

# Hardware/ Software Co-Design Advances for Optimizing Resource Allocation in Reconfigurable Systems

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**ABSTRACT**

In the phenomenal evolution of computing systems, being able to adapt and work efficiently has become a most important attribute. However, at the cutting edge of this technological revolution is hardware/software co-design for reconfigurable systems. By merging the processing power of customizable hardware with the flexibility of software, this breaks new ground in system optimization and resource allocation, without the loss of real hardware. We will dive into this interesting horizon and uncover how co-design methodologies change the landscape of modern computing to unimaginable levels of performance and versatility. With its ever increasing computational demand, the ability to dynamically allocate resources and reconfigure system architectures on the fly is turning out to be a game changer. The principles of hardware/software co-design have been applied to real world problems in a range of different domains from embedded systems to high performance clusters. This paper is intended to serve as a comprehensive overview of the latest developments, methodologies, and real world applications of this ground breaking approach to system design. Leaving behind the traditional hardware and software partitioning, coopting the concept of cutting edge algorithms for task partitioning and scheduling from machine learning to those devising scheduling policies for hardware, studying the synergies between hardware and software components, we present the synergies of reconfigurable computing platforms and hardware implementation. Together, let's walk you through this exciting journey of optimized resource allocation where hardware and software begin to intermingle, leading to systems that are more powerful, efficient and adaptable than ever before.

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**HARDWARE/SOFTWARE CO DESIGN**

Hardware software co design is a paradigm shift from the normal segregated way of system development to an integrated and holistic method. The design of hardware and software components at the same time offers high interaction optimization and helps improve overall system performance, forming this innovative strategy. Co-design is based at its core on using the strengths of hardware and software to create systems that are greater than their parts. Designers are able to consider the full system architecture from the outset so that decisions on which system functionalities should

be implemented in hardware for maximum efficiency and which should be implemented in software to maintain flexibility can be made.<sup>[1-5]</sup>

An important advantage of this method is it can cover a wider design space. Rather than being limited by fixed hardware specifications, the co-design is able to allocate resources dynamically according to the unique needs of the dependent application. The flexibility of having fully flexible software becomes critically important when the underlying hardware is reconfigurable to meet changing computational demands. Typically the co-design process can be broken down into several iterations of system specification,

partitioning, integration, and verification. During the course of these phases, designers must carefully balance a number of competing requirements, e.g., performance, power consumption, cost, and time-to-market. Together, these factors are considered using co-design methodologies, which allow us to create more efficient and cost effective solutions than conventional design approaches.<sup>[6-9]</sup>

## RECONFIGURABLE COMPUTING IN THE ROLE OF

As a powerful paradigm which bridges the gap of the flexibility of the general purpose processors and the high performance of ASIC(Asspic), reconfigurable computing has been on the rise. The crux of this approach is the reprogrammable field programmable gate array (FPGA), a hardware platform which can be programmed to realize customized digital circuits. Hardware reconfiguration on-the-fly becomes possible, which then allows for a wealth of possibilities for system optimization. Unlike fixed hardware implementations, reconfigurable systems can be reconfigured to adapt the system architecture to the needs of specific computational tasks. Because of such adaptability, more effective use of resources can be achieved, resulting in significant performance and energy efficiency gains (Table 1).

Table 1: Advances in Hardware/Software Co-Design for Resource Optimization

Advance	Role in Optimization
Unified Design Frameworks	Unified design frameworks combine hardware and software design in a single environment, allowing seamless coordination and efficient resource utilization.
Hardware-Aware Software Development	Hardware-aware software development ensures that the software is designed with knowledge of the underlying hardware, enabling more efficient execution on reconfigurable systems.
Cross-Layer Optimization	Cross-layer optimization targets multiple layers (hardware, software, communication) simultaneously, achieving higher performance by reducing inefficiencies across all levels.
Dynamic Resource Allocation	Dynamic resource allocation involves adjusting resources in real-time based on workload, ensuring that the system adapts to changes in processing demand and usage.

