

## Report on the workshop “Organising, Managing and Regulating Martial Arts” during the 21<sup>st</sup> EASM conference

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### REPORT

#### Abstract

The present report provides a brief account of a workshop entitled “Organising, Managing and Regulating Martial Arts” organised during the 21<sup>st</sup> EASM conference held in Istanbul (Turkey) on September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2013. It was the first scientific workshop with regard to the organisational and policy related aspects of (full contact) martial arts. During this international meeting four scientists described in-depth the recent history and current situation regarding the organisation and regulation of martial arts in their country (i.e., France, Flanders (Belgium), Italy and the Netherlands). The workshop was a unique meeting which provided a good opportunity to obtain a better understanding of the specific situation with regard to the regulation of martial arts in some European countries and to exchange results of current research concerning this topic. Further research could be helpful to gain more insight in dealing with problems related to governance, regulation and management of martial arts within a European context.

**Palabras clave:** Martial arts; combat sports; scientific research; scientific meetings; congresses; EASM.

#### Informe sobre el taller “Organizando, gestionando y regulando las artes marciales”, durante la 21<sup>a</sup> conferencia de la EASM

##### Resumen

El presente informe resume el taller “Organizando, gestionando y regulando las artes marciales”, organizado durante la 21<sup>a</sup> conferencia de la EASM celebrada en Estambul (Turquía) el 12 de septiembre de 2013. Este ha sido el primer taller sobre los aspectos políticos y organizativos de las artes marciales (de contacto pleno). Durante este encuentro internacional cuatro científicos describieron en profundidad la historia reciente y situación actual de la organización y regulación de las artes marciales en su país (i.e., Francia, Flandes – Bélgica, Italia y Holanda). El taller fue un evento único, una buena oportunidad para obtener una mejor comprensión de la situación específica de la regulación de las artes marciales en algunos países europeos, y para intercambiar resultados de las investigaciones actuales sobre este tema. La realización de más investigaciones podría ayudar a comprender mejor cómo tratar los problemas asociados a la gobernanza, regulación y gestión de las artes marciales en el contexto europeo.

**Keywords:** Artes marciales; deportes de combate; investigación científica; eventos científicos; congresos; EASM.

#### Resumo do workshop “Organizar, Administrar e Regular as Artes marciais”, durante a 21.<sup>a</sup> conferência da EASM

##### Resumo

O presente texto resume o *workshop* “Organizar, Administrar e Regular as Artes Marciais”, organizado durante a 21.<sup>a</sup> conferência da EASM, celebrada em Istambul (Turquia), no dia 12 de setembro de 2013. Esta foi a primeira conferência centrada nos aspetos políticos e organizativos das artes marciais (de pleno contacto físico). Durante este encontro internacional quatro científicos descreveram, em profundidade, a história recente e a atual situação da organização e regulação das artes marciais no seu País (i.e., França, Flandres - Bélgica, Itália e Holanda). O congresso foi um evento único, uma excelente oportunidade para obter uma melhor compreensão da situação específica da regulação das artes marciais em alguns países europeus e para intercâmbio dos resultados das investigações atuais sobre o tema. A realização de mais investigações poderia ajudar a compreender melhor como tratar os problemas associados à governança, regulação e gestão das artes marciais no contexto europeu.

**Palavras-chave:** Artes marciais; desportos de combate; investigação científica; eventos científicos; congresos; EASM.

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## 1.- Introduction

Martial arts have often been described in controversial terms (Vertonghen & Theeboom, 2013). On the one hand, they have been associated with negative effects to personal and social well-being (in terms of aggressive and violent behaviour) (e.g., Endresen & Olweus, 2005; Reynes & Lorant, 2002). As a result, some claim that there is a need for a ban (American Academy of Paediatrics, 2011; Gauthier, 2009; Pearn, 1998; World Medical Association, 2005). On the other hand however, there is a belief that martial arts practice can lead to positive socio-psychological outcomes (e.g., Fulton, 2011; Wargo et al., 2007) and as such believe in the pedagogic value of martial arts. In this view, martial arts are seen as an instrument in the (re)socialisation of (problematic) youngsters. These ambiguous meanings and values make it difficult for administrators to support and regulate especially full contact martial arts in a clear-cut manner. While at first, this ‘wicked’ social problem was expected to be solved by the martial arts sector itself (van Bottenburg & Heilbron, 1996), it became clear that the distinctly fragmented sector is incapable in regulating the sport by themselves. Some have therefore suggested that the sector will have to work together with the government and promoters to tackle this problem (Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004). However, this issue is not bound to geographical places or limited to specific countries (Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004). The deterritorialisation and globalisation of martial arts asks for research at a supranational level. Because of the increasing needs of policy makers and researchers to exchange knowledge and experience on this topic, a workshop on the organisation and regulation of martial arts was organised during the 21<sup>st</sup> annual conference of the European Association of Sport Management (EASM) on September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2013 in Istanbul, Turkey. The aim of the workshop was (1) to gain more insight into the various problems experienced in organising, managing and regulating (full contact) martial arts at the local, national, continental and global level and (2) to obtain a better understanding in the research conducted regarding (full contact) martial arts in the participating countries.

