Grid computing resources developed

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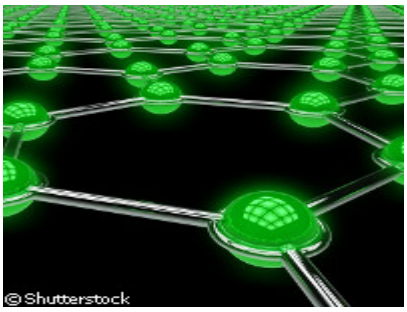

EU-funded researchers have succeeded in establishing a platform for trading computing resources where standardised computing resources can be purchased and sold. The GridEcon ('Grid Economics and Business Models') project partners said computing could become a utility like electricity. GridEcon is funded under the Information Society Technologies (IST) Thematic area of the EU's Sixth Framework Programme (FP6) to the tune of EUR 2.35 million.

Thanks to this commodity market platform, users can bid on available computing capacity or invite a tender for a specific computing time slot. According to the researchers, the platform developed by GridEcon enables this spot and future market mechanism. The GridEcon partners developed a virtual trading floor for computing resources. The platform allows validation of new market-based services.

GridEcon's main objective was to improve the functionality of existing grid technology with respect to its capability to allow for the economics-aware operation of grid applications, according to the partners.

The difference between what GridEcon offers and what emerged in the past is that the latter typically offered only their spare capacity. GridEcon's platform is open, giving users the opportunity to buy and sell computing capacity on their own terms. It also allows buyers to be sellers. A company can offer its spare capacity if it has a large computer park, but it can also bid for increased capacity if it needs it.

'One of our key goals with the platform was to make it easy to use and set up,' said

GridEcon's technical director, Prof. Jörn Altmann. 'So this workflow engine hides the underlying complexity of the system, because we did not want the user to have to deal with that.'

While the GridEcon researchers designed and tested one market mechanism, a company can develop another market mechanism and then plug new functionality into the platform. This illustrates GridEcon's flexibility, and shows how it can be applied in a variety of potential market types, the partners said.

The platform is available under open source license terms and the entire code can be obtained from the GridEcon website. 'We started developing a fixed price quotation broker, which can give users an indication of price at a future date as a backbone for their bidding on the futures market,' said Sonja Klingert of the International University in Germany, which coordinated GridEcon.

She noted how the global online retailer Amazon brought out some 'futures' functionality on their Elastic Computer Cloud platform, EC2. 'It was encouraging, because it showed we were going in the right direction,' Ms Klingert said.

'Our role was to build the platform and test it, and the results of our testing phase were indeed positive with respect to functionality and response times. But it is there for somebody else to turn it into a commercial venture,' she added. 'We are making the website more attractive to business people, so they can see its potential and go live with it.'

A number of the GridEcon partners have already been contacted by potential users looking to establish a business around this paradigm. The number of visitors to the website continues to grow as well.

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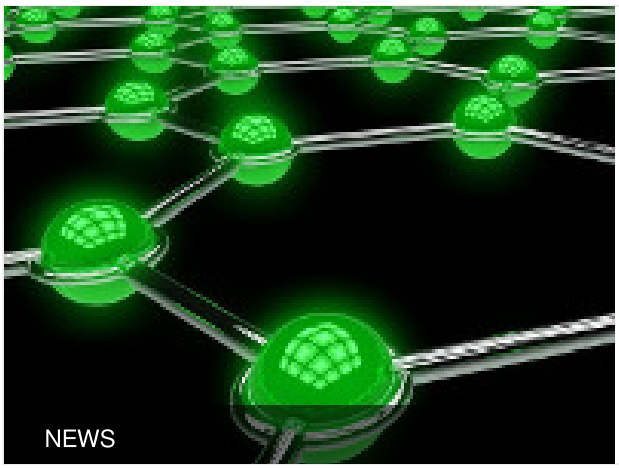

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