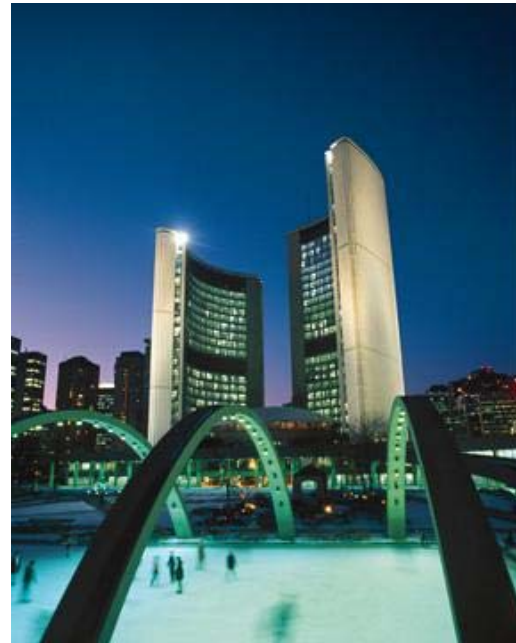


Architectural Knowledge:

Reflexive Dynamics between Place and Design

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OUTLINE: GOALS OF THIS PAPER

- To understand the complex relationship between design and place in cities
- Understanding the dynamics of innovation within architecture as a creative industry
 - Tension between homogeneity and distinctiveness in architectural knowledge and practice
- Role of urban space in generating unique, distinctive architectural knowledge/practice and style
 - Circulating knowledge
 - Attracting and retaining architectural talent
 - Managing risk
- Rethinking the role of cities as spaces for generation, circulation and consumption of architectural knowledge

ARCHITECTURE:

A creative industry

- Surprisingly little work on architects as ‘creative professionals’ or architecture as a ‘creative industry’
 - Cultural geographies of architecture and representativeness of building form and function (Lees 2001; McNeill & Tewdwr-Jones 2003; Yeoh 2005)
 - Role of foreign architects & megaprojects in city promotion (Olds 2001; Marshall 2003; Jencks 2005)
 - Phenomenon of the ‘Global architect’:
 - McNeill *The Global Architect* (2008)
 - Ecologies of knowledge in global firms: local and non-local sources of inspiration, experience (Faulconbridge 2007)

CONTEXT:

Toronto's emergence as a design centre



- \$1B investment in 'cultural renaissance' facilities
- Local and global buzz: an architectural renaissance too?
- Current debate: 'starchitect' imports or homegrown talent?
- Evidence of a distinctive 'Toronto style' emerging?

From 'Toronto the Good' to 'Toronto the Great'?

“Suddenly, seemingly only in the past five years, the city is exploding with new and exciting architecture. ... And what this new Toronto aspires to is an architecture that is as exciting as its culture, is as varied as its diversity, and is as open as the youthful minds that flood its streets.”

Daniel Libeskind, *Design City Toronto* (2007)

STARCHITECTS DO TORONTO



ART GALLERY OF ONTARIO

Gehry International Architects, Inc (Los Angeles)

MICHAEL LEE-CHIN CRYSTAL, ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Studio Daniel Libeskind (New York, Berlin) and Bregman + Hamann (Toronto)

HOMEGROWN TALENT: A Toronto design aesthetic?

NATIONAL BALLET SCHOOL

Kuwabara, Payne, McKenna, Blumberg
and Goldsmith Borgal & Co. (Toronto)

“The concept fuses architecture, dance, movement, and spectacle within a series of stacked, horizontal platforms (stages) that project the building’s program to the city. By **preserving and integrating existing historic structures**, the project establishes a model for the **harmonious coexistence of heritage and contemporary architecture**. ‘The students feel the building has not only informed the community about their art form, but enhanced their creativity,’ the jury enthused.”

