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REASONS FOR THE KARATE PRACTICE IN PORTUGAL: SYNTHESIS OF AN INQUIRY

ABSTRACT

The interest in martial arts and sports of combat – «*technologies of the body*», in *Michel Foucault sense (1988: 17)*, because they allow the «(...) individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality» –, continues to grow in Portugal. The first edition of the **Scientific Congress on Martial Arts and Sports of Combat [SCMASC]**¹, 13th and 14th April 2007, in Viseu, is a good example of this point of view. This event has showed the increasing number of researchers and academics, and the working papers have brought solids results in this matter.

The present paper, presented at the SCMASC, is the resultant of an inquiry for questionnaire (preliminary) about the motivations and others sociological aspects of sixty-two (62) karatecas.

Key words: Martial Arts; Sports of Combat; Karate

Introduction

In Portugal, the only study that is known about the motivations of the karate practitioners is the one presented in the book «*The FCDEF-UP, Psychology of the Sport: Studies on Motivation*», 2001, whose responsibility of coordination fits to Prof. António Manuel Fonseca. For its importance, it matters here to summarize in brief lines the main results.

Of the authorship of Fernando Mota, Eduardo Silva, David Pinto and António Manuel Fonseca, the «*Exploratory study concerning of the reasons for the karate practice*» (1995), is centred in two main objectives: i) the identification of the main reasons for sports practice in karate practitioners; ii) the exploitation of eventual differences between these motifs in terms of sex, age, practice duration, etc.

Using a different methodology, they had applied an inquiry for questionnaire to a sample of 40 karate practitioners, both sexes, with ages between 12 and 53 years, and with times of modality practice that varied between 2 and 20 years.

The *Questionnaire of Motivation for Physical Activities* (QMAD: Serpa & Frias, 1990), that it is a version translated and adapted of the *Participation Motivation*

¹ Cf. www.adiv.pt/ccamdc/ (consulted in 20th February 2008).

Questionnaire (PMQ: Gill, Gross and Huddleston, 1983), was filled up by practitioners and instructors. This questionnaire, whose real reach must escape to a significant majority of the portuguese, consists of a list of thirty reasons that the athletes normally relate as being in the origin of their decision to practise sport, in that case the reasons for which the athletes chooses to practise karate, using a 5 points Likert scale (1= not important; 5= very important).

However, as we understood by reading the study, the PMQ - and, of course, its translated versions - is not the more adjusted instrument to evaluate the main reasons that motivate the individuals to practise this modality.

Karate is characterized by certain specificity, and that it is not contemplated in the thirty reasons that constitute the PMQ. The reasons indicated for the karatecas for this modality practice had been then grouped in seven categories (the used scale were different: 1= important, 2= very important and 3= extremely important), and that, for their importance, we pass to refer: *Physical and/or Psychological Well-Being*; *Self-defense*; *Self-Control*; *Affiliation* (e.g.: conviviality, maintenance or acquisition of friendships); *Competition* (e.g.: reasons to the competition with other people, that is, "physical contact"); *Discipline/Concentration*; *Pleasure for Practical of the Karate* (e.g.: enjoyment proportionate by the karate practice).

In terms of results, it was observed that: 82% of the inquired ones had related *physical and/or psychological well being* as the main reason for practicing karate; 41% the *pleasure for prating* it; 30% the *affiliation*; 27.5% the *auto-control*; 25% *discipline and the concentration*; 10% the *competition*; 4.3% the *self-defense* (considered as the less important reason).

Although the apparent existing differences between karate and other modalities (like swimming, volleyball, soccer, or gymnastics), the reasons that take people to orient them to practice karate are not different as it could be waited. This psychosociologic picture takes the authors to observe that: «*The reasons indicated by karatecas as responsible for their decision to practise this modality had been relatively similar to the ones indicated, in other studies, for practitioners of other sports modalities. For example, Physical and/or Psychological Well-Being seem not only one of the main resultants of the sports activity, but also, and even therefore, one of the biggest reasons for sports practice (e.g.: Brodtkin & Weiss, 1990; Fonseca & Fontainhas, 1993; Fonseca & Novais, 1994; Frias & Serpa, 1991; Serpa, 1992). Also the biggest importance attributed for the karatecas to the reasons related with the Pleasure for Practice of the Karate find equivalent in other studies where the amusement was considered as one of the most important reasons y the inquired (e.g.: Cross & Coast, 1988; Fonseca & Ribeiro, 1994). The Affiliation, equally considered for the practitioners in this study as an important reason for practical its of karate, has been equally pointed in the studies as one of the reasons most important for sports practice (e.g.: Cross & Wedge, 1990; Frias & Serpa, 1991; Serpa, 1992)*» (Fonseca et al., 2001:27).

