

First call for papers

Risks and safety in combat sports and martial arts

International congress, 15th JORRESCAM, May 28-29, 2020

Faculty of Sport Sciences and Physical Education, University of Lille¹

The 15th Days of Reflection and Research on Combat Sports and Martial Arts (JORRESCAM) continues the ideas and objectives of preceding events, the first of which was held in 1991. On one hand, it studies a specific category of practices and disciplines: combat sports and martial arts². Taken in all forms here, Combat Sports and Martial Arts (CSMAs) are distinguished by the fact that the body is both the tool used for confrontation and domination (actual or symbolic) and the target to reach (whether directly or indirectly). On the other hand, it provides a multidisciplinary perspective on a given topic. Lastly, it brings together a wide range of actors in different positions and functions: researchers, practitioners, teachers, trainers, students, institutional actors, managers, doctors, journalists, legal experts, etc., in order to spark dialogue, discussion of ideas, collaborations and, from there, the development of new expertise.

Problematising the connections between CSMAs and the dialectic of risks and safety is made complex by the variety of disciplines concerned and their specific features, but also by uses and manners of practice (particularly in connection with the theme chosen for this congress) and by the physical and symbolic involvement that they imply, more generally. Some points of reference illustrate, partially and therefore reductively, the areas of problematisation that could be developed.

¹ Congress organised by the RASE (responsibility of actors in sports and education) team from URePSSS (Unité de Recherche Pluridisciplinaire Sport Santé Société) Research Unit (EA 7369), University of Lille, University of the Littoral Opal Coast, Artois University.

² Referred to as CSMAs throughout the text.

From one perspective, the topic of risks has specific echoes regarding CSMA. In collective minds and main representations, some combat sports and martial arts may be associated – whether justifiably or imagined – with dangerous and risky activities because of, in particular, specific techniques, weapons that may be used, the goal of practising or their differently restrictive rules (consider the development of mixed martial arts, for example). Martial arts were initially made up of disciplines used in military fields and potentially for deadly purposes, such as other combat activities later. In a competitive space, combat efficiency is a challenge specific to a number of disciplines, allowing them to assert their identities and superiority over other activities. Insurers now also reinforce this status as a high-risk sport, despite slight differences to be considered depending on the activities in question. This perception can also be seen especially when in connection with certain categories of participants who are considered vulnerable. For this reason, many combat sports have been deemed dangerous for women and children, sometimes to the point of banning them from taking part. The risks associated with CSMA may also be a hindrance to teaching combat sports and martial arts in an educational environment, although some physical education teachers “risk” teaching combat sports in schools. At a time when the digital world is spreading in society, the media pays varying levels of attention to different CSMA and contributes to building their social representations. The theory of a “risk society” has been in development for several decades and poses a challenge for the safety concerns linked with CSMA. Several categories (accepted/controlled risk, controlled/regulated risk, etc.) structure various social sectors in parallel with increasing research into safety and the assertion of a duty of responsibility that is applied to the actors and institutions concerned.

What are the current representations of CSMA, from a point of view of the risks connected with them, according to the actors, institutions and participants concerned? Can groups judged to be vulnerable be identified? How do these representations vary historically and socially, in relation to changes in lifestyles, perspectives, education and the incorporated standards? To what extent do these representations lead people to commit to practice or teach a CSMA or, in contrast, contribute to leave the sport or to stop teaching, and what are the motivations at play?

Although objective risks characterize the disciplines of CSMA differently, fighting (real or simulated, direct or indirect) and even the underlying hand-to-hand combat may effectively cause potentially traumatic, of a physical nature in particular. Accidents are common in some disciplines and, for some practitioners, may be obvious or taken for granted and therefore rarely questioned and put to the side. However, they may also lead to some withdrawing from practising. The evolution of scientific knowledge on the effects of practising have made it possible to objectify some verifiable risks linked to injuries or illnesses, in particular. Several medical theses (already ancient for some of them) are evidence of this. Recent research conducted on sports shows a growing interest in the harmful effects for practitioners, especially, but not exclusively, for top sport. Weight categories that organize some sports and the diets they often induce have been analysed in terms of risks to the health and well-being of fighters. Accidents lead to financial costs for the actors and institutions concerned (e.g. leave from work for fighters, damages paid by insurers or sports federations) and, to a larger extent, for society, which makes safety a top-priority concern. Added to objective risks are subjective risks, which correspond to those that are perceived and experienced by fighters in relation to new references from psychology that have an impact on theories of training and teaching models.

On which knowledge (empirical, medical, scientific, educational, etc.) of risks are the representations of CSMA based? How are these risks analysed and categorised? To what extent does our understanding of risks linked to the practice of CSMA raise the question of responsibility – particularly moral and social – of the actors and institutions involved in promoting the spread of these practices?

