

FOURIER ANALYSIS AND GEOMETRIC COMBINATORICS

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ABSTRACT. This article is based on the series of lectures on the interaction of Fourier analysis and geometric combinatorics delivered by the author in Padova at the Minicorsi di Analisi Matematica in June, 2002.

This paper is based on the lectures the author gave in Padova at the Minicorsi di Analisi Matematica in June, 2002. The author wishes to thank the organizers, the participants, and the fellow lecturers for many interesting and useful remarks. The author also wishes to thank Leonardo Colzani, Julia Garibaldi, and Derrick Hart for many useful comments and suggestions about the content and style of the paper.

The main theme of this paper is an old and beautiful subject of geometric combinatorics. We will not even attempt to cover anything resembling a significant slice of this broad and influential discipline. See, for example, [PaAg95] for a thorough description of this subject. The purpose of this article is to describe Szekely's ([Sz97]) beautiful and elementary proof of the Szemerédi-Trotter incidence theorem ([ST83]), a result that found a tremendous number of applications in combinatorics, analysis, and analytic number theory. We shall describe some of the consequences of this seminal result and its interaction with problems and techniques of Fourier analysis and additive number theory.

This paper is organized into six sections: Section I contains Szekely's proof of the Szemerédi-Trotter incidence theorem. We also explain how a modification of the same proof can be used to deduce a weighted version of this result and indicate an application of weighted incidence theory to the study of diophantine equations. We complete the section by proving corollaries of Theorem 0.1 on distance sets and sumsets. In Section II we use incidence theory to prove that the unit disc in the plane does not possess an orthogonal basis of exponentials. Section III describes a connection between incidence theory and Andrews' theorem on the number of vertices of convex polyhedra. Section IV features a geometric proof of a distance set estimate for well-distributed sets and applications to the

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study of existence of orthogonal exponential bases in higher dimensions. Section V examines incidence theory and its consequences in the context of finite fields. Finally, Section VI establishes an explicit connection between the Erdos Distance Problem, studied in Section IV, and its continuous analog, the Falconer Distance Conjecture, typically studied using Fourier methods.

Definition. An incidence of a point and a line is a pair (p, l) , where p is a point, l is a line, and p lies on l .

Theorem 0.1. (*Szemerédi-Trotter*) Let I denote the number of incidences of a set of n points and m lines (or m strictly convex closed curves). Then

$$(0.1) \quad I \lesssim n + m + (nm)^{\frac{2}{3}},$$

where here and throughout the paper, $A \lesssim B$ means that there exists a positive constant C such that $A \leq CB$.

Quite often in applications, one uses the following "weighted" version of the Szemerédi-Trotter theorem due to L. Székely ([Sz97]).

Theorem 0.1'. Given a set of n points and m simple (no self-intersections) curves in the plane, such that any two curves intersect in at most α points and any two points belong to at most β curves, the number of incidences is at most $C(\alpha\beta)^{\frac{1}{3}}(nm)^{\frac{2}{3}} + m + 5\beta n$.

The probabilistic proof of Theorem 0.1 (due to Székely) given below, can be modified (as it is done in [Sz97], Theorem 8) to yield Theorem 0.1'. We outline these modifications at the end of Section I below where we also briefly describe some of the applications of weighted incidence theory to the theory of diophantine equations.

Corollary 0.2. Let S be a subset of \mathbb{R}^2 of cardinality n . Let $\Delta(S) = \{|x - y| : x, y \in S\}$, where $|\cdot|$ denotes the Euclidean norm. Then

$$(0.2) \quad \#\Delta(S) \gtrsim n^{\frac{2}{3}}.$$

This estimate is not sharp. It is conjectured to hold with the exponent 1 in place of $\frac{2}{3}$. For the best known exponents to date (around .86), see [SolToth2001] and [STT2001]. However, Corollary 0.2 is still quite useful as we shall see in the final section of this paper.

Corollary 0.3. Let A be a subset of \mathbb{R} of cardinality n . Then either $A + A = \{a + a' : a, a' \in A\}$ or $A \cdot A = \{aa' : a, a' \in A\}$ has cardinality $\gtrsim n^{\frac{5}{4}}$.

This estimate has been recently improved in a number of ways by several authors. See, for example, [BKT2003] and references contained therein.

