Redundancy Elimination in Highly Parallel Solutions of Motion Coordination Problems

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***Abstract*— Problems of coordinated motion of multiple entities are addressed in this paper. These problems are dealt on the abstract level where they can be viewed as a task of constructing a spatial-temporal plan for a set of identical mobile entities. The entities are moving in a certain environment and they need to reach given goal positions starting from initial ones. The most abstract formal representations of coordinated motion problems are known as "pebble motion on a graph" and "multi-robot path planning". The existent state-of-the-art algorithms for pebble motion and multi-robot problems were suspected of generating solutions containing redundancies and this hypothesis eventually confirmed. It this paper, we present several techniques for identifying and eliminating redundancies from solutions generated by these algorithms. An extensive experimental evaluation was performed and it showed that the quality of generated solutions can be improved up to the order of magnitude. We also identify parameters characterizing instances of problems where the improvement is expectable.**

Keywords-multi-robot path planning; pebble motion on a graph; redundancy elimination; parallel plans

I. Introduction, Context, and Motivation

Problems of coordinated motion of multiple identical entities as they are introduced in [3], [6], [7], and [11] represent a basic abstraction for many real-life and theoretical tasks. The classical task that can be abstracted as a problem of coordinated motion takes place in a certain physical environment where *identical mobile entities* are moving (typically represented by *mobile robots*). Each entity is given its initial and goal position in the environment. The task is to construct a spatial-temporal plan for all the entities such that they can reach their goal positions following this plan while the plan satisfies certain natural constraints. These constraints are constituted by a requirement that the entities must avoid obstacles in the environment and must not collide with each other.

The standard abstraction that is adopted throughout this work uses an undirected graph to model the environment. The vertices of this graph represent positions in the environment and the edges represent an unblocked way between two positions. An arrangement of entities in the environment is abstracted as a uniquely invertible assignment of entities to vertices. At least **one** vertex remains **unoccupied** in order to make the movement of entities possible. The time is discrete; it is an ordered set of *time steps* isomorphic to the structure of *natural numbers*. A way how an arrangement of entities can be transformed into another can slightly differ in variants of the problem. The best known abstract formalizations of coordinated motion problems are represented by *pebble motion on a graph* as defined in [3] and [11], and *multi-robot path planning* as defined in [6], [7], and [8] while the latter allows higher parallelism.

Abstract problems of coordinated motion of multiple entities on a graph are motivated by many real-life problems. The most typical motivating example is motion planning of a group of mobile robots that are moving in *2-dimensional space*. Generally, if there is enough free space in the environment, algorithms based on search for shortest paths in a graph with an eventual collision resolution can be used [1]. However, if non-trivial amount of space is occupied different approaches must be adopted.

Many well known puzzles can be formulated as coordinated motion on a graph. The best known is so called Lloyd's 15-puzzle and its generalizations as described in [5] and [11]. In practice, the entities may be represented by various mobile or movable objects – for example rearranging containers in storage area can be interpreted as a problem of coordinated motion where entities are represented by containers. Indeed, this approach has been used for planning motions of automated straddle carriers in a storage area in Patrick port facility at Port Brisbane in Queensland [6]. Although the approach suggested in [6] seems not to scale for larger number of entities it clearly demonstrate the usefulness of discussed abstractions. Entities do not necessarily need to be physical objects. Virtual spaces of computer simulations and games convey many situations where motions of certain entities must be planned. An example is a coordination of groups of units in *strategic computer games* [10].

It is necessary to stress that contrary to multi-agent motion planning [2], the **centralized approach** is adopted in this work. That is, the environment is fully observable for the

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central planning mechanism and the individual entities merely execute the submitted centrally created plan.

There exist several relatively efficient methods for solving problems of coordinated motion on a graph. This work is particularly targeted on solving methods described in [7], [8]. These methods represent state-of-the-art algorithms for the class of problems where the graph modeling the environment is *bi-connected* and there are **many entities** placed in the graph. More precisely, the number of entities μ is comparable to the size of the set of vertices (that is, $\mu = \Theta(|V|)$). Despite the good performance of these methods the generated solutions are suspected of containing certain *redundancies*. This is a **hypothesis** whose examination is the main contribution of this paper. If it is the case that generated solutions contain redundancies, then a question how they can be removed to improve the solution arises.

The task was to analyze solutions of non-trivial size which turned out to be infeasible to be done manually. Moreover, it is necessary to emphasize that searched redundancies were of a priori unknown nature. Therefore a software tool ***GraphRec*** [4] allowing visual analysis of solutions of problems of motion on a graph has been exploited for this analysis. Several types of redundancies were observed using the *GraphRec* software in generated solutions. The most prominent three of them that we manage to formally capture are described in this paper. Methods for automated discovering and elimination of these three defined types of redundancies are suggested and analyzed theoretically as well as experimentally.

The top level **organization** of the paper has two parts. The first part explains a specific variant of the coordinated motion problem (section II) and the basic solving algorithm (section III); this part merely recalls existing concepts. The second part contains the main contribution of this work; redundancy elimination methods are described (section IV), and the benefit of suggested methods is justified in the experimental section (section V).

II. Pebble Motion on a Graph

In the rest of the paper, we restrict ourselves on the variant of the entity motion coordination problem known as *pebble motion on a graph* defined in [5] and [11]. The work can be extended on *multi-robot path planning* using minor modifications only.

