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# A lightweight forwarding strategy for Named Data Networking in low-end IoT

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## Abstract

The proliferation of IoT devices has given a new dimension to networking operations. In fact, IoT issues in terms of complex communication patterns, dynamic topologies and security force to re-think the basic networking operations in a more adapted way. Moreover, the IoT needs contribute to show the limitations of the IP model to support content-based applications, and the emergence of the Information-Centric Networking (ICN) paradigm seems to be more compliant with the IoT vision. In this context, to enable the ICN model in IoT devices, we present a lightweight forwarding strategy for Named Data Networking over IEEE802.15.4. Named Data Networking is an ICN architecture with a great potential for the IoT and future Internet. This paper presents a forwarding strategy that reduces network overhead to the bare minimum, while keeping satisfactory performance in different IoT application scenarios. To forward named contents without node addresses, the strategy is based on a reinforcement learning technique that provides an accurate broadcast-based forwarding with a reduced overhead.

*Keywords:* Named Data Networking, learning, wireless networks, Internet of Things, IEEE802.15.4.

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## 1. Introduction

Massive technological innovations towards electronic miniaturization, associated with the deployment of manifold wireless technologies, have fostered the emergence of billions of small devices connected over the Internet, creating the omnipresent *Internet of Things* (IoT) [1]. IoT systems are currently deployed on the IP protocol suite. However, the IP architecture shows its limitations to support the IoT needs. For example, security is still focused on communication channels when the data itself needs to be secured. Moreover, IoT systems need

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efficient support for resource naming and discovery, which is not easy to deploy  
10 with IP in constrained infrastructures [2]. Although dedicated adaptations such  
as CoAP and 6LoWPAN have been developed, matching the IoT vision without  
fundamental changes remains difficult for IP.

The Information Centric Networking (ICN) [3] approach can natively sup-  
port IoT needs including resource identification, access control, content security,  
15 and mobility. The most interesting embodiment of the ICN model is Named  
Data Networking (NDN) [4]. In NDN, pieces of contents are named independ-  
ently of their location, following a URL-like naming structure. Applications  
request contents from the network by sending *Interest* packets that pull back  
*Data* packets. Native features come along with this principle such as: com-  
20 munication without establishing end-to-end connections and a name-to-address  
resolution. In addition, it is not necessary to maintain consumer-provider paths,  
which provides a native support of connection disruption resulting from node  
mobility.

So far, the suitability of NDN for the IoT has been investigated to some  
25 extent [5], but the lightweight aspect of NDN should be improved in order to  
enable NDN in current IoT systems. It has been observed in [6] that an NDN  
stack implementation in IoT devices (RIOT and Contiki) can save up to 60%  
of ROM and 80% of RAM compared to the RPL/6LoWPAN stack. Moreover,  
a simple flooding mechanism in an NDN wireless network generates three times  
30 fewer packets than RPL/6LoWPAN routing. Even if the superiority of NDN in  
terms of performance remains to be demonstrated, the data-centric approach of  
NDN can be an alternative to the 6LoWAPN stack in future IoT solutions [7].

To deploy NDN in IoT devices, one of the first challenges is to support the  
NDN forwarding in a low-rate wireless network, such as IEEE802.15.4. NDN  
35 wireless forwarding strategies are generally based on a *broadcast-and-learn* mech-  
anism. For example, such an approach, which can be called Blind Flooding  
(BF)[8] has been proposed for NDN over IEEE802.11. Nodes use timers to  
defer Interest and Data packet retransmissions, so that a node can cancel its  
retransmission if another node is sending an Interest/Data with the same name.  
40 However, such a solution cannot be used directly over IEEE802.15.4 due to  
data-rate and resource limitations.

Although lightweight mechanisms for constrained devices are rare in the lit-  
erature, a simple one has been proposed in [6]. This technique called RONR  
(detailed in Section 3) uses Interest broadcast (flooding) to discover the re-  
45 quested content. After the Data packet is received, each node keeps a mapping  
between the name prefix of the content and the source MAC address of the re-  
ceived Data, which will be used as the next hop address to forward subsequent  
Interests. The flooding phase is triggered again when the mapping expires.  
However, we show in this paper that unicast is not always the best approach,  
50 especially with mobile devices, due to the reusable nature of NDN packets as  
they are independent from host addresses.

To take advantage of the broadcast while reducing overhead, we design a  
Reinforcement-based Lightweight Forwarding (R-LF) strategy for NDN over  
IEEE802.15.4. The idea of R-LF is to make the broadcast as accurate as the uni-

55 cast, in terms of transmitted frames and retransmission decisions. Instead of targeting optimal performance for one configuration, which can be achieved more efficiently with a proactive mechanism, our objective is to design a lightweight *tradeoff* technique that can keep satisfactory performance in different communication patterns such as multiple data flows, multi-consumer, multi-source, and  
60 dynamic topology changes.

Our contribution through this paper can be summarized as follows:

- We study the importance of the broadcast mechanism and we draw up guidelines for designing a forwarding strategy over IEEE802.15.4.
- We propose the R-LF strategy based only on content names and broadcast  
65 communications.
- We show by simulation that our strategy can fit different small-scale IoT scenarios in comparison to all-unicast and all-broadcast forwarding approaches.
- We deploy NDN with R-LF on Arduino devices and we give measures on  
70 its lightness aspect.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows: Section 2 gives an overview of NDN, focusing on the forwarding aspect. Section 3 presents relevant forwarding approaches for NDN in wireless networks. In Section 4, we show the importance of the broadcast in wireless NDN forwarding, followed by our guidelines for a  
75 lightweight forwarding strategy design. Section 5 details the proposed strategy and its relevant steps, operations and parameters. Section 6 reports the results of the strategy evaluation in different communication scenarios. Section 7 concludes the paper with a brief discussion and future improvements.

## 2. Named Data Networking

80 NDN is an ICN protocol in which the communication is completely based on content names, while the IP protocol uses source and destination addresses to deliver contents.

In NDN, content chunks are decoupled from the producer location, and each data packet must be signed by its producer. Thereby, routers can reuse the same  
85 packet to satisfy other consumer requests for the same content, providing NDN with a native caching mechanism. The connectionless communication model of NDN gives it a native mobility support, and relying exclusively on content names to communicate removes the need for middleware to support applications [9].

