3-TRANSITIVE DIGRAPHS

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Abstract

Let $D$ be a digraph, $V(D)$ and $A(D)$ will denote the sets of vertices and arcs of $D$, respectively.

A digraph $D$ is 3-transitive if the existence of the directed path $(u, v, w, x)$ of length 3 in $D$ implies the existence of the arc $(u, x) \in A(D)$. In this article strong 3-transitive digraphs are characterized and the structure of non-strong 3-transitive digraphs is described. The results are used, e.g., to characterize 3-transitive digraphs that are transitive and to characterize 3-transitive digraphs with a kernel.

Keywords: digraph, kernel, transitive digraph, quasi-transitive digraph, 3-transitive digraph, 3-quasi-transitive digraph.

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1. Introduction

In this work, $D = (V(D), A(D))$ will denote a finite digraph without loops or multiple arcs in the same direction, with vertex set $V(D)$ and arc set $A(D)$. For general concepts and notation we refer the reader to [1, 4] and [7], particularly we will use the notation of [7] for walks, if $C = (x_0, x_1, \ldots, x_n)$ is a walk and $i < j$ then $x_i C x_j$ will denote the subwalk $(x_i, x_{i+1}, \ldots, x_{j-1}, x_j)$ of $C$. Union of walks will be denoted by concatenation or with $\cup$. For a vertex $v \in V(D)$, we define the out-neighborhood of $v$ in $D$ as the set $N^+_D(v) = \{u \in V(D) | (v, u) \in A(D)\}$; when there is no possibility of confusion we will omit the subscript $D$. The elements of $N^+(v)$ are called the out-neighbors of $v$, and the out-degree of $v$, $d^+_D(v)$, is the number of out-neighbors of $v$. Definitions of in-neighborhood, in-neighbors and in-degree of $v$ are analogously given. We say that a vertex $u$ reaches a vertex $v$ in
A digraph is strongly connected (or strong) if for every \( u, v \in V(D) \), there exists a \( uv \)-directed path, i.e., a directed path with initial vertex \( u \) and terminal vertex \( v \). A strong component (or component) of \( D \) is a maximal strong subdigraph of \( D \). The condensation of \( D \) is the digraph \( D^* \) with \( V(D^*) \) equal to the set of all strong components of \( D \), and \( (S, T) \in A(D^*) \) if and only if there is an \( ST \)-arc in \( D \). Clearly \( D^* \) is an acyclic digraph (a digraph without directed cycles), and thus, it has both vertices of out-degree equal to zero and vertices of in-degree equal to zero. A terminal component of \( D \) is a strong component \( T \) of \( D \) such that \( d^+_T(T) = 0 \). An initial component of \( D \) is a strong component \( S \) of \( D \) such that \( d^-_S(S) = 0 \).

A biorientation of the graph \( G \) is a digraph \( D \) obtained from \( G \) by replacing each edge \( \{x, y\} \in E(G) \) by either the arc \( (x, y) \) or the arc \( (y, x) \) or the pair of arcs \( (x, y) \) and \( (y, x) \). A semicomplete digraph is a biorientation of a complete graph. An orientation of a graph \( G \) is an asymmetrical biorientation of \( G \); thus, an oriented graph is an asymmetrical digraph. A tournament is an orientation of a complete graph. An orientation of a digraph \( D \) is a maximal asymmetrical subdigraph of \( D \). A complete digraph is a biorientation of a complete graph obtained by replacing each edge \( \{x, y\} \) by the arcs \( (x, y) \) and \( (y, x) \).

Let \( D \) be a digraph with vertex set \( V(D) = \{v_1, v_2, \ldots, v_n\} \) and \( H_1, H_2, \ldots, H_n \) a family of vertex disjoint digraphs. The composition of digraphs \( D[H_1, H_2, \ldots, H_n] \) is the digraph having \( \bigcup_{i=1}^n V(H_i) \) as its vertex set and arc set \( \bigcup_{i=1}^n A(H_i) \cup \{(u, v) | u \in V(H_i), v \in V(H_j), (v_i, v_j) \in A(D)\} \). The dual (or converse) of \( D \), \( D^\perp \), is the digraph with vertex set \( V(D^\perp) = V(D) \) and such that \( (u, v) \in A(D^\perp) \) if and only if \( (v, u) \in A(D) \). The directed cycle of length 3 will be denoted, as usual, by \( C_3 \).

A digraph is transitive if for every three distinct vertices \( u, v, w \in V(D) \), \((u, v), (v, w) \in A(D)\) implies that \((u, w) \in A(D)\). Transitive digraphs have a lot of properties, many of which can be verified straightforward by using the following structural characterization, which can be found in [1] as an exercise.
Theorem 1. Let $D$ be a digraph $D$ with strong components $S_1, S_2, \ldots, S_n$. Then $D$ is a transitive digraph if and only if $D = D^*[S_1, S_2, \ldots, S_n]$, where $S_i$ is a complete digraph for $1 \leq i \leq n$.

