TAME $\mathbb{Z}^2$-ACTIONS ON $E^n$

Paul Frazier Duvall, Jr. and Jim Maxwell
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P. F. DUVALL, JR. AND J. W. MAXWELL

Let $H(E^n)$ denote the group of homeomorphisms of euclidean $n$-space, and $G$ a subgroup isomorphic to $Z \oplus Z$. $G$ is said to be a $Z^2$-action on $E^n$ and two such actions are said to be equivalent if they are conjugate in $H(E^n)$. In §2, the notion of a tame $Z^2$-action is introduced and for $n \geq 5$ tame $Z^2$-actions are shown to be classified by $\pi_i(SO_{n-2}) \cong Z$. In §3, tameness is shown to be inherited by a subaction of a tame $Z^2$-action and an example of a nontame $Z^2$-action with tame subactions is given.

1. Introduction. Let $U$ be an $n$-dimensional manifold and let $H(U)$ denote the group of homeomorphisms of $U$ onto itself with the compact open topology. If $G$ is a subgroup of $H(U)$, we say that $G$ acts on $U$ and refer to $G$ as an action. If $K$ is a topological group which is isomorphic to $G$, we refer to $G$ as a $K$-action. Two actions are (topologically) equivalent if they are conjugate in $H(U)$. We say that $G$ satisfies Sperner’s condition if for each compact set $X \subset U$ the set $\{g \in G \mid g(X) \cap X \neq \emptyset\}$ is finite. Unless otherwise stated, all actions on $E^n$ will be assumed to be orientation preserving, i.e., we require that each member of an action be orientation preserving.

If $Z^i$ denotes the free abelian group on $i$ generators, we have, for $i \leq n$, the standard $Z^i$-action on $E^n$, generated by the maps $h_j$, $j = 1, \ldots, i$, where $h_j(x_1, \ldots, x_n) = (x_1, \ldots, x_j + 1, \ldots, x_n)$. It is a classical result that a $Z$-action on $E^n$ is equivalent to the standard action if and only if it satisfies Sperner’s condition, and Duvall and Husch [3] showed that for $n \neq 4$, a $Z^2$-action on $E^n$ is equivalent to the standard action if and only if it satisfies Sperner’s condition. In general, however, Sperner’s condition is not sufficient to insure that a $Z^2$-action is equivalent to the standard action. Examples of nonstandard actions which satisfy Sperner’s condition may be found in [9], [10], [6], and [3]. Husch [6], and Husch and Row [7] have shown that the standard $Z$-action for $n > 4$ and the standard $Z$ and $Z^2$-actions for $n = 3$ are characterized by Sperner’s condition together with an additional homotopy condition.

In this note, we define the notion of a tame action (inspired by [6]) and show that the tame $Z^2$-actions on $E^n$, $n \geq 5$, are classified by $\pi_i(SO_{n-2}) \cong Z$. We also give examples of some nonstandard $Z^2$-actions. We will often use the fact that if $G$ satisfies Sperner’s condition and has no elements of finite order, then the orbit space $U/G$ is a $(T_2)$ manifold and the natural projection $U \to U/G$ is a regular covering.
map [8]. We use the symbol \( \cong \) to denote homeomorphism or isomorphism, depending on the context. For equivalent formulations of Spner's condition and any notation not specifically explained here, the reader is referred to [3].

2. Tame actions. Recall that a sequence \( \{G_i, \alpha_i\}_{i=1}^\infty \)

\[
G_1 \xleftarrow{\alpha_1} G_2 \xleftarrow{\alpha_2} \cdots
\]

of groups and homomorphisms is \textit{stable} if for some subsequence

\[
G_{i_1} \xleftarrow{\beta_1} G_{i_2} \xleftarrow{\beta_2} G_{i_3} \xleftarrow{\beta_3} \cdots
\]

we have

\[
\beta_n : \text{image } \beta_{n+1} \longrightarrow \text{image } \beta_n
\]

is an isomorphism for each \( n \), where \( \beta_n = \alpha_{i_n} \alpha_{i_{n+1}} \cdots \alpha_{i_{n+1}} \). We omit the proof of the following proposition. One implication is proved in [7]; the other may be verified by a routine diagram chase.

