



# MARTIAL ARTS STUDIES ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE 2026

*University of Brighton, 22-24 July*



## OFFICIAL BOOK OF ABSTRACTS



University of Brighton



## FOREWORD

The Martial Arts Studies Association (MASA) held its annual conference at the University of Brighton, 22<sup>nd</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> July 2026. The conference came at a very exciting time for MASA. It was the first to be held since the association formally incorporated in 2025, as well as the 10<sup>th</sup> conference since its earlier founding (as the Martial Arts Studies Research Network) in 2015. The Association's journal, *Martial Arts Studies*, had just published its 20<sup>th</sup> issue earlier in 2026, while academic research on martial arts continues to grow apace worldwide.

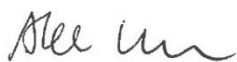
Held in this context, the conference did not disappoint. 97 papers were presented across the three days of the event, including two keynote lectures and four practical workshops. A further 12 papers were shared online, two films were screened during the conference, and a signing ceremony was held as MASA signed a memorandum of understanding with UNESCO ICM.

For the first time ever, a roundtable session was held including representatives of eight different martial arts and sports governing bodies, in conversation with each other and members of the MASA Board regarding future knowledge exchange opportunities between martial arts researchers and the leadership of the martial arts sector. Meanwhile, the wider conference was attended by 125 people representing 30 different countries from five continents.

Altogether, this was the largest and most ambitious Martial Arts Studies conference yet, which hopefully will set the stage for further growth, development, and maturation of our field in the years ahead. The MASA Board is very excited to continue celebrating the broad, diverse, and rapidly growing field of martial arts studies with our members and wider scholarly community.

This book of abstracts is a formal record of the work presented at the conference, both in person and online. It is presented in order of the sessions held at the conference, with special sessions (keynotes, spotlight panel, and online papers) at the end of the document.

On behalf of MASA, I would like to extend a huge thanks to all the presenters, as well as their coauthors, for the hard work and enthusiasm that contributed such a bounty of intellectual content. I hope to see you all again next year!



Alex Channon, MASA Chair and lead conference organiser

On behalf of the MASA Board, August 2026

## PARALLEL SESSION 1

### Panel 1A: Feminist Approaches to Pedagogy and Leadership in Martial Arts

#### New Possibilities for Martial Arts through Feminism

*Fabiana Turelli, University of Manitoba ([fabiana.turelli@umanitoba.ca](mailto:fabiana.turelli@umanitoba.ca))*

Proving physical power is an archaic demonstration of superiority. Civilized ways of leadership rely on relationality, empathy, and skills for community building where belonging is a shared achievement. Martial arts under traditional approaches are often supported on hierarchical systems that notably deny broad inclusion, instead reinforcing patriarchal social norms. Feminist approaches to pedagogy and leadership in martial arts are disruptive of conventional ways, therefore, they are revolutionary. By embedding martial arts with feminism, transformation of both martial environments and habitus become achievable goals, while taking the most benefit from martial arts for participants. Feminism is a revolutionary movement which advocates for justice, but does not kill anybody in the path, as usually revolutions do. Although a peaceful revolution, feminism approaches to pedagogy and leadership in martial arts does not translate into passivity or lack of embodied fighting skills, strength or aggression. They are instead powerful, reasoned decisions towards civilization, communication, and collaboration. The ground of the struggles, as the mats of the fights, though, are still made, mainly, of traditional approaches. This requires that feminist approaches be carried out with deep knowledge of the field and its rules, and performed with intentionality to redesign rules and pathways as “do”s that encompass and expand diversity beyond privileged voices and strokes. In this panel presentation, I share some reflections on martial arts’ necessary transformation and how this can be achieved through feminist approaches that combine sophisticated theory mastery with the viscosity of patriarchal trauma.

*Keywords:* Martial arts; feminism; revolution; social justice; belonging

#### Feminist Pedagogy in Martial Arts and Combat Sports

*Mariana Simões Pimentel Gomes, University of Campinas (UNICAMP) ([gomesmsp@unicamp.br](mailto:gomesmsp@unicamp.br))*

This paper examines how a feminist and intersectional pedagogy can transform martial arts and combat sports from male-templated spaces into equitable learning environments, particularly in schools and community programs (hooks, 2015; Gomes, 2025). Drawing on research that situates martial arts and combat sports as embodied social spaces where gender is continuously constructed and negotiated (Channon & Jennings, 2014), it questions the artisan/technician model characterized by master-disciple transmission (Terrisse, 1991; Gomes, 2023), rote form, and the athletic male body as the metric of mastery. In line with analyses that explore the potential for undoing gender hierarchies in mixed-sex combat sport contexts (Channon, 2014), the paper advances a consent-centered, problem-solving approach. This approach includes multimodal instruction (visual, verbal, tactile with consent), TGfU and representative games, principle-based assessment focusing on base, protection, and decision-making, and rotating leadership with women in visible roles such as demonstration, refereeing, and mentoring (Korsakas, 2023). Anchored in feminist pedagogical principles that frame education as a practice of freedom (hooks, 2015), the pedagogical agenda is tied to governance changes: anti-harassment protocols, non-objectifying uniform and equipment policies and leadership pipelines for women (Gomes, 2025). The framework also addresses intersectional barriers affecting Black and Indigenous women, LGBTQIAPN+ practitioners, women from socio-economically vulnerable contexts, and women with disabilities, recognizing that participation in combat sports is shaped by broader structures of power and inequality (Channon & Jennings, 2014). System-level signals such as Olympic quota parity and UNESCO-ICM programs showing majority female participation when consent and women’s leadership are structurally embedded reinforce the urgency of these transformations (Gomes, 2025).

*Keywords:* Feminist pedagogy; Intersectionality; Martial arts and combat sports; Gender equity

#### Psychology & Human Movement: Fostering Gender Equity in Martial Arts & Combat Sports via Perception-Action Processes

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This study aims at fostering gender equity in MA&CS (Martial Arts & Combat Sports) through perception-action and pre-reflexive processes in a Psychology & Human Movement approach. Pre-reflexive processes can be defined through a sensible perception of movement, which is embodied and embedded. This notion of perception-action processes can be related to studies considering gender bias on comprehending movement through situatedness in a world with gender disparities. Research including this matter on MA&CS refer to the challenge of overcoming stereotypes (e.g. women are weaker, less likely to enjoy or enroll in MA&CS), not only to a more equitable participation but also to a fair recognition of their accomplishments. In sum, MA&CS can lead to excellence or violence, depending on intentions and behaviors towards girls, women and other less representative groups. A Psychology & Human Movement approach involves promoting gender equity highlighting conducts and behaviors that might impact people in such specific context. It includes the development of a sensible norm which is constituted and modulated empathically without surrendering to pure conventionality. It refers to raising awareness to the body itself, that informs its constraints to the subjects through movement. Pre-

reflexive processes can play a significant role in perpetuating gender disparities and implicit biases, whether by instructors, practitioners or their peers.

*Keywords:* martial arts, combat sports, gender, perception-action, phenomenology

### **Women Leading with Care in Capoeira as 'a Practice of Vulnerability'**

*Gina Robinson, King's College London ([georgina.s.robinson@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:georgina.s.robinson@kcl.ac.uk))*

As with many martial arts, Afro-Brazilian capoeira has historically been considered a masculine universe, from which women were banned or discouraged from taking part. More women have been practising capoeira in Brazil since the 1980s, however, and today its leaders include women from countries around the world. Female masters, or *Mestras*, are being recognised as the future gatekeepers of the art, and they have developed strategies to assert their authority and claim agency in the *roda* (ring) in the centre of which capoeira games take place. In this paper I show how female leaders are redefining images of authenticity and authority in capoeira by creating space and advocating the visibility of women. I draw on empirical evidence from interviews with female capoeira leaders in Brazil, USA, Mexico, France and the UK, and ethnographic fieldnotes taken during events I attended in Brazil and Europe as a practising researcher for my doctoral research (Robinson, 2025). I use this data to discuss the leadership strategies women employ when teaching classes and organising events and compare these with leadership styles as identified in other martial arts (Bickford, 2020). Women's strategies challenge pedagogical practices by advocating an ethics of care, which is necessary because capoeira – as with other martial arts – contains elements of high-risk play (O'Shea, 2018). I argue that women advocate capoeira as a caring and critical praxis which exposes gendered double standards and unequal power relations, through a process of 'undoing gender'; in the capoeira *roda* (Channon, 2014). Through promoting caring practices as leaders, I argue that women are challenging capoeira's historical reputation as a violent, marginalised, and hyper-masculinised practice. They are promoting alternative leadership models that could be adopted in other social, political, and strategic domains.

*Keywords:* Capoeira; Women; Leadership; Care; Vulnerability

## **Panel 1B: Tradition and Development 1: Martial Arts and/as Sports**

### **Globalising the Way of the Sword: Kendo, Culture, and Practice in the UK and China**

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This paper explores what it means to practise kendo in an international context and how practitioners make meaning of their practice across different cultural settings. Kendo is a modern Japanese martial art derived from samurai swordsmanship traditions. Using bamboo swords (*shinai*) and protective armour, it combines competitive sparring with an emphasis on discipline, etiquette, and character cultivation, and today functions both as a sport and a form of personal development. This study examines kendo practice in the UK and China through an ethnographic and phenomenological lens. Drawing on participant observation, semi-structured interviews with nine practitioners (four in the UK and five in China) from different level, and reflexive analysis informed by over ten years of the researcher's own practice, the paper conceptualises motivation as dynamic and evolving rather than static or purely intrinsic or extrinsic. Findings show that practitioners' motivations shift over time in relation to embodied training, competition, failure, ageing, responsibility within the dojo, and relationships with instructors and peers. Distinct pedagogical styles and organisational structures in the UK and China shape how hierarchy, authority, and learning are experienced, particularly through differences in verbal instruction, imitation-based training, and the role of the "second dojo" as a space of informal teaching. The paper further examines how practitioners negotiate tensions between sportified competition and traditional budō ideals. Rather than viewing these as opposing forces, practitioners often understand them as coexisting and mutually shaping, with kata, grading systems, and international competitions playing ambivalent roles in sustaining or diluting philosophical values. Beyond the dojo, kendo influences practitioners' identities, emotional regulation, resilience, and everyday life. The study argues that international kendo is best understood as a culturally adaptive practice shaped by global sport structures, national narratives, and lived embodied experience.

*Keywords:* kendo; motivation; lived experience; globalisation

### **The Origins of Senegalese Wrestling with Blows: A Professional Sporting Configuration (1927–1939)**

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Senegalese wrestling with blows emerged as a combat practice during the interwar period. Its objective was to make an opponent fall while simultaneously delivering punches, all within a paid arena that staged a festive, semi ceremonial spectacle celebrating local champions. Its development reflects a set of cultural, social, and political hybridities shaped by both African traditions and French colonial influence. This presentation examines these intersecting influences by asking whether the process of sportivization observed in English pastimes (Elias & Dunning, 1994), particularly English bare knuckle boxing, can be compared to the evolution of this form of wrestling with blows. Both practices share similar configurations around professionalization (paid arenas, remunerated fighters, managerial structures), even though the underlying processes differ. Identifying these dynamics helps to establish the originality of Senegalese wrestling within the broader field of combat sports and clarifies the specificity of its historical trajectory. In order to do so,

this study revisits existing sources and scholarship, analyzes two digitized newspapers, and draws on local archival materials. The findings reveal a two stage sporting configuration that shaped the practice. First, the early 1930s saw the establishment of dedicated combat arenas, supported by several factors including urban migration, economic development, and the creation of the Federal Sports Committee in 1933. Second, between 1936 and 1938, punching was formally set, influenced by a shifting national and international context (Central Sports Committee, 1938; the rise of boxing, etc.). This configuration rested on two intertwined processes that combined distinct forms of power (record keeping, emerging democratic organizations) and knowledge (popular rituals, festive traditions). On the eve of World War II, wrestling with blows had become fully autonomous from European sport and its colonial framework. This hybrid sporting configuration lies at the root of the difficulties Senegalese wrestling has faced in adapting to modern institutional criteria (federation structures, regulations, and so on) since independence in 1960, challenges the country is attempting to address with the recent creation of a new federation (August 2025).

**Keywords:** Lamb, wrestling with blows, Senegal, sportivization, configuration, power, culture, knowledge

### **Japanese Professional Sumo on the Verge of International Marketing**

*Martin J. Meyer, University of Vechta ([dr.martin.joh.meyer@icloud.com](mailto:dr.martin.joh.meyer@icloud.com))*

Research into the internationalisation of sumo has so far focused on two approaches: the worldwide spread of amateur sumo, analogous to the global expansion of other Japanese martial arts; and the controversial assimilation of international athletes into Japanese professional sumo, which is characterised by 'cultural nationalism.' The fact that, after a 20-year hiatus from tournaments abroad, a professional sumo tournament took place in London 2025 and that another is scheduled to take place in Paris this year reveals a third approach to the internationalisation of sumo: Japanese professional sumo as an international sports product. The recently increasing international marketing of professional sumo is based on several factors. These include, above all, a significantly deeper background knowledge and interest in professional sumo on the part of Western societies, combined with increased marketing of sumo to Western tourists in Japan itself, primarily by the Japan Sports Agency. In order to interest non-Japanese audiences in the sport of sumo and offer insights into its inherent culture, symbolism and core values, various measures are being implemented, including tournament recordings with English commentary, multilingual print and audio explanations for foreign tournament visitors in Japan, the opening of sumo training to tourists, and TV media such as "Sanctuary" and "Little Miss Sumo." However, the international marketing of professional sumo also raises pressing questions about its future development, such as whether women will be allowed to participate in professional sumo; whether sumo will transform into an Olympic sport; or whether increased international interest will also lead to an increase of non-Japanese wrestlers in professional sumo.

**Keywords:** sumo; sports tourism; internationalisation; London; honbasho

## **Panel 1C: Training Contexts and Experiences 1**

### **Self-Efficacy in Public and Professional Safety Training (PPST): A UK Case Study**

*Oliver Fitton, Northumbria University ([o.fitton@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:o.fitton@northumbria.ac.uk))*

Previous research by Butler, Gothe, and Petruzzello (2023) sought to develop a reliable scale for measuring an officer's self-efficacy in a US Police Academy setting. Their results supported the importance of physical training curricula at improving recruit officers' self-efficacy toward handling violent encounters prior to entering the law enforcement workforce. Police officers in the UK receive mandatory defensive tactics training. This research applies Butler, Gothe, and Petruzzello's self-efficacy scale to police officers entering into service with a police force in the North of England. Over the course of five years all new entrants are given the opportunity to participate in a pre and post training surveys that record demographic and experiential details, and self-efficacy ratings. The objectives of this study are: 1) investigate the impact of Public and Professional Safety Training (PPST) on the self-efficacy of police officers, 2) investigate the impact of prior experience in martial arts on the self-efficacy of police officers, and 3) develop a dataset that can be directly compared to that of Butler, Gothe, and Petruzzello (2023) enabling comparative analysis between UK and US cases. This paper outlines the results of the year of this study. Going forwards, existing police data relating to participants' use of force (such as complaints, injuries, 'use of force forms', and commendations) will be compared with pre and post training survey data to investigate the hypothesis latent in Butler, Gothe, and Petruzzello's work that increased police officer self-efficacy results in improved use of force outcomes.

**Keywords:** police; use of force; defensive tactics; self-efficacy; police training

### **The Stress of Stress: A Systems-Theoretical Account of Police Training Semantics**

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Semantics such as "performance under pressure", "training under stress", and, more recently "coping" and "resilience" have become highly usable in policing—especially within tactical and combative training environments (e.g. self-defence training) and associated fields of research. Our contribution reconstructs their usability as an effect of conceptual vagueness (Hutmacher & Franz, 2025) paired with a functional fit. Drawing from a form – and systems-theoretical perspective (Luhmann, 1996; Spencer-Brown,

1979) we analyze how the semantics translates operational uncertainty into individualized, trainable problems of performance and self-regulation, thereby rendering deviation primarily as an issue of the individual officer's regulation capacities. In this way, a recognizable, reasonable and accountable persona-form of the "under-pressure performing officer" becomes available for assessment, selection, and socialization within training. Our theoretical analysis culminates in a form-theoretical paradox: as the stress/resilience semantics becomes a dominant programmatic frame: The guiding distinction that organizes training re-enters its own marked side. The promise of relief is coupled to evaluative expectations that themselves produce second-order burdens: the stress of stress. As such the program reproduces, through its own operations, the very problem it claims to manage. We propose reflexivity as a form for complexity control: when training applies its own operations to itself, it gains the potential to shift the unit of problem-processing from the individual officer's regulation capacity to the organization's expectation structures, enabling alternative program logics and professional self-descriptions.

*Keywords:* Performance under Pressure, Training under Stress, Form-Theoretical Paradox, Systems Theory, Reflexivity

### **Learning to Fail Safely: Reducing Novice Attrition Through Intentional Pedagogical Design in Sparring Martial Arts**

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Failure is unavoidable in sparring-based martial arts, yet it is often misunderstood and poorly structured, leading to increased injury risk, misinterpretation of feedback, and higher student attrition, especially among novices. Drawing on practitioner-led research informed by Randy Brown's 25 years of coaching experience in Mantis Boxing and Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, this presentation examines how failure can be pedagogically reframed as a valuable learning experience rather than something discouraging or threatening. The analysis integrates theories of learning from failure, psychological safety, and edgework to show how training environments shape practitioners' interpretations of failure. Rather than treating failure as either something to eliminate or something students must simply endure, the presentation demonstrates how instructors can design training conditions that keep students engaged at the edge of competence without unnecessary injury risk. Using actual examples from Randy's school, the presentation reviews three instructional interventions—removing protective gear, redesigning curriculum to embed failure within the learning process, and mentor sparring—that alter how students experience failure. These intentional adjustments preserve the intensity and authenticity of live training while reducing unnecessary physical and psychological risks. Intended for instructors, researchers, and practitioners, this presentation contributes to martial arts pedagogy by offering a practical framework for improving learning, safety, and retention without diluting the transformative impact of sparring.

*Keywords:* attrition, edgework, failure, martial arts pedagogy, psychological safety

### **"Hardship Bonds People, Quicker and Closer": How Military Veterans Develop a Sense of Community through Practicing Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu**

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Military veterans are a population facing specific health and wellbeing challenges. Besides such problems as those which arise from direct exposure to traumatic events, which may or may not affect any individual, all veterans must contend with the transition out of the military and into the civilian world. For some this can be a uniquely stressful experience involving the loss of routine, identity, camaraderie, and sense of purpose that gives meaning and order to their lives. Accepting the premise that military organisations function as a kind of total institution, as well as the observation that most military personnel begin their careers as teenagers or young adults with limited life experience, social disconnectedness and alienation is an understandably common phenomenon among veterans exiting the armed forces. This paper reports on interviews with nine male British military veterans reflecting on their participation in a 60-day training programme in Brazilian jiu-jitsu (BJJ). Focusing on the concept of sense of community (SOC) and drawing on Warner's (2015) Sport and Sense of Community Theory (SSCT), we argue that training in BJJ presents varied opportunities for veterans to develop SOC. This helps them manage several of the challenges they have faced, or are currently facing, in their transition out of the military and into civilian life. Moreover, we highlight adaptations to the SSCT model which may better account for diverse populations practicing this and similar sporting activities for the purposes of developing SOC. These include the notions of specific population affinity, competition/cooperation, and external community opportunities.

*Keywords:* Brazilian jiu-jitsu, community, martial arts, military veterans, sense of community

## PARALLEL SESSION 2

### Panel 2A: Martial Arts and/as Communication

#### **Banalisation Without Loss: Aikido as an Embodied System of Meaning-Making**

Greet Angèle De Baets, Université Catholique de Louvain ([greet.debaets@uclouvain.be](mailto:greet.debaets@uclouvain.be))

Aikido is increasingly mobilised outside the *dojo*, including in leadership development, psychotherapy, conflict management, and organisational communication. Such recontextualisations are often criticised as forms of banalisation. However, this paper argues that not all banalisation entails a loss of martial meaning. Certain forms may preserve and foreground aikido's core semiotic structures. Developing a theoretical argument grounded in linguistic anthropology, sociolinguistics, and superlinguistics, this paper conceptualises aikido as an embodied, multimodal system of meaning-making. Drawing on empirical material from aikido-embodied communication training conducted with working professionals in Belgium and the Netherlands, the analysis takes the results of this mixed-methods study using video-recorded observations, interactional transcripts, and multi-phase surveys as its point of departure. Aikido techniques are approached not as fighting skills, but as patterned interactional resources. These include timing, posture, spatial orientation, touch, attention, and relational alignment, through which meaning is enacted and negotiated in interaction, for example through the calibrated use of touch to establish connection and foster an other-relative perspective. The paper engages critically with debates in Martial Arts Studies on instrumentalisation, recontextualisation, and popularisation. It proposes a distinction between empty banalisation, where martial practices are reduced to abstract metaphors or slogans, and productive banalisation. In productive banalisation, physical and technical complexity characteristic of formal martial training is reduced without undermining meaning, as core interactional semiotic principles continue to organise embodied interaction and pedagogy. From this perspective, aikido-embodied communication training is analysed not as a metaphorical appropriation of martial arts, but as a pedagogical transformation grounded in embodied semiotic practice. By reframing banalisation as a differentiated process rather than a loss, this paper contributes to discussions about how martial arts knowledge circulates beyond traditional training spaces, and how embodied practices generate meaning across contexts.

