

ON THE MINIMAL TIME NULL CONTROLLABILITY OF THE HEAT EQUATION

OVIDIU CÂRJĂ

Department of Mathematics, “Al. I. Cuza” University
Iași, 700506, Romania and
“Octav Mayer” Mathematics Institute, Romanian Academy
Iași, 700506, Romania

ALINA LAZU

Department of Mathematics, “Gh. Asachi” Technical University
Iași, 700506, Romania

ABSTRACT. We show that the heat equation modelled as $y' = Ay + u$ in $L^1(\Omega)$ is null controllable by controls in $L^\infty(0, T; L^p(\Omega))$ with $1 < p < \infty$. Moreover, the corresponding minimal time function is Hölder continuous.

1. Introduction. Let us consider the control process described by the parabolic equation in a domain Ω in \mathbb{R}^n

$$\begin{aligned} y_t &= \Delta y + u & (t, x) &\in \mathbb{R}_+ \times \Omega \\ y &= 0 & (t, x) &\in \mathbb{R}_+ \times \partial\Omega \\ y(0, x) &= \xi(x) & x &\in \Omega. \end{aligned} \tag{1}$$

Let $1 \leq p_1 \leq p_2 < \infty$. We are interested in transferring the initial state $\xi \in L^{p_1}(\Omega)$ to the target zero, in minimum time, by means of an admissible control $u(t, x)$ satisfying bounds of the type

$$\int_{\Omega} |u(t, x)|^{p_2} dx \leq 1. \tag{2}$$

The partial differential equation (1) can be rewritten as an ordinary differential equation in $L^{p_1}(\Omega)$ of the form

$$\begin{aligned} y'(t) &= A_{p_1} y(t) + Bu(t), \quad t \geq 0 \\ y(0) &= \xi, \end{aligned} \tag{3}$$

where A_{p_1} is the Laplace operator with the Dirichlet boundary condition defined on $L^{p_1}(\Omega)$, B is the embedding operator from $L^{p_2}(\Omega)$ to $L^{p_1}(\Omega)$ and the control function u is assumed to be in $L^\infty(0, t; L^{p_2}(\Omega))$, for $t > 0$. It is known that A_{p_1} generates a C_0 -semigroup of contractions $\{S_{p_1}(t); t \geq 0\}$ on $L^{p_1}(\Omega)$. The mild solution of (3) is

$$y(t, \xi, u) = S_{p_1}(t)\xi + \int_0^t S_{p_1}(t-s)Bu(s)ds, \quad t \geq 0. \tag{4}$$

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Let $T > 0$. Define the operator $V_T : L^\infty(0, T; L^{p_2}(\Omega)) \rightarrow L^{p_1}(\Omega)$ by

$$V_T u = \int_0^T S_{p_1}(s) B u(s) ds.$$

Obviously, V_T is a bounded linear operator.

The control system (3) is said to be null-controllable on $[0, T]$ if for each $\xi \in L^{p_1}(\Omega)$ there exists $u \in L^\infty(0, T; L^{p_2}(\Omega))$ such that $y(T, \xi, u) = 0$, i.e.,

$$\text{Range}(S_{p_1}(T)) \subset \text{Range}(V_T).$$

In the particular case when $p_1 = p_2 \in [1, \infty)$, it is known that the control system (3), with B the identity operator, is null controllable on $[0, T]$. In fact, this is true for a general control system of type

$$y' = Ay + u, \quad (5)$$

where A generates a C_0 -semigroup on a general Banach space X and u is a control in $L^\infty(0, T; X)$. See, e.g., [6].

One of the aims of this paper is to study the null controllability of the system (3), when the controls are in $L^\infty(0, T; L^{p_2}(\Omega))$, with $p_2 \geq p_1$.

Another problem we are interested in is the regularity of the associated minimal time function.

