Content model for hypermedia affordances

Working concept development document for discussion; evolved from Machine Actionable links discussion

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# Introduction

Web architecture encourages client software that is designed as an agent in a dynamic information space (Charlton, 2012). This is enabled by one of the fundamentals of REST architecture (Fielding, thesis ; Fielding 2008 blog), 'hypermedia as the engine of application state'. Understanding this rather arcane concept is central to understanding modern web applications and architecture. The idea is that a web application is a software agent that retrieves documents from the web, and follows instructions contained in those documents to move towards a goal. The application starts with some objective, and a link to retrieve a hypermedia document that contains the initial instructions. Application logic consists of inspecting the instructions in the document, determining which instructions to follow, and executing those instructions. The logic may involve requesting user input to make choices or to provide information (fill out forms) necessary to complete the process.

The original web architecture was designed to account for human-directed navigation of links to obtain resources that for the most part were intended for display and visual processing by human users. With the increasing adoption of service-based architecture, linked data, and semantic web technology, machine interpretation and processing of resources is becoming an integral part of an evolving distributed computation system. Simply clicking on a link to see what you get does not work in this environment. Links between resources for machine-automated processing require additional information about the nature of the target resource, its capabilities, data structure, and content.

This approach revolves around the concept of hypermedia, a document that contains both information and controls to enable a user (human or automated) to make choices and select actions that direct the execution of an application. HTML is a widely used hypermedia type. As originally conceived, it provided a human user with a text document containing links that could be followed to view other text documents. In the language of hypermedia, the text provides information, and links are the controls that provide the mechanism to change browser application state, i.e. display a new web page. The user in this case is a human, and any necessary explanation of the controls (links) is in the text for a user to read. This document outlines a scheme for properties that can be used to specify the behavior of a link in a hypermedia document such that machine agents can interpret the link and use it with minimal intervention by a human user. The idea is that the details of application execution are dynamic; the client doesn't have a fixed copy of the instructions that has locked-in dependencies on particular URIs or processing models.

This proposal addresses a more complex situation: given a choice of several URIs to deference (typically using http framework, with implication that http header parameters may be involved), a software application (machine) must determine which one(s) exposes the representation or interface that the software can utilize. The solution proposed here is for link providers to supply some a priori knowledge of the link targets to help applications utilizing the links; this information is supplied as properties associated with the links in a resource representation.There are a variety of situations in which a hypermedia document might present a list of links (affordances, controls). The objective might be to make an information resource available to a user in their native work environment, to reconstruct an archived compound digital object, or to reconstruct a workflow or data visualization. The basic issue is what information must be included with these controls to enable a machine agent to select the proper one to achieve the application goal.

This issue impacts a variety of current activities considering use of various hypermedia formats, including [Atom](https://tools.ietf.org/html/rfc5023), GeoRSS, and various XML schema to describe associations between resources. Some examples are the Open Geospatial Consortium [OWS context Standards Working Group](http://www.ogcnetwork.net/context), the Earth Science Information Partners (ESIP) [data and service casting schemes](http://wiki.esipfed.org/index.php/Discovery_Cluster), the [Energistics energy industry ISO19115 metadata profile](http://www.energistics.org/asset-data-management/metadata-work-group), the protocol for [Web Description Resources (POWDER](http://www.w3.org/TR/powder-dr/)), USGS Community for Data Integration Web Application Integration Framework group, linked data profiles being developed for JSON encoding (JSON-LD, <http://json-ld.org/>), JSON hypermedia profiles ([HAL](http://tools.ietf.org/html/draft-kelly-json-hal-06), [SIREN](https://github.com/kevinswiber/siren), [Hydra](http://www.markus-lanthaler.com/hydra/), [Home Document](http://tools.ietf.org/html/draft-nottingham-json-home)), and the [Open Archives Initiative Object Reuse and Exchange](http://www.openarchives.org/ore/) specification.

## Use Scenarios

Here are a variety of scenarios framed in several contexts: a metadata record, a ‘service cast’ or ‘dataset cast’ document, an ‘OWS context’ (‘common operating picture’) document (atom xml or JSON), or an XML ‘data’ document (like GeoSciML). These use cases are all related to the issue of what information needs to be encoded to make a URI machine-actionable in a simple, useful way.

* A data citation provides a link to directly access a particular subset of some data set.
* A GeoSciML instance document contains URIs that specify terminological quantifiers for various property elements; a user interface must present these using labels intelligible to users of the data
* A WaterML instance document contains URIs that specify terminological quantifiers for various property elements; a data processing application is comparing these attribute values to data from another source and must assess concept similarity. An owl representation would be most useful.
* A WFS server is processing filter requests against a GeoSciML document with concept expansion on attribute values specified by URIs, and must determine the transitive closure of the concept in the containing concept scheme.
* Geospatial information context document (common operating picture, OWS context) provides links to a collection of resources that constitute a workspace environment, e.g. a map mash-up bringing a variety of service-based spatial data together to convey some interpretation, including portrayal configuration, filters on datasets, operation options, etc...
* A metadata record for a data granule links to a metadata record describing the collection that contains the granule
* A metadata description of a service resource links to metadata for datasets it serves.
* Metadata for a dataset contains actionable link/description of services providing the data so that a client can connect to the service and access data without human intervention.
* Dataset (or collection) cast specifies what services are available to query, access, or transform each dataset, and client software can enable user to do these without intervention.
* A service metadata record contains links to metadata for the datasets the service distributes or utilizes.
* An Atom feed describing an information resource provides links enabling a variety of human and machine interactions with the resource that access different representations and interfaces.
* A workflow is described by a branching chain of service calls described in a hypermedia document.

