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(71) Applicant: SISVEL TECHNOLOGY S.R.L. [IT/IT]; Via
Castagnole 59, I-10060 None (to) (IT).

(72) Inventor: SCOZZARO, Andrea; Via Beaumont 23, I-
10138 Torino (to) (IT).

(74) Agents: CAMOLESE, Marco et al.; c/o METROCON-
SULT SRL, Via Sestriere 100, I-10060 None (to) (IT).

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(54) Title: METHOD FOR RECONSTRUCTING THE MAP OF AN ENVIRONMENT SURROUNDING A WIRELESS DEVICE
AND WIRELESS DEVICE IMPLEMENTING SUCH METHOD

(57) Abstract: A method is described for reconstructing the map of an environment (20) surrounding a wireless device (100), said environment (20) being equipped with one or more radio frequency tags (1) set in a number dependent on the level of detail to be obtained in said reconstruction, said method comprising the steps of: - receiving identification and localization data of said one or more radio frequency tags (1) over a wireless connection by said at least one wireless reception means (3) of the wireless device (100); - storing the identification and localization data of said one or more radio frequency tags (1) into a filing and/or storage means (5,6) by a processing means (2) of the wireless device (100); - providing on said output means (7) of the wireless device (100) at least one map of said environment (20) built on the basis of the identification and localization data of the radio frequency tags (1).



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METHOD FOR RECONSTRUCTING THE MAP OF AN ENVIRONMENT SURROUNDING A WIRELESS DEVICE AND WIRELESS DEVICE IMPLEMENTING SUCH METHOD

DESCRIPTION

The present invention relates to a method for reconstructing a map of an environment surrounding a wireless device, so as to allow a user of the device to locate his/her own position within said environment.

The present invention also relates to a wireless device implementing such a method.

Various systems are known in the art which are finalized to localize a device, and hence its user, within a certain environment (e.g. public buildings, shopping centres, museums, town halls, hospitals).

More in particular, such systems are based mainly on information deriving from communication between a radio frequency reader, built in the device, and a plurality of radio frequency identifiers (i.e. RFID tags), arranged within the environment according to a predetermined layout.

Such tags include information about their own position, which information is transmitted to a local server.

In order to be able to operate, therefore, these systems require the device to be connected to a network (whether a local area network or a wide area network) and to know the URL address of the server to which the information about the positions of the radio frequency tags are sent.

As an alternative, for example, it is known from Japanese patent application no. JP 2007-235496 to download data of a map of an environment from a server to a memory of the device, although this clearly implies problems related to periodic updating and to the necessity for the device to be in a known environment, since its use in unknown environments is not conceivable.

Furthermore, the methods currently available cannot provide the user with visual indications about the type of the elements (exits, corridors, rooms) present in the surrounding environment, which indications are often necessary for reaching a given destination; to this end, one must still use paper maps or indications available on the premises.

It is therefore one object of the present invention to provide a method for

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reconstructing the map of an environment surrounding a wireless device which can provide a sufficiently accurate graphic representation of the environment where the device is located.

It is another object of the present invention to provide a method for reconstructing the map of an environment surrounding a wireless device which can be used without having previously obtained information about the environment itself.

It is a further object of the present invention to provide a method for reconstructing the map of an environment surrounding a wireless device which is less costly than prior-art methods.

These and other objects of the invention are obtained through a method for reconstructing the map of an environment surrounding a wireless device and through a wireless device implementing such method as set out in the appended claims, which are an integral part of the present description.

In brief, for each radio frequency tag or point to be represented on the map, all or some of the following pieces of information are made available

- absolute and geographical coordinates of the place in terms of latitude, longitude and elevation; or
- coordinates (e.g. Cartesian, polar, etc.) of a known point, e.g. expressed either in absolute terms or in relative terms as distances from a given point with respect to the three dimensions;
- relative geographical information, such as building number, floor, sector, staircase and the like;
- information about a certain object or environmental element (door, window, wall, staircase, column and the like).

Based on such information, it is possible to obtain an approximate map of the place where the device is located, as well as the position thereof within that area, so as to offer the user of the device a good margin of orientation on the premises without having to make use of paper maps or other information sources.

Further features of the invention are set out in the appended claims, which are intended to be an integral part of the present description.

The above objects will become more apparent from the following detailed description of a method for reconstructing the map of a surrounding environment and of a wireless device implementing such method, with particular reference to the annexed drawings,

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wherein:

- Figure 1 is a block diagram showing the operation of a preferred embodiment of the device according to the invention;
- Figure 2 shows the structure of a possible reference environment;
- Figure 3 shows a possible arrangement of radio frequency tags in the reference environment of Fig. 2;
- Figure 4 shows some values of a table of identification and localization data relating to the radio frequency tags of Fig. 3;
- Figure 5 shows the current position of a wireless device according to the invention in the reference environment of Fig. 2.

