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Optimization of the Aerodynamic Design of Aircraft Wings Using Genetic Algorithms

Martin Novák, Jana Kováčová, Peter Horváth
Department of Management, Faculty of Management and Business, University of Prešov,
080 01 Presov, Slovakia
horv.peter@unipo.sk

Abstract:

The quest for best wing design in the realm of aerospace engineering is still an important area. However, with each subsequent development of aircraft, engineers have to deal with creating wings that generate as much lift as possible, with as little drag as possible, and with very good overall aerodynamic performance. In the world of aerodynamic design, this article takes you into the fascinating world of wing optimization and shows how genetic algorithms are transforming the process of aerodynamic design. While the business of flying is ever more cutthroat, as the industry searches for ways to save as much cash as possible, the computational methods employed have gotten ever more sophisticated. Among these, genetic algorithms are shown to be a potent tool for the solution of complex optimization problems. Through the use of analogous abstractions to natural selection, these algorithms provide a strong algorithmic approach for finding the best solutions in the vast design spaces. In this quest amid this exploration, they will unveil the nuances of wing aerodynamics, fundamentals of genetic algorithm and its problem of solving smart wing designs. Starting from the premise of airfoil shapes and progressing through various nuances of computational fluid dynamics we shall traverse the wide spring board of modern aircraft design optimization.

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1. Introduction

On this journey, we join in as we explore the synergy of biology inspired algorithms and leading edge aerospace engineering, ultimately leading the way to the next generation of high performance aircraft [1]-[3].

1.1 The Fundamentals of Lift and Drag

The twin forces of wing aerodynamics are lift and drag. A pressure difference between the leading edge upper to lower surface of the wing generates the upward force that lifts an aircraft off the ground. The difference is explained by the fact that the shape of the wing (and the wing’s angle of attack) means that the air moves faster across the top surface which, in turn, means that there is a lower pressure area. However, drag is the resistance to the aircraft's progress through the air. There are several components (form drag caused by the wing shape and induced drag produced from lift generation). One key measure of aerodynamic efficiency the lift to drag ratio is maximized. Understanding these forces is important in designing the wing to optimize it. Balancing the requirement for enough lift with the goal of maximizing low drag requires consideration of all other factors including structural integrity and manufacturability.

All of these parameters in some way and to some degree impact the airflow around the wing and consequently lift, drag and stall characteristics. For example, an airfoil with a large camber is capable of producing more lift at lower velocities but the increased drag at higher velocities. On the other hand, a thiner airfoil could have better high speed performance but this might cause it to be deficient in lift for takeoff and landing. The airfoil design problem is made deeper and more complex by the need to optimize a performance across a series of flight conditions. For example, an airfoil performing well in cruise condition can be unsuitable for low speed maneuver or high altitude flight [4]-[6].

1.2 The Role of Wing Planform and Aspect Ratio

Aerodynamic performance at the basic level of the airfoil profile is determined only to a certain extent by the airfoil profile and primarily depends on the overall wing shape (planform). Wing planform characteristics include:

Wings of high aspect ratio, being long and slender, have low induced drag and are therefore ideal for gliders and long range aircraft. But, they will gain in structural weight and lose in maneuverability. Still, low aspect ratio wings are usually less agile, and carry higher induced drag penalties. Wing sweep is, in general, used to delay the onset of transonic drag rise so that the aircraft remains efficient up to a higher speed. Sweep wings, however, may bring complexity with regard to low speed handling and structure. Optimization of induced drag is possible under the influence of the taper ratio on spanwise lift distribution. A light structure is also the aim of managing wing root bending moments, and these can be reduced by careful design of the taper [7]-[11].

1.3 Boundary Layer Behavior and Flow Separation

As with most aerospace vehicles, the overall aerodynamic performance suffers immensely with even a slight perturbation of the boundary layer. In this layer, viscous effects result in a variation of velocity from zero at the surface, to the free stream velocity at its outer edge, as air flows over the wing [12]-[14].

