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Adler, I and Krause, PK (2019) A lower bound on the tree-width of graphs with irrelevant vertices. Journal of Combinatorial Theory, Series B, 137. pp. 126-136. ISSN: 1096-0902

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jctb.2018.12.008

A lower bound on the tree-width of graphs with irrelevant vertices

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Abstract

For their famous algorithm for the disjoint paths problem, Robertson and Seymour proved that there is a function f such that if the tree-width of a graph G with k pairs of terminals is at least $f(k)$, then G contains a solution-irrelevant vertex (Graph Minors. XXII., JCTB 2012). We give a single-exponential lower bound on f. This bound even holds for planar graphs.

Keywords: disjoint paths problem, irrelevant vertex, vital linkage, unique linkage, planar graph, tree-width

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1. Introduction

The Disjoint Paths Problem is one of the famous classical problems in the area of graph algorithms. Given a graph G, and k pairs of terminals, $(s_1, t_1), \ldots, (s_k, t_k)$, it asks whether G contains k vertex-disjoint paths $P_1, \ldots, P_k$ such that P_i connects s_i to t_i, (for $i = 1, \ldots, k$). Karp proved that the problem is NP-hard in general [4] and Lynch proved that it remains NP-hard on planar graphs [6]. Robertson and Seymour showed that it can be solved in time $g(k) \cdot |V(G)|^3$ for some computable function g, i. e. the problem is fixed-parameter tractable (and, in particular, solvable in polynomial time for fixed k). For a recursive step in their algorithm ((10.5) in [11]), they prove [13] that there is a function $f\colon \mathbb{N} \to \mathbb{N}$ such that if a graph G with k pairs of terminals has tree-width at least $f(k)$, then G contains a vertex that is *irrelevant* to the solution, i. e. G contains a non-terminal vertex v such that G has a solution if and only if the graph $G - v$ (with the same terminals) has a solution.

In this paper we give a lower bound on f, showing that $f(k) \geq 2^k$, even for planar graphs. For this we construct a family of planar input graphs $(G_k)_{k\geq 2}$, each with k pairs of terminals, such that the tree-width of G_k is $2^k - 1$, and every member of the family has a unique solution to the Disjoint Paths Problem,

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where the paths of the solution use all vertices of the graph. Hence no vertex of G_k is irrelevant. As a corollary, we obtain a lower bound of $2^k - 1$ on the tree-width of graphs having *vital linkages* (also called *unique linkages*) [12] with k components.[2] Our result contrasts the polynomial upper bound in a related topological setting [7], where two systems of curves are untangled on a sphere with holes.

For planar graphs, an upper bound of $f(k) \leq 72\sqrt{2}k^{\frac{3}{2}} \cdot 2^k$ was given in [1]. An elementary proof for a bound of $f(k) \leq (72k \cdot 2^k - 72 \cdot 2^k + 18)\lceil\sqrt{2k+1}\rceil$ was provided later [5] as well as a slightly improved bound of $f(k) \leq 26k \cdot 2^{\frac{3}{2}} \cdot 2^k$ requiring a slightly more involved proof [2]. Our lower bound shows that this is asymptotically optimal. Recently, an explicit upper bound on f on graphs of bounded genus [3] was found, then refined into one that is single exponential in k and the genus [8]. The exact order of growth of f on general graphs is still unknown.

2. Preliminaries

Let $\mathbb{N}$ denote the set of all non-negative integers. For $k \in \mathbb{N}$, we let $[k] := \{1, \dots, k\}$. For a set S we let 2^S denote the power set of S. A *graph* $G = (V, E)$ is a pair of a set of *vertices* V and a set of *edges* $E \subseteq \{e \mid e \in 2^V, |e| = 2\}$, i. e. graphs are undirected and simple. For an edge $e = \{x, y\}$, the vertices x and y are called *endpoints* of the edge e, and the edge is said to be between its endpoints. For a graph $G = (V, E)$ let $V(G) := V$ and $E(G) := E$. Let H and G be graphs. The graph H is a *subgraph* of G (denoted by $H \subseteq G$), if $V(H) \subseteq V(G)$ and $E(H) \subseteq E(G)$. For a set $X \subseteq V(G)$, the subgraph of G *induced by* X is the graph $G[X] := (X, \{e \in E(G) \mid e \subseteq X\})$ and we let $G - v := G[V(G) \setminus \{v\}]$.

