Finding and counting given length cycles *

(Extended Abstract)

Noga Alon ** *Raphael Yuster* ** *Uri Zwick* **

School of Mathematical Sciences, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv 69978, ISRAEL.

Abstract. We present an assortment of methods for finding and counting simple cycles of a given length in directed and undirected graphs. Most of the bounds obtained depend solely on the number of edges in the graph in question, and not on the number of vertices. The bounds obtained improve upon various previously known results.

1 Introduction

The problem of deciding whether a given graph $G = (V, E)$ contains a simple cycle of length k is among the most natural and easily stated algorithmic graph problems. If the cycle length k is part of the input then the problem is clearly NP-complete as it includes in particular the Hamiltonian cycle problem. For every fixed k however, the problem can be solved in either $O(VE)$ time (Monien [Mon85]) or $O(V^\omega \log V)$ [AYZ94], where $\omega < 2.376$ is the exponent of matrix multiplication.

The main contribution of this paper is a collection of new bounds on the complexity of finding simple cycles of length exactly k, where $k \geq 3$ is a fixed integer, in a directed or an undirected graph $G = (V, E)$. These bounds are of the form $O(E^{\alpha_k})$ or of the form $O(E^{\beta_k} \cdot d(G)^{\gamma_k})$, where $d(G)$ is the *degeneracy* of the graph (see below). The bounds improve upon previously known bounds when the graph in question is relatively sparse or relatively degenerate.

We let C_k stand for a simple cycle of length k. When considering directed graphs, a C_k is assumed to be directed. We show that a C_k in a directed or undirected graph $G = (V, E)$, if one exists, can be found in $O(E^{2-\frac{2}{k}})$ time, if k is even, and in $O(E^{2-\frac{2}{k+1}})$ time, if k is odd. For finding triangles (C_3's), we get the slightly better bound of $O(E^{\frac{2\omega}{\omega+1}}) = O(E^{1.41})$, where $\omega < 2.376$ is the exponent of matrix multiplication.

Even cycles in undirected graphs can be found even faster. A C_{4k-2} in an undirected graph $G = (V, E)$, if one exists, can be found in $O(E^{2-\frac{1}{2k}(1+\frac{1}{k})})$ time. A C_{4k}, if one exists, can be found in $O(E^{2-(\frac{1}{k}-\frac{1}{2k+1})})$ time. In particular, we can find an undirected C_4 in $O(E^{4/3})$ time and an undirected C_6 in $O(E^{13/8})$ time.

* Work supported in part by THE BASIC RESEARCH FOUNDATION administrated by THE ISRAEL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES.

** E-mail addresses of authors: {`noga,raphy,zwick`}`@math.tau.ac.il` .

cycle	complexity	cycle	complexity
C_3	$E^{1.41}$, $E\cdot d(G)$	C_7	$E^{1.75}$, $E^{3/2}\cdot d(G)$
C_4	$E^{1.5}$, $E\cdot d(G)$	C_8	$E^{1.75}$, $E^{3/2}\cdot d(G)$
C_5	$E^{1.67}$, $E\cdot d(G)^2$	C_9	$E^{1.8}$, $E^{3/2}\cdot d(G)^{3/2}$
C_6	$E^{1.67}$, $E^{3/2}\cdot d(G)^{1/2}$	C_{10}	$E^{1.8}$, $E^{5/3}\cdot d(G)^{2/3}$

Table 1. Finding small cycles in directed graphs – some of the new results

cycle	complexity	cycle	complexity
C_4	$E^{1.34}$	C_8	$E^{1.7}$
C_6	$E^{1.63}$	C_{10}	$E^{1.78}$

Table 2. Finding small cycles in undirected graphs – some of the new results

The *degeneracy* $d(G)$ of an undirected graph $G = (V, E)$ is the largest minimal degree among the minimal degrees of all the subgraphs G' of G (see Bollobás [Bol78], p. 222). The degeneracy $d(G)$ of a graph G is linearly related to the *arboricity* $a(G)$ of the graph, i.e., $a(G) = \Theta(d(G))$, where $a(G)$ is the minimal number of forests needed to cover all the edges of G. The degeneracy of a directed graph $G = (V, E)$ is defined to be the degeneracy of the undirected version of G. The degeneracy of a graph is an important parameter of the graph that appears in many combinatorial results. It is easy to see that for any graph $G = (V, E)$ we have $d(G) \le 2E^{1/2}$. For graphs with relatively low degeneracy we can improve upon the previously stated results. A C_{4k} in a directed or undirected graph $G = (V, E)$ that contains one can be found in $O(E^{2-\frac{1}{k}}\cdot d(G))$ time. A C_{4k+1}, if one exists, can be found in $O(E^{2-\frac{1}{k}}\cdot d(G)^{1+\frac{1}{k}})$ time. Similar results are obtained for finding C_{4k-2}'s and C_{4k-1}'s. In particular, C_3's and C_4's can be found in $O(E\cdot d(G))$ time and C_5's in $O(E\cdot d(G)^2)$ time. Some of the results mentioned are summarized in Tables 1 and 2.

