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SOFTWARE – PRACTICE AND EXPERIENCE

Softw. Pract. Exper. (2010)

Published online in Wiley Online Library (wileyonlinelibrary.com). DOI: 10.1002/spe.1006

1

Developing UPPAAL over 15 years

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SUMMARY

11 UPPAAL is a tool suitable for model checking real-time systems described as networks of timed automata
12 communicating by channel synchronizations and extended with integer variables. Its first version was
13 released in 1995 and its development is still very active. It now features an advanced modeling language,
14 a user-friendly graphical interface, and a performant model checker engine. In addition, several flavors
15 of the tool have matured in recent years. In this paper, we present how we managed to maintain the tool
during 15 years, its current architecture with its challenges, and we give the future directions of the tool.
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Received 31 March 2010; Revised 31 May 2010; Accepted 14 July 2010

17 KEY WORDS: UPPAAL; real-time; model-checker; development

INTRODUCTION

19 UPPAAL is first of all a research tool born from the collaboration of Uppsala and Aalborg univer-
20 sities [1]. It takes its theoretical roots from Alur and Dill's pioneer work on timed automata [2].
21 Its performance originally comes from zones [3] as a representation for states and the efficient
22 implementation of operators on its canonical data-structure known as difference-bound matrix
23 (DBM) [4]. Since then the development has been fueled by scientific results on algorithms or new
24 data structures [5–10], academic case-studies [11–15], industrial case-studies [16–20], and also
25 teaching [21].

26 On the other hand, having such a tool helps to develop and test new theories and algorithms,
27 which has given us synergy during the last decade between tool development and theoretical
results.

28 Recently, the tool has blossomed into several domain specific versions, namely, CORA [6, 22]
(cost-optimal reachability), TRON [23, 24] (online testing), COVER [25, 26] (offline test gener-
30 ation), TIGA [27] (timed game solver), PORT [28] (component based and partial order), PRO
(extension with probabilities, in progress), and TIMES [29, 30] (scheduling and analysis). These
32 extensions are made based on a common code base, re-using basic data structures to represent
33 states, store them, and perform common operations such as delay, intersection, or computing
34 successor states.

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1 CORA is based on linearly priced timed automata [31]. The model extends timed automata
 3 with a special cost variable whose rate is specified for every state. The algorithm uses guiding to
 solve minimum cost reachability problems.

TRON is a testing tool suited for black-box conformance testing [32, 33] of timed systems.
 5 It is mainly targeted for embedded software commonly found in various controllers. Testing is
 done online in the sense that that tests are derived, executed, and checked while maintaining the
 7 connection to the system in real-time.

COVER is a tool for creating test suites from UPPAAL models with coverage specified by
 9 coverage observers a.k.a. observer automata.

TIGA is an extension for solving reachability and safety problems on timed game automata. Its
 11 algorithm [34] is a symbolic extension of the on-the-fly algorithm suggested by Shann *et al.* [35]
 for linear-time model-checking of finite-state systems. It is used for controller synthesis [36], it has
 13 application to testing [37], and it has been extended to synthesis under partial observability [38].

PORT is a version targeted at component-based modeling and verification. Its interface is
 15 developed as an Eclipse plug-in. The tool supports graphical modeling of internal component
 behavior as timed automata and hierarchical composition of components. It is able to exploit the
 17 structure of such systems and apply partial order reduction techniques successfully [39].

PRO is an extension of timed automata with probabilities [40, 41]. The model is extended with
 19 branching nodes that allow the user to specify weights for every outgoing edge. The engine can
 then compute probability bounds to reach specified states. It is work-in-progress.

TIMES TIMES is a tool-set for modeling, schedulability analysis, synthesis of (optimal) sched-
 21 ules and executable code. Its modeling language is timed automata extended with tasks. It models
 23 systems that can be described as a set of tasks that are triggered periodically or sporadically by
 time or external events. The release pattern is given by a timed automaton and the tool performs
 25 schedulability analysis on it. TIMES works by encoding the problem into timed automata and it
 uses the UPPAAL engine for the checks. It translates back the answer in terms of Gantt chart
 27 to visualize schedules. There are other tools that are using UPPAAL as a back-end verification
 engine, e.g. REX [42].