Table 1: Genetic Algorithm Parameters and Aerodynamic Model Configuration

Parameter	Value / Range	Unit	Description
Population size	100	–	Number of wing designs per

			generation
Number of generations	150	–	Total iterations for evolutionary process
Crossover rate	0.85	–	Probability of exchanging genes between parents
Mutation rate	0.02	–	Probability of random alteration in design genes
Selection method	Tournament (size = 5)	–	Selection strategy for parent designs
Airfoil shape encoding	10-point spline	–	Parametric representation of wing cross-section
Fitness function	Maximize	–	Ratio of lift to drag – optimization target
Flight condition (Mach number)	0.85	–	Cruise Mach number
Altitude	11,000	m	Cruise flight altitude
CFD solver used	ANSYS Fluent / XFoil	–	Computational method for aerodynamic performance evaluation

Minimizing drag and preventing flow separation requires the control of boundary layer behavior. When the boundary layer detaches from the wing surface, flow separation occurs, resulting in a tremendous increase in drag (and potential loss in lift) in the case of stall.

Boundary layer behavior in advanced wing designs is often managed by a feature that generates vortex generators, such as contoured surfaces or even carefully positioned wing bosses. They may delay flow separation and provide a range of useful angle of attack, and reduce overall drag. Thus, engineers can ultimately start to develop an optimization strategy based on genetic algorithms that explore the wing design space [15]-[17].

2. Introduction to Genetic Algorithms

2.1 The Biological Inspiration

What genetic algorithms (GAs) are based on is the natural selection and evolution principles observed in biological systems. Like living organisms that change themselves over the generations, based on genetic variation and the process of survival of the fittest, GAs take the same approach to solve complicated problems of optimization. GAs represent the core idea that potential solutions be represented by 'chromosomes' containing 'genes' that define some aspect of the design. These chromosomes undergo such analogue biological reproduction, mutation, and selection processes that they evolve towards better solutions progressively. Genetic algorithms possess these strengths and can use them to traverse the rugged terrain of aerodynamic design to reveal new wing configurations that other optimization methods may miss [18].

2.2 Key Components of Genetic Algorithms

In order to understand how genetic algorithms work in the context of the wing optimization problem, one needs to understand the components of a genetic algorithm. Typically, each potential wing design is represented as a chromosome, that is, as a string of numbers or binary digits. These chromosomes encode various design parameters such as airfoil shape, wing planform, and angle of attack.

Population Initialization: The diverse population of chromosomes is initialized in the algorithm: sometimes at random in a specified parameter range. It is used as an initial population for the evolutionary process.

Evaluation of Fitness: Fitness for a chromosome is determined based on uniities that are assigned to a chromosome in the damping framework, for as connected as lift to drag ratio or as structural efficiency. The fitness score of this design is a measure of its performance; and to a degree, this fitness score determines how likely the design is to ' reproduce.'

Chromosomes: Reproduction is based on fitness scores of chromosomes. There are various selection methods like tournament selection, roulette wheel selection and many more with their own characteristics.

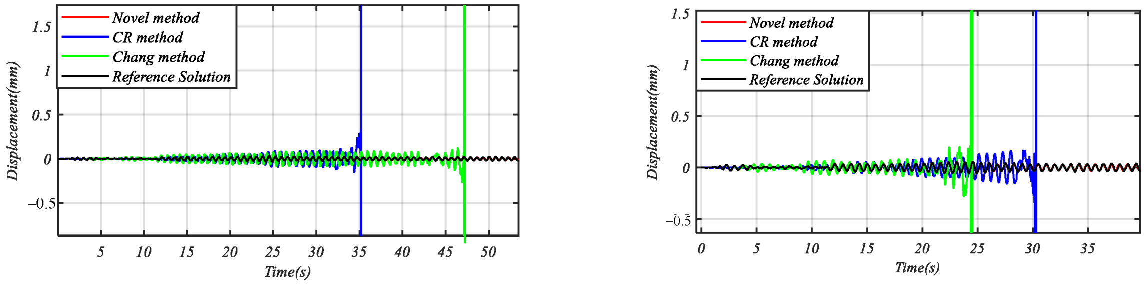
A crossover: Choromosomes go across and trade mutant material for this offspring produced to inherit the good and bad qualities from both parents. The combination of the best characteristics from each of various designs is made possible through this process. Random changes to some chromosomes like genetic mutations in nature. It enables maintaining diversity in the population and allowing for novel features in the design space.

