

A smooth pseudoconvex domain in \mathbf{C}^2 for which L^∞ -estimates for $\bar{\partial}$ do not hold

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Let \mathcal{D} be a smoothly bounded domain in \mathbf{C}^n . It is well known (see [HL] and [Ø]) that if \mathcal{D} is strictly pseudoconvex then we can solve the $\bar{\partial}$ -equation with estimates in L^p for any $1 \leq p \leq \infty$. It has also been known for some time that this is no longer true if \mathcal{D} is merely pseudoconvex. Namely, Sibony [S2] found an example of such a domain in \mathbf{C}^3 where L^∞ -estimates do not hold. The reader should also consult the paper [FS1] which contains a discussion of L^p -estimates in general and many counterexamples to this type of questions. However, all counterexamples known seem to treat the case $n \geq 3$ and L^p -estimates for $p > 2$.

In this paper we shall prove

Theorem 1. *There is a smoothly bounded Hartogs domain in \mathbf{C}^2 , and a $\bar{\partial}$ -closed $(0, 1)$ -form g in \mathcal{D} , which extends continuously to $\bar{\mathcal{D}}$, such that the equation $\bar{\partial}u = g$ has no bounded solution.*

Recall that a Hartogs domain is a domain of the form

$$(1) \quad \mathcal{D} = \{(z, w); |w| < e^{-\varphi(z)}\}$$

where φ is subharmonic. If e.g. φ is smooth in the disk and

$$\varphi = \frac{1}{2} \log \frac{1}{1-|z|^2}$$

near the boundary of the disk, then $\partial\mathcal{D}$ will be smooth.

There is a special reason why we are interested in the case $n=2$. The form g in Theorem 1 extends continuously to $\partial\mathcal{D}$. So, the same example shows that we don't have L^∞ -estimates for $\bar{\partial}_b$ either. But in \mathbf{C}^2 there is a duality between $\bar{\partial}_b$ in L^∞ and in L^1 . Therefore we get

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Theorem 2. *There is a sequence of functions g_n on $\partial\mathcal{D}$ such that*

- (i) $\|g_n\|_{L^1} \leq 1$,
- (ii) *there is u_n in L^1 such that $\bar{\partial}_b u_n = g_n$,*
- (iii) *if $\bar{\partial} v_n = g_n$ then $\|v_n\|_{L^1} \rightarrow \infty$.*

In other words, we do not have L^1 estimates for $\bar{\partial}_b$ either. Another way of expressing the conclusion of Theorem 2 is that the closed and densely defined operator $\bar{\partial}_b: L^1 \rightarrow L^1$ does not have closed range.

Whether one can solve the $\bar{\partial}$ -equation in \mathcal{D} with L^1 -estimates is another question, which I do not know the answer to. In a recent paper by Bonneau and Diederich ([BD]), L^1 -estimates with a logarithmic loss are proved. One should also compare the results by Feffermann–Kohn, Christ and Nagel–Rosay–Stein–Wainger (see [FK], [C], [NRSW]), which contain sup-norm estimates, and even Hölder estimates for $\bar{\partial}_b$ in domains of finite type in \mathbf{C}^2 (thus in particular for domains with real-analytic boundary). Recently a more elementary proof of a slightly weaker result was obtained by Range ([R]).

Our construction is quite different from the one in [S2] (it is actually more similar to the earlier one in [S1]). It is based on the relation between estimates for the $\bar{\partial}$ -equation in domains of the form (1), and estimates for the one dimensional $\bar{\partial}$ -equation in the disk with weight $e^{-n\varphi}$ where $n \in \mathbf{N}$.

It is well known (see [FS1], [FS2] or [B]) that if φ is an arbitrary subharmonic function in the disk, then one can in general not solve the equation

$$(2) \quad \frac{\partial u}{\partial \bar{z}} = f$$

in the disk with estimates

$$(3) \quad \sup_{\Delta} |u| e^{-\varphi} \leq C \sup_{\Delta} |f| e^{-\varphi}.$$

The analogous question for smooth φ 's is whether one can solve (2) with the estimate

$$(4) \quad \sup_{\Delta} |u| e^{-n\varphi} \leq C \sup_{\Delta} |f| e^{-n\varphi}.$$

where C is a constant that does not depend on n (nor f of course). It turns out (see Section 2) that if we have L^∞ -estimates in a domain \mathcal{D} of type (1), then one can solve the $\bar{\partial}$ -equation in the disk with the estimate (4). Hence, all we need to do to prove Theorem 1, is to find a subharmonic function $\varphi \in C^\infty(\bar{\Delta})$ for which this is impossible. This is the object of Section 1. In Section 2 we show how this implies Theorems 1 and 2.