Advance	Role in Optimization
Task Parallelization	Task parallelization distributes tasks across multiple processing units, improving execution speed and optimizing the use of available computational resources.
Integrated Simulation Tools	Integrated simulation tools provide a platform for testing and refining both hardware and software components together, improving system performance before deployment.

We believe one of the key advantages of reconfigurable computing is that it can exploit spatial and temporal parallelism. Designers can create highly optimized architectures focused on a particular algorithm or application by customizing datapath and processing element. Such levels of customization can lead to orders of magnitude improvements in performance when applied to computations of specific kinds. Furthermore, reconfigurable systems provide a unique combination of hardware acceleration spearheaded with software programmability. By using this hybrid approach, developers can use the power of the computationally intensive task in hardware while still being able to update and change algorithms through software updates. One thing I've found particularly useful in fast growing domains like machine learning and data analytics, where algorithms and models are constantly being improved and refined, is the synergy between hardware and software.<sup>[10-14]</sup>

## RESOURCE ALLOCATION OPTIMIZATION

Under the context of reconfigurable systems, resource allocation is of critical importance in hardware/software co-design. We want to distribute computational tasks and data to available hardware and software resources so as to maximize performance while minimizing power and other limits. A fundamental challenge in resource allocation is the inherent heterogeneity of modern computing systems. Typically these systems have an admixture of general purpose processors, specialized accelerators and the reconfigurable logic offerings with their merits and shortcomings. To determine what tasks to place where and when, and thus determine effective allocation strategies, we need to consider the unique characteristics of each resource type. More recently, dynamic resource allocation techniques have been adopted that enable systems to change their

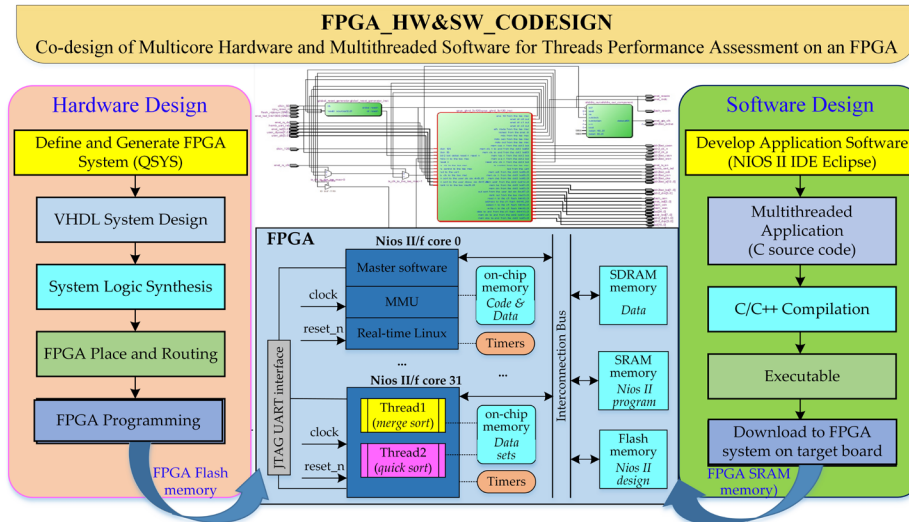


Fig. 1: Resource Allocation Optimization

resource allocation in real time as workloads and the surrounding environment change. Runtime monitoring and prediction algorithms are used in these approaches to optimize resource utilization continuously as a function of the current system state along with future expectations of system demand (Figure 1).

