

# Distributed Memory Parallel Algorithms for Minimum Spanning Trees

Vladimir Lončar, Srdjan Škrbić and Antun Balaž

**Abstract**—Finding a minimum spanning tree of a graph is a well known problem in graph theory with many practical applications. We study serial variants of Prim's and Kruskal's algorithm and present their parallelization targeting message passing parallel machine with distributed memory. We consider large graphs that can not fit into memory of one process. Experimental results show that Prim's algorithm is a good choice for dense graphs while Kruskal's algorithm is better for sparse ones. Poor scalability of Prim's algorithm comes from its high communication cost while Kruskal's algorithm showed much better scaling to larger number of processes.

**Index Terms**—Minimum spanning tree, parallel algorithms, message passing, distributed memory computer.

## I. INTRODUCTION

A MINIMUM spanning tree (MST) of a weighted graph  $G = (V, E)$  is a subset of  $E$  that forms a spanning tree of  $G$  with minimum total weight. MST problem has many applications in computer and communication network design, as well as indirect applications in fields such as computer vision and cluster analysis [1].

In this paper we implement two parallel algorithms for finding MST of a graph, based on classical algorithms of Prim [2] and Kruskal [3]. Algorithms target message passing parallel machine with distributed memory. Primary characteristic of this architecture is that the cost of inter-process communication is high in comparison to cost of computation. Our goal was to develop algorithms which minimize communication, and to measure the impact of communication on the performance of algorithms. Our primary interest were graphs which have significantly larger number of vertices than processors involved in computation. Since graphs of this size cannot fit into the memory of a single process, we use a partitioning scheme to divide the input graph among processes. We consider both sparse and dense graphs.

First algorithm is a parallelization of Prim's serial algorithm. Each process is assigned a subset of vertices and in each step of computation, every process finds a candidate minimum-weight edge connecting one of its vertices to MST.

Manuscript received March 7, 2013; revised March 30, 2013. Authors are partially supported by Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Serbia, through projects no. ON174023: "Intelligent techniques and their integration into wide-spectrum decision support", and ON171017: "Modeling and numerical simulations of complex many-body systems", as well as European Commission through FP7 projects PRACE-2IP and PRACE-3IP.

V. Lončar is with the Department of Mathematics and Informatics, Faculty of Science, University of Novi Sad, Serbia, e-mail: vladimir.loncar@dmi.uns.ac.rs.

S. Škrbić (corresponding author) is with the Department of Mathematics and Informatics, Faculty of Science, University of Novi Sad, Serbia, e-mail: srdjan.skrbic@dmi.uns.ac.rs.

A. Balaž is with the Institute of Physics, University of Belgrade, Serbia, e-mail: antun.balaz@scl.rs

The root process collects those candidates and selects one with minimum weight which it adds to MST and broadcasts result to other processes. This step is repeated until every vertex is in MST.

Second algorithm is based on Kruskal's approach. Processes get a subset of  $G$  in the same way as in first algorithm, and then find local minimum spanning tree (or forest). Next, processes merge their MST edges until only one process remains, which holds edges that form MST of  $G$ .

Implementations of these algorithms are done using C programming language and MPI (Message Passing Interface) and tested on a parallel cluster PARADOX using up to 256 cores and 256 GB of distributed memory.

Next section contains references to the most important related papers. In section III we continue with the description and analysis of algorithms - both serial and parallel versions, and their implementation. In the last section we describe experimental results, analyze them and draw our conclusions.

## II. RELATED WORK

ALGORITHMS for MST problem have mostly been based on one of three approaches, that of Boruvka [4], Prim [2] and Kruskal [3], however, a number of new algorithms has been developed. Gallager et al. presented an algorithm where processor exists at each node of the graph (thus  $n = p$ ), useful in computer network design [5]. Katriel and Sanders designed an algorithm exploiting cycle property of a graph targeting dense graph, [6], while Ahrabian and Nowzari-Dalini's algorithm relies on depth first search of the graph [7].

Due to its parallel nature, Boruvka's algorithm (also known as Sollin's algorithm) has been the subject to most research related to parallel MST algorithms. Examples of algorithms based on Boruvka's approach include Chung and Condon [8], Wang and Gu [9] and Dehne and Götz [10].

