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**Modeling the Use of Nonrenewable Resources Using
a Genetic Algorithm**

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Abstract:

This paper shows, how a genetic algorithm (GA) can be used to model an economic process: the interaction of profit-maximizing oil-exploration firms that compete with each other for a limited amount of oil. After a brief introduction to the concept of multi-agent-modeling in economics, a GA-based resource-economic model is developed. Several model runs based on different economic policy assumptions are presented and discussed in order to show how the GA-model can be used to gain insight into the dynamic properties of economic systems. The remainder outlines deficiencies of GA-based multi-agent approaches and sketches how the present model can be improved.

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1. Introduction

Using evolutionary algorithms to model economic behavior is still relatively new to scientific literature, but since the early nineties the interest in evolutionary economics is growing steadily. There are several reasons, why the application of Genetic Algorithms (GAs) in economic modeling is attractive, the most important being: The common neoclassical economic models are based on the assumption that individuals are *rational*. But nobody is taking all his economic decisions according to completely rational optimization decisions, a big deal of our economic behavior can a priori not be optimal, since we do not have the complete information that is necessary to take the optimal decision; we are not globally intelligent. In these situations our behavior is sometimes rather inductive than deductive (see Arthur, 1994). This insight has led to the notion of "*bounded rationality*", which has been heavily discussed in economics in recent years (e.g. Selten, 1990 and Consliek, 1996). Furthermore, our learning processes in economics are rather *decentralized* than centralized. Different economic agents have different beliefs. They react differently to different economic situations, based on their personal experiences and dispositions. Real economic agents interact via a given environment in a *local* and *autonomous* way.

Bounded rationality and decentralized learning can be modeled using a GA. GAs are most frequently used for all kinds of optimization problems, face recognition etc.; these are applications where we use GAs as an *instrumental* tool. GAs are applied as a *descriptive* tool, when we use them to model the behavior of economic, biological, physical etc. systems. In these cases, we expect the behavior of real systems to be similar to the behavior of a GA. Mostly this behavior is time-dependent, but GAs can also be used for spatial modeling approaches. My interest in modeling a time dependent process using a GA was ultimately inspired by former work in dynamic systems theory.

Before setting up the economic model that underlies the multi-agent-model presented in this paper, we should think briefly about the goals of socio-economic modeling. Unlike modeling in engineering sciences, the primary goal in socio-economic modeling and simulation is not optimization and optimal control. This is mainly due to the fact that we usually do not have the possibility of making repeated socio-economic experiments. Moreover, socio-economic systems are usually highly complex and very aggregated; in contrast to engineering problems, it is often impossible to break down a problem into various sub-problems.

Thus, one of the primary aims of modeling in the social and economic sciences is to promote our understanding of the phenomena that we observe. By running different scenarios, we obtain useful information for assessing the implications of different assumptions and policies, we can predict possible paths of development. Hence, the particular models are of great importance in all kinds of decision-making problems under uncertainty.

In this paper we use GAs as a descriptive tool to build a resource economics model with bounded rational agents. The economic agents, in our case oil firms, copy the elements of the strategic decisions of other agents by crossover. Mutation assures some kind of innovative behavior of the firms. The agents in our model undergo a simple "adaptation process"¹, their decisions are evaluated by their environment, which we set up according to common *microeconomic* assumptions for a competitive market².

Our agents are not very skillful, they do not know the remaining amount of the resource, and profits are their only concern. This idea of less skillful (=bounded rational) agents is relatively new to *resource economics*, but, as mentioned above, it got a big deal of attention in *evolutionary economics* in recent

¹ I do not dare to call it "*learning process*". Only the agents presented in chapter 3.4 really show some kind of simple learning behavior.

² This is another interesting feature of the use of multi-agent-Systems for economic modeling: We make our assumptions only for the behavior at the micro level, but we observe not only micro- but also macroscopic variables; thus, multi-agent models give us not only the possibility to study both, the microeconomic and the macroeconomic level, but also to study the dependencies between these two levels.

years. Beckenbach (Beckenbach, 2000) gives a good overview of the use of GAs in resource economic models and he even presents a spatial approach. Geisendorf (Geisendorf, 1999) uses GAs for modeling "a profit oriented fishery with GA generated catching potential".

The economic problem presented in this paper is to find the optimal path for the extraction of the nonrenewable resource oil. It can be solved using optimal control theory (Dorfman, 1969), but so far, it has not been handled using a multi-agent-approach.

