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Choosing MSc tracks at the Faculty of Architecture

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Abstract

The Faculty of Architecture features five MSc tracks and several MSc programmes (see Figure 1), but just one BSc programme provides a broad base. In this programme, students take modules from six curricula (*leerlijnen*) that are not directly coupled to the MSc programmes. This research centres on how students choose an MSc programme, which is largely unknown. The findings show that most students enter the faculty with a predetermined plan of what to study after the BSc degree. The largest share plans to choose the MSc track in architecture, and stick to it. Nevertheless, students experience doubt during their education and choice process, and for a considerable group, the doubt remains after they have chosen a path. The doubt might be linked to the awareness of the MSc programmes on offer, the relations between curricula and MSc programmes, sources of information, and the way in which certain modules spark enthusiasm. For some curricula, including the AC (*academische vaardigheden*: academic skills) and MSc tracks (Management in the Built Environment and Landscape Architecture), the relations are very weak.

Keywords

Choice, specialisation, building technology, urbanism, landscape architecture, management in the built environment

COVER FIGURE Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment, from *TU Delft Mediaportal*, by CheeseWorks, 2022

1 Motivation

There is little knowledge about how students choose their MSc track to continue their studies at the Faculty of Architecture within the MSc programme Architecture, Urbanism, and Building Sciences. Amongst the staff, there is a strong belief that the majority of students enter the faculty with a clear desire to become an architect, which is one of the MSc tracks on offer. The other MSc tracks include urbanism, building technology, landscape architecture, and management in the built environment. It is the belief that students choose these tracks when they have discovered that architecture is in some way not what they thought it would be, when one of the other tracks appears more attractive, or when they discover their skill set is not well matched with architectural design. How students choose their MSc track is interesting since roughly half of the students in the MSc are attracted directly from their own BSc (see Table 1). For each MSc track, the relationship between the BSc and MSc differs as they attract a different percentage of participants directly from the BSc.

To investigate how students are drawn to an MSc track and how they choose their specialisation, a questionnaire was sent to explore how they chose their MSc track quantitatively. The questionnaire consisted of 20 questions and took a maximum of 10 minutes to answer, as most of the questions were closed (i.e. 'yes' or 'no' questions). The questionnaire asked about knowledge of different specialisations, moments of awareness and choice, and the relationship between courses and specialisations.

2 Some background and key figures

The Faculty of Architecture offers four separate MSc programmes and five different specialisations – or tracks – within the MSc Architecture, Urbanism, and Building Sciences (see Table 1). In addition to these core curricula, there are additional MSc programmes connected to other faculties in Delft (an overview is provided in Figure 1).

BSc/MSc/TRACKS	# 1 ST YEAR STUDENTS 19-20
BSc Bouwkunde (Dutch only)	379
MSc Geomatics	33
MSc Geographical Information Management and Applications (GIMA)	n/a
MSc Metropolitan Analysis, Design, and Engineering (MADE)	36
MSc Architecture, Urbanism, and Building Sciences (AUBS), five MSc tracks:	692 (264 directly from BSc)
Architecture (A)	518
Building Technology (BT)	42
Landscape Architecture (LA)	21
Management in the Built Environment (MBE)	45
Urbanism (U)	66

TABLE 1 Faculty of Architecture MSc courses and MSc tracks, by O&S BK



FIGURE 1 The broad BSc Bouwkunde, the several MSc programmes, and the five MSc tracks of the AUBS MSc programme of the faculty of Architecture, by author, 2024.

For the questionnaire, all BSc students who registered for an MSc track after the summer of 2020 and all students who entered an MSc track from the BSc during the 2019–2020 academic year were invited to participate by email (June 2020). Overall, 172 students answered, and 151 questionnaires were completed fully by respondents belonging to the target group (July 2020). The overall response rate was 32% (see Table 2).

	INVITED TO PARTICIPATE*	RESPONSE	% RESPONSE
BSc (to start MSc after summer)	185	75	41%
MSc (finishing 1 st year MSc)	289	76	26%
Total	471	151	32%

TABLE 2 Response (*invitations were sent by O&S BK)

TRACKS	# REGISTERED 19-20*	% 19-20	% RESPONSE
Architecture (A)	166	72%	54%
Building Technology (BT)	12	5%	7%
Landscape Architecture (LA)	4	2%	4%
Management in the Built Environment (MBE)	27	12%	17%
Urbanism (U)	23	10%	18%
Total (n)	232		151

TABLE 3 The registration in tracks is limited to students who previously were in the BSc Architecture programme in Delft, compared to participants in the questionnaire (*data from O&S BK)

The average age of respondents was 23.2 when starting the MSc, and 47% of the respondents identified as female. The median time students spend in the BSc programme is 41 months, and the respondents finishing their BSc had spent, on average, 42 months. In total, 50% of the responses came from students starting their MSc after the summer of 2020, and the other half were busy finishing their first year of MSc studies. The response was representative of the student population in the faculty (see Table 3).

