

Martial Arts: Between History, Sports, and Entertainment in Communist and Post-communist Romania

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Abstract

The history of martial arts in the Romanian space stretches from the beginning of the 20th century until today, being part of the evolution of the Romanian society and an important component of the social dynamics both in the communist period and in the first years after the Romanian Revolution. Using analytical tools specific to the field of the history of ideas and mentalities, this article discusses the evolution of martial arts in the Romanian space during the communist regime and after its fall and tries to find out what social role martial arts played in all these periods of socio-political transition.

Keywords: Martial Arts; History; Sports; Entertainment; Mentalities; Communism.

I. Introduction: About martial arts

When we hear the term ‘martial arts’, most of us think of films starring Bruce Lee (1940–1973), Jackie Chan, or Steven Seagal; the famous creations of director and producer Akira Kurosawa (1910–1998); or perhaps even the famous prints of warriors by Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1798–1861). The powerful impact of Eastern martial arts on the social imaginary and the collective memory has determined that almost everyone today can relate to this field in one way or another. Almost every one of us knows at least one person who has practiced or is practicing a martial arts style, and every one of us knows at least one film that features martial arts, and these are just two of the indicators used to measure the popularity of these types of practice.

Attracted by the doctrine, philosophy, and spirit of the martial arts, the contemporary academic world in various geographical areas began to study and explore the world of martial arts in the first half of the 20th century. Naturally, the first steps in this direction were taken by those with easy access

to areas with a rich martial tradition. The countries that had the most contact with authentic sources of martial arts were also the first to show a great interest in discovering, exploring, and understanding them. Romania was one of the countries that first came into contact with martial arts through the English and French space at the beginning of the 20th century, when several public order officers and non-commissioned officers from Romania first came into contact with a martial art of Japanese origin, which had already been practiced and taught for several years by Japanese masters in Great Britain.

From the point of view of the relevance of research on this subject, two aspects can be distinguished. The first relates to Romanian historiography, where there is an obvious historiographical vacuum on the subject of martial arts. This historiographical gap is marked by the absence of academic works on martial arts in Romania and by the presence of mostly magazine articles and popular books.

The second aspect is related to Eastern Europe, more precisely to the majority of post-Soviet countries, such as Romania, where it is also possible to distinguish an absence of academic concern for the subject of martial arts.

These two aspects are a reason to state that any research in the field of martial arts at this time in this part of Europe has a pioneering character and therefore represents a great responsibility for researchers. Therefore, the present study is part of an attempt to research and study the phenomenon of martial arts and its manifestations in a post-Soviet country, where the practice of martial arts has had the character of a highly valued social trend for a good period of history. Therefore, by its very nature, the study falls within the broader field of the history of ideas, mentalities, and mass culture.

The research on the subject of martial arts in Romania has a completely unique character, framing the local academic horizon among the world academic concerns, connecting the Romanian space with other areas of the world where the subject of martial arts has been researched for decades in renowned academic forums of the world, such as the Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales (INALCO) in Paris, France; the University of Bridgeport Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies (UB Martial Arts Studies The international College) in the USA, and Cardiff University in the United Kingdom, where there is a Martial Arts Studies Research Network coordinated by Professor Paul Bowman and where an important publication in the field of martial arts appears twice a year (i.e., Cardiff University Press).

At the same time, the study of this phenomenon is an important contribution to the discovery and better understanding of the history of ideas and

mentalities of Romanian society in the last hundred years and a source of knowledge for the histories of the interwar period, the communist period, and the early 21st century. It is also an important contribution to cultural studies, memory and identity studies, and the history of mass culture.

For a good understanding of the subject under study, it is necessary to examine the image of martial arts among the Romanian public and how they are perceived by both practitioners and enthusiasts and also by those who are not close to the field. The research questions that the article tries to answer are related to the route of martial arts through the Romanian space as a phenomenon that gained popularity after the fall of the communist regime, when the practice of martial arts became legal in Romania. Therefore, the research questions are the following.