A *path* P in a graph $G = (V, E)$ is a sequence $n_0, \dots, n_k \in V$ of pairwise distinct vertices of G, such that for every $i \in \{0, \dots, k-1\}$ there is an edge $\{n_i, n_{i+1}\} \in E$. The vertices n_0 and n_k are called *endpoints* of P. The path P is called a path *from* n_0 *to* n_k (i. e. paths are *simple*). We sometimes identify the path P in G with the subgraph $(\{n_0, \dots, n_k\}, \{\{n_0, n_1\}, \dots, \{n_{k-1}, n_k\}\})$ of G. A graph G is called *connected*, if it has at least one vertex and for any two vertices $x, y \in V(G)$, there is a path from x to y in G. The inclusion-maximal connected subgraphs of a graph are called *connected components* of the graph. For $A, B \subseteq V(G)$, a set $S \subseteq V(G)$ separates A from B, if there is no path from a vertex in A to a vertex in B in the subgraph of G induced by $V(G) \setminus S$. A *tree* is a non-empty graph T, such that for any two vertices $x, y \in V(T)$ there is exactly one path from x to y in T.

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[2] This result appeared in the last section of a conference paper [1]. While the main focus of the paper [1] was a single exponential upper bound on f on planar graphs, it only sketches the lower bound. Here we provide the full proof of the lower bound. A longer proof of the lower bound can also be found in the thesis [5].

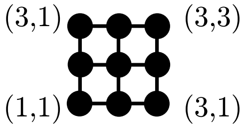

Figure 1: (3×3)-grid

Let $m, n \in \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\}$. The $(m \times n)$-*grid* is a graph $H = (V, E)$ with $V := [m] \times [n]$ and $E := \{\{(y, x), (w, z)\} \mid (y, x) \in V, (w, z) \in V, |x - z| + |y - w| = 1\}$. In case of a square grid where $m = n$, we say that n is the *size* of the grid. An edge $\{(y, x), (w, z)\}$ in the grid is called *horizontal*, if $y = w$, and *vertical*, if $x = z$. See Figure 1 for the (3×3)-grid.

A *drawing* of a graph G is a representation of G in the Euclidean plane $\mathbb{R}^2$, where vertices are represented by distinct points of $\mathbb{R}^2$ and edges by simple curves joining the points that correspond to their endpoints, such that the interior of every curve representing an edge does not contain points representing vertices. A *planar drawing* (or *embedding*) is a drawing, where the interiors of any two curves representing distinct edges of G are disjoint. A graph G is *planar*, if G has a planar drawing (See [10] for more details on planar graphs). A *plane graph* is a planar graph G together with a fixed embedding of G in $\mathbb{R}^2$. We will identify a plane graph with its image in $\mathbb{R}^2$. Once we have fixed the embedding, we will also identify a planar graph with its image in $\mathbb{R}^2$.

Definition 1 (Disjoint Paths Problem (DPP))**.** *Given a graph G and k pairs of* terminals $(s_1, t_1) \in V(G)^2, \ldots, (s_k, t_k) \in V(G)^2$*, the* DISJOINT PATHS PROBLEM *is the problem of deciding whether G contains k vertex-disjoint paths $P_1, \ldots, P_k$ such that P_i connects s_i to t_i (for $i \in [k]$). If such paths $P_1, \ldots, P_k$ exist, we refer to them as a* solution. *We denote an* instance *of* DPP *by $G, (s_1, t_1), (s_2, t_2), \ldots, (s_k, t_k)$.*

Let $G, (s_1, t_1), \ldots, (s_k, t_k)$ be an instance of DPP. A non-terminal vertex $v \in V(G)$ is *irrelevant*, if $G, (s_1, t_1), \ldots, (s_k, t_k)$ has a solution if and only if $G - v, (s_1, t_1), \ldots, (s_k, t_k)$ has a solution.

