STELLAR POPULATIONS as BUILDING BLOCKS of GALAXIES

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Contents

Preface ......................................................... xvii
Organising Committee ....................................... xix

Session 1. Model Ingredients: Stellar Evolution Models

Stellar Evolutionary Models: challenges from observations of stellar systems . . . 3

Santi Cassisi

Populations of massive stars in galaxies, implications for the stellar evolution theory 13

Georges Meynet, Patrick Eggenberger and André Maeder

On Stellar Models with Blanketed Atmospheres as Boundary Conditions . . . . 23

Don A. VandenBerg, Bengt Edvardsson, Kjell Eriksson, Bengt Gustafsson and
Jason W. Ferguson

Stellar Evolution Challenge ................................... 28

A. Weiss, S. Cassisi, A. Dotter, Z. Han and Y. Lebreton

Thresholds for the Dust Driven Mass Loss from C-rich AGB Stars .............. 37

Lars Mattsson, Rutik Wahlin and Susanne Höfner

BaSTI - a library of stellar evolution models: updates and applications .......... 39

A. Pietrinferni, S. Cassisi, M. Salaris, D. Cordier and F. Castelli

Are interpolations in metallicity reliable? ............................................. 41

L. Angeretti, G. Fiorentino and L. Greggio

Low-mass stellar models with new opacity tables and varying $\alpha$-element enhance-
ment factors ..................................................... 43

A. Weiss, J. Ferguson, and M. Salaris

Session 2. Model Ingredients: Stellar Spectral Libraries

Libraries of synthetic stellar spectra – or are we building palaces upon sand? .. 47

Bengt Gustafsson, Ulrike Heiter and Bengt Edvardsson

A High Resolution $\alpha$-enhanced stellar Library for Evolutionary Population Synthe-
sis ................................................................. 58

Lucimara Martins and Paula Coelho
Metallicity and age of M31 globulars from automated fits to theoretical spectra.  
Ruth C. Peterson  

Analysis of stellar populations with large empirical libraries at high spectral resolution.  
Philippe Prugniel, Mina Koleva, Pierre Ocvirk, Damien Le Borgne and Caroline Soubiran  

Abundances in the Galactic Bulge: evidence for fast chemical enrichment.  
M. Zoccali, A. Lecureur, B. Barbuy, V. Hill, A. Renzini, D. Minniti, Y. Momany, A. Gómez and S. Ortolani  

Chemical Abundances in Metal-Rich Bulge-like Stars.  
L. Pompéia, B. Barbuy, M. Grenon and B. Gustafsson  

Flux Calibration Issues.  
Andrew J. Pickles  

Spectra of bulge stars with known abundance ratios for population synthesis.  
B. Barbuy, A. Alves-Brito, M. Zoccali, D. Minniti, V. Hill, A. Lecureur, A. Gómez, S. Ortolani, A. Renzini, P. Coelho and L. Sodré  

Physical requirements for modeling stellar atmospheres according to the different spectral features observed.  
L. Crivellari, O. Cardona and E. Simonneau  

Cross-checking reliability of some available stellar spectral libraries using artificial neural networks.  
Ranjan Gupta, S. Jotin Singh and Harinder P. Singh  

Hubble's Next Generation Spectral Library.  
Sara R. Heap and Don Lindler  

A new stellar library in the K band for the empirical calibration of the CO index.  
E. Márml-Queraltó, N. Cardiel, A. J. Cenarro, A. Vazdekis, F. J. Gorgas, and R. F. Peletier  

New Empirical Fitting Functions of the Lick/IDS indices using MILES.  
J. M. Martín-Hernández, E. Márml-Queraltó, J. Gorgas, N. Cardiel, P. Sánchez-Blázquez, A. J. Cenarro, R. F. Peletier, A. Vazdekis and J. Falcón-Barros  

Filling Gaps in Indo-US Stellar Spectral Library using Principal Component Analysis.  
Harinder P. Singh, S. Jotin Singh, Ranjan Gupta and M. Yuasa  

Spectral synthesis in the near UV (3000-4500 Å).  
Rodolfo Smiljanic and Beatriz Barbuy  

Towards a low metallicity carbon star spectral library.  
R. Wahlin, L. Mattsson, S. Höfnér and B. Aringer  

Session 3. Initial Mass Function  
The stellar initial mass function.  
Pavel Kroupa  

A Possible Origin of the Mass–Metallicity Relation of Galaxies.  
Carsten Weidner, Joachim Köppen and Pavel Kroupa
Session 4. Stellar Population Models

On TP-AGB stars and the mass of galaxies ........................................... 125
   Gustavo Bruzual A.

