

JEPETTO: a Cytoscape plugin for gene set enrichment and topological analysis based on interaction networks

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Received on July 30, 2013; revised on November 25, 2013; accepted on December 13, 2013

Associate Editor: Prof. Alfonso Valencia

ABSTRACT

Summary: JEPETTO (Java Enrichment of Pathways Extended To TOpology) is a Cytoscape 3.x plugin performing integrative human gene set analysis. It identifies functional associations between genes and known cellular pathways and processes using protein interaction networks and topological analysis. The plugin integrates information from three separate web servers we published previously, specialising in enrichment analysis, pathways expansion and topological matching. This integration substantially simplifies the analysis of user gene sets and the interpretation of the results. We demonstrate the utility of the JEPETTO plugin on a set of misregulated genes associated with Alzheimer's disease.

Availability: Source code and binaries freely available for download at <http://apps.cytoscape.org/apps/jepetto>, implemented in Java and multi-platform. Installable directly via Cytoscape plugin manager. Released under the GNU General Public Licence.

Contact: jepetto.plugin@gmail.com

Supplementary information: available at *Bioinformatics* online.

1 BACKGROUND

The integration of heterogeneous data derived from functional genomics experiments is an essential step in providing insights into biological systems behaviour, especially disease-related processes. Nowadays this integration is becoming easier, thanks to extendable network analysis platforms such as Cytoscape (Shannon *et al.*, 2003). Although several existing Cytoscape plugins do functional analysis, not many go beyond performing a “term-based” search or link ontology. In contrast, JEPETTO integrates gene sets with pathways and the molecular interaction networks they are embedded in. It uses information from three different web servers to perform network enrichment, pathways expansion and topological analysis.

2 IMPLEMENTATION

Input. Our plugin operates on target gene set provided by a user. The list of gene names can be given directly or imported from an existing network created in Cytoscape (many gene identifier formats are accepted e.g. *Ensembl*, *HGNC*, *Entrez*, *UniProt*). The other main parameters are the reference annotation database (*KEGG*, *BioCarta*,

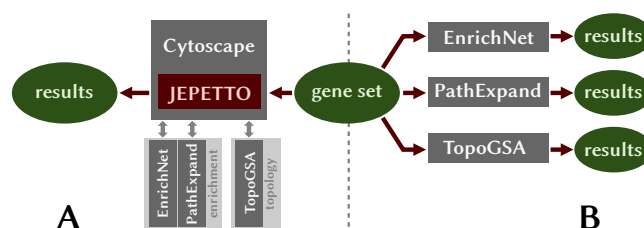


Fig. 1. Plugin architecture: (A) analysis via JEPETTO (single input/output), (B) analysis via existing web servers (multiple input/output points).

GO, *InterPro*, etc.) and the molecular interaction network (*STRING* or a user-defined network).

Processing. There are two types of analysis available in JEPETTO: enrichment and topology based. For the enrichment analysis *EnrichNet* and *PathExpand* web servers are used and the topological analysis is performed with *TopoGSA*. The plugin communicates with the web servers as shown in Fig. 1A and integrates the results within the Cytoscape environment. This single point integration eliminates the need to use the web servers individually and simplifies repeated analysis on previously obtained results.

EnrichNet (Glaab *et al.*, 2012) maps the input gene set onto a molecular interaction network and using a random walk, scores distances between the genes and pathways/processes in a reference database. This network-based association score (XD-score) is relative to the average distance to all pathways and represents a deviation (positive or negative) from the average distance. As an option, *EnrichNet* provides XD-scores for 60 human tissues, derived from tissue-specific gene expression data.

PathExpand (Glaab *et al.*, 2010a) maps the input pathway/process onto the human protein-protein interaction network and extends it with proteins that: (1) are strongly associated with the pathway nodes, (2) increase the pathway compactness by connecting its disconnected members. The exact expansion acceptance criteria can be modified in the plugin advanced options.

TopoGSA (Glaab *et al.*, 2010b) maps the input gene set on an interaction network, computes its topological signature and compares it against signatures of pathways/processes in a reference database. The topological signature is built from five distinct properties: network density, centrality of nodes in the network or their tendency to form clusters.

