ON THE RANK OF A TROPICAL MATRIX

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Abstract. This is a foundational paper in tropical linear algebra, which is linear algebra over the min-plus semiring. We introduce and compare three natural definitions of the rank of a matrix, called the Barvinok rank, the Kapranov rank and the tropical rank. We demonstrate how these notions arise naturally in polyhedral and algebraic geometry, and we show that they differ in general. Realizability of matroids plays a crucial role here. Connections to optimization are also discussed.

1. Introduction

The rank of a matrix $M$ is one of the most important notions in linear algebra. This number can be defined in many different ways. In particular, the following three definitions are equivalent:

- **The rank of $M$ is the smallest integer $r$ for which $M$ can be written as the sum of $r$ rank one matrices. A matrix has rank 1 if it is the product of a column vector and a row vector.**

- **The rank of $M$ is the smallest dimension of any linear space containing the columns of $M$.**

- **The rank of $M$ is the largest integer $r$ such that $M$ has a non-singular $r \times r$ minor.**

Our objective is to examine these familiar definitions over an algebraic structure which has no additive inverses. We work over the tropical semiring $(\mathbb{R}, \oplus, \odot)$ whose arithmetic operations are $a \oplus b := \min(a, b)$ and $a \odot b := a + b$.

The set $\mathbb{R}^d$ of real $d$-vectors and the set $\mathbb{R}^{d \times n}$ of real $d \times n$-matrices are semimodules over the semiring $(\mathbb{R}, \oplus, \odot)$. The operations of matrix addition and matrix multiplication are well defined. All our definitions of rank make sense over the tropical semiring $(\mathbb{R}, \oplus, \odot)$:

**Definition 1.1.** The Barvinok rank of a matrix $M \in \mathbb{R}^{d \times n}$ is the smallest integer $r$ for which $M$ can be written as the tropical sum of $r$ rank one matrices. Here, we say that a $d \times n$-matrix has rank one if it is the tropical product of a $d \times 1$-matrix and a $1 \times n$-matrix.

**Definition 1.2.** The Kapranov rank of a matrix $M \in \mathbb{R}^{d \times n}$ is the smallest dimension of any tropical linear space (to be defined in Definition 3.2) containing the columns of $M$.

**Definition 1.3.** A square matrix $M = (m_{ij}) \in \mathbb{R}^{r \times r}$ is tropically singular if the minimum in

$$
\det(M) := \bigoplus_{\sigma \in S_r} m_{1\sigma_1} \odot m_{2\sigma_2} \odot \cdots \odot m_{r\sigma_r} = \min\{ m_{1\sigma_1} + m_{2\sigma_2} + \cdots + m_{r\sigma_r} : \sigma \in S_r \}
$$

is attained at least twice. Here $S_r$ denotes the symmetric group on $\{1, 2, \ldots, r\}$. The tropical rank of a matrix $M \in \mathbb{R}^{d \times n}$ is the largest integer $r$ such that $M$ has a non-singular $r \times r$ minor.

We will show that these three definitions are non-equivalent:
Theorem 1.4. For every matrix $M$ with entries in the tropical semiring $(\mathbb{R}, \oplus, \odot)$, we have
\[
\text{tropical rank}(M) \leq \text{Kapranov rank}(M) \leq \text{Barvinok rank}(M).
\]
Both of these inequalities can be strict.

The proof of Theorem 1.4 consists of Propositions 3.6, 4.1, 7.2 and Theorem 7.3 in this paper. As we go along, several alternative characterizations of the Barvinok, Kapranov and tropical ranks will be offered. One of them arises from the fact that every $d \times n$-matrix $M$ defines a tropically linear map $\mathbb{R}^n \to \mathbb{R}^d$. The image of $M$ is a polyhedral complex in $\mathbb{R}^d$. Following [10], we identify this polyhedral complex with its image in the tropical projective space $\mathbb{TP}^{d-1} = \mathbb{R}^d / \mathbb{R}(1, 1, \ldots, 1)$. This image is the tropical convex hull of (the columns of) $M$ as in [10]. Equivalently, this tropical polytope is the set of all tropical linear combinations of the columns of $M$. We show in Section 4 that the tropical rank of $M$ equals the dimension of this tropical polytope plus one. The discrepancy between Definition 1.3 and Definition 1.2 comes from the crucial distinction between tropical polytopes and tropical linear spaces, as explained in [16, §1]. The latter are described in [20] where it is shown that they are parametrized by the tropical Grassmannian.

We start out in Section 2 by studying the Barvinok rank (Definition 1.1). This notion of rank arises naturally in the context of combinatorial optimization [3, 6]. In Section 3 we study the Kapranov rank (Definition 1.2). This notion is the most natural one from the point of view of algebraic geometry, where tropical arithmetic arises as the “tropicalization” of arithmetic in a power series ring. It has good algebraic and geometric properties but is difficult to characterize combinatorially; for instance, it depends on the base field of the power series ring, which here we take to be the complex numbers $\mathbb{C}$, unless otherwise stated.

In Section 4 we study the tropical rank (Definition 1.3). This is the best notion of rank from a geometric and combinatorial perspective. For instance, it can be expressed in terms of regular subdivisions of products of simplices [10]. In Section 5, we use this characterization to show that the tropical and Kapranov ranks agree when either of them is equal to $\min(d, n)$.

Section 6 is devoted to another case where the Kapranov and tropical ranks agree, namely when either of them equals two. The set of $d \times n$-matrices enjoying this property is the space of trees with $d$ leaves and $n$ marked points. This space is studied in the companion paper [9].

The second inequality of Theorem 1.4 is strict for many matrices (see Proposition 2.5 for examples), but it requires more effort to find matrices for which the first inequality is strict. Such matrices are constructed in Section 7 by relating Kapranov rank to realizability of matroids.

Our definition of tropically non-singular is equivalent to what is called “strongly regular” in the literature on the min-plus algebra [5, 8]. The resulting notion of tropical rank, as well as the notion of Barvinok rank, have been previously discussed from an optimization perspective. In the final section of the paper we revisit some of that literature, which is concerned mainly with algorithmic issues, and relate it to our results. We also point out several (mostly algorithmic) open questions.

Summing up, the three definitions of rank studied in this paper generally disagree, and they have different flavors (combinatorial, algebraic, geometric). But they all share some of the familiar properties of matrix rank over a field. Among them: the rank of a matrix and its transpose are the same; the rank of a minor cannot exceed that of the whole matrix; the rank is invariant under (tropical) multiplication of rows or columns by constants, and under insertion of a row or column obtained as a combination of others; the rank of $M \oplus N$ is at most the sum of the ranks of $M$ and $N$; and the rank of $M \odot N$ is at most the minimum of the ranks of $M$ and $N$.

2. The Barvinok rank

Barvinok, Johnson and Woeginger [3], building on earlier work of Barvinok, showed that for fixed $r$, the Traveling Salesman Problem can be solved in polynomial time if the distance matrix
is the tropical sum of \( r \) matrices of tropical rank one (with \( \oplus \) as "max" instead of "min"). This motivates the definition and nomenclature of Barvinok rank as the smallest \( r \) for which \( M \in \mathbb{R}^{d \times n} \) is expressible in this fashion. Since matrices of tropical rank one are of the form \( X \odot Y^T \), for two column vectors \( X \in \mathbb{R}^d \) and \( Y \in \mathbb{R}^n \), this is equivalent to saying that \( M \) has a representation

\[
M = X_1^T \odot Y_1 \oplus X_2^T \odot Y_2 \oplus \cdots \oplus X_r^T \odot Y_r.
\]

For example, the following equation shows a \( 3 \times 3 \)-matrix with Barvinok rank two:

\[
\begin{pmatrix}
0 & 4 & 2 \\
2 & 1 & 0 \\
2 & 4 & 3
\end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix}
0 \\
2 \\
2
\end{pmatrix} \oplus \begin{pmatrix}
0, 4, 2 \\
0, 2
\end{pmatrix} \oplus \begin{pmatrix}
3 \\
3
\end{pmatrix} \oplus \begin{pmatrix}
2, 1, 0
\end{pmatrix}.
\]

This matrix also has tropical rank 2 and Kapranov rank 2 because the matrix is tropically singular.

We next present two reformulations of the definition of Barvinok rank: in terms of tropical convex hulls and non-negative matrices. Recall (e.g. from \([7]\)) that the three conditions (a), (b) and (c) in the statement of the proposition are equivalent.

**Proposition 2.1.** Let \( M \) be a real \( d \times n \)-matrix. The following properties are equivalent:

(a) \( M \) has Barvinok rank at most \( r \).

(b) The columns of \( M \) lie in the tropical convex hull of \( r \) points in \( \mathbb{T}P^{d-1} \).

(c) There are matrices \( X \in \mathbb{R}^{d \times r} \) and \( Y \in \mathbb{R}^{r \times n} \) such that \( M = X \odot Y \). Equivalently, \( M \) lies in the image of the following tropical morphism, which is defined by matrix multiplication:

\[
\phi_r : \mathbb{R}^{d \times r} \times \mathbb{R}^{r \times n} \to \mathbb{R}^{d \times n}, \quad (X, Y) \mapsto X \odot Y.
\]

**Proof.** Let \( M_1, \ldots, M_n \in \mathbb{R}^d \) be the column vectors of \( M \). Let \( X_1, \ldots, X_r \in \mathbb{R}^d \) and \( Y_1, \ldots, Y_r \in \mathbb{R}^n \) be the columns of two unspecified matrices \( X \in \mathbb{R}^{d \times r} \) and \( Y \in \mathbb{R}^{r \times n} \). Let \( Y_{ij} \) denote the \( j \)-th coordinate of \( Y_i \). The following three algebraic identities are easily seen to be equivalent:

(a) \( M = X_1 \odot Y_1^T \oplus X_2 \odot Y_2^T \oplus \cdots \oplus X_r \odot Y_r^T \),

(b) \( M_j = Y_{ij} \odot X_1 \oplus Y_{ij} \odot X_2 \oplus \cdots \oplus Y_{ij} \odot X_r \) for all \( j = 1, \ldots, n \), and

(c) \( M = X \odot Y^T \).