Another dimensions that deserves attention in resource allocation is data movement and communication between different system components. Placing tasks and their data to minimize communication overhead is important because data transfer is often a bottleneck to system performance. This challenge is addressed by techniques including data locality aware scheduling and intelligent caching strategies. In addition, energy aware resource allocation has attained huge importance – especially in mobile and embedded systems. Thus, designer can consider power consumption as well as performance metric to make the system seeking an optimum between computation capability and energy efficiency. It often uses techniques like dynamic voltage and frequency scaling (DVFS), or selective power gating of components which are not being used.<sup>[15-18]</sup>

## PARTITIONING ALGORITHMS

It is known that mechanisms for partitioning the tasks and functionalities between hardware and software components are of paramount importance in hardware/software co-design. The goal of these algorithms is to provide the best combination that among system performance ensures different constraints, for example, power consumption and

area utilization and cost. Graph based algorithms are one popular way to partition. This method treats the system as a directed acyclic graph (DAG), consisting of nodes which represent tasks or computational units and edges which represent data dependencies or communication between nodes. Then, the partitioning problem is reshaped as a graph cutting problem, balancing computational load while minimizing cost incurred by the edges across hardware and software domains (Table 2).

Recently, heuristic algorithms have been growing popular because they provide near optimal solutions within reasonable times for complex partitioning problems. Hardware/software partitioning has been applied to a variety of techniques including simulated annealing, genetic algorithms and tabu search that provide a good trade off between solution quality and computational complexity. Having seen this, research has emerged in machine learning based approaches to partitioning. The use of these algorithms leverages historical data and runtime feedback to learn how to make intelligent partitioning decisions that change over time to cater to changes in system behavior and workload characteristics. Specifically reinforcement learning has been showing promise in this domain, which is the capability of systems to learn to continually improve their partition interpreting strategies over time. With the increased need to optimize multiple conflicting criteria simultaneously, multi objective partitioning algorithms have become an important element of the designer’s repertoire. These algorithms take into account performance, power consumption,

**Table 2: Optimizing Resource Allocation in Reconfigurable Systems**

Technique	Optimization Benefit
Resource Over-Provisioning	Resource over-provisioning ensures that sufficient resources are available to meet peak demands, avoiding bottlenecks and improving system reliability.
Demand-Based Resource Scaling	Demand-based resource scaling dynamically adjusts the amount of resources allocated based on real-time system demand, ensuring optimal resource usage.
Predictive Resource Management	Predictive resource management uses forecasting techniques to anticipate resource needs and allocate resources accordingly, improving system responsiveness and efficiency.
Resource Contention Management	Resource contention management reduces conflicts and ensures that multiple processes can access shared resources without causing delays or system failures.
Energy-Aware Resource Allocation	Energy-aware resource allocation ensures that resources are allocated efficiently to minimize power consumption, balancing performance with energy savings.
Load Balancing Strategies	Load balancing strategies distribute workloads evenly across available resources, preventing any single resource from being overwhelmed and ensuring efficient system operation.

reliability and cost, and produce sets of Pareto optimal solutions, representing different trade offs between these objectives. Such partitioning strategy allows designers to achieve more flexibility in selecting a strategy that matches their own requirements and constraints.<sup>[19-25]</sup>

## METHODS OF INNOVATIVE SCHEDULING

Scheduling is an important hardware/software co-design problem since it must effectively schedule tasks that may be executed on resources to meet timing and dependency constraints while also maximizing efficient use of available resources. With the advances in systems being more complex and heterogenous, we see the need for advanced scheduling techniques to the challenges of modern computing environments. Because of its simplicity and effectiveness, list scheduling algorithms are still a popular choice for the many co-design applications. These algorithms arrange the tasks according to different metrics, for example critical path length, communication costs, etc., based on resource requirements. List schedulers have this capability through maintaining a dynamic priority list that allows them to make quick decisions about task allocation and execution order as system conditions change in real time.<sup>[26-28]</sup>

