

Backstage to the Future Caribbean: evaluation and results

April 2018



ECONOMÍA APLICADA A LAS INDUSTRIAS CREATIVAS

Content

Introduction	3
What was the situation of the participants before the start of the programme?	5
Participants' working situation prior to the participation in the Backstage to the Future programme.....	5
Trainees' assessment of their skills prior to their participation in the BTF programme?	8
What did the trainees need prior to their participation in the BTF programme?	9
A clearer path for growth: the experience in San Andrés	11
Results in terms of technical abilities	11
Results in terms of soft skills and networks	14
Overall skills and confidence: perception of improvement	16
Consolidation and strengthening: the experience in Jamaica.....	21
Results in terms of technical skills.....	21
Results in terms of soft skills and networks: a new level of confidence	23
Employment and career	25
A cultural approach	26
A miscellaneous perspective: what is the current position of the participants and what are their perceptions regarding their future?	28
What are your expectations about the medium and long-term results of the programme?	28
Impact of the programme on the individual context	28
Impact of the programme on the collective context.....	29
Starting a new business: key elements	30
Building a reputation with the programme.....	31
Final thoughts and recommendations	32

Introduction

Backstage to the Future (BTF) is a training programme that searches the development and consolidation of technical skills among the young population. For 2017, this platform was deployed in San Andrés, Colombia, during the 30th anniversary of the Green Moon Festival. It also had a supplementary process, during the Rebel Salute Festival in Jamaica. This programme was focused on improving and reinforcing technical abilities of a group of Caribbean participants, more precisely their skills for organising and holding live events.

BTF is designed to train the participants and further develop their abilities in relation to two main aspects: the technical skills and the soft skills. First, BTF is intended to improve the knowledge of the participants in the technical aspects of the creative activity, focusing on live events. In addition, the platform aims to develop their abilities on communication and networking. Conclusively, the ultimate objective of BTF is to provide the trainees with elements they can use for the construction of a better future, allowing them to discover all the possibilities they have in both their life and occupation.

It is clear that the islands of San Andrés and Providencia have become a priority for the Colombian government due to their challenging historical, political and social context. Nevertheless, it is not always easy for the government to work with and for their community. In contrast, the British Council is always interested in getting closer to the islands by reason of the past they share and due to the affinity there is between the Caribbean and the English-speaking islands. Therefore, it is relevant to state that working hand in hand with the British Council was positive for the BTF participants because it poses a less threatening presence in this local context, which is the reason why the local communities did not put up any type of resistance.

As a pillar of the programme's conception, the organisers focused on creating a respectful and sensitive approach with regard to the local context and its dynamics. That is why they paid two previous visits to the islands in order to understand them properly and to adjust the call-for-proposals process. In addition, they worked with strategic allies in the islands (people who work at the Green Moon Festival, for instance), who have a vast knowledge and understanding of the local context, the young people and their needs.

A key factor of this process was to recognise the local dynamics, to respect them, and to draw up a programme that could fit in that specific context as harmoniously as possible with the ultimate purpose of establishing a direct benefit. For this process, Derek Richards, as the programme's leader, was a key agent. At first, it is important to note that his selection was based on the excellent work he has done in the technical fields and his sound management of the soft skills. Additionally, there was no doubt that his profile was a perfect fit not only because of his Caribbean heritage, but also due to the fact that he has worked in projects related to Caribbean and African cultures in the United Kingdom. In conclusion, his work record, his technical abilities and his close links to the Caribbean rhythms make him an excellent option as a leader trainer.

To understand the entire process as well as the results of the Backstage to the Future programme, Lado B designed an evaluation that takes into consideration the opinion of both the trainees and the trainers, and incorporates both qualitative and quantitative inputs. Consequently, Lado B decided to use three different mechanisms to collect information and understand what were the participants' opinions and feelings about the Backstage to the Future programme: surveys and

interviews conducted with the trainees (considering particularly those who were from San Andrés and Jamaica); interviews with the trainers from San Andrés and the host technicians from Jamaica; and participant observations of the work performed in San Andrés. Furthermore, these evaluation mechanisms enabled a direct experience and understanding of the entire process.

In order to discuss further all the aspects of the programme Lado B has prepared this document, which is divided into five sections. The first section presents and discusses the situation of the trainees prior to their participation in the programme. The second section unveils the results of the participants after the San Andrés experience. The third section covers the experience of the activities carried out in Jamaica. The fourth section provides a glimpse on how the trainees feel today and where they are left after participating in the Backstage to the Future. Finally, the last section includes recommendations and contributes conclusive ideas.

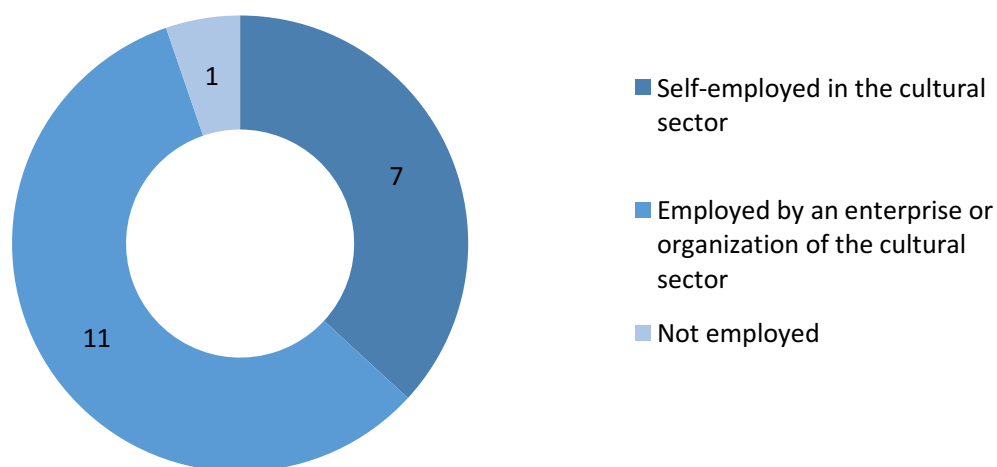
What was the situation of the participants before the start of the programme?

The Backstage to the Future Programme Caribbean was a project focused on integrating young people from Colombia, Cuba, Jamaica and Venezuela as trainees. For the first exercise, which was carried out in San Andrés within the framework of the 2017 Green Moon Festival, 23 trainees participated in the activities: two of them came from Cuba, one from Jamaica, one from Venezuela, and 19 from Colombia (specifically, five from Providencia and 14 from San Andrés). For the second exercise, carried out in Jamaica within the framework of the 2018 Rebel Salute Festival, 10 people participated in the activities: four came from Colombia, three from Jamaica, two from Cuba and one from Venezuela.

Participants' working situation prior to the participation in the Backstage to the Future programme

How can we characterise the trainees who participated in the programme? One of the aspects that can answer this question is the employment situation of the trainees prior to their participation in the programme. Lado B surveyed in San Andrés 19 participants. As shown in Graph 1.1, most of them were working for a company or organisation in the cultural sector (11 participants), seven were self-employed in the cultural sector, and just one of them was not employed at that moment. This fact draws attention to the importance of programmes such as Backstage to the Future, because it focuses on providing workers with tools to reinforce their technical skills and, accordingly, increase their productivity.

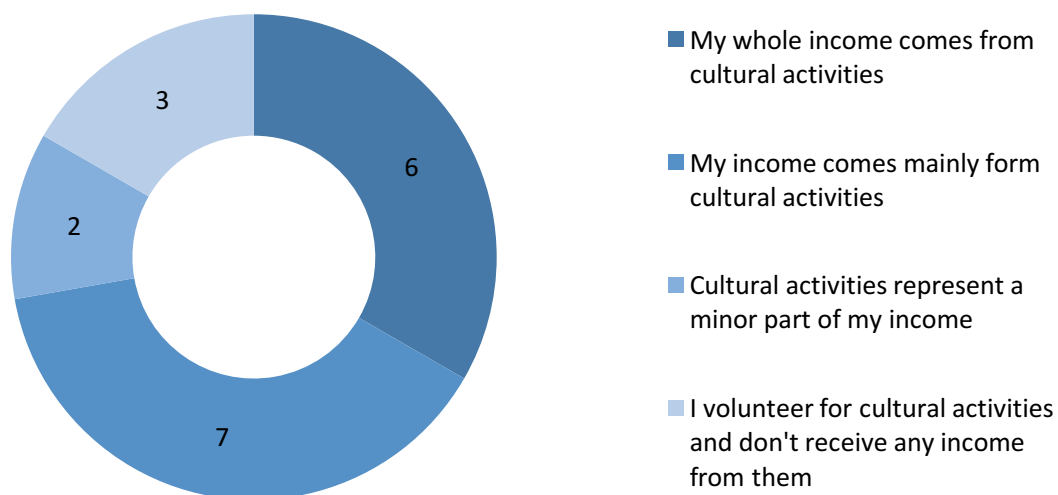
Graph 1.1: What is your current employment situation?