Statement (b) says that each column vector of \( M \) lies in the tropical convex hull of \( X_1, \ldots, X_r \). The entries of the matrix \( Y \) are the multipliers in that tropical convex combination. This shows that the three conditions (a), (b) and (c) in the statement of the proposition are equivalent. \( \square \)

Part (b) of Proposition 2.1 suggests that the Barvinok rank of a tropical matrix is more an analogue of the non-negative rank of a matrix than of the usual rank. Recall (e.g. from \([7]\)) that the *non-negative rank* of a real non-negative matrix \( M \in \mathbb{R}^{d \times n} \) is the smallest \( r \) for which \( M \) can be written as a product of non-negative matrices of format \( d \times r \) and \( r \times n \). Equivalently, it is the smallest \( r \) for which the columns (or rows) of \( M \) lie in the positive hull of \( r \) non-negative vectors. Compare this with the formulation of Barvinok rank given in Proposition 2.1 (b); this closer connection comes from the fact that tropical linear combinations yield an object more analogous to a "positive span" or "convex hull" \([10, 16]\) than a linear span. For more information on non-negative rank see \([7]\), and for the connection to rank over other semigroup rings see \([11]\).

We next take a closer look at the structure of the tropical matrix multiplication map \( \phi_r \).

**Proposition 2.2.** The map \( \phi_r \) is piecewise-linear. The domains of linearity form a fan in \( \mathbb{R}^{d \times r} \times \mathbb{R}^{r \times n} \). This fan is the common refinement of the normal fans of \( dn \) simplices of dimension \((r - 1)\).

**Proof.** Let \( U = (u_{ij}) \) and \( V = (v_{jk}) \) be matrices of indeterminates of format \( d \times r \) and \( r \times n \) respectively. The entries of the (classical – not tropical) matrix product \( UV \) are the \( dn \) quadratic
polynomials $u_{i1}v_{1k} + u_{i2}v_{2k} + \cdots + u_{ir}v_{rk}$. The Newton polytope of each such quadric is an $(r - 1)$-dimensional simplex $P_{ik}$. Let $P = \sum_{i=1}^{d} \sum_{k=1}^{n} P_{ik}$ denote the Minkowski sum of these $dn$ simplices. This is a polytope of dimension $(2 \cdot \min(d, n) - 1)(r - 1)$ sitting inside $\mathbb{R}^{d \times r} \times \mathbb{R}^{r \times n}$.

The $ik$-coordinate of the tropical map $\phi_r$ takes a pair of matrices $(X, Y)$ to the real number $\min(x_{i1} + y_{1k}, x_{i2} + y_{2k}, \ldots, x_{ir} + y_{rk})$. This function is the support function of the simplex $P_{ik}$. It is linear on each cone in the normal fan of $P_{ik}$. Hence $\phi_r$ is a linear map on the common refinement of the normal fans of the simplices $P_{ik}$. This common refinement is the normal fan of their Minkowski sum $P$. We conclude that $\phi_r$ is piecewise-linear on the normal fan of $P$. $\square$

**Corollary 2.3.** If $r = 2$ then the tropical morphism $\phi_2$ is piecewise-linear with respect to the regions in an arrangement of $dn$ hyperplanes in $\mathbb{R}^{d \times 2} \times \mathbb{R}^{2 \times n}$.

**Proof.** If $r = 2$ then each $P_{ij}$ is a line segment, and their Minkowski sum $P$ is a zonotope of dimension $2 \cdot \min(d, n) - 1$. The normal fan of the zonotope $P$ is a hyperplane arrangement, and it follows from the previous proof that $\phi_r$ is piecewise linear on that hyperplane arrangement. $\square$

**Example 2.4.** Let $d = n = 3$ and $r = 2$. Then $P$ is a four-dimensional zonotope with nine zones in $\mathbb{R}^{12} = \mathbb{R}^{3 \times 2} \times \mathbb{R}^{2 \times 3}$. This zonotope has 230 vertices, so the dual hyperplane arrangement has 230 maximal regions. The tropical morphism $\phi_2$ maps each of these 230 regions linearly onto an 8-dimensional cone in $\mathbb{R}^{3 \times 3}$. The image of $\phi_2$ is the set of all tropically singular $3 \times 3$-matrices. This is a polyhedral fan with 15 maximal cones. It is the codimension one skeleton of the normal fan of the four-dimensional Birkhoff polytope (the convex hull of all six $3 \times 3$-permutation matrices). $\square$

By Proposition 2.1, the set of all Barvinok matrices of rank $\leq r$ is the image of the tropical morphism $\phi_r$. In particular, this set is a polyhedral fan in $\mathbb{R}^{d \times n}$, as in the previous example. The distinction between the Barvinok rank and the Kapranov rank, to be discussed in the next section, can be explained by the following general fact of tropical algebraic geometry: For most polynomial maps, the image of the tropicalization is strictly contained in the tropicalization of the image.

We next present an example of a matrix which will show that the Barvinok rank can be much larger than the other two notions of rank. The matrix to be considered is the $n \times n$-matrix

$$C_n = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 0 & 0 & \cdots & 0 \\ 0 & 1 & 0 & \cdots & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 1 & \cdots & 0 \\ \vdots & \vdots & \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & \cdots & 1 \end{pmatrix}$$

This looks like the unit matrix (in classical arithmetic) but it is far from being a unit matrix in tropical arithmetic, where 0 is the neutral element for $\oplus$ and $\infty$ is the neutral element for $\odot$. After obtaining the following result, we learned that the same calculation had already been done in [6].

**Proposition 2.5.** The Barvinok rank of the matrix $C_n$ is the smallest integer $r$ such that

$$n \leq \left( \frac{r}{3} \right).$$

**Proof.** Let $r$ be an integer and assume that $n \leq \binom{r}{\lfloor r/2 \rfloor}$. We first show that Barvinok rank $(C_n) \leq r$. Let $S_1, \ldots, S_n$ be distinct subsets of $\{1, \ldots, r\}$ each having cardinality $\lfloor r/2 \rfloor$. For each $k \in 1, \ldots, r$, we define an $n \times n$-matrix $X_k = (x_{ij}^k)$ with entries in $\{0, 1, 2\}$ as follows:

$$x_{ij}^k = 0 \text{ if } k \in S_i \setminus S_j, \quad x_{ij}^k = 2 \text{ if } k \in S_j \setminus S_i, \quad x_{ij}^k = 1 \text{ otherwise.}$$
The matrix $X_k$ has tropical rank one. To see this, let $V_k \in \{0,1\}^n$ denote the vector with $i$th coordinate equal to one or zero depending on whether $k$ is an element of $S_i$ or not. Then we have

$$X_k = V_k^T \circ (1 \circ (-V_k)).$$

To prove Barvinok rank $(C_n) \leq r$, it now suffices to establish the identity

$$C_n = X_1 \oplus X_2 \oplus \cdots \oplus X_r.$$

Indeed, all diagonal entries of the matrices on the right hand side are 1, and the off-diagonal entries (for $i \neq j$) of the right hand side are $\min(x_{ij}^1, x_{ij}^2, \ldots, x_{ij}^r) = 0$, because $S_i \setminus S_j$ is non-empty.

To prove the converse direction, we consider an arbitrary representation

$$C_n = Y_1 \oplus Y_2 \oplus \cdots \oplus Y_r,$$

where the matrices $Y_k = (y_{ij}^k)$ have tropical rank one. For each $k$ we set $T_k := \{(i,j) : y_{ij}^k = 0\}$. Since the matrices $Y_k$ are non-negative and have tropical rank one, it follows that each $T_k$ is a product $I_k \times J_k$, where $I_k$ and $J_k$ are subsets of $\{1, \ldots, n\}$. Moreover, we have $I_k \cap J_k = \emptyset$ because the diagonal entries of $Y_k$ are not zero. For each $i = 1, \ldots, n$ we set

$$S_i := \{k : i \in I_k\} \subseteq \{1, \ldots, r\}.$$

We claim that no two of the sets $S_1, \ldots, S_n$ are contained in one another. Sperner’s Theorem [1] then proves that $n \leq \binom{r}{\lceil \frac{r}{2} \rceil}$. To prove the claim, observe that if $S_i \subseteq S_j$ then the entry $y_{ij}^k$ cannot be zero for any $k$. Indeed, if $k \in S_i \subseteq S_j$ then $j \in I_k$ implies $j \notin J_k$. And if $k \notin S_i$ then $i \notin I_k$. □

For example, $C_6$ has Barvinok rank 4, as the following decomposition shows:

$$C_6 = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 1 & 1 & 2 & 2 & 2 \\ 1 & 1 & 1 & 2 & 2 & 2 \\ 1 & 1 & 1 & 2 & 2 & 2 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 & 1 & 1 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 & 1 & 1 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 & 1 & 1 \end{pmatrix} \oplus \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 1 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 \\ 1 & 1 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 \\ 2 & 2 & 1 & 1 & 1 & 2 \\ 2 & 2 & 1 & 1 & 1 & 2 \\ 0 & 1 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 \\ 0 & 1 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix} \oplus \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 0 & 1 & 0 & 1 & 0 \\ 2 & 1 & 2 & 1 & 2 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 & 1 & 0 & 1 & 0 \\ 2 & 1 & 2 & 1 & 2 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 & 1 & 0 & 1 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 & 1 & 1 & 0 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \oplus \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 2 & 2 & 2 & 1 & 1 \\ 1 & 2 & 2 & 2 & 1 & 1 \\ 1 & 2 & 2 & 2 & 1 & 1 \\ 0 & 1 & 1 & 1 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 & 1 & 1 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 & 1 & 1 & 0 & 0 \end{pmatrix}.$$

Similarly, $C_{36}$ has Barvinok rank 8, even though all its proper $35 \times 35$ minors have Barvinok rank 7 (and its $8 \times 8$ minors have Barvinok rank at most 5). Asymptotically,

$$\text{Barvinok rank } (C_n) \sim \log_2 n.$$

We will see in Examples 3.5 and 4.4 that the Kapranov rank and tropical rank of $C_n$ are both two.

