

UNIFIED MODELING OF GALAXY POPULATIONS IN CLUSTERS

Allocation: NSF PRAC/3,000 Knh

PI: Thomas Quinn¹

Co-PI: Fabio Governato¹

Collaborator: Michael Tremmel¹

¹University of Washington

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Clusters of galaxies are both a useful probe of cosmology and a laboratory for understanding galactic feedback processes. However, modeling galactic-scale feedback processes in the context of a cluster presents a computational challenge because of the large dynamic range involved. Through the use of a highly scalable N-body/Smooth Particle Hydrodynamics code running on Blue Waters, our project is beginning to tackle this challenging problem. Preliminary results show that models that have successfully reproduced the morphology and number densities of field galaxies can also produce realistic models of cluster galaxies. Large computational resources with high-performance networks are necessary for these calculations.

RESEARCH CHALLENGE

Groups and clusters of galaxies are the largest bound objects in the Universe, containing more than a third of the warm-hot diffuse gas and a significant fraction of the galaxies in the universe. Consequently, understanding the physical processes that occur in group and cluster environments, including the interactions among the dark matter, hot diffuse gas, stars, and active galactic nuclei (AGN), is key to gaining insights into the evolution of baryons and galaxies across the age of the universe. Furthermore, galaxy clusters are one of the few places where the majority of baryons are visible via X-ray and microwave. In contrast to field galaxies, where feedback from supernovae and AGN puts gas into a mostly invisible circumgalactic medium, feedback from cluster galaxies will impact the state of the intracluster medium (ICM). Hence, clusters will provide very tight constraints on our understanding of galactic feedback processes. Clusters of galaxies are also key probes of cosmology and large-scale structure. Their size makes them visible across a wide range of redshifts, and their population statistics are sensitive to cosmological parameters such as the amplitude of the initial power spectrum and the evolution of the cosmic expansion rate. However, using clusters as cosmological probes requires understanding of the relationship between observables and the total mass of the cluster, which in turn requires the detailed modeling of the gravitational/hydrodynamic processes using large simulations.

METHODS & CODES

This project uses the highly scalable N-body/hydrodynamics code ChaNGa to model the formation and evolution of a population of galaxies in a Coma-sized galaxy cluster, including their contribution to and interaction with the ICM. This code is built on the Charm++ [1] parallel programming infrastructure. It leverages the object-based virtualization and data-driven style of computation inherent in Charm++ to adaptively overlap communication and computation and achieve high levels of resource utilization on large systems. The code has been shown to scale well to 0.5 million cores on Blue Waters [2].

The ChaNGa code includes a well-constrained model for star formation and feedback, and improved implementation of supermassive black hole formation, growth, mergers, and feedback [3,4]. In our previous Blue Waters work we have demonstrated that these models can reproduce populations of field galaxies at intermediate-to-high redshift [5], and can reproduce the observed stellar mass-halo mass relationship of galaxies from dwarfs up to galaxy groups [4].

Our simulations will be compared to observations of cluster galaxies to understand the physical and temporal origin of their morphologies. The model ICM will be compared to X-ray and microwave data (via the Sunyaev–Zeldovich effect) to understand the relation between these observations and the underlying gas properties. Finally, the overall mass distribution will be used to better understand how these clusters act as gravitational lenses for background galaxies.

RESULTS & IMPACT

We have completed a prototype simulation of a cluster one-tenth the mass of our target cluster, but at the same mass resolution. Even this simulation is pushing the state of the art in modeling galaxy clusters. Preliminary analysis of this cluster indicates that we continue to produce the observed stellar mass to halo mass even at 10^{14} solar masses. The model central galaxy also displays a morphology typical of observed brightest cluster galaxies: an old, extended stellar distribution and a complete lack of cold gas.