But, the structure of transitive digraphs is so rich that, working on this family, many problems become trivial or have a very simple solution. In view of this situation, some generalizations of transitive digraphs have been studied. Without doubt, the most studied generalization of transitive digraphs is the family of quasi-transitive digraphs. A digraph is quasi-transitive if for every three distinct vertices $u, v, w \in V(D)$, $(u, v), (v, w) \in A(D)$ implies that $(u, w) \in A(D)$ or $(w, u) \in A(D)$. Clearly, every semicomplete digraph is a quasi-transitive digraph, so, quasi-transitive digraphs generalize both, transitive and semicomplete digraphs. Quasi-transitive have been characterized by Bang-Jensen and Huang in [2], and their structure is very similar to the structure of transitive digraphs. Once again, this structural characterization has been very helpful to solve a large number of problems over this family, e.g., characterization of quasi-transitive digraphs with 3-kings, Hamiltonicity in quasi-transitive digraphs, or the Laborde-Payan-Xuong Conjecture for quasi-transitive digraphs.

Quasi-transitive digraphs were generalized with 3-quasi-transitive digraphs. A digraph $D$ is 3-quasi-transitive if for every directed path, $(v_0, v_1, v_2, v_3)$, either $(v_0, v_3) \in A(D)$ or $(v_3, v_0) \in A(D)$. Let us notice that in the definition of 3-quasi-transitive digraphs, the subdigraph $(v_0, v_1, v_2, v_3)$ considered is a directed path, so it cannot happen that $v_0 = v_3$ and we can effectively work on digraphs without loops. The family of 3-quasi-transitive digraphs were introduced by Bang-Jensen in the context of arc-locally semicomplete digraphs, which generalize both, semicomplete digraphs and semicomplete bipartite digraphs. A digraph is arc-locally in-semicomplete if $(z, x), (x, y), (w, y) \in A(D)$ and $z \neq w$ implies that $(z, w) \in A(D)$ or $(w, z) \in A(D)$. A digraph is arc-locally out-semicomplete if $(x, z), (x, y), (y, w) \in A(D)$ and $z \neq w$ implies that $(x, w) \in A(D)$ or $(w, x) \in A(D)$. A digraph is arc-locally semicomplete if it is arc-locally in-semicomplete and arc-locally out-semicomplete. These families are defined to fulfill a property on some specific orientation of a path of length 3, in all of them, the existence of a (undirected) 4-cycle can be inferred from the existence of the specific orientation. There is one more orientation of a directed path of length 3 that induces the existence of a fourth family of digraphs. A digraph is often called of the type $H_4$ if $(x, w), (x, y), (z, y) \in A(D)$ and $z \neq w$ implies that $(w, z) \in A(D)$ or $(z, w) \in A(D)$. The problem of finding structural characterizations of these four families of digraphs was proposed by Bang-Jensen. Besides transitive and quasi-transitive digraphs, also arc-locally semicomplete digraphs [8] and arc-locally in-semicomplete digraphs [13] have been characterized.

In [10], Galeana-Sánchez and the author introduce $k$-transitive and $k$-quasi-transitive digraphs. A digraph $D$ is $k$-transitive if the existence of a directed
path \((v_0, v_1, \ldots, v_k)\) of length \(k\) in \(D\) implies that \((v_0, v_k) \in A(D)\). A digraph \(D\) is \(k\)-quasi-transitive if the existence of a directed path \((v_0, v_1, \ldots, v_k)\) of length \(k\) in \(D\) implies that \((v_0, v_k) \in A(D)\) or \((v_k, v_0) \in A(D)\). Also in [10], some basic properties on the structure of both \(k\)-transitive and \(k\)-quasi-transitive are proved. These properties are used to prove the existence of \(n\)-kernels in both families.

The aim of this article is to characterize strong 3-transitive digraphs and give a thorough description of the structure of non-strong 3-transitive digraphs. We will use the following characterization of strong 3-quasi-transitive digraphs given by Galeana-Sánchez, Goldfeder and Urrutia in [9].

**Theorem 2** (Galeana-Sánchez, Goldfeder, Urrutia). Let \(D\) be a strong 3-quasi-transitive digraph of order \(n\). Then \(D\) is either a semicomplete digraph, a semicomplete bipartite digraph or isomorphic to \(F_n\) (Figure 1).

Thus, Section 2 will be devoted to prove some basic results about 3-transitive digraphs. In Section 3 the characterization of strong 3-transitive digraphs and the structural description of non-strong 3-transitive digraphs are given. In Section 4, one application of the results of Section 3 is given: A characterization of 3-transitive digraphs having a kernel. Also, an interesting problem concerning underlying graphs of 3-transitive and 3-quasi-transitive digraphs is proposed.

## 2. Preliminary Results

We begin this section with a very simple remark that will be very useful through this work.

**Remark 3.** A digraph \(D\) is a 3-transitive digraph if and only if \(\overrightarrow{D}\) is 3-transitive.

The following is another simple, yet useful, property of \(k\)-transitive digraphs.

**Proposition 4.** If \(D\) is a \(k\)-transitive digraph with \(k \geq 2\), then \(D\) is \(k + n(k - 1)\)-transitive for every \(n \in \mathbb{N}\).
Proof. Let $D$ be a $k$-transitive digraph. We will proceed by induction on $n$.

For $n = 1$, consider $(v_0, v_1, \ldots, v_{k+(k-1)})$, a directed path of length $k+(k-1)$. From the $k$-transitivity of $D$ we have that $(v_0, v_k) \in A(D)$, so $(v_0, v_k, v_{k+1}, \ldots, v_{k+(k-1)})$ is a $v_0v_k$-directed path of length $k$, and by the $k$-transitivity of $D$, we have that $(v_0, v_{k+(k-1)}) \in A(D)$.

