BACHELOR PAPER

Thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Science in Engineering at the University of Applied Sciences Technikum Wien - Degree Program Computer Science

Currying the web: A custom Java REST framework - built on functional paradigms - compared to Spring Boot: Performance, Developer Guidance and Ease of Use

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Abstract

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1 Introduction

Web development is a huge part of the software industry. Most of the time, the server part of a web application is built using the MVC pattern and object oriented programming [1]. Functional programming is not used as much in web development, in the last few years however, functional programming has been gaining a lot of popularity with languages such as Haskell, Scala and Clojure but also with functional concepts being added to object oriented languages like Java and C# [2].

Combining functional programming with web development using more widely used languages e.g. Java is a scarcely researched topic which this thesis aims to explore and shine some light on. The goal is to build a REST framework in Java 21 using functional paradigms and compare it to Spring Boot in terms of performance, developer guidance and ease of use.

2 Literature review

2.1 REST

Representational State Transfer (REST) is the state-of-the-art way to build the server part of a client-server-architecture and it is most likely only going to get bigger in the industry [3]. It was first described by Roy Fielding in his doctoral dissertation in 2000. REST is based on the following properties [4]:

- Client-server - The client and the server are separated and can be developed independently.
- Stateless - The server does not store any client state. Every request contains all the information the server needs to process it.
- Cache - Responses can be cached to improve performance.
- Uniform Interface - The interface between the client and the server is uniform and simple.

2.2 Functional programming

2.2.1 General

Functional programming - unlike procedural or object oriented programming - is not based on the Turing machine, but rather on lambda calculus. Lambda calculus, developed by Alonzo Church in the 1930s, is a mathematical system later proven - by Turing himself - to be equivalent to the Turing machine [5].

The base principles of functional programming are [6]:

- Immutability - Variables are not changed after they are assigned a value.
- Pure functions - Functions do not have side effects and always return the same output for the same input.
- Higher order functions - Functions can be passed as arguments to other functions.
- Referential transparency - A function call can be replaced by its return value without changing the program's behavior.

A big part of functional programmings is the concept of monads which have their roots in category theory. They allow for encapsulating side effects in a pure way. For a container to be a monad it has to abide by the laws of left identity, right identity and associativity. [7]

2.2.2 Web development

Yesod is a web framework for the before mentioned functional programming language Haskell. It allows developers to build entire websites using templates and widgets or RESTful web services. Additionally, Yesod offers the ability to persist data using Haskell's type system into PostgreSQL, SQLite, MySQL, and MongoDB. [8]

2.2.3 In Java

The introduction of lambda expressions in Java 8 brought functional programming to the Java ecosystem. Where before developers had to use anonymous classes to pass functions as arguments, they can now use lambda expressions. This also shifts the view point of passing an object that carries functionality to passing behavior itself. The concept behind these lambda expressions in Java is called functional interfaces. Functional interfaces are interfaces that have exactly one abstract method. They can be annotated with `@FunctionalInterface`.

Also new to Java 8 is the Streams API. It hides away the iteration over collections by offering many higher order functions. Additionally, streams are only evaluated when a terminal operation, such as collecting, counting or averaging is called, implementing the - before mentioned - functional programming principle of lazy evaluation. [9]

2.3 Spring Boot

Spring Boot is a framework for building stand-alone web applications and RESTful web services in Java. Unlike Spring Framework there is zero requirement for XML configuration. It can be deployed using an internal web server or going the classic route of deploying a war file onto an external web server. [10]

3 Curryful

Curryful tries to combine Java's simplicity with functional paradigms to build greater REST APIs.

4 Research questions and hypotheses

4.1 Research questions

All of the following questions will be answered by comparing Curryful to Spring Boot.

1. Will building a REST API using functional paradigms, from the ground up, result in a more performant application?
2. Will building a REST API using functional paradigms naturally guide the developer to eliminate unwanted behavior?
3. Will the developer experience benefit from developing a REST API using functional paradigms from the ground up?

