

# The end of an era, start of new beginnings

The legacy of the Women's Studies section at the  
Faculty of Architecture in Delft (1978-1998)

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Title: A women's consultation. Source: Noortje Weenink, "Veertig jaar na Vrouwenstudies: een post-feministisch tijdperk?" *Archined*, accessed March 10, 2021, <https://www.archined.nl/2021/02/veertig-jaar-na-vrouwenstudies-een-post-feministisch-tijdperk/>

## Abstract

This thesis focuses on the Women's Studies section at the Faculty of Architecture in Delft, active from 1978 to 1998. The initial goal of the section was to contribute to the elimination of women's oppression by expanding the knowledge of this social reality. The emergence of the second feminist wave in 1960 in the Netherlands motivated women to establish female study groups, to link societal changes to the academic content. In 1977, architecture students in Delft followed this trend and organized female consultations at the Faculty of Architecture. They started sharing personal experiences concerning the women's movement linked to their position within the faculty and the architectural profession in general. Despite internal disagreement from the faculty's dean, the consultations ultimately led to the official course of Women's Studies in 1978. The goal of the course shifted during the first years from the "oppression of women in the built environment" into a more scientific field of the "construction of gender differences". In 1986, staff members started questioning the future of the section. They believed that two scenarios were possible for the development of Women's Studies: the section could continue as a separate study field or integrate with existing research areas. Unfortunately, for the future of feminist studies at the Faculty of Architecture neither of these scenarios became reality. The section lost its support, and therefore the needed money flow, and got disbanded in 1998. The aim of this research is to link recent questions concerning the position of women in architecture to the achievements of the Women's Studies section 40 years ago. The current activism is linked to the persistent gender gap in architectural practice, which shows that the topics covered by the Women's Studies course are still relevant today. In the current women's movement, the subject goes beyond the oppression of women and into intersectionality, in which the societal discrimination of multiple social groups comes to light. To bring about actual change, listening to and talking with the students is not enough. They need the right resources to take that next step in the women's movement to eliminate inequality and exclusion in universities.

Keywords – Women's Studies, architectural education, female oppression, Anna Vos, Heidi De Mare, intersectionality, Delft University of Technology

## Preface

As a female architecture student, I've felt under-represented during my education at the Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment in Delft. I'm mostly taught about great male architects like Le Corbusier and Frank Lloyd Wright, but female representation is necessary for students, like myself, and architects in practice to feel included. Because I sometimes feel out of place, I was surprised to learn that a Women's Studies section once existed at the Faculty of Architecture. Why had I never heard of this? What have they achieved in their active years? Why was this section disbanded in 1998? What is left of the course and where is it now? All these questions combined explain the reasons behind my motivation for writing this history thesis. Because I feel under-represented, I questioned the achievements of the section at the beginning of my research. When I concluded it, my perspective changed; the section was fighting for something else, something greater, which I now benefit from. For an architecture student in 2021, it is interesting to read how some values, that seem normal today, had to be fought for in the previous century.

The extensive archive of the Women's Studies section at the Faculty of Architecture gave me the insight I needed. Primary sources like records, notes, reports, letters, all donated by Anna Vos in 2017 to the Department of Architectural History and Urban Planning, helped me find the reason behind what happened in the previous century regarding the ending of Women's Studies. This thesis is written for the course AR2A011 Architectural History Thesis, which is part of the MSc2 of Architecture, Urbanism and Building Sciences at the Delft University of Technology.

I hope you enjoy reading this architectural history thesis.

Mirthe Andriessen

Delft, April 2021

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# 1. Introduction

Men formed a large majority in architectural education in Delft until 2018<sup>1</sup>. This is partly because education at the University of Technology was originally designed by and for men only. Although the first female students started studying in Delft in 1905<sup>2</sup>, women were strongly discouraged from studying and working in The Netherlands until 1957. Women who got married were declared incapacitated by the government: they lacked the ability to perform a specified act or function<sup>3</sup>. The long-term effect was that the technical university in Delft was strongly male dominated for decades<sup>2</sup>. A primary shift started during the first and second feminist wave in The Netherlands in the 20th century, which contributed to the changed view on and position of women in Dutch society<sup>4</sup>. The first feminist wave (1870-1920) slightly improved the opportunities for unmarried women to study or practice a specific profession. During the second feminist wave (1960-1980) the opportunities for women in higher education and the acceptance for married women to contribute to family income grew further.

In 1974, women felt the need to link the societal changes to the study content of Dutch universities, where the number of women started growing<sup>5</sup>. They organized female consultation groups in which they discussed their position within the women's movement and academia. The aim was to contribute to the elimination of female oppression in society by analysing and theorising its origin and function and to improve the position of women in scientific practice in Dutch universities. Feminist research made its way into the academic field of architecture in Delft in 1977, mostly because of the influence of Teacher's Assistant Anna Vos on architectural education<sup>6</sup>.

Now, 40 years later, the number of female students in architectural education in Delft is just as high as the number of male students<sup>1</sup>. However, female architecture students and staff are again asking questions regarding the position of women in architectural education and the reason behind the persistent gender gap in architectural education<sup>7</sup> and the profession<sup>8</sup>. With this research, the achievements of Women's Studies and the reasons behind the recent concern for women in architecture come to light. Where do these new questions concerning female inclusion come from and where does the new generation meet the old?

