

Semi-automated Ontology Population from Building Construction Drawings

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Abstract: Ontologies have been applied as knowledge representation in different domains, including intelligent building management. One of the challenges in using ontologies is the population with building specific information, such as the building elements and the energy consuming devices. The population usually has to be done manually by analysis and interpreting the building drawings, thus it requires extensive work. This is due to the lack of semantic information in the existing building construction drawings, which only contain geometrical information. However, it is possible to understand the semantics of the drawings, if the knowledge in interpreting the semantics of the symbols, shapes and other geometric information is present. This paper introduces a tool to extract the semantic information from CAD drawings and populate the ontology using the extracted semantic information in a semi-automatic way. The drawing primitives from CAD files are used to perform the pattern matching and classification algorithms to extract the semantic information. The resulting semantic information is then mapped to the corresponding ontology classes of a T-Box ontology. Finally individuals of the corresponding classes are created to populate the ontology and their geometric properties like world coordinate position and bounding box are set.

1 INTRODUCTION

Buildings are becoming more intelligent. There are various reasons for this new trend, like energy efficiency, comfort, and rising complexity of multimedia devices and intelligent furnitures. Another view on this is the web of objects (Atzori et al., 2010). Whereas the web of objects describes an object oriented web of intelligent agents, this work focuses on the central intelligence of the building. The core component of an artificial intelligence is a knowledge base containing semantic description of the domain and allowing the interaction with the intelligent agents. An ontology is a common representation to describe the semantics. It contains the information and concepts needed for the intelligent building management.

The need for more semantic information has also been addressed in the development of the Building Information Model (BIM) (Howard and Björk, 2008) and the introduction of BIM standards like IFC and gbXML. The way to create the CAD content goes through a paradigm shift from drawing to configuring and this facilitates the collection of the semantic information. The reason one can not take advantage of those new features now is that they will take effect at

least in the next several years because of their low use (Laakso and Kiviniemi, 2012). Until then the present data of recent buildings mostly consist of construction drawings based on 2D geometric primitives.

Our work addresses the extraction of semantic informations from 2D drawings with the goal to create an ontology represented knowledge base for intelligent buildings. First one needs to define different classes and relation definitions for building management domains, such as the classes representing elements like room, door, window and the relations like hasDoor, hasWindow, etc. This will result in a T-Box ontology, which can be used as the common structure and taxonomy for the building information model. Then, one needs to populate the ontology with the building specific instances like the list of rooms with their position and dimensions, the positions of doors and windows, and the building automation systems with all the sensors and actuators. The population usually has to be done manually, which requires extensive work. The building plans are usually drawn in CAD as collections of primitives representing certain symbols. It needs pre-knowledge in order to interpret the semantic of the drawings and populate the corresponding ontology.

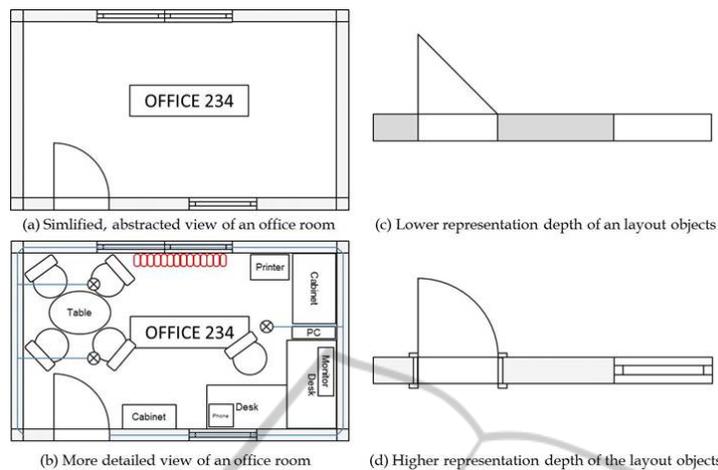


Figure 1: Possible representation of a CAD drawing (Wicaksono et al., 2012).

