# Raport Badawczy Research Report

RB/27/2014

An intelligent distributed system for flexible management of variable energy supply and demand in microgrids

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Część II

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Part II

### Chapter 4

## Multi-agent systems

#### 4.1 Introduction

Computer systems are evolving faster than ever before. Increasing power of the hardware allowed for more demanding software, which became capable of calculating more complex problems. Wooldridge in [126] describes the most important trends in the history of computing: ubiquity, interconnection, intelligence, delegation and human orientation. Ubiquity means that computer systems are getting more common and appearing in places where no one expected them to be. It seems to be correct, as for instance in Europe there are statistically 124,7 mobile phone subscriptions per 100 people [68] and most of these are smartphones. Such devices are really small computers with not small computing power. The interconnection trend is real: computer systems are usually connected to the Internet or at least almost all of them have such ability. Furthermore, it reached a point where the network is the place where processing takes place and the device is just an interface to it (e.g. cloud computing, web applications). Artificial intelligence is a broadly researched topic, as systems are required to solve problems and fulfill their task using more advanced and complicated algorithms and methods. With the increase of complexity, the computer programs tend to be more autonomous. There also is a trend to facilitate the user interface, to the point that the system should be "guessing" what user wants. Personalization became a key word, the aim of the Graphical User Interface (GUI) is that people feel comfortable with it and want to use it. The user does not know anymore what exactly the program is doing or how it is achieving it, and as long as it works properly he tends not to bother with the details of implementation. Computers became more accessible to people without proper engineering expertise, interfaces aim to be more intuitive and resistant to errors.

Agents and multi-agent systems are part of this trend. The idea of agents has become the subject of research since about 1980 and was slowly gaining popularity, but the fashion for agent solutions came with the spread of Internet. Agents are seen as the next step in creating an intelligent network to make browsing for information and computing more effective. They are considered as autonomous and smart programs that realize tasks with minimal guidance from a user. This approach is still wishful thinking – real agent systems are computer systems with specific tasks and properties: they have some degree of autonomy and they interact with other systems and people. The biggest obstacles that agent systems have to deal with are too high expectations and overestimation of their abilities. There are multiple definitions of agent systems and they are often misinterpreted or abused. The term agent has multiple meanings depending on field of research. This can create confusion when the proper explanation of the term is not present. In this chapter, the definition of the agent will be discussed and the agent properties be presented.

#### 4.2 Definition and history of agents

There are many definitions of the word "agent". Most of them look simplistic and all lead to a very similar and general concepts, but understanding what is an agent is much more difficult. In this chapter, only general concepts of agent-based approaches will be presented, for further details can be found in [126] and [108].

One of the simplest definitions of agents was given by Wooldridge [126]: an agent is an autonomous computer system, situated in some environment, that performs an action to fulfil tasks and goals defined by the user. An agent should realize its task independently, has decisive power and distinguish itself from the environment. Yoav Shoham in [108] gives slightly different definition: an agent is an entity whose state is viewed as consisting of mental components such as beliefs, capabilities, choices, and commitments. He comments that a number of things can be described in such way and that a clear and formally defined distinction is almost impossible. There are a number of formal definitions of agents ([126], section. 2.5), but they are cannot by applied to all agents in general, but rather to some specific subtype of agents.

A *multi-agent system* is system where a group of agents interact with each other in an environment. This interaction is usually realized by communication (defined in broad sense), which allows for autonomy in behavior.

When there are different definitions of agents (even formal ones), it is clear that there might not be a unity about understanding of agent concept. However, both Shoham and Wooldridge explain the same thing in their definition: an agent that is an approach of looking at programming from a higher level of abstraction. The agent is not a type of program, or a thing, it is the way we treat the program, a personification of computer code that simplifies the perception of the problem. Encapsulating the functionality into agent is very useful. The classic black-box concept, where only input and output are considered, is too simplified when tasks cannot be done unconditionally and require cooperation (or aggregation of results) of different elements. For such conditions, it needs to have the ability to delegate work, ask for help and cooperate. This lead to the addition of complicated processes and logic, which adds a behaviour. To emphasize these differences, the term agent was used to indicate a system that incorporates this.

