvements (code 2.4 Figure 5.23). The FRAMAB LLH selection with BRR parameter control (code 2.5) at the beginning was using the mixture of mainly two j.ES and py.SA, but later switched to simulated annealing-only mode. As we may see, it gave a fast coarse-grained solution improvements in the beginning, and stable, but rather slow fine-grained improvements in a later stage.

On the final results quality charts (Figure 5.24) we observe a dominance of FRAMAB-based LLH selection (codes 2.4, 2.5) over BRR-based and TPE-based parameter control (codes 2.4 and 3.4) over BRR-based (codes 2.5, 3.5). On a contrary, the results obtained with BRR-based parameter control are more stable than TPE-based. The quality of final results did not reach the best performing tuned j.ES (code 4.3.2). However, since the optimization process did not settle in a local optima, we have a doubt that HH-PC will not outperform j.ES when given same number of external iterations.

For a better intuition, let us draw the reader's attention to Figure 5.25. Note how HH-PC (code 3.4) approaches j.ES progress curve. If it were not for the issue with a number of external iterations, the results would be better and, probably, outperforming tuned j.ES. Nevertheless, for current implementation and given 15 minutes for all solvers j.ES managed to make more iterations and moved further.

**Discussion.** The observed results of solving the united ASP and PSP problems by HH-PC are encouraging. With small problem instances (kroA100, pr439, rat783) HH-PC managed to approach and in some cases even outperform the best underlying LLH with tuned hyper-parameters. As the problem size significantly grows (pla7397), the gap between HH-PC and the best performing LLH started to increase. An explanation for this behavior is simple: the system needs to build surrogate models not only for single, but for multiple LLHs and, therefore, requires more performance evidences in comparison to MH-PC or HH-SP. On a contrary, the amount of performance evidences only decreases as a consequence of an issue with py.ES. Since the parameter values are not selected to properly reflect LLHs performance, algorithm selection also straggles. Nevertheless, HH-PC significantly exceed the results of static default



**Figure 5.25** HH-PC and tuned jMetal ES solving process comparison on pla7397 (statistic of 9 runs).

parameters and the guided by models approach outperforms random-based HH-PC. To overcome the problem with lack of information we propose to execute an additional meta-learning step before the beginning of optimization session. Unfortunately, we are forced to postpone an investigation of this rather intriguing idea for the future work.

## 5.5 Parameter Analysis of Hyper-Heuristic with Parameter Control

The second benchmark is dedicated to evaluation of the proposed approach configuration influence on the solving process. Due to limited time, we decided to perform the benchmarks only for the most complex system mode: on-line selection hyper-heuristic with parameter control in low-level heuristics (HH-PC).

### 5.5.1 Evaluation Plan

As with the concept evaluation, this set of benchmarks we also start from the planning. For comparison basis we selected one statistically better performing HH-PC setup, in which FRAMAB was used for the algorithm selection, and TPE for parameter control respectively. Their default configuration of which was as follows. Implemented FRAMAB algorithm exposes only one parameter: the balancing coefficient  $C$ . In Section 4.3.3 we discussed it values and also proposed an approach to replace this static value by one, derived from the deviation of results. In all previous tests we used exactly this approach. TPE implementation exposes *split size* parameter, which defines the percentage of available data, used to create a distribution of good-performing parameter values (see TPE description during HpBandSter framework review in Section 2.3.2). In all our experiments we used  $1/3$  of available data to construct a ‘good’ distribution. The amount of information, which was used to construct the surrogate models was controlled by a shared parameter *window size*. In our evaluations we were using 80% of available information each time. As one may remember, since we did not implement a proper optimization algorithm over surrogates, but rather used a random sampling and afterwards selected the best parameter set by means of their results with surrogates, we used a predefined number of randomly sampled parameter values on each level (more details in Section 4.3.3). During our experiments we sampled 96 combinations of parameter values on each level (the default value in BRISv2). Also, in our setup we used a predefined number of workers (6 ps) and static time for task execution (15 seconds). The implemented RL approach required continuing the solving process between iterations. For doing so, after accomplishing a task the workers were sending a complete bunch of obtained solutions to main node, which is then attached them to the new tasks. This difference is caused by the usage of

single-solution simulated annealing and population-based evolution strategy meta-heuristics.

All aforementioned characteristics form a three groups of experiments:

1. **Learning granularity** group is designed to investigate the influence of performance evidences amount and quality, obtained between external iterations. It is formed by such parameters as *window size*, *task time* and *number of workers*.
2. **Learning models configuration** group of experiments are dedicated to investigate the influence of HLH parameters on the results quality and includes *FRAMAB C coefficient*, *TPE split size*, *random search size* over the surrogates.
3. **Generic low-level heuristic configuration** group is currently formed only from one characteristic for investigation: amount of solver warming-up information, which is defined by the number of solutions, reported in the end of LLH external iteration.

We aggregate the proposed parameters and define the values for evaluation in Table 5.5.

**Table 5.5** Prediction techniques used for the concept evaluation.

Parameter	Investigated values	Default value
Learning granularity		
<b>Window size</b>	30%, 50%, 100%	80%
<b>Task time</b>	5, 10, 30 seconds	15 seconds
<b>Number of workers</b>	3, 9, 12	6
Learning models configuration		
<b>FRAMAB C coefficient</b>	Static 0.001, 0.01, 0.1	STD-based
<b>TPE split size</b>	10%, 50%, 70%	30%
<b>Random search size</b>	50, 200	96
Generic LLH configuration		
<b>Warming-up solutions</b>	one	all

We set all other parameters as they were configured during HH-PC evaluation, in particular the experiment running time is set to 15 minutes, number of experiment repetition is 9, the search space is unchanged (3 LLHs with the same parameter ranges and default values).

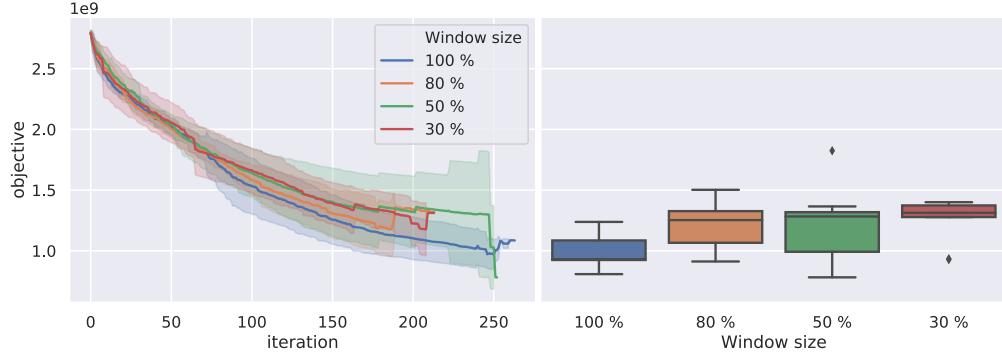
The idea of performing the full factorial design was quickly abandoned since it requires 46 days of non-stop experiment running. Therefore, we performed a one-exchange benchmark design, which resulted in 18 experiments, which needed 40,5 hours to perform 9 repetitions.

### 5.5.2 Learning Granularity

In this experiment we investigate the influence of RL routines configuration on learning process. The idea is as follows. Changing the *window size*, *task time* and *number of workers*, the underlying models may learn a different picture of dependencies. For instance, if we increase a task time, a sampled configuration will be measured more thoroughly, however, given a fixed experiment running time, the overall number of iteration will be decreased. On a contrary, by increasing a number of workers for the same fixed experiment time a size of investigated *parameter space* will be increased, therefore, the underlying learning models will construct a more precise surrogates.

