The p-median problem: A survey of metaheuristic approaches

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Abstract. The p-median problem, like most location problems, is classified as NP-hard, and so, heuristic methods are usually used for solving it. The p-median problem is a basic discrete location problem with real application that have been widely used to test heuristics. Metaheuristics are frameworks for building heuristics. In this survey, we examine the p-median, with the aim of providing an overview on advances in solving it using recent procedures based on metaheuristic rules.

Keywords: metaheuristics, location, p-median.

1 Introduction

Let us consider a combinatorial or global optimization problem

$$\min\{f(x) \,|x \in X\} \tag{1}$$

where $f(x)$ is the *objective function* to be minimized and X the set of *feasible solutions*. A solution $x^* \in X$ is *optimal* if

$$f(x^*) \leq f(x),\ \forall x \in X. \tag{2}$$

An *exact algorithm* for problem (1), if one exists, finds an optimal solution x^*, together with the proof of its optimality, or shows that there is no feasible solution ($X = \emptyset$), or the problem is ill-defined (solution is unbounded). In the other hand, a *heuristic algorithm* for (1) finds quickly a solution x' that is near to be an optimal solution. The metaheuristics are general strategies to design heuristic algorithms.

Location analysis is a field of Operational Research that includes a rich collection of mathematical models. Roughly speaking, a problem is classified to belong to the location field if some decision regarding the position of new facilities has to be made. In general, the objective or goal of the location problem is related with the distance between new facilities and other elements of the space where they have to be positioned. Location models may be divided into three groups: *continuous* ($X \subseteq R^q$), *discrete* (X is finite) and *network* models (X is a finite union of linear and continuous sets). Another possible classification is as a *median* (minisum) or *center* (minimax) problem, depending on the nature of the objective function considered. Location models are also deterministic or stochastic, linear or nonlinear, single or multi criteria, and so on. See several survey articles and books (Love *et al.* (1988), Brandau and Chiu (1989), Mirchandani and Francis (1990), Drezner (1995), Daskin 1995, etc.). Moreover, several special issues of journals have been devoted to locational analysis (e.g., more recently, *Annals of Operations Research*, Vol. 111, (2002), *Computers and Operations Research*, Vol. 29, (2002)). Also, the main topic of two journals (*Location Theory* (1983 - 1997) and *Studies in Locational Analysis*) deals exclusively with location problems.

Numerous instances of location problems, arising in Operational Research and other fields, have proven too large for an exact solution to be found in reasonable time. It is well-known from complexity theory (Garey and Johnson, 1978; Papadimitriou, 1994) that thousands of problems are NP-hard, that no algorithm with a number of steps polynomial in the size of the instance is known, and that finding one for any such problem would entail obtaining one for any and all of them. The p-median problem have been proved NP-hard by Kariv and Hakimi (1969). Moreover, in some cases where a problem admits a polynomial algorithm, the power of this polynomial may be so large that instances of realistic size cannot be solved in reasonable time in the worst case, and sometimes also in the average case or most of the time.

So one is often forced to resort to *heuristics*, that are capable of yielding quickly an approximate solution, or sometimes an optimal solution but without proof of its optimality. Some of these heuristics have a worst-case guarantee, i.e., the solution x_h obtained satisfies

$$\frac{f(x_h) - f(x)}{f(x_h)} \leq \varepsilon, \ \forall x \in X, \tag{3}$$

for some ε, which is, however, rarely small. Moreover, this ε is usually much larger than the error observed in practice and may therefore be a bad guide in selecting a heuristic. In addition to avoiding excessive computing time, heuristics address another problem, that of local optima. A local optimum x_L of (1) has the property that

$$f(x_L) \leq f(x), \ \forall x \in N(x_L) \cap X, \tag{4}$$

where $N(x_L)$ denotes a neighborhood of x_L. (Ways to define such a neighborhood will be discussed below.) If there are many local minima, the range of values they span may be large. Moreover, the globally optimum value $f(x^*)$ may differ substantially from the average value of a local minimum, or even from the best such value among many, obtained by some simple heuristic (a phenomenon called by Baum (1986), the central-limit catastrophe). There are, however, many ways to get out of local optima, or, more precisely, the valleys which contain them (or set of solutions followed by the descent method under consideration towards the local solution).