**Keywords:** Aikido; Banalisation; Embodied Meaning Making; Recontextualisation; Interactional Semiotics

#### **Rolling and Scrolling: Practice, Consumption, and Ideology in Mediatized Brazilian Jiu Jitsu**

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Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu (BJJ) has undergone several distinct mediatization phases, from the intimate instruction of the Gracie family in Brazil to the global visibility provided by the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC), each phase reconfiguring BJJ through changing modes of mediatization. Its most recent phase has unfolded on YouTube, Instagram, and membership platforms, such as Patreon, where techniques circulate as tutorials, highlight reels, and long-form conversations. This paper argues that BJJ's latest rise in popularity is linked to (at least) three interlocking processes: the amplification of BJJ through podcasts such as the Joe Rogan Experience and their *manosphere* adjacency, where BJJ functions as the embodied correlate of a libertarian anti-institutional ethos; the cohortification of BJJ audiences through platform algorithms, especially on YouTube, that silently group practitioners with self-help, biohacking, supplement, and political content regardless of their explicit interests; and the transformation of BJJ from a localized disciplinary practice into a continuously modulating formation organized around self-optimization and the perpetual consumption of instructional, supplements, and podcasts. The deeply mediatized BJJ community is thus simultaneously a practice community, a consumer cohort, and a broader embodied ideological formation in which libertarian, hypermasculine, and neoliberal regimes of self-optimization converge.

**Keywords:** BJJ, Communicative Capitalism, Masculinity, Platform Affordances

#### **In which Journals can I Publish my Research on Martial Arts and Combat Sports? An Update**

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Research in martial arts and combat sports (MA&CS) is a young yet dynamic field. A few years ago, Gutiérrez-García et al. (2018) analysed 12 active MA&CS journals that were contributing to the development of the MA&CS scientific community and knowledge. In this study, we update this list by analysing the current situation of new and existing journals in terms of visibility, impact, and accessibility. Based on extensive internet and database searches, we have found up to 20 journals: (1) Archives of Budo: Journal of Innovative Agonology; (2) Chinese Wushu; (3) Ido Movement for Culture. Journal of Martial Arts Anthropology; (4) International Journal of (e)Sports & Taekwondo Sciences; (5) International Journal of Martial Arts – INJOMA; (6) International Journal of Wrestling Science; (7) International Martial Arts and Culture Journal; (8) Journal of Combat Sports Medicine; (9) Journal of Martial Arts; (10) Journal of Martial Arts Research – JOMAR; (11) Journal of the World Society of Taekwondo Culture; (12) Martial Arts; (13) Martial Arts Studies; (14) Research Journal of Budo; (15) Revista de Artes Marciales Asiáticas; (16) Taekwondo Journal of Kukkiwon; (17) The Arts and Sciences of Judo; (18) The Journal of Korean Alliance of Martial Arts; (19) The Korean Journal of Kumdo; and (20) Wushu

Studies. These journals have different levels of visibility, impact and accessibility, making them more or less appealing to MA&CS researchers. Compared to 2018, there has been no clear development in MA&CS journals as a whole. While some have improved their indicators and new journals have been created, others have disappeared. Nevertheless, MA&CS researchers have an unusually high number of journals in which to publish studies compared to those available for other sports.

**Keywords:** Martial arts; combat sport; scientific literature; academic journals; scholarly communication

## Panel 2B: Medical and Therapeutic Applications

### **Sport and Autism: The Katautism Model for the Inclusion of Autistic Children Through Judo and Karate in Primary Schools**

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**Purpose:** The benefits of sport for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) children are widely documented; among the most suitable disciplines are judo and karate (Bahrami et al., 2016; Bremer et al., 2016; Morales et al., 2022; Pierantozzi et al., 2022). However indications of a structured model remain limited. The present study reports the results developed within the KATAUTISM Project (Maussier et al., 2025), according to the KATAUTISM model (Maussier, 2024). It is based on specialized coach and psychologists training, close collaboration with parents, school system, effective communication strategies, and the use of specific tools. **Methods:** The study involved 31 ASD children (n=5 girls, n=26 boys), aged between 6-10 and representing all autism severity levels, who participated in an inclusive school-based martial arts program alongside their classmates. Participants were divided into two groups: a judo program (n = 16) and a karate program (n=15). The intervention lasted 24 weeks, with 2 sessions per week, each lasting 1 hour. Three domains were analyzed: autism severity, social impairment, and gross motor skills. **Results:** Practicing judo and karate in an inclusive school setting, using the Katautism model, leads to significant improvements in motor skills, behavior, and social inclusion in ASD children. All subjects completed the intervention alongside their classmates, showing statistically significant improvements ( $p < 0.05$ ) across all 3 analyzed domains. Similar in karate (K) and judo (J) practitioners were the percentage variations of the GARS total standard (J -16,23; K -16,73), SRS TOT T (J -9,12; K -11,27), and TGMD- 3 GMI (J 68,73; K 64,00). **Conclusion:** The results further suggest the effectiveness of the KATAUTISM model and its replicability across different sports. The significant improvements in mannerisms, self- and hetero-aggressive behaviors, and emotional regulation among ASD children can possibly contribute to social inclusion. A key role is played by specialized coaches, the psychologists experienced in autism, a constructive collaboration with the school system and parents, and the use of specific tools to ensure predictability. However, it is essential to adopt a structured model that makes sport accessible while respecting the specific needs of autistic individuals and maximizing their benefits.

**Keywords:** Autism, Judo, Karate, Social inclusion, Primary school

### **Technique as Preventative Medicine: Lessons from the Movement Inspired by Martial Arts (MIMA) Project**

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Martial arts are often associated with young and athletic people, and women from diverse and socioeconomically disadvantaged ethnic communities might find them particularly appealing or accessible. Meanwhile, older adults are at risk of social isolation, dementia, physical frailty and poor mental health. With this in mind, the Movement Inspired by Martial Arts (MIMA) project draws on various warm up and conditioning exercises from a variety of martial arts to provide a repertoire of movements for older adults to engage in a dynamic and flexible group exercise session. This presentation reflects on the two-year journey of designing, developing and disseminating the MIMA programme in Cardiff, Wales. It begins with an overview of the inspiration for the project from the great variety of movement and techniques of the body in martial arts (see Jennings and Szekeres, 2025) before delving into the specific weekly workshops running with certain groups: 1) a charity devoted to women from specific ethnic and religious backgrounds; 2) a NHS 12-week initiative using MIMA for older adults across Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan; 3) a dementia support group for patients and their carers, and 4) a residential home for elderly people in a working-class community. Using a co-production approach and a mixed methods design, we are in the midst of data collection using physical and cognitive testing as well as focus groups and reflective logs. This paper shares lessons learned from the field observations from the lead instructor of many of the MIMA classes. We outline how these reflections have aided us training a cohort of MIMA ambassadors and instructors with our partner organisations. Finally, we offer some light, adaptable exercises to try out from the comfort of our seats.

**Keywords:** Health; wellbeing; older adults; dementia; diversity

### **Martial Arts, Medicine, and Cultural Capital: Zheng Huaixian's Legacy Through a Sociological Lens**

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This study takes Zheng Huaixian, a renowned "Master of Martial Arts Medicine" in China, as a case study to explore how individuals accumulate and transform cultural capital within specific socio-cultural contexts, based on Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital. Using

literature analysis and case study methods, the research identifies key stages in Zheng's accumulation of cultural capital, including his early cultural background, the development of martial arts skills, the sublimation of his cultural capital, and its transformation into social and economic capital. The findings reveal that Zheng gained widespread recognition and respect in both socio-cultural and economic domains through his exceptional martial arts expertise and profound medical knowledge. Furthermore, the study highlights the interplay between individual trajectories and social structures in the accumulation of cultural capital, extending the applicability and explanatory power of cultural capital theory to non-Western contexts. This research not only provides a novel perspective on the intersection of martial arts and medicine but also offers significant insights for the sociological study of cultural capital and interdisciplinary research.

*Keywords:* Symbolic capital; martial medicine culture; Zheng Huaixian; economic capital; social capital

## **Panel 2C: Tradition and Development 2: Globalised Martial Culture and Heritage**

### **The Experiment of Tradition through the Practice of Japanese Martial Arts**

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The purpose of this article is to analyze the intersection of embodied practice, spirituality, and cultural representation. By focusing on Japanese martial arts as a lived, embodied form of spirituality outside traditional institutional contexts, this research addresses a critical gap in religious studies and anthropology. Based on fieldwork conducted in France and Japan in 2018 and 2019 (Cabaret, 2025), the article examines how tradition is represented through both the practices and the discourses of practitioners. The analysis is situated at the intersection of Marcel Mauss's theory of "techniques du corps" (Mauss, 1934) and Max Weber's notion of traditionalism (Weber, 1924). I argue that practitioners understand bodily training as a way of enacting what they perceive as a resurgence of ancient modes of cultivating ethos and ethical dispositions. The significance of this article lies in its contribution to understanding how globalization reshapes religious practices (Yamada, 2011), how spiritual meaning is constructed through disciplined physical training (Heelas, 2008), and how cultural imaginaries of Japan (Benesch, 2014) play a role in shaping spiritual experiences worldwide. In doing so, it not only enriches martial arts studies but also deepens our broader comprehension of the dynamics of spiritual quest and cross-cultural encounters.

*Keywords:* Spirituality, martial arts, orientalism, traditionalism, self-development

### **Cultivating Character through Martial Arts: Dutch and Japanese Practitioners' Perspectives on Values and Personal Development in Kendo**

*Pepijn Boomgaard, Waseda University ([pepijn.boomgaard@asagi.waseda.jp](mailto:pepijn.boomgaard@asagi.waseda.jp))*

Kendo is a martial art rooted in traditional Japanese swordsmanship and closely intertwined with Japanese culture. Nowadays, it is often promoted as a means of cultivating character, with practitioners and organizations asserting that kendo fosters personal and social values. However, kendo's values are not clearly defined, and empirical research on how practitioners themselves perceive and experience kendo's values and benefits remains limited. Moreover, kendo is becoming increasingly popular outside of Japan, and while this international spread is largely welcomed, it raises important questions about how kendo's purported values are preserved, interpreted, or transformed as the art is adopted by practitioners from diverse cultural backgrounds. This research explores how kendo shapes practitioners' values and personal development, focusing on their subjective perceptions of change. Through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, 11 Dutch and 10 Japanese kendo practitioners were asked to reflect on their experiences, including how they believe kendo promotes values and how it has influenced their attitudes, behaviors, and sense of self. The interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes in participants' narratives, with narrative identity theory serving as an interpretive framework that conceptualizes these accounts as stories of self-development and transformation. By examining practitioners' lived experiences across cultural contexts, this research contributes to martial arts studies by deepening understanding of how martial arts may function as sites of value transmission and personal development, and how their meanings and practices evolve through processes of internationalization.

*Keywords:* Kendo, values, self-development, cross-cultural comparison, lived experience

### **Onko-chishin 温故知新 (Review the Old to Know the New): How Japanese Philology Contributes to Martial Arts Studies**

*Richard Gábor Gottner, Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) ([gottner.richard@btk.elte.hu](mailto:gottner.richard@btk.elte.hu))*

When speaking of Japanese martial arts, both the academic research and popular informative literature frequently lack the correct use of the Japanese language and the necessary historical and cultural understanding, even though these aspects are often the primary attractive force for many practitioners, sparking interest in authentic Japanese budō. Many researchers approach the topic from disciplines like sports and health sciences, education, psychology, sociology and other practical fields. From the standpoint of these pragmatic fields, translating and analysing centuries-old Japanese texts may seem impractical, unnecessary even. However, translating these texts is an important first step leading to further applications. This paper aims to demonstrate how Japanese Philology, the discipline of understanding Classical Japanese texts, their historical setting and cultural context, can be an integral part of Japanese

martial arts research. The paper explores this concept through some examples of contextualizing these texts, making such centuries-old, experience-based wisdom available and applicable to contemporary multidisciplinary approaches.

*Keywords:* Japanese Philology, Japanese budo, classical martial arts texts, contextualization

## PARALLEL SESSION 3

### Panel 3A: Training Contexts and Experiences 2

#### **Re-embodiment Tradition: A Phenomenological Study of Intentionality and Physicality in Wing Chun**

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This study examines the learning trajectory of a contemporary Wing Chun master who critically re-evaluates traditional practices and engages with the documentary heritage of an ancient martial art text. Through a phenomenological account of his perceptions, bodily experiences, and the gradual formation of his own theoretical framework, the master demonstrates how a martial arts tradition can be reinterpreted, re-embodied, and transmitted through a semiotic system of representation. Conventional scholarship on Chinese martial arts often assumes that knowledge is preserved mainly through oral instruction and the imitation of bodily postures. Inner bodily sensations—such as proprioception, intentionality, and kinesthetic awareness—are usually treated as ineffable and therefore impossible to document. Yet the survival of the Boxing Classic: Essential Boxing Methods challenges this view. Its detailed records, along with other historical manuals, suggest that sensory and experiential dimensions of practice were encoded in semiotic languages that remain insufficiently studied. The Wing Chun master's reflections are examined within this context. The phenomenological lens of this paper allows exploration of how he interprets his embodied experiences, negotiates cultural heritage sources, and formulates a personal understanding of the art. His account reveals the fluid nature of authenticity, the non-linear transmission of skills, and the creative use of semiotic systems to articulate and reinterpret martial arts knowledge.

**Keywords:** Bodily perception, phenomenological research, consciousness, physicality

#### **Training Alone Together: Developing a Virtual Opponent for Home-Based Kickboxing Training**

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The COVID 19 pandemic disrupted martial arts training worldwide, with total training hours decreasing by 67.3% (Meyer et al., 2021) and exposing the lack of effective home-based sparring solutions. Existing Virtual Reality applications prioritise gamification over technical realism, while online instructional content risks reinforcing improper technique. To address this gap, we developed a proof of concept VR kickboxing sparring simulator that leverages computer vision and machine learning for home-based training. An external camera captures the user's movements, Google's MediaPipe library (Lugaresi et al., 2019) performs pose detection and our code calculates joint angles. Our trained Machine Learning classifier then categorises these joint angles into one of seventeen kickboxing techniques, such as a jab, cross, or body kick. These classified movements feed into a second model, trained on kickboxing videos, which predicts an appropriate opponent response. Within Unity, a 3D game engine, an AI avatar performs this response as an animation. For instance, if the user throws a left jab, the opponent might counter with a right hook, establishing a continuous sparring loop in which user and avatar react to each other. This work demonstrates how computer vision and machine learning can be combined to create VR training environments. With further development, the system could evolve into a full VR kickboxing game for platforms like the Meta Store or Steam. This could include features like real time form analysis and haptic feedback to preserve technical standards during home-based training. Longer term studies could then assess whether regular VR training improves actual performance in kickboxing compared to other home-based alternatives.

**Keywords:** Kickboxing, Machine Learning, Virtual Reality

#### **A Reconstruction of the Body-Qi-Spirit Subject in Tai Chi Chuang: Integrating the Spontaneous Brain and the Spontaneous Body**

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Tai Chi Chuan, as a form of ancient Chinese martial arts, is a qi-based practice. We first point out, based on a close study of Tai Chi Chuan classics, that the practice in question involves a subject of three layers of components: a) at the bottom layer is body and shape (身/形), b) at the middle layer is shi and qi (勢/氣), and c) at the top layer is mind and spirit (心/神). The bottom and top layers involve the familiar bodily and mental phenomena, respectively, whereas the middle layer involves central but obscure phenomena described as “shi” and “qi”. We, then, show why some of the recent attempts (e.g., Yoh, 2011, 2012) to explicate the practice of Tai Chi Chuan in terms of Jullien's (1995) philosophical reconstruction of shi are seriously inadequate. Finally, we sketch a way of unpacking the three-layered subject in the Tai Chi practice by drawing conceptual and empirical resources from spatiotemporal neuroscience and rehabilitation medicine to illuminate the idea of qi in terms of how the spontaneous brain works and the idea of shi in terms of how the spontaneous body functions. By taking this integrated approach, we aim to shed light on how the dynamics of physical movements and transformation of mental features take place in the Tai Chi practice.

**Keywords:** Tai Chi Chuan, Qi, Body, Mind, Brain

## Panel 3B: Martial Arts (in) Media

### Hagiographical Constructions of Ueshiba Morihei in Globalised Aikido

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The paper analyses the hagiographical construction of Ueshiba Morihei (1883–1969), founder of Aikido, within a globalised martial arts context. Drawing on comparative research on hagiography and its theoretical use as a heuristic category, it examines how biographies (particularly those by Ueshiba Kisshomaru and John Stevens) portray Ueshiba as an exemplary figure endowed with divine mission, enlightenment, and supranormal abilities, while simultaneously adopting an ambivalent tone that leaves room for scepticism. This epistemological flexibility, the paper argues, enhances the texts' rhetorical effectiveness and broad appeal across religious and secular audiences. Beyond written biographies, the paper situates these narratives within a broader hagiographical process that includes devotional images in dojo spaces, relics, pilgrimage practices, and practitioners' testimonies. Classic hagiographical motifs (e.g., mastery of animals, ascetic suffering, and world renunciation) are shown to structure accounts of Ueshiba's life. The paper further examines how such narratives are explicitly framed as didactic tools aimed at legitimizing orthodoxy and orthopraxy in the face of Aikido's global dissemination. Finally, the paper explores the cultural portability and glocalisation of Ueshiba's hagiography. While deeply rooted in Japanese religious contexts such as Shinto and Omoto-kyo, these narratives resonate internationally by aligning with Christian hagiographical forms, Buddhist themes, perennialist ideas, and the holistic and countercultural milieus of the post-1960s West. The paper concludes that Ueshiba's hagiography operates across multiple, partially compatible truth regimes, illustrating how sanctifying narratives function and are received in a transnational setting.

**Keywords:** Aikido, hagiography, globalisation, glocalisation

### Picturing Kung Fu: Translation and Visualization in Graphic Adaptations of Jin Yong

Andy Rodekoer, Wake Forest University ([rodekoaj@wfu.edu](mailto:rodekoaj@wfu.edu))

The martial arts novels of Jin Yong have been adapted into different media countless times since the 1950s, most famously into films and television series. This presentation focuses on selected cases studies of the numerous, but often overlooked, renderings of Jin Yong's stories into visual art, illustration, and comics. Rather than getting entangled in questions of textual fidelity to a presumed original text, I am more keenly focused on the aesthetics of representing kung fu action. Adapting the dynamic movement and subtle power of martial arts in Jin Yong's fiction into a static visual medium helps us consider not just the narrative choices made by these artists, but the aesthetic, medial, and commercial contexts that shape these adaptations. This presentation comparatively surveys some of the most prolific translators of Jin Yong's novels from different localities into these visual paratexts and adaptations to argue that, as part of a broader, transmedial storytelling environment, these texts are crucial to shaping and contextualizing the experience of reading and the possibilities of meaning that these novels continue to offer.

**Keywords:** Jin Yong, comics, aesthetics, adaptation, kung fu

### The Sweet Science Fiction of Self-Defence: Martial Bodies and the Fantasies of Asia in Early SF Literature

Luke White, Middlesex University ([L.white@mdx.ac.uk](mailto:L.white@mdx.ac.uk))

During the 1960s and 70s, Asian martial arts decisively entered the imagination of Western science fiction (from *Dune's* 'weirding way' to the 'force' in *Star Wars*), expressing a post-counterculture fascination with all things Eastern and articulating displaced fantasies about Asia as a space of mysticism, adventure and obscene violence. But long before this, discourses of 'self-defence' – especially surrounding the 'sweet science' of boxing – had provided a vital component of the genre's action scenarios. These mirror the ways male bodies – and the dangerously primitive potential for violence they seemed to harbour – were a particular concern for modernising narratives in self-defence literature, which was itself scientising and even science-fictional in its logic. As Godfrey (2013) has argued, these debates (like SF, whose narratives revolved around scenarios of exploration, cultural contact, alien invasion, imperial warfare and the like) were also deeply marked by the fantasy spaces of empire, imagining the urban criminal in the guise of the 'Thuggee' or garotter from the colonies. This paper, then, examines the self-defence scenarios in early SF narratives from Jules Verne and H. G. Wells to Buck Rogers and Flash Gordon, exploring the physical and martial cultures these represent. It seeks to understand the ways these are bound into the genre's thematics of modernisation, reason and empire, and the vision of the 'Orient' and empire this enabled. It explores the ways these fantasies paved the way for the emergence of martial arts in SF media later in the century – but also why the Asian arts that were already making their mark in Western culture and literature as SF took off remained largely absent from the genre until the 1960s.