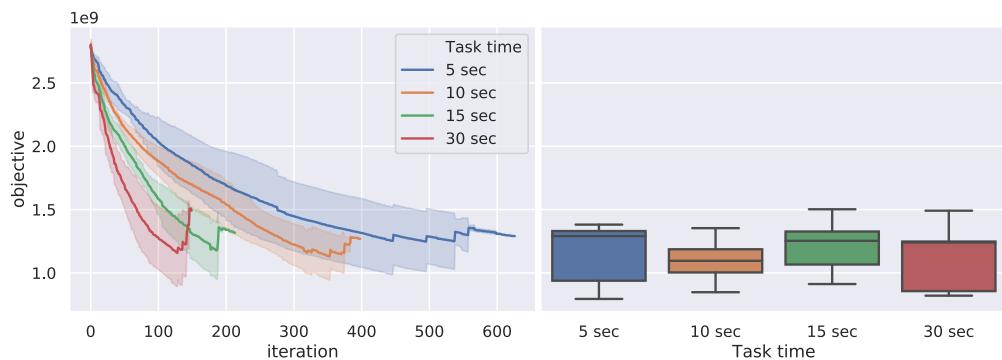
**Please note**, the perturbations at the end of runs on progress charts are caused by different number of performed iterations. More detailed explanation could be found in Section 5.4.2.

## 5 Evaluation



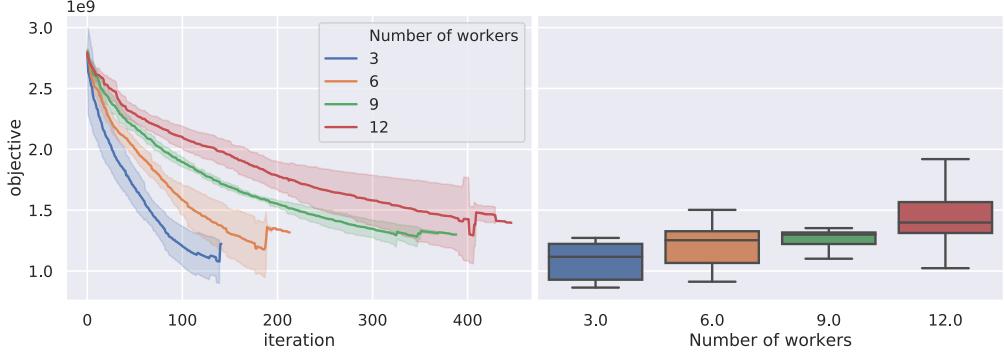
**Figure 5.26** Influence of HH-PC (code 2.4) window size on pla7397 TSP instance solving process.

**Window size.** According to our expectations in Section 3.3, this parameter is responsible for the forgetting mechanism, which is required for system adaptation to changes in optimization process and domination of one parameters over others (including LLH). In Figure 5.26 we presented the system running results with four different window sizes. We observe that the best results were obtained, when the learning models used all available information, in other words, with disabled forgetting mechanism. On a contrary, with the smallest window size the quality of final results are the worst. A trend could be observed, according to which with a larger window size system provides a better quality of results. During the benchmarks, dedicated to the concept evaluation we used 80% of available information, which corresponds to the middle-quality parameter value. Our conclusion is as following: with this problem instance and system setup, the changes in a learning process and parameter preference are mostly negligible, therefore, the forgetting mechanism should be disabled. In a future, it would be rather intriguing to investigate the influence of this parameter with other, potentially dynamic problem and/or instance, where the parameter preference is changing.



**Figure 5.27** Influence of HH-PC (code 2.4) task time on pla7397 TSP instance solving process.

**Task time.** Varying the time for one task evaluation (external iteration), one will dramatically change the granularity of obtained results. For instance, in our experiments with the least amount of time (5 seconds) HH-PC managed to perform more than 600 external iterations, while with the largest budgeted (30 seconds) approximately 150 (Figure 5.27). However, as we mentioned previously, the more information does not necessarily imply a more precise surrogate models. The used by us during the concept evaluation 15 seconds provided in the worst results. Boundary cases with 5 and 30 seconds task time gave rather unstable result (see box-plots in Figure 5.27). The former is full of too approximately evaluated parameters, while the latter simply did not manage to perform enough iterations. Balancing between results stability and quality we conclude that for the current setup statistically better choice would be to set 10 seconds for a task running time.



**Figure 5.28** Influence of HH-PC (code 2.4) workers number on pla7397 TSP instance solving process.

**Number of workers.** The influence of workers number was rather surprise to us. According to our expectations, with a growing number of LLH runners, the amount of evaluated configurations increases. However, instead of getting surrogate models with a better quality and as a result, improving sampled parameters performance, we observe the opposite behavior. For increasing number of workers the results became worse and worse, see box-plots in Figure 5.28. Currently, we do not have a comprehensive explanation of the observed behavior, except of possible surrogate models over-fitting. It is broadly studied problem in ML, according to which the models create a too complex hypothesis, which can not generalize well to unforeseen data. Thus, in our case it is possible that being over-fit, models did not adequately predict a possible results for sampled parameters, therefore, guided prediction process in a wrong direction. In any case, this behavior requires more comprehensive investigation.

### 5.5.3 Learning Models Configuration

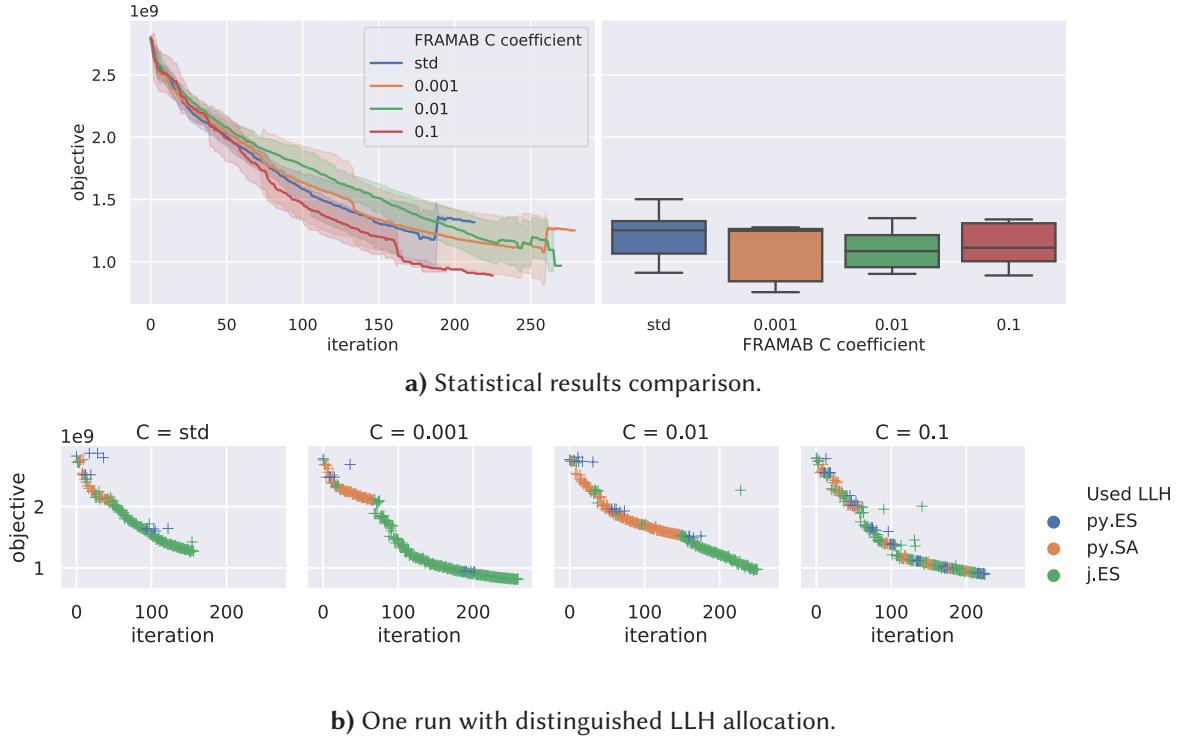
We perform this set of experiments for getting an intuition about the influence of underlying high-level heuristic configuration on general performance. As mentioned above, in HH-PC code 2.4 we used following learning models: FRAMAB for LLH selection and TPE for parameter tuning.

