Proceedings of the 17th World Congress
The International Federation of Automatic Control
Seoul, Korea, July 6-11, 2008

WLAN based Pose Estimation for Mobile Robots

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Abstract: Nowadays, many buildings are equipped with a WLAN infrastructure, as an inexpensive communication technology. In this paper a method to estimate position and heading (pose) of a mobile robot using WLAN technology is described. The proposed technique for localizing a mobile robot is based on the use of received signal strength values of WLAN access points in range. A radio map based method and Euclidean distance in combination with Delaunay triangulation and interpolation is proposed. Measured signal strength values of an omnidirectional antenna and a beam antenna are compared with the values of a radio map, in order to estimate the pose of a mobile robot, whereby the directionality of the beam antenna is used to estimate the heading of the robot. The paper presents the experimental results of measurements in an office building.

1. INTRODUCTION

Navigation is a key ability of mobile robots. The task of navigation can be divided into localization and path planning. Aim of localization is to estimate the pose (position and heading) of a mobile robot with respect to its environment. There are three different kinds of localization problems in mobile robotics: position tracking, global localization and kidnapped robot problem. Position tracking requires knowledge of the start position and is also known as local localization. The problem is called global localization, if there is no priori estimate of the pose. The kidnapped robot problem describes a situation, where a localized robot is moved to a different place without its knowledge. It is often used to test a robot's ability to recover from localization failures. Approaches which are capable of solving the global localization problem can be modified such that they can also solve the kidnapped robot problem (Fox, 2002).

Usually robot odometric sensors are used to solve the localization problem of wheeled robots. Odometric sensors provide information about robot movements, but the provided information is noisy and accumulates errors over time. Odometrie is accurate enough for local movements but is not suitable for long term localization and global localization (Thrun, 2000).

Additional sensors such as laser and vision provide information about the environment of a mobile robot. Several methods have been proposed to use this information to estimate the pose of a mobile robot. Unfortunately laser sensors are expensive and vision needs computational overhead of image processing. Furthermore this techniques require a map and usually a start position. If the start position is unknown, the pose have to be searched in the whole map, which is difficult and time consuming in a large environment. A global pose estimation using WLAN technology can support such methods by finding the starting pose. Furthermore it can solve the kidnapped robot problem by detecting localization failures and by providing a new starting pose.

Nowadays mobile robots often are equipped with IEEE 802.11 WLAN adapters, in order to communicate with computers or other mobile devices. Furthermore, many buildings are already equipped with an IEEE 802.11 WLAN infrastructure, as a popular and inexpensive technology. Most WLAN adapters are able to measure the signal strengths of received packets as part of their standard operation. The signal strengths of received packets vary noticeably by changing the position. Thus, the signal strength can be used to estimate the position of a mobile device by cheap technology.

In this paper, the problem of global localization is solved using the WLAN infrastructure in an indoor scenario. It extends the existing WLAN localization techniques in two ways. First, it describes a technique for estimating the heading of a mobile robot. A measured set of signal strength values of an omnidirectional antenna and a beam antenna is compared with a radio map in order to estimate position and heading of a mobile robot. Second, Delaunay triangulation and interpolation is proposed in order to reduce the density of the calibration points in the radio map and thus minimizing the manual effort to build the map. Furthermore the proposed technique can support other map based pose estimation methods by finding a global start position. The paper extends the work presented in (Röhrig and Künemund, 2007) by refining the algorithm of heading estimation and by presenting more experimental results, which show the effectiveness of the technique.

2. RELATED WORK

Up to now there are developed several kinds of localization techniques for the use in wireless networks. Sayed et al. (2005) give a review of existing techniques. This techniques can be classified by the information they use:

- Connectivity information,
- Angle of Arrival (AoA),
- Time of Arrival (ToA),
- Time Difference of Arrival (TDoA),
- Received Signal Strength (RSS).

