

Two approaches for discretizing spaces of tensors with specified interelement continuity conditions

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- 1 Introduction: Continuity conditions
- 2 Double forms: Matrix fields with tangential or normal continuity,
Riemann curvature tensor
- 3 Blow-up finite elements: Any continuity conditions you like
- 4 Concluding remarks: Differential geometry vs. Riemannian geometry

Section 1

Introduction: Continuity conditions

Tangential and normal continuity of vector fields

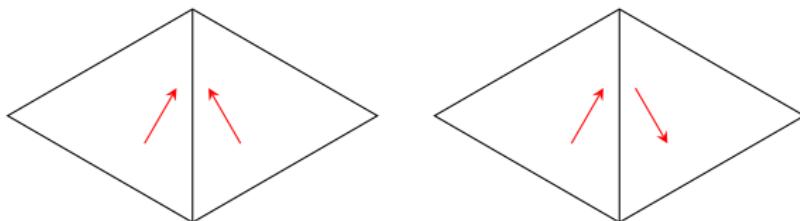


Figure: Tangential continuity (left) vs. normal continuity (right)

Tangential continuity

- Well-defined line integrals.
- In $H(\text{curl})$.

Normal continuity

- Well-defined fluxes.
- In $H(\text{div})$.

One-forms Λ^1

- $M dx + N dy + P dz$
- Restricted to the xy -plane $z = 0$:
 - $M dx + N dy$.
 - Tangential components.

Two-forms Λ^2

- $M dy \wedge dz + N dz \wedge dx + P dx \wedge dy$.
- Restricted to the xy -plane $z = 0$:
 - $P dx \wedge dy$.
 - Normal component.

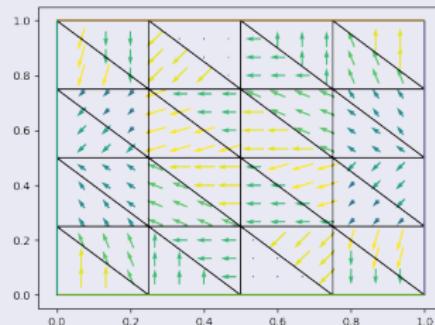
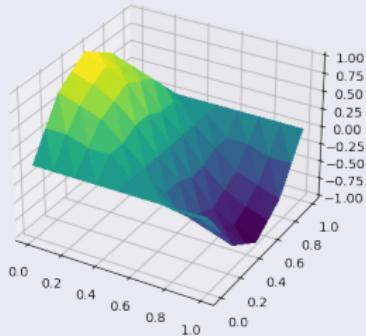
Continuity conditions

- Vector fields with tangential continuity are one-forms.
- Vector fields with normal continuity are $(n - 1)$ -forms.

What's wrong with full continuity?

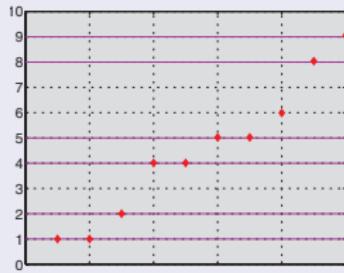
FEEC perspective: differential complexes

Gradients of scalar fields only have tangential continuity



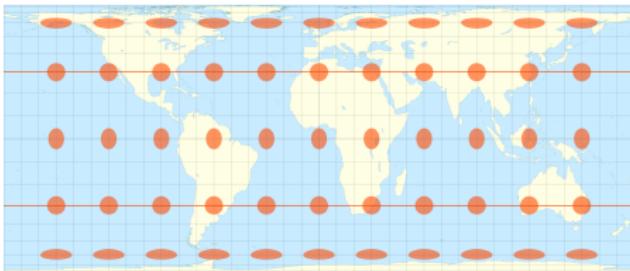
Spurious eigenvalues of the $\operatorname{curl curl}$ operator (AFW, 2010)

- Solve $\operatorname{curl curl} \mathbf{u} = \lambda \mathbf{u}$, where \mathbf{u} is a vector field on a square domain with appropriate boundary conditions.
- Using vector fields with full continuity yields **false** eigenvalue $\lambda = 6$.



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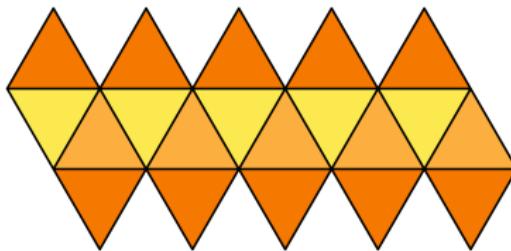
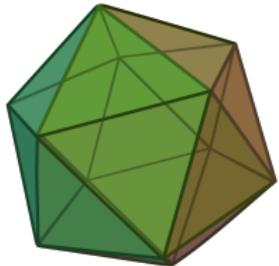
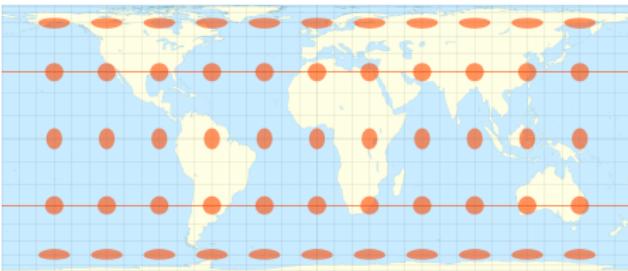
Geometric perspective



Four images from Wikipedia

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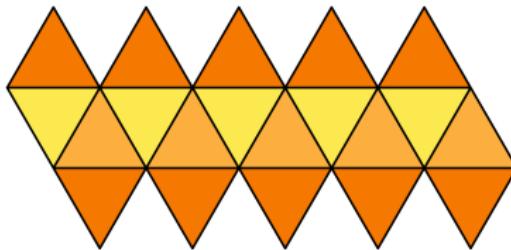
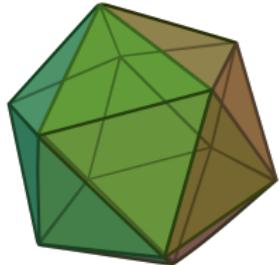
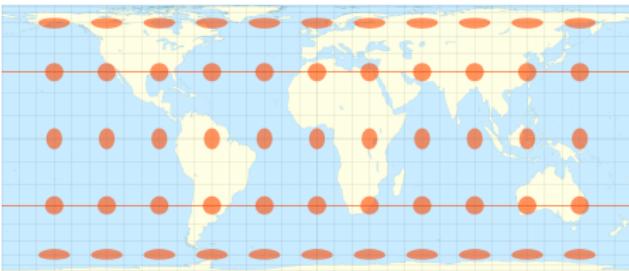
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Why compute intrinsically?

- Intrinsic problems, e.g. numerical relativity, Ricci flow.
- Structure preservation: independence of embedding.

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Geometric perspective: Angle defect obstruction to continuous elements

- Try to construct a tangent vector field on the icosahedron.

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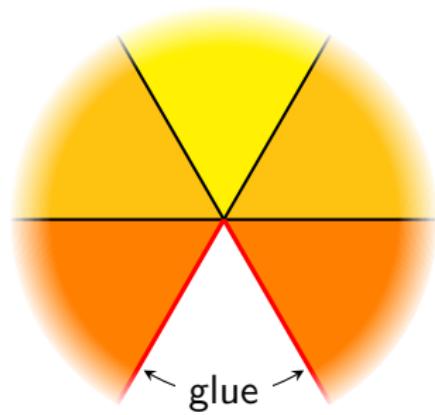
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- Try to construct a tangent vector field on the icosahedron.
- What do we see when we zoom in on a vertex?

