

MIXED EHRHART POLYNOMIALS

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ABSTRACT. For lattice polytopes $P_1, \dots, P_k \subseteq \mathbb{R}^d$, Bihan (2014) introduced the discrete mixed volume $\text{DMV}(P_1, \dots, P_k)$ in analogy to the classical mixed volume. In this note we initiate the study of the associated mixed Ehrhart polynomial $\text{ME}_{P_1, \dots, P_k}(n) = \text{DMV}(nP_1, \dots, nP_k)$. We study properties of this polynomial and we give interpretations for some of its coefficients in terms of (discrete) mixed volumes. Bihan (2014) showed that the discrete mixed volume is always non-negative. Our investigations yield simpler proofs for certain special cases.

We also introduce and study the associated *mixed h^* -vector*. We show that for large enough dilates rP_1, \dots, rP_k the corresponding *mixed h^* -polynomial* has only real roots and as a consequence the mixed h^* -vector becomes non-negative.

1. INTRODUCTION

Given a lattice polytope $P \subseteq \mathbb{R}^d$, the number of lattice points $E(P) := |P \cap \mathbb{Z}^d|$ is the **discrete volume** of P . It is well-known ([10]; see also [1, 2]) that the lattice point enumerator $E_P(n) = |nP \cap \mathbb{Z}^d|$ agrees with a polynomial, the so-called **Ehrhart polynomial** $E_P(n) \in \mathbb{Q}[n]$ of P , for all non-negative integers n . Recently, Bihan [5] introduced the notion of the **discrete mixed volume** of k lattice polytopes $P_1, \dots, P_k \subseteq \mathbb{R}^d$,

$$(1) \quad \text{DMV}(P_1, \dots, P_k) := \sum_{J \subseteq [k]} (-1)^{k-|J|} |P_J \cap \mathbb{Z}^d|,$$

where $P_J := \sum_{j \in J} P_j$ for $\emptyset \neq J \subseteq [k]$ and $P_\emptyset = \{0\}$.

In the present paper, we study the behavior of the discrete mixed volume under simultaneous dilation of the polytopes P_i . This furnishes the definition of a **mixed Ehrhart polynomial**

$$(2) \quad \text{ME}_{P_1, \dots, P_k}(n) := \text{DMV}(nP_1, \dots, nP_k) = \sum_{J \subseteq [k]} (-1)^{k-|J|} E_{P_J}(n) \in \mathbb{Q}[n].$$

Khovanskii [14] relates the evaluation $\text{ME}_{P_1, \dots, P_k}(-1)$ to the arithmetic genus of a compactified complete intersection with Newton polytopes P_1, \dots, P_k . Danilov and Khovanskii [8] investigate a Hodge-Deligne polynomial $e(Z; u, v) \in \mathbb{Z}[u, v]$ of a complex algebraic variety Z which in case of a smooth projective variety agrees with the Hodge polynomial $\sum_{pq} (-1)^{p+q} h^{pq}(Z) u^p v^q$. In joint work with Sandra Di Rocco and Benjamin Nill the first

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author verified that, if $\dim P_i = d$ for all i , then $\text{DMV}(P_1, \dots, P_k) = e(Z; 1, 0)$ where $Z \subset (\mathbb{C}^*)^d$ is the uncompactified complete intersection. A slight variant of (2), yet under the same name, has been employed in [18] as a very specific means to study higher-dimensional, mixed versions of Pick's formula in connection with the combinatorics of intersections of tropical hypersurfaces. The definition of the mixed Ehrhart polynomial therein differs from our definition by the exclusion of the empty set from the sum.

Here, we initiate the study of mixed Ehrhart polynomials and their coefficients with respect to various bases of the vector space of polynomials of degree at most d . First, we show that in the usual monomial basis, the coefficients of mixed Ehrhart polynomials can be read off directly from the multivariate Ehrhart polynomial $E(n_1 P_1 + \dots + n_k P_k)$, where $n_1, \dots, n_k \in \mathbb{Z}_{\geq 0}$ are non-negative integers (Theorem 2.2). This gives a meaning to the coefficients of $\text{ME}_{P_1, \dots, P_k}(n)$. In particular this provides a simple proof that the coefficient of n^i vanishes for $i < k$.

As a consequence of the main result from [5], it follows that $\text{ME}_{P_1, \dots, P_k}(n) \geq 0$ for all $n \geq 0$. This is accomplished by the use of irrational mixed decompositions and skilled estimates. Using our understanding of the coefficients of $\text{ME}_{P_1, \dots, P_k}(n)$, we give direct proofs for this fact in the cases $k \in \{2, d-1, d\}$ and $P_1 = \dots = P_k = P$ in Section 3.

