Goals for a modern ISA specification

Alastair Reid

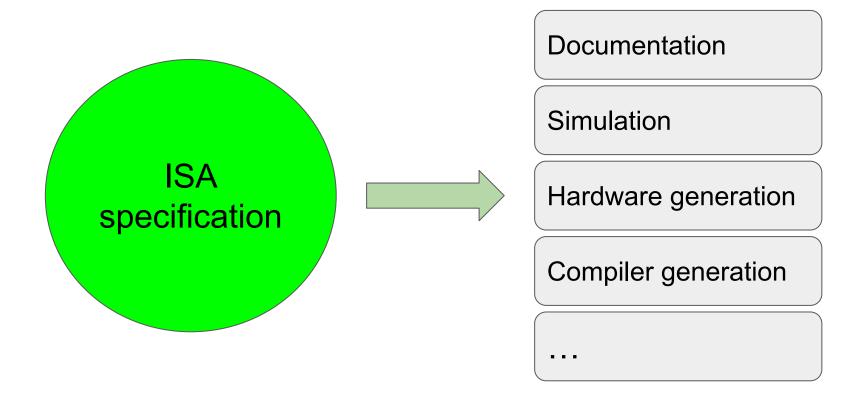
Saturday 17 June, 2023 PLARCH Orlando, Florida, USA This is a personal talk - I am not representing my employer today.

The ISA spec I am currently working on may not satisfy all the goals.

The goals conflict with each other and we are still working on how to resolve the conflicts.

Please talk to me about which uses / goals matter most to you.

The key property of a "modern ISA specification"



Why using specifications multiple ways matters

Guaranteed consistency between uses

Virtuous cycle

Amortize cost across multiple uses

Either: lower cost or enable higher investment of effort

Specs that enable many uses are more flexible

ISP: The first "modern ISA specification" (that I know of)

Bell & Newell, The PMS and ISP descriptive systems for computer structures, AFIPS, 1970

Bell & Newell, Computer structures: Readings and examples, McGraw-Hill, 1971

Barbacci, Bell, Siewiorek, ISP: A notation to describe a computer's instruction sets, IEEE Computer 6(3), **1973**

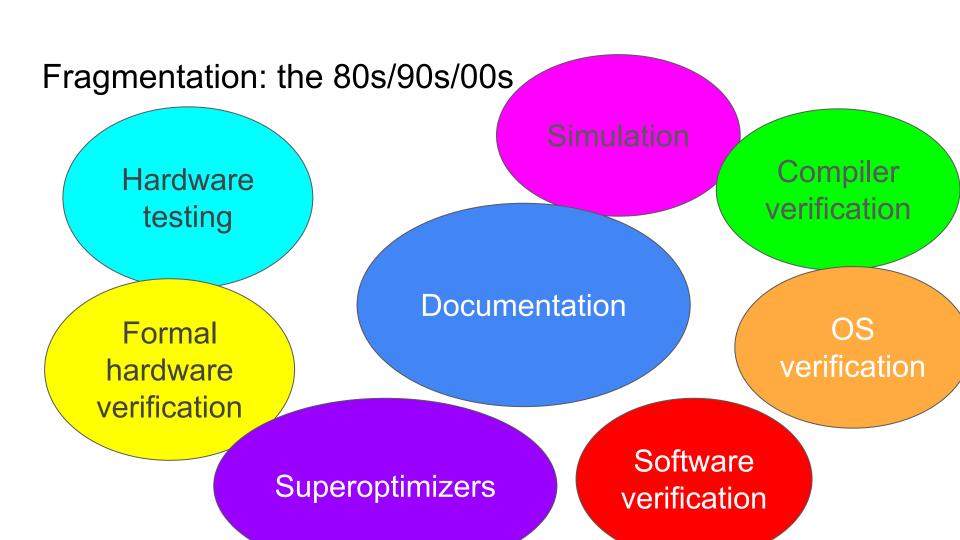
DEC Inc, PDP-11/45 processor handbook, 1973

Fraser, A knowledge-based code generator generator, 1977

. . .

