Special issue of STAPS journal
“Combat Sports, Martial Arts and Societies”

Editors:
Haimo Groenen, Lecturer, URePSSS (ULR 7369), Univ. Lille,
Alessandro Porrovecchio, Lecturer, URePSSS (ULR 7369), Univ. Littoral Côte d’Opale.

Main objectives of the special issue

This special issue focuses on combat sports and martial arts (CSMA) and the socio-cultural challenges and changes linked to them. CSMA have given rise to more than a decade of innovative national and international research, as evidenced by their diverse research questions and theoretical frameworks. This special issue wants to explore several themes related to this rapidly expanding body of knowledge.

The recent economic, social and health crises have not spared sporting and physical activities. The COVID-19 pandemic, for example, has affected many aspects of the CSMA’s practice: contact and training praxis; competitions; regulations, as well as the perceptions and uses of CSMA as health and prevention or adapted physical activities.

The diffusion, the regulation and the institutionalization of new fighting disciplines, and the hybridization which sometimes underlies them, modifies the competitive space of combat activities in connection with the specific stake of the combative efficiency and some national features. The success of MMA remarkably evidences this while questioning the moral norms or forms of violence accepted in society, as in the specific French context.

The emergence of a “risk culture”, the increased search for security and the omnipresence of the principle of responsibility also emerge at the level of CSMA. On the one hand, some practices and disciplines can be perceived as risky activities, potentially impacting the engagement of practitioners and professionals. On the other hand, security considerations emerge through the renewed interest in different forms of self-defense, the processes of development and dissemination of CSMA in various institutions, the re-problematization of the place of these martial activities in school curricula, or the promotion

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1 See, for example, Paul Bowman (2019), Deconstructing martial arts, Cardiff: Cardiff University Press.
8 Visible for example within the French Judo Federation through the promotion of self-defense, but also more broadly the sportivization of ji-jitsu at the international level.
of safety education. Once again, the COVID 19 pandemic problematises this risk/security dialectic.

A public health issue emerges through the quest (or even “privatization”) of health and well-being within different populations, which is linked to prevention strategies and health education. More broadly, CSMA emerge through the transformation of public policies (e.g. sport and exercise as medical prescription). This can redirect the development strategies of some CSMAs’ institutions and their use for educational or even therapeutic means, or engagement in their practice.

Identity and bodily transformations are crossed by the issue of gender: the growing place of women in physical and sporting activities and the evolving nature of their practices, in connection with broader socio-cultural changes, are a significantly evident in CSMAs too. These practices are symbolically rich from the perspective of the social relations of gender domination. They are both vectors of emancipation and spaces for the reproduction or deconstruction of established gender relations. These transformations are then linked to the emergence of new relations between bodies, society and nature, in which martial arts and Asian mind-body disciplines play a major role. This is accompanied by the loss of speed of the federal competitive sports model, for the benefit of other kinds of practice.

The evolution of digital technologies helps the media coverage of some combat practices, especially among younger audiences (e.g. WWE wrestling, MMA), and the emergence and institutionalization of e-sports. At the same time, these technological advances are renewing the possibilities for studying techniques and training strategies.

These elements underline the plurality of transformations and contemporary challenges (social, cultural, technological, health, physical, etc.) which cross the CSMA in different national contexts, and the importance of comprehensive and critical approaches. Finally, this special issue aims to identify, through the illumination of a plurality of themes, and human and social sciences, to what extent the CSMA are both a witness to changes in contemporary societies and a specific driving force for changing society.

Proposals should position themselves within the abovementioned themes, which are not exclusive.

**Paper submission and selection process**

1. Abstract submission and selection through peer review
2. Full paper submission and second peer review.

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10 Since the 2000s, the French Judo Federation has developed taïso, a form of practice finalized by health, before promoting “judo health”.

11 Larose, P. (2018). « L’atelier Corps et Parole; une application singulière du judo pour favoriser l’émergence d’une parole sur ce qui fait violence », *Enfances & Psy*, 78(2), 142-151. See also, for example, the practices developed by the National Psychoboxe Institute.


Abstract format: 500 words max., Times New Roman, single spaced, title in bold, author(s) and related institution(s). No subtitles, no footnotes. Abstracts should be sent to haimo.groenen@univ-lille.fr and alessandro.porrovecchio@univ-littoral.fr. They should show clearly the object of study, the issue, the possible hypotheses of theoretical framework, the data collected/analysed, the methodologies used, the main results, and a maximum of five bibliographical references.

Timeline:
Deadline for sending abstracts: September 13th.
Reviewers’ feedback on selected contributions: no later than September 27th.
Deadline for sending full papers: December 20th.
Reviewers’ feedback: at the end of February 2021 at the latest.
Receipt of revised full papers: mid July 2021 at the latest.
Special issue scheduled for December 2021.