



Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich
Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich

Lecture with Computer Exercises: Modelling and Simulating Social Systems with MATLAB

Project Report

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We hereby agree to make our source code for this project freely available for download from the web pages of the SOMS chair. Furthermore, we assure that all source code is written by ourselves and is not violating any copyright restrictions.

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1 Abstract

The amount of people transported by train in Switzerland has been constantly rising in the last years. This growth brings many questions to the SBB, the largest train company in Switzerland. [7] In this paper we discuss the approach of maximizing the amount of people transported in the Swiss rail network. In an optimised scenario trains would be able to fill their capacity and more people could be transported with the same resources. This increase of efficiency would help with counteracting the pressure on the rail network. We will approach this problem with a model, which is inspired by the path finding of ant colonies. Ants have been found to be very efficient at finding paths, which lead to food sources. Those paths are optimised in terms of travel time to the source and the quality of the food.

2 Individual contributions

The paper is an team effort of Joël Mathys and Marc Rauch. There was no strict division of the work, but both of us had a focus on a certain part of the paper.

- Joël Mathys: Simulation, visualisation, graph generation, writing of report
- Marc Rauch: Behaviour of single ants, writing of report

3 Introduction and Motivations

The amount of people who use the Swiss rail network has risen by over 900% in the last 100 years. However the number of train stations and the total distance covered by rails have only seen a growth of less then 20% [7]. Therefore the efficiency, of transporting those customers has become more important. In this paper we describe the efficiency as passengers transported per time. The goal is to maximize this efficiency and transport as many passengers as possible in a given time period. For this optimization the resources should only be redistributed, but no additional trains or stations have to be added to the system. We assume, that the most efficient way to transport these people is a compromise between distance to the destination and the size of the target city. If a train connection covers a long distance, then the destination city has to be large, so that enough passengers have the desire to use this connection. If the distance is short, and the demand for the connection is lower, it is still worthwhile to allocate some resources to that connection. Ants have a similar goal when searching for a new food source. They have to find a compromise between distance to a source and the quality of the provided food. Many studies show, that the method used by ants to find this optimum is very efficient. In fact they are so

competent, that over the last 20 years lots of research was done in solving problems with the inspiration from ants. These so called ant colony optimization (ACO) algorithms are mainly used in solving hard problems, which can not be efficiently solved. Through the research many promising algorithms have been found [2]. For the rest of this paper we are going to explore the following questions:

- How can the productivity in a network be maximised?
- What does this imply on the Swiss rail network?

We are going to investigate those questions with the help of an ACO. The analogy between the ant model and the rail system will be described In chapter 4.5. The productivity in the ant network is defined as the amount of food, that is brought back to the colonies per time. We are looking to investigating the following parameters:

1. The population sizes do not change.
2. The ants are free to change colonies globally.
3. The ants can only change colonies locally.

In the end we compare the resulting efficiency of each of those strategies.

4 Description of the Model

The model is based on research on the ant *Lasius niger*, in the book "Self-organization in biological systems" [1]. This paper describes the process of trail formation in ants. This phenomenon can easily observed in the wild, by placing some sugar solution. After a short while the food will be discovered and shortly after, the number of ants at the food source will increase rapidly, until eventually it stabilizes and a well established trail of ants can be observed from the nest to the sugar. To study this behaviour, several experiments have been conducted on a colony of *Lasius niger*. The research was done under Laboratory conditions, so that the terrain could be controlled and therefore the experiments are repeatable. The terrain was constructed in such a way, that there was one path leading away from the colony, which then split into two paths with a food source at the end of both paths. The length, as well as the quality of the food sources could be controlled. Then the behaviour of the ants was observed and formulated as a mathematical model.

4.1 Trail laying

It was found, that the ants would place chemicals, so called pheromones, which motivates other ants to follow the laid path. When an ant finds a food source it will

lay pheromones on the way back to the nest and on the following trips to the source. This acts as a positive feedback for the other ants, which are likely to follow that trail. Trail laying is only observed by ants, who found food. The intensity of the laid trails is dependant on the quality of the found food. The better the food source, the more pheromones will be deposited. The frequency of laying pheromones is also reduced based on the current direction of the ant. If the ant is walking in a trajectory with a bad angle to the direct route to the nest less pheromones will be placed. The placed chemicals also evaporate over time. They undergo an exponential decay given by formula 1.

$$\frac{dC}{dt} = -\frac{1}{l}C \quad (1)$$

where l is the lifetime of the pheromones and C the concentration.

