JCloudScale: Closing the Gap Between IaaS and PaaS

Rostyslav Zabolotnyi, Distributed Systems Group, Vienna University of Technology
Philipp Leitner, Software Evolution & Architecture Lab, University of Zurich
Waldemar Hummer, Distributed Systems Group, Vienna University of Technology
Schahram Dustdar, Distributed Systems Group, Vienna University of Technology

The Infrastructure-as-a-Service (IaaS) model of cloud computing is a promising approach towards building elastically scaling systems. Unfortunately, building such applications today is a complex, repetitive and error-prone endeavor, as IaaS does not provide any abstraction on top of naked virtual machines. Hence, all functionality related to elasticity needs to be implemented anew for each application. In this paper, we present JCloudScale, a Java-based middleware that supports building elastic applications on top of a public or private IaaS cloud. JCloudScale allows to easily bring applications to the cloud, with minimal changes to the application code. We discuss the general architecture of the middleware as well as its technical features, and evaluate our system with regard to both, user acceptance (based on a user study) and performance overhead. Our results indicate that JCloudScale indeed allowed many participants to build IaaS applications more efficiently, comparable to the convenience features provided by industrial Platform-as-a-Service (PaaS) solutions. However, unlike PaaS, using JCloudScale does not lead to a loss of control and vendor lock-in for the developer.

Categories and Subject Descriptors: D.2.2.c [Software Engineering]: Distributed/Internet based software engineering tools and techniques; D.2.0.c [Software Engineering]: Software Engineering for Internet projects

General Terms: Languages, Experimentation, Performance

Additional Key Words and Phrases: Cloud Computing, Middleware, Programming, JCloudScale

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the cloud computing paradigm [Buyya et al. 2009; Grossman 2009] has provoked a significant push towards more flexible provisioning of IT resources, including computing power, storage and networking capabilities. Besides economic factors (e.g., pay-as-you-go pricing), the core driver behind this cloud computing hype is the idea of elastic computing. Elastic applications are able to increase and decrease their resource usage based on current application load, for instance by adding and removing computing nodes. Optimally, elastic applications are cost and energy efficient (by virtue of operating close to optimal resource utilization levels), while still providing the expected level of application performance.

The research leading to these results has received funding from the European Community's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007-2013) under grant agreement no. 610802 (CloudWave) and no. 318201 (SIMPLI-CITY).

Author’s addresses: R. Zabolotnyi, W. Hummer, S. Dustdar, Institute of Information Systems 184/1, Distributed Systems Group, Vienna University of Technology, Argentinierstrasse 8, A-1040 Wien, Austria. P. Leitner: s.e.a.l. - software evolution & architecture lab, University of Zurich, Binzmühlestrasse 14, 8050 Zurich, Switzerland.

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© YYYY ACM 1539-9087/YY/01-ARTA $15.00
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1145/0000000.0000000

ACM Transactions on Internet Technology, Vol. V, No. N, Article A, Publication date: January YYYY.
Elastic applications are typically built using either the IaaS (Infrastructure-as-a-Service) or the PaaS (Platform-as-a-Service) paradigm [Armbrust et al. 2010]. In IaaS, users rent virtual machines from the cloud provider, and retain full control (e.g., administrator rights). In PaaS, the level of abstraction is higher, as the cloud provider is responsible for managing virtual resources. In theory, this allows for more efficient cloud application development, as less boilerplate code (e.g., for creating and destroying virtual machines, monitoring and load balancing, or application code distribution) is required. However, practice has shown that today’s PaaS offerings (e.g., Windows Azure, Google’s AppEngine, or Amazon’s Elastic Beanstalk) come with significant disadvantages, which render this option infeasible for many developers. These problems include: (1) strong vendor lock-in [Lawton 2008; Dillon et al. 2010], as one is typically required to program against a proprietary API; (2) limited control over the elasticity behavior or the application (e.g., developers have very little influence on when to scale up and down); (3) no root access to the virtual servers running the actual application code; and (4) little support for building applications that do not follow the basic architectural patterns assumed by the PaaS offering [Jayaram 2013] (e.g., Apache Tomcat based web applications). All in all, developers are often forced to fall back to IaaS for many use cases, despite the significant advantages that the PaaS model would promise.

In this paper, we introduce JCloudScale, a Java-based middleware that eases the task of building elastic applications. Similar to PaaS, JCloudScale takes over virtual machine management, application monitoring, load balancing, and code distribution. However, given that JCloudScale is a client-side middleware instead of a complete hosting environment, developers retain full control over the behavior of their application. Furthermore, JCloudScale supports a wide range of different applications. JCloudScale applications run on top of any IaaS cloud, making JCloudScale a viable solution to implement applications for private or hybrid cloud settings [Sotomayor et al. 2009; Abraham et al. 2010]. In summary, we claim that the JCloudScale model is a promising compromise between IaaS and PaaS, combining many advantages of both worlds.

The main contributions of this paper are two-fold. Firstly, we describe the JCloudScale middleware in detail. This contribution is in extension of our initial work in [Leitner et al. 2012]. Secondly, we conducted a user study to evaluate JCloudScale in comparison to both, existing IaaS (OpenStack and Amazon EC2) and PaaS (Amazon Elastic Beanstalk) systems. We address runtime performance impact of JCloudScale, as well as development productivity and user acceptance. Our study results suggest that JCloudScale increases developer productivity in comparison to pure IaaS solutions, comparable to Elastic Beanstalk. Unlike Elastic Beanstalk, JCloudScale is more flexible, does not lead to vendor lock-in, and can also be used in a private or hybrid cloud environment. However, our results also show that there still are technical issues in the current JCloudScale prototype that need to be addressed. Further, our results show that, in its current version, JCloudScale indeed impacts performance in a small but noticeable manner. JCloudScale is already available as an open source project from GitHub.

The rest of this paper is structured as follows. In Section 2, we describe the basic JCloudScale architecture, which we follow up with an in-depth discussion of specific elasticity-related features in Section 3. Section 4 gives an implementation overview of the middleware. This implementation forms the basis for the empirical evaluation in Section 5. Section 6 surveys related work, and, finally, Section 7 concludes the paper with an outlook on open issues.
2. THE CLOUDSCALE MIDDLEWARE
In the following, we introduce the main notions and features of JCloudScale.

