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**A NON-STRICTLY PSEUDOCONVEX DOMAIN FOR WHICH  
THE SQUEEZING FUNCTION TENDS TO 1  
TOWARDS THE BOUNDARY**

JOHN ERIK FORNÆSS AND ERLEND FORNÆSS WOLD

# A NON-STRICTLY PSEUDOCONVEX DOMAIN FOR WHICH THE SQUEEZING FUNCTION TENDS TO 1 TOWARDS THE BOUNDARY

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**In recent work by Zimmer it was proved that if  $\Omega \subset \mathbb{C}^n$  is a bounded convex domain with  $C^\infty$ -smooth boundary, then  $\Omega$  is strictly pseudoconvex provided that the squeezing function approaches 1 as one approaches the boundary. We show that this result fails if  $\Omega$  is only assumed to be  $C^2$ -smooth.**

## 1. Introduction

We recall the definition of the squeezing function  $S_\Omega(z)$  on a bounded domain  $\Omega \subset \mathbb{C}^n$ . If  $z \in \Omega$ , and  $f_z : \Omega \rightarrow \mathbb{B}^n$  is an embedding with  $f_z(z) = 0$ , we set

$$(1-1) \quad S_{\Omega, f_z}(z) := \sup\{r > 0 : B_r(0) \subset f_z(\Omega)\},$$

and then

$$(1-2) \quad S_\Omega(z) := \sup_{f_z} \{S_{\Omega, f_z}(z)\}.$$

A guiding question is the following: which complex analytic properties of  $\Omega$  are encoded by the behaviour of  $S_\Omega$ ? For instance, if  $S_\Omega$  is bounded away from 0, then  $\Omega$  is necessarily pseudoconvex, and the Kobayashi–, Carathéodory–, Bergman– and the Kähler–Einstein metrics are complete, and they are pairwise quasi-isometric; see [Liu, Sun and Yau 2004; Yeung 2009]. Recently, Zimmer [2018b] proved that if

$$(1-3) \quad \lim_{z \rightarrow b\Omega} S_\Omega(z) = 1$$

for a  $C^\infty$ -smooth, bounded convex domain, then the domain  $\Omega$  is necessarily strictly

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pseudoconvex.<sup>1</sup> In this short note we will show that this does not hold for  $C^2$ -smooth domains.

**Theorem 1.1.** *There exists a bounded convex  $C^2$ -smooth domain  $\Omega \subset \mathbb{C}^n$  which is not strongly pseudoconvex, but*

$$(1-4) \quad \lim_{z \rightarrow b\Omega} S_{\Omega}(z) = 1,$$

where  $S_{\Omega}(z)$  denotes the squeezing function on  $\Omega$ .

For further results about the squeezing function the reader may also consult the references [Diederich, Fornæss and Wold 2016; Deng, Guan and Zhang 2012; 2016; Fornæss and Rong 2016; Fornæss and Wold 2015; Kim and Zhang 2016; Liu, Sun and Yau 2004; Yeung 2009; Zimmer 2018b]. In the last section we will post some open problems.

## 2. The construction

**The construction in  $\mathbb{R}^n$  and curvature estimates.** We start by describing a construction of a convex domain  $\Omega$  in  $\mathbb{R}^n$  with a single non-strictly convex point. Afterwards we will explain how to make the construction give the conclusion of Theorem 1.1 for each  $n = 2m$ , when we make the identification with  $\mathbb{C}^m$ .

Let  $x = (x_1, \dots, x_n)$  denote the coordinates on  $\mathbb{R}^n$ . For any  $k \in \mathbb{N}$  we let  $B_k$  denote the ball

$$(2-1) \quad B_k := \{x \in \mathbb{R}^n : x_1^2 + \dots + x_{n-1}^2 + (x_n - k)^2 < k^2\}.$$

On some fixed neighbourhood of the origin, each boundary  $bB_k$  may be written as a graph of a function

$$(2-2) \quad x_n = \psi_k(x') = \psi_k(x_1, \dots, x_{n-1}) = k - \sqrt{k^2 - \|x'\|^2} = \frac{1}{2k} \|x'\|^2 + O(\|x\|^3).$$

