

Szemerédi-type theorems for subsets of locally compact abelian groups of positive upper Banach density

by

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1. Introduction. E. Szemerédi's theorem proved in 1975 says that if a set $E \subseteq \mathbb{Z}$ is of positive upper Banach density, i.e.,

$$\text{BD}^*(E) := \limsup_{N-M \rightarrow \infty} \frac{|E \cap [M, N]|}{N-M} > 0,$$

then E contains arbitrarily long arithmetic progressions [8, 3]. By using their multiple recurrence theorem, H. Fürstenberg and Y. Katznelson proved in 1978 a multidimensional version of Szemerédi's theorem: If $E \subseteq \mathbb{Z}^n$ is of positive upper Banach density and F is a finite subset of \mathbb{Z}^n , then for some vector $u \in \mathbb{Z}^n$ and integer $d \geq 1$, $u + dF \subset E$ ([4] or [3, Theorem 7.16]).

Based on the above multidimensional version, H. Fürstenberg [3, Theorem 7.17] proved that if $E \subseteq \mathbb{R}^n$ is of positive upper Banach density with respect to the Lebesgue measure on \mathbb{R}^n and F is a finite subset of \mathbb{R}^n , then for some vector $u \in \mathbb{R}^n$ and integer $d \geq 1$, $u + dF \subset E$.

In the more general case where \mathbb{R}^n is replaced by an abelian discrete additive group $(G, +)$, using the Stone-Čech compactification βG of G and Fürstenberg's multiple recurrence theorem, Hindman and Strauss [5, Theorems 5.5 and 5.6] proved in 2006 that if $E \subset G$ is of positive upper density relative to some Følner net in G , then for any $a \in G$ and $l \in \mathbb{N}$, $\{u \in G \mid u + d\{a, 2a, \dots, la\} \subseteq E\}$ has positive upper density relative to the same Følner net for some $d \in \mathbb{N}$.

In this note, we will extend the usual notion of upper Banach density, and then by using ergodic-theoretic techniques following H. Fürstenberg,

2010 *Mathematics Subject Classification*: Primary 22B05; 37A15; Secondary 11B25; 37A45.

Key words and phrases: Szemerédi theorem, Fürstenberg correspondence principle, amenable group.

Received 17 March 2016; revised 30 March 2017.

Published online 1 August 2017.

we shall derive more generalizations of Szemerédi’s theorem for any finite configurations not limited to the form $\{a, 2a, \dots, la\}$ (Theorems 3.1 and 3.3 and Corollary 3.5), for any locally compact Hausdorff, not necessarily discrete, abelian group G with any fixed Haar measure.

2. Følner sequences and upper density. In this section we introduce some basic notions and preliminary lemmas.

2.1. Basic notions. Let $(G, +)$ be a locally compact Hausdorff additive topological group. According to Haar’s theorem [6, Theorem 29C], there exists a left-invariant Haar measure on $(G, +)$, which we denote by $|\cdot|$ or dg . When G is discrete, $|\cdot|$ is just the usual counting measure on G .

A sequence $(F_n)_{n=1}^\infty$ of compact subsets in G is called a *classical Følner sequence* in $(G, +, |\cdot|)$ if

$$\lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} \frac{|(g + F_n) \Delta F_n|}{|F_n|} = 0 \quad \forall g \in G.$$

It is well known that if G is a locally compact σ -compact Hausdorff abelian group, like $(\mathbb{Z}^m, +)$ with the discrete topology or $(\mathbb{R}^m, +)$ with the Euclidean metric topology, then it has classical Følner sequences. Although a discrete uncountable abelian group does not have any classical Følner sequences, it always has Følner nets [1, 5].

Since an uncountable abelian group has no classical Følner sequence under the discrete topology, we need to introduce a nonclassical Følner sequence in any locally compact Hausdorff group $(G, +, |\cdot|)$.

DEFINITION 2.1. Given any subset $F \subseteq G$, a sequence $\mathcal{F} = (F_n)_{n=1}^\infty$ of compact subsets of G is called an *F-Følner sequence* in $(G, +, |\cdot|)$ if

$$(2.1) \quad \lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} \frac{|(g + F_n) \Delta F_n|}{|F_n|} = 0 \quad \forall g \in F.$$

Notice that (2.1) holds only for $g \in F$ but not for any $g \in G$.

