Polyhedral products and commutator subgroups of right-angled Artin and Coxeter groups joint with Yakov Veryovkin

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1. Preliminaries

Polyhedral product

$$(X, A) = \{(X_1, A_1), \dots, (X_m, A_m)\}$$
 a sequence of pairs of spaces, $A_i \subset X_i$.

 \mathcal{K} a simplicial complex on $[m] = \{1, 2, \ldots, m\}$, $\varnothing \in \mathcal{K}$.

Given
$$I = \{i_1, \ldots, i_k\} \subset [m]$$
, set

$$(X, A)^I = Y_1 \times \cdots \times Y_m$$
 where $Y_i = \begin{cases} X_i & \text{if } i \in I, \\ A_i & \text{if } i \notin I. \end{cases}$

The K-polyhedral product of (X, A) is

$$(\mathbf{X}, \mathbf{A})^{\mathcal{K}} = \bigcup_{I \in \mathcal{K}} (\mathbf{X}, \mathbf{A})^I = \bigcup_{I \in \mathcal{K}} \Big(\prod_{i \in I} X_i \times \prod_{j \notin I} A_j\Big).$$

Notation:
$$(X, A)^{\mathcal{K}} = (X, A)^{\mathcal{K}}$$
 when all $(X_i, A_i) = (X, A)$; $X^{\mathcal{K}} = (X, pt)^{\mathcal{K}}$, $X^{\mathcal{K}} = (X, pt)^{\mathcal{K}}$.

Categorical approach

Category of faces $CAT(\mathcal{K})$.

Objects: simplices $I \in \mathcal{K}$. Morphisms: inclusions $I \subset J$.

TOP the category of topological spaces.

Define the $CAT(\mathcal{K})$ -diagram

$$\mathcal{D}_{\mathcal{K}}(\mathbf{X}, \mathbf{A}) \colon \mathrm{CAT}(\mathcal{K}) \longrightarrow \mathrm{TOP},$$

$$I \longmapsto (\mathbf{X}, \mathbf{A})^{I},$$

which maps the morphism $I \subset J$ of $CAT(\mathcal{K})$ to the inclusion of spaces $(X, A)^I \subset (X, A)^J$.

Then we have

$$(\boldsymbol{X}, \boldsymbol{A})^{\mathcal{K}} = \operatorname{colim} \mathcal{D}_{\mathcal{K}}(\boldsymbol{X}, \boldsymbol{A}) = \operatorname{colim}_{I \in \mathcal{K}} (\boldsymbol{X}, \boldsymbol{A})^{I}.$$

Let $(X, A) = (S^1, pt)$, where S^1 is a circle. Then

$$(S^1)^{\mathcal{K}} = \bigcup_{I \in \mathcal{K}} (S^1)^I \subset (S^1)^m.$$

When $\mathcal{K} = \{\emptyset, \{1\}, \dots, \{m\}\}$ (m disjoint points), the polyhedral product $(S^1)^{\mathcal{K}}$ is the wedge $(S^1)^{\vee m}$ of m circles.

When \mathcal{K} consists of all proper subsets of [m] (the boundary $\partial \Delta^{m-1}$ of an (m-1)-dimensional simplex), $(S^1)^{\mathcal{K}}$ is the fat wedge of m circles; it is obtained by removing the top-dimensional cell from the m-torus $(S^1)^m$.

For a general $\mathcal K$ on m vertices, $(S^1)^{\vee m}\subset (S^1)^{\mathcal K}\subset (S^1)^m$.

Let $(X,A)=(\mathbb{R},\mathbb{Z})$. Then

$$\mathcal{L}_{\mathcal{K}}:=(\mathbb{R},\mathbb{Z})^{\mathcal{K}}=\bigcup_{I\in\mathcal{K}}(\mathbb{R},\mathbb{Z})^I\subset\mathbb{R}^m.$$

When K consists of m disjoint points, \mathcal{L}_{K} is a grid in \mathbb{R}^{m} consisting of all lines parallel to one of the coordinate axis and passing though integer points.