As aforementioned, the object of the present invention is a method which, by using information about the radio frequency tags 1, in particular RFID tags, can provide an approximate map of the premises where a device 100 according to the present invention is located.

In Figure 1 one can see that said device 100, in order to be able to operate, comprises:

- at least one wireless reception means 3 for receiving data;
- at least one processing means 2, e.g. consisting of at least one CPU;
- at least one filing means 5 and/or one storage means 6;
- optionally, at least one reader 4 of radio frequency tags 1, for detecting and subsequently reading one or more radio frequency tags 1 arranged within a reference environment in accordance with a predefined layout;
- at least one output means, e.g. consisting of at least one display 7, for displaying the results, preferably as at least one map of said environment.

It is also conceivable that the output means, instead of consisting of said display 7, consists of one or more different audio playback devices 8 or tactile-stimulus generators 9, which would make the map recognizable also to blind people.

The processing means 2 receives, through the wireless reception means 3, identification and localization information about the radio frequency tags 1 via radio signals 16, and stores it into the storage means 6 and/or the filing means 5. Upon receiving a command from the processing means 2, the reader 4 of radio frequency tags 1 may optionally detect the presence of any radio frequency tags 1 within its own coverage range through radio signals 16 received by said reader 4 in a manner substantially known in the art.

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Then the processing means 2 updates the storage means 6 that contains the data for localization of the radio frequency tags 1, and subsequently it processes the localization data of the radio frequency tags 1 in the storage means 6 and outputs an updated map through the output means, e.g. by displaying it on the display 7 (or equivalent), possibly also indicating the current position.

The above-described operating cycle is carried out repeatedly, so as to allow for constant updating of the map being displayed as the user of the wireless device 100 is moving.

The data received through the wireless reception means 3 can be stored, for example, in the form of a table like the one shown in Figure 4, wherein the number of rows and fields corresponds to the number of described radio frequency tags 1, the columns showing all or some of the following pieces of information:

- univocal identifier of the radio frequency tag 1;
- coordinates of the position of the device (latitude, longitude), or its three-dimensional position relative to a given geographical point;
- floor number;
- type of radio frequency tag 1 (perimeter, door, window, room, corridor);
- area identifier.

It should not however be excluded that other rather different elements of interest present in the environment may also be included as references, such as: lifts, ramps, fire extinguishers, power outlets, trap doors, radiators, boilers, air intakes, and the like. For example, the display 7 may show symbols indicating the single radio frequency tags 1, in particular:

- different types of radio frequency tags 1 are characterized by different symbols;
- in some cases, the information may be arranged in a particular order, so as to provide a sorted sequence of steps (e.g. radio frequency tags 1 for a corridor may be identified in a predetermined order that allows reconstructing a sequence of linear steps; likewise, radio frequency tags 1 of a perimeter of a certain area may be represented by means of a continuous line going through them in an orderly manner);
- radio frequency identifiers 1 belonging to the same logic geographical unit or to a more complex environmental structure made up of multiple elements (e.g. doors and windows afferent to the same room, or rooms belonging to the same department or office) are characterized by a common identification datum which allows to group

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them and to represent them within the area involved;

- the actual distances, which can be deduced from the coordinate indication, are represented on the basis of a given scale such that they appear as realistic as possible, which scale may be resized by means of a specific command available on the device (e.g. buttons 10 or on-screen commands 7).

The devices capable of efficiently implementing the method described herein may be of different types, such as:

- mobile devices (e.g. smartphones), comprising a display 7 (possibly, but not necessarily, a touch screen 9), a reader 4 of radio frequency tags 1 and/or an optical sensor 11, a wireless reception means 3, a processor 2, a storage means 6 and/or a filing means 5, as well as possible further components such as buttons 10 or audio playback devices 8;
- devices for blind users, comprising button or voice commands 10, an audible-signal generator 8 or a tactile-stimulus generator 9, a reader 4 of radio frequency tags and/or an optical sensor 11, a wireless reception means 3 equipped with a processor 2, a storage means 6 and a filing means 5.

Any different configurations of said device 100 observing the same principle of operation as the above-described preferred embodiments will still fall within the protection scope of the present invention.

The information about the radio frequency tags 1 may be transmitted by suitable apparatuses 14 through any radio protocol, and is such that it can be received and interpreted by the wireless device 100 through the radio signals 18. Preferably, the information can be transmitted through a Wi-Fi network protocol, i.e. according to any standard of the IEEE 802.11 set. In particular, it is advantageous to transmit said information in the part transmitted in clear by any Wi-Fi access point, e.g. in the Wi-Fi beacon, so that any wireless device adapted to receive Wi-Fi signals can interpret it without any limitation due to the information security provided by these standards. It will thus be possible to use existing Wi-Fi networks already in use in public buildings to transmit orientation information without interfering with secure information used by authorized users having access to said networks.

Figure 2 shows one possible reference environment 20 consisting of a floor of a building, comprising perimeter walls, partition walls, windows, doors and rooms.