The reasons related with the development of *self-defense* capacities, usually associates to martial arts practitioners, had not been considered by these as of most important for sports practice. It is admitted, however, to be possible that the importance of this reason is bigger in an initial phase of the karate practice and comes to decrease with the elapsing of the practice, while the practitioners increase their techniques.

Influenced by the singularity of this study, we wanted to explore this line of research, appealing, equally, to the application of an inquiry for questionnaire to karate practitioners. However, it was intended to go deeper in the analysis. Beyond the reasons relative to the karate practice, using a slightly different scale, we intended to evaluate

the sociological profile of the karatecas at national level. This paper is about the results obtained.

Methodology

Since diverse characteristics of the target population are unknown (e.g.: exact number of practitioners, age, sex, socio-economic level, level of studies, place of residence, place of practice), and given the impossibility to get a listing of all the universe elements, methods of not random sampling were used. This type of sampling says that when there is no concern of severity in the sample representatively (for example, in the accomplishment of pilot studies or preliminary analyses), can be used not random sampling methods (or not probabilistic), that do not allow to define with severity the probabilities of inclusion of the different population elements in the sample. These methods are more economic and expedites and than the random ones. However, it cannot be assured that for a reliable interval of 95% the error is approximately 5%.

Conscientious of that this error is not passable of quantification the conclusions presented here must have in account this type of situation. Thus, the data in analysis are based on a sample of 62 karatecas (51 male and 11 female) that have answered to the questionnaire.

2. Application, accomplishment and treatment of the questionnaire

The inquiry was performed in Portugal Continental and in the Autonomous Regions of Azores and Madeira, being established that the results would have to be representative to the level of NUT II - Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics. The questionnaire was applied in different forms: mail and email, provoking an effect of “snowball”, delivered personally in national and international training, normal and special trainings and formation.

Information was collected between 3rd November 2005 and 31st March 2006. The collected data set was analysed with the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences).

3. Presentation of the research results

Starting to analyse the distribution by sex, one evidenced that almost the sample totality (82%) are males and only 18% are female. The enormous disproportion verified between both sexes seems to reveal the reduced weight that women still withhold in the karate practice.

The age of the inquired oscillates between the 9 and 55 years old, being the age groups of 24-35 years and 36-55 years the ones that congregate a bigger percentage of practitioners (74,2%). In relation to the average of ages, it is placed in the 31,87 years, being 17, 23, 27, 29, 34, 35, 39 and 55 years the most frequent ages. The value that accumulates until itself 50% of the comments (medium) tells us that in this distribution half of the inquired have in the maximum 30 years, which reveals an extremely young population.

Tab. 1: Distribution of the inquired, by age groups

Age groups	N	%
Less than 10 years old	1	1,6
10 – 13 years old	1	1,6
14 – 18 years old	5	8,1
19 – 23 years old	9	14,5
24 – 35 years old	24	38,7
36 – 55 years old	22	35,5
More than 55 years old	0	0,0
Total	62	100,0

Source: Inquiry to the karate practitioners

Being one of the central concerns objectives of this work to find out a relation (or absence of it) between the opinions of the practitioners on diverse aspects related with its modality, figured us important to guarantee the control of other variables that could be correlated with the sex. Thus, we studied the relation between age groups and sex, having concluded that there is no relation between them ($\chi^2= 0,00827$; $p= 15,5462$). A surprising situation is the observation of high school habilitation by the inquired ones.

With effect, 54.8% frequent or had completed an average level formation (baccalaureate) or superior (licenciature, master or PhD degree). The level of modal education, that they had frequented or concluded, is the licenciature. However, we do not know if we have here an effect of sample skew, since that is that is constituted, as it was said, from the voluntary reply, then very dependent of the motivation of the inquired ones for answering.

