HÖLDER CONTINUITY OF HARMONIC QUASICONFORMAL MAPPINGS

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Abstract. We prove that for harmonic quasiconformal mappings $\alpha$-Hölder continuity on the boundary implies $\alpha$-Hölder continuity of the map itself. Our result holds for the class of uniformly perfect bounded domains, in fact we can allow that a portion of the boundary is thin in the sense of capacity. The problem for general bounded domains remains open.

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1. Introduction

The following theorem is the main result in [8].

Theorem 1.1. Let $D$ be a bounded domain in $\mathbb{R}^n$ and let $f$ be a continuous mapping of $\overline{D}$ into $\mathbb{R}^n$ which is quasiconformal in $D$. Suppose that, for some $M > 0$ and $0 < \alpha \leq 1$,

$$|f(x) - f(y)| \leq M|x - y|^{\alpha}$$

whenever $x$ and $y$ lie on $\partial D$. Then

$$|f(x) - f(y)| \leq M'|x - y|^{\beta}$$

for all $x$ and $y$ on $\overline{D}$, where $\beta = \min(\alpha, K_f^{1/(1-n)})$ and $M'$ depends only on $M$, $\alpha$, $n$, $K(f)$ and $\text{diam}(D)$.

The exponent $\beta$ is the best possible, as the example of a radial quasiconformal map $f(x) = |x|^\alpha x$, $0 < \alpha < 1$, of $\mathbb{B}^n$ onto itself shows (see [11], p. 49). Also, the assumption of boundedness is essential. Indeed, one can consider $g(x) = |x|^\alpha x$, $|x| \geq 1$ where $\alpha > 0$. Then $g$ is quasiconformal in $D = \mathbb{R}^n \setminus \mathbb{B}^n$ (see [11], p. 49), it is identity on $\partial D$ and hence Lipschitz continuous on $\partial D$. However, $|g(te_1) - g(e_1)| \approx t^{\alpha+1}$, $t \to \infty$, and therefore $g$ is not globally Lipschitz continuous on $D$.

This paper deals with the following question, suggested by P. Koskela: is it possible to replace $\beta$ with $\alpha$ if we assume, in addition to quasiconformality, that $f$ is harmonic? In the special case $D = \mathbb{B}^n$ this was proved, for arbitrary moduli of continuity $\omega(\delta)$, in [2]. Our main result is that the answer is positive, if $\partial D$ is a uniformly perfect set (cf. [6]). In fact, we prove a more general result, including domains having a thin, in the sense of capacity, portion of the boundary. However, this generality is in a sense illusory, because any harmonic and quasiconformal (briefly hqc) mapping extends harmonically and quasiconformally across such portion of the boundary. Nevertheless, it leads to a natural open question: is the answer positive for arbitrary bounded domain in $\mathbb{R}^n$?

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In the case of smooth boundaries much better regularity up to the boundary can be deduced, see [7]; related results for harmonic functions were obtained by [1].

We denote by \( B(x, r) \) and \( S(x, r) \) the open ball, respectively sphere, in \( \mathbb{R}^n \) with center \( x \) and radius \( r > 0 \). We adopt the basic notation, terminology and definitions related to quasiconformal maps from [11]. A condenser is a pair \((K, U)\), where \( K \) is a non-empty compact subset of an open set \( U \subset \mathbb{R}^n \). The capacity of the condenser \((K, U)\) is defined as

\[
\cap(K, U) = \inf \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} |\nabla u|^n dV,
\]

where infimum is taken over all continuous real-valued \( u \in ACL^n(\mathbb{R}^n) \) such that \( u(x) = 1 \) for \( x \in K \) and \( u(x) = 0 \) for \( x \in \mathbb{R}^n \setminus U \). In fact, one can replace the \( ACL^n \) condition with Lipschitz continuity in this definition. We note that, for a compact \( K \subset \mathbb{R}^n \) and open bounded sets \( U_1 \) and \( U_2 \) containing \( K \) we have: \( \cap(K, U_1) = 0 \) iff \( \cap(K, U_2) = 0 \), therefore the notion of a compact set of zero capacity is well defined (see [12], Remarks 7.13) and we can write \( \cap(K) = 0 \) in this situation. For the notion of the modulus \( M(\Gamma) \) of a family \( \Gamma \) of curves in \( \mathbb{R}^n \) we refer to [11] and [12]. These two notions are related: by results of [5] and [13] we have

\[
\cap(K, U) = M(\Delta(K, \partial U; U)),
\]

where \( \Delta(E, F; G) \) denotes the family of curves connecting \( E \) to \( F \) within \( G \), see [11] or [12] for details.