Primary and archival sources are used for this research, as well as qualitative data collected from recent publications. In the last five years Charlotte van Wijk, Noortje Weenink, Veerle Alkemade, and Rixt Hoekstra all wrote about the role of Women's Studies in architectural education in Delft. To be able to compare new work with old, the archive of Women's Studies offers a great deal of help. This archive consists of old seminar notes, reports of meetings, letters from staff member Anna Vos, and the publications of *Vrouwen en de Stad*, written by Heidi de Mare, Anna Vos and Lisl Edhoffer. The first part of these publications

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<sup>1</sup> "Student population," TU Delft, accessed April 7, 2021, <https://www.tudelft.nl/en/about-tu-delft/facts-and-figures/education/student-population>

<sup>2</sup> "Novieten: Eerstejaarsstudenten van de TH en TU Delft in de periode 1905-2018," Academisch Erfgoed TU Delft, accessed March 14, 2021, <https://erfgoed.tudelft.nl/nl/exhibitions/novieten>

<sup>3</sup> Corjo Jansen, "De Lex-Van Oven: 50 jaar opheffing handelingsonbekwaamheid van de gehuwde vrouw," *Nederlands Juristenblad* 81, no. 23 (June 2006): 1256.

<sup>4</sup> Rixt Hoekstra, "Second-Wave Feminism in Dutch Universities: Revisiting the Work of Feminist Scholars and Its Consequences for Dutch Architectural History," *Architectural Histories* 8, no. 1 (2020): 3.

<sup>5</sup> Margo Brouns, *Veertien jaar Vrouwenstudies in Nederland; een overzicht* (Groningen: RION, 1988), 8.

<sup>6</sup> Hoekstra, "Second-Wave Feminism in Dutch Universities," 6.

<sup>7</sup> 66% male and 34% female staff at the TU Delft. "Staff," TU Delft, accessed April 8, 2021, <https://www.tudelft.nl/en/about-tu-delft/facts-and-figures/staff>

<sup>8</sup> 72% male and 28% female architects in The Netherlands in 2018. Bureau Architectenregister, *Jaarverslag 2018*, (Den Haag: Bureau Architectenregister, 2018), 12. <https://www.architectenregister.nl/media/1096/jaarverslag-2018-def.pdf>

gives insight into the goal of Women's Studies at the Faculty of Architecture and the second part is a collection of influential texts, combined for the course.

This research starts with the origin of Women's Studies in The Netherlands in 1974 and explores their goals and achievements. It particularly focusses on the reasons behind the start of Women's Studies at the Faculty of Architecture in 1978 and the end of the official course in 1998. Were there any apparent flaws in the course? Was the course simply not needed in architectural education anymore? This thesis does not deal with the theoretical content of the course, but only with the practical status of the course chronologically. Since Women's Studies are no longer part of the curriculum in the original format, the research will conclude with a link to present times to examine the cause of the recent questions concerning women in architecture.

The course of Women's Studies started in 1974 with the ambitious goal of discovering a way to end female oppression but shifted into a less active and more scientific field of the "construction of gender differences" in 1983<sup>9</sup>. In Delft, they tackled the question of the role of public housing on the view of women in society. The existence of Women's Studies was always dependent on a continuous money flow. Ultimately, the Women's Studies section at the Faculty of Architecture got disbanded in 1998 due to the lack of support by the faculty's management.

Although women are no longer a minority at the faculty in 2021 and there are less barriers for women to practice science, a call for more inclusivity at the university has taken over the interest of recent feminist groups<sup>10</sup>. The year 2020 has left us a changed world. A pandemic did not stop people from expressing their concerns and frustrations in society, and today, we are experiencing the so-called 'fourth feminist wave'. The world, and therefore architecture, is in constant change and education should follow. What better time to pick up where the previous generation left of than now?

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<sup>9</sup> Charlotte van Wijk, "Women's Studies at the Architecture Department of Delft Technical University," In *Women's creativity since the Modern Movement (1918-2018): Toward a new perception and reception*, ed. Caterina Franchini, Emilia Maria Garda, Helena Seražin (Ljubljana: France Stele Institute of Art History, 2018), 193-200: 197.

<sup>10</sup> Noortje Weenink, "Veertig jaar na Vrouwenstudies: een post-feministisch tijdperk?" *Archined*, date of publication February 9, 2021, accessed March 15, 2021, <https://www.archined.nl/2021/02/veertig-jaar-na-vrouwenstudies-een-post-feministisch-tijdperk/>

## 2. The beginning of Women's Studies (1974-1983)

At the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the role of women as housewives prevailed in The Netherlands<sup>11</sup>. This idea started to change slowly during the second feminist wave in which several women's organizations arose. The *Man-Vrouw-Maatschappij* [Man-Woman-Society] was founded in 1968 and fought for a new social order with equal rights and duties for men and women<sup>12</sup>. The women's group *Dolle Mina* [Mad Mina] formed a left-wing alternative in 1969 as a reaction to the elitist character of MVM. The first women support groups were established in 1972 in which women started to analyse their societal position and their daily experiences with the power relationship between men and women.

### 2.1. Women's Studies in The Netherlands

The second feminist wave entered the Dutch academic field in 1974, because of the arrival of the first feminist study groups at universities in Amsterdam, Nijmegen, Utrecht<sup>13</sup>. The study groups wanted to approach the women's movement from a theoretical point of view and organized meetings about the position of women within universities. The emergence of Women's Studies would have been impossible without the existence of a women's movement.