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Section 1

In this section we shall study estimates of the form

$$(1.1) \quad \sup |v|e^{-\varphi} \leq C \sup |f|e^{-\varphi}$$

for solutions to the equation

$$\frac{\partial v}{\partial \bar{z}} = f$$

in the unit disk, Δ . We are interested in for which functions φ such an estimate holds for all f in, say, $C_c^\infty(\Delta)$, and also for which functions ψ (1.1) holds with a fixed constant for $\varphi=n\psi$, $n=1, 2, 3, \dots$

Proposition 1.2. *We can solve the $\bar{\partial}$ -equation in Δ with the estimate (1.1) if and only if the following inequality holds*

$$(1.3) \quad \int_{\Delta} |\alpha|e^\varphi \leq C \int_{\Delta} \left| \frac{\partial \alpha}{\partial \bar{z}} \right| e^\varphi \quad \forall \alpha \in C_c^\infty(\Delta).$$

The best constants in (1.1) and (1.3) are the same.

Proof. The fact that $\partial v/\partial \bar{z}=f$ is equivalent to

$$\int_{\Delta} f\alpha = - \int v \frac{\partial \alpha}{\partial \bar{z}} \quad \forall \alpha \in C_c^\infty(\Delta).$$

If v satisfies (1.1) we get

$$\left| \int f\alpha \right| \leq C \sup(|f|e^{-\varphi}) \int \left| \frac{\partial \alpha}{\partial \bar{z}} \right| e^\varphi.$$

Taking the supremum over all f with $|f| \leq e^\varphi$ we get (1.3).

If, on the other hand (1.3) holds then

$$(1.4) \quad \left| \int f\alpha \right| \leq C \sup(|f|e^{-\varphi}) \int \left| \frac{\partial \alpha}{\partial \bar{z}} \right| e^\varphi.$$

Let

$$F = \left\{ \frac{\partial \alpha}{\partial \bar{z}} e^\varphi ; \alpha \in C_c^\infty \right\} \subseteq L^1(\mathcal{D}).$$

Define a linear functional

$$T: F \rightarrow \mathbf{C}$$

by

$$T\left(\frac{\partial\alpha}{\partial\bar{z}}e^\varphi\right) = \int f\alpha.$$

(1.4) implies that T is well defined and that $\|T\| \leq C \sup |f|e^{-\varphi}$.

We can extend T to a linear operator

$$T: L^1(\Delta) \rightarrow \mathbf{C}$$

with the same norm. Hence there is a function $u \in L^\infty(\Delta)$ such that

$$\int f\alpha = \int u \frac{\partial\alpha}{\partial\bar{z}} e^\varphi$$

and $\|u\|_\infty = \|T\|$. Letting $v = -ue^\varphi$ we have a solution to $\bar{\partial}v = f$ which satisfies (1.1). The proof is complete. \square

Note that the question whether (1.3) holds depends only on $\Delta\varphi$. In other words, if h is harmonic and (1.3) holds for φ , then it holds with φ replaced by $\varphi + h$ (just multiply α by $e^{h+i\tilde{h}}$ where \tilde{h} is the harmonic conjugate to h).

We also remark that if (1.3) holds for all $\alpha \in \mathcal{C}_c^\infty(\Delta)$, then it actually holds for all α in L^1 with compact support, which are such that $\partial\alpha/\partial\bar{z}$ is a finite measure. We will use this remark at several points.

Proposition 1.5. *Assume that (1.3) holds with a fixed constant for $\varphi = n\psi$ where $n \in \mathbf{N}$. Then ψ is subharmonic.*

Proof. Let $\Delta' \subset\subset \Delta$ be a disk and let $\alpha = X_{\Delta'}$. Then (1.3) implies

$$\int_{\Delta'} e^{n\psi} \leq C \int_{\partial\Delta'} e^{n\psi} |dz|.$$

Hence, if $\psi \leq 0$ on $\partial\Delta'$ then $\psi \leq 0$ in Δ' . Since we can change ψ to $\psi - h$ where h is any harmonic polynomial, we see that if $\psi \leq h$ on $\partial\Delta'$, then $\psi \leq h$ in Δ' . This means that ψ is subharmonic. \square

A similar argument shows that if the analog of (1.3) in L^2 -norm

$$(1.6) \quad \int |\alpha|^2 e^\varphi \leq C \int \left| \frac{\partial\alpha}{\partial\bar{z}} \right|^2 e^\varphi$$

holds for $\varphi = n\psi$ then ψ is also subharmonic. In this case, the converse is also true. This follows from the inequality used in the proof of Hörmander's theorem (see [H]). We shall now see that in L^1 -norm the situation is quite different.