The interesting feature of this problem is that optimal or quasi-optimal behavior requires either that the firms collaborate voluntarily or that some sort of regulator or "economic planner" forces collaboration by prescribing the production decision of each firm at every time-step. Completely competitive behavior of all firms will lead to very inefficient behavior in terms of the particular profit of the firms.

The goal of this project is to find a very small set of economically reasonable regulating policies that assure a quasi-optimal behavior of the competitive firms under the given assumptions about their behavior. We lay down assumptions concerning the computational and behavioral limits of the agents and we will then investigate their consequences under different economic policies.

2. The model: Firms competing for a finite amount of crude oil

2.1 The economic background and model assumptions

Assume that we have an oil field, which is owned by n firms. The reservoir under the oil field holds a finite and not renewable amount of petroleum, and the n firms compete with each other for the oil. When the oil reservoir is depleted, the wells run dry. All the firms want to maximize the current value of their profits from selling the crude oil.

We further make the following assumptions for our small economy.

1. The demand curve is downward sloping, i.e. the higher the amount of oil on the market, the lower the oil price. The demand function that determines the market price of the oil, is given by the function:

$$P(t) = 11 - \alpha * Q(t), \quad (1)$$

where $Q(t)$ is the total amount of oil pumped at time-step t , $P(t)$ is the price for one unit of oil at time-step t , and α , the slope parameter, is arbitrarily set to 0.00003^3 .

2. The firms face a convex cost function without fixed cost, marginal costs are positive, the costs grow at an in-creasing rate.

$$C_j(t) = B * Q_j(t)^\delta \quad (2)$$

The cost function has the form:

$C_j(t)$ are the costs for firm j at time t and $Q_j(t)$ is the oil pumped by firm j at time t . B has the value 0.1 and δ is set to 1.25 .

3. All firms maximize their current value profit (CVP) which is given by:

$$CVP_j(t) = P(t) * Q_j(t) - C_j(t) \quad (3)$$

for each firm $j = 1, \dots, n$.

In order to keep the model simple, we assume that no substitute for oil will be discovered and that the costs of extraction will remain the same over time.

The description so far leads to a model of competitive scarcity. If we further assume that the firms know the size of the oil reservoir and that the cumulative stream of current value profits is discounted

³ Note that we do not investigate the sensitivity of the model towards the parameter α .

each period at an interest rate I we obtain a well-defined optimal-path problem for every firm: Maximize the cumulative stream of discounted current value profits:

$$\int_0^T (P(t) * Q_j(t) - C_j(t)) * e^{-I*t} dt = \int_0^T CVP_j(t) * e^{-I*t} dt \quad (4)$$

This problem can be solved using optimal control theory (Dorfman, 1969). In the competitive optimal case, all firms have the same strategy decisions at every time-step. A dynamic simulation model of the resource-economic model that has been explained above can be found with slightly different assumptions in (Ruth&Hannon, 1997).

Optimal behavior means that firms maximize the present value of cumulative profits. We realize from FIGURE 1 that this requires firms to make the appropriate pumping and selling decisions over time such that the oil price is rising constantly. These ideas led to the establishment of OPEC. The present paper was partly inspired by the huge amount of oil price and OPEC-policy-discussions that took place in late summer 2000.

2.2 The GA-implementation of the economic model

2.2.1 The general idea

In our genetic algorithm, every string represents the market strategy of a certain firm. The market strategy of our firms is simply the amount of oil that they pump at a certain time-step: The value coded by the string at time-step t represents the amount of oil that a particular firm pumps at time t .

Every firm wants to maximize its own profit. The firms try to achieve profit-maximization by imitating the strategy decision of the more successful firms. This is represented by the selection and crossover process: The higher the realized benefits of a certain firm, the more likely a less successful firm chooses this firm as a crossover partner. Completely new strategy decisions - which are assumed to be relatively seldom - are represented by a small mutation probability.

To make simulation realistic, we want to assure the continuity of existing firms⁴: To achieve this, we slightly change the common selection and crossover process: An individual in the population in generation t (call it $X_{i,t}$) selects another individual $X_{j,t}$ (based on the particular selection method). Then, crossover takes place (with a certain crossover probability p_{cross}), and a new individual $X_{i,t+1}$ is generated. That way, the resulting offspring $X_{i,t+1}$ is uniquely identified with its parental individual $X_{i,t}$. This is done for all $i = 1, \dots, n$, so that the continuity of each firm is guaranteed.

