

The Geography of Control: Local Plants, Global Brains, Shared Talent Pipelines

Ongoing **regionalisation is changing more than the location of production**. It is forcing automotive companies to decide where knowledge, control and decision-making should sit when supply chains become shorter, more digital and more exposed to disruption.

Production strategies are becoming hybrid. Micro-factories and regional assembly units are being considered for local markets, while non-strategic or cost-sensitive activities may still be outsourced. But batteries, high-performance computing units, safety-critical ECUs, software architectures and testing capabilities increasingly sit closer to the centre of control. The reason is not only cost. It is **speed of engineering change, protection of know-how, supply continuity and the ability to react** when transport routes or trade conditions change. One example from the interviews is the shift in risk thinking after disruptions to China-Europe rail, Suez and other routes: **the cheapest supplier is no longer automatically the best supplier**.

This changes the geography of talent. Advanced software, AI and cybersecurity expertise may remain concentrated in global hubs, but smart factories still need digital capability on-site. A **“mother-daughter plant” logic captures the new model**: the mother plant holds innovation and competence, while daughter plants industrialise, adapt and improve locally. Not every skill must sit at every site, **but every site must be digitally literate enough to work with data tools**, digital twins, human-machine interfaces and OT/IT integration.

Workforce outsourcing is also becoming more selective. In the past, agency workers could cover simpler operations at significant scale; one interview recalled levels of 15–20%. In more technical factories, that model weakens. Letting a qualified worker go may mean losing them permanently. Flexibility therefore shifts from “bring in anyone quickly” toward working-time banks, negotiated shift flexibility, multiskilling, project specialists and carefully bounded external expertise for software, AI, testing or prototyping.

Talent attraction follows the same logic. A single employer-branding message is not enough. Researchers, software specialists, production workers and administrative staff need different conditions, career paths and leadership. Regional collaboration is still too often project-based, personal or superficial. The missing layer is pre-competitive talent infrastructure: shared academies, regional skill intelligence, structured university links and cooperation strong enough to localise production without localising shortages.

This brief draws on the TRIREME report [Skills for the Mobility Transition: An Industry Perspective](#), based on structured interviews with 60 industry stakeholders across the automotive and mobility value chain in 2025.