Proposition 1.7. *Let φ be any subharmonic function in Δ with the property that $\varphi = -\infty$ on some set with an interior accumulation point. Then (1.3) does not hold with any constant C .*

Proof. Assume that $a \in \Delta$ and that $\varphi(a) = -\infty$. Then it follows from (1.3) that

$$\int |\alpha| \frac{e^\varphi}{|z-a|} \leq C \int \left| \frac{\partial \alpha}{\partial \bar{z}} \right| \frac{e^\varphi}{|z-a|}.$$

To see this consider (1.3) with α replaced by $\alpha/(z-a)$. Then

$$\frac{\partial \alpha}{\partial z} / (z-a) = \frac{\partial \alpha}{\partial \bar{z}} / (z-a) + \pi \alpha \delta_a,$$

but the last term gives no contribution since $e^{\varphi(a)} = 0$. Iterating this observation we see that if $\varphi(a_1) = \varphi(a_2) = \dots = \varphi(a_n) = -\infty$ then

$$(1.8) \quad \int |\alpha| \frac{e^\varphi}{\prod_1^n |z-a_j|} \leq C \int \left| \frac{\partial \alpha}{\partial \bar{z}} \right| \frac{e^\varphi}{\prod_1^n |z-a_j|}.$$

In particular we can take $\alpha = \chi_{\Delta'}$, where $\Delta' \subset \subset \Delta$ is a disk containing an accumulation point, p , of the set where $\varphi = -\infty$. Then (1.8) can clearly not hold in the limit as all a_j tend to p . Hence (1.3) cannot hold. \square

The preceding proof shows a curious fact. If φ is given by

$$\varphi_a = \frac{1}{3} \sum_1^3 \log |z-a_j|$$

then (1.3) cannot hold with a fixed constant as $a = (a_1, a_2, a_3) \rightarrow 0$. On the other hand, in the limit we get

$$\varphi = \log |z|,$$

which does satisfy (1.3) (just multiply α by z).

We are now ready to prove our main technical result.

Proposition 1.9. *There is a subharmonic function ψ in $C^\infty(\bar{\Delta})$ such that if C_n denotes the best constant in*

$$(1.10) \quad \int_{\Delta} |\alpha| e^{n\psi} \leq C_n \int_{\Delta} \left| \frac{\partial \alpha}{\partial \bar{z}} \right| e^{n\psi} \quad \forall \alpha \in C_c^\infty,$$

then $\overline{\lim} C_n = \infty$.

Proof. Let φ be a function subharmonic in a neighborhood of $\bar{\Delta}$ which is harmonic near $\partial\Delta$ and which is such that (1.3) is violated. Then there is a sequence

of smooth subharmonic functions φ_k in $\bar{\Delta}$, which are harmonic near $\partial\Delta$ such that $\varphi_k \downarrow \varphi$. Let $\|\varphi_k\|_{C^k(\bar{\Delta})} = A_k$. Take a sequence of integers n_k such that $n_k/A_k \rightarrow \infty$, and put $\psi_k = \varphi_k/n_k$. Then we have a sequence of smooth subharmonic functions such that

- (i) $\lim \|\psi_k\|_{C^k} = 0$ and
- (ii) if B_k is the best constant in

$$\int |\alpha| e^{n_k \psi_k} \leq B_k \int \left| \frac{\partial \alpha}{\partial \bar{z}} \right| e^{n_k \psi_k} \quad \forall \alpha \in C_c^\infty$$

then $\lim B_k = \infty$.

Moreover, all ψ_k 's are harmonic near $\partial\Delta$, so $\Delta\psi_k \in C_c^\infty(\Delta)$. Now, if

$$\Delta' = \Delta(a, r) \subset\subset \Delta$$

is a small disk in Δ , and if ψ is one of our ψ_k 's we transport ψ to Δ' by the following definition.

$$\tau(\Delta', \psi) = r^{-2} G \left[(\Delta\psi) \left(\frac{z-a}{r} \right) \right]$$

where G is the Green-potential in Δ .