Connectivity information is available in all kinds of wireless networks. The accuracy of the localization depends on the range of the used technology and the density of the beacons. In cellular networks, Cell-ID is a simple localization method based on

⋆ This work was supported in part by the research program of the University of Applied Sciences Dortmund.

cell sector information (Guolin Sun et al., 2005). In infrastructure mode of a Wireless LAN (WLAN), the access point (AP) to which the mobile device is currently connected, can be determined since mobile devices know the MAC hardware address of the AP, which they are connected to. Bluetooth is another technology, which allows a relatively accurate localization because of its low radio range (Feldmann et al., 2003). Besides the deployment of Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) in Supply Chain Management (see Michael and McCathie, 2005), the RFID technology is also suitable for position estimation. RFID tags can be deployed at known positions in the environment, in order to obtain position information when they are in range. This information can be be fused with data from other sensors (e.g. odometers) for the purpose of improving the accuracy of localization (Hähnel et al., 2004; Koch et al., 2007).

AoA determines the position with the angle of arrival from fixed anchor nodes using triangulation. Nasipuri and Li (2002) proposed a method, where a wireless sensor node localizes itself by measuring the angle to three or more beacon signals. Each signal consists of a continuous narrow directional beam, that rotates with a constant angular speed. Drawback of AoA based methods is the need for a special and expensive antenna configuration e.g. antenna arrays or rotating beam antennas.

ToA and TDoA estimate the range to a sender by measuring the signal propagation delay. The Cricket localization system (see Priyantha et al., 2001) developed at MIT utilizes a radio signal and a ultrasound signal for position estimation based on trilateration. TDoA of these two signals are measured in order to estimate the distance between two nodes. This technique can be used to track the position of a mobile robot (Alriksson and Rantzer, 2007). ToA as wells as TDoA require a complex wireless network infrastructure, which is usually not present in today's WLAN installations.

RSS information can be used in most wireless technologies, since mobile devices are able to monitor the RSS as part of their standard operation. The distance between sender and receiver can be obtained with the Log Distance Path Loss Model described in (Patwari et al., 2003). Unfortunately, the propagation model is sensitive to disturbances such as reflection, diffraction and multi-path effects. The signal propagation depends on building dimensions, obstructions, partitioning materials and surrounding moving objects. Own measurements show, that this disturbances make the use of a propagation model for accurate localization in an indoor environment almost impossible (see Röhrig and Künemund, 2007). Bahl and Padmanabhan (2000) introduce fingerprinting, which is a method to overcome this disadvantage by utilizing a radio map. Fingerprinting is divided in two phases: In the initial calibration phase, the radio map is built by moving around and storing RSS values at various predefined points of the environment. In the localization phase, the mobile device moves in the same environment and the position is estimated by comparing the current RSS values with the radio map. A metric to compare the measured RSS values with the radio map is Euclidean distance proposed by Bahl and Padmanabhan (2000). Ladd et al. (2004) use a Bayesian algorithm and Großmann et al. (2006) propose Delaunay triangulation with lines of constant signal strength.

Several methods for localization in WLAN environments using RSS have been developed, in order to improve the accuracy of the estimation. Kumar K. et al. (2006) propose a Kalman filter, a Monte-Carlo algorithm is used by Hu and Evans (2004) as well a by Moster and Tews (2006), Brunato and Battiti (2005) apply statistical learning and Fuzzy is used by Astrain et al. (2006) and by Teuber and Eissfeller (2006). All of these methods utilize a radio map and estimate only the position but not the heading of the mobile device. The main disadvantage of radio map based methods is the high manual effort to build the map in the calibration phase. The use of Delaunay triangulation and interpolation allows a radio map with a low density of calibration points and reduces the time for manual generation of the map (Röhrig and Künemund, 2007).

