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Note on alternating directed cycles

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Abstract

The problem of the existence of an alternating simple dicycle in a 2-arc-coloured digraph is considered. This is a generalization of the alternating cycle problem in 2-edge-coloured graphs and the even dicycle problem (both are polynomial time solvable). We prove that the alternating dicycle problem is $\mathcal{NP}$-complete. Let $f(n)$ ($g(n)$, resp.) be the minimum integer such that if every monochromatic indegree and outdegree in a strongly connected 2-arc-coloured digraph (any 2-arc-coloured digraph, resp.) D is at least $f(n)$ ($g(n)$, resp.), then D has an alternating simple dicycle. We show that $f(n)=\Theta(\log n)$ and $g(n)=\Theta(\log n)$. © 1998 Elsevier Science B.V. All rights reserved

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1. Introduction, terminology and notation

We shall assume that the reader is familiar with the standard terminology on graphs and digraphs and refer the reader to [4]. We consider digraphs without loops and multiple arcs. The arcs of digraphs are coloured with two colours: colour 1 and colour 2. By a *cycle* in a digraph (in a graph) we mean a directed simple cycle (a simple cycle). A cycle C is *alternating* if any consecutive arcs (edges) of C have distinct colours.

The problem of the existence of an alternating cycle in a 2-arc-coloured digraph (*the ADC problem*) generalizes the following two problems: the existence of an alternating cycle in a 2-edge-coloured graph (this problem is polynomial time solvable, cf. [2]; the faster of two polynomial algorithms described in [2] follows from a nice characterization [7] of 2-edge-coloured graphs containing an alternating cycle) and the

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existence of an even length cycle in a digraph (the complexity until recently was not known [9,10]; W. McCuaig et al. [11] proved that it is polynomial time solvable).

To see that the ADC problem generalizes the even cycle problem, replace every arc (x, y) of a digraph D by two vertex disjoint alternating paths of length three, one starting from colour 1 and the other – from colour 2. Clearly, the obtained 2-edge-coloured digraph has an alternating cycle if and only if D has a cycle of even length.

We prove that the ADC problem is $\mathcal{NP}$-complete by providing a transformation from the well-known 3-SAT to the ADC problem.

To indicate that an arc (x, y) has colour $i \in \{1,2\}$ we shall write $(x, y)_i$. For a vertex v in a 2-arc-coloured digraph D, $d_i^+(v)$ ($d_i^-(v)$) denotes the number of arcs of colour i leaving (entering) v, $i=1,2$; $\delta_{\mathrm{mon}}(v)=\min\{d_i^+(v), d_i^-(v)\colon\ i=1,2\}$. The following parameter is of importance to us:

$$\delta_{\mathrm{mon}}(D)=\min\{\delta_{\mathrm{mon}}(v)\colon\ v\in V(D)\}.$$

We study a function $f(n)$ ($g(n)$, resp.), the minimum integer such that if $\delta_{\mathrm{mon}}(D) \geqslant f(n)$ ($\delta_{\mathrm{mon}}(D)\geqslant g(n)$, resp.), for a strongly connected digraph (any digraph, resp.) D with n vertices, then D has an alternating cycle. We show that $f(n)=\Theta(\log n)$ and $g(n)=\Theta(\log n)$.

By contrast with that, the corresponding function $f(n)$ for the even cycle problem does not exceed three (see [9]). Using Theorem 3.2 in [8], one can show that the corresponding function $g(n)$ for the even cycle problem equals $\Theta(\log n)$. By Theorem 3.2 in [8], there exists a digraph H_n with n vertices and minimum outdegree at least $\frac{1}{2}\log n$ [1] not containing even cycles. Let H_n' be the digraph obtained from H_n by reorienting all arcs. Take vertex disjoint copies of H_n and H_n' and add all arcs from H_n' to H_n. The obtained digraph and the upper bound in Theorem 3.2 of [8] provide the estimate $\Theta(\log n)$.

