

Technical note 1: Collaborative Research Center 1070 – Geoscientific and archaeological research

A seamless workflow for defining archaeological site densities with contour lines by using the open source (geo-)statistical language R

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Description

The development and analysis of distribution maps is one of the most frequent applications in archaeological research. For instance, sets of archaeological sites can be used to calculate larger areas, which represent, for example, the spatial spread of a culture or the site density within an area of interest. In many previous studies this is archived manually. However, this process is problematic because it is based on a subjective impression which most likely leads to many different results and interpretations. In contrast, a standardized workflow as well as standardized settings and parameters enable the possibility to share the results and make them comparable to other similarly processed geo data.

Besides reducing the personal influence of different experts, computer generated maps facilitate the description of archaeological phenomena on a large scale and/or high resolution. Here we present a semi-automated workflow, which was developed in the open source statistical language R, by using different state-of-the-art packages to facilitate each single methodological step in one seamless workflow. This open source script represents a time- and cost-efficient solution, which simplifies otherwise complicated workflows and/or expensive software solutions and calculates reproducible maps with isolines. Therefore it allows researchers an objective interregional and chronological comparison by using the standardized workflow to generate the density maps and/or different times, e.g. different time periods on the same regional extend, and/or different regions and the development over time.

In German prehistoric archaeology contour lines or isolines are being used to describe archaeological site densities since the early 1990s (Zimmermann 1992; Saile 1998: 139). Originally for archaeological research, this method was introduced by Mats P. Malmer in the late 1950s (Malmer 1957; Malmer 1962: 697–702; Sørensen 2002: 170–171).

The computation of these isolines is done in several steps, the basic principle didn't change much. First of all a set of archaeological sites with distinct coordinates is needed. On the basis of these sites so-called Thiessen polygons or Voronoi diagrams are calculated. The nodes of these polygons are defined by the perpendicular bisectors of Delaunay triangulations – this process is also called tessellation (Zimmermann 1992). Liebling and Pournin (2012) are providing a good review about the methodological and historical developments of the Voronoi diagrams ranging back to Kepler and Descartes. The calculation of the distance between the archaeological sites and the nodes of the Thiessen polygons is based on the principle of the largest empty circle – LEC (Toussaint 1983; Preparata and Shamos 1988: 255–262). The distance of a node to the nearest three sites corresponds to the radius of a circle in which there are no further sites (Zimmermann et al. 2004: Fig. 4). Consequently, in regions with a high density of archaeological sites, there are several small empty circles. On the other hand, regions with a very low density of archaeological sites are defined by few empty circles with larger radii. Based on the distances from the Thiessen polygons' nodes to the nearest archaeological sites a geostatistical interpolation approach can be used to estimate a distance map on a predefined resolution. Common approaches are Inverse-Distance Weighted, Spline Interpolation and Kriging. We used one standard version of Kriging so called Ordinary Kriging to compute the distances between the archaeological sites. Kriging originates from the mining industry and is based on the idea of a mining engineer D.G. Krige and a statistician H.S. Sichel (Conolly and Lake 2006: 97–101; Hengl 2011). The statistical formulation is based on the work of the mathematician G. Matheron (Cressie 1993; Webster and Oliver 2001). Ordinary Kriging represents the most common Kriging method and is based on the following assumptions (Cressie 1993):

- Global, constant mean of the random function is unknown.
- The random function is assumed to be at least intrinsic stationary with a known variogram function.

The following equations and descriptions are based on Hengl (2011):

$$Z(x) = \mu + \varepsilon'(x)$$

where μ is the global mean and $\varepsilon'(x)$ is the spatially correlated stochastic part of variation. The variogram function is derived by the analysis of point data and the plotting of the so-called semivariances (Hengl 2011):

$$\gamma(h) = \frac{1}{2} E[(z(x_i) - z(x_i+h))^2]$$

where $z(x_i)$ is a value of an known sample location and $z(x_i+h)$ is the value of a neighbor at distinct distance h .