29 In this paper we focus on the ‘core’ tool UPPAAL and present our experience in developing
 and maintaining it for the last decade. In particular, we present the backbone architecture that has
 31 allowed us to expand the tool on different variants of timed automata. The following sections give
 an overview of the tool architecture, our experience in the process of building the tool, and the
 33 future development directions.

OVERVIEW OF THE TOOL ARCHITECTURE

35 *Client-server architecture.* The tool has two main components: a graphical user interface written
 in Java and a model-checker engine written in C++. The interface runs almost effortlessly on
 37 different platforms and we can exploit the rich functionalities available for programming interfaces
 inherent to the libraries that come with the Java programming language. The C++ language gives
 39 us both advanced object-oriented programming and performance. These two components form a
 basic client-server architecture with the graphical interface (client) communicating with the model
 41 checker (server) via a local pipe[‡] or the network[§]. This separation of concerns makes UPPAAL
 easier to port and maintain on different platforms.

43 The graphical interface has three ‘tabs’ that correspond to the main tasks a user needs to do:
 to edit a model in the editor, to simulate it in the simulator, and submit verification queries to
 45 the model-checker. Additionally, the user may come back to the simulator to visualize a trace
 generated by the verification. Figure 1 gives a view of the simulator of the tool. The different
 47 variants of the tool have specialized interfaces and the figure shows the simulator used in TIGA.

[‡]A common inter-process communication mechanism.

[§]The verification can be done on a remote server, which is a rarely exploited feature.

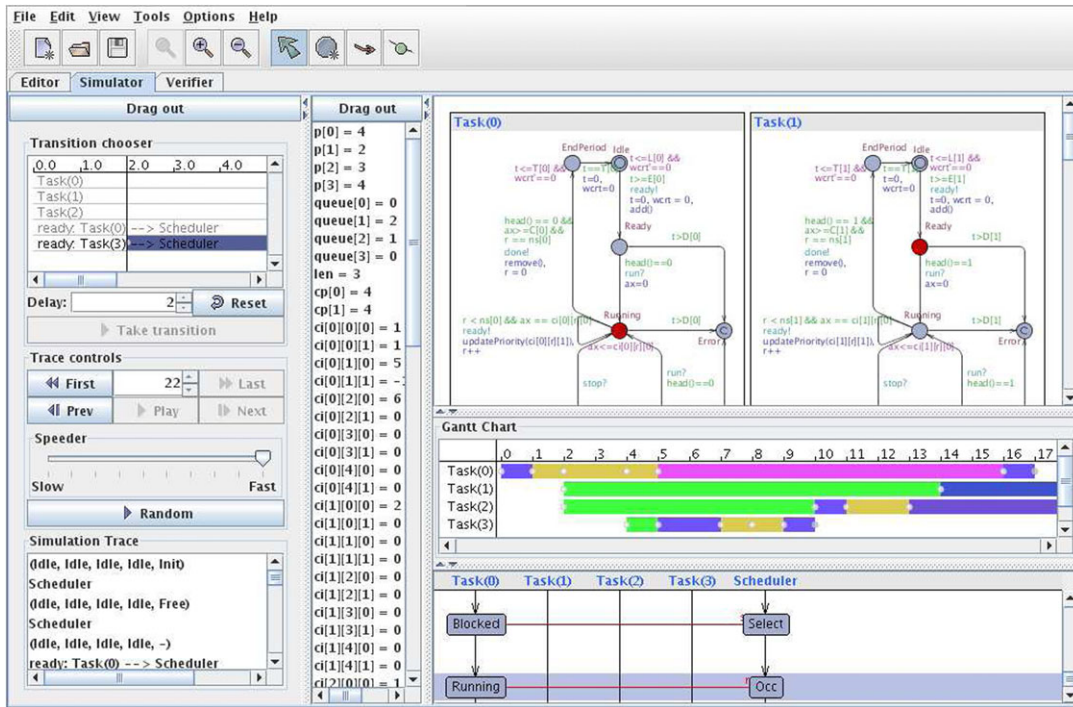


Figure 1. View of the ‘concrete’ simulator of TIGA.

