REMARKS ON J. ESPINAR’s “FINITE INDEX OPERATORS ON SURFACES”

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Abstract. In this paper, we make some remarks on José Espinar’s paper “Finite index operators on surfaces” [arXiv:0911.3767, to appear in Journal of Geometric Analysis (2011)].


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1. Introduction

In [1], we considered operators of the form $J = \Delta + aK - q$ on a complete non-compact Riemannian surface $(M,g)$, where $\Delta$ is the non-negative Laplacian, and $K$ the Gaussian curvature associated with the metric $g$. The parameter $a$ is some positive constant, and $q$ is a non-negative locally integrable function on $M$. More precisely, we studied the consequences, for the geometry of the triple $(M,g; q)$, of the fact that the operator $J$ is non-negative (in the sense of quadratic forms).

Motivated by applications to minimal and cmc surfaces, J. Espinar [3] considers a different framework (see also [4]). More precisely, he considers a Riemannian surface $(M,g)$, possibly with boundary $\partial M$ and not necessarily complete, and operators of the form $\Delta + aK - c + P$, where the parameters $a,c$ are positive constants, and $P$ is a non-negative integrable function.

In this note, we consider complete surfaces without boundary, and prove results similar to those in [3][4], under weaker assumptions. For this purpose, we apply the methods of [1].

2. General framework

Generally speaking, we will use the same notations as in [1], $(M,g)$ will denote a complete (possibly compact) surface without boundary.

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2.1. The operators. In this paper, we consider operators of the form,

\[ J = \Delta + aK - q + P. \]

Here \( \Delta \) is the non-negative Laplacian, and \( K \) the Gaussian curvature associated with the metric \( g \). We let \( \mu \) denote the Riemannian measure associated with \( g \).

\( \blacklozenge \) We make the following assumptions on the operator \( J \),

\[ \begin{aligned}
\{ a & \text{ is a positive constant,} \\
q & \text{ is a non-negative, locally integrable function on } M, \\
& \text{ and we let } c = \inf_M q \geq 0, \\
P & \text{ is an integrable function on } M, \\
& \text{ and we let } \|P\|_1 = \int_M |P| \, d\mu.
\end{aligned} \]

Note that we do not impose any sign condition on the function \( P \).

\( \blacklozenge \) We say that the open geodesic ball \( B(x_0, R) \) is \( J \)-stable if the operator \( J \) is non-negative in the sense of quadratic forms,

\[ 0 \leq Q_J(\phi) = \int_M \{ |d\phi|^2 + (aK - q + P)\phi^2 \} \, d\mu \]

for all \( \phi \) in \( \text{Lip}_0(B(x_0, R)) \), the Lipschitz functions with compact support inside the ball.

2.2. Volume growth assumptions. Fix a reference point \( x_0 \) in \( M \). We consider the following assumptions on the volume growth on \((M, g)\).

\( \blacklozenge \) We say that \((M, g)\) has polynomial volume growth of order at most \( k \) if there exists a constant \( C_k \) such that,

\[ V(B(x_0, R)) \leq C_k(1 + R)^k, \]

for all \( R > 0 \).

\( \blacklozenge \) We say that \((M, g)\) has \( k \)-subpolynomial volume growth if

\[ \limsup_{R \to \infty} \frac{V(B(x_0, R))}{R^k} = 0. \]

\( \blacklozenge \) We say that \((M, g)\) has subexponential volume growth if

\[ \limsup_{R \to \infty} \frac{\ln \left( V(B(x_0, R)) \right)}{R} = 0. \]

For a complete surface without boundary, these definitions do not depend on the choice of the reference point \( x_0 \), although the constant \( C_k \) a priori does.