**Keywords:** self-defence, science fiction, Orientalism, boxing, empire

### Constructing "Martial Art-ness": Racialised Representation in British Television Advertising (1960s–1990s)

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This paper examines the circulation and transformation of martial arts tropes in British television advertising from the 1960s to the 1990s. It maps the iconographical deployment of "martial art-ness" as a creative strategy across product categories, from cereals to carpets. Positioning advertising as a site of cultural production and critique, the study draws on Hall's (1997) representation theory,

alongside Saha's (2018) premise that cultural producers standardise and appropriate representations of "the Other." It explores how such tropes—embedded in racialised constructions of East and Southeast Asian identities—are produced and mediated within the 20–30 second television commercial. Drawing on advertising archival research, the paper identifies 69 adverts across shifting historical and postcolonial contexts (Chan, 2024). A focused critical visual analysis of 33 advertisements adopts a post-structuralist hermeneutic approach, informed by Foucauldian ideology. Rather than decoding fixed meanings, the study interprets how recurrent visual and narrative forms produce regimes of meaning, shaping what can be seen and known about racialised identities, while raising ethical questions of stereotyping and representation. The analysis shows that martial arts aesthetics generate culturally coded signifiers that are historically contingent and politically inflected, evolving alongside developments such as the Race Relations Act. It interrogates authenticity, racialisation, and appropriation, highlighting shifts from Japanese forms performed by white actors to racially marked kung fu tropes (Chan et al., 2020). By bringing advertising critique into dialogue with martial arts studies, this research demonstrates the value of commercial media for analysing racialised constructions.

**Keywords:** Martial arts tropes; British advertising; Racialised constructions; Archival research; Advertising critique

## Panel 3C: Martial Arts and/as Performance

### Suspense and Surprise: Chinese Martial Movement as Dramaturgical Lens

Daniel Mroz, University of Ottawa ([dmroz@uottawa.ca](mailto:dmroz@uottawa.ca))

I introduce two fundamental movement patterns used in the Chinese martial arts and share how I have employed them in my work as a theatre director to create suspense and surprise on stage. Zhēng hé lì 整合力 or integrated movement, and jú bù lì 局部力 or sectional movement are key methods for generating power in Zhōngguó Wǔshù 中国武术. I explain how these kinds of movement operate dramaturgically using examples from *Nor the Cavaliers Who Come With Us*, a piece of original theatre I directed in 2005 with recent graduates of the National Theatre School of Canada.

### Taekkyeon Suplex with VTubers: The Representation and Re-enactment of Korean Taekkyeon in the 2020s

Won-deuk Seo, University of Yonsei ([dudu1277@naver.com](mailto:dudu1277@naver.com))

In January 2025, the Widae Taekkyeon Organization in South Korea initiated a series of three collaborative digital performances with Virtual YouTubers. By engaging with creators such as Namgung Hyuk, Singh\_abdul, and Hyang-ah-chi, the group demonstrated Taekkyeon's "suplex" techniques through a blend of physical invitations and motion-capture technology. These sessions were often supplemented by rigorous technical commentary. As Paul Bowman argues, the representation of martial arts profoundly shapes their actual practice. Thus, one must ask: what form of representation did these collaborations employ, and what specific impact did they seek to achieve? Current Korean traditional martial arts are categorized into Ssireum(wrestling), Gukgung(archery), and Taekkyeon. Taekkyeon, a striking-oriented art centered in late-Joseon Seoul, narrowly survived the colonial era through the lineage of Song Deok-gi. Most contemporary branches are modern reconstructions by his disciples; however, Widae Taekkyeon distinguishes itself through the lineage of Ko Yong-woo, who studied under Song for fifteen years before moving to the U.S. Their recent media presence—including VTuber collaborations and the publication of the Sourcebook of Korean Traditional Martial Arts—can be viewed as a strategic maneuver to assert historical legitimacy against established factions. The crux of this phenomenon lies in how Widae Taekkyeon navigates themes of nationalism, combat efficacy, and aesthetics differently from existing discourses. By emphasizing the structural form as a primary element, they initiate their discourse through aesthetic appeal. This suggests a paradigm shift where the visual allure of the art serves as the foundational logic for its modern re-enactment and cultural positioning.

**Keywords:** Taekkyeon, martial arts, Virtual YouTubers, Korea

### The History and Role of Music in Capoeira

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Afro-Brazilian capoeira stands out among martial arts for its systematic use of music to inspire, frame and regulate what is called a "game" between two players in the circle or roda. Many practitioners and some capoeira scholars still claim that this association is the result of capoeira being disguised as a dance under slavery. This paper will explore the relationship between music and capoeira practice by locating it in the wider context of the Black Atlantic. In fact, most African and African derived combat games use music in comparable ways, making capoeira far from exceptional in this respect. Capoeira has developed a complex musical tradition over time, relying on a percussive ensemble of up to eight musicians (the "orquestra" or "bateria") and a growing corpus of various types of songs that fulfil a range of functions in training sessions and the roda performance. So much so that the musical bow with a gourd resonator called berimbau has become an icon representing the art - even though it's also used in other contexts.

**Keywords:** Capoeira, music, Black Atlantic

### **Towards a Performativity-Based Understanding of Norms and Values in Martial Arts Practice**

*Martin Minarik, Georg-August-University Göttingen ([martin.minarik@uni-goettingen.de](mailto:martin.minarik@uni-goettingen.de))*

This contribution presents a model elucidating the performative production of norms and values within martial arts practice. Drawing on praxeological approaches and performance theory, the model highlights the dual processes through which meaning emerges: via codified, routinized practices and situational, subjective enactments. Martial arts are conceptualized not merely as physical exercises but as complex performative spaces where collective and individual norms and values are continuously enacted, negotiated, and potentially transformed. Beyond martial arts, the model is applicable to other movement cultures, such as dance or organized sport, and may offer both an analytical tool for qualitative cultural-sociological research and a practical heuristic for designing, reflecting upon, and evaluating movement-pedagogical interventions.

*Keywords:* Aesthetics, Embodiment, Norms and Values, Praxeology, Performance, Values-based Education

## **Practical Session 1: Community Building and Values-Based Education**

### **Project Sifu: Creative Practice in Martial Arts Filmmaking**

*Wayne Wong, University of Sheffield ([k.wong@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:k.wong@sheffield.ac.uk)); Soo Cole, Fighting Spirit Film Festival and Shaolin Temple UK*

This workshop presents Project Sifu, a practice-based research project that explores how martial arts cinema and embodied training can function as tools for participatory pedagogy, community building, and cultural belonging. The session combines a curated screening (approx. 45 minutes) from Project Sifu (2025), a documentary research, with a hands-on workshop (approx. 45 minutes) that translates its methods into an accessible, repeatable pedagogical model. Project Sifu works with students and young people, many with no prior martial arts experience, to explore movement, choreography, and basic action filmmaking as collaborative practices rather than performance-oriented mastery. Drawing on research in martial arts studies, film studies, and embodied learning, the project treats martial arts not as a fixed tradition but as a relational, adaptive language through which participants negotiate trust, attention, gender norms, and cultural difference. Following the screening, participants will engage in a practical workshop introducing core elements of the project's methodology: shared warm-up, simple choreographic sequences designed for safety and inclusivity, and basic filming exercises using mobile phones. The emphasis is not technical skill but process, showing how embodied participation can foster dialogue, confidence, and collective authorship in a short time frame.

*Keywords:* Embodied pedagogy; Martial arts cinema; Participatory practice; Practice-based research; Knowledge exchange

### **'Consent through Sport': Adapting Martial Arts to Teach Positive Values**

*Alex Channon, University of Brighton ([a.channon@brighton.ac.uk](mailto:a.channon@brighton.ac.uk)); Ali Bayley, Darkstar Jiu Jitsu ([office@darkstarjiujitsu.com](mailto:office@darkstarjiujitsu.com))*

This practical workshop will outline the Consent through Sport teaching methodology. Derived from the Love Fighting Hate Violence project (Channon and Matthews, 2016; 2018), this method builds on the model of values-based pedagogy to deliver consent education to secondary school-age students. This pedagogical model stresses the importance of constructing sport and physical education in ways which explicitly foreground values as learning outcomes, with sport thereby positioned as a vehicle for ethical education and not an end in itself. The Consent through Sport method thereby places martial arts-inspired activity in service of teaching young people about consent, thereby revitalising consent education while delivering it through an engaging and memorable format. The workshop will begin with a brief introduction to the project and discuss its development and implementation in the UK to date, including a brief discussion of pupils' feedback on the lessons we have delivered in schools to date. It will then feature practical demonstrations of three short games modeled on martial arts activities which are intentionally designed to create opportunities for reflection on the nature of consent. The workshop will close with a brief discussion of participants' experiences and their suggestions for adaptations of the model.

*Keywords:* Consent; Physical Education; Values

## PARALLEL SESSION 4

### Panel 4A: Martial Pedagogies

#### **The Development of Effectiveness Scales Based on "Fighting Knowledge" for the Assessment of Functional Units of the Judo Combat: A Pilot Study**

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Judo is a martial art practiced worldwide, traditionally taught through methodologies focused on technique. However, these approaches have been questioned by the Combat Sports Pedagogy, which proposes models focused on tactical understanding, such as the concept of "Fighting Knowledge" (Terrisse et. al., 1995). A previous study on non-traditional methodologies in judo teaching, focused on tactics, which used effectiveness parameters on numerical scales from 1 (Not Effective) to 5 (Very Effective) (Joaquim, 2023). This highlighted the need to describe these scores to better guide professionals who will use this tool, given the scarcity of systematized instruments that objectively assess students' offensive and defensive performance in each phase of combat. Objectives: To develop and analyze the instrument called the Effectiveness Scale, which describes the performance levels "Very effective," "Effective," "Not Very effective," and "Not effective" in each functional unit of judo combat (Pre-contact; Standing Control; Transition Control; and Ground Control) according to Olívio-Junior and Drigo (2015) with the aim of supporting teachers in their pedagogical practice. Method: This is an ongoing methodological study developed through a literature review and definition of criteria that characterize the levels of effectiveness, with validation planned with Judo Senseis and Physical Education professionals. Results: The initial version was applied and tested in a previous study (Silva et. al., 2025), yielding positive results regarding its applicability and potential use as a support tool for teachers. Preliminary analysis indicates that the instrument contributes to improving lesson planning, guiding feedback, and structuring more targeted pedagogical interventions.

**Keywords:** Judo; Fighting Knowledge; Effectiveness Scale; Combat Sports Pedagogy;

#### **Roll the Bones: Alternative Teaching of Martial Arts via Tabletop Roleplaying**

Randy Brown, Randy Brown Mantis Boxing & Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu ([randy@randybrownmantisboxing.com](mailto:randy@randybrownmantisboxing.com))

Board games have a rich history at the highest levels of military organizations, valued tools to 'game out' or simulate strategies before committing to battle. Tabletop Roleplaying Games are excellent vehicles that facilitate fun, learning, and experiences and have untapped potential to help teach martial arts. When the pandemic hit in early 2020 I closed my gym and moved our teams online. The kids' team was the most vulnerable. Knowing martial arts could be a rock through turbulent times, keeping them healthier physically and mentally, we needed a means of keeping them engaged. To stimulate their training, and rivet their minds, I devised a Martial Arts TTRPG with built-in incentives. Accomplishing real world missions, watching videos, and reading awarded buffs and additional experience points to their in-game characters. Converting rich, dynamic, realistic martial arts combat into a comprehensive and comprehensible ruleset that others can follow has been rife with challenges. The use of dice probability reflecting randomness, impressing agency through low threshold hit/damage models, and instituting an action economy, became integral to the design in order to convey the anxiety and tension of a real fight. This process revealed the systemization of martial arts styles in such a format can be a strong tool to teach the intricacies of fighting albeit in an unconventional format. The design and development yielded unexpected outcomes of a deeper understanding of my own system that would otherwise have escaped me. Using a TTRPG to help a wide spectrum of martial arts learners simulate not only skills, but physical and social conflicts, multi-attacker scenarios, unarmed vs armed encounters, and even learn history and culture has much promise, and has shown validity.

**Keywords:** Game Theory, Game Design, Alternative Learning, Martial Arts

#### **Tactics-Centered Approaches to the Teaching of Martial Arts and Combat Sports: Strategies for Practice Design, Curriculum Setting, and Performance Assessment in Training Environments**

Tomás de Lima Ribeiro Almeida Freitas, University of Campinas (UNICAMP) ([t157434@dac.unicamp.br](mailto:t157434@dac.unicamp.br)); Luiz Gustavo Bonatto Rufino, University of Campinas (UNICAMP) ([rufinol@unicamp.br](mailto:rufinol@unicamp.br))

The dialog between studies in Martial Arts and Combat Sports pedagogy, motor learning, and team sports didactics led to the development of several approaches to the didactics of combat that prioritize live resistance situations in all stages of training. This work reviews both academic publications in Combat Sports and Martial Arts Pedagogy, and media assets published by several Combat Sports coaches to model and describe strategies for practice design and curriculum setting mobilized in such approaches, highlighting how situational design and the managing of opposition levels combine non-linearly to generate motor behaviors with different levels of unpredictability, unifying the theoretical treatment of these teaching methods under the category of "Tactics-Centered Approaches". This work then presents how these theoretical assumptions underpinned the development of the first versions of an instrument for assessing the tactical-technical behavior of combat practitioners in live situations, the implementation of a university extension program that offers training in Traditional Kungfu via these approaches, and the testing of such instrument within this program. It is

concluded that even beginners can develop combat competence without resorting to the repetition of solo or cooperative exercises, and that tactical-centered approaches seem to demand the abstraction of sets of techniques into larger tactical patterns for better results. It is also found that the assessment of students' tactical-technical behavior in combat through criteria based on general tactical patterns is probably possible and may be more sensitive to a student's learning than some methods based on the counting of technical actions, when the students involved hold a large asymmetry in size or strength.

**Keywords:** Combat Sports; Martial Arts; Tactics; Motor Learning; Teaching

#### **Reframing Martial Arts Pedagogy: A Model-Based Research Project on Tactical Games and University–Community Collaboration**

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This paper presents the theoretical and methodological foundations of a funded research project that seeks to reframe the pedagogy of Martial Arts and Combat Sports (MACS) through Model-Based Practice, with emphasis on the Tactical Games Approach (TGA). Despite the global expansion and cultural significance of MACS, their teaching remains largely dominated by technique-driven instruction and hierarchical master–apprentice traditions. While historically legitimised, such approaches often constrain tactical understanding, learner agency, and pedagogical innovation in contemporary educational contexts. Positioned within debates in martial arts studies and physical education pedagogy, this project advances a model-based perspective that conceptualises MACS not merely as systems of technical transmission, but as educational practices structured through explicit pedagogical models. Drawing on literature on Model-Based Practice and game-centred approaches, the research investigates how TGA can be meaningfully adapted to the specific relational, tactical, and embodied characteristics of combat activities. The project involves the co-development of pedagogical interventions with community coaches and educators, systematic observation of teaching–learning processes, and analysis through frameworks of social learning and value creation. Rather than reporting final results, this paper outlines the conceptual rationale, research questions, and methodological architecture of the study. By situating tactical learning within a broader pedagogical model, the project seeks to contribute to ongoing discussions about the future of martial arts education, challenging technique-centric paradigms and proposing a theoretically grounded, context-sensitive alternative for MACS teaching.

**Keywords:** Combat sports; Tactical games; Teaching and learning process; Model-Based practices; Pedagogical practices

#### **Panel 4B: From Ambiguity to Archive: Governance, Definition, and Documentation at the International Centre of Martial Arts for Youth Development and Engagement under the auspices of UNESCO (ICM)**

##### **Documenting the Dynamic: The World Martial Arts In-depth Research (WMAIR) Project as a Foundation for Dialogue**

*DongChan Kim, UNESCO ICM ([dc.kim@unescoicm.org](mailto:dc.kim@unescoicm.org))*

As international organizations grapple with the definitional ambiguity of "martial arts," a concurrent crisis unfolds in the field: the rapid disappearance of indigenous practices amidst modernization. This presentation reviews the "World Martial Arts In-depth Research (WMAIR)" project, an initiative launched by the International Centre of Martial Arts for Youth Development and Engagement under the auspices of UNESCO (ICM) in 2017 to address the twin challenges of preservation and knowledge generation. The WMAIR project operates on the premise that effective governance requires a grounded understanding of how martial arts actually exist and evolve. Treating martial arts as Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), the project has systematically documented practices across Southeast Asia (2018, 2021), Historical European Martial Arts (2019), and South, West, and Central Asia (2022–2024). Most recently, the 2025–2026 cycle has investigated the martial traditions of the Pacific, examining the full spectrum of heritage from combat-oriented grappling arts to iconic cultural expressions such as "War Dances". By combining literature review with fieldwork, the research captures the multifaceted nature of these arts—encompassing physical techniques, tools, historical origins, and spiritual dimensions. Crucially, the analysis highlights the socio-cultural transformation of these practices, tracing their evolution from means of warfare to instruments of colonial resistance, and finally to modern sports or performing arts (Lee & Lauwaert, 2021). Ultimately, this presentation posits WMAIR not as a definitive solution, but as an open resource for the academic community. While the project preserves heritage, its strategic value lies in its potential to bridge the gap between theory and policy. ICM invites scholars to engage with this empirical archive, asking a critical question: How can we collectively rebuild a working model of governance that operationalizes this complexity to support communities, without erasing the nuances that give these practices meaning?

**Keywords:** Martial Arts Documentation, Intangible Cultural Heritage, Evidence-Based Governance, Institutional Ambiguity, Global Knowledge Hub

### **Governing a Moving Target: Mapping and Synthesising Shared Features to Define “Martial Arts”**

*Sangjin Yoon, UNESCO ICM ([sj.yoon@unescoicm.org](mailto:sj.yoon@unescoicm.org))*

Across the globe, ‘martial arts’ functions as an umbrella term for practices that can be simultaneously understood as combat systems, sports, pedagogies, wellness regimes, ritual traditions, and cultural industries. Yet this breadth is not merely descriptive—it creates a governance problem. When an international organisation seeks to support martial arts in education, youth engagement, health promotion, and community cohesion, it must translate normative aspirations into programmes, partnerships, and evaluation frameworks. Without a workable shared definition, decisions about scope and legitimacy become contested: Should priority be given to traditional lineages, modern combat sports, hybridised fitness practices, or community-based pedagogies that may not resemble sport at all? This paper examines definitional plurality as a form of institutional ambiguity that shapes stakeholder relations, organisational mandates, and the credibility of “martial arts” as an academic and policy category. Building on debates in martial arts studies about meaning, organisation, and pedagogy, the argument is that the absence of internationally communicable definitional criteria does not simply hinder comparison; it also undermines coherent governance by blurring what counts as evidence, what counts as impact, and what counts as responsible intervention. To move beyond the binary of universalism versus cultural particularism, the paper outlines an applied research strategy—drawing on ongoing definitional work at ICM— designed to produce a usable definition for international collaboration: collecting regionally grounded definitions through multi-continental scholarly networking and documentary review, then synthesising shared dimensions through structured expert consultation and consensus-oriented analysis. The goal is not to erase difference, but to identify common features that can guide programme design, partnership building, and evaluation—especially in initiatives that aim to foster inclusion, wellbeing, and non-violent social relations through embodied practice. By reframing ‘definition’ as a governance tool rather than a purely semantic exercise, this approach contributes to ongoing conversations about the future direction of martial arts studies and how the field can engage constructively with institutions and communities beyond academia.

**Keywords:** ICM, martial arts governance, definitional plurality, institutional ambiguity

### **Governing Martial Arts in a Complex Global Landscape: Challenges, Opportunities, and Strategic Directions for ICM**

*SungSik Cho, UNESCO ICM ([ss.cho@unescoicm.org](mailto:ss.cho@unescoicm.org))*

Martial arts today constitute a globally significant yet structurally complex field. They span combat sports, traditional cultural practices, military training systems, health oriented movement forms, and commercial self defense programs. This diversity produces blurred conceptual boundaries and fragmented organizational structures, making martial arts exceptionally difficult to govern. Rival federations, lineage based authority, cultural ownership claims, and rapid hybridization all undermine efforts to establish shared standards for safety, instructor qualifications, ethical practice, and competition rules. These governance challenges are structural rather than incidental, rooted in the plural and contested nature of martial arts themselves. At the same time, the need for coherent governance is increasingly urgent. Martial arts intersect with multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including health and well being (SDG 3), quality education (SDG 4), gender equality (SDG 5), decent work (SDG 8), cultural heritage protection (SDG 11.4), peace and strong institutions (SDG 16), and international cooperation (SDG 17). Without appropriate governance, the positive contributions of martial arts to these global agendas remain inconsistent, vulnerable, or unrealized. This proposal argues that the International Centre of Martial Arts for Youth Development and Engagement under the auspices of UNESCO (ICM) is uniquely positioned to address these challenges. ICM’s mandate enables culturally sensitive, evidence based approaches that balance tradition and innovation, promote safe and inclusive participation, and support equitable access across genders, ages, and regions. By strengthening governance frameworks, ICM can help ensure that martial arts evolve as safe, inclusive, culturally respectful, and socially beneficial practices aligned with global sustainable development priorities. This presentation examines the status and persistent difficulties in building governance frameworks within both the martial arts sector and ICM itself. It also identifies strategic actions that can guide future initiatives and provide a foundation for further discussion among panel members.