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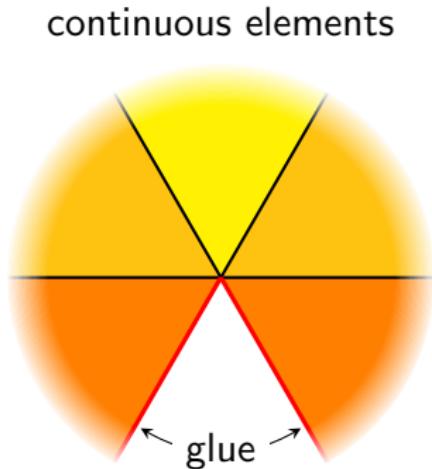
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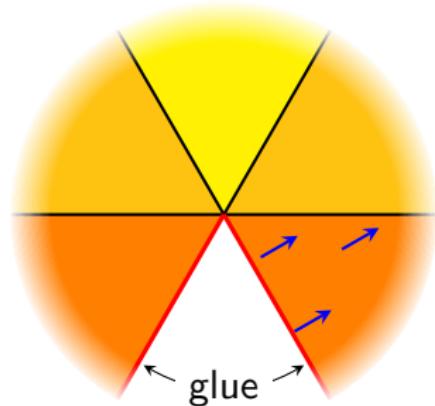


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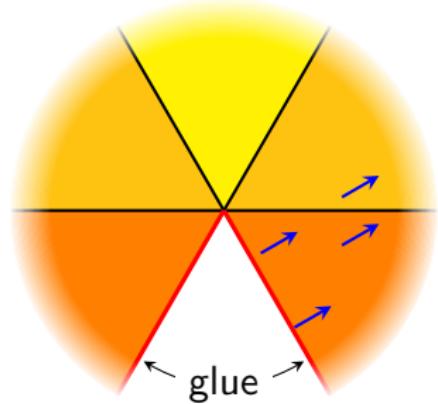


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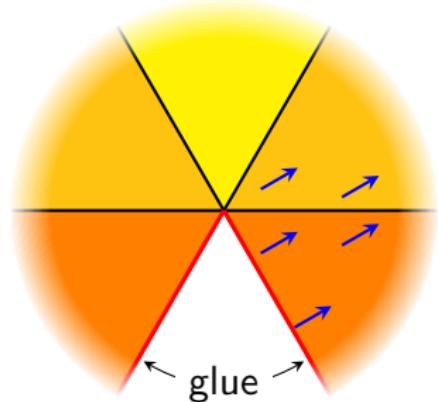


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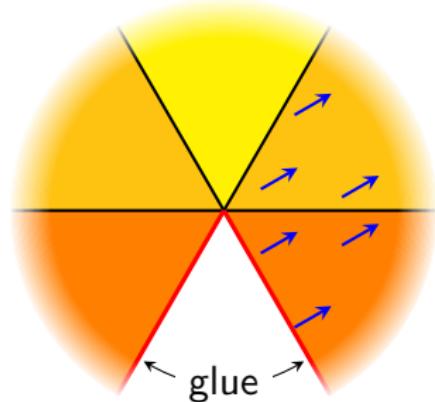


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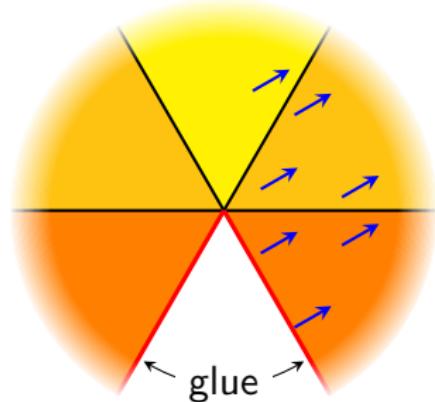


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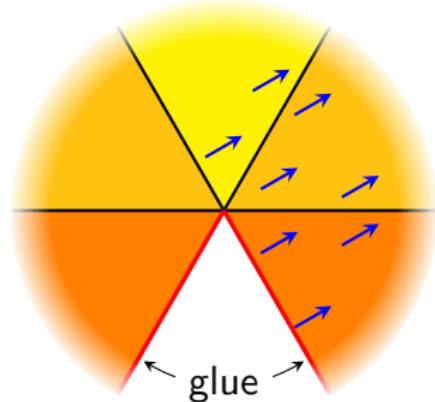


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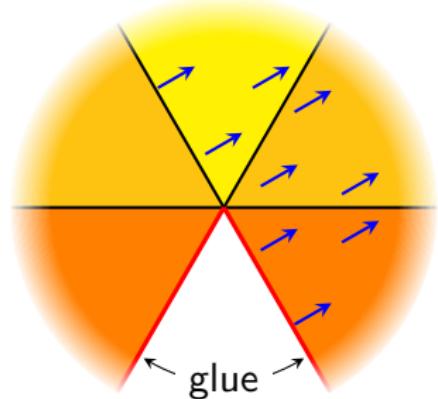


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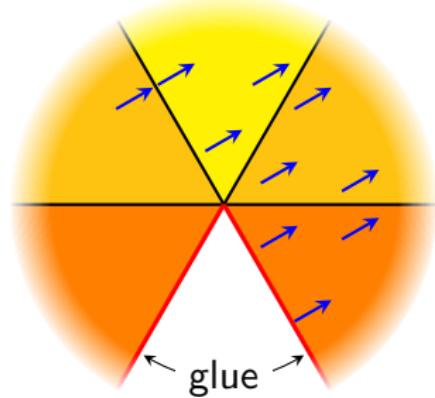


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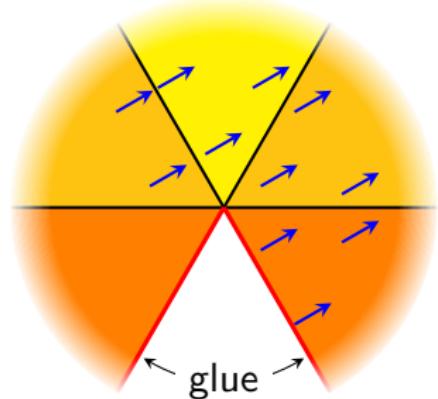


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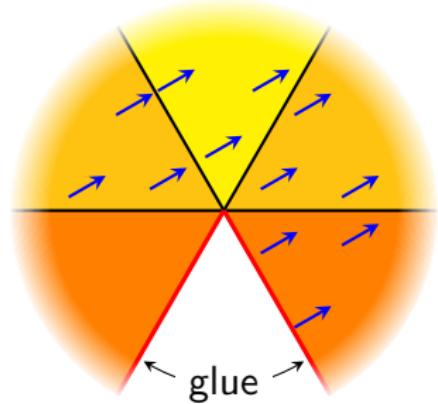


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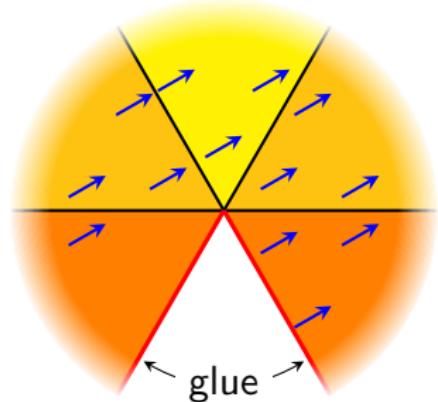


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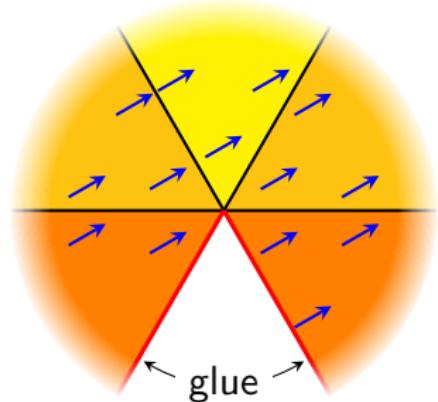