SECTION I: PROOF OF THEOREM 0.1, COROLLARY 0.2 AND COROLLARY 0.3

We shall deduce Theorem 0.1 from the following graph theoretic result due to Ajtai et al ([Ajtai86]), and, independently, to Leighton. Note that for the purposes of this paper, a pair of vertices in a graph can be connected by at most one edge.

Definition. The crossing number of a graph, $cr(G)$, is the minimal number of crossings over all the possible drawings of this graph in the plane. A crossing is an intersection of two edges not at a vertex.

Definition. We say that a graph G is planar if there exists a drawing of G in the plane without any crossings.

Theorem 1.1. *Let G be a graph with n vertices and e edges. Suppose that $e \geq 4n$. Then*

$$(1.1) \quad cr(G) \gtrsim \frac{e^3}{n^2}.$$

Before proving Theorem 1.1, we show how it implies Theorem 0.1. Take the points in the statement of the Theorem as vertices of a graph. Connect two vertices with an edge if the two corresponding points are consecutive on some line. It follows that

$$(1.2) \quad e = I - m.$$

If $e > 4n$ we get $I < 4n + m$, which is fine with us. If $e \geq 4n$, we invoke Theorem 1.1 to see that

$$(1.3) \quad cr(G) \gtrsim \frac{e^3}{n^2} = \frac{(I - m)^3}{n^2}.$$

Combining (1.3) with the obvious estimate $cr(G) \leq m^2$, we complete the proof of Theorem 0.1. Observe that strictly speaking, we have only proved Theorem 0.1 for lines and points. In order to extend the argument to translates of the same strictly convex curve, one needs to replace (1.2) with an (easy) estimate $e \gtrsim I$.

We now turn our attention to the proof of Theorem 1.1. Let G be a planar graph with n vertices, e edges, and f faces. Euler's formula (proved by induction) says that

$$(1.4) \quad n - e + f = 2.$$

Combined with the observation that $3f \leq 2e$, we see that in such a planar graph

$$(1.5) \quad e \leq 3n - 6.$$

It follows that if G is any graph, then

$$(1.6) \quad cr(G) \geq e - 3n.$$

We now convert this linear estimate into the estimate we want by randomization. More precisely, let G be as in the statement of Theorem 1.1 and let H be a random subgraph of G formed by choosing each vertex with probability p to be chosen later. Naturally, we keep an edge if and only if both vertices survive the random selection. Let $\mathbb{E}()$ denote the usual expected value. An easy computation yields

$$(1.7) \quad \mathbb{E}(\text{vertices}) = np,$$

$$(1.8) \quad \mathbb{E}(\text{edges}) = ep^2,$$

$$(1.9) \quad \mathbb{E}(\text{crossing number of } H) \leq p^4 cr(G).$$

Observe that the inequality in (1.9) is due to the fact that the number of avoidable crossings in G may decrease once a smaller random subset is extracted.

It follows by linearity of expectation that

$$(1.10) \quad cr(G) \geq \frac{e}{p^2} - \frac{3n}{p^3}.$$

Choosing $p = \frac{4n}{e}$ we complete the proof of Theorem 1.1, and consequently of Theorem 0.1. Theorem 0.1' can be proved in a similar fashion. First one shows that under the assumption that any two vertices are connected by at most β edges, the conclusion of Theorem 1.1 becomes $cr(G) \gtrsim \frac{e^3}{\beta n^2}$. Then, in the application of this estimate to incidences, the upper bound on $cr(G)$ is no longer m^2 , but rather $m^2\alpha$. Combining this with the trivial estimates yields the conclusion of Theorem 0.1'.

Further developments in weighted incidence theory have recently led to the following result proved in the case $d = 2$ by S. Konyagin ([Ko00]), and by Iosevich, Rudnev and Ten ([IRT03]) for $d > 2$.

Theorem 1.2. *Let $\{b_j\}_{j=1}^N$ denote a strictly convex sequence of real numbers (in the sense that vectors (j, b_j) lie on a strictly convex curve). Then the number of solutions of the equation*

$$(1.11) \quad b_{i_1} + \cdots + b_{i_d} = b_{j_1} + \cdots + b_{j_d}$$

is

$$(1.12) \quad \lesssim N^{2d-2+2^{-d}}.$$

Taking $b_j = j^2$, for example, shows that $N^{2d-2+2^{-d}}$ in (1.12) cannot be replaced by anything smaller than N^{2d-2} . We conjecture that $O(N^{2d-2})$ is the right estimate, up to logarithms, for any strictly convex sequence $\{b_j\}$.

