# On the Qualitative Representation of Spatial Knowledge in 2D Space

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**Abstract.** Various *relation-based* systems, concerned with the qualitative representation and processing of spatial knowledge, have been developed in numerous application domains. In this paper we identify the common concepts underlying qualitative spatial knowledge representation, we compare the representational properties of the different systems and we outline the computational tasks involved in relation-based spatial information processing. The paper also describes *symbolic spatial indexes*, relation-based structures which combine several ideas in spatial knowledge representation. A symbolic spatial index is an array that preserves only a set of spatial relations among distinct objects in an image, called the *modelling space*; the index array discards information, such as shape and size of objects, and irrelevant spatial relations. The construction of a symbolic spatial index from an input image can be thought of as a transformation that keeps only a set of *representative points* needed for the definition of the relations of the modelling space. By keeping the relative arrangements of the representative points in symbolic spatial indexes and discarding all other points, we maintain enough information to answer queries regarding the spatial relations of the modelling space without the need to access the initial image or an object database. Symbolic spatial indexes can be used to solve problems involving route planning, composition of spatial relations and update operations.

**Key Words.** Spatial Data Models and Query Languages, Representation of Direction and Topological Relations, Qualitative Spatial Information Processing.

## 1. Introduction

This paper is concerned with the representation and processing of spatial knowledge. The term *spatial knowledge* refers to configurations among distinct spatial entities, i.e., spatial representations preserve location in space without incorporating information such as shape, size, texture or colour of objects (for a discussion about spatial representations see Glasgow and Papadias, 1992). As an example of the use of spatial knowledge representations in everyday life, consider subway maps (e.g., the London Underground map). These maps do not display the shapes and sizes of the stations or quantitative distances between the stations, but they usually contain only line and point data and preserve spatial relations such as *north* (one station is north of another station) and *intersects* (one line intersects another line).

In particular, the paper concentrates on *qualitative spatial representations*. Qualitative knowledge representation does not require an intermediate domain in which scale is defined, but comparisons are performed directly in the represented domain; in the domain of spatial knowledge, object locations are compared through *spatial relations* (Freksa, 1992). Spatial relations have been classified (Pullar and Egenhofer, 1988) in several types, including *direction relations* that describe order in space (e.g., *north,*

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*north_east*), *topological relations* that describe neighbourhood and incidence (e.g., *inside, overlap*), *ordinal relations* that describe inclusion (ordinal relations are a subset of topological relations), and distance relations (e.g., *near, far*). The previous types of spatial relations have been studied independently or in association with each other. Egenhofer and Herring (1990), for instance, provide a mathematical framework for the definition of topological relations, while Papadias and Sellis (1993) define direction relations using representative points. Kainz et al., (1993) model ordinal relations using partially ordered sets and Frank (1992) proposes a method for qualitative reasoning that combines direction with distance relations.

There are several reasons for following a qualitative approach to spatial knowledge representation:

- the precision of quantitative representations is not always desirable
- the input and the output of spatial processes is often qualitative rather than quantitative
- qualitative knowledge is usually cheaper.

In Computer Vision research, semantic networks and graph representations have been used to represent spatial relations among image components. Levine (1978) developed a semantic network where the nodes denote objects and the arcs encode spatial relations such as *left*, *above*, or *behind*. In Artificial Intelligence several representational formalisms, usually based on logic (e.g., Randell et al., 1992), have been developed to represent and reason with spatial relations. The qualitative representation and processing of spatial knowledge has been proposed for Image Databases and Geographic Information Systems (Sistla et al., 1994), (Papadias and Sellis, 1992). Other possible applications include Route Planning (Holmes and Jungert, 1992), Image Similarity Retrieval (Lee et al., 1992) and Spatial Pattern Matching (Glasgow et al., 1992), matching that depends on the spatial relations among distinct objects, and not on geometric properties.

We will use the term *relation-based representations* for qualitative representational systems that deal with spatial relations, but exclude object characteristics or quantitative metric information. In this paper we look at existing work on qualitative spatial knowledge representation and we describe symbolic spatial indexes, a new relation-based representation. Section 2 outlines several systems concerned with the representation of spatial relations and links the various approaches under one framework of study. Section 3 introduces symbolic spatial indexes and Section 4 describes how they can be used to capture direction relations in different levels of resolution. Section 5 enhances the expressive power of symbolic spatial indexes by incorporating topological relations. Section 6 is concerned with qualitative information processing using symbolic spatial indexes and Section 7 concludes with comments and a discussion about future work.

## 2. An Overview of Qualitative Spatial Knowledge Representation

Several relation-based systems have been proposed for the representation of spatial relations in various scientific areas. Depending on the particular viewpoint, the goals have been:

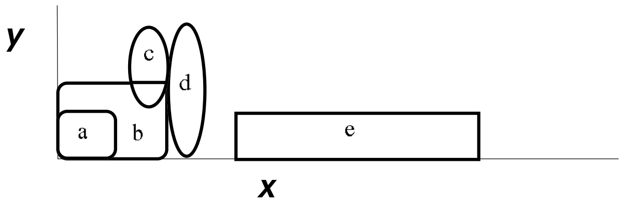
- explanatory and predictive power, in the case of computational models of Vision and Imagery
- expressive power and inferential adequacy, in the case of Artificial Intelligence representation schemes
- efficient manipulation of large amounts of geographic and geometric data, in the case of Spatial Databases.

In the following section we identify the concepts underlying qualitative spatial knowledge representation, we survey previous relation-based systems and we link the different perspectives under one framework.

### 2.1 Properties of Relation-Based Representations

The image representations that we assume are 2D projections of 3D objects as, for example, the image of Figure 1. Each object in the image occupies a set of pixels and has an interior, a boundary and a complement with respect to the embedding space. Furthermore, we assume a pair of viewer-independent orthogonal axes *x* and *y*.

**Figure 1. Original image**

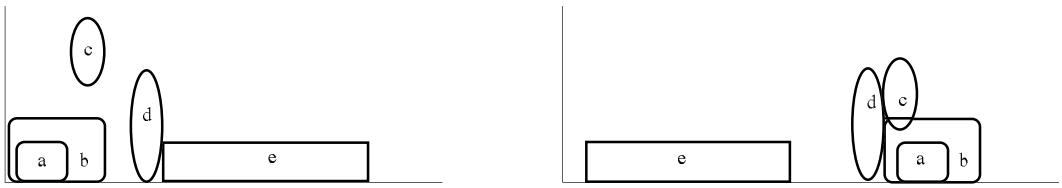



The image conveys information about the objects' characteristics (such as shape, size and colour) as well as spatial knowledge about the location of objects in space. Relation-based representations of the image discard object characteristics and irrelevant spatial relations and preserve only a set of spatial relations which is called the modelling space M. Buisson (1989) argues that the spaces of interest in spatial reasoning are *topological spaces* which include only concepts of connectedness and continuity, *vector spaces* which deal with vectorial dimensions and directions, *metric spaces* which deal with the concept of distance and *Euclidean spaces* which admit notions of scalar products, orthogonality, angle and norm. In this paper we will deal with the relation-based representation of modelling spaces consisting of binary direction and topological relations among rigid objects.

Let $S^M$ be the relation-based representation which preserves the spatial relations of M that exist in an image s. Each spatial relation $r \in M$ between two object representations p and q in s is mapped onto a relation R between two symbolic object representations P and Q in $S^M$. In the rest of the paper we will use small letters to denote objects in the original images and capital letters to denote symbolic object representations in relation-based structures. We will adopt the notation $s \Vdash^M r(p, q)$ to denote that image s implies the spatial relation r ($r \in M$) between objects p and q. Two images s and t are said to be *equivalent with respect to a modelling space M* ($s \equiv^M t$) iff they imply the same subset of M for every pair of objects, that is : $s \Vdash^M r(p, q) \Leftrightarrow t \Vdash^M r(p, q)$. The image in Figure 2a is equivalent to the image of Figure 1 with respect to direction relations in 2D space, such as *north, east* etc., while the image in Figure 2b is equivalent to the image of Figure 1 with respect to topological relations such as *meet, disjoint, overlap*. Image equivalence depends on the resolution of the assumed modelling space (see section 4). Depending on their definitions, direction and topological relations may be related; topological properties, for instance, may be inferred from direction relations.

**Figure 2. Images equivalent to the original image**

**a. With respect to direction relations** **b. With respect to topological relations**




According to Hernàndez (1993), the relation-based representation of spatial knowledge (Hernàndez uses the term *relative representation based on comparative relations*) avoids the falsifying effects of exact geometric representations by not committing to all aspects of the situation being presented; in this sense a relation-based representation is underdetermined since it may correspond to many situations. Using our terminology we can say that each relation-based representation does not correspond to a single image, but to a class of equivalent images with respect to a modelling space, that is, relation-based representation systems are *ambiguous*[1]. This feature is of great importance in cases such as scene matching where equivalent scenes should have the same representations. If we do not use relation-based representations, then for determining equivalence[2] between two visual scenes we would have to search for a transformation chain that would transform one scene into the other. The combinatorial search for transformation chains connecting the two scenes can be avoided by computing the corresponding relation-based representations and comparing them for identity. Notice that in order to have this feature, the representation system must be *unique*; only one output relation-based representation should be generated from an input image representation. In this case we have:

$s \equiv^M t \Leftrightarrow S^M = T^M$.

We do not claim that relation-based representation systems are adequate for all applications involving spatial knowledge. For instance, they can not be used in problems that involve visualisation or quantitative reasoning. Nevertheless, there exist several potential application domains where relation-based representations could be used independently (e.g., qualitative reasoning) or in conjunction with other representation systems (e.g., Spatial Databases). In the rest of this section we will describe various representational systems which have been developed for different computational tasks and we will provide a framework to facilitate the study of qualitative spatial knowledge representation.

## 2.2 Previous Relation-Based Systems

Most of the work in Artificial Intelligence concerned with qualitative spatial reasoning has focused on *logic-based representations*. Such representational systems permit the description of real-world knowledge into predicates and rules of inference. Randell et al. (1992) developed a theory for topological reasoning in 2D space expressed in a many-sorted logic. Sistla et al. (1994) proposed a set of rules for inference of direction and ordinal relations in 3D images and proved soundness and completeness. A variety of approaches to qualitative

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[1]An extensive discussion about *ambiguity* and *uniqueness* of representations for rigid objects can be found in (Requicha, 1980).