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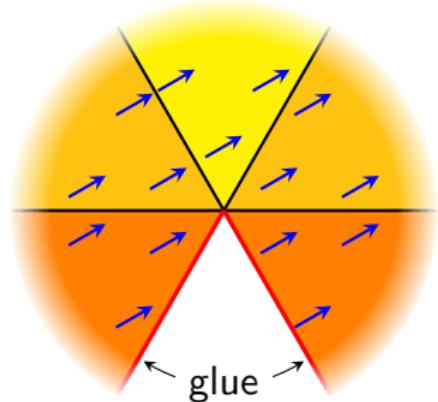


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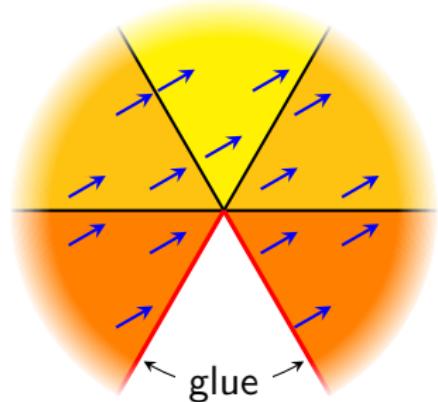


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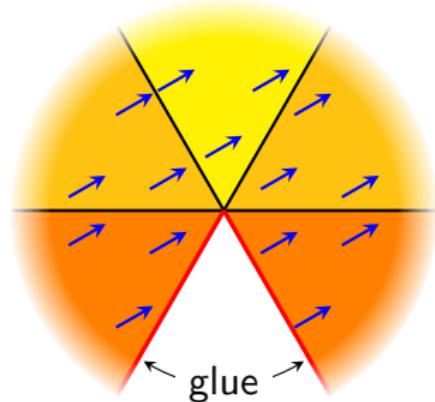
continuous on each triangle

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continuous elements



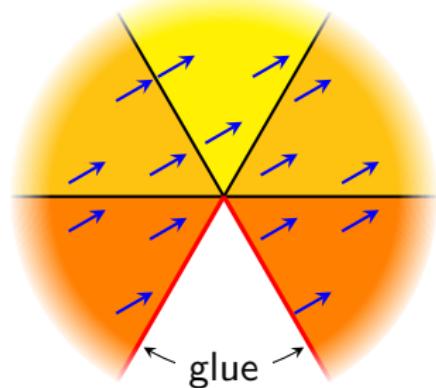
continuous on each triangle
discontinuous across red edge

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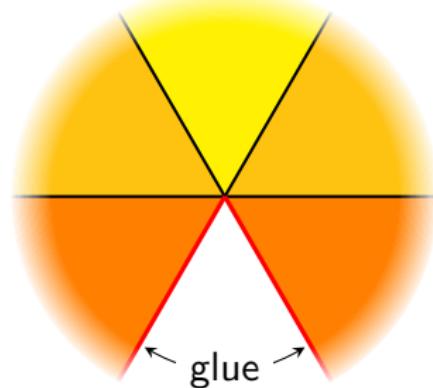
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continuous elements



blow-up elements



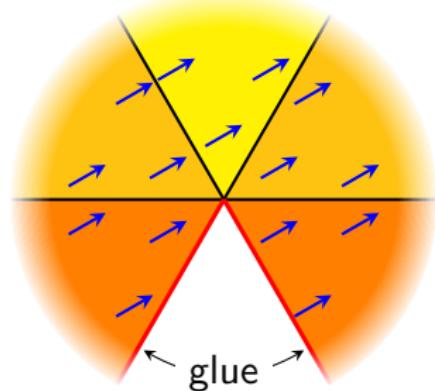
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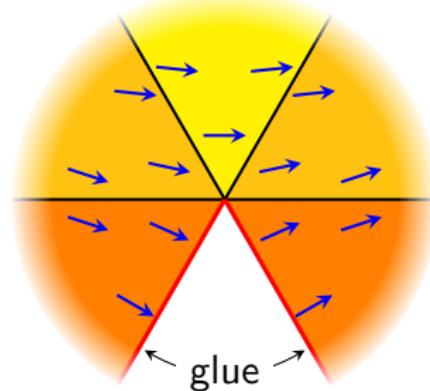
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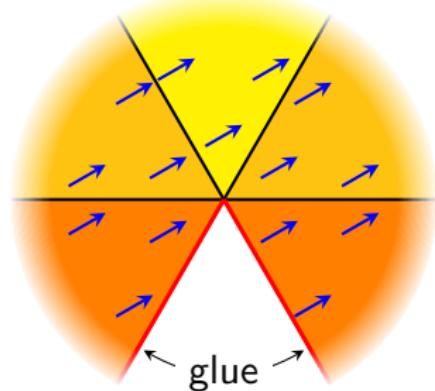
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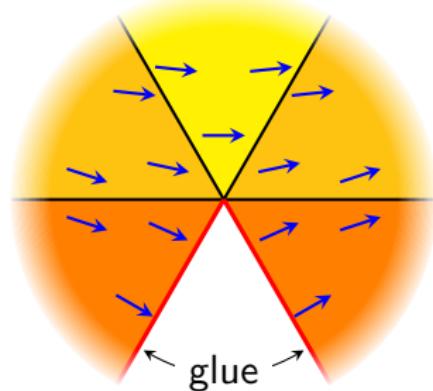
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continuous elements



continuous on each triangle
discontinuous across red edge

blow-up elements



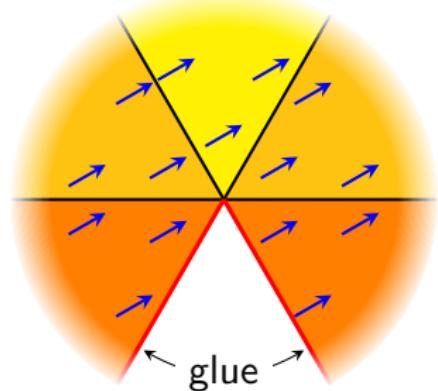
continuous across all edges

What's wrong with full continuity?

Geometric perspective: Angle defect obstruction to continuous elements

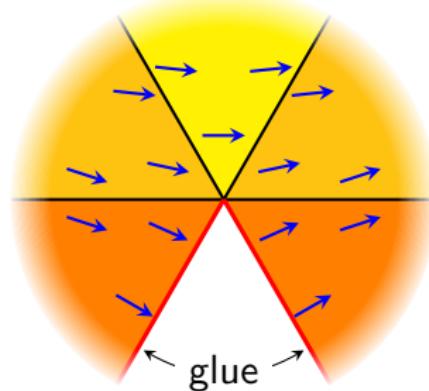
- Try to construct a tangent vector field on the icosahedron.
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continuous elements



continuous on each triangle
discontinuous across red edge

blow-up elements



continuous across all edges
discontinuous at vertices

Section 2

Double forms: Matrix fields with tangential or normal continuity, Riemann curvature tensor

Continuity conditions for matrix fields

- tangential–tangential
- normal–normal
- normal–tangential

Applications

- Strain/stress tensors
 - Elasticity (objects deforming under stress)
 - Fluid mechanics (Stokes equations)
- Curvature tensor
 - Numerical geometry
 - Numerical relativity

