



Lecture Notes

# Cluster Analysis

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# Introduction

[This chapter is under construction!]

Clustering is a fundamental unsupervised learning tool. It can be used to search data for hidden structure, to summarize data and to classify new unseen data according to prior findings. Since applications are manifold, clustering also offers a rich variety of algorithmic problems. In this lecture, we will study clustering problems through the lens of algorithm theory. Thus, we are equipped with a mathematical formulation that allows us to judge the quality of a clustering, and our goal is to find a clustering that has the best possible quality.

The clustering problems studied in this lecture share some properties: Most of them are *partitional* clustering problems, i.e., we get some input data and want to partition it into disjoint subsets of associated elements. Furthermore, most problems that we study are *center-based*, which means that we do not only want the partitioning, but we want a set of *centers* and an assignment of points to centers which then implicitly defines the partitioning. All clustering problems are *geometric* clustering problems, which means that we have geometric information about the input data (which we then call input *points*), i.e., we know the distances between any two points.

For our study of geometric clustering problems, we need to recall the definition of *metric spaces*. The most known metric space is the Euclidean space  $\mathbb{R}^d$ , where two points  $x, y \in \mathbb{R}^d$  with  $x = (x_1, \dots, x_d)^T$  and  $y = (y_1, \dots, y_d)^T$  have distance  $\|x - y\| = \sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^d (x_i - y_i)^2}$ . It is a special case of the following more general definition.

**Definition 1.** Let  $X$  be any non-empty set and  $d : X \times X \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$  be a function on  $X$ . Then  $d$  is a metric on  $X$  if it holds for all  $x, y, z \in X$  that

1.  $d(x, y) \geq 0$  and  $d(x, y) = 0$  if and only if  $x = y$ ,
2.  $d(x, y) = d(y, x)$ , and
3.  $d(x, y) \leq d(x, z) + d(z, y)$ .

We call a pair  $(X, d)$  consisting of a finite set  $X$  and a metric  $d$  a metric space.

We refer to Condition 3 in Definition 1 as the *triangle inequality*. Usually we call elements of  $X$  *points*. Furthermore, we extend any metric  $d$  to point sets by setting

$$d(x, A) = \inf_{y \in A} d(x, y)$$

for any  $A \subseteq X$  and

$$d(A, B) = \inf_{x \in A, y \in B} d(x, y).$$

for any  $A, B \subseteq X$ .

The Euclidean space  $\mathbb{R}^d$  with the Euclidean distance is one example for a metric space. We will encounter it later in the lecture when we study the  $k$ -means problem. This modeling is common in machine learning and statistics, where  $k$ -means comes up as an important problem. However, clustering is also a classical topic in graph theory. Here, it is more common to study the case of *finite metric spaces*. The input then consists of a *finite* point set  $P$  and a distance function  $d : P \times P \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$  which is metric, i.e.  $(P, d)$  form a metric space. In this scenario,  $d$  simply consists of  $|P|^2$  numbers that give the distance for every pair of points in  $P$ . The can thus be viewed as an undirected complete weighted graph: the vertices are the points in  $P$ , and the weight of edge  $\{x, y\}$  is  $d(x, y) = d(y, x)$  for all  $x, y \in P$ .

In this context, the the metric space  $(P, d)$  can also be implicitly given by a *graph metric*: For any (not necessarily complete) graph  $G = (V, E)$  weighted by a function  $w : V \times V \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^{\geq 0}$ , we define the *shortest path distance*  $d_s(x, y)$  between  $x, y \in V$  to be the length of the shortest path between  $x$  and  $y$  in  $G$ . One can show that  $d_s$  is a metric on  $V$ , and thus  $G$  and  $w$  implicitly define the metric space  $(V, d_s)$ .

All problems studied in this lecture are minimization problems. As it turns out, for most of them, it is not known how to compute optimal solutions in polynomial time, and it may well be impossible to do so, since the problems are NP-hard. For this reason, we will resort to approximation algorithms that find a reasonably good solution instead of an optimal one.

Recall that an  $\alpha$ -approximation algorithm for a minimization problem is an algorithm that outputs solutions with a value that is at most  $\alpha$  times the value of an optimal solution. Let  $\mathfrak{I}$  be the set of all possible input instances to an optimization problem, let  $ALG$  be an algorithm that computes a feasible solution  $S^{ALG}(I)$  for any  $I \in \mathfrak{I}$ . For any  $I \in \mathfrak{I}$ , let  $S^*(I)$  be an optimal solution for  $I$ . For a minimization problem, suppose that  $c(S)$  is the cost of a solution  $S$ . Then  $ALG$  is an  $\alpha$ -approximation algorithm if

$$\sup_{I \in \mathfrak{I}} \frac{c(S^{ALG}(I))}{c(S^*(I))} \leq \alpha.$$

Whenever we talk about  $\alpha$ -approximation algorithms, we implicitly mean algorithms that have a polynomial worst-case running time. All problems considered in this lecture can be solved optimally given exponential running time.

Our studies will also include *randomized* approximation algorithms. For randomized algorithms,  $c(S^{ALG}(I))$  or  $v(S^{ALG}(I))$ , respectively, is a random variable. We might either want to achieve that it is close to the optimum value with high probability, or

that its expected value is close to the optimum value. We choose the second alternative. Thus, we say that a randomized algorithm  $ALG$  is an  $\alpha$ -approximation algorithm in expectation for a minimization problem if

$$\sup_{I \in \mathcal{I}} \frac{\mathbf{E}[c(S^{ALG}(I))]}{c(S^*(I))} \leq \alpha.$$

As for deterministic algorithms, we also require randomized approximation algorithms to have a polynomial worst-case running time.

## 1.1 Mathematical facts and notations

This section collects mathematical facts that we need throughout the lecture.

**Fact 2.** For all  $r \in \mathbb{R}$  with  $r \neq 1$  and all  $n \geq 0$ ,

$$\sum_{i=0}^n r^i = \frac{1 - r^{n+1}}{1 - r}.$$

If  $|r| < 1$ , then

$$\sum_{i=0}^{\infty} r^i = \frac{1}{1 - r}.$$

For a number  $i \in \mathbb{N}^{\geq 1}$ , we sometimes use the abbreviation  $[i] = \{1, \dots, i\}$  to denote the set of all numbers from 1 to  $i$ .

**Fact 3.** For any  $i \in \mathbb{N}^{\geq 1}$ , set

$$H_i = \sum_{j=1}^i \frac{1}{j}.$$

Then it holds that

$$\ln(i) \leq H_i \leq \ln(i) + 1,$$

where  $\ln$  is the natural logarithm.

## The happy world of $k$ -center

We start with the study of the  $k$ -center problem. It is a classical problem from graph theory, and it is one of the rare problems where we precisely know the best possible approximation ratio under the assumption that  $P \neq NP$ . This approximation ratio can be achieved by two elegant approximation algorithms.

### 2.1 The metric $k$ -center problem

The input to the  $k$ -center problem is a finite metric space  $(P, d)$  and a number  $k \in \mathbb{N}^{\geq 1}$ . The  $k$ -center problem is a center-based clustering problem, meaning that we are searching for a set of centers  $C$  that give a good clustering when every point is assigned to the center closest to it. Center-based clustering problems differ in the evaluation of the quality of a center set. The  $k$ -center problem is a so-called min-max problem: We are minimizing the maximum distance of any point to its closest center.

**Definition 4.** Let  $(P, d)$  be a metric space and  $k \in \mathbb{N}^{\geq 1}$  be a number. The  $k$ -center

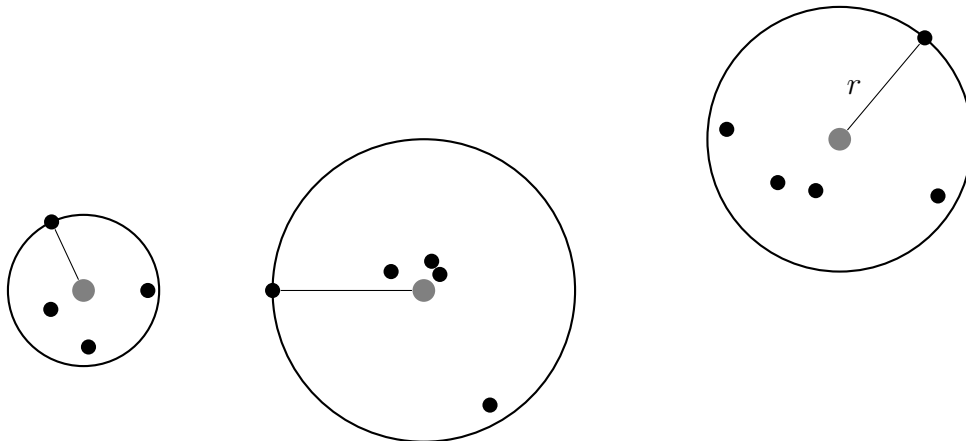


Figure 2.1: An example for a  $k$ -center instance and solution with  $k = 3$ .

problem is to compute a set  $C \subseteq P$  with  $|C| = k$  that minimizes

$$r(C) := \max_{x \in P} \min_{c \in C} d(x, c).$$

We call the value  $\max_{x \in P} \min_{c \in C} d(x, c)$  either  $k$ -center objective value or maximum radius of the solution  $C$ . Figure 2.1 shows a point set, three chosen centers and the radii of the resulting three clusters. The maximum radius of the depicted solution is labeled by  $r$ .

## 2.2 A simple and elegant approximation

Gonzalez' algorithm [Gon85] gives a greedy 2-approximation for the  $k$ -center problem. The algorithm starts by picking an arbitrary point  $c_1 \in P$  as the first center. Then it does  $k - 1$  iterations of the following: Choose the point  $c_i$  which is farthest away from the previously chosen centers  $\{c_1, \dots, c_{i-1}\}$  to be the center. This is repeated until  $k$  centers are chosen.

**farthest-first-traversal**(a finite metric space  $(P, d)$ ,  $k \in \mathbb{N}^{\geq 1}$ )

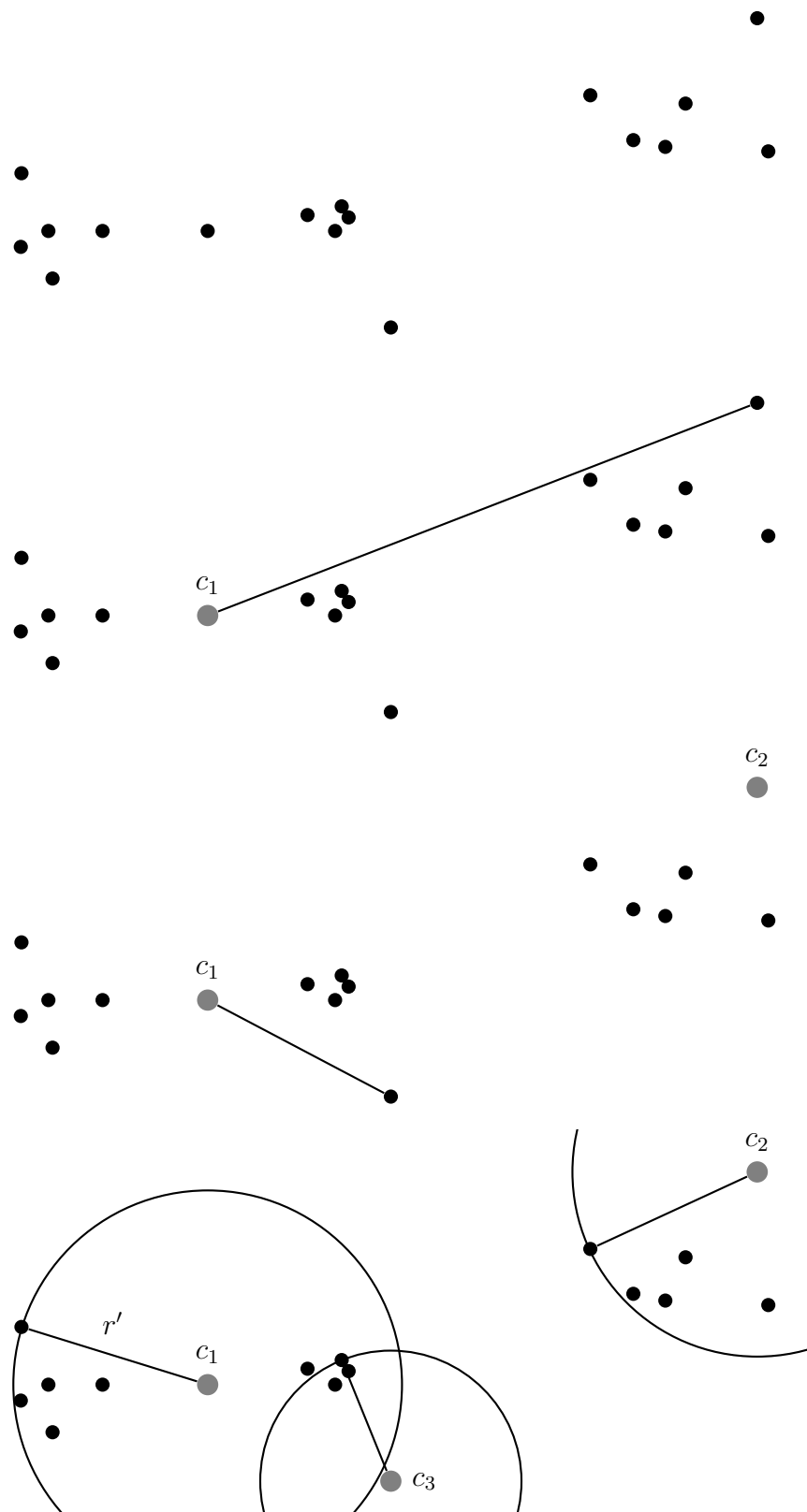
1. Choose a center  $c_1$  arbitrarily from  $P$  and set  $C^1 = \{c_1\}$
2. **For**  $i = 2$  **to**  $k$  **do**
3.     Choose  $c_i$  as (one of) the points maximizing  $d(x, C^{i-1})$ ,  
i.e.,  $c_i = \arg \max\{d(x, C^{i-1}) \mid x \in P\}$
4.     Set  $C^i = C^{i-1} \cup \{c_i\}$
5. **Return**  $C = \{c_1, \dots, c_k\}$

Figure 2.2 shows an example run of Algorithm **farthest-first-traversal** with  $k = 3$ . The first center is chosen arbitrarily. Center 2 and 3 are then chosen as points with maximum distance to the previously chosen centers. This means that the algorithm has the tendency to choose points that are at the border of a cluster. The resulting solution is worse than the solution depicted in Figure 2.1, but its maximum radius  $r'$  only slightly larger than  $r$  from the previous solution. The following theorem shows that in general, the maximum radius is at most twice the maximum radius of an optimal solution.

**Theorem 5.** *Algorithm **farthest-first-traversal**  $((P, d), k)$  computes a 2-approximation for the  $k$ -center problem.*

*Proof.* Let  $C$  be the solution computed by **farthest-first-traversal** $((P, d), k)$ . This solution has radius  $r(C) = \max_{x \in P} d(x, C)$ . Then there is a point  $y \in P$  that actually has distance  $r(C)$  to its closest center in  $C$ , i.e.,  $d(y, C) = \min_{c \in C} d(y, c) = r(C)$ . Now we observe that the distance between  $y$  and its closest center can only get shorter during the execution of the algorithm, i.e.,  $d(y, C^i) \geq d(y, C^k)$  for all  $i \in \{1, \dots, k\}$ . Thus,  $d(y, C^i) \geq r(C)$  is true for all  $i \in \{1, \dots, k\}$ . Since Gonzalez'



Figure 2.2: An example run of farthest first traversal with  $k = 3$ .

algorithm always chooses the point that has maximum distance to the previously chosen centers,  $d(y, C^i) \geq r(C)$  implies  $d(c_{i+1}, C^i) \geq r(C)$  for all  $i \in \{1, \dots, k-1\}$ . This means that the centers and  $y$  form a set of  $k+1$  points with pairwise distance  $r(C)$ . Any solution has to have a cluster with two of these points, and this cluster then has at least radius  $r(C)/2$ . Since the optimal solution has a maximum radius of at least  $r(C)/2$ , and the computed solution has a radius of  $r(C)$ , we conclude that the computed solution is a 2-approximation.  $\square$

**Lemma 6.** *Algorithm `farthest-first-traversal`( $P, d$ ) can be implemented to run in time  $\mathcal{O}(|P| \cdot k)$ .*

*Proof.* Line 1 takes constant time. The loop in lines 2-4 is executed  $k-1$  times. For line 3, the algorithm needs to find the point whose closest center is farthest away. To keep track of this, we use an array  $c_{\min}$  which stores the closest center (so far) for each point, i.e. we preserve the equality  $c_{\min}(x) = \arg \min\{c \in C^{i-1} d(x, c)\}$  for all  $x \in P$ . The array is initialized in time  $\mathcal{O}(|P|)$  before starting the loop. In the loop, when we choose a new center  $c_i$ , we compare  $d(x, c_i)$  with  $d(x, c_{\min}(x))$  and update  $c_{\min}(x)$  accordingly. This takes constant time for every point, i.e., updating  $c_{\min}$  takes time  $\mathcal{O}(|P|)$ . We can find the point with the maximum  $c_{\min}$  value simultaneously or find it in another  $\mathcal{O}(|P|)$  operations after the updating is finished. Thus, lines 2-4 take time  $\mathcal{O}(|P|k)$ .  $\square$

## Was part of lecture 1, but is not used until later

The following definitions will later be part of the respective chapters.

