Domain, Convexity

Computational Intelligence, Lecture 5

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- Problems with inequality constraints
- Quadratic programming
- Domain. Bounded and unbounded domains.
- Convex domains
- Convex combination
- Supporting hyperplane
- Convex functions
- Jensen's inequality
- Epigraph

Problem 1.

$$\begin{aligned} \underset{\mathbf{x}}{\text{minimize}} \quad & ||\mathbf{Dx} + \mathbf{f}||, \\ \text{subject to} \quad & \mathbf{x} \leq \mathbf{b}. \end{aligned} \tag{1}$$

Problem 2.

$$\begin{aligned} \underset{\mathbf{x}}{\text{minimize}} \quad & ||\mathbf{x}||, \\ \text{subject to} \quad & \mathbf{Ax} \leq \mathbf{b}. \end{aligned} \tag{2}$$

Problem 3.

$$\begin{aligned} \underset{\mathbf{x}}{\text{minimize}} \quad & ||\mathbf{Dx} + \mathbf{f}||, \\ \text{subject to} \quad & \begin{cases} \mathbf{Ax} \leq \mathbf{b}, \\ \mathbf{Cx} = \mathbf{d}. \end{cases} \end{aligned} \tag{3}$$

Mentioned problems can be described together as quadratic programs. The name is due to the cost function being quadratic (or equivalent). They are allowed to have linear equality and inequality constraints.

General form of a quadratic program is given below:

$$\underset{\mathbf{x}}{\text{minimize}} \quad \mathbf{x}^\top \mathbf{H}\mathbf{x} + \mathbf{f}^\top \mathbf{x},$$

$$\text{subject to} \quad \begin{cases} \mathbf{A}\mathbf{x} \leq \mathbf{b}, \\ \mathbf{C}\mathbf{x} = \mathbf{d}. \end{cases} \tag{4}$$

where $\mathbf{H}$ is positive-definite and $\mathbf{A}\mathbf{x} \leq \mathbf{b}$ describe a *convex region*.

Domain, Convexity

Problem 1. Find minimum of the function $f = x^2 + 2y^2$ if $x \in \mathbb{R}$ and $y \in \mathbb{R}$.

Problem 2. Find minimum of the function $f = x^2 + 2y^2$ if $x \in [1\ 2]$ and $y \in [2\ 5]$.

Note that solutions of problems 1 and 2 are different, and this is only due to the difference of the allowed values that the *decision variables* x and y can assume.

Definition 1

Space of all allowed values that decision variables can assume is called the *domain* of optimization problem.

Problem 3. Find minimum of the function $f = -x^2$ if $x \in [-3 \ 2]$.

Problem 4. Find minimum of the function $f = -x^2$ if $x \in \mathbb{R}$.

Problem 5. Find minimum of the function $f = -x^2$ if $x \in (-\infty \ 2]$.

The major difference between domains of the problems 2, 3 vs problems 1, 4 and 5 is that the latter are *not bound* (i.e., you can construct a sequence of the values in the domain that would approach infinity).

We can see that in the case of problems 3-5, bounded domain allows the problem to have a solution.

Problem 6. Find maximum of the function $f = x^2$ if $1 \leq x < 2$.

Problem 7. Find minimum of the function $f = x^2$ if $1 \leq x < 2$.

This time, it is the fact that one of the *boundaries* of the domain was not included in the domain that has lead the problem 6 to have no solution, while problem 7 had one. For the problem 6 we can pick a value arbitrary close to $x = 2$, approaching it from the left, but for any such value, there always will be other values of the decision variable closer to $x = 2$ and hence producing larger values of f.

Definition 2

Domain is *convex* iff for any two points in the domain, the line segment connecting them is also in the domain.
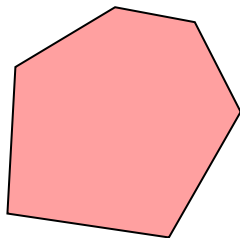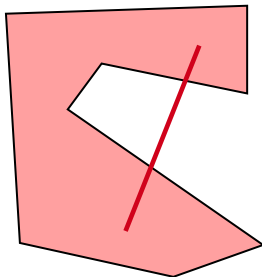

Figure 1: Convex domain

Figure 2: Non-convex domain

In the proofs it is convenient to remember that for any two points $\mathbf{x}_1$ and $\mathbf{x}_2$, all points in the line segment connecting them are given as $\mathbf{x}_l = \alpha\mathbf{x}_1 + (1-\alpha)\mathbf{x}_2$, where $\alpha \in [0\ 1]$. This is called *convex combination*.

