ABOUT PSEUDO-RIEMANNIAN LICHNEROWICZ CONJECTURE

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Abstract. We construct what we think to be the first known examples of compact pseudo-Riemannian manifolds having an essential group of conformal transformations, and which are not conformally flat. Our examples cover all types (p, q), with $2 \le p \le q$.

1. Introduction

The aim of this short note is to provide a negative answer to the following question, raised by G. D'Ambra and M. Gromov in [DG] under the name of *pseudo-Riemannian Lichnerowicz Conjecture*.

Question 1 ([**DG**] **p96**). Let (M, g) be a compact pseudo-Riemannian manifold of dimension $n \geq 3$. Assume that the group of conformal transformations of (M, g) does not preserve any metric in the conformal class [g]. Is then (M, g) conformally flat?

When there does not exist any metric in the conformal class [g] of a pseudo-Riemannian manifold (M,g) for which the conformal group Conf(M,g) acts isometrically, one usually says that Conf(M,g) is essential, or equivalently that (M,[g]) is an essential conformal structure.

Question 1 is a generalization to the pseudo-Riemannian framework of a question asked by A. Lichnerowicz in the middle of the sixties. The conjecture raised by Lichnerowicz was that among compact Riemannian manifolds, the standard sphere is the only essential conformal structure. Following several attempts providing partial solutions to the conjecture, a complete answer was given independently by M. Obata and J. Ferrand.

Theorem 1 ([Ob],[Fe1]). Let (M,g) be a compact Riemannian manifold of dimension $n \geq 2$. If the conformal group of (M,g) is essential then (M,g) is conformally diffeomorphic to the standard sphere \mathbf{S}^n .

We won't detail here the interesting developments of Theorem 1 in the non-compact case (see [Fe2], [Sch], [Fr3]), and for other structures than conformal ones ([Mat], [MRTZ]). We refer the interested reader to the very nice survey [Fe3] which

^{*}Supported by the ANR program Aspects Conformes de la Géométrie Received . Accepted .

reviews the full history of the conjecture. Reference [KM] deals with the parallel results for strictly pseudoconvex CR-structures.

Here, we will only focus on the non-Riemannian situation, the basic question being to find a generalization to Theorem 1 for pseudo-Riemannian manifolds. Recall that for any type (p,q), $1 \le p \le q$, there is a compact structure generalizing the standard conformal sphere. It is type-(p,q) Einstein's universe $\mathbf{Ein}^{p,q}$, namely the product $\mathbb{S}^p \times \mathbb{S}^q$ endowed with the conformal class of the product metric $-g_{S^p} \oplus g_{S^q}$ (where g_{S^m} stands for the Riemannian metric with constant curvature +1 on \mathbb{S}^m). The conformal group of $\mathbf{Ein}^{p,q}$ is the pseudo-Riemannian Möbius group O(p+1,q+1), and this conformal group is essential. Let us also emphasize that the space $\mathbf{Ein}^{p,q}$ is conformally flat, namely each point of $\mathbf{Ein}^{p,q}$ admits a small neighborhood conformally diffeomorphic to an open subset of type-(p,q) Minkowski space.

A direct generalization of Theorem 1 would be that $\mathbf{Ein}^{p,q}$ (and its finite covers when p=1) is the only compact type-(p,q) conformal structure admitting an essential conformal group. It turns out that such a statement is far from true, already in the Lorentzian framework, as the following result shows.

Theorem 2 ([Fr1]). For every pair of integers (n,g), with $n \geq 3$ and $g \geq 1$, the manifold obtained as the product of \mathbb{S}^1 and the connected sum of g copies of $\mathbb{S}^1 \times \mathbb{S}^{n-2}$ can be endowed with infinitely many distinct conformally flat Lorentz structures, each one being essential.

