NOTE ON IRREGULAR GRAPHS

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Dedicated to Professor Bogoljub Stanković (1924–2018)

(Presented at the 1st Meeting, held on February 23, 2018)

A b s t r a c t. *Let G be a graph with vertex set $\mathbf{V}(G)$ and edge set $\mathbf{E}(G)$. For $v \in \mathbf{V}(G)$, by $d_G(v)$ is denoted the degree of the vertex v. A graph in which not all vertices have equal degrees is said to be irregular. Different quantitative measures of irregularity have been proposed, of which the Albertson index $irr(G) = \sum_{uv \in \mathbf{E}(G)} |d_G(u) - d_G(v)|$ is the most popular. We compare $irr(G)$ with the recently introduced sigma-index $\sigma(G) = \sum_{uv \in \mathbf{E}(G)} [d_G(u) - d_G(v)]^2$ and show that in the general case these are incomparable. Graphs in which $|d_G(u) - d_G(v)| = 1$ holds for all $uv \in \mathbf{E}(G)$ are called stepwise irregular (SI). Several methods for constructing SI graphs are described.*

1. *Introduction*

Let G be a simple undirected connected graph with vertex set $\mathbf{V}(G)$ and edge set $\mathbf{E}(G)$, Let $|\mathbf{V}(G)| = n$ and $|\mathbf{E}(G)| = m$, in which case G is said to be an (n, m)-graph. The degree of a vertex $v \in \mathbf{V}(G)$ is the number of edges incident with v and it is denoted by $d_G(v)$. A vertex of degree one is said to be pendent. An edge incident to a pendent vertex is said to be also pendent.

A graph G is regular if all its vertices have the same degree, otherwise it is irregular. In many applications and problems it is of importance to know how irregular a given graph is, i.e., to have a quantitative measure of graph irregularity [16, 42].

There have been several attempts to determine how irregular a graph is [16, 13, 10, 11, 12, 17, 35], but these have not been captured by a single parameter. It seems that the oldest numerical measure of graph irregularity was proposed by Collatz and Sinogowitz [19] and was defined as

$$\lambda_1 - \frac{2m}{n},$$

where λ_1 is the largest eigenvalue of the adjacency matrix, usually referred to as the spectral radius of the underlying graph [20, 44]. Recall that the spectral radius of a simple (n, m)-graph satisfies $\max\{\overline{d}, \sqrt{\Delta}\} \le \lambda_1 \le \Delta$, where Δ is the maximal vertex degree and $\overline{d}(G) = 2m/n$ the average degree of the graph G. It follows, that if a graph is regular, then $\lambda_1 = 2m/n$ and $\lambda_1 > 2m/n$ otherwise.

A somewhat more straightforward measure of irregularity was put forward by Bell [14], who proposed that the variance $\mathrm{Var}(G)$ of the vertex degrees

$$\mathrm{Var}(G) = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{v \in \mathbf{V}(G)} d_G(v)^2 - \left(\frac{1}{n} \sum_{v \in \mathbf{V}(G)} d_G(v) \right)^2. \tag{1.1}$$

serves for this purpose.

It can be easily seen that the Bell irregularity index, Eq. (1.1), can be written as

$$\mathrm{Var}(G) = \frac{1}{n} M_1(G) - \left(\frac{2m}{n} \right)^2,$$

where $M_1(G)$ is the classical first Zagreb index [29, 40, 15], defined as

$$M_1(G) = \sum_{v \in \mathbf{V}(G)} d_G(v)^2 = \sum_{uv \in \mathbf{E}(G)} \left[d_G(u) + d_G(v) \right].$$

Several additional measures of graph irregularity were proposed [24, 38, 43], but until now these have not attracted much attention.