Expressing the (usual or mixed) Ehrhart polynomial in the basis $\{\binom{n+d-i}{d} : 0 \leq i \leq d\}$ gives rise to the definition of the (usual or mixed) h^* -vector and h^* -polynomial (see Section 4). By a famous result of Stanley [15], the usual h^* -vector is non-negative (componentwise). We illustrate that for the mixed h^* -vector this is not true in general. Yet, we show that this has to hold asymptotically for dilates rP_1, rP_2, \dots, rP_k . This follows from the stronger result that for $r \gg 0$ the mixed h^* -polynomial is real-rooted with roots converging to the roots of the d^{th} Eulerian polynomial. This can be seen as the mixed analogue of Theorem 5.1 in [9] (see also [3, 7]). As a byproduct, we obtain that asymptotically the mixed h^* -vector becomes log-concave, unimodal and, as mentioned, in particular positive, except for its 0^{th} entry, which always equals 0.

Our paper is structured as follows. In Section 2, we prove various structural properties of the mixed Ehrhart polynomial. In Section 3, we review Bihan's non-negativity result of the discrete mixed volume, particularly from the viewpoint of the mixed Ehrhart polynomial, and provide alternative proofs for some special cases. Finally, in Section 4 we study the h^* -vector and the h^* -polynomial of the mixed Ehrhart polynomial, and in particular show real-rootedness of the mixed h^* -polynomial and positivity of the h^* -vector for large dilates of lattice polytopes.

2. STRUCTURE OF THE MIXED EHRHART POLYNOMIAL

In this section, we collect basic properties of the mixed Ehrhart polynomial. For some known results we provide new or simplified proofs. For the whole section, we fix a collection $\mathbf{P} = (P_1, \dots, P_k)$ of k lattice polytopes in \mathbb{R}^d and we assume that $P_1 + \dots + P_k$ is of full dimension d . The mixed Ehrhart polynomial, as introduced in (2), is by definition a univariate polynomial of degree $\leq d$, which can be written as

$$\text{ME}_{\mathbf{P}}(n) = \text{me}_d(\mathbf{P})n^d + \text{me}_{d-1}(\mathbf{P})n^{d-1} + \dots + \text{me}_0(\mathbf{P}).$$

Our first result gives a description of the coefficients of the mixed Ehrhart polynomial. For this we recall a result independently due to Bernstein and McMullen; see [12, Theorem 19.4].

Theorem 2.1 (Bernstein-McMullen). *For lattice polytopes $\mathbf{P} = (P_1, \dots, P_k)$ in \mathbb{R}^d , the function*

$$E_{\mathbf{P}}(n_1, \dots, n_k) := E(n_1 P_1 + \dots + n_k P_k)$$

agrees with a multivariate polynomial for all $n_1, \dots, n_k \in \mathbb{Z}_{\geq 0}$. The degree of $E_{\mathbf{P}}$ in n_i is $\dim P_i$.

In particular, $E_{\mathbf{P}}(n_1, \dots, n_k)$ has total degree $d = \dim(P_1 + \dots + P_k)$. We write this polynomial as

$$(3) \quad E_{\mathbf{P}}(n_1, \dots, n_k) = \sum_{\alpha \in \mathbb{Z}_{\geq 0}^k} e_{\alpha}(\mathbf{P}) n^{\alpha}$$

where $n^{\alpha} = n_1^{\alpha_1} \cdots n_k^{\alpha_k}$ for $\alpha = (\alpha_1, \dots, \alpha_k) \in \mathbb{Z}_{\geq 0}^k$.

Theorem 2.2. *For $\mathbf{P} = (P_1, \dots, P_k)$ a collection of lattice polytopes in \mathbb{R}^d*

$$\text{me}_i(\mathbf{P}) = \sum_{\alpha} e_{\alpha}(\mathbf{P}),$$

where the sum runs over all $\alpha \in \mathbb{Z}_{\geq 1}^k$ such that $|\alpha| := \alpha_1 + \dots + \alpha_k = i$. In particular, $\text{me}_i(P) = 0$ for all $0 \leq i < k$.