**FRAMAB C coefficient.** As you remember from FRAMAB description, presented in Section 4.3.3, the role of coefficient C is to give the user possibility to control the EvE balance while selecting the LLH. In our implementation we proposed the usage of result improvement standard deviation, motivated by (1) the exploration encourage, while the uncertainty in results exist and (2) possibility of FRAMAB parameter-less usage. Therefore, in first set of benchmarks we exclusively used this, STD-based FRAMAB regime.

The results of performed benchmarks with possibly different C values are presented in Figure 5.29. More concretely, in Figure 5.29a we compare statistic of all repetitions with different parameter value. Here we may conclude, the proposed parameter-less (STD-based) FRAMAB performs slightly worse in comparison to other algorithms. Glancing on the sequence of LLH allocation, presented in Figure 5.29b, we conclude that parameter reflects its intent, especially, comparing  $C = 0.1$  and  $C = 0.001$ . When C is large, the exploration-related part of FRAMAB's UCB value is increased, therefore, more different algorithms are used for optimization. However, when the C value is decreased, only few switches may be observed. An intriguing idea arises to introduce the technique for FRAMAB parameter control, according to which, the entire LLH portfolio utilized at the beginning with high C value, while approaching the end C is increased, to more concentrate with the best-performing LLH.

**TPE split size.** The internals of Bayesian TPE approach for parameter sampling were described during BOHB algorithm discussion in Section 2.3.2. Evaluated in this experiment *split size* parameter defines the proportion of information, used to construct the probability distributions of good parameter values.

## 5 Evaluation

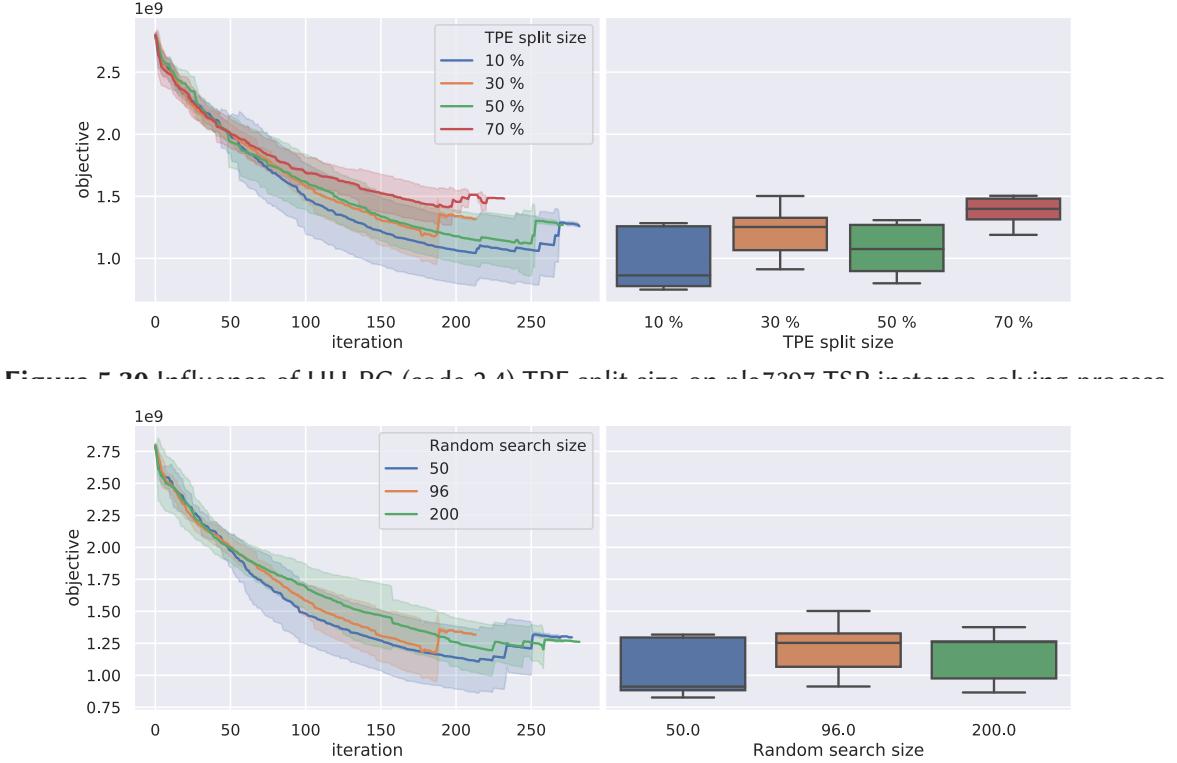


**Figure 5.29** Influence of HH-PC (code 2.4) FRAMAB C coefficient on pla7397 TSP instance solving process.

With small split size, only elite parameter values form distribution, therefore, an overall sampling process happens to be more greedy or, in other words, more exploitation-biased. According to our observations, presented in Figure 5.30, the least greedy parameter allocation produces statistically the worst results (70 %), while usage of 10 % split relieved the best potential. Used in previous experiments 30 % split produced slightly worse results than 50 %, which still could be caused by the randomized processes. Probably, this behavior should be investigated using more statistical data.

**Random search size.** This HLH parameter configures the random search process, performed over the created surrogate models. With given random search size equal  $N$ , for selecting the parameter values of LLH on each level  $N$  randomized samples are taken. Afterwards, these samples are compared with each other using surrogate models and one with the best results became level prediction. Therefore, according to our expectations, by increasing the random search size, the parameter values prediction process become more precise and as a consequence, performance increases.

After evaluating two additional to default sizes of 50 and 200 samples respectively, the obtained results happen to be not as we expected. In general, we observe a quality fluctuation, which is caused by randomized processes. When the sampling size was decreased, the quality statistics was slightly improvement, which is non-logical behavior (see intermediate and final results in Figure 5.31). It only motivates us to implement a proper optimization technique over surrogates for improving a robustness of the prediction process.



