Planning and Sequential Decision Making for Human-Aware Robots

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in the Faculty of Engineering Mechatronics and Intelligent Systems

May 2012
Declaration of Authorship

I, Tarek Taha, declare that this thesis titled, 'Planning and Sequential Decision Making for Human-Aware Robots' and the work presented in it are my own. I confirm that:

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Date: 07/05/2019
'The greatest enemy of knowledge is not ignorance, it is the illusion of knowledge'

Stephen W. Hawking
Abstract

Faculty of Engineering
Mechatronics and Intelligent Systems

Doctor of Philosophy

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This thesis explores the use of probabilistic techniques for enhancing the interaction between a human and a robotic assistant. The human in this context is regarded as an integral part of the system, providing a major contribution to the decision making process and is able to overwrite, re-evaluate and correct decisions made by the robot to fulfil her or his true intentions and ultimate goals and needs. Conversely, the robot is expected to behave as an intelligent collaborative agent that predicts human intentions and makes decisions by merging learned behaviours with the information it currently possesses. The work is motivated by the rapid increase of the application domains in which robotic systems operate, and the presence of humans in many of these domains. The proposed framework facilitates human-robot social integration by increasing the synergy between robot's capabilities and human needs, primarily during assistive navigational tasks.

The first part of the thesis sets the groundwork by developing a path-planning/re-planning strategy able to produce smooth feasible paths to address the issue of navigating a robotic wheelchair in cluttered indoor environments. This strategy integrates a global path-planner that operates as a mission controller, and a local reactive planner that navigates locally in an optimal manner while preventing collisions with static and dynamic obstacles in the local area. The proposed strategy also encapsulates social behaviour, such as navigating through preferred routes, in order to generate socially and behaviourally acceptable plans.

The work then focuses on predicting and responding to human interactions with a robotic agent by exploiting probabilistic techniques for sequential decision making and planning under uncertainty. Dynamic Bayesian networks and partially observable Markov decision processes are examined for estimating human intention in order to minimise the flow of information between the human and the robot during navigation tasks. A framework to capture human behaviour, motivated by the human action cycle as derived from the psychology domain is developed. This framework embeds a human-robot interaction layer, which defines variables and procedures to model interaction scenarios, and facilitates the transfer of information during human-robot collaborative tasks.
Experiments using a human-operated robotic wheelchair carrying out navigational daily routines are conducted to demonstrate the capacity of the proposed methodology to understand human intentions and comply with their long term plans. The results obtained are presented as the outcome of a set of trials conducted with actor users, or simulated experiments based on real scenarios.
Acknowledgements

This work was made possible by many people other than myself, and I am extremely grateful for their encouragement and support.

Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisors, Dr Jaime Valls Miró and Professor Gamini Dis-sayanake, for their support, guidance and encouragement.

I would also like to thank all the bright minds who were around me at the Centre of Excellence for Autonomous Systems, for all the intelligent conversations, coffee breaks and research culture. Nathan Kirchner, Gavin Paul, Stephan Sehestedt and Weizhen Zhou, your presence around helped more than you can imagine.

Many thanks to Professor Raymond Apthorpe for his words of wisdom and support, and Christer for bearing with me during my intense times.

I would also like to acknowledge Dr Lisa Lines for her editorial intervention, which was restricted to Standards D and E of the Australian Standards for Editing Practice.

I would like to reserve my final thanks to my parents for their years of blessings and motivation.
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Abbreviations

ADD  Algebreic Decision Diagrams
AI   Artificial Intelligence
AMCL Adaptive Monte-Carlo Localisation
BDD  Binary Decision Diagrams
BN   Bayesian Network
CAS  Centre of Autonomous Systems
CPT  Conditional Probability Table
CSTEP Controlled Sampling and Time Efficient Planner
CVM  Curvature Velocity Method
DAC  Digital to Analog Converter
DBN  Dynamic Bayesian Network
DWA  Dynamic Window Obstacle Avoidance
EM   Expectation Maximisation
GDWA Global Dynamic Window Approach
HRI  Human Robot Interaction
ITE  If-Then-Else
MDP  Markov Decision Processes
MSE  Mean Square Error
ND   Nearness Diagram
POMDP Partially Observable Markov Decision Processes
PRM  Probabilistic Road Maps
RRT  Rapidly-Exploring Random Trees
VFH  Vector Field Histogram
Dedicated to my parents