Connectivity Solutions for Next-Generation Convergent Optical Networks

L. G. M. Riveros†, T. Sutili†, R. C. Figueiredo†, C. Mineto†, J. A. S. Maciel†, and E. Conforti§
†Photonics and Quantum Solutions – CPQD
§School of Electrical and Computer Engineering, University of Campinas
Campinas, São Paulo, Brazil

***Abstract*—The next generation of communication networks represents a paradigm shift toward a multi-diversity ecosystem, integrating various technologies to meet the demands of an increasingly connected world. This paper addresses key technologies to create an unified ecosystem for data center interconnections, optical transport and access networks, mobile xHaul, and quantum communication into a cohesive framework. It leverages advanced enablers such as artificial intelligence, software-defined networking, and evolutionary computing to enhance modeling, scalability, and efficiency. These networks are designed to support emerging applications requiring ultra-low latency, high bandwidth, and robust security, such as next-generation radio access, IoT, hyperscale data centers, critical-application optical links, and edge computing. By facilitating seamless convergence across heterogeneous technologies, the multi-diversity ecosystem enables intelligent, adaptive, and sustainable connectivity, paving the way for transformative innovations in global communication infrastructure.**

***Keywords*—Connectivity, optical networks, optical-mobile convergence, artificial intelligence, software-defined networking.**

I. Introduction

THE global demand for telecommunications systems is experiencing unprecedented growth, driven by the rapid digital transformation across industries, the rise of data-intensive applications, and the increasing number of connected devices. Emerging technologies, including the internet of things (IoT), artificial intelligence (AI), cloud computing, and extended reality (XR), are fueling this surge by requiring highly efficient, scalable, and resilient communication infrastructures. As a result, state-of-the-art solutions are evolving to meet the demands of high-speed, low-latency, and reliable connectivity, paving the way for significant advancements in various domains.

Among these advancements, optical transport networks (OTNs) have become an enabling solution for the global backbone infrastructure, offering unparalleled bandwidth, long-haul capabilities, and cost-effective scalability [1]. Similarly, optical access networks (OANs) are transforming last-mile connectivity, enabling gigabit-speed internet and supporting the ever-growing need for bandwidth in residential and enterprise environments. The current technology of OANs, enabled by passive optical networks (PON) such as XGS-PON and NG-PON2 provide tens of Gbps until the user terminal, and the coherent PON (CPON) and very high speed PON (VHSP) are expected new scenarios to increase the convergence with wireless networks [2, 3].

Concurrently, the emergence of 5G and the anticipated rollout of 6G networks are revolutionizing wireless communication through enhanced radio access technologies, supporting applications that demand ultra-low latency, massive device connectivity, and unprecedented throughput [4]. Optical solutions need to advance further to meet the challenging requirements of radio access networks (RAN), including front-, mid-, and backhaul (collectively referred to as xHaul). The performance expectations for data capacity and latency differ based on the division of functions among central (CU), distribution (DU), and radio (RU) units, necessitating tailored solutions within the optical layer.

Developing new solutions for high-performance data communication systems must aim to increase the system capacity-reach product (bits/s × km) while keeping acceptable levels of complexity, energy consumption, and cost. This includes the role of data centers in supporting the emergence of technology applications, demanding data computing resources, and connectivity between data centers and smart networks. In this scenario, Data Center Interconnects (DCIs) are critical for managing the explosive growth of cloud services and edge computing by enabling high-capacity and low-latency links between data centers [5]. Moreover, the advent of quantum communication is introducing a new paradigm in secure data transmission, leveraging quantum mechanics to achieve unbreakable encryption and novel communication protocols, especially the quantum-key distribution (QKD) that will provide data security and quantum links in cloud applications [6].