There are many challenges when extracting semantic geometrical information directly from CAD drawings and many software products for CAD on the market used for drawing building layouts. These tools have versions and variants resulting in many differences and incompatibilities between them, different interfaces and import/export file formats. A further challenge is the varying representation of the building elements in such a drawing. The quality of the information often fully depends on the person who inputs the data (Vanlande et al., 2008). Figure 1 shows some examples of different representation possibilities. It differs in the degree of information density and level of representation depth. Another problem of the automated recognition of building elements from CAD drawings are the different languages used. Each author labels his drawing using a particular language, depending on the country. In addition, CAD drawings are often made for different perspectives of the building so called viewports (top or front projection). Then a recognition program has to distinguish all perspectives. Other kinds of CAD drawings are block schemes for building domains such as ventilation, heating, access controls, photovoltaic, electric circuit etc. To populate the ontology correctly it is important to be able to use all layouts of the building (all floors and all perspectives) in order to avoid information loss.

A fully automated pattern matching method to extract semantic informations from the CAD drawings is not practicable since every drawing differs in its conventions. The proposed solution focuses on a semi-automatic approach, enabling the user to select a building element. The object type is defined by the user and his information can then be populated into the ontology. The user selection can be used to filter all identical objects automatically using pattern

matching algorithms. This is especially useful for recurring objects like doors and furniture. Another type of information are the zones and rooms which can also be easily populated.

This paper presents the methodology of OntoCAD and its potential in the field of building ontologies. This introduction is followed by the state of the art in ontology population, building layouts, and pattern matching on primitives. Then the methodology and implementation of our solution is described. The last part is dedicated to the conclusion and outlook.

2 STATE OF THE ART

The following section presents the state of the art and related works in the three topics: ontology population, building layouts and geometric pattern matching.

2.1 Ontology Population

Ontology population has been a major challenge in constructing an ontology-based knowledge base. Literature often describes that a manual construction of ontology individuals leads to costly and extensive work. Some researchers have proposed methods to populate ontology semi-automatically in different domains. However, the population methods depend strongly on the information sources.

In the semantic web domain, where the information sources are semi-structured documents, such as HTML and XML, the ontology is populated based on the syntactic and semantic similarity between the ontology and the web tables containing terms that are extracted from web documents. The web documents are collected by a web crawler. The populated ontol-

ogy is used for automatic cataloging of IT products (Song et al., 2009).

Another method for ontology population is in the risk management domain. The method tries to populate the ontology semi-automatically from fact sheet documents using combined Natural Language Processing (NLP) techniques. It extracts the verbs from natural language text and matches them to the corresponding relations in the T-Box ontology. However, the human intervention is still needed for control and validation (Makki et al., 2009). There are some other works that propose ontology population methods from unstructured texts based on NLP approaches (Vargas-Vera et al., 2007), (Maynard et al., 2009). Up to now, there exists no method to populate ontologies in the building management domain.

2.2 Building Layouts

CAD design tools, such as AutoCAD, ArchiCAD or Revit are commonly used for the creation of building layouts representing two or three dimensional drawing (plans, sections, elevations). Further CAD-based software is used to plan and model many domains of a building, such as ventilation, heating, access controls and photovoltaic (Krahtov et al., 2009). The number of elements in a sketch and its complexity may vary (Donath, 2009) (see Figure 1).

Building information modeling (BIM) is the process of development and use of computer generated models to simulate the lifecycle of a facility including planning, design, construction and operation (Azhar et al., 2008). The resulting model of BIM is a data-rich, object-oriented, intelligent and parametric digital representation of the facility and serves as shared knowledge resource which helps the decision making at each stage of the facility lifecycle (Azhar et al., 2008). With the BIM model the former 2D construction drawings are augmented with intelligent contextual semantic, where objects are defined in terms of building elements and systems such as spaces, walls, beams and columns (CRC, 2007). To achieve the BIM concepts, an open standardized data model called IFC (Industry Foundation Classes) for enabling interoperability between BIM software and containing the semantic information of the facility has been developed. The reason one can not use the benefits of IFC for the population of building ontologies is that today after almost 20 years of IFC development (since 1994) we witness the low usage in actual construction drawings. Laakso assumes that this is caused by the slow adoption of collaborative model-based construction processes and industry reluctance to switch over

to new IT tools (Laakso and Kiviniemi, 2012). Even if IFC becomes more used, there will still be cases with drawing-like data without semantic information.