Recent years have witnessed a growing interest in hierarchical scheduling for large scale systems with many levels of parallelism. Importantly, these techniques break the scheduling problem into a hierarchy of sub problems that facilitate better

management of complex task graphs and heterogeneous resources. Hierarchical scheduling strategies combine global and local scheduling strategies, balancing system optimization and fine grained resource management. The probabilistic scheduling methods provide a powerful tool for dealing with uncertainty in the execution times of tasks and the availability of resources. These techniques formulate statistical models of the variability in the scheduling outcomes, thus providing a more robust basis for decision making when the variability is present. For example, stochastic scheduling algorithms can produce schedules resistant to unexpected delays or failures of resources, thereby enhancing system reliability in general. As battery powered devices and green computing initiatives have become even more important, energy aware scheduling has grown in importance. Energy usage and more traditional performance metrics are taken into account, and these algorithms seek to minimize energy use without violating timing constraints. Energy aware schedulers often incorporate such techniques as dynamic voltage and frequency scaling (DVFS) to find a good compromise between performance and power efficiency.

## INTEGRATING HARDWARE AND SOFTWARE FEATURE

Hardware and software components are successfully integrated through hardware/software co-design. In this process interfaces and communication protocols are created in order to have efficient interaction



between the different system elements to be done without too much overhead and with maximum overall performance. Managing different abstraction levels and design paradigms used in hardware and software development is one key problem in Hardware/Software integration. Usually designer do bridge this gap through the use of hardware abstraction layers (HALs) and device drivers to provide software with a standardized interface by which to interact with underlying hardware components. These abstraction layers enable to isolate software from hardware details, making the software more portable and maintainable. Effective data exchange between hardware and software components makes use of communication protocols. As with most cool things nowadays, high speed interfaces like PCIe and AXI have emerged as popular ways of connecting reconfigurable hardware accelerators to host CPUs; providing very low latency and very high bandwidth. In the case of embedded systems, protocols such as SPI and I2C offer of lightweight means of interfacing to other peripherals and sensors.

Memory management is a critical aspect of hardware software integration where system has a shared memory architecture. Cache coherence protocols or memory consistency models must be used to ensure data integrity as well as to synchronize hardware and software components. Since advanced memory management units (MMUs) and memory protection schemes may be used, conflicts are prevented and system reliability is increased. With the rapid rise of co-simulation and emulation tools, having them for the task of verifying that the integrated hardware and software components are working correctly is a must. By using these tools, designers can test the whole system in a virtual environment and find, and thus solve, problems before the system produces working prototypes. The process is further enhanced by hardware in the loop (HIL) testing techniques, whereby real hardware components are included in the simulation environment to generate more accurate results and faster iteration cycles (Figure 2).

