

Remarks on curvature in sub-Riemannian geometry

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joint work with D. Alekseevsky, A. Medvedev, nearly finished ...

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- 1 Cartan geometries
 - Subriemannian prolongation
 - Underlying parabolic geometries
- 2 Cohomologies
- 3 Free step 2 distributions
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Subriemannian geometry

Definition

Subriemannian geometry (M, D, S) on a manifold M is given by a distribution D , and (positive definite) metric S on D .

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Sheaf $\mathcal{D}^{-1} = \mathcal{D}$ of vector fields valued in D generates the filtration by sheafs

$$\mathcal{D}^j = \{[X, Y], X \in \mathcal{D}^{j+1}, Y \in \mathcal{D}^{-1}\}, \quad j = -2, -3, \dots$$

We say that D is a bracket generating distribution if for some k , \mathcal{D}^k is the sheaf of all vector fields on M .

Bracket generating distribution D defines the filtration of subspaces

$$T_x M = D_x^k \supset \dots \supset D_x^{-1}$$

at each point $x \in M$.

The associated graded tangent space

$$\text{gr } T_x M = T_x M / D_x^{k+1} \oplus \dots \oplus D_x^{-1}$$

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Definition

(M, D, S) is a *sub-Riemannian geometry with constant symbol* if D is bracket generating, and the nilpotent algebra $\text{gr } T_x M$, together with the metric, is isomorphic to a fixed graded Lie algebra

$$\mathfrak{g}_- = \mathfrak{g}_{-k} \oplus \cdots \oplus \mathfrak{g}_{-1}$$

with a fixed metric σ on \mathfrak{g}_{-1} .

Prolongation of subriemannian geometries

Let $\mathfrak{g}_0 \subset \mathfrak{so}(\mathfrak{g}_{-1})$ be the Lie algebra of the Lie group G_0 of all automorphisms of the graded nilpotent algebra \mathfrak{g}_- preserving the metric σ on \mathfrak{g}_{-1} .

The action of the derivations from \mathfrak{g}_0 on \mathfrak{g}_- extends the Lie algebra structure on \mathfrak{g}_- to the Lie algebra

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Observation 1

The Tanaka prolongation of \mathfrak{g} is finite.^a

^aCorollary 2 of Theorem 11.1 in *Tanaka, N.*, On differential systems, graded Lie algebras and pseudo-groups, *J. Math. Kyoto Univ.*, 10, 1 (1970), 1-82.

Observation 2

Already the first prolongation is trivial.^a Thus \mathfrak{g} is the full prolongation of \mathfrak{g}_- .

^aYatsui, T., *On pseudo-product graded Lie algebras*, Hokkaido Math. J., 17 (1988), 333-343.

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Theorem

For each subriemannian manifold (M, D, S) with constant symbol, there is the unique Cartan connection $(\mathcal{G} \rightarrow M, \omega)$ of type (\mathfrak{g}, G_0) with the curvature function $\kappa : \mathcal{G} \rightarrow \mathfrak{g} \otimes \Lambda^2 \mathfrak{g}_-^$ satisfying $\partial^* \kappa = 0$. Via the Bianchi identities, the entire curvature is obtained from its harmonic projection κ_H , i.e. the component with $\partial \kappa_H = 0$ as well.^a*

^aMorimoto, T., *Cartan connection associated with a subriemannian structure*, Differential Geometry and its Applications 26 (2008), 75-78.

The distribution D on M itself is often a finite type geometry. defines a nice finite type filtered geometry which enjoys a canonical Cartan connection, too.

Many of them belong to the class of the parabolic geometries, for which the full Tanaka prolongation of \mathfrak{g}_- is a semisimple Lie algebra

$$\bar{\mathfrak{g}} = \mathfrak{g}_{-k} \oplus \cdots \oplus \mathfrak{g}_{-1} \oplus \bar{\mathfrak{g}}_0 \oplus \bar{\mathfrak{g}}_1 \oplus \cdots \oplus \bar{\mathfrak{g}}_k$$

and $\mathfrak{g}_- = \mathfrak{g}_{-k} \oplus \cdots \oplus \mathfrak{g}_{-1}$ is the opposite nilpotent radical to the parabolic subalgebra $\mathfrak{p} = \bar{\mathfrak{g}}_0 \oplus \cdots \oplus \bar{\mathfrak{g}}_k \subset \bar{\mathfrak{g}}$, with $\mathfrak{g}_0 \subset \bar{\mathfrak{g}}_0$.

