Review of Arturo Espinosa Baro's PhD thesis

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1 Summary

Topological complexity was defined around the turn of the century by Michael Farber. For any space X , the number $TC(X)$ depends only on the homotopy type of X, and quantifies the complexity of the task of navigation in X from a topological standpoint. Viewing X as the configuration space of a robotic mechanism or other mechanical system, knowledge of $TC(X)$ may have practical implications for the motion planning problem for that system. Due to this, and due to its close connection with more classically studied invariants such as the Lusternik–Schnirelmann category $cat(X)$, topological complexity has attracted a significant amount of attention from the homotopy theory community.

The definition of $TC(X)$ is an instance of a more general concept called *sectional category*. Given a fibration $p : E \to B$, its sectional category secat(p) is the minimal k such that B admits an open cover $\{U_0, \ldots, U_k\}$, on each set of which p admits a local section. Replacing local sections by local homotopy sections, one arrives at the definition of $secat(p)$ of an arbitrary map. (In fact, the notion is sufficiently homotopy invariant that we could also define the sectional category of a map to be the sectional category of a fibrational substitute.) Then $TC(X)$ is defined to be the sectional category of the free path fibration

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\pi: PX \to X \times X, \qquad \gamma \mapsto (\gamma(0), \gamma(1))
$$

which evaluates a path at its initial and final points. The connection to navigation in X becomes clear: local sections of π correspond to "motion planners" which determine a path from A to B for pairs (A, B) in a region of $X \times X$. Since π is a fibrational substitute of the diagonal map $\Delta: X \to X \times X$, we could equally define $TC(X) :=$ secat $(\Delta : X \to X \times X)$.

One of the main motivating questions in this area concerns the influence of the fundamental group on topological complexity. Given a discrete group G there exists a connected complex X with $\pi_1(X) \cong G$ and all higher homotopy groups trivial; such a space is called a $K(G, 1)$ -space, and is unique up to homotopy type. We may therefore define $TC(G) := TC(X)$, where X is any $K(G, 1)$ -space. A fundamental question posed by Farber, which remains unanswered despite having inspired a great deal of interesting research, is to describe $TC(G)$ in purely algebraic terms. The corresponding question for Lusternik–Schnirelmann category is answered by the Eilenberg–Ganea theorem: if $cat(G)$ is similarly defined, it agrees with $cd(G)$, the cohomological dimension of the group G, whenever $cd(G) \geq 3$ (and in fact this last restriction can be removed after work of Stallings, Swan and Dranishnikov–Rudyak).

One can observe that $TC(G) = \secat(\Delta : X \to X \times X)$ is the sectional category of a map between aspherical spaces, whose homotopy class is then determined by the map on fundamental groups (in this case the diagonal homomorphism $d: G \hookrightarrow G \times G$. The jumping off point of this thesis is that the important problem of Farber from the last paragraph can be generalised. Given a homomorphism of discrete groups $\phi: G \to H$, we may define $\mathsf{secat}(\phi) := \mathsf{secat}(f: X \to Y)$ where X is any $K(G, 1)$ -space, Y is any $K(H, 1)$ space, and f is any map inducing ϕ on fundamental groups. One can then ask for an algebraic description of secat(ϕ). Farber's problem is the case $\phi = d : G \hookrightarrow G \times G$. Having this generalisation in mind can prove a useful sanity check when pondering potential conjectural descriptions of $TC(G)$.

Another topic considered in the thesis is effective topological complexity. This is a variant of topological complexity which takes symmetries of the configuration space into account. There are several such variants, but the effective version is distinguished as the only variant which makes use of the symmetries to reduce the complexity of the motion planning problem. Given a group G (now regarded as a group of symmetries,

as opposed to the fundamental group of a space) and a space X with G -action, the effective topological complexity $TC^{G,\infty}(X)$ is defined similarly as $TC(X)$, except that paths are now allowed finitely many "break" points" where continuity is broken to jump to another point in the same G-orbit. It follows that $TC^{G,\infty}(X)$ is bounded above by $TC(X)$. Beyond computations made by Blaszczyk and Kaluba for \mathbb{Z}_p -spheres, there are relatively few calculations of effective topological complexity in the literature.