Parallelization of Prim's algorithm has been presented by Deo and Yoo [11]. Their algorithm targets shared memory computers. Improved version of Prim's algorithm has been presented by Gonina and Kale [12]. Their algorithm adds multiple vertices per iteration, thus achieving significant speedups. Another approach targeting shared memory computers presented by Setia et al. [13] uses the cut property of a graph to grow multiple trees in parallel. Hybrid approach, combining both Boruvka's and Prim's approaches has been developed by Bader and Cong [14].

Examples of parallel implementation of Kruskal's algorithm can be found in work of Jin and Baker [15], and Osipov et al [16]. Osipov et al. proposes a modification to Kruskal's algorithm to avoid edges which certainly are not in a graph. Their algorithm runs in near linear time if graph is not too sparse.

Bulk of the research into parallel MST algorithms has targeted shared memory computers like PRAM, i.e. computers where entire graph can fit into memory. Our algorithms target distributed memory computers and use partitioning scheme to divide the input graph evenly among processors. Because no process contains info about partition of other processes, we designed our algorithms to use predictable communication patterns, and not depend on the properties of input graph.

### III. THE ALGORITHMS

LET us assume that graph  $G = (V, E)$ , with vertex set  $V$  and edge set  $E$  is connected and undirected. Without loss of generality, it can be assumed that each weight is distinct, thus  $G$  is guaranteed to have only one MST. This assumption simplifies implementation, otherwise a numbering scheme can be applied to edges with same weight, at the cost of additional implementation complexity.

Let  $n$  be the number of vertices,  $m$  the number of edges ( $|V| = n$ ,  $|E| = m$ ), and  $p$  the number of processes involved in computation of MST. Let  $w(v, u)$  denote weight of edge connecting vertices  $v$  and  $u$ . Input graph  $G$  is represented as  $n \times n$  adjacency matrix  $A = (a_{i,j})$  defined as:

$$a_{i,j} = \begin{cases} w(v_i, v_j) & \text{if } (v_i, v_j) \in E \\ 0 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases} \quad (1)$$

#### A. Prim's Algorithm

Prim's algorithm starts from an arbitrary vertex and then grows the MST by choosing a new vertex and adding it to MST in each iteration. Vertex with an edge with lightest weight incident on the vertices already in MST is added in every iteration. The algorithm continues until all the vertices have been added to the MST. This algorithm requires  $O(n^2)$  time. Implementations of Prim's algorithm commonly use auxiliary array  $d$  of length  $n$  to store distances (weight) from each vertex to MST. In every iteration a lightest weight edge in  $d$  is added to MST and  $d$  is updated to reflect changes.

Parallelizing the main loop of Prim's algorithm is difficult [17], since after adding a vertex to MST lightest edges incident on MST change. Only two steps can be parallelized: selection of the minimum-weight edge connecting a vertex not in MST to a vertex in MST, and updating array  $d$  after a vertex is added to MST. Thus, parallelization can be achieved in the following way:

- 1) Partition the input set  $V$  into  $p$  subsets, such that each subset contains  $n/p$  consecutive vertices and their edges, and assign each process a different subset. Each process also contains part of array  $d$  for vertices in its partition. Let  $V_i$  be the subset assigned to process  $p_i$ , and  $d_i$  part of array  $d$  which  $p_i$  maintains. Partitioning of adjacency matrix is illustrated in Fig. 1.
- 2) Every process  $p_i$  finds minimum-weight edge  $e_i$  (candidate) connecting MST with a vertex in  $V_i$ .
- 3) Every process  $p_i$  sends its  $e_i$  edge to the root process using all-to-one reduction.
- 4) From the received edges, the root process selects one with a minimum weight (called global minimum-weight edge  $e_{min}$ ), adds it to MST and broadcasts it to all other processes.

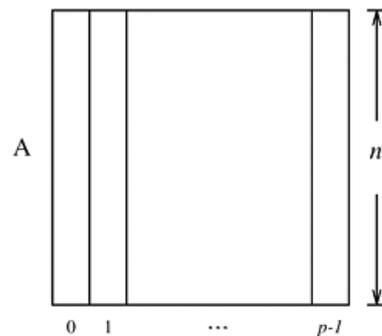


Fig. 1. Partitioning of adjacency matrix among  $p$  processes

- 5) Processes mark vertices connected by  $e_{min}$  as belonging to MST and update their part of array  $d$ .
- 6) Repeat steps 2-5 until every vertex is in MST.