Stellar Population SEDs at 2.3Å ......................................................... 133
   A. Vazdekis, N. Cardiel, A.J. Cenarro, J.L. Cervantes, J. Falcón-Barroso, J.
   Gorgas, J. Jiménez-Vicente, J.M. Martín-Hernández, R.F. Peletier, P.
   Sánchez-Blázquez, S. O. Selam and E. Toloba

High resolution spectral models for solar scaled and α-enhanced compositions . 138
   P. Coelho, G. Bruzual, S. Charlot, A. Weiss and B. Barbuy

New response functions for absorption-line indices from high-resolution spectra . 143
   R. Tantalo, C. Chiosi and L. Piovan

High-redshift galaxies and the TP-AGB phase ..................................... 147
   Claudia Maraston

Modelling the Near-IR Spectra of Red Supergiant-dominated Populations ...... 152
   Ariane Lanoç, Jay S. Gallagher, Richard de Grijs, Peter Hauschildt, Djaizia
   Ladjal, Mustapha Mouhcine, Linda J. Smith, Peter R. Wood and Natascha
   Förster Schreiber

Stellar model choice and the MOPED fossil record ................................ 156
   Benjamin Panter

The Chemistry of the Local Group ..................................................... 161
   Brad K. Gibson

An optimized Hβ index for disentangling stellar clusters and galaxy ages ...... 165
   Jose Luis Cervantes and Alexandre Vazdekis

A new approach to derive [α/Fe] for integrated stellar populations .............. 167
   J.L. Cervantes, P. Coelho, B. Barbuy, and A. Vazdekis

A probabilistic formulation of evolutionary synthesis models: implications for SED
   fittings ......................................................................................... 169
   M. Cerviño and V. Luridiana

Synthesis models in the VO framework ................................................. 171
   M. Cerviño, E. Terlevich, R. Terlevich, C. Rodrigo-Blanco, V. Luridiana, A.
   López and E. Solano

Stellar Population Challenge: analysis of M67 with the VO ....................... 173
   M. Cerviño, R. Gutiérrez and E. Solano

NBursts: Simultaneous Extraction of Internal Kinematics and Parametrized SFH
   from Integrated Light Spectra ....................................................... 175
   Igor Chilingarian, Philippe Prugniel, Olga Sil’chenko and Mina Koleva

Access to Stellar Population Models in the Virtual Observatory .................. 177
   Igor V. Chilingarian

Simple Stellar Populations: constraints from open clusters and binary evolution . 179
   L. Deng and Y. Xin

A Binary Model for the UV-upturn of Elliptical Galaxies ........................ 181
   Z. Han, Ph. Podsiadlowski, A.E. Lynas-Gray and K. Schawinski
Comparison of different spectral population models ........................................... 183
   Mina Koleva, Philippe Prugniel, Pierre Ocvirk, Damien Le Borgne, Igor
      Chilingarian and Caroline Soubiran
Age and metallicity of Galactic clusters from full spectrum fitting ................... 185
   Mina Koleva, Philippe Prugniel, Pierre Ocvirk and Damien Le Borgne
The Effect Of Alpha-Element Enhancement On Surface Brightness Fluctuation
   Magnitudes And Broad-Band Colors ............................................................. 187
   Hyun-chul Lee, Guy Worthey, and John P. Blakeslee
Potential colors for studying stellar populations .............................................. 189
   Zhongmu Li, Zhanwen Han and Fenghui Zhang
Surface-brightness fluctuations in stellar populations ..................................... 191
   A. Marín-Franch and A. Aparicio
A graphical user interface for STECKMAP ......................................................... 193
   P. Ocvirk
Towards a calibration of SSP models from the optical to the mid-infrared .......... 195
   P. Pessev, P. Goudfrooij, T. Puzia and R. Chandar
Hδ in the integrated light of galaxies: What are we actually measuring? .......... 197
   L.C. Prochaska, J. A. Rose and R.P. Schiavon
Tracing stellar populations of galaxies with the SBF method ........................... 199
   G. Raimondo, M. Cantiello, E. Brocato, J. P. Blakeslee and M. Capaccioli
Separating Physical Components from Galaxy Spectra by Subspace Methods .... 201
   Ching-Wa Yip, Alex S. Szalay, Andrew J. Connolly and Tamas Budavári
Blue Stragglers in Galactic Open Clusters and Simple Stellar Population Models 203
   Y. Xin, L. Deng and Z.W. Han
Binary Stellar Population Synthesis Model ....................................................... 205
   F. Zhang, Z. Han and L. Li

