

Search for the symbols of the Ústecký Region

Aleš Brožek

Regions were traditional administrative units in the Czech lands, many centuries ago. In the Czech language, they were known as *kraje*. Thus the tribal region of the Lučané was called the Žatecký kraj, according to the famous Czech chronicler Kosma, who wrote his *Kosmova kronika* in the 12th century. In the 13th century the old names were replaced by new ones, based on the names of the largest towns.

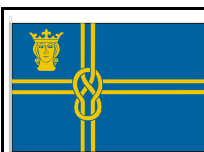
Originally the *kraje* were divided into two types, administrative and judicial. The judicial *kraje* were abolished during the Hussite wars of the 15th century. It is interesting to note that, because of its practical use, the Czech regional system was introduced in Germany by Emperor Maximilian I at the end of the 15th century. The German term for such a region, *Kreis*, derives from the Czech *kraj*.

A new administrative division came into being in 1848, with 7 *kraje* in the Czech lands. In 1862 the *kraje* authorities were again abolished. This establishing regions and their subsequent abolition was typical also of the 20th century. In Czechoslovakia in 1960, 10 *kraje* replaced the 14 which had existed since 1948. All were abolished after the velvet revolution in 1989.

The contemporary division of the Czech Republic, valid since 1 January 2000, has once again established *kraje*. According to Law No. 347, of 3 December 1997, they number 14. This law was adopted after much political negotiation, because there was a great number of suggestions as to how many *kraje* should exist. One political party suggested dividing the Czech republic into as many as 77 *kraje*. Their number would correspond with the number of subdivisions (*okresy* in Czech). Another party suggested division into two historical regions – Bohemia and Moravia.

On 12 April 2000, Law No. 129 concerning the new regions was adopted. It was very important from the heraldic and vexillological aspects, as Paragraph 5 stated that “the kraj or its components which are set up by the kraj and the juridical body may use the arms and flag of the kraj”.

Because, like the new municipal symbols, the *kraj* emblems were to be granted by the Chairman of the Czech Parliament, the subcommittee for heraldry discussed the matter of regional symbols at its meeting on 1 November 2000. Set up to judge the designs of municipal arms and flags according to Law No. 367 of 1990, this subcommittee consists of experts in heraldry and vexillology. One of its most active members, Director of the Moravian Archives Dr. Karel Müller, informed the meeting that he and Jan Tejkal, had met with Jiří Louda, another subcommittee member, on the occasion of the latter’s 80th birthday. They had discussed the style of the new regional symbols and



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had written a preliminary concept. It contained three possible variations for the symbols.

The first variation enabled the regions to design their own symbols, according to their individual wishes. The subcommittee would consider them only if the proposals corresponded with heraldic and vexillological rules. Regional symbols would thus be varied. The disadvantage was the risk of a flood of amateur designs.

The second variation recommended that the regional arms be inspired by the national arms of the Czech Republic, typical of a quartered shield. In this pattern, the first quarter would consist of the historical arms of Bohemia, Moravia or Silesia, to show the historical country to which the region, or the larger part of it, belonged. The second quarter would contain the arms of the capital of the region, or the main figure from the arms. The third quarter would show contemporary or historical devices symbolising traditions of the region. The last quarter would either repeat the first, or show the arms of the country to which the minor part of the region belonged. Regional flags would show the arms superimposed on a rectangular field consisting of stripes. The disadvantage of this variation was seen in the repetition of the Bohemian lion in too many arms, because the majority of the regions were in Bohemia. Dr. Müller and Mr. Tejkal suggested that the eagle of St. Wenceslas might be used instead of the Bohemian lion in the fourth quarter.

The third variation was a compromise between the other two. It recommended some conditions with which the regional arms should correspond, e.g. the number of sections in the arms, the need to use heraldry figures and similar considerations.

After a long debate, the subcommittee agreed on the design of a quartered shield, bearing the arms of the historical country, a figure from the capital of the region, and heraldic or general figures to represent the region in the third and fourth quarters. Vexillologists declined the design of a striped flag with the arms added, and recommended quartered flags repeating the figures from the arms. These criteria were approved by the Parliamentary Committee for science, education, culture, youth and physical training, in Resolution 198, at its 39th meeting, 8 November 2000. The concept of a striped flag with the regional arms was mistakenly mentioned, and the part of the resolution dealing with the flag had to be corrected later.

As a member of the subcommittee, I visited the regional administration of Ústecký kraj in April 2001, and offered to act as a consultant in the process of choosing the symbols of Ústecký kraj. As a citizen of Ústí nad Labem, which is the capital of this region, I longed to see attractive symbols for it.¹ At the time, officials of the administration had received many offers and designs for arms and flags, and did not know what to do. Once they understood that I did not want to force my views, but only to express my opinions of the suggested designs, they were much more open and showed me all the material they had received.

The first letter came on 12 December 2000, signed by Mr. J. Tejkal, the co-author of the concept discussed in the subcommittee, and a member of the Vexillology Club. He mentioned that he had designed arms and flags for 200 Moravian municipalities, and offered to create regional symbols for a very modest fee.