1. What was the evolution of the martial arts phenomenon in the Romanian space during communist and post-communist governments?
2. Are the martial arts a sport, a form of entertainment, or both?
3. What was the relationship of martial arts in Romanian society under communism and after the fall of communism?

II. The communist regime in Romania and the martial arts

By a decision of the communist leadership, the field of martial arts had been illegal since 1978, when the first pressure was exerted on groups of practitioners. However, a few years later, on 27 August 1982, Circular 1253, issued by the Bureau of the Executive Committee of the National Council for Physical Education and Sports, clearly stated that any practice or teaching of Oriental martial arts was strictly prohibited.

This period of hardship was a constant flight for practitioners from the eyes of the authorities, and communities of practitioners often sought refuge in the halls of Jūdō, a discipline that had remained untouched by the tentacles of the communist party leadership.

Decision no. 1253 of 27 August 27 1982 of the Office of the Executive Committee of the National Council for Physical Education and Sport is as follows:

Seeing the conclusions of the CNEFS team of specialists and the organisations with attributions regarding the content of their activity in our country;
Analysing the proposed measures for the prevention of practices harmful to the sporting activity;

The Office of the Executive Committee of the National Council for Physical Education and Sports Decides:

– It is forbidden to organise and operate any form of yoga and karate, besides or within sports clubs and associations or other units, regardless of their membership;

– The sections of the National Council for Physical Education and Sport, the Territorial Councils of the sports movement, the clubs of the sports associations, the organisations with attributions in the sport movement are responsible for fulfilling the provisions of the present decision [...]

Head. IX – Arrangement and maintenance of school sports bases – the last paragraph: It is strictly forbidden to make available physical education rooms for other sports groups, which carry out prohibited activities, such as: BUDO, KARATE, YOGA.¹

The attitude of the communist regime seems to have been one of fear of these types of practices. The pragmatic reasons for the regime's fear of martial arts are unclear, as no logical reasoning can be found for the decisions and position taken by the communist leadership. Probably victims of the scandal generated by the tragedy of the Romanian intellectuality known as the Transcendental Meditation Business, the communities of martial arts practitioners folded and continued to follow their training, despite the obvious danger of knowingly exposing themselves. About continuing such practices while they were banned, martial arts instructor C.L. said:

We practiced behind the blocks, in the evening, in the dimly lit areas, so that no one would see us, that no one would denounce us. In the woods, you would rarely dress in a kimono if you were going out because there was a chance to be seen. Sometimes we practiced in Jūdō halls with friends who had access to some Jūdō halls and were at the Jūdō club shelter. I was doing it myself at school, thanks to a sports teacher who understood me and allowed me to practice even after sports hours. So in no case visible.²

Speaking about what he had heard about the period of illegality, another practitioner interviewed for this study said:

¹ Executive Committee of the National Council for Physical Education and Sports, Decision no. 1253 of August 27, 1982, file I no. 10949 at CNSAS archive, dedicated to 'Transcendental Meditation', vol. 8, f. 48.

² Interviewee Cristian Laiber, interviewed by Mircea Gorunescu, 2018, Private collection of interviews, Bucharest.

I only know that before 1989, the practitioners, as many as they were, were very enthusiastic about the practice, and I am talking about the illegal martial arts, which were mainly Karate, from what I heard. They were called dances and were practiced in various places as far back as possible. In Bucharest I know three such places, from what I heard from different practitioners: the basement of the National Theatre, when it was under renovation, the Văcărești Delta, and the Grozăvești Park.³

The moment of the Romanian Revolution offered the martial arts in Romania the chance of the desired return to legality, which was achieved by Order no. 62 of 16 January 1990, signed by then Minister of Sport Mircea Anghel. In order to avoid future bans and problems, and to support the practice of martial arts, most of the clubs were grouped under the Romanian Federation of Martial Arts, which was the starting point for the formation of all the existing federations today. Public practices, demonstrations, and training courses in the country and abroad were resumed, as well as exchanges of experience and participation in major championships. During the interview, instructor C.L. recounted the moment he heard about the return to legality of the martial arts:

I know I saw on TV in the '90s when the Romanian Federation of Martial Arts was established and according to a government decision martial arts became legal ... it was a great joy. I was very happy that they could be done legally and that I didn't have to hide. It was a real joy.⁴

This joy was to become a very important element that animated the masses of people in the phenomenon that had just erupted in 1990.