In the last decade, general heuristic methods, usually called *metaheuristics*, have engendered a lot of success in OR practice. Metaheuristics provide a general framework to build heuristics for combinatorial and global optimization problems. They have been the subject of intensive research since Kirkpatrick, Gellatt and Vecchi (1983) proposed *Simulated Annealing* as a general scheme for building heuristics able to escape the local optimum "trap". Several other metaheuristics were soon proposed. For a discussion of the best-known among them the reader is referred to the books edited by Reeves (1993) and Glover and Kochenberger (2003). Some of the many successful applications of metaheuristics are also mentioned there.

In this survey we give an overview of heuristic methods with emphasis on recent results of metaheuristic approaches used to solve one of the basic discrete facility location problems, the p-Median problem (PMP). Significant advances in the state-of-the-art may be attributed to these newer methods.

2 Formulation

Consider a set L of m facilities (or location points), a set U of n users (or customers or demand points), and a $n \times m$ matrix D with the distances travelled (or costs incurred) for satisfying the demand of the user located at i from the facility located at j, for all $j \in L$ and $i \in U$. The objective is to minimize the sum of these distances or transportation costs

$$(\min) \quad \sum_{i \in U} \min_{j \in J} \; d_{ij},$$

where $J \subseteq L$ and $|J| = p$. PMP can be defined as a purely mathematical problem: given an $n \times m$ matrix D, select p columns of D in order that the sum of minimum coefficients in each line within these columns be smallest possible.

The p-median problem and its extensions are useful to model many real word situations, such as the location of industrial plants, warehouses and public facilities (see for example Christofides 1975, for a list of applications). PMP can also be interpreted in terms of cluster analysis; locations of users are then replaced by points in an m-dimensional space (see Hansen and Jaumard 1997, for cluster analysis from a mathematical programming viewpoint). It may thus offer a powerful tool for data mining applications (Ng and Han, 1994).

Beside this combinatorial formulation, the PMP has also an integer programming one. Let us define two sets of decision variables: (i) $y_j = 1$, if a facility is opened in $j \in L$, and 0, otherwise; (ii) $x_{ij} = 1$, if customer i is served from a facility located in $j \in L$, and 0, otherwise. Then the integer programming formulation is as follows:

$$\min \quad \sum_i \sum_j d_{ij} x_{ij} \tag{5}$$

subject to

$$\sum_j x_{ij} = 1, \quad \forall i, \tag{6}$$

$$x_{ij} \leq y_j, \quad \forall i, j, \tag{7}$$

$$\sum_j y_j = p, \tag{8}$$

$$x_{ij}, y_j \in \{0, 1\}. \tag{9}$$

Constraints (6) express that the demand of each user must be met. Constraints (7) prevent any user from being supplied from a site with no open facility. The total number of open facilities is set to p by constraint (8).

3 Test problems

Most often test instances used in comparing heuristics for PMP are the following.

(i) **OR-Library instances.** There are 40 ORLIB problems from Beasley (1985), where the set of facilities is equal to the set of users. The problem parameters range from instances with $n = 100$ nodes and $p = 5, 10, 20$ and 33 up to instances with $n = 900$ and $p = 5, 10, 90$. All these test problems are solved exactly (Beasley, 1985), which makes them suitable for computational comparisons. They are available at the OR-Library webpage[1].

(ii) **TSP-Lib instances.** The larger problem instances are usually taken from the travelling salesman library, Reinelt (1991). They are available at the TSP-Lib webpage[2].

(iii) **Rolland** ***et al.*** **instances.** Rolland *et al.* (1996) tested their heuristics with non Euclidean instances with up to 500 nodes and potential facilities. Distances between nodes are random numbers from some interval. This set is available (from the authors or from us) upon request.

(iv) **Alberta, Galvão, Koerkel, Daskin and Pizzolato instances.** Five old and different sets of instances are recently collected and used in Alp *et al.* (2003). They are available at Erkut's web page[3].

(v) **Resende and Werneck instances.** A new class of instances for PMP is introduced recently in Resende and Werneck (2004). These instances are generated in the same way as those in the RSC set above: each instance is a square matrix in which each entry (i, j) represents the cost of assigning user i to facility j. Values of 100, 250, 500 and 1000 users were tested, each with values of p ranging from 10 to $n/2$. This set is available from the authors upon request.

(vi) **Kochetov instances.** This collection of test instances is classified into four groups: (a) instances on perfect codes (PCodes); (b) instances

[1] `http://mscmga.ms.ic.ac.uk/info.html`
[2] `http://www.iwr.uni-heidelberg.de/groups/compt/software/TSPLIB95`
[3] `http://www.bus.ualberta.ca/eeerkut/testproblems`

on chess-boards (Chess); (c) instances on finite projective planes (FPP); (d) instances with large duality gap (Gap-A, Gap-B, Gap-C). They are down-loadable at the Sobolev Institute of Mathematics webpage[4]. At the same site the codes of several solution methods are also provided: (a) exact branch and bound; (b) simulated annealing; (c) probabilistic TS (described below as well); (d) genetic algorithm.