# Link Properties Review

To explore what is being done to implement machine actionable links, a survey was made of several specifications that are in use (Table 1). The various approaches generally build on the html <Link> approach, with information encoded in one or more attributes on the link, or in the codelist/controlled vocabulary associated with these attributes. All utilize MIME type in some fashion, and generally in include some kind of ‘rel’ or ‘role’ attribute used to indicate the semantics of the link.

Table 1. Link parameter specifications reviewed for this analysis

| Specification | Link | Notes |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ESIP discovery | <http://wiki.esipfed.org/index.php/Discovery_Cast_Atom_Response_Format_v1.1> | Describes links to external information. These links include a relation and type. |
| ISO19115/ 19139 |  | formal metadata specification. CI\_OnlineResource element is used to encode machine actionable links |
| IETF Web Linking | <http://tools.ietf.org/html/rfc5988> | IETF-5988 specifies relation types for web links, defines a registry for type definitions to enable interoperability, and defines the use of the Link field in HTTP headers to encode links |
| IANA link type registry |  |  |
| ATOM | <http://tools.ietf.org/html/rfc4287> | An XML-based document format that describes lists of related information known as "feeds". Feeds are composed of a number of items, known as "entries", each with an extensible set of attached metadata. Defines link element with relation type, original vocabulary of 5 types extended in IANA link type registry |
| RDFa | http://rdfa.info/about/ | scheme to add attributes on xml elements to tag them with RDF encoded metadata, designed for use in XHTML web documents. These allow association of xml element values with URI’s for properties, datatypes, linked resources (only one, because they are xml attibutes), types, or identifiers |
| xlink |  | specification for attributes associated with links in xml documents |
| GML codeType |  | XML element scheme to associate a URI with a context, use for linking to concept resources. Similar to CodeList type in ISO 19139. |
| HAL | http://tools.ietf.org/html/draft-kelly-json-hal | JSON Hypertext Application Language (HAL) is a standard which establishes conventions for expressing hypermedia controls. |
| Hydra | <http://www.markus-lanthaler.com/hydra/spec/latest/core/> | RDF vocabulary for hypermedia HATEOAS API; indirect implications for link properties on Collection entity. |
| Home document | http://tools.ietf.org/html/draft-nottingham-json-home | IETF rfc draft. Hypermedia document format to describe capabilities of a resource so non-browser client can decide at run time how to interact with the server based upon the described capabilities |

Table 2. Link type relation vocabularies reviewed for this analysis

| Vocabulary | link | Notes |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ESIP link type |  | for data casting and service casting, to extend ATOM Link types |
| ISO19115-1 online function codes |  | for function property of CI\_Online Resource. From draft version of 19115-1 DIS. |
| IANA link relations | <http://www.iana.org/assignments/link-relations/link-relations.xml> | for rel attribute of Link element. extends link types defined in IETF-5988 |
| DataCite RelType | <http://schema.datacite.org/meta/kernel-2.2/doc/DataCite-MetadataKernel_v2.2.pdf> | relationships from a citation to a related resource |
| RDFa relation | <http://www.w3.org/TR/rdfa-syntax/#relValues> | RDF predicates for relationships between resources |
| Dublin Core Terms | <http://dublincore.org/documents/dcmi-terms/> | Compare terms in substitution group for dct:relation. |

# Results of compilation of specifications

Table 3 is a summary of parameters used as link properties in the various schema that were studied (see Table 1). These are grouped into related attributes color coded in the table. 1) Basic information necessary to understand the link and its target. 2) Additional useful information about the target. 3) Information about link function. 4) operational switches that indicate suggested or required client behavior when a link is used, and are all optional. Sources of link relationship vocabularies are summarized in Table 2, and a compilation of the relationship types is presented in Table 4.

Table 3. Link properties that are in use. The first four are the most widely used and are considered the ‘core’ attributes. Abbreviations in the schemes column: xlink—W3C link specification; atom—IETF4287 Atom feed specification RFC; iso—ISO 19115/19139; 5988—IETF5988 web link RFC; esip—ESIP discovery cluster data and web casting discussion; ows—OpenGeospatial consortium OWS context discussion from Standards working group.

