INTEGRABILITY CONDITIONS FOR $\Delta u = k - Ke^{au}$ WITH APPLICATIONS TO RIEMANNIAN GEOMETRY

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1. In this note we announce some integrability conditions for the equation $\Delta u = k - Ke^{au}$ on compact orientable Riemannian 2-manifolds (where $\Delta$ is the Laplacian), and we give some applications to problems in Riemannian geometry. Further results and details will appear elsewhere. We begin with a description of the geometry problem which led us to a study of the above equation. $M$, throughout, will denote a compact, connected, oriented, 2-dimensional manifold.

Problem. What are necessary and sufficient conditions on a sufficiently smooth (we shall restrict ourselves to $C^\infty$ data here) function $K$ on $M$ for $K$ to be the Gaussian curvature of some Riemannian metric on $M$?

If $K$ is the Gaussian curvature of a Riemannian metric $g$ with volume form $\omega$ on $M$, the only known global condition which $K$ must satisfy is the Gauss-Bonnet formula

$$\int_M K\omega = 2\pi \chi(M),$$

where $\chi(M)$ is the Euler characteristic of $M$. Here $K\omega$ is called the curvature form of the metric $g$. One can rephrase the above question in terms of curvature forms, and in this case it turns out [9] that the condition $\int_M \Omega = 2\pi \chi(M)$ is not only necessary but also is sufficient for a two form $\Omega$ to be the curvature form of a Riemannian metric on $M$. As for the Gaussian curvature functions themselves, (1) seems only to impose certain sign requirements depending on the genus of $M$. Specifically, it seems natural to expect that a necessary and sufficient condition for a smooth function $K$ to be the Gaussian curvature of a Riemannian metric on $M$ is

(i) that $K$ be positive somewhere if genus($M$) = 0,
(ii) that $K$ change sign, if not identically 0, if genus($M$) = 1,
(iii) that $K$ be negative somewhere if genus($M$) > 1.

As a special case of (i), H. Gluck has recently shown [3] that $K$ is a Gaussian curvature if $K$ is strictly positive. His approach is to...
show that by composing $K$ with a diffeomorphism one can satisfy the integrability conditions for the Minkowski problem. This approach, however, is limited to the case of genus 0 and strictly positive $K$.

Let $g$ be a given Riemannian metric on $M$ with Gaussian curvature $k$. We attack the above problem by trying to realize $K$ (or $K \circ \phi$ where $\phi$ is an arbitrary diffeomorphism of $M$) as the curvature of a metric $\bar{g}$ pointwise conformal to $g$, that is, of the form $\bar{g} = e^{2u}g$ for some $C^\infty$ function $u$ on $M$. This approach has the advantage that, in principle at least, it is applicable to all cases (i)–(iii) and it leads directly to the specific partial differential equation for $u$,

\begin{equation}
\Delta u = k - Ke^{2u},
\end{equation}

where $\Delta$ is the Laplacian of the metric $g$.

In this form our problem is related to a question posed by L. Nirenberg who asked, for a given smooth strictly positive function $K$ on $S^2$, whether or not there is a compact strictly convex surface $\Sigma$ in $E^3$ and a conformal diffeomorphism $\phi: \Sigma \to S^2$ such that $K \circ \phi$ is the Gaussian curvature of $\Sigma$. This reduces directly to the question of the existence of solutions of $\Delta u = 1 - Ke^{2u}$ on $S^2$ for a given strictly positive $K$. It has been shown by D. Koutroufiotis [6] that this equation does have solutions for symmetric functions $K$ on $S^2$ sufficiently close to the function 1. However, it is a consequence of one of our integrability conditions (see §3 below) that there are $K$ arbitrarily close to 1 for which this equation has no solutions.

Melvyn Berger pointed out to us some work [1] that he had done on equation (2) by variational methods, and using these methods he has made some progress [2] on our questions (ii) and (iii), answering (iii) affirmatively for strictly negative $K$ and providing a partial solution for (ii), a complete solution for which we announce below.

2. In this section $M$ is a compact, connected, oriented, Riemannian 2-manifold, with $\Delta$ the associated Laplace operator and $\omega$ the volume form. Let $f$ be a $C^\infty$ function on $M$ with $\int_M f \omega = 0$. In this situation we have a necessary and sufficient condition on $h$ for there to exist a solution of $\Delta u = f + he^{au}$ for $\alpha$ a positive real constant.

**Theorem 1.** We consider the equation $\Delta u = f + he^{au}$ under the assumptions that $\int_M f \omega = 0$ and $\alpha > 0$. If $h \equiv 0$, the equation has a solution. If $h$ is not identically zero, then a necessary and sufficient condition for there to exist a solution is that $h$ take on both positive and negative values, and that $\int_M he^{au} \omega > 0$, where $v$ is a solution of $\Delta v = f$.

The proof uses a variational argument together with an extension
of the Trudinger Inequality [8], [7], [5] to manifolds. In the case of
the torus, this gives necessary and sufficient conditions for curvature
functions to be related by a conformal change of metric. As an appli­
cation of Theorem 1 we prove

THEOREM 2. A necessary and sufficient condition for a smooth func­
tion $K$ to be the Gaussian curvature of some Riemannian metric on the
torus is that $K$ change sign if not identically 0.