4 Classical heuristics

Classical heuristics for the p-median problem often cited in the literature are (i) *Greedy*, (ii) *Stingy*, (iii) *Dual ascent*, (iv) *Alternate*, (v) *Interchange* and (vi) *Composite* heuristics. The first three are constructive heuristics, while the next two need a feasible initial solution. Several hybrids of these have also been suggested.

(i) **Greedy.** The Greedy heuristic (Kuehn and Hamburger, 1963) starts with an empty set of open facilities, and then the 1-median problem on L is solved and added to this set. Facilities are then added one by one until the number p is reached; each time the location which most reduces total cost is selected. An efficient implementation is given in Whitaker (1983).

(ii) **Stingy.** The Stingy heuristic (Feldman, *et al.*, 1966), also known as *Drop* or *Greedy-Drop*, starts with all m facilities opened, and then removes them one by one until the number of facilities has been reduced to p; each time the location which least increases total cost is selected. A modified implementation of the stingy heuristic is to start from a subset instead of the entire set of potential sites (Salhi and Atkinson, 1995).

(iii) **Dual ascent.** Another type of heuristic suggested in the literature is based on the relaxed dual of the integer programming formulation of PMP and uses the well-known *Dual ascent* heuristic DUALOC (Erlenkotter, 1978). Such heuristics for solving the p-median problem are proposed in Galvão (1980) and in Captivo (1991).

(iv) **Alternate.** In the first iteration of Alternate (Maranzana, 1964), facilities are located at p points chosen in L, users assigned to the closest facility, and the 1-median problem solved for each facility's set of users. Then the procedure is iterated with these new locations of the facilities until no more changes in assignments occur. Since the iterations consist

[4] `http://www.math.nsc.ru/AP/benchmarks/P-median/p-med_eng.html`

of alternately locating the facilities and then allocating users to them, this method will be referred to as the *alternating* heuristic. This heuristic may switch to an exhaustive exact method if all possible $\binom{m}{p}$ subsets of L are chosen as an initial solution. However, this is not usually the case since the complexity of the algorithm then becomes of $O(m^p)$.

(v) **Interchange.** The Interchange procedure (Teitz and Bart, 1968) is commonly used as a standard to compare with other methods. Here a certain pattern of p facilities is given initially; then, facilities are moved iteratively, one by one, to vacant sites with the objective of reducing total cost; this local search process is stopped when no movement of any single facility decreases the value of the objective function.

(vi) **Composite heuristics.** Several hybrids of these heuristics have been suggested. For example, in the *GreedyG* heuristic (Captivo, 1991), in each step of *Greedy*, the *Alternate* procedure is run. A combination of *Alternate* and *Interchange* heuristics has been suggested in Pizzolato (1994). In Moreno-Pérez *et al.* (1991), a variant of *Stingy* (or *Greedy-Drop*) is compared with *Greedy + Alternate* and *Multistart Alternate.* In Salhi's (1997) perturbation heuristic, *Stingy* and *Greedy* are run one after another, each having a given number of steps. The search allows exploration of infeasible regions by oscillating around feasibility. The combination of *Greedy* and *Interchange*, where the *Greedy* solution is chosen as the initial one for *Interchange*, has been most often used for comparison with other newly proposed methods (see for example Voss, 1996, and Hansen and Mladenović, 1997).

5 Implementation of interchange local search

The Interchange method is one of the most often used classical heuristics either alone or as a subroutine of other more complex methods and within metaheuristics. Therefore, it would seem that an efficient implementation is extremely important. The formula of benefit (or profit) w_{ij} in applying an interchange move is

$$\begin{aligned} w_{ij} &= \sum_{u:c_1(u)\neq j} \max\{0,[d_1(u)-d(u,i)]\} \\ &- \sum_{u:c_1(u)=j} [\min\{d_2(u),d(u,i)\}-d_1(u)], \end{aligned} \tag{10}$$

where u, i and j are indices of a user, and the ingoing and outgoing facilities, respectively; $c_1(u)$ represents the index of the closest facility of user u; $d_1(u) = d(u, c_1(u))$ and $d_2(u)$ represent distances from u to the closest and second closest facilities, respectively. The first sum in (10) accounts for users whose closest facility is not j. The second sum refers to users assigned to j in the current solution; since they lost their closest facility, they will be reassigned either to the new facility i or to their second closest, whichever is more advantageous.