Fix one such graded semisimple $\bar{\mathfrak{g}}$ and consider the frame bundle $\mathcal{G}_0 \rightarrow M$ of $\text{gr } TM$ giving a parabolic geometry. Often the structure group G_0 of \mathcal{G}_0 is the full group of graded automorphisms of \mathfrak{g}_- .¹ Adding a metric S on D , we have got two Cartan connections there:

¹See Čap, A., Slovák, J., Parabolic Geometries I, Background and General Theory, AMS, Math. Surveys and Monographs 154, x+628pp. for details. ▶

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Theorem

Consider a bracket generating distribution D on M with the constant symbol equal to the negative part of a graded semisimple Lie algebra $\bar{\mathfrak{g}}$ and the corresponding frame bundle $\mathcal{G}_0 \rightarrow M$ of $\text{gr } TM$. Then there is the unique Cartan connection $(\bar{\mathcal{G}} \rightarrow M, \omega)$ of type $(\bar{\mathfrak{g}}, P)$ with the curvature function $\bar{\kappa} : \bar{\mathcal{G}} \rightarrow \bar{\mathfrak{g}} \otimes \Lambda^2 \mathfrak{g}_-$ satisfying $\partial^ \bar{\kappa} = 0$. Via the Bianchi identities, the entire curvature is obtained from its harmonic projection $\bar{\kappa}_H$, i.e. the component with $\partial \bar{\kappa}_H = 0$ as well.*

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Consider a parabolic geometry (M, D) equipped by the metric S on D , assume (M, D, S) has got constant symbol.

Thus we have got:

$$\mathfrak{g} = \mathfrak{g}_{-k} \oplus \cdots \oplus \mathfrak{g}_{-1} \oplus \mathfrak{g}_0$$

$$\bar{\mathfrak{g}} = \mathfrak{g}_{-k} \oplus \cdots \oplus \mathfrak{g}_{-1} \oplus \bar{\mathfrak{g}}_0 \oplus \bar{\mathfrak{g}}_1 \oplus \cdots \oplus \bar{\mathfrak{g}}_k$$

This is an instance of a \mathfrak{g}_- -submodule W of \mathfrak{g}_- -module V .

The gradings on \mathfrak{g} and $\bar{\mathfrak{g}}$ induce the gradings on the corresponding spaces of chains, the differential ∂ respects this grading, thus we get grading on the cohomology spaces, too.

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We are interested in geometries described via the filtration induced by the distribution D and we declare its symbol to be equal to the Lie algebra \mathfrak{g}_- at all points. Thus, all the curvatures have to vanish in all nonpositive homogeneities.

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Theorem

Assume that $H_+^1(\mathfrak{g}_-, \bar{\mathfrak{g}}) = 0$. The cohomology $H_+^2(\mathfrak{g}_-, \mathfrak{g})$ is a direct sum of 2 parts:

- 1 $H_+^1(\mathfrak{g}_-, \bar{\mathfrak{g}}/\mathfrak{g})$,
- 2 $\ker \pi_2: H_+^2(\mathfrak{g}_-, \bar{\mathfrak{g}}) \rightarrow H_+^2(\mathfrak{g}_-, \bar{\mathfrak{g}}/\mathfrak{g})$.

Remark

$\bar{\mathfrak{g}}_0$ equals to all derivations on the graded algebra \mathfrak{g}_- if and only if all the non-negative homogeneities $H_{\geq 0}^1(\mathfrak{g}_-, \bar{\mathfrak{g}})$ vanish.

If $H_0^1(\mathfrak{g}_-, \bar{\mathfrak{g}}) \neq 0$, then we need further reduction of the algebra of all derivations to $\bar{\mathfrak{g}}_0$ in order to get a canonical Cartan connection. In particular, the technical assumption in the theorem is not much restrictive.