The imbalance of an edge $e = uv \in \mathbf{E}(G)$, defined as

$$imb(e) = |d_G(u) - d_G(v)|,$$

appears implicitly in a paper by Albertson and Berman [9], in the context of Ramsey problems, and later in [18]. In [8], Albertson defined the irregularity of G as the sum

of imbalances of all edges, i.e.,

$$irr(G) = \sum_{e \in \mathbf{E}(G)} imb(e) = \sum_{uv \in \mathbf{E}(G)} |d_G(u) - d_G(v)| \,. \qquad (1.2)$$

Eventually, the Albertson index irr became the most popular and most thoroughly investigated irregularity measure, see [2, 3, 32, 30, 30, 33, 27, 34, 45, 25, 21, 36, 37, 39, 46]. Recently, a variant of the Albertson index, named "total irregularity", was considered [47, 7, 1, 41, 4, 5, 6, 22, 23], defined as

$$\sum_{\{u,v\} \subseteq \mathbf{V}(G)} |d_G(u) - d_G(v)| \,.$$

Trying to avoid the absolute value calculation in the Albertson index, Eq. (1.2), one naturally arrived at the irregularity index $\sigma(G)$, defined as [31]

$$\sigma(G) = \sum_{uv \in E(G)} \big[d_G(u) - d_G(v)\big]^2 \,. \qquad (1.3)$$

In contrast to the Albertson index, the σ-index can be expressed in terms of the earlier much studied second Zagreb index $M_2(G)$ [40, 15] and the forgotten index $F(G)$ [26], namely

$$\sigma(G) = F(G) - 2\,M_2(G),$$

where

$$F(G) = \sum_{v \in \mathbf{V}(G)} d_G(v)^3 = \sum_{uv \in \mathbf{E}(G)} \big[d_G(u)^2 + d_G(v)^2\big]$$

and

$$M_2(G) = \sum_{uv \in \mathbf{E}(G)} d_G(u)\,d_G(v) \,.$$

Because of the close similarity between the Albertson index, Eq. (1.2) and the σ-index, Eq. (1.3), it is reasonable to expect that they are consistent with regard to measuring graph irregularity. Thus, it could be expected that the condition

$$irr(G_1) \geq irr(G_2) \;\Leftrightarrow\; \sigma(G_1) \geq \sigma(G_2) \qquad (1.4)$$

is satisfied by any pair of graphs G_1, G_2.

In what follows, we point out that relation (1.4) is not generally valid. This casts serious doubts on the true meaning of what one refers to as "irregularity", and the attempts to measure it by means of a single parameter.

If condition (1.4) would not hold for the graphs G_1 and G_2, then the two measures irr and σ would infer different orderings of their irregularity. If so, then the irregularity measures irr and σ would be inconsistent with regard to G_1 and G_2, i.e., would be mutually inconsistent in the general case.

2. *Inconsistence between Albertson and σ-Index*

In this section we consider the inconsistency cases for the Albertson and σ-indices, i.e., seek for pairs of graphs for which

$$irr(G_1) > irr(G_2) \qquad \text{and} \qquad \sigma(G_1) < \sigma(G_2)$$

holds. This condition can be rewritten in the form:

$$\big[irr(G_1) - irr(G_2)\big]\big[\sigma(G_1) - \sigma(G_2)\big] < 0 \,. \tag{2.1}$$

We first focus our attention to trees, that is connected $(n, n-1)$-graphs.

In order to find a pair of n-vertex trees satisfying inequality (2.1), let $T_1(n)$ be a tree without vertices of degree greater than 3, with Albertson index as large as possible. Such a tree possesses only vertices of degree three and pendent vertices. Their numbers are denoted by n_3 and n_1, respectively.

It is easy to see that the imbalance of edges connecting two degree–three vertices is zero, and the imbalance of the pendent edges is 2. Therefore, $irr(T_1(n)) = 2\,n_1$ and $\sigma(T_1(n)) = 2^2\,n_1$.