**Keywords:** ICM, martial arts, multifaceted phenomenon, governance complexity, institutional fragmentation

## **Panel 4C: The Therapeutic Potential of Martial Arts: Trauma and Violence-Informed Perspectives Supporting Mental Health**

### **From Blues to Blue Belt: A Bayesian Analysis of Training Volume in Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu and Mental Health**

*Ben Britton, University of Newcastle ([benjamin.britton@newcastle.edu.au](mailto:benjamin.britton@newcastle.edu.au))*

Background: While the benefits of combat sports are well-documented, the specific “dose” required to achieve clinical shifts in mental health remains under-researched. This study utilized Bayesian linear regression to examine the relationship between cumulative Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu (BJJ) training volume and psychological outcomes. Methods: Data were collected from practitioners (n=82) regarding training duration and frequency. Mental health status was assessed via the DASS-21 and Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI). Training volume was log-transformed to account for the non-linear relationship of cumulative practice. Bayesian model comparison used default priors to calculate Bayes Factors and posterior distributions. Results: Analysis revealed decisive evidence for a relationship between training volume and reduced depression, strong evidence for stress reduction, and moderate evidence for anxiety reduction.

and increased wellbeing. Post-hoc analysis of clinical thresholds found that depression scores dropped from "Severe" to "Mild" at approximately 50 sessions and reached "Normal" levels by 250 sessions. Conclusions: Cumulative BJJ participation is decisively associated with reduced depressive symptoms, following a logarithmic pattern where the greatest gains occur during early practice. The dose-response curve suggests clinical thresholds are crossed around the time a practitioner earns their first stripe, with normalization by blue belt. BJJ may serve as a potent behavioural intervention for depression, with the most significant gains realised early in the experience.

**Keywords:** BJJ, Mental Health, Depression, Dose-response

#### **Beyond the Bag: Evidence and Practice Considerations from a Trauma and Violence-Informed Cardio Boxing Program for Women Victim-Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence**

*Thea Baker, Deakin University ([thea.baker@deakin.edu.au](mailto:thea.baker@deakin.edu.au))*

Victim-survivors of intimate partner violence face elevated physical and mental health risks - including post-traumatic stress, cardiovascular disease, substance misuse, emotional dysregulation, and suicidality - many of which can be supported through physical activity. Emerging evidence suggests moderate-vigorous activities like non-contact cardio boxing may aid recovery, yet few programs have been co-designed with both lived-experience experts and key relevant parties to support acceptability, feasibility and sustained real-world implementation. This presentation combines findings from a nested series of research studies that centred women victim-survivor voices alongside key relevant party expertise to inform the design and delivery of a trauma- and violence-informed non-contact cardio boxing trial. Delivered over eight weeks with 32 women in Melbourne, Australia, the program was facilitated in small groups and combine cardio boxing skills, non-contact drills (shadow boxing, bag work, pad work), and trauma-focused psychoeducation (nervous system responses, emotional regulation). A stepped-wedge design assessed psychological distress (K6), with participants serving as their own controls. Mental health symptoms (post-traumatic stress, interoception) and wellbeing outcomes (empowerment, quality of life, sleep, physical activity) were also measured. Drawing on 28 qualitative interviews (n=14 victim-survivors; n=14 key relevant parties) and preliminary trial results, this presentation concludes with tangible practice implications for researchers, program developers, and practitioners.

**Keywords:** Trauma and violence-informed physical activity; trauma; intimate partner violence; victim-survivors; mental health

#### **Opting 'Out' is In: Designing for Consent and Agency in Empowerment Self Defence**

*Maya D'Amour, The Power Project ([maya@thepowerproject.space](mailto:maya@thepowerproject.space))*

Self-defence programmes often take for granted that enrolment and ongoing participation imply consent to physical contact and sparring. We set out to explore what it would look like to design a self-defence programme that treats consent as something actively communicated and continually renegotiated. Our approach treats the exercise of choice as a core form of participation. We invite participants to modify, opt out, observe, or withdraw, and to choose between contact and non-contact variations of activities. This presentation reflects on our experience designing consent signals, opt-in and opt-out protocols, and facilitation cues that make agency visible and legitimate. By designing activities with multiple legitimate modes of participation, and by treating opting out, modification, observation, and withdrawal as meaningful forms of participation, we foster environments that consistently increase participants' sense of self-efficacy without relying on pressure, implicit conformity or assumptions about what empowerment should look like.

**Keywords:** Empowerment Self defence; Consent; Agency; Choice; Trauma informed practice

### **Panel 4D: Violence, Aggression, and Extremism**

#### **Five for Fighting: Martial Arts Frameworks and the Cultural Logics of Violence in Professional Hockey**

*Lauren Steimer, University of South Carolina ([lsteimer@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:lsteimer@mailbox.sc.edu))*

This presentation examines the history of fighting in the National Hockey League through the lens of martial arts studies, revealing cultural and embodied dimensions that conventional analyses overlook. While martial arts scholarship emphasizes ritualized practice, pedagogy, and ethics, reframing hockey fighting through these lenses exposes a hybrid practice—unsanctioned yet institutionalized, improvisational yet governed by an unwritten social code. Drawing on theories of performativity and embodied knowledge, the paper explores the enforcer's paradox of aggression and self-control: fighters cultivate calibrated violence, situational awareness, and composure in a high-speed environment. This perspective clarifies the philosophy and ethics of the "code"—norms of consent, proportionality, and honor—that operate outside formal regulation yet shape conduct, reputation, and team cohesion. The analysis situates hockey fighting within the broader genealogy of stick-and-ball sports and their historical ties to warfare and martial values, showing that hockey fighting is part of a continuum in which sport absorbs and rearticulates martial techniques and ethics. Aligning hockey's injury and safety discourse with combat-sport research reframes risk as both cultural and biomedical: acute harm and long-term neurotrauma (including CTE) coexist with tacit practices intended to protect opponents and teammates. Finally, the paper interrogates the masculinist myth-making that positions fighting as essential to hockey's identity and considers its impact on women's hockey, where this emphasis historically constrained growth and legitimacy. Extending martial arts studies beyond bounded traditions repositions hockey fighting as a culturally meaningful form of embodied performance.

*Keywords:* Ice Hockey, Sport, Fighting, Ethics, Honor

### **Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, Aggression and the Double-Bind of Masculinity**

*R. Ben Penglase, Loyola University Chicago ([bpenglase@luc.edu](mailto:bpenglase@luc.edu))*

This paper examines how Brazilian jiu jitsu shapes men's experiences of aggression and violence. Drawing on Susan Bordo, I argue that jiu jitsu allows men to navigate the "double-bind" of masculinity, in which men are encouraged to be aggressive and assertive, and yet are often condemned if aggression is seen as excessive or inappropriate (Bordo 1999). Many researchers have argued that contact sports and martial arts such as MMA, boxing and jiu jitsu encourage men to understand masculinity in terms of aggression and physical force. Drawing on interviews with men in a jiu jitsu gym in Chicago about learning to execute "submissions," I seek to join researchers who are adding nuance and complexity to the analysis of the relationship between martial arts, aggression, and masculinity. When describing learning submissions, the men I trained with focused on two themes: failure, and restraint. They described their dismay at failing to execute submissions and being easily submitted, and hence dominated, by other men. This experience, though, was seen as necessary to learn submissions. The mastery of submissions, in turn, was understood in terms of restraint: as being able to execute a submission, and possibly inflict pain, but applying the minimal amount of force. This embodied experience with aggression and physical force does not lead men to condemn violence. Instead, men came to understand the use of force as a skill in which the use of excessive aggression and physical strength are detrimental. In this way, the application of force comes to be stripped of any moral components and is seen simply as the effective application of technique. Second, they understand themselves as "humble warriors" who could use physical force in confrontations but in appropriate ways.

*Keywords:* Brazilian jiu jitsu, gender, masculinity, violence, aggression

### **Martial Arts Participation and the Prevention of Violent Extremism: A Mixed Methods Study from Bosnia and Herzegovina**

*Hajrudin Solak, Independent Researcher ([shajrudin@gmail.com](mailto:shajrudin@gmail.com))*

Violent extremism is a complex social issue that requires preventive, tailor-made, and innovative strategies addressing its root causes (Schmid, 2013). In prevention of violent extremism (PVE), civil society organisations are increasingly utilising education, cultural initiatives, and sports activities to combat social exclusion, identity grievances, and the absence of positive belonging (Cherney & Hartley, 2015). While team sports dominate existing sports-based PVE efforts, the use of martial arts remains largely unexamined. Meanwhile, martial arts gyms present fertile ground for radicals to target vulnerable youth (Just, 2025). This research explores how engaging in martial arts may contribute to PVE by promoting discipline, self-control, prosocial values, and positive identity development, thereby addressing the factors that push and pull individuals toward violent extremism. Using mixed methods research design, this study combines a quantitative survey of recreational martial arts practitioners in Bosnia and Herzegovina with follow-up qualitative interviews to deepen and contextualise survey findings. In addition, semi-structured interviews are conducted with organisations and practitioners internationally who intentionally utilise martial arts within PVE or violence-prevention programmes. Beyond its contribution to PVE scholarship, this study advances martial arts studies by examining martial arts as a socially embedded practice relevant to identity formation, moral development, and community belonging. By empirically engaging recreational practitioners and prevention-oriented organisations, it extends martial arts research into the domains of violence prevention, peacebuilding, and social resilience, offering a foundation for future interdisciplinary inquiry.

*Keywords:* martial arts; violent extremism; PVE; identity formation; resilience

### **Martial Arts, Gladiatorial Fitness, and the Action Body**

*Lindsay Steenberg, Oxford Brookes University ([lsteenberg@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:lsteenberg@brookes.ac.uk))*

Focused on the process of martial arts and combat based fitness regimes, this paper investigates the role of fitness training (and the personal trainer) as key contributor to the personae of action film stars. Often becoming celebrities in their own right, the combat trainer or coach has become a force for guaranteeing the authenticity of a performer in the face of ubiquitous digital effects. I argue that the way the media frames the training regimes of the celebrity body (particularly but not exclusively the male body) relies on discourses of violence through fight-based training programmes such as boot camps, boxing, and martial arts. This paper unpacks the violence of these training regimes, linking it to an intense fetishization of managed risk – in spaces such as survivalist reality television, no holds barred combat sports and the intense bodily transformations of stars such as Christian Bale, Paul Mescal, and Scott Adkins. Furthermore, the managed risk of the training routine builds itself on deeply nostalgic notions of historical and working class bodies at work. Using the hyper-visible physicality and gladiatorial mentality of films such as *300* and programmes such *Spartacus*, this paper argues that the gender politics of 'behind the scenes' fitness programmes conflate violence with physical training in order to produce the 'perfect' nostalgic sculptural body of the action star.

*Keywords:* Stardom, gladiator, combat, fitness, action film

## PARALLEL SESSION 5

### Panel 5A: Muay Thai, Migration, and Diasporic Women

#### **Assumptions vs Actual Experiences of Muay Thai for a Group of Novice Women Learners in Canada**

*Emily Dobrich, Western University ([edobrich@uwo.ca](mailto:edobrich@uwo.ca))*

Much of the literature on women's learning in martial arts and combat sports has either critiqued barriers to participation (e.g., Lindsay et al., 2023; Rodrigues et al., 2022) or hailed the benefits to women from increased power and agency (e.g., Velija et al., 2013). The present research offers a critical perspective adding to these ongoing discourses in martial arts studies by comparing the assumptions a group of novice women had about learning Muay Thai prior to learning with their actual experiences after learning. In doing so, this research challenges the myths and stereotypes that may prevent women from becoming involved in Muay Thai, encouraging a new vision with improved outcomes for women learning martial arts and combat sports. In this qualitative research project, informed by critical and intersectional feminist theories (e.g., Crenshaw, 1989), nine participants attended twelve sessions to learn Muay Thai. The sessions were delivered at a gym in Canada. Sessions followed a feminist coaching model. Participants had little to no martial arts experience. Interviews were conducted pre- and post-project. Interview data was analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. This research has original, interdisciplinary and transnational relevance to martial arts studies, education and gender through three findings. First, participants' motivations for and assumptions about Muay Thai are indicative of contemporary sportified perceptions of martial arts. Second, participants' beliefs about their ability to learn martial arts before their engagement in the project transformed as their confidence increased through their actual learning experiences. Prior to actually engaging in the learning of Muay Thai they tended to underestimate their capacity to learn Muay Thai. Last, results provide new directions for women in learning of Muay Thai with recommendations for the development of female coaches and role models.

**Keywords:** Muay Thai; women; education; gender; feminism

#### **Fighting for Space: Identity Reconstruction through Muay Thai among Migrant Women in Hong Kong**

*Thomas Chan, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University ([ycth.chan@cpce-polyu.edu.hk](mailto:ycth.chan@cpce-polyu.edu.hk))*

This paper explores the intersection of gender, migration, and embodied practice through the lived experiences of female amateur Muay Thai fighters in Hong Kong. Moving beyond the binary of oppression and empowerment, the study examines how migrant workers navigate and reconstruct their sense of self within the city's socio-cultural landscape. Through ethnographic observation and in-depth interviews, the research highlights how Muay Thai offers a transformative space for negotiating labor precarity, cultural belonging, and bodily autonomy. By situating these fighters within the broader discourse of migrant labor in Hong Kong, the paper argues that the gym becomes a site of both resistance and "self-making." Ultimately, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how sport mediates identity formation for migrant communities operating within a Chinese-dominated urban setting.

**Keywords:** Muay Thai, Migrant Labor, Identity Reconstruction, Embodiment, Hong Kong

#### **Muay Thai as a tool for Reconnection to Aspirations among Migrant and Refugee Women in Spain**

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This article examines the role of martial arts training in promoting wellbeing and social inclusion among migrant and refugee women, drawing on three programs delivered by the Social Martial Arts Association (SOMA) in Barcelona, Spain. Grounded in trauma-informed practice and the mind-body connection, it frames martial arts as a space for reconnecting participants with their aspirations and sense of agency. Although studies show similar interventions can support wellbeing and inclusion among migrant populations, it remains underexplored how strengths-based approaches within martial arts build on participants' existing skills rather than deficit-based models (Pulla, 2017; Khatib et al., 2024). While migrant women's experiences of structural exclusion, racism, and marginalization are well documented (Contreras Hernández, 2020), the role of embodied practices in addressing prolonged uncertainty, suspension, and constrained life trajectories in host societies is still insufficiently examined. This article addresses this gap by analyzing a strengths-based Muay Thai program that fosters reactivation of individual goals and aspirations. Based on data collected between 2025 and 2026, including pre- and post-program wellbeing assessments, qualitative feedback, and individual goal-oriented sessions, the study combines quantitative and qualitative insights. By situating martial arts within broader discussions of social inclusion, the article contributes to debates on embodied approaches to politics. It argues such interventions can engage the body as a site of transformation, counteracting enforced waiting and social exclusion, and supporting migrant women in reconnecting with their aspirations and future pathways.

**Keywords:** Muay Thai, Migrant Women, Strengths-based approach, Wellbeing, Social inclusion

## Panel 5B: Martial Arts, from Somaesthetics to Somaethics

### The Feeling of Structures: Style as Somaesthetics

Paul Bowman, Cardiff University ([bowmanp@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:bowmanp@cardiff.ac.uk))

What does it mean to be doing one martial art as opposed to another? Where does one style end and another begin? How do we determine the differences between styles? What is the wider significance of drawing such distinctions? In this paper, I draw on the resources provided by such approaches as affect studies, phenomenology, and somaesthetics, to argue that martial arts 'styles' – and hence 'martial arts' as such – are best understood as a matters of somaesthetics – and the structuring/policing of sense and sensation that philosopher Jacques Rancière has described as a matter of the 'partage du sensible'. In the short time available, the paper will illustrate its argument by discussing the stark contrasts between three very different martial arts: taijiquan, escrima and Brazilian jiu jitsu. The work seeks to contribute, first, to the well-worn discussion of the definition of martial arts, and second, to demonstrate the unique usefulness within martial arts studies of key concepts from cultural theory, such as 'structure of feelings' (Raymond Williams), 'conjuncture' (Stuart Hall), 'partition of the sensible' (Jacques Rancière), and 'affect' (Spinoza, Deleuze, Massumi).

**Keywords:** Martial arts, somaesthetics, structures of feeling, feeling of structures

### Grappling with Vulnerability: MacIntyre at the JiuJitsu Mat and the Bedside

Peter Katz, University Hospitals, Cleveland Medical Center and Case Western Reserve University ([peter.katz@uhhospitals.org](mailto:peter.katz@uhhospitals.org))

This essay uses martial arts studies and the philosophy of embodiment to argue for the need to cultivate shared vulnerability and dependence. As Alisdair MacIntyre (1999; 2007) suggests, vulnerability is fundamental to being human (and animal): it offers meaning and grounds our ethics. Martial arts studies can offer a robust methodology to understand asymmetrical power relationships and what it means in our bodies to share vulnerability with one another (Juvin 2010). To make this claim, I juxtapose a clinical ethics case and a Brazilian JiuJitsu roll with a new practitioner. Both of these cases appear to be examples of asymmetrical power where the other person is vulnerable. But, this talk argues, these relationships only work because of mutual vulnerability (Mackenzie 2014). Clinical ethics, like martial arts, is an entry into an embodied language-game, where not simply ideas but the emotional integrity of both sides are at stake. Explicit rules constrain communication: hospital policy on "disruptive" patients and families, the agreement not to punch or kick each other while grappling. But a productive conversation, whether grappling or goals of care, requires both parties to mutually expand what can be said, how bodies comport themselves, and how we receive one another. It is tempting to frame vulnerability as something other people have, and a reason why we should protect or even pity them. But if we bring MacIntyre to the jiuJitsu mat and the bedside, we can reframe vulnerability as a valuable quality (Daigle 2023) that we should cultivate in ourselves and one another.

**Keywords:** Embodiment; ethics; affect; philosophy; medicine

### Exploring Affective Habitus as a Tool for Martial Arts Studies

Lauren Miller Crawford, Texas Tech University ([L.miller@ttu.edu](mailto:L.miller@ttu.edu))

We are remade in the image of the art we practice. Social fields develop "a unique ethos" (Stebbins 1982:257) based on their histories as well as the people who take up positions within them. I have seen this first-hand in capoeira and Brazilian jiu jitsu. It is of little surprise that an art developed by enslaved Africans so that they could psychologically, spiritually, and physically survive their oppressive living conditions would differ from an art devised by members of a privileged, White family later in Brazil's history (see Penglase 2025). When each art entered the global milieu, they retained traces of the political philosophies held by those who carried them abroad (see Rocha et al, 2015). Arts appeal to people for very different reasons, thus their respective social fields take on different sets of characteristics. Capoeira "has the power to alter an individual's affective habitus, an underlying emotional orientation toward the world that one acquires as a result of engagement with a particular social field" (Miller Griffith 2023:67). Capoeiristas become aligned with left-leaning social causes, particularly those that benefit the African Diaspora. This holds in all communities of that involve centripetal movement towards a core group of stakeholders that uphold the community's values, traditions, and standards (see Lave & Wenger 1991). Examining how novices acquire this affective habitus is a useful exercise as it can help give concrete shape to our claims that the practice of martial arts is transformative. This presentation compares the affective habitus of capoeiristas—as I have come to understand it from more than 20 years of researching this community—with my introduction to the affective habitus of BJJ practitioners as a novice to the field.

**Keywords:** Capoeira; BJJ; affective habitus

## Panel 5C: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Martial Arts and Trauma Recovery

### Organising Threat in Time: A Conceptual Bridge Between Psychotraumatology and Self-Defence Training

Anne Kramer, London Metropolitan University ([anne.kramer@therapiezentrum-eifel.de](mailto:anne.kramer@therapiezentrum-eifel.de)); Mario S. Staller, University for Police and Public Administration North Rhine-Westphalia ([mario.staller@hspu.nrw.de](mailto:mario.staller@hspu.nrw.de)); Swen Koerner, German Sport University Cologne ([koerner@dshs-koeln.de](mailto:koerner@dshs-koeln.de))

Trauma-related suffering can be described as a disturbance of temporality, in which traumatic memories are experienced as if they were occurring in the present (Schauer et al., 2025) Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET) addresses this problem by systematically oscillating between controlled activation of traumatic memories and present-oriented anchoring, while embedding fragmented experiences into a coherent chronological life narrative. (Lely et al., 2019; Siehl et al., 2021). This conceptual paper proposes that self-defence training can be designed to embody an analogous pendulum logic in an embodied format with reduced reliance on verbal narration. We integrate NET's oscillation principle with the Self-Defence Design Principle of Representative Learning Design (Pinder et al., 2011; Staller et al., 2017), which emphasizes sampling and preserving functionally relevant informational constraints to ensure action fidelity. On this basis, we outline an embodied pendulum coaching model that alternates between linear and nonlinear coaching pedagogy in a situated manner (Körner & Staller, 2019). The key design operation is the systematic and controlled insertion and withdrawal of trauma-associated informational constraints (e.g., proximity, unpredictability, vocal intensity) while maintaining robust "now" markers (e.g., consent rules, stop/exit options, fun, pacing). The contribution is twofold: (1) a theoretical bridge between psychotraumatology and self-defence training via a shared problem of temporal organization of threat, and (2) a research agenda specifying how representativeness and a trauma-informed coaching pedagogy may contribute to reducing trauma-related distress.