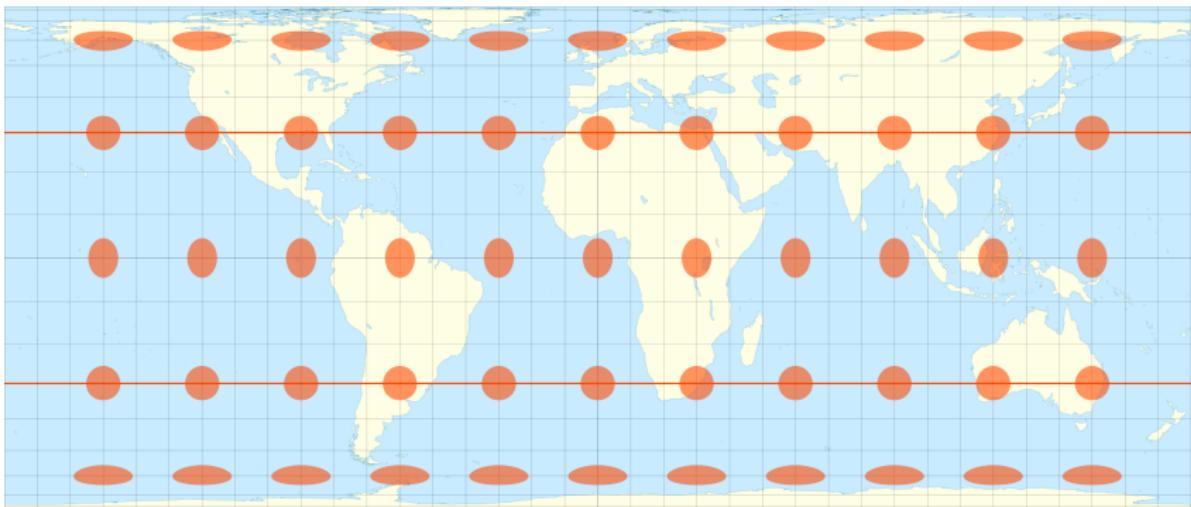
Vector fields (\mathbb{R}^3)

- Vector fields with tangential continuity are one-forms Λ^1 .
- Vector fields with normal continuity are two-forms Λ^2 .

Matrix fields ($\mathbb{R}^3 \otimes \mathbb{R}^3$)

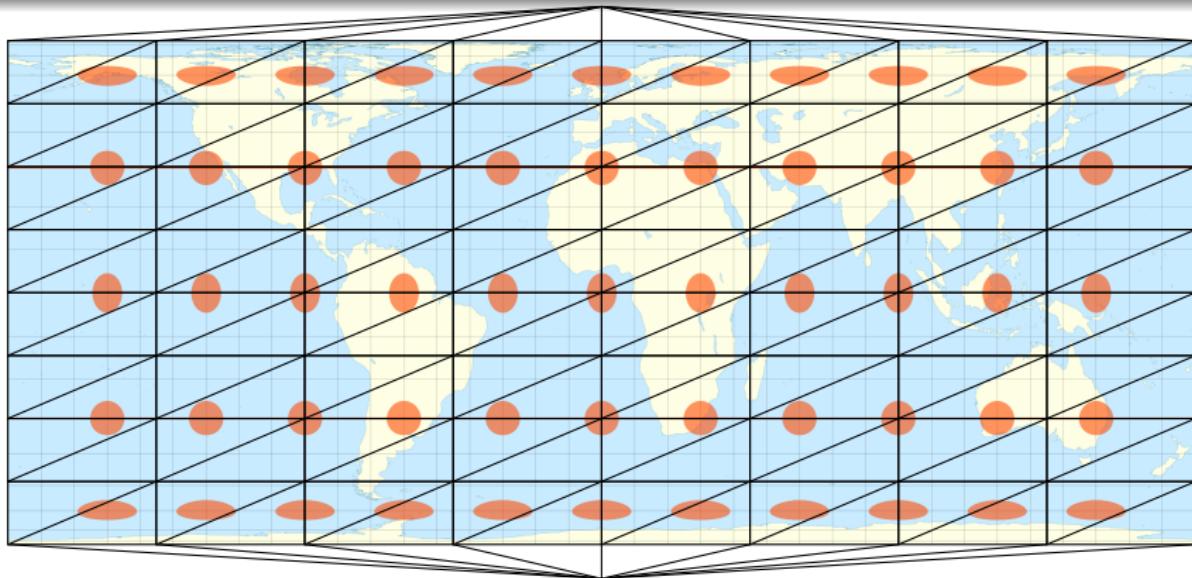
- Matrix fields with tangential–tangential continuity are $(1, 1)$ -forms
 $\Lambda^{1,1} := \Lambda^1 \otimes \Lambda^1$.
- Matrix fields with normal–tangential continuity are $(2, 1)$ -forms
 $\Lambda^{2,1} := \Lambda^2 \otimes \Lambda^1$.
- Matrix fields with normal–normal continuity are $(2, 2)$ -forms
 $\Lambda^{2,2} := \Lambda^2 \otimes \Lambda^2$.

Intrinsic geometry with Regge metrics



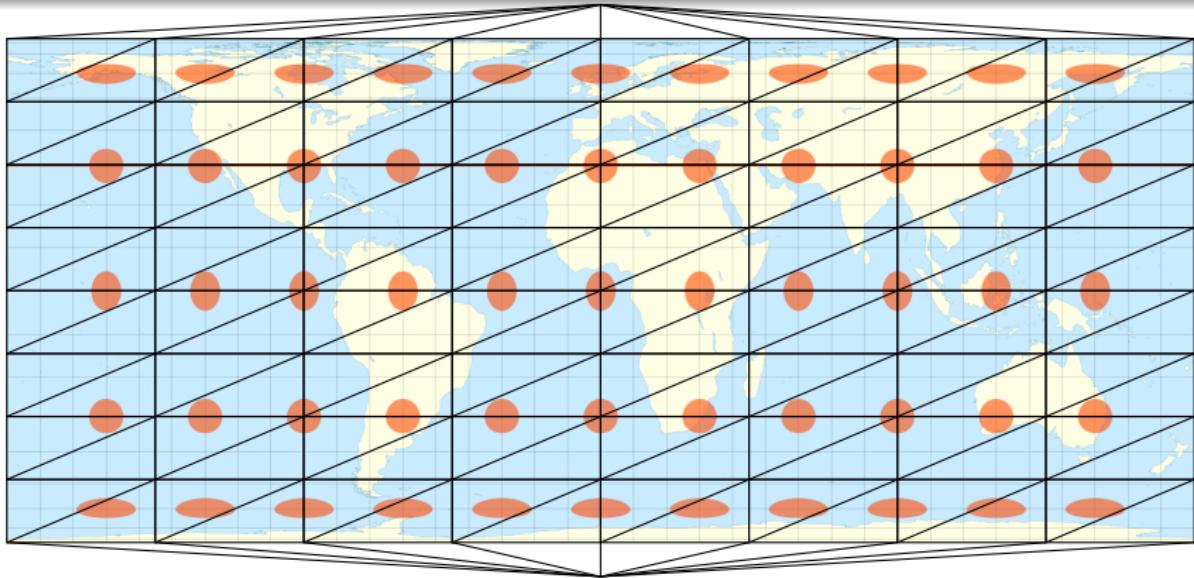
Map credit: Wikipedia, Gaba

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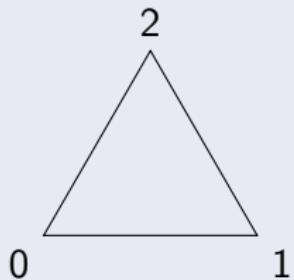
Regge finite elements

- Record the length of each edge.
- For each triangle, use the corresponding Euclidean metric.
- Get piecewise constant metric with tang.-tang. continuity.