Proof of Corollary 0.2. Draw a circle of fixed radius around each point in S . By Theorem 0.1, the number of incidences is $\lesssim n^{\frac{4}{3}}$. This means that a single distance cannot repeat more than $\approx n^{\frac{4}{3}}$ times. It follows that there must be at least $\approx n^{\frac{2}{3}}$ distinct distances since the total number of distances is $\approx n^2$. In other words, we just proved that $\Delta(S) \gtrsim n^{\frac{2}{3}}$ as promised.

Proof of Corollary 0.3. The choice of lines and points is less obvious here. Let $P = (A + A) \times (A \cdot A)$. Let L be the set of lines of the form $\{(ax, a' + x) : a, a' \in A\}$. We have

$$(1.13) \quad \#P = \#(A + A) \times \#(A \cdot A),$$

$$(1.14) \quad \#L = n^2,$$

while the number of incidences is clearly $n \times n^2 = n^3$. It follows that

$$(1.15) \quad n^3 \lesssim (\#P)^{\frac{2}{3}} n^{\frac{4}{3}},$$

which means that

$$(1.16) \quad \#P \gtrsim n^{\frac{5}{3}}.$$

It follows that either $\#(A + A)$ or $\#(A \cdot A)$ exceeds a constant multiple of $n^{\frac{5}{4}}$. This completes the proof of Corollary 0.3.

SECTION II: APPLICATION TO FOURIER ANALYSIS

Definition. We say that a domain $\Omega \subset \mathbb{R}^d$ is spectral if $L^2(\Omega)$ has an orthogonal basis of the form $\{e^{2\pi i x \cdot a}\}_{a \in A}$.

The following result is due to Fuglede ([Fug74]). It was also proved in higher dimensions by Iosevich, Katz and Pedersen ([IKP99]).

Theorem 2.1. *A disc, $D = \{x \in \mathbb{R}^2 : |x| \leq r\}$, is not spectral.*

Proof of Theorem 2.1. Let A denote a putative spectrum. We need the following basic lemmas:

Lemma 2.2. *A is separated in the sense that there exists $c > 0$ such that $|a - a'| \geq c$ for all $a, a' \in A$.*

Lemma 2.3. *There exists $s > 0$ such that any square of side-length s contains at least one element of A .*

For a sharper version of Lemma 2.3 see [IP2000].

The proof of Lemma 2.2 is straightforward. Orthogonality implies that

$$(2.1) \quad \int_D e^{2\pi i x \cdot (a-a')} dx = 0,$$

whenever $a \neq a' \in A$. Since $\int_D dx = 2\pi r$ and the function $\int_D e^{2\pi i x \cdot \xi} dx$ is continuous, the left hand side of (2.1) would have to be strictly positive if $|a - a'|$ were small enough. This implies that $|a - a'|$ can never be smaller than a positive constant depending on r .

The proof of Lemma 2.3 is a bit more interesting. By Bessel's inequality we have

$$(2.2) \quad \sum_A |\widehat{\chi}_D(\xi + a)|^2 \equiv |D|^2,$$

for almost every $\xi \in \mathbb{R}^d$, since the left hand side is a sum of squares of Fourier coefficients of the exponential with the frequency ξ with respect to the putative orthogonal basis $\{e^{2\pi i x \cdot a}\}_{a \in A}$. We have

$$(2.3) \quad \sum_{A_\xi} |\widehat{\chi}_D(a)|^2 = \sum_{A_\xi \cap Q_s} + \sum_{A_\xi \cap Q_s^c} = I + II,$$

where $A_\xi = A - \xi$ and Q_s is a square of side-length s centered at the origin.

We invoke the following basic fact. See, for example, [Stein93]. We have

$$(2.4) \quad |\widehat{\chi}_D(\xi)| \lesssim |\xi|^{-\frac{3}{2}}.$$

It follows that

$$(2.5) \quad II \lesssim \sum_{A_\xi \cap Q_s^c} |a|^{-3} \lesssim s^{-1}.$$

Choosing s big enough so that $s^{-1} \ll |D|^2$, we see that $I \neq 0$, and, consequently, that $A_\xi \cap Q_s$ is not empty. This completes the proof of Lemma 2.3.

