

# xADL: Enabling Architecture-Centric Tool Integration With XML

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## ABSTRACT

In order to support architecture-centric tool integration within the ArchStudio 2.0 Integrated Development Environment (IDE), we adopted Extensible Markup Language (XML) to represent the shared architecture-in-progress. Since ArchStudio is an architectural style-based development environment that incorporates an extensive number of tools, including commercial off-the-shelf products, we developed a new, vendor-neutral, ADL-neutral interchange format called Extensible Architecture Description Language (xADL), as well as a ‘vocabulary’ specific to the C2 style (xC2). This paper outlines our vision for representing architectures as hypertext, the design rationale behind xADL and xC2, and summarizes our engineering experience with this strategy.

**Keywords:** Software environments, software architectures, off-the-shelf tool integration, XML

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The widespread adoption of Software Engineering Environments (SEE) predates the term itself. The rational decomposition of the development process and its artifacts can arguably be traced back to the advent of separate compilation. The zeroth generation of SEE integration took files as its primary unit of discourse between various tools. The well-known UNIX pipe-and-filter architectural style was entirely based on the concept that one tool’s output data could be used as an input to another [11].

The first step, then, was a repository-centric approach for managing these artifacts. In such an Integrated Development Environment (IDE), different tools would work upon a central, shared database representing the product-in-progress. The archetype of this generation was the Stoneman reference model for the Ada Program Support Environment [7]. Interlisp [26] can be seen as one instance of this approach with suite of tools operating on a shared parse-tree.

A versioned filesystem was another popular variant, notably Revision Control System (RCS) [27].

Continuing the ascent, a second generation of process-centric IDEs emerged in the 1980s which took relations between these artifacts and their associated workflows as its unit of discourse. Tools such as Marvel [3] assisted developers by automating basic process steps and coordinating the work of tools “outside” the development path proper. In the extreme, IDE support tools maintained *only* those relations, as in the Chimera Linkbase [1].

Finally, we see the current era as the advent of architecture-centric IDEs that control the evolution of software throughout its lifecycle using architecture descriptions as its primary unit of discourse. As an example, ArchStudio 2.0 assumes the existence of versioned repositories and process automation in its foundation, and so focuses on the design, evaluation, instantiation, and editing of C2-style architectures. Supporting tool integration in this generation now requires an open, hypertext web representing the entire product, from architecture down to development artifacts.

We developed an Extensible Markup Language (XML) syntax for Architecture Description Languages (xADL) and customizations to the C2 style in particular (xC2) in support of these goals. Furthermore, we integrated our XML Abstract Syntax Tree (AST) and an Abstract Data Type (ADT) representing the architecture-in-progress to the ArchStudio 2.0 environment on the fly, thereby highlighting the ease of dynamism in an IDE itself designed in the C2 style. By wrapping a parsed, shared representation of the work at hand behind a (potentially-distributed) event notification interface, our approach technologically updates the basic strategy of Field [23].

The balance of this paper focuses particularly on the role XML played in the integration of several tools within ArchStudio 2.0. We shall outline the origins and promise of XML broadly, our detailed design of xADL and xC2, our implementation experience with it, and a discussion of its implications for broader and deeper tool integration within architecture-centric IDEs.

## 2 EXTENSIBLE MARKUP LANGUAGE (XML)

The HyperText Markup Language (HTML) allows the

structural markup of World Wide Web documents. Now, HTML's evolutionary successor, XML, takes document markup to the next level, by offering human-readable semantic markup that is also machine-readable. As a result, XML makes it dramatically easier to develop and deploy new mission-specific markup, enabling the automation of the authoring, parsing, and processing of networked data.

Broadly speaking, the XML 1.0 standard [6] is a simplification of the Standard Generalized Markup Language (SGML) which itself dates back to the mid-60s. XML should be seen as a toolkit for creating new elements (also known as 'tags') and attributes upon them, as well as grammar rules governing the parse tree. All of these rules are captured in a Document Type Definition (DTD), which can be used to formally validate any XML instance (file) against it.