Map credit: Wikipedia, Gaba

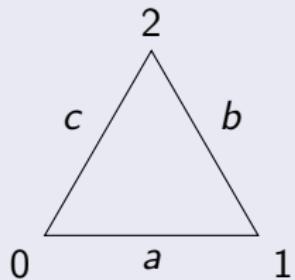
Regge metric on a reference triangle

Barycentric coordinates $\lambda_0 + \lambda_1 + \lambda_2 = 1$



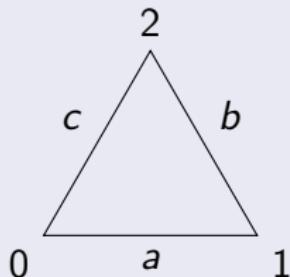
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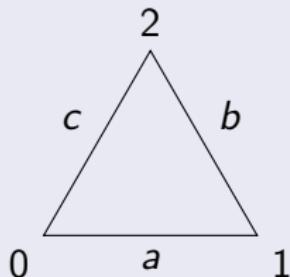


Regge metric:

$$\begin{aligned}g = & -\frac{1}{2}a^2(d\lambda_0 \otimes d\lambda_1 + d\lambda_1 \otimes d\lambda_0) \\& -\frac{1}{2}b^2(d\lambda_1 \otimes d\lambda_2 + d\lambda_2 \otimes d\lambda_1) \\& -\frac{1}{2}c^2(d\lambda_2 \otimes d\lambda_0 + d\lambda_0 \otimes d\lambda_2)\end{aligned}$$

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Observations

- If \mathbf{v} is the vector from vertex 0 to vertex 1, then

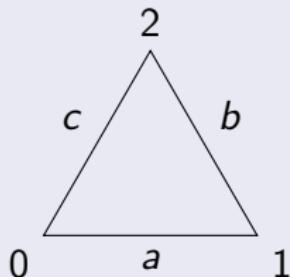
$$d\lambda_0(\mathbf{v}) = -1, \quad d\lambda_1(\mathbf{v}) = 1, \quad d\lambda_2(\mathbf{v}) = 0.$$

As desired:

$$g(\mathbf{v}, \mathbf{v}) = -\frac{1}{2}a^2(-1 - 1) - \frac{1}{2}b^2(0 + 0) - \frac{1}{2}c^2(0 + 0) = a^2.$$

Regge metric on a reference triangle

Barycentric coordinates $\lambda_0 + \lambda_1 + \lambda_2 = 1$



Regge metric:

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As desired:

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- Crucial: $-\frac{1}{2}a^2(d\lambda_0 \otimes d\lambda_1 + d\lambda_1 \otimes d\lambda_0)$ is zero on other edges.

Local bases for finite element spaces

- Each basis element φ must be associated to a face F of the triangulation, such that, for any other face G ,

$$\varphi \text{ is nonzero on } G \Leftrightarrow G \geq F.$$

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Constant coefficient symmetric bilinear forms $\Lambda_{\text{sym}}^{1,1}$

- Regge's construction works in any dimension. To each edge ij , associate

$$d\lambda_i \otimes d\lambda_j + d\lambda_j \otimes d\lambda_i.$$

Constant coefficient finite elements for bilinear forms

Local bases for finite element spaces

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Constant coefficient symmetric bilinear forms $\Lambda_{\text{sym}}^{1,1}$

- Regge's construction works in any dimension. To each edge ij , associate

$$d\lambda_i \otimes d\lambda_j + d\lambda_j \otimes d\lambda_i.$$

Constant coefficient antisymmetric bilinear forms $\Lambda_{\text{asym}}^{1,1}$

- Finite element spaces **do not exist** in dimension ≥ 3 .
- In 3D, antisymmetric bilinear forms \leftrightarrow vector fields with normal continuity.
- A nonzero constant vector field can't be tangent to three faces of a tetrahedron.

Natural subspaces of double forms

Theorem (Eigendecomposition of s^*s)

$$\Lambda^{p,q} = \bigoplus_m \Lambda_m^{p,q}, \quad \max\{0, q-p\} \leq m \leq \min\{q, n-p\}.$$

Example

- $\Lambda_0^{1,1}$: Symmetric bilinear forms, $\varphi(X; Y) = \varphi(Y; X)$.
- $\Lambda_1^{1,1}$: Λ^2 , antisymmetric bilinear forms, $\varphi(X; Y) = -\varphi(Y; X)$.

- $\Lambda_0^{2,1}$: spanned by $\alpha \otimes \beta$ such that $\alpha \wedge \beta = 0$.
 - Matrix proxy in 3D: trace-free matrices.
- $\Lambda_1^{2,1}$: Λ^3 .
 - Matrix proxy in 3D: multiples of the identity matrix.

- $\Lambda_0^{2,2}$: Symmetric, satisfying the algebraic Bianchi identity.
 - Riemann curvature tensor.
- $\Lambda_1^{2,2}$: Antisymmetric, $\varphi(X, Y; Z, W) = -\varphi(Z, W; X, Y)$.
- $\Lambda_2^{2,2}$: Λ^4 .

Theorem

Apart from $\Lambda_q^{p,q} \cong \Lambda^{p+q}$ with constant coefficients, there is a finite element space for every natural space of double forms $\Lambda_m^{p,q}$ with polynomial coefficients of any degree (including zero).

Example (Constant coefficient spaces)

- $\Lambda_0^{1,1}$: symmetric matrices with tangential–tangential continuity (Regge, 1961).
 - Higher order: (Li, 2018).
- $\Lambda_0^{2,1}$ in 3D: trace-free matrices with normal–tangential continuity (Gopalakrishnan, Lederer, and Schöberl, 2019).
- $\Lambda_0^{2,2}$ in 3D: symmetric matrices with normal–normal continuity (Pechstein and Schöberl, 2011).
- $\Lambda_0^{2,2}$ (or $\Lambda_0^{n-2,n-2}$) in any dimension: finite elements for the Riemann curvature tensor.

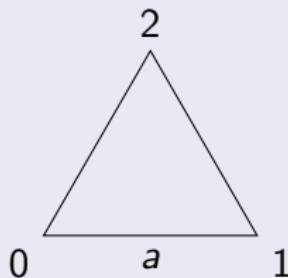
Degrees of freedom for constant coefficient spaces

	d						
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
$\Lambda_0^{1,1}$	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
$\Lambda_0^{2,1}$	0	0	2	0	0	0	0
$\Lambda_0^{2,2}$	0	0	1	2	0	0	0
$\Lambda_1^{2,2} \cong \Lambda_0^{3,1}$	0	0	0	3	0	0	0
$\Lambda_0^{3,2}$	0	0	0	3	5	0	0
$\Lambda_1^{3,2} \cong \Lambda_0^{4,1}$	0	0	0	0	4	0	0
$\Lambda_0^{3,3}$	0	0	0	1	5	5	0
$\Lambda_1^{3,3} \cong \Lambda_0^{4,2}$	0	0	0	0	6	9	0
$\Lambda_2^{3,3} \cong \Lambda_1^{4,2} \cong \Lambda_0^{5,1}$	0	0	0	0	0	5	0

Table: Number of degrees of freedom for $\Lambda_m^{p,q}$ associated to a face of the triangulation of dimension d is $\frac{p-q+2m+1}{p+m+1} \binom{d+1}{q-m} \binom{q-m-1}{d-p-m}$.

Extension

Recall



- It was crucial that $-\frac{1}{2}a^2(d\lambda_0 \otimes d\lambda_1 + d\lambda_1 \otimes d\lambda_0)$ vanishes on the other edges.