Another member of the Vexillology Club and its Vice-Chairman is Jaroslav Martykán, who lived for many years in Velké Březno, a village close to Ústí nad Labem. On 3 January 2001, he sent arms and flag designs for the *kraj* to Jiří Šulc, *hejtman* of Ústecký kraj. The *hejtman* was a former Mayor of the town of Most, and had his regional office there, as there was yet no administrative building for Ústecký

KRAJSKÁ VLAJKA

POMĚR STRAN 2:3

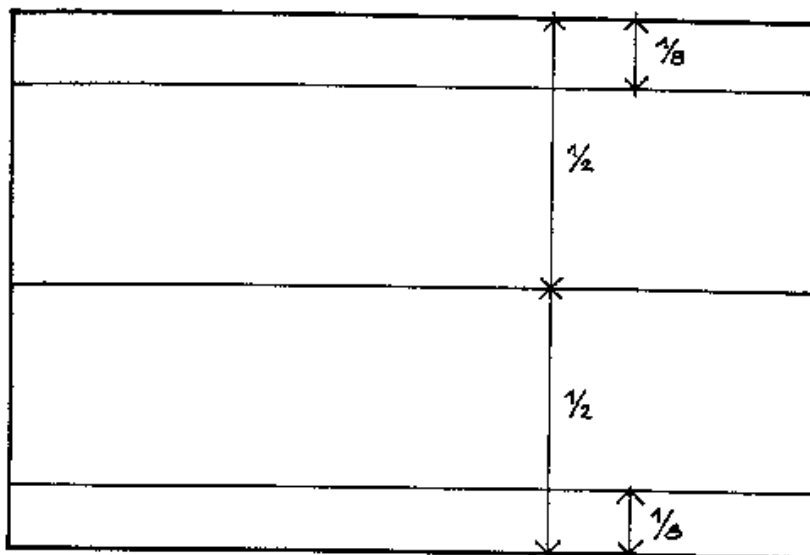


Figure 1

kraj. The proposed building in Ústí nad Labem was still under construction, and Mr. Martykán suggested the building be inaugurated by hoisting the flag. His design included among other things, the silver bridge and golden six-pointed star from the municipal arms of Most. This drew immediate criticism from the editor of the monthly magazine *Nové Ústecké Přehledy*. The editor lived in the north Bohemian town of Teplice, and criticised Martykán's design for the lack of figures from the arms of Teplice.²

Some offers were sent not only to the administration of Ústecký kraj but to all the *kraje* at once. Mr. Petr Bahník of Prague elaborated a set of arms and flag designs for each region. His flag designs were very simple, as he used a set of four horizontal stripes in each case (Fig. 1). Thus the flag of the Ústecký region would consist of yellow over white over red over yellow, in the ratio of 1:3:3:1. These colours came from his design for the arms (the silver Bohemian lion on red, rising from three wavy silver stripes at the base of the shield, and with its head protected with a helmet bearing a golden coronet). Mr. Bahník was aware that he had not followed the criteria of the subcommittee, but he criticised them and considered his own solution "more elegant". Despite this, his proposal for the arms of the Hradecký region was also enclosed. This followed the subcommittee criteria, and showed his ability to respect them.

The offers of the JAKO agency, sent on 5 March 2001 and those of Mr. Václav Novák of Prague the next day were similar to the offer made by Mr. Tejkal, as they did not contain designs for the region as such, but only samples of municipal arms which they designed and which were adopted by the municipalities. These were offered as references. In a letter of 23 March 2001, Mr. Novák sent flag and arms designs (Fig.

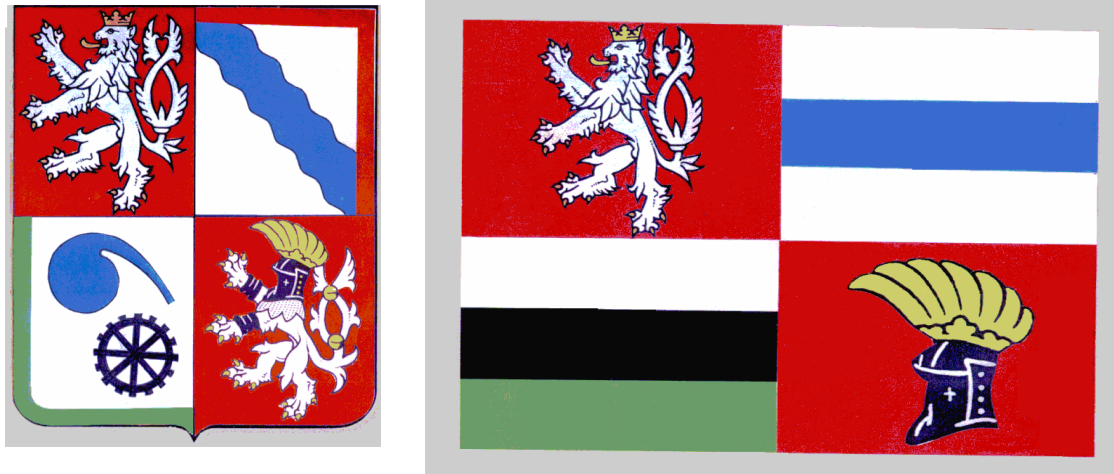


Figure 2



Figure 3

2), stressing the importance of industry (symbolised by a cog-wheel and a flask). Four weeks later he sent two further designs originating from his previous drafts, with the addition of a hop-plant (Fig. 3). His design pleased the Mayor of the town of Žatec, which is famous for hop-gardening. In a letter of 11 April, the Mayor demanded that a figure of hops appear in the regional arms.

