

Packing Edge-Disjoint Cycles in Graphs and the Cyclomatic Number

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Abstract. For a graph G let $\mu(G)$ denote the cyclomatic number and let $\nu(G)$ denote the maximum number of edge-disjoint cycles of G .

We prove that for every $k \geq 0$ there is a finite set $\mathcal{P}(k)$ such that every 2-connected graph G for which $\mu(G) - \nu(G) = k$ arises by applying a simple extension rule to a graph in $\mathcal{P}(k)$. Furthermore, we determine $\mathcal{P}(k)$ for $k \leq 2$ exactly.

Keywords. graph; cycle; packing; cyclomatic number

1 Introduction

We consider finite and undirected graphs $G = (V_G, E_G)$ with vertex set V_G and edge set E_G which may contain multiple edges but no loops. We use standard terminology [10] and only recall some basic notions. If an edge $e \in E_G$ has the two incident vertices u and v in V_G , then we write $e = uv$. The degree $d_G(u)$ in G of a vertex $u \in V_G$ is the number of edges $e \in E_G$ incident with u . A path in G of length $l \geq 0$ is a sequence $v_0 e_1 v_1 e_2 \dots e_l v_l$ of distinct vertices $v_0, v_1, \dots, v_l \in V_G$ and distinct edges $e_i = v_{i-1} v_i \in E_G$ for $1 \leq i \leq l$. A cycle in G of length $l \geq 2$ is a sequence $v_1 e_2 v_2 \dots e_l v_l e_1 v_1$ such that $v_1 e_2 v_2 \dots e_l v_l$ is a path of length $(l-1)$ and $e_l = v_l v_1 \in E_G$. The subgraph induced by some set $U \subseteq V_G$ is denoted by $G[U]$. An *ear* of G is a path in G of length at least 1 such that all internal vertices have degree 2 in G . An ear of G is *maximal*, if it is not properly contained in another ear of G . If P is an ear of G and I is the set of internal vertices of P , then we say that G arises from $G' = (V_G \setminus I, E_G \setminus E_P)$ by *adding the ear* P and that G' arises from G by *removing the ear* P . Whitney [10, 13] proved that a graph of order at least 2 is 2-connected if and only if it has an *ear decomposition*, i.e. it arises from a chordless cycle by iteratively adding ears. A graph is a *cactus graph*, if all of its cycles are edge-disjoint which is equivalent to the fact that all of its blocks are cycles or edges.

The *cyclomatic number* of a graph G with $\kappa(G)$ components is

$$\mu(G) = |E_G| - |V_G| + \kappa(G).$$

A *cycle packing* \mathcal{C} of G of order l is a set of l edge-disjoint cycles of G . The maximum order of a cycle packing of G is denoted by

$$\nu(G).$$

A cycle packing of maximum order is called *optimal*. For a cycle packing \mathcal{C} , the set of edges contained in some cycle in \mathcal{C} is denoted by

$$E_{\mathcal{C}}.$$

Our research in the present paper is motivated by the well-known inequality

$$\nu(G) \leq \mu(G)$$

which holds for every graph G . As our main result, we prove that for every fixed $k \in \mathbb{N}_0 = \{0, 1, 2, \dots\}$ there is a finite set $\mathcal{P}(k)$ of graphs such that every 2-connected graph G for which

$$\mu(G) - \nu(G) = k$$

arises by applying a simple extension rule to one of the graphs in $\mathcal{P}(k)$, i.e. there are essentially only finitely many configurations which cause $\mu(G)$ and $\nu(G)$ to deviate by k . Furthermore, we determine $\mathcal{P}(k)$ for $k \leq 2$ exactly.

The results which are most related to ours concern the minimum difference $p(k)$ between the size $|E_G|$ and the order $|V_G|$ of a graph G which forces the existence of k edge-disjoint cycles, i.e.

$$p(k) = \min \{p \mid \nu(G) \geq k \ \forall G = (V_G, E_G) \text{ with } |E_G| - |V_G| \geq p\}.$$

There are several classical results concerning this parameter

$$p(k) = \begin{cases} 0 & , k = 1 \\ 4 & , k = 2 \quad [6] \\ 10 & , k = 3 \quad [8] \\ 18 & , k = 4 \quad [1, 14] \\ \Theta(k \log k) & [6, 11, 12, 14]. \end{cases}$$

Recently, algorithmic aspects of cycle packing problems have received considerable attention. While the problem to determine optimal cycle packings is APX-hard [3, 4, 7, 9] and remains NP-hard even when restricted to Eulerian graphs of maximum degree 4 [2], there are simple approximation algorithms [3, 7].

