

# Wided Ben Messaoud

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## Social representations of karate among young people

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### Abstract

**Problem and Aim.** This survey aims to present on a summary of the views of *karatekas* on their practice. It aims to define their social representations of *karate* on the basis of the theories of Serge Moscovici and Jean Claude Abric. The research sheds light on the influence of these social representations on practitioners' behaviours. It shows also how these social representations are, in turn, affected by their socio cultural environment.

**Method.** Twenty members of a *karate* association in Tunis were sampled on a voluntary basis. The results have been reached by qualitative techniques; interviews and hierarchical evaluation.

**Results and Conclusions.** The constituent elements of social representations of *karate* namely; practice forms, and the biological, sociological and psychological effects of *karate* as central components were identified. At the one extremity *karate* is considered as a means of entertainment. As contrasting components, it has been found that *karate* is perceived as a way of life and a future plan for living. At the other extremity there are cognitive effects, income and the culture of Japan. Besides, on the one hand, it has been proved that the social representations of *karate* determine the behaviours of practitioners, their cognitions and their emotions. On the other hand these social representations are determined by the socio cultural environment of the *karateka* (media, parents, friends, siblings and peers).

### Introduction

Although Japanese martial arts, also called *budo*, first came to light in the land of the rising sun, little by little they came to the fore; they crossed the border to expand throughout the world. The Japanese originally had recourse to these practices to survive. They used them notably to defend their tribes, their territories and their homeland. With the passing of time, Japanese martial arts witnessed different changes. They became not only sports aimed at winning competitions according to the rules, but also a show. The rules established for the sport alleviate and reduce the risk of accidents and injuries through the process of progress. [Elias, Dunning 1994]. Some writers contend that religion had an undeniable role in this process. Thanks to *Zen* which appeared in the twelfth century the brutal techniques of war were transformed into *budo* [Eté 2010]. There are so many definitions of Japanese martial arts that it makes it quite difficult to find a unique and definitive one. *Budo* combines two Chinese ideograms *Wu* (Jap. *bu*) and *Dao*

(*do*). *Wu/bu* means martial and warrior. In turn, '*dao/do*' means a way, a method and an education in order to perfectly understand the self and the ego [Deshimaru 1983]. Generally, *budo* means the way of the warrior [Power 1998; cf. Cynarski 2013a; Cynarski, Skowron 2014].

In addition, martial arts in Greek-Latin etymology is the association of two words; "martial" deriving from Mars, the god of war, and "art" which refers to a set of processes, rules and methods to create something perfectly. Thus, within this framework, martial arts present a set of processes and methods to effectively carry out a task closely linked to war [Olivier 2010]. Fouquet, in his attempt to draw a general definition, defines martial arts as any form of single combat, with tool or hand-to-hand, in which the goal is to effectively eliminate an enemy [Fouquet 1996]. Yet the spiritual aspect is also one of the component parts of *budo*. They are not simply a set of combat techniques but also a way to educate and develop the spirit and the soul [Cynarski 2012, 2013b; Cynarski, Lee-Barron 2014]. They closely bind the body to the spirit, techniques to value and tradition to modernity.

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There is an array of Japanese martial arts. The present research is restricted to *karate*. Its roots are most precisely found in Okinawa, southern Japan. Thanks to Gichin Funakoshi, the precursor of the *Shotokan* style, *karate* was recognized in a sport event for the first time in 1922 in Tokyo. He added 'do' to the word *karate* in order to include it among *budo*, because it is also based on the search for a philosophical way through the practice of an art of war [Habersetzer 1987]. A wide range of styles emerged, namely; *Shorin-ryu*, *Shorei-ryu*, *Shito-ryu*, *Goju-ryu*, *Wadokai*, *Shotokai*, *Shukokai*, *Kyokushinkai* ... [Habersetzer 1991].

In Tunisia, the first federation of *karate* and associated disciplines was established on 20 April 1984. Apart from *karate Shotokan*, it encompasses *taekwondo* and *kung fu*. Because of the increasing number of participants in these sports, each has its own federation. The number of *karateka* more than doubled in 10 years; from 3998 in 2001 to 8278 in 2011. Recently a new federation appeared, that of *karate kyokushinkai*. There are other styles as well, but they are still only associations since the number of participants is still limited. This present paper puts *karate Shotokan* under the spotlight because it is both the oldest federation and has the largest number of practitioners.