As any planar graph has a vertex whose degree is at most 5, the degeneracy of any planar graph is at most 5. As a consequence of the above bounds we get, in particular, that C_3's, C_4's and C_5's in planar graphs can be found in $O(V)$ time. This in fact holds not only for planar graphs but for any non-trivial *minor-closed* family of graphs.

Another contribution of this paper is an $O(V^{\omega})$ algorithm for *counting* the number of C_k's, for $k \le 7$, in a graph $G = (V, E)$.

2 Comparison with previous works

Monien [Mon85] obtained, for any fixed $k \ge 3$, an $O(VE)$ algorithm for finding C_k's in a directed or undirected graph $G = (V, E)$. In a previous work [AYZ94] we showed, using the *color-coding* method, that a C_k, for any fixed $k \geq 3$, if one exists, can also be found in $O(V^\omega)$ expected time or in $O(V^\omega \log V)$ worst-case time, where $\omega < 2.376$ is the exponent of matrix multiplication.

Our new $O(E^{2-\frac{2}{k}})$ algorithm is better than both the $O(VE)$ and the $O(V^\omega)$ algorithms when the input graph $G=(V,E)$ is sufficiently sparse. It is interesting to note that for $k \leq 6$, Monien's $O(VE)$ bound is superseded by either the $O(V^\omega)$ algorithm, when the graph is dense, or by the $O(E^{2-1/\lceil\frac{k}{2}\rceil})$ algorithm, when the graph is sparse. For every $k \geq 7$, each one of the four bounds (including the bound that involves the degeneracy) beats the others on an appropriate family of graphs.

In a previous work [YZ94] we have also shown that cycles of an *even* length in *undirected* graphs can be found even faster. Namely, for any even $k \geq 4$, if an undirected graph $G=(V,E)$ contains a C_k then such a C_k can be found in $O(V^2)$ time. Our $O(E^{2-\frac{1}{2k}(1+\frac{1}{k})})$ bound for C_{4k-2} and $O(E^{2-(\frac{1}{k}-\frac{1}{2k+1})})$ bound for C_{4k} are again better when the graph is sparse enough.

Itai and Rodeh [IR78] showed that a *triangle* (a C_3) in a graph $G=(V,E)$ that contains one can be found in $O(V^\omega)$ or $O(E^{3/2})$ time. We improve their second result and show that the same can be done, in directed or undirected graphs, in $O(E^{\frac{2\omega}{\omega+1}}) = O(E^{1.41})$ time.

Chiba and Nishizeki [CN85] showed that triangles (C_3's) and quadrilaterals (C_4's) in graphs that contain them can be found in $O(E \cdot d(G))$ time. As $d(G) = O(E^{1/2})$ for any graph G, this extends the result of Itai and Rodeh. We extend the result of Chiba and Nishizeki and show that C_{4k-1}'s and C_{4k}'s can be found in $O(E^{2-\frac{1}{k}} \cdot d(G))$ time. We also show that C_{4k+1}'s can be found in $O(E^{2-\frac{1}{k}} \cdot d(G)^{1+\frac{1}{k}})$ time. This gives, in particular, an $O(E \cdot d(G)^2)$ algorithm for finding pentagons (C_5's). Our results apply to both directed and undirected graphs.

Itai and Rodeh [IR78] and also Papadimitriou and Yannakakis [PY81] showed that C_3's in planar graphs can be found in $O(V)$ time. Chiba and Nishizeki [CN85] showed that C_3's as well as C_4's in planar graphs can be found in $O(V)$ time. Richards [Ric86] showed that C_5's and C_6's in planar graphs can be found in $O(V \log V)$ time. We improve upon the result of Richards and show that C_5's in planar graphs can be found in $O(V)$ time. In a previous work [AYZ94] we showed, using color-coding, that for any $k \geq 3$, a C_k in a planar graph, if one exists, can be found in either $O(V)$ *expected* time or $O(V \log V)$ worst case time.