Finding a minimum-weight edge and updating of  $d_i$  during each iteration costs  $O(n/p)$ . Each step also adds a communication cost of all-to-one reduction and all-to-one broadcast. These operations complete in  $O(\log p)$ . Combined, cost of one iteration is  $O(n/p + \log p)$ . Since there are  $n$  iterations, total parallel time this algorithm runs in is:

$$T_p = O\left(\frac{n^2}{p}\right) + O(n \log p) \quad (2)$$

Prim's algorithm is better suited for dense graphs and works best for complete graphs. This also applies to its parallel formulation presented here. Ineffectiveness of the algorithm on sparse graphs stems from the fact that Prim's algorithm runs in  $O(n^2)$ , regardless of the number of edges. A well-known modification [18] of Prim's algorithm is to use binary heap data structure and adjacency list representation of a graph to reduce the run time to  $O(m \log n)$ . Furthermore, using Fibonacci heap asymptotic running time of Prim's algorithm can be improved to  $O(m + n \log n)$ . Since we use adjacency matrix representation, investigating alternative approaches for Prim's algorithm was out of the scope of this paper.

#### B. Kruskal's Algorithm

Unlike Prim's algorithm which grows a single tree, Kruskal's algorithm grows multiple trees in parallel. Algorithm first creates a forest  $F$ , where each vertex in the graph is a separate tree. Next step is to sort all edges in  $E$  based on their weight. Algorithm then chooses minimum-weight edge  $e_{min}$  (i.e. first edge in sorted set). If  $e_{min}$  connects two different trees in  $F$ , it is added to the forest and two trees are combined into a single tree, otherwise  $e_{min}$  is discarded. Algorithm loops until either all edges have been selected, or  $F$  contains only one tree, which is the MST of  $G$ . This algorithm is commonly implemented using Union-Find algorithm [19]. Find operation is used to determine which tree a particular vertex is in, while Union operation is used to merge two trees. Kruskal's algorithm runs in  $O(m \log n)$  time, but can be made even more efficient by using more sophisticated Union-Find data structure, which uses union by rank and path compression [20]. If the edges are already sorted, using improved Union-Find data structure Kruskal's

algorithm runs in  $O(m\alpha(n))$ , where  $\alpha(n)$  is the inverse of the Ackerman function.

Our parallel implementation of Kruskal's algorithm uses the same partitioning scheme of adjacency matrix as in Prim's approach and is thus bounded by  $O(n^2)$  time to find all edges in matrix. Having that in mind, our parallel algorithm proceeds through the following steps:

- 1) Every process  $p_i$  first sorts edges contained in its partition  $V_i$ .
- 2) Every process  $p_i$  finds a local minimum spanning tree (or forest, MSF)  $F_i$  using edges in its partition  $V_i$  applying the Kruskal's algorithm.
- 3) Processes merge their local MST's (or MSF's). Merging is performed in the following manner. Let  $a$  and  $b$  denote two processes which are to merge their local trees (or forests), and let  $F_a$  and  $F_b$  denote their respective set of local MST edges. Process  $a$  sends set  $F_a$  to  $b$ , which forms a new local MST (or MSF) from  $F_a \cup F_b$ . After merging, process  $a$  is no longer involved in computation and can terminate.
- 4) Merging continues until only one process remains. Its MST is the end result.

Creating a new local MSF during merge step can be performed in a number of different ways. Our approach is to perform Kruskal's algorithm again on  $F_a \cup F_b$ . Computing the local MST takes  $O(n^2/p)$ . There is a total of  $\log p$  merging stages, each costing  $O(n^2 \log p)$ . During one merge step one process transmits maximum of  $O(n)$  edges for a total parallel time of:

$$T_p = O(n^2/p) + O(n^2 \log p) \quad (3)$$

Based on speedup and efficiency metrics, it can be shown that this parallel formulation is efficient for  $p = O(n/\log n)$ , same as the first algorithm.

### C. Implementation

Described algorithms were implemented using ANSI C and Message Passing Interface (MPI). Fixed communication patterns in parallel formulation of the algorithms map directly to MPI operations. Complete source code can be found in [21].