The conveners of this international workshop were Marianne Dortants, Prof. dr. Marc Theeboom and Prof. dr. Maarten van Bottenburg. Marianne Dortants is a lecturer and researcher at the Utrecht School of Governance (Utrecht University). Her recent work focuses on the organisation and (self)-regulation of full-contact martial arts in the Netherlands. Marc Theeboom works as a full professor at the Faculty of Physical Education and Physiotherapy and the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel. His research primarily focuses on educational and policy-related aspects of (youth) sports in general and specific target groups in particular (e.g., socially deprived youth, ethnic minorities, elderly). Since the beginning of 2013, he is closely involved in the ‘Risk Martial Arts Platform Flanders’. And Maarten van Bottenburg is professor of sports development at the Utrecht School of Governance of Utrecht University since 2004 and has been involved, among other things, with investigating desportisation of full contact martial arts.

## 2.- The workshop “Organising, Managing and Regulating Martial Arts”

During the workshop a number of oral presentations were held. First, a short introduction of the sub-theme was given by the conveners. Afterwards, researchers from four countries (France, Flanders (Belgium), Italy and the Netherlands) presented the recent history and current situation with regard to the organisation and regulation of martial arts in their country. The first presenter, Marianne Dortants, described the specific situation in the Netherlands. She referred to the results of a recent research she conducted on the problematic organisation and (self)-regulation of full-contact martial arts in the Netherlands (Dortants & van Bottenburg, 2013). The most remarkable conclusion of this study was that the Dutch government prefers self-regulation, while the sector asks the government to overrule all competing parties. Because of the fragmentation, the sector would be incapable to regulate the sport by themselves. The next presenter, Matthieu Delalandre, described the case of Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) in France. More specifically, he focused on the specific situation regarding the recognition of this sport and the controversies of the sportification process of mixed martial arts in France. Matthieu Delalandre ended his presentation with the question whether the MMA international system can be compatible with the French sports system. Next was Sergio Raimondo from Italy who described the history and organisation of one of the largest martial arts federation in his country, namely Unione Italiana Sport Per tutti - Area

Nazionale Discipline Orientali (UISP – ADO) and how they view the evolution of full contact martial arts. Finally, Jikkemien Vertonghen and Els Dom discussed the organisation of the “risk martial arts” sector in Flanders in general and the development and activities of the Risk Martial Arts Platform Flanders in particular. By describing the Flemish case, they aimed to highlight the need to develop a sound martial arts policy that can provide a legitimisation base for the provision and organisation of these sports.

After the presentations of the four countries, Marc Theeboom summarised and reflected on the contributions. The final part of the workshop consisted of a debate to discuss how further research and exchange of the results of research could be helpful to gain better insights to solve the problems related to governance, regulation and management of martial arts within the European context.

### 3.- Conclusions

The reflections and final debate of the workshop resulted in the conclusion that a number of similarities as well as differences can be noticed in the organisation and regulation of martial arts in different European countries.

The most important similarities are:

- Martial arts (full contact) are often seen as a violent activity and as a result are often **not** officially **recognised** as a sport. Consequently, there are often no opportunities for official financial and logistic support.
- There is an overall **increasing participation** of full contact martial arts.
- The martial arts sector is often **fragmented** as a result of internal conflicts and competition between the different martial arts organisations/federations.
- There is **no general government policy** regarding the regulation and organisation of full contact. Consequently, there is a **lack of coordination** resulting in the fact that medically and ethically sound sports participation cannot be guaranteed.
- The **limited knowledge** and insight with regard to martial arts among sports administrators and the media often results in a negative public image of (full contact) martial arts.

The most important differences are:

- **Different terms and definitions** are used to refer to martial arts / combat sports / martial sports / ‘risk martial arts’ / ‘hard martial arts’ / ... . This makes the comparison between different countries difficult.
- Each country has its own **history and development** of the organisation of (full contact) martial arts.
- Each country has its own **characteristic** sports organisations and federations, and as a result its own **regulation system**.

Finally this workshop revealed that in several countries the policy (at all levels) is struggling with a number of tensions. Briefly, they can be described as follows:

- The tension between traditional (eastern) versus modern martial arts (e.g., MMA, kickboxing). Often, the former are viewed as ‘superior’.
- The growing participation rate versus the negative public image with regard to full contact martial arts.
- The paradox of regarding martial arts as having great educational value but experiencing major ethical and moral concerns at the same time.

- The perceptions of the martial artists themselves versus the perceptions of outsiders/public authorities.
- The commercialisation of martial arts versus the sportification of the sport.

In conclusion, the workshop “Organising, Managing and Regulating Martial Arts” was a first initiative to gain more insight into the nature of the problems experienced in organising, managing and regulating martial arts. It is clear that more initiatives are needed to initiate and stimulate research cooperation, exchange of information and to consider the option of developing a international network of researchers and policy makers involved in organising, managing and regulating martial arts.

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## Author's biographical data

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**Jikkemien Vertonghen** works as an assistant professor at the Department of Sports Policy and Management (Faculty of Physical Education and Physiotherapy) of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB). In April 2011, Jikkemien received her PhD in Physical Education and Movement Sciences, in which she analysed contextual factors (i.e., structural qualities of martial arts, type of guidance, characteristics and social context of martial arts participants) in youth martial arts practice. Jikkemien's research interests are related to youth sports in general and martial arts practice in particular, educational and pedagogical opportunities of sports and positive youth development through sports. E-mail: [jikkemien.vertonghen@vub.ac.be](mailto:jikkemien.vertonghen@vub.ac.be)

**Marianne Dortants** is a lecturer and researcher at the Utrecht School of Governance, Utrecht University. She has a broad interest in cultural and power processes in organisations. Her research focuses on mechanism of inclusion and exclusion in organisations, especially in sports organisations. Her recent work focuses on the organisation and (self)regulation of Martial Arts in the Netherlands. E-mail: [m.dortants@uu.nl](mailto:m.dortants@uu.nl)

