Flags of Constructed Languages
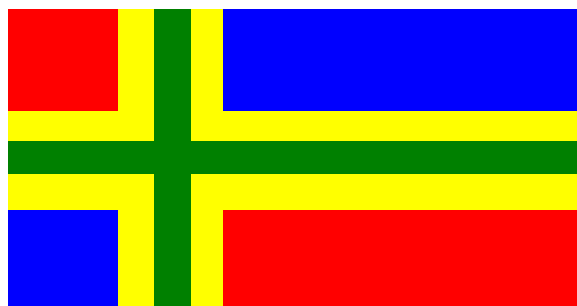
Patrice de La Condamine

Abstract

Since the dawn of humanity, humans have oscillated between the preservation of their own individuality and identity and their need to belong to a global community. The ideal of embracing and of researching the unification of its origins haunts their hearts. With this central to its spirit, constructed languages were developed, whether destined for secondary or international use, intended for vast cultural arenas or with strictly a philosophical use in mind.

One will encounter well-known names such as Volapuk, Esperanto, Ido, Bolak, Interlingua, Occidental but also Glosa, Kotava, Lingua Franca Nova, and Atlango. Or even Folkspraat, Slovio, Norden, Afrihili, Slovianski, Hedsdel, etc. And we haven't even mentioned the philosophical language Lojban. The most interesting aspect is establishing that all these languages have flags which translate the messages and the ideals of the groups in question.

Interpreting the flags of constructed languages is essential for several reasons; firstly it allows us to understand that all these flags without exception, deliver the same message that the their existence isn't necessarily linked to the simple notion of territory, and secondly, the flag is first and foremost, by means of its design and colours, a mental territory.

After having shown and explained the different flags we will conclude with the presentation of the flag of Conlang, a language created by the United Nations of constructed languages.

Folkspraak

FLAGS OF CONSTRUCTED LANGUAGES

Introduction

For everyone present here for this 24th International Congress of Vexillology in Washington, it is not necessary to explain the vital need that one has to represent oneself through the use of emblems, and we all know the essential place which flags occupy in this role. The journey of discovery that we will take will describe the origins of the flags of a particularly interesting group of nations: I would like to speak to you about constructed languages.

Multiplicity of Identities and their representations

The awakening of identity involves *ipso facto* an image of ourselves which consequently calls for a representation of this very image. The flags in our atlases, invariably associated the names of the countries, make us consider that one *identity* could only rhyme with an established *State* and thus be recognized as a well defined territory. The reality is however more complex and this is well represented with the existence of corporations, clubs, circles, parties, which belong to life in society. The mental fatherlands and identifications are actually a very subjective concept. The idea of "civic nation"; developed in the 18th and 19th century, found an extension of itself in the concept of constructed languages.

Languages and Flags

The notion of universal, hidden somewhat in the heart of each human being, led our spirits to imagine languages being able to exceed the tower of Babel and bring about better communication between men. Modern times have seen at least six hundred projects of constructed languages; the 18th century and the people known as the *Illuminati* were most interested in this phenomenon, accentuated in the19th century with the development of world trade. Languages, being by definition the tools of communication, their promoters were unaware of the role of the flag as messenger. Between the double sphere of *Volapük*, of *Néo,* or of *Lojban*, the stars of *Esperanto* or of *Ido*, the rays of *Lingua Franca Nova,* or the *psy of Glosa*, we will visit the families of this little known archipelago of constructed languages which, although, not found in the atlas, are however, a living and breathing reality for its various followers and speakers.

Let us specify before starting that the objectives of these languages are very variable: some would like to become the new international language, others more modestly proclaim to want to be only *subsidiaries to* the national languages. Some claim only better communication within a cultural or linguistic domain. There are finally the philosophical languages conceived with a single aim of better understanding the

mechanisms between perception, thought and language. But these languages share a common point: they have a flag!

Some examples

Volapük was the first constructed language to know certain success. Created in 1879 by the German priest Johann Martin Schleyer, it drew its name from the English roots *world* and *speak*: "speech of the world "! The flag was white, with the drawing in black of a *planisphere*, a mercury scale and two spread wings and two snakes, for knowledge. The planisphere represented the universal vocation of Volapük. In the centre, a white ribbon carried the slogan *"MENAD MAILBOX, PÛK MAILBOX"* in black capital letters, meaning: "one humanity, one language". After some success, Volapük collapsed; recently, a handful of partisans tried to revive the language via the Internet, with suggestions of a new flag which encapsulated the idea of the terrestrial sphere but in purple and yellow this time.