Let us assume the result valid for $n - 1$ and let $(v_0, v_1, \ldots, v_{k+n(k-1)})$ be a directed path of length $k + n(k - 1)$ in $D$. By the induction hypothesis $(v_0, v_{k+(n-1)(k-1)}) \in A(D)$, and clearly $(v_0, v_{k+(n-1)(k-1)}, \ldots, v_{k+n(k-1)})$ is a directed path of length $k$ in $D$.

It follows from the $k$-transitivity that $(v_0, v_{k+n(k-1)}) \in A(D)$. The result is now obtained by the Principle of Mathematical Induction. 

As a particular case of Proposition 4, we can observe that a 3-transitive digraph is $n$-transitive for every odd integer $n$. We can state this observation as the following corollary.

Corollary 5. Let $D$ be a 3-transitive digraph and $(v_0, v_1, \ldots, v_n)$ a directed path in $D$. Then $(v_0, v_i) \in A(D)$ for every odd integer $1 \leq i \leq n$.

Proof. It is straightforward from Proposition 4. 

In [14], Wang and Wang proved some results describing the structure of non-strong 3-quasi-transitive digraphs. Since every 3-transitive digraph is also 3-quasi-transitive, the properties stated next hold also for 3-transitive digraphs.

Proposition 6 [14]. Let $D'$ be a non-trivial strong induced subdigraph of a 3-quasi-transitive digraph $D$ and let $s \in V(D) \setminus V(D')$ with at least one arc from $D'$ to $s$ and $D' \Rightarrow s$. Then each of the following holds:

1. If $D'$ is a bipartite digraph with bipartition $(X,Y)$ and there exists a vertex of $X$ which dominates $s$, then $X \mapsto s$.
2. If $D'$ is a non-bipartite digraph, then $D' \mapsto s$.

In the case of 3-transitive digraphs, the condition $D' \Rightarrow s$ in Proposition 6 not necessary. The following proposition is some kind of analogous of Proposition 6 for 3-transitive digraphs, emphasizing the behavior of certain strong subdigraphs.

Proposition 7. Let $D$ be a 3-transitive digraph and $v \in V(D)$. The following statements hold:

1. For every $C_3$ in $D$ such that there is a $C_3v$-arc in $D$, then $C_3 \to v$.
2. For every $C_3$ in $D$ such that there is a $vC_3$-arc in $D$, then $v \to C_3$.
3. For every $\overrightarrow{K_n}$ in $D$, $n \geq 3$, such that there is a $\overrightarrow{K_nv}$-arc in $D$, then $\overrightarrow{K_n} \to v$.
4. For every $\overrightarrow{K_n}$ in $D$, $n \geq 3$, such that there is a $v\overrightarrow{K_n}$-arc in $D$, then $v \to \overrightarrow{K_n}$.
5. For every $\overrightarrow{K_{n,m}} = (X, Y)$ in $D$ such that there is a $Xv$-arc in $D$, then $X \rightarrow v$.

6. For every $\overrightarrow{K_{n,m}} = (X, Y)$ in $D$ such that there is a $vX$-arc in $D$, then $v \rightarrow X$.

**Proof.** For 1. Let $C_3 = (x, y, z, x)$ be a cycle in $D$ and $(x, v) \in A(D)$. The existence of the directed path $(y, z, x, v)$ in $D$, implies that $(y, v) \in A(D)$. Finally, since $(z, x, y, v)$ is a directed path of length 3 in $D$, $(z, v) \in A(D)$. Thus $C_3 \rightarrow v$.

For 2. It suffices to dualize 1 using Remark 3.

For 3. Let $D[S]$, with $S = \{1, 2, \ldots, n\}$, be a complete subdigraph of $D$ and $(1, v) \in A(D)$. Let $i \in S \setminus \{1\}$ be an arbitrary vertex. Remember that $n \geq 3$, so there exists a vertex $j \in S \setminus \{1, i\}$. Now, since $D[S] = \overrightarrow{K_n}$, we have the existence of the directed path $(i, j, 1, v)$, which implies that $(i, v) \in A(D)$. But $i$ is an arbitrary vertex of $D[S]$, and then we can conclude that $D[S] \rightarrow v$.

For 4. It suffices to dualize 3 using Remark 3.

For 5. Let $\overrightarrow{K_{n,m}} = (X, Y)$ be a complete subdigraph of $D$ and $x \in X$. If $|X| = 1$, then we are done. If not, let $z \in X$ be a vertex such that $z \neq x$. Since $Y \neq \emptyset$, there is a vertex $y \in Y$. Also, $(z, y), (y, x) \in A(D)$, because $D[X \cup Y]$ is a complete bipartite digraph. So $(z, y, x, v)$ is a directed path of length 3 in $D$ and hence, $(z, v) \in A(D)$. Thus, $X \rightarrow v$.

For 6. It suffices to dualize 5 using Remark 3. □

The following proposition is also due to Wang and Wang.

**Proposition 8** [14]. Let $D'$ be a non-trivial strong subdigraph of a 3-quasi-transitive digraph $D$. For any $s \in V(D) \setminus V(D')$, if there exists a directed path between $s$ and $D'$, then $s$ and $D'$ are adjacent.

In the case of 3-transitive digraphs we can be a little more specific. The proof of the following proposition will be omitted since it is almost the same as the one given by Wang and Wang in [14].

