

# A Docking Experiment: Swarm and Repast for Social Network Modeling

Jin Xu Yongqin Gao Gregory Madey

Dept. of Comp. Science

University of Notre Dame

Notre Dame, IN 46556

Email: {jxu1, ygao1, gmadey}@nd.edu

April, 2003

## ABSTRACT

Axtell, Axelrod, Epstein and Cohen [24] describe a docking or alignment process and experiment for verifying simulations. By comparing simulations built independently using different simulation tools, the docking or alignment process may discover bugs, misinterpretation of model specification, and inherent differences in toolkit implementations. If the behavior of the multiple simulations are similar, then verification confidence is increased. North and Macal [22] reported on such experiment using Mathematica, Swarm and RePast to simulate the Beer Distribution Game (originally simulated using system dynamics simulation methods).

In this paper, we present the results of docking a Repast simulation and a Java/Swarm simulation of four social network models of the Open Source Software (OSS) community. Data about the SourceForge OSS developer site has been collected for over 2 years. Developer membership in projects is used to model the social network of developers. Social networks based on random graphs, preferential attachment, preference attachment with constant fitness, and preferential attachment with dynamic fitness are modeled and compared to collected data. We describe how properties of social networks such as degree distribution, diameter and clustering coefficient are used to dock Repast and Swarm simulations of four social network models. The simulations grow “artificial societies” representing the SourceForge developer/project community. As a by-product of the docking experiment, we provide observations on the advantages and disadvantages of the two toolkits for modeling such systems.

**Keywords:** dynamic social network; docking; agent-based modeling; open source software

# INTRODUCTION

Agent-based Modeling has become an attractive computational methodology in recent years. Its popularity results from the fact that it allows for complex systems to be simulated in a relatively straightforward way. Unlike traditional mathematical simulation tools, agent-based modeling simulates artificial worlds based on components called agents and defines rules to determine the interactions of agents. Although agent-based modeling is used commonly in simulations, it is not guaranteed to provide an accurate representation of a particular empirical application [3]. In this context, Axtell et al claimed “It seems fundamental to us to be able to determine whether two models claiming to deal with the same phenomenon can, or cannot, produce the same result” [24].

There are three ways to validate an agent-based simulation. The first way is to compare the simulation output with the real phenomenon. This way is relatively simple and straightforward. However, often we cannot get complete real data on all aspect of the phenomenon. The second way compares agent-based simulation results with results of mathematical models. The disadvantage of this way is that we need to construct mathematical models which may be difficult to formulate for a complex system. The third way is by docking with other simulations of the same phenomenon. Docking is the process of aligning two dissimilar models to address the same question or problem, to investigate their similarities and their differences, but most importantly, to gain new understanding of the question or issue [4].

Axtell, Axelrod, Epstein and Cohen describe a docking or alignment process and experiment for verifying simulations [24]. By comparing simulations built independently using different simulation tools, the docking or alignment process may discover bugs, misinterpretations of model specification, and inherent differences in toolkit implementations. If the behaviors of the multiple simulations are similar, then validation confidence is increased. North and Macal reported on such an experiment using Mathematica, Swarm and RePast to simulate the Beer Distribution Game (originally simulated using system dynamics simulation methods) [22]. In Louie and Ashworth [2], docking is done by comparing results of the canonical Garbage Can model with those of “NK Model”. Xu and Gao used Repast and Swarm to dock a random network model of the Open Source Software phenomenon [17]. Although the above docking experiments show the importance and advantages of docking, there are only a few docking studies and none have used topological properties of social networks as docking parameters.

In this paper, we present the results of docking a Repast simulation and a Java/Swarm simulation of four dynamic social network models of the Open Source Software (OSS) community. The results reported in this paper are part of a study of the Open Source Software [8–15,17]. Data about the SourceForge OSS developer site has been collected for over 2 years. Developer membership in projects is used to model the social network of developers. Social networks based on random graphs, preferential attachment, preferential attachment with constant fitness, and preferential attachment with dynamic fitness are modeled and compared to collected data. We describe how properties of social networks such as degree distribution, diameter and clustering coefficient are used to dock Repast and Swarm simulations of four social networks. The simulations grow “artificial societies” representing the SourceForge developer/project community. As a by-product of the docking experiment, we

provide observations on the advantages and disadvantages of the two toolkits for modeling such systems.

