Golden opportunities for e-infrastructures at the EGI Community Forum

Last week, iSGTW was at the European Grid Infrastructure Community Forum 2013. Find out what Nancy Rothwell, Peter Coveney, Kostas Glinos, and Steven Newhouse had to say during the opening plenary session. The quartet touch on a range of topics, from the importance of human capital and uniting e-infrastructures, to open access and future funding mechanisms.

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"We aspire to a single, unified e-infrastrucure - not just bits and pieces," says Peter Coveney. Image courtesy e-Science Talk.

week, *iSGTW* was at the European Grid Infrastructure (EGI) Community Forum 2013. The event, held in Manchester, a city renowned for its footballing exploits, was kicked off with a plenary session on Tuesday morning featuring four speakers of Champions-League calibre.

The first speaker, Nancy Rothwell, who is president and vice-chancellor of the University of Manchester, welcomed the 380 delegates attending the event and highlighted the university's strong history of world-leading computing research. This history includes being the birth place of 'the baby', the first stored-program electronic digital computer, which successfully executed its first program in 1948.

e-infrastructures united

Rothwell was followed by Peter Coveney, director of the Centre for Computational Science at University College London, UK, who was described by session chair David Wallom as a "constant champion of the integration of e-infrastructures".

"We aspire to a single, unified e-infrastrucure - not just bits and pieces," says Coveney, who took the opportunity to discuss at length the globalization of scientific research. "Collaborations, and thus data, are increasingly global," he says. "Effective

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international data sharing and access have become critically important."

380 delegates attended the EGI Community Forum 2013. Image courtesy e-Science Talk.

Coveney also spoke about EGI, which he describes as "a great thing". He highlights the role the organization played in the discovery of the Higgs boson particle at CERN. "This discovery was all about data and computing, but so is so much other scientific research," he says. Coveney also stresses the importance of users being able to transparently operate across EGI, PRACE, EUDAT and other European e-infrastructures. A working group has been set up to achieve this, he explains.

Additionally, Coveney discussed an important major perception shift which is taking place in terms of the way in which scientific data is viewed. Data is less and less seen as a private preserve, he argues, and we need to mandate intelligent openness in order to improve sharing. Coveney also emphasizes the importance of developing new software tools to simplify the creation and exploitation of datasets, but, he warns, there are important legal aspects of both data access and preservation, which must be considered when

doing so. Of course, it's not just a matter of putting appropriate technical solutions in place. It's also very important to strengthen the cohort of data scientists needed to manage and support the use of digital data, says Coveney.

EC goals

Kostas Glinos, head of the e-infrastructures unit at the European Commission (EC), was next on the agenda. He spoke about Horizon 2020, which is the European level funding programme set to start in 2014. Supporting the open access data policy of the EC is a high priority for Horizon2020, says Glinos. In addition to open access to scientific publications being a general principle of all Horizon 2020 projects, Horizon 2020 will also include a pilot initiative for open access to data. The vision for e-infrastructures remains the same: "to make every researcher digital, through the development and deployment of e-infrastructures - achieve the digital ERA [European Research Area]."

"We need to look at not just how e-infrastructures can help with scientific research, but also how they can be used to address the objectives of society overall," says Kostas Glinos. Image courtesy e-Science Talk.

During his talk, Glinos also spoke of the importance of involving industry in European e-infrastructures more heavily and highlighted the seven instruments through which Horizon 2020 projects will be supported by the EC. These instruments are as follows: grants for research and development, grants for innovation, support and coordination actions, program co-funding actions, pre-commercial procurement, public procurement of innovative solutions, and prizes. He singled out pre-commercial procurement and public procurement of innovative solutions as being particularly important instruments, saying: "These are important because research infrastructures often have very advanced needs, which makes them an excellent lead market."

Lastly, Glinos discussed the importance of 'de-siloing', so that researchers are able to cooperate more effectively using e-infrastructures. He says: "We need to look at not just how e-infrastructures can help with scientific research, but also how they can be used to address the objectives of society overall."

Champions

The fourth and final speaker during this session was Steven Newhouse, director of EGI. He started his talk by giving a brief overview of how EGI had evolved over the last 10 years from the European Data Grid, which comprised of a then-highly-impressive 4000 cores, spread across 30 sites (*cf.* 400,000 cores and 350 resource centers today). He

outlined EGI's vision for 2020, saying that the organization aims "to support the digital European Research Area through a pan-European research infrastructure based on an open federation of reliable services that provide uniform access to national computing, storage, and data resources."

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Newhouse also echoed Coveney's thoughts on the importance of developing the necessary human capital to make sure e-infrastructures are successful and highlighted the role initiatives such as the EGI Champions scheme play in developing this. "This allows us to identify individuals within the community who cannot only work with us to make the infrastructure better than it is, but who are also able to go out and talk to their own communities about how distributed computing can impact their work."

In addition, Newhouse talked about the importance of EGI's Virtual Team model, which enables National Grid Infrastructure (NGI) and EGI personnel to establish short-living projects that focus on well defined, non-operational activities around the production infrastructure. "It's possible

to find experts on almost any subject - that's one of the benefits of having a large and diverse community," says Newhouse. "The challenge, however, is bringing this expertise together and applying it to the problems we have; the Virtual Team model is very good at doing this."

Finally, with Horizon 2020 now firmly on the European horizon and the EGI-InSPIRE project set to come to an end next year, Newhouse spoke about the importance of change for EGI. "Sustainable change is key across all of the things we do," he says. "As we increase the scale of our activities and cope with demand from users, things have to change - but, first of all, we have to be able to actually sustain those things we do at the moment. The question is: which ones are the key things which people are willing to invest in?"

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