Furthermore, the standard setup of our GA model includes the feature that only those firms, whose average profit at time t is below mean profit at this time-step, are allowed to take part in crossover. My GA-runs have shown that this idea assures quicker and more stable convergence than the classical idea that all individuals are allowed to take part in crossover. It prevents the case that a fit individual $X_{i,t}$ has a relatively unfit crossover partner $X_{j,t}$. This is of particular importance in the present economic model, since the firms are all very similar.

Although tournament selection led to even quicker convergence in most cases, we choose roulette-wheel selection for the following model runs, since roulette-wheel selection has led to more uniform behavior in the standard run (FIGURE 1), independent of the different random seeds. Furthermore, the goal of agent-

⁴ This means that string number j of the population can be identified with the same firm number j in all time-steps. Each offspring firm can be uniquely attributed to one parent firm. To my astonishment, this idea seems to be totally uncommon in economic multi-agent modeling. For example, Arifovic ((Arifovic, 1990) and Geisendorf (Geisendorf, 1999) have not implemented this feature in their economic GA-models.

based modeling is not to obtain quick convergence, but to find a somewhat realistic mapping of real behavior. In this sense, the bigger uniformity of different roulette-wheel runs induces us to opt for this selection method.

The GA-model is based on the economic model presented in the previous chapter. Since we are modeling the oil-decision of the firms over time and since we assume that the firms are not able to behave anticipatory, we do not include the discount rate in our model. To make the model more realistic, we include the cost of extension of a firm according to standard economic assumptions. The equation for the costs of each firm has the form:

$$Cost_j(t) = \left\{ \begin{array}{ll} \sqrt{\frac{C_j(t)}{C_j(t-1)}} * C_j(t) & \text{if } \frac{Q_j(t)}{Q_j(t-1)} > 1.05 \\ C_j(t) & \text{else} \end{array} \right\} \quad (5)$$

$C_j(t)$ has the same form as given in (2), so that equation (5) just stands for slightly increased costs for those firms that increase their amount of pumped-oil by more than 5% from one time-step to the next time-step.

In early stages of my GA-work, I implemented niching (based on phenotypic sharing, as outlined in Deb&Goldberg, 1989), but I found that niching is not reasonable given my assumption of a competitive market, where the firms' only concern is to maximize their profits. In order to assure as much analogy as possible to the classical microeconomic assumptions for optimal path problems, I abandoned the idea of niching and I have stuck to the idea of the competing agents with identical goals and properties.

2.2.2 Coding and parameter considerations

For building a realistic multi-agent model, the appropriate choice of coding and parameters is extremely important. At the beginning of my experiments I had some problems to find the appropriate coding for my GA. To avoid Hamming-cliff problems of a normal binary coding and to avoid that mutations occurring at starting positions of the binary string can have an overwhelming influence on the individuals' strategy decisions, I implemented a Gray code representation of the firms' strategy. But I found that the Gray coding sometimes caused convergence problems and that I still didn't control the mutation problem very well. Therefore, I switched to "normal" binary coding and introduced a mutation probability that is dependent on the particular position of a bit in the bit-string. The mutation probability is calculated according to the following formula:

$$P_{mut}(\text{bitpos}) = P_{mut} * \frac{1}{(\text{lchrom} - \text{bitpos})^2} \quad (6)$$

This assures that the mutation probability decreases when the real value represented by the particular bit increases.

In order to provide for a realistic behavior, problems of genetic drift and inter-building-block-difficulties had to be avoided. At the beginning of my trials, I chose a population size of 10 and a string length of 10, used the economic model parameters (such as initial amount of oil etc.) given in the resource-economic model described in (Ruth&Hannon, 1997). I initialized the firms according to a uniform random distribution with a given mean and a maximal deviation of 10% of the mean. This resulted either in genetic drift, mainly because I had low signal building blocks, or in premature convergence. This couldn't be found by only looking at the decoded results of the firms' decisions but it became clear when I looked

at the binary strings that were generated after some generations. As described in (Goldberg, 1992 & 1993) an increase of the population size is likely to help. I increased my population size to 40, but the GA was still very dependent on the initial mixing. In order to avoid this, I worked out the following idea that assures a good initial mixing of the population:

The first (and highest) bit of every initial population member should be set to one. All the other bits should be either a one or a zero with 50% probability. I scaled the problem given in (Ruth&Hannon, 1997) so that the population is initialized according to a symmetric and uniform random distribution with the mean value 6144. Now, a string length of 13 assures that the initial mixing corresponds to the idea that I described above, provided that the symmetric interval lies within the range of $[6144-2048 = 2^{11}, 6144+2048=2^{13}]$ and has the mean value 6144. This can easily be shown using some simple mathematical arguments.

