

Resolution of Singularities

Toni Annala

Contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	A condensed historical account of the problem	3
2	Completions	7
2.1	Completion of topological abelian groups	9
2.2	Completions of topological rings and modules	16
2.3	Hensel's lemma	18
2.4	Structure of completions of local Noetherian rings	19
3	Blowing Up	21
4	Hironaka's Proof	22
5	de Jong's Proof	22

1 Introduction

For many of the most important theorems in mathematics giving even an approximate idea of what the theorem states is fairly hard. This is not the case with resolution of singularities. The basic idea is very geometric, and can be easily stated approximately assuming very little prior mathematics background. It is a statement considering varieties, i.e., solution sets of equation systems consisting entirely of polynomial equations.

Let us start with an example. The solution set for the equation $y^2 - x^3$ is visualized in Figure 1. At every point of the curve, except at the origin, the curve seems to be smooth, i.e., if we zoom close enough, it starts looking like a straight line. These kind of points are called *nonsingular* or *regular points*. More generally in higher dimensional varieties (say the dimension is n) we would consider a point to be nonsingular if locally around

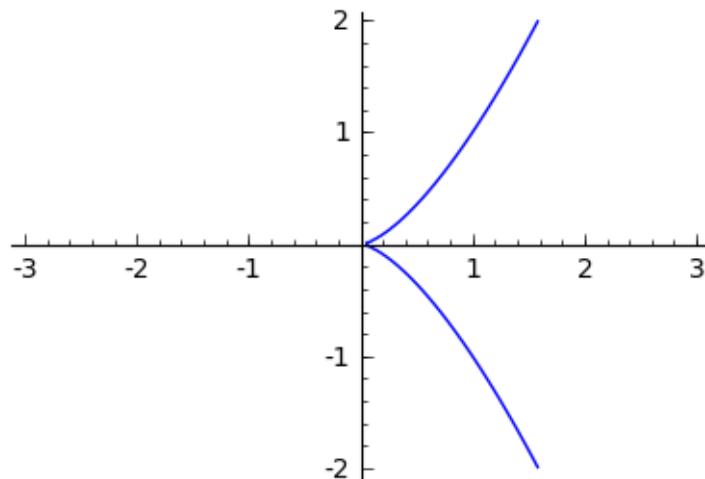


Figure 1: A cusp.

it the variety looks like the "normal" n -dimensional space (you can think of \mathbb{R}^n if we are dealing with real solutions, \mathbb{C}^n if with complex solutions).

But something weird happens at the origin: the direction of the curve "changes" suddenly, and no matter how close we try to zoom, the curve will never start looking like a straight line. Points that fail to be nonsingular are called *singularities* or *singular points*. The type of curve singularity we have in Figure 1 is called a *cusp*.

Now a question arises: would it be possible to parametrize our singular curve C with another, nicer, curve: could we parametrize the points of C with points of a nonsingular curve C' (meaning that it has no singular points)? In the above case it is indeed possible. Take the curve C' that is the zero set of the polynomial equation $y'^2 - x'$ plotted in Figure 2. We would like to define a map $C' \rightarrow C$. Send a point $(x', y') \in C'$ to $(x', y'x')$. This point lies in C as

$$(y'x')^2 - x'^3 = x'^2(y'^2 - x'),$$

and the right hand side is zero by assumption. Hence we have what we desired: a parametrization of the curve C by a nonsingular curve C' .

Before going further, let us have another example. The equation $y^2 - x^3 - x^2$ gives the curve visualized in Figure 3. The origin is clearly singular, but this singularity is different from the one we had in Figure 1. The curve intersects itself! Luckily this self-intersection is in some sense as good as possible, at least the different branches meet *transversally*, i.e., they have distinct tangent lines. A singular point, where two branches of a curve meet transversally is called a *node*.

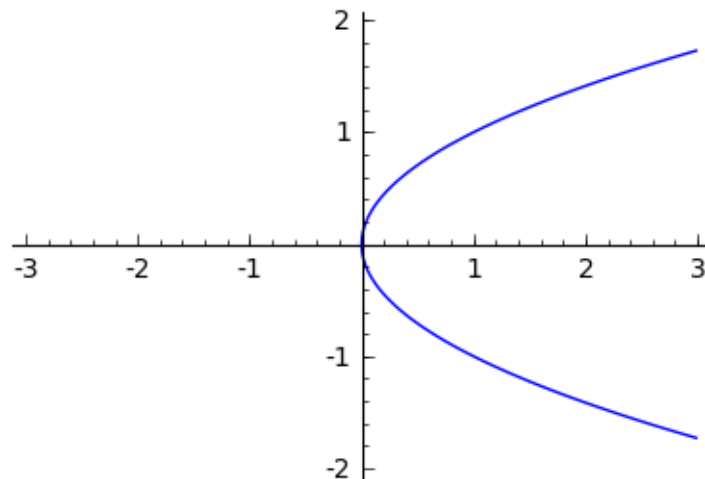


Figure 2: The solution set for $y'^2 - x' = 0$.

Can we find a nonsingular parametrization for this curve? Yes we can. Take the curve $y'^2 - x' - 1$, which is visualized in Figure 4. A parametrization is again given by $(x', y') \mapsto (x', x'y')$ which can be checked with similar reasoning as before.

Finding a parametrization of a singular variety by a nonsingular one is called *resolving* its singularities (this is not what one usually means by it, usually we would require the parametrizing curve to be isomorphic to the original one almost everywhere). The problem of resolution of singularities simply asks whether or not the singularities of any variety can be resolved. It is also of some interest if there is a systematic way of doing this.

1.1 A condensed historical account of the problem

Although the problem is much older, we start with Oscar Zariski. Zariski was arguably the leading algebraic geometer of the first half of the twentieth century: if Grothendieck is to be regarded as the father of modern algebraic geometry, then Zariski is the grandfather. He did his undergraduate studies in Kiev, and later moved to do his doctorate in Rome under Guido Castelnuovo. During his graduate studies he was very much influenced by what is now known as the Italian school of classical algebraic geometry, which is nowadays notorious for their usage of "geometric intuition" leading to some false proofs and untrue theorems.

But Zariski was more algebraically inclined than his Italian teachers. And even though he enjoyed the geometric way of thinking of the Italians, he also had some worries con-

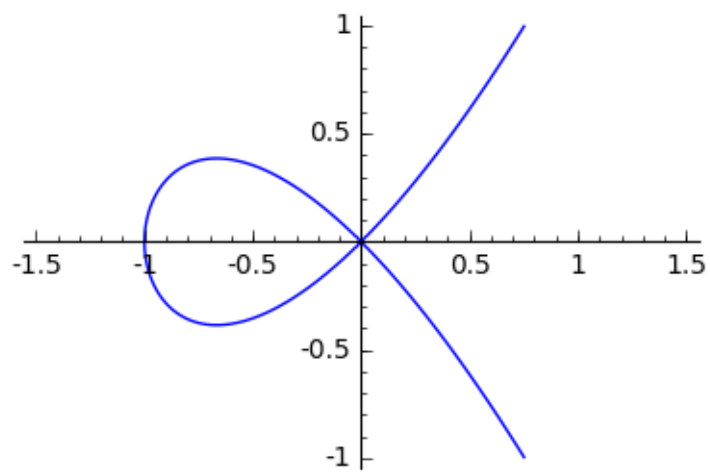


Figure 3: This kind of singularity is called a *node*.