[2]In order to determine equivalence between two images, or spatial entities in general, we assume that there is a pre-defined modelling space of binary relations which are the only relations of interest between any pair of objects.

spatial reasoning has been based on Allen's (1983) temporal reasoning approach; extensions of Allen's interval algebra to higher-dimension spaces can be found in (Güsgen, 1989) and (Mukerjee and Joe, 1990). Related research has been carried out in the area of *spatial constraint networks*. A spatial constraint network is a graph-based description of a scene, where the nodes represent objects and the arcs correspond to disjunctions of possible spatial relations between them. Inserting a new relation between two objects in the network affects not only the two objects, but the insertion might yield additional constraints between other objects (*constraint propagation*). Studies of constraint propagation and consistency checking in networks of topological relations can be found in (Smith and Park, 1992) and (Egenhofer and Sharma, 1993). Hernàndez, (1993) studied constraint networks of direction and topological relations.

Egenhofer and Herring (1990) have developed a system which deals with a modelling space consisting of the binary topological relations *disjoint, meet, equal, overlap, contains* (and the converse relation *inside*) and *covers* (and the converse *covered_by*). In their notation, each object P is represented in 2D space as a point set which has an interior ($P^O$) and a boundary ($\partial P$). The topological relation between any two objects (point sets) P and Q is described by the four intersections of P's boundary and interior with the boundary and the interior of Q. Egenhofer (1991) extended the system by introducing the 9-intersection matrices which also include objects' exteriors. The matrix *In,* illustrated in Figure 3, represents the four intersections between the two point sets P and Q. For instance, if the intersection of the boundaries of P and Q is non-empty, the element *In(1,1)* is $\sim\varnothing$, otherwise it is $\varnothing$. The following four matrices of Figure 3 show how the formalism represents spatial knowledge about Figure 1. The information preserved in the matrices is that a *covered_by* b, b *overlaps* c, b *meets* d, b *disjoint* e. Notice that all equivalent images with respect to the assumed modelling space (such as the images in Figures 1 and 2b) generate the same set of matrices. The formalism uses an inference mechanism to infer the spatial relation between two objects when their spatial relation with a third object is known (the *composition relation*). From a *covered_by* b and b *disjoint* e, it can be inferred that a *disjoint* e (if multiple relations can be inferred, a disjunction of the possible relations is generated).

**Figure 3. Intersection matrices**

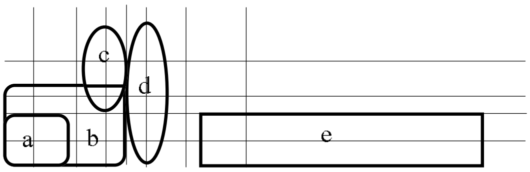
$$In = \begin{vmatrix} \partial P \cap \partial Q & \partial P \cap Q^O \\ P^O \cap \partial Q & P^O \cap Q^O \end{vmatrix}$$

$$I(A,B)=\begin{vmatrix} \sim\varnothing & \sim\varnothing \\ \varnothing & \sim\varnothing \end{vmatrix} \quad I(B,C)=\begin{vmatrix} \sim\varnothing & \sim\varnothing \\ \sim\varnothing & \sim\varnothing \end{vmatrix} \quad I(B,D)=\begin{vmatrix} \sim\varnothing & \varnothing \\ \varnothing & \varnothing \end{vmatrix} \quad I(B,E)=\begin{vmatrix} \varnothing & \varnothing \\ \varnothing & \varnothing \end{vmatrix}$$

Chang et al. (1987) developed the two-dimensional string (*2D string*) representation for encoding *symbolic images*, images where distinct objects are denoted by different symbols. A 2D string is a pair of one dimensional strings (u, v) where u represents the symbolic projections of the objects on the x axis, and v represents the projections on the y axis. The modelling space for 2D strings includes direction relations in 2D space. Although topological relations are not explicitly represented, topological information can sometimes be extracted from 2D strings. Several variations, such as the *2D-H strings* and the *2D-G strings* (Chang et al., 1989), have been introduced to extend the expressive power of the original 2D strings. Figure 4 illustrates the construction of a 2D-G string through a *cutting function* that detects and records differences in object projections on the x and y axes. Figure 4a illustrates the instances where the construction process has detected a change in object projections. On the x axes, for example, there are projections of objects a and b in the beginning; after the end of object a there is only object b, then starts object c and so on. Figure 4b contains the strings u and v that represent the order of object projections (*es* denotes empty space).

**Figure 4. The construction of a 2D-G string**

**a. Detection of differences in object projections**




**b. Corresponding 2D-G string**

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u: AB | B | BC | BCD | D | es | E
v: ABDE | ABCDE | BCD | CD
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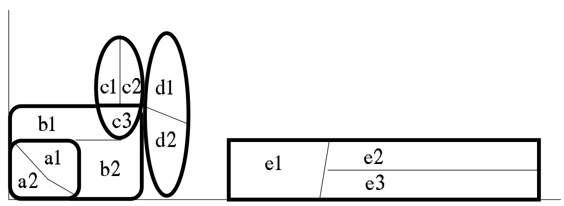
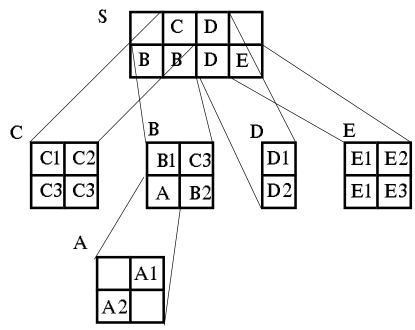
A hierarchical variation of symbolic images, called *symbolic arrays*, was used as the spatial working memory representation in the knowledge representation scheme for Computational Imagery (Papadias and Glasgow, 1991). Each array represents spatial relations (symbolic arrays have been used primarily for direction relations) among the distinct parts of a complex spatial entity. A part may be decomposed in an array of simpler parts at the immediately lower level (aggregation hierarchies). For instance, if we assume that the regions of Figure 1 consist of sub-regions, as illustrated in Figure 5a, then we can use the array structure of Figure 5b to represent the ordinal relations between regions and sub-regions and the direction relations between the sub-regions of each region such as the fact that A is *in* region B, while it is *south* of sub-region B1. Direction relations between parts that exist in different regions (e.g., the relation *west* between A1 and E1) are not explicitly represented but they can sometimes be retrieved using appropriate inference mechanisms (Papadias et al., 1994a). Symbolic arrays were implemented in a functional language, called NIAL, based on a formal theory of nested arrays. Several functions which operate on symbolic arrays have been developed. These functions can be used to create symbolic arrays from other representations that store spatial knowledge (such as a frame database of complex objects), to modify symbolic arrays (e.g., rotate an array or move an object within an array) or to extract information found in the array (Glasgow and Papadias, 1992).

**Figure 5. Symbolic array example**

**a. Sub-regions of the original objects**




**b. Corresponding symbolic array**




Depending on the modelling space which is to be preserved for a specific application domain, several of the previous systems could be used. Although the different systems can represent the same information about a given domain (they can be made *informationally equivalent* [3]), they are not *computationally equivalent* since the efficiency of the retrieval mechanisms is not the same. Identical tasks may involve different algorithmic solutions and consequently have different complexities in distinct representational systems. Consider the goal of finding the objects that exist *west* of a given object.

1. In a representation system based on first order logic this goal involves considering stored predicates plus recursive calls to rules of the form: $west(P, Q) \wedge west(Q, R) \Rightarrow west(P, R)$.
2. In a 2D string representational system the processing goal becomes a problem of string subsequence matching. In a symbolic array the problem becomes one of searching array elements.

Furthermore, there is a basic difference between the inference mechanisms involved in logic and in the other spatial representation schemes. Inference in logic involves a proof procedure (e.g., resolution) built into the concept of logic. However there can be spatial knowledge representation systems which make inferences without the use of explicit rules of deduction but simply by a constraint satisfaction mechanism built into the processes that construct and access them. Lindsay (1988) used the following example: consider a simple case consisting of a discrete grid, each cell of which could be occupied by a single object labelled by a name. Now consider the case where object b is one grid point to the *right* of a, c is directly *above* b, and d is one grid point to the *left* of c. From this information we may conclude that d is directly *above* a. This inference could be supported by a logic-based system with appropriate rules of deduction; such a system would be *deductive*. Alternatively, this inference could be supported by a system of construction and retrieval processes that placed object names on the described grid and read off relations by scanning the grid; such a system would be *non-deductive*. The non-deductive system requires no separate computational inference-making stage; the operation of the construction process entails the making of inferences and is similar to the well known techniques of query modification and materialisation of views in relational database management systems (Ullman, 1988).

## 2.3 Discussion About Qualitative Spatial Knowledge Representation

The representational systems of the previous subsection are relation-based because they use spatial relations among symbolically represented objects rather than absolute coordinates. We can increase the amount of spatial knowledge that we can represent by increasing the size and the complexity of the representations. In any case the preserved spatial knowledge will be a subset of the knowledge found in the initial image (as, for example, the one in Figure 1) in the sense that spatial relations can also be retrieved from the image using appropriate retrieval processes that operate on pixels. What we gain by using relation-based representations is a reduction of storage size and an increase of computational efficiency in spatial knowledge retrieval since irrelevant information is discarded. The extraction of spatial relations from relation-based structures involves symbolic, and not numerical, computation and avoids the usual problems of geometric representations such as finite resolution and geometric consistency (although some of these problems may arise during the construction of relation-based structures from input images).

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[3] A discussion about *informational* and *computational equivalence* of spatial representations can be found in (Larkin and Simon, 1987).

Let M be the modelling space, **s** the set of input image representations and **S** the set of the relation-based representation structures; then a spatial relation-based representation system can be defined as a function: (**s**,M) $\rightarrow$ **S**. In procedural terms, the function which maps an input image representation s (s $\in$ **s**) to an output relation-based structure $S^M$ ($S^M \in$ **S**) which preserves the spatial relations of M, is achieved through a *construction process* that :

1. scans the input image, detecting the relation r (r $\in$ M) between each pair of pixel object representations p and q,
2. maps r onto a relation R between the corresponding symbolic object representations in the output relation-based structure.

The construction process can be defined procedurally as:

```
Construction Process (s,M)
create S^M
for each object p in s do
 for each object q in s do
   for each relation r (r ∈ M)do
     if s ╟^M r(p, q) then incorporate R(P,Q) in S^M
   endfor
 endfor
endfor
return (S^M)
```

In the case of logic-based representations the previous construction process would add a predicate of the form R(P,Q) in the list of predicates representing the image s when the spatial relation r between objects p and q is detected in s. For Egenhofer's system the construction process will add an intersection matrix representing the topological relation between P and Q. In the cases of 2D strings and symbolic arrays though, information is not just added but the position of the new item of information in the output representation is determined by a constraint satisfaction mechanism built into the construction process. Thus, according to Lindsay's (1988) definitions, 2D strings and symbolic arrays are non-deductive representations while logic-based representations and intersection matrices are deductive.