3. LOCALIZATION APPROACH

The proposed method for localizing the mobile robot is based on the use of RSS values of WLAN APs in range. A radio map based method and Euclidean distance in combination with interpolation is used, because of the described reasons. A measured set of RSS values of the omnidirectional antenna and the beam antenna is compared with the radio map. The radio map is built in an initial calibration phase and contains measured sets of RSS values at various predefined poses (x, y, θ). In the experiments, four headings (0°, 90°, 180°, 270°) at every position are stored. In the localization phase, RSS values of several APs are recorded and compared with the radio map. One observation in both phases consists of RSS values of both antennas and all APs. Values of APs out of range are set to a minimal value $c_{\min} = -100\,\mathrm{dBm}$.

3.1 Euclidean distance

Euclidean distance is a metric to compare the observations of the localization phase with the radio map. In WLAN localization the calibration data are compared with the measured data:

$$d_j = \sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^{M} \left(c_j^{\mathrm{AP}_i} - s^{\mathrm{AP}_i}\right)^2} \qquad (1)$$

where $c_j^{\mathrm{AP}_i}$ is the RSS value of AP_i at pose j in the radio map, s^{AP_i} is the measured RSS value of AP_i and M is the total number of APs. The Euclidean distance d_j is a metric for the distance between the calibration data $c_j^{\mathrm{AP}_i}$ and the measured data s^{AP_i} in signal space. After calculating d_j for all calibration points, there will be at least one pose with minimal d_j. One approach is to declare this pose to be the estimated pose of the mobile robot. The accuracy of this method depends beside other factors on the density of the underlying grid of calibration points.

3.2 Estimation of the position

In order to reduce the manual effort to build the map, the density of calibration points should be as low as possible. Thus, the interpolation of the estimated position is proposed. In this case a lower density of calibration points is possible. Interpolation is based on Delaunay triangulation and lines of constant signal strength (isolines). For interpolation purposes of the position, the signals of the omnidirectional antenna are used only. With Delaunay triangulation a network of triangles for a set of points (nodes) in the plane is developed, such that no point is inside the circumcircle of any triangle (Leach, 1992). The nodes are represented by the calibration points. Given a measured RSS value of one AP, triangles whose nodes show RSS values higher and lower than the measured value can be selected. Linear interpolation between node values within the triangle delivers a more detailed radio map consisting of a surface of interpolated RSS values over the triangle. Moreover, it is possible to calculate an interpolated line of constant RSS (isoline) within the triangle and in the whole area of triangulation. Fig. 1 shows the isolines of AP_1, Fig. 2 shows the isolines of AP_2.