3 Findings

A majority (58%) of the students who attended the BSc of Architecture intended to follow an MSc track within the same faculty, of which 66% wanted to enrol in the MSc track of Architecture, making up 39% of the first-year students. However, most students – 53% (42% + 11%) – had no clear plan of what MSc or track to choose when they enrolled in the BSc (see Table 4).

MSc PLAN?	#	%	TRACK PLAN ?	#	%	# CHOSEN INITIALLY
Did have a plan	88	58%	Architecture (A)	59	39%	54
			Building Technology (BT)	3	2%	3
			Landscape Architecture (LA)	0	0%	0
			Management in the Built Environment (MBE)	4	3%	3
			Urbanism (U)	6	4%	5
			Did not know track	17	11%	
Did not have a plan	63	42%			42%	

TABLE 4 What MSc or track to choose when enrolling at the faculty

During their BSc studies, students become increasingly aware of the different tracks. However, it may not be until their final semester that BSc students learn about all of the different MSc options. Most students choose their track to continue their studies only when the deadline for MSc enrolment arrives: halfway through the 6th and last BSc semester (see Table 5).

	BECAME AWARE OF TRACKS	CHOSE A TRACK
Pre-semester 1	1%	1%
Semester 1	16%	5%
Semester 2	11%	0%
Semester 3	22%	3%
Semester 4	20%	4%
Semester 5	14%	23%
Semester 6	15%	54%
After semester 6	0%	5%
Do not remember / no response	3%	5%

TABLE 5 The moment students became aware of MSc tracks and when they made their choice

Students consulted different sources of information to inform their choices. Three main sources stand out: website, informational meetings, and fellow students. When asked to identify the most important source of information in their decision-making process, students also indicated the website and informational meetings and added that their internship experience was also a factor (see Table 6). There were differences between tracks, but website and informational meetings are essential to all of them.

	SOURCES USED	MOST INFLUENTIAL	MOST INFLUENTIAL SOURCE PER TRACK
Website	82%	23%	A (27%), BT (30%), U (19%), MBE (12%), LA (17%)
Informational meetings	59%	17%	A (20%), U (15%), MBE (12%), LA (17%)
Fellow student	68%	10%	BT (20%), MBE (19%)
Flyers	38%	3%	LA (17%)
Family / friends	37%	9%	A (11%)
Former student	32%	5%	
Internship	32%	15%	A (12%), LA (33%), MBE (23%), U (15%)
Minor (BSc-5)	31%	6%	BT (20%), U (15%), LA (17%)

TABLE 6 Information sources for choosing an MSc track, most influential sources, and preference (per track)

Many students considered several MSc tracks before making a final decision, and most were interested in the MSc in architecture. In line with their relative share within the MSc population, fewer students considered building technology and landscape architecture (see Table 7). Half of the students continued to consider another MSc track after making their choice. Some of the alternatives under consideration were from another faculty, and some were from outside TU Delft. Nine registered students switched faculties from BSc to MSc in 2018–2019 (O&S data).

	CONSIDERED TRACK	STILL CONSIDERING ANOTHER TRACK	KNEW TRACK AT START OF THE BSc
Architecture	82%	48%	80%
Building Technology	30%	70%	100%
Landscape Architecture	24%	100%	0%
MBE	41%	27%	25%
Urbanism	49%	63%	45%

TABLE 7 Consideration of tracks during choice, after choice, and the relationship to students' intention at the start of their BSc studies

4 Relations between BSc courses and MSc tracks

The modules offered in the BSc are organised into six different curricula (*leerlijnen*, see Figure 2), and the students pointed out that some modules and some curricula (*leerlijnen*) spark more enthusiasm for a certain MSc track. The relation is strongest for the MSc track in architecture and the design curricula ('ON' for *ontwerpen*, specifically ON1,2,4,6), 'GR' (all GR modules considering *grondslagen*: theoretical basics) and 'OV' (all modules considering communication techniques, *overdrachtstechnieken*). Students who chose the MSc track in architecture mentioned modules from these three curricula frequently as sparking enthusiasm to choose the track. The 'TE' curriculum (Technology) led to enthusiasm for the MSc track in building technology and the MSc in architecture.

The 'MA' curriculum (*maatschappij, proces en praktijk*: society, process, and practice) caused the greatest interest in the MSc track MBE, some interest in urbanism, and little for architecture. The MSc track in urbanism drew some students from the 'ON' and 'GR' curricula (increases with each GR module).

For some modules, the relationship was stronger: ON3 and ON5 focus more on the urban and regional scale, for example. The MSc track in landscape architecture performed similarly to the MSc track in urbanism and drew most students from the ON3 and ON5 modules but also from GR4 (see Table 8 for an overview). Clearly, the MA, OV and AC (*academische vaardigheden*: academic skills) curricula were of the least assistance in sparking enthusiasm for specific MSc tracks. However, for individual tracks, such as building technology, the number of students interested in the modules represented a large share of the students who chose the building technology track. This relationship exists between the MA modules and the MBE track as well.