2.3. Fundamental inequalities. We briefly recall the notations of [1], Section 2. Given a reference point \( x_0 \in M \), we consider the open geodesic balls \( B(x_0, t) \), and their Euler-Poincaré characteristics \( \chi(B(x_0, t)) \). More precisely, we introduce the function,

\[ \hat{\chi}(s) = \sup \{ \chi(B(x_0, t)) \mid t \geq s \}. \]

This is a non-increasing function with a sequence of discontinuities, finite possibly empty, or infinite, \( \{t_j\}_{j=1}^{\infty} \), with \( \infty \in \mathbb{N} \cup \{\infty\} \). Note that this sequence depends on the choice of the reference point \( x_0 \). We call \( \omega_j \) the jump of the function \( \hat{\chi} \) at the discontinuity \( t_j \).
We call *admissible* a function $\xi : [0, Q] \to \mathbb{R}$, which is $C^1$ and piecewise $C^2$, with $\xi, \xi'' \geq 0$ and $\xi' \leq 0$. Let $N(Q)$ be the largest integer $n$ such that $t_n \leq Q$.

We now recall two key results from [1].

1. The topology of $M$ is controlled by the function $\hat{\chi}$. More precisely, we have the inequality (see [1], Lemma 2.1),

$$1 - \sum_{n=1}^{N} \omega_n \leq \chi(M).$$

2. Assume that the operator $J$ satisfies the assumptions (2), and let $B(x_0, Q)$ be some $J$-stable ball in $M$. Let $\xi$ be any admissible function on $[0, Q]$, with $\xi(Q) = 0$, and let $r$ denote the distance function to the center $x_0$ of the ball. Plugging the function $\xi(r)$ into the quadratic form for $J$ and applying [1], Lemma 2.3, we obtain the inequality

$$\int_{B(x_0, Q)} q \xi^2(r) \, d\mu \leq 2\pi a \xi^2(0) + 2\pi a \sum_{j=1}^{N(Q)} \omega_n \xi^2(t_n) + \int_{B(x_0, Q)} \left[ (1 - 2a)(\xi')^2 - 2a \xi \xi'' \right] r \, d\mu,$$

which yields the weaker inequality,

$$c \int_{B(x_0, Q)} \xi^2(r) \, d\mu \leq 2\pi a \xi^2(0) + \|\xi\|_\infty^2 \|P\|_1 + \int_{B(x_0, Q)} \left[ (1 - 2a)(\xi')^2 - 2a \xi \xi'' \right] r \, d\mu.$$  

3. **Statements**

Inequality (8) shows that the case in which the operator $J = \Delta + aK - q + P$ is non-negative—under the assumptions (2)—is similar to the case in which the operator $\Delta + aK - q$ has finite index, as treated in [1], Theorem 4.1. More precisely, we have the following result.

**Theorem 3.1.** Let $(M, g)$ be a complete Riemannian surface without boundary, and let $J$ be the operator,

$$J = \Delta + aK - q + P,$$

with $q \geq 0$ locally integrable and $P$ an integrable function. Assume that $J \geq 0$ on $\text{Lip}_0(M)$, and that either of the following conditions holds,

(i) $a > \frac{1}{4}$, or

(ii) $a = \frac{1}{4}$, and $(M, g)$ has subexponential volume growth, or

(iii) $a \in (0, \frac{1}{4})$, and $(M, g)$ has $k_a$-subpolynomial volume growth, with $k_a = 2 + \frac{4a}{1 - 4a}$.

Then, either $M$ is closed, or $(M, g)$ is non-compact with finite topology and at most quadratic area growth. In particular, $(M, g)$ is conformally equivalent to a closed Riemannian surface with at most finitely many points removed. Furthermore, $q$ is integrable on $(M, g)$, and we have,

$$\int_M q \, d\mu \leq 2\pi a \chi(M) + \int_M P \, d\mu.$$
Remark. When considering an operator of the form $J = \Delta + aK + W$, taking $q = W_-$ and $P = W_+$, the previous result gives the following. If either of the conditions (i), (ii) or (iii) holds, and if $W_+$ is integrable, then $W \in L^1(M, \mu)$, $M$ has finite conformal type, and

$$0 \leq 2\pi a \chi(M) + \int_M W \, d\mu.$$ 

The interesting case, in the present framework, is the case in which the infimum $c$ of the function $q$ is positive. We have the following result.