The book *Veertien jaar Vrouwenstudies in Nederland* [Fourteen years Women's Studies in the Netherlands] by Margo Brouns describes the complex development of Women's Studies in the Netherlands. The first phase of feminist practice in the academic field consists of looking for the origins and functioning of women's oppression, with the ultimate goal of changing this social reality. It is assumed that differences between men and women are not biologically founded, but socially and historically constructed. The subjective experience of women is the initial research object: they discussed their own position within universities and reviewed written texts about the female role in society. In 1983, the object of analysis shifted from the concept of women's oppression to the asymmetrical power relations between the sexes and their broader social contexts<sup>14</sup>. Women's Studies ultimately changed into "Gender Studies", which is not only about gaining insight into the position of women but also relates to the historically changing categories "masculinity" and "femininity".

### 2.2. The origin of Women's Studies at the Faculty of Architecture in Delft

In Delft, a group of female architecture students started sharing personal experiences concerning the women's movement in 1977<sup>15</sup>. They linked their changing societal position to their position within the faculty and in architectural practice<sup>16</sup>. There was a growing need to relate the subjects that developed during these meetings to the curriculum. The plan was to organize a seminar within the architecture study program to investigate the subordinate position of women in relation to broader societal developments and the domestic field of architecture. The women's group, which was called *Vrouwen en Architectuur* [Women and Architecture], was led by Annerieke (Anna) Vos. She was a Teacher's Assistant for architecture professor Max Risselada.

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<sup>11</sup> Hoekstra, "Second-Wave Feminism in Dutch Universities," 3.

<sup>12</sup> Brouns, *Veertien jaar Vrouwenstudies in Nederland*, 7.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>15</sup> Archive 'Vrouwenstudies Bouwkunde', Annerieke Vos, "Inleiding van Projektradar nummer 9," 1978.

<sup>16</sup> Anna Vos, *2 jaar vrouwenstudies*. (Delft: PWG Projektraad TH Delft, 1979), 6.

The women's consultations and their initiative for the seminar faced a great deal of resistance from the dean of the faculty, which was revealed in the monthly periodical of the faculty in 1987. *B-nieuws* published a text about dean Peter Pennink in which he compares the group of female students to a knitting club and the result of the seminar to a cake, which causes frustration among the group of female students<sup>17</sup>. To express their anger, the women's group posted a cartoon in *B-Nieuws* that depicts the dean pierced with knitting needles (figure 1). This cartoon caused some commotion within the faculty.

Pennink: "What's the result [of the seminar]?  
A thesis?"

Vos: "In any case, a visible piece of work!"

Pennink: "Oh, a cake for sure?"<sup>18</sup>



Figure 1. Cartoon of Dean Pennink. (1987), *B-nieuws*: announcements from the Department of Architecture, 12(7): 122

Since Anna Vos was a Teacher's Assistant for professor Max Risselada, he gave her permission to start the seminar, despite the dean's opposing words<sup>19</sup>. But because of the uncertainty regarding her position as Teacher's Assistant, it took a year to organize an experimental seminar on Women's Studies. A letter from Vos to the group explains the delay of the seminar (figure 2).

A big gap between the political preferences of female architecture students caused some friction too. Those who voted for right-wing political parties did not associate themselves with those on the left-wing (feminist activists)<sup>20</sup>. Despite this disagreement, 22 female architecture students joined the course in the first semester<sup>21</sup>, and 19 women and one man in the second semester. Those were considered high numbers<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> Author unknown, "Vrouwen" in *B-nieuws: mededelingen van de Afdeling der Bouwkunde* 12, no. 9 (1987): 170.

<sup>18</sup> Pennink: "Wat is het resultaat? Een scriptie?" - Vos: "In elk geval een zichtbaar werkstuk!" - Pennink: "Oh, een taart zeker?"

<sup>19</sup> Veerle Alkemade, "Feminisme en architectuuronderwijs: een onderzoek naar de afdeling Vrouwenstudies op de faculteit Bouwkunde aan de TU Delft," Thesis, (TU Delft, 2018): 17.

<sup>20</sup> Vos, *2 jaar vrouwenstudies*, 36.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 19.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 25.