**Keywords:** Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET), Representative Learning Design, Trauma-informed coaching, nonlinear pedagogy, linear pedagogy

### **Shadowboxing The Object: How might the Aggression-Releasing Benefits of Martial Arts be Understood Psychodynamically and Employed Psychotherapeutically?**

Kevin Braddock, *The Soma Space: Movement For Mental Health* ([kb@permitfullexpression.com](mailto:kb@permitfullexpression.com))

Aggression is a central feature of human life yet as a concept it is conflicted, suffering from poor definition and an often negative valuation. This paper explores its positive potentialities for psychotherapy and mental health, reviewing literature on aggression from within and adjacent to psychotherapy with the aim of understanding if and how aggression may be employed beneficially in the work. It further considers literature on trauma recovery, which psychoanalytic theory prefigured, and which increasingly harnesses the body to assist recovery. Martial arts are thought to effect cathartic releases of aggression among participants; thus this paper considers commonalities between psychotherapy and martial arts, and how they might beneficially be combined. It focuses on the martial art of Tai Chi, which I myself practice, arguing that it may offer a sympathetic adjunct to psychotherapy. The paper makes recommendations for practice with clients and for therapists themselves, and for further research (This paper was my thesis for my MA in Psychodynamic Psychotherapy & Counselling (awarded with distinction 2023, Goldsmiths, UOL)).

**Keywords:** Aggression, psychoanalysis, Tai Chi, martial arts

## **Panel 5D: Martial Arts Histories**

### **From Cultural Transmission to Institutional Authority: The Regulation of Judo Instruction and Grading in Brazil (1933–1972)**

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This study analyses the historical regulation of judo teaching, grading, and institutional authority in Brazil between 1933, when the first organisational judo institution was founded (Jukendō), and 1972, when the Brazilian National Confederation took charge of the sport. It addresses how authority to teach and confer ranks was defined, disputed, and institutionalised within Brazilian judo. The study is based on a systematic search for the term "judo" in the Brazilian National Library's digital archive. Publications were chronologically organised and refined through exclusion criteria, and the analysis relied on comparative reading across multiple newspapers, addressing interpretative bias and the problems of silence and emphasis characteristic of journalistic sources. Through these historical documents, we investigated the transformation of judo from a culturally embedded practice within the Japanese immigrant community to a sport governed by centralised bureaucratic structures. Initially organised under Jukendō, judo operated as an educational and cultural system in which legitimacy to teach and confer ranks derived from communal recognition and traditional hierarchies. In 1941, Decree-Law 3,199 centralised state control over sport, and following the dissolution of Jukendō in 1942, judo's regulatory authority was transferred to the Brazilian Pugilistic Confederation. The post-Second World War period was marked by disputes over legitimacy, and progressive assertion of control by the Brazilian Pugilistic Confederation through the standardization of competitions and grading systems. The study highlights conflicts surrounding dan promotion and tensions between the Kodokan and national sport regulations. It also examines attempts by the government to legally require formal Physical Education credentials as a prerequisite for teaching judo. Although aimed at improving instruction, this requirement proved impractical and was never effectively enforced. Reforms in the 1960s linked black belt status to pedagogical competence and were subject to extensive institutional oversight. The creation of the Brazilian Judo Confederation consolidated this process, redefining legitimacy, authority, and professional boundaries in Brazilian judo. By examining these developments, the study demonstrates how grading and teaching requirements functioned as mechanisms of institutional authority and political control.

**Keywords:** Martial arts, history, sport bureaucracy

### **The So-Called Marquis of Queensberry Rules and the Myth of Individual Creation; John Graham Chambers, Founder or Impostor? (1867-1879)**

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It is traditionally accepted and believed that John Graham Chambers[1] was responsible for establishing the Marquis of Queensberry rules in 1867. This gentleman, a colleague of John Sholto Douglas Queensberry at Cambridge University, reorganized the AAC (Amateur Athletic Club) in 1866, which had been founded in 1863 under the name Mincing Lane. However, was this running and billiards specialist really behind these rules? This is doubtful, given that in 1879, Ned Donnelly, former professional brawler and coach at the London Athletic Club, wrote: "There is no published code of rules for the management of boxing competitions or for the guidance of the judges, so I beg to offer the following suggestions, which may be of service until a proper set has been formed by some recognized authority" (p. 121). Using various sources (The Field, books, archives), we will show that, while John Graham Chambers certainly played a role in the process of creating these rules, it was far from central. Actually, this calls into question the idea that a single person can be the true innovator, but that, very often, a network of people is behind it.

**Keywords:** Boxing, Marquis of Queensberry, John Graham Chambers, Rules

### **Martial Arts and the Modern Self: Shifts in Subjectivity in Meiji Japan**

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A standard narrative holds that in the Tokugawa Period (1600–1868) the goal of martial training in Japan shifted from self-protection to self-perfection. Terminology evolved from bujutsu (martial techniques) to budō (martial practices as a dao). Understanding this shift requires that we be attentive to the nature of the "self," a concept that is neither transcultural nor transhistorical; it is rooted in religious beliefs, geo-political factors, education, social norms, etc. This paper will trace the evolution of the "self" in Japanese martial arts from feudal rule (Tokugawa Period) to the modern nation-state of Meiji. The focus will be on the "rebranding" of classical jujutsu as modern judō in the hands of Kanō Jigorō (1860–1938). Kanō writes of being thrown multiple times by his old-school jujutsu instructor. Each time Kanō asks for an explanation, the teacher throws him again. Finally, exasperated, the teacher says, "What is it with you?! You think you'll understand it by asking questions? Just keep doing it and you'll pick it up." Kanō records his dissatisfaction with this policy whereby "every bit of training was to get the body to understand" (Inoue, Budō no tanjō, 2004). Kanō would later pen copious treatises documenting the hows and whys of judo. Clearly two very different visions of the "self" are at play. The conceptions of the "self" from both sides of the divide will be excavated from various jujutsu manuals of the late Tokugawa and early Meiji periods as well as from Kanō's writings. These will be interpreted in the context of their vastly different historical moments and geo-political situations. Attention will also be paid to shifts in the methods of training as Althusser, for one, reminds us that repeated, patterned uses of the body (ritual) inscribe ideologies in the mind.

**Keywords:** Jujutsu, judo, Kano Jigoro, self

## PARALLEL SESSION 6

### Panel 6A: Childhood, Aging and Disability

#### **Between Street and Dojo: Judo Practice and Childhood in Scampia**

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This paper presents ethnographic research conducted at a judo dojo in Scampia, a peripheral neighbourhood of Naples (Italy) historically shaped by socioeconomic deprivation, strong criminal presence, and enduring territorial stigma. In this context, children are routinely exposed to normative frameworks in which authority, belonging, and recognition are often mediated through illicit economies and informal power structures. Drawing on participant observation and close engagement with everyday training practices, the paper examines how judo offers an alternative moral and social order within this environment. Inside the dojo, criminal norms are replaced by rules emphasising respect, cooperation, and self-control; figures of illicit authority are countered by the presence of a legitimate adult mentor; and individualistic survival strategies give way to collective discipline and mutual reliance among training partners. The paper argues that martial arts practice provides children with a concrete, embodied experience of order, belonging, and recognition that contrasts with dominant logics of the surrounding environment. In doing so, this work contributes to martial arts studies by showing how combat sports can function as locally meaningful alternatives to prevailing social norms in marginalised urban settings.

*Keywords:* Anthropology, Judo, Childhood, Marginalised Urban Environments

#### **A Tough Vicarious Experience: Parents' Perceptions and Emotions When Supporting Their Daughters' Competitive Engagement in MACS**

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This paper draws on data generated in a PhD project that explored how parents and coaches constructed girls' participation in martial arts and combat sports (MACS). Interviews were conducted with 28 parents and 17 coaches of girls engaged in MACS. Foucauldian discourse analysis was utilised to examine how parenting and coaching experiences, beliefs, and knowledge-power relations shaped understandings of girls' training and competition. Focusing here on parents' experiences of supporting and spectating their daughters' competitive involvement, I examine how they negotiated perceptions of risk, injury, and violence. Findings suggest that 'insider' parents – those engaged within the 'sport-net' and familiar with the pedagogical and cultural norms of MACS – were generally more accepting of their daughters' participation and more able to distinguish between controlled combat sport and interpersonal violence. In contrast, 'outsider' parents, with limited exposure to MACS cultures, expressed heightened concerns about safety and were more likely to frame the practices as violent. Nevertheless, outsider perspectives could shift through engagement with insider discourses centred on discipline, control, respect, care, and trust – values integral to many MACS coaching pedagogies. Despite these differences, all parents reported the emotional challenge of watching their daughters fight. I argue that, for some, this constituted a form of vicarious limit experience, generating complex emotional responses and prompting distinctive strategies of emotional regulation. Gendered discourses influenced many of the parents' reactions as they normalised different expectations of their girl's behaviour and appearance. How these gendered discourses were interpreted varied by the level of 'insider' engagement parents had and the distinction between the social expectations of mothering and fathering. Overall, these findings contribute to broader discussions of how martial arts participation intersects with youth development, parental support and responsibility, and the negotiation of perceived health risk within MACS cultures.

*Keywords:* Parenting, Violence, Limit, Responsive, Sport-net

#### **A Symbolic Interactionist Look at Constructions of Ageing by Self and Others Across Multiple Cultures and Martial Arts: A Research Plan and Preliminary Findings**

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When looking at martial arts practitioners aged 60 years and older, the literature focuses predominantly on medical/physiological aspects with psychological and social impacts covered somewhat less extensively. This study attempts to add to the body of knowledge by investigating practitioners' perceptions of self as senior-aged martial artists and their understandings of the benefits and challenges of practicing a martial art at their ages. These experiences include accommodations made to adapt to aging physicality but also to the perceived benefits and challenges within physical, psychological and social domains of life. The perceptions and experiences of instructors who teach to practitioners aged 60-plus are also examined, and all of the above are scrutinized through a symbolic interactionist lens with an emphasis on constructions of aging of self and others. This study focuses on three forms of martial arts – striking (e.g., karate-do), grappling (e.g., Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu) and weaponry (e.g., traditional Okinawan kobudo, Irish stick fighting and cane fighting) – as practiced and taught in Asia, North and South America, the Middle East/GCC and Europe. Quantitative data is collected through online surveys and analyzed using the RedCap platform, and qualitative data is collected through interviews conducted in-person and through online communication platforms including Zoom and Teams. Surveys and interviews are conducted

across multiple countries and therefore in multiple languages, including English, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, German, Japanese, Swedish, French, and others. The presentation will explain the overall research plan and share preliminary findings.

**Keywords:** Social Constructions, Aging, Multinational, Instruction

### **Jiu-Jitsu and People with Disabilities: The Perspective of Paradesportive Jiu-Jitsu Athletes**

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Paradesportive Jiu-jitsu was institutionalized in 2017. Although it is still in a process of consolidation, it presents significant potential due to its broad system of functional classes, which allows access for individuals with different disabilities. This paper investigates how men with disabilities experience Paradesportive Jiu-jitsu, focusing on the meaning attributed to disability and to Jiu-jitsu, as well as on the social and pedagogical conditions shaping this practice. Semi-structured interviews were conducted using the oral life history approach, and the data were examined through content analysis. The analysis was grounded in Disability Studies, particularly the social model of disability. The findings reveal ableism as a structuring element of participants' experiences, organized around three main axes: physical, attitudinal, and pedagogical barriers. Physical barriers included accessibility limitations in training facilities. Attitudinal barriers were related to the lack of representation of people with disabilities as Jiu-jitsu practitioners and to the spectacle-making of disabled bodies within training environments. Pedagogically, the lack of adequately trained teachers emerged as a central issue. The study concludes that Jiu-jitsu teaching environments are, for the most part, not prepared to accommodate people with disabilities. Therefore, a paradigm shift is required across the three axes identified. Rethinking the accessibility conditions of training spaces, recognizing people with disabilities as potential practitioners, and expanding professional training for the paradesportive modality are essential steps. Addressing these demands, the study proposes Paradesportive Jiu-jitsu as a space of potentiality through what is termed "overcoming inclusion," a perspective in which the disabled body is not understood as a disadvantage. From the internal logic of the modality, all practitioners require adaptations due to bodily differences, including specific adaptations for children, older adults, and people with disabilities. Therefore, pedagogical practices should focus on individual potentials rather than limitations, encouraging the development of adapted techniques and strategies. When supported by an anti-ableist pedagogical approach, Jiu-jitsu can foster a sense of belonging, redefine disability, and contribute to more inclusive and transformative martial arts education.

**Keywords:** Jiu-jitsu; People with disabilities; Disability Studies; Combat Sports Pedagogy.

## **Panel 6B: Philosophical Appraisals**

### **Beyond Fighting: Bruce Lee's Jeet Kune Do as Cultural Pedagogy and Ideological Struggle**

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This paper examines Bruce Lee's Jeet Kune Do (JKD) as a form of cultural pedagogy that teaches ways of seeing race, power, and resistance as much as it teaches techniques of fighting. Focusing on key films such as *Fist of Fury* (1972) and *Enter the Dragon* (1973), together with Lee's own writings and interviews, I explore how JKD emerges in the early 1970s at the intersection of Hong Kong's export-oriented film industry, US civil-rights era racial politics, and a growing global martial arts culture. Rather than treating JKD only as an efficient combat method, I read it as a set of embodied lessons about identity, humiliation, and dignity for audiences navigating colonial and post-colonial hierarchies. Using Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony, I analyse how Lee's rhetoric of "using no way as way" and "being like water" challenges dominant "common sense" about racialised bodies, masculinity, and style. Close readings of selected fight sequences show how interception, economy of motion, and directness operate not just as tactical choices, but as critiques of cinematic convention and of Hollywood's marginalisation of Asian male heroes. At the same time, I trace how these counter-hegemonic gestures are quickly folded into a marketable "Bruce Lee package", generating tensions between resistance and commodification. The paper combines film and media analysis with auto-ethnographic reflection on my own practice as a Jeet Kune Do instructor working in contemporary Irish and UK contexts. By putting screen texts in dialogue with training, teaching, and live demonstrations, I show how JKD continues to function as an ideological resource for students and fans who use Bruce Lee to think through questions of race, belonging, and freedom. The paper contributes to martial arts studies by linking embodiment and ideology, and by framing Jeet Kune Do as an ongoing site of cultural struggle rather than a closed historical style.

**Keywords:** Bruce Lee; Jeet Kune Do; Cultural Hegemony; martial arts pedagogy; Orientalism

### **Queer Orientations in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu**

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The culture of Brazilian Jiu Jitsu (BJJ) has long been shaped by commitments to individual progress through sacrifice and hard work. Social media discourse and promotional materials surrounding BJJ commonly position the practice as a meritocratic context for fostering the strength, resilience and defensive capabilities necessary for achieving self-reliance and self-actualisation in a harsh and competitive world. This ideological framing establishes the hardships of training and competition as metaphors for everyday life, encouraging practitioners to conceptualise BJJ as a way to inoculate themselves against the harm and precarity of life under neoliberal capitalism. This paper explores what might be gained by approaching BJJ through a different ideological frame, proposing strategies

for ‘imagining otherwise’ (Olufemi 2021) during training. It examines BJJ through the lens of Sara Ahmed’s Queer Phenomenology (2006), establishing an orientation that centres experiences of intimacy, community and care within the practice. Through presenting a queer reading of BJJ training, the paper seeks to illuminate the many political and ontological tensions within the practice, drawing attention to the ways in which BJJ culture’s grindset stoicism flattens out its political and relational complexity.

*Keywords:* Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, Training, Queer Phenomenology, Neoliberalism

### **Toward a Critical Theory of Boxing**

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In a recent essay on the emancipatory meaning of boxing in the history of the working class in France, journalist Selim Derkaoui pleads that the ultimate dream of the boxer is “the end of boxing” (Derkaoui 2023, 129). In a Marxist analysis of the sport, Derkaoui argues that a classless society would also be one without boxing, and that its societal manifestation of meaning can be understood along these lines. It is true that boxing cannot be fully understood in isolation from economies of pain and violence, social reproduction and exclusion, that reach far beyond the gym or the ring. At the same time, to understand violence it is not enough to focus on particular actions, agents, and their self-understanding. It also requires a philosophical analysis of the concept of violence, and of the historical conditions that support accounts of its meaning, legitimacy, or justification at any given instance, beyond Marxist or sociological accounts. Therefore, in my talk, I will introduce several philosophers who have dealt extensively with the concept of violence in this context, particularly Walter Benjamin, Judith Butler, and Elsa Dorlin, in ways that can be productively applied to the practice of boxing. Until recently, there has only been limited engagement with boxing (Sartre 1991) or other combat sports in philosophy (Bowman 2019). And yet, given the urgency of understanding productions of pain, violence, and agency in contemporary societies, philosophy cannot lag behind.

*Keywords:* Philosophy, Boxing, Violence, Pain

## **Panel 6C: Tradition and Development 3: Political and Cultural Identities**

### **North and South: The Mobility of Martial Arts, Philosophy, and Ethics in Chinese Martial Arts Cinema (1930s–1960s)**

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This research investigates martial arts films situated within the tumultuous historical context of modern China, spanning the 1930s to the 1960s – a period marked by profound internal crises and external threats. In these cinematic portrayals, martial arts function simultaneously on two critical symbolic levels: they signify personal empowerment and individual agency (as seen in figures like Ip Man), while also symbolizing collective authority and institutionalized power through organizations like the Chinese Warrior Society (中华武士会) and the Jingwu Athletic Association (精武体育会). The core of this study examines the migration of martial arts traditions between the Japanese invasion and the Cultural Revolution. By analysing cinematic depictions of practitioners’ voluntary and involuntary mobility across Northern and Southern China, and applying theoretical frameworks drawn from Edward Said’s travelling theory and the Daoist concept of ‘flow’, the research assesses whether these traditions were culturally preserved, transformed, or extinguished by films. It further explores how the philosophical and cultural ideologies underpinning diverse styles were synthesized or altered through geographical displacement. By comparing and examining the narrative themes, policies and audience perceptions of films produced or set between the 1930s and 1960s, this analysis contextualises the development of martial arts cinema within its broader historical and industrial framework. Thus, this study discusses how martial arts cinema, as a distinct cultural genre, has articulated and negotiated shifting ethical perspectives within specific socio-historical frameworks as a distinct cultural genre.

*Keywords:* Martial Arts Cinema, China (1930s -1960s); Traveling Theory; Daoist Thoughts

### **Under Blank Shields: On Demystification and Ideological Imposture in Judo, Muay Thai and Krav Maga**

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Any given martial system can be analysed through two aspects. The first is non-conventional, and concerns the biomechanical and physiological —the transmission of forces in a punch or the breaking of balance in a throw— physical, material facts which would not depend on consensus. The second is conventional, including rulesets, rituals, philosophies or aesthetics, and do depend on consensus. Conventional aspects organise and specify the non-conventional: boxing’s rules privilege punches, while Muay Thai’s restrict wrestling takedowns so as to achieve a stylistic identity. This article examines the implications of imposing —internally and externally, a priori and a posteriori— conventional matters onto martial practices in order to achieve academic legitimacy, social capital, or to objectify them as symbols of larger, intellectual and political conflicts. Through three case studies —judo, Muay Thai and krav maga— it analyses how martial systems are construed through their foundational myths as embodiments of certain philosophical, aesthetic or national values and identities, so as to face specific contexts and narratives; such as the Westernisation and modernisation of Meiji-era Japan in the case of judo, the encounters between Thailand and European, nineteenth-century colonizing powers, and Anti-Semitism in twentieth-century Europe in the case of krav maga. The contemporary consideration and politicisation of krav maga due to its association with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is object of special attention. By means of careful comparison and controlled analogy, the article tests the coherence —as well as its viability towards the interests of its own cause— of ascribing moral responsibility or

ideological endorsement to any technical practice on the basis of historical, national or political association. This research should not be taken as an apology for any ideological position or institution. It will, instead, ponder on the challenges derived from both mystification and demystification of any given martial system's narrative and their logical implications. Ultimately, it will conclude that both the conventional and the non-conventional should in all cases be aimed towards the immediate and intrinsic objectives of the system, leaving prejudice and any supposed reason to discriminate outside. In other words: to train under no flag, to train under blank shields.

