

# A Denotational Semantics of Concepts in ODP Information Language

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**Abstract**— Distributed systems can be very large and complex and the many different considerations which influence their design can result in a substantial body of specification, which needs a structuring framework if it is to be managed successfully. The purpose of the RM-ODP is to define such a framework. The Reference Model for Open Distributed Processing (RM-ODP) provides a framework within which support of distribution, inter-working and portability can be integrated. It defines: an object model, architectural concepts and architecture for the development of ODP systems in terms of five viewpoints. However, RM-ODP is a meta-norm, and several ODP standards have to be defined. Indeed, the viewpoint languages are abstract in sense that they define what concepts should be supported and not how these concepts should be represented using the UML/OCL meta-modeling approach. In this paper, we report on the definition and address of the syntax and semantics for a fragment of ODP object concepts defined in the RM-ODP foundations part and in the information language. These concepts are suitable for describing and constraining ODP information viewpoint specifications.

**KEYWORDS:** RM-ODP, Information Language, Structural Concepts, Denotational Meta-modeling Semantics, UML/OCL, PIM, PSM and MDA.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of distributed processing has led to a need of coordinating framework for the standardization of Open Distributed Processing (ODP). The open distributed processing (ODP) computational viewpoint describes the functionality of a system and its environment in terms of a configuration of objects interacting at interfaces, independently of their distribution. Quality of service (QoS) contracts and service level agreements are an integral part of any computational specification, which is specified in ODP in terms of environment contracts. The Reference Model for ODP (RM-ODP) [1-4] provides such a framework. It creates an architecture supporting distribution, networking and portability. The foundations part [2] contains the definition of concepts and analytical framework for normalized description of (arbitrary) distributed processing systems.

These concepts are gathered in several categories including basic modeling concepts, specification concepts, organizational concepts, and structuring concepts. The architecture part [3] contains specifications of the required characteristics that qualify distributed processing to be open. It defines a framework containing:

- Five viewpoints called: enterprise, information, computation, engineering and technology; which provide a basis for the ODP systems specification.
- A language for each viewpoint, defining concepts and rules to specify ODP systems from the corresponding viewpoint.
- Specifications of functions required to support ODP systems.
- Transparency prescriptions, showing how to use the ODP functions to achieve distribution transparency.

In other words, the first three viewpoints do not take into account neither distribution nor heterogeneity inherent problems. This principle corresponds closely to the concepts of PIM (Platform Independent Model) and PSM (Platform Specific Model) models in MDA (Model Driven Architecture) architecture [5]. However, RM-ODP is a meta-norm [6] and can not be directly applied. Indeed, for instance, the viewpoint languages are abstract in sense that they define what concepts should be supported, not how these concepts should be represented. It is important that RM-ODP does not use the term language in its largest sense: a set of terms and rules for the construction of statements from terms; it does not propose any notation for supporting viewpoint languages.

In fact, RM-ODP provides only a framework for the definition of new ODP standards. These standards include those for ODP functions [7-8]; standards for modeling and specifying ODP systems; standards for methodology, programming, implementing, and testing ODP systems. Elsewhere, the languages Z [9], SDL [10], LOTOS [11] and, Esterelle [12] are used in RM-ODP architectural semantics part [4] for the specification of ODP concepts. Unfortunately, up to now, no formal method is suitable to specify and verify every aspect of an ODP system. The inherent characteristics of ODP systems imply the need to integrate different specification languages and to handle non-behavioral properties of ODP systems that is the QoS concepts.

There had been an amount of research to apply UML [13] as a syntactic notation for the ODP viewpoint language [14-16]. The taken approach is to give a meta-model description for the language; it is a definition of this language

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by itself. This is presented in terms of three views: the abstract syntax, the well-formedness rules and the modeling elements semantics. The abstract syntax is expressed using a subset of UML static modeling notations that are class diagrams. The well-formedness rules are expressed in OCL [17], a precise language based on first order-logic. OCL is used for expressing constraints on objects structure which cannot be expressed by class diagrams only. We used the meta-modeling approach [18] to define syntax of a sub-language for ODP QoS-aware enterprise viewpoint specifications.

Furthermore, a part of UML meta-model itself has a precise semantic [19] defined using denotational meta-modeling approach. The denotational approach [20] is realized by defining the instance form of every language element and a set of rules determining which instances are denoted or not by a particular language element. There are three main steps through a denotational meta-modeling approach to the semantics:

1. Define the meta-model for the model's language: object template, interface template, action template, type, and role.
2. Define the meta-model for the instances' language: objects, binders, and interfaces.
3. Define the mapping or the meaning function between these two languages.