In Section 2 we prove our main result about the finiteness of $\mathcal{P}(k)$ and in Section 3 we determine $\mathcal{P}(k)$ for $k \leq 2$ exactly.

2 Graphs G with $\mu(G) - \nu(G) = k$

In this section we study the graphs G for which $\mu(G)$ and $\nu(G)$ differ by some fixed k . It is well-known — and easy to see — that the graphs G with $\mu(G) - \nu(G) = 0$ are exactly the cactus graphs, i.e. their blocks are either edges or arise by possibly subdividing the edges of a cycle of length 2.

For $k \in \mathbb{N}_0$ let

$$\mathcal{G}(k)$$

denote the set of 2-connected graphs G with $\mu(G) - \nu(G) = k$. In view of the above remark about cactus graphs, we obtain that $G \in \mathcal{G}(0)$ if and only if G is a cycle or an edge. The next lemma implies that in order to characterize the graphs G with $\mu(G) - \nu(G) = k$, it suffices to characterize the 2-connected graphs with this property.

Lemma 1 *Let $k \in \mathbb{N}_0$. If G is a graph with $\mu(G) - \nu(G) = k$ whose blocks B_1, B_2, \dots, B_l satisfy $B_i \in \mathcal{G}(k_i)$ for $1 \leq i \leq l$, then $k = k_1 + k_2 + \dots + k_l$.*

Proof: This follows immediately from the fact that every cycle of G is entirely contained in some block of G . \square

In order to explain the simple extension rule mentioned in the introduction, we need some more notation.

An l -cycle-path is a cactus with at most 2 endblocks and exactly $l \in \mathbb{N}_0$ cycles.

An l -cycle-path-subgraph of a graph $G = (V_G, E_G)$ with attachment vertices u and v is an induced subgraph $H = (V_H, E_H)$ of G which is an l -cycle-path such that u and v are two distinct vertices of H for which $d_G(w) = d_H(w)$ for all $w \in V_H \setminus \{u, v\}$ and $H + uv = (V_H, E_H \cup \{uv\})$ is 2-connected, i.e. only the attachment vertices may have neighbours outside of V_H and, if H has more than one block, then the attachment vertices are two non-cutvertices from the two endblocks of H . Note that a 0-cycle-path-subgraph of G with attachment vertices u and v is an ear of G with endvertices u and v .

A graph $H = (V_H, E_H)$ is said to arise from a graph $G = (V_G, E_G)$ by replacing the edge $e = uv \in E_G$ with an l -cycle-path, if H has an l -cycle-path-subgraph $Q = (V_Q, E_Q)$ with attachment vertices u and v such that (cf. Figure 1)

$$\begin{aligned} V_G &= V_H \setminus (V_Q \setminus \{u, v\}) \text{ and} \\ E_G &= (E_H \setminus E_Q) \cup \{e\}. \end{aligned}$$

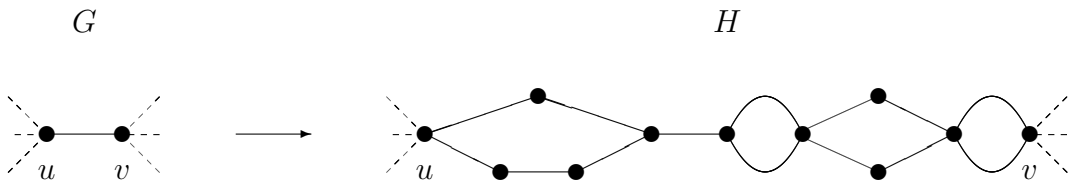


Figure 1 Replacing the edge $e = uv \in E_G$ with a 4-cycle-path.

A graph H is said to *extend* a graph G , if there is an optimal cycle packing \mathcal{C} of G such that H arises from G by replacing every edge $e \in E_{\mathcal{C}}$ with a 0-cycle-path and replacing every edge $e \in E_G \setminus E_{\mathcal{C}}$ with an l -cycle-path for some $l \in \mathbb{N}_0$. A graph H is said to be *reduced*, if there is no graph G different from H such that H extends G .