Finally, the fact that the number of triangles in a graph can be counted in $O(V^\omega)$ time is trivial. In [AYZ94] we showed, using color-coding, that for any $k \geq 3$, a C_k, if one exists, can be found in either $O(V^\omega)$ *expected* time or in $O(V^\omega \log V)$ worst case time. Here we show that for any $k \leq 7$ the number of C_k's in a graph can be counted in $O(V^\omega)$ time. The counting method used here yields, in particular, a way of finding C_k's for $k \leq 7$, in $O(V^\omega)$ worst case time.

3 Finding cycles in sparse graphs

Monien [Mon85] obtained his $O(VE)$ algorithm by the use of *representative collections*. Such collections are also used by our algorithms. In the sequel, a p-set is a set of size p.

Definition 1 ([Mon85]) *Let $\mathcal{F}$ be a collection of p-sets. A sub-collection $\hat{\mathcal{F}} \subseteq \mathcal{F}$ is q-representative for $\mathcal{F}$, if for every q-set B, there exists a set $A \in \mathcal{F}$ such that $A \cap B = \emptyset$ if and only if there exists a set $A \in \hat{\mathcal{F}}$ with this property.*

It follows from a combinatorial lemma of Bollobás [Bol65] that any collection $\mathcal{F}$ of p-sets, no matter how large, has a q-representative sub-collection of size at most $\binom{p+q}{p}$. Monien [Mon85] describes an $O(pq \cdot \sum_{i=0}^{q} p^i \cdot |\mathcal{F}|)$ time algorithm for finding a q-representative sub-collection of $\mathcal{F}$ whose size is at most $\sum_{i=0}^{q} p^i$. Relying on Monien's result we obtain the following lemma:

Lemma 2. *Let $\mathcal{F}$ be a collection of p-sets and let $\mathcal{G}$ be a collection of q-sets. Consider p and q to be fixed. In $O(|\mathcal{F}| + |\mathcal{G}|)$ time, we can either find two sets $A \in \mathcal{F}$ and $B \in \mathcal{G}$ such that $A \cap B = \emptyset$ or decide that no two such sets exist.*

Proof. We use Monien's algorithm to find a q-representative sub-collection $\hat{\mathcal{F}}$ of $\mathcal{F}$ whose size is at most $\sum_{i=0}^{q} p^i$ and a p-representative sub-collection $\hat{\mathcal{G}}$ of $\mathcal{G}$ whose size is at most $\sum_{i=0}^{p} q^i$. This takes only $O(|\mathcal{F}| + |\mathcal{G}|)$ time (as p and q are constants).

It is easy to see that if there exist $A \in \mathcal{F}$ and $B \in \mathcal{G}$ such that $A \cap B = \emptyset$, then there also exist $A' \in \hat{\mathcal{F}}$ and $B' \in \hat{\mathcal{G}}$ such that $A' \cap B' = \emptyset$. To see this note that if $A \cap B = \emptyset$ then by the definition of q-representatives, there must exist a set $A' \in \hat{\mathcal{F}}$ such that $A' \cap B = \emptyset$ and then, there must exist a set $B' \in \hat{\mathcal{G}}$ such that $A' \cap B' = \emptyset$ as required.

After finding the representative collections $\hat{\mathcal{F}}$ and $\hat{\mathcal{G}}$ it is therefore enough to check whether they contain two disjoint sets. This can be easily done in constant time (as p and q are constants). □

We also need the following lemma obtained by Monien [Mon85].

Lemma 3 [Mon85]. *Let $G = (V, E)$ be a directed or undirected graph, let $v \in V$ and let $k \geq 3$. A C_k that passes through v, if one exists, can be found in $O(E)$ time.*

We are finally able to present our improved algorithm.