An important study has been done by Whitaker (1983), where he describes the so-called *fast interchange* heuristic. It was not widely used (possibly because of an error in that paper) until Hansen and Mladenović (1997) applied it as a subroutine of a variable neighborhood search (VNS) heuristic. Among other results reported is that *Add* and *Interchange* moves have similar complexity. Moreover, p times fewer operations are spent for one *fast interchange* move as compared to one *interchange* move of Teitz and Bart (1968). In fact, the following three efficient ingredients are incorporated in the interchange heuristic in Whitaker (1983): (i) *move evaluation*, where a best removal of a facility is found when the facility to be added is known; (ii) *updating* of the first and the second closest facility of each user; (iii) restricted *first improvement* strategy, where each facility is considered to be added only once. In the implementation of Whitaker's interchange algorithm by Hansen and Mladenović (1997), only (i) and (ii) are used; i.e., instead of (iii), a best improvement strategy is applied. Hence, the restriction of facilities to be added to the solution is removed as well. Moreover, the complexity of steps (i) and (ii) is evaluated.

Recently, a new efficient implementation has been suggested by Resende and Werneck (2003). Its worst case complexity is the same ($O(mn)$), but it can be significantly faster in practice. The formula (10) is replaced with

$$w_{ij} = \sum_{u \in U} \max\{0, d_1(u) - d(u,i)\} - \sum_{u | c_1(u) = j} [d_2(u) - d_1(u)] + e_{ij}.$$

The first sum represents gains by inserting facility i, the second losses by dropping facility j, while the last one is from a matrix $E = [e_{ij}]$ called *extra*, which mostly has a value 0, and whose updating makes this implementation efficient for large problem instances:

$$e_{ij} = \sum_{u | c_1(u) = j;\ d(u,i) < d_2(u)} [d_2(u) - \max\{d(u,i), d_1(u)\}].$$

Therefore, the extra memory required for the matrix E allows for significant accelerations. Several variants have been considered: full matrix (FM) and sparse matrix (SM) representation of E; with preprocessing, i.e., ranking distances from each user to all potential facilities (FMP and SMP), and so on. For example, the average speedups obtained by SMP on OR-Library, RW and TSP-Lib test instances were by factors of 8.7, 15.1 and 177.6, respectively, if the running times for preprocessing were not included. If they were included, then SMP was faster 1.8, 2.1 and 20.3 times, respectively, than the fast interchange. As expected, the greatest gains were observed on Euclidean instances, since a significant number of the e_{ij} are equal to 0 in this case.

Another step forward in solving PMP by interchange local search has recently been suggested in Kochetov and Alekseeva (2004), where a new neighborhood structure, called LK (Lin-Keringham), has been proposed. A depth parameter k that counts the number of interchange moves within one step of local search is introduced. The LK(k) neighborhood can be described by the following steps: (a) find two facilities i_{add} and i_{drop} such that the best solution in the 1-interchange neighborhood is obtained; (b) exchange them to get a new solution; (c) repeat steps (a) and (b) k times such that a facility to be inserted has not previously been dropped in steps (a) and (b). The set LK(k) is thus defined as

$$LK(k) = \{(i^t_{add}, i^t_{drop}), t = 1, \ldots, k\}.$$

The best solution from LK(k) is the local minimum with respect to the LK neighborhood structure. This local search has successfully been used within Lagrangian relaxation (LR), random rounding (after linear relaxation) (RR), and within ant colony optimization (ACO) (Dorigo and Di Caro (1999), Dorigo and Stützle (2004)). Results reported are of very good quality; e.g., all methods (LR, RR, ACO) solve exactly the OR-Lib test instances. These methods are also compared on Kochetov (2004) test instances.

6 Metaheuristics

We briefly describe here some of the metaheuristic methods developed for solving the PMP. They include: (i) Lagrangian heuristics; (ii) Tabu search (TS), (iii) Variable neighborhood search (VNS), (iv) Genetic search, (v) Scatter search, (vi) GRASP with Path relinking (vii) Simulated annealing, (viii) Heuristic concentration, (ix) Ant colony optimization, (x) Neural Networks and (xi) Other metaheuristics.