WHY BLUE WATERS

Our scientific goals require modeling over a large dynamic range in mass and space. We have demonstrated that we need mass resolutions on the order of 10^5 solar masses to accurately follow star formation and galaxy morphology. In addition, we

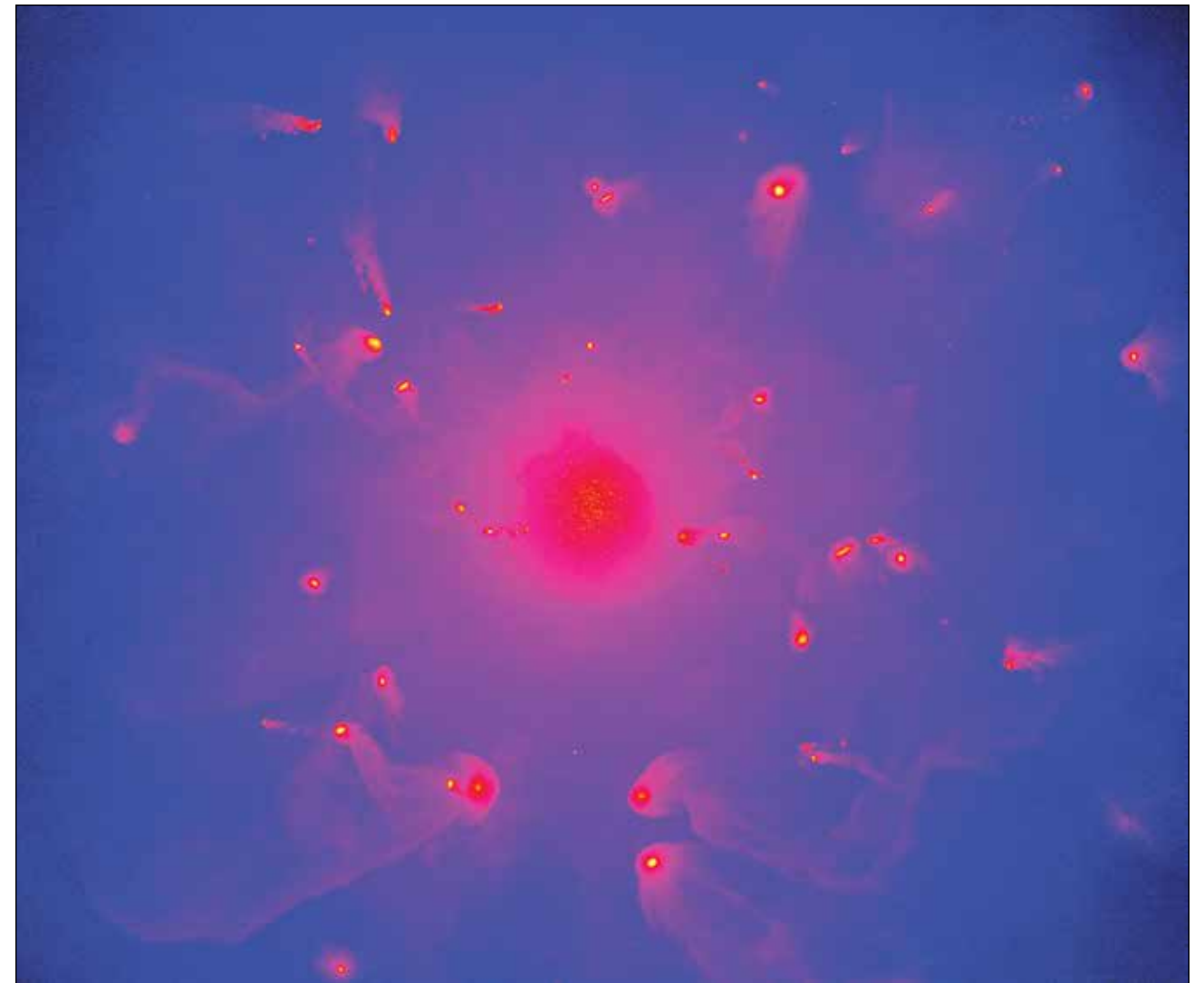


Figure 1: The gas density is shown for the central 3 megaparsecs in a simulation of a Virgo-size cluster (10^{14} solar masses). Note the lack of dense gas in the very center and the stripping of the dense gas out of the smaller galaxies.

need to model a galaxy cluster on the order of 10^{15} solar masses that is comparable to those observed over a range of redshifts. Hence, 10 billion particles are needed. Such a simulation can only be run on the largest computers available. Furthermore, the long-range nature of gravity requires a high-performance, low-latency network to perform the calculation.