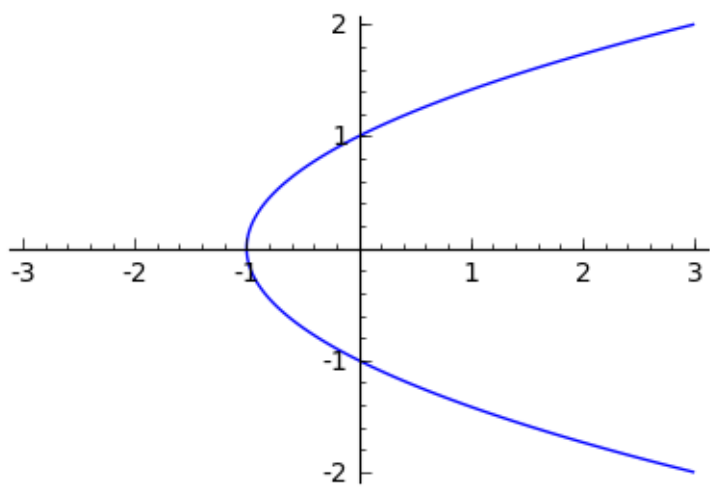


Figure 4: I swear, a parabola is not going to *always* work.

cerning their rigour. Because of these, Castelnuovo once stated: "Zariski, you are here with us but are not one of us" [Par]. This was not meant in a bad way, the methods of the Italian school had reached a dead-end, and would no longer be able to accomplish significant progress in the field, and Castelnuovo knew this all too well. But it would still take years before Zariski would start systematically rebuilding the foundations of algebraic geometry.

In 1932, now in the United States, Zariski began to work on his monograph *Algebraic Surfaces*, a task that would take him three years. The purpose of the monograph was to give a complete account of the results concerning algebraic curves obtained by the Italian school with rigorous proofs. However, while writing the book, he became increasingly certain that the entire foundations of algebraic geometry should be completely rebuilt using commutative algebra. He later stated himself: "working on that book took all my time because as I worked I became more and more disgusted with the kind of proofs that the Italian geometers were giving, and I started studying algebra seriously." [Par] He started incorporating recent results from commutative algebra achieved mainly by Noether, Krull and Dedekind, and casting everything in algebraic geometry in terms of the theory of commutative rings and their ideals.

After the completion of the monograph in 1935, Zariski went on to develop an abstract theory of algebraic geometry over an arbitrary (algebraically closed) ground field (instead of the coordinates of the points being complex numbers, they could be elements of some abstract field). It was during this time when he got interested in the resolution problem. The problem of resolution of singularities for higher dimensional varieties had long stood open, and many good mathematicians had given it a shot. Only some partial results had been achieved, and these were over complex numbers.

Zariski gave a simple proof for the resolution problem for surfaces using his notion of *normalization*, a term that should ring a bell to anyone who has studied algebraic geometry or commutative algebra. Resolution for surfaces is more complicated than for curves as the singularities of a surface need not to be confined in a finite set of points: the singular points can form curves as well. Normalizing a variety produces a variety whose singularities are of codimension two, which, in the case of surfaces, means that all singularities are point-singularities, i.e., the earlier complication is now gone! After normalization, resolving the singularities was fairly straightforward.

The resolution of singularities for surfaces had, however, essentially already been solved by the Italian algebraic geometers [Par]. But Zariski didn't stop there. Later, he was able to show that the singularities of three-folds (three dimensional varieties) over a field of characteristic zero (three dimensional varieties) can be resolved. This was a problem that had completely eluded the approaches of the Italian school, and was also the moment that proved to rest of the world how powerful algebraic methods could be in algebraic geometry.

This is however where the contributions of Zariski (essentially) end. For further progress some time had to pass, and another rebuilding of the foundations of algebraic geometry had to happen. Alexander Grothendieck, motivated by the famous Weil conjectures linking together number theory and geometry, began a systematic rebuilding of the whole field in mid 50s. The result was a very powerful theory of algebraic geometry, whose level of abstraction was something previously unseen in mathematics. Even Mumford, a student of Zariski who won the Fields medal in 1974, stated the following in a letter to Grothendieck: "... I should say that I find the style of the finished works, esp. EGA, to be difficult and sometimes unreadable, because of its attempt to reach superhuman level of completeness." [Mum] One can only imagine the struggle for those mathematicians that weren't quite as good as Mumford when trying to learn the theory. Such was the power of this theory, however, that the theory became universally accepted rather quickly.

At the time, resolution of singularities was considered one of the most important open problems in algebraic geometry, for it would enable one to transfer many questions concerning singular varieties to questions involving only nonsingular ones, which are better understood. Even Grothendieck considered the problem to be one of the two most important ones, alongside his standard conjectures (which, to this day, remain open).

In the 60s Heisuke Hironaka, another student of Zariski to be given the Fields medal, decided to attack the resolution problem. Zariski himself never truly tried to deploy the Grothendieck style of algebraic geometry. This was probably because of the great time investment required in order to learn to use it, combined with the fact that his own research was going well enough. [Par] But Hironaka, like many of the students of Zariski, fully endorsed this new theory. With the new tools given by the theory of schemes, he was able to do what Zariski himself had tried and failed: in the famous paper published in 1964 in *Annals of Mathematics*, Hironaka gave a complete proof for resolution of singularities over a ground field of characteristic zero.

The proof, originally around 200 pages long, quickly gained a reputation for being extremely complicated and hard to understand. However, in further research the proof has been simplified and shortened considerably. For example in [Włó] Włodarczyk gives a self contained proof for resolution of singularities via a Hironaka-style argument in around twenty pages! An overview of a Hironaka-style argument for proof of resolution of singularities in characteristic 0 is given in Section 4.

This still left open the finite characteristic case important in many applications to number theory. Partial results were obtained by Shreeram Abhyankar, another student of Zariski, who in 1966 published a proof for resolution of singularities for three-folds over algebraically closed fields of finite characteristic different from 2, 3 and 5 [HLOQ]. He later on went to generalize his result for three-folds in characteristic 2, 3 and 5, as well as giving a proof for resolution of singularities for arithmetic surfaces.

However, for a long time essentially no progress was made. Hironaka's argument

resisted all attempts of generalization to finite characteristic, and all algebraic approaches in the spirit of Zariski and his students seemed to fail as well. The initial success of the algebraic approach had blinded almost the entire field into thinking that this was the right way. The spell was finally broken by a young Dutch mathematician Aise Johan de Jong, who in a 1995 talk gave an outline for a very geometric proof for resolving singularities by means of so called alterations.

