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Grid induced minor theorem for graphs of small degree



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ABSTRACT

A graph H is an induced minor of a graph G if H can be obtained from G by vertex deletions and edge contractions. We show that there is a function $f(k, d) = \mathcal{O}(k^{10} + 2^{d^5})$ so that if a graph has treewidth at least $f(k, d)$ and maximum degree at most d , then it contains a $k \times k$ -grid as an induced minor. This proves the conjecture of Aboulker, Adler, Kim, Sintiari, and Trotignon (2021) [1] that any graph with large treewidth and bounded maximum degree contains a large wall or the line graph of a large wall as an induced subgraph. It also implies that for any fixed planar graph H , there is a subexponential time algorithm for maximum weight independent set on H -induced-minor-free graphs.

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1. Introduction

A graph H is a minor of a graph G if H can be obtained as a contraction of a subgraph of G . An induced minor is a minor that is obtained as a contraction of an induced subgraph.

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The famous grid minor theorem of Robertson and Seymour [19] (see also [9,10]) states that there is a function $f : \mathbb{N} \rightarrow \mathbb{N}$ so that any graph with treewidth at least $f(k)$ contains a $k \times k$ -grid as a minor. A question with several applications in graph theory and algorithms [1,5,16] is when can “minor” be replaced by “induced minor” in the grid minor theorem. In general this is not possible: complete graphs have unbounded treewidth but do not contain a 2×2 -grid as an induced minor. However, one could expect that minors and induced minors behave similarly in sparse graphs. Fomin, Golovach, and Thilikos proved that for any fixed graph H , there is a constant c_H so that any H -minor-free graph with treewidth at least $c_H \cdot k$ contains a $k \times k$ -grid as an induced minor [13]. In this paper, we give a grid induced minor theorem for another important class of sparse graphs, in particular for the class of graphs with bounded maximum degree.

Theorem 1. *There is a function $f(k, d) = \mathcal{O}(k^{10} + 2^{d^5})$ so that for any positive integers k, d it holds that if a graph has treewidth at least $f(k, d)$ and maximum degree at most d , then it contains a $k \times k$ -grid as an induced minor.*

For graphs with treewidth at least 2^{d^5} , the size of the grid that we obtain is up to a subpolynomial $2^{\mathcal{O}(\log^{5/6} k)}$ factor the same as the size of the grid in the grid minor theorem. In particular, the bound $\mathcal{O}(k^{10} + 2^{d^5})$ on $f(k, d)$ follows from the most recent bound on the grid minor theorem [10] and will improve if the bound on the grid minor theorem is improved.

Together with some routing arguments from [1], Theorem 1 implies that the following conjecture of Aboulker, Adler, Kim, Sintiari, and Trotignon [1] holds.

Corollary 1. *For every $d \in \mathbb{N}$, there is a function $f_d : \mathbb{N} \rightarrow \mathbb{N}$ such that every graph with maximum degree at most d and treewidth at least $f_d(k)$ contains a $k \times k$ -wall or the line graph of a $k \times k$ -wall as an induced subgraph.*

In addition to [1], this conjecture has been explicitly mentioned by Abrishami, Chudnovsky, Dibek, Hajebi, Rzażewski, Spirkl, and Vušković in three articles of their “Induced subgraphs and tree decompositions” series [2–4] and the main results of the first two articles of this series [2,5] are special cases of this conjecture.

Theorem 1 has several direct algorithmic implications. In particular, by known algorithms using treewidth [7,11], it implies that a large number of combinatorial problems can be solved in linear-time on graphs that exclude a planar graph as an induced minor and have bounded maximum degree. Note that in contrast, for any non-planar graph H , for example the maximum independent set problem is NP-complete on subcubic graphs that exclude H as an induced minor [18].

Theorem 1 implies also the following algorithmic result.

