

GEFÖRDERT VOM



Bundesministerium
für Bildung
und Forschung

Schlussbericht

Verbund: 05A2020 - D-MeerKAT-II

Zuwendungsempfänger: Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München
Projektleitung: Prof. Dr. Joseph Mohr
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Förderkennzeichen: 05A20WM4
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Projektträger: Projektträger DESY

Zusätzlicher Kontakt:
Zusätzlicher Name:

Genutzte Großgeräte:	Labor	Gerät	Experiment
Diplomarbeiten:	0		
Dissertationen:	0		
Habilitationen:	0		
Referierte Publikationen:	14		
Andere Veröffentlichungen:	2		
Patente:	0		
Bachelorarbeiten:	0		
Masterarbeiten:	2		
Staatsexamen:	0		

Dieser Bericht wurde beim Projektträger über einen individuellen Online-Zugang vom Projektleiter eingereicht und am 13.05.2025 15:15 für eine Veröffentlichung freigegeben.

Schlussbericht

Zuwendungsempfänger:	Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität
Projektleitung:	Prof. Dr. Joseph Mohr
Verbund:	05A20WM4 D-MeerKAT-II
Thema:	Ein deutscher Beitrag zur Weiterentwicklung der Radioastronomie im Zentimeterwellenlängenbereich

Zusammenfassung

In Work Package 4 of the D-MeerKAT-II project, we carried out the development of a new interferometric imaging algorithm for on-the-fly (OTF) scanning observations with the MeerKAT observatory. Once this algorithm was demonstrated on test scan data, we build up a series of radio astronomy pipelines for scan data calibration, flagging, OTF correction, imaging and self-calibration and then later added cataloging and mosaicking. We carried out extensive validation of these pipelines to determine the quality of the astrometry and photometry of the radio continuum sources imaged with the pipeline. These tests, coming during a no-cost extension of the D-MeerKAT-II project, indicated measurable noise in the astrometry and photometry that triggered further improvements and a different mode of radio imaging in the follow-on project D-MeerKAT-III. The pipelines developed in D-MeerKAT-II have been shared with collaborators and are the basis for the data processing of the ongoing MeerKLASS survey that is composed of scan observations.

Bericht

1 Aufgabenstellung und Voraussetzungen, unter denen das Vorhaben durchgeführt wurde

The Meer Karoo Array Telescope (MeerKAT) is a modern radio interferometer built by the South African Radio Astronomy Observatory (SARAO) that was put into operation in 2018. The Max Planck Society (MPG) is contributing S-band receivers, hardware and software to this precursor instrument of the Square Kilometre Array (SKA). It has also built the SKA-MPG prototype antenna at the same site. That antenna was put into operation in 2022. This prototype enables the first observations with an SKA-Mid antenna, and the MeerKAT extension MeerKAT+ will consist of such antennas.

The BMBF joint research project D-MeerKAT-II enabled German scientists at seven universities (Bielefeld, Bochum, TU Dortmund, Hamburg, Heidelberg, LMU and TU Munich) and four non-university research institutes (MPIfR Bonn, MPA Garching, FZ Jülich, TLS cTautenburg) to make a variety of contributions to the further development of radio astronomical methods in the MeerKAT accessible wavelength ranges. These contributions include the establishment of a proto-type, future-oriented center for large amounts of radio astronomical research data, the development of scalable pipelines for MeerKAT (Work Package 1), the establishment of new methods for MeerKAT imaging and signal processing (Work Package 2), the development of new methods for transient searches in radio data (Work Package 3), the preparation of an “on-the-fly” interferometric imaging algorithm and associated pipelines for radio imaging observations in scanning mode with MeerKAT (Work Package 4), and the upgrade of the SKA-MPG telescope for a spectropolarimetric sky survey and robotic operation, as well as quality control of the data using metadata (Work Package 5).

At the LMU we focused on Work Package 4 in collaboration with other scientists in D-MeerKAT II (TLS, Bochum) as well as radio experts associated with the MeerKLASS survey project, which is a nominally 10.000 deg² radio intensity mapping survey carried out in scan mode by MeerKAT to study the 3D distribution of HI as traced by the spiral galaxies within the large scale structure of the Universe. These external collaborators are located in South Africa (University of Western Cape- UWC), in the UK (Manchester University) and in New Zealand Victoria University of Wellington).