The rest of paper is organized as follows. The second section provides background on our Open Source Software (OSS) study and simulation. The following section discusses docking simulations using Swarm and Repast. Experimental results and comparisons are given in the fourth section. The fifth section presents conclusions and discussions.

## SOCIAL NETWORK MODEL

Social network theory is a conceptual framework through which we view the OSS developer movement. The theory, built on mathematical graph theory, depicts interrelated social agents as nodes or vertices of a graph and their relationships as links or edges drawn between the nodes [26]. The number of edges (or links) connected to a node (or vertex) is called the index or degree of the node.

Of special interest are the evolutionary processes and associated topological formation in dynamic growing networks. Early work in this field by Erdos and Renyi focuses on random graphs, i.e., those where edges between vertices were attached in a random process (called ER graphs here) [1]. However, the distributions of index values for the random graphs do not agree with the observed power law distribution for many social networks, including the OSS developer network at SourceForge. Some other evolutionary mechanisms include: 1) the Watts-Strogatz (WS) model [27], 2) the Barabasi-Albert (BA) model with preferential attachment [19,20,23], 3) the modified BA model with fitness [1,18], and 4) an extension of the BA model (with fitness) to include dynamic fitness based on project life cycle reported in [11,13–15]. The WS model captures the local clustering property of social networks and was extended to include some random reattachment to capture the small world property, but failed to display the power-law distribution of index values. The BA model added preferential attachment, both preserving the realistic properties of the WS model and also displaying the power-law distribution. The BA model was extended with the addition of random fitness to capture the fact that sometimes newly added nodes grow edges faster than previously added nodes (the “young upstart” phenomenon).

The Open Source Software (OSS) development movement is a classic example of a dynamic social network; it is also a prototype of a complex evolving network. Prior research suggests that the OSS network can be considered a complex, self-organizing system [1,7,16]. These systems are typically comprised of large numbers of locally interacting elements.

The Open Source Software community can be described as a dynamic social network. In our model of the OSS collaboration network, there are two entities – developer and project. The network can be illustrated as a graph. In this network, nodes are developers. An edge will be added if two developers are participating in the same project. Edges can be removed if two developers are no longer participating on the same project. The study of the OSS collaboration network can help us understand the evolution of the social network’s topology, the development patterns of each individual object and the impact of the interaction among objects to the evolution of the overall network system.

We use agent-based modeling to simulate the OSS development community. Unlike developers, projects are passive elements of the social network. Thus, we only define developers

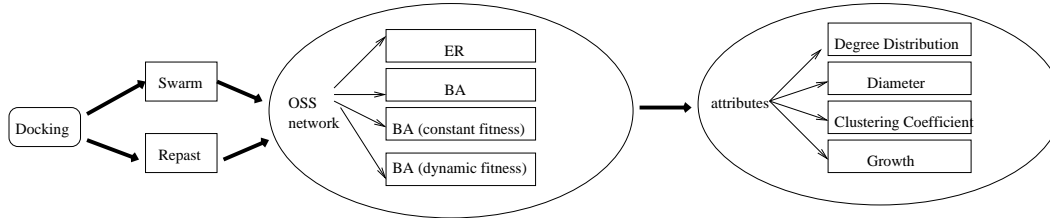


Figure 1: Docking Process

as the agents which encapsulate a real developer’s possible daily interactions with the development network. Our simulation is time stepped instead of event driven, with one day of real time as a time step. Each day, a certain number of new developers are created. Newly created developers use decision rules to create new projects or join other projects. Also, each day existing developers can decide to abandon a randomly selected project, to continue their current projects, or to create a new project. A developer’s selection is determined by a Java method based on the relative parameter and the degree of the developer.

## DOCKING OSS COLLABORATION NETWORK SIMULATION

In this section, we describe the docking of our OSS collaboration network simulation by two agent-based modeling tools – Java Swarm and Repast. Simulation details are compared between these two models.