His proof, published in a 1996 article [Jong], worked just as well over finite characteristic. A circle had closed: first algebra had had to replace geometry when geometrical methods failed, and now geometry, when all algebraic approaches seemed to fail, replaced algebra. Perhaps the most striking trait of his proof was the fact that essentially everything needed was already well known for nearly twenty years before the proof [HLOQ], the ingenious part was how the results were put together.

The resolution given by alterations is not, however, a resolution in the traditional sense. Traditionally one wants the resolution to produce a variety that is *birational* to the original variety, i.e., it is isomorphic to the original variety outside some small subset. What de Jongs method gives is more like some kind of finite cover. But for many of the applications this is enough. The traditional problem of resolution of singularities in finite characteristic remains open.

2 Completions

This section is devoted to an important construction called *completion* which, together with localization, forms a very powerful way of looking at the structure of an algebraic variety near a point. Familiarity with basic algebraic geometry and commutative algebra is assumed.

We begin with a motivating example. Recall the nodal curve C from the first section, defined as the solution set of the polynomial $y^2 - x^3 - x^2$. At the origin the curve intersects itself, and it seems like the curve should, at least near the origin, consist of two components. But as $y^2 - x^3 - x^2$ is an irreducible polynomial, the coordinate ring $\mathcal{O}_C(C)$ is an integral domain, as is the localization $\mathcal{O}_{C,p}$ at origin p .

This can be thought in the following way. The open sets of the Zariski topology are just the curve C minus finitely many points, so they contain almost all of the curve C . The localization at origin gives essentially all information about the curve C found in arbitrarily small neighbourhoods of the origin, and as none of these is small enough to make C irreducible, the localization stays irreducible. It is as if algebra doesn't allow us to see close enough.

Of course analytically we may break the curve into to branches: the equation of the

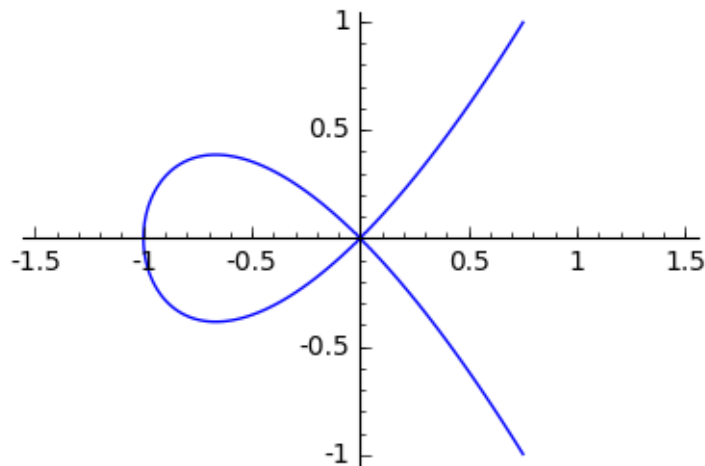


Figure 5: The nodal curve.

curve

$$y^2 = x^3 + x^2$$

can be solved to give

$$y = \pm\sqrt{x^3 + x^2} = \pm x\sqrt{1+x},$$

describing the two branches of the curve.

We may connect this back to algebraic geometry when we note that $\sqrt{1+x}$ can be expressed by its Taylor series. Hence, if we think $y^2 - x^3 - x^2$ as an element of the formal power series ring $k[[x, y]]$ instead of the polynomial ring $k[x, y]$, the equation $y^2 - x^3 - x^2$ cuts out a reducible subscheme of $\text{Spec} k[[x, y]]$, and the irreducible components correspond to the two branches at the origin. Somehow, when we passed into the ring of formal power series, we are now much closer to the origin than by localization.

As $k[[x, y]]$ is a local ring with maximal ideal (x, y) , the localization $k[x, y]_{(x, y)}$ embeds into it, and from this it is fairly easy to see that $\mathcal{O}_{C, p}$ embeds into $k[[x, y]]/(y^2 - x^3 - x^2)$. The idea of completion of local rings is exactly this: we want to get closer, so instead of just looking at the localization, we somehow replace the local ring with some sort of power series ring. We say that we pass into *formal neighbourhood* of a point p when we do this. The nice thing is that these are usually much simpler than the local rings: for example, if we have a nonsingular k -variety X of dimension d , where k is algebraically closed, then the completion $\hat{\mathcal{O}}_{X, p}$ of the local ring at a closed point p is isomorphic to $k[[x_1, \dots, x_d]]$.

2.1 Completion of topological abelian groups

Let G be a topological abelian group. We say that a sequence (x_i) in G is *Cauchy sequence* if for all neighbourhoods U of 0 we have $N_U \in \mathbb{N}$ such that $x_i - x_j \in U$ for all $i, j \geq N_U$. We say that G is *complete* if all Cauchy sequences converge to some value in G . Although this notion does make sense for non-Hausdorff groups too, from now on we will require complete groups to be Hausdorff.

Before continuing, we quickly recall the following useful fact of topological groups. If we set U_0 to be the intersection of all neighbourhoods of 0, then it is in fact true that U_0 is a subgroup of G . Moreover, this subgroup is closed, and it is zero if and only if G is Hausdorff. The topological group G/U_0 is Hausdorff and U_0 is contained in the kernel of any continuous homomorphism $G \rightarrow H$, where H is Hausdorff.

Definition 2.1. Let G be a topological abelian group. The (*Hausdorff*) *completion* of G , denoted by \widehat{G} , is "the smallest complete group where G can be mapped into". More precisely, this means that completion is a continuous group morphism $G \rightarrow \widehat{G}$, where \widehat{G} is complete, and for all continuous homomorphisms $G \rightarrow X$, where X is complete, we have a unique morphism such that the following diagram commutes:

$$\begin{array}{ccc} \widehat{G} & \xrightarrow{\quad \exists! \quad} & X \\ \uparrow & \nearrow & \\ G & & \end{array}$$

It is clear that this defines \widehat{G} up to unique isomorphism if it exists. Given a continuous homomorphism $f : G \rightarrow H$, the universal property induces a morphism $\widehat{f} : \widehat{G} \rightarrow \widehat{H}$, and it is easy to check that this defines a functor.

First property of the completion we are going to prove is the fact that it commutes with "passing into Hausdorffification".

Proposition 2.2. Let G be a topological abelian group and U_0 the intersection of all neighbourhoods of 0. If the completion of G/U_0 exist, then $G \rightarrow G/U_0 \rightarrow \widehat{(G/U_0)}$ is the completion of G .

