

CONFERENCE REPORT

EXPERIENCING, TRAINING & THINKING THE BODY IN MARTIAL ARTS & MARTIAL SPORTS

8th Conference of the German Society of Sport
Science's Committee for Martial Arts Studies

Ghent University
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INTRODUCTION

In 2011, the German Society of Sport Science formed a Committee for Martial Arts Studies, which has subsequently sponsored annual conferences in alternating universities throughout Germany. This was the first year that the committee held one of its conferences outside of Germany, at the University Ghent in Belgium. Professor Andreas Niehaus from the Department of Languages and Cultures hosted the event and chose the title 'Experiencing, Training, and Thinking the Body in Martial Arts and Martial Sports' for this year's conference. As keynotes, he invited Professor Yasuhiro Sakaue from Hitotsubashi University in Japan, who spoke on 'The Nationalization of the Body in Martial Arts', and Professor Mario Staller from the University of Applied Sciences for Public Administration and Management of North Rhine-Westphalia in Germany, who gave a keynote titled 'The Journey is the Destination: An Expertise-Oriented Perspective on Thinking, Experiencing, and Practicing Martial Arts, Combat Sports, and Self-Defence'.

KEYNOTES

The two keynote lecturers highlighted different aspects of this year's topic. The first keynote by Professor Sakaue focused on martial arts in the context of nationalisation. Following the modern history of martial arts and especially kendo, Sakaue showed how the training of (and thinking about) martial arts depends on political and social change. Accordingly, he analysed the conditions that led (and continue to lead) to the nationalisation of Japanese martial arts. He closed his lecture with reflections on the future of traditional martial arts in Japanese society given the declining number of adolescent practitioners.

The second keynote, presented by Mario Staller, concentrated on aspects of the process of becoming an expert in the context of martial arts, combat sports, and self-defence. While considering 'expertise' as complex, dynamic, non-linear, and contingent upon contextual influences, he argued for an expertise-oriented developmental framework of the concept.

PANELS

Panel 1: Martial Arts in Perspective

During the first panel, three speakers addressed topics related to Asian martial arts. The first presentation analysed the idea of wisdom in martial arts from the angle of modernity and invented tradition. The second paper then turned towards a rather understudied topic by elaborating on the connection of medical and martial education in South India. The third lecture discussed the practical relevance of martial arts philosophy, interpreting well-known texts from Musashi Miyamoto and Soho Takuan.

Panel 2: Biographies and Motivations of Fighters

Professor Peter Kuhn opened this panel by introducing his research project entitled 'A Fighter's Life', which brings together researchers from different countries to discuss issues regarding the biographies and the motivations of fighters. This presentation was followed by two other papers. The first speaker presented the results of a research project conducted in Kanazawa, Japan. The researcher had interviewed Japanese karateka and judoka about their motivations and compared the findings with the results from an earlier study in Germany. Based on interviews, and previously unknown primary sources, the second speaker revealed the life of the West German boxer and entrepreneur Peter Paffen, who founded a leading company for martial arts equipment.

Panel 3: Professionalisierungsdiskurse innerhalb der Polizei

The third panel addressed discourses of professionalisation within the police and involved seven contributions. This made it the largest panel of the conference. The contributions covered various law enforcement related topics ranging from the perception of reality in police training to the dynamics of violence encountered by paramedics. Most striking was the fact that all of the research was either conducted or supported by Swen Körner and Mario Staller – which is perhaps unsurprising as Staller at this moment appears to be the number one researcher in Germany (and probably Europe) regarding police training.

Panel 4: Gender and Emancipation in Martial Arts

The four papers in this panel discussed issues related to gender and emancipation in martial arts. Two presentations focused on gender issues in MMA. The first looked at mixed gender training in MMA and the social relevance of the body and gender. The following speaker turned from the training experience towards the mediated representation of female MMA fighters in German media. A third lecture analysed the current 'ring girl' discussion in German (Olympic) boxing. The speaker presented a qualitative case study of a renowned German boxing trophy and analysed a Facebook questionnaire by the organizers of the tournament. The closing lecture then zoomed in on questions related to gender sensitive self-defence courses, drawing on qualitative research data from interviews with experts.