4.2 Binary choices

In the experiment there was a choice the ants had to make, when the path split into two and they have to decide, whether to go left or right. This decision is made based on the concentration of pheromones on each branch. So that the branch with a higher concentration of pheromones on it has a better chance of being chosen. For that decision a formula for the probability of choosing one of the two branches was found.

$$P_L = \frac{(k + C_L)^n}{(k + C_L)^n + (k + C_R)^n} \text{ and } P_R = 1 - P_L \quad (2)$$

n is the non-linearity factor. with a high value of n a branch with little more pheromones then the other will be strongly favoured. With experiments it is approximately found that $n = 2$. k stands for the likelihood of the ant taking a path with no pheromones on it. P is the probability of choosing the left or right path and C the concentration of pheromones on each path.

4.3 U-Turns

It is often observed, that ants on a trail make an U-turn, return to the last branch point and follow the other path. After an U-turn the ant does not lay a trail, until it has gone back to the branch and follows the new path. There are two causes of this behaviour. If the amount of pheromones on the trail is low the ant may turn around. The second reason is direction based. If the orientation to the target is not good the probability of an U-turn is high. This probability can be modelled by equation 3. [1]

$$P = \frac{P_0}{1 + \alpha C} \quad (3)$$

P_0 stands for the probability of an direction based U-turn. α describes the importance of the pheromone based U-turn.

4.4 Extensions

For our project we could not use the model as given in the paper, So the model was changed in some aspects to ease the implementation and add additional functionality. Because the goal of this paper is to model more complicated networks then the one with only one binary decision, formula 2 has to be adapted to support a choice between more than just two paths.

$$P_i = \frac{(k + C_i)^n}{\sum_{j=1}^{nr} (k + C_j)^n} \quad (4)$$

nr describes the number of adjacent edges on the node.

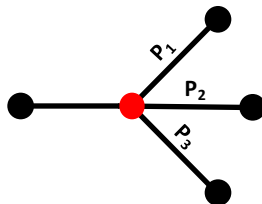


Figure 1: Decision of an ant approaching a traffic node of degree 4 (represented in red) from the left hand side, with the probabilities P_1 to P_3 of the next edge.

Notice, that although the graph is not directed the decision of taking the same edge back to where the ant came from is not allowed. This edge is not part of the decision set. Because we represent the terrain on which the ants move by a graph, the implementation of direction based turns is very difficult. Therefore we set $P_0 = 1$ in equation 3 and are left with the pheromone based U-turn equation.

4.5 Relation to the Swiss rail network

The Swiss rail network should be described with the help of this model. The network is given as a graph, which connects all train station to each other. The following analogies between the ant and the train model have been made:

- The train stations represent the sources, as well as the colonies.
- The ants are replaced by trains.
- The food is represented by the travelling passengers.

In the new model the train stations are the starting point and the destination of all trains. Therefore there is no more distinction between colonies and sources, since colonies are sources for ants of a different colony. When a train reaches its destination, it gets filled up with people. The more people are at that station the more passengers will board the train. The amount of waiting passengers at the station is equivalent to the quality of the food. With every arrival of trains at a station the quality of this station decreases, as there are less passengers waiting to be transported. This devaluation of the stations is counteracted by a regeneration rate, which is proportional to the popularity of the station. A popular station has a high regeneration rate, as there are lots of new potential passengers arriving in a given time step. With those analogies the productivity, which was defined as food carried to each colony per time is defined as people transported to each station per time. This is exactly the quantity, which we want to optimize.

5 Implementation

For the implementation of the model we used MATLAB. In order to keep the code readable as the project grows, we split the main functionalities into different files.

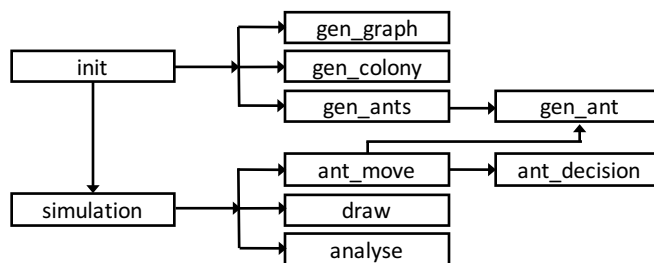


Figure 2: Dependencies of the different MATLAB scripts. The arrows indicate calls of functions

The only executable file is *init.m*. It defines all global variables like the mean lifetime of pheromones, the number of ants and the parameters of the simulation. All the objects, which are important to the simulation are also created in this file. This is done by a call of *gen_sources*, *gen_colonies*, *gen_graph* and *gen_ants*. The generated structures are then fed into the *simulation* script, where a simulation loop is implemented and the position of the ants is updated by *ant_move* for the specified number of iterations. The relevant data is then stored and processed by the *analyse* function. In the end the result of the analysis is visualized by the *draw* function.