2.1. Basic Notions
JCloudScale is a Java-based middleware for building elastic IaaS applications. The ultimate aim of JCloudScale is to facilitate developers to implement cloud applications (in the following referred to as target applications) as local, multi-threaded applications, without even being aware of the cloud deployment. That is, the target application is not aware of the underlying physical distribution, and does not need to care about technicalities of elasticity, such as program code distribution, virtual machine instantiation and destruction, performance monitoring, and load balancing. This is achieved with a declarative programming model (implemented via Java annotations) combined with bytecode modification. To the developer, JCloudScale appears as an additional library (e.g., a Maven dependency) plus a post-compilation build step. This puts JCloudScale in stark contrast to most industrial PaaS solutions, which require applications to be built specifically for these platforms. Such PaaS applications are usually not executable outside of the targeted PaaS environment.

The primary entities of JCloudScale are cloud objects (COs). COs are object instances which execute in the cloud. COs are deployed to, and executed by, so-called cloud hosts (CHs). CHs are virtual machines acquired from the IaaS cloud, which run a JCloudScale server component. They accept COs to host and execute on client request. The program code responsible for managing virtual machines, dispatching requests to virtual machines, class loading, and monitoring is injected into the target application as a post-compilation build step via bytecode modification. Optimally, COs are highly cohesive and loosely coupled to the rest of the target application, as, after cloud deployment, every further interaction with the CO constitutes a remote invocation over the network.

Fig. 1 illustrates the basic operation of JCloudScale in an interaction diagram. The grey boxes indicate code that is injected. Hence, these steps are transparent to the application developer.

Fig. 2 shows a high-level deployment view of a JCloudScale application. The grey box in the target application JVM again indicates injected components. Note that CHs are conceptually “thin” components, i.e., most of the actual JCloudScale business logics is running on client side. CHs consist mainly of a small server component that accepts requests from clients, a code cache used for classloading, and sand boxes for executing COs. As JCloudScale currently does not explicitly target multi-tenancy [Bezemer et al. 2010], these sand boxes are currently implemented in a lightweight way via custom Java classloaders. On client-side, the JCloudScale middle-
ware collects and aggregates monitoring data, and maintains a list of CHs and COs. Further, the client-side middleware is responsible for scaling up and down based on user-defined policies (see Section 3.1).

Listing 1. Declaring COs in Target Applications

```java
1 @CloudObject
2 public class MyCO {
3     @CloudGlobal
4         private static String myCoName;
5     @DataSource(name = "couchdb")
6         private DataStore datastore;
7     @EventSink
8         private EventSink eventsink;
9     public MyResult myMethod(@ByValueParameter MyParameters params) {
10         ...}
11 }
```

2.2. Interacting with Cloud Objects

Application developers declare COs in their application code via simple Java annotations (see Listing 1 for a minimal example). As is the case for any object in Java, the target application can fundamentally interact with COs in two different ways: invoking CO methods, and getting or setting CO member fields. In both cases, JCloudScale intercepts the operation, executes the requested operation on the CH, and returns the result (if any) back to the target application. In the meantime, the target application is blocked (more concretely, the target application remains in an “idle wait” state while it is waiting for the CH response). Fundamentally, JCloudScale aims to preserve the functional semantics of the target application after bytecode modification. That is, every method call or field operation behaves functionally identical to a regular Java program.
One exception to this rule are CO-defining classes that contain static fields and methods. Operations on those are by default not intercepted by JCLOUDSCALE, as they potentially lead to a problem that we refer to as JVM-local updates: if code executing on a CH (for instance a CO instance method) changes the value of a static field, only the copy in this CH’s JVM will be changed. Other COs, or the target application JVM, are not aware of the change. Hence, in this case, the value of the static field is tainted, and the execution semantics of the application changes after JCLOUDSCALE bytecode injection. To prevent this problem and preserve standard Java language semantics, static fields can be annotated with the @CloudGlobal annotation (see Listing 1, line 4-5). Changes to such static fields are maintained in the target application JVM, and all CH JVMs are operating on the target application JVM copy via callback. Note that this behavior is not default for performance reasons, as synchronizing static field values is expensive, and only required if JVM-local updates are possible.

2.3. Remote Classloading
Whenever a CH has to execute a CO method, JCLOUDSCALE has to ensure that all necessary resources (i.e., program code and other files, for instance configuration files) are available on that CH. In order to ensure freshness of the available code and to retrieve missing files, we intercept the default class loading mechanism of Java and verify that the code available to the CH is the same as the one referenced by the client. If this is not the case, the correct version of the code is fetched dynamically from the target application. In order to improve performance, CHs additionally maintain a code cache, which is a high-speed storage of recently used code. This mechanism allows JCLOUDSCALE to load missing or modified code efficiently and seamlessly for the application only whenever it is necessary, thus simplifying application development and maintenance. We discuss this process in more detail in [Zabolotnyi et al. 2013].

3. SUPPORTING CLOUD ELASTIC APPLICATIONS
So far, we have discussed how JCLOUDSCALE transparently enables remoting in cloud applications. We now explain how JCLOUDSCALE enables elastic applications.

3.1. Autonomic Elasticity via Complex Event Processing
One central advantage of JCLOUDSCALE is that it allows for building elastic applications by mapping requests to a dynamic pool of CHs. This encompasses three related tasks: (1) performance monitoring, (2) CH provisioning and de-provisioning, and (3) CO-to-CH scheduling and CO migration. One design goal of JCLOUDSCALE is to abstract from technicalities of these tasks, but still grant developers low-level control over the elasticity behavior.

An overview over the JCLOUDSCALE components related to elasticity, and their interactions, is given in Fig. 3. Conceptually, our system implements the well-established autonomic computing control loop of monitoring-analysis-planning-execution (MAPE) [Kephart and Chess 2003] (MAPE). The base data of monitoring is provided using event messages. All components in a JCLOUDSCALE system (COs, CHs, as well as the middleware itself) trigger a variety of predefined lifecycle and status events, indicating, for instance, that a new CO has been deployed or that the execution of a CO method has failed. Additionally, JCLOUDSCALE makes it easy for applications to trigger custom (application-specific) events. Finally, events may also be produced by external event sources, such as an external monitoring framework. All these events form a consolidated stream of monitoring events in a message queue, by which they are forwarded into a complex event processing (CEP) engine [Luckham 2002] for analysis. CEP is the process of merging a large number of low-level events into high-level knowledge,
e.g., many atomic execution time events can be merged into meaningful performance indicators for the system in total.

