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2. Minimal components	3. Independent generators
; 4. Interval exchanges and conclusion	;
References	; Index of Notation
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Sommario/riassunto

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