Finally lines of constant values (contour or isolines) are delineated from the krigged distance map to describe the relative density of the archaeological sites. As aforementioned these isolines can be used for the description and comparison of distributions maps of archaeological cultures (Saile 1998: 139–177; Saile 2003; Zimmermann et al. 2004; Zimmermann et al. 2009; Wendt et al. 2010). Additionally, they can be used in order to model territories of collectors, i.e. to illustrate the state of research (Frank 2007; Mischka 2007: 230–232; Pankau 2007: 102–112) and to analyze the distribution of archaeological finds within an excavated area (Loew 2006). If you are interested in doing the latter with our script, please make sure to adjust the cell size and the unit of the contour line delineation.

Based on the mathematical assumptions only euclidean distances between sites are used for computation, therefore geographical features like rivers or mountains influencing the possible density representation (e.g. Perceived distance – Perception) etc. are not taken into account. If you would like to use e.g. terrain information to guide the Kriging estimates you can adjust the script by using e.g. ‘Universal Kriging’ instead. Furthermore the isoline dataset depends on a distinct point dataset, as soon as archaeological sites are being removed or added, the results can change and different isolines and site densities are generated (Ducke and Kroefges 2008; Mischka 2009: 50).

Methodological workflow and script example

Different R packages are necessary for each single step to delineate archaeological site density. A brief introduction to each package is given in **Tab. 1**.

Tab. 1: R packages used for the delineation of archaeological site densities

Package	Version	Description	Citation
sp	1.2–1	Classes and Methods for Spatial Data	Pebesma and Bivand 2005
deldir	0.1–9	Delaunay Triangulation and Dirichlet (Voronoi) Tessellation	Turner 2015
ggplot2	2.0.0.	Implementation of the Grammar of Graphics	Wickham 2009
rgeos	0.3–1.5	Interface to Geometry Engine – Open Source (GEOS)	Bivand and Rundel 2016
geoR	1.7–5.1	Analysis of Geostatistica Data	Ribeiro and Diggle 2015
maptools	0.8–39	Tools for Reading and Handling Spatial Objects	Bivand and Lewin-Koh 2016
rgdal	1.1–3	Bindings for the Geospatial Data Abstraction Library	Bivand et al. 2015

All libraries have to be installed on a local machine and implemented via library command.

- R-SCRIPT Part 1 - Libraries

```
[1] library(„sp“)  
[2] library(„deldir“)  
[3] library(„ggplot2“)  
[4] library(„rgeos“)  
[5] library(„geoR“)  
[6] library(„maptools“)  
[7] library(„rgdal“)
```

To implement the Voronoi polygon tessellation of a point layer, we used the ‘voronoipolygon’ function from C. Farmer (<http://carsonfarmer.com/2009/09/voronoi-polygons-with-r/>).

- R-SCRIPT Part 2 - Functions

```
[8] voronoipolygons <- function(x) {  
[9]   require(deldir)  
[10]  require(sp)  
[11]  if (.hasSlot(x, „coords“)) {  
[12]    crds <- x@coords  
[13]  } else crds <- x  
[14]  z <- deldir(crds[,1], crds[,2])  
[15]  w <- tile.list(z)  
[16]  polys <- vector(mode='list', length=length(w))  
[17]  for (i in seq(along=polys)) {  
[18]    pcrds <- cbind(w[[i]]$x, w[[i]]$y)  
[19]    pcrds <- rbind(pcrds, pcrds[1,])  
[20]    polys[[i]] <- Polygons(list(Polygon(pcrds)), ID=as.character(i))  
[21]  }  
[22]  SP <- SpatialPolygons(polys)  
[23]  voronoi <- SpatialPolygonsDataFrame(SP, data=data.frame(x=crds[,1],  
[24]    y=crds[,2], row.names=sapply(slot(SP, „polygons“),  
[25]    function(x) slot(x, „ID“))))  
[26] }
```

Some general setting related to working directory, spatial point dataset of the archaeological sites, Layer, Resolution of the final raster dataset, and Elevation bands. [Important remark: Set the correct Working Directory which contains and stores all your relevant data].

- R-SCRIPT Part 3 - Settings

```
[27] setwd(„Path/To/Your/Data“)  
[28] PointDataSet = „Testdatensatz.shp“  
[29] Layer = “Testdatensatz”  
[30] cellsize = 500  
[31] ElevationBands = 1000
```

Load and prepare the spatial point dataset including exclusion of duplicates.

```
[32] ogrListLayers(PointDataSet)
[33] Shape <- readOGR(PointDataSet, layer=Layer)
[34] Shape <- remove.duplicates(Shape)
```

Generation of the Voronoi polygons and extraction of the Voronoi polygon nodes.

