# Automorphisms of Engel Manifolds

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November 29, 2019

# What are Engel manifolds?

## Definition

Let E be a 4-manifold. An *Engel structure* on E is a completely nonintegrable distribution whose rank 2.

# F. Engel (1889,Darboux's theorem for Engel manifolds)

Let (E, D) be an Engel manifold, and let  $p \in E$ . Then, there exists a chart (U; x, y, z, w) with  $p \in U$  such that  $\mathcal{D}|_U = Ker(dy - zdx) \cap Ker(dz - wdx)$ .

# What are Engel manifolds?

# R. Montgomery(1993)

A germ of rank k "good" distribution on a *n*-manifold is "stable"  $\Rightarrow dim(G_{k,n}) = k(n-k) \le n$   $\Leftrightarrow k = 1,$ or, k = n - 1,or, (n,k) = (4,2)or, tirivial (i.e. k or n is 0)

- The word "good" means that it admits a *k*-frame generating a finie dimensional Lie algebra.
- The word "stable" means that the distribution as section of a Grassmannian bundle is stable.

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# **Previous Work**

## Theorem (1999, R. Montgomery)

There is an Engel manifold such that the automorphism group is 1 dimensional at most if it is a Lie group.

# Question (ref. AIM Problem Lists)

Is there an Engel manifold with trivial automorphism group?

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## Question (ref. AIM Problem Lists)

Is there an Engel manifold with trivial automorphism group?

 $\rightarrow$  The answer is "Yes" (Mitsumatsu, Y.)

However, the following question is open.

# Question (Mitsumatsu)

Is there an closed Engel manifold with trivial automorphism group?



### Engel structures and contact structures

- from Engel to contact
- from contact to Engel

#### Main results

- extend to orbifolds
- the development map and Engel automorphisms
- construction of the answer of AIM's problem

## Definition 1.1

Let *E* be a 4-manifold. An *Engel structure* on *E* is a smooth rank 2 distribution  $\mathcal{D} \subset TE$  with following condition:

 $\mathcal{D}^2 :\stackrel{\mathrm{def}}{=} \mathcal{D} + [\mathcal{D}, \mathcal{D}] \text{ has rank 3, and } \mathcal{D}^3 :\stackrel{\mathrm{def}}{=} \mathcal{D}^2 + [\mathcal{D}^2, \mathcal{D}^2] \text{ has rank 4.}$ 

The pair (E, D) is called an *Engel manifold*. Let  $(E_1, D_1), (E_2, D_2)$  be Engel manifolds. A *Engel morphism*  $f : (E_1, D_1) \rightarrow (E_2, D_2)$  is a local diffeomorphism  $f : E_1 \rightarrow E_2$  with  $df(D_1) \subset D_2$ .

#### Propositoin 1.2 (R. Montgomery)

Let (E, D) be an Engel manifold. Then, there exists a unique rank 1 distribution  $\exists ! \mathcal{L} \subset D$  such that  $[\mathcal{L}, D^2] \subset D^2$ .

• The above  $\mathcal{L}$  is called the *characteristic foliation* of  $(E, \mathcal{D})$ .

# Example 1.3

$$\begin{split} & \mathcal{E} \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} J^2(1,1) \cong \mathbb{R}^4 \ni (x,y,\dot{y},\ddot{y}) \\ & \mathcal{D} \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \textit{Ker}(\alpha) \cap \textit{Ker}(\beta) \left( \alpha \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} dy - \dot{y} dx, \beta \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} d\dot{y} - \ddot{y} dx \right) \\ & \longrightarrow (\mathcal{E},\mathcal{D}) \text{ is an Engel manifold.} \\ & \text{Then,} \\ & \mathcal{L} = \langle \partial_{\ddot{y}} \rangle = \textit{Ker}(\alpha) \cap \textit{Ker}(\beta) \cap \textit{Ker}(dx) \text{ is the characteristic foliation.} \\ & \text{And,} \\ & \mathcal{D} = \langle \partial_{\ddot{y}}, X \rangle = \textit{Ker}(\alpha) \cap \textit{Ker}(\beta) \left( X \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \partial_x + \dot{y} \partial_y + \ddot{y} \partial_{\dot{y}} \right), \\ & \mathcal{E} \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \mathcal{D}^2 = \langle \partial_{\ddot{y}}, X, \partial_{\dot{y}} \rangle = \textit{Ker}(\alpha). \end{split}$$

