

# IPC WORKSHOP

## SUMMARY

Geneva, February 4 and 5, 2008

1. On February 4 and 5, 2008, WIPO organized a Workshop to discuss the experience of the various users in patent offices and industry with the reformed IPC in its first two years. Experts in classification from IP Offices, commercial providers of patent information, users of the IPC in industry and other experts on patent information participated in the Workshop.
2. Two years after the introduction of the reformed IPC, there is the need to assess the status of its implementation, consider the efficiency of various features that were introduced during the reform and propose adjustments and improvements. The meeting served as an opportunity to bring users of the IPC from various backgrounds together with the experts in IP offices working on the development of the IPC in order to have a fruitful exchange of information and ideas for the future.
3. During the Workshop, participants were informed of the schedule for the publication of the next edition of the core level of the IPC (IPC-2009) and of improvements to be added to the Internet publication, such as term and cross-reference searching, easier access to PDF files and to other IT tools, access to pre-reform editions and display of warnings in areas where reclassification is not completed. Participants took note of the new presentation of the WIPO/IPC site and of its further development, which gives easier access to information concerning the IPC and to various IT tools. It was further requested to monitor information on the IPC in external sites and to provide links to such information when it is of interest.
4. Participants of the Workshop expressed their general satisfaction with the various IT tools available for the IPC. In particular, it was indicated that IPCCAT was a very useful tool that should be further developed. In view of the current circumstances, a subclass/main group concordance table from IPC-7 to the version in force should be maintained and directly available from IPCCAT. It was noted that the SPLIT tools for installing the IPC locally were made version-independent and RSS feeds were available on the WIPO/IPC site.
5. During discussion on reclassification it was noted that 91% of documents published before 2006 carry valid IPC-8 symbols in the Master Classification Database (MCD), and during last year, 97% of new documents were published with valid IPC codes. An international reclassification project aiming at reclassifying all patent documents impacted by revision of the IPC had been implemented. As a result, approximately 90% of such documents were already reclassified on the day when the corresponding revised schemes entered into force. A tool was demonstrated, that has been developed by the Brazilian office, to help small and medium offices to participate in this effort. Further development of this tool to become a centralized service is foreseen for 2009. Use of this new service would also allow the correction of non-valid or wrong symbols. The IPC community was also invited to reach an agreement on the handling of old patent collections that were not reclassified or had even never been classified at all.

6. The simultaneous publication of a revised scheme and of the corresponding reclassification data was considered a significant achievement of the reform. However, in some cases, this feature of the reformed IPC caused difficulties because of limitation of reclassification resources in offices. Participants of the Workshop agreed that this problem should not become an obstacle to the development of the IPC. New schemes should enter into force even when the reclassification of the PCT minimum documentation is not 100% complete. Users should, however, receive a warning in such cases and an indication on the non-reclassified patent collections.
7. Participants of the Workshop were informed that some important offices (e.g. JPO, USPTO) had the intention or had already implemented outsourcing of classification and reclassification by private companies. It was noted that measures had been taken to ensure strict quality control. Concerns were expressed by some participants that expertise on classification could be potentially lost in the future by those offices and that only a very limited number of contractors holding such expertise could be available. However it was pointed out that sufficient numbers of contractors will be available, based in part on the experiences of JPO. Furthermore, classification expertise will always exist in-house due to the fact, for example, that US patent examiners are responsible for performing quality assurance checking of the contractor's work as well as identifying fields of search and indicating classifications at allowance.
8. Several concerns were expressed on the use of some attributes of IPC codes. For example, whether the roll-up to the core level should be indicated as automatic or intellectual, whether the "action date" should be the date when a document is classified/reclassified or the date when it is published. In that respect, it was questioned whether the roll up should keep all attributes or, furthermore, whether there was any need at all to automatically roll-up advanced level symbols to the core level.
9. The usefulness of the inventive-additional information attributes was also discussed. It was pointed out that the use of additional information is rather low and varies from office to office. It should be explored whether the reasons for low usage are due to lack of information, lack of training or whether the system itself should be reviewed. It was further noted that some attributes were intended for internal purposes in the database and should not be available to the public since they could bring confusion. It was finally agreed that the attributes should be simplified and should reflect the needs of both offices and external users.
10. A presentation on the use of IPC in industry brought the attention to experts in IP offices that the IPC was also used for other purposes than searching prior art, like for general business and portfolio decisions or for general technology strategy decisions. Users in industry were particularly concerned by incorrect, missing or late assigning of IPC codes on patent documents. They welcome any early information on future revisions and on reclassification in order to adapt their searching strategies.
11. Participants were additionally informed on the implementation of the IPC in various commercial databases and on some concerns of commercial patent information providers. In that respect, it was noted that 2% of new applications were still published without classification. The attribution of the first symbol indicator was strongly requested by users of patent information. Revision of the IPC every three months was considered as a heavy burden for users and database producers. In that respect, it was generally agreed that new versions should not be published more frequently than twice a year. Finally, there was a strong demand for updating the categorization assistant IPCCAT to the latest version of the IPC.

