

Understanding Commons and Peer Production

OKCon 2011

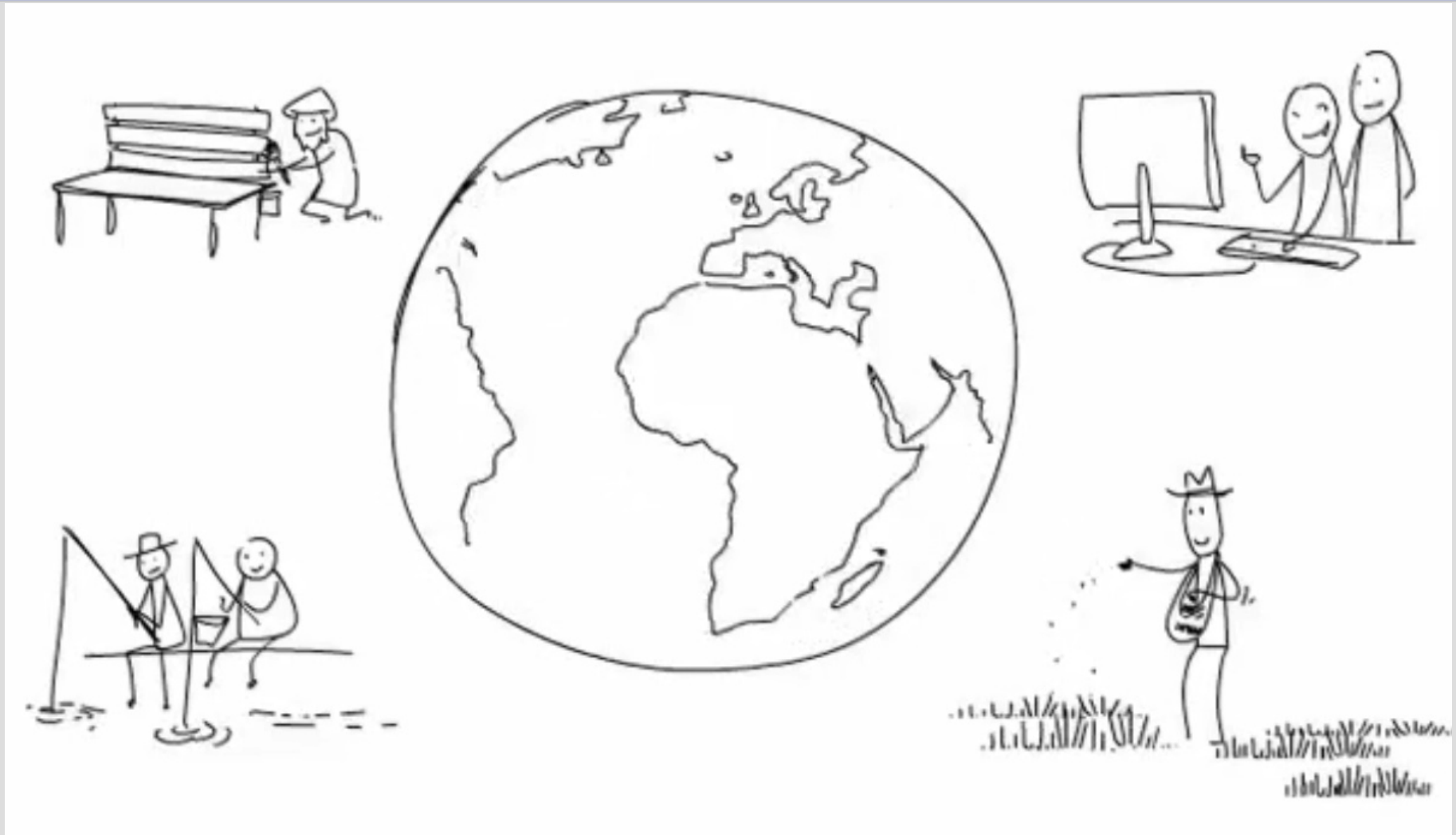
Berlin, June, 30th & July, 1st

Stefan Meretz, Berlin

oekonux.org

keimform.de

Video on the Commons



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=otmrkhEFSZM>

The Notion of Commons – in Six Steps

Commons are common goods

However, what are common goods?

- Public goods?
- Goods belonging to all people, thus to nobody?

