NONLOCAL CHARACTERIZATIONS OF VARIABLE EXPONENT SOBOLEV SPACES

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Abstract. We obtain some nonlocal characterizations for a class of variable exponent Sobolev spaces arising in nonlinear elasticity theory and in the theory of electrorheological fluids. We also get a singular limit formula extending Nguyen results to the anisotropic case.

1. Introduction

In the last twenty years, starting from the work by Bourgain, Brezis and Mironescu [5], there has been a considerable effort in the literature to provide some useful nonlocal characterizations of functions in Sobolev spaces. The results in [5] are mainly for $W^{1,p}(\Omega)$ on a bounded domain $\Omega$, but they can be extended to the whole space setting. In particular, if $p \in (1, +\infty)$ and $u \in L^p(\mathbb{R}^n)$, then $u \in W^{1,p}(\mathbb{R}^n)$ if and only if

$$\sup_{s \in (0,1)} (1-s) \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \frac{|u(x) - u(y)|^p}{|x-y|^{n+ps}} \, dx \, dy < +\infty,$$

in which case

$$\lim_{s \searrow 1} (1-s) \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \frac{|u(x) - u(y)|^p}{|x-y|^{n+ps}} \, dx \, dy = K_{n,p} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} |\nabla u|^p \, dx,$$

where

$$K_{n,p} = \frac{1}{p} \int_{S^{n-1}} |\omega \cdot e|^p \, d\mathcal{H}^{n-1}(\omega), \quad e \in S^{n-1}.$$  

Another nonlocal characterization was obtained by Nguyen in [10–12] involving a nonhomogeneous functional. More precisely, if $p \in (1, +\infty)$ and $u \in L^p(\mathbb{R}^n)$, then $u \in W^{1,p}(\mathbb{R}^n)$ if and only if

$$\sup_{\delta \in (0,1)} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \frac{\delta^p}{|x-y|^{n+p}} \, dx \, dy < +\infty,$$

in which case

$$\lim_{\delta \searrow 0} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \frac{\delta^p}{|u(x) - u(y)|^\gamma} \, dx \, dy = K_{n,p} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} |\nabla u|^p \, dx.$$

Nonhomogeneous quantities like these appear in some new estimates for the topological degree investigated in [4]. The limiting case $p = 1$ is related to BV functions but it is actually more delicate, see [10,11]. On the other hand, differential equations and variational problems involving variable $p(x)$-growth conditions, and hence variable exponent Sobolev spaces $W^{1,p(\cdot)}(\mathbb{R}^n)$, arise from nonlinear elasticity theory and electrorheological fluids, and have been the target of various investigations, especially in regularity theory and in nonlocal problems (see e.g. [1,2,7,14]).

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Let $p : \mathbb{R}^n \to [1, +\infty)$ be a measurable function. Let’s define

$$p^- := \text{ess inf}_{\mathbb{R}^n} p \quad \text{and} \quad p^+ := \text{ess sup}_{\mathbb{R}^n} p.$$ 

For $x \in \mathbb{R}^n$, we set

$$K_{n,p}(x) := \frac{1}{p(x)} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} |x-y|^{n+p(x)} \, d\mathcal{H}^{n-1}(y), \quad e \in \mathbb{S}^{n-1}.$$ 

We also set

$$W^{1,p^+} (\mathbb{R}^n) := W^{1,p^+} (\mathbb{R}^n) \cap W^{1,p^-} (\mathbb{R}^n).$$

In this framework, in the spirit of the results of [10], we have the following

**Theorem 1.1.** Let $1 < p^- \leq p^+ < +\infty$ and let $u \in W^{1,p^+} (\mathbb{R}^n)$. Then

(a) there exists $C > 0$, depending only on $n$ and $p^\pm$, such that for every $\delta > 0$

$$\int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \frac{\delta^p(x)}{|x-y|^{n+p(x)}} \, dx \, dy \leq C \left( \|\nabla u\|_{L^{p^+}(\mathbb{R}^n)}^{p^+} + \|\nabla u\|_{L^{p^-}(\mathbb{R}^n)}^{p^-} \right);$$

(b) we have

$$\lim_{\delta \to 0} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \frac{\delta^p(x)}{|x-y|^{n+p(x)}} \, dx \, dy = \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} K_{n,p}(x) |\nabla u(x)|^p(x) \, dx;$$

(c) if $u \in L^{p^+} (\mathbb{R}^n)$ and

$$\sup_{0 < \delta < 1} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \frac{\delta^p(x)}{|x-y|^{n+p(x)}} \, dx \, dy < +\infty,$$

then $u \in W^{1,p^+} (\mathbb{R}^n)$.

Unfortunately, it has not been possible to provide a limit formula in the more general context of the Sobolev space $W^{1,p^+} (\mathbb{R}^n)$, the basic problem being that the Hardy-Littlewood maximal function in one direction on $L^{p^+}$ fails to be bounded (for the modular) unless $p^+(\cdot)$ is a constant [6], see also [9]. In the limit case $p^- = 1$, let $u \in L^{p^+} (\mathbb{R}^n)$ and $E = \{ x \in \mathbb{R}^n : p(x) = 1 \}$. Assume $\text{int}(E) \neq \emptyset$ and

$$\sup_{0 < \delta < 1} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \frac{\delta^p(x)}{|x-y|^{n+p(x)}} \, dx \, dy < +\infty.$$ 

Then, if $B$ denotes any ball in $\mathbb{R}^n$, it holds

$$\sup_{B \subset \text{int}(E)} |B|^{-\frac{n+1}{n}} \int_B \int_B |u(x) - u(y)| \, dx \, dy < +\infty,$$

which, for $n = 1$, reads as

$$\sup_{B \subset \text{int}(E)} \int_B \int_B |u(x) - u(y)| \, dx \, dy < +\infty,$$

namely $u \in BMO(E)$, the space of bounded mean oscillation functions on $E$. See Remark 4.6.

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2. Preliminary stuff

In this section we recall some basic properties of the variable exponent spaces, see [3, 7, 8].

2.1. Variable exponents spaces. Let \( \Omega \subset \mathbb{R}^n \) be a measurable set and let \( p : \mathbb{R}^n \to [1, +\infty) \) be a measurable function. We define \( L^{p(\cdot)}(\Omega) \) as the space of measurable functions \( u : \Omega \to \mathbb{R} \) with

\[
\rho_{p(\cdot)}(u) := \int_{\Omega} |u(x)|^{p(x)} \, dx < +\infty,
\]

so, denoting by \( M(\Omega) \) the space of measurable functions on the domain \( \Omega \), we set

\[
L^{p(\cdot)}(\Omega) := \{ u \in M(\Omega) : \rho_{p(\cdot)}(u) < +\infty \}.
\]

The function \( p \) is called exponent of \( L^{p(\cdot)}(\Omega) \), while \( \rho_{p(\cdot)}(u) \) is the modular of \( u \). If \( u \in L^{p(\cdot)}(\Omega) \),

\[
\|u\|_{L^{p(\cdot)}(\Omega)} := \inf \left\{ \lambda > 0 : \rho_{p(\cdot)} \left( \frac{u}{\lambda} \right) \leq 1 \right\}
\]

is a norm for \( L^{p(\cdot)}(\Omega) \), called Luxemburg norm, which makes the space complete. In other words, \( L^{p(\cdot)}(\Omega) \) is a Banach space with respect to \( \| \cdot \|_{L^{p(\cdot)}(\Omega)} \). Taken a locally integrable function \( \omega : \mathbb{R}^n \to (0, +\infty) \), we can introduce a weighed version of variable exponent Lebesgue spaces. We define \( L^{p(\cdot), \omega}(\Omega) \) as the space of measurable functions \( u : \Omega \to \mathbb{R} \) such that

\[
\rho_{p(\cdot), \omega}(u) := \int_{\Omega} |u(x)|^{p(x)} \omega(x) \, dx < +\infty,
\]

so we can set

\[
L^{p(\cdot), \omega}(\Omega) := \{ u \in M(\Omega) : \rho_{p(\cdot), \omega}(u) < +\infty \}.
\]