The initial mixing is essential for the success of the presented model and together with the higher population size, phenomena such as genetic drift and premature convergence can be avoided. Furthermore, even when the GA converged to a relatively stable price level (such as in FIGURE 1), there was still some variability in the population and the GA permanently tried to improve the short-term profits of the firms under the given economic constraints.

An interesting result of the work so far is that multi-agent-problems are very sensitive to problems such as genetic drift and premature convergence⁵. The GA-based multi-agent models that are found in literature do not pay sufficient attention to problems that are associated with a reasonable initial setup and parameter choice of the GA⁶. Instead, they only focus on extensive sensitivity analyses of mutation probability, crossover probability and population size and they try to interpret the particular results from an economic point of view. In my opinion, it is more reasonable to perform sensitivity analyses on the pure economic parameters of the model, and not on the GA-parameters. A sensitivity analysis on the GA-parameters is more interesting from the point of view of a GA-researcher than from the point of view of an economist. In some cases, it is not the economic assumptions that lead to great differences in the results, but it is the parameter setting of the GA that leads to specific GA-behavior. On the other hand, problems such as genetic drift can have a reasonable economic interpretation, so I do not dare to say that it is a priori wrong to play too much with GA-parameters in a GA-economic model. But at least, one should pay attention to the fact that the simulation results are not only dependent on the economic assumptions but also on the "self-dynamics" of the GA, which sometimes does not have an economic interpretation.

In my opinion, when one uses GA-models (such as the one presented in this paper) that are concerned with testing different economic hypothesis, one shouldn't play too much with pure GA-parameters (such as different crossover probabilities etc.). I propose the following procedure: First, choose a GA-parameter setting that (a) results in realistic economic behavior given the economic assumptions of the model and (b) yields stable and robust behavior for slight changes of GA-parameters and different random seeds. That is, problems such as premature convergence etc. should be avoided. Second, test different economic assumptions or policies by changing the economic environment; interpret the results.

This is the proceeding we follow in the present work: Having found appropriate parameters, we examine the implications of different economic policies on our multi-agent-model.

For the presented model, I found the following parameters to be the most appropriate:

◆ population size $n = 40$ ◆ string-length = 13 ◆ $P_{mut} = 0.1$ ◆ $P_{cross} = 0.5$.

⁵ For descriptive GA-applications, unlike optimization applications, not only the final result of the GA-run is important, it is also the behavior over time that is important, because the time path of the multi-agent simulations is expected to comply roughly with the real systems' behavior over time, in order to qualify the multi-agent model as a reasonable mapping of reality.

⁶ E.g. (Geisendorf, 1999) chooses population size $n = 10$ for her standard runs and checks the sensitivity of her model to different mutation and crossover probabilities.

3. Results

3.1 The theoretically optimal case with uniform agents

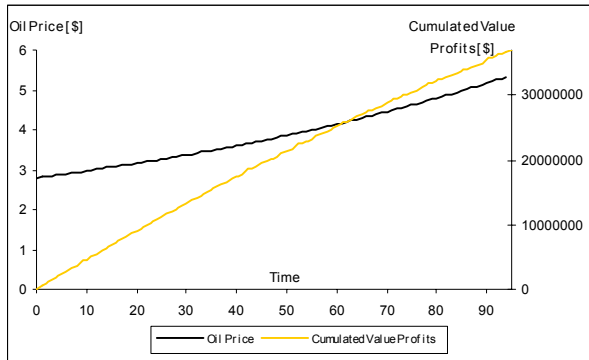


FIGURE 1

As I have described above, if all n oil-firms would collaborate, if all of them could trust in each other and if they were all oriented towards long-term profit goals, the optimal time-path of the oil price that maximizes the cumulated value profits of all firms could be found with the aid of optimal control theory. We simulate this optimal case under the assumption of a discount rate of 1%. FIGURE 1 shows the generated optimal path of prices and of cumulated value profit.

Reality shows that complete collaboration, uniform behavior, complete information on the other firms' behavior and long-term orientation for all firms is a

highly idealized microeconomic assumption. In this paper, we chose the opposite assumption: We assume that the firms do not collaborate, that they are only interested in their own advantages over the other firms and that they do not have complete information. Furthermore, they only have short-term goals: Try to improve the oil strategy and maximize the profit as soon as possible!