Color Online, B&W in Print

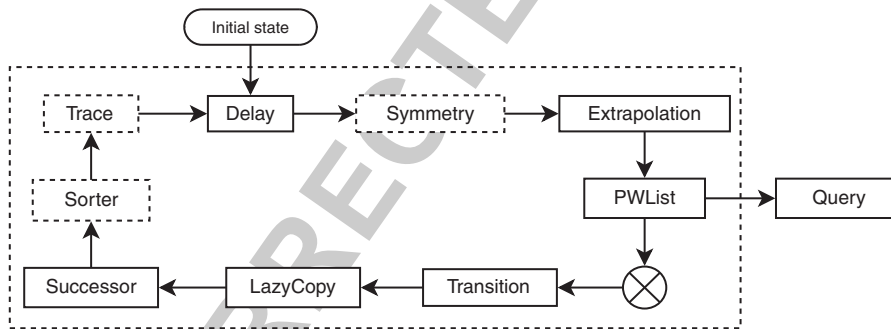


Figure 2. Pipeline architecture for the reachability filter.

1 On the left is the *command* part where the user can select transitions, go back in the trace, play
 2 randomly, or navigate through the current trace (history of states). The list in the middle shows the
 3 values of the variables and clocks. The timed automata are shown on the right and below them a
 4 Gantt chart and a message sequence chart. The simulator of UPPAAL lacks the Gantt chart and
 5 has other similar components, although instead of navigating with *concrete* clock valuations, the
 6 user sees *symbolic* states. The point here is to stress reuse of components across different tools.
 7 It is important to amortize development costs over time on different specializations of the tool
 8 without having to rewrite everything from scratch. This is obvious but the insidious consequence
 9 is that it is often difficult in practice to publish on these new additions. This is due to the lack of
 10 dedicated conferences where tool developments can be reported on.

11 *Pipeline architecture.* The model-checker itself (the *engine*) is designed around a pipeline
 12 architecture [5] where each block or *filter* processes states and sends them to the next stage as
 13 shown in Figure 2. The figure shows the configuration for the *reachability* filter. Other algorithms
 such as the *liveness* and the *leadsto* checkers have their own filters built on the same principle.

F2

1 In this example, the initial state is pushed to the reachability filter in its delay component to start
 2 the exploration. Then it runs its main loop that takes states from our (unified passed and) waiting
 3 list structure, explores them, and puts the successors in that structure. This structure (also called
 4 the *PWList*) implements one (colored) state set with states marked waiting and passed. It is unified
 5 in the sense that we have one structure instead of the traditional waiting and passed lists that need
 6 two lookups in hash tables per loop iteration of the reachability algorithm. Only states colored as
 7 waiting are explored and inclusion check between symbolic states is done against all states. The
 8 main chain for the exploration is *Transition* (which transitions can be taken)—*Successor* (execution
 9 of the transitions)—*Delay* (let time pass)—*Extrapolation* (apply an appropriate extrapolation to
 10 ensure finite exploration)—*PWList* (inclusion check and mark the state to be explored)—*Query*
 11 (evaluate the formula if the state was not included).

12 In fact we inserted a *LazyCopy* filter to reduce copies of states between the transition and
 13 successor filters. This filter really copies states only when necessary, e.g. computing one successor
 14 only does not require a copy and two successors require one copy only. It acts as a one-place
 15 buffer. When priorities are used in the model, this filter is swapped by another filter that is going to
 16 buffer transitions and sort them by priority, without changing the rest of the pipeline. Some filters
 17 are optional, such as *Sorter* that can sort transitions, *Trace* that is used to store traces or *Symmetry*
 18 that is projecting the states to a representative of its equivalence class (orbit) when symmetry is
 19 used in the model. In addition, different kinds of extrapolations can be used depending on the
 20 model, which results in different kinds of instances for the *Extrapolation* filter. We note that it is
 21 simpler to have the logic (in terms of if statements) to instantiate the right type of a component
 22 once and use the generic design to connect the components and use them transparently. The reader
 23 understands that the combination of these features gives rise to a lot of configurations. The point
 24 here is to keep orthogonal features separated.