For $k \in \mathbb{N}_0$ let

$$\mathcal{P}(k)$$

denote the set of reduced graphs in $\mathcal{G}(k)$. Note that $\mathcal{P}(0)$ contains exactly two elements, an edge and a cycle of length 2. It is instructive to verify that for $k \geq 1$ a graph in $\mathcal{P}(k)$ contains neither vertices of degree at most 2 nor l -cycle-path-subgraphs for $l \geq 2$.

The next lemma summarizes some important properties of the above extension notion.

Lemma 2 *If $G_0 \in \mathcal{G}(k)$, G_1 extends G_0 , and G_2 extends G_1 , then*

(i) $G_1 \in \mathcal{G}(k)$,

(ii) G_2 extends G_0 , and

(iii) every graph in $\mathcal{G}(k)$ extends a graph in $\mathcal{P}(k)$.

Proof: Let \mathcal{C}_0 be an optimal cycle packing of G_0 such that G_1 arises from G_0 by replacing every edge $e \in E_{G_0}$ with an l_e -cycle-path L_e with $l_e = 0$ for $e \in E_{\mathcal{C}_0}$. Let \mathcal{C}'_1 denote the set of the

$$\sum_{e \in E_{G_0}} l_e$$

edge-disjoint cycles contained in the l_e -cycle-paths L_e for $e \in E_{G_0}$.

Clearly,

$$\mu(G_1) = \mu(G_0) + |\mathcal{C}'_1|.$$

Since the set of cycles in G_1 which are subdivisions of the cycles in \mathcal{C}_0 together with the cycles in \mathcal{C}'_1 form a cycle packing of G_1 , we obtain $\nu(G_1) \geq \nu(G_0) + |\mathcal{C}'_1|$.

Let \mathcal{C}_1 be an optimal cycle packing of G_1 such that G_2 arises from G_1 by replacing every edge $f \in E_{G_1}$ with an h_f -cycle-path H_f with $h_f = 0$ for $f \in E_{\mathcal{C}_1}$ and such that subject to this condition

$$|\mathcal{C}'_1 \cap \mathcal{C}_1|$$

is largest possible.

If E'_1 is an arbitrary set of edges which contains exactly one edge from each cycle in \mathcal{C}'_1 , then removing the $|\mathcal{C}'_1|$ edges in E'_1 from G_1 can delete at most $|\mathcal{C}'_1|$ cycles in \mathcal{C}_1 , which implies $\nu(G_0) \geq \nu(G_1) - |\mathcal{C}'_1|$.

In view of the above, this implies that

$$\nu(G_1) = \nu(G_0) + |\mathcal{C}'_1| \tag{1}$$

and hence (i).

Furthermore, this implies that every edge contained in a cycle in \mathcal{C}'_1 belongs to $E_{\mathcal{C}_1}$ and edges contained in different cycles in \mathcal{C}'_1 are contained in different cycles in \mathcal{C}_1 . (Otherwise there would be a choice for E'_1 such that removing the edges in E'_1 would only delete at most $|\mathcal{C}'_1| - 1$ cycles, which implies the contradiction $\nu(G_0) \geq \nu(G_1) - |\mathcal{C}'_1| + 1$.)

It follows that, if $l_e \geq 2$ for some $e \in E_{G_0}$, then \mathcal{C}_1 necessarily contains the l_e edge-disjoint cycles contained in the l_e -cycle-path L_e .

Furthermore, if $l_e = 1$ for some $e \in E_{G_0}$ and \mathcal{C}_1 does not contain the unique cycle C_e contained in the 1-cycle-path L_e , then there are exactly two cycles C'_e and C''_e in \mathcal{C}_1 which contain E_{C_e} . Since $(E_{C'_e} \cup E_{C''_e}) \setminus E_{C_e}$ contains the edge set of a cycle C'''_e ,

$$\tilde{\mathcal{C}}_1 = (\mathcal{C}_1 \setminus \{C'_e, C''_e\}) \cup \{C_e, C'''_e\}$$

is an optimal cycle packing of G_1 such that $E_{\tilde{\mathcal{C}}_1} \subseteq E_{\mathcal{C}_1}$ and

$$|\mathcal{C}'_1 \cap \tilde{\mathcal{C}}_1| > |\mathcal{C}'_1 \cap \mathcal{C}_1|$$

which is a contradiction to the choice of \mathcal{C}_1 .