Proof. For a subset $I \subseteq [k]$ we write $\mathbb{1}_I \in \{0, 1\}^k$ for its characteristic vector. Observe that

$$\text{DMV}(P_1, \dots, P_k) = \sum_{I \subseteq [k]} (-1)^{k-|I|} E_{\mathbf{P}}(\mathbb{1}_I).$$

Setting

$$A(\alpha) = \sum_{I \subseteq [k]} (-1)^{k-|I|} \mathbb{1}_I^{\alpha} \quad \text{where} \quad \mathbb{1}_I^{\alpha} = \prod_{i=1}^k (\mathbb{1}_I)_i^{\alpha_i},$$

presentation (3) then implies

$$\text{DMV}(P_1, \dots, P_k) = \sum_{\alpha \in \mathbb{Z}_{\geq 0}^k} e_{\alpha}(\mathbf{P}) A(\alpha).$$

It is easy to verify that $A(\alpha) = 1$ if $\alpha_i > 0$ for all $i = 1, \dots, k$ and $A(\alpha) = 0$ otherwise. Hence,

$$\text{ME}_{P_1, \dots, P_k}(n) = \text{DMV}(nP_1, \dots, nP_k) = \sum_{\alpha \in \mathbb{Z}_{\geq 0}^k} e_{\alpha}(n\mathbf{P}) A(\alpha) = \sum_{i=0}^d \left(\sum_{\alpha \in \mathbb{Z}_{\geq 1}^k, |\alpha|=i} e_{\alpha}(\mathbf{P}) \right) n^i,$$

where the last step used that e_{α} is homogeneous of degree $(\alpha_1, \dots, \alpha_k)$. \square

The proof also recovers Lemma 4.10 from [18] with different techniques. In order to give an interpretation to some of the coefficients of $\text{ME}_{\mathbf{P}}(n)$, let us write

$$E_{\mathbf{P}}(n_1, \dots, n_k) = \sum_{i=0}^d E_{\mathbf{P}}^i(n_1, \dots, n_k)$$

where $E_{\mathbf{P}}^i(n_1, \dots, n_k)$ is homogeneous in n_1, \dots, n_k of degree i . By the same reasoning as in the case of the usual Ehrhart polynomial we note

$$(4) \quad E_{\mathbf{P}}^d(n_1, \dots, n_k) = \text{vol}_d(n_1 P_1 + \dots + n_k P_k) = \sum_{\substack{\alpha \in \mathbb{Z}_{\geq 0}^k \\ |\alpha|=d}} \binom{d}{\alpha_1, \dots, \alpha_k} \text{MV}_d(P_1[\alpha_1], \dots, P_k[\alpha_k]) n^{\alpha}.$$

In the above expression, the (normalized) coefficient MV is called the **mixed volume**; see, e.g., [12, Chapter 6]. Moreover, the notation $MV_d(P_1[\alpha_1], \dots, P_k[\alpha_k])$ means that the polytope P_i is taken α_i times. Based on (4) together with Theorem 2.2, we obtain streamlined proofs for the following known characterizations of the two highest mixed Ehrhart coefficients (see also Steffens [17, Lemma 3.7 and 3.8]).

Corollary 2.3. *Let $\mathbf{P} = (P_1, \dots, P_k)$ be lattice polytopes such that $d = \dim(P_1 + \dots + P_k)$. Then*

$$\text{me}_d(\mathbf{P}) = \sum_{\alpha} \binom{d}{\alpha_1, \dots, \alpha_k} MV_d(P_1[\alpha_1], \dots, P_k[\alpha_k]),$$

where the sum runs over all $\alpha \in \mathbb{Z}_{\geq 1}^k$ with $|\alpha| = d$. In particular, $\text{ME}_{\mathbf{P}}(n)$ is a polynomial of degree d .

Proof. By Theorem 2.2, $\text{me}_d(\mathbf{P})$ is the sum of coefficients of $E_{\mathbf{P}}(n_1, \dots, n_d)$ of total degree d . These are coefficients of $E_{\mathbf{P}}^d(n_1, \dots, n_k) = \text{vol}(n_1 P_1 + \dots + n_k P_k)$ that are given by the mixed volumes. For the second claim, it is sufficient to note that since the sum $P_1 + \dots + P_k$ is full-dimensional, $E_{\mathbf{P}}^d$ is not identically zero and all coefficients are non-negative. \square

For $k = d$, the previous corollary recovers a result of Bernstein [4]

$$(5) \quad \text{ME}_{P_1, \dots, P_d}(n) = d! MV_d(P_1, \dots, P_d) n^d.$$

A similar reasoning also allows us to give an expression for the second highest coefficient $\text{me}_{d-1}(P)$. For an integral linear functional $a \in (\mathbb{Z}^d)^\vee$, the rational subspace $a^\perp \subseteq \mathbb{R}^d$ is equipped with a lattice $a^\perp \cap \mathbb{Z}^d$ and a volume form vol_a so that a fundamental parallelepiped has unit volume. We denote the face of a polytope $P \subseteq \mathbb{R}^d$ where a is maximized by P^a and consider it (after translation) as a polytope inside a^\perp . Similarly, we write MV_a (DMV_a) for the (discrete) mixed volume of a collection of polytopes in a^\perp computed using vol_a .