25 The overall pipeline architecture allows us to reason about the algorithm in terms of blocks that
 26 we can change if we need another semantics. Implementing another checker, e.g. a timed game
 27 solver, is relatively easy and consists in adding components that will do the backward propagation,
 28 changing the first filter to either explore forward or backward, adding a post-processing filter
 29 to detect what is winning or losing in the game after *Extrapolation*, and changing the graph
 30 representation. The new pipeline still has the same structure and follows the same design. To change
 31 the semantics of the game, e.g. to implement simulation checking [43], we change *Transition* that
 32 implements the transition relation and *Delay* to allow turn-based delays.

33 There are two important points that this architecture illustrates: object-oriented programming
 34 and reuse of components. The filters are in practice abstract classes hence these components are
 35 managed at a high level. Second, we can reuse these filters for different pipeline configurations,
 36 i.e. for different checkers. We note that the architecture is also fit for functional languages.

37 *Additional components.* In addition to these components, UPPAAL contains a virtual machine to
 38 execute the compiled byte-code of our C-like input language supporting user defined functions and
 39 types. This allows the user to write complex and compact models while still limiting the state-space
 40 explosion—complexity can be concentrated in functions to avoid using intermediate states.

41 We currently distribute some open source components, such as the parser and the DBM library.
 42 The DBM library has a Ruby binding, which allows for quick prototyping. The parser under-
 43 stands the XML format we use in UPPAAL, which allows other researchers to use the same
 44 format. The DBM library handles DBMs and federations (unions of DBMs) used to represent
 45 symbolic states. The DBM library supports a wide range of operations including subtractions and
 46 merging of DBMs.

47

TOOL BUILDING PROCESS

48 *Tools are not prototypes.* It is relatively easy to produce prototypes as proofs of concept of some
 49 theory or algorithm to strengthen a paper but it is notoriously more difficult to develop a tool that is
 50 going to survive the test of time. Unfortunately, prototypes are more common in practice. Building
 51 and maintaining tools take a lot of time and is generally given less academic credit compared

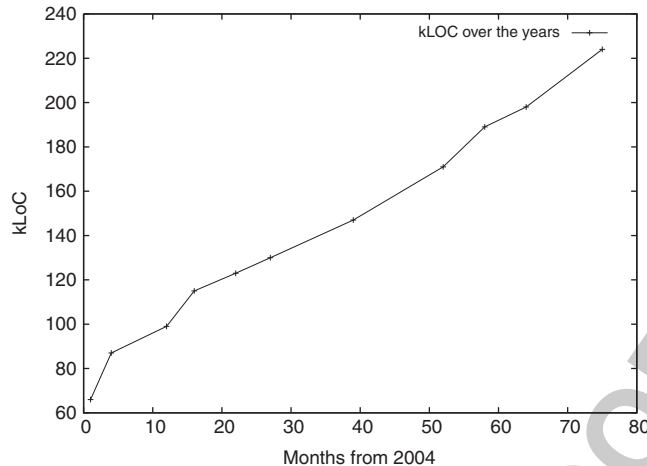


Figure 3. Evolution of the code base.

1 to more theoretical work, which explains the limited number of maintained tools. In the domain
 of formal methods, tools are crucial and they also serve as a dissemination means for theoretical
 3 results. Tools do have a positive impact through the case-studies that they allow other users to do,
 often in collaboration, which is important to amortize the development cost (in terms of time) and
 5 earn publications (otherwise we perish)¹.

7 *Who develops?* The first question in developing tools is who is going to do it? Most of the time
 it is done by masters or PhD students, which makes sense economically since professors cannot
 afford writing C++ code. However, when temporary developers who have their own agenda (own
 9 thesis to write) work on the tools, there is the obvious issue that someone needs to take over,
 otherwise the tool will disappear. In addition, temporary developers do not have a long-term vision
 11 and are interested (rightfully so) in their own thesis. Over the years, changing teams without a
 common interest or focus means that the code will degrade if there is no control. What happened
 13 with us was that there were some PhD students who stayed in the team for a long time, long
 enough to lay down a solid architecture and durable design. As a first rule of survival, *one should*
 15 *have a solid design* and encourage people to stick to it even if they do not like it. At some point
 in time old design decisions will not make sense any more but that is a different issue.