AIA 2007 Honor Awards citation

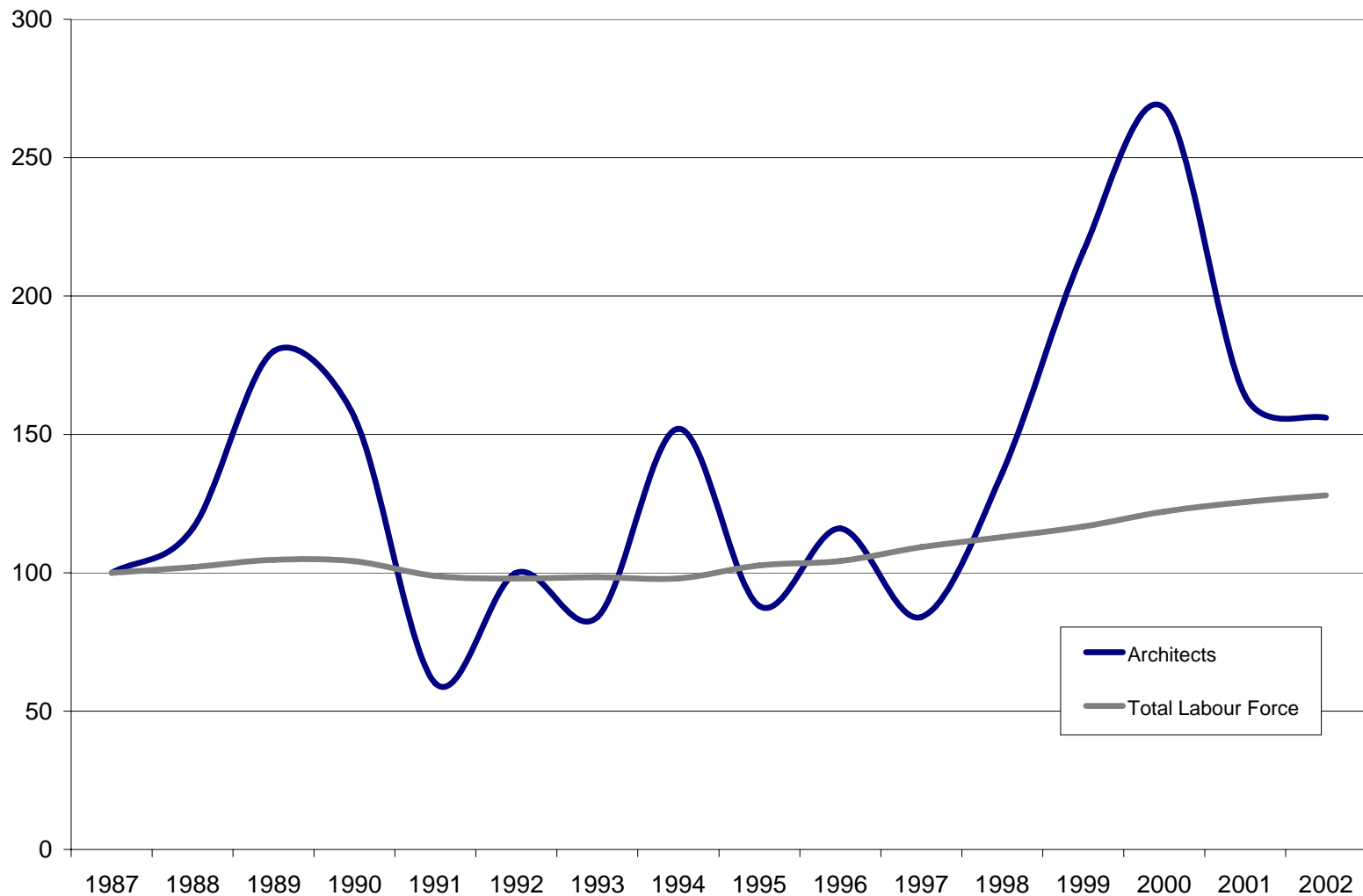


TORONTO ARCHITECTURE:

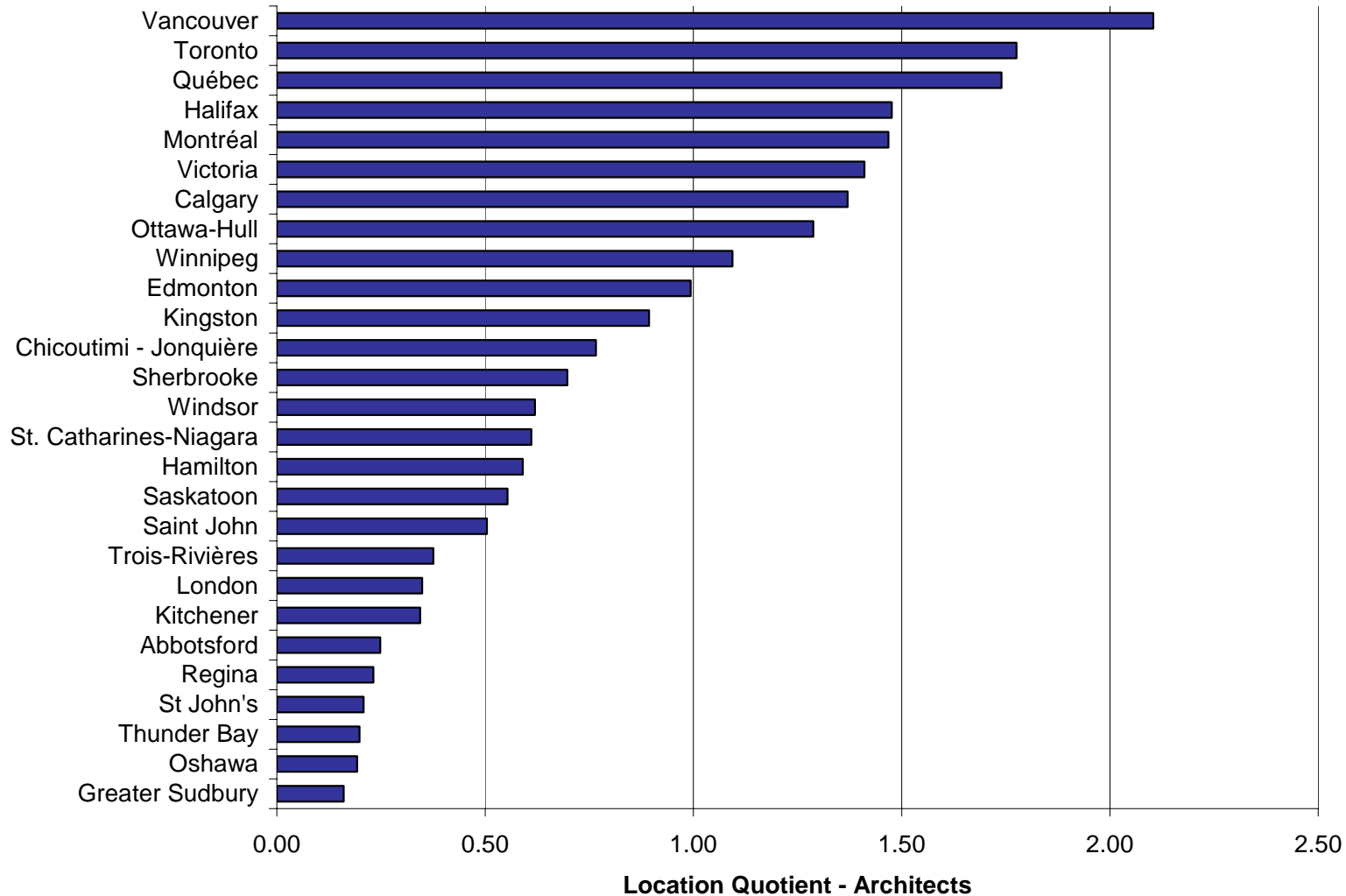
Vital statistics

- 3,690 in Toronto region, 608 registered practices
 - 29% of Canada's 12,800 architects work in Toronto
- High growth profession
 - 4.2% average annual growth rate, 1991-2001 (vs 1% average for all professions)
- Attracting talent
 - 44% of architects are foreign-born (vs 29% Ontario average)
- Highly educated workforce
 - 85% with a university degree
 - 21% with Master's degree or higher (highest of all design professions)

GROWING BUT CYCLICAL: Employment of architects, Toronto, 1987-2002



GEOGRAPHICAL CONCENTRATION: specialization in architecture, Canadian cities



TORONTO ARCHITECTURE:

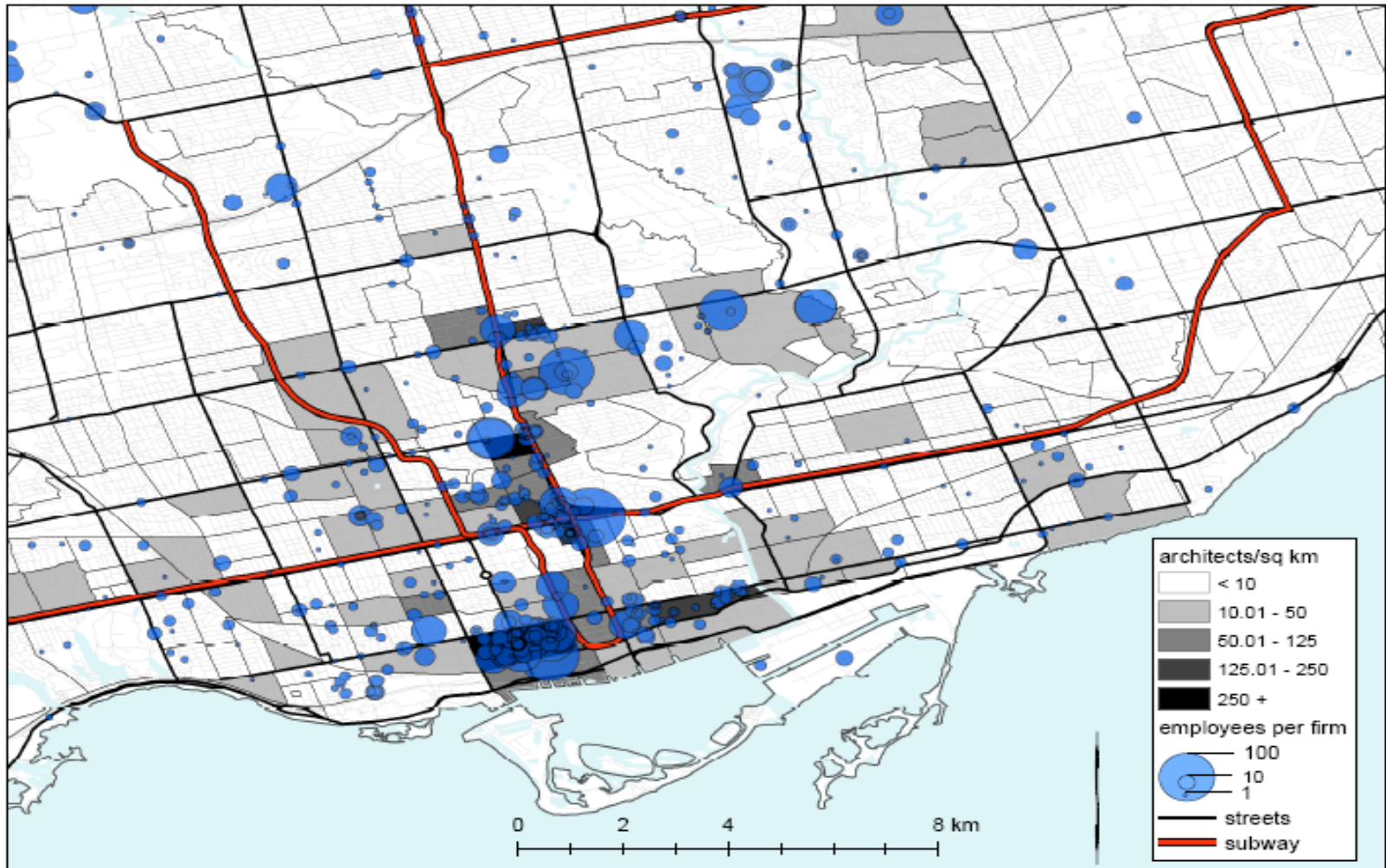
Geographical foundations for its success

- Role of place in fostering innovative practice?
 - Circulating knowledge
 - embodied
 - disembodied
 - Project organization of work
- Attracting and retaining architectural talent
- Managing risk
 - employees
 - employers

TORONTO CASE STUDY

- Semi-structured interviews (2007/08)
 - 20 interviews with locally owned firms (owner, principal, sr. partner)
 - 15 interviews with architect-employees
 - small (1-9), medium (10-49) and large firms (>50)
 - ‘design’ and ‘production’ firms
- Further interviews with intermediaries
 - design schools, accreditation bodies, professional associations, critics

ARCHITECTURE FIRMS IN TORONTO: Clustering in the central design districts



CIRCULATING ARCHITECTURAL KNOWLEDGE

- Geographical clustering of firms
 - Fosters circulation of design knowledge
 - embodied (know-how: symbolic and synthetic knowledge)
 - mobility of talented labour between firms
 - disembodied
 - monitoring competition
 - gossip, rumour, buzz
 - social interaction
 - work related (know-who)
 - » project partners, teams
 - » capability, reputation, reliability
 - outside work (lunch, after work)

CIRCULATING

ARCHITECTURAL KNOWLEDGE

KG: Was there a reason why you chose this particular neighbourhood?

- *Yeah, there was, because **a lot of our friends are architects and they work around here.** I think there is also something about belonging too, to the group as well, to be close by.*

KG: Do you ever interact with these other architects?

