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Locality-preserving distributed path reservation protocol for asynchronous cooperative mobile robots

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Locality-preserving distributed path reservation protocol for asynchronous cooperative mobile robots

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Abstract

Many interesting applications of mobile robotics envision groups or swarms of robots cooperating toward a common goal. Due to their inherent mobility and limited energy resources, it is only natural to consider that the robots form a mobile ad hoc network (MANET) on which they can rely for their communication. Cooperation is however difficult to obtain under the weak communication guarantees offered by MANETs. In this paper, we focus on a very fundamental cooperation problem, namely, preventing the robots from colliding against each other in a fully decentralized manner.

This paper presents a distributed path reservation system for a group of “blind” mobile robots. The protocol assumes a mobile ad hoc network formed by the robots themselves, and takes advantage of the inherent locality of the problem in order to reduce communication. In contrast with other work, our protocol requires neither initial nor complete knowledge of the composition of the group. The protocol makes only very weak timing assumptions regarding both communication and movement, and relies instead on a well-defined neighborhood discovery primitive.

1. Introduction and related work

We consider an asynchronous distributed system composed of cooperative autonomous mobile robots forming a mobile ad hoc network MANET on which they can rely for their communication. In such a system there are no upper bounds on the communication delays or on the speed of robots thus it is impossible for a robot to keep track of other robots in the system.

We aim at resolving the collision freedom problem by providing a distributed path reservation protocol for a group of blind mobile robots in this system. This protocol takes advantage of the inherent locality of the problem. Our protocol guarantees deterministically the collision freedom between robots as a safety property, so no collision between robots can occur during the execution of the protocol.

1.1. Related work

TCB wormholes Martins et al in ([6] and [7]) provide an implementation of a system based on Timely Computing Base (TCB) [14], designed for a wireless mobile system used in their practical demonstration, such that the local TCB components allow detecting time failures in a timely manner. They demonstrated, under certain conditions, the fundamental mechanisms underlying the construction of adaptable real-time applications with the help of TCB by providing an emulation of 3 balls, each of them is controlled by a sentient object running in an application trying to avoid collisions among the balls. In this scenario a sentient object controlling a ball disseminates
an event with the ball position, speed and direction, thus each object constructs a real-time image of the reality. These events should be timely delivered to achieve the real-time image and avoid collisions. If timing failures are being detected then the system stops or the balls speed is adjusted, also a timely change of a ball direction may avoid a possible collision.

**Cooperative mobile applications** Nett et al. [11] present a layered system architecture for cooperative mobile systems in real-time applications. Coordination is the key to achieve the required effective cooperation, which means that individual systems can take actions under local control based on a sufficiently consistent view of the common system environment. The system model is synchronous assuming the existence of a known constant upper bound on the communication delays. The communication hardcore of their architecture presented in [10] and [11] is based on a wireless LAN and the designed communication protocols use the access point as a central router since each station participating in the group communication protocols must be within the reach of the access point. The communication hardcore can manage real-time constraint requirements. Nett et al. [11] considered a traffic control application explained in [12] as a testbed of their system architecture. In this testbed a group of mobile robots are driving along traces that form 2 closed loops. The two loops overlap such that there is a shared space situation with the need for cooperation of mobile systems. Each robot near the shared zone triggers an event to the Cooperative Application Development Interface (CADI) layer of the system architecture which offers each robot near the shared zone a consistent view of the global state of the system, (i.e. the positions and velocities of all the robots near the shared zone with respect to the same point of time) based on the QoS provided by the communication hardcore. Therefore, robots can schedule their access to the shared zone by adjusting their velocities in order to use it efficiently and to avoid collisions.

**Robotics research** The problem of robots collision avoidance has been handled using different strategies which are sensor-based motion planning methods. Mínguez et al. [8] compute collision-free motion for a robot operating in dynamic and unknown scenarios, also they survey the existing collision avoidance navigation approaches. Motion planning algorithms consider a model of the environment (either previously known or dynamically built), to compute a collision free path between the current robot location and the goal. In dynamic or unknown environments the trajectories generated by motion planning algorithms become inaccurate thus they can not be applied to such environments. Solving this problem involves sensor data within the motion planning by applying a perception-action process that is repeated periodically at a high rate. These approaches use a local fraction of the information available (sensory information), so they can fall into trap situations. Some of these approaches apply mathematical equations to the sensory information and the solutions are transformed into motion commands. (e.g., [9]). Another group of methods compute a set of suitable motion commands to select one command based on navigation strategy (e.g., [13]), while other methods (e.g., [8]), compute a high level information description (entities near obstacles, areas of free space), from the sensory information then apply different techniques simplifying the difficulty of the navigation to obtain a motion command in complex scenarios.