There are good reasons for adopting the UML meta-modeling approach in context of ODP systems. The UML meta-models provide a precise core of any CASE tool. The tools include a consistency checker that makes sure that invariants defined on a model do not conflict, a consistency checker between meta-models makes sure that different system specifications are consistent and do not conflict. Besides, for testing ODP systems [2, 3], the current techniques [21, 22] are not widely accepted. A new approach for testing, named agile programming [23, 24] or test first approach [25] is being increasingly adopted. The opinion is integrating system model and testing model using UML meta-modeling approach [26]. This approach is based on the executable UML [27]. In this context, OCL is used to specify the properties that have to be tested. OCL also serves to attach constraints to UML meta-models in order to verify the coherence of meta-models and to translate the constraints into code to evaluate them on instance models.

The part of RM-ODP considered in this paper is a subset for describing and constraining the structure of ODP information viewpoint specifications. It consists of modeling and specifying concepts defined in the RM-ODP foundations part and concepts in the information language. The UML/OCL meta-model developed here elaborates the conceptual core of the ODP information viewpoint language. We do not consider concepts for describing dynamic behavior.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 presents the literature review. Section 3 describes the subset of concepts considered in this work named the object model and information viewpoint. Section 4 describes the meta-model for generic models, object, action, template,

type/subtype, class/subclass and basic/derived class. Section 5 describes the meta-model for models instances, which are essentially object diagrams. Section 6 makes the connection between models and their instances. This introduces the basic form of the semantic approach described here. A conclusion and perspectives finalize the paper.

## II. LITERATURE OF REVIEW

*Behavior models play a central role in system specifications. Many specification languages can be used to specify the behavior of a business and IT systems. A system designer chooses a particular language depending on the designer's experience and on the problems he is trying to solve. For example, to show the conformance of the implementation of a system behavior with its specification, a system designer can use formal languages (for example, Pi-calculus). To visualize the state machine of a developed system, a system designer may use a UML statechart diagram or activity diagram (a variation of a state machine in which the states represent the performance of actions or subactivities [34]). The design of complex systems requires that a system designer solve many problems simultaneously (visualize a model, check the conformance of a model, etcetera), thus several specification languages should be used. This raises a problem: a system designer needs to build several independent models of the same system. This leads to the duplication of the information, which can be an additional source of errors: models done in different languages can be inconsistent.*

*The concept from the RM-ODP semantic domain that is necessary for the modeling of the behavior of systems was considered in [35]. The basic concepts that were used in this work are taken from the clause 8 "Basic modeling concepts" of the RM-ODP Part 2. These concepts are: action, time, and state. According to [30], these concepts are essentially the first-order propositions about model elements. Also used, some concepts (type, instance, and precondition, postcondition) from the clause 9 "Specification concepts". Specification concepts are the higher-order propositions applied to the first-order propositions about the model elements. Wegmann [31] states: "Basic Modeling Concepts and generic Specification Concepts are defined by RM-ODP as two independent conceptual categories. Essentially, they are two qualitative dimensions that are necessary for defining model elements that correspond to entities from the universe of discourse".*

*To explain the semantics of the generic model more clearly, the Alloy formalism was used. Alloy is a simple modeling language that allows a modeler to describe the conceptual space of a problem domain. Using Alloy, specifying the RMODP semantic domain can be obtained.*

*RM-ODP conceptual elements from the semantic domain can be partitioned in the following way:*

```
model RM-ODP {  
  domain {ODP_Concepts}  
  state {  
    partition ... BasicModellingConcepts,  
    SpecificationConcepts : static  
    ODP_Concepts  
    ...  
  }  
}
```

### **Code Fragment 1. RM-ODP model**

*Let's consider the minimum set of modeling concepts (Basic Modeling Concepts and Specification Concepts) necessary for the specification of systems behavior. There are a number of approaches for specifying the behavior of distributed systems coming from people with different backgrounds and considering different aspects of behavior. "However, they can almost all be described in terms of a single formal model" [32]. Based on [32], Lamport specifies the behavior of a concurrent system. A system designer has "to specify a set of states, a set of action and a set of behavior". Each behavior is modeled as a finite or infinite sequence of interchangeable states and actions.*

*To describe this sequence there are mainly two dual approaches. According to [33] they are:*

- 1. "Modeling systems by describing their set of actions and their behaviors".*
- 2. "Modeling systems by describing their state spaces and their possible sequences of state changes".*