3. The Kapranov rank

The tropical semiring has a strong connection to power series rings and their algebraic geometry. We review the basic setup from [20, 22]. Let $K = \mathbb{C}\{t\}$ be the field of Puiseux series with complex coefficients. The elements in $K$ are formal power series $f = c_1 t^{a_1} + c_2 t^{a_2} + \cdots$, where $a_1 < a_2 < \cdots$ are rational numbers that have a common denominator. Let $\deg : K^* \to \mathbb{Q}$ be the natural valuation sending a non-zero Puiseux series $f$ to its degree $a_1$. For any two elements $f, g \in K$, we have $\deg(fg) = \deg(f) + \deg(g) = \deg(f) \circ \deg(g)$. In general we also have $\deg(f + g) = \min(\deg(f), \deg(g)) = \deg(f) \oplus \deg(g)$, unless there is a cancellation of leading terms. Thus the tropical arithmetic is naturally induced from ordinary arithmetic in power series fields.

The field $K = \mathbb{C}\{t\}$ is algebraically closed of characteristic zero. If $I$ is any ideal in $K[x_1, \ldots, x_d]$ then we write $V(I)$ for its variety in the $d$-dimensional algebraic torus $(K^*)^d$. Thus the elements of $V(I)$ are vectors $x(t) = (x_1(t), \ldots, x_d(t))$ where each $x_i(t)$ is a Puiseux series and $f(x(t)) = 0$ for each polynomial $f \in I$. Let us now enlarge the field $K$ and allow all formal power series $f = c_1 t^{a_1} + c_2 t^{a_2} + \cdots$ where the $a_i$ can be real numbers, not just rationals. We denote this larger
field by $\tilde{K}$ and we write $\tilde{V}(I)$ for the variety in $(\tilde{K}^*)^d$ defined by $I$. The degree map can be applied coordinatewise, giving rise to a map which takes vectors of non-zero power series into $\mathbb{R}^d$:

$$\deg : (\tilde{K}^*)^d \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^d, \ (f_1(t), \ldots, f_d(t)) \mapsto (\deg(f_1), \ldots, \deg(f_d)).$$

We define the tropical variety of $I$, denoted $T(I) \subset \mathbb{R}^d$, to be the image of $\tilde{V}(I)$ under the map $\deg$. In [20, 22], the following alternative description of the tropical variety is given:

**Theorem 3.1.** The tropical variety $T(I)$ is the set of vectors $w \in \mathbb{R}^n$ such that the initial ideal $\text{in}_w(I) = (\text{in}_w(f) : f \in I)$ contains no monomial. The dimension of $T(I)$ is the dimension of $V(I)$.

This theorem is basically due to Misha Kapranov, who proved it in an unpublished manuscript for the case when $I$ is a principal ideal. The extension to arbitrary ideals was first stated in [22] and fully proved in [20]. The initial ideal $\text{in}_w(I)$ can be computed from any generating set of $I$ by computing a Gröbner basis with respect to any term order that refines $w$. This shows that $T(I)$ is a polyhedral subcomplex of the Gröbner fan of $I$, and it leads to an algorithm for computing $T(I)$.

We defined Kapranov rank to be the smallest dimension of any tropical linear space containing the columns of $M$; now, we can make this precise by defining tropical linear spaces.

**Definition 3.2.** A tropical linear space in $\mathbb{R}^d$ is any subset $T(I)$ where $I$ is an ideal generated by affine-linear forms $a_1x_1 + \cdots + a_dx_d + b$ in $\tilde{K}[x] = \tilde{K}[x_1, \ldots, x_d]$.

Note that here the scalars $a_1, \ldots, a_n, b$ are power series in $t$ with complex coefficients, the choice of the complex numbers being critical. If $I$ is the principal ideal generated by one affine-linear form $a_1x_1 + \cdots + a_nx_n + b$, then $T(I)$ is a tropical hypersurface. Tropical linear spaces were studied in [20], where it was shown that they are parametrized by the tropical Grassmannian. Every tropical linear space $L$ is a finite intersection of tropical hyperplanes, but not conversely, and the number of tropical hyperplanes needed is generally larger than the codimension of $L$.

Recall from Definition 1.2 that the Kapranov rank of a matrix $M \subset \mathbb{R}^{d \times n}$ is the smallest dimension of any tropical linear space containing the columns of $M$. It is not completely apparent in this definition that the Kapranov rank of a matrix and its transpose are the same, but this follows from our next result. Let $J_r$ denote the ideal generated by all the $(r+1) \times (r+1)$-subdeterminants of an $d \times n$-matrix of indeterminates $(x_{ij})$. This is a prime ideal of dimension $rd + rn - r^2$, and the generating determinants form a Gröbner basis. The variety $V(J_r)$ consists of all $d \times n$-matrices with entries in $K^*$ whose (classical) rank is at most $r$.

**Theorem 3.3.** For a real matrix $M = (m_{ij}) \in \mathbb{R}^{d \times n}$ the following statements are equivalent:

(a) The Kapranov rank of $M$ is at most $r$.

(b) The matrix $M$ lies in the tropical determinantal variety $T(J_r)$.

(c) There exists a $d \times n$-matrix $F = (f_{ij}(t))$ with non-zero entries in the field $\tilde{K}$ such that the rank of $F$ is less than or equal to $r$ and $\deg(f_{ij}) = m_{ij}$ for all $i$ and $j$.

The power series matrix $F$ in part (c) is called a lift of $M$. We abbreviate this as $\deg(F) = M$.

**Proof.** The equivalence of (b) and (c) is simply our definition of tropical variety applied to the ideal $J_r$ since, over the field $\tilde{K}$, lying in the variety of the determinantal ideal $J_r$ is equivalent to having rank at most $r$. To see that (c) implies (a), consider the linear subspace of $\tilde{K}^d$ spanned by the columns of $F$. This is an $r$-dimensional linear space over a field, so it is defined by an ideal $I$ generated by $d - r$ linearly independent linear forms in $\tilde{K}[x_1, \ldots, x_d]$. The tropical linear space $T(I)$ contains all the column vectors of $M = \deg(F)$.

Conversely, suppose that (a) holds, and let $L$ be a tropical linear space of dimension $r$ containing the columns of $M$. Pick a linear ideal $I$ in $\tilde{K}[x_1, \ldots, x_d]$ such that $L = T(I)$. By applying the definition of tropical variety to the ideal $I$, we see that each column vector of $M$ has a preimage...
in $\tilde{V}(I) \subset (\tilde{K}^*)^d$ under the degree map. Let $F$ be the $d \times n$-matrix over $\tilde{K}$ whose columns are these preimages. Then the column space of $F$ is contained in the variety defined by $I$, so we have $\text{rank}(F) \leq r$, and $\text{deg}(F) = M$ as desired. \hfill $\square$

**Corollary 3.4.** The Kapranov rank of a matrix $M \in \mathbb{R}^{d \times n}$ is the smallest rank of any lift of $M$.

The ideal $J_1$ is generated by the $2 \times 2$-minors $x_{ij}x_{kl} - x_{il}x_{kj}$ of the $d \times n$-matrix $(x_{ij})$. Therefore, a matrix of Kapranov rank one must certainly satisfy the linear equations $m_{ij} + m_{kl} = m_{il} + m_{kj}$. This happens if and only if there exist real vectors $X = (x_1, \ldots, x_d)$ and $Y = (y_1, \ldots, y_n)$ with

$$m_{ij} = x_i + y_j \quad \text{for all } i, j \iff m_{ij} = x_i \odot y_j \quad \text{for all } i, j \iff M = X^T \odot Y.$$

Conversely, if such $X$ and $Y$ exist, we can lift $M$ to a matrix of rank one by substituting $t^{m_{ij}}$ for $m_{ij}$. Therefore, a matrix $M$ has Kapranov rank one if and only if it has Barvinok rank one. In general, the Kapranov rank can be much smaller than the Barvinok rank, as the following example shows.

**Example 3.5.** Let $n \geq 3$ and consider the matrix $C_n$ in Proposition 2.5 of Section 2. The matrix $C_n$ does not have Kapranov rank one, so it has Kapranov rank at least two. Let $a_3, a_4, \ldots, a_n$ be distinct nonzero complex numbers. Consider the matrix

$$F_n = \begin{pmatrix} t & 1 & t + a_3 & t + a_4 & \cdots & t + a_n \\ 1 & t & 1 + a_3t & 1 + a_4t & \cdots & 1 + a_nt \\ t - a_3 & 1 & t & t - a_3 + a_4 & \cdots & t - a_3 + a_n \\ t - a_4 & 1 & t - a_4 + a_3 & t & \cdots & t - a_4 + a_n \\ \vdots & \vdots & \vdots & \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ t - a_n & 1 & t - a_n + a_3 & t - a_n + a_4 & \cdots & t \end{pmatrix}.$$ 

The matrix $F_n$ has rank 2 because the $i$-th column (for $i \geq 3$) equals the first column plus $a_i$ times the second column. Since $\text{deg}(F_n) = C_n$, we conclude that $C_n$ has Kapranov rank two.

The two-dimensional tropical plane containing the columns of $C_n$ is the two-dimensional fan $L$ in $\mathbb{R}^n$ which consists of the $n$ cones $\{x_i \geq x_1 = \cdots = x_{i-1} = x_{i+1} = \cdots = x_n\}$; this is the tropical variety defined by the ideal in $K[x_1, \ldots, x_n]$ generated by $n - 2$ linear forms with generic coefficients in $C$. Its image in $\mathbb{T}\mathbb{P}^{n-1}$ is the line all of whose tropical Plücker coordinates are zero [20].

The following proposition establishes half of Theorem 1.4.

**Proposition 3.6.** Every matrix $M \in \mathbb{R}^{d \times n}$ satisfies Kapranov rank$(M) \leq$ Barvinok rank$(M)$, and this inequality can be strict.