2. **System model**

We consider dynamic system of mobile robots. The number of robots is unknown. Each robot is identified by a unique identifier. Each robot has a positioning system that returns the robot’s position with a bounded error. There is no bound in the time needed to compute the robot’s position. We do not consider robot failures in this model.

The robots are linked by an ad-hoc network and communicate by exchanging messages. The topology of the network is unknown. All the robots have a limited communication range, denoted $C$. If the distance between two robots $R_i$ and $R_j$ is less than $C$, $R_i$ can receive messages sent by $R_j$ and robot $R_j$ can receive messages sent by $R_i$. Communications channels are reliable but non FIFO. There is no bound on the time needed to process and transmit a message.

3. **Neighborhood discovery (Discover)**

*Requirements.* Our proximity detection primitive called Discover enables a robot to detect its local neighbors that exist in a proximity of one communication hop and satisfying a certain known predefined condition. The implementation of this primitive is based on geocasting a ping message in a geographical area centered on the robot at the
time of calling Discover with a radius equals to the communication range, then all the robots located in that geographical area and satisfying the condition must acknowledge the caller of Discover. Therefore, it can determine its requested group of robots.

**Difference with Geocast protocols.** Geocasting protocols in Mobile Ad hoc Networks (MANETs) have been studied and analyzed in different papers (e.g., [4], [16], [5]). In [4] a flooding-based geocasting protocols have been proposed, while routing-based geocast protocols were presented in other works (e.g. [3]), and others propose cluster-based geocast protocols (e.g. [1]). These protocols relied on strategies and techniques to improve the performance of the geocast delivery in terms of accuracy and message overhead. Geocasting protocols were aimed at different problem than that of our primitive Discover with different requirements.

**Node presence detector.** Detecting the presence of nodes in an asynchronous system where there are no bounds on communication delays, cannot be solved deterministically. [2] The impossibility is based on the fact that, in such systems, a very slow node can not be distinguished from an absent one. Thus, a timing property is required to implement the primitive Discover.

**Timing property.** The primitive Discover relies on the following timing property: there exists a known upper bounded time delay called ($\Delta$) such that the following property holds:

**Property 1 (Delay)** \(\forall \text{ instant of time } t, \forall R_i; \text{ If } R_i \text{ starts Discover, at } (t), \text{ then } R_i \text{ receives an acknowledgment from any } R_j \text{ located in its communication range and satisfying a certain predefined condition, at } (t') \text{ such that: } t' - t \leq \Delta\)

**Timing characteristics of MANETs.** Providing a mobile node with access to the wireless medium in a timely manner is well known subtle problem. There are some proposals to enhance MANETs with real-time capabilities, but as far as we know they are not implemented.

**Timely Computing Base concept.** We base on the concept of Timely Computing Base (TCB) wormhole-based systems introduced by P. Verissimo and A. Casimiro in ([14], [15]) to build our proximity detection primitive. In TCB based systems there exist some parts which are more predictable than others. These more predictable parts can be seen as wormholes (they are comparably small parts of the system), through which it is possible to do things much faster than apparently possible in the other parts of the system. The architecture of a system with a TCB has a payload part, in which protocols and application processes are executed. Communications take place over a global network (payload channel). The system has also a control part, made of TCB modules in each node, interconnected by a medium called control channel. In a TCB based system the payload part can have any degree of synchronism, on the other hand the TCB subsystem (control part) provides some synchronism properties such as known upper bounds on message delivery delays. A practical demonstration of a TCB system is presented in Martins et al. [6] and [7]).

**Design of the primitive Discover.** Our primitive Discover relies on a special communication hardwire (control network) in which it uses a distinct radio channel from the channel used to exchange messages in the remainder (main) part of our protocol (payload network). (illustrated in Fig. ??). The ping messages used by the primitive Discover are very light weight messages. The information carried by a ping “Discover” message is just the position coordinates of the robot caller, while a messages used in the protocol have generally a large size carrying information about the parameters of a complex geographical zone or carrying a long list of integer numbers representing robots identifiers. (see Section ??) Therefore, a timely behavior of Discover can be ensured since it is based on broadcasting light weight ping messages to a one hop proximity area over a dedicate network. This behavior meets the requirements to achieve this primitive.\(^1\) \(^2\)

4. Definitions

**Definition 1 (Chunk, Path)** Ch: a chunk is a line segment along which a robot moves. P: a path is a continuous route composed of a series of contiguous chunks.\(^3\)

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1 The compensation of the draw back of the hidden terminal problem on the time-bounded access to the wireless medium is out of scope of this paper
2 Discover geocasts (broadcast) a ping message that is supposed to cover all the robots located in a circular area whose radius is the communication range C. We do not address in this paper, the very special case where a robot existing in the given area, is not covered by the wave of Discover.
3 A path can take an arbitrary geometric shape, but in this paper we consider only line segment based paths for simplicity without lack of generality.
Paths are planned and provided by an upper layer to the protocol (application layer).