*"These views are dual in the sense that an action can be understood to define state changes, and state changes occurring in state sequences can be understood as abstract representations of actions" [33]. In [35] work, he/she considers both of these approaches as an abstraction of the more general approach based on RM-ODP.*

### **III. .RM-ODP**

RM-ODP is a framework for the construction of open distributed systems. It defines a generic object model in foundations part, and an architecture which contains specifications of the required characteristics that qualify distributed processing as open. The architecture extends and specializes object concepts of foundations part. The RM-ODP architecture model consists of a set of five viewpoint models, the concepts and rules associated with the language of each model, the distribution transparency constructs, and the ODP functions. The entire RM-ODP model is based on the RM-ODP foundations of an object model, rules for specification, and rules for structuring

RM-ODP (Model Reference - Open Distributed Processing) [ISO96a] [ISO96b] [ISO98] is an international standard published by ISO/IEC. It provides a reference model for the specification of open distributed applications. The RM-ODP model can describe a system according to five viewpoints; each viewpoint is interested in a particular aspect of the system. These viewpoints are:

**Enterprise.** It introduces the concepts necessary to represent a system in the context of an enterprise on which it operates. It is interested to the objective and the policies of a system. A system is then represented by a community which is a configuration of enterprise objects formed to achieve a

goal.

**Information.** It is focused on the semantics of information and the treatment carried out on information. A system is then described by information objects, relationships and behavior. The description is expressed through the use of three diagrams named invariant, static and dynamic.

**Computational.** It allows a functional decomposition of the system. The various functions are fulfilled by objects that interact thanks to their interfaces. The basic concepts define the type of the interfaces which the computational objects support, the way in which the interfaces can be bound, and the forms of interaction which can take place. Adaptation management in multi-view systems

**Engineering.** It is focused on the deployment and communication of a system. It defines communication concepts like channel, stub, skeleton and deployment concepts like cluster, capsule, etc.

**Technology.** It describes the implementation of a system in term of configuration of technical objects representing the hardware and software components of the implementation. The goal of such a description is to provide additional information for the implementation and the test, by selecting standard solutions for the components and the communication mechanisms.

#### **A. .RM-ODP OBJECT MODEL (FOUNDATIONS PART)**

The RM-ODP international standard [5] presents a very good architectural framework for modeling distributed systems. In our experience, unfortunately at the present time not many modelers use the standard in their everyday practice. It's a pity, considering the amount of highly qualified experts' knowledge invested in the project and the big constructive potential that its results might bring to practice if they were adequately used. We see one of the ways to promote the use of RM-ODP in formalization of its framework. The formalization requires a careful and attentive translation of the standard definitions into formal logical constructions, but once done it would allow creation of ODP-based software toolsets that could bring to modelers an "easy to be applied" version of the standard.

Generally, the term object model refers to the collection of concepts used to describe objects in an object-oriented specification (OMG CORBA), Object model [5] and RM-ODP object model [4]. It corresponds closely to the use of the term data-model in the relational data model. To avoid misunderstandings, the RM-ODP defines each of the concepts commonly encountered in object oriented models. It underlines a basic object model which is unified in the sense that it has successfully to serve each of the five ODP viewpoints. It defines the basic concepts concerned with existence and activity: the expression of what exists, where it is and what it does. The core concepts defined in the object model are object and action. An object is the unit of encapsulation: a model of an entity. It is characterized by its

behavior and, dually, by its states. Encapsulation means that changes in an object state can occur only as a result of internal actions or interactions. An action is a concept for modeling something which happens. ODP actions may have duration and may overlap in time. All actions are associated with at least one object: internal actions are associated with a single object; interactions are actions associated with several objects.

Objects have an identity, which means that each object is distinct from any other object. Its identity implies that there exists a reliable way to refer to objects in a model. Depending on the RM-ODP viewpoint, the emphasis may be placed on behavior or on states. When the emphasis is placed on behavior, an object is informally called to perform functions and offer services, these functions are specified in terms of interfaces. An interface is a subset of interactions where an object can participate. Contrary to other object models, ODP object can have multiple interfaces.

The other concepts defined in the object model are derived from concepts of object and action; those are class, template, type, subtype/supertype, subclass/superclass, composition and behavioral compatibility. Though, the composition of objects is a combination of two or more objects yielding a new object. An object is behaviorally compatible with a second object with respect to a set of criteria if the first object can replace the second object with no notice by the environment on the difference in object behavior on basis of that set of criteria.