Hence $\mathcal{C}'_1 \subseteq \mathcal{C}_1$. By (1), the cycles in $\mathcal{C}_1 \setminus \mathcal{C}'_1$ are the subdivisions of the cycles in an optimal cycle packing \mathcal{C}'_0 of G_0 . Clearly, $l_e > 0$ implies $e \notin E_{\mathcal{C}'_0}$. Since $h_f > 0$ for some $f \in E_{G_1} \setminus E_{\mathcal{C}_1}$ implies that f is a bridge of an l_e -cycle-path L_e with $e \notin E_{\mathcal{C}'_0}$, it follows that G_2 extends G_0 , i.e. (ii) holds.

By definition, for every graph $H \in \mathcal{G}(k)$ there is a graph $G \in \mathcal{P}(k)$ such that H arises from G by a finite sequence of extensions. Applying (ii) in an inductive argument implies that H extends G and (iii) follows. This completes the proof. \square

We proceed to our main result.

Theorem 3 *The set $\mathcal{P}(k)$ is finite for every $k \in \mathbb{N}_0$.*

Proof: We will prove the result by induction on k .

Since $|\mathcal{P}(0)| = 2$, we may assume that $k \geq 1$.

We will argue that every graph in $\mathcal{P}(k)$ arises from some graph in $\mathcal{P}(k-1)$ by applying a subset of a finite set of operations. Since, by induction, $\mathcal{P}(k-1)$ is finite, this clearly implies that $\mathcal{P}(k)$ is finite.

Let $H \in \mathcal{P}(k)$.

If a graph H^- arises by removing an ear from H , then

$$\nu(H) - 1 \leq \nu(H^-) \leq \nu(H) \text{ and } \mu(H^-) = \mu(H) - 1,$$

i.e. $H^- \in \mathcal{G}(k-1)$ or $H^- \in \mathcal{G}(k)$. Therefore, an ear decomposition of H yields a sequence of 2-connected graphs

$$G_0, G_1, \dots, G_l$$

such that

- $G_l = H$,

- G_i arises by adding the ear P_i to G_{i-1} for $1 \leq i \leq l$,
- $\nu(G_0) = \nu(G_1)$ and
- $\nu(G_{i-1}) = \nu(G_i) - 1$ for $2 \leq i \leq l$.

We assume that the sequence is chosen to be shortest possible, i.e. l is minimum.

Note that $G_0 \in \mathcal{G}(k-1)$ and $G_i \in \mathcal{G}(k)$ for $1 \leq i \leq l$.

By Lemma 2 (iii), G_0 extends some graph

$$G \in \mathcal{P}(k-1).$$

Let

$$\mathcal{C}_l$$

be an optimal cycle packing of $H = G_l$.

Since for $l \geq 2$ we have $\nu(G_{l-1}) = \nu(G_l) - 1$ and removing the ear P_l from G_l can only affect one cycle from \mathcal{C}_l , the ear P_l is contained in a unique cycle

$$C_l \in \mathcal{C}_l$$

and

$$\mathcal{C}_{l-1} := \mathcal{C}_l \setminus \{C_l\}$$

is an optimal cycle packing of G_{l-1} . Iterating this argument, we obtain that for $i = l, (l-1), (l-2), \dots, 2$, the ear P_i is contained in a unique cycle

$$C_i \in \mathcal{C}_i \subseteq \mathcal{C}_l$$

and that

$$\mathcal{C}_{i-1} := \mathcal{C}_i \setminus \{C_i, C_{i+1}, \dots, C_l\}$$

is an optimal cycle packing of G_{i-1} . Note that this argument does not apply to $i = 1$, because $\nu(G_0) = \nu(G_1)$.

Since each of the ears in

$$\mathcal{E} = \{P_2, P_3, \dots, P_l\}$$

is contained in a unique different cycle in \mathcal{C}_l , no internal vertex of any P_i is contained in any P_j for $2 \leq i \leq l$ and $1 \leq j \leq l$ with $i \neq j$. Since H is reduced and hence has no vertex of degree 2, this implies that the ears in \mathcal{E} all have length 1, i.e. they are all edges.

