“Privacy” is a complex issue. This complexity calls for a simplification in daily use. This text analyses the role of privacy pictograms to improve handling of privacy issues. We understand “privacy pictograms” as simplified pictures expressing privacy-related statements, in particular results of data protection audits or similar evaluations concerning informational privacy relevant components of data processing, statements on how well a situation matches the privacy preferences of a user, statements from privacy policies on planned or performed processing of potentially personal data or on guarantees concerning the use of these data, or statements on how personal data may be used by others.

When considering privacy and data protection in law and in practice across the continents, it is clear that an international solution would require international consensus on syntax and semantics of privacy pictograms which is not trivial to achieve. For specific domains, it may be possible, though. In addition, the role of user-controlled identity management systems which are in a large part influenced by European privacy principles can be relevant when introducing privacy pictograms in user interfaces and interpreting statements from privacy policies as well as existing privacy seals.

Potentially a “Privacy Commons” can build upon the success of the “Creative Commons” without running into danger to impermissibly oversimplify privacy issues.

The text is organised as follows: In Chapter 2 we distinguish several relevant settings which require a differing treatment when discussing the usage and value of privacy pictograms. Chapter 3 illustrates a few existing proposals for icon sets and compares them. In Chapter 4, requirements for a widespread use are listed, giving a kind of roadmap for further work on privacy pictograms. Finally, Chapter 5 sums up the findings.