*Keywords:* Martial arts, demystification, judo, Muay Thai, krav maga

### **Fighting With Tradition - Xu Xiaodong and Traditional Chinese Martial Arts**

*John Tasker, Cardiff University ([taskerjp@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:taskerjp@cardiff.ac.uk))*

This paper examines the challenge fights of Xu Xiaodong against traditional martial artists as part of a cycle in the production, institutionalisation, and contestation of Chinese martial arts. Rather than treating the controversy as an external assault on tradition, the paper argues that Xu represents a moment in which martial arts systems are challenged by their own practitioners through embodied testing and competitive encounter. The cycle begins in the 1980s with the “wuxia fever,” when martial arts fiction, television, and cinema shaped powerful martial imaginaries that linked combat skill, morality, and national identity. These translated into a dramatic increase in participation in martial arts training and the expansion of schools, performance groups, and tourism economies. Over time, traditional martial arts stabilised as heritage, privileging display, lineage, and symbolism over combative testing. By the early 2000s, institutionalisation had narrowed the conditions under which martial efficacy could be debated. Xu Xiaodong – trained within this system but attracted by the international trend of MMA – emerged as internal critics who subjected traditional martial claims to bodily verification through fighting. These encounters transformed physical punches and kicks into public arguments about legitimacy, authenticity, and modernity. The paper argues that Xu's interventions expose a structural contradiction in contemporary martial arts cultures: when practices are required to function simultaneously as heritage, spectacle, and combat system, tensions inevitably surface. The case contributes to martial arts studies by demonstrating how media representation, institutional control, and embodied challenge shape the evolution of martial traditions in the modern world.

*Keywords:* Chinese Martial Arts, Tradition, MMA

## **Practical Session 2: Methods for Research and Practice**

### **Reconstruction of historical martial arts as embodied historiography: Introduction to the ADVISE method**

*Maciej Talaga, University of Warsaw; Bartłomiej Walczak, Independent Researcher ([m.talaga@al.uw.edu.pl](mailto:m.talaga@al.uw.edu.pl))*

How can reconstruction of lost or poorly attested martial arts serve as a form of historiographical inquiry rather than merely revivalist practice? This practical workshop does not offer a comprehensive answer, but introduces ADVISE, an embodied research framework designed specifically to extract martial techniques from fragmentary historical sources. The full method integrates five aligned components – Analysis, Division, Interpolation, Synthesis, and External Input – and treats martial techniques as material-historical problems defined by goals, affordances, and action capabilities rather than fixed “moves” (Walczak 2023; Talaga 2025). The workshop itself is focused on one of ADVISE core elements: hands-on exploration of affordances encoded in historical descriptions of martial techniques in order to infer actor's goals and create a practice feedback loop that may lead towards deeper and more meaningful understanding of the original material achieved through practitioner's repeated embodied experience. Participants will work through a concise sequence derived from fifteenth-century German treatises on fighting. The emphasis will be on demonstrating how embodied trial and error combined with textual feedback from a historical source can clarify textual ambiguities or omissions, revealing historically-plausible decision-making logic and generating new research questions.

*Keywords:* Embodied research, historical European martial arts, ADVISE, embodied archives

### **From Epidemiology to Mat-Side Practice: Designing Injury-reduction Warm-Ups That Actually Get Used**

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Injury-prevention warm-ups (IPWs) are widely promoted across sports; however, in grappling disciplines, their adoption remains inconsistent, and their design is often based on tradition rather than evidence. Epidemiological studies across wrestling, Brazilian jiu-jitsu, judo, and related grappling sports consistently report high injury prevalence at the knee, shoulder, and head/neck, alongside recurrent mechanisms linked to takedowns and transitional phases of combat. This practical workshop presents a structured, data-driven pedagogical approach to designing IPWs for grappling sports, grounded in published injury epidemiology and an evidence-based injury prevention framework. Rather than demonstrating a fixed warm-up routine, participants engage in guided problem-based learning tasks that require them to interpret injury patterns and justify exercise selection using the Team-Sport Injury Prevention (TIP) cycle and the Raise–Activate–Mobilise–Potentiate (RAMP) model. Through small-group activities and facilitated discussion, attendees learn how to align warm-up content with sport-specific injury risk while addressing known barriers to implementation, including time constraints, coach knowledge, and cultural resistance. The workshop emphasises transferable principles for knowledge translation, enabling participants to design IPWs that are evidence-informed, adaptable across grappling

disciplines, and feasible within real training environments. This session will be of relevance to researchers, clinicians, and coach-educators seeking to bridge the gap between injury epidemiology and applied practice in martial arts and combat sports.

*Keywords:* Injury reduction programming, Grappling sports, Warm-up design, Knowledge translation, Sports injury epidemiology

## PARALLEL SESSION 7

### Panel 7A: Beyond Technique: Professional Decision-Making in Martial Arts Pedagogy

#### Professional Coaching as Situated Decision-Making in Martial Arts Instruction

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Martial arts teaching is often evaluated through authenticity, tradition, or technical efficiency. This paper proposes a complementary lens: professional coaching as situated decision-making. Coaching is understood as a practice of making defensible choices under uncertainty — choices shaped by learners' goals, risk and safety constraints, institutional expectations, and the moral economies of "realism" and "discipline" circulating in many dojos and gyms. Building on reflective-practice and coaching-process research, the paper outlines a compact decision model (goal-setting, task design, feedback, authority/relational stance, risk management, and evaluation). Using short training vignettes, it shows how different instructional cultures prioritise different values (efficiency vs. care; compliance vs. ownership; toughness vs. wellbeing), and how these priorities shape coaching decisions, training outcomes and participation climates. The contribution is twofold: (1) a transferable analytic tool for martial arts studies to examine pedagogy as a core organisational and cultural dimension of martial arts; and (2) a reflective vocabulary for practitioners to articulate and revise their teaching rationales beyond lineage- or "realism"-based legitimization.

**Keywords:** Coaching, professional judgement, pedagogy, training culture, reflective practice, risk management

#### Prompting the Decision-Making: Martial Arts Instruction by Artificial Intelligence

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The previous papers in this panel address decision-making as a human act. However, the growing use of artificial intelligence tools based on large language models is influencing decision-making in diverse social domains. For instance, innovations are embedded in performance data analysis through artificial intelligence but also in the design of learning and coaching. Considering the use of artificial intelligence in educational settings, this paper explores the answers different artificial intelligence tools have for guiding principles on the instruction of martial arts. An inquiry is performed using basic prompts to leave room for the tools' answers. The subsequent analysis is material-driven and examines the initial next token provided by the artificial intelligence tools. The goal is to map the tools' pedagogy for martial arts instructions. The results will present an explorative yet contingent image of what artificial intelligence tools emphasise as the guiding principles. The forthcoming study brings up possibilities to discuss the role of artificial intelligence for professional decision-making in martial arts pedagogy. On the one hand, the expected results will give a first impression of what artificial intelligence 'associates' with martial arts pedagogy; on the other hand, the importance of professional reflection on the prompting into the decision-making process is highlighted, leading to future perspectives for martial arts practice using generative artificial intelligence.

**Keywords:** Artificial intelligence; instructional design; martial arts pedagogy; decision-making

#### Gamified Physical Education – Student Motivation in the Field of Martial Arts

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Although gamification has become established in education in recent years, there is a need for systematically designed studies to further reveal any educational benefits of gamification (Dichev & Dicheva, 2017). Empirical research that has explicitly looked at gamified physical education shows an improvement in student motivation and engagement (Arufe-Giráldez et al., 2022; Camacho-Sánchez et al., 2023). The study conducted for this article aims to gain further insights from other education systems that have not yet been sufficiently researched to further evaluate the use of gamification as a teaching method in physical education. To this end, a gamified teaching project in the field of martial arts was carried out as an example within the framework of German curricular physical education. In a pre-test, post-test quasi-experimental research design, the basic psychological needs (Ryan & Deci, 2017) of 94 students (12 ± 1.0 years) enrolled in four classes were assessed using standardized questionnaires (van der Kaap-Deeder et al., 2020). Randomly selected, two classes experienced a gamified learning unit, and the other two followed a traditional non-gamified approach for 10 weeks in the physical education units. Besides some expected significant main effects over time for all groups the results showed no significant differences at post-tests favouring the experimental groups (gamified approach) over the control groups (non-gamified approach) in all the variables assessed. Therefore more studies with larger variability in contexts, participants and content are needed.

**Keywords:** Gamification, physical education, motivation, interventional study, martial arts

#### Cooperative Conflict as Occupation: The Potential of Self-Defence Training for Occupational Therapy

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Self-defence training is typically discussed within the domains of violence prevention, personal safety, or sport (Koedijk et al., 2019; Körner & Staller, 2018; Staller et al., 2016; Voigt & Zinner, 2023; Yikilmaz et al., 2025). This conceptual paper proposes a different perspective by exploring the potential of self-defence training as an occupational medium within occupational therapy. Drawing on systems-theoretical considerations (Luhmann, 1996), the paper argues that a carefully designed self-defence training exhibits structural characteristics that align closely with core occupational therapy concepts such as occupation, participation, and agency under conditions of uncertainty. We conceptualize this form of self-defence training as cooperative conflict: a practice in which confrontation and cooperation are inseparably intertwined. The guiding principle “Don’t (get) hurt” structures this practice as the co-production of safety through mutual responsibility. Conflict simulations become effective precisely because they are embedded in cooperative social arrangements. This paradoxical structure enables participants to engage in regulated risk-taking while maintaining shared responsibility and social accountability. From an occupational therapy perspective, such training can be understood as occupation under risk. We position self-defence training as a potential occupational medium that can be integrated into occupational therapy under specific structural conditions. We offer an occupation-based account of self-defence practice that opens a theoretically grounded avenue for occupational therapy.

**Keywords:** Occupational Therapy, Self-Defence Training, Occupation under Risk, Systems theory, Martial Arts Coaching

## **Panel 7B: Health and Wellbeing**

### **Regulating the “Animal”: Embodied Skill Acquisition, Aggression, and Mental Balance in Traditional Martial Arts**

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This paper presents findings from an interpretative phenomenological analysis examining the relationship between traditional Chinese martial arts training and mental health. While martial arts schools have previously been discussed as spaces for collective identity formation and social belonging, this study extends the discussion by focusing on practitioners’ experiences of what they describe as an inner “animal”—a metaphor for primal fighting energy, assertiveness, and aggressivity—and by situating these experiences within pedagogical and learning structures. The findings suggest that martial arts schools function as constrained learning environments in which aggression is neither suppressed nor indiscriminately expressed, but actively regulated through structured practice, social hierarchy, and feedback. Participants describe learning to activate and deactivate this embodied energy in response to contextual demands, developing timing, restraint, and self-regulation beyond repetitive technical training. The paper argues that mental balance emerges through embodied skill acquisition rather than emotional suppression, and that the ability to consciously modulate aggression supports psychological stability and adaptive engagement with external stimuli. Traditional martial arts training is thus framed as a pedagogical process in which learning design, embodied experience, and feedback loops contribute meaningfully to mental health and human development.

**Keywords:** Martial arts studies; embodied cognition; skill acquisition; aggression regulation; mental health; phenomenology

### **The Culture of Weight Loss Among Brazilian Combat Sports Athletes: Social, Psychological, and Gendered Dimensions from a Figurational Sociological Perspective**

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Rapid weight loss (RWL) is a widespread and normalized practice among combat sports athletes, despite well-documented physical and psychological risks. Beyond physiological consequences, RWL is embedded in moral expectations, identity formation, and power relations within combat sport cultures. This study examines how Brazilian combat sports athletes experience, justify, and reproduce rapid weight loss practices through the lens of Norbert Elias’s figurational sociology. A descriptive and comparative qualitative study was conducted with 32 athletes from different combat sports in Brazil, using an online questionnaire approved by an institutional ethics committee. The analysis focused on weight-cutting strategies, access to professional support, emotional experiences, and social markers such as gender, region, and socioeconomic conditions. Findings reveal extreme weight losses (up to 17 kg), limited professional supervision, and marked emotional impacts, including anxiety, irritability, exhaustion, and depressive symptoms. Significant differences emerged between male and female athletes, as well as across socioeconomic and regional contexts. Interpreted through Elias’s concepts of figuration, habitus, and self-restraint, these practices appear not as individual choices, but as socially learned dispositions shaped by competitive pressures and long-term civilizing processes within combat sport environments. The study contributes to Martial Arts Studies by demonstrating how rapid weight loss operates as a culturally regulated practice that disciplines bodies and emotions, reinforcing gendered and social inequalities while being perceived as a legitimate requirement for sporting success.

**Keywords:** Combat sports; Weight loss culture; Figurational sociology; Gender relations; Emotions and self-regulation

### **A Qualitative Study on the Role of Taekwondo in Promoting Mental and Psychological Wellbeing**

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Taekwondo is widely practiced in Nepal as a form of martial arts. The sport started in 1983; it is played in all seven provinces of Nepal. Taekwondo is commonly perceived for physical fitness, self-defense and competitive achievement. However, its psychological and mental well-being dimensions are often overlooked. Beyond physical development, this sport helps emotional regulation and enhances self-esteem, resilience and analysis skills, which are significant for mental wellbeing. Today, the primary concern of Nepali parents is that their children are digital screen-centric, disrespectful and have little to no socialization, but taekwondo provides structured training in a team with a coach helping people develop social skills and teamwork. Unfortunately, these factors have been overlooked by players as well as researchers. In Nepal, there is no research conducted in sports psychology, so this paper can be a significant trajectory for many other researchers and for the sports community. This study will examine the role of taekwondo in promoting mental and psychological wellbeing among youths of Nepal following the biopsychosocial model. This model developed by Engel (1977) is an interdisciplinary model that focuses on holistic factors of health, illness and wellbeing, it states that wellbeing cannot be understood through one factor but through combination of biological, psychological, social and cultural factors. This scientific framework helps to understand the role of taekwondo in overall wellbeing particularly focusing on the psychological aspects of practitioners. This study is a case study design using in-depth interviews, key information interviews (KII) and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) to collect data from the taekwondo practitioners aged 18-40 years. Through the thematic analysis, the researcher aims to highlight the holistic benefits of taekwondo in the lives of practitioners. The findings will raise awareness of the taekwondo community and also pave the path for future researchers, especially in Nepal, where sport psychology is least prioritized.

**Keywords:** Taekwondo, mental wellbeing, sports psychology, biopsychosocial model, youths.

### **Injury Prevalence, Risk Factors, and Training Behaviours in Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu: A Cross-Sectional Survey of 1,305 Athletes**

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**Background:** Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu (BJJ) is a grappling-based martial art and combat sport characterised by high physical demands, repeated sparring exposure, and complex submission-based techniques. Research examining injury patterns and associated training behaviours in BJJ remains limited. This study aimed to investigate injury prevalence, risk factors, and training behaviours among BJJ athletes. **Methods:** A cross-sectional study was conducted using a 29-item online survey disseminated via social media and BJJ forums. The survey collected demographic, training, and six-month injury history data from a convenience sample of BJJ athletes. In total, 1,305 athletes completed the survey, comprising 1,200 males and 105 females. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and Pearson chi-square tests of independence to examine unadjusted associations between categorical variables and injury status. Multivariable logistic regression was used to identify factors independently associated with injury status, with statistical significance accepted at  $p \leq .05$ . **Results:** The overall six-month injury prevalence was 81.2%. Most injuries occurred during training (92.8%), and 81.1% of injured athletes continued to train or compete while injured. The knee was the most frequently injured anatomical site (23.0%), ligament sprains were the most common injury type (38.5%), and scrambles or transitions were the leading mechanism of injury (20.5%). Weekly training frequency ( $p = .044$ ) and number of sparring rounds per session ( $p = .035$ ) were significantly associated with injury occurrence in unadjusted analyses. However, in the multivariable logistic regression model, training experience was the only factor independently associated with injury, with greater experience associated with reduced odds of injury. **Conclusions:** Injury prevalence was high among BJJ athletes, with most injuries occurring during training and many athletes continuing to participate while injured. These findings suggest that injury prevention strategies in BJJ should consider training exposure, sparring volume, athlete experience, and return-to-play behaviours. A BJJ-specific consensus statement on injury definitions and reporting, alongside prospective injury surveillance, structured warm-ups, training-load monitoring, and return-to-play protocols, may help strengthen injury prevention within the sport.

**Keywords:** Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, Combat Sports, Martial Arts, Injury Epidemiology, Sports Injury

## **Panel 7C: Contemporary Ethnographies**

### **Intercorporeality, Relational Self-Cultivation, and Social Bonding in Taekwondo: An Embodied Ethnography in a Dojang in Nuevo León, Mexico**

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For three years I practiced taekwondo at a Moo Duk Kwan dojang in Nuevo León, Mexico. This sustained bodily immersion formed the basis of an embodied ethnography of everyday martial practice, complemented by participant observation, field diary, ethnographic interviews, and participatory photo-elicitation with 30 practitioners (students, instructors, and family members) who visually documented what taekwondo means in their lives. A central finding is how everyday practice generates social bonds and cultivates empathy through the body. This finding engages with literature documenting taekwondo's efficacy as social intervention in schools, hospitals, prisons, and refugee programs, where systematic reviews report reductions in aggression and strengthening of prosocial bonds. We know little, however, about the concrete mechanisms through which this bonding operates in the dojang. I analyze these ethnographic materials through intercorporeality (Fuchs, 2016)—the mutual bodily coupling between practitioners—and kinesthetic

empathy (Sheets-Johnstone, 2011), articulated with Confucian relational self-cultivation (Tu Wei-ming, 1985; Yuasa, 1987). Findings show that empathy is cultivated through embodied micro-rituals: regulating strike intensity with one's partner, taking turns holding palchaguis, synchronizing breathing during poomsae, sustaining bodily trust in sparring. These gestures transform martial contact into an infrastructure of mutual care. Self-cultivation in the dojang is constitutively relational. Practitioners modulate their energy in and through the body of the other. This research contributes to martial arts studies an ethnographic explanation of the intercorporeal mechanisms that underpin the social efficacy of traditional taekwondo.

**Keywords:** Intercorporeality; Kinesthetic empathy; Embodied ethnography; Taekwondo; Relational self-cultivation

### **Boxing Gym as a Resonant Chamber: Listening to Embodiment in Boxing**

Kris Orszaghova, Central European University ([orszaghovak@ceu.edu](mailto:orszaghovak@ceu.edu))

Sport is often regarded as a primarily visual spectacle. However, this paper seeks to demonstrate that sport is equally a sonic event, characterised by a chorus of breathing, grunting, laughter, commands and rhythms. Instead of looking, this study listens to sport. Drawing on a three-year multi-sited ethnography in 16 boxing gyms, 11 competitions and two international tournaments in Central and Eastern Europe, the study combines sonic ethnography and reflexive autoethnography to show how sound participates in the gendering of bodies in sport. Theoretically, the paper builds on feminist and sound studies to conceptualise voice as both paradoxical (Barthes, 1991) and relational (Cavarero, 2005). Following Cavarero (2005), it introduces the concept of vocalic resonance as a relational force that produces temporary collectivities. By employing Stoeve's concepts of "sonic colour line" and "listening ear" (2016) and Salem's "sonic gender line" (2025), the paper shows how auditory norms enforce racial, class and gender legibility. Simultaneously, the overlapping voices, screams, breaths, and rhythms of boxing gyms create what this paper refers to as a sonic commons that opens space for the queering of embodiment. The paper shows how unruly voices, breaths and screams become targets of gender policing and disciplining but also function as sites of resistance that reconfigure embodiment and unsettle the gender binary. The paper, acknowledging visual regimes of surveillance and disciplining, argues that shared and overlapping sounds turn boxing gyms into resonant chambers where bodies resound with rhythms that extend beyond visual categorisation into queer possibility. In sport, queering is perhaps less a spectacle to see and more a resonance to practice.

**Keywords:** Boxing, gender, voice, resonance, acoustemology

### **Commitment, Contingency, and Ethical Life in a Chinese Martial Arts School in Cairo**

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Authenticity appears to be everywhere in martial arts. Practitioners debate lineages, masters, origins, and legitimate transmission, while scholars have examined authenticity as historical claim, social construction, and sometimes invention. Based on ethnographic research with Chinese martial arts practitioners in Cairo, I ask not only what counts as authentic, but what is at stake when practitioners debate about authenticity. In Cairo, I found that newcomers, long-term practitioners, and observers were often using authenticity to answer different questions. Rather than remaining a stable concern throughout one's engagement with martial arts, authenticity is mobilized to address different problems at different stages of becoming a martial artist. Most practitioners did not enter through historical certainty but through contingent encounters. They arrived through friendship, proximity, curiosity, or unexpected encounters. Later still, some retrospectively described their encounter as destiny. The question, then, is not simply why people believe a tradition is authentic, but how they come to inhabit particular lives despite contingency, uncertainty, and historical complexity. I argue that alongside a logic of authenticity, my interlocutors increasingly operated through what I call a *logic of inheritance*. Where authenticity asks whether a tradition is genuine, inheritance asks whether its recipient has become capable: *Have I become worthy of receiving and carrying this tradition?* Authenticity thus becomes part of ethical formation rather than a stable criterion of historical truth. Perhaps most surprisingly, it often becomes more important not as uncertainty disappears, but as historical complexity grows.