Moreover, this information allows us to observe the importance of cultural activities in the trainees' occupation: most of them stated that most of their income comes from this type of

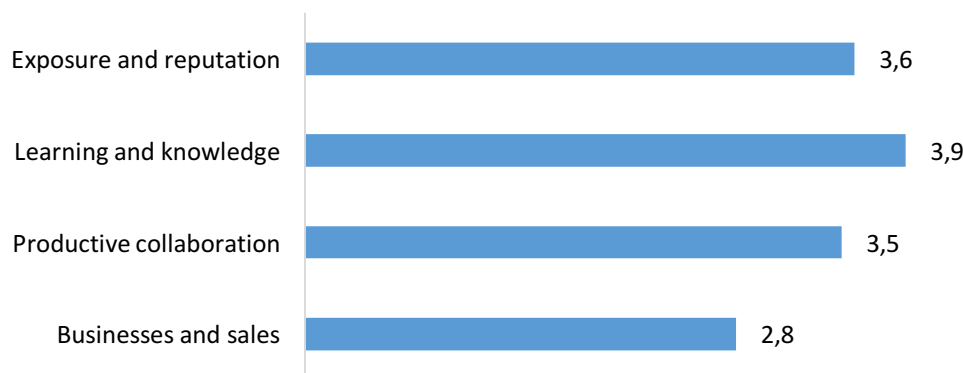
activities. As exhibited in Graph 1.2, seven of the surveyed trainees stated that their entire income comes from cultural activities. For six of the participants, the cultural field is the main source of their income.

Graph 1.2: Which of the following sentences states more accurately your income situation?



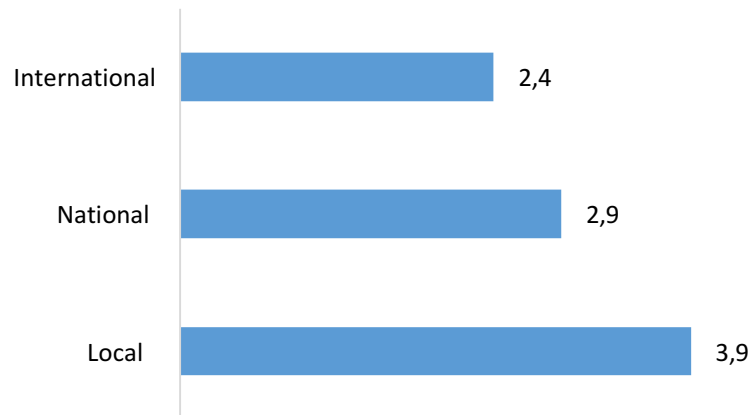
During the initial talks with the participants, it was possible to perceive their desire to learn and expand their knowledge. This need possibly reflects the fact that, even if the trainees work at a local level, they do not feel that they could gain important economic benefits from their networks. As shown in Graph 1.3, none of the options regarding the benefits obtained by working in their current network has a rating higher than 4. The highest rating is related to learning and knowledge (3.9), followed by exposure and reputation (3.6) and productive collaboration (3.5). The lowest rating is associated with the use of their network for business and sales (2.8).

Graph 1.3: What benefit do you get by working in your current network? (1: Never – 5: Always)



In a deeper analysis of this issue, it is worth stating that, as it can be observed in Graph 1.4, most of the participants stated that their network had mainly a local range (3.9), and in a considerably lower degree, countrywide (2.9) and international (2.4).

Graph 1.4: What is the range of your current network? (1: Strongly disagree – 5: Strongly agree)



Another element that shed light on the trainees' condition is the evaluation they underwent before the programme started regarding their skills in working at different geographical levels (results shown in Graph 1.5). Most of them answered that they had strong skills in working at a local level (4.4). Contrastingly, the lowest self-evaluation ratings were those related to working at an international level (3.3). These results highlight the importance of programmes such as Backstage to the Future, because it is not just about teaching the participants how to use technical equipment, but about offering them the opportunity to acquire or develop the necessary skills to render relevant and efficient services in broader contexts and markets.

Furthermore, it is relevant to note that one of the trainees stated as the main motivation for participating in the programme the interest in generating an impact on their daily lives and careers, especially in their local context. This can be interpreted as a response to the fact that they believe that once a person has the knowledge and confidence, that person can translate those aspects into better opportunities in the corresponding work field. Additionally, it allows them to exploit the opportunities in a more efficient way. In other words, it is a process of empowerment, as one of the trainers put it: "once you have a little bit of knowledge, you can transfer that in to your daily life, you can network on that, you can then transfer that into cash" (Steve Reece, 2017).

Graph 1.5: How do you evaluate your current skills to...? (1: Novice – 5: Highly Advanced)

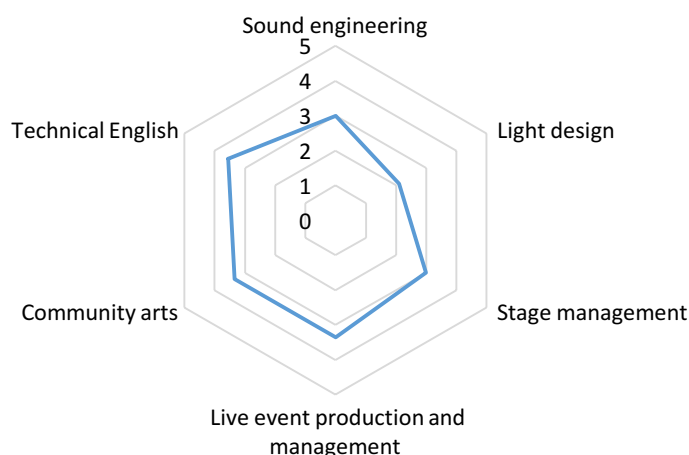


Trainees' assessment of their skills prior to their participation in the BTF programme?

The trainees' empirical competence. The trainers of the BTF programme in San Andrés stated that the trainees already had a good level of technical competences prior to their participation. However, it should be emphasised that their knowledge was mostly empirical: they learned their skills after performing their work for years. Even if the trainees had some limited empirical training before the BTF, the trainers highlighted that they were all able to successfully overcome the challenges given to them. This may have something to do with some sort of resourcefulness many technicians develop by facing limitations in their training background and technology availability situations in some Colombian regions (Lado B, 2016). When the trainees realised the BTF programme was meant for them, they showed major interest and great deal of enthusiasm on improving their skills in a structured way with the support from qualified technicians.

The trainees' self-assessment of their technical skills. Certainly, the trainees were aware that they had shortages regarding their technical skills. In the words of one of the trainers: "they weren't afraid to show their ignorance, because they all wanted to learn" (Don McDowell, 2017). This fact can be observed in the self-evaluation the apprentices made of their own technical skills. Graph 1.6 shows that none of the six categories got a rating greater than four. The highest rating is the one related to Technical English (3.6) and the lowest rating is the one linked to lightning design (2.1).

Graph 1.6: How do you assess the level of your technical skills in the following aspects? (1: Novice – 5: Highly Advanced)



However, when asked about the overall level of their confidence in their professional abilities before the BTF programme, the average rating for this aspect was 4.4, which shows that even being aware about their technical skills shortages, they were significantly positive about their capacities. In contrast, when the participants were asked about the specific knowledge and skills necessary to steer their careers in the direction they wanted, they were more critical with an average rating of 4.1 for this aspect. This information brings an interesting finding to light: the trainees perceived certain disadvantages regarding their technical skills and knowledge in order to steer their careers in an appropriate way but, at the same time, they were very confident about their professional abilities. This conclusion was shared among the trainers before the BTF programme: “So, they have the ability. It's just about challenging their experience, rising their expectations and give them the opportunity to match them” (Derek Richards, 2017).