Developers steer the scaling behavior by defining a scaling policy, which implements the planning part of this MAPE loop. This policy is invoked whenever a new CO needs to be scheduled. Possible decisions of the scaling policy are the provisioning of new CHs, migrating existing COs between CHs, and scheduling the new CO to a (new or existing) CH. The policy is also responsible for deciding whether to de-provision an existing CH at the end of each billing time unit. Additionally, developers can define any number of monitoring metrics. Metrics are simple 3-tuples \(<\text{name}, \text{type}, \text{cep-statement}>\). CEP-statements are defined over the stream of monitoring events. An example, which defines a metric \(\text{AvgEngineSetupTime}\) of type \(\text{java.lang.Double}\) as the average duration value of all \(\text{EngineSetupEvents}\) received in a 10 second batch, is given in Listing 2.

```
1 MONITORINGMETRIC metric =
2 new MONITORINGMETRIC();
3 metric.setName("AvgEngineSetupTime");
4 metric.setType(Double.class);
5 metric.setEPL("select avg(duration)
6 from EngineSetupEvent.win
7 :time_batch(10 sec)";
8 EventCorrelationEngine.getInstance().
9 .registerMetric(metric);
```

Listing 2. Defining Monitoring Metrics via CEP

Monitoring metrics range from very simple and domain-independent (e.g., calculating the average CPU utilization of all CHs) to rather application-specific ones, such as the example given in Listing 2. Whenever the CEP-statement is triggered, the CEP engine writes a new value to an in-memory monitoring repository. Scaling policies...
have access to this repository, and make use of its content in their decisions. In combination with monitoring metrics, scaling policies are a well-suited tool for developers to specify how the application should react to changes in its work load. Hence, sophisticated scaling policies that minimize cloud infrastructure costs or that maximize utilization [Genaud and Gossa 2011] are easy to integrate. As part of the JCLoudScale release, we provide a small number of default policies that users can integrate out of the box, but expect users to write their own policy for non-trivial applications. This has proven necessary as, generally, no generic scaling policy is able to cover the needs of all applications.

Finally, the cloud manager component, which can be seen as the heart of the JCLoudScale client-side middleware and the executor of the MAPE loop, enacts the decisions of the policy by invoking the respective functions of the IaaS API and the CH remote interfaces (e.g., provisioning of new CHs, de-provisioning of existing ones, as well as the deployment or migration of COs).

![Monitoring Event Hierarchy](image)

Fig. 4. Monitoring Event Hierarchy

Fig. 4 depicts the type hierarchy of all predefined events in JCLoudScale. Dashed classes denote abstract events, which are not triggered directly, but serve as classifications for groups of related events. All events further contain a varying number of event properties, which form the core information of the event. For instance, for ExecutionFailedEvent, the properties contain the CO, the invoked method, and the actual error. Developers and external event sources can extend this event hierarchy by inheriting from CustomEvent, and writing these custom events into a special event sink (injected by the middleware, see Listing 1). This process is described in more detail in [Leitner et al. 2012].

3.2. Deploying to the Cloud

As all code that interacts with the IaaS cloud is injected, the JCLoudScale programming model naturally decouples Java applications from the cloud environment that they are physically deployed to. This allows developers to re-deploy the same application to a different cloud simply by changing the respective parts of the JCLoudScale configuration. JCLoudScale currently contains three separate cloud backends, supporting OpenStack-based private clouds, the Amazon EC2 public cloud, and a special local environment. The local environment does not use an actual cloud at all, but simulates CHs by starting new JVMs on the same physical machine as the target appli-
cation. Support for more IaaS clouds, for instance Microsoft Azure’s virtual machine cloud, is an ongoing activity.

![Supported Deployment Environments](image)

Fig. 5. Supported Deployment Environments

It is also possible to combine different environments, enabling hybrid cloud applications. In this case, the scaling policy is responsible for deciding which CO to execute on which cloud. Fig. 5 illustrates the different types of environments supported by JCloudScale.

![Conceptual Development Process](image)

Fig. 6. Conceptual Development Process

### 3.3. Development Process

As JCloudScale makes it easy to switch between different cloud environments, the middleware supports a streamlined development process for elastic applications, as sketched in Fig. 6. The developer typically starts by building her application as a local, multi-threaded Java application using common software engineering tools and methodologies. Once the target application logic is implemented and tested, she adds the necessary JCloudScale annotations, as well as scaling policies, monitoring metric definitions, and JCloudScale configuration as required. Now she enables JCloudScale code injection by adding the necessary post-compilation steps to the application build process. Via configuration, the developer specifies a deployment in the local environment first. This allows her to conveniently test and debug the application on her development machine, including tuning and customizing the scaling policy. Finally, once she is satisfied with how the application behaves, she changes the configuration to an actual cloud environment, and deploys and tests the application in a physically distributed fashion.
We argue that this process significantly lessens the pain that developers experience when building applications for IaaS clouds, as it reduces the error-prone and time-consuming testing of applications on an actual cloud. However, of course this process is idealized. Practical usage shows that developers will have to go back to a previous step in the process on occasion. For instance, after testing the scaling behavior in the local environment, the developer may want to slightly adapt the target application to better support physical distribution. Still, we have found that the conceptual separation of target application development and implementation of the scaling behavior is well-received by developers in practice.

4. IMPLEMENTATION

We have implemented JCLoudScale as a Java-based middleware under an Apache Licence 2.0. The current stable version is available from GitHub. This web site also contains documentation and sample applications to get users started with JCLoud-Scale.