90 Consequently, NDN can be seen as an evolved network protocol, since it intrinsically includes operations traditionally provided by higher layers in the IP model, such as security and flow control.

NDN defines two types of packets: Interest and Data, and each NDN node maintains three data structures to ensure its operations: the Forwarding Information Base (FIB) used by a node to decide which interface(s) to forward  
95

the Interest to, the Pending Interest Table (PIT) contains Interest already forwarded waiting for Data, and the Content Store (CS) contains forwarded Data packets cached to satisfy future requests.

NDN contents are identified through hierarchical natural names, formed by a sequence of name components separated by slashes. Each component can be accessed and handled separately. For example, the name */home/room1/temperature* may identify the temperature value of room 1, while */home/room1/humidity* identifies the humidity value in room 1, and */home/room2/all* identifies all sensor values of room 2. Applications are free to design their own naming scheme since the routers do not interpret the whole name. Moreover, a producer can add name components to the initial name in order to provide more information about the content (e.g. timestamp, sequence number, geolocation, etc.).

The communication is consumer driven, that is, a communication is initiated by the consumer who asks for the content. Typically, an NDN exchange operates according to the following steps: (1) The consumer requests a certain content by sending an Interest carrying the name of the requested data (e.g. */room1/temperature*). (2) The router that receives an Interest checks if the corresponding Data exists in the CS; if the Data is found it is returned to satisfy the Interest without going further. Otherwise, the router verifies if an Interest requesting the same content is already in the PIT: if so the Interest is dropped and only the incoming interface is added to the existing PIT entry. If there is no Interest waiting in the PIT, the router checks the FIB to find one or multiple interfaces to forward the Interest (i.e. multipath routing supported) and creates a PIT entry containing the forwarded Interest with its incoming interface. (3) When an Interest reaches the node that contains the requested content, this node sends back a Data packet carrying the content, the name that is the same as the Interest name to which suffixes may be added, and security information about the content producer (e.g. signature, key name, etc.). This Data packet takes the reverse path of the Interest following traces left in the PIT of each intermediate node. Each Data packet is a response to one Interest packet.

Figure 1 summarizes the processing steps of an Interest and a Data packet over the NDN data structures. Notice that a matching in the FIB corresponds to the longest prefix match. To forward an Interest named */home/room2/all* for example, assuming there are in the FIB two prefixes */home* and */home/room2*, both prefixes match but the longest one is chosen.

To enable the NDN communication model in wireless networks, some forwarding approaches have been proposed. The next Section reviews the most relevant ones.

### 3. Related work

The forwarding approaches described in this Section can be defined as "*flood-and-learn*" mechanisms [10], in the sense that a flooding phase is used to discover content sources (i.e. producers or caches), and subsequent requests are forwarded more accurately based on the *learned* information. In the context of

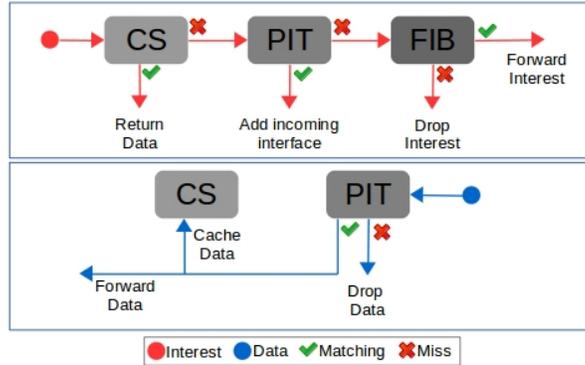


Figure 1: Interest and Data process in NDN

140 this paper, the flooding phase refers to the sequence of Interest broadcast used by the nodes to retrieve a content when no information is available.

Even if most of these solutions are designed for MANETs and do not consider constrained IoT devices, they represent an interesting starting point to design a wireless NDN forwarding strategy.

145 In [11], a broadcasting protocol has been designed for data dissemination in vehicular networks. Timers were used to defer packet forwarding. During the waiting time, if a node overhears a packet with the same name, the scheduled packet is dropped, which reduces risks of collisions. However, this blind-flooding mechanism causes a large overhead and does not guarantee that the best path is used to retrieve contents. Therefore, more elaborate solutions have been  
150 proposed to move from a blind-flooding to a controlled-flooding.

In the *Listen First Broadcast Later* strategy (LFBL) [12], each node uses its eligibility value to deduce the delay to wait before retransmitting an Interest. The node's eligibility is based on its distance from the content source that each node maintains: the closer is the node to the source, the shorter is the waiting  
155 time. This approach contributes to generate reduced overhead by propagating packets faster. However, LFBL nodes maintain distance tables, and endpoint identification (e.g. MAC addresses) is used for source and destination nodes, which slightly evokes the host-based communication model.

The *Neighborhood-Aware Interest Forwarding* (NAIF)[13] strategy is based  
160 on a forwarding rate adjustment. Each node collects statistics on its neighborhood forwarding and periodically adjusts its forwarding rate (i.e. the ratio of the Interests it should forward). This mechanism makes the nodes collaboratively forward packets without explicit communication, and no additional data structure is needed. Moreover, good performance results have been obtained in  
165 terms of completion ratio, but the round-trip time is quite high. As it is based on a purely statistical method, nodes need to first get enough information and reactively adapt to changes in the situation. This makes the approach slow to converge under dynamical communication changes. Thus, it is more suitable for

170 downloading contents (e.g. files) but is not adapted for small content chunks of IoT applications. According to the reported results, it achieves almost the same performance as the blind-flooding strategy under high mobility cases.

175 One forwarding strategy has been implemented in a network of constrained IoT devices over IEEE802.15.4 in [6]. The objective is to reduce the overhead while keeping a satisfactory data retrieval efficiency, all with a minimum state in nodes. This approach called Reactive Optimistic Name-based Routing (RONR) works as follows: after retrieving the first content by Interest broadcast, a node keeps a temporary FIB entry in order to avoid flooding subsequent Interests. The FIB entry binds the content prefix to the content source MAC address. The nodes also use the Interest source MAC address to forward the requested 180 Data packet. This enables a mapping which can be denoted as *Interest Unicast Data Unicast* (IUDU). When the FIB entry for the requested content does not exist, or it is deleted, the flooding phase is performed again to discover another content source. The RONR approach significantly reduces the network overhead. However, the strategy has no means to select the shortest path to 185 retrieve contents. Moreover, we can intuitively figure out that a unicast mapping hardly supports node mobility and simultaneous data flows in a local network.