Theorem 2 contrasts with Theorem 1 in the sense that at the global level, there are a lot of compact Lorentz manifolds which are essential. Nevertheless, all examples built in [Fr1] to show Theorem 2 have the same local geometry since they are conformally flat. Hence, they do not provide a negative answer to the local question 1. Actually several results obtained for instance in [BN], [FrZ], [FrM], involving stronger essentiality assumptions on the conformal group, seemed to support a positive answer to Question 1. To this extent, our main result stated below is rather surprising.

Theorem 3. For every $p \geq 2$, and every $q \geq p$, one can construct on the product $\mathbb{S}^1 \times \mathbb{S}^{p+q-1}$ a 2-parameter family of distinct type-(p,q) analytic pseudo-Riemannian conformal structures, which are not conformally flat, and with an essential conformal group.

Let us stress the fact that examples provided by this theorem are *compact* (non-compact essential structures which are not conformally flat were already known, see for instance [A2], [KR], [Po]).

The structures constructed to get Theorem 3 will even have a stronger essentiality property, namely their conformal group can not preserve any finite Borel measure which is nonzero on open subsets. Since a pseudo-Riemannian metric defines naturally a volume form, this *strong essentiality* property is indeed stronger than the classical notion of essentiality.

Observe that Theorem 3 does not cover the Lorentzian signature, so that Question 1 remains open in this case.

2. Construction of the counterexamples

Let us fix two integers p, q, with $q \ge p \ge 2$. We write q = 2 + s for some $s \in \mathbb{N}$. We consider \mathbb{R}^{p+q} , endowed with coordinates (x_1, \ldots, x_{p+q}) and the metric

$$g_0 := 2dx_1dx_2 + x_3^2dx_1^2 + 2dx_3dx_4 + \sum_{i=5}^{p+q} \epsilon_i dx_i^2, \tag{1}$$

where

 $-\epsilon_j = 1 \text{ if } j \in \{5, \dots, 4+s\}.$

- $\epsilon_i = -1$ otherwise.

The metric g_0 is pseudo-Riemannian of signature (p,q) on \mathbb{R}^{p+q} . Actually, expression (1) makes sense only when q>2 (or equivalently $s\geq 1$), which we will assume in all the paper. To build type-(2,2) examples, one merely has to consider the metric $2dx_1dx_2+x_3^2dx_1^2+2dx_3dx_4$ on \mathbb{R}^4 and all what we do below adapts in a straightforward way. Observe that those type-(2,2) metrics where already considered for other purposes, for instance in [DW, section 6.3].

Let us pick a vector $\lambda = (\alpha, \beta) \in \mathbb{R}^2$, and consider the linear transformation of \mathbb{R}^{p+q} whose matrix in coordinates (x_1, \ldots, x_{p+q}) is given by

$$\varphi_{\lambda} = \operatorname{diag}(e^{-\alpha+2\beta}, e^{3\alpha}, e^{2\alpha-\beta}, e^{3\beta}, e^{\alpha+\beta}, \dots, e^{\alpha+\beta}).$$

One checks immediately that $(\varphi_{\lambda})^*g_0 = e^{2(\alpha+\beta)}g_0$, so that φ_{λ} is a conformal diffeomorphism of (\mathbb{R}^{p+q}, g_0) . Actually, any diagonal linear transformation of \mathbb{R}^{p+q} which is conformal for g_0 must be of the form φ_{λ} for some $\lambda \in \mathbb{R}^2$.

We are going to consider the open subset of \mathbb{R}^2 defined by

$$\Lambda = \{ (\alpha, \beta) \in \mathbb{R}^2 \mid \alpha < \beta < \frac{\alpha}{2} < 0 \}.$$

For every $\lambda \in \Lambda$, all entries of φ_{λ} are in the interval]0,1[, hence the group Γ_{λ} generated by φ_{λ} acts freely properly and discontinuously on

$$\dot{\mathbb{R}}^{p+q} = \mathbb{R}^{p+q} \setminus \{0\}.$$

Because Γ_{λ} preserves the conformal class $[g_0]$, the quotient manifold

$$M_{\lambda} = \dot{\mathbb{R}}^{p+q}/\Gamma_{\lambda}$$

inherits from $[g_0]$ a type-(p,q), analytic conformal structure $[g_{\lambda}]$.