This paper explores the synergies among these cutting-edge technologies, which collectively aim to create a seamless, integrated, and future-proof communication ecosystem. By examining the interplay of optical and wireless networks, advanced tools, and quantum advancements, we highlight how these innovations address the increasing complexity and demands of modern telecommunication systems, laying the foundation for the next generation of digital connectivity. The present work highlights the integration of the communication ecosystem (Section II), the modeling of networks (Section III), AI tools in network development (Section IV), and final

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The authors can be contacted via the email: lriveros@cpqd.com.br.

considerations about the perspectives and opportunities in optical-wireless communication (Section V).

II. The next generation of communication ecosystem

As the digital age accelerates, the next generation of communication networks is evolving into a highly integrated and diversified ecosystem. This transformation is driven by the need for seamless connectivity across various technological domains, including data center interconnections, optical transport and access networks, optical and mobile convergence, and the emerging paradigm of quantum communication with quantum-based encryption [7]. In Fig. 1, the integrated topology of these communication domains is shown.

Modern data centers, as the backbone of cloud computing, artificial intelligence, and big data analytics, require ultra-high-capacity and low-latency connectivity. Advanced DCI solutions leverage dense wavelength division multiplexing (DWDM) and coherent optics to support terabit-level data transfers employing hollow-core fiber (HCF) for lower latency interconnections. The next-generation DCI systems are being designed to enhance efficiency with software-defined networking (SDN), enabling dynamic and automated allocation of resources to match fluctuating demands.

Optical networks are evolving to meet the exponential growth in bandwidth requirements driven by 5G/6G, AI-IoT, and cloud services. Optical transport systems embrace higher-order modulation formats, intelligent transponders, and elastic wavelength grids (EON) to maximize spectral efficiency. Digital coherent systems in optical transport networks employ digital signal processing (DSP) algorithms to mitigate nonlinear effects and distortions, leveraging techniques such as constellation shaping, digital nonlinear compensation, and artificial intelligence [8]. Besides, the optical long-haul links will provide higher capacity by adapting the transmission channel using advanced amplification approaches combining distributed Raman and doped-fiber amplifiers for ultra-wideband amplification across the S-, C-, and L-bands, including special fibers with multiple modes and/or cores for spatial-division multiplexing (SDM). Meanwhile, optical access networks, such as passive optical networks, are expanding to include next-generation standards like 100G/200G CPON and VHSP, enabling faster and more scalable connectivity for end users. The next PON generation will include DSP to compensate for the degrading effects along the link, demanding the optimization of the tradeoff between its cost, complexity, and capacity [9].

Furthermore, the convergence of optical and mobile networks is a pivotal trend in enabling end-to-end connectivity for 5G and beyond. By integrating optical transport systems with mobile fronthaul, midhaul, and backhaul, operators can achieve high-capacity, ultra-low latency, and enhanced reliability for radio access networks. In this context, PON technology enables the RAN connectivity convergence to support the xHaul transport attending the link mobile requests in terms of latency, capacity, and distance for different services and demands [10]. Technologies such as integrated photonics and edge computing are facilitating the new applications, allowing for more efficient deployment of services like augmented reality, automated industries, and autonomous vehicles.

In terms of security for the next generation of integrated networks, quantum communication represents a paradigm shift in secure data transmission. Quantum-key distribution leverages the principles of quantum mechanics to ensure unbreakable encryption, making it a critical component in safeguarding sensitive data against future quantum computing threats [11]. Hybrid networks that integrate QKD with classical optical transport systems are being developed to enable scalable and practical quantum communication. Such advancements can support the convergence of satellite and terrestrial networks with QKD solutions [12].

The convergence of these diverse technologies within the next-generation communication networks is creating a cohesive ecosystem that supports the demands of an increasingly connected world. These networks are not only breaking performance barriers but also enabling new possibilities in connectivity, security, and innovation. The successful integration of these technologies will drive a future where global communication systems are more efficient, resilient, and secure than ever before.

III. The modeling of integrated network environment

The advent of next-generation communication networks demands a paradigm shift in how networks are designed, deployed, and managed. Software-defined networking emerges as a key enabler of this transformation, providing the flexibility and intelligence needed to integrate diverse technologies such as data center interconnections, optical transport and access networks, optical-mobile convergence, and quantum communication. This chapter explores SDN's pivotal role in shaping a multi-diversity ecosystem through its core principles (design, virtualization, disaggregation, standardization, and interoperability) and highlights its applications in simulation, monitoring, and digital twin implementations.