The economic question of this paper is: Given the underlying assumptions concerning the modeled behavior of the individual firms, what economic policy can lead to a *quasi-optimal* behavior of the n firms? "Quasi-optimal" is defined here as a constantly rising oil price.

If we abstract from some economic assumptions of our multi-agent-model and if we tackle the problem from the perspective of a GA-researcher (and not from the perspective of an economist), the underlying question of this paper is now reduced to the simple and sobering question: How can I assure that the average fitness of my GA (which is the amount of oil pumped by a particular firm) goes down ?

Again, should I want to point out that the interpretation of the presented model runs can be considered from the perspective of both, economics and evolutionary computation. It is important to have that in mind, in order not to misinterpret the results. Nevertheless, we will see that GAs can yield some interesting information for economic policy analysis that cannot be obtained from the traditional static and comparative-static economic models.

3.2 Results of different model runs

In Figure 2 we see the results of the standard run. As expected, the profit-maximizing firms increase their oil-pumping over time in order to maximize their particular profits. This leads to a slow decrease in the

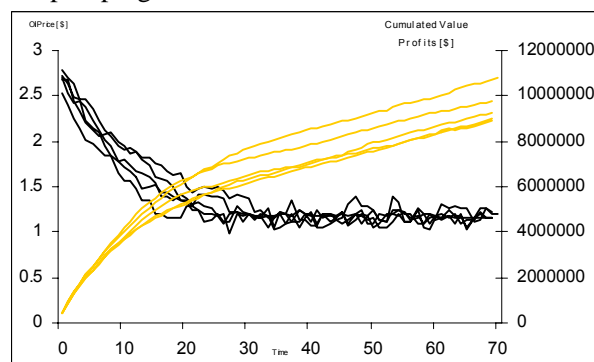


FIGURE 2

market price of oil, which is inefficient in the long run. After a certain amount of time-steps the system reaches a low but relatively stable market price that guarantees very small positive profits for all firms. A slightly lower price would result in negative profits for the firms. Areas of negative profits are avoided in all GA runs, because firms with negative profits would immediately take part in crossover with a better firm and so they improve their strategy. Furthermore, we see that the GA is relatively robust. In all my runs, the same behavior

as that shown in the five representative runs in FIGURE 2 occurred. This is mainly due to the sensible parameter setting as described in chapter 2.1.

Note that the graphs stop at the time-step when the oil reservoir is empty. Therefore, different runs stop at different points of time. In comparison with the optimal graph, we see that in the non-optimal behavior in FIGURE 2 the oil-reservoir is depleted earlier, because the firms pump more.

In the following part of this paper, we will investigate some policies or rules that can be implemented by some kind of economic regulator (such as the government) in order to provide incentives for more resource efficient behavior on the part of the firms. These policies (such as subsidies etc.) are used by many governments in order to influence firms' behavior⁷. There is a comprehensive discussion in economic literature on whether these policies are efficient and what their influence on firms' behavior might be.

In order to prevent graphical confusion, only the oil price development will be presented in the following graphs. Since the development of the oil price is a good indicator for the efficiency of the examined policy, presenting the oil price is sufficient for evaluating the different policy implications.

(1) The first scenario is based on the idea that 15 firms of the 40 firms are given a subsidy of \$ 8000 at every time-step. Note that the policy-maker doesn't care to whom these subsidies are given - the firms are randomly chosen at the beginning of the simulation period. Some resulting GA-runs are shown in FIGURE 3. We see that this policy leads to an oil price that is oscillating irregularly about the level of approximately \$ 2.60. Obviously, in this scenario the oil wells run dry later than in the standard scenario presented above. Hence, the cumulated profit of the firms is much higher than in FIGURE 2.

(2) The second scenario is shown in FIGURE 4. In this scenario, I assumed that at every time-step the 15 weakest firms receive a subsidy of \$ 8000. The price rises steeply in the first time-steps, but shortly after, it comes down and again we perceive irregular oscillations; but this time they are fluctuating about the level of approximately \$ 2.90.

