The development of the subnational flags of Canada

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Abstract

Subnational flags in Canada date back to at least 1939. Over 950 municipal flags have been analysed using the FOTW database, augmented by the Canadian Heraldic Authority. Data collected include the year of adoption (44 per cent of municipalities), the basic design and symbols employed, and non-vexillological municipal information (e.g., population, community status). Subnational flags were adopted with increasing frequency after the adoption of the current national flag in 1965, which generated increased public interest in municipal and provincial symbols. Although 9 out of 13 provincial and territorial flags were introduced in the five years after 1965, municipal flag adoption was slower, and peaked in 1990-2010. At least 90 per cent of municipalities with a population of over 10,000 now display a municipal flag. Flag design ranges from simple arms, seal or shield (21 per cent); municipal logo (44 per cent); heraldic design (10 per cent); Canadian pale (18 per cent); other designs (7 per cent). Design elements reflect local industry, environment, heritage, transportation, climate, maps, and recreation. National and provincial symbols are employed on 23 per cent of municipal flags; with national symbols most common on flags of municipalities in the Prairies and the North, and provincial symbols in Quebec.

Introduction

Prior to the debate surrounding the introduction of the Maple Leaf flag of Canada in 1965, very few municipal, provincial or territorial jurisdictions employed their own flag. Only two provinces (Quebec and British Columbia), and fewer than a dozen municipalities appear to have used a flag, although many larger units had adopted coats of arms or distinctive shields.

During and immediately after the selection of a design for the national flag, most provinces and territories quickly adopted their own symbols. Prince Edward Island was first, almost 11 months before the Maple Leaf was hoisted, followed by Manitoba, New Brunswick and Ontario in 1965, Yukon in 1967, and Alberta, Saskatchewan and Northwest Territories in 1969. In 1980 Newfoundland abandoned the Union Jack it had used since joining Canada in 1949 in favour of the current flag of Newfoundland and Labrador, and Nunavut adopted a flag upon the formation of the territory in 1999. Anomalously, Nova Scotia did not officially confirm its flag until 2013, although it had been in use since at least 1929. Lower level entities soon started to develop flags also.

This contribution results from an investigation into the adoption dates, design styles, and incorporated elements of flags of the next level of jurisdiction, the municipalities. It includes cities, towns and *villes* as incorporated municipalities, and

all other lower-level government and district authorities. As no central authority regulates the design of municipal symbols in Canada, this survey provides an insight into the art of promotion by municipal councils as they have seen themselves through the past 50 years.

Analytical methods

As listed in Wikipedia in June 2017 Canada contains 3,572 municipalities, in a plethora of municipal types, e.g. cities (162), towns (719), *villes* in Quebec (223), and a wide range of others, including (each with over 50 examples) parishes, rural municipalities, townships, villages, municipal districts, communities, district municipalities, and municipalities.[1] This variety arises from the different systems of land subdivision in each province and territory. In general, cities and towns are relatively easy to distinguish, and the *villes* in Quebec can be equated with cities or towns depending on their population and local usage.

Municipal reorganisation is frequent in Canada. In areas of population growth, cities expand and incorporate surrounding areas, whereas in areas of population decline, towns dissolve to be included in counties or merge with counties to become regional municipalities. In some cases, towns may have flags but are also included in regional municipalities. Not all of the 975 flags analysed here are therefore currently in use, but they are included in the survey as they document the trends in vexillography during their period of use.

A total of 975 municipalities were discovered to be vexilliferous, of which 212 are cities, 402 are towns, 196 are villages or small clustered communities, and 165 are various district entities (counties, regional municipalities, townships, etc.) The main sources of information were the Flags of the World (FOTW) website,[2] *Canadian Civic Flags* (2011),[3] and the Canadian Heraldic Authority website[4].