Then $v = \tau(\Delta', \psi)$ is smooth and $\Delta v = \Delta(\psi((z-a)/r))$ in Δ' and $\Delta v = 0$ outside Δ' . Moreover

$$(1.11) \quad \|\Delta v\|_{C^{k-2}} \leq r^{-k} \|\Delta\psi\|_{C^{k-2}} \leq r^{-k} \|\psi\|_{C^k}.$$

Choose a disjoint sequence of disks $\Delta_k = \Delta(a_k, r_k)$ in Δ , which converges to an interior point. By taking a sparse subsequence, renumbering and letting $\tilde{\psi}_k = \tau(\Delta_k, \psi_k)$ we get that

- (iii) $\sum r_k^{-k} \|\psi_k\|_{C^k} < \infty$ and
- (iv) $\lim r_k B_k = \infty$.

Then (iii) together with (1.11) shows that $\psi = \sum \tilde{\psi}_k \in C^\infty(\bar{\Delta})$.

Assume, to get a contradiction, that (1.10) holds with $C_n \leq C$. Take in particular $\alpha \in C_c^\infty(\Delta_k)$. Then

$$\int_{\Delta_k} |\alpha| e^{n\tilde{\psi}_k} \leq C \int_{\Delta_k} \left| \frac{\partial \alpha}{\partial \bar{z}} \right| e^{n\tilde{\psi}_k}$$

since the other $\tilde{\psi}_j$'s are harmonic in Δ_k . The change of variables $\tau = a_k + r_k \zeta$ transports this estimate to Δ . We then get

$$\int_{\Delta} |\alpha| e^{n\psi_k} \leq \frac{C}{r_k} \int_{\Delta} \left| \frac{\partial \alpha}{\partial \bar{z}} \right| e^{n\psi_k}$$

since $\Delta\psi_k = \Delta(\tilde{\psi}_k(a+r\zeta))$. Taking in particular $n=n_k$ we obtain $B_k \leq C/r_k$, which contradicts $\lim r_k B_k = \infty$. \square

Section 2

We shall now see how we can use the function ψ from Proposition 1.9 to prove Theorem 1.

Proposition 2.1. *Let \mathcal{D} be a domain of the form*

$$\mathcal{D} = \{ (z, w); |z| < 1, |w| < e^{-\varphi(z)} \},$$

where φ is a smooth function. Assume that for any $\bar{\partial}$ -closed form f which extends continuously to $\bar{\mathcal{D}}$ we can solve the equation $\bar{\partial}u=f$ with u bounded. Then there is a constant C such that for any $f \in C_c^\infty(\Delta_{1/2})$ and any $n \in \mathbb{N}$ we can solve $\partial u / \partial \bar{z} = f$ in $\Delta_{1/2}$ with

$$(2.2) \quad \sup_{\Delta_{1/2}} |u| e^{-n\varphi} \leq C \sup_{\Delta_{1/2}} |f| e^{-n\varphi}$$

Proof. Assume the conclusion is false. Then there is a sequence $n_k \rightarrow \infty$ and a sequence of $f_k \in C_c^\infty(\Delta_{1/2})$ such that

$$\sup |f_k| e^{-n_k \varphi} =: a_k \rightarrow 0$$

and if u_k are any solutions for

$$\frac{\partial u_k}{\partial \bar{z}} = f_k.$$

Then

$$\sup |u_k| e^{-n_k \varphi} \rightarrow \infty.$$

By choosing a sparse subsequence we can assume $\sum a_k < \infty$. Let

$$f = \sum_0^\infty f_k(z) w^{n_k} d\bar{z}.$$

The sum is absolutely and uniformly convergent in $\bar{\mathcal{D}}$. So, f is continuous on $\bar{\mathcal{D}}$ and $\bar{\partial}f=0$. By hypothesis we can find a function $u \in L^\infty(\mathcal{D})$ such that $\bar{\partial}u=f$. Since f has no $d\bar{w}$ component, u is holomorphic in w , and we can expand u in a power series

$$u(z, w) = \sum_0^\infty u_n(z) w^n.$$

Identifying coefficients of w^n in $\bar{\partial}u=f$ we get

$$\frac{\partial u_{n_k}}{\partial \bar{z}} = f_k.$$

But

$$u_n(z)r^n = \frac{1}{2\pi} \int_{-\pi}^{\pi} u(z, re^{i\theta})e^{-in\theta} d\theta$$

so if $r < e^{-\varphi}$ we get

$$\sup_{\Delta_{1/2}} |u_n(z)|r^n \leq \|u\|_{L^\infty}.$$

Letting $n=n_k$ and $r \uparrow e^{-\varphi}$ we see that

$$\sup_{\Delta_{1/2}} |u_n|e^{-n_k\varphi} \leq C$$

contradicting the choice of f_k . \square

Theorem 1 is now a direct consequence. Starting with our function ψ from Proposition 1.9, we can scale it down to $\Delta_{1/2}$. Then we can extend ψ to a smooth subharmonic function φ in Δ such that $\varphi = \frac{1}{2} \log(1/(1-|z|^2))$ near $\partial\Delta$. By Proposition 1.2 the conclusion of Proposition 2.1 fails for φ . Hence, if we use φ to define \mathcal{D} we get a smoothly bounded domain in \mathbf{C}^2 which satisfies the claim in Theorem 1.

