Chapter XL
Ontologies and Law: A Practical Case of the Creation of Ontology for Copyright Law Domain

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ABSTRACT

This chapter introduces the reader with the specificity of the development of a particular type of legal ontology, that is ontology of copyright law. The process of the development of this ontology (ALIS IP Ontology) should be seen as a miniature guide for anyone who will pursue a goal to create an ontology for any sphere of law. In this chapter the development of the copyright ontology is not addressed separately as such, but in vaster perspective, analyzing not only particular problems that the development of the legal ontology implies, but also looking at the ontology development issues in the light of the general relation that the law (and intellectual property law in particular) has with the IT domain.
1. INTRODUCTION

Where does the term “ontology” come from? This term was introduced by metaphysics, which, according to Aristotle, is divided into two directions of study: studies of existence as such and studies of eternal and immaterial entities. For the latter studies the term “rational theology” was applied, while for the former, the term “ontology” was introduced in XVII century: the illuminist philosopher D’Alembert (1717-1783) defines ontology as the branch of philosophy that studies the general properties (like possibility, existence or duration), shared by both spiritual and material entities (Rossi, 1996, p. 240).

This Handbook is dedicated not to the philosophical ontologies though. In this chapter we present the reader with the different kind of ontologies: the ontologies that enable the functioning of the Semantic Web. This chapter focuses on the ontologies developed for a particular domain, that is a legal domain. We describe the legal ontology dedicated to the intellectual property (IP) law, that is ALIS IP Ontology, on which our research group is still working on.

This chapter is organized as follows: Section 2 describes the role the Semantic Web plays in solving the problems of legal domain, with the emphasis on the legal ontologies that provide a big help in this problem solution (section 2.1). Section 3 is dedicated to the particularity of the domain our ontology is addressing, that is intellectual property law. Section 4 introduces the ALIS project to the reader in order to explain what is the purpose and the role of the ALIS IP Ontology. Section 5 is entirely dedicated to explain ALIS IP Ontology: we confront it with other ontologies of IP law domain, such as IPROnto and ICLOnto. The chapter ends up with the conclusions.

2. LAW AND THE SEMANTIC WEB

Law has two major problems today: “handling the complexity and types of legal knowledge, and having reasonable ways to store, retrieve and structure a great amount of legal information” (Benjamins, 2005, p.1). These problems are much more evident in the light of technological development. Naturally, information is a key to success everywhere, not only in legal campus. Nevertheless, law is also the field that has a direct and powerful influence in society: from the citizens to the organizations, from the families to the public administrations. All the lawyers have to know a lot of information, to choose the right resources for retrieving it, to manage it, to know how to apply it and so on. The technological explosion does not cease to make more and more information available. The problem now is not to get the information, but to manage it. And in law this problem is quite an urgent one, considering the quantity of norms, regulations, directives, rulings, codes, statutes, acts, decisions that are created, emanated, abolished, changed, updated, delivered every day.

What are the risks of this situation? The main risk is the so called Information Overload (IO) phenomenon. This situation happens when the lawyer is unable to handle the information to make a decision. In such case he gets overloaded: unable to process the information, to decide, to remember, to link the data and to react to the information he already has. In such a state, the errors usually occur and the price for such errors could be very high.

Furthermore, the legal information should be known not only to the lawyer, Everyone who is retained to be a person (legal or natural) under the law has to have a basic knowledge about the legal framework, or, at least, be able to orientate himself in it. Some specific professionals such as doctors or civil engineers should know further specific norms, which regulate their procession campuses. Of course, it does not mean the we
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