

Cultural Skills research summary

Examining cultural skills gaps and shortages in Colombia

Author: Lado B



‘The cultural sector in Colombia has great potential for growth and could have a very strong presence in the market, but for that we need to organise ourselves, and have the technical knowledge that responds to the needs and challenges of Colombian life. This will positively impact not only individuals, but also the entire cultural sector.’

Research participant



About this report

The purpose of this report is to present an overview of the skills gaps and shortages of the cultural sector in Colombia, and to present recommendations and delivery models to the British Council to implement evidence-based skills programmes in the country to address the sector's specific needs. The research project was commissioned and funded by the British Council's Colombia office and the UK-based Cultural Skills team. They identified seven cities of interest: Barranquilla, Bogotá, Bucaramanga, Cali, Manizales, Medellín, and San Andres and Providencia, and six specific sub-sectors: design, museums and heritage, performing arts, film, visual arts, and publishing. The research was carried out through mixed methods: a desk-based literature review, 101 semi-structured face-to-face interviews, seven focus groups, and an online survey with 306 respondents. All of these were conducted simultaneously from February to April 2016. The participants were selected from the wide-ranging network of connections of the research team. A main researcher and a team member knowledgeable about the cultural sector in each city led the research and gathered the conclusions on each specific location. Between May and July, the research team analysed the information collected across Colombia to create a general overview of the skill gaps and shortages in the cultural sector in the country.

This report includes a general overview of Colombia and its cultural sector and identifies the key players

and the main skills gaps and shortages across the six sub-sectors. It intends to provide the evidence necessary for the recommendations provided to the Cultural Skills team and the Arts team in Colombia to implement programmes in Colombia aimed at overcoming the challenges addressed in this project. The report identifies the time frames, potential partners, and special considerations that should be taken into account when developing such programmes.

It is important to note that this research project has its limitations due to its scope and time constraints. It provides insights into the skills gaps and shortages in the cultural sector in Colombia in seven cities across six sub-sectors. Therefore, it is not a comprehensive overview and characterisation of the cultural and higher education sectors in the country or any of the cities addressed in the text.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank British Council colleagues in the UK and Colombia for the guidelines, suggestions, and feedback, which were essential for the writing of this report. Likewise, we would like to acknowledge the researchers in each of the seven cities who were very helpful in pointing us to key players, and providing us with contacts. We would also like to express our gratitude to more than 400 individuals who participated in the survey, interviews and focus groups, and who provided us with contacts and insights into the specificities of each sub-sector and city.

Foreword

© Megan Dancey



From museums to music, fashion to film, the skills that support the artistic process are essential to the development of a thriving

cultural sector. Skills range from technical specialism, to leadership and management; policy and qualification development, to youth engagement and English language.

The Cultural Skills team strengthens cultural relations between the UK and the rest of the world through sharing knowledge and developing mutual benefit. With partners in the UK and internationally we build sustainable cultural skills programmes that develop the skills of those practitioners and institutions across the whole of the UK and internationally, supporting the artistic, social and economic benefits of a thriving and dynamic cultural sector.

Colombia's culture is rich, varied and often world leading: literature, theatre and music to name a few areas of absolute excellence. As Colombia reaches a pivotal moment

in its history, culture has a key role to play both nationally and internationally, showing Colombia both to the world and to itself: a diverse, vibrant and rich cultural history of the intertwining and clash of indigenous, African and European pasts. A strong, thriving cultural sector can help shape a new history of possibilities and imaginations as the country takes new steps into the future.

This research seeks to understand how skills could be better shared between Colombia and the UK, and how this could lead to mutual benefit to the cultural sector in both countries. The Cultural Skills team is committed to building on the work of the Arts team within the British Council in Colombia, and providing a positive response to the challenges and opportunities highlighted within this report.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Simon T Dancey'.

Simon T Dancey
Director, Cultural Skills team

Foreword

© Adriana González Hassig



The significance of the cultural and creative industries to the social and economic development of Colombia is

becoming more and more evident. According to the Colombian Cultural Satellite Account, activities related to the cultural and creative industries sector represented 1.5 per cent of the 2013 National Added Value and generated around 180,000 jobs. Strengthening the cultural industries ecosystem is therefore essential, and can be achieved through identifying key positions and players, from creative roles to the more technical, including training, circulation, distribution and marketing.

This document's intention to diagnose and strengthen technical training for the cultural sector provides valuable input – as does its aim of encouraging holistic development in the sector, and its alignment with efforts to decentralise the cultural and creative industries entrepreneurship policy.

We welcome and celebrate this initiative, and receive it as an important contribution to the development of sectorial public policies and influence on decision-making in public and private sectors at a local and national level.

This work presented by the British Council enhances management tools, contributes to legitimising the cultural enterprise potential, and outlines the way that cultural industries contribute to social and economic welfare in the regions. It is an open invitation to keep on working in an articulated manner on projects that can develop the cultural industries in Colombia.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Adriana'.

Adriana González Hassig
Cultural Entrepreneurship
Group Officer, Ministry of Culture

Introduction and overview

Colombia, as with many other countries in the region, is in the midst of major social, political, and economic change. The government has reached an agreement with the left wing rebels FARC to end an internal armed conflict which has afflicted the country for five decades. This pact is considered the first step towards the construction of peace in a country marked by a prolonged history of violence generated by revolutionary armies, right wing paramilitary groups, and organised crime. However, there are sectors of society that reject the outcome of the negotiations between the government and the rebels.

At the same time, the country faces major economic challenges. Despite the internal conflict, Colombia has had a stable and growing economy in recent decades. High commodity prices, in particular oil, were the foundation of Colombian economic growth during the past 20 years. For this reason, the country has been vulnerable to the fall in oil prices, and economic growth has slowed down in 2015 and 2016. However, services and consumption continue to drive the economy, and experts expect the market to start to recover in 2017. Within this political and economic milieu, culture has begun to play a relevant role in Colombia due to its economic potential and as a resource for reconciliation.

The cultural sector

In the past 15 years the cultural sector in Colombia has experienced a significant growth as a result of its international recognition, a stable legal framework and policies for its promotion, as well as the activity of cultural managers. The sector has a permanent cultural offer that thrives on the diversity of Colombian cultural identities. However, the sector still faces challenges on issues such as management, funding, and reach. The 1991 Constitution granted the state a central role in the promotion and management of culture, which enabled the creation of the Ministry of Culture, the National Culture System, and a national culture plan. For this reason, the cultural sector in Colombia is highly institutionalised due to an attempt from the state to formalise, manage and strengthen it, despite the lack of economic resources.

Historically, the role of the state has been to provide funding for cultural activities, which were seen as a source of welfare for citizens and as a marker for Colombian regional identity and diversity. The orientation of public policies and programmes

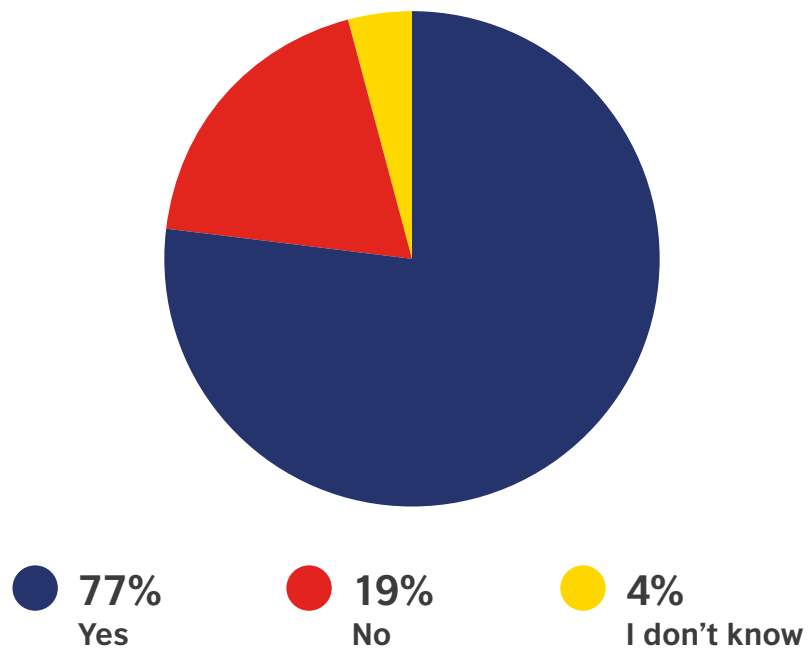
has varied widely depending on governments focusing on different aspects of culture, primarily the arts, by providing funding for creation. In recent years the scope has broadened towards artistic education, cultural heritage, and the promotion of cultural industries and entrepreneurship.

Despite the active role of central government and its attempts to formalise and strengthen the cultural sector, one of the major problems is that it remains informal in its structure and working. For this reason, the sector cannot be accurately measured. A significant number of cultural activities in the country are held in non-conventional spaces, in which new creative practices emerge, and exchange and circulation of cultural goods and services takes place. Some of the most important initiatives include the development of networks of independent visual arts spaces, managed by artists; alternative music circuits in bars or improvised shows on the street and public spaces; and spaces for business development and networking.



Key findings

Does the cultural sector in Colombia suffer from a shortage of suitably qualified, skilled, and experienced professionals?



© Lukas Jaramillo/British Council



This report identifies three main types of skill shortages and gaps. The first gap is that identified between higher education and cultural sector needs. There are a few technical education programmes which focus on the non-creative areas of the cultural sector, and university degrees emphasise theory and the creative process. This situation leads to a series of skills shortages in the management capacity of cultural companies, in areas such as entrepreneurship skills, finance and business skills, marketing skills, audience development skills, public policy development skills, and collaborative work skills. In addition to this, there are shortages related to the necessary technical processes for the production and circulation of cultural content that vary according to each sub-sector. Most of these skills shortages are in roles which support the artistic activity, such as stage set up, lighting, art work transportation and storage, among others.

Perceptions of skills shortages and gaps also vary according to the experience of sector professionals; either as those with a conceptual or empirical training of several years and a history of work, or young graduates with relatively little experience of working in the sector, and whose job expectations are based on recent training. Deficiencies in capabilities are also different between different cities. There are differences in the specificities of the cultural sector and in perceived skills gaps between large and relatively open cities, compared to small and relatively closed regions. Cities

like Barranquilla, Bogotá, or Medellín host major institutions and universities, and