Any 3-dimensional submanifold  $M \subset E$  intersecting transversally the characteristic foliation has a contact structure  $TM \cap D^2$ .

#### Definition 1.4

Let *M* be an odd dimensional manifold. A *contact structure* on *M* is a corank 1 distribution  $\xi \subset TM$  such that, for any local differential form  $\alpha$  with  $\xi = Ker(\alpha)$ ,  $d\alpha|_{\xi} : \xi \otimes \xi \to \mathbb{R}$  is nondegenerate. Then, the pair  $(M, \xi)$  is called a *contact manifold*. and  $\alpha$  is called a *contact form*.

Let  $(M_1, \xi_1), (M_2, \xi_2)$  be contact manifolds. A *contact morphism*  $f: (M_1, \xi_1) \to (M_2, \xi_2)$  is a local diffeomorphism  $f: M_1 \to M_2$  with  $df(\xi_1) \subset \xi_2$ .

# foliations, holonomies and leaf spaces

Any vector field tangent to the characteristic foliation  $\mathcal{L}$  preserves the "even contact structure"  $\mathcal{D}^2$ .

In particular, any holonomy of  ${\mathcal L}$  is a germ of contact morphism.

So the leaf space  $E/\mathcal{L}$  has a contact structure  $\mathcal{D}^2/\mathcal{L}$ .

We want to research the relation between an Engel structure and the contact structure, but the leaf space is not necessarily a manifold. (In general, it is a Lie groupoid.)

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#### Theorem 1.5

Let X be a manifold and let  $\mathcal{F}$  be a foliation on X.

- 1. If all leaves of  $\mathcal{F}$  is compact and all holonomy groups of that are finite, then the leaf space  $X/\mathcal{F}$  is an orbifold.
- 2. As above, if all holonomy groups are trivial, then the leaf space X/F is a manifold.

# Definition 1.6 (Y.)

Let (E, D) be an Engel manifold, and let  $\mathcal{L}$  be the characteristic foliation of (E, D).

- 1. If all leaves of  $\mathcal{L}$  is compact and all holonomy groups of that are finite, then we says that  $(E, \mathcal{D})$  has the *proper* characteristic foliation.
- 2. As above, if all holonomy groups are trivial, then we says that (E, D) has the *trivial* characteristic foliation.

## Propositoin 1.7 (R. Montgomery)

Let (E, D) be an Engel manifold that has the trivial characteristic foliation, let M be the leaf space of the characteristic foliation, and let  $\pi : E \to M$  be the quotient map. Then,  $\xi \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} d\pi(D^2)$  is well-defined, and it is a contact structure on M. Moreover,  $(E, D) \mapsto (M, \xi)$  is functorial. Let  $(M, \xi)$  be a contact 3-manifold, let  $E = \mathbb{P}(\xi) \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \prod_{x \in M} \mathbb{P}(\xi_x) = (\xi - 0)/\mathbb{R}^{\times}$ , and let  $\pi : E \to M$  is the projective map. Now, we define a rank 2 distribution  $\mathcal{D}$  on E in the following way: For each  $l \in E$  with  $\pi(l) = x$ ,  $l \subset \mathbb{P}(\xi_x)$  is a line that cross the origin. By the way, we define  $\mathcal{D}_l \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} d\pi_l^{-1}(l) \subset T_l E$ . Similarly, let  $E' = \mathbb{S}(\xi) \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} (\xi - 0)/\mathbb{R}_{>0}$ . Then E' is a 2-covering on E. Now, we define a rank 2 distribution  $\mathcal{D}'$  on E' as the pull-back of  $\mathcal{D}$ .