A more subtle consequence of Theorem 1 is the following result, which one might expect since there is no Gauss-Bonnet theorem for
the plane $E^2$.

THEOREM 3. Each $C^\infty$ function on the plane $E^2$ is the Gaussian curva­
ture of some Riemannian on $E^2$.

3. In this section we consider the equation $\Delta u = 1 - Ke^{2u}$ on the
2-sphere $S^2$, where $\Delta$ is the Laplacian of the standard metric. Our
main result is the following integrability condition, which shows,
among other things, that there are functions $K$ on $S^2$ which are known
to be curvature functions but which cannot be realized by a con­
formal change of the standard metric.

THEOREM 4. A necessary condition on $K$ for there to exist a solution
of $\Delta u = 1 - Ke^{2u}$ on $S^2$ is that

$$\int_{S^2} (e^{2u} \nabla K \cdot \nabla F) \omega = 0$$

for all spherical harmonics $F$ of degree 1. (Here $\nabla$ denotes the gradient on
$S^2$.)

This necessary condition can easily be generalized to cover the
equation $\Delta u = k - Ke^{2u}$ with $\int_{S^2} k \omega = 4\pi$.

It follows immediately, for example, that $\Delta u = 1 - Ke^{2u}$ has no
solutions if $K$ is a spherical harmonic of degree 1 since in this case the
integral in (3) is necessarily positive for $K = F$. Since the integral in
(3) is unchanged by adding constants to $K$, one can easily construct
examples of strictly positive $C^\infty$ functions on $S^2$, for example $2 + \cos \phi$
we use spherical coordinates $z = \cos \phi$, $x = \sin \phi \cos \theta$, $y = \sin \phi \sin \theta$
for which the equation has no solutions, thereby answering Niren­
berg’s question negatively. If one takes the special case in which
$F = \cos \phi$, then (3), in spherical coordinates, becomes

$$\int_0^\pi \left\{ \int_0^{2\pi} e^{2u} K \sin^2 \phi \, d\theta \right\} \, d\phi = 0.$$
It was this form of (3) to which we were first led by our observation of the nonexistence of rotationally symmetric (function of $\phi$ alone) solutions for $\Delta u = 1 - Ke^{2u}$ given rotationally symmetric data $K$ (see [4]).

It appears that (3) poses no a priori constraint if one allows the modification of $K$ by a diffeomorphism $\phi$ of $S^2$. Thus it is possible that for each $K$ which is positive somewhere on $S^2$ there is a diffeomorphism $\phi$ of $S^2$ such that $\Delta u = 1 - (K \circ \phi)e^{2u}$ has a solution. If this be the case, then $K \circ \phi$ and hence $K$ would be Gaussian curvatures of Riemannian metrics on $S^2$, thereby answering (i) affirmatively.

4. The equation in §3 becomes much more interesting if we free it from the geometric case of exponent 2 in $e^{2u}$ and consider the equation $\Delta u = f + he^{au}$ on an arbitrary compact, connected, oriented Riemannian 2-manifold $M$, under the assumptions that $\text{vol}(M) > 0$ and that $h$ be negative somewhere. In this situation we have the following theorem, which has been observed in a special case by Berger and Moser.

**Theorem 5.** Suppose that $(\text{vol}(M))^{-1}\int_M f\omega = c > 0$, that $h$ is negative somewhere on $M$, and that $\alpha$ is a positive real constant. Then there exists $\beta > 0$ such that for $0 < \alpha < \beta$, the equation $\Delta u = f + he^{au}$ always has a solution.

As in the case of Theorem 1 the proof here uses a variational argument together with the Trudinger Inequality on manifolds. Using his sharp version of the Trudinger inequality for $S^2$ [7], Moser has shown that one can take $\beta = 2$ on $S^2$. Our Theorem 4 shows that 2 is the best possible value for $\beta$ on $S^2$. One of the interesting phenomena here is the different nature of the constraints at the extremes of the range $0 < \alpha \beta < \beta$. At the value $c = 0$, corresponding to our Theorem 1, where we have a necessary and sufficient condition, the constraint is an integral inequality on $h$ plus the requirement that $h$ take on both positive and negative values. On $S^2$, for $\alpha = 2$, the only known constraint so far is the “Gauss-Bonnet theorem” and an integral identity involving the derivatives of $h$. The fact that 2 is the best possible value of $\beta$ for $S^2$ is intimately tied to the fact that 2 is the lowest nonzero eigenvalue of $(-\Delta)$. We have no information on $S^2$ for the range $2 < \alpha < 6$. But again at 6, which is the next eigenvalue of $(-\Delta)$ we have a constraint analogous to (3) showing that there are rotationally symmetric $K$, for example $K = 3 \cos^2 \phi - 1$, for which $\Delta u = 1 - Ke^{6u}$ has no rotationally symmetric solutions.

**Added in Proof.** It follows from a strengthened version of The-
Theorem 1 that a necessary and sufficient condition for a smooth function $K$ on the Klein bottle to be the Gaussian curvature of some metric is that $K$ change sign if not identically zero.

Recently, Moser has shown that (2) has antipodally symmetric solutions on $S^2$ if $k=1$ and if $K$ is an antipodally symmetric function which is positive somewhere. From this it follows that the condition of being positive somewhere characterizes curvature functions on the real projective plane.

References


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