Another interesting design (Fig. 4) came from Mr. Miroslav Hirsch living in Dvůr Králové. He suggested arms consisting of a silver pike on blue in the second quarter and of crossed hammers and a hot spring on gold in the third quarter.

To speed the discussion on the symbols of the Ústecký region the *hejtman* invited me to a meeting with him on 2 May 2001. Also present were Mr. Miroslav Řebíček, his deputy for education, health service and culture, Mr. Oto Neubauer, the chairman of the commission for external relations and Ms. Marie Tomčová, head of the *hejtman's* secretariat. I informed them of the criteria determined by the subcommittee and approved by the parliamentary committee, and also explained two ways in which other regional administrations had solved the matter of creating regional sym-

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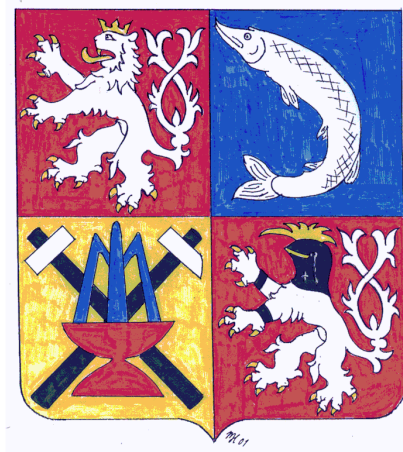


Figure 4

bols. The Olomoucký kraj asked only one person to submit a design, Jiří Louda, the well-known heraldist, designer of the arms of the Czech Republic and a resident of Olomouc. The Karlovarský region announced a contest for its symbols. I recommended that latter choice, because I hoped that contestants might find more interesting designs than a single person. Those attending the meeting agreed.

The result of the meeting³ was the announcement of a contest for arms only. The rules were to be published in newspapers before the end of May 2001. One quarter of the shield was to express characteristic features of the landscape, and another quarter to characterise the history of the region. The designs were to be submitted anonymously, before the end of June 2001. The prize was to be 10,000 Czech crowns (about 330 euros). The designs would be judged by a commission consisting of those attending the meeting and others deputised by the *hejtman*.

This procedure was approved at the 8th meeting of the Board of the Ústecký region which took place on 23 May 2001. The Board entrusted the *hejtman* and the chairman of the commission for external relations with proposing five regional personalities who would become members of the jury at the same time.⁴ At the 11th meeting of the Board of the Ústecký region, it was agreed unanimously that the *hejtman* should address the president of the university in Ústí nad Labem, the president of the Supreme Control Authority or the director of the Municipal Archives in Ústí nad Labem.⁵

The contest rules appeared in regional newspapers on 27 May 2001, and were displayed on a board in the building of Ústecký kraj on 30 May 2001. The deadline for submitting designs was midday, 29 June 2001, and the prize for the winning design was to be double that discussed on 2 May 2001.

Ms. Marie Tomčová, the head of the *hejtman's* secretariat, called me at the beginning of August 2001 and told me that the number of entries had exceeded expectation. She asked me to come to the office on 7 August, open the envelopes and set aside the designs which did not follow the rules of the contest. We found altogether 44 arms designs in 31 envelopes, because some contestants sent more than one design in an envelope. There were even 5 flag designs (Figs. 5-9) although they were not required. 18 designs were set aside, mainly because they did not respect heraldic rules and showed the history and landscape of the region in a naturalistic way.