Fix a smooth cut-off function  $\chi(x') = \chi(|x'|)$  with compact support in  $\{|x'| < 1\}$  which is one near the origin. We will create a new limit-graphing function  $f(x')$  by subsequently gluing the functions  $\psi_k$  and  $\psi_{k+1}$  by setting

$$(2-3) \quad g_k(x') = \psi_k(x') + \chi\left(\frac{x'}{\epsilon_k}\right)(\psi_{k+1}(x') - \psi_k(x')),$$

where the sequence  $\epsilon_k$  will converge rapidly to zero, and the boundary of our domain  $\Omega$  will be defined (locally) as the graph  $\Sigma$  of the function  $f$  defined as follows: Start by setting  $f_k := \psi_k$  for some  $k \in \mathbb{N}$ . Then define  $f_{k+1}$  inductively by

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<sup>1</sup>Added in proof: Zimmer [2018a] has subsequently improved his results to convex domains with  $C^{2,\alpha}$ -boundary.

setting  $f_{k+1} = f_k$  for  $\|x'\| \geq \epsilon_k$  and then  $f_{k+1} = g_k$  for  $\|x'\| < \epsilon_k$ . Finally we set  $f = \lim_{k \rightarrow \infty} f_k$ .

To show that the limit function  $f$  is  $C^2$ -smooth (if the  $\epsilon_k$ 's converge rapidly to 0), we need to show that the sequence  $\{f_k\}$  is a Cauchy sequence with respect to the  $C^2$ -norm, i.e., we need to estimate the derivatives

$$(2-4) \quad \sigma_{ij}^k(x') := \frac{\partial^2}{\partial x_i \partial x_j} \left( \chi \left( \frac{x'}{\epsilon_k} \right) (\psi_{k+1}(x') - \psi_k(x')) \right).$$

Note first that

$$(2-5) \quad \psi_{k+1}(x') - \psi_k(x') = \frac{-1}{2k(k+1)} \|x'\|^2 + O(\|x'\|^3).$$

We see that

$$|\sigma_{ij}^k(x')| = \left( \frac{1}{\epsilon_k^2} O(\|x'\|^2) + \frac{1}{\epsilon_k} O(\|x'\|) \right) \frac{1}{2k(k+1)} + \frac{1}{\epsilon_k^2} O(\|x'\|^3) + \frac{1}{\epsilon_k} O(\|x'\|^2),$$

and so for  $\|x'\| < \epsilon_k$  we have

$$(2-6) \quad |\sigma_{ij}^k(x')| \leq C \cdot \frac{1}{2k(k+1)} + O(\epsilon_k),$$

where the constants are independent of any particular choice of  $\epsilon_k$ . So if  $\epsilon_k$  is small enough we see that  $|\sigma_{ij}^k|$  is of order of magnitude  $1/k^2$ , which shows that  $\{f_k\}$  will be a Cauchy sequence.

To ensure that  $\Omega$  is convex we will need to estimate the curvature of  $\Sigma$ , and estimates of the curvature of the partial graphs  $\Sigma_k = \{x, g_k(x)\}$  will be necessary to prove [Theorem 1.1](#). Informally our goal is to show the following: *There exist  $N, m \in \mathbb{N}$ ,  $N > m$ , such that if  $k \geq N$  and if  $\epsilon_k$  is sufficiently small (depending on  $k$ ), then  $\Sigma_k$  curves, at every point and in all directions, more than  $bB_{k+m}$  and less than  $bB_{k-m}$ .*

We make this more precise. The surface  $\Sigma_k$  has a defining function  $\rho_k(x) = g_k(x') - x_n$ . If  $v_p$  is a tangent vector to  $\Sigma_k$  at  $p = (x', g_k(x))$ , the curvature of  $\Sigma_k$  in the direction of  $v_p$  is defined as

$$(2-7) \quad \kappa_p^{\Sigma_k}(v_p) := \frac{H\rho_k(p)(v_p)}{\|\nabla\rho_k(p)\| \|v_p\|^2},$$

where  $\nabla\rho_k$  is the gradient, and  $H\rho_k$  is the Hessian of  $\rho_k$  (which is equal to the Hessian of  $g_k$ ). The curvature (2-7) depends only on the direction of  $v_p$ , and the curvature of  $bB_k$  is  $\frac{1}{k}$  at all points and in all directions. The precise statement of our goal stated above is this:

**Lemma 2.1.** *Let  $\psi_k$  and  $\chi$  be defined as above for  $k \in \mathbb{N}$ . There exist  $N, m \in \mathbb{N}$ ,  $N > m$ , such that if each  $\epsilon_k$  is sufficiently small (depending on  $k$ ), and  $k \geq N$ , then*

$$(2-8) \quad \frac{1}{k+m} \leq \kappa_p^{\Sigma_k}(v_p) \leq \frac{1}{k-m},$$

for all  $v_p$  tangent to  $\Sigma_k$ .