Table 1.1: What is the current level of your confidence in your professional abilities (1: Very Low – 5: Very High)

**Average
4.4**

Table 1.2: Do you think you currently have the knowledge and skills needed to develop your creative career in the direction you would want (1: Strongly Disagree – 5: Strongly Agree)

**Average
4.1**

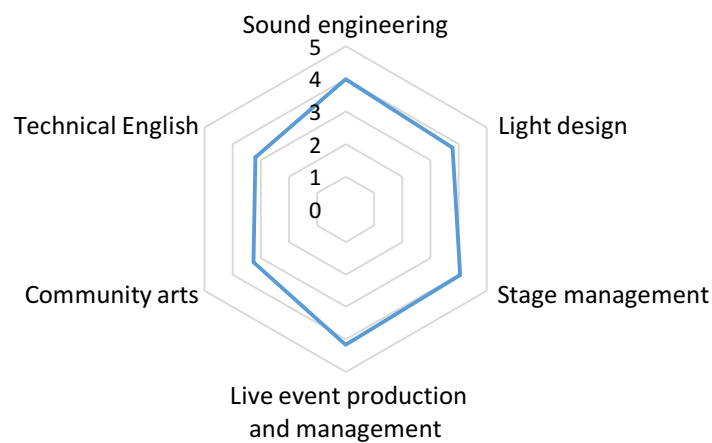
What did the trainees need prior to their participation in the BTF programme?

The trainees' needs. A concrete list of the skills the trainees felt they needed to acquire was defined. Unsurprisingly, greater needs were found regarding the skills where their assessment was lower: they were very interested in learning about stage management (4.1), sound engineering (4.0) and lightning design (3.8). Graph 1.7 evidences that the element the trainees thought they

needed the least is the technical English (3.2). This result is not unexpected, considering that it is the element about which they stated to have the strongest skills prior to the event.

At this point, we must highlight the importance of stage management as one of the most relevant jobs in events and concerts. One of the most outstanding elements of the BTF experience in San Andrés is that, at the beginning, the trainees did not exactly know about the specific existence and relevance of the stage management skill. Now, they understand that this element is essential and that “they can contribute a lot to the live industry, bringing their experience from their jobs and learning about stage management, which supplements them in their jobs” (Derek Richards, 2017).

Graph 1.7: Which of the following skills and experience do you urgently need to acquire? (1: No Priority - 5: Priority)

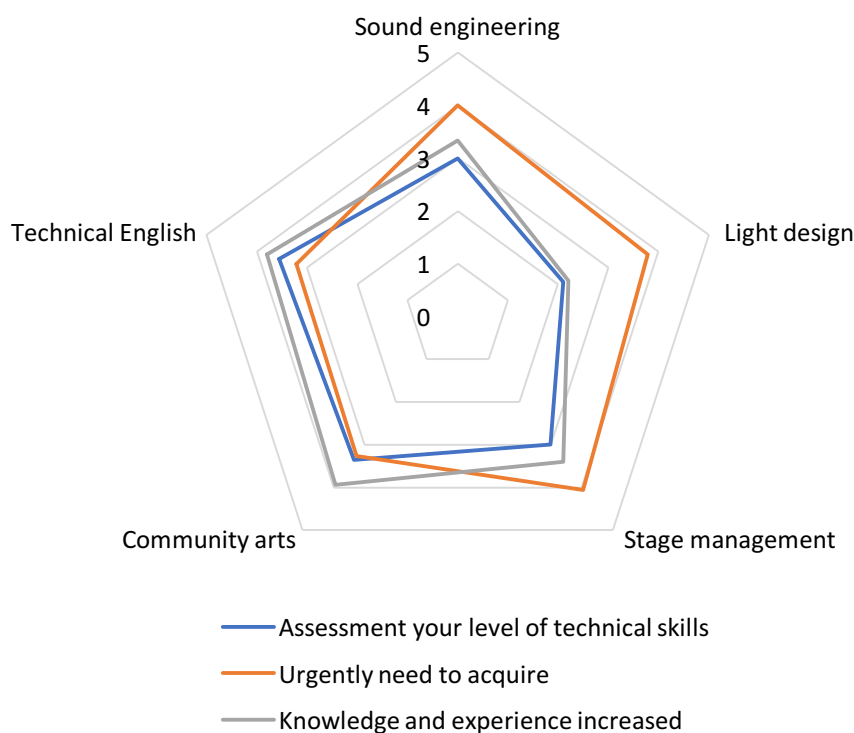


A clearer path for growth: the experience in San Andrés

Results in terms of technical abilities

By comparing the assessment of the technical skills (Graph 1.6) with the elements the trainees state they need to acquire (Graph 1.7), and considering their increased knowledge and experience after their participation in the Backstage to the Future programme, significantly interesting findings can be observed. As shown in Graph 2.1, the trainees were able to improve their knowledge and experience in all the aspects in relation to their skills levels prior to their participation in the BTF programme (grey line vs. blue line). It worth highlighting that deepest impact was achieved in the community arts and the stage management elements, as these two aspects presented the greatest improvements. Conversely, lightning design was the element with the lowest strengthening level. This might be related to the fact that the lightning design trainer was objectively not as experienced as the other trainers.

Graph 2.1: Assessment of technical skills level vs. skills trainees urgently need to acquire vs. increased knowledge and experience



Another conclusion of this comparison exercise is that the BTF programme improved the trainees' skills in just few days, but they still have some way to go to match their long-term needs. In this sense, the programme allowed the participants to take their first steps toward professional growth. It opened a new path for technical improvement and for understanding what it takes to achieve their professional goals. Many of the trainees are now able to understand what kind of specialisation they want to pursue after the BTF.

This trainee empowerment process is promising in many ways. The empowerment element can be reviewed in Graph 2.2. As we can see, after the event, the trainees were able to build an international network of colleagues and friends with whom they intend to keep in touch. Additionally, the results show that they feel more confident about their professional abilities and that they now understand and appreciate the benefits of working in an international context.

Nevertheless, even though the trainees expressed their positivism about the results and conveyed that they now understand and appreciate to a higher degree the benefits of working in an international context, the element that they rated the lowest was the one related to feeling better prepared to work in an international context (Graph 2.2). This element shows the fact that before the end of the experience in San Andrés, the trainees were highly conscious about their evolving technical skills level. By the same token, the trainees continue to be extremely realistic about their knowledge and they know that even though they have started a change, they need to invest more work, time and practice to feel adequately prepared for performing within an international network¹.

Graph 2.2: To what extent do you agree with these statements?



¹ This aspect would change drastically with the shadowing experience in the Rebel Salute Festival.

Evaluation of the BTF approach

The evaluation of the methodological approach of the BTF programme deployed in San Andrés is highly positive. As it can be seen in Graph 2.3, the three training modules produced high evaluation ratings over 4.5. Conversely, the element with the lowest rating is the one related to the purpose-built facility used for the training activities (3.9). This result is possibly the consequence of some problems related to infrastructure and weather, which seem to have had an impact on the opinion of the beneficiaries. When asked about what elements could be improved regarding the overall process, one of the participants offered this opinion: “Possibly the place. As we are on an island, the wind sometimes blows the dust off... and that made some people uncomfortable” (Karen Livingstone, 2018).

Graph 2.3: How do you evaluate the pertinence of the following aspects of the BTF programme methodology and approach?



It is important to note that the trainees evaluated the approach of the training process as very positive. The participants communicated feelings about the technical teaching being enough and the practical experience being perfectly combined throughout the process. In the words of one of the trainees: “the theoretical and practical components were quite well organised, because we knew how to manage our time between classes and practical activities... The coordination was good enough not to get bored in the theoretical sections, because they explained a theory and, then, we immediately transitioned to the practice” (Patrick Livingstone Miller, 2018).

Results in terms of soft skills and networks

Undoubtedly, one of the main goals of the programme is to foster the interest in working on and reinforcing the soft skills. This is a particularly relevant aspect when considering the observations trainers made about the trainees, being highly capable team-workers, but lacking abilities related to the efficient communication and transmission of ideas. Soft skills are one of the major aspects to work on, because this type of skills give the trainees the opportunity to carry out their job anywhere. This fact can be perceived in the words of one of the trainers: “all of these techniques, all of these exercises, whatever they are [...] to keep them, to keep those tools, so that they (trainees) can go and work with people wherever they are” (Don McDowell, 2017).