A classical Følner sequence in $(G, +, |\cdot|)$ is just a G -Følner sequence. Let us consider an example in order to show that an F -Følner sequence in $(G, +, |\cdot|)$ is not necessarily a classical Følner sequence for $F \neq G$. Let $(G, +) = (\mathbb{R}^2, +)$ with $|\cdot| = dx dy$ under the standard Euclidean topology and $\varepsilon > 0$. Define a sequence of thin rectangles $F_n = \{(x, y) : |x - n| \leq \varepsilon, |y| \leq n\}$. Clearly, $|F_n| = 4n\varepsilon \rightarrow \infty$ as $n \rightarrow \infty$. It is easy to see that for $F = \{0\} \times \mathbb{R}$, $(F_n)_{n=1}^\infty$ is an F -Følner sequence but not a classical Følner sequence in $(G, +, |\cdot|)$.

DEFINITION 2.2. Given any $F \subseteq G$, for any F -Følner sequence $\mathcal{F} = (F_n)_{n=1}^\infty$ in $(G, +, |\cdot|)$ and any $|\cdot|$ -measurable subset $E \subseteq G$, we set

$$(2.2) \quad D_{\mathcal{F}}^*(E) = \limsup_{n \rightarrow \infty} \frac{|E \cap F_n|}{|F_n|},$$

which is called the *upper density of E relative to \mathcal{F}* in $(G, +, |\cdot|)$.

We shall say that E is of *positive upper Banach density* in $(G, +, |\cdot|)$, and write $\text{BD}^*(E) > 0$, if $D_{\mathcal{F}}^*(E) > 0$ for some classical Følner sequence $\mathcal{F} = (F_n)_{n=1}^{\infty}$ in $(G, +, |\cdot|)$. We shall be concerned with measurable sets $E \subseteq G$ having $\text{BD}^*(E) > 0$.

A locally compact Hausdorff additive topological group $(G, +)$ is said to be *amenable* if the so-called *Følner condition* holds: for any compact set $K \subseteq G$ and any $\varepsilon > 0$, there exists a compact set $F \subseteq G$ such that

$$\frac{|(K + F) \Delta F|}{|F|} < \varepsilon$$

(see, e.g., [7]). Each locally compact Hausdorff abelian topological group is amenable. Of course, an amenable group need not have a classical Følner sequence if the group is not σ -compact [7]. However, for any compact subset K of an amenable group G there always exists a K -Følner sequence in the sense of Definition 2.1.

2.2. Preliminary lemmas. The following simple result follows from the definition of amenable group:

LEMMA 2.3. *If $(G, +)$ is an amenable and locally compact Hausdorff topological group, then for any compact set $K \subseteq G$ there exists a K -Følner sequence $(F_n)_{n=1}^{\infty}$ in $(G, +, |\cdot|)$.*

Proof. Since G is amenable and locally compact, [7, Theorem 4.10] shows that for any compact set $K \subseteq G$ and $\varepsilon_n > 0$, there exists some compact set $F_n \subseteq G$ such that

$$\frac{|(g + F_n) \Delta F_n|}{|F_n|} < \varepsilon_n \quad \forall g \in K.$$

Letting $\varepsilon_n \rightarrow 0$ implies the desired result. ■

This lemma enables us to choose an F -Følner sequence $\mathcal{F} = (F_n)_{n=1}^{\infty}$ in $(G, +, |\cdot|)$ for any compact set $F \subseteq G$ in Theorems 3.1 and 3.3 below.