Corollary 2. *For every fixed planar graph H , there is a $2^{\mathcal{O}(n/\log^{1/6} n)}$ time algorithm for maximum weight independent set on H -induced-minor-free graphs, where n is the number of vertices of the input graph.*

Algorithms for maximum weight independent set on H -induced-minor-free graphs for specific planar graphs H have recently received attention [12,14,15]. In this area a central open question asked by Dallard, Milanic, and Storgel [12] is if there exists a fixed planar graph H so that maximum weight independent set is NP-complete on H -induced-minor-free graphs, or whether a polynomial time or quasipolynomial time algorithm could be obtained for H -induced-minor-free graphs for all planar graphs H . Theorem 1 can be seen as a step towards the latter direction.

2. Preliminaries

We use \log to denote base-2 logarithm. A graph G has a set of vertices $V(G)$ and a set of edges $E(G)$. For a vertex $v \in V(G)$, $N(v)$ denotes the set of its neighbors. For a set of vertices $S \subseteq V(G)$, $G[S]$ denotes the subgraph of G induced by S . The distance between two vertices in a graph is the minimum number of edges on a path between them, or if they are in different connected components the distance is infinite.

A minor model of a graph H in a graph G is a collection $\{X_v\}_{v \in V(H)}$ of pairwise disjoint vertex sets $X_v \subseteq V(G)$ called *branch sets* so that each induced subgraph $G[X_v]$ is connected, and if there is an edge $uv \in E(H)$, then there is an edge between X_u and X_v in G . A graph G contains H as a minor if and only if there is a minor model of H in G . An induced minor model of H is a minor model with an additional constraint that if $u, v \in V(H)$, $u \neq v$, and $uv \notin E(H)$, then there are no edges between X_u and X_v . A graph G contains H as an induced minor if and only if there is an induced minor model of H in G .

A tree decomposition of a graph G is a pair (T, β) , where T is a tree and β is a function $\beta : V(T) \rightarrow 2^{V(G)}$ mapping nodes of T to sets of vertices of G called bags so that

1. $V(G) = \bigcup_{i \in V(T)} \beta(i)$,
2. for every $uv \in E(G)$ there exists $i \in V(T)$ with $\{u, v\} \subseteq \beta(i)$, and
3. for every $v \in V(G)$, the nodes $\{i \in V(T) \mid v \in \beta(i)\}$ induce a connected subtree of T .

The width of a tree decomposition is $\max_{i \in V(T)} |\beta(i)| - 1$ and the treewidth of a graph is the minimum width of a tree decomposition of it.

We recall a standard lemma on treewidth.

Lemma 1. *Let G be a graph of treewidth k and let X_1, \dots, X_p be pairwise disjoint subsets of $V(G)$ so that for each X_i it holds that $|X_i| \leq q$ and $G[X_i]$ is connected. The treewidth of the graph obtained by contracting each set X_i into a single vertex is at least k/q .*

Proof. Let G' be the graph obtained from G by contracting each set X_i into a vertex x_i . Suppose that G' has a tree decomposition of width at most $k/q - 1$. We construct a

tree decomposition of G by replacing each vertex x_i in the decomposition by the set X_i . This increases the bag sizes by a factor of q , so we obtain a tree decomposition of G of width at most $k - 1$, which is a contradiction. \square

3. Proof of Theorem 1

We will first define *sparsifiable graphs* and show that minors in sparsifiable graphs correspond to induced minors. Then we show that if a graph has treewidth k and maximum degree at most $\log^{1/5} k$, then it has an induced subgraph that is sparsifiable and has treewidth $k/2^{\mathcal{O}(\log^{5/6} k)}$.

3.1. Sparsifiable graphs

We say that a vertex v of a graph is *sparsifiable* if it satisfies one of the following conditions:

1. v has degree at most 2,
2. v has degree 3 and all of its neighbors have degree at most 2, or
3. v has degree 3, one of its neighbors has degree at most 2, and the two other neighbors form a triangle with v .

We call a graph sparsifiable if every vertex of it is sparsifiable. We say that a vertex is of type 2 if it satisfies the condition 2 and that a vertex is of type 3 if it satisfies the condition 3 but does not satisfy the condition 2.

Now we show that minors and induced minors are highly related in sparsifiable graphs.