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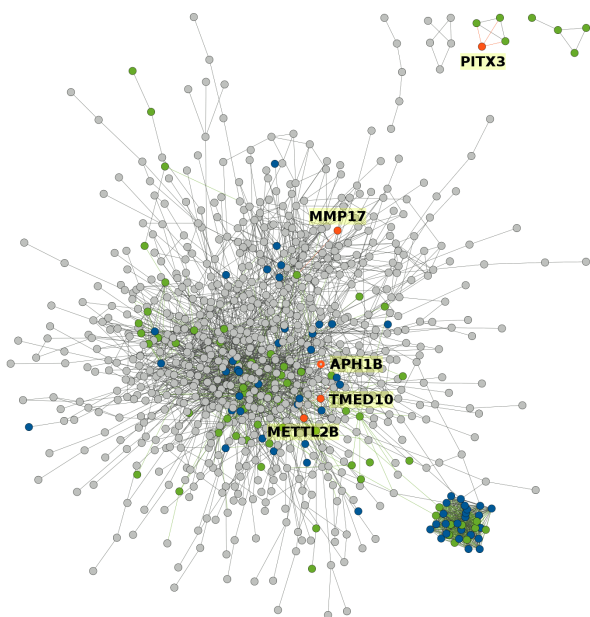


Fig. 2. Target gene set within Alzheimer’s disease environmental network. Grey nodes represent the input set, green represent the pathway and blue represent the overlap between them. Orange nodes represent the expansion. Interactions between the input set and added nodes are highlighted: edges to pathway nodes are green and edges to expansion nodes are orange.

Output. The enrichment analysis finds pathways significantly associated with the input gene set (in terms of XD-score). When a pathway is selected its expansion is constructed and a network of interactions between the gene set, pathway and expansion is generated (see Fig. 2). The topology analysis finds pathways with a pattern of interactions most similar to those in the input gene set and visually compares their topological properties (see Fig. 3).

3 CASE STUDY

We have retrieved the Alzheimer’s disease related set of genes from *Phenopedia*¹. The enrichment analysis of this set assigned the highest XD-score (1.94) to the Alzheimer’s disease pathway. The pathway was expanded and the disease environmental network (see Fig. 2) was generated. The following genes were added as the expansion: *TMED10*, *METTL2B*, *APH1B*, *MMP17* and *PITX3*.

The first three of these genes have been experimentally characterized as direct Alzheimer’s cofactors (additional details in Supplementary Information). *MMP17* protein family was found to play a role in β -amyloid proteins degradation related to the increase of mitogen-activated protein kinase (MAPK), the main trigger of the Alzheimer’s disease (Yoshiyama *et al.*, 2000). *PITX3* is involved in transcription of a micro-RNA known to have reduced expression levels in Parkinson’s diseased brains and may also contribute to the Alzheimer’s pathology development (Shioya *et al.*, 2010).

The topological analysis of the largest connected component of the Alzheimer’s disease environmental network confirmed the previous findings. Among the most topologically similar pathways

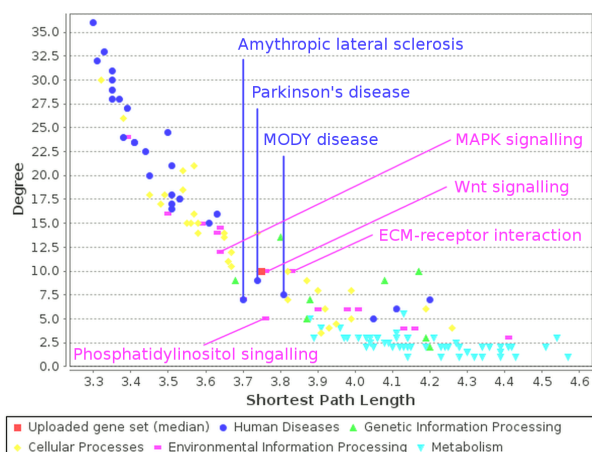


Fig. 3. Comparative analysis of topological properties. The red square next to the *Wnt* signalling pathway represents the target network.

were *Wnt* signalling pathway related to *MMP17* and Parkinson’s disease pathway related to *PITX3*. It also highlighted similarity to sclerosis and diabetes and several environmental information processing pathways (see Fig. 3 and Supplementary Information).