#### Propositoin 1.8 (R. Montgomery)

The above  $\mathcal{D}, \mathcal{D}'$  is an Engel structure on E, E'. Moreover,  $(M, \xi) \mapsto (E, \mathcal{D})$  and  $(E', \mathcal{D}')$  are functorial.

## Definition 1.9

The above (E, D) is called *Cartan prolongation*, and we denote this  $\mathbb{P}(M, \xi)$ . The above (E', D') is called *oriented Cartan prolongation*, and we denote this  $\mathbb{S}(M, \xi)$ .

Any Cartan prolongation has the trivial characteristic foliation. In fact, the Cartan prolongation is the "minimal" object of such Engel manifolds.

Let  $(E, \mathcal{D})$  be an Engel manifold that has the trivial characteristic foliation, let  $(M, \xi)$  be the leaf space of the characteristic foliation, and let  $\pi : E \to M$  be the quotient map. Now, we define  $\phi : E \to \mathbb{P}(\xi)$  as  $\phi(e) \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} d\pi(\mathcal{D}_e) \subset \xi_{\pi(e)}$ .

#### Propositoin 1.10 (R. Montgomery)

The above  $\phi$  is an Engel morphism  $(E, \mathcal{D}) \to \mathbb{P}(M, \xi)$ . Moreover, this satisfies the universality: For any contact 3-manifold  $(N, \nu)$  and any Engel morphism  $\psi : (E, \mathcal{D}) \to \mathbb{P}(N, \nu)$ , there exists a unique contact morphism  $\tilde{\psi} : (M, \xi) \to (N, \nu)$  such that  $\psi = \mathbb{P}(\tilde{\psi}) \circ \phi$ .

- The above  $\phi$  is called the *development map* associated to  $(E, \mathcal{D})$ .
- The functor  $\mathbb{P}$  is fully faithful.

The above discussion can be generalized to an Engel manifold with proper characteristic foliation in the obvious way. That is, if  $E/\mathcal{L}$  is an orbifold, then  $E/\mathcal{L}$  has a contact structure, and then E has the development map. However, the Cartan prolongation of a contact 3-orbifold is an Engel orbifold in general.

#### Question

When is the Cartan prolongation of a contact 3-orbifold an Engel manifold?

# Theorem 2.1 (Y.)

Let  $(\Sigma, \xi)$  be a contact 3-orbifold.

- 1. The Cartan prolongation of  $(\Sigma, \xi)$  is a manifold if and only if  $(\Sigma, \xi)$  is positive, and  $|G_x|$  is odd for all  $x \in \Sigma$ , where  $G_x$  is the isotropy group at x.
- The oriented Cartan prolongation of (Σ, ξ) is a manifold if and only if (Σ, ξ) is positive.

In fact, all Engel manifolds obtained as the Cartan prolongation of a "space" with contact structure are obtained as above. This can be shown by using Lie groupoid theory.

- Recall, a *manifold* is a topological space to be locally Euclidean.
- An *orbifold* is a topological space to be locally Euclidean with a finite group action.

#### Definition 2.2

Let  $\Sigma$  be an orbifold,  $\{(V_{\lambda} \subset \mathbb{R}^{n}, G_{\lambda} \cap V_{\lambda}, p_{\lambda} : V_{\lambda} \to \Sigma)\}_{\lambda \in \Lambda}$  be an orbifold atlas on  $\Sigma$ , and  $\phi_{\lambda\mu}$  be the transformation map for  $\lambda, \mu \in \Lambda$ . A *contact structure* on  $\Sigma$  is a family  $\xi = \{\xi_{\lambda}\}_{\lambda \in \Lambda}$  of contact structures on each  $V_{\lambda}$  such that all  $G_{\lambda} \cap V_{\lambda}$  are contact actions, and all  $\phi_{\lambda\mu}$  are contact morphisms. The pair of an orbifold and a contact structure is called a *contact orbifold*.