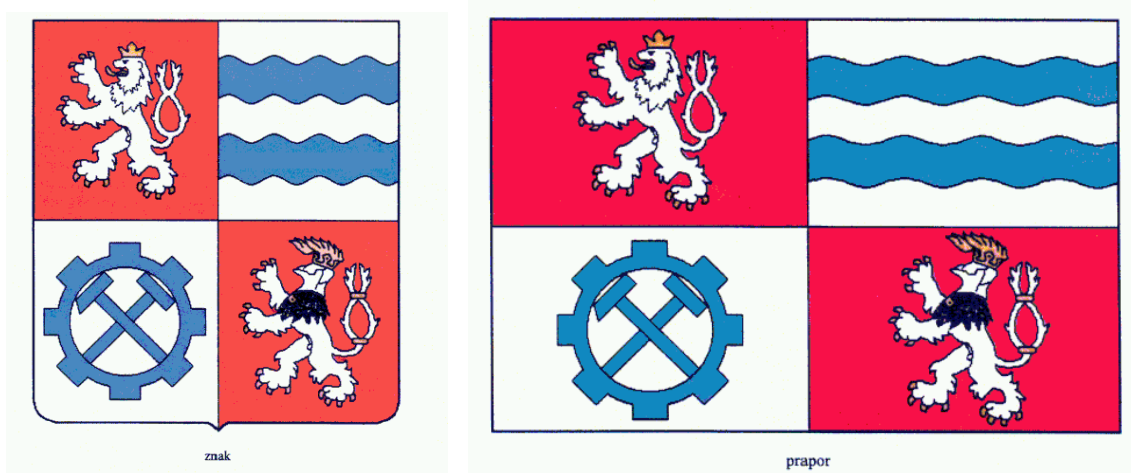


Figure 5

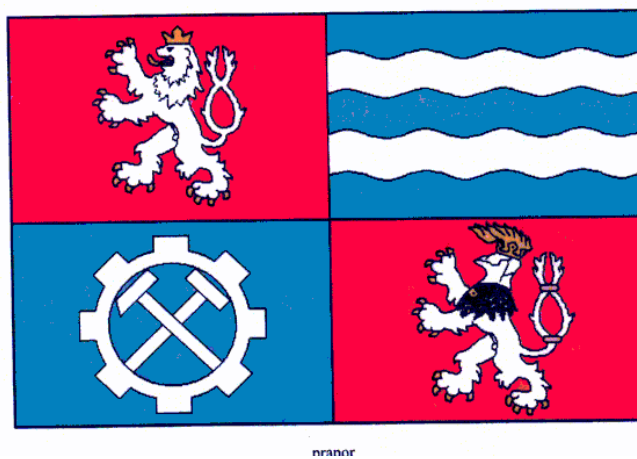


Figure 6

Návrh na symboly kraje Ústí nad Labem

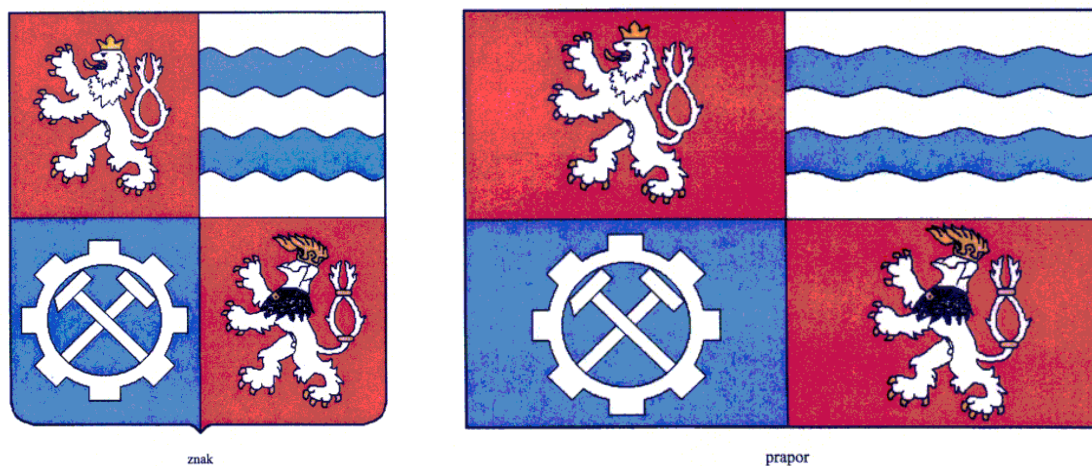


Figure 7

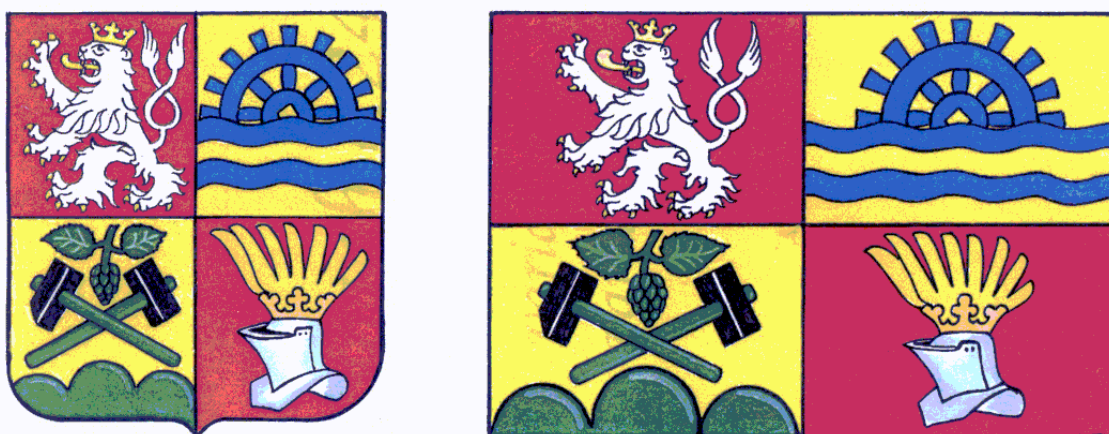


Figure 8

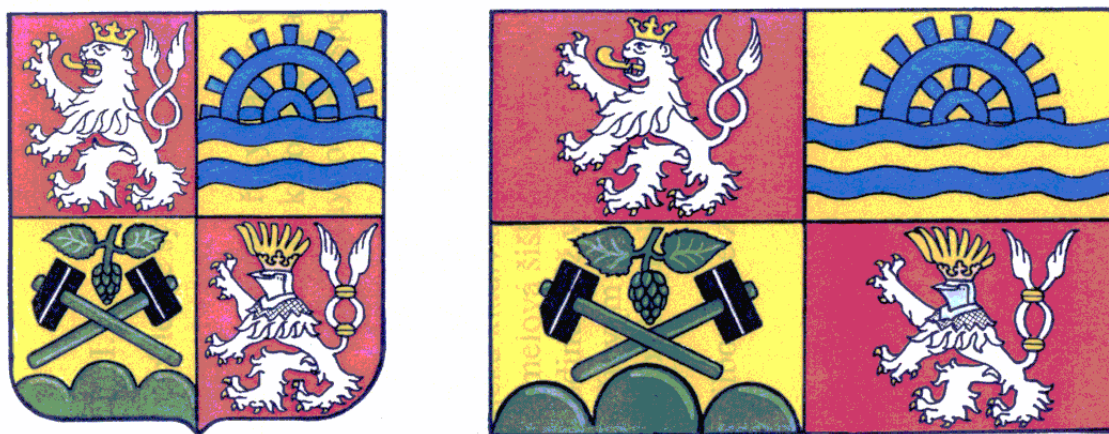


Figure 9

The landscape was expressed in the drawings mainly by means of wavy stripes, standing for water and the Elbe (11 designs), with stylised mountains, sometimes by means of wedges or edges (8 designs), with the famous mountain Říp⁶ (6 designs), with the geological formation called Porta Bohemica (4 designs) or with Střekov castle (1 design). The history of the region was shown by means of crossed mining hammers (18 designs), a cog-wheel standing for metallurgy, engineering and chemistry (9 designs) or through a flaming eagle symbolising the house of the Přemyslides which originated from this region (5 designs). This princely and later royal dynasty was also symbolised by a simple plough (2 designs) or by a monument showing the plough (3 designs).⁷ Agricultural products also appeared very frequently. The branch of a hop-plant was on 12 designs, the hop cone on 6 designs, the grape wine on 4 designs and an apple on 1 design.

The designs which I did not set aside were copied and given to 14 members of the jury, who met on 29 August 2001. Apart from politicians and three directors of galleries, some prominent personalities participated. The most famous were Eva

Návrh znaku Ústeckého kraje

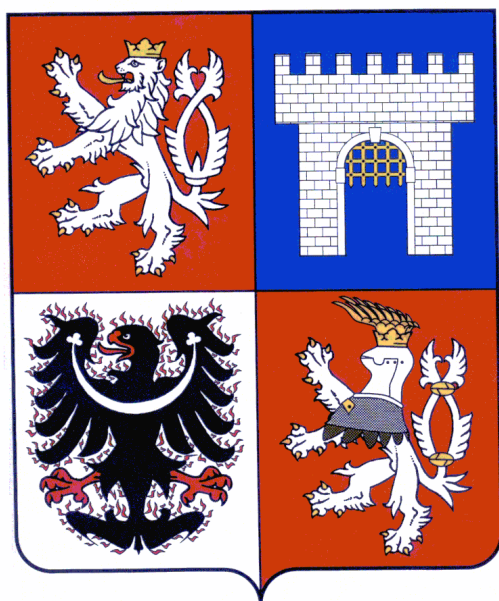


Figure 10

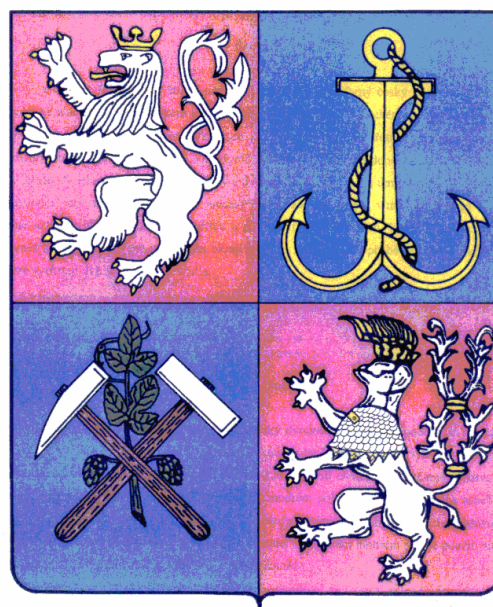


Figure 11

Herzigová, top model, and Ivan Hlinka, ice-hockey coach who travelled from Pittsburgh in the U.S.A. After I had explained the criteria and heraldry rules in brief, the discussion of the designs became heated.