Table 1 summarizes the mentioned forwarding approaches with their main pros and cons.

Table 1: NDN wireless forwarding approaches

Name	Approach principle	Pros	Cons	Evaluation
BF	Interest flooding	Satisfaction rate	High overhead	Simulation (IEEE802.11)
	Random-delayed retransmissions	Mobility support	Packet redundancy	
LFBL	Proportional-delay retransmission	Low round-trip time	Distance table	Simulation (IEEE802.11)
	Content source identification	Low overhead	Node identification Mobility	
NAIF	Adaptive Forwarding rate	Mobility support Satisfaction rate	High round-trip time High overhead	Simulation/Emulation (IEEE802.11)
RONR	Interest flooding	Low round-trip time	Mobility	Real-world (IEEE802.15.4)
	Prefix to MAC address mapping	Low overhead	NDN potential limited by unicast	

190 In [14], the name-to-address mapping is studied in terms of resource consumption in low-end IoT devices. Real-world experiments have shown that forwarding packets with unicast addresses can reduce resource consumption in IoT devices and increase the performance in comparison to the broadcast forwarding. However, the studied mappings are not evaluated in terms of network overhead and content dissemination efficiency with mobile nodes. Therefore, in 195 the next Section, we study the impact of NDN-MAC mapping on the communication performance under mobility conditions.

#### 4. NDN-MAC mapping and design guidelines

200 In this section, we simulate a simple IoT scenario to show the impact of NDN-MAC mapping on forwarding performance. Using the unicast approach described above (RONR), we evaluate other mapping combinations. Therefore, instead of using a unicast address to send both Interest and Data packets, nodes can use different mappings for Interest and Data: (i) Interest Broadcast Data

Broadcast (IBDB), (ii) Interest Broadcast Data Unicast (IBDU), (iii) Interest Unicast Data Broadcast (IUDB), (iv) Interest Unicast Data Unicast (IUDU).

205 We evaluated these mappings in a network of *16* relay nodes, with *4* mobile consumers requesting contents from *1* mobile producer. A cache of *20* packets is enabled in relay nodes. Details on parameters and metrics are provided in Section 6.

210 According to the results reported in Figure 2, mappings with Interest broadcast (i.e. IBDB and IBDU) always transmit the highest number of frames as expected. Indeed, the broadcast generates more Interests in the network, which leads to more retransmissions and more collisions. For the same reason, both IUDU and IUDB generate the lowest number of frames.

215 IBDB and IUDB achieve, respectively, the first and the second best Interest satisfaction rate. This shows an advantage of Data broadcast, and NDN in general, to satisfy multiple pending Interests with one Data packet transmission. Moreover in IBDB, the exploratory nature of Interest broadcast takes advantages of caching in relay nodes, which gives the best satisfaction rate. This is confirmed by the mean hop count of received Data, which is the smallest in 220 IBDB and the highest in IUDU.

However, a significant difference is observed in the Interest-Data round-trip time. Data broadcast in IUDB as well as in IBDB causes a high medium-access competition, which leads to a higher RTT than with Data unicast (i.e. IUDU and IBDU). This raises an important concern about the necessity of 225 using accurate timers to defer packet retransmissions. At the same time, since mappings with Data broadcast provide the highest satisfaction rate, we can not design a forwarding strategy for NDN without considering the Data broadcast.

To sum up, the results suggest to consider Interest and Data broadcast, as it increases content dissemination efficiency and provides a good Interest 230 satisfaction rate. However, the large overhead caused by the Interest broadcast requires a careful design to reduce unnecessary Interest retransmissions. Moreover, the vision of NDN that consists in retrieving contents without using any host address is nicely satisfied with a broadcast strategy.

The simulation results and the study of the related solutions allow to draw 235 up the following guidelines for an adapted forwarding strategy: (i) rely on a minimal state to process packets without maintaining explicit routes, (ii) avoid reverting to a random Interest flooding phase in order to reduce collision risks, network congestion and overhead, (iii) avoid node identification and additional data structures to correctly fit the NDN vision, (iv) distribute decisions and 240 computation tasks over the network, and minimize complexity to meet IoT device capabilities.

Based on these guidelines, we designed an approach inspired from [15] that uses the learned values to compute the delay time to wait before retransmitting a packet. However, the framework has been designed to handle simple 245 sensor-to-sink communications in WSNs, which makes it unsuitable for complex communication modes. Thus, fundamental improvements and accurate parameter calibration have been made to build an adaptable forwarding strategy for wireless named data networks as detailed in the next Section.

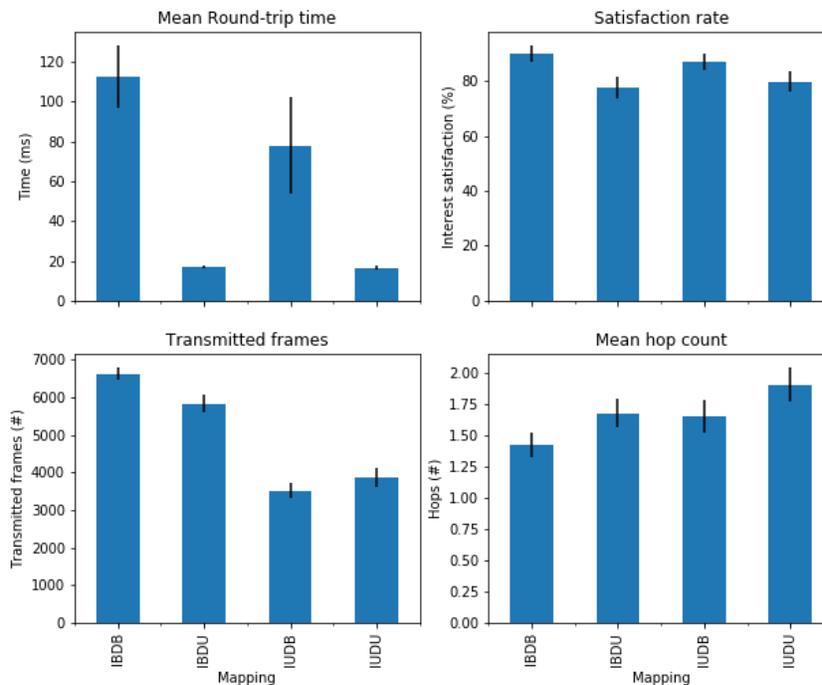


Figure 2: NDN-MAC mapping simulation results

## 5. R-LF strategy design

### 250 5.1. Overview

Routing and forwarding operations are significantly different in NDN and IP. In IP, only the routing operation is smart in the sense that different routing protocols can be envisioned. The forwarding operation always consists in finding the longest match available in the routing table and sending the packet to the corresponding next hop. In NDN however, in addition to the routing operation