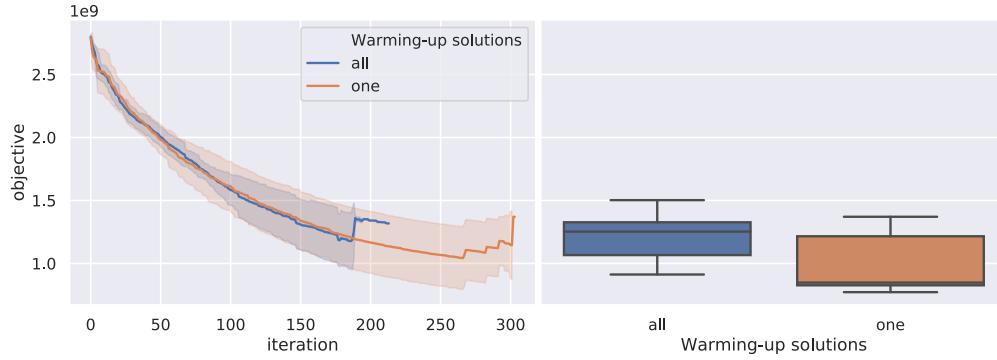
**Figure 5.31** Influence of HH-PC (code 2.4) random search size for surrogate optimization on pla7397 TSP instance solving process.

#### 5.5.4 Generic Low-Level Heuristics Configuration

The generic LLH configuration benchmark is represented by only one experiment, which we performed to evaluate how does the *number of warming-up solutions* affects the search. Our intuition during the implementation was following: we have to initialize the solver with all previously available solutions not to lose the obtained trajectory and traversal velocity. It is relevant only to the population-based algorithms, such as evolution strategy or potential genetic algorithm. The implemented py.SA simply used the best one among available population to start. When SA completes its run, it reports only a single obtained solution. If the following LLH is population-based ES, we do not copy SA-based solution, but rather allow ES to sample all the rest uniformly at random.

However, after changing this behavior to the only one warming-up solution usage, we surprisingly found out that the results quality was almost not affected: please, pay attention to overlapping progress curves in a left side of Figure 5.32. Moreover, passing only one solution between LLHs the overall number of external iterations were increased dramatically (from 200 to 300). It is caused by the reduced overhead for information processing and sending through network. We conclude that changing the behavior to only one warming-up solution usage provides a positive impact on the final results quality and do not affect the intermediate progress.

## 5 Evaluation



**Figure 5.32** Influence of HH-PC (code 2.4) workers number on pla7397 TSP instance solving process.

## 5.6 Conclusion

The evaluation of proposed concept implementation was presented in this chapter and performed in two stages.

In the first stage an analysis of the implemented concept was performed. We compared it with a baseline, defined by underlying meta-heuristics used separately with static hyper-parameters. Conclusions about the concept applicability are following:

- Firstly, the proposed reinforcement learning-based generic parameter control approach (MH-PC) is able to improve the performance of statically defined meta-heuristic hyper-parameters and in some cases even outperform the results of tuned parameters. From the implementation perspective, the system has lack of mechanism for bad-performing external iteration termination. On the generic level, it may be implemented in form of tasks termination mechanism, carried out by BRISEv2.
- Secondly, the developed heuristic selection technique (HH-SP) is able to reach a quality of the best performing underling low-level heuristic. Nevertheless, the mentioned above issue of LLH struggling should be resolved.
- Finally, the united approach of on-line algorithm selection and parameter tuning (HH-PC) reaches the desired results of the best underlying algorithm with tuned parameters on rather small problem instances. For making a confident conclusion it should be investigated more thoroughly on a set of larger problem instances, where low-level heuristics require more time to converge in local optimum. We leave the answer for this question open for the future work.

In the second evaluation part we investigated an influence of the proposed united approach (HH-PC) parameters on its performance. We found the influence of some among evaluated parameters to be not as we expected. More concretely, an insertion of relatively ‘light’ *forgetting mechanism* instead of improving an optimization process made the results statistically worse. The increasing number of workers only decreases the surrogate models accuracy. The decision of using all available solutions for LLH initialization introduced a redundant overhead, but does not improve quality, therefore, it will be reconsidered. Nevertheless, the set of experiments from the second evaluation stage should also be performed over the other system operating modes (MH-PC and HH-SP) for making a confident conclusion. Up until now it reviled the system adaptation ability with help of exposed parameters and their non-obvious influence on the performance.

Yevhenii: add evaluation of 2.4 on a largest problem instance will all reviewed fixes?

## 6 Conclusion

Before making a general conclusion, let us briefly remind our objective. The task of this thesis was to extend the existing parameter tuning software product line with an approach of algorithm selection. We made a step further and extended this goal with simultaneous parameter control in the selected algorithms.

During our research the complex objective was split into several compound tasks, which were formulated in three research questions (Section 1.2). Therefore, to conclude our work we answer to these questions.

### **RQ 1** *Is it possible to perform the algorithm configuration at runtime on a generic level?*

Performing the review of conducted research related to algorithm configuration problems, we found that most of the generic approaches are related to parameter tuning, in other words, to searching a proper configuration at design time. The idea of adapting algorithm parameters arose in field of evolutionary algorithms and spread into other meta-heuristics, however, in algorithm-dependent manner.

In this thesis we proposed a generic approach to control the parameters, which relies on two aspects. Firstly, it should be possible to evaluate the performance of system under control with specified configuration at any time. Ideally, if it is possible to run the system with specified beforehand budget (number of iterations, or wall-clock time). Secondly, it should be possible to change the target algorithm configuration and proceed an execution with obtained results. If both requirements are hold, the reinforcement learning methodologies are used to traverse the parameter space, evaluating configurations performance iteratively, while algorithm is running. The proposed concept of generic parameter control was evaluated in Section 5.4.3 on three algorithms: Python-based simulated annealing and evolution strategy and Java-based evolution strategy implementations. Approach revealed its applicability by reaching, and in some cases even outperforming the results of tuned in off-line algorithm configurations. A limitation of the proposed concept lays in its applicability to those algorithms, which execution time is much larger than parameter control routines.

### **RQ 2** *Is it possible to simultaneously perform algorithm selection and parameters adaptation while solving an optimization problem?*

The problem of concurrent algorithm type and its configuration selection is not new and the examples was found in ongoing research of *automated machine learning* field. Researchers combined the two problems into one search problem, however, most of the approaches rely on off-line learning.

Our idea of merging those two problems lays in treating the algorithm type as a regular categorical parameter in search space, utilizing parent-child relationships to define dependent parameters in such search space and performing the selection by means of (1) sampling the independent parameters first while children are hidden, (2) fixing the selected for parent value and exposing the *activated* children parameters to proceed with prediction. The proposed step-wise configuration construction process provides a possibility to utilize a wide range of surrogate models to learn the dependencies among parameter values. The requirements and imitations of the proposed approach remain the same, as for defined above generic parameter control technique.

## 6 Conclusion

### RQ 3 What is the effect of selecting and adapting algorithm while solving an optimization problem?

According to our expectations, the proposed approach should expose the performance, comparable to the best among available for selection algorithms with tuned parameters. The performed in Section 5.4.5 evaluation and analysis of simultaneous on-line algorithm selection and parameter control revealed its applicability for relatively small optimization problem instances. More concretely, given the same wall-clock time and environment setup, HH-PC was able to produce better results than the best underlying tuned meta-heuristics for kroA100 TSP instance. For slightly larger (pr439) example, the results were comparable with the tuned meta-heuristics. With rat783 HH-PC only in some cases reached the best solver used solely, while experiments with pla7397 TSP instance shown a considerable degradation in HH-PC performance. However, analyzing the results we found several implementation issues not only in the implemented concept, but also in one of underlying algorithms. Therefore, our conclusion on a positive results of merging the on-line algorithm selection and parameter control problems can not be assured yet.