Since *karate* is an imported sport, how do Tunisian *karateka* consider their practice? How do they perceive it? What place does it have in their lives? Why do they practice it? What are their motives? To sum up all these questions in only one; what social representations do Tunisian practitioners have of *karate*? The study by Olivier Bernard on the social representations that martial artists in Quebec have of their practice shows the following results; perceptions linked basically to the body, to the effectiveness of techniques, to self defence, to sport, to a way of life, to the market, to mythical ideas, to social acknowledgment and to a way of self-reconstruction ... [Olivier 2008]. So what is the case for Tunisian *karateka*?

This research has referenced the theories of Serge Moscovici and Jean Claude Abric to draw out the social representations that the *karateka* have of their practice. Moscovici was the first to bring this concept to life in his study of the social representations of psychoanalysis in 1961 [Abric 1994]. It is a worldwide concept of common sense. It allows the world view of a person or a group to be identified. It also allows the influence peoples' views have on their decisions and interactions and the role they play in society to be discerned. According to Denise Jodelet, social representation can be defined as a form of knowledge which is socially elaborated and shared which aims to construct a unique reality within a social group [Jodelet 1989]. On the contrary, in behaviourist theories, there is no distinction between the subject and the object. In other words, there is no split between the internal and external universe of the individual or the group [Moscovici 1969]. Social representations stem

from the cognitive system and depend, not only on the context of the discourse based on interaction and discussions between individuals, but also on the social context, that concerns the ideological context and the social occupation that a person or a group has in society [Abric 1994].

In order to conform with Moscovici's theory the formulation of social representations is a two-step process. In the first stage concrete information concerning a particular object is selected. This is the transition from scientific theory to a figurative model or figurative nucleus. In the second stage the component parts of the figurative nucleus undergo decontextualisation which is marked by breaking the link to the production context. This nucleus refers to the culture, norms and values of the members of a group [Abric 1994]. The concept of culture is defined by Guy Rocher as a set of ways of thinking and feeling, and of acting which are more or less formal. They are used objectively and symbolically to form a particular and distinct community [Rocher 1992].

Jean Claude Abric evolved the theory of the figurative nucleus and came up with his Central Nucleus Theory. He identified the peripheral components, which are a set of organized, structured and hierarchical constituents revolving around a central nucleus or central system [Abric 1994]. The central nucleus provides social representations with their sense, meaning and organization. It is consistent, coherent, stable and resistant to changes to context and environment [Abric 1994]. To detect the centrality of each component the valence of each item must be taken into account.

Jean Claude Abric described valence as described valence as the properties of an item in relation to types of induction [Abric 1994]. The components of the central system are derived from the global context which affects their historical, social and ideological aspects. Added to this, sharing the same central nucleus is fundamental to having a homogeneous and coherent group [Abric 1994]. As regards the peripheral components or peripheral system, they hinge on the central nucleus. They enable adaptation to context changes to occur in order to protect the latter. They integrate any new information coming from the environment. Conflicting statements may thus be presented. Furthermore, this system is characterized by flexibility, a moving and evolving aspect. The peripheral system is essentially made up of individual lives and personal experiences [Abric 1994].

Another controversial issue concerns the link established between social representations and social practices. Some authors think that social representations are determined by social practices. They follow Marxist sociology and materialistic philosophy, where ideologies spring from the means of production within society. Thus, the socio-cultural context determines social practices. Furthermore, social practices generate ideologies and social representations [Abric 1994]. It is thus appropriate to

ask how *karate* as a social practice, a social environment and a culture can influence the ideas and ways of thinking of practitioners of this martial art and their social representations?

Other thinkers however opt for the opposing view that social representations influence social practices and behaviours. This is shown in Denise Jodelet's study on mental illness where some social representations are not even expressed verbally, but are shown in mental patients' behaviour [Abric 1994]. If it is the case, how can social representations of *karate* determine the social practices and behaviours of *karateka*?

In this paper two assumptions are advanced: Firstly that social representations of *karate* are socially constructed, and secondly that they determine, in turn, the behaviour of practitioners. This research aims not only to describe social representations that *karateka* have of their practice, but also to distinguish the relationship between social representations and social practices.