It is now easy to see that if  $\epsilon_k \searrow 0$  sufficiently fast, then  $\Omega$  is convex, and strictly convex away from the origin. If we let  $\Omega_k$  denote the domain whose boundary near the origin is given by the graph of  $f_k$ , we see that  $\Omega_k$  is strictly convex, the Hessian being positive definite everywhere. Moreover,  $\Omega = \cup_k \Omega_k$ , and so  $\Omega$  is convex.

*Proof of Lemma 2.1.* When we estimate the curvature we may assume that the functions  $g_k$  are simply

$$(2-9) \quad g_k(x') = \psi_k(x') - \chi\left(\frac{x'}{\epsilon_k}\right) \left(\frac{1}{2k(k+1)}\right) |x'|^2 =: \psi_k(x') + \sigma_k(x'),$$

since the higher order terms missing in this expression of  $g_k$  can be made insignificant by choosing  $\epsilon_k$  small enough. Because of the  $|x'|^2$  term it is easy to see that

$$(2-10) \quad dg_k(x') = d\psi_k(x') + \Delta_k(x')$$

and

$$(2-11) \quad Hg_k(x') = H\psi_k(x') + h_k(x'),$$

where the coefficients in both  $\Delta_k$  and  $h_k$  are of order of magnitude  $1/k^2$  independently of  $k$  and of the choice of a small  $\epsilon_k$ .

Fix a point  $x'$  and a vector  $v \in \mathbb{R}^{n-1}$  with  $\|v\| = 1$ . Then a tangent vector  $v_p$  at the point  $(x', g_k(x'))$  is given by

$$(2-12) \quad v_p = (v, dg_k(x')(v)) = (v, d\psi_k(x')(v) + \Delta_k(x')(v)).$$

Estimating the curvature we see that

$$\begin{aligned} \kappa_p^{\Sigma_k}(v_p) &= \frac{(H\psi_k(x') + h_k(x'))(v_p)}{\|\nabla \rho_k(p)\| \|v_p\|^2} \\ &= \frac{(H\psi_k(x'))((v, d\psi_k(x')v) + (0', \Delta_k(x')(v)))}{\|-\mathbf{e}_n + \nabla \psi_k(p) + \nabla \sigma_k(x')\| \|(v, d\psi_k(x')(v)) + (0', \Delta_k(x')(v))\|^2} + O\left(\frac{1}{k^2}\right) \\ &= \frac{(H\psi_k(x'))((v, d\psi_k(x')v))}{\|-\mathbf{e}_n + \nabla \psi_k(x')\| \left(1 + O\left(\frac{1}{k^2}\right)\right) \|(v, d\psi_k(x')(v))\|^2 \left(1 + O\left(\frac{1}{k^2}\right)\right)^2} + O\left(\frac{1}{k^2}\right) \\ &= \frac{(H\psi_k(x'))((v, d\psi_k(x')v))}{\|-\mathbf{e}_n + \nabla \psi_k(x')\| \|(v, d\psi_k(x')(v))\|^2} + O\left(\frac{1}{k^2}\right) = \frac{1}{k} + O\left(\frac{1}{k^2}\right), \end{aligned}$$

where the term  $\frac{1}{k}$  comes from the fact that the expression above is the formula for the curvature of a ball of radius  $k$ . From this it is straightforward to deduce the existence of an  $m$  such that the lemma holds.  $\square$

**The squeezing function on  $\Omega$ .** We will now explain why the squeezing function goes to 1 uniformly as we approach  $b\Omega$  provided that the  $\epsilon_k$ 's decrease sufficiently fast. Let  $N, m$  be as in [Lemma 2.1](#), and start by setting  $f_k = \psi_k$  for some  $k > N$ .

Fix some small  $\delta_k > 0$ . By [Lemma 2.1](#), if  $\epsilon_k$  is small enough, we can for each  $p = (x', x_n) \in b\Omega_k$ , with  $\|x'\| < \delta_k$ , find a ball  $B$  of radius  $k + m$  containing  $\Omega_k$  such that  $p \in bB$ . By the same lemma we can for each such  $p$  also find a local piece of a ball of radius  $k - m$  touching  $p$  from the inside of  $\Omega_k$ , and the size of the local ball is uniform. So using [Lemma 3.1](#) we may find a  $t_k > 0$  small enough such that

$$(2-13) \quad S_{\Omega_k}(x', x_n) \geq 1 - \frac{m}{(k+m)}$$

if  $x_n \leq t_k$ .

