Inviting Whole Humanity to an Elite Club? Global Heritage Production Regimes and UNESCO Heritage Lists through the Lens of the Ostrom’s Concepts

The most interesting beauty contests in international relations happen twice a year in different parts of our globe. They concern inscriptions into the UNESCO World Heritage List and the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The crucial tension around the Lists is: how to maintain high standards and values associated with them and at the same time govern them as truly global and diverse repositories of Humanity’s heritage? This paper aims to reflect on that tension. Starting with Elinor Ostrom’s concepts and approaches, it shifts the reflection from identifiable resources considered as commons (natural, cultural, urban, knowledge, digital) to policy tools and institutions created to govern them, that we propose to approach as “a shared resource subject to social dilemmas”. Then, on the basis of the typology of goods, we propose reinterpretation of the notion of ‘subtractability’ – from purely material to symbolic one. We also explore three important characteristics of heritage lists: ‘credibility’, ‘interdependence’ and ‘deservingness’.

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