4 SUMMARY

JEPETTO integrates three different network-centric human gene set analysis methods under a single interface of the Cytoscape 3.x environment. It performs enrichment and topological analysis based on the interaction networks. It displays the target gene set within its interaction environment and identifies possible gene cofactors and topologically related pathways and processes that are unlikely to be detected using traditional term-based analysis.

In the case study of the Alzheimer’s disease associated genes, JEPETTO was able to identify a number of known disease cofactors and suggested directions for further investigation.

Funding: This work was supported by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council [EP/J004111/1].

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¹ <http://www.hugenavigator.net/>

Supplementary Information

JEPETTO: a Cytoscape plugin for gene set enrichment and topological analysis based on interaction networks

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Received on July 30, 2013; revised on November 25, 2013; accepted on December 13, 2013

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1 ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE CASE STUDY

In this study, we use JEPETTO to perform an integrated analysis with a target set of misregulated genes associated with Alzheimer's disease. Alzheimer is the most common type of dementia resulting in the brain degeneration. The disease is one of the leading causes of death for individuals over the age of 65. Dysregulation of the brain cell functions slowly generates a set of harmful symptoms: memory loss, personality changes, misorientation and others. The disease worsens as it progresses and although some treatments exist, they do not tackle the long-term effects (Thies and Bleiler, 2011). Alzheimer's disease remains incurable. Therefore, it is important to identify new components that may be involved in the disease development or the potential targets for a cure.

2 DATA SOURCES

In the following case study, we used JEPETTO to analyse a set of genes related to Alzheimer's disease. The gene set associated with the disease was retrieved from *Phenopedia* (Yu *et al.*, 2010), part of the Human Genome Epidemiology (HuGE) encyclopedia. It contained 1551 human genes found in 2705 PubMed publications, related with Alzheimer's disease. The complete list of genes in this study is provided in Table 4 (last page).

3 WORKFLOW

JEPETTO offers two types of analysis. The **enrichment analysis** finds pathways strongly associated with a query gene set in the context of an interaction network, while **topology analysis** finds pathways sharing a similar set of topological features.

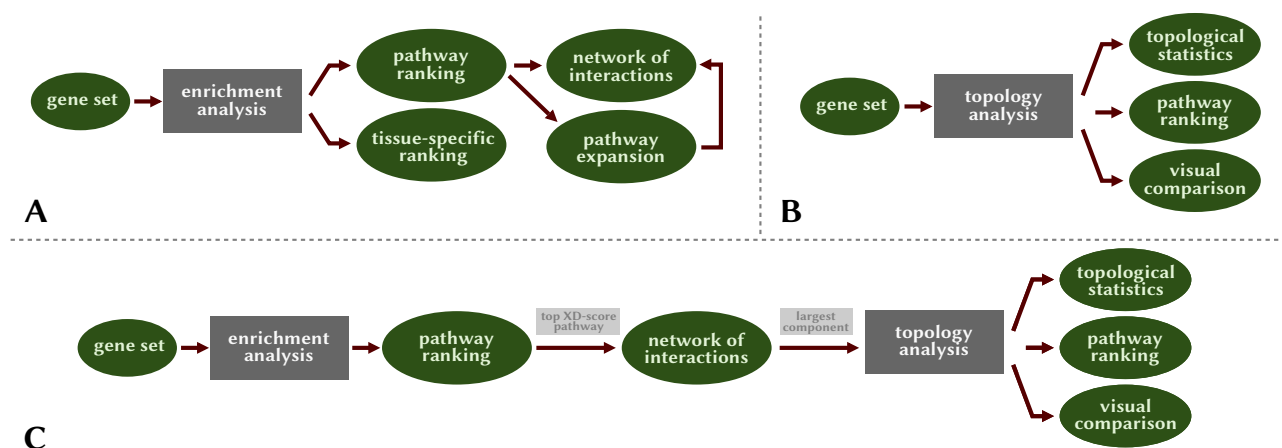


Fig. 1. Examples of JEPETTO's workflow: (A) enrichment analysis provides general and tissue-specific ranking of pathways ordered by XD-score and a network of interaction between the input gene set, a selected pathway and the selected pathway expansion (if found), (B) topology analysis provides topological signature of the input gene set interactions compared to randomly sampled same-size networks, ranking of pathways ordered by topological similarity to the input gene set and visual comparison of pathway topological properties, (C) combined analysis used in the Alzheimer's disease case study; a network of interactions is generated using a pathway with the highest XD-score and the largest connected component of the network is used as input to topology analysis.