Session 5. Stellar Populations in the Milky Way
Decomposition of the Galactic Disk ................................................................. 209
   Bacham E. Reddy
Studying Milky Way structure using stellar populations .................................. 213
   J.T.A. de Jong, D.J. Butler, H-W. Rix, A.E. Dolphin and D. Martínez-Delgado
The HST/ACS Survey of Galactic
   Globular Clusters ............................................................................................ 218
   Ata Sarajedini
Metallicity distribution of ω Cen Red Giants based on the Strömgren m1 metallicity
   index ................................................................................................................. 223
   A. Calamida, G. Bono, L.M. Freyhammer, F. Grundahl, C.E. Corsi, P. B.
      Stetson, R. Buonanno, M. Hilker and T. Richtler
Detailed Properties of Populous Clusters in the Large Magellanic Cloud .......... 227
   A.J. Grocholski, A. Sarajedini, A.A. Cole, D. Geisler,
      K.A.G. Olsen, G.P. Tiede, V.V. Smith and C.L. Mancone
Mn, Cu, and Zn abundances in metal-rich globular clusters
A. Alves-Brito, B. Barbuy and D.M. Allen

New Lessons from the First Galactic Stars
J. Andersen and B. Nordström

The Determination of Stellar Parameters of Giants in the Galactic Disks and Bulge
Joakim Byström, Nils Ryde, Sofia Feltzing, Johan Holmberg and Thomas Bensby

Reconstructing the spatial distribution of the Galactic stellar halo
M. Cignoni, V. Ripepi, M. Marconi, J. M. Alcalá, M. Capaccioli, M. Pannella and R. Silvotti

Membership, binarity, reddening and metallicity of red giant candidates in three southern open clusters
J.J. Claria, J.-C. Mermilliod, A.E. Piatti and M.C. Parisi

Near-Infrared photometry of the Galactic Globular Cluster NGC 6441
M. Dall'Ora, J. Storm, G. Bono, P.B. Stetson, G. Andreuzzi, R. Buonanno, F. Caputo, M. Marconi, M. Monelli, A. Piersimoni, V. Ripepi, L. Vanzi and A.K. Vivas

The NGC 2419 project: preliminary results on stellar variability
M. Di Criscienzo, G. Greco, M. Dall'Ora, V. Ripepi, G. Clementini, I. Musella, M. Marconi, L. Federici, L. Di Fabrizio, Baldacci and M. Maio

Alpha-enhancement in the MW: results from the SDSS spectroscopic stellar database
M. Franchini, C. Morossi, P. Di Marcantonio and M.L. Malagnini

TCS-CAIN: NIR survey of the Galactic plane
C. González Fernández, A. Cabrera Lavers, F. Garzón, P.L. Hammersley, M. López-Corredoira and B. Vicente

Kinematic structure in the Galactic halo at the North Galactic Pole: RR Lyrae and BHB stars show different kinematics
T.D. Kinman, C. Cacciari, A. Bragagli, A. Buzzoni and A. Spagna

The Frequency of Carbon-Enhanced Metal-Poor Stars Based on SDSS Spectroscopy
B. Marsteller, T.C. Beers, T. Sivarani, S. Rossi, J. Knapp, B. Plez and J. Johnson

Structure of the Milky Way and the distribution of young stellar clusters
María Messineo, Karl M. Menten, Harm J. Habing, and Monika Petr-Gotzens and Frédéric Schuller

Integrated spectroscopy and individual spectra of stars of open cluster remnants and candidates
D.B. Pavani, E. Bica, A.V. Ahumada and J.J. Claria

The Chemical Evolution of Omega Centauri
Donatella Romano

A First Study of Giant Stars in the Galactic Bulge based on Crises spectra
N. Ryde, B. Edvardsson, B. Gustafsson, and H.-U. Käufl

The puzzling origin and evolution of stellar populations in ω Centauri
A. Sollima, F. R. Ferraro, M. Bellazzini and E. Pancino

Session 6. Resolved Stellar Populations in the Local Group
Resolved Stellar Population Modeling .......................... 267
Antonio Aparicio, Sebastián L. Hidalgo, Carme Gallart and Santi Cassisi

Star Formation History and Chemical Evolution of Resolved Galaxies: a New Model 274
Myung Gyoon Lee and In-Soo Yuk

Abundances & Abundance Ratios in our Galaxy & the Local Group ............. 279
Eline Tolstoy

The Recent Star Formation Histories of Nearby Galaxies ...................... 286
Evan D. Skillman, John M. Cannon and Andrew E. Dolphin

The ACS LCID project: overview and first results .......................... 290
Carme Gallart, for the LCID Team

The ACS LCID Project: Quantifying the Delayed Star Formation in Leo A ... 295
Andrew A. Cole for the LCID Team

The VMC survey and the SFH of some Local Group Galaxies ................. 300
Maria-Rosa L. Cioni

Old main-sequence turnoff photometry in the SMC: Star Formation History and
Chemical Enrichment Law ........................................... 305
Noelia E. D. Noël, Carme Gallart, Antonio Aparicio, Sebastián L. Hidalgo,
Ricardo Carrera, Edgardo Costa and René A. Méndez