Proof. Assume we have a morphism $G \rightarrow X$, where X is a complete topological group. As X is Hausdorff, we know that U_0 is contained in the kernel of our map, and we can find a unique morphism $G/U_0 \rightarrow X$ making the diagram

$$\begin{array}{ccc}
G/U_0 & & \\
\uparrow & \searrow \exists! & \\
G & \xrightarrow{\quad} & X
\end{array}$$

commute. We can now use the fact that the completion of G/U_0 is known to exist, and hence we have a unique map $\widehat{(G/U_0)} \rightarrow X$ making the upper triangle of

$$\begin{array}{ccc}
G/U_0 & \xrightarrow{\quad} & \widehat{(G/U_0)} \\
\uparrow & \searrow & \vdots \exists! \\
G & \xrightarrow{\quad} & X
\end{array}$$

commute. As $G \rightarrow G/U_0$ is surjective, the map $\widehat{(G/U_0)} \rightarrow X$ is also the only one making

$$\begin{array}{ccc}
\widehat{(G/U_0)} & \dashrightarrow \exists! & X \\
\uparrow & \nearrow & \\
G & &
\end{array}$$

commute, and hence we are done. \square

Next we will show that the completion always exists when G is first countable. The idea is exactly the same one that is used when completing metric spaces.

Denote by $s(G)$ the set of Cauchy sequences in group G . This is a group: if (x_i) is a Cauchy sequence, then so is $(-x_i)$ for negation is homeomorphism. If (x_i) and (y_i) are Cauchy sequences, then so is $(x_i + y_i)$. This is not too hard to see: for all neighbourhoods U of the origin, we have smaller neighbourhoods V_1 and V_2 such that $V_1 + V_2 \subset U$ by continuity of summation. Then we may choose N to be large enough so that $x_i - x_j \in V_1$ and $y_i - y_j \in V_2$ for all $i, j \geq N$. Now $(x_i + y_i) - (x_j + y_j) = (x_i - x_j) + (y_i - y_j) \in U$. Similarly we can see that $s_0(G)$, the sequences of G that converge to 0, is a subgroup of $s(G)$. We define a topological group G' algebraically as $s(G)/s_0(G)$.

Next we define G' topologically. For every neighbourhood U of 0, let $U' \subset G'$ consist of those equivalence classes $[(x_i)]$ for which there exists a neighbourhood ϵ of origin, such that $x_i + \epsilon \subset U$ for $i \gg 0$. This is clearly independent of the choice of the representative (x_i) . This forms a neighbourhood basis for 0 in G' inducing a structure of a topological group, as the next lemma shows.

Lemma 2.3. *The open sets U' define a structure of a topological group on G' when we give G' the topology where the open sets are of form*

$$\{O \subset G \mid \text{for all } x \in G \text{ we have } U' \text{ s.t. } x + U' \subset O\}.$$

In this topology U' form a neighbourhood basis for 0 (we do not yet claim these to be open, although it is true).

Proof. From basic properties of topological groups, it suffices to show that the following three properties hold:

1. For all U', V' we have W' such that $W' \subset U' \cap V'$.
2. For all U' we have V' such that $V' + V' \subset U'$.
3. For all U' we have V' such that $V' \subset -U'$.

Verifying these conditions is fairly straightforward:

1. Here we may take $W = U \cap V$. For if $x \in W'$, then for some ϵ we have that $x_i + \epsilon \subset W$ for i large enough, and hence also $x_i + \epsilon \subset U, V$ for such i .
2. Because G is a topological group, we may choose a neighbourhood V of the origin such that $V + V \subset U$. Assume $x, y \in V'$, so that we have ϵ such that the open sets $x_i + \epsilon$ and $y_i + \epsilon$ are contained in V for $i \gg 0$. But now $(x_i + \epsilon) + (y_i + \epsilon)$ is contained in U , and therefore $x' + y' \in U'$. This shows that $V' + V' \subset U'$.
3. Clearly we may choose $V = -U$.

This finishes the proof. □

Next we show the continuity of our homomorphism $G \rightarrow G'$.

Lemma 2.4. *The map $G \rightarrow G'$ defined earlier is continuous.*

Proof. It is enough to show continuity at the origin. This is shown if we show that the preimage of U' is U . It is clear that if $x \in G$ is not in U , then its image in G' does not lie inside U' . On the other hand, if $x \in U$, then by continuity of the addition, we see that we can find an open set ϵ containing 0 such that $x + \epsilon \subset U$. Hence the image of x lies in U' . □

We are getting ready to prove that $G \rightarrow G'$ is the completion. First, however, we note that the sets U' are actually open, and after that we are finally able to conclude that G' is complete.

Lemma 2.5. *The sets $U' \subset G'$ are open.*

Proof. Let $x \in U'$, i.e., we have an open set ϵ containing 0 such that $x_i + \epsilon \subset U$ for large i . Now I claim that $x + \epsilon' \subset U'$, which would finish the proof. If $y \in x + \epsilon'$, then we have an open neighbourhood δ of origin such that $y_i - x_i + \delta \subset \epsilon$ for large i . But as $y_i = (y_i - x_i) + x_i$, we see that for $i \gg 0$

$$\begin{aligned} y_i + \delta &= x_i + (y_i - x_i) + \delta \\ &\subset x_i + \epsilon \\ &\subset U, \end{aligned}$$

proving the claim. □

Lemma 2.6. *If G is first countable, then so is G' .*

Proof. If (U_i) is a countable open neighbourhood basis for $0 \in G$, then (U'_i) is a countable open neighbourhood basis for $0 \in G'$, proving the claim. □

Lemma 2.7. *Assume that G is first countable. Now every Cauchy sequence in G' converges.*

Proof. Let (U_i) and (U'_i) be as in the previous lemma. We may assume that U_i , and hence U'_i , are descending, i.e., $U_i \supset U_{i+1}$.

Let $(x^i)_i$ be a Cauchy sequence in G' . We can pass to a subsequence such that $x^{i_1} - x^{i_2} \in U'_n$ for $i_1, i_2 \geq n$, and to prove the convergence of the original sequence, it is enough to show that the new sequence converges. Each x^i is represented by some Cauchy sequence $(x^i_j)_j$ in G , we may pick representative such that $x^{i_1}_{j_1} - x^{i_2}_{j_2} \in U_n$ for all $j_1, j_2 \geq n$.

I claim that $(x^i)_i$ converges to the element x of G' represented by $x = (x^j_j)_j$. In order to show that this is indeed the case, we need to show that, for large i , we have $x^i - x \in U'_n$. Let i be such that $U_i + U_i + U_i + U_i \subset U_n$. Now for all $m \geq j \geq i$ we have

$$\begin{aligned} x^i_j - x^j_j &= (x^i_j - x^i_m) + (x^i_m - x^j_m) + (x^j_m - x^j_j) \\ &\in U_j + U_i + U_j \\ &\subset U_i + U_i + U_i, \end{aligned}$$

and hence, for large j , we have $x^i_j - x^j_j + U_i \subset U_n$, proving that $x^i - x \in U'_n$. This concludes the proof. □

Lemma 2.8. *The group G' is Hausdorff and if G is Hausdorff, then $G \rightarrow G'$ is a topological embedding.*

Proof. Let \mathcal{U} contain all the neighbourhoods of 0 in G . To prove that G' is Hausdorff, it is enough to show that $\bigcap_{U \in \mathcal{U}} U' = \{0\}$. If x lies in U' , for all its representatives (x_i) we have that $x_i \in U$ for large i . Hence if $x \in \bigcap_{U \in \mathcal{U}} U'$, then this means that x_i converges to 0, i.e., $x = 0 \in G'$.