2.3 Geometric Pattern Matching

To populate the building ontology in an efficient way, pattern matching algorithms are used to find all entities like doors, windows and furniture. There are a lot of applications where pattern matching plays an important role. These include pose determination, computer aided design, robot vision and many more. This work considers a very small subset of pattern matching methods. Spatial pattern matching is the process of finding a geometric transformation to match two given images. Only the special case where the image is a 2D vector graphic is called geometric pattern matching. Moreover only exact and total pattern matching is considered. This is the case for whole matches with an optimal transformation. This means that matching patterns are identical. As described by (Hagedoorn, 2000) there are different methods for geometric pattern matching, for instance graph matching and geometric hashing. Graph matching means that the structure of a pattern is described as a graph and matching is performed between the graphs. Geometric hashing means that the pattern as a whole is described by a normalised description. The drawback of geometric hashing is that it works for known patterns, as a data structure (the hash table) has to be constructed for the whole data.

This work uses a correspondence method where patterns are matched by fitting pairs of geometric primitives. This method combines the geometric primitives that make up the input pattern. An example is pairing line segments, where each combination of two line segments in the patterns must fit to make a match.

3 SOLUTION

Our methodology uses a semi-automated approach for the extraction of semantic information from building CAD drawings using user input at different stages. The drawings are exported from CAD design software using the exchange format DXF. OntoCAD imports and draws the primitives, layers and view-ports. A T-Box ontology (see Section 3.2) is used as input, which allows the user to choose building elements from a building taxonomy. The user can see and use the vector based primitive representations to add semantic information. The population process is accelerated through the OntoCAD user interface and the pattern

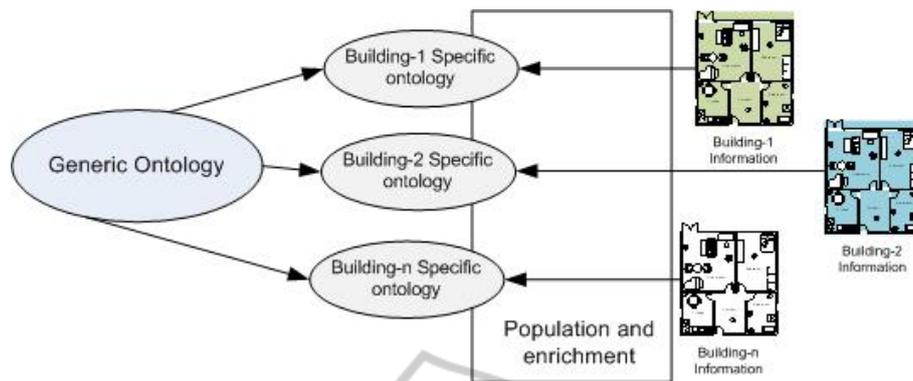


Figure 2: Generic and building specific ontology.

matching algorithms to find the similar objects. The user has the possibility to directly validate the results and apply necessary corrections. Each step is continuously and automatically saved to a building specific ontology containing A-Box elements. The advantage of a user-centred method is that the user can provide meta information about the data like drawing type (top or side view) or additional semantic information like room name or number, supported by an intuitive graphical user interface. The target user of our solution can be a facility manager, building owner, or building management system specialist.

3.1 The Ontology Source

In our work, the building management ontology is represented in OWL (Web Ontology Language), a W3C specified knowledge representation language (Smith et al., 2004). Basically there are two types of ontologies. A generic ontology (T-Box ontology) represents a common information model for building energy management, which is then populated and extended with building specific information resulting in more building specific ontologies (A-Box ontology). It is illustrated in Figure 2.

The ontological classes as well as their attributes and relations representing the resources needed for the building management are created manually by experts. The ontology containing these hand-crafted elements is called generic ontology. The generic ontology only contains the ontological classes or T-Box components that describe the knowledge structure, definitions and terminology. It does not contain any ontological individuals or A-Box components and contains no building specific information. Figure 3 depicts the ontology main classes representing the different resources needed for the building management. The class *BuildingElement* models the building structures that are observed, examined and analyzed in energy management activities. The building elements are passive entities which have states, but do not have capabilities to measure or to observe their own states. The class *BuildingElement* and its subclasses represent the fundamentals of the BIM. It is aligned with the domain layer in IFC2x4.

The aim of the ontology population in our work is to create individuals for the classes and subclasses of *BuildingElement* and to enrich them with geometric properties. For this, the generic ontology must satisfy requirements of data and object properties. Those properties have to be linked to each class. This means that a property holds information to which classes it belongs.