Let $U_{ad} = \left\{ u \in L^\infty(0, \infty; L^{p_2}(\Omega)); \|u(t)\|_{L^{p_2}(\Omega)} \leq 1 \text{ a.e.} \right\}$ be the admissible set of controls. For $t \geq 0$, denote by $R(t)$ the set of all initial states in $L^{p_1}(\Omega)$ which can be transferred to zero during $[0, t]$ by admissible controls, i.e.,

$$R(t) = \{ \xi \in L^{p_1}(\Omega); y(t, \xi, u) = 0 \text{ for some } u \in U_{ad} \}.$$

Let $R = \cup_{t \geq 0} R(t)$ and define the minimal time function $\mathcal{T} : L^{p_1}(\Omega) \rightarrow [0, \infty]$ by

$$\begin{aligned} \mathcal{T}(\xi) &= \inf \{ t; \xi \in R(t) \} & \text{for } \xi \in R, \\ \mathcal{T}(\xi) &= +\infty & \text{for } \xi \notin R. \end{aligned} \quad (6)$$

When $p_1 = p_2 \in [1, \infty]$ and B is the identity operator, because $S_{p_1}(t)$ is a C_0 -semigroup of contractions, we have that $R = L^{p_1}(\Omega)$ and

$$|\mathcal{T}(x_1) - \mathcal{T}(x_2)| \leq \|x_1 - x_2\|, \quad \forall x_1, x_2 \in L^{p_1}(\Omega),$$

that is, the minimal time function $\mathcal{T}(\cdot)$ is Lipschitz continuous on $L^{p_1}(\Omega)$. In fact, for a general system of type (5) it is known that the minimal time function is locally Lipschitz continuous on the reachable set. Moreover, if the semigroup generated by A is a contraction semigroup, as in our case, then $R = X$ (see [10]) and the minimal time function is globally Lipschitz (see [3, 6]).

In this paper we obtain some regularity properties for the minimal time function, in case where the controls are taken from $L^\infty(0, T; L^{p_2}(\Omega))$, with $p_2 \geq p_1$.

Finally, we study the null controllability with vanishing energy of system (3).

2. The null-controllability problem. In order to solve our null-controllability problem, we shall consider an abstract framework where our problem will be a particular case.

Consider the linear control system

$$y'(t) = Ay(t) + Bu(t), \quad t \geq 0, \quad (7)$$

where $A : D(A) \subset X \rightarrow X$ generates a C_0 -semigroup $\{S(t); t \geq 0\}$ on X and $B : U \rightarrow X$ is a bounded linear operator, U being a Banach space. The following characterization of the null controllability of (7) was proved in [13] in the hypothesis

that both spaces X and U where reflexive. Here we relax the conditions on X to be a general Banach space, requiring that the reflexive Banach space U be separable. Here and hereafter we denote by $\mathcal{B}_Y(0, 1)$ the unit closed ball in the Banach space Y .

Theorem 2.1. *Let X and U be Banach spaces. Assume that U is reflexive and separable. Then the system (7) is null-controllable with respect to $L^\infty(0, T; U)$ if and only if there exists $\alpha(T) > 0$ such that*

$$\alpha(T) \|S^*(T) x^*\|_{X^*} \leq \int_0^T \|B^* S^*(t) x^*\|_{U^*} dt, \quad (8)$$

for all $x^* \in X^*$.

Proof. Since (8) is equivalent to

$$S(T) (\mathcal{B}_X(0, \alpha(T))) \subset \text{closure}_{V_T} (\mathcal{B}_{L^\infty(0, T; U)}(0, 1)) \quad (9)$$

(see, e.g., [5, Theorem 2.2]), in order to complete the proof, we only have to show that $V_T (\mathcal{B}_{L^\infty(0, T; U)}(0, 1))$ is a closed set.

Let $(u_n)_n \subset \mathcal{B}_{L^\infty(0, T; U)}(0, 1)$ be such that $\lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} V_T(u_n) = y$, $y \in X$. There exists $u \in \mathcal{B}_{L^\infty(0, T; U)}(0, 1)$ such that, on a subsequence, we have that $(u_n)_n$ is weakly star convergent to u in $L^\infty(0, T; U)$. On the other hand, let us observe that $V_T^* x^* = B^* S^*(\cdot) x^*$ and belongs to $L^1(0, T; U^*)$ for any $x^* \in X^*$, because U^* is a separable Banach space (where strong and weak measurability coincide). See, e.g., [7]. Hence, for any $x^* \in X^*$,

$$\langle V_T(u_n), x^* \rangle = \langle u_n, V_T^* x^* \rangle \rightarrow \langle u, V_T^* x^* \rangle = \langle V_T(u), x^* \rangle.$$

In conclusion, we obtain that $y = V_T(u)$ with $u \in \mathcal{B}_{L^\infty(0, T; U)}(0, 1)$. This completes the proof. \square

The following theorem gives a sufficient condition for the null-controllability of the system (7).