17 *Code size.* When the code grows (see Figure 3) it is increasingly difficult for new people to use
 the code hence it becomes important to have some permanent staff to take care of it and revise it
 19 so that it can offer a limited and more useful interface. This is a considerable effort that is essential
 for the survival of the tool. In the past we had a few such revisions: the *pipeline* architecture, the
 21 *virtual machine*, and handling of *federations* in the model-checker. The size and complexity of the
 code has now become a barrier for new internal people but it is also a serious problem for external
 23 collaboration. We need a new revision to update the interfaces of the different components and add
 more abstraction to the code. For long-term development, it is important to have some permanent
 25 staff to take care of such revisions and keep a long-term vision. However, it is a trade-off between
 the academic and development work.

27 *Code aging.* Curiously code ages. This is due to the fact that developers forget old code
 and new methods or libraries appear over the years, which makes the code become older or
 29 deprecated. In addition, progress in compilers also means that special efforts in the past to make
 some algorithms efficient are now obsolete, e.g. we can commonly address iteratively elements
 31 in matrices by expressions like $dbm[i * dim + j]$ with confidence that the compiler will *not* use
 relatively expensive multiplications for element accesses. To counter code aging, documentation

¹The well-known motto *publish or perish* emphasized by a system holding that name is a testament of the tool development dilemma in academia.

1 is vital. Our experience has been to ‘document’ the code using doxygen formatted comments.
2 There is no real documentation apart from these comments, although some efforts have been made
3 to describe the overall design decisions and the communication protocol. We have crash courses
4 to inform new programmers, which is a limited solution. As for the comments, they are extensive
5 and they keep the memory of former developers. It is a weakness in the development process to
6 lack stand-alone *white papers* that give technical details of the code but this has not been our
7 priority.

8 *Life cycles.* The tool has gone over different life cycles over the years. A life cycle can be defined
9 by major changes in architecture that are needed to accommodate new developments. It happens
10 when old designs become too obsolete for new additions that were not foreseen in the past. The
11 first cycle was with the original ATG graph editor^{||} and an early custom simulator. The second
12 cycle introduced an integrated graphical editor, the client–server architecture still in use today,
13 and an improved engine. The third cycle is the current one with a modular pipeline architecture.
14 This pipeline architecture is probably the determinant factor for keeping additions of new features
15 without breaking the tool. In terms of features it is interesting to note that early development efforts
16 were focused on performance improvements and then later on interface and language features. The
17 later developments of the tool introduced new algorithms to handle different problems rather than
18 improvements in the current algorithms.

19 During a cycle, the development is incremental, following the current design and making changes
20 until the amount of desired new features and algorithms conflicts too much with the design. At this
21 point there is a major effort to redesign (or re-factor) the code. The current architecture has
22 lived up to its expectations for the approximately 8 years, during which we could re-use existing
23 components and create new ones that we could literally plug together. However, the plethora of
24 new variants of the tool hides the current internal issues with the architecture and now is the time
25 for a major update.

26 *Distributed development.* We use a centralized version management system (CVS and later
27 subversion), which allows distributed teams to work on the same code. This is common for
28 distributed projects. A given checkout of the repository contains all variants of the tool but each
29 of them is located in its own separated module. Developers are responsible for few modules (their
30 own) and modify other modules only occasionally. The key here is to have *responsibility* for the
31 different parts for maintenance. In addition, we have the simple rules *committed code must compile*
32 and *any distributed code must pass the regression test*. As breaking these rules produces heated
33 reactions, they tend to be observed. The goal here is to keep discipline.

34 *Testing.* For a tool in the field of formal methods we would expect to apply formal verification
35 techniques to it to ensure its correctness. Let us say research is not there yet. The code base has
36 currently 200+ KLoC in C++ which implement algorithms that are themselves notoriously difficult
37 to prove. There are tools we have used to assist us, such as gcov, purify, and valgrind.
38 However, what we routinely do is to test. We use regression testing on a battery of known examples
39 and results. When a bug is discovered, we insert that the new example in the test suite and make
40 sure new versions pass the new tests. This is an automatic process handled by a script.