An explicit list of this thesis contributions is following:

1. Proposed the concept of reinforcement learning-based generic parameter control in meta-heuristics. Empirical evaluation of three meta-heuristic implementation proved its ability to reach the performance of tuned in off-line parameters.
2. Proposed the concept of reinforcement learning-based on-line selection hyper-heuristic with parameter control in low-level meta-heuristics. The experiments demonstrated its applicability, however, the concept requires more thorough evaluation.
3. The usability of an existing software product line for parameter tuning BRISEv2 was extended with aforementioned cases without losing the flexibility of usage a wide range of learning models. Also, the concept of data preprocessing was encapsulated for variability reasons.

We consider the thesis task to be accomplished and the proposed reinforcement learning-based generic parameter control and algorithm selection approaches (yet separately) to be useful for solving the optimization problems with help of meta-heuristics.

# 7 Future work

In this chapter we discuss the postponed for future work investigations. We organized them into several groups and sort each of them in descendant by means of urgency and importance. Section 7.1 is dedicated to the prediction process and learning models used in HLH of developed approach. In Section 7.2 we discuss a set of enhancements for the search space that should be performed for better usability. Finally, in the section Section 7.3 we discuss a benchmark experiments, required to obtain a better evidences about the proposed approach applicability and HH-PC in particular.

## 7.1 Prediction Process

**Surrogate optimization generalization.** In Section 4.3 we discussed the process of parameter values prediction based on surrogate models. A classical approach of optimization with surrogates implies two steps. Firstly, the models should be constructed and evaluated by means of their accuracy. If the model is not accurate enough, it could result in a wrong prediction and as a consequence in wrong optimization guidance. After getting the proper model, the second step should be performed, namely, surrogate optimization. It is an actual process of prediction making, which bases on construction of configuration and using surrogate to estimate its quality. In our work we used a random search surrogate optimization technique instead of implementing a more sophisticated algorithm due to the lack of time. However, the evaluation of random search intensity (Figure 5.31) revealed the urgency of this question, since the quality of random search results is not stable. Therefore, one of the first steps in future work should be the implementation of proper algorithm for the surrogate model optimization.

**Process metrics for reinforcement learning.** The proposed concept of reinforcement learning-guided parameter space traversal is based on the estimation of relative improvement, performed by the selected parameters (Section 3.1). However, the amount of obtained information may not be enough to truly estimate the configuration quality. We would like to emphasize that it is not a problem of the surrogates, but of the reinforcement learning. Thus, the possible improvement of results may be obtained from adding additional RL metrics. For instance, a RL-based parameter control for EAs [65] besides algorithm-dependent metrics, such as genotypic and phenotypic diversity, fitness standard deviation (in population) used also algorithm-independent metrics such as fitness improvement and stagnation counter. While improvement estimation is already used in our concept, the later, namely, a stagnation estimation is a possible candidate for additional learning metrics. Please note, using several such several metrics, the surrogate optimization process turns to be a multi-objective OP.

**Meta-/Off-line learning phase.** Relying fully on the on-line learning, in early stages (while surrogate models can not be constructed properly due to lack of information) our concept behaves as a random search. However, many studies, somehow related to proposed technique reported a significant performance boost in early stages, if the off-line or in other words meta-learning was performed. More concretely, in [44] (also discussed in Section 2.4) the authors performed meta-learning to pre-train their surrogate models for guiding the search at the beginning. In [115] the authors developed selection

hyper-heuristic with mixed learning type, therefore, before an actual run, the off-line phase were executed to guide the on-line selection at early stages. In our system we could use the results of previously executed experiments for similar scenario case to guide right from start not only the LLH selection, but also the parameter control.

Separately we would like to highlight a recent study [13], in which the authors also suggest to use reinforcement learning approach to solve a similar *dynamic algorithm configuration* problem. In their work the problem was enclosed in Markov decision processes which includes meta-learning step: learning across the problem instances.

## 7.2 Search Space

**Composition on numerical parameters.** In current implementation of the search space we highlighted that it is able to form the parent-child relationship only when parent is of the categorical type Section 4.2.2. However, it may happen, when the dependencies among parameters are based on their numeric values. As an example, imagine the algorithm in which for one parameter values range the first child type should be exposed, while for other range – another child. As a possible solution we propose utilizing a similar to used in categorical parameters approach, but instead of a single activation value, use ranges. Thus, during the prediction propagation step the parameter entity will check all ranges and expose the related children (for more details see description of the Listing 4.6).

**Constraints among parameters.** Sometimes, the prohibitions for a specific values may arise with respect to other parameters. For instance, the value of one numeric parameter should be at least as high as value of the other. In this case along with activation values the notion of deactivation values may be introduced.

## 7.3 Evaluations and Benchmarks

The presented in Chapter 5 evaluation contains only the coarse-grained set of experiments, however, the proposed in this thesis concept of merging algorithm selection and parameter control comprises several building blocks, each of which should be thoroughly evaluated separately. Therefore, here we propose a set of fine-grained directions for future evaluation.

### 7.3.1 Use-Case Evaluation

**Optimization problems.** The advantage of hyper-heuristics lays in their ability to tackle a *family* or *class* of optimization problems, defiled by underlying low-level heuristics. Due to this flexibility of hyper-heuristics in general and the proposed concept in particular, by changing the domain-dependent components of low-level heuristics one will be able to tackle numbers of other optimization problems. Our evaluation in Chapter 5 is performed only on a traveling salesman problem. However, the combinatorial problems also include other types such as *flow-shop scheduling* [53], *nurse rostering* [26], *knapsack* [99], *n-queens* [97] and many other real-life and synthetic optimization problems. Used in our implementation jMetalPy framework [6] out of the box includes domain-dependent components for aforementioned knapsack problem, but thanks to its flexibility it is relatively easy to add other problem types.

**Construction hyper-heuristics.** The discussed in Section 2.2.5 idea of construction hyper-heuristics implies the algorithm creation from the building blocks. In our work we treated the *mutation*, *crossover*, *selection types* as the categorical parameters of underlying LLHs. However, in used jMetal and jMetalPy

frameworks these parameters are implemented as separate operators that should be specified during the algorithm instantiation. Therefore, the proposed concepts of search space and RL-based parameter assignment may be evaluated also for the construction hyper-heuristic cases.

**Automatic machine learning.** Making a step further from construction hyper-heuristic, an orthogonal research direction of an automatic machine learning field is exposed. The reviewed in Section 2.4 framework deal with the construction of machine learning pipelines that operate on datasets. In our approach, the proposed representation of the search space may be used to define the ML pipeline structure. For instance, the first several levels of our search space may encode the data preprocessing in ML pipeline. The successive level denotes the ML algorithm instances, while the final level is dedicated to validation technique. This system use-case should be evaluated against the already proposed solutions in automatic machine learning field, for instance, AutoSklearn [44], TPOT [88] and many others.

### 7.3.2 System Configuration Evaluation

The benchmark set, presented in Section 5.5 is dedicated to the implemented concept configuration evaluation. Due to the time constraints, we were able to probe only a few system modes and settings. Nevertheless, a vast bunch of experiments should be conducted urgently.

**Modes of operation.** In Section 5.5 only to HH-PC mode was benchmarked. But, it includes two other modes, namely MH-PC and HH-SP, which configuration should be evaluated separately by means of (1) underlying surrogate models settings, (2) adding more LLHs. While the influence of first direction was partially relieved in Section 5.5, the second direction, which is relevant only to HH-SP and HH-PC modes requires more clarification. By extending the search space with more LLHs, the RL will require more information (in terms of external iterations) for tuning available LLHs and differentiating among them by means of their performance. It is clear that with LLH number growth, the final performance gap between the best performing (tuned) LLH and HH-PS (HH-PC) will increase. The goal of this experiments will lay in a dependency estimation between search space complexity and the introducing RL-based search overhead.

