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Weak vector and scalar potentials. Applications to Poincaré's theorem and Korn's inequality in Sobolev spaces with negative exponents.

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Abstract

In this paper, we present several results concerning vector potentials and scalar potentials with data in Sobolev spaces with negative exponents, in a not necessarily simply-connected, three-dimensional domain. We then apply these results to Poincaré's theorem and to Korn's inequality.

1 Weak versions of a classical theorem of Poincaré

In this work, (the results of which were announced in [2]), Ω is a bounded open connected subset of \mathbb{R}^3 with a Lipschitz-continuous boundary Γ . The notation $X', \langle \cdot, \cdot \rangle_X$ denotes the duality pairing between a topological space X and its dual X' . The letter C denotes a constant that is not necessarily the same at its various occurrences.

We begin with a weak version of a well-known theorem of Poincaré. Here as elsewhere in this paper, “weak” means that the result to which it is attached holds as well in Sobolev spaces with negative exponents.

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Theorem 1.1. *Let $\mathbf{f} \in H^{-m}(\Omega)^3$ for some integer $m \geq 0$. Then the following properties are equivalent:*

(i) $H^{-m}(\Omega)^3 \langle \mathbf{f}, \boldsymbol{\varphi} \rangle_{H_0^m(\Omega)^3} = 0$ for all $\boldsymbol{\varphi} \in V_m = \{\boldsymbol{\varphi} \in H_0^m(\Omega)^3; \operatorname{div} \boldsymbol{\varphi} = 0\}$,

(ii) $H^{-m}(\Omega)^3 \langle \mathbf{f}, \boldsymbol{\varphi} \rangle_{H_0^m(\Omega)^3} = 0$ for all $\boldsymbol{\varphi} \in \mathcal{V} = \{\boldsymbol{\varphi} \in \mathcal{D}(\Omega)^3; \operatorname{div} \boldsymbol{\varphi} = 0\}$

To begin with, let $\mathbf{f} \in H^{-m}(\Omega)^3$ be such that $\mathbf{curl} \mathbf{f} = \mathbf{0}$ in Ω . We then use the same argument as in [8]: We know that there exist a unique $\mathbf{u} \in H_0^m(\Omega)^3$ and a unique $p \in H^{-m+1}(\Omega)/\mathbb{R}$ (see [5]) such that

$$\Delta^m \mathbf{u} + \mathbf{grad} p = \mathbf{f} \quad \text{and} \quad \operatorname{div} \mathbf{u} = 0 \quad \text{in } \Omega. \quad (1)$$

Hence $\Delta^m \mathbf{curl} \mathbf{u} = \mathbf{0}$ in Ω so that the hypoellipticity (see [10]) of the polyharmonic operator Δ^m implies that $\mathbf{curl} \mathbf{u} \in C^\infty(\Omega)^3$. Since $\operatorname{div} \mathbf{u} = 0$, we deduce that $\Delta \mathbf{u} = \mathbf{curl} \mathbf{curl} \mathbf{u} \in C^\infty(\Omega)^3$. This also implies that $\Delta^m \mathbf{u}$ belongs to $C^\infty(\Omega)^3$ and is an irrotational vector field. By the classical Poincaré theorem, there exists $q \in C^\infty(\Omega)^3$ such that $\Delta^m \mathbf{u} = \mathbf{grad} q$. Thus, $\mathbf{f} = \mathbf{grad} (p + q)$ and, thanks to [4] proposition 2.10, the function $p + q$ belongs to the space $H^{-m+1}(\Omega)$. \square

We can give another proof of the implication (iv) \implies (iii) by using the following theorem:

Theorem 1.2. *Assume that both Ω and $\mathbb{R}^3 \setminus \Omega$ are simply-connected. Let $\mathbf{u} \in H_0^m(\Omega)^3$, $m \geq 0$, be a vector field that satisfies $\operatorname{div} \mathbf{u} = 0$ in Ω . Then there exists a vector potential $\boldsymbol{\psi}$ in $H_0^{m+1}(\Omega)^3$ such that*

$$\mathbf{u} = \mathbf{curl} \boldsymbol{\psi}, \quad \operatorname{div} \Delta^{m+1} \boldsymbol{\psi} = 0 \quad \text{in } \Omega, \quad \text{and} \quad \|\boldsymbol{\psi}\|_{H^{m+1}(\Omega)^3} \leq C \|\mathbf{u}\|_{H^m(\Omega)^3}. \quad (2)$$

Proof. Let $\mathbf{u} \in H_0^m(\Omega)^3$ be such that $\operatorname{div} \mathbf{u} = 0$ in Ω and let $\tilde{\mathbf{u}}$ denote the extension of \mathbf{u} by $\mathbf{0}$ in $\mathbb{R}^3 \setminus \Omega$. Thus $\tilde{\mathbf{u}} \in H_0^m(\mathbb{R}^3)^3$, $\operatorname{div} \tilde{\mathbf{u}} = 0$ in \mathbb{R}^3 , and there exist an open ball B containing $\bar{\Omega}$ and a vector field $\mathbf{w} \in H_0^{m+1}(B)^3$ such that $\tilde{\mathbf{u}} = \mathbf{curl} \mathbf{w}$, $\operatorname{div} \Delta^{m+1} \mathbf{w} = 0$ in B , and

$$\|\mathbf{w}\|_{H^{m+1}(B)^3} \leq C \|\mathbf{u}\|_{H^m(B)^3}.$$

The open set $\Omega' := B \setminus \bar{\Omega}$ is bounded, has a Lipschitz-continuous boundary and is simply-connected. Furthermore, the vector field $\mathbf{w}' := \mathbf{w}|_{\Omega'}$ belongs to $H^{m+1}(\Omega')^3$ and satisfies $\mathbf{curl} \mathbf{w}' = \mathbf{0}$ in Ω' . Therefore there exists a function $\chi' \in H^1(\Omega')$ such that $\mathbf{w}' = \mathbf{grad} \chi'$ in Ω' . Hence in fact $\chi' \in H^{m+2}(\Omega')$ and the estimate

$$\|\chi'\|_{H^{m+2}(\Omega')} \leq C \|\mathbf{w}'\|_{H^{m+1}(\Omega')^3}$$

holds. Since the function $\chi' \in H^{m+2}(\Omega')$ can be extended to a function $\tilde{\chi}$ in $H^{m+2}(\mathbb{R}^3)$, with

$$\|\tilde{\chi}\|_{H^{m+2}(\mathbb{R}^3)} \leq C \|\chi'\|_{H^{m+2}(\Omega')} \leq C \|\mathbf{w}'\|_{H^{m+1}(\Omega')^3},$$

the vector field $\tilde{\boldsymbol{\varphi}} := \mathbf{w} - \mathbf{grad} \tilde{\chi}$ belongs to the space $H^{m+1}(B)^3$ and satisfies $\tilde{\boldsymbol{\varphi}}|_{\Omega'} = \mathbf{0}$. Then the restriction $\boldsymbol{\varphi} := \tilde{\boldsymbol{\varphi}}|_{\Omega}$ belongs to the space $H_0^{m+1}(\Omega)^3$, satisfies the estimate (2), and $\mathbf{curl} \tilde{\boldsymbol{\varphi}} = \mathbf{curl} \mathbf{w} = \tilde{\mathbf{u}}$ in B . Thus $\mathbf{u} = \mathbf{curl} \boldsymbol{\varphi}$

in Ω . Let now p denote the unique solution in the space $H_0^{m+2}(\Omega)$ of $\Delta^{m+2}p = \operatorname{div} \Delta^{m+1}\boldsymbol{\varphi}$, so that the estimate

$$\|p\|_{H^{m+2}(\Omega)} \leq C \|\boldsymbol{\varphi}\|_{H^{m+1}(\Omega)^3}$$

holds. Then the function $\boldsymbol{\psi} = \boldsymbol{\varphi} - \mathbf{grad} p$ satisfies (2). \square

We can give yet another proof of the above implication (iv) \implies (iii): Consider again the solution $\mathbf{u} \in H_0^m(\Omega)^3$ to (1) and let $\mathbf{v} \in H_0^{m+1}(\Omega)^3$ denote the vector potential of \mathbf{u} as given by theorem 1.2. We then have $\Delta^m \mathbf{curl} \mathbf{u} = \mathbf{0}$. If $m = 2k$, for some integer $k \geq 1$, then

$$\begin{aligned} {}_{H^{-m-1}(\Omega)^3} \langle \Delta^m \mathbf{curl} \mathbf{u}, \mathbf{v} \rangle_{{}_{H_0^{m+1}(\Omega)^3}} &= {}_{H^{-1}(\Omega)^3} \langle \Delta^k \mathbf{curl} \mathbf{u}, \Delta^k \mathbf{v} \rangle_{{}_{H_0^1(\Omega)^3}} \\ &= \int_{\Omega} \Delta^k \mathbf{u} \cdot \Delta^k \mathbf{curl} \mathbf{v} \, dx \\ &= \|\Delta^k \mathbf{u}\|_{L^2(\Omega)^3}^2. \end{aligned}$$