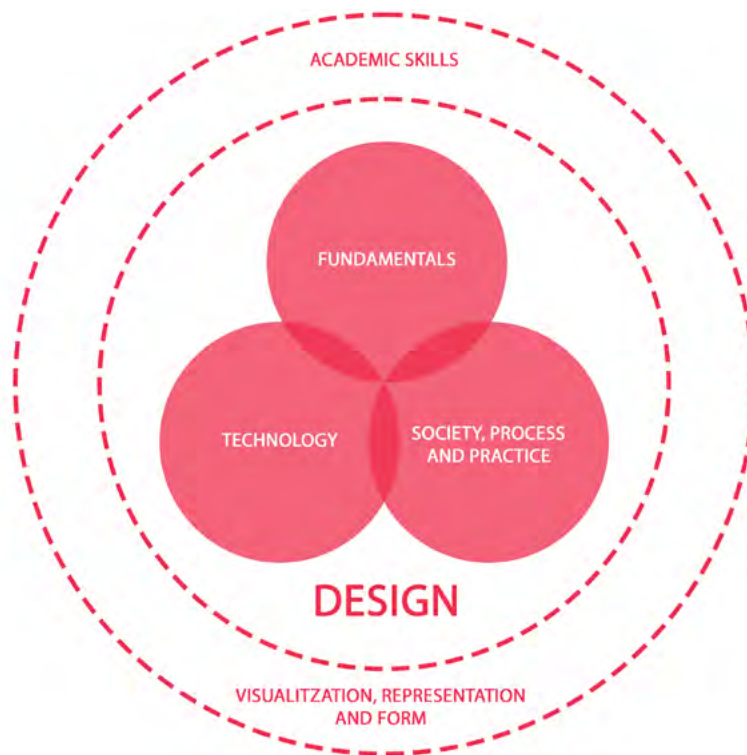


FIGURE 2 The 2013-2024 BSc curriculum concept with 6 throughlines: Academic Skills (AC); Visualisation, Representation and Form (OV); Fundamentals (GR); Technology (TE); Society, Process and Practice (MA); and Design (ON), drawn by author based on information Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment, 2024.

Q12 / Q11	A	U	MBE	BT	LA	AVERAGE
AC 1	4%	4%	15%	0%	0%	5%
AC 2	6%	0%	15%	0%	0%	4%
AC 3	15%	7%	27%	10%	0%	12%
GR 1	27%	0%	0%	0%	17%	9%
GR 2	33%	7%	0%	0%	0%	8%
GR 3	40%	22%	4%	0%	17%	17%
GR 4	37%	56%	4%	0%	33%	26%
MA 1	1%	15%	35%	0%	0%	10%
MA 2	2%	11%	31%	0%	0%	9%
MA 3	2%	7%	54%	0%	0%	13%
ON 1	57%	0%	8%	0%	0%	13%
ON 2	54%	0%	4%	10%	0%	14%
ON 3	18%	74%	8%	0%	67%	33%
ON 4	72%	30%	8%	10%	17%	27%
ON 5	22%	85%	73%	0%	50%	46%
ON 6	84%	7%	4%	80%	17%	38%
OV 1	34%	0%	0%	0%	0%	7%
OV 2	34%	0%	0%	10%	0%	9%
OV 3	21%	0%	0%	20%	17%	11%
TE 1	5%	0%	0%	20%	0%	5%
TE 2	6%	0%	0%	20%	0%	5%
TE 3	9%	0%	0%	30%	0%	8%
TE 4	18%	0%	0%	40%	0%	12%
TE 5	29%	0%	0%	60%	0%	18%

TABLE 8 Percentage of students who chose a track and mentioned a BSc module as sparking their interest in it

5 Conclusions

Most students (58%) enter the Architecture BSc programme with a predetermined idea to study for an MSc after their BSc degree, specifically the MSc in architecture. At the same time, 42% of the students had no clear plan and little idea of what MSc programmes were offered. A large group of students doubted their initial preference or started to doubt it during their BSc, and almost half of the students still considered other MSc tracks while enrolled in the MSc track of their choice. The predetermined idea and level of doubt might relate to a relatively late awareness of the different MSc track options: in the course the second year more than half of the students become aware of the different tracks and options. It could also result from the vague content provided about certain tracks or weak links between modules and curricula in the BSc and MSc tracks. Some BSc modules clearly relate to specific tracks and spark enthusiasm for a specific one, like the ON modules do for the architecture track. Other modules, as in the AC curriculum, deliver more generic skills and lack a clear relationship to any enthusiasm for a particular MSc track.

Another key finding is that students receive information about the tracks during the BSc programme, which they gather from different sources. Further clarification and information about choices, relations between modules and tracks, and 'formal' information channels are key. Some of the tracks, mostly MBE and LA,

might consider putting more emphasis on the courses related to their tracks and ‘advertising’ their track – not only within the BSc but also providing information to prospective BSc students.

The power of the advertisement, as well as insight into the choice process, what students consider, what activities they undertake, and what doubts they have, call for further exploration. Given the BSc renewal in 2024, it would be interesting to repeat the study and supplement it with a focus group to explore the choice process in-depth.

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Back: Students working into the evening in the modelshop at Bouwkunde, TU Delft (Photo by Frank van der Hoeven)

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