ETH Zurich Department of Architecture
ARCHITECTURE OF TERRITORY
Chair of Architecture
and Territorial Planning
Professor Milica Topalović

Communes
Spring 2017

Commune Abondance

Forested Mountain Tops

Bettina Baggenstos and Lara Motschi



Tucked away behind the first row of mountains touching the lake, the valley of Abondance reveals a landscape of high Alpine pastures and forested mountain tops. The beauty and indeed abundance of grazing meadows not only gave the commune its name, it also describes a special breed of cattle and even the cheese produced here. The seasonality of the alpage has shaped the understanding of land as common resources (*Allmende*). The right to use the highlands according to ancient laws is still held by the farming cooperatives down in the valley. In this particular case, these practices created an architectural typology: The double farm is a shared winter building housing two families, their animals and winter supplies in a large, compact volume. In summer, the families move back up to their mountain huts to raise cattle and produce cheese.



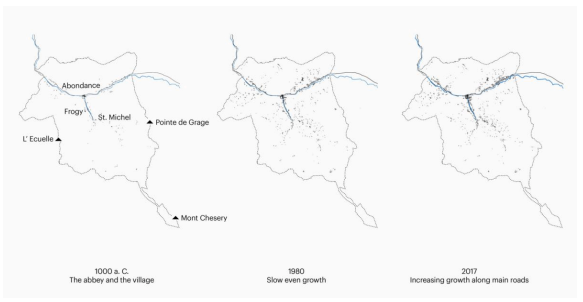
"Double" ferme: a multifunctional building typology.



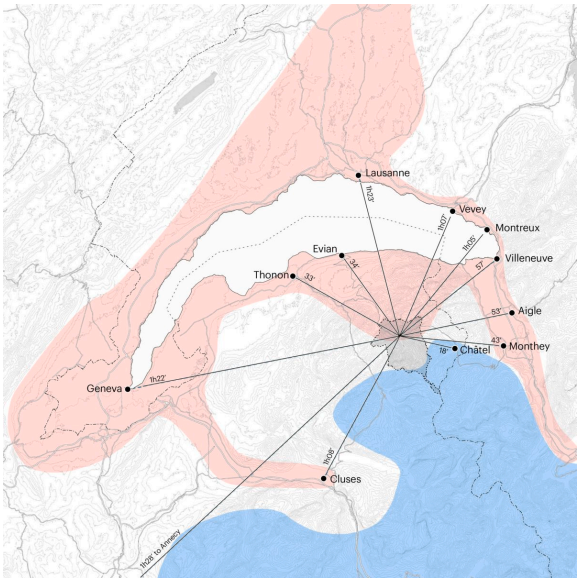
Wood manufacturing has been traditionally the main economic sector.



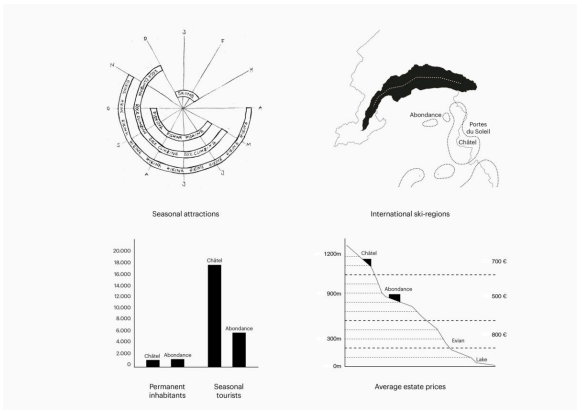
Construction project in the valley.



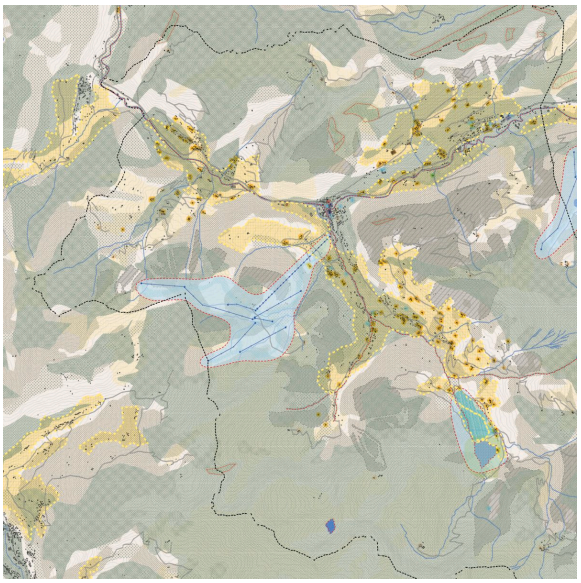
Historical development of the urban fabric.



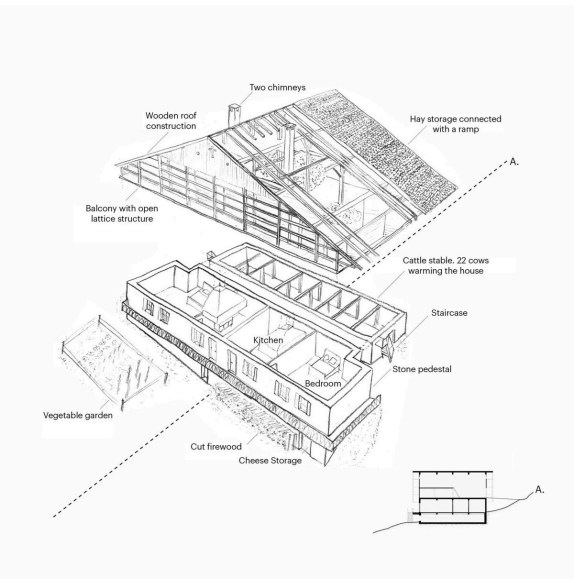
The commune is located between the metropolitan region and the alpine resorts.