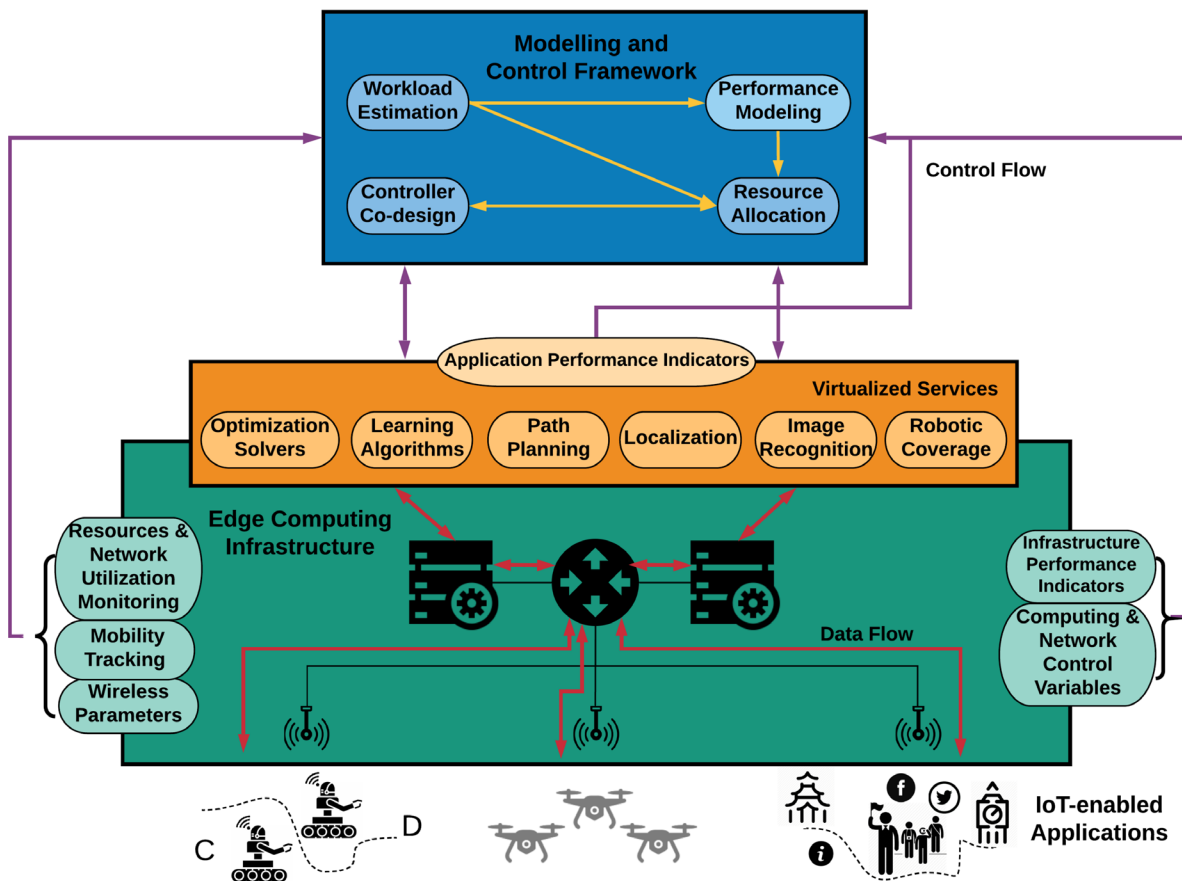


Fig. 2: Integrating Hardware and Software Feature

## DESIGN SPACE EXPLORATION

Hardware Software co design is a process of combining hardware and software to produce machines with specified performance, power, and cost requirements. It is a design space exploration where different design alternatives must be systematically evaluated to identify the optimal solution. As discussed above, this of course is especially relevant in situations that arise when the reconfigurability of the hardware underlying the system leaves open the possibility for virtually any number of possible configurations. Multi objective optimization techniques, have been one of the common approaches to design space exploration. These techniques seek to find Pareto-optimal solutions marking the best compromise between the competing design objectives. While genetic algorithms and evolutionary strategies have proven effective at navigating large design spaces to generate diverse sets of solutions for designers to evaluate against their own priorities and constraints, we question whether this objective exposes a flaw in the genetic algorithms approach to design.

Design space exploration relies on analytical models, whose fast estimates of system performance and resource utilization avoid the need for time consuming simulations or prototyping. Typically these models make use of statistical methods, and machine learning algorithms to predict the system behavior in the light of important design parameters. Efficiently pruning the design space and concentrating on the most promising configurations from this efficient design space can be accomplished by combining analytical models with more detailed simulation tools. Design space exploration is enabled using rapid prototyping and FPGA based emulation. This facilitates fast hardware configuration implementation and testing to guide designers on realworld performance and resource utilization. Based on high level synthesis tools, and by employing modular design techniques, designers can perform rapid iteration of different architectural options and assess their impact on system level metrics. In recent years, machine learning has been used to assist design space exploration by utilizing artificial intelligence powers to navigate complicated design spaces quicker. In order to automate the exploration process and choose fruitful directions to search in, reinforcement learning and Bayesian optimization have been applied successfully, leaning on past design iterations. In general, these AI driven approaches can greatly decrease the effort and time expended in

finding the best design solutions, especially when the system is large and complex.