| Element | Scope note | Schemes that use |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 1. Basic information | | |
| targetURI | URI that identifies the resource that is the source of the link. This is generally an http URI, which will be dereferenced. The associated attributes provide guidance for client software to determine if it wants to dereference this identifier and what representations is can expect when it does. If identifier is not http, then the protocol property should indicate the scheme used. | xlink, atom, iso, 5988, esip, ows, HAL |
| rel | URI from IANA rel vocabulary for consistency with IETF5988. Semantics of link from global vocabulary for interoperability. Semantics in this context means calculatable (see discussion in Coyle, 2010 p. 19). Attribute value is list; best practice is to include one of the 5 original Atom link@rel values for interoperability. HAL uses IETF RFC-5988 rel terms for JSON property names, and adds an extra name property to differentiate links with same rel. | xlink, atom, 5988, esip, HAL |
| title | free text to label link in GUI, used to describe the meaning of a link or resource in a human-readable fashion | xlink, atom, iso, 5988, owc, HAL |
| MIMEtype | MIME content type. Indicates media format of link target. Expects a MIME type (http://www.iana.org/assignments/media-types/application/in­dex.html). Intention is that if a type is listed here, it is known to be offered by the host that the href will dereference to | atom, 5988, esip, owc, HAL |
| template | Boolean to indicate if the provided targetURI is a template according to RFC-6570 (<http://tools.ietf.org/html/rfc6570>); templates have parameters, which may have controlled vocabularies; to use template need binding between template URI and parameter definitions. This is done with a template-vars property | HAL, Hydra |
| template-vars | A collection of key value pairs that map parameter names in the template to global identifiers for resources that define the semantics and syntax of the parameter | home-doc:href-vars |
| 1. Additional information | | |
| altTitle | String that encodes title value in a different character set, and/or contains language information as per [RFC5987]. | 5988 |
| description | detailed text description of the target resource content and capabilities | iso |
| media | indicates intended destination medium or media for style information (see Le Hors et al., 1999, Section 6.13 http://www.w3.org/TR/html401 ). Example values include 'screen', 'tty', 'print', 'braille', 'aural'... Vocabulary appears to be related to type of device (including paper as a device...) that is intended target for resource representation. Default to 'screen', and it is anticipated that other values would be only rarely required. | 5988 |
| length | Numeric value, indicates an advisory length of the linked content in octets; it is a hint about the content length of the representation returned when targetURI is dereferenced | atom |
| hreflang | Three-letter language code that specifies the language of the target resource content. When used together with the rel="alternate", it implies a translated version of the target resource. Multiple "hreflang" parameters on a single link-value indicate language options that may be requested by the client. | atom, 5988 |
| 1. Function, format, schema of target | | |
| function | Term that tells client why they’d use this link. Purpose property provides mechanism for more granular, application specific indication of link semantics. Example values: 'download', ‘browsing’, 'fileAccess'. Analogous to ISO19115 CI\_OnlineFunctionCode. See Table 5. Default is ‘download’. | iso |
| protocol | Identifier for basic messaging protocol to be used to dereference the TargetURI, e.g. http, ftp, dns, smb, nfs, smtp, pop; other identifier schemes that may not have implicit web behavior are also possible, e.g. ARK DOI EAN13 EISSN ISBN ISSN ISTC LISSN LSID UPC URN. See IETF registry at http://www.rfc-editor.org/rfcxx00.html. Protocol operating at the 'bottom' of the application layer of the OSI network protocol stack. Default is HTTP. | iso |
| overlayAPI | URI that identifies the API for messages that may be tunneled to client applications using the protocol specified by the 'protocol' property. URI to identify serviceType and version should be defined by the service specification. | esip, owc, iso |
| profile | Profile of media type specified by MIMEtype; specifies information model for content contained in messages conforming to the MIMEtype media format; note that the same output scheme might be encoded using different MIME types, so the two are somewhat orthogonal. | iso, esip, HAL |
| hints | Object that contains additional information about link operation/actions. ServiceType and outputScheme specific information that assists clients to find relevant information about interacting with a resource beforehand, as a means of optimizing communications, as well as advertising available behaviors (e.g., to aid in laying out a user interface for consuming the API). Home-documents draft proposes set of common hints. | home-doc |
| 1. Operational switches | | |
| xml:base | stem for relative URI in attributes, or for CURIEs | xml |
| nofollow | Indicates that the context’s original author or publisher does not endorse the link target. Optional, Boolean; default is ‘False’ | IANA |
| show | When link is to resource that is a component of the resource containing the link, indicates desired presentation of the ending resource on traversal from the starting resource. Value must be one of the values "new", "replace", "embed", "other", and "none". Used to assemble a resource 'by reference' to libraries of component parts. 'new' and 'replace' only make sense in the context of a window-based browsing application. | xlink |
| actuate | When link is to resource that is a component of the resource containing the link, indicates desired behavior when the containing resource is parsed or loaded into the client environment. Values: "onLoad", "onRequest", "other", and "none". Is ‘onLoadl same as ‘prefetch’? | actuate |
| noreferrer | Indicates that no referrer information is to be leaked when following the link | IANA |
| prefetch | Indicates that the link target should be preemptively cached | IANA |

Table 4. Compilation of relation type terms from analyzed specifications. Terms are grouped according to the scope of the relation; each attribute group is shaded with a different color and the groups are labeled with gray-shaded cells. Rel terms that specify link function are summarized separately in Table 5.