2 Wissenschaftlicher und technischer Stand, an den angeknüpft wurde

The work in the D-MeerKAT-II project built upon the preliminary work done in the D-MeerKAT-I project. In addition, the network was expanded by three partners compared to the previous project partners (TU Dortmund, University of Hamburg, and TLS Tautenburg as an associated partner), and the cooperation with the AEI Hannover as an associated partner was not continued. With regard to Work Package 4, the development by SARAO of a scan mode for MeerKAT and the availability of large amounts of MeerKAT scan data through the project MeerKLASS provided a strong need for the development of the OTF algorithm and the associated pipelines that could be used to process the MeerKLASS test data into radio continuum images and associated catalogs.

3 Planung und Ablauf des Vorhabens sowie Kooperation mit Dritten

As summarized in the Kurzbericht, the project development could be best understood as having been carried out in three phases. In the first phase Dr. Natasha Maddox led an effort to encourage SARAO, which operated the MeerKAT array, to implement an OTF mode of scan observations, where the correlator phase center tracks the pointing of the array as the array is scanned back and forth at fixed elevation, building up sky images through the Earth's rotation. After an initial enthusiasm to do this (there is such a mode

at the eVLA), there was no SARAO action due to other more pressing issues facing the limited available staff at MeerKAT. As the first year of the project approached without any clear indication that the new mode would be available, we began working with additional collaborators (Prof. Keith Grainge, Uni Manchester in UK and Prof. Oleg Smirnov (Uni Western Cape, South Africa) to explore whether the existing scan data, where the correlator phase center is fixed at the scan center in array coordinates, could be used for interferometric imaging. Through a series of calculations we were able to show that such OTF imaging should be possible. Essentially, given the characteristics of the MeerKAT observations (2s integrations, 4000 frequency channels), the phase errors in L-band increase with distance from the correlator phase center rather slowly. Over the +/-5 degree sweep of the scan, the phase smearing effects were expected to impact source fluxes at the ~1% level, which would make OTF images even in the existing MeerKAT scan mode more than adequate to produce science ready radio interferometric imaging data.

In the second phase of the project a new team member, Dr. Kristof Rozgonyi, accepted the D-MeerKAT-II position at LMU, and he began leading a focused working group with the team we had built (listed above) to implement the OTF method. This involved a roughly two year long effort of testing techniques, planning improvements to the techniques and then moving through another cycle of testing and improvement. This effort has proven to work, and through the D-MeerKAT-II project a series of pipelines (calibration, flagging, OTF correction, imaging, cataloging) were developed and validated. These pipelines enable the MeerKLASS scan data to be interferometrically imaged, and the image depths or significantly deeper than the RACS survey, carried out by another SKA precursor experiment in Australia. This series of breakthroughs has led to approval of the first half of the required observing time to pursue the MeerKLASS survey with MeerKAT.

In the third phase of the project a new team member, Dr. Daniel Hernandez-Lang, carried out an extensive cataloging and testing campaign using the OTF pipelines prepared in the second phase. This testing allowed us to precisely quantify the astrometric and photometric efforts of the OTF imaging and showed several interesting things: 1) the astrometry appeared more scattered along the Right Ascension direction than along the Declination direction and 2) the peak and total fluxes were not in sufficiently good agreement for unresolved sources. These results triggered further work by the OTF working group, which had grown with the addition of two additional postdoctoral researchers- Dr. Suman Chatterjee at Uni Western Cape and Dr. Sourabh Paul at Manchester University. Additional study indicated that due to the Earth's rotation during the 2s correlator integration, an expected direction-dependent smearing would be expected. This smearing would alter the synthesized beam, extending it about 15" (depending on sky location) in the Right Ascension direction. Given the astrometric and photometric peculiarities uncovered by Dr. Hernandez-Lang, this seemed like a likely culprit. As Dr. Hernandez-Lang's validation came to an end, a new team member Dr. Sarvesh Mangla arrived from India to join the OTF working group and push forward for an improved OTF interferometric imaging pipeline in D-MeerKAT-III.