Extension operators

- We need to be able to take a form on edge 01, and extend it to the triangle so that it vanishes on the other edges.
- The metric on edge 01 is $a^2 d\lambda_1 \otimes d\lambda_1$.
- However, if we extend to the triangle using the formula $a^2 d\lambda_1 \otimes d\lambda_1$, it won't vanish on edge 12.
- We first need to use $d\lambda_0 + d\lambda_1 = 0$ to rewrite $a^2 d\lambda_1 \otimes d\lambda_1$ as $-\frac{1}{2}a^2(d\lambda_0 \otimes d\lambda_1 + d\lambda_1 \otimes d\lambda_0)$ on edge 01.

Constructing extensions

Example ($\mathcal{P}_r \Lambda_m^{p,q} = \mathcal{P}_0 \Lambda_0^{1,1}$)

- ① Start with a form on edge 01 with vanishing trace: $d\lambda_1 \otimes d\lambda_1$
- ② $\lambda_i = u_i^2, d\lambda_i = 2u_i du_i:$ $4u_1^2 du_1 \otimes du_1.$
- ③ $u_0 du_0 + u_1 du_1$ wedge with each factor:
 $4u_0^2 u_1^2 (du_0 \wedge du_1) \otimes (du_0 \wedge du_1).$
- ④ Hodge star both factors (as forms on \mathbb{R}^2): $4u_0^2 u_1^2.$
- ⑤ Divide by $u_0 u_1:$ $4u_0 u_1.$
- ⑥ Divide by $(2r + p + m + 1)(2r + q - m) = 2:$ $2u_0 u_1.$
- ⑦ Exterior derivative on both factors: $2(du_0 \otimes du_1 + du_1 \otimes du_0).$
- ⑧ Apply $(-1)^{p+q}$ times the inverse Hodge star:
 $-2(du_1 \otimes du_0 + du_0 \otimes du_1).$
- ⑨ Multiply by $u_0 u_1:$ $-2u_0 u_1(du_1 \otimes du_0 + du_0 \otimes du_1).$
- ⑩ Convert back to $\lambda_i:$ $-\frac{1}{2}(d\lambda_1 \otimes d\lambda_0 + d\lambda_0 \otimes d\lambda_1).$

Section 3

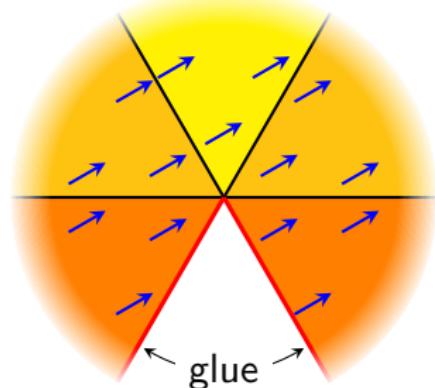
Blow-up finite elements: Any continuity conditions
you like

Motivation

Motivating problem

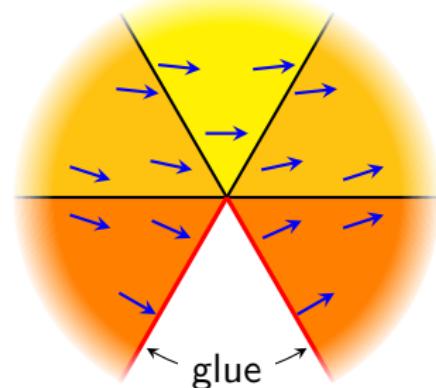
- Goal: construct **intrinsic** discretizations of tangent vector fields on smooth surfaces that are **continuous across edges**.
- Obstruction to using classical \mathcal{P}_1 elements: **angle defect**.

continuous elements



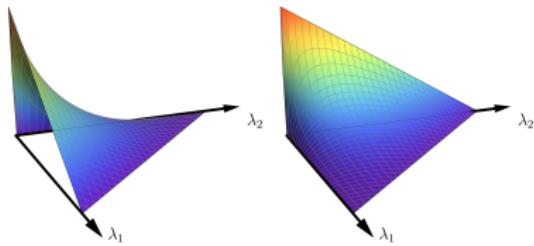
continuous on each triangle
discontinuous across red edge

blow-up elements

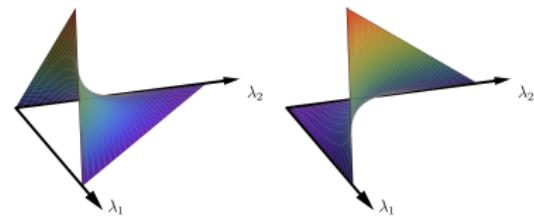


continuous across all edges
discontinuous at vertices

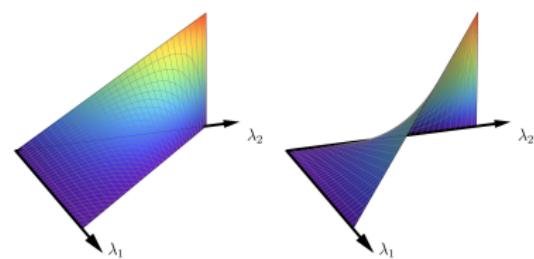
New finite element space



$$\psi_{012} = \frac{\lambda_0\lambda_1}{\lambda_1 + \lambda_2}, \quad \psi_{021} = \frac{\lambda_0\lambda_2}{\lambda_2 + \lambda_1},$$



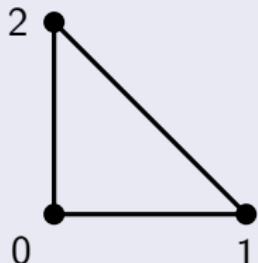
$$\psi_{102} = \frac{\lambda_1\lambda_0}{\lambda_0 + \lambda_2}, \quad \psi_{120} = \frac{\lambda_1\lambda_2}{\lambda_2 + \lambda_0},$$



$$\psi_{201} = \frac{\lambda_2\lambda_0}{\lambda_0 + \lambda_1}, \quad \psi_{210} = \frac{\lambda_2\lambda_1}{\lambda_1 + \lambda_0}.$$

Degrees of freedom

Classical \mathcal{P}_1

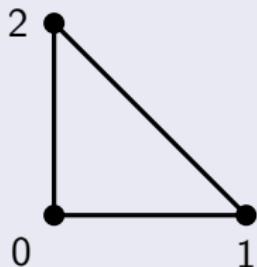


Barycentric coordinates: $\lambda_0 + \lambda_1 + \lambda_2 = 1$.

- 0 : $\lambda_0 = 1 \Leftrightarrow \lambda_1 = \lambda_2 = 0$
- 1 : $\lambda_1 = 1 \Leftrightarrow \lambda_2 = \lambda_0 = 0$
- 2 : $\lambda_2 = 1 \Leftrightarrow \lambda_0 = \lambda_1 = 0$

Degrees of freedom

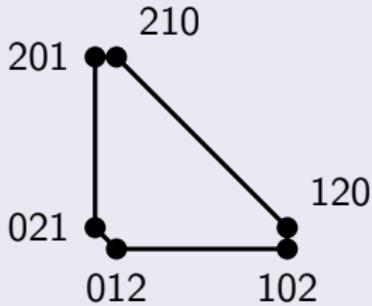
Classical \mathcal{P}_1



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Blow-up $b\mathcal{P}_1$



- 012 : $\lim_{\lambda_1 \rightarrow 0} \lim_{\lambda_2 \rightarrow 0}$
- 120 : $\lim_{\lambda_2 \rightarrow 0} \lim_{\lambda_0 \rightarrow 0}$
- 201 : $\lim_{\lambda_0 \rightarrow 0} \lim_{\lambda_1 \rightarrow 0}$
- 021 : $\lim_{\lambda_2 \rightarrow 0} \lim_{\lambda_1 \rightarrow 0}$
- 102 : $\lim_{\lambda_0 \rightarrow 0} \lim_{\lambda_2 \rightarrow 0}$
- 210 : $\lim_{\lambda_1 \rightarrow 0} \lim_{\lambda_0 \rightarrow 0}$