When $\mathcal{K} = \partial \Delta^{m-1}$, the complex $\mathcal{L}_{\mathcal{K}}$ is the union of all integer hyperplanes parallel to coordinate hyperplanes.

Let $(X,A)=(\mathbb{R}P^{\infty}, \rho t)$, where $\mathbb{R}P^{\infty}=B\mathbb{Z}_2$. Then

$$(\mathbb{R}P^{\infty})^{\mathcal{K}} = \bigcup_{I \in \mathcal{K}} (\mathbb{R}P^{\infty})^I \subset (\mathbb{R}P^{\infty})^m.$$

Example

Let $(X, A) = (D^1, S^0)$, where $D^1 = [-1, 1]$ and $S^0 = \{1, -1\}$. The real moment-angle complex is

$$\mathcal{R}_{\mathcal{K}} := (D^1, S^0)^{\mathcal{K}} = \bigcup_{I \in \mathcal{K}} (D^1, S^0)^I.$$

It is a cubic subcomplex in the *m*-cube $(D^1)^m = [-1, 1]^m$.

When \mathcal{K} consists of m disjoint points, $\mathcal{R}_{\mathcal{K}}$ is the 1-dimensional skeleton of the cube $[-1,1]^m$. When $\mathcal{K}=\partial\Delta^{m-1}$, $\mathcal{R}_{\mathcal{K}}$ is the boundary of the cube $[-1,1]^m$. Also, $\mathcal{R}_{\mathcal{K}}$ is a topological manifold when $|\mathcal{K}|$ is a sphere.

The four polyhedral products above are related by the two homotopy fibrations

$$(\mathbb{R},\mathbb{Z})^{\mathcal{K}}=\mathcal{L}_{\mathcal{K}}\longrightarrow (S^1)^{\mathcal{K}}\longrightarrow (S^1)^m,$$

$$(D^1,S^0)^{\mathcal{K}}=\mathcal{R}_{\mathcal{K}}\longrightarrow (\mathbb{R}P^\infty)^{\mathcal{K}}\longrightarrow (\mathbb{R}P^\infty)^m.$$

By analogy with the polyhedral product of spaces $\mathbf{X}^{\mathcal{K}} = \operatorname{colim}_{I \in \mathcal{K}} \mathbf{X}^{I}$, we may consider the following more general construction of a discrete group.

Graph product

 ${m G}=(G_1,\ldots,G_m)$ a sequence of m discrete groups, $G_i
eq \{1\}$.

Given $I = \{i_1, \ldots, i_k\} \subset [m]$, set

$$G^I = \{(g_1,\ldots,g_m) \in \prod_{k=1}^m G_k \colon g_k = 1 \text{ for } k \notin I\}.$$

Then consider the following CAT(\mathcal{K})-diagram of groups:

$$\mathcal{D}_{\mathcal{K}}(\mathbf{G}) \colon \mathrm{CAT}(\mathcal{K}) \longrightarrow \mathrm{GRP}, \qquad I \longmapsto \mathbf{G}^I,$$

which maps a morphism $I\subset J$ to the canonical monomorphism $oldsymbol{G}^I o oldsymbol{G}^J.$

The graph product of the groups G_1, \ldots, G_m is

$$\mathbf{G}^{\mathcal{K}} = \operatorname{colim}^{\scriptscriptstyle{\mathrm{GRP}}} \mathcal{D}_{\mathcal{K}}(\mathbf{G}) = \operatorname{colim}_{I \in \mathcal{K}}^{\scriptscriptstyle{\mathrm{GRP}}} \mathbf{G}^{I}.$$

The graph product $G^{\mathcal{K}}$ depends only on the 1-skeleton (graph) of \mathcal{K} . Namely,

Proposition

The is an isomorphism of groups

$$G^{\mathcal{K}}\cong igotimes_{k=1}^m G_k/(g_ig_j=g_jg_i \ \ \text{for} \ g_i\in G_i, \ g_j\in G_j, \ \{i,j\}\in \mathcal{K}),$$

where $\bigstar_{k=1}^m G_k$ denotes the free product of the groups G_k .