**Theorem 3.2.** Let $(M, g)$ be a complete Riemannian surface without boundary, and let $J$ be the operator,

$$J = \Delta + aK - q + P,$$

with $q \geq c > 0$ locally integrable, and $P$ an integrable function on $(M, g)$. Assume that $J \geq 0$ on Lip$_0(M)$, and that either of the following conditions holds,

(i) $a > \frac{1}{4}$, or  
(ii) $a = \frac{1}{4}$, and $(M, g)$ has subexponential volume growth, or  
(iii) $a \in (0, \frac{1}{4})$, and $(M, g)$ has polynomial volume growth of degree at most $k$, for some $k$.

Then, either $M$ is closed, or $(M, g)$ is non-compact with finite topology and finite volume. In particular, $(M, g)$ is conformally equivalent to a closed Riemannian surface with at most finitely many points removed. In both case, $M$ compact or non-compact,

$$(11) \quad cV(M, g) \leq \int_M q \, d\mu \leq 2\pi a \chi(M) + \int_M P \, d\mu,$$

where $V(M, g)$ is the volume of $(M, g)$.

**Remark.** Under conditions (i) and (ii), this result is a direct consequence of Theorem 3.1. Note however that we only need a polynomial volume growth condition in (iii), without any bound on the degree (compare with Theorem 3.1). This is so because the condition that $J \geq 0$, with $c > 0$, is quite strong. One might wonder whether it is possible to weaken the growth condition in (ii).

Theorems 3.1 and 3.2 have their counterparts with the assumption that the operator $J$ is non-negative replaced by the assumption that the operator $J$ has finite index. As a matter of fact, one can immediately reduce the former case to the latter by using the following proposition of independent interest.

**Proposition 3.3.** Let $(M, g)$ be a complete Riemannian manifold and let $W$ be a locally integrable function on $M$. Then the operator $\Delta + W$ has finite index if and only if there exists a locally integrable function $P$ with compact support such that the operator $\Delta + W + P$ is non-negative.
4. Proofs

4.1. Proof of Theorem 3.1

Let us first deal with the case in which $M$ is closed. In this case, we can use the constant function $1$ in the quadratic form associated with the operator $J$,

$$Q_J(f) = \int_M (|df|^2 + (aK - q + P)f^2) \, d\mu$$

and (10) follows immediately from the Gauss-Bonnet theorem.

From now on, we assume that $(M, g)$ is complete, non-compact.

Case (i).

Assume that $B(x_0, Q)$ is a $J$-stable ball for some $Q$. Let $\xi(t) = (1-t/Q)^\alpha$, for some $\alpha \geq 1$. Then,

$$\left(1 - 2a\right)(\xi')^2 - 2a\xi'' = -\alpha\left[(4a - 1)\alpha - 2a\right]\left(1 - \frac{t}{Q}\right)^{2\alpha - 2}.$$

Choose $\alpha = \frac{2a}{1-4a}$. Apply (8) with these choices of $\xi$ and $\alpha$. Then,

$$\int_M q(1-t/Q)^{2\alpha} + 2\pi a \sum_{n=1}^{N(Q)} \omega_n (1-\frac{t}{Q})^{2\alpha} \leq 2\pi a + \int_M P(1-t/Q)^{2\alpha}.$$