- R-SCRIPT Part 4 - Voronoi polygon tessellation (**Fig. 1**)

```
[35] VoronoiPolygons <- voronoi.polygons(Shape)
[36] VoronoiPolygonNodes <- fortify(VoronoiPolygons)
[37] df.sp <- VoronoiPolygonNodes
[38] coordinates(df.sp) <- ~long+lat
[39] VoronoiPolygonNodes.sp <- remove.duplicates(df.sp)
[40] VoronoiPolygonNodes.sp.df <- as.data.frame(VoronoiPolygonNodes.sp)
[41] VoronoiPolygonNodes.sp.df$NearestNodeDistance <- -9999
[42] plot(VoronoiPolygons, lty = "dashed")
[43] points(VoronoiPolygonNodes.sp, pch=16, col="red")
[44] points(Shape, pch = 16, col="darkblue")
```

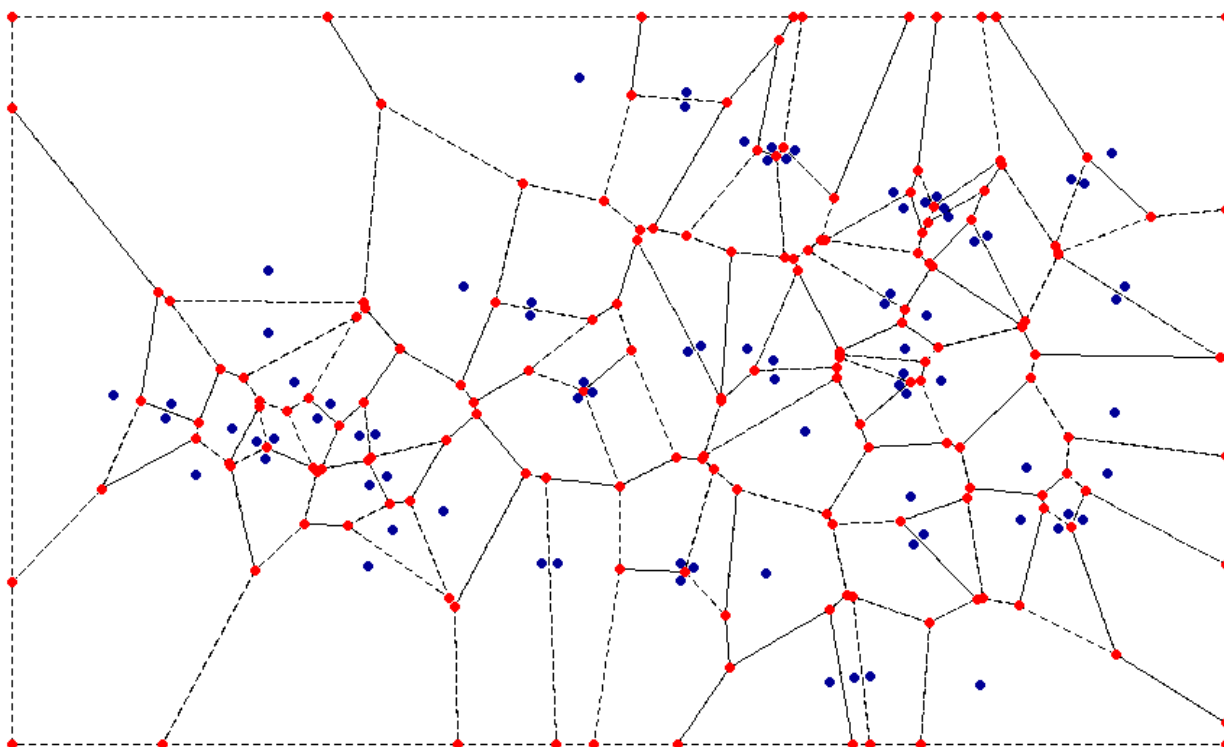


Fig. 1: Archaeological (Target) sites (blue) and Voronoi tessellation and node extraction (red) of the test dataset (download section).