Our implementation integrates a plethora of existing technologies, which is summarized in Fig. 7. JCLoudScale uses aspect-oriented programming [Kiczales and Hilsdale 2001] (via AspectJ) to inject remoting and cloud management code into target applications. Typically, this is done as a post-compilation step in the build process. Dynamic proxying is implemented by means of the CGLib code generation library. For event processing, the well-established Esper CEP engine is used. The client-side middleware interacts with CHs via a JMS-compatible message queue (currently Apache ActiveMQ). Furthermore, COs and the target application itself can read from and write to a shared data store (for example Apache CouchDB). CHs themselves are simple Ubuntu 12.10 Linux hosts running Java and a small JCloudScale operating system service, which receives CO requests and executes them. Currently, we have built CH base images for OpenStack and Amazon EC2, which are linked from the Google Code web site, and which can be used out of the box with the stable version 0.4.0 of JCloudScale (the current version at the time of writing). We will also provide images for future stable versions, once they become available.

Fig. 7. Implementation Overview

1https://github.com/xLeitix/jcloudscale

ACM Transactions on Internet Technology, Vol. V, No. N, Article A, Publication date: January YYYY.
5. VALIDATION
As part of our validation of the JCloudScale framework, we aim at answering the following three research questions:

— **RQ1**: Does using JCloudScale instead of established tooling lead to more efficient development of cloud solutions, e.g., in terms of solution size or development time?
— **RQ2**: How does JCloudScale compare with established tooling in terms of ease-of-use, debugging, and other more “soft” quality dimensions?
— **RQ3**: What runtime overhead does JCloudScale impose at execution time?

In order to answer **RQ1** and **RQ2**, we conducted a multi-month user study. **RQ3** is addressed via numerical overhead measurements on a simple example application, with and without JCloudScale.

5.1. User Study
In order to evaluate **RQ1** and **RQ2**, we conducted an user study with 14 participants to assess the developers’ experience with JCloudScale as compared to using standard tools.

5.1.1. Study Setup and Methodology. We conducted our study with, in total, 14 male master students of computer science at TU Vienna (participants P01 – P14), and based on two different non-trivial implementation tasks. The first task was to develop a parallel computing implementation of a genetic algorithm (T1). The second task required the participants to implement a service that executes JUnit test cases on demand (T2). For both tasks, an elastic solution was asked for, which was able to react to changes in load dynamically and automatically by scaling up and down in the cloud. Both T1 and T2 required roughly a developer week of effort (assuming that the respective participant did not have any particular prior experience with the used technologies).

The study ran in two phases. In Phase (1), we compared using JCloudScale on top of OpenStack with programming directly via the OpenStack API, without any specific middleware support. This phase reflected a typical private cloud [Dillon et al. 2010] use case of JCloudScale. In Phase (2), we compare JCloudScale on top of Amazon EC2 with using Amazon Elastic Beanstalk. This reflects a common public cloud usage of the framework. In both study phases, we asked participating developers to build solutions for both tasks using JCloudScale and the respective comparison technology, and compare the developer experience based on quantitative and qualitative factors. We had 9 participating developers in Phase (1), and 5 participants in Phase (2). One participant in Phase (2) only completed one of the two tasks.

| ID | Phase | Java Exp. | Cloud Exp. | JCS/OS | OS | JCS/EC2 | Beanstalk |
|----|-------|-----------|------------|--------|----|---------|-----------|
| P01 | Phase (1) | + | + | T1 | T2 | – | – |
| P02 | Phase (1) | + | – | T1 | T2 | – | – |
| P03 | Phase (1) | – | – | – | – | – | – |
| P04 | Phase (1) | – | – | – | – | – | – |
| P05 | Phase (1) | – | – | T2 | T1 | – | – |
| P06 | Phase (1) | + | + | T2 | T1 | – | – |
| P07 | Phase (1) | + | – | T2 | T1 | – | – |
| P08 | Phase (1) | – | – | T2 | T1 | – | – |
| P09 | Phase (1) | – | – | T2 | T1 | – | – |
| P10 | Phase (2) | + | + | – | – | T2 | T1 |
| P11 | Phase (2) | + | – | – | – | T1 | T2 |
| P12 | Phase (2) | + | – | – | – | T1 | T2 |
| P13 | Phase (2) | + | – | T2 | T1 | – | – |
| P14 | Phase (2) | + | – | T2 | T1 | – | – |
Phase (1) of the study lasted two months. We initially presented JCloudScale and the comparison technologies to the participants, and randomly assigned which of the tools each participant should be using for T1. Participants then had one month of time to submit a working solution to the task along with a short report, after which they could start working on T2 with the remaining technology. Similar to T1, participants were given one month of time to submit a solution and a short report. Based on the lessons learned from Phase (1), we slightly clarified and improved the task descriptions and gave participants more time (1.5 months per task) for Phase (2). Other than that, Phase (2) was executed identically to Phase (1).

Table I summarizes the relevant background for each participant of the study. To preserve anonymity, we classify the self-reported background of participants related to their Java or cloud experience into three groups: relevant work experience (+), some experience (~), or close to no experience (-). The last four columns indicate whether the participant submitted solutions for JCloudScale running on top of OpenStack, OpenStack directly, JCloudScale running on top of EC2, or AWS Elastic Beanstalk, as well as which task the participant solved using these (combinations of) technologies.

For the OpenStack-related implementations, we used a private cloud system hosted at TU Vienna. This OpenStack instance consists of 12 dedicated Dell blade servers with 2 Intel Xeon E5620 CPUs (2.4 GHz Quad Cores) each, and 32 GByte RAM, running on OpenStack Folsom (release 2012.2.4). For the study, each participant was allotted a quota of up to 8 very small instances (1 virtual CPU, and 512 MByte of RAM), which they could use to implement and test their solutions. For the AWS-related implementations, participants were assigned an AWS account with sufficient credit to cover their implementation and testing with no particular limitations.

|                | Phase (1) |                | Phase (2) |                |
|----------------|-----------|----------------|-----------|----------------|
|                | JCS/OS    | OS             | JCS/EC2   | Beanstalk      |
|                | A        | σ_A            | B        | σ_B            |
| T1 Business Logics | 200 | 176            | 552 | 215            |
| Cloud Management | 100 | 112            | 180 | 86             |
| Other Code     | 170 | 157            | 286 | 226            |
| Entire Application | 400 | 416            | 1050 | 434            |
| T2 Business Logics | 450 | 292            | 375 | 699            |
| Cloud Management | 100 | 48             | 250 | 364            |
| Other Code     | 325 | 213            | 300 | 297            |
| Entire Application | 1025 | 461           | 1500 | 901            |
|                | A        | σ_A            | C        | σ_C            |
|                | 388 | 152            | 1590 | 1203           |
|                | 2141 | 1331           | 2790 | 2660           |
|                | B        | σ_B            | D        | σ_D            |
|                | 825 | 947            | 897 | 1127           |
|                | 970 | 280            | 968 | 968            |