Example: Evaluating degrees of freedom

Recall

$$\lambda_0 + \lambda_1 + \lambda_2 = 1, \quad \psi_{012} = \frac{\lambda_0 \lambda_1}{\lambda_1 + \lambda_2}.$$

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Evaluating degrees of freedom

$$012 : \lim_{\lambda_1 \rightarrow 0} \lim_{\lambda_2 \rightarrow 0} \frac{\lambda_0 \lambda_1}{\lambda_1 + \lambda_2} = \lim_{\lambda_1 \rightarrow 0} \frac{\lambda_0 \lambda_1}{\lambda_1} = \lim_{\lambda_0 \rightarrow 1} \lambda_0 = 1,$$

$$021 : \lim_{\lambda_2 \rightarrow 0} \lim_{\lambda_1 \rightarrow 0} \frac{\lambda_0 \lambda_1}{\lambda_1 + \lambda_2} = \lim_{\lambda_2 \rightarrow 0} \frac{0}{\lambda_2} = 0,$$

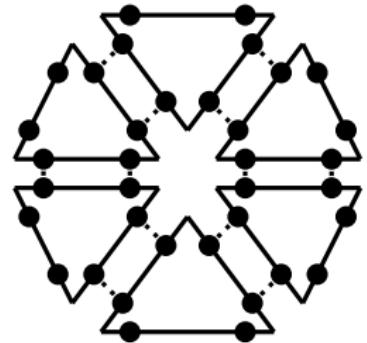
$$120 : \lim_{\lambda_2 \rightarrow 0} \lim_{\lambda_0 \rightarrow 0} \frac{\lambda_0 \lambda_1}{\lambda_1 + \lambda_2} = \lim_{\lambda_2 \rightarrow 0} \frac{0}{1} = 0,$$

$$102 : \lim_{\lambda_0 \rightarrow 0} \lim_{\lambda_2 \rightarrow 0} \frac{\lambda_0 \lambda_1}{\lambda_1 + \lambda_2} = \lim_{\lambda_0 \rightarrow 0} \frac{\lambda_0 \lambda_1}{\lambda_1} = 0,$$

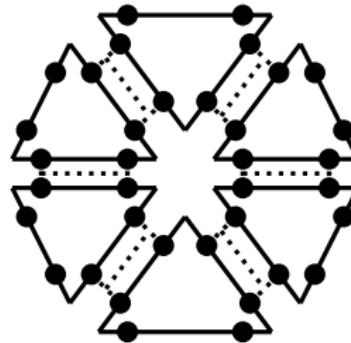
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$$210 : \lim_{\lambda_1 \rightarrow 0} \lim_{\lambda_0 \rightarrow 0} \frac{\lambda_0 \lambda_1}{\lambda_1 + \lambda_2} = \lim_{\lambda_1 \rightarrow 0} \frac{0}{1} = 0.$$

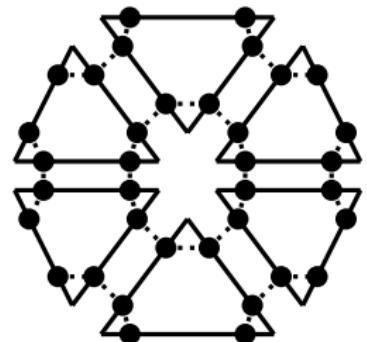
Global spaces



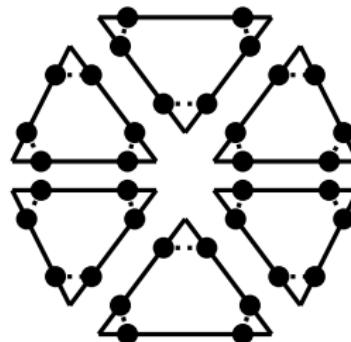
Blow-up finite elements



Crouzeix–Raviart–style blow-up elements



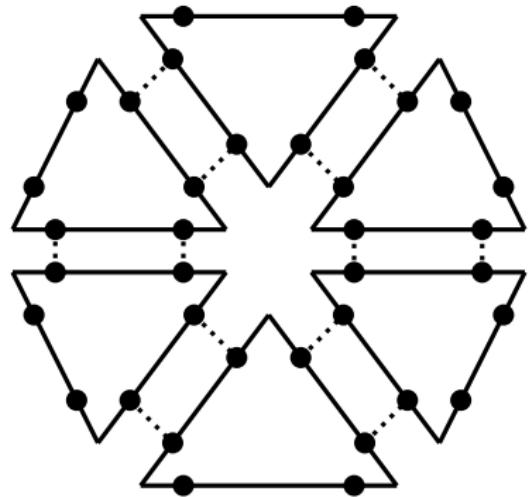
Lagrange



Discontinuous Lagrange

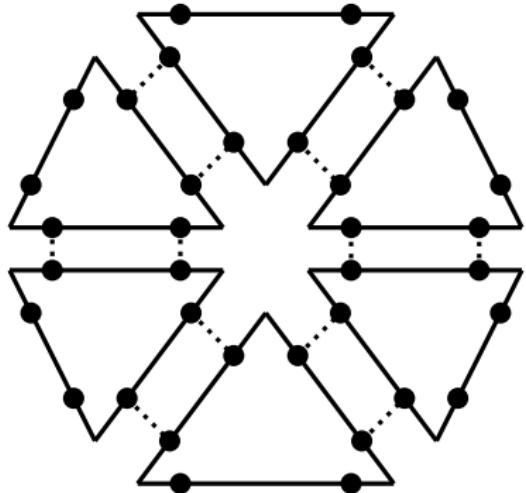
Blow-up finite elements for tensors

- Scalar fields: we placed a number at each dot.



Blow-up finite elements

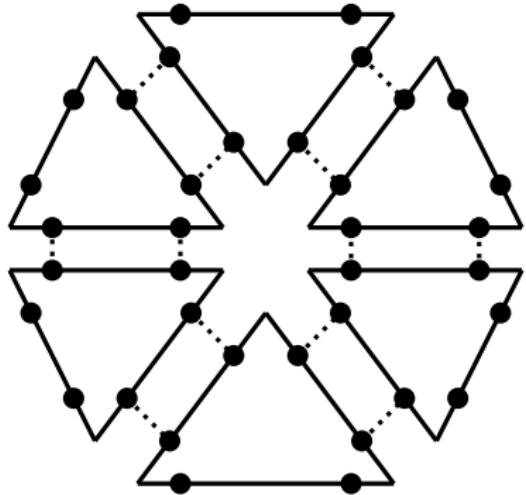
Blow-up finite elements for tensors



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- Scalar fields: we placed a number at each dot.
- Vector fields: we place two numbers at each dot, for the tangential and normal components, respectively.