**Proposition 1.** \textit{In the commutative diagram}

\[
1 \quad 1 \quad 1 \quad 1
\]

\[
\cdots \longrightarrow A_{i+1} \xrightarrow{\alpha_i} A_i \longrightarrow A_{i-1} \longrightarrow \cdots \longrightarrow A_1
\]

\[
\cdots \longrightarrow B_{i+1} \xrightarrow{\beta_i} B_i \longrightarrow B_{i-1} \longrightarrow \cdots \longrightarrow B_1
\]

\[
\cdots \longrightarrow C_{i+1} \xrightarrow{\gamma_i} C_i \longrightarrow C_{i-1} \longrightarrow \cdots \longrightarrow C_1
\]

\[
1 \quad 1 \quad 1 \quad 1
\]

of groups and homomorphisms, suppose that the columns are exact and that the \( \gamma_i \) are isomorphisms. Then, \( \{A_i, \alpha_i\}_{i=1}^\infty \) is stable if and only if \( \{B_i, \beta_i\}_{i=1}^\infty \) is stable. If either sequence is stable, the induced sequence \( 1 \rightarrow \varprojlim A_i \rightarrow \varprojlim B_i \rightarrow \varprojlim C_i \rightarrow 1 \) is exact.

Let \( G \) be a \( \mathbb{Z}^2 \)-action on \( E^n \). For each \( X \subset E^n \), let \( GX \) denote the set \( \{g(X) \mid g \in G\} \). We say that \( G \) is \textit{tame} provided that:

1. \( G \) satisfies Spner's condition and
2. For each compact set \( C \subset E^n \), there is a compact set \( D \subset E^n \)
containing $C$ such that the inclusion induced map $l_*: \pi_j(E^n - GD) \to \pi_j(E^n - GC)$ is the zero map for $j = 0, 1$.

We assume now that $G$ is a tame $Z^r$-action and that $n \geq 5$. Let $O_g$ be the orbit space $E^n/G$. Then $O_g$ is a manifold and the projection $p: E^n \to O_g$ is a covering map. Since $O_g$ is an Eilenberg-McLane $K(Z^r, 1)$ space, it follows [15] that $O_g$ has the homotopy type of the torus $T^n = S^1 \times S^1$. Since $H_n(O_g) \cong H_{n-1}(O_g) \cong 0$, it follows that $O_g$ is noncompact and has one end [14].

Let $\{D_i\}_{i=1}^\infty$ be a collection of compact subsets of $O_g$ such that $\bigcup D_i = O_g$, $D_{i+1} \supset D_i$ for each $i$, and $O_g - D_i$ is connected for each $i$. Using (2) above, we can find a nested sequence $\{C_i\}_{i=1}^\infty$ of compact subsets of $E^n$ such that $GC_i \supset p^{-1}D_i$ and $l_*: \pi_j(E^n - GC_{i+1}) \to \pi_j(E^n - GC_i)$ is zero for each $i$ and $j = 0, 1$. By choosing a subsequence of $D_i$'s if necessary, we can assume without loss of generality that $GC_i = p^{-1}D_i$.