2. $\mathcal{NP}$-completeness

Theorem 2.1. *The ADC problem is $\mathcal{NP}$-complete.*

Proof. To show that the ADC problem is $\mathcal{NP}$-hard, we transform the well-known problem 3-SAT ([6, p. 46]) to the ADC problem. Let $U=\{u_1,\ldots,u_k\}$ be a set of variables, let $C=\{c_1,\ldots,c_m\}$ be a set of clauses such that every c_i has three literals, and let v_{il} be the lth literal in the clause c_i.

We construct a 2-arc-coloured digraph D which has an alternating cycle if and only if C is satisfiable. The vertex set of D consists of two disjoint sets X and Y, where $X=\{x_i\colon\ i=1,2,\ldots,m+2\}$ and $Y=\{y_{j0}, y_{j,t+1}, y_{j1}^r, y_{j2}^r,\ldots, y_{jt}^r\colon\ r=1,2;\ j=1,2,\ldots,k\}$ ($t=6m$).

[1] All logarithms in this paper are of basis 2.

If a literal v_{il} is a variable, u_j, then let $\mathrm{par}(i,l)=1$ and $\mathrm{ind}(i,l)=j$; and if v_{il} is the negation of a variable u_j, then let $\mathrm{par}(i,l)=2$ and $\mathrm{ind}(i,l)=j$. Let $y(v_{il})=y_{j,q}^{\mathrm{par}(i,l)}$, where $j=\mathrm{ind}(i,l)$ and $q=6(i-1)+2l$.

The arc set of D is $A(D)=(\bigcup_{j=1}^{k}\bigcup_{r=1}^{2}P_j^r)\cup(\bigcup_{i=1}^{m}\bigcup_{p=1}^{3}Q_{ip})\cup B$, where the sets in $A(D)$ are defined as follows:

$$B=\{(x_{m+1},x_{m+2})_1,(x_{m+2},y_{1,0})_2,(y_{k,t+1},x_1)_2\}\cup\{(y_{p,t+1},y_{p+1,0})_2\colon 1\leqslant p\leqslant k-1\},$$

$$P_j^r=\{(y_{j0},y_{j1}^r)_1,(y_{j1}^r,y_{j2}^r)_2,(y_{j2}^r,y_{j3}^r)_1,(y_{j3}^r,y_{j4}^r)_2,\ldots,(y_{j,t-1}^r,y_{jt}^r)_2,(y_{jt}^r,y_{j,t+1})_1\},$$

$$Q_{ip}=\{(x_i,y(v_{ip}))_1,(y(v_{ip}),x_{i+1})_2\}.$$

Suppose now that C is satisfiable and consider a truth assignment α for U that satisfies all the clauses in C. Then, for every $i=1,2,\ldots,m$, there exists an l_i such that v_{i,l_i} is true under α. It is easy to check that D has the following alternating cycle:

$$\begin{aligned}&(x_1,y(v_{1l_1}),x_2,y(v_{2l_2}),x_3,\ldots,x_m,y(v_{ml_m}),x_{m+1},\\&x_{m+2},y_{1,0},y_{1,1}^{r(1)},y_{1,2}^{r(1)},\ldots,y_{1,t}^{r(1)},y_{2,1}^{r(2)},\ldots,\\&y_{2,t}^{r(2)},y_{2,t+1},y_{3,0},\ldots,y_{k,0},y_{k,1}^{r(k)},\ldots,y_{k,t}^{r(k)},y_{k,t+1},x_1),\end{aligned}\tag{1}$$

where $r(j)=2$ if u_j is true under α and $r(j)=1$, otherwise.

Now suppose that D has an alternating cycle. We prove that C is satisfiable. Because of the above correspondence between a truth assignment for U and an alternating cycle in D of the form (1), to show that C is satisfiable it suffices to prove that every alternating cycle in D is of the form (1).