Calculate all distances between Voronoi polygon nodes and archaeological sites.

```
[45] glDistance <- gDistance(VoronoiPolygonNodes.sp, Shape, byid = TRUE)
```

Generate the final raster dataset based on a given cell size and a rectangular shape defined by the minimum and maximum coordinate of the spatial point dataset including a small buffer defined by the cell size.

- R-SCRIPT Part 5 - Raster dataset

```
[46] xmin <- min(VoronoiPolygonNodes$long) - cellsize
```

```
[47] xmax <- max(VoronoiPolygonNodes$long) + cellsize
```

```
[48] ymin <- min(VoronoiPolygonNodes$lat) - cellsize
```

```
[49] ymax <- max(VoronoiPolygonNodes$lat) + cellsize
```

```
[50] grd <- expand.grid(x=seq(from=xmin, to=xmax, by=cellsize), y=seq(from=ymin, to=ymax, by=cellsize))
```

Derive the shortest distance of a Voronoi polygon node to the closest archaeological site (**Fig. 2**).

```
[51] for (pts in 1:length(VoronoiPolygonNodes.sp.df[,1])) {
```

```
[52] VoronoiPolygonNodes.sp.df[pts,length(VoronoiPolygonNodes.sp.df[,1])  
  <- min(glDistance [,pts])/1000
```

```
[53] }
```

- R-SCRIPT Part 6 - Ordinary Kriging using geoR-package (**Fig. 3**).

```
[54] m.coords <- ss.matrix(cbind(VoronoiPolygonNodes.sp.df[,1],  
  VoronoiPolygonNodes.sp.df[,2]))
```

```
[55] v.values <- as.vector(VoronoiPolygonNodes.sp.df$NearestNodeDistance)
```

```
[56] bin1 <- variog(coords=m.coords, data=v.values)
```

```
[57] plot(bin1)
```

```
[58] ols <- variofit(bin1, ini=grd, fix.nug=TRUE, wei="cressie")
```

```
[59] summary(ols)
```

```
[60] km <- krige.conv(cords = m.coords, data = v.values, loc = grd, krige =  
  krige.control(obj.model=ols))
```

```
[61] image(km, main="Kriging estimates")
```

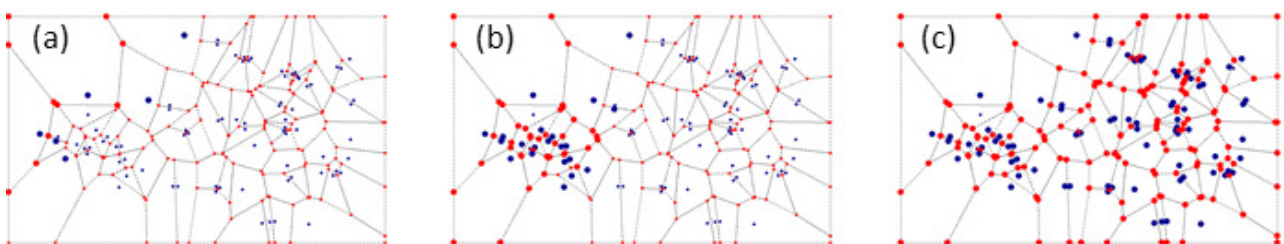


Fig. 2: Step wise shortest path detection (a) 10 sites processed [represented by an increased symbol size], (b) 40 sites processed [represented by an increased symbol size], (c) entire dataset.