**Definition 7.** *Let  $(P, d)$  be a metric space and  $f : P \rightarrow \mathbb{N}^{\geq 1}$  be a function of opening costs. The facility location problem is to compute a set  $C \subseteq P$  that minimizes*

$$\sum_{x \in P} \min_{c \in C} d(x, c) + \sum_{c \in C} f(c).$$

– end of lecture 1 –

## 2.3 A matching lower bound

The  $k$ -center problem is NP-hard. This has been observed simultaneously by Hochbaum [Hoc84] and Hsu and Nemhauser [HN79], who also both discovered the inapproximability result that we will see below. Both their proofs rely on a reduction from the *dominating set problem*.

**Definition 8.** *Let  $G = (V, E)$  be an undirected unweighted graph. A set  $D \subset V$  is a dominating set for  $G$  if every vertex in  $V$  has a neighbor in  $D$ , i.e., for all  $u \in V$ , either  $u \in D$  or there exists a  $v \in D$  such that  $\{u, v\} \in E$ .*

*The dominating set problem is to decide for a given graph  $G$  and a number  $k \in \mathbb{N}^{\geq 1}$  whether a dominating set  $D$  for  $G$  exists that has cardinality at most  $k$ , i.e.,  $|D| \leq k$ .*

The dominating set problem is NP-hard; it is one of the problems shown to be NP-hard in the book by Garey and Johnson [GJ79]. It is closely related to the  $k$ -center problem.

**Lemma 9.** *The  $k$ -center problem is NP-hard. Furthermore, it is NP-hard to compute an  $\alpha$ -approximation for the  $k$ -center problem for any  $\alpha < 2$ .*

*Proof.* Let  $G = (V, E)$ ,  $k$  be an input to the dominating set problem. We define an input for the  $k$ -center problem by setting  $P = V$  and setting the distance  $d(x, y)$  between  $x \in P$  and  $y \in P$  to 1 if  $\{x, y\} \in E$ , and to 2 otherwise. This is a metric because no function  $d : P \times P \rightarrow \{1, 2\}$  can violate the triangle inequality. Assume that we are given an algorithm that decides the decision variant of the  $k$ -center problem, i.e., for a given weighted graph, a number of centers and a value  $t$ , it decides whether a solution to the  $k$ -center problem of radius at most  $t$  exists. We apply this algorithm to the input  $P$ ,  $d$ ,  $k$  and  $t = 1$ . We output YES if the algorithm finds a clustering of radius at most 1 and NO otherwise.

Now we argue that this reduction is correct. First, assume that a dominating set  $D$  of size at most  $k$  exists in  $D$ . Then every vertex in  $V$  is either in  $D$  or it has a neighbor in  $D$ . Consider  $D$  as a center set in  $G'$ . Then every point in  $P$  either has distance 0 to its closest center (if it is in  $D$  itself), or it has distance 1 (if it has a neighbor in  $D$ ). Thus, the maximum radius of the solution is 1. Second, assume that the algorithm found a center set  $C$  with maximum radius 1 in  $G'$ . Then  $C$  is a dominating set in  $G$ : Every vertex has distance  $\leq 1$  to at least one vertex in  $C$ , so it is either in  $C$  or a neighbor of a point in  $C$ .

This shows that the  $k$ -center problem is NP-hard. But that is not all: We observe that the reduction nearly immediately also gives an inapproximability result. That is because the only possible distances between two distinct points in  $G'$  are 1 or 2. Thus, any approximation algorithm with an approximation ratio  $\alpha < 2$  has no other option than providing an optimal solution. More precisely we can formulate the above reduction in the following way: Assume that we are given an algorithm that computes an  $\alpha$ -approximation for the  $k$ -center problem for  $\alpha < 2$ . Apply this algorithm to  $P$ ,  $d$ ,  $k$ . If the maximum radius of the solution is 1, then output YES, otherwise, output NO. By the same arguments as above, this reduction is correct and shows that it is NP-hard to compute an  $\alpha$ -approximation for the  $k$ -center problem for  $\alpha < 2$ .  $\square$

## 2.4 Incremental and hierarchical clustering

In this section, we consider *incremental* and *hierarchical* clustering. The basic idea behind these notions is that instead of one clustering for one fixed number of centers, we want multiple clusterings, indeed, even *one clustering for each possible value of  $k$* . The two notions are related, but differ in the details of the desired clusterings.

Incremental clusterings are motivated by the scenario where we want to place centers, but we do not know how many we will build, or we cannot build them all at the same

time. An incremental clustering thus gives an ordering of the input points, and the first  $k$  points in this order form the center set for the  $k$ -center clustering with  $k$  centers.

In the following, we will compare incremental and hierarchical clusterings with optimal clusterings for a fixed number of centers. For this purpose we refer to an optimal solution for the  $k$ -center problem (with  $k$  centers) by  $C_k^{\text{opt}}$ .

**Definition 10.** *Let  $(P, d)$  be a metric space. An incremental clustering is an ordering  $x_1, \dots, x_{|P|}$  of all points in  $P$ .*

*For any  $k \in [|P|]$ , the solution to the  $k$ -center problem on  $P$  induced by such an incremental clustering is the center set  $\{x_1, \dots, x_k\}$ .*

*We say that an incremental clustering is  $\alpha$ -competitive if for all  $k \in [|P|]$ ,*

$$r(\{x_1, \dots, x_k\}) \leq \alpha \cdot r(C_k^{\text{opt}}),$$

*where  $C_k^{\text{opt}}$  is an arbitrary optimum solution with  $k$  centers.*

Our notion of competitiveness in Definition 10 compares the individual clusterings with optimal clusterings with the same number of clusters. Notice that we do not actually know the values  $r(C_k^{\text{opt}})$ , and can in general not compute them (assuming  $P \neq NP$ ), so we can not compute the competitiveness of a given incremental solution.

In general, a 1-competitive incremental clustering does not even exist since the optimal clusterings may contradict each other in their choice of centers.

However, we observe that Gonzalez' algorithm can be used to compute an incremental clustering if we simply continue using it until all points have become a center. This means that the approximation algorithm which is optimal under the condition  $P \neq NP$  can directly be used to compute incremental clusterings of the same quality.

**full-farthest-first-traversal**(a finite metric space  $(P, d)$ )

1. Choose a center  $c_1$  arbitrarily from  $P$ , set  $C^1 = \{c_1\}$
2. **For**  $i = 2$  **to**  $|P|$  **do**
3.     Set  $R_i := \max_{x \in P} d(x, C^{i-1})$
4.     Choose a  $c_i$  as a point with  $d(c_i, C^{i-1}) = R_i$ , set  $C^i = C^{i-1} \cup \{c_i\}$
5. **Return**  $c_1, \dots, c_{|P|}$  and  $R_2, \dots, R_{|P|}$

The only real change compared to **farthest-first-traversal** is that the algorithm **full-farthest-first-traversal** does not have  $k$  as a parameter, runs the main loop until  $|P|$  centers are chosen and returns the numbering instead of one fixed center set. The other changes are for our convenience: We name the distance of center  $c_i$  to the previously chosen centers  $R_i$ . This will prove helpful later.

**Corollary 11.** *The algorithm **farthest-first-traversal** $((P, d))$  computes a 2-competitive incremental  $k$ -center clustering. In particular,  $R_k \leq 2 \cdot r(C_{k-1}^{\text{opt}})$  holds for all  $k \in \{2, \dots, |P|\}$  and optimal solutions  $C_k^{\text{opt}}$ .*

*Proof.* This follows directly from Theorem 5.  $\square$

Later in this lecture, we see that it is a lucky coincidence that a best-possible approximation algorithm for the  $k$ -center problem already computes an incremental solution. For other objectives, this is not the case, and obtaining incremental clusterings is much more involved.

Hierarchical clusterings are related to incremental clusterings, yet they are motivated differently. Here, the *clusterings* have to be related. More precisely, we want that for all  $k$ , the clustering with  $k$  clusters can be obtained from the clustering with  $k + 1$  clusters by merging two of the clusters. We call this *hierarchical compatibility*. Until now, we have had a fairly center-based view on clusterings. That makes sense in all scenarios where we want to summarize the data by the centers, and thus, the centers are really what we are interested in. However, in some scenarios it is the *partitioning itself* that we are curious about. We want to know how the data points themselves cluster into groups, and the center is just a means to judge the (dis)similarity of the points in the same cluster. This is the case for hierarchical clustering. We want to see the data clustered into groups at different levels of granularity.

**Definition 12.** Let  $(P, d)$  be a metric space. A hierarchical  $k$ -center clustering consists of  $|P|$  partitionings  $\mathcal{H}_1, \dots, \mathcal{H}_{|P|}$  of  $P$  that satisfy

- $|\mathcal{H}_k| = k$  for all  $k \in \{1, \dots, |P|\}$ , in particular this means that  $\mathcal{H}_1 = \{P\}$  and  $\mathcal{H}_{|P|} = \{\{x\} \mid x \in P\}$ ,
- and  $\mathcal{H}_k = \mathcal{H}_{k-1} \setminus \{A\} \cup \{A_1, A_2\}$  for all  $k \in \{2, \dots, |P|\}$ , with  $A \in \mathcal{H}_{k-1}$  and two clusters  $A_1, A_2 \in \mathcal{H}_k$  with  $A = A_1 \dot{\cup} A_2$ .

Let  $\mathcal{H}_k$  be one of the clusters in the hierarchy, and assume that we name its clusters  $C_1, \dots, C_k$ . Then we define  $r(\mathcal{H}_k)$  to be the maximum radius of the clusters if we choose centers optimally, i.e.,  $r(\mathcal{H}_k) := \max_{i \in [k]} \min_{c \in C_i} \max_{x \in C_i} d(x, c)$ .

We say that an hierarchical clustering  $\mathcal{H}_1, \dots, \mathcal{H}_{|P|}$  is  $\alpha$ -competitive if

$$r(\mathcal{H}_k) \leq \alpha \cdot r(C_k^{\text{opt}})$$

for all  $k \in [|P|]$  and optimal solutions  $C_k^{\text{opt}}$ .

Definition 12 is fairly complex. Each  $\mathcal{H}_k$  is a *partitioning* of  $P$ , i.e., it contains  $k$  sets that are disjoint and whose union is  $P$ . To compute the cost of such a clustering, we consider optimal centers: For each cluster in a clustering, we pick the point in the cluster which minimizes the 1-center cost of that cluster. These centers may change between the levels of the hierarchy. So our notion of hierarchical clustering is different from incremental clustering in two ways: Firstly, we require the clusters themselves to be hierarchically compatible, which is a stronger requirement than having nested center sets. But secondly, we do not require the centers to stay the same, so here we require less. For each level, we may completely change our choice of centers.

Gonzalez' algorithm will again be useful for our goal to find a good hierarchical clustering. However, this time the farthest first traversal is only the first building block of

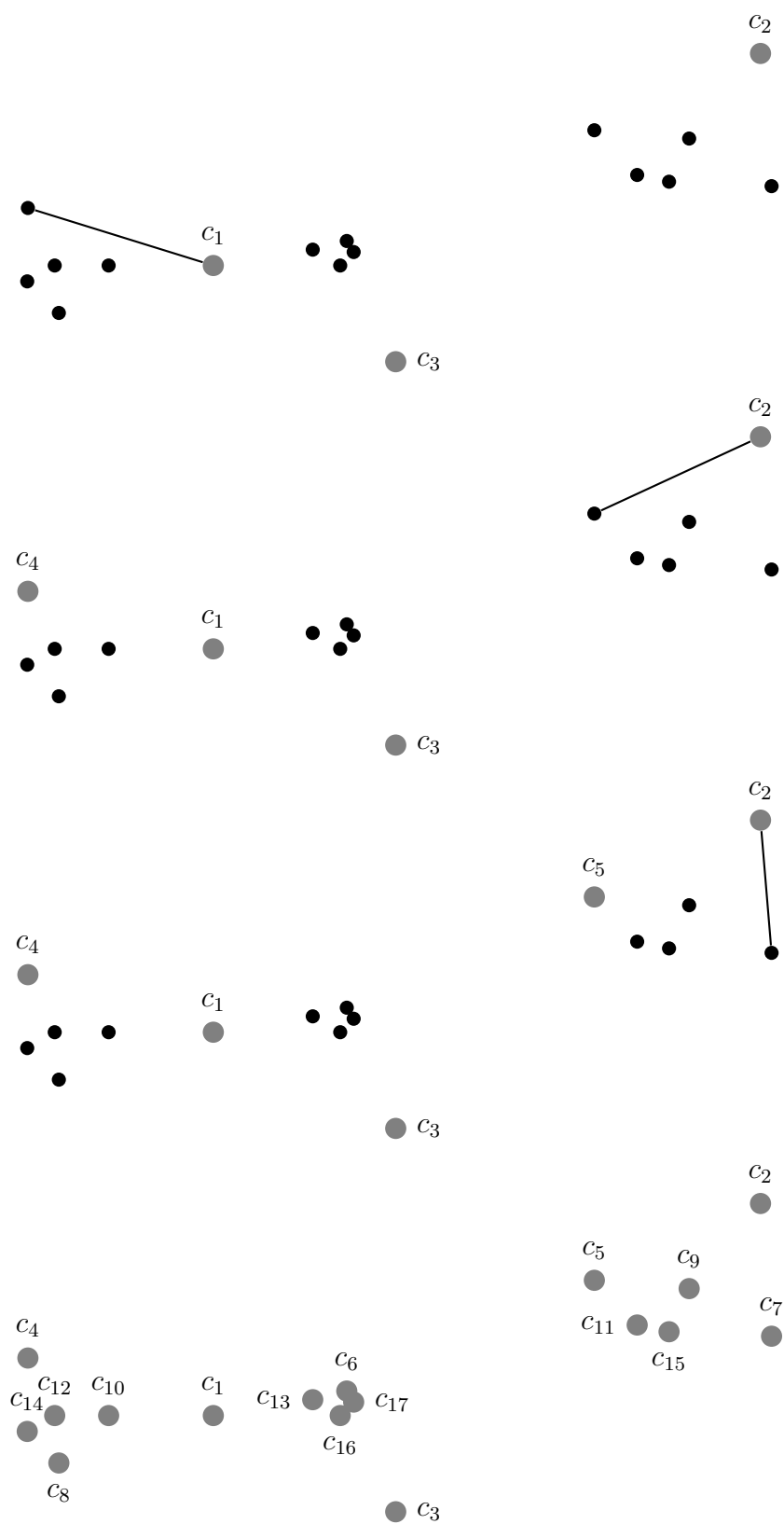


Figure 2.3: Continuation of Figure 2.2 as an example for a full farthest first traversal.

the algorithm. The incremental clustering computed by Gonzalez' algorithm has the properties that we investigated above, in particular,  $\{x_1, \dots, x_j\}$  is a 2-approximative solution for the  $k$ -center problem with  $k = j$ . However, the clusters induced by  $\{x_1, \dots, x_j\}$  for different values of  $j$  are in general not hierarchically compatible with each other. For example, the cluster that was associated with  $x_j$  in the  $j$ -clustering may split up when assigned optimally to the first  $j - 1$  centers.

Still, we will make use of the incremental clustering. Say that the full farthest first traversal outputs the order  $x_1, \dots, x_{|P|}$  and the values  $R_2, \dots, R_{|P|}$ . We now find a good hierarchical clustering in three more steps.