Other Japanese martial arts, including the famous Karate (with all of its styles, including Shotokan and Kyokushin) were practiced in Romania at the same time as Jūdō and Ju-Jitsu, and many of the practitioners of the latter two were also practitioners of Karate, although it is difficult to identify which of them practised what.

³ Interviewee Vlad Cârstea, interviewed by Mircea Gorunescu, 2018, Private collection of interviews, Bucharest.

⁴ Cristian Laiber interview, 2018.

III. The size and scope of the practice in the Romanian space

The martial arts in their sporting sense have been very popular in Romania since the communist regime, even though, paradoxically, their practice was illegal. The reasons for why martial arts are rooted in Romanian society are varied, but some of them were identified in the opinions of the Romanian groups of practitioners who participated in interviews during this study.

When asked why he started practicing, martial arts practitioner D.A. stated that

The reason why I started martial arts was due to the fact that at that time I was at the General School No. 19 in Gavana, and I was not a very developed type. I was weaker (I am talking about '89-'90, until I went to high school) and I had two classmates who actually beat me. It was 100% bullying. They fought and knew how to fight. One day I went to the cinema and saw a movie with Bruce Lee, and this I remember was during the Ceausescu regime.. After seeing the film I said I had the solution for my two colleagues. Two weeks later my cousin came to our house and told me that he goes to Karate Kyokushin, Oyama's Famous Karate, who kills bulls, cuts bottles ... that was actually how I started.⁵

Also, about the reason for the start in practice, instructor C.L. noted that

I think for many it was a situation of a more or less violent environment, in which, in childhood, the big ones make difficult days for the little ones, so it may be such a thing. I cannot say that I had a childhood marked by such things, but I experienced some time when I would have wanted to know how to defend myself. My grandfather insisted, at that time, not to learn how to defend myself in any way, because he had been through a war and then he knew that violence was totally useless. On the other hand, I still knew I needed to defend myself, and I knew my grandfather wouldn't be standing next to me to protect me. From here, there appeared a need to be safe and secure, not always needing someone to stand up for you. As they say, take care of yourself.⁶

⁵ Interviewee Daniel Anghel, interviewed by Mircea Gorunescu, 2018, Private collection of interviews, Bucharest.

⁶ Cristian Laiber interview, 2018.

Another reason identified in discussions with practitioners of the period is the lack of a martial tradition specific to the Romanian area or people. From several conversations with experienced practitioners, it appears that the lack of a developed martial environment in the country meant that the penetration of Oriental martial arts created a natural curiosity around them, which led to a large number of followers in a relatively short time. Moreover, because of the way they were transmitted, the nature of their structure, the fact that they had no indigenous rivals, and also because of the geographical distance from their creative source, these martial arts quickly acquired a mystical, exotic aura that captured the public's attention for several decades.

The geographical distance from the source of these practices and the stories that most often accompanied the trainings outlined a profile specific to their Eastern specificity. In a fully communist regime, the source of inspiration and importation of martial arts came on the chain of other communist regimes, such as the Chinese or North Korean. I have also identified the same idea with a Romanian researcher who has dealt with the subject of martial arts in the Romanian space. Mihai-Andrei Aldea, in his book *Ortodoxia și Artele Marțiale (Mai ales la Români)* states:

Separated from the old Romanian martial arts [...] but also from the awareness of the existence of European martial arts in general (until 1944, well-known in Romania), the Romanians under communism have almost completely forgotten about them. But they did not cease to feel their need [...] As a result, they were, so to speak, shocked by the presence of martial arts in the films of the fraternal republics of North Korea and China.⁷

Beyond the issue of authentic Romanian martial arts and the debate on their existence in time, what emerges from Mihai-Andrei Aldea's text is in line with all the information we have gathered during our discussions with individuals who practiced martial arts in the communist period. Although they did not come from a country with a communist regime, Japanese martial arts arrived in Romania in the same way and almost at the same time as those from China and North Korea, as well as other Eastern martial arts.