12. The quality of classification of documents was the subject of a presentation, but came back in discussion after several other presentations. This issue comprises the absence of symbols, the allocation of invalid symbols and, most importantly, the allocation of wrong symbols and the divergence in classification between offices. Systematic problems exist with some offices in some areas. The reasons for wrong classifications could be insufficient training of classifiers or deficiencies in the scheme. These problems should be examined in a more systematic way by the IPC community. The issue of classification quality is probably even more important than the exhaustive revision of the IPC. Furthermore, the possibility of using new technologies should be explored, one example being the possibility for external users to submit comments on allocation of a classification symbol to a document in a simple fashion, e.g. like in Wikipedia.

13. The USPTO presented the procedure for revising the US Classification. A revised scheme is developed closely together with its definitions. The scheme is tested several times with a limited set of documents, and adjusted between iterations. After approval of the final scheme, the whole corresponding backfile is reclassified before the scheme enters production.

14. The Workshop participants noted a presentation on JPO's Classification system consisting of a combination of a Classification scheme (FI), based on the IPC, and on indexing F-terms. This combination allows the creation of search sets consisting ideally of 50 – 100 documents. This system is used to classify JP documents and is open to the public, e.g. EP examiners use it extensively.

15. Workshop participants were apprised of the progress of the Harmony project. This project intends to harmonize the local classification systems at the JPO, USPTO and the EPO, and provides the major input to the revision of the IPC. It had been thought initially that the harmonization process would be swift; however, experience has shown that the process is in fact much more resource-consuming than it had been anticipated. It is not necessarily a short-term goal to harmonize the three schemes completely. Efforts are being focused on active technical fields where many searches have to be done and where consequently an improved classification scheme would deliver substantial benefits in search efficiency. A number of other ideas are emerging that could be followed in the future, such as:

- local classification schemes can be complementary and their use may in some cases be preferable to a unique Classification;
- the depth of a scheme is less important compared to accuracy in using it; and
- in areas where other tools than classification, like CAS, are available, these tools should be used instead of developing very exhaustive classification schemes.

16. During a presentation on the use of classification at the EPO, participants were informed that ECLA and FI/FT are used primarily for searching while IPC is used to search collections that are not classified in the above systems, e.g., Chinese, Korean and Russian documentation. Their size and importance have increased during recent years and the EPO is taking a number of measures to facilitate access to those documents for search. The IPC is considered to be a skeleton forming the basis to other systems. Further revision of the IPC should be focused on the quality of the scheme, on identifying problems and quickly reacting to resolve them. The IPC could serve as a potential tool for the search of Non-Patent Literature (NPL). In that respect editors of NPL should be approached in order to ask them to use the IPC as a classification tool.

17. It was noted that one of the main features of the reformed IPC, that is the creation of the core level, did not have the success that it had been expected when considering the number of documents classified therein. On the other hand the division between core and advanced levels, with the requirement for compatibility and the different revision cycles, had introduced many complications in the revision and the publication procedures, without bringing the increase in efficiency that had been anticipated. There is a need for simplification, for example by synchronizing the publication of the two levels and by using a unique revision procedure. A simplification of the division between the two levels should also be considered, based on the needs of the offices which use the core level for classification.

18. In conclusion, the Workshop was considered to be a very instructive platform for the exchange of views on the IPC between users coming from diverse horizons. The International Bureau was invited to reconvene the Workshop every two years. In the meantime, users of the IPC outside offices were invited to participate in the discussions on the IPC e-forum concerning the further development of the IPC.

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