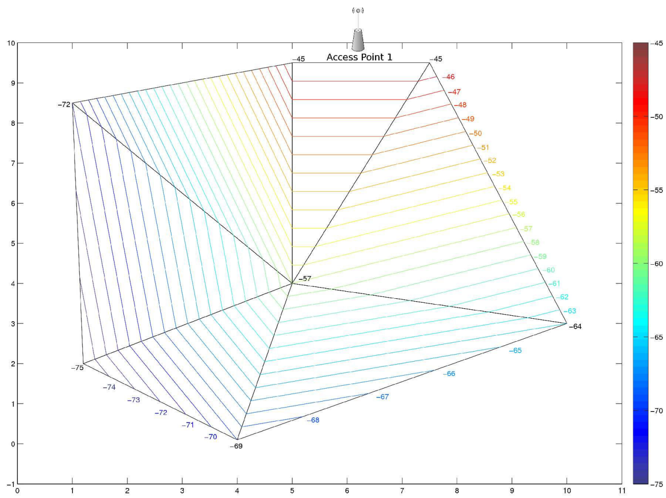

Fig. 1. Lines of constant RSS (isolines) for AP_1

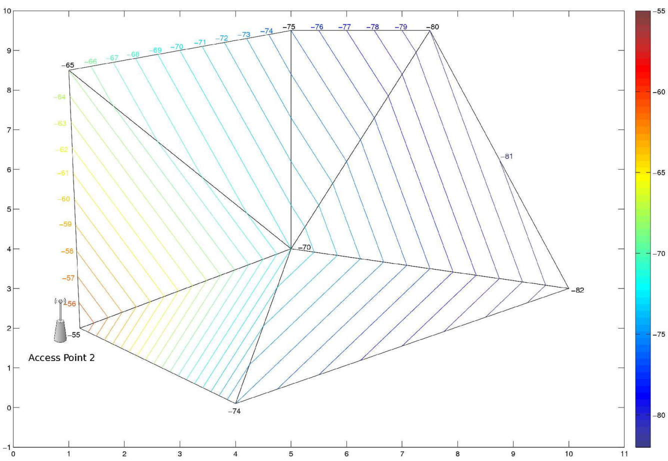

Fig. 2. Lines of constant RSS (isolines) for AP_2

Given two RSS values of different APs, it is possible to select triangles whose interpolation surfaces include the according isolines. If there is an intersection of both isolines, the intersection point within the triangle can be calculated. Fig. 3 shows the merged radio map for AP_1 and AP_2. There are two points of intersection in the radio map for this measurement.

The pose is estimated using the points of intersection. Points with a large distance to the real position have to be eliminated from the calculation of the estimated position. The elimination of points of intersection is performed using an acceptance circle. This circle is built by a triangle of three points in the radio map with least Euclidean distance to the measured RSS values. It is assumed that the real position is near by this triangle. The center of the circle is the balance point of the triangle. The radius of the circle is built by the largest edge of the triangle. All intersection points outside of the acceptance circle were excluded from the calculation.

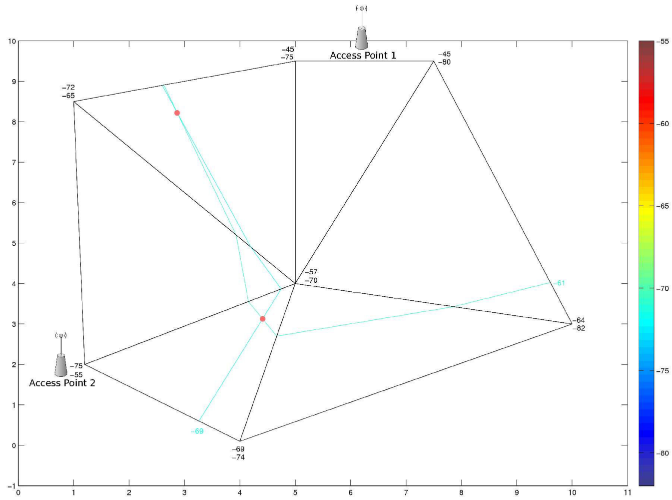

Fig. 3. Merged radio map for AP_1 and AP_2

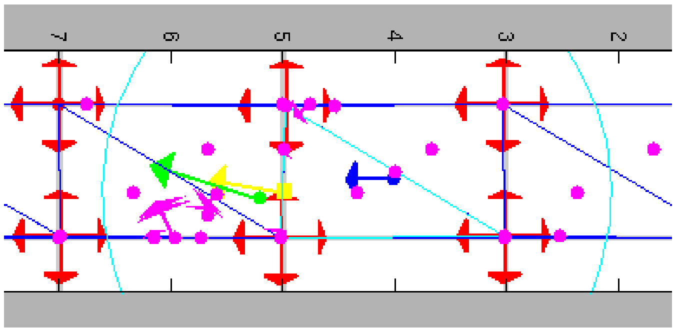

Fig. 4. Visualization of estimation technique

Fig. 4 shows a radio map with calibration poses (red arrows), acceptance circle (cyan) and points of intersection (magenta). The real pose of the robot is shown as blue arrow, while the green arrow represents the estimated pose.

