

THE ALICE Y1 ARCHITECTURE DESIGN STUDIO PROGRAM

We live in a time when fundamental ecosystem disturbance announces its proximity through ecological precarity: abnormal climatic conditions, pollution, and extinction (Tsing, 2018). It is essential that architecture adapts to this change and recognizes its complicity by questioning the foundational lessons inherited from our teachers, from history, and our practices as professionals. By questioning if these foundations are adequate, how should we learn from the incredibly rich and abundant environments built up by the many cultures of this planet, both human and non-human? We have a choice and an obligation in how we listen to the world, understand it, re-read it. We have a choice and an obligation as to which values we keep and which we may have to replace.

The ALICE Y1 architecture design studio program approaches this challenge to architectural practice in two ways. The first is its processual nature. Architecture does not belong to an abstract world conceived as a series of coherent problems, a world where architecture would form objects to solve those pre-defined problems. Rather, architecture is always entangled in questions directly linked to how we understand our existence and therefore emergent in nature. As gestures and inventions, architecture has both cultural and technical meaning. These two aspects of architecture cannot be separated as they are of one and the same nature. The things that we invent and produce to act upon the space and environment that we live in are extensions of our body. They are never static, but are in constant transformation, situated in relation to us as living individuals and societal beings, and in relation to the environment that is itself an evolving eco-system of other living organisms. Being alive, we—humans, plants, other species, our languages, our arts, our society—are interwoven in a perpetually evolving relationship. Architecture is therefore both an expression and concretization of the relationships that we build with all life.

The second aspect that we stress in ALICE Y1 is architecture's collective nature. Architecture is never made alone; it is a means of communicating in society and with the environment. The collective languages by which we discuss architecture play a fundamental role in how we conceive of architecture itself. Gestures—the making and the making-through—of architecture are not only built, but learn, architecture. Ways to co-habit, practicing collective acts, between us and a living environment. Will we, in such initiation, reconsider our individual responsibilities?

We think, speak, and make architecture together. ALICE Y1 emphasizes the collaborative nature of architecture by making projects as individuals, in pairs, as small groups, as collectives, and as one large group of people. ALICE projects are collaborations with many public partnerships beyond the university. To emphasize the importance of the collective act, we have hypothesized, and succeeded, in thinking, designing, and building projects with 200 people and more, all authors and co-authors, as the culmination of the academic year.



The most important aspect in the ALICE series is however not the final form of the end-of-year construction, but rather the explorative processes of its contributions and the capacity of an articulated mis-en-space to support the search for new forms of living together through architecture. We learn. As such, the ALICE series becomes a research agenda through which we not only build, but learn, architecture. Ways to co-habit, practicing collective acts, between us and a living environment. Will we, in such initiation, reconsider our individual responsibilities?

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Lessons from collective practice require regular periods of reflection: what have we learned—about architecture, community needs, and local environments—as we develop projects collectively? How can this knowledge evolve, for both pedagogy and practice, enabling students and teachers alike to continuously improve their ways of working?

Following the single-year cycles of INSIDE (2015–2018) and BECOMING (2018–2021), ALICE adapted its pedagogical approach towards a more continuous and attentive process of knowledge acquisition. RESONANCE was a multi-year cycle structured around four annual stages: FOUNDATIONS (2022–2023), PLANES (2023–2024), ROOMS (2024–2025), and PLAY (2025–2026). In May 2026, the cycle concluded with a series of interventions that prefigured future uses of the Batteille-Lamoureux park in Carouge.

MATERIAL LANDSCAPES For the years 2026–2029, ALICE launches the new cycle Material Landscapes, an architectural design studio program combining territorial analysis, interdisciplinary spatial programming, and hands-on design-build experience. Addressed to first-year EPFL students, the program is developed in close collaboration with local communities, cultural institutions, and private stakeholders. Its agenda is explicitly transcalar, moving from territorial conditions to material details, allowing students to engage with architectural methods and tools while developing concrete proposals for architectural and landscape projects.

The Material Landscapes program explores how the material conditions of a territory, together with its built and unbuilt landscapes, reflect the social, ecological and economic processes that shape them. It investigates the emergence of logical continuities and niches in urban and rural landscapes through knowledge and existing practices. Projects respond to both the needs and potentials of each territory, as well as the challenges, which are central to the climate emergency, the program focuses on regenerative practices seeking to restore material, ecological, and effective connections. It proposes that caring for ecological, social, and material interdependencies can contribute to the transformation of our environments and support a shift from extractive to regenerative modes of production and inhabitation.

Within this framework, Material Landscapes approaches territories as situated conditions, revealing the relationships and interdependencies that define them. Architectural and landscape interventions are developed in collaboration with local human and non-human communities, drawing from situated knowledge and existing practices. Projects respond to both the needs and potentials of each territory, as well as the challenges, which are central to the climate emergency, the program focuses on regenerative practices seeking to restore material, ecological, and effective connections. It proposes that caring for ecological, social, and material interdependencies can contribute to the transformation of our environments and support a shift from extractive to regenerative modes of production and inhabitation.