255 that can be smart as in IP, multiple approaches are possible to handle packet forwarding with more or less additional information and with or without caching. Our proposed strategy does not use an explicit routing phase to provide/update forwarding information<sup>1</sup>. R-LF is a *learn-broadcast-learn* approach that operates according to the following steps: (i) the nodes overhear Data packets and

260 learn a cost value by reinforcement, (ii) the nodes decide to forward an Interest

<sup>1</sup>The routing phase is implicit as in the mechanisms presented in the related work.

with a delay according to their cost-based eligibility, (iii) the nodes update their cost from the result, which can be an Interest timeout or a received Data packet.

The following describes the general R-LF approach and the mathematical formalization.

### 5.2. General description

To forward packets, a node traditionally decides in terms of what the next hop is, which can be considered as a spatial forwarding decision. However, as NDN forwarding is based on content names and R-LF runs directly on top on the MAC layer, a node decides in terms of when it should retransmit the Interest, or how long it should wait before retransmitting. Such a process can be seen as a temporal forwarding decision. As reported above, this vision has already been proposed, and its basic principle consists in ensuring that the more eligible node will retransmit the Interest first.

To describe the forwarding approach, the following assumptions are made:

- Interest and Data packets carry the cost value of the sending node, denoted as *C-field*.
- An Interest flooding with random delays is used to find the producer when the first Interest is issued for an unknown content.
- Nodes are able to overhear Interest and Data packets related to other communications.

R-LF operates according to two phases: (i) a reinforcement learning that consists in maintaining a cost value for each available content prefix, (ii) adjustment of the waiting delay based on the neighborhood activity.

The first learning phase starts after a source node receives a randomly flooded Interest, and acts as follows: (i) the source node responds with a Data packet carrying the initial cost (e.g. 0), (ii) the first forwarder on the source-consumer path computes its cost with a reinforcement technique, replaces the C-field with the value obtained, and retransmits back the Data packet, (iii) each node on the path follows the same procedure until the Data packet reaches the consumer, (iv) in the vicinity of the path, the nodes that overhear the Data packet can perform a passive cost update to learn their eligibility relative to the data source.

The random flooding step is then over, and the first learning phase is set up. Each node maintains the cost related to the corresponding content prefix after retrieving (or overhearing) a Data packet with a smaller cost. Let us refer to this phase as the *reinforcement* phase.

To describe the forwarding process, we define the delay to wait before retransmission as  $\Phi(a)$ . The formal definition of  $\Phi(a)$  will be detailed later. The forwarding decision in a relay node consists in finding the appropriate value of  $a$  that gives a correct delay to wait. Since  $a$  is calculated in two steps, let  $a = \Delta + \theta$ , with  $\Delta$  and  $\theta$  as explained in the following.

Let  $C_x(p)$  and  $C_y(p)$  be the current cost for prefix  $p$  at nodes  $x$  and  $y$  respectively. Whenever node  $x$  receives an Interest issued (or forwarded) by node  $y$ , it computes the value  $\Delta = C_y(p) - C_x(p)$ . Here,  $\Delta$  quantifies the global eligibility of node  $x$  to forward the Interest. If  $\Delta \geq 0$  then node  $x$  can potentially forward the Interest.

The value of  $\theta$  is locally computed by the forwarder based on its neighborhood activity to refine  $\Delta$  before calculating the delay time. Let us refer to this phase as the *Delta adjustment* phase. With the delta adjustment, the random-delayed forwarding is used only when the prefix is unknown by the forwarder ( $x$ ) and is reset by the sender ( $y$ ). Thus, even after an Interest timeout in  $x$  and  $y$ , the value of  $\theta$  can be used in most cases to distinguish nodes eligibility.

After computing  $a$ , the Interest retransmission is delayed for  $\Phi(a)$  units of time. During the delay-listening time, if node  $x$  detects that a forwarder  $z$  is transmitting a packet with the same name, it deduces that  $z$  is more eligible to handle the Interest and cancels its retransmission.

The next subsection provides the mathematical details.

### 5.3. Details and mathematical formalism

**Reinforcement phase:** The cost value at node  $x$  is updated according to the following reinforcement equation 1:

$$C_x(p) = (1 - \alpha)C_x(p) + \alpha (r + \min C_y(p)) \quad (1)$$

In this equation used in Q-learning and Q-routing [16],  $\alpha$  is the learning rate,  $r$  is the reward,  $C_x(p)$  is the cost at node  $x$  for the prefix  $p$ , and  $\min C_y(p)$  is the smallest cost heard by node  $x$  from node  $y$ .

Assuming the hop-count as a metric, the reward is always equal to 1, and the cost of each node increases as the distance to the content source increases. The cost at the content source is 0.

The cost values reflect the distance to the content source, and are used to decide on a forwarder's eligibility. Moreover, the approximate nature of the update formula produces a large number of possible cost values over the network, which helps to avoid obtaining the same waiting delay for different nodes (Section 6.2).

Since the nodes remember only the smallest heard cost, a node may have an obsolete estimation of its cost value. To avoid that, after an Interest timeout, a node resets its cost value (i.e.  $C_x(p)$ ) to 0 and the smallest heard cost (i.e.  $\min C_y(p)$ ) to  $\hat{\Delta}$ , in order to accept cost updates. Note that in Interest packets, a cost value of 0 indicates that the sender has reset its cost or it has no information about the content prefix. Thus, it does not interfere with the 0 cost value of a Data packet that actually means that the packet has been sent by the producer. The estimation of  $\hat{\Delta}$  is presented further.

**Delta adjustment:** The adjustment serves two purposes: it refines  $\Delta$  to deal with local uncertainty in real time, and allows each node to handle multiple content prefixes simultaneously as it is shown in the next Section. In fact, using

345 only  $\Delta$  to compute delays, even if it is accurate, does not allow different content names cohabitation to be supported.