When $\lambda \in \Lambda$, φ_{λ} is a linear Euclidean contraction preserving orientation and it is not hard to check that the manifold M_{λ} is analytically diffeomorphic to the product $\mathbb{S}^1 \times \mathbb{S}^{p+q-1}$.

2.1. The conformal structures $(M_{\lambda}, [g_{\lambda}])_{{\lambda} \in {\Lambda}}$ are strongly essential

We consider the conformal structure $(M_{\lambda}, [g_{\lambda}])$, where $\lambda \in \Lambda$. On $\mathbb{R}^{p,q}$, let us define the flow

$$\varphi^t = \operatorname{diag}(e^{-\frac{3}{2}t}, e^{-\frac{3}{2}t}, 1, e^{-3t}, e^{-\frac{3}{2}t}, \dots, e^{-\frac{3}{2}t}).$$

This flow satisfies $(\varphi^t)^*g_0 = e^{-3t}g_0$, hence is conformal for g_0 . Moreover, it centralizes Γ_{λ} , hence induces a conformal flow $\overline{\varphi}^t$ on $(M_{\lambda}, [g_{\lambda}])$. Let

$$\pi_{\lambda}: \dot{\mathbb{R}}^{p+q} \to M_{\lambda}$$

be the covering map. Let us consider the "box"

$$U = \{(x_1, \dots, x_{p+q}) \in \mathbb{R}^{p+q} \mid x_j \in [-\frac{1}{2}, \frac{1}{2}] \text{ for } j \neq 3 \text{ and } x_3 \in [\frac{1}{2}, \frac{3}{2}]\},$$

and the segment

$$I = \{(0, 0, x_3, 0, \dots, 0) \in \mathbb{R}^{p+q} \mid x_3 \in [\frac{1}{2}, \frac{3}{2}]\}.$$

Then, one has

$$\lim_{t \to +\infty} \overline{\varphi}^t(\pi_\lambda(U)) = \pi_\lambda(I), \tag{2}$$

the limit being taken for the Hausdorff topology. Relation (2) implies that the flow $\overline{\varphi}^t$ can not preserve any finite Borel measure on M_{λ} which is positive on open sets, hence $(M_{\lambda}, [g_{\lambda}])$ is a strongly essential conformal structure.

2.2. Some curvature computations

We must now check that for every $\lambda \in \Lambda$, the structure $(M_{\lambda}, [g_{\lambda}])$ is not conformally flat. For that, it is enough to check that $[g_0]$ is not conformally flat, which will be ensured by Proposition 4 below. In all this section, we denote by ∇ , R, W respectively the Levi-Civita connection, the Riemann curvature tensor, and the Weyl tensor of the metric g_0 . We will adopt the notation e_i , $i = 1, \ldots, p + q$, for the coordinate vector field $\frac{\partial}{\partial x^i}$.

Proposition 4. The metric g_0 is Ricci flat but not flat. Hence it is not conformally flat. The only nonzero component of the Weyl tensor W are, at each $x \in \mathbb{R}^{p,q}$

$$W(e_1, e_3, e_1) = -W(e_3, e_1, e_1) = e_4$$

and

$$W(e_3, e_1, e_3) = -W(e_1, e_3, e_3) = e_2.$$

In particular the Weyl tensor of g_{λ} is nowhere zero on M_{λ} .

Proof. Let us first recall Koszul's formula, for pairwise commuting vector fields X, Y, Z on \mathbb{R}^{p+q} .

$$2g_0(\nabla_X Y, Z) = X.g_0(Y, Z) + Y.g_0(Z, X) - Z.g_0(X, Y)$$
(3)

Thanks to (3), and given that among the functions

$$g_0(e_i, e_j), i, j \in \{1, \dots, p+q\},\$$

the only nonconstant one is $g_0(e_1, e_1) = x_3^2$, we get that all the expressions $g_0(\nabla_{e_i}e_j, e_k)$ vanish, except:

$$g_0(\nabla_{e_1}e_1, e_3) = -x_3$$

and

$$g_0(\nabla_{e_1}e_3, e_1) = g_0(\nabla_{e_3}e_1, e_1) = x_3.$$

Hence $\nabla_{e_1} e_1 = -x_3 e_4$ and $\nabla_{e_1} e_3 = \nabla_{e_3} e_1 = x_3 e_2$.