**I. Levels of granularity** The full farthest first traversal provides us with  $|P|$  clusterings of decreasing cost: The first one is the 1-center clustering where every point is assigned to  $x_1$ , the second clustering is induced by assigning every point to either  $x_1$  or  $x_2$ , and so on. The costs of these solutions are  $R_2, \dots, R_{|P|}$  for  $k = 1, \dots, |P| - 1$ . [Recall that  $R_i$  is the cost of the  $(i - 1)$ -clustering, since it is the maximum distance between any point to the centers in  $\{x_1, \dots, x_{i-1}\}$ .] The clustering for  $k = |P|$  has cost 0 since every point has its own cluster. We now group the points into levels with the goal that the corresponding  $R_i$  values have roughly the same cost for points in the same level. The largest  $R_i$  value is  $R_2$ , and we also call this value  $R$ , i.e.,  $R = R_2$ . The formal definition of the levels is:

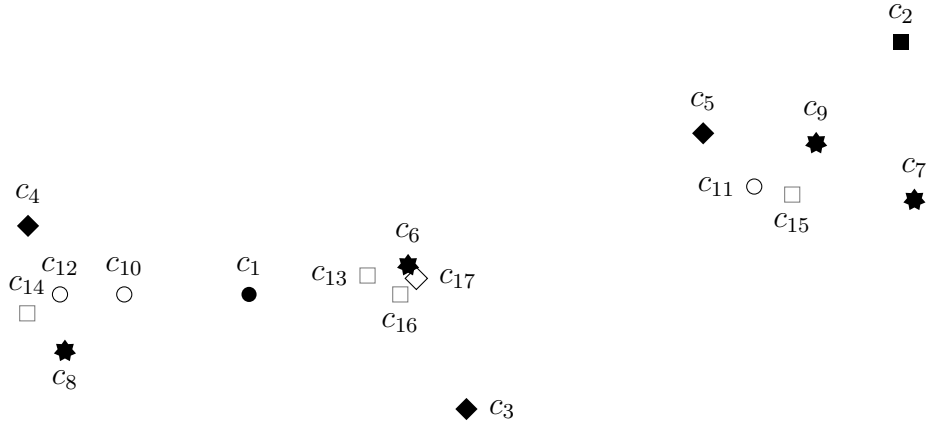
$$L_0 = \{x_1\}, \quad L_j = \left\{ x_i \mid R_i \in \left( \frac{R}{2^j}, \frac{R}{2^{j-1}} \right] \right\} \text{ for all } j \geq 1.$$

The first point  $x_1$  is special because it does not have an  $R_i$  value (these start at  $i = 2$ ). Thus,  $x_1$  gets its own special level  $L_0$ . The remaining points are partitioned into the levels according to their  $R_i$  in an exponentially decreasing manner, based on  $R = R_2$ .  $L_1$  contains all points  $x_i$  with  $R/2 < R_i \leq R$ . This in particular includes  $x_2$  since  $R_2 = R$ , and it may or may not include further points.  $L_3$  contains all  $x_i$  with  $R/4 < R_i \leq R/2$ , and in general,  $L_j$  contains all  $x_i$  with  $R/2^j < R_i \leq R/2^{j-1}$ . Figure 2.4 depicts the resulting levels for the points in our ongoing example.

Notice that we do not give an upper bound on  $j$ , i.e., on the maximum level index. Indeed, we do not know any such bound: The cost of the  $(|P| - 1)$ -center clustering may be arbitrarily small compared to the cost of the 1-center clustering. However, at most  $|P|$  of the levels are non-empty because there are only  $|P|$  points that are assigned to levels. Furthermore notice that for all points in the same level, the  $R_i$  value is of a comparable magnitude, more precisely, they are all within a factor of 2 of the left interval boundary.

For use in the next paragraph, we define a function  $L : \{x_1, \dots, x_{|P|}\} \rightarrow \mathbb{N}^{\geq 1}$  which gives the index of the level that a point is in, i.e.,  $L(x_i) = j$  when  $x_i \in L_j$ .

**II. The parent function** We need the levels of granularity in order to define a mapping that we call the *parent function*. It assigns a parent to every point in  $P$ . For



$$\begin{aligned} \bullet L_0 &= \{c_1\} & \blacksquare L_1 &= \{c_2\} & \blacklozenge L_2 &= \{c_3, c_4, c_5\} & \star L_3 &= \{c_6, c_7, c_8, c_9\} \\ \circ L_4 &= \{c_{10}, c_{11}, c_{12}\} & \square L_5 &= \{c_{13}, c_{14}, c_{15}, c_{16}\} & \diamond L_6 &= \{c_{17}\} \end{aligned}$$

Figure 2.4: Continuation of Figure 2.3, showing the levels of all points.

every  $i \in \{2, \dots, |P|\}$ , we define

$$\text{parent}(x_i) := \arg \min \{d(x_i, y) \mid y \in \bigcup_{j=0}^{L(x)-1} L_j\}.$$

For  $x_1$ , we set  $\text{parent}(x_1) := x_1$ , so  $x_1$  is mapped to itself. For all  $x_i \neq x_1$ , the parent of  $x_i$  is its closest point among all points in a level with lower index than  $L(x_i)$ . Notice that this means that the parent is a point  $x_\ell$  with  $\ell < i$ , and that among all points  $x_\ell$  with  $\ell < i$  we exclude exactly those that are in the same level as  $x_i$  itself. In our example, the parents are as follows:

$$\begin{array}{c} i \\ \text{parent}(x_i) \end{array} \begin{array}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|} \hline 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 6 & 7 & 8 & 9 & 10 & 11 & 12 & 13 & 14 & 15 & 16 & 17 \\ \hline - & 1 & 1 & 1 & 2 & 3 & 2 & 4 & 5 & 8 & 5 & 8 & 6 & 12 & 11 & 6 & 6 \\ \hline \end{array}$$

Notice that the parent does not have to be in the level directly before the level of  $x$ , it can be in any level with a lower index. For example, the parent of  $c_{16} \in L_5$  in our example is  $c_6 \in L_3$ . This is important, since it allows us to show the following bound for the distance between a point and its parent.

**Lemma 13.** For all  $x \in P$ ,

$$d(x, \bigcup_{j'=0}^j L_{j'}) \leq \frac{R}{2^j} \quad \text{and} \quad d(x, \text{parent}(x)) \leq \frac{R}{2^{L(x)-1}}.$$

*Proof.* This is a property of the farthest first traversal. Let  $x_\ell$  be the point with highest index in  $L_j$ . Then all points are at distance  $R_{\ell+1}$  from  $\{x_1, \dots, x_\ell\} = \bigcup_{j'=0}^j L_{j'}$ , because



$R_{\ell+1}$  is the distance that  $x_{\ell+1}$  had to this solution. Furthermore,  $x_{\ell+1}$  is not in  $L_j$ , so its distance  $R_{\ell+1}$  is at most  $R/(2^j)$ . We conclude that

$$d(x, \bigcup_{j'=0}^j L_{j'}) \leq R_{\ell+1} \leq \frac{R}{2^j}$$

for all  $x \in P$ . Furthermore,  $\text{parent}(x)$  is the closest point to  $x$  in  $\bigcup_{j=0}^{L(x)-1} L_j$ , so it follows directly that

$$d(x, \text{parent}(x)) = d(x, \bigcup_{j'=0}^{L(x)-1} L_{j'}) \leq \frac{R}{2^{L(x)-1}}$$

is true for all  $x \in P$ . □

**III. The full algorithm** The final algorithm computes the above described levels and the parent function, and then uses the parent function to compute a hierarchical clustering. This is the full pseudo code:

**hierarchical-kcenter**(a finite metric space  $(P, d)$ )

1. Compute  $x_1, \dots, x_{|P|}$  and  $R_2, \dots, R_{|P|}$  by calling **full-farthest-first-traversal** $((P, d))$
2. Set  $R := R_2$  and set  $L_0 := \{x_1\}$ ,  $L(x_1) = 0$
3. **For all**  $j \geq 1$ , set  $L_j = \{x_i \mid R_i \in (\frac{R}{2^j}, \frac{R}{2^{j-1}}]\}$ , and set  $L(x_i) = j$  iff  $x_i \in L_j$
4. **For all**  $x \in P$ , set  $\text{parent}(x) := \arg \min\{d(x, y) \mid y \in \bigcup_{j=0}^{L(x)-1} L_j\}$
5. Set  $C_i = \{x_i\}$  and  $\mathcal{H}_{|P|} = \{C_i \mid i \in [|P|]\}$
6. **For**  $k = |P| - 1$  to 1 **do**
7.     Notice that  $x_{k+1}$  is the center of the cluster  $C_{k+1}$  to be reassigned
8.     Let  $x_p = \text{parent}(x_{k+1})$  be the parent of  $x_{k+1}$ , notice  $x_p \in C_p$
9.     Set  $C_p = C_p \cup C_k$  and  $\mathcal{H}_k = \{C_i \mid i \in [k]\}$
10. **Return**  $\mathcal{H}_1, \dots, \mathcal{H}_{|P|}$

In Lines 1-4, the algorithm computes the incremental clustering by using Gonzalez' algorithm, then derives the levels of all points and computes the parent function. The remaining steps compute the actual hierarchical clustering. The process starts with  $\mathcal{H}_{|P|}$ , the partitioning into singleton clusters, i.e., into  $C_i = \{x_i\}$ . Now the algorithm creates the clusterings with less clusters iteratively. It always removes the last clustering (according to the numbering), and merges it with a clustering that is lexicographically before it. This is done by considering the parent  $x_p = \text{parent}(x_{j+1})$  and adding the points in  $C_j$  to  $C_p$  (which is the cluster that contains  $x_p$  and was originally initialized by  $C_p = \{x_p\}$ ). The cluster  $C_{j+1}$  is then dissolved, and the clustering with  $i$  clusters consists of the updated clusters  $C_1, \dots, C_j$ . Figure 2.5 shows the hierarchical clustering that this procedure creates for our example point set (notice

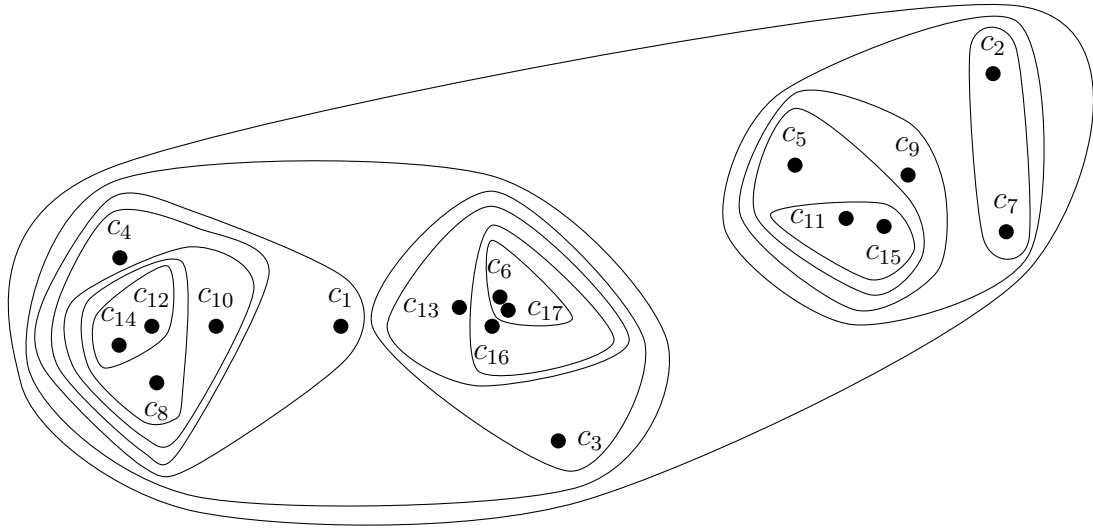


Figure 2.5: Continuation of Figure 2.4, depicting the resulting hierarchical clustering.

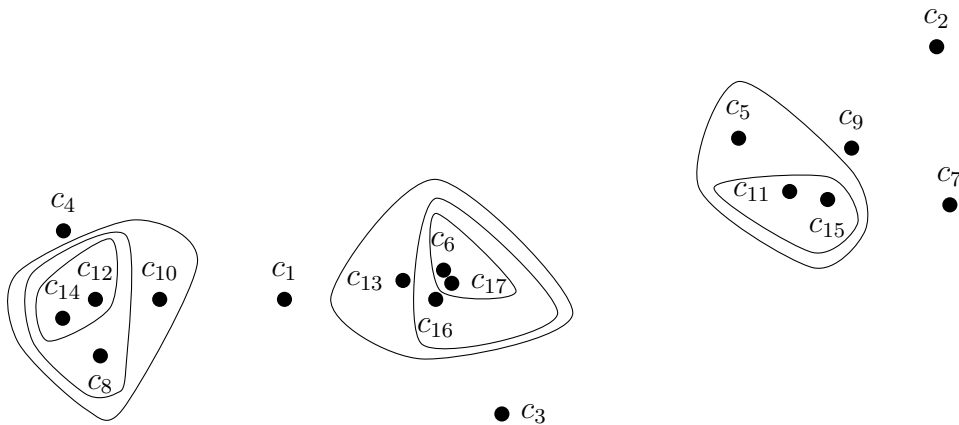


Figure 2.6: Continuation of Figure 2.5, depicting the clustering for  $k = 9$ .

that the picture does not uniquely define all intermediate clusterings, although the algorithm does, since the order is not depicted for unrelated sets). Figure 2.6 shows one specific clustering from the hierarchy, namely the clustering for  $k = 9$ .

– end of Lecture 2 –

By Lemma 13, we know that the first time that a point is reassigned (then, to its parent), the distance to its new center is relatively small: It is at most  $R/(2^{L(x)-1})$ . Before we proceed, let us briefly discuss what this means. Assume that  $x = x_i$ . Since  $x$  is on level  $L(x)$ , we know that  $R_i \in (\frac{R}{2^{L(x)}}, \frac{R}{2^{L(x)-1}}]$ . Now notice that  $R_i$  is the cost of the Gonzalez' solution for  $k = i - 1$ . At the point when we reassign  $x = x_i$  for the first time, we compute the  $(i - 1)$ -clustering. The cost of this clustering is  $R_i$ . We conclude that the  $(i - 1)$ -clustering of Gonzalez costs  $R_i > \frac{R}{2^{L(x)}} = 2 \cdot (R/(2^{L(x)-1}))$ . So, compared to the Gonzalez' solution,  $x$  now has at most twice the distance to its closest center in the  $(i - 1)$ -clustering. [Since Gonzalez' itself is a 2-approximation,

this means that the distance between  $x$  and its closest center is at most 4 times the optimum maximum radius.]

Now the crucial question is: What does it mean for the radius that points are potentially reassigned multiple times? The key feature of the algorithm is that two solutions in different levels differ exponentially with respect to their cost. Thus, if a point is reassigned again and again, then the additional distance incurred by the first reassignments plays a smaller and smaller role compared to the later clusterings. Consider  $c_{15}$  in our ongoing example. Its parent is  $c_{11}$ , the parent of  $c_{11}$  is  $c_5$ , the parent of  $c_5$  is  $c_2$ , and the parent of  $c_1$  is  $c_1$ . This means that  $c_{15}$  is reassigned four times. Say we are interested in the clustering for  $k = 4$ , which is created when  $c_5$  stops being a center, which in particular means that  $c_{15}$  is reassigned for the third time, namely to  $c_2$ . By the triangle inequality, we know that

$$d(c_{15}, c_2) \leq d(c_{15}, c_{11}) + d(c_{11}, c_5) + d(c_5, c_2).$$

Furthermore, we know that  $c_{15} \in L_5$ ,  $c_{11} \in L_4$ ,  $c_5 \in L_2$  and  $c_2 \in L_1$ , implying that

$$\begin{aligned} & d(c_{15}, c_{11}) + d(c_{11}, c_5) + d(c_5, c_2) \\ & \leq \frac{R}{2^{L(c_{15})-1}} + \frac{R}{2^{L(c_{11})-1}} + \frac{R}{2^{L(c_5)-1}} \\ & \leq \frac{R}{2^4} + \frac{R}{2^3} + \frac{R}{2^1} \leq R. \end{aligned}$$

Since  $c_5 \in L_2$ ,  $R_5 \in (\frac{R}{2^2}, \frac{R}{2^1}]$ , meaning that the 4-clustering costs at least  $R/4$ . So even though we did three reassignments, the bound only doubled compared to the distance between  $c_5$  and its direct parent. The following theorem shows that in general, the solution for any  $k$  has a radius which is at most 4 times the radius of Gonzalez' solution with the same number of clusters. Since Gonzalez' is guaranteed to be a 2-approximation, we conclude that the hierarchical  $k$ -center algorithm is 8-approximative.

**Theorem 14.** *Algorithm `hierarchical-kcenter`(( $P, d$ )) computes a hierarchical clustering on  $(P, d)$  which is 8-approximative as defined in Definition 12.*

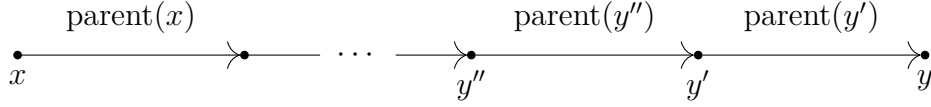
*Proof.* The output of Algorithm `hierarchical-kcenter` is a hierarchical clustering by definition. We now fix a number  $k \in \mathbb{N}^{\geq 1}$  and show that the  $k$ -clustering  $\mathcal{H}_k$  contained in the hierarchy has a maximum radius which is at most 4 times as large as the maximum radius of the  $k$ -clustering computed by Gonzalez' algorithm.