| Type | | Subtype | | Notes | Vocabularies | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Access to resource representation and description | | | | | | |
| current-version (iana:current) | |  | | link to current version of the context resource; MIMEtype, outputschema used to disambiguate different representations available. This is to allow advertising of specific representations. [syn: latest-version] | IANA | |
| browseGraphic | |  | | link to low-resolution visualization of resource, used for determination of fitness for purpose | esip, iso | |
| browsing | |  | | link is to web application that will allow user to explore the resource content | iso | |
| documentation (iana:describedBy) | |  | | online information about the resource | esip, ISO, IANA, DataCite | |
| metadata | |  | | link retrieves formal metadata record describing resource. outputScheme provides information to select metadata | esip, ISO, RDFa | |
| monitor | |  | | Link to resource (feed) that can be used to monitor changes in the context resource. See http://tools.ietf.org/html/rfc5989. This relation type target URI apparently has to be a session Initiation Protocol (sip:) URI. | IANA | |
|  | | monitor-group | | resource that can be used to monitor changes in a group of HTTP resources that includes the context resource. From rfc5989: The monitor-group URI corresponds only to an Resource List Server (RLS as defined in RFC 4662) and never an HTTP resource or fixed set of HTTP resources. This relation type target URI apparently has to be a session Initiation Protocol (sip:) URI. | IANA | |
| contents | |  | | link to listing of the parts of the context resource. This listing is considered a kind of feed | IANA, RDFa | |
| alternate | |  | | link is to a different representation (substitute, variant, version) of the context resource. [this appears to make sense only if the context resource is a particular representation, otherwise the alternates should be separate links to access the resource] | IANA, DataCite, RDFa, DCT | |
|  | | duplicate | | link to a resource whose available representations are byte-for-byte identical with the corresponding representations of the context | IANA | |
|  | | successor-version | | link to resource that supersedes the context resource in a version history | IANA, DataCite, DCT | |
|  | | predecessor-version | | link to resource that precedes the context resource in a version history | IANA, dataCite | |
|  | | working-copy | | link to a resource that is a revision draft for a successor resource | IANA | |
|  | | working-copy-of | | link from a revision draft resource to the resource it is intended to supersede | IANA | |
|  | | isOriginalFormOf | | link from the original version in version sequence to some successor version. | DataCite | |
|  | | isVersionOf | | inverse link for isOriginalFormOf; link from a version to the original resource in a version sequence | DCT | |
| icon | |  | | Link to icon resource representing the link context | IANA, RDFa | |
| index | |  | | link to index resource for searching context resource(?) | IANA, RDFa | |
| Alternate identifiers associated with resource | | | | | | |
| bookmark | |  | | target of relationship is permanent link to use for bookmarking purposes. | IANA RDFa | |
| canonical | |  | | target of relationship is preferred version of a set of URIs with highly similar content. It is intended to help search engines when the same or highly similar similar content is available at different URIs. | IANA | |
| self | |  | | a link (URI) for the current context. E.g. use in search result listing to reproduce the search URI that produced the result. | IANA | |
| Links between parts of a segmented resource | | | | | | |
| start | |  | | first resource in the ordered collection of resources that contains the current context. | IANA, RDFa | |
| first | |  | | to the first item in the ordered collection of resources that contains the current context. (see also start and top). | IANA, DataCite, RDFa | |
| prev | |  | | to the previous item in the ordered collection of resources that contains the current context. (see also start and top). | IANA, DataCite, RDFa | |
| last | |  | | last resource in the ordered collection of resources that contains the current context. | IANA, DataCite, RDFa | |
| next | |  | | to the next item in the ordered collection of resources that contains the current context. (see also start and top). | IANA, DataCite, RDFa | |
| up | |  | | link to a parent resource in a linked hierarchy of resources. | IANA, RDFa, DCT | |
| hasPart | |  | | Generic type for links to parts of a resource | DCT | |
|  | | section | | link to a section (part) of a collection of resource | IANA, RDFa | |
|  | | chapter | | identifier for a chapter (part) within a resource | IANA, DataCite, RDFa | |
|  | | subsection | | [how are chapters, sections, and subsections distinguished?] | IANA, RDFa | |
| Links to resource specifying properties of the context resource | | | | | | |
| copyright | |  | | Link to copyright statement that applies to the context resource | IANA, RDFa | |
| license | |  | | Link to a resource that specifies licensing stipulations for use of context resource | IANA, RDFa | |
| privacyPolicy | |  | | link to a Platform for Privacy Preferences (P3P) privacy scheme Policy Reference File. | RDFa | |
| author | |  | | link is to Author. The author is the originating agent for a resource; this is a 'non-information' resource, thus there is some representation involved | IANA | |
| tag | |  | | a literal value (string) to be associated with the context resoruce as a finding aid | IANA | |
| conformsTo | |  | | dublin core relation type; explicit link to specification that resource conforms to. Normally this should be same as URI in outputScheme link parameter, but as a distinct relation element allows separate explicit link to conformance spec for target resource. Title of link should be same as outputScheme or ServiceType URI in a link rel. | DCT | |
| hasFormat | |  | | if a type attribute is not a registered MIME type, or needs additional explanation, a separate hasFormat element with title={the type string} can be included. | DCT | |
| requires | |  | | link to a resource to which the context resource has a dependency. This element must be contained in a metadata description for the resource that present the requirement. | DCT | |
| via | |  | | link to a resource that is a source of information in the context resource; interpreted here to be generic term subsuming compilation, citation, referencing. Provenance. | IANA | |
|  | | compiles | | Link to resource whose content has been incorporated into the context resource | DataCite | |
|  | | cites | | link to a resource that is cited for some reason (evidence, authority, attribution) in the context resource. Distinction of Cite and Reference needs clarification | DataCite, RDFa | |
|  | | references | | link to a resource that provided information used in the development of the context resource. Distinction of Cite and Reference needs clarification | DataCite, DCT | |
| Link is to related resource | | | | | | |
| event | |  | | link is to micro-article related to context resource [intention is somewhat unclear in esip discussions] | esip | |
| related | |  | | link is to a resource that has some useful association to the context resource; generic link with essentially no semantics | IANA | |
|  | | enclosure | | a related resource that is potentially large and might require special processing. [Not very useful because semantics are unclear] | IANA | |
| collection | |  | | link gets Data Casting Collection. Function unclear; guess is a document that is a list of related resources. How is this different from esip feed? | esip | |
|  | | feed | | link is to a related RSS or ATOM feed; esip restricts to feed of feeds… only necessary if use [serviceCast](http://sciflo.jpl.nasa.gov/scast/) and [dataCast](http://datacasting.jpl.nasa.gov/) as other collection subtypes | esip | |
| replies | |  | | link is to a resource that responds in some way to assertions or information in the context resource | IANA | |
| documents | |  | | link to a resource that is the subject of information in the context resource | DataCite | |
| isCompiledBy | |  | | link to resource that incorporates context resource into a compiled resource | DataCite | |
| appendix | |  | | link is to appendix resource | IANA, RDFa | |
|  | | isSupplementTo/ isSupplementedBy | | subtyping is based on interpretation that an appendix is equivalent to a supplement | DataCite | |
| archives | |  | | link to collection of resources of historical interest relative to the context resource | IANA | |
|  | | next-archive | | Navigation through archive resource-- have to maintain relationship with what the archive context is… Intention is unclear | IANA | |
|  | | prev-archive | | Navigation through archive resource-- have to maintain relationship with what the archive context is… Intention is unclear | IANA | |
|  | | version-history | | a listing (feed) that enumerates ordered collection of all versions of the context resource | IANA | |
| glossary | |  | | a glossary that defines terms used in the context resource | IANA, RDFa | |
| help | |  | | link to a help resource that provides guidance on the use and interpretation of the context resource | IANA, RDFa | |
| stylesheet | |  | | link to resource that provides instructions for presentation of the context resource | IANA, RDFa | |
| isFormatOf | |  | | if resource is a format specification, this relation indicates link to resources that are examples of the format | DCT | |
| isReferencedBy | |  | | generic type for inverse link to resource that uses information from and references (by link?) the context resource. Distinction of Cite and Reference needs clarification+C43 | DataCite, DCT | |
| isCompiledBy | |  | | link to resource that incorporates context resource into a compiled resource | DataCite | |
| isCitedBy | |  | | link to a resource that cites the context resource for some reason (evidence, authority, attribution). Distinction of Cite and Reference needs clarification | DataCite | |
| isRequiredBy | |  | | inverse link for Requires--explicit link to resources that have a dependency on the context resource. | DCT | |
| payment | |  | | this is considered a link function, not a relationship type; listed here because is IANA rel type. | IANA | |
| replaces | |  | | link to a resource that the context resource is meant to supersede. See also 'predessor-version'. Distinction is that replace is used if resources are not a version sequence, for instance if a new specification is superseding some existing spec. | DCT | |
| Function | | | | | | | |
| download |  | | link will retrieve data from web | | | ESIP, ISO | |
|  | fileAccess | | link is network file path specific to some local area network | | | iso | |
| service |  | | link is to service end point that provides access to resource through some interface | | | esip, IANA | |
|  | search | | link to online web application to search within the described resource; not clear if ISO intention is the same (or what it is!) | | | iso, IANA | |
| upload |  | | link endpoint will accept file upload (? POST, or get web-form that user interacts with to upload a file?) | | | iso | |
| emailService |  | | should be smtp or mailTo protocol type for user to interact with context contact agent | | | iso | |
| offlineAccess |  | | link to online instructions for requesting the resource from the provider | | | iso | |
|  | order (iana:payment) | | link to online order web application for obtaining the resource. Payment may be part of this process. | | | iso, IANA | |
| hub |  | | link to online web application that enables registration for notification of updates to the context (see monitor relation types…) | | | IANA | |
| edit |  | | link to a resource that can be used to edit the link's context | | | IANA | |
| edit-media |  | | link to a resource that can be used to edit media associated with the link's context | | | IANA | |