Panel 5: Training the Martial Body

'Training the Martial Body' presented various perspectives on topics related to martial arts training. While one presentation addressed issues of training boxing coaches, another questioned the adequacy of levels of complexity in self-defence instruction. Apart from these very martial arts-centred contributions, two further presentations focused on outlying perspectives. One presented findings on the subjective perception of boxing training among adolescent goal keepers, while the other elaborated on the representation of martial arts training in superhero movies and comics.

Panel 6: Social Behaviour and Social Interaction in Martial Arts

This panel concentrated on social behaviour and social interaction in martial arts. The presentations ranged from fighting in video and computer games to the behaviours of spectators of martial arts and martial sports. A qualitative study looked into the effects of periods of reflection during and after judo training. The final presentation in this panel discussed the importance of rhythm in boxing from a sociological point of view. While suggesting an underlying biomechanical grammar of social interaction, this lecture also elaborated on aspects like antagonistic cooperation and empathy.

Panel 7: Selling Martial Bodies: Economies of Martial Arts

'Selling Martial Bodies: Economies of Martial Arts' addressed economic perspectives in and on martial arts. With three contributions it was a small but nonetheless interesting panel. The first presentation covered the much-debated fight between Floyd Mayweather and Conor McGregor in 2017 and discussed whether it portended the takeover of boxing by MMA. The second presentation focused on martial arts as a service market segment in Bavaria. And the last presentation emphasised instances of economisation and effects of invented tradition in regard of the popularisation of krav maga in Germany.

POSTER PRESENTATIONS

Lastly, adding to the 30 contributions mentioned above were three poster presentations. The first poster presented the findings of a Japanese-German visuomotor adaption study, comparing results for martial arts and running experts, which could identify effects of increased ambidextrousness among martial arts experts. The second poster examined paradoxes in the concept of qi in Asian cultures. And the third poster addressed the limited academic coverage of the early history of boxing in Germany and promoted the launch of a national boxing archive.

CONCLUSION

Ghent is a remarkably beautiful city and the university and organiser proved to be superb hosts. The academic quality of contributions was high without significant exceptions. Still, the number of participants (approximately 30 persons) was rather low. While this is not uncommon for conferences of the German committee, the remoteness of Ghent might have been a deterrent for some potential German participants (except for the West German participants from North Rhine-Westphalia, who certainly dominated the conference). On the other hand, not only keynote speaker Yasuhiro Sakaue from Hitotsubashi University in Tokyo, but also Professor Ricardo Mak from Baptist University in Hong Kong, made their way to Belgium and engaged in important and mutually stimulating academic exchanges with the European martial arts studies community.

Also, the meeting of the members' committee generated some notable news. Swen Körner stepped down from his office as speaker of the committee and Mario Staller was elected as his successor. The next conference will be hosted by Martin Meyer and Mario Staller at the University of Vechta in Lower Saxony, Germany, and the title will be 'Teaching is Learning: Methods, Contents and Role Models in the Didactics of Martial Arts' (3-5 October 2019). Furthermore, the newly founded *Journal of Martial Arts Research* (JOMAR), an online open access journal closely associated to the committee and hosted at the University of Bayreuth, has published its first volume (www.j-o-mar.com). Apart from the conference homepage (<http://www.dvs-kampfkunst-kampfsport.ugent.be>), all abstracts – as well as most of the papers – will be published in JOMAR.

Finally, the committee intends to send a delegation to next year's Martial Arts Studies conference at Chapman University, Orange, California, in the United States (23-24 May 2019) to talk about some of the cultural and political issues involved in establishing a committee such as has been developed in Germany, and is looking forward to literally pushing the boundaries of the international martial arts discourse.

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