**Proposition 9.** Let $D'$ be a non-trivial strong subdigraph of a 3-transitive digraph $D$ and $s \in V(D) \setminus V(D')$. Then each of the following holds:

1. If there exists an $sD'$-directed path in $D$, then an $sD'$-arc exists.
2. If there exists a $D's$-directed path in $D$, then a $D's$-arc exists.

The following couple of propositions will be used later to characterize strong 3-transitive digraphs.

**Proposition 10.** Let $D$ be a strong 3-transitive digraph of order $n \geq 4$. If $D$ is semicomplete, then $D$ is complete.

**Proof.** For any $(x, y) \in A(D)$, let $P = (y_0, y_1, \ldots, y_s)$ be a shortest path from $y$ to $x$. If $s \geq 3$, then by Corollary 5 we can find a shorter path than $P$ from $y$ to
Suppose that \( s = 2 \), then \((x, y, y_1, x)\) is a 3-cycle in \( D \). Let \( D' = D\{x, y, y_1\} \). Since the order of \( D \) is \( n \geq 4 \), there exists \( v \in V(D) \setminus V(D') \). Also, \( D \) is strong, so a \( D' \)-directed path and an \( sD' \)-directed path exist in \( D \). It follows from Propositions 7 (1 and 2) and 9 that \((y_1, v), (v, x) \in A(D)\). So \((y, y_1, v, x)\) is a directed path of length 3 in \( D \) and hence, \((y, x) \in A(D)\). This contradicts that \( s = 2 \). Thus, \((y, x) \in A(D)\).

**Proposition 11.** Let \( D \) be a strong 3-transitive digraph. If \( D \) is semicomplete bipartite, then \( D \) is complete bipartite.

**Proof.** Let \((X, Y)\) be the bipartition of \( D \). It suffices to prove that for any \((v, u) \in A(D)\), \((u, v) \in A(D)\). Since \( D \) is strong, there exists a path \( P \) from \( u \) to \( v \) of length \( n \). Again, since \( D \) is bipartite and \( u \) and \( v \) belong to the different partite, \( n \) must be odd. By Corollary 5, \((u, v) \in A(D)\).

3. **The Structure of 3-transitive Digraphs**

Let \( C^*_3 \) and \( C^{**}_3 \) be directed triangles with one and two symmetrical arcs, respectively. Digraphs \( C_3, C^*_3 \) and \( C^{**}_3 \) are shown in Figure 2.

![Figure 2. The digraphs \( C_3, C^*_3 \) and \( C^{**}_3 \).](image)

The characterization of strong 3-transitive digraphs is now proved.

**Proposition 12.** A strong digraph \( D \) of order \( n \) is 3-transitive if and only if it is one of the following:

1. A complete digraph,
2. A complete bipartite digraph,
3. \( C_3, C^*_3 \) or \( C^{**}_3 \).

**Proof.** Since every 3-transitive digraph is 3 quasi-transitive, in virtue of Theorem 2, a strong 3-transitive digraph must be either semicomplete, semicomplete bipartite or isomorphic to \( F_n \). But \( F_n \) is not 3-transitive, so a strong 3-transitive digraph must be either semicomplete or semicomplete bipartite. It is clear that every strong digraph of order less than or equal to 3 is either complete, complete
bipartite or one of the digraphs $C_3, C_3'$ or $C_3''$. If $D$ has order greater than or equal to 4, and it is a semicomplete digraph, it follows from Proposition 10 that $D$ is complete. Finally, if $D$ is semicomplete bipartite, it follows from Proposition 11 that $D$ is complete bipartite.

As immediate corollary from Proposition 12, we get the following result.

**Corollary 13.** Let $D$ be a 3-transitive digraph. Then $D$ is Hamiltonian if and only if $D$ is strong and it is not bipartite or it is regular.

Let us recall that Proposition 7 describes the interaction of a single vertex with some subdigraphs of a 3-transitive digraph $D$. This covers the case when a strong component of $D$ consists of a single vertex. In [14], the following proposition is proved.

**Proposition 14.** Let $D_1$ and $D_2$ be two distinct non-trivial strong components of a 3-quasi-transitive digraph with at least one $D_1D_2$-arc. Then either $D_1 \rightarrow D_2$ or the digraph induced by $D_1 \cup D_2$ is a semicomplete bipartite digraph.

As it was noted before, every 3-transitive digraph is a 3-quasi-transitive digraph, so Proposition 14 is also valid for 3-transitive digraphs. In an attempt to be more explicit with the interaction between non-trivial strong components of a 3-transitive digraph, we state the following proposition. Nonetheless, we omit the proof, since it is very similar to the proof of Proposition 14.

**Proposition 15.** Let $D$ be a 3-transitive digraph and $S_1, S_2$ be distinct strong components of $D$ such that there exists an $S_1S_2$-arc. The following statements hold:

1. If $S_1$ contains a subdigraph isomorphic to $C_3$, then $S_1 \rightarrow S_2$.
2. If $S_2$ contains a subdigraph isomorphic to $C_3$, then $S_1 \rightarrow S_2$.
3. If $S_i$ is a complete bipartite digraph with bipartition $(X_i, Y_i)$ for $i \in \{1, 2\}$ and if the $S_1S_2$-arc is an $X_1X_2$-arc, then $X_1 \rightarrow X_2$.
4. If $S_i$ is a complete bipartite digraph with bipartition $(X_i, Y_i)$ for $i \in \{1, 2\}$ and there exist an $X_1X_2$-arc and a $Y_1X_2$-arc, then $S_1 \rightarrow S_2$.
5. If $S_i$ is a complete bipartite digraph with bipartition $(X_i, Y_i)$ for $i \in \{1, 2\}$ and there exist an $X_1X_2$-arc and an $X_1Y_2$-arc, then $S_1 \rightarrow S_2$.