A New Deep HST/ACS CMD of I Zw 18: Evidence for Red Giant Branch Stars . 310
A. Aloisi, F. Annibali, J. Mack, M. Tosi, R. van der Marel, G. Clementini,
R. A. Contreras, G. Fiorentino, M. Marconi, I. Musella and A. Saha

The Star Formation History of M33’s Outer Regions ........................ 315
M.K. Barker, A. Sarajedini, D. Geisler, P. Harding and R. Schommer

The ACS LCID Project: Variable Stars in Tucana and LGS3 ................. 317
Edouard J. Bernard for the LCID Team

A SAGE View of the Mass Losing Sources in the Large Magellanic Cloud .... 319
Robert D. Blum, S. Points, S. Srinivasan, K. Völk, M. Meixner, F.
Markwick-Kemper, R. Indebetouw, B. Whitney, M. Meade, B. Babler, E.B.
Churchwell, K. Gordon, C. Engelbracht, B.-Q. For, K. Misseit, U. Vijh, C.
Leitherer, W. Reach, J.L. Hora, and The SAGE Team

Probing Stellar Populations in the Outskirts of NGC4244 .................... 321
S. Buehler, A.M.N. Ferguson, M.J. Irwin, N. Arimoto and P. Jablonka

The Magellanic Clouds Chemical Enrichment History via Ca II Triplet Spectroscopy 323
R. Carrera C. Gallart A. Aparicio E. Costa E. Hardy R. Mendez and N. Noel

A method for recovering the star formation history of resolved stellar populations 325
M. Cignoni S. Degl’Innocenti, P. G. Prada Moroni and S. N. Shore

Integrated spectral properties of blue concentrated star clusters of the Large Magellanic Cloud ..................... 327
J.J. Claría, M.C. Parisi, A.V. Ahumada, J.F.C. Santos Jr., E. Bica and A.E.
Piatti

A wide field survey of Sagittarius dSph. Data and tools for the study of the Sgr
Tidal Stream ......................................................... 329
M. Correnti, M. Bellazzini, F.R. Ferraro and L. Monaco
RR Lyrae stars in the Bootes structure .......................... 331
   M. Dall’Ora, G. Clementini, K. Kinemuchi, V. Ripepi, M. Marconi, M. Di Criscienzo, L. Di Fabrizio, C. Greco, C. T. Rodgers, C. Kuehn and H. A. Smith
Stellar populations in the Magellanic Clouds: looking through the dust .......................... 333
   Guido De Marchi, Nino Panagia and Martino Romaniello
The Stellar Structures around Disk Galaxies .......................... 335
   Igor Drozdovsky, Nikolay Tikhonov, Antonio Aparicio, Carme Gallart, Matteo Monelli, Sebastian Hidalgo, Edouard J. Bernard, Olga Galazutdinova and the LCID team
VL T spectroscopy of RR Lyrae stars in the Sagittarius northern tidal stream .......................... 337
   S. Duffau, M. T. Ruiz, R. Zinn and A. K. Vivas
The star formation history of the dwarf irregular galaxy SagDIG .......................... 339
   E. V. Held, Y. Momany, L. Rizzi, I. Saviane, L. R. Bedin and M. Gullieuszik
Very metal poor Classical Cepheids: variables in IZw18 .......................... 341
   G. Fiorentino, M. Marconi, G. Clementini, I. Musella, A. Aloisi, F. Annibali, R. A. Contreras and M. Tosi
The Oosterhoff types of the Fornax dSph Globular Clusters .......................... 343
   C. Greco, G. Clementini, M. Catelan, E. Poretti, E.V. Held, M. Gullieuszik, M. Maio, A. Rest, N. De Lee, H. A. Smith and B.J. Pritzl
The Star Formation History of Phoenix Dwarf Galaxy using IAC-pop Algorithm .......................... 345
   Sebastian L. Hidalgo, Antonio Aparicio and David Martínez-Delgado
The Binary Fraction of the Young Star Cluster NGC 1818 in the Large Magellanic Cloud .......................... 347
   Yi Hu, Qiang Liu, Licai Deng, and Richard de Grijs
The outer disk stellar populations in M31 .......................... 349
   R. A. Johnson, D. Faria, A. M. N. Ferguson and J. C. Richardson
A spectroscopy-based Age-Metallicity Relation of the SMC .......................... 351
   Andrea Kayser, Eva K. Grebel, Daniel R. Harbeck, Andrew A. Cole, Andreas Koch, Katharina Glatt, John S. Gallagher and Gary S. Da Costa
Analysis of HST CMDs of 15 intermediate-age LMC clusters: self-consistent physical parameters and 3D distribution .......................... 353
   L.O. Kerber, B.X. Santiago and E. Brocato
Star Formation History of Dwarfs in Nearby Galaxy Groups .......................... 355
   L. Makarova, D. Makarov, I. Karachentsev, A. Dolphin, B. Tully, S. Sakai, E. Shaya, L. Rizzi, M. Sharina and V. Karachentseva
A panoramic view of the Southern quadrant of the Andromeda galaxy outer halo .......................... 357
   Nicolas F. Martin, Rodrigo A. Ibata and Mike J. Irwin
Searching for RR Lyrae stars in the Canis Major overdensity .......................... 359
   C. Mateu, K. Vivas, R. Zinn and L. Miller
The structural complexity of the dwarf galaxies of the Local Group .......................... 361
   Alan W. McConnachie, Nobuo Arimoto and Mike J. Irwin
Spitzer Survey of the Large Magellanic Cloud: Surveying the Agents of a Galaxy’s Evolution (SAGE) .......................... 363
   M. Meixner, K. Gordon, R. Indebetouw, B. Whitney, M. Meade, B. Babler, J. Hora, U. Vijh, S. Srinivasan, C. Leitherer, M. Sewilo, C. Engelbracht, M. Block, B. For, R. Blum, W. Reach and J-P. Bernard
The Cepheids Variable Stars Population in the Local Group Dwarf Irregular Galaxy Pegasus ................................. 365
I. Meschin, C. Gallart, S. Cassisi, A. Aparicio and A. Rosenberg