We first prove that every alternating cycle in D contains the arc $(y_{k,t+1},x_1)_2$. Assume that this is not true, i.e. the digraph $D'=D-(y_{k,t+1},x_1)$ has an alternating cycle. The vertex x_1 cannot belong to an alternating cycle in D' as its indegree in D' is zero. Assuming that x_2 is in an alternating cycle we easily conclude that x_1 must be one of the predecessors of x_2 in such a cycle. Thus, x_2 is not in an alternating cycle. Similar arguments show that no vertex in X is in an alternating cycle. However, the subgraph of D induced by Y has no alternating cycle.

Let F be an alternating cycle in D. We have proved that F has x_1. It is easy to check that F thus contains either Q_{11} or Q_{12} or Q_{13}. In any case F contains x_2. Thus, F has either Q_{21} or Q_{22} or Q_{23}. Repeating this argument we conclude that, for every $i=1,2,\ldots,m$, F contains either Q_{i1} or Q_{i2} or Q_{i3}. Now we see that y_{10} is also in F. Therefore, for every $j=1,2,\ldots,k$, either P_j^1 or P_j^2 is in F. Thus, we have proved that F is of the form (1). □

We do not know what is the complexity of the ADC problem restricted to tournaments.

Problem 2.2. *Does there exist a polynomial algorithm to check whether a* 2*-arc-coloured tournament has an alternating cycle?*

3. Functions $f(n)$ and $g(n)$

As $f(n) \leqslant g(n)$ we shall only prove a lower bound for $f(n)$ in Theorem 3.4 and an upper bound for $g(n)$ in Theorem 3.6.

Let $S(k)$ be the set of all sequences whose elements are from the set $\{1,2\}$ such that neither 1 nor 2 appears more that k times in a sequence. We assume that the sequence without elements (i.e. the empty sequence) is in $S(k)$. We start with three technical lemmas.

Lemma 3.1. $|S(k)| = \binom{2(k+1)}{k+1} - 1$.

Proof. Clearly, $|S(k)| = \sum_{i=0}^{k} \sum_{j=0}^{k} \binom{i+j}{i}$. Using the well-known identity $\sum_{i=0}^{m} \binom{n+i}{n} = \binom{n+m+1}{n+1}$, we obtain

$$|S(k)| = \sum_{i=0}^{k} \binom{i+k+1}{i+1} = \sum_{i=0}^{k} \binom{i+k+1}{k}$$
$$= \left(\sum_{t=0}^{k+1} \binom{k+t}{k} \right) - 1 = \binom{2(k+1)}{k+1} - 1. \qquad \square$$

Lemma 3.2. *For every* $k \geqslant 1$,

$$\binom{2k}{k} < \frac{1}{\sqrt{\pi}} \frac{4^k}{\sqrt{k}}. \tag{2}$$

Proof. Using the well-known inequality (see, e.g. [5, p. 54])

$$\sqrt{2\pi} n^{n+1/2} \mathrm{e}^{-n} \mathrm{e}^{(12n+1)^{-1}} < n! < \sqrt{2\pi} n^{n+1/2} \mathrm{e}^{-n} \mathrm{e}^{(12n)^{-1}},$$

we obtain

$$\binom{2k}{k} = \frac{(2k)!}{k!k!}$$
$$< \frac{\sqrt{2\pi}(2k)^{2k+1/2} \mathrm{e}^{-2k} \mathrm{e}^{(24k)^{-1}}}{(\sqrt{2\pi} k^{k+1/2} \mathrm{e}^{-k} \mathrm{e}^{(12k+1)^{-1}})^2}$$
$$= \frac{2^{2k} k^{2k} \sqrt{2k} \mathrm{e}^{-2k}}{\sqrt{2\pi} k^{2k} k \mathrm{e}^{-2k}} \times \mathrm{e}^{1/24k - 2/(12k+1)}$$
$$= \frac{4^k}{\sqrt{\pi}\sqrt{k}} \times \mathrm{e}^{(1-36k)/((24k)(12k+1))}.$$

As $(1-36k)/((24k)(12k+1)) < 0$ when $k \geqslant 1$, we arrive at (2). $\square$

Let $d(n) = \lfloor \frac{1}{4} \log n + \frac{1}{8} \log \log n - a \rfloor$, where $a = \frac{5 - \log \pi}{8}$ $(\leqslant 0.5)$.