To show this, we briefly use an extension of the parent function which we define inductively. The function `parent`<sup>1</sup> is just the parent function, defined by `parent`<sup>1</sup>( $x$ ) = `parent`( $x$ ) for all  $x \in P \setminus \{x_1\}$ , and `parent`( $x_1$ ) =  $x_1$ . The function `parent`<sup>0</sup> is the identity, i.e., `parent`<sup>0</sup>( $x$ ) =  $x$  for all  $x \in P$ . The function `parent` <sup>$i$</sup>  for  $i > 1$  results from applying the parent function  $i$  times. More precisely, `parent` <sup>$i$</sup>  results from `parent` <sup>$i-1$</sup>  by setting `parent` <sup>$i$</sup> ( $x$ ) = `parent`(`parent` <sup>$i-1$</sup> ( $x$ )) for all  $x \in P$  with  $x \neq x_1$  and `parent` <sup>$i$</sup>  =  $x_1$ .

**Claim 15.** *Let  $x \in P$ ,  $i \geq 1$ ,  $y' = \text{parent}^{i-1}(x)$  and  $y = \text{parent}(y') = \text{parent}^i(x)$ . Then*

$$d(x, y) \leq \frac{R}{2^{L(x)-1}} + \frac{R}{2^{L(x)-2}} + \frac{R}{2^{L(x)-3}} + \cdots + \frac{R}{2^{L(y')-1}} = \sum_{j=L(y')}^{L(x)} \frac{R}{2^{j-1}}.$$

*Proof.* We prove the claim inductively. For  $i = 1$ , the claim follows from Lemma 13. Assume that that  $i \geq 2$  and that the claim is true for  $i - 1$ . If  $\text{parent}^{i-1}(x) = \text{parent}^i(x)$ , then we are done by induction hypothesis. Otherwise, set  $y'' = \text{parent}^{i-2}(x)$ , thus we also know that  $\text{parent}(y'') = y'$ . Notice that  $y$  is in a lower level than  $y'$ , i.e.  $L(y) < L(y')$ , by the definition of the parent function, and similarly,  $L(y') < L(y'')$ .



By induction hypothesis,

$$d(x, y') \leq \frac{R}{2^{L(x)-1}} + \frac{R}{2^{L(x)-2}} + \frac{R}{2^{L(x)-3}} + \dots + \frac{R}{2^{L(y'')-1}}.$$

By the triangle inequality,  $d(x, y) \leq d(x, y') + d(y', y)$ . By Lemma 13,  $d(y', y) \leq \frac{R}{2^{L(y')-1}}$ . Combining these statements shows the claim.  $\square$

We want to bound the maximum radius of the  $k$ -clustering. This clustering results from reassigning the points  $x_{|P|}, \dots, x_{k+1}$ , potentially multiple times. Let  $x$  be one of these points, and let  $y'$  be the last point among its parents which is in  $\{x_{|P|}, \dots, x_{k+1}\}$ , and  $y = \text{parent}(y')$  be the first one that is in  $\{x_k, \dots, x_1\}$ . By Claim 15, we know that  $d(x, y) \leq \sum_{j=L(y')}^{L(x)} \frac{R}{2^{j-1}}$ . We can simplify this by using Fact 2:

$$d(x, y) \leq \sum_{j=L(y')}^{L(x)} \frac{R}{2^{j-1}} \leq \frac{R}{2^{L(y')-1}} \sum_{j=0}^{\infty} \left(\frac{1}{2}\right)^j = \frac{R}{2^{L(y')-1}} \cdot \frac{1}{1/2} = \frac{R}{2^{L(y')-2}}.$$

The radius of the  $k$ -clustering  $\{x_1, \dots, x_k\}$  is  $R_{k+1}$ . Now the crucial observation is that since  $y'$  is still in  $\{x_{|P|}, \dots, x_{k+1}\}$ , its level  $L(y')$  is at least  $L(x_{k+1})$ , i.e.,  $L(y') \geq L(x_{k+1})$ , and

$$d(x, y) \leq \frac{R}{2^{L(y')-2}} \leq \frac{R}{2^{L(x_{k+1})-2}}.$$

Since  $R_{k+1} \in \left(\frac{R}{2^{L(x_{k+1})}}, \frac{R}{2^{L(x_{k+1})-1}}\right]$ , we get that

$$d(x, y) \leq \frac{R}{2^{L(x_{k+1})-2}} = 4 \cdot \frac{R}{2^{L(x_{k+1})}} < 4 \cdot R_{k+1}.$$

This is true for all points  $x \in P$ , thus the maximum radius of the solution is bounded by 4 times the maximum radius of the Gonzalez' solution, which is at most 2 times the maximum radius of an optimal solution. The theorem follows.  $\square$

## 2.5 Another elegant 2-approximation

In this section, we see another 2-approximation algorithm for the  $k$ -center problem. It is a little more complicated to state, but will give us new insights to the problem. It is based on the following crucial observation.

**Observation 16.** *There are only  $\mathcal{O}(|P|^2)$  possible values for the maximum radius of the optimal solution for the  $k$ -center problem on  $(P, k)$ .*

For any set  $P$  and any set of centers  $C \subset P$ , the  $k$ -center objective value is a *distance* between a pair of points, and there are only  $\mathcal{O}(|P|^2)$  such pairs. Thus, we can ‘guess’ the optimum value. This is a technique often applied: One shows that the number of possible values for some quantity is bounded, iterates through all of them and can then perform an algorithm with the assumption that the current guess is correct.

In the case of  $k$ -center we use our guess to build a so-called *threshold graph*. Let  $\tau$  be any pairwise distance between points in  $P$ . Then the threshold graph  $G_\tau$  contains an edge between two points iff their distance is at most  $\tau$ .

**Definition 17.** *Let  $(P, d)$  be a metric space, and let  $\tau \in \{d(x, y) \mid x, y \in P\}$ .*

*The threshold graph  $G_\tau = (P, E_\tau)$  is defined by  $E_\tau = \{\{x, y\} \mid x, y \in P, d(x, y) \leq \tau\}$ .*

Based on the threshold graph, we define a structure called *two-hop graph*. For that, we use the following definition which we reuse later on.

**Definition 18.** *For any graph  $G = (V, E)$ , we define  $G^i = (V, E^i)$  recursively by  $E^i = E^{i-1} \cup \{\{x, y\} \mid x, y \in V \wedge \exists z \in V : \{x, z\} \in E \wedge \{z, y\} \in E^{i-1}\}$ .*

The *two-hop graph* is the graph  $G_\tau^2 = (P, E_\tau^2)$ , i.e., two points  $x, y \in P$  are connected in  $G_\tau^2$  if they are connected in  $G_\tau$  or if there is a third point to which both of them are connected in  $G_\tau$ . Thus, the distance between  $x, y$  with  $\{x, y\} \in E_\tau^2$  is at most  $2\tau$ .

Assume that  $\tau$  is the optimum value, and that  $C$  is an optimum  $k$ -center clustering for  $P$ . Then for every point  $x$  in  $P$ , there is a center  $c$  in  $C$  such that  $x$  and  $c$  are adjacent in  $G_\tau$ . Furthermore, if two points  $x, y \in P$  have the same closest center in  $C$ , then  $x$  and  $y$  are adjacent in  $G_\tau^2$ . Or, interpreted in a different way: Two points that are *not* adjacent in  $G_\tau^2$  can not be in the same cluster in any solution of maximum radius  $\tau$  since there is no point which is in distance  $\geq \tau$  of both of them. As a consequence, a 2-approximative solution for the  $k$ -center problem can be computed by finding a maximal independent set in  $G_\tau^2$ . Before we formally prove this statement, recall the definition of independent sets.

**Definition 19.** *Let  $G = (V, E)$  be an unweighted undirected graph. A set  $I \subseteq V$  is an independent set if for all  $u, v \in I$ ,  $\{u, v\} \notin E$ , i.e., no vertices in  $I$  are adjacent.*

When we talk about *maximal independent sets*, we mean that the set is *inclusionwise maximal*. Note that this is a different requirement than asking for a *maximum independent set*, which is an independent set of maximum cardinality. Computing maximum independent sets is NP-hard. In contrast to this, inclusionwise maximality means that no element can be added without destroying independence, and an independent set with this property can be found greedily.

**Definition 20.** *An independent set  $I$  in a graph  $G = (V, E)$  is maximal if for every  $u \in V \setminus I$ ,  $I \cup \{u\}$  is not an independent set.*

**maximal-independent-set**( $G = (V, E)$ )

1. Set  $I = \emptyset$  and  $T = V$ .
2. **Repeat**
3.     Choose  $u \in T$  arbitrarily and set  $I = I \cup \{u\}$ .
4.     Set  $T = T \setminus \{v \in T \mid v = u \vee \{u, v\} \in E\}$ .
5. **Until**  $T = \emptyset$
6. **Return**  $I$

**Observation 21.** *Algorithm `maximal-independent-set`( $G = (V, E)$ ) computes a maximal independent set in  $G$ .*

*Proof.* Observe that whenever a vertex  $u$  is added to  $I$ , all its neighbors are removed from  $T$ . Thus, since vertices are only added if they are still in  $T$ , the algorithm always maintains the property that  $I$  is independent. Furthermore, every vertex that is deleted from  $T$  has a neighbor in  $I$  and adding it to  $I$  thus destroys independence. This means that  $I$  is a maximal independent set.  $\square$

Now we prove that a maximal independent set in  $G_\tau^2$  provides a 2-approximation for the  $k$ -center problem.

**Lemma 22.** *Let  $(P, d)$ ,  $k$  be an input for the  $k$ -center problem, and assume that  $\tau$  is the maximum radius of an optimal solution to the  $k$ -center problem on  $(P, d)$ ,  $k$ . Then*

1. *any independent set in  $G_\tau^2$  has cardinality at most  $k$ , and*
2. *any maximal independent set is a feasible solution to the  $k$ -center problem with maximum radius  $2\tau$ .*

*Proof.* Let  $I$  be any independent set in  $G_\tau^2$  and assume that  $|I| > k$ . Then  $I$  contains at least  $k + 1$  points which have the property that no two of them can share the same closest center in the optimum solution (otherwise, they would be connected in  $G_\tau^2$ ). This is a contradiction since there are at most  $k$  clusters in the optimum solution. This proves 1.

Now assume that  $I$  is a maximal independent set and that there is a point  $x$  which is not within distance  $\leq 2\tau$  of any point in  $I$ . Then  $x$  can be added to  $I$  without destroying independence. This is a contradiction to the assumption that  $I$  is maximal. This proves 2.  $\square$

Lemma 22 gives rise to the following algorithm.

**`k-center-via-thresholding`**(a finite metric space  $(P, d)$ ,  $k \in \mathbb{N}^{\geq 1}$ )

1. Compute a list  $L$  of all pairwise distances  $d(x, y)$  for  $x, y \in P$ ,  $x \neq y$
2. Set  $\tau_{\min} := \max L$  and  $C_{\min} := \{x\}$  for an arbitrary  $x \in P$
3. **For**  $\tau \in L$  **do**
4.     Compute  $C \subseteq P$  by calling `maximal-independent-set`( $G_{\tau}^2$ )
5.     If  $|C| \leq k$  and  $\tau < \tau_{\min}$ , set  $\tau_{\min} = \tau$  and  $C_{\min} = C$ .
6. **Return**  $C_{\min}$

An algorithm along this lines was first published by Hochbaum and Shmoys [HS85].

**Theorem 23.** *Algorithm `k-center-via-thresholding`(( $P, d$ ),  $k$ ) computes a 2-approximation for the  $k$ -center problem.*

*Proof.* The algorithm computes a maximal independent set in  $G_{\tau}^2$  for all possible choices of  $\tau$  as a pairwise distance between points in  $P$ . Since the optimum solution is a pairwise distance between points in  $P$ , the algorithm in particular performs one iteration where  $\tau$  is indeed the optimum value.

Let  $I^*$  be the solution computed by `maximal-independent-set`( $G_{\tau}^2$ ) in the iteration where  $\tau = r(C_k^{\text{opt}})$ . By Observation 21,  $I^*$  is an independent set in  $G_{\tau}^2$ . By 1 of Lemma 22, any independent set has cardinality  $\leq k$ , so in particular,  $|I^*| \leq k$ . This means that  $I^*$  is a feasible solution to the  $k$ -center problem on  $(P, d)$ ,  $k$ . Furthermore, by 2 of Lemma 22, the maximum radius of  $I^*$  is at most  $2\tau$ . Since  $\tau$  is the optimum value,  $2\tau$  is at most twice the optimum value.

The solution that is finally output may not be this solution, but since we choose the solution with minimum  $\tau$  that satisfies that the cardinality is at most  $k$ , this can only improve the final output.  $\square$

Compared to Gonzalez' algorithm, the thresholding algorithm for  $k$ -center seems complicated. However, we have now learned a lot about the structure of optimal solutions for  $k$ -center, and this knowledge will prove important for the next chapter. In fact, Gonzalez' algorithm is in some way a special case of the thresholding algorithm. By always choosing the point that is farthest away, it implicitly ensures that the point is independent of the previous points in  $G_{\tau}^2$  (for  $\tau$  being the optimum value) as long as such a point exists. If no such point exists, then Gonzalez' algorithm already found a maximal independent set and simply adds additional centers until the cardinality of the center set is  $k$ . (We could similarly add additional centers to the solution of the thresholding algorithm if  $|I^*| < k$ ). This can only improve the solution. So, Gonzalez' algorithm is one way to compute a maximal independent set (plus some extra centers), but the thresholding algorithm shows that there is a bit more flexibility in the choice of the centers than always choosing the one that is farthest away. Instead, any maximum independent set in  $G_{\tau}^2$  can be chosen as the center set.

## 2.6 A streaming algorithm for $k$ -center

In the streaming model, we want to (approximately) solve problems in one pass over the input data.<sup>1</sup> There are different scenarios that motivate this model: In some applications, data is actually created at a speed that is so large that the data can not be stored. It is only available at the time of creation, and algorithms have to immediately process and filter it. This is for example the case for CERN's Large Hadron Collider. Another (and maybe more common) motivation is that nowadays, data is often of a size that may still fit on our hard drive, but not at all into the main memory of our computer.

The practical efficiency of algorithms that constantly read from the hard drive is so poor that streaming algorithms provide an immense speed-up because they only read every data point once from the hard drive, and this happens in blocks. The latter requirement is important, and it means that usually, we have to assume that the order of the points is given to us – randomizing or sorting the data requires additional passes over the data.

One-pass algorithms are not necessarily linear since could theoretically do extensive computations for each new data point. However, most of the time, this is not the case, and algorithms developed theoretically in the streaming model tend to be fast in practice as well. That has to do with the fact that they store very little data, and even doing much with this little amount of data is still quick. By saying *we only want to do one pass over the data*, we implicitly say that we do not want to store very much. We would like to store at most as much as fits into the main memory in order to avoid cache misses which would cause additional reads from the hard drive.

The aim when developing algorithms in the streaming model is to find algorithms that store as little as possible. How much do we need to store? That depends on the problem. For approximately solving  $k$ -clustering problems, we need at least  $\Omega(k)$  space, since the desired output itself consists of  $k$  centers. The storage may also (need to) depend on the amount of data that the algorithm processes. A typical goal when designing streaming algorithms is that after reading  $n$  points of data, the storage requirement is a polynomial in  $\log n$ . Notice one detail in this formulation: we do not talk about the *size* of a *data set*, instead, we assume the view that the data is a *stream*, and we are interested in statements that hold after each data point, at which point the current *length* of the stream is the quantity which we compare our storage to.

For  $k$ -center, the streaming model is not well-defined without further considerations. Imagine an input to the  $k$ -center problem in the general metric case. It consists of a point set  $P$  and a metric  $d$ . If the points now arrive one by one, how do we get access to the metric? It seems unlikely that we would have the pairwise distances in the main memory if  $P$  itself is too large to fit into the memory.

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<sup>1</sup>There exist streaming models where this requirement is relaxed and a small number of passes over the data is allowed. For some problems, that is unavoidable because they cannot be (approximately) solved in one pass over the data. However, for the problems considered in this lecture, we restrict the streaming model to one pass only.



So in this section, we assume that we have some sort of oracle access to the distances. That may seem absurd at first. However, if the data is for example from  $\mathbb{R}^d$ , then the oracle would just find the distance  $d(x, y)$  between points  $x, y \in \mathbb{R}^d$  by computing the Euclidean distance between them. The Euclidean space and distance may not be the modeling of our choice in a given application, but it is reasonable to assume that we have a way to compute a distance between two data points, instead of being given a finite metric space in form of a matrix or graph. Notice that this may require that we store more information on a point than just its number: For points in  $\mathbb{R}^d$ , storing a point needs  $\Theta(d)$  space. For this reason, we will measure the storage of our  $k$ -clustering streaming algorithms in terms of the number of points that we store, not in terms of the actual storage required.