Theorem 2.2. *Assume $U \subset X$ continuously, i.e. there exists $k > 0$ such that $\|x\|_X \leq k \|x\|_U$, for any $x \in U$. Assume further that U is reflexive and separable. Let $T > 0$ and B the embedding operator from U to X .*

Suppose that there is $f(\cdot) \in L^\infty(\tau, T)$, for some $\tau \in (0, T)$, such that

$$\|S^*(t) x^*\|_{X^*} \leq f(t) \|B^* x^*\|_{U^*}, \quad \forall x^* \in X^*, \quad \text{a.e. on } (\tau, T). \quad (10)$$

Then, the system (7) is null-controllable on $[0, T]$ with respect to $L^\infty(0, T; U)$.

Proof. For the proof, we shall use Theorem 2.1, more exactly, we shall prove the existence of $\alpha(T) > 0$ such that (8) holds true.

To this aim, observe that for any $x^* \in X^*$ we have

$$\begin{aligned} \|S^*(T) x^*\|_{X^*} &= \frac{1}{T - \tau} \int_0^{T - \tau} \|S^*(T - t) S^*(t) x^*\|_{X^*} dt \\ &\leq \frac{1}{T - \tau} \int_0^{T - \tau} f(T - t) \|B^* S^*(t) x^*\|_{U^*} dt. \end{aligned}$$

Hence,

$$\begin{aligned} \|S^*(T)x^*\|_{X^*} &\leq \frac{1}{T-\tau} \|f\|_{L^\infty(\tau, T)} \int_0^{T-\tau} \|B^*S^*(t)x^*\|_{U^*} dt \\ &\leq \frac{1}{T-\tau} \|f\|_{L^\infty(\tau, T)} \int_0^T \|B^*S^*(t)x^*\|_{U^*} dt. \end{aligned}$$

The proof is completed. \square

Now, let us return to the control system (3). First, we shall present some regularity results concerning the semigroup generated by the Laplace operator on $L^p(\Omega)$, for $p \geq 1$, useful in our study.

Regarding the dual semigroup of $S_p(t)$, $p \geq 1$, we have that $S_p^*(t)h = S_q(t)h$, for any $h \in L^q(\Omega)$, where $\frac{1}{p} + \frac{1}{q} = 1$.

Lemma 2.3. [14, Lemma 7.2.1] *Let Ω be a nonempty, bounded and open subset in \mathbb{R}^n , whose boundary is of class C^1 and let $p \in [1, \infty]$. Let A_p be the Laplace operator subjected to the Dirichlet boundary condition on $L^p(\Omega)$, with the convention that, for $p = \infty$, $L^p(\Omega)$ is replaced with $C_0(\overline{\Omega})$. Let $\{S_p(t); t \geq 0\}$ be the C_0 -semigroup generated by A_p on $L^p(\Omega)$. Then, for each $p, r \in [1, \infty]$, each $\xi \in C_0(\overline{\Omega})$ and each $t \geq 0$ we have $S_p(t)\xi = S_r(t)\xi$.*

By this Lemma, we can denote the C_0 -semigroup generated by the Laplace operator subjected to the Dirichlet boundary condition on any of the spaces $L^p(\Omega)$, by the same symbol $\{S(t); t \geq 0\}$.

Theorem 2.4. [14, Theorem 7.2.6] *Let Ω be a nonempty, bounded and open subset in \mathbb{R}^n , whose boundary is of class C^1 . Let $p \geq 1$ and let $\{S(t); t \geq 0\}$ be the C_0 -semigroup generated by the Laplace operator subjected to the Dirichlet boundary condition on $L^p(\Omega)$. Then, for each $1 \leq p \leq r \leq \infty$, each $\xi \in L^p(\Omega)$ and each $t > 0$, we have*

$$\|S(t)\xi\|_{L^r(\Omega)} \leq (4\pi t)^{-\frac{n}{2}\left(\frac{1}{p}-\frac{1}{r}\right)} \|\xi\|_{L^p(\Omega)}.$$