The function \( \omega \) is called weight of the space. Moreover, \( L^{p(\cdot), \omega}(\Omega) \) is a Banach space with norm

\[
\|u\|_{L^{p(\cdot), \omega}(\Omega)} := \inf \left\{ \lambda > 0 : \rho_{p(\cdot), \omega} \left( \frac{u}{\lambda} \right) \leq 1 \right\}.
\]

The following relationship between the norm and the modular holds:

\[
(2.1) \quad \min \left\{ \rho_{p(\cdot), \omega} \left( \frac{u}{\lambda^{\frac{1}{p}}}, \rho_{p(\cdot), \omega} \left( \frac{u}{\lambda^{\frac{1}{q}}} \right) \right) \right\} \leq \|u\|_{L^{p(\cdot), \omega}(\Omega)} \leq \max \left\{ \rho_{p(\cdot), \omega} \left( \frac{u}{\lambda^{\frac{1}{p}}}, \rho_{p(\cdot), \omega} \left( \frac{u}{\lambda^{\frac{1}{q}}} \right) \right) \right\}.
\]

We denote by \( W^{1,p(\cdot)}(\Omega) \) the space of \( u \in L^{p(\cdot)}(\Omega) \) such that their gradient \( \nabla u \in L^{p(\cdot)}(\Omega) \), so that

\[
W^{1,p(\cdot)}(\Omega) := \left\{ u \in L^{p(\cdot)}(\Omega) : \exists \nabla u \in L^{p(\cdot)}(\Omega) \right\}.
\]

If \( u \in W^{1,p(\cdot)}(\Omega) \), the object

\[
\|u\|_{W^{1,p(\cdot)}(\Omega)} := \|u\|_{L^{p(\cdot)}(\Omega)} + \|\nabla u\|_{L^{p(\cdot)}(\Omega)}
\]

is a norm for \( W^{1,p(\cdot)}(\Omega) \). Moreover, \( W^{1,p(\cdot)}(\Omega) \) is a Banach space with respect to \( \| \cdot \|_{W^{1,p(\cdot)}(\Omega)} \).

2.2. Fractional Sobolev spaces. If \( s \in (0, 1) \), we can also extend the concept of fractional Sobolev space to the variable exponent case, as follows. Let \( \Omega \subset \mathbb{R}^n \) be a measurable set and let \( p : \mathbb{R}^n \times \mathbb{R}^n \to [1, +\infty) \) and \( q : \mathbb{R}^n \to [1, +\infty) \) be two measurable functions. If we suppose that \( p \) and \( q \) are two bounded exponents, then there exist \( p^+, p^-, q^+, q^- \in [1, +\infty) \) such that

\[
\forall x, y \in \mathbb{R} : \quad p^- \leq p(x, y) \leq p^+, \quad q^- \leq q(x) \leq q^+.
\]

Taken \( s \in (0, 1) \), we denote by \( W = W^{s,p(\cdot),q(\cdot)}(\Omega) \) the functions space

\[
W := \left\{ u \in L^{q(\cdot)}(\Omega) : \exists \lambda > 0 : \int_{\Omega} \int_{\Omega} \frac{|u(x) - u(y)|^{p(x,y)}}{\lambda^{p(x,y)|x-y|^{n+sp(x,y)}}} \, dx \, dy < +\infty \right\}.
\]
If we set the variable exponent seminorm as

\[ [u]_{s,p(\cdot, \cdot)} := \inf \left\{ \lambda > 0 : \int_{\Omega} \int_{\Omega} \frac{|u(x) - u(y)|^{p(x,y)}}{\lambda^{n+p(x,y)|x-y|^{n+sp(x,y)}} \, dx \, dy \leq 1 \right\}, \]

it is possible to prove that \( W \) is a Banach space with respect to the norm

\[ \|u\|_W := \|u\|_{L^n(\Omega)} + [u]_{s,p(\cdot, \cdot)}. \]

The concepts introduced are consistent with the classical definitions of the spaces \( L^p(\Omega) \), \( W^{1,p}(\Omega) \) and \( W^{s,p}(\Omega) \) when the functions \( p \) and \( q \) are equal and constant.

2.3. Maximal functions. Let \( u \in L^1_{\text{loc}}(\mathbb{R}^n) \) be a local summable function. We define its maximal function \( M(u) \) by setting

\[ M(u)(x) := \sup_{r>0} \int_{B(x,r)} |u(y)| \, dy = \sup_{r>0} \frac{1}{\mathcal{L}^n(B(x,r))} \int_{B(x,r)} |u(y)| \, dy, \]

where \( \mathcal{L}^n(A) \) represents the \( n \)-dimensional Lebesgue measure of \( A \subset \mathbb{R}^n \). Moreover, we introduce the Hardy-Littlewood maximal operator as the function \( M : \{u \mapsto M(u)\} \).

**Theorem 2.1.** Let \( p \in (1, +\infty] \). Then there exists a constant \( C > 0 \), depending only on the dimension \( n \) of the space and on the index \( p \), such that

\[ \forall u \in L^p(\mathbb{R}^n) : \quad \|M(u)\|_{L^p(\mathbb{R}^n)} \leq C \|u\|_{L^p(\mathbb{R}^n)}. \]

In other words, the Hardy-Littlewood maximal operator \( M : L^p(\mathbb{R}^n) \to L^p(\mathbb{R}^n) \) is bounded.

**Proof.** See [15, Chapter 1, Theorem 1]. \( \square \)

For our purposes, taken any \( \omega \in \mathbb{S}^{n-1} \), we also define

\[ M_\omega(u)(x) := \sup_{h>0} \frac{1}{h} \int_0^h |u(x + s\omega)| \, ds \]

as the maximal function of \( u \) along the considered direction \( \omega \). Arguing as in [13, Lemma 3.1], it is possible to prove the existence of a universal constant \( C > 0 \) such that, for all \( \omega \in \mathbb{S}^{n-1} \),

\[ \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} |M_\omega(u)(x)|^p \, dx \leq C \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} |u(x)|^p \, dx, \quad \forall u \in L^p(\mathbb{R}^n). \]

For variable exponents the inequality fails unless \( p(\cdot) \) is constant [6,9]. For instance, if \( p(x) = 2 \) on \((-\infty, -2)\) and \( p(x) \geq 4 \) on \([2, +\infty)\), then \( \int_{\mathbb{R}} |u|^p(x) \, dx < +\infty \), but \( \int_{\mathbb{R}} |M(u)|^p(x) \, dx = +\infty \) for the function \( u(x) = |x|^{-1/3} \chi_{[2,\infty)}(x) \).

**Definition 2.2.** A function \( \alpha : \Omega \subset \mathbb{R}^n \to \mathbb{R} \) is called log-Hölder continuous on \( \Omega \) if there exists a constant \( c > 0 \) such that

\[ \forall x, y \in \Omega : \quad |\alpha(x) - \alpha(y)| \leq \frac{c}{\log (e + |x-y|^{-1})}. \quad (2.2) \]

Moreover, \( \alpha \) satisfies the log-Hölder decay condition if there exist \( \alpha_\infty \in \mathbb{R} \) and \( c > 0 \) such that

\[ \forall x \in \Omega : \quad |\alpha(x) - \alpha_\infty| \leq \frac{c}{\log (e + |x|)}. \quad (2.3) \]

The function \( \alpha \) is called globally log-Hölder continuous on the domain \( \Omega \) if it is log-Hölder continuous on \( \Omega \) and it satisfies the decay condition just introduced. In this case, the constant \( c \) satisfying both the equations (2.2) and (2.3) is called log-Hölder constant of \( \alpha \).
Now let’s introduce the following class of variable exponents:

\[ \mathcal{P}^{\log}(\Omega) := \left\{ p \in M(\Omega) : \frac{1}{p} \text{ is globally log-Hölder continuous} \right\}. \]

We denote by \( c_{\log}(p) \), or \( c_{\log} \), the log-Hölder constant of \( 1/p \) and, if \( \Omega \) is a bounded domain, we are able to introduce the index \( p_\infty \) by setting

\[ p_\infty := \left( \lim_{|x| \to +\infty} \frac{1}{p(x)} \right)^{-1}, \]

with the usual convention \( 1/0 = +\infty \).