Theorem 4. *Deciding whether a directed or undirected graph $G = (V, E)$ contains simple cycles of length exactly $2k - 1$ and of length exactly $2k$, and finding such cycles if it does, can be done in $O(E^{2-\frac{1}{k}})$ time.*

Proof. We describe an $O(E^{2-\frac{1}{k}})$ time algorithm for finding a C_{2k} in a directed graph $G = (V, E)$. The details of all the other cases are similar. Let $\Delta = E^{\frac{1}{k}}$. A vertex in G whose degree is at least Δ is said to be of *high degree*. The graph $G = (V, E)$ contains at most $2E/\Delta = O(E^{1-\frac{1}{k}})$ high degree vertices. We check, using Monien's algorithm (Lemma 3), whether any of these high degree vertices lies on a simple cycle of length $2k$. For each vertex this costs $O(E)$ operations and the total cost is $O(E^2/\Delta) = O(E^{2-\frac{1}{k}})$. If one of these vertices does lie on a cycle of length $2k$ we are done. Otherwise, we remove all the high degree vertices and all the edges adjacent to them from G and obtain a subgraph G' that contains a C_{2k} if and only if G does. The maximum degree of G' is at most $\Delta = E^{\frac{1}{k}}$ and there are therefore at most $E \cdot \Delta^{k-1} = E^{2-\frac{1}{k}}$ simple directed paths of length k in G'. We can find all these simple paths in $O(E^{2-\frac{1}{k}})$ time. We divide these paths into groups according to their endpoints. This can be done using radix sort in $O(E^{2-\frac{1}{k}})$ time and space. We get a list of all the pairs of vertices connected by simple directed paths of length exactly k. For each such pair u, v, we get a collection $\mathcal{F}_{u,v}$ of $k-1$-sets. Each $k-1$-set in $\mathcal{F}_{u,v}$ corresponds to the $k-1$ intermediate vertices that appear on simple directed paths of length k from u to v. For each pair u, v that appears on the list, we check whether there exist two directed paths of length k, one from u to v and the other from v to u, that meet only at their endpoints. Such two paths exist if there exist $A \in \mathcal{F}_{u,v}$ and $B \in F_{v,u}$ such that $A \cap B = \emptyset$. This can be checked, as shown in Lemma 2, in $O(|\mathcal{F}_{u,v}| + |\mathcal{F}_{v,u}|)$ time. As the sum of the sizes of all these collections is $O(E^{2-\frac{1}{k}})$, the total complexity is again $O(E^{2-\frac{1}{k}})$. This completes the proof. □

In the case of triangles, we can get a better result by using fast matrix multiplication.

Theorem 5. *Deciding whether a directed or an undirected graph $G = (V, E)$ contains a triangle, and finding one if it does, can be done is $O(E^{\frac{2\omega}{\omega+1}}) = O(E^{1.41})$ time.*

Proof. Let $\Delta = E^{\frac{\omega-1}{\omega+1}}$. A vertex is said to be of *high degree* if its degree is more than Δ and of *low degree* otherwise. Consider all directed paths of length two in G whose intermediate vertex is of low degree. There are at most $E \cdot \Delta$ such paths and they can be found in $O(E \cdot \Delta)$ time. For each such path, check whether its endpoints are connected by an edge in the appropriate direction. If no triangle is found in this way, then any triangle in G must be composed of three high degree vertices. As there are at most $2E/\Delta$ high degree vertices, we can check whether there exists such a triangle using matrix multiplication in $O((E/\Delta)^\omega)$ time. The total complexity of the algorithm is therefore

$$O(E \cdot \Delta + (E/\Delta)^\omega) = O(E^{\frac{2\omega}{\omega+1}}).$$

This completes the proof. □

We have not been able to utilize matrix multiplication to improve upon the result of Theorem 4 for $k \geq 4$. This constitutes an interesting open problem.

4 Finding cycles in graphs with low degeneracy

An undirected graph $G = (V, E)$ is *d-degenerate* (see Bollobás [Bol78], p. 222) if there exists an acyclic orientation of it in which $d_{out}(v) \leq d$ for every $v \in V$. The smallest d for which G is d-degenerate is called the *degeneracy* or the *max-min degree* of G and is denoted by $d(G)$. It can be easily seen (see again [Bol78]) that $d(G)$ is the maximum of the minimum degrees taken over all the subgraphs of G. The degeneracy $d(G)$ of a graph G is linearly related to the *arboricity* $a(G)$ of the graph, i.e., $a(G) = \Theta(d(G))$, where $a(G)$ is the minimal number of forests needed to cover all the edges of G. The degeneracy of a directed graph $G = (V, E)$ is defined to be the degeneracy of the undirected version of G. It is easy to see that the degeneracy of any planar graph is at most 5. Clearly, if G is d-degenerate then $|E| \leq d \cdot |V|$. The following simple lemma, whose proof is omitted, is part of the folklore (see, e.g., [MB83]).