# Discussion

REST type applications implemented using the Internet typically communicate using [application layer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Application_Layer) (ITU-T, 1994-07) protocols such as HTTP, FTP, or SMTP. Many applications, such as web browsers, e-mail clients, and file-transfer programs, require only the operations provided by these protocols. More complex distributed applications that are now common use various techniques to nest complex data bundles and operation invocations within messages transported via the basic application layer protocols. Three general styles have emerged in messaging schemes for such web applications: component-based (tunneling), object-based, and hypermedia-based (Amundsen, 2012-12-14).

In the component-based style, HTTP messages directed to a single web location contain requests against some component's API. The HTTP protocol is incidental, simply acting as transport to tunnel requests to the actual application. This style is illustrated by SOAP-based implementations that use XML-encoded content in HTTP POST requests to tunnel procedure calls to application components on the host machines. In the object-based style, a domain object hierarchy is defined, and application function is based on HTTP methods that create, read, update, and delete the domain objects (e.g. users, products etc.). In the hypermedia-based style, a media type is defined for messages that specify resources (users, products etc.) and possible actions (read, write, create, delete, filter, report, etc.) on those resources. The media format must be understood a priori by client applications. The object of this proposal is a hypermedia profile to specify component-based, object based, or hypermedia-based interactions, enabling a hypermedia-based application to interact with server capabilities utilizing any of the styles.

## Media type

A hypermedia definition (media type) describes a processing model in terms of some collection of controls used to change application state, and the syntax and vocabulary of instructions used to guide a client in navigating application states towards a goal. A hypermedia format must enable complex application behavior using the base protocol (e.g. HTTP), specifying actions as desired side-effects. The format should not be proscriptive about how the base protocol methods are used to achieve specific goals. One server may implement a process via single POST, while another may use a PUT-POST-POST sequence for the same process. The format should be self-explanatory within the scope of semantics defined for the media type; such semantics normally take the form of vocabularies of properties used to characterize controls (e.g. links) in hypermedia documents. Presentation and description of processing options and control operation should follow consistent and uniform patterns, such that automated clients can utilize the instructions without resorting to sophisticated parsing and text analysis.

Client applications on World Wide Web use a media type specified by the content-type header in the response to an ‘HTTP GET’ to determine how to process the document. The client has to know characteristics of the media type to utilize the response content. An application will commonly be presented with a hypermedia document and need to choose from a variety of links. In order to function correctly, the software must identify the links that will access resources that are useful to the application, or meet its processing requirements. A software agent may only know how to parse CSV or NetCDF files, or might require an OGC WMS, WFS or WCS; perhaps it requires graphics encoded as SVG; it may require content encoded in particular xml schema, e.g. GeoSciML, WaterML, or a particular RDF vocabulary. A client might need to know the available options for representations of a requested resource.

Content negotiation in http allows management of these options in simple cases, but the use of [MIME](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet_media_type) types to specify details of xml schema, data structure, or vocabulary does not scale. These conventions become very application- and domain-specific and MIME is intended to be a ‘standard’ that spans multiple applications and domains. To address the specifics of particular applications or domains, media-type profiles are used to add additional semantics to the media type.

The most common hypermedia control is a link, and these are the focus of this proposal. Links are machine actionable if a software application can parse the link and use the information it contains to make appropriate decisions about application progress and how to utilize the target resource. The profile specified in this document defines properties that must be specified for links to resources using the three web application styles outlined above. The specification is abstract, in that it does not proscribe a particular encoding scheme. The intention is that the properties can be implemented in hypermedia formats using various encodings like XML, JSON, RDF, etc.