**Definition 2 (Geometric Incertitude)** The are 3 sources of errors concerning the position and the motion of a robot:

1. Error related to the position information provided by the positioning system denoted by $\varepsilon_{\text{gps}}$. In addition, the motion of a robot creates 2 additional sources of errors:
2. Error related to the translational movement, which is denoted by $\varepsilon_{\text{tr}}$.
3. Error related to the rotational movement, which is denoted by $\varepsilon_{\theta}$.

**Definition 3 (Zone)** A zone is defined as the area needed by a robot to move safely along a chunk. This includes provisions for the shape of the robot, positioning error and imprecisions in the moving of the robot.

The zone must have the following properties:
- be a convex shape
- contain the chunk the robot is following

5. Collision freedom protocol

All robots run the same protocol. When a robot wants to move along a given chunk, it must reserve the zone that surrounds this chunk. When this zone is reserved, the robot moves along the chunk. Once the robot reaches the end of the chunk, it releases the zone except for the area where the robot is waiting. When moving along a path, the robot repeats this procedure for each chunk along the path.

**Definition 4 (Reservation Zone)** The reservation range specifies that a robot $R_i$ can only reserve zones that are entirely within a circle centered on the robot at the time of reservation with a radius equals at most to the half the transmission range. $\text{Zone}_{.i} \subset \text{Cir}(\text{pos}_i, \frac{\omega}{2})$

5.1. Structure of the reservation zone

The reservation zone for robot $R_i$ is composed of the following three sub zones, illustrated by (Fig. 1)

1. Pre-Motion Zone: $\text{Pre(Zone)}$ the zone that robot $R_i$ may occupy while waiting (not moving) until it reserves Zone.
2. Post-Motion Zone: $\text{Post(Zone)}$ the zone that robot $R_i$ may occupy after the motion, while waiting until reserves the next zone.
3. Motion Zone: $\text{Mot(Zone)}$ the zone that robot $R_i$ occupy while moving.

5.2. Definitions and notations

*Relation between robots and a zone.* The relationship between robots and zone changes in time. A zone is said to be free if it is not owned by any robot. A robot requests a zone, and eventually it is granted this zone. We say the robot owns the zone and all the points contained in this zone. When the robot has left a zone, it releases the zone. A given point can be owned by only one robot.

We define the following relations between robots and zone:

**Definition 5 (Zone (released))** It is the zone released by a robot $R_i$. A robot releases its reserved zone and keeps only Post(Zone) under its reservation.

$\text{RelZone}_{.i} = \text{Zone}_{.i} \setminus \text{Post(Zone)}_{.i}$

**Definition 6 (Zone (owned))** $R_i$ is the owner of Zone $\text{Zone}_{.i}$ if $R_i$ reserves Zone $\text{Zone}_{.i}$ and does not yet release the zone $\text{RelZone}_{.i}$

$\left( R_i = \text{Own}(\text{Zone}_{.i}) \right) \iff \text{Reserve}(R_i, \text{Zone}_{.i}) \land \neg \text{Release}(R_i, \text{RelZone}_{.i})$
Relation between robots. We introduce the following definitions related to possible relations between robots during the run of the protocol:

**Definition 7 (Conflict)** $R_i$ and $R_j$ are in “Conflict” situation if both requested zones overlap.

The Conflict relation is expressed as follows:

\[ \text{Conflict}(R_i, R_j) \iff (S_i \cap \text{Pre}(\text{Zone}_{m,j}) \cap \text{Post}(\text{Zone}_{m,j}) \cap \text{Pre}(\text{Zone}_{k,i}) \cap \text{Post}(\text{Zone}_{k,i}) = \emptyset) \]

**Definition 8 (Risk)** $R_i$ is in “Risk” situation with $R_j$ if the requested zone by $R_i$ overlaps either with Pre-Motion zone or with Post-Motion zone of $R_j$.

In other words, $R_i$ is in “Risk” situation with $R_j$ \iff the requested zone by $R_i$ overlaps with a brake zone of $R_j$.

\[ \text{Risk}(R_i, R_j) \iff (\text{Zone}_{i,i} \cap \text{Pre}(\text{Zone}_{m,j}) \neq \emptyset) \lor (\text{Zone}_{i,i} \cap \text{Post}(\text{Zone}_{m,j}) \neq \emptyset) \]

We define $\text{Risk}_{\text{pre}}$ and $\text{Risk}_{\text{post}}$ as follows:

- $\text{Risk}_{\text{pre}}(R_i, R_j) \iff \text{Zone}_{i,i} \cap \text{Pre}(\text{Zone}_{m,j}) \neq \emptyset$
- $\text{Risk}_{\text{post}}(R_i, R_j) \iff \text{Zone}_{i,i} \cap \text{Post}(\text{Zone}_{m,j}) \neq \emptyset$

**Definition 9 (Turn)** The Turn of a robot $R_i$ is defined as its rank order to reserve Zone$_{i,i}$, (precedence relations) with respect to a conflicting group of robots.