No designs were accepted by the majority. I preferred the design with a silver tower in the second quarter and a flaming eagle in the third (Fig. 10), but the politicians considered this symbol too religious. Ivan Hlinka was against the eagle because he thought it was not fair for one region to claim this symbol of the Přemyslids, as it belongs to all Bohemia. Eva Herzigová and the *hejtman's* deputy favoured a design with an anchor (Fig. 11) which stood for ship-building. However we were aware that, if we were to accept it, citizens of Děčín would be pleased, as it has a large shipyard, but those of Žatec will ask for a branch of a hop-plant and those of Litoměřice for wine grapes and so on ad infinitum.

Therefore I suggested the adoption of symbols acceptable to the citizens of the whole region. In contrast to my choice the majority agreed to use green hills behind a silver tower standing on blue and white wavy stripes on blue in the second quarter, as everyone could see in it the representation of the Krušné hory mountains and the river Elbe. The silver tower with seven crenellations would stand for the geological formation Porta Bohemica. The number of crenellations would correspond with the number of subdivisions of Ústecký kraj. The golden gate should symbolise the riches of the region. In addition, these three dominant colours (white, green and blue) could become regional colours (Fig. 12). Unfortunately the majority did not manage to agree on figures for the third quarter. The *hejtman* therefore decided to abandon the competition and to call the two designers of the most acceptable emblems to draw the regional