## Protocol and URI Scheme

Link targets are specified using a URI [RFC3986] string. Various schemes have been defined for the syntax and interpretation of URI's, e.g. http, ftp, dns, smb, nfs, pop. See the Interned Assigned Numbers Authority (IANA) registry at <http://www.iana.org/assignments/uri-schemes.html> for a complete list of formally registered URI schemes; there are a variety of other identifier schemes in use that are not formally registered with IANA (e.g. ARK, DOI, EAN13, EISSN, ISBN, ISSN, ISTC, LISSN, LSID, UPC), but are well know and defined within certain communities. Many of the registered schemes are associated with protocols that specify a messaging scheme to access a representation of the identified resource, and operations that may be invoked on that resource. URI syntax defined by IETF RFC-3986 specifies that "each URI begins with a scheme name" [RFC3986, section 1.1.1]. Thus, if a link target is specified by a URI whose URI scheme has a known binding with an internet messaging protocol, this protocol does not have to be explicitly specified by an additional property associated with the link.

The World Wide Web is a network of linked resources based on the HyperText Transfer Protocol (HTTP [RFC2616]) and the Internet. HTTP offers a simple set of requests for interactions between networked resources. As the complexity of client-server and distributed applications using the World Wide Web has evolved, various schemes have been developed to utilize HTTP to implement networked programming interfaces with other operations and messaging schemes. Simple Object Access Protocol (SOAP [[SOAP](http://www.w3.org/TR/soap/)]) and Microsoft RPC-over-HTTP [MSRPC] are two examples of such schemes. In these models, interaction (procedure calls) between software agents is through a communication protocol that is 'tunneled' through an HTTP messaging channel. Although a link to a resource based on this Remote Procedure Call (RPC) over HTTP approach may have a URI that uses the 'http:' URI scheme, the important protocol that must be specified for the link is the protocol that is tunneled through HTTP. Similar schemes may be implemented on other URI schemes that have defined messaging protocols. Protocols specific to particular applications that are layered on the base protocol specified by the URI scheme are indicated using overlayAPI and profile properties.

## URI Templates

Another common approach to developing networked applications is to define a collection of resources and parameters on the resource that allow a pattern- and rule-based scheme to access particular resource instances. Interaction with the resource instances is based on standard HTTP operations to create, read, update, and delete instances. A URI template [[RFC6570](http://tools.ietf.org/html/rfc6570)] defines URI syntax with parameters that may be assigned values to access particular resources. The OpenSearch specification [OpenSearch1.1] is a widely used example of this approach. Link descriptions in hypermedia documents must also be able to provide sufficient information to enable a software agent to utilize these kind of network applications.

# Proposed solution for machine actionable links

In order for software client to utilize a link, it first must understand the URI scheme for the link identifier and how to dereference that kind of URI. Table 6 lists elements that are considered most important for characterizing machine actionable links. This information could conceivably all be encoded in the MIME type, perhaps even utilizing some structured syntax to allow analysis of the MIME type string to extract some of these properties. It would lead to a massive proliferation of MIME types of increasing length and complexity. The solution favored here is to specify additional properties to link items.

Table 6. Proposed properties for useful machine-actionable links.

| **property** | **scope notes** |
| --- | --- |
| linkage (syn: href, targetURI) | URI that identifies the resource that is the target of the link. Mandatory. This is generally an http URI, which will be dereferenced. |
| title | Free text to label the link in user interfaces. Optional. The content of the "title" attribute is Language-Sensitive. Entities such as "&amp;" and "&lt;" represent their corresponding characters ("&" and "<", respectively), not markup. Link elements MAY have a title attribute. The "title" parameter MUST NOT appear more than once in a given link-value; occurrences after the first MUST be ignored by parsers. |
| type | Media type of response, specified by registered MIME media format. Mandatory, default value text/html. The intention is that the type is known to be offered by the host that the targetURI accesses, but this should not be assumed. The Content-Type header of the response obtained by dereferencing targetURI should be checked to verify the actual response media type. There MUST NOT be more than one type parameter in a link-value; occurrences after the first MUST be ignored by parsers. If multiple media type representations are available, they should be indicated by separate link elements. This property is about the target of the link. |
| rel | Semantics of link (see discussion in Coyle, 2010 p. 19). Mandatory. Term from IANA **rel** vocabulary should be included for consistency with IETF RFC-5988. Recommendation is to use the Terms not namespace qualified, following guidance in Atom Specification RFC-4287, section 4.2.7.2. Other domain-specific terms, not from IANA registry MAY be included; these SHOULD be namespace qualified. Multiple rel values are separated by comma; a rel value string MUST be quoted if it contains a comma (","). This property provides guidance on the relationship between the resource that contains the link and the target resource; generally it will be used by applications to determine the purpose of traversing/actuating the link. |
| overlayAPI | URI that identifies a URI template scheme or the API for messages that may be tunneled to client applications using the protocol associated with the templateURI. Mandatory if such scheme or protocol is necessary to utilize the link. URI to identify RPC protocol, service type, or URI template scheme and version should be defined by the service specification. Version information should be included if applicable. E.g. OGC WMS, WS-services. This property is for services that encode remote procedure calls using e.g. standard HTTP methods (GET, POST). |
| profile | Profile of media type specified by MIMEtype; specifies information model for content contained in messages conforming to the MIMEtype media format; note that the same output scheme might be encoded using different MIME types, so the two are somewhat orthogonal. e.g. GeoSciML v3 GeologicUnit, ESIP Discovery. These are profiles that typically add conventions and vocabularies on top of the media type specified by MIMEType. |
| Other properties that may be useful (all optional) | |
| altTitle | String that encodes title value in a different character set, and/or contains language information as per [RFC5987]. |
| descriptionURL | detailed text description of what the online resource is/does. Since is not considered good practice to put extensive text in an element attribute, implement by reference with a url for an html description page. |
| length | Indicates an advisory length of the linked content in octets; it is a hint about the content length of the representation returned when linkage identifier is dereferenced |
| hreflang | describes the language of the resource pointed to by the linkage attribute. When used together with the rel="alternate", it implies a translated version of the entry. Multiple "hreflang" parameters on a single link-value indicate language options that may be indicated by the client. |
| behavior | A comma separated list of properties specifying behavior expected in client when link is actuated. See Table 7 for list of values. |
| hints | Object with additional, profile-specific information about link operation; granular to protocol or overlayAPI method level. Object provides additional information to allow clients to interact with a resource beforehand, as a means of optimizing communications, as well as advertising available behaviors (e.g., to aid in laying out a user interface for consuming the API). Home-documents draft proposes set of common hints as an example. |