The systems of subsection 2.2 follow different approaches to the specification of construction processes. Chang et al. (1989) have used *symbolic projections* to generate 2D strings from raster input images. In Figure 4 we illustrated a projection-based method, called the cutting function, which creates 2D-G string representations from 2D input images. For symbolic arrays the construction process is domain dependent; in Molecular Scene Analysis applications (Glasgow et al., 1992), a construction process creates symbolic arrays representing proteins from crystallographic data. On the other hand, logic-based systems do not usually include a construction process as a part of the system but they take an initial set of relation predicates describing aspects of an image as given and perform some reasoning task (e.g., find the deductive closure of the relations in the system). The meaning of spatial predicates is encoded in the set of axioms that constitute the theory of logic-based systems.

We assume that the construction process has the ability to detect all the binary relations of the modelling space between distinct objects in the input image and map them onto relations among symbolic object representations independently of the implementation. We will use the notation $S^M \vdash R(P, Q)$ to denote that the relation R between object representations P and Q is retrieved through the representation $S^M$. A relation-based representation is *complete* iff whenever a relation r ($r \in M$) between object representations p and q holds in an image s, then the corresponding relation R between P and Q can be retrieved through $S^M$, that is, $s \Vdash^M r(p, q) \Rightarrow S^M \vdash R(P, Q)$. According to the previous definition, the representational systems of subsection 2.2, except for symbolic arrays, are complete, because no information is lost due to the structure of the relation-based representations.

Hierarchical spatial representations, such as symbolic arrays, are in general non-complete since we may loose information about the relations of the assumed modelling space. For instance, using the symbolic arrays of Figure 5b we cannot answer whether *A is east of C* or *A is west of C*. The hierarchical representation of space reduces storage requirements in applications where spatial knowledge is organised in hierarchies that correlate in certain ways. On the other hand, it results in information loss regarding the relations between objects that exist in different arrays although some of these relations can be retrieved. An extensive discussion about efficiency and information loss in geographic applications of symbolic arrays can be found in (Papadias et al., 1994a).

In addition to the representational properties of the system, the processing tasks also determine the choice of the representation system when various options are available. Graph-based representations have been used in pattern matching because graph matching is an area which has been extensively studied and several efficient algorithms have been developed. Logic-based representations are used in qualitative spatial reasoning because they provide a natural and flexible way to represent spatial knowledge, usually well understood semantics and inference rules in terms of which proof procedures can be defined. The ordered structure of information and the compactness of non-deductive representations, such as 2D string and symbolic arrays, facilitates the retrieval of spatial relations in applications involving large image databases and GIS. In the rest of the paper we apply the concepts presented in this section for the development of another relation-based representation, called symbolic spatial index.

# 3. Symbolic Spatial Indexes

Symbolic spatial indexes were motivated by previous work on symbolic images and arrays. Consider, for example, the symbolic image in Figure 6. Although it is obvious that the symbolic image preserves some spatial relations about the image of Figure 1, several questions arise regarding the symbolic image, such as:

- Which spatial relations are preserved?
- Why this and not another symbolic image was generated from the input image?
- How can we incorporate more detailed direction and topological information in the symbolic image?
- How can we use symbolic images to infer information not explicitly stored (e.g., image overlay)?

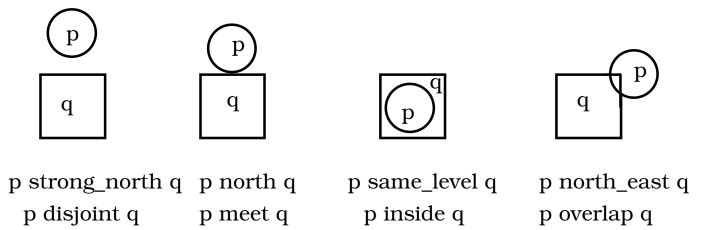
**Figure 6. A symbolic image**

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | C | D | | |
| B | B | D | | E |
| A | B | D | | E |

Symbolic spatial indexes were developed as an attempt to answer the above questions. In the rest of the paper we will discuss the representational properties of symbolic spatial indexes and we will show how they relate to the systems of the previous section. In addition, we will demonstrate construction processes that can be used to construct indexes from input image representations, we will describe alternative ways to represent direction and topological information at different levels of resolution and we will show how spatial indexes can be used in qualitative spatial information processing.

In order to generate a spatial index array from an input image, we assume a construction process that detects a set of special points in the image, called *representative points*. Every spatial relation in the modelling space can be defined using only the representative points. There are two kinds of representative points in the context of this paper; *direction representative points* which are used for the definition of direction relations and *topological (intersection) representative points* which are used for the definition of topological relations. Figure 7 illustrates several spatial relations whose formal definitions using representative points will be given later in the paper. The first line denotes the direction relation between objects p and q while the second line denotes the topological relation between the two objects.

**Figure 7. Some direction and topological relations**




Similar to symbolic images, spatial indexes are arrays of cells that store symbolic object representations. The construction of a symbolic spatial index from an input image can be thought of *as a transformation that keeps only the representative points needed for the definition of the relations of the modelling space* and discards all the other points of the image. By filling the array cells with representative points we maintain adequate expressive power to answer queries regarding the spatial relations of the modelling space without the need to access the initial image or an object database.

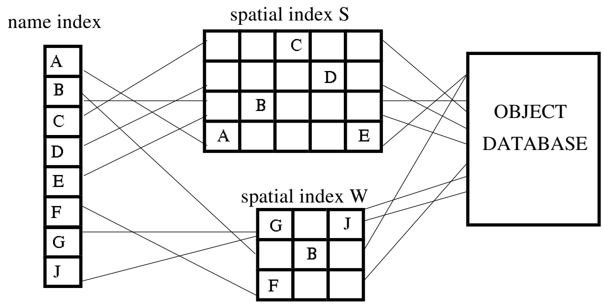
We use subscripts to denote the individual cells; $S_{ij}$ denotes the cell at row i and column j. $S_{ij}$ and $S_{kl}$ refer to the same cell iff i=k and j=l and $S_{11}$ is the lower left cell of the array. Each cell of an index can be empty or it can be occupied by one (or more) symbol(s) denoting one (or more) representative point(s). We will start with indexes which represent each object using one representative point and we will gradually increase the number of points (symbols) per object. Direction representative points are indicated by a capital letter corresponding to the object to which the point belongs, and a subscript that corresponds to the points function[4]. For example, $P_c$ denotes the center of object p. PQ denotes a topological representative point that belongs to the intersection of objects p and q. The predicate S(*sym, i, j*) denotes that the cell $S_{ij}$ contains the symbol *sym*; S($P_c$,i,j) denotes that $S_{ij}$ contains $P_c$, while S(PQ,i,j) denotes that $S_{ij}$ contains the symbol PQ.

Where conventional indexes are used in database systems to facilitate information retrieval with respect to some attribute values, symbolic spatial indexes can be used to facilitate retrieval with respect to relations in space. Consider a database of cities where we would like to answer questions involving the relative positions of cities. In a spatial index-based implementation each index corresponds to one map (see Figure 8) and each city

[4]The subscripts are not necessary for the definition of spatial relations and sometimes we omit them in the illustrations.

symbol exists in all the indexes that represent maps in which the city participates. With this scheme we can efficiently retrieve the cities that satisfy spatial conditions in one or more maps.

**Figure 8. A possible implementation of symbolic spatial indexes**




Consider, for example, the query "is there a city with population more than 1 million *north_east* of city B in map S". Using the name index we locate city symbol B in the spatial index S and then we select the symbols denoting cities *north_east* of B (cities C and D). Using the pointers from these symbols to the object database we retrieve the additional information concerning the query (population of the cities). Furthermore, we can answer more complicated queries such as "retrieve all cities that in map S exist *north_east* of some city that is *south_east* of city G in map W". Details about how we can express such queries in symbolic spatial indexes will be given in Section 6. In the next two sections we will demonstrate how the construction process detects representative points and generates symbolic spatial indexes that preserve the spatial relations of the modelling space.

## 4. Representation of Direction Relations in Spatial Indexes

For the representation system of this section we assume that the modelling spaces consist of direction relations such as *north, east, north_east, same_level* etc. Notice that the meaning of these relations is not obvious. Most people will agree that England is *north* of Portugal, but what about the relation between Spain and Portugal? There are parts of Spain that are directly north of parts of Portugal, but is it enough for stating that Spain is *north* of Portugal?[5] These concepts are directly applicable to Geographic Applications where the formalization of spatial relations is crucial for user interfaces and query optimisation strategies. In addition, the importance of direction relations has been pointed out by several researchers in areas including Spatial Data Structures (Peuquet, 1986), Spatial Reasoning (Dutta, 1989), Cognitive Science (Jackendoff, 1983) and Linguistics (Herskovits, 1986). In the rest of the section we will specify the meaning of the direction relations using representative points and we will show how we can map direction relations onto relations among representative points stored in symbolic spatial indexes. We will use two sets of definitions for direction relations: the first one defines the direction relation between two objects by using one representative point per object while the second set of definitions uses two representative points per object.

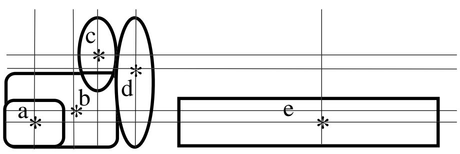
[5]A survey and an experimental study regarding the use of direction relations in cognitive spatial reasoning at geographic scales can be found in (Mark, 1992).

## 4.1 Representation of Direction Relations Using One Point per Object

Most of the work on direction relations has concentrated on point objects. According to this approach, each object is abstracted as one point, which may be the center of mass, the center of symmetry etc. As an example consider *cartographic generalisation* and *geometric abstraction* (Bruegger and Muller, 1992). At some high level of resolution (state level) cities are represented as regions, while at a lower level (country or continent level) cities are denoted by points. The symbol * in Figure 9a denotes the centers of the objects in the initial image and the projection lines correspond to the instances at which the construction process has detected a representative point (a center). All the rows and columns that do not contain a representative point are deleted from the input image and the result is moved to the spatial index $S^{M_{D1}}$ (Figure 9b). Using this construction process, the order of the representative points on the x and y axes is preserved in the output index but metric and topological information is lost.

**Figure 9. Generation of symbolic spatial index $S^{M_{D1}}$**

**a. Detection of representative points**




**b. Symbolic spatial index $S^{M_{D1}}$**

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | $C_c$ | | |
| | | | $D_c$ | |
| | $B_c$ | | | |
| $A_c$ | | | | $E_c$ |

$M_{D1}$ denotes the set of *primitive* direction relations for point objects that we can define using the previous construction process. Primitive relations have the following properties:

– they are mutually exclusive

– they provide a complete coverage

– they correspond to the highest resolution given a set of representative points.