To compute  $\theta$ , let  $N_a$  be the neighborhood activity rate for all data names. From the perspective of a node,  $N_a$  can be computed by  $N_a = D_u/I_d$ , where  $D_u$  is the number of unsolicited received Data and  $I_d$  is the number of non-forwarded  
 350 Interests (dropped Interests).

Then,  $\theta$  may be simply defined as

$$\theta = Th - N_a \quad (2)$$

where  $Th \leq 1$  is the activity threshold above which the waiting time should be increased. For simplicity, but without losing accuracy,  $N_a$  is kept between 0 and 1. Thus, if  $Th$  is lower than 1 (e.g. 75%),  $\theta$  can be negative. In this  
 355 case, the value of  $\Delta$  is reduced, which will increase the waiting time. When no statistic is available,  $N_a = Th$ .

**Delay function:** After defining the appropriate value of  $a$ , the delay time is computed with a function that is inversely proportional to the value of  $a$ .  
 360 Such a function can be intuitively defined by:

$$\Phi(a) = \frac{M}{e^{a/2}} + m \quad (3)$$

This function ensures that when two nodes can both forward an Interest, the node with the highest value of  $a$  will delay its transmission for a shorter time than the node with the lowest value, as depicted in Figure 3. Here,  $m$  forces the forwarder to wait for a minimum time to let the transmission of the corresponding Data packet if any.  
 365

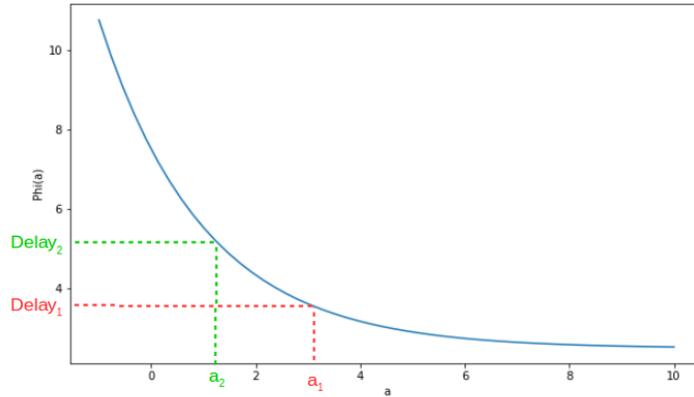


Figure 3: Delay function example

The importance of  $\Phi$  is capital and a parameter calibration is needed to have an efficient distribution of waiting times. We can observe that  $\lim_{a \rightarrow \infty} \Phi(a) =$

$m$ . Therefore, we need to ensure that  $\Phi(\hat{a}) > m$ , where  $\hat{a}$  is an estimation of the highest value of  $a$ .

370 According to Eq.2,  $\theta$  is  $\leq Th$ . Given that the lowest cost value that can be received by a node is  $\theta$ , we can deduce the highest gap between two cost values by estimating the maximum value of  $\Delta$ . For that, we use the following property of the Q-learning formula:

$$C_x(p) \leq r + C_y(p) \Rightarrow C'_x(p) \leq r + C_y(p) \quad (4)$$

375 where  $C'_x(p)$  is the updated value of  $C_x(p)$ . This property can be easily verified using the Q-learning update formula and initial conditions.

Assuming that in a network of  $n$  nodes, the maximum distance is  $\sqrt{n}$  hops, we use Eq.4 to recursively estimate the maximum expected value of  $\Delta$  as  $\hat{\Delta} = (\sqrt{n} + 1)$ . Then, we deduce an estimation of  $\hat{a}$  to set the parameters of  $\Phi(a)$ .

380 The forwarding decision process for a node  $x$  with a cost of  $C_x(p)$ , receiving an Interest from node  $y$  with a cost of  $C_y(p)$  under a prefix  $p$  is summarized in Algorithm 1.

```

Function ProcessInterest
Data: Interest packet
begin
  if  $p$  is unknown then
    if  $C_y(p) == 0$  then
      | Broadcast with random delay
    else
      | Drop Interest (node not eligible)
    end
  else
    if  $C_y(p) == 0$  then
      |  $\Delta = \hat{\Delta} - C_x$ 
    else
      |  $\Delta = C_y - C_x$ 
    end
    if  $\Delta \geq 0$  then
      |  $\theta = Th - N_a$ 
      |  $a = \Delta + \theta$ 
      | Broadcast with  $\Phi(a)$  delay
    else
      | Drop Interest (node not eligible)
    end
  end
end

```

**Algorithm 1:** Interest forwarding process

## 6. Evaluation

For evaluation purpose, we implemented the NDN module in the OMNeT++ simulator [17] including R-LF, BF and RONR forwarding strategies<sup>2</sup>. We first study the impact of the learning rate ( $\alpha$ ) on R-LF performance, and we fix the values for parameters  $M$ ,  $N$  and  $Th$ . After that, we evaluate R-LF in comparison with RONR, a completely unicast approach, and BF which is a broadcast only mechanism that uses delayed retransmissions (Section 3).

The evaluation comparison studies 3 configurations: (i) a variable number of simultaneous data flows, (ii) one data flow with multiple consumers and cache enabled in relay-nodes, (iii) multiple data flows with a variable producer mobility speed. Finally, some experimental measures are reported on the R-LF implementation on the Arduino platform over IEEE802.15.4.

### 6.1. Simulation design

We consider a scenario that reflects a small-scale IoT monitoring application. The network topology is inspired from mobile WSNs: It consists of 16 fixed routers organized in a grid of  $200m \times 200m$ , through which producer and consumer nodes move following the Random Way Point mobility model. The MAC layer configuration reflects the IEEE802.15.4 properties (i.e. bit-rate, communication range and CSMA). Figure 4 gives an example of the simulated topology, and Table 2 reports the relevant simulation parameters.