This implies that $\Delta^k \mathbf{u} = \mathbf{0}$ in Ω and thus $\mathbf{u} = \mathbf{0}$ since $\mathbf{u} \in H_0^m(\Omega)^3$. The case $m = 2k + 1$ follows by a similar argument. \square

2 Scalar Potentials

Let Γ_i , $0 \leq i \leq I$, denote the connected components of the boundary Γ of the domain Ω , Γ_0 being the boundary of the only unbounded connected component of $\mathbb{R}^3 \setminus \overline{\Omega}$. We do not assume that Ω is simply-connected, however we assume that there exist J connected and oriented surfaces Σ_j , $1 \leq j \leq J$ contained in Ω , with the following properties: each surface Σ_j is an open subset of a smooth manifold, the boundary of Σ_j is contained in Γ for $1 \leq j \leq J$, the intersection $\overline{\Sigma}_i \cap \overline{\Sigma}_j$ is empty for $i \neq j$, and finally the open set $\Omega^\circ = \Omega \setminus \bigcup_{j=1}^J \Sigma_j$ is simply-connected and pseudo-Lipschitz in the sense of [1]. Each such surface Σ_j is called a cut. Finally, let $[\cdot]_j$ denote the jump of a function over each cut Σ_j , $1 \leq j \leq J$.

We then define the spaces

$$\begin{aligned} H(\mathbf{curl}, \Omega) &= \{\mathbf{v} \in L^2(\Omega)^3; \mathbf{curl} \mathbf{v} \in L^2(\Omega)^3\}, \\ H(\operatorname{div}, \Omega) &= \{\mathbf{v} \in L^2(\Omega)^3; \operatorname{div} \mathbf{v} \in L^2(\Omega)\}, \end{aligned}$$

each one being equipped with the graph norm, and their subspaces

$$\begin{aligned} H_0(\mathbf{curl}, \Omega) &= \{\mathbf{v} \in H(\mathbf{curl}, \Omega); \mathbf{v} \times \mathbf{n} = \mathbf{0} \quad \text{on } \Gamma\}, \\ H_0(\operatorname{div}, \Omega) &= \{\mathbf{v} \in H(\operatorname{div}, \Omega); \mathbf{v} \cdot \mathbf{n} = 0 \quad \text{on } \Gamma\}. \end{aligned}$$

For any function q in $H^1(\Omega^\circ)$, $\mathbf{grad} q$ denotes the gradient of q in the sense of distributions in $\mathcal{D}'(\Omega^\circ)$. It belongs to $L^2(\Omega^\circ)^3$ and therefore can be extended to $L^2(\Omega)^3$. In order to distinguish this extension from the gradient of q in $\mathcal{D}'(\Omega)$, we denote it by $\widetilde{\mathbf{grad}} q$. Finally, we remark that the space

$$K_T(\Omega) := \{\mathbf{w} \in H(\mathbf{curl}, \Omega) \cap H_0(\text{div}, \Omega); \mathbf{curl} \mathbf{w} = \mathbf{0} \text{ and } \text{div} \mathbf{w} = 0 \text{ in } \Omega\}$$

is of dimension equal to J : As shown in [1] Prop. 3.14, it is spanned by the vector fields $\widetilde{\mathbf{grad}} q_j^T$, $1 \leq j \leq J$, where each function $q_j^T \in H^1(\Omega^\circ)$, which is unique up to an additive constant, satisfies

$$\begin{aligned} \Delta q_j^T &= 0 && \text{in } \Omega^\circ, \\ \partial_n q_j^T &= 0, && \text{on } \Gamma, \\ [q_j^T]_k &= \text{constant}, [\partial_n q_j^T]_k = 0, \langle \partial_n q_j^T, 1 \rangle_{\Sigma_k} = \delta_{jk} && \text{for } 1 \leq k \leq J. \end{aligned} \quad (3)$$

where $\langle \cdot, \cdot \rangle_{\Sigma_k}$ denotes the duality pairing between the spaces $H^{-1/2}(\Sigma_k)$ and $H^{1/2}(\Sigma_k)$.

Theorem 2.1. *Given any function $\mathbf{f} \in L^2(\Omega)^3$ that satisfies*

$$\mathbf{curl} \mathbf{f} = \mathbf{0} \quad \text{in } \Omega \quad \text{and} \quad \int_{\Omega} \mathbf{f} \cdot \mathbf{v} \, d\mathbf{x} = 0 \quad \text{for all } \mathbf{v} \in K_T(\Omega), \quad (4)$$

there exists a scalar potential χ in $H^1(\Omega)$ such that

$$\mathbf{f} = \mathbf{grad} \chi \quad \text{in } \Omega \quad \text{and} \quad \|\chi\|_{H^1(\Omega)} \leq C \|\mathbf{f}\|_{L^2(\Omega)^3}. \quad (5)$$

Proof. It suffices to show that, given any vector field $\mathbf{v} \in H_0(\text{div}, \Omega)$ such that $\text{div} \mathbf{v} = 0$ in Ω , there holds $\int_{\Omega} \mathbf{f} \cdot \mathbf{v} \, d\mathbf{x} = 0$. Let

$$\mathbf{z} = \sum_{j=1}^J \langle \mathbf{v} \cdot \mathbf{n}, 1 \rangle_{\Sigma_j} \widetilde{\mathbf{grad}} q_j^T$$

and $\mathbf{w} = \mathbf{v} - \mathbf{z}$. According to [1], theorem 3.17, there exists a vector potential $\boldsymbol{\psi} \in L^2(\Omega)^3$ that satisfies $\mathbf{w} = \mathbf{curl} \boldsymbol{\psi}$, $\text{div} \boldsymbol{\psi} = 0$ in Ω and $\boldsymbol{\psi} \times \mathbf{n} = \mathbf{0}$ on Γ . Hence

$$\int_{\Omega} \mathbf{f} \cdot \mathbf{v} \, d\mathbf{x} = \int_{\Omega} \mathbf{f} \cdot \mathbf{curl} \boldsymbol{\psi} \, d\mathbf{x} = 0.$$

The result is then a consequence of theorem 1.1: there exists a function $\chi \in H^1(\Omega)$ satisfying (5). \square

Remark 2.2. (1) Any function $\mathbf{f} \in L^2(\Omega)^3$ that satisfies $\mathbf{curl} \mathbf{f} = \mathbf{0}$ in Ω can be decomposed as:

$$\mathbf{f} = \mathbf{grad} \chi + \widetilde{\mathbf{grad}} p, \quad \text{with } \chi \in H^1(\Omega) \quad \text{and} \quad \widetilde{\mathbf{grad}} p \in K_T(\Omega).$$

Such a result was alluded to in [11].

(2) The second condition in (4) is trivially satisfied when Ω is simply-connected, since $K_T(\Omega) = \{\mathbf{0}\}$ in this case.

Theorem 2.3. *Given any distribution $\mathbf{f} \in H_0(\operatorname{div}, \Omega)'$ that satisfies*

$$\mathbf{curl} \mathbf{f} = \mathbf{0} \quad \text{in } \Omega \quad \text{and} \quad {}_{H_0(\operatorname{div}, \Omega)'} \langle \mathbf{f}, \mathbf{v} \rangle_{H_0(\operatorname{div}, \Omega)} = 0 \quad \text{for all } \mathbf{v} \in K_T(\Omega), \quad (6)$$

there exists a scalar potential χ in $L^2(\Omega)$ such that

$$\mathbf{f} = \mathbf{grad} \chi \quad \text{in } \Omega \quad \text{and} \quad \|\chi\|_{L^2(\Omega)} \leq C \|\mathbf{f}\|_{H_0(\operatorname{div}, \Omega)'}. \quad (7)$$

Proof. Let $\mathbf{f} \in H_0(\operatorname{div}, \Omega)'$ be such that $\mathbf{curl} \mathbf{f} = \mathbf{0}$ in Ω . Hence (see proposition 1 of [6]) there exist $\boldsymbol{\psi} \in L^2(\Omega)^3$ and $\chi_0 \in L^2(\Omega)$ such that

$$\mathbf{f} = \boldsymbol{\psi} + \mathbf{grad} \chi_0 \quad \text{in } \Omega \quad \text{and} \quad \|\boldsymbol{\psi}\|_{L^2(\Omega)^3} + \|\chi_0\|_{L^2(\Omega)} \leq C \|\mathbf{f}\|_{H_0(\operatorname{div}, \Omega)'}. \quad (8)$$