Lemma 2. *Let G be a sparsifiable graph and H a graph of minimum degree at least 3. If G contains H as a minor, then G contains H as an induced minor.*

Proof. Let $\{X_v\}_{v \in V(H)}$ be a minor model of H in G . Say that an edge $ab \in E(G)$ is violating if there exists non-adjacent vertices u, v of H so that $a \in X_u$ and $b \in X_v$. Note that if there are no violating edges, then $\{X_v\}_{v \in V(H)}$ is also an induced minor model of H . Suppose that $\{X_v\}_{v \in V(H)}$ minimizes the number of violating edges among all minor models of H . We will show by contradiction that the number of violating edges must be zero.

Let $ab \in E(G)$ be a violating edge with $a \in X_u$ and $b \in X_v$. Both a and b must have degree at least 2 because otherwise u or v would have degree 1. First, consider the case that ab has a degree 2 endpoint, and by symmetry assume that the degree 2 endpoint is $a \in X_u$. The neighbor of a not in X_v must be in X_u because u has degree at least 3. It also holds that $G[X_u \setminus \{a\}]$ is connected because a has degree 1 in $G[X_u]$. The only other branch set that a is adjacent to than X_u is X_v , but there is no edge between u

and v in H , so we can replace X_u by $X_u \setminus \{a\}$ in the minor model. This decreases the number of violating edges.

The other case is that both a and b have degree 3. Because they are adjacent, they both are of type 3, so they form a triangle together with a vertex c . First, consider the case that $c \in X_v$. Now, a is adjacent to two vertices in X_v and the third vertex it is adjacent to must be in X_u because u has degree at least 3. Therefore, we can replace X_u by $X_u \setminus \{a\}$ in the minor model, which decreases the number of violating edges.

The same argument as above works also if $c \in X_u$ or if c is not in any branch set. The remaining case is that $c \in X_w$ for some $w \in V(H) \setminus \{u, v\}$. If w is not adjacent to u (resp. to v), then removing a from X_u (resp. b from X_v) again decreases the number of violating edges, so we can assume that w is adjacent to both u and v . Because u and v have degree at least 3 and u and v are not adjacent, it holds that the unique vertex in $N(a) \setminus \{b, c\}$ is in X_u and that the unique vertex in $N(b) \setminus \{a, c\}$ is in X_v . We replace X_u by $X_u \setminus \{a\}$, X_v by $X_v \setminus \{b\}$, and X_w by $X_w \cup \{a, b\}$. This removes the violating edge ab , and does not create any new violating edges because w is adjacent to both u and v , and both $N(a)$ and $N(b)$ are contained in $X_u \cup X_v \cup X_w$. \square

Lemma 2 cannot be directly used when H is the $k \times k$ -grid because its corners have degree 2. However, contracting four edges each incident to a distinct corner of the $k \times k$ -grid yields a graph of minimum degree 3 that contains the $k - 2 \times k - 2$ -grid as an induced minor. Therefore Lemma 2 implies that if a sparsifiable graph contains a $k \times k$ -grid minor, then it contains a $k - 2 \times k - 2$ -grid induced minor.

3.2. Sparsifying a graph

We will make use of the following theorem proved by Chekuri and Chuzhoy that every graph contains a degree-3 subgraph that approximately preserves its treewidth.

Theorem 2 ([8]). *There exists a constant δ so that every graph with treewidth $k \geq 2$ has a subgraph with maximum degree 3 and treewidth at least $k / \log^\delta k$.*

For the rest of this section we will use δ to denote the constant δ given by Theorem 2. We note that instead of Theorem 2 we could alternatively use the grid minor theorem, but that would yield a significantly worse dependence on the treewidth in our result.

A distance-5 independent set in a graph G is a set $I \subseteq V(G)$ of vertices so that for any pair $u, v \in I$ of distinct vertices, the distance between u and v in G is at least 5. Next we show how to make all vertices in a distance-5 independent set sparsifiable while approximately preserving treewidth. This will be then used to prove Theorem 1 by observing that the vertices of a graph with maximum degree d can be partitioned into $d^4 + 1$ distance-5 independent sets.