## IV. EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS

**I**MPLEMENTATIONS of algorithms were tested on a cluster of up to 32 computing nodes. Each computer in the cluster had two Intel Xeon E5345 2.33 GHz quad-core CPUs and 8 GB of memory, with Scientific Linux 6 operating system installed. We used OpenMPI v1.6 implementation of the MPI standard. The cluster nodes are connected to the network with a throughput of 1 Gbit/s. Both implementations were compiled using GCC 4.4 compiler. This cluster has enabled testing algorithms with up to 256 processes as shown in Table I.

We tested graphs with densities of 1%, 5%, 10%, 15% and 20% with number of vertices ranging from 10,000 to 100,000, and number of edges from 500,000 to 1,000,000,000. Distribution of edges in graphs was uniformly random, and all edge weights were unique. Due to the high memory requirements of large graphs, not every input graph could be partitioned in a small number of cluster nodes, as can be seen in Table I.

TABLE I  
TESTING PARAMETERS

Processes	Nodes	Processes per node	No. of vertices
4	4	1	10k - 50k
8	8	1	10k - 60k
16	16	1	10k - 80k
32	32	1	10k - 100k
64	32	2	10k - 100k
128	32	4	10k - 100k
256	32	8	10k - 100k

TABLE III  
CPU TIME (IN SECONDS) FOR ALGORITHMS WITH INCREASING DENSITY

	1%	5%	10%	15%	20%
Kruskal	0.607	2.603	5.342	8.164	10.663
Prim	30.189	30.007	30.382	30.518	30.589

### A. Results

Due to the large amount of obtained test results, we only present the most important ones here. Complete set of results can be found in [21].

In the Table II we show the behavior of algorithms with increasing number of processes on input graph of 50,000 vertices and density of 10%:

Results show poor scalability of Prim's algorithm, due to its high communication cost. Otherwise, computation phase of Prim's algorithm is faster than that of Kruskal's. Due to the usage of adjacency matrix graph representation, Prim's algorithm performs almost the same regardless of the density of the input graph. This can be seen from the results of input graph with 50,000 vertices and 32 processes with varying density shown at Table III.

On the other hand, Kruskal's algorithm shows degradation of performance with increasing density. Results of Kruskal's algorithm show that majority of local computation time is spent sorting the edges of input graph, which grows with larger density. Increasing the number of processes makes local partitions smaller and faster to process, thus allowing this algorithm to achieve good scalability. If the edges of input graph were already sorted, Kruskal's algorithm would be significantly faster than other MST algorithms.

### B. Impact of communication overhead

Cost of communication is much greater than the cost of computation, so it is important to analyse the time spent in communication routines. During tests we measured the time spent waiting for the completion of the communication operations. In case of Prim's algorithm, we measured the time that the root process spends waiting for the completion of MPI\_Reduce and MPI\_Bcast operations. Communication in Kruskal's algorithm is measured as total time spent waiting for messages received over MPI\_Recv operation in the last active process (which will contain the MST after last iteration of the merge operation). This gives us a good insight into the duration of communication routines because the last active process will have to wait the most.

The Table IV shows communication times of processing input graph of 50,000 vertices with 10% density.

TABLE II  
CPU TIME (IN SECONDS) FOR ALGORITHMS WITH INCREASING NUMBER OF PROCESSES

	4	8	16	32	64	128	256
Kruskal	38.468	19.94	10.608	5.342	2.958	1.796	1.382
Prim	16.703	15.479	25.201	30.382	30.824	32.661	39.737

TABLE IV  
COMMUNICATION VERSUS COMPUTATION TIME (IN SECONDS)

Processes	4	8	16	32	64	128	256
Prim's algorithm							
Total	16.703	15.479	25.201	30.382	30.824	32.661	39.737
Communication	8.188	11.183	23.009	29.248	30.237	32.322	39.467
Kruskal's algorithm							
Total	38.468	19.94	10.608	5.342	2.958	1.796	1.382
Communication	0.171	0.356	0.371	0.288	0.317	0.253	0.256