As summarized in the Kurzbericht, a crucial element of our success in D-MeerKAT-II was the formation of an OTF working group composed of several leading radio astronomers around the world and with contributions from early career scientists in their groups. These scientists include Prof. Mario Santos and Prof. Oleg Smirnov of the University of Western Cape in South Africa, two leading MeerKAT experts, Prof. Keith Grainge from Manchester University in the UK, an outstanding and world renowned radio astronomer. The OTF working group also received support from Dr. Yvette Perrott (Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand), a long term collaborator and former student of Prof. Grainge's. At the very end of the D-MeerKAT-II period we were joined by two postdoctoral researchers Dr. Suman Chatterjee (UWC, South Africa) and Dr. Sourabh Paul (Uni Manchester, UK). These two postdocs together with Dr. Sarvesh Mangla (LMU), who is funded under D-

MeerKAT III, were chiefly responsible for the development of the final OTF imaging method that relies on DDFacet.

During the second phase of the project we also organized biweekly meetings with other D-MeerKAT-II collaborators here in Germany. In particular, we worked to include the Thüringer Landessternwarte group of Prof. Dr. Matthias Hoefft, including Dr. Aritra Basu and Dr. Gulay Gurkan and also Dr. Peter Kamphuis, an established HI radio astronomer working in Bochum. In addition to general discussion of the OTF challenges, this team provided a working pipeline that employs the mosaic coaddition tool to combine the 2s snapshot images coming from the OTF imaging pipeline.

4 Verwendung der Zuwendung (wichtigste Positionen des zahlenmäßigen Nachweises, z. B. Investitionen, Personalmittel)

Over the period of the D-MeerKAT-II project, we funded the following early career scientists:

Dr. Natasha Maddox led Work Package 4 activities during the first year of the award (1. July 2020 - 30. June 2021). Thereafter she was promoted to a Research Scientist in the Chair for Cosmology and Structure Formation at LMU, where she worked for another year before moving to a permanent Lectureship (Junior Professorship) at the University of Bristol, UK.

Dr. Kristof Rozgonyi led Work Package 4 activities and developed the new OTF algorithm and pipelines during years two and three of the award (15. July 2021 – 30. June 2023). We requested and were granted a no-cost extension at that time that allowed us to use the remaining funding through the end of June 2024. Dr. Rozgonyi remained on the project until 31. August 2023. During those last two months he wrote documentation for his pipelines, gave tutorials to all our collaborators on how to use the pipelines and placed the pipelines in his Gitlab repository.

Dr. Daniel Hernandez led Work Package 4 activities during the Fall months of 2023 and ended his participation in the project in early 2024. During this period he focused on applying the set of OTF pipelines to a variety of different scan datasets and then compared the catalogs of objects and associated peak and total fluxes and object positions with previously published catalogs. His work provided a launching point for further development of the OTF imaging pipeline in D-MeerKAT-III—work that is led by Dr. Sarvesh Mangla, who started in D-MeerKAT-III in March 2024.

Travel funding was used to support some travel by the supported scientists throughout.

No investment funding was requested or received in D-MeerKAT-II, I believe.

5 Erzielte Ergebnisse mit Gegenüberstellung der vereinbarten Ziele

The proposal for Work Package 4 involved the development of a new On-the-Fly (OTF) interferometric mode to enable commensal scan and interferometric imaging with the MeerKAT array. This goal was achieved through the development of a new algorithm and a set of pipelines that supports OTF imaging using the original scan-mode of observations on MeerKAT. In this scan mode the correlator is operating, outputting visibility measurement sets every 2 second while the array is scanned back and forth at fixed elevation. The correlated phase center is fixed in array coordinates at the center of the 10 deg long scan, and each 2 second measurement set contains the visibilities acquired in the pointing direction of the array during that time over a 1 degree diameter primary beam patch of the sky. The scan motion has a peak velocity of 5 arcmin/s, and therefore during the 2s

integration the primary beam is moving approximately 10 arcmin across the sky, corresponding to 1/6 of the diameter of the primary beam.

