

Zeitschrift: Commentarii Mathematici Helvetici
Herausgeber: Schweizerische Mathematische Gesellschaft
Band: 54 (1979)

Artikel: The values of sectional curvature in indefinite metrics.
Autor: Kulkarni, R.S.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-41569>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 05.02.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

The values of sectional curvature in indefinite metrics

R. S. KULKARNI[†]

In his study of symmetric spaces with respect to *indefinite* metrics, J. Wolf has shown that the sign of the sectional curvature function of these manifolds is not well-behaved except in the case of manifolds of constant curvature. More specifically, he proves e.g. that if $M = G/H$ is a symmetric space where G is a simple Lie group, say and H is the connected component of the fixed point set of an involutive automorphism of G , and if the metric of M induced from that of G defined by the Killing form of the Lie algebra of G is indefinite, then the sectional curvature function of M is nonpositive iff it is bounded from above and below (cf. Wolf [1], theorem 1.3.1 or [2], theorem 12.1.5). Moreover, among the “isotropic” manifolds with indefinite metrics, Wolf shows that only the manifolds of constant curvature have bounded sectional curvature functions (cf. [1], theorems 2.9 and 4.1). If M has dimension 2, then this result follows easily from the fact that a connected 2-dimensional locally homogeneous space must have constant curvature, the sign of which may be fixed by requiring compatibility with an appropriate Killing form. On the other hand we show here that, for dimension ≥ 3 , a more precise result holds without any hypothesis of homogeneity.

THEOREM. *Let M^n , $n \geq 3$, be a connected, smooth manifold with a smooth, indefinite metric. If the sectional curvature function of M is either bounded from above or bounded from below, then M is of constant curvature.*

Proof. Denote the sectional curvature function by K , the curvature tensor by R and the metric by $\langle \cdot, \cdot \rangle$ and suppose that the index of the metric is h where $0 < h < n$. Recall that K is defined only for nondegenerate 2-dimensional subspaces: if v, w are linearly independent vectors at a point in M such that

$$\|v \wedge w\|^2 = \langle v, v \rangle \langle w, w \rangle - \langle v, w \rangle^2 \neq 0,$$

[†] Supported by the NSF grant MCS 77-04151.

and

$$K(\text{span}\{v, w\}) = \frac{\langle R(v, w)v, w \rangle}{\|v \wedge w\|^2}.$$

Suppose that $K \neq \text{constant}$. Then by Schur's theorem (cf. [2], 2.2.7), since $n \geq 3$, there exists a point p in M such that K does not take the same value for all nondegenerate 2-dimensional subspaces of the tangent space at p . The assertion is that at p itself K takes arbitrarily large positive and negative values. If this were false, then say K is bounded from below, say by d . (The argument is similar if K is bounded from above.) Consider a 3-dimensional subspace σ of the tangent space at p on which the metric is nondegenerate and *indefinite* and consider an orthonormal frame $\{e_i, e_j, e_\alpha\}$ spanning this subspace. For definiteness, let

$$\langle e_i, e_i \rangle = \langle e_j, e_j \rangle = -1, \quad \langle e_\alpha, e_\alpha \rangle = 1. \quad (1.1)$$

Denote $\langle R(e_i, e_j)e_i, e_\alpha \rangle$ by $R_{ij\alpha}$ and $K(\text{span}\{e_i, e_j\})$ by K_{ij} , etc. Then

$$K_{ij} = R_{ijij}, \quad K_{i\alpha} = -R_{i\alpha i\alpha}.$$

By assumption,

$$K(\text{span}\{xe_i + e_\alpha, e_j\}) = \frac{x^2 K_{ij} + 2x R_{ij\alpha} - K_{\alpha j}}{x^2 - 1} \geq d,$$

i.e.,

$$(x^2 K_{ij} - K_{\alpha j}) + 2x R_{ij\alpha} \begin{cases} \geq d(x^2 - 1) & \text{if } |x| > 1 \\ \leq d(x^2 - 1) & \text{if } |x| < 1 \end{cases} \quad (1.2)$$

so by continuity

$$x^2 K_{ij} - K_{\alpha j} + 2x R_{ij\alpha} = 0 \quad \text{if } x = 1 \text{ or } -1.$$

This implies that

$$K_{ij} = K_{\alpha j}, \quad R_{ij\alpha} = 0 \quad (1.3)$$

and, by symmetry, also

$$K_{ij} = K_{\alpha i}, \quad R_{i\alpha ij} = 0. \quad (1.3')$$

Apply this result to the frame $\{xe_i + ye_\alpha, e_j, ye_i + xe_\alpha\}$ where x, y are arbitrary real numbers satisfying $x^2 - y^2 = 1$. It follows from (1.3) that

$$\langle R(xe_i + ye_\alpha, ye_i + xe_\alpha)xe_i + ye_\alpha, e_j \rangle = 0.$$

This easily leads to $R_{i\alpha j\alpha} = 0$. These conditions on the components of R suffice to imply that K takes the same value for all nondegenerate 2-dimensional subspaces contained in σ .

Let G (resp. $G(\sigma)$) be the Grassmannian of all unoriented 2-dimensional subspaces of the tangent space at p (resp. of σ) and let G_0 (resp. $G_0(\sigma)$) be the subspace of G (resp. $G(\sigma)$) consisting of all *nondegenerate* 2-dimensional subspaces. Let S be the connected component of the identity of the group preserving a nonsingular form of index h on \mathbf{R}^n . Then S acts canonically on G and leaves G_0 invariant. The orbits of S in G_0 are easily seen to be the components of G_0 . It follows that G_0 has two components if $h = 1$ or $n - 1$, and three components otherwise. Alternatively, a component of G_0 may be described as a subset consisting of all nondegenerate 2-dimensional, mutually isometric subspaces. For the same reason, $G_0(\sigma)$ has two components, one consisting of nondegenerate 2-dimensional subspaces on which the induced metric is *indefinite* and the other consisting of those subspaces on which the induced metric is *negative definite* (cf. the choice made in (1.1)). Now evidently K is an analytic function on G_0 . A continuous variation of σ through 3-dimensional, nondegenerate subspaces shows that K is constant on an open subset intersecting two out of the possible three components of G_0 consisting of nondegenerate 2-dimensional subspaces on which the metric is indefinite or negative definite. By analyticity of K it follows that K is constant on these components. If G_0 has three components, then we apply the above reasoning to another family of nondegenerate, 3-dimensional subspaces σ' on which the induced metric has index 1. It follows that K takes the same value on all the components of G_0 . The contradiction proves the theorem.

Q.E.D.

Remark 1. It follows from the above result that *the concepts of a manifold being “positively curved” or “negatively curved” based on the sign of K are vacuous for indefinite metrics and dimension ≥ 3 except in the case of constant curvature.*

Remark 2. It may be shown by means of examples that the sectional curvature function of a smooth manifold with a smooth indefinite metric and dimension ≥ 3 may be nonconstant and still may omit certain values.

REFERENCES

- [1] WOLF, J.: Isotropic manifolds of indefinite metric, *Commentarii Math. Helv.* 39 (1964), 21–64.
- [2] WOLF, J.: *Spaces of constant curvature*, 3rd edition, Boston, Publish or Perish, Inc. (1974).

Received March 13, 1978.