Because of $n_1 + n_3 = n$ and $n_1 + 3\,n_3 = 2(n-1)$, we get $n_1 = n/2 - 1$. Thus, the tree $T_1(n)$ must possess an even number of vertices, and

$$irr(T_1(n)) = n + 2 \qquad \text{and} \qquad \sigma(T_1(n)) = 2n + 4 \,. \tag{2.2}$$

Let $T_2(n)$ be an n-vertex tree with vertices of degree greater than 3, with Albertson index as small as possible. This tree must possess a single vertex of degree 4, four pendent vertices, and $n-5$ vertices of degree 2. Denote by p_4 the number of pendent vertices attached to the degree 4 vertex of $T_2(n)$. It is easy to verify that irrespective of the actual value of the parameter n,

$$irr(T_2(n)) = \begin{cases} 4 \times 2 + 4 \times 1 + 0 \times 3 = 12 & \text{if } p_4 = 0 \\ 3 \times 2 + 3 \times 1 + 1 \times 3 = 12 & \text{if } p_4 = 1 \\ 2 \times 2 + 2 \times 1 + 2 \times 3 = 12 & \text{if } p_4 = 2 \\ 1 \times 2 + 1 \times 1 + 3 \times 3 = 12 & \text{if } p_4 = 3 \end{cases} \tag{2.3}$$

and

$$\sigma(T_2(n)) = \begin{cases} 4 \times 2^2 + 4 \times 1^2 + 0 \times 2^2 = 20 & \text{if } p_4 = 0 \\ 3 \times 2^2 + 3 \times 1^2 + 1 \times 3^2 = 24 & \text{if } p_4 = 1 \\ 2 \times 2^2 + 2 \times 1^2 + 2 \times 3^2 = 26 & \text{if } p_4 = 2 \\ 1 \times 2^2 + 1 \times 1^2 + 3 \times 3^2 = 32 & \text{if } p_4 = 3 \end{cases} \tag{2.4}$$

Substituting Eqs. (2.2)–(2.4) back into (2.1), we get

$$\left[irr(T_1(n)) - irr(T_2(n))\right]\left[\sigma(T_1(n)) - \sigma(T_2(n))\right]$$

$$= \begin{cases} 2(n-10)(n-8) & \text{if } p_4 = 0 \\ 2(n-10)(n-10) & \text{if } p_4 = 1 \\ 2(n-10)(n-12) & \text{if } p_4 = 2 \\ 2(n-10)(n-14) & \text{if } p_4 = 3. \end{cases}$$

Bearing in mind that n must be an even integer, we see that the condition (2.1) can be satisfied only if $p_4 = 3$ and only for $n = 12$.

In Fig. 1 is depicted a tree $T_1(12)$ (of the two possible), as well as the unique tree $T_2(12)$ with $p_4 = 3$. These are the smallest possible examples of trees for which the Albertson and σ indices are inconsistent.
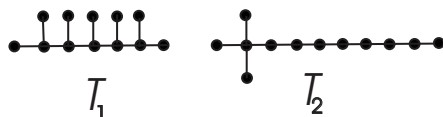

Figure 1. Two 12-vertex trees inconsistent with regard to Albertson and σ-index: $irr(T_1) = 14$, $irr(T_2) = 12$ whereas $\sigma(T_1) = 28$, $\sigma(T_2) = 32$.

In an analogous manner we may construct pairs of connected unicyclic, bicyclic, and higher–cyclic graphs for which the Albertson and σ indices are inconsistent. The species depicted in Fig. 2 are the smallest possible of their kind.
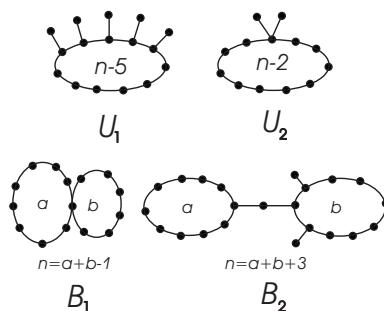

Figure 2. Unicyclic and bicyclic graphs inconsistent with regard to Albertson and σ-index: $irr(U_1) = 12$, $irr(U_2) = 10$ whereas $\sigma(U_1) = 22$, $\sigma(U_2) = 26$; $irr(B_1) = 8$, $irr(B_2) = 10$ whereas $\sigma(B_1) = 16$, $\sigma(B_2) = 14$. These values hold for any feasible choices of the parameters a, b and n.