A *tree-decomposition* of a graph G is a pair (T, χ), consisting of a tree T and a mapping $\chi\colon V(T) \to 2^{V(G)}$, such that for each $v \in V(G)$ there exists $t \in V(T)$ with $v \in \chi(t)$, for each edge $e \in E(G)$ there exists a vertex $t \in V(T)$ with $e \subseteq \chi(t)$, and for each $v \in V(G)$ the set $\{t \in V(T) \mid v \in \chi(t)\}$ is connected in T. The *width* of a tree-decomposition (T, χ) is

$$\mathrm{w}(T, \chi) := \max\left\{ \big|\chi(t)\big| - 1 \;\middle|\; t \in V(T) \right\}.$$

If T is a path, (T, χ) is also called a *path-decomposition*. The *tree-width of* G is

$$\mathrm{tw}(G) := \min\left\{ \mathrm{w}(T, \chi) \;\middle|\; (T, \chi) \text{ is a tree-decomposition of } G \right\}.$$

The *path-width of* G is

$$\mathrm{pw}(G) := \min\left\{ \mathrm{w}(T, \chi) \;\middle|\; (T, \chi) \text{ is a path-decomposition of } G \right\}.$$

Obviously, every graph G satisfies $\mathrm{pw}(G) \geq \mathrm{tw}(G)$. Every tree has tree-width at most 1 and every path has path-width at most 1. It is well known that the $(n \times n)$-grid has both tree-width and path-width n. Moreover, if $H \subseteq G$, then $\mathrm{tw}(H) \leq \mathrm{tw}(G)$ and $\mathrm{pw}(H) \leq \mathrm{pw}(G)$.

Theorem 1 (Robertson and Seymour [13])**.** *There is a function* $f\colon \mathbb{N} \to \mathbb{N}$ *such that if* $\mathrm{tw}(G) \geq f(k)$*, then* $G, (s_1, t_1), \ldots, (s_k, t_k)$ *has an irrelevant vertex (for any choice of terminals* $(s_1, t_1), \ldots, (s_k, t_k)$ *in* G*).*

A *linkage* in a graph G is a subgraph $L \subseteq G$, such that each connected component of L is a path. The *endpoints* of a linkage L are the endpoints of these paths, and the *pattern* of L is the matching on the endpoints induced by the paths, i. e. the pattern is the set

$$\big\{\{s,t\} \;\big|\; L \text{ has a connected component that is a path from } s \text{ to } t\big\}\,.$$

A linkage L in a graph G is a *vital linkage* in G, if $V(L) = V(G)$ and there is no other linkage $L' \neq L$ in G with the same pattern as L.

Theorem 2 (Robertson and Seymour [13])**.** *There are functions* $g, h\colon \mathbb{N} \to \mathbb{N}$ *such that if a graph* G *has a vital linkage with* k *components then* $\mathrm{tw}(G) \leq g(k)$ *and* $\mathrm{pw}(G) \leq h(k)$*.*

3. The lower bound

Our main result is the following.

Theorem 3. *Let* $f, g, h\colon \mathbb{N} \to \mathbb{N}$ *be as in Theorems 1 and 2. Then* $f(k) \geq 2^k$*,* $g(k) \geq 2^k - 1$*, and* $h(k) \geq 2^k - 1$*. Moreover, this holds even if we consider planar graphs only.*

In our proof we construct a family of graphs $G_k, k \geq 1$, of tree-width and path-width $\geq 2^k - 1$, and with a vital linkage with k components. Figure 2 shows the graph G_4.

Definition 2 (The graph G_k)**.** *Let* $k, p \in \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\}$*. We inductively define an instance* $G_k, (s_1, t_1), \ldots, (s_k, t_k)$ *of* DPP *as follows.*

The Graph $G_{1,p}$ *is the path* $x_1, x_2, \ldots, x_p$ *with* p *vertices,* $s_1(G_{1,p}) := x_1$*,* $t_1(G_{1,p}) := x_p$*. The* bottom row *and the* top row *of* $G_{1,p}$ *are the graph* $G_{1,p}$ *itself.*

We define the graph $G_{k+1,p}$ *by adding a path* $y_1, y_2, \ldots, y_p$ *with* p *vertices to* $G_{k,2p}$ *as follows. Let* $x_1, x_2, \ldots, x_{2p}$ *be the bottom row of* $G_{k,2p}$ *and let* $z_1, z_2, \ldots, z_{2p}$ *be the top row of* $G_{k,2p}$*. Let*

$$\begin{aligned} V(G_{k+1,p}) &:= V(G_{k,2p}) \cup \{y_1, y_2, \ldots, y_p\}, \\ E(G_{k+1,p}) &:= E(G_{k,2p}) \cup \big\{\{y_i, y_{i+1}\} \;\big|\; 1 \leq i < p\big\} \cup \\ &\qquad\qquad \big\{\{y_i, x_i\}, \{y_i, x_{2p-i+1}\} \;\big|\; 1 \leq i \leq p\big\}\,. \end{aligned}$$