To summarize, a streaming algorithm for a  $k$ -clustering problem

- has access to a distance oracle,
- specifies the steps to be done after reading a new input point,
- stores very little (at least  $\Omega(k)$  points and at most  $\mathcal{O}(\text{poly}(k \cdot \log n))$ ), and
- is able to provide a solution for the  $k$ -clustering problem at any point in time.

– end of lecture 3 –

## A streaming approximation algorithm for $k$ -center

The following algorithm is due to Charikar, Chekuri, Feder and Motwani [CCFM04]. While not originally stated as a streaming algorithm, their algorithm can be formulated in the streaming model in a straightforward way as we see in the following.

Before the streaming algorithm is ready, the following routine is called to initialize some variables, in particular  $k$ , the number of clusters. This number is now fixed during all computations done on the following data stream.

**init**( $k \in \mathbb{N}^{\geq 1}$ )

1. Store the number  $k$
2. Set  $C := \emptyset$ ,  $\ell = 0$  and  $\text{init} := \text{true}$

Now the processing can start. We assume that the points come in some given order, and that for each point, the routine **update** is called (after the routine has finished for the previous point). This function has two modes: While reading the first  $k$  points, it simply stores the read points in  $C$ . Notice one detail: If a point arrives multiple times, the copies are of course ignored. Storing the first  $k$  distinct points is the only way to achieve any approximation since during this phase, the optimum solution (place the centers on the points) has value zero.

That changes when  $C$  contains  $k$  points and a new point  $x$  with  $x \notin C$  arrives. This is the first time when any optimum solution has a non-zero cost. We can determine an optimum solution in this situation: It results from merging two points with minimum

distance. The function `update` now observes that the initialization phase has ended, adds  $x$  to  $C$ , removes one of the points of a closest pair from  $C$  and initializes a value  $\ell$  to the smallest pairwise distance. Now  $|C| \leq k$  is reestablished.

In the second mode, `update` ignores  $x$  if and only if there is a point in  $C$  which is at distance at most  $\ell$  from  $x$ . Ignoring means that  $x$  already has a good center, so we do not need to do anything when processing  $x$ . If, however,  $d(x, C) > \ell$ , then ignoring  $x$  would increase the radius of the solution in an uncontrolled fashion. Thus,  $x$  is added to  $C$ . The function ends by calling `check`, which we describe below, and which ensures that  $|C| \leq k$  is reestablished if necessary.

**update(a point  $x$  from a metric space)**

1. **If** (init = true) **then**
2.     If  $x \notin C$ , add  $x$  to  $C$
3.     **If**  $|C| = k + 1$  **then**
4.         Set  $\ell$  to the closest pairwise distance between points in  $C$
5.         Remove one point of a closest point pair from  $C$
6.         Set init := false
7. **Else**
8.     **If**  $d(x, C) > 2\ell$  **then**
9.         Add  $x$  to  $C$
10.         **check()**

It remains to specify `check`. This function reduces the number of centers if necessary. It only has three lines: Check if  $|C| > k$ , and if so, replace  $C$  by a maximum independent set in  $G_{2\ell}$  (Note the following subtlety: We compute the independent set in  $G_{2\ell}$ , the threshold graph where points are connected iff their distance is at most  $2\ell$ , and not in  $G_\ell^2$ , the two-hop graph. If two points are connected in  $G_\ell^2$ , then they are also connected in  $G_{2\ell}$ , but the reverse statement is not true.), and finally set  $C = I$  and  $\ell = 2\ell$ . These steps are repeated until  $|C| \leq k$ . Notice that one iteration may not establish  $|C| \leq k$  if the pairwise distances between the points in  $C$  are much larger than  $\ell$ . However, once  $\ell$  is at least half the smallest pairwise distance, the cardinality of  $C$  decreases. Notice that in order to implement `check` efficiently, one should compute the break point beforehand and directly increase  $\ell$  sufficiently, but for the purpose of this analysis, considering the process as having several iterations is convenient.

**check()**

1. **While**  $|C| > k$  **do**
2.     Compute  $I \subseteq C$  by calling `maximal-independent-set( $G_{2\ell}(C)$ )`
3.     Set  $C := I$  and  $\ell = 2 \cdot \ell$

For the sake of completeness, we also provide the following function which outputs the current solution. This function can be called at any time; if called while `update`

is still executed, it may however give a solution with  $k + 1$  centers. It should only be called between the executions of `update`.

**solution()**

1. **Return**  $C$

For the following analysis, we denote the set of the first  $i \geq 1$  points in the stream by  $P_i$ . Since we now deal with multiple point sets, we use the more detailed notation

$$r(C, P_i) := \max_{x \in P_i} \min_{c \in C} d(x, c)$$

for the maximum radius of the solution  $C \subset P_i$  with respect to the points in  $P_i$ .

**Lemma 24.** *For every  $i \geq 1$ , after processing the first  $i$  points in the stream with `update`, the the following invariants hold:*

1. *The maximum radius  $r(C, P_i)$  is at most  $2\ell$ .*
2. *All points in  $C$  have a pairwise distance of at least  $\ell$ .*
3. *It holds  $\ell \leq 4 \cdot r(C_k^{\text{opt}}, P_i)$ , where  $C_k^{\text{opt}}$  is an optimal solution for the  $k$ -center problem on  $P_i$ . Thus,  $\ell/4$  is a lower bound on the optimum value.*

*Proof.* As long as  $i \leq k$ ,  $\ell$  is still zero, which is a lower bound for the radius of any  $k$ -center solution, and also for all possible pairwise distances between the points. Furthermore, the radius  $r(C, P_i)$  is also zero. Thus, all invariants are true.

For  $i = k + 1$ ,  $\ell$  is set to the smallest distance between any pair of points among the first  $k + 1$  points. Notice that any  $k$ -center solution on  $P_{k+1}$  has to place two of the first  $k + 1$  points into the same cluster, and only the centers from  $P_{k+1}$  are available. Thus, the smallest pairwise distance is the optimum value for  $k$ -center on  $P_{k+1}$ , it holds  $\ell = r(C_k^{\text{opt}})$ . The point that is removed from  $C$  to reduce the number to  $k$  is a point who has a neighbor at distance  $\ell$  (which remains in  $C$ ), so  $r(C, P_{k+1}) = \ell$  holds after removing it. Furthermore, all other points have a pairwise distance of at least  $\ell$ . We conclude that all invariants are again true after the  $(k + 1)$ th point.

Now fix any  $i > k + 1$  and assume that the invariants are true for  $i - 1$ . If the  $i$ th point  $x_i$  is ignored by `update`, meaning that line 8 produced `false`, then the new point is within distance  $2\ell$  of a point in  $C$ . Since  $r(C, P_{i-1}) \leq 2\ell$ , and  $d(x_i, C) \leq 2\ell$ ,  $r(C, P_i) \leq 2\ell$ . No new point is added to  $C$ , so `check()` is not called, and the optimum value can only increase, so all invariants are again true.

Now if  $d(x_i, C) > 2\ell$ , then  $x_i$  is added to  $C$ . This only affects invariant 2., and this invariant stays true: the point is added to  $C$  because it is at distance  $> 2\ell > \ell$  of any point in  $C$ . So all invariants are true before `check()` is called.

Now we consider what happens during the execution of `check`. We know that the invariants are true when we enter the function. Now we show that the invariants are true after each iteration of the `while`-loop. So assume that we are in line 1 of `check` and all invariants are true. If  $|C| \leq k$ , nothing happens and we are done. If  $|C| > k$ , we observe that because of invariant 2., this means that we have at least  $k + 1$  points

which have a pairwise distance of at least  $\ell$  (in fact we have exactly  $k+1$  points because `check` is called after every point insertion). Since any optimum solution has to place two of them into the same cluster,  $r(C_k^{\text{opt}}, P_i) \geq \ell/2$ . Line 2 of `check` replaces  $C$  by an independent set  $I$  in  $G_{2\ell}$ . All points in  $I$  have a pairwise distance of more than  $2\ell$ . Furthermore, every point in  $C \setminus I$  has a distance of at most  $2\ell$  to its closest point in  $I$ . Now let  $x \in P_i \setminus C$  be a point that has been deleted or removed at an earlier point in time. By invariant 1.,  $d(x, C) \leq 2 \cdot \ell$ . By the triangle inequality,  $d(x, I) \leq 4 \cdot \ell$  since every point in  $C$  has distance at most  $2\ell$  to  $I$ . We have now seen:

- for any optimum solution  $C_k^{\text{opt}}$ ,  $r(C_k^{\text{opt}}, P_i) \geq \ell/2$ ,
- all points in  $I$  have a pairwise distance of more than  $2\ell$ , and
- the maximum radius of the solution  $I$  is bounded by  $r(I, P_i) \leq 4\ell$ .

This means that after line 3, where  $C$  is set to  $I$  and  $\ell$  is replaced by  $2\ell$ , all invariants are again true.  $\square$

We have already shown our main result, the following theorem is a corollary: Invariants 1. and 3. imply that after point  $i$  is fully processed, we have  $r(C, P_i) \leq 2 \cdot \ell \leq 8 \cdot r(C_k^{\text{opt}})$ .

**Theorem 25.** *For all  $i \geq 1$ , if the first  $i$  points have been processed by `update`, then the solution  $C = \text{solution}()$  is an 8-approximation for the  $k$ -center problem on  $P_i$ . The algorithm stores  $\Theta(k)$  points.*

## 2.7 The $k$ -center problem with outliers

[In the winter semester 2017/2018, the section on  $k$ -center with outliers is excluded from possible questions in the oral exam.]

In this section, we apply our knowledge about the structure of the  $k$ -center problem to develop an approximation algorithm for a variant of the  $k$ -center problem.

**Definition 26.** *Let  $(P, d)$  be a metric space, let  $k, z \in \mathbb{N}^{\geq 0}$  be numbers. The  $k$ -center problem with outliers is to compute a set  $C \subseteq P$  with  $|C| = k$  and a set of outliers  $Z \subseteq P$  with  $|Z| \leq z$  such that*

$$\max_{x \in P \setminus Z} \min_{c \in C} d(x, c)$$

*is minimized.*

The  $k$ -center problem with outliers allows  $z$  points to be marked as *outliers*. They are ignored when computing the maximum radius of a solution. Why do we say that this adds a constraint to the problem? That is because we can also view it differently: The  $k$ -center problem with outliers asks for  $k' = k + z$  centers, but  $z$  of these centers may only serve themselves. Thus, we have the additional constraint that  $z$  centers can not serve other points.

– end of lecture 4 –

The  $k$ -center problem with outliers can be 2-approximated [CGK16]. However, this result is a special case of an algorithm for a much more general case (the non-uniform  $k$ -center problem), and does not fit too well here. Instead, we will consider an easier variation which is based on the algorithm by Hochbaum and Shmoys and gives a 3-approximation for the problem.

The main algorithm is very similar to the thresholding algorithm for the standard  $k$ -center problem:

**thresholding-with-constraints**(a finite metric space  $(P, d)$ , and  $k, z \in \mathbb{N}^{\geq 1}$ )

1. Compute a list  $L$  of all pairwise distances  $d(x, y)$  for  $x, y \in P, x \neq y$
2. Set  $\tau_{\min} := \max L, Z_{\min} = \emptyset$  and  $C_{\min} := \{x\}$  for an arbitrary  $x \in P$
3. **For**  $\tau \in L$  **do**
4. Compute  $(C, Z)$  with  $C, Z \subseteq P, |Z| \leq z$   
by calling `ind-set-outlier`( $G, F, z, \tau$ )
5. If  $|C| \leq k$  and  $\tau < \tau_{\min}$ , set  $\tau_{\min} = \tau, Z_{\min} = Z$  and  $C_{\min} = C$ .
6. **Return**  $C_{\min}$  and  $Z_{\min}$

Aside from the fact that we have to keep track of the outlier set  $Z_{\min}$  in addition to  $I$ , the main change is that we use a different subroutine to compute the actual center set. The idea of the algorithm is to try to find the center of an optimal cluster (or a similarly good point) by picking a point that has many points close to it. Since we have a guess  $\tau$  for the optimum value available, close just means that the points are within distance  $\tau$ . In the subroutine, we store all yet uncovered points in a set  $T$  (in the beginning,  $T = P$ ).

For any  $x \in P$ , we then count the number of uncovered points that  $x$  has in its neighborhood. More precisely, we determine the cardinality of the set

$$N(x) = \{z \in T \mid d(x, z) \leq \tau\}$$

for all points in  $P$ . We also call  $N(x)$  the *direct neighborhood* of  $x$ . While the direct neighborhood is needed for determining the next center, we need the *extended neighborhood* of a point  $x \in P$  for deciding which points shall now be considered as covered. The extended neighborhood is given by

$$E(x) = \{z \in T \mid d(x, z) \leq 3\tau\}$$

Here is the subroutine that we use:

**ind-set-outlier** $((P, d), z, \tau)$

1. Set  $I = \emptyset$  and  $T = P$
2. **Repeat**
3.     Choose  $u \in P$  with  $|N(u)| = \max\{|N(x)| \mid x \in P\}$  and set  $I = I \cup \{u\}$ .
4.     Remove all vertices in  $E(u) \cap T$  from  $T$
5. **Until**  $|T| \leq z$
6. **Return**  $(I, T)$

Routine **ind-set-outlier** starts by copying  $P$  to  $T$ , i.e., in the beginning, all points are uncovered. It then repeatedly chooses a center and removes points from  $T$  which are now considered covered. The next center  $u$  is chosen based on the size of the direct neighborhood. One of the points with the largest direct neighborhood is selected to be  $u$ , and then  $u$  is added to  $I$ . The next step is to compute the extended neighborhood  $E(u)$  and to delete all points in  $E(u)$  from  $T$ . Note that  $E(u)$  is not deleted from  $P$ ; we allow all points in  $P$  to be centers. Side remark: This means that the computed set  $I$  will not be an independent set in  $G_{3\tau}$  (but we have a new argument to replace our previous argumentation, so it is not a problem). It is an interesting exercise to prove that  $I$  will be, in fact, an independent set in  $G_{2\tau}$ .

After removing  $E(u)$ , the routine checks whether the number of points  $T$  is still larger than  $z$  and, if so, repeats the process. Once  $|T|$  has decreased sufficiently, the routine returns  $(I, T)$ . Thus by definition, Routine **ind-set-outlier** always computes a solution with at most  $z$  outliers. It may, however, compute more than  $k$  centers. In the following lemma, we show that this can not happen if the subroutine is called with  $\tau \geq r(C_k^{\text{opt}})$ .

**Lemma 27.** *If  $\tau$  is at least the maximum radius of an optimal solution for the  $k$ -center problem with outliers and forbidden centers on  $(P, d)$ ,  $z, F \subset P, k$ , then **ind-set-outlier** $((P, d), F, z, \tau)$  computes  $(I, T)$  with  $|I| \leq k$  and  $|T| \leq z$ .*

*Proof.* We relate the output of the algorithm to a fixed optimal solution. An optimal solution consists of a center set  $C^{\text{opt}}$  and a set of outliers  $Z^{\text{opt}}$ . We are interested in a partitioning induced by  $C^{\text{opt}}$ , and we name this partitioning  $\mathcal{A}$  (so it is a set of  $k$  disjoint subsets of  $P$ ). The union of the sets in  $\mathcal{A}$  is  $P \setminus Z$ .

Some more notation: For the purpose of this proof, we name the center chosen in the  $i$ th iteration of **ind-set-outlier** by  $u_i$ . Its direct neighborhood is abbreviated by  $N_i := N(u_i)$  and its extended neighborhood is  $E_i := E(u_i)$ . Furthermore, we let  $T_i$  be the set  $T$  at the *beginning* of iteration  $i$ .

Our goal is now to show that routine **ind-set-outlier** covers at least  $\sum_{A \in \mathcal{A}} |A|$  points with the first  $k$  centers. That then means that the set of outliers contains less than  $|P| - \sum_{A \in \mathcal{A}} |A| \leq z$  points after the  $k$ th iteration, i.e., the routine stops and returns a feasible solution.

We make a case distinction. First, we consider all clusters  $A$  in  $\mathcal{A}$  with the property that at least one point from  $A$  was in the direct neighborhood of a center that

**ind-set-outlier** chose in the first  $k$  iterations. We call the set of all these clusters  $\mathcal{G} \subseteq \mathcal{A}$ , and the set of the remaining clusters  $\mathcal{B} = \mathcal{A} \setminus \mathcal{G}$ . For every cluster  $A \in \mathcal{G}$ , we let  $i(A) \in [k]$  be the smallest number for which  $A \cap N_{i(A)} \neq \emptyset$ .