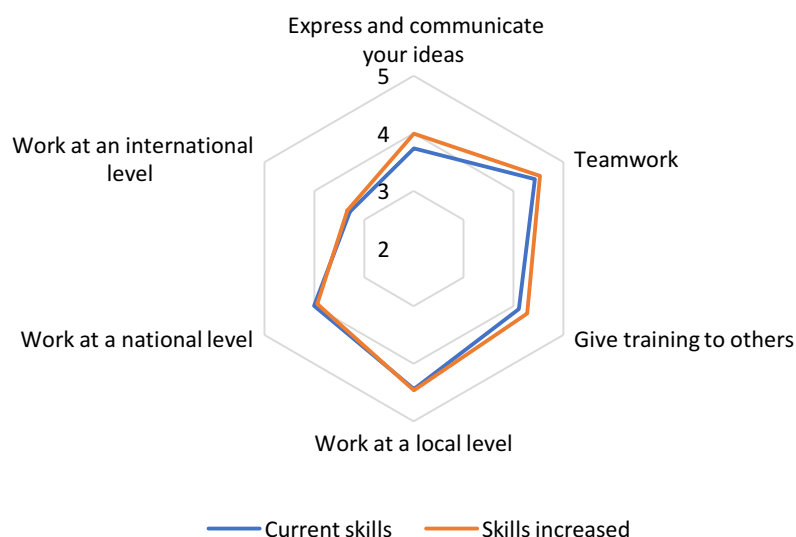
Interesting conclusions can be reached by comparing the assessment of the soft skills before and after the BTF programme (Graph 2.4). Prior to the start of the programme, the trainers perceived that the trainees were enthusiastic about teamwork but they were not keen on communication, particularly with regard to communicating their ideas efficiently. However, the programme enabled the improvement on competences related to expressing and communicating ideas and training other people, as evidenced by the following comment by one of the trainers:

“In my opinion, one thing that we transferred in the methodology was the vehicle and the means to communicate in a different way. They (the trainees) demonstrated that in so many different ways during the week, and in such a fresh way yesterday, when the stage management group organised what needed to be done and didn’t think about that... there was constant communication” (Steve Reece, 2017).

Moreover, the results of the survey showed that there was no significant improvement in the skills that are necessary to work at any geographical level (locally, countrywide and internationally) (Graph 2.4). In this regard, testimonies such as the following (from a trainee who only participated in the activities carried out in San Andrés) allow to conclude that said small improvement might be due to the trainees entering a stage of realisation that they need to consolidate the knowledge they acquired and work outside their comfort zone to reach higher levels of technical proficiency:

“I think that I definitely need to make progress in some aspects... I’d be lying if I tell you that I’m ready. First, I need to adjust the knowledge I gained with this experience” (Elkin Llanos, 2018).

Graph 2.4: Self-assessment of soft skills prior to the BTF vs. after the BTF



Notwithstanding the foregoing, the results of the process and training in terms of soft skills were very satisfying as these skills supplement the technical skills. This conclusion can be drawn from the evolution of the confidence the trainees express about their own abilities and skills:

“People you work for know two things about you: your capabilities and secondly your level of confidence... and after being part of this programme, you have to do everything with confidence, and having a clear sense of your capacity. That is really important because we can keep on talking about technical skills [...] but we are also here to make a change. The most important thing they can take with them from this experience is confidence, and they are going to be able to achieve what they achieved yesterday (BTF closing day)” (Derek Richards).

It is important to note that this increased confidence was not only observed on an individual basis but also on a collective basis. This means that the trainees realised the potential they have, but they also discovered the capacities and talents of their fellow trainees: “I was pleasantly surprised to see that my colleagues, those I had the chance to work with, have great capabilities. [...] I can rely on them because they have a great potential to develop the knowledge we acquired this week” (Elkin Llanos, 2018).

Backstage to the Future: a training programme with a great atmosphere

“I like everything, and I mean everything: the classmates, the trainers, what they’re teaching us. Every single thing!” (Nitchman Robinson, 2017).

In addition to the importance of the BTF programme in terms of training and teaching, it is possible to perceive highly positive feedback about the entire process. In other words, the programme not only produced results related to the technical and soft skills training, it also generated a noticeable positive atmosphere.

The trainees have stated that they feel very happy about the personal relationships they were able to build: “I got some new friends, new knowledge, new contacts, relationships, memories...”

(Daelsis Pena Padilla, 2017). They were able to build friendships and good relationships with the other participants, and they expect to keep in touch with this new network of people.

This aspect is significantly important, considering that both the trainees and the trainers stated that they were aware of not having the best abilities in terms of soft skills and communication. Therefore, the fact that they created networks and learned how to be more collaborative in their daily life and work are crucial aspects for the future development. As one of the trainees commented on one of the activities: “I participate in and help the group because they also help me to get my mixing right”.

Additionally, the trainees have stated that they are very happy with the trainers because they did an excellent job, and some of the trainees have even established the trainers as references for their goals: “I want to get to the level of his (Steve’s) mixing skills someday” (trainee, 2017). The trainers were very open to share what they know, they were very assertive with their teaching, and engaged the students throughout the entire process.

Finally, it is important to note that the trainees were not the only ones who acquired new knowledge from the BTF programme. The trainers have stated that they learnt a great deal about the trainees and their context, and about the islands and how important they are to them. The trainers also expressed happiness about being able to see the evolution of their students and about being sure that they will have a better future. In addition, the entire process made them aware of their teaching skills and made them reflect on what and how they teach: “I learnt in a way that cannot be compared to other experiences I’ve had” (Dereck Richards, 2017).

Overall skills and confidence: perception of improvement

In further analysis of the results in terms of technical and soft skills, it can be concluded that the BTF programme in San Andrés increased the trainees’ clarity regarding the path they need to follow to improve their careers. Table 2.1 presents results that exhibit that the trainees made a modest but important upgrade in their perception of the knowledge and skills they must develop to steer their careers in the direction they want to go (from 4.1 to 4.3). This fact shows that the BTF programme cleared the path they must pursue.

Table 2.1: Do you think you currently have the knowledge and skills you need to develop your creative career in the direction you want vs. I now think I have the knowledge and skills I need to develop my career in the direction I want (1: Strongly disagree – 5: Strongly agree)

Necessary skills to develop your creative career in the direction you want (before the BTF)	4.1
I now have the knowledge and skills I need to develop my career in the direction I want (after the BTF)	4.3

For the trainers, the most important thing was to reinforce the knowledge and experience of the participants. Before entering the programme, the trainees did have certain skills but they lacked confidence. The importance of confidence is one of the aspects that the trainers emphasised the

most: “I think it’s mainly confidence, it’s really mainly confidence. And I think some of the learning they’ll gain will be to recognise what they already have... focusing on a skill and then being able to share that” (Don McDowell, 2017). By strengthening the determination of the trainees, they are also given the opportunity to find solutions to possible problems or situations they may encounter in their professional path.

As a general conclusion, confidence is one of the most relevant elements of this programme. Having some sort of work security, wanting to learn more, understanding the importance of cooperation and sharing, and taking their technical skills to another level demonstrates the highly positive impact the programme had on all the participants, and it can be asserted that these facts are a reflection of having achieved all the objectives.

Along the same line, it was also observed that one of the main aspirations of the trainers was to reinforce the confidence of the participants. Thus, the learning process showed the trainees that this programme is a tool that contributes to the maximisation of their work potential, which allows them to understand the problems and situations they may encounter in their daily activities, as well as to identify the applicability of their skills in general and to have a more prosperous future.

How do the trainees feel about the Backstage to the Future programme?

The BTF programme produced very good results, especially those related to the possibility of learning more every day. The entire process was highly comprehensive: it was not just about the line of knowledge the trainees chose to focus on, but about all the subjects addressed throughout the programme (sound, lighting and stage management). This conclusion was drawn up from comments such as this: “I also want to learn more about the other fields I’m not going to focus on” (trainee, 2017).

All these learning processes are significantly important if the context the participants came from is considered, as well as the fact that most of their initial knowledge was empirical. In this sense, the trainees expressed that they will be taking the knowledge, skills and experience they acquired to their daily work activities with the purpose of focusing on improving what is produced in their local context:

"I'm going to take fantastic knowledge and ideas back to Providencia because [...] this has been a new process, something new that I have done in my life. Here, in both San Andrés and Providencia, the festivals are organised empirically. I feel that I can contribute a lot to my island because I can start the legacy of organising festivals and events the right way, with a higher quality level” (Maroxy Robinson, 2017).

To have the opportunity to learn more and the possibility to take that knowledge back to their work and personal network are very important factors for the trainees, particularly because they have expressed happiness about the process that they are just beginning. Even though they know they have a long way to go, they have expressed certainty about it being considerably useful: “Improving my skills was one of my biggest dreams” (Nitchman Robinson, 2017).

So, what is next? All the trainees have stated that they want to continue studying to keep on learning, having experiences and paving this road of learning they are building: “I want to participate in the practical activities as much as I can” (trainees, 2017). That is why it is important

to note that the BTF programme did not just help the participants to realise the knowledge and skills they had and lacked, they were pleasantly surprised by the positive results and achievements in relation to both the event and their personal performance.

San Andrés and its challenges

“There is something really beautiful they have, which is the way they are interconnected with their island” (Don McDowell, 2017).