Observe that, thanks to the density of $\mathcal{D}(\Omega)^3$ in $H_0(\operatorname{div}, \Omega)$,

$${}_{H_0(\operatorname{div}, \Omega)'} \langle \mathbf{grad} \chi_0, \mathbf{v} \rangle_{H_0(\operatorname{div}, \Omega)} = 0 \quad \text{for all } \mathbf{v} \in K_T(\Omega).$$

Therefore, the function $\boldsymbol{\psi} \in L^2(\Omega)^3$ satisfies relations (4). By theorem 2.1, there exists a function $p \in H^1(\Omega)$ such that

$$\boldsymbol{\psi} = \mathbf{grad} p \quad \text{in } \Omega \quad \text{and} \quad \|p\|_{H^1(\Omega)} \leq C \|\boldsymbol{\psi}\|_{L^2(\Omega)^3} \leq C \|\mathbf{f}\|_{H_0(\operatorname{div}, \Omega)'}. \quad (8)$$

Hence the function $\chi = p + \chi_0$ satisfies the announced properties. \square

Remark 2.4. Note that this theorem is an extension of the equivalence (iii) \iff (iv) in theorem 1.1 with $m = 1$ to the case where Ω is not simply-connected.

More generally, let us introduce, for any integer $m \geq 0$, the space

$$H_0^m(\operatorname{div}, \Omega) := \{\mathbf{v} \in H_0(\operatorname{div}, \Omega); \operatorname{div} \mathbf{v} \in H_0^m(\Omega)\},$$

which coincides with $H_0(\operatorname{div}, \Omega)$ for $m = 0$. Its dual space, denoted by $H^{-m}(\operatorname{div}, \Omega)$, can then be characterized by

$$H^{-m}(\operatorname{div}, \Omega) = \{\boldsymbol{\psi} + \mathbf{grad} \chi; \boldsymbol{\psi} \in H_0(\operatorname{div}, \Omega)', \chi \in H^{-m}(\Omega)\}.$$

One can also show that $\mathcal{D}(\Omega)^3$ is dense in $H_0^m(\operatorname{div}, \Omega)$ and that the following Green formula holds for any $\chi \in H^{-m}(\operatorname{div}, \Omega)$ and $\mathbf{v} \in H_0^m(\operatorname{div}, \Omega)$:

$${}_{H^{-m}(\operatorname{div}, \Omega)} \langle \mathbf{grad} \chi, \mathbf{v} \rangle_{H_0^m(\operatorname{div}, \Omega)} + {}_{H^{-m}(\Omega)} \langle \chi, \operatorname{div} \mathbf{v} \rangle_{H_0^m(\Omega)} = 0. \quad (9)$$

As a consequence of theorem 2.3, it is easy to prove the following theorem, which shows that property (iv) in theorem 1.1 also holds when Ω is not simply-connected.

Theorem 2.5. *For any distribution $\mathbf{f} \in H^{-m}(\text{div}, \Omega)$ that satisfies (6), there exists a scalar potential χ in $H^{-m}(\Omega)$ such that*

$$\mathbf{f} = \mathbf{grad} \chi \quad \text{in } \Omega \quad \text{and} \quad \|\chi\|_{H^{-m}(\Omega)} \leq C \|\mathbf{f}\|_{H^{-m}(\text{div}, \Omega)}. \quad (10)$$

Proof. We give the proof when $m = 1$; the general case is similar. Let $\mathbf{f} \in H^{-1}(\text{div}, \Omega)$ satisfy (6). Then, there exist $\boldsymbol{\psi} \in H_0(\text{div}, \Omega)'$ and $\chi_0 \in H^{-1}(\Omega)$ such that

$$\mathbf{f} = \boldsymbol{\psi} + \mathbf{grad} \chi_0 \quad \text{in } \Omega \quad \text{and} \quad \|\boldsymbol{\psi}\|_{H_0(\text{div}, \Omega)'} + \|\chi_0\|_{H^{-1}(\Omega)} \leq C \|\mathbf{f}\|_{H^{-1}(\text{div}, \Omega)}. \quad (11)$$

Observe that, thanks to (11), we have

$${}_{H^{-1}(\text{div}, \Omega)} \langle \mathbf{grad} \chi_0, \mathbf{v} \rangle_{H_0^1(\text{div}, \Omega)} = - {}_{H^{-1}(\Omega)} \langle \chi_0, \text{div } \mathbf{v} \rangle_{H_0^1(\Omega)} = 0$$

for all $\mathbf{v} \in K_T(\Omega)$. By theorem 2.3, there exists a function $p \in L^2(\Omega)$ such that $\boldsymbol{\psi} = \mathbf{grad} p$ and the estimate (7) holds. Then the function $\chi = \chi_0 + p$ satisfies the announced properties. \square

3 Vector potentials in $H_0^m(\Omega)^3$

First, we recall some results concerning the existence of tangential vector potential (see [1] for proofs).

Below, $\langle \cdot, \cdot \rangle_{\Gamma_i}$ denotes the duality pairing between the spaces $H^{-1/2}(\Gamma_i)$ and $H^{1/2}(\Gamma_i)$. Given any function $\mathbf{u} \in H(\text{div}, \Omega)$ that satisfies

$$\text{div } \mathbf{u} = 0 \quad \text{in } \Omega \quad \text{and} \quad \langle \mathbf{u} \cdot \mathbf{n}, 1 \rangle_{\Gamma_i} = 0, \quad 0 \leq i \leq I, \quad (12)$$

there exists a vector potential $\boldsymbol{\psi}$ in $L^2(\Omega)^3$ such that

$$\mathbf{u} = \mathbf{curl} \boldsymbol{\psi}, \quad \text{div } \boldsymbol{\psi} = 0 \quad \text{in } \Omega, \quad \text{and} \quad \boldsymbol{\psi} \cdot \mathbf{n} = 0 \quad \text{on } \Gamma, \quad (13)$$

satisfying the estimate

$$\|\boldsymbol{\psi}\|_{L^2(\Omega)^3} \leq C \|\mathbf{u}\|_{L^2(\Omega)^3}. \quad (14)$$

Moreover, there exists a unique vector field $\boldsymbol{\psi} \in L^2(\Omega)^3$ satisfying (13) and such that

$$\langle \boldsymbol{\psi} \cdot \mathbf{n}, 1 \rangle_{\Sigma_j} = 0, \quad 1 \leq j \leq J, \quad (15)$$

and the estimate (14) holds. When Ω is of class $\mathcal{C}^{1,1}$, then $\boldsymbol{\psi}$ belongs to $H^1(\Omega)^3$ and the estimate

$$\|\boldsymbol{\psi}\|_{H^1(\Omega)^3} \leq C \|\mathbf{u}\|_{L^2(\Omega)^3} \quad (16)$$

holds. If moreover $\mathbf{u} \in H^m(\Omega)^3$ and Ω is of class $\mathcal{C}^{m+1,1}$, for some integer $m \geq 0$, then $\boldsymbol{\psi}$ belongs to $H^{m+1}(\Omega)^3$ and the estimate

$$\|\boldsymbol{\psi}\|_{H^{m+1}(\Omega)^3} \leq C \|\mathbf{u}\|_{H^m(\Omega)^3} \quad (17)$$

holds. We also recall the result concerning the existence of normal vector potentials (see again [1] for proofs). For any vector field $\mathbf{u} \in H(\text{div}, \Omega)$ that satisfies

$$\text{div } \mathbf{u} = 0 \quad \text{in } \Omega, \quad \mathbf{u} \cdot \mathbf{n} = 0 \quad \text{on } \Gamma \quad \text{and} \quad \langle \mathbf{u} \cdot \mathbf{n}, 1 \rangle_{\Sigma_j} = 0, \quad 1 \leq j \leq J, \quad (18)$$

there exists a vector potential $\boldsymbol{\psi}$ in $L^2(\Omega)^3$ such that

$$\mathbf{u} = \mathbf{curl } \boldsymbol{\psi}, \quad \text{div } \boldsymbol{\psi} = 0 \quad \text{in } \Omega \quad \text{and} \quad \boldsymbol{\psi} \times \mathbf{n} = \mathbf{0} \quad \text{on } \Gamma, \quad (19)$$

and the estimate

$$\|\boldsymbol{\psi}\|_{L^2(\Omega)^3} \leq C \|\mathbf{u}\|_{L^2(\Omega)^3} \quad (20)$$

holds. Moreover, there exists a unique vector field $\boldsymbol{\psi} \in L^2(\Omega)^3$ satisfying (19) and such that

$$\langle \boldsymbol{\psi} \cdot \mathbf{n}, 1 \rangle_{\Gamma_i} = 0, \quad 0 \leq i \leq I, \quad (21)$$

and the estimate (20) holds. When \mathbf{u} is more regular, then (16) and (17) are also satisfied.