If (Conflict($R_i$, $R_j$) then $R_i$ precedes $R_j$ \iff Release($R_i$, RelZone$_{i,j}$) happens before Reserve($R_j$, Zone$_{i,j}$).

In other words, $R_i$ precedes $R_j$ \iff $\text{Turn}(R_i) < \text{Turn}(R_j)$ denoted by: $T(R_i) < T(R_j)$

### 5.3 Variables

We present the variables used in the collision freedom protocol:

- $\text{Zone}_{i,i}$ is the current requested or the current reserved zone by $R_i$
- $G_i$ represents the group of robots that replied to $\text{Discover}_i$ (i.e. the robots such that the requested zone or the reserved zone when received $\text{Discover}_i$) overlaps with the reservation range of $R_i$
  
  \[ G_i = \{ R_j : \text{Zone}_{i,i} \cap \text{Cir}(\text{pos}_i, \frac{C_i}{2}) \neq \emptyset \text{ when received } \text{Discover}_i \} \]
- $\text{WLAfter}_{i,-}$ is the list of robots waiting for $R_i$ since it precedes all the members of this list.
  
  \[ \text{WLAfter}_{i,-} = \{ R_j : T(R_i) < T(R_j) \} \]
- $\text{WLAfter}_{-i}$ is the list of robots that $R_i$ is waiting for, since all the members of this list precede $R_i$
  
  \[ \text{WLAfter}_{-i} = \{ R_j : R_i \in \text{WLAfter}_{j,-} \} \]
- Overlap$_i$ is the list of robots that conflict with $R_i$. 

![Figure 1. Reservation Zone.](image-url)
• Depend$_i$ is the list of dependencies of $R_i$ that contains the requests $(R_j, Zone_{.j})$ such that Zone$_{.j}$ overlaps with Zone$_{.i}$ and also the dependencies of each request $(R_j, Zone_{.j})$.

We define the relation “depend” denoted $\sim$ as follows: $R_i ~ R_j \iff \exists \text{ a finite sequence } (R_k, R_{k+1}, \ldots, R_{k+n}) \text{ such that } Zone_{.i} \cap Zone_{.k} \neq \emptyset \land 0 \leq k \leq n-1, Zone_{.k+p} \cap Zone_{.k+p+1} \neq \emptyset \land Zone_{.k+n} \cap Zone_{.j} \neq \emptyset$

### 5.4 Protocol description

All robots run the same protocol. We explain the phases of the protocol with respect to $R_i$. The protocol can be decomposed in four phases:

1. **Discover:** $R_i$ calls the neighborhood discover primitive Discover$_i$, then $R_i$ determines the group $G_i$.

2. **Negotiate phase:** The goal of the Negotiation phase is that $R_i$ determines the conflicting robots with it, then $R_i$ builds the graph of the precedence relations to determine the group of robots that precede it and the group of robots that pass after it. The vertices of the graph represent the conflicting robots and the directed edges represent the precedence relations. The Negotiation phase can be summarized by the following steps:

   • $R_i$ multicasts a message req$_i$ to all the members of $G_i$ carrying all the parameters of Zone$_{.i}$.
   • $R_i$ waits until it receives either a Discover$_j$ or a message msg$_j$ from each robot $R_j \in G_i$.
   • The group $G_i$ contains two disjoint subgroups of robots: the first subgroup denoted $G1_i$ is composed of robots $R_i$ such that $R_i$ does not belong to $G_j$ and a second subgroup denoted $G2_i$ is composed of robots $R_j$ such that $R_j$ belongs to $G_j$. In other words, the first subgroup $G1_i$ denotes the robots $R_j$ such that Discover$_j$ happened after they determine $G_j$, while the second subgroup $G2_i$ denotes the robots $R_j$ such that Discover$_j$ happened before they determine $G_j$. When a robot $R_i$ calls the primitive Discover$_i$, then all robots that may collide with $R_i$ receives Discover$_i$, and reply to it, consequently $R_i$ can determine its group $G_i$. After that if $R_i$ receives a request from a robot $R_k$ then the requested or the reserved zone by $R_k$ when it received Discover$_i$ was not overlapping with the reservation range of $R_i$ but the current one overlaps.
   • $R_i$ receives a message “AfterMe” from robots in the group $G1_i$ if the requested zone $Zone_{.j}$ overlaps with $Zone_{.i}$, otherwise $R_i$ receives “OK” message from robots of $G1_i$. $R_i$ constructs the list Overlap$_i$ by adding the $R_j$ to the list with the dependency type (“AfterMe”).
   • $R_i$ receives a message msg$_j$ that contains the parameters of the requested zone $Zone_{.j}$ from robots in the group $G2_i$ if $Zone_{.j}$ and $Zone_{.i}$ overlaps, otherwise msg$_j$ indicates “OK”. $R_i$ updates its Overlap$_i$ list by adding $R_j$.
   • After $R_i$ has determined its Overlap$_i$ list, it multicasts the Overlap$_i$ list to each robot in that list, and it waits until receive the Overlap$_j$ from each robot $R_j$ that belongs to Overlap$_i$, so it builds the list Depend, which contains the group of robots that conflict with $R_i$ in addition to the conflicting robots with each element of that group. The motivation behind exchanging the dependency list is that all the conflicting robots can build the same Directed Acyclic Graph $Dag_{res}$ of the precedence relations consistently.
   • $R_i$ constructs from the list Depend, the graph $Dag_{AfterMe}$ related to “AfterMe” precedence relation, (see 5.5) and then it adds the precedence relations related to Risk constraints (see 5.6), thus, it constructs the graph $Dag_{risk}$ composed with the graph $Dag_{AfterMe}$. If a cycle is created by adding a directed edge to $Dag_{risk}$ then an exception is raised to the upper layer that can make a decision to resolve the conflict.