**Proposition 2.** $\pi_i(O_g, O_g - D_i) = 0$ for each $i$, and $E^n - GC_i$ is connected.

**Proof.** Let $x$ be a base point for $O_g - D_i$, and assume without loss of generality that $x \in O_g - D_i$. Let $\hat{x}$ be a point in $E^n - GC_{i+1}$ such that $p(\hat{x}) = x$. Let $\alpha: (I, \{0, 1\}, \{0\}) \to (O_g, O_g - D_i, x)$ be a map, and assume (without loss of generality) that $\alpha(1) \in O_g - D_{i+1}$. Let $\hat{\alpha}$ be the lift of $\alpha$ based at $\hat{x}$. We have $\hat{x}, \hat{\alpha}(1) \in E^n - GC_{i+1}$ so by (2) there is a path $\beta$ in $E^n - GC_i$ joining $\hat{x}$ and $\hat{\alpha}(1)$. Since $\hat{\alpha}$ and $\beta$ are homotopic with endpoints fixed in $E^n$, $\alpha$ and $p\beta$ are homotopic in $O_g$, so that $[\alpha] = 0$ in $\pi_i(O_g, O_g - D_i)$. The second conclusion follows from the first by a covering space argument.

**Proposition 3.** If $\varepsilon$ is the end of $O_g$, $\pi_i$ is stable at $\varepsilon$ and the natural projection $\pi_i(\varepsilon) \to \pi_i(O_g)$ is an isomorphism.

**Proof.** For each $i$, let $x_i \in E^n - GC_i$ be a base point, $y_i = p(x_i)$, and let $\alpha_i$, $p\alpha_i$ be connecting paths between $x_i$, $x_{i+1}$ and $y_i$, $y_{i+1}$. We have the following diagram from the exact homotopy sequences of a fibration

\[
\begin{array}{cccccc}
1 & \to & \pi_i(E^n - GC_i, x_i) & \to & \pi_i(O_g - D_i, y_i) & \to & \pi_0(p^{-1}(y_i)) & \to 1 \\
& & \uparrow & \uparrow \cong & \uparrow \cong & \uparrow \cong & \\
& & \pi_i(O_g, y_i) & & & \\
& & & & & 1 \\
\end{array}
\]
which gives rise to the commutative diagram

\[
\begin{array}{ccc}
1 & \rightarrow & \pi_i(E^n - GC_i, x_i) \\
\uparrow & & \uparrow \\
1 & \rightarrow & \pi_i(O_g - D_i, y_i) \\
\uparrow & & \uparrow \\
\vdots & & \vdots \\
1 & \rightarrow & \pi_i(O_g - D_{i+1}, y_{i+1}) \\
\uparrow & & \uparrow \\
\vdots & & \vdots \\
\end{array}
\]

where the columns are change of base point maps and each \(\gamma_i\) is an isomorphism. We apply Proposition 1 to see that \(\pi_i\) is stable at \(\varepsilon\) and that

\[
1 \rightarrow \lim \{\pi_i(E^n - GC_i, x_i)\} \rightarrow \lim \{\pi_i(O_g - D_i, y_i)\} \\
\rightarrow \lim \{\pi_i(O_g, y_i)\} \rightarrow 1
\]

is exact. This translates into \(1 \rightarrow \pi_i(\varepsilon) \rightarrow \pi_i(O_g) \rightarrow 1\), and the proof is complete.

Now by [11], we may assume that \(O_g\) has a (unique) PL structure. There is a map \(f: T^n \rightarrow O_g\) which is a homotopy equivalence. We may assume \(f\) to be an embedding by general position. Let \(\tau_g = f(T^n)\). By a theorem of Hudson [5], \(\tau_g\) is unique up to concordance, hence, up to ambient isotopy [4].

**Theorem 4.** If \(G\) is a tame \(Z^2\)-action on \(E^n\), \(n \geq 5\), then \(O_g\) is PL-homeomorphic to the interior of a regular neighborhood of \(\tau_g\).