Návrh znaku Ústeckého kraje

Varianta A

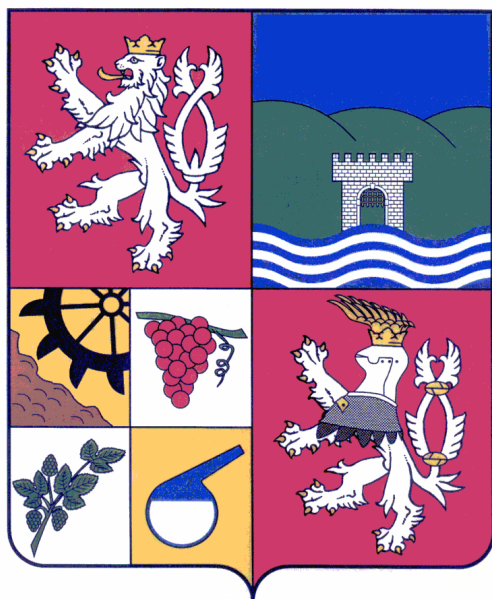


Figure 12

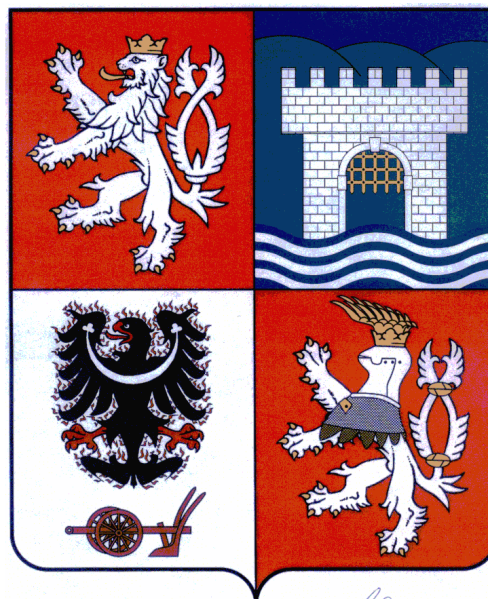


Figure 13

arms according to the wishes of the jury.

At the beginning of September 2001, Radek Michel, a graphic editor of Ústí nad Labem and Stanislav Kasík, a heraldist of Roudnice nad Labem, were commissioned to draw the regional arms. These would show in the second quarter the silver tower of larger size for Porta Bohemica, seven wavy silver and blue stripes for water and some hills for mountains. The third quarter was to be done in four variants (the flaming eagle, the plough, a combination of hammers and hops and a combination of wine grapes and hops).

These new designs were judged on 11 October 2001. As Stanislav Kasík had not followed the requirements, only Radek Michel's designs were considered. Even though Michel had made two additional variants of the third quarter (a combination of the eagle and plough, and a combination of hammers and grapes), the jury did not like them. He drew the figures in the third silver quarter, whereas the prevailing colours of the second quarter were silver, green and blue (Fig. 13). Lubomír Voleník, president of the Supreme Control Authority, finally suggested the third quarter display a silver plough on blue, over a green base. Radek Michel was immediately telephoned to alter the third quarter according to Voleník's suggestion. He drew it (Fig. 14) together with three variants of the flag (Fig. 15). This solution of the arms was accepted not only by the jury, but also by the Board of Ústecký kraj at its 18th meeting on 17 October 2001.

To test public opinion of the arms before they were discussed in the Council of Ústecký kraj, the Board ordered the arms to be advertised publicly in the daily newspaper *Severočeské Noviny*, and also presented them on the Ústecký region website from 6 to 20 November 2001. 615 people were in favour of the arms, 160 people against. As