It is fairly evident that the trainees share an extremely deep cultural bond: they have a very strong connection with the San Andrés and Providencia islands, their history and their culture; as Don McDowell put it:

“There is something that comes out of these people and it’s not just Caribbean or Latin American, it’s about the nature of their community. For example, the way women and men are interweaved in the cultural industry, not only in a professional and collaborative manner, but in way that resembles a family... And there’s also the whole historical thing about the culture and the tradition of the island. Most of the San Andrés and the Providencia people have some connection with the *raizal* culture and all its background” (Don McDowell, 2017).

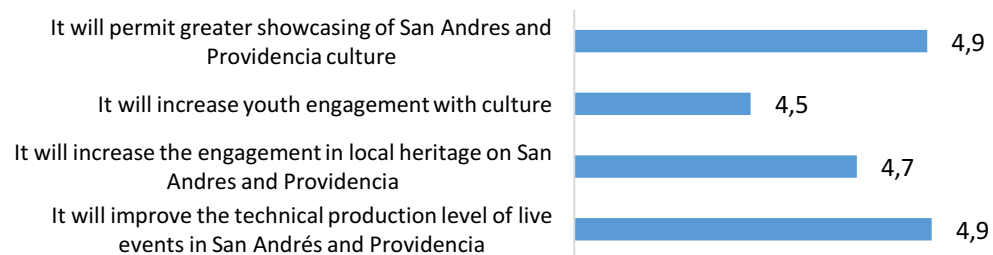
Even though the cultural setting has a lot of importance in their work and daily life, the trainees are very aware about the fact that the islands do not have suitable infrastructure. As shown in Table 2.2, this aspect got an average rating of 2.8. This confirms that the venues, recording studios, equipment, etc. found in the islands are not nearly adequate.

Table 2.2: ANSWER ONLY IF YOU COME FROM SAN ANDRÉS OR PROVIDENCIA: How adequate do you think the San Andrés and Providencia infrastructure (venues, recording studios, equipment rental shops, etc.) is for the development of your activity?

**Average
2.8**

Furthermore, the relevance of the BTF programme in the local context is reflected in the hopes that the trainees stated the programme would generate both among them and in their local communities. As it can be observed in Graph 2.5, the trainees have significantly high expectations regarding all the surveyed aspects (all presented ratings above 4.5). However, the highest ratings are those for the aspects related to the improvement of the quality level of the technical production of live events in San Andrés and Providencia (4.7), and to the fact that the programme will allow showcasing the culture of San Andrés and Providencia in a greater scale (4.9).

Graph 2.5: ANSWER ONLY IF YOU COME FROM SAN ANDRÉS Y PROVIDENCIA: What impact do you expect the BTF programme will have on your local community? (1: Very Low – 5: Very High)



Consolidation and strengthening: the experience in Jamaica

The Backstage to the Future experience in Jamaica was considerably different from the event held in San Andrés. Nevertheless, the contrast was not a surprise because the objectives of the two events were conceptually different. On the one hand, the San Andrés programme was particularly focused on teaching the participants theory and practical knowledge that they could be able to use in the future. On the other hand, the shadowing experience in Jamaica consisted in observing what the trainees learnt in a real scenario within the context of an international festival.

However, there were other different elements. For example, the activities in San Andrés lasted more days, which is why many of the participants felt that was a calmer and more laidback experience: “San Andrés was much calmer, there were many more days. I was also able to get to know the trainees and the trainers. I had the time to meet them, talk to them, and make new friends... But, in Jamaica, we’re just going to be here a few days to go to the festival and be at the resort for a while” (Yua Arteaga, 2018).

In addition, the relationships the trainees established with the trainers were clearly different. The interaction in San Andrés was a significantly closer and personal, and the relationships have actually continued after the programme (most of the participants have kept in touch with other participants and the trainers). Contrastingly, in the shadowing experience in Jamaica, the participants had close interactions among them but their relationships with the host technicians were simply cordial and professional. In other words, no new strong bonds were created; the participants were there to observe and learn through the experience.

Even though the experiences were different, they were also supplementary. The experience in Jamaica represented the opportunity for the trainees to see everything they learnt in the BTF activities carried out in San Andrés in the practice in real life and in real time:

“This second stage of the programme in Jamaica was the opportunity to watch the implementation of everything I learnt in the first part in San Andrés. So, it's a wonderful opportunity because I was able to see other things, I was able to see how the stage manager handles all the changes on the stage: the groups, the security protocols. I was able to learn many things. It was a wonderful experience” (Maroxy Robinson, 2018).

Results in terms of technical skills

Interesting aspects can be extracted from the results of the evaluation of the approach and methodology of the shadowing experience in Jamaica. In general, it can be stated that the overall ratings for the event are significantly good, as shown in Graph 3.1. However, one of the aspects obtained a particularly high rating (4.9): allowing the participants to interact with a new group of professionals from the same field.

Moreover, the element related to allowing the participants to expand their international network obtained a rating lower than the aforementioned (4.5), even though it is still a high score. Yet, this slightly lower rating was not a surprise considering that the participants had already created their international network and had already built friendships and relationships among them in the San

Andrés experience. In addition, the shadowing experience in Jamaica was more “impersonal”, in the sense that the trainees were not as close to the host technicians and there were no direct teaching interactions. In this regard, Maroxy Robinson (2018) made the following comment: “in the teamwork field there were strong teamwork efforts among the apprentices. But I feel that we could have done a better job combining our teamwork with the work of the Jamaican festival staff.”

Furthermore, another aspect that was objectively positive for the trainees was the opportunity to better understand how to support a staff team in a large-scale event (4.8). In alignment with this aspect, all of the trainees stated that they feel they can know be part of groups responsible for managing international events. They are aware, nonetheless, of the fact that they need to attain more knowledge and more experience. However, in conclusion, they affirm that they feel they can be part of international work teams and do a good job in that type of context: “I’m not saying I can do everything, everything as they do; but I do believe that I have the ability to work [in that context]” (Nitchman Robinson, 2018). This means that the trainees’ experience in Jamaica helped them in imagining themselves at a different professional level, and it boosted even more their confidence about what they know and what they can do.

To sum up, it can be concluded that the most important knowledge-related aspect of the entire programme was the theoretical understanding of what working at an international festival entails. The practical contents were not as significant as the theory taught, but the shadowing experience was the perfect continuation for the training process in San Andrés. Additionally, the trainees did have the possibility to confirm in what direction they want to steer their professional careers and to streamline their projects based on the knowledge and experience acquired.

Graph 3.1: What is your assessment of the relevance of the following approach and methodology aspects related to the shadowing experience in Jamaica?



Results in terms of soft skills and networks: a new level of confidence

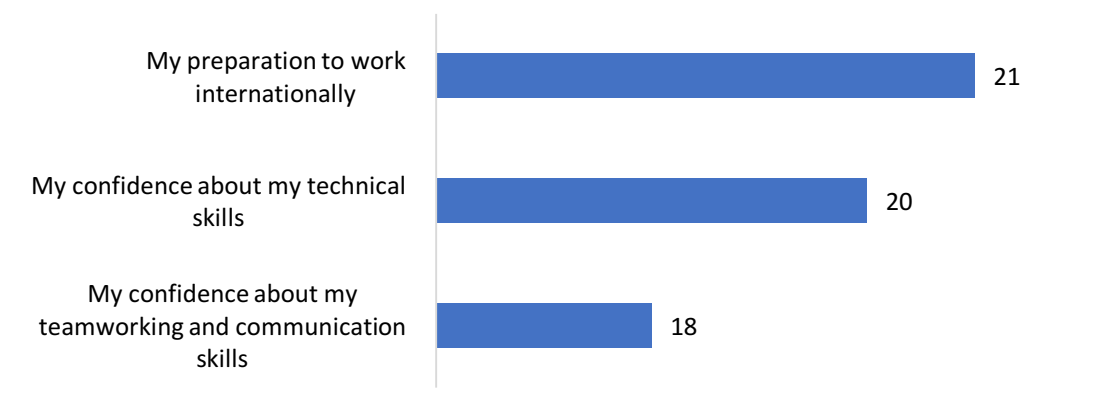
It can be stated that one of the aspects that evolved the most among the trainees throughout the entire process is their confidence in both their abilities and their knowledge. This increased confidence is actually reflected in the results of the survey conducted in that regard after the shadowing experience: the trainees expressed that they felt better prepared to work in an international context (average rating: 21). Additionally, the participants also assessed an increase in the confidence they have now in their technical skills (average rating: 20).