Each type of analysis is performed independently of the other, but depending on the research question at hand, different workflows could be used to combine them.

If a user is interested in the gene set functional interpretation, she will perform the enrichment analysis and focus on pathways with the highest scores. She could generate the network of interaction for each pathway of interest and analyse the overlap with the gene set and the protein-encoding genes added as the path expansion.

Sometimes a different reference database might be preferred. *KEGG* works well for the enzymatic pathways but to describe the gene set in terms of association to the biological processes, *GO* database is more adequate. The same is true for molecular functions or sub-cellular localisation.

If a user wants to check if the pattern of interactions between a set of genes is unusual, she will perform the topology analysis and focus on the topological statistics. In particular, she might compare the topological signature of the gene set interactions against the interactions expected by chance.

The user might be interested in exploration of the regulatory mechanisms and use pathways ranking to indicate new directions of research. Moreover, she could use the visual comparison to examine the distribution of selected topological properties across pathways.

Figure 1 shows the information flow in the enrichment analysis, topology analysis and a combination of the two that we used in this case study. We were interested in capturing the pattern of interactions between the input gene set and the Alzheimer's disease pathway. Therefore, in our workflow, the largest connected component of the generated network of interactions, is used as an input to the topology analysis (see Figure 1C). This is by no means the only possible approach and JEPETTO allows users to follow different workflows.

4 PATHWAYS ENRICHMENT ANALYSIS

In the first step of the enrichment analysis with JEPETTO, the target gene set was mapped onto the *String* interaction network. Out of the 1551 gene identifiers, 1079 were successfully mapped and used in the further analysis. The closest pathways and cellular processes from *KEGG* were identified using **XD-score** (see Table 1).

XD-score uses a random walk in the molecular interaction network to determine a distance between the mapped genes and the pathways in the reference database. The score is relative to the average random walk distance between the mapped genes and all the pathways (background model). Positive values of XD-score imply stronger than average association between genes and the pathway, while negative values imply a below average, weak association.

As it was expected, Alzheimer's disease signalling pathway appeared at the top of the pathways ranking (see Figure 2). It had high XD-score of 1.944, over three times above the significance threshold of 0.61 found by the regression fit (equivalent to adjusted for multiple comparisons Fisher test q-value of 0.05 incremented by the upper bound of the 95% confidence interval to compensate for model parameters uncertainty).

Among other top ranked pathways we found the Parkinson's disease, two cytochrome P450 metabolism pathways, malaria, two types of diabetes, bladder and thyroid cancers, asthma and sclerosis. Several of these pathways had a Fisher test q-value > 0.05 and due to small overlap size, it is unlikely that the functional link to the

pathway	XD-score	q-value	overlap
Alzheimer's disease	1.94363	0.00000	61/138
Parkinson's disease	1.68315	0.00030	34/99
Drug metabolism - cytochrome P450	1.63051	0.00088	10/17
Adipocytokine signaling pathway	1.61004	0.00000	31/57
Oxidative phosphorylation	1.47101	0.01427	27/94
Metabolism of xenobiotics by cytochrome P450	1.43247	0.00088	11/20
Malaria	1.32922	0.00010	20/42
Allograft rejection	1.27581	0.00071	13/25
Huntington's disease	1.23351	0.00080	44/149
Type I diabetes mellitus	1.23075	0.00030	15/29
Asthma	1.15382	0.01046	9/19
Graft-versus-host disease	1.11136	0.00216	12/25
Complement and coagulation cascades	1.08489	0.00002	28/65
Arachidonic acid metabolism	1.05812	0.01046	11/26
Renin-angiotensin system	1.03942	0.04537	7/16
Type II diabetes mellitus	0.91851	0.00036	19/43
Steroid hormone biosynthesis	0.91025	0.09053	6/15
Thyroid cancer	0.88697	0.00024	14/25
Prion diseases	0.85760	0.00030	17/35
NOD-like receptor signaling pathway	0.82540	0.00058	23/59
Linoleic acid metabolism	0.79510	0.08463	5/11
Bladder cancer	0.78203	0.03185	13/38
Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS)	0.72818	0.00675	17/47
Chagas disease	0.67119	0.00001	38/99
Retinol metabolism	0.65284	0.11294	5/12
Leishmaniasis	0.65217	0.00009	26/62
Notch signaling pathway	0.64745	0.03164	14/42