   After that, $R_i$ constructs the final precedence relations graph $Dag_{res}$ that contains $Dag_{AfterMe}$ and $Dag_{risk}$. The construction of the final graph $Dag_{res}$ is done by adding directed edges according to a sorting criteria specified by the application layer (see 5.7). If adding a directed edge creates a cycle in $Dag_{res}$ then the orientation of the directed edges is reversed which breaks the cycle. $Dag_{res}$ is built starting from the vertex that represents the robot of the minimal identifier in the increasing order of the robots identifiers. The idea of scanning the vertices according to a specified predetermined order is to ensure that $R_i$ and all the members of Depend, build the same graph $Dag_{res}$ in a consistent manner.

   • After building the precedence relations graph $Dag_{res}$, $R_i$ determines the group of robots that precede it $WL_{After_{-i}}$ and the group of robots that pass after it $WL_{After_{-i}}$. 

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• $R_i$ waits until receiving the release messages from all the members of the group that precede it $WLA_{After_{i}}$.

The modular design of our protocol yields a flexibility concerning the ordering techniques and strategies depending on the application requirements. To determine the turn relation between two robots it is possible to consider their distances to the intersection zone and in case of equidistance situation then the identifiers are considered.

3. Reserve phase: This phase starts when $R_i$ receives a release message from all its predecessors, then it reserves $Zone_{i}$ and becomes Own($Zone_{i}$). Since $R_i$ reserves its requested zone it moves inside it.

4. Release phase: When $R_i$ finishes moving inside its reserved zone $Zone_{i}$, it multicasts a release message to all its followers (members of the group $WLA_{After_{i}}$).

**Algorithm 1** Collision Avoidance Protocol

1: $Discover_i \Rightarrow G_i$
2: Overlap$_i := \emptyset$
3: Depend$_i := \emptyset$

**Thread Reply**

4: reply to the primitive $Discover$ sent by other robots.
5: if Receive$(Zone_{i}, G_i) \text{ from } R_k \notin G_i \text{ then}$
6: if Conflict$(R_k, R_i) \text{ then}$
7: Send$(\text{"AfterMe" } + \text{ Zone}_{i}, R_k)$
8: $WLA_{After_{i}} := WLA_{After_{i}} \cup \{R_k\}$
9: end if
10: end if

**Negotiate phase**

11: Multicast $(request(Zone_{i}, G_i), G_i)$
12: Wait until Receive$(\text{msg}_j) \text{ from all } R_j \in G_i$
13: if $R_j \notin G_i \land Zone_{i} \cap Zone_{j} \neq \emptyset \text{ then}$
14: Receive$(\text{"AfterMe" } + Zone_{i})$
15: $WLA_{After_{i}} := WLA_{After_{i}} \cup \{R_j\}$
16: $Overlap_i := Overlap_i \cup (R_j, Zone_{i}, type := \text{"AfterMe"})$
17: end if
18: if $R_j \in G_i \land Zone_{i} \cap Zone_{j} \neq \emptyset \text{ then}$
19: $Overlap_i := Overlap_i \cup (R_j, Zone_{i})$
20: end if
21: Depend$_i := Overlap_i$
22: for all $R_j \in Overlap_i$ do
23: Multicast$(Depend_i, R_j) \text{ \{disseminate the dependencies\}}$
24: end for
25: Wait until Receive Depend$_j$ from all $R_j \in Overlap_i$
26: Depend$_i := Depend_i \cup Overlap_i$
27: $Dag_{AfterMe} := \text{AfterMeHandler}(Depend_i)$
28: $Dag_{risk}(R_i) := \text{Risk Handler}(Dag_{AfterMe}, \text{Depend}_i)$
29: $Dag_{res}(R_i) := \text{Conflict Resolver}(Dag_{risk}(R_i), \text{Depend}_i, \text{Sorting-Criteria SC})$
30: Update$(WLA_{After_{i}}), WLA_{After_{i}}$