Table 7. Vocabulary for specifying link behavior property.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Term | Explanation |
| nofollow | if property is specified, indicates that the context’s original author or publisher does not endorse the link target. |
| showreplace | equivalent to ‘show’ value for xlink:show property. |
| showembed | equivalent to ‘embed’ value for xlink:show property. |
| actuateOnLoad | equivalent to ‘onLoad’ value for xlink:actuate property. |
| actuateOnRequest | equivalent to ‘onRequest’ value for xlink:actuate property. |
| noreferrer | if property is specified, indicates that no referrer information is to be leaked when following the link |
| prefetch | if property is specified, indicates that the link target should be preemptively cached |

## Examples

open search link in ESIP discovery/data cast

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Link property | Value |
| linkage | http:// |
| rel | search, template |
| title | Search service for collection |
| type | application/opensearchdescription+xml |
| protocol |  |
| overlayAPI |  |
| profile | http://a9.com/-/spec/opensearch/1.1/ |
| description | Point to a search service from a collection cast entry |

### OGC Web Feature Service link

link to an OGC web feature. , need feature name (which implies XML schema)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Link property | Value |
| linkage |  |
| rel |  |
| title |  |
| type |  |
| protocol |  |
| overlayAPI |  |
| profile |  |

### OpenDAP endpoint

DAP-URL = "http://" host [ ":" port ] [ abs-path ]

abs-path = server-path data-source-id [ "." ext [ "?" query ] ]

server-path = [ "/" token ]

data-source-id = [ "/" token ]

ext = "das" | "dds" | "dods"

token = <See IETF RFC 2396 for allowable characters>

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Link property | Value |
| linkage |  |
| rel |  |
| title |  |
| type |  |
| protocol |  |
| overlayAPI |  |
| profile |  |

### WS service

with SOAP (need example…)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Link property | Value |
| linkage |  |
| rel |  |
| title |  |
| type |  |
| protocol |  |
| overlayAPI |  |
| profile |  |

### ESRI geoservice

endpoint

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Link property | Value |
| linkage |  |
| rel |  |
| title |  |
| type |  |
| protocol |  |
| overlayAPI |  |
| profile |  |

### TileMill map service

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Link property | Value |
| linkage |  |
| rel |  |
| title |  |
| type |  |
| protocol |  |
| overlayAPI |  |
| profile |  |

OWS context link

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Link property | Value |
| linkage |  |
| rel |  |
| title |  |
| type |  |
| protocol |  |
| overlayAPI |  |
| profile |  |

### ISO19119 Service metadata

link to datasets hosted by the service

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Link property | Value |
| linkage |  |
| rel |  |
| title |  |
| type |  |
| protocol |  |
| overlayAPI |  |
| profile |  |

### macrostrat endpoint

Shanan Peters' services

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Link property | Value |
| linkage |  |
| rel |  |
| title |  |
| type |  |
| protocol |  |
| overlayAPI |  |
| profile |  |

### IRIS seismic data web service

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Link property | Value |
| linkage |  |
| rel |  |
| title |  |
| type |  |
| protocol |  |
| overlayAPI |  |
| profile |  |

### Link to home document

for an NGDS node

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Link property | Value |
| linkage |  |
| rel |  |
| title |  |
| type |  |
| protocol |  |
| overlayAPI |  |
| profile |  |

### Link to Z39.50 service

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Link property | Value |
| linkage |  |
| rel |  |
| title |  |
| type |  |
| protocol |  |
| overlayAPI |  |
| profile |  |

## Implementation—still waiting….

The Atom protocol allows attributes to be added to any element as long as they are not in the atom (<http://www.w3.org/2005/Atom>) namespace (Nottingham and Sayre, 2005, p. 7). An xml schema at <http://schemas.usgin.org/schemas/ExtLinkAttributes0.5.xsd> defines the attributes from Table 6 that extend the base attributes defined on the link element in the Atom Specification.

As a concrete example of the need for clearer conventions for specifying link properties, consider links in simple metadata. The Open Geospatial Consortium catalog service for the web requires all implementations to be able to provide a response conforming to the csw record xml schema (http://schemas.open- gis.net/csw/2.0.2/CSW-discovery.xsd). The content of this schema is essentially the Dublin Core and Dublin Core Term elements (<http://dublincore.org/documents/dcmi-terms/>). Metadata from the ESRI Geoportal (v1.0) CSW implementation encodes links to OGC service end points like this:

<dct:references scheme=” urn:x-esri:specification:ServiceType:ArcIMS:Metadata:Server “>http://url.to.server/wms?service=WMS&request= </dct:references>.

