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Extension Problems in Complex Analysis

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ABSTRACT. — We present some new results on the extension problem of analytic objects. In particular we discuss two classes of them, namely sections of coherent sheaves and Levi flat hypersurfaces.

1. - INTRODUCTION

One of the recurring problems in Complex Analysis is that of extending “analytic objects”: Hartogs theorem (holomorphic functions “fill compact holes” in \mathbb{C}^n , $n \geq 2$) is the prototype of all extension theorems. Analytic objects are meant to be those geometric objects which can be constructed starting from holomorphic functions (e.g. analytic subsets of a complex space, coherent sheaves and their sections, cohomology classes with value in a coherent sheaf, etc. ...).

The theme is classic and there exists a rather vast literature on the subject (see for instance [Si] for a general account). In addition, in the first part of this paper, we sketch some new results. In the second part we will discuss the extension problem for a different class of geometric objects, namely the Levi flat hypersurfaces of \mathbb{C}^n : a real hypersurface of \mathbb{C}^n is said to be *Levi flat* if it is foliated by complex hypersurfaces. Originally introduced as biholomorphic transforms of real hyperplanes (cfr. [Se]), Levi flat hypersurfaces appear in many global problems in Complex Analysis and during the last twenty years they became a very fruitful area of research.

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2. - EXTENDING ANALYTIC OBJECTS

Let X be a (reduced) complex space. For every open subset U of X let $\mathfrak{A}(U)$ a class of analytic objects defined on U . We assume that, if U, V are open subsets of X and $V \subset U$, there is a “restriction map”

$$\rho_V^U : \mathfrak{A}(U) \rightarrow \mathfrak{A}(V)$$

satisfying the usual compatibility condition: $\rho_W^V \circ \rho_V^U = \rho_W^U$ whenever $W \subset V \subset U$.

The extension problem can be formulated as follows: given a family \mathcal{C} of closed subset C of X , decide whether on not the restriction map

$$\rho_{X \setminus C}^X : \mathfrak{A}(X) \rightarrow \mathfrak{A}(X \setminus C)$$

is onto for every $C \in \mathcal{C}$. The most interesting cases for applications are the following

- (I) \mathcal{C} is a family of compact sets of X ;
- (II) \mathcal{C} is the family of all analytic (or, more generally, thin) subsets of X ;
- (III) \mathcal{C} is a family of closed subsets of X of the form $K \cap \{\operatorname{Re} F \geq 0\}$ where K is a compact subset of X and F if a holomorphic function in X (and in this situation $\{\operatorname{Re} F \geq 0\} \setminus C$ is said to be a *semi-corona*).

2.1. *Classical results*

The results relative to cases (I) and (II) are rather classical. Let us recall the main ones

(I) HARTOGS TYPE EXTENSION THEOREMS

- Let X be a normal complex space, K a compact subset such that $X \setminus K$ is connected. Then the natural homomorphism

$$\mathcal{O}(X) \rightarrow \mathcal{O}(X \setminus K)$$

is an isomorphism.

- Let X be a Stein space, $\varphi : X \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$ a strongly plurisubharmonic function and $K = \{\varphi \leq c\} \subset X$. Let $\mathcal{C}ob(X)$ be the category of all coherent sheaves over X and $\mathcal{F} \in \mathcal{C}ob(X)$. The natural homomorphisms

$$H^j(X, \mathcal{F}) \rightarrow H^j(X \setminus K, \mathcal{F})$$

are isomorphisms for $1 \leq j \leq \operatorname{depth}(\mathcal{F}) - 1$.

- Let X be Stein and $\Omega = \{r < \varphi < s\} \subset X$ where $\varphi : \Omega \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$ is a strongly plurisubharmonic function such that $\{r + \varepsilon < \varphi < s - \varepsilon\} \subset \Omega$, $\varepsilon > 0$. Let Y be an analytic subset of Ω and \mathfrak{S}_Y the ideal of Y . If $\operatorname{depth}(\mathfrak{S}_Y) \geq 3$, Theorem A of Oka-Cartan-Serre holds true for \mathfrak{S}_Y . In particular, Y extends to $\{\varphi < s\}$.