## VERIFICATION AND VALIDATION STRATEGIES

The correctness and reliability of hardware/software co-designed systems is a major challenge, requiring effective verification and validation techniques able to cope with the complexity of integrated hardware and software parts. Traditional testing methods have limited capability when systems are made sophisticated, and new techniques are required for comprehensive evaluation of system behavior under different operational scenarios. Rigorous mathematical proof of system correctness has gained formal verification methods prominence in co design environments. Model checking and theorem proving provide designers means of verifying critical system properties for hardware and software components to guarantee the correct behavior of the system under all possible input conditions. Formal methods are computationally intensive, but they are very important for safety critical applications, where absolute correctness is what is required. Verification of the interaction between hardware and software components requires the use of co-simulation techniques. These approaches enable designers to simulate the entire system in a virtual environment and try out the integration of multiple elements early in the development cycle, before they are realized.

Mixed level simulation is supported by advanced co-simulation frameworks which use combinations of software models and highly detailed hardware descriptions which strike a balance between accuracy and speed. Hardware in the Loop (HIL) testing has taken a leading role as a powerful technique of validating jointly created systems in embedded or cyberphysical instances. HIL approaches have two advantages-first, by including the use of real hardware components in the testing environment, they can more accurately report results and pinpoint problems not detected by pure software simulations. This information is of particular value in verifying timing sensitive behaviours and the interactions of hardware and software. As the field of co-design moves forward, coverage driven verification strategies have become more important to corroborate that the system at large is fully tested. The approaches here build on metricized, sophisticated coverage metrics to guide generation of new test cases for parts of the design that were not exercised during testing. A built in

advanced coverage analysis tool allows insight into both functional and architectural coverage, helping design engineers identify potential blind spots in verification efforts.<sup>[29]</sup>

## **A COLLECTION OF CASE STUDIES AND REAL-WORLD APPLICATIONS FOR NETWORK DATA ANALYSIS**

Real world application of hardware/software co design is examined for its practical benefits and the challenges. The co-design of hardware and software solutions enabled by these case studies are applied to many domains like embedded systems and high performance computing, showing the wide applicability and power of the integrated hardware/software solutions. Co design approaches have been used successfully in the field of image and video processing that resulted in efficient systems for real time applications. An example of one implementation that uses software tasks along with hardware accelerators is using a JPEG compression algorithm. So designers did this of course, by offloading computationally intensive operations like the Discrete Cosine Transform (DCT) onto reconfigurable hardware, and returning control and encoding to software, achieving significant speedups compared to pure software implementation. Not only did this hybrid approach increase performance, but it also provided more flexibility when adapting the system to accommodate different image set sizes and quality requirements.

Hardware/software co-design techniques have been successfully used to advance the field of wireless communications. Co-design approaches to the development of software defined radio (SDR) systems has enabled the creation of flexible, and efficient platforms suitable for supporting multiple communication standards. Merging computationally intensive signal processing algorithms in reconfigurable hardware and protocol stacks and control functions in software, these systems strike a balance between performance and adaptability. This flexibility is especially useful for fast moving fields, such as 5G and beyond, where new standards and protocols are always coming online. Hardware/software co-design has been a central driving factor in the development of the advanced driver assistance systems (ADAS) and especially autonomous vehicles in the automotive industry. Finally, these complex systems must rely on the simultaneous integration of many sensors,

the real time processing of large masses of data, and sophisticated decision making algorithms.