**Reinforcement learning configuration.** Other worth-to-mention course of investigation is the influence of currently implemented RL-based optimization approach. The experiments with different TSP instances showed inefficiency of strictly defined time-based external iterations. For instance, with kroA100 TSP most of the used LLHs reached the local optimum after a couple of first external iterations and settled there till the end of optimization process. Thus, the *adaptive external iteration time* should be introduced, which analyzing the process stagnation will be able to terminate the optimization session earlier.

On a contrary, instead of time-based mechanism for external iteration termination, one may also limit the number of internal iterations performed by LLH. Using this mechanism the set of use-cases may be extended with the expensive for evaluation optimization problems.

## *7 Future work*

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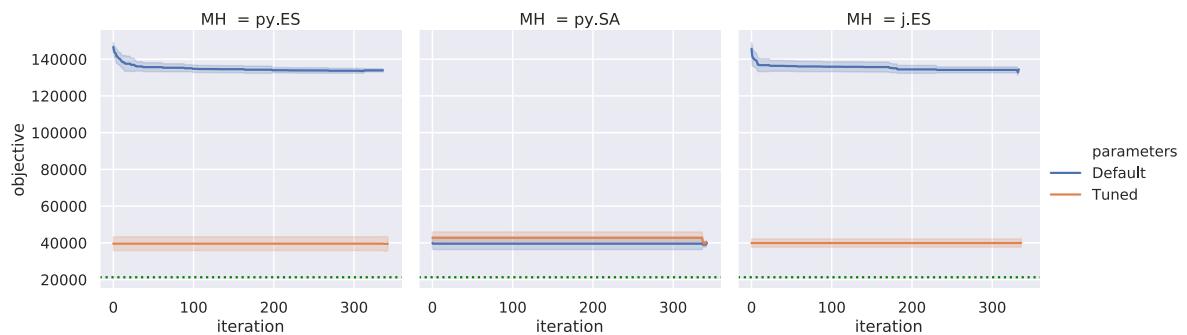
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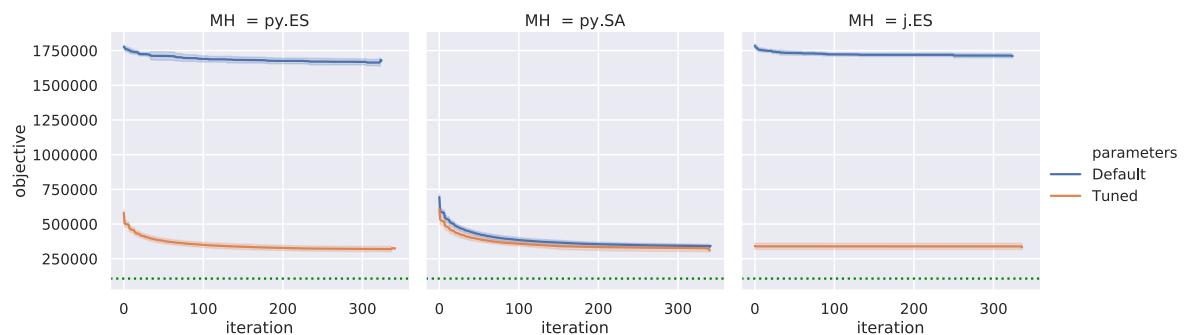
# A Evaluation plots

## A.1 Concept Evaluation

### A.1.1 Baseline

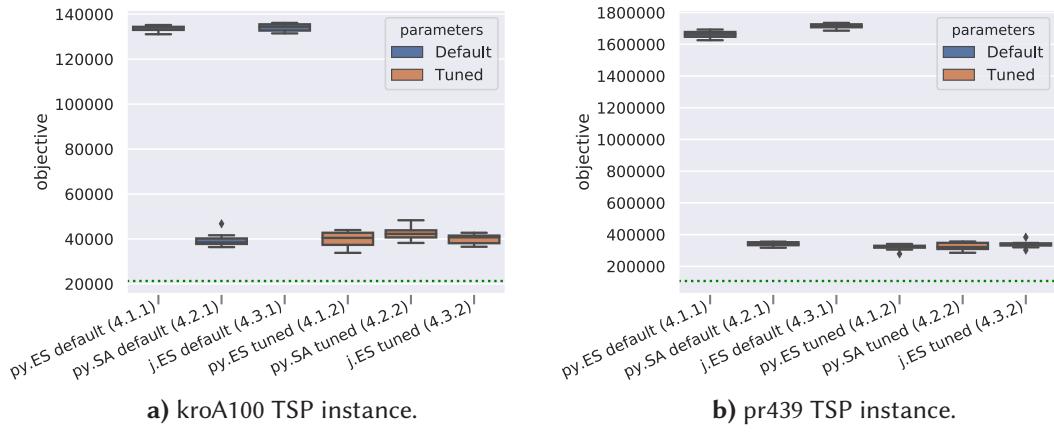


**Figure A.1** Intermediate results of meta-heuristics with static parameters on kroA100.



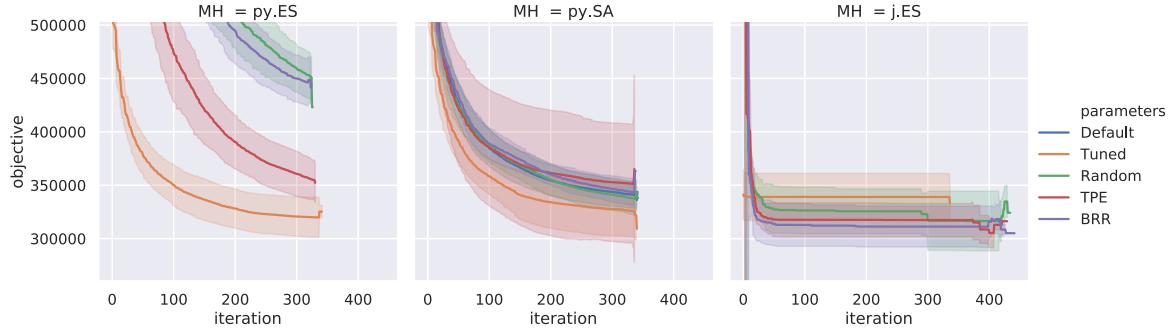
**Figure A.2** Intermediate results of meta-heuristics with static parameters on pr439.

