Effectful Programming in the Flix Programming Language

Magnus Madsen



You may be familiar with imperative programming.

You may be familiar with object-oriented programming.

You may be familiar with functional programming.

Today: effect-oriented programming in Flix

If you love types, you are going to love effects!

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1 Effect-Oriented Programming

What is an Effect System?

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An **effect system** aims to describe the **actions** of a program.

- Does this function read from the file system?
- Does this function access the network?
- Does this function mutate memory in the heap?

We can use effect systems (i) to **support program reasoning**, (ii) to **enforce safety properties**, and (iii) to **enable compiler optimizations**.

Type and Effect Systems, Pictorially

Here is a simple function:

def f(x) = x / getCurrentMinute()

What can be said about this function?

- A type system tells us that x has type Int and f has type Int -> Int
- An effect system tell us that f may have the effects {DivByZero, NonDet}.

Purity (1/2)

We can express that a function is pure:

Here the implementation of add cannot have any side-effects.

Purity (2/2)

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We can also require that a function argument is pure:

Here f cannot have any effects.

Effectful Functions

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We can also write a function with a specific effect:

def sayHello(name: String): Unit \ { I0 } =
 println("Hello \${name}!") // ^^ printing is impure

The 10 effect describes an action that interacts with the outside world.

Effect Safety

We **cannot** subvert the type and effect system.

For example, if we write:

```
def helloWorld(): Unit \ { } =
    println("Hello World!")
```

The Flix compiler reports:

>> Unable to unify the effects: 'Pure' and 'IO'.

2 | println("Hello World!") mismatched effects.

Effect Polymorphism

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We can express that the effects of function depends on its argument:

The effects of map are the same as the effects of f:

```
List.map(x -> x * x + 42, l) // has the effect { }
List.map(x -> println(x), l) // has the effect { IO }
```

Function Composition

We can compose two functions:

The composed function has the effects of f and g.

For example:

- If f has effect {} and g has effect {IO} then the result is {IO}.
- If f has effect {NonDet} and g has effect {IO} then the result is {NonDet, IO}.

Effect Exclusion

We can express a function that excludes a specific effect:

def onException(f: Exception -> Unit \ ef - {Throw}): Unit = ...

Here onException can be called with any function that does not throw.

As another example:

def onMouseDown(f: MouseEvent -> Unit \ ef - {Block}): Unit = ...

Four Kinds of Effects

Flix has four categories of effects:

- Primitive
- Heap
- Library-Defined
- User-Defined



In Flix, the current primitive effects are:

Env Exec FsRead FsWrite Net NonDet Sys IO

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2 Heap Effects

Local Mutable Memory

Key Idea: If a function uses mutable memory – that is local to that function – then the function can be seen as pure from the outside.

We can express this idea as follows:

- We associate all mutable data with a **region** (lexical scope).
- Reads and writes to data in a region are precisely tracked by the effect system.
- Mutable memory in the region cannot escape the lexical scope.
- When we leave the lexical scope, all heap effects from that scope "disappear".

Note: This is not borrowing, but there are strong similarities.

Example: MutList (1/2)

```
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```

Flix has a MutList collection which is similar to e.g. Java's ArrayList.

The signatures of its functions are:

```
mod MutList {
    def empty(rc: Region[r]): MutList[a, r] \ Heap[r]
    def push(x: a, v: MutList[a, r]): Unit \ Heap[r]
    def pop(v: MutList[a, r]): Option[a] \ Heap[r]
    def count(f: a -> Bool \ ef, v: MutList[a, r]): Int32 \ ef + Heap[r]
}
```

Example: MutList (2/2)

Here is how we can use a MutList[t, r]:

```
def main(): Unit \ IO =
    region rc {
        let animals = MutList.empty(rc); // Heap[rc]
        MutList.push("Elephant", animals); // Heap[rc]
        MutList.push("Giraffe", animals); // Heap[rc]
        MutList.push("Zebra", animals); // Heap[rc]
        println(MutList.pop(animals)) // Heap[rc] + I0
    } // I0
```

Prints Some("Zebra").

Example: Sorting

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```
///
/// Sort the given list `l` so that elements
/// are ordered from low to high according
/// to their `Order` instance.
///
def sort(l: List[a]): List[a] with Order[a] =
    region rc {
        let arr = List.toArray(rc, l);
        Array.sort(arr);
        Array.toList(arr)
    }
```

- **1.** Introduce a new region.
- 2. Allocate (mutable) data in the region.
- 3. Do imperative programming.
- 4. Return immutable data.