Corollary 2.4. *Let $\mathbf{P} = (P_1, \dots, P_k)$ be a collection of d -dimensional lattice polytopes in \mathbb{R}^d . Then*

$$\text{me}_{d-1}(\mathbf{P}) = \frac{1}{2} \sum_a \sum_{\substack{\alpha \in \mathbb{Z}_{\geq 1}^k \\ |\alpha| = d-1}} \binom{d-1}{\alpha_1, \dots, \alpha_k} MV_a(P_1^a[\alpha_1], \dots, P_k^a[\alpha_k]),$$

where a ranges over the primitive facet normals of $P_1 + \dots + P_k$.

Proof. For a full-dimensional lattice polytope $P \subseteq \mathbb{R}^d$, we have the following expression for its second highest Ehrhart coefficient

$$e_{d-1}(P) = \sum_a \frac{1}{2} \text{vol}_a(P^a),$$

where a ranges over all primitive vectors. This, of course, is a finite sum as P has only finitely many facets. It follows that

$$\begin{aligned} \text{me}_{d-1}(\mathbf{P}) &= \sum_{I \subseteq [k]} (-1)^{k-|I|} \sum_a \frac{1}{2} \text{vol}_a(P_I^a) \\ &= \frac{1}{2} \sum_a \sum_{I \subseteq [k]} (-1)^{k-|I|} \text{vol}_a(P_I^a). \end{aligned}$$

Since $e_d(P) = \text{vol}_d(P)$ for a d -dimensional lattice polytope $P \subseteq \mathbb{R}^d$, (2) implies that the inner sum in the previous expression equals $\text{me}_{d-1}(P_1^a, \dots, P_k^a)$. The result now follows from Corollary 2.3 applied to $\mathbf{P}^a = (P_1^a, \dots, P_k^a)$. Observe that if a is a facet normal

for P_I , then a is a facet normal for P_J for all $J \supseteq I$. Hence, the above sum is over all primitive facet normals of $P_1 + \dots + P_k$. \square

Next, we will show that for the special case that $P_1 = P_2 = \dots = P_k = P$, the mixed Ehrhart polynomial can be expressed in terms of the h^* -vector of P ; see Section 4. For now, let us mention that Stanley [15] showed that there exist non-negative integers $h_i^*(P)$ such that

$$(6) \quad E_P(n) = h_0^*(P) \binom{n+d}{d} + h_1^*(P) \binom{n+d-1}{d} + \dots + h_d^*(P) \binom{n}{d}.$$

In terms of this presentation we get:

Theorem 2.5. *Let $P \subseteq \mathbb{R}^d$ be a d -dimensional lattice polytope and let $\mathbf{P} = (P, \dots, P)$ be a collection of k copies of P . Then*

$$\text{ME}_{\mathbf{P}}(n) = \sum_{j=0}^d \left(\sum_{i=0}^k (-1)^{k-i} \binom{k}{i} \binom{in+d-j}{d} \right) h_j^*(P).$$

In particular,

$$\text{DMV}(\mathbf{P}) = \sum_{j=0}^d \binom{d-j}{d-k} h_j^*(P).$$

Proof. From the definition of the mixed Ehrhart polynomial, we infer

$$\text{ME}_{\mathbf{P}}(n) = \sum_{i=0}^k (-1)^{k-i} \binom{k}{i} E_{iP}(n).$$

Using that $E_{iP}(n) = E_P(in)$ and the expression of $E_P(n)$ as in (6), this yields

$$\text{ME}_{\mathbf{P}}(n) = \sum_{j=0}^d h_j^*(P) \sum_{i=0}^k (-1)^{k-i} \binom{k}{i} \binom{in+d-j}{d}.$$

This shows the first claim. For the second claim it suffices to observe that $\text{DMV}(\mathbf{P}) = \text{ME}_{\mathbf{P}}(1)$ and to check that, in this case, the inner sum in the above expression equals $\binom{d-j}{d-k}$ by the binomial identity in [11, (5.24)]. \square

This is reminiscent to the relation between f -vectors and h -vectors in the enumerative theory of simplicial polytopes. Investigating this analogy further yields a theory of discrete mixed valuations that will be expounded in an upcoming paper of the third author with Katharina Jochemko.