The task in pebble motion on a graph is given by an undirected graph with an *initial* and a *goal arrangement* of pebbles in the vertices of this graph. Each vertex of the graph contains at most one pebble (which represents a movable entity) and at least one vertex remains unoccupied. The task is to find a sequence of moves for each pebble such that all the pebbles reach their goal vertices. A pebble can move into a **neighboring unoccupied** vertex while no other pebble is entering the target vertex at the same time. The following definition formalizes the problem. An illustration of the problem is shown in Fig. 1.

Definition 1 ***(pebble motion on a graph).*** Let $G = (V, E)$ be an undirected graph and let $P = \{p_1, p, \dots, p_\mu\}$ be a set of pebbles where $\mu < |V|$. The ***initial arrangement*** of pebbles is defined by a simple function $S_P^0 : P \longrightarrow V$ (that is $S_P^0(p_i) \neq S_P^0(p_j)$ for $i, j = 1,2, \dots, \mu$ with $i \neq j$); the ***goal arrangement*** of pebbles is defined by another simple function $S_P^+ : P \longrightarrow V$. A problem of ***pebble motion on a graph*** is the task to find a number ξ and a sequence $S_P = [S_P^0, S_P^1, \dots, S_P^\xi]$ where $S_P^k : P \longrightarrow V$ is a simple function for every $k = 1,2, \dots, \xi$. The following constraints must hold for S_P:

(i) $S_R^\zeta = S_R^+$, that is, pebbles finally reach their destinations.

(ii) Either $S_P^k(p) = S_P^{k+1}(p)$ or $\{S_P^k(p), S_P^{k+1}(p)\} \in E$ for every $p \in P$ and $k = 1,2, \dots, \xi - 1$.

(iii) $S_P^k(p) \neq S_P^{k+1}(p)$ and $S_P^k(q) \neq S_P^{k+1}(q)$ for $\forall q \in P$ such that $q \neq p$ must hold for every $p \in P$ and $k = 1,2, \dots, \xi - 1$, that is no two pebbles can enter a vertex at the same time.

The problem described above is formally a quadruple $\Pi = (G = (V, E), P, S_P^0, S_P^+)$. □

In practice, the *quality of solution* matters. The typical measures of the quality of solution are its **length** (the total number of moves) and the **makespan** (which corresponds to the number ξ). These numbers are required to be small. Unfortunately, requiring either the length of solution or its makespan to be as small as possible makes the problem **intractable** [5] (the decision variant of the problem is *NP*-complete). On the other hand, if there is **no requirement** on the quality, the question whether there exists a solution is in the ***P* class** as it shown in [3] and [11].

However, methods giving evidence that the problem belongs to the *P* class described in [3] and [11] generates excessively long solutions that are unsuitable for practice when each movement of an entity represented by a pebble costs something. Therefore it was necessary to find a **compromise** between the quality of solution and computational effort of its construction. Methods following this compromise are described in [7] and [8]. Solutions produced by these methods were submitted for analysis into the visualization tool in order to find if and how they can be further improved.

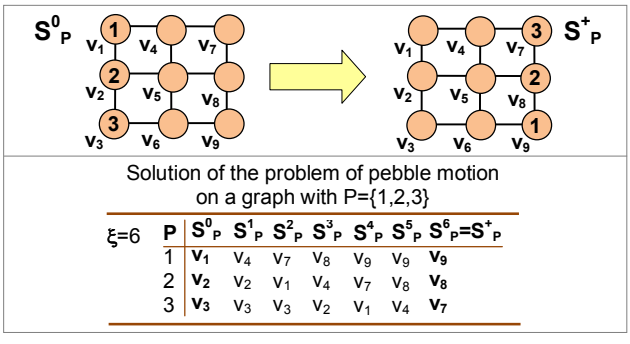

Fig 1. *An illustration of a problem of* ***pebble motion on a graph***. The task is to move pebbles from their initial positions specified by S_P^0 to the goal positions specified by S_P^+. A solution of length 6 is shown.

III. Solving Coordinated Motion Problems

This section is devoted to a brief recall of algorithms described in [7] and [8]. Understanding how these algorithm works will provide us an insight into the structure of solutions produced by them. This theoretical insight founded the hypothesis that solutions can be further improved.

The most important class of pebble motion problems is formed by those whose graph is *bi-connected* which intuitively means that each pair of vertices is connected by two disjoint paths.

Definition 2 ***(connectivity, bi-connectivity).*** An undirected graph $G = (V, E)$ is ***connected*** if $|V| \geq 2$ and for every pair of distinct vertices $u, v \in V$ there exists a path connecting u and v in G. An undirected graph $G = (V, E)$ is ***bi-connected*** if $|V| \geq 3$ and for every vertex $u \in V$ the graph $G' = (V - \{u\}, E \cap \{\{v, w\} | v, w \in V \wedge v \neq u \wedge w \neq u\})$ is connected. □

The importance of this class of problems is assessed by the fact that they are **almost always solvable**. Moreover, spatial environments in real tasks are often abstracted as two dimensional **grids** which are bi-connected in most cases.

If the bi-connected graph contains at least **two unoccupied** vertices and it is not a cycle, then every goal arrangement of pebbles is reachable from every initial arrangement [7]. If the graph contains just **one unoccupied** vertex which can be without loss of generality fixed, then any arrangement of pebbles can be regarded as a *permutation* with respect to the initial arrangement.

A permutation is *even* if it can be composed of the even number of transpositions; otherwise it is *odd*. If the goal arrangement represents an **even** permutation, then the problem is **always solvable**. In case of an odd permutation, the problem is solvable if and only if the graph contains a cycle of the odd length [11].