If G is Hausdorff and $x \neq y$ are two of its elements, then $x - y$ is nonzero, and we have a neighbourhood U of the origin such that $x - y \notin U$. Therefore the images of x and y in G' cannot coincide, and we can conclude that $G \rightarrow G'$ is an injection.

Finally, we need to show that the map $G \rightarrow \text{im}(G)$ is a homeomorphism. But we have done the essential work already: by the proof of 2.4 it is clear that the image of an open neighbourhood U of the origin is just $U' \cap \text{im}(G)$. \square

Now we are finally ready to prove the existence of completion.

Theorem 2.9. *If G is first countable then $G \rightarrow G'$ is the completion of G .*

Proof. At least we know that G' is complete. Assume then that X is a complete topological group, and $f : G \rightarrow X$ a continuous homomorphism. It is clear by the definition of G' that its elements can be approximated by a sequences contained in the image of G . If we want to extend f into a continuous function $f' : G' \rightarrow X$, then for a point $x \in G'$ represented by a Cauchy sequence (x_i) in G , we must have that $f'(x) = \lim f(x_i)$. We are done if we can show that f' defined as above gives a well defined continuous morphism $G' \rightarrow X$.

First of all, as $f : G \rightarrow X$ is continuous, it is easy to see that it sends Cauchy sequences in G to Cauchy sequences in X . Hence at least the limit $\lim f(x_i)$ exists. If the Cauchy sequences (x_i) and (x'_i) define the same element of G , then $x_i - x'_i \rightarrow 0$, and thus $f(x_i) - f(x'_i) = f(x_i - x'_i) \rightarrow 0$. This proves that our map f' is a well defined function $G' \rightarrow X$. It is also easy to see that this is a homomorphism of groups. The final thing left is to show that f' is continuous.

Let $V \subset X$ be an open neighbourhood of 0. Let $0 \in V_2 \subset V$ be an open set such that $V_2 + V_2 \subset V$, and U_2 the preimage of V_2 in G . I claim that f' sends U'_2 into V . This is almost trivial: if x represented by (x_i) lies in U'_2 , then for large i , $x_i \in U_2$, and hence $f(x_i) \in V_2$. But from this it follows that $f(x_i) + V_2 \subset V$ for $i \gg 0$ and we can conclude, using the next lemma, that $f'(x) \in V$, which is exactly what we wanted. \square

Lemma 2.10. *If (x_i) is a convergent sequence in a topological abelian group G such that for some open set ϵ containing 0 $x_i + \epsilon \subset V$ for $i \gg 0$, then $x_i \rightarrow x \in V$.*

Proof. As $x_i \rightarrow x$, we must have $x - x_i \in \epsilon$ for large i , from which it follows that $x \in x_i + \epsilon \subset V$. \square

This general construction simultaneously takes care of, for example, completing rational numbers in the usual topology to obtain real numbers R_p , in the p -adic topology to obtain p -adic numbers \mathbb{Q}_p , completing $k[x_1, \dots, x_n]$ in a specific topology to obtain $k[[x_1, \dots, x_n]]$ and much more. We gather here some now trivial properties of the completion.

Corollary 2.11. *The completion of a discrete topological group G is G .*

Corollary 2.12. *Let H be a subgroup of first countable Hausdorff G . Now the closure of H in \widehat{G} is the completion of H .*

Proof. Now H is first countable and Hausdorff, and using the construction for the completion we just have described, the claim is trivial, as the closure of H in \widehat{G} is the set of points that can be approximated by sequences in H (\widehat{G} is first countable, otherwise this would not necessarily hold). \square

Filtrations

A special kind of topology often encountered in algebra is one given by *filtrations*. If G is a topological abelian group, then a filtration is just a descending chain

$$G = G_0 \supset G_1 \supset G_2 \supset \dots$$

of subgroups. The filtration induces a structure of a topological group, where G_i forms a neighbourhood basis for 0 (the argumentation is almost identical to 2.3). As the G_i are subgroups, for all $x \in G_i$ we have $x + G_i \subset G_i$, and therefore the sets G_i will be open in the topology.

G is necessarily first countable, and Hausdorff if and only if $\bigcap_i G_i$ is the trivial subgroup. Assuming this is the case, we can give another construction for the completion of G . It is based on the fact that for every equivalence class of Cauchy sequences, one can choose a representative (x_i) such that $x_i - x_j \in G_n$ for all $i, j \geq n$. Therefore x_i defines the following values up to G_i . Such sequences are clearly in one to one correspondence with elements of $\prod_i (G/G_i)$ where the higher coordinates agree with the i^{th} one modulo G_i . This is actually a special case of a general construction known as the *projective limit*. Usually this is denoted by $\varprojlim (G/G_i)$.

This construction is actually quite useful, as we shall see in a moment. Define a map $\Delta_G : \prod_i (G/G_i) \rightarrow \prod_i (G/G_i)$ by sending $([x_i])$ to $([x_i - x_{i+1}])$. The following proposition is just a restatement of the definition.

Proposition 2.13. *The limit $\varprojlim (G/G_i)$ is exactly the kernel of Δ_G .*

Using the above proposition, we can obtain some nice results rather easily using just a tiny bit of basic homological algebra. Namely:

Theorem 2.14. *Let H be a (topological) subgroup of G . Now we have a canonical isomorphism*

$$\varprojlim(\overline{G}/\overline{G_i}) \cong \varprojlim(G/G_i) / \varprojlim(H/H_i),$$

where $\overline{G} = G/H$, $\overline{G_i}$ is the image of G_i in \overline{G} , and $H_i = H \cap G_i$.