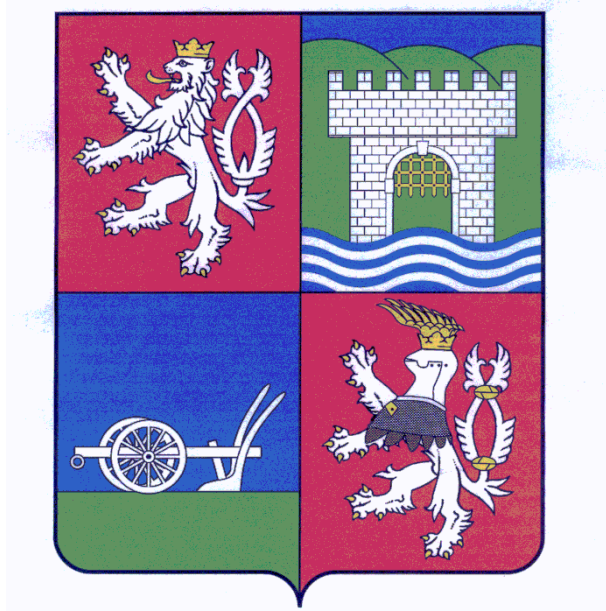


Figure 14

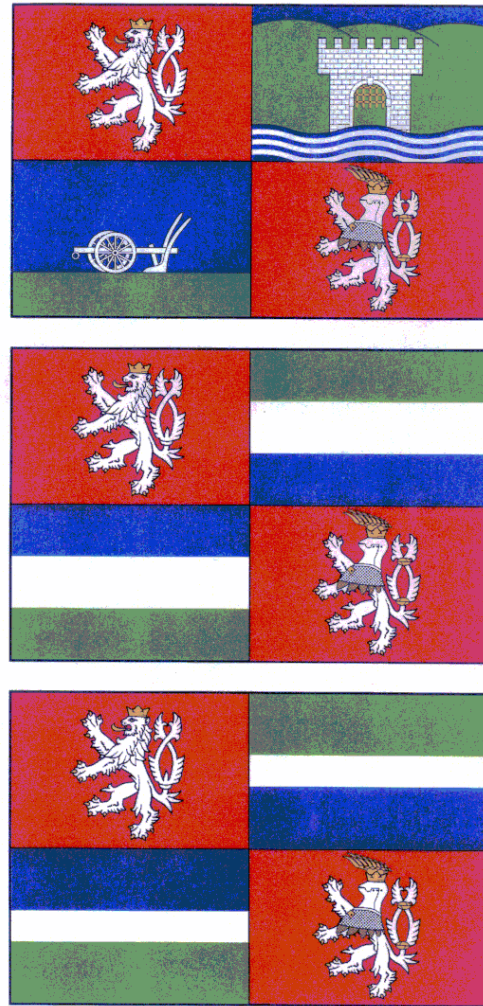


Figure 15

the respondents were able to write comments on the arms, we learned that many criticised the modern shape of the plough. Some recommended the mountain Říp, instead of Porta Bohemica. Others wanted to show symbols of the spa industry for the district of Teplice, or mining industry emblems, and several others. One respondent wanted to have a lark over the plough, while another was probably joking in suggesting a blue bird from the logo of the Civic Democratic Party and the rose of the Social Democratic Party. Some expressed the view that such an enquiry is needless, a waste of money and makes idiots of the public. Also the answer “I do not like these arms but I do not like Skoda cars and policemen either” speaks for itself.

The editors of another daily, *Mladá Fronta Dnes* were strong critics of the arms and gave space mainly to opponents of the design. The result of their enquiry was that 64 readers disliked the arms and only 30 liked them. Many opposed the colour combination of green and blue. They criticised the colours as too dark and the figures as too small. They objected to the tower and plough, as standing for places close to Ústí nad Labem. They did not consider that the type of plough would have been used by the



Figure 16

Przemyslides, and referred to a drawing on the wall of the rotunda in Znojmo (Fig. 16) where the plough was simpler. An “expert” even remarked that there were no furrows behind the plough! Some readers recommended the oak of Oldřich in the North Bohemian village of Peruc, because the legend of Oldřich was said to be more famous than that of the plough man, Přemysl.⁸ One reader dismissed the arms as being like a picture in a children’s colouring book.

In spite of differences in public opinion about the arms, the discussion and voting of the representatives of Ústecký kraj at its 8th meeting, 12 December 2001, was clear. 48 voted for the arms with three voting against and two abstentions. They agreed that the only changes to be made would be those suggested by the subcommittee for heraldry and vexillology. These were a better shape for the wavy stripes, a more stylised plough, and a more accurate drawing of the arms of Ústí nad Labem in the fourth quarter. The modified drawing of the arms (Fig. 17) and the flag (Fig. 18) were approved unanimously and the *hejtman* was commissioned to obtain the approval of the Chairman of Parliament. This was done by Resolution of the Chairman of Parliament 104, of 9 April 2002. The *hejtman* received a letter granting the use of the arms and flag of Ústecký kraj at a ceremony on 14 May 2002.

Rules for the use of the arms of Ústecký kraj and of displaying the flag were issued on 26 June 2002. The arms may be used without specific approval of the Board of the Ústecký Region, only by regional authorities and institutions administered by the region. Other individuals or organisations, personal or juridical, may use them only with the approval of the Board and the payment of a fee. A single use costs 500 Czech crowns, use for a month 1,000 crowns and use for a year 6,000 crowns. On the other hand, the flag of Ústecký kraj may be hoisted without specific approval, but the user must bear in mind the honour due to the flag.⁹

The Ústecký kraj also uses a logo, which is not controlled by the Czech Parliament. It too was designed by Radek Michel, and shows the tower with seven crenellations over the wavy stripes symbolizing the Elbe. It has been in use since November 2001, on the web pages of the Administration of Ústecký kraj, on letterheads and on leaflets produced by it (Fig. 19).