Lemma 3.3. $\binom{2(2d(n)+1)}{2d(n)+1} < n$ *for all* $n \geqslant 24$.

Proof. Let $s = \binom{2(2d(n)+1)}{2d(n)+1}$ and assume that $s \geqslant n$, for the sake of contradiction. Let $\phi(x) = x - \log(2x+1)/8$. By the definition of s and inequality (2), we obtain that

$$\tfrac{1}{4}\log s < a - \tfrac{1}{8} + \phi(d(n)). \tag{3}$$

Since $d(n) \leqslant d(s) \leqslant \frac{1}{4}\log s + \frac{1}{8}\log\log s - a$ and the function $\phi(x)$ is monotonically increasing for $x \geqslant 0$, we obtain the following from (3).

$$\tfrac{1}{4}\log s < a - \tfrac{1}{8} + \phi(\tfrac{1}{4}\log s + \tfrac{1}{8}\log\log s - a). \tag{4}$$

By observing that

$$\frac{\log\log s}{8} - \frac{1}{8} = \frac{\log\log\sqrt{s}}{8},$$

we obtain the following from (4).

$$\tfrac{1}{8}\log(\log\sqrt{s} + \tfrac{1}{4}\log\log s - 2a + 1) < \tfrac{1}{8}\log\log\sqrt{s}. \tag{5}$$

Thus, $\frac{1}{4}\log\log s - 2a + 1 < 0$, a contradiction when $d(n) \geqslant 1$ (i.e. $n \geqslant 24$). Therefore, $s < n$, when $n \geqslant 24$. □

Theorem 3.4. *For every integer* $n \geqslant 24$, *there exists a* 2*-arc-coloured strongly connected digraph* G_n *with* n *vertices and* $\delta_{\mathrm{mon}}(G_n) \geqslant d(n)$ *not containing an alternating cycle.*

Proof. Let the vertex set of a digraph D_n be $S(2d(n))$ and let two vertices of D_n be connected if and only if one of them is a prefix of the other one. Moreover, if $x = (x_1, x_2, \ldots, x_p)$ and $y = (y_1, y_2, \ldots, y_q)$ are vertices of D_n, and x is a prefix of y (namely, $x_i = y_i$ for every $i = 1, 2, \ldots, p$), then the arc $a(x, y)$ between x and y has colour y_{p+1} and $a(x, y)$ is oriented from x to y if and only if $|\{j\colon j \geqslant p+1$ and $y_j = y_{p+1}\}| \leqslant d(n)$.

D_n is strongly connected since the arc between a pair of vertices $x = (x_1, x_2, \ldots, x_p)$ and $y = (x_1, x_2, \ldots, x_p, x_{p+1})$ is oriented from x to y, and the arc between the empty sequence $\emptyset$ and a vertex v of D_n which is a sequence with $4d(n)$ elements is oriented from v to $\emptyset$.

Let $x = (x_1, x_2, \ldots, x_p)$ be a vertex of D_n. It is easy to see that $d_1^+(x) \geqslant d(n)$. Indeed, if x contains at most $d(n)$ elements equal one, then $(x, x^r)_1$ is in D_n, where $r = 1, 2, \ldots, d(n)$ and x is a prefix of x^r followed by r ones. If x contains $t > d(n)$ elements equal one, then $(x, y)_1$ is in D_n, where y is obtained from x by either adding at most $2d(n) - t$ ones or deleting more than $d(n)$ rightmost ones, together with 2's between them, from x.

