

Tutorial Nix

COMPAS22

Quentin GUILLOTEAU, Adrien FAURE, Millian POQUET,
Olivier RICHARD

Université Grenoble Alpes, Inria, CNRS, Grenoble INP, LIG

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The goal of this tutorial

- Present Reproducibility issues
- Show that current solutions do not tackle those issues
- Present Nix as a promising solution
- Show you how we use it in the Datamove team
- Let you play with it!

The Reproducibility Problem

Different Levels of Reproducibility

- 1 **Repetition:** Run exact same experiment
- 2 **Replication:** Run experiment with different parameters
- 3 **Variation:** Run experiment with different environment

↪ **Share the experimental environment and how to build/modify it**

How to share a Software Environment in HPC?

- Containers? ↪ need Dockerfile to rebuild/modify. might not be repro (e.g., apt update, curl, commit)
- Modules? ↪ cluster dependent. how to modify?
- Spack? ↪ share through modules...

Why is it important?

Control your software environment!

- Use/develop/test/distribute software
 - Manually install many dependencies?
 - Shared env for whole team (tunable) and test machines
 - Bug only on my machine? Means this is hardware or OS related
- Reproducible research
 - Repeat experiment in exact same environment
 - Introduce or test variation

Listing the versions of the dependencies is not enough!

↪ How to easily rebuild from there?

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Nix and NixOS

The Nix Package Manager

- Functional Package Manager
- Packages are functions
 - Inputs = dependencies
 - Body of function = how to build
- Nix Lang \simeq JSON + λ
- (\simeq) Solves Dependencies Hell
- Reproducible by design
- No side effects:
 - fails if undeclared dep.
 - new pkg cannot break existing ones
- Started in 2003
- 12k commits, 47k C++ LOC

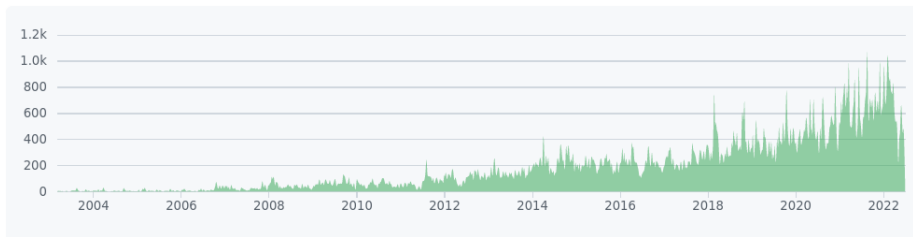
The NixOS Linux Distribution

- Based on Nix
- Declarative approach
- Complete description of the system (kernel, services, pkgs)

Nixpkgs: The Nix Packages Repository

nixpkgs: <https://github.com/NixOS/nixpkgs>

- Git repository
- Only contains Nix Expressions of the packages
- 340k commits, 85k packages¹
- **Pinning the commit of nixpkgs ensure reproducibility of build**
- Binary cache of stable packages \leadsto faster builds



¹<https://repology.org/repositories/statistics>

Main ideas on building a Nix package

Build in a sandbox

- pure env variables
- no network access (src fetched by Nix, not by user code)
- no inter-process communication
- isolated filesystem

Build phases

- unpackPhase
- patchPhase
- configurePhase
- buildPhase
- checkPhase
- installPhase

Example of Package

```
1 { stdenv, fetchgit, simgrid, boost, cmake }:  
2  
3 stdenv.mkDerivation rec {  
4   pname = "chord";  
5   version = "0.1.0";  
6  
7   src = fetchgit {  
8     url = "https://gitlab.inria.fr/me/chord";  
9     rev = "069d2a5bfa4c40...";  
10    sha256 = "sha256-ff4f...";  
11  };  
12  
13  buildInputs = [ simgrid boost cmake ];  
14  
15  # configurePhase = "cmake .";  
16  # buildPhase = "make";  
17  # installPhase = "mkdir -p $out/bin && mv chord $out/bin";  
18 }
```

Dependencies

Sources

Build Info

Derivation

Override Inputs

```
1 { pkgs ? import (fetchTarball {
2   url = "https://github.com/NixOS/nixpkgs/[...].tar.gz";
3   sha256 = "sha256:[...]";}) {}
4 }:
5 let
6   packages = rec {
7     chord = pkgs.callPackage ./chord.nix { };
8     chord_custom = chord.override {
9       simgrid = simgrid-330;
10      boost = boost-167;
11    };
12
13    boost-176 = ...;
14    boost-167 = ...;
15    boost = boost-176;
16
17    simgrid-330 = ...;
18    simgrid-331 = ...;
19    simgrid = simgrid-331;
20  };
21 in packages
```

Pinning

Pkg Def

Override

`nix-build -A chord_custom`

Nix Store

All packages in */nix/store*

- Isolated packages
- *Hash(inputs, source code)-packagename*
- Package names known before build → binary cache

```
/nix/store
├── hash-packagename
│   ├── bin
│   │   └── packagename
│   └── lib
│       └── libpackagename.so
```

How to store the packages?

