Technological information in the patent offices of the MERSOSUR countries and Mexico

Edwin Urquidi [*],[1]

Center for Studies of Intellectual Property Development, URQUIDI & ROJAS Calle 21, No. 8350 (Calacoto), Piso 9 of. 4, La Paz-Bolivia, Bolivia

Abstract

The range and availability of patent and technological information from the patent offices of the MERCOSUR group of countries (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay, with Bolivia and Chile as unofficial partners) and Mexico is described. The services and products available are reviewed under themes which include: technical patent searches, documentation access problems, patent statistics, patent databases, the main patent applicants, and training and university education.
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1. Introduction

Certain aspects of the development of patent information databases and dissemination in MERCOSUR countries and Mexico have previously been described in this journal, between 1983 and 2003, by Barroso [1], Zárate [2], Castañeda [3], Treiguer [4], and Rosenberg [5]. The present article provides a broad-based review of the current situation in this area and embraces seven main thematic areas: Technological information services of the national patent office, documentation access problems, patent statistics, main users, classes of documents, patent bank and database, training and university education.

I will refer to the offices of industrial property in the MERCOSUR countries and Mexico.[2] All patent documents contain summaries of a certain invention in a technological field. However, because of the number of summaries in the application files, they must be organized and put in electronic format to avoid loss. This is expensive and takes time. Nevertheless, the systematizing effort of the offices is worth it, because it is for a single time, and lasts forever.

It's also important to take into account that accessible patent information saves resource waste in research and development, because it must be available not only to an exclusive elite of scientists or technicians, but to all

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[*] Tel.: + 591 2 2794491; fax: +591 2 2770333.
E-mail address: eurquidi@cedpi.com.bo
[1] www.cedpi.com.bo

[2] The MERCOSUR countries are: Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay, with Chile and Bolivia as unofficial partners. I should point out that the total population of the MERCOSUR countries is 245,825,528 inhabitants, and Mexico has 102,000,000. *Editor's note:* MERCOSUR is an economic Southern Common Market Agreement, also known as the Treaty of Asunción, and dates from 1991—see http://www.mre.gov.br/cdbrasil/itamaraty/web/ingles/relext/mre/orgreg/mercom/tassunc/apresent.htm and http://www.itcilo.it/actrav/actrav-english/telearn/global/ilo/blokit/mercoa.htm for more information.

the public.[3] Permanent systematizing contributes to a technological culture. Because of this, I believe patent information should be on the Internet. Otherwise, we can simply consider it to be almost non-existent and therefore of little value.

2. Technological information services of the patent offices

The services to the Mexican industry by IMPI (the Mexican Institute of Industrial Property) includes the Technological Information Center (CIT). These services are required by offices, individuals, companies, investigation centers, universities and IMPI itself.

In Brazil, to administer the bank of patents, the National Institute of Industrial Property (INPI) has created a Documentation and Technological Information Center (CEDIN) that contains a wealth of information on the development of technologies in the country and abroad. The services, which provide research capacity, are economically extended through a team of technicians specialized in chemical, electric, mechanical, civil engineering and architecture; and are directed towards companies, researchers, and government institutions, which receive information regarding the main technological trends, legal status, families of patents and technological monitoring.

In the same way, one of the primary objectives of Argentina's National Institute of Industrial Property is to diffuse and promote the use of the technical patent document information in the technological innovation undertaken by industry, investigators and inventors. To meet this objective, the INPI puts its information services at the users' disposal, allowing them to take full advantage of the important patent databases and documents available in its offices. These services are offered through the Technological Information Department, at the request of the interested parties, and after payment of the pertinent fee.

Chile's Technological Information Office (OFIN-TEC) puts at the public's disposition information disclosed worldwide by the intellectual property systems in general, and industrial property in particular, for those who want to create new products and procedures in a more informed manner. Those interested can identify technologies of free use, determine the novelty of an invention and its possible registration, searching the Database Consultation section.

Although Uruguay has systematized patent information, it is not offered as an additional service to its industry, but limited to a segment of local investigators who are aware of the work in the National Office of Indus-

trial Property.[4] Because of this, it can be inferred that there is no official policy of promoting technological information as there is in Brazil, Argentina and Mexico.

The main services of these offices include:

- Searches on the history of national and foreign patents regarding a particular technical topic.
- History search of national and foreign patents on accessible bibliographical data (owner, priority, inventor).
- Patent search services for determined technical topics or accessible bibliographic data.
- Determination of (statistical) patenting trends, by technical topic or accessible bibliographic data, and
- Providing the complete text of national or foreign patent documents.

Bolivia and Paraguay do not have technological information service units, and thus no experience in the matter. This is basically due to the shortage of qualified personnel also reflected in the irregular issue of patents. However, there are isolated initiatives by the pertinent offices to provide the limited local industry with information on the patent system.

3. Documentation access problems

Regarding the problems of access to patent literature, note that the patent systems are national. There are no multinational systems, such as that administered by the European Patent Office and the Cooperation Treaty on Patents. There is a group of national patent systems, effective in each of the national states. The invention patent is always a national institution, even in those cases of advanced regional agreements.

The legal systems and administrative practices of the patent offices imply specialization, not only by the civil-servant, but by the user who will access the documentation.

The language barrier is another problem for developing countries, as most of the global information is in English. Another factor that impacts on this problem is the great volume of documents. Although with the new technologies there is more agile support, it makes obtaining large volumes of copies more expensive.

The available literature is easily searched by expert investigators, but not by other users—who require the help of specialized services.

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[3] According to Argentina's Assistant Commissioner of Patents, E. Arias, this country invests 0.3% of the GDP in the scientific sector; and Brazil 15%.

[4] In National Office of Uruguay, these elementary services are extended through the Library of the Office of Industrial Property, which provides, to whoever requests it, copies of documents of national and foreign patents; and technical help for the search and presentation of applications.