Figure 3 shows one possible arrangement of radio frequency tags 1 in the environment

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20 shown in Figure 2. In particular, by way of example, there are radio frequency tags 1 on doors, windows, corners of perimeter walls, and ceilings of rooms and corridors. This creates a grid of points in the environment, which allows a wireless device 100 located in the reference environment 20 to acquire information about the most significant elements present therein (rooms, corridors, passageways, escapes etc.) and to reconstruct a representation of a map of the environment that will help the user orientate him/herself.

Figure 4 shows one possible table built by the processing means 2 based on the identification and localization data stored in the storage means 5 and/or contained in the filing means 6. Each row corresponds to at least one radio frequency tag 1 and comprises a univocal identifier (Tag ID), data about its geographical position (Latitude, Longitude and Elevation), information about the type of element of the reference environment 20 associated with the radio frequency tag 1 (e.g. Perimeter, Door, Room, Window), about the identification of said element (Room ID, Corridor ID, Perimeter ID) and about the position thereof within the environment 20 (e.g. Floor, Wing, Department, Section).

Figure 5 shows one possible graphic representation of the environment map that can be obtained by the wireless device 100 by starting from the data contained in the table of Figure 4; in this representation, the radio frequency tags 1 mentioned in said table have been highlighted by way of example. It roughly indicates the profile defined by the perimeter walls, the position of windows and doors, as well as the area, approximated by defect, taken up by the rooms 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, wherein the associated radio frequency tags 1 (of door, window and ceiling) are characterized by the same room identifier (Room ID in Figure 4).

For example, the area 54 of Figure 5 is approximately defined by the region that includes all those radio frequency tags 1 whose Room ID is 5.

The corridor radio frequency tags 1 in Figure 5 indicate the area occupied by the corridor and may advantageously be associated with a sorted sequence, so as to indicate to the wireless device 100 a path to be followed in order to reach an escape or an emergency exit. Likewise, a sorted sequence may be associated with other types of radio frequency tags, e.g. the perimeter ones, to indicate to the wireless device 100 how to trace the profile of the perimeter walls for the purpose of obtaining a correct graphic representation, which can be done by drawing a line consecutively joining the

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various points (e.g. the points of a corridor that winds across the building, or of the perimetric profile of the building).

In order to avoid adding a field specifically dedicated to said sorted sequence, the latter may be implicitly indicated through a suitable selection or structure of the radio frequency tag (Tag ID), which may take appropriately increasing or decreasing numerical values to indicate that order.

If the wireless device 100 is equipped with a reader 4 of radio frequency tags, it receives radio signals 16 emitted by radio frequency tags sufficiently close to one another, which signals contain data about its geographical position and about the radio signal transmission power or other data useful for determining the distance travelled by them to reach a receiver. When radio signals 16 are received from at least three different radio frequency tags 1, the device 100 can establish its own position based on the knowledge of the position of the emitting radio frequency tags and of its own distance from such tags, which can be determined through the use of any known distance estimation technique by applying, according to the case, the known triangulation or multilateration system.

In the example of Figure 5 it is assumed that the wireless device 100 is located in the point 500 and is receiving radio signals 16 from the three radio frequency tags 1A, 1B and 1C. In this case, the device 100 can estimate its own position by starting from the knowledge of the positions of 1A, 1B and 1C, received through the radio signals emitted by them, and by estimating the distance from each of them based on said radio signals by using any known technique and by applying the triangulation system to the data thus obtained. In this way, the wireless device 100 can calculate its own position through the processing means 2 and can represent it in one way or another through an output means 7, e.g. graphically on a map screen as a suitable graphic symbol or through an audible message emitted by an audio player under the control of a voice synthesizer, which for example says to the user "You are in room 4 on the first floor".

When the map of the environment is reconstructed as a graphic representation, the actual distances (deduced from the analysis of the coordinates of the radio frequency tags 1) will be reduced according to a scale which is adequate for representing them on the display of the device (possibly resizable through a suitable command entered through a touch screen 7 or buttons 10).

The map thus built will then be filled with the points indicating doors, windows,

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corridors, rooms, etc. Points sharing the same area identifier (room, corridor, perimeter) may be highlighted with a special stroke or colour, thus grouping them into one set.

Aiming at limiting the number of applied radio frequency tags 1, and at reducing the quantity of information transmitted to the device 100 through the Wi-Fi beacon, the radio frequency tags 1 relating to any internal partition walls in the environment will not be indicated: the resulting representation of the environment will have a certain degree of approximation, which will however be such as to ensure the perception of one's position with respect to the surrounding environment.

If the device 100 is equipped with a compass, it will also be possible to indicate the directional orientation on the map.

The choice pertaining to the arrangement of the radio frequency tags 1 within the environment can be made in such a way as to ensure an even coverage of the environmental areas which are considered to be of interest: said positions are then recorded and archived to be easily made available to the device 100.