To enable interferometric observations with each of these 2 second integrations, the phase center during the observation (fixed at the center of the scan in array coordinates) is rotated to align with the mean pointing position of the array during the integration. Thereafter, the snapshot integration can be processed as though it were a standard (albeit very short) pointed radio interferometric observation.

Perhaps surprisingly, the degradation in the interferometric imaging due to the offset between the correlator phase center and the array pointing position is negligible in L-band. During the extensive validation period at the end of D-MeerKAT-II we determined that there were measurable degradations of the astrometry and flux measurements that were later determined to be due to rotation of the sky during the 2 second integration. This motion—dragging of the phase center across the sky—is a small effect that would normally not be present in a tracked (pointed) observation. Nevertheless, it leads to a smearing of the synthesized beam in the Right Ascension direction that creates an anisotropy in the synthesized beam that must be modeled directly to ensure the highest quality astrometry and photometry. A further reduction of the integration time to 0.5 seconds or 1 second would reduce this effect, as would simply tracking the correlator phase center across the sky—making it a fixed position in Right Ascension and Declination on the Celestial Sphere rather than a fixed position in array coordinates. The degradation of the imaging from this effect is small but measurable, and therefore discussions continue about implementing a slightly modified scan mode at the MeerKAT array to further improve the OTF imaging.

In summary, we achieved the proposed goals of our project, and this new algorithm and new set of pipelines are being used today by MeerKAT scientists to prepare radio survey data from the MeerKLASS scans.

6 Notwendigkeit und Angemessenheit der geleisteten Arbeit

Work Package 4 could not have been financed and therefore could not have been carried out without funds from BMBF awarded to the D-MeerKAT-II project. The appropriate use of the funds has been demonstrated by the results achieved, the successes in the training of young scientists, in the publications completed over the period of the award and in the ongoing application of the newly developed OTF pipelines in the MeerKLASS collaboration moving forward.

7 Voraussichtlicher Nutzen, insbesondere Verwertbarkeit der Ergebnisse

The D-MeerKAT-II network was able to make important progress in terms of building up new collaborations and intensifying cooperation with colleagues from South Africa, from the UK, and within the network itself. Through this work we were able to increase the visibility of German University contributions to MeerKAT.

Moreover, the LMU development of a new OTF algorithm and associated pipelines have enabled the use of MeerKAT scan data for interferometric imaging. This will enable new science with existing data and will make scan-based surveys like MeerKLASS more attractive. Indeed, over the past year the MeerKLASS collaboration has been awarded up to 1000 hours of MeerKAT scan observations in the UHF. This award—to be carried out as 500 hours in 2025 and 500 hours in 2026—together with the test datasets over smaller areas obtained since 2019 and perhaps another similar scale award starting in 2027 will make MeerKLASS the first large scale radio scan survey carried out with the goal of both supporting forefront cosmological observations through intensity mapping and a wide range of radio AGN, radio galaxy and extended radio source studies (radio relics, radio halos, the Sunyaev-Zel'dovich effect signatures from clusters) that can be carried out in combination with other forefront datasets like those from DESI, Euclid and Rubin.

8 Während der Durchführung des Vorhabens dem Zuwendungsempfänger bekannt gewordenen Fortschritt auf dem Gebiet des Vorhabens bei anderen Stellen

There has been significant development with the radio astronomy community since the D-MeerKAT projects began in 2017. Germany is now a member of SKA with significant expected contributions to the hardware, implementation, operation and science exploitation. MeerKAT has developed into the most sensitive radio astronomy observatory on the planet, and ASKAP, another SKA precursor designed quite differently, has been successfully used to carry out large scale L-band surveys of the sky. In parallel, new challenges from low Earth satellite Radio Frequency Interference have emerged, making the UHF a simpler band to use for continuum and intensity mapping surveys. Finally, the context within which MeerKAT and radio astronomy operations—the availability of multi-band and spectroscopy surveys in the optical, NIR, X-ray and mm-wave—has continued to change for the better, and this enables a broader range of richer science to emerge from radio surveys.