Lemma 3. *Let G be a graph of treewidth k and maximum degree d with $2d^2 \leq k$, and let $I \subseteq V(G)$ be a distance-5 independent set in G . There exists an induced subgraph $G[S]$*

of G so that $G[S]$ has treewidth at least $k/((d^2 + 1) \log^\delta k)$ and every vertex in $I \cap S$ is sparsifiable in $G[S]$.

Proof. For each vertex $v \in I$, let B_v be the set of vertices at distance at most 2 from v (i.e. $B_v = \{v\} \cup N(v) \cup N(N(v))$). The induced subgraphs $G[B_v]$ are connected, and because I is a distance-5 independent set, the sets B_v are disjoint. Let H be the graph obtained by contracting each set B_v into one vertex. Because $|B_v| \leq d^2 + 1$, Lemma 1 implies that the treewidth of H is at least $k/(d^2 + 1)$. By Theorem 2, there exists a subgraph H' of H with maximum degree 3 and treewidth at least $k/((d^2 + 1) \log^\delta k)$. We can assume that $V(H') = V(H)$. Let $Q \subseteq V(G)$ be the vertices of G that are not in any B_v . The graph H' is a minor of G , with a minor model whose branch sets are the sets B_v for each $v \in I$ and singleton sets $\{u\}$ for each $u \in Q$.

We will construct a set $S \subseteq V(G)$ so that $Q \subseteq S$, all vertices of $I \cap S$ are sparsifiable in $G[S]$, and H' has a minor model in G whose branch sets are the sets $B_v \cap S$ for all $v \in I$ and singleton sets $\{u\}$ for all $u \in Q$. The graph $G[S]$ therefore will contain H' as a minor and therefore will have treewidth at least $k/((d^2 + 1) \log^\delta k)$.

Consider a vertex $v \in I$. We will construct $B_v \cap S$ so that either $v \notin S$ or v is sparsifiable in $G[S]$. Because H' has maximum degree 3, we can choose a set $T \subseteq B_v$ of at most three terminal vertices that are at distance 2 from v whose connectivity should be preserved in $G[B_v \cap S]$ in order to preserve the minor model of H' . We start by setting $B_v \cap S$ to be the union of the shortest paths from the terminals $t \in T$ to v . Note that the only vertices at distance 2 from v that are on the shortest paths are the terminals T . Then, we say that a terminal $t \in T$ is private to a vertex $u \in N(v) \cap S$ if u is the only vertex in $N(v) \cap S$ adjacent to t . If a vertex $u \in N(v) \cap S$ does not have a private terminal, we remove u from S . Now, every vertex in $N(v) \cap S$ has a private terminal. If $|N(v) \cap S| \leq 2$, the vertex v has degree at most 2 in $G[S]$ and we are done. The remaining case is that $|N(v) \cap S| = 3$ and each vertex in $N(v) \cap S$ has a private terminal, implying that $|T| = 3$ and the edges between $N(v) \cap S$ and T form a matching. If the graph $G[N(v) \cap S]$ is connected, we remove v from S and are done. If the graph $G[N(v) \cap S]$ is not connected, it contains at most one edge. If it contains no edges, the vertices $N(v) \cap S$ have degree 2 in $G[S]$, and therefore v is a type 2 vertex in $G[S]$. If it contains one edge, then v is a type 3 vertex in $G[S]$. \square

Next we finish the proof of Theorem 1 by applying Lemma 3 $d^4 + 1$ times.