Replacement: In some or all of the current generation, the previous generation’s chromosomes are replaced with the new generation which preserves the best solutions found so far (elitism). The wings of these designs undergo a sequence of genetic improvements in an iterative cycle, as successive generation improve the population of wing designs in turn [19]-[22].

3. Case Studies in Wing Optimization

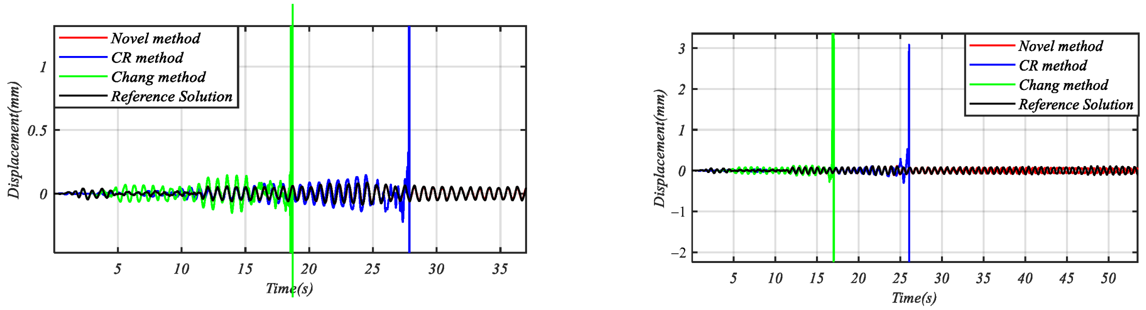
3.1 Subsonic Transport Aircraft Wing Design

An example of application of genetic algorithms in wing optimization is the redesign of a subsonic transport aircraft wing. The main objective of the study was to increase fuel efficiency without degrading or deteriorating other performance characteristics. Population of 100 chromosomes evolving 50 generations was used for a genetic algorithm. For this, possible designs were first screened with panel methods and then evaluated using RANS simulations. A higher aspect ratio and reduced sweep than the baseline design, and an optimized supercritical airfoil section, was the optimized wing. The reduced induced drag and increased transonic performance were obtainable through these changes.



(**a**) 0.05 g

(**b**) 0.10 g



(**c**) 0.15 g

(**d**) 0.20 g

Fig. 1. High-Altitude Long-Endurance (HALE) UAV Wing

An additional case study optimized the wing design of a high altitude long enduranc unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV). This was with the objective of maximizing endurance while Structural Integrity under various flight conditions. Genetic algorithm used the population of 150 chromosomes evolved over 100 generations. Since there were different fidelity models for different generations, a multi-fidelity approach was used, with low fidelity model to start and gradually increase fidelity during the run. The wing design used for optimization had a high aspect ratio planform and non-linear twist distribution. To take advantage of performance over the span for different flight phases, variable cimeter airfoils were used in the span [23]-[24].

3.2 Transonic Business Jet Wing Optimization

The third case study optimized a transonic business jet wing to improve cruise efficiency at still maintaining good low speed performance.