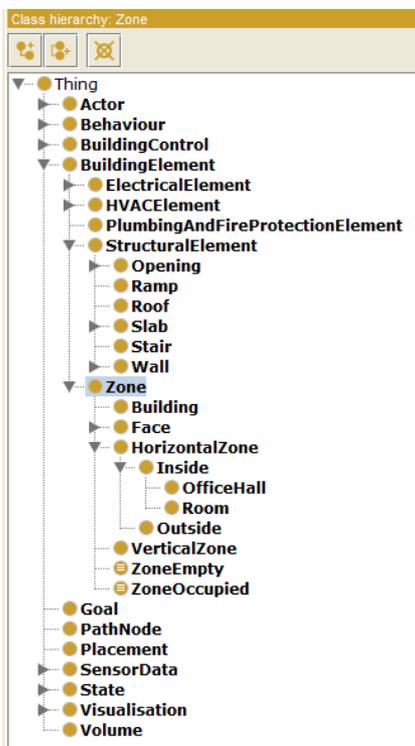


Figure 3: Main classes of the building management ontology that will be populated.

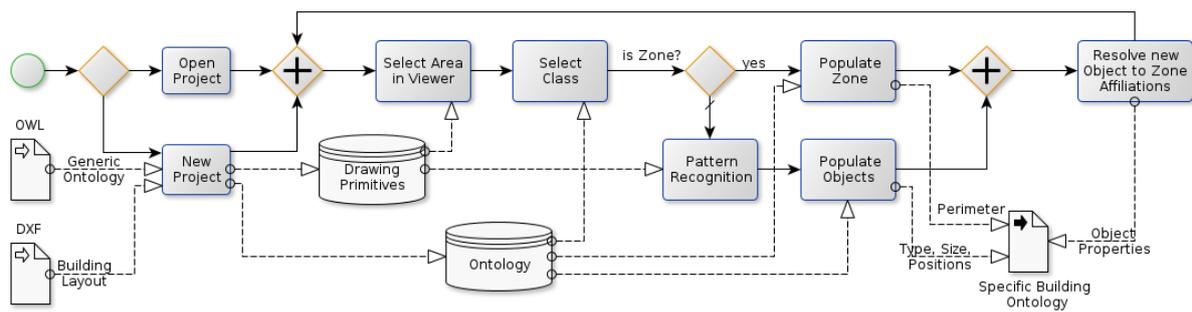


Figure 4: Workflow of OntoCAD.

3.2 OntoCAD

OntoCAD is a tool to populate the generic ontology with geometric information implementing the proposed methodology. It relies on open libraries like Python, OpenGL and PyGTK, which make it highly portable. The architecture is modular and contains the following five modules: Input interface (for the CAD drawings and the generic ontology), data model, graphical user interface (GUI), pattern matching and population modules. The whole workflow is depicted on Figure 4.

3.2.1 Input Interfaces

OntoCAD allows the import of 2D Layouts via the DXF exchange format from Autodesk ¹. DXF export is nowadays supported in most CAD modelling software. OntoCAD imports only the geometric primitives line, arc, circle and ellipse, other geometric primitives are reduced to supported primitives or discarded. Other information like metadata is also discarded. Our DXF parser is partially based on the FreeCAD implementation, `dxfReader.py` ² by Ed Blake. It is essentially a state machine that constructs the initial data hierarchy following the open DXF specifications.

In our work, OWL is used as the language to represent the ontologies. OntoCAD supports the import of OWL files with the RDF/XML format that represents the generic ontology. The classes represent the taxonomy and are therefore organized in a hierarchical tree. To populate individuals with OntoCAD, it is important to know the available classes and the data properties for each class.

3.2.2 User Interaction

The graphical user interface consists of four main

¹www.autodesk.com

²free-cad.sourceforge.net/SrcDocu/d7/dd1/dxfReader_8py_source.html

parts (see Figure 5). The toolbar allows to load layout (.dxf) and ontology (.owl) files and toggle the visualization of the already extracted objects and zones. The left panel lists all layers contained in the drawing file, each visualized with a different color. Selecting a layer from the list will highlight it in the viewer. One can toggle the visibility of the layer. This will also affect the performance of the pattern matching algorithm as it will ignore invisible layers. The central viewer is quite important as the whole methodology is based on the users experience and visual recognition of building elements. The viewer uses OpenGL and a custom shader to render curved primitives like arcs and circles. The user does not change the primitives except when loading a CAD file, thus the vertex buffer objects do not need to update during the population process. This makes the viewer very performant and guarantees a fluent navigation and interaction. The navigation consists of panning and zooming into the data and selecting groups of primitives with a polygon selection tool.