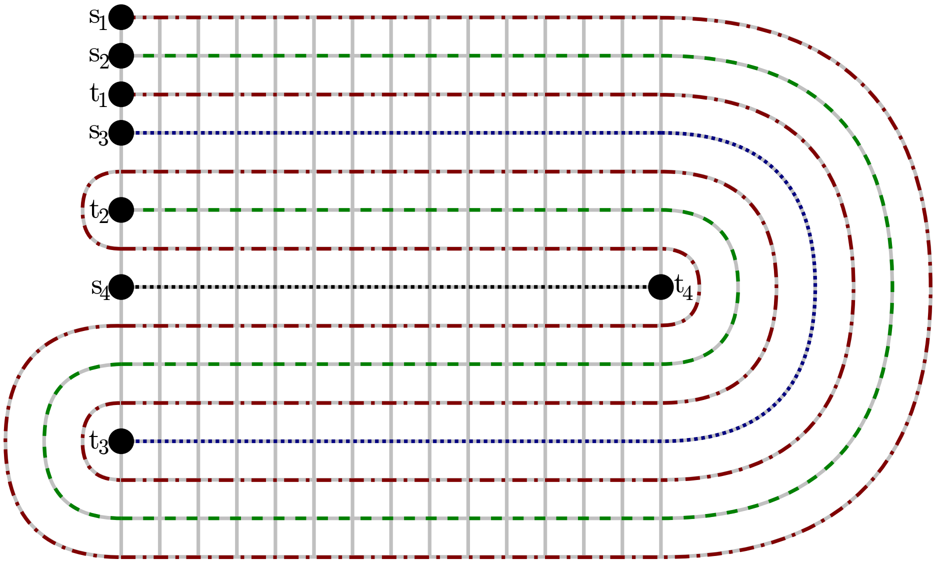

Figure 2: $G_4, (s_1, t_1), (s_2, t_2), (s_3, t_3), (s_4, t_4)$ with solution.

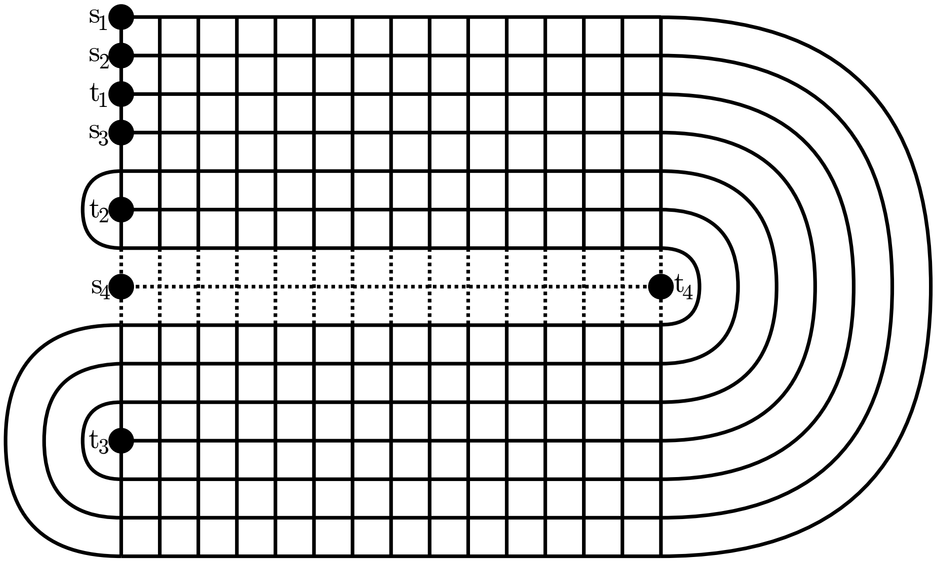

Figure 3: The construction of $G_4 = G_{4,15}$ from $G_{3,30}$.