Table 1. Strongly associated pathways found in *KEGG*. The XD-score determines the significance of the association. The q-value determines the significance of the overlap (Fisher test). Last column shows number of overlapping genes vs size of the pathway.

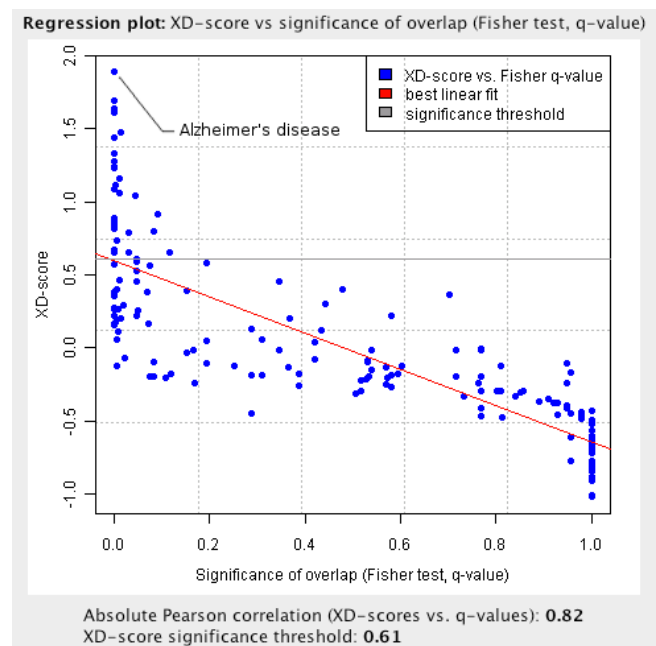


Fig. 2. JEPETTO screenshot of the regression plot between XD-score and the overlap significance (q-value). Each dot in the regression plot represents a pathway or process predicted in the enrichment analysis as related to the Alzheimer's disease target gene set. Best linear fit is shown with a red line. The XD-score significance threshold is shown with a grey horizontal line. The Alzheimer's disease pathway visible at the top had XD-score = 1.944 and q-value < 10⁻⁵.