Let $G_i = \mathbb{Z}$. Then $G^{\mathcal{K}}$ is the right-angled Artin group

$$RA_{\mathcal{K}} = F(g_1, \dots, g_m) / (g_i g_j = g_j g_i \text{ for } \{i, j\} \in \mathcal{K}),$$

where $F(g_1, \ldots, g_m)$ is a free group with m generators.

When \mathcal{K} is a full simplex, we have $RA_{\mathcal{K}} = \mathbb{Z}^m$. When \mathcal{K} is m points, we obtain a free group of rank m.

Example

Let $G_i = \mathbb{Z}_2$. Then $G^{\mathcal{K}}$ is the right-angled Coxeter group

$$RC_{\mathcal{K}} = F(g_1, \ldots, g_m)/(g_i^2 = 1, \ g_ig_j = g_jg_i \ \text{for} \ \{i,j\} \in \mathcal{K}).$$

2. Classifying spaces

The homotopy fibrations $\mathcal{L}_{\mathcal{K}} \to (S^1)^{\mathcal{K}} \to (S^1)^m$ and $\mathcal{R}_{\mathcal{K}} \to (\mathbb{R}P^{\infty})^{\mathcal{K}} \to (\mathbb{R}P^{\infty})^m$ are generalised as follows.

Proposition

There is a homotopy fibration

$$(E\mathbf{G},\mathbf{G})^{\mathcal{K}}\longrightarrow (B\mathbf{G})^{\mathcal{K}}\longrightarrow \prod_{k=1}^m BG_k.$$

A missing face (a minimal non-face) of $\mathcal K$ is a subset $I \subset [m]$ such that $I \notin \mathcal K$, but $J \in \mathcal K$ for each $J \subsetneq I$.

 ${\cal K}$ a flag complex if each of its missing faces consists of two vertices. Equivalently, ${\cal K}$ is flag if any set of vertices of ${\cal K}$ which are pairwise connected by edges spans a simplex.

Every flag complex $\mathcal K$ is determined by its 1-skeleton $\mathcal K^1$.

Theorem

Let $G^{\mathcal{K}}$ be a graph product group.

- $\bullet \ \pi_1((B\mathbf{G})^{\mathcal{K}}) \cong \mathbf{G}^{\mathcal{K}}.$
- **3** Both spaces $(B\mathbf{G})^{\mathcal{K}}$ and $(E\mathbf{G}, \mathbf{G})^{\mathcal{K}}$ are aspherical if and only if \mathcal{K} is flag. Hence, $B(\mathbf{G}^{\mathcal{K}}) = (B\mathbf{G})^{\mathcal{K}}$ whenever \mathcal{K} is flag.
- **1** $\pi_1((E\,\mathbf{G},\,\mathbf{G})^{\mathcal{K}})$ is isomorphic to the kernel of the canonical projection $\mathbf{G}^{\mathcal{K}} \to \prod_{k=1}^m G_k$.

Proof

(1) Proceed inductively by adding simplices to \mathcal{K} one by one and use van Kampen's Theorem. The base of the induction is \mathcal{K} consisting of m disjoint points. Then $(B\mathbf{G})^{\mathcal{K}}$ is the wedge $BG_1 \vee \cdots \vee BG_m$, and $\pi_1((B\mathbf{G})^{\mathcal{K}})$ is the free product $G_1 \star \cdots \star G_m$.

Proof

(2) To see that $B(\mathbf{G}^{\mathcal{K}}) = (B\mathbf{G})^{\mathcal{K}}$ when \mathcal{K} is flag, consider the map

$$\operatorname{colim}_{I \in \mathcal{K}} B \mathbf{G}^{I} = (B \mathbf{G})^{\mathcal{K}} \to B(\mathbf{G}^{\mathcal{K}}). \tag{1}$$

According to [PRV], the homotopy fibre of (1) is $\operatorname{hocolim}_{I \in \mathcal{K}} \mathbf{G}^{\mathcal{K}}/\mathbf{G}^{I}$, which is homeomorphic to the identification space

$$(BCAT(\mathcal{K}) \times \mathbf{G}^{\mathcal{K}})/\sim.$$
 (2)