Let us introduce an important theorem about the boundness of the Hardy-Littlewood maximal operator \( M : \{ u \mapsto M(u) \} \) on the Lebesgue space \( L^{p(\cdot)}(\mathbb{R}^n) \).

**Theorem 2.3.** Let \( p \in \mathcal{P}^{\log}(\mathbb{R}^n) \) be a bounded variable exponent, with \( p^- > 1 \). Then there exists a constant \( K_{p^-} > 0 \), depending only on the dimension \( n \) of the space and on the log-Hölder constant \( c_{\log}(p) \) of \( 1/p \), such that

\[ \forall u \in L^{p(\cdot)}(\mathbb{R}^n) : \| M(u) \|_{L^{p(\cdot)}(\mathbb{R}^n)} \leq K_{p^-} \| u \|_{L^{p(\cdot)}(\mathbb{R}^n)}. \]

In other words, the Hardy-Littlewood maximal operator \( M : L^{p(\cdot)}(\mathbb{R}^n) \to L^{p(\cdot)}(\mathbb{R}^n) \) is bounded.

**Proof.** See [7, Theorem 4.3.8].

As shown in [7, Corollary 4.3.11], the previous theorem holds also in the case of exponents \( p \in \mathcal{P}^{\log}(\Omega) \) and functions \( u \in L^{p(\cdot)}(\Omega) \), with \( \Omega \subset \mathbb{R}^n \).

### 3. Anisotropic formulas

We are now ready to study the behavior of the singular limit in the anisotropic case. In the following, unless otherwise stated, we will assume \( 1 < p^- \leq p^+ < +\infty \).

**Lemma 3.1.** Let \( u \in W^{1,p^+}(\mathbb{R}^n) \). Then there exists a positive constant \( C \), dependent only on \( n \) and \( p^\pm \), such that for all \( \delta > 0 \)

\[ \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \frac{\delta^{p(x)}}{|x-y|^{n+p(x)}} \, dx \, dy \leq C \left( \| \nabla u \|_{L^{p^+}(\mathbb{R}^n)}^{p^+} + \| \nabla u \|_{L^{p^-}(\mathbb{R}^n)}^{p^-} \right). \]

In particular, the integral at the left-hand side is finite.

**Proof.** By using polar coordinates, we have

\[ \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \frac{\delta^{p(x)}}{|x-y|^{n+p(x)}} \, dx \, dy = \int_{\mathbb{S}^{n-1}} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_0^{+\infty} \frac{\delta^{p(x)}}{h^{n+p(x)}} h^{n-1} \, dh \, dx \, d\mathcal{H}^{n-1}(\omega) \]

\[ = \int_{\mathbb{S}^{n-1}} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_0^{+\infty} \frac{\delta^{p(x)}}{h^{p(x)+1}} \, dh \, dx \, d\mathcal{H}^{n-1}(\omega). \]

Thanks to this equation, it is sufficient to prove the existence of a constant \( C > 0 \), dependent only on \( p^\pm \), such that for all \( \omega \in \mathbb{S}^{n-1} \) we have

\[ \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_0^{+\infty} \frac{\delta^{p(x)}}{h^{p(x)+1}} \, dh \, dx \leq C \left( \| \nabla u \|_{L^{p^+}(\mathbb{R}^n)} + \| \nabla u \|_{L^{p^-}(\mathbb{R}^n)} \right). \]
From the fundamental theorem of calculus,
\[
|u(x+h\omega)-u(x)| \leq \int_0^h \left| \frac{d}{ds} u(x+s\omega) \right| ds = \int_0^h |\nabla u(x+s\omega) \cdot \omega| ds \\
\leq \int_0^h |\nabla u(x+s\omega)| ds \leq h \mathcal{M}_\omega(\nabla u)(x),
\]
for a.e. \((x, h) \in \mathbb{R}^n \times (0, +\infty)\), where
\[
\mathcal{M}_\omega(u)(x) = \sup_{h>0} \int_0^h |u(x+s\omega)| ds
\]
is the maximal function of \(u\) with respect to the direction \(\omega \in S^{n-1}\) previously introduced. From this inequality, it follows the set inclusion
\[
\{x \in \mathbb{R}^n : |u(x+h\omega)-u(x)| > \delta \} \subset \{x \in \mathbb{R}^n : h \mathcal{M}_\omega(\nabla u)(x) > \delta \},
\]
from which we have
\[
\int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_0^{+\infty} \frac{\delta p(x)}{h^{p(x)+1}} dh dx \leq \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_0^{+\infty} \frac{\delta p(x)}{h^{p(x)+1}} dh dx = \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \frac{1}{p(x)} |\nabla u(x)|^{p(x)} dx.
\]
Recalling that \(p^- \leq p(x) \leq p^+\), we can increase the multiplicative inverse of \(p(x)\) to \(1/p^-\), getting
\[
\int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_0^{+\infty} \frac{\delta p(x)}{h^{p(x)+1}} dh dx \leq \frac{1}{p^-} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} |\mathcal{M}_\omega(\nabla u)(x)|^{p(x)} dx.
\]
At this point, we split the integral at the right-hand side, over the sets of \(x \in \mathbb{R}^n\) with
\[
\mathcal{M}_\omega(\nabla u)(x) \leq 1 \quad \text{or} \quad \mathcal{M}_\omega(\nabla u)(x) > 1,
\]
so that we are able to increase the integrand function by using, respectively, the exponents \(p^-\) or \(p^+\) and then by extending both the integrals over the entire space \(\mathbb{R}^n\). In this way, we get
\[
\frac{1}{p^-} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} |\mathcal{M}_\omega(\nabla u)(x)|^{p(x)} dx \leq \frac{1}{p^-} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} |\mathcal{M}_\omega(\nabla u)(x)|^{p^-} dx + \frac{1}{p^-} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} |\mathcal{M}_\omega(\nabla u)(x)|^{p^+} dx.
\]
As a direct consequence of the theory of maximal functions, there exist positive constants \(C_{p^\pm}\), depending on \(p^\pm\), such that
\[
\frac{1}{p^-} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} |\mathcal{M}_\omega(\nabla u)(x)|^{p(x)} dx \leq \frac{1}{p^-} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} |\mathcal{M}_\omega(\nabla u)(x)|^{p^-} dx + \frac{1}{p^-} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} |\mathcal{M}_\omega(\nabla u)(x)|^{p^+} dx \\
\leq \frac{C_{p^-}}{p^-} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} |\nabla u(x)|^{p^-} dx + \frac{C_{p^+}}{p^-} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} |\nabla u(x)|^{p^+} dx \\
\leq C \left( \|\nabla u\|_{L^{p^+}(\mathbb{R}^n)} + \|\nabla u\|_{L^{p^-}(\mathbb{R}^n)} \right),
\]
where \(C := \max \{C_{p^+}, C_{p^-}\} / p^-\). The assertion follows. \(\square\)
Remark 3.2. Observe that, if $p : \mathbb{R}^n \to [1, +\infty)$ is bounded and measurable, then we have

$$W^{1,p}(\mathbb{R}^n) \subset W^{1,p(\cdot)}(\mathbb{R}^n).$$

In fact, taken $u \in W^{1,p(\cdot)}(\mathbb{R}^n)$, first of all

$$\int_{\mathbb{R}^n} |u(x)|^{p(x)} \, dx = \int_{u(x) \leq 1} |u(x)|^{p(x)} \, dx + \int_{u(x) > 1} |u(x)|^{p(x)} \, dx$$

$$\leq \|u\|_{L_{p^-}(\mathbb{R}^n)}^{p^-} + \|u\|_{L_{p^+}(\mathbb{R}^n)}^{p^+}$$

and, at the same time,

$$\int_{\mathbb{R}^n} |\nabla u(x)|^{p(x)} \, dx \leq \|\nabla u\|_{L_{p^-}(\mathbb{R}^n)} + \|\nabla u\|_{L_{p^+}(\mathbb{R}^n)},$$

so $u \in W^{1,p(\cdot)}(\mathbb{R}^n)$.