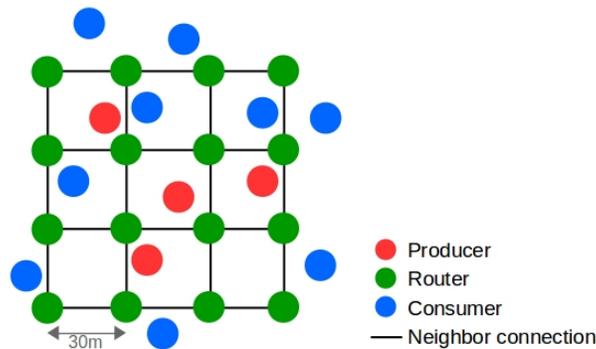


Figure 4: Topology example

<sup>2</sup>Source code available on <https://github.com/amar-ox/NDNOMNeT/tree/dev/main>

Table 2: Simulation parameters

Parameter	Value
Data packet size	100 B
Interest packet size	50 B
Interest send interval	1 s
Interest lifetime	2 s
Max Interest retransmissions	1
Cache size	20 packets
Cache replacement	FIFO
Data freshness	10 s
Wireless bit-rate	250 Kbps
Wireless MAC potocol	802.15.4 CSMA
Communication range	35 m

In all the simulations, the reported results correspond to the average values obtained with 10 random executions. The following metrics are measured:

- The total number of transmitted packets, to study the accuracy of the forwarding decisions and the generated overhead.
- The mean round-trip time (RTT) for an Interest-Data exchange.
- The Interest satisfaction rate to show the global efficiency of the approach.
- The mean hop count of received Data, to study the ability of the strategy to find the nearest source (producer or cache) for the requested content.

## 6.2. Impact of the learning rate

R-LF involves a set of parameters that need to be calibrated to provide the best performance. Empirical simulation observations give the parameter values as follows:  $M=5$ ,  $N=2.5$  and  $Th=0.75$ . However, the most important parameter to calibrate is the learning rate ( $\alpha$ ). To study the impact of  $\alpha$  on R-LF performance, we simulate a scenario in which two consumers request the same content served by one producer, with 20 packets caching enabled in relays nodes. The results are presented in Figure 5.

Small values of  $\alpha$  (i.e.  $\leq 0.6$ ) globally give poor performance. This can be explained by the fact that small values of  $\alpha$  prevent nodes from learning fast by slowing down the update process. Likewise, when  $0.9 < \alpha \leq 1.0$ , the nodes overwrite previously learned values, which leads to more similar values and thus to more frequent collisions.

We find that  $0.8 \leq \alpha \leq 0.9$  generally gives the best performance results. Moreover, these values provide stable results through the different executions. For this reason, even if  $\alpha = 0.9$  and  $\alpha = 1.0$  give good performance,  $\alpha = 0.8$  is more likely to keep the same performance through the different executions. We conclude that  $0.85$  is a good value to obtain a satisfactory performance for the studied metrics. The value of  $\alpha$  is fixed to  $0.85$  for the rest of the simulations.

Figure 6 shows the distribution of the values of  $a$  over the time for the 16 relay nodes. Globally, only a few similarities are observed in the values and the range of the possible values is completely exploited by the nodes. This is

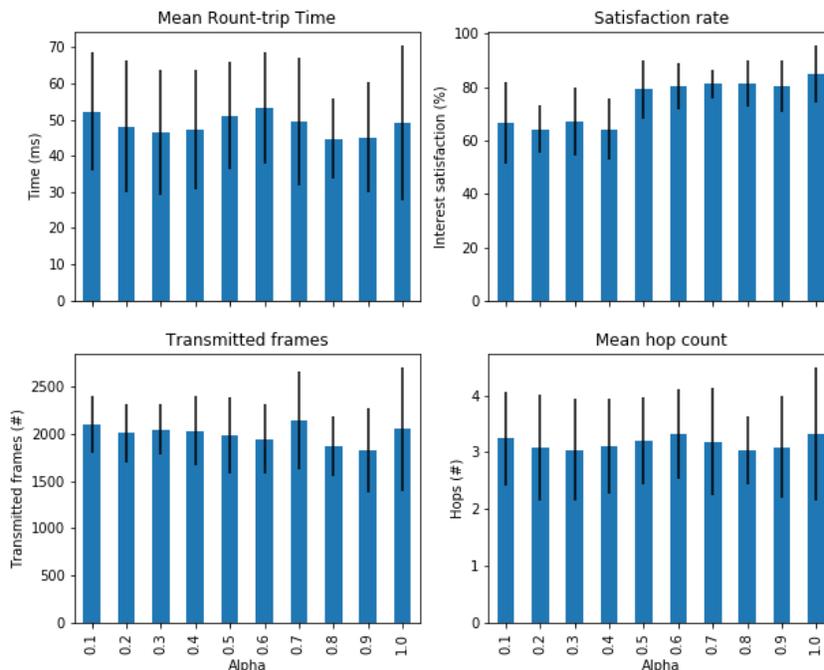


Figure 5: Impact of the learning rate

due to the reinforcement formula and the delta adjustment that helps to reduce similarities in the computed values. More similarities in  $a$ -values are observed between  $-0.5$  and  $1.5$ . However, according to the  $\Phi$  formula (Figure 3), the delays corresponding to this range are high enough to let a node with a higher value of  $a$  retransmit first.

### 6.3. Multiple data-flows

The forwarding strategy has to support multiple namespace cohabitations. To create multiple data flows, each pair of consumer-producer exchanges packets under one name prefix. For example, consumer  $C1$  requests content created by producer  $P1$  under the prefix  $/ndn/home/humidity/*$ , and consumer  $C2$  requests content created by producer  $P2$  under the prefix  $/ndn/home/temperature/*$ . Practically, this case may occur when data is collected according to its type, or when multiple applications run in the same wireless network. Since only one consumer is requesting contents from one producer, caching is disabled in all nodes for this simulation. Figure 7 shows the metric measured according to 2, 4 and 8 simultaneous dataflows, which we believe is reasonable in a local monitoring application.