Since $M$ is complete non-compact, and under the assumption of the theorem, inequality (13) holds for all $Q > 0$, and we can let $Q$ tend to infinity. Using the monotone convergence theorem for the left-hand side and the dominated convergence theorem for the right-hand side, we get

$$\int_M q \, d\mu \leq 2\pi a (1 - \frac{N}{\sum \omega_n}) + \int_M P \, d\mu,$$

and inequality (10) follows from Lemma 2.1 in [1]. This inequality implies that the topology is finite (with a lower bound for the Euler characteristic), and that $q$ is integrable. To show that the surface is parabolic, we prove that the volume growth is at most quadratic. To do so, we proceed as in [1]. From (9) and (12), choosing $\alpha$ large enough, we conclude that there exists a positive constant $C_\alpha$ such that

$$\frac{C_\alpha}{2a-2Q^2} V(B(x_0, Q)) \leq \frac{C_\alpha}{Q^2} \int_M (1 - t/Q)^{2\alpha - 2} \, d\mu \leq 2\pi a + \|P\|_1,$$

which concludes the proof.

Case (ii).

Assume that $B(x_0, Q)$ is a $J$-stable ball. Take $\xi(t) = e^{-at} - e^{-aQ}$ for some $\alpha > 0$. Then,

$$\left(\xi'\right)^2 - \xi'' = \alpha^2 e^{-at} e^{-aQ}.$$

Applying (5) with $a = \frac{1}{2}$ and $\xi$ as above, gives

$$\begin{cases}
\int_{B(x_0, Q)} q\xi^2(r) \, d\mu + \frac{1}{2} \sum_{n=1}^{N(Q)} \omega_n \xi^2(t_n) \\ \frac{1}{2} \xi^2(0) + \int_M P \xi^2(r) \, d\mu + \frac{\alpha^2}{2} e^{-aQ} \int_{B(x_0, Q)} e^{-ar} \, d\mu.
\end{cases}$$

Since $M$ is complete non-compact, inequality (14) holds for all $Q > 0$, and we can let $Q$ tend to infinity and argue as in [1]. The point is that the last term in the right-hand side of (14) goes to zero when $Q$ tends to infinity.
for any fixed $\alpha > 0$, because $M$ has subexponential area growth. Using monotone and dominated convergence theorems, it follows that

$$\int_M q e^{-2\alpha r} d\mu + \frac{\pi}{2} \sum_{n=1}^N \omega_n e^{-2\alpha t_n} \leq \frac{\pi}{2} + \int_M Pe^{-\alpha r} d\mu.$$ 

Letting $\alpha$ tend to zero, and using \[1\] Lemma 2.1, we get inequality (10). In particular, $M$ has finite topology and $q$ is integrable. To get quadratic area growth, we use inequality (9) with the test function $\xi$ given in \[1\] Lemma 2.4. We get the inequality

$$\left\{ \begin{array}{l}
\frac{1}{4R^2} \int_{B(R)} e^{2(1-\frac{\pi}{2})^2} d\mu \leq \frac{\pi}{2} e^2 + \|P\|_1 \\
+ \frac{1}{2} \alpha^2 \beta^2 e^{-\alpha Q} \int_{C(R,Q)} e^{-\alpha r} d\mu,
\end{array} \right.$$ 

and we let $Q$ tend to infinity to finish the proof.

\[\bigcirc \text{ Case (iii).} \] Assume that $B(x_0, Q)$ is a $J$-stable ball. Take $\xi(t) = (1 + \epsilon t)^{-\alpha} - (1 + \epsilon Q)^{-\alpha}$ with $\epsilon > 0$ and $\alpha = \frac{2a}{1-4a}$. Then,

$$(1 - 2a)(\xi')^2 - 2a \xi \xi'' = 2ae^2 \alpha (\alpha + 1)(1 + \epsilon Q)^{-\alpha}(1 + \epsilon t)^{-\alpha - 2}.$$ 

Applying (8) to $\xi$ we find,

$$\left\{ \begin{array}{l}
\int_{B(x_0, Q)} q \xi^2(r) d\mu + 2\pi a \sum_{n=1}^N \omega_n \xi^2(t_n) \leq \\
2\pi a \xi^2(0) + \int_M P \xi^2(r) d\mu \\
+ 2ae^2 \alpha (\alpha + 1)(1 + \epsilon Q)^{-\alpha} \int_{B(x_0, Q)} (1 + \epsilon r)^{-\alpha - 2} d\mu.
\end{array} \right.$$ 