Barbacci, Instruction set processor specifications (ISPS): The notation and its applications, IEEE TCS, 1981

See: https://alastairreid.github.io/RelatedWork/notes/isps/



A revival in the last decade

Arm v8-A and Arm v8-M

- Reid, CAV 2016, "Trustworthy Specifications of ARM v8-A and v8-M System Level Architecture"

RISC-V

- Armstrong et al., POPL 2019, "ISA Semantics for ARMv8-A, RISC-V, and CHERI-MIPS"

Planning a multi-use ISA specification

What are all the uses that we care about?

What are the needs of each use case?

What are the conflicts between these different uses?

How close can we get to meeting all the needs?

	Read -able	F a s t	Mechan -ized	Correct	Over approx	100% insn	Virt Mem	100% CSRs	100% Except -ions	Weak memory	Side channels
Docs	Υ				Υ	Υ	Y	Υ	Υ		
HW test			Υ			Υ	Υ	Υ	Y		
HW verify			Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y		
SW v'fy			Υ	Y	Y						
Compiler			Y	Υ	Υ						
Superopt			Y	Y	Υ						
os			Y	Y	Υ		Y	Υ	Υ		
Simulate		Υ	Υ	Y	Υ				Υ		
MP			Υ		Υ					Y	
Security					Υ		Y		Y		Υ

	Read -able	F a s t	Mechan -ized	Correct	Over approx	100% insn	Virt Mem	100% CSRs	100% Except -ions	Weak memory	Side channels
Docs	Υ				Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		
HW test			Y			Y	Y	Y	Y		
HW verify			Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y		
SW v'fy			Y	Y	Y						
Compiler			Y	Y	Y						
Superopt			Y	Y	Υ						
os			Y	Y	Υ		Y	Υ	Υ		
Simulate		Υ	Υ	Y	Υ				Υ		
MP			Υ		Υ					Y	
Security					Υ		Y		Y		Υ

	Read -able	F a s t	Mechan -ized	Correct	Over approx	100% insn	Virt Mem	100% CSRs	100% Except -ions	Weak memory	Side channels
Docs	Υ				Υ	Υ	Υ	Υ	Υ		
HW test			Υ			Υ	Y	Υ	Y		
HW verify			Υ	Υ		Υ	Y	Y	Υ		
SW v'fy			Υ	Y	Y						
Compiler			Υ	Y	Υ						
Superopt			Υ	Y	Y						
os			Υ	Y	Υ		Υ	Υ	Y		
Simulate		Y	Υ	Y	Υ				Y		
MP			Υ		Υ					Y	
Security					Y		Υ		Y		Υ

	Read -able	F a s t	Mechan -ized	Correct	Over approx	100% insn	Virt Mem	100% CSRs	100% Except -ions	Weak memory	Side channels
Docs	Υ				Y	Υ	Y	Y	Y		
HW test			Υ			Y	Y	Y	Y		
HW verify			Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y		
SW v'fy			Υ	Υ	Y						
Compiler			Υ	Υ	Y						
Superopt			Υ	Υ	Υ						
os			Υ	Υ	Υ		Y	Υ	Υ		
Simulate		Υ	Υ	Υ	Υ				Υ		
MP			Υ		Υ					Y	
Security					Υ		Y		Y		Υ

	Read -able	F a s t	Mechan -ized	Correct	Over approx	100% insn	Virt Mem	100% CSRs	100% Except -ions	Weak memory	Side channels
Docs	Υ				Υ	Υ	Υ	Υ	Υ		
HW test			Υ			Υ	Υ	Υ	Υ		
HW verify			Υ	Υ		Y	Y	Y	Y		
SW v'fy			Υ	Υ	Υ						
Compiler			Υ	Υ	Υ						
Superopt			Υ	Υ	Υ						
os			Υ	Υ	Υ		Υ	Υ	Υ		
Simulate		Υ	Υ	Υ	Υ				Υ		
MP			Υ		Υ					Y	
Security					Υ		Y		Y		Υ