A discussion about primitive direction relations can be found in subsection 4.3. We define the mapping function that maps direction relations among objects in the initial image to relations among the object centers in $S^{M_{D1}}$ as follows:

p north_west q $\equiv$ $\exists$ i,j,κ,l $[S(P,i,j) \wedge S(Q,k,l) \wedge i>k \wedge j<l]$

p restricted_north q $\equiv$ $\exists$ i,j,κ,l $[S(P,i,j) \wedge S(Q,k,l) \wedge i>k \wedge j=l]$

p north_east q $\equiv$ $\exists$ i,j,κ,l $[S(P,i,j) \wedge S(Q,k,l) \wedge i>k \wedge j>l]$

p restricted_west q $\equiv$ $\exists$ i,j,κ,l $[S(P,i,j) \wedge S(Q,k,l) \wedge i=k \wedge j<l]$

p same_position q $\equiv$ $\exists$ i,j,κ,l $[S(P,i,j) \wedge S(Q,k,l) \wedge i=k \wedge j=l]$

p restricted_east q $\equiv$ $\exists$ i,j,κ,l $[S(P,i,j) \wedge S(Q,k,l) \wedge i=k \wedge j>l]$

p south_west q $\equiv$ $\exists$ i,j,κ,l $[S(P,i,j) \wedge S(Q,k,l) \wedge i<k \wedge j<l]$

p restricted_south q $\equiv$ $\exists$ i,j,κ,l $[S(P,i,j) \wedge S(Q,k,l) \wedge i<k \wedge j=l]$

p south_east q $\equiv$ $\exists$ i,j,k,l $[S(P,i,j) \wedge S(Q,k,l) \wedge i<k \wedge j>l]$

Exactly one of the previous relations holds true between any pair of point objects. The primitive relations are transitive and *same_position* is also symmetric. The rest form four pairs of converse relations (e.g., p *north_east* q $\Leftrightarrow$ q *south_west* p). Additional direction relations can be defined using disjunctions of the primitive relations. For instance, we can define the relation: *p same_level q* ≡ *p restricted_east q* ∨ *p restricted_west q* ∨ *p same_position q.*

Similar to symbolic arrays, spatial indexes that preserve direction relations can capture aggregation hierarchies. In contrast to symbolic arrays where the concept of inclusion is embedded in the implementation language, symbolic spatial indexes can represent ordinal relations by permitting objects that appear as parts of regions in an index to be names of other indexes. For instance, the arrays of Figure 10 could be used to represent the direction and inclusion relations of Figure 5a. In such applications spatial indexes, in addition to direction relations, preserve the relation *in*: p in q ≡ ∃ i,j Q(P,i,j) and its converse relation *contains*: p contains q ≡ q in p. Object p is *in* q, if symbol P exists in the array Q representing object q.

**Figure 10. Representation of ordinal relations**

S

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | C | | |
| | | | D | |
| | B | | | |
| A | | | | E |

A

| | |
|---|---|
| | A2 |
| A1 | |

B

| | |
|---|---|
| B1 | |
| | B2 |

C

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| C1 | | C2 |
| | C3 | |

D

| |
|---|
| D1 |
| D2 |

E

| | |
|---|---|
| | E2 |
| E1 | |
| | E3 |

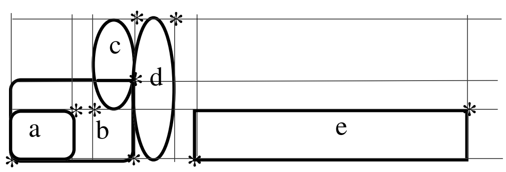
The advantage in defining spatial relations using representative points stored in arrays is that information retrieval reduces to straightforward procedures that search parts of the arrays for representative points. Modelling space $M_{D1}$ is adequate for point abstractions of objects but consider that we want the ability to answer queries of the form "are there parts of c which are *restricted_south* of some parts of b?". The "centers approach" is not sufficient for such queries and we need abstractions that preserve two or more representative points for each object.

## 4.2 Representation of Direction Relations Using Two Points per Object

Depending on the application domain there are several options for choosing multiple points for the definition of direction relations. In this subsection we describe a second set of definitions which uses the lower left point ($P_f$) and the upper right point ($P_s$) of the minimum bounding rectangle that covers p. Figure 11a contains the *edge points* of the bounding rectangles and Figure 11b illustrates the corresponding spatial index $S^{M_{D2}}$.

**Figure 11. Generation of symbolic spatial index $S^{M_{D2}}$**

**a. Detection of representative points**




**b. Symbolic spatial index $S^{M_{D2}}$**

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | $C_s$ | $D_s$ | | |
| | | | $B_s$ | | | |
| | $A_s$ | $C_f$ | | | | $E_s$ |
| $B_f$ ,$A_f$ | | | $D_f$ | | $E_f$ | |

Although the image of Figure 2a will generate the spatial index of image 9b using the centers as representative points, it will not generate the index of Figure 11b using two representative points per object. It can been seen that *image equivalence depends on the choice of representative points*. When we use two points instead of one we can represent more detailed spatial knowledge. For instance, we can define several refinements of the *north* relation:

p strong_north q ≡ ∀ i,j,k,l [(S(P,i,j) ∧ S(Q,k,l))⇒ i>k] p strong_bounded_north q $\equiv$ $\forall$ i,j $\forall$ k,l [(S(P,i,j)$\wedge$S(Q,k,l)) $\Rightarrow$ i>k] $\wedge$ $\forall$ i,j [S(P,i,j) $\Rightarrow$ $\exists$ k,l (S(Q,k,l) $\wedge$ j>l)] $\wedge$ $\forall$ i,j [S(P,i,j) $\Rightarrow$ $\exists$ k,l (S(Q,k,l) $\wedge$ j<l)]

p strong_northeast q $\equiv$ $\forall$ i,j $\forall$ k,l [(S(P,i,j)$\wedge$S(Q,k,l)) $\Rightarrow$ i>k $\wedge$ j>l]

p just_north q $\equiv$ $\forall$ k,l [S(Q,k,l) $\Rightarrow$ $\exists$ i,j (S(P,i,j) $\wedge$ i>k)] $\wedge$ $\forall$ i,j [S(P,i,j) $\Rightarrow$ $\exists$ k,l (S(Q,k,l) $\wedge$ i>k)] $\wedge$ $\exists$ i,j $\exists$ k,l [S(P,i,j)$\wedge$S(Q,k,l) $\wedge$ i=k]

p weak_north q $\equiv$ $\forall$ k,l [S(Q,k,l) $\Rightarrow$ $\exists$ i,j (S(P,i,j) $\wedge$ i>k)] $\wedge$ $\forall$ i,j [S(P,i,j) $\Rightarrow$ $\exists$ k,l (S(Q,k,l) $\wedge$ i>k)] $\wedge$ $\exists$ i,j $\exists$ k,l [S(P,i,j)$\wedge$S(Q,k,l) $\wedge$ i<k]

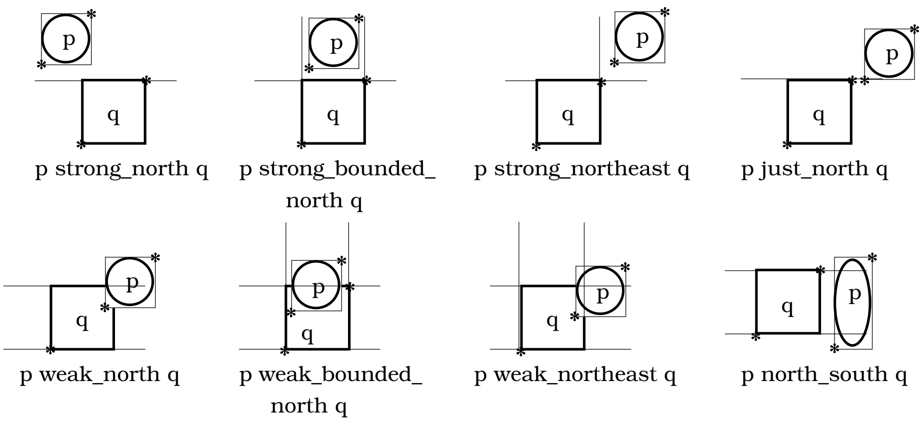
p weak_bounded_north q $\equiv$ $\forall$ k,l [S(Q,k,l) $\Rightarrow$ $\exists$ i,j (S(P,i,j) $\wedge$ i>k)] $\wedge$ $\forall$ i,j [S(P,i,j) $\Rightarrow$ $\exists$ k,l (S(Q,k,l) $\wedge$ i>k)] $\wedge$ $\forall$ i,j [S(P,i,j) $\Rightarrow$ $\exists$ k,l (S(Q,k,l) $\wedge$ j>l)] $\wedge$ $\forall$ i,j [S(P,i,j) $\Rightarrow$ $\exists$ k,l (S(Q,k,l) $\wedge$ j<l)] $\wedge$ $\exists$ i,j $\exists$ k,l [S(P,i,j) $\wedge$ S(Q,k,l) $\wedge$ i<k]

p weak_ northeast q $\equiv$ $\forall$ k,l [S(Q,k,l) $\Rightarrow$ $\exists$ i,j (S(P,i,j) $\wedge$ i>k $\wedge$ j>l)] $\wedge$ $\forall$ i,j [S(P,i,j) $\Rightarrow$ $\exists$ k,l (S(Q,k,l) $\wedge$ i>k$\wedge$ j>l)] $\wedge$ $\exists$ i,j $\exists$ k,l [(S(P,i,j) $\wedge$ S(Q,k,l) $\wedge$ i<k]

p north_south q $\equiv$ $\forall$ k,l [S(Q,k,l) $\Rightarrow$ $\exists$ i,j (S(P,i,j) $\wedge$ i>k)] $\wedge$ $\forall$ k,l [S(Q,k,l) $\Rightarrow$ $\exists$ i,j (S(P,i,j) $\wedge$ i<k)]

These relations are illustrated in Figure 12 while an implementation using R-trees can be found in (Papadias et al., 1994b). According to the previous definitions Spain is *north_south* of Portugal while England is *strong_north* of Portugal. Similar refinements may be necessary for many applications and cannot be achieved if we use one point per object. Notice that the previous relations do not provide a complete coverage and they are not necessarily mutually exclusive (a discussion about the primitive relations of $M_{D2}$ can be found in the following subsection). Although few out of the possible primitive relations of $M_{D2}$ are given specific names they are preserved in $S^{M_{D2}}$ and they can be retrieved using a proper query language.