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Remark

The projection π_2 is zero whenever the cochains representing the cohomology are valued in \mathfrak{g} . Actually, the structure of $H^2(\mathfrak{g}_-, \bar{\mathfrak{g}})$ is quite well known and positive homogeneities in the curvature are rather exceptional. Only a very few of those in the list allow for curvature components valued in $\bar{\mathfrak{g}}_{\geq 0}$. Except for the length $k = 1$ and contact cases, there are just five exceptions.

Proof.

The first rows of the long exact sequence are

$$\begin{array}{ccccccc} \dots & \longrightarrow & H_+^1(\mathfrak{g}_-, \bar{\mathfrak{g}}) = 0 & \xrightarrow{\pi_1} & H_+^1(\mathfrak{g}_-, \bar{\mathfrak{g}}/\mathfrak{g}) & \longrightarrow & \\ & & \delta & & & & \\ & \longleftarrow & & & & & \\ & & H_+^2(\mathfrak{g}_-, \mathfrak{g}) & \xrightarrow{i_2} & H_+^2(\mathfrak{g}_-, \bar{\mathfrak{g}}) & \xrightarrow{\pi_2} & H_+^2(\mathfrak{g}_-, \bar{\mathfrak{g}}/\mathfrak{g}) \longrightarrow \end{array}$$

Notice the connecting homomorphism δ is essentially given by ∂ . The first part of $H_+^2(\mathfrak{g}_-, \mathfrak{g})$ is $H_+^1(\mathfrak{g}_-, \bar{\mathfrak{g}}/\mathfrak{g})$, which is mapped by δ injectively into $H_+^2(\mathfrak{g}_-, \mathfrak{g})$. The second part is $\text{im } i_2: H_+^2(\mathfrak{g}_-, \mathfrak{g}) \rightarrow H_+^2(\mathfrak{g}_-, \bar{\mathfrak{g}})$. Exactness of the sequence implies $\text{im } i_2 = \ker \pi_2$. □

There are further helpful technical claims for computation of $H_+^1(\mathfrak{g}_-, \bar{\mathfrak{g}}/\mathfrak{g})$. We write $\bar{\mathfrak{g}}^i$ for the "left \mathfrak{g}_- -invariant ends" of $\bar{\mathfrak{g}}$.

Lemma

For $i \geq 0$ we have $H_{i+1}^1(\mathfrak{g}_-, \bar{\mathfrak{g}}/\mathfrak{g}) = H_{i+1}^1(\mathfrak{g}_-, \bar{\mathfrak{g}}^i/\mathfrak{g})/\delta(\bar{\mathfrak{g}}^{i+1})$.

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Lemma

$H_1^1(\mathfrak{g}_-, \bar{\mathfrak{g}}/\mathfrak{g}) = \mathfrak{g}_{-1}^ \otimes (\bar{\mathfrak{g}}_0/(\mathfrak{g}_0 \oplus \mathbb{R}Z))$ where Z is the grading element of the parabolic geometry $(\bar{\mathfrak{g}}, \bar{\mathfrak{g}}_{\geq 0})$.*

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Lemma

*If k is the length of the grading for \mathfrak{g} then for $i \geq k + 1$
 $H_{i+1}^1(\mathfrak{g}_-, \bar{\mathfrak{g}}/\mathfrak{g}) = 0$.*

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Let M be a manifold of dimension $n(n+1)$. We say that distribution D of dimension n is a free (step 2) distribution on M if $D + [D, D] = TM$.

This is a nice parabolic geometry, of type $(\bar{\mathfrak{g}}, \bar{P})$ with the Lie algebras of the form

$$\bar{\mathfrak{g}} = \left\{ \begin{pmatrix} A & X & Y \\ -Z^t & 0 & -X^t \\ T & Z & -A^t \end{pmatrix} \right\}, \quad \bar{\mathfrak{p}} = \left\{ \begin{pmatrix} A & 0 & 0 \\ -Z^t & 0 & 0 \\ T & Z & -A^t \end{pmatrix} \right\},$$

where $A, Y, T \in \text{Mat}_n(\mathbb{R})$, $X, Z \in \mathbb{R}^n$, $Y + Y^t = T + T^t = 0$.

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where $A, Y, T \in \text{Mat}_n(\mathbb{R})$, $X, Z \in \mathbb{R}^n$, $Y + Y^t = T + T^t = 0$.

We introduce the obvious basis $e^{[ij]}$, e^j , e_j^i , e_j , $e_{[ij]}$ in \bar{g} .