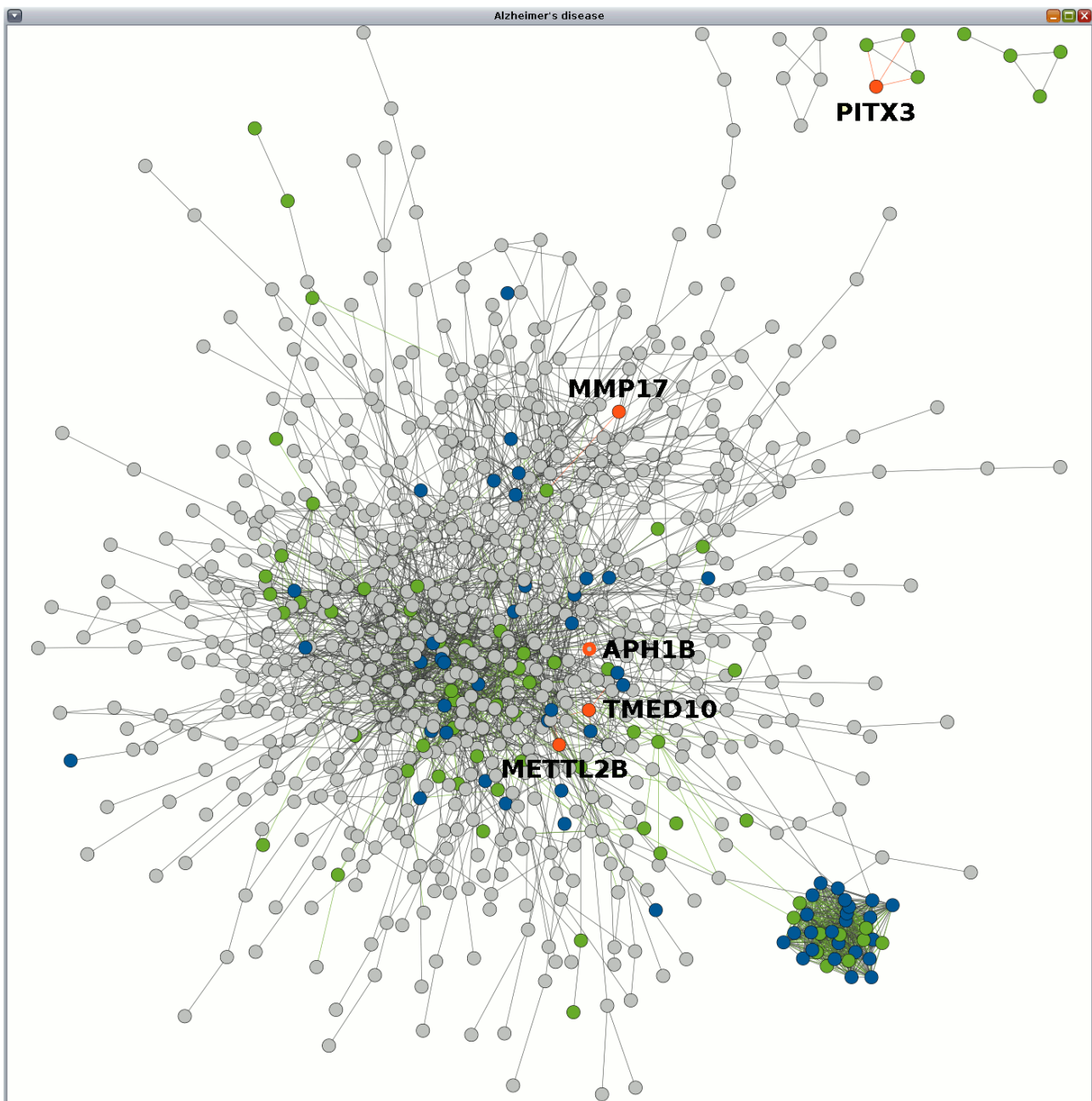


Fig. 3. Target gene set within Alzheimer's disease environmental network. Node colours are: grey for the genes in the target set, blue for the overlap between the pathway and the target gene set, green for the pathway specific components and orange for pathway/process expansion (all expansion nodes are also labelled). The edge colours are: green for interactions between the input set and the pathway, orange for interactions between the input set and the expansion and grey for others. Only connected components larger than 3 nodes are shown to improve clarity.

input gene set would have been found by traditional term overlap analysis methods that ignore the topology.

To further strengthen the results, JEPETTO *expands* the selected pathway with strongly associated proteins.¹ The resulting

¹ As this process is based on human protein-protein interaction network, the results for non-human gene sets have to be interpreted with care.

Alzheimer's disease gene environmental network is shown in Figure 3. There are two main gene clusters visible in the network: (1) mainly green nodes on the right, specific to the associated pathway and (2) a mix of pathway specific genes and genes from the target set on the right. The labelled orange genes in between the two clusters (*APH1B*, *METTL2B*, *MMP17*, *TMED10* and *PITX3*) are the predicted path expansions.

Curiously enough, *APHIB* was already present in the input gene set and was "rediscovered" by the path expansion algorithm from the analysis of the Alzheimer's disease pathway interactions.

APHIB is a gene that may display a rare polymorphism observed in Alzheimer's disease associated populations, increasing the disease susceptibility through interactions with the Apolipoprotein E. The principle is that *APHIB* is an important subunit of the γ -secretase complex which is known to produce amyloid β -peptides (main molecular actor in Alzheimer's disease). *APHIB* single nucleotide polymorphism implies a native interaction with the Apolipoprotein E dysregulating neuronal processes, specifically the ones observed in Alzheimer's disease population (Poli *et al.*, 2008).

METTL2B corresponds to a putative methyltransferase interacting with mutated presenilins. Presenilin genes are recognized as being part of the major components involving an early-onset of Alzheimer's disease. In addition, methyltransferase proteins and presenilins have been found to work together in Alzheimer's genesis (Zhang *et al.*, 2001).