The above interpretation is supported by the history of agents and multi-agent systems. Computer system are evolving to be more efficient, operate on more complicated structure. The amount of data in computer systems is growing at very fast rate - people start having problem with grasping the whole complexity of data. Consequently, the computer systems had to start using more intelligent techniques to process and present data in manageable way. Among recently published articles, some current trends in software computing are visible. Many research goes towards autonomous systems that can understand linguistic terms and understand the context of the requests. There is the desire that systems would understand imprecise requirements, search for the solution by themselves, but on the other hand they have to be obedient, should not know private data and for sure not abuse them. It is a kind of personification of the system, treating computer system on higher level of abstraction.

In Fig. 4.1 a simplified schema of programming evolution is presented: the agent concept emerged from the development of computer programming. With time the computers become more popular and started developing more complex structure. The era of the object oriented programming came and programmers had to learn to encapsulate the logic of the system to make it more understandable. The programs started to be so big and complicated that such an approach was necessary. With the further development, this also stopped being enough – programs started to be divided into modules, libraries, etc. It was necessary to grasp the full logic, the different levels of details. The modules had to be compatible with each other. The need for even higher abstraction level appeared

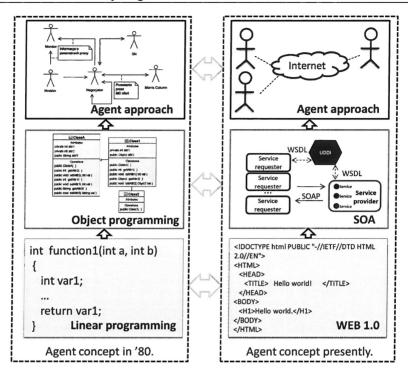


Figure 4.1: Development of Agent's concept.

- an agent. But agent approach has really gained its popularity with the development and popularization of Internet (appearance of Web 2.0 concept). Up to this point, the agent approach was mainly a research model (mainly used in logic architectures as e.g. Agent0 made in 1991 by Shoham [107]), which at the heart is a distributed system. There was not really a practical application for the concept. The technological advancements in hardware, and then the birth of web 1.0 changed the concept of separate computers into a network. This can essentially be used as a distributed system, and the agent approach was reconsidered in this context. The development of Internet technologies opened the door for new concepts: Web 2.0, Web 3.0 and Web 4.0 [3]. Web 2.0 is an idea of web as place of social interactions where people create the content and the web pages provide just the tool to do that. Unlike the web 2.0, which is a fact, the following technologies are still the subject of research and have not yet reached the necessary popularity. Web 3.0 is a so called semantic web - an idea to standardize the information representation to make it more accessible to machines and thus ease data processing. Web 4.0 is a different name for using intelligent agents to gain new experience in interaction with computer systems. It considers using agents for gathering and processing data in such a way that would be very human like, e.g. agent would present data in natural language adjusting the information to the perception abilities of a user. This is still a field of research and will not be implemented in near future as understanding and processing natural language is difficult

task.

Very often there is confusion on when agents can be described as intelligent. The intelligent agents have following properties[126]: reactivity, proactiveness and social ability. Reactivity means that agent perceives the environment and is aware of the changes that happen in it and acts accordingly. Proactiveness means that an agent has a goal and actively pursuits it, the agent takes initiative. Social ability is an interaction with other agents which requires more than just exchange of information: it includes cooperation, negotiation and argumentation. As can be seen in this description the intelligent agent do not require ability of learning or mobility. Considering this definition of intelligent agents, the agents described in chapter 5 can be considered intelligent agents.

#### 4.3 Agents and SOA

Service Oriented Architecture (SOA) is a concept of building computer systems from a collection of services which can be called in order to perform a task. Originally, the motivation for SOA was to overcome problems with integration of heterogeneous information systems and provide agile development of new solutions. Over time, with the fast growth of the Internet and the advent of ubiquitous environments, the services have become web services and the standards developed for enterprises reached their limits. However, fresh ideas in this area, often in the from of extension of existing standards, are continuously generated, especially by communities centered around semantic web and ubiquitous computing. Several results, especially service registries, service discovery and composition methods etc., exist and can be reused or at least serve as an inspiration for developing new architectures.