When our funding in D-MeerKAT-II began, we had hopes to developing a new OTF observing mode in collaboration with the MeerKAT observatory and quickly producing the first next-generation L-band surveys. MeerKAT had other priorities, and the ASKAP collaboration moved more quickly, but in the end our L-Band survey data from OTF will be significantly deeper than the ASKAP based L-Band survey (RACS-mid and RACS-low), and our MeerKLASS based UHF surveys are likely to be the first large solid angle, deep radio surveys in the southern sky—eclipsing in depth and solid angle the excellent work done in the north with LOFAR.

So many things have changed since we first proposed the project, but in the end the changes offer a richer scientific reward than we had envisioned as the original driver for our OTF interferometric imaging proposal.

9 Erfolgte und geplante Veröffentlichungen der Ergebnisse

9.1 Referierte Publikationen (z. B. in Fachzeitschriften oder -büchern und referierte Konferenzproceedings)

During the first year of the project, Dr. Maddox led or contributed to the publication of the following radio astronomy related publications:

“Measuring the HI mass function below the detection threshold”, 2020, Pan, H., Jarvis, M., Allison, J., Heywood, I., Santos, M., **Maddox, N.**, Bradley D., Kang, X., MNRAS 491, 1227.

“The life cycle of radio galaxies in the LOFAR Lockman Hole Field”, 2020, Jurlin N et al (including **N. Maddox**), A&A, 638, 34.

“The Fornax Deep Survey with the VST. IV A size and magnitude limited catalog of dwarf galaxies in the area of the Fornax clusters”, 2020, Venhola, A. et al (including **N. Maddox**), A&A, 638, 5.

“Cosmology with Phase 1 of the Square Kilometer Array Red Book 2018: Technical specifications and performance forecasts”, 2020, SKY Cosmology Working group (including **N. Maddox**), PASA, 37, 7.

“MIGHTEE-HI: The HI emission project of the MeerKAT MIGHTEE survey”, 2021, **Maddox, N.** et al, A&A, 646, 35.

“MIGHTEE: are giant radio galaxies more common than we thought?”, Delhaize, J. et al (including **N. Maddox**), MNRAS, 505, 136.

“MIGHTEE-HI: the baryonic Tully-Fisher relation over the last billion years”, 2021, Ponomareva, A. et al (including **N. Maddox**), MNRAS, 508, 1195.

“The Photometric and Spectroscopic Properties of Remnant and Restarted Radio Galaxies in the Lockman Hole Field” 2021, Jurlin, N. et al (including N. Maddox), in *Galaxies*, Vol 9, Issue 4, 122.

During the second two years of the project, Dr. Rozgonyi led or contributed to the following radio astronomy publications:

“CHILES. VII. Deep Imaging for the CHILES Project, an SKA Prototype”, 2022, Dodson, R. et al (including **K. Rozgonyi**), *AJ*, 163, 59.

“The Variation of the Gas Content of Galaxy Groups and Pairs Compared to Isolated Galaxies”, 2022, Roychowdhury, S. et al (including **K. Rozgonyi**), *ApJ*, 927, 20.

“Proof of concept Gridded Visibility Stacking Pipeline for Deep Spectral Line Interferometric Imaging”, 2022, **Rozgonyi, K** et al, *ASPC*, 532, 341.

“Deep investigation of neutral gas origins (DINGO): HI stacking experiments with early science data”, 2023, Rhee, J. et al (including **K. Rozgonyi**), *MNRAS*, 518, 4646.

“Very long baseline interferometry observations of the high-redshift blazar candidate J0141-5427”, Gabanyi et al (including **K. Rozgonyi**), *PASA*, 40, 4.

“DEVILS/MIGHTEE/GAMA/DINGO: the impact of SFR time-scales on the SFR-radio luminosity correlation”, 2024, Cook et al (including **K. Rozgonyi**), *MNRAS*, 531, 708.

A refereed publication describing the software developed in this project was not completed prior to Dr. Rozgonyi leaving LMU and moving into industry. We are actively working on a series of three publications with our collaborators. These will focus on the revised OTF method (product of D-MeerKAT-III), and its application to an L-Band and a UHF Band survey dataset.