TMED10, also known as *TMP21*, is a negative regulator of the amyloid β -peptide production. During the Alzheimer's disease development amyloid β -peptides are aggregated on a rolling basis and quickly become highly neurotoxic agents (Bromley-Brits and Song, 2012; Cohena *et al.*, 2013). An inhibition of *TMED10* can thus only enhance the molecule aggregation, therefore increase Alzheimer's development and symptomatic effects.

This means that without any prior knowledge of the disease specific mechanisms, JEPETTO was able to automatically identify three genes known to be direct cofactors of the Alzheimer's disease.

The other two genes are not yet known to play any role in the Alzheimer's pathology development. However, the proteins from the matrix metalloproteinase *MMP17* family are capable of degrading the β -amyloid proteins and it is speculated that distribution of MMPs in the brain matter is a part of Alzheimer's pathomechanism (Yoshiyama *et al.*, 2000). Therefore, further studies on *MMP17* as a disease cofactor and its role in β -amyloid proteins accumulation might be interesting.

The last gene in the expansion set, *PITX3*, is an auto-regulated component producing micro-RNAs. It transcribes *miR-133b* which expression level is known to be down-regulated in Parkinson's diseased brains (Shioya *et al.*, 2010). For this reason, it might also contribute to the Alzheimer's pathology development. Particularly in early stages of the disease, the analysis of *PITX3* expression profile may help to understand its genesis.

5 TOPOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

The enrichment analysis was complemented with a network topology analysis. As input, we used the largest connected component (767 nodes) of the enriched network. The topological properties of the network were compared to the properties of random interaction networks of the same size. The results revealed significant differences in the topological signatures (see Table 2).

The average shortest path length is smaller than in random networks which indicates closer interactions. This is confirmed by over two times higher average node degree which additionally reveals more dense interactions between the target genes. Also the average node betweenness centrality is almost three times higher which signals the presence of more central nodes (hubs) in the

Network	Topological properties				
	SPL	BC	D	CC	EC
Target	3.81	45287	18.4	0.11	0.04
Random	4.13 \pm 0.02	14189 \pm 2492	8.14 \pm 0.66	0.11 \pm 0.01	0.02 \pm 0.00
Background	4.12 \pm 0.94	14669 \pm 68893	8.27 \pm 16.2	0.11 \pm 0.21	0.02 \pm 0.04

Table 2. Enriched Alzheimer's disease network topological properties. Topological properties are: shortest path length (SPL), betweenness centrality (BC), node degree (D), clustering coefficient (CC), eigenvector centrality (EC). For random networks mean values from a simulation with 100 samples are reported.

target network. The difference in eigenvector centrality suggest more variety in node importance, although that difference is not significant in comparison to the background network. Interestingly, genes in the target set are not more likely to form clusters, as the average clustering coefficient is the same as for random networks. These results support the hypothesis that the target network is specific and interactions between its genes are unlike those commonly present in the background network as a whole.

The topological signature of the interactions in the enriched network was then compared to those of known pathways and biological processes. We searched the *KEGG* database for the closest topological matches. Table 3 shows the list of the most similar biological mechanisms found.

The closest topological match was the *Wnt* signalling pathway (*score* = 0.05). It is involved in tissue development but also participates in genesis of various tumours and pathologies (Goodwin and D'Amore, 2002). In particular, it acts jointly with the *β -catenin* signalling pathway in the regulation of development of blood vessels in the central nervous system during angiogenesis (Daneman *et al.*, 2009). Blood vessels differential maturation or regression is known to be partially modulated by *MMP17* (Sounni *et al.*, 2011). Therefore there seems to be a link between *MMP17* and Alzheimer's early onset, as indicated by the pathway expansion.

Name	Score
Wnt signaling pathway	0.05
Ubiquitin mediated proteolysis	0.08
Tight junction	0.09
Melanogenesis	0.10
ECM-receptor interaction	0.10
Parkinson's disease	0.11
Regulation of actin cytoskeleton	0.11
Natural killer cell mediated cytotoxicity	0.12
Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis	0.13
Axon guidance	0.13
Long-term depression	0.14
Gap junction	0.14
Maturity onset diabetes of the young	0.15
GnRH signaling pathway	0.15
MAPK signaling pathway	0.15
TGF-beta signaling pathway	0.17

Table 3. Closest topological matches found in KEGG. The distance score associated with each match is a normalised sum of ranks computed from differences between the topological properties.