Theorem 3.3 (Anisotropic limit I). For all $u \in W^{1,p(\cdot)}(\mathbb{R}^n)$, we have the limit formula

$$\lim_{\delta \to 0} \int_{|u(x)-u(y)| > \delta} \frac{\delta^{p(x)}}{|x-y|^{n+p(x)}} \, dx \, dy = \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} K_{n,p(x)} |\nabla u(x)|^{p(x)} \, dx,$$

where $K_{n,p(x)}$ is defined as in (1.2). In particular, the limit exists and is finite.

Proof. First of all, taken $h > 0$, let’s prove that, for all $\omega \in \mathbb{S}^{n-1}$, we have

(3.2)

$$\sup_{\delta \in (0,1)} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_0^{+\infty} \frac{1}{h^{p(x)+1}} \, dh \, dx < +\infty,$$

and

(3.3)

$$\lim_{\delta \to 0} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_0^{+\infty} \frac{1}{h^{p(x)+1}} \, dh \, dx = \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \frac{1}{p(x)} |\nabla u(x) \cdot \omega|^{p(x)} \, dx.$$

Since $u \in W^{1,p(\cdot)}(\mathbb{R})$,

$$u(x+h\omega) - u(x) = \int_0^h \frac{d}{ds} u(x+s\omega) \, ds = \int_0^h (\nabla u(x+s\omega) \cdot \omega) \, ds$$

for all $(x, h) \in \mathbb{R}^n \times (0, +\infty)$. Let’s set

$$A(\delta) := \left\{ (x, h) \in \mathbb{R}^n \times (0, +\infty) : \left| \frac{u(x+\delta h\omega) - u(x)}{\delta h} \right| > 1 \right\},$$

$$A := \left\{ (x, h) \in \mathbb{R}^n \times (0, +\infty) : \left| \frac{d}{ds} u(x+s\omega) \right|_{s=0} > 1 \right\},$$

$$B := \left\{ (x, h) \in \mathbb{R}^n \times (0, +\infty) : \mathcal{M}_\omega (\nabla u) (x) h > 1 \right\},$$

and let $\chi_K (x, h)$ be the characteristic function of a set $K \subset \mathbb{R}^n \times (0, +\infty)$. By the definition of maximal function, we have the inequalities chain.
\[ M_\omega (\nabla u) (x) = \sup_{h > 0} \frac{1}{h} \int_0^h |\nabla u(x + s\omega)| \, ds \]
\[ \geq \sup_{h > 0} \frac{1}{h} \left| \int_0^h \frac{d}{ds} u(x + s\omega) \, ds \right| \]
\[ = \sup_{h > 0} \frac{1}{h} |u(x + h\omega) - u(x)| \geq \left| \frac{u(x + \delta h\omega) - u(x)}{\delta h} \right|, \quad \forall \delta > 0, \]

so that
\[ A(\delta) \subset B \implies \chi_{A(\delta)} (x, h) \leq \chi_B (x, h), \quad \forall (x, h) \in \mathbb{R}^n \times (0, +\infty). \]

Since
\[ \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_0^{+\infty} \frac{1}{h^{p(x)+1}} \chi_B (x, h) \, dh \, dx = \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_0^{+\infty} \frac{1}{h^{p(x)+1}} |M_\omega (\nabla u) (x)|^{p(x)} \, dx, \]
from what observed in the proof of the previous Lemma, the right hand side is finite, so we have
\[ \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_0^{+\infty} \frac{1}{h^{p(x)+1}} \chi_{A(\delta)} (x, h) \, dh \, dx \leq \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_0^{+\infty} \frac{1}{h^{p(x)+1}} \chi_B (x, h) \, dh \, dx < +\infty, \]
as well as (3.2). The function \( \frac{\chi_{A(\delta)} (x, h)}{h^{p(x)+1}} \) is dominated by \( \frac{\chi_B (x, h)}{h^{p(x)+1}} \), that is summable. Since
\[ \lim_{\delta \to 0} \chi_{A(\delta)} (x, h) = \chi_A (x, h) \]
for a.e. \( (x, h) \in \mathbb{R}^n \times \mathbb{R} \times (0, +\infty) \), from dominated convergence, it follows
\[ \lim_{\delta \to 0} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_0^{+\infty} \frac{1}{h^{p(x)+1}} \chi_{A(\delta)} (x, h) \, dh \, dx = \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_0^{+\infty} \frac{1}{h^{p(x)+1}} \chi_A (x, h) \, dh \, dx \]
\[ = \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_0^{+\infty} \frac{d}{ds} u(x + s\omega) \bigg|_{s=0}^{p(x)} \, ds \, dx = \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \frac{1}{p(x)} \, |\nabla u(x)| \cdot \omega^{p(x)} \, dx. \]

So, since (3.3) holds, we are ready to prove the Lemma. Making the change of variable \( y - x = \delta h\omega \), with \( \omega \in \mathbb{S}^{n-1} \), we have
\[ \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \frac{\delta^{p(x)}}{|u(x) - u(y)|^{n+p(x)}} \, dx \, dy = \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{\mathbb{S}^{n-1}} \int_0^{+\infty} \frac{\delta^{p(x)}}{|h|^{n+p(x)}} \delta^n h^{n-1} \, dh \, d\mathcal{H}^{n-1} (\omega) \, dx \]
\[ = \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{\mathbb{S}^{n-1}} \int_0^{+\infty} \frac{1}{|h|^{p(x)+1}} \, dh \, d\mathcal{H}^{n-1} (\omega) \, dx, \]
so, by using dominated convergence theorem and equation (3.3), it follows
\[ \lim_{\delta \to 0} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \frac{\delta^{p(x)}}{|u(x) - u(y)|^{n+p(x)}} \, dx \, dy = \lim_{\delta \to 0} \int_{\mathbb{S}^{n-1}} \int_0^{+\infty} \frac{1}{|h|^{p(x)+1}} \, dh \, d\mathcal{H}^{n-1} (\omega) \]
\[ = \int_{\mathbb{S}^{n-1}} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \frac{1}{p(x)} \, |\nabla u(x) \cdot \omega|^{p(x)} \, dx \, d\mathcal{H}^{n-1} (\omega). \]

Since, for every \( V \in \mathbb{R}^n \) and for all \( p \geq 1 \), we have
\[ \int_{\mathbb{S}^{n-1}} |V \cdot \omega|^p \, d\mathcal{H}^{n-1} (\omega) = p K_{n,p} |V|^p, \]
where \( K_{n,p} \) is defined as in (1.1), then, for every \( V \in \mathbb{R}^n \) and for all \( x \in \mathbb{R}^n \), we have
\[
\int_{S^{n-1}} |V \cdot \omega|^p(x) \, dH^{n-1}(\omega) = p(x) K_{n,p(x)} |V|^p(x).
\]

As a consequence, we are able to obtain the Nguyen type limit formula
\[
\lim_{\delta \to 0} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{|u(x) - u(y)| > \delta} \frac{\delta^p(x)}{|x - y|^{n+p(x)}} \, dx \, dy = \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} K_{n,p(x)} |\nabla u(x)|^p(x) \, dx.
\]

Observe that, by the definition of \( K_{n,p(x)} \), we have
\[
\lim_{\delta \to 0} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{|u(x) - u(y)| > \delta} \frac{\delta^p(x)}{|x - y|^{n+p(x)}} \, dx \, dy = \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \frac{1}{p(x)} \left( \int_{S^{n-1}} |\omega \cdot e|^{p(x)} \, dH^{n-1}(\omega) \right) |\nabla u(x)|^p(x) \, dx \leq \frac{1}{p^{-}} \int_{S^{n-1}} |\omega \cdot e|^{p^{-}} \, dH^{n-1}(\omega) \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} |\nabla u(x)|^{p(x)} \, dx
\]
\[
= K_{n,p^{-}} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} |\nabla u(x)|^{p(x)} \, dx,
\]
so that the limit is finite.