What does this mean? Let  $x \in A \cap N_i$  be the point that is in the non-empty intersection (set  $i = i(A)$  for this paragraph). Then every point in  $A$  has a distance of at most  $2\tau$  to  $x$ , since they are in the same optimum cluster as  $x$ . But the distance between  $x$  and  $u_i$  is at most  $\tau$ , since  $x \in N_i$  as well. This means that every point in  $A$  has a distance of at most  $3\tau$  to  $u_i$ , implying that  $(A \cap T_i) \subseteq E_i$ . Since all points in  $E_i$  are deleted in iteration  $i$ , this means that  $A \cap T_i$  is deleted from  $T$ . Notice that this also means that the  $i \in [k]$  with  $A \cap N_i \neq \emptyset$  is unique: After the first iteration where this happens, no points from  $A$  remain in  $T$ .

What about the points from  $A$  that were deleted from  $T$  *before* iteration  $i$ ? Since iteration  $i$  is the first iteration where a point from  $A$  was in the direct neighborhood of the chosen center, points there were previously deleted were *not* in the direct neighborhood, but only in the extended neighborhood.

Let  $I_G = \{i \in [k] \mid \exists A \in \mathcal{G} : i = i(A)\}$  and  $I_B = [k] \setminus I_G$ . Then we have just shown that

$$\bigcup_{A \in \mathcal{G}} A \subseteq \left( \bigcup_{i \in I_G} E_i \cup \bigcup_{i \in I_B} E_i \setminus N_i \right).$$

Notice that  $|I_G| \leq |\mathcal{G}|$ : while multiple clusters from  $\mathcal{G}$  may be deleted in the same iteration, there is only one fixed iteration that is added to  $I_G$  for each  $A \in \mathcal{G}$ . Thus, also  $|I_B| \geq |\mathcal{B}|$  is true.

Now we know that all points in  $\bigcup_{A \in \mathcal{G}} A$  are removed and are not in  $T$  after iteration  $k$ . What points can still be in  $T$ ? Let  $A \in \mathcal{B}$  be one of the optimum clusters we have not considered so far. It may be that some of the points in  $A$  are removed during the  $k$  iterations, which is only good for us. Indeed, we can strengthen our above statement to:

$$\left( \bigcup_{A \in \mathcal{G}} A \cup \bigcup_{A \in \mathcal{B}} A \setminus r(A) \right) \subseteq \left( \bigcup_{i \in I_G} E_i \cup \bigcup_{i \in I_B} E_i \setminus N_i \right),$$

where  $r(A)$  is the subset of  $A$  containing all points still remaining after iteration  $k$ . This means that This implies that

$$\left( \sum_{A \in \mathcal{G}} |A| + \sum_{A \in \mathcal{B}} (|A| - |r(A)|) \right) \leq \left( \sum_{i \in I_G} |E_i| + \sum_{i \in I_B} |E_i \setminus N_i| \right),$$

and now have to show that  $\sum_{A \in \mathcal{B}} |r(A)|$  is not too large.

Since all points in  $r(A)$  are not removed during the first  $k$  iterations,  $|A \cap T_i| \geq |r(A)|$  holds for all  $i \in [k]$ . In particular, the center  $c(A)$  of  $A$  (which is a point in  $P$  and thus always a possible center) has a neighborhood of size at least  $|r(A)|$ . Since we always choose a point with a neighborhood of maximum size,  $|N_i| \geq |r(A)|$  is always true: for all  $i \in [k]$  and all  $A \in \mathcal{B}$ . Together with the fact that  $|I_B| \geq |\mathcal{B}|$ , this implies

$$\sum_{i \in I_B} |N_i| \geq \sum_{A \in \mathcal{B}} |r(A)|.$$

In words, this inequality says the following: What we remove (in addition to  $\bigcup_{i \in I_G} E_i \cup \bigcup_{i \in I_B} E_i \setminus N_i$ ) is at least as much as what we should remove (in addition). Formally, we have shown that

$$\begin{aligned} \sum_{A \in \mathcal{A}} |A| &= \left( \sum_{A \in \mathcal{G}} |A| + \sum_{A \in \mathcal{B}} (|A| - |r(A)|) \right) + \sum_{A \in \mathcal{B}} |r(A)| \\ &\leq \left( \sum_{i \in I_G} |E_i| + \sum_{i \in I_B} |E_i \setminus N_i| \right) + \sum_{i \in I_B} |N_i| \\ &= \sum_{i=1}^k |E_i|, \end{aligned}$$

and that completes our proof.  $\square$

Lemma 27 contains the main technical step to prove the following result by Charikar et. al. [CKMN01].

**Theorem 28.** *Algorithm `thresholding-with-constraints`  $((P, d), F, k, z)$  computes a 3-approximation for the  $k$ -center problem with outliers and forbidden centers.*

*Proof.* Similarly to Observation 16, we observe that only the pairwise distances present in  $(P, d)$  are possible candidates for the value of an optimal solution to the  $k$ -center problem with outliers and forbidden centers on  $(P, d), F, k, z$ . Since the algorithm `thresholding-with-constraints` iterates through all of them, it performs one iteration of `ind-set-outlier` where  $\tau$  is the optimum value. By Lemma 27, the center set  $C$  computed by this call satisfies  $|C| \leq k$ . By line 3 of `ind-set-outlier`,  $C$  only contains points from  $P \setminus F$ . By line 6 of `ind-set-outlier`, we know that  $|T| \leq z$ . Furthermore, all points not in  $T$  have been removed because they are neighbors of a point in  $C$  in  $G_\tau^3$ , and are thus within distance  $3\tau$  of a point in  $C$ . Since  $\tau$  is the optimum value,  $C$  and  $T$  are a 3-approximative solution for the  $k$ -center problem with outliers and forbidden centers. The solution that is finally chosen is either this solution or one that is only better.  $\square$

## 2.8 The fair $k$ -center problem

Adding constraints to a clustering problem can mean many things. We have seen one constraint (clustering with outliers) where we restrict the number of points that can be assigned to some centers (a set of  $z$  centers can only be assigned at most one point, namely themselves). Another classical variant of the  $k$ -center problem would be to add upper or lower capacities to all centers. For example, the capacitated  $k$ -center problem asks for a set of centers  $C$  and an assignment of points to centers such that the number of points assigned to a center  $c$  does not violate its capacity  $u(c)$  (notice the difference to the outlier version: The capacity is here given for each center  $c$  individually, which is different from saying that there should be a center with at most a certain number of points). The lower-bounded  $k$ -center problem restricts the number of assigned points



from below, not above, by demanding that every center gets at least as many point as its lower bound  $\ell(c)$  states. Both these problems can be approximated; indeed, the lower-bounded  $k$ -center problem allows for a 3-approximation [AS16], and the capacitated  $k$ -center problem for a 6-approximation [KS00] (matching lower bounds are not known).

In this section, we want to study a problem that is loosely related to  $k$ -center with upper and lower capacities, but has a very modern motivation. This is the *fair  $k$ -center problem* as proposed by Chierichetti, Kumar, Lattanzi and Vassilvitskii [CKLV17].

The model for fair  $k$ -center strives to find a clustering where all clusters have the same composition with respect to some sensitive attribute as the whole point set. As an example, consider assigning children to kindergartens in a way that ensures that the the number of boys and the number of girls is roughly equal.

The difficulty of the fair  $k$ -center problem depends highly on the exact mathematical formulation. For the purpose of this lecture, we will restrict ourselves to binary attributes as in the example of boys and girls. This case is significantly easier to model and to approximate than the more general formulation where the number of different possible attribute values is larger than two.

**Definition 29.** Let  $(P, d)$  be a metric space, and let  $a : P \rightarrow \{0, 1\}$  be a mapping. For any subset  $S \subseteq P$  we use the notations  $S_0$  and  $S_1$  to denote the sets of points with attribute value 0 and 1, respectively, i.e.,

$$S^j = \{x \in S \mid a(x) = j\}$$

for  $j \in \{0, 1\}$ . Then we call

$$\text{ratio}(S, j) = \frac{|S^j|}{|S|}$$

the ratio of attribute value  $j$  in  $S$ , and we say that  $S$  is exactly balanced if

$$\text{ratio}(S, 0) = \text{ratio}(P, 0).$$

[This implies  $\text{ratio}(S, 1) = \text{ratio}(P, 1)$  since we only have two attribute values.] For convenience, we assume that at least half of the points have attribute value 1 (otherwise, we switch the naming). We say that  $S$  is  $(\ell, u)$ -balanced for  $\ell \in [0, \text{ratio}(P, 0)]$  and  $u \in [\text{ratio}(P, 0), 1]$  if

$$\ell \leq \text{ratio}(S, 0) \leq u.$$

Achieving exactly balanced clusters according to Definition 29 can be difficult. Imagine for example a point set  $P$  with 49 points with attribute value 0 and 51 points with attribute value 1. Then no true subset of  $P$  is exactly balanced according to Definition 29 because a balanced cluster has to have  $\text{ratio}(C, 0) = 49/100$ , and the only subset of  $P$  satisfying this constraint is  $P$  itself. Choosing  $\ell$  and  $u$  away from  $49/100$  allows to split  $P$  into multiple clusters. For arbitrary  $\ell$  and  $u$ , the problem can still be complicated even for two attribute values. We define the following special case as our variant of the fair  $k$ -center problem.

**Definition 30.** Let  $(P, d)$  be a metric space, let  $a : P \rightarrow \{0, 1\}$  be a mapping and let  $k, t \in \mathbb{N}^{\geq 1}$  be numbers (where  $t$  is such that  $\frac{1}{t} \leq \text{ratio}(P, 0)$ ). The fair  $k$ -center problem is to compute a set  $C = \{c_1, \dots, c_k\} \subseteq P$  with  $|C| = k$  and an assignment  $c : P \rightarrow C$  such that the induced clusters  $C_1, \dots, C_k$  (with  $C_i = \{x \in P \mid c(x) = c_i\}$ ) are  $(\frac{1}{t}, 1)$ -balanced and

$$r(C, c) := \max_{x \in P} d(x, c(x))$$

is minimized.

– end of lecture 5 –

Definition 30 demands a solution where the ratio of the points with attribute value 0 is at least  $1/t$ , i.e., in any cluster we have that for each point of value 0, there are at most  $t - 1$  points of attribute value 1. It allows any  $t$  with  $(1/t) \leq \text{ratio}(P, 0)$ , so the only restriction here is that we do not allow irrational numbers. Furthermore, we drop the upper bound  $u$  and set it to 1.

**Lemma 31.** Assume that the center set  $C^*$  and the assignment  $c^* : C \rightarrow P$  form an optimal solution to the fair  $k$ -center problem on  $(P, d, a, k, t)$ . Then there is an assignment  $c' : P^1 \rightarrow P^0$  such that

1. for all  $x \in P^0$ ,  $|\{y \in P^1 \mid c'(y) = x\}| \leq t - 1$ , and
2. for all  $y \in P^1$ ,  $d(y, c'(y)) \leq 2r(C^*, c^*)$ .

*Proof.* We construct  $c'$  by considering each cluster in the optimum solution individually. So let  $S$  be a cluster in the optimum solution. We know that the solution is  $(\frac{1}{t}, 1)$ -balanced, so in particular,  $\text{ratio}(S, 0) \geq 1/t$ . By definition, this means that

$$\frac{|S^0|}{|S^0| + |S^1|} \geq \frac{1}{t} \Leftrightarrow |S^1| \leq (t - 1)|S^0|.$$

We can thus split  $S^1$  into  $|S^0|$  groups of at most  $t - 1$  points each, and then assign each group to a unique point in  $S^0$ . This satisfies requirement 1. For requirement 2., observe that all points in  $S$  have a distance of at most twice the maximum radius.  $\square$

Lemma 31 ensures us that there is a good clustering into  $|P^0|$  clusters, where the points in  $P^0$  are the centers. This is a crucial observation since it is much easier to find a clustering with this structure than to find a fair  $k$ -clustering directly. Using the finer  $|P^0|$ -clustering, we can then later construct a fair  $k$ -clustering.

If we already know that the points in  $P^0$  are supposed to be the centers, all that is left to do is to compute the assignment of points with attribute value 1 to these centers, in a way that ensures sufficient balance. Finding this assignment is (basically) the task in Problem 3 on Problem Set 5, and we defer the solution to the tutorial (proof will later be added).

**Lemma 32.** Let  $(P, d)$  be a metric space, let  $a : P \rightarrow \{0, 1\}$  be a mapping and let  $k, t \in \mathbb{N}^{\geq 1}$  be numbers (where  $t$  is such that  $\frac{1}{t} \leq \text{ratio}(P, 0)$ ). Assume that a set of centers  $C$  is given, and an assignment  $a : P^0 \rightarrow C$  of the points with attribute value 0 to these centers is given as well. Extending  $c$  to  $P^1$  such that

- all induced clusters are  $(\frac{1}{t}, 1)$ -balanced, and
- the maximum radius of  $(C, c)$  is minimal

is possible in polynomial time.

Lemma 32 says that if  $C$  and  $c : P^0 \rightarrow C$  are fixed, then extending  $c$  optimally is possible in polynomial time. In the tutorial, this lemma is used in a scenario where the points in  $P^0$  are already assigned; here, we use it in a scenario where the points in  $P^0$  are the centers (and thus implicitly assigned to themselves). After using Lemma 32 to compute an assignment of then points in  $P^1$  to the points in  $P^0$ , we use a  $k$ -center 2-approximation of our choice to cluster the points in  $P^0$ . And then, all we have to do is to combine the two clusterings.

**fair-k-center** $((P, d), a : P \rightarrow \{0, 1\}, k, t \in \mathbb{N}^{\geq 1})$

1. Check that  $\text{ratio}(P, 0) \leq 0.5$  and that  $\frac{1}{t} \leq \text{ratio}(P, 0)$
2. Find an optimal assignment  $c' : P^1 \rightarrow P^0$  of the points in  $P^1$  to  $P^0$  under the condition that  $(c')^{-1}(x) \leq t - 1$  for all  $x \in P^0$  (Lemma 32)
3. Call **farthest-first-traversal** $((P^0, d), k)$  to compute a center set  $C$
4. **For all**  $x \in P^0$
5.     Set  $c(x) = \arg \min_{c \in C} d(x, c)$
6. **For all**  $y \in P^1$
7.     Set  $c(y) = c(c'(y))$
8. **Return**  $(C, c)$

**Theorem 33.** *Let  $(P, d)$  be a metric space,  $a : P \rightarrow \{0, 1\}$  be a mapping and  $t \in \mathbb{N}^{\geq 1}$  such that  $\frac{1}{t} \leq \text{ratio}(P, 0)$ . Then Algorithm **fair-k-center** computes a 4-approximation to the fair  $k$ -center problem on  $((P, d), a, t)$ .*

*Proof.* By Lemma 31, we know that it is possible to assign the points in  $P^1$  to the points in  $P^0$  such that the maximum distance between any point  $y \in P^1$  to its assigned point  $c'(y) \in P^0$  is at most  $2r(C^*, c^*)$ , where  $(C^*, c^*)$  is an optimal solution, and such that for any point  $y \in P^0$ ,  $(c')^{-1}(y) \leq t - 1$ . By Lemma 32, we know that we can find an optimal assignment of the points in  $P^1$  to the points in  $P^0$  under the condition that every point in  $P^0$  gets at most  $t - 1$  points; such an optimal assignment then has a radius of at most  $2r(C^*, c^*)$  as well. So the assignment  $c'$  computed in line 2. satisfies that  $d(y, c'(y)) \leq 2r(C^*, c^*)$  for all  $y \in P^1$ .

Next, the algorithm clusters the points in  $P^0$  by using a 2-approximation for the  $k$ -center problem. The optimum solution to the unconstrained  $k$ -center problem on  $(P^0, 0)$  can only be cheaper than the solution to the fair  $k$ -center problem on the full point set. Thus, the maximum distance between any point  $x \in P^0$  and its closest center  $c(x) = \arg \min_{c \in C} d(x, c)$  in the computed set  $C$  is at most  $2r(C^*, c^*)$ .

Finally, the algorithm sets the center of any  $y \in P^1$  to  $c(c'(y))$ . By the triangle inequality,

$$d(y, c(c'(y))) \leq d(y, c'(y)) + d(c'(y), c(c'(y))) \leq 2r(C^*, c^*) + 2r(C^*, c^*) \leq 4r(C^*, c^*),$$

so every point in  $P^1$  is at distance at most  $4r(C^*, c^*)$  of its final center, which proves the theorem.  $\square$

## The exciting world of $k$ -means

In this chapter, we consider the probably most known clustering problem: The  $k$ -means problem. Even more famous than this problem is a heuristic for it (Lloyd's algorithm) which we discuss later and which is commonly often referred to as *the*  $k$ -means algorithm. We will argue that nowadays, there are improvements of this algorithm that should be considered instead of implementing the heuristic in its vanilla version.

Furthermore, we will see how the  $k$ -means problem can be approximated in the streaming model, i.e., by one-pass algorithms. The resulting combination of a practical approximation algorithm and streaming routines lead to very powerful practical algorithms for the  $k$ -means problem.