9.2 Andere Veröffentlichungen (z. B. Konferenzbeiträge wie Vorträge und Poster, unreferierte Proceedings, Conference Notes)

“On-the-fly (OTF) mosaicking with MeerKAT: a fast, commensal interferometric and single-dish intensity mapping survey mode”, 2022, **Rozgonyi, K.**, Mohr, J., Maddox, N., *EAS conference proceeding*, 1215.

“Imaging Spectral-Line Deep Fields in the SKA-Era: insights from CHILES and DINGO” 2024, Dodson et al (including **K. Rozgonyi**), *IAU conference*, 32, 703.

9.3 Abschlussarbeiten (Bachelor, Master, Diplom, Staatsexamen, Promotion, Habilitation)

During the D-MeerKAT-II time period there were two Masters theses in our group focused on radio AGN and radio galaxies, scientific topics that will be enabled by the OTF interferometric imaging pipeline that we have developed within D-MeerKAT-II. Dr. Maddox played an active role in the first project.

“A MIGHTEE Study of the Group Environment”, **Masters thesis** by Shreyam Parth Krishna, August 2021 (supervised by Prof. Mohr and Dr. Natasha Maddox)

“Environmental Dependence of Radio AGN out to $z \sim 1.3$ ”, **Masters thesis** by Aditya Singh, July 2021 (supervised by Prof. Mohr, Dr. Matthias Klein, and Dr. Sebastian Grandis)

Kurzbericht

- öffentlich -

Zuwendungsempfänger:	Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität
Projektleitung:	Prof. Dr. Joseph Mohr
Verbund:	05A20WM4 D-MeerKAT II
Thema:	Ein deutscher Beitrag zur Weiterentwicklung der Radioastronomie im Zentimeterwellenlängenbereich

1. Ziel und Inhalt des Projektes

Das Ziel unseres Projekts war es, interferometrische Aufnahmen mit Scandaten zu ermöglichen, die vom MeerKAT-Array in Südafrika erfasst wurden. Der Kontext für diese Arbeit ist, dass Intensity-Mapping-Scanning-Beobachtungen im L- oder UHF-Band es ermöglichen, die tiefe, kombinierte HI-Signatur der gasreichen Galaxienpopulationen zu untersuchen, die die großräumige Struktur des Universums nachzeichnen. Die Verteilung dieser Galaxien erlaubt Rückschlüsse auf die Galaxienhäufung und die zugrundeliegende dunkle Materie sowie die Ermittlung von Merkmalen wie der Größe des Horizonts bei Materie-Strahlungs-Gleichheit und der Größe der Baryon-Akustik-Oszillationen.

Die MeerKLASS-Durchmusterung, die eine Fläche von 10.000 deg^2 abdecken soll, ist so konzipiert, dass sie diese wissenschaftliche Aufgabe erfüllen kann, allerdings mit erheblichen Kosten für die Beobachtungszeit von MeerKAT. Die für MeerKLASS erforderlichen Scanning-Beobachtungen akkumulieren im Wesentlichen Intensitätsmessungen einzelner Antennae durch Scanning-Bewegungen des Arrays von ~ 10 Grad bei fester Elevation. Bei dieser Art der Beobachtung kann der variable Himmel effektiv entfernt werden, und die Himmelsabdeckung kann viel effizienter aufgebaut werden als im traditionellen Ausrichtungsmodus.

In Zusammenarbeit mit Prof. Mario Santos von der Universität Western Cape in Südafrika schlugen wir vor, eine Methode zu entwickeln, die eine interferometrische Bildgebung (Kontinuumsbildgebung, aber im Prinzip auch HI-Spektralbildgebung) aus denselben Scandaten ermöglichen würde. Diese so genannte interferometrische On-the-fly-Abbildung (OTF) würde dann eine breite Palette traditioneller Radioastronomiestudien unter Verwendung der von MeerKLASS (und anderen Projekten) erfassten Scandaten ermöglichen.

Die SKA-Entwicklungsteams haben ihr Interesse bekundet, diese Methode auch für Intensitäts-Mapping-Scans zu verwenden.