We are now ready to complete the proof of Theorem 2.1. Intersect A with a large disc of radius R . By Lemma 2.2 and Lemma 2.3, this disc contains $\approx R^2$ points of A . We need another basic fact about $\widehat{\chi}_D(\xi)$, that it is radial, and in fact equals, up to a constant, to $|\xi|^{-1} J_1(2\pi|\xi|)$, where J_1 is the Bessel function of order 1. We also need to know that zeros of Bessel functions are separated in the sense of Lemma 2.2. This fact is contained in any text on special functions. See also [StWe71].

With this information in tow, recall that orthogonality implies that $|a - a'|$ is a zero of J_1 . Since the largest distance in the disc of radius R is $2R$ and zeros of J_1 are separated, we see that the total number of distinct distances between the elements of A in the disc of radius R is at most $\approx R$. This is a contradiction since Corollary 0.2 says that R^2 points determine at least $R^{\frac{4}{3}}$ distinct distances. This completes the proof of Theorem 2.1.

It turns out that not only does $L^2(D)$ not possess an orthogonal basis of exponentials, the numbers of exponentials orthogonal with respect to D is in fact finite. This is a theorem due to Fuglede ([Fug01]) which was extended to all sufficiently smooth well-curved symmetric convex domains by Iosevich and Rudnev ([IR2003]). The latter paper is based on the generalization of the following beautiful geometric principle due to Erdos ([Erdos45]).

Theorem (Erdos integer distance principle). *Let S be an infinite subset of \mathbb{R}^d such that the distance between any pair of points in S is an integer. Then S is a subset of a line.*

More recently, the author's student, Georgyi Arutyunyan ([Aru04]) obtained a good explicit bound on the number of orthogonal exponentials with respect to the unit ball $B_d \subset \mathbb{R}^d$. His bound is based on the following beautiful observation. Erdos ([Erdos45]) observed that given any positive integer N , one can construct a set of cardinality N in the plane such that all the pair-wise distances are integers. This fact and the prominence of the Erdos integer distance principle in the aforementioned paper of Iosevich and Rudnev proved to be a serious obstacle in obtaining a good upper bound on the number of orthogonal exponentials. However, Georgyi observed that in the orthogonality problem the distances do not only need to be integers, but in fact odd integers. He proceeded to prove that it is impossible to construct a set in the plane of cardinality greater than three (with corresponding bounds in higher dimensions) such that all the pair-wise distances are odd integers. Finally, Georgyi proved an asymptotic version of this combinatorial principle and applied it to obtain an explicit upper bound on the number of orthogonal exponentials with respect to the unit ball.

SECTION III: APPLICATIONS TO CONVEX GEOMETRY

The following result is due to Andrews ([Andrews63]).

Theorem 3.1. *Let Q be a convex polygon with n integer vertices. Then $n \lesssim |Q|^{\frac{1}{3}}$.*

Proof of Theorem 3.1. Let \mathcal{C} denote a strictly convex curve running through the vertices of Q . Let Ω denote the convex domain bounded by \mathcal{C} . Let L denote the set of strictly convex curves obtained by translating \mathcal{C} by every lattice point inside Ω . Let P denote the set of lattice points contained in the union of all those translates. By Theorem 0.1 the number of incidences between the elements of P and elements of L is $\lesssim |\Omega|^{\frac{4}{3}}$ since $\#L \approx \#P \approx |\Omega|$. Since each translate of \mathcal{C} contains exactly the same number of lattice points,

$$(3.1) \quad \#\mathcal{C} \cap \mathbb{Z}^2 \lesssim \frac{|\Omega|^{\frac{4}{3}}}{|\Omega|} = |\Omega|^{\frac{1}{3}}.$$

This completes the proof of Theorem 3.1. Observe that proof implies the following (easier) estimate.

Lemma 3.2. *Let Γ be a closed strictly convex curve in the plane. Then*

$$(3.2) \quad \#\{R\Gamma \cap \mathbb{Z}^2\} \lesssim R^{\frac{2}{3}}.$$

What sort of an incidence theorem would be required to prove a more general version of this result?

Definition. We say that $A \subset \mathbb{R}^d$ is well-distributed if the conclusions of Lemma 2.2 and Lemma 2.3 hold for A .