The right side panel allows the user to manipulate the ontology. The first tab, “Properties”, is a mapping of the data properties to a function of OntoCAD. This is necessary because the data properties are arbitrary strings with no information on how to compute them and cannot be automatically set. OntoCAD functions calculate for instance geometrical data like position, area, length, etc. A data property from the ontology that describes a position could be ‘hasPosition’, ‘hasLocation’, ‘hasXCoordinate’, etc. Thus it is important that the user maps those before starting to populate individuals. This configuration is done only once, then the user can start populating the ontology. Another tab, “Ontology”, visualizes the ontology class tree to show all the available classes of individuals and to help the user to understand the structure of the OWL file. The “Entity” tab, as seen in Figure 5, contains a dropdown menu with all available classes, a button to add individuals and a list of the data properties of the currently selected class. If a data property has been mapped to “User input”, then a text entry

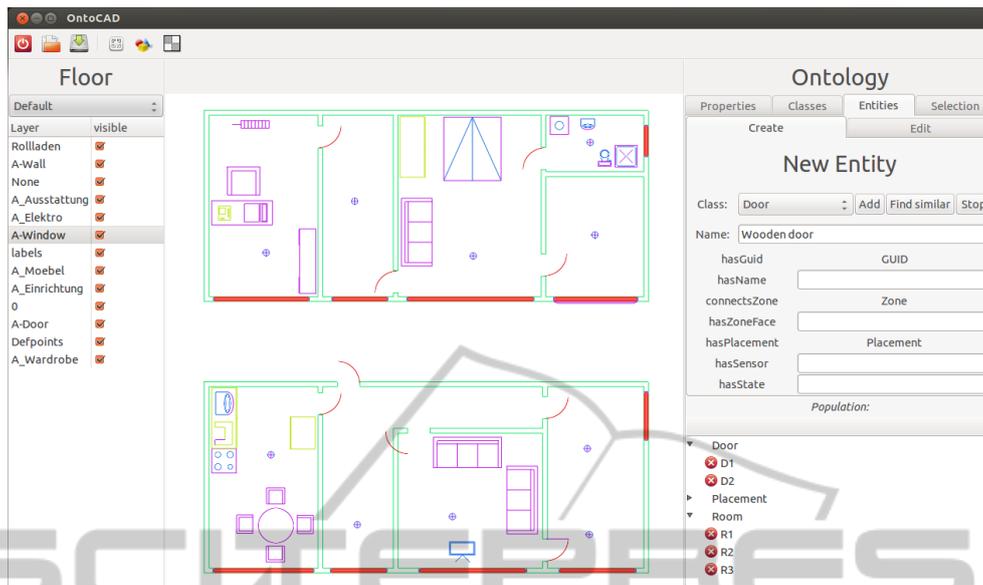


Figure 5: OntoCAD GUI.

will appear next to it, this allows to add additional semantic information, for instance the room type, room number and room label. When populating two cases are distinguished:

- Zones or rooms where their perimeter is defined by the polygon selection tool. There OntoCAD can provide the selection area, the polygon vertices, or the bounding box of the selection.
- Objects or other small sets of primitives that make up logical entities. In such a case it is often interesting to search for all duplicates in the drawing to populate all instances at once, for example lamps or doors. In that case OntoCAD can provide the bounding boxes, the position, the width or the length for every instance.

3.2.3 Data Model

The internal data model of OntoCAD consists of the CAD layout and the ontology. The layout uses five CAD primitives: points, line segments, circles, ellipses and arcs, organized by layers. When loading a layout, the primitives are copied to a vertex buffer object for the OpenGL viewer. The ontology consists of classes in a hierarchical tree, two lists of data properties and object properties and a list of individuals.