More usefully, though, XML defines a lower level of conformance known as 'well-formed'. This level merely assures that all the elements open and close properly, and so on. Such purely mechanical checking allows designers to 'mix and match' elements from several DTDs. In particular, the XML Namespaces facility allows us to interpret unknown element names as URLs which can be further investigated automatically or by hand. Namespaces thus disambiguate potentially conflicting tag semantics.

Our data integration strategy for ArchStudio 2.0 adopted XML for several of the properties introduced above:

- A text format governed by an open standard promised future-proof file formats. Furthermore, the advent of hybrid XHTML modules already provided a rich tagset for human-readable documentation and presentation of the architecture-in-progress.
- Well-formed XML accommodated multiple tools' own subtrees within the data model, as well as tool-specific attributes decorating existing elements.
- Namespaces explicitly articulated separate control over the vocabulary for describing high-level architectures in common (xADL), style-specific features (xC2), and tool-specific additional data.
- Intrinsic support for hypertext linking encouraged future

refactoring of architecture description into separate resources describing individual components and types, potentially published remotely by several developers (hyperlinked reuse).

- Finally, rich protocols for accessing, managing, and versioning XML repositories already existed, in the form of WebDAV (Web Distributed Authoring and Versioning) extensions to HTTP and the XPointer language for hyperlinking directly within XML documents

### 3 APPROACH

ArchStudio [20] is an architecture-centric IDE, based on the C2 architectural style [25]. The C2 style is an event- and component-based style, which allows dynamic evolution of the software system at runtime [12], due to its enforced decomposition into units of computation and data store, called *components*, and units that enable the interaction among components, called *connectors*, as suggested by David Garlan and Mary Shaw [23]. The highly dynamic nature of the C2 style is primarily caused by a central rule of the style, which does not allow direct links between two components, but rather requires the involvement of a connector in between. Hence components may be plugged in and out of the system without leaving another component behind with a dangling link. The separation of architectural units into components and connectors may be regarded analog to the nodes and transitions concept of Petri nets [21], where direct links may only exist from nodes to transitions and vice versa, but not within each domain. However, the C2 concept differs insofar as connector may be linked directly to other connectors.

ArchStudio not only supports the development of C2 style software, but was itself implemented in the C2 style. Such support for software evolution made ArchStudio itself an excellent target for incremental tool integration. Version 2.0 built upon a suite of tools already developed for ArchStudio 1.0 to add a new shared repository format (xADL), new style-checking tools, and several commercial- and research-grade off-the-shelf tools, including Rational Rose [22], Armani [19], Metamata [14], and JavaBeans [24] as shown in Figure 1.

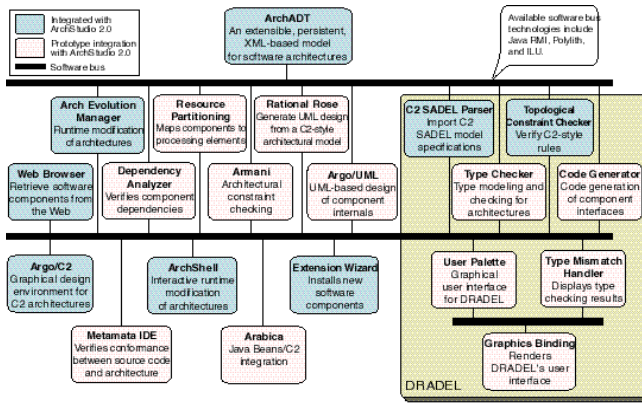


Figure 1. ArchStudio 2.0 integrates several tools in the C2 style.

The first step required introducing an abstract data type representing the architecture-in-progress, ArchADT, quite apart from its new representation in an XML-based abstract syntax tree (AST). Each step had a beneficial consequence:

1. Since the message-based C2 style transmits by-copy rather than by-reference, globally sharing an ArchADT replaced the habit of sending enormous messages representing the entire architecture-in-progress. Furthermore, the new technique removed artificial sequence dependencies for tools that modified disjoint aspects of the architecture.
2. While ArchStudio 1.0 tool integration was either limited to tools that understood its internal application programming interface (API) or were mapped to it using component wrappers, the advent of XML at least eased data integration with off-the-shelf tools. Since the AST supported lowest-common-denominator access for tools which added new subtrees of information, or new attributes of existing objects, an XML AST enabled integration of tool-specific information transparently, within the ArchADT.