It is also conceivable that the device 100 has an internal logic which can give the user (whether graphically on the display 7 or by means of audible and/or tactile signals produced by suitable audible 8 or tactile 9 signal generators) information about the environment 20 where he/she currently is, such as the type and the position of elements belonging to said environment 20 and the direction to be followed in order to reach a certain destination, which can be selected, for example, through a touch screen 7, a voice command system or buttons 10.

The advantage offered by the solution described herein is therefore apparent, in that this solution, in addition to what was already available from the prior art, adds the possibility of reconstructing, for example as a graphic representation, the approximate map of the environment 20 where a person is, the particular points of interest of which are highlighted in order to make it easier for the user to orientate him/herself in an unknown or unfamiliar place; furthermore, the radio frequency tags 1 employed may be passive ones, i.e. commercially available at low cost, and there may be a large number of them arranged in the environment as necessary.

Another clear advantage derives from the fact that the map can be reconstructed by using a very small quantity of information (approx. ten bytes per radio frequency tag 1).

Within the frame of a different implementation of the invention, it is also conceivable to replace or supplement the radio frequency tags 1 with simple QR codes or bidimensional bar codes 15, which can be easily read through the camera built in a common smartphone device: just like the radio frequency tags 1, said code can provide a simple univocal identifier.

Finally, for simpler devices lacking a radio frequency tag reader 4 or a camera, it is possible to conceive a variant of the present invention which allows the user to manually enter the QR code 15, which he/she may have learnt from a signalling available in the reference environment.

The method for reconstructing the map of an environment surrounding a wireless device and the wireless device implementing such method described herein by way of example may be subject to many possible variations without departing from the novelty spirit of the inventive idea; it is also clear that in the practical implementation of the invention the illustrated details may have different shapes or be replaced with other technically equivalent elements.

It can therefore be easily understood that the present invention is not limited to a method for reconstructing the map of an environment surrounding a wireless device and a wireless device implementing such method, but may be subject to many modifications, improvements or replacements of equivalent parts and elements without departing from the novelty spirit of the inventive idea, as clearly specified in the following claims.

CLAIMS

1. A method for reconstructing the map of an environment (20) surrounding a wireless device (100), said environment (20) being equipped with one or more radio frequency tags (1) set in a number dependent on the level of detail to be obtained in said reconstruction, said device (100) comprising:

- at least one wireless reception means (3) adapted to receive the identification and localization data of said radio frequency tags (1) associated with elements present in said environment (20);

- at least one processing means (2);

- at least one filing and/or storage means (5,6);

- at least one output means (7) adapted to provide information about said environment (20), characterized in that said method comprises the steps of:

- receiving identification and localization data of said one or more radio frequency tags (1) over a wireless connection by said at least one wireless reception means (3);

- storing said identification and localization data of said one or more radio frequency tags (1) into said filing and/or storage means (5,6) by said processing means (2);

- providing on said output means (7) at least one map of said environment (20) built on the basis of said identification and localization data of said radio frequency tags (1).

2. A method according to claim 1, characterized in that said radio frequency tags (1) are replaced or supplemented with QR codes (15), or bidimensional bar codes.

3. A method according to claim 1, characterized in that said identification and localization data are stored in the form of at least one table, and that in said at least one table there is at least one row for each of said radio frequency tags (1), and that in columns of said table are represented, either fully or partially, at least the following fields belonging to said identification and localization data of said radio frequency tags (1):

- univocal identifier of one of said radio frequency tags (1);

- coordinates, in particular latitude, longitude, elevation, or geographical position of one element of said environment (20) associated with the radio frequency tag (1);

- type of radio frequency tag (for example: door, window, room, ...) defining at least one element present in said environment (20) which the radio frequency tag (1) is associated with.

4. A method according to claim 3, characterized in that said identification and

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localization data of a radio frequency tag (1) comprise information about further elements of interest, different from one another but equally present in the reference environment (20).

5. A method according to claim 4, characterized in that said at least one table includes additional rows and/or columns containing information about said further elements of interest.

6. A method according to claim 1, characterized in that the information is reproduced on said output means (7) according to a particular order capable of providing a sorted sequence.

7. A method according to claim 1, characterized in that said radio frequency tags (1) relating to a determined environmental structure are characterized by a common identification datum which allows to group them and to represent the elements associated therewith and constituting said structure within the latter.

8. A method according to claim 1, wherein said wireless device (100) comprises a reader (4) of radio frequency tags (1), adapted to detect said radio frequency tags (1) present within its own coverage range, the method being characterized in that it comprises a further step of receiving radio signals (16) from at least one of said radio frequency tags, of estimating the position thereof through said at least one processing means (2) on the basis of the received radio signals (16), and of providing on said output means (7) said estimated position within said map of said environment (20).

9. A method according to claim 1, characterized in that the information necessary for building said map has the order of magnitude of tens of bytes for each one of said radio frequency tags (1).