### The Docking Process

The docking process is an important stage of the OSS project [8]. The initial simulation was written using Swarm. There are several reasons why docking is necessary in this project. First, docking is used to test the correctness of the Swarm implementation. Second, docking provides the Repast version of the OSS simulation which we would like to use in our future research. Repast has several advantages in this project: it is written in pure Java which makes debugging easier; it provides us a graphical representation of the network layout; and most importantly, Repast 2.0 provides distributed running environment [5].

As shown in Figure 1, Swarm simulations and Repast simulations are docked for four models of the OSS network. Our docking process began when the author of the swarm simulation wrote the docking specification. Then, the Repast version was written based on the docking specification. Simulations are validated by comparing network attributes generated by running these two simulation models.

### Swarm

Swarm is a software package for multi-agent simulation of complex systems, originally developed at the Santa Fe Institute [21]. In the Swarm model, the basic unit is called an agent.

Modelers can define a set of rules to describe the interaction of agents. Furthermore, Swarm also provides display, control and analysis tools.

Our swarm simulation has a hierarchical structure which consists of a *developer* class, a *modelswarm* class, an *observerswarm* class and a *main* program. The *modelswarm* handles creating developers and controls the activities of developers. In *modelswarm*, a schedule is generated to define a set of activities of the agents. The *observerswarm* is used to implement data collection and draw graphs. The *main* program is a driver to start the whole simulation.

The core of a swarm simulation consists of a group of agents. Agents in our simulation are developers. Each developer is an instance of a Java class. A developer has an identification id, a degree which is the number of links, and a list of projects participated by this developer. Furthermore, a developer class has methods to describe possible daily actions: create, join, abandon a project or continue the developer's current collaborations. A separate Java method models each of the first three possibilities. A fourth method encapsulates a developer's selection of one of the three alternatives. Here, three model parameters appear. Each represents the probability of one of the three developer activities. Comparison of a randomly generated number to these probabilities determine which behavioral method the agent will enact.

## Repast

RePast is a software framework for agent-based simulation created by Social Science Research Computing at the University of Chicago [25]. Like Swarm, RePast provides an integrated library of classes for creating, running, displaying, and collecting data from an agent-based simulation [6]. In addition, RePast is written in pure Java which has better portability and extensibility than Swarm. Furthermore, RePast provides some different library packages which provide features such as network display, QuickTime movies and snapshot.

Our RePast simulation of OSS developer network consists of a *model* class, a *developer* class, an *edge* class and a *project* class. The class structure of the simulation is different from that of the Swarm simulation. This is due in part to the graphical network display feature of Repast. The model class is responsible for creation and control of the activities of developers. Furthermore, information collection and display are also encapsulated in the *model* class. The *developer* class is similar to that in Swarm simulation. An *edge* class is used to define an edge in OSS network. We also create a *project* class with properties and methods to simulate a project.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section discusses docking of Repast and Swarm simulations on four OSS network models, and then presents the results and comparisons. Furthermore, discussion of docking process is given.

Degree distribution, diameter and clustering coefficient are frequent attributes used to describe a network [] and have been used ever since the foundation of random network theory. In order to study the validity of our simulation, we compare these attributes in two simulations.

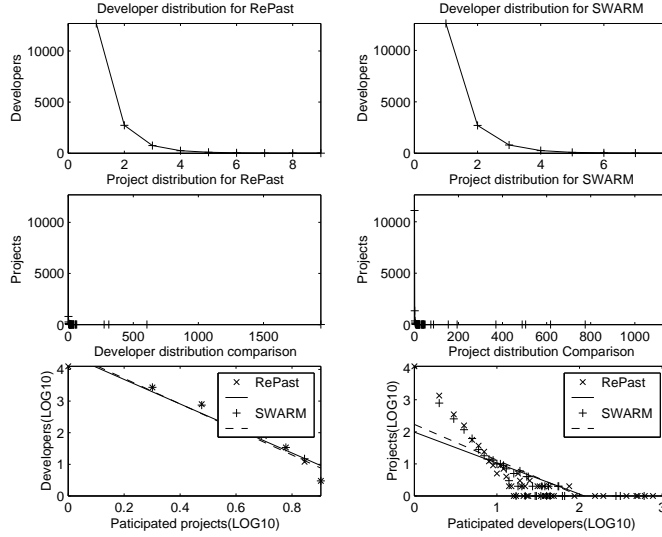


Figure 2: Developer Distribution

As shown in Figure 2. The upper two figures are the developer distributions, the middle two figures are the project distributions and the lower two are their logarithm versions. From the figure, we can observe that the data matches for both developer distribution and the project distribution.