These ratings appear to be connected with the opportunity the trainees had of watching professionals performing in an international context, making them less afraid of what they would go through in that type of scenarios. In addition, the positive results regarding the trainees' confidence might be a reaction to knowing that they acquired new knowledge through a practical and real-life experience. About these aspects, Yessica Cifuentes stated the following: "It's a major contribution because it's a real experience. It is not just sitting there to watch a video or to listen to someone and take notes. It's being in the middle of the action of an event, [...] technically it's all you can dream of for a learning process" (Yessica Cifuentes, 2018).

Moreover, the participants also discovered that even in top-level international events, the highly experienced professionals sometimes make mistakes too. This discovery changed their mentality, enabling them to take a possible mistake as an opportunity to become more experienced and develop new abilities, instead of taking it merely as a negative aspect.

Conversely, the element the trainees feel they developed the least is the aspect related to the confidence in their teamwork and communication skills (average rating: 18). This low rating might be explained by the fact that, even though the trainees had the opportunity to meet new people in the shadowing experience in Jamaica, the interactions between them and the host technicians were not as close as those they had in San Andrés.

Graph 3.2: Results of the BTF in Jamaica: in relation to the experience of the BTF in San Andrés, to what extent has your confidence increased regarding the following aspects?



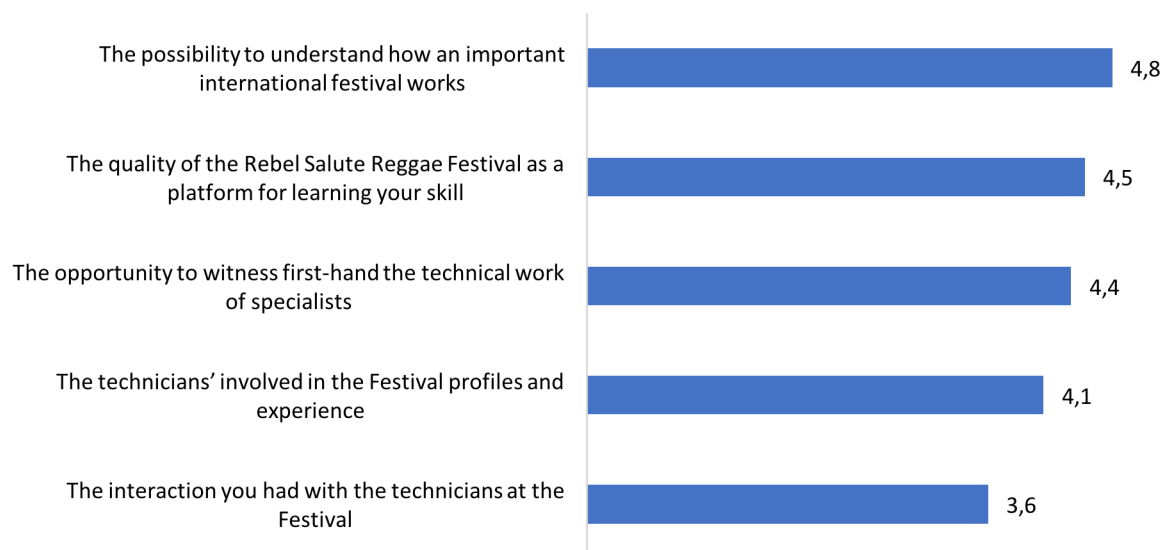
The Rebel Salute Festival approach

After the positive results produced by the experience in the Rebel Salute Festival among the participants, it is worth discussing the approach and methodology implemented by the programme. As it has been previously mentioned, the element with the top rating was the aspect related to the possibility of understanding how an important international festival works (4.8).

The participants also expressed significantly positive opinions about having the opportunity to witness first-hand the technical work of specialists (4.4) and about the experience and the profiles of said host technicians (4.1). As it was stated by one of the trainees: they were “highly professional. [...] They really know what they are doing but they are also super relaxed. They work with their own style, in their own way. And, when the show starts, everything goes as it has to go” (Fermin Whitaker, 2018).

In contrast, the element that obtained the lowest rating (3.6) is the aspect related to the interaction of the trainees with the host technicians during the festival. Even though all the trainees know that the technicians were focused on doing their job, and they did not want to distract the technicians, the trainees expressed that they felt they were a little disconnected. One of the trainees put it this way: “I feel that the technical team didn’t know that we were going to be there [...] because I think they could have used us more. They could have taken advantage of the fact that we were going to be there, preparing tasks for us or something like that” (Yua Arteaga, 2017).

Graph 3.3: Evaluation of the BTF: what is your assessment of the relevance of the following aspects regarding the approach and methodology of the shadowing experience in Jamaica?



Employment and career

The impact of the participation in the shadowing experience in Jamaica on the participants' work careers and on their hopes is one of the most relevant results of this process. As shown in Graph 3.4, the aspects with the highest ratings are those related to having the opportunity to get a better job (4.5) and to the possibility getting higher-level freelance work (4.4). Contrastingly, the aspects with the lowest ratings are those related to the possibility of getting a better position and to the possibility of securing better remuneration in the organisation they work for (2.5 and 2.0, respectively).

These results are relevant because they show that after their participation in the programme, the trainees have reached new levels of confidence in both their work and knowledge, and they have a new perspective on their future. They are actually wishing to assume some risks in their careers in order to have a better future. Different from the results of the survey conducted prior to the trainees' participation in the San Andrés activities, which showed that they believed they were not prepared to work in an international context or in large-scale festivals, the participants have stated that they now feel they are well prepared: "Actually I feel ready. I feel ready because you don't learn only by preparing yourself. You just have to take the plunge sometimes. And even if you make mistakes, that is how you learn, you learn from mistakes too" (Yessica Cifuentes, 2018).

This confidence-building process has different elements that can be highlighted. On the one hand, participating in an international festival with real situations occurring in real time represented the possibility for the trainees to think about things they would do differently in the daily exercise of their work:

"We also identified things that were missing. Things that were done in a different way than how they should have been done, and I think that is great too because we can learn from that. It means that if you see something that is being done that way, and you know that it is not the right way to do it, then you will also learn from that. You learn from that experience too, you know, about how things should be done correctly. I like that part of the experience because it is a great festival, but like all festivals it has some things to improve" (Maroxy Robinson, 2018).

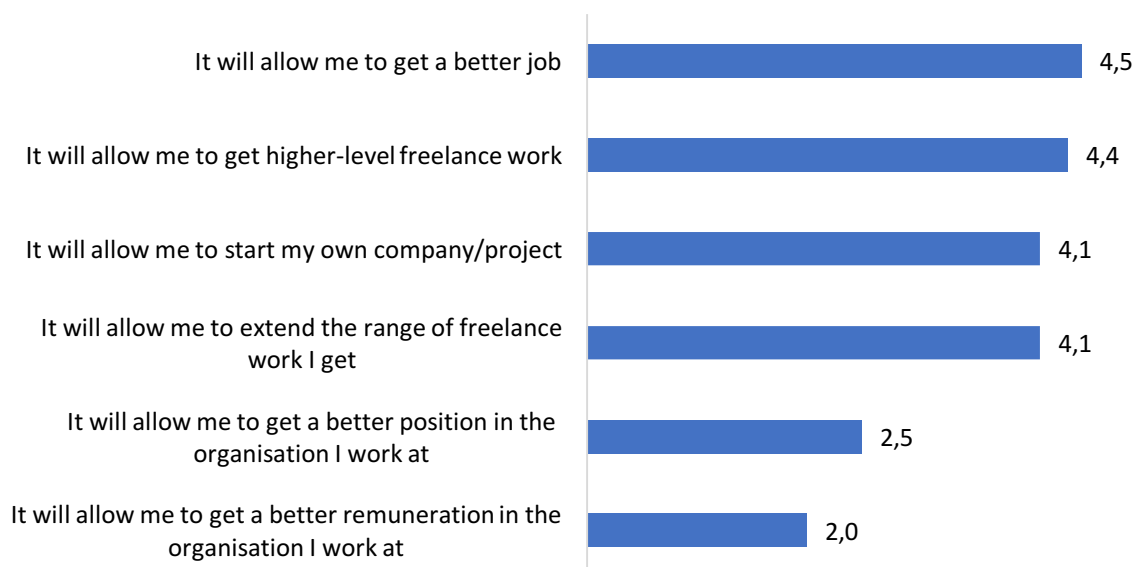
Thus, this observation was something that allowed them to realise that they can be part of large-scale scenarios and that they can dream big in terms of their career and about the level they can reach:

"I try not to picture myself in such big scenarios and in such big dreams because disappointment is always ugly. But to see that I was there, and that I was on that platform, and that I understood what was happening around me, and that I knew why the things were happening, [...] for me that was everything. It is not impossible, you can do it, and you can make mistakes, but they will not define you as a professional. What defines you is the ability to correct the mistakes and to finish what you are doing" (Yessica Cifuentes, 2018).