Similarly, we define an *Engel structure* on an orbifold and an *Engel orbifold*.

#### Example 2.3

 $\xi_{std} \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} Ker(dz + xdy - ydx)$  is a contact structure on  $\mathbb{R}^3$ . We define  $\phi_n, \psi : \mathbb{R}^3 \to \mathbb{R}^3$  as  $\phi_n(x, y, z) \stackrel{\text{def}}{=}$   $(x \cos(\frac{2\pi}{n}) - y \sin(\frac{2\pi}{n}), x \sin(\frac{2\pi}{n}) + y \cos(\frac{2\pi}{n}), z), \psi(x, y, z) \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} (x, -y, -z).$ Then,  $G_{n,std} \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \langle \phi_n, \psi \rangle \frown (\mathbb{R}^3, \xi_{std})$  and  $H_{n,std} \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \langle \phi_n \rangle \frown (\mathbb{R}^3, \xi_{std})$ are contact actions of finite groups. These are called *standard models*. Then,  $(\mathbb{R}^3, \xi_{std})/G_{n,std}$  and  $(\mathbb{R}^3, \xi_{std})/H_{n,std}$  are contact orbifolds.

#### Theorem 2.4 (Darboux's theorem for contact 3-orbifolds)

Let  $(\Sigma, \xi)$  be a contact 3-orbifold, and let  $x \in \Sigma$ . Then, there exists an orbifold chart (V, G, p) around x such that (V, G) is isomorphic to an open neighborhood of  $0 \in (\mathbb{R}^3, H)$  where  $H = G_{n,std}$  or  $H = H_{n,std}$ .

#### Definition 2.5

Let  $\Sigma$  be an orbifold and  $x \in \Sigma$ . Take an orbifold chart (V, G, p) with  $x \in p(V) \subset \Sigma$ , and take a point  $\tilde{x} \in p^{-1}(x)$ . Then,  $G_x \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \{ \sigma \in G \mid \sigma \tilde{x} = \tilde{x} \}$  is called the *isotropy group* at x.

#### Definition 2.6

A contact orbifold  $(\Sigma, \xi)$  is *positive* if all  $G_x \frown \xi_x$  preserve the orientation.

• 
$$(\mathbb{R}^3, \xi_{std})/G_{n,std}$$
 is not positive.

•  $(\mathbb{R}^3, \xi_{std})/H_{n,std}$  is positive.

Because of Darboux's theorem for contact 3-orbifolds, the main result follows the following lemma.

#### Lemma 2.7

- 1. The actions  $G_{n,std} \cap \mathbb{P}(\xi_{std}), G_{n,std} \cap \mathbb{S}(\xi_{std})$  are not free.
- 2. The action  $H_{n,std} \cap \mathbb{P}(\xi_{std})$  is free if and only if n is odd.
- 3. The action  $H_{n,std} \cap \mathbb{S}(\xi_{std})$  is free for any n.

# Main result 2

The composition of the two functors



induces a group morphism

$$\Phi: Aut(E, \mathcal{D}) \to Aut(E/\mathcal{L}, \mathcal{D}^2/\mathcal{L}) \cong Aut(\mathbb{P}(E/\mathcal{L}, \mathcal{D}^2/\mathcal{L}))$$

#### Theorem 2.8 (Y.)

Let (E, D) be a connected Engel manifold. Suppose that  $\mathbb{P}(E/\mathcal{L}, D^2/\mathcal{L})$  is a manifold. If the development map  $\phi : (E, D) \to \mathbb{P}(E/\mathcal{L}, D^2/\mathcal{L})$  is not covering, then the above group morphism  $\Phi$  is injective.

