

# Adaptive Methods for Contact Problems

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**Abstract** This contribution is concerned with the adaptive finite-element-formulation of contact problems. For this, first the theoretical background of continuum mechanics and contact kinematics is given. Next the basic finite element formulation for large deformation contact processes is presented for two-dimensional problems. The development of the discretization of contact contributions follows. Here standard approaches are discussed for the case of frictional and frictionless contact. Finally different adaptive strategies involving as well residual based error estimators as error indicators based on superconvergence patch recovery are derived and formulated to include the contributions due to contact. Also error estimators based on dual principles are discussed. Examples show the performance of the different formulations and adaptive strategies.

## 1 Introduction

Boundary value problems involving contact are of great importance in industrial applications in mechanical and civil engineering. The range of application starts with relatively simple problems like foundations or bearings and includes metal forming processes, rubber sealings, drilling problems, crash analysis of cars, rolling contact between car tires and the road. Other applications are related to biomechanics where human joints, implantats or teeth are of consideration. Due to this variety contact problems are today combined either with large elastic or inelastic deformations including time dependent responses. Thermal coupling might have to be considered, see cooling of electronic devices, heat removal within nuclear power plant vessels or thermal insulation of astronautic vehicles. For most industrial applications numerical methods have to be applied since the contacting bodies have complex geometries or undergo large deformations. Due to that the appropriate meshing for a problem can often not be found a priori to the computation. Hence there is a need to develop adaptive methods for contact problems.

The main idea of adaptive mesh refinement is depicted in Fig. 1. It shows the basic ingredients of an adaptive method for contact problems. Part 1 is the determination of the contact, part 2 a solution of the problem with a given mesh and finally the adaptive process in part 3 leads to an automatic mesh refinement of the discretization.

Adaptive methods rely on a posteriori error estimators which estimate e.g. the difference between the exact solution  $\mathbf{u}$  and the approximate solution  $\mathbf{u}_h$  of the displacement field. For an elliptic variational problem of order  $m$  with complete interpolation polynomials of order  $k$  in a norm containing derivatives of degree  $s$ , see Straug and Fix (1973), one

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## **Table of Contents New Developments In Contact Problems**

1. Understanding the eBook New Developments In Contact Problems
  - The Rise of Digital Reading New Developments In Contact Problems
  - Advantages of eBooks Over Traditional Books
2. Identifying New Developments In Contact Problems
  - Exploring Different Genres
  - Considering Fiction vs. Non-Fiction
  - Determining Your Reading Goals
3. Choosing the Right eBook Platform
  - Popular eBook Platforms
  - Features to Look for in an New Developments In Contact Problems
  - User-Friendly Interface
4. Exploring eBook Recommendations from New Developments In Contact Problems
  - Personalized Recommendations
  - New Developments In Contact Problems User Reviews and Ratings
  - New Developments In Contact Problems and Bestseller Lists
5. Accessing New Developments In Contact Problems Free and Paid eBooks

- New Developments In Contact Problems Public Domain eBooks
  - New Developments In Contact Problems eBook Subscription Services
  - New Developments In Contact Problems Budget-Friendly Options
6. Navigating New Developments In Contact Problems eBook Formats
    - ePub, PDF, MOBI, and More
    - New Developments In Contact Problems Compatibility with Devices
    - New Developments In Contact Problems Enhanced eBook Features
  7. Enhancing Your Reading Experience
    - Adjustable Fonts and Text Sizes of New Developments In Contact Problems
    - Highlighting and Note-Taking New Developments In Contact Problems
    - Interactive Elements New Developments In Contact Problems
  8. Staying Engaged with New Developments In Contact Problems
    - Joining Online Reading Communities
    - Participating in Virtual Book Clubs
    - Following Authors and Publishers New Developments In Contact Problems
  9. Balancing eBooks and Physical Books New Developments In Contact Problems
    - Benefits of a Digital Library
    - Creating a Diverse Reading Collection New Developments In Contact Problems
  10. Overcoming Reading Challenges
    - Dealing with Digital Eye Strain
    - Minimizing Distractions
    - Managing Screen Time
  11. Cultivating a Reading Routine New Developments In Contact Problems
    - Setting Reading Goals New Developments In Contact Problems
    - Carving Out Dedicated Reading Time
  12. Sourcing Reliable Information of New Developments In Contact Problems
    - Fact-Checking eBook Content of New Developments In Contact Problems
    - Distinguishing Credible Sources
  13. Promoting Lifelong Learning
    - Utilizing eBooks for Skill Development

- Exploring Educational eBooks
14. Embracing eBook Trends
- Integration of Multimedia Elements
  - Interactive and Gamified eBooks

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