Lemma 6. *Let $G = (V, E)$ be a connected undirected graph $G = (V, E)$. An acyclic orientation of G such that for every $v \in V$ we have $d_{out}(v) \leq d(G)$ can be found in $O(E)$ time.*

The main result of this section is the following Theorem:

Theorem 7. *Let $G = (V, E)$ be a directed or an undirected graph.*
(i) Deciding whether G contains a simple cycle of length exactly $4k-2$, and finding such a cycle if it does, can be done in $O(E^{2-\frac{1}{k}} \cdot d(G)^{1-\frac{1}{k}})$ time.
(ii) Deciding whether G contains simple cycles of length exactly $4k-1$ and exactly $4k$, and finding such cycles if it does, can be done in $O(E^{2-\frac{1}{k}} \cdot d(G))$ time.
(iii) Deciding whether G contains a simple cycle of length exactly $4k+1$, and finding such a cycle if it does, can be done in $O(E^{2-\frac{1}{k}} \cdot d(G)^{1+\frac{1}{k}})$ time.

Proof. We show how to find a C_{4k+1} in a directed graph $G = (V, E)$, if one exists, in $O(E^{2-\frac{1}{k}} \cdot d(G)^{1+\frac{1}{k}})$ time. The proofs of the other claims are easier. If $d(G) \geq E^{\frac{1}{2k+1}}$, we can use the algorithm of Theorem 4 whose complexity is $O(E^{2-\frac{1}{2k+1}}) \leq O(E^{2-\frac{1}{k}} \cdot d(G)^{1+\frac{1}{k}})$. Assume therefore that $d(G) \leq E^{\frac{1}{2k+1}}$.

Let $\Delta = E^{\frac{1}{k}} / d(G)^{1+\frac{1}{k}}$. As $d(G) \leq E^{\frac{1}{2k+1}}$, we have that $d(G) \leq \Delta$. A vertex is said to be of *high degree* if its degree is more than Δ and of *low degree* otherwise. As in the proof of Theorem 4, we can check in $O(E^2/\Delta)$ time whether any of the high degree vertices lies on a C_{4k+1}. If none of them lies on a C_{4k+1}, we can remove all the high degree vertices along with the edges adjacent to them from G and obtain a graph whose maximal degree is at most Δ. The degeneracy of a graph can only decrease when vertices and edges are deleted and $d(G)$ is therefore an upper bound on the degeneracy of the graph obtained.

Suppose therefore that G is a graph with maximal degree Δ and degeneracy $d(G)$. To find a C_{4k+1} in G, it is enough to find all directed simple paths of length $2k$ and $2k+1$ in G and then check, using the algorithm described in the proof of Lemma 2, whether there exist a path of length $2k$ and a path of length $2k+1$ that meet only at their endpoints.

In $O(E)$ time we can get an acyclically oriented version G' of G in which the out-degree of each vertex is at most $d(G)$. The orientations of the edges in G and G' may be completely different. The number of paths, not necessarily directed, of length $2k+1$ in G, is at most

$$2 \cdot 2E \cdot \sum_{i=0}^{k} \binom{2k}{i} \Delta^i d(G)^{2k-i} = O(E\Delta^k d(G)^k).$$

To see this, consider the orientations, in G', of the edges on a $2k+1$-path in G. In at least one direction, at most k of the edges are counter directed. The number of paths of length $2k+1$ in which exactly i among the last $2k$ edges are counter directed is at most $2E \cdot \binom{2k}{i} \Delta^i d(G)^{2k-i}$. The binomial coefficient $\binom{2k}{i}$ stands for the possible choices for the position of the counter directed edges in the path. Similarly, the number of paths of length $2k$ in G is $O(E\Delta^k d(G)^{k-1})$.

We can lower the number of paths of length $2k+1$ and $2k$ we have to consider by utilizing the fact that a C_{4k+1} can be broken into two paths of length $2k+1$ and $2k$ in many different ways. In particular, let C be a directed C_{4k+1} in G and consider the orientations of its edges in G'. As $4k+1$ is odd and as G' is acyclic, C must contain three consecutive edges e_{2k}, e_{2k+1} and e_{2k+2}, the first two of which have the same orientation while the third one has an opposite orientation. It is therefore enough to consider all $2k+1$-paths that start with at least two backward oriented edges and all $2k$-paths that start with at least one backward oriented edge. The orientations referred to here are in G'.