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#### Lemma 2.9

Let (E, D) be an Engel manifold. Suppose that  $\mathbb{P}(E/\mathcal{L}, D^2/\mathcal{L})$  is a manifold.

- 1. If there exists a leaf L of  $\mathcal{L}$  such that  $\phi|_L : L \to \mathbb{P}(\mathcal{D}^2/\mathcal{L})_L$  is not covering, then the above group morphism  $\Phi$  is injective.
- 2. If, for any leaf L of  $\mathcal{L}$ ,  $\phi|_L : L \to \mathbb{P}(\mathcal{D}^2/\mathcal{L})_L$  is covering, then  $\phi$  is covering

# outline of proof

 $\begin{array}{l} \displaystyle \frac{\operatorname{proof} \text{ of } 1.}{\operatorname{Suppose } \Phi(f) = \Phi(g) \text{ for } f,g \in \operatorname{Aut}(E,\mathcal{D}). \\ \operatorname{Because } \phi|_L \text{ is not covering, we can identify } \phi|_L \text{ with } \\ \displaystyle (a,b) \to \mathbb{R}/\mathbb{Z} \, (a \neq -\infty). \end{array}$ 

$$\begin{array}{c} (c,d) \xrightarrow{\phi} \mathbb{R}/\mathbb{Z} \\ f & \uparrow \phi(f) = \Phi(g) \\ (a,b) \xrightarrow{\phi} \mathbb{R}/\mathbb{Z} \end{array}$$

Then there exists  $\epsilon > 0$  such that  $f(a + \epsilon) = g(a + \epsilon)$ . Because *E* is connected, we obtain f = g.

#### proof of 2.

Take any leaf L of  $\mathcal{L}$ , and let  $L' \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \mathbb{P}(\mathcal{D}^2/\mathcal{L})_L$ .

There exists a nonsingular vector field X realizing the holonomy on L', defined on a open neighborhood U.

Let  $\tilde{X}$  be a pull-back of X by  $\phi$ . Because any  $\phi|_{L_0}$  is covering,  $\tilde{X}$  is complete.

So, we can obtain  $\phi|_{\phi^{-1}(U)} : \phi^{-1}(U) \to U$  is covering whose degree is the same as that of  $\phi|_L$ .

Let  $(E, \mathcal{D})$  be a connected Engel manifold. Suppose that  $E/\mathcal{L}$  is a manifold.

Define  $\sigma : E/\mathcal{L} \to \mathbb{Z}_{\geq 0} \cup \{\infty\}$  by  $\sigma(L) \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \min\{\#\phi^{-1}(y) \mid y \in \mathbb{P}(\mathcal{D}^2/\mathcal{L})_L\}$ . Call  $\sigma$  twisting number function.

#### Propositoin 2.10

For any  $f \in Aut(E, D)$ , the induced automorphism  $E/\mathcal{L} \to E/\mathcal{L}$  preserves the twisting number function  $\sigma$ .

#### Example 2.11

$$\begin{split} & \mathcal{E} \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \mathbb{R}^4 \ni (x, y, z, \theta) \\ & \mathcal{D} \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \langle \partial_{\theta}, \cos(\frac{\theta}{2}) X + \sin(\frac{\theta}{2}) Y \rangle \left( X \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \partial_x - y \partial_z, Y \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \partial_y \right) \\ & \longrightarrow (\mathcal{E}, \mathcal{D}) \text{ is an Engel manifold.} \\ & \text{Then, } \mathcal{L} = \langle \partial_{\theta} \rangle \text{ is the characteristic foliation.} \\ & \text{And, } \mathcal{E} \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \mathcal{D}^2 = \langle \partial_{\theta}, X, Y \rangle. \\ & \longrightarrow M \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \mathcal{E}/\mathcal{L} \cong \mathbb{R}^3 \ni (x, y, z), \ \xi \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \mathcal{E}/\mathcal{L} \cong \langle X, Y \rangle. \\ & \mathcal{M} \times S^1 \cong \mathbb{P}(\mathcal{M}, \xi); (\mathbf{x}, [\theta]) \mapsto \langle \cos(\frac{\theta}{2}) X_{\mathbf{x}} + \sin(\frac{\theta}{2}) Y_{\mathbf{x}} \rangle. \\ & \phi : \mathcal{E} \to \mathcal{M} \times S^1; (\mathbf{x}, \theta) \mapsto (\mathbf{x}, [\theta]) \text{ is identified with the development map.} \\ & \longrightarrow \text{The twisting number function } \sigma \text{ is a constant function } \infty. \end{split}$$