The information collected was dependent on the source – the basic details include an image of the flag, details of its design and components, date of adoption (available for 428 municipalities) and population. Elements of the flag were then subdivided into eight categories: local industry, natural environment, heritage, transportation, climate, recreation, map or location information, and other devices. In addition, each flag was inspected for the presence of a symbol that represents either Canada (usually a maple leaf or beaver) or the province or territory (commonly the floral emblem). The results of these analyses are presented here.

Dates of flag adoption

In most cases a flag is adopted by the municipal government on a specific date, either the date of the meeting that approved it, or when it was recorded by the Canadian Heraldic Authority, or when it was first flown. In the survey of flags conducted here, usually only one of these dates is available and is recorded simply

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1   'Lists of Municipalities in Canada', https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lists_of_
     municipalities_in_Canada [accessed June 2017]
2   Canadian Provinces, Territories, Regions and Cities', Flags of the World (FOTW)
     website, http://flagspot.net/flags/ca-prov.html#mun [accessed June 2017]
3   E.B. Kaye, 'Canadian City Flags', *Raven: A Journal of Vexillology*, 18 (2011)
4   Canadian Heraldic Authority, *Public Register of Arms, Flags, and Badges of
     Canada*, https://www.gg.ca/en/heraldry [accessed June 2017]

as the year of adoption. Of 975 vexilliferous entities identified, we have precise date information for 428 (44 per cent).

The oldest municipal flag found is that of Montreal, developed in 1939 as a banner of arms, after the coat of arms was adopted in its current form in 1938. The flag as a banner of arms was introduced in time for a royal visit by King George VI and Queen Elizabeth in 1939 and has continued in use. The flag is a red cross of St George on a white field, with a symbol in each quadrant: fleur-de-lys, rose, thistle and shamrock, representing the French, English, Scots and Irish, four of the founding peoples of Canada. These elements can also be found on the national arms. Recently (2017) the mayor of Montreal, Denis Coderre, has suggested the addition of an element to recognise the First Nations communities. This proposal has received considerable support although the precise symbol yet to be determined.[5]

Ten municipal flags introduced before 1965; all have an armorial basis.
Images FOTW
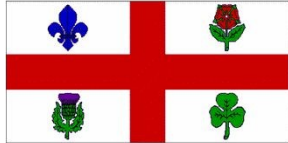
Nine other communities had adopted flags before the introduction of the national Maple Leaf flag: four in Quebec (Nicolet, 1943; Baie-D'Urfé, 1961; Baie Comeau, 1962; Saint-Léonard, 1963), two in Ontario (Richmond Hill, 1950; Oshawa, 1952), and Nanaimo, BC (1951); Saskatoon, SK (1952); Dartmouth, NS (1961). The presence of these flags in widely distributed areas suggests that other communities

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5   CBC News, 'Montreal mayor proposes updating city flag to reflect contribution of Aboriginal people', 14 February 2017; http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/montreal-flag-indigenous-1.3981820 [accessed April 2017]

may well have adopted flags before 1965, and occasional allusions exist to earlier flags, e.g. the *Daily News* reported that a city flag was raised in St John's, NL in August 1907. The current flag of St John's post-dates 1965, the year it adopted its coat of arms.

All ten municipal flags that predate the introduction of the current national flag are armorial in design. Seven feature prominently the coat or arms or the central shield from the arms, two (Montreal, Nanaimo) are banners of arms, while the remaining Richmond Hill uses an armorial element, a crown lion passant on an ermine mound, from the arms of the Duke of Richmond.

On 15 February 1965, the current national flag of Canada was proclaimed into law by the Queen, after a lengthy and at times acrimonious debate in Parliament. Throughout the debate, which extended from 1960 to 1964, Canadians took greater interest in vexillological matters, as witnessed by the sudden proliferation of provincial flags.

Eight of the 12 provinces and territories then in existence adopted their current flags between 1964 and 1969, and by the end of the decade, all provinces and territories were officially or unofficially vexilliferous.