Here $B_{\mathrm{CAT}}(\mathcal{K})$ is homeomorphic to the cone on $|\mathcal{K}|$. The equivalence relation \sim is defined as follows: $(x,gh) \sim (x,g)$ whenever $h \in G^I$ and $x \in B(I \downarrow \mathrm{CAT}(\mathcal{K}))$, where $I \downarrow \mathrm{CAT}(\mathcal{K})$ is the *undercategory*, and $B(I \downarrow \mathrm{CAT}(\mathcal{K}))$ is homeomorphic to the star of I in \mathcal{K} . When \mathcal{K} is a flag complex, the identification space (2) is contractible by [PRV]. Therefore, the map (1) is a homotopy equivalence, which implies that $(BG)^{\mathcal{K}}$ is aspherical when \mathcal{K} is flag.

Proof

Assume now that $\mathcal K$ is not flag. Choose a missing face

$$J = \{j_1, \dots, j_k\} \subset [m]$$
 with $k \geqslant 3$ vertices. Let $\mathcal{K}_J = \{I \in \mathcal{K} \colon I \subset J\}$.

Then $(B\mathbf{G})^{\mathcal{K}_J}$ is the fat wedge of the spaces $\{BG_j, j \in J\}$, and it is a retract of $(B\mathbf{G})^{\mathcal{K}}$.

The homotopy fibre of the inclusion $(B\mathbf{G})^{\mathcal{K}_J} o \prod_{j \in J} BG_j$ is

 $\Sigma^{k-1}G_{j_1}\wedge\cdots\wedge G_{j_k}$ a wedge of (k-1)-dimensional spheres.

Hence, $\pi_{k-1}((B\mathbf{G})^{\mathcal{K}_J}) \neq 0$ where $k \geqslant 3$.

Thus, $(B\mathbf{G})^{\mathcal{K}_J}$ and $(B\mathbf{G})^{\mathcal{K}}$ are non-aspherical.

The rest of the proof (the asphericity of $(EG, G)^{\mathcal{K}}$ and statements (3) and (4)) follow from the homotopy exact sequence of the fibration $(EG, G)^{\mathcal{K}} \to (BG)^{\mathcal{K}} \to \prod_{k=1}^{m} BG_k$.

Specialising to the cases $G_k=\mathbb{Z}$ and $G_k=\mathbb{Z}_2$ respectively we obtain:

Corollary

Let $RA_{\mathcal{K}}$ be a right-angled Artin group.

- $\bullet \pi_1((S^1)^{\mathcal{K}}) \cong RA_{\mathcal{K}}.$
- ② Both $(S^1)^{\mathcal{K}}$ and $\mathcal{L}_{\mathcal{K}} = (\mathbb{R}, \mathbb{Z})^{\mathcal{K}}$ are aspherical iff \mathcal{K} is flag.
- \bullet $\pi_i((S^1)^{\mathcal{K}}) \cong \pi_i(\mathcal{L}_{\mathcal{K}})$ for $i \geqslant 2$.
- **1** $\pi_1(\mathcal{L}_{\mathcal{K}})$ is isomorphic to the commutator subgroup $RA'_{\mathcal{K}}$.

Corollary

Let RC_K be a right-angled Coxeter group.

- $\bullet \ \pi_1((\mathbb{R}P^{\infty})^{\mathcal{K}}) \cong RC_{\mathcal{K}}.$
- **2** Both $(\mathbb{R}P^{\infty})^{\mathcal{K}}$ and $\mathcal{R}_{\mathcal{K}} = (D^1, S^0)^{\mathcal{K}}$ are aspherical iff \mathcal{K} is flag.
- $\pi_i((\mathbb{R}P^{\infty})^{\mathcal{K}}) \cong \pi_i(\mathcal{R}_{\mathcal{K}}) \text{ for } i \geqslant 2.$
- $\pi_1(\mathcal{R}_{\mathcal{K}})$ is isomorphic to the commutator subgroup $RC'_{\mathcal{K}}$.