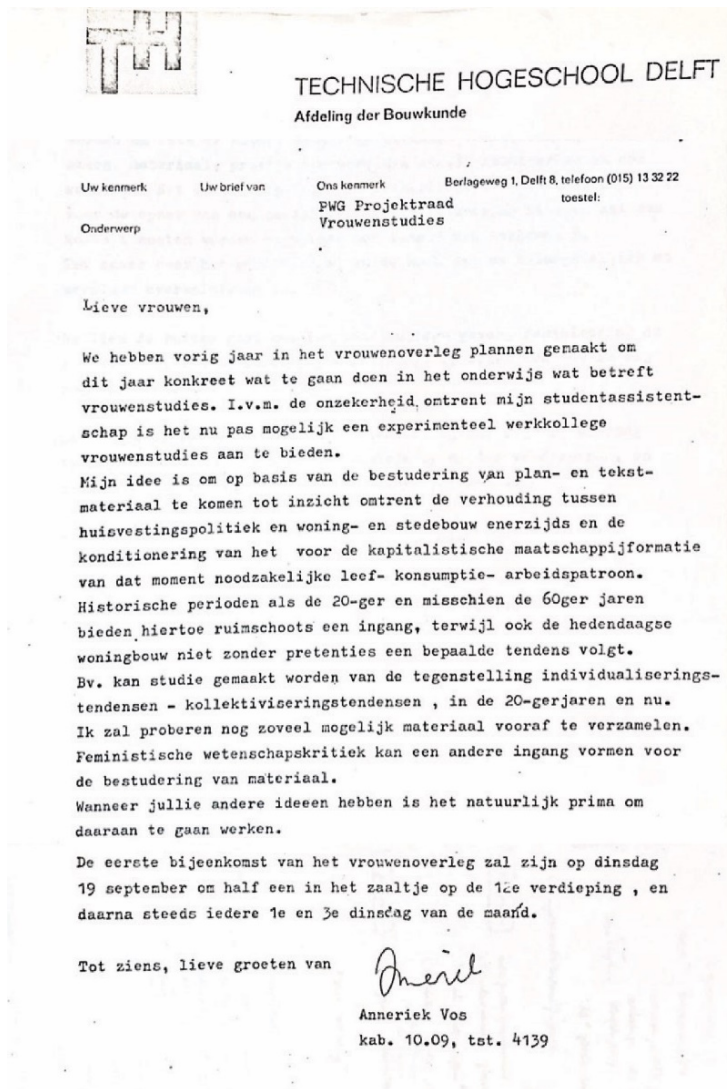


Figure 2. A part of a letter to the women of Women and Architecture. Archive 'Vrouwenstudies Bouwkunde'. Annerieke (Anna) Vos. PWG Projectraad Vrouwenstudies. Technische Hogeschool Delft, Afdeling der Bouwkunde. Augustus 1978.

Just as other Women's Studies courses in The Netherlands, the first aim of the seminar is to develop an understanding of the origin and functioning of the subordination of women and to acquire knowledge that contributes to the elimination of female oppression. The course included discussing and researching written literature about the role of women in society and the built environment, as well as their oppressive position within domestic surroundings<sup>23</sup>. They assumed that the arrangement of spaces helps produce the subordinate position of women in specific social formations and that it should be possible to translate a feminist social program into design<sup>24</sup>. But Women's Studies was there not only to design a better world, but also to do historical research and analyse social housing programs and the relationship between the position of men and women. On the other hand, they believed that this historical research could help to develop new strategies and thus ensure cultural and societal change<sup>25</sup>.

The women's group did not only show her dissatisfaction with the female position in society, but also within the faculty itself and its curriculum content. The students were asked if they designed collective homes, for which demand was increasing in society, but they did not<sup>26</sup>. They were mostly thought about single-family housing.

To change the subordinate position of women in the entire faculty, they aimed for an integration of their feminist theories in other architectural departments. The goal was not to develop an isolated specialism, but that changes would eventually occur in the faculty as a whole<sup>27</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> Vos, *2 jaar vrouwenstudies*, 15.

<sup>24</sup> Lisl Edhoffer, Heidi de Mare, and Anna Vos, *Vrouwen en de Stad: Deel 1*, (Delft: Technische Hogeschool Delft, 1986), 11.

<sup>25</sup> Vos, *2 jaar vrouwenstudies*, 13.

<sup>26</sup> Archive 'Vrouwenstudies Bouwkunde', Author unknown, "Inleiding: Waarom Vrouwenstudies op Bouwkunde?" (1980).

<sup>27</sup> Archive 'Vrouwenstudies Bouwkunde', Author unknown, "Voorstel voor een programma voor vrouwenstudies op bouwkunde," (1980).

### 2.3. The evaluation of the Women's Studies course

Letters from 1978 from the Women's Studies archive show the fears of Anna Vos about the future of the seminar. Because of the vulnerable position in the department, the help of all the participants is needed. Vos writes: "I feel quite insecure. (...) Help everyone to ensure that the women's seminar can be continued properly. I can't do that on my own"<sup>28</sup>. The opinion and feedback from the participants of Women's Studies were used to improve the course in future editions. The course was never a predetermined program but was based on the input of the students<sup>29</sup>.

The evaluation on the first two semesters, written in *Twee jaar Vrouwenstudies* [Two years of Women's Studies] in 1979, gave a clear overview of the internal and structural problems of the course. Firstly, it was concluded that the groups were too big to have a smooth, efficient discussion, which was needed to share personal experiences and to save time to discuss different points of interest in the field of Women's Studies<sup>30</sup>. The participation of men was questioned too. The motivation for and relationship to the course varied between men and women. Women wanted to learn about themselves and their position within society, while male students came to learn about others<sup>31</sup>. The section was afraid of men generalizing the issues of women.

The value of the Women's Studies course was often questioned within the faculty. Because of this hostility and distrust towards Women's Studies, the section was tempted to focus more on fast and feasible results instead of theory. The input of personal stories was therefore considered important to complement the theoretical input, but there was an internal disagreement about the value of contributing one's own experience to the research. Women who worked more analytically did not immediately feel the need to bring their own experiences into the group<sup>32</sup>. The choice between theoretical or action-oriented work was something to carefully consider.

A new proposal for the academic year 1979/1980 was based on the evaluation of the previous editions of the course<sup>33</sup>. The course would be divided into two parts: a reading seminar and a themed seminar. The purpose of the reading seminar is to gain knowledge about the subordinate position of women in the scientific and the architectural field. This insight can subsequently be used for the research done in the themed seminar<sup>34</sup>. By separately studying and discussing the obligated readings for the course there would be more time to focus on theoretical results<sup>35</sup>. On top of that, they implemented a new requirement for students to join the course: being a woman<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> Anneriek (Anna) Vos, PWG Projectraad Vrouwenstudies, Technische Hogeschool Delft, Afdeling der Bouwkunde, October 27 1978. "Ik voel me nogal onzeker. (...) Help dan ook allemaal mee ervoor te zorgen dat het vrouwenwerkcollege goed voortgezet kan worden. In mijn eentje lukt me dat niet."

<sup>29</sup> Archive 'Vrouwenstudies Bouwkunde', Anna Vos, "Werkafspraken themawerkcollege vrouwenstudies kollektivering," 1979/1980.

<sup>30</sup> Vos, *2 jaar vrouwenstudies*, 27.