An inductive construction of bi-connected graphs by adding *handles* [9] is a pivotal concept in developing solving algorithms. Let $G = (V, E)$ be a graph, a *handle* with respect to G is a sequence of vertices $L = [u, x_1, x_2, \ldots, x_l, v]$, where $u, v \in V$ and $x_i \notin V$ for $i = 1,2, \ldots, l$ (it allowed that $l = 0$). The result of *addition* of the handle L to the graph G is a new graph $G' = (V', E')$, where $V' = V \cup \{x_1, x_2, \ldots, x_l\}$ and either $E' = E \cup \{\{u, v\}\}$ if $l = 0$ or $E' = E \cup \{\{u, x_1\}, \{x_1, x_2\}, \ldots, \{x_{l-1}, x_l\}, \{x_l, v\}\}$ if $l \geq 1$. Every bi-connected graph $G = (V, E)$ can be constructed from a cycle by a sequence of handle additions.

A. The BIBOX-θ Solving Algorithm

The *BIBOX-θ* algorithm [8] solves a case of the problem of pebble motion on a graph when the graph is bi-connected and there is single unoccupied vertex. It represents state-of-the-art for the described class of problems in terms of speed and quality of generated solutions. This is the main reason why solutions produced by this algorithm are studied here.

In the first phase, a handle decomposition is found; that is, a cycle - called *initial cycle* - and a sequence of handles is determined. Without loss of generality it is required that the unoccupied vertex within the goal arrangement of pebbles is in the initial cycle. The algorithm then proceeds inductively according to the handle decomposition from the last handle to the initial cycle with the first handle.

Two properties of bi-connected graphs with at least one unoccupied vertex are exploited while pebbles are placed within handles: **(a)** every vertex can be made unoccupied (this is even true for a connected graph), **(b)** every pebble can be moved to an arbitrary vertex [8]. A handle is processed in the following way. An orientation of the handle is chosen first – this orientation determines ordering of vertices within the handle. The first and the last vertex of the handle are the connection points to the remainder graph.

Then pebbles starting with the pebble whose goal position is in the second vertex of the handle are placed into the handle in the **stack manner**. The current pebble is moved to the last vertex of the handle.

Two cases are distinguished here. If the pebble is already somewhere in the handle it must be moved outside first. If the current pebble is outside the handle, then it can be moved into the last vertex of the handle using property (b).

After placing the pebble into the last vertex of the handle, the handle is rotated once in the direction to the first vertex. When all the pebbles within the handle are processed the task is to solve the problem of the same type on a smaller graph.

Nevertheless, the stack manner of placing pebbles cannot be applied for the initial cycle and the first handle of the decomposition. Here the algorithm uses a database containing **pre-calculated optimal solutions** for transpositions and rotation of pebbles along 3-cycles in graphs consisting of a cycle and a handle. A solution to any solvable instance on the initial cycle with the first handle is then composed of solutions from such a database [8].

B. A Case with More Unoccupied Vertices

If there are exactly **two** unoccupied vertices in the graph an alternative more efficient placing of pebbles in the initial cycle and the first handle can be used [7]. If there are **more than two** unoccupied vertices in the graph the approach proposed in [8] is to fill all the remaining unoccupied vertices except two with **dummy pebbles**. The instance is then solved by the *BIBOX-θ* algorithm and the solution is post-processed by removing movements of dummy robots out of the solution.

This approach is however suspected of generating unnecessary movements for original pebbles. Notice that original pebbles have to make quite complicated movements when a dummy pebble is being placed into a handle. All these movements of the original pebbles are redundant in fact since movements of the dummy pebble will be eventually filtered out.

IV. Elimination of Redundancies

Several types of redundancies were **discovered** using the *GraphRec* software. A formal description of these redundancies and algorithms for their elimination are provided in the following sections. When reasoning about redundancies, it is convenient to assume solutions to be sequential; that is, a solution has just one movement between consecutive time steps. Fortunately, the *BIBOX-θ* algorithm can produce solutions in this form. A solution of this form can be viewed as a sequence of moves.

The notation $k_i: u_i \rightarrow v_i$ will denote a move of a pebble k_i from a vertex u_i to a vertex v_i commenced at time step i. The move is called *non-trivial* if $u_i \neq v_i$. From the formal point of view, the sequential solution is a sequence of non-trivial moves $\Phi = [k_i: u_i \rightarrow v_i | i = 1,2,\dots,\xi-1]$ (consistency with Definition 1 is also assumed).

Definition 3 ***(inverse moves).*** Two consecutive moves $k_i: u_i \rightarrow v_i$ and $k_{i+1}: u_{i+1} \rightarrow v_{i+1}$ with $i \in \{1,2,\dots,\xi-2\}$ are called *inverse* if $k_i = k_{i+1}$, $u_i = v_{i+1}$, and $v_i = u_{i+1}$. □

Observe that a pair of inverse moves can be left out of the solution without affecting its *validity* - it still solves the problem. However, elimination of an inverse pair may cause that another pair of inverse moves arises. Hence, it is necessary to remove inverse moves from the solution repeatedly until there are any.

Algorithm 1. Elimination of inverse moves.

```
function Erase-Inverse-Moves (Φ): sequence
1: do
2:     η ← ∅
3:     let [k_1: u_1 → v_1, k_2: u_2 → v_2, ..., k_{ξ-1}: u_{ξ-1} → v_{ξ-1}] = Φ
4:     for i = 1,2, ..., ξ − 1 do
5:         if k_i: u_i → v_i and k_{i+1}: u_{i+1} → v_{i+1} are inverse then
6:             η ← η ∪ {k_i: u_i → v_i, k_{i+1}: u_{i+1} → v_{i+1}}
7:     Φ ← Φ − η
8: while η ≠ ∅
9: return Φ
```

The process of elimination inverse moves is expressed as Algorithm 1. The worst case time complexity of the algorithm is $O(|\Phi|^2)$, space complexity is $O(|\Phi|)$.