The introduction of flags by lower levels of government was less immediate – nine more communities had flags by the end of the 1960s – but the rate of introduction increased through the next four decades: 36 in the 1970s, 61 in the 1980s, 124 in the 1990s, and 141 in the 2000s. A further 43 flags have been documented so far in the 2010s.
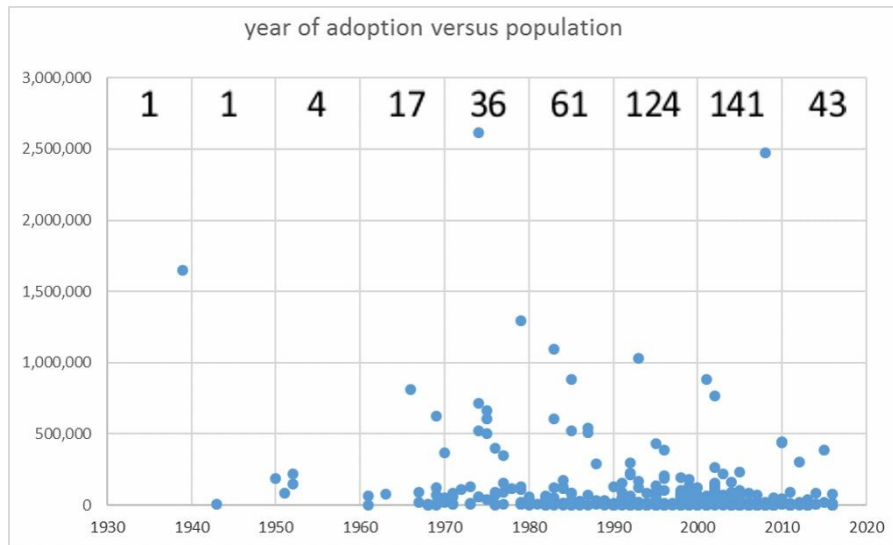

Year of adoption against municipal population for 428 municipal flags:
the figure in bold at the top of each column represents the total number of known
adoptions in that decade (note relevant data available for only 44% of the flags
included in this study)

Analysis of municipal flag design

Municipal flags were classified into four categories according to their basic design. Armorial designs include flags with a coat of arms or a shield from the coat of arms, and banners of arms. Flags employing a Canadian Pale design were distinguished as a second category, including those that use the arms on the Pale. A third category includes those flags that feature prominently a municipal logo or brand design. All other flags were placed in a fourth category, which includes those that are at least in part blazonable (e.g. saltire, bicolour) but range to others that employ the municipality name alone, or even photographic reproductions. Many flags employ elements that could place them in more than one category, and in those cases, the dominant element was selected to categorise them.

Using the subset of flags with known dates of introduction, the frequency of different flag types and flag elements can be tracked through time.
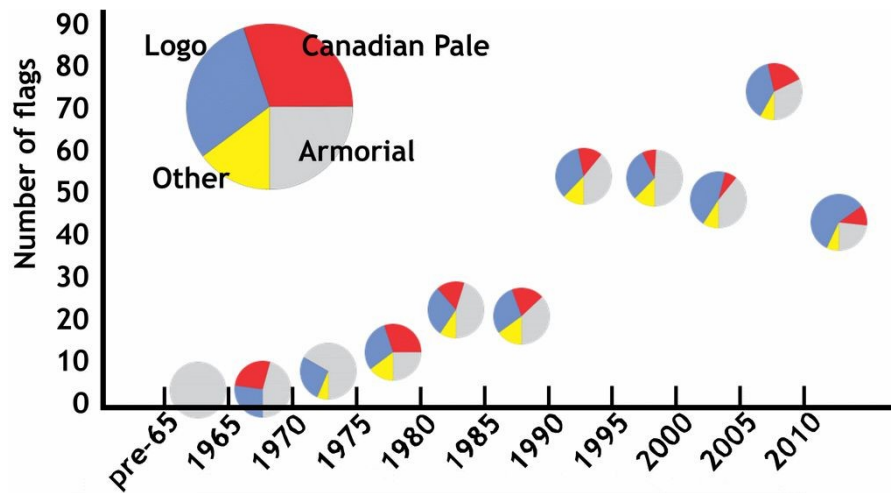
Flag type analysed by year of adoption grouped in 5-year intervals; the y-axis shows the total number of flags per decade; pie-charts show the relative abundance of each type, coded as shown (upper left)