Esperanto is the only constructed language having achieved a certain success in the world. Created in 1887 by the Pole Lazare Zamenhof, this easy language carried along by active militancy very quickly found followers who wanted to give a visible expression to their ideal: the green flag of hope, decorated with a white *canton*, the colour of peace, on which a green star with five rays was detached, representing the esperantist radiation throughout the five continents. This flag, established in 1893, is hoisted in the meetings and congress. A whole Esperantist vexillology has developed since according to the localizations and the affinities of the speakers.

Bolak emerged in 1899 with the Frenchman Léon Bollack who wanted a rational language for "an everyday use" for trade. The word *bolak* meant "blue": colour of the sky and the oceans which represented, according to the author, the unit of a world humanity joined together by communications. The adopted flag was thus a plain blue field. Bollack, who published everything at its own expense, was sensitive to the symbols: he allotted titles to the followers and made members adopt gestural conventions between each other, so much so, that a linguistic attempt at masonry was evoked. Later, having to indicate an international language, its ex-partisans chose Ido, which inherited the blue of Bolak on its flag.

Ido was born in 1907. It was a direct descendant of Esperanto and had Louis de Beaufront at its helm. A flag was adopted, representing a sky blue field decorated with a large white dissymmetrical star with six rays on which "Ido" was written in black. The star inspired the idea of a dynamic in the blue symbolizing open-mindedness and the future. At the beginning of the 21st century, Ido still exists and congresses are regularly held. It wants to be the direct competitor of Esperanto.

Interlingua saw the light of day in 1908 with the Italian Giuseppe Peano. For this non declensional Neo-Latin language, otherwise called *Latino sine flexione*, the language had designed a decorated white flag of a terrestrial sphere underlined in black

and barred with a ribbon on the height of the equator with the inscription *INTERLINGUA* in capital letters on it; it was all topped off by an eagle with outstretched wings symbolizing the take-off of the new universal language, and made us think of the old Roman emblem. But the promised linguistic empire did not have the success it counted on.

Occidental was conceived by the Estonian of German origin Edgar Von Wahl. This ex-esperantist published his review *Kosmoglot* in 1922 to diffuse its project, but the events of the 1930s, the war and the Soviet occupation ruined its work. Von Wahl even had to change the name of its language into *Interlingue* because of the suspicions of Moscow of the word *Occidental*... With the cold war, its partisans joined *Interlingua-IALA*, a new language created in 1951. Followers of Occidental still exist with an Internet site and a publication. The flags link the blue and the yellow of the European flag. The flag of origin showed a sharp blue field decorated with a yellow circle pointing out the yin and the yang, intended to show concepts of equality and balance supported by the international language. The Internet site shows the logo in black on a white background on its banner page.

Néo-Esperanto was in 1925 a second "child of the break-up" following the style of Esperanto with the reformist Rene de Saussure. The continuation was made by keeping the colours of Esperanto, but reversed: a decorated green flag with a white star in the top left hand corner.

Novial was a creation of the Danish linguist Otto Jespersen; Esperantist then Idist, Jespersen imagined a *Nov* (news) *I* (international), *A* (auxiliary), *L* (lingua): Novial! From an acronym, a name had been born. For the flag, Jespersen explained why in keeping with the star with five rays of Esperanto and the star with six rays of Ido, one needed a star with seven rays. This star was reproduced on a green-blue background, a result of the addition of the green esperantist and blue idist flag. But it is with a second version that Novial was finally made known: a white flag with a supported yellow octagonal sun from which eight orange triangles emerge. It is the idea of the international language radiating on humanity and allowing peace between its members. A small group of speakers still exists.