Intelligent networks' programmability and centralized control enable several advanced applications by separating the control and data planes, enabling sliced network management. Furthermore, virtualization, a cornerstone of SDN, allows physical infrastructure to host multiple virtual network instances, ensuring efficient utilization of resources. This modularity is critical in a multi-diverse ecosystem, where different network types (optical, wireless, and quantum) must seamlessly coexist and dynamically adapt to varying demands as shown in Fig. 2.

The enablers to implement the integrated networking ecosystem are defined as:

- **Design and Virtualization**: SDN redefines network architecture by separating the control and data planes, enabling centralized network management. However, the decoupling between the control and user planes does not meet the programmability of the elements, which is solved through their virtualization. Therefore, through

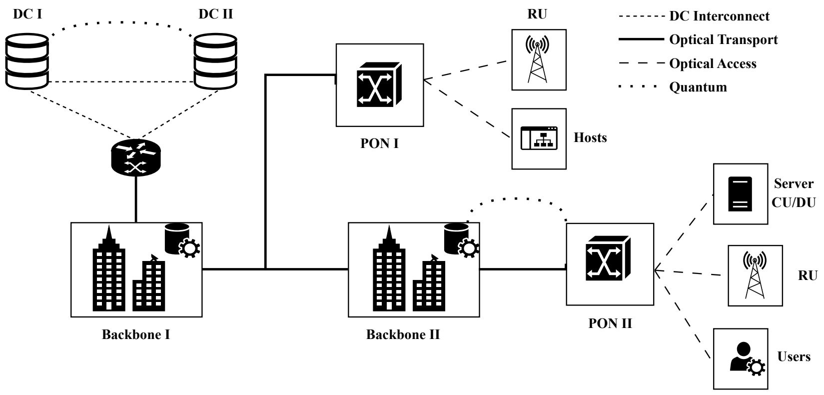

Fig. 1. Integrated topology of the connectivity ecosystem including optical transport links between urban centers, data center interconnections, and access networks for end-user and mobile connectivity.

virtual elements, the abstraction of the topology becomes accessible for the creation of applications and the forwarding of flows in a virtualized topology, enabling improvements in the development of SDN controllers.

- **Disaggregation**: SDN promotes the disaggregation of network hardware and software, offering operators the flexibility to choose components from multiple vendors. This approach fosters innovation by reducing dependency on proprietary solutions and allowing the integration of cutting-edge technologies tailored to specific needs, such as high-capacity optical links or low-latency mobile networks.
- **Standardization and Interoperability**: The adoption of open standards, such as OpenFlow and NETCONF/YANG, ensures interoperability across heterogeneous networks. This capability is vital for creating a unified ecosystem, allowing technologies like 5G, edge computing, and quantum communication to interoperate without compromising performance or security. Standardization also simplifies network upgrades and future-proofing.
- **Simulation**: By leveraging SDN controllers, operators can simulate complex network scenarios, test new configurations, and anticipate system behavior under various conditions. For instance, operators can model how integrating quantum communication links would affect existing optical networks.
- **Data Collection and Monitoring**: SDN continuously collects real-time data from network elements, offering insights into traffic patterns, link utilization, and performance bottlenecks. This visibility allows proactive network adjustments and troubleshooting.
- **Control and Management**: SDN automates resource allocation, load balancing, and failure recovery, providing a level of agility unmatched by traditional networks. This is essential in environments with high variability, such as those supporting IoT or dynamic cloud services.