Notion of Commons – Two

**Commons are common goods
maintained by a community**

Peter Linebaugh: „There is no commons without commoning“

- **But is it only about maintenance?**
- **What about newly developed goods?**

Notion of Commons – Three

Commons are common goods
developed and maintained
by a community

What about resources?

- **Where do they come from?**
- **What can resources be?**

Notion of Commons – Four

**Commons are common goods
developed and maintained
by a community **using**
natural or produced resources**

What about usage?

- **Who can use resources and goods?**
- **All people?**

Notion of Commons – Five

Commons are common goods developed and maintained by a community using natural or produced resources, which are available for users

Who defines to be a „user“?

- **What are the conditions?**
- **How is it decided?**

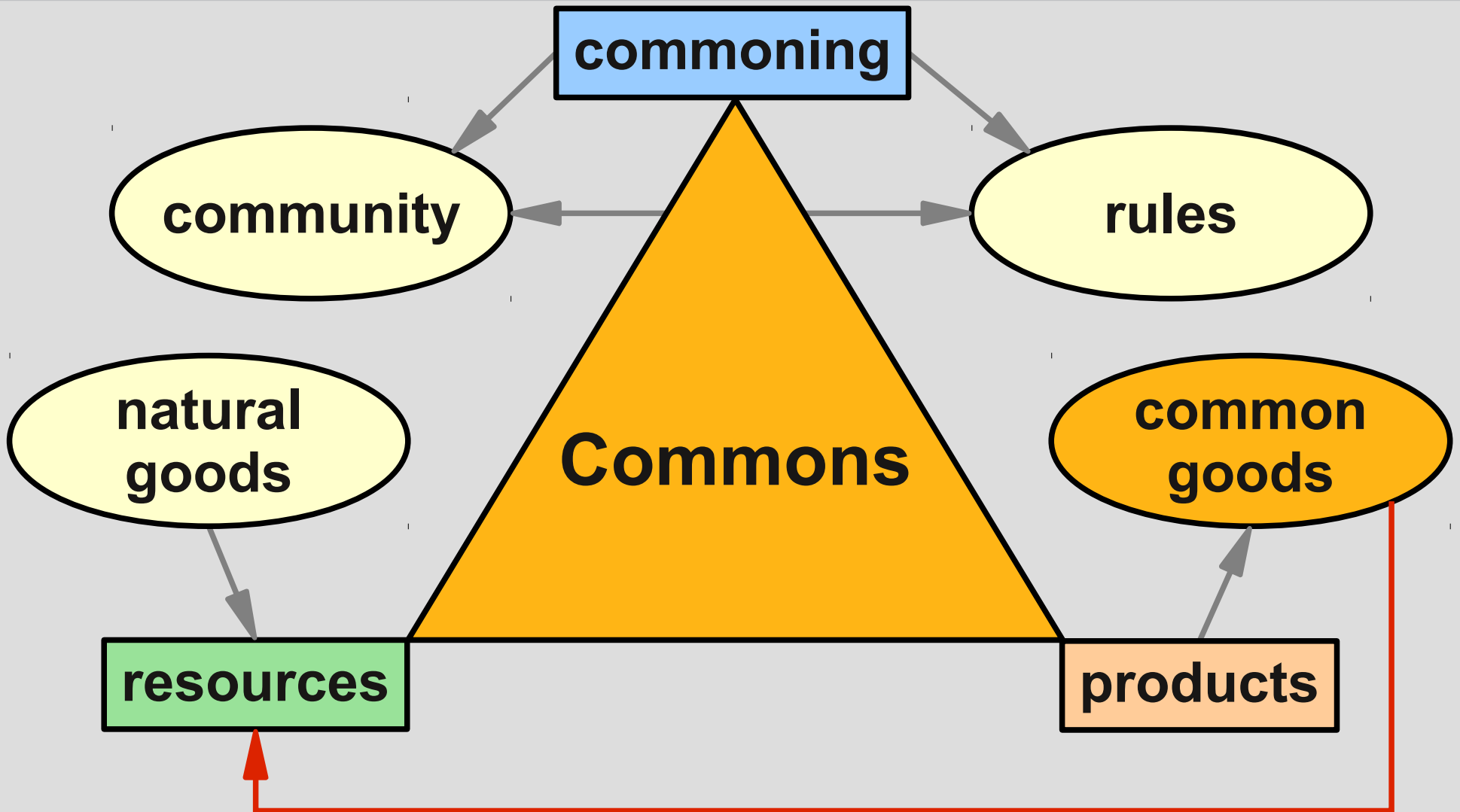
Notion of Commons – Six

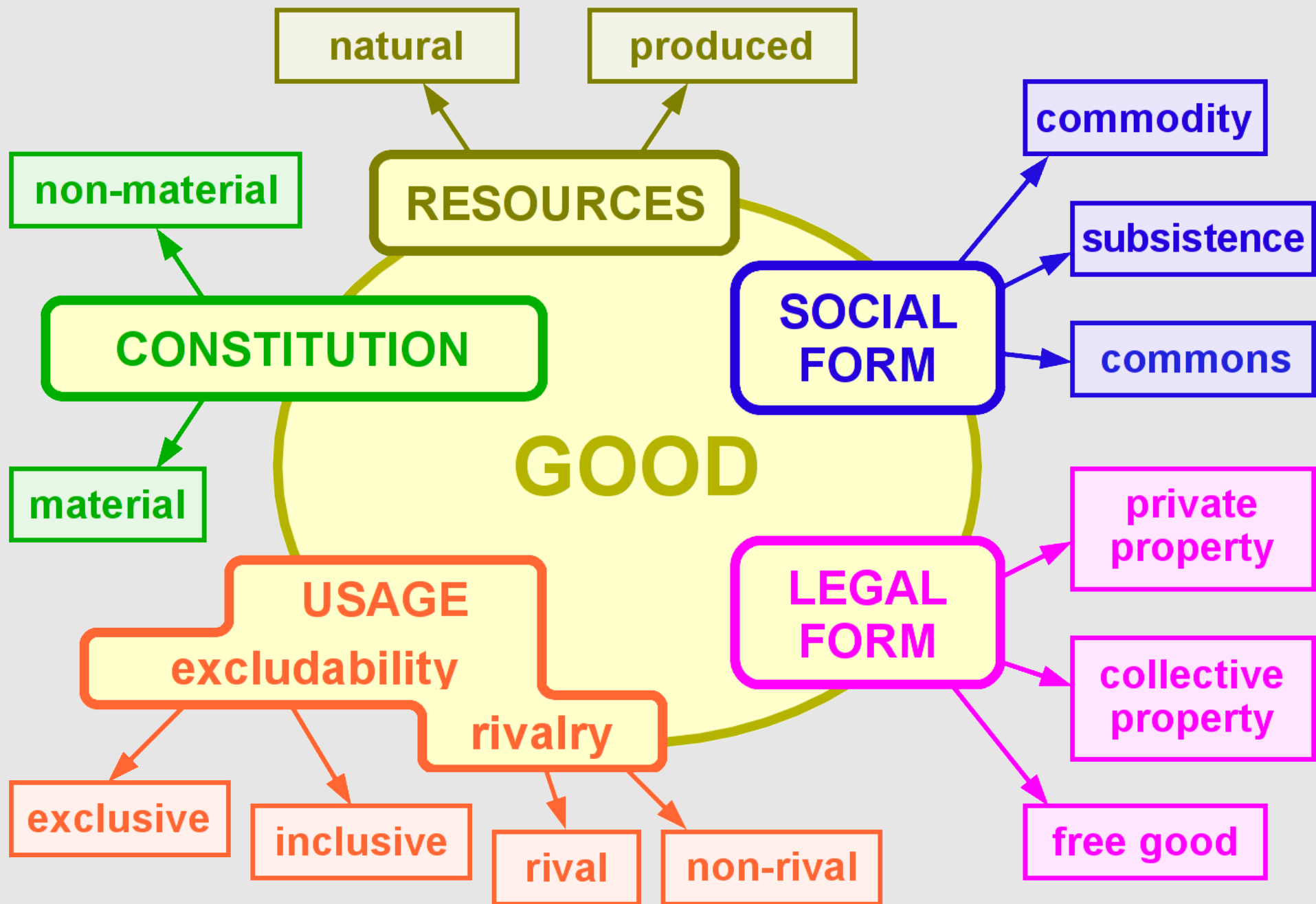
Commons are common goods developed and maintained by a community using natural or produced resources, which are available for users **under commonly agreed rules**

This is a useful definition...