The estimated position $(\hat{x}, \hat{y})$ is calculated with weighted points of intersection:

$$\hat{x} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{N} w_i x_i}{\sum_{i=1}^{N} w_i}, \qquad \hat{y} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{N} w_i y_i}{\sum_{i=1}^{N} w_i}, \tag{2}$$

where w_i is the weight of intersection x_i, y_i and N is the total number of intersections inside the acceptance circle.

Experiments have shown, that measured RSS values closer to APs are more reliable than those in larger distance (see Röhrig and Künemund, 2007). Hence, the weight w_i of intersection i is calculated with RSS values of the crossing isolines:

$$w_i = (s_{i,1} - s_{\min})^2 + (s_{i,2} - s_{\min})^2 \quad \text{with} \quad s_{\min} = -100\,\text{dBm} \tag{3}$$

where $s_{i,1}$ and $s_{i,2}$ are the RSS values of the isolines at intersection i and $s_{\min}$ is the lowest possible RSS value. Higher RSS values are measured closer to APs and lead to larger weights.

3.3 *Estimation of the heading*

The heading is estimated with RSS values of the beam antenna. For every point of intersection i a heading $\hat{\theta}_i$ with assigned vector length $\hat{\rho}_i$ is calculated. $\hat{\rho}_i$ is a metric for the quality of the estimation and is used as weight. The estimation of $(\hat{\theta}_i, \hat{\rho}_i)$ is calculated with radio map values of the surrounding triangle:

$$\hat{\theta}_i = \operatorname{atan2}\left(\sum_{j=1}^{J}\frac{w_i}{d_j}\sin\theta_j, \sum_{j=1}^{J}\frac{w_i}{d_j}\cos\theta_j\right), \quad (4)$$

$$\hat{\rho}_i = \sqrt{\left(\sum_{j=1}^{J}\frac{w_i}{d_j}\sin\theta_j\right)^2 + \left(\sum_{j=1}^{J}\frac{w_i}{d_j}\cos\theta_j\right)^2}, \quad (5)$$

where J is the number of weighted headings (with least Euclidean distance) at the nodes of the surrounding triangle, d_j is the Euclidean distance between measured RSS values from the beam antenna and stored RSS values in the radio map and w_i is the weight of intersection i (Eqn. 3). In Fig. 4 $(\hat{\theta}_i, \hat{\rho}_i)$ are represented by magenta arrows.

The heading of the mobile robot $\hat{\theta}$ is estimated by adding the headings of all intersections:

$$\hat{\theta} = \operatorname{atan2}\left(\sum_{i=1}^{N}\sum_{j=1}^{J}\frac{w_i}{d_j}\sin\theta_j, \sum_{i=1}^{N}\sum_{j=1}^{J}\frac{w_i}{d_j}\cos\theta_j\right), \quad (6)$$

$$\hat{\rho} = \sqrt{\left(\sum_{i=1}^{N}\sum_{j=1}^{J}\frac{w_i}{d_j}\sin\theta_j\right)^2 + \left(\sum_{i=1}^{N}\sum_{j=1}^{J}\frac{w_i}{d_j}\cos\theta_j\right)^2}. \quad (7)$$

In Fig. 4 $(\hat{\theta}, \hat{\rho})$ is represented by the green arrow.