## A Evaluation plots

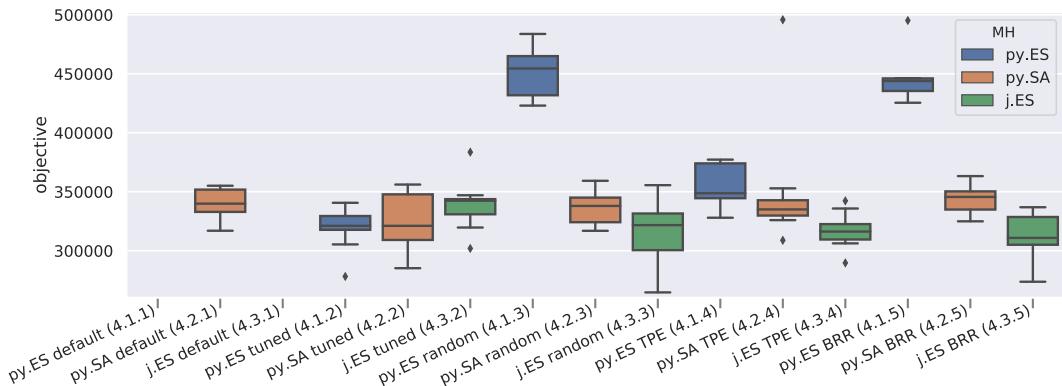


**Figure A.3** Final results of meta-heuristics with static parameters.

### A.1.2 Parameter Control

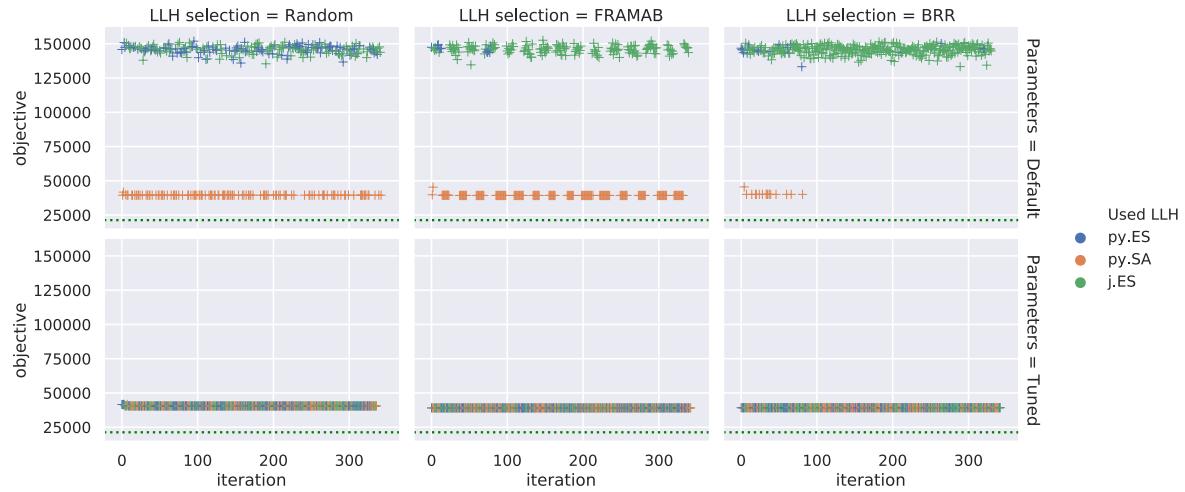


**Figure A.4** Intermediate results of meta-heuristics with parameter control on pr439.

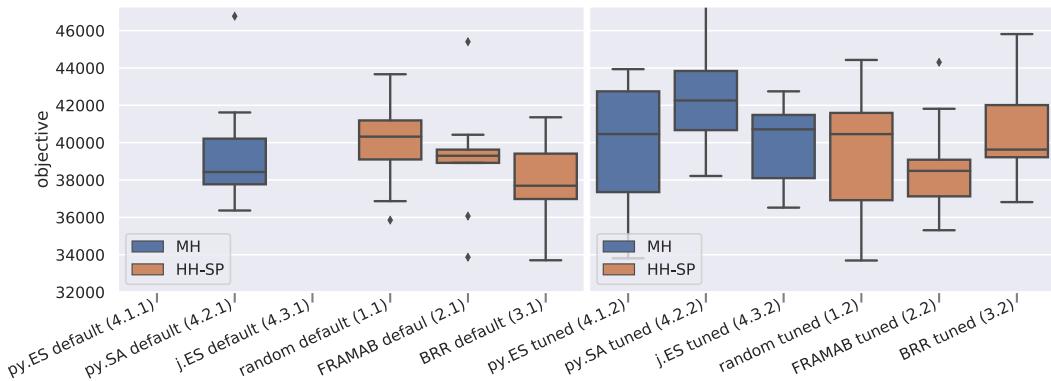


**Figure A.5** Final results of meta-heuristics with parameter control on pr439.

### A.1.3 Selection Hyper-Heuristic with Static LLH Parameters

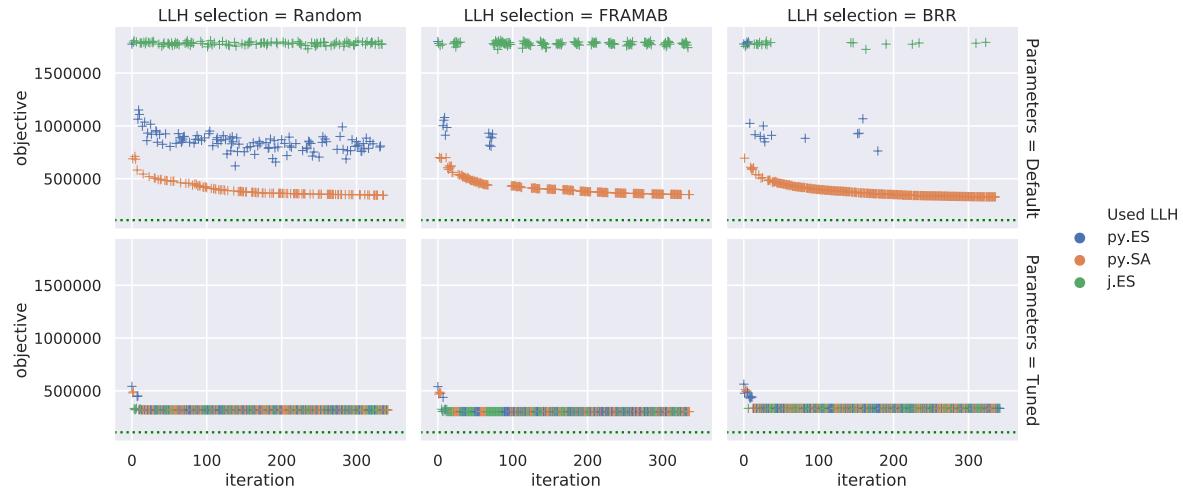


**Figure A.6** Intermediate performance of on-line selection hyper-heuristic with static hyper-parameters on kroA100 (single experiment).

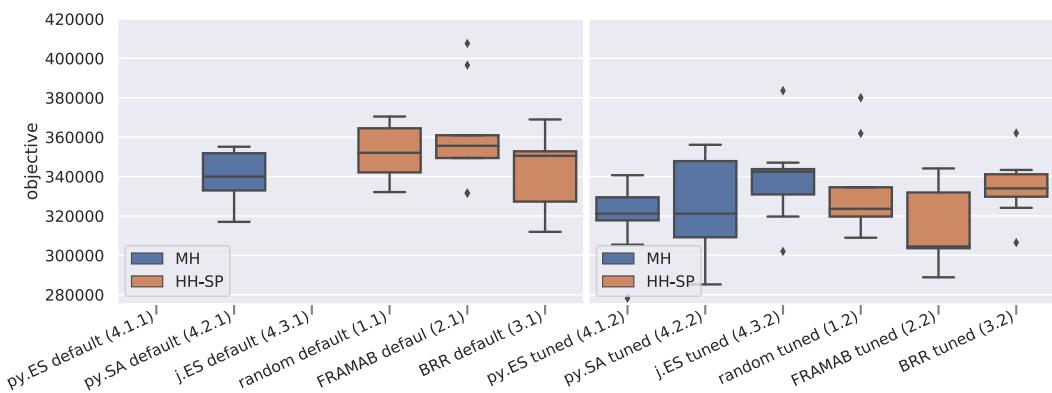


**Figure A.7** Final results of on-line selection hyper-heuristic with static hyper-parameters on kroA100 (statistic of 9 runs).