(II) REMMERT-STEIN TYPE THEOREMS

Let Y be an analytic subset of a Stein space X . Then

a) if X is a normal space and $\text{codim } Y_x \geq 2, \forall x \in Y$, the natural homomorphism

$$\mathcal{O}(X) \rightarrow \mathcal{O}(X \setminus Y)$$

is an isomorphism;

b) if $\dim_{\mathbb{C}} Y = d$ every analytic subset $Z \subset X \setminus Y$ such that $\dim Z_x \geq d + 1, \forall x \in Z$, extends through Y ;

c) let $\mathcal{F} \in \text{Cob}(X)$ be such that $\text{depth}(\mathcal{F}) \geq q$; then the natural homomorphisms

$$H^j(X, \mathcal{F}) \rightarrow H^j(X \setminus Y, \mathcal{F})$$

are isomorphisms for $j \leq q - d - 1$.

2.2. Semi-coronae

The interest for the case (III) is relatively more recent. The starting point is maybe the following extension theorem for CR-functions stated in [LT] (see also [St1]):

THEOREM 2.1: *Let Σ be a real connected C^1 -hypersurface in \mathbb{C}^n , $n \geq 2$, oriented, compact, with boundary $b\Sigma$. Assume that the following conditions are fulfilled:*

(i) *$b\Sigma$ belongs to a C^∞ -hypersurface M and there exists a relatively open subset A of M such that $b\Sigma = bA$;*

(ii) *$\Sigma \cap M = b\Sigma$;*

(iii) *M is the zero set of a pluriharmonic function in a neighbourhood of the open set D bounded by $\Sigma \cup A$.*

Then every Lipschitz CR-function in $\Sigma^0 = \Sigma \setminus b\Sigma$ extends to D by a holomorphic function which is continuous on $D \cup \Sigma^0$.

This result is, in fact, an extension theorem for semi-coronae, in view of the Plemelj formula for Bochner-Martinelli Transforms in \mathbb{C}^n (cfr. [HL]).

For a generalization to CR-forms see [P]. Similar results are proved in [L], in the context of Stein manifold.

Further generalizations to CR-objects can be found in [T].

It is worthwhile observing that Theorem 2.1 motivated the notion of “removable set”. Let X be a complex manifold and $\Omega \subset X$ a bounded domain with regular boundary; a (closed) subset $E \subset b\Omega$ is said to be *removable* if all CR-functions in $b\Omega \setminus E$ extend holomorphically to Ω . In [St2] and [J] can be found a large number of references on the subject.

Very recently the case of semi-coronae was considered again with reference to the extension problem for coherent sheaves.

Let X be a Stein space and $\Omega = \{r < \varphi < s\} \subset X$, where $\varphi : \Omega \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$ is a strongly plurisubharmonic function such that $\{r + \varepsilon < \varphi < s - \varepsilon\} \subset \Omega, \forall \varepsilon > 0$ sufficiently small. Let $B = \{\varphi < s\}$ and F be a holomorphic function in a neighbourhood of $\overline{\Omega}$. Let $\Omega^+ \cup \Omega^-$ and $B^+ \cup B^-$ be the connected decompositions of $\Omega \setminus \{\text{Re } F = 0\}$ and

$B \setminus \{\operatorname{Re} F = 0\}$ respectively. Then, using the cohomological techniques by ANDREOTTI and GRAUERT (cfr. [AG]) one proves the following result (cfr. [ST]):

- Let $\mathcal{F} \in \operatorname{Cob}(B)$. The natural homomorphism

$$H^0(B^+, \mathcal{F}) \rightarrow H^0(\Omega^+, \mathcal{F})$$

is onto in the following two cases:

- (i) $\operatorname{depth}(\mathcal{O}_{X,x}) \geq 3, \forall x \in B$, and \mathcal{F} is locally free;
- (ii) $B \cap \operatorname{Sing}(X) \cap B = \emptyset$ and $\operatorname{depth}(\mathcal{F}_x) \geq 3 \forall x \in B$.

In the same context G. Della Sala and A. Saracco have proved that

- if $B \cap \operatorname{Sing}(X) \cap B = \emptyset$ every analytic subset Y of Ω such that $\operatorname{depth}(\mathfrak{S}_x) \geq 4, \forall x$, extends to B^+ (cfr. [DS]).