Example 2.6. *Let $P = [0, 1]^3 \subseteq \mathbb{R}^3$ be the 3-dimensional unit cube. Then the usual h^* -vector of P equals $(1, 4, 1, 0)$. By Theorem 2.5, the discrete mixed volume of the collection (P, P) is given by*

$$\text{DMV}(P, P) = \binom{3-0}{3-2} \cdot 1 + \binom{3-1}{3-2} \cdot 4 + \binom{3-2}{3-2} \cdot 1 = 12.$$

The mixed Ehrhart polynomial of (P, P) equals $\text{ME}_{P,P}(t) = 6t^3 + 6t^2$.

Proposition 2.7. *Let $\mathbf{P} = (P_1, \dots, P_k) \subseteq \mathbb{R}^d$ be lattice polytopes. If $\dim P_i = 0$ for some i , then $\text{ME}_{\mathbf{P}}(n) = 0$.*

Proof. Without loss of generality we can assume that P_k is 0-dimensional. For any $J \subseteq [k-1]$, we have that P_J and $P_{J \cup \{k\}}$ are translates of each other and the corresponding terms in (2) occur with different signs. This yields the claim. \square

For the remaining part of this section, we are interested in the discrete mixed volume of lattice polytopes P_1, \dots, P_k for which the Minkowski sum is **exact**, that is,

$$\dim P_1 + \dots + P_k = \dim P_1 + \dots + \dim P_k.$$

In this situation, we can give the following interpretation for $\text{DMV}(P_1, \dots, P_k)$.

Proposition 2.8. *Let $\mathbf{P} = (P_1, \dots, P_k)$ be an exact collection of lattice polytopes, and assume that $0 \in P_i$ for $1 \leq i \leq k$.*

Then $\text{DMV}(P_1, \dots, P_k)$ counts the number of lattice points $z \in (P_1 + \dots + P_k) \cap \mathbb{Z}^d$ that are not contained in a subsum P_J for $J \neq [k]$.

Proof. Since \mathbf{P} is exact, $P = P_1 + \dots + P_k$ is affinely isomorphic to the Cartesian product $P_1 \times \dots \times P_k$. In particular, P_I is the intersection of P with the linear span of P_I . We see that the intersection $P_I \cap P_J$ is exactly $P_{I \cap J}$. Hence

$$\text{DMV}(P_1, \dots, P_k) = |P \cap \mathbb{Z}^d| - \sum_{J \neq [k]} (-1)^{k-|J|} |P_J \cap \mathbb{Z}^d| = E(P \setminus \bigcup_{J \neq [k]} P_J). \quad \square$$

For the case that all polytopes are segments, the previous proposition can be used to recover (5).

3. NON-NEGATIVITY OF THE DISCRETE MIXED VOLUME AND THE MIXED EHRHART POLYNOMIAL

Bihan [5] showed the following fundamental non-negativity result.

Theorem 3.1. *Let $P_1, \dots, P_k \subseteq \mathbb{R}^d$ be lattice polytopes. Then*

$$\text{DMV}(P_1, \dots, P_k) \geq 0.$$

Thus the mixed Ehrhart polynomial evaluates to non-negative integers for all positive integers n .

Bihan's proof relies on irrational mixed decompositions. In this section we give simple proofs for the special cases $k \in \{2, d-1, d\}$ and $P_1 = \dots = P_k = P$. For the case $k = d$ this is a consequence of (5). For $P_1 = \dots = P_k = P$ this follows from Theorem 2.5 together with Stanley's result on the non-negativity of the h^* -vector; see [15, 13].

Direct proof of Theorem 3.1 for $k = 2$. Let P_1 and P_2 be lattice polytopes in \mathbb{R}^d . Since the mixed Ehrhart polynomial is invariant under translation of the polytopes, we may assume that 0 is a common vertex of P_1 and P_2 , $P_1 \cap P_2 = \{0\}$ and that there is a hyperplane H weakly separating P_1 from P_2 . Hence $P_1 \cup P_2 \subseteq P_1 + P_2$. It follows that

$$E_{P_1+P_2}(n) \geq E_{P_1}(n) + E_{P_2}(n) - 1,$$

for all $n \in \mathbb{Z}_{\geq 0}$, i.e., $\text{ME}_{P_1, P_2}(n) \geq 0$ for all $n \in \mathbb{Z}_{\geq 0}$. □

For $k = d-1$, a direct proof idea has already been used in the framework of tropical geometry and d -dimensional Pick-type formulas in [18]. The following is a proof along similar lines.