It is well known that any discrete countable abelian group G has G -Følner sequences. Although this is not the case for any discrete abelian group, yet we can obtain the following

LEMMA 2.4. *Let $(G, +)$ be a discrete abelian group. Then for any finite subset $F \subseteq G$ and any Følner net $(F_{\theta})_{\theta \in \Theta}$ in $(G, +, |\cdot|)$, there exists an F -Følner sequence $(F_n)_{n=1}^{\infty}$ in $(G, +, |\cdot|)$ such that $(F_n)_{n=1}^{\infty} \subseteq (F_{\theta})_{\theta \in \Theta}$.*

Proof. Let $(F_\theta)_{\theta \in \Theta}$ be a Følner net in $(G, +, |\cdot|)$ that is, (Θ, \geq) is a directed index set and each F_θ is a finite subset of G such that

$$\lim_{\theta \in \Theta} \frac{|(g + F_\theta) \Delta F_\theta|}{|F_\theta|} = 0 \quad \forall g \in G.$$

Then for any $\epsilon > 0$, there is some $\theta_\epsilon \in \Theta$ such that

$$\frac{|(g + F_\theta) \Delta F_\theta|}{|F_\theta|} < \epsilon \quad \forall g \in F \text{ and } \theta \geq \theta_\epsilon.$$

Letting $\epsilon \rightarrow 0$ we get the desired F -Følner sequence $(F_n)_{n=1}^\infty$ in $(G, +, |\cdot|)$. ■

For any $K \subset G$, we denote by $\langle K \rangle$ the subgroup of $(G, +)$ spanned by K ,

$$\langle K \rangle = \{k_1 + \dots + k_n \mid n \geq 1, k_i \in K \cup (-K)\},$$

where $-K = \{-k \mid k \in K\}$.

LEMMA 2.5. *Let $(G, +)$ be an amenable locally compact Hausdorff topological group and $K \subseteq G$ any compact set. If $(F_n)_{n=1}^\infty$ is a K -Følner sequence in $(G, +, |\cdot|)$, then it is also a $\langle K \rangle$ -Følner sequence in $(G, +, |\cdot|)$.*

Proof. Given any $g, g_1, g_2 \in K$, by (2.1) with K in place of F we have

$$\begin{aligned} & \lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} \frac{|(g_2 + g_1 + F_n) \Delta F_n|}{|F_n|} \\ & \leq \lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} \frac{|(g_2 + g_1 + F_n) \setminus F_n| + |F_n \setminus (g_2 + g_1 + F_n)|}{|F_n|} \\ & = \lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} \frac{|(g_2 + g_1 + F_n) \setminus (g_2 + F_n)| + |(g_2 + F_n) \setminus (g_2 + g_1 + F_n)|}{|F_n|} \\ & = 0 \end{aligned}$$

and

$$\lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} \frac{|(-g + F_n) \Delta F_n|}{|F_n|} = \lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} \frac{|F_n \Delta (g + F_n)|}{|F_n|} = 0.$$

Thus $(F_n)_{n=1}^\infty$ is a $\langle K \rangle$ -Følner sequence in $(G, +, |\cdot|)$. ■

We notice here that, as a σ -compact topological group, $(\langle K \rangle, +)$ itself need not be amenable, since $\langle K \rangle$ is not necessarily a closed subset of G . In addition, $(F_n \cap \langle K \rangle)_{n=1}^\infty$ need not be a Følner sequence in $\langle K \rangle$. In fact, $F_n \cap \langle K \rangle = \emptyset$ in the example constructed before. Moreover, it is possible that $E \cap \langle K \rangle = \emptyset$ in Definition 2.2.

3. Fürstenberg correspondence principle. Let $(G, +)$ be a locally compact Hausdorff additive topological group with zero element \mathbf{o} . Given any compact Hausdorff space X , we shall say that $T: G \times X \rightarrow X$ is a *Borel G -action* on X (X is then called a *Borel G -space* and we simply write $G \curvearrowright_T X$) if

- $T_g: x \mapsto T(g, x)$ is a continuous selfmap of X for each $g \in G$;
- $T: (g, x) \mapsto T(g, x)$ is jointly Borel measurable;
- $T_{\mathbf{o}}x = x$ for each $x \in X$, and $T_{g+h} = T_g \circ T_h$ for all $g, h \in G$.

In this section, we will consider Fürstenberg correspondence principles between configurations in subsets of G and Borel G -space X associated to G .

The following Szemerédi-type theorem (Theorem 3.1) is one of our main results, in the proof of which there are two ingredients in our Fürstenberg correspondence principle: (1) the compact Hausdorff G -space X is not necessarily metrizable; and (2) although the topology of $(G, +, |\cdot|)$ may not be discrete, yet to define the associated G -action we will employ the discrete topology that is not necessarily compatible with the fixed Haar measure $|\cdot|$ on G .