Néo was the work of the Belgian diplomat Arturo Alfandari in 1937 who longed for a constructed language which had been "latinized". Apart from a brief popularity in the 1960s, Néo was little known. A site devoted to the language shows the continents of the world presented in the form of two discs, all surrounded by white on black, with the inscription in capital letters *NEO.*

Interlingua-IALA was created by the German-American Alexander Gode and was born in 1951 to try to establish a better understanding between men after the war. The colour Europe blue is used as a base for the two versions of the flag: the first shows an "I" whose point imitates a sphere; the second also represents a central "I", written in a sphere, giving a stylized drawing, a symbol of opening up to the world.

Glosa was created in 1943 by the British Lancelot Hogben, which was rediscovered in 1972 thanks to a compatriot, Ronald Clark, who wanted to make this simple language with its stems in Latin and in Greek a tool of transnational communication. A flag with a bright green field presents a blue logo symbolizing the importance of communications: telephone, radio, fax, television, computer, Internet, satellites… The circles represent respectively, base vocabulary, its extension and "mega-vocabulary" obtained by the Graeco-latin contribution. The opening at the top represents the adaptability in the world; let us also notice that the drawing forms the Greek letter *psy*, a representation of the human spirit and its sovereignty over all things.

Kotava was born in 1978 and was the invention of a woman, Staren Fetcey, whose European references are no longer appropriate for the current world. It was *a priori* a language with a completely made up vocabulary to guarantee total neutrality. Kotava presents a flag made up of five equal horizontal bands of green, red, white, blue and yellow on its site. No explanation being provided, let us try a deduction by imagining the five continents: Africa, America, Europe, Oceania, Asia, thus confirming the world challenge of *kotavusikeem*.

Uropi appears in 1983 with the French academic Joel Landais. Marked by the discovery of the common base of the Indo-European languages, the author dreams of remaking this lost unit. The uropists, who took part in *Forum of the Languages* in Toulouse in 2010, adopted a blue flag with a large yellow "U" … like *Uropi* and *Universal*.

Atlango was a creation by the Pole Ryszard Antoniszczak in 2002, who wanted a language "*for all the European Union and America"* based on the languages of Europe and Esperanto. The flag translates this pan-European idea correctly: blue and yellow background logo which makes you think of a hollow cross and star of the flag of NATO. For the anecdote, the presence of the Bible on the site of Atlango shows the links with the philosophy of its originator.

Arahau emerged in 2006 on the initiative of the writer and Russian poet Ivan Karasev. This language, *a minima*, is equipped with a flag: its somewhat abstract drawing is based on white and red, symbols of "dualism" and "natural philosophy" which seem to have inspired the language, without any other details for the moment.

Folkspraak is an attempt to establish a Germanic language of the people. At the beginning, there was a group living in Denmark in the 1960s wishing to set up a ready-made fringe community life of fraternity. Established in the Netherlands in 1972, the group developed this language to bring the citizens of the countries of the North closer. If the community is restricted, an Internet site exists and devotes a page to the flag in these terms "*Folkspraak behove en flag"*, by inviting the visitors to vote. The most known flag quarters red and blue with a green Scandinavian cross bordered with yellow. For lack of explanations, we make the link with a Frisian regionalistic flag; green would translate the choice of a simple life and fraternity. As a reminder of the 18th century, the Frisian flag of Zevenwouden showed white and green squares.

Lingua franca nova was diffused in the 1990s by the Dutch academic George Boeree, who wished to revive the pidgin Mediterranean formerly employed by the sailors and commercial Italian, Venetian, Genovese, Catalan, Spanish, Portuguese, and Maltese. The flag shows a suggestive drawing: a range situated lower left with rays successively emanating from it in blue, green, yellow, orange and red representing respectively France, Portugal, Spain, Catalonia, and Italy.

Slovio was born in 2001 with Slovak Hucko who wished to give the Slavic people a common language; a kind of federate Slavic Esperanto. The blue, red and white of Pan-slavism are in favour with the official site of Slovio. Several models are proposed but the most recent drawing shows two horizontal bands of blue on red, with a large white disc on which is detached a red lime leaf as well as a cross with a blue double cross-piece. The lime, a well known tree of these regions and the cross with a double cross-piece is a religious and historic emblem common to these Slavic and Orthodox countries at the same time.

Lojban, appeared in the 1980s, and here we enter the languages of research conceived and used by linguists and anthropologists. Although Lojban does not claim any international auxiliary vocation, it has a flag however: on a white field, two dark blue circles one on top of the other on top of which there is a set of horizontal and vertical red arrows, which expresses well the idea of research and the transmission of knowledge without end.