A type (*of an*  $\langle x \rangle$ ) is a predicate characterizing a collection of  $\langle x \rangle$ s. The ODP notion of type is much more general than most of object models. Also, ODP permits to define several types, and dynamically change types.

A class (*of an*  $\langle x \rangle$ ) defines the set of all  $\langle x \rangle$ s satisfying a type. An object class, in the ODP meaning, represents the collection of objects that satisfy a given type. Many object models do not clearly distinguish between a specification for an object and the set of objects that fit the specification. ODP makes the distinction between template and explicit class.

An  $\langle x \rangle$  template specifies the common features of a collection  $x$  in a sufficient detail that an  $x$  can be instantiated using it.

#### B. RM-ODP Information language

The information held by the ODP system about entities in real world, including the ODP system itself, is modeled in an information specification in terms of information objects, and their relationships and behaviors.

Basic information elements are modeled by atomic information objects. More complex information is modeled as composite information objects which, as any other ODP object, exhibit behavior, state, identity and encapsulation. Its type is a predicate characterizing a collection of information objects, which their class is the set of all information objects satisfying a given type.

An information object template specifies the common features of an information objects collection in sufficient detail that an information object can be instantiated using it. It may reference static, invariant and dynamic schema.

An action is a model of something that happens in real world. Actions are instances; their types are modeled by ODP action types. An action in the information viewpoint is associated with at least one information object. It can be either internal action or interaction.

An invariant schema is a set of predicates on one or more information objects which must always be true. The predicates constrain the possible states and state changes of the objects on which they apply.

ODP also notes that an invariant schema can specify the types of one or more information objects; that will always be satisfied by whatever behavior the objects might exhibit. A static schema defines the state of one or more information objects, at some point in time, subject to the constraints of any invariant schema.

A dynamic schema is a requirement of the allowable state changes of one or more information objects, subject to the constraints of any invariant schema. A dynamic schema specifies how the information can evolve as the system operates. In addition to describing state changes, dynamic schema can also create and delete information objects, and allow reclassifications of instances from one type to another. Besides, in the information language, a state change involving a set of objects can be seen as an interaction between those objects. Not all the objects involved in the interaction need to change state; some of the objects may be involved in a read-only manner [29].

#### IV. UNITS

The SI unit for magnetic field strength  $H$  is A/m. However, if you wish to use units of T, either refer to magnetic flux density  $B$  or magnetic field strength symbolized as  $\mu_0 H$ . Use the center dot to separate compound units, e.g., "A·m<sup>2</sup>."

#### V. SYNTAX DOMAIN

We define in this section the meta-models for concepts presented in the previous section. Figure 1 defines the context free syntax for the core of object concepts, and figure 2 defines the context free syntax for the information language.