Let \mathcal{K} be an m-cycle (the boundary of an m-gon). A simple argument with Euler characteristic shows that $\mathcal{R}_{\mathcal{K}}$ is homeomorphic to a closed orientable surface of genus $(m-4)2^{m-3}+1$.

(This observation goes back to a 1938 work of Coxeter.)

Therefore, the commutator subgroup of the corresponding right-angled Coxeter group RC_K is a surface group.

Similarly, when $|\mathcal{K}|\cong S^2$ (which is equivalent to \mathcal{K} being the boundary of a 3-dimensional simplicial polytope), $\mathcal{R}_{\mathcal{K}}$ is a 3-dimensional manifold. Therefore, the commutator subgroup of the corresponding $RC_{\mathcal{K}}$ is a

3-manifold group.

3. The structure of the commutator subgroups

We have

$$\operatorname{Ker}\left(\boldsymbol{G}^{\mathcal{K}} \to \prod_{k=1}^{m} G_{k}\right) = \pi_{1}((\boldsymbol{E}\boldsymbol{G}, \boldsymbol{G})^{\mathcal{K}}).$$

In the case of right-angled Artin or Coxeter groups (or when each G_k is abelian), the group above is the commutator subgroup $(\mathbf{G}^{\mathcal{K}})'$.

We want to study the group $\pi_1((E\mathbf{G}, \mathbf{G})^{\mathcal{K}})$, identify the class of simplicial complexes \mathcal{K} for which this group is free, and describe a generator set.

A graph Γ is called chordal (in other terminology, triangulated) if each of its cycles with \geqslant 4 vertices has a chord.

By a result of Fulkerson–Gross, a graph is chordal if and only if its vertices can be ordered in such a way that, for each vertex i, the lesser neighbours of i form a complete subgraph. (A perfect elimination order.)

Theorem

The following conditions are equivalent:

- Ker $(\mathbf{G}^{\mathcal{K}} \to \prod_{k=1}^m G_k)$ is a free group;
- $(EG, G)^{\mathcal{K}}$ is homotopy equivalent to a wedge of circles;
- \odot \mathcal{K}^1 is a chordal graph.

Proof

- (2) \Rightarrow (1) Because $\operatorname{Ker}\left(\boldsymbol{G}^{\mathcal{K}} \to \prod_{k=1}^{m} G_{k}\right) = \pi_{1}((E\,\boldsymbol{G},\,\boldsymbol{G})^{\mathcal{K}}).$
- $(3)\Rightarrow(2)$ Use induction and perfect elimination order.
- (1) \Rightarrow (3) Assume that \mathcal{K}^1 is not chordal. Then, for each chordless cycle of length \geqslant 4, one can find a subgroup in $\operatorname{Ker}(\boldsymbol{G}^{\mathcal{K}} \to \prod_{k=1}^m G_k)$ which is a surface group. Hence, $\operatorname{Ker}(\boldsymbol{G}^{\mathcal{K}} \to \prod_{k=1}^m G_k)$ is not a free group.

Corollary

Let $RA_{\mathcal{K}}$ and $RC_{\mathcal{K}}$ be the right-angled Artin and Coxeter groups corresponding to a simplicial complex \mathcal{K} .

- (a) The commutator subgroup $RA_{\mathcal{K}}'$ is free if and only if \mathcal{K}^1 is a chordal graph.
- (b) The commutator subgroup $RC'_{\mathcal{K}}$ is free if and only if \mathcal{K}^1 is a chordal graph.

Part (a) is the result of Servatius, Droms and Servatius.

The difference between (a) and (b) is that the commutator subgroup $RA'_{\mathcal{K}}$ is infinitely generated, unless $RA_{\mathcal{K}}=\mathbb{Z}^m$, while the commutator subgroup $RC'_{\mathcal{K}}$ is finitely generated. We elaborate on this in the next theorem.

Let $(g, h) = g^{-1}h^{-1}gh$ denote the group commutator of g, h.