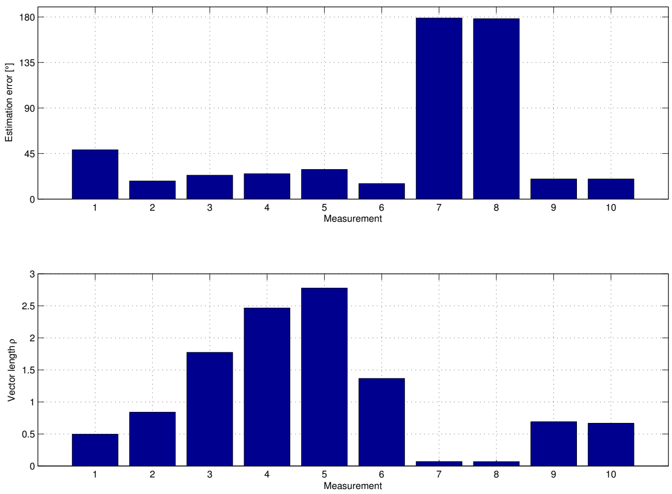

Fig. 5. $\hat{\rho}$ versus estimation error

Fig. 5 compares $\hat{\rho}$ with the estimation error of the heading of 10 measurements at the same location. Measurements 7 and 8 achieve large estimation errors of 180°. This large errors correspond with very low values of $\hat{\rho}$, which indicate a low estimation accuracy. It is proposed to use $\hat{\rho}$ in a later signal processing stage to weight the estimated heading.

4. EXPERIMENTAL SETUP

The experiments are carried out with a mobile robot Pioneer3-AT manufactured by ActivMedia (Fig. 6). The robot is equipped with an embedded computer for real time robot control and an additional PC with two WLAN cards for communication and localization. One WLAN card is connected to an omnidirectional antenna, the other card is connected to a beam antenna.

A robot server is included in the operating system of the embedded computer. It manages the low-level tasks of robot control and operation, including motion and odometry. For programming purposes ActivMedia provides the toolkit ARIA (ActivMedia Robotics Interface for Application) (see Activmedia,

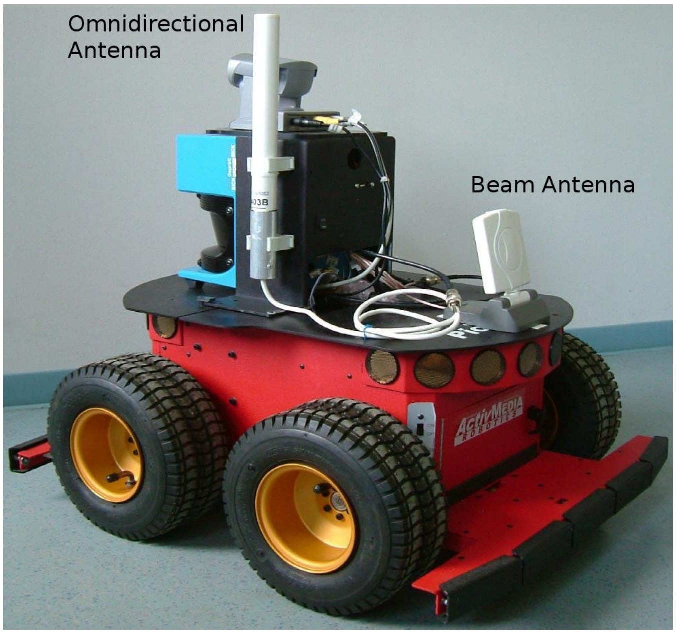

Fig. 6. Pioneer3-AT

2006). ARIA provides an interface to control the robot's velocity, heading, relative heading, and provide detailed information about odometry and operating conditions from the mobile robot.

The operation system on the PC is Ubuntu Linux, which offers support for wireless communication by the wireless extension (WE). WE is an application programming interface (API) allowing a user space program to configure a WLAN driver and receive statistic information. The software is divided into three parts: a localization engine, a graphical user interface (GUI) and a WLAN scanner. The localization engine and the GUI are written in the Matlab script language, the WLAN scanner is implemented in C. The WLAN scanner uses the WE `ioctl()`-Interface for reading RSS values from both WLAN adapters. The communication between localization engine and WLAN scanner is build with TCP/IP sockets. Since the localization engine are built on Matlab, it is possible to run it on every computer which offers a Matlab environment and a network access. The GUI is used for monitoring information to the user and for building the radio map.

Fig. 7 shows the GUI with a map of a room in the Computer Science building. The red arrows around the red dots show the four headings of the robot in every calibration point of the radio map. The colored lines represent the RSS isolines. In order to build the radio map, the user moves the robot to predefined poses (red arrows) and stores the measured RSS values. In the localization phase, the blue arrow represents the real pose of the mobile robot and green and yellow arrow visualizes estimated poses.

5. EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS

Experiments are performed in an office building of the Computer Science Department. A test series was measured at the hallway shown in Fig. 4. The existing WLAN-infrastructure was used for the measurements. Fig. 8 shows a histogram of position errors achieved in this test series, which are in a range from 0 to 4 m. In most cases, the accuracy is better than 1.0 m.

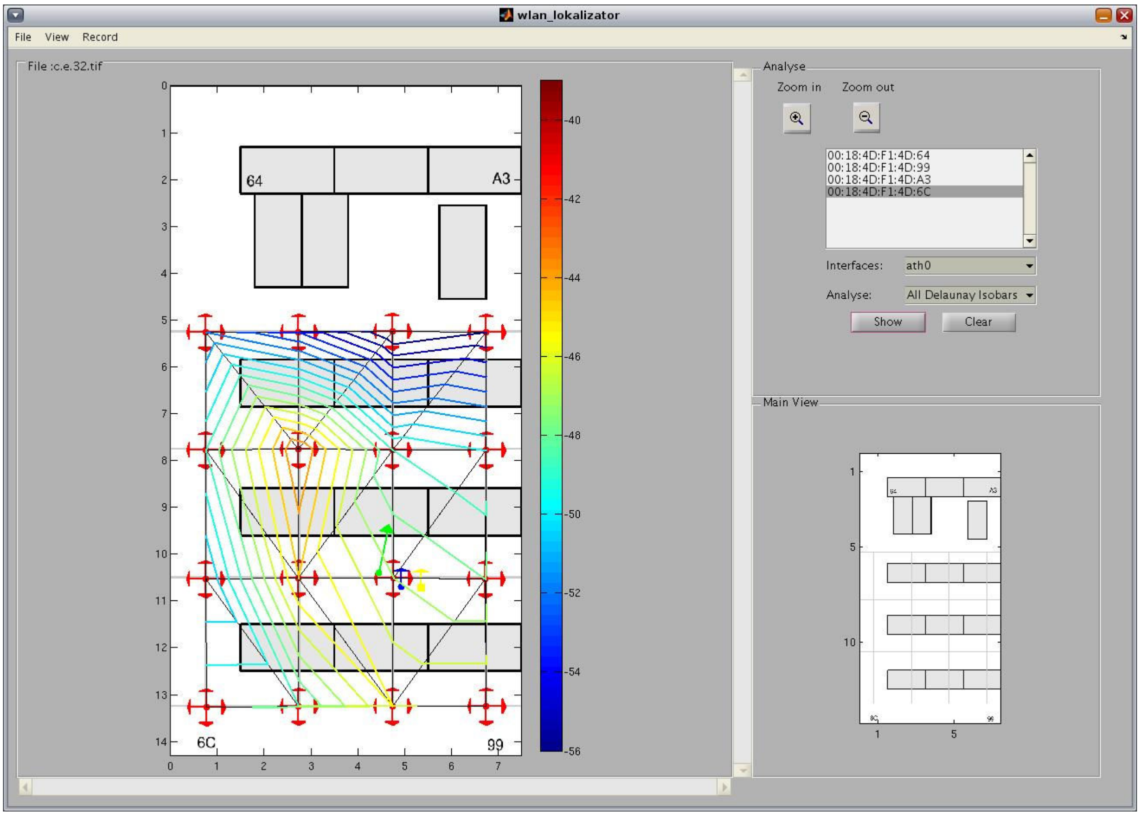

Fig. 7. Matlab Localization engine and GUI

The accuracy depends directly on the position of the APs in range. For a good and reliable estimation, three ore more APs in a short distance are required. The placement of additional APs increases the accuracy of the estimation.