As a direct consequence of Propositions 9 and 15, we have the following corollary.

**Corollary 16.** Let $D$ be a 3-transitive digraph and $S_1$ a strong component of $D$ which contains a subdigraph isomorphic to $C_3$. If $S_1 \rightarrow v$ for some vertex $v \in V$, then $S_1 \rightarrow u$ for every vertex $u \in V$ that can be reached from $v$. Dually, if $v \rightarrow S_1$ for some vertex $v \in V$, then $u \rightarrow S_1$ for every vertex $u \in V$ that reaches $v$. 
We have already proved that the structure of 3-transitive digraphs is very similar to the structure of transitive digraphs. The following results are devoted to a deeper exploration of the similarities between these families of digraphs. A structural characterization of 3-transitive digraphs that are transitive is given.

**Theorem 17.** Let $D$ be a non-strong 3-transitive digraph with strong components $S_1, S_2, \ldots, S_p$. Then $D = D^*[S_1, S_2, \ldots, S_p]$ if and only if, for every pair of strong components $S_i, S_j$ of $D$, such that an $S_iS_j$-arc exists in $D$, then:

1. If $S_i, S_j$ are complete bipartite digraphs, then $D[S_i \cup S_j]$ is not bipartite.
2. If one of $S_i$ and $S_j$ is a complete bipartite digraph and the other consists of a single vertex, then $D[S_i \cup S_j]$ is not bipartite.

**Proof.** The necessity is trivial. In order to prove the sufficient, let $S_i$ and $S_j$ be two distinct strong components of $D$ such that there is an $S_iS_j$-arc. If both $S_i$ and $S_j$ are both non-trivial digraphs, then by 1 of the theorem and Proposition 14, we have that $S_i \to S_j$. Since the converse of a 3-transitive digraph is still a 3-transitive digraph, we assume, without loss of generality, that $S_i$ is a non-trivial complete bipartite digraph with bipartition $(X_i, Y_i)$ and $S_j = \{v\}$. Since $D[S_i \cup S_j]$ is not a bipartite digraph, then there is a vertex $x \in X_i$ such that $x \to v$ and there is a vertex $y \in Y_i$ such that $y \to v$. By Proposition 6.1, we have that $S_i \to v$.

**Theorem 18.** Let $D$ be a 3-transitive digraph. Then $D^*$ is a transitive digraph if and only if for every triplet of strong components $S_1, S_2, S_3$ of $D$, such that: $S_i$ consists of a single vertex $v_i$, $i \in \{1, 3\}$; $S_2$ is either a single vertex $v_2$ or a complete bipartite digraph with bipartition $(X, Y)$ and $v_1 \to v_2 \to v_3$ or $v_1 \to X \to v_3$ but there are neither $v_1Y$-arcs nor $Yv_3$-arcs in $D$, respectively, then $(v_1, v_3) \in A(D)$.

**Proof.** Let $D$ be a 3-transitive digraph. If $D^*$ is a transitive digraph, then for every triplet of strong components $S_1, S_2$ and $S_3$ of $D$, such that there is an $S_1S_2$-arc in $D$ and an $S_2S_3$-arc in $D$, then there is an $S_1S_3$-arc in $D$. In particular, if $S_1$ and $S_3$ consist of single vertices $v_1$ and $v_3$ respectively, then $(v_1, v_3) \in A(D)$.

For the converse, let $D$ be a 3-transitive digraph and $S_1, S_2$ and $S_3$ strong components of $D$, such that there is an $S_1S_2$-arc in $D$ and an $S_2S_3$-arc in $D$. We will prove that there is an $S_1S_3$-arc in $D$. If $S_1$ contains an isomorphic copy of $C_3$, then, by Corollary 16, we have that $S_1 \to S_3$ in $D$. If $S_3$ contains an isomorphic copy of $C_3$, again, by Corollary 16, we have that $S_1 \to S_3$. So, let us assume that neither $S_1$ nor $S_3$ contains an isomorphic copy of $C_3$.

It follows from Proposition 12 that $S_1$ and $S_3$ are either a single vertex or complete bipartite digraphs. If $S_1$ is not a single vertex, then it is a complete bipartite digraph with bipartition $(X_1, Y_1)$. Let us assume without loss of generality that the $S_1S_2$-arc is an $X_1S_2$-arc. Let $(x_1, u)$ be the $S_1S_2$-arc in $D$. Since
$S_2$ is a strong component of $D$, we have, by Propositions 12 and 15, two cases. The first case is that a vertex $s_3 \in V(S_3)$ exists, such that $(u, s_3) \in A(D)$. In this case is clear that, for any vertex $y_1 \in Y_1$ (recall that $Y_1 \neq \emptyset$), $(y_1, x_1, u, s_3)$ is a directed path of length 3 in $D$. By the 3-transitivity of $D$, we have that $(y_1, s_3) \in A(D)$, the desired $S_1S_3$-arc. The second case is that vertices $v \in V(S_2)$ and $s_3 \in V(S_3)$ exist, such that $(u, v), (v, s_3) \in A(D)$. Again, it is clear that $(x_1, u, v, s_3)$ is a directed path of length 3 and thus, $(x_1, s_3) \in A(D)$, the desired $S_1S_3$-arc. The case when $S_3$ is a complete bipartite digraph can be obtained dualizing the previous argument using Remark 3.