THEOREM 3.1. *Let $(G, +)$ be a locally compact Hausdorff abelian topological group and $F \subseteq G$ a compact subset. If a measurable $E \subseteq G$ is of positive upper density corresponding to an F -Følner sequence $\mathcal{F} = (F_n)_{n=1}^\infty$ in $(G, +, |\cdot|)$, then for any $g_1, \dots, g_l \in \langle F \rangle$,*

$$\text{BD}_*(\{d \in \mathbb{Z} \mid D_{\mathcal{F}}^*(\{u \in E : u + d\{g_1, \dots, g_l\} \subseteq E\}) > 0\}) > 0.$$

Here BD_* denotes the lower Banach density of sets in $(\mathbb{Z}, +, |\cdot|_{\mathbb{Z}})$, and $\langle F \rangle$ stands for the subgroup of G generated by F .

Proof. By refining the F -Følner sequence $\mathcal{F} = (F_n)_{n=1}^\infty$ if necessary, we may assume

$$D_{\mathcal{F}}^*(E) = \lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} \frac{|E \cap F_n|}{|F_n|}.$$

Let $X = \prod_{g \in G} \{0, 1\}$ be the Cartesian product endowed with the standard pointwise convergence topology. Then X is a compact Hausdorff space. For any $x \in X$, we may identify it with the function $x(\cdot): G \rightarrow \{0, 1\}$ from G into the discrete space $\{0, 1\}$. Note that $x(\cdot) \in X$ is not necessarily a measurable function from G to $\{0, 1\}$ under the locally compact Hausdorff topology of G and that the compact Hausdorff topology of X is independent of the topology of G .

Let $\chi \in X$ be given by $\chi(g) = 1$ if and only if $g \in E$. Since by hypothesis E is $|\cdot|$ -measurable, $\chi(\cdot): G \rightarrow \{0, 1\}$ is $|\cdot|$ -measurable under the locally compact Hausdorff topology of G .

Define the clopen cylinder set of X , $[1]_{\mathbf{o}} = \{x \in X \mid x(\mathbf{o}) = 1\}$, which is a compact G_δ -set and so is a Baire subset of X . Then the corresponding characteristic function $1_{[1]_{\mathbf{o}}}$ is a continuous function on X , i.e., $1_{[1]_{\mathbf{o}}} \in C(X)$.

As in the usual Fürstenberg correspondence principle, under the discrete topology of G we may now define a G -action on X as follows:

$$(g, x) \mapsto T_g x = x(\cdot + g)$$

where $x(\cdot + g) \in X$ is defined by

$$x(\cdot + g): t \mapsto x(t + g).$$

It should be noted that the continuity of $T_g: X \rightarrow X$ is obvious under the product topology of X . Thus, under the discrete topology of G , $G \curvearrowright_T X$ is a canonical G -action; in other words, X is a Borel G -space.

By the Riesz representation theorem we can identify Baire measures on X with positive functionals on $C(X)$. Using the refined F -Følner sequence $\mathcal{F} = (F_n)_{n=1}^\infty$ in $(G, +, |\cdot|)$ we define a Baire probability on the product space X by

$$\mu_n(\varphi) = \frac{1}{|F_n|} \int_{F_n} \varphi(T_g\chi) dg \quad \forall \varphi \in C(X),$$

noting that $\varphi(T_g\chi): g \mapsto \varphi(T_g\chi)$ is $|\cdot|$ -measurable and dg -integrable from F_n to $\{0, 1\}$ under the topology of $(G, +, |\cdot|)$ because of the measurability of E , and that the Haar measure $|\cdot|$ is not defined under the newly introduced discrete topology of G .

Under the usual weak- $*$ topology of Baire probability measures on X , we can find a net $(\mu_\theta)_{\theta \in \Theta}$, which is a subnet of the Baire probability measure sequence $(\mu_n)_{n=1}^\infty$, such that

$$\lim_{\theta \in \Theta} \mu_\theta = \mu \quad \text{weakly-}^*$$

for some Baire probability measure μ on X . By Lemma 2.5, it is routine to check that μ is T_g -invariant for each $g \in \langle F \rangle$ (not for any $g \in G$).