Kinematical properties of stellar populations in the Carina dSph galaxy ....... 367
M. Monelli, G. Bono, M. Nonino, P. Francois, F. Thevenin, A. Aparicio, R.
Buonanno, F. Caputo, C.E. Corsi, M. Dall’Ora, C. Gallart, A. Manteanu, L.
Pulone, V. Ripepi, H.A. Smith, F.B. Stetson, A.R. Walker and J.Q. Public

The ACS LCID project: data reduction strategy ......................... 369
M. Monelli for the LCID team

A photometric and spectroscopic study of the stellar populations in the Large
Magellanic Cloud .................................................. 371
A. Mucciarelli, F. R. Ferraro, E. Carretta, L. Origlia and F. Fusi Pecci

The Star Formation History in a SMC field: IAC-star/IAC-pop at work ........ 373
Noelia E. D. Noel, Antonio Aparicio, Carme Gallart, Sebastian L. Hidalgo,
Edgardo Costa and Rene A. Mendez

Stellar Populations of Halo Substructure Along The Major Axis of M31 ...... 375
J. C. Richardson, A. M. N. Ferguson, R. A. Johnson and D. C. Faria

Session 7. Stellar Populations in Early-type Galaxies

Integrated Spectra of Early-Type Galaxies ............................ 379
James A. Rose

Stellar Population gradients in early-type galaxies ....................... 391
Patricia Sanchez-Blazquez, Duncan Forbes, Jay Strader, Pierre Ocvirk, Jean
Brodie and Robert Proctor

Early Type Galaxies in the Mid Infrared: a new flavor to their stellar populations 395
A. Bressan, P. Panuzzo, O. Vega, L. Buson, M. Clemens, G.L. Granato, R.
Rampazzo, L. Silva and J.R. Valdes

Stellar Populations of Decoupled Cores in E/S0 Galaxies with SAURON and OASIS 399
Richard M. McDermid, Eric Emsellem, Kristen L. Shapiro, Roland Bacon,
Martin Bureau, Michele Cappellari, Roger L. Davies, Tim de Zeeuw, Jesus
Falcon-Barroso, Davor Krajnovic, Harald Kuntschner, Reynier F. Peletier and
Marc Sarzi

The use of [Mg/Fe] to trace truncated star formation in elliptical galaxies .... 404
Ignacio G. de la Rosa, Reinaldo R. de Carvalho, Alexandre Vazdekis and Beatriz
Barbuy

The many faces of early-type dwarf galaxies ........................... 409
T. Lisker, E. K. Grebel, B. Binggeli, M. Vodička, K. Glatt, and P. Westera

The star formation history of dwarf galaxies: First results of the MAGPOP-ITP 414
Dolf Michielsen, Alessandro Boselli, Javier Gorgas, Reynier Peletier and the
MAGPOP-ITP team

Central Stellar Populations of S0 Galaxies in the Fornax Cluster ........... 416
A.G. Bedregal, A. Aragón-Salamanca, M.R. Merrifield and N. Cardiel

Galaxies with nested bars: constraining their formation scenarios ........... 418
Adriana de Lorenzo-Cáceres, Alexandre Vazdekis and J. Alfonso L. Aguerri
Stellar Populations Across cD Galaxies
Susan I. Loubser, A.E. Sansom and I.K. Soechting

