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Beyond the Milky Way: an historical perspective

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The discovery that what were once called spiral nebulae are other galaxies similar to our own, has modified our concept of Universe and marked the beginning of extragalactic astronomy, of space exploration beyond the Milky Way and of its time evolution. In this talk I will summarize facts that have stimulated and driven Hubble's discovery 100 years ago, and which have been the immediate revolutionary consequences of this. Our knowledge of galaxies and of the Universe has made an enormous progress during the past century, but we are still missing a solution for a few relevant cosmic puzzles, which are shaping the next generation of telescopes and future astrophysical researches.

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