41 *Bug management.* Another well-known tool we are using is the bug management system *bugzilla*.
42 Bugs are not only program errors but also requested features. They are sorted by priorities that
43 developers can set. Errors usually come with examples to reproduce them. They are added to the
44 regression tests when the errors are corrected. Sometimes a change in the code triggers a new error
45 that was not present in the past. We use binary search on the revision number (in our subversion
46 repository) to find which revision introduced the changes that triggered that error. This is a simple
47 and very effective technique.

48 *Cross-platform.* An integral part of the development process is to take care of cross-platform
49 development. Early on we decided to stick with one compiler, gcc/g++. We can use the same
50 code and change a few headers only and compile for Windows, Linux, and MacOS. By doing so
51 we can also take advantage of some useful gnu extensions. We dropped support for SunOS due to

^{||}This is an editor tool used by UPPAAL from 1995 to 1999.

1 the absence of users and also machines installed with SunOS. All three supported platforms are
 2 actively used with an increase for MacOS in the recent years. What we do to manage this is to
 3 keep third-party libraries at a minimum. Currently, we need `libxml2` compiled for all platforms
 4 and we use `boost` headers only. The rest is generated code by tools such as `bison` and `flex`.
 5 Compilation is done under Linux for Linux and Windows, MacOS binaries are compiled on a
 6 Mac. We foresee problems in the future when supporting multi-threads since we will have to use
 7 additional libraries such as `Win32-pthread` to support POSIX threads (to begin with, the library
 8 needs to be patched for Win64).
 9 *Community.* Finally, to survive, a tool needs its community. We have a discussion forum** that
 10 our user community uses to ask or answer questions and maintain an active discussion on the
 11 tool. In fact, this helps us tremendously because we cannot handle all newcomers to the tool
 12 individually and we are grateful to users who help each other. The community also provides us
 13 with new problems and case-studies, which in turn instill progress in algorithms and theory.

CHALLENGES

15 The first challenge is to manage the complexity and size of the project. Implementing advanced
 16 algorithms is tricky, specially when it is in a formal tool which is used for verification. As shown
 17 in Figure 3 the code (in kilo lines of code of C/C++) has been steadily growing. This growth
 18 comes from new variants and algorithms that are added to the repository. The count includes all
 19 code (used or not) for all variants of UPPAAL for the model-checker engine only. The graphical
 20 interface adds 40+ kLoC in Java.

21 The second challenge is to keep improving the performance and features of the tool despite
 22 the growing algorithm complexity. Table I shows the evolution of the performance of the tool.
 23 Experiments have been performed on a Pentium D 2.80 GHz with 1 GB RAM. We use `memtime`
 24 that measures time and polls memory (not reliable below 0.1 s). Entries marked ‘—’ denote veri-
 25 fications that were stopped after 2 h or 900 M. The models are available on www.uppaal.org under
 26 *Examples/benchmarks*. Apart from the performance improvements, the recent versions support
 27 user-defined functions and symmetry reduction. These features are not used in the experiments but
 28 they would further improve the performance.

29 The third challenge is to cope with new extensions of the tool to explore different theoretical
 30 paths. The current architecture has been pushed to implement the different known flavors of
 31 UPPAAL but also to extend every checker. Recent extensions to UPPAAL include priorities and
 32 stop-watches. TIGA was recently extended with a simulation checker. It is being extended with
 33 a new timed interface checker. Although the overall pipeline architecture accommodates these
 34 extensions, we have reached the limit of some ‘implementation details’. These are: (1) there can
 35 only be one global system, (2) long-wished features, such as clock constraints on receiving edges
 36 of broadcast synchronizations, are now needed, (3) the engine is designed for 32-bit architectures,
 37 (4) there is no multi-core support, (5) there is only one kind of symbolic state, and the list goes
 38 on. These are obstacles for doing compositional model-checking where we would need to handle
 39 several systems and combine results. In addition, it is difficult to adapt the engine to different
 40 kinds of systems without changing core structures such as the states. Currently, when compiling
 41 CORA, one C macro is changed to swap to a different type of DBM supporting costs. This works
 42 because we made sure that the commonly needed interface was exactly the same. This is a very
 43 limited solution.