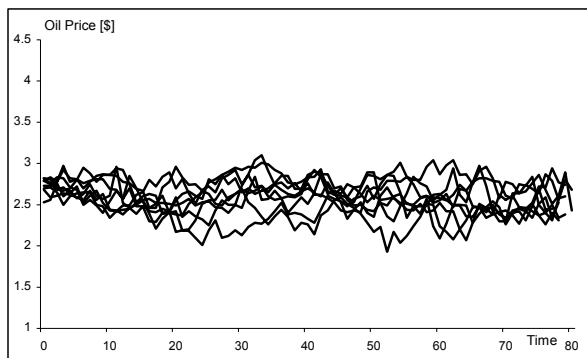


FIGURE 3

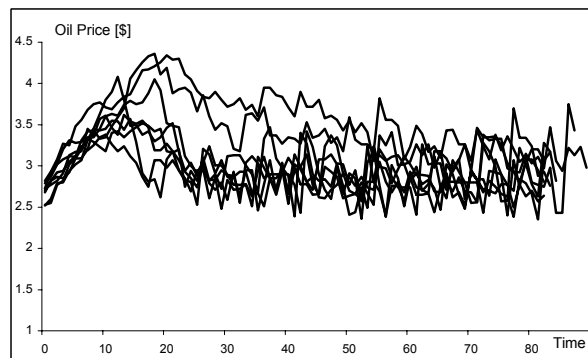


FIGURE 4

(3) The next scenario is based on the following idea: Every time-step we reduce by 5% the expected amount of oil of those firms, which were among the 15 best in the preceding time-step. This means that every firm takes place in the usual crossover and mutation process, but then the generated amount of oil of the 15 best firms in the preceding time-step is reduced by 5%. Consequently, the particular coding of those 15 firms has to be readjusted and the calculation of the economic background has to be reevaluated, since the oil amount has changed for 15 firms. This idea was born, when I was thinking about the possibilities of self-organization in artificial societies: I assumed that the competition among the firms induces the weaker firms to collaborate and to aggravate the oil pumping process for their successful

⁷ The current worldwide oil market is characterized by all kinds of subsidies, depletion allowances and price supports.

competitors. But the idea can also be interpreted as a policy-makers' decision to cut down by 5% the proposed amounts of oil of those firms, which were among the best in the last time period.

The results of this assumption are shown in FIGURE 5. We see that this measure seems to be efficient; at least it leads to a rising price. On the other hand, the extremely high variability of the price is not attractive from the point of view of the policy-maker⁸.

(4) In the fourth scenario, the policy-maker increases by 20% *the cost* of pumping oil of the 15 best firms. He does this every time-step. We can interpret this policy as a tax on the firms. The tax is dependent on the amount of oil pumped. As can be seen in FIGURE 6, the result is amazingly good. The price is rising constantly and the fluctuation of the price is extremely small, which is desirable from the perspective of the policy-maker. Nevertheless, we shouldn't be too enthusiastic, since the increase in the price is not very high and the GA will converge to a price level of about \$ 3.25.

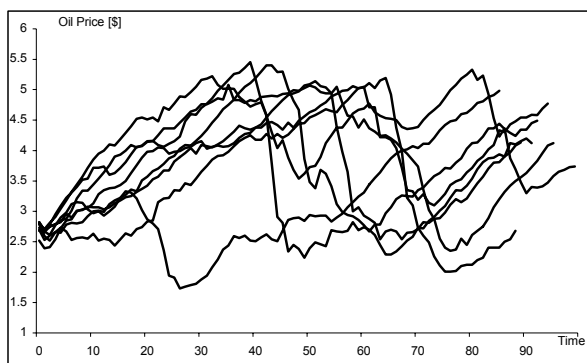


FIGURE 5

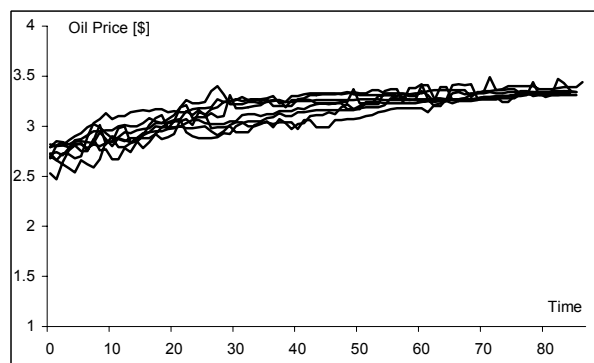


FIGURE 6

In order to check the sensibility of the outcomes of the policy analysis to an important model assumption about the behavior of the firms, I ran the policy scenarios (1)-(4) under the following assumption: Not the current value profit but the cumulated value profit of a particular firm is an indicator of its success. This means that in this case, only the firms that are below the average of the *cumulated* value profit participate in crossover. Moreover, the 15 best firms in our policy scenarios are now chosen according to the firms *cumulated* value profit.