Let

$$P = v_0 e_1 v_1 e_2 v_2 \dots e_r v_r$$

be a maximal ear of G_1 . Since G_1 is 2-connected and $k \geq 1$, the endvertices v_0 and v_r of P are of degree at least 3. Let

$$I = \{v_1, v_2, \dots, v_{r-1}\}$$

be the set of internal vertices of P .

The next claim is obvious.

Claim A *If an ear P_i for $2 \leq i \leq l$ has exactly one endvertex in I , then C_i contains either the edge e_1 or the edge e_r . Therefore, at most two ears in \mathcal{E} have exactly one endvertex in I .*

Claim B *No ear P_i for $2 \leq i \leq l$ has its two endvertices in I .*

Proof of Claim B: For contradiction, we assume that the index i with $2 \leq i \leq l$ is minimum such that P_i has the endvertices $v_x, v_y \in I$ for $1 \leq x < y \leq r-1$. Since $\nu(G_{i-1}) = \nu(G_i) - 1$, the cycle C_i is formed by P_i and the subpath P' of P between v_x and v_y . This implies that no internal vertex of P' is an endvertex of an ear $P_j \in \mathcal{E} \setminus \{P_i\}$. Hence P_i is an ear of H and C_i is a 1-cycle-path-subgraph of H .

Let H' arise from H by removing the ear P_i .

If $\nu(H') = \nu(H)$, we may choose $\tilde{G}_0 = H'$, $\tilde{P}_1 = P_i$ and $\tilde{G}_1 = H$ contradicting the choice of the sequence G_0, G_1, \dots, G_l as shortest possible. Hence $\nu(H') = \nu(H) - 1$. This implies that H' has an optimal cycle packing not using the edges of P' and H is not reduced, which is a contradiction. \square

Claim C *G_1 does not contain a 2-cycle-path-subgraph.*

Proof of Claim C: For contradiction, we assume that Q is a 2-cycle-path-subgraph of G_1 with attachment vertices u and v . We may assume that $d_Q(u), d_Q(v) \geq 2$, i.e. that the 2 cycles C' and C'' of Q are the endblocks of Q .

Clearly, for every optimal cycle packing \mathcal{C}'_1 of G_1 , we have $E_{C'} \cup E_{C''} \subseteq E_{\mathcal{C}'_1}$. This implies that $E_{C'} \cup E_{C''} \subseteq E_{C_1}$ and, by Claims A and B, no ear in \mathcal{E} has an endvertex in $V_Q \setminus \{u, v\}$. Hence Q is also a 2-cycle-path-subgraph of H and H is not reduced, which is a contradiction. \square

Since G_1 arises by adding the ear P_1 to G_0 , Claim C implies that G_0 does not contain an s -cycle-path-subgraph for $s \geq 6$. Since every s -cycle-path-subgraph for $s \leq 5$ yields at most $2 \cdot 5 + 6 = 16$ maximal ears, this implies that the number of maximal ears of G_0 is at most $16|E_G|$ and hence the number of maximal ears of G_1 is at most $16|E_G| + 3$.

Since H is reduced and hence has no vertex of degree 2, Claim A implies that no maximal ear of G_1 has more than 2 internal vertices. This implies that the order $|V_{G_1}|$ and size $|E_{G_1}|$ of G_1 is bounded in terms of the size $|E_G|$ of G .

Since all ears in \mathcal{E} are edges between vertices of G_1 , the number of ears in \mathcal{E} with different endvertices is bounded in terms of $|V_{G_1}|$, i.e. it is bounded in terms of $|E_G|$.

Furthermore, since the ears in \mathcal{E} all lie in different edge-disjoint cycles, the number of ears in \mathcal{E} which have the same endvertices is bounded by the size $|E_{G_1}|$ of G_1 , i.e. it is bounded in terms of $|E_G|$.

Altogether, G_1 arises from G by applying a subset of a set of operations whose cardinality is bounded in terms of $|E_G|$, and H arises from G_1 by applying a subset of a set of operations whose cardinality is also bounded in terms of $|E_G|$.