### Material and methods

The studied population was made up of *karateka* in El-Mourouj, a district in Tunis. By voluntary sampling, 20 *karateka*, 13 women and 7 men who are members of the El-Hidhab *karate* association were interviewed. Interviewing was stopped where there was insufficient data. The average age of the whole population was 15.9 years old. That of the women was 14 and that of the men 17.8. Their experience ranged from 2 months to 15 years. Added to this they held different levels - from white to black belts. The average length of interviews was 40 minutes. They took place in the gym, in the reception area or in the changing room as chosen by the interviewees.

They were recorded and then transcribed in order to get data support.

This qualitative research used both interrogative and associative techniques to collect data. The first, interrogative, technique concerns comprehensive interviews and is close to the semi-directive interview, where interviewees are prompted to speak and express themselves. The interview guide is flexible and taking account of the order of questions is useless. The researcher has to start the conversation and prompt the participant to speak [Kaufmann 2004]. The guidelines for this current survey revolved around three themes:

1. General data (name, last name, age, sex, occupation, academic level, place of residence etc.;
2. Karate and the socio cultural environment of the practitioners;
3. Karate and the behaviours of the practitioners.

The second, associative technique concerned hierarchical evocation and comprised two phases; free association and the hierarchy of items. As a first step the interviewee provided the researcher with terms or expressions on the basis of an inductive word. Secondly the participants ranked the items in order of importance [Abric 2003]. This technique gives access to the hidden elements of the nucleus system [De Rosa 1988]. Two hierarchical indications are highlighted; the frequency items appear and their ranking [Verges 1992].

Content analysis was applied as a technique to explore the data support. In line with René Lécuyer, this method classifies and codifies data in different categories with specific characteristics [Lécuyer 1988]. Pierre Verges puts forward prototypical analysis, as an efficient technique to analyze the data support of the associative method. It is about cross-referring the frequency and rank of each item in order to present a table

**Tab. 1.** Sampling's information

	Men	Women	Total
10-15 years	2	9	11
16-20 years	3	3	6
21-25 years	2	1	3
Total	7	13	20
Primary school level	0	3	3
Basic school level	1	6	7
High school level	4	2	6
University level	2	2	4
Total	7	13	20

**Tab. 2.** Analysis of hierarchical evocations

Rank	Rank	
Frequency	Area n°1: Central components	Area n°2: 1 <sup>st</sup> peripheral components
Frequency	Area n°3: Contrasting components	Area n°4: 2 <sup>nd</sup> peripheral components

comprised of four squares. These areas show central nucleus components as well as peripheral ones [Rous-siau, Bonardi 2001].

The first area comprises the most frequent and the most important items. Thus, it is the area of central system elements. The second area encompasses the most relevant peripheral components. The third area is the square of contrasting elements. As its name shows, it includes relevant but not very frequent components. As regards the fourth area, it is comprised of the least important and the least frequently-mentioned items [Abric 2003].

## Results and discussion

During contact with the 20 *karateka* members, they were all asked to give 6 words that crossed their mind when they heard the trigger word “karate“. They then ranked them in descending order according to their importance. 120 words were used and were classified and gathered in groups or themes as follows:

- Ways of practice: combat, *kata*, competitions, shows, defence;
- Prospective plans: ranks, *karate* master, world championships;
- Biological effects: health, strength, reaction rate, flexibility, precision;
- Psychological effects: willpower, self-confidence, perseverance, discipline, well developed personality, composure;

- Sociological effects: friendship, respect of others, violence;
- Cognitive effects: intelligence, concentration;
- Means of entertainment: stress release, relaxation;
- Culture: Japan, martial arts, samurai;
- Way of life;
- Income.

## 1. Constituent elements of social representations

### 1.1. Central nucleus

Analysis of the collected information reveals that all the elements of social representations revolve around four central components, namely, in order; ways of practice, biological effects, sociological effects and psychological effects. As regards ways of practice, the practitioners see *karate* only as combat or *kata* or competition. In addition they consider it a method of self-defence. Others enjoy it as a show. Added to this, *karateka* regard their practice as an effective way to develop physical conditioning for instance, improving strength, reaction rates, flexibility and precision in the execution of movements. Furthermore practitioners think that *karate* is a way to make friends, to learn to respect themselves and others and to reduce violent behaviour. Furthermore, *karate* has many beneficial effects on personality; improving self-confidence, developing a calm and composed character and learning discipline, perseverance and willpower.