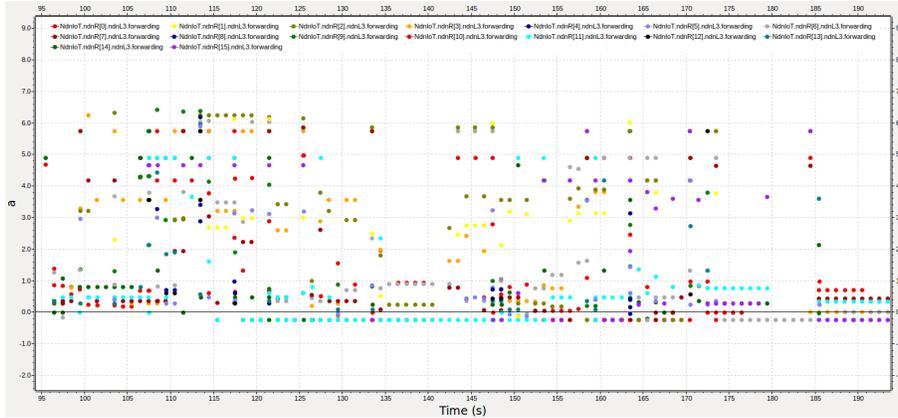


Figure 6:  $a$ -values example

450 The total number of frames transmitted by R-LF is very low, given that it is a broadcast-only technique. We observe that the number of frames transmitted with R-LF is much more close to RONR (unicast) than BF (broadcast). The low number of frames is the result of the Interest forwarding controlled by the reinforcement learning, followed by the delta adjustment step which can increase the waiting delay if the neighborhood activity is high. Moreover, the same difference between the three approaches is observed for 2, 4 and 8 data flows.

455 The satisfaction rate is roughly the same for the three approaches. However, the broadcast strategies (i.e. R-LF and BF) seem to be more adapted to support more simultaneous dataflows.

460 On average, R-LF and BF retrieve contents with almost one hop lower than RONR. Indeed, the unicast forwarding approach needs the expiration of the FIB entry to update the next hop address, while the broadcast forwarding can retrieve contents from any potential source in the vicinity of the forwarder. However, we can observe that this performance is achieved by BF at the cost of a large overhead, while R-LF gives the same efficiency with an overhead close to RONR.

465 R-LF provides an RTT lower than BF as it uses proportional timers instead of random ones. Moreover, R-LF scales better with more nodes/dataflows and becomes closer to RONR in terms of RTT. Obviously, RONR achieves the lowest RTT as forwarders do not use any delays before retransmitting. Having a reduced RTT is the main advantage of using a unicast strategy in this configuration.

#### 6.4. Multiple consumers

475 In this case, only one content prefix (e.g. `/ndn/home/*`) is involved in the network. Multiple consumers simultaneously request contents provided by one

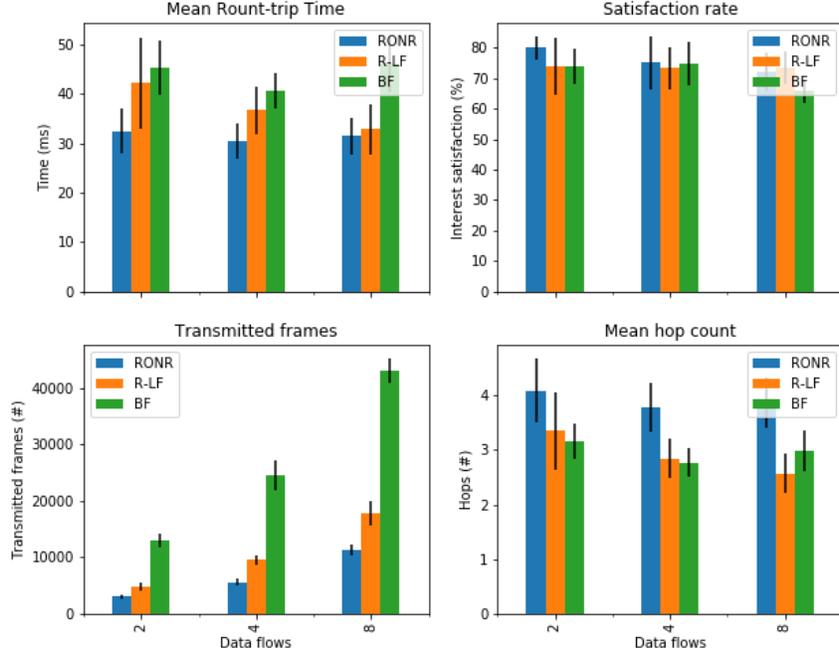


Figure 7: Multiple dataflows scenario results

producer, and/or by relay-node caches. This case is much more close to a many-to-one communication, such as a gateway-devices communication. However, it can also be considered as many-to-many due to caching that allows any relay-node to be a partial source of a content.

480 Figure 8 shows the results obtained for 2, 4 and 8 consumers.

Broadcast approaches (i.e. BF and R-LF) make better use of caching and achieve the highest satisfaction rate. The difference in the Data hop count is still in advantage of R-LF and BF. However, R-LF keeps its reduced overhead in comparison to BF.

485 When enabling caches, BF and R-LF are clearly penalized by the RTT in comparison to RONR. This is certainly due to the high competition access to the medium as the number of content sources increases with caching. Here, accurate Interest broadcast and delayed retransmissions of R-LF are not sufficient to provide a low RTT.

#### 490 6.5. Producer speed

This case is the same as the first simulation scenario, with 4 dataflows. To study the forwarding strategies support for higher mobility, we increase the

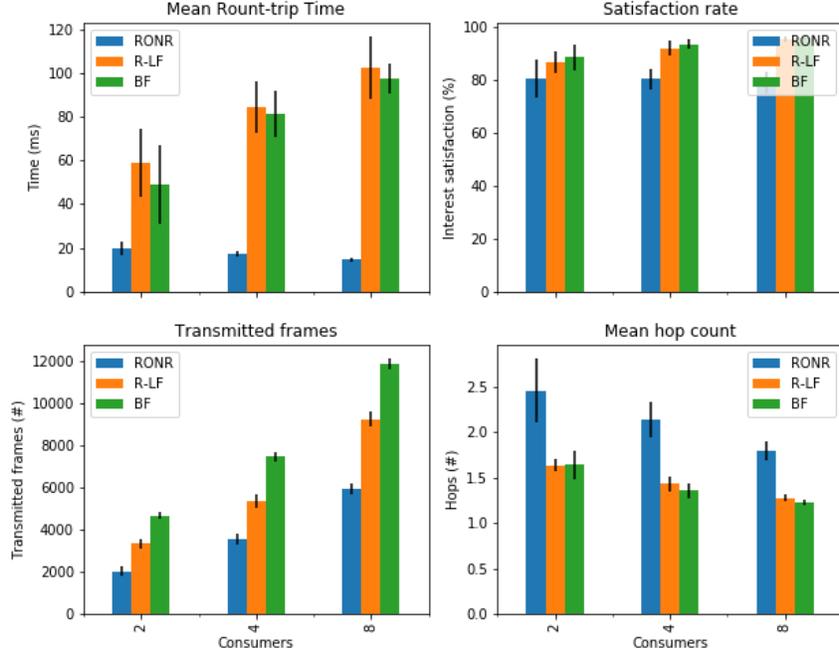


Figure 8: Multiple consumers and caching scenario results

producer speed from  $1\text{ mps}$  to  $7\text{ mps}$ .