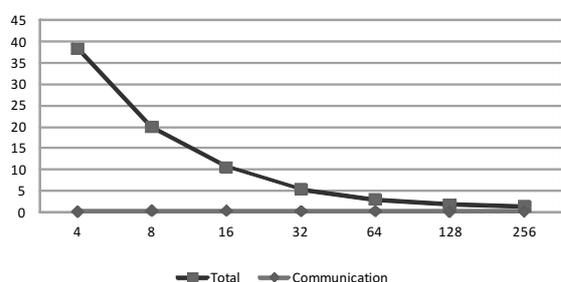


Fig. 2. Communication in Kruskal's algorithm

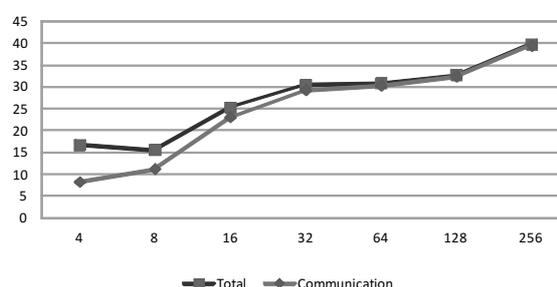


Fig. 3. Communication in Prim's algorithm

When comparing communication time with a total computation time it can be noted that the Prim's algorithm spends most of time in communication operations, and by increasing number of processes almost all the running time of the algorithm is spent on communication operations. A bottleneck in Prim's algorithm is the cost of MPI\_Reduce and MPI\_Bcast communication operations. These operations require communication between all processes, and are much more expensive than local computation within each process, because all processes must wait until the operation is completed, or until the data are transmitted over the network. This prevents Prim's algorithm from achieving substantial speedup of running time with increasing number of processes. Therefore, this algorithm is most efficient on the fewest number of processes that the partitioned input graph can fit.

On the other hand Kruskal algorithm spends much less time in communication operations, but instead spends most of the time in local computation. These differences are illustrated in Figures 2 and 3. The diagrams show that communication in Prim's algorithm rises sharply with increasing number of processes, while execution time slowly reduces. In Kruskal's algorithm, the situation is reversed.

### C. Analysis of results

The experimental results confirmed some of the assumptions made during the development and analysis of algorithms, but also made a couple of unexpected results. Results of these experiments gave us directions for further improvement of the described algorithms.

Prim's algorithm has shown excellent performance in computational part of the algorithm, but a surprisingly high cost of communication operations spoils its final score. Finding candidate edges for inclusion in MST can be further improved by using techniques described in [18], but it will not significantly improve the total time of the algorithm, as communication routines will remain the same. Unfortunately, the communication can not be further improved by changing the algorithm. The only way to reduce the cost of communication is to use a cluster that has a better quality network, or to rely on the semantics of the implementation of the MPI operation MPI\_Allreduce.