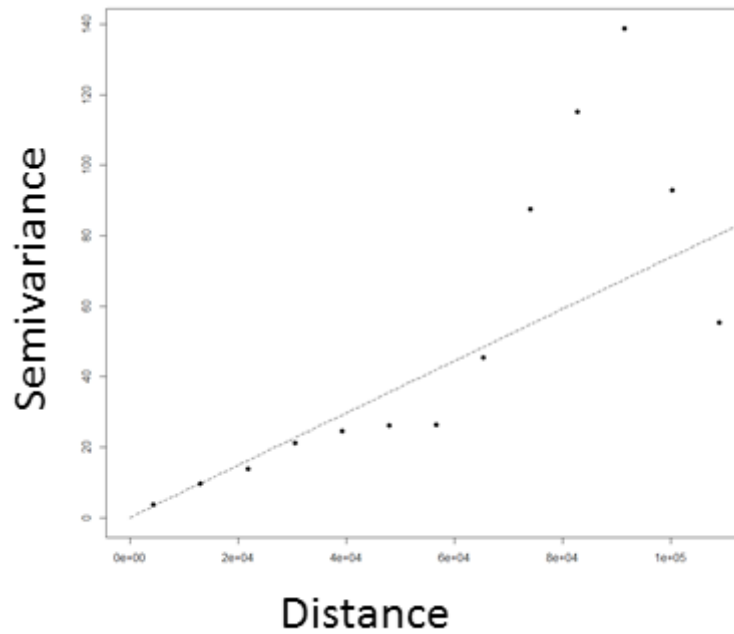


Fig. 3: Experimental (circles) and theoretical variogram (dashed line) of the sample dataset (Typ: linear).

– R-SCRIPT Part 7 – Delineation of isolines from the Kriging estimates (**Fig. 4**).

```
[62] contour(km, add=TRUE, nlev=21)
```

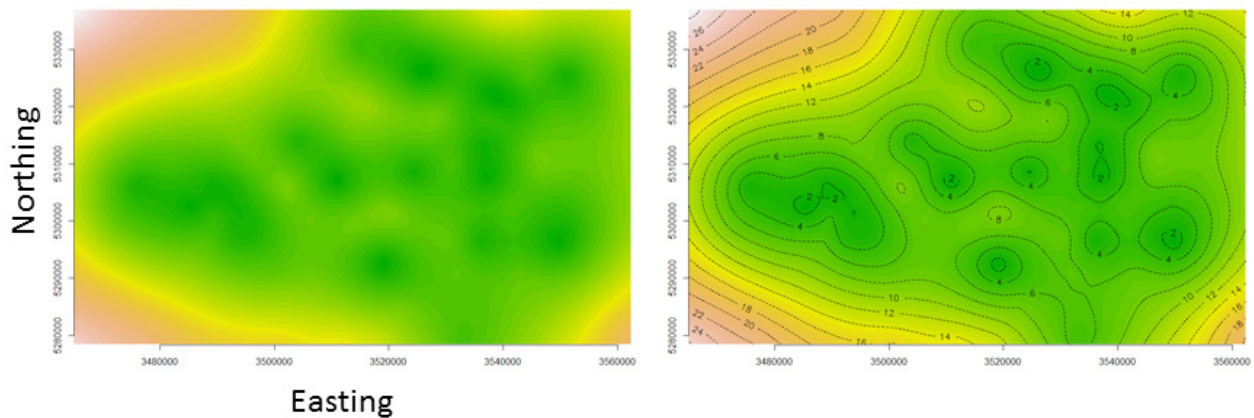


Fig. 4: Kriging distance map and contour line delineation (unit kilometers).

– R-SCRIPT Part 8 – Export raster dataset and isolines as Spatial Polyline Dataset (.shp)

```
[63] ExportGrid <- expand.grid(x=seq(from=xmin, to=xmax, by=cellsize),
```

```
    y=seq(from=ymin, to=ymax, by=cellsize))
```

```
[64] coordinates(ExportGrid) <- ~x+y
```

```
[65] gridded(ExportGrid) <- TRUE
```

```
[66] ExportGrid$predict <- km$predict
```

```
[67] ExportGrid$predict <- as.numeric(ExportGrid$predict)
```

```
[68] writeGDAL(ExportGrid[, "predict"], "KrigingMap.tif", drivename="GTiff",
```



```
    type="Float64", options=NULL)
[69] im<- as.image.SpatialGridDataFrame(ExportGrid)
[70] cl <- contourLines(im,ElevationBands)
[71] shp <- ContourLines2SLDF(cl)
[72] SLDF <- ContourLines2SLDF(cl)
[73] writeOGR(SLDF, "KrigingMap_ContourLines", driver="ESRI Shapefile")
```

The entire script with short description is attached in the download section. Additionally we provide a test dataset, which we have used for further testing's. The test dataset contains a complete random selection of burial sites from Hallstatt period in Baden-Württemberg after Paret (1961).

This technical section is made to evolve! Please share your thoughts, requirements and suggestions regarding the described issues to Jan Ahlrichs (Jan(dot)Ahlrichs(at)uni-tuebingen(dot)de) and Karsten Schmidt (Karsten(dot)Schmidt(at)uni-tuebingen(dot)de).

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