Remark 3.1. Let \mathbf{u} be a vector field in $H(\text{div}, \Omega)$ that satisfies:

$$\text{div } \mathbf{u} = 0 \quad \text{in } \Omega \quad \text{and} \quad \mathbf{u} \cdot \mathbf{n} = 0 \quad \text{on } \Gamma.$$

Using the same arguments as those of theorem 2.1, it is easy to verify that

$$\langle \mathbf{u} \cdot \mathbf{n}, 1 \rangle_{\Sigma_j} = 0, \quad 1 \leq j \leq J,$$

if and only if

$$\int_{\Omega} \mathbf{u} \cdot \mathbf{grad } q_j^T \, d\mathbf{x} = 0 \quad \text{for all } 1 \leq j \leq J.$$

Another kind of less standard but useful vector potential is given by the following theorem.

Theorem 3.2. *Assume that the boundary of the domain Ω is of class $\mathcal{C}^{1,1}$. For any function \mathbf{u} in $H(\text{div}, \Omega)$ satisfying (18), there exists a vector potential $\boldsymbol{\psi}$ in $H_0^1(\Omega)^3$, such that*

$$\mathbf{u} = \mathbf{curl } \boldsymbol{\psi} \quad \text{and} \quad \text{div } \Delta \boldsymbol{\psi} = 0 \quad \text{in } \Omega, \quad \|\boldsymbol{\psi}\|_{H^1(\Omega)^3} \leq C \|\mathbf{u}\|_{L^2(\Omega)^3}. \quad (22)$$

Proof. Given any vector field $\mathbf{u} \in H(\operatorname{div}, \Omega)$ satisfying (18), we associate the vector potential $\boldsymbol{\psi}_0 \in H^1(\Omega)^3$ satisfying (19) and the estimate

$$\|\boldsymbol{\psi}_0\|_{H^1(\Omega)^3} \leq C\|\mathbf{u}\|_{L^2(\Omega)^3}.$$

That Γ is of class $\mathcal{C}^{1,1}$ implies that the normal trace $\boldsymbol{\psi}_0 \cdot \mathbf{n}$ belongs to $H^{1/2}(\Gamma)$. Hence, the fourth-order problem

$$\Delta^2 \chi = 0 \quad \text{in } \Omega, \quad \chi = 0 \quad \text{and} \quad \partial_n \chi = \boldsymbol{\psi}_0 \cdot \mathbf{n} \quad \text{on } \Gamma$$

has a unique solution χ in $H^2(\Omega)$ satisfying the estimate

$$\|\chi\|_{H^2(\Omega)} \leq C\|\boldsymbol{\psi}_0 \cdot \mathbf{n}\|_{H^{1/2}(\Gamma)} \leq C\|\mathbf{u}\|_{L^2(\Omega)^3}.$$

Then the vector field

$$\boldsymbol{\psi} = \boldsymbol{\psi}_0 - \mathbf{grad} \chi$$

satisfies (22). □

The vector field $\boldsymbol{\psi}$ given by the previous theorem is unique up to vector fields belonging to the space

$$K_0^1(\Omega) := \{\mathbf{w} \in H_0^1(\Omega)^3; \mathbf{curl} \mathbf{w} = \mathbf{0} \text{ and } \operatorname{div}(\Delta \mathbf{w}) = 0 \text{ in } \Omega\}$$

(see proposition 3.4 below).

Corollary 3.3. *Assume that the boundary of the domain Ω is of class $\mathcal{C}^{m+1,1}$, for some integer $m \geq 0$. For any vector field $\mathbf{u} \in H^m(\Omega)^3$ that satisfies (18), there exists a vector potential $\boldsymbol{\psi}$ in $(H^{m+1}\Omega) \cap H_0^1(\Omega)^3$ satisfying*

$$\mathbf{u} = \mathbf{curl} \boldsymbol{\psi} \quad \text{and} \quad \operatorname{div} \Delta \boldsymbol{\psi} = 0 \quad \text{in } \Omega \quad \text{and} \quad \|\boldsymbol{\psi}\|_{H^{m+1}(\Omega)^3} \leq C\|\mathbf{u}\|_{H^m(\Omega)^3}.$$

Proof. Under the given assumptions, the vector potential $\boldsymbol{\psi}$ given by the previous theorem belongs to $H^{m+1}(\Omega)^3$ and its normal trace $\boldsymbol{\psi} \cdot \mathbf{n}$ belongs to $H^{m+1/2}(\Gamma)$, on the one hand. On the other hand, the solution χ to the fourth-order problem found in the previous belongs to $H^{m+2}(\Omega)^3$. □

We now characterize the space $K_0^1(\Omega)$.

Proposition 3.4. *Assume that the boundary of the domain Ω is of class $\mathcal{C}^{1,1}$. Then the space $K_0^1(\Omega)$ is spanned by the vector fields $\mathbf{grad} q_i^1$, $1 \leq i \leq I$, where*

each q_i^1 is the unique solution in $H^2(\Omega)$ to the problem

$$\begin{aligned} \Delta^2 q_i^1 &= 0 && \text{in } \Omega, \\ q_i^1|_{\Gamma_0} &= 0 && \text{and } q_i^1|_{\Gamma_k} = \delta_{ik}, \quad 1 \leq k \leq I, \\ \partial_n q_i^1 &= 0 && \text{on } \Gamma, \\ \langle \partial_n \Delta q_i^1, 1 \rangle_{\Gamma_k} &= \delta_{ik} \text{ and } \langle \partial_n \Delta q_i^1, 1 \rangle_{\Gamma_0} &= -1, \quad 1 \leq k \leq I. \end{aligned} \quad (23)$$

Proof. First, we prove that the space $K_0^1(\Omega)$ and the space

$$G^1 := \{\mathbf{grad} q \in H_0^1(\Omega)^3; \quad \Delta^2 q = 0 \quad \text{in } \Omega\}$$

coincide. First, it is clear that G^1 is included in $K_0^1(\Omega)$. Second, given $\mathbf{w} \in K_0^1(\Omega)$, let $\widetilde{\mathbf{w}}$ denote the extension by zero of \mathbf{w} to an open ball B containing $\overline{\Omega}$. Since $\mathbf{curl} \widetilde{\mathbf{w}} = \mathbf{0}$ in B , $\widetilde{\mathbf{w}}$ is the gradient of a function $q \in H^2(B)$. Moreover, $q = 0$ in $B \setminus \overline{\Omega}$, so that $q' := q|_{\Omega}$ belongs to $H_0^2(\Omega)$. Since $\mathbf{w} = \mathbf{grad} q'$, one finds that \mathbf{w} belongs to G^1 . Moreover, it is clear that the set of vector fields $\mathbf{grad} q_i$, $1 \leq i \leq I$, where $q_i \in H^2(\Omega)$ is the unique solution to

$$\begin{aligned} \Delta^2 q_i &= 0 \quad \text{in } \Omega, \\ q_i|_{\Gamma_0} &= 0 \quad \text{and} \quad q_i|_{\Gamma_k} = \delta_{ik}, \quad 1 \leq k \leq I, \\ \partial_n q_i &= 0 \quad \text{on } \Gamma, \end{aligned} \quad (24)$$

spans G^1 ($= K_0^1(\Omega)$).

