Chapter LXXXVI
Pervasive and Ubiquitous Computing Databases: Critical Issues and Challenges

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of the so-called Pervasive and Ubiquitous Computing was introduced in the early nineties as the third wave of computing to follow the eras of the mainframe and the personal computer. Unlike previous technology generations, Pervasive and Ubiquitous Computing recedes into the background of everyday life: “it activates the world, makes computers so imbedded, so fitting, so natural, that we use it without even thinking about it, and is invisible, everywhere computing that does not live on a personal device of any sort, but is in the woodwork everywhere” (Weiser 1991). Pervasive and Ubiquitous Computing is often referred to using different terms in different contexts. Pervasive, 4G mobile and sentient computing or ambient intelligence also refer to the same computing paradigm. Several technical developments come together to create this novel type of computing, the main ones are summarized in Table 1 (Davies and Gellersen 2002; Satyanarayanan 2001).
One of the major challenges in turning the Pervasive and Ubiquitous Computing vision into reality is the development of distributed system architectures that will support effectively and efficiently the ability to instrument the physical world (Estrin et al. 2002, National Research Council 2001). Such architectures are being developed around two core concepts: self-organizing networks of embedded devices with wireless communication capabilities and data-centricity. To augment physical artifacts with computational and communications capabilities it is necessary to enable miniaturized hardware components capable of wireless communication. However, these same characteristics that allow for instrumentation of physical objects also impose significant constraints. Systems architectures require significant changes due to the severely limited resources available on these devices. One possible solution is offered by the emergence of data-centric systems. In this context, data-centric refers to in-network processing and storage, carried out in a decentralized manner (Estrin et al. 2000).

One objective of data-centricity is to let systems exploit the anticipated high node densities to achieve longer unsupervised operating lifetimes. Indeed, smaller form factor wireless sensor nodes have limited resources and often cannot afford to transfer all the collected data to the network edge and forward to centralized information processing systems. A practical example of the data-centric approach for network routing is directed diffusion (Intanagonwiwat et al. 2000). This mechanism employs in-network processing by routing data along aggregation paths and thus removing the need for an address-centric architecture. It exploits data naming as the lowest level of system