2. Ablauf und Ergebnisse des Vorhabens

Das Projekt lief in drei Phasen ab. In der ersten Phase bemühte sich Dr. Natasha Maddox darum, SARAO, den Betreiber des MeerKAT-Arrays, zu ermutigen, einen OTF-Modus für Scan-Beobachtungen zu implementieren, bei dem das Phasenzentrum des Korrelators der Pointing Richtung des Arrays folgt, während das Array in fester Elevation hin und her gescannt wird, um Himmelsbilder durch die Erdrotation zu erstellen. Nach anfänglichem

Enthusiasmus, dies zu tun (es gibt einen solchen Modus am eVLA), gab es keine SARAO-Aktion aufgrund anderer dringenderer Probleme, mit denen das begrenzte verfügbare Personal am MeerKAT konfrontiert war. Als sich das erste Jahr des Projekts näherte, ohne dass es einen klaren Hinweis darauf gab, dass der neue Modus verfügbar sein würde, begannen wir mit weiteren Mitarbeitern (Prof. Keith Grainge, Uni Manchester in Großbritannien und Prof. Oleg Smirnov (Uni Western Cape, Südafrika)) zu untersuchen, ob die vorhandenen Scandaten, bei denen das Phasenzentrum des Korrelators in den Array-Koordinaten auf das Scan-Zentrum fixiert ist, für die interferometrische Bildgebung verwendet werden können. Durch eine Reihe von Berechnungen konnten wir zeigen, dass eine solche OTF-Abbildung möglich sein sollte. Angesichts der Eigenschaften der MeerKAT-Beobachtungen (2s-Integrationen, 4000 Frequenzkanäle) nehmen die Phasenfehler im L-Band mit der Entfernung vom Phasenzentrum des Korrelators nur langsam zu. Es wird erwartet, dass die Phasenverschmierungseffekte über den gesamten Scanbereich von ± 5 Grad die Quellflüsse auf einem Niveau von $\sim 1\%$ beeinflussen, was OTF-Bilder sogar im bestehenden MeerKAT-Scanmodus mehr als ausreichend machen würde, um wissenschaftlich brauchbare radiointerferometrische Bilddaten zu erzeugen.

In der zweiten Phase des Projekts nahm ein neues Teammitglied, Dr. Kristof Rozgonyi, die D-MeerKAT-II-Stelle an der LMU an, und er begann, mit dem von uns gebildeten Team (siehe oben) eine gezielte Arbeitsgruppe zur Umsetzung der OTF-Methode zu leiten. Dazu gehörte ein etwa zwei Jahre dauernder Versuch, Techniken zu testen, Verbesserungen an den Techniken zu planen und dann einen weiteren Test- und Verbesserungszyklus zu durchlaufen. Diese Bemühungen haben sich bewährt, und im Rahmen des Projekts D-MeerKAT-II wurde eine Reihe von Pipelines (Kalibrierung, Flagging, OTF-Korrektur, Bildgebung, Katalogisierung) entwickelt und validiert. Diese Pipelines ermöglichen es, die MeerKLASS-Scandaten interferometrisch abzubilden, und die Bildtiefen sind deutlich höher als bei der RACS-Durchmusterung, die von einem anderen SKA-Vorläufer-Experiment in Australien durchgeführt wurde. Diese Reihe von Durchbrüchen hat dazu geführt, dass die erste Hälfte der erforderlichen Beobachtungszeit für die Fortsetzung der MeerKLASS-Durchmusterung mit MeerKAT genehmigt wurde.