(i) **Lagrangian heuristics**. These heuristics for solving PMP (Cornuejols, *et al.*, 1977) are based on the mathematical programming formulation (5)-(9). Different variants of this approach are suggested in Galvão

Type	**Heuristic**	**References**
CH	Greedy	Kuehn & Hamburger (1963), Whitaker (1983).
	Stingy	Feldman *et al.* (1966), Moreno-Pérez *et al.* (1991).
	Dual ascent	Galvão (1977, 1980).
	Hybrids	Moreno-Pérez *et al.* (1991), Captivo (1991), Pizzolato (1994).
LS	Alternate	Maranzana (1964).
	Interchange	Teitz & Bart (1968), Whitaker (1983), Hansen & Mladenović (1997), Resende & Warneck (2003), Kochetov & Alkseeva (2003).
MP	Dynamic programming	Hribara and Daskin (1997).
	Lagrangian relaxation	Cornuejols *et al.* (1977), Mulvey & Crowder (1979), Galvão (1980), Beasley (1993), Daskin (1995), Senne & Lorena (2000), Barahona & Anbil (2000), Beltran *et al.* (2004).
MH	Tabu search	Mladenovic *et al.* (1995, 1996), Voss (1996), Rolland *et al.* (1996), Ohlemüller (1997) Salhi (2002), Goncharov & Kochetov (2002).
	Variable neighborhood search	Hansen & Mladenović (1997), Hansen *et al.* (2001), García-López *et al.* (2002), Crainic *et al.* (2004).
	Genetic search	Hosage & Goodchild (1986), Dibbie & Densham (1993), Moreno-Perez *et al.* (1994), Erkut *et al.* (2001), Alp *et al.* (2003).
	Scatter search	García-López *et al.* (2003).
	Simulated Annealing	Murray & Church (1996), Chiyoshi & Galvão (2000), Levanova & Loresh (2004).
	Heuristic concentration	Rosing *et al* (1996), Rosing & ReVelle (1997), Rosing *et al.*, (1999).
	Ant colony	Levanova & Loresh (2004).
	Neural Networks	Domínguez Merino and Muñoz Pérez (2002), Domínguez Merino *et al.* (2003).
	Hybrids	Resende & Warneck (2004).
	Other	Dai & Cheung (1997), Taillard (2003), Kochetov *et al.* (2004).

Table 1: p-median heuristic references (the types are: Constructive heuristics (CH), Local Search (LS), Mathematical Programming (PM) and MetaHeuristics (MH)).

(1980), Mulvey and Crowder (1979) and Beasley (1993). Usually, the constraint (6) is relaxed so that the Lagrangian problem becomes:

$$\max_{u} \min_{x,y} \sum_{i} \sum_{j} (d_{ij} - u_i) x_{ij} + \sum_{i} u_i \qquad (11)$$

s.t. (7), (8) and (9).

Note that the objective function (11) is minimized with respect to the original variables and is maximized with respect to the Lagrangian multipliers.

In Lagrangian heuristics the following steps are repeated iteratively: 1) set the values of the multipliers u_i; 2) solve the Lagrangian model, i.e., find the x_{ij} and y_i; 3) adjust the multipliers. Thus, it may be seen as an "Alternate" type heuristic. The largest value of (11) (over all iterations) represents a lower bound of PMP. If the variables u_i are fixed, the resulting model (in step 2) is easy to solve (see, e.g., Daskin, 1995). The solution found may not be feasible, since the constraint (6) may be violated. However, feasibility is obtained by assigning the users to their closest open facility. The best of the feasible solutions found over all iterations would also have the best (lowest) upper bound. Therefore, Lagrangian heuristics provide both lower and upper bounds of the problem considered. The final most complex task is to modify the multipliers based on the solution just obtained. A common approach is by subgradient optimization. In Beasley (1993), at each subgradient iteration, Lagrangian solutions are made primal feasible and the reallocation improved by the classical Alternate heuristic. A faster variant, called the Lagrangian/surrogate heuristic has recently been proposed by Senne and Lorena (2000). We also refer the reader to the *Volume* subgradient approach introduced by Barahona and Anbil (2000). A semi-Lagrangian relaxation (SLR) method is suggested in Beltran *et al.* (2004). The idea is to get a better lower bound in the Lagrangian relaxation by treating the set of equality constraints in (6) and (8) twice: in the relaxation and in the set of constraints replacing relation "=" with "≤". In theory SLR closes the integrality gap.