Armorial design flags

Armorial designs include all flags with a simple coat or arms or the shield from a coat of arms, usually centred. Many of these flags were devised by the Chief Herald of Canada and are fully described on the Public Register of Arms, Flags and Badges of Canada.[6] Also included in this category are flags that are true banners of arms: those where the design of the shield is modified into a rectangular arrangement to serve as the flag.

Until 1975, armorial flags comprised over half of all flag introductions, and if we include Canadian Pale designs that use a coat of arms, almost three-quarters of all municipal flags. Not until 2000 did the combined group of armorial and Canadian Pale designs account for under 50 per cent of flag introductions.

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6 Canadian Heraldic Authority, *Public Register of Arms, Flags, and Badges of Canada*, https://www.gg.ca/en/heraldry/public-register [accessed June 2017]

Canadian Pale flags
The well-known design of the new Canadian flag (1965) had an almost immediate impact on subnational flags in Canada. The Canadian Pale design, using a flag with dimensions 1:2, vertically divided 1:2:1, was quickly recognised as a successful flag design and presented abundant opportunity for lower-level jurisdictions to apply their own colour scheme and symbolism. The Northwest Territories (1969) and Yukon (1967) both adopted this basic plan, slightly modified by Yukon to a 2:3:2 ratio, and applied their territorial shield or coat of arms in the central panel. At least 168 municipalities have been identified using the Canadian Pale as the basis of their flags, most commonly in a blue-white-blue (85 examples) or green-white-green (18 examples) arrangement. Only 11 examples were found using red-white-red, perhaps to avoid possible confusion with the national flag when flying.

Canadian Pale designs appeared within a year of the adoption of the national flag, the earliest being the City of Edmonton (1966), which devised a blue-white-blue scheme with the coat of arms centred in the white panel. Other notable examples are Strathcona County, AB (1967); Etobicoke, ON (1977, now merged with Toronto); St Catharines, ON (1979); and Prince Albert, SK (1980). Since 1980, Canadian Pale designs have consistently been used in 5 per cent to 20 per cent of all new municipal flags in Canada. Particularly noteworthy are the flags of the communities of the Northwest Territories, which all employ Canadian Pale designs, adopted in 1985, to be used in the NWT pavilion at Vancouver's Expo '86.

Logo flags
Until 1975, most flags employed an armorial design. The earliest introduction of a flag without reference to the arms is the town of Capreol in northern Ontario (1968), which uses an uneven yellow-blue bicolour, the name written vertically on the narrow yellow field at the fly, and a yellow maple leaf with a beaver superimposed on the broad blue field. The following year Scarborough ON (now part of Toronto) adopted a flag showing the cliffs of the Scarborough Bluffs as four overlapping blue quadrilaterals, four blue waves at the base, and a red maple leaf on a white field, diagrammatically representing a shoreline view. These non-armorial designs launched an outpouring of designs of this type, which became the dominant design choice by 2000.

Many logo flags clearly work well as identifying symbols. Noteworthy is the flag of Toronto, the largest metropolitan area in Canada. This flag consists of a blue field with two curved white bands and vertical stripes representing the outline of the City Hall towers at Nathan Philips Square, overlain by a bright red maple leaf at the base. The design is simple, easily recalled and eyecatching, and is now widely used across the city.