3. - LEVI FLATNESS AND EXTENSION

3.1. Levi flatness

Let M be a smooth real submanifold of \mathbb{C}^n of dimension m . Let $T_p(M)$ and $HT_p(M) \subset T_p(M)$ be the real and the complex tangent hyperplane to M at p respectively. The distribution \mathcal{L} on $M, p \mapsto HT_p(M), \forall p \in M$, is called the *Levi distribution*. M is said to be *Levi flat* whenever \mathcal{L} is integrable. Levi flatness is characterized by the condition:

$$\operatorname{Levi}(\varphi) = \sum_{j,k=1}^n \frac{\partial^2 \varphi}{\partial z_j \partial \bar{z}_k} w_j \bar{w}_k = 0$$

when $p \in M$ and $w \in HT_p(M), \{\varphi = 0\}$ being a local equation for M . Let us denote $L(\varphi)(p)$ the hermitian form $\operatorname{Levi}(\varphi)|_{HT_p(M)}$.

In view of Frobenius theorem, it is a easy to show that a Levi flat hypersurface M is foliated by complex hypersurfaces. This geometric property allows to extend the notion of Levi flatness to topological hypersurfaces. As a consequence of the solution of the Levi problem (cfr. [H]) we have that a Levi flat hypersurface locally divides \mathbb{C}^n in domains of holomorphy.

A smooth hypersurface M is said to be *strongly Levi convex* if $L(\varphi)(p) \neq 0$ for all $p \in M$. A domain D of $\mathbb{C}^n, n \geq 2$, with a smooth boundary bD , is said to be *strongly pseudoconvex* if $L(\varphi)(p) > 0$ for every $p \in b\Omega$ and every local equation φ for bD such that $\varphi < 0$ on D .

3.2. Hulls and Levi flat extension

Let K be a compact subset of \mathbb{C}^n . We recall that the *hull of holomorphy* of K is the spectrum $\mathfrak{S}(K)$ of the closure $\mathbf{H}(K)$ of $\mathcal{O}(K)$ in $C^0(K)$. From the Gelfand Theory, we know that $\mathfrak{S}(K)$ is a compact Hausdorff space, ramified over \mathbb{C}^n ([GRS]).

In general the structure of $\mathfrak{S}(K)$ is very involved and describing it is one of the most challenging global problems in Complex Analysis.

We have the following elementary but useful fact: if we know that every $f \in \mathcal{O}(K)$ extends holomorphically to a neighbourhood of a compact subset $K' \supset K$ of \mathbb{C}^n with $K \subset K'$, then $K' \subset \mathfrak{S}(K)$. This raises the following problem:

given a compact subset K of \mathbb{C}^n , can we construct a (possibly maximal) compact subset $\widehat{K} \subset \mathbb{C}^n$ such that $K \subset \widehat{K}$ and all holomorphic functions in $\mathcal{O}(K)$ extend holomorphically on a neighbourhood of \widehat{K} ?

A good candidate for \widehat{K} is the union of all *analytic discs* with boundaries in K i.e. the images of continuous maps $b : \overline{D}(0, 1) \rightarrow \mathbb{C}^n$ from the unit disc $\overline{D}(0, 1) \subset \mathbb{C}$, which are holomorphic in $D(0, 1)$ and such that $b(\partial D(0, 1)) \subset K$. The reason in doing this is the following result:

every $f \in \mathcal{O}(K)$ extends holomorphically to a neighborhood of

$$\bigcup_b b(\overline{D}(0, 1))$$

where b is varying in the family of all analytic discs with boundary in K .

Proving the existence of “sufficiently rich” families of analytic disc is, in general, very difficult. The situation is more clear for $n = 2$, at least when K is a compact subset of a strongly Levi convex hypersurface M . Let us suppose that U is an open bounded domain of M , with smooth boundary $S = \partial U$. Assume that $S = \widetilde{S}$ where $\widetilde{S} \setminus S$ is Levi flat. Then every function $f \in \mathcal{O}(\overline{U})$ extends holomorphically to the domain Ω between \overline{U} and \widetilde{S} . In particular, from what is preceding, we have $\overline{\Omega} \subset \mathfrak{S}(K)$ and thus we are led to the following problem:

given a smooth compact surface $S \subset \mathbb{C}^2$, find a Levi flat hypersurface \widetilde{S} with boundary S . \widetilde{S} is then said to be a *Levi flat extension* of S .