**Figure 12. Refinements of the north relation**




By projecting the contents of a symbolic spatial index on the x and y axes we can generate pairs of 1-D encodings. Figure 13a illustrates the strings $x_s$ and $y_s$ representing array $S^{M_{D2}}$; $x_s$ contains the symbolic projections on the x axis and $y_s$ on the y axis. If we remove the subscripts from the object symbols and eliminate the identical substrings we will generate the strings of Figure 13b. Although these strings resemble the 2D-G string of Figure 4b, they are not identical due to the differences of the construction process that creates the symbolic spatial index and the cutting function that creates the 2D-G strings. The correspondence of spatial indexes and 2D strings depends on the choice of the representative points.

**Figure 13. One dimensional encodings of $S^{M_{D2}}$**

| **a. Strings representing $S^{M_{D2}}$** | **b. Elimination of subscripts** |
|---|---|
| $x_s$: $A_fB_f \mid A_s \mid C_f \mid B_sC_sD_f \mid D_s \mid E_f \mid E_s$ | AB \| A \| C \| BCD \| D \| E |
| $y_s$: $A_fB_fD_fE_f \mid A_sC_fE_s \mid B_s \mid C_sD_s$ | ABDE \| ACE \| B \| CD |

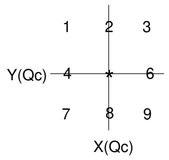
If m is the number of objects and k is the number of points per object then the maximum size of the index array is $(km)^2$, when there is exactly one symbol in each row and each column. On the other hand, the size of each of the 1D encodings that can be used to represent the array is *km*; thus 1D representations are more efficient for information storage. Chang and his colleagues (1987) developed algorithms for the generation of 2D strings from symbolic images and for the reconstruction of images from their 2D string representations. Similar algorithms can be applied to produce one dimensional encodings of symbolic spatial indexes and vice-versa.

### 4.3 Discussion About the Representation of Direction Relations Using Representative Points

The term *primary object* denotes the object to be located and the term *reference object* refers to the object in relation to which the primary object is located. When one point is used for the representation of the reference object the plane is divided into nine partitions. The symbol * in Figure 14a denotes the representative point of the reference object, and X and Y are functions that return the *x* and y coordinates of a point. The numbers correspond to the possible positions of the representative point of the primary object with respect to the reference object; i.e., the primitive relations of $M_{D1}$ (Figure 14b). Figure 14c illustrates how direction relations among points on the plane are mapped onto relations among point symbols in a symbolic spatial index. The symbol $Q_c$ in Figure 14c denotes the reference point symbol and the numbers refer to the direction relation depending on the position of the primary point symbol in the index array. The relation between two point symbols does not change if we add or remove from the index array lines and columns that do not contain the point symbols.

**Figure 14. Direction relations using one point per object**

**a. Plane partitions**




**b. Primitive relations**

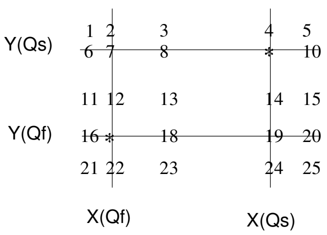
1: north_west
2: restricted_north
3: north_east
4: restricted_west
5,*: same_position
6: restricted_east
7: south_west
8: restricted_south
9: south_east

**c. Positions in the index**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 4 | Qc | 6 |
| 7 | 8 | 9 |

When we use two points for the representation of the reference object, the plane is divided into 25 partitions; thus there are 25 possible ways to place a point of the primary object in the plane. The symbol * in Figure 15a denotes the direction representative points of the reference object and the numbers correspond to the partitions of the plane. In general, if k is the number of points used to represent the reference object, then the plane is divided into $(2k+1)^2$ partitions; $k^2$ of the partitions are points, 2k(k+1) are open line segments and $(k+1)^2$ are open regions. The previous numbers refer to the case when the points do not have any common x or y coordinates.

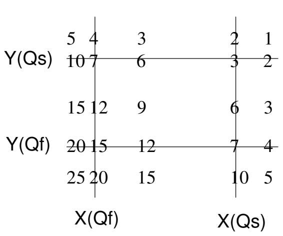
**Figure 15. Plane partitions using two points**




For one-dimensional space the number of partitions is 2k+1; k of the partitions are points and k+1 are line segments. When we have two points for the reference object, for instance, the number of partitions is 5. If the primary object P is also represented by two points $P_f$ and $P_s$ ordered on the x axis ($X(P_f) < X(P_s)$) then the number of primitive relations between the two objects in 1D space is 13. These 13 relations correspond to the relations between time intervals introduced in (Allen, 1983) and applied for 1D spatial reasoning in (Freksa, 1991) and (Pullar and Egenhofer, 1988). In two-dimensional space and for the case of region objects the constraint for the first and the second points of the bounding rectangle is: $X(P_f) < X(P_s) \wedge Y(P_f) < Y(P_s)$ and the number of possible relations is 169 (the square of the number of relations in 1D space). The 169 relations constitute the primitive relations of $M_{D2}$ in case of region objects since they are mutually exclusive, they provide a complete coverage and they correspond to the higher resolution using two points per object. An illustration of these relations for minimum bounding rectangles and a classification with respect to topological information can be found in (Lee et al., 1992).

If we relax the constraint for the representative points of the primary object to: $X(P_f) \leq X(P_s) \wedge Y(P_f) \leq Y(P_s) \wedge \neg (X(P_f) = X(P_s) \wedge Y(P_f) = Y(P_s))$, i.e., we also allow line primary objects (potentially parallel to the coordinate axes), then the number of permitted relations are 221. Figure 16 illustrates how the placement of the first point in one partition constrains the possible partitions for the second. If for instance, we place $P_f$ in partition 4, then the only acceptable partitions for $P_s$ are 4 and 5 (on the other hand, if p were a region the only permitted position for $P_s$ would be partition 5). The sum of all numbers is 221, i.e., the set of primitive direction relations between a region reference object and a line primary object. If we relax the constraint to: $X(P_f) \leq X(P_s) \wedge Y(P_f) \leq Y(P_s)$ allowing $X(P_f) = X(P_s) \wedge Y(P_f) = Y(P_s)$ (the primary object can be a region, a line, or a point) the number of primitive relations is 225, since there are four more relations for the four point partitions. Similarly we can calculate the number of primitive direction relations between any combination of region, line and point objects.

**Figure 16. Primitive relations between a region and a line object**




The previous numbers refer to primitive relations. The relations *strong_north, weak_north, just_north, weak_northeast* and *north_south* are not primitive because they constrain each point to a number of possible partitions. For example, object p is *weak_north* of object q if $P_f$ is in one of the partitions 11-15 and $P_s$ is in the partitions 1-5 with respect to q. The rest of the relations are primitive because they constrain each point to exactly one partition; for instance, according to *weak_bounded_north*, $P_f$ must be in partition 13 and $P_s$ must be in partition 3 with respect to q. Relations of lower resolution can be defined by allowing points to be in various partitions, i.e., using disjunctions of more "restrictive" relations. For instance, we can define the relation *north* as: *p north q* $\equiv$ *p strong_north q* $\vee$ *p weak_north q* $\vee$ *p just_north q*. *Strong_north* and *weak_north* can be further decomposed to disjunctions of other relations until we reach primitive relations. In case of *strong_north* the definition consists of 13 primitive relations (two of which are *strong_northeast* and *strong_bounded_north*). Out of the large number of possible direction relations only a few may be needed for an application domain. For example, it is improbable that a geographic extension of SQL would include 169 different expressions for primitive directions between region objects. Although we have defined a few of these relations a number of additional ones can be defined and used in practical applications.

Our work extends previous approaches to direction relations (Dutta, 1989), (Freksa, 1992) etc. by dealing with extended objects instead of point objects. Peuquet and Ci-Xiang (1987) designed an algorithm for the determination of direction relations between arbitrary polygons represented by minimum bounding rectangles. Their method involves only four direction relations (*north, east, west* and *south*) and is based on the *cone-shaped* concept of direction, i.e., direction relations are defined using angular regions between the reference and the destination object (primary object). Our method is based on the concept of *projections*. An extensive study of the two approaches for point objects can be found in (Frank, 1994).

# 5. Incorporation of Topological Relations in Spatial Indexes

Although for the objects of Figure 1 when there are intersecting minimum bounding rectangles the actual objects also intersect, this is not always true for any pair of objects (this is a well known fact in spatial data structures where in case of intersecting bounding rectangles there is a *refinement step* to retrieve the relation between the actual objects, Papadias et al., 1994b). As a consequence, indexes that preserve direction relations are inadequate for several practical applications that also involve neighbourhood, inclusion, overlap or other topological queries. In this section we will show how we can incorporate topological relations in symbolic spatial indexes containing direction information.

## 5.1 Representation of Topological Relations Using One Symbol per Object

The notion of resolution in the representation of direction relations can be extended for topological relations; but instead of the number of points per object, in case of topological relations it is the type of symbols per object that determines the number of represented relations. For instance, we can use different symbols in order to distinguish a point that belongs to the boundary from a point that belongs to the interior of an object. We will start with the representation of topological relations using one symbol per object. According to this approach the primitive relations that we represent are $p \cap q = \emptyset$ which corresponds to the *disjoint* relation, and $p \cap q \neq \emptyset$ which corresponds to all the other topological relations of Figure 7.

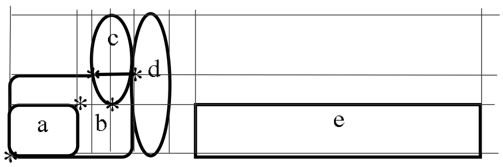
Unlike direction relations where we can assume the existence of unique representative points ("centers" or "edge" points), uniqueness is not trivial for symbolic spatial indexes preserving topological relations. Multiple options arise in cases where two or more points satisfy the conditions to be (intersection) representative points for a topological relation between two objects. For instance, any point of object a can be chosen as a representative point for the intersection with object b. In order to achieve uniqueness when there exist two or more symbolic spatial indexes corresponding to the same equivalence class, the construction process is responsible for creating the "correct" index by choosing one point in a deterministic way.

The construction process that creates the index $S^{M_{D2T1}}$, incorporating both direction and topological information about s, starts by detecting the direction representative points. The first intersection points that are incorporated in $S^{M_{D2T1}}$ are the ones that coincide with direction representative points. Intersection points AB coincide with points $A_f$ and $A_s$, while intersection points BC, BD and CD coincide with $B_s$. Such points do not increase the size of the output index. Then the process detects object intersections that exist on the sides of the bounding rectangles. We follow this approach because intersections on the sides of the rectangles generate at most one extra row or column in the output index, whereas an arbitrary intersection may produce an extra row and an extra column. Finally the construction process finds intersections for the pairs of objects that do not intersect on a direction representative point or on their bounding rectangles.