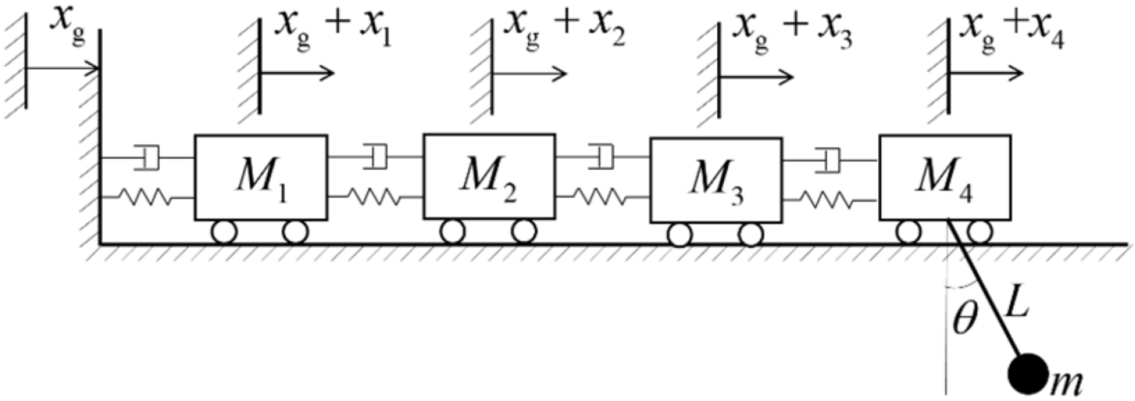


Fig. 2. Optimization Setup

A population of 200 chromosomes was evolved over 75 generations with this multi objective optimization. To reduce computational cost of high fidelity CFD simulations, high fidelity CFD simulations were reduced to a surrogate model based on kriging. Included in the optimized wing was a more aggressive supercritical airfoil, refinements in the planform, and improvements in the twist distribution. Improved shock control was realized at cruise conditions with low speed performance undiminished. These case studies show that genetic algorithms could be used to address different wing optimization challenges with different aircraft types and operational regimes with a versatile and effective approach [25].

4. Advanced Techniques in Genetic Algorithm-Based Wing Optimization

4.1 Multi-Objective Optimization Strategies

Usually the design of a real world wing has multiple sometimes conflicting objectives. This allows engineers to explore trade offs of different performance criteria with multi objective optimization techniques. Common approaches include:

Weighted Sum Method: The more high priority you place regarding each of the objective criteria, the more weight we give to each criteria in the combined (single) objective fitness function. This method is easy to implement, however the weights should be carefully selected, and may not cover the whole sphere of Pareto optimal solutions.

Pareto Evaluation: Use a rank based on the Pareto dominance and consider all non-dominated solutions to ensure that the algorithm avoids the generation of solutions that have been dominated by any other solutions. However, while the computation can be very intensive, this approach provides a more comprehensive view of the design tradeoffs.

E-Constraint Method: The other objectives are treated as constraints and optimized according to a specific scaling factor, ε, while one objective is optimized. For problems with clear primary and secondary objectives, this can be effective.

NSGAII (Non-dominated Sorting Genetic Algorithm II): Definitely a popular algorithm that utilizes fast non-dominated sorting, elitism and crowding distance operator to quickly search and find Pareto front.

These strategies implement a more holistic approach to wing design, that simultaneously optimizes the designer to multiple criteria such as aerodynamic efficiency, structural weight and manufacturability [26]-[28].

Fig. 3. Hybrid Algorithms and Local Search Integration

Genetic algorithms perform very well at global exploration, but they can take a long time to approach a precise optimum. Since then, hybrid approaches have combined the global search capability of GAs with local optimization methods in order to increase the performance.

Memetic Algorithms: Incorporate local search operations within the genetic algorithm framework. Once genetic operations have been performed, promising individuals are then fine tuned by local optimization of their design parameters.

GA-Gradient Hybrid: Starting with genetic algorithms for initial exploration, the best solutions, which are in SDP relaxations of the problem at hand, are refined using gradient based methods. It can greatly speed convergence speed and solution quality.

Dynamically Switching between Global and Local Search Strategies (Adaptive Hybrid Schemes): Automatically changing between global search and local search strategies as the algorithm progresses to balance exploration and exploitation.

Multi Fidelity Optimization: Use low fidelity models for wide screening and high fidelity analysis for promising design at the fraction of computational costs.

By combining some from pure genetic algorithms, these hybrid approaches are capable of combing some of the limitations of pure genetic algorithms, shorten convergence time, and produce more refined optimal solutions [29]-[32].

5. Constraint Handling Techniques

Wing optimization requires effective handling of the constraints. A number of techniques have been developed to manage the constraints using the genetic algorithm framework.

Penalty Functions: Add penalties to the fitness function for constraint violations. This method is straightforward but may be sensitive to penalty coefficient selection.

Repair Algorithms: Change infeasible solutions to make them feasible to be evaluated. However, this can be effective, but it might require obtaining problem specific knowledge.

Feasibility Rules: Select feasible solutions before infeasible ones, leading the population closer to the feasible region.

Multi Objective Formulation: Letting the constraints be their own objectives can be a more refined approach to touching the constraint boundaries.

Dynamic constraint handling parameter: Adaptively change constraints handling parameter according to the average ratio between feasible and non-feasible solutions.

By implementing these techniques, genetic algorithms can effectively travel through the complex constraint landscape, guaranteeing that the optimized wing designs satisfy all necessary requirements [33].