**Release phase**

31: when reception of release messages from all members of $WLA_{After_{i}}$
32: Reserve$(R_i, Zone_{i})$
33: end when
34: Move()

**Release phase**

35: when Release$(R_i, RelZone_{i})$
36: Multicast a release message to members of: $WLA_{After_{i}}$
37: end when

5.5. AfterMe Handler

This handler generates a graph of precedence relations concerning the relation “AfterMe”. The input of AfterMe Handler is the list of dependencies of $R_i$ Depend$_i$ and the output is the Directed Acyclic Graph $Dag_{AfterMe}$ such that its vertices represent the robots related by the relation “AfterMe” and each directed edge represents a precedence relation between a couple of robots $R_x$ and $R_y$. If $R_y$ sent a message “AfterMe” to a $R_x$ then a directed edge $(R_y, R_x)$ is added to the graph.
If $R_j$ sent a message “AfterMe” to $R_i$ then $R_i$ should be after $R_j$ and after any $R_k$ predecessor to $R_j$. Consequently, no circular precedence relationship can occur when generating $Dag_{AfterMe}$.

**Algorithm 2** AfterMe Handler algorithm

1: procedure AfterMe Handler(Decend)
2: for all $(R_x, R_y) \in$ Depend, do
3: if DependType $=$ “AfterMe” then
4: \[ Dag_{AfterMe} := Dag_{AfterMe} \cup \text{DirEdge}(R_y \rightarrow R_x) \] \{ $R_y$ sent “AfterMe” message to $R_x$ \}
5: end if
6: if DirEdge($R_x, R_y$) and DirEdge($R_y, R_z$) then
7: \[ Dag_{Risk} := Dag_{Risk} \cup \text{DirEdge}(R_x \rightarrow R_z) \] \{ if $R_y$ sent “AfterMe” message to $R_z$ then $R_z$ should be after any $R_x$ that precedes $R_y$ \}
8: end if
9: end for
10: end

### 5.6. Risk Handler

The Risk Handler is responsible for handling the situations concerning the “Risk” relation (i.e., when there is an overlapping between a requested zone by a robot $R_i$ with a Pre-Motion or a Post-Motion zone of another robot $R_j$).

The input of the Risk Handler of $R_i$ is the list of dependencies of $R_i$ and $Dag_{AfterMe}$ generated by the AfterMe Handler, since $Dag_{Risk}$ represent both Risk and AfterMe relations. Risk Handler delivers: either the graph $Dag_{Risk}(R_i)$ which determines the precedence relations between robots in “Risk” situation with $R_i$, or raising exceptions whenever a detectable deadlock situation occurs or a circular precedence relationship is detected.

The precedence relations of $Dag_{Risk}$ is specified according to the constraints of the “Risk” situation only. A directed edge between two vertices $(R_x, R_y)$ in $Dag_{Risk}$ means that $R_x$ is in Risk situation with $R_y$ and that $R_x$ must precede $R_y$ because of “Risk” constraints. When a circular precedence relationship is created by adding a directed edge, or a deadlock situation is detected then the appropriate exception is raised to the upper layer because Risk Handler can not modify the precedence relations due to the constraints of “Risk” situation. A circular precedence relation may occur while generating $Dag_{Risk}$ as follows: there is a directed edge $(R_j, R_i)$ due to “AfterMe” relation, and a directed edge $(R_i, R_j)$ is going to be added to $Dag_{Risk}$ because of a Risk situation. In such a case an appropriate exception is raised to the upper layer.