Analogously, one can show that $d_1^-(x) \geqslant d(n)$. By symmetry, $\delta_{\mathrm{mon}}(D_n) \geqslant d(n)$.

Now we prove that D_n contains no alternating cycle. Assume that D_n contains an alternating cycle C. The empty sequence $\emptyset$ is not in C as $\emptyset$ is adjacent with the vertices

of the form $(i,\ldots)$ by arcs of colour $i\in\{1,2\}$, but the vertices of the form $(1,\ldots)$ are not adjacent with the vertices of the form $(2,\ldots)$. Analogously, one can prove that the vertices (1) and (2) are not in C. In general, after proving that C has no vertex with p elements, we can show that C has no vertex with $p+1$ elements.

By Lemma 3.1, D_n has $b(n)=\binom{2(2d(n)+1)}{2d(n)+1}-1$ vertices. By Lemma 3.3, $b(n)<n$. Now we append $n-b(n)$ vertices along with arcs to D_n to obtain a digraph G_n with $\delta_{\mathrm{mon}}(G_n)\geqslant d(n)$: Take a vertex $x\in D_n$ with $4d(n)$ elements. We add $n-b(n)$ copies of x to D_n such that every copy has the same out- and in-neighbours of each colour as x. The vertex x and its copies form an independent set of vertices.

The construction of G_n implies that $\delta_{\mathrm{mon}}(G_n)\geqslant d(n)$, G_n is strongly connected and G_n has no alternating cycle, by the same reason as D_n. □

In order to prove an upper bound for $g(n)$ we need a result on hypergraph colouring. First we give some definitions. A *hypergraph* is a pair $H=(V,E)$, where V is a finite set whose elements are called vertices and E is a family of subsets of V called edges. A hypergraph is *k-uniform* if each of its edges has size k. We say that H is 2-*colourable* if there is a 2-colouring of V such that no edge is monochromatic. The following result was proved by Beck [3].

Proposition 3.5. *There exists an absolute constant c such that any k-uniform hypergraph with at most* $ck^{1/3}2^k$ *edges is* 2*-colourable.*

Now we are ready to prove an upper bound for $g(n)$.

Theorem 3.6. *Let* $D=(V,A)$ *be a* 2*-arc-coloured digraph on* $|V|=n$ *vertices. If* $d_i^+(v)\geqslant \log n-\frac{1}{3}\log\log n+\mathrm{O}(1)$ *for every* $i=1,2$ *and* $v\in V$*, then* D *contains an alternating cycle.*

Proof. Without loss of generality assume that $d_i^+(v)=k$ for all $v\in V$ (k will be defined later), otherwise simply remove extra arcs. For each vertex $v\in V$ and each colour $i=1,2$, let

$$B_v^i=\{u\in V\colon (v,u) \text{ is an arc of colour } i\}.$$

The size of each of the sets B_v^i is equal to k, thus they form a k-uniform hypergraph H with n vertices and $2n$ edges. Let $k=\log n-\frac{1}{3}\log\log n+b$, where b is a constant. Then it is easy to see that by choosing b large enough we get that $ck^{1/3}2^k>2n$. By Proposition 3.5, our hypergraph H is 2-colourable. By taking a 2-colouring of H we get a partition $V=X\cup Y$ such that B_v^i intersects both X and Y for every $i=1,2$ and $v\in V$. Let D_1 be a subdigraph of D which contains only arcs of colour 1 from X to Y and arcs of colour 2 from Y to X. The outdegree of every vertex in D_1 is positive, since all sets B_v^i intersect both X and Y. Therefore D_1 contains a cycle, which is alternating by the construction of D_1. □

Remark. As pointed out to us by Alon a similar approach was used in [1].

It would be interesting to find better bounds for the functions $f(n)$ and $g(n)$ as well as to investigate these functions for tournaments.

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