### 3.1 The (Euclidean) $k$ -means problem

Here is a formal definition of the  $k$ -means problem:

**Definition 34.** Let  $P \subset \mathbb{R}^d$  be a finite set of points from the Euclidean space and  $k \in \mathbb{N}^{\geq 1}$  be a number. The (Euclidean)  $k$ -means problem is to compute a set  $C \subset \mathbb{R}^d$  with  $|C| = k$  that minimizes

$$\text{dist}^2(P, C) := \sum_{x \in P} \min_{c \in C} \|x - c\|^2.$$

In the following we also use the abbreviation  $\text{dist}^2(P, z) := \text{dist}^2(P, \{z\})$  for denoting the sum of the squared distances of all points in  $P$  to a single point  $z$ . Furthermore, we sometimes consider *weighted*  $k$ -means. Then the input point set comes together with a weight function  $w : P \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$ , and the objective to minimize changes to

$$\text{dist}^2(P, w, C) := \sum_{x \in P} w(x) \cdot \min_{c \in C} \|x - c\|^2.$$

If the weights are integral, we can think of the weights as multiplicities.

The  $k$ -means problem is NP-hard, and it is NP-hard to approximate it better than 1.0013 (see [ACKS15, LSW17]). There are at least three papers proposing constant-factor approximation algorithms for the  $k$ -means problem, the best of which achieves an approximation ratio of 6.357 (see [ANSW17]). All of these are based on algorithms for the  $k$ -median problem, the close sibling of the  $k$ -means problem:

**Definition 35.** Let  $(P, d)$  be a metric space and  $k \in \mathbb{N}^{\geq 1}$  be a number. The  $k$ -median problem is to compute a set  $C \subseteq P$  with  $|C| = k$  that minimizes

$$\sum_{x \in P} \min_{c \in C} d(x, c).$$

Compared to the  $k$ -median problem, we notice two major changes. First of all, the metric space is the Euclidean space. That is a restriction: Instead of an arbitrary space of which we only know that it satisfies the three axioms in Definition 1, we know exactly how the distances are computed.

**Fact 36.** The Euclidean space  $\mathbb{R}^d$  consists of all vectors  $(x_1, \dots, x_d)^T$  with  $x_i \in \mathbb{R}$  for all  $x_i \in \mathbb{R}$ . The length of a vector  $x \in \mathbb{R}^d$  is defined as

$$\|x\| := \sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^d x_i^2},$$

and the distance between two points  $x, y \in \mathbb{R}^d$  is the length of their difference vector, i.e.,

$$\|x - y\| = \sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^d (x_i - y_i)^2}.$$

This distance is a metric on  $\mathbb{R}^d$ .

However, the  $k$ -means problem is *not* a special case of the  $k$ -median problem. On the contrary: Firstly, the objective function considers squared Euclidean distances. These are not metric; so while the  $k$ -means problem is based on a specific metric (Euclidean distances), its cost is not actually metric. Indeed, the cost that a point incurs does not satisfy the triangle inequality. This is a major challenge when adapting approximation algorithms for  $k$ -median to  $k$ -means. Often, the way to resolve it (at the cost of a worse bound) is to use the fact that squared distances satisfy the following *relaxed triangle inequality*.

**Fact 37.** Let  $x, y, z \in \mathbb{R}^d$  be points. It holds that

$$\|x - y\|^2 \leq 2\|x - z\|^2 + 2\|z - y\|^2.$$

Secondly, notice that the center set  $C$  can be chosen from *all* of  $\mathbb{R}^d$  in the case of the  $k$ -means problem, while in the  $k$ -median problem, it is (usually) restricted to the input point set. For the  $k$ -median problem, an optimal solution can be computed in time  $\binom{n}{k} \in \Theta(n^k)$  by testing all possible choices of  $k$  centers from  $P$ . For the  $k$ -means problem, it is not straightforward to obtain a similar result. It is possible test

all partitionings of  $P$  into  $k$  subsets and then finding the best center for each subset (we see how to do this in the next section), but the running time of this is  $\Theta(k^n)$ , which is in general much worse than  $\Theta(n^k)$ . Inaba, Katoh and Imai [IKI94] show how to optimally solve the  $k$ -means problem in time  $n^{\mathcal{O}(dk)}$ . This algorithm is based on enumerating Voronoi diagrams.

## 3.2 Lloyd's algorithm

The extremely popular heuristic often called *the  $k$ -means algorithm* which we discuss in the following is usually attributed to a note by Lloyd in 1957 which was later published in [Llo82], but it has also (independently) been discovered by Steinhaus [Ste56]. The interested reader is referred to [Boc07] for a historical overview.

The heuristic is based on the following extremely helpful observation which is usually considered folklore. The following proof is similar to the proof in [KMN<sup>+</sup>04].

**Fact 38.** *Let  $P \subset \mathbb{R}^d$  be a finite point set and let  $\mu(P) := \frac{1}{|P|} \sum_{x \in P} x$  be its centroid. Then, every point  $z \in \mathbb{R}^d$  satisfies*

$$\sum_{x \in P} \|x - z\|^2 = \sum_{x \in P} \|x - \mu(P)\|^2 + |P| \cdot \|\mu(P) - z\|^2.$$

Notice this is the same as saying that  $\text{dist}^2(P, z) = \text{dist}^2(P, \mu(P)) + |P| \cdot \|\mu(P) - z\|^2$ .

*Proof.* We abbreviate  $\mu = \mu(P)$  during the proof. Notice that for all points  $x, y \in \mathbb{R}^d$ , it holds that  $\|x + y\|^2 = \langle x + y, x + y \rangle = \langle x, x \rangle + 2\langle x, y \rangle + \langle y, y \rangle = \|x\|^2 + 2\langle x, y \rangle + \|y\|^2$ . This implies that  $\|x - z\|^2 = \|x - \mu + \mu - z\|^2 = \|x - \mu\|^2 + 2\langle \mu - z, x - \mu \rangle + \|\mu - z\|^2$ . Furthermore, it holds that

$$\sum_{x \in P} (x - \mu) = \left( \sum_{x \in P} x \right) - |P| \cdot \mu = |P| \cdot \mu - |P| \cdot \mu = 0.$$

Combining both statements implies that

$$\begin{aligned} \sum_{x \in P} \|x - z\|^2 &= \sum_{x \in P} \|x - \mu\|^2 + 2(\mu - z)^T \sum_{x \in P} (x - \mu) + |P| \cdot \|z - \mu\|^2 \\ &= \sum_{x \in P} \|x - \mu\|^2 + |P| \cdot \|z - \mu\|^2. \quad \square \end{aligned}$$

Fact 38 has a lot of consequences. The most obvious consequence is that the *centroid* of a point set is the best 1-means solution: The best 1-means solution is the point  $z$  that minimizes  $\sum_{x \in P} \|x - z\|^2$ . By Fact 38, this sum has a fixed part,  $\sum_{x \in P} \|x - \mu(P)\|^2$ , and only the additional term  $|P| \cdot \|z - \mu(P)\|^2$  actually depends on  $z$ . It becomes zero iff  $z = \mu(P)$ . This also explains how iterating through all partitionings of  $P$  leads to an (exponential time) algorithm that optimally solves the  $k$ -means problem. In any optimal solution, the center of any cluster has to be chosen as the centroid of the

cluster. Thus, the optimal solution can be found by iterating through all partitionings and optimally computing the centers for the subsets.

Another consequence of Fact 38 is that it gives rise to Lloyd's algorithm

**Lloyds-algorithm**( $P \subset \mathbb{R}^d$ ,  $k \in \mathbb{N}^{\geq 1}$ )

1. Choose a set of  $k$  centers  $C \subset \mathbb{R}^d$  arbitrarily
2. **Repeat**
3.   Set  $C' = \emptyset$
4.   Compute a clustering  $C_1, \dots, C_k$  induced by  $C$
5.   **For each**  $i \in [k]$  **do**
6.       **If**  $|C_i| > 0$
7.           Add  $\mu(C_i)$  to  $C'$
8.   Replace  $C$  by  $C'$
9. **Until** a stopping criterion is met
10. **Return** ( $C$ )

Algorithm **Lloyds-algorithm** can be implemented in different ways. Firstly, the initial choice of centers is not specified. A common method is to choose  $k$  points from  $P$  uniformly at random. The main improvement of Lloyd's algorithm that we will see later on is to replace this step by a better initialization method. Secondly, the algorithm as stated above lets clusters run empty. A practical improvement would be to add a completely new center to  $C'$  whenever a cluster ran empty. If doing this, we again have to specify how the new center is chosen (for example, uniformly at random from  $P$ , or along the lines of the improved initialization that we see later), and have to make sure that this can not make the algorithm cycle (see Observation 39 below). Thirdly, the stopping criterion is not stated. There are two common choices: Either stopping after a fixed number of iterations  $I$ , or stopping when the solution quality does not decrease 'significantly' anymore, i.e., when in an iteration, the new solution is less than  $T$  better than the previous solution for some fixed  $T$ . Both methods need the user to specify a parameter; specifying the number of iterations has the advantage that the running time of the algorithm is bounded by  $\mathcal{O}(Indk)$ . Bounding the minimum improvement should only be done based on some knowledge of the magnitude of the optimum cost. It is also possible to run Lloyd's algorithm until convergence.

**Observation 39.** *After finitely many steps of Lloyd's algorithm,  $C' = C$  holds before line 8, i.e., the algorithm converges.*

*Proof.* This is true because every iteration where  $C'$  differs from  $C$  improves the solution. Say we start with  $C$  and assign every point to its closest center. For a given center set, that is the best possible assignment. Now if  $C$  does not exactly contain the centroids of the clusters, then the cost of the solution is improved when the centers are replaced by the centroids because of Fact 38.



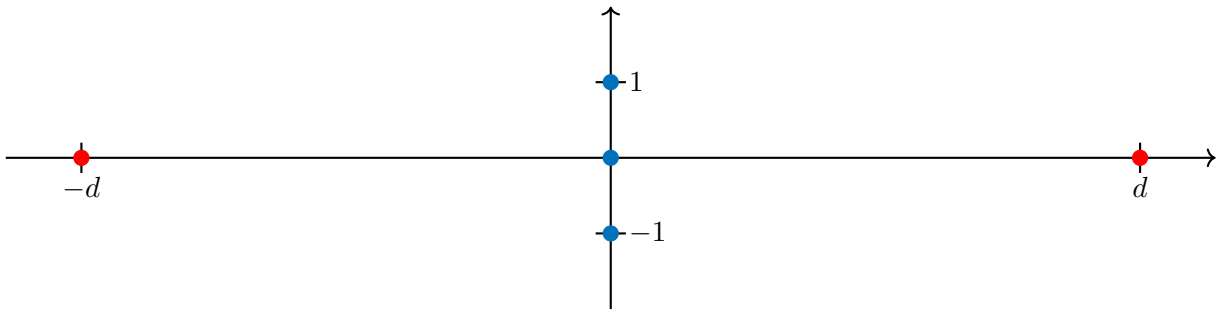


Figure 3.1: An example with five points where the blue points form a local but not global optimum for  $k = 3$ . (Figure copied from [Sch14].)

Further notice that after the first iteration, the algorithm only considers center sets that are sets of centroids of a partitioning. Since every change strictly improves the cost, we can not encounter the same centroid set again. Thus, the algorithm has to stop after at most  $\mathcal{O}(k^n)$  iterations.  $\square$

Lloyd’s algorithm is a *local search heuristic*: Given a solution for the problem, it does a local improvement step, and when run to convergence, it produces a *local optimum*. However, the quality of such a local optimum can be bad. Consider Figure 3.1: Once Lloyd’s algorithm chooses the blue points as the centers, the solution is locally optimal, but worse than the optimum solution by a factor of  $\Omega(d^2)$ .

Furthermore, even though Lloyd’s algorithm often reportedly converges quickly in many practical applications, its running time is not bounded by a polynomial in the input size in general. Indeed, Vattani [Vat11] proposes a family of instances in  $\mathbb{R}^2$  where Lloyd’s algorithm needs exponentially many iterations. However, in practice, Lloyd’s algorithm is not necessarily run until convergence as we discussed above. Also, it has been shown that the *smoothed complexity* of Lloyd’s algorithm is indeed polynomial. Smoothed analysis provides a model for analyzing algorithms under the assumption that inputs are a bit randomized and thus not completely adversarial. Details on the smoothed analysis of Lloyd’s algorithm are discussed in the lecture *Randomized Algorithms and Probabilistic Analysis*, see [RS18].

### 3.3 The $k$ -means++ algorithm

The  $k$ -means++ algorithm is a combination of a powerful seeding technique called  $D^2$ -*sampling* and Lloyd’s algorithm. It was proposed by Arthur and Vassilvitskii [AV07] and has had a major impact on practical and theoretical studies of the  $k$ -means problem. It is named after Lloyd’s algorithm, more precisely, after its alternative name ( $k$ -means algorithm).

From a theoretical point of view,  $D^2$ -sampling is the main contribution of Arthur and Vassilvitskii’s work. Indeed,  $D^2$ -sampling alone provides an (expected) approximative solution as we will see in this section. From a theoretical point of view, it is not clear

that Lloyd’s algorithm improves upon the guarantee of  $D^2$ -sampling in a significant manner.

On the other hand, from a practical point of view,  $k$ -means++ is often considered as a ‘variant’ of Lloyd’s algorithm, which just has a very good initialization. So from that perspective, running Lloyd’s algorithm is crucial; and indeed, when performing experiments, it is obvious that the improvement by refining the solution with Lloyd’s algorithm is significant.

So  $k$ -means++ should really be seen as a combination of sampling and Lloyd’s algorithm, which in its entirety is a very good algorithm. At least in practical experiments, it produces much better solutions than each of the two algorithms individually.

$D^2$ -sampling can intuitively be seen as a probabilistic variant of Gonzalez’ algorithm. Recall that for Gonzalez’ algorithm for  $k$ -center, we pick the first point arbitrarily and then subsequently pick the point that is farthest away from all previously chosen centers. For objectives like  $k$ -median and  $k$ -means, we have the additional complication that we have to take into accounts that multiple points cost more than small amounts. Here is a small picture to illustrate this fact:



Each point has a name depicted below it, and a weight depicted above it. Assume we were to solve  $k$ -center on this instance, run Gonzalez’ and pick  $a$  as the first center. Then  $d$  would be chosen as the second center. This solution has a cost of 2 for  $k$ -center which is even optimal for this instance. However, for any sum-based objective, the solution is by a factor of  $\Omega(m)$  worse than the optimum solution: All points at  $c$  have to pay for being assigned to  $d$ , while in the optimum solution  $\{a, c\}$ , only two points pay (namely,  $b$  and  $d$ ).

Furthermore, we can also see at this simple example that picking the first center *arbitrarily* is not a good idea, just by the same argument: If we pick arbitrarily, we might spend one center on either  $b$  or  $d$ , and then the final solution is off by a factor of  $\Omega(m)$ , no matter how we pick the second center.

$D^2$ -sampling addresses these issues. It chooses the first point *uniformly at random* from  $P$ . In the above mini example, this would mean that with probability  $(2m - 2)/m$ , we choose a good first center. The remaining centers are then also chosen randomly. For the  $i$ th center, a point from  $P$  is chosen with a probability that is proportional to *its current cost*. That has the following effect: Points that are currently very costly are more likely to be chosen. However, if there are *many* points at some area (for example, in the middle of an optimum cluster), then it becomes very likely that one of these points is chosen – even though there might be a single point somewhere which has a higher current cost.

**D2-sampling**( $P \subset \mathbb{R}^d$ ,  $k \in \mathbb{N}^{\geq 1}$ )

1. Choose a point  $x_1 \in P$  uniformly at random, set  $C^1 = \{x_1\}$
2. **For**  $i = 2$  to  $k$  **do**
3.     Draw a point  $x_i \in P$  according to the probability distribution

$$\frac{\min_{c \in C^{i-1}} \|x - c\|^2}{\sum_{y \in P} \min_{c \in C^{i-1}} \|y - c\|^2}$$

4.     **Set**  $C^i = C^{i-1} \cup \{x_i\}$
5. **Return**  $C^k$

Again consider the mini example: Now if  $a$  is the first center, then (assuming unit distances between neighbored points)  $b$  costs 1, every point at  $c$  costs  $2^2 = 4$ , and  $d$  costs  $3^2 = 9$ . Points at  $a$  cost nothing. So the probability to choose a point at  $c$  in the second iteration is

$$\frac{4m}{1 + 4m + 9} = 1 - \frac{10}{4m},$$

which goes to 1 when  $m$  goes to infinity.