Included in this category are many flags that have arisen from a municipal branding exercise. Referred to here as 'brand flags', these are generally recognised as stylistically 'modern' – indeed most have been developed by municipal governments employing branding professionals to update their internet presence, and the designs have been applied also to the municipal symbols. Some work well as flags, but many end up lost in a moving piece of fabric. Branding can be distinguished in modern designs as flags that cannot be described in blazon, commonly include text (municipality name and/or motto), and commonly employ

non-standard colours. They are typically limited in their colour range, over 80 per cent being dominantly dark blue or green; they may have colours fading into each other and may even include photo-reproductions.
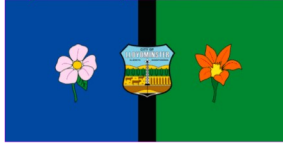
Municipal flags of Canada displaying a range of designs. Images FOTW

Noteworthy here is the brand and flag of Ottawa – a blue-teal green vertical bicolour, over which is laid the shape of a large letter O, formed of four white swirls whose ends are pointed to emulate a maple leaf, and which mimic the skyline of the Parliament buildings. This flag was introduced when the original city of Ottawa merged with 12 surrounding municipalities. The colours and design are distinctive and bold, and are widely used in the city. Interestingly, the design company that devised this brand also attempted to redesign the coat of arms, but that was rejected by the Chief Herald, and the old city arms continue in use.

Equally noteworthy perhaps are brands that fail as flags. One example is the city of Winnipeg, which in 1975 adopted as its flag a diagonal bicolour blue over yellow, with a white band between, and with a central disc bearing a shield and two ribbons. In 2001 it undertook a rebranding exercise which resulted in a dark blue flag, bearing a small red, blue and orange logo over a light blue curve, and the name Winnipeg in white serif letters below. While the logo may be appropriate on letterhead or websites, it is almost indistinguishable on a flying flag, and the text can be read correctly only on the obverse.

Other designs

Canadian municipalities generally have no restrictions on the designs that can be used on flags. As a result, a wide range of other designs have been employed, including: bicolours; tricolours (excluding Canadian Pale designs); flags divided vertically, horizontally or diagonally; ensign patterns; lozenges; saltires; or flags that use photographs, local scenes, maps, or words alone. Some noteworthy examples are flags that show affiliation with their province – numerous saltire designs are

used in Nova Scotia. Many districts (counties, townships, regional or district municipalities) show a map of the municipality, and one curious case is Lloydminster, a city bisected by the Alberta-Saskatchewan provincial border. The flag of Lloydminster is similarly divided as a blue-green bicolour (using colours from the Alberta and Saskatchewan provincial flags), the floral emblems (wild rose for Alberta, prairie lily for Saskatchewan), and in the centre the municipal shield which is similarly divided by a producing oil well with an Alberta cattle scene on the sinister half and a Saskatchewan prairie scene on the dexter half.

A notable recent example is the flag of Sault Ste Marie, ON, introduced in 2016. The design of this flag is deliberately shaped in a flying-flag form, with curved upper and lower edges, although permission is granted for it to be manufactured in a rectangular format, the parts outside the flag design being reproduced as white fabric.

Flag design – summary and findings

This survey has shown that municipal flags were very rare until the time of the Great Flag Debate, which culminated with the introduction of the Maple Leaf flag in 1965. Thereafter municipalities of all sizes began to adopt flags. The rate of adoption increasing exponentially up to the first decade of the 21st century. In some cases flags were adopted by several municipalities for a particular purpose, for example the NWT communities in Expo '86. As more communities displayed flags, peer pressure set in and neighbouring communities did likewise. Through the 1980s many ingenious logos were developed, often involving community participation (flag contests), but by 2000 a substantial proportion were being devised by commercial design companies, generally as part of a community branding process.

The sharp acceleration of flag adoptions in the 1990s corresponds with the introduction of the internet. When a municipality is building its first web page, one obvious feature is the municipal flag. In researching municipal flags, it is often worthwhile seeking out old web pages on sites like the Wayback Machine (https://archive.org/), where not only is the flag shown, but also information about it. More recent web pages often lose the associated information, and in many cases have been rebranded, eliminating the flag or in several cases replacing it with a brand flag.

What do we put on our flag?