Since $M$ is complete non-compact, inequality (15) holds for all $Q > 0$, we can let $Q$ tend to infinity, and argue as in \[1\]. The point is that the last term in the right-hand side of (15) goes to zero when $Q$ tends to infinity for any fixed $\epsilon > 0$, because of the assumption on the area growth of $M$. It follows that

$$\int_M q(1 + \epsilon t)^{-\alpha} d\mu + 2\pi a \sum_{n=1}^N \omega_n (1 + \epsilon t_n)^{-\alpha} \leq 2\pi a + \int_M P(1 + \epsilon t)^{-\alpha} d\mu.$$ 

Letting $\epsilon$ tend to zero and using \[1\] Lemma 2.1, we get (10). In particular, $M$ has finite topology and $q$ is integrable. To get the quadratic area growth, we use inequality (9) and the test function $\xi$ given in \[1\] Lemma 2.5. We get the inequality,

$$\left\{ \begin{array}{l}
\frac{\alpha \beta}{R^2} \int_{B(R)} (1 + \frac{\pi}{2})^{-2\alpha - 2} d\mu \leq 2\pi a + \|P\|_1 \\
+ 2ae^2 \alpha (\alpha + 1)(1 + \epsilon Q)^{-\alpha} \int_{B(x_0, Q)} (1 + \epsilon r)^{-\alpha - 2} d\mu.
\end{array} \right.$$ 

We can conclude the proof by letting $Q$ tend to infinity. \[\Box\]

4.2. Proof of Theorem 3.2. Cases (i) and (ii) are direct consequences of Theorem 3.1, applying inequality (10) to the function $q \geq c > 0$. In case (iii), we first prove that $(M, g)$ has in fact polynomial volume growth of degree $k$ less than $2 + \frac{1}{1-4a}$, this follows from the assumption $c > 0$. 

Case (iii), Preliminaries. Assume that $B(x_0, Q)$ is a $J$-stable ball. Take $\xi(t) = (1 + et)^{-\alpha} - (1 + \epsilon Q)^{-\alpha}$ for $\epsilon, \alpha > 0$. Then,
\[
\begin{cases}
(1 - 2a)(\xi')^2 - 2a\xi'' &= \alpha e^2[(1 - 4a)\alpha - 2a](1 + et)^{-2a-2} \\
+ 2ae^2(\alpha + 1)(1 + \epsilon Q)^{-\alpha}(1 + et)^{-\alpha-2}.
\end{cases}
\]
Applying (11) to $\xi$ we find,
\[
\begin{cases}
\int_{B(x_0, Q)} \xi^2(r) \, d\mu \leq (2\pi a + ||P||_1)\xi^2(0) \\
+ \epsilon^2\alpha[(1 - 4a)\alpha - 2a]\int_{B(x_0, Q)} (1 + \epsilon r)^{-2a-2} \, d\mu \\
+ 2ae^2\alpha(\alpha + 1)(1 + \epsilon Q)^{-\alpha}\int_{B(x_0, Q)} (1 + \epsilon r)^{-\alpha-2} \, d\mu.
\end{cases}
\]

Call respectively $A_2$ and $A_3$ the last two terms in the right-hand side of the preceding inequality.

Assume that there exists a positive constant $C_k$ such that $V(B(x_0, t)) \leq C_k (1 + t)^k$, for all $t > 0$. Then,
\[
\begin{cases}
\int_{B(x_0, Q)} (1 + \epsilon r)^{-\beta} \, d\mu \leq C_k (1 + \epsilon Q)^{-\beta}(1 + Q) \\
+ \beta\epsilon C_k \int_{B(x_0, Q)} (1 + \epsilon r)^{-\beta-1}(1 + t)^k \, dt.
\end{cases}
\]
Since $(M, g)$ is complete non-compact, we can let $Q$ tend to infinity in (16).