Let A be a well-distributed set, and let A_R denote the intersection of A and the ball of radius R centered at the origin. Observe that $\#A_R \approx R^d$. Let U be a strictly convex hyper-surface contained in the unit ball. Suppose we had a theorem which said that the number of incidences between A_{5R} and a family of hyper-surfaces $\{RU + x\}_{x \in A_R}$ is $\lesssim R^{d\alpha}$. Repeating the argument above, we would arrive at the conclusion that if P is a convex polyhedron with N lattice vertices, then

$$(3.3) \quad |P| \gtrsim N^{\frac{1}{\alpha-1}}.$$

However, a higher dimensional version of the aforementioned theorem of Andrews says that

$$(3.4) \quad |P| \gtrsim N^{\frac{d+1}{d-1}}.$$

This leads us to conjecture that the putative incidence theorem described above should hold with $\alpha = 2 - \frac{2}{d+1}$, which was recently proved in [ILR04] under additional smoothness assumptions. This result is sharp in view of (3.3) and the following result due to Barany and Larman ([BL98]).

Theorem 3.3. *The number of vertices of P_R , the convex hull of the lattice points contained in the ball of radius $R \gg 1$ centered at the origin is $\approx R^{d\frac{d-1}{d+1}}$.*

SECTION IV: HIGHER DIMENSIONS

Theorem 4.1. *If $R > 0$ is sufficiently large, then*

$$(4.1) \quad \#(\Delta(A \cap [-R, R]^d)) \gtrsim R^{2-\frac{1}{d}}.$$

This result was recently proved in a more general setting, using different methods, by Solymosi and Vu ([SV2003]).

Corollary 4.2. *The ball $B_d = \{x : |x| \leq 1\}$ is not spectral in any dimension greater than 1.*

Corollary 4.2 follows from Theorem 4.1 in the same way as Theorem 2.1 follows from Corollary 0.2. Lemma 2.2 and Lemma 2.3 go through without change except that in \mathbb{R}^d ,

$$(4.2) \quad |\widehat{\chi}_{B_d}(\xi)| \lesssim |\xi|^{-\frac{d+1}{2}},$$

$\widehat{\chi}_{B_d}(\xi)$ is a constant multiple of

$$(4.3) \quad |\xi|^{-\frac{d}{2}} J_{\frac{d}{2}}(2\pi|\xi|),$$

and the zeroes of $J_{\frac{d}{2}}$ are still separated.

See [Stein93], [StWe71] and/or any text on special functions for the details.

We are left to prove Theorem 4.1. Since A is well-distributed, there is $s > 0$ such that every cube of side-length s contains at least one point of A . Fix a reference cube of side-length s and consider a row of consecutive cubes in each of the coordinate directions with respect to the reference cube. Chose a point of A in the 10th cube in each coordinate direction. Name those points P_1, P_2, \dots, P_d . Let O denote the center of the reference cube. Construct a system of annuli centered at O of width Md , with the first annulus of radius $\approx R$. Construct $\approx R$ such annuli.

It follows from the assumption that A is well distributed that each constructed annulus \mathcal{A} has $\approx R^{d-1}$ points of A . Let

$$(4.4) \quad \cup_{i=1}^d \{|x - P_i| : x \in \mathcal{A}\} = \{d_1, \dots, d_k\}.$$

Let

$$(4.5) \quad A_j^l = \{x \in \mathcal{A} \cap A : |x - P_l| = d_j\}.$$

It is not hard to see that

$$(4.6) \quad A_j^l = \cup_{1 \leq j_m \leq k} \cup_{m=1}^{d-1} A_j^l \cap_{l' \neq l} A_{j_m}^{l'}.$$

Taking unions of both sides in j and counting, we see that

$$(4.7) \quad R^{d-1} \lesssim k^d.$$

This follows from the fact, which follows by a direct calculation, that the intersection of d spheres in question consists of at most two points. Taking d 'th roots and using the fact that we have $\approx R$ annuli with $\approx R^{d-1}$ point of A , we conclude that

$$(4.8) \quad \#\Delta(A \cap [-R, R]^d) \gtrsim R^{1+\frac{d-1}{d}} = R^{2-\frac{1}{d}},$$

as desired.

Observe that while the intersection claim made above is not difficult to verify for spheres, the situation becomes much more complicated for boundaries of general convex bodies, even under smoothness and curvature assumptions. This issue is partially addressed in [GIL2004].

Another point of view on distance set problems was recently pursued by Iosevich and Laba ([IL2003]) and, independently, by Kolountzakis ([Kol2003]).