Definition 4 ***(redundant moves).*** A sequence of moves $[k_{i_j}: u_{i_j} \rightarrow v_{i_j} | j = 1,2,\dots,l]$, where $I = [i_j \in \{1,2,\dots,\xi-2 | j=1,2,\dots,l\}]$ is a an increasing sequence of indices, is called *redundant* if $|\{k_{i_j} | j = 1,2,\dots,l\}| = 1$, $u_{i_1} = v_{i_l}$, and for each move $k_\iota: u_\iota \rightarrow v_\iota$ with $i_1 < \iota < i_l \wedge \iota \notin I$ it holds that $k_\iota \neq k_{i_1} \Rightarrow u_{i_1} \notin \{u_\iota, v_\iota\}$. □

Redundant moves represents **generalization** of inverse moves (a pair of inverse moves form a redundant sequence). It is a sequence of moves which relocates a pebble into some vertex for the second time while other pebbles do not enter this vertex at any time step between the beginning and the end of the sequence. Eliminating a redundant sequence of moves preserves validity of the solution.

Again, it is necessary to remove redundant sequences repeatedly since its removal may cause that another redundant sequence arises.

Algorithm 2 formalizes the process of removing redundant moves in the pseudo-code. The worst case time complexity is $O(|\Phi|^4)$, the space complexity is $O(|\Phi|)$.

Definition 5 ***(long sequence).*** Let S_P^t be a set of vertices occupied by pebbles at time step t. A sequence of moves $[k_{i_j}: u_{i_j} \rightarrow v_{i_j} | j = 1,2,\dots,l]$, where $I = [i_j \in \{1,2,\dots,\xi-2\} | j = 1,2,\dots,l]$ is an increasing sequence of indices, is called *long* if $|\{k_{i_j} | j = 1,2,\dots,l\}| = 1$ and there exists a path $C = [c_1 = u_{i_1}, c_2, \dots, c_n = v_{i_l}]$ in G such that $n < l$, $C \cap S_P^{i_1} = \emptyset$, and for all the moves $k_\iota: u_\iota \rightarrow v_\iota$ with $i_1 < \iota < i_l \wedge \iota \notin I$ it holds that $k_\iota \neq k_{i_1} \Rightarrow \{u_\iota, v_\iota\} \cap C = \emptyset$. □

Algorithm 2. Elimination of redundant moves.

```
function Erase-Redundant-Moves (Φ): sequence
1: do
2:     η ← Find-Redundant-Moves(Φ)
3:     Φ ← Φ − η
4: while η ≠ ∅
5: return Φ

function Find-Redundant-Moves (Φ): sequence
6: let [k_1: u_1 → v_1, ..., k_{ξ-1}: u_{ξ-1} → v_{ξ-1}] = Φ
7: for i = 1,2, ..., ξ − 2 do {beginning of redundant sequence}
8:     for j = ξ − 1, ξ − 2, ..., i + 1 do
       {end of redundant sequence}
9:         if k_i = k_j ∧ u_i = v_j then
10:            η ← ∅ {redundant sequence}
11:            for τ = i, i + 1, ..., j do
12:                if k_i = k_τ then η ← η ∪ {k_τ: u_τ → v_τ}
13:            if Check-Redundant-Moves(Φ, i, j) then return η
14: return ∅

function Check-Redundant-Moves (Φ, i, j): boolean
15: let [k_1: u_1 → v_1, ..., k_{ξ-1}: u_{ξ-1} → v_{ξ-1}] = Φ
16: for ι = i + 1, i + 2, ..., j − 1 do
17:     if k_ι ≠ k_i ∧ u_i ∈ {u_ι, v_ι} then return False
18: return True
```

The concept of long sequence is a **generalization** of redundant sequence (the path C is empty in the case of redundant sequence). Intuitively, the long sequence can be replaced by a sequence of moves along a shorter path (cutoff path) into which other pebbles do not enter between the beginning and the end of the sequence. Replacing a long sequence of moves by a sequence of moves along the path C again preserves validity of the solution. The replacement of long sequences must be performed repeatedly since new long sequences may arise.

The process of replacement is formally expressed below as Algorithm 3. The worst case time complexity is $O(|\Phi|^4 + \Phi 3V2$, the space complexity is $O\Phi + V + E$.

Algorithm 3. Replacement of long sequences.

function *Replace-Long-Moves* (Φ, G): **sequence**
1: **do**
2: | $(\eta, \pi) \leftarrow$*FindLongMoves*(Φ, G)
3: | $\Phi \leftarrow \Phi - \eta$; $\Phi \leftarrow \Phi \cup \pi$
4: **while** $(\eta, \pi) \neq (\emptyset, [])$
5: **return** Φ

