Coarse Geometry and Operator Algebras

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Introduction to Coarse Geometry

- Studying the topology of metric spaces tells us about their 'small scale' structure, e.g. convergence properties...
- ... but doesn't see 'large scale' properties.
- For example, the usual metric on $\mathbb{Z}$ and the metric given by $d(z, z') = 1$ if $z \neq z'$ give the same topology on $\mathbb{Z}$, but only one metric is bounded.
- There are also natural situations where a metric space is only defined "coarsely" (e.g. finitely-generated groups)

Organization of this talk

- develop the basic theory of coarse geometry in which metric spaces are studied according to an equivalence relation which only sees large scale structure (although coarse structures can be defined without a metric, we won't worry about that here)
- discuss properties which are preserved by this equivalence relation and how they relate to each other
- see how coarse geometry relates to C^*-algebras
- time permitting, discuss some of my work in coarse geometry, dynamics, and operator algebras

Coarse equivalence – definitions

- Suppose $\phi : X \to Y$ is a map of metric spaces.
- We say ϕ is *uniformly expansive* if there exists a non-decreasing function $\rho^+ : [0, \infty) \to [0, \infty)$ such that $d_Y(\phi(x), \phi(x')) \leq \rho^+(d_X(x, x'))$.
- We say ϕ is *effectively proper* if there exists a proper nondecreasing function $\rho_- : [0, \infty) \to [0, \infty)$ such that $d_Y(\phi(x), \phi(x')) \geq \rho_-(d_X(x, x'))$.
- If ϕ is both uniformly expansive and effectively proper, it's called a *coarse embedding*.
- Moreover, we say ϕ is *coarsely onto* if there is $R > 0$ such that for all $y \in Y$ there exists $x \in X$ such that $d_Y(\phi(x), y) \leq R$.
- A coarse embedding which is coarsely onto is called a *coarse equivalence*. This will be our notion of equivalence (this is an equivalence relation).

Examples

- any bounded metric space is coarsely equivalent to a point
- $\mathbb{Z}^n$ (with its usual metric as a subspace of $\mathbb{R}^n$) is coarsely equivalent to $\mathbb{R}^n$.

Alternative definitions

- Other references may develop the definition of coarse equivalence in different ways.
- For instance, a map ϕ is called *coarse* if it is uniformly expansive, and a map $\psi : X \to Y$ is called a coarse equivalence if there is a coarse map $\phi : Y \to X$ such that $\psi \circ \phi$ and $\phi \circ \psi$ are both a bounded distance away from the identity maps on X and Y respectively (so ψ has a 'coarse inverse').
- Note: These definitions of coarse equivalence are equivalent, but a coarse map is not in general a coarse embedding (Exercise: find an example showing this).
- Think the about analogy with topology, homeomorphism = topological embedding + surjective = continuous + continuous inverse

quasi-isometry – definition

- When the *control functions* ρ_+ and ρ_- have a specific form, we have different terminology for this stronger condition:
- A map of metric spaces $\phi : X \to Y$ is a *quasi-isometric embedding* if there are constants C and D such that $\frac{1}{C} d_X(x, x') - D \leq d_Y(\phi(x), \phi(x')) \leq C d_X(x, x') + D$. If it is also coarsely-surjective, we call ϕ a *quasi-isometry*.

More examples (graphs and Cayley graphs)

- If $G = (V, E)$ is a connected graph, we can give V a metric by defining $d(v, v')$ to be the least number of edges that must be traversed in a path from v to v'. In this case, any two n-regular trees with $n \geq 3$ are quasi-isometric.
- If Γ is a finitely-generated group, we can think of Γ as having the metric coming from a Cayley graph with respect to some finite generating set, and any choice of finite generating sets gives rise to quasi-isometric spaces, so we can talk about Γ as a coarse space without specifying a metric.
- Exercise: for graphs with metrics defined above, coarse equivalence and quasi-isometry are equivalent.

Coarse properties

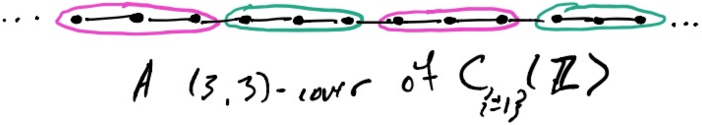
- In topology, we first defined a notion of equivalence (homeomorphism) and then studied properties which were preserved by that equivalence (e.g. connectedness, compactness, simple-connectedness, etc.)
- We will now discuss some properties of metric spaces which are preserved by coarse equivalence. Some will be familiar, and many will be related to the study of operator algebras.