(ii) **Tabu search.** Several Tabu Search (Glover 1989, 1990) methods have been proposed for solving PMP (see also Glover and Laguna, 1997, for an introduction to Tabu Search). In Mladenović *et al.*, (1995, 1996), a 1-interchange move is extended into a so-called *1-chain-substitution* move. Two tabu lists (TL) are used with given and random TL sizes. Another TS heuristic is suggested by Voss, (1996), where a few variants of the so-called *reverse elimination* method are discussed. In Rolland *et al.*, (1996), a 1-interchange move is divided into add and drop moves which do not necessarily follow each other and so feasibility is not necessarily maintained during the search; this approach, within TS, is known as *strategic oscillation* (see Glover and Laguna, 1993). The same restricted neighborhood structure is used in a more recent TS for solving PMP in Salhi (2002). After a drop move, the set of potential ingoing facilities is restricted to the K (a parameter) closest ones to the one just dropped. Moreover, the functional representation of the TL size and a flexible concept of the aspiration level are proposed. Although results reported do not improve significantly upon those obtained by purely random TL size, this analysis gives possible directions in designing efficient TS heuristics. A simple Probabilistic TS (PTS) is suggested by Kochetov (2001). Denote by $N(x)$ the 1-interchange neighborhood of any solution x (a set of open facilities). A restricted neighborhood $N_r(x) \subset N(x)$ (with a given probabilistic threshold $r < 1$) is obtained at random: each $y \in N(x)$ is included in $N_r(x)$ if a random number uniformly generated from the interval (0,1) is less than r. The simple TS heuristic based on $N_r(x)$ does not use aspiration criteria, intensification or diversification rules, but it allows the author to establish a connection with irreducible Markov chains and to develop asymptotic theoretical properties. For solving PMP by PTS, good results on Kochetov test instances (see above) are reported in Goncharov and Kochetov (2002).

(iii) **Variable neighborhood search** (VNS). There are several papers that use VNS for solving the PMP. In the first one (Hansen and Mladenović, 1997), the basic VNS is applied and extensive statistical analysis of various strategies performed. Neighborhood structures are defined by moving $1, 2, \ldots, k_{\max}$ facilities and correspond to sets of 0–1 vectors at Hamming distance $2, 4, \ldots, 2k_{\max}$ from x. The descent heuristic used is 1–interchange, with the efficient fast interchange (FI) computational scheme described above. Results of a comparison of heuristics for OR-Library and some TSP-Lib problems are reported. In order to solve larger PMP instances, in Hansen *et al.* (2001), both reduced VNS and a decomposition variant of VNS (VNDS) are applied. Subproblems with increasing numbers of users (that are solved by VNS) are obtained by merging subsets of users (or market areas) associated with k ($k = 2, \ldots, p$) medians. Results on instances of 1400, 3038 and 5934 users from the TSP library show that VNDS improves notably upon VNS in less computing time, and gives much better results than FI, in the same time that FI takes for a single descent. Moreover, Reduced VNS, which does not use a descent phase, gives results similar to those of FI in much less computing time. Two papers of Parallel VNS for PMP are García-López *et al.* (2002) and Crainic *et al.* (2004). The first of the three parallelization strategies analyzed in García-López *et* *al.* (2002) attempts to reduce computation time by parallelizing the local search in the sequential VNS. The second one implements an independent search strategy that runs an independent VNS procedure on each processor. The third one applies a synchronous cooperation mechanism through a classical master-slave approach. The *Cooperative* VNS parallelization proposed in Crainic *et al.* (2004) applies a cooperative multi-search method based on a central-memory mechanism.

(iv) **Genetic algorithm** (GA). Several genetic search heuristics have been suggested. Hosage and Goodchild (1986) encoded a solutions as a string of m binary digits (genes). In order to reach feasibility (p open facilities), the authors penalized the number of open facilities. The results reported are poor, even on small problems. In Dibbie and Densham (1993), each individual has exactly p genes, and each gene represents a facility index. This appears to be better representation of the solution. The authors used conventional genetic operators: selection, cross-over and mutation. Reported results are similar to Interchange local search, but with considerably longer processing time. The size of the instances tested was $n = m = 150$ (user and facility sites coincide) and $p = 9$. Moreno-Perez *et al.* (1994) designed a parallelized GA for the PMP. Each gene represents a facility index as well. Beside conventional GA operators, they used multiple population groups (colonies), which exchange candidate solutions with each other (via migrations). Finally, in Alp *et al.* (2003), much better results are reported, but still not as good as those obtained by VNS, TS or hybrid approaches. It is even not clear if the suggested method belongs to the class of GA. The mutation operator is avoided, and the new members of the population are not generated in the usual way (i.e., by using selection and cross-over operators). Two solutions are selected at random, and then the union of them taken, obtaining an infeasible solution with number of genes (facilities) larger than p. To reach feasibility, the Stingy or Greedy-Drop classical heuristic is applied. Better results would be obtained if the Interchange heuristic was applied after Stingy and the resulting method would then be similar to VNS. Results on OR-Library, Galvão, Alberta and Koerkel test instances are reported.