Let q_1, q_2 be the conjugates of p_1, p_2 , i.e. $\frac{1}{q_i} + \frac{1}{p_i} = 1$, $i = 1, 2$. Using Theorem 2.4 for $q_2 \leq q_1$ we obtain

$$\|S^*(t)h\|_{L^{q_1}(\Omega)} \leq (4\pi t)^{-\frac{n}{2}\left(\frac{1}{q_2}-\frac{1}{q_1}\right)} \|h\|_{L^{q_2}(\Omega)}, \quad \forall h \in L^{q_1}(\Omega), \quad \forall t > 0.$$

Denote $C = \frac{n}{2}\left(\frac{1}{q_2} - \frac{1}{q_1}\right) = \frac{n}{2}\left(\frac{1}{p_1} - \frac{1}{p_2}\right) > 0$ and let $f(t) = (4\pi t)^{-C}$, for $t > 0$. Obviously $f(\cdot) \in L^\infty(\tau, T)$ for any $\tau \in (0, T)$.

Now, we can state the following result regarding the null-controllability of (3).

Theorem 2.5. *Let Ω be a nonempty, bounded and open subset in \mathbb{R}^n , whose boundary is of class C^1 . Let $T > 0$ and $1 \leq p_1 \leq p_2 < \infty$, $p_2 > 1$. Then, the system (3) is null-controllable on $[0, T]$ with respect to $L^\infty(0, T; L^{p_2}(\Omega))$.*

Remark 1. Obviously, if the system is null controllable with respect to $L^\infty(0, T; L^{p_2}(\Omega))$ then it is null controllable with respect to $L^p(0, T; L^{p_2}(\Omega))$, for any $p \in [1, \infty)$.

3. The minimal time function. In this section we use the previous results in order to obtain estimates for the minimal time function.

From the previous section, taking $\tau = \frac{T}{2}$, we have

$$\|S^*(T)x^*\|_{(L^{p_1}(\Omega))^*} \leq 2^{C+1} (4\pi)^{-C} T^{-1-C} \int_0^T \|B^*S^*(t)x^*\|_{(L^{p_2}(\Omega))^*} dt,$$

for any $x^* \in (L^{p_1}(\Omega))^*$ and for any $T > 0$. This inequality can be rewritten as

$$\alpha(T) \|S^*(T)x^*\|_{(L^{p_1}(\Omega))^*} \leq \int_0^T \|B^*S^*(t)x^*\|_{(L^{p_2}(\Omega))^*} dt, \quad (11)$$

where

$$\alpha(T) = 2^{C-1} \pi^C T^{C+1}. \quad (12)$$

For $p_2 \in (1, \infty)$ the space $L^{p_2}(\Omega)$ is a reflexive and separable Banach space and, by Theorem 2.1, we have that (11) is equivalent to the inclusion

$$S(T) (\mathcal{B}_{L^{p_1}(\Omega)}(0, \alpha(T))) \subset V_T (\mathcal{B}_{L^\infty(0,T;L^{p_2}(\Omega))}(0, 1)), \quad \forall T > 0. \quad (13)$$

At this point let us remark that (13) gives precise estimates for the minimum time function as the following theorem, taken from [1], shows.

Theorem 3.1. *Let X and U be Banach spaces. Suppose there exists a function $\alpha : [0, \infty) \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$ strictly increasing, continuous, with $\alpha(0) = 0$ and $\lim_{t \rightarrow \infty} \alpha(t) = \infty$, such that*

$$S(T) (\mathcal{B}_X(0, \alpha(T))) \subset V_T (\mathcal{B}_{L^\infty(0,T;U)}(0, 1)) \quad (14)$$

is verified for any $T \geq 0$. Then $\mathcal{T}(x) \leq \alpha^{-1}(\|x\|)$ for any $x \in X$.

Returning to our problem, taking $\alpha(\cdot)$ given by (12), we have that it is strictly increasing, continuous, $\alpha(0) = 0$, (13) holds for any $T > 0$ and $\alpha^{-1}(r) = \lambda^{-\frac{1}{C+1}} r^{\frac{1}{C+1}}$, where $\lambda = 2^{C-1} \pi^C$.

Applying Theorem 3.1 we get

$$\mathcal{T}(x) \leq \lambda^{-\frac{1}{C+1}} \|x\|^{\frac{1}{C+1}}, \quad (15)$$

for any $x \in R$. Moreover, we have $R = L^{p_1}(\Omega)$ because $S(t)$ is a contraction semigroup (see [10]), hence (15) holds for any $x \in L^{p_1}(\Omega)$.