In '83, using Bishop's theorem on the existence of families of analytic discs (cfr. [B]), Bedford and Gaveau proved the first fundamental result: a generic graph of a smooth function g on a topological 2-sphere $S \subset \mathbb{C}_z \times \mathbb{R}_u$ such that $S \times \mathbb{R}_v$ is a strongly Levi convex hypersurface in $\mathbb{C}_{z,w}^2$, $z = x + iy$, $w = u + iv$, is extendable by a Levi flat graph \widetilde{S} (i.e. bounds a Levi flat graph).

The problem of finding a bounded Levi flat hypersurface \widetilde{S} in \mathbb{C}^2 with a prescribed boundary S has been extensively studied in the last twenty years by many authors (cfr. [BG], [BKI], [G], [E], [Sh], [Kr], [CS], [ShT1], [SIT]).

The analytic counterpart of Bedford-Gaveau's statement is an existence theorem for the Dirichlet problem for a quasilinear second order degenerate elliptic equation, the so called *Levi equation* (cfr. 3.1). Levi flat extendability of a surface in \mathbb{C}^2 by PDE was brought forward in [SIT] and in a more substantial way in [CM].

In higher dimensions, the situation is completely different from what it is in \mathbb{C}^2 . The generic $(2n-2)$ -manifold S is not even locally extendable by a Levi flat hypersurface \tilde{M} . Indeed, locally, S is the graph of a smooth function g , so the existence of a local Levi flat graph extending M amounts to solve a boundary problem for a system of (non-linear) differential operators and this requires compatibility conditions for g . Some existence results have been recently obtained for \mathbb{C}^3 (cfr. [DTZ]).

4. - SEMI-LOCAL LEVI FLAT EXTENSIONS

In this last section we discuss a *semi local version* of Levi flat extendability in \mathbb{C}^2 , i.e. the Levi flat extension from a part of the boundary.

Let Ω be a domain in $\mathbb{C}_z \times \mathbb{R}_v$ with a smooth boundary such that $\Omega \times \mathbb{R}_v$ is a strongly pseudoconvex domain in $\mathbb{C}_{z,w}^2$. Let U be an open subset of $b\Omega$. In [ShT3] (see also [ShT2]) we study the following problem: find an open subset Ω^U of $\bar{\Omega}$ with the properties

- (i) $\Omega^U \setminus b\Omega = U$;
- (ii) every graph $\Gamma(g)$ of a continuous function $g : U \rightarrow \mathbb{R}_v$, extends to $\Omega^U \setminus b\Omega$ by a continuous graph $\Gamma(F)$, Levi flat over $\Omega^U \setminus b\Omega$;
- (iii) Ω^U is maximal with the properties (i), (ii).

The problem itself interesting can be seen as the first step for a general theory of the domains of existence for Levi flat hypersurfaces.

CONSTRUCTION OF Ω^U

Denote $\mathcal{A}(\Omega \times \mathbb{R}_v)$ the Fréchet algebra $\mathcal{O}(\Omega \times \mathbb{R}_v) \cap C^0(\bar{\Omega} \times \mathbb{R}_v)$. Let $E_1 \subset E_2 \subset \dots$ be an exhaustion of U by compact subsets such that $E_n \subset \overset{\circ}{E}_{n+1}$ for every $n \in \mathbb{N}$. For each $n \in \mathbb{N}$ consider the set $K_n = E_n \times [-n, n]$, and the $\Lambda(\Omega \times \mathbb{R}_v)$ -hull

$$\hat{K}_n = \{\zeta \in \bar{\Omega} \times \mathbb{R}_v : |f(\zeta)| \leq \|_{K_n} \forall f \in \mathcal{A}(\Omega \times \mathbb{R}_v)\}$$

of K_n . Define $W = \cup_n \hat{K}_n \subset \bar{\Omega} \times \mathbb{R}_v$.