Another reason is that the stories of groups of practitioners who conducted their training in secret, far from the eyes of the people, are to some extent true. In most cases, these groups of practitioners could even include members of the communist security forces or the militia, who had a passion

⁷ Aldea 2014: 28.

or interest in the practice and, by their mere presence, unofficially legitimised the existence and continuity of the martial arts in the various spaces where they were held. Moreover, in the gyms of Romania, where there are still instructors who practised during the communist period, the story of the existence of a large group of people who practised various martial arts in famous sports clubs, such as Dinamo Bucharest or Steaua Bucharest, is told. It is obvious that the people's passion for such a practice was based on various and diverse motives.

The range of practitioners was very wide, as were the reasons for maintaining an active passion: from those who practiced because they were banned (for whom participation in training was therefore a kind of resistance to the regime, an attitude of disobedience to the imposed order) to those who practised out of a passion fuelled by various aspects more related to individual inclinations and values. In a regime of coercion and control, the identity of and the relationships within the group were also very important. Identifying with a clandestine group that practiced exotic but forbidden aerial sports was both precious and dangerous, and it is easy to understand why some of those who did not take part in martial arts training during the communist period would adopt a different behaviour after the fall of the regime. The stakes of the idea of resistance had disappeared.

After 1990, there was an 'explosion' in the martial arts halls in Romania. Most of the remaining groups of practitioners became legal and entered public and official society. Some practitioners consider that this was a very important moment, because for the first time the martial environment in Romania became visible and was in direct contact with the international community of martial arts, which caused a change in mentality and attitude, but also an openness to knowledge.

Also after 1989, a number of important measures concerning the status of the martial arts and their purpose were a priority for the Romanian authorities. Thus, for the first time, the martial world in Romania was mentioned and defined as with a purpose by Government Decision no. 297 of 21 March 1990, published in the Official Gazette no. 72 of 22 April 1992,⁸ regarding the practice of martial arts in Romania, which stipulates in Article I that

⁸ The text of the Government Decision can be consulted at the address: http://www.cdep.ro/pls/legis/legis_pck.htm_act_text?id=8649, (accessed 25.07.2022) or <http://www.monitoruljuridic.ro/act/hotarire-nr-297-din-21-martie-1990-privind-practicarea-artelor-martiale-in-romania-emitent-guvern-publicat-n-1005.html> (accessed 25.07.2022).

Martial arts are a valuable component of physical education and sports activity in Romania, their development at national level contributing to the education of young people especially in the spirit of respect for the high moral values of humanity, the propagation of non-violence, the maintenance and strengthening of health, the increase of physical capacities, and intellectuals of the population, as well as the removal of diseases.⁹

Also, in the aforementioned government decision, the statute of the Romanian Federation of Martial Arts is also provided that

The establishment of the Romanian Federation of Martial Arts is approved, subordinated to the Ministry of Sport, an autonomous specialised body, having legal personality.¹⁰

Also within the decision, Article 3 provides that

The Romanian Federation of Martial Arts coordinates, at the national level, the activity of sports units—leagues, associations, clubs, initiation and training centres—in the field of martial arts, provides specialised guidance and exercises rigorous control of the way this activity is performed, organises the national competition system, selects and prepares national sports teams, and ensures the professional knowledge of the trainers and coaches.¹¹

As far as the size of the practice is concerned, information can be extracted from the data provided by the National Institute of Statistics of Romania, which has made available data on the official number of practitioners registered with the associations (see Images 1 and 2 in the annex). At the same time, information on the extent of the practice can be observed and analysed through the written press from the beginning of the 1990s, as well as through public relations with the editors of profile magazines or through interviews with practitioners of that period. In the case of the federations founded immediately after 1990, the graphs show that the number of sports sections and the number of sportsmen and sportswomen legitimised by the