**Keywords:** Chineseness, globalization, embodiment, soft power

### **What is Training a Practice of? The Ethic of Care, Preservation, and Equilibrium in Olympic Taekwondo**

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This paper is an ethnographic rendering of the practice of Taekwondo as observed in an Olympic Taekwondo academy. By placing the training body at the centre of its inquiry, this paper asks "what is training a practice of?". The paper problematises the idea of training as preparation for competition or as site of technical transmission alone, and highlights emergent notions of ethics, care and equilibrium within the practice of Olympic Taekwondo. It demonstrates how protective gear, training mats, kick pads etc. adorned for safety and protection as per the formal rules and regulations cease to be "a compromise between the safety of the athletes and realism in combat" (Moenig, Cho, and Song, 2012) and are conceived into technical objects to be mastered, affective surfaces to be tapped into, and creative tools of building momentum, constituting the material culture (Warnier, 2011) of Taekwondo that co-produce the bodies in practice. Further, the paper also illustrates how during training, practitioners employ a certain knowledge and take ethico-moral decisions of who should fight whom, rather than adhering to the competition rules and regulations of who can fight whom. This contributes to the sensory and embodied reconfiguration central to the everyday practice of Taekwondo, to illustrate how training practices are shaped not just by technical regulations but by an intimate ethic of care, preservation, and equilibrium in the network of

bodies, objects and spaces. In doing so, the paper posits training as site of accumulation—not only of technical dexterity and skill of the sport, but also of specific somatic awareness and moral discernment underlining the “doing” of Taekwondo.

*Keywords:* Taekwondo, Ethic, Body practice, moral ecology

## PARALLEL SESSION 8

### Panel 8A: Epistemology and Methodology

#### **Replicating and Validation of the ENK Theoretical Framework for Martial Arts Studies Research**

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This study was a replication and validation of the Embodied Narrative Knowing (ENK) theoretical framework (Overton, 2017). ENK was first used to uncover the experience of martial artists. Overton (2017) found four themes: Change, Embodiment, Interaction, and Way of Life, that embodied the experiences of martial artists. Since the original study, student researchers have found similar themes but expectedly used different language and definitions to describe their findings. The current study was designed to replicate Overton's (2017) study while allowing for multiple researchers to work in collaboration. This approach brings diverse experiences and perspectives of each researcher toward their analysis and interpretation of the data. Martial artists were interviewed about their experiences of being a martial artist and that data was analyzed by the two student researchers. For the current study the primary researcher trained and mentored three student researchers through the process, including qualitative data collection and thematic narrative analysis. The two students collaborated on the themes and definitions of those themes, with little interference from the primary researcher. The goal of validating ENK through the current research was to examine the difference in themes and definitions that the researchers created. These were then compared to Overton's (2017) study to examine similarities and differences that were found amongst the researchers. This process attempts to triangulate data from similar sources to illustrate the creation of shared themes and definitions among multiple researchers and the similarities that exist, further validating ENK as a theoretical framework for use with martial arts studies or any practice that is considered an other-way-of-knowing. This presentation examines the process of conducting martial arts research utilizing ENK and is presented along with the analysis of the data from the martial artists who were interviewed. The similarities and differences between the thematic analysis of the student researchers and the primary researcher will also be highlighted. It is our hope that through this exploration we will illustrate the benefit of utilizing a theoretical framework (ENK) tailored to the study of martial arts and those who practice it.

*Keywords:* Theoretical framework, student researchers, other ways of knowing

#### **The (Non-)Definition of Martial Arts: Martial Arts as an Observational Form**

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"Martial arts" remains a widely used yet notoriously unstable category (Bowman, 2017; Wetzler, 2015). Rather than resolving definitional disputes by identifying substantial features, this paper offers a form-theoretical (Spencer-Brown, 1979) account of how "martial arts" becomes a usable object in research and practice. Therefore, we treat "martial arts" as a marked term within a guiding distinction (martial arts/non-martial arts) that necessarily implies an unmarked outside. This yields a constitutive paradox: any definition must draw a boundary while simultaneously obscuring the contingency of the distinction that makes the boundary possible (Luhmann, 1999). Building on recent critiques of essentialism and calls for pragmatic, context-specific classificatory work (Bailey & Samsudin, 2025), we show how definitional moves function as stabilizing operations that distribute legitimacy, exclude "borderline cases," and recalibrate the relation between combat, sport, health, spirituality, and performance. The contribution is a shift from the question "What are martial arts?" to "How are martial arts observed and what is include / excluded?"—opening a program for studying definitional operations across institutions, media, and training cultures.

*Keywords:* Form theory, guiding distinction, martial arts definition, marked/unmarked space, constitutive paradox

#### **Between Naturalisation and Relativisation: The Epistemological Need for a Phenomenological Definition of Martial Arts**

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Across Martial Arts Studies, definitions of martial arts often remain implicit or strategically suspended. Objectivist approaches reduce the phenomenon to measurable behavioural, physiological, or technical variables, while historicist perspectives dissolve it into culturally situated configurations. Although divergent, both converge in leaving unresolved the question of what martial arts are as such. The former naturalises the phenomenon; the latter relativises it. This paper argues that the persistent ontological indeterminacy in the field reflects an unresolved epistemological problem. Before asking how martial arts function socially, historically, or psychologically, it is necessary to clarify the mode of givenness through which they are experienced and recognised as martial arts. The issue is not primarily empirical, but eidetic. Drawing on classical phenomenology, the paper advances the need for a suspensive shift from naturalistic attitudes toward a descriptive investigation of the structures that render martial arts intelligible as a modality of corporal fighting. Through phenomenological reduction, the analysis distinguishes contingent historical expressions from invariant structural features, thereby restoring the possibility of a grounded definition. Historical plurality is not denied; it becomes intelligible on the basis of clarified structures. By explicating configurations such as duel and self-defence, phenomenology offers an

epistemological grounding capable of orienting theoretical, empirical, and comparative research. The aim is therefore foundational: to show that Martial Arts Studies depends upon a phenomenologically grounded ontology if it is to attain conceptual rigor.

*Keywords:* Phenomenology; martial arts definition; ontology; epistemology

### **Embodied Archives: Safeguarding Intangible Martial Heritage of North-Eastern Poland in Bodies of Practitioners**

*Maciej Talaga, University of Warsaw ([m.talaga@al.uw.edu.pl](mailto:m.talaga@al.uw.edu.pl))*

Contemporary heritage discourse increasingly turns to digital reconstructions to make intangible practices accessible. While such approaches are valuable in some contexts, I argue that they risk displacing the very phenomenon they aim to preserve when applied uncritically to embodied martial traditions. Building on research into folk wrestling practices from north-eastern Poland - constitutive forms of movement culture now virtually extinct - this paper proposes an approach that prioritises actual bodily knowledge over representational proxies or digital prostheses. Engaging polemically with Sarah Kenderdine's (2017; n.d.) notion of dynamic, performative heritage in motion, I contend that digital mediation alone is insufficient for safeguarding the epistemic core of martial practices. Where Kenderdine's framework rightly highlights the potentials of digital exhibitions, it often remains within the realm of representation of embodiment rather than the situated, lived experience of martial bodies. For martial arts studies - especially in its endeavour to understand past physical cultures - it is a crucial distinction: movement cannot be faithfully archived unless it is re-enacted in real bodies situated in lived social contexts. Using the case of Polish folk wrestling (*biady*), I illustrate how embodied research - combining ethnographic fieldwork, auto-ethnographic protocols, and systematic body-based documentation - can generate archival knowledge that materially anchors martial heritage in contemporary practitioners' bodies. I propose that safeguarding intangible martial heritage requires methodologies that treat bodies not as surfaces to be represented, but as sites of knowledge in motion.

*Keywords:* Folk wrestling, intangible cultural heritage, martial culture, embodied archives, digital prostheses

## **Panel 8B: Educational Applications**

### **From Club to Symbols: An Ethnographic Method for Developing a Notation System for Arnis**

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Physical education (PE) teachers who teach arnis often have to augment their live demonstrations with textual instructions and postural images that hardly capture the fullness of each strike or movement. To date, no widely accessible, easy-to-use, and intuitive instructional manual exists for teachers to use in arnis instruction. This deficiency can be remedied by a notation system that can concisely and intuitively describe each movement yet remains simple enough for PE students to understand. This paper outlines the methods and processes that culminated in a proposed, albeit preliminary and rudimentary, notation system for arnis. Data for the notation were collected through ethnographic methods, especially participant observation and immersion, in conjunction with personal interviews, video recording, photography, journaling, and note-taking. Four grandmasters of a well-respected arnis club provided the observational data converted into notation using the proposed symbol set. A total of seven grandmasters validated the final output.

*Keywords:* Arnis, choreography notation, martial arts notation, notation system, physical education, strike patterns

### **Applied Martial Arts Studies: Making the Case for the Undergraduate Curriculum in a Humanities Context**

*Tammy S. Gordon, North Carolina State University ([tsgordo2@ncsu.edu](mailto:tsgordo2@ncsu.edu))*

In his founding work on Martial Arts Studies, Paul Bowman rightly positioned the field in the history of the development of cultural studies in the 1980s and 90s. Parallel with, and sometimes in contradiction to the theoretical lean of cultural studies, scholars in applied fields in the humanities sought ways to solve contemporary problems with humanities methods. Programs in public history, applied literature, and others under the institutional umbrella of public humanities grew throughout the late twentieth and early 21st centuries, producing graduates grounded in humanities approaches but versed in meeting the challenges of other fields such as medicine, law, and social work. New scholarship aimed to demonstrate the efficacy of humanities methods such as narrative theory or archival ethics in fields outside the humanities. Drawing on the history of applied programs in the humanities since the 1970s, this paper argues that Martial Arts Studies program development and scholarship has as much synergy with applied programs as it does with cultural studies. Martial arts are grounded in kinesthetic philosophy, making Martial Arts Studies ideal for confronting a persistent rhetoric of polarity, the unnecessary dichotomy between theory and practice. Drawing on scholarship in Martial Arts Studies and the educational history of applied fields in the humanities, this presentation offers guidance for undergraduate program development in the context of the professionalization of martial arts beyond ranking systems and teacher training already in place for individual arts. Martial artists trained in interdisciplinary programs in the humanities, management, education, health and exercise science, and other disciplines will bring new approaches to an industry dominated by leadership traditions that may not always be suited to contemporary needs.

*Keywords:* Public humanities; applied scholarship; educational history; martial arts studies; curriculum development

### **Global Teaching of Martial Arts: Pedagogical Experiences and Methodological Possibilities**

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Traditional approaches to teaching martial arts tend to follow a technicist structure, emphasizing the repetition of isolated techniques. In contrast, contemporary sport pedagogy has increasingly proposed teaching–learning processes centered on tactical aspects. Grounded in these assumptions, this paper proposes global teaching methods for martial arts, using games and playful activities as pedagogical tools for the development of competencies transferable across different modalities. These approaches are implemented within the ‘Martial Arts School’, an outreach project of the University of Campinas (UNICAMP), which has been running for 20 years and has served children aged 4 to 7. Based on the theoretical framework proposed by Gomes (2008, 2023), the organization of instructional content is structured around the conditional principles of combat sports—intentional contact, attack–defense fusion, opponent/target relations, unpredictability, and rules—as well as situational groups: short-distance, characterized by grips, throws, and immobilizations; medium-distance, characterized by controlled contact through strikes; and long-distance, mediated by the manipulation of implements. This systematic organization allows for the creation of diverse activities designed to develop specific competencies transferable across different modalities. The project demonstrates that these pedagogical approaches promote a global, meaningful, and engaging learning experience. Such strategies can be applied in a variety of educational contexts while preserving the core characteristics of martial arts. Furthermore, this approach provides physical education teachers who are not specialists in martial arts with resources to work with this content at the level of sport initiation.

**Keywords:** Combat sports pedagogy; non-linear teaching approaches; game-based learning

### **Panel 8C: Women's Gendered Experiences and Perspectives**

#### **Aesthetic Experience as Motivation for Women Athletes' Continuity in Combat Sports**

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Women and girls who start practicing in martial arts and combat sports (MACS) tend to abandon the practices early after joining them. Women and girls usually are not captivated to remain training, instead facing many challenges that push them out of practices. Yet a few continue. We wonder, then, what makes them do so. We explored this in a study with 14 women elite level athletes, who were in preparation for the Tokyo 2020 (2021) Olympic Games. Although they had the life project of an Olympic medal as a motivation to persist, this reason showed not to be the most meaningful for them. Thus, in this study we explore what makes women remain practicing in karate when there seems to be so many challenges and difficulties for their continuity. We inquire on reasons that keep women athletes engaged beyond their commitment to a national team, from how they started, to some reasons for their permanence that reveal themselves as more superficial, to finally those reasons that relate to meaningful experiences. We close the paper with a claim that encompasses recommendations to the MACS scholar and practitioner community to turn practices into empowering experiences for women by listening to them.

**Keywords:** Gender; martial arts and combat sports; embodiment; flow; identity

#### **Martial Arts as a Tool for Unlearning and Healing: Feminism-Informed Praxis of Martial Arts by Women on Chinese Social Media**

Jingzhe Zhang, *Utrecht University* ([jing-zhe@tutanota.com](mailto:jing-zhe@tutanota.com))

This article examines communication practices of female martial arts practitioners on the Chinese social media platform RedNote. Through semi-structured interviews and discourse analysis of social media content, I argue that female practitioners of martial arts in China, especially those of Brazilian JiuJitsu, consciously use martial arts as an unlearning tool to recognize, reflect on, and break free from internalized disciplines and toxic psychological habits that they acquired as woman growing up in China, such as fear of conflict, tendency to compromise boundaries, sexualization of the body, fear and shame of mistakes and failures, meritocracy and perfectionism, etc. And by documenting and sharing their reflections and experiences on social media, these women not only deepen their embodied praxis of unlearning and healing, but also add to it a pedagogical dimension, promoting social change by prompting their audience to practice with more consciousness. I argue that their praxis as a form of resistance that responds to oppression indicates the potential of martial arts in healing justice and in functioning as a transformational infrastructure that intersects and binds the personal and the sociopolitical, the individual and the community, the oppressed and the healing to be done.

**Keywords:** Feminism, unlearning, healing justice, martial arts, China

#### **Hit Like a Girl? Girls, Women, and MMA**

Frida Siekkinen, *University of Gothenburg* ([frida.siekkinen@gu.se](mailto:frida.siekkinen@gu.se))

MMA has developed from being perceived as a primarily masculine activity to a sport practiced by people of different genders and ages. While research on women in MMA has increased, studies focusing on a Nordic context remain limited. This presentation draws on preliminary findings from an ongoing qualitative study addressing this gap. The study adopts an ethnographic approach, combining

in-depth interviews with female MMA practitioners and participant observations of training sessions at martial arts centers in Sweden. It explores how participants negotiate and construct gender, especially femininity, within MMA. Key themes include meaning-making processes, body perceptions, gender norms, conditions for female participation, and same-sex and mixed-sex training. The analysis is informed by theoretical concepts of discourse, subject positions, and performativity (Butler, 1993/2011; Foucault, 1982). Preliminary findings indicate no unified understanding of gender norms in MMA, despite its male dominance. Mixed-sex training is generally perceived as unproblematic when weight differences are minimal, and close physical contact is viewed as a natural part of the sport. Attitudes toward same-sex training vary; some emphasize female solidarity and role models, while others view it as less important. Nevertheless, participants express a shared desire for increased female representation to improve training and competition opportunities. The training environment and personal experiences shape perceptions of gender, while appearance is largely considered irrelevant during training. Overall, the study contributes to understanding how young women navigate and redefine femininity within a traditionally male-dominated sport, offering insights into gender dynamics in MMA.

*Keywords:* Mixed martial arts, femininity, subject positionings, gender norms

## SPECIAL SESSIONS

### Keynote Lectures

#### **The Ethics of Being 'In the Corner': Research Integrity, Policy and Practice in Boxing**

Anne Tjønndal, Nord University ([anne.tjonndal@nord.no](mailto:anne.tjonndal@nord.no))

Personal experiences are critical tools for uncovering hidden social structures and power dynamics in sport. Emotions triggered by personal experiences, such as discomfort in socially normalized situations, can highlight inequalities and tensions within a sporting field. In this sense, personal investment is not a barrier to rigorous inquiry but a productive point of departure for meaningful social scientific research. Yet working simultaneously as practitioner and researcher brings its own complexities. Drawing on more than twenty years of involvement in boxing - as an athlete, coach, referee and in various leadership positions - and over a decade of research on coach-athlete relations and gender and boxing, in this lecture I reflect on the productive messiness of occupying multiple positions at once. This keynote examines the ethical, methodological, and relational challenges that develops when one is both inside and outside the ring. Attention is given to questions of research integrity, the politics of proximity, and the work of translating research based knowledge into policy and everyday practice within combat sports.

**Keywords:** Research integrity; Practitioner-researcher; Boxing; Coach-athlete relations; Sport policy and knowledge translation

#### **Reclaiming Purpose: Martial Arts, Youth Development, and Societal Impact**

Marc Theeboom, Vrije Universiteit Brussel ([marc.theeboom@vub.be](mailto:marc.theeboom@vub.be))

At a time when societies are searching for effective ways to support young people's development and well-being, an important question emerges: what role can martial arts play? For researchers, practitioners, and policymakers alike, this question is both timely and consequential. Drawing on work in youth development and sustained engagement with martial arts communities, this keynote argues that their potential to foster social learning, inclusion, and well-being among young people remains under-recognised in education, public health, and social policy. Despite their global reach, martial arts are still too often framed in ways that obscure their wider societal impact. Addressing this gap requires more than stronger evidence. It calls for deeper collaboration - across disciplines and beyond academia - between researchers, educators, health professionals, policymakers, and practitioners. Strengthening these connections is essential if the value of martial arts for young people is to be more effectively understood and translated into practice and policy. In this sense, youth development provides a concrete lens for articulating the societal impact of martial arts. This keynote therefore highlights how addressing both internal dynamics within martial arts and external engagement with policy and practice offers a productive direction for how martial arts studies can contribute to contemporary societal challenges.

**Keywords:** Martial arts; youth development; societal impact; theory of change; interdisciplinary collaboration

### **Spotlight Panel: Breaking the Code of Silence: Safeguarding in Combat Sports and Martial Arts**

#### **Safeguarding the Coach–Athlete Relationship in Combat Sports and Martial Arts: Fostering Well-Being for Great Performance**

Anastasiya Khomutova, University of Brighton ([a.khomutova@brighton.ac.uk](mailto:a.khomutova@brighton.ac.uk))

This presentation critically examines safeguarding in combat sports and martial arts through the lens of the coach–athlete relationship, highlighting how high-pressure performance cultures, gendered expectations and entrenched traditions can normalise interpersonal violence and boundary violations. Drawing on qualitative accounts from athletes, coaches and parents, it highlights everyday practices around training, travel, accommodation and “discipline” that blur professional boundaries, foster fear and self-blame, and silence disclosures of harm. Using the 3C+1 model of the coach–athlete relationship (Jowett, 2017) as a framework, the presentation explores how closeness, commitment, complementarity and co-orientation can be either exploited to maintain control or deliberately cultivated to create safety, trust and open communication. The psychological and performance consequences for athletes and organisations are outlined, including anxiety, diminished self-worth, withdrawal from sport and reputational and legal risks. The session concludes with concrete, context-sensitive recommendations for coaches and combat sport organisations, focusing on reflective practice, culturally aware safeguarding policies, clear reporting mechanisms and everyday strategies to challenge harmful norms and co-create safe, empowering environments for all participants.

**Keywords:** Safeguarding, coach-athlete relationship, interpersonal violence, cultural awareness, sport psychology

### **Safeguarding Beyond Rules: An Interpersonal Neurobiology Perspective on Trauma, Training Culture, and Sub-Threshold Harm in Martial Arts**

*Aura Goldman, Independent Practitioner and Researcher ([auragoldman@gmail.com](mailto:auragoldman@gmail.com))*

Martial arts are often positioned as developmental practices capable of cultivating discipline, meaning, and personal transformation. At their best, they offer structured challenges and relational guidance that support human flourishing. Yet, the same characteristics assumed to drive growth (e.g., pain, hierarchy, loyalty, and close bonds) also create distinctive vulnerabilities to harm. Drawing on Interpersonal Neurobiology (IPNB), this paper conceptualises martial arts environments as nested relational systems, comprising coach-athlete dyads, group cultures, and institutional contexts, that shape embodied regulation and agency. When relational guidance is attuned and challenge is appropriately bounded, these systems foster resilience. However, when cultures fail to differentiate functional endurance from coercion or boundary erosion, relational intensity can contribute to dysregulation, silence, and cumulative harm. Grounded in scholarship and practice-based evidence (composite case material and professional reflections) from clinical work, this analysis highlights “sub-threshold harm.” These are normalised patterns, such as inadequate prevention or mitigation of injury risk, coerced participation, and blurred consent within hierarchies, that often fall below formal intervention thresholds yet elevate long-term risk. The paper argues that effective safeguarding must ultimately move beyond procedural compliance to encompass the relational and embodied dimensions of practice. From an IPNB perspective, safeguarding is an ethical and developmental responsibility: preserving agency within hierarchy and creating training cultures that allow for early recognition and repair before harm becomes entrenched.