THEOREM 4.1: *The set W has the following properties:*

- (i) W is open in $\bar{\Omega} \times \mathbb{R}_v$ and $W \cap (\Omega \times \mathbb{R}_v)$ is pseudoconvex.
- (ii) W is invariant under translation in v -direction. In particular, there is an open subset Ω^U of $\bar{\Omega}$ such that $W = \Omega^U \times \mathbb{R}_v$.
- (iii) Moreover, if U is the union of simply-connected subdomains of bG , then W is the CR-hull of $U \times \mathbb{R}_v$ (i.e. every CR-function in U extends holomorphically to W).

In the case when Ω is a topological 3-ball or U has only simply-connected components, the domain Ω^U has the following property:

THEOREM 4.2: *Let $\Omega \subset \mathbb{C}_z \times \mathbb{R}_u$ be a bounded domain with smooth boundary such that $\Omega \times \mathbb{R}_v \subset \mathbb{C}_{z,w}^2$ is strongly pseudoconvex. Let U be an open subset of $b\Omega$ and let U_1, U_2, U_3, \dots be the connected components of U . Assume that at least one of the following conditions is satisfied:*

- (i) *D is diffeomorphic to a 3-ball.*
- (ii) *All connected components U_n of U are simply-connected.*

Then the domains Ω^{U_m} are connected, disjoint and $\Omega^U = \cup_m \Omega^{U_m}$.

The conclusion of the above theorem is false in general as it is shown by the following

EXAMPLE 4.1: Let Ω be the solid torus in $\mathbb{C}_z \times \mathbb{R}_u$ defined by the inequality $(|z| - 2)^2 + u^2 < 1$. By an easy direct computation one shows that the domain $\Omega \times \mathbb{R}_v \subset \mathbb{C}_{z,w}^2$ is strictly pseudoconvex. Consider the open subset $U = U_1 \cup U_2$, where

$$U_1 = \left\{ (z, u) \in b\Omega : |z| < \frac{3}{2} \right\}, \quad U_2 = \left\{ (z, u) \in b\Omega : |z| > \frac{5}{2} \right\}.$$

Then the connected components U_1 and U_2 of U are obviously disjoint, but the set $\Omega^U = \{(z, u) \in \Omega : |u| < \sqrt{3}/2\}$ is connected (the set $\Omega^U \times \mathbb{R}_v$ is foliated by annuli $A_c = \{(z, w) \in \Omega \times \mathbb{R}_v : u = \operatorname{Re} C, v = \operatorname{Im} C\}$ where C satisfies the inequality $\{|\operatorname{Re} C| < \sqrt{3}/2\}$).

Now we formulate the central result stated in [ShT3]:

THEOREM 4.3: *Let Ω be a bounded domain in $\mathbb{C}_z \times \mathbb{R}_u$ such that the domain $\Omega \times \mathbb{R}_v \subset \mathbb{C}_{z,w}^2$ is strongly pseudoconvex. Let U be an open subset of $b\Omega$ and Ω^U the defined above subdomain of $\overline{\Omega}$. Then for every $\varphi \in C(U)$ there exist two continuous extensions Φ^+, Φ^- in Ω^U with the properties: the functions Φ^\pm are continuous on Ω^U , their graphs $\Gamma(\Phi^\pm)$ are Levi flat over $\Omega^U \cap \Omega$ and $\Phi^\pm|_U = \varphi$.*

Moreover, for any function $\Phi \in C(\Omega^U)$ such that $\Gamma(\Phi)$ is Levi flat over $\Omega^U \cap \Omega$ and $\Phi|_U = \varphi$ one has

$$\Phi^-(z, u) \leq \Phi(z, u) \leq \Phi^+(z, u)$$

for each point $(z, u) \in \Omega^U$.

As for the maximality of Ω^U , we have the following

THEOREM 4.4: *Let $\Omega \subset \mathbb{C}_z \times \mathbb{R}_u$ be a bounded domain diffeomorphic to a 3-ball such that the domain $\Omega \times \mathbb{R}_v$ is strictly pseudoconvex. Let U be an open subset of $b\Omega$ constituted by the disjoint union of simply-connected domains each of which is contained either in the “upper” or in the “lower” part of $b\Omega$ (with respect to the u -direction). Then there is a function $\varphi \in C(U)$ such that Ω^U is the maximal domain where the Levi-flat extension of the graph of φ can be defined.*

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