Proof. For each i , we clearly have the exact sequence

$$0 \rightarrow H/H_i \rightarrow G/G_i \rightarrow \overline{G}/\overline{G_i} \rightarrow 0$$

This gives rise to the following commutative diagram with exact rows:

$$\begin{array}{ccccccc} 0 & \longrightarrow & \prod_i(H/H_i) & \longrightarrow & \prod_i(G/G_i) & \longrightarrow & \prod_i(\overline{G}/\overline{H_i}) \longrightarrow 0 \\ & & \downarrow \Delta_H & & \downarrow \Delta_G & & \downarrow \Delta_{\overline{G}} \\ 0 & \longrightarrow & \prod_i(H/H_i) & \longrightarrow & \prod_i(G/G_i) & \longrightarrow & \prod_i(\overline{G}/\overline{H_i}) \longrightarrow 0 \end{array}$$

The snake lemma gives us the exact sequence

$$0 \rightarrow \varprojlim(H/H_i) \rightarrow \varprojlim(G/G_i) \rightarrow \varprojlim(\overline{G}/\overline{G_i}) \rightarrow \text{coker}(\Delta_H)$$

which proves our claim, as $\text{coker}(\Delta_H) = 0$ by the next lemma. \square

Lemma 2.15. *The map Δ_G is surjective.*

Proof. Let us have an element $x = (x_i) \in \prod_i(G/G_i)$. We construct an element $x' = (x'_i)$ that maps to x . Pick $x'_1 = x_1$ and $x'_2 = 0$, so that we have an element $(x'_1, x'_2, 0, 0, \dots)$ mapping to $(x_1, x_2, 0, 0, \dots)$.

Assume we have chosen $(x'_1, \dots, x'_{n+1}, 0, \dots)$ mapping to $(x_1, \dots, x_n, x'_{n+1}, 0, \dots)$. As the map $G/G_{n+2} \rightarrow G/G_{n+1}$ is surjective, we may choose x'_{n+2} in such a way that the difference $x'_{n+1} - x'_{n+2}$ equals x_{n+1} . But now $(x'_1, \dots, x'_{n+2}, 0, \dots)$ maps to $(x_1, \dots, x_{n+1}, x'_{n+2}, 0, \dots)$ and we are done by induction. \square

We have the following immediate corollary:

Corollary 2.16. *Let G be a topological group, whose topology is given by a filtration, and $H \leq G$ a subgroup. Now we have a canonical isomorphism*

$$\widehat{(\overline{G}/\overline{H})} \cong \widehat{G}/\widehat{H}.$$

Proof. This is a trivial consequence of the previous discussion. The fact that G is Hausdorff is used for identifying $\varprojlim (G/G_i)$ with the completion, and the fact that H is closed is necessary to make sure that G/H is Hausdorff. \square

This looks a bit like the completion might be exact, at least in good cases. But it is quite dangerous to try to think about these properties in that way: the category of topological abelian groups is not abelian as there is too much freedom in the choice of topology, and therefore one has to be quite careful when talking about exact sequences. This can, however, be fixed by restricting into a suitable subcategory which is restrictive enough on topology.

Quite often, a convenient way of specifying an element of \widehat{G} , where G has the topology induced by a filtration, is to give an infinite sum

$$\sum_i x_i$$

where $x_i \in G_i$. This is interpreted as the limit of the Cauchy sequence formed by the partial sums. It is clear that every element of the completion \widehat{G} can be expressed in this form.

2.2 Completions of topological rings and modules

A *topological ring* A is a topological abelian group with a continuous multiplication map $A \times A \rightarrow A$ satisfying the ring axioms. If A is a topological ring, then, quite naturally, a *topological A -module* is a topological abelian group together with a continuous multiplication $A \times M \rightarrow M$. We define the *completion* of a topological ring and a topological module to be the completion as a topological abelian group.

Using the constructions we have for completion, it is easy to see that if A is Hausdorff and first countable, then \widehat{A} is a topological ring, and similarly if M is Hausdorff and first countable, then \widehat{M} is both a topological A and a topological \widehat{A} -module.

If A is a ring (M an A -module), then a *filtration* on A (on M) is a descending sequence $I_1 \supset I_2 \supset \dots$ of ideals (descending sequence $M_1 \supset M_2 \supset \dots$ of submodules). Again, it is easy to see that filtration on A gives it a structure of a topological ring, and a filtration (M_i) on M satisfying $I_j M_i \subset M_{i+j}$ gives rise to a structure of a topological A -module.

The most common filtration occurring in commutative algebra is the *I -adic* filtration: we have an ideal I of A , and we set $I_i = I^i$. Similarly we have the *I -adic* filtration on M defined by $M_i = I^i M$. The induced topology is called the *I -adic topology*. Two well known theorems in commutative algebra can be given a topological meaning.

Proposition 2.17. (*Topological Krull's intersection theorem*) *Let A be a local Noetherian ring and I a proper ideal. Now the I -adic topology on A and on finite A -modules M is Hausdorff.*

Proof. The usual statement is that the intersection $\bigcap_i I^i M$ is zero, which is equivalent to the filtration inducing a Hausdorff topology. \square

Proposition 2.18. (*Topological Artin-Rees lemma*) *Let A be a Noetherian ring and I its proper ideal. Give the ring A the I -adic topology. If M is a finitely generated A -module with I -adic topology and N is a submodule of M , then the topology N inherits from M is exactly the I -adic topology.*

Proof. Again, the usual statement is just that the I -adic filtration on M restricts to a I -good filtration on N , which is easily seen to prove the claim. \square

Assume that the ring A is Noetherian. We can now restrict our attention to the category of finitely generated I -adic A -modules. The objects are just finitely generated A -modules with the I -adic topology and the morphisms are the continuous A -linear maps. However, if $f : M \rightarrow N$ is any map of A -modules, then $f(I^i M) \subset I^i N$, and hence the morphism is seen to be continuous in the I -adic topology. Hence, categorically, the finitely generated I -adic A -modules are equivalent to finitely generated A -modules. Especially we can conclude that they form an abelian category.

Now we can finally interpret the proof of 2.14 as saying that the completion is an exact functor. But for future use, it is convenient to note that the completion coincides with taking the tensor product with \widehat{A} . As the completion $M \rightarrow \widehat{M}$ is a map to a \widehat{A} -module, we have the usual map $\widehat{A} \otimes_A M \rightarrow \widehat{M}$. This is easily seen to define a natural transformation, which in good situations is an isomorphism.

Proposition 2.19. *Let A be a Noetherian ring and M a finitely generated A -module. Now the natural map $\widehat{A} \otimes_A M \rightarrow \widehat{M}$ is an isomorphism.*

Proof. This is clear if M is a free module. In the general case, as A is Noetherian, we know that M is *finitely presented*, i.e., we have an exact sequence

$$F_1 \rightarrow F_0 \rightarrow M \rightarrow 0$$

where the modules F_i are free. Using what we already know for free A -modules, we obtain the commutative diagram

$$\begin{array}{ccccccc} \widehat{A} \otimes_A F_1 & \longrightarrow & \widehat{A} \otimes_A F_0 & \longrightarrow & \widehat{A} \otimes_A M & \longrightarrow & 0 \\ \downarrow & & \downarrow & & & & \\ \widehat{F}_1 & \longrightarrow & \widehat{F}_0 & \longrightarrow & \widehat{M} & \longrightarrow & 0 \end{array}$$

where the vertical maps are isomorphisms. Now we can use the uniqueness of cokernels to conclude that the natural map $\widehat{A} \otimes_A M \rightarrow \widehat{M}$ is an isomorphism. \square

In the process we have seen that \widehat{A} is a flat A -algebra.