**Tab. 3.** Rank and frequency of items

	Average of frequency	Average of rank
Ways of practice	1.7	2
Prospective plans	0.5	3
Biological effects	1.8	2.222
Psychological effects	1.2	2.166
Sociological effects	0.6	3
Cognitive effects	0.4	3.75
Means of entertainment	0.8	3.125
Culture	0.5	3.2
Way of life	0.1	1
Income	0.1	5

**Tab. 4.** Components of social representations of *karate*

Rank average	<=3	>=3
Frequency average		
>=0.55	Ways of practice Biological effects Psychological effects Sociological effects	Means of entertainment
<= 0.55	Prospective plans Way of life	Cognitive effects Income Culture

## 1.2. Peripheral system

The first peripheral area is composed of means of entertainment, the most pertinent element. *Karate* is considered as a way to release stress and to relax. In the second area, two contrasting components emerge; prospective plans and way of life. In fact, the effect of *karate* on practitioners goes beyond the *dojo*, the place of training, to reach into their daily lives. The example of discipline can be mentioned here; *karateka* are not only disciplined in their practice but also in their professional life. Added to this, participants pin their future hopes on *karate*. They are motivated to improve their level, to win in competitions and to participate in world championships. Some of them even want to carry it on into their careers to become *karate* masters. The second peripheral area, as mentioned above, contains the least frequent and the least important elements. Finally the second peripheral area contains the cognitive effects of *karate*, the culture of Japan and income. The practice of this martial art does indeed enhance concentration and self-control. According to some participants, *karate* represents a way to have an income, by getting prize-money from competitions or from working as a *karate* master. Other *karateka* are influenced by absorbing ideas from the media which have their origins in the history of *karate* and Japanese culture.

## 1.3. Links between the central and the peripheral system

The number of connections that an element of social representations makes with other items is a relevant indicator of its centrality [Abric 1994]. The present research shows that the central elements establish numerous links with others. For example a show, a way of practicing *karate*, is not only considered as a means of entertainment reflecting Japanese culture, but also as a lucrative activity. Besides, improving their level, or winning competitions or becoming a *karate* master needs strong will and motivation, which are psychological elements. Also, in order to be in good physical shape and sporty, *karateka* tend to adopt a healthy way of life like a healthy diet and good sleep.

## 2. Social representations of *karate* and the behaviour of *karateka*

Social representations of *karate* influence the behaviours, affects and cognitions of *karateka*. Firstly, as regards behaviours, this martial art prevents practitioners' conduct from <sup>1</sup> becoming aggressive; it helps to develop a calm and peaceful character and is also considered a way of life. One of the *karateka* declared:

*"I couldn't sit still for a minute and I got easily irritated, but thanks to the training, I have become more calm and composed."* (X16, F, 11 years old)

A calm mind and inner peace have their origins in the Zen Buddhism notion of the vacuous spirit [Hber-setzer 1986a]. Chotoku Kyan, one of the well-known Okinawa masters, highlights the fact that martial arts prevent violence, alleviate troubles and assure self-protection [Reynes, Lorant 2004; Tokitsu 2003]. *Karate* is a codified practice which controls the process of violence [Bodin, Heas 2002] It is also regarded as a way of life; it provides practitioners with more organization, positivity and effectiveness. One of the interviewees said:

*"Karate makes me avoid a build-up of homework ... I feel obliged to do all my homework before I go training..."* (X3, M, 15 years old)

Another explained how *karate* affects every detail of her life as well as her choices and professional career:

*"Karate is the centre of my life. I practice it in the morning and in the evening. It exists in every part of my daily life; I have to go to sleep early because I have to practice karate in the morning. I mustn't eat too much because I don't want to change my weight category. I have to stay very organized all the time because I have to manage two main things in my life; sport and study. It is guiding my professional choice too; I want to be karate master."* (X8, F, 22 years old)

Moreover, *karate* is considered as a way to be disciplined, and it affects both the training and daily life of practitioners. This is the case for this *karateka* who has become more punctual, assiduous and well-organized. He reported:

*"Karate affects my everyday life positively. I have become more organized, my room is tidy, my clothes and bags as well... I am better at making timetables, drawing up lists of priorities and always arriving on time at my appointments."* (X5, M, 22 years old)

In line with Deshimaru's teaching, this dimension makes the difference between sport and martial art. In fact, the former is limited to the *dojo*, whereas the latter is closely-linked to the daily lives of practitioners [Deshimaru 1983].