**Proof.** Suppose that $M$ has Barvinok rank $r$. Write $M = M_1 \oplus \cdots \oplus M_r$ where each $M_i$ has Barvinok rank one. Then $M_i$ has Kapranov rank one, so there exists a rank one matrix $F_i$ over $\tilde{K}$ such that $\text{deg}(F_i) = M_i$. Moreover, by multiplying the matrices $F_i$ by random complex numbers, we can choose $F_i$ such that there is no cancellation of leading terms in $t$ when we form the matrix $F = F_1 + \cdots + F_r$. This means $\text{deg}(F) = M$. Clearly, the matrix $F$ has rank $\leq r$. Theorem 3.3 implies that $M$ has Kapranov rank $\leq r$. Example 3.5 shows that the inequality can be strict. \hfill $\square$

A general algorithm for computing the Kapranov rank of a matrix $M$ involves computing a Gröbner basis of the determinantal ideal $J_r$. Suppose we wish to decide whether a given real $d \times n$-matrix $M = (m_{ij})$ has Kapranov rank $> r$. To decide this question, we fix any term order $<_M$ on the polynomial ring $\mathbb{C}[x_{ij}]$ which refines the partial ordering on monomials given assigning weight $m_{ij}$ to the variable $x_{ij}$, and we compute the reduced Gröbner basis $G$ of $J_r$ in the term order $<_M$. For each polynomial $g$ in $G$, we consider its leading form $\text{in}_M(g)$ with respect to the partial ordering coming from $M$. As noted in [21, 31], we have $\text{in}_M(\text{in}_M(g)) = \text{in}_M(g)$ for all $g \in G$. 


The ideal generated by the set of leading forms \( \{ \text{in}_M(g) : g \in \mathcal{G} \} \) is the initial ideal in_M(J_r). Let \( x^{all} \) denote the product of all \( dn \) unknowns \( x_{ij} \). The second step in our algorithm is to compute the saturation of the initial ideal with respect to the coordinate hyperplanes:
\[
(5) \quad \left( \text{in}_M(J_r) : (x^{all})^\infty \right) = \{ f \in \mathbb{C}[x_{ij}] : f \cdot (x^{all})^s \in J_r \text{ for some } s \in \mathbb{N} \}.
\]
Computing such an ideal quotient, given the generators in_M(g), is a standard operation in computational commutative algebra. It is a built-in command in software systems such as CoCoA, Macaulay 2 or Singular. The following is a direct consequence of Theorems 3.1 and 3.3.

**Corollary 3.7.** The matrix \( M \) has Kapranov rank > \( r \) if and only if (5) is the unit ideal \( (1) \).

In view of this, the (combinatorial) Theorem 5.5, Theorem 6.5 and Corollary 7.4 have the following commutative algebra implications. Recall from [16] that a finite generating set \( S \) of an ideal \( I \) is a tropical basis if, for every weight vector \( w \in \mathbb{R}^n \) for which the initial ideal \( \text{in}_w(I) \) contains a monomial, there is an \( f \in S \) such that \( \text{in}_w(f) \) is a monomial. Every ideal \( I \) in \( K[x_1, \ldots, x_n] \) has a tropical basis but tropical bases are often much larger than minimal generating sets.

**Corollary 3.8.** The \( 3 \times 3 \)-minors of a matrix of indeterminates form a tropical basis. The same holds for the maximal minors of a matrix, but it does not hold for the \( 4 \times 4 \)-minors of a \( 7 \times 7 \)-matrix.

We have defined Kapranov rank in terms of power series arithmetic over the complex field \( \mathbb{C} \), which is a canonical choice for doing algebraic geometry. However, the same definition works over any field \( k \). One can consider the Puiseux series field \( K = k\{\{t\}\} \) with either rational or real exponents. Note that the former is not algebraically closed if \( k \) is algebraically closed of characteristic \( p \), but this need not concern us. We denote the latter by \( \bar{K} \) as before. All we need is the degree map \( (\bar{K}^*)^d \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^d \). We define a tropical linear space over the field \( k \) to be the image under “deg” of any linear subspace of the \( \bar{K} \)-vector space \( \bar{K}^d \), and we define the Kapranov rank over \( k \) using Definition 1.2. Theorem 3.3 is true over all fields, but Proposition 3.6 is true only over infinite fields because in its proof we needed to take random coefficients. Indeed, Example 6.6 in Section 6 shows a matrix whose Kapranov rank over the 2-element field \( F_2 \) is greater than the Barvinok rank. Even over infinite, algebraically closed fields, the Kapranov rank of a matrix may differ from field to field; we will discuss this further and give examples in Section 7.

### 4. The tropical rank

We begin by proving the first inequality in Theorem 1.4. To complete the proof of Theorem 1.4, it remains to be seen that the inequality can be strict. This will be done in in Section 7.

**Proposition 4.1.** Every matrix \( M \in \mathbb{R}^{d \times n} \) satisfies tropical rank\((M) \leq \text{Kapranov rank}(M)\).

**Proof.** If the matrix \( M \) has a tropically non-singular \( r \times r \) minor, then any lift of \( M \) to the power series field \( \bar{K} \) must have the corresponding \( r \times r \)-minor non-singular over \( \bar{K} \), since the leading exponent of its determinant occurs only once in the sum. Consequently, no lift of \( M \) to \( \bar{K} \) can have rank less than \( r \). By Theorem 3.3, this means that the Kapranov rank of \( M \) must be at least \( r \). \( \square \)

The set of all tropical linear combinations of a set of \( n \) vectors in \( \mathbb{R}^d \) is a polyhedral complex. It has a 1-dimensional linearity space, spanned by the vector \( (1, \ldots, 1) \), but upon quotienting out by this 1-dimensional space, we get a bounded subset in tropical projective space \( \mathbb{T}^{d-1} = \mathbb{R}^d / \mathbb{R}(1, \ldots, 1) \). This set is the tropical convex hull of the \( n \) given points in \( \mathbb{T}^{d-1} \), and it was investigated in depth in [10]. We review some relevant definitions and facts.

We fix a subset \( V = \{ v_1, \ldots, v_n \} \subseteq \mathbb{R}^d \). For each sequence \( S = (S_1, \ldots, S_d) \) of subsets \( S_i \subseteq \{1, \ldots, n\} \), we denote by \( X_S \) the region of \( \mathbb{T}^{d-1} \) defined by the inequalities \( x_k - x_j \leq v_{ik} - v_{ij} \) for all \( k \in \{1, \ldots, d\} \) and all \( i, j \) such that \( i \in S_j \). According to [10, Theorem 15], the tropical convex
hull of \( V \) equals the union of the \( X_S \) which are bounded. The sequence \( S \) is called the type of a given point \( x \in X_S \) in the tropical polytope \( t\text{conv}(V) \). The dimension of a particular cell \( X_S \) of the tropical polytope can be easily computed from the combinatorics of the set \( S \): let \( G_S \) be the graph which has vertex set \( 1, \ldots, d \), with \( i \) and \( j \) connected by an edge if \( S_i \cap S_j \) is nonempty. The dimension of \( X_S \) is one less than the number of connected components of the graph \( G_S \).

Recall from Definition 1.3 that the tropical rank of a matrix is the size of the largest non-singular square minor, and that an \( r \times r \) matrix \( M \) is non-singular if \( \bigcap_{i=1}^r M_{\sigma(i), i} = \sum_{i=1}^r M_{\sigma(i), i} \) achieves its minimum twice as \( \sigma \) ranges over the symmetric group \( S_r \). Here is another characterization.

**Theorem 4.2.** Let \( M \subset \mathbb{R}^{d \times n} \) be a matrix. Then the tropical rank of \( M \) is equal to one plus the dimension of the tropical convex hull of the columns of \( M \), viewed as a tropical polytope in \( \mathbb{T} \mathbb{P}^{d-1} \).

**Proof.** Let \( V = \{ v_1, \ldots, v_n \} \) be the set of columns of \( M \), and let \( P = t\text{conv}(V) \) be their tropical convex hull in \( \mathbb{T} \mathbb{P}^{d-1} \). Suppose that \( r \) is the tropical rank of \( M \), that is, there exists a tropically non-singular \( r \times r \)-submatrix of \( M \), but all larger square submatrices are tropically singular.

We first show that \( \dim(P) \geq r - 1 \). We fix a non-singular \( r \times r \)-submatrix \( M' \) of \( M \). Deleting the rows outside \( M' \) means projecting \( P \) into \( \mathbb{T} \mathbb{P}^{r-1} \), and deleting the columns outside \( M' \) means passing to a tropical subpolytope \( P' \) of the image. Both operations can only decrease the dimension, so it suffices to show \( \dim(P') \geq r - 1 \). Hence, we can assume that \( M \) is itself a tropically non-singular \( r \times r \)-matrix. Also, without loss of generality, we can assume that the minimum over \( \sigma \in S_r \) of

\[
(6) \quad f(\sigma) = \sum_{i=1}^r v_{\sigma(i), i}
\]

is uniquely achieved when \( \sigma \) is the identity element \( e \in S_r \). We now claim that the cell \( X_{\{1, \ldots, r\}} \) in \( P = P' \) is of dimension \( r - 1 \). The inequalities defining this cell are \( x_k - x_j \leq v_{jk} - v_{jj} \) for \( j \neq k \). Suppose that this cell were not full-dimensional. By Farkas’ Lemma, there would exist a non-negative linear combination of the inequalities \( x_k - x_j \leq v_{jk} - v_{jj} \) which equals 0 \( \leq c \) for some non- positive real \( c \). This linear combination would imply that some other \( \sigma \in S_r \) has \( f(\sigma) \leq f(e) \), a contradiction.

For the converse, suppose that \( \dim(P) \geq r \). Pick a region \( X_S \) of dimension \( r \). The graph \( G_S \) has \( r + 1 \) connected components, so we can pick \( r + 1 \) elements of \( \{1, \ldots, n\} \) of which no two appear in a common \( S_j \). Assume without loss of generality that this set is \( \{1, \ldots, r + 1\} \), so that \( i \in S_j \) if and only if \( i = j \), for \( 1 \leq i, j \leq r + 1 \). We claim that the square submatrix consisting of the first \( r + 1 \) rows and columns of \( M \) is tropically non-singular. Indeed, we have:

\[
 f(\sigma) - f(e) = \sum_{i=1}^{r+1} v_{\sigma(i), i} - \sum_{i=1}^{r+1} v_{ii} = \sum_{i=1}^{r+1} (v_{\sigma(i), i} - v_{ii}),
\]

but whenever \( \sigma(i) \neq i \), \( v_{\sigma(i), i} - v_{ii} > 0 \) since \( i \in S_i \) and \( i \notin S_{\sigma(i)} \). Therefore, if \( \sigma \) is not the identity, we have \( f(\sigma) - f(e) > 0 \), and \( e \) is the unique permutation in \( S_{r+1} \) minimizing the expression (6). So \( M \) has tropical rank at least \( r + 1 \). This is a contradiction, and we conclude \( \dim(P) = r - 1 \). \( \square \)

We next present a combinatorial formula for the tropical rank of a zero-one matrix, or any matrix which has only two distinct entries. We define the support of a vector in tropical space \( \mathbb{R}^d \) as the set of its zero coordinates. We define the support poset of a matrix \( M \) to be the set of all unions of supports of column vectors of \( M \). This set is partially ordered by inclusion.

