Solid angles subtended by the platonic solids (regular polyhedra) at their vertices

Mr Harish Chandra Rajpoot

M.M.M. University of Technology, Gorakhpur-273010 (UP), India

March, 2015

Introduction: We know that all five platonic solids i.e. regular tetrahedron, regular hexahedron (cube), regular octahedron, regular dodecahedron & regular icosahedron have all their vertices identical, hence the solid angle subtended by any platonic solid at any of its identical vertices will be equal in magnitude. If we treat all the edges meeting at any of the identical vertices of a platonic solid as the lateral edges of a right pyramid with a regular n-gonal base then the solid angle subtended by any of five platonic solids is calculated by using HCR’s standard formula of solid angle. According to which, solid angle \( \omega \), subtended at the vertex (apex point) by a right pyramid with a regular n-gonal base & an angle \( \alpha \) between any two consecutive lateral edges meeting at the same vertex, is mathematically given by the standard (generalized) formula as follows

\[
\omega = 2\pi - 2n \sin^{-1}\left(\cos \frac{\pi}{n} \sqrt{\tan^2 \frac{\pi}{n} - \tan^2 \frac{\alpha}{2}}\right) \quad \forall \ n \in \mathbb{N} \ & \ n \geq 3
\]

Thus by setting the value of no. of edges \( n \) meeting at any of the identical vertices of a platonic solid & the angle \( \alpha \) between any two consecutive edges meeting at that vertex in the above formula, we can easily calculate the solid angle subtended by the given platonic solid at its vertex. Let’s assume that the eye of observer is located at any of the identical vertices of a given platonic solid & directed (focused) straight to the centre (of the platonic solid) (as shown in the figures below) then by setting the corresponding values of \( n \) & \( \alpha \) in the above generalized formula we can analyse all five platonic solids as follows

1. Solid angle subtended by a regular tetrahedron at any of its four identical vertices: we know that a regular tetrahedron has 4 congruent equilateral triangular faces, 6 edges & 4 identical vertices. Three equilateral triangular faces meet at each vertex & hence 3 edges meet at each vertex & the angle between any two consecutive edges is 60° thus in this case we have

\[
n = 3 \ & \ \alpha = 60^\circ \quad \text{(interior angle of equilateral triangular face)}
\]

\[
\Rightarrow \omega = 2\pi - 2n \sin^{-1}\left(\cos \frac{\pi}{n} \sqrt{\tan^2 \frac{\pi}{n} - \tan^2 \frac{\alpha}{2}}\right) \\
= 2\pi - 2(3) \sin^{-1}\left(\cos \frac{\pi}{3} \sqrt{\tan^2 \frac{\pi}{3} - \tan^2 \frac{60^\circ}{2}}\right) = 2\pi - 6 \sin^{-1}\left(\frac{1}{2} \sqrt{3^2 - \frac{1}{3^2}}\right) \\
= 2\pi - 6 \sin^{-1}\left(\frac{1}{2} \frac{8}{3}\right) = 2\pi - 6 \sin^{-1}\left(\frac{2}{3}\right)
\]

Hence, the solid angle \( \omega_T \) subtended by a regular tetrahedron at its vertex is given as

\[
\left(\omega_T\right) = 2\pi - 6 \sin^{-1}\left(\frac{2}{3}\right) \approx 0.551285598 \text{ sr}
\]

2. Solid angle subtended by a regular hexahedron (cube) at any of its eight identical vertices: we know that a regular hexahedron (cube) has 6 congruent square faces, 12 edges & 8 identical vertices. Three square faces meet at each vertex & hence 3 edges meet at each vertex & the angle between any two consecutive edges is 90° thus in this case we have
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\[ n = 3 \text{ & } \alpha = 90^\circ \text{ (interior angle of square face)} \]

\[ \Rightarrow \omega = 2\pi - 2n \sin^{-1} \left( \cos \frac{\pi}{n} \sqrt{\tan^2 \frac{\pi}{n} - \tan^2 \frac{\alpha}{2}} \right) \]