3. *Stepwise irregular graphs*

A graph G in which the imbalance $imb(e)$ of any edge $e \in \mathbf{E}(G)$ is unity, is referred to as a stepwise irregular (SI) graph [28]. Evidently, among graphs with non-zero imbalance, the stepwise irregular species have minimal irregularity. In the recent paper [28], it was shown how SI graphs can be systematically constructed, provided that a single SI graph with pendent vertices is known. This we refer to as:

Construction method 1 [28]

Let v be a pendent vertex of the graph G_1, adjacent to the vertex u, see Fig. 3. If the graph G_1 is stepwise irregular (in which case the degree of the vertex u must be 2), then also the graph G_1^* is stepwise irregular. Since G_1^* possesses a pendent vertex, adjacent to a vertex of degree 2, the construction of SI graphs can be continued.
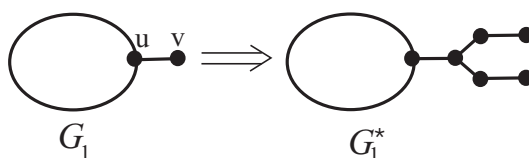

Figure 3. Construction of SI graphs according to the method from the paper [28]

In this section, we point out a few additional general methods for constructing SI graphs.

Construction method 2

Let v be a vertex of the graph G_2 having degree 2, adjacent to the vertices u_1 and u_2, see Fig. 4. If the graph G_2 is stepwise irregular so that the vertices u_1 and u_2 are both of degree 3, then also the graph G_2^* is stepwise irregular. Since G_2^* possesses a vertex of degree 2, adjacent to two vertices of degree 3, the construction of SI graphs can be continued.
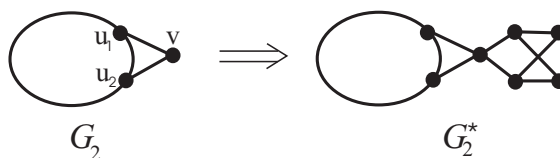

Figure 4. Construction of SI graphs according to the method 2

Construction method 3

Let v be a vertex of the graph G_3 having degree 3, adjacent to the vertices u_1, u_2, and u_3, see Fig. 5. If the graph G_3 is stepwise irregular so that the vertices u_1, u_2, and u_3 are all of degree 4, then also the graph G_3^* is stepwise irregular. Since G_3^* possesses a vertex of degree 3, adjacent to three vertices of degree 4, the construction of SI graphs can be continued.
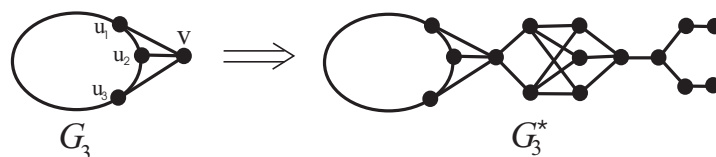

Figure 5. Construction of SI graphs according to the method 3

A connected graph is said to be bidegreed if some of its vertices are of degree Δ and the other vertices are of degree δ, $\Delta > \delta > 0$. A bidegreed bipartite graph is called semiregular if each vertex in the same part of bipartition has the same degree.

Construction method 4

Denote by $K_{p,q}$ the complete bipartite graph with $n = p + q$ vertices and $m = pq$ edges. Complete bipartite graphs with $p \neq q$ form a subset of semiregular graphs. If $q = p + 1$, then the graphs $K_{p,p+1}$ are semiregular and stepwise irregular. It is easy to see that the 3-vertex star $K_{1,2}$ and the 5-vertex bicyclic graph $K_{2,3}$ are the smallest stepwise irregular graphs. Both of them are semiregular.