We now briefly summarize the contents of the thesis, which after the introductory Chapter 1 is split into 3 parts. Part I is preliminary, and contains a review of the material from homological algebra and the theory of sectional category which will be needed for the rest of the thesis. Part II concerns sectional category and topological complexity of $K(G, 1)$ -spaces, and consists of 3 chapters. **Chapter 4** concerns the sectional category of subgroup inclusions $H \hookrightarrow G$. A characterisation is given in terms of the existence of equivariant maps between classifying spaces, generalising a result of Farber–Grant–Lupton–Oprea. Then the Berstein–Schwarz class of G relative to H is introduced, which is a sort of universal cohomology class in $H¹(G; I(G/H))$ which simultaneously generalises the Berstein–Schwarz class of a group and the Farber–Costa canonical class for topological complexity, and is the main technical tool of the chapter. The main result here is that maximality of the sectional category, in the sense that $\secat(H \hookrightarrow G) = \cdots \circ d(G)$, is detected by vanishing or otherwise of the appropriate power of the relative Berstein–Schwarz class. The chapter also contains a discussion of Adamson cohomology and its relationship to sectional category and Bredon cohomology. Most of the results of this chapter have been published in a joint article with Blaszczyk and Carrasquel-Vera in the Journal of Pure and Applied Algebra.

Chapter 5 is titled "Lower bounds of sectional category of subgroup inclusions", and picks up where the last chapter left off. The main tool is a generalisation of a spectral sequence due to Farber and Mescher, which can be used in favourable cases to detect when a cohomology class is *essential*, which means roughly that its weight when used to bound secat($H \hookrightarrow G$) from below is equal to its dimension. The main result which can be derived from this spectral sequence is that $\secat(H \leftrightarrow G) \geq \text{cd}(G) - \kappa_{G,H}$, where $\kappa_{G,H}$ is defined to be the supremum of $\text{cd}(H_x)$ where $H_x = H \cap x H x^{-1}$ and x ranges over $G \setminus H$. Several applications to sequential topological complexity of $K(G, 1)$ -spaces and to parametrized topological complexity of group epimorphisms are given. The results of this chapter appear in a joint article with Farber, Mescher and Oprea which has been submitted for publication.

Chapter 6 presents an original interpretation of $\secat(H \hookrightarrow G)$ and $TC(G)$ as an equivariant A-genus. While still topological in nature, this does allow the author to refine some of the bounds derived from the characterisation in terms of equivariant maps between classifying spaces. A single-author article covering this material is in the latter stages of preparation.

Part III consists of a single chapter, Chapter 7, on properties of the effective topological complexity. There is a brief review of variants of topological complexities in the presence of symmetry, and basic properties of $TC^{G,\infty}$. The main innovation of this chapter is the introduction of a new invariant of G-spaces, their effective Lusternik–Schnirelmann category, denoted cat^{G, ∞} (X) . This is related to $TC^{G,\infty}(X)$, and several conclusions are drawn. It is shown that when the orbit map $\rho : X \to X/G$ admits a strict section, then $cat^{G,\infty}(X) = cat(X/G)$ and $TC^{G,\infty}(X) = TC(X/G)$. When the orbit map ρ is a fibration, the above equalities become inequalities ≤, but one can also conclude that only one break point is required to obtain the minimum. Several examples are explored, focussing on the cases when G is a Lie group. The results of this chapter appear in a joint work with B laszczyk and Viruel, which has been accepted for publication in the Proceedings of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, Section A: Mathematics.

The thesis concludes with an extensive bibliography, and a useful list of symbols and alphabetical index.

2 Assessment

I consider this thesis to be at the level of a good PhD thesis from a top 20 university in the UK. The original results, while not unexpected, still require a high level of technical mastery, and cover a broad range of techniques. The writing is excellent in general, despite the length of the attached list of corrections (which anyway is commensurate with the length of the thesis). There are places where I felt the prose could have been more brief, although I enjoyed the poetic style! My only small criticism was that the author seems reluctant to use categorical techniques. In particular, Lemmas 4.2.6 and 4.2.7 seem to say respectively that induction is left adjoint to restriction, and as a result restriction preserves injectives; Theorem 4.2.14 rests

mainly on the fact that restriction is left adjoint to taking fixed points. In my opinion this viewpoint is not only useful for shortening proofs, but also for understanding the heart of the matter.

3 Conclusion

The thesis represents a significant body of original work, carried out both independently and jointly in collaboration with other researchers. It presents in a coherent narrative the results of 4 distinct scientific articles, which are either published, submitted for publication, or in the latter stages of preparation. There is no summary of the author's contributions to the joint works, although Chapter 6 is solely authored and demonstrates the candidates ability to work independently. The material presented clearly demonstrates the candidates breadth and depth of technical knowledge in the subject. The language criteria have been met.

In conclusion, my opinion is that the thesis meets all of the conditions of Article 187 of the Act of July 20, 2018, Law on Higher Education and Science, and justifies awarding the candidate a doctoral degree in the discipline of mathematics.

4 Corrections

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