In der dritten Phase des Projekts führte ein neues Teammitglied, Dr. Daniel Hernandez-Lang, eine umfangreiche Katalogisierungs- und Testkampagne mit den in der zweiten Phase vorbereiteten OTF-Pipelines durch. Diese Tests ermöglichten es uns, die astrometrischen und photometrischen Leistungen der OTF-Abbildung genau zu quantifizieren und zeigten mehrere interessante Dinge: 1) die Astrometrie schien entlang der Rektaszensionsrichtung stärker gestreut zu sein als entlang der Deklinationsrichtung und 2) die Spitzen- und Gesamtflüsse stimmten bei unaufgelösten Quellen nicht ausreichend gut überein. Diese Ergebnisse waren der Auslöser für weitere Arbeiten der OTF-Arbeitsgruppe, die durch zwei zusätzliche Postdoktoranden - Dr. Suman Chatterjee von der Uni Western Cape und Dr. Sourabh Paul von der Universität Manchester - erweitert wurde. Weitere Untersuchungen ergaben, dass aufgrund der Erdrotation während der 2 Sekunde Integration des Korrelators eine richtungsabhängige Verschmierung zu erwarten ist. Diese Verschmierung würde den Synthesized Beam verändern und ihn um etwa $15''$ (je nach Himmelsort) in Richtung Rektaszension verlängern. Angesichts der von Dr. Hernandez-Lang aufgedeckten astrometrischen und photometrischen Besonderheiten schien dies ein wahrscheinlicher Grund zu sein. Als Dr. Hernandez-Langs Validierung zu Ende ging, kam ein neues Teammitglied, Dr. Sarvesh Mangla, aus Indien, um der OTF-Arbeitsgruppe beizutreten und eine verbesserte interferometrische OTF-Abbildungspipeline in D-MeerKAT-III voranzutreiben.

3. Darstellung der wesentlichen Ergebnisse und deren konkreter Nutzen sowie ggf. die Zusammenarbeit mit anderen Forschungseinrichtungen

Im Rahmen des D-MeerKAT-II-Projekts wurde eine Reihe von interferometrischen OTF-Abbildungspipelines entworfen, entwickelt und validiert. Diese Arbeit wurde zunächst von Dr. Natasha Maddox (1. Jahr), dann von Dr. Kristof Rozgonyi (Jahre 2-3) und später von Dr. Daniel Hernandez-Lang an der LMU (während der ersten sechs Monate einer einjährigen kostenfreien Verlängerung) geleitet.

Diese OTF-Pipelines (Kalibrierung, Flagging, OTF-Korrektur, Bild-/Selbstkalibrierung, Katalogisierung und Koaddition) wurden mit den MeerKAT- und MeerKLASS-Mitarbeitern geteilt und dienen als Grundlage für die Datenverarbeitung bei den MeerKLASS-Durchmusterungen im L-Band und UHF-Band.

Entscheidend für den Erfolg von D-MeerKAT-II ist die Bildung einer OTF-Arbeitsgruppe, die sich aus mehreren führenden Radioastronomen aus der ganzen Welt zusammensetzt und an der sich auch Nachwuchswissenschaftler aus ihren Gruppen beteiligen. Zu diesen Wissenschaftlern gehören Prof. Mario Santos und Prof. Oleg Smirnov von der University of Western Cape in Südafrika, zwei führende MeerKAT-Experten und Prof. Keith Grainge von der Manchester University in Großbritannien. Unterstützung erhielt die OTF-Arbeitsgruppe auch von Dr. Yvette Perrott (Victoria University of Wellington, Neuseeland), einer langjährigen Mitarbeiterin von Prof. Grainge. Ganz am Ende des D-MeerKAT-II-Zeitraums kamen zwei Postdoktoranden hinzu: Dr. Suman Chatterjee (UWC, Südafrika) und Dr. Sourabh Paul (Uni Manchester, UK).

Während der zweiten Phase des Projekts organisierten wir auch zweiwöchentliche Zoom-Treffen mit anderen D-MeerKAT-II-Mitarbeitern hier in Deutschland. Insbesondere arbeiteten wir daran, die Gruppe der Thüringer Landessternwarte von Prof. Dr. Matthias Hoelt, einschließlich Dr. Aritra Basu und Dr. Gulay Gurkan, und auch Dr. Peter Kamphuis, einen etablierten HI-Radioastronomen, der in Bochum arbeitet, einzubeziehen. Neben einer allgemeinen Diskussion der OTF-Herausforderungen stellte dieses Team eine funktionierende Pipeline zur Verfügung, die das Mosaik-Koadditions-Tool verwendet, um die 2 Sekunde Snapshot Bilder aus der OTF-Abbildungspipeline zu kombinieren.