So, the remaining cases are when $S_1$ and $S_3$ consist of single vertices. We have again two cases. First, when $S_2$ contains a subdigraph isomorphic to $C_3$, then $S_2 \to S_3$. So, there exist vertices $s_1 \in V(S_1), u, v \in V(S_2), s_3 \in V(S_3)$ such that $(s_1, u), (u, v), (v, s_3) \in A(D)$. Thus, $(s_1, u, v, s_3)$ is a directed path of length 3 in $D$. By the 3-transitivity of $D$, $(s_1, s_3) \in A(D)$ is the desired $S_1S_3$-arc. If $S_2$ does not contain a subdigraph isomorphic to $C_3$, then $S_2$ is a single vertex or complete bipartite. If $S_2$ is a single vertex, then $S_2 = S_3$ and we have the existence of an $S_1S_3$-arc. The remaining case is that $S_2$ is a complete bipartite digraph with bipartition $(X, Y)$ such that $v_1 \to v_2 \to v_3$ or $v_1 \to X \to v_3$ but there are neither $v_1Y$-arcs nor $Yv_3$-arcs in $D$, respectively, then, by hypothesis $(v_1, v_3) \in A(D)$. Hence, we have the existence of an $S_1S_3$-arc. The remaining case is that $S_2$ is a complete bipartite digraph with bipartition $(X, Y)$ such that $v_1 \to X \to v_3$, and either a $v_1Y$-arc or a $Yv_3$-arc exists. In the first case we have by Proposition 15 that $v_1 \to S_2$, and thus, vertices $u \in X, v \in Y$ exist such that $(v_1, v), (u, v) \in A(D)$. So, $(v_1, v, u, v_3)$ is a directed path of length 3 in $D$. For the second case, again by Proposition 15, it follows that $S_2 \to v_3$. Then, vertices $u \in X$ and $v \in Y$ exist such that $(v_1, u), (v, v_3) \in A(D)$. Therefore, $(v_1, u, v, v_3)$ is a directed path of length 3 in $D$. In either case, it follows by the 3-transitivity of $D$ that $(v_1, v_3) \in A(D)$. So an $S_1S_3$-arc exists.

Since the cases are exhaustive, we have that $D^*$ is transitive.

**Corollary 19.** Let $D$ be a 3-transitive digraph. Then $D$ is a transitive digraph if and only if every strong component of $D$ is a complete digraph and, for every triplet of strong components $S_1, S_2, S_3$ of $D$, such that: $S_i$ consists of a single vertex $v_i, i \in \{1, 3\}$; $S_2$ is either a single vertex $v_2$ or a symmetrical arc $(v_2, v_2') \in A(D)$ and $v_1 \to v_2 \to v_3$ but $(v_1, v_2'), (v_2', v_3) \notin A(D)$, then $(v_1, v_3) \in A(D)$.

**Proof.** It is clear from Theorems 1, 17 and 18.

**Corollary 20.** Let $D$ be a 3-transitive digraph. If every strong component of $D$ is a complete digraph of order greater than or equal to 3, then $D$ is transitive.

**Proof.** Let $D$ be a 3-transitive digraph such that every strong component of $D$ is a complete digraph of order greater than or equal to 3. Then, by Theorem 18, it is clear that $D^*$ is transitive. Also, in virtue of Theorem 15, we can observe
that \( S_i \to S_j \) for every pair of strong components \( S_i, S_j \) of \( D \) such that there exists an \( S_iS_j \)-arc in \( D \). Thus, \( D = D^*[S_1, S_2, \ldots, S_n] \), where \( \{S_1, S_2, \ldots, S_n\} \) is the set of strong components of \( D \) and \( D^* \) is transitive. So, by Theorem 1, \( D \) is transitive.

As we have already shown, the structure of 3-transitive digraphs is very similar to the structure of transitive digraphs. We know that the condensation of a transitive digraph is again transitive. A characterization of 3-transitive digraphs with a transitive condensation has been already given, but a natural question arises. Is the condensation of a 3-transitive digraph 3-transitive again? Sadly, the answer is no, Figure 3 shows a counterexample to this fact.

Following similar ideas to those used to characterize the 3-transitive digraphs with a transitive condensation in Theorem 18, we can characterize 3-transitive digraphs with a 3-transitive condensation. The ‘bad’ configurations, preventing the condensation of a 3-transitive digraph to be 3-transitive, are pointed out in the following theorem.