(v) **Scatter search**. The Scatter Search (SS) metaheuristic (Glover *et al.*, 2000) is an evolutionary strategy based on a moderated size set of good solutions (the *Reference Set* that evolves mainly by combining its solutions to construct others exploiting the knowledge of the problem at hand. Unlike other strategies of combination of solutions the search for a local optimum in the SS is a guided task. To start the SS, a moderated size reference set is selected from a wide population of solutions. This set is generated and iteratively updated attempting to intensify and diversify the search. After combining the solutions in the reference set, a local search procedure is applied to improve the resulting solution, and the reference set is updated to incorporate both good and disperse solutions. These steps are repeated until a stopping condition is met. The method provides not only a single heuristic solution, like other metaheuristics, but also a reduced set of disperse high quality solutions.

García-López *et al.* (2003) design a SS for the PMP by introducing a distance in the solution space that is used to control the diversification of the method. The distance between two solutions J and I is given by

$$d(I,J) = \sum_{i \in I} \min_{j \in J} d_{ij} \quad + \sum_{j \in J} \min_{i \in I} d_{ij}.$$

The reference set consists of k (a parameter) best solutions from the population and $r - k$ randomly chosen following diversification criteria (r denotes the reference set size). Solutions of a selected subset of the reference set are combined as follows: first, as in heuristic concentration, the set of facilities that appear in each solution of the subset is found; then to get the size p, new facilities are added iteratively according predefined rules. The combined solutions are then improved by a local search based on interchanges. The resulting solution is incorporated to the reference set because it improves one of its k best solutions or because it improves the diversity of the set according the distance between its solutions.

Good results are reported on TSP-Lib instances. Three types of parallelization have been proposed in García-López *et al.* (2003) to achieve either an increase of efficiency or an increase of exploration. The procedures have been coded in C using OpenMP [**?**] and compared in a shared memory machine with large instances.

(vi) **GRASP with Path relinking.** A hybrid heuristic that combines elements of several "pure" metaheuristics is suggested in Resende and Werneck (2004). Like GRASP (Greedy Randomized Adaptive Search Procedure, Feo and Resende, 1995), their heuristic is a multistart approach where each iteration consists of the construction of initial points by a randomized greedy step, followed by local search. Like in TS and SS, their method borrows the idea of path-relinking (Laguna and Martii, 1999). That is, a path between any two solutions from a set of good or *elite* solutions is found and local search performed starting from each solution on that path. Since the distance between two solutions (defined by the symmetric difference) is systematically changed by one before local search is performed, their path-relinking shares a similarity with VNS as well. Moreover, they augment path-relinking with the concept of multiple generations, a key feature of genetic algorithms. A large empirical analysis includes OR-Library, TSP-Lib, Galvão and RW (see above) sets of instances. Compared with other methods, their procedure often provides better results in terms of both running time and solution quality.

(vii) **Simulated annealing** (SA). The basic SA heuristic for PMP has been proposed in Murray and Church (1996). The SA heuristic proposed in Chiyoshi and Galvão (2000) combines elements of the vertex substitution method of Teitz and Bart with the general methodology of simulated annealing. The cooling schedule adopted incorporates the notion of temperature adjustments rather than just temperature reductions. Computational results are given for OR-Library test instances. Optimal solutions were found for 26 of the 40 problems tested. Recently, an SA heuristic that uses the LK neighborhood structure has been proposed in Levanova and Loresh (2004). Results of good quality are reported on Kochetov data sets, and all 40 OR-Library test instances are solved exactly.

(viii) **Heuristic concentration**. The Heuristic concentration HC method (Rosing and ReVelle, 1997) has two stages. In stage one, a set of solutions is obtained by repeating q times the Drop/Add heuristic, and then retaining the best m among them. The elements of desirable facility sites selected from the set of solutions form a *concentration set*. Stage two of HC limits the set of potential facilities to this set and resolves the model. Such a restricted model can be solved heuristically or even exactly. An extension of HC, known as the *Gamma heuristic* (Rosing *et al.*, 1999) includes a third stage as well. Testing is performed on 81 randomly generated instances with 100 to 300 nodes. The results in Rosing *et al.* (1998) compare successfully with the TS of Rolland *et al.* (1996).