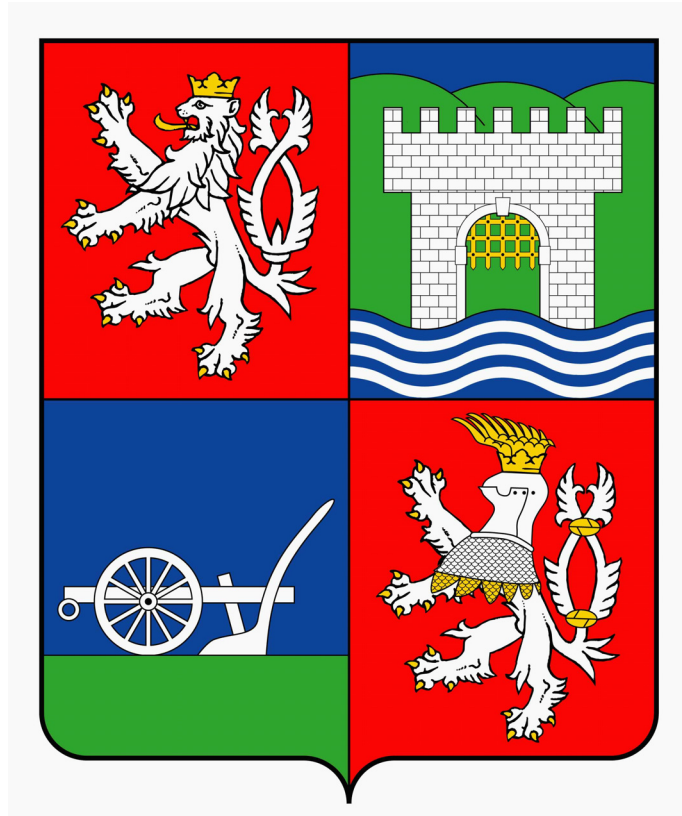


Figure 17

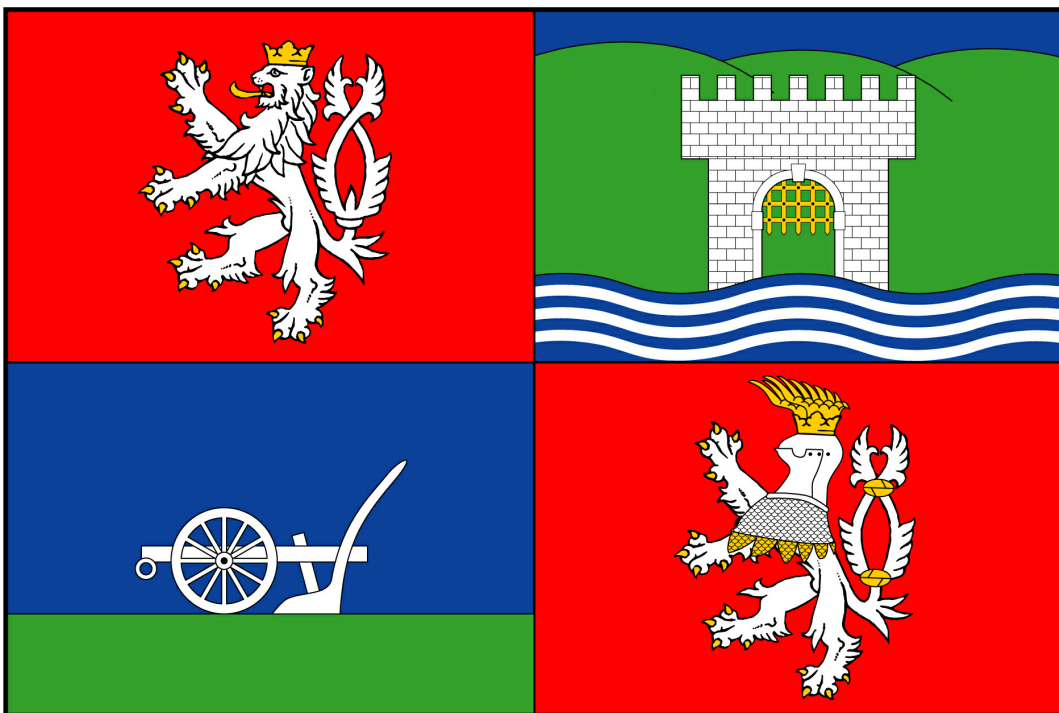


Figure 18



Figure 19

Notes

¹ North Bohemian reporters interviewed me as early as November 2000. An article in the daily newspaper *Ústecký Deník* on 29 November 2000, mentions my wish for my region to have the best flag. It also mentioned a joke by Tomáš Jelínek, a member of the Four-Party Coalition. He recommended the use of two animals in the arms of the Ústecký region – an owl and a small stag. The owl would represent the wisdom of regional representatives, and the small stag would quickly steer the region to prosperity. It should be noted that Mr. Jelínek's surname means a small stag.

² *Nové Ústecké Přehledy*, February 2001, p. 48.

³ Minutes of the meeting for heraldry, 2 May 2001.

⁴ Resolution of the 8th meeting of the Board of the Ústecký region, 23 May 2001.

⁵ Resolution of the 11th meeting of the Board of the Ústecký region, 27 June 2001. The president of the Supreme Control Authority joined the jury only at the end.

⁶ According to legend, some time in the 7th or 8th century, the Forefather, Čech, was with his people, looking for a place to live. They came to the hill of Říp. After they had climbed it, the Forefather saw the place around and said: "This is the country which I have, as I remember, promised you. The country which is not subject to anyone, full of animals and birds. You can smell honey and milk and as you can see, the climate is also very pleasant for us to stay."

⁷ According to legend, the princess Libuše married a ploughman called Přemysl, who became the first prince of Bohemia.

⁸ According to legend, a Czech prince, Oldřich, met and married Božena, a village girl, who is said to be the Foremother of all Bohemian princes, kings and emperors.

⁹ Unlike institutions administered by Liberecký kraj, the North Bohemian Research Library did not receive a copy of a regional flag from the regional authority with permission to display it. The Director of the Regional Library in Liberec told me of an embarrassing situation, when he received the flag of Liberecký kraj from the *hejtman*. He thought that it was a banner for distinguished achievement, and thanked the *hejtman* for it very cordially.

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About the author



Aleš Brožek, born in 1952 in Prague, studied chemistry at the University in Prague. After work at research and development in a chemical factory and in abstracting and lending services in a chemical information centre, he has been serving as Director of the North Bohemian Research Library in Ústí nad Labem since 1990. He married Hana in 1978 and they have two children, Hana and Zuzana. Brožek's interests in vexillology date from childhood. He is co-founder of Vexilologický klub, editor of its periodical (*Vexilologie*), winner of the 1997 Vexillon prize, frequent speaker at international congresses of vexillology, author of *Lexikon vlajek a znaků zemí světa* (1998, Czech edition, 2000, German edition) and numerous articles on vexillology and compiler of annual bibliographies of flag books and charts.

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