We set $s_{k+1}(G_{k+1,p}) := y_1$*,* $t_{k+1}(G_{k+1,p}) := y_p$ *and* $s_i(G_{k+1,p}) := s_i(G_{k,p})$*,* $t_i(G_{k+1,p}) := t_i(G_{k,p})$ *for* $1 \leq i \leq k$*. The* top row *of* $G_{k+1,p}$ *is* $z_1, \ldots, z_p$ *and the* bottom row *of* $G_{k+1,p}$ *is* $z_{2p}, \ldots, z_{p+1}$*.*

Let $G_k := G_{k,2^k-1}$*. We define the* DPP *instance* $G_k, (s_1, t_1), \ldots, (s_k, t_k)$ *as* $G_k, (s_1(G_k), t_1(G_k)), \ldots, (s_k(G_k), t_k(G_k))$*.*

Figure 3 shows the construction of $G_4 = G_{4,15}$ from $G_{3,30}$.

Remark 1. *By construction, the graph* G_k *contains a* $((2^k - 1) \times (2^k - 1))$*-grid as a subgraph. The tree-width and path-width of* G_k *are thus at least* $2^k - 1$*.*

Remark 2. *By construction, the graph* G_k *contains a linkage (because in each step we add a path linking a new terminal pair).*

We will now show that this linkage is vital by considering a topological version.

Definition 3 (Topological DPP)**.** *Given a subset* X *of the plane and* k *pairs of terminals* $(s_1, t_1) \in X^2, \ldots, (s_k, t_k) \in X^2$ *the* TOPOLOGICAL DISJOINT PATHS PROBLEM *is the problem of deciding whether there are* k *pairwise disjoint curves in* X*, such that each curve* P_i *is homeomorphic to* $[0, 1]$ *and its ends are* s_i *and* t_i*. If such curves* $P_1, \ldots, P_k$ *exist, we refer to them as a* solution*. We denote an* instance *of the topological Disjoint Paths Problem by* $X, (s_1, t_1), (s_2, t_2), \ldots, (s_k, t_k)$*.*

A *disc-with-edges* is a subset X of the plane containing a closed disc D such that the connected components of $X \setminus D$, called *edges*, are homeomorphic to open intervals $(0, 1)$. We now define a family $(X_k)_{k \in \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\}}$ of discs-with-edges together with terminals. These will be used as instances of the topological DPP. Figure 4 illustrates the construction.

Definition 4 (X_k)**.** *Let* D *be a closed disc in the plane and* $k \in \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\}$*. We start by inductively defining points* s_k*,* t_k *on the boundary* ∂D *of* D*. (These will be used as terminals and to confine the way the edges are added to* D*.) Let* s_1, t_1 *be two distinct points on* ∂D*, and let* $C_1 := \partial D \setminus \{s_1, t_1\}$*. Hence* C_1 *is the union of two curves, each homeomorphic to the open interval* $(0, 1)$*. Call one of the curves* S_1 *and the other* T_1*. Assume that* s_k*,* t_k*,* C_k*,* S_k*, and* T_k *are already defined, and assume that* T_k *is a curve adjacent to* t_k *and* s_1*. Place a new point* s_{k+1} *on* S_k *and a new point* t_{k+1} *on* T_k*, let* $C_{k+1} := C_k \setminus \{s_{k+1}, t_{k+1}\}$*, let* T_{k+1} *be the component of* C_{k+1} *adjacent to* t_{k+1} *and* s_1*, and let* S_{k+1} *be the component of* C_{k+1} *adjacent to* t_{k+1} *and* t_k*.*

Now let $X_1 := D$ *and* $E_1 := \varnothing$*. Assume the space* X_k *and the set* E_k *are already defined. We define* X_{k+1} *by adding a planar matching of* $2^k - 1$ *edges to* X_k*. We call the set of these edges* E_{k+1}*. The edges are pairwise disjoint and disjoint from* X_k*. They are added such that each end is adjacent to a point on* ∂D *and no two edges are adjacent to the same point on* ∂D*. Each edge has one end adjacent to a point on the component of* C_{k+2} *between* t_k *and* s_{k+1}*, and the other end adjacent to a point on the component of* C_{k+2} *between* t_k *and* s_{k+2}*. Finally, let* $X_{k+1} := X_k \cup E_{k+1}$*.*