function *Find-Long-Moves* (Φ, G): **pair**
6: **let** $[k_1 : u_1 \rightarrow v_1, \ldots, k_{\xi-1} : u_{\xi-1} \rightarrow v_{\xi-1}] = \Phi$
7: **for** $i = 1,2, \ldots, \xi - 2$ **do**
8: | **for** $j = \xi - 1, \xi - 2, \ldots, i + 1$ **do**
9: | | **if** $k_i = k_j$ **then**
10: | | | $\eta \leftarrow \emptyset$
11: | | | **for** $\tau = i, i + 1, \ldots, j$ **do**
12: | | | | **if** $k_i = k_\tau$ **then** $\eta \leftarrow \eta \cup \{k_\tau : u_\tau \rightarrow v_\tau\}$
13: | | | $C \leftarrow$*Check-Long-Moves*$(\Phi, i, j, |\eta|, G)$
14: | | | **if** $C \neq []$ **then**
15: | | | | **let** $[c_1, c_2, \ldots, c_n] = C$
16: | | | | $\pi \leftarrow [k_i : c_1 \rightarrow c_2, \ldots, k_i : c_{n-1} \rightarrow c_n]$
17: | | | | **return** (η, π)
18: **return** $(\emptyset, [])$

function *Check-Long-Moves* $(\Phi, i, j, l, G = (V, E))$: **sequence**
19: **let** $[k_1 : u_1 \rightarrow v_1, \ldots, k_{\xi-1} : u_{\xi-1} \rightarrow v_{\xi-1}] = \Phi$
20: $(V', E') \leftarrow G$; $V' \leftarrow V' - S_P^i$; $E' \leftarrow E' \cap \{\{u, v\} | u, v \in V'\}$
21: **for** $\iota = i + 1, i + 2, \ldots, j - 1$ **do**
22: | **if** $k_\iota \neq k_i$ **then**
23: | | $V' \leftarrow V' - \{u_\iota, v_\iota\}$; $E' \leftarrow E' \cap \{\{u, v\} | u, v \in V'\}$
24: **let** C be a shortest path between u_i and v_j in $G' = (V', E')$
25: **if** C is defined **and** $|C| < l$ **then return** C
26: **return** []

Redundancies described above were discovered using the *GraphRec* software. Notice that the gradual generalization was adopted in the description. Although long sequences subsume both less general redundancies, it is not advisable to apply their replacement directly. It is better to apply elimination of redundancies stepwise from the less general one to more general ones. The reason for this practice is the increasing time complexity of redundancy elimination algorithms. A sequence of moves submitted to the more complex algorithm is potentially shortened by eliminating less general redundancies using this practice.

V. Experimental Evaluation

An experimental evaluation was made with above three suggested methods for redundancy elimination. Algorithms 1, 2, and 3 were implemented in C++ and were tested on a set of benchmark instances of the problem of pebble motion. Solutions found by the *BIBOX-θ* [8] algorithm on these benchmark instances were submitted to redundancy elimination methods. This algorithm represents the state-of-the-art for the tested class of the problem.

Several characteristics of redundancy elimination were evaluated: the reduction of the **total number of moves** within solutions, **parallel makespan**, **average parallelism**, and **runtime** were measured. The implementation of redundancy elimination algorithms almost exactly follows the pseudo-code given in section IV.

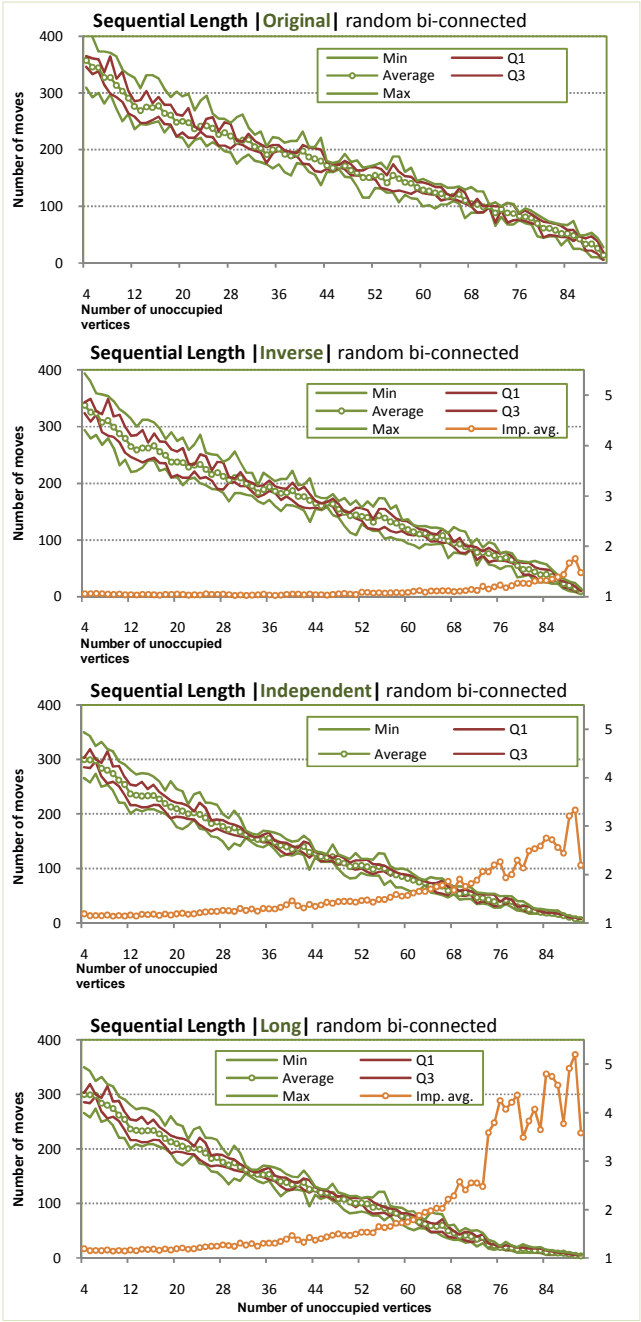

Fig. 2. ***Sequential length distribution*** *on random bi-connected graphs.* A collection of 10 graphs consisting of 90 vertices with length of handles ranging uniformly between 2 and 8 were generated for each number of unoccupied vertices. **Minimum**, **maximum**, **average**, **first quartile**, and **third quartile** out of sequential solution lengths of random instances over graphs from the collection are shown. The above characteristics of the solution length distribution are shown for original solutions as well as for solutions after removal of redundancies by the selected technique. The average improvement of solution is shown too in the same chart. It is possible to observe that solution lengths are distributed in a relatively narrow zone around the average length (approximately ±10% of the average length). The zone tends to narrow yet more for more sophisticated redundancy elimination.