The number of paths of length $2k+1$ in G whose first two edges are backward oriented in G' is $O(E\Delta^{k-1}d(G)^{k+1})$. To see this, note that any such path is composed of a directed path $\{e_{2k}, e_{2k+1}\}$ of length two, attached to an arbitrarily oriented path $\{e_1, \ldots, e_{2k-1}\}$ of length $2k-1$. The number of paths of length $2k-1$ is, as shown earlier, at most $O(E\Delta^{k-1}d(G)^{k-1})$ and the number of directed path of length two with a specified starting point is at most $d(G)^2$. Similarly, there are at most $O(E\Delta^{k-1}d(G)^k)$ $2k$-paths that start with a backward oriented edge.

It should be clear from the above discussion that all the required paths of length $2k+1$ and $2k$, whose total number is $O(E\Delta^{k-1}d(G)^{k+1})$, can be found in $O(E\Delta^{k-1}d(G)^{k+1})$ time. Paths which are not properly directed, in G, are thrown away. Properly directed paths are sorted, using radix sort, according to their endpoints. Using Lemma 2 we then check whether there exist a directed $2k+1$-path and a directed $2k$-path that close a directed simple cycle. All these operations can again be performed in $O(E\Delta^{k-1}d(G)^{k+1})$ time.

Recalling that $\Delta = E^{\frac{1}{k}}/d(G)^{1+\frac{1}{k}}$, we get that the over all complexity of the algorithm is

$$O(\frac{E^2}{\Delta} + E \cdot \Delta^{k-1} d(G)^{k+1}) = O(E^{2-\frac{1}{k}} d(G)^{1+\frac{1}{k}}) \quad .$$

This completes the proof of the Theorem. □

As an immediate corollary we get:

Corollary 8. *If a directed or undirected planar graph $G = (V, E)$ contains a pentagon (a C_5), then such a pentagon can be found in $O(V)$ worst-case time.*

By combining the ideas of this section, the $O(E^{\frac{2\omega}{\omega+1}})$ algorithm of Theorem 5 and the color-coding method [AYZ94] we can also obtain the following result whose proof is omitted.

Theorem 9. *Let $G = (V, E)$ be a directed or undirected graph. A C_6 in G, if one exists, can be found in either $O((E\cdot d(G))^{\frac{2\omega}{\omega+1}}) = O((E\cdot d(G))^{1.41})$ expected time or $O((E\cdot d(G))^{\frac{2\omega}{\omega+1}}\cdot\log V) = O((E\cdot d(G))^{1.41}\cdot\log V)$ worst case time.*

5 Finding cycles in sparse undirected graphs

To obtain the results of this section we rely on the following combinatorial lemma of Bondy and Simonovits [BS74].

Lemma 10 [BS74]. *Let $G = (V, E)$ be an undirected graph. If $|E| \geq 100k\cdot |V|^{1+\frac{1}{k}}$ then G contains a $C_{2\ell}$ for every integer $\ell \in [k, n^{1/k}]$.*

By combining the algorithm described in the proof of Theorem 7 with an algorithm given in [YZ94] we obtain the following theorem.

Theorem 11. *Let $G = (V, E)$ be an undirected graph.*
(i) A C_{4k-2} in G, if one exists, can be found in $O(E^{2-\frac{1}{2k}(1+\frac{1}{k})})$ time.
(ii) A C_{4k} in G, if one exists, can be found in $O(E^{2-(\frac{1}{k}-\frac{1}{2k+1})})$ time.

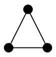
Proof. We prove the second claim. The proof of the first claim is similar. Let $d = 200k\cdot E^{\frac{1}{2k+1}}$. If $d(G) \geq d$ then, by the definition of degeneracy, there is a subgraph $G' = (V', E')$ of G in which the minimal degree is at least d. Such a subgraph can be easily found in $O(E)$ time (see, e.g., [MB83]). Clearly $E' \geq dV'/2 \geq 100k\cdot V'\cdot E'^{\frac{1}{2k+1}}$ and therefore $E' \geq (100k\cdot V')^{1+\frac{1}{2k}} \geq 100k\cdot (V')^{1+\frac{1}{2k}}$. By Lemma 10 we get that G' contains a C_{4k} and such a C_{4k} can be found in $O(V'^2) = O(E^{2-\frac{2}{2k+1}})$ time using the algorithm given in [YZ94]. If, on the other hand, $d(G) \leq d$, then a C_{4k} in G, if one exists, can be found in $O(E^{2-\frac{1}{k}}\cdot d) = O(E^{2-(\frac{1}{k}-\frac{1}{2k+1})})$ time using the algorithm of Theorem 7. It is easy to check that $E^{2-\frac{2}{2k+1}} \leq E^{2-(\frac{1}{k}-\frac{1}{2k+1})}$ with equality holding only if $k = 1$. In both cases, the complexity is therefore $O(E^{2-(\frac{1}{k}-\frac{1}{2k+1})})$ as required. □