At the same time, the region was integrated into a wider interregional network long before the emergence of modern nations. Watchmaking became the region's defining activity. Production methods and technological innovations, combined with highly specialized craftsmanship, reflected the area into the world's leading watchmaking center. The development of the watchmaking system—a decentralized production model based on specialized skills in the fabrication and assembly of watch components—allowed farmers practice in watchmaking during the winter months. This created a specific ecology of learning, where agricultural knowledge, artisanal expertise, and territorial resources became closely interconnected. Some of these practices continue today.

Like any city, La Chaux-de-Fonds is deeply connected to its territory. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, watchmaking became the region's defining activity. Production methods and technological innovations, combined with highly specialized craftsmanship, reflected the area into the world's leading watchmaking center. The development of the watchmaking system—a decentralized production model based on specialized skills in the fabrication and assembly of watch components—allowed farmers practice in watchmaking during the winter months. This created a specific ecology of learning, where agricultural knowledge, artisanal expertise, and territorial resources became closely interconnected. Some of these practices continue today.

Innovation in the region extended beyond watchmaking. In the eighteenth century, La Chaux-de-Fonds was rebuilt through a collective effort and according to an urban plan directly influenced by watchmaking. Designed by watchmaker Charles-Henri Junod, the plan introduced narrow blocks that provided optimal daylight for workshops requiring precise manual work. The city became an extension of its productive practices. Today, this unique urban structure is recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. In 1867, Karl Marx described La Chaux-de-Fonds in Das Kapital as an immense factory town, highlighting the organization of labor within the Jura watchmaking industry.

Although the city never reached the scale imagined by nineteenth-century visionaries, it has preserved a rare spirit of innovation and a distinctive identity, surrounded by a remarkable landscape accessible directly from Boulevard Leopold-Robert, its main urban axis.

For Easter 2027, as part of La Chaux-de-Fonds Swiss Cultural Capital 2027, ALICE will mount a prostructure around the Grande Fontaine. From May 2027 onwards, this structure will become an experimental public space for La Chaux-de-Fonds and its visitors. Conceived as a three-dimensional canvas, it will evolve over time: perhaps becoming a lantern illuminating the fountain? A luminous cloud above the Pond? An archive of landscape stories? A narrator of the fountain's possible histories? Or simply a place where children can play with water?