Let us now briefly discuss $\bar{\partial}_b$ on $\partial\mathcal{D}$. Let $u(z, w)$ be a bounded function on $\partial\mathcal{D}$. We can then expand $u(z, w)$ in a Fourier series

$$u(z, e^{-\varphi+i\theta}) \sim \sum_{-\infty}^{\infty} u_n(z)e^{-|n|\varphi}e^{in\theta}.$$

We can always extend u smoothly to \mathcal{D} . Let on the other hand f be a $(0, 1)$ form in \mathcal{D} which extends continuously to $\bar{\mathcal{D}}$. Finally let ϱ be any smooth defining function for \mathcal{D} . We say $\bar{\partial}_b u = f$ if

$$\bar{\partial}u \wedge \bar{\partial}\varrho = f \wedge \bar{\partial}\varrho \quad \text{on } \partial\mathcal{D}$$

in the sense of distributions.

Now, let in particular f be the form in Theorem 1. By extending u to \mathcal{D} by

$$u(z, w) = \sum_0^{\infty} u_n(z)w^n + \sum_{-\infty}^{-1} u_n(z)\bar{w}^{-n}$$

we see that if $\bar{\partial}_b u = f$ then

$$\frac{\partial u_{n_k}}{\partial \bar{z}} = f_k.$$

Again, by estimating Fourier coefficients we see that $\bar{\partial}_b u = f$ has no bounded solution.

We finally turn to the proof of Theorem 2. This follows in principle from what we just said, but it is probably more instructive to give a direct construction.

We know from the construction of φ that there is a sequence of functions $\alpha_k \in C_c^\infty(\Delta_{1/2})$, and a sequence n_k such that

$$(a) \quad \int \left| \frac{\partial \alpha_k}{\partial \bar{z}} \right| e^{n_k \varphi} = 1$$

and

$$(b) \quad \int |\alpha_k| e^{n_k \varphi} \rightarrow \infty.$$

Put for $(z, w) \in \partial \mathcal{D}$

$$g_k = \frac{\partial \alpha_k}{\partial \bar{z}} w^{-n_k} d\bar{z}.$$

Since surface measure on $\partial \mathcal{D}$ is equivalent to $idz \wedge d\bar{z} \wedge d\theta$ (a) means that $\|g_k\|_{L^1(\partial \mathcal{D})} \leq C$. Moreover $g_k = \bar{\partial}_b \alpha_k w^{-n_k}$. If now v_k is any solution to $\bar{\partial}_b v_k = g_k$ then

$$v_k - \alpha_k w^{-n_k} = h_k$$

has a holomorphic extension to \mathcal{D} . Hence

$$\frac{1}{2\pi} \int_{-\pi}^{\pi} v_k(z, we^{i\theta}) e^{in_k \theta} d\theta = \alpha_k w^{-n_k}.$$

Therefore

$$\|\alpha_k w^{-n_k}\|_{L^1} \leq \|v_k\|_{L^1}.$$

But (b) says precisely that the left hand side here tends to infinity. Hence $\|v_k\|_{L^1}$ cannot be bounded, so we have proved Theorem 2.

Remark added March 31, 1993. The construction in this paper is based on the existence of a subharmonic function, φ , in the disk such that sup-norm estimates for $\bar{\partial}$ with the weight factor $e^{-\varphi}$ fail. Shortly after the paper was completed Forneaess and Sibony [FS2] noted that their construction from [FS1] of a function with similar properties for L^p -estimates, implies in the same way that there is a smoothly bounded Hartogs domain in \mathbf{C}^2 where L^p -estimates fail for any $p > 2$. Feeding the same function into our construction for $\bar{\partial}_b$ one gets a smoothly bounded domain in \mathbf{C}^2 where $\bar{\partial}_b$ does not have closed range in any L^p -space except for $p=2$. A more detailed explanation of this together with further examples of the same kind can be found in [B2].

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