**Proposition 4.3.** The tropical rank of a zero-one matrix with no column of all ones equals the maximum length of a chain in its support poset.
The assumption that there is no column of all ones is needed for the statement to hold because a column of zeroes and a column of ones represent the same point in tropical projective space $\mathbb{T}\mathbb{P}^{d-1}$.

**Proof.** There is no loss of generality in assuming that every union of supports of columns of $M$ is actually the support of a column. Indeed, the tropical sum of a set of columns gives a column whose support is the union of supports, and appending this column to $M$ does not change the tropical rank since the tropical convex hull of the columns remains the same. Therefore, if there is a chain with $r$ elements in the support poset we may assume that there is a set of $r$ columns with supports contained in one another. Since there is no column of ones, from this we can easily extract an $r \times r$ minor with zeroes on and below the diagonal and 1’s above the diagonal, which is tropically non-singular.

Reciprocally, suppose there is a tropically non-singular $r \times r$ minor $N$. We claim that the support poset of $N$ has a chain of length $r$, from which it follows that the support poset of $M$ also has a chain of length $r$. Assume without loss of generality that the unique minimum permutation sum is obtained in the diagonal. This minimum sum cannot be more than one, because if $n_{ii}$ and $n_{jj}$ are both 1 then changing them for $n_{ij}$ and $n_{ji}$ does not increase the sum. If the minimum is zero, orienting an edge from $i$ to $j$ if entry $ij$ of $N$ is zero yields an acyclic digraph, which admits an ordering. Rearranging the rows and columns according to this ordering yields a matrix with 1’s above the diagonal and 0’s on and below the diagonal. The tropical sum of the last $i$ columns (which corresponds to union of the corresponding supports) then produces a vector with 0’s exactly in the last $i$ positions. Hence, there is a proper chain of supports of length $r$.

If the minimum permutation sum in $N$ is 1, then let $n_{ii}$ be the unique diagonal entry equal to 1. The $i$-th row in $N$ must consist of all 1’s: if $n_{ij}$ is zero, then changing $n_{ij}$ and $n_{ji}$ for $n_{ii}$ and $n_{jj}$ does not increase the sum. Changing this row of ones to a row of zeroes does not affect the support poset of $N$ (it just adds an element to every support), and yields a non-singular zero-one matrix with minimum sum zero to which we can apply the argument in the previous paragraph. □

**Example 4.4.** The tropical rank of the matrix $C_n$ in Proposition 2.5 equals two, since all its $3 \times 3$ minors are tropically singular, while the principal $2 \times 2$ minors are not. The supports of its columns are all the sets of cardinality $n - 1$ and the support poset consists of them and the whole set $\{1, \ldots, n\}$. The maximal chains in the poset have indeed length two.

### 5. Mixed Subdivisions and Corank One

A useful tool in tropical convexity is the computation of tropical convex hulls by means of mixed subdivisions of the Minkowski sum of several copies of a simplex. We recall the definition of mixed subdivisions, adapted to the case of interest to us. See [18] for more details.

**Definition 5.1.** Let $\Delta^{d-1}$ be the standard $(d-1)$-simplex in $\mathbb{R}^d$, with vertex set $A = \{e_1, \ldots, e_d\}$. Let $n\Delta^{d-1}$ denote its dilation by a factor of $n$, which we regard as the convex hull of the Minkowski sum $A + A + \cdots + A$. Let $M = (v_{ij}) \subset \mathbb{R}^{d \times n}$ be a matrix. Consider the lifted simplices

$$P_i := \text{conv}\{(e_1, v_{1i}), \ldots, (e_d, v_{di})\} \subset \mathbb{R}^{d+1} \quad \text{for } i = 1, 2, \ldots, n.$$  

The regular mixed subdivision of $n\Delta^{d-1}$ induced by $M$ is the set of projections of the lower faces of the Minkowski sum $P_1 + \cdots + P_n$. Here, a face is called lower if its outer normal cone contains a vector with last coordinate negative.

It was shown in [10, §4] that there is a bijection between the cells $X_S$ in the convex hull of the columns of $M$ and the interior cells in the regular subdivision of a product of simplices induced by $M$. Via the Cayley trick [18], the latter biject to interior cells in the regular mixed subdivision defined above. Here we provide a short direct proof of the composition of these two bijections:
Lemma 5.2. Let \( M \subset \mathbb{R}^{d \times n} \) and let \( S = (S_1, \ldots, S_d) \), where each \( S_j \) is a subset of \( \{1, \ldots, n\} \). Then, the following properties are equivalent:

1. The tropical convex hull in \( \mathbb{T}^{d-1} \) of the columns of \( M \) contains a cell of type \( S \).
2. There is a non-negative matrix \( M' \) such that \( M' \) is obtained from \( M \) by adding constants to rows or columns of \( M \), and such that \( M'_{ij} = 0 \) precisely when \( i \in S_j \).
3. The regular mixed subdivision of \( n \Delta^{d-1} \) induced by \( M \) has as a cell the Minkowski sum \( \tau_1 + \cdots + \tau_n \) where \( \tau_i = \text{conv}(\{e_j : i \in S_j\}) \).

Moreover, if this happens the cells referred to in parts (1) and (3) have complementary dimensions.

Proof. Adding a constant to a row of \( M \) amounts to translating the set of \( n \) points in \( \mathbb{T}^{n-1} \), while adding a constant to a column leaves the point set unchanged. Consider a cell \( X_S \) in the tropical convex hull, let \( x \) be any point in the relative interior of \( X_S \) and let \( M' \) be the (unique) matrix obtained by translating the point set by a vector \(-x\) and normalizing every column by adding a scalar so that its minimum coordinate equals 0. Conversely, for a matrix \( M' \) as in (2), consider the point \( x \) whose coordinates are the amounts added to the columns of \( M \) to obtain \( M' \). The point \( x \) is in the tropical convex hull of the columns of \( M \). Let \( S \) be its type. Then the modified matrix \( M' \) has zeroes precisely in entries \((j, i)\) with \( i \in S_j \), proving the equivalence of (1) and (2).

For the equivalence of (2) and (3), observe that adding a constant to a row or column of \( M \) does not change the mixed subdivision of \( \sum P_i \). For a non-negative matrix \( M' \) with at least a zero in every column, the positions of the zero entries define the face of \( \sum P_i \) in the negative vertical direction. Conversely, for every cell of the regular mixed subdivision, we can apply a linear transformation to give that cell height zero and all other vertices positive height (this is what it means to be in the lower envelope.) The resulting height function is precisely the matrix \( M' \) in (2), which proves the equivalence of (2) and (3). The assertion on dimensions is easy to prove.

This lemma implies that the tropical convex hull is dual to the regular mixed subdivision.

Corollary 5.3. Given a matrix \( M \), the poset of types in the tropical convex hull of its columns and the poset of interior cells of the corresponding regular mixed subdivision are antiisomorphic.

Corollary 5.4. Let \( M \subset \mathbb{R}^{n \times d} \). The tropical rank of \( M \) equals \( d \) minus the minimal dimension of an interior cell in the regular mixed subdivision of \( n \Delta^{d-1} \) induced by \( M \).

We can use these tools to prove that the tropical and Kapranov ranks of a matrix coincide if the latter is maximal.

Theorem 5.5. If an \( n \times d \) matrix \( M \) has Kapranov rank \( d \) then it has tropical rank \( d \), too.

Proof. By Corollary 5.4, \( M \) has tropical rank \( d \) if and only if the corresponding regular mixed subdivision has an interior vertex. The theorem then follows from the next two lemmas.

Lemma 5.6. A \( d \times n \)-matrix \( M \) has Kapranov rank less than \( d \) if and only if the corresponding regular mixed subdivision has a cell that intersects all facets of \( n \Delta^{d-1} \).

Proof. If \( M \) has Kapranov rank less than \( d \), then its column vectors lie in a tropical hyperplane. Since all tropical hyperplanes are translates of one another, there is no loss of generality in assuming that it is the hyperplane defined by \( x_1 \oplus \cdots \oplus x_d \). That is, after normalization, all columns of \( M \) are non-negative and have at least two zeroes. Then, by Lemma 5.2, the zero entries of \( M \) define a cell \( B \) in the regular mixed subdivision none of whose Minkowski summands are single vertices. In particular, for every facet \( F \) of \( \Delta^{d-1} \) and for every \( i \in \{1, \ldots, n\} \), the \( i \)-th summand of \( B \) is at least an edge and hence it intersects \( F \). Hence, \( B \) intersects all facets of \( n \Delta^{d-1} \). For the converse suppose the regular mixed subdivision has a cell \( B \) which intersects all facets of \( n \Delta^{d-1} \). We may assume that \( M' \) gives height zero to the points in that cell and positive height to all the others. The
The cell in the preceding statement need not be unique. For example, if a tetrahedron is sliced by planes parallel to two opposite edges, then each maximal cell meets all the facets of the tetrahedron.

**Lemma 5.7.** In every polyhedral subdivision of a simplex which has no interior vertices, but arbitrarily many vertices on the boundary, there is a cell that intersects all of the facets.

**Proof.** Observe that there is no loss of generality in assuming that the polyhedral subdivision $S$ is a triangulation. For a triangulation, we use Sperner’s Lemma [1]: “if the vertices of a triangulation of $\Delta$ are labeled so that (1) the vertices of $\Delta$ receive different labels and (2) the vertices in any face $F$ of $\Delta$ receive labels among those of the vertices of $F$, then there is a fully labeled simplex”.