Secondly, the social representations of *karate* have an impact on practitioners' affects; it is regarded as a symbol of determination, perseverance and willpower, as well as containing an element of motivation to improve one's level and rank. Some interviewees work on their performance in order to participate in national and international competitions. Others are attracted to carry on *karate* in their careers and become masters. In this category a *karateka* revealed:

*"I take part in many competitions and some I win and some I lose. Then I strive to improve my performance."* (X1, M, 18 years old)

Another added:

*"I really want to participate in national competitions and be the Tunisian champion. Then I can participate in*

<sup>1</sup> X stands for interviewee/ F stands for female/ M stands for male/ years old refers to age

*international competitions. My ultimate dream is to be a karate master and establish my own club.*" (X5, M, 22 years old)

And this practitioner said:

*"...even when I am losing at the start of the combat, I don't lose hope and I struggle till the very end and on many occasions I win."* (X8, F, 22 years old)

As Roland Habersetzer said, determination, will and the degree of involvement in the execution of a movement make the difference between martial artists. The one who is most resolute stands a good chance of winning the combat [Habersetzer 1986a]. Apart from improving self-confidence, this martial art also gives *karateka* the courage to defend themselves, their family or their friends in case of attack. It therefore helps to have a feeling of security. The case of this confident and self-assured practitioner can be mentioned. She reported:

*"I once participated in a competition with a very strong karateka... It was the biggest challenge of my life. Now, I fear nothing in life, I don't get stressed about exams, tests, or any situation that may shake me... When one can find solutions to difficult situations in competitions then one can obviously find others to face any problem in life."* (X8, F, 22 years old)

Another said:

*"I am always easily frightened in the street and public places; actually I have a kind of social anxiety. But from the moment that I started practicing karate I felt a lot better... I feel more confident and I have a feeling of security that wasn't there before..."* (X12, F, 14 years old)

Training should encompass the mind and body, the spirit and physical condition [Cynarski 2011]. In the *dojo*, a term deriving from the Sanskrit word '*bodhimandala*' which is the 'place of enlightenment', the spiritual dimension of karate prevails [cf. Mor-Stabilini 2013; Cynarski 2014]. *Karate* which means empty hand, refers to the freedom to use the hands and aims to create harmony, consistency and symbiosis between both the internal and the external life, so to get a well-balanced person [Cynarski 2014]. Psychological well-being is one of the main motives of practicing *karate* in Portugal [Rosa 2012]. The original Okinawan *karate* regards the competitive dimension as a hindrance to the fulfilment of the real goals of *karate* which is the personal development of its practitioners [Sieber 2001, 2011; Sieber, Cynarski 2002-2003]. That is why two opposing karate styles can be distinguished; sporting *karate* and *budo karate*. The former is based on winning competitions and getting prizes while the latter aims for self-improving, self-realization, exceeding one's limit and reaching mastery. *Budo karate* rejects the notion of rivalry and the concept of competition [Cynarski 2014].

Thirdly, *karate* is regarded as an effective way to improve the cognition, concentration, self-control and sociability of practitioners. Through practice, practitioners can be detached from their environment and

be indifferent to any disruption and concentrate only on the opponent. One *karateka* reported:

*"This sport has helped me a lot to concentrate, to control myself in different situations and specially to think before acting..."* (X1, M, 18 years old)

Another related:

*"I don't have any mental blocks and I don't back away from life's difficulties like those who don't practice karate. I can accept defeat... The biggest quality of a martial artist is their capacity to adapt to different situations. Athletes develop not only their bodies but also their spirits and mental capacities. In the beginning of my career, my performance always suffered when I found myself in another dojo. As time went by I could adapt to different situations and places. I could eventually focus only on my adversary and ignore anything disturbing in my environment."* (X5, M, 22 years)

In fact, "empty mind" refers to a spiritual state of mind, of total reception rejecting any external interference [Habersetzer 1986a]. Just like *Zen*, martial arts are generally based on the creation and concentration of energy in the here and now. Directing the spirit is the basis of every physical technique. If the mind is active, vigilant and alert, then a lot of opportunities can be seized and a lot of attacks can be avoided as well. Useless factors stemming from opponents' movements or spirit have to be ignored and the practitioner should only concentrate on the present moment in the present place. The spirit has to be like the moon, even while appears motionless, its reflection on the water is moving [Deshimaru 1983]. Furthermore, *karate* offers participants a sociable environment. In fact, their communication skills are improved; they respect their opponents, partners and judges, they overcome shyness and become more integrated within society. One of the *karateka* revealed:

*"When it comes to my social life, karate allows me to learn how to communicate and behave properly, it helps me to be calm and easy-going..."* (X5, M, 22 years old)

Another one confirmed:

*"Karateka have good behaviour. Combat teaches us how to respect others, opponents, judges..."* (X7, F, 12 years old)

And this interviewee added:

*"I was a timid person and hardly talked to anyone... but, thanks to karate, I know a lot of people and I have many friends..."* (X14, F, 11 years old)

*Karate* helps practitioners to behave properly in society [Pain 2011]. It also improves socio cognition and attention span [Palermo 2011]. Social cognitions can be defined as the understanding of social situations and the capacity to behave in an appropriate way. [Frith 2007]. Some studies have shown that *karate* is not only an effective way of social integration, but is also a form of psychotherapy. It offers treatment for neuropsychological and behavioural disorders and socio cognitive dysfunctions such as Autism and attention deficit disorder [Palermo 2011].

### 3. Social representations of karate and the socio cultural environment of karateka

Social representations of karate are influenced by the socio cultural environment of practitioners. For many of the interviewees, even though karate has a decreasing position in international broadcasting in favour of new and spectacular activities like mixed martial arts, [Cynarski 2014] their social representations are based on received ideas which come mainly from mass media, like action movies and Japanese cartoons (*manga*). One of the interviewees related:

*“I have liked martial arts since my childhood. I watched lots of Jacky Chan and Bruce Lee action movies. I have been very influenced by those movies, I imitate their movements...I have flourished and developed myself through my training...I chose it because it’s the most well-known martial art and Bruce Lee practiced Karate ...”* (X8, F, 22 years old)

Another practitioner, fascinated by Japan and influenced by *manga*, said:

*“Karate is my favourite sport; I watch lots of mangas like Samurai Champloo and Dragon Ball Z...when I am in the dojo, I take a break from the present and travel through time and space. I live in the samurai era...”* (X17, F, 17 years old)

Influenced by widely-circulating ideas which they share socially, some karateka think of their practice as an effective way to release stress, to relax and to renew energy. This was the case for this practitioner, as she explained:

*“My main reason to practice karate is unwinding and releasing stress. I am very stressed and I did nothing except studying...now I have found peace of mind and even my grades are improving...”* (X13, F, 17 years old)

Added to this, it is also regarded as a means of entertainment and as a sport which has many benefits. One of the interviewees reported:

*“Sport helps me to progress and move forward in life. It is something good and fruitful. It is a lot better than drifting aimlessly along like the majority of youths do in their free time.”* (X10, M, 21 years old)

Others are sure that karate improves their physical condition; bloodstream, endurance, muscle development, elimination of excess of fat. One of them related:

*“Running, moving and sweating are very good for health and essential to lose weight and get rid of fat...”* (X4, F, 14 years old)

Besides these factors this martial art also represents a method of self-defence. A participant reported:

*“Since there are problems of security following the 2011 revolution, I can use some effective techniques to defend myself. For me, karate is basically a means of security.”* (X13, F, 17 years old)

This is consonant with the findings of a study carried out in Poland; it showed that the most important reason to practice karate was self-defence [Kusnierz 2011]. This utilitarian aspect needed for safety, is also one of the trends in practicing karate in Europe apart from the humanistic and recreational ones [Cynarski 2014]. But bouts of combat are very different from real attack situations. That said, karate helps practitioners to develop others criteria, like reaction rate, strength, attention, and good physical condition generally. An interviewee explained that clearly:

*“A karateka can’t use all the techniques like taking one’s guard to an aggressor or do a combat where it is not allowed to injure the opponent... karate, in general, develops muscles, reflexes and organize the spirit...”* (X3, M, 15 years old)

Some don’t choose their practice; they just do as their parents tell them. It is the case of this practitioner who wanting to meet his father’s request, revealed:

*“My father is a karate master. I went to the dojo with him many times but I was uninterested. I prefer football... but my father wanted me to practice karate and have a sports career... In the beginning, I found the training boring and I ditched many training sessions. Then, as time went by, I really started to like it and now I can’t imagine my life without it...”* (X5, M, 22 years old)

Or the case of this interviewee who said:

*“It’s my father who chose karate for me, because I was very aggressive, restless and got into a lot of fights... but little by little I enjoyed practicing and I really liked it.”* (X18, M, 19 years old)