**Remark 3.4.** The function \( \{ x \mapsto K_{n,p(x)} \} \) is also bounded, since \( |K_{n,p(x)}| \leq K_{n,p^{-}} \). Moreover \( \{ s \mapsto K_{n,s} \} \), for \( s \in [1, +\infty) \), is a monotonically decreasing function, that tends to 0 as \( s \to +\infty \). In fact, we have
\[
\frac{d}{ds} \left[ \frac{1}{s} \int_{S^{n-1}} |\omega \cdot e|^s \, dH^{n-1}(\omega) \right] = -\frac{1}{s^2} \int_{S^{n-1}} |\omega \cdot e|^s \, dH^{n-1}(\omega)
\]
\[
+ \frac{1}{s} \int_{S^{n-1}} |\omega \cdot e|^s \log |\omega \cdot e| \, dH^{n-1}(\omega) < 0, \quad s \geq 1,
\]
and the assertions follow. Hence, roughly speaking, very large anisotropic exponents \( p(x) \) will produce, in some sense, a small measure \( \mu = K_{n,p(x)} \mathcal{L}^n \) in the limit formula.

In the classical case, where \( p \) is a constant exponent, if we have
\[
\lim_{\delta \to 0} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{|u(x) - u(y)| > \delta} \frac{\delta^p}{|x - y|^{n+p}} \, dx \, dy = K_{n,p} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} |\nabla u(x)|^p \, dx,
\]
then we have also
\[
\lim_{\delta \to 0} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{|u(x) - u(y)| > \delta} \frac{p \delta^p}{|x - y|^{n+p}} \, dx \, dy = p K_{n,p} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} |\nabla u(x)|^p \, dx.
\]

This fact is not obvious in the variable exponent case.

**Theorem 3.5 (Anisotropic limit II).** For all \( u \in W^{1,p_+} (\mathbb{R}^n) \), we have the limit formula
\[
\lim_{\delta \to 0} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{|u(x) - u(y)| > \delta} \frac{p(x) \delta^p(x)}{|x - y|^{n+p(x)}} \, dx \, dy = \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} p(x) K_{n,p(x)} |\nabla u(x)|^{p(x)} \, dx,
\]
where \( K_{n,p(x)} \) has been introduced previously. In particular, the limit exists and is finite.
Proof. In analogy to the previous case, taken \( h > 0 \), we prove that, for all \( \omega \in \mathbb{S}^{n-1} \),

\[
(3.4) \quad \sup_{\delta \in (0,1)} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{|u(x+\delta h\omega)-u(x)| \geq \delta} \frac{p(x)}{h^{p(x)+1}} \, dh \, dx < +\infty
\]

and

\[
(3.5) \quad \lim_{\delta \to 0} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{|u(x+\delta h\omega)-u(x)| \geq \delta} \frac{p(x)}{h^{p(x)+1}} \, dh \, dx = \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} |\nabla u(x) \cdot \omega|^{p(x)} \, dx.
\]

Of course, we have the inequality

\[
\int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{|u(x+\delta h\omega)-u(x)| \geq \delta} \frac{p(x)}{h^{p(x)+1}} \, dh \, dx \leq p^+ \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{|u(x+\delta h\omega)-u(x)| \geq \delta} \frac{1}{h^{p(x)+1}} \, dh \, dx
\]

and, by what previously proved, (3.5) holds. Now, taking into account the equations obtained for the first anisotropic limit formula, we have

\[
\int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{|u(x+\delta h\omega)-u(x)| \geq \delta} \frac{p(x)}{h^{p(x)+1}} \chi_B(x,h) \, dh \, dx = \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} |\mathcal{M}_\omega (\nabla u)(x)|^{p(x)} \, dx,
\]

where the right-hand side is convergent, as proved in Lemma 3.1. From \( A(\delta) \subset B \), we get

\[
\frac{p(x)}{h^{p(x)+1}} \chi_A(x,h) \leq \frac{p(x)}{h^{p(x)+1}} \chi_B(x,h), \quad \forall (x,h) \in \mathbb{R}^n \times (0, +\infty), \quad \forall \delta > 0,
\]

where \( p(x)h^{-p(x)-1} \chi_B(x,h) \) is summable. Then, by the dominated convergence theorem,

\[
\lim_{\delta \to 0} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{|u(x+\delta h\omega)-u(x)| \geq \delta} \frac{p(x)}{h^{p(x)+1}} \chi_A(x,h) \, dh \, dx = \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} |\nabla u(x) \cdot \omega|^{p(x)} \, dx,
\]

proving (3.5). Now we are ready to prove the theorem. Setting \( y - x = \delta h\omega \), with \( \omega \in \mathbb{S}^{n-1} \),

\[
\int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{|u(x)-u(y)| \geq \delta} \frac{p(x)}{|x-y|^{n+p}} \, dx \, dy = \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{\mathbb{S}^{n-1}} \int_{|u(x+\delta h\omega)-u(x)| \geq \delta} \frac{p(x)}{h^{p(x)+1}} \, dh \, d\mathcal{H}^{n-1}(\omega) \, dx,
\]

so, making the limit as \( \delta \to 0 \), it results

\[
\lim_{\delta \to 0} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{|u(x)-u(y)| \geq \delta} \frac{p(x)}{|x-y|^{n+p}} \, dx \, dy = \lim_{\delta \to 0} \int_{\mathbb{S}^{n-1}} \int_{|u(x+\delta h\omega)-u(x)| \geq \delta} \frac{p(x)}{h^{p(x)+1}} \, dh \, d\mathcal{H}^{n-1}(\omega) = \int_{\mathbb{S}^{n-1}} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} |\nabla u(x) \cdot \omega|^{p(x)} \, dx \, d\mathcal{H}^{n-1}(\omega).
\]

In conclusion, applying Fubini-Tonelli’s theorem and recalling that, for any \( V \in \mathbb{R}^n \) and \( x \in \mathbb{R}^n \)

\[
\int_{\mathbb{S}^{n-1}} |V \cdot \omega|^{p(x)} \, d\mathcal{H}^{n-1}(\omega) = p(x) K_{n,p(x)} |V|^{p(x)},
\]

we get

\[
\lim_{\delta \to 0} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{|u(x)-u(y)| \geq \delta} \frac{p(x)}{|x-y|^{n+p(x)}} \, dx \, dy = \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} p(x) K_{n,p(x)} |\nabla u(x)|^{p(x)} \, dx.
\]

Of course the right-hand side is finite, so that the limit is also finite. The proof is complete. \( \square \)
4. Sufficient conditions

Lemma 4.1. Let \( u \in L^{p(.)}(\mathbb{R}^n) \cap C^2(\mathbb{R}^n) \). Then we have

\[
\int_{\mathbb{R}^n} p(x) K_{n,p(x)} |\nabla u(x)|^{p(x)} \, dx \leq \liminf_{\varepsilon \to 0} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \varepsilon \frac{|u(x) - u(y)|^{p(x)+\varepsilon}}{|x-y|^{n+p(x)}} \, dx \, dy.
\]

Moreover, if \( u \) satisfies

\[
C(u) := \sup_{0<\varepsilon<1} \int_{\mathbb{S}^{n-1}} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{0}^{+\infty} \varepsilon \frac{|u(x + r\omega) - u(x)|^{p(x)+\varepsilon}}{r^{p(x)+1}} \, dr \, dx \, d\mathcal{H}^{n-1}(\omega)
\]

then \( u \in W^{1,p(.)}(\mathbb{R}^n) \).