5.1.2. Comparison of Development Efforts (RQ1). RQ1 asked whether JCloudScale makes it easier and faster to build elastic IaaS applications. To this end, we asked participants to report on the size of their solutions (in lines of code, without comments and blank lines). The results are summarized in Table II. A – D represent the median size of solutions, while σ_A – σ_D indicate standard deviations. It can be seen that using JCloudScale indeed generally reduces the total source code size of applications. Going into the study, we expected JCloudScale to mostly reduce the amount of code necessary for interacting with the cloud. However, our results indicate that using JCloudScale also often reduced the amount of code of the application business logics, as well as assorted other code (e.g., data structures). When investigating these results, we found that participants considered many of the tasks that JCloudScale...
takes over as “business logics” when building the elastic application on top of OpenStack or Elastic Beanstalk. To give one example, many participants counted code related to performance monitoring towards “business logics”. Note that, due to the open nature of our study tasks, the standard deviations are all rather large (i.e., solutions using all technologies varied widely in size). It needs to be noted that the large difference in T1 sizes (for JCloudScale on top of OpenStack and EC2) between Phase (1) and Phase (2) solutions can be explained by clarifications in the task descriptions. In Phase (1), some formulations in the tasks led to much simpler implementations, while our requirements were formulated much more unambiguously in Phase (2), leading to more complex (and larger) submissions. Hence, we caution the reader to not compare results from Phase (1) with those from Phase (2).

### Table III. Time Spent (in Full Hours)

|               | Phase (1)       | Phase (2)       |
|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|               | JCS/OS | OS   | JCS/EC2 | Beanstalk |
|               | $A$ | $\sigma_A$ | $B$ | $\sigma_B$ | $C$ | $\sigma_C$ | $D$ | $\sigma_D$ |
| Tool Learning | 7   | 2   | 12   | 5    | 28  | 18    | 18  | 1   |
| Coding        | 4   | 10  | 30   | 17   | 42  | 25    | 54  | 23  |
| Bug Fixing    | 7   | 7   | 18   | 12   | 14  | 8     | 20  | 14  |
| Other Activities | 13  | 9   | 14   | 14   | 5   | 0     | 6   | 6   |
| Entire Application | 31  | 25  | 76   | 33   | 127 | 25    | 121 | 36  |
| Tool Learning | 8   | 6   | 2    | 1    | 15  | 10    | 23  | 18  |
| Coding        | 30  | 11  | 25   | 17   | 36  | 5     | 30  | 14  |
| Bug Fixing    | 10  | 11  | 10   | 7    | 16  | 16    | 5   | 0   |
| Other Activities | 7   | 4   | 11   | 10   | 5   | 0     | 9   | 9   |
| Entire Application | 62  | 13  | 46   | 17   | 125 | 40    | 102 | 13  |

However, looking at lines of code alone is not sufficient to validate our hypothesis that JCloudScale improves developer productivity, as it would be possible that the JCloudScale solutions, while being more compact, are also more complicated (and, hence, take longer to implement). That is why we also asked participants to report on the time they spent working on their solutions. The results are compiled in Table III. We have classified work hours into a number of different activities: initially learning the technology, coding, testing and bug fixing, and other activities (e.g., building OpenStack cloud images). Our results indicate that the initial learning curve for JCloudScale is lower than for working with OpenStack directly. However, in comparison with Elastic Beanstalk, some participants reported equal or even more complexity of JCloudScale, mainly because of the limited tutorial and help information about JCloudScale available in Internet. For coding JCloudScale appeared to be much faster tool for participants who had at least some prior experience with cloud computing.

Due to the high standard deviations, looking at this quantitative data alone remains inconclusive. Hence, we also analyzed qualitative feedback by the participants in their reports. Multiple developers have reported that they felt more productive when using JCloudScale. For instance, P01 has stated that “the coolest thing about JCloudScale is the reduction of development effort necessary, to host applications in the cloud (...) [there] are a lot of thing you do not have to care about in detail.” P03 also concluded that using JCloudScale “went a lot smoother than using OpenStack directly”. P07 also seemed to share this sentiment and stated that “[After resolving initial problems/ the rest of the project was without big problems and I was able to be very productive in coding the solution.” In comparison to Elastic Beanstalk, participants indicate that core idea behind JCloudScale is easier to grasp for starting cloud developers than...
the one behind modern PaaS systems. For example, P13 indicated that “the JCloudScale API is easier to understand and more intuitive to use. Also, it fits more into a Java-like programming model, instead of the weird request-based approach of the Amazon API”. However, some participants noted that the fact that Elastic Beanstalk is based on common technology also appeals to them. For instance, P10 specified that “[In case of Elastic Beanstalk,] well-known technology is the basis for everything (Tomcat/Servlet)”. Hence, the participant argued that this allows developers who are already familiar with these platforms to be productive sooner.

Summarizing our study results regarding RQ1, we conclude that JCloudScale indeed seems to allow for higher developer productivity than working directly on top of an IaaS API, such as the one of OpenStack. In comparison to AWS Elastic Beanstalk, our results do not clearly indicate more or less productivity with JCloudScale.

5.1.3. Comparision of Developer-Perceived Quality (RQ2). In order to answer RQ2, we were interested in the participant’s subjective evaluation of the used technologies. Hence, we asked them to rate the technologies along a number of dimensions from 1 (very good) to 5 (insufficient). We report on the dimensions “simplicity” (how easy is it to use the tool?), “debugging” (how easy is testing and debugging the application?), “development process” (does the technology imply an awkward development process?), and “stability” (how often do unexpected errors occur?). A summary of our results is shown in Table IV.

|                | Phase (1) |                  | Phase (2) |                  |
|----------------|-----------|------------------|-----------|------------------|
|                | JCS on OpenStack | OpenStack | JCS on EC2 | Elastic Beanstalk |
|                | A  | σ_A | B  | σ_B | C  | σ_C | D  | σ_D |
| Simplicity     | 3  | 0.6 | 3  | 1.2 | 2  | 0   | 2  | 1.4 |
| Debugging      | 3  | 1.5 | 3  | 1.2 | 4  | 0   | 3.5| 0.7 |
| Development Process | 4  | 1.7 | 3.5| 0.5 | 2  | 1.4 | 3  | 0   |
| Stability      | 2  | 1.4 | 2  | 0.8 | 2  | 1.4 | 1.5| 0.7 |
| Overall        | 3  | 0.6 | 3  | 0.8 | 2  | 0   | 2  | 1.4 |
|                | 2  | 0.4 | 3  | 1.4 | 2  | 1.5 | 3  | 1.4 |
|                | 2  | 0.7 | 3  | 1.4 | 2  | 0   | 2.5| 0.7 |
|                | 2  | 0.6 | 3  | 1.4 | 2  | 0   | 2.5| 0.7 |
|                | 2  | 1.5 | 3  | 0.5 | 3  | 0.5 | 3  | 1.4 |

Overall, participants rated all used technologies similarly. However, JCloudScale was rated worse than the comparison technologies mainly in terms of “stability”. This is not a surprise, as JCloudScale still is a research prototype in a relatively early development stage. Participants indeed mentioned multiple stability-related issues in their reports (e.g., P10 mentions that “When deploying many cloud objects to one host there were behaviors which were hard to reason about”). Further, some technical implementation decisions in JCloudScale were not appreciated by our study participants. To give an example, P11 noted that “It is confusing in the configuration that the field AMI-ID actually expects the AMI-Name, not the ID”. In contrast, JCloudScale has generally been rated slightly better in terms of simplicity and ease-of-use, especially for T2. For example, participant P09 claimed that “JCloudScale is the clear winner in ease of use. If you quickly want to just throw some Objects in the cloud, it’s the clear choice.”. Similarly, P12 reported “[JCloudScale is] programmer friendly. All procedure is more low level and as a programmer there are more things to tune and adjust.”. In terms of debugging features, all used technologies were not rated overly

|                | Phase (1) |                  | Phase (2) |                  |
|----------------|-----------|------------------|-----------|------------------|
|                | JCS on OpenStack | OpenStack | JCS on EC2 | Elastic Beanstalk |
|                | A  | σ_A | B  | σ_B | C  | σ_C | D  | σ_D |
| Simplicity     | 3  | 0.6 | 3  | 1.2 | 2  | 0   | 2  | 1.4 |
| Debugging      | 3  | 1.5 | 3  | 1.2 | 4  | 0   | 3.5| 0.7 |
| Development Process | 4  | 1.7 | 3.5| 0.5 | 2  | 1.4 | 3  | 0   |
| Stability      | 2  | 1.4 | 2  | 0.8 | 2  | 1.4 | 1.5| 0.7 |
| Overall        | 3  | 0.6 | 3  | 0.8 | 2  | 0   | 2  | 1.4 |
|                | 2  | 0.4 | 3  | 1.4 | 2  | 1.5 | 3  | 1.4 |
|                | 2  | 0.7 | 3  | 1.4 | 2  | 0   | 2.5| 0.7 |
|                | 2  | 0.6 | 3  | 1.4 | 2  | 0   | 2.5| 0.7 |
|                | 2  | 1.5 | 3  | 0.5 | 3  | 0.5 | 3  | 1.4 |
well, JCloudScale was generally perceived slightly better (due to its local development environment), but realistically all compared systems are currently deemed too hard to debug if something goes wrong. Finally, in terms of the associated development process, JCloudScale is generally valued highly, with the exception of T1 and JCloudScale on OpenStack. We assume that this is a statistical artifact, as the development process of JCloudScale is judged well in all other cases. Concretely P01 stated that with JCloudScale, “You are able to get application into the cloud really fast. You are not forced to take care about a lot of cloud-specific issues”.

Independently of the subjective ratings, multiple participants stated that they valued the flexibility that the JCloudScale concept brought over Elastic Beanstalk. Particularly, P11 noted that “[JCloudScale provides] more flexibility. The developer can decide when to deploy hosts, on which host an object gets deployed, when to destroy a host, etc”. Additionally, participants favored the monitoring event engine of JCloudScale for performance tracking over the respective features of the PaaS system. For example, P12 specified as an JCloudScale advantage that “programmatic usage of different events with a powerful event correlation framework [is] in combination with listeners extremely powerful.”.

Concluding our discussion regarding RQ2, we note that JCloudScale indeed has some way to go before it is ready for industrial usage. The general concepts of the tool are valued by developers, but currently, technical issues and lack of documentation and technical support make it hard for developers to fully appreciate the power of the JCloudScale model. One aspect that needs more work is how developers define the scaling behavior of their application. Both tasks in our study required the participants to define non-trivial scaling policies, e.g., in order to optimally schedule genetic algorithm executions to cloud resources, which most participants felt unable to do with the current API provided by JCloudScale. Overall, in comparison to working directly on OpenStack, many participants preferred JCloudScale, but compared to a mature PaaS platform, AWS Elastic Beanstalk still seems slightly preferrable to many. However, it should be noted that JCloudScale still opens up use cases for which using Beanstalk is not an option, for instance for deploying applications in a private or hybrid cloud [Leitner et al. 2013].

5.2. Runtime Overhead Measurements (RQ3)

Finally, we investigated whether the improved convenience of JCloudScale is paid for with significantly reduced application performance. Therefore, the main goal of these experiments was to compare the performance of the same application built on top of JCloudScale and using IaaS platform (OpenStack or EC2) directly.

5.2.1. Experiment Setup. To achieve this, we built a simple sample application (inspired by T2 from the user study) on top of Amazon EC2 and our private OpenStack cloud. The application JSTAAS (“JavaScript Testing-as-a-Service”) provides testing of JavaScript applications as a cloud service. Clients register with the service, which triggers JSTAAS to periodically launch this client’s registered test suites. Results of test runs are stored in a database, which can be queried by the client. Tests vary widely in the load that they generate on the servers, and clients are billed according to this load.

Secondly, we also implemented the same application using JCloudScale. As the main goal was to calculate the overhead introduced by the JCloudScale, we designed both implementations to have the same behavior and reuse as much business logics code as possible. In addition, to simplify our setup, focus on execution performance evaluation and to avoid major platform-dependent side effects, we limited our-
selves to a scenario, where the number of available cloud hosts is static. The source code of both applications is available online.\footnote{http://www.infosys.tuwien.ac.at/staff/phdschool/rstzab/papers/TOIT14/}

All four solutions (directly on OpenStack, directly on EC2, and using JCloudScale on both, OpenStack and EC2) follow a simple master-slave pattern: a single node (the master) receives tests through a SOAP-based Web Service and schedules them over the set of available worker nodes. All solutions were tested with a test setup that consisted of 40 identical parallelizable long-running test suites scheduled evenly over the set of available cloud machines. Each test suite consisted of a set of dummy JavaScript tests calculating Fibonacci numbers. During the evaluation, we measured the total time of an entire invocation of the service (i.e., how long a test request takes end-to-end, including scheduling, data transmission, result collection, etc.). A single experiment run consisted of 10 identical invocations of the testing web service, each time with a different number of CHs (ranging from 2 to 20 CHs). To eliminate the influence of other parallel cloud activity, experiment runs for both versions of evaluation application were running interchangeably for each number of CHs. To discard accidental results, such experiment runs were repeated 10 times for each version of evaluation application.

5.2.2. Experiment Results. Figure 8 and Figure 9 show the median total execution time for different numbers of hosts. In general, both applications show similar behavior in each environment, meaning that both approaches are feasible and have similar parallelizing capabilities with minor overhead difference. In both environments, there is an overhead of JCloudScale that is proportional to the amount of used CHs and approximately equal to 2 – 3 seconds per introduced host for multiple minutes evaluation application. This overhead may be significant for performance-critical production applications, but we believe that it is a reasonable price to pay in the current development stage of the JCloudScale middleware. However, detailed investigation (and, subsequently, reduction) of the overhead introduced by JCloudScale is planned for future releases of the system.

Another important issue that is visible from Figure 8 and Figure 9 is the cloud performance stability and predictability. With an increasing number of hosts, the total execution time is expected to monotonously decrease, up to a limit when the overhead of parallelization is larger than the gain of having more processors available. This indeed happens in case of Amazon EC2. However, starting with 10 used hosts in OpenStack, the overall application execution time remains almost constant or even increases. In our case, this is mainly caused by the limited size of our private cloud.
In our system, starting with 10 hosts, physical machines start to get overutilized, and virtual machines start to compete for resources (e.g., CPU or disk IO).

5.3. Threats to Validity
The major threat to (internal) validity, which the results relating to RQ1 and RQ2 face, are that the small sample size of 14 study participants, along with relatively open problem statements, does not allow us to establish statistical significance. However, due to the reports we received from participants, as well as due to comparing the solutions themselves, we are convinced that our results that JCloudScale lets developers build cloud applications more efficiently was not a coincidence. Further, our participants were aware that JCloudScale is our own system. Hence, there is a chance that our participants gave their reports a more positive spin, so as to do us a favor. However, given that all reports contained both negative aspects of all evaluated frameworks, we are confident that most participants reported truthfully. In terms of external validity, it is possible that the two example projects we chose for our study are not representative of real-world applications. However, we argue that this is unlikely, as the projects have specifically been chosen based on real-life examples that the authors of this paper are aware of or had to build themselves in the past. Another thread to external validity is that the participants of our study are all students at TU Vienna. While most of them have some practical real-life experience in application development, none can be considered senior developers.

In terms of RQ3, the major thread to external validity is that the application we used to measure overhead on is necessarily simplified, and not guaranteed to be representative of real JCloudScale applications. Real applications, such as the ones built in our user study, are hard to replicate in exactly the same way on different systems, hence comparative measurements amongst such systems are always unfair. To minimize this risk, we have taken care to preserve what we consider core features of cloud applications even in the simplified measurement application.

6. RELATED WORK
We now put the JCloudScale framework into context of the larger distributed and cloud computing ecosystem. As the scope of JCloudScale is rather wide, there are a plethora of existing tools, frameworks and middleware that are related to parts of the functionality of our system. Based on the descriptions in Section 2 and Section 3 we consider the main dimensions to compare frameworks across are (1) to what extend they transparently handle remoting and elasticity, (2) how easy it is to locally test and debug applications, (3) whether the system restricts what kinds of applications can be built (e.g., only Tomcat-based web applications), (4) whether the system handles cloud
| Remoting Frameworks                        | Transparent Remoting | Transparent Elasticity | Local Testing | Unrestricted Architecture | Transparent VM Management | Cloud Provider Independence |
|-------------------------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|---------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Java RMI                                  | yes                  | no                     | yes           | yes                        | no                         | no                         |
| Enterprise Java                           | yes                  | partial                | yes           | yes                        | no                         | no                         |
| Beans (EJB)                               | yes                  | yes                    | no            | yes                        | yes                        | yes                        |
| Elastic Remote [Jayaram 2013]             | yes                  | yes                    | no            | yes                        | yes                        | yes                        |
| Aneka [Vecchiola et al. 2008]            | partial              | no                     | yes           | yes                        | yes                        | yes                        |

| Paas Systems                              |                      |                        |               |                            |                            |                           |
|-------------------------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|---------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Appengine                                 | yes                  | yes                    | partial       | no                         | yes                        | no                         |
| Amazon Elastic                            | yes                  | yes                    | no            | yes                        | yes                        | no                         |
| Beanstalk                                 | yes                  | yes                    | no            | yes                        | no                         | no                         |
| Havoku                                    | yes                  | yes                    | partial       | no                         | yes                        | yes                        |
| AppScale [Chohan et al. 2010]             | yes                  | yes                    | no            | no                         | yes                        | yes                        |
| [Krintz 2013]                             |                      |                        |               |                            |                            |                            |
| ConPaaS [Pierre et al. 2011]              | yes                  | yes                    | no            | partial                    | yes                        | yes                        |
| [Pierre and Stralau 2012]                 |                      |                        |               |                            |                            |                            |
| BOOM [Alvaro et al. 2010]                | yes                  | yes                    | no            | no                         | no                         | yes                        |
| Ese [Sätzger et al. 2011]                | yes                  | yes                    | no            | no                         | no                         | yes                        |
| Granules [Pallickara et al. 2009]         | yes                  | yes                    | yes           | no                         | yes                        | yes                        |

| Cloud Deployment & Test Frameworks        |                      |                        |               |                            |                            |                           |
|-------------------------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|---------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| JClouds                                   | no                   | no                     | no            | yes                        | no                         | yes                        |
| Docker                                    | no                   | no                     | yes           | yes                        | no                         | yes                        |
| Cafe [Mietzner et al. 2009]               | no                   | no                     | yes           | yes                        | no                         | yes                        |
| MADCAT [Inzinger et al. 2014]             | no                   | no                     | yes           | yes                        | no                         | no                         |
| OpenTOSCA [Binz et al. 2012]              | no                   | partial                | no            | yes                        | yes                        | yes                        |
| [Binz et al. 2013]                        |                      |                        |               |                            |                            |                            |

| JCloudScale                               | yes                  | partial                | yes           | yes                        | yes                        | yes                        |
virtual machines for the user, and (5) whether the system is bound to one specific cloud provider. Systems that are cloud provider independent typically also can be used in a private cloud context. We provide a high-level comparison of various systems along these axes in Table 6. We have evaluated each system along each axis, and assigned “yes” (fully supported), “no” (no real support), or “partial” (some support). All evaluations are to the best of the knowledge of the authors of this paper, and based on tool documentations or publications.

Firstly, JClouds can be compared to traditional distributed object middleware [Wolfgang Emmerich 2000], such as Java RMI or EJB. These systems provide transparent remoting features, comparable to JClouds, but clearly do not provide any support for cloud specifics, such as VM management. It can be argued that EJB provides some amount of transparent elasticity, as EJB application containers can be clustered. However, it is not easy to scale such clusters up and down. A recent research work [Jayaram 2013] has introduced the idea of Elastic Remote Methods, which extends Java RMI with cloud-specific features. This work is comparable in goals to our contribution. However, the technical approach is quite different. Aneka [Vecchiola et al. 2008; Calheiros et al. 2012], a well-known .NET based cloud framework, is a special case of a cloud computing middleware that also exhibits a number of characteristics of a PaaS system. We argue that Aneka’s abstraction of remoting is not perfect, as developers are still rather intimately aware of the distributed processing that is going on. To the best of our knowledge, Aneka does not automatically scale systems, and provides no local testing environment.

Secondly, as already argued in Section 5, many of JClouds’s features are comparable to common PaaS systems (Google Appengine, Amazon Elastic Beanstalk, or Heroku, to name just a few). All of these platforms provide transparent remoting and elasticity, and take over virtual machine management from the user. However, all of these systems also require a relatively specific application architecture (usually a three-tiered web application), and usually tie the user tightly to one specific cloud provider. Support for local testing is usually limited, although most providers nowadays have at least limited tooling or emulators available for download.

In addition to these commercial PaaS systems, there are also multiple platforms coming out of a research setting. For instance, AppScale [Chohan et al. 2010; Krintz 2013] is an open-source implementation of the Google Appengine model. AppScale can also be deployed on any IaaS system, making it much more vendor-independent than other PaaS platforms. This is similar to the ConPaaS open source platform [Pierre et al. 2011; Pierre and Stratan 2012], which originates from a European research project of the same name. ConPaaS follows a more service-oriented style, treating applications as collections of loosely-coupled services. This makes ConPaaS suited for a wider variety of applications, however, it has to be said that ConPaaS still imposes significant restrictions on the application that is to be hosted.

In scientific literature, there are also a number of PaaS systems which are more geared towards data processing, e.g., BOOM [Alvaro et al. 2010], Esc [Satzger et al. 2011], or Granules [Pallickara et al. 2009]. These systems are hard to compare with our work, as they generally operate in an entirely different fashion as compared to JClouds or the commercial PaaS operators. However, they typically only support a very restricted type of (data-driven) application model, and often do not actually interact with the cloud by themselves. This makes them necessary cloud provider independent, but also means that developers need to implement the actual elasticity-related features themselves.

Thirdly, we need to compare JClouds to a number of cloud computing related frameworks, which cover a part of the functionality provided by our middleware. JClouds is a Java library that abstracts from the heterogenous APIs of different IaaS
providers, and allows to decouple Java applications from the IaaS system that they operate in. JCloudScale internally uses JClouds to interact with providers. However, by itself, JClouds does not provide any actual elasticity. Docker is a container framework geared towards bringing testability to cloud computing. Essentially, Docker has similar goals to the local test environment of JCloudScale.

JCloudScale also has some relation to the various cloud deployment models and systems that have recently been proposed in literature, e.g., Cafe [Mietzner et al. 2009], MADCAT [Inzinger et al. 2014], or OpenTOSCA [Binz et al. 2012; Binz et al. 2013], which is an open source implementation of an upcoming OASIS standard. These systems do not typically cover elasticity by themselves (although TOSCA has partial support for auto-scaling groups), but they are usually independent of any concrete cloud provider.

By design, JCloudScale supports most of the characteristics we discuss here. However, especially in comparison to PaaS systems, developers of JCloudScale applications are not entirely shielded from issues of scalability. Further, as the user study discussed in Section 5 has shown, the system still needs to improve how scaling policies are written, so as to make building elastic systems easier for developers.

7. CONCLUSIONS

JCloudScale is a Java-based middleware that eases the development of elastic cloud applications on top of an IaaS cloud. JCloudScale follows a declarative approach based on Java annotations, which removes the need to actually adapt the business logics of the target application to use the middleware. Hence, JCloudScale support can easily be turned on and off for an application, leading to a flexible development process that clearly separates the implementation of target application business logics from implementing and tuning the scaling behavior.

We have introduced the core concepts behind JCloudScale, and presented an evaluation of the middleware based on an user study as well as using a simple case study application. Our results indicate that JCloudScale is well received among initial developers. Our results support our claim that the general JCloudScale model has advantages to both, working directly on top of an IaaS API or on an industrial PaaS systems. However, further study is required to strengthen these claims, as the limited scale of our initial study was not sufficient to clear all doubts about the viability of the system. Further, there are also technical and conceptual issues that require further investigation. Most importantly, we have learned that implementing actually elastic applications is still cumbersome for developers, as getting the scaling policy right is not as easy as we had hoped.

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