Figure 9 shows the results obtained. As for the first scenario, the R-LF performance is close to the best among RONR and BF for each metric. We observe that when producers move faster, the RTT achieved by R-LF becomes closer to RONR, while it increases in the BF strategy. However, the satisfaction rate with RONR significantly decreases when the speed increases, while it decreases reasonably with R-LF.

Even under producer mobility, BF achieves a good satisfaction rate as broadcast is not much affected by the mobility. However, the high satisfaction rate achieved by BF comes along with a very large overhead, as shown by the total number of transmitted frames. Moreover, we observe that the number of frames transmitted in R-LF is slightly higher than RONR, but very low in comparison to BF. Finally, the shortest path is still ensured by R-LF even with a higher speed.

The unicast mapping shows its limitations to keep a good performance in presence of mobile nodes, while R-LF is able to provide a satisfactory performance.

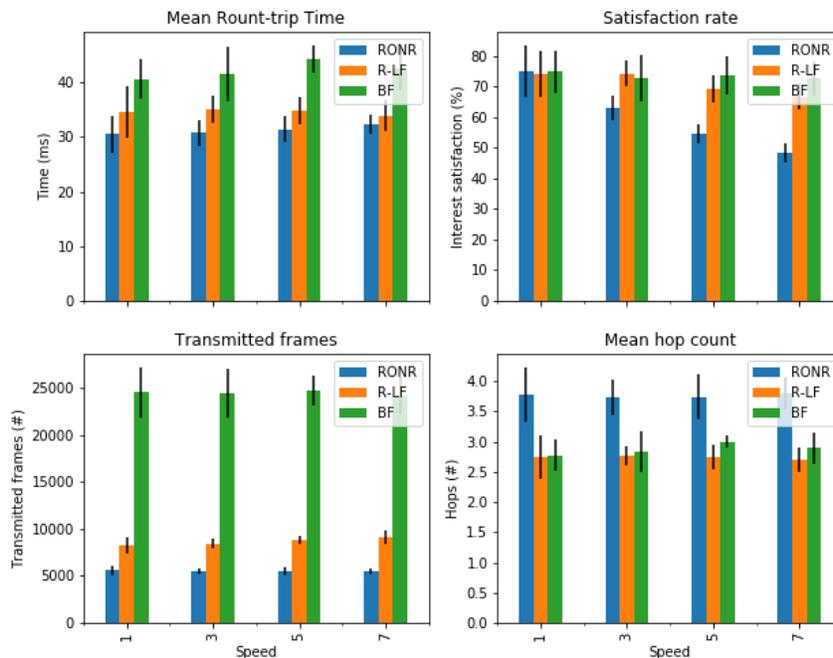


Figure 9: Producers speed scenario results

510 *6.6. Implementation on IoT devices*

We ported a simple version of the NDN module with R-LF on the Arduino platform<sup>3</sup>. We measured the time required to forward Interest and Data for both Arduino UNO (16 Mhz) and DUE (84 Mhz). The results are reported in Table 3. The Interest forwarding process for an unknown content name and an empty FIB (i.e. the first Interest) takes approximately 145 $\mu$ s. The Interest forwarding process for a known content name, with 5 FIB entries, is about 50 $\mu$ s. This difference is mainly due to the random number generation used for the first Interest flooding. A FIB entry update after receiving a Data packet takes 70 $\mu$ s.

515 On the Arduino DUE, the time required for the first Interest forwarding is 55 $\mu$ s, and 10 $\mu$ s when the content name is known, considering 10 FIB entries. The FIB entry update time is about 18 $\mu$ s.

Concerning the memory space required by the implementation, only 28% of storage is needed for the UNO and 50% of RAM. The implementation on the Arduino DUE occupies 6% of the total memory. The implementation includes

<sup>3</sup>Source code available on <https://github.com/amar-ox/NDN802.15.4-arduino>

525 a simple NDN packet definition, the three NDN data structures and the R-LF  
process over IEEE802.15.4.

Obviously, these values will increase when security algorithms will be added.  
However, the leeway is still important for security and reliability improvements.  
As an empirical comparison, some open source implementations of the IPv6  
530 stack over IEEE802.15.4 take about 12% storage and 45% RAM in the Arduino  
Mega<sup>4</sup>, while R-LF takes 3% storage and 12% RAM.

Table 3: R-LF measures on Arduino

Operation	Time (UNO)	Time (DUE)
First Interest forwarding	145 $\mu$ s	55 $\mu$ s
Subsequent Interest forwarding	50 $\mu$ s	10 $\mu$ s
FIB entry update	70 $\mu$ s	18 $\mu$ s

## 7. Discussion and conclusion

In the three simulated scenarios, the R-LF performance is always close the  
best one among RNR and BF for all the metrics. This shows the adaptability  
535 of R-LF to different communication scenarios. The only exception to this ob-  
servation is the RTT in the multi-consumer scenario, which certainly requires  
more sophisticated techniques for retransmitting cached Data packets.

In our strategy, the random Interest flooding occurs rarely, as the delta ad-  
justment step can be used to compute a waiting delay even if the cost value is  
540 reset. This contributes to significantly reduce the network overhead and repre-  
sents an important improvement regarding the basic *flood-and-learn* schema.

The reinforcement learning provides a satisfactory performance without re-  
quiring an explicit exploration phase. Hence, to forward an Interest, a node  
needs only a simple FIB look-up as expected in NDN.

545 The R-LF strategy supports complex communication patterns. The results  
obtained through different scenarios show that the accuracy of the unicast map-  
ping can be approached by a broadcast-based strategy. Moreover, they show  
the adaptability of the R-LF approach to support multiple dataflows, multiple  
consumers and nodes mobility.

550 As a future work, we aim to improve the overhearing efficiency and media  
access for cached Data retransmission, especially in multi-consumer cases.

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<sup>4</sup><https://github.com/telecombretagne/Arduino-IPv6Stack>

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