## A Evaluation plots

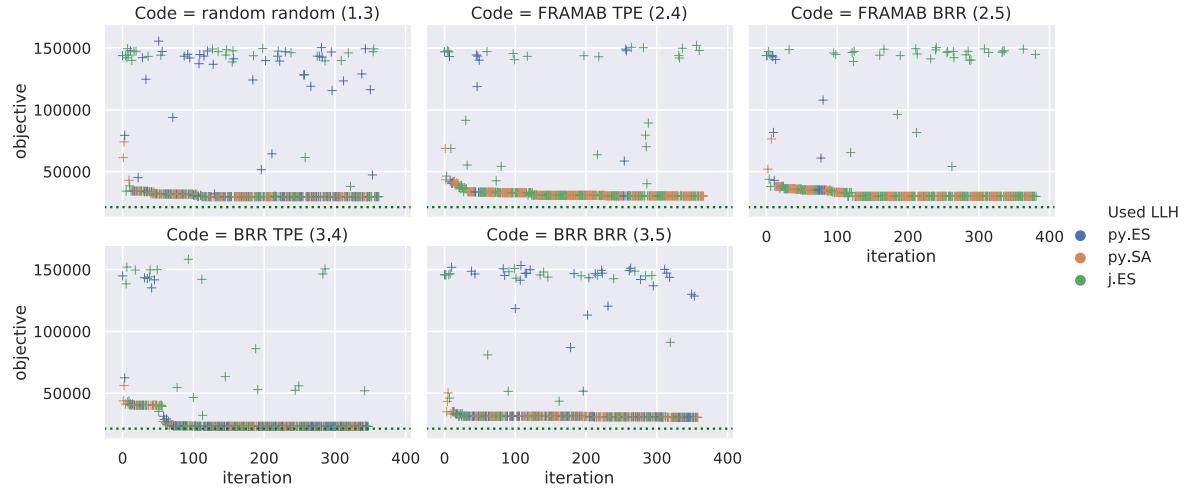


**Figure A.8** Intermediate performance of on-line selection hyper-heuristic with static hyper-parameters on pr439 (single experiment).

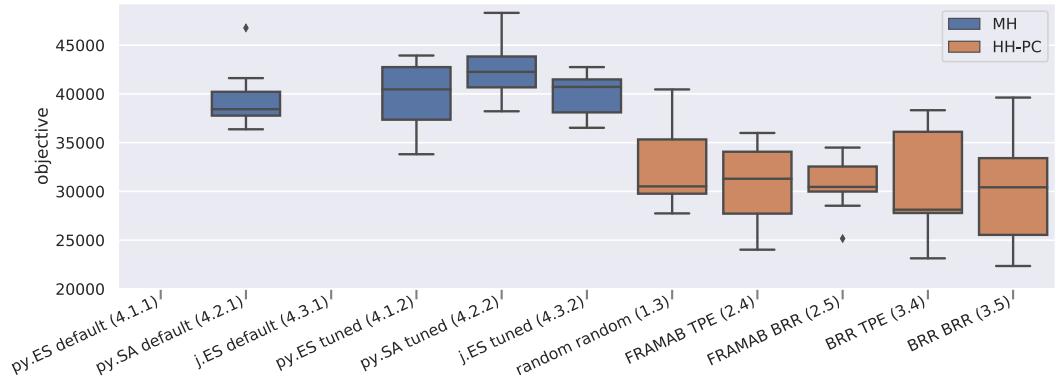


**Figure A.9** Final results of on-line selection hyper-heuristic with static hyper-parameters on pr439 (statistic of 9 runs).

#### A.1.4 Selection Hyper-Heuristic with Parameter Control

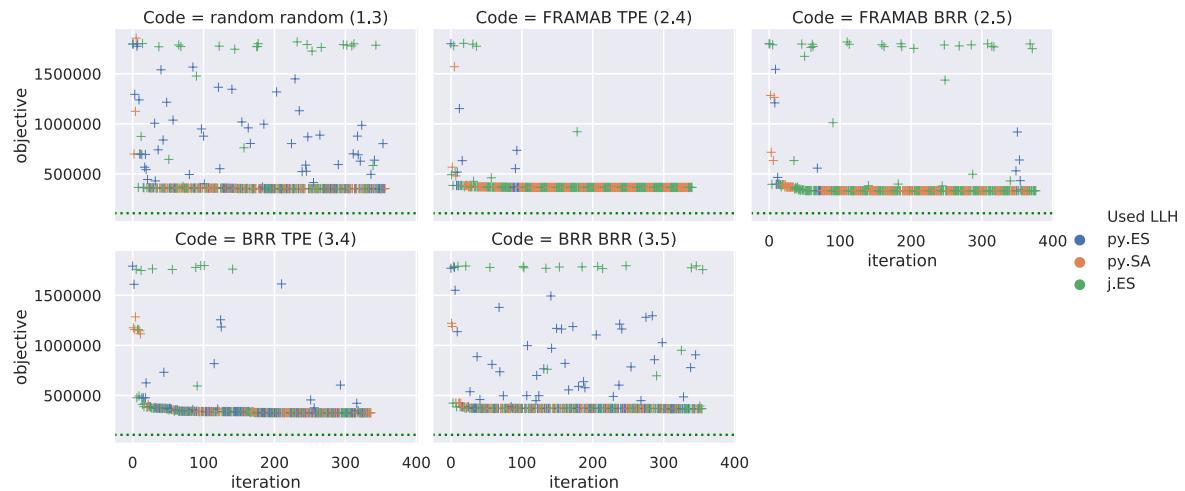


**Figure A.10** Intermediate performance of HH-PC on kroA100 (single experiment).

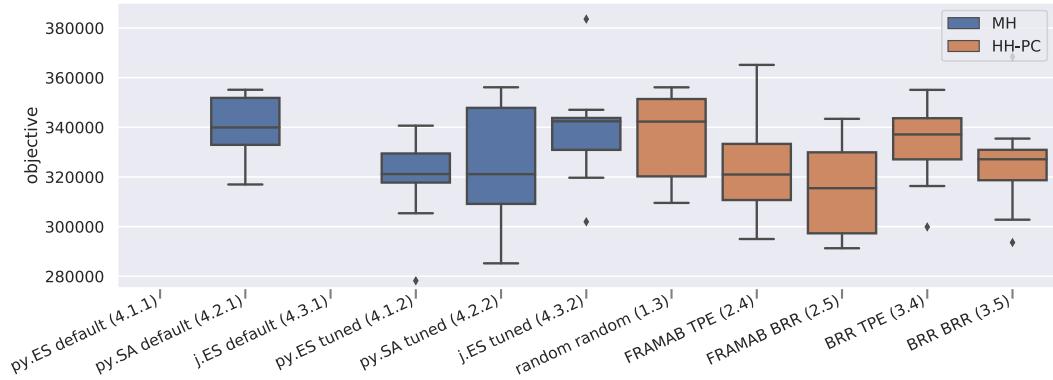


**Figure A.11** Final results of HH-PC compared with MH on kroA100 (statistic of 9 runs).

## A Evaluation plots



**Figure A.12** Intermediate performance of HH-PC on pr439 (single experiment).



**Figure A.13** Final results of HH-PC compared with MH on pr439 (statistic of 9 runs).

## **Confirmation**

I confirm that I independently prepared the thesis and that I used only the references and auxiliary means indicated in the thesis.

Dresden,