The results were qualitatively the same as the result that I have discussed above: Again, scenario (4) resulted in a constantly rising price without much fluctuation. Scenario (3) was very fluctuating, the same applies to scenario (1) and (2), although the amplitude of the oscillations in scenario (1) and (2) was relatively low compared to the amplitude in scenario (3).

3.3 Implications of the results

The GA-runs presented so far have shown how GAs can be used to investigate the implications of different economic policies.

Multi-agent-models differ from the classical static or comparative-static economic models in that they not only present the final equilibrium that will be reached after implementing a certain policy, but their scenarios also give examples for *the way to the equilibrium* and the impact of a certain policy on the behavior of the particular individuals *over time*. By modeling the behavior of individuals (this means: making assumptions about the *micro*-level), we obtain results about the behavior of some aggregate economic entity (the *macro*-level), such as the oil market.

⁸ Even if it looks as if the price is constantly rising at the end of our examined time-period, this is not the case: If we run the scenario for more time-steps (by increasing the amount of oil in the reservoir), the price will continue to oscillate with the observed high amplitude and without coming to a stable level.

Which of the presented scenarios would be the most attractive for a policy maker? Policy (3) seems to cause an efficient increase in the oil price, but the high variability of the oil price shows that this policy is likely not to produce a robust and economically optimal behavior.

Although policy (1) assures price stability to a certain extent, it is less efficient than policy (2), although the same amount of subsidy-money is spent. Policy (4) seems to be very attractive. As common in economic policy analysis, we examine the transfer payments (which means the amount of money that has to be transferred "to another destination", either in the form of subsidies to the firm, as in (2), or in the form of tax payments from the firm, as in (4)), that occur under policies (2) and (4). Similar to assumptions in classical economic policy analysis, subsidies for the firms should simply be considered as transfer payment from society to the firms; but they do not by themselves constitute a change in overall welfare of the society. We should think of all the transfer payments as redistribution measures with the goal of influencing firms' behavior.

For policy (4), we just multiply the subsidy of \$ 8000 by the number of firms that receive the subsidy and by the number of time-steps that this subsidy has to be paid. We obtain \$ 10,800,000 of transfer payments.

For estimating the transfer payments of policy (4), we perform 20 GA runs (with different random seeds) and let the computer calculate the cumulated tax payments each time. The average tax payment per GA-run is \$ 3,398,989 and the standard deviation is \$ 240,914.

This shows that policy (4) comes along with significantly less transfer payments. Moreover, since the standard deviation of the tax payment is relatively low, this policy seems to be relatively robust.

Based on the information of this model, a policy-maker would probably opt for policy (4).

The new information that we obtained by running our four scenarios is: Though leading to a more profitable behavior than in the standard scenario (FIGURE 2), the policies (1), (2) and (3) are likely to produce a relatively fluctuating price; policy (4) induces robust behavior and the desired rising oil price. This information is not obvious, it cannot be obtained by classical economic methods, since the classical economic methods typically examine the possibility and the level of an equilibrium, but they are *not* able to study the time path to the equilibrium. The present work shows that some interesting information about possible development paths under different economic assumptions and policies can be obtained when using a multi-agent framework. Agent-based modeling approaches allow the investigation and analysis of previously inaccessible phenomena.

In this sense, classical economic modeling approaches and multi-agents models of economic systems, are not competing with each other, but they are complementary: Multi-agent-models can examine features of economic systems that cannot be investigated using traditional approaches, and vice versa.

3.4 Critical remarks and areas for future research

Despite the interesting and promising insights into the dynamic properties of economic systems that we gained due to the use of GAs as a modeling tool, we shouldn't forget to think briefly about some deficiencies of the GA approach.

Taking a closer look at the mechanics of our GA, we realize that there are significant differences between the GA-agents and human learning or strategy choice.

First of all, it is evident that just having a look at other firms benefit is not sufficient for adapting its whole production program. This idea is a highly idealized picture of real behavior. Furthermore, our GA-model assumes that human interaction takes place pair-wise. In real economic systems this is certainly not the case. Some information (such as statistical market data etc.) is available to all economic agents, other pieces of information are exchanged pair-wise. A more sophisticated GA-model should therefore consider a more adequate way of information transmission than that way presented in this paper.

The most important inadequateness of our GA-model is probably the lack of some cognitive aspects of our agents:

Real economic agents have a memory; they not only remember past experiences, but they are also able to compare new strategies with old ones or check whether the intended new strategy decisions have already been tried in the past.