One still has to check the last line of (23). Introduce now

$$M_2 := \{r \in H^2(\Omega); r|_{\Gamma_0} = 0 \text{ and } r|_{\Gamma_k} = \delta_{ik}, \quad 1 \leq k \leq I, \quad \partial_n r = 0 \text{ on } \Gamma\}.$$

For $1 \leq i \leq I$, the problem: find q_i^1 in M_2 such that

$$\forall r \in M_2, \quad \int_{\Omega} \Delta q_i^1 \Delta r \, d\mathbf{x} = -r|_{\Gamma_i}, \quad (25)$$

has a unique solution. Furthermore, the following Green's formula can be proven by a density argument, for any functions q and r in M_2 with $\Delta^2 q$ in $L^2(\Omega)$:

$$\int_{\Omega} (\Delta^2 q) r \, d\mathbf{x} = \int_{\Omega} \Delta q \Delta r \, d\mathbf{x} + \sum_{i=1}^I r|_{\Gamma_i} \langle \partial_n(\Delta q), 1 \rangle_{\Gamma_i}.$$

This formula implies that the solution q_i^1 to (25) satisfies (23). The vector fields $\mathbf{grad} q_i^1$, $1 \leq i \leq I$, are clearly linearly independent and they belong to $K_0^1(\Omega)$. Consequently, they form a basis of $K_0^1(\Omega)$. \square

Proposition 3.5. *Assume that the boundary of the domain Ω is of class $\mathcal{C}^{1,1}$. Given any function \mathbf{u} in $H(\operatorname{div}, \Omega)$ satisfying (18), there exists a unique vector potential $\boldsymbol{\psi}$ in $H_0^1(\Omega)^3$ satisfying*

$$\mathbf{u} = \operatorname{curl} \boldsymbol{\psi}, \quad \operatorname{div} \Delta \boldsymbol{\psi} = 0 \quad \text{in } \Omega \quad \text{and} \quad \langle \partial_n(\operatorname{div} \Delta \boldsymbol{\psi}), 1 \rangle_{\Gamma_i} = 0, \quad 0 \leq i \leq I. \quad (26)$$

Moreover, the estimate (16) holds.

Proof. Let $(\boldsymbol{\psi}_0 - \mathbf{grad} \chi)$ be the potential vector of \mathbf{u} given in the proof of theorem 3.2. Then the vector field

$$\boldsymbol{\psi} = \boldsymbol{\psi}_0 - \mathbf{grad} \chi + \sum_{i=1}^I \langle \partial_n(\Delta \chi), 1 \rangle_{\Gamma_i} \mathbf{grad} q_i^1$$

satisfies (26) (note that the quantities $\langle \partial_n(\Delta \chi), 1 \rangle_{\Gamma_i}$ are well defined since $\Delta^2 \chi = 0$). \square

Corollary 3.6. *Assume that the boundary of the domain Ω is of class $\mathcal{C}^{m+1,1}$ for some integer $m \geq 0$. Given any function \mathbf{u} in $H^m(\Omega)^3$ that satisfies (18), there exists a unique vector potential $\boldsymbol{\psi}$ in $(H^{m+1}\Omega) \cap H_0^1(\Omega)^3$ satisfying*

$$\mathbf{u} = \operatorname{curl} \boldsymbol{\psi}, \quad \operatorname{div} \Delta \boldsymbol{\psi} = 0 \quad \text{in } \Omega \quad \text{and} \quad \langle \partial_n(\operatorname{div} \Delta \boldsymbol{\psi}), 1 \rangle_{\Gamma_i} = 0, \quad 0 \leq i \leq I$$

and the estimate (17).

Theorem 3.7. *Assume that the boundary of the domain Ω is of class $\mathcal{C}^{2,1}$. Given any function \mathbf{u} in $H_0^1(\Omega)^3$ that satisfies*

$$\operatorname{div} \mathbf{u} = 0 \quad \text{in } \Omega \quad \text{and} \quad \langle \mathbf{u} \cdot \mathbf{n}, 1 \rangle_{\Sigma_j} = 0, \quad 1 \leq j \leq J, \quad (27)$$

there exists a vector potential $\boldsymbol{\psi}$ in $H_0^2(\Omega)^3$ such that

$$\mathbf{u} = \operatorname{curl} \boldsymbol{\psi} \quad \text{and} \quad \operatorname{div} \Delta^2 \boldsymbol{\psi} = 0 \quad \text{in } \Omega \quad \text{and} \quad \|\boldsymbol{\psi}\|_{H^2(\Omega)^3} \leq C \|\mathbf{u}\|_{H^1(\Omega)^3}. \quad (28)$$

Proof. Given \mathbf{u} in $H_0^1(\Omega)^3$ that satisfies (27), let $\boldsymbol{\varphi} \in (H^2(\Omega) \cap H_0^1(\Omega))^3$ denote the vector potential given by corollary 3.6. The sixth-order problem

$$\Delta^3 \chi = 0 \quad \text{in } \Omega, \quad \chi = \frac{\partial \chi}{\partial \mathbf{n}} = 0 \quad \text{and} \quad \frac{\partial^2 \chi}{\partial \mathbf{n}^2} = \frac{\partial \boldsymbol{\varphi}}{\partial \mathbf{n}} \cdot \mathbf{n} \quad \text{on } \Gamma, \quad (29)$$

has a unique solution $\chi \in H^3(\Omega)$ that satisfies the estimate

$$\|\chi\|_{H^3(\Omega)} \leq C \left\| \frac{\partial \boldsymbol{\varphi}}{\partial \mathbf{n}} \right\|_{H^{1/2}(\Gamma)^3} \leq C \|\boldsymbol{\varphi}\|_{H^2(\Omega)^3} \leq C \|\mathbf{u}\|_{H^1(\Omega)^3}.$$

Note that the last boundary condition in (29) can be written as

$$\left(\frac{\partial}{\partial \mathbf{n}} \mathbf{grad} \chi \right) \cdot \mathbf{n} = \frac{\partial \varphi}{\partial \mathbf{n}} \cdot \mathbf{n}.$$

For any unit tangent vector $\boldsymbol{\tau}$ on Γ , we have:

$$\frac{\partial \varphi}{\partial \mathbf{n}} \cdot \boldsymbol{\tau} = \frac{\partial \varphi_i}{\partial x_j} n_j \tau_i = \frac{\partial \varphi_j}{\partial x_i} \tau_i n_j = \frac{\partial \varphi_j}{\partial \boldsymbol{\tau}} n_j = 0.$$

Also, one can show that $(\partial_n \mathbf{grad} \chi) \cdot \boldsymbol{\tau} = 0$, which implies that the relation $\partial_n \mathbf{grad} \chi = \partial_n \boldsymbol{\varphi}$ holds. So, the vector field $\boldsymbol{\psi} = \boldsymbol{\varphi} - \mathbf{grad} \chi$ belongs to $H^2(\Omega)^3$ and satisfies (28). \square

The vector field $\boldsymbol{\psi}$ given by Theorem 3.7 is unique up to vector fields in the space

$$K_0^2(\Omega) := \{ \mathbf{w} \in H_0^2(\Omega)^3; \mathbf{curl} \mathbf{w} = \mathbf{0} \text{ and } \operatorname{div} \Delta^2 \mathbf{w} = 0 \text{ in } \Omega \},$$

which we now characterize.

Proposition 3.8. *Assume that the boundary of the domain Ω is of class $\mathcal{C}^{2,1}$. Then the space $K_0^2(\Omega)$ is spanned by the vector fields $\mathbf{grad} q_i^2$, $1 \leq i \leq I$, where each function q_i^2 is the unique solution in $H^3(\Omega)$ to the problem*

$$\begin{aligned} \Delta^3 q_i^2 &= 0 && \text{in } \Omega, \\ q_i^2|_{\Gamma_0} &= 0 && \text{and } q_i^2|_{\Gamma_k} = \delta_{ik}, \quad 1 \leq k \leq I, \\ \partial_n q_i^2 &= \partial_n^2 q_i^2 = 0 && \text{on } \Gamma, \\ \langle \partial_n(\Delta^2 q_i^2), 1 \rangle_{\Gamma_k} &= \delta_{ik} \text{ and } \langle \partial_n(\Delta^2 q_i^2), 1 \rangle_{\Gamma_0} &= -1, \quad 1 \leq k \leq I. \end{aligned} \tag{30}$$

Proof. First, we prove that the space $K_0^2(\Omega)$ coincides with the space

$$G^2 := \{ \mathbf{grad} q \in H_0^2(\Omega)^3; \Delta^3 q = 0 \text{ in } \Omega \},$$

using the same argument as in proposition 3.4. We next note that the set of vector fields $\mathbf{grad} q_i$, $1 \leq i \leq I$, where $q_i \in H^3(\Omega)$ is the unique solution to the problem

$$\begin{aligned} \Delta^3 q_i &= 0 && \text{in } \Omega, \\ q_i|_{\Gamma_0} &= 0 && \text{and } q_i|_{\Gamma_k} = \delta_{ik}, \quad 1 \leq k \leq I, \\ \partial_n q_i &= \partial_n^2 q_i = 0 && \text{on } \Gamma, \end{aligned} \tag{31}$$

spans $K_0^2(\Omega)$.