GeoNetwork opensource (OneGeology catalog hosted by BRGM) encodes the capabilities URL thus:

<dc:URI protocol="WWW:LINK-1.0-http--link" description="http://ogc.bgs.ac.uk/cgi-bin/BGS\_GSN\_Bedrock\_Geology/wms">[http://ogc.bgs.ac.uk/cgi-bin/BGS\_GSN\_Bedrock\_Geology/wms?</dc:URI](http://ogc.bgs.ac.uk/cgi-bin/BGS_GSN_Bedrock_Geology/wms?%3c/dc:URI)>

Note the dc:URI is not a valid element in the csw:record XML schema.

Other CSW servers may very well use different encodings. This is not interoperable—a web client cannot reliably parse even a ‘simple’ csw record to get the capabilities URL for an OGC service. The csw:record XML implementation of Dublin Core elements only allows a single attribute (scheme) on the relation element substitution group. It appears that the ESRI approach, using the <dct:references> element with a URI that identifies an OGC getCapabilities document would be a viable solution. The other extended link properties could be added in the <dct:references> element, but this would not be schema valid against the csw:record schema.

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# Glossary

identifier: a string that is intended to correspond to a specific, particular resource

link: an object that has the purpose of enabling access to a resource, a representation of a resource, or some method offered by the resource.

Protocol: a scheme for messaging between two agents, defining what requests are supported, how requests and responses (both normal and for error conditions) are encoded, and how messages are addressed and directed to the proper recipient.

### Graveyard

The content of the service’s response is a representation of the requested resource, discussed in the next section. The internet functions on a series of [‘stacked’ protocols](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communications_protocol#Protocol_layering), starting from the hardware level, and working up to the level of file formats. The internet is defined by the stack of low-level protocols that allow machines to communicate—TCP and IP. This allows applications developed for use on the internet (like the World Wide Web) to be developed by defining higher level protocols transported using the lower level protocols.

Utilization of a URI-based link in the application layer can be specified with three properties:

Link protocol—this determines the protocol for dereferencing the identifier and has implications for operations and options in that dereferencing. HTTP is the most common protocol; a variety of other identifier protocols (doi, issn, isbn, ark) use dereferencing schemes based on HTTP operation, but have separate name servers. The IETF URI specification mandates that “each URI begins with a scheme name” (section 1.1.1, IETF RPC-3986); thus explicit specification as a link attribute for links using URIs should be unnecessary.

Service type– this determines the operations, parameters etc. that may be used in construction of a request for a desired resource, operation, or application state. Service type identifiers should be version-specific.

Service profile – In many cases, knowing the service type (WMS, WFS, OpenDAP, CSW) is not sufficient—there may be additional constraints in particular service instances that are standardized in a profile that needs to be understood in order to successfully use the service. These typically specify particular data schema, vocabularies, and data constraints.

Options for resource representation when dereferencing an identifier have traditionally been accounted for with MIME types and HTTP content negotiation; this has worked fine for handling representations that can be mapped to user applications and resources that a human will interact with mostly by viewing on a computer screen. The evolution into machine-actionable links and linked data requires more explicit approaches to presenting choices to a client that are handled in the application before the http request is issued. Computer processing of representations returned in JSON, XML, CSV, NetCDF encoding may be possible to some degree with no a priori understanding of the content data schema, but things are much easier and more efficient if the client is working with a representation (encoding and schema) that it understands. Thus the client should be able to determine if there is a representation available that it can work with and how to request precisely that representation.

Metadata records that describe a resource intended for use by a software client may present a variety of distribution options (using distribution in the ISO19115 sense). This metadata may be in an Atom feed describing a dataset, a formal metadata record from a catalog search, an archive record for some aggregated resource (OAI Object Reuse and Exchange). A client processing the record needs to be able to identify the distribution / representation option it needs. For example the client might need a WMS that serves tiff images, a WFS that offers GeoSciML mapped features, or a CSW that uses the INSPRIRE ISO profile.

Should be a URI that can dereference to some kind of service specification document. [e.g. CSW 2.0.2, WFS 1.1.1, WMS 1.3.0, OpenSearch 1.1, OpenDAP]. Proposal is that the type URI should indicate the specification version; one or more versions that may be requested can be explicitly indicated by multiple serviceType values.

URI for xml schema or JSON scheme, other description of data structure and content. Clients look at this to pick the link that will get a representation they can use.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| function | Term tells client why they’d use this link. (optional, default value ‘download’). Function property provides mechanism for more granular, application specific indication of link semantics. Example values: 'download', 'browsing', 'fileAccess', ‘service’. |
| media | Indicates intended destination medium or media for style information (see Le Hors et al., 1999, Section 6.13 http://www.w3.org/TR/html401 ). Example values include 'screen', 'tty', 'print', 'braille', 'aural'... Vocabulary appears to be related to type of device or material manifestation (including paper as a device...) that is intended target for resource representation. Default to 'screen', and it is anticipated that other values would be only rarely required. [debate point—is this necessary for links that are intended to operate on the web?] |

[*notes for elaboration* A hypermedia application can be modeled using a behavior tree. A behavior tree is effectively a process flow that’s assembled by a crawler and executed by depth first search. In a data access model, the ultimate goal is to obtain the desired data and have it ready to use in the user's native application environment.]

Machine actionable links to resources that are not simple HTTP GETs for documents a browser will understand would require one or more of the Group 3 attributes in Table 3 (function, protocol, serviceType, and outputScheme). Table 5 is a summary of terms applicable to the function property of a link; these have been extracted from the relationship type compilation as a separate vocabulary. Protocol defaults to HTTP, and this will be the most common value. The protocol property could also be used to flag targetURI’s that are not standard web protocols, e.g. ISBN, DOI, ARK. For links to services with more complex behavior, protocol layers overlying the base (http, ftp) can be specified by serviceType, and if necessary an outputScheme applicable to the serviceType.