#### Example 2.12

Fix a point  $\mathbf{x}_0 \in \mathbb{R}^3$  and a number  $n \in \mathbb{Z}_{\geq 0}$ .  $E \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \mathbb{R}^4 - \{\mathbf{x}_0\} \times ((-\infty, -n\pi] \cup [n\pi + \epsilon, \infty)) \ (\epsilon \in (0, 2\pi])$  $\mathcal{D} \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \langle \partial_{\theta}, \cos(\frac{\theta}{2}) X + \sin(\frac{\theta}{2}) Y \rangle \left( X \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \partial_{x} - y \partial_{z}, Y \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \partial_{y} \right)$  $\rightarrow$  (*E*, *D*) is an Engel manifold. Then,  $\mathcal{L} = \langle \partial_{\theta} \rangle$  is the characteristic foliation. And.  $\mathcal{E} \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \mathcal{D}^2 = \langle \partial_{\theta}, X, Y \rangle.$  $\longrightarrow M \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} E/\mathcal{L} \cong \mathbb{R}^3 \ni (x, y, z), \xi \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \mathcal{E}/\mathcal{L} \cong \langle X, Y \rangle.$ Then,  $M \times S^1 \cong \mathbb{P}(M, \xi)$ ;  $(\mathbf{x}, [\theta]) \mapsto \langle \cos(\frac{\theta}{2}) X_{\mathbf{x}} + \sin(\frac{\theta}{2}) Y_{\mathbf{x}} \rangle$ .  $\phi: E \to M \times S^1$ ;  $(\mathbf{x}, \theta) \mapsto (\mathbf{x}, [\theta])$  is identified with the development map.  $\rightarrow$  The twisting number function  $\sigma$  is the following:

$$\sigma(\mathbf{x}) = egin{cases} n & (\mathbf{x} = \mathbf{x}_0) \ \infty & (otherwise) \end{cases}$$

## Theorem 2.13 (Mitsumatsu, Y.)

There exists an Engel manifold with trivial automorphism group.

# proof Take a countable dense subset $Q = \{\mathbf{x}_n\}_{n=1}^{\infty} \subset \mathbb{R}^3$ .

$$E \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \mathbb{R}^4 - \bigcup_n \{\mathbf{x}_n\} \times ((-\infty, -n\pi] \cup [n\pi + \epsilon, \infty)) (\epsilon \in (0, 2\pi])$$
$$\mathcal{D} \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \langle \partial_\theta, \cos(\frac{\theta}{2})X + \sin(\frac{\theta}{2})Y \rangle (X \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \partial_x - y \partial_z, Y \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \partial_y)$$
$$\longrightarrow (E, \mathcal{D}) \text{ is an Engel manifold.}$$

 $\longrightarrow$  The twisting number function  $\sigma$  is the following:

$$\sigma(\mathbf{x}) = egin{cases} n & (\mathbf{x} = \mathbf{x}_n) \ \infty & (otherwise) \end{cases}$$

For any  $f \in Aut(E, D)$ , the induced automorphism  $\underline{f} : \mathbb{R}^3 \to \mathbb{R}^3$  is the identity on Q. Because  $Q \subset \mathbb{R}^3$  is dense,  $\underline{f}$  is the identity on  $\mathbb{R}^3$ . So f is the identity.