Vertical Surface Brightness Profiles of Boxy Bulges

G. Aronica\textsuperscript{1}, M. Bureau\textsuperscript{2}, E. Athanassoula\textsuperscript{3} and R.-J. Dettmar\textsuperscript{1}

\textsuperscript{1}Astronomisches Institut der Ruhr-Universität Bochum, Bochum, D-44780, Germany
email: aronica@astro.rub.de

\textsuperscript{2}Sub-Department of Astrophysics, University of Oxford, Keble Road, Oxford, OX1 3RH, UK

\textsuperscript{3}Laboratoire d’Astrophysique de Marseille, 2 place Le Verrier, 13248 Marseille Cedex 4, France

Abstract. The thickening of the bar in barred disk galaxies has a strong influence in shaping the morphology in the inner regions of a disk galaxy above the galactic plane. The result of such a secular evolutionary process can be observed in galaxies with box/peanut shaped (b/ps) bulges. We have applied a one-dimensional fitting method to our sample of 30 edge-on disk galaxies using different fitting function approaches. A clear increase in scale height can be observed in the area of the most prominent b/ps isophotes compared to the neighbouring disk and bulge areas, in agreement with the predictions of the bar thickening model.

Keywords. infrared: galaxies, methods: data analysis, galaxies: photometry, galaxies: evolution, galaxies: structure, galaxies: spiral, galaxies: bulges, instabilities

1. Box/peanut shaped bulges

The work of Bureau & Freeman (1999) showed that box/peanut shaped (b/ps) bulges can be observed frequently (≈ 71\% of their sample) in barred edge-on disk galaxies. That result and the work of Bureau, Aronica, Athanassoula, et al. (2006) corroborated the view of a stellar bar as the primary driver for the formation of the b/ps structure. In fact, those structures can evolve from a vertical instability in the bar (bar buckling, e.g., Pfenniger & Friedli (1991)) causing a vertical thickening of that component (e.g., Patsis, Skokos, & Athanassoula (2002), Athanassoula (2005)) on secular timescales.

2. Analysis and results

In order to analyze the vertical surface brightness distribution we used $K_s$-band near infrared data of the sample galaxies described in Bureau & Freeman (1999) consisting of 30 galaxies. We have applied to the vertical surface brightness distribution of those galaxies a one-dimensional fitting approach based only on a thin disk component. The functions used were Sersic type functions, Gauss-Hermite polynomials, and the canonical exponential and sech type functions.

The innermost regions of the disk of galaxies with a b/ps structure are characterized by a global minimum in scale height (see Figure 1): a possible indication for a rather flat component like a compact cold disk. Further, the regions with the most prominent b/ps isophotes show higher values for the scale height compared to the neighbouring disk and bulge areas. Also, the shape parameters of all fitting functions used show rather flat-topped vertical surface brightness distributions, contrary to the outer disk regions. Both changes, the local maxima in scale height and the flat-topped shaped distributions in the region with the most prominent b/ps isophotes, are consistent with the model of b/ps bulge formation out of the thickening of the bar in those galaxies.
Figure 1. Results of the one-dimensional fitting approaches for the galaxy ESO 443-G042. In the first two panels, the grayscale $K_{\text{s}}$-band image with isocontours, respectively the radial surface brightness profile taken along the major axis of the galactic plane at $z = 0$ are plotted. The next two panels show the results for the shape parameters of a Sersic type ($\lambda$), a generalized sech type ($2/n$), and a Gauss–Hermite polynomial type ($h_4$) fitting approach. All those parameters are a measure for the peakiness of the fitted distribution. In the last two panels the fitted scale height for all fitting functions used is displayed; the upper one shows the results for the functions with varying shape, whereas the lower one the results for fixed shapes (e.g. an exponential function).

References