Next, again by [Lemma 2.1](#), we find a  $\delta_{k+1} < \delta_k$  such that if  $\epsilon_{k+1}$  is small enough, then for each  $p = (x', x_n) \in b\Omega_{k+1}$  with  $\|x'\| < \delta_{k+1}$ , we may oscillate with balls of radius  $k + 1 - m$  and  $k + 1 + m$  respectively. So there is a  $t_{k+1} < t_k$  such that

$$(2-14) \quad S_{\Omega_{k+1}}(x', x_n) \geq 1 - \frac{m}{(k+1+m)}$$

if  $x_n \leq t_{k+1}$ . Furthermore, by further decreasing  $\epsilon_{k+1}$ , we can keep the estimate (2-13) with  $\Omega_k$  replaced by  $\Omega_{k+1}$ . The reason is the following. First of all, by [\[Fornæss and Wold 2015\]](#), there exists a constant  $C_k$  such that

$$(2-15) \quad S_{\Omega_k}(z) \geq 1 - C_k \cdot \text{dist}(z, b\Omega_k),$$

and near any compact  $K \subset b\Omega_k$  away from 0, this estimate is not going to be disturbed by a small perturbation of  $b\Omega_k$  near the point 0; the estimate is obtained by using oscillating balls at points of  $K$  whose boundaries will stay bounded away from 0. Furthermore, on any compact subset of  $\Omega_k$  we have that  $S_{\Omega_{k+1}} \rightarrow S_{\Omega_k}$  as  $\epsilon_{k+1} \rightarrow 0$ .

Continuing in this fashion, we obtain a decreasing sequence  $0 < t_j < t_{j+1}$ ,  $j = k, k + 1, \dots$ , and an increasing sequence of domains  $\Omega_j$ , such that for each  $j$  we have

$$(2-16) \quad S_{\Omega_j}(x', x_n) \geq 1 - \frac{m}{(k+i+m)}$$

for  $t_{k+i} \leq x_n \leq t_{k+i-1}$ , for  $i \leq j$ . The result now follows from [Lemma 3.2](#).

### 3. Lemmata

Let  $0 < s < 1/2$ ,  $0 < d < r < 1$ , and set  $B_s = B(s, 1 - s)$ , the ball of radius  $1 - s$  centred at  $(s, 0')$ . Furthermore, we set

$$(3-1) \quad B_{s,d} = B_s \cap \{(z_1, z') \in \mathbb{B}^n : \operatorname{Re}(z_1) > d\}.$$

**Lemma 3.1.** *If  $B_{s,d} \subset \Omega \subset \mathbb{B}^n$ , and if  $r > 1 - \frac{sd}{4}$ , then  $S_\Omega(r, 0) > 1 - s$ .*

*Proof.* Set  $\mu = 1 - s$  and  $\eta = \frac{d}{2}$ , and then

$$(3-2) \quad B_\eta^\mu = \left\{ (z_1, z') \in \mathbb{C}^n : |z_1 - (1 - \eta)|^2 + \frac{\eta}{\mu} |z'|^2 < \eta^2 \right\}.$$

Then certainly  $\operatorname{Re}(z_1) > d$  on  $B_\eta^\mu$ , and we also have that  $B_\eta^\mu \subset B_s$ . To see the latter, we translate the two balls sending  $(1, 0')$  to the origin, where they are defined by

$$(3-3) \quad \tilde{B}_s = \{(z_1, z') : 2\mu \operatorname{Re}(z_1) + |z|^2 < 0\},$$

and

$$(3-4) \quad \tilde{B}_\eta^\mu = \left\{ (z_1, z') : 2\eta \operatorname{Re}(z_1) + |z_1|^2 + \frac{\eta}{\mu} |z'|^2 < 0 \right\}.$$

Also,

$$\begin{aligned} 2\eta \operatorname{Re}(z_1) + |z_1|^2 + \frac{\eta}{\mu} |z'|^2 < 0 &\Rightarrow 2\eta \operatorname{Re}(z_1) + \frac{\eta}{\mu} |z_1|^2 + \frac{\eta}{\mu} |z'|^2 < 0 \\ &\Leftrightarrow 2\mu \operatorname{Re}(z_1) + |z|^2 < 0. \end{aligned}$$