Case (iii) continued. Define $k_0$ by
\[
k_0 = \inf\{k \mid \exists C_k \text{ such that } V(B(x_0, t)) \leq C_k (1 + t)^k, \forall t > 0\}.
\]

Claim: $k_0 < 2 + \frac{4a}{\epsilon - 2a}$. Indeed if not, let $k_1$ be such that $k_0 < k_1 < k_0 + \frac{1}{2}$. Choose $\alpha$ such that $2\alpha + 2 = k_1 + \frac{1}{2}$, and $\epsilon = 1$. Using (17), one finds that the term $A_2$ in (16) is uniformly bounded when $Q$ tends to infinity. Similarly, one sees that the term $A_3$ tends to zero as $Q$ tends to infinity. It follows that for any $R > 0$, one has that
\[
c \int_{B(x_0, R)} (1 + r)^{-2\alpha} \, d\mu \leq C(k_1),
\]
which implies that $cV(B(x_0, R)) \leq C(k_1)(1 + R)^{2\alpha} \leq C(k_1)(1 + R)^{k_0 - 1}$. This contradicts the definition of $k_0$.

Since $k_0 < 2 + \frac{4a}{\epsilon - 2a}$, the assumption of Theorem 3.1 (iii) is satisfied and we can conclude.

4.3. Proof of Proposition 3.3.

Assume that $\Delta + W$ has finite index on $C^1_0(M)$, then there exists a compact $K \subset M$ such that $\Delta + W$ is non-negative on $C^1_0(M \setminus K)$. Take $\phi$ to be a smooth function with compact support, such that $0 \leq \phi \leq 1$ and $\phi \equiv 1$ in a compact neighborhood of $K$. Given any $\psi \in C^1_0(M)$, write $\psi$ as $\psi = \phi\psi + (1 - \phi)\psi$. An easy computation gives,
\[
\begin{cases}
\int_M |d\phi|^2 + W\psi^2 = \\
\int_M |d((1 - \phi)\psi)|^2 + W((1 - \phi)\psi)^2 \\
+ \int_M W(\phi^2 + 2\phi(1 - \phi))\psi^2 \\
- \frac{1}{2} \int_M \psi^2 \Delta((1 - \phi)^2) - \int_M \psi^2 |d\phi|^2 \\
+ 2\int_M \phi(1 - \frac{1}{2}\phi)|d\psi|^2.
\end{cases}
\]
Because \( \Delta + W \) is non-negative in \( M \setminus K \), and because of our choice of \( \phi \), the first and fourth terms in the right-hand side of (20) are non-negative. The other terms can be written as 
\[
\int_M P \psi^2,
\]
where the function \( P \) is defined by
\[
\begin{align*}
P &:= |d\phi|^2 - \Delta(\phi(1 - \frac{1}{4}\phi)) \\
&\quad - W\phi^2 - 2\phi(1 - \phi)W.
\end{align*}
\]
Recall that \( W \) is locally integrable and that \( \phi \) is smooth with compact support. It follows that \( P \) is locally integrable, with compact support. By (20), the operator \( \Delta + W + P \) is non-negative on \( C_0^1(M) \), as stated.

\[\Phi\]

Assume that there exists a function \( P \), which is locally integrable with compact support, such that \( \Delta + W + P \) is non-negative on \( C_0^1(M) \). Let \( K \) be a compact neighborhood of the support of \( P \). Then,
\[
0 \leq \int_M |d\psi|^2 + W\psi^2 + P\psi^2 = \int_M |d\psi|^2 + W\psi^2,
\]
for any \( \psi \in C_0^1(M \setminus K) \), and this means that \( \Delta + W \) is non-negative on \( C_0^1(M \setminus K) \). By a result of B. Devyver [2], this implies that \( \Delta + W \) has finite index on \( C_0^1(M) \). \([\text{\Box}]\)

References