Upshot: Using an array-based sort is much faster than any list-based sort.

Example: ToString

```
/// Returns a String representation of the given list `l`.
/// The returned String is of the form x1 :: x2 :: .. :: Nil.
def toString(l: List[a]): String with ToString[a] =
    region rc {
        let sb = StringBuilder.empty(rc);
        foreach(x <- 1) {
            StringBuilder.appendString("${x} :: ", sb)
        }:
        StringBuilder.appendString("Nil", sb);
        StringBuilder.toString(sb)
    }
```

Using StringBuilders in toString functions is intuitive and efficient.

Summary: Local Mutable Memory

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We can use *mutable memory* inside pure functions. Allows us to:

- implement functions in imperative style.
- use an imperative style when it is more natural and/or more efficient.

We can be functional programmers but use imperative style when we want!

We get the best of both worlds!

3 Algebraic Effects and Handlers

Programming with Effect Handlers

- Write **one** abstract program.
 - Express indirect inputs (e.g. current time) as an effect
 - Express indirect outputs (e.g. writing to a file) as an effect
- The type-and-effect system tracks these effects.
- Install different handlers
 - One for production
 - One for testing
 - More for adapting to different APIs
- Enjoy your **modular**, **reusable**, **testable** implementation!

Example: A Small Http Client (1/2)

```
def main(): Unit \ {Net, IO} =
    run {
        let url = "http://example.com/";
        Logger.info("Downloading URL: '${url}'");
        match HttpWithResult.get(url, Map.empty()) {
            case Result.0k(response) =>
                let file = "data.txt":
                Logger.info("Saving response to file: '${file}'");
                let body = Http.Response.body(response);
                match FileWriteWithResult.write(str = body. file) {
                    case Result.0k( ) =>
                        Logger.info("Response saved to file: '${file}'")
                    case Result.Err(err) =>
                        Logger.fatal("Unable to write file: '${err}'")
            case Result.Err(err) =>
                Logger.fatal("Unable to download URL: '${err}'")
    } with FileWriteWithResult.runWithIO
      with HttpWithResult.runWithIO
      with Logger.runWithIO
```

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Example: A Small Http Client (2/2)

```
def main(): Unit \ {Net, I0} =
    run {
        // ...
        // ...
        with fileWriteWithResult.runWithI0
        with Logger.runWithI0
        with handler HttpWithResult {
            def request(_method, _url, _headers, _body, resume) = {
                let e = IoError(ErrorKind.ConnectionFailed, "Oops!");
                resume(Err(e))
            }
        }
    }
}
```

Effect handlers work like resumable exceptions.

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Advantages of Effect Handlers

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Effects and handlers can be used to support **modularity**, **reusability**, and **testability**.

4 Design Principles

The Flix Principles

What is a **design principle**? I think of them as a **social contract**:

- What *programmers* can expect from us, the *language designers*.
- What we, as *language designers*, expect from the *programmers*.

Good programming language design

<u>Principled</u> i.e., systematic programming language design.

Where do the Principles come from?

Inspired by:

- Discussions on GitHub Issue Tracker
- OCaml Discuss, Rust internals, ...

Posted on the Flix website for the public.

A mechanism for **consensus building** and **conflict resolution**:

- Reduces tension during discussions and code review.
- Separates **technical** discussions from **language design** discussions.



What is a Principle?