Usual approach: Merge them all

- Conflicts
- PATH=/usr/bin

```
/usr
├── bin
│   └── myprogram
└── lib
    ├── libc.so
    └── libmylib.so
```

Nix approach: Keep them separated

- + Pkg variation
- + Isolated
- + Well def. PATH
- + Read-only

```
/nix/store
├── y9zg6ryffgc5c9y67fcmfdkyyiivzpj-glibc-2.27
│   └── lib
│       └── libc.so
├── nc5qbagm3wqfg2lvlgwj3r3bn88dpqr8-mypkg-0.1.0
│   ├── bin
│   │   └── myprogram
│   ├── lib
│   │   └── libmylib.so
```

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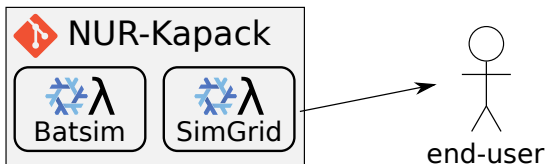
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How we use Nix



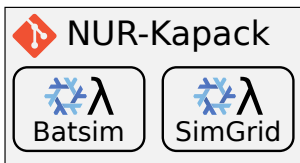
Write Nix expressions.

How we use Nix



Put them in a Git repository.

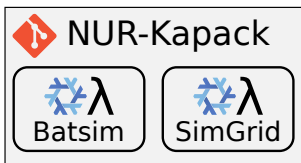
How we use Nix



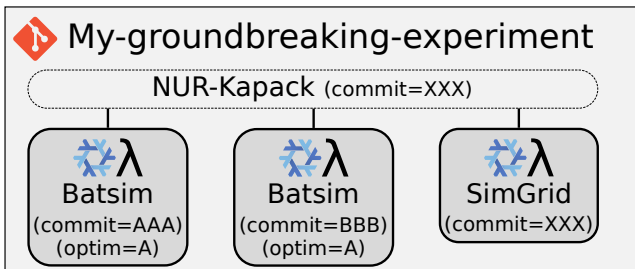
Use them for your experiment.



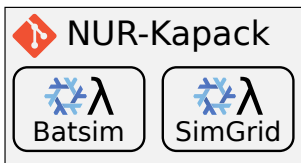
How we use Nix



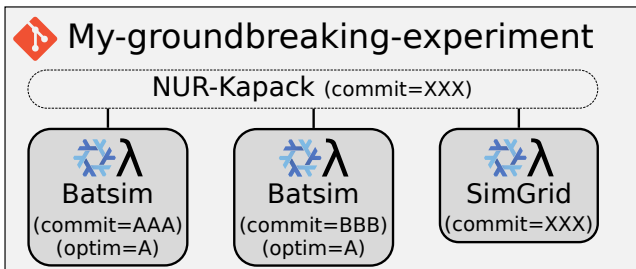
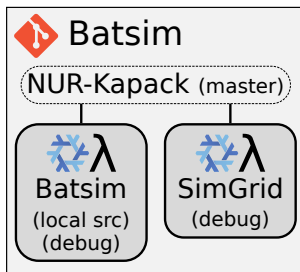
Customize them.



How we use Nix



Use them for dev,
including CI.



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Nix critique

Strengths

- + No missing dependencies, local build likely works anywhere
- + Traceable dependencies (pinned Nixpkgs)
- + `nix-shell` = multi-language `virtualenv`
- + Minimal size docker container generation is trivial
- + Distributed Nix expressions — e.g., `nur-kapack`

Weaknesses

- Contaminant: dependencies must be expressed in Nix
- Learning curve + change in practice
- Implicit behaviors to build packages (looks magic at first sight)
- External storage (github, gitlab,...)

Take home message

Nix in a nutshell

- Define pure packages (build in sandbox)
- Control and isolate your environments

Steep learning curve, but worth it

- If you want to make sure your code runs in 5 years
- If you want to escape dependency hell

Your turn!

What you will do now

- 1 install Nix on your machines (or G5K)
- 2 package the chord application (distributed hashtable)
- 3 build a docker image of chord
- 4 start a package repository
- 5 use this repository to start experiments

<https://tinyurl.com/NixCompas22>

If you have time

- **package your own applications!** (don't hesitate to ask for help)
- play with Nix Flakes