Now our mini example is simple. In general,  $k$ -means++ does not always find perfect centers or even a constant-factor approximation. From a theoretical point of view, it is worse than known approximation algorithms. But compared to Lloyd's algorithm,  $k$ -means++ does have a bounded approximation ratio, at least on expectation. Arthur and Vassilvitskii show the following:

**Theorem 40.** *Let  $C$  be the solution computed by D2-sampling on  $P \subset \mathbb{R}^d$  and  $k \in \mathbb{N}^{\geq 1}$ . Note that  $C$  is a random variable. The expected cost of  $C$  is a  $\mathcal{O}(\log k)$ -approximation, more precisely, it holds*

$$E[\text{dist}^2(P, C)] \leq 8(\ln k + 2) \text{dist}^2(P, C^*)$$

where  $C^*$  is an optimal solution for the input  $P$ ,  $k$ , and  $\ln$  is the natural logarithm.

### 3.3.1 Bicriteria approximation algorithm

We first give a bicriteria result for  $D^2$ -sampling which is due to Aggarwal, Deshpande and Kannan [ADK09]. An  $(\alpha, \beta)$ -bicriteria approximation algorithm for a standard clustering problem is an algorithm that is given  $P$  and  $k$  and computes a solution of cost  $\alpha \text{dist}^2(P, C^*)$ , where  $C^*$  is an optimal solution for the  $k$ -means problem on  $(P, k)$ , but with  $\beta \cdot k$  centers. Bicriteria algorithms are also used in other contexts; the defining property is that the solution space is extended by relaxing some condition in a controlled way and obtaining a solution of a cost that is good compared to an optimal solution without the relaxation.

For our setting, this means that  $D^2$ -sampling is used with a  $t \geq k$  to obtain a solution that is good compared to the best solution with  $k$  centers. For the analysis, we

will compare the computed solution with an arbitrary fixed optimum solution  $C^* = \{c_1^*, \dots, c_k^*\}$ . As we did in the proof for  $k$ -center with outliers, we again use  $\mathcal{A}$  to denote a fixed clustering induced by this optimal solution.

For deriving the technical details of the analysis, we will have to compute probabilities of hitting a point from a specific subset of  $P$  multiple times. So before we start, it is good to observe that for any  $S \subseteq P$  and any sample  $x$  drawn with  $D^2$ -sampling based on center set  $C^{i-1}$ , we have

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Prob}(x \in S) &= \sum_{y \in S} \text{Prob}(x = y) = \sum_{y \in S} \frac{\min_{c \in C^{i-1}} \|y - c\|^2}{\sum_{z \in P} \min_{c \in C^{i-1}} \|z - c\|^2} \\ &= \frac{\text{dist}^2(S, C^{i-1})}{\text{dist}^2(P, C^{i-1})}. \end{aligned}$$

The general idea of  $D^2$ -sampling is to try and find clusters that are still expensive and cover them by drawing a good center for them. The following definition states what we consider to be an expensive cluster for the course of the bicriteria analysis.

**Definition 41.** For a center set  $C \subset \mathbb{R}^d$ , we say that a cluster  $A_j \in \mathcal{A}$  is good if

$$\text{dist}^2(A_j, C) \leq 10 \cdot \text{dist}^2(A_j, \mu(A_j)).$$

Otherwise, we say  $A_j$  is bad with respect to  $C$ . Furthermore, at the beginning of iteration  $i$  of  $D^2$ -sampling, we define  $\text{GOOD}_i$  as the set of clusters that are good with respect to  $C^{i-1}$ , and  $\text{BAD}_i = \mathcal{A} \setminus \text{GOOD}_i$ .

So the probability to draw a point from a subset  $S$  is the share of the total cost that it is currently contributing.

Observe that  $C$  is a 10-approximation if all clusters are good. This is the aim of the algorithm: Continue to sample points until all clusters are good. However, that is not necessarily possible. Assume there is a cluster which has zero cost in the optimum, but right now costs a little but, but much less than the overall cost of the solution. Then  $D^2$ -sampling will most likely not find a point from this cluster because its probability mass is not very large. But then again, this does not really matter because the overall cost is not affected by this cluster, even though it is a bad cluster. So, even if some clusters are still bad, we might have a good approximation if these clusters do not contribute much to the overall cost. We are interested to analyze what happens if there are bad clusters and these cause a lot of cost. The next lemma says that if the solution is not a 20-approximation, then the point that we sample next is from a bad cluster with constant probability.

**Lemma 42.** In iteration  $i$  of  $D^2$ -sampling, either  $\text{dist}^2(P, C^{i-1}) \leq 20 \cdot \text{dist}^2(P, C^*)$ , or the probability that  $x_i$  is from  $\text{BAD}_i$  is at least  $1/2$ .

*Proof.* We show that if  $\text{dist}^2(P, C^{i-1}) > 20 \cdot \text{dist}^2(P, C^*)$ , then

$$\text{Prob}(x_i \in \bigcup_{A \in \text{BAD}_i} A) \geq \frac{1}{2}.$$

Observe that

$$\sum_{A \in \text{GOOD}_i} \text{dist}^2(A, C^{i-1}) \leq \sum_{A \in \text{GOOD}_i} 10 \cdot \text{dist}^2(A, \mu(A)) \leq 10 \cdot \text{dist}^2(P, C^*)$$

by the definition of good clusters and the fact that the good clusters are a subset of all clusters. So if  $\text{dist}^2(P, C^{i-1}) > 20 \cdot \text{dist}^2(P, C^*)$ , then the bad clusters have to be expensive:

$$\sum_{A \in \text{BAD}_i} \text{dist}^2(A, C^{i-1}) = \text{dist}^2(P, C^{i-1}) - \sum_{A \in \text{GOOD}_i} \text{dist}^2(A, C^{i-1}) \geq 10 \cdot \text{dist}^2(P, C^*).$$

This means that we can bound the probability to sample a point from a bad cluster from below.

$$\text{Prob}(x_i \in \bigcup_{A \in \text{BAD}_i} A) = \frac{\sum_{A \in \text{BAD}_i} \text{dist}^2(A, C^{i-1})}{\text{dist}^2(P, C^{i-1})} \geq \frac{10 \cdot \text{dist}^2(P, C^*)}{20 \cdot \text{dist}^2(P, C^*)} = \frac{1}{2}.$$

□

So with each sample, we have a constant probability to get a point from a cluster that is bad. However, we still have to figure out the probability that this sample is actually a good center for that bad cluster. In order to do that, we identify a subset of points of any cluster which contains only good centers. It is called  $B(A_j, \alpha)$ , and it is defined in the following definition.

**Definition 43.** For any  $A_j \in \mathcal{A}$ , define

$$(r(A_j))^2 := \frac{1}{|A_j|} \text{dist}^2(A_j, \mu(A_j)) = \frac{1}{|A_j|} \sum_{x \in A_j} \|x - \mu(A_j)\|^2$$

and

$$B(A_j, \alpha) := \{x \in A_j \mid \|x - \mu(A_j)\| \leq \alpha \cdot r(A_j)\}.$$

So  $r^2(A_j)$  is the average cost of a point in  $A_j$ , and  $B(A_j, \alpha)$  contains all points whose cost is at most  $\alpha^2$  times the average cost. The following lemma gives the evidence that all points in  $B(A_j, \alpha)$  are good centers for  $A_j$  (if  $\alpha$  is a constant).

**Lemma 44.** Let  $A_j \in \mathcal{A}$  and  $z \in B(A_j, \alpha)$ . Then

$$\text{dist}^2(A_j, z) \leq (\alpha^2 + 1) \text{dist}^2(A_j, \mu(A_j)).$$

*Proof.* The lemma is a consequence of Fact 38 together with the definitions of  $B(A_j, \alpha)$  and  $r(A_j)$ :

$$\begin{aligned} \text{dist}^2(A_j, z) &\stackrel{\text{Fact 38}}{=} \text{dist}^2(A_j, \mu(A_j)) + |A_j| \cdot \|\mu(A_j) - z\|^2 \\ &\leq \text{dist}^2(A_j, \mu(A_j)) + |A_j| \cdot \alpha^2 \cdot (r(A_j))^2 \\ &= \text{dist}^2(A_j, \mu(A_j)) + |A_j| \cdot \alpha^2 \cdot \frac{\text{dist}^2(A_j, \mu(A_j))}{|A_j|} \\ &= (\alpha^2 + 1) \cdot \text{dist}^2(A_j, \mu(A_j)). \end{aligned}$$

□

Now that we have seen that points in  $B(A_j, \alpha)$  are good centers, we want to lower bound the probability of drawing one of them. First, we observe that there are many points in  $B(A_j, \alpha)$ . This is true because if there were many points outside of  $B(A_j, \alpha)$ , they together would cost too much; more than the cost of  $A_j$ , which is impossible.

**Lemma 45.**

$$|B(A_j), \alpha| \geq \left(1 - \frac{1}{\alpha^2}\right) \cdot |A_j|$$

*Proof.* Assume that

$$\begin{aligned} |B(A_j), \alpha| &\leq \left(1 - \frac{1}{\alpha^2}\right) \cdot |A_j| \\ \Leftrightarrow |A_j \setminus B(A_j), \alpha| &\geq \frac{1}{\alpha^2} \cdot |A_j|, \end{aligned}$$

i.e., many points lie outside of  $B(A_j, \alpha)$ . By the definition of  $B(A_j, \alpha)$ , for all points  $x \notin B(A_j, \alpha)$ ,  $\|x - \mu(A_j)\|^2 > \alpha^2(r(A_j))^2$ . Thus, our assumption the cost of the points outside of  $B(A_j, \alpha)$  alone already cost

$$\begin{aligned} \sum_{x \in A \setminus B(A_j, \alpha)} \|x - \mu(A_j)\|^2 &> \frac{1}{\alpha^2} \cdot |A_j| \cdot \alpha^2(r(A_j))^2 \\ &= \frac{1}{\alpha^2} \cdot |A_j| \cdot \alpha^2 \frac{\text{dist}^2(A_j, \mu(A_j))}{|A_j|} \\ &= \text{dist}^2(A_j, \mu(A_j)). \end{aligned}$$

Thus, under the assumption that many points lie outside of  $B(A_j, \alpha)$ , we have

$$\text{dist}^2(A_j, \mu(A_j)) \geq \sum_{x \in A \setminus B(A_j, \alpha)} \|x - \mu(A_j)\|^2 > \text{dist}^2(A_j, \mu(A_j)),$$

which is a contradiction, and that proves the lemma.  $\square$

Second, we show that the points in  $B(A_j, \alpha)$  are not only many, but also have a high total cost.

**Lemma 46.**

$$\text{Prob}(x_i \in B(A_j, \alpha) \mid x_i \in A_j \wedge A_j \in \text{BAD}_i) \geq \frac{1}{10} \cdot \left(1 - \frac{1}{\alpha^2}\right) \cdot (3 - \alpha)^2.$$

*Proof.* The probability that we want to compute is:

$$\text{Prob}(x_i \in B(A_j, \alpha) \mid x_i \in A_j \wedge A_j \in \text{BAD}_i) = \frac{\text{dist}^2(B(A_j, \alpha), C^{i-1})}{\text{dist}^2(A_j, C^{i-1})}.$$

We do that by using the following statements.

1. If we let  $c_j = \arg \min_{c \in C^{i-1}} \|\mu(A_j) - c\|^2$  be a center in  $C^{i-1}$  closest to  $\mu(A_j)$ , then  $\text{dist}^2(A_j, C^{i-1}) \leq \text{dist}^2(A_j, c_j) = \text{dist}^2(A_j, \mu(A_j)) + |A_j| \cdot \|\mu(A_j) - c_j\|^2 = |A_j| \cdot ((r(A_j))^2 + \|\mu(A_j) - c_j\|^2)$  by Fact 38 and the definition of  $r(A_j)$ .

2. We observe that

$$\begin{aligned} |A_j| \cdot \|\mu(A_j) - c_j\|^2 &= \text{dist}^2(A_j, c_j) - \text{dist}^2(A_j, \mu(A_j)) \\ &\geq \text{dist}^2(A_j, C^{i-1}) - \text{dist}^2(A_j, \mu(A_j)) \geq 9 \text{dist}^2(A_j, \mu(A_j)), \end{aligned}$$

which implies that  $\|\mu(A_j) - c_j\|^2 \geq 9 \cdot \frac{\text{dist}^2(A_j, \mu(A_j))}{|A_j|} = 9(r(A_j))^2$ .

3. If we pick any  $c \in C^{i-1}$  and any  $x \in B(A_j, \alpha)$ , it holds that:

$$\begin{aligned} \|x - c\| &\geq \|c - \mu(A_j)\| - \|x - \mu(A_j)\| \geq \|\mu(A_j) - c_j\| - \|x - \mu(A_j)\| \\ &\geq \|\mu(A_j) - c_j\| - \alpha \cdot r(A_j), \end{aligned}$$

where the first inequality follows by the triangle inequality, the second follows by the definition of  $c_j$ , and the third follows since  $x \in B(A_j, \alpha)$ . This implies that

$$\text{dist}^2(B(A_j, \alpha), C^{i-1}) \geq |B(A_j, \alpha)| \cdot (\|\mu(A_j) - c_j\| - \alpha \cdot r(A_j))^2.$$

4.  $|B(A_j, \alpha)| \geq \left(1 - \frac{1}{\alpha^2}\right) \cdot |A_j|$  holds by Lemma 45.

We use these facts to observe that

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{\text{dist}^2(B(A_j, \alpha), C^{i-1})}{\text{dist}^2(A_j, C^{i-1})} &\stackrel{1}{\geq} \frac{\text{dist}^2(B(A_j, \alpha), C^{i-1})}{|A_j| \cdot ((r(A_j))^2 + \|\mu(A_j) - c_j\|^2)} \\ &\stackrel{3}{\geq} \frac{|B(A_j, \alpha)| \cdot (\|\mu(A_j) - c_j\| - \alpha \cdot r(A_j))^2}{|A_j| \cdot ((r(A_j))^2 + \|\mu(A_j) - c_j\|^2)} \\ &\stackrel{4}{\geq} \frac{\left(1 - \frac{1}{\alpha^2}\right) \cdot |A_j| \cdot (\|\mu(A_j) - c_j\| - \alpha \cdot r(A_j))^2}{|A_j| \cdot ((r(A_j))^2 + \|\mu(A_j) - c_j\|^2)} \\ &= \frac{\left(1 - \frac{1}{\alpha^2}\right) \cdot (\|\mu(A_j) - c_j\| - \alpha \cdot r(A_j))^2}{(r(A_j))^2 + \|\mu(A_j) - c_j\|^2} \end{aligned}$$

Now, although we do not know  $\|\mu(A_j) - c_j\|$ , we know that  $\|\mu(A_j) - c_j\| \geq 3r(A_j)$  holds by 2. If we consider  $\frac{(\|\mu(A_j) - c_j\| - \alpha \cdot r(A_j))^2}{(r(A_j))^2 + \|\mu(A_j) - c_j\|^2}$  as a function in  $\|\mu(A_j) - c_j\|$ , we observe (e.g., by computing its first and second derivative), that it is monotonly increasing for  $\|\mu(A_j) - c_j\| \geq r(A_j)$ . Thus, we can replace  $\|\mu(A_j) - c_j\|$  by  $3r(A_j)$  to obtain the lower bound

$$\frac{\left(1 - \frac{1}{\alpha^2}\right) \cdot (3r(A_j) - \alpha \cdot r(A_j))^2}{10(r(A_j))^2} = \frac{1}{10} \cdot \left(1 - \frac{1}{\alpha^2}\right) \cdot (3 - \alpha)^2.$$

□

After this fairly technical lemma, we have all ingredients to show that with constant probability, a new sample converts at least one bad cluster into a good cluster (as long as the solution is not good already).

**Corollary 47.** *Assume that in iteration  $i$  it still holds that  $\text{dist}^2(P, C^{i-1}) \geq 20 \text{dist}^2(P, C^*)$ . Then the probability that  $x_i$  is in  $B(A_j, 1.44225)$  for an  $A_j \in \text{BAD}_i$  is at least 0.126.*

*Proof.* With probability  $1/2$ ,  $x_i$  is from a bad cluster which we name  $A_j$ , and with probability at least  $\frac{1}{10} \cdot \left(1 - \frac{1}{\alpha^2}\right) \cdot (3 - \alpha)^2$ , it is in  $B(A_j, \alpha)$ . Now for  $\alpha = 1.4425$ , we get

$$\frac{1}{2} \cdot \frac{1}{10} \cdot \left(1 - \frac{1}{1.4425^2}\right) \cdot (3 - 1.4425)^2 \geq 0.063.$$

□

Corollary 47 implies that the expected number of samples that we need to convert at least one bad cluster into a good cluster is  $\frac{1}{0.063} \leq 16$ . By linearity of expectation and Markov's inequality, we conclude that the probability that after  $32k$  samples there are still bad clusters *and* the cost is more than  $20 \cdot \text{dist}^2(P, C^*)$  is at most  $1/2$ . Details on this are discussed in the tutorial about Problem Set 07.

**Theorem 48.** *For  $t = 32k$ ,  $D2\text{-sampling}(P, t)$  computes a 20-approximation for the  $k$ -means problem with probability at least  $1/2$ .*

**Further chapters are under construction and will be inserted when ready!**



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