Asymptotic dimension

- There are many equivalent definitions of the asymptotic dimension first introduced by Gromov.
- Here is one: We say a metric space X has *asymptotic dimension* at most d if for all $R > 0$ there exists $M > 0$ and a cover $\mathcal{U}$ of X such that $\mathcal{U} = \mathcal{U}_0 \sqcup \ldots \sqcup \mathcal{U}_d$ where $d(U, V) > R$ for all $U, V \in \mathcal{U}_i$ with $U \neq V$ and all $0 \leq i \leq d$, and $\mathrm{diam}(U) < M$ for all $U \in \mathcal{U}_i$ and all $0 \leq i \leq d$.
- Other equivalent definitions make it clear that this is a large-scale version of covering dimension (see for example [2, Theorem 1])
- Exercise: show $\mathrm{asdim} X$ is a coarse property

Examples

- $\text{asdim}\mathbb{R}^n = \text{asdim}\mathbb{Z}^n = n$. The picture below shows one of the covers showing that $\mathbb{Z}$ has asymptotic dimension ≤ 1.



- Exercise: draw a picture for $n = 2$.
- (with the metric it gets as a subset of $\mathbb{R}$) $\text{asdim}\{n^2 : n \in \mathbb{N}\} = 0$

(some) Properties of asdim

- [3, Theorem 37] Asdim acts like a dimension theory in that it is subadditive on products $\text{asdim}(X \times Y) \leq \text{asdim}X + \text{asdim}Y$ (Note: this is not obvious using the definition given in this talk – it can be proved from the theorem above or using an alternative definition. It is more straightforward to see that $\text{asdim}(X \times Y) \leq (\text{asdim}X + 1)(\text{asdim}Y + 1) - 1.$)
- [8] Suppose $\text{asdim}X \leq n$, then there exists a coarse embedding of X into a product of $n + 1$ trees.

Amenability

- Amenability of groups is also a coarse property
- Exercise: Show this (I recommend using the Reiter condition)

Finite presentability

- if Γ and Λ are finitely generated and quasi-isometric, then Γ is finitely presented iff Λ is (so in particular a finite index subgroup of a finitely presented group is finitely presented).
- This can be proved by showing that a group is finitely-presented iff it is 'coarsely simply connected', and that coarse simple connectedness is a coarse invariant (at least for graphs). [P.]

Property A

- A metric space X has *property A* if for any $R > 0$ and $\epsilon > 0$, there exists a Hilbert space $\mathcal{H}$, a map $\xi : X \to \mathcal{H}$ and a number S such that

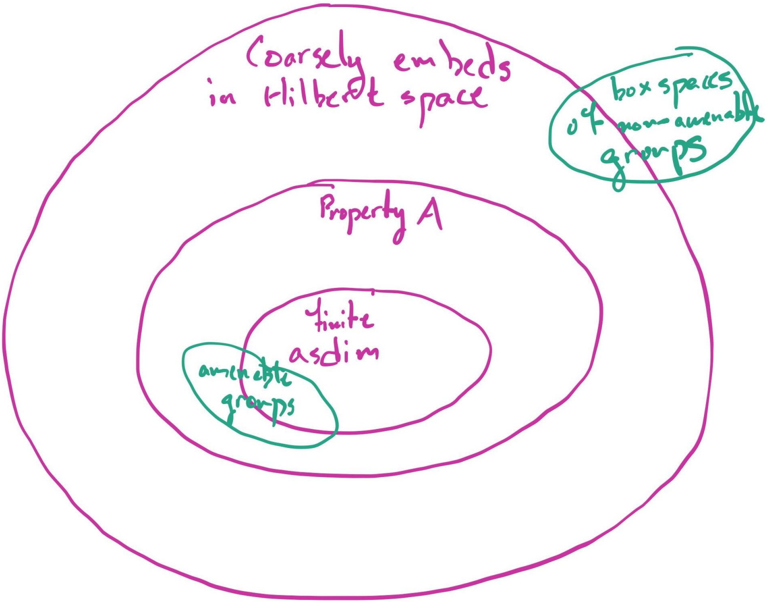
$$\begin{aligned}&(1)\ \|\xi_x\| = 1 \text{ for every } x \in X,\\ &(2)\ \text{if } d(x,y) < R, \text{ then } \|\xi_x - \xi_y\| < \epsilon\\ &(3)\ \text{and if } d(x,y) \geq S, \text{ then } \langle \xi_y, \xi_x \rangle = 0.\end{aligned}$$