In general, the process chooses the intersection points in a deterministic way so that uniqueness is preserved and the output index remains as small as possible (for a detailed description of the algorithm see Papadias, 1994). Figure 17 illustrates the generation of symbolic spatial index $S^{M_{D2T1}}$. The symbol * in Figure 17a denotes the instances where the construction process has detected an intersection (the direction representative points are not included because they are illustrated in Figure 11a). Figure 17b illustrates the generated index $S^{M_{D2T1}}$ (the order of symbols in topological representative points is not important, AB is the same as BA).

**Figure 17. Generation of symbolic spatial index $S^{M_{D2T1}}$**

**a. Detection of representative points**




**b. Symbolic spatial index $S^{M_{D2T1}}$**

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | $C_s$ | $D_s$ | | |
| | | BC | | $B_s$,BC,BD,CD | | | |
| | $A_s$,AB | $C_f$ | BC | | | | $E_s$ |
| $A_f$,$B_f$,AB | | | | $D_f$ | | $E_f$ | |

Using $S^{M_{D2T1}}$, in addition to the direction relations of $M_{D2}$ we can define the topological relations:

p disjoint q ≡ $\neg\exists$ i,j S(PQ,i,j)

p not_disjoint q ≡ $\exists$ i,j S(PQ,i,j)

Notice that $S^{M_{D2T1}} \vdash R(P,Q)$ does not necessarily imply that $S^{M_{D2}} \vdash R(P,Q)$ or $S^{M_{T1}} \vdash R(P,Q)$. $S^{M_{D2T1}}$ cannot be represented using $S^{M_{D2}}$ and a set of intersection predicates since it also contains the relative positions of intersections with respect to the direction representative points. This property allows the definition of relations that belong to $M_{D2T1}$ but not to $M_{T1}$ or $M_{D2}$. Such relations are:

p north_touches q ≡ $\exists$ i,j[S(PQ,i,j)$\wedge$ $\forall$ k,l (S(P,k,l) $\Rightarrow$ k $\geq$ i)]

p east_touches q ≡ $\exists$ i,j [S(PQ,i,j)$\wedge$ $\forall$ k,l (S(P,k,l) $\Rightarrow$ l $\geq$ j)]

$$p \text{ south\_touches } q \equiv \exists\, i,j[S(PQ,i,j) \wedge \forall\, k,l\ (S(P,k,l) \Rightarrow i \geq k)]$$

$$p \text{ west\_touches } q \equiv \exists\, i,j\ [S(PQ,i,j) \wedge \forall\, k,l\ (S(P,k,l) \Rightarrow j \geq l)]$$

Objects a and c *north_touch* object b in Figure 1 because there exists an intersection point in the southmost part of their boundary[6]. The previous construction process records the relative positions of the intersections with respect to the bounding rectangles and permits the definition of relations such as *north_touches*. If such relations are not needed for an application domain then a simpler construction process that marks just one intersection for each pair of objects can be implemented.

Although we assumed two distinct modelling subspaces $M_{D2}$ and $M_{T1}$, we do not argue that direction relations are independent from topological relations. In the case that the objects are the same as their minimum bounding rectangles, the direction relation conveys also the topological relation between the objects. In the case of arbitrary objects, when none of the points of the primary object is in the bounding rectangle of the reference object then we also have the topological relation *disjoint* between the objects. Furthermore, it is not permitted to have certain direction relations in conjunction with some topological relations among the same objects. For example, according to the previous definitions it is not possible to have *p strong_north q* and *p touch q* in the same array. A discussion about the topological information that bounding rectangles convey about the actual objects that they enclose can be found in (Clementini et al., 1994).

### 5.2 Discussion about the Representation of Topological Relations Using Representative Points

As in the case of direction relations, the topological resolution of symbolic spatial indexes can be increased or decreased to match the representation and processing goals of a given application domain. If we make the distinction between the boundary of an object p, denoted by $\partial p$, and the interior denoted by $p^o$, then we can define the topological relation between two objects using the following intersections (illustrated as intersection matrices in Figure 3):

$\partial p \cap \partial q = \emptyset$, $\quad \partial p \cap \partial q = \neg\emptyset$

$p^o \cap \partial q = \emptyset$, $\quad p^o \cap \partial q = \neg\emptyset$

$\partial p \cap q^o = \emptyset$, $\quad \partial p \cap q^o = \neg\emptyset$

$p^o \cap q^o = \emptyset$, $\quad p^o \cap q^o = \neg\emptyset$.

The relations in each line are mutually exclusive; one is true, while the other is false for any pair of objects. By combining the intersections between boundaries and interiors we can create 16 mutually exclusive topological relations between objects. However not all of these relations are valid due to the constraints imposed by the properties of the object boundaries and interiors. For instance, for all pairs of objects the following constraints must always hold:

$$(p^o \cap q^o = \neg\emptyset) \Rightarrow (\partial p \cap \partial q = \neg\emptyset \vee \partial p \cap q^o = \neg\emptyset \vee p^o \cap \partial q = \neg\emptyset)$$

$$(p^o \cap q^o = \emptyset \wedge \partial p \cap \partial q = \emptyset) \Rightarrow (p^o \cap \partial q = \emptyset \wedge \partial p \cap q^o = \emptyset).$$

[6]The relations that combine direction and topological information should not be confused with conjunctions of direction and topological relations. For instance, p north_touches q $\neq$ p north q $\wedge$ p not_disjoint q. Object a north_touches b but it is not the case that a north b.

Out of the 16 possible relations that can be defined using the previous intersections only the following eight defined in (Egenhofer and Herring, 1990) are valid. These are the primitive relations[7] of $M_{T2}$ (some of these relations are illustrated in Figure 7):

p disjoint q $\equiv (\partial p \cap \partial q = \emptyset) \wedge (p^o \cap \partial q = \emptyset) \wedge (\partial p \cap q^o = \emptyset) \wedge (p^o \cap q^o = \emptyset)$

p meet q $\equiv (\partial p \cap \partial q \neq \emptyset) \wedge (p^o \cap \partial q = \emptyset) \wedge (\partial p \cap q^o = \emptyset) \wedge (p^o \cap q^o = \emptyset)$

p equal q $\equiv (\partial p \cap \partial q \neq \emptyset) \wedge (p^o \cap \partial q = \emptyset) \wedge (\partial p \cap q^o = \emptyset) \wedge (p^o \cap q^o \neq \emptyset)$

p contains q $\equiv (\partial p \cap \partial q = \emptyset) \wedge (p^o \cap \partial q \neq \emptyset) \wedge (\partial p \cap q^o = \emptyset) \wedge (p^o \cap q^o \neq \emptyset)$

p inside q $\equiv (\partial p \cap \partial q = \emptyset) \wedge (p^o \cap \partial q = \emptyset) \wedge (\partial p \cap q^o \neq \emptyset) \wedge (p^o \cap q^o \neq \emptyset)$

p covers q $\equiv (\partial p \cap \partial q \neq \emptyset) \wedge (p^o \cap \partial q \neq \emptyset) \wedge (\partial p \cap q^o = \emptyset) \wedge (p^o \cap q^o \neq \emptyset)$

p covered_by q $\equiv (\partial p \cap \partial q \neq \emptyset) \wedge (p^o \cap \partial q = \emptyset) \wedge (\partial p \cap q^o \neq \emptyset) \wedge (p^o \cap q^o \neq \emptyset)$

p overlap q $\equiv (\partial p \cap \partial q \neq \emptyset) \wedge (p^o \cap \partial q \neq \emptyset) \wedge (\partial p \cap q^o \neq \emptyset) \wedge (p^o \cap q^o \neq \emptyset)$

The construction process that generates a symbolic spatial index preserving the relations of $M_{T2}$ must detect four kinds of intersections for each pair of objects; $\partial p \cap \partial q$, $p^o \cap \partial q$, $\partial p \cap q^o$ and $p^o \cap q^o$. For each non-empty one, the corresponding symbol is marked; i.e. if $\partial p \cap \partial q$ is found non-empty, the symbol $\partial P \partial Q$ is marked in the output index. In order to transform the previous definitions of topological relations to definitions using representative point symbols stored in a symbolic spatial index, we have to replace each equation of the form: $p \cap q \neq \emptyset$ with a formula of the form: $\exists$ i,j S(PQ,i,j) and each equation of the form $p \cap q = \emptyset$ with a formula of the form $\neg\exists$ i,j S(PQ,i,j). Thus, the definitions of the topological relations between objects represented by two symbols per object (the boundary and the interior) are transformed to:

p disjoint q $\equiv \neg \exists i,j\ S(\partial P\partial Q,i,j) \wedge \neg\exists i,j\ S(P^o\partial Q,i,j) \wedge \neg\exists i,j\ S(\partial PQ^o,i,j) \wedge \neg\exists i,j\ S(P^oQ^o,i,j)$

p meet q $\equiv \exists i,j\ [S(\partial P\partial Q,i,j)] \wedge \neg\exists i,j\ S(P^o\partial Q,i,j) \wedge \neg\exists i,j\ S(\partial PQ^o,i,j) \wedge \neg\exists i,j\ S(P^oQ^o,i,j)$

p equal q $\equiv \exists i,j\ [S(\partial P\partial Q,i,j)] \wedge \neg\exists i,j\ S(P^o\partial Q,i,j) \wedge \neg\exists i,j\ S(\partial PQ^o,i,j) \wedge \exists i,j\ S(P^oQ^o,i,j)$

p contains q $\equiv \neg\exists i,j\ [S(\partial P\partial Q,i,j)] \wedge \exists i,j\ S(P^o\partial Q,i,j) \wedge \neg\exists i,j\ S(\partial PQ^o,i,j) \wedge \exists i,j\ S(P^oQ^o,i,j)$

p inside q $\equiv \neg\exists i,j\ [S(\partial P\partial Q,i,j)] \wedge \neg\exists i,j\ S(P^o\partial Q,i,j) \wedge \exists i,j\ S(\partial PQ^o,i,j) \wedge \exists i,j\ S(P^oQ^o,i,j)$

p covers q $\equiv \exists i,j\ [S(\partial P\partial Q,i,j)] \wedge \exists i,j\ S(P^o\partial Q,i,j) \wedge \neg\exists i,j\ S(\partial PQ^o,i,j) \wedge \exists i,j\ S(P^oQ^o,i,j)$

p covered_by q $\equiv \exists i,j\ [S(\partial P\partial Q,i,j)] \wedge \neg\exists i,j\ S(P^o\partial Q,i,j) \wedge \exists i,j\ S(\partial PQ^o,i,j) \wedge \exists i,j\ S(P^oQ^o,i,j)$

p overlaps q $\equiv \exists i,j\ [S(\partial P\partial Q,i,j)] \wedge \exists i,j\ S(P^o\partial Q,i,j) \wedge \exists i,j\ S(\partial PQ^o,i,j) \wedge \exists i,j\ S(P^oQ^o,i,j)$

For an example of an array that preserves the previous topological relations using two symbols per object see (Papadias and Sellis, 1993). Notice that while the number of points per object needed for the direction relations is independent of the relations of the object with the other objects (one or two points for the first and second cases of the previous section), the number of points per object for the topological relations depends on the configuration. The maximum number of points needed to represent binary topological relations among m objects using the previous definitions is $4C(m,2) = 2m(m-1)$ when all the pairs of objects overlap ($C(m,2)$ denotes the number of possible selections of 2 out of m objects). Since for every pair of overlapping objects we need four intersections, the total number of points is four times the number of possible selections of two out of m objects.