... which, however, do not answer all questions

The Commons Triangle





Constitution

non-material

CONSTITUTION

material

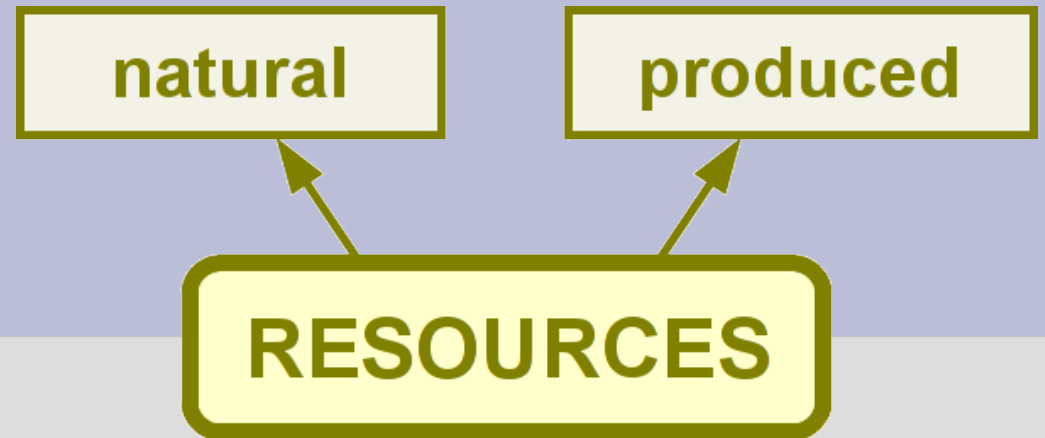
material goods

- have a physical shape
- can be used up or crushed out
- perform their purpose only by their physical constitution

non-material goods

- are decoupled from a specific physical shape
- services:
 - coincidence of production and consumption
- preservable non-material goods:
 - need a physical carrier

Resources



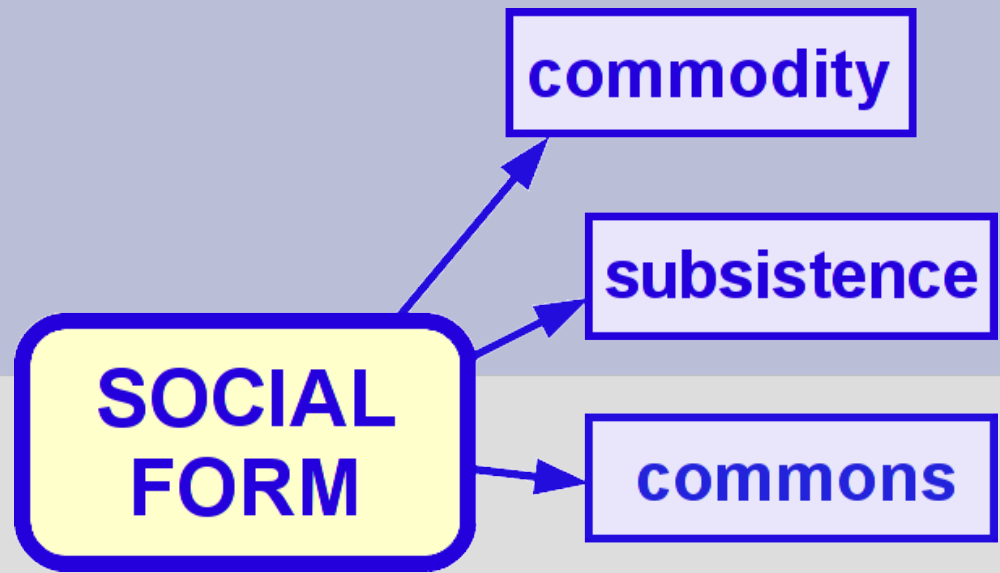
natural resources

- already existing and raw resources
- seldom found in uninfluenced environments

produced resources

- created material or non-material preconditions for further use in the
 - production of goods
 - production/preservation of resources
- examples: raw material, knowledge

Social Form



Commodity

- privately produced good for exchange/selling
- preconditions are scarcity and exclusion

