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ON THE DISTANCE POLYNOMIAL OF A GRAPH

PAVEL KŘIVKA, NENAD TRINAJSTIĆ

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The distance matrix, which is a structure less common than the adjacency matrix [1], has been increasingly used in recent years in several different areas such as anthropology [2], [3], graph theory [4]–[6], theory of communication [7], chemistry [8]–[10], history [11], etc.

The distance matrix (which is sometimes also called the metrics matrix) is, in a sense, a more complicated and also a richer structure than the adjacency matrix. While each $(0, 1)$ symmetric matrix in which each diagonal entry is zero corresponds to a unique graph or digraph, this is not the case with the distance matrix (which is a symmetric matrix with diagonal entries zero, but not $(0, 1)$). We will consider finite connected graphs without loops. Graphs will be symbolized by G . The distance matrix \mathbf{D} has the entries $d_{ii} = 0$ and d_{ij} = the length of the shortest path between the vertices i and j . The distance polynomial of G is defined as $\det |x\mathbf{I} - \mathbf{D}|$ where \mathbf{I} is the unit matrix.

Proposition 1. *Every root of the distance polynomial is real.*

Proof. The eigenvalues of a symmetric matrix are always real [12].

Proposition 2. *The coefficient a_{n-1} at x^{n-1} is always zero.*

Proof. Follows from the development of the determinant.

Proposition 3. *The distance polynomial of a complete graph with n vertices equals $(x + 1)^{n-1}(x - n + 1)$.*

Proof. For complete graphs the distance matrix coincides with the adjacent matrix.

Proposition 4. *The sum of the roots of the distance polynomial is zero.*

Proof. The sum of roots is equal to the trace of \mathbf{D} which is zero since G has no loops.

Proposition 5. *The sum of the squares of the roots of the distance polynomial is equal to $\sum d_{ij}^2$ (the sum is through all pairs i, j and each pairs is taken twice – (i, j) and (j, i)).*

Proof. The sum of the squares of the roots is equal to the trace of \mathbf{D}^2 .

Proposition 6. *If there are two vertices with the same neighbourhood in G , then one root of the distance polynomial is either -1 (if the vertices are adjacent) or -2 (if the two vertices are not adjacent).*

Proof. If the two vertices are adjacent, the distance between them is 1. If the two vertices are not adjacent, the distance between them is 2, otherwise the corresponding rows in \mathbf{D} are the same. After subtracting these two rows, we obtain before the determinant either $(x + 1)$ or $(x + 2)$.

Proposition 7. *If G is a path on $n + 1$ vertices ($n \geq 3$), then $a_0 = (-1)^n n 2^{n-1}$, where a_0 is a constant coefficient, i.e. $a_0 = \det |-\mathbf{D}|$.*

Proof. By directly calculating the determinant

$$(1) \quad \det |\mathbf{D}| = \begin{vmatrix} 0 & 1 & 2 & 3 & \dots & n \\ 1 & 0 & 1 & 2 & \dots & n-1 \\ 2 & 1 & 0 & 1 & \dots & n-2 \\ \cdot & \cdot & \cdot & \cdot & \dots & \cdot \\ \cdot & & & & & \cdot \\ \cdot & & & & & \cdot \\ n & n-1 & \dots & \dots & \dots & 0 \end{vmatrix}$$

First we subtract the n -th column from the $(n + 1)$ -st and afterwards we add the last row to all the precedings ones, so that in the last column we obtain all zeros except the entry $a_{n+1, n+1} = -1$.

$$(2) \quad \begin{vmatrix} n & n & n & \dots & n & 0 \\ n+1 & n-1 & n-1 & \dots & n-1 & 0 \\ n+2 & n & n-2 & \dots & n-2 & 0 \\ \cdot & \cdot & & & & \cdot \\ \cdot & & & & & \cdot \\ \cdot & & & & & \cdot \\ 2n-1 & \cdot & \cdot & & \cdot & 0 \\ n & \cdot & & & \cdot & -1 \end{vmatrix} =$$

(5)

$$\left| \begin{array}{cccc|cccc}
 x+2 & -(x+2) & 0 & \dots & 0 & & & \\
 0 & x+2 & -(x+2) & \dots & 0 & & & \\
 \cdot & & \cdot & & \cdot & & & \\
 \cdot & & \cdot & & \cdot & & & \\
 \cdot & & \cdot & & \cdot & & & \\
 \cdot & & \cdot & & \cdot & & & \\
 -2 & \cdot & \cdot & \dots & -2 & 0 & -1 & -1 & 0 & \dots & -1 \\
 \hline
 & & & & & & x+2 & -(x+2) & 0 & \dots & 0 \\
 & & & & & & 0 & x+2 & -(x+2) & \dots & 0 \\
 & & & & & & \cdot & & \cdot & & \\
 & & & & & & \cdot & & \cdot & & \\
 & & & & & & \cdot & & \cdot & & \\
 & & & & & & \cdot & & \cdot & & \\
 -1 & \cdot & \cdot & & -1 & & -2 & \cdot & \cdot & & -2 & x
 \end{array} \right|$$

We immediately see that $m + n - 2$ eigenvalues are -2 . According to Proposition 5, we have $\sum x_i^2 = \sum_{i,j} d_{ij}^2 = 4m(m-1) + 4n(n-1) + 2mn = 4m^2 - 4m + 4n^2 - 4n + 4mn$ and as $\sum_{i=3}^{m+n} x_i^2 = 4(m+n-2)$, we have $x_1^2 + x_2^2 = 2(2m^2 + 2n^2 - 4m - 4n + mn + 4)$. According to Proposition 4, we have $x_1 + x_2 - 2(m+n-2) = 0$.