Theorem 4.2. ([IL2003] for $d = 2$ and [Kol2003] for $d > 2$). Let A be a well-distributed subset of \mathbb{R}^d , $d \geq 2$. Let K be a symmetric bounded convex set. Then $\Delta_K(A)$ is separated only if K is a polyhedron with finitely many vertices.

The more difficult question of which polyhedra can result in separated distance sets is partially addressed in both aforementioned papers, but the question is, in general, unresolved.

SECTION V: SOME COMMENTS ON FINITE FIELDS

In this section we consider incidence theorems in the context of finite fields. More precisely, let F_q denote the finite field of q elements. Let F_q^d denote the d -dimensional vector space over F_q . A line in F_q^d is a set of points $\{x + tv : t \in F_q\}$ where $x \in F_q^d$ and $v \in F_q^d \setminus (0, \dots, 0)$. A hyperplane in F_q^d is a set of points (x_1, \dots, x_d) satisfying the equation $A_1x_1 + \dots + A_dx_d = D$, where $A_1, \dots, A_d, D \in F_q$ and not all A_j 's are 0.

It is clear that without further assumptions, the number of incidences between n hyperplanes and n points is $\approx n^2$ and no better, since we can take all n planes to be rotates of the same plane about a line where all the points are located. We shall remove this "difficulty" by operating under the following non-degeneracy assumption.

Definition. We say that a family of hyperplanes in F_q^d is non-degenerate if the intersection of any d (or fewer) of the hyper-planes in the family contains at most one point.

The main result of this section is the following:

Theorem 5.1. Suppose that a family \mathcal{F} of n hyper-planes in F_q^d is non-degenerate. Let \mathcal{P} denote a family of n points in F_q^d . The the number of incidences between the elements of \mathcal{F} and \mathcal{P} is $\lesssim n^{2-\frac{1}{d}}$. Moreover, this estimate is sharp.

We prove sharpness first. Let \mathcal{F} denote the set of all the hyper-planes in F_q^d and \mathcal{P} denote the set of all the points in F_q^d . It is clear that $\#\mathcal{F} \approx \mathcal{P} \approx q^d$. On the other hand, the number of incidences is simply the number of hyper-planes times the number of points on each hyper-planes, which is $\approx q^{2d-1}$. Since $q^{2d-1} = (q^d)^{2-\frac{1}{d}}$, the sharpness of the Theorem 5.1 is proved.

We now prove the positive result. Consider an n by n matrix whose (i, j) entry is 1 if i 'th point lies on j 's line, and 0 otherwise. The non-degeneracy condition implies that this matrix does not contain a d by 2 sub-matrix consisting of 1's. Using Holder's inequality we see that the number of incidences,

$$(5.1) \quad I = \sum_{i,j} I_{ij} \leq \left(\sum_i \left(\sum_j I_{ij} \right)^d \right)^{\frac{1}{d}} \times n^{\frac{d-1}{d}}$$

$$(5.2) \quad = \left(\sum_i \sum_{j_1, \dots, j_d} I_{ij_1} \dots I_{ij_d} \right)^{\frac{1}{d}} \times n^{\frac{d-1}{d}} \lesssim n \times n^{\frac{d-1}{d}} = n^{2-\frac{1}{d}},$$

because when j_k 's are distinct, $I_{ij_1} \dots I_{ij_d}$ can be non-zero for at most one value of i due to the non-degeneracy assumption. If j_k 's are not distinct, we win for the same reason. This completes the proof of Theorem 5.1.

Why should the finite field case be different from the Euclidean case? The proof of Szemerédi-Trotter theorem given above suggests that main difference may be the notion of order. In the proof of Szemerédi-Trotter we used the fact that points on a line may be ordered. However, no such notion exists in a finite field. Nevertheless, Tom Wolff conjectured that if q is a prime, then there exists $\epsilon > 0$ such that the number of incidences between n points and n lines in F_q^2 should not exceed $n^{\frac{3}{2}-\epsilon}$ for $n \approx q$. This fact has recently been proved by Bourgain, Katz, and Tao ([BKT2003]).

SECTION VI: A FOURIER APPROACH

In this sections we briefly outline how some results in geometric combinatorics can be obtained using Fourier analysis. For a more complete description, see, for example, [HI2003], [IL2004], and [ILR2004].