Since $D_{\mathcal{F}}^*(E) > 0$, we have $\mu([1]_\circ) > 0$. Indeed, as $1_{[1]_\circ}(\cdot) \in C(X)$ and $1_{[1]_\circ}(T_g\chi) = 1_E(g)$, it follows that

$$\mu([1]_\circ) = \lim_{\theta \in \Theta} \frac{1}{|F_\theta|} \int_{F_\theta} 1_{[1]_\circ}(T_g\chi) dg = \lim_{\theta \in \Theta} \frac{|E \cap F_\theta|}{|F_\theta|} = D_{\mathcal{F}}^*(E).$$

Let $g_1, \dots, g_l \in \langle F \rangle$. Then by Fürstenberg's multiple recurrence theorem [4, 3], it follows that

$$D = \{d \in \mathbb{Z} \mid \mu([1]_\circ \cap T_{g_1}^{-d}[1]_\circ \cap \dots \cap T_{g_l}^{-d}[1]_\circ) > 0\}$$

is of positive lower Banach density in $(\mathbb{Z}, +, |\cdot|_{\mathbb{Z}})$. Set $K = \{g_1, \dots, g_l\}$. Next, given any $d \in D$ we set

$$A = \{u \in E \mid u + dK \subseteq E\} \quad \text{and} \quad U = [1]_\circ \cap T_{g_1}^{-d}[1]_\circ \cap \dots \cap T_{g_l}^{-d}[1]_\circ.$$

Then U is clopen and so is a Baire set in X for T_g is continuous of X to itself and hence

$$\mu(U) = \lim_{\theta \in \Theta} \frac{1}{|F_\theta|} \int_{F_\theta} 1_U(T_g\chi) dg \leq \lim_{\theta \in \Theta} \frac{|A \cap F_\theta|}{|F_\theta|} \leq \limsup_{n \rightarrow \infty} \frac{|A \cap F_n|}{|F_n|} = D_{\mathcal{F}}^*(A).$$

This proves Theorem 3.1. ■

Let $\mathcal{B}a(X)$ be the σ -algebra of all Baire subsets of X . It should be noted that for $G \curvearrowright_T (X, \mathcal{B}a(X), \mu)$ associated to E in the proof of Theorem 3.1, X is never metrizable if G is uncountable. Further, since in our context there is no ergodic decomposition theorem because $(X, \mathcal{B}a(X), \mu)$ is not (isomorphic to) a Polish probability space and so has no quasi-generic point, the proof of $\text{D}_{\mathcal{F}}^*(\{u \in E \mid u + d\{g_1, \dots, g_l\} \subseteq E\}) > 0$ is of interest.

An interesting consequence of the above theorem is the following, which is a generalization of the classical Szemerédi theorem for $G = \mathbb{Z}$ due to E. Szemerédi [8], for $G = \mathbb{Z}^m$ due to Fürstenberg and Katznelson [4], and for $G = \mathbb{R}^m$ with the Euclidean metric topology due to H. Fürstenberg [3, Theorem 7.17].

COROLLARY 3.2. *Let $(G, +)$ be a second countable locally compact Hausdorff abelian topological group. If a measurable set $E \subseteq G$ is of positive upper Banach density, i.e., $\text{BD}^*(E) > 0$, then for any $g_1, \dots, g_l \in G$,*

$$\text{BD}_*(\{d \in \mathbb{Z} \mid \text{BD}^*(\{u \in E : u + d\{g_1, \dots, g_l\} \subseteq E\}) > 0\}) > 0.$$

Proof. Since every second countable locally compact Hausdorff group is σ -compact, G has a classical Følner sequence. Then $\text{BD}^*(E)$ makes sense and the statement follows at once from Theorem 3.1 with $F = G$. ■

If we now utilize the Bergelson–Leibman [2] polynomial multiple recurrence theorem instead of Fürstenberg’s multiple recurrence theorem in the proof of Theorem 3.1, we can easily obtain the following.