Proposition 2.20. *Assume that A is a Noetherian ring. Now the completion \widehat{A} is a flat A -algebra.*

Proof. As tensoring with \widehat{A} is the same as completion for all *finitely generated* A -modules, we see that $\widehat{A} \otimes_A$ preserves all short exact sequences of finitely generated A -modules. But it is well known that this is equivalent to \widehat{A} being flat. \square

From now on, assume that we are dealing with a local ring A with maximal ideal m_A and residue field $K = A/m_A$. Moreover, unless otherwise stated, all completions will be taken with respect to the m_A -adic topology.

Proposition 2.21. *The completion \widehat{A} is a local ring with maximal ideal \widehat{m}_A and residue field K .*

Proof. We know that $\widehat{A}/\widehat{m}_A \cong (\widehat{A/m_A})$ naturally, and as A/m_A is K with the discrete topology, the left hand side of the equation is K . This proves that \widehat{m}_A is a maximal ideal.

In order to see that it is the only one, we need to show that \widehat{m}_A contains all nonunits of \widehat{A} . This is perhaps most easily seen from the limit construction: the completion of m_A consists of exactly those elements of $\varprojlim (A/m_A^i)$, whose first coordinate is zero. If this is not the case, then in all coordinates we have something in A/m_A^i not lying in the image of m_A . But this means that the coordinates are units, and hence the element is invertible as well, proving that all elements lying outside \widehat{m}_A are units. \square

2.3 Hensel's lemma

One of the nicest property of complete rings is what is known as the Hensel's lemma. The version we are going to give states that if a polynomial $f \in A[x]$ has a simple root in A/m_A , then it also has a root in \widehat{A} .

Theorem 2.22. Hensel's lemma. *Let f be a polynomial in $A[x]$ which has a simple root $[a_0] \in A/m_A$. Now there is an element $a \in \widehat{A}$ such that $a = a_0$ modulo m_A and $f(a) = 0$.*

Proof. It is enough to find sums $a_0 + a_1 + \dots + a_n$, where $a_i \in m_A^i$, such that $f(a_0 + \dots + a_n) \in m_A^{n+1}$ for all n . This is because the polynomial f clearly defines a continuous map $A \rightarrow A$ and $f(a_0 + \dots + a_n) \rightarrow 0$ as n tends to infinity. Thus, if we set $a = a_0 + a_1 + \dots$, then $f(a) = 0$.

Assume we have already chosen a_0, \dots, a_n , and would like to choose $a_{n+1} \in m_A^{n+1}$ in a way that our inductive assumption would still hold. Now we have

$$f(a_0 + \dots + a_n + a_{n+1}) = f(a_0 + \dots + a_n) + f'(a_0 + \dots + a_n)a_{n+1} + ba_{n+1}^2$$

where $b \in A$. If we look at the right hand side in A/m_A^{n+2} , we obtain the following equation:

$$0 = f(a_0 + \dots + a_n) + f'(a_0 + \dots + a_n)a_{n+1}.$$

now $f'(a_0 + \dots + a_n) = f'(a_0) \neq 0$ in A/m_A , and hence $f'(a_0 + \dots + a_n)$ is invertible in A/m_A^{n+2} . We may now solve a_{n+1} from the equation:

$$a_{n+1} = -\frac{f(a_0 + \dots + a_n)}{f'(a_0 + \dots + a_n)},$$

and we are done by induction. \square

2.4 Structure of completions of local Noetherian rings

One of the great things about completion is how it simplifies the theory of local rings. Although localization tries to encapsulate only the local information near a point in a variety, it usually contains very much information, as the open sets of the Zariski topology are so large. Therefore the structure of the local rings is also quite varied. However, once we require completeness, the rings have surprisingly little structural freedom. In this subsection we concentrate on local k -algebras where k is a field of characteristic 0.

Lemma 2.23. *Let A contain a field of characteristic 0. Now \hat{A} contains a coordinate field, i.e., a field mapping isomorphically onto A/m_A in the quotient map $\hat{A} \rightarrow \hat{A}/\widehat{m_A} = A/m_A$.*

Proof. Clearly A contains a field of characteristic 0 if and only if it contains \mathbb{Q} . Denote by K the residue field A/m_A .

Let $(\alpha_i)_{i \in I}$ be a transcendence basis for K over \mathbb{Q} , i.e., a collection of elements of K satisfying no nontrivial algebraic relations over \mathbb{Q} such that K is algebraic over $\mathbb{Q}((\alpha_i)_{i \in I})$. Now we can clearly choose elements $a_i \in A$ such that $a_i = \alpha_i$ modulo m_A , and thus we see that $\mathbb{Q}((\alpha_i)_{i \in I}) \cong \mathbb{Q}((a_i)_{i \in I}) \subset A$. Hence $\mathbb{Q}((a_i)_{i \in I})$ is also contained in \hat{A} .

Now we may extend $\mathbb{Q}((a_i)_{i \in I})$ into K by using Hensel's and (if needed) transfinite induction. This works because if we have an intermediate field extension $\mathbb{Q}((a_i)_{i \in I}) \subset M \subset K$, then also M has characteristic 0, and hence any element of K is a simple root of a polynomial with coefficients in M , and hence can be lifted to \hat{A} by Hensel's lemma. \square

To make use of the previous result, we introduce a useful construction. Given a (not necessarily local) ring A , we can construct the *graded ring* associated to I -adic filtration, denoted by $\text{gr}_I(A)$ or just $\text{gr}(A)$, as follows: as an abelian group, it is just the direct sum $\bigoplus_{i=0}^{\infty} (I^i/I^{i+1})$. To define it as a graded ring, we simply note that the map $(I^i/I^{i+1}) \times (I^j/I^{j+1}) \rightarrow I^{i+j}/I^{i+j+1}$ induced by the multiplication of A is well defined.

Assume that we have a morphism of $f : A \rightarrow B$ of general commutative rings, and let us have ideals $I \subset A$ and $J \subset B$ such that $fI \subset J$. Now also $fI^i \subset J^i$, and therefore we may define a map $\text{gr}_I(A) \rightarrow \text{gr}_J(B)$ of graded rings.

Lemma 2.24. *Let us have a homomorphism $f : A \rightarrow B$ of rings, and ideals $I \subset A$ and $J \subset B$ be such that $fI \subset J$ and the induced map $A/I \rightarrow B/J$ is a surjection. If the image of I generates J over B , then the associated map $\text{gr}(A) \rightarrow \text{gr}(B)$ is surjective.*

Proof. It is enough to show that for all i , the degree i part of the associated map is surjective. The case $i = 0$ has already been taken care of as $A/I \rightarrow B/J$ was assumed to be surjective. By the assumption that fI generates J over B , we see that fI^i generates J^i over B . Hence the image of I^i/I^{i+1} generates J^i/J^{i+1} over B/J . But as J^i/J^{i+1} can be also thought as an A/I algebra, and as $A/I \rightarrow B/J$ is surjective, and finally as the associated map $I^i/I^{i+1} \rightarrow J^i/J^{i+1}$ is a map of (A/I) -modules, we see that the map $I^i/I^{i+1} \rightarrow J^i/J^{i+1}$ must be surjective. \square

Using the above lemma, we can prove an important theorem concerning the structure of completions.