**Description of the Risk Handler**

- Risk$_{pre}(R_i, R_j)$ means that $Zone_{-,i}$ overlaps with $Pre(Zone_{-,j})$. If $Zone_{-,i}$ overlaps with $Pre(Zone_{-,j})$ only, then $R_j$ must precede $R_i$.
- Risk$_{post}(R_i, R_j)$ means that $Zone_{-,i}$ overlaps with $Post(Zone_{-,j})$. If $Zone_{-,i}$ overlaps with $Post(Zone_{-,j})$ only, then $R_i$ must precede $R_j$.
- A detectable deadlock situation (e.g., Deadlock$_3$) occurs if both Risk$_{pre}(R_i, R_j)$ and Risk$_{post}(R_i, R_j)$. In this case $Zone_{-,i}$ overlaps with both $Pre(Zone_{-,j})$ and $Post(Zone_{-,j})$. Consequently, neither $R_i$ nor $R_j$ can move, therefore a detectable deadlock situation occurs. Other detectable deadlock situations (Deadlock$_1$, Deadlock$_2$, Deadlock$_4$) are deduced by a similar reasoning.
- $Dag_{Risk}$ is constructed by adding directed edges between vertices according to the constraints of “Risk”.
- Detectable deadlock situations “direct” between two robots can occur in the system are explained in the Risk Handler algorithm (Deadlock$_1$, Deadlock$_2$, Deadlock$_3$, Deadlock$_4$) situations. They are caused by overlapping between zones in special cases.
- Other detectable deadlock situations “indirect” can happen because of circular precedence relationship in the $Dag_{Risk}$. In such a case an exception is raised since it is not possible to change the direction of any edge in $Dag_{Risk}$.
Algorithm 3 Risk Handler algorithm

1: procedure Risk Handler(DagAfterMove, Depend, Dep) 
2: for all \((R_x, R_y)\) ∈ Depend do
3:   Deadlock\(_1\) = Risk\(_{pre}\)(\(R_x, R_y\)) \& Risk\(_{pre}\)(\(R_y, R_x\))
4:   Deadlock\(_2\) = Risk\(_{post}\)(\(R_x, R_y\)) \& Risk\(_{post}\)(\(R_y, R_x\))
5:   Deadlock\(_3\) = Risk\(_{pre}\)(\(R_x, R_y\)) \& Risk\(_{post}\)(\(R_y, R_x\))
6:   Deadlock\(_4\) = Risk\(_{pre}\)(\(R_y, R_x\)) \& Risk\(_{post}\)(\(R_x, R_y\))
7: if Deadlock\(_1\) ∨ Deadlock\(_2\) ∨ Deadlock\(_3\) ∨ Deadlock\(_4\) then
8:   Raise Exception “what to do?” to the upper layer.
9: end if
10: if Risk\(_{post}\)(\(R_x, R_y\)) ∨ Risk\(_{pre}\)(\(R_y, R_x\)) then
11:   \(\text{Dag}_{\text{risk}} := \text{Dag}_{\text{risk}} \cup \text{DirEdge}(R_x \rightarrow R_y)\)
12: end if
13: if Risk\(_{pre}\)(\(R_x, R_y\)) ∨ Risk\(_{post}\)(\(R_y, R_x\)) then
14:   \(\text{Dag}_{\text{risk}} := \text{Dag}_{\text{risk}} \cup \text{DirEdge}(R_y \rightarrow R_x)\)
15: end if
16: if DetectCycle(\(\text{Dag}_{\text{risk}}(R_i)\)) then
17:   Raise Exception “what to do?” to the upper layer.
18: end if
19: end for
20: end

All robots generate the same \(\text{Dag}_{\text{risk}}\), since all robots know the dependencies of other robots.

The possibility that a deadlock situation happens is due to different parameters, such as the geometrical characteristics of the reservation zone. In some situations, deadlock cases can be reduced or canceled by a careful path planning managed by the application layer.

The protocol raises an exception to the upper layer in order to handle such situations. The upper layer decides an action which can be an alternative paths provided to robots.

5.7. Conflict Resolver

The Conflict Resolver of \(R_i\) constructs \(\text{Dag}_{\text{res}}(R_i)\) which separates the set of the robots conflicting with \(R_i\) in two subsets: the predecessors and the successors of \(R_i\). The input of the Conflict Resolver is the following: the dependencies of \(R_i\) (Depend, ), \(\text{Dag}_{\text{risk}}\) created by the Risk Handler, and a sorting criteria (SC) provided by the application layer.

Description of the Conflict Resolver algorithm The goal is to determine the precedence relations between \(R_i\) and the conflicting robots with \(R_i\). This is performed by sorting each couple of the conflicting robots \((R_i, \text{Depend, })\) and its dependencies according to the sorting criteria SC. When a circular precedence relationship is created then the precedence relation between the couple of robots that caused the cycle is reversed to break this circular precedence situation.

Conflict Resolver permits to build \(\text{Dag}_{\text{res}}(R_i)\) in a consistent manner such that \(R_i\) and the conflicting robots with \(R_i\) build the same \(\text{Dag}_{\text{res}}(R_i)\). To achieve the consistency, each robot builds \(\text{Dag}_{\text{res}}\) as follows:

- \(R_i\) adds a directed edge to \(\text{Dag}_{\text{res}}\) between two vertices \((R_x, R_y)\) according to SC, starting from the vertex that represents the robot of minimal identifier among the set of dependencies of \(R_i\), compared with the remainder of the vertices in the increasing order of their identifiers.

