

Constructing Commons in the Cultural Environment

B. Frischmann, M. Madison, K. Strandburg¹

Abstract

This paper considers the problem of understanding intellectual sharing/pooling arrangements and the construction of cultural commons arrangements. We argue that an adaptation of the approach pioneered by Elinor Ostrom and collaborators to commons arrangements in the natural environment may provide a template for the examination of constructed commons in the cultural environment.

We thus argue in favor of an approach to understanding the institutional features of commons and pooling arrangements through case studies from a wide range of disciplines. Such an approach promises to lead to a better understanding of how participants in commons and pooling arrangements structure their interactions in relation to the environment(s) within which they are embedded and with which they share interdependent relationships. We propose a framework for evaluating the contours of different pooling arrangements with an eye toward developing an understanding of the structural differences across arrangements and industries as well as the underlying contextual reasons for such differences. Among other things, we argue that a theoretical approach to cultural constructed commons should consider rules pertaining to membership criteria, contribution and use of pooled resources, internal licensing conditions, management of external relationships, and institutional form along with the degree of collaboration among members, sharing of human capital, degrees of integration among participants, and whether there is a specified purpose to the arrangement.

¹ Brett M. Frischmann, Loyola University Chicago School of Law; Michael J. Madison, University of Pittsburgh School of Law; Katherine J. Strandburg, DePaul University College of Law.