EXTRACTA MATHEMATICAE Vol. **19**, Núm. 3, 335 – 337 (2004)

On Continuous Surjections from Cantor Set

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(Presented by J.M.F. Castillo)

AMS *Subject Class.* (2000): 54C55 *Received January* 21, 2004

It is a famous result of Alexandroff and Urysohn [1] that every compact metric space is a continuous image of Cantor set Δ. In this short note we complement this result by showing that a certain "uniqueness" property holds.

Given topological spaces X and Y, let $C(X,Y)$ denote the collection of all continuous mappings from X to Y. If Y is metrized by d, one can endow $C(X,Y)$ with the uniform metric

$$\operatorname{dist}(f,g) = \sup_{x\in X} d(f(x),g(x)).$$

It is clear that if φ is a homeomorphism of X, the map $f \mapsto \varphi \circ f$ is an isometry of $C(X,Y)$.

Our result is the following.

Theorem. *Let K be a compact metric space and let f and g be two continuous mappings from Δ onto K. For every $\varepsilon > 0$ there exists a homeomorphism φ of Δ such that* $\operatorname{dist}(g, f\circ\varphi) < \varepsilon$.

Before going into the proof, let us fix some notations. We regard the points of $\Delta = \{0,1\}^{\mathbb{N}}$ as functions $x : \mathbb{N} \to \{0,1\}$ and we write $\Delta^{(n)}$ for the set of all two-valued functions $y : \{1,2,\dots,n\} \to \{0,1\}$. Given $y \in \Delta^{(n)}$, put

$$\Delta_y = \{x \in \Delta : \ x(k) = y(k), \ 1 \le k \le n\}.$$

Obviously Δ_y is homeomorphic to Δ. The n-th standard decomposition of Δ is the partition of Δ into the 2^n clopen sets

$$\Delta = \bigoplus_{y\in\Delta^{(n)}} \Delta_y.$$

Supported in part by DGICYT project BMF 2001—083.

LEMMA. *Let S be a finite set and let f and g be be two surjections $\Delta \to S$ which are constant on the sets of some standard decomposition of Δ. Then there is a homemorphism φ of Δ such that $g = f \circ \varphi$.*

Proof. Since $\Delta \approx \Delta \oplus \Delta$ we see that for every $s \in S$ there is a homeomorphism $\varphi_s : g^{-1}(s) \to f^{-1}(s)$. In fact,

$$h^{-1}(s) \approx \Delta \oplus \overset{k_h}{\dots} \oplus \Delta \approx \Delta \qquad (h = f,\, g).$$

The required homeomorphism is then given by

$$\varphi = \left(\bigoplus_{s \in S} \varphi_s \right) : \Delta = \bigoplus_{s \in S} g^{-1}(s) \to \bigoplus_{s \in S} f^{-1}(s) = \Delta.$$

∎

Proof of the Theorem. Fix $\varepsilon > 0$ and take n such that if $\Delta = \oplus_y \Delta_y$ is the n-th standard decomposition, then the sets

$$h(\Delta_y) \qquad (h = f, g)$$

have all diameter at most ε. Also, for $y \in \Delta^{(n)}$, let $y^+ = \min \Delta_y$ and define $h_1 : \Delta \to K$ taking $h_1(x) = h(y^+)$ for $x \in \Delta_y$. Clearly, $\operatorname{dist}(h, h_1) \leq \varepsilon$ for $h = f, g$ and so the sets $h_1(\Delta)$ are ε-nets on K having at most 2^n points.

Let K_1 be the range of f_1 and define $g_2 : \Delta \to K_1$ taking $g_2(\Delta_y)$ as the point $k \in K_1$ minimizing the distance to $g_1(\Delta_y) = g(y^+)$. Clearly, $\operatorname{dist}(g_2, g_1) \leq \varepsilon$. Of course, g_2 need not be onto K_1, but its range, say S is a 2ε-net in K and so there exists a projection of K_1 onto its subset S such that $\operatorname{dist}(\pi, \mathrm{Id}_S) \leq 2\varepsilon$. Taking $f_2 = \pi \circ f_1$, we see that $\operatorname{dist}(f_2, f_1) \leq 2\varepsilon$.

Finally, we can apply the Lemma to the pair f_2, g_2 to get a homeomorphism φ of Δ such that $g_2 = f_2 \circ \varphi$. Therefore

$$\begin{aligned} \operatorname{dist}(g, f \circ \varphi) &\leq \operatorname{dist}(g, g_2) + \operatorname{dist}(g_2, f \circ \varphi) \\ &\leq \operatorname{dist}(g, g_2) + \operatorname{dist}(g_2, f_2 \circ \varphi) + \operatorname{dist}(f_2 \circ \varphi, f \circ \varphi) \leq 5\varepsilon, \end{aligned}$$

which completes the proof. ∎

Remarks. Every non-empty clopen subset of Δ is homeomorphic to Δ (this follows from Hausdorff characterization of Δ as the only totally disconnected perfect compact metric space [3]). So, the Lemma holds without any restriction on f and g.

The only property of Δ needed to get the conclusion of the Theorem is that given $\varepsilon > 0$ there exists a decomposition $\Delta = C_1 \oplus \cdots \oplus C_n$ into clopen sets of diameter less that ε with each C_i homeomorphic to Δ.

(See [2] for unexplained terms.) The above Theorem makes transparent that the set of continuous surjections $\Delta \to K$ that admit (or do not admit) a regular averaging operator is uniformly dense in the set of all continuous surjections $\Delta \to K$ whenever it is not empty; see [2, Theorem 3].

References

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