In addition to this notion of capacity, related to quasiconformal mappings, we need Wiener capacity, related to harmonic functions. For a compact \( K \subset \mathbb{R}^n \), \( n \geq 3 \), it is defined by

\[
\cap_W(K) = \inf \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} |\nabla u|^2 dV,
\]

where infimum is taken over all Lipschitz continuous compactly supported functions \( u \) on \( \mathbb{R}^n \) such that \( u = 1 \) on \( K \). Let us note that every compact \( K \subset \mathbb{R}^n \) which has capacity zero has Wiener capacity zero. Indeed, choose an open ball \( B_R = B(0, R) \supset K \). Since \( n \geq 2 \) we have, by Hölder inequality,

\[
\int_{\mathbb{R}^n} |\nabla u|^2 dV \leq |B_R|^{1-2/n} \left( \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} |\nabla u|^n dV \right)^{2/n}
\]

for any Lipschitz continuous \( u \) vanishing outside \( U \), our claim follows immediately from definitions.

A compact set \( K \subset \mathbb{R}^n \), consisting of at least two points, is \( \alpha \)-uniformly perfect (\( \alpha > 0 \)) if there is no ring \( R \) separating \( K \) (i.e. such that both components of \( \mathbb{R}^n \setminus R \) intersect \( K \)) such that \( \mod(R) > \alpha \). We say that a compact \( K \subset \mathbb{R}^n \) is uniformly perfect if it is \( \alpha \)-uniformly perfect for some \( \alpha > 0 \).

We denote the \( \alpha \)-dimensional Hausdorff measure of a set \( F \subset \mathbb{R}^n \) by \( \Lambda_\alpha(F) \).

2. The main result

In this section \( D \) denotes a bounded domain in \( \mathbb{R}^n \), \( n \geq 3 \). Let

\[
\Gamma_0 = \{ x \in \partial D : \cap(\overline{B}(x, \epsilon) \cap \partial D) = 0 \text{ for some } \epsilon > 0 \},
\]

and \( \Gamma_1 = \partial D \setminus \Gamma_0 \). Using this notation we can state our main result.

**Theorem 2.1.** Assume \( f : \overline{D} \to \mathbb{R}^n \) is continuous on \( \overline{D} \), harmonic and quasiconformal in \( D \). Assume \( f \) is Hölder continuous with exponent \( \alpha \), \( 0 < \alpha \leq 1 \), on \( \partial D \) and \( \Gamma_1 \) is uniformly perfect. Then \( f \) is Hölder continuous with exponent \( \alpha \) on \( \overline{D} \).
If $\Gamma_0$ is empty we obtain the following

**Corollary 2.2.** If $f : \overline{D} \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^n$ is continuous on $\overline{D}$, Hölder continuous with exponent $\alpha$, $0 < \alpha \leq 1$, on $\partial D$, harmonic and quasiconformal in $D$ and if $\partial D$ is uniformly perfect, then $f$ is Hölder continuous with exponent $\alpha$ on $\overline{D}$.

The first step in proving Theorem 2.1 is reduction to the case $\Gamma_0 = \emptyset$. In fact, we show that existence of a hqc extension of $f$ across $\Gamma_0$ follows from well known results. Let $D' = D \cup \Gamma_0$. Then $D'$ is an open set in $\mathbb{R}^n$, $\Gamma_0$ is a closed subset of $D'$ and $\partial D' = \Gamma_1$.