10. A method according to claim 2, characterized in that the values corresponding to the QR codes (15), learnt on the basis of a signalling available in said environment (20), are entered manually by the user of the wireless device (100).

11. A method according to claim 1, characterized in that the wireless reception means (3) operate in accordance with any one of the Wi-Fi protocols defined by the IEEE 802.11x standards.

12. A wireless device (100) characterized in that it comprises:

at least one wireless reception means (3);

at least one processing means (2);

at least one filing and/or storage means (5,6);

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at least one output means (7),

which are adapted to implement said method according to any one of claims 1 to 11.

13. A device according to claim 12, characterized in that said output means (7) comprises at least one display and/or at least one touch screen (7) and/or an audio playback unit (8), and/or a tactile-stimulus production unit (9), capable of reproducing information about the reference environment (20) on said map, respectively as a graphic, audio or tactile reproduction.

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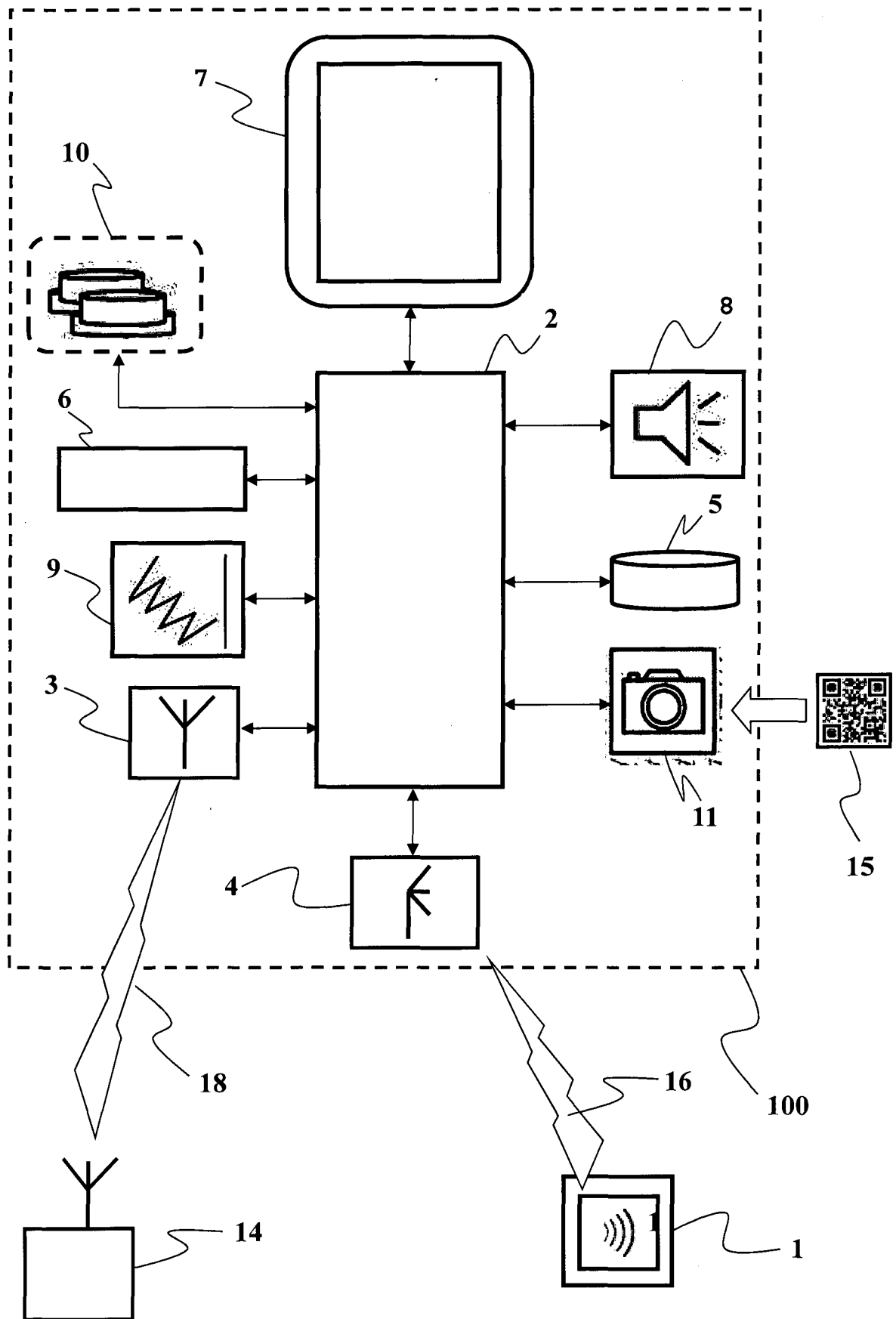
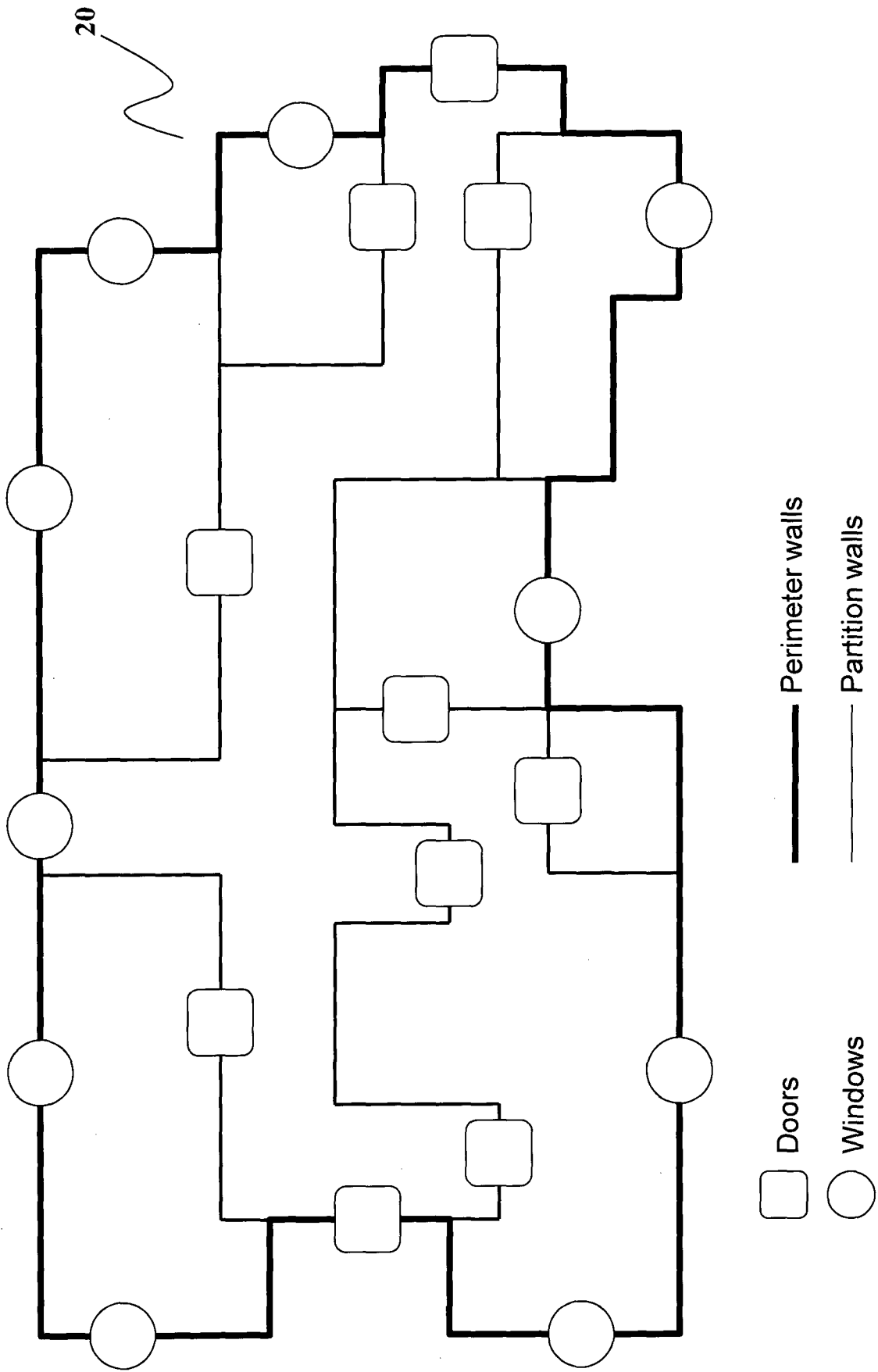