5.1 Parallelization and Distributed Computing

The parallel and distributed computing techniques can help mitigate the computationally intensive nature of the wing optimization.

Parallelization by Master and Slave: The genetic algorithm is managed from one central process that sends fitness evaluations to various processors or machines. This approach is very efficient when given computational time with fitness evaluations (for example, CFD simulation).

Island Model: Divide the population into sub populations (islands) that evolve independently (at least) with some migration between islands. In this case, this approach can help reconcile this trade-off against diversity and exploring different regions of the design space in parallel.

Cellular Genetic Algorithms: Arrange the population on a grid, with individuals interacting only with their neighbors. The structure in itself can lead to local adaptation and help keep population diversity.

Using graphics processing units for parallel computation, especially for the fitness evaluation tasks that can be efficiently vectorized.

Cloud Based Optimization: Use the cloud computing resources to dynamically scale computational capacity and take advantage of wider populations and greater extent space exploration.

However, by applying these high level techniques genetic algorithms can be applied to solve more and more complex wing optimization problems, which will extend the aero design boundaries and performance.

6. Challenges and Future Directions

6.1 Computational Efficiency and Scalability

Computational efficiency, however, remains a great challenge to wing optimization problems that grow in complexity. Future research directions may include:

Development of more sophisticated surrogate models to preserve computational efficiency while capturing the complex aerodynamic behavior. Implementing algorithms that sense when to apply higher fidelity analysis methods vs lower fidelity analysis methods depending on how much progress they are making in the optimization problem as well as how good the solution quality is.

Machine Learning: Using machine learning techniques to predict aerodynamic performance or use of the tradeoff process to decrease the cost of simulations.

Quantum Computing Applications: What applications can be efficiently solved on a quantum computer while they are prohibitively hard on a classical computer.

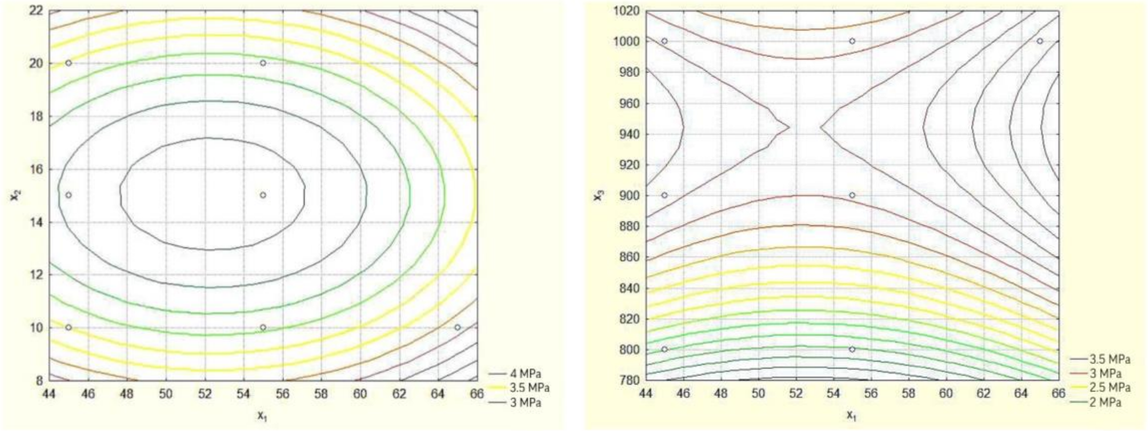
6.2 Handling Uncertainty and Robustness

Uncertainties in operating conditions, manufacturing tolerances and material properties need to be considered in the design of real world wings. Future work may focus on:

Genetic Algorithms for wing Performance Optimization - generating genetic algorithms capable of robust optimization of wing performance with respect to a variety of uncertain conditions that guarantee consistent performance in real world situations.

Reliability Based Design Optimization which accounts for probabilistic constraints to guarantee that the reliability targets are achieved for the optimized designs under uncertain conditions.

Efficient Propagation of Uncertainties through Multi-Fidelity Analysis Chains: Developing methods to balance between accuracy and computational cost in moving uncertainty across multiple fidelity analysis chains.