Our task is to give our triangulation a Sperner labeling with the property that every vertex labeled $i$ lies in the $i$-th facet of the simplex. The way to obtain this is: the vertex opposite to facet $i$ is labeled $i + 1$. More generally, the label $i$ of a vertex $v$ is taken so that $v$ is contained in facet $i$ but not on facet $i - 1$. All labels are modulo $d$. \qed

### 6. Matrices of rank two

By Theorem 4.2, if a matrix has tropical rank two, then the tropical convex hull of its columns is one-dimensional. Since it is contractible [10], this tropical polytope is a tree. Another way of showing this is via the corresponding regular mixed subdivision. Tropical rank 2 means that all the interior cells have codimension zero or one. Hence, the subdivision is constructed by slicing the simplex via a certain number of hyperplanes (which do not meet inside the simplex) and its dual graph is a tree. The special case when the matrix has Barvinok rank two is characterized by the following proposition.

**Proposition 6.1.** The following are equivalent for a matrix $M$:

1. It has Barvinok rank 2.
2. All its $3 \times 3$ minors have Barvinok rank 2.
3. The tropical convex hull of its columns is a path.

**Proof.** (1)⇒(2) is trivial (the Barvinok rank of a minor cannot exceed that of the whole matrix) and (3)⇒(1) is easy: if a tropical polytope is a path, then it is the tropical convex hull of its two endpoints. Proposition 2.1 then implies that the Barvinok rank is two.

For (2)⇒(3) first observe that the case where $M$ is $3 \times 3$ again follows from Proposition 2.1. We next prove the case where $M$ is $d \times 3$ by contradiction: since the tropical convex hulls of rows and of columns of a matrix are isomorphic as cell complexes [10, Theorem 23], assume that the tropical convex hull of the rows of $M$ is not a path. Then, there are three rows whose tropical convex hull is not a path, and their $3 \times 3$ minor has Barvinok rank 3. Finally, if $M$ is of arbitrary size $d \times n$ and the tropical convex hull of its columns is not a path, consider three columns whose tropical convex hull is not a path and apply the previous case to them. \qed

Our goal in this section is to show that if $M$ has tropical rank 2 then it has Kapranov rank 2. Following Theorem 3.3 (c), this is done by constructing an explicit lift to a rank 2 matrix over $\tilde{K}$.

**Lemma 6.2.** Let $M$ be a matrix of tropical rank two. Let $x$ be a point in the tropical convex hull of the columns of $M$. Let $M'$ be the matrix obtained by adding $-x$ to every column and then...
normalizing columns to have zero as their minimal entry. After possibly reordering the rows and columns, $M'$ has the following block structure:

$$M' := \begin{pmatrix}
0 & 0 & 0 & \cdots & 0 \\
0 & A_1 & 0 & \cdots & 0 \\
0 & 0 & A_2 & \cdots & 0 \\
\vdots & \vdots & \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\
0 & 0 & 0 & \cdots & A_k \\
\end{pmatrix},$$

where the matrices $A_i$ have all entries positive and every $2 \times 2$ minor has the property that the minimum of its four entries is achieved twice. Each 0 represents a matrix of zeroes of the appropriate size, and the first row and column blocks of $M'$ may have size zero. Moreover, the tropical convex hull of the columns of $M'$ is the union of the tropical convex hulls of the column vectors of the blocks augmented by the zero vector 0, and two of these $k$ trees meet only at the point 0.

**Proof.** First, adjoin the column $x$ to our matrix if it does not already exist; since $x$ is in the convex hull of $M$, this will not change the tropical convex hull of the columns of $M$. We can then simply remove it at the end, when it is transformed into a column of all zeroes. Thus, we can assume that one of the columns of the matrix $M'$ consists of all zeroes.

The asserted block decomposition means that any two given columns of $M'$ have either equal or disjoint cosupports, where the cosupport of a column is the set of positions where it does not have a zero. To prove that this holds, just observe that if it didn’t then $M'$ would have the following minor, where $+$ denotes a strictly positive entry. (Recall that each column has a zero in it.)

$$\begin{pmatrix}
0 & + & + \\
0 & 0 & + \\
0 & ? & 0 \\
\end{pmatrix}$$

But this $3 \times 3$-matrix is tropically non-singular. The assertion of the $2 \times 2$ minors follows from the fact that the non-negative matrix

$$\begin{pmatrix}
0 & a & b \\
0 & c & d \\
0 & 0 & 0 \\
\end{pmatrix}$$

is tropically singular if and only if the minimum of $a$, $b$, $c$ and $d$ is achieved twice.

Finally, the assertion about the convex hulls is trivial, since any linear combination of column vectors from a given block will have all zero entries except in the coordinates corresponding to that block. Any path joining two such points from different blocks will pass through the origin. \qed

We next introduce a technical lemma for making a power series lifting sufficiently generic.

**Lemma 6.3.** Let $A$ be a non-negative matrix with no zero column and suppose that the smallest entry in $A$ occurs the most times in the first column. Let $\hat{A}$ be the matrix

$$\begin{pmatrix}
0 & 0 \\
0 & A \\
\end{pmatrix}$$

obtained by adjoining a row and a column of zeroes. If $\hat{A}$ has Kapranov rank two, then $\hat{A}$ has a rank-2 lift $F \in \hat{K}^{d \times n}$ in which every $2 \times 2$ minor is non-singular and the $i$-th column can be written as a linear combination $\lambda_i u_1 + \mu_i u_2$ of the first two columns $u_1$ and $u_2$, with $\deg(\lambda_i) \geq \deg(\mu_i) = 0$.

**Proof.** Starting with an arbitrary rank-2 lift, let $F$ be obtained by adding to every row/column a $\hat{K}$-linear combination of all other rows/columns with coefficients of sufficiently high degree but otherwise generic. This preserves the rank 2 of the lift and the degree of every entry, but makes every $2 \times 2$ minor of $F$ non-singular. The $i$-th column of $F$ is now a $\hat{K}$-linear combination $\lambda_i u_1 + \mu_i u_2$.
of the first two columns. If the degrees of $\lambda_i$ and $\mu_i$ are different, then their minimum must be zero in order to get a degree zero element in the first entry of column $i$. But then $\deg(\mu_i) > \deg(\lambda_i) = 0$ is impossible, because it would make the $i$-th column of $A$ all zero. Hence $\deg(\lambda_i) > \deg(\mu_i) = 0$.

If the degrees are equal, then they are non-positive in order to get degree zero for the first entry in $\lambda_i u_1 + \mu_i u_2$. But they cannot be equal and negative, or otherwise entries of positive degree in $u_2$ would produce entries of negative degree in $u_i$. Hence, $\deg(\lambda_i) = \deg(\mu_i) = 0$ in this case. □

**Corollary 6.4.** Let $A$ and $B$ be non-negative matrices. Assume that the two matrices

$$
\tilde{A} := \begin{pmatrix} A & 0 \\ 0 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \quad \text{and} \quad \tilde{B} := \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 0 \\ 0 & B \end{pmatrix}
$$

have Kapranov rank equal to 2. Then, the matrix

$$
M := \begin{pmatrix} A & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & B \end{pmatrix}
$$

has Kapranov rank equal to 2 as well.

**Proof.** We may assume that neither $A$ nor $B$ has a zero column. Hence Lemma 6.3 applies to both of them. We number the rows of $M$ from $-k$ to $k'$ and its columns from $-l$ to $l'$, where $k \times l$ and $k' \times l'$ are the dimensions of $A$ and $B$ respectively. In this way, $A$ (respectively $B$) is the minor of negative (respectively, positive) indices. The row and column indexed zero consist of all zeroes. To further exhibit the symmetry between $A$ and $B$ the columns and rows in $A$ will be referred to “in reverse”. That is to say, the first and second columns of it are the ones indexed 0 and −1 in $M$.

We now construct a lifting $F = (a_{i,j}) \in k\{t\}^{d \times n}$ of $M$. We assume that we are given rank-2 lifts of $\tilde{A}$ and $\tilde{B}$ which satisfy the conditions of the previous lemma. Furthermore, we assume that the lift of the entry $(0,0)$ is the same in both, which can be achieved by scaling the first row in one of them.

We use exactly those lifts of $\tilde{A}$ and $\tilde{B}$ for the upper-left and bottom-right corner minors of $M$. Our task is to complete that with an entry $a_{i,j}$ for every $i, j$ with $ij < 0$, such that $\deg(a_{i,j}) = 0$ and the whole matrix still has rank 2. We claim that it suffices to choose the entry $a_{-1,1}$ of degree zero and sufficiently generic. That this choice fixes the rest of the matrix is easy to see: The entry $a_{1,-1}$ is fixed by the fact that the $3 \times 3$ minor

$$
\begin{pmatrix}
  a_{-1,-1} & a_{-1,0} & a_{-1,1} \\
  a_{0,-1} & a_{0,0} & a_{0,1} \\
  a_{1,-1} & a_{1,0} & a_{1,1}
\end{pmatrix}
$$

needs to have rank 2. All other entries $a_{i,-1}$ and $a_{i,1}$ are fixed by the fact that the entries $a_{i,-1}$, $a_{i,0}$ and $a_{i,1}$ (two of which come from either $\tilde{A}$ or $\tilde{B}$) must satisfy the same dependence as the three columns of the minor above. For each $j = -l, \ldots, -2$ (respectively $j = 2, \ldots, l'$), let $\lambda_j$ and $\mu_j$ be the coefficients in the expression of the $j$-th column of $\tilde{A}$ (respectively, of $\tilde{B}$) as $\lambda_j u_0 + \mu_j u_{-1}$ (respectively, $\lambda_j u_0 + \mu_j u_1$). Then, $a_{i,j} = \lambda_j a_{i,0} + \mu_j a_{i,-1}$ (respectively, $a_{i,j} = \lambda_j a_{i,0} + \mu_j a_{i,1}$).