**Proof.** Let \(N\) be a regular neighborhood of \(\tau_g\) in \(O_g\). From the exact sequence of the triad \((O_g, O_g - \tau_g, \text{int} N)\) [1], we have

\[
\cdots \rightarrow \pi_i(O_g - \tau_g, \text{int} N - \tau_g) \rightarrow \pi_i(O_g, \text{int} N) \\
\rightarrow \pi_i(O_g, O_g - \tau_g, \text{int} N) \rightarrow \pi_{i-1}(O_g - \tau_g, \text{int} N - \tau_g) \rightarrow \cdots \\
\rightarrow \pi_i(O_g, O_g - \tau_g, \text{int} N) \rightarrow \pi_i(O_g - \tau_g, \text{int} N - \tau_g) \\
\rightarrow \pi_i(O_g, \text{int} N) .
\]

Since \(\pi_i(O_g, \text{int} N) \cong 0\) for all \(i\), we can apply [4, Lemma 12.4] to get \(\pi_i(O_g, O_g - \tau_g, \text{int} N) \cong 0\) for all \(i\), and thus \(\pi_i(O_g - \tau_g, \text{int} N - \tau_g) \cong 0\) for all \(i\). It follows that the inclusion \(\text{int} N - \tau_g \rightarrow O_g - \tau_g\) is a homotopy equivalence and hence the inclusion \(\text{bdy} N \rightarrow O_g - \text{int} N\) is a homotopy equivalence. General position gives an inclusion induced isomorphism \(\pi_i(O_g - \text{int} N) \cong \pi_i(O_g)\) so the projection \(\pi_i(\varepsilon) \rightarrow \pi_i(O_g - \text{int} N)\) is an isomorphism by Proposition 3. Applying Siebenmann's Open
Collar Theorem [14], we have that $O_\alpha - \text{int } N$ is $PL$ homeomorphic to $\text{bdy } N \times [0, 1)$. Thus, $O_\alpha \cong \text{int } N$.

**Corollary 5.** There are exactly two topological types of tame $Z^2$-actions on $E^n$, $n \geq 5$.

**Proof.** Two tame $Z^2$-actions are equivalent if and only if their orbit spaces are homeomorphic [3]. By a theorem of T. Price [13, p. 336] and uniqueness of $PL$ structures [11], orientable regular neighborhoods of $T^2$ in codimension three or greater are $SO_{n-2}$ bundles and are classified up to homeomorphism by $\pi_1(SO_{n-2}) \cong Z_2$, $n \geq 5$.


**Proposition 6.** Suppose $G$ is a $Z^2$-action on $E^n$, $n \geq 2$ and $H \subset G$ is a subgroup of index two. Then $G$ is a tame action if and only if $H$ is a tame action.

**Proof.** Suppose first that $G$ is a tame action. Since $G$ satisfies Sperner’s condition, clearly $H$ does. Now let $\{C_j\}$ be a sequence of compact sets in $E^n$ such that $C_j \subset C_{j+1}$ for each $j$ and the inclusion $E^n - GC_{j+1}$ into $E^n - GC_j$ is zero on $\pi_0$ and $\pi_1$. Since $H$ is a subgroup of index two, one can find a homeomorphism $k$ in $G$ such that $GC_j = HD_j$ where $D_j = C_j \cup k(C_j)$. Hence, $H$ is tame.

Now suppose $H$ is tame and suppose $G$ fails to satisfy Sperner’s condition. Then for some compact set $C \subset E^n$, the set

$$M = \{g \in G \mid g(C) \cap C \neq \emptyset\}$$

is infinite. We can find a basis $\{h, k\}$ for $G$ such that $\{h, k^2\}$ is a basis for $H$. Since $H$ satisfies Sperner’s condition, $M$ must contain an infinite number of elements of the form $h^i k^{2i+1}$. Let $D = k(C) \cup C$. Then if $h^i k^{2i+1} \in M$, $h^i k^{2i}(D) = h^i k^{2i+1}(C) \cup h^i k^{2i}(C)$ so that $h^i k^{2i}(D) \cap D \neq \emptyset$. But then $H$ does not satisfy Sperner’s condition, a contradiction. Thus, $G$ satisfies Sperner’s condition.