We can think of the variable α as a slider - sliding α from 0 to 1 we slide $\mathbf{x}_l$ from $\mathbf{x}_2$ to $\mathbf{x}_1$.

A line segment between points $\mathbf{x}_1$ and $\mathbf{x}_2$ is called *convex hull* of points $\mathbf{x}_1$ and $\mathbf{x}_2$. It can be defined as:

$$\mathcal{L} = \{\mathbf{x}:\ \alpha\mathbf{x}_1 + (1-\alpha)\mathbf{x}_2,\ \alpha \in [0\ 1]\} \tag{5}$$

Equivalently, a convex combination (line segment) of two points $\mathbf{x}_1$ and $\mathbf{x}_2$ is given as:

$$\mathcal{L} = \{\mathbf{x} : \ \beta_1\mathbf{x}_1 + \beta_2\mathbf{x}_2, \ \beta_1 + \beta_2 = 1, \ \beta_{1,2} \in [0 \ 1]\} \qquad (6)$$

To show the equivalence, we can observe that $\beta_1 = 1 - \beta_2$. Defining $\alpha = \beta_1$ we get $\beta_2 = 1 - \alpha$, with $\alpha \in [0 \ 1]$ demonstrating equivalence.

$\mathbf{x} \in \mathcal{X}$, $\mathcal{X} = \mathbb{R}^n$ is convex.

$\mathbf{x} \in \mathcal{X}$, $\mathcal{X} = \{\mathbf{x} \in \mathbb{R}^n : \mathbf{x} \leq \mathbf{h}\}$ is convex.

Proof: Note that $\alpha \mathbf{x}_1 \leq \alpha \mathbf{h}$ and $(1 - \alpha)\mathbf{x}_2 \leq (1 - \alpha)\mathbf{h}$, hence, $\alpha \mathbf{x}_1 + (1 - \alpha)\mathbf{x}_2 \leq \alpha \mathbf{h} + (1 - \alpha)\mathbf{h} = \mathbf{h}$. $\square$

$\mathbf{x} \in \mathcal{X}$, $\mathcal{X} = \{\mathbf{x} \in \mathbb{R}^2 : x_1^2 + x_2^2 \leq h^2\}$ is convex.

Proof: This is the same as $||\mathbf{x}|| \leq h$. Note that $||\alpha \mathbf{x}_1|| \leq \alpha h$ and $||(1 - \alpha)\mathbf{x}_2|| \leq (1 - \alpha)h$. Applying triangle inequality, we get:

$$||\alpha \mathbf{x}_1 + (1 - \alpha)\mathbf{x}_2|| \leq ||\alpha \mathbf{x}_1|| + ||(1 - \alpha)\mathbf{x}_2|| \leq$$
$$\leq \alpha h + (1 - \alpha)h = h$$

So the convex combination of $\mathbf{x}_1$ and $\mathbf{x}_2$ is still in the domain. $\square$

$\mathbf{x} \in \mathcal{X}$, $\mathcal{X} = \{\mathbf{x} \in \mathbb{R}^n : \mathbf{x}^\top \mathbf{H} \mathbf{x} \leq 1\}$, where $\mathbf{H} \succ 0$ is positive-definite symmetric matrix is convex.

For any positive-definite symmetric $\mathbf{H}$ it is true that $\mathbf{H} = \mathbf{D}^\top \mathbf{D}$, where $\mathbf{D} = \sqrt{\mathbf{H}}$ is called a matrix square root and it is full rank. With that $\mathbf{x}^\top \mathbf{H} \mathbf{x} \leq 1$ becomes $\mathbf{x}^\top \mathbf{D}^\top \mathbf{D} \mathbf{x} \leq 1$. Defining $\mathbf{y} = \mathbf{D}\mathbf{x}$ we get $\mathcal{X} = \{\mathbf{D}^{-1}\mathbf{y} : \mathbf{y}^\top \mathbf{y} \leq 1\}$. This is a linearly deformed previously covered domain, and as such it is also convex.

Prove the following statements:
$x \in \mathcal{X}$, $\mathcal{X} = [-1 \ 2] \cup [3 \ 7]$ is not convex.

$\mathbf{x} \in \mathcal{X}$, $\mathcal{X} = \{\mathbf{x} \in \mathbb{R}^2 : x_1^2 + x_2^2 \geq h^2\}$ is not convex.