The features implemented and integrated by SDN enablers allow the concept of digital twins to be a game-changer in network management, offering a virtual replica of physical networks for analysis, prediction, and optimization. Digital twins are built using data collected by SDN controllers, combined with advanced modeling techniques. These replicas simulate the real-time state of the network, enabling predictive maintenance and scenario testing. Besides, digital twins enable network operators to evaluate the impact of new configurations, forecast network failures, and experiment with advanced use cases, such as quantum-enhanced encryption or ultra-reliable low-latency communications (URLLC), without risking live operations. They also facilitate the deployment of autonomous networks, where AI-driven systems optimize performance and manage failures without human intervention.

SDN's design principles and advanced applications position it as a cornerstone for the next-generation multi-diversity ecosystem. By enabling seamless integration, dynamic management, and enhanced operational efficiency, SDN allows networks to evolve with technological advancements and user demands. The introduction of digital twins further amplifies these capabilities, providing operators with tools to manage complexity, ensure reliability, and explore new frontiers in connectivity and security.

IV. AI ENABLERS AND TECHNIQUES

Artificial intelligence is revolutionizing the next generation of communication networks, addressing the growing complexity of integrating diverse technologies such as optical transport, mobile convergence, data center interconnections, and quantum communication. By leveraging AI, networks become smarter, more adaptive, and capable of meeting the demands of unprecedented scalability, ultra-low latency, and advanced security. This review explores the multifaceted contributions of AI and its advanced techniques (including neural networks, reinforcement learning, fog computing, federated learning, evolutionary computation, optimization algorithms, and generative AI) in shaping the future of communication networks.

AI significantly enhances the performance of communication networks in various domains. In data center interconnections, AI models predict traffic patterns and optimize bandwidth allocation, ensuring smooth data flow even

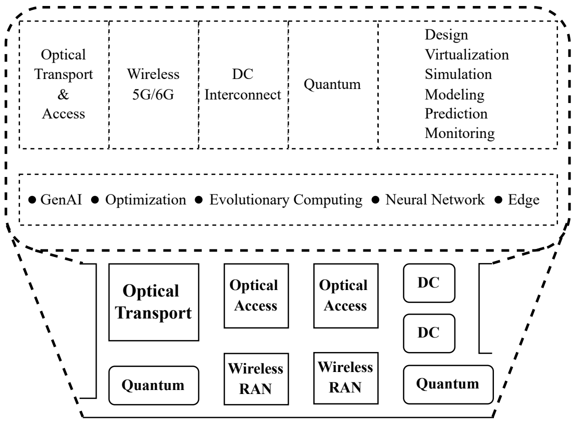

Fig. 2. Network intelligent connectivity environment is structured into physical and management layers within the SDN architecture, incorporating an intermediate layer that utilizes AI techniques.

during peak demand periods. Optical transport systems benefit from AI-driven signal processing techniques that improve spectral efficiency, dynamic wavelength allocation, and fault detection. In the realm of optical-mobile convergence, AI facilitates seamless transitions between network domains, reducing latency and enhancing resource-sharing capabilities, particularly crucial for the rollout of 5G and future wireless standards. Furthermore, quantum communication systems leverage AI for optimizing quantum-key distribution processes and mitigating noise in quantum channels, ensuring the robustness and security of encrypted data exchanges.

Neural networks play a foundational role in the development of next-generation networks. Artificial neural networks (ANNs) are widely used for predictive tasks such as network traffic forecasting, fault detection, and anomaly identification. By analyzing large datasets, ANNs can detect patterns and correlations that enable proactive network management. Convolutional neural networks (CNNs), specialized for processing visual data, are applied in scenarios such as network topology visualization and physical-layer defect detection, improving the oversight of infrastructure. Recurrent neural networks (RNNs), which excel at processing time-series data, are critical for real-time traffic prediction and latency monitoring, allowing networks to dynamically adapt to changing conditions.

Reinforcement learning (RL) is another powerful AI approach that enables networks to learn optimal configurations through iterative feedback. RL algorithms excel in dynamic resource allocation, allowing networks to optimize spectrum usage, bandwidth distribution, and energy efficiency. Autonomous network management systems built on RL can make real-time decisions for fault recovery, routing adjustments, and service optimization without human intervention. This capability is especially valuable in multi-diverse ecosystems, where demands and conditions can vary dramatically across different network segments.