With co-design approaches, efficient and scalable architectures have been created that can cope with these challenging requirements, whilst adhering to stringent safety and reliability standards. For example, designers have created ADAS systems that can adapt to changing driving conditions and scenarios by using reconfigurable hardware to accelerate computer vision and machine learning tasks and keeping the high level control logic in software. Hardware/software co-design methodologies have also been used in the field of high performance computing (HPC) to solve increasingly complex and challenging scientific and engineering problems. Co-design approaches have been crucial to the development of exascale computing systems which require extreme power and performance and must be developed as a system. Through the intimate integration of hardware and software design concerns, researchers have been able to design system architectures, communication protocols, and programming models that achieve unparalleled performance and energy efficiency. The holistic ideas have resulted in the introduction of heterogeneous computing nodes consisting of traditional CPUs and specialized accelerators along with sophisticated runtime systems that dynamically resource based on application need.

## **FUTURE TRENDS AND CHALLENGES**

Since hardware/software co-design has been evolving over the years, several trends and challenges are ahead that shape the future of this field. What these developments portend is a thickening of the boundaries of what is possible in system design, as well as new obstacles that inventors and engineers will need to tackle. One of the significant trend is that the use of artificial intelligence and machine learning techniques in co design methodologies is growing. Today's AI driven design space exploration, automated partitioning and intelligent resource allocation algorithms allow the designers to deal with highly complex systems. Although these AI-based tools have proven to be valuable additions to the design flow, their large scale integration, their reliability and explainability are open challenges. Hardware/software co-design is facing opportunities and challenges in the context of heterogeneous computing architectures. With more disparate resources coming into play: CPUs, GPUs, FPGAs, specialized accelerators, etc., the task of

optimizing where and how to best run a workload on this heterogeneous resource mix gets harder and harder. There is an active research in developing unified programming models and runtime systems that can easily take advantage of heterogeneous platforms.

The design of system is becoming more and more important in terms of energy efficiency and sustainability. At the same time as computing systems become an area of increasingly intense scrutiny for their environmental impact, co-design methodologies are evolving toward also integrating power optimization with traditional performance metrics. Such a shift has created new opportunities for advancements in energy aware design techniques, from low power circuit designs to intelligent power management strategies at the system level. Hardware / software co design is enabled by the convergence of edge computing and Internet of Things (IoT) technologies, creating new opportunities and new challenges. With more and more processing moving toward the edge of networks, designers will need to design efficient and adaptive systems that can operate in constrained power and resource conditions. In this landscape of evolving capabilities we will rely heavily on co-design approaches that can balance local processing capabilities with cloud offloading strategies. In safety critical applications security and reliability considerations are becoming more important in co designed systems. As one of security features integrated into hardware and software, while maintaining system performance and flexibility, it is getting to be a growing challenge. An active area of research is the development of techniques for robust verification and validation to guarantee the integrity and resilience of complex, co-designed systems.

## CONCLUSION

As a powerful paradigm, hardware/software co-design has led to the development of a holistic approach to system development that utilizes the strengths of the hardware and software domains concurrently in order to optimize resource allocation in reconfigurable systems. By removing hardware from the software development process, this methodology frees hardware and software designers from traditional constraints and creates more efficient, flexible and powerful computing systems for a wide class of applications. In this article, we have explored the core principles of co design from state of the art partitioning algorithms and scheduling schemes to emerging approaches for

combining hardware and software components. We have done this, showing how these methodologies are being applied in real word if such as embedded systems or high performance computing and thereby demonstrating the versatility and reusability of co design approaches. Looking ahead, there will be further evolutionary progress made in hardware/software co-design with the advent of artificial intelligence, heterogeneous compute architectures, and ever increasing application such as automated driving. The benefits of co-design methodologies for creating more powerful, efficient and adaptable computing systems are indeed clear while challenges remain in such areas as both the design automation, and energy efficiency as well as security but seem to offer great potential. World's leading designers and engineers adopting hardware software co design principles and out of the box use of the latest tools and techniques in this and other domains are pushing the limits into the what is possible in system design, ushering innovations that will influence future computing in every domain. The work we address will be central to solving modern computing challenges as we navigate them and its coincidental nature with hardware and software co design will likely contribute to creating new possibilities in the years to come.

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