<sup>31</sup> Archive 'Vrouwenstudies Bouwkunde', Author unknown, "Uitgangspunten van vrouwenstudies," (1986), 13.

<sup>32</sup> Archive 'Vrouwenstudies Bouwkunde', Author unknown, "Vrouwenstudies op Bouwkunde," year unknown.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Archive 'Vrouwenstudies Bouwkunde', Anna Vos, "Beleidsnota Vrouwenstudies Bouwkunde 1980," October 22 1980.

<sup>35</sup> Vos, *2 jaar vrouwenstudies*, 32.

<sup>36</sup> Archive 'Vrouwenstudies Bouwkunde', Anna Vos, "Omschrijving werkcollege studiejaar 1979/1980," 1979.

### 3. Essential moments for Women's Studies at the Faculty of Architecture (1983-1987)

Since Women's Studies was not considered a core subject in the curriculum, and, therefore, a future was not guaranteed, the need for a permanent academic employee started to grow in 1980<sup>37</sup>. To achieve this, they composed a strong team that coordinates education and research related to Women's Studies<sup>38</sup>. A permanent academic spot becomes more likely when the section has a strong and steady foundation on which a permanent employee could rely. But even the composition of this team is a long and complicated process, which stirs up some frustration on Vos's side: "Turning around in circles makes me grumpy."<sup>39</sup> A lot of questions should be solved beforehand: How big should the team be? What is the relationship with the rest of the department? How do you make sure Women's Studies don't live in isolation in the faculty? Ultimately, the board of the faculty believes it is important to strive for a scientific employee in Women's Studies to ensure more continuity<sup>40</sup>. According to the profile description of the academic employee, a familiarity with the state of feminist theories and an interest in the improvement of the societal position of women are required. If it would not be possible to find a candidate who met these requirements, the spot would be split up<sup>41</sup>. Eventually, after four uncertain years, it is Anna Vos, together with art historian Heidi de Mare, who gained a shared permanent position in 1984<sup>42</sup>.

#### 3.1. A change of direction

Although Vos and De Mare achieved a permanent spot in 1984, they had already made collective changes to the course content the year before. The course moved away from the concept of women's oppression and the idea of direct societal improvement through design in 1983 and started questioning how genders could stimulate the power of both within urban rituals<sup>43</sup>. They took distance from the involvement with direct architectural practice because they saw architecture as an intellectual discipline and not just a method of building. Instead, the section wanted to understand the differentiated impact of societal changes on the issues of women and link the architectural discipline to the social and political strategies at that time<sup>44</sup>.

According to the research by Veerle Alkemade, this new theoretical approach of the Women's Studies section led to some resistance within the Chair of Architecture. The seminars still fell under the responsibility of architecture professor Max Risselada, but the course content did not fit with the rest of the architectural curriculum anymore. These new theories did not create direct means to build or design. The theoretical approach made the course more fitting for the Chair of History, Media and Theory, with Franziska Bollerey as responsible professor<sup>45</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> Vos, *2 jaar vrouwenstudies*, 37.

<sup>38</sup> Archive 'Vrouwenstudies Bouwkunde', Annerieke (Anna) Vos, "Werkgroep i.o. vrouwenstudies op bouwkunde: notitie van Annerieke," February 5 1980.

<sup>39</sup> "Ik word sjagrijnig van het in cirkels rondraaien."

<sup>40</sup> Archive 'Vrouwenstudies Bouwkunde', Loes Verhaart, "Notulen werkgroep vrouwenstudies," September 17 1980.

<sup>41</sup> Archive 'Vrouwenstudies Bouwkunde', Author unknown, "Profielchets en vakature wetenschappelijk medewerkster vrouwenstudies (1,0)," 1980.

<sup>42</sup> Hoekstra, "Second-Wave Feminism in Dutch Universities," 6.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

<sup>44</sup> Alkemade, "Feminisme en architectuuronderwijs," 20.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 21.

### 3.2. Women and the City

In 1986, after 12 years of Women's Studies, and approximately 20 years after the start of the second feminist wave, the theme of housing and living has gained an important position in and outside the women's movement<sup>46</sup>. Feminists wanted to have a say in the functionalists housing programme because of growing demands for individual and flexible living<sup>47</sup>. The Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and Environment at the time asked the section of Women's Studies of the Architecture Department for advice for a new building code<sup>48</sup>.

Since Anna Vos and Heidi de Mare gained a permanent position in 1984, the section felt as if they had overcome the greatest challenge they had to face. They were now free to organize their own education<sup>49</sup>. In 1986, they collectively wrote the book *Vrouwen en de Stad* [Women and the City], which became part of the course literature. In the book, Vos presents a new perspective on the developments of public housing and the historical architectural task of it and De Mare gives another sociocultural approach in which gender and architecture are questioned as cultural phenomena.

### 3.3. A Prologue to Visibility

Vos's influence on the Women's Studies course continuous after the book *Vrouwen en de Stad*. Because of tight budget, the Women's Studies section initially thought that it would not be possible to invite guest lecturers to contribute to the course content<sup>50</sup>. When the section received financial support of 10.000 guilders<sup>51</sup> from the Ministry of Education and Science and Executive Board Emancipation Committee of TU Delft in 1987, Anna Vos and Susanne Komossa organized the lecture series *A Prologue to Visibility*<sup>52</sup>. Lectures were given by female architects like Zaha Hadid, Laura Thermes, and Beth Gali, who shared a panel together with the organizers of the series (figure 3). At this point, the number of female students was rising fast (from 10% in 1978 to almost 35% in 1990<sup>53</sup>), while the design staff still largely consisted of men. This disproportionate gender composition of the teacher's population was the reason behind the lecture series: to cut through this pattern of male dominance and potentially shrink this academic bias.