Further, because $S(t)$ is a semigroup of contractions, the local properties of the minimal time function become global (see [6]) and applying the abstract results from [6, Theorem 2.1] in our case, we obtain:

Theorem 3.2. *Let Ω be a nonempty, bounded and open subset in \mathbb{R}^n , whose boundary is of class C^1 . Assume $1 \leq p_1 \leq p_2 < \infty$, $p_2 > 1$. Then, there exists $k > 0$, depending on p_1 , p_2 and n , such that*

$$\mathcal{T}(x) \leq k \|x\|^{\frac{1}{\frac{n}{2}(\frac{1}{p_1} - \frac{1}{p_2}) + 1}},$$

for any $x \in L^{p_1}(\Omega)$.

Moreover, \mathcal{T} is Hölder continuous, i.e.

$$|\mathcal{T}(x_1) - \mathcal{T}(x_2)| \leq k \|x_1 - x_2\|^{\frac{1}{\frac{n}{2}(\frac{1}{p_1} - \frac{1}{p_2}) + 1}},$$

for any $x_1, x_2 \in L^{p_1}(\Omega)$.

4. Controllability with vanishing energy. In [11], the authors introduce an interesting concept, null controllability with vanishing energy, for linear control systems in Hilbert spaces, and give characterizations for it. Further results in this direction, when X is a Banach space and U is a Hilbert space, are given in [12]. In both [11] and [12] the control space is $L^2(0, T; U)$. Here we shall present some results concerning a related concept considering the control space $L^\infty(0, T; U)$.

Definition 4.1. We say that the system (7) is null controllable with vanishing energy, in short NCVE, if for all $x \in X$ and all $\varepsilon > 0$ there exists a time $t > 0$ and a function $u \in L^\infty(0, t; U)$ satisfying $\|u\| \leq \varepsilon$ and such that $y(t, x, u) = 0$.

Proposition 1. *The system (7) is NCVE if and only if there exists $\tilde{\varepsilon} > 0$ such that for all $x \in X$ there exist a time $t > 0$ and a function $u \in L^\infty(0, t; U)$ satisfying $\|u\| \leq \tilde{\varepsilon}$ and such that $y(t, x, u) = 0$.*

Proof. Let $\varepsilon > 0$ and $x \in X$. For $z = \frac{\varepsilon}{\tilde{\varepsilon}}x$ there exist $t > 0$ and $u \in L^\infty(0, t; U)$, with $\|u\| \leq \tilde{\varepsilon}$ such that

$$S(t)(z) + \int_0^t S(t-s)Bu(s)ds = 0,$$

so, we have that $y(t, x, v) = 0$, where $v = \frac{\varepsilon}{\tilde{\varepsilon}}u \in L^\infty(0, t; U)$ and $\|v\| \leq \varepsilon$. \square

Let $\rho > 0$ and denote by R_ρ the set of all points $x \in X$ such that $y(t, x, u) = 0$, for some $t > 0$ and $u \in L^\infty(0, t; U)$ with $\|u\| \leq \rho$. Then, Definition 4.1 gives the following result.

Proposition 2. *The system (7) is NCVE if and only if for each $\rho > 0$ the reachable set R_ρ is the whole space.*

Remark 2. Proposition 1 says that if for some $\rho^* > 0$ we have $R_{\rho^*} = X$ then, for all $\rho > 0$, the reachable set R_ρ is the whole space.

The next result is related to Theorem 3.1 from [12] and gives a necessary condition for the NCVE. See also Theorem 3 in [4]. The proof is standard and is based on the Baire Category Theorem.

Theorem 4.2. *Assume that X is a reflexive Banach space and, for some Banach space F , $U = F^*$. Assume further that U is separable. If the system (7) is NCVE, then there exists $t > 0$ such that the system is null controllable in time t , i.e., for all $x \in X$ there exists $u \in L^\infty(0, t; U)$ such that $y(t, x, u) = 0$.*