Stellar population analysis of two ellipticals
André de C. Milone, Miriani Pastoriza and Mauro Rickes

Stellar line-strength indices distribution inside the bar region
I. Pérez, P. Sánchez-Blázquez and A. Zurita

IC 4200: an early-type galaxy formed via a major merger.
Paolo Serra, S.C. Trager, J.M. van der Hulst, T.A. Oosterloo, R. Morganti and J.H. van Gorkom

Stellar populations of dwarf elliptical galaxies from optical and near-IR high-resolution spectroscopic data.
E. Toloba, J. Gorgas, A.J. Cenarro and the MAGPOP-ITP team

Session 8. Extragalactic Globular Cluster Systems

Formation History of Stars and Star Clusters in Nearby Galaxies
S. S. Larsen, M. D. Mora, J. P. Brodie and T. Richtler

The Globular Cluster System of NGC 5128
Doug Geisler, Matias Gómez, W.E. Harris, K. Woodley, G.L. Harris, T. Puzia and M. Hempel

Extragalactic globular clusters: unraveling galaxy formation and constraining stellar evolution theories.
A. Javier Cenarro, Michael A. Beasley, Jay Strader, Jean P. Brodie and Duncan A. Forbes

Resolving Stellar Populations in Extragalactic Globular Cluster Systems
Maren Hempel

Star Cluster Population of the Interacting Galaxy System M51
Narae Hwang and Myung Gyoon Lee

Planetary Nebulae in Extragalactic Young Star Clusters
S. S. Larsen and T. Richtler

Ages and metallicities of Globular Clusters in M33
Alessia Moretti and E. V. Held

Globular Cluster Systems in Massive Low Surface Brightness Galaxies
Daniela Villegas, Markus Kissler-Patig, Andrés Jordán, Paul Goudfrooij and Martin Zwaan

Session 9. Stellar Populations in Late-type Galaxies

The Star Formation History of Late Type Galaxies
Roberto Cid Fernandes

Stellar Populations in KDCs of Sa Galaxies
Jesús Falcón-Barroso, Roland Bacon, Michele Cappellari, Roger Davies, P. Tim de Zeeuw, Eric Emsellem, Davor Krajnović, Harald Kuntschner, Richard M. McDermid, Reynier F. Peletier, Marc Sarzi and Glenn van de Ven
Nuclear Star Clusters (Nuclei) in Spirals and Connection to Supermassive Black Holes .................................................. 475
Roeland P. van der Marel, Joern Rossa, Carl Jakob Walcher, Torsten Böker, Luis C. Ho, Hans-Walter Rix and Joseph C. Shields

Stellar Populations in Spiral Galaxies ........................................ 480
Lauren A. MacArthur, Jesús J. González and Stéphane Courteau

The Nature of Galactic Bulges from SAURON Absorption Line Strength Maps .................................................. 485
Reynier F. Peletier, Jesús Falcón-Barroso, Katia Ganda, Roland Bacon, Michele Cappellari, Roger L. Davies, P. Tim de Zeeuw, Eric Enslem, Davor Krajnović, Harald Kuntschner, Richard M. McDermid, Marc Sarzi, and Glenn van de Ven

The Stellar Populations of Seyfert 2 Nuclei ................................ 489
Marc Sarzi, Joseph C. Shields, Richard W. Pogge, and Paul Martini

Techniques for quantifying the Star Formation Morphology of Galaxies at increasing redshift ........................................ 493
J. Ruyma Azzollini and J.E. Beckman

The edges of the stellar populations of early type spirals as probed by their radial brightness profiles ........................................ 495
J. Beckman, L. Gutiérrez, R. Aladro, P. Erwin and M. Pohlen

A SINFONI view of the nuclear star formation ring in NGC 613 .................. 497
Torsten Böker, J. Falcon-Barroso, J. H. Knapen, E. Schinnerer, E. Allard and S. Ryder

Stellar Populations in the Center of the Barred Galaxy NGC 4900 ............. 499
Simon Cantin, Mercedes Mollá, Carmelle Robert and Anne Pellerin

Where in the Virgo Cluster are Galaxies Stripped? Stellar Population Evolution of Stripped Spiral Galaxies in Virgo ......................... 501
Hugh H. Crowl and Jeffrey D.P. Kenney

GHOSTS: The Resolved Stellar Outskirts of Massive Disk Galaxies ............. 503
Roelof S. de Jong, A.C. Seth, E.F. Bell, T.M. Brown, J.S. Bullock, S. Courteau, J.J. Dalcanton, H.C. Ferguson, P. Goudfrooij, S. Holfeltz, C. Purcell, D. Radburn-Smith and D. Zucker