Each principle has up to four components:

- A name and a short description
- \cdot A rationale
- \cdot A discussion
- A hypothesis

A principle should be decidable, i.e. we must be able to determine if a language satisfies it.

Category	Count
Syntax	4
Static Semantics	8
Correctness and Safety	13
Compiler Messages	6
Standard Library	8
Miscellaneous	2
Total	41



Principle 4: Mirrored term and type syntax.

Flix should have consistent **term** and **type**-level syntax:

- A function application is written as f(a, b, c) whereas a type application is written as f[a, b, c].
- A function expression is written as $x \rightarrow x + 1$ whereas a function type is written as Int32 \rightarrow Int32.
- A tuple expression is written as (true, 12345) whereas a tuple type is written as (Bool, Int32).
- $\boldsymbol{\cdot}$ and so on

Correctness and Safety (1/2)

Principle 13: No warnings, only errors.

- Warnings can be ignored or turned off.
- · Allowing both sends mixed messages: when is a warning serious?

Correctness and Safety (2/2)

Principle 18: No Useless ExpressionsPrinciple 20: No Variable ShadowingPrinciple 21: No Unused Declarations

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Example: Correctness and Safety

```
def reverse(l: List[t]): List[t] = region rc {
    let m = MutDeque.empty(rc);
    // ^ Shadowed name.
   def loop(l0) = match l {
         // ^^ Unused local variable.
       case Nil => MutDeque.toList(m)
       case n :: m =>
              // ^ Shadowing name.
           MutDeque.pushFront(n);
             Useless expression,
                                under-applied function.
           loop(m)
   };
   loop(l)
```

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Standard Library

Principle 34: No Dangerous Functions.

- Functions should be **total** (non-crashing)
- Functions should encourage **good programming style**.

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Design Principles

We believe that the development of a programming language should follow a set of principles. That is, when a design decision is made there should exist some rationale for why that decision was made. By outlining these principles, as we develop Flix, we hope to keep ourselves honest and to communicate the kind of language Flix aspires to be.

Many of these ideas and principles come from languages that have inspired Flix, including Ada, Elm, F#, Go, Haskell, OCaml, Rust, and Scala.

Update: The Flix Principles has been published in a paper at Onward! '22. Read it here: The Principles of the Flix Programming Language.

Language Principles

Simple is not easy

We believe in Rich Hickey's creed: simple is not easy. We prefer a language that gets things right to one that makes things easy. Such a language might take longer to learn in the short run, but its simplicity pays off in the long run.

Everything is an expression

Flix is a functional language and embraces the idea that everything should be an expression. Flix has no local variable declarations or if-then-else statements, instead it has let-bindings and if-then-else expressions. However, Flix does not take this idea as far as the

Human-readable errors

In the spirit of Elm and Rust, Flix aims to have human readable and understandable compiler messages. Messages should describe the problem in detail and provide information about the context, including suggestions for how to correct the problem.

Private by default

Flix embraces the principle of least privilege. In Flix, declarations are hidden by default (i.e. private) and cannot be accessed from outside of their namespace (or sub-namespaces). We believe it is important that programmers

No null value

Fix does not have the null value. The null value is now widely considered a mistake and languages such as *CH*, Dart, Kotlin and Scala are scrambling to adopt mechanisms to ensure non-nullness. In Fix, we adopt the standard solution from functional languages which is to represent the absence of a value using the option type. This solution is simple to understand, works well, and guarantees the absence of dreaded NullPointerExceptions.

No implicit coercions

In Flix, a value of one type is never



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5 Oh, and one more thing ...

Graph Queries

Motivation: I want to go on vacation, but where can I go?

I can fly from Aarhus airport to a few airports in Europe. From there I can continue my journey.



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Example: Embedded Datalog

We want to solve a classic graph reachability problem.