However, these risks are not necessarily viewed negatively. Sociology studies have shown that some people take part in physical activities in a search for risks to take because these play a role in the construction of their identity. In parallel with a negative view of CSMA caused by the risks involved, another logic comprises taking advantage of the combative efficiency and physical effects of these activities. Professions, such as the police, have used some combat sports and martial arts as tools to serve the safety of the general public. Alongside this legitimate use of strength and a type of violence, fighters also practise these sports as part of a federation or association for specific sports as a way to ensure their safety in the event of a physical attack or to develop a feeling of safety. Some disciplines are distorted from their initial practices and used for commercial reasons, being presented, whether rightfully or not, as a means of self-defence. Despite this, the use of CSMA remains very restricted with regard to legislation and individual responsibilities in play, including in cases of self-defence. Therefore, developing these practices raises the question of them being regulated or even prohibited by public authorities, especially in connection with the process of civilising lifestyles and sportivisation of combat activities and martial arts.

So what are the uses of CSMA for safety purposes and for the actors and institutions involved? How can the state regulate the practice of CSMA in public and private spaces? How can the law tackle these questions?

On the other hand, the process of establishing and spreading CSMA within different institutions (federations, associations, school, military, etc.) is often proof of safety considerations through pioneers and those involved in disciplines. A range of strategies can be identified, such as adapting the activity to limit the risks, even going so far as to put its inoffensive nature at the forefront. Several options and safety levers may be identified *a priori*. This is shown in strategies for limiting practice according to categories of practitioners (age, sex), taking out insurance and creating awareness of actors, prevention and information. But also by the rules of sports – when they exist – the equipment used, the teaching models, and also the safety regulations that are, eventually, put in place. In more general terms, the ethics characterising the culture of various disciplines (such as respecting opponents) may also serve a safety function by creating a framework around the use of potentially dangerous techniques. From this stems the question of how to train professionals (teachers, trainers, managers) and from this, their professionalization. How, and to what extent, are these professionals trained to manage risks related to ensuring the safety of students? The distinction between active and passive safety has also been an opportunity to revitalise approaches to education and teaching. The specific features of certain environments and institutions should also be taken into account. Education on safety and health, which has been launched in schools in France, for example, particularly in physical education, may bring about innovative ways of tackling the risk/safety debate. The mechanisms in play in the perception and management of risks by fighters have also been studied. Didactic analyses have placed risk management at the centre of combat sports, but also of learning and fighters strategies in connexion with resources. In the sports context of CSMA, taking risks is integral in trying to win and all the more so when victory can be achieved through a single decisive action (e.g. ending in a knockout in boxing or ippon in judo), which questions the tactics used by competitors.

What place do safety concerns have for actors and institutions involved in spreading CSMA's, and with regard to the practitioners concerned? Which safety levers are maintained? Which policies, strategies and preventative measures can be identified? To what extent do technical, regulatory, material and technological developments contribute to managing the safety of fighters?

These preliminary considerations do not exhaust the possible questions on the theme of the congress. However, these show that relations between CSMA's, risks and safety are complex and ambivalent. Lastly, this subject can potentially concern all institutions (authorities, federations, associations, insurance providers etc.) and actors (leaders, managers, teachers, trainers, fighters, parents, doctors, journalists, etc.) involved in CSMA's. It is a heuristic subject that aims to understand the processes, convergences and specific features within this group of activities and encourages comparative approaches. This subject deserves to be questioned through perspectives based in a variety of scientific disciplines (history, sociology, anthropology, economics, psychology, psychoanalysis, neuroscience, biomechanics, medical sciences, pedagogical sciences, intervention sciences, communication sciences, legal sciences, etc.).

Paper proposals can highlight either the issue of risks or the issue of safety, or can deal with them simultaneously. These can focus on:

- representations of CSMA's from a risk-based perspective
- knowledge developed around risks in CSMA's
- effect of risks and their taking into account by actors of CSMA's
- the use of CSMA for safety purposes
- the importance placed on safety and safety policies in CSMA's
- the safety levers used in CSMA's
- any other area of study that is deemed relevant

At the same time, the congress is open to presentations on other subjects, especially those resulting from ongoing pioneering works related to CSMA's.

Instructions for papers proposals

Papers proposals may be sent in French or English until January 31, 2020. They must have a title, an abstract of between 250 and 350 words (outlining the issue, the methodology and the primary results), the name(s) and institution(s) of the author(s) and a maximum of five key words.

Format: Word document, Times New Roman, size 12 font, single spacing.

Document title: Abstract JORRESCAM 2020 Author's name.

Other potential contributions:

Proposals for contributions in another format (poster, reports of experiments...) must be the subject of a detailed presentation in order to be examined under the best conditions by the scientific committee.

Information related to the congress:

- 20-minute presentations will be followed by a 10-minute Q&A with the audience
- presentations may be given in French or English
- the scientific committee will choose from the submitted proposals in mid-April 2020
- registration for the congress is €90, excluding the cost of lunches on 28 and 29 May (€15 per meal) and a gala dinner (€40) on 28 May
- scientific publication : we plan to publish a special issue of the *International Journal of Sport Science and Physical Education* , and the proceedings of the congress
- information about the congress can be find at: <http://jorrescam.free.fr>

Contact for any information about the congress:

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