44 Another challenge is to use modern technology to its full potential. Updating to 64-bit is mainly
 45 technical. Taking real advantage of 64-bit is challenging. Modern compilers have the ability to
 46 *vectorize* code^{††} but this is still limited to simple algorithms and not to the critical $O(n^3)$ algorithms
 47 that we have. Going for multi-core support (multi-threaded UPPAAL) is more difficult. There have

**<http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/uppaal/>.

††This in essence allows the use of SIMD instructions (single instruction, multiple data) on streams of data.

Table I. Evolution of performance in terms of time (s) and memory consumption (MB).

Version	CSMA5	CSMA7	CSMA12	Fischer5	Fischer7	Fischer12	HDDI7	HDDI12
3.0.39	8.4 s 7.2 MB	—	—	4.2 s 10.6 MB	—	—	36.3 s 20.1 MB	—
3.2.12	0.3 s 3.8 MB	417 s 145 MB	—	1.6 s 6.8 MB	—	—	7.2 s 11.9 MB	—
3.3.25	0.2 s 3.4 MB	198 s 113 MB	—	1.1 s 6 MB	—	—	3.2 s 8.4 MB	—
3.4.6	<0.1 s 3.1 MB	40.7 s 34.5 MB	—	0.3 s 4.9 MB	4706 s 267 MB	—	0.1 s 1.6 MB	5.3 s 14.1 MB
4.0.11	<0.1 s 1.6 MB	0.2 s 38 MB	33.8 s 115 MB	<0.1 s 1.6 MB	0.4 s 38.1 MB	418 s 300 MB	<0.1 s 1.6 MB	0.4 s 38 MB
4.1.2	<0.1 s 1.6 MB	0.2 s 21.6 MB	41.9 s 99 MB	<0.1 s 21 MB	0.3 s 21.6 MB	341 s 248 MB	0.05 s 1.6 MB	0.2 s 22.9 MB

1 been experiments in the past in this direction and we know that the current architecture could be
 3 adapted by having one thread per pipeline copy. This fits memory locality but we also know that
 5 it did not work so well because blocking data-structures (access protected by mutex) were major
 7 bottlenecks. It is crucial to have non-blocking structures such as [44] if we want to use multi-cores
 efficiently, although this is a temporary solution that will last at most 10 years^{‡‡}. In addition, we
 want to make the components extendable more easily in particular to allow more people to work
 on UPPAAL without having to know what most of the code is doing. The bottom line is that there
 are research opportunities but not all issues are research related.

9

FUTURE

We have shown in this paper the main challenges that we faced in building UPPAAL over the years
 11 along with our own solutions. The conclusion is to get the synergy theory—implementation—case-
 13 studies that in turn provides the *publications*. There is no bullet-proof solution and we consider
 ourselves to have been lucky to have started at the right time and got such a good response from
 the community to get this synergy.

15 UPPAAL has already spawned one company, UP4ALL^{§§}, that sells a version of the tool for
 commercial uses. Another market we intend to target is testing. Research tools really have a future
 17 if they can be applied and used outside academia, as witnessed by Lustre/SCADE. However, their
 future as a free academic tool is uncertain as discussed in this paper in relation with the dilemmas.
 19 The situation is that tool paper tracks exist and show the interest in academic tool development
 but they are often on the side of main conferences and they usually accept short papers with short
 21 talks. This could be improved to stimulate tool development in the community.

To continue the development on the academic path, we are exploring different domains as the
 23 different flavors of UPPAAL show. This also means that a new life cycle with another architectural
 revision is now needed to cope with more extensions of UPPAAL. This will enable us to let other
 25 researchers experiment with the internals of UPPAAL while still maintaining our core engine.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is important to remember that UPPAAL is the result of the cumulative efforts of many collaborators.
 Among them we would like to thank early pioneers Johan Bengtsson and Fredrik Larsen, former contrib-
 utor of the graphical interface Carsten Weise, and active contributor and maintainer Marius Mikučionis
 (UPPAAL and TRON). We also thank contributors of different extensions of UPPAAL, among them

^{‡‡}Shared memory architectures do not scale and message passing-based architectures will take over.

^{§§}To contact UP4ALL email sales@uppaal.com.

Didier Lime (TIGA), John Håkansson (PORT), Anders Hessel (COVER), Leonid Mokrushin (TIMES), Jakob Illum (CORA), Arild Haugstad (PRO). Last but not least we thank our supporting user community.

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