Fog computing, enabled by AI, brings computational power closer to the network edge, reducing latency and supporting real-time applications. AI-enhanced fog nodes process and analyze data locally, enabling rapid decision-making for latency-sensitive use cases such as autonomous vehicles and augmented reality. This decentralized approach enhances scalability and reliability, as networks can distribute processing loads more effectively across multiple nodes. Fog computing also supports localized resource management, optimizing the performance of applications that demand ultra-fast response times.

Federated learning is a novel AI technique that ensures privacy and security while enabling collaborative model training across distributed devices. By allowing individual nodes, such as IoT devices or mobile networks, to train AI models locally and share only aggregated updates, federated learning preserves data sovereignty and minimizes the risks associated with centralized data collection. This approach is especially relevant in scenarios where data sensitivity is paramount, such as in healthcare or financial networks, and supports the development of decentralized intelligence within communication systems.

Evolutionary computing offers another avenue for solving complex optimization challenges in next-generation networks. By mimicking the process of natural selection, evolutionary algorithms can explore vast solution spaces to identify optimal configurations for network design and operation. Applications include optimizing network topologies for high-density environments, fine-tuning parameters for energy-efficient performance, and balancing competing objectives such as latency reduction and throughput maximization. These algorithms enable networks to evolve dynamically, adapting to new requirements and constraints over time.

Multi- and many-objective optimization algorithms (MOOA) address the inherently competing goals of communication networks. As networks strive to balance performance, cost, energy consumption, and other factors, these algorithms provide systematic methods for exploring trade-offs and identifying balanced solutions. For example, they can simultaneously optimize latency and throughput in data centers or minimize energy use while maintaining quality of service in wireless networks. By providing a structured framework for decision-making, these algorithms empower network operators to achieve tailored outcomes that meet diverse operational requirements.

Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) introduces new possibilities for simulation, prediction, and automation in next-generation networks. GenAI models can synthesize realistic network traffic patterns, enabling operators to test the resilience of network architectures under simulated stress conditions. These models also enhance anomaly detection by generating and analyzing rare or extreme network events, improving preparedness for unexpected disruptions. In addition, GenAI supports predictive maintenance by modeling the likelihood of component failures and suggesting optimal schedules for repairs, reducing downtime and enhancing reliability.

In conclusion, artificial intelligence is a key solution in the development and management of next-generation communication networks. Through advanced techniques such as neural networks, reinforcement learning, fog computing, federated learning, evolutionary computing, optimization algorithms, and generative AI, these networks become more intelligent, adaptive, and resilient. By addressing the complexities of a multi-diversity ecosystem, AI ensures that communication technologies can meet the demands of a rapidly evolving digital world, paving the way for a more connected, efficient, and secure future.

V. Conclusions

The next generation of communication networks represents a transformative shift towards a multi-diversity ecosystem, where the convergence of diverse technologies defines the foundation for a hyper-connected world. This ecosystem integrates optical transport, wireless systems, data center interconnections, and emerging quantum communication, creating a seamless and adaptive infrastructure capable of addressing evolving demands for bandwidth, latency, and security. Optical-mobile convergence, for instance, bridges the gap between the high-capacity backbone of optical networks and the flexibility of wireless access, ensuring low-latency, high-reliability connectivity for applications like 5G, edge computing, and IoT. Similarly, the integration of quantum communication with existing infrastructures introduces unparalleled security through quantum-key distribution, reinforcing trust in data exchange across critical networks. This ecosystem thrives on advanced enablers such as artificial intelligence techniques and software-defined networks, which provide the intelligence, flexibility, and efficiency needed to unify heterogeneous technologies. AI, in particular, plays a vital role in optimizing resource allocation, enabling predictive maintenance, and facilitating real-time decision-making, while software-defined networks ensure interoperability and dynamic adaptability. By unifying these diverse technologies, next-generation communication networks will drive innovation across industries, enhance global connectivity, and empower solutions to challenges that transcend borders and disciplines.

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