It follows that all the curvature components $R(e_i, e_j)e_k$ vanish, except

$$R(e_3, e_1)e_1 = \nabla_{e_3}(-x_3e_4) - \nabla_{e_1}(x_3e_2) = -e_4$$

and

$$R(e_3, e_1)e_3 = \nabla_{e_3}(x_3e_2) - 0 = e_2.$$

This implies that the Ricci tensor of g_0 is identically zero, which yields W = R. Because R is nonzero at each point of \mathbb{R}^{p+q} , we conclude that g_0 , hence g_{λ} , is not conformally flat, and moreover that the Weyl tensor of g_{λ} is nonzero at each point of M_{λ} .

2.3. The conformal structures $(M_{\lambda}, [g_{\lambda}])_{{\lambda} \in {\Lambda}}$ are pairwise distinct

To get Theorem 3, it remains to show that whenever $\lambda = (\alpha, \beta)$ and $\tilde{\lambda} = (\tilde{\alpha}, \tilde{\beta})$ are distinct in Λ , then $(M_{\lambda}, [g_{\lambda}])$ and $(M_{\tilde{\lambda}}, [g_{\tilde{\lambda}}])$ are not conformally diffeomorphic. This will be done through several observations.

Conformally invariant plane distribution on $(\dot{\mathbb{R}}^{p+q}, [g])$. We saw in Proposition 4 that for every $x \in \mathbb{R}^{p+q}$, the only nonzero components of W_x are

$$W_x(e_1(x), e_3(x), e_1(x)) = -W_x(e_3(x), e_1(x), e_1(x)) = e_4(x)$$

and

$$W_x(e_3(x), e_1(x), e_3(x)) = -W_x(e_1(x), e_3(x), e_3(x)) = e_2(x).$$

This implies that

$$\text{Im}W_x = \text{Span}(e_2(x), e_4(x))$$
 for every $x \in \mathbb{R}^{p+q}$.

The 2-dimensional distribution $(\operatorname{Span}(e_2(x), e_4(x)))_{x \in \mathbb{R}^{p+q}}$ clearly integrates into a foliation of \mathbb{R}^{p+q} which is preserved by Γ_{λ} . Hence, we get a 2-dimensional foliation on M_{λ} , that we denote by \mathcal{F}_{λ} . Let us stress that \mathcal{F}_{λ} is defined by the conformal structure $[g_{\lambda}]$, since it integrates the distribution given by the image of the Weyl tensor of $[g_{\lambda}]$. In particular, any conformal diffeomorphism between $(M_{\lambda}, [g_{\lambda}])$ and $(M_{\tilde{\lambda}}, [g_{\tilde{\lambda}}])$ maps \mathcal{F}_{λ} to $\mathcal{F}_{\tilde{\lambda}}$.

Observe moreover that among the leaves tangent to the distribution

$$\operatorname{Span}(e_2(x), e_4(x))_{x \in \mathbb{R}^{p+q}},$$

only one is preserved individually by Γ_{λ} , namely

$$\Sigma = \{(0, u, 0, v, 0, \dots, 0) \in \dot{\mathbb{R}}^{p,q} \mid (u, v) \in \dot{\mathbb{R}}^2\} \subset \dot{\mathbb{R}}^{p+q}.$$

It follows that \mathcal{F}_{λ} admits a unique closed leaf Σ_{λ} , diffeomorphic to a 2-torus, and obtained by projecting Σ on M_{λ} .