This completes the proof. \square

The reader should note that the proof of Theorem 3 yields a — rather unefficient — algorithm which for $k \geq 1$ allows to derive $\mathcal{P}(k)$ from $\mathcal{P}(k-1)$ and has a running time which is bounded in terms of $|\mathcal{P}(k-1)|$ and the maximum size of graphs in $\mathcal{P}(k-1)$. Therefore, for every fixed k , we can — in principle — determine $\mathcal{P}(k)$ in finite time.

We finish this section with another algorithmic consequence of Theorem 3.

Let $k \in \mathbb{N}_0$ be fixed and let G be a fixed graph in $\mathcal{P}(k)$.

For a given 2-connected graph H as input, we can decide in polynomial time whether H extends G . The simplest argument implying this might be to consider all injective mappings of V_G to V_H and check whether the edges of G can be suitable replaced by cycle-paths in order to obtain H . This can clearly be done in polynomial time.

Therefore, in view of Lemma 1 and Theorem 3, for a given graph H as input, we can decide in polynomial time whether $\mu(H) - \nu(H) = k$. Furthermore, in view of the proof of Lemma 2, we can also efficiently construct an optimal cycle packing of H — even all of them — in this case.

3 $\mathcal{P}(1)$ and $\mathcal{P}(2)$

In this section we illustrate Theorem 3 and determine $\mathcal{P}(1)$ and $\mathcal{P}(2)$ explicitly.

The following lemma captures a straightforward yet important observation which was essentially also used by the proof of Theorem 3.

Lemma 4 *Let $k \geq 1$.*

(i) *Every graph $H \in \mathcal{P}(k)$ arises by adding an edge to a graph G such that either $\nu(G) = \nu(H)$ and G extends a graph in $\mathcal{P}(k-1)$, or $\nu(G) = \nu(H) - 1$ and G extends a graph in $\mathcal{P}(k)$.*

(ii) *Let $\mathcal{Q} \subseteq \mathcal{P}(k)$.*

If every graph H in $\mathcal{P}(k)$ which arises by adding an edge to a graph G such that either $\nu(G) = \nu(H)$ and G extends a graph in $\mathcal{P}(k-1)$, or $\nu(G) = \nu(H) - 1$ and G extends a graph in \mathcal{Q} , also belongs to \mathcal{Q} , then $\mathcal{Q} = \mathcal{P}(k)$.

Proof: (i) Let $H \in \mathcal{P}(k)$ and let P be the last ear in some ear decomposition of H .

Since H is reduced, P has length 1, i.e. it is an edge. Let G arise by removing P from H .

Clearly, $\mu(G) = \mu(H) - 1$ while $\nu(G) = \nu(H)$ or $\nu(G) = \nu(H) - 1$.

By the definition of $\mathcal{P}(k)$, $\nu(G) = \nu(H)$ implies that G extends a graph in $\mathcal{P}(k-1)$ and $\nu(G) = \nu(H) - 1$ implies that G extends a graph in $\mathcal{P}(k)$.

(ii) Let $H \in \mathcal{P}(k)$.

Iteratively deleting edges as in (i) and reducing the constructed graphs, we obtain a sequence G_0, G_1, \dots, G_l such that $G_0 \in \mathcal{P}(k-1)$, $G_i \in \mathcal{P}(k)$ for $1 \leq i \leq l$, G_i contains an edge e_i such that $G_i - e_i$ extends G_{i-1} for $1 \leq i \leq l$ and $G_l = H$.

Since G_{i-1} has less edges than G_i for $1 \leq i \leq l$, the sequence is finite.

Inductively applying the hypothesis, we obtain that $G_i \in \mathcal{Q}$ for $1 \leq i \leq l$, i.e. $H \in \mathcal{Q}$ which implies $\mathcal{Q} = \mathcal{P}(k)$. \square

Note that Lemma 4 (ii) yields a criterion to check whether some subset \mathcal{Q} of $\mathcal{P}(k)$ already contains all of $\mathcal{P}(k)$. Therefore, the proofs of the following two results reduce to tedious yet straightforward case analysis. The following result is in fact equivalent to a result in [5].

Theorem 5 $\mathcal{P}(1) = \{K_2^3\}$ where K_2^3 is the unique graph with two vertices and three parallel edges (cf. Figure 2).

Proof: It is easy to verify that $K_2^3 \in \mathcal{P}(1)$.