Recall that the cyclomatic number of a connected graph G with n vertices and m edges is $\gamma(G) = m - n + 1$. A cubic graph is a regular graph of degree 3. A cubic graph of order n has $m = \frac{3}{2}n$ edges, i.e., it is an $(n, \frac{3}{2}n)$-graph.

Construction method 5

Stepwise irregular graphs can be constructed from cubic graphs or cubic multi-graphs. Let G be a connected (multi)graph, and denote by $S(G)$ its subdivision graph. If G is a cubic regular $(n, \frac{3}{2}n)$-graph, with cyclomatic number $\gamma(G)$, then $S(G)$ will be a bidegreed semiregular stepwise irregular $(\frac{5}{2}n, 3n)$-graph with degree set $\{2, 3\}$, having the same cyclomatic number as G.

In Fig. 6 is depicted a sequence of small bidegreed and tridegreed SI graphs, denoted by H_n, where the subscript n stands for their order.
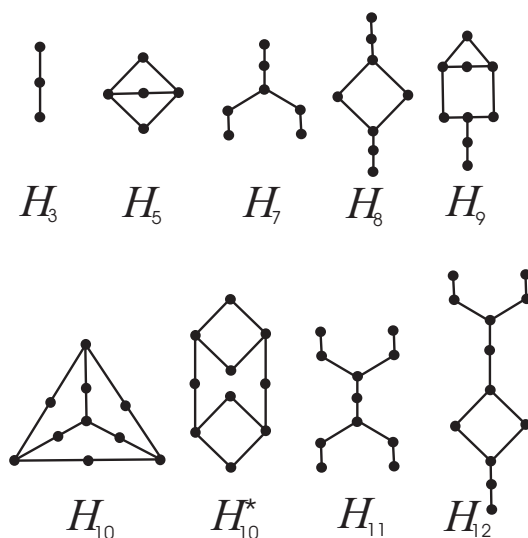
Figure 6. Stepwise irregular graphs with small cyclomatic numbers

The cyclomatic number of the graphs H_n is small, $\gamma = 0, 1, 2,$ or 3. Among them, $H_3 \cong K_{1,2}$, H_7, and H_{11} are trees, H_8 and H_{12} are unicyclic graphs, $H_5 \cong K_{2,3}$ and H_9 are bicyclic graphs, whereas H_{10} and H_{10}^* are tricyclic. The graphs H_3, H_5, H_{10}, and H_{10}^* are semiregular. The graphs H_5 and H_{10}^* are subdivision graphs of the cubic multigraphs J_2 and J_4^*, depicted in Fig. 7, whereas H_{10} is the subdivision graph of the complete graph K_4 (which is regular of degree 3).
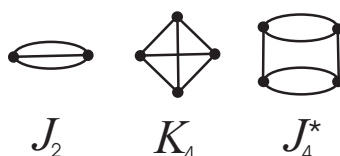

Figure 7. Cubic graphs from which the SI graphs H_5, H_{10}, and H_{10}^* are constructed

In the recent paper [28], the following two results were stated:

Theorem 10. [28] *There exist stepwise irregular bicyclic graphs whose order is any positive odd integer, except* 1*,* 3*,* 5*,* 7*,* 9*, and* 11*.*

Theorem 11. [28] *There exist connected stepwise irregular graphs of any order, except* 1*,* 2*,* 4*,* 5*, and* 6*.*

Considering the SI graphs shown in Fig. 7, and bearing in mind the graphs H_5 and H_9, the following minor correction to these theorems need to be made:

Theorem 10 (corrected). *There exist stepwise irregular bicyclic graphs whose order is any positive odd integer, except* 1, 3, 7, *and* 11.

Theorem 11 (corrected). *There exist connected stepwise irregular graphs of any order, except* 1, 2, 4, *and* 6.

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