We can do so elegantly using Flix's support for **embedded Datalog**:

```
///
/// Computes all airports reachable from origin.
///
def reachable(origin: String, routes: List[(String, String)]): List[String] =
    let db = inject routes into Route;
    let pr = #{
        Path(src, dst) :- Route(src, dst).
        Path(src, dst) :- Path(src, hop), Route(hop, dst).
    };
    query db, pr select dst from Path(origin, dst) |> Foldable.toList
```

We can easily extend this program with more constraints.

Summary: Embedded Datalog

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Flix supports embedded Datalog programs as first-class values.

- We can implement functions using inject and query.
- Datalog with negation is a very expressive logic language.
- Embedded Datalog programs are fully integrated into the language.

Upshot: We can use Datalog where it really shines: to answer graph queries.

Reflections on Programming in Flix

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Flix allows functions to be written in the most natural and/or efficient style:

- Functionally (i.e. with immutable data structures)
- Imperatively (i.e. with mutable data structures)
- **Declaratively** (i.e. as a collection of logic constraints)

... without revealing these implementation to the clients.

6 Ecosystem and Tooling

○ A https://flix.dev

Home Get Started VSCode Principles Documentation FAQ Blog Contribute Internships

Flix —

A powerful effect-oriented programming language

Flix is a principled effect-oriented functional, imperative, and logic programming language developed at Aarhus University and by a community of open source contributors.

Why effect-oriented? And why Flix?

Why Effects? Effect systems represent the next major evolution in statically typed programming languages. By explicitly modeling side effects, effect-oriented programming enforces modularity and helps program reasoning. User-defined effects and handlers allow programmers to implement their own control structures.

Why Flix? We claim that of all the upcoming effect-oriented programming languages, Flix offers the most complete language implementation, the most extensive standard library, the most detailed documentation, and the best tool support.

Moreover, Flix builds on proven programming language technology, including: algebraic data types and pattern matching, extensible records, traits, higher-kinded types, associated types and effects, structured concurrency, and more.

File Information

```
// Getting information on files with Flix.
def main(): Unit \ ID =
let f = "README.md";
// Check if the file 'README.md' exists.
match File.exists(f) {
    case Ok(exist) => {
```

```
//defidition f um file Roume.ms .
cose 06(stats) ~ (
    print[n'(sf)] is of type [[stats.file]ype]]);
    print[n'("The creation time of sf()] is [[stats.creatUnTime].")
    }
    case for(ms) ~ = print[n'("An error occurred with message: $[(ms)]")
```

Algebraic Data Types and Pattern Matching

Algebraic data types and pattern matching are the bread-andbutter of functional programming and are supported by Flix with minimal fuss.

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✓ Play C^{*}

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Co	ompile & Run 🕨 🛛 A Si	nple Card Game Simulation	Standard Library	Sharea	ble Link	•
	<pre>// A Suit type derivit enus Suit vitt Eq. for case Clubs case Clubs case Spades case Demonds // A Rank type derivit enus Rank with Eq. for case Nuework case Nuework case Nuework case Nuework case Automet case Rank.Man case Rank.Man cas</pre>	g an Eq and Tostring instance Standard Output g an Eq and Tostring instance Standard Output g an Eq and Order instance Image: Standard Output g an Eq instance Image: Standard Output g an Eq instance Image: Standard Output g an Eq instance Image: Standard Output if (instance) Image: Standard Output g an Eq instance Image: Standard Output if (instance) Image: St				
	<pre>11</pre>	<pre>print(n'No one has any cards. It's a draw.') rint(n'Player 1 is out of cards. Player 2 is (No!1) rint(n'(Player 2 is out of cards. Player 1 wins!') rint(n'===================================</pre>				
4	7 println("Playe 8 if (r1 > r2)	r 1 plays S(c1). Player 2 plays S(c2).");				