This is the first question asked by any municipality when the prospect of a flag is first raised. Should it be something related to the local economy? Or should it be historical, relating to the founding of the community? Should it demonstrate why people reside there now? Or should it be more abstract, using colours, fields and curves to represent the community? Inevitably these considerations engender much debate at town and community meetings, and the job gets passed off either to a flag design competition (usually involving schoolchildren) or more recently a design company. Results from both options vary.

The 975 flags discovered in this survey were examined to identify the symbols used on municipal flags. Only identifiable elements were included – swirls and curves intended to represent ideas such as progress, diversity, community, etc. were

recorded simply as 'swirls'. Many flags include several elements, especially if they incorporate a shield or coat of arms, where small details are more easily included. The symbols used were then grouped into nine categories: industry, the natural environment, national or provincial emblems, heritage, transportation, maps, climate, recreation, and other devices.

The results of this survey are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Elements included on municipal flags

Element type	Frequency %
Industry	45
Natural environment	29
National or provincial emblems	27
Heritage	27
Transportation	15
Maps	10
Climate	6
Recreation	5
Other devices	9
Values expressed as a percentage of all flags analysed	

By far the most common element on municipal flags is a symbol representing the local industry (including agriculture, commercial fishing and forestry), seen on 45 per cent of all municipal flags. This applies especially to smaller communities: 54 per cent of communities of less than 10,000 population show a representation of the local economy; for communities of under 5,000, that figure is 66 per cent. The smaller the community, the more likely it is that one industry dominates the local economy, making the choice of symbol easy; for example, the flag of Elliot Lake, ON, once a uranium-mining town, is the arms on a white field, showing an atom, and a miner's hat and pick. Annapolis County, NS employs a blue saltire on white, from the province's flag, with a shield containing an apple tree, representative of the orchard industry. Some communities use the intricacy possible with a coat of arms, a shield or a seal to include multiple industries. Estevan, SK uses a gold over black uneven bicolour, representative of grain and coal, while its city seal employs four symbols of industry – a coal mine, an oil derrick, a lightning bolt (signifying electricity generation) and a gas flame, all separated by two bundles of wheat stalks per saltire.

Canada displays a wide range of climates, from maritime temperate to Arctic, but the dominant climatic theme on municipal flags is sunshine. The sun appears on 12 per cent of the municipal flags, sometimes indicating a favourable climate or growing conditions (e.g. Orillia, ON), or as a sunrise or sunset theme, commonly indicating either natural beauty, or a shoreline location. Other climatic or atmospheric indicators include the aurora borealis, especially in northern communities, snowflakes, and windmills. In some cases there is an overlap between indicators of climate and elements representing recreational opportunities (the sun over a sailboat), perhaps best typified by Sylvan Lake, AB, which shows a four-season logo with springtime winds blowing a sailboat, the summer sun, leafless trees in the fall, and a hockey player on the ice in winter. Recreational themes can be detected on 10 per cent of the municipal flags.

Elliot Lake, ON

Annapolis Co., NS 2004

Estevan, SK 1973

Guysborough, NS 2006

Kingston ON 2000

Gimli, MB

Glendon, AB

Sylvan Lake, AB

Hay River, NWT 1986

Municipal flags of Canada displaying elements representing industry,
*the natural environment, heritage, and climate. Images FOTW*

Elements of the natural environment can be seen on 29 per cent of Canadian municipal flags. Such elements range from highly stylised (e.g., the former city of Scarborough, ON showing the Scarborough Bluffs overlooking Lake Ontario) to photographic reproductions, e.g. Guysborough Municipality, NS shows an image of a moose, with its seal on a blue-green bicolour to represent the woods and waters of the region.

Symbols relating to heritage range from historical artefacts (e.g. the Martello Tower and three coronets on the flag of Kingston, representing the loyalist settlers and the defences set up during the War of 1812), to ancestral objects (e.g. the Viking ship on the flag of Gimli, MT, the largest Icelandic community outside Iceland), and to ethnic foods (e.g. the Ukrainian perogy on the flag of Glendon, AB).