Т

	Read -able	F a s t	Mechan -ized	Correct	Over approx	100% insn	Virt Mem	100% CSRs	100% Except -ions	Weak memory	Side channels
Docs	Υ				Υ	Υ	Y	Y	Y		
HW test			Υ			Υ	Y	Y	Y		
HW verify			Y	Υ		Y	Y	Y	Y		
SW v'fy			Y	Y	Y						
Compiler			Y	Y	Υ						
Superopt			Y	Y	Υ						
os			Y	Υ	Υ		Υ	Υ	Υ		
Simulate		Υ	Y	Υ	Υ				Υ		
MP			Υ		Υ					Y	
Security					Υ		Y		Y		Υ

	Read -able	F a s t	Mechan -ized	Correct	Over approx	100% insn	Virt Mem	100% CSRs	100% Except -ions	Weak memory	Side channels
Docs	Υ				Υ	Υ	Υ	Υ	Υ		
HW test			Y			Υ	Υ	Υ	Υ		
HW verify			Y	Y		Υ	Y	Y	Y		
SW v'fy			Y	Y	Y						
Compiler			Y	Y	Y						
Superopt			Y	Y	Y						
os			Y	Υ	Υ		Υ	Υ	Υ		
Simulate		Υ	Y	Υ	Υ				Υ		
MP			Y		Υ					Y	
Security					Υ		Υ		Υ		Υ

	Read -able	F a s t	Mechan -ized	Correct	Over approx	100% insn	Virt Mem	100% CSRs	100% Except -ions	Weak memory	Side channels
Docs	Υ				Υ	Υ	Y	Y	Υ		
HW test			Υ			Υ	Y	Y	Y		
HW verify			Y	Υ		Y	Y	Y	Y		
SW v'fy			Y	Y	Υ						
Compiler			Υ	Y	Υ						
Superopt			Υ	Y	Y						
os			Υ	Υ	Υ		Y	Y	Y		
Simulate		Υ	Υ	Y	Υ				Υ		
MP			Y		Υ					Υ	
Security					Υ		Y		Y		Υ

Т

A compromise between all use cases

Multi-use ISA spec

Authoritative Correct Validated

Custom ISA spec

Tuned for purpose Small Fast Good for proofs

A compromise between all use cases

Multi-use ISA spec

Authoritative Correct Validated

Custom ISA spec

Tuned for purpose Small Fast Good for proofs

Hybrid

Some validation burden

Research challenges in creating a multi-use ISA spec

Engineering

100% insn, MSRs, exceptions, ...? - "just" engineering / cost

Readable vs correct? - an ongoing discussion

Overapproximate or precisely matching a particular core? - the biggest daily issue

Weak memory - almost understand how to do it, hard to verify

uArch side channels - not yet clear how to specify in uArch-independent way

Research

Conclusions

We should strive to make specifications multi-use

Conflicts between different uses

Still not clear if / how we can meet all needs in a single ISA spec

- Which is why it is fun to try

Questions?

The remaining slides are the originals from before when I had to remove all

animation in order to produce a PDF

A compromise between all use cases

Multi-use ISA spec

Authoritative Correct Validated

Custom ISA spec

Tuned for purpose Small Fast Good for proofs

Hybrid

Some validation burden

	Read -able	F a s t	Mechan -ized	Correct	Over approx	100% insn	Virt Mem	100% CSRs	100% Except -ions	Weak memory	Side channels
Docs	Υ				Υ	Υ	Υ	Y	Υ		
HW test			Υ			Υ	Υ	Y	Υ		
HW verify			Y	Y		Υ	Y	Y	Y		
SW v'fy			Υ	Υ	Υ						
Compiler			Υ	Υ	Υ						
Superopt			Υ	Υ	Υ						
os			Υ	Υ	Υ		Υ	Y	Υ		
Simulate		Υ	Υ	Υ	Υ				Υ		
MP			Υ		Υ					Υ	
Security					Υ		Υ		Υ		Υ