5.1 Graph

The network, on which the ants move is given by a graph. This graph consists of two different types of nodes. The traffic- and source nodes. Traffic nodes are introduced, where two or more roads come together and the ant is forced to choose one of those paths. The other type of node is the source node. Each source node is the start of a colony. However the members of a colony do not see their own starting node as a food source (they can not get their food from their starting node). But the starting nodes of other colonies are seen as food sources. Because we have to be able to control the structure of the graph, it can be read from a .txt file containing the information of all nodes and edges. Those text files are randomly generated by a python script with the method of power law distribution.

5.1.1 Rail network

For the second part of our goal, to maximize the productivity in the Swiss rail network we have to be able to utilize the graph of this network. We got the data to construct this graph from a graphic outlining all the far distance connection of the SBB [6]. We chose to select the colonies to be the train stations with the most visitors per day [4]. The weight of the edges is not given by the physical distance, but by the time it takes to travel from one node to the other by a direct connection (based on the SBB time table)[5]. To draw the graph we used the Swiss coordinate system and normalized it, so that Geneva is the origin. In the drawn version the edges represent geographical distance.

5.2 Ant behaviour

The movement and decision of the ants is based on the model described in chapter 4. The script responsible for the update of the position at every time step is called *ant_move*. There the next position of the ant on the graph is determined. The ant has a variable to store the progress on the edge. As soon, as this progress reaches the weight of the edge a node has been reached. If the node is a food source, different from the starting point the ant will bring some of the food back to the colony. By doing so the food source will experience a devaluation. The ant follows exactly the same path back to its nest, that it took on the way to the source. On the way back it will deposit pheromones, with an intensity depending on the quality of the found food source. The pheromones are saved in a variable of the edges. Each colony has their own pheromones, the decision of the ant is not affected by the trail laying of the ants from other colonies. If the found node is a traffic node, then the ant has to make a decision between the n adjacent paths. This decision happens in the

ant_decision function. As seen in formula 4 the decision depends on the concentration of pheromones on the path. This concentration is calculated by

$$c = \frac{pheromones}{weight} \quad (5)$$

Where weight is the length of an edge. The ant is free to choose from all the edges on the node, except for the one it used to get there. However this freedom presents another problematic. Because the ant is free to choose between all the edges it is allowed to walk in circles. Those cycles would then be reinforced by the trail laying on the way back. To solve this we still allow the ants to walk in circles, but when they do the circle will be removed from the path vector, which is used to find the way back to the nest. The U-turns are implemented exactly as described in equation 3. At every time step this probability is calculated. With this probability a U-turn happens and the ant walks back to the last visited node.

5.3 Ant reallocation

As described in the introduction chapter, the goal is to maximise the productivity of the network by reallocating ants to other colonies. In the following the implementation of the two strategies is explained.

5.3.1 Local reallocation

Remember from chapter 3, that the productivity of an colony is calculated by the total food, brought back to the colony per time. Hence the productivity of a single ant of a colony is calculated by dividing the productivity of the colony by the number of corresponding ants. Now when the ant finds a colony it has a probability of staying there and work for them (Formula 6)

$$P = \max(0, \frac{Prod_{ant} - Prod_{new}}{Prod_{ant} + Prod_{new}}) \quad (6)$$

P describes the probability of staying at the new colony, $Prod_{ant}$ stands for the productivity of the arriving ant and $Prod_{new}$ for the productivity of the ants at the new colony.

5.3.2 Global reallocation

In contrary to the local approach, the ants do not have to walk to their new home in the global solution. Instead the reallocation happens, when the ant arrives at its own nest. If the productivity of that ant is lower, then the global average productivity,

The ant can be transferred to a new colony. To determine whether the ant is moved a modification to equation 6 is made, where $prod_{new}$ is replaced by the global average productivity. If moved the target colony is then determined by chance out of all the colonies, which perform better then average. If an ant is transferred, it happens instantly. At the next time step the ant will be part of the new colony.

6 Simulation Results and Discussion

7 Summary and Outlook

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