⁹ *Government of Romania*, 'HOTARIRE nr. 297 din 21 martie 1990 privind practicarea artelor martiale in Romania', Monitorul Juridic, [website], 1990, <http://www.monitoruljuridic.ro/act/hotarire-nr-297-din-21-martie-1990-privind-practicarea-artelor-martiale-in-romania-emitent-guvern-publicat-n-1005.html>, (accessed 25.07.2022).

¹⁰ *Government of Romania*.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

federations reached their highest levels in the first year of registration of the statistical data. In this sense, Images 1 and 2, in the case of the Romanian Federation of Martial Arts, show the situation after 1990. It can be observed that in 1992, the first year in which statistical data were registered, there were 1,083 spot sections and 30,000 athletes accredited within the federation. The following graph shows a sharp decline in 1993, a relative stagnation of the figures in 1994 and 1995, and their increase in 1996 and 1997. The period 1993–1995 represents the segment in which the possible migration of many practitioners—and their withdrawal from the Romanian Federation of Martial Arts—to the other federations and organisations born in these years (e.g., The Romanian Federation of Traditional Karate and Related Disciplines and the Romanian Kyokushin Karate Organisation) took place.

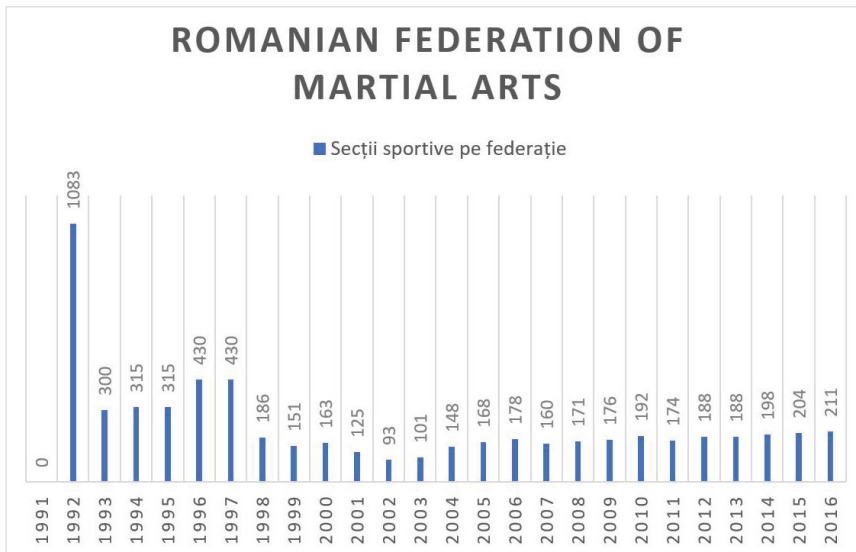


Image 1. Graph showing the number of sports sections within the Romanian Federation of Martial Arts. Graphic representation made by the author with the help of data provided by the National Institute of Statistics of Romania