Direct proof of Theorem 3.1 for $k = d-1$. By Theorem 2.2, the mixed Ehrhart polynomial of a collection of lattice polytopes $\mathbf{P} = (P_1, \dots, P_{d-1}) \subseteq \mathbb{R}^d$ is of the form

$$\text{ME}_{\mathbf{P}}(n) = \text{me}_d(\mathbf{P})n^d + \text{me}_{d-1}(\mathbf{P})n^{d-1}.$$

It suffices to show that $\text{me}_d(\mathbf{P})$ and $\text{me}_{d-1}(\mathbf{P})$ are non-negative. For the leading coefficient $\text{me}_d(\mathbf{P})$, Corollary 2.3 yields

$$\text{me}_d(\mathbf{P}) = \frac{d!}{2} \text{MV}_d \left(P_1, P_2, \dots, P_{d-1}, \sum_{i=1}^{d-1} P_i \right).$$

For the remaining coefficient, Theorem 2.4 together with the fact that $k = d - 1$ yields

$$\text{me}_{d-1}(\mathbf{P}) = \frac{(d-1)!}{2} \sum_a \text{MV}_a(P_1^a, \dots, P_{d-1}^a),$$

where the sum is over all primitive facet normals of $P_1 + \dots + P_{d-1}$. \square

4. MIXED h^* -POLYNOMIALS

For a d -dimensional lattice polytope P , let

$$\text{Ehr}_P(z) = \sum_{n \geq 0} E_P(n) z^n$$

be the **Ehrhart series** of P . As $E_P(n)$ is a polynomial in n of degree d , there exist integers $h_0^*(P), \dots, h_d^*(P)$ such that

$$\text{Ehr}_P(z) = \frac{\sum_{j=0}^d h_j^*(P) z^j}{(1-z)^{d+1}};$$

see, e.g., [1, 12]. The polynomial in the numerator is called the **h^* -polynomial** of P (also known as δ -polynomial [16]) and denoted by $h_P^*(z)$. Similarly, the coefficient vector $h^*(P) := (h_0^*(P), \dots, h_d^*(P))$ is called the **h^* -vector** of P . Stated differently, the Ehrhart polynomial of a d -dimensional lattice polytope P can be expressed as in (6). By Stanley's non-negativity theorem [15], the coefficients $h_0^*(P), h_1^*(P), \dots, h_d^*(P)$ are non-negative integers. Moreover, it is known that

$$(7) \quad h_0^*(P) = 1, \quad h_1^*(P) = |P \cap \mathbb{Z}^d| - (d+1), \quad h_d^*(P) = |\text{int}(P) \cap \mathbb{Z}^d|,$$

where $\text{int}(P)$ denotes the interior of the polytope P .

The definition of mixed Ehrhart polynomials prompts the notion of a **mixed h^* -vector** $h^*(\mathbf{P}) = (h_0^*, \dots, h_d^*)$ of a collection $\mathbf{P} = (P_1, \dots, P_k)$ of lattice polytopes, which is given by

$$(8) \quad \text{ME}_{\mathbf{P}}(n) = h_0^*(\mathbf{P}) \binom{n+d}{d} + \dots + h_d^*(\mathbf{P}) \binom{n}{d},$$

where $d = \dim(P_1 + \dots + P_k)$. In this section, we study properties of $h^*(\mathbf{P})$ for a collection of *full-dimensional* lattice polytopes, i.e., $\dim P_i = d$ for all i . Though Stanley's h^* -non-negativity does not extend to the mixed h^* -vector as we will see below, we show that for large enough dilates $r\mathbf{P} := (rP_1, \dots, rP_k)$, $r \gg 0$, the corresponding **mixed h^* -polynomial**

$$h_{r\mathbf{P}}^*(z) = h_0^*(\mathbf{P}) + \dots + h_d^*(\mathbf{P}) z^d$$

has only real roots and hence the mixed h^* -vector is log-concave. This is in line with results of Diaconis and Fulman [9] for the usual h^* -vector.

Since we assume that all polytopes P_i have the same dimension, the mixed h^* -vector can be written as

$$(9) \quad h_i^*(\mathbf{P}) = \sum_{\emptyset \neq J \subseteq [k]} (-1)^{k-|J|} h_i^*(P_J) + (-1)^{k+i} \binom{d}{i}$$

for $0 \leq i \leq d$. The next lemma collects some elementary properties of mixed h^* -vectors.

