

MeerChoirs: Studying Galaxy Evolution in Nearby Galaxy Groups

Level: MSc

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Project Description:

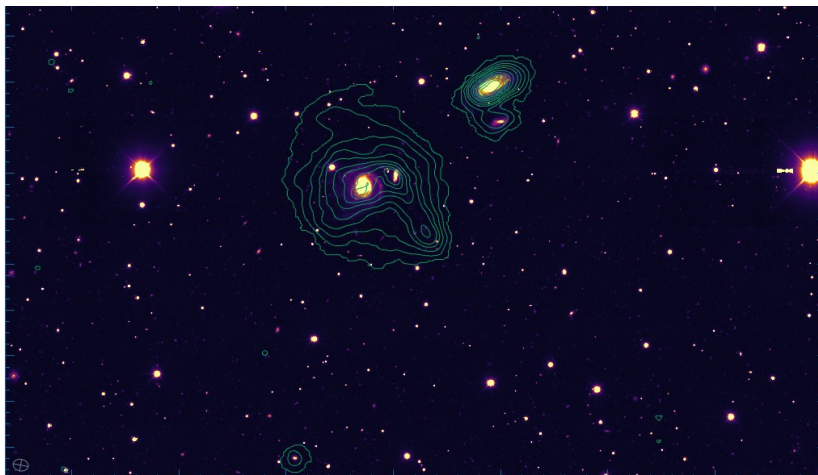
Galaxies can be found in different environments, from low density voids to galaxy groups and clusters, which are much more dense than voids. The morphology, gas content and star formation rates of galaxies varies across different environments; which suggests that the environment is an important factor to consider when studying how galaxies evolve. Groups can be thought of as a nice transition between low density field environments and high density cluster environments, therefore we can use them to study how things change between these environment extremes. MeerChoirs aims to study groups by using HI data from MeerKAT and optical data from telescopes such as SALT and WIYN. HI is an ideal tracer to look for the presence of galaxy interactions in groups, and MeerKAT provides us with high sensitivity data over a large field of view, which makes it ideal to study nearby groups and their environment. These observations are the most sensitive and highest resolution HI observations of these groups, and are detect HI in galaxies that have had no previous HI detections.

In this project the student will use the HI observations to perform a census of the HI content of the galaxies in the group, determine their kinematics, look for signatures of galaxy interaction and for intra-group gas. They will then compare the HI properties to star formation and other galaxy properties using multi-wavelength data such as WISE near and mid-infrared observations and SALT longslit observations. And to study how the HI and galaxy properties are affected by environment and other processes.

The MeerKAT data has already been taken, and the student might take part in reducing and imaging the HI for the particular group they are working on. Some of the SALT data has been observed, but further observations still need to be taken for the particular group the student will work on. The student may also take part in proposals to obtain data from other galaxies. The student will also get to work with the wider MeerChoirs team and the project has potential to be continued for PhD work.

The project is relatively flexible and can be tailored towards the student's interests and strengths.

Requirements: The student needs to be very comfortable with Python coding, and be familiar with handling fits files.



On the Left is an image showing recently imaged HI data for one of the MeerChoirs groups overlaid on a deep optical image of the central region of the group. This is only from half of the total exposure time and it is also worth noting that the MeerKAT field of view is larger than the shown region, and new sources have been detected outside of this region in the latest imaged data.