Lemma 4. *If a graph G has treewidth k and maximum degree at most $\log^{1/5} k$, then it contains an induced subgraph that is sparsifiable and has treewidth at least $k/2^{\mathcal{O}(\log^{5/6} k)}$.*

Proof. Let G be a graph with treewidth k and maximum degree d . The vertices of G can be partitioned into $d^4 + 1$ distance-5 independent sets I_1, \dots, I_{d^4+1} by observing that there are at most d^4 vertices at distance at most 4 from any vertex and using a greedy method. We then sequentially apply Lemma 3 with these distance-5 independent sets, in

particular letting $G_0 = G$, and then for each i with $1 \leq i \leq d^4 + 1$ letting G_i be the graph obtained by applying Lemma 3 with G_{i-1} and $I_i \cap V(G_{i-1})$. As taking induced subgraphs only increases distances, $I_i \cap V(G_{i-1})$ is a distance-5 independent set in G_{i-1} . It also holds that once a vertex becomes sparsifiable, it will stay sparsifiable because taking induced subgraphs cannot increase vertex degrees or add new neighbors. Therefore G_{d^4+1} is sparsifiable. The graph G_{d^4+1} has treewidth at least $k/((d^2 + 1) \log^\delta k)^{d^4+1}$, meaning that when $d^5 \leq \log k$, the decrease in the treewidth is by a factor of at most

$$((d^2 + 1) \log^\delta k)^{d^4+1} = 2^{\mathcal{O}(d^4(\log(d^2+1)+\log \log^\delta k))} = 2^{\mathcal{O}(d^4 \log \log^\delta k)} = 2^{\mathcal{O}(\log^{5/6} k)}. \quad \square$$

Theorem 1 follows from using Lemma 4 to obtain a sparsifiable induced subgraph with treewidth at least $k/2^{\mathcal{O}(\log^{5/6} k)}$, then applying the grid minor theorem [10] to obtain a $\Omega(k^{1/10}) \times \Omega(k^{1/10})$ grid minor, and then using Lemma 2 to argue that this grid minor, after contracting the corners, is also an induced minor.

4. Proofs of corollaries

We detail how Corollary 1 and Corollary 2 follow from Theorem 1.

Corollary 1. *For every $d \in \mathbb{N}$, there is a function $f_d : \mathbb{N} \rightarrow \mathbb{N}$ such that every graph with maximum degree at most d and treewidth at least $f_d(k)$ contains a $k \times k$ -wall or the line graph of a $k \times k$ -wall as an induced subgraph.*

Proof. The proof of Theorem 1.1 in [1] shows that there is a function $g : \mathbb{N} \rightarrow \mathbb{N}$ so that if a graph contains a triangulated $g(k) \times g(k)$ -grid as an induced minor, then it contains either a $k \times k$ -wall or the line graph of a $k \times k$ -wall as an induced subgraph. Then, this corollary follows from Theorem 1 by observing that a $k \times k$ -grid contains a triangulated $k/6 \times k/6$ -grid as an induced minor and setting $f_d(k) = c \cdot (g(k)^{10} + 2^{d^5})$ for some large enough constant c . \square

Corollary 2. *For every fixed planar graph H , there is a $2^{\mathcal{O}(n/\log^{1/6} n)}$ time algorithm for maximum weight independent set on H -induced-minor-free graphs, where n is the number of vertices of the input graph.*

Proof. Let G be the input graph and assume that n is sufficiently large compared to H . While there is a vertex of degree at least $\log^{1/5}(n/\log n)$ in G , we branch from this vertex. This branching tree has size at most

$$n \binom{n}{n/\log^{1/5}(n/\log n)} < n(e \cdot \log^{1/5}(n/\log n))^{n/(\log^{1/5}(n/\log n))} = 2^{\mathcal{O}(n/\log^{1/6} n)}.$$

Then, if all vertices of G have degree less than $\log^{1/5}(n/\log n)$ and G has treewidth more than $cn/\log n$ for some constant c , then by Theorem 1 G contains a $\Omega(n^{1/11}) \times$

$\Omega(n^{1/11})$ grid induced minor, and therefore contains any planar graph H as an induced minor if n is sufficiently large compared to H . Therefore, if all vertices of G have degree less than $\log^{1/5}(n/\log n)$, then G must have treewidth $\mathcal{O}(n/\log n)$, and we can use a parameterized single-exponential time constant-factor approximation of treewidth [17] together with dynamic programming [6] to solve maximum weight independent set in $2^{\mathcal{O}(n/\log n)}$ time. \square

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