Proof. By using polar coordinates, we get

\[
C(u) = \sup_{0<\varepsilon<1} \int_{\mathbb{S}^{n-1}} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{0}^{+\infty} \varepsilon \frac{|u(x + r\omega) - u(x)|^{p(x)+\varepsilon}}{r^{p(x)+1}} \, dr \, dx \, d\mathcal{H}^{n-1}(\omega).
\]

Consider the restriction to the open balls \( B_A \subset \mathbb{R}^n \) at the origin with radius \( A > 0 \),

\[
\sup_{0<\varepsilon<1} \int_{\mathbb{S}^{n-1}} \int_{B_A} \int_{0}^{+\infty} \varepsilon \frac{|u(x + r\omega) - u(x)|^{p(x)+\varepsilon}}{r^{p(x)+1}} \, dr \, dx \, d\mathcal{H}^{n-1}(\omega) \leq C(u).
\]

Since \( u \in C^2(\mathbb{R}^n) \), arguing as in the proof of [10, Lemma 4], we have

\[
|Du(x) \cdot r\omega|^{p(x)+\varepsilon} \leq |u(x + r\omega) - u(x)|^{p(x)+\varepsilon} + C r^{p(x)+\varepsilon+1}, \quad \forall (\omega,x,r) \in \mathbb{S}^{n-1} \times B_A \times (0,1).
\]

Multiplying by \( \varepsilon \) and dividing by \( r^{p(x)+1} \), after integrating, we get

\[
\liminf_{\varepsilon \to 0} \int_{\mathbb{S}^{n-1}} \int_{B_A} \int_{0}^{1} \varepsilon \frac{|Du(x) \cdot r\omega|^{p(x)+\varepsilon}}{r^{p(x)+1}} \, dr \, dx \, d\mathcal{H}^{n-1}(\omega)
\]

\[
\leq \liminf_{\varepsilon \to 0} \int_{\mathbb{S}^{n-1}} \int_{B_A} \int_{0}^{1} \varepsilon \frac{|u(x + r\omega) - u(x)|^{p(x)+\varepsilon}}{r^{p(x)+1}} \, dr \, dx \, d\mathcal{H}^{n-1}(\omega)
\]

\[
+ C \lim_{\varepsilon \to 0} \int_{\mathbb{S}^{n-1}} \int_{B_A} \int_{0}^{1} \varepsilon r^\varepsilon \, dr \, dx \, d\mathcal{H}^{n-1}(\omega)
\]

\[
= \liminf_{\varepsilon \to 0} \int_{\mathbb{S}^{n-1}} \int_{B_A} \int_{0}^{1} \varepsilon \frac{|u(x + r\omega) - u(x)|^{p(x)+\varepsilon}}{r^{p(x)+1}} \, dr \, dx \, d\mathcal{H}^{n-1}(\omega).
\]
After some computation, we are able to apply Fatou’s Lemma as shown in the following equation

\[
\liminf_{\varepsilon \to 0} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \frac{1}{\varepsilon} |Du(x) \cdot r\omega_{p(x)+\varepsilon}|r^{p(x)+1} dr \, d\mathcal{H}^{n-1}(\omega)
\]

\[
= \liminf_{\varepsilon \to 0} \int_{B_A} \left( \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} |Du(x) \cdot \omega_{p(x)+\varepsilon}|d\mathcal{H}^{n-1}(\omega) \right) dx
\]

\[
\geq \int_{B_A} \left( \liminf_{\varepsilon \to 0} |Du(x) \cdot \omega_{p(x)+\varepsilon}|d\mathcal{H}^{n-1}(\omega) \right) dx
\]

\[
= \int_{B_A} p(x) K_{n,p(x)} |Du(x)|^{p(x)} dx,
\]

hence the inequality

\[
\int_{B_A} p(x) K_{n,p(x)} |Du(x)|^{p(x)} dx \leq \liminf_{\varepsilon \to 0} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{B_A} \frac{1}{\varepsilon} |u(x + r\omega) - u(x)|^{p(x)+\varepsilon} r^{p(x)+1} dr \, d\mathcal{H}^{n-1}(\omega).
\]

By the arbitrariness of \( A > 0 \), we conclude that

\[
\int_{\mathbb{R}^n} p(x) K_{n,p(x)} |Du(x)|^{p(x)} dx \leq \liminf_{\varepsilon \to 0} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \frac{\varepsilon}{|x - y|^{n+p(x)}} dx \, dy \leq C(u).
\]

Since \( p^+ K_{n,p^+} \leq p(x) K_{n,p(x)} \), if \( C(u) \) is finite, we get \( u \in W^{1,p(\cdot)}(\mathbb{R}^n) \), concluding the proof. \( \Box \)

**Corollary 4.2.** Let \( u \in L^p(\mathbb{R}^n) \cap C^2(\mathbb{R}^n) \) and set \( \omega(x) = p(x) K_{n,p(x)} \). Then

\[
\|\nabla u\|_{L^{p(\cdot)}(\mathbb{R}^n, \omega)} \leq \liminf_{\varepsilon \to 0} \max_{\pm} \left( \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \frac{\varepsilon |u(x) - u(y)|^{p(x)+\varepsilon}}{|x - y|^{n+p(x)}} dx \, dy \right)^{1/p^+}
\]

and, if the right-hand side is finite, \( u \in W^{1,p(\cdot)}(\mathbb{R}^n) \). In addition, if \( p \in \mathcal{P}^{\log}(\mathbb{R}^n) \), we have \( \mathcal{M}(\nabla u) \in L^{p(\cdot)}(\mathbb{R}^n) \).

**Proof.** By Lemma 4.1, we have

\[
\int_{\mathbb{R}^n} |\nabla u(x)|^{p(x)} \omega(x) dx \leq \liminf_{\varepsilon \to 0} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \frac{\varepsilon |u(x) - u(y)|^{p(x)+\varepsilon}}{|x - y|^{n+p(x)}} dx \, dy,
\]

while, remembering property (2.1), we have also

\[
\|\nabla u\|_{L^{p(\cdot)}(\mathbb{R}^n, \omega)} \leq \max_{\pm} \left( \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} |\nabla u(x)|^{p(x)} \omega(x) dx \right)^{1/p^+}
\]

\[
\leq \max_{\pm} \liminf_{\varepsilon \to 0} \left( \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \frac{\varepsilon |u(x) - u(y)|^{p(x)+\varepsilon}}{|x - y|^{n+p(x)}} dx \, dy \right)^{1/p^+}
\]

\[
\leq \liminf_{\varepsilon \to 0} \max_{\pm} \left( \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \frac{\varepsilon |u(x) - u(y)|^{p(x)+\varepsilon}}{|x - y|^{n+p(x)}} dx \, dy \right)^{1/p^+},
\]
so the first assertion follows. Since \( p^+ K_{n,p^+} \leq p(x) K_{n,p(x)} \), if the last term is finite, we get \( u \in W^{1,p(x)}(\mathbb{R}^n) \). Moreover, if \( p \in \mathcal{P}^\text{log} (\mathbb{R}^n) \), by applying Theorem 2.3, there exists a constant \( K_{p^-} > 0 \) such that

\[
\|\mathcal{M}(\nabla u)\|_{L^{p^+}(\mathbb{R}^n)} \leq K_{p^-} \|\nabla u\|_{L^{p^+}(\mathbb{R}^n)},
\]

and the proof is complete. \( \square \)

We will need the following lemma.

**Lemma 4.3.** Let \( \Omega \subset \mathbb{R}^n \) be a measurable set and let \( \psi \) and \( \phi \) be two non-negative measurable functions on the domain \( \Omega \times \Omega \). If we take a measurable function \( \alpha : \Omega \to (-1, +\infty) \), then

\[
\int_0^1 \int \int \delta^{\alpha(x)}(x,y) \psi(x,y) \, dx \, dy \, d\delta = \int_\Omega \int \psi(x,y) \int_0^1 \delta^{\alpha(x)} \, d\delta \, dx \, dy
\]

Proof. From a direct computation, by using Fubini-Tonelli’s theorem, we have

\[
\int_0^1 \int \int \delta^{\alpha(x)}(x,y) \psi(x,y) \, dx \, dy \, d\delta = \int_\Omega \int \psi(x,y) \int_0^1 \delta^{\alpha(x)} \, d\delta \, dx \, dy
\]

\[
= \int_\Omega \int_0^1 \psi(x,y) \int_\Omega \int \delta^{\alpha(x)} \, d\delta \, dx \, dy + \int_\Omega \int_0^1 \psi(x,y) \int_\Omega \int \delta^{\alpha(x)} \, d\delta \, dx \, dy
\]

\[
= \int_\Omega \int_\psi(x,y) \left[ \frac{\delta^{\alpha(x)+1}}{\alpha(x)+1} \right]_0^1 dx \, dy + \int_\Omega \int_\psi(x,y) \left[ \frac{\delta^{\alpha(x)+1}}{\alpha(x)+1} \right]_0^1 dx \, dy
\]

\[
= \int_\Omega \int_\psi(x,y) \frac{\delta^{\alpha(x)+1}}{\alpha(x)+1} dx \, dy + \int_\Omega \int_\psi(x,y) \frac{1}{\alpha(x)+1} dx \, dy,
\]

and the assertion follows. \( \square \)