Proof. For $n \geq 1$, let X_n be the set of all $x \in X$ such that $y(n, x, u) = 0$ for some $u \in L^\infty(0, n; U)$ with $\|u\| \leq 1$. Clearly, $X = \cup X_n$. We show that X_n are closed sets. To this end, fix $n \geq 1$ and take a sequence (x_k) in X_n such that $x_k \rightarrow x$. We have to show that $x \in X_n$. Let $u_k \in L^\infty(0, n; U)$ with $\|u_k\| \leq 1$ such that $y(n, x, u_k) = 0$. Since

$$L^\infty(0, n; U) = L^1(0, n; F)^*, \tag{16}$$

we can select a subsequence of (u_k) (denoted with the same name) which is $L^1(0, n; F)$ -weakly convergent to $u \in L^\infty(0, n; U)$ and $\|u\| \leq 1$ holds true. Applying a functional $x^* \in X^*$ to both sides of

$$S(n)x + \int_0^n S(n-s)Bu_k(s)ds = 0$$

we get

$$\langle x^*, S(n)x \rangle + \int_0^n \langle B^* S^*(n-s)x^*, u_k(s) \rangle ds.$$

Taking limits, we obtain $S(n)x + \int_0^n S(n-s)Bu ds = 0$, as claimed. By the Baire Category Theorem, there exist n_0 and $x_0 \in X_{n_0}$ such that $X_{n_0} - x_0$ is a neighborhood of the origin. By linearity, all points of $X_{n_0} - x_0$ can be transferred to 0 by controls in $L^\infty(0, n; U)$. Again by linearity it follows that all points of X can be transferred to 0 and the proof is complete. \square

Remark 3. Since F^* is separable, F is separable too, so $L^1(0, n; F)$ is separable. This allowed us to work with subsequences in the above proof. The equality in (16) holds true also in case U is reflexive with $F = U^*$. The result of Theorem 4.2 is also true in this case, although $L^1(0, n; F)$ is not necessarily separable, working with generalized subsequences instead of subsequences. The reader can find details in [7, Section 12.9], [8, Section 3.1].

Remark 4. The reflexivity of X can be dropped in Theorem 4.2, working with the Phillips adjoint semigroup $S^\circ(t)$ instead of $S^*(t)$ (which may be not strongly continuous). See, e.g., [8, Section 3.1] for a similar discussion.

Let us denote by $\mathcal{E}(t, x, 0)$ the minimum energy to bring x to the origin of X in time t , i.e.

$$\mathcal{E}(t, x, 0) = \inf_{u \in \mathcal{M}(t, x, 0)} \|u\|_{L^\infty(0, t; U)},$$

where $\mathcal{M}(t, x, 0)$ is the (possibly empty) set of controls $u \in L^\infty(0, t; U)$ such that $y(t, x, u) = 0$.

The following theorem is a version of a result from [1] and gives estimates for the minimum energy related to estimates of the minimal time function.

Theorem 4.3. *Suppose that there exists a function $\beta : [0, \infty) \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$ strictly increasing, continuous, with $\beta(0) = 0$ and $\lim_{s \rightarrow \infty} \beta(s) = \infty$, such that $\mathcal{T}(x) \leq \beta(\|x\|)$ for any $x \in X$. Then, for each $x \in X$ and each $t > 0$, we have*

$$\mathcal{E}(t, x, 0) \leq \frac{1}{\beta^{-1}(t)} \|x\|.$$

Returning to our system (3), we can state the following result.

Theorem 4.4. *Let Ω be a nonempty, bounded and open subset in \mathbb{R}^n , whose boundary is of class C^1 . Let $T > 0$ and $1 \leq p_1 \leq p_2 < \infty$, $p_2 > 1$. Then system (3) is NCVE.*

Proof. Let us define

$$\beta(r) = k r^{\frac{1}{\sigma+1}}, \text{ for any } r \geq 0,$$

where $C = \frac{n}{2} \left(\frac{1}{p_1} - \frac{1}{p_2} \right)$ as before. Obviously, this function is strictly increasing, continuous, $\beta(0) = 0$ and $\lim_{s \rightarrow \infty} \beta(s) = \infty$. Moreover, from the previous section we have that $\mathcal{T}(x) \leq \beta(\|x\|)$, for any $x \in L^{p_1}(\Omega)$. Using Theorem 4.3 we obtain

$$\mathcal{E}(t, x, 0) \leq k^{C+1} t^{-C-1} \|x\|,$$

for any $x \in L^{p_1}(\Omega)$ and any $t > 0$. Now, since $\lim_{t \rightarrow \infty} \mathcal{E}(t, x, 0) = 0$ for any $x \in X$, we get that the system (3) is NCVE. \square

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E-mail address: ocarja@uaic.ro

E-mail address: vieru_alina@yahoo.com