According to Lemma 3.5 in [Fornæss and Wold 2015] we have

$$(3-5) \quad S_\Omega(r, 0) \geq \sqrt{\mu} \sqrt{1 - 2(1 - r)\frac{1}{\eta}} = \sqrt{(1 - s)\left(1 - \frac{4(1 - r)}{d}\right)},$$

from which the lemma follows easily.  $\square$

**Lemma 3.2.** *Let  $\Omega_j \subset \Omega_{j+1}$  for  $j \in \mathbb{N}$ , set  $\Omega = \cup_j \Omega_j$ , and assume that  $\Omega$  is bounded. Let  $z \in \Omega$ , and assume that  $S_{\Omega_j}(z) > 1 - \delta$  for all  $j$  large enough so that  $z \in \Omega_j$ . Then  $S_\Omega(z) \geq 1 - \delta$ .*

*Proof.* Let  $f_j : \Omega_j \rightarrow \mathbb{B}^n$  be an embedding such that  $f_j(z) = 0$  and  $B_{1-\delta}(0) \subset f_j(\Omega_j)$ . By passing to a subsequence we may assume that  $f_j \rightarrow f : \Omega \rightarrow \mathbb{B}^n$  uniformly on compact sets, with  $f(z) = 0$ . Setting  $g_j = f_j^{-1} : B_{1-\delta}(0) \rightarrow \Omega$  we may also assume that  $g_j \rightarrow g$  uniformly on compact sets. Then  $f|_{g(B_{1-\delta}(0))} = g^{-1}$ , from which the result follows.  $\square$

#### 4. Some open problems

**Problem 4.1.** Does Zimmer’s result hold for pseudoconvex domains of class  $C^\infty$ ?

**Problem 4.2.** How much smoothness is needed for Zimmer’s result hold for pseudoconvex domains?

**Problem 4.3.** Let  $\Omega \subset \mathbb{C}^2$  be a bounded pseudoconvex domain of class  $C^\infty$ . Is  $S_\Omega(z)$  bounded away from zero?

In light of the result of [Deng, Guan and Zhang 2016], the answer to the last question is affirmative for bounded strictly pseudoconvex domains of class  $\mathbb{C}^2$  in all dimensions. For strictly convex domains in  $\mathbb{C}^n$ , this was proved in [Yeung 2009]. Furthermore, it has been shown in [Kim and Zhang 2016] that the same holds for bounded convex domains without any further regularity assumptions, and by [Nikolov and Andreev 2017], it even holds for bounded  $\mathbb{C}$ -convex domains in general. On the other hand, by [Fornæss and Rong 2016], the answer is negative in general for  $n \geq 3$ .

Quantifying the asymptotic behaviour of the squeezing function, we showed in [Fornæss and Wold 2015] that

$$(i) \quad S_\Omega(z) \geq 1 - C \operatorname{dist}(z, b\Omega), \text{ and}$$

$$(ii) \quad S_\Omega(z) \geq 1 - C\sqrt{\operatorname{dist}(z, b\Omega)},$$

for strongly pseudoconvex domains of class  $C^4$  and  $C^3$  respectively. In [Diederich, Fornæss and Wold 2016] we showed that if the squeezing function approaches 1 essentially faster than in (i), then  $\Omega$  is biholomorphic to the unit ball.

**Problem 4.4.** What is the optimal estimate for the squeezing function for strictly pseudoconvex domains of class  $C^k$  with  $k < 4$ ?

Let  $\phi : \mathbb{B}^2 \rightarrow \mathbb{C}^2$  be defined as

$$\phi(z_1, z_2) := (z_1, -z_2 \log(z_1 - 1)).$$

Then  $\Omega := \phi(\mathbb{B}^2)$  is of class  $C^1$ , and  $(1, 0)$  is a non-strictly pseudoconvex boundary point of  $\Omega$ . So  $S_\Omega$  being identically equal to 1 does not even imply strict pseudoconvexity in the case of  $C^1$ -smooth boundaries.

**Problem 4.5.** Let  $\phi : \mathbb{B}^n \rightarrow \Omega$  be a biholomorphism, and assume that  $\Omega$  is a bounded  $C^2$ -smooth domain. Is  $\Omega$  strictly pseudoconvex?

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