Structure and evolution of star-forming gas in late-type spiral galaxies ........ 505
Kambiz Fathi, John E. Beckman, Almudena Zurita, Mónica Relaño, Johan H. Knapen, Göran Östlin, Claude Carignan, Laurent Chemin, Olivier Daigle and Olivier Hernandez

Multi-Band Bar/Bulge/Disk Image Decomposition of a Thousand Galaxies ..... 507
Dimitri Gadotti and Guinevere Kauffmann

News from bulges hosted by low surface brightness galaxies .................. 509
Gaspar Galaz, Alvaro Villalobos, Lorenzo Morelli, Ivan Lacerna, Carlos Donzelli and Leopoldo Infante

Two-dimensional spectroscopy of late-type spirals ................................ 511
Katia Ganda, Reynier F.Peletier, Jesús Falcón-Barroso and Richard M. McDermid

Comparison of UBV R photometry of giant HII regions in NGC 628 with a detailed grid of evolution models of star clusters .................. 513
Alexander S. Gusev, Valery I. Myakutin, Firouz K. Sakhibov and Mikhail A. Smirnov
| Title                                                                 | Page |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| The star formation history in circumnuclear regions of galaxies       | 515  |
| Johan H. Knapen, Emma L. Allard, Marc Sarzi, Reynier F. Peletier and Lisa M. Mazzuca |
| Physical conditions of ionized gas and stellar populations in circumnuclear starbursts | 517  |
| Johan H. Knapen, Lisa M. Mazzuca and Marc Sarzi                       |
| Stellar population in bulge of spiral galaxies                        | 519  |
| L. Morelli, E. Pompei, A. Pizzella, L. Coccato, E.M. Corsini, J. Mendez, R. Saglia, M. Sarzi and F. Bertola |
| Radial distributions of spectral absorption indices in spiral disks    | 521  |
| Mercedes Mollá                                                        |
| Detection of a stellar halo in NGC 4244                               | 523  |
| A. Seth, R. de Jong, J. Dalcanton, and the GHOSTS team                |
| Stellar ages and star-forming properties of galaxies in a dense group around IC 65 | 525  |
| J. Vennik and U. Hopp                                                 |
| Sampling effects in the emission line spectra of HII regions           | 527  |
| M. Villaverde, V. Luridiana and M. Cerviño                           |
| Stellar populations and AGN in the bulges of SDSS galaxies            | 529  |
| Vivienne Wild, Guinevere Kauffmann and Tim Heckman                    |
| Chemodynamical models of barred galaxies                              | 531  |
| Hervé Wozniak and Léo Michel-Dansac                                   |
| Radial Dependency of Stellar Population Properties in Disk Galaxies from SDSS Photometry | 533  |
| Ching-Wa Yip and Rosemary F. G. Wyse                                 |

**Session 10. Stellar Populations at Higher Redshifts**

Stellar Populations at Higher Redshifts                                      | 537  |
| Tadayuki Kodama                                                           |
| Environment and the epochs of galaxy formation in the SDSS era             | 546  |
| D. Thomas, C. Maraston, K. Schawinski, M. Sarzi, S.-J. Joo, S. Kaviraj and S. K. Yi |
| Chemical clocks for early-type galaxies in clusters                        | 551  |
| Conrado Carretero, Alexandre Vazdekis and John E. Beckman                 |
| A census of the physical parameters of nearby galaxies                    | 556  |
| Anna Gallazzi, J. Brinchmann, S. Charlot and S.D.M White                  |
| IFU observations of the core of Abell 2218                                | 561  |
| N. Cardiel, S.F. Sánchez, M.A.W. Verheijen, S. Pedraz, and G. Covone      |
| Colors of intermediate z bulges in Groth and GOODS-N                      | 563  |
| Lilian Domínguez-Palmero and Marc Bakcells                                |
| Stellar Population in Extremely Red Galaxies                              | 565  |
| A.Hempel, D.Schaerer, J.Richard, E.Egami and R.Pelló                      |
Star formation properties of UV selected galaxies in the ELAIS field  
J. Iglesias-Páramo, V. Buat, J. Hernández-Fernández, C.K. Xu, D. Burgarella 
and GALEX & SWIRE teams  

Velocity Fields of Spiral Galaxies in z~0.5 Clusters  
Elif Kutdemir, Bodo Ziegler and Reynier F. Peletier  

News from z\leq6-10 galaxy candidates found behind gravitational lensing clusters  
D.Schaerer, A.Hempel, R.Peló, E.Egami and J.Richard  

Toward more precise photometric redshift estimation  
O. Vince and I. Csabai  

Session 11. New Observing Facilities  
Stellar populations – the next ten years  
J. Bland-Hawthorn  

Author Index  

Preface

The last IAU Symposium on Stellar Populations was held in 1995, i.e., more than ten years ago. We felt that at the time where stellar populations are providing among the strongest constraints on our current picture of how galaxies form and evolve an IAU Symposium to review the status of this field and to discuss routes that need to be followed to pursue this research was largely needed. We therefore proposed the idea to celebrate an IAU Symposium on the island of La Palma, where one of the observatories that have contributed so much to the development of this field is located, and where a new 8-10m class telescope will soon see the first light. An IAU Symposium had not been held in La Palma since the Observatorio de El Roque de Los Muchachos was built up about two decades ago.