Proposition 9. *If G is a star with n vertices, then*

$$\det |xI - D| = (x+2)^{n-2} (x^2 - 1 - (n-2)(2x+1)).$$

The distance polynomial of the star graph will be denoted by S_n .

Proof. The distance polynomial of a star is given by

$$(6) \quad S_n = \begin{vmatrix} x & -1 & -1 & \dots & -1 \\ -1 & x & -2 & \dots & -2 \\ -1 & -2 & x & \dots & -2 \\ \cdot & & \cdot & & \cdot \\ \cdot & & \cdot & & \cdot \\ -1 & -2 & -2 & \dots & x \end{vmatrix}$$

By subtracting the $(n-1)$ -st row from the n -th row, we can put the factor $(x+2)$ (from the last row) in front of the determinant and expand it with respect to the last row:

$$(7) \quad S_n = (x + 2) \left(\begin{vmatrix} x & -1 & -1 & \dots & -1 \\ -1 & x & -2 & \dots & -2 \\ -1 & -2 & x & \dots & -2 \\ \vdots & \vdots & \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ -1 & -2 & -2 & \dots & -2 \end{vmatrix} + \begin{vmatrix} x & -1 & -1 & \dots & -1 \\ -1 & x & -2 & \dots & -2 \\ -1 & -2 & x & \dots & -2 \\ \vdots & \vdots & \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ -1 & -2 & -2 & \dots & x \end{vmatrix} \right)$$

The second determinant evidently corresponds to S_{n-1} . The first determinant differs from the second one only in the entry $d_{n-1, n-1} = -2$. If we denote this one by \bar{S}_{n-1} , we obtain the recurrent formula

$$(8) \quad S_n = (x + 2)(\bar{S}_{n-1} + S_{n-1}).$$

Now, if we consider the determinant \bar{S}_n , we obtain by the same procedure the formula

$$(9) \quad \bar{S}_n = (x + 2)\bar{S}_{n-1}.$$

Combining (8) and (9) we obtain

$$(10) \quad S_n = (x + 2)^{n-2}(S_2 + (n - 2)\bar{S}_2)$$

and

$$(11) \quad S_2 = \begin{vmatrix} x & -1 \\ -1 & x \end{vmatrix} = x^2 - 1,$$

$$(12) \quad \bar{S}_2 = \begin{vmatrix} x & -1 \\ -1 & -2 \end{vmatrix} = -2x - 1, \quad \text{q.e.d.}$$

Proposition 10. *If G is an even cycle, then at least one root of the distance polynomial is zero.*

Proof. It suffices to prove that $\det |D| = 0$.

$$(13) \quad \det |D| = \begin{vmatrix} 0 & 1 & 2 & 3 & \dots & n/2 & \dots & 1 \\ 1 & 0 & 1 & 2 & \dots & (n/2) - 1 & \dots & 2 \\ 2 & 1 & 0 & 1 & \dots & (n/2) - 2 & \dots & 3 \\ 3 & 2 & 1 & 0 & \dots & \dots & \dots & \dots \\ \vdots & \vdots & \vdots & \vdots & \ddots & \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ n/2 & (n/2) - 1 & (n/2) - 2 & (n/2) - 3 & \dots & 0 & \dots & (n/2) - 1 \\ \vdots & \vdots & \vdots & \vdots & \ddots & \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ \vdots & \vdots & \vdots & \vdots & \ddots & \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ 1 & 2 & 3 & \dots & n/2 & \dots & 1 & 0 \end{vmatrix}.$$

By adding the first row to the $(n/2 + 1)$ -st one and the second row to the $(n/2 + 2)$ -nd one, we get two identical rows, namely the $(n/2 + 1)$ -st and the $(n/2 + 2)$ -nd, q.e.d.

Comment. Since the distance matrix for cycles is a circulant matrix, we can obtain its roots by means of rules for the corresponding determinant [13].

Examples.

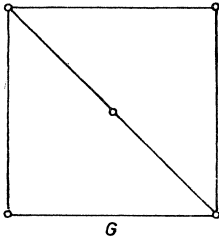
a) C_3 - cycle

$$\det |xI - D| = (x - 2)(x + 1)^2$$

b) C_4 -cycle

$$\det |xI - D| = (x + 2)^2(x - 4)x$$

c)



$$\det |xI - D| = (x + 2)^3(x^2 - 6x + 2)$$

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Note added in proof. Proposition 7 holds generally for any tree as was first proved in [7]. By an accident we overlooked a paper [a] which contains without proofs

some theorems related to our work. Some other related references can be found in the second edition of the book [b] that came only recently into our hands.

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Souhrn

O DISTANČNÍM POLYNOMU GRAFU

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Článek se zabývá některými vlastnostmi distančního polynomu některých typů grafů, speciálně cest, bipartitních grafů, cyklů a hvězd.

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