In particular, we designed xADL to be a shared language for representing a variety of possible ADLs. It introduces five basic tags, namely <Architecture>, <Component>, <Connector>, <ComponentType>, and <ConnectorType>, each with its own subtrees as well as hyperlinks between them.

- xADL
  - Architecture
    - Links
- Component
  - Supports
- ComponentType
  - Interface
    - Parameter
- Connector
  - Supports
- ConnectorType
  - Interface
    - Parameter

where

- xADL->Architecture->Links specifies a list of directed hyperlinks between component and connector instances (links to <Component> and <Connector> tags, respec-

```
<!-- xC2 adds one parameter to the xADL:ConnectorType tag
namely a message filtering policy with a default of none -->
<ELEMENT xADL:ConnectorType (Supports*)>
<!ATTLIST xADL:ConnectorType name CDATA #REQUIRED
```

```
    xC2:filter (no_filtering
notification_filtering
message_filtering
prioritized
message_sink) | 'no_filtering'>
```

Figure 2. An excerpt from the combined xADL and xC2 DTD (tively),

- *Component->Supports* specifies name and type(s) supported by a component instance,
- *ComponentType->Interface* specifies name and method interfaces for each component type,
- *ComponentType->Interface->Parameter* specifies input and output parameters of a component interface,
- *Connector->Supports* specifies name and type(s) supported by a connector instance,
- *ConnectorType->Interface* specifies name and method interfaces for each connector type, and
- *ConnectorType->Interface->Parameter* specifies input and output parameters of the connector interface.

xADL may be extended to support a particular architectural style, such as C2, by mixing-in additional XML Namespaces. In our case, xC2 added C2-specific tags, attributes, and constraints to the specification, as shown in the example in Figure 2.

xADL also supports the storage of tool-specific information as well-formed XML data, though at the expense of formal validation against a single, unified DTD. Leaving the interpretation of data to participating tools still allows ArchStudio to centrally manage and monitor the architecture-in-progress, even if it does not “understand” the data it stores.

### 3 IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES

The first tool to be upgraded was DRADEL (Development of Robust Architectures using a Description and Evolution Language) [18]. As the hub of the first-generation system, it was used to model architectures in the C2 style, check and enforce style constraints, manage heterogeneous subtyping, and generate application skeleton code. The central artifact representing the architecture-in-progress was a read-only, edit-externally C2SADEL text file.

Our new repository strategy was implemented at two layers: a ‘physical’ AST that guaranteed storage of well-formed XML fragments; and a ‘logical’ ArchADT that enforced the grammar and semantic rules (validity) of xADL and xC2. For the former service, we published a request-response message interface for basic tree manipulation: CreateTree, AddChildNode, DeleteNode, SetAttribute, GetNodeInfo, ReadFromFile, SaveToFile, and so on in the manner of Figure 1. At the logical layer, we preserved the existing interface at a higher level of abstraction, such as



support simple component interconnections; furthermore, Rapide employs specialized "connection components" to support more complex interactions. Additionally, all ADLs model component interfaces and do so in a relatively uniform fashion. Therefore, these shared aspects of ADLs would become part of the basic xADL schema.

That basic schema could then be extended in a number of ways to represent the varying parts of architectural descriptions across ADLs, such as the manner in which ADLs model architectural semantics, support evolution (both at system design time and run time), constrain the architecture (and its evolution), and so forth. Thus, for example, an xADL schema could simultaneously describe architectures specified in C2SADEL [18] and Wright [1]. If a particular tool is interested in the static model of behavior, it would access C2SADEL's component invariants and pre- and postconditions; alternately, if the tool is interested in the system's dynamic semantics, it would access Wright's CSP-related items and ignore others. Another possibility that xADL affords us is the support for multiple configurations of the same set of components, where we access the part of the schema representing the specific configuration we are interested in, disregarding all other configurations.