In a country as large as Canada, it is not surprising that transportation methods feature on 15 per cent of the municipal flags. Examples include the railroad (McBride, BC), shipping (Port Colborne, ON) and aircraft (Stephenville, NL, although this example represents the former US Air Force base near the town). Similarly, maps feature on 10 per cent of the flags, with crossroads being an especially common theme (Mission, BC; Oyen, AB; Ameliasburgh, ON' Pointe-aux-Trembles, QC). Maps are commonly used on county flags, showing the outline of the county. Interesting stylised maps show the three river mouths of Trois-Rivières, QC, and the cross-border case of Lloydminster, AB and SK employs a vertical bicolour separated by a narrow black stripe to represent the two provinces that meet at the Fourth Meridian, locally 50th Avenue, Highway 17. The flag of Digby Neck and the Islands, NS is highly schematic, with green rectangles representing Long Island, Brier Island and the long peninsula of Digby Neck, with the ocean waves on either side. In contrast, the flag of Vulcan County, AB is a simple, but precise, outline map of a rather nondescript county shape, with local produce and the name laid over it.
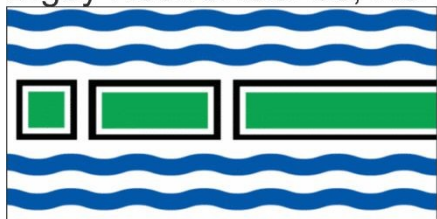
Mission, BC
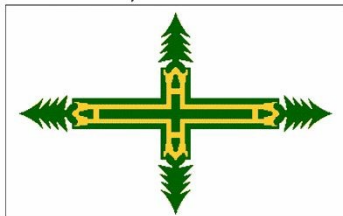
Trois-Rivières, QC

Digby Neck & Islands, NS

Vulcan County, AB

Municipal flags of Canada displaying elements representing maps. Images FOTW

The use of the different themes varies regionally across Canada, and Table 2 shows a breakdown of six regions.

Symbols representing industry are especially common on flags in Atlantic Canada and the Prairies, probably because of the large number of small communities dominated by one industry. Such symbols are relatively scarce on flags in British Columbia and the northern territories, likely because the environmental theme dominates there. There is an almost perfect inverse relationship between the dominance of industrial symbols and environmental symbols.

Heritage elements are most prominent in the parts of Canada first settled by European settlers – Atlantic Canada and Quebec. Both regions contain over twice the number of heritage symbols than any western or northern region. Symbols representing transport are surprisingly common in Atlantic Canada, mostly showing ships, and low in Quebec and the Prairies.

Elements representing climate are uniformly in the 4 per cent to 6 per cent range, except in the north, where the climate is more extreme and appears (mostly as the sun) on 23 per cent of flags.

Table 2. Use of symbols on flags, analysed by region

	Industry	Environment	Heritage	Transport	Map	Climate	Recreation	Other device
BC	36	42	12	15	11	6	3	17
Prairies	54	23	19	9	8	4	4	11
Ontario	46	28	28	21	9	5	9	7
Quebec	28	24	44	7	10	6	6	7
Atlantic	62	18	40	25	13	5	1	4
North	25	57	20	13	13	23	2	8
Values expressed as a percentage of all flags analysed								

National and provincial or territorial symbols

The final part of this analysis involves the use of national and/or provincial or territorial symbols. Across Canada, 23 per cent of the municipal flags carry one or other of these elements, with 16 per cent showing a national symbol, 11 per cent a provincial or territorial symbol, and 4 per cent elements of both levels.
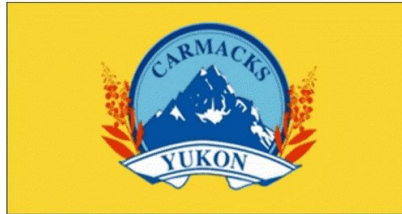
Rimbey, AB

Kitchener, ON

St. Andrews, MB

Carmacks, Yukon

Bonavista, NL

Kapuskasing, ON

Municipal flags of Canada displaying national and provincial symbols.
Images FOTW

The most common national symbol is the maple leaf, used on 13 per cent of all municipal flags, followed by the beaver on 4 per cent of flags, although in a few cases, the beaver may be canting rather than a national symbol (Beaver County and Beaverlodge, AB; Castor, QC).