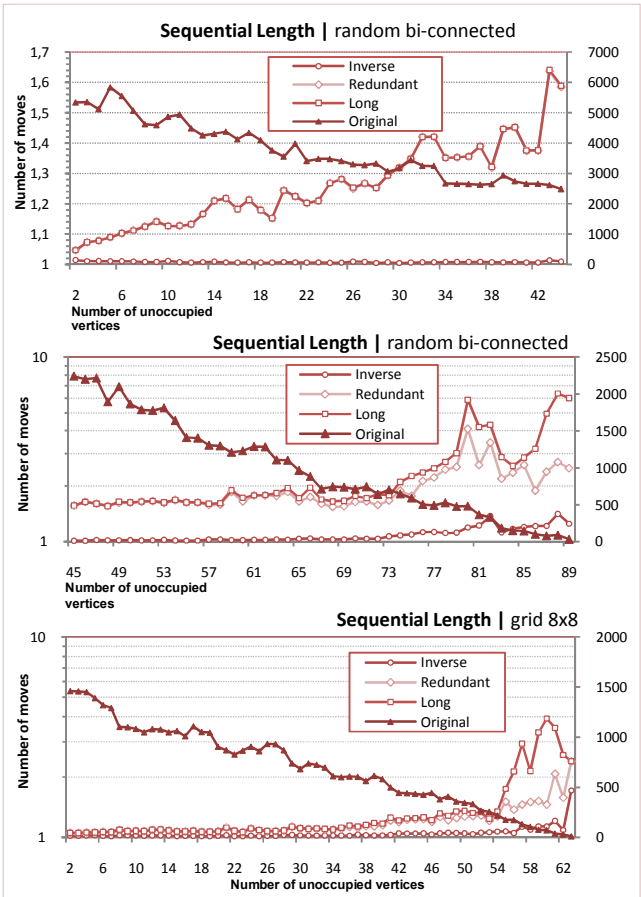

Fig. 3. ***Solution length improvement*** *on random bi-connected graph and 8×8 grid*. The total number of moves of the original solution and improvement ratio after applying redundancy elimination techniques are shown. As the number of unoccupied vertices grows the better improvements can be achieved. Up to 5 times smaller solutions can be obtained.

It was always the case that solution was processed by the less general redundancy elimination before it was submitted to more general and more sophisticated one. This measure ensures that the more time consuming algorithms obtains already processed solution for which there is a chance to be significantly shorter. The complete source code to allow reproducibility of all the experiments presented in this paper and raw experimental data are provided at the website: http://ktiml.mff.cuni.cz/~surynek/research/ictai2011.

Two structurally different sets of instances of the problem of pebble motion on a graph were tested. The first set of problems consists of **randomly generated bi-connected** graphs with approximately 90 vertices. The initial and the goal arrangement of pebbles were generated as a random permutation. The construction of the random bi-connected graph exploits the well known property of bi-connected graphs that they can be constructed by starting with a cycle followed by a gradual addition of handles to the currently constructed graph [9]. Specifically, graphs were constructed by adding handles of random length (uniform distribution from interval 2..8) to the initial cycle of length 7. Tests were done with a collection of 10 different random bi-connected graphs of the above setup.

The second set of testing instances consists of a **grid** of the size 8×8 where the initial and the goal arrangement of pebbles were again random permutations. In both cases, a random permutation was generated by applying quadratic number of random transpositions of pair individual pebbles starting with the identical permutation (that is, $|V|^2$ transpositions were applied).

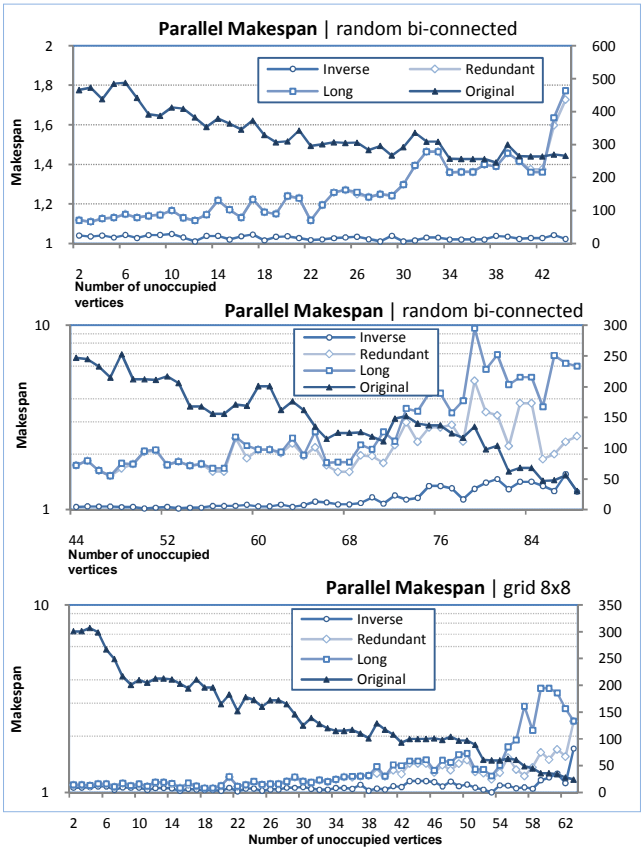

Fig. 4. ***Parallel makespan improvement***. Redundancy elimination has even better effect on the makespan than on the size of the solution. Removal of redundancies allows more efficient increasing of the parallelism. Up to 10 times shorter solutions can be obtained on bi-connected graphs.