We can add some learning properties to my agents according to the following idea: Think of learning as updating the probabilities of taking a certain action on the basis of payoffs in preceding time-steps. Every individual has a two-dimensional learning-vector $L[]$. After each strategy decision, the individual evaluates its strategy, according to the following rule:

If $\Delta Q_{i,t} = Q_i(t) - Q_i(t-1)$ and $\Delta CVP_{i,t} = CVP_i(t) - CVP_i(t-1)$ have different signs (which means that there is a negative correlation between oil price and profit), then add the negative profit elasticity $-\Delta CVP_{i,t} / \Delta Q_{i,t}$ to the first element $L[1]$ of the learning vector. If $\Delta Q_{i,t}$ and $\Delta CVP_{i,t}$ have the same sign (positive correlation between oil price and profit), then add the profit elasticity $\Delta CVP_{i,t} / \Delta Q_{i,t}$ to the second element $L[2]$ in the learning vector.

At every time-step the individual calculates the updated probability of a negative correlation between price and profit: $P[\text{neg}] = L[1] / (L[1] + L[2])$. The probability of a positive correlation is calculated according to: $P[\text{pos}] = L[2] / (L[1] + L[2]) = 1 - P[\text{neg}]$. Then, with the probability $P[\text{neg}]$ only a decrease in the amount of oil is accepted (because the individual has learned that a decrease in the amount of oil can lead to an increase in profits). Equally, an increase in the amount of oil pumped is only accepted with a probability $P[\text{pos}]$.

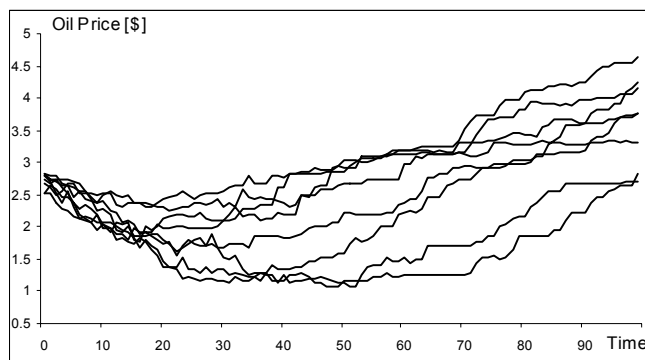


FIGURE 7

The result of the GA-run is shown in FIGURE 7. In order to obtain the best learning results, we have to increase the mutation rate to 0.75. This assures that there is enough innovation in the system to make the individuals learn quickly⁹. We can also test the four policies (1)-(4) on our learning agents. Although the subsidy scenarios (1) and (2) now result in significantly higher prices than the tax scenario (4), it is interesting to note that again, scenario (4) was the one which led to the least variability of the price level and had the most robust behavior.

Although this result seems promising, especially since scenario (4) led to the same robust behavior as in the previous GA-setups, the graph also shows how sensitive multi-agent models are to the assumptions that we make about the agents' capacities.

Thus, in order to obtain valid models that reflect observed behavior, we should think about how to calibrate our model against empirical data of real economic systems. Arthur (Arthur, 1991) shows with a simple learning task example that it is possible to calibrate learning-algorithm parameters against data on human learning. It should also be possible to calibrate GA-models, such as the one presented in this paper, against economic data.

⁹ Furthermore, we can test the implications of different learning parameters: Instead of adding elasticities, we can add the square root of the elasticities, which increases the impact of small learning events (elasticity < 1) and decreases the impact of huge learning events (elasticity >> 1). We could as well just add a constant to the particular vector element of $L[]$ in case of the particular learning event. Of all the learning scenarios that I have tested in my research, the one presented above is the best. But with some further research, the learning of the individuals can surely be improved to a certain extent.

4. Summary and Conclusion

This paper has examined how a GA can be used to model economic behavior. It claims that for the examination of dynamic economic systems with the aid of GAs, some fundamental knowledge about GA-theory is necessary in order to prevent possible misinterpretations of the results. To accomplish this, a robust GA-behavior that can be achieved by a sensible choice of GA-parameters, is the prerequisite.

Furthermore, this paper has shown that a GA-based modeling approach can reveal interesting properties of dynamic systems that can't be found with traditional economic methods. An example is the finding that policy (4), presented in chapter 3, turned out to be the most stable policy in the sense of not leading to a high variability of the oil price. Multi-agent models complement traditional theoretical and empirical approaches in economics.

Chapter 4 has indicated that a big deal of research has to be done in the field of agent-based modeling. The agents' behavior has to be made more realistic and the models have to be calibrated against observed data.

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