(ix) **Ant colony optimization** (ACO) was first suggested in Colorni *et al.* (1991). The motivation for the method comes from nature. The main idea is to use the statistical information obtained from previous iterations and to guide the search into the more promising areas of the solution space. Usually the method contains several parameters, whose estimation and updating (as in SA) mostly influence the quality of the obtained solution. In Levanova and Loresh (2004) a randomized *stingy* or drop heuristic is used within AC: initially a solution x is set to be the set of all potential facilities L; a facility j to be dropped is chosen at random (with probability r_j) from the restricted drop neighborhood set: $S_j(\lambda) = \{j \mid \Delta f_j \leq (1-\lambda)\min_\ell \Delta f_\ell + \lambda \max_\ell \Delta f_\ell\}$, for $\lambda \in (0,1)$ and $\Delta f_j = f(x) - f(x \setminus \{j\})$. The probability r_j is defined in a usual way, also introducing some more parameters. When the cardinality of x reaches p, the interchange heuristic (Resende and Werneck, 2003) with LK neighborhood structure (Kochetov and Alkseeva, 2005) is performed with x as an initial solution. A randomized drop routine followed by LK interchange is repeated a given number of times, and the best overall solution is kept.

(x) **Neural Networks.** In Domínguez Merino and Muñoz Pérez (2002), a new integer formulation for of the p-median problem allows them to apply a two-layers neural network to solve it. In Domínguez Merino *et al.* (2003) a competitive recurrent neural network consisting on a single layer with $2np$ neurons is used to design three different algorithms.

(xi) **Other metaheuristics.** In Dai and Cheung (1997), two decomposition heuristics aiming at problems of large scale are proposed. Firstly, a level-m optimum is defined. Starting from a local optimum, the first heuristic efficiently improves it to a level-2 optimum by applying an existing exact algorithm for solving the 2-median problem. The second heuristic further improves it to a level-3 optimum by applying a new exact algorithm for solving the 3-median problem. In Taillard (2003), three heuristics have been developed for solving large centroid clustering problems. Beside the p-median, this includes the multisource Weber problem and minimum sum-of-squares clustering. The first heuristic, named *candidate list strategy* (CLS), may be seen as a variant of VNS (in the first version of the paper appeared as technical report in 1996, CLS was called VNS): an alternate heuristic is used as a local search procedure; a random perturbation, or shaking, of the current solution is done by choosing solutions from the restricted interchange neighborhood. The other two, called LOPT and DEC, use decomposition for solving large problem instances. An interesting idea of finding the partition of L, and thus the number of subproblems, by using dynamic programming is developed in the DEC procedure.

7 Conclusions

Table 1 presents an overview on the development of heuristics for solving the p-median problem (PMP). We should ask a basic question given the nature of this survey: Has the advent of metaheuristics advanced the state-of-the-art significantly? Based on a large body of empirical evidence, the answer should be a resounding Yes! While the earlier methods of constructive heuristics and local searches have been successful on relatively small instances of PMP, the empirical results shoe that solution quality may deteriorate rapidly with problem size. The use of metaheuristics has led to substantial improvements in solution quality on large scale instances within reasonable short computing time. Using nomenclature from tabu search, the success may be attributed to the ability of these metaheuristic-based methods to “intensify” the search in promising regions of the solution space, and then “diversify” the search in a systematic way when needed.

Some brief conclusions on the use of metaheuristics are as follows: (i) The neighborhood structure used in descent plays the most important role for the efficiency and effectiveness of any metaheuristic for PMP. The interchange neighborhood appears to be a better choice than the alternate, or drop/add. The variable depth neighborhood structure LK(k) (Kochetov and Alekseeva, 2005) seems to be a better choice than the 1-interchange. (ii) The implementation of 1-interchange local search is the second very important issue. The implementation of Whitaker (1983) is better than that suggested by Teitz and Bart (1968), but not better than that proposed by Hansen and Mladenović (1997). This one in turn is outperformed by the implementation of Resende and Werneck (2003). Therefore, it is not easy to conclude what metaheuristic approach dominates others. For example, an SA heuristic with Teitz and Bart implementation of the interchange heuristic proposed by Chiyoshi & Galvão (2000) was able to solve 26 out of 40 OR-Library test instances. However, an SA heuristic suggested by Levanova and Loresh (2004) using an LK neighborhood and Resende and Werneck (2003) implementation solved all 40 instances exactly.

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