Let now

$$M_3 := \{r \in H^3(\Omega); r|_{\Gamma_0} = 0, r|_{\Gamma_k} = \delta_{ik}, 1 \leq k \leq I, \partial_n r = \partial_n^2 r = 0 \text{ on } \Gamma\}.$$

For $1 \leq i \leq I$, the problem: find q_i^2 in M_3 such that

$$\forall r \in M_3, \quad \int_{\Omega} \mathbf{grad} \Delta q_i^2 \cdot \mathbf{grad} \Delta r \, d\mathbf{x} = r|_{\Gamma_i}, \quad (32)$$

has a unique solution. Furthermore, the following Green's formula can be proved by a density argument, for any functions q and r in M_3 with $\Delta^3 q$ in $L^2(\Omega)$:

$$\int_{\Omega} (\Delta^3 q) r \, d\mathbf{x} = - \int_{\Omega} \mathbf{grad} \Delta q \cdot \mathbf{grad} \Delta r \, d\mathbf{x} + \sum_{i=1}^I r|_{\Gamma_i} \langle \partial_n(\Delta^2 q), 1 \rangle_{\Gamma_i}.$$

This formula shows that the solution q_i^2 of (32) satisfies (30). The vector fields $\mathbf{grad} q_i^2$, $1 \leq i \leq I$, are clearly linearly independent and they belong to $K_0^2(\Omega)$. Consequently, they form a basis of $K_0^2(\Omega)$. \square

Corollary 3.9. *Assume that the boundary of the domain Ω is of class $\mathcal{C}^{2,1}$. Given any function \mathbf{u} in $H_0^1(\Omega)^3$ such that (27) holds, there exists a unique vector potential $\boldsymbol{\psi}$ in $H_0^2(\Omega)^3$ satisfying*

$$\mathbf{u} = \mathbf{curl} \boldsymbol{\psi}, \quad \text{div} \Delta^2 \boldsymbol{\psi} = 0 \text{ in } \Omega \quad \text{and} \quad \langle \partial_n(\text{div} \Delta \boldsymbol{\psi}), 1 \rangle_{\Gamma_i} = 0, \quad 0 \leq i \leq I,$$

with the corresponding estimate.

More generally, we can prove using the same arguments:

Theorem 3.10. *Assume that boundary of the domain Ω is of class $\mathcal{C}^{m+1,1}$ for some integer $m \geq 1$. Given any vector field \mathbf{u} in $H_0^m(\Omega)^3$ that satisfies (27), there exists a vector potential $\boldsymbol{\psi}$ in $H_0^{m+1}(\Omega)^3$ such that*

$$\mathbf{u} = \mathbf{curl} \boldsymbol{\psi} \quad \text{and} \quad \text{div} \Delta^{m+1} \boldsymbol{\psi} = 0 \quad \text{in } \Omega \quad \text{and} \quad \|\boldsymbol{\psi}\|_{H^{m+1}(\Omega)^3} \leq C \|\mathbf{u}\|_{H^m(\Omega)^3}. \quad (33)$$

Moreover, there exists a unique vector potential $\boldsymbol{\psi}$ in $H_0^{m+1}(\Omega)^3$, satisfying (33) and

$$\langle \partial_n \text{div} \Delta \boldsymbol{\psi}^{m+1}, 1 \rangle_{\Gamma_i} = 0, \quad 0 \leq i \leq I. \quad (34)$$

Remark 3.11. Similar results are found in Borchers & Sohr [7], but with different proof.

Let Ω be a domain with a boundary of class $\mathcal{C}^{m+1,1}$ for some integer $m \geq 1$ and let \mathbf{u} in $H_0^m(\Omega)^3$ be such that $\text{div} \mathbf{u} = 0$. If Ω is simply-connected ($J = 0$), and Γ is connected ($I = 0$), then there exists a unique vector potential $\boldsymbol{\psi}$ in $H_0^{m+1}(\Omega)^3$ satisfying (33).

4 Weak vector potentials

First, we note that the continuous embeddings $H_0(\mathbf{curl}, \Omega)' \hookrightarrow H^{-1}(\Omega)^3$ and $H_0(\operatorname{div}, \Omega)' \hookrightarrow H^{-1}(\Omega)^3$ hold. Besides, given any $\mathbf{f} \in H^{-1}(\Omega)^3$, we know that there exist a unique $\mathbf{u} \in H_0^1(\Omega)^3$ and $\chi \in L^2(\Omega)$ such that

$$\mathbf{f} = -\Delta \mathbf{u} + \mathbf{grad} \chi \quad \text{and} \quad \operatorname{div} \mathbf{u} = 0 \quad \text{in } \Omega, \quad (35)$$

and satisfying the estimate

$$\|\mathbf{u}\|_{H^1(\Omega)^3} + \|\chi\|_{L^2(\Omega)/\mathbb{R}} \leq C \|\mathbf{f}\|_{H^{-1}(\Omega)^3}.$$

Letting $\boldsymbol{\xi} = \mathbf{curl} \mathbf{u}$, we obtain the decomposition $\mathbf{f} = \mathbf{curl} \boldsymbol{\xi} + \mathbf{grad} \chi$ with $\operatorname{div} \boldsymbol{\xi} = 0$ in Ω and $\boldsymbol{\xi} \cdot \mathbf{n} = 0$ on Γ . Since $\boldsymbol{\xi} \in L^2(\Omega)^3$ and $\chi \in L^2(\Omega)$, it follows that $\mathbf{curl} \boldsymbol{\xi} \in H_0(\mathbf{curl}, \Omega)'$ and $\mathbf{grad} \chi \in H_0(\operatorname{div}, \Omega)'$, so that

$$H^{-1}(\Omega)^3 = H_0(\mathbf{curl}, \Omega)' + H_0(\operatorname{div}, \Omega)'. \quad (36)$$

Proposition 4.1. *Assume that the boundary of the domain Ω is of class $\mathcal{C}^{1,1}$. Then, for any \mathbf{f} in the dual space $H_0(\operatorname{div}, \Omega)'$, there exist a unique $\mathbf{u} \in (H^2(\Omega) \cap H_0^1(\Omega))^3$ and $\chi \in L^2(\Omega)$ solution to (35) and satisfying the estimate*

$$\|\mathbf{u}\|_{H^2(\Omega)^3} + \|\chi\|_{L^2(\Omega)/\mathbb{R}} \leq C \|\mathbf{f}\|_{H_0(\operatorname{div}, \Omega)'}$$

Proof. Let \mathbf{f} be in the dual space of $H_0(\operatorname{div}, \Omega)$. We know (see proposition 1 of [6]) that there exist $\boldsymbol{\psi} \in L^2(\Omega)^3$ and $\chi_0 \in L^2(\Omega)$ such that

$$\mathbf{f} = \boldsymbol{\psi} + \mathbf{grad} \chi_0 \quad \text{and} \quad \|\boldsymbol{\psi}\|_{L^2(\Omega)^3} + \|\chi_0\|_{L^2(\Omega)} \leq C \|\mathbf{f}\|_{H_0(\operatorname{div}, \Omega)'}. \quad (37)$$

Thanks to the regularity of Γ , there exist $\mathbf{u} \in (H^2(\Omega) \cap H_0^1(\Omega))^3$ and $p \in H^1(\Omega)$ satisfying

$$\boldsymbol{\psi} = -\Delta \mathbf{u} + \mathbf{grad} p \quad \text{and} \quad \operatorname{div} \mathbf{u} = 0 \quad \text{in } \Omega, \quad (38)$$

with

$$\|\mathbf{u}\|_{H^2(\Omega)^3} + \|p\|_{H^1(\Omega)/\mathbb{R}} \leq C \|\boldsymbol{\psi}\|_{L^2(\Omega)^3}.$$

Then \mathbf{u} and $\chi = p + \chi_0$ satisfy the announced properties. \square

We next consider the space

$$K_N(\Omega) := \{\mathbf{w} \in H_0(\mathbf{curl}, \Omega) \cap H(\operatorname{div}, \Omega); \mathbf{curl} \mathbf{w} = \mathbf{0} \text{ and } \operatorname{div} \mathbf{w} = 0 \text{ in } \Omega\}$$

which is of dimension I . As shown in proposition 3.18 of [1], this space is spanned by the vector fields $\mathbf{grad} q_i^N$, $1 \leq i \leq N$, where each function $q_i^N \in$

$H^1(\Omega)$ is the unique solution to the problem

$$\begin{aligned} \Delta q_i^N &= 0 && \text{in } \Omega, \\ q_i^N &= 0 && \text{on } \Gamma_0, \quad \langle \partial_n q_i^N, 1 \rangle_{\Gamma_0} = -1, \\ q_i^N &= \text{constant} && \text{on } \Gamma_k, \quad \langle \partial_n q_i^N, 1 \rangle_{\Gamma_k} = \delta_{ik}, \text{ for } 1 \leq k \leq I. \end{aligned} \quad (39)$$