Provincial symbols are overwhelmingly the floral emblems of the provinces or territories, e.g. the wild rose and prairie lily on the flag of the trans-border city of Lloydminster, AB and SK; the trillium on the flag of Kapuskasing, ON; or the violet on the flag of Grand Falls, NB. The fleur-de-lys, the floral emblem of Quebec, may be seen as a provincial symbol or as a heritage symbol, tracing its origin back to the early settlers from pre-revolutionary France. However, its visibility on the provincial flag likely is the reason it is used on many municipal flags in Quebec. The only examples of a territorial symbol seem to be the fireweed used on the flags of Carmacks and Haines Junction, YT.

Table 3 analyses the use of these provincial/territorial symbols and shows a preponderance of maple leaves in Ontario (30 per cent) and Quebec (27 per cent). The low numbers in the west and north likely arise from the fact that maple trees are rarely seen in the colder and drier climates of most of those regions. By contrast the provincial symbols are rarely seen on Ontario flags – only 5 per cent of municipalities display the trillium, possibly because the trillium is widely used as a symbol of the provincial government, and municipalities are reluctant to align themselves with the government itself.

Table 3. National and provincial or territorial symbols used on municipal flags

	National symbols	Provincial/territorial symbols	National and provincial symbols
British Columbia	6	5	4
Prairies	8	11	1
Ontario	30	5	3
Quebec	27	21	18
Atlantic Canada	13	13	7
The North	5	5	0
Values expressed as percentages of all flags analysed			

Conclusions

Following the introduction of the current national flag in 1965, Canadian provinces and territories quickly adopted their own flags. The adoption of flags by municipalities followed, slowly at first, and mainly by cities, but with increasing frequency up to the present day. Almost every city-level municipality has adopted a flag, as have most towns, and increasingly flags are being added for villages, hamlets, and district authorities.

Approximately 17 per cent of Canadian municipalities use a Canadian Pale design, most in the 1:2:1 ratio, although some modified to 2:3:2. This design was adopted by some municipalities within a year of the appearance of the national flag in 1965, and continues to be used for new flags to the present day. Initially as municipalities developed flags, the most common designs involved either the coat of arms or the shield from the arms on a simple field, or a banner of arms. Designs featuring logos unrelated to the arms became popular in the 1980s and now appear on many new flags. However, flags are being introduced increasingly as part of a branding exercise, where a design company is employed to develop a distinctive brand, usually to redesign the municipal website. Some of these brand designs have been widely accepted and are used on flags, others are less successful in that role.

A wide range of symbols appear on municipal flags. Those that incorporate the coat of arms may contain up to ten symbols, scattered across the shield, crest, supporters and compartment, and commonly reflect the dominant industries of the community. Other symbols employed represent the natural environment or the history of the community. As brand flags became more common, the intended significance of elements of the flag have become more obscure, even though the significance as defined by the designer may run to a few hundred words.

Symbols explicitly representing the higher levels of government are found on 23 per cent of municipal flags, with almost half the municipal flags in Quebec carrying a

maple leaf or fleur-de-lys. Municipalities in western Canada and the North are less likely to use these symbols, partly because the typical sugar maple tree, whose leaf most closely resembles the one on the national flag, does not survive in most of those regions.

Canadian municipal flags continue to evolve. Over 10 per cent of Canadian municipalities, especially in British Columbia and Quebec, have already selected a second flag – in many cases to replace an earlier flag bearing the coat of arms – and most of these flags have been developed as part of a rebranding exercise. It seems sure that with time branded flags will eventually become the dominant flag type in Canada.

Acknowledgements

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