THEOREM 3.3. *Let $(G, +)$ be a locally compact Hausdorff abelian group and $F \subseteq G$ a compact subset. If a measurable set $E \subseteq G$ is of positive upper density corresponding to an F -Følner sequence $\mathcal{F} = (F_n)_{n=1}^\infty$ in $(G, +, |\cdot|)$, then for any $g_1, \dots, g_l \in \langle F \rangle$,*

$$\text{BD}_*(\{d \in \mathbb{Z} \mid \text{D}_{\mathcal{F}}^*(\{u \in E : u + \{p_1(d)g_1, \dots, p_l(d)g_l\} \subseteq E\}) > 0\}) > 0$$

for any l polynomials $p_1(t), \dots, p_l(t) \in \mathbb{Z}[t]$ with $p_i(0) = 0$ for $i = 1, \dots, l$.

Recall that for any discrete abelian group $(G, +)$, $E \subseteq G$ is of positive upper Banach density if and only if there exists a Følner net $(F_\theta)_{\theta \in \Theta}$ in $(G, +, |\cdot|)$ such that

$$\text{BD}^*(E) = \lim_{\theta \in \Theta} \frac{|E \cap F_\theta|}{|F_\theta|} > 0.$$

Then by Theorem 3.3 together with Lemma 2.4, we obtain

COROLLARY 3.4. *Let $(G, +)$ be a discrete abelian additive group and let $p_1(t), \dots, p_l(t) \in \mathbb{Z}[t]$ with $p_i(0) = 0$ for $1 \leq i \leq l$. If $E \subseteq G$ is such that $\text{BD}^*(E) > 0$ with Følner nets, then for any $\{g_1, \dots, g_l\} \subseteq G$ we have*

$$\text{BD}_*(\{d \in \mathbb{Z} \mid \text{BD}^*(\{u \in E : u + p_i(d)g_i \in E \text{ for } i = 1, \dots, l\}) > 0\}) > 0.$$

Proof. For any $\{g_1, \dots, g_l\} \subseteq G$, let $F = \{g_1, \dots, g_l\}$. By Lemma 2.4, we can find some F -Følner sequence, say $\mathcal{F} = (F_n)_{n=1}^\infty$, in $(G, +, |\cdot|)$ with $D_{\mathcal{F}}^*(E) = \text{BD}^*(E)$. Then the statement follows from Theorem 3.3. ■

We notice here that G does not have any classical Følner sequence under the discrete topology when G is uncountable, and moreover the finite set $\{g_1 = a, g_2 = 2a, \dots, g_l = la\}$ in [5] is a special configuration in Corollary 3.2. A special case of Theorem 3.3 is the following

COROLLARY 3.5. *Let $(G, +)$ be an amenable group, $F \subset G$ a compact set and $E \subseteq G$ with $D_{\mathcal{F}}^*(E) > 0$ for some F -Følner sequence $\mathcal{F} = (F_n)_{n=1}^\infty$ in G . Then for any $g \in \langle G \rangle$, $l \in \mathbb{N}$ and $p_1(t), \dots, p_l(t) \in \mathbb{Z}[t]$ with $p_i(0) = 0$ for $i = 1, \dots, l$, there is some $d \in \mathbb{N}$ such that*

$$D_{\mathcal{F}}^*(\{u \in E : u + \{p_1(d)g, 2p_2(d)g, \dots, lp_l(d)g\} \subseteq E\}) > 0.$$

Proof. This follows from Theorem 3.3 with $g_1 = g, g_2 = 2g, \dots, g_l = lg$ by noting that T_{g_1}, \dots, T_{g_l} are commuting. ■

Finally, we note that in Theorems 3.1 and 3.3, we cannot consider $(\langle F \rangle, +)$ as an independent abelian group, because the F -Følner sequence $(F_n)_{n=1}^\infty$ only belongs to G , and not to $\langle F \rangle$, and moreover the E we consider here may have a void intersection with $\langle F \rangle$ and $D_{\mathcal{F}}^*(E)$ is associated to $(F_n)_{n=1}^\infty$ in G .

Acknowledgements. The authors would like to thank the referee for his/her many constructive comments.

This work was partly supported by National Natural Science Foundation of China (Grant Nos. 11431012 and 11271183) and PAPD of Jiangsu Higher Education Institutions.

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