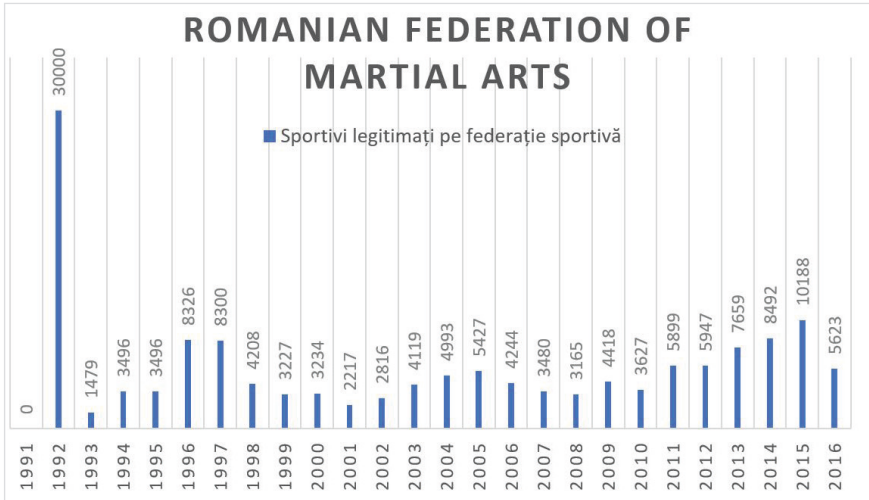


Image 2. Graph showing the number of sportsmen legitimized within the Romanian Federation of Martial Arts. Graphic representation made by the author with the help of data provided by the National Institute of Statistics of Romania

After 1990, the whole Romanian space became encompassed by the desire to practice martial arts, while even though they most often appeared under this name, were really combative sports. The desire of Romanians to participate in and identify with such organisations and groups has grown steadily until today, but the reasons for why they were still attracted to martial practice have changed. Both during the communist period and at present, the idea of martial arts as a social phenomenon can be projected.

IV. Martial arts in Romania—a social phenomenon?

From the first writings of martial arts masters to their students, writings that certainly excluded media communication from the beginning, to today’s specialised publications and magazines, martial arts have undergone changes in their status and perception in society. In this way, martial arts have become a widespread social phenomenon throughout the world, arousing the curiosity of many people and creating a demand for information on the subject. Over time, confidential documents containing martial arts techniques and knowledge became the source of various works and publications on martial arts, as well as newspaper and magazine articles. The opening of martial arts to the general public took place through modern communication channels,

with martial themes being present in the cinematographic world, as well as in TV shows, radio, and print media.

In every culture in the world to which the Japanese martial arts have been imported, works and publications about them have appeared over time, arousing the interest of the public and delighting the fans. In the case of Romania, in the period up to 1990, there is no evidence of the existence of magazines or newspapers dedicated to martial arts practitioners in the print media. Of course, there were isolated works or small articles in daily newspapers, but we cannot speak of a specialised press for the field of martial arts in Romania. In the communist period, given that the only legal martial art was Jūdō, it is easy to understand why other styles were completely absent from the Romanian press landscape.

The year 1990 completely changed the face of this problem. With the emergence of a large number of clubs and associations of practitioners, and with the intensification of the practice and propagation of martial arts in Romanian society, a series of magazines appeared to respond to the market demand and the curiosity of practitioners in this field.

In 1990, with the intensification of the martial arts phenomenon, the first publications dedicated to this field appeared in the Romanian press. A whole series of magazines appeared, promoting the practice and discussing martial arts not only as a physical activity but also from other points of view, including spiritual, philosophical, and scientific. The Romanian press that specialised in this field was the fruit of practitioners who had obtained the means and resources to produce such press products.

At the beginning of the 1990s, it was no longer a question of martial arts in newspapers, sports, or entertainment magazines, but of whole written constructions that aimed to deal with this phenomenon that marked Romanian society in the last decade of the 20th century. Budo Best, a well-known distributor of sports products, which in 1990–1991 published one of the first martial arts magazines in Romania, *Martial Arts*, was one of the first companies to organise editorial offices. From 1990 to 2001, well-known magazines on martial arts were published in Bucharest (e.g., *Arte Marțiale*, *Centura Neagră – revista artelor marțiale*, *Arte și luptă*, *Martial Art*), Ploiești (*Karate-Do*), Pitești (*Tigrul și Dragonul*), Cluj-Napoca (*Musubi*, *Karate-Budo Magazin*), Târgu Mureș (*Free Style*), and Galați (*Arte Marțiale*).