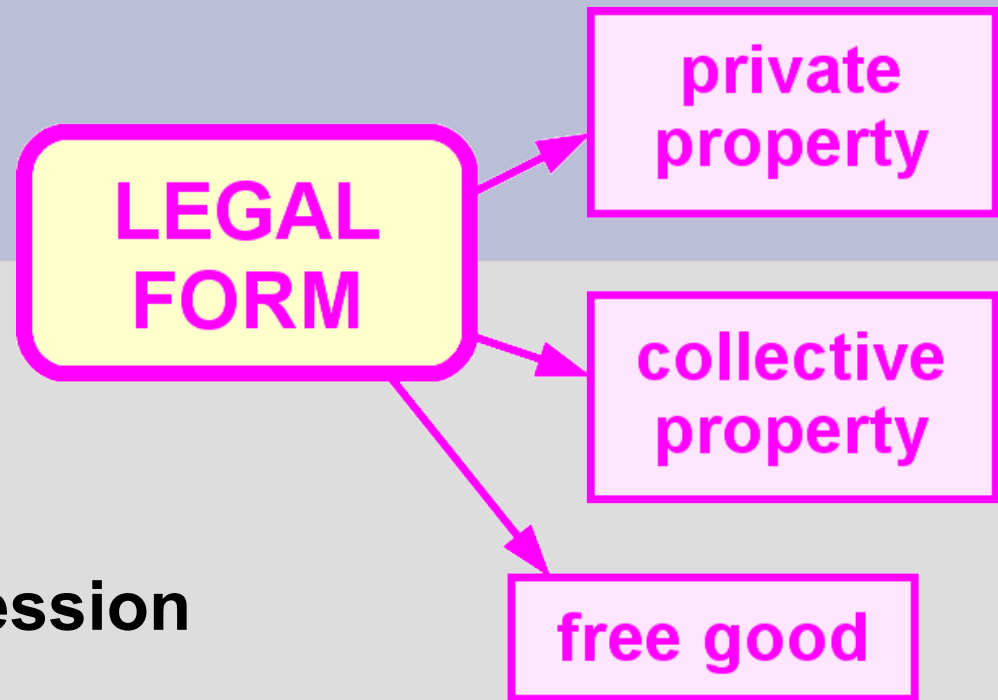
Subsistence

- produced good for personal use or benefit of personally known others (family, friends etc.)
- no exchange, but giving, taking, circulation

Commons

- Produced/maintained goods for general others
- no exchange, but usage upon agreed rules

Legal Form



Private Property

- exclusive control
- independent of constitution and possession

Collective Property

- collectively owned private property
- stock corporation, nationally-owned enterprise, house owner community, cooperative etc.

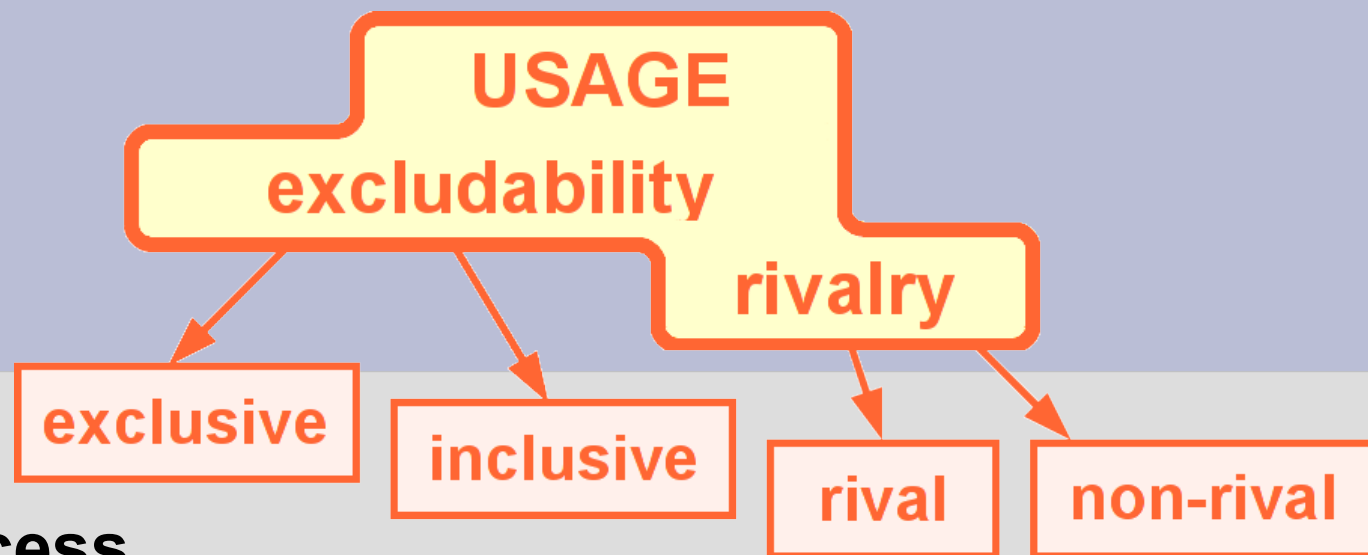
Free Goods (res nullius, terra nullius, no man's land)