Now let $\{C_j\}$ be a sequence of compact sets in $E^n$ such that $C_j \subset C_{j+1}$ for each $j$ and $\bigcup C_j = E^n$. As above there is a homeomorphism $k$ in $G$ such that $GC_j = HD_j$ where $D_j = C_j \cup k(C_j)$ (the homeomorphism $k$ in the above basis will suffice). Taking a subsequence of the $C_j$’s we find that inclusion $E^n - HD_{j+1} = E^n - GC_{j+1}$ into $E^n - HD_j = E^n - GC_j$ is zero on $\pi_0$ and $\pi_1$. Thus, $G$ is a tame action.

**Proposition 7.** Suppose that $X$ is the total space of an orientable $O(q)$ bundle over $T^q$, $q \geq 3$ and $p: \tilde{X} \to X$ is a double cover of $X$. Then $\tilde{X}$ is the total space of the trivial $O(q)$ bundle over $T^q$. 


Proof. Orientable $O(q)$ bundles over $T^2$ are classified by $\pi_1(SO_q)$ which is $\mathbb{Z}_2$ for $q \geq 3$. Applying the classification described by Price in [13] yields the proposition.

**Theorem 8.** Suppose that $H$ is a tame $\mathbb{Z}^2$-action on $E^n$, $n \geq 5$. Then $H$ is topologically equivalent to the standard $\mathbb{Z}^2$-action if and only if there exists a $\mathbb{Z}^2$-action $G$ on $E^n$ such that $H$ is a subgroup of $G$ and $G/H \cong \mathbb{Z}_2$.

**Proof.** If $H$ is equivalent to the standard action, the required $G$ clearly exists.

Now suppose $H$ is tame and $G$ is given such that $G/H \cong \mathbb{Z}^2$. By Proposition 6, one has that $G$ is tame. Thus, $O_G$ is homeomorphic to the interior of a orientable regular neighborhood of $T^2$ and, therefore, is the total space of an orientable $O(q)$ bundle over $T^2$. But the natural covering projection of $O_H$ onto $O_G$ is a double cover of $O_G$. The theorem follows from Proposition 7.

**Corollary 9.** Suppose $G$ is a tame $\mathbb{Z}^2$-action on $E^n$, $n \geq 5$. Then every homeomorphism in $G$ except the identity is topologically equivalent to a translation of $E^n$.

**Proof.** Suppose $f$ is a member of $G$. Then one can find a basis $\{h, k\}$ for $G$ such that there is a positive integer $n$ for which $h^n = f$. Clearly if $h$ is topologically equivalent to a translation then so is $f$. Let $H$ be the subgroup of $G$ generated by $\{h, k^2\}$. Then $H$ is a subgroup of index two and by Proposition 6 is tame. Applying Theorem 8, one gets $H$ topologically equivalent to the standard $\mathbb{Z}^2$-action and, hence, $h$ is topologically equivalent to a translation.

**Remark.** Proposition 6 is true whenever $H$ is a subgroup of finite index. This together with Corollary 9 says that every subaction of a tame $\mathbb{Z}^2$-action is tame.

**Example.** For $n \geq 5$, let $W^{n-2}$ be a contractible open manifold and let $Q^n = S^1 \times S^1 \times W^{n-2}$. Then the universal cover of $Q^n$ is $E^2 \times W^{n-2} \cong E^n$ [12], so that if $G$ is the corresponding group of covering transformations, $G$ is a $\mathbb{Z}^2$-action satisfying Sperner's condition. Let $e_q$ and $e_w$ denote the ends of $Q^n$ and $W^{n-2}$ respectively. It follows by applying Proposition 1 that if $\pi_i(e_q)$ is stable so is $\pi_i(e_w)$ and there is a short exact sequence $1 \to \pi_i(e_w) \to \pi_i(e_q) \to \mathbb{Z}^2 \to 1$. If $W^{n-2}$ is the Whitehead example [17] for $n = 5$ or the interior of a contractible manifold with nonsimply connected boundary for $n > 5$ [2], the above shows that $Q^n$ is not the interior of a regular neighborhood of $T^n$, so
that $G$ is not a tame action. However, if $h_1, h_2$ are the generators of $G$ corresponding to the standard cover of $S^1 \times S^1$, the orbit space of the subgroup generated by $h_i$ is homeomorphic to $S^1 \times E^{n-1}$, so that $h_1$ and $h_2$ are both topologically equivalent to translations.