**Theorem 21.** Let \( D \) be a 3-transitive digraph. Then \( D^* \) is a 3-transitive digraph if and only if for every 4-set, \( \{S_1, S_2, S_3, S_4\} \), of strong components of \( D \) such that: \( S_i \) consists of a single vertex \( v_i \), \( i \in \{1, 4\} \) and one of the following conditions is fulfilled:

1. \( S_2 \) consists of single vertex \( v_2 \) and \( S_3 \) is a complete bipartite digraph with bipartition \((X, Y)\), such that \( v_1 \to v_2 \to X \) and \( Y \to v_4 \), but there are neither \( v_2Y \)-arcs nor \( Xv_4 \)-arcs in \( D \);

2. \( S_2 \) is a complete bipartite digraph with bipartition \((X, Y)\) and \( S_3 \) consists of single vertex \( v_3 \), such that \( v_1 \to X \) and \( Y \to v_3 \to v_4 \), but there are neither \( v_1Y \)-arcs nor \( Xv_3 \)-arcs in \( D \);

3. \( S_j \) is a complete bipartite digraph with bipartition \((X_j, Y_j)\), \( j \in \{2, 3\} \), such that \( v_1 \to X_2 \to X_3 \) and \( Y_3 \to v_4 \), but there are neither \( v_1Y_2 \)-arcs, \( v_1X_3 \)-arcs, \( Y_3v_4 \)-arcs, nor \( X_3v_4 \)-arcs, and \( D[V(S_2) \cup V(S_3)] \) is a semicomplete bipartite digraph,

then \((v_1, v_4) \in A(D)\).
Proof. Let \( D \) be a 3-transitive digraph. If \( D^* \) is a 3-transitive digraph, then for every 4-set of strong components \( \{S_1, S_2, S_3, S_4\} \) of \( D \), such that there is an \( S_iS_{i+1} \)-arc in \( D \), \( i \in \{1, 2, 3\} \), then there is an \( S_4S_1 \)-arc in \( D \). In particular, if \( S_1 \) and \( S_4 \) consist of single vertices \( v_1 \) and \( v_4 \) respectively, then \( (v_1, v_4) \in A(D) \).

Conversely, let \( \{S_1, S_2, S_3, S_4\} \) be a 4-set of strong components of \( D \) such that there is an \( S_iS_{i+1} \)-arc in \( D \), \( i \in \{1, 2, 3\} \). If \( S_1 \) or \( S_4 \) are non-trivial, then by Proposition 9, there exists an \( S_1S_4 \)-arc in \( D \). So let us assume without loss of generality that \( S_1 \) consists of a single vertex \( S_i \), \( i \in \{1, 4\} \). Suppose that \( S_2 \) or \( S_3 \) contains \( C_3 \) as a subdigraph. It can be easily derived from Corollary 16 the existence of an \( S_1S_4 \)-arc in \( D \). So, we have 3 cases.

Before the analysis of the cases, let us recall that, by Proposition 7, if \( S = (X, Y) \) is a bipartite strong component of \( D \) and \( v \in V(D) \setminus V(S) \) such that a \( vX \)-arc exists, then \( v \to X \); and if an \( Xv \)-arc exists, then \( X \to v \).

The first case is when \( S_2 \) consists of single vertex \( v_2 \) and \( S_3 \) is a complete bipartite digraph with bipartition \( (X, Y) \). Clearly, if a \( v_2X \)-arc, and an \( Xv_4 \)-arc exist, then \( v_2 \to X \to v_4 \). Thus, a \( v_1v_4 \)-directed path of length 3 exists and \( (v_1, v_4) \in A(D) \) by the 3-transitivity of \( D \). Analogously, if a \( v_3Y \)-arc and a \( Yv_4 \)-arc exist in \( D \), clearly \( (v_1, v_4) \in A(D) \). So, we can assume without loss of generality that \( v_2 \to X, Y \to v_4 \) and there are neither \( v_2Y \)-arcs nor \( Xv_4 \)-arcs in \( D \). Then, by hypothesis, \( (v_1, v_4) \in A(D) \).

The second case is when \( S_2 \) is a complete bipartite digraph with bipartition \( (X, Y) \) and \( S_3 \) consists of single vertex \( v_3 \). But this case is just the dual of the first case, so, using Remark 3, it can be easily shown that \( (v_1, v_4) \in A(D) \).

The third case is when \( S_1 \) is a complete bipartite digraph with bipartition \( (X_j, Y_j) \), \( j \in \{2, 3\} \). Let us assume without loss of generality that \( v_1 \to X_2 \) and \( Y_3 \to v_4 \). If \( X_2 \to Y_3 \), then \( v_1 \to X_2 \to Y_3 \to v_4 \) and clearly \( (v_1, v_4) \subseteq A(D) \). If \( Y_2 \to X_3 \), it is easy to observe that \( X_2 \to Y_3 \). So, we can suppose that \( X_2 \to X_3 \) (thus \( Y_2 \to Y_3 \)) and that there are neither \( X_2Y_3 \)-arcs nor \( Y_2X_3 \)-arcs. Thus, \( D[V(S_2) \cup V(S_3)] \) is semicomplete bipartite. If \( v_1 \to Y_2 \), then \( v_1 \to Y_2 \to Y_3 \to v_4 \) and we are done. If \( v_1 \to X_3 \), then \( v_1 \to X_3 \to Y_3 \to v_4 \) and \( (v_1, v_4) \in A(D) \). Symmetrically, if \( Y_2 \to v_4 \) or \( X_3 \to v_4 \) we can conclude that \( (v_1, v_4) \in A(D) \).

Hence, we can suppose that there are neither \( v_1Y_2 \)-arcs, \( v_1X_3 \)-arcs, \( Y_2v_4 \)-arcs, nor \( X_3v_4 \)-arcs in \( D \). By hypothesis \( (v_1, v_4) \in A(D) \).

Since the cases are exhaustive, we have that \( D^* \) is 3-transitive.