Corollary 12. *Let $G = (V, E)$ be an undirected graph.*
(i) A quadrilateral (C_4) in G, if one exists, can be found in $O(E^{4/3})$ time.
(ii) A hexagon (C_6) in G, if one exists, can be found in $O(E^{13/8})$ time.

6 Counting small cycles

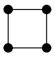
Let $A = A_G$ be the adjacency matrix of a simple undirected graph $G = (V, E)$. Assume for simplicity that $V = \{1, \ldots, n\}$. Denote by $a_{ij}^{(k)} = (A^k)_{ij}$ the elements of the k-th power of A. The trace $tr(A^k)$ of A^k, which is the sum of the entries along the diagonal of A^k, gives us the number of closed paths of length k in G. If we could also compute the number of *non-simple* closed paths of length k in G we would easily obtain the number of *simple* closed paths of length k in G. This number is just $2k$ times the number of C_k's in G.

Every closed path of length 3 is simple. The number of triangles in G is therefore

$$\#($$  $$) = \frac{1}{6} \cdot tr(A^3) \quad .$$

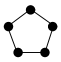
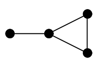
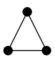
Furthermore, the number of triangles that pass through vertex i is exactly $\frac{1}{2} a_{ii}^{(3)}$ and the number of triangles that use the edge $(i, j) \in E$ is exactly $a_{ij}^{(2)}$.

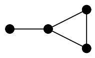
Closed paths of length 4 are not necessarily simple. Every non-simple closed path of length 4 however is of one of the forms shown in Fig. 1. The number of quadrilaterals (C_4's) in G is therefore

$$\#($$  $$) = \frac{1}{8} \cdot [tr(A^4) - 4 \cdot \#($$ $$) - 2 \cdot \#($$ $$)] \quad .$$

The number of simple paths of length 2 in G, i.e., #( ), is clearly $\sum_{i=1}^{n} \binom{d_i}{2}$ where $d_i = a_{ii}^{(2)}$ is the degree of vertex i, and #( ) is just $|E|$, the number of edges in the graph.

Non-simple closed paths of length 5 are of one of the forms shown in Fig. 2. The number of pentagons (C_5's) in G is therefore

$$\#($$  $$) = \frac{1}{10} \cdot [tr(A^5) - 10 \cdot \#($$  $$) - 30 \cdot \#($$  $$)] \quad .$$

The number of  's in G is easily seen to be $\frac{1}{2} \sum_{i=1}^{n} (d_i - 2) a_{ii}^{(3)}$. The number of triangles in G was already computed so the number of pentagons in G can easily be calculated using the above formula.

The same method can also be used to count the number of hexagons (C_6's) and septagons (C_7's). The formulae become however much more complicated. To obtain the number of hexagons, for example, we should count first the number of occurrences in G of each of the subgraphs shown in Fig. 3. We omit the exact formulae.

It can be checked that the number of occurrences in G of each of the subgraphs shown in Fig. 3 and those needed to find the number of septagons (C_7's) in G can be calculated using only $O(V^2)$ operations, once the powers $A, \ldots, A^7$ of the adjacency matrix A of the graph are available. We obtain therefore the following result.

Theorem 13. *The number of C_k's, for $k \leq 7$ in a graph $G = (V, E)$ can be found in $O(V^\omega)$ time.*

Similar formulae can be obtained of course for the number of octagons (C_8's) and even larger cycles. However, to compute the number of octagons, we have

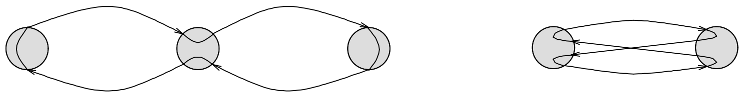


Fig. 1. Non-simple closed paths of length 4.