Tab. 2: Distribution of the respondents, by education level

Level of Studies	N	%
PhD	1	1,6
Master	6	9,7
Licenciature	24	38,7
Bachelor's degree	3	4,8
Secondary level (10.º, 11.º e 12.º years)	20	32,3
3.º Cycle (7.º, 8.º e 9.º years)	5	8,1
2.º Cycle (5.º e 6.º years)	2	3,2
1.º Cycle (primary schools)	1	1,6
Total	62	100,0

Source: Inquiry to the karate practitioners

Analysing the distribution of the ages groups and sex, for education level, it is verified that between the highest education level we found the youngest practitioners (between 24 and 35 years old) and of the masculine sex. The difficulties that karatecas face in the exercise of its modality could serve to explain a refusal to the installation of conjugal responsibilities. However, this hypothesis showed baseless, since a good part of the inquired ones (45.2%) are married or live in fact union. Widowhood cases were not registered.

Relatively to the nationality, 98.4% (n = 61) are portuguese and only 1.6% (n=1) has more than one nationality. In respect to the geographic zone where the inquired ones, they practice their modality in the region of Alentejo and Lisbon and Tagus Valley Region concentrates most of the respondents. If we add the regions North and Centre and the regions Alentejo and Algarve, it is possible to obtain the following percentage distribution: 39,9%, North+Center; 30,6%, Lisbon and Vale of the Tagus

(Tejo); 33,8%, Alentejo+Algarve. Despite our efforts, it was not possible to get resulted for the Autonomous Region of Azores.

Tab. 3: Distribution of the respondents, by geographic zone of residence

Geographic Zone of Residence	N	%
Continent		
North	14	22,6
Centre	7	11,3
Lisbon and Tagus Valley Region	19	30,6
Alentejo	19	30,6
Algarve	2	3,2
Sum	61	98,3
Autonomous Regions		
Azores	0	0,0
Madeira	1	1,6
Sum	1	1,6
Total	62	100,0

Source: Inquiry to the karate practitioners

The crossing of the variables zone of residence and age group discloses significant differences, being able to conclude not existence of association between these two variable ($\chi^2= 22,3721$; $p= 0,61417$). Regarding the economic activity, the frequency distribution discloses that 60% of the inquired work for account of other, 8% works for personal account and 1.6% are entrepreneur. 26% of the inquired ones are still students and 4.8% look a first or new job.

Tab. 4: Distribution of the inquired ones, before the economic activity

Economic activity	N	%
Entrepreneur/Boss	1	1,6
Worker for account of other	37	59,7
Worker by personal account	5	8,1
Family worker without remuneration	0	0,0
Search a 1.º job	1	1,6
Search a new job	2	3,2
Student	16	25,8
Pensioner	0	0,0
Total	62	100,0

Source: Inquiry to the karate practitioners

4. Time of practice, graduation, giving up and motivations for the modality

Relatively to the question on the time of practice, we found practitioners with a very short experience in the modality (less than 6 months) e others with great longevity, (exceeding the 40 years). This certifies two things: the first one, is that it is a modality for the life, that is, until the health allows it; second, it is a modality that approaches younger and older practitioners, proporcionating the exchange of experiences.

Tab. 5: Distribution of the respondents, by time of practice

Time of practice	N	%
Less than 6 months	1	1,6
Between 1 and 5 years	12	19,4
Between 5 and 10 years	12	19,4
Between 10 and 15 years	10	16,1
Between 15 and 20 years	13	21,0
Between 20 and 25 years	0	0,0
Between 25 and 30 years	6	9,7
Between 30 and 35 years	2	3,2
Between 35 and 40 years	2	3,2
More than 40 years	4	6,5
Total	62	100,0

Source: Inquiry to the karate practitioners

Crossing the data between the permanence in the modality and the sex, one evidences that men are the ones who remain more time. The women have times of permanence in karate sufficiently shorter than men. Cases of women who exceeded 25 years of practice were not found. When they are asked if they had given up to karate practise, 74% answers negatively. The 16 individuals that had given up the modality, but that were had returned, had affirmed that studies and professional motives the main causes of their removal.

