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### Homotopy in Biased Graphs: Combinatorics vs. Topology

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#### Abstract for the Combinatorics and Geometry/Topology Seminars 2004 January 29

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A path in the 1-skeleton of a topological cell complex (with endpoints in the 0-skeleton) is a sequence  $P = v_0, e_1, v_1, e_2, \dots, v_k$ . An elementary homotopy of  $P$  consists of replacing a subpath  $P'$  by another path  $Q'$ , with the same endpoints, so that  $P' \cup Q'$  is contractible. One can require that  $P' \cup Q'$  is a circle, i.e., homeomorphic to a 1-sphere. Call this *topological homotopy*.

If we replace the 1-skeleton by an arbitrary graph and the condition of contractibility by a list of allowed circles in the graph, we have *combinatorial homotopy*. This is the sort of homotopy involved in my recent characterization of associative multary quasigroups. Here the list of allowed circles has to satisfy a “linearity” condition; the combination of the graph and the linear class of allowed circles is called a “biased graph”. A particular lemma in the proof of the quasigroup theorem displays clearly the operation of combinatorial homotopy.

The questions are: what does a topologist know (or want to know) about combinatorial homotopy, and how similar and how different are topological and combinatorial homotopy?

From:

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Last update: **2020/01/29 19:03**