The Symposium was sponsored by IAU Commission 28 and supported by six IAU Commissions relevant for the field (see acknowledgements below). The Symposium obtained the support of IAU Divisions VII and VIII and was approved by the IAU Executive Committee in April 2005. The Symposium was then properly announced reaching a strong oversubscription with more than 300 pre-registered participants. As a result, we were obliged to turn down a rather high proportion of the pre-registered participants due to the limited capacity of the selected Hotel. As a result about 40 people who were originally included in the waiting list were admitted in the end. Finally, approximately 180 participants from 25 countries attended the Symposium. IAU grants were awarded to 40 participants. Preference was given to young researchers from economically less-privileged countries.

We would like to express our immense gratitude to all the members of the LOC for their very active involvement in the organisation of the meeting and above all to Tanja Karthaus who did most of the work. We would like to thank the Hotel for their great help and flexibility in all sort of aspects related to the organisation of the event and for the participants requests. We also would like to thank Sonia Soria for her great help and in particular for obtaining most of photos during this event. We also express our gratitude to all the members of the SOC for their invaluable help to set up the whole scientific programme.

The conference was attended by both modelers (in stellar evolution and stellar populations) and observers working on Stellar Populations in the Milky Way, the Local Group and unresolved nearby and high redshift galaxies. We are particularly glad that researchers of resolved stellar populations and those working with integrated light, two important areas of research that have grown separately, attended the Symposium to unite their efforts in the era where new ground and space astronomical facilities are providing the means to study the same objects with these two approaches. The programme included 12 reviews to introduce each topic and 50 contributed talks. The SOC asked each reviewer to present a very balanced overview of the theme. The contributed talks were
selected by the SOC, and special care was taken to represent all the themes covered in
the Symposium. We are particularly satisfied that a balance between active senior and
young researchers was reached in the programme of talks. In addition, there were about
140 poster papers. Within the SOC we considered different ways for emphasizing the
true relevance of these posters. We therefore decided to ask five experienced researchers
to help by presenting summaries of the posters, in this way giving people an overview
of the information present, so that it would be easier for the participants to select the
posters that they wanted to look at in detail. Each of the five poster summary sessions
was allotted 20 minutes (1 hour and 40 minutes in total) and all were scheduled during
the first half of the week so that the participants had enough time to look at the posters
afterwards. The SOC members would like to express our gratitude to S. Heap, J. An-
dersen, P. Stetson, J.E. Beckman and U. Fritze, for their enthusiasm and great effort for
accomplishing such a difficult task.

We also organized two challenges, where researchers from the community participating in
the conference were asked to model a number of pre-defined problems. The solutions were
discussed, and by comparing them the audience could get a good idea of the differences
between (I) various stellar evolution models and (II) different stellar population models.
The specifications of the proposed models and fits to be calculated had been defined
in the last week of June 2006 during the workshop “Fine-Tuning Stellar Population
Models” held at the Lorentz Center in Leiden, The Netherlands, which was attended by
about 60 participants, 40 of which also attended the IAU Symposium 241. We would
like to express our personal thanks to the organizers of these challenges, A. Weiss and
S. Trager, for the tremendous work involved in the definition of the challenges, for their
patience and struggle with the community to get their results in due time and for their
efforts in summarizing the results and conclusions. We also would like to thank all the
groups who contributed to these challenges. Finally, the Symposium included two sets of
three parallel discussion sessions, where in smaller groups people a number of important
problems in the field were discussed:

- Abundance patterns of different elements in stars and galaxies: what are they and
  what can we learn from them.
- When did the first galaxies form?
- What can be done to make the Virtual Observatory useful for stellar population
  analysis?
  - Later stellar evolution phases and their impact on population synthesis
  - What is the relationship between compact ellipticals (such as M32) and more massive
    ellipticals
- What should we do with the future instruments on the Hubble Space Telescope
  (WFC3 and COS)?

We are happy with the experience of a large conference in La Palma. The weather started
rough, but became very pleasant at the end of the conference. Many participants visited
the observatory, during one of the two excursions, and saw the beautiful Island of La
Palma. We hope that for many people this has been a remarkable visit, and that many
IAU Symposia will follow here.

Alexandre Vazdekis and Reynier Peletier, co-chairs SOC,
La Laguna, Groningen, May 5, 2007
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