In this way we obtain a family X_k*,* $(s_1, t_1), (s_2, t_2), \ldots, (s_k, t_k)$ *of instances to the topological DPP.*

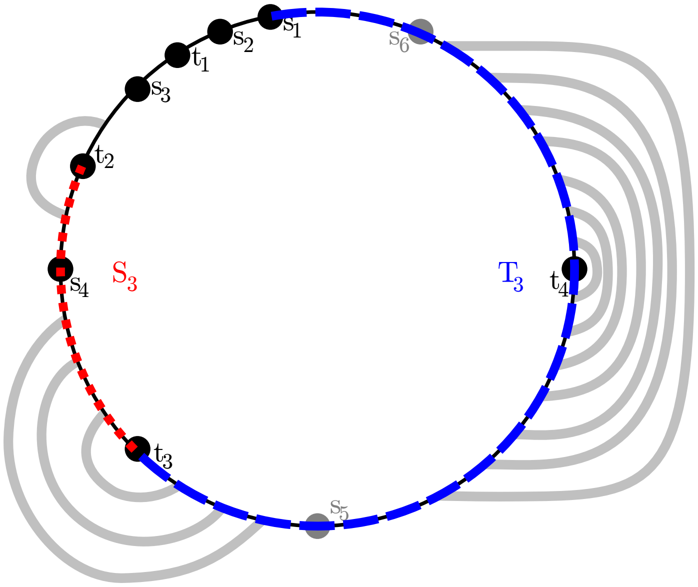

Figure 4: The construction of $X_4, (s_1, t_1), \ldots, (s_4, t_4)$, for the topological DPP. Note that s_5 and s_6 are only used to place E_4 correctly.

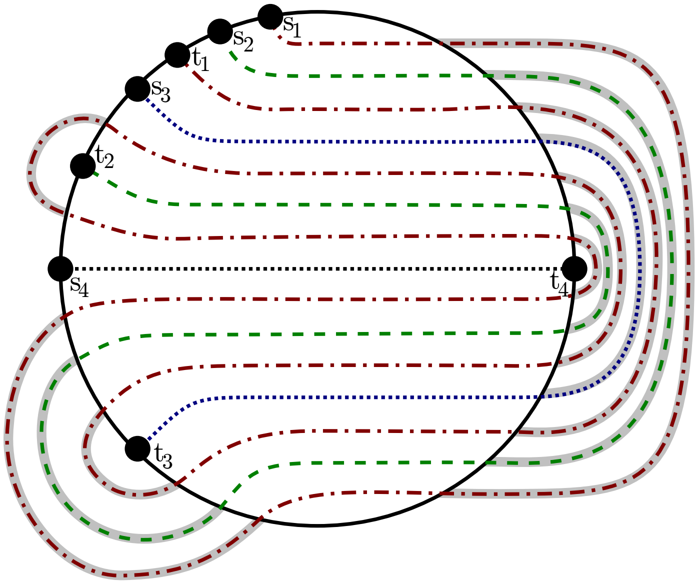

Figure 5: A solution of the topological DPP from Figure 4.

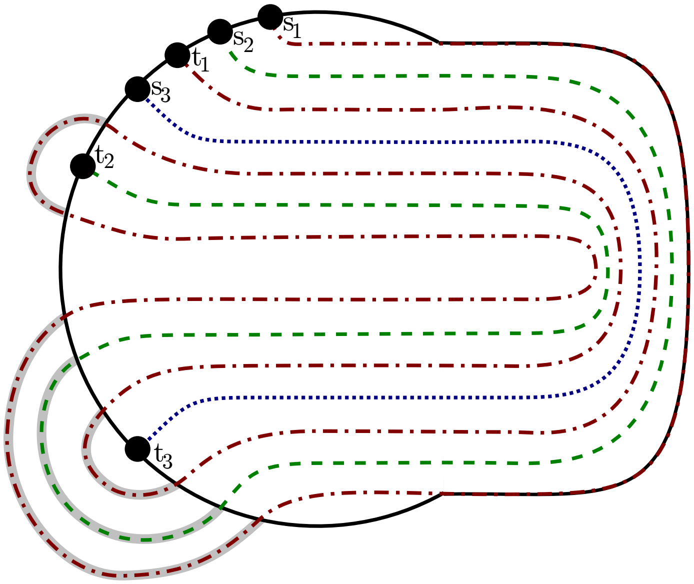

Figure 6: The solution on $X'_3, (s_1, t_1), \ldots, (s_3, t_3)$ induced by the solution on $X_4, (s_1, t_1), \ldots, (s_4, t_4)$.