[7]Randell et al. (1992) presented an interval logic for topological reasoning that includes the same set of primitive topological relations. Related work can also be found in Vieu (1993).

If we need more refined topological information additional symbols per object could be used. Egenhofer (1991), defines topological relations by using definitions that involve the interiors, the boundaries and the exteriors of objects. If we want a further extension of the expressive power to include the dimensions of the intersections we could add symbols to distinguish line from point data etc.

# 6. Qualitative Information Processing Using Spatial Indexes

While previous sections were concerned with knowledge representation issues, Section 6 describes how symbolic spatial indexes can facilitate qualitative information processing. In particular we will show how spatial indexes can deal with the problems of information retrieval (subsection 6.1), composition of spatial relations (subsection 6.2), route planning (subsection 6.3) and the problem of update operations (subsection 6.4). Since each of these problems itself requires extensive analysis, in this paper we will briefly deal with them without providing the reader with details in the algorithmic level.

## 6.1 Information Retrieval

Consider the task of finding all objects that exist *strong_north* of object B in index $S^{M_{D2T1}}$. Using a Pictorial SQL (e.g., Roussopoulos et al., 1988) we could express the query in the following form:

`select P`
`from` $S^{M_{D2T1}}$
`where strong_north(P,B)`

An SQL-like format though, is restrictive since not all of the relations of the modelling space are given specific names. In this subsection we will describe how we can retrieve information stored in symbolic spatial indexes using a pictorial Query-By-Example (PQBE) language. In comparison to verbal (spatial) query languages, PQBE provides a more intuitive and easy to use interface because of its close correspondence with the structure of 2D space. Unlike verbal languages it does not presume knowledge of keywords for spatial relations on behalf of the user, nor familiarity with database languages but complex spatial conditions are expressed in a straightforward manner. Similar to the original QBE, PQBE generalises from the example given by the user in order to compute the answer to the query. In this case, instead of having skeleton tables showing the relation scheme, we have skeleton arrays corresponding to symbolic spatial indexes. Domain variables denoting objects and images are preceded by the character "_", while constants appear without qualification. The character D before a variable causes its value to be displayed. For the following examples we will use the index arrays $S^{M_{D1}}$ and $W^{M_{D1}}$ illustrated in Figure 18 (these indexes are also illustrated in Figure 8). We assume that the indexes represent maps of cities.

**Figure 18. Spatial indexes representing maps of cities**

**a. Index $S^{M_{D1}}$**

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | C | | |
| | | | D | |
| | B | | | |
| A | | | | E |

**b. Index $W^{M_{D1}}$**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| G | | J |
| | B | |
| F | | |

The query in the skeleton array of Figure 19a will retrieve all cities P (primary object variable) where P is *north_east* with respect to city B (reference object constant) in map S. The query results in a search of the subpart of the array illustrated in Figure 19b. The output (the set of cities that satisfy the spatial conditions), is illustrated in Figure 19c.

**Figure 19. Query involving primary object retrieval**

**a. Skeleton array**

S

| | |
|---|---|
| | D _P |
| B | |

**b. Sub-array to be searched**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| C | | |
| | D | |

**c. Results**

{C,D}

Similarly, the query in the skeleton array of Figure 20a will retrieve all cities P such that P is *north_east* of some city Q (reference object variable) in map S. The result of this query (B, C, D) is a superset of the previous result, because cities *north_east* of B are also included. We can also have queries with more than one primary, or reference, objects. The query in the skeleton array of Figure 20b, will retrieve all cities *north_east* of B and *north_west* of some city Q, where Q is *north_east* of B in S. The result (city C) is a subset of the cities that are retrieved through the query of Figure 19a because the primary objects in this case must satisfy more specialised spatial conditions (all binary constraints among the domain variables and the constants that appear in a skeleton array must be taken into account when processing the query). Unlike the previous queries which refer to map constants, the query in the skeleton array of Figure 20c will retrieve all cities *north_east* of B in some map I (map variable). This query, in addition to cities C and D, will also retrieve city J because it is *north_east* of B in map W.

**Figure 20. Additional queries involving primary object retrieval**

**a. Reference object variable**

S

| | |
|---|---|
| | D _P |
| _Q | |

**b. Multiple reference objects**

S

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | D _P | |
| | | _Q |
| B | | |

**c. Image variable**

_I

| | |
|---|---|
| | D _P |
| B | |

We can use multiple skeleton arrays to express *union*, *intersection* and *join*. The query in Figure 21a, will retrieve all cities *north_east* of B in map S or in map W. PQBE also allows map retrieval. The query in Figure 21b, for instance, will retrieve all maps in which city C is *north_east* of B (map S). The previous queries retrieve spatial knowledge explicitly stored in one or more symbolic spatial indexes. PQBE also allows the retrieval of spatial knowledge regarding cities that exist in different maps. This information is not explicitly stored but it can be inferred using appropriate rules of inference encoded in a composition table (composition of spatial relations using symbolic spatial indexes is discussed in the next subsection). The only difference is that in queries involving composition, the skeleton arrays do not correspond to particular indexes and therefore skeleton arrays do not have superscripts denoting specific maps. For instance, the result of the query of Figure 21c is the set of all cities in the database that are *north_east* of city F. This query, unlike the previous ones, retrieves not only the cities that are *north_east* of F in some map (B and J are *north_east* of F in map W), but also the cities that exist in different maps and satisfy the spatial condition according to the composition table.

Cities C and D are also *north_east* of F because they are *north_east* of B in map S and B is *north_east* of F in map W (transitivity).

**Figure 21. Additional features of PQBE**

**a. Union**

S

| | |
|---|---|
| | D__P |
| B | |

W

| | |
|---|---|
| | D__P |
| B | |

**b. Image retrieval**

D_I

| | |
|---|---|
| | C |
| B | |

**c. Inference**

| | |
|---|---|
| | D__P |
| F | |

Chang and Fu (1980) developed Query-by-Pictorial Example (QPE), a relational query language for manipulating spatial and conventional relations in image databases. QPE allows the expression of spatial queries by pointing on the display screen using special input devices. Despite the name similarity the concept of QPE is rather different from PQBE. Chang et al. (1987, 1988) proposed a pictorial language aimed at the retrieval of object configurations which is similar to PQBE. PQBE extends Chang's pictorial language by including variable and constant reference objects, negation, union, intersection, join and a large set of additional features (for details see Papadias and Sellis, 1994). Further extensions, such as incorporation of topological relations, can be developed to enhance the expressive power of Pictorial Query-by-Example.

### 6.2 Composition of Spatial Relations - Image Overlay

The problem of composition can be defined as "if the spatial relation between P and O, and between O and Q is known what are the possible relations between P and Q?". Frank (1994) presented composition tables for direction relations based on the concepts of *projections* and *cone-shaped directions*. Freksa (1992) also studied composition of direction relations in 2D space and Egenhofer (1991) composition of topological relations. Frank uses the notion of *Euclidean approximate* to deal with uncertainty, while in Freksa's and Egenhofer's systems when various cases are possible the systems generate a disjunction of the potential primitive relations. In this subsection we will show how symbolic spatial indexes can deal with composition of spatial relations.

Consider that we want to perform an image overlay using the symbolic spatial indexes of Figure 18, i.e., we would like to generate an index that preserves information existing in $S^{M_{D1}}$ and in $W^{M_{D1}}$. The two indexes have an object (B in this case) in common. Let **S** the set of representation structures (symbolic spatial indexes preserving $M_{D1}$) and **O** the set of symbolic object representations. We can define a composition operator com: **S**x**S**x**O**x**O**x**O** →**S**, that takes as input the two indexes to be composed, the common object with respect to which the composition is made, and two other objects each belonging to one array, whose composition relation is to be found. The operator creates one or more output arrays which contain only the three objects preserving their relative positions. For instance, com($S^{M_{D1}}$,$W^{M_{D1}}$, B, D, F) will generate the array of Figure 22.

**Figure 22. Spatial index com($S^{M_{D1}}$, $W^{M_{D1}}$, B, D, F)**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | D |
| | B | |
| F | | |

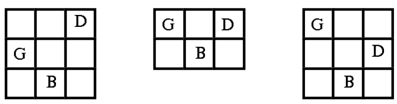
In order to compute the composition relation, the operator uses the following composition table. Table 1 illustrates the composition relation between objects P and Q when their relation with a third object O is known (instead of the full name of the relation we use abbreviations e.g., NW instead of north_west). For instance, the array of Figure 22 is generated using the facts that D is *north_east* B in index $S^{M_{D1}}$, B is *north_east* F in index $W^{M_{D1}}$ and the entry (3,3) of the composition table.

**Table. 1 Composition Table**

| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | **NW(O,Q)** | **RN(O,Q)** | **NE(O,Q)** | **RW(O,Q)** | **SP(Y,Z)** | **RE(O,Q)** | **SW(O,Q)** | **RS(O,Q)** | **SE(O,Q)** |
| 1 | **NW(P,O)** | NW | NW | NW∨RN∨NE | NW | NW | NW∨RN∨NE | NW∨RW∨SW | NW∨RW∨SW | T |
| 2 | **RN(P,O)** | NW | RN | NE | NW | RN | NE | NW∨RW∨SW | RN∨SP∨RS | NE∨RE∨SE |
| 3 | **NE(P,O)** | NW∨RN∨NE | NE | NE | NW∨RN∨ NE | NE | NE | T | NE∨RE∨SE | NE∨RE∨SE |
| 4 | **RW(P,O)** | NW | NW | NW∨RN∨ NE | RW | RW | RW∨SP∨RE | SW | SW | SW∨RS∨SE |
| 5 | **SP(P,O)** | NW | RN | NE | RW | SP | RE | SW | RS | SE |
| 6 | **RE(P,O)** | NW∨RN∨NE | NE | NE | RW∨SP∨RE | RE | RE | SW∨RS∨SE | SE | SE |
| 7 | **SW(P,O)** | NW∨RW∨SW | NW∨RW∨SW | T | SW | SW | SW∨RS∨SE | SW | SW | SW∨RS∨SE |
| 8 | **RS(P,O)** | NW∨RW∨SW | RN∨SP∨RS | NE∨RE∨SE | SW | RS | SE | SW | RS | SE |
| 9 | **SE(P,O)** | T | NE∨RE∨SE | NE∨RE∨SE | SW∨RS∨SE | SE | SE | SW∨RS∨SE | SE | SE |

In several cases there may be multiple possible outputs for image overlay. In such cases the operator, such as the ones in Freksa's and Egenhofer's systems, will generate a list of output arrays corresponding to the possible relations. For instance, com($S^{M_{D1}}$, $W^{M_{D1}}$, B, D, G) will generate the arrays of Figure 23.