3.2.4 Module for Pattern Matching

Our goal is to get as much semantic information as possible from the building's 2D layout, and as automated as possible. Our approach consists of grouping primitives into objects based on a user defined se-

Bins for the similarity criterion

7	34	12	0
6	9	0	0
5	0	126	8
4	56	0	25
3	79	21	66
2	15	98	0
1	0	3	62
	A	B	C

Layer

Figure 6: Example of accessing the similar primitives using the similarity criterion.

lection of primitives. The user has the possibility to use a polygon selection tool to select all the primitives that belong to a logical building element. The targeted building elements are recurring ones. This applies mostly to furniture like tables, chairs, or other objects that have been inserted multiple times by the author. Our approach uses primitives to find similar building elements with the following steps:

- gather a set with primitives similar to the selected ones
- compute the set of relations between the selected primitives
- group the similar primitives into objects based on the above set of relations

The initial step is to take a subset of all the primitives using criteria that define two primitives as similar. Important aspects of such a criterion is the rotation and scale invariance. For our purpose it is important to have rotation invariance but not scale invariance. This is based on the assumption that rotated shapes are rotated identical objects but scaled shapes are likely to

be different objects. Our criteria for lines is the length, for circles and arcs it is the radius and for ellipses the minimum and maximum radius. To speed up the process a map is kept in every layer where the primitives are sorted by their similarity criterion. This allows fast access to the primitives, a subset example is depicted on Figure 6. The picture shows how the data is organized, the numbers represent the amount of primitives in the layer.

To compare patterns of primitives it is important to define how to describe such a pattern. For this purpose relations between the different types of primitives are introduced. The first and most important relation is the line segment to line segment relation. It is important to have rotation invariance but no scale invariance as for the similarity criterion. The line segment to line segment relation is the set of the four distances between the line segment endings as illustrated on Figure 7. This definition of the relation allows to find matches with transformations corresponding to euclidean isometries as it preserves the length between two points.

The last step is to group the primitives into objects. The constraint is to match the selected set of primitives. One needs to define what is considered being a match. First the sets need to have the same number of primitives, and second all relations have to exist that are also in the reference set. An example of matching similar chairs, even rotated, can be seen on Figure 8.

The algorithm has been highly optimized, also by using kd-trees and nearest neighbour search. In most cases the pattern matching performs in under 5 seconds with a building layout having 10^5 line segments.

3.2.5 Output

The result of the population process is the building specific ontology (A-Box ontology). OntoCAD computes the values for the individuals, their data and object properties. This includes geometric information such as size, area or world position of objects and the perimeter for zones. Other information are individual semantic data like type, name, globally unique identifiers (GUIDs) and the building elements affiliation to zones. All changes are saved continuously and automatically to disk (.owl file). The results can be opened

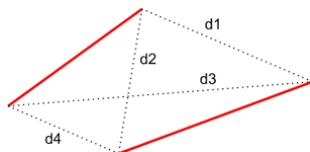


Figure 7: The line to line relation is defined by the square values of d_1 , d_2 , d_3 and d_4 .

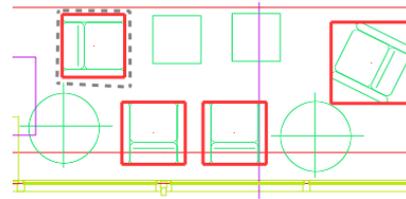


Figure 8: Geometric pattern matching of furniture.

and further edited with other ontology tools (for instance Protégé).

4 SUMMARY AND OUTLOOK

Our methodology enables the user to extract and consolidate semantic information in a consistent and efficient manner from 2D building layouts to populate an ontology. We addressed the challenge of handling the highly unpredictable data in a generic way by including the user to parse small geometric formations into semantic information. The second challenge related to process big amounts of data from buildings in an efficient way. We overcame this by combining the user input with pattern matching algorithms.

Our implementation, the OntoCAD tool, allows the user to extract small recurring patterns from a CAD layout with very little effort and time. Our first use case is to extract all building elements from a building layout and use the resulting specific ontology combined with SWRL rules to run ontology reasoning algorithms in order to infer the energy efficiency states of the building elements.

Our future work will further explore the possibilities and use cases of OntoCAD in different domains. An interesting extension would be the construction of a 3D building model from the 2D layout. The primitives forming the walls have to be extruded, moreover the position of doors, windows and furniture can be used to augment the building with detailed 3D building models. We see a high potential of OntoCAD in the fields of building construction, but also in factory planning and production management.

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