The series of results presented in Fig. 2 are devoted to an evaluation of the **distribution** of the **total number of moves** within the solution on random bi-connected graphs. All the three redundancy elimination methods were evaluated in this test. The solution length is shown in the dependence on the number of unoccupied vertices which ranged from 4 to 89. The following characteristics calculated out of solution lengths for instances over the mentioned collection of 10 graphs are shown for each number of unoccupied vertices: **maximum**, **minimum**, **first quartile, third quartile**, and **average length**. Notice that the computational cost of producing results for the benchmarks is so high that our capacity did not allow us to produce them for larger collection than that of size 10.

It can be observed from results in Fig. 2 that the sequential solution lengths tend to be close to the average solution length; more precisely they are in the zone of approximately $\pm 10\%$ around the average length from which it can be concluded that the original *BIBOX-θ* and redundancy elimination techniques have a stable behavior.

To keep the results readable the remaining results are presented for a single bi-connected graph only – one of those 10 randomly generated bi-connected graphs was chosen.

The **reduction** of the **total number of moves** within the solution depending on the increasing number of unoccupied vertices is shown in Fig. 3. It can be observed from Fig. 3 together with Fig. 2 that up to 5 times smaller solution can be obtained by applying redundancy elimination. The most expensive elimination of long sequences is beneficial when there is approximately 70% and more unoccupied vertices.

Results regarding the effect of redundancy elimination on **parallel makespan** are shown in Fig. 4. These results correlate well with the total number of moves while the improvement is slightly better for the makespan.

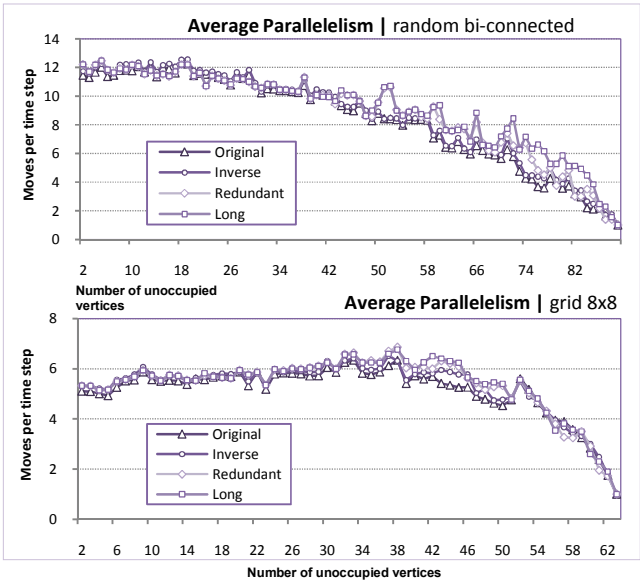

Fig. 5. ***Average parallelism*** *(average number of mover per time step).* The redundancy elimination leads to increasing of the parallelism most significantly when there is 50% to 90% of unoccupied vertices in the graph.

This observation is further quantified in Fig. 5. where the dependence of the average parallelism (which is defined as the total number of moves divided by the makespan) on the number of unoccupied vertices is shown. It can be observed that redundancy elimination typically leads to a slight increase in the average parallelism.

Results regarding runtime on a testing machine are summarized in Fig. 6. Expectably, the runtime consumed to eliminate long sequences is highest while it is still reasonable for an offline post-processing. Eliminating inverse moves and redundant sequences is relatively cheap so they can be used as an on-line post-processing tool.

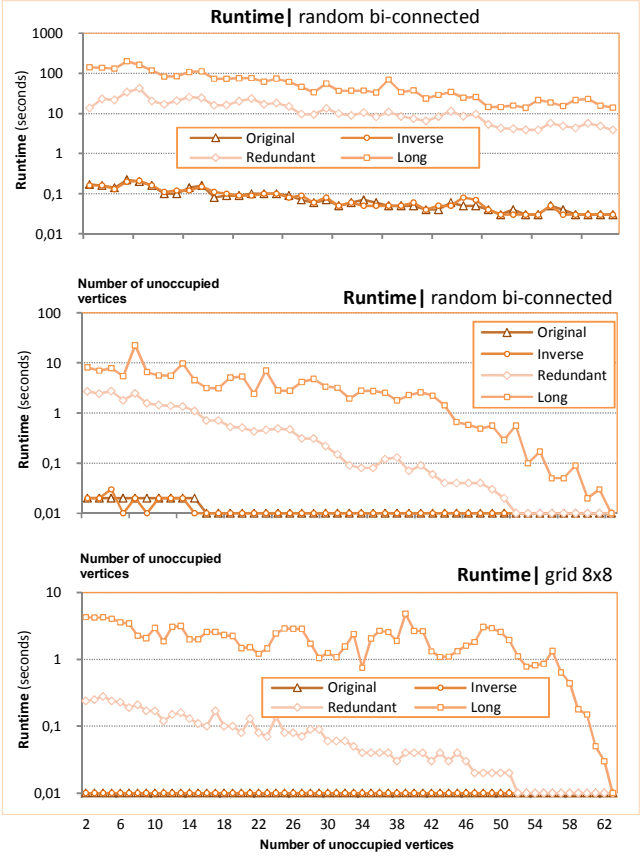

Fig. 6. ***Runtime*** *necessary for eliminating redundancies.* Eliminating long sequences is computationally the most costly (test were run on an Pentium 4, 2.4GHz, 512MB RAM, under Mandriva Linux 10.1, 32-bit edition).