- socially unregulated goods under free access
- tragedy of commons is tragedy of no man's land

Legacy of Codex Justinianus

Realm	Access	Regulation
res nullius	open to all	unregulated
res privatae	owner	market
res publicae	government	state
res communes	community	peer to peer

Usage



Excludability

- **exclusive: access is prevented (→commodity)**
- **inclusive: open access for all (→Wikipedia)**

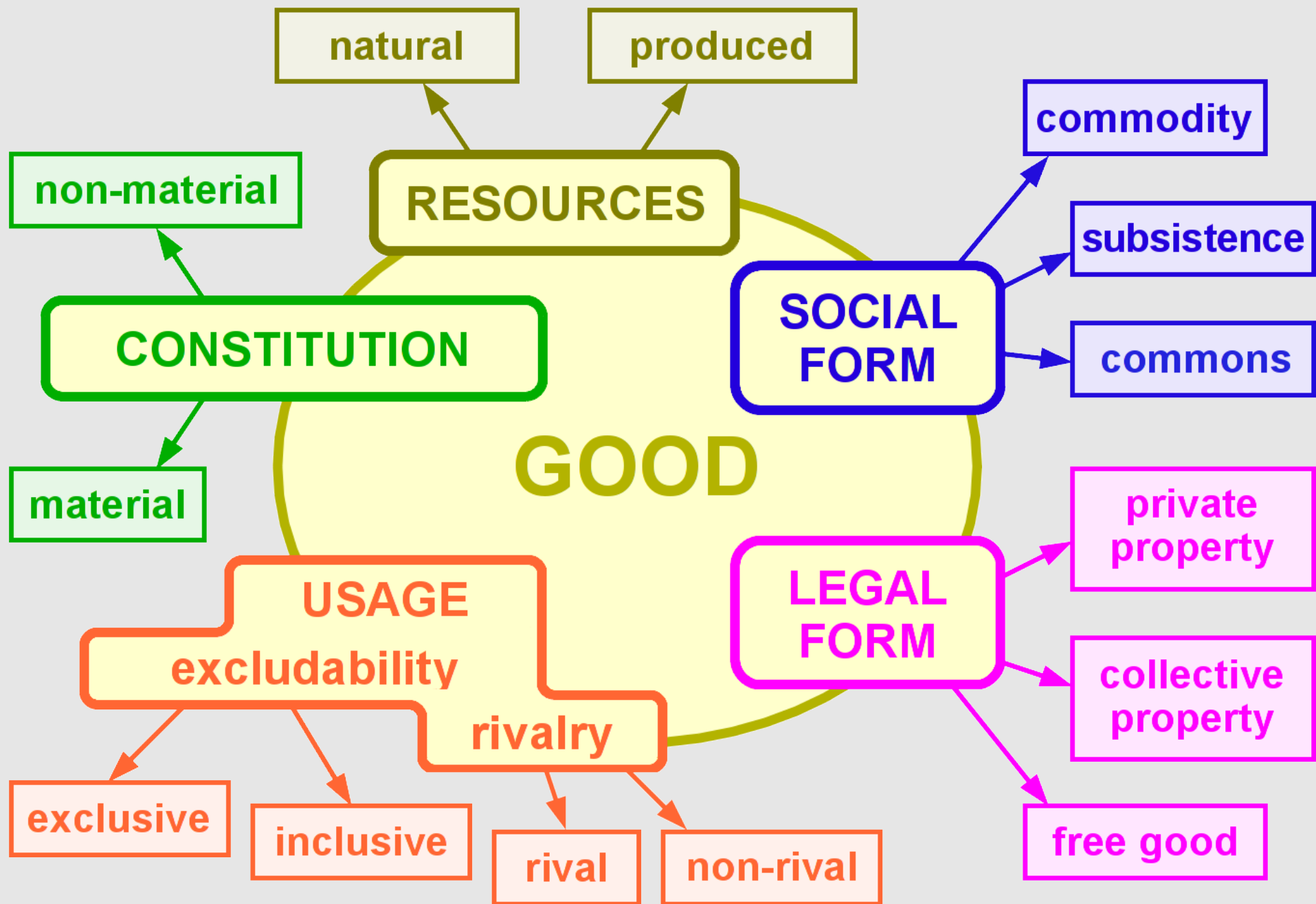
Rivalry

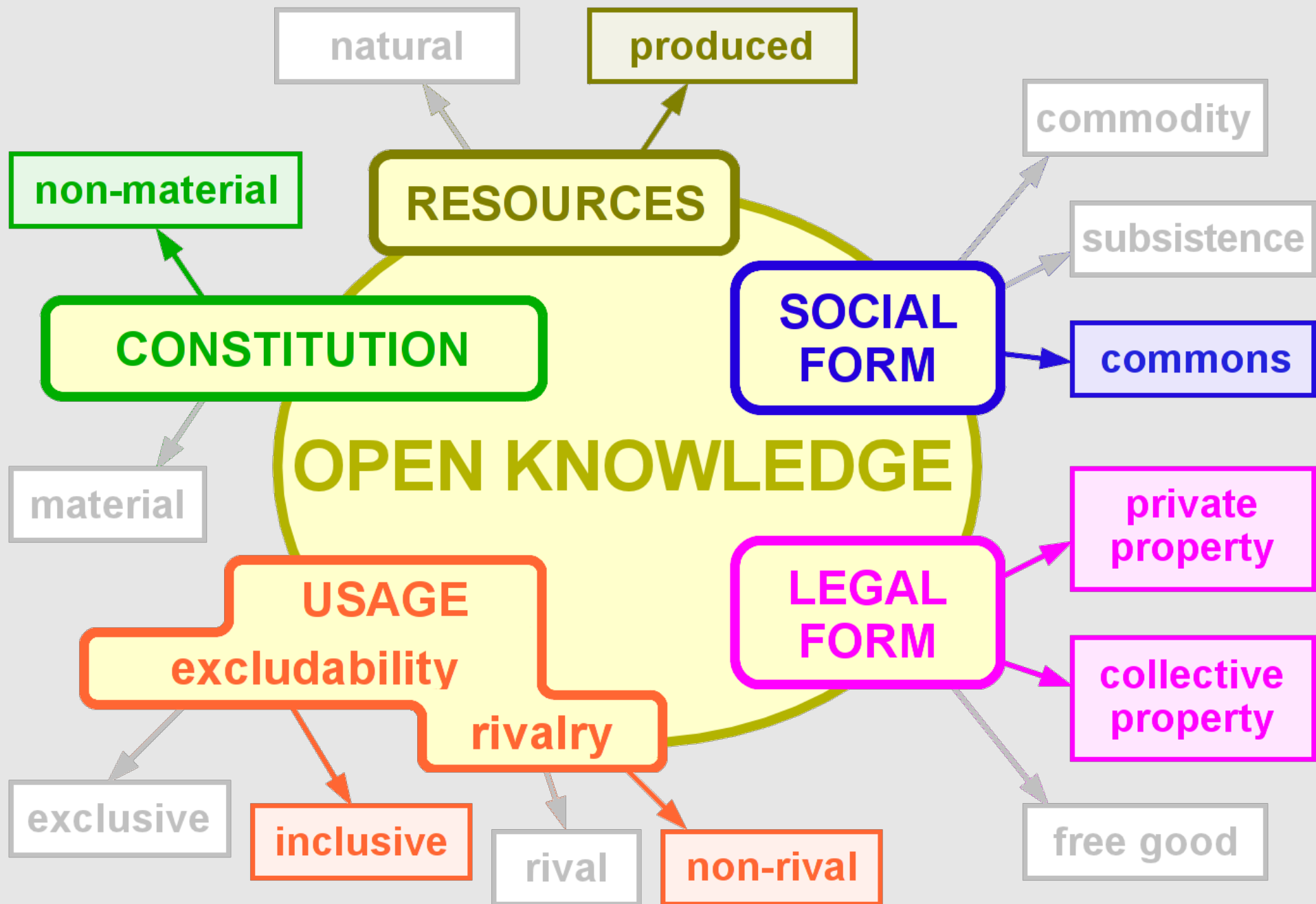
- **rival: use restrictions for other people (→apple)**
- **non-rival: no restrictions for others (→ $E=mc^2$)**

Economics: relevant characteristic of goods!