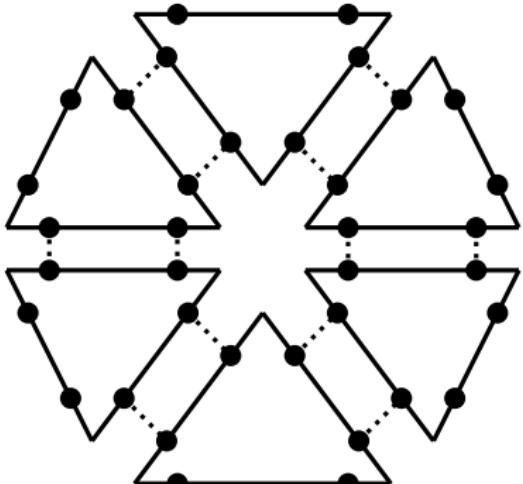
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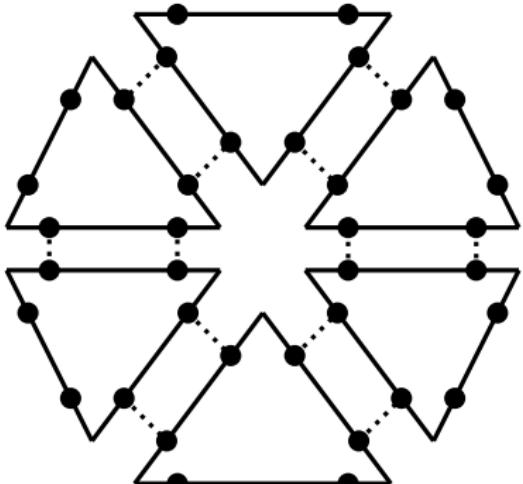
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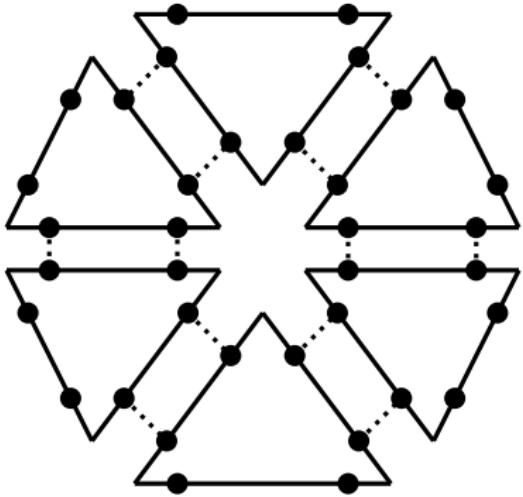
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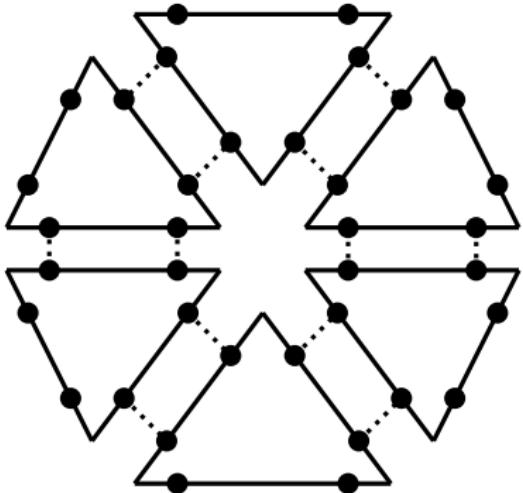
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- General tensor fields are analogous.

Vector Laplacian eigenvalue problems on surfaces

Hodge Laplacian

$$(dd^* + d^*d)v^\flat = \lambda v^\flat.$$

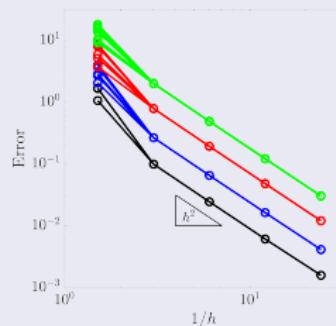
- Tangential continuity suffices.
- Standard FEEC works.
- L^2 pairing suffices.

Bochner Laplacian

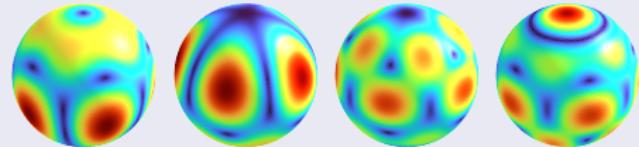
$$\nabla^*\nabla v = \lambda v.$$

- Must have full continuity across edges.
- Can't use standard FEEC.
- Needs Riemannian metric.

Bochner Laplacian on sphere using blow-up elements



Eigenvalue error



Eigenfield magnitude ($\lambda = 11, 11, 19, 19$)

There's more

This talk so far

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There's more

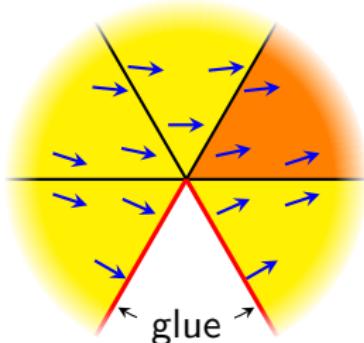
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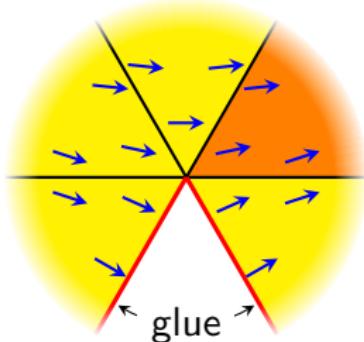
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- Degrees of freedom in terms of blow-up simplex.

Blowing up



- Even on an individual triangle, the vector field is not continuous at the origin.
- But it is “continuous in polar coordinates,” i.e. in r and θ .

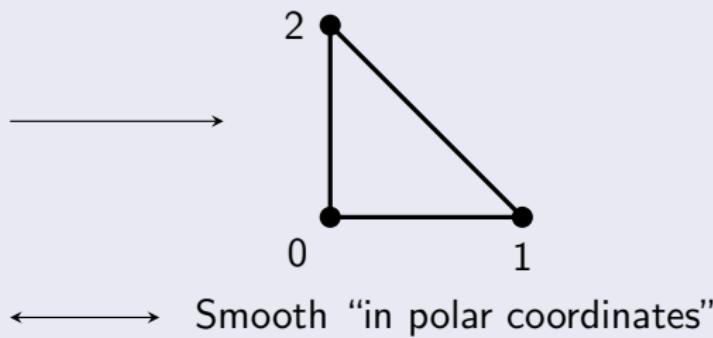
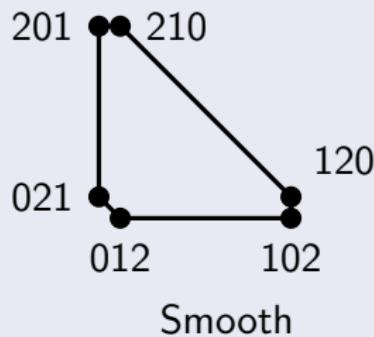
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Blowing up manifolds with corners (Melrose, 1996)

- formalizes continuity/smoothness “in polar coordinates”



Section 4

Concluding remarks: Differential geometry vs.
Riemannian geometry

Metric-independent finite element spaces

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Metric-dependent finite element spaces

- Defining finite element spaces of vector fields with full continuity requires a Riemannian metric (even via differential form proxies).
- Behavior depends on whether angle defect is zero or not.

Thank you



[Yakov Berchenko-Kogan and Evan S. Gawlik](#)

Finite element spaces of double forms.

<https://arxiv.org/abs/2505.17243>



[Yakov Berchenko-Kogan](#)

Duality in finite element exterior calculus and Hodge duality on the sphere.

Found. Comput. Math. 21(5):1153–1180, 2021.



[Evan S. Gawlik and Anil N. Hirani](#)

Sequences from sequences, sans coordinates.

In preparation.



[Yakov Berchenko-Kogan and Evan S. Gawlik](#)

Blow-up Whitney forms, shadow forms, and Poisson processes.

Results in Applied Mathematics, special issue on Hilbert complexes, Paper No. 100529, 2025.



[J. P. Brasselet, M. Goresky, and R. MacPherson.](#)

Simplicial differential forms with poles.

Amer. J. Math., 113(6):1019–1052, 1991.

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