The last part of the results presented in Fig. 7 is devoted to an investigation of **step parallelism** – that is, the number of moves performed simultaneously at the individual time steps. A single random bi-connected graph used in previous tests is presented here as well. There were 60 vertices out of 90 unoccupied. Although it is difficult to make any analysis of such results, one aspect is quite apparent from presented results – it can be observed that the qualitatively most significant change occurs when the elimination of redundant moves is used (this observation has been done also on other graphs and setups which are not presented here). On the other hand, the change obtained by applying elimination of inverse moves on the original solution as well as the change obtained by eliminating long sequences of moves from the solution which is already free of redundant moves is relatively little.

It is possible to conclude that the solution can be improved by up to the **order of magnitude** in the measured characteristics for both types of tested graphs.

Removal of redundant sequences represents the **best trade-off** between detection cost and solution improvement according to performed experiments. Whereas eliminating inverse moves or long sequences feature utmost situations; the former brings almost no improvement; the latter seems to be computationally too costly for an on-line post-processing.

An expectable result is that the better improvement of solutions is gained when there are more unoccupied vertices in the input graph. Notice that definitions of redundancies are based on the **mutual non-interfering** of motions of pebbles. The more unoccupied space is available in the graph the less interference between moves of pebbles is possible.

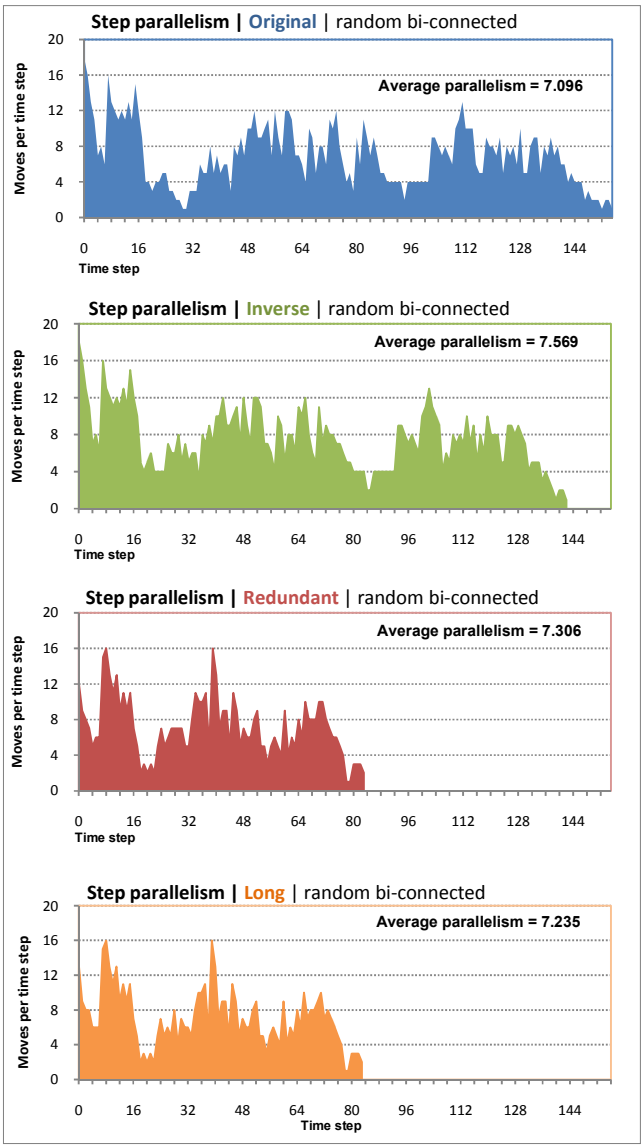

Fig. 7. ***Step parallelism*** *on random bi-connected graph.* The graph consists of 90 vertices and 60 of them are unoccupied. The length of handles was uniformly generated from the range 2..10 - the same setup as in other experiments. Number of moves in the individual time steps is shown.

VI. Summary, Conclusions, and Future Work

This work addressed the quality (makespan) of solutions of problems of coordinated motion problems. Particularly, solutions generated by the existing state-of-the-art algorithm *BIBOX-θ* for the given class of the problem were analyzed with respect to the presence of certain type of redundancies. Our hypothesis was that there exist certain types redundancies in generated solutions while we were not aware how do they look like at the beginning.

A special visualization tool *GraphRec* was used for analyzing solutions produced by the *BIBOX-θ* algorithm. This tool allowed automating two tasks that cannot be made manually – proper drawing of a graph which a given instance consists of and visualizing moves of entities over this graph. The tool eventually confirmed that redundancies really exist and it was possible to propose their formal description.

Several types of **redundancies were defined** and **methods for their elimination** were proposed. To justify quality of our proposal an extensive experimental evaluation of proposed methods was performed on the number of different problem setups. It eventually confirmed that solutions can be improved by up to the order of magnitude using the suggested methods. The secondary finding is that the better improvement can be gained for problems with higher number of unoccupied vertices.

For future work it would interesting to revise algorithms for generating solutions of pebble motion and related problems to not to generate redundancies that we discovered in this work. A minor topic for future work is to develop more efficient elimination algorithms for proposed redundancies.

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