Theorem 4.2. *Given any distribution \mathbf{f} in the dual space $H_0(\mathbf{curl}, \Omega)'$ that satisfies*

$$\operatorname{div} \mathbf{f} = 0 \text{ in } \Omega \text{ and } {}_{H_0(\mathbf{curl}, \Omega)'} \langle \mathbf{f}, \mathbf{v} \rangle_{H_0(\mathbf{curl}, \Omega)} = 0 \text{ for all } \mathbf{v} \in K_N(\Omega), \quad (40)$$

there exists a vector potential $\boldsymbol{\xi}$ in $L^2(\Omega)^3$ such that

$$\mathbf{f} = \mathbf{curl} \boldsymbol{\xi}, \quad \text{with} \quad \operatorname{div} \boldsymbol{\xi} = 0 \text{ in } \Omega \quad \text{and} \quad \boldsymbol{\xi} \cdot \mathbf{n} = 0 \text{ on } \Gamma, \quad (41)$$

and such that the following estimate holds:

$$\|\boldsymbol{\xi}\|_{L^2(\Omega)^3} \leq C \|\mathbf{f}\|_{H_0(\mathbf{curl}, \Omega)'}. \quad (42)$$

Proof. Let \mathbf{f} be in the dual space $H_0(\mathbf{curl}, \Omega)'$. According to corollary 5 of [6], there exist $\boldsymbol{\psi} \in L^2(\Omega)^3$ and $\boldsymbol{\xi}_0 \in L^2(\Omega)^3$ with $\operatorname{div} \boldsymbol{\xi}_0 = 0$ in Ω and $\boldsymbol{\xi}_0 \cdot \mathbf{n} = 0$ on Γ , such that $\mathbf{f} = \boldsymbol{\psi} + \mathbf{curl} \boldsymbol{\xi}_0$ and such that the estimate

$$\|\boldsymbol{\psi}\|_{L^2(\Omega)^3} + \|\boldsymbol{\xi}_0\|_{L^2(\Omega)^3} \leq C \|\mathbf{f}\|_{H_0(\mathbf{curl}, \Omega)'}$$

holds. Thanks to the density of $\mathcal{D}(\Omega)^3$ in $H_0(\mathbf{curl}, \Omega)$, we deduce that for all $\mathbf{v} \in K_N(\Omega)$, we have

$${}_{H_0(\mathbf{curl}, \Omega)'} \langle \mathbf{curl} \boldsymbol{\xi}_0, \mathbf{v} \rangle_{H_0(\mathbf{curl}, \Omega)} = 0.$$

Since $\operatorname{div} \mathbf{f} = 0$, it follows that $\operatorname{div} \boldsymbol{\psi} = 0$. Then, thanks to the orthogonality relations

$${}_{H_0(\mathbf{curl}, \Omega)'} \langle \mathbf{f}, \mathbf{grad} q_i^N \rangle_{H_0(\mathbf{curl}, \Omega)} = 0 \quad \text{for all } i = 1, \dots, I,$$

the relations $\langle \boldsymbol{\psi} \cdot \mathbf{n}, 1 \rangle_{\Gamma_i} = 0$ are satisfied for all $i = 1, \dots, I$. There thus exists a vector potential $\boldsymbol{\varphi} \in L^2(\Omega)^3$ (see theorem 3.12 of [1]) such that $\boldsymbol{\psi} = \mathbf{curl} \boldsymbol{\varphi}$, with $\operatorname{div} \boldsymbol{\varphi} = 0$ in Ω and $\boldsymbol{\varphi} \cdot \mathbf{n} = 0$ on Γ , and such that

$$\|\boldsymbol{\varphi}\|_{L^2(\Omega)^3} \leq C \|\boldsymbol{\psi}\|_{L^2(\Omega)^3}.$$

Hence, the vector field $\boldsymbol{\xi} = \boldsymbol{\xi}_0 + \boldsymbol{\varphi}$ possesses the announced properties. \square

Remark 4.3. The previous theorem has been established in [6] when Γ is connected, in which case $K_N = \{\mathbf{0}\}$.

For any integer $m \geq 0$, let us introduce the space

$$H_0^m(\mathbf{curl}, \Omega) := \{\mathbf{v} \in H_0(\mathbf{curl}, \Omega); \mathbf{curl} \mathbf{v} \in H_0^m(\Omega)^3\}.$$

We can easily characterize its dual space, as:

$$H^{-m}(\mathbf{curl}, \Omega) = \{\boldsymbol{\psi} + \mathbf{curl} \boldsymbol{\xi}; \boldsymbol{\psi} \in H_0(\mathbf{curl}, \Omega)', \boldsymbol{\xi} \in H^{-m}(\Omega)^3\}.$$

We can prove that $\mathcal{D}(\Omega)^3$ is dense in $H_0^m(\mathbf{curl}, \Omega)$ and that the following Green formula holds: for any $\boldsymbol{\xi} \in H^{-m}(\mathbf{curl}, \Omega)$ and $\mathbf{v} \in H_0^m(\mathbf{curl}, \Omega)$

$$H^{-m}(\mathbf{curl}, \Omega) \langle \mathbf{curl} \boldsymbol{\xi}, \mathbf{v} \rangle_{H_0^m(\mathbf{curl}, \Omega)} + H^{-m}(\Omega)^3 \langle \boldsymbol{\xi}, \mathbf{curl} \mathbf{v} \rangle_{H_0^m(\Omega)^3} = 0. \quad (43)$$

By using the decomposition (1) with $(m+1)$ instead of m , it is easy to prove (as in Section 2) that

$$H^{-m-1}(\Omega)^3 = H^{-m}(\mathbf{curl}, \Omega) + H^{-m}(\text{div}, \Omega), \quad \text{for } m \geq 1.$$

Theorem 4.4. *For any distribution \mathbf{f} in the dual space $H^{-1}(\mathbf{curl}, \Omega)$ that satisfies*

$$\text{div} \mathbf{f} = 0 \quad \text{in } \Omega \quad \text{and} \quad \langle \mathbf{f}, \mathbf{v} \rangle = 0, \quad \text{for all } \mathbf{v} \in K_N(\Omega) \quad (44)$$

there exists a vector potential $\boldsymbol{\xi}$ in $H^{-1}(\Omega)^3$ such that

$$\mathbf{f} = \mathbf{curl} \boldsymbol{\xi}, \quad \text{div} \boldsymbol{\xi} = 0 \quad \text{in } \Omega, \quad \text{and} \quad \|\boldsymbol{\xi}\|_{H^{-1}(\Omega)^3} \leq C \|\mathbf{f}\|_{H^{-1}(\mathbf{curl}, \Omega)}. \quad (45)$$

Proof. Given \mathbf{f} in the dual space $H^{-1}(\mathbf{curl}, \Omega)$, there exist $\mathbf{f}_0 \in H_0(\mathbf{curl}, \Omega)'$ and $\boldsymbol{\xi}_0 \in H^{-1}(\Omega)^3$ such that $\mathbf{f} = \mathbf{f}_0 + \mathbf{curl} \boldsymbol{\xi}_0$, and satisfying the estimate

$$\|\mathbf{f}_0\|_{H_0(\mathbf{curl}, \Omega)'} + \|\boldsymbol{\xi}_0\|_{H^{-1}(\Omega)^3} \leq C \|\mathbf{f}\|_{H^{-1}(\mathbf{curl}, \Omega)}.$$

Since $\boldsymbol{\xi}_0 \in H^{-1}(\Omega)^3$, there exists $\boldsymbol{\theta}_0 \in L^2(\Omega)^3$ satisfying $\text{div} \boldsymbol{\theta}_0 = 0$ in Ω , $\boldsymbol{\theta}_0 \cdot \mathbf{n} = 0$ on Γ , and there exists $\chi \in L^2(\Omega)$ such that $\boldsymbol{\xi}_0 = \mathbf{curl} \boldsymbol{\theta}_0 + \mathbf{grad} \chi$ and

$$\|\boldsymbol{\theta}_0\|_{L^2(\Omega)^3} + \|\chi\|_{L^2(\Omega)/\mathbb{R}} \leq C \|\boldsymbol{\xi}_0\|_{H^{-1}(\Omega)^3}.$$

Since $\mathbf{f}_0 \in H_0(\mathbf{curl}, \Omega)'$, then $\mathbf{f}_0 = \boldsymbol{\psi}_0 + \mathbf{curl} \boldsymbol{\varphi}_0$, with $\boldsymbol{\psi}_0 \in L^2(\Omega)^3$, $\boldsymbol{\varphi}_0 \in L^2(\Omega)^3$, $\text{div} \boldsymbol{\varphi}_0 = 0$ in Ω , $\boldsymbol{\varphi}_0 \cdot \mathbf{n} = 0$ on Γ and

$$\|\boldsymbol{\psi}_0\|_{L^2(\Omega)^3} + \|\boldsymbol{\varphi}_0\|_{L^2(\Omega)^3} \leq C \|\mathbf{f}_0\|_{H_0(\mathbf{curl}, \Omega)'}$$

Then $\mathbf{f} = \boldsymbol{\psi}_0 + \mathbf{curl} \boldsymbol{\varphi}_0 + \mathbf{curl} \mathbf{curl} \boldsymbol{\theta}_0 = \boldsymbol{\psi}_0 + \mathbf{curl} \boldsymbol{\mu}$, with $\boldsymbol{\mu} = \boldsymbol{\varphi}_0 + \mathbf{curl} \boldsymbol{\theta}_0$, $\text{div} \boldsymbol{\mu} = 0$ in Ω , and the estimate

$$\|\boldsymbol{\psi}_0\|_{L^2(\Omega)^3} + \|\boldsymbol{\mu}\|_{H^{-1}(\Omega)^3} \leq C \|\mathbf{f}\|_{H^{-1}(\mathbf{curl}, \Omega)}$$

holds.