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mod Json.Write { use Json. JsonElement use Json.JsonElement.{JsonObject. JsonArray. JsonString. JsonNumber. JsonBool. JsonNull} use Json.Utils.escape pub def toCompactString(ison: JsonElement): String = match ison { case JsonObject(map) => let contents = map "{" + contents + "}" case JsonArrav(list) => let contents = list |> List.joinWith(toCompactString, ","); case JsonString(s) => escape(s) case $JsonNumber(n) => "S{n}$ case JsonBool(b) => "\${b}" def escape(s: String): String case JsonNull => "null" Converts the given string into a JSON string, including surrounding guotes. pub def toPrettyString(tab: Int32, json: JsonElement): String = match json { case JsonObject(map) if Map.isEmpty(map) => "{}" case JsonObject(map) => let contents = map $l > Map. ioinWith((k, y) -> escape(k) + ": " + toPrettyString(tab, y), ".\n"):$ "{\n" + String.indent(tab. contents) + "}" case JsonArray(Nil) => "[]" case JsonArray(list) => let contents = list l> List.joinWith(toPrettyString(tab), ".\n"): "[\n" + String.indent(tab. contents) + "]" case JsonString(s) => escape(s) case JsonNumber(n) => "\${n}' case JsonBool(b) => "\${b}' case JsonNull => "null"

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1. Inti	oduction to Flix		=	1	Q	Programming Flix		₽	0	ð
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2.1	. Hello World!					Introduction to Flix				

Flix is a principled functional, logic, and imperative programming language developed at Aarhus University and by a community of open source contributors in collaboration with researchers from the University of Waterloo, from the University of Tubingen, and from the University of Copenhagen.

Flix is inspired by OCami and Haskell with ideas from Rust and Scala. Flix looks like Scala, but its type system is based on Hindley-Milner which supports complete type inference. Flix is a *state-of-the-art* programming language with multiple innovative features, including:

- a polymorphic type and effect system with full type inference.
- region-based local mutable memory.
- user-defined effects and handlers.
- higher-kinded traits with associated types and effects.
- · embedded first-class Datalog programming.

Flix compiles to efficient JVM bytecode, runs on the Java Virtual Machine, and supports full tail call elimination. Flix has interoperability with Java and can use JVM classes and methods. Hence the entire Java ecosystem is available from within Flix.

Filx aims to have world-class Visual Studio Code support. The Filx Visual Studio Code extension uses the real Filx compiler hence there is always a 1:1 correspondence between the Filx language and what is reported in the editor. The advantages are many: (a) diagnostics are always exact, (b) code navigation "just works", and (c) refactorings are always correct.

Look 'n' Feel

Here are a few programs to illustrate the look and feel of Flix:

This program illustrates the use of algebraic data types and pattern matching:

6.4. Structs
 6.5. Collections
 7. Control Structures

2.2. Next Steps

3.1. Primitives

3.2. Tuples

3.3. Enums

Functions

3.4. Type Aliases

5.2. Chains and Vectors

5.3. Sets and Maps 5.4. Records

Immutable Data

5.1. Lists

Mutable Data

6.1. Regions 6.2. References

6.3. Arrays

3. Data Types

7.1. If-Then-Else

7.2. Pattern Matching

7.3. Foreach

7.4. Foreach-Yield

7.5. Monadic For-Yield

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flix 0.58.0 Modules Abort

Adaptor Add Applicative Array Assert BigDecimal

BigInt Bool Box Chain Chalk Chan Channel Char Clock CodePoint Coerce Collectable CommutativeGroup CommutativeMonoid CommutativeSemiGroup Comparison Console DelayList DelayMap

Div Down Eff Env Environment Eq Exec Exit FileRead FileReadWithResult FileWrite FileWriteWithResult Filterable Elveniet

Prelude

Type Aliases

type alias FileIO - FsRead + FsWrite A type alias for the FileRead and FileWrite effects.	60 Source
type alias Heap[h: Eff] = h A type alias used while we transition to a proper Heap effect.	(c) Source
type alias Static = 10 Static denotes the region of global lifetime.	oo Source