There is a wide range of applications to the Web Services, not only in context of SOA. Accordingly to the authors of [55], they are considered the future of distributed computing. The above is well specified, self descriptive and platform independent technology which also goes with an idea of encapsulation and granularity.

The Web Service is a stateless request-response application. It is simple and easy to use by systems on all platforms and made using different technologies. Because Web Services are considered by some as the main element of SOA, an increasing number of applications are using them or integrating with them, as service oriented architecture is considered to be start of the new generation of web-based business applications.

Web Services are designed to be simple, stateless elements delivering limited, coherent pieces of information. The above makes them easy to use, but is also limits their application. To perform complicated tasks, there is a need to interact, to send many different messages, as well as react accordingly to the development of the situation. The interaction is a core element of agents and their interoperability.

The Web Services and the agents are characterized by following common features:

- Both have detailed specifications made by FIPA for agent systems and W3C for Web Services.
- They both have got some kind of register for discovering and registering existing agents or Web Services.
- Thanks to the detailed specification they can communicate with any system that
  uses specific communication protocols, independently from the technology or the
  platform.

#### 4.4 Limitations and problems with agent concept

In [127], the authors identify the most common problems with development of agent-based systems, and divide them into categories: political, conceptual, management, analysis and

design, micro level, macro level and implementation issues. The general conclusion is the result of 10-year experience with agent system development and can be summarized into four typical issues: there is not enough understanding of what is an agent and why it is used; there are too high expectations about the abilities of agents; people are forgetting that agents are computer programs that have special requirements; and they should be implemented according to well defined development standards.

The misinterpretation of the agent definition leads to abusing the term, the authors of [127] even fear that it will become a buzzword which will undermine its research status. Agents are sometimes considered to be distributed, generic tools using artificial intelligence (AI), completely forgetting that the implementation of such a system is an extremely difficult task and requires well-defined constraints and requirement analysis. Such programs exist, but often remain in the prototype phase of development.

Agents are meant to be distributed systems and this makes their implementation more difficult and requires one to use a number of mechanisms for handling exceptional states of the system. In a well designed and implemented system, the death or malfunction of one agent can disturb the task but should not disturb the multi-agent system. This adds additional code which is not fully connected to the required functionality. Consequently, the systems tends to be complex, often sacrificing the efficiency and speed. It has to be carefully weighted with the overhead whether using the agent approach is justified for the given problem and if the usage of agent architecture provides real benefits.

#### 4.5 Standards and protocols

FIPA – The Foundation for Intelligent Physical Agents is an IEEE Computer Society standards organization that defines the standards regarding agent technologies and protocols of communication between them. It was accepted by the IEEE in 2005 to promote the agent-based approach [28]. Since 1997, FIPA published a number of specifications of abstract architectures of agents and multi-agent systems. The politics of FIPA is to create standards that would organize the agents cooperation but without limiting access to new technologies or ideas: they assume that the technology used to create an agent is not important as long as it would be able to use some pre-defined protocols and have a minimal set of features. The areas of which FIPA takes care the most are: agents, communication between agents, services, agent management and integration of agent with different technology agents.

FIPA defines necessary elements necessary to proper functioning of the whole multiagent system:

- Agent management system (AMS) which manages the life-cycle of an agents: it can start, stop, suspend and deregister agents from the system.
- White pages is a service for agent identification which translates between the name
  of an agent and the physical address of the agent.
- Yellow pages is a service identifying the services that are offered by agents in the system.
- Message transport service is a service that forms the communication medium between the agents.

The agent's features, behavior and the way of communication are very well specified by the set of specifications developed by FIPA ([30],[31], [29]).