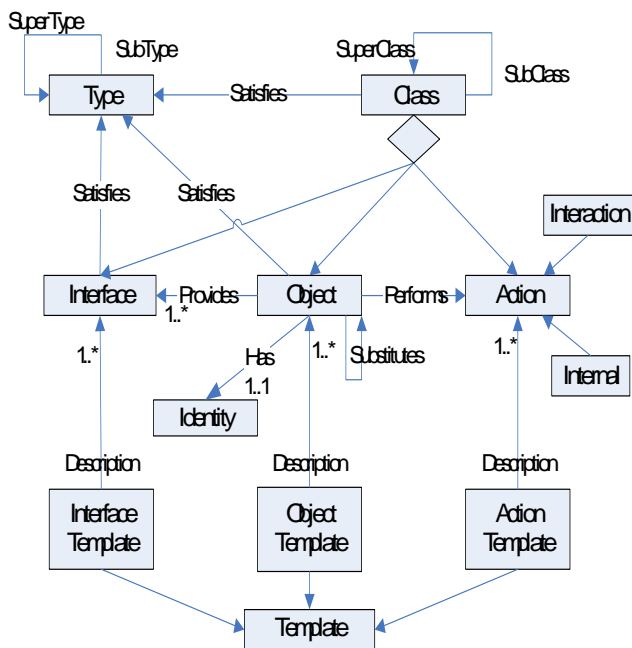


Fig. 1 RM-ODP Foundation Object Model

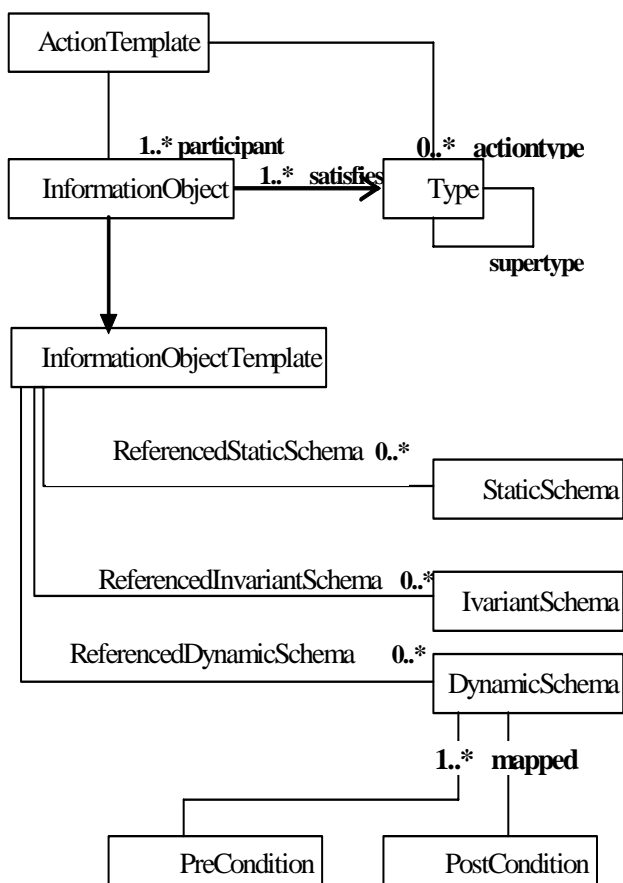


Fig. 2 Information concepts

In the following, we define context constraints for the defined syntax.

**Context m: Model inv:**

```
m.Specifier->includesAll(m.InformationObjectTemplates.D
dynamicSchema)
m.Describer ->includesAll( m.
InformationTemplate.StaticSchema)
m.Constrainer->includesAll(m.
InformationObject.InvariantSchema)
m.ActionTemplates ->
includesAll(m.InformationObjectTemplates.action)
m.Types->includesAll(m.ActionTemplates.Types ->
union(m.InformationObject.Types)
```

We consider the concepts of subtype/supertype (RM-ODP 2-9.9) and subclass/superclass (RM-ODP 2-9.10) as relations between types and classes respectively.

**Context m: model inv**

```
m.types-> forall( t1: Type, t2: Type | t2.subtype ->
includes(t1) implies t1.valid_for.satisfies_type=t2)
m.types-> forall( t1: Type, t2: Type | t1.supertype
->includes(t2) implies t1.valid_for.satisfies_type=t2)
```

**Context a: ActionTemplate inv:**

```
a.informationobject.StartState <>
a.informationobject.EndState
```

**Context o: Object Template inv:**

```
iot (information object template) is not parent of or child of
itself
not (iot.parents ->includes(iot) ) or
iot.children->includes(iot))
```

VI. SEMANTICS DOMAIN

The semantics of a UML model is given by constraining the relationship between a model and possible instances of that model (see Figure 3). It means constraining the relationship between expressions of the UML abstract syntax for models and expressions of the UML abstract syntax for instances. We define a model to specify the ODP information viewpoint. That is, a set of information objects, their relationships and behaviors. This model defines Semantic Domain (figure 3).

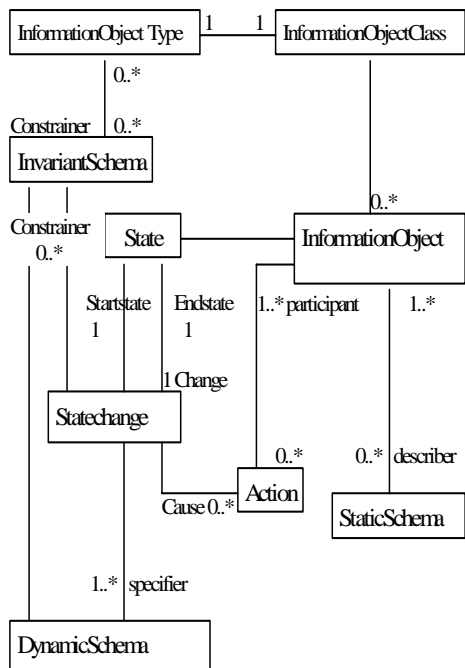


Fig. 3 Semantic Domain

A system can only be an instance of a single system model, because it is self contained and disjoint from other models. On the other side, objects are instances of one or more object templates; they may be of one or several types. With no further constraints, it is possible for an object to change the templates of which it is an instance; thus this meta-model supports dynamic types.