4. Consequences

4.1. Existence of kernels

Let \( D \) be a digraph and \( N \subseteq V(D) \). We say that \( N \) is \( l \)-absorvent if for every vertex \( u \in V(D) \setminus N \), there is a vertex \( v \in N \) such that \( d(u, v) \leq l \) in \( D \). The set
$N$ is $k$-independent if for every $u, v \in N$, we have that $d(u, v), d(v, u) \geq N$. We call $N$ a $(k, l)$-kernel of $D$ if $D$ is $k$-independent and $l$-absorbtent. A $(k, k - 1)$-kernel is a $k$-kernel and a 2-kernel is simply a kernel. In [12], von Neumann and Morgenstern introduce the concept of kernel of a digraph in the context of Game Theory. Since then, kernels have been largely studied for their applications within many branches of Mathematics, we can find in [5] a very good survey on the subject. Also, in [6] is proved that the problem of determining if a given digraph has a kernel is $NP$-complete, so, finding sufficient conditions for a digraph to have a kernel or finding large families of digraphs with a kernel is a very valuable progress.

**Theorem 22.** Let $D$ be a 3-transitive digraph. Then $D$ has a kernel if and only if it has no terminal strong component isomorphic to $C_3$.

**Proof.** The ‘only if’ part will be proved by contrapositive. Let $D$ be a 3-transitive digraph such that a terminal strong component $S$ is isomorphic to $C_3$. Let $V(S) = \{v_0, v_1, v_2\}$ and $A(S) = \{(v_i, v_{i+1})\}_{i=0}^{2}$ (mod 3). Since $S$ is terminal, we have that $d^+ (v) = 1$ for every $v \in V(S)$. Thus, the only out-neighbor of $v_i$ is $v_{i+1}$ (mod 3). It is clear that $S$ has no kernel and vertices in $S$ cannot be absorbed by any other vertex in $D$, thus, $D$ has no kernel.

The ‘if’ implication will be proved by induction on the number of strong components of $D$. Let us assume that $D$ is strong. It can be directly verified that the digraphs mentioned in Proposition 12, except for $C_3$ have a kernel. So, let us assume that every 3-transitive digraph such that no terminal strong component isomorphic to $C_3$ and with $n$ strong components has a kernel. Let $D$ be a 3-transitive digraph such that no terminal strong component isomorphic to $C_3$ and with $n + 1$ strong components. Let us recall that $D^*$ is an acyclic digraph, so, we can consider an initial strong component $S$ of $D$. By induction hypothesis, $D - S$ has a kernel $N$. If $S$ is not a complete bipartite digraph, then, either $S$ consists of a single vertex or contains a subdigraph isomorphic to $C_3$. If $S$ consists of a single vertex $v$, and $v$ is absorbed by $N$, we are done. If $v$ is not absorbed by $N$, since $S$ is initial, $N \cup \{v\}$ is independent and thus a kernel of $D$. If $D$ contains a subdigraph isomorphic to $C_3$, we can use Corollary 16 to prove that $S \rightarrow S_t$ for some terminal strong component $S_t$ of $D$. But since $S_t$ is terminal, at least one vertex of $S_t$ must belong to $N$, and thus $S$ is absorbed by $N$. So, $N$ is a kernel of $D$. If $S$ is a complete bipartite digraph, we must consider three cases. Let $(X, Y)$ be the bipartition of $S$. If neither $X$ nor $Y$ is absorbed by $N$, then we consider $N \cup X$. Since $S$ is an initial component, every arc between $X$ and $N$ must be an $XN$-arc. But if such arc exists, we would have by Proposition 7.5 that $X \rightarrow N$, contradicting our assumption. So $N \cup X$ is an independent set, and $Y \rightarrow X$ because $S$ is a complete bipartite digraph. Thus, $N \cup X$ is a kernel for $D$. If some vertex of $X$ is absorbed by $N$, then by Proposition 7.5 $X$ is absorbed...
by \( N \). So let us assume that \( Y \) is not absorbed by \( N \). Once again, since \( S \) is an initial component, every arc between \( N \) and \( Y \) must be a \( YN \)-arc, but no such arc can exist. So, \( N \cup Y \) is an independent absorbent set of \( D \), and hence a kernel of \( D \). The case when \( Y \) is absorbed but \( X \) is not is analogous. Finally, if \( S \) is absorbed by \( N \), we have that \( N \) is the desired kernel of \( D \).

Since in every case \( D \) has a kernel, the result follows from the Principle of Mathematical Induction. 

In [10], Galeana-Sánchez and the author proved that a \( k \)-transitive digraph \( D \) has a \( n \)-kernel for every \( n \geq k \). Thus, Theorem 22 completes the study of existence of \( k \)-kernels in 3-transitive digraphs.

4.2. One further problem

A graph \( G \) is a comparability graph if it can be oriented as an asymmetrical transitive digraph. In [11], Ghouila-Houri proved that the underlying graphs of asymmetrical quasi-transitive digraphs are comparability graphs. That is to say, a graph \( G \) can receive a transitive orientation if and only if \( G \) can receive a quasi-transitive orientation. In view of this result, and considering the great similarity between the structure of transitive and 3-transitive digraphs, we propose the following conjecture.

**Conjecture 23.** Let \( D \) be an asymmetrical 3-quasi-transitive digraph, then the underlying graph of \( D \), \( UG(D) \), admit a 3-transitive asymmetrical orientation.

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3-transitive Digraphs


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