Theorem

The commutator subgroup $RC'_{\mathcal{K}}$ has a finite minimal generator set consisting of $\sum_{J\subset [m]}\operatorname{rank}\widetilde{H}_0(\mathcal{K}_J)$ iterated commutators

$$(g_j,g_i), (g_{k_1},(g_j,g_i)), \ldots, (g_{k_1},(g_{k_2},\cdots(g_{k_{m-2}},(g_j,g_i))\cdots)),$$

where $k_1 < k_2 < \dots < k_{\ell-2} < j > i$, $k_s \neq i$ for any s, and i is the smallest vertex in a connected component not containing j of the subcomplex $\mathcal{K}_{\{k_1,\dots,k_{\ell-2},j,i\}}$.

Idea of proof

First consider the case $\mathcal{K}=m$ points. Then $\mathcal{R}_{\mathcal{K}}$ is the 1-skeleton of an m-cube and $RC_{\mathcal{K}}'=\pi_1(\mathcal{R}_{\mathcal{K}})$ is a free group of rank $\sum_{\ell=2}^m (\ell-1)\binom{m}{\ell}$. It agrees with the total number of nested commutators in the list.

Then eliminate the extra nested commutators using the commutation relations $(g_i, g_j) = 1$ for $\{i, j\} \in \mathcal{K}$.

Idea of proof

To see that the given generating set is minimal, argue as follows. The first homology group $H_1(\mathcal{R}_{\mathcal{K}})$ is $RC'_{\mathcal{K}}/RC''_{\mathcal{K}}$. On the other hand,

$$H_1(\mathcal{R}_{\mathcal{K}}) \cong \sum_{J \subset [m]} \widetilde{H}_0(\mathcal{K}_J).$$

Hence, the number of generators in the abelian group $H_1(\mathcal{R}_{\mathcal{K}}) \cong RC'_{\mathcal{K}}/RC''_{\mathcal{K}}$ is $\sum_{J \subset [m]} \operatorname{rank} \widetilde{H}_0(\mathcal{K}_J)$, and the latter number agrees with the number of iterated commutators in the in generator set for $RC'_{\mathcal{K}}$ constructed above.

Then the commutator subgroup $RC_{\mathcal{K}}'$ is free with the following basis:

$$(g_3,g_1), (g_4,g_1), (g_4,g_2), (g_4,g_3),$$

 $(g_2,(g_4,g_1)), (g_3,(g_4,g_1)), (g_1,(g_4,g_3)), (g_3,(g_4,g_2)),$
 $(g_2,(g_3,(g_4,g_1))).$

Example

Let \mathcal{K} be an m-cycle with $m \geqslant 4$ vertices.

Then \mathcal{K}^1 is not a chordal graph, so the group $RC_\mathcal{K}'$ is not free.

In fact, $\mathcal{R}_{\mathcal{K}}$ is an orientable surface of genus $(m-4)2^{m-3}+1$, so $\mathcal{RC}'_{\mathcal{K}}\cong\pi_1(\mathcal{R}_{\mathcal{K}})$ is a one-relator group.

The are similar results of Grbic, P., Theriault and Wu describing the commutator subalgebra of the graded Lie algebra given by

$$L_{\mathcal{K}} = FL\langle u_1, \dots, u_m \rangle / ([u_i, u_i] = 0, [u_i, u_j] = 0 \text{ for } \{i, j\} \in \mathcal{K}),$$

where $FL\langle u_1,\ldots,u_m\rangle$ is the free graded Lie algebra on generators u_i of degree one, and $[a,b]=-(-1)^{|a||b|}[b,a]$ denotes the graded Lie bracket.

The commutator subalgebra is the kernel of the Lie algebra homomorphism $L_{\mathcal{K}} \to \mathit{CL}\langle u_1, \ldots, u_m \rangle$ to the commutative (trivial) Lie algebra.

The graded Lie algebra L_K is a graph product similar to the right-angled Coxeter group RC_K .

It has a similar colimit decomposition, with each $G_i=\mathbb{Z}_2$ replaced by the trivial Lie algebra $CL\langle u\rangle=FL\langle u\rangle/([u,u]=0)$ and the colimit taken in the category of graded Lie algebras.

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