We could take a more direct approach, but we take advantage of this opportunity to introduce the following beautiful problem in geometric measure theory.

Falconer Distance Conjecture. *Let $E \subset [0, 1]^d$, $d \geq 2$. Suppose that the Hausdorff dimension of E is greater than $\frac{d}{2}$. Then $\Delta(E) = \{|x - y| : x, y \in E\}$ has positive Lebesgue measure.*

We shall not discuss the history and other particulars of the Falconer Distance Problem in this paper. See, for example, [Wolff03] and references contained therein for a thorough description of the problem and related machinery. The main thrust of this section is to show that any non-trivial theorem about the Falconer Distance Conjecture can be used to deduce a corresponding "discrete" result about distance sets of well-distributed subsets of \mathbb{R}^d .

Theorem 6.1. *Let K be a bounded convex set in \mathbb{R}^d , $d \geq 2$, symmetric with respect to the origin. Suppose that the Lebesgue measure of $\Delta_K(E)$ is positive whenever the Hausdorff dimension of $E \subset [0, 1]^d$ is greater than s_0 , with $0 < s_0 < d$. Let A be a well-distributed subset of \mathbb{R}^d . Then $\#\Delta_K(A \cap [-R, R]^d) \gtrsim R^{\frac{d}{s_0}}$.*

The following result is essentially proved in [Falc86].

Theorem 6.2. *Let $E \subset [0, 1]^d$, $d \geq 2$, of Hausdorff dimension greater than $\frac{d+1}{2}$. Suppose that K is a bounded convex set, symmetric with respect to the origin, with a smooth boundary and everywhere non-vanishing Gaussian curvature. Then the Lebesgue measure of $\Delta_K(E)$ is positive.*

Theorem 6.1 and 6.2 combine to yield the following "discrete" theorem.

Theorem 6.3. *Let A be a well-distributed subset of \mathbb{R}^d , $d \geq 2$. Suppose that K is a bounded convex set, symmetric with respect to the origin, with a smooth boundary and everywhere non-vanishing Gaussian curvature. Then $\#\Delta_K(A \cap [-R, R]^d) \gtrsim R^{2-\frac{2}{d+1}}$.*

Observe that while this result is not as strong as the one given by Theorem 4.1, it is more flexible since it does not require K to be the Euclidean ball.

Proof of Theorem 6.1. Let $q_1 = 2$ and choose integers $q_{i+1} > q_i^i$. Let

$$(6.1) \quad E_i = \{x \in [0, 1]^d : |x_k - p_k/q_i| \leq q_i^{-\frac{d}{s}} \text{ for every } p = (p_1, \dots, p_d) \in A \cap [0, q_i]^d\}.$$

Let $E = \cap E_i$. It follows from the proof of Theorem 8.15 in [Falc85] that the Hausdorff dimension of E is s . Suppose that there exists an infinite subsequence of q_i s such that $\#\Delta_K(A \cap [0, q_i]^d) \lesssim q_i^\beta$ for some $\beta > 0$. Then we can cover $\Delta_K(E_i)$ by $\lesssim q_i^\beta$ intervals of length $\approx q_i^{-\frac{d}{s}}$. If $\beta < \frac{d}{s}$, $|\Delta_K(E_i)| \rightarrow 0$ as $i \rightarrow \infty$. It follows that $\Delta_K(E)$ has Lebesgue measure 0. However, by assumption, $\Delta_K(E)$ is positive if $s > s_0$. The conclusion follows.

The proof of Theorem 6.1 suggests that one may be able to make further progress on the Erdos Distance Conjecture for well-distributed sets using Fourier methods by studying the Falconer Distance Conjecture for special sets constructed in the previous paragraph.

Definition. We say that a compact set E is a Salem set if there exists a Borel measure μ supported on E such that for any $\epsilon > 0$

$$(6.2) \quad |\widehat{\mu}(\xi)| \leq C_\epsilon |\xi|^{-\frac{s}{2} + \epsilon}.$$

Machinery due to Mattila (see [Wolff03] for a thorough description) implies that the Falconer Conjecture holds for sets defined by (6.1) if they are in fact Salem sets. In the special case $A = \mathbb{Z}^d$, the estimate (6.2) holds. This is essentially a theorem due to R. Kaufman ([Kauf81]). We conjecture that (6.2) holds for any well-distributed set. If true, this would imply the Erdos Distance Conjecture for well-distributed sets.

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