Remark 3. *The embedding of* G_k *(as shown in Figure 2 for* G_4*) corresponds to the space* X_k*. Thus by Remark 2 the topological* DPP *on* X_k*,* $(s_1, t_1), (s_2, t_2), \ldots, (s_k, t_k)$ *has a solution.*

For an instance of the topological DPP on X_4, this solution can be seen in Figure 5.

Lemma 1. *For* $k \in \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\}$ *the topological* DPP *instance* $X_k, (s_1, t_1), \ldots, (s_k, t_k)$ *has a unique solution* $P_1, \ldots, P_k$ *(up to homeomorphism). The solution uses all edges* $\bigcup_{1 \le i \le k} E_i$*.*

Proof. For $k = 1$ this is true because $E_1 = \varnothing$. Inductively assume that the lemma holds for k. Let $P_1, \ldots, P_{k+1}$ be any solution to $X_{k+1}, (s_1, t_1), \ldots, (s_{k+1}, t_{k+1})$. This solution induces a solution of the topological DPP $X_k, (s_1, t_1), \ldots, (s_k, t_k)$ as follows. Every edge $e \in E_{k+1}$ together with the segment of ∂D that connects the ends of e and contains t_{k+1} bounds a disc D_e. The space $X'_k := X_{k+1} \cup \bigcup_{e \in E_{k+1}} D_e$ is homeomorphic to X_k and the paths $P_1, \ldots, P_k$ form a solution of X'_k, (s_1, t_1), $\ldots$, (s_k, t_k). Figure 6 illustrates this for $k = 3$. By induction, this solution is unique up to homeomorphism and the paths $P_1, \ldots, P_k$ use all edges in $\bigcup_{1 \le i \le k} E_i$. Let $Q_1, \ldots, Q_k$ be the solution obtained by embedding the graph G_k (cf. Remark 3). By uniqueness, for each $i \in [k]$, the edges of $\bigcup_{1 \le i \le k} E_i$ used by P_i are the same as for Q_i, and the order of their appearance on P_i when walking from s_i to t_i is also the same as on Q_i. Hence the solution $P_1, \dots, P_k$ on X'_k restricted to the closed disc D of X'_k is a planar matching of curves (the curves in $\bigcup_{1 \leq i \leq k} P_i \setminus \bigcup_{1 \leq i \leq k} E_i$) between pairs of points on ∂D (and the same pairs of points are obtained by restricting $Q_1, \dots, Q_k$ to D). These pairs of points also have to be matched in X_{k+1}.

We now claim that in the solution $P_1, \dots, P_{k+1}$ on X_{k+1}, each curve in $\bigcup_{1 \leq i \leq k} P_i \setminus \bigcup_{1 \leq i \leq k} E_i$ uses an edge of E_{k+1}. If not, then there is a curve

$$p \in \bigcup_{1 \leq i \leq k} P_i \setminus \bigcup_{1 \leq i \leq k} E_i$$

that avoids all edges in E_{k+1}. Since the edges of $\bigcup_{1 \leq i \leq k} E_i$ are already used, p is routed within D. By construction of X_{k+1} and the fact that all edges of $\bigcup_{1 \leq i \leq k} E_i$ are already used, this means that p separates s_{k+1} from both t_{k+1} and the endpoints of the edges in E_{k+1}, a contradiction to P_{k+1} being a path in the solution. Hence p uses an edge of E_{k+1}.

Since the sets $\bigcup_{1 \leq i \leq k} P_i \setminus \bigcup_{1 \leq i \leq k} E_i$ and E_{k+1} have equal size, it follows that each curve of the matching

$$\bigcup_{1 \leq i \leq k} P_i \setminus \bigcup_{1 \leq i \leq k} E_i$$

uses precisely one edge of E_{k+1}. Since the endpoints of the matching are fixed, they induce an order on the matching curves which determines precisely which edge of E_{k+1} is used by which curve.