Distinguished closed lightlike geodesics on $(M_{\lambda}, [g_{\lambda}])$. Let (M, g) be a pseudo-Riemannian manifold, which is not Riemannian. We denote by ∇ the Levi-Civita connection associated to the metric g. A 1-dimensional immersed submanifold γ of M is called a *lightlike geodesic* if there exists a parametrization $\gamma: I \to M$ satisfying

$$g_0(\dot{\gamma}, \dot{\gamma}) = 0 \tag{4}$$

and

$$\nabla_{\dot{\gamma}}\dot{\gamma} = 0. \tag{5}$$

A parametrization $s \mapsto \gamma(s)$ satisfying (5) is called an affine parametrization of γ .

Whereas equation (5) depends on the choice of a metric g in the conformal class [g], the property for a 1-dimensional immersed submanifold γ to be a lightlike geodesic only depends on [g]. This is a direct consequence of the relation between the Levi-Civita connections of two metrics in the same conformal class (see for instance [M] for the related computations).

However, an affine parametrization $s \mapsto \gamma(s)$ with respect to g won't be in general an affine parametrization for another g' in the conformal class [g]. Yet, and this is a remarkable fact, there does exist a finite dimensional, conformally invariant, family of local parametrizations for a lightlike geodesic. To see this, let us consider $s \mapsto \gamma(s)$ a lightlike geodesic of (M, g), with affine parameter s. A parameter p = p(s) will be said to be *projective* if it satisfies the equation

$$\{p,s\} = -\frac{2}{n-2}Ric(\dot{\gamma}(s),\dot{\gamma}(s)). \tag{6}$$

In equation (6), Ric denotes the Ricci tensor of the metric g and $\{p, s\}$ is the Schwarzian derivative of p, namely

$$\{p,s\} = \frac{p'''}{p'} - \frac{3}{2} \left(\frac{p''}{p'}\right)^2.$$

Recall that $\{p,u\}=0$ if and only if p=h(u), where h is an homographic transformation. From the chain rule $\{p,q\}=(\{p,s\}-\{q,s\})(\frac{ds}{dq})^2$, one infers that q=q(s) is another projective parameter for γ if and only if there exists an homographic transformations h such that q=h(p).

Let $g' = e^{2\sigma}g$ be a metric in the conformal class of g. Suppose that we parametrize some piece of γ by an affine parameter s with respect to the metric g, and by an affine parameter t with respect to the metric g'. If p = p(s) is a projective parameter associated to s, and q = q(t) is a projective parameter associated to t, the relation $\{p,q\} = 0$ must hold (see [M, Proposition 2.10]). In other words, q is also a projective parameter associated to s and s is a projective parameter associated to s, hence the class of projective parameters depends only on the conformal class s

Assume now that γ is a closed lightlike geodesic of (M, [g]). The previous discussion shows that around each point of γ , there is a small segment which can be parametrized projectively and two such projective parametrizations differ by applying a suitable homographic transformation. In other words, the 1-dimensional

manifold γ is endowed with a $(\mathbb{RP}^1, \mathrm{PSL}(2,\mathbb{R}))$ -structure, and this structure is an invariant of the conformal class [q].

Let us illustrate this on our structures $(M_{\lambda}, [g_{\lambda}])$. We keep the notations of Section 2.2 and denote by ∇ the Levi-Civita connection of g_0 . We already computed that on \mathbb{R}^{p+q} , the quantities $\nabla_{e_2}e_2$, $\nabla_{e_2}e_4$ and $\nabla_{e_4}e_4$ are identically zero. It follows that lightlike geodesics of the surface $\Sigma \subset \mathbb{R}^{p+q}$ are just pieces of straightlines $s \mapsto x_0 + s.u$, where $x_0 \in \Sigma$ and $u \in \operatorname{Span}(e_2, e_4)$, parametrized by some interval $I \subset \mathbb{R}$ of the form $I = \mathbb{R}$, $I =]-\infty, a[$ or $I =]b, +\infty[$. Lightlike geodesics of Σ_{λ} are thus merely the curves $s \mapsto \pi_{\lambda}(x_0 + s.u)$. Among them, only four are closed, namely:

- $\begin{array}{ll} (1) \ \, \gamma_{\lambda}^{+} :]0, +\infty[\to M_{\lambda}, \ \, s \mapsto \pi_{\lambda}((0,s,0,\ldots,0)). \\ (2) \ \, \gamma_{\lambda}^{-} :]0, +\infty[\to M_{\lambda}, \ \, s \mapsto \pi_{\lambda}((0,-s,0,\ldots,0)). \\ (3) \ \, \delta_{\lambda}^{+} :]0, +\infty[\to M_{\lambda}, \ \, s \mapsto \pi_{\lambda}((0,0,0,s,0,\ldots,0)). \\ (4) \ \, \delta_{\lambda}^{-} :]0, +\infty[\to M_{\lambda}, \ \, s \mapsto \pi_{\lambda}((0,0,0,-s,0,\ldots,0)). \end{array}$

The parametrizations of geodesics of Σ which are of the form $s \mapsto x_0 + s.u$ are affine with respect to g_0 (again because $\nabla_{e_2}e_2 = \nabla_{e_2}e_4 = \nabla_{e_4}e_4 = 0$). The key point is that because g_0 is Ricci-flat, equation (6) tells us that those parametrizations are actually projective. A conformal map preserves projective parametrizations, hence $s\mapsto \gamma_{\lambda}^{\pm}(s)$ and $s\mapsto \delta_{\lambda}^{\pm}(s)$ are projective parametrizations for the closed lightlike geodesics of Σ_{λ} . This tells us in particular that the $(\mathbb{RP}^1,\mathrm{PSL}(2,\mathbb{R}))$ -structures on γ_{δ}^+ and γ_{δ}^- are both projectively equivalent to the quotient $]0,+\infty[/\{z\mapsto e^{3\alpha}z\},$ and those on δ_{λ}^+ and δ_{λ}^- are projectively equivalent to $]0,+\infty[/\{z\mapsto e^{3\beta}z\}.$

Conclusion. Let $\lambda = (\alpha, \beta)$ and $\tilde{\lambda} = (\tilde{\alpha}, \tilde{\beta})$ be two points of Λ . Assume that there exists a conformal diffeomorphism

$$f:(M_{\lambda},[g_{\lambda}])\to (M_{\tilde{\lambda}},[g_{\tilde{\lambda}}]).$$

As observed before, f maps Σ_{λ} to $\Sigma_{\tilde{\lambda}}$, and the set of closed lightlike geodesics of Σ_{λ} to the set of closed lightlike geodesics of $\Sigma_{\tilde{\lambda}}$. Hence the set $\{\gamma_{\lambda}^{\pm}, \delta_{\lambda}^{\pm}\}$ is mapped to $\{\gamma_{\tilde{\lambda}}^{\pm}, \delta_{\tilde{\lambda}}^{\pm}\}$, the maps being projective with respect to the distinguished $(\mathbb{RP}^1, \mathrm{PSL}(2,\mathbb{R}))\text{-structures on } \gamma_\lambda^\pm, \delta_\lambda^\pm, \gamma_{\tilde{\lambda}}^\pm, \delta_{\tilde{\lambda}}^\pm.$

The last observation is that whenever μ and ν are two distinct reals in]0,1[, the projective structures $]0, +\infty[/\{z\mapsto \mu.z\}]$ and $]0, +\infty[/\{z\mapsto \nu.z\}]$ are distinct. This is just because no homographic transformation mapping $]0, +\infty[$ to itself conjugates the groups generated by $z \mapsto \mu.z$ and $z \mapsto \nu.z$ respectively.

We thus infer that $(e^{3\alpha}, e^{3\beta}) = (e^{3\tilde{\alpha}}, e^{3\tilde{\beta}})$ or $(e^{3\alpha}, e^{3\beta}) = (e^{3\tilde{\beta}}, e^{3\tilde{\alpha}})$. Since (α, β) and (β, α) can not be simultaneously in Λ , we conclude that $(\alpha, \beta) = (\tilde{\alpha}, \tilde{\beta})$.

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