Another important fact is that the trainees have stated that they feel that embracing these knowledge means that they now can offer new services to those who hire them: "I already think of stage management as one additional service I can offer" (Yessica Cifuentes, 2018). In conclusion,

the Jamaica experience gave the trainees new arguments to assume possible risks in their careers, extending the range of their work, looking for new jobs or possibly becoming entrepreneurs. The possibility of staying where they are now doesn't seem very attractive.

Graph 3.4: Employment and career: to what extent do you agree with the following possible consequences of the Rebel Salute Reggae Festival experience?



A cultural approach

The participation in the Rebel Salute Festival was an activity that helped the trainees in building a work future with clearer purposes of what they want to do. Additionally, it was an experience that enabled them to reach higher levels of confidence in their abilities, in their knowledge and in the services they can offer as technicians. Besides that, it was also a significantly deep experience in terms of cultural outreach and learning.

Firstly, the Rebel Salute Festival is a very unique experience. As Ryan Bayley commented: it is a family event with “clean” music (music that does not include profanities or violence). Secondly, it is an event that “promotes a healthy lifestyle [...] and it doesn’t end up affecting your body. It is also a spiritual experience. If you take care of your body, you take care of the mind, you take care of the heart” (Ryan Bayley, 2018).

In terms of cultural aspects, the most relevant element the trainees learnt were the control, positivity and calmness with which the host technicians dealt with the problems and difficult situations of their job:

“On a cultural level and on a personal level I learnt more, because the Rastafari religion is a very calm religion. They are extremely peaceful so it was incredible to see them with that peaceful attitude and to handle that stress [...] I asked him at the end: Hey, do you do yoga

or what is it that do you do to keep yourself so calm? And he answered: no, it's just my job; and I have to breathe, because if I don't manage the situation the show will suffer, and the show must go on" (Fermin Whitaker, 2018).

Therefore, having the opportunity to learn technical aspects of the work and also feeling that it was a cultural and personal experience are unique achievements of this shadowing experience. The Rebel Salute Festival was a process of absorbing the differences and experiencing things they did not expect to live.

Thus, it is necessary to establish the Caribbean identity as a relevant factor in this process of creating a cultural bond between the trainees and the host technicians. In addition, it helped in building a bridge between the participants and the experience. In other words, the fact that the participants felt that they are part of the Caribbean is an element that had a significant impact on the outcome of the programme. This can be perceived in comments made by the trainees, such as the following: "We are an island. Even though we are from Colombia, we have a great historical and cultural affinity to the Caribbean. We have the same history, the same roots" (Yessica Cárdenas, 2018).

As part of this cultural process, the Caribbean music is an important element that allowed the participants to create bonds and connections with the professionals of the Rebel Salute Festival:

"That was very important for me because I grew up consuming the music of the Rebel Salute Festival. And having the opportunity to work on the stage, where we saw 70 artists of this magnitude, of this level... and to see them in just two days, in such a short period of time... and to be there, and to have the opportunity to help, to learn and see how everything is kept under control, that was very important for me. That was a dream come true" (Fermin Whitaker, 2018).

However, it is important to note the cultural bond with said "Caribbean feeling" was not a constant among all the participants. For example, in the case of Yua Arteaga, who came from Venezuela: "In my case, what happens is that maybe I don't have such a strong affinity to the Caribbean culture, because I also have influences of other music genres. For instance, the guys from San Andrés had a much stronger affinity to the Caribbean culture" (Yua Arteaga, 2018).

A miscellaneous perspective: what is the current position of the participants and what are their perceptions regarding their future?

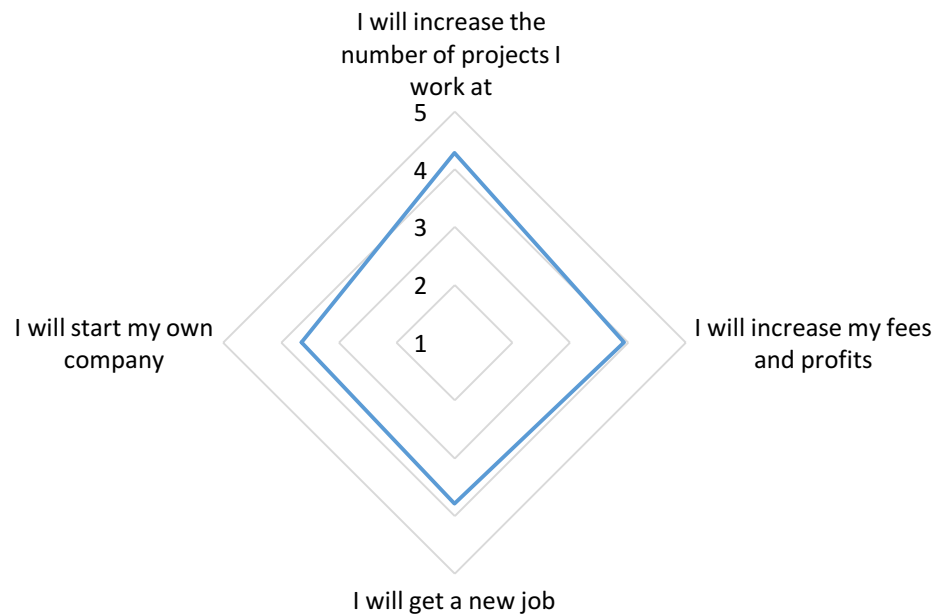
What are your expectations about the medium and long-term results of the programme?

Impact of the programme on the individual context

As it has been analysed above, the programme produced significantly positive results among the trainees. Nevertheless, it should be noted that, even though the experience was positive for all of them, it is possible to identify two different types of experiences: the experience in San Andrés with the Green Moon Festival and the experience in Jamaica with the Rebel Salute Festival produced different results.

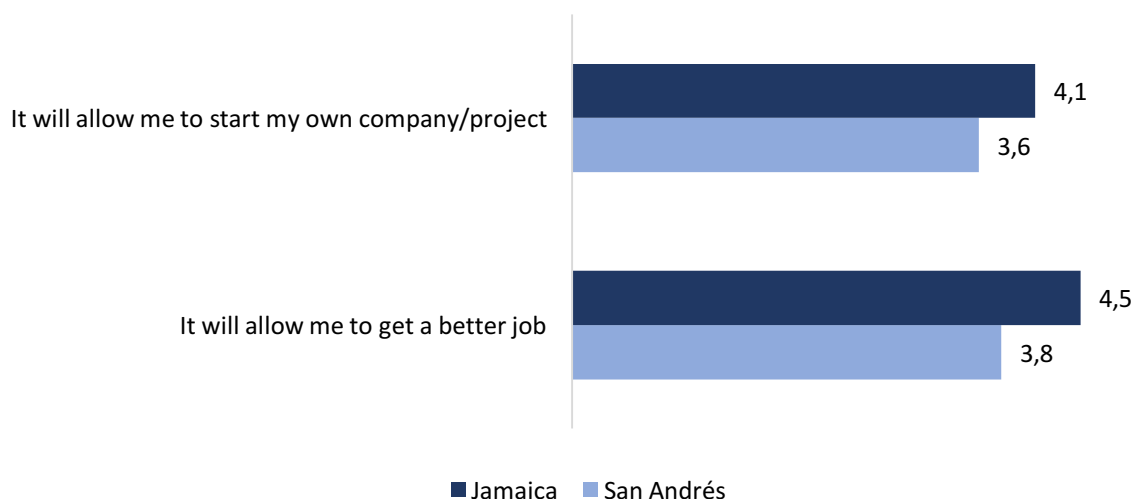
Let us start by discussing the consequences of the experience of the activities carried out in San Andrés. As it can be seen in the Graph 4.1, when asked about the possible consequences of the BTF programme, the trainees answered that their main expectations are to increase their fees and profits (3.9), and to increase the number of projects they work on (4.3). Additionally, the results of the evaluation show that a majority the trainees will probably choose to implement their new knowledge specifically on their current work projects or even to increase the amount of work and responsibilities in the organisation that currently employs them.

Graph 4.1: To what extent do you agree with the following possible consequences of the programme? (1: Do not agree at all – 5: Fully agree)



In the case of the trainees who took part in the activities carried out in Jamaica, it can be perceived that they now have higher levels of confidence and that they are willing to take more risks in their work life. In other words, the experience in the Rebel Salute Festival helped them in getting out of their comfort and safety zones. As shown in Graph 4.2, when the participants were asked if they believe that the BTF experience will allow them to start their own company or project and to get better jobs, the ratings are higher among the trainees who also participated in the activities carried out in Jamaica (4.1 and 4.5 compared to 3.6 and 3.8 among the trainees who only participated in the activities carried out in San Andrés).

Graph 4.2: Employment and career: to what extent do you agree with the following possible consequences of the BTF San Andrés vs. BTF Jamaica experience?



Impact of the programme on the collective context

In addition to the important results in terms of individual and personal development, it is important to note that the BTF programme also had a positively deep impact in terms collective proposals on the community. As it has been previously analysed, the San Andrés and Providencia islands do not have adequate frameworks in terms of the materials available and possibilities to acquire additional knowledge that would allow the participants to make further progress in their careers. That is why boosting these young technicians' confidence in their knowledge and experience will help to develop their work life and to make positive contributions to the islands because now they are aware of what they need to thrive.

For example, after the programme enabled them to realise that the work they do is called stage management, the trainees now see the need to implement that role in their local context: "The stage manager role must be implemented here in the festivals in San Andrés because it's a role that is overlooked, it goes unnoticed, but it is very important for the show" (Fermin Whitaker, 2018).

Moreover, the trainees are extremely enthusiastic about the personal projects they are developing. For example, many of them (some of whom participated in the activities carried out in

Jamaica and some who did not) joined efforts and created a proposal for the 2018 Green Moon Festival. It should be highlighted that this was a proposal prepared by the trainees with the support of the trainers they kept in touch with after the programme, who gave them some ideas and help them in making a few corrections to their proposal:

“Along with the team that went to Jamaica and with some of the trainees who only participated in the first stage of the programme, we are preparing a proposal to see if they let us, as a team, do the stage management of the Green Moon Festival, which is the strongest, biggest, most relevant festival in San Andrés” (Yessica Cardenas, 2018).

Thus, both the trainees who participated in the activities carried out in Jamaica and those who only participated in the activities carried out in San Andrés have expressed their interest in working in the local context and creating new opportunities for their local peers. In this regard, Karen Livingstone stated that she is currently working “on a project where I want to display the cultural expressions of the island by means of a festival” (Karen Livingstone, 2018). In other words, most of the trainees want to have a positive impact on the existing festivals in their local context, but they also want to create new festivals and events (however small their initial scale would be) with the purpose of giving more people a voice and fostering cultural and social expressions.

In addition, the trainees have also stated that they want to start businesses that allow them to grow as professionals but also to give their local peers new work and development opportunities.

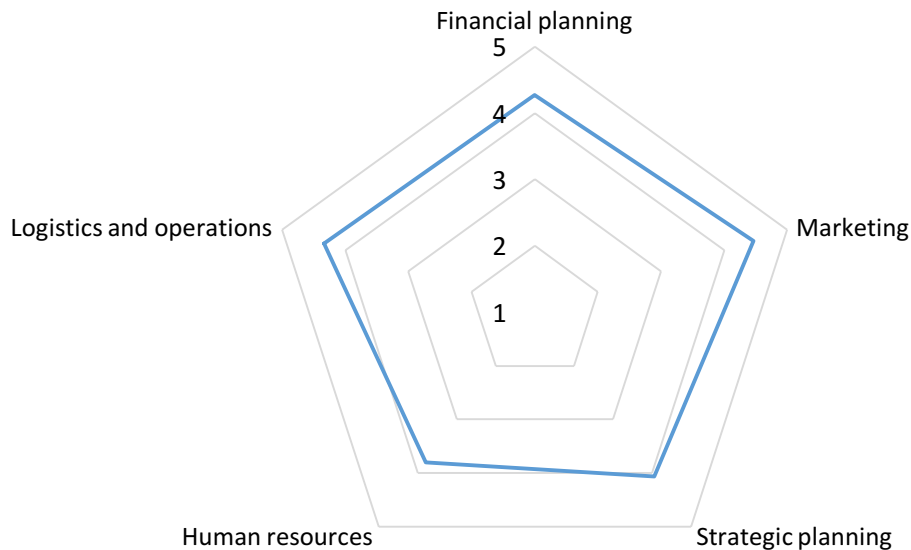
“The plan is to work with him to see if we can start the business together, and to develop the music market on the island, [...] creating opportunities for us as sound engineers and for local artists” (Nitchman Robinson, 2018).

Starting a new business: key elements

As it is natural, the background of the participants largely determines the life decisions they make. This observation can be perceived in the case of Yua Arteaga, who came from Venezuela looking for opportunities abroad due to the difficulties her country is currently facing. In contrast, the participants who are originally from San Andrés want to have an impact and work in their local context.

Beyond this matter, it is clear that the trainees who were part of the Jamaican experience, as it has been analysed in previous sections, are more open to taking greater work and employment risks than the trainees who only participated in the activities carried out in San Andrés. In this sense, some trainees want to find new jobs in other organisations where they can use their skills more concretely. In addition, as it has also been discussed in previous sections, most of the participants want to start a new personal project as entrepreneurs and they all agree that it would be very interesting to have a training programme focused on how to start a business. With regard to this idea, when asked about what aspects would be the most relevant, the trainees pointed out that they would be highly interested in the operation of business and their financial development. This is reflected in the high ratings of the marketing, financial planning and logistics and operations aspects in the results of the survey (Graph 4.3).

Graph 4.3: If you plan to start your own business eventually, would you be interested in a training programme focused on supporting you in establishing your new business? If so, what aspects would you be most interested in?



Building a reputation with the programme

In addition to improving the knowledge and confidence of the young people who participated in it, the BTF programme also built itself a broad and positive image in the San Andrés and Providencia territories. This means that the local people recognise the importance of the event and they are extremely happy with its results. Therefore, they have expressed their interest in ensuring that this type of ideas continues to be part of the life on the islands.

“What I would like to add is that it [the programme] must be repeated [...] because it is something good for us. The people are seeing the progress and they are very happy about what is happening with us” (Nitchman Robinson, 2018).

Therefore, it is possible to state that the Backstage to the Future experience has given the participants a new status in their local context. They are now recognised for being the technicians who travelled to Jamaica and got to know important artists, and for offering new services based on what they learnt in the programme.

Final thoughts and recommendations

In terms of results, it is clear that the Backstage to the Future programme produced a significantly positive outcome overall. All the participants (including both trainees and trainers) have stated that the programme was successful in improving the technical skills, the soft skills and the creation of new networks. However, as in almost every situation, there is always room for improvement by means of small changes focused on consolidating the event toward the future.

In the case of the San Andrés experience, the only recommendation would be to find a better setting in terms of infrastructure, a more adequate facility. The fact of carrying out the activities outdoors has some benefits and some strong downsides: on the one hand, the trainees stated that performing training sessions outdoors gives the programme a nice 'flow.' On the other hand, the environmental conditions of the island, such as the heat, the strong winds and the sand, often pose difficulties. In spite of this, and on another subject, it is important to note that all the reviews and comments about the interactions with the trainers, their qualifications and their theoretical and practical experience were extremely positive.

Furthermore, in the case of the shadowing experience in Jamaica, the trainees recognise that the host technicians were very open to talk to them and to answer their questions. They are also aware that even though the technicians were informed about them coming to the festival as trainees, due the nature of the event and to the amount of work the host technicians had, it was really difficult to establish relationships and have more interaction. However, the participants stated that it would be highly positive for this part of the programme to find a way to improve the level of interaction with the host technicians in order to maximise the learning experience.

A second recommendation for this shadowing experience would be arriving at the location a few days before the start of the event. These additional days will enable the participants to learn about the design and assembly processes of the Festival.

Another general recommendation is to create some sort of mechanism for ensuring and facilitating the two-way feedback exchange between trainees and trainers and host technicians through the internet or any other media. This feedback exchange already occurs in an organic way, but it would be extremely positive for the programme to find a way to make it more formal.

One more aspect worth keeping in mind is the importance of encouraging the trainees and technicians participating in the programme to be committed to working hard and to having a good attitude toward the entire experience. This commitment would contribute enormously to the construction of an increasingly positive future for them, whether it is working in festivals around the world or creating their own enterprises.

So, what is the future of the Backstage to the Future programme? In the words of Ryan Bayley, the programme must "keep up." The importance of passing technical knowledge on to the trainees, and encouraging them to develop their skills in multiple fields is quite clear. However, it should be highlighted that the programme not only benefits the individuals directly involved in it, it also improves the general conditions and development in the local and regional context. This is the reason for the good reputation the Backstage to the Future programme currently enjoys in the islands, and why the community keeps asking when is it going to be organised again.