Figure 1. An example xADL file viewed in Microsoft Internet Explorer 5.0 rendered by our default XSL stylesheet

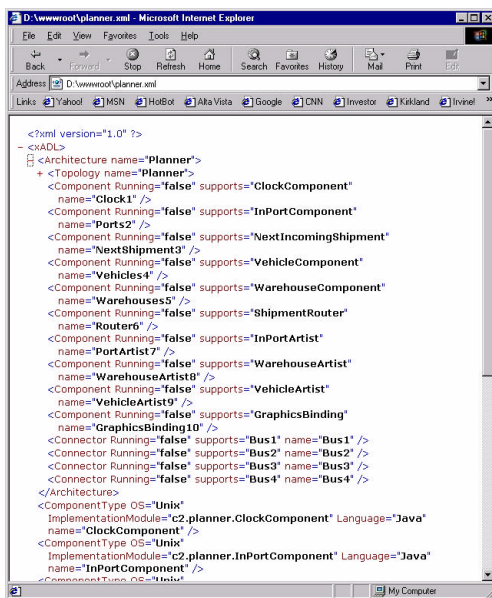
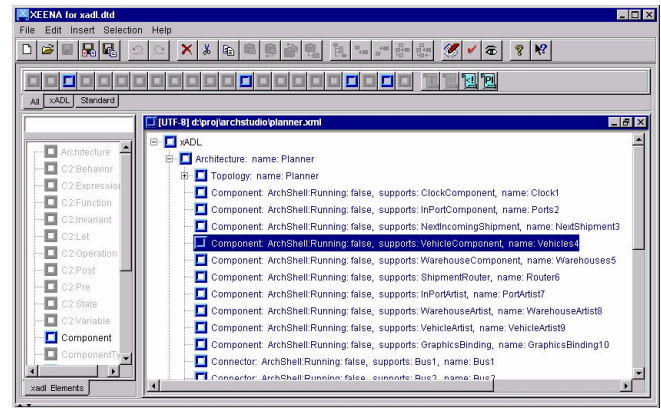


Figure 2. IBM's Xeena is a DTD-driven editor which can thus

automatically enforce XML validation rules on xADL/xC2 files



## 5 CONCLUSIONS

We adopted XML as a key technology for enabling architecture-centric tool integration in the ArchStudio 2.0 IDE. The C2 style eased the evolution from the previous version's custom text file format, C2SADEL, to a generic XML AST as the repository. This had immediate benefits for integrating several tools' data in the same file, for annotating existing data without interfering with its original use, and for hyperlinking to external data transparently.

Furthermore, we developed a new ontology for describing entire families of Architecture Description Languages (ADLs). By extracting the five most common abstractions and their relations into a top-level xADL namespace, we were able to separately represent data specific to the C2 architectural style and C2SADEL in a subsidiary xC2 namespace.

These technologies directly aided a strictly distributed team to integrate a substantial set of research and commercial tools within ArchStudio 2.0. Our eventual aim is even wider, to support Internet-scale development, with potentially large and varying developer communities composing systems over long times and distances [8]. Representing architectures as hypertext affords us reach; extracting our ontology in XML promises depth, through integration with generic, non-ADL-aware XML applications.

## 6 ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We wish to acknowledge the following individuals for their participation in the work described in this paper. ArchStudio 1.0 was developed by P. Oreizy and N. Medvidovic. ArchStudio 2.0 was developed by P. Oreizy, R. Khare, M. Guntersdorfer, K. Nies, E. Dashofy, Y. Kanomata, R. Natarajan, A. Hitomi, R. Klashner, L. Pan, M. Dias, M. Vieira, S. Devanathan, and J. Robbins.

This effort was sponsored by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, and Air Force Research Laboratory, Air Force Material Command, USAF, under agreement numbers F30602-97-2-0021 and F30602-99-C-0174. The U. S. Government is authorized to reproduce and distribute reprints for Governmental purposes notwithstanding any copyright annotation thereon.