Areidansk was born in 1988 from work from the philologist and Italian linguist Carmelo Lupini. Devoting itself to cultural and anthropological research, Lupini thus delivered its assumptions on the evolution of the Indo-European language; albeit in a strictly experimental spirit. It however gave its language a flag: three horizontal bands of white, black and red, with an edge skirting the pole and the re-use of these colours in the form of three squares.

We will finish with **Conlang**... which is not a language, but the federation which gathers the followers of the constructed languages. The UNO of the constructed languages, all in one! The purple field of the flag represents the creativity of the researchers and the rising sun of a new humanity illuminates a black shaped tower of Babel. This flag, adopted in September 2004, wants to be representative of the spirit which animates the originators of constructed languages.

Reflexions and conclusion

These flags, carrying ideals which regularly return to concepts such as unity or peace, show us colours and symbols relating to them: white, blue, green… with the use of spheres, suns and stars, rays, and arrows… Whether hope, infinity, radiant light, height and tolerance beyond what can be separated or opposed… the flags of the constructed languages translate a permanent concern of the man who is in search of his life on earth and the appropriation of the direction to be given to this life.

Many other names of languages as well as their flags could be described, but a long list is not essential. What, on the other hand, is important, in our eyes, is the interest which the knowledge of the flags of constructed languages presents us with. This uncharted journey without apparent borders, will teach us two principal lessons.

The first lesson is that flags cannot systematically be associated with the existence of materialized territories such as we traditionally represent them through States; out of habit if not convenience. Group identity, not forced by terrestrial borders, is initially a mental representation. The flags of constructed languages represent *nations of the spirit*; they make us revisit the idea of *nation*. The proof could be given to us by those families who speak only Esperanto at home and who use their *pasaport-servo* to travel. The passport of the Esperantist nation is as dear to their heart as the national passport!

The second lesson proves to us, if it were still necessary, the constancy of the necessary definition of identity when a group is formed and decides to share a certain number of values. These identity projections are still illustrated by flags, which send many messages to heavens. Languages are visions of the world and the flags of constructed languages express this concept well.
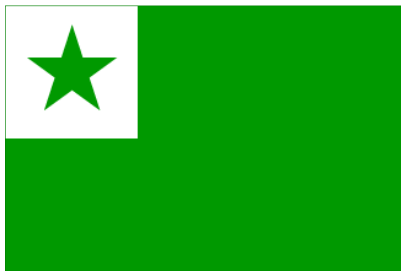
But we, the vexillologists, we know all that. We know that flags exist only by the grace of dreams which are projected by man on earth. Thus, after having collected the flags, we always return to the starting point: those who do this are men. If flags are the auxiliaries of history, then vexillologists are its scouts.
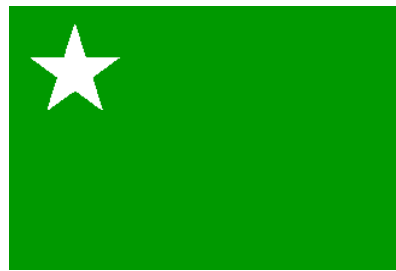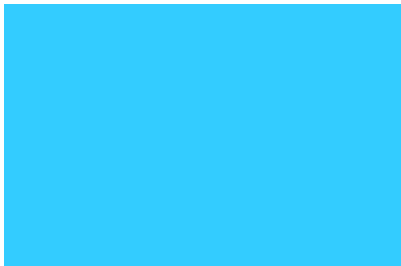
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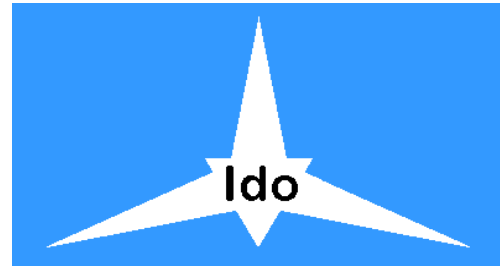Volapük : first flag and actual project
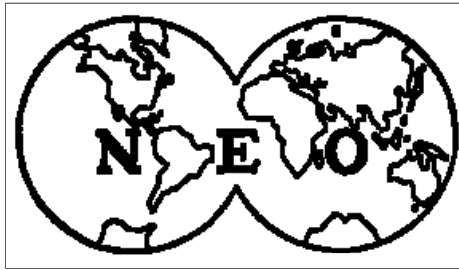