What remains to be shown is that if $a_{-1,1}$ is of degree zero and sufficiently generic then all the new entries are of degree zero too. For this, observe that if $j \in \{-l', \ldots, 2\}$ (resp. $j \in \{2, \ldots, l\}$) then $a_{i,j}$ is of degree zero as long as the coefficient of degree zero in $a_{i,-1}$ (resp. $a_{i,1}$) are different from the degree zero coefficients in the quotient $-\lambda_j a_{i,0}/\mu_j$ (here we are using the assumption that $\deg(\lambda_j) \geq \deg(\mu_j) \geq 0$). In terms of the choice of $a_{-1,1}$ this translates to the following determinant having non-zero coefficient in degree zero:
ON THE RANK OF A TROPICAL MATRIX

\[
\begin{pmatrix}
  a_{i,-1} & a_{i,0} & -\lambda_j a_{i,0}/\mu_j \\
  a_{-1,-1} & a_{-1,0} & a_{-1,1} \\
  a_{0,-1} & a_{0,0} & a_{0,1}
\end{pmatrix}
\quad \text{respectively}
\begin{pmatrix}
  a_{0,-1} & a_{0,0} & a_{0,1} \\
  a_{1,-1} & a_{1,0} & a_{1,1} \\
  -\lambda_j a_{i,0}/\mu_j & a_{i,0} & a_{i,1}
\end{pmatrix}.
\]

That \( a_{-1,1} \) and \( a_{1,-1} \) sufficiently generic imply non-singularity of these matrices follows from the fact that the following \( 2 \times 2 \) minors come from the given lifts of \( \tilde{A} \) and \( \tilde{B} \), hence they are non-singular:

\[
\begin{pmatrix}
  a_{i,-1} & a_{i,0} \\
  a_{0,-1} & a_{0,0}
\end{pmatrix}
, \quad \begin{pmatrix}
  a_{0,0} & a_{0,1} \\
  a_{i,0} & a_{i,1}
\end{pmatrix}.
\]

\[\square\]

**Theorem 6.5.** Let \( M \) be a matrix of tropical rank 2. Then its Kapranov rank equals 2 as well.

**Proof.** The Kapranov rank of \( M \) is always at least the tropical rank, so we need only show that the Kapranov rank is less than or equal to 2. If the tropical convex hull \( P \) of the columns of \( M \) is a path, then \( M \) has Barvinok rank 2 (by Proposition 6.1) and thus Kapranov rank 2. Otherwise, let \( x \) be a node of degree at least three in the tree \( P \). We apply the method of Lemma 6.2. Since \( x \) has degree at least three, it follows that there are at least three blocks \( A_i \). In particular, \( M \) has at least three columns. We induct on the number of columns of \( M \). If \( M \) has exactly three columns, then each block \( A_i \) is a single column, and every row of \( M \) has at most one positive entry. It is easy to construct an explicit lift of rank 2: in each row, lift the positive entry \( a \) as \(-t^a\) and the zero entries as \(-1\) and \(1 + t^a\). If there are rows of zeroes, lift them as \((1, 1, 2)\), for example.

Next, suppose that \( M \) has \( m \geq 4 \) columns. The two blocks with the fewest number of combined columns have at least 2 and at most \( m - 2 \) rows all together. Possibly after adding a row and column of zeroes, this provides a decomposition of our matrix as

\[
M = \begin{pmatrix}
  0 & 0 & 0 \\
  0 & A & 0 \\
  0 & 0 & B
\end{pmatrix},
\]

where both \( A \) and \( B \) have at least two columns. It then follows that the minors

\[
\begin{pmatrix}
  0 & 0 \\
  0 & A
\end{pmatrix}
\quad \text{and} \quad 
\begin{pmatrix}
  0 & 0 \\
  0 & B
\end{pmatrix}
\]

both have fewer columns than the original matrix. By the inductive hypothesis they have Kapranov rank 2. Applying Corollary 6.4 completes the inductive step of the theorem. \[\square\]

In the proof of Lemma 6.3 we again required the ability to pick generic field elements. Thus, Theorem 6.5 holds over any infinite coefficient field, but it may fail over finite fields. This is illustrated by the following example. Proposition 4.1 and Theorem 5.5 fail here too, as does the fact that Kapranov rank is invariant under insertion of a tropical combination of existing columns.

**Example 6.6.** The matrix

\[
M = \begin{pmatrix}
  1 & 0 & 0 \\
  0 & 1 & 0 \\
  0 & 0 & 0
\end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix}
  1 & 0 & 0 \\
  2 & 1 & 1 \\
  1 & 0 & 0
\end{pmatrix} \oplus \begin{pmatrix}
  1 & 2 & 1 \\
  0 & 1 & 0 \\
  0 & 1 & 0
\end{pmatrix}.
\]

has Barvinok and tropical ranks equal to 2, but Kapranov rank 3 over the two-element field \( \mathbb{F}_2 \).
7. Matrices constructed from matroids

One of the important properties of rank in usual linear algebra is that it produces a matroid. Unfortunately, the definitions of tropical rank, Kapranov rank, and Barvinok rank all fail to do this. Consider the configuration of four points in the tropical plane \( \mathbb{T}P^2 \) given by the columns of

\[
M = \begin{pmatrix}
0 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\
0 & 0 & 1 & 2 \\
1 & 0 & 0 & -1
\end{pmatrix}.
\]

By any of our three definitions of rank, the maximal independent sets of columns are \{1, 2\}, \{1, 3, 4\}, and \{2, 3, 4\}. These do not all have the same size, and so they cannot be the bases of a matroid. The central obstruction here is that the sets \{1, 2, 3\} and \{1, 2, 4\} are collinear, but the set \{1, 2, 3, 4\} is not. Despite this failure, there is a strong connection between tropical linear algebra and matroids.

The results in Sections 5 and 6 imply that any matrix whose tropical and Kapranov ranks disagree must be at least of size \( 5 \times 5 \). The smallest example we know is \( 7 \times 7 \). It is based on the Fano matroid. To explain the example, and to show how to construct many others, we prove a theorem about tropical representations of matroids. The reader is referred to [14] for matroid basics.

**Definition 7.1.** Let \( M \) be a matroid. The cocircuit matrix of \( M \), denoted \( C(M) \), has rows indexed by the elements of the ground set of \( M \) and columns indexed by the cocircuits of \( M \). It has a 0 in entry \((i, j)\) if the \( i \)-th element is in the \( j \)-th cocircuit and a 1 otherwise.

In other words, \( C(M) \) is the zero-one matrix whose columns have the cocircuits of \( M \) as supports. (As before, the support of a column is its set of zeroes.) As an example, the matrix \( C_n \) of Section 2 is the cocircuit matrix of the uniform matroid of rank 2 with \( n \) elements. Similarly, the cocircuit matrix of the uniform matroid \( U_{n,r} \) has size \( n \times \binom{n}{r-1} \) and its columns are all the zero-one vectors with exactly \( r \) ones. The following results show that its tropical and Kapranov ranks equal \( r \). The tropical polytopes defined by these matrices are the tropical hypersimplices studied in [12].

**Proposition 7.2.** The tropical rank of the cocircuit matrix \( C(M) \) is the rank of the matroid \( M \).

**Proof.** This is a special case of Proposition 4.3 because the rank of \( M \) is the maximum length of a chain of non-zero covectors, and the supports of covectors are precisely the unions of supports of cocircuits. Note that \( C(M) \) cannot have a column of ones because every cocircuit is non-empty. \( \square \)

**Theorem 7.3.** If the Kapranov rank of \( C(M) \) over the ground field \( k \) is equal to the rank of \( M \), then \( M \) is representable over \( k \). If \( k \) is an infinite field, then the converse also holds.

**Proof.** Let \( M \) be a matroid of rank \( r \) on \( \{1, \ldots, d\} \) which has \( n \) cocircuits and suppose that \( F \in K^{d \times n} \) is a rank \( r \) lift of the cocircuit matrix \( C(M) \). For each row \( f_i \) of \( F \), let \( v_i \in K^d \) be the vector of constant terms in \( f_i \in K^d \). We claim that \( V = \{v_1, \ldots, v_d\} \) is a representation of \( M \). First note that \( V \) has rank at most \( r \) since every \( K \)-linear relation among the vectors \( f_i \) translates into a \( k \)-linear relation among the \( v_i \). Our claim says that \( \{i_1, \ldots, i_r\} \) is a basis of \( M \) if and only if \( \{v_{i_1}, \ldots, v_{i_r}\} \) is a basis of \( V \). Suppose \( \{i_1, \ldots, i_r\} \) is a basis of \( M \). Then, as in the proof of Proposition 4.3, we can find a square submatrix of \( C(M) \) using rows \( i_1, \ldots, i_r \) with 0’s on and below the diagonal and 1’s above it. This means that the lifted submatrix of constant terms is lower-triangular with nonzero entries along the diagonal. It implies that that \( v_{i_1}, \ldots, v_{i_r} \) are linearly independent, and, since \( \text{rank}(V) \leq r \), they must be a basis. We also conclude \( \text{rank}(V) = r \). If \( \{i_1, \ldots, i_r\} \) is not a basis in \( M \), there exists a cocircuit containing none of them; this means that some column of \( C(M) \) has all 1’s in rows \( i_1, \ldots, i_r \). Therefore, \( f_{i_1}, \ldots, f_{i_r} \) all have zero constant term in that coordinate, which means that \( v_{i_1}, \ldots, v_{i_r} \) are all 0 in that coordinate. Since the cocircuit is not empty, not all vectors \( v_j \) have an entry of 0 in that coordinate, and so \( \{v_1, \ldots, v_r\} \) cannot be a basis. This shows that \( V \) represents \( M \) over \( k \), which completes the proof of the first statement in Theorem 7.3.
For the second statement, let us assume that $\mathcal{M}$ has no loops. This is no loss of generality because a loop corresponds to a row of 1's in $C(\mathcal{M})$, which does not increase the Kapranov rank because every column has at least a zero. Assume $\mathcal{M}$ is representable over $k$ and fix a $d \times n$-matrix $A \in k^{d \times n}$ such that the rows of $A$ represent $\mathcal{M}$ and the sets of non-zero coordinates along the columns of $A$ are the cocircuits of $\mathcal{M}$. Suppose $\{1, \ldots, r\}$ is a basis of $\mathcal{M}$ and let $A'$ be the submatrix of $A$ consisting of the first $r$ rows. Write

$$A = \begin{pmatrix} I_r \\ C \end{pmatrix} \cdot A'$$

where $I_r$ is the identity matrix and $C \in k^{(d-r) \times r}$. Observe that $A$, hence $C$, cannot have a row of zeroes (because $\mathcal{M}$ has no loops). Since $k$ is an infinite field, there exists a matrix $B' \in k^{r \times n}$ such that all entries of the $d \times r$-matrix $\begin{pmatrix} I_r \\ C \end{pmatrix} \cdot B'$ are non-zero. We now define

$$F = \begin{pmatrix} I_r \\ C \end{pmatrix} \cdot (A' + tB') \in \mathbb{K}^{d \times n}.$$ 

This matrix has rank $r$ and $\deg(F) = C(\mathcal{M})$. This completes the proof of Theorem 7.3. \hfill \Box

**Corollary 7.4.** Let $\mathcal{M}$ be a matroid which is not representable over a given field $k$. Then the Kapranov rank with respect to $k$ of the tropical matrix $C(\mathcal{M})$ exceeds its tropical rank.