Lemma 4.1. *Let $\mathbf{P} = (P_1, P_2, \dots, P_k) \subseteq \mathbb{R}^d$ be a collection of d -dimensional lattice polytopes. Then,*

- (i) $h_0^*(\mathbf{P}) = 0$,
- (ii) *If $k = 2$, then $h_1^*(P_1, P_2) = \text{DMV}(P_1, P_2)$. In particular, $h_1^*(P_1, P_2) \geq 0$.*

Proof. (i) Since, for any lattice polytope $P \subseteq \mathbb{R}^d$ we have $h_0^*(P) = 1$ (see (7)), it follows from (9) that

$$h_0^*(\mathbf{P}) = \sum_{\emptyset \neq J \subseteq [k]} (-1)^{k-|J|} + (-1)^k = 0.$$

(ii) We know from (7) that the first entry of the h^* -vector of a d -dimensional lattice polytope $P \subseteq \mathbb{R}^d$ satisfies

$$h_1^*(P) = |P \cap \mathbb{Z}^d| - (d+1) = E_P(1) - (d+1).$$

This fact combined with (9) yields

$$\begin{aligned} h_1^*(P_1, P_2) &= (E_{P_1+P_2}(1) - (d+1)) - (E_{P_1}(1) - (d+1) + E_{P_2}(1) - (d+1)) - d \\ &= E_{P_1+P_2}(1) - E_{P_1}(1) - E_{P_2}(1) + 1 \\ &= \text{DMV}(P_1, P_2), \end{aligned}$$

where the second equality follows from (2). For the ‘‘In particular’’-part it suffices to note that $\text{DMV}(P_1, P_2)$ is non-negative (see Section 3). \square

A natural question when dealing with integer vectors is whether all entries are non-negative. The previous lemma provides some positive results in this direction. However, as opposed to the h^* -vector of a single lattice polytope, the next example shows, that in general it is not true that the coefficients of the mixed h^* -vector are non-negative.

Example 4.2. *Consider the collection $\mathbf{P} = (\Delta_d, \dots, \Delta_d)$ consisting of k copies of the standard d -simplex. For $(d+1-i)k < d+1$ none of the $(d+1-i)P_J = (d+1-i)|J|\Delta_d$ has interior lattice points. Hence, $h_i^*(P_J) = 0$ so that $h_i^*(\mathbf{P}) = (-1)^{k+i} \binom{d}{i}$ can be negative (see (9)). To be specific, $h^*(\Delta_3, \Delta_3) = (0, 3, 4, -1)$.*

Though we have just seen, that there do exist collections of polytopes with negative mixed h^* -vector entries, observe that for $m \geq 2$ all entries of $h^*(m\Delta_3, m\Delta_3) = (0, m^3 + 2m, 4m^3, m^3 - 2m^2)$ are indeed non-negative, and the leading coefficients in m are the Eulerian numbers $(0, 1, 4, 1)$ (see below).

We therefore propose to study the following question.

Question 4.3. *Let $\mathbf{P} = (P_1, \dots, P_k) \subseteq \mathbb{R}^d$ be a collection of d -dimensional lattice polytopes. Under which conditions are all (or certain) entries of $h^*(\mathbf{P})$ non-negative? Is it true that $h_i^*(\mathbf{P}) \geq (-1)^{k+i} \binom{d}{i}$? What can be said if the polytopes are allowed to be of arbitrary dimension?*

In Corollary 4.5 we will show that asymptotically, i.e., if one considers high enough dilations of d -dimensional polytopes, the mixed h^* -vector $h^*(\mathbf{P})$ always becomes non-negative. This suggests that it might be enough to require the lattice polytopes to contain ‘‘sufficiently many’’ interior points.

Before we provide our main result of this section, we recall the definition of the d -th **Eulerian polynomial** $A_d(t) = \sum_{k=1}^d A(d, k)t^k$. One, out of several, combinatorial approaches to define $A_d(t)$ is the following

$$\sum_{n \geq 0} n^d z^n = \frac{A_d(z)}{(1-z)^{d+1}}.$$

It is known that the Eulerian polynomials $A_d(t)$ have only simple and real roots and all roots are negative. The following result, which is a generalization of Theorem 5.1 in [9], provides a relation between Eulerian polynomials and mixed h^* -polynomials of lattice polytopes.

Theorem 4.4. *Let $\mathbf{P} = (P_1, \dots, P_k)$ be a collection of d -dimensional lattice polytopes. Then, as $r \rightarrow \infty$,*

$$\frac{h_{r\mathbf{P}}^*(z)}{r^d} \longrightarrow \sum_{J \subseteq [k]} (-1)^{k-|J|} \text{vol}(P_J) A_d(z).$$

Note that for $k = d$, (5) implies the result for $r = 1$.