Definitions

def $1>(x: a, f: a \rightarrow Unit \setminus ef): a \setminus ef$ Pipes the given value x into the function f. Given a value x and a function f returns x.						
<pre>def ++(x: a, y: a): a with <u>SemiGroup[a]</u> Alas for SemiGroup.combine.</pre>	6	Source				

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			mlutze test: remove fuzzing sour	rces after each test (#10182) 🗸 f011147 · 11 h	ours ago 🕚 10,829 Commits	The Flix Programming Langu	age			
			.github/workflows	feat: add new workflow for completion invariant	(#10188) 3 days ago	language programming-langua	ge			
			idea/inspectionProfiles	feat: add IDEA inspection profile (#10118)	2 weeks ago	functional jvm logic flix				
			docs	feat: release 0.58.1 (#10031)	last month	hacktoberfest imperative				
			examples	feat: require parentheses for datalog-if-guard (#	9811) last month	Readme				
			gradle/wrapper	feat: upgrade Gradle to 8.5 (#6929)	2 years ago					
			i main	test: remove fuzzing sources after each test (#10	182) 11 hours ago	E Custom properties				
			🗋 .editorconfig	chore: fix .editorconfig typo (#6611)	2 years ago	 				
			🗋 .gitattributes	chore: add .gitattributes (#2723)	4 years ago	앟 160 forks				
			🗋 .gitignore	chore: add tilde-suffixed files to .gitignore (#972) 2 months ago	Report repository				
			🗋 AUTHORS.md	feat: add Array.copyInto (related to #6292) (#10	081) 2 weeks ago	Releases 76				
			LICENSE.md	Added license.	10 years ago	Version 0.58.1 Latest				
			🗅 README.md	fix: remove fixed height from README img (#961	8) 2 months ago	+ 75 releases				
			🗅 build.gradle	feat: add new workflow for completion invariant	(#10188) 3 days ago					

Visual Studio Code / LSP Support

- ✓ syntax highlighting
- ✓ inline diagnostics
- ✓ auto-complete
- ✓ type and effect hover
- ✓ find references
- ✓ find implementations
- ✓ jump to definition

- ✓ code snippets
- ✓ automatic rename
- ✓ code hints
- ✓ code lenses
- ✓ document symbols
- ✓ workspace symbols
- ✓ highlight related symbols

Modern Compiler Architecture

Flix has a modern compiler which is **resilient**, **incremental**, and **parallel**.



7 Wrapping Up

Project Contributors & Statistics

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Selection of Research Papers

Associated Effects: Flexible Abstractions for Effectful Programming • Matthew Lutze, Magnus Madsen	[PLDI '24]
With or Without You: Programming with Effect Exclusion • Matthew Lutze, Magnus Madsen, Philipp Schuster, Jonathan Brachthäuser	[ICFP '23]
The Principles of the Flix Programming Language Magnus Madsen 	[ONWARD '22]
Polymorphic Types and Effects with Boolean Unification • Magnus Madsen, Jaco van de Pol	[OOPSLA '20]
Fixpoints for the Masses: Programming with First-Class Datalog Constraints • Magnus Madsen, Ondřej Lhoták	[OOPSLA '20]

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Summary

Flix is a powerful **effect-oriented** programming language.

Flix aims to offer a **unique combination of features**:

Features

- algebraic data types and pattern matching
- $\cdot\,$ traits with higher-kinded types
- a polymorphic type and effect system
- algebraic effects and handlers
- embedded Datalog
- Runs on the JVM

Tooling

- $\checkmark\,$ documentation and examples
- ✓ extensive standard library
- ✓ Visual Studio Code support
- ✓ generic LSP Support
- ✓ parallel and incremental compiler
- ✓ package manager

We are moving towards **version 1.0** and we want your feedback:

https://flix.dev/

Additional Resources

The Official Flix Website: The Programming Flix Book API Documentation Online Playground GitHub Twitter Gitter https://flix.dev https://doc.flix.dev https://api.flix.dev https://play.flix.dev https://github.com/flix/flix https://twitter.com/flixlang https://gitter.im/flix/Lobby