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Patrice Abry, Nelly Pustelnik, Stéphane Roux, Pablo Jensen, Patrick Flandrin, Rémi Gribonval, Charles-Gérard Lucas, Éric Guichard, Pierre Borgnat, Nicolas Garnier

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COVID-19 Reproduction Number Estimation: Spatial and Temporal in Convex Optimization to Promote Piecewise Smoothness

P. Abry¹, N. Pustelnik¹, S. Roux¹, P. Jensen¹, P. Flandrin¹, R. Gribonval¹, C.-G. Lucas¹, E. Guichard¹, P. Borgnat¹, N. Garnier¹. (1) Université de Lyon, ENS de Lyon, CNRS, Laboratoire de Physique, France, patrice.abry@ens-lyon.fr (2) Université de Lyon, ENS de Lyon, UCB Lyon 1, Inria, LIP, France (3) Université de Lyon, ENS de Lyon, CNRS, Lab. Triangle, France

Among the different indicators that quantify the spread of an epidemic such as the on-going COVID-19, stands first the reproduction number which measures how many people can be contaminated by an infected person. In order to permit the monitoring of the evolution of this number, a new estimation procedure is proposed here, assuming a well-accepted model for current incidence data, based on past observations [1]. The novelty of the proposed approach [2] is twofold: 1) the estimation of the reproduction number is achieved by convex optimization within a proximal-based inverse problem formulation, with constraints aimed at promoting piecewise smoothness; 2) the approach is developed in a multivariate setting, allowing for the simultaneous handling of multiple time series attached to different geographical regions, together with a spatial (graph-based) regularization of their evolutions in time. The effectiveness of the approach is first supported by simulations, and two main applications to real COVID-19 data are then discussed. The first one refers to the comparative evolution of the reproduction number for a number of countries, while the second one focuses on French departments and their joint analysis, leading to dynamic maps revealing the temporal co-evolution of their reproduction numbers. Additionally, we will report new work showing how to deal, in this framework, with outliers coming from errors in data reporting or other events.

Figure 1: Current estimate of the Reproduction number in France (left), at the level of departments in France using the graph-based regularization (center) and for the world (right).

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References