Others choose to practice karate just to imitate their friends, peers, sibling and neighbours... One of karateka related:

*“I practiced this martial art just to imitate my friends... But, as time went by, I really liked it.”* (X1, M, 18 years old)

Another one said:

*“I have been training since I was 6 years old. I wanted to be with my neighbours and friends. I had no idea about this sport, but little by little I have found myself keen on it...”* (X10, M, 21 years old)

Tab. 5. Choice of karateka

	Men	Women	Total
Karateka’s own choice	0	6	6
Family choice	3	5	8
Peer group imitation	4	2	6
Total	7	13	20



And this interviewee imitating his older brother reported:

“I practiced karate because my older brother does. I was curious to see what it was like, I just wanted to discover it...” (X3, M, 15 years old)

To Gabriel Tarde, imitation concerns an idea, a will, a judgment and a purpose, where there are certain beliefs and certain desires. Belief and desire are two psychological elements that incite individuals to invent and then to imitate [Tarde 1993].

## Conclusion

By comprehensive interviews and hierarchy evocations with 20 members of the *karate* association in El-Mourouj, a district in Tunis, social representations of *karate* have been detected. To begin with, the central nucleus is composed of the practicing forms, and the biological, psychological and sociological dimensions of this martial art. The peripheral system, in its turn, is made up of a means of entertainment, future plans, and a way of life, as well as of cognitive effects, income and Japanese culture.

In a nutshell various hypotheses are confirmed. The first is that social representations of *karate* affect the observable behaviour, emotions and mental capacities of participants. They consider their practice as a way to social integration and sociability and an effective way for psychological and cognitive development. All these effects are transposable from the *dojo* to the daily lives of the *karateka*. Secondly, social representations of *karate* are influenced by the socio cultural environment of participants. Influenced by mass media and socially shared ideas, they regard *karate* as an effective way to improve their physical condition and self-defence skills as well as a means of entertainment and stress release. Others are deeply affected by their social circle; Their parents, friends, peers and neighbours.

The results of this research basically concern a certain sample in a certain time. Naturally social representations change according to time and place [Abric 1994]. They change and evolve by training too. The role of *karate* masters is obviously undeniable in this process [Trabal, Augustini 2000].

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## Reprezentacje społeczne karate wśród młodzieży

**Słowa kluczowe:** psycho-socjologia, sztuki walki, budo, kultura, zachowanie

### Abstrakt

**Problem i cel.** Celem pracy jest przedstawienie doświadczeń uczestników badania i ich spojrzenia na karate na podstawie teorii Serge'a Moscovici i Jean Claude Abrica. Badania rzucają światło na wpływ reprezentacji społecznych na zachowanie zawodników. Pokazują również, jak te reprezentacje społeczne pozostają pod wpływem społeczno-kulturowego środowiska. **Metoda.** W badaniu brało dobrowolny udział dwudziestu członków Stowarzyszenia Karate w Tunisie. Było to 13 kobiet i 7 mężczyzn. Średnia wieku 15,9 lat (średnia wieku kobiet - 14 lat, mężczyzn - 17,8 lat). Doświadczenie sportowe wyniosło od 2 miesięcy do 15 lat (od poziomu białego do czarnego pasa). Badania zostały przeprowadzone za pomocą technik jakościowych, między innymi wywiadów (ok. 40 minut). Uczestnikom badania zadano pytania dotyczące skojarzeń, które wywołuje słowo „karate”. Następnie przytoczone odpowiedzi przedstawiono wg częstotliwości pojawiania się w wypowiedziach. **Wyniki i wnioski.** W wypowiedziach badanych pojawiło się 120 słów, które zostały sklasyfikowane w różnych kategoriach, tzw. reprezentacjach społecznych karate. Objęły one: formy ćwiczeń, biologiczne, socjologiczne i psychologiczne skutki karate. Z jednego punktu widzenia karate jest uważane przez badanych za rodzaj rozrywki, chociaż stwierdzono także, że karate to sposób życia i perspektywiczny plan. Z drugiej strony odkryto efekty poznawcze, wpływ ideowy i fascynację kulturą Japonii. Poza tym wykazano, że reprezentacje społeczne karate determinują zachowanie zawodników, ich procesy poznawcze oraz emocje. Reprezentacje społeczne są określane przez środowisko społeczno-kulturowe karateków (media, rodziców, przyjaciół, rodzeństwo i rówieśników).