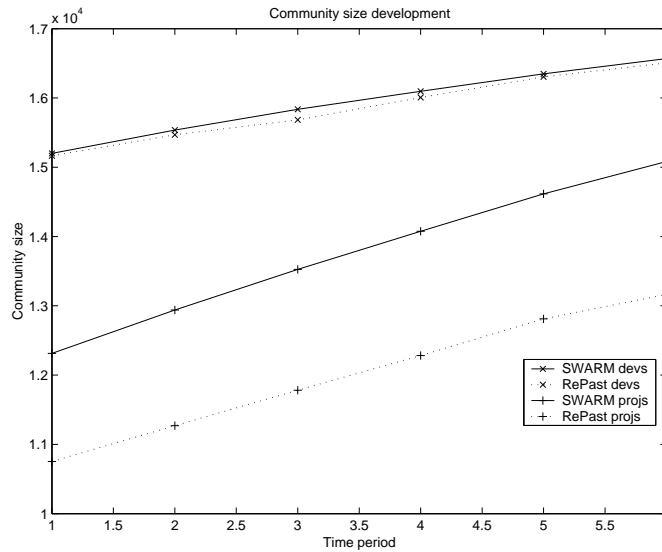


Figure 3: Community Size Development

Figure 3 shows the total number of developers and projects relative to the time period. The size of developers are almost the same for Swarm and RePast simulation. However, there is a gap between two simulations for projects. The reason is that a given number of developers are created in each time step in both simulations. However, the number of projects is determined by the behavior of developers, which is related to different random generators associated with RePast and Swarm. But we can see the increasing rate of projects are almost the same.

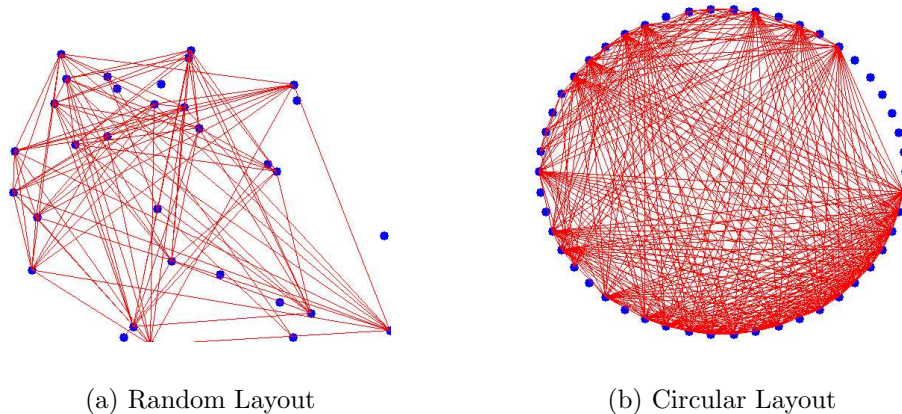


Figure 4: Network Layout

Furthermore, We use network display provided by RePast to draw OSS network. The network is shown by both circular and random layout in Figure 4. The node in the graph represents a developer. An edge between two nodes mean these two developers participate in the same project. We can see that some projects have many developers, while some projects have just a few or even none developers. This phenomenon also matches the real world.

## Conclusion

This paper discusses validation of agent-based simulation using the docking process. It describes four simulation models of OSS developer network using Swarm and RePast. Properties of social networks such as degree distribution, diameter and clustering coefficient are used to dock Repast and Swarm simulations of four social networks. Experimental results show that docking two agent-based simulations can help validate a simulation. This paper showed that a docking process can also be used to validate a migration of a simulation from one software package to another. In our case, the docking process helped with the transfer to Repast to take advantages of its features. Repast simulation runs faster than Swarm simulation because RePast is written in pure Java while Swarm is originally written in Object C which may cause some overhead for Java Swarm. Furthermore, RePast provides more display library packages such as network package which help users to do analysis.

*This research was funded in part by the NSF Award-0222829, from the Digital Society & Technologies Program, CISE/IIS.*

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