February 2008

MADALGO seminar by Anastasios Sidiropoulos, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Algorithmic Embeddings into Low-Dimensional Spaces

We consider the problem of computing a minimum-distortion embedding of a finite metric space into a low-dimensional Euclidean space. It has been shown by Matousek [Mat90] that for any $d\geq 1$, any n-point metric can be embedded into R^d with distortion $\sim O(n^{2/d})$ via a random projection, and that in the worst case this bound is essentially optimal. This clearly also implies an $\sim O(n^{2/d})$-approximation algorithm for minimizing the distortion. We show that for any fixed $d\geq 2$, there is no polynomial-time algorithm for embedding into R^d, with approximation ratio better than $\Omega(n^{1/(17d)})$, unless P=NP. Our result establishes that random projection is not too far, concerning the dependence on d, from the best possible approximation algorithm for this problem. Our proof uses a result from Combinatorial Topology due to Sarkaria, that characterizes the embeddability of a simplicial complex in terms of the chromatic number of a certain Kneser graph.

We complement the above result by showing that for the special case where the input space is an ultrametric, there exists a polynomial-time algorithm for embedding into R^d with poly-logarithmic approximation ratio.

Joink work with Jiri Matousek, and Krzysztof Onak.