**Theorem 4.4.** The following facts hold:

(a) for every \( u \in W^{1,p^+} (\mathbb{R}^n) \), there exists \( C > 0 \), depending only on \( n \) and \( p^+ \), such that

\[
\sup_{0 < \varepsilon < 1} \int_\mathbb{R}^n \int_\mathbb{R}^n \frac{\varepsilon |u(x)-u(y)|^{p(x)+\varepsilon}}{|x-y|^{n+p(x)}} \, dx \, dy
\]

\[
+ \int_\mathbb{R}^n \int_\mathbb{R}^n \frac{1}{|x-y|^{n+p(x)}} \, dx \, dy \leq C \left( \|\nabla u\|_{L^{p^+}(\mathbb{R}^n)} + \|\nabla u\|_{L^{p^+}(\mathbb{R}^n)} \right);
\]

(b) for every \( u \in W^{1,p^+} (\mathbb{R}^n) \),

\[
\lim_{\varepsilon \to 0} \int_\mathbb{R}^n \int_\mathbb{R}^n \frac{\varepsilon |u(x)-u(y)|^{p(x)+\varepsilon}}{|x-y|^{n+p(x)}} \, dx \, dy = \int_\mathbb{R}^n p(x) K_{n,p(x)} |\nabla u(x)|^{p(x)} \, dx.
\]

Proof.

(a) Let \( u \in W^{1,p^+} (\mathbb{R}^n) \). By Lemma 3.1, there exists \( C > 0 \), depending only on \( n \) and \( p^+ \), such that

\[
\int_\mathbb{R}^n \int_\mathbb{R}^n \frac{\delta^{p(x)}}{|x-y|^{n+p(x)}} \, dx \, dy \leq C \left( \|\nabla u\|_{L^{p^+}(\mathbb{R}^n)} + \|\nabla u\|_{L^{p^+}(\mathbb{R}^n)} \right),
\]
for all \( \delta > 0 \). Multiplying this inequation by \( \varepsilon \delta^{n-1} \), with \( \varepsilon \in (0, 1) \), and integrating with respect to \( \delta \) over the interval \( (0, 1) \), we have

\[
(4.2) \quad \int_0^1 \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \frac{\varepsilon \delta^{p(x)+\varepsilon-1}}{|x-y|^{n+p(x)}} \ dx \ dy \ d\delta \leq C \left( \|\nabla u\|_{L^p(\mathbb{R}^n)}^{p^+} + \|\nabla u\|_{L^p(\mathbb{R}^n)}^{-} \right).
\]

By using Lemma 4.3 with

\[
\alpha(x) = p(x) + \varepsilon - 1, \quad \phi(x, y) = |u(x) - u(y)| \quad \text{and} \quad \psi(x, y) = \frac{\varepsilon}{|x-y|^{n+p(x)}},
\]

the integral at the left-hand side of the inequality becomes

\[
\int_0^1 \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \frac{\varepsilon \delta^{p(x)+\varepsilon-1}}{|x-y|^{n+p(x)}} \ dx \ dy = \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \frac{\varepsilon |u(x) - u(y)|^{p(x)+\varepsilon}}{(p(x) + \varepsilon)|x-y|^{n+p(x)}} \ dx \ dy \ d\delta
\]

\[
+ \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \frac{\varepsilon}{|x-y|^{n+p(x)}} \ dx \ dy.
\]

In particular, by equation (4.2), it follows

\[
\sup_{0<\varepsilon<1} \int_{|u(x)-u(y)|\leq 1} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \frac{\varepsilon |u(x) - u(y)|^{p(x)+\varepsilon}}{|x-y|^{n+p(x)}} \ dx \ dy \leq C \left( \|\nabla u\|_{L^p(\mathbb{R}^n)}^{p^+} + \|\nabla u\|_{L^p(\mathbb{R}^n)}^{-} \right).
\]

Finally, by matching this formula with the starting inequality for \( \delta = 1 \), it follows

\[
\sup_{0<\varepsilon<1} \int_{|u(x)-u(y)|\leq 1} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \frac{\varepsilon |u(x) - u(y)|^{p(x)+\varepsilon}}{|x-y|^{n+p(x)}} \ dx \ dy \leq C \left( \|\nabla u\|_{L^p(\mathbb{R}^n)}^{p^+} + \|\nabla u\|_{L^p(\mathbb{R}^n)}^{-} \right),
\]

for some constant \( C \) depending only on \( n, p^\pm \) and the first assertion follows.

(b) Let \( u \in W^{1,p^\pm}(\mathbb{R}^n) \). Let us compute the limit

\[
\lim_{\varepsilon \to 0} \int_0^1 \varepsilon \delta^{\varepsilon-1} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \frac{(p(x) + \varepsilon) \delta^{p(x)}}{|x-y|^{n+p(x)}} \ dx \ dy \ d\delta.
\]

Taking \( \tau \in (0, 1) \), we can write the integral with respect to \( \delta \) as

\[
\lim_{\varepsilon \to 0^+} \int_0^1 \varepsilon \delta^{\varepsilon-1} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \frac{(p(x) + \varepsilon) \delta^{p(x)}}{|x-y|^{n+p(x)}} \ dx \ dy \ d\delta
\]

\[
= \lim_{\tau \to 0^+} \lim_{\varepsilon \to 0^+} \int_0^\tau \varepsilon \delta^{\varepsilon-1} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \frac{(p(x) + \varepsilon) \delta^{p(x)}}{|x-y|^{n+p(x)}} \ dx \ dy \ d\delta
\]

\[
+ \lim_{\tau \to 0^+} \lim_{\varepsilon \to 0^+} \int_\tau^1 \varepsilon \delta^{\varepsilon-1} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \frac{(p(x) + \varepsilon) \delta^{p(x)}}{|x-y|^{n+p(x)}} \ dx \ dy \ d\delta.
\]
On the one hand, the second integral at the right-hand side goes to 0 as $\varepsilon \to 0$, since
\[
\lim_{\varepsilon \to 0^+} \int_0^1 \varepsilon^{\delta-1} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{|u(x)-u(y)|>\delta} \frac{(p(x) + \varepsilon)\delta p(x)}{|x-y|^{n+p(x)}} \, dx \, dy \, d\delta
\leq \lim_{\varepsilon \to 0^+} \int_0^1 \varepsilon^{\delta-1} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{|u(x)-u(y)|>\delta} \frac{\delta p(x)}{|x-y|^{n+p(x)}} \, dx \, dy \, d\delta
\leq C_{n,p} \left( \|\nabla u\|^p_{L^p_+ (\mathbb{R}^n)} + \|\nabla u\|^p_{L^p_- (\mathbb{R}^n)} \right) \lim_{\varepsilon \to 0^+} \left( (p^+ + \varepsilon)(1 - \tau^\varepsilon) \right) = 0.
\]

On the other hand, we can write the first integral by making the change of variable $\delta = \tau z$, and remembering both the anisotropic limit formulas, it happens that
\[
\lim_{\tau \to 0^+} \lim_{\varepsilon \to 0^+} \int_0^\tau \varepsilon^{\delta-1} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{|u(x)-u(y)|>\delta} \frac{\delta p(x)}{|x-y|^{n+p(x)}} \, dx \, dy \, d\delta
= \lim_{\tau \to 0^+} \lim_{\varepsilon \to 0^+} \int_0^\tau \varepsilon^{\delta-1} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{|u(x)-u(y)|>\tau z} \frac{p(x)(\tau z)^p(x)}{|x-y|^{n+p(x)}} \, dx \, dy \, dz
= \lim_{\tau \to 0^+} \lim_{\varepsilon \to 0^+} \int_0^\tau \varepsilon^{\delta-1} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{|u(x)-u(y)|>\tau z} \frac{p(x)(\tau z)^p(x)}{|x-y|^{n+p(x)}} \, dx \, dy \, dz
= \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} p(x) \, K_{n,p(x)} \, |\nabla u(x)|^p(x) \, dx.
\]