The media of the 1990s, in relation to the phenomenon of martial arts, reflected the disregard for the period of illegal martial practice that had weighed heavily on the practitioner's psyche. In this regard, in an article in the first issue of *Karate-Budo Magazine* (Image 3), published in 1991, a well-known Romanian karate practitioner, Adrian Popescu-Săcele, in

an interview, explaining the origin of the name ‘Stagiul Ardealului’ (i.e., an event known in the world of karate) mentioned the following about the period of illegality:

This was an idea that started years ago, in 1983 at one of the traineeships in Satu-Mare. Illegality gave us the feeling of unity and we wanted a materialisation of our desire for manifestation and, at the same time, a characterisation.¹²



Image 3. Cover of Karate-Budo Magazin magazine, Nr. 1 since 1991. The magazine was published under the care of the „Martial Arts” company in Cluj. Source: Private collection

Such articles are historical sources of particular importance, as they are testimonies of the situation in the 1990s, an important index of the mentality of the practitioners of that time, who for the first time openly and without fear expressed their own opinions about the martial arts that they practiced.

¹² Marocoj 1991: 2.

The martial arts magazines of the 1990s strongly promoted the philosophical and spiritual aspects of martial arts practice, emphasising what the ‘true spirit’ of the samurai or the ‘true mentality of the warrior’ meant in the vision of the time. This is why we find so many stories and tales about the lives of the masters, as well as advice on how to practice or how to assimilate and internalise the martial arts into a way of life. Such articles were extremely popular, and the number of pages in these monthly, bimonthly, annual, and biannual magazines is proof that they were not only popular but also highly sought after. Thus we find articles about Gichin Funakoshi, the founder of Shotokan Karate, and his book titled *Karate-Do My Way of Life*:

Many people practice Karate, but few are able to ‘live Karate’, due to the huge psychological implications that occur in both the Dojo and everyday life. If physical training and karate techniques can be learned relatively quickly, the psychological side is infinitely stronger. It requires many other qualities: patience, passion, determination, and last but not least, an open mind to everything around. The one who practices karate during training hours is a good karateka,¹³ but the one who manages to cross the boundaries of training hours, learning to practice Karate every moment, harmonising his spirit with everything around him, has managed to penetrate the essence of Karate, learned to live Karate.¹⁴

The psychological effect of such articles on practitioners, who were for the first time freely and legally reading profile magazines and reading stories that outlined realities that most of them had probably only dreamed of, was one of great proportions. Such portrayals of the old masters further strengthened the practitioners’ desire to continue on the path of martial arts and created a mirage in front of each individual. It is very likely that many practitioners at that time, after reading such articles, said, ‘One day I want to be like that teacher’, cultivating their own reasons for advancing the practice and seeing martial practice differently than just as a recreational sport.

These stories not only encouraged those involved in martial arts training but also fascinated and attracted other people to the field and were even sources for stories and rumours that spread in society, within communities of practitioners, because it is well known that ‘rumours are ubiquitous, regardless of the spheres of social life. They are the oldest mass media’.¹⁵

¹³ *Karateka* means *karate* practitioner.

¹⁴ Crişan 1991: 5.

¹⁵ Noël-Kapferer 1993: 53.

The covers of the magazines were very evocative, symbolising through the images chosen a wide range of values, such as perseverance, will, hardness, and endurance (See Image 4, a cover of the martial arts magazine from Cluj-Napoca that shows a karate practitioner breaking blocks of BCA material with his forehead). These were the characteristics of any martial art, as they were perceived at the time in relation to the warrior ideal, samurai, ninja, etc.

