THE WORD PROBLEM AND THE AHARONI-BERGER-ZIV CONJECTURE ON THE CONNECTIVITY OF INDEPENDENCE COMPLEXES

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Abstract. For each finite simple graph $G$, Aharoni, Berger and Ziv consider a recursively defined number $\psi(G) \in \mathbb{Z} \cup \{+\infty\}$ which gives a lower bound for the topological connectivity of the independence complex $I_G$. They conjecture that this bound is optimal for every graph. We use a result of recursion theory to give a short disproof of this claim.

The map $\psi$ is defined as follows: $\psi(\emptyset) = -2$; if $G$ is a non-empty discrete graph, $\psi(G) = +\infty$; if $G$ is non-discrete with edge set $E$, $\psi(G) = \max\{\min\{\psi(G-e), \psi(G \setminus e) + 1\} \mid e \in E\}$. Here $G-e$ denotes the subgraph of $G$ obtained by removing the edge $e$ and $G \setminus e$ denotes the subgraph of $G$ induced by the vertices which are not adjacent to any of the vertices of $e$.

The independence complex $I_G$ of a finite simple graph $G$ is the simplicial complex whose simplices are the non-empty independent subsets of vertices of $G$. From an exact sequence of [6] (Claim 3.1) and from Van-Kampen and Hurewicz Theorems it is easy to deduce that $I_G$ is $\psi(G)$-connected [2, Theorem 2.3]. It is conjectured in [2, Conjecture 2.4] that $I_G$ is not $(\psi(G) + 1)$-connected, unless it is contractible. This was proved to be true in the particular case of chordal graphs [5]. However we will see that the conjecture is false in general, although we will not exhibit an explicit example. The following well-known result ([3, Corollary 3.9]) is a consequence of the non-existence of an effective way for determining whether a group $\Gamma$ given by a finite presentation is trivial or not [1, 7] and a construction that associates to each presentation of $\Gamma$ a 2-dimensional complex with fundamental group isomorphic to $\Gamma$ (see [4] for example).

Theorem *. There exists no algorithm that can decide whether a finite simplicial complex is simply connected or not.

The truth of the Aharoni-Berger-Ziv Conjecture would provide an algorithm (Turing machine) capable of determining if $I_G$ is simply connected for every finite simple graph $G$ (just computing $\psi(G)$ and checking if it is positive). On the other hand, given a finite simplicial complex $K$, there is a graph $G$ such that $I_G$ is isomorphic to the first barycentric subdivision of $K$. The vertices of $G$ are the simplices of $K$ and its edges are the pairs of simplices such that none of them is a face of the other. In particular, the conjecture contradicts Theorem *.

2000 Mathematics Subject Classification. 05C69, 55P99, 03D80, 57M05.

Key words and phrases. Graphs, independence complexes, topological connectivity, algorithm, computability.

† Supported by grant KAW 2005.0098 from the Knut and Alice Wallenberg Foundation.
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