\[ = 2\pi - 2(3) \sin^{-1} \left( \cos \frac{\pi}{3} \sqrt{\tan^2 \frac{\pi}{3} - \tan^2 \frac{90^\circ}{2}} \right) = 2\pi - 6 \sin^{-1} \left( \frac{1}{2} \sqrt{\left(\sqrt{3}\right)^2 - (1)^2} \right) \]

\[ = 2\pi - 6 \sin^{-1} \left( \frac{1}{2} \sqrt{2} \right) = 2\pi - 6 \sin^{-1} \left( \frac{1}{\sqrt{2}} \right) = 2\pi - 6 \left( \frac{\pi}{4} \right) = \frac{\pi}{2} \]

Hence, the solid angle \((\omega_s)\) subtended by a regular hexahedron (cube) at its vertex is given as

\[(\omega_s) = \frac{\pi}{2} \approx 1.570796327 \text{ sr}\]

2. Solid angle subtended by a regular octahedron at any of its six identical vertices: we know that a regular octahedron has 8 congruent equilateral triangular faces, 12 edges & 6 identical vertices. Four equilateral triangular faces meet at each vertex & hence 4 edges meet at each vertex & the angle between any two consecutive edges is 60° thus in this case we have

\[ n = 4 \text{ & } \alpha = 60^\circ \text{ (interior angle of equilateral triangular face)} \]

\[ \Rightarrow \omega = 2\pi - 2n \sin^{-1} \left( \cos \frac{\pi}{n} \sqrt{\tan^2 \frac{\pi}{n} - \tan^2 \frac{\alpha}{2}} \right) \]

\[ = 2\pi - 2(4) \sin^{-1} \left( \cos \frac{\pi}{4} \sqrt{\tan^2 \frac{\pi}{4} - \tan^2 \frac{60^\circ}{2}} \right) = 2\pi - 8 \sin^{-1} \left( \frac{1}{\sqrt{2}} \sqrt{(1)^2 - \left( \frac{1}{\sqrt{3}} \right)^2} \right) \]

\[ = 2\pi - 8 \sin^{-1} \left( \frac{2}{\sqrt{3}} \right) = 2\pi - 8 \sin^{-1} \left( \frac{1}{\sqrt{3}} \right) \]

Hence, the solid angle \((\omega_o)\) subtended by a regular octahedron at its vertex is given as

\[(\omega_o) = 2\pi - 8 \sin^{-1} \left( \frac{1}{\sqrt{3}} \right) \approx 1.359347638 \text{ sr}\]

4. Solid angle subtended by a regular dodecahedron at any of its twenty identical vertices: we know that a regular dodecahedron has 12 congruent regular pentagonal faces, 30 edges & 20 identical vertices. Three regular pentagonal faces meet at each vertex & hence 3 edges meet at each vertex & the angle between any two consecutive edges is 108° thus in this case we have

\[ n = 3 \text{ & } \alpha = 108^\circ \text{ (interior angle of regular pentagonal face)} \]

\[ \Rightarrow \omega = 2\pi - 2n \sin^{-1} \left( \cos \frac{\pi}{n} \sqrt{\tan^2 \frac{\pi}{n} - \tan^2 \frac{\alpha}{2}} \right) \]
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\[ = 2\pi - 2(3) \sin^{-1}\left( \cos \frac{\pi}{3} \sqrt{\tan^2 \frac{\pi}{3} - \frac{\tan 108^\circ}{2}} \right) \]

\[ = 2\pi - 6 \sin^{-1}\left( \frac{1}{2} \sqrt{\left(\frac{\sqrt{3}}{\sqrt{2}}\right)^2 - \left(\frac{\sqrt{3} + \sqrt{5}}{\frac{\sqrt{2}}{5}}\right)^2} \right) \]

\[ = 2\pi - 6 \sin^{-1}\left( \frac{10 - 2\sqrt{5}}{5} \right) = 2\pi - 6 \sin^{-1}\left( \frac{5 - \sqrt{5}}{10} \right) \]