**Keywords:** Safeguarding in martial arts, Interpersonal neurobiology, Coach-athlete relationships, Sub-threshold harm, Embodied agency

### **Survivors’ Experiences of Sexual Harassment and Abuse in Muay Thai**

*Emma Thomas, Under the Ropes ([emma@undertheropes.com](mailto:emma@undertheropes.com))*

Muay Thai has a history of excluding and othering women, which is rooted in cultural norms that frame their participation as a threat to male athletes and the perceived sanctity of the sport. Despite recent strides in the growth of women’s participation, these gendered social barriers persist, resulting in various negative impacts for women in the sport. This includes the perpetuation of sexual harassment and abuse against women. This qualitative study sought to understand women’s experiences of sexual violence in Muay Thai through twelve semi-structured interviews with survivors and an analysis of eight safeguarding policies. Participants included athletes from Thailand, US, UK, Mexico, France and Germany, who shared experiences both in Thailand and internationally, while policies were analysed from both national and international federations. Through narrative inquiry, the study centred the thoughts and feelings of survivors and how they understood their experiences, and used document analysis to interrogate the roles that Muay Thai authorities played in these experiences. Findings revealed organisational and institutional failures, with gyms complicit in the enabling and dismissal of sexual violence, and federations failing to provide adequate measures for whistleblowing, safeguarding, and investigation. Survivors’ narratives centred around betrayal by coaches, distrust of the sport’s authorities, and a sense of hopelessness for future change. Utilising these findings, this study provides recommendations for global Muay Thai authorities to address these failures through survivor-centred and trauma-informed safeguarding measures which are guided by athlete voices and informed by the sport’s unique culture. As the world’s first study on sexual violence in Muay Thai, it aims to address a research gap by acknowledging and exploring this issue for the first time in academic literature.

**Keywords:** Safeguarding, sexual harassment, sexual abuse, Muay Thai

**Online Panel** (NB – the online panel is hosted on the MASA YouTube channel, [accessible via this link](#); the papers will remain available for viewing throughout 2026)

### **Exploring Leadership and Holistic Development Through the Perceptions of Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu Practitioners**

*Chris Kidwell, Independent Researcher ([kidwell05\\_lee@yahoo.com](mailto:kidwell05_lee@yahoo.com))*

Martial arts are a form of individualistic development for leaders, but there are gaps in the literature surrounding this phenomenon. The purpose of the study was to explore the perceptions of Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu (BJJ) practitioners regarding learning, leadership development, and holistic growth through martial arts practice. A multi-site design, where interviews, questionnaires, and observations of the sample population, including leaders with blue, purple, brown, and black belts, contributed to the qualitative datasets for thematic analysis and triangulation. The study contributed to the literature on leadership and holistic development through the practice of martial arts. This field is currently underrepresented, and concluded that martial arts practice can enhance individual development. The study employed the theoretical frameworks established by social learning theory and servant leadership theory to explore the practical implications of leadership influence and development through training in martial arts. The study’s design and methodology facilitated the answers to the research questions regarding the perceptions of Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu practitioners’ learning, leadership, and holistic development through martial arts practice; how practicing Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu leads to growth and development; and how Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu can contribute to leadership development. The study also provided a foundation for further research on

the implications of martial arts practice for mental health, leadership development, and the benefits of physical activity for overall well-being.

**Keywords:** Holistic growth, leadership development, servant leadership, social learning, martial arts

### **Affordances Under Asymmetry: An Ecological Analysis of Ninpo Taijutsu and Self-Defense Against Interpersonal Violence**

*David B. Glover, Independent Scholar ([david@davidbglover.com](mailto:david@davidbglover.com)); Dennis Mahoney, Shinobi Martial Arts; Theresa Murphy, Shinobi Martial Arts*  
Where do ecological principles and concepts succeed, and where do they require refinement, in accounting for perception-action skills that support self-defense under conditions of asymmetrical interpersonal violence? Drawing on Gibson's ecological psychology, extended through ecological dynamics and informed by practitioner-led analysis with two senior ninpo taijutsu instructors, this paper examines how skills cultivated through training for self-defense can be understood in terms of affordances, effectivities, and perception-action coupling. While ecological research has addressed skilled interaction in sport and other structured contexts, the article identifies where ecological language becomes strained when applied to nonconsensual, asymmetrical self-defense. The analysis suggests that self-defense from a ninpo taijutsu perspective involves not only maximizing one's own action possibilities but also actively disrupting an aggressor's affordances and effectivities. In response, the article introduces a dual affordances-effectivities analytical matrix to examine how defenders intentionally disrupt an aggressor's action possibilities while simultaneously improving their own.  
**Keywords:** Action-perception, affordance theory, ecological psychology, ninpo taijutsu, self-defense

### **Towards an Indigenous Martial Archive: Kalaripayattu and the Evolving Social Field**

*Shivshankar Rajmohan AK, Vellore Institute of Technology (VIT) ([shivshankarrajmohan.ak@vit.ac.in](mailto:shivshankarrajmohan.ak@vit.ac.in)); Aiswarya Sureshan, NIT Warangal ([as21hsrer01@student.nitw.ac.in](mailto:as21hsrer01@student.nitw.ac.in))*

A society's consciousness of its past manifests through the arbitrary circulation and reproduction of tangible and intangible artefacts. The indigenous South-Indian martial art form called Kalaripayattu is one such consistently contested cultural artefact. From its inception during the Sangam era, Kalaripayattu existed as a 'field,' an inherently stratified domain of everyday life within which human subjects (non-)consensually involve in constant and rigorous struggle for distinction and capital. However, very minimal mainstream scholarly literature exists, particularly addressing the nature and modalities of somatic reformulation and their discursive potentialities. The institution of Kalaripayattu, the body of oral literatures it generated, and the forms of subjects it legitimised occupy the position of a nomological agency that has generated modes of historical embodiment within the cultural scheme of Kerala. To comprehend the specificities of the social field of Kalaripayattu and its constant presence as a site of cultural memory, a martial archive is required. The proposed paper provides a detailed account of the peculiarities of the social field out of which this martial art form emerged and evolved. It critically engages with the traditional positioning of Kalaripayattu as a battle art, and contextualises it by adopting an alternative category of "martially inspired art." One of the primary objectives of the paper is to problematise the popular and generally accepted view of the Dhanur Vedic origin of Kalaripayattu. The paper, in its attempt to address these key issues, employs some of the key concepts in archival methodology and merges them with the framework of memory studies and indigenous studies.

**Keywords:** Kalaripayattu, Martial archive, social field, cultural memory, embodiment

### **Building Safer Environments in Combat Sports and Martial Arts: The Safe Combat Project**

*Helena Verhelle, Thomas More University of Applied Sciences ([helena.verhelle@thomasmore.be](mailto:helena.verhelle@thomasmore.be)); Renata Soares Ramos Falcão, Ghent University ([Renata.SoaresRamosFalcão@UGent.be](mailto:Renata.SoaresRamosFalcão@UGent.be))*

Combat sports and martial arts (CS&MA) offer positive developmental benefits, including positive impacts on general health (Bu et al., 2010; Vertonghen & Theeboom, 2010). However, they also present elevated safeguarding concerns due to sport-specific dynamics. As noted by Avelar Rosa & Nery (2021), these sports involve high tolerance for physical aggression, close contact, and hierarchical structures. Moreover, the often-blurred boundary between accepted physicality and potential abuse, particularly in high-intensity practices where knockouts are integrated into the competitive structure, further emphasizes the need for clearly defined safeguarding protocols. The SAFE COMBAT project (Erasmus+ Sport Call 2024) tackles these challenges by developing tailored safeguarding strategies. Involving six European countries, the project aims to understand how safeguarding is currently perceived, and applied within CS&MA, while also identifying gaps and examples of good practices across different national and disciplinary contexts. To meet these objectives, a three-dimensional research design was applied: (a) a literature review focused on existing research, concepts and policy in CS&MA regarding safeguarding, (b) an online questionnaire to map current practices, and (c) focus groups with stakeholders (e.g., athletes, coaches, parents, managers) to understand their comprehension regarding safeguarding and their national frameworks. This approach aims to generate a detailed understanding of the current safeguarding landscape, thereby producing critical knowledge that will inform the development of a European safeguarding code specifically for CS&MA as well as targeted educational tools through a massive open online course (MOOC).

**Keywords:** Combat sports and martial arts; Interpersonal violence; safeguarding

### **The Great Divergence of Tai Chi Chuan: Lineage Formation and Technical Reconfiguration Across Six Major Traditions**

Suchan Hong, *Sawasdee Tai Chi* ([suchanhong@naver.com](mailto:suchanhong@naver.com))

This paper examines the historical formation of the six major traditions of Tai Chi Chuan—Chen (陳), Yang (楊), Wu (武, Wu Yuxiang), Wu (吳, Quan You), Sun (孫), and Hulei (忽雷)—from the seventeenth to the twentieth century. Rather than viewing Tai Chi Chuan as a singular, unified system that later fragmented into distinct schools, this study argues that its development proceeded through continuous processes of technical reconfiguration across parallel lines of transmission. Drawing on lineage records, early Tai Chi Chuan treatises, and comparative analysis of form structures, the paper traces how Chen family practice was reorganized through the consolidation of Laojia (Old Frame) under Chen Changxing and the emergence of Xiaojia (Small Frame) through Chen Qingping, both of which exerted lasting influence on later lineages. The circulation and recontextualization of the Tai Chi Chuan Treatise (Taijiquan Lun) within the Wu Yuxiang lineage further provided a shared theoretical framework that shaped subsequent developments without establishing a single orthodox model. Later traditions, including Sun-style Tai Chi Chuan and Hulei Tai Chi Chuan, are examined as historically situated configurations that preserved earlier technical principles while reorganizing form structures and movement logic within distinct transmission lines. By framing these traditions as contingent formations of embodied practice and textual reference rather than fixed genealogical branches, this paper presents Tai Chi Chuan as a dynamic historical system in which continuity is maintained through technical reconfiguration rather than linear descent.

**Keywords:** Tai Chi Chuan (Taijiquan); martial arts historiography; lineage construction; oral transmission; textual criticism

### **Karate-do as Zen, Bushido, and Budo: The Ancient Way of Emptiness in the Contemporary World**

Vladimir Jovanovski, *Ss. Cyril and Methodius University* ([macedonian.samurai@gmail.com](mailto:macedonian.samurai@gmail.com))

This paper examines Karate-do not merely as a martial art or cultural practice, but as an embodied epistemology through which knowledge, ethics, and perception are constituted through the disciplined interaction of body and mind. While Karate-do is often framed as sport or self-defense, this study argues that it functions as a form of “lived philosophy” rooted in Zen Buddhism, Bushido ethics, and Budo as a path of self-cultivation. Central to this analysis is the concept of emptiness (ku/mu), understood not as metaphysical void but as a mode of embodied awareness realized through practice. This is expressed through states such as mushin (no-mind), shoshin (beginner’s mind), fudoshin (immovable mind), and zanshin (continuous awareness), demonstrating how cognition and action merge in trained bodily performance. Using qualitative cultural analysis and philosophical hermeneutics, the paper conceptualizes Karate-do as a “moving epistemology,” where knowledge is enacted through disciplined corporeal practice. In this framework, the body becomes a site of knowledge production rather than merely a vehicle of expression. The study further situates Karate-do within broader Zen aesthetic systems – shodo (Japanese calligraphy), haiku (Japanese poetry), ikebana (Japanese flower arrangement), sado (tea ceremony), and karesansui (Zen rock garden) – highlighting a shared logic of presence, simplicity, and meaningful emptiness. It also considers how these ideas are mediated through film and global visual culture, where Karate-do is frequently represented as a narrative of ethical and existential transformation.

**Keywords:** Karate-do, Zen Buddhism, Bushido, Budo, Emptiness

### **Traditional Fencing: Living heritage**

María Fernanda Lammoglia Cobo, *University of Cambridge* ([mfl137@cam.ac.uk](mailto:mfl137@cam.ac.uk))

Traditional fencing is not a sport like its Olympic counterpart; instead, it is a living martial art with historical weapons, deeply embedded in its cultural and historical roots and transmitted from master to student over generations. I will present five fencing traditions within their historical context: 1) Sicilian Paranza as a popular dueling form with long sticks and knives; 2) Bataireacht (Irish stick fighting) as a combination of fencing, boxing and grappling with shillelagh (wooden walking sticks); 3) rupka (cutting) and flankirovka (“the art of spinning”) with the Cossack’s guardless sabre, the shashka; 4) academic fencing as a strictly regulated form of fencing with sharp swords amongst fraternity students; and 5) military sabre fencing as taught at the historical Toldi Miklos Royal Institute. These traditional fencing case studies, together with an outlook on duel fencing, show martial arts as cultural manifestations and intangible heritage that embody the history, philosophy and rituals of their societies of origin.

**Keywords:** martial arts, traditional fencing, heritage

### **From Mallavidya to MMA: Tracing the Roots of India's Grappling Cultures from Ancient Past to the Present**

Kush Dhebar, *Department of Archaeology and Museums, Haryana* ([dhebarkush@gmail.com](mailto:dhebarkush@gmail.com))

India’s martial cultures reflect its broader diversity, and grappling is a particularly pan Indian practice that has continually adapted to changing social, political, and cultural contexts. This paper traces the long history of submission grappling in the subcontinent, arguing that it has functioned not only as a method of close combat and sport but also as a medium for ethical formation, social mobility, and cultural exchange. The study follows grappling from its ancient and early medieval manifestations as mallavidya and malla yuddha, through the Indo-Persianate formations of kushti and pehlwani shaped by Turko-Central, Asian influences and the ethical ideals of javanmardi and futuwat, to the contemporary spread of Brazilian Jiu Jitsu and mixed martial arts in India. It shows how grappling has moved between the domains of warfare, physical education, ritual performance, and commercialised sport while retaining a recognisable bodily grammar and moral imagination. Methodologically, the paper adopts a multidimensional, interdisciplinary approach, drawing on archaeology, history, anthropology, linguistics, mythology, visual and performing arts, warfare studies, and

sports science. Building on the author's doctoral research on temple and cave sculptures depicting grappling and pugilism, it combines iconographic analysis with embodied ethnography grounded in long-term training in wrestling, Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, Muay Thai, yoga asana, boxing, and capoeira. Overall, it proposes Indian submission grappling as a moving archive of cultural memory and innovation in which bodies, techniques, and virtues travel, translate, and transform across historical regimes.

**Keywords:** Mixed Martial Arts, Mallavidya, BJJ, Kushti, Pahalwani

### **Martial Arts Forms as Kinesthetic Sigils: Philosophy as a Way of Life Through Movement, Magick, and Metaphysics**

Steven Geisz, University of Tampa ([sgeisz@ut.edu](mailto:sgeisz@ut.edu))

Martial arts training often involves practicing ritualized forms (tàolù 套路 in Chinese; kata 型/形 in Japanese) consisting in set sequences of choreographed movements. There is considerable debate among martial artists about the martial value of such form practice. Here, however, I want to leave debates about martial efficacy aside and consider instead how such form practice might be valuable as a means of epistemic and cognitive transformation of the practitioner. I explore the ways in which martial arts form practices are analogous to practices within the new spiritual tradition of Chaos Magick of working with sigils—that is, glyph-like symbols thought to have transformative efficacy when one engages with them through a process involving temporarily-induced forgetfulness. I argue that the power of martial arts form practice to effect epistemic and cognitive transformation in practitioners can be better understood by comparing it with the practice of working with sigils as advocated by contemporary Chaos Magick practitioners. I will argue that there are important parallels between the rituals of personal transformation of taiji (and, more broadly, martial arts) form practice and the rituals of sigil-work as advocated by recent and contemporary Chaos Magick practitioners. Both assume that a transformation of one's attentional habits and abilities cannot fruitfully be pursued directly. Both require repeated, ritualized engagement with a symbol. Both involve techniques that function to cause a kind of temporary inattention to key aspects of what one is doing, and both provide opportunities for transformation by creating repeated opportunities for one to come back into awareness of the possible significances of the ritual one is performing.

**Keywords:** Martial arts form, taolu, kata, sigil, Chaos Magick

### **Martial Arts Practice in Youth with Autism: A National Initiative and Dyadic Case Study**

Jonathan Drummond, University of Kentucky ([jonathan.drummond@uky.edu](mailto:jonathan.drummond@uky.edu))

This dyadic case study follows from a 30-month case study on 12-year-old Max, a boy with autism training in Tang Soo Do (TSD; a Korean martial art). After years of solo training, Max was joined in TSD training by 14-year-old Tyler; the two have been training together for 11 months. Their dyadic case study is contextualized in a larger cohort of 19 youth with autism participating in martial arts in five different locations in the United States (Virginia (2 sites), Kentucky, Texas, and California). Changes and/or stability in physiological capacity/physical condition (strength, balance, and flexibility), martial arts mastery, medical support, sleep habits, gross/fine motor skills, self-efficacy, self-regulation, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, executive function (especially working memory), and academic performance are addressed. Documented changes in social engagement/interaction as part of the boys' martial arts journey together are highlighted. Statistical controls are noted.

**Keywords:** Autism, martial arts, physiological, psychological, working memory

### **Breaking as Method: BreakStory, NABI, and Protective Literacy in Martial Arts Studies**

Kenisha Coy, My CARE Initiative & Wellness Institute ([kc@mycareinitiative.org](mailto:kc@mycareinitiative.org))

This paper introduces BreakStory as a NeuroArts-Based Intervention (NABI) method that centers martial arts breaking as an embodied research method and public pedagogy. Rather than treating breaking as spectacle or a mere “test” of power, I frame it as a repeatable threshold practice for paradigm shift: interrupt–refuse–replace. In this model, Breaking becomes a disciplined way to surface trained compliance, rehearse agency, and support non-clinical socio-emotional self-regulation through breath, attention, and intentional action. I ground the approach in a martial pedagogy triad: conditioning, practice, training, often used interchangeably but analytically distinct. I propose that coercive normalization operates as a social curriculum through similar mechanisms, circulating through cultural narratives and everyday language that frames control as “discipline,” “respect,” “professionalism,” or “properness”—a petri-dish heuristic in which institutions and “common sense” norms become the medium through which scripts can diffuse.

BreakStory operationalizes an artifact-to-action pipeline: (1) Critical Language Analysis pattern-tagging (e.g., minimization, invalidation, agency-hiding, threat framing); (2) Empathy Spectrum scoring for nuance, dignity, and choice-preservation; (3) optional readability as a clarity flag; and (4) protective outputs; recognition, response scripts (pause/clarify/boundary), relational scripts (witnessing + options), and a protective rewrite. A concise Protective Language Viability (PLV) dashboard visualizes shifts. The paper concludes by specifying dissemination through pedagogy/andragogy/heutagogy as the BreakStory Protective Literacy Protocol (BPLP) for martial arts studies, civic venues, and community wellness partners.

**Keywords:** BreakStory; Critical Language Analysis; conditioning–practice–training; gyeokpa/kyokpa (격파); tameshiwari (試し割り)

### **Legality as the Foundation of an Applied Combat System: From Destructive Impact to Controlled Neutralization**

*Oleg Maltsev, European Academy of Sciences of Ukraine ([info@euasu.org](mailto:info@euasu.org))*

This paper proposes that legality should not be treated as an external legal restriction imposed upon an applied combat system, but rather as one of its foundational design principles. In applied combat training, effectiveness cannot be measured solely by the ability to inflict maximum damage on an opponent. Such a model creates significant legal, professional, ethical, and personal risks for the practitioner. The paper introduces a different criterion of applied effectiveness: the ability of a combat system to provide a controlled, sequential, and legally justified application of force in accordance with the level of threat, the operational task, the environment, and the permissible degree of intervention. From this perspective, the highest level of mastery is not destructive force, but controlled neutralization: the termination of a dangerous action with the minimum necessary level of force and with the immediate cessation of impact once the objective has been achieved. The paper introduces the concept of “legally grounded effectiveness” as a key criterion for evaluating applied combat systems. Such a system must remain effective regardless of weight category and should not rely solely on physical strength or favorable sporting conditions. Instead, its effectiveness must be built upon the management of distance, timing, angle, initiative, balance, psychological pressure, and the precise calibration of force. Special attention is given to the safety of the practitioner. An applied combat system must protect not only the practitioner’s body, but also his or her freedom, legal status, professional reputation, and future. In this sense, legality is not a limitation on effectiveness; it is a condition of mature effectiveness. Keywords: Legality, applied combat system, neutralization of threat, self-defense, martial arts, professional training

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