4.2 Hypotheses

1. Building a REST API using functional paradigms, from the ground up, will result in a more performant application. Functional programming's keenness on mutability and mitigation of side effects makes concurrency and parallelism disregard the need for locks or synchronization. In the context of FaaS, startup times are lower and the cold start problem is eased.
2. Building a REST API using functional paradigms will naturally guide the developer to eliminate unwanted behavior. Common pitfalls of object oriented programming such as mutable state, side effects, null references and unchecked exceptions will be avoided. Null values are practically omitted and exceptions handled gracefully through the use of monads. The stateless design functional programming promotes will also synergize with REST's statelessness principle.
3. The developer experience will benefit as error handling becomes more natural and testing becomes less of a burden because functions will always produce the same output for the same input and not rely on external factors. Additionally, the declarative nature of functional programming will increase conciseness and expressiveness directly leading to less lines required to achieve similar results.

4.3 Hypotheses

5 Methodology

ChatGPT 4 was prompted to generate two simple REST APIs. One for a todo list application and one for playing Yahtzee. Each API was generated twice, once using Curryful and once using Spring Boot. The prompts were kept as identical as possible besides, having to provide more information about Curryful, as ChatGPT does not know about this new framework, resulted in changes that had to be made.

The prompts, also found in the appendix, and any changes that had to be done to the generated code are available in the projects' repositories:

- Todo list in Curryful
- Todo list in Spring Boot
- Yahtzee in Curryful
- Yahtzee in Spring Boot

5.1 Performance

TODO

5.2 Provoking unwanted behavior using invalid requests

The prompts were held short and only ask for necessary implementation details, leaving room to play with for the AI generating the code.

Using Postman, both application generated by ChatGTP were sent requests, trying to provoke unwanted behavior. The applications were restarted after each request to empty the in-memory storage, which was one of the implementation details.

The requests can be found in the form of JSON, exported by Postman as a collection v2.1 here

5.2.1 Todo list

The requests are:

- POST request where "completed" is a string
- POST request where a car is added
- POST request where the body is empty
- GET request for id -1
- PUT request for id -1
- POST request to toggle completed for id -1
- DELETE request for id -1
- GET request for id test
- GET request for id 999999999999999999999

5.2.2 Yahtzee

5.3 Static code analysis

The generated code was analyzed using SonarCloud to determine both cyclomatic and cognitive complexity. The cyclomatic complexity is a measure of the number of linearly independent paths through a program's source code and therefore also represents the number of test cases required to reach a coverage of 100%. Cognitive complexity describes how hard it is for a person to understand the code. (TODO: Might need citation)

An additional measure to determine developer experience is the number of lines of code and statements, which Sonar also provides. To guarantee a fair comparison, all projects were formatted according to the same rules:

- lines must not be longer than 120 characters
- each added part of a method chain should be in a new line, unless the entire chain is not longer than 120 characters

6 Results

6.1 Provoking unwanted behavior using invalid requests

6.1.1 Todo list

Request	Expected status code	Actual status code	
		Curryful	Spring Boot
POST request where "completed" is a string	400	400	400
POST request where a car is added	400	400	200
POST request where the body is empty	400	400	400
GET request for id -1	404	404	200
PUT request for id -1	404	404	200
POST request to toggle completed for id -1	404	404	200
DELETE request for id -1	404	404	200
GET request for id test	400	-	400
GET request for id 99999999999999999999	400	-	400

Table 1: Results of the invalid requests

The project using Curryful responded with the expected status code seven out of nine times. The two times it did not respond with the expected status code, the application crashed and did not respond at all. This is an oversight by ChatGTP which tried parsing the id path parameter to an integer, without checking if it is actually an integer:

```
context.getPathParameters().get("id").map(Integer::parseInt)
```

More than just an oversight by ChatGPT, this is a massive error in the Curryful framework itself.

The project using Spring Boot responded with the expected status code four out of nine times. The POST request adding a car created a todo without a title. All requests trying to access a non-existent todo with the id -1, returned 200, making it seem like the todo actually exists.

6.1.2 Yahtzee

6.2 Static code analysis

7 Discussion

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