Thanks to the density of $\mathcal{D}(\Omega)^3$ in $H_0^1(\mathbf{curl}, \Omega)$, we infer that

$$H^{-1}(\mathbf{curl}, \Omega) \langle \mathbf{curl} \boldsymbol{\mu}, \mathbf{v} \rangle_{H_0^1(\mathbf{curl}, \Omega)} = 0, \quad \text{for all } \mathbf{v} \in K_N(\Omega).$$

Since $\operatorname{div} \mathbf{f} = 0$, $\operatorname{div} \boldsymbol{\psi}_0 = 0$ and therefore the condition $\langle \boldsymbol{\psi}_0 \cdot \mathbf{n}, 1 \rangle_{\Gamma_i} = 0$ is automatically satisfied for any $i = 0, \dots, I$. Then by (12), there exists a vector potential $\boldsymbol{\varphi} \in L^2(\Omega)^3$ such that

$$\boldsymbol{\psi}_0 = \mathbf{curl} \boldsymbol{\varphi}, \quad \operatorname{div} \boldsymbol{\varphi} = 0 \quad \text{in } \Omega \quad \text{and} \quad \boldsymbol{\varphi} \cdot \mathbf{n} = 0 \quad \text{on } \Gamma,$$

and

$$\|\boldsymbol{\varphi}\|_{L^2(\Omega)^3} \leq C \|\boldsymbol{\psi}_0\|_{L^2(\Omega)^3}.$$

Hence, the vector field $\boldsymbol{\xi} = \boldsymbol{\mu} + \boldsymbol{\varphi}$ satisfies the announced properties. \square

More generally, we can prove:

Theorem 4.5. *Given any integer $m \geq 0$ and any distribution \mathbf{f} in the dual space $H^{-m}(\mathbf{curl}, \Omega)$ that satisfies (44), there exists a vector potential $\boldsymbol{\xi}$ in $H^{-m}(\Omega)^3$ such that*

$$\mathbf{f} = \mathbf{curl} \boldsymbol{\xi}, \quad \text{with} \quad \operatorname{div} \boldsymbol{\xi} = 0 \quad \text{in } \Omega, \quad \text{and} \quad \|\boldsymbol{\xi}\|_{H^{-m}(\Omega)^3} \leq C \|\mathbf{f}\|_{H^{-m}(\mathbf{curl}, \Omega)}.$$

5 Weak versions of Korn's inequality

Finally, we consider tensor fields. The next theorem generalizes theorem 3.2 of [8] and theorem 7 of [3] to Sobolev spaces with negative exponents.

In what follows, the subscript $_s$ denotes a space of symmetric matrix fields.

Theorem 5.1. *Assume that Ω is simply-connected. Given an integer $m \geq 0$, let $\mathbf{e} = (e_{ij}) \in H_s^{-m}(\Omega)^{3 \times 3}$ be a symmetric matrix field that satisfies the following compatibility conditions for all $i, j, k, l \in \{1, 2, 3\}$:*

$$\mathcal{R}_{ijkl} := \frac{\partial^2 e_{ik}}{\partial x_l \partial x_j} + \frac{\partial^2 e_{jl}}{\partial x_k \partial x_i} - \frac{\partial^2 e_{jk}}{\partial x_l \partial x_i} - \frac{\partial^2 e_{il}}{\partial x_k \partial x_j} = 0 \quad \text{in } H^{-m-2}(\Omega). \quad (46)$$

Then there exists a vector field $\mathbf{v} \in H^{-m+1}(\Omega)^3$ such that $e_{ij} = \frac{1}{2}(\partial_j v_i + \partial_i v_j)$ and \mathbf{v} is unique up to vector fields in the space $R(\Omega) = \{\mathbf{a} + \mathbf{b} \wedge \mathbf{id}_\Omega; \mathbf{a}, \mathbf{b} \in \mathbb{R}^3\}$.

Proof. Given $\mathbf{e} = (e_{ij}) \in H_s^{-m}(\Omega)^{3 \times 3}$, let $f_{ijk} := \partial_j e_{ik} - \partial_i e_{jk}$. Then $f_{ijk} \in H^{-m-1}(\Omega)$ and, thanks to the compatibility conditions (46), we have

$$\frac{\partial}{\partial x_l} f_{ijk} = \frac{\partial}{\partial x_k} f_{ijl}.$$

Hence the implication (iii) \implies (iv) in theorem 1.1 shows that there exist distributions $p_{ij} \in H^{-m}(\Omega)$, unique up to additive constants, such that $\partial_k p_{ij} = f_{ijk}$.

Besides, since $\partial_k p_{ij} = -\partial_k p_{ji}$, we can choose the distributions p_{ij} in such a way that $p_{ij} + p_{ji} = 0$. Noting that the distributions $q_{ij} := e_{ij} + p_{ij}$ belong to $H^{-m}(\Omega)$ and satisfy $\partial_k q_{ij} = \partial_j q_{ik}$, we again resort to theorem 1.1 to assert the existence of distributions $v_i \in H^{-m+1}(\Omega)$, unique up to additive constants, such that $\partial_j v_i = q_{ij}$. \square

For any integer $m \geq 0$, let

$$E(\Omega) := \{\mathbf{e} \in H_s^{-m}(\Omega)^{3 \times 3}, \mathcal{R}_{ijkl}(\mathbf{e}) = 0\}$$

and

$$\dot{H}^{-m+1}(\Omega)^3 := H^{-m+1}(\Omega)^3 / R(\Omega).$$

By the previous theorem, given any $\mathbf{e} = (e_{ij}) \in E(\Omega)$, there exists a unique $\dot{\mathbf{v}} = (\dot{v}_i) \in \dot{H}^{-m+1}(\Omega)^3$ such that $e_{ij} = \frac{1}{2}(\partial_j v_i + \partial_i v_j)$. We may thus define a linear mapping $\mathcal{F} : E(\Omega) \rightarrow \dot{H}^{-m+1}(\Omega)^3$ by $\mathcal{F}(\mathbf{e}) = \dot{\mathbf{v}}$. Using the same method as in [8], we can then prove the following Korn's inequality in Sobolev spaces with negative exponents:

Theorem 5.2. *The linear mapping $\mathcal{F} : E(\Omega) \rightarrow \dot{H}^{-m+1}(\Omega)^3$ is an isomorphism. Besides, there exists a constant $C \geq 0$ such that*

$$\inf_{\mathbf{r} \in R(\Omega)} \|\mathbf{v} + \mathbf{r}\|_{H^{-m+1}(\Omega)^3} \leq C \sum_{i,j} \|\varepsilon_{ij}(\mathbf{v})\|_{H^{-m}(\Omega)} \quad \text{for all } \mathbf{v} \in H^{-m+1}(\Omega)^3,$$

and

$$\|\mathbf{v}\|_{H^{-m+1}(\Omega)^3} \leq C(\|\mathbf{v}\|_{H^{-m}(\Omega)^3} + \sum_{i,j} \|\varepsilon_{ij}(\mathbf{v})\|_{H^{-m}(\Omega)}) \quad \text{for all } \mathbf{v} \in H^{-m+1}(\Omega)^3$$

where $\varepsilon_{ij}(\mathbf{v}) = \frac{1}{2}(\partial_j v_i + \partial_i v_j)$.

Remark 5.3. Analogous techniques would likewise extend to Sobolev spaces with negative exponents the results obtained for non-simply connected domains in [9], [12] and [13].

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