Fig. 1

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- Doors
- Windows
- Perimeter walls
- Partition walls

Fig. 2

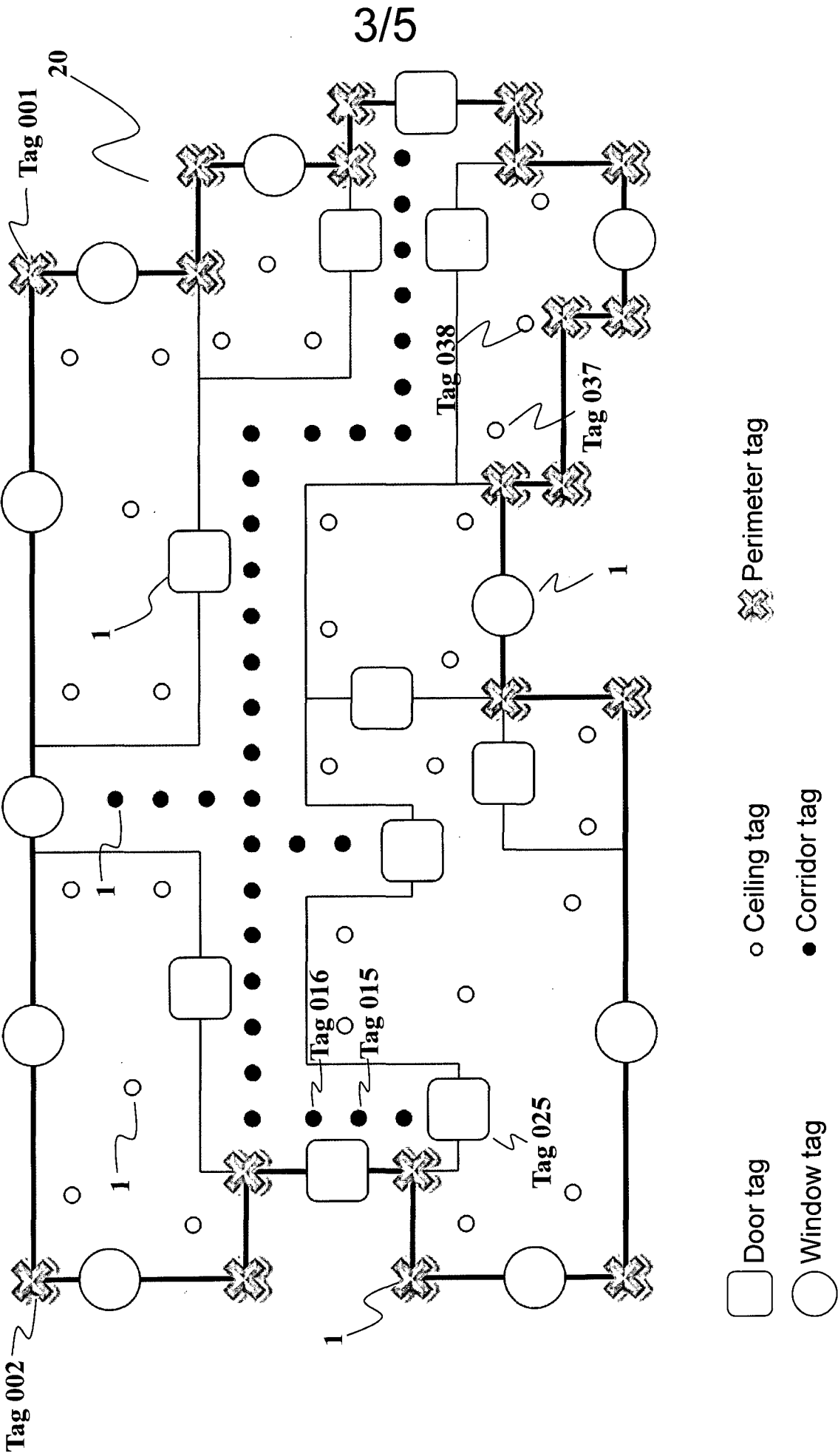


Fig. 3

[illegible]

