

Projective Ring Lines and Their Generalisations

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October 4, 2012

Abstract

We give a survey on projective ring lines and some of their substructures which in turn are more general than a projective line over a ring.

Keywords: Projective line over a ring, distant graph, connected component, elementary linear group, subspace of a chain geometry, Jordan system, projective line over a strong Jordan system

1 Distant graph and connected components

The *projective line* $\mathbb{P}(R)$ over any ring R (associative with $1 \neq 0$) can be defined in terms of the free left R -module R^2 as follows [11], [24]: It is the orbit of a starter point $R(1, 0)$ under the action of the general linear group $GL_2(R)$ on R^2 . A basic notion on $\mathbb{P}(R)$ is its *distant relation*: Two points are called distant (in symbols: Δ) if they can be represented by the elements of a two-element basis of R^2 . The *distant graph* $(\mathbb{P}(R), \Delta)$ has as vertices the points of $\mathbb{P}(R)$ and as edges the pairs of distant points. The distant graph is connected precisely when $GL_2(R)$ is generated by the *elementary linear group* $E_2(R)$, i.e., the subgroup of $GL_2(R)$ which is generated by elementary transvections, together with the set of all invertible diagonal matrices [7]. The orbit of $R(1, 0)$ under $E_2(R)$ is a connected component of the distant graph. It admits a parametrisation in terms of infinitely many formulas [7], [8]. The situation is less intricate for a ring R of *stable rank 2* (see

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[15], [36], or [37]), as it gives rise to a connected distant graph with diameter ≤ 2 . The above-mentioned parametrisation turns into *Bartolone's parametrisation* [1] of $\mathbb{P}(R)$, namely

$$\mathbb{P}(R) = \{R(t_2 t_1 - 1, t_2) \mid t_1, t_2 \in R\} \quad (R \text{ of stable rank } 2).$$

Refer to the seminal paper of P. M. Cohn [16] for the algebraic background, and to the work of A. Blunck [5], [6] for orbits of the point $R(1, 0)$ under other subgroups of $\text{GL}_2(R)$.

2 Chain Geometries, subspaces and Jordan Systems

Let R be an algebra over a commutative field K ; by identifying K with $K \cdot 1_R$ the projective line $\mathbb{P}(K)$ is embedded in $\mathbb{P}(R)$. For $R \neq K$ the projective line $\mathbb{P}(R)$ can be considered as the point set of the *chain geometry* $\Sigma(K, R)$; the $\text{GL}_2(R)$ orbit of $\mathbb{P}(K)$ is the set of *chains* [11], [24]. The geometries of Möbius, Minkowski and Laguerre are well known examples of chain geometries [2]. A crucial property is that any three mutually distinct points are on a unique chain. The chain geometry $\Sigma(K, R)$ may be viewed as a refinement of the distant graph, since two points of $\mathbb{P}(R)$ are distant if, and only if, they are on a common chain. There are cases though, when the word “refinement” is inappropriate in its strict sense: Let $R = \text{End}_F(V)$ be the endomorphism ring of a vector space V over a (not necessarily commutative) field F and let K denote the *centre* of F . Then the K -chains of $\mathbb{P}(R)$ can be defined solely in terms of the distant graph $(\mathbb{P}(R), \Delta)$ [10].

Each chain geometry $\Sigma(K, R)$ is a *chain space*; see [11], where also the precise definition of *subspaces* of a chain space is given. The algebraic description of subspaces of $\Sigma(K, R)$ is due to A. Herzer [23] and H.-J. Kroll [29], [30], [31]. It is based on the following notions: A *Jordan system* is a K -subspace of R satisfying two extra conditions: (i) $1 \in J$; (ii) If $b \in J$ has an inverse in R then $b^{-1} \in J$. (See [33] for relations with *Jordan algebras* and *Jordan pairs* and compare with [18], [34].) A Jordan system J is called *strong* if it satisfies a (somewhat technical) condition which guarantees the existence of “many” invertible elements in J . Strong Jordan systems are closed under *triple multiplication*, i. e., $xyx \in J$ for all $x, y \in J$. The *projective line* $\mathbb{P}(J)$ over a strong Jordan system $J \subset R$ is defined by restricting the *parameters* t_1, t_2 to J in Bartolone's parametrisation. We wish to emphasise that in general a point of $\mathbb{P}(J)$ cannot be written as $R(a, b)$ with $a, b \in J$, unless J is even a subalgebra of R . The main theorem about subspaces is as follows: If R is a strong algebra then any connected subspace of $\Sigma(K, R)$ is projectively equivalent to a projective line over a strong Jordan system of R .

Projective lines over strong Jordan systems admit many applications: For example, one may use them to describe subsets of Grassmannians which are closed

under reguli [23] or chain spaces on quadrics [4]. See also [3], [25], [26], [27], and the numerous examples given in [11].

Finally, let us mention one of the many questions that remain: *Is it possible to replace the strongness condition for Jordan systems by closedness under triple multiplication without affecting the known results?* A partial affirmative answer was given in [9] for case when R is the ring of $n \times n$ matrices over a field F with an involution σ and J is the (not necessarily strong) Jordan system of σ -Hermitian matrices. The proof is based upon the verification that the projective line over this J is, up to some notational differences, nothing but the point set of a *dual polar space* [14] or, in the terminology of [38], the point set of a *projective space of σ -Hermitian matrices*.

A wealth of further references can be found in [2], [11], [19], [24], [28], [35], [37], and [38]. Refer to [12], [13], [17], [20], [21], [22], and [32] for deviating definitions of projective lines which we cannot present here.

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