Hence, the solid angle \((\omega_D)\) subtended by a regular dodecahedron at its vertex is given as

\[ (\omega_D) = 2\pi - 6 \sin^{-1}\left( \frac{5 - \sqrt{5}}{10} \right) \approx 2.961739154 \text{ sr} \]

5. Solid angle subtended by a regular icosahedron at any of its twelve identical vertices: we know that a regular icosahedron has 20 congruent equilateral triangular faces, 30 edges & 12 identical vertices. Five equilateral triangular faces meet at each vertex & hence 5 edges meet at each vertex & the angle between any two consecutive edges is \(60^\circ\) thus in this case we have

\[ n = 5 \ & \ \alpha = 60^\circ \ (\text{interior angle of equilateral triangular face}) \]

\[ \Rightarrow \omega = 2\pi - 2n \sin^{-1}\left( \cos \frac{\pi}{n} \sqrt{\tan^2 \frac{\pi}{n} - \tan^2 \frac{\alpha}{2}} \right) \]

\[ = 2\pi - 2(5) \sin^{-1}\left( \cos \frac{\pi}{5} \sqrt{\tan^2 \frac{\pi}{5} - \tan 60^\circ} \right) \]

\[ = 2\pi - 10 \sin^{-1}\left( \frac{\sqrt{5} + 1}{4} \sqrt{\left(\frac{\sqrt{5} - 2\sqrt{5}}{\sqrt{3}}\right)^2 - \left(\frac{1}{\sqrt{3}}\right)^2} \right) \]

\[ = 2\pi - 10 \sin^{-1}\left( \frac{\sqrt{5} + 1}{4} \sqrt{\left(\frac{3 - \sqrt{5}}{3}\right)^2} \right) = 2\pi - 10 \sin^{-1}\left( \frac{\sqrt{5} - 1}{2\sqrt{3}} \right) \]

Hence, the solid angle \((\omega_I)\) subtended by a regular icosahedron at its vertex is given as

\[ (\omega_I) = 2\pi - 10 \sin^{-1}\left( \frac{\sqrt{5} - 1}{2\sqrt{3}} \right) \approx 2.634547026 \text{ sr} \]

All the above results of the solid angles subtended by the platonic solids at their vertices can be tabulated as follows
# Solid angles subtended by the platonic solids (regular polyhedra) at their vertices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Platonic solid (regular polyhedron)</th>
<th>Regular polygonal face</th>
<th>No. of congruent faces</th>
<th>No. of equal edges</th>
<th>No. of identical vertices</th>
<th>Solid angle subtended by the platonic solid at its each vertex (in Ste-radian (sr))</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regular tetrahedron</td>
<td>Equilateral triangle</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>(2\pi - 6 \sin^{-1}\left(\frac{\sqrt{2}}{3}\right) \approx 0.551285598 \text{ sr})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular hexahedron (cube)</td>
<td>Square</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>(\frac{\pi}{2} \approx 1.570796327 \text{ sr})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular octahedron</td>
<td>Equilateral triangle</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>(2\pi - 8 \sin^{-1}\left(\frac{1}{\sqrt{3}}\right) \approx 1.359347638 \text{ sr})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular dodecahedron</td>
<td>Regular pentagon</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>(2\pi - 6 \sin^{-1}\left(\frac{5 - \sqrt{5}}{10}\right) \approx 2.961739154 \text{ sr})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular icosahedron</td>
<td>Equilateral triangle</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>(2\pi - 10 \sin^{-1}\left(\frac{\sqrt{3} - 1}{2\sqrt{3}}\right) \approx 2.634547026 \text{ sr})</td>
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**Note:** Above articles had been derived & illustrated by Mr H.C. Rajpoot (B Tech, Mechanical Engineering)

M.M.M. University of Technology, Gorakhpur-273010 (UP) India  
March, 2015

Email: rajpootharishchandra@gmail.com

Author’s Home Page: https://notionpress.com/author/HarishChandraRajpoot