The commutation relations are given by:

$$[e^{[ij]}, e_{[jk]}] = -e_k^i - \delta_k^i e_j^j = \begin{cases} -e_k^i, & k \neq i \\ -e_i^i - e_j^j, & k = i \end{cases}$$

The metric S defines a reduction of \bar{P} -principle bundle $\bar{\mathcal{G}}$ to $G_0 = SO_n(\mathbb{R})$ -principle bundle \mathcal{G} of orthogonal frames. The sub-Riemannian structure in the background can be given in terms of orthonormal frame X_1, \dots, X_n on D .

We define $X_{[ij]} = -[X_i, X_j]$. Due to the fact that D is a free distribution the graded symbol of $\{X_i, X_{[jk]}\}$ is given by $e_i, e_{[jk]}$ with the same relations as in $\bar{\mathfrak{g}}$.

The infinitesimal model is given by

$$\mathfrak{g} = \mathfrak{g}_{-2} \oplus \mathfrak{g}_{-1} \oplus \mathfrak{g}_0 = \langle e_{[ij]} \rangle \oplus \langle e_k \rangle \oplus \langle a_j^i \rangle.$$

Theorem

The $H^2(\mathfrak{g}_-, \bar{\mathfrak{g}})$ part of $H^2(\mathfrak{g}_-, \mathfrak{g})$ is the entire $H^2(\mathfrak{g}_-, \bar{\mathfrak{g}})$, i.e. the subspace of totally trace-free elements in

$$\text{Hom}(\mathfrak{g}_{-1} \wedge \mathfrak{g}_{-2}, \mathfrak{g}_{-2}).$$

The $H^1(\mathfrak{g}_-, \bar{\mathfrak{g}}/\mathfrak{g})$ part of $H^2(\mathfrak{g}_-, \mathfrak{g})$ consists of 2 subspaces:

- in degree 1 it is generated by symmetric and traceless in (i, j) tensors

$$\alpha_{(ij)}^k = \left(e_j \otimes e_i^* + e_i \otimes e_j^* + \sum_t (e_{[jt]} \otimes e_{[it]}^* + e_{[it]} \otimes e_{[jt]}^*) \right) \wedge e_k^*$$

- in degree 2 it is generated by symmetric in (p, q) tensors

$$\alpha_{(pq)} = \sum_t e_t \otimes (e_{[tp]}^* \wedge e_q^* + e_{[tq]}^* \wedge e_p^*) + \sum_{t,r} e_{[tr]} \otimes e_{[tp]}^* \wedge e_{[qr]}^*.$$

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Theorem

Assume $n \geq 4$. The only constant curvature models for free step 2 sub-Riemannian geometries are defined on $SO(n+1)$ and $SO(n,1)$ with orthonormal frame given by the elements of \mathfrak{so}_{n+1} of the form

$$\begin{pmatrix} 0 & A_i^t \\ -A_i & 0_n \end{pmatrix},$$

and by the elements of $\mathfrak{so}_{n,1}$ of the form

$$\begin{pmatrix} 0 & A_i^t \\ A_i & 0_n \end{pmatrix},$$

where the only non-zero element in A_i is on the place i .

We have to check the individual invariants components of the harmonic curvature for the trivial submodules in the \mathfrak{so}_n decomposition.

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While there are no such trivial submodules in the totally tracefree part of $\text{Hom}(\mathfrak{g}_{-1} \wedge \mathfrak{g}_{-2}, \mathfrak{g}_{-2})$, and in the homogeneity one traceless in (i, j) tensors

$$\alpha_{(ij)}^k = \left(e_j \otimes e_i^* + e_i \otimes e_j^* + \sum_t (e_{[jt]} \otimes e_{[it]}^* + e_{[it]} \otimes e_{[jt]}^*) \right) \wedge e_k^*,$$

there is just one such module in

$$\alpha_{(pq)} = \sum_t e_t \otimes (e_{[tp]}^* \wedge e_q^* + e_{[tq]}^* \wedge e_p^*) + \sum_{t,r} e_{[tr]} \otimes e_{[tp]}^* \wedge e_{[qr]}^*.$$

.

The models with positive and negative curvature are just those in the theorem.