The guest lecturers, who also assisted as visiting critics in a design course, all had different cultural and educational backgrounds. This turned out to be valuable for the students and their design process, because of the different educational views and architectural experiences. According to the section, references from other forms of design education are important for the continuous development of architectural education too<sup>54</sup>.

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<sup>46</sup> Edhoffer, De Mare, Vos, *Vrouwen en de Stad: Deel 1*, 5.

<sup>47</sup> Heidi de Mare and Anna Vos, *Urban Rituals in Italy and the Netherlands: Historical contrasts in the use of public space, architecture, and the urban environment* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1993), 6.

<sup>48</sup> Van Wijk, "Women's Studies at the Architecture Department of Delft Technical University," 198.

<sup>49</sup> Alkemade, "Feminisme en architectuuronderwijs," 23.

<sup>50</sup> Archive 'Vrouwenstudies Bouwkunde', Loes Verhaart, "Notulen werkgroep vrouwenstudies," September 17 1980.

<sup>51</sup> 10.000 guilders is approximately 4500 euros.

<sup>52</sup> Anna Vos, Liesbeth Wesseling and Riette van der Werff. *Proloog tot zichtbaarheid*. (Delft/Amsterdam: TU Delft, Faculteit der Bouwkunde, 1987), 4-5.

<sup>53</sup> Van Wijk, "Women's Studies at the Architecture Department of Delft Technical University," 195.

<sup>54</sup> Anna Vos, *Introductie Proloog tot Zichtbaarheid II* (Delft: TU Delft, Faculteit der Bouwkunde, 1988).

Because of this success, they organized a second lecture series in 1988: *Prologue to Visibility II*. The lecturers were all young, female, independent architects, living and working in the Netherlands. Offering again the opportunity to turn the design project into a platform for discussion about different educational and architectural views. This time, their participation as visiting critics is possible thanks to financial contributions from the guest lecturer fund and the science fund of the Faculty of Architecture<sup>55</sup>.



Figure 3. The guest lecturers for 'A Prologue to Visibility'. Noortje Weenink, "Veertig jaar na Vrouwenstudies: een post-feministisch tijdperk?" *Archined*, accessed March 10, 2021, <https://www.archined.nl/2021/02/veertig-jaar-na-vrouwenstudies-een-post-feministisch-tijdperk/>

<sup>55</sup> Anna Vos, *Introductie Proloog tot Zichtbaarheid II*.

## 4. The disintegration of Women's Studies (1987-1998)

After 13 years of experience, the Women's Studies sections in The Netherlands had developed into a professional research field<sup>56</sup>. Nonetheless, not everyone was as pleased with the used research method. The question rose if using one's own experience was evidence for creating new theories. Members started questioning how and if the section should continue.

### 4.1. Criticism from within

An article by Heidi de Mare from 1987 shows her doubts about the feminist research approach<sup>57</sup>. The research is based on the fact that feminists have different experiences concerning architecture, but that they agree on one thing: a joint rejection towards the 1970s family floor plan, which is based on societal norms and values. Feminists believed that the family floor plan reinforced hierarchical inequalities and stimulated the oppression of women<sup>58</sup>. This collective rejection towards the standard 1970s floor plan should eventually lead to a new kind of program that meets the demands of all women. This common starting point and object of research creates the illusion that a joint answer can be formulated. This jointly developed strategy sometimes means a deadlock<sup>59</sup>.

First, a "woman-friendly" design approach seems to be unusable: it's impossible to design a floor plan that applies to all women. Therefore, it is important for the section of Women's Studies not to rely too much on the individual experience of feminists<sup>60</sup>. Women's visions have been essential for the start of Women's Studies, because it is women who experience the relationship between men and women as problematic and who can indicate which blind spots occur in science<sup>61</sup>. However, according to De Mare, this does not mean that working groups should elevate their own experiences to the norm.

Secondly, some even question the relevance of the Women's Studies section in their contribution to the women's movement<sup>62</sup>. Feminists outside of the academic world judged that Women's Studies had become too theoretical and too focused on issues within universities<sup>63</sup>. Although Women's Studies had a desire for immediate solutions to practical problems, not all results of theory and research can be immediately put into practice. Nevertheless, when theory and research provide insight into the social relationships in which women find themselves, they are seen as useful by the section of Women's Studies, even if the relationship with practice does not appear to be directly present<sup>64</sup>.

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<sup>56</sup> Brouns, *Veertien jaar Vrouwenstudies in Nederland*, 6.

<sup>57</sup> Heidi De Mare, "Vrouwenstudies Bouwkunde in Delft: haar situering ten opzichte van de feministische kritiek op de gebouwde omgeving," In *Zomeruniversiteit Vrouwenstudies 1987: Inrichten*, ed. Hetty Berens, Sjetjie Bruins, Lies Netel (Groningen: Coöperatieve Drukkerij Volharding 1987): 88.

<sup>58</sup> Edhoffer, De Mare, Vos, *Vrouwen en de Stad: Deel 1*, 17.

<sup>59</sup> Heide Hinterthür, Sjoukje de Jong, Marion Vredeling, *Het vertrek* (Delft: Studium Generale Delft, 1987), 5

<sup>60</sup> De Mare, "Vrouwenstudies Bouwkunde in Delft," 96.

<sup>61</sup> Archive 'Vrouwenstudies Bouwkunde', Author unknown, "Voorbereiding voor de thema-bespreking over Vrouwenstudies: tijdens de vrouwenwerkweek in juni 1980," (1980): 5.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>63</sup> Hoekstra, "Second-Wave Feminism in Dutch Universities," 2.