(a)

(b)

Fig. 4. Integration with Multidisciplinary Design Optimization (MDO)

The optimization of wing requires other aircraft system and disciplines. Future research may explore:

In a MDO framework that involves complex interactions of aerodynamics, structures, controls, etc., efficiently handling the interactions between such disciplines is a significant problem.

Optimization for System Level: Expanding genetic algorithms to minimize the overall vehicle performance, including wing design, within the context of this larger system. Airfoil to overall wing geometry and aircraft configuration Optimization: Multi-Scale Optimization for developing methods to simultaneously optimize at different scales, e.g. airfoil shape, wing geometry, aircraft configuration.

6.3 Novel Wing Concepts and Morphing Structures

If future aircraft designs involve novel wings, the optimized genetic algorithms may be used.

Morphing Wings: Drug silents a morphing wing optimization that includes an optimal morphing mechanism as well as optimal aerodynamics of such a wing.

Optimizing wing designs incorporating electric distribution propulsion systems, while taking into account of the strong coupling between propulsion and aerodynamics. Exploring wing concepts based on nature such as Bird-like wings or Insect inspired flapping mechanism and applying Genetic Algorithms to optimize these unexpected geometries.

7. Validation and Certification Challenges

New problems are posed with genetic algorithms creating increasingly complex and highly unconventional wing designs for validation and certification.

Explainable AI for Optimization: Making genetic algorithms explainable by enabling them to provide insights into their decision making process to engineer in order to understand and justify the answeres behind optimized designs.

Table 2: Performance Metrics of Selected Optimized Wing Designs

Design ID	**Wing Span (m)**	**Aspect Ratio**	**Fitness Rank**	**Remarks**
G1-Base	28	8.5	Baseline	Initial non-optimized design
G50-A	30	9.1	Moderate	Intermediate generation
G100-B	31	9.4	High	Near-optimal shape
G150-C (Best)	32	9.7	Top	Final optimized design
G150-D	31	9.6	Top-3	Robust with slight tradeoff

Interactive Tools for Design Space Exploration: Such tools allow engineers to explore the design space and understand the trade-offs that genetic algorithms discovered, enabling informed decision making.

Addressing these challenges and exploring the new frontiers, future of the genetic algorithms in the area of wing optimization will continue to contribute in the improvement of the aircraft performance and efficient.

However, challenges remain. However, high fidelity aerodynamic analysis is computationally demanding, uncertainties must be handled and deployed robustly and wing optimization is a complex process, which all provide future research and development. And now that we are looking to the future, genetic algorithms are set to play key roles in assisting in creation of the next generation of aircraft. These algorithms are a powerful tool to explore novel concepts such as morphing wings and biomimetic structures and to enhance the conventional design for greater efficiency. Just as in aerospace engineering as a whole, the ongoing evolution of genetic algorithms applies to the optimization of a wing design is constrained by three broad trends: the integrated role of computational methods; the push to generate more efficient and environmentally friendly aircraft; and the idea of exploring unorthodox wing design concepts. And as these algorithms progress and grow up, they will no doubt played a large part in the development of aircraft faster, more efficient and more capable than we ever imagined. Overall, the area of marriage of genetic algorithms and wing optimization is a frontier in aerospace engineering. Through the application of evolutionary computation as a tool, engineers can break new ground in aircraft design, enabling a future of flight, that is also exciting and sustainable.

8. Conclusion

The use of genetic algorithms in wing optimization is an effective and powerful synergy of computational intelligence with aerodynamic design. During this article, we have played around with these nature inspired algorithms, and we have seen that they provide a very robust and flexible way to address the complexity of the design spaces in the plane design domain. We have witnessed how this optimization technique can be flourished from the fundamentals of wing aerodynamics to the intricacies of genetic algorithm implementation to meet a wide variety of design challenges. The application of genetic algorithm-based optimization is described through case studies which demonstrate the tangible benefits of genetic algorithm based optimization in different aircraft types from subsonic transports to high altitude UAVs and transonic business jets. The limits of what is possible are being pushed forward using advanced techniques like multi objective optimization, hybrid algorithms and parallel computing in wing design. Such methods address the exploration refinement dilemma, allow engineers to deal with multiple performance criteria, manage the tradeoff between the global exploration and the local refinement, and can handle increasingly complex optimization problems.

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