- Although there is a straightforward way of formulating amenability for metric spaces, such a property won't in general pass to subspaces. The point of property A is to act like amenability for metric spaces while also taking into account more of the total structure of the space.
- See, for example [4, 5.5.6], for some other characterizations.
- Exercise: Show this is a coarse property (this takes some work, but there's no special trick to it)
- ([4, 5.5.7]) A countable group Γ has property A if and only if it is exact (i.e. its reduced group C^*-algebra has a faithful, nuclear representation)

Coarse embeddings in Hilbert space

- Every metric space coarsely embeds into a Banach space, but not necessarily a Hilbert space
- Every tree (hence every free group) coarsely embeds in Hilbert space
- Coarse embeddings in Hilbert space are used to verify the coarse Baum-Connes conjecture for certain groups, which in turn has applications to geometry and topology (Novikov conjecture)

Relation between coarse properties

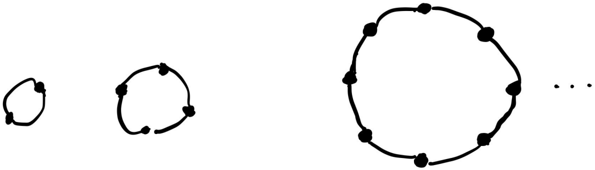


Box Spaces

- An important object in the study of coarse properties are box spaces
- Suppose $\Gamma = \langle F \rangle$ is finitely-generated. Let (N_n) be a decreasing sequence of finite-index normal subgroups of Γ. A *box space* of Γ is the disjoint union of Cayley graphs $C_F(\Gamma/N_n)$ with the metric given by $d(x, y) =$ usual distance between x and y if $x, y \in C_F(\Gamma/N_n)$ and $d(x, y) = \operatorname{diam} C_F(\Gamma/N_k) + \operatorname{diam} C_F(\Gamma/N_l)$ if $x \in C_F(\Gamma/N_k)$ and $y \in C_F(\Gamma/N_l)$.

A box space of $\mathbb{Z}$:

$$\bigsqcup_{n=1}^{\infty} C_{\{\pm 1\}}(\mathbb{Z}/2^n)$$



box spaces and coarse properties

- A box space of Γ has property A iff Γ is amenable
- Some box spaces of non-abelian free groups are expanders, which do not coarsely embed Hilbert space. Some box spaces of such groups do admit such embeddings (and some which aren't expanders still don't) ([1] and [5])
- If Γ is residually finite, then the asymptotic dimension of a box space of Γ is either infinite or equal to that of Γ. If Γ is virtually nilpotent, its box spaces are finite (asymptotic)-dimensional. [6]

uniform Roe algebras

- ([4, 5.5.3]) Let X be a metric space with bounded geometry. An operator $A \in \mathbb{B}(l^2(X))$ is said to have *finite propagation* if $\langle A\delta_y, \delta_x \rangle \neq 0$ only if $d(x, y) < S$ (so thinking of A as an $X \times X$-matrix, the entries at distance greater than S from the diagonal are 0). The *translation algebra* $A(X)$ is the $*$-algebra of all operators with finite propagation. The closure of the translation algebra $A(X)$ in $\mathbb{B}(l^2(X))$ is called the *uniform Roe algebra* and is denoted by $C_u^*(X)$.
- If Γ is a countable group (e.g. a finitely-generated group) it has a natural metric and $C_u^*(\Gamma) \cong l^\infty(\Gamma) \rtimes_r \Gamma$.

uniform Roe algebras and coarse geometry

- If d and d' are two metrics on X such that the identity map $(X,d) \to (X,d')$ is a coarse equivalence, then $C_u^*(X,d) = C_u^*(X,d')$ (this is because the two metrics lead to the same translation algebra $A(X)$)
- X and Y are coarsely equivalent iff $\mathcal{K}(l^2) \otimes C_u(X) \cong \mathcal{K}(l^2) \otimes C_u(Y)$
- Recall that the C^*-algebra of a group is nuclear iff the group is amenable. Similarly, a metric space X has property A if and only if $C_u^*(X)$ is nuclear. [4]
- Moreover, if asdim$X \leq d$, then the nuclear dimension of $C_u^*(X)$ is at most d (see [11]). It has been conjectured that the reverse inequality holds.

Coarse embeddings and the Baum-Connes conjecture

- The Baum-Connes conjecture states that a certain map called the assembly map $RK_*^\Gamma(\underline{E}\Gamma) \to K_*(C_r^*(\Gamma))$ is an isomorphism.
- When this holds, it is often helpful for computing K-theory and has applications to geometry and topology (verifying the Novikov conjecture for instance).
- There is also a coarse Baum-Connes conjecture regarding a different assembly map $K_*(X) \to K_*(C^*(X))$ (where $C^*(X)$ is the (not uniform) Roe algebra).