There is one well-formedness rule for instances, which are given below:

**Context s: system inv:**

The source and target information objects of s's links are information objects in s  
 $s.informationobjects \rightarrow includesAll(s.links.source \rightarrow union(s.links.target))$

Links between two information objects are unique per role  
 $s.links \rightarrow forAll(l|s.links \rightarrow select(l|l.source=l.source \& l.target=l.target \& l.of=l.of)=1)$

Declaration of "Specification concepts" (RM-ODP 2.9) in Alloy [28], time dependence.

**Context Time inv :**

$forall(o:InformationObject ,t:Time | t.instant \rightarrow notEmpty \implies o.state \rightarrow notEmpty)$

**Context Precondition inv :**

$forall( prec: Dynamicschema.Precondition , o : InformationObject | exists( s : State ) | o.mappedTo = prec \text{ and } o.state\_start = s)$

**Context Postcondition inv :**

$forall( postc: dynamicschema.Postcondition , o : InformationObject | exists( s : State ) | o.mappedTo = postc \text{ and } a.state\_end = s)$

VII. MEANING FUNCTION

Other invariants are required to constraint the relationships between models and instances. These constitute the semantics which are the subject of this section. The semantics for the UML-based language defined by the relationship between a system model and its possible instances (systems). The constraints are relatively simple, but they demonstrate the general principle. Firstly there are two constraints related to information objects and links, respectively. The first shows how inheritance relationships can force an information object to be of many Information Object Template.

**Context o: object inv:**

The templates of o must be a single template and all the parents of that template

$o.of \rightarrow exists(t | o.of=t \rightarrow union(t.parents))$

The second ensures that a link connects objects of templates as dictated by its role.

**Context l: link inv:**

Information Objects which are the source/target of link have templates which are the source/target of the corresponding roles.

$(l.of.source) \rightarrow intersection(l.source.of) \rightarrow notEmpty$   
 $\text{and } (l.of.target) \rightarrow intersection(l.target.of) \rightarrow notEmpty$

Secondly, there are four constraints which ensure that a model instance is a valid instance of the model, it is claimed to be an instance of:

The first and second ensure that objects and links are associated with templates known in the model.

**Context s: system inv:**

The model, that s is an instance of, includes all object templates that s.objects are instances of.

$s.of.InformationObjectTemplates \rightarrow includesAll(s.informationObjects.of)$

The model, that s is an instance of, includes all InformationObjectClass that s.informationObjects are instances of

$s.of.InformationObjectClass \rightarrow includesAll(s.informationObjects.of)$

The third ensures that links are associated with roles known in the model.

**Context s: system inv:**

The model, that s is an instance of, includes all the role that s.links are instances of

$s.of.roles \rightarrow includesAll(s.links.of)$

The fourth constraint ensures that the system cardinality constraints on roles are observed.

**Context s: system inv:**

The links of s respect cardinality constraints for their corresponding role

$s.links.of \rightarrow forAll( r | let links\_in\_s \text{ be } r.instances \rightarrow intersect( s.links ) \text{ in } ( r.upperBound \rightarrow notEmpty \implies links\_in\_s \rightarrow size \leq )$

```
r.upperBound )  
and links_in_s->size >= r.upperbound)
```

The fifth ensures that reverse links are in place for roles with inverses. If a link is of a role with an inverse, then there is a corresponding reverse link

```
s.links->forAll ( l | l.of.role.inverse ->notEmpty implies  
s.links ->select ( l' | l'.source=l.target & l'.target=l.source &  
l'.of = l.of.inverse)->size=1
```

## VIII. CONCLUSION

The Reference Model for Open Distributed Processing (RM-ODP) provides a framework which supports distribution, inter-working and portability can be integrated.

However, the ODP viewpoint languages define what concepts should be supported, not how these concepts should be represented. In addition, the UML standard has adopted a meta-modeling approach to define the abstract syntax of UML. One approach to define the formal semantics of a language is denotational: essentially elaborating the value or instance denoted by an expression of the language in a particular context. However, when we use the denotational meta-modeling approach in this paper, we defined the UML/OCL based syntax and semantics of a language for a fragment of ODP object concepts described in the foundations part and in the information viewpoint language. Indeed, these concepts are suitable to define and constrain ODP information viewpoint specifications. In parallel, we are applying the same approach to define a language of concepts characterizing dynamic behavior. APPENDIX

Appendixes, if needed, appear before the acknowledgment.

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