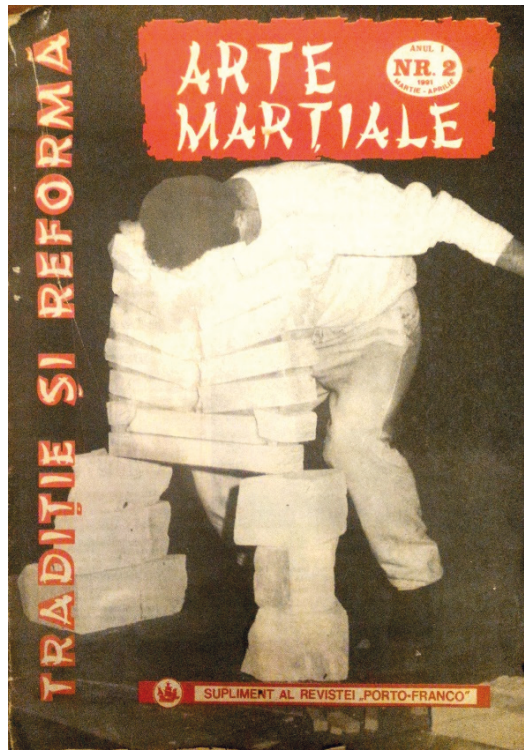


Image 4. Cover of the magazine Martial Arts, Nr. 2 since 1991. Printed at the polygraphic company Porto-Franco, Galați. Source: Private collection

The articles were looking for unique aspects that would attract the reader, and the large number of pages indicated that the public appreciated and demanded the martial arts magazines, an aspect that is even mentioned in all the magazines of the time and is also highlighted in the magazine *Black Belt* (See Image 5, right), where there is a section called the ‘Post Office’, where the editorial department sends the following message to the public:

We wanted the [magazine] *Black Belt* to please you, but your appreciation has exceeded any expectations. And there is no greater reward for us than the interest we arouse, as there is no greater satisfaction for a martial arts instructor than the assiduity and progress of his students. You are generous and we hope we will never disappoint you, together with the editors and readers, to become better human beings, to have fuller lives, to get closer to perfection through the martial arts. [...] This magazine is the fruit of a passion, in which now, after writing to us, we find out that we are not alone, and that is why we want it more complete, better than everything we have read so far about martial arts, and we hope to reach it to allow for special graphic conditions, to become the symbol of rigor, harmony, and high aesthetic sense, cultivated through the martial arts.



Image 5. Pages from Centura Neagră magazine - martial arts magazine, Nr. 1 since 1992. On the left, a plea for martial attitude. On the right side, the editorial Post section, where the title of the publication is specified and the high demand of the public for this magazine is mentioned. Source: Private collection

The text shows that the public had an interest in this magazine, as shown by a general interest in all such publications in the 1990s. You can also see that the editors were practitioners, because their vision of what the magazine should be and what it should represent was strongly shaped by values derived from what the martial arts symbolised at the time and the way they

were represented (i.e., in the collective mind by values such as rigour, harmony, and high aesthetic sense). In other words, practitioners had to have a special outfit and a special character. The extent of the martial arts phenomenon in the early 1990s is also evident, and from this it can be seen that the extent of practitioners' interest in martial arts was very high before 1990.

Conclusions

Concluding the present analysis, we can highlight some aspects related to the status of martial arts on the Romanian territory. The present study has succeeded not only in defining and clarifying the types of martial arts existing in the Romanian space but also in identifying the main aspects that distinguish a classical martial art from a modern, sporting one. As a result of the analysis, it has also been established that the martial arts in Romania have followed a particular path, being in constant contact not only with the authorities and political regimes in the country, but also with the Romanian public, which quickly adhered to the principles of the practice and often found refuge and relief in the martial arts universe.

As a summary answer to the three research questions mentioned at the beginning of this paper, it can be concluded that the communist period was a time when martial arts were not only a form of entertainment and relaxation but also a means of symbolically fighting the oppressive regime and giving individuals a sense of group membership and identity, with a space of spirituality and exoticism, which categorically had a significant impact on the collective memory, a fact proven by the explosion in popularity from the beginning of the 1990s.

Martial arts practitioners were assigned an important role in the bullied society of the 1990s, their duty to answer all questions related to the ability of martial arts to elevate man to a completely different condition, to 'cleanse' and remove the adverse influences of past times, which, at the time of writing this article, felt so strongly in people's collective consciousness. In absolute terms, the 1990s represented a period of reorienting and redefining symbols, social and national identity, and the role of each individual and his place in society.

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