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## 8 APPENDIX: THE XADL / XC2 DOCUMENT TYPE DEFINITION (DTD)

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="US-ASCII"?>
```

```
<!-- Revision 1 of xADL/1.0 -->
```

```
<!-- xADL
```

```
This is an arbitrary parent/container element that demarcates the beginning of a "xADL block" of information.
```

```
In the future, we want xADL webs of documents spun from individual XML instances describing single instances, interfaces, or architectural configurations. However, initial implementations will use a single file, so we created a "surrogate parent" element which functions as the root for XML purposes -->
```

```
<!ELEMENT xADL (ComponentType | ConnectorType | Architecture)*>
```

```
<!-- ARCHITECTURE
```

```
The Architecture tag represents a single configuration of instances by the directed edges between them. Thus, the content model is a list of Link tags. -->
```

```
<!ELEMENT Architecture (Component | Connector)* , Topology>
```

```
<!ATTLIST Architecture name CDATA #REQUIRED>
```

```
<!ELEMENT Topology (Link)*>
```

```
<!-- LINK
```

```
The Link Element represents a single directed edge between any two instances (Components or Connectors). In particular, the edge endpoint can be specified as a particular Port by using XLink Fragment identifiers, e.g. gameboard#Top, or vault#DepositorySlot.
```

```
-->
```

```
<!ELEMENT Link EMPTY>
```

```
<!ATTLIST Link from CDATA #REQUIRED
to CDATA #REQUIRED
name CDATA #IMPLIED >
```

```
<!-- COMPONENT TYPE
```

```
This tag has only one xADL attribute, name. At the basic xADL level, the only salient feature of a ComponentType is its Methods. A type hierarchy, if any, can be constructed with the Supports child element
```

```
C2, in particular DRADEL, adds analysis of "behavior", for which see the optional child tag Behavior -->
```