#### 4.6 Java Agent Development Framework (JADE)

The Java Agent Development Framework (JADE) [10] is used to implement the agent systems in this work. It is fairly popular and was shown to be efficient enough to be used in implementing large-scale multi-agent programs [17]. JADE contains a library for implementing agents and their functionality, the launching environment which gives the abilities of the multi-agent environment, and a set of tools that help to monitor agents behavior.

JADE is implemented in JAVA, so it works on a virtual machine over the operating system of the computer and requires Java version of 1.4 or older. Due to JAVA, there are some performance limitations, but on the other hand it allows launching JADE agents on all devices that run JAVA. It is a distributed as an open source software under the terms of the LGPL (Lesser General Public License Version 2). The JADE Board consist of: Telecom Italia, Motorola, Whitestein Technologies AG, Profactor GmbH, and France Telecom R&D.

JADE organizes agents into platforms – the logical structure that defines the boundaries of the multiagent environment. Platforms hold containers, which group agents. A platform can be spread over multiple networked computers, whereas a container is tied to a predefined machine. JADE allows for migrating the containers and agents between different physical machines in a transparent way, from the point of view of an agent. Platform and containers are necessary to comply with the standards of FIPA: in a platform, agents have names while their physical address (including IP address) is stored in the white pages service. Containers allow for freezing, moving and restarting agents, and allow for transport of messages between agents.

The biggest advantage of JADE is that it is not limiting the programmers. The JADE offers a very good library which allow to easily create basic agent functions, but the detailed functionality can be implemented using all available libraries in JAVA.

#### 4.7 Future of agents

The work on agents is continuing, there are more research fields where the concept of agents brings added value. There is also an increased recognition of what an agent is and now its properties are better defined. Agent is a concept that opens a way to more anthropomorphic way of thinking about computer systems and modeling. Agent modeling is closely related to such fields as linguistic reasoning, fuzzy computing, game theory mechanisms, theory of communication, negotiations, social behaviors, parallel computing, distributed systems, etc. There are no real autonomous agents yet, but the work continues; the use of artificial intelligence and expert systems is very promising. A better understanding of the term agent will help to clarify when to use the concept and when it is not suitable.

#### 4.8 Agent systems in energy modeling

The use of the agent concept in the electric energy modeling was widely researched and there is a consensus that the energy management systems can benefit from agent approach. The work of IEEE Power Engineering Society's Multi-Agent Systems (MAS) Working Group, published in [64] and [65], presents the discussion over the usability of agents in the energy sector. The authors underlined the features that are very desired in the energy management applications: extendibility, flexibility, using open standards, heterogeneity of agent programing languages, suitability for modeling destributed system and high fault tolerance.

The applications where agent systems would be especially suitable according to [64] are: diagnostics, monitoring, distributed control, modeling, simulation and protection. Many implementations of EMS systems for distributed energy management exist: [122, 54, 2, 47, 49, 98, 105].

### Abbreviation list

AI Artificial Intelligence
AMS Agent Management System
CGB Condensing Gas Boilers
CHP Combined Heat and Power

DEMS Distributed Energy Management System

DSM Demand Site Management EMS Energy Management System

FIPA Foundation for Intelligent Physicl Agents

GUI Graphical User Interface

GM Gas Microturbine

JAVA Agent DEvelopment Framework

kW Kilowatt

LECR Laboratory of Energy Consumption Rationalization
LMEB Laboratory of MicroCHP and Ecological Boilers
LPISE Laboratory of Power Industry Safety Engineering

LST Laboratory of Solar Techniques

LWPE Laboratory of Wind Power Engineering

LV Low Voltage

MABB Matched-block bootstrap MAS Multi-agent System

MHPP Micro Hydroelectric Power Plant

ms miliseconds
MV Medium Voltage
MVT Micro Wind Turbines

P power

PHEV Plug-in hybrid electric vehicle

PV Photovoltaic panels
Q reactive power
RE Reciprocating Engine

s seconds

SMES Superconducting Magnetic Energy Storage

SOA System Oriented Architecture

U voltage

VPP virtual power plants VP virtual prosumer 110 Appendix

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