References


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Wm. R. Allaway, *On finding the distribution function for an orthogonal polynomial set* ................................................................. 305

Eric Amar, *Sur un théorème de Mooney relatif aux fonctions analytiques bornées* ...... 311

Robert Morgan Brooks, *Analytic structure in the spectrum of a natural system* ...... 315

Bahattin Cengiz, *On extremely regular function spaces* ........................................ 335


Paul Frazier Duvall, Jr. and Jim Maxwell, *Tame $Z^2$-actions on $E^n* ......................... 349

Allen Roy Freedman, *On the additivity theorem for n-dimensional asymptotic density* .................................................................................. 357

John Griffin and Kelly Denis McKennon, *Multipliers and the group $L_p$-algebras* ..... 365

Charles Lemuel Hagopian, *Characterizations of $\lambda$ connected plane continua* .... 371

Jon Craig Helton, *Bounds for products of interval functions* ................................. 377

Ikuko Kayashima, *On relations between Nörlund and Riesz means* ......................... 391

Everett Lee Lady, *Slender rings and modules* ......................................................... 397

Shozo Matsuura, *On the Lu Qi-Keng conjecture and the Bergman representative domains* ................................................................................. 407

Stephen H. McCleary, *The lattice-ordered group of automorphisms of an $\alpha$-set* ... 417

Stephen H. McCleary, *$\sigma$–2-transitive ordered permutation groups* .................. 425

Stephen H. McCleary, *$\sigma$-primitive ordered permutation groups. II* ...................... 431

Richard Rochberg, *Almost isometries of Banach spaces and moduli of planar domains* .................................................................................. 445

R. F. Rossa, *Radical properties involving one-sided ideals* .................................... 467

Robert A. Rubin, *On exact localization* ................................................................. 473

S. Sribala, *On $\Sigma$-inverse semigroups* ................................................................. 483

H. M. (Hari Mohan) Srivastava, *On the Konhauser sets of biorthogonal polynomials suggested by the Laguerre polynomials* .......................................................... 489

Stuart A. Steinberg, *Rings of quotients of rings without nilpotent elements* ........... 493

Daniel Mullane Sunday, *The self-equivalences of an H-space* ................................. 507

W. J. Thron and Richard Hawks Warren, *On the lattice of proximities of Čech compatible with a given closure space* ................................................. 519

Frank Uhlig, *The number of vectors jointly annihilated by two real quadratic forms determines the inertia of matrices in the associated pencil* ............................... 537

Frank Uhlig, *On the maximal number of linearly independent real vectors annihilated simultaneously by two real quadratic forms* ................................. 543

Frank Uhlig, *Definite and semidefinite matrices in a real symmetric matrix pencil* .... 561

Arnold Lewis Villone, *Self-adjoint extensions of symmetric differential operators* .... 569

Cary Webb, *Tensor and direct products* ................................................................. 579

James Victor Whittaker, *On normal subgroups of differentiable homeomorphisms* ................................................................................. 595

Jeremy L. Paul, *Addendum to: “Sequences of homeomorphisms which converge to homeomorphisms”* .................................................................. 615

David E. Fields, *Correction to: “Dimension theory in power series rings”* ............. 616

Peter Michael Curran, *Correction to: “Cohomology of finitely presented groups”* .... 617

Billy E. Rhoades, *Correction to: “Commutants of some Hausdorff matrices”* .......... 617

Charles W. Trigg, *Corrections to: “Versum sequences in the binary system”* ......... 619