But:

- **Exclusion is result of an activity (→Social Form)**
- **Rivalry results from constitution and can be dealt with**





Characteristics of Peer Production (1)

Peer Production is based on **contributions**, not on exchange:

- peer-projects have a common goal
- participants contribute to this goal
- utility, not making money motivates participants
- effort sharing is the mode of production

Characteristics of Peer Production (2)

Peer Production is based on **free cooperation**, not on coercion and command:

- nobody can compel others to do something
- nobody is forced to obey others
- structures base on maintainers or admins who can decide, for example, which contributions to accept and which to refuse
- structures can be changed or: if the project can not be convinced, it can be forked
- cooperation among equals make them to “peers”

Characteristics of Peer Production (3)

Peer Production is based on **possession**, not on property:

- resources are privately or collectively owned
- resources are used and shared for the sake of the project („share what you can“)
- resources and products generally matter as something that can be used (possession), not as something that can be sold (property)

Commons Beyond State and Market

„What one can observe in the world, ... is that neither the state nor the market is uniformly successful in enabling individuals to sustain longterm, productive use of natural resource systems. Further, communities of individuals have relied on institutions resembling neither the state nor the market to govern some resource systems with reasonable degrees of success over long periods of time“

**Elinor Ostrom (1990), Governing the Commons, p.1
(German title, re-translated: The Constitution of the Commons – Beyond State and Market)**

Openness

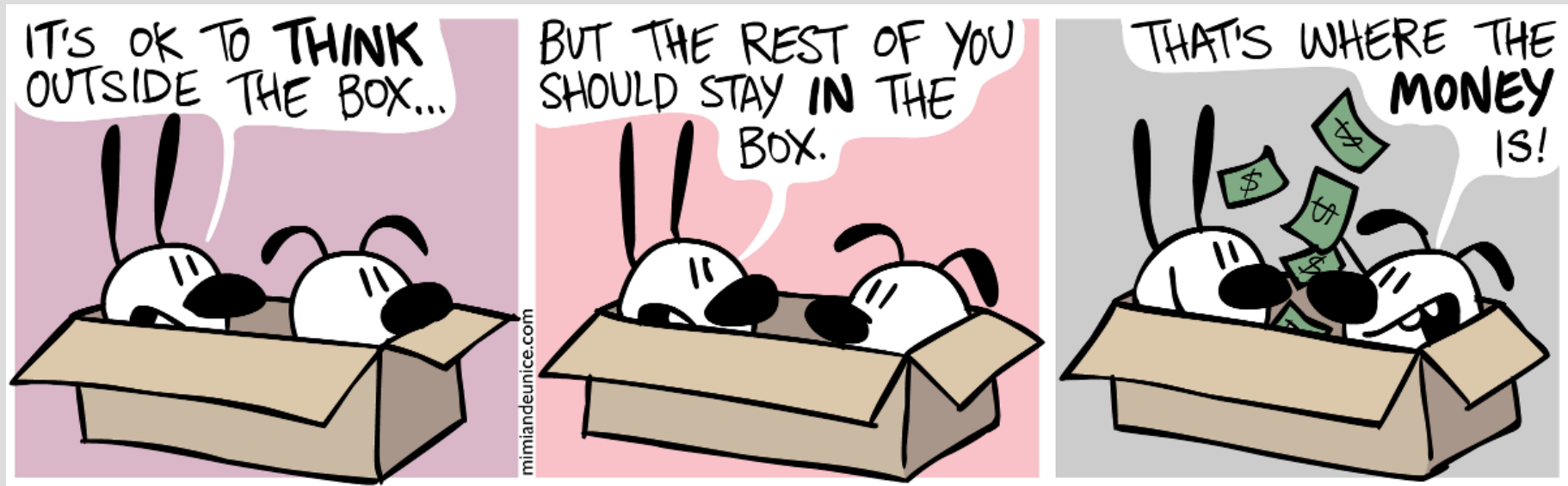
„Open-ness, in short, is more than a commercial and cultural issue. It’s a survival issue. Systemic challenges such as climate change, or resource depletion—so-called ‘wicked problems’—cannot be solved using the same techniques that caused them in the first place. Open research, open governance, and open design are a precondition for the continuous, collaborative, social mode of enquiry and action that are needed.“

John Thackara in: Open Design Now – Why Design Cannot Remain Exclusive

Thank you :-)

More about commons and peer production:
www.keimform.de/category/english

Finally...



Cartoon by great Nina Paley under CC-by-sa license
<http://mimiandeunice.com/2011/07/01/inside-the-box/>