Theorem 2.25. *Let A be a Noetherian local ring containing a field of characteristic 0. Now \widehat{A} is isomorphic to $K[[x_1, \dots, x_n]]/I$, where $K = A/m_A$.*

Proof. As A is Noetherian, the maximal ideal m_A is generated by a finite collection a_1, \dots, a_n of elements. Moreover the images of these elements in \widehat{A} generate the maximal ideal \widehat{m}_A . As K is contained in \widehat{A} , we get a map of rings $K[x_1, \dots, x_n] \rightarrow \widehat{A}$ which sends x_i to a_i . If we denote by I the ideal of $K[x_1, \dots, x_n]$ generated by all the x_i , then we can use the above lemma to see that the associated map $\text{gr}_I(K[x_1, \dots, x_n]) \rightarrow \text{gr}_{\widehat{m}_A}(\widehat{A})$ is surjective. But this means that $K[x_1, \dots, x_n]/I^i \rightarrow \widehat{A}/\widehat{m}_A^i$ is surjective for all i .

We notice that $\varprojlim (K[x_1, \dots, x_n]/I^i) = K[[x_1, \dots, x_n]]$ and $\varprojlim (\widehat{A}/\widehat{m}_A^i) = \widehat{A}$, and hence we are done using the next lemma. \square

Lemma 2.26. *Let $G \rightarrow H$ be a map of abelian groups with filtrations (G_i) and (H_i) respectively. Assume that the image of G_i is contained in H_i , i.e., that we have induced maps $G/G_i \rightarrow H/H_i$. If these induced maps are surjective, then so is the limit map $\varprojlim (G/G_i) \rightarrow \varprojlim (H/H_i)$.*

Proof. This is essentially proven in 2.14. \square

One of the nicer theorem concerning completions tells us, among other things, that if we have a regular point p on a variety X , then formally locally the variety looks like an affine space near the point p , i.e., $\widehat{\mathcal{O}}_{X,p} \cong K[[x_1, \dots, x_n]]$. Before proving this, however, we need a lemma.

Lemma 2.27. *Let A be a regular local ring of dimension d , $K = A/m_A$, and let m_A be generated by a regular sequence a_1, \dots, a_d . Now the associated graded ring is isomorphic to $K[x_1, \dots, x_d]$ via a map $K[x_1, \dots, x_d] \rightarrow \text{gr}_{m_A}(A)$ sending x_i to the image of a_i in m_A/m_A^2 .*

Proof. As a_i generate the maximal ideal of A , we see that the map $k[x_1, \dots, x_d] \rightarrow \text{gr}(A)$ is surjective (it is clear that $\text{gr}_I(k[x_1, \dots, x_d])$, where $I = (x_1, \dots, x_d)$, is just $k[x_1, \dots, x_d]$ with the usual grading). We need to show that this is an injection, which is equivalent to stating that for all nonzero homogeneous polynomials F we have $F(a_1, \dots, a_d) \neq 0$.

Assume that this is not the case, i.e., we have some nonzero homogeneous F of degree n such that $F(a_1, \dots, a_d) = 0$. We can lift the coefficients of F from K to A and obtain a homogeneous polynomial $\tilde{F} \in A[x]$ such that $\tilde{F}(a_1, \dots, a_d) \in m_A^{n+1}$. Thus for some homogeneous polynomial H of degree $n+1$, we have that $(\tilde{F} - H)(a_1, \dots, a_d) = 0$, i.e., we have a nontrivial algebraic relation, defined by a polynomial $f \in A[x]$ with no constant terms, among the a_i .

But this leads to a contradiction. If x_1 divides f , we are done, as a_1 is a zerodivisor. Otherwise we move to modulo a_1 and to a new polynomial $f(0, x_2, \dots, x_d)$. Then we do the same thing for a_2 and a_3 and so on, until we find that some a_i is a zerodivisor modulo a_1, \dots, a_{i-1} . This must happen at least when $i = d$, as the polynomial f had no constant terms. This concludes the proof. \square

Theorem 2.28. *Let A be a regular local ring of dimension d . Now there is an isomorphism $K[[x_1, \dots, x_d]] \xrightarrow{\sim} \hat{A}$, where $K = A/m_A$, and x_1, \dots, x_d is sent to an image of a regular sequence a_1, \dots, a_d generating m_A in \hat{A} .*

Proof. Let a_1, \dots, a_d be a regular sequence generating the maximal ideal m_A of A . By the previous lemma we have that the map $\text{gr}_I(K[x_1, \dots, x_d]) \rightarrow \text{gr}_{m_A}(A)$, where $I = (x_1, \dots, x_d)$, associated to the map sending x_i to a_i is an isomorphism. By dimensionality, we can therefore conclude that $K[x_1, \dots, x_d]/I^i \rightarrow A/m_A^i$ is an isomorphism for all i , which shows that the respective completions are isomorphic as well, proving the theorem. \square

3 Blowing Up

One of the most common ways of getting rid of singularities is called *blowing up*. The simplest case is blowing up a point on a plane, which we are going to introduce through an example now. Recall our old friend, the nodal curve, which has a singularity at the origin. We are going to get rid of the singularity by blowing up the origin.

We begin by mapping each point of the curve, except the origin, into a three dimensional space via the map that sends (x, y) to $(x, y, y/x)$. The z -coordinate is just the slope of the direct line connecting the point (x, y) with the origin.

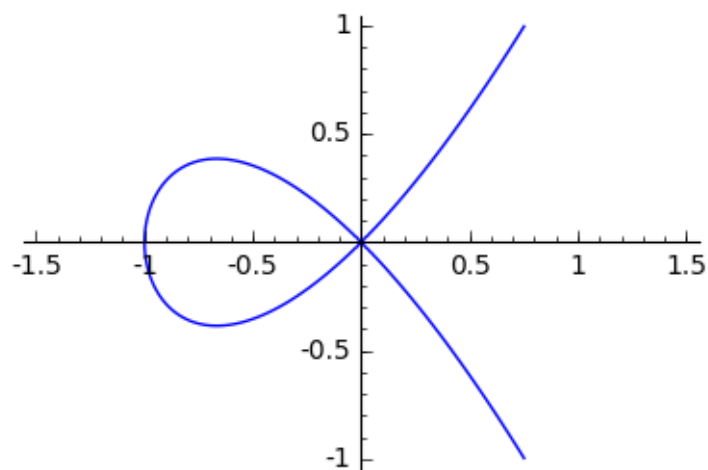


Figure 6: The nodal curve.

4 Hironaka's Proof

5 de Jong's Proof

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