Also the previously found link to Parkinson's disease (*PITX3* pathway expansion) is reflected in the topological similarity of the Parkinson's pathway (*score* = 0.11).

Another interesting top match was the maturity onset diabetes of the young (*MODY*) pathway (*score* = 0.15). A link between the diseases has been confirmed by recent experiments on Alzheimer transgenic and diabetic mice (Takeda *et al.*, 2010), where an increase in the *amyloid- β* aggregation caused by diabetes, resulted in increased Alzheimer's effects.

To complete the topological analysis, we have performed a visual comparison using node degree and shortest path length, two properties with values significantly different from those obtained by chance for the random networks. Figure 4 shows the target network in relation to other *KEGG* pathways and processes. Among the most similar diseases we found, except of the Parkinson's disease and *MODY* discussed above, the myotrophic lateral sclerosis. Interestingly, sclerosis as a neuro-degenerative process shares several biological mechanisms with Alzheimer's disease, e.g. *SIRT1*, a lastingness effector, protects neurons from degeneration in both diseases (Kim *et al.*, 2007).

The closest environmental information processing pathways in Figure 4 were the previously discussed *Wnt* signalling, together with phosphatidylinositol signalling and ECM-receptor interaction. Phosphatidylinositol compounds take part in many cellular processes and for some of them a metabolism imbalance has been observed during Alzheimer's disease pathogenesis (Landman *et al.*, 2006). The extracellular matrix (ECM) components interacts with amyloid precursor proteins (APP) and aberration in that process is associated with a deposition of β -amyloid senile plaques, a hallmark pathology of the Alzheimer's disease Small *et al.* (1993). Interestingly, MAPK signalling pathway, known to contribute to the brain inflammation in Alzheimer's disease Munoz and Ammit (2010), was found closer to the target network in the comparative analysis than in the pathway ranking.

6 SUMMARY

To conclude, by using JEPETTO on a new Alzheimer's disease associated gene set we were able to identify correctly three known disease cofactors (*APH1B*, *METTL2B*, *TMED10*) and a number of candidate genes and pathways that may be involved in the pathology genesis worth further investigation (e.g. *MMP17* and *Wnt* signalling pathway or *PITX3* and Parkinson's disease pathway).

Funding: This work was supported by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council [EP/J004111/1, EP/H000968/1].

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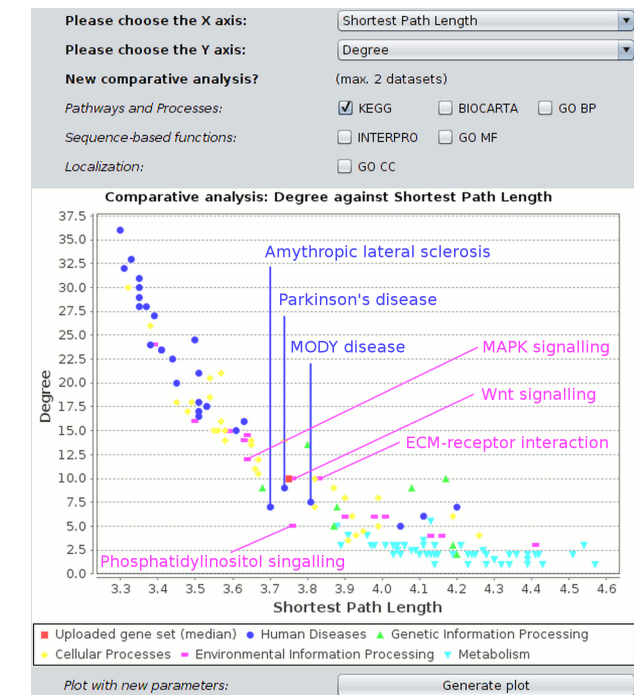


Fig. 4. JEPETTO results panel displaying comparative analysis of topological properties. The target network is represented with a red square.

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