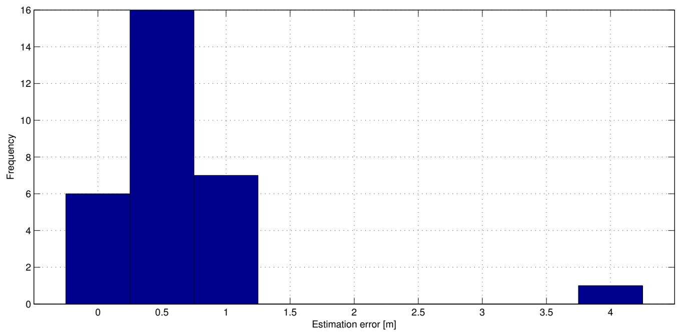

Fig. 8. Histogram of estimation error of position

Fig. 9 compares the estimation accuracy of Delaunay isoline interpolation with Euclidean distance interpolation. In most cases estimations with isoline method achieve a better accuracy than estimations with Euclidean distance only.

Fig. 10 shows a histogram of the heading error. Heading errors are in the full range from 0 to 180 $^\circ$. In most cases an accuracy better than 45 $^\circ$ can be achieved and worse estimations can be detected by low values of $\hat{\rho}$.

6. CONCLUSION AND FURTHER WORK

This paper has presented a method for estimating the pose of a mobile robot. The method is based on a radio map and uses RSS values of WLAN APs in range. In order to reduce

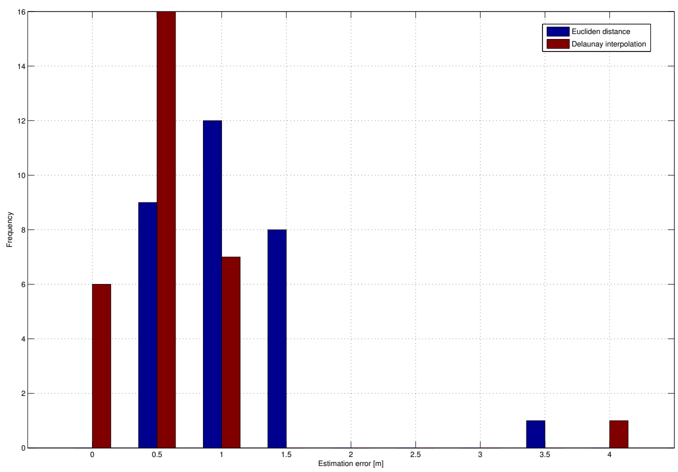

Fig. 9. Comparison of Euclidean distance and Delaunay interpolation

the density of calibration points in the radio map, Delaunay triangulation is applied to interpolate the position of the mobile robot. Furthermore the estimation of the heading of a mobile robot with the aid of a beam antenna was presented. Since the accuracy of the estimation depends highly on the positions of the APs in the environment, the placement of the APs has to be optimized, in order to get a good and reliable position estimation.

In future work the accuracy of the estimation should be improved by using a Kalman filter or a Monte Carlo particle filter. Furthermore the accuracy may be improved by fusion with position information obtained from other sensor e.g. odometry, sonar or laser.

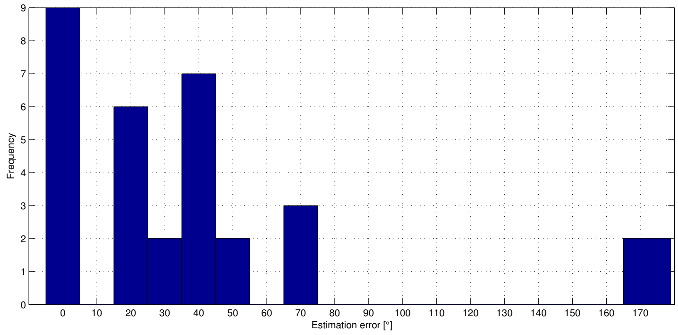

Fig. 10. Histogram of estimation error of heading

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