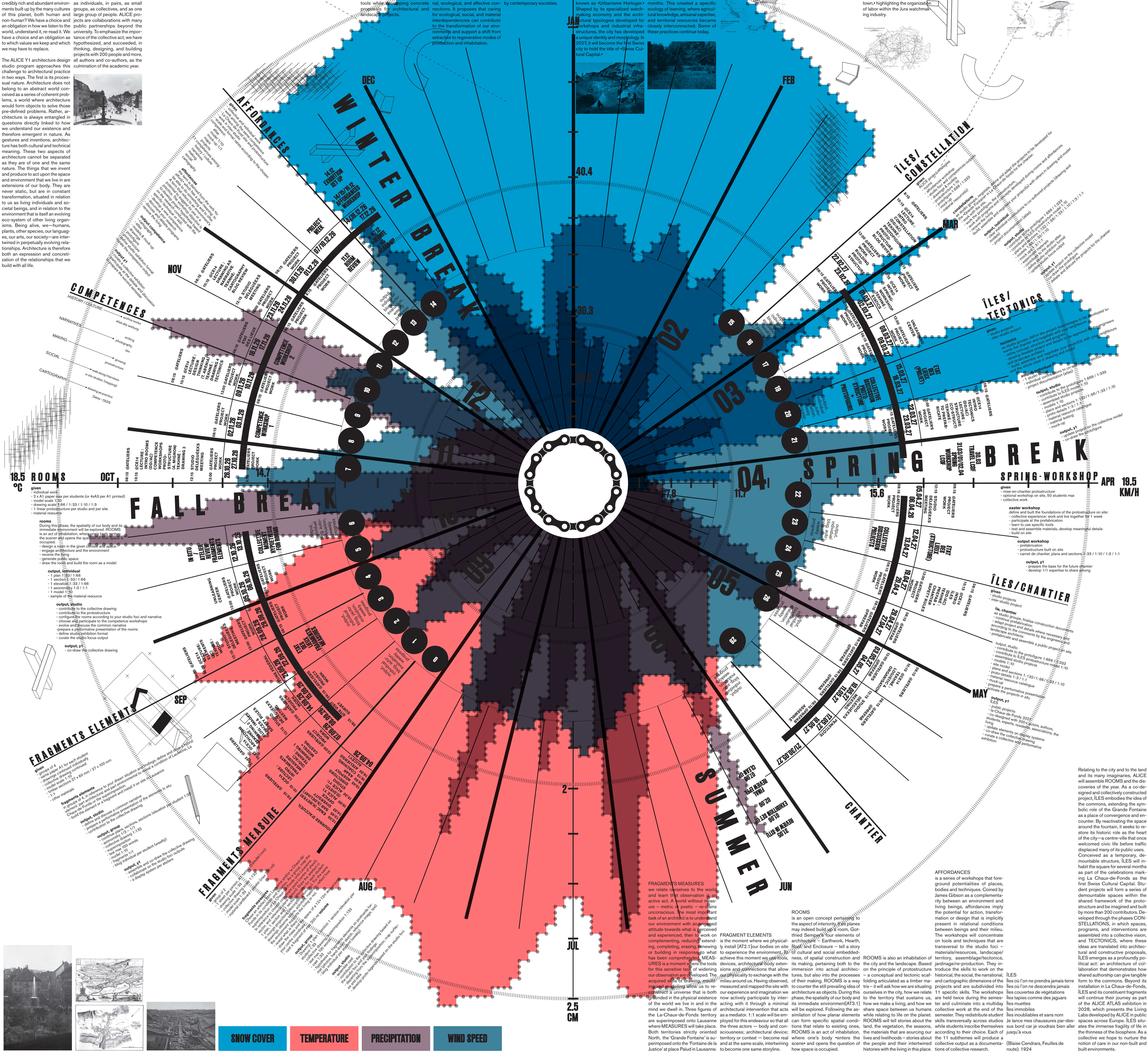
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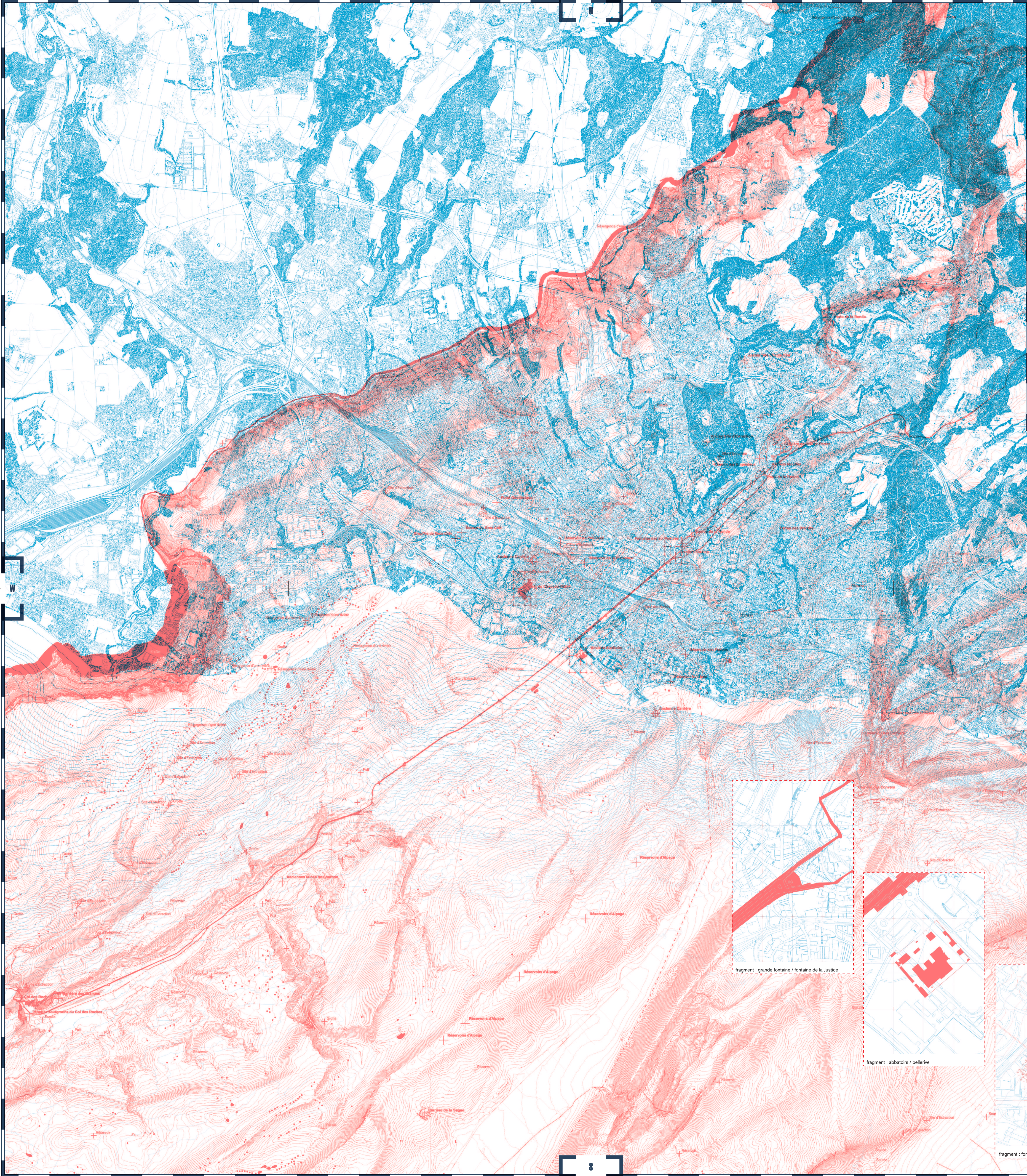
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ALICE

**MATERIAL LANDSCAPES/
ÎLES**

EPFL

SECTION
D'ARCHITECTURE

PREMIÈRE ANNÉE
2026/2027
SEMESTRES 1+2

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