**Figure 23. Spatial indexes corresponding to com($S^{M_{D1}}$, $W^{M_{D1}}$, B, D, G)**




The composition relations are generated using the facts that D is *north_east* of B in index $S^{M_{D1}}$, B is *south_east* of G in index $W^{M_{D1}}$ and the entry (3,9) of the composition table. The arrays correspond to the three possible relations between D and G (NE∨RE∨SE) when their relative positions with respect to B are known. Notice that symbolic spatial indexes do not preserve metric information; otherwise only one relation could be generated as the result of composition. There is also the possibility that the composition does not produce any information about the possible relation between two objects. For instance, com($S^{M_{D1}}$, $W^{M_{D1}}$, B, D, J) will generate nine arrays that correspond to the primitive relations of $M_{D1}$ between D and J when it is also known that B is south-west of both D and J; composition does not rule out any possible positions (the entries of the composition table that denote disjunction of nine primitive relations contain the symbol *T*).

The previous composition table has been extended to capture ordinal relations for applications such as the one in Figure 10 (Papadias et al., 1994a). The same composition operator can handle symbolic spatial indexes preserving modelling spaces of direction relations using two, or more, representative points per object but the number of possible outputs grows exponentially with the number of points used to represent the objects. The problem of composing both direction and topological relations though (e.g., arrays preserving $M_{D2T1}$), is more complicated and requires analysis beyond the scope of the paper.

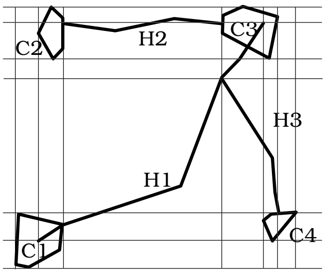
### 6.3 Route Planning

Route planning has been extensively studied in areas of Artificial Intelligence, such as motion planning and robot navigation. Previous systems designed to deal with this problem, include TOUR (Kuipers, 1978) and SPAM (McDermott and Davis, 1984). Holmes and Jungert (1992) have demonstrated how symbolic projections can be applied to knowledge-based route planning in digitised maps. In this subsection we will show how symbolic spatial indexes can be used to define routes connecting two objects.

Consider the map of Figure 24a, in which the regions represent cities and the lines correspond to highways that connect them. Figure 24b illustrates the corresponding symbolic spatial index $T^{M_{D2T1}}$.

**Figure 24. Map of cities and highways**

**a. Initial map t**




**b. Spatial index $T^{M_{D2T1}}$**

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7 | | | $C2_s$ | | | $C3_s$ | |
| 6 | | | $H2_f$ ,H2C2 | $H2_s$,H2C3 | $H1_s$ , H1C3 | | |
| 5 | | $C2_f$ | | $C3_f$ | | | |
| 4 | | | | H1H3 | | $H3_s$ | |
| 3 | | | $C1_s$ | $H3_f$ | | C4H3 | $C4_s$ |
| 2 | | $H1_f$,C1H1 | | | $C4_f$ | | |
| 1 | $C1_f$ | | | | | | |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

A direct connection between cities $C_k$ and $C_l$ corresponds to a highway that intersects with both cities and can be defined as: $C_k$ *d_connects* $C_l \equiv \exists H_m \exists i,j,g,f\ [S(C_kH_m,i,j) \wedge S(H_mC_l,g,f)]$. $H_1$ directly connects cities $C_1$ and $C_3$ since $S(C_1H_1,2,2) \wedge S(H_1C_3,6,5)$.

We will use the notation $H_m$ *reaches* $H_n$ to denote that highway $H_n$ can be reached from $H_m$ using highway intersections (for all the examples we assume bi-directional highways). The relation *reaches* can be defined as: $H_m$ *reaches* $H_n \equiv \exists\ i,j\ [S(H_mH_n)] \vee \exists\ H_k\ [H_m$ *reaches* $H_k \wedge H_k$ *reaches* $H_n]$. $H_1$ *reaches* $H_3$ since $S(H_1H_3,4,4)$.

An indirect connection is achieved through a highway that intersects with the first city, and a second highway which reaches the first one (directly or indirectly) and passes from the second city. Indirect connection through highways can be defined as: $C_k$ *i_connects* $C_l \equiv \exists H_m\ \exists H_n\ \exists i,j,g,f\ [S(C_kH_m,i,j) \wedge H_m$ *reaches* $H_n \wedge S(H_nC_l,g,f)\ ]$. $C_1$ and $C_4$ are indirectly connected through $H_1$ and $H_3$ since $S(C_1H_1,2,2) \wedge H_1$ *reaches* $H_3 \wedge S(H_3C_4,3,6)$.

Additional types of connections, such as the connection of two cities through an intermediate city, can be defined to express situations involving routes from a city to another. In procedural terms the previous definitions reduce to a search for topological representative points involving lines. Direction information can be used in choosing a line which is in the direction of the destination, when several choices are available. Furthermore, composition can be used in route finding when the start and the destination cities exist in different symbolic spatial indexes (provided that a common object belongs to the route).

### 6.4 Update Operations

Spatial knowledge representation systems deal with a dynamic environment in which a change in a single item of knowledge may have widespread effects. In logic-based systems, the assertion of a new fact may invalidate previous inferences. The problem of updating a system's representation of the state of the world to reflect the effects of actions is known as the *frame problem*.

Extensions of PQBE can be used to handle update operations in symbolic spatial indexes. Object deletion from an index can be treated in a way similar to object retrieval. The character R before a variable causes the contents of the variable to be removed from the index array. The query in the skeleton array of Figure 25a will cause all the objects P such that P is *restricted_east* of A to be removed from $S^{M_{D1}}$ . After all the symbols denoting objects that satisfy the previous conditions (object E) are deleted, the empty rows and columns are removed, and the resulting array is illustrated in Figure 25b.

**Figure 25. Object removal using PQBE**

**a. Skeleton array**

S

| | |
|---|---|
| A | R__P |

**b. New index**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | C | |
| | | | D |
| | B | | |
| A | | | |

Object insertion can also be handled by PQBE provided that the position of the object to be added is precisely specified. Otherwise the insertion of an object using conditions expressed in PQBE may result in several output arrays corresponding to the possible positions of the new object. Another way to insert an object in a symbolic spatial index is by explicitly specifying the cells where each point of the object is to be added. Furthermore, object movements within the array can be handled by removing the object from its old positions and inserting it in the new ones.

Related to update operations are the problems of *spatial knowledge assimilation* and *error correction* (Davis, 1986). The goal of assimilation is, given an accurate representation of spatial knowledge and an accurate fact, to augment the representation in order to include the new fact. The goal of error correction is, given a spatial knowledge representation which is not quite accurate and a new fact which is more precise, to improve the representation. Both of these problems could be treated by operators similar to the composition operator that take two symbolic spatial indexes as arguments (one representing the initial state and one representing the new fact) and generate one or more output indexes that describe the new state.

## 7. Conclusion

This paper deals with the qualitative representation of spatial knowledge and in particular with the representation of binary direction and topological relations in 2D space. Various relation-based systems concerned with the representation of spatial relations have been developed in several areas with different processing tasks. Graph representations and logic-based formalisms have been used in qualitative spatial reasoning. Intersection matrices describe binary topological relations for a set of objects and compute the composition relations among them. 2D strings represent images by one-dimensional encodings, and symbolic arrays preserve the spatial structure of complex entities in aggregation hierarchies.

The paper describes a new relation-based structure, called a symbolic spatial index, which applies several different ideas in qualitative spatial knowledge representation. The set of spatial relations that is explicitly represented in a symbolic spatial index, its modelling space, is determined by the choice of representative points. In this paper we have dealt with modelling spaces consisting of direction relations using one and two points per object, and topological relations using one symbol per object. Further extensions are possible for applications that require higher direction and topological resolution.

Table 2 summarises the properties of several relation-based systems. The first two columns refer to the representation systems and the type of spatial relations that they have been used to represent. Column 3 describes construction processes that have been developed to generate relation-based representations from other forms of spatial knowledge. All the systems are ambiguous (column 4), while some of them are unique (column 5) according to the definitions in subsection 2.1. For the rest of the systems uniqueness cannot be determined due to the lack of a definition for the construction process. Column 6 classifies the systems into deductive and non-deductive according to the discussion in subsections 2.2 and 2.3. Column 7 refers to completeness of representations with respect to the assumed modelling space.

**Table 2. Properties of spatial relation-based representation systems**

| Representation System | Modelling Space | Construction Process | Ambiguous | Unique | Deductive | Complete |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Logic-based | direction and/or topological | No | Yes | - | Yes | Yes |
| Intersection matrices | topological | No | Yes | - | Yes | Yes |
| 2D-G strings | direction (and topological) | symbolic projection | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |
| Symbolic arrays | direction and ordinal | application dependent | Yes | - | No | No |
| Spatial Indexes | direction (and topological) | modelling space dependent | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |

Spatial information processing using relation-based representations involves symbolic and not numerical computation and avoids the usual problems of geometric representations. Although relation-based systems cannot be applied in all domains involving spatial knowledge, we believe that there is a wide scope of potential applications ranging from Qualitative Reasoning and Spatial Databases to Robot Navigation and Computational Vision and Imagery. In this paper we have shown how symbolic spatial indexes can be used to handle information retrieval, image overlay, route planning and update operations, although additional tasks (such as image similarity retrieval) are not excluded.

Topics that emerged during this work and can be considered for further investigation include

- the combinatorial study of the number of direction and topological relations that we can represent as a function of the number and the properties of the representative points used for each object
- the integration of direction and topological reasoning within one framework
- the notion of image equivalence with respect to a modelling space, ambiguity, uniqueness and completeness of spatial relation-based representations

– comparative studies of the previous representational systems with respect to storage requirements, computational efficiency, expressive power and inferential adequacy.

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