Fig. 4

5/5

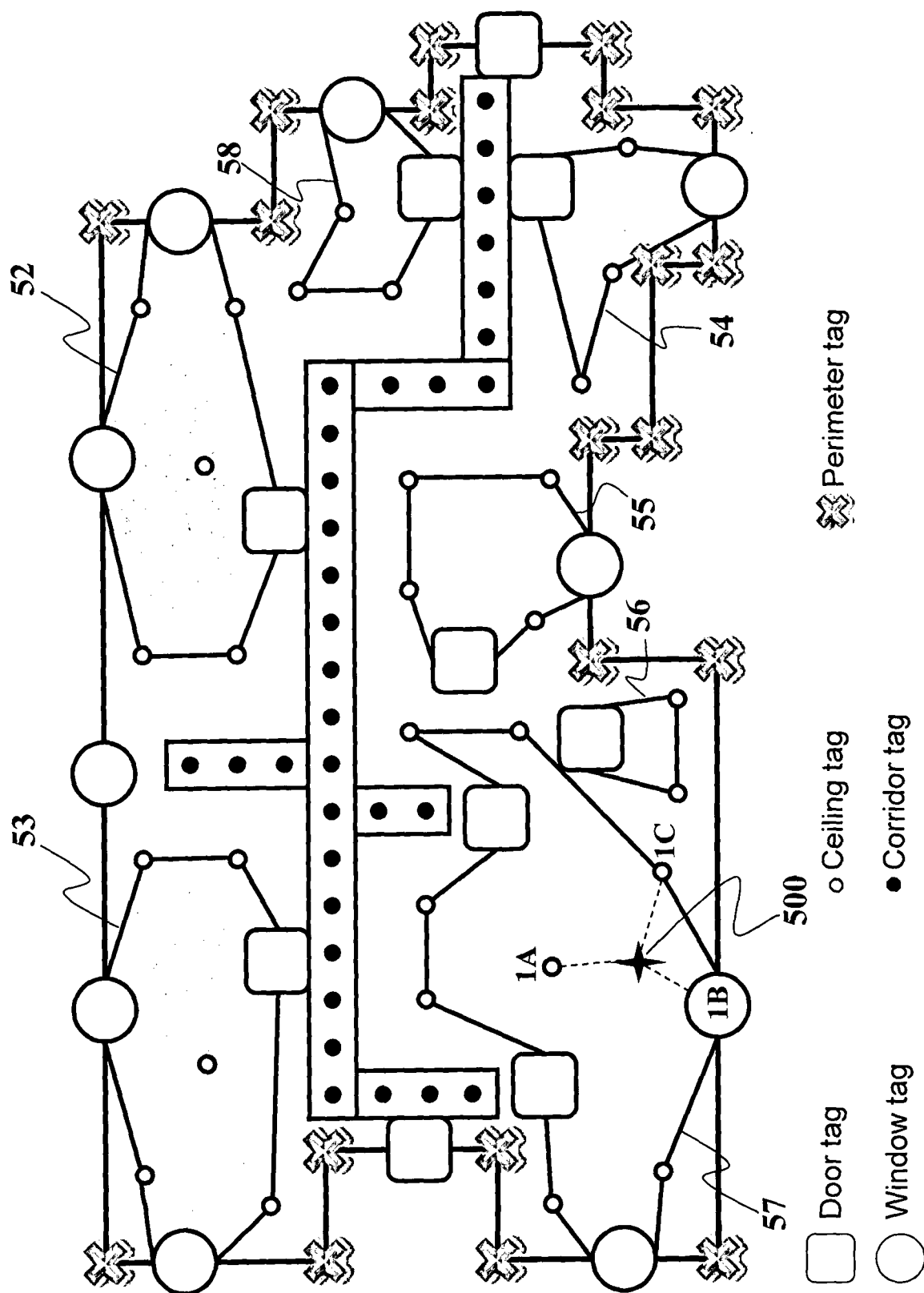


Fig. 5

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No
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A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER INV. G01S5/00 G01S5/02 H04L29/08 G01S5/08 H04W64/00 G01S1/68 H04W4/04 ADD. According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC											
B. FIELDS SEARCHED Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols) G01S H04L H04W Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used) EPO-Internal, WPI Data											
C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="width: 10%;">Category*</th> <th style="width: 70%;">Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages</th> <th style="width: 20%;">Relevant to claim No.</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td style="text-align: center; vertical-align: top;">X</td> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> WO 2006/096431 A2 (CISCO TECH INC [US]; PATEL LABHESH [US]; SHAFFER SHMUEL [US]; CHAHROUR) 14 September 2006 (2006-09-14) pages 3-25 column 3, line 5 - line 6 ----- </td> <td style="text-align: center; vertical-align: top;">1-13</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center; vertical-align: top;">A</td> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> JP 2008 181504 A (KANAGAWA DENTSU KOKOKU CO LTD) 7 August 2008 (2008-08-07) abstract ----- </td> <td style="text-align: center; vertical-align: top;">2,10</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>			Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.	X	WO 2006/096431 A2 (CISCO TECH INC [US]; PATEL LABHESH [US]; SHAFFER SHMUEL [US]; CHAHROUR) 14 September 2006 (2006-09-14) pages 3-25 column 3, line 5 - line 6 -----	1-13	A	JP 2008 181504 A (KANAGAWA DENTSU KOKOKU CO LTD) 7 August 2008 (2008-08-07) abstract -----	2,10
Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.									
X	WO 2006/096431 A2 (CISCO TECH INC [US]; PATEL LABHESH [US]; SHAFFER SHMUEL [US]; CHAHROUR) 14 September 2006 (2006-09-14) pages 3-25 column 3, line 5 - line 6 -----	1-13									
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<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div> <input type="checkbox"/> Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C. </div> <div> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> See patent family annex. </div> </div>											
<div style="display: flex;"> <div style="flex: 1;"> <p>* Special categories of cited documents :</p> <p>"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance</p> <p>"E" earlier application or patent but published on or after the international filing date</p> <p>"L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)</p> <p>"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means</p> <p>"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed</p> </div> <div style="flex: 1;"> <p>"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention</p> <p>"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone</p> <p>"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art</p> <p>"&" document member of the same patent family</p> </div> </div>											
Date of the actual completion of the international search <div style="text-align: center; font-size: 1.2em;">17 January 2013</div>		Date of mailing of the international search report <div style="text-align: center; font-size: 1.2em;">25/01/2013</div>									
Name and mailing address of the ISA/ European Patent Office, P.B. 5818 Patentlaan 2 NL - 2280 HV Rijswijk Tel. (+31-70) 340-2040, Fax: (+31-70) 340-3016		Authorized officer <div style="text-align: center; font-size: 1.2em;">Hirsch, Stefanie</div>									

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

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