Coarse embeddings and the Baum-Connes conjecture continued

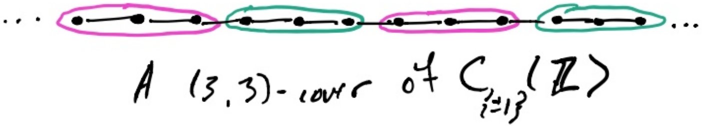
$$\begin{array}{ccc} K_*^{\Gamma}(\underline{E}\Gamma) & \longrightarrow & K_*(C_r^*\Gamma) \\ \downarrow & & \downarrow \\ K_*(\underline{E}\Gamma) & \longrightarrow & K_*(C^*(|\Gamma|)) \end{array}$$

- A commutative diagram relates these two maps (the vertical maps come from forgetting about equivariance), so the conjectures are related.
- A countable discrete group Γ which coarsely embeds in Hilbert space satisfies the coarse Baum-Connes conjecture
- This implies the (regular) Baum-Connes assembly map is injective, implying Γ satisfies the Novikov conjecture

large-scale dynamics

- We say a free action $\Gamma \curvearrowright X$ has *dynamic asymptotic dimension* $\leq d$ if for all finite $F \subset \Gamma$ there is an open cover $\mathcal{U} = \{U_0, \ldots, U_d\}$ such that (for $f_i \in F$) the set $|x|_F = \{y : y = f_k \cdots f_1 \cdot x \text{ and } f_l \cdots f_1 \cdot x \in U_i \text{ for all } 1 \leq l \leq k\}$ is uniformly finite with respect to x.
- Example: the action by an irrational rotation $\mathbb{Z} \curvearrowright S^1$ has dynamic asymptotic dimension 1.
- This dimension theory would appear to be sensitive both to the large scale structure of the Γ-orbits and to the topology of X

DAD and asdim



- for free actions $\Gamma \curvearrowright X$, $\mathrm{DAD}(\Gamma \curvearrowright X) \geq \mathrm{asdim}\Gamma$.
- When the dynamic asymptotic dimension of an isometric free action is finite, it is bounded above by $\mathrm{asdim}\Gamma + \dim X$ [10]
- There are many cases where $\mathrm{DAD}\Gamma \curvearrowright X = \mathrm{asdim}\Gamma$, but nothing in general is known about this except when X is 0-dimensional.

DAD of odometers

- If Γ is a finitely-generated group and (N_n) is a decreasing sequence of finite-index normal subgroups, we can form an action $\Gamma \curvearrowright \prod_n \Gamma/N_n$ (or more generally, $\Gamma \curvearrowright \lim_{\leftarrow} \Gamma/N_n$). Such an action is called an odometer.
- If Γ is residually finite, then $\mathrm{DAD}(\Gamma \curvearrowright \lim_{\leftarrow} \Gamma/N_n)$ is equal to the asymptotic dimension of the box space $\sqcup_n C_F(\Gamma/N_n)$. [P.]
- Any isometric action on a Cantor set is (pretty much) an odometer, so the above extends to those actions as well. [P.]

DAD and amenability

- finite DAD implies an action is amenable
- this can be used to show that odometers of non-amenable groups have infinite DAD
- amenability of groups is thought to at least sometimes imply finite-dimensionality of box spaces, so amenability of actions may also sometimes imply finite dynamic asymptotic dimension

DAD and operator algebras

- The nuclear dimension of the crossed product product, $C(X) \rtimes_r \Gamma$ is bounded above by $(\mathrm{dad}(\Gamma \curvearrowright X) + 1)(\dim(X) + 1) - 1$ where $\dim(X)$ is the covering dimension of X. [7]
- Finite dynamic asymptotic dimension is also related to the Baum-Connes conjecture.

Kakutani equivalence

- Kakutani equivalence is a weaker notion of equivalence for group actions than orbit equivalence: two group actions $\Gamma \curvearrowright X$, $\Lambda \curvearrowright Y$ are Kakutani equivalent if there are clopen subsets of X and Y such that their translates cover X and Y and such that the 'restricted actions' on those subsets are orbit equivalent.
- One can show that for compact spaces, Kakutani equivalence is equivalent to the existence of a continuous orbit couple ([9]), which implies a coarse equivalence of the orbit structures.
- This implies Kakutani equivalent actions have the same DAD [P.]

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