Esperanto

Néo-Esperanto

Bolak

Ido

Interlingua
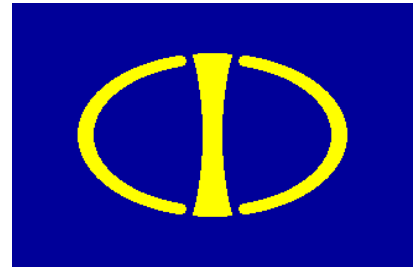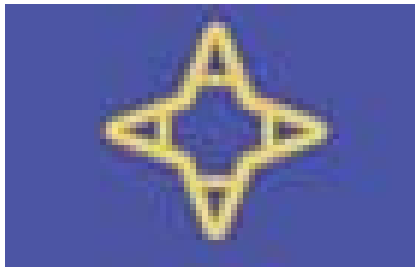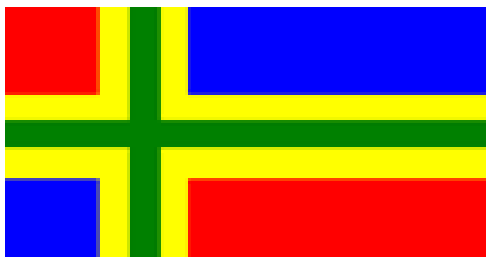

Occidental

Novia

Néo

Occidental-IALA

Glosa

Kotava

Uropi
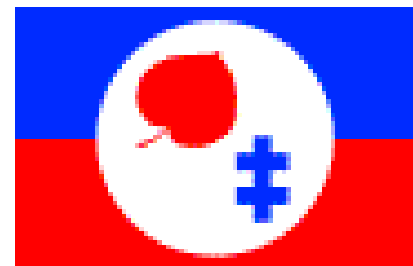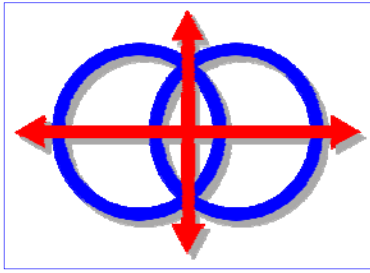
Atlango

Arahau

Folkspraak

Slovio

Lingua franca nova

Lojban

Areidansk

Conlang

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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WEBSITES

Volapük: http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Volapuk/
[site et blog des actuels volapükistes]

Espéranto : http://www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/qy-eo.html
[site *Flags Of The World*. Image António Martins]

Nov-Esperanto: http://espigor.w.interia.pl/Nov-Esperanto/index.html
[page dédiée au drapeau du Néo-Espéranto]

Bolak: http://www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/qy_plan.html#bolak
[site *Flags Of The World*. Image António Martins]

Ido: http://www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/qy-io.html
[site *Flags Of The World*. Image António Martins]

Interlingua-LSF: http://www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/qy_plan.html#lsf
[site *Flags Of The World*. Image António Martins]

Occidental-Interlingue: http://www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/qy_plan.html#occ
[site Flags Of The World. Image António Martins]

Novial : http://www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/qy_plan.html#novial
[site *Flags Of The World*. Image António Martins]

Néo : http://www.connectedglobe.com/mmm/neo.html

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[site *Flags Of The World*. Image António Martins]

Glosa : http://www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/qy-qgl.html
[site *Flags Of The World*. Image António Martins]

Kotava: http://www.kotava.org/index.php
[site officiel du Kotava]

Uropi: http://uropi.free.fr/index1.html et http://uropi.canalblog.com/
[blogue uropi]

Atlango: http://www.vido.net/atlango/
[site officiel de l'Atlango]

Arahau: http://rbardalzo.narod.ru/
[site d'Ivan Karasev]

Folkspraak :   www.geocities.com/folkspraak/MAINENGLISH.html
[site dédié aux drapeaux du Folkspraat]

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Slovio :   http://www.slovio.com/
[site du Slovio]

Lojban: http://www.lojban.org/pics/flags/loj.gif
[site du Lojban]

Areidansk: http://carmelolupini.altervista.org/
[page Internet de l'auteur]

Conlang: http://www.joerg-rhiemeier.de/Conlang/Conflag_med.png
[site Conlang page]

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About the Author

Patrice de La Condamine studied Portuguese at the Université de Rennes completing a dissertation entitled *"Cape Verdian immigration in France"* (Paris, UNESCO, 1982). He was a French teacher in Lisbon (1980–1981) and a Portuguese teacher in France (1981–1987). Currently, he is an archivist in a high-school, in the Collège d'Ossau, Arudy.