Note that the only graphs extending graphs in $\mathcal{P}(0)$ are cycle-paths. This easily implies that, if $H \in \mathcal{P}(1)$ arises by adding an edge to a graph G with $\nu(G) = \nu(H)$ such that G extends a graph in $\mathcal{P}(0)$, then $H = K_2^3$.

Furthermore, if $H \in \mathcal{P}(1)$ arises by adding an edge to a graph G with $\nu(G) = \nu(H) - 1$ and G extends K_2^3 , then H extends K_2^3 . Since H is reduced, we obtain $H = K_2^3$.

By Lemma 4 (ii), the proof is complete. \square

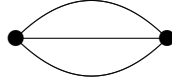


Figure 2 $\mathcal{P}(1) = \{K_2^3\}$.

We say that the graphs which arise from one of the two graphs G_1 or G_2 in Figure 3 by contracting a subset of the edges indicated by dashed lines are *generated from* G_1 or G_2 , respectively.

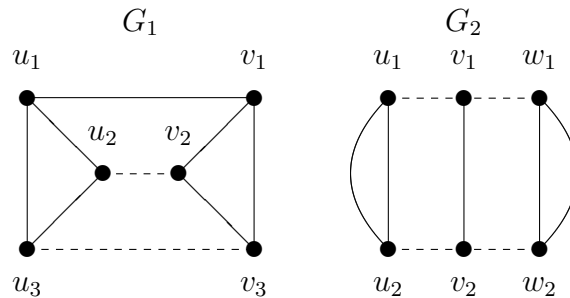


Figure 3 The graphs $G_1, G_2 \in \mathcal{P}(2)$.

Theorem 6 $\mathcal{P}(2)$ consists of K_4 and all graphs which are generated from G_1 or G_2 .

Proof: It is easy to verify that K_4 and all graphs which are generated from G_1 or G_2 belong to $\mathcal{P}(2)$.

Let $H \in \mathcal{P}(2)$.

We consider different cases.

Case 1 H arises by adding an edge uv to a graph G with $\nu(G) = \nu(H) = 1$ such that G extends K_2^3 .

In this case G is a subdivision of K_2^3 .

Since $\nu(H) = 1$, the vertices u and v are not contained in a common maximal ear of G . This implies that $H = K_4$.

Case 2 H arises by adding an edge uv to a graph G with $\nu(G) = \nu(H) \geq 2$ such that G extends K_2^3 .

In this case G has a unique optimal cycle packing \mathcal{C} .

If $d_G(u) = d_G(v) = 2$ and u and v lie on a maximal ear contained in a cycle in \mathcal{C} , then $H = G_2$.

If $d_G(u) = d_G(v) = 2$ and u and v lie in different maximal ears contained in one cycle in \mathcal{C} , then H extends K_4 . Since $H \neq K_4$, H is not reduced which is a contradiction.

If $d_G(u) = d_G(v) = 2$ and u and v lie in different cycles in \mathcal{C} , then H is generated from G_1 .

If $d_G(u) \geq 3$, $d_G(v) = 2$ and v lies in a cycle in \mathcal{C} , then H extends K_4 . Since $H \neq K_4$, H is not reduced which is a contradiction.

In all remaining subcases, H is generated from G_2 .

Case 3 H arises by adding an edge uv to a graph G with $\nu(G) = \nu(H) - 1$ such that G extends K_4 .

Let v_1, v_2, v_3, v_4 denote the vertices of K_4 . We may assume that G arises by replacing the edges $v_i v_j$ with $l_{i,j}$ -cycle-paths $Q_{i,j}$.

Since H is reduced and $\nu(G) = \nu(H) - 1$, the vertices u and v are not both contained in one of the cycle-paths $Q_{i,j}$ and we obtain that H is generated from G_1 .

Case 4 H arises by adding an edge uv to a graph G with $\nu(G) = \nu(H) - 1$ such that G extends a graph generated from G_1 .

It is easy to verify that $\nu(G) = \nu(H) - 1$ implies that H is generated from G_1 .

Case 5 H arises by adding an edge uv to a graph G with $\nu(G) = \nu(H) - 1$ such that G extends a graph generated from G_2 .

It is easy to verify that $\nu(G) = \nu(H) - 1$ implies that H is generated from K_4 or G_2 .

By Lemma 4 (ii), the proof is complete. \square

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