Tab. 6: Reasons for giving up of the modality

Giving up the modality	N	%
Health matters	2	3,2
Studies	6	9,7
Professional motives	4	6,5
Family motives	1	1,6
Inappropriate gyms	1	1,6
Other(s) motive(s)	2	3,2
Total	16	25,8

Source: Inquiry to the karate practitioners

Questioned on their graduation in the modality, the results demonstrate that 55% (=34) have advanced graduations (from black belt) and 45% (=28) have inferior graduations (*kyu*).

Tab. 7: Distribution of the respondents, by graduation in the modality

Graduation	N	%
5.º <i>dan</i> (black belt)	3	4,8
4.º <i>dan</i> (black belt)	2	3,2
3.º <i>dan</i> (black belt)	6	9,7
2.º <i>dan</i> (black belt)	9	14,5
1.º <i>dan</i> (black belt)	14	22,6
1.º <i>kyu</i> (brown belt)	8	12,9
2.º <i>kyu</i> (brown belt)	8	12,9
3.º <i>kyu</i> (blue belt)	5	8,1
4.º <i>kyu</i> (green belt)	3	4,8
5.º <i>kyu</i> (yellow belt)	3	4,8
6.º <i>kyu</i> (white belt)	1	1,6
Total	62	100,0

Source: Inquiry to the karate practitioners

Regarding the reasons underlying to karate practice, and its degree of importance, the following is verified:

- Very important: *The Pleasure for the Karate Practice* had 45 answers (72,6%), followed by *Physical and/or Psychological Well-Being* with 33 answers (53,2%);
- Important: *The Affiliation* had 31 answers (50%). Very next to this result was the *Discipline/Concentration* with 29 answers (46,8%);
- Little important: *The Self-defense* conquered 20 answers (32,3%). *The Competition* had 13 answers (21%);
- Nothing important: *The Competition* received 33 answers (53,2%). 9,7% consider that the conviviality and the maintenance or acquisitions of friendships in the karate practice are no importance.

Tab. 8: Distribution of the answers given for the inquired, according to motivations for the practice

Reasons for practice	Very important	%	Important	%	Little important	%	Nothing important	%
Physical and/or Psychological Well-Being	33	53,2	27	43,5	2	3,2	0	0,0
Self-defence	15	24,2	23	37,1	20	32,3	4	6,5
Self-control	29	46,9	24	38,7	8	12,9	1	1,6
Affiliation	16	25,8	31	50,0	9	14,5	6	9,7
Competition	3	4,8	13	21,0	13	21,0	33	53,2
Discipline/Concentration	28	45,2	29	46,8	3	4,8	2	3,2
Pleasure for the Karate Practice	45	72,6	16	25,8	1	1,6	0	0,0

Source: Inquiry to the karate practitioners

Tab. 9: Distribution of the reasons for karate practice, the according to the average and standard deviation

Reasons for the practical	Average	Standard deviation
Pleasure for the Karate Practice	3,71	0,492
Physical and/or Psychological Well-Being	3,50	0,565
Discipline/Concentration	3,39	0,723
Self-control	3,30	0,759
Affiliation	2,91	0,893
Self-defence	2,79	0,890
Competition	1,77	0,948

Source: Inquiry to the karate practitioners

5. Conclusions

According to the collected information, and taking in consideration, of course, the sampling conditionings, will be able to reach the following conclusions:

- Strong predominance of the masculine sex (82,3%).
- The more representative age groups in both the sex are between 24 and 35 years and 36 and 55 years.
- High levels of school qualifications.
- The majority of the inquired practitioners of karate exert its economic activity for account of other.
- The majority of the practitioners who had answered to the inquiry inhabit in the Regions of Lisbon and Tagus Valley Region and Alentejo.
- The majority of the karatecas does not give up practicing its modality. If it makes it, for some moment of its life, is essentially due to professional or school questions
- The reasons indicated as being most important for the karatecas are the *Pleasure for the Karate Practice*, *Physical and/or Psychological Well-Being* and the *Affiliation*. The *Competition* is what is less important to karate practitioners.
- The times of permanence of the men in karate are superior to the ones of the women.

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