<sup>64</sup> Archive 'Vrouwenstudies Bouwkunde', Author unknown, "Voorbereiding voor de thema-bespreking over Vrouwenstudies: tijdens de vrouwenwerkweek in juni 1980," (1980): 7.

## 4.2. The dichotomy for the future of Women's Studies: integration or confrontation

In 1980, the section had already discussed options for the development of Women's Studies: the section could continue separately or integrate with existing study fields<sup>65</sup>. Initially, the relationship between Women's Studies and existing sciences was thought of in terms of integration. For the improvement of the position of women and qualitative progress of scientific practice, it was believed that Women's Studies should not be developed in isolation but should be accessible for everyone who is involved in science<sup>66</sup>.

Women's Studies were seen as an emergency measure, as a temporary correction of existing science. The question is: how long is temporary? To avoid the dangers of adapting and splitting up the section into separate disciplines that are hardly in touch with each other, feminist researchers advocated for a long confrontation between Women's Studies and existing scientific fields to make sure that sexist sciences disappear completely. "Women's Studies should become a permanent affair until it becomes self-evident in science to stop ignoring women and their social position", as was written in preparation for the women's work week in 1980<sup>67</sup>. The question is when these specific circumstances are achieved. They imagined the situation in which there were no longer any objective and subjective barriers for women to practice science, and that education and research fields would do just as much justice to the conditions of men as to the conditions of women<sup>68</sup>.

Because this situation is hard to control, the section found it important that the different research fields would continue to contribute to the formation of theory and research about the position of women and that there should also be opportunities to be able to unite these separate insights<sup>69</sup>. The Women's Studies section feared that the integration concept would mean that the degree of integration would be measured by the extent to which the word "woman" or "women's literature" would occur in education and in research. "Research on "women" is not necessarily a step towards the integration of Women's Studies"<sup>70</sup>.

Ultimately, it was concluded by feminist scientists in 1988 that the plan of integration was nothing more than "wishful thinking". The development of an interdisciplinary language and collaboration was more difficult than expected<sup>71</sup>. In addition to that, most of the direct funding for Women's Studies had stopped under the influence of a new governmental science policy<sup>72</sup>. Without enough funding, no scientific innovation would be possible for the section and no funding at all would mean the end of the Women's Studies department.

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<sup>65</sup> Archive 'Vrouwenstudies Bouwkunde', Author unknown, "Voorbereiding voor de thema-bespreking over Vrouwenstudies: tijdens de vrouwenwerkweek in juni 1980," (1980): 4.

<sup>66</sup> Archive 'Vrouwenstudies Bouwkunde', Author unknown, "Uitgangspunten van vrouwenstudies," (+/- 1986): 5.

<sup>67</sup> "Vrouwenstudies dienen een permanente zaak te worden totdat het binnen de wetenschap vanzelfsprekend wordt om vrouwen en hun maatschappelijke positie niet langer te negeren."

<sup>68</sup> Archive 'Vrouwenstudies Bouwkunde', Author unknown, "Uitgangspunten van vrouwenstudies," (+/- 1986): 8.

<sup>69</sup> Archive 'Vrouwenstudies Bouwkunde', Author unknown, "Voorbereiding voor de thema-bespreking over Vrouwenstudies: tijdens de vrouwenwerkweek in juni 1980," (1980): 4.

<sup>70</sup> Archive 'Vrouwenstudies Bouwkunde', Author unknown, "Uitgangspunten van vrouwenstudies," (+/- 1986): 7. "Ook is onderzoek naar 'vrouwen' niet noodzakelijkerwijs een stap op weg naar integratie van vrouwenstudies."

<sup>71</sup> Brouns, *Veertien jaar Vrouwenstudies in Nederland*, 238.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, 239.

### 4.3. The end of Women's Studies at the Faculty of Architecture in Delft

Without governmental funding, the section fully relied on internal support from the faculty. When Anna Vos in 1997 decided to focus on architectural practice instead of education, she gave up her spot as academic employee for the Women's Studies section. The dean of the faculty at the time, Hans Beunderman, closed the section a year later, because, to him, the section had become "infertile"<sup>73</sup>. On top of that, a new educational structure consisted of a complete premeditation for the Bachelor's Programme and had left limited freedom of choice for the students. Without support of any kind, the course came to an official end in 1998.

As mentioned before, the staff members always expected the course to end as Women's Studies were seen as a quick fix for a long lasting problem. The question remains if this ending came at the right time. Did the section consider their work done or would they rather have continued? The fact that Vos left the section could mean that she thought of the course as finished, or maybe that she did not want to continue the uncertain struggle of the course. Heidi de Mare only left architectural education in 2001<sup>74</sup>. One staff member of the Women's Studies section, Irene Cieraad, moved to the Chair of Interiors Buildings Cities. Cieraad was a specialist in the field of domesticity<sup>75</sup>. In the interiors chair, she incorporated a more inclusive research approach of the users' perspective in different age categories and cultural backgrounds<sup>76</sup>. She left the chair in 2018. There are no further records about any integration of the course and its members in different architectural departments.

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<sup>73</sup> Alkemade, "Feminisme en architectuuronderwijs," 27.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Hoekstra, "Second-Wave Feminism in Dutch Universities," 9.

<sup>76</sup> Van Wijk, "Women's Studies at the Architecture Department of Delft Technical University," 201.