$\mathbf{x} \in \mathcal{X}$, $\mathcal{X} = \{\mathbf{x} \in \mathbb{R}^n : \mathbf{x}^\top \mathbf{H} \mathbf{x} \geq 1\}$, where $\mathbf{H}$ is positive-definite symmetric matrix is not convex.

These proves simply require one counter-example to show that the defining property of convex domains does not hold.

For a convex set $\mathcal{C}$ and a point $\mathbf{x}_0$ on its boundary, if inequality $\mathbf{a}^\top \mathbf{x} \leq \mathbf{a}^\top \mathbf{x}_0$ holds for $\forall x \in \mathcal{C}$, then $\mathbf{a}^\top \mathbf{x} = \mathbf{a}^\top \mathbf{x}_0$ is a *supporting hyperplane*.
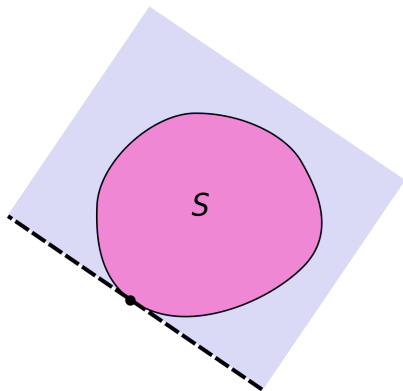

Figure 3: Supporting hyperplane (source: wikipedia)

Consider a dynamical system:

$$\mathbf{H}\mathbf{a} + \mathbf{C}\dot{\mathbf{q}} + \mathbf{g} = \mathbf{B}\mathbf{u} \qquad (7)$$

For the current state $\mathbf{q}$, $\dot{\mathbf{q}}$ find such $\mathbf{u}$ that makes $\mathbf{a}$ closest to the desired value $\mathbf{a}_d$, requiring that each component of $\mathbf{u}$ does not exceed a threshold u_{max} by absolute value.

Solution:

$$\begin{aligned} \underset{\mathbf{u},\mathbf{a}}{\text{minimize}} \quad & (\mathbf{a} - \mathbf{a}_d)^\top (\mathbf{a} - \mathbf{a}_d), \\ \text{subject to} \quad & \begin{cases} \mathbf{H}\mathbf{a} + \mathbf{C}\dot{\mathbf{q}} + \mathbf{g} = \mathbf{B}\mathbf{u} \\ |u_i| \le u_{max}, \ \forall i \end{cases} \end{aligned} \qquad (8)$$

The domain described by the inequalities $|u_i| \le u_{max}$ is **convex**.

Find a position $\mathbf{r} = [x, \ y]^\top$ of a robot, closest to the desired position $\mathbf{r}_d = [x_d, \ y_d]^\top$ but not less than 5m away from the ground station and no more than 100 meters away from the ground station. Position of the ground station is $\mathbf{r}_g = [x_g, \ y_g]^\top$.

Solution:

$$
\begin{aligned}
\underset{x,y}{\text{minimize}} \quad & (x - x_d)^2 + (y - y_d)^2, \\
\text{subject to} \quad & \begin{cases} (x - x_g)^2 + (y - y_g)^2 > 5^2 \\ (x - x_g)^2 + (y - y_g)^2 < 100^2 \end{cases}
\end{aligned} \tag{9}
$$

The domain described by these inequalities is **not convex**.

Convex functions

A function, for which a line connecting any points on its graph lies above the graph is a convex function.
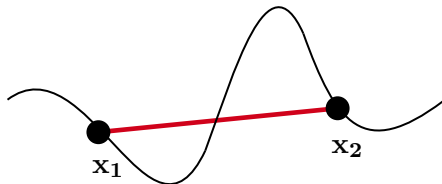

Figure 4: Convex function

Figure 5: Non-convex function

Definition 3

Function $f(\mathbf{x})$ defined on a domain $\mathcal{D}$, for which it holds that $\forall \mathbf{x}_1, \mathbf{x}_2 \in \mathcal{D}$, $f(\alpha \mathbf{x}_1 + (1 - \alpha)\mathbf{x}_2) \leq \alpha f(\mathbf{x}_1) + (1 - \alpha)f(\mathbf{x}_2)$ is called *a convex function*.