- If adding the directed edge \((R_x, R_y)\) creates a cycle in \(\text{Dag}_{\text{res}}\) then replace the directed edge \((R_x, R_y)\) by the directed edge \((R_y, R_x)\) to break the circular precedence relationship.

6. properties of our protocol

The properties achieved by our protocol are the following:
Algorithm 4 Conflict Resolver algorithm

1: procedure Conflict Resolver(Dag risk (Ri), Dependi, Sorting-Criteria SC)
2: if SC == “NULL” then
3: Run a consensus algorithm \(\{\text{If there is no a specified sorting criteria, then the conflicting robots run a consensus algorithm}\}\)
4: else
5: \(\text{Dag}_{\text{res}}(R_i) := \text{Dag}_{\text{risk}}(R_i)\)
6: for \((x := \text{MinID}; x \leq \text{MaxID}; R_y \in \text{Dependi})\) do
7: for \((y > x; y \leq \text{MaxID}; R_y \in \text{Dependi})\) do
8: if Conflict(Rx, Ry) then
9: \(\text{DirEdge}(R_x, R_y) := \text{Sort}_{\text{SC}}(R_x, R_y)\) \(\{\text{sort the 2 robots according to the Sorting Criteria SC}\}\)
10: \(\text{Dag}_{\text{res}}(R_i) := \text{Dag}_{\text{res}}(R_i) \cup \text{DirEdge}(R_x, R_y)\)
11: if DetectCycle(\(\text{Dag}_{\text{res}}(R_i)\)) then
12: \(\text{DirEdge}(R_x, R_y) := \text{DirEdge}(R_y, R_x)\) \(\{\text{If a cycle is detected then inverse the direction of the edge}\}\)
13: end if
14: end if
15: end for
16: end for
17: end if
18: end

6.1. Safety property

The collision freedom property is the Safety property of our protocol, so no collision between robots can occur. This property is expressed as follows:

Property 2 (Mutual exclusion) If the requested zone of \(R_i\) overlaps with that of \(R_j\) then one and only one of them becomes “Owner” to its required zone. In other words, a zone in the plan can be owned by one and only one robot.
\((\text{Zone}.i \cap \text{Zone}.j \neq \emptyset) \Rightarrow (R_i = \text{Own}(\text{Zone}.i)) \text{ XOR } (R_j = \text{Own}(\text{Zone}.j))\)

Property 3 (Integrity) A robot can release a zone if and only if it has previously reserved this zone. This property is expressed as follows:
For any zone \(\text{Zone}.i\), Release(\(R_i, \text{RelZone}.i\)) takes place only if previously: Reserve(\(R_i, \text{Zone}.i\)) Reserve(\(R_i, \text{Zone}.i\)|happensbefore)|Release(\(R_i, \text{RelZone}.i\))

6.2. Liveness properties

Property 4 (No Circular Precedence Relationship) Our protocol has no circular precedence relationship, consequently if \(R_i\) requests \(\text{Zone}.i\) then it eventually reserves it, so no starvation occurs unless one of the detectable deadlock situations explained in the Risk Handler section (see 5.6). Dealing with detectable deadlock situations takes place in the upper layers, our protocol present the lowest layer that handles the safety property of the system.
Resolving the detectable deadlock situations in the upper layers can be carried out by different strategies such as offering an alternative path or an alternative chunk of a certain path (motion planning).

7. Advantages and improvements

We mention some advantages of our locality preserving protocol:

1. A robot \(R_i\) can use its maximal speed to move along a reserved chunk since it is deterministically guaranteed that \(R_i\) is exclusively the only owner of the reserved zone.

2. The protocol does not require any routing techniques except for avoiding circular precedence relationships (deadlock situations).

3. It is possible to improve the performance in terms of time that a robot \(R_i\) requires to reach its destination by adjusting the reservation range according to the local density of robots around \(R_i\) returned by the neighborhood discovery primitive Discover.
4. By adding a mechanism that enables a robot $R_i$ to demand an alternative path or alternative chunk from an upper layer (path planner layer) a tangible improvement can be performed as follows: $R_i$ can “hear” gratuitously the required zones by its local neighbors due to the nature of communications in Mobile Ad Hoc networks. If the requested zone $Zone_{i,j}$ conflicts with a certain number of requested zones by the local neighbors then $R_i$ demands an alternative chunk or an alternative path where the congestion is lower.

8. Conclusion

We introduced a collision freedom protocol for asynchronous cooperative mobile robots based on a distributed path reservation system. Our protocol takes advantages of the inherent locality of the problem. This protocol offers a dynamic scheduling mechanism for zone reservation requests coming dynamically in this system, our protocol copes with this dynamic context, relying on a dynamic mechanism to manage the order of requests in a consistent manner.

Our protocol requires neither initial nor complete knowledge of the composition of the group. It is based on a well-defined neighborhood discovery primitive and makes very weak timing assumptions.

References