Proof. For a d -dimensional lattice polytope $P \subseteq \mathbb{R}^d$, the Ehrhart polynomial in the usual basis takes the form

$$E_P(n) = e_d(P)n^d + e_{d-1}(P)n^{d-1} + \dots + e_0(P)$$

where $e_d(P) = \text{vol}(P)$. For the Ehrhart series we compute

$$\sum_{n \geq 0} E_P(n)z^n = \sum_{i=0}^d e_i(P) \sum_{n \geq 0} n^i z^n = \frac{\sum_{i=0}^d e_i(P)(1-z)^{d-i} A_i(z)}{(1-z)^{d+1}}.$$

By comparing $E_{rP}(n)$ with $E_P(rn)$, we see that $e_i(rP) = r^i e_i(P)$ and hence

$$h_{rP}^*(z) = r^d \text{vol}(P) A_d(z) + \sum_{i=0}^{d-1} r^i e_i(P) (1-z)^{d-i} A_i(z).$$

Now from (9) together with the fact that $rP_\emptyset = \{0\}$ for all $r > 0$, we infer

$$\frac{h_{r\mathbf{P}}^*(z)}{r^d} = \sum_{J \subseteq [k]} (-1)^{k-|J|} \frac{h_{rP_J}^*(z)}{r^d} \xrightarrow{r \rightarrow \infty} \sum_{J \subseteq [k]} (-1)^{k-|J|} \text{vol}(P_J) A_d(z),$$

which shows the claim. \square

For $k = 1$ this also yields the result of Diaconis and Fulman [9, Theorem 5.1] on the asymptotic behavior of the usual h^* -polynomial of a lattice polytope. Similar results have also been achieved by Brenti and Welker [7] and Beck and Stapledon [3].

Before we provide some almost immediate consequences of the previous result, we recall that a sequence (a_0, a_1, \dots, a_d) of real numbers is called **log-concave** if $a_i^2 \geq a_{i-1}a_{i+1}$ for all $1 \leq i \leq d-1$. The sequence (a_0, a_1, \dots, a_d) is called **unimodal** if there exists a $0 \leq \ell \leq d$ such that $a_0 \leq \dots \leq a_\ell \geq \dots \geq a_d$.

Corollary 4.5. *Let $\mathbf{P} = (P_1, P_2, \dots, P_k)$ be a collection of d -dimensional lattice polytopes in \mathbb{R}^d . Then there exists a positive integer R (depending on \mathbf{P}) such that for $r \geq R$:*

- (i) *the mixed h^* -polynomial $h_{r\mathbf{P}}^*(t)$ has only real roots $\beta^{(1)}(r) < \beta^{(2)}(r) < \dots < \beta^{(d-1)}(r) < \beta^{(d)}(r) < 0$ with $\lim_{r \rightarrow \infty} \beta^{(i)}(r) = \rho^{(i)}$ for $1 \leq i \leq d$. Here, $\rho^{(1)} < \rho^{(2)} < \dots < \rho^{(d)} = 0$ denote the roots of $A_d(t)$.*
- (ii) *$h_i^*(r\mathbf{P}) > 0$ for $1 \leq i \leq d$.*

(iii) $h^*(r\mathbf{P})$ is log-concave and unimodal.

Proof. (i) First observe that, by Theorem 4.4, the roots of $h_{r\mathbf{P}}^*(t)$ converge to the roots of $A_d(t)$. Moreover, since the roots of $A_d(t)$ are known to be all distinct and negative, there exists a positive integer R such that for $r \geq R$, $h_{r\mathbf{P}}^*(t)$ has only simple and real (negative) roots. Otherwise, since complex roots come up in pairs (if τ is a complex root, also its complex conjugate $\bar{\tau}$ is a root), the Eulerian polynomial $A_d(t)$ would be forced to have a root of multiplicity 2, which yields a contradiction.

(ii) It follows from (2) and the fact that $e_d(P) = \text{vol}(P)$ for a d -dimensional lattice polytope $P \subseteq \mathbb{R}^d$ that the factor on the right-hand side in Theorem 4.4 equals $\text{me}_d(\mathbf{P})$. Thus, by Corollary 2.3, it is a non-negative linear combination of mixed volumes of P_1, \dots, P_k and as such, this factor is positive. Theorem 4.4 then implies that the sequence $\left(\frac{h_{r\mathbf{P}}^*(z)}{r^d}\right)_{r \geq 1}$ converges to a polynomial, whose coefficients, except for the constant term (which equals 0), are strictly positive. Hence, there has to exist a positive integer R (depending on \mathbf{P}) such that for $r \geq R$ all but the constant coefficient of $h_{r\mathbf{P}}^*(t)$ are strictly positive. This shows (ii).

(iii) Using the first two parts, we know that there exists a positive integer R such that for $r \geq R$ the polynomial $h_{r\mathbf{P}}^*(t)$ has non-negative coefficients and, in addition, is real-rooted. Theorem 1.2.1 of [6] implies that $h^*(r\mathbf{P})$ is log-concave. Since by the choice of r , this sequence does not have internal zeros, it is unimodal by [6, Section 2.5]. \square

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