- *Yeah, so **we joint venture with other architects.** When you are small, a small practice, and you want to bid on a job, you very often are much more successful if you do it in conjunction with another architect. Actually, **all the other architects that we've worked with have also been close by.** -- Patrick, medium firm owner*

ATTRACTING AND RETAINING ARCHITECTURAL TALENT

- Social networks, word-of-mouth, personal referrals
 - primary source of labour market information for employers and employees
- Proximity to U of T Faculty of Architecture, Landscape & Design
 - Practitioners work as part-time instructors, critics
 - recruit talent
 - Students seeking internships, summer jobs
- Attractiveness of ‘architectural ghetto’ for prospective employees

ATTRACTING AND RETAINING ARCHITECTURAL TALENT

- ***Our best recruitment tool is the people that we have here.** So we basically, you know, ask them to put the word out ... to people that they know ... that there are opportunities here. We don't ... target other people that we've run across in other firms, or ... poach them. But, you know, we have had people come to us who have run across us in other ... situations and said, you know, I'd like to come and work for you.*
– Martin, medium firm principal
- *I'll say to a client, ... do you know of anybody in the industry who is looking to move, or that wants a change? So we do it a little bit that way, a little bit through **word of mouth. Employees know about other people in the market place, friends, other people that they've worked with that are interested in moving.** (...) also, **I've taught at U of T** and so has [partner] (...) When you are teaching there **you have access to some of those recent grads, and students.** We've hired some of those people as well. We try to stay plugged into that community as well.*
– Derrick, medium firm owner

ATTRACTING AND RETAINING ARCHITECTURAL TALENT

- *It's a great location. And people who work for us really like it. ... if we had an office somewhere in Mississauga, I mean, we'd get a different kind of person who has different requirements. You know, **nobody drives to the office** and... you know, there's lots of places to have lunch, and you can go shopping, they go into health clubs, you see them, doggy daycare facilities close by, I mean, **I think people like being in the neighbourhood who work for us so that's important.***
– Mike, medium firm owner (52)

MANAGING RISK: EMPLOYEES

- Voluntary mobility (job switching)
 - Architects attracted to clusters due to easy availability of a series of employment opportunities
 - Easier to raise income by switching firms than by internal promotion
- Involuntary mobility (layoffs)
 - Risk of layoff is substantial in a highly cyclical industry
 - Downside risk is reduced by proximity to a dense cluster of potential employers (and locally circulating knowledge)
- Two scales: city-region and neighbourhood

MANAGING RISK: EMPLOYEES

- *People tend to move around a lot in Toronto. And I don't think that that's something that happens much in other cities. People shop around for different design experiences, or better hours, or whatever. – Alex, large firm employee (32)*
- *There is always something else, and ... it's actually a very small community...and everybody sort of knows each other in a certain way, is aware of whose doing what, and you know, **there's the most options**.– Janet, medium firm employee (31)*
- *I've always tended to **focus on firms downtown** typically because I find they have the most work, for one. I believe ... that **they're the most stable** compared to firms that are outside of the GTA. – Tony, medium firm employee (49)*

MANAGING RISK: EMPLOYEES

- *...So I jumped around a lot. I never thought I would, although I did know from the onset that **in order to move up both in level of responsibility and in pay that the typical route to take is to move.***
 - Diana, large firm employee (50)

MANAGING RISK: EMPLOYERS

- Location within ‘architectural ghetto’ encourages contingent labour market practices
 - Firms more likely to manage fluctuations in their business by hiring/firing instead of retaining labour over the business cycle
- But also contradictions for employers
 - Location within high-density architectural clusters raises risk of unwanted poaching of talent by competitors; local competition pushes wages up

MANAGING RISK: EMPLOYERS

*“Well [firm x] moved [down the street]. They needed to hire eighty people... The people that want to work there aren’t the people that I want anyway. **The problem is they will steal from me** and then those people will be unhappy or whatever and those people will be chained to the amount of money they make. **They are so skew with the pay scale.**”* – Ricardo, medium firm owner (48)

*“I’m kind of concerned a little bit because... People keep bumping into each other and ... oh, there’s **at least a half a dozen people who have worked at our office who are working within two blocks from us now...** And some, you know, and some of the people in our office used to work for other people within a couple of blocks of our office.”* – Mike, medium firm owner (52)

CONCLUSION: DESIGN AND PLACE A REFLEXIVE RELATIONSHIP

- Design shapes visual identity of places
- Geography of architectural industry shapes the innovative dynamism of local firms
 - Circulating architectural knowledge
 - Generates distinctive local style (product)
- Geographical clustering enhances opportunities, manages risk for workers and employers
- Contradictory dynamics too
 - Some risks (for both workers and firms) are amplified by clustering

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