This corollary furnishes many examples of matrices whose Kapranov rank exceeds their tropical rank. Consider, for example, the Fano and non-Fano matroids, depicted in Figure 1. They both have rank three and seven elements. The first is only representable over fields of characteristic two, the second only over fields of characteristic different from two. In particular, Corollary 7.4 applied to these two matroids implies that over every field there are matrices with tropical rank equal to three and Kapranov rank larger than that. Also, it shows that the Kapranov rank of a matrix may be different over different fields $k$ and $k'$, even if $k$ and $k'$ are assumed to be algebraically closed. This is a more significant discrepancy than that of Example 6.6, which used a finite field.

More explicitly, the cocircuit matrix of the Fano matroid is

$$C(\mathcal{M}) = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 1 & 0 & 1 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 & 1 & 0 & 1 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 1 & 1 & 0 & 1 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 & 1 & 0 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 & 1 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 & 1 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix}.$$
This matrix is the smallest known example of a matrix whose Kapranov rank over \( \mathbb{C} \) (four) is strictly larger than its tropical rank (three). Put differently, the seven columns of this matrix (in \( \mathbb{T}\mathbb{P}^6 \)) have as their tropical convex hull a two-dimensional cell complex which does not lie in any two-dimensional linear subspace of \( \mathbb{T}\mathbb{P}^6 \), a feature decidedly absent from ordinary geometry.

Applied to non-representable matroids, such as the Vamos (rank 4, 8 elements, 41 cocircuits) or the non-Pappus matroid (rank 3, 9 elements, 20 cocircuits) \([14]\), Corollary 7.4 yields matrices with different Kapranov and tropical ranks over every field. One can also get examples in which the difference of the two ranks is arbitrarily large. Indeed, given matrices \( A \) and \( B \), we can construct the matrix

\[
M := \begin{pmatrix}
A & \infty \\
\infty' & B
\end{pmatrix}
\]

where \( \infty \) and \( \infty' \) denote matrices of the appropriate dimensions and whose entries are sufficiently large. Appropriate choices of these large values (pick the extra columns to be points in the tropical convex hull of the columns of \( A \) and \( B \) and add large constants to each column) will ensure that the tropical and Kapranov ranks of \( M \) are the sums of those of \( A \) and of \( B \). The difference between the Kapranov and tropical ranks of \( M \) is equal to the sum of this difference for \( A \) and for \( B \).

The construction in Theorem 7.3 is closely related to the Bergman complex of the matroid \( \mathcal{M} \). Ardila and Klivans \([2]\) showed that this complex is triangulated by the order complex of the lattice of flats of \( \mathcal{M} \). Since flats correspond to unions of cocircuits, the following result is easily derived:

**Proposition 7.5.** The Bergman complex of the matroid \( \mathcal{M} \) is equal to the tropical convex hull of the rows of the modified cocircuit matrix \( \mathcal{C}'(\mathcal{M}) \), where the 1’s in \( \mathcal{C}(\mathcal{M}) \) are replaced by \( \infty \)'s.

For the Fano matroid, the Bergman complex is the cone over the incidence graph of points and lines in the matroid. It consists of 15 vertices, 35 edges and 21 triangles.

### 8. Related work and open questions

As mentioned in the introduction, our definition of non-singular square matrix corresponds to the notion of “strongly regular” in the literature on the max-plus (or min-plus) algebra. The definition of “regular matrix” in \([4, 5, 8]\) is the following one, for which we prefer to use a different name:

**Definition 8.1.** A square matrix \( M \) is positively tropically regular if, in the formula for its tropical determinant, the minimum over all even permutations equals the minimum over odd permutations. The positive tropical rank of a matrix is the maximum size of a positively tropically regular minor.

The reason for this terminology is that \( M \) is positively tropically regular if it lies outside the positive tropical variety defined by the determinant. For basics on positive tropical varieties and a detailed study of the positive tropical Grassmannian see \([19]\). The positive tropicalization of determinantal varieties leads also to a notion of positive Kapranov rank that satisfies the inequalities

\[
\text{pos. tropical rank }(M) \leq \text{pos. Kapranov rank }(M) \leq \text{Barvinok rank }(M).
\]

Of course, the tropical and Kapranov ranks are less than or equal to their positive counterparts.

Our notion of tropical rank, however, appears in \([5, 8]\) under a different name. Proposition 8.3 below was previously proved in \([5]\):

**Definition 8.2.** The columns of a matrix \( M \in \mathbb{R}^{d \times n} \) are strongly linearly independent if there is a \( b \in \mathbb{R}^d \) such that the tropical linear system \( M \odot x = b \) has a unique solution \( x \in \mathbb{R}^n \). A square matrix is strongly regular if its columns are strongly linearly independent.

**Proposition 8.3.** Strongly regular and tropically non-singular are equivalent, for a square matrix.
Proof. Suppose an $r \times r$ matrix $M$ is tropically non-singular; then there is some $(r - 1)$-dimension cell $X_S$ in the tropical convex hull of its columns in $\mathbb{T}^d$. After relabeling we have $S_i = \{i\}$ for $i = 1, 2, \ldots, r$. Then taking a point in the relative interior of $X_S$ yields a vector $b \in \mathbb{R}^r$ for which $M \odot x = b$ has a unique solution, each $x_i$ being necessarily equal to $b_i - m_{ii}$.

Conversely, suppose the columns of a matrix are strongly linearly independent. Pick $b \in \mathbb{R}^r$ such that $M \odot x = b$ has a unique solution. Then, for each $x_j$, there exists a $b_i$ for which the expression $\sum M_{ik}x_k$ is uniquely minimized for $k = j$ (otherwise we could increase $x_j$ and get the same value for $M \odot x$). This is equivalent to $b$ having type $S$, where $S_j = \{i\}$. □

Corollary 8.4. The tropical rank of a matrix equals the largest size of a strongly linearly independent subset of its columns.

We now discuss some algorithmic issues. Apart from Corollary 8.4, the main result in [5] is an $O(n^3)$ algorithm to check strong (i.e., tropical) regularity of an $n \times n$ matrix. The key step is to find a permutation that achieves the minimum in the determinantal tropical sum, which is the assignment problem in combinatorial optimization [15]. Similarly, it is shown in [4] that the problem of testing positive tropical regularity of square matrices is equivalent to the problem of testing existence of even cycles in directed graphs. The complexity of this “even cycle problem”, equivalent to Polya’s permanent problem, was unknown for a long time. Recently, Robertson et al. [17] and McCuaig [13] showed an algorithm to test it in $O(n^3)$ time.

For the Barvinok rank, we quote some results by Cela et al. [6]:

Proposition 8.5. The computation of the Barvinok rank of a matrix $M \in \{0,1\}^{d \times n}$ is an NP-complete problem. Deciding whether a matrix has Barvinok rank 2 can be done in time $O(dn)$.

NP-completeness is proved by a reduction to the problem of covering a bipartite graph by complete bipartite subgraphs. For the case of rank 2, an algorithm is derived from the fact that matrices of Barvinok rank 2 are permuted Monge matrices. Cela et al. also prove that a matrix has Barvinok rank 2 if and only if all its $3 \times 3$ minors do (our Proposition 6.1) and that the Barvinok rank is bounded below by the maximum size of a strongly regular minor (i.e., by the tropical rank).

We finish by listing some open questions, most of them with an algorithmic flavor:

1. Singularity of a single minor can be tested in polynomial time. But a naive algorithm to compute the tropical rank would need to check an exponential number of them. Can the tropical rank of a matrix be computed in polynomial time? In other words, is there a tropical analogue of Gauss elimination?

2. Fix an integer $k$. The number of square minors of size at most $k + 1$ of a $d \times n$ matrix $M$ is polynomial in $dn$. Hence, there is a polynomial time algorithm for deciding whether $M$ has tropical rank smaller or equal to $k$. Is the same true for the Barvinok rank? It is even open whether Barvinok rank equal to 3 can be tested in polynomial time.

3. For a fixed $k$, a positive answer to either of the following two questions would imply a positive answer to the previous one:
   (a) Is there a number $N(k)$ such that if all minors of $M$ of size at most $N(k)$ have Barvinok rank at most $k$ then $M$ itself has Barvinok rank at most $k$? Proposition 2.5 shows that $N(k) \geq \left\lceil \frac{k+1}{k+1} \right\rceil$. According to [6], $N(k) = 2^k + 1$ suffices for 0/1 matrices.
   (b) Is there a polynomial time algorithm for the Barvinok rank of matrices with tropical rank bounded by $k$? (This is open even for $k = 2$).

4. Can the Barvinok rank of a matrix $M$ be defined in terms of the regular mixed subdivision of $n\Delta^{d-1}$ produced by $M$? Ideally, we would like a “nice and simple” characterization such as the one given for the tropical rank in Corollary 5.4. But the question we pose is whether matrices producing the same mixed subdivision have necessarily the same Barvinok rank.
(5) All the questions above are open for the Kapranov rank, too.
(6) Does there exist a $5 \times 5$-matrix which has tropical rank 3 but Kapranov rank 4?

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