Clearly $\text{cap}(K \cap \Gamma_0) = 0$ for each compact $K \subset D'$, and therefore, by Lemma 7.14 in [12], $\Lambda_\alpha(K \cap \Gamma_0) = 0$ for each $\alpha > 0$. In particular, $\Gamma_0$ has $\sigma$-finite $(n-1)$-dimensional Hausdorff measure. Since it is closed in $D'$, we can apply Theorem 35.1 in [11] to conclude that $f$ has a quasiconformal extension $F$ across $\Gamma_0$ which has the same quasiconformality constant as $f$.

Since $\Gamma_0$ is a countable union of compact subsets $K_j$ of capacity zero and hence of Wiener capacity zero we conclude that $\Gamma_0$ has Wiener capacity zero. Hence, by a classical result (see [4]), there is a (unique) extension $G : \overline{D'} \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^n$ of $f$ which is harmonic in $D'$. Obviously, $F = G$ is a harmonic quasiconformal extension of $f$ to $\overline{D'}$ which has the same quasiconformality constant as $f$.

In effect, we reduced the proof of Theorem 2.1 to the proof of Corollary 2.2. We begin the proof of Corollary 2.2 with the following

**Lemma 2.3.** Let $D \subset \mathbb{R}^n$ be a bounded domain with uniformly perfect boundary. There exists a constant $m > 0$ such that for every $y \in D$ we have

$$\text{cap}(\overline{B}(y, \frac{d}{2}), D) \geq m, \quad d = \text{dist}(y, \partial D).$$

**Proof.** Fix $y \in D$ as above and $z \in \partial D$ such that $|y - z| = d \equiv r$. Clearly $\text{diam}(\partial D) = \text{diam}(D) > 2r$. Set $F_1 = \overline{B}(z, r) \cap (\partial D)$ and $F_2 = \overline{B}(z, r) \cap \overline{B}(y, \frac{d}{2})$, $F_3 = S(z, 2r)$. Let $\Gamma_{i,j} = \Delta(F_i, F_j; \mathbb{R}^n)$ for $i, j = 1, 2, 3$. By [8, Thm 4.1(3)] there exists a constant $a = a(E, n) > 0$ such that

$$M(\Gamma_{1,3}) \geq a$$

while by standard estimates [11, 7.5] there exists $b = b(n) > 0$ such that

$$M(\Gamma_{2,3}) \geq b.$$

Next, by [12, Cor 5.41] there exists $m = m(E, n) > 0$ such that

$$M(\Gamma_{1,2}) \geq m.$$

Finally, with $B = \overline{B}(y, d/2)$ we have

$$\text{cap}(B, D) = M(\Delta(B, \partial D; \mathbb{R}^n)) \geq M(\Gamma_{1,2}) \geq m.$$

In conclusion, from the above lemma, our assumption

$$|f(x_1) - f(x_2)| \leq C|x_1 - x_2|^{\alpha}, \quad x_1, x_2 \in \partial D,$$

and Lemma 8 in [8] we conclude that there is a constant $M$, depending on $m$, $n$, $K(f)$, $C$ and $\alpha$ only such that

$$|f(x) - f(y)| \leq M|x - y|^{\alpha}, \quad y \in D, \quad x \in \partial D, \quad \text{dist}(y, \partial D) = |x - y|.$$
However, an argument presented in [8] shows that the above estimate holds for $y \in D$, $x \in \partial D$ without any further conditions, but with possibly different constant:

$$|f(x) - f(y)| \leq M'|x - y|^\alpha, \quad y \in D, \quad x \in \partial D.$$  

The following lemma was proved in [3] for real valued functions, but the proof relies on the maximum principle which holds also for vector valued harmonic functions, hence lemma holds for harmonic mappings as well.

**Lemma 2.6.** Assume $h : \overline{D} \to \mathbb{R}^n$ is continuous on $\overline{D}$ and harmonic in $D$. Assume for each $x_0 \in \partial D$ we have

$$\sup_{B_r(x_0)\cap D'} |h(x) - h(x_0)| \leq \omega(r) \quad \text{for} \quad 0 < r \leq r_0.$$

Then $|h(x) - h(y)| \leq \omega(|x - y|)$ whenever $x, y \in D$ and $|x - y| \leq r_0$.

Now we combine (2.5) and the above lemma, with $r_0 = \text{diam}(D)$, to complete the proof of Corollary 2.2 and therefore of Theorem 2.1 as well.

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