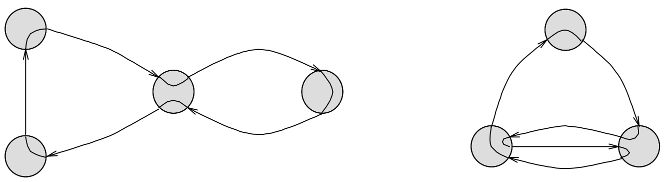


Fig. 2. Non-simple closed paths of length 5.

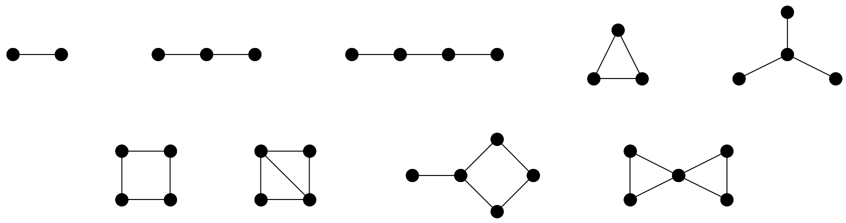


Fig. 3. Subgraphs that should be counted to obtain the number of hexagons

to find first the number of K_4's in the graph, where K_l denotes a clique of size l. We do not know how to do this in $O(V^\omega)$ time.

It is easy to count the number of K_4's in a graph in $O(V^{\omega+1})$ time: for each vertex, count the number of triangles among its neighbors, sum these numbers and divide by 4. Counting the number of K_4's in a graph, or in fact, deciding whether a graph contains a K_4, in $o(V^{\omega+1})$ time is an interesting open problem.

For counting the number of larger cycles using our method, we would have to count the number of larger cliques in the graph. Nešetřil and Poljak [NP85] give an $O(V^{\omega\lceil\frac{\ell}{3}\rceil})$ time algorithm for deciding whether a graph $G=(V,E)$ contains a K_l. It is easy to check that their method can also be used to count the number of such cliques contained in the graph. By combining the method of Nešetřil and Poljak [NP85] with the ideas used in Section 4, we get the following result.

Theorem 14. *The number of K_l's in an undirected graph $G=(V,E)$ can be counted in either $O(V\cdot(d(G))^{\omega\lceil\frac{\ell-1}{3}\rceil})$ or $O(E\cdot(d(G))^{\omega\lceil\frac{\ell-2}{3}\rceil})$ time.*

Using an idea similar to the one used in Theorem 5, we can also get an $O(E^{\frac{3\omega+3}{\omega+3}})=O(E^{1.89})$ algorithm for deciding whether a graph $G=(V,E)$ contains a K_4.

References

[AYZ94] N. Alon, R. Yuster, and U. Zwick. Color-coding: a new method for finding simple paths, cycles and other small subgraphs within large graphs. In *Proceedings of the 26th Annual ACM Symposium on Theory of Computing, Montréal, Canada*, pages 326–335, 1994.

[Bol65] B. Bollobás. On generalized graphs. *Acta Math. Acad. Sci. Hungar.*, 16:447–452, 1965.

[Bol78] B. Bollobás. *Extremal graph theory.* Academic Press, 1978.

[BS74] J.A. Bondy and M. Simonovits. Cycles of even length in graphs. *Journal of Combinatorial Theory, Series B*, 16:97–105, 1974.

[CN85] N. Chiba and L. Nishizeki. Arboricity and subgraph listing algorithms. *SIAM Journal on Computing*, 14:210–223, 1985.

[IR78] A. Itai and M. Rodeh. Finding a minimum circuit in a graph. *SIAM Journal on Computing*, 7:413–423, 1978.

[MB83] D.W. Matula and L.L. Beck. Smallest-last ordering and clustering and graph coloring algorithms. *Journal of the ACM*, 30:417–427, 1983.

[Mon85] B. Monien. How to find long paths efficiently. *Annals of Discrete Mathematics*, 25:239–254, 1985.

[NP85] J. Nešetřil and S. Poljak. On the complexity of the subgraph problem. *Commentationes Mathematicae Universitatis Carolinae*, 26(2):415–419, 1985.

[PY81] C.H. Papadimitriou and M. Yannakakis. The clique problem for planar graphs. *Information Processing Letters*, 13:131–133, 1981.

[Ric86] D. Richards. Finding short cycles in a planar graph using separators. *Journal of Algorithms*, 7:382–394, 1986.

[YZ94] R. Yuster and U. Zwick. Finding even cycles even faster. In *Proceedings of the 21st International Colloquium on Automata, Languages and Programming, Jerusalem, Israel*, 1994. To appear.