```
<!ELEMENT ComponentType (Supports)*,
```

Method\*,  
x2:Behavior?>

<!ATTLIST ComponentType name CDATA #REQUIRED>

<!-- CONNECTOR TYPE  
This tag has only one xADL attribute, name. At the basic xADL level, there are no further refinements on a Connector except its type relations (if any).  
  
C2 adds the attribute filter, specifying one of several predefined choices. The default setting is no\_filtering-->

<!ELEMENT ConnectorType (Supports\*)>  
<!ATTLIST ConnectorType name CDATA #REQUIRED  
x2:filter (no\_filtering | notification\_filtering | message\_filtering | prioritized | message\_sink ) 'no\_filtering'>

<!-- METHOD  
The Method tag describes a single operation upon several Parameters (which can represent inputs, outputs, or both).  
  
C2 adds the direction attribute.  
C2, in particular DRADEL, referred to these as InterfaceElements.  
C2, in particular DRADEL, maps each Method to an Operation for behavioral analysis. x2:mapToOper cites a value for uid which occurs on an Operation (since it is not clear if Operation names are unique enough) -->

<!ELEMENT Method (Parameter\*)>  
<!ATTLIST Method name CDATA #REQUIRED  
x2:direction (provide | require) #REQUIRED  
x2:mapToOper IDREF #IMPLIED >

<!-- PARAMETER  
To support arbitrary method signatures in xADL, parameter roles (in, out, inout; default of 'in') are specified separately for each parameter. This allows multiple results, for examples. The Parameter tag is an empty element.  
Its type attribute is an opaque string for our purposes (e.g. "Int")  
  
C2, in particular DRADEL, maps each Parameter to a Variable for behavioral analysis. x2:mapToVar cites a value for uid which occurs on an Variable (since it is not clear if Variable names are unique enough) -->

<!ELEMENT Parameter EMPTY>  
<!ATTLIST Parameter name CDATA #REQUIRED  
type CDATA #REQUIRED  
role ( in | out | inout ) 'in'  
x2:mapToVar IDREF #IMPLIED >

<!-- COMPONENT  
The Component tag is a named instance that can point to one (or more) ComponentTypes it supports. It can expose these functions over one (or more) named Ports.  
  
NOTE: C2 LINK SETS  
C2 data structures traditionally put all of a brick's connections to other bricks on this one, but we have chosen to entirely externalize this responsibility to the Link tags, leaving it as a simple computation over the hyperweb to compute sets such as "aboveCompLinks". -->

<!ELEMENT Component (Port\*,Supports\*)>  
<!ATTLIST Component name CDATA #REQUIRED >

<!-- CONNECTOR  
The Connector tag is a named instance that can point to one (or more) ConnectorTypes it supports. It can expose these functions over one (or more) named Ports. -->

<!ELEMENT Connector (Port\*,Supports\*)>  
<!ATTLIST Connector name CDATA #REQUIRED >

<!-- PORT  
The Port tag is a qualifier for naming Link endpoints within a given Component or Connector.  
  
NOTE: C2 USAGE  
C2-style architectures will have to explicitly add <Port type="Top"> and <Port type="Bottom"> to every single Component and Connector, and also specify #Top and #Bottom on every link. -->

<!ELEMENT Port EMPTY>  
<!ATTLIST Port type CDATA #REQUIRED >

<!-- SUPPORTS  
The Supports tag specifies type-compatibility for Component and Connector. However, the downside is that XML verification alone can not enforce type-coherency (i.e. that a Component's Supports child can only link to ComponentTypes rather than ConnectorTypes).  
  
The "type" attribute must be a unique string occurring in some other ComponentType or ConnectorType's "name" attribute. -->

<!ELEMENT Supports EMPTY>  
<!ATTLIST Supports type CDATA #REQUIRED >

<!-- x2:BEHAVIOR  
The following x2: prefixes tags all support C2, in particular DRADEL, in specifying component behavior. It also adds mapToOper and mapToVar attributes to Method and Parameter, respectively, to link behavioral specifications to interfaces.  
  
The x2:Behavior tag has only one xADL attribute, name, which is implied as the name of the enclosing ComponentType.  
  
Its children map onto C2SADL's specifications for state variables, invariants, and operations. -->

<!ELEMENT x2:Behavior (x2:State, x2:Invariant, x2:Operation\*)>  
<!ATTLIST x2:Behavior name CDATA #IMPLIED>

<!ELEMENT x2:State (x2:Variable | x2:Function)\* >  
<!ELEMENT x2:Variable EMPTY>  
<!ATTLIST x2:Variable name CDATA #REQUIRED  
type CDATA #REQUIRED  
uid CDATA #REQUIRED >

<!-- x2:FUNCTION  
From and To values are supposed to be types, either language built-ins (Integer, etc) or custom types -->

<!ELEMENT x2:Function EMPTY>  
<!ATTLIST x2:Function name CDATA #REQUIRED  
from CDATA #REQUIRED  
to CDATA #REQUIRED >

<!ELEMENT x2:Invariant (x2:Expression)\*>

<!-- x2:EXPRESSION  
Expression is an anonymous grouping tag to bracket unparsed expression text from the original C2SADL spec.  
E.g. <x2:Expression> x <math>\leq</math> y </x2:Expression> -->

<!ELEMENT x2:Expression ANY>

<!-- x2:OPERATION  
Operation is a named, uniquely identified grouping tag to bracket related information from the original C2SADL spec. In particular, it may include at most one Let, Pre, and Post sections. -->

<!ELEMENT x2:Operation (x2:Let?, x2:Pre?, x2:Post?)>  
<!ATTLIST x2:Operation name CDATA #REQUIRED  
direction (provide | require ) #REQUIRED

|                   |                         |       |             |   |  |
|-------------------|-------------------------|-------|-------------|---|--|
| <!ELEMENT xC2:Let | uid<br>(xC2:Variable)*> | CDATA | #REQUIRED > | <!ELEMENT xC2:Pre<br><!ELEMENT xC2:Post | (xC2:Expression)><br>(xC2:Expression)> |
|-------------------|-------------------------|-------|-------------|---|--|