## 5. Conclusion and discussion

This thesis discusses the origin and development of the Women's Studies section at the Faculty of Architecture in Delft from 1978, and focusses on the reasons behind the disintegration of the section in 1998. The course namely arose from the emergence of the second feminist wave in The Netherlands. Because of the need to link societal changes regarding the position of women to the academic field, to combat sexism not only in the streets but also in academia, Women's Studies were initiated at Dutch universities in 1974. The section started with an active attitude towards the elimination of women's oppression by theorising its origin and functioning. This later shifted to a less feminine-defined, more gender-based goal. At the Faculty of Architecture in Delft, the Women's Studies section initially lacked internal support because of the dean's distrust in the course. Eventually, the management of the department saw the importance of the Women's Studies section for the rest of the faculty which resulted in the designation of a permanent academic employee. This growing trust in the section also led to an increase in funding, which opened the international door. The possibility for the lecture series *A Prologue to Visibility* shows how much the course relied on external support.

After more than a decade of Women's Studies, there was still an internal disagreement about the research method of the course. The conclusion can be drawn that there was no clear plan on how to end the oppression of women. On top of that, the future structure of the course was unclear. Two options were possible for the development of Women's Studies: the section could continue as a separate field or integrate with existing study areas. The initial plan was to integrate the women's study field into existing academic research areas, but this was hard to structurally manage. As long as there was a fair chance for women to join and stay in the academic world, the section had already achieved its main goal. The possibility for the existence of the course completely relied on a continuous money flow. Therefore, the future of Women's Studies was always uncertain. In the end, most of the needed funding was cut off, which led to the ending of most of the Women's Studies sections in The Netherlands. At the Faculty of Architecture in Delft, the section faced the same fate and got disbanded due to a lack of support from the dean of the faculty in 1998.

Ultimately, the Women's Studies section at the Faculty of Architecture lasted 20 years and had a great influence on the current state of the faculty in which women have equal opportunities as men. Partly because of the amount of work that has been done in the women's movement and by the Women's Studies sections, there are no longer any structural barriers for women to study architecture. This research shows that women were able to change the academic agenda with a self-critical and flexible attitude towards the curriculum content. With their initiative for an all-female lecture series, they contributed to closing the staffs' gender gap and obtaining an inclusive perspective on architecture and education. Although there is no longer a numerical gender difference among students in the Faculty of Architecture in Delft, a gender gap is still feasible in architectural practice<sup>77</sup>. This mainly has raised questions among female architecture students regarding their future position in the architectural profession<sup>78</sup>. Furthermore, recent societal changes have resulted in new demands for intersectionality in- and outside the faculty. The subject of emancipation has shifted from only female oppression into the awareness of the oppression of different social groups<sup>79</sup>. Despite the efforts of organising exhibitions and discussions by students to address the lack of inclusivity at the faculty, their actions seemed to miss out on the understanding of the management of the faculty. To them "culture change is a long process"

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<sup>77</sup> 28% women over 72% men in The Netherlands, without considering salaries, job types or hierarchies in the positions. Bureau Architectenregister, *Jaarverslag 2018*, 12.

<sup>78</sup> Van Wijk, "Women's Studies at the Architecture Department of Delft Technical University," 199.

<sup>79</sup> Weenink, "Veertig jaar na Vrouwenstudies: een post-feministisch tijdperk?"

and the students should first come with practical solutions<sup>80</sup>. A pattern between the old and the new generation of feminists can be depicted from how they are initially treated. However, a first initiative to provide more diversity and inclusivity within the Faculty of Architecture started with the appointment of a Diversity and Inclusion officer in 2021<sup>81</sup>. Will this eventually lead to a new scientific field of *Intersectionality*? With the right resources and enough support, the example of Women's Studies shows that structural change is indeed possible.

The fact that the same questions have to be asked in 1978 and in 2021, shows that the problems women have to face in architectural education are everything but solved. The current frustration towards these problems led to a great amount of research into the subject of Women's Studies. In the previous century, feminist researchers were successful in advocating a new academic field within the curriculum that was outside of their area of specialization. There is a recent willingness within the faculty to learn from this specific approach. The donation of the Women's Studies archive by Anna Vos in 2017 triggered questions from current academic employees such as Charlotte van Wijk, Amy Thomas and other members of the Chair of Architectural History and Urban Planning. This interest led to an extensive research into the approach of the disbanded section which resulted in an (online) exhibition called *Novieten* [Novices]<sup>82</sup>.

A next step into the change of architectural education can be made as long as the researches do not end up being forgotten or put away. Hence the motivation for this research, which comes from the frustration towards the curriculum of the Bachelors of Architecture, Urbanism and Building Sciences at the Technical University of Delft. It lacks female insight and representation. As a woman studying architecture, the interest in knowing the possibilities for women in the architectural profession is growing. One surprising element and probably a big difference with current times is the fact that men were not allowed to join the Women's Studies course 40 years ago. Nowadays, societal criticism has shifted from problems for women to issues that concern everyone. As the persistent gender gap in architecture is showing, it's time to collectively correct the failures of our profession to resolve the inequalities within.

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<sup>80</sup> Weenink, "Veertig jaar na Vrouwenstudies: een post-feministisch tijdperk?", "(...) cultuurverandering is een lang proces."

<sup>81</sup> "Inclusion and diversity at BK," TU Delft, last modified February 23, 2021, <https://www.tudelft.nl/en/2021/bk/inclusion-and-diversity-at-bk>

<sup>82</sup> This exhibition was organized in 2018 by Charlotte van Wijk and Jules Schoonman. "Novieten," Academisch Erfgoed TU Delft, accessed April 10, 2021, <https://erfgoed.tudelft.nl/nl/exhibitions/novieten>

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