

Zeitschrift: L'Enseignement Mathématique
Herausgeber: Commission Internationale de l'Enseignement Mathématique
Band: 34 (1988)
Heft: 1-2: L'ENSEIGNEMENT MATHÉMATIQUE

Artikel: GEODESICS IN THE UNIT TANGENT BUNDLE OF A ROUND SPHERE
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Kapitel: 2. Geodesics in \mathbb{S}^2
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-56596>

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2. GEODESICS IN US^2

If $(p(t), v(t))$ is a geodesic in the unit tangent bundle US^2 , then by the discussion in the preceding section, there must be a geodesic $h(t)$ through the identity in $SO(3)$ such that

$$h(t)(p(0)) = p(t) \quad \text{and} \quad h(t)(v(0)) = v(t).$$

But $h(t)$ must fix a line in three-space, and rotate the orthogonal two-plane at constant speed. Hence $p(t)$, if it moves at all, must travel along a great or small circle, and $v(t)$ must make a constant angle with this circle.

A concrete distance formula between points (p, v) and (q, w) in US^2 is easily obtained. Let δ denote the distance between p and q on S^2 , with $0 \leq \delta \leq \pi$. If this distance is less than π , that is, if p and q are not antipodal, then parallel translate v along the smaller arc of the unique great circle between p and q , and let ε denote the angle at q between this parallel translate of v and the vector w , as shown in Figure 3. If $\delta = \pi$, set $\varepsilon = 0$. Finally, let d denote the distance between (p, v) and (q, w) in US^2 . Then a straightforward calculation reveals the formula

$$\cos(d/2) = \cos(\delta/2) \cos(\varepsilon/2),$$

which is just the Pythagorean formula on a round sphere of radius 2, as indicated in Figure 4. Indeed, we have

$$US^2 = SO(3)/SO(1) = SO(3),$$

a round, real projective 3-space.

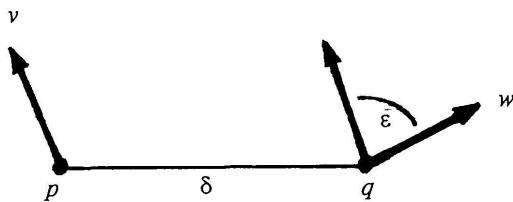


FIGURE 3

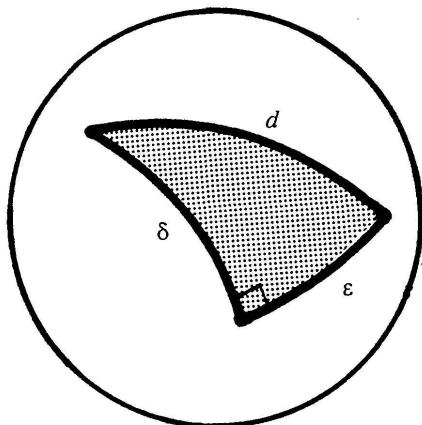


FIGURE 4