Altogether, this shows that the solution to $X_{k+1}, (s_1, t_1), \dots, (s_{k+1}, t_{k+1})$ is unique up to homeomorphism and uses all edges $\bigcup_{1 \leq i \leq k} E_i$.

q. e. d.

Remark 4. *In a topological* DPP *instance, the number of edges around the terminals is crucial. Even just relaxing the conditions on X_k by having 2 edges instead of 1 edge around terminal t_2 allows a quite different solution to the topological* DPP*. This solution uses no edge around t_k, one edge around each of $t_3, t_3, \dots, t_{k-1}$, and the two edges around t_2 (Figure 7 shows this for $k = 4$).*

Theorem 4. *Let $k \in \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\}$. The graph G_k contains a vital linkage.*

Proof. Let $P_1, \dots, P_k$ be the linkage from Remark 2. We argue that it is vital. For $k = 1$ and $k = 2$, one can easily verify that G_k has a unique embedding. For $k \geq 2$, contracting an edge at s_1 suffices to make G_k 3-connected. Since 3-connected planar graphs have unique embeddings [14], the graph G_k also has a unique embedding, and it suffices to consider our previous embedding of G_k (cf. Figure 2). Let D be the minimal disc containing the grid in G_k. The disc D together with $E(G_k)$ is the space X_k. The paths $P_1, \dots, P_k$ thus give a solution to the topological DPP instance $X_k, (s_1, t_1), \dots, (s_k, t_k)$, which by Lemma 1 is unique and uses all edges in E_k. Thus any linkage $P'_1, \dots, P'_k$ with the same pattern as $P_1, \dots, P_k$ can differ from $P_1, \dots, P_k$ only inside the grid. Thus for

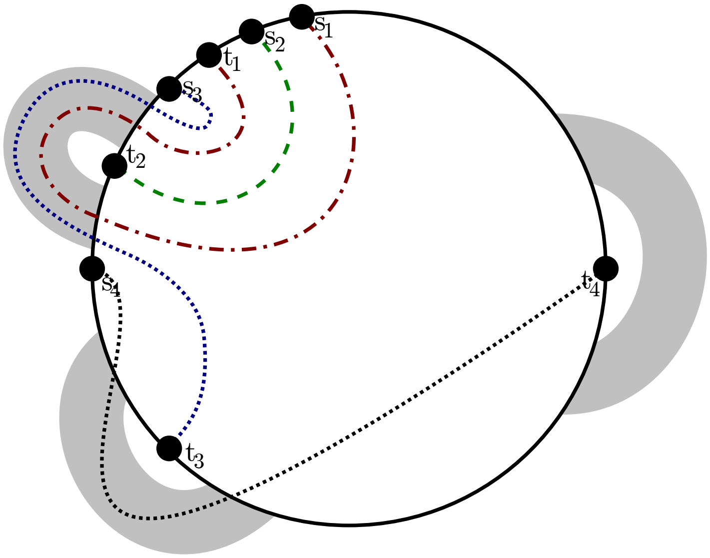

Figure 7: The number of edges around the terminals is crucial (cf. Remark 4).

each $y \in [2^k - 1]$ there is a subpath Q'_y of some path of the solution $P'_1, \dots, P'_k$, such that the endpoints of Q'_y are $(y', 1)$ and $(y, 2^k - 1)$ for some $y' \in [2^k - 1]$. Hence the family $(Q'_y)_{y \in [2^k - 1]}$ is a linkage between the first column and the last column of the grid.

Suppose that $P'_1, \dots, P'_k$ indeed differs from $P_1, \dots, P_k$. Then at least one path Q'_y contains a vertical edge e in the grid. Hence the column of e contains at most $2^k - 3$ vertices that are not used by Q'_y and, by Menger's Theorem [9], the remaining $2^k - 2$ paths of the family cannot be routed, a contradiction.
q. e. d.

Proof of Theorem 3 Theorem 3 immediately follows from Theorem 4 and Remark 1. q. e. d.

Acknowledgements

This research was partially supported by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, project Graphstrukturtheorie und algorithmische Anwendungen, AD 411/1-1 and project Graphstrukturtheorie im Übersetzerbau, KR 4970/1-1. We thank Frédéric Mazoit for valuable discussions, especially for inspiring Remark 4. We also thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting very elegant shortenings of our construction and proof.

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