He obtained a doctorate of Contemporary Historyreading: *"Researching the ethnic identities of the former USSR through their flags"* (Université d'Arras, 2007) under the tutelage of Jean-Pierre Arrignon. The panel of adjudicators included Michel Lupant, President of the FIAV.

Since 2004, he has presented conferences at the Université des Sciences Sociales de Toulouse where he has given lectures on China, Africa, and Latin America concerning History and Vexillology.

He is a member of several associations including: Société française de Vexillologie, Défense de la Langue française, Société de Géographie. He was chairman of l'Université Inter-Ages de Libourne (1997–2001).

Main areas of interest – understanding and relaying the history of man

Patrice de La Condamine feels the need to understand societies and appreciate them for what they are. He studies the links that exist between men, their memory, and emblems.

He has been interested in flags since adolescence. In 1976, he discovered the work of Whitney Smith entitled: *"Flags through history and around the world"* and began to explain history of human societies through their flags and has since specialized in vexillology. Other interests include travel, languages and scripts.

He self-edits his own work on essentially historical, sociological and vexillological subjects. He possesses his own ISBN and a catalogue record in the Bibliothèque nationale. Works are of a limited edition.

Patrice de La Condamine has carried out conferences in History, Geopolitics, Emblematology, Sociology, Vexillology for a variety of different groups (associations, institutions, universities).

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Vexillological works of the author since 2005

2005 :
Les couleurs de l'empire éclaté
(nouveaux drapeaux des ex-RSS / new flags of the ex-USSR)

Le Tibet : une histoire à travers le drapeau, les emblèmes, les symboles
(history of Tibet through its flags)

Les drapeaux des royaumes des neiges
(petits Etats himalayens / flags of the small himalayan states)

Les drapeaux de l'archipel lusophone
(drapeaux des pays de langue portugaise / the flags of the portuguese communities)

Les couleurs panafricaines
(the panafrican colours)

De Normandie, d'Angleterre, d'Aquitaine : un léopard et son destin
(the history of the flags of Normandy, England, Aquitaine)

2006 :
Les nouvelles couleurs de l'Empire
(sur les drapeaux des régions russes / the new colours of the russian oblasts)

Des croix scandinaves méconnues
(the unknown scandinavian crosses on tlags)

2007 :
Des Espagnes, des couleurs : les drapeaux des autonomies espagnoles
(the colours of the spanish regions flags)

L'Italie, une nation, des régions : une histoire par les drapeaux
(the history of the italian flags)

Les bannières des provinces de France
(history of the flags of the old provinces of France before 1789)*

2008 :
Les Allemands de la Volga
(étude historique, sociologique, vexillologique / historical, sociolocal and vexillological essay about the German of the Volga)

Un voyage bulgare
(vexillologie de la Bulgarie / history of the bulgarian flags)

Les drapeaux des langues construites
(the flags of the constructed languages)

Les couleurs de l'Empire éclaté (3ème édition)

2009 :
Drapeaux et emblèmes du Royaume Uni
(the flags and the emblems of the United Kingdom)

2010 :
Le Japon et la Grande Asie, les Etats de la Sphère de Coprospérité 1930–1945
(Japan and the Great Asian sphere flags, 1930–1945)

Insoumissions dans la Russie de 2010
(flags of uprisings in Russia)

Le Birobidjan, une aventure juive en Sibérie
(Birobidjan: a jewish adventure in Siberia)

Couleurs et emblèmes de France
(history of all the flags and symbols of France)

2011 :
Les Italies périphériques
(drapeaux des régions et communautés culturelles / the flags of all the italian regions and communities)

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