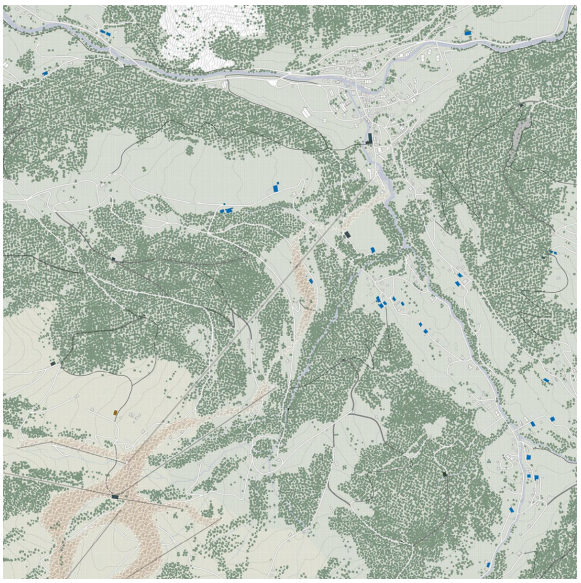
Local potentials of altitude and connectivity.



Concept of coexisting economies:
tourism, cheese production and forestry.



"Double" ferme: Re-imagining building heritage.



New territorial connections between the
wood industry and touristic facilities.

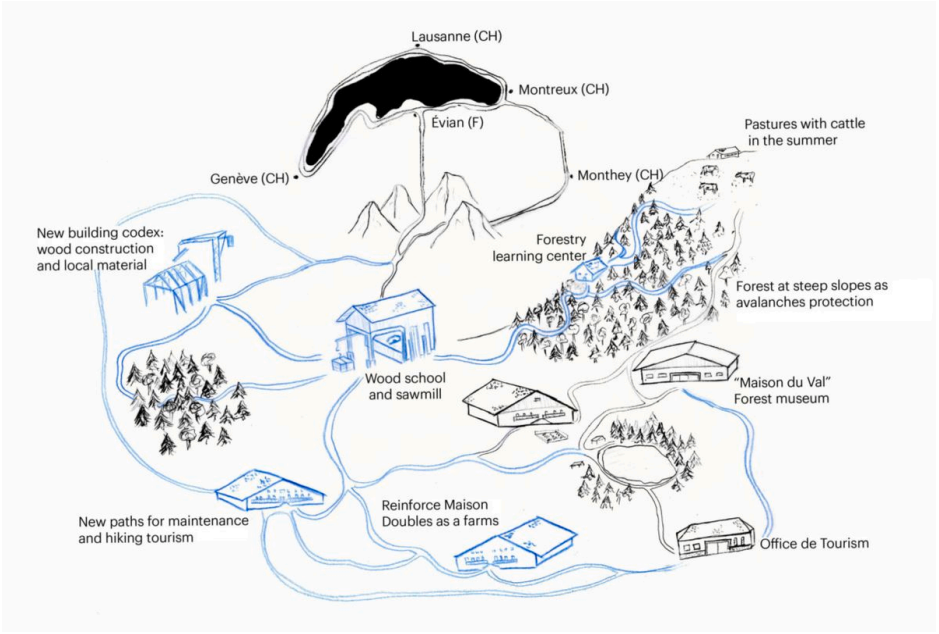
Abondance is also the first entry point to the winter resort Portes du Soleil, which connects several surrounding valleys to one of Europe's largest skiing destinations. The plateau of the Lac de Plagnes is especially well suited for nordic skiing and summer hikes, so it is no surprise that the tourist industry is the second most important source of income in the region. But the privileged location within a Unesco protected area, the Geopark Chablais, also comes with a lot of natural threats: town planning is determined by the risk of snow and rock avalanches and floods of the river Dranse.

Surrounding the 14th century Abbey, the historic village houses tourist facilities, an ice driving circuit a catholic, international boarding school, Sainte Croix des Neiges. In Abondance constellation of traditional farming, alpine tourism and cultural institutions we would like to investigate the productive commons and the alpage.

Accommodating Development Pressure on the Slopes







A network of programs in relation to the metropolitan region.

This work by Bettina Baggenstos and Lara Motschi was created as part of the design studio Communes at ETH Zurich in Spring 2017. The PDF is intended for educational purposes only. Its commercial distribution is strictly forbidden.

© 2025, Architecture of Territory

Architecture of Territory
Professor Milica Topalović

TEACHING TEAM
Thais De Roquemaurel
Hans Hortig
Karoline Kostka
Metaxia Markaki
Ferdinand Rabe von Pappenheim
Milica Topalović

Prof. Milica Topalović
ETH Zurich
ONA G41
Neunbrunnenstrasse 50
8093 Zurich
Switzerland
+41 (0)44 633 86 88
www.topalovic.arch.ethz.ch