The inequality in the definition is called *Jensen's inequality*. It can be re-written equivalently as:

$$\begin{cases} f(\alpha_1 \mathbf{x}_1 + \alpha_2 \mathbf{x}_2) \leq \alpha_1 f(\mathbf{x}_1) + \alpha_2 f(\mathbf{x}_2) \\ \alpha_1 + \alpha_2 = 1 \end{cases} \tag{10}$$

Epigraph of a function $\varphi(x)$ is a set of points "above the graph":

$$\text{epi}(\varphi) = \{(x, t) : \ \varphi(x) \leq t\} \tag{11}$$
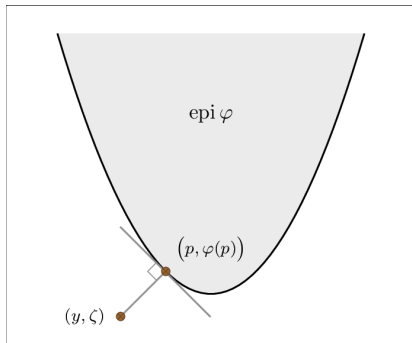

Figure 6: Epigraph. Credit - link.

Epigraph of a convex function is convex. A tangent to a function is a supporting hyperplane to its epigraph.

Here are some single-variable convex functions:

- $f(x) = 1$
- $f(x) = x$; $f(x) = x + 1$, $f(x) = 6x + 3$
- $f(x) = x^2$; $f(x) = (x - 5)^2$; $f(x) = (x + 1)^2 - 10$
- $f(x) = x^3$, if $x > 0$

Here are some multi-variable convex functions:

- $f(\mathbf{x}) = \mathbf{A}\mathbf{x} + \mathbf{b}$
- $f(\mathbf{x}) = \mathbf{x}^\top \mathbf{H}\mathbf{x}$, $\mathbf{H} \succ 0$
- $f(\mathbf{x}) = \max(x_1, \ ... \ x_n)$.
- $f(\mathbf{x}) = \log(e^{x_1} + ... + e^{x_n})$.
- $f(x, y) = \frac{x^2}{y}$.

Definition 3

If the domain of the optimization problem is convex and the cost function is convex, it is called a *convex optimization problem.*

Additionally, we will always assume that the domain of the convex optimization problem contains its boundary. Also, without the loss of generality, we will consider only minimization problems.

There are a few important properties of convex optimization problems (with our additional assumption):

- If the domain is non-empty, there is a solution.
- The problem has no local minima. We can find a path from any point to the solution, along which the cost function will not increase.

EXAMPLE - FORCE CONTROL

Consider a robot arm; the force of its end-effector is related to the torques in its joints via equation $\mathbf{f} = \mathbf{J}\tau$. Find the joint torques that produce the output force closest to the desired value $\mathbf{f}_d$, while component torques are limited in magnitude by τ_{max}.

Solution:

$$
\begin{aligned}
&\underset{\tau, \mathbf{f}}{\text{minimize}} \quad (\mathbf{f} - \mathbf{f}_d)^\top (\mathbf{f} - \mathbf{f}_d), \\
&\text{subject to} \quad
\begin{cases}
\mathbf{f} = \mathbf{J}\tau \\
|\tau_i| \leq \tau_{max}, \ \forall i
\end{cases}
\end{aligned}
\tag{12}
$$

Let us re-write the cost function as follows:

$$
(\mathbf{f} - \mathbf{f}_d)^\top (\mathbf{f} - \mathbf{f}_d) = \mathbf{f}^\top \mathbf{f} + 2\mathbf{f}^\top \mathbf{f}_d + \mathbf{f}_d^\top \mathbf{f}_d
\tag{13}
$$

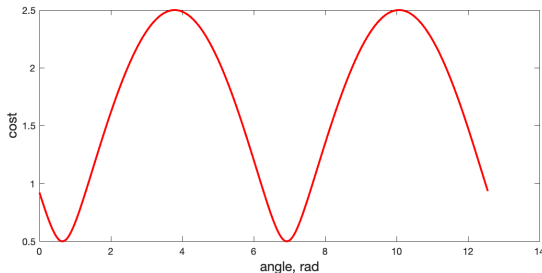The cost function is **convex** (it is quadratic) and the domain is **convex**.

Consider an inverted pendulum; the position of its point is described as $x = \cos(\varphi)$, $y = \sin(\varphi)$. Find such angle φ that puts the point closest to the desired position x_d, y_d.

Solution:

$$\underset{\varphi}{\text{minimize}} \quad (\cos(\varphi) - x_d)^2 + (\sin(\varphi) - y_d)^2 \qquad (14)$$

The cost function is **not convex**. See its graph:

Lecture slides are available via Github, links are on Moodle:

github.com/SergeiSa/Computational-Intelligence-2025