In turn, we can conclude that
\[
\lim_{\varepsilon \to 0} \int_0^1 \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{|u(x)-u(y)|>\delta} \frac{(p(x) + \varepsilon)\varepsilon \delta p(x) + \varepsilon^{-1}}{|x-y|^{n+p(x)}} \, dx \, dy \, d\delta = \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} p(x) \, K_{n,p(x)} \, |\nabla u(x)|^p(x) \, dx.
\]

Applying Lemma 4.3 with
\[
\alpha(x) = p(x) + \varepsilon - 1, \quad \phi(x,y) = |u(x) - u(y)| \quad \text{and} \quad \psi(x,y) = \frac{(p(x) + \varepsilon)\varepsilon}{|x-y|^{n+p(x)}},
\]
we write
\[
\int_0^1 \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{|u(x)-u(y)|>\delta} \frac{(p(x) + \varepsilon)\varepsilon \delta p(x) + \varepsilon^{-1}}{|x-y|^{n+p(x)}} \, dx \, dy \, d\delta = \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \frac{\varepsilon \, u(x) - u(y)^{p(x)+\varepsilon}}{|x-y|^{n+p(x)}} \, dx \, dy
+ \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{|u(x)-u(y)|>1} \frac{\varepsilon}{|x-y|^{n+p(x)}} \, dx \, dy.
\]

Hence, by taking the limit as $\varepsilon \to 0$, the assertion follows. \hfill \Box
The following facts hold:

(a) if \( u \in L^{p(\cdot)}(\mathbb{R}^n) \cap C^2_0(\mathbb{R}^n) \) is a bounded \( C^2 \) function and
\[
\sup_{0<\varepsilon<1} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \varepsilon |u(x) - u(y)|^{p(\cdot)+\varepsilon} \frac{1}{|x-y|^{n+p(\cdot)}} \, dx \, dy + \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} 1 \frac{1}{|x-y|^{n+p(\cdot)}} \, dx \, dy < +\infty,
\]
then \( u \in W^{1,p(\cdot)}(\mathbb{R}^n) \);

(b) if \( u \in L^{p(\cdot)}(\mathbb{R}^n) \) and
\[
\sup_{0<\delta<1} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \sigma^{p(\cdot)}(x) \delta^{p(\cdot)}(x) \frac{1}{|x-y|^{n+p(\cdot)}} \, dx \, dy < +\infty,
\]
then \( u \in W^{1,p(\cdot)}(\mathbb{R}^n) \).

Proof.

(a) Let \( u \in L^{p(\cdot)}(\mathbb{R}^n) \) be a bounded \( C^2 \) function satisfying (a). Then
\[
\sup_{0<\varepsilon<1} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \varepsilon |u(x) - u(y)|^{p(\cdot)+\varepsilon} \frac{1}{|x-y|^{n+p(\cdot)}} \, dx \, dy \leq \sup_{0<\varepsilon<1} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \varepsilon |u(x) - u(y)|^{p(\cdot)+\varepsilon} \frac{1}{|x-y|^{n+p(\cdot)}} \, dx \, dy + 2^{p^*+1} \max \left\{ 1, \|u\|^2_{L^\infty(\mathbb{R}^n)} \right\} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} 1 \frac{1}{|x-y|^{n+p(\cdot)}} \, dx \, dy < +\infty.
\]
The assertion follows from Lemma 4.1.

(b) Let \( u \in L^{p(\cdot)}(\mathbb{R}^n) \cap C^2_0(\mathbb{R}^n) \) such that
\[
(4.3) \quad \sup_{0<\delta<1} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \sigma^{p(\cdot)}(x) \delta^{p(\cdot)}(x) \frac{1}{|x-y|^{n+p(\cdot)}} \, dx \, dy \leq C < +\infty,
\]
for some constant \( C > 0 \). Multiplying the inequality by \( \varepsilon \delta^{\varepsilon-1} \), with \( \varepsilon \in (0,1) \), and integrating with respect to \( \delta \) over the interval \( (0,1) \), we have
\[
\int_0^1 \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \varepsilon \delta^{p(\cdot)+\varepsilon-1} \frac{1}{|x-y|^{n+p(\cdot)}} \, dx \, dy \, d\delta \leq C.
\]
Applying Lemma 4.3 with
\[
\alpha(x) = p(x) + \varepsilon - 1, \quad \phi(x,y) = |u(x) - u(y)| \quad \text{and} \quad \psi(x,y) = \frac{\varepsilon}{|x-y|^{n+p(\cdot)}},
\]
the left-hand side of the last inequality becomes
\[
\int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \varepsilon |u(x) - u(y)|^{p(\cdot)+\varepsilon} \frac{p(x)}{|x-y|^{n+p(\cdot)}} \, dx \, dy + \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \varepsilon \frac{p(x)}{|x-y|^{n+p(\cdot)}} \, dx \, dy \leq C,
\]
so we get
\[
\sup_{\varepsilon \in (0,1)} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \varepsilon |u(x) - u(y)|^{p(\cdot)+\varepsilon} \frac{1}{|x-y|^{n+p(\cdot)}} \, dx \, dy \leq C(p^*+1).
\]
Recalling that, by (4.3),
\[
\int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \frac{1}{|x-y|^{n+p(x)}} \, dx \, dy \leq C,
\]
assumption (a) of the Theorem is satisfied, so \(u \in W^{1,p(.)}(\mathbb{R}^n)\) and the proof is complete. In the general case, one can argue as in [13] by using a density argument.

We conclude with an observation dealing with the limiting case \(p^- = 1\).

**Remark 4.6.** Let \(u \in L^{p(.)}(\mathbb{R}^n)\) with \(1 = p^- \leq p^+ < +\infty\) and set \(E = \{x \in \mathbb{R}^n : p(x) = 1\}\). Assume \(\text{int}(E) \neq \emptyset\) and

\[
\Lambda = \sup_{0 < \delta < 1} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \frac{\delta^{p(x)}}{|x-y|^{n+p(x)}} \, dx \, dy < +\infty.
\]

Then

\[
\sup_{B \subset \text{int}(E)} |B|^{-\frac{n+1}{n}} \int_B \int_B |u(x) - u(y)| \, dx \, dy < +\infty.
\]

In particular, for \(n = 1\), it reads as

\[
\sup_{B \subset \text{int}(E)} \int_B \int_B |u(x) - u(y)| \, dx \, dy < +\infty,
\]

so \(u \in BMO(E)\), the space of bounded mean oscillation functions on \(E\). In fact, let \(x_0 \in \text{int}(E)\) and \(B \subset \text{int}(E)\) a ball centered at \(x_0\). We have, for all \(\delta \in (0,1)\),

\[
\int_B \int_B \frac{\delta}{|x-y|^{n+1}} \, dx \, dy \leq \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \frac{\delta^{p(x)}}{|x-y|^{n+p(x)}} \, dx \, dy \leq \Lambda.
\]

Then, taking into account [12, (a) of Theorem 1], we have

\[
\int_B \int_B |u(x) - u(y)| \, dx \, dy \leq C \left( |B|^{-\frac{n+1}{n}} \int_B \int_B \frac{\delta}{|x-y|^{n+1}} \, dx \, dy + \delta |B|^2 \right)
\]

\[
\leq C \left( \Lambda |B|^{-\frac{n+1}{n}} + \delta |B|^2 \right),
\]

for some constant \(C\) depending on \(n\). Then the above assertions follow by the arbitrariness of \(\delta \in (0,1)\) – making the limit as \(\delta \to 0^+\) – and \(B \subset \text{int}(E)\).

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