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; 4. Interval exchanges and conclusion ;
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Sommario/riassunto

The theory of -trees has its origin in the work of Lyndon on length functions in groups. The first definition of an <i>R</i>-tree was given by Tits in 1977. The importance of -trees was established by Morgan and Shalen, who showed how to compactify a generalisation of Teichmuller space for a finitely generated group using <i>R</i>-trees. In that work they were led to define the idea of a -tree, where is an arbitrary ordered abelian group. Since then there has been much progress in understanding the structure of groups acting on <i>R</i>-trees, notably Rips' theorem on free actions. There