Kruskal's algorithm has shown good performance, especially for sparse graphs, while the performance degrades with increasing density. It is important to note that many real-world graphs have density much smaller than 1% (for example, graph of roads as edges and junctions as vertices has a density much smaller than 1%). Also, this algorithm showed much better scaling to larger number of processes than Prim's algorithm. Cost of communication in Kruskal's algorithm is much smaller than in Prim's algorithm, but the local computation is slower. This can be improved by using more efficient Union-Find algorithms [20], or by improving merging of local trees between processes. Kruskal's algorithm does not use a lot of slow messages like Prim's algorithm, but can send very large messages depending on the number of processes and the size of the graph. This can be improved by introducing techniques for compressing messages, or changing the structure of the message.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] R. L. Graham and P. Hell, "On the history of the minimum spanning tree problem," *IEEE Ann. Hist. Comput.*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 43–57, Jan. 1985. [Online]. Available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1109/MAHC.1985.10011>
- [2] R. C. Prim, "Shortest connection networks and some generalizations," *Bell System Technology Journal*, vol. 36, pp. 1389–1401, 1957.
- [3] J. B. Kruskal, "On the Shortest Spanning Subtree of a Graph and the Traveling Salesman Problem," *Proceedings of the American Mathematical Society*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 48–50, Feb. 1956. [Online]. Available: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2033241>
- [4] O. Boruvka, "O Jistém Problému Minimálním (About a Certain Minimal Problem) (in Czech, German summary)," *Práce Mor. Přírodoved. Spol. v Brně III*, vol. 3, 1926.
- [5] R. G. Gallager, P. A. Humblet, and P. M. Spira, "A distributed algorithm for minimum-weight spanning trees," *ACM Trans. Program. Lang. Syst.*, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 66–77, Jan. 1983. [Online]. Available: <http://doi.acm.org/10.1145/357195.357200>
- [6] I. Katriel, P. Sanders, J. L. Trff, and J. L. Tra, "A practical minimum spanning tree algorithm using the cycle property," in *In 11th European Symposium on Algorithms (ESA), number 2832 in LNCS*. Springer, 2003, pp. 679–690.
- [7] H. Ahrabian and A. Nowzari-Dalini, "Parallel algorithms for minimum spanning tree problem," *International Journal of Computer Mathematics*, vol. 79, no. 4, pp. 441–448, 2002.
- [8] S. Chung and A. Condon, "Parallel implementation of borvka's minimum spanning tree algorithm," in *Proceedings of the 10th International Parallel Processing Symposium*, ser. IPPS '96. Washington, DC, USA: IEEE Computer Society, 1996, pp. 302–308. [Online]. Available: <http://dl.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=645606.661036>
- [9] W. Guang-rong and G. Nai-jie, "An efficient parallel minimum spanning tree algorithm on message passing parallel machine," *Journal of Software*, vol. 11, no. 7, pp. 889–898, 2000.
- [10] F. Dehne and S. Gtz, "Practical parallel algorithms for minimum spanning trees," in *In Workshop on Advances in Parallel and Distributed Systems*, 1998, pp. 366–371.
- [11] Y. Y. B. Deo, Narsingh, "Parallel algorithms for the minimum spanning tree problem," in *Proceedings of the International Conference on Parallel Processing*, 1981, pp. 188–189.
- [12] E. Gonina and L. V. Kale, "Parallel prim's algorithm on dense graphs with a novel extension," *PPL Technical Report*, October 2007.
- [13] A. N. R. Setia and S. Balachandran, "A new parallel algorithm for minimum spanning tree problem," in *Proc. International Conference on High Performance Computing (HiPC)*, 2009, pp. 1–5.
- [14] D. A. Bader and G. Cong, "Fast shared-memory algorithms for computing the minimum spanning forest of sparse graphs," *J. Parallel Distrib. Comput.*, vol. 66, no. 11, pp. 1366–1378, Nov. 2006. [Online]. Available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jpdc.2006.06.001>
- [15] M. Jin and J. W. Baker, "Two graph algorithms on an associative computing model," in *Proceedings of the International Conference on Parallel and Distributed Processing Techniques and Applications, PDP'07, Las Vegas, Nevada, USA, June 25-28, 2007, Volume 1*, 2007, pp. 271–277.
- [16] V. Osipov, P. Sanders, and J. Singler, "The filter-kruskal minimum spanning tree algorithm," in *ALLENEX'09*, 2009, pp. 52–61.
- [17] A. Grama, G. Karypis, V. Kumar, and A. Gupta, *Introduction to Parallel Computing (2nd Edition)*, 2nd ed. Addison Wesley, Jan. 2003. [Online]. Available: <http://www.worldcat.org/isbn/0201648652>
- [18] T. H. Cormen, C. Stein, R. L. Rivest, and C. E. Leiserson, *Introduction to Algorithms*, 2nd ed. McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2001.
- [19] D.-Z. Pan, Z.-B. Liu, X.-F. Ding, and Q. Zheng, "The application of union-find sets in kruskal algorithm," in *Proceedings of the 2009 International Conference on Artificial Intelligence and Computational Intelligence - Volume 02*, ser. AICI '09. Washington, DC, USA: IEEE Computer Society, 2009, pp. 159–162. [Online]. Available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1109/AICI.2009.155>
- [20] Z. Galil and G. F. Italiano, "Data structures and algorithms for disjoint set union problems," *ACM Comput. Surv.*, vol. 23, no. 3, pp. 319–344, Sep. 1991. [Online]. Available: <http://doi.acm.org/10.1145/116873.116878>
- [21] S. Škrbić. (2013) Scientific computing seminar. [Online]. Available: <http://www.is.pmf.uns.ac.rs/paralel/>