Short paper

A simple algorithm for calculating the area of an arbitrary polygon

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Received: October 28th 2016, Revised: June 15th 2017, Accepted: June 30th 2017

Abstract. Computing the area of an arbitrary polygon is a popular problem in pure mathematics. The two methods used are Shoelace Method (SM) and Orthogonal Trapezoids Method (OTM). In OTM, the polygon is partitioned into trapezoids by drawing either horizontal or vertical lines through its vertices. The area of each trapezoid is computed and the resultant areas are added up. In SM, a formula which is a generalization of Green’s Theorem for the discrete case is used. The most of the available systems is based on SM. Since an algorithm for OTM is not available in literature, this paper proposes an algorithm for OTM along with efficient implementation. Conversion of a pure mathematical method into an efficient computer program is not straightforward. In order to reduce the run time, minimal computation needs to be achieved. Handling of indeterminate forms and special cases separately can support this. On the other hand, precision error should also be avoided. Salient feature of the proposed algorithm is that it successfully handles these situations achieving minimum run time. Experimental results of the proposed method are compared against that of the existing algorithm. However, the proposed algorithm suggests a way to partition a polygon into orthogonal trapezoids which is not an easy task. Additionally, the proposed algorithm uses only basic mathematical concepts while the Green’s theorem uses complicated mathematical concepts. The proposed algorithm can be used when the simplicity is important than the speed.

Keywords. Computational geometry, computer graphics programming, coordinate geometry, Euclidian geometry, computer programming.

1 Introduction

A polygon is defined as the region of a plane bounded by a finite collection of line segments which forms a simple closed curve. Let $v_0, v_1, v_2, \ldots, v_{n-1}$ be $n$ points in the plane. Here and throughout the paper, all index arithmetic will be
mod \( n \), conveying a cyclic ordering of the points, with \( v_0 \) following \( v_{n-1} \), since \((n - 1) + 1 \equiv 0 \pmod{n}\). Let \( e_0 = v_0v_1, e_1 = v_1v_2, \ldots, e_i = v_iv_{i+1}, \ldots, e_{n-1} = v_{n-1}v_0 \) be \( n \) segments connecting the points. Then these segments bound a polygon if and only if

1) The intersection of each pair of segments adjacent in the cyclic ordering is the single point shared between them: \( e_i \cap e_{i+1} = v_{i+1} \), for all \( i = 0, 1, 2, \ldots, n-1 \).

2) Non adjacent segments do not intersect: \( e_i \cap e_j = \emptyset \), for all \( j \neq i + 1 \).

3) None of three consecutive points \( v_i \) are collinear.

These segments define a curve since they are connected end to end and the curve is closed since they form a cycle and the curve is simple since non adjacent segments do not intersect. The points \( v_i \) are called the vertices of the polygon while the segments \( e_i \) are called its edges. Therefore a polygon of \( n \) vertices has \( n \) edges (O’Rourke 1998).

In the proposed algorithm, the polygon is separated into orthogonal trapezoids by drawing horizontal lines through each vertex of the polygon. The area of each trapezoid is computed and added up to find the area of the entire polygon.

2 Methodology

This section describes the proposed algorithm and its implementation. The C programming language has been used for the implementation.

2.1 Representation of the polygon

The polygon is represented using two arrays \( x \) and \( y \). The \( points \) variable stores the number of vertices in the polygon. \((x[i], y[i])\) denotes the coordinates of the \( i^{th} \) vertex where \( i = 0, 1, \ldots, (points - 1) \).

2.2 Drawing horizontal lines through each vertex of the polygon

The polygon is separated into orthogonal trapezoids by drawing horizontal lines through each vertex of the polygon. This is done by using \( findYg \) function. First each \( y \)-coordinate is stored in \( yg \) array. Then \( sortArray \) function is used to sort those \( y \)-coordinates in ascending order.
2.3 The refineYg function

Each horizontal line drawn in section 2.2 may go through more than one vertex in the polygon. In those cases yg array contains duplicate values. The refineYg function is used to remove those duplicate values from the yg array. Using a for loop, initially the yg array is copied to yh array. After that only the distinct values are written to the yg array. The ygn variable will finally contain the number of distinct elements. Since the yg array is already sorted in ascending order, duplicate values are always in consecutive cells. The first element of yg array is set into first element of yh array by \( yg[0] = yh[0] \) and now ygn is 1. Using another for loop, values of yh are copied one by one to yg only if current value is not equal to the previous. The condition \( yh[i - 1] \neq yh[i] \) is used for this purpose.

2.4 The pos function

The pos function is used to decide the position of a given vertex \((x[v], y[v])\) with respect to a horizontal line \( y = yg[u] \). If the vertex is on the horizontal line then the function returns zero. If the vertex is above the horizontal line then it returns 1 and if the vertex is below the horizontal line it returns -1.

2.5 The findGaps function

The findGaps function takes \( u \) as a parameter which denotes the indices of yg array. A horizontal line drawn in section 2.2 may intersect edges of the polygon as shown in Figure 1.

Two consecutive horizontal lines bound a set of orthogonal trapezoids. In order to compute the area of them, coordinates of the end points should be calculated. For a given two consecutive horizontal lines, the intersection points of upper and lower horizontal lines differ depending on the special
cases as described in this section later. Therefore x-coordinates of the intersection points corresponding to lower horizontal line are stored in gap1 array and that of upper horizontal line are stored in gap2 array each iteration. The \( n1 \) and \( n2 \) variables will contain the number of elements in gap1 and gap2 arrays respectively.

The purpose of first for loop found in findGaps function is to deal with intersections of each edge with the given horizontal line \( y = yg[u] \). The end points of each edge are \((x[i], y[i])\) and \((x[j], y[j])\) where \( i = 0, 1, \ldots, (n - 1) \) and \( j = (i + 1) \mod \text{points} \). The \( pi \) and \( pj \) variables decide the positions of the end points using pos function.

Depending on the way edges intersect with the horizontal line, there are five possible situations as shown in Figure 2.

![Fig. 2. Possible intersections of edges](image)

From the left each possible situation is names as General Case, Down to Down Case, Up to Up Case, Down to Up Case, and Up to Down Case respectively. In the figure, 1 and 2 numbers denote whether that intersection point considered for gap1 array or gap2 array respectively. Following subsections describe how to deal with each case.

**General Case**

If \( (pi * pj < 0) \) then end points are on opposite sides of the horizontal line. The intersection point is \((xc, yg[u])\). And the equation of the edge can be written as,

\[
(y - y[i]) / (x - x[i]) = (y[j] - y[i]) / (x[j] - x[i]);
\]

\[
x = (x[j] - x[i]) * (y - y[i]) / (y[j] - y[i]) + x[i];
\]

Since the intersection point is on \( y = yg[u] \) line,

\[
xc = (x[j] - x[i]) * (yg[u] - y[i]) / (y[j] - y[i]) + x[i];
\]

This intersection point should be included to both gap1 and gap2 arrays.
Down to Down Case

If \((p_i = p_j = 0)\) then the entire edge goes through the horizontal line as in second to fifth situations in Figure 2. The values of \(a\) and \(b\) are computed by \(a = i - 1\) and \(b = j + 1\). They denote the indices of neighboring vertices of the end points of the edge. When \(i = 0\) then \(a = -1\), but actually it should be \((\text{points} - 1)\). When \(j = (\text{points} - 1)\) then \(b = \text{points}\), but actually it should be 0. These two special cases should be handled.

The \(pa\) and \(pb\) variables store the positions of \(a\) and \(b\) vertices respectively. If \(pa \times pb > 0\) then it should be either second or third case in Figure 2. If \(pa < 0\), it should be definitely the second situation. In this case both the end points should be included to \(gap2\) array.

Up to Up Case

If \(pa \times pb > 0\) and \(pa > 0\), it is the third situation. In this case both the end points should be included to \(gap1\) array.

Down to Up Case

If \(pa \times pb < 0\) and \(pa < 0\) then it is the fourth situation. In this case \(i\) end point should be included to \(gap2\) array and \(j\) end point should be included to \(gap1\) array.

Up to Down Case

If \(pa \times pb < 0\) and \(pa > 0\) then it is the fifth situation. In this case \(i\) end point should be included to \(gap1\) array and \(j\) end point should be included to \(gap2\) array.

Depending on the way vertices intersect with the horizontal line, there are three possible ways as shown in Figure 3.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Fig. 3. Possible intersections of vertices}
\end{align*}
\]

The first two situations are ignored since they do not affect the area between given two horizontal lines. The second for loop is used to deal with vertex
intersections with the horizontal line. The vertices on the horizontal line are
found by checking the condition $y[i] = yg[u]$. The $pa$ and $pb$ variables are
found as in previous situation. If $(pa \ast pb < 0)$, it is the third situation. In this
situation the intersection vertex should be included to both $gap1$ and $gap2$
arrays.

2.6 The findSums function

There are $ygn$ number of horizontal lines which can be drawn through vertices
of the polygon as shown in Figure 1. Each horizontal line has two arrays $gap1$
and $gap2$. Inside the for loop, initially $n1$ and $n2$ are set into zero. Then $gap1$
and $gap2$ array values are found using findGaps function for each horizontal
line. The sortArray function is used to sort those two arrays in ascending
order.

2.7 The computeSum function

Figure 4 shows an example diagram of a horizontal line. The numbers
indicate the indices of the gap array in computeSum function. The thick line
segments on the horizontal line shows the intersection regions with the
polygon.

```
0 1 2 3 4 5
```

Fig. 4. Intersection regions example

The purpose of computeSum function is to calculate the sum of the lengths of
the thick line segments and store it in $sum[index]$ element of $sum$ array. The
value of $sum[index]$ is set into zero initially. Then the elements of gap array
are added or subtracted from the $sum[index]$ depending on whether their
indices are even or odd respectively.

In each iteration of the for loop inside findSums function, the computeSum
function is invoked for gap1 and gap2 arrays. The sum1 and sum2 arrays
correspond to gap1 and gap2 arrays respectively.

2.8 The getAreaS function

Figure 5 shows an example of polygon parts bounded by two consecutive
horizontal lines drawn through vertices of polygon. The $sum1[i]$ stores the
sum of lengths of thick line segments corresponds to the lower horizontal line.
And $sum2[i + 1]$ stores the sum of lengths of thick line segments corresponds
to the upper horizontal line.
The area variable in getAreaS function stores the area bounded by \(i\)th couple of consecutive horizontal lines. The gap between the two horizontal lines is \((yg[i+1] - yg[i])\). Therefore the area bounded by the two horizontal lines can be computed by \(0.5 \times (yg[i+1] - yg[i]) \times (sum1[i] + sum2[i+1])\). This formula is similar to the area formula for a trapezoid and it can be proved as follows.

**Proof:** Let the gap between two horizontal lines is \(h\) and \(N\) be the number of trapezoids. Then the height, lower base and upper base of the trapezoids are \((h, a_1, b_1), (h, a_2, b_2), \ldots, (h, a_N, b_N)\) respectively. Sum of areas of trapezoids,

\[
= (h/2) \times (a_1 + b_1) + (h/2) \times (a_2 + b_2) + \ldots + (h/2) \times (a_N + b_N)
\]

\[
= (h/2) \times [(a_1 + a_2 + \ldots + a_N) + (b_1 + b_2 + \ldots + b_N)]
\]

### 2.9 The getArea function

The area variable inside getArea function will store the total area of the polygon. The for loop accesses each area bounded between consecutive couple of horizontal lines and sum them up.

### 3 Results and Discussion

The algorithm was implemented using C programming language. Following hardware and software were used.

**Computer:** Intel(R) Celeron(R) M; processor 1.50 GHz, 896 MB of RAM;
**IDE:** Turbo C++; Version 3.0; Copyright(c) 1990, 1992 by Borland International, Inc;
**System:** Microsoft Windows XP Professional; Version 2002; Service Pack 2.

To validate the proposed algorithm, it was compared with an implementation of Shoelace Method (Wijeweera 2015, O’Rourke 1998). A set of random polygons as shown in Table 1 were used.
Calculating the area of an arbitrary polygon

Table 1. Set of random polygons

| Polygon | Coordinates of Vertices |
|---------|-------------------------|
| 1       | (10, 10), (110, 210), (90, 80), (250, 60) |
| 2       | (60, 240), (10, 190), (50, 20), (110, 150), (150, 190) |
| 3       | (140, 90), (200, 240), (40, 190), (70, 10), (280, 80), (210, 130) |
| 4       | (60, 60), (300, 130), (240, 220), (100, 250), (20, 200), (40, 20), (260, 70) |
| 5       | (100, 240), (130, 80), (270, 210), (190, 20), (150, 60), (90, 10), (10, 80), (80, 100) |
| 6       | (150, 40), (50, 10), (10, 190), (120, 250), (230, 220), (130, 90), (240, 160), (240, 30), (50, 120) |
| 7       | (140, 90), (240, 60), (140, 240), (250, 170), (290, 10), (30, 10), (10, 120), (130, 220), (80, 70), (170, 140) |
| 8       | (230, 40), (30, 10), (80, 70), (10, 90), (70, 90), (150, 140), (150, 60), (190, 140), (80, 250), (210, 200), (280, 10) |
| 9       | (90, 90), (150, 160), (130, 220), (240, 70), (250, 10), (160, 110), (110, 30), (40, 10), (20, 130), (90, 250), (130, 160), (90, 190) |
| 10      | (90, 70), (60, 150), (10, 20), (60, 190), (90, 150), (140, 240), (190, 130), (230, 170), (270, 60), (190, 10), (230, 100), (140, 30), (160, 150) |

The number of clock cycles to compute the area of a polygon is not measurable since the value is too small. Therefore the number of clock cycles to compute the area of the same polygon 10^8 times was measured (Kodituwakku et al. 2013). This was done for each polygon in Table 1 using Orthogonal Trapezoid Method (OTM) and Shoelace Method (SM). The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Set of random polygons

| Polygon | OTM  | SLM  |
|---------|------|------|
| 1       | 4554 | 204  |
| 2       | 5345 | 241  |
| 3       | 9914 | 291  |
| 4       | 11641| 327  |
| 5       | 14408| 361  |
| 6       | 20791| 406  |
| 7       | 28416| 453  |
| 8       | 21939| 466  |
| 9       | 33098| 490  |
| 10      | 41047| 532  |

According to the results the efficiency of the proposed method is lower than the existing method.

4 Conclusion

An algorithm to computerize Orthogonal Trapezoid Method was proposed. And it was experimentally compared against Shoelace Method. The area of
the polygon was computed by decomposing the polygon into a set of trapezoids. The decomposition was not a trivial task. Currently triangular polygonal meshes are used in computer graphics programming to model surfaces (Hearn and Baker 1998). The proposed decomposition technique can be to generate trapezoidal polygonal meshes.

References

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Appendix

Program code is supplied as a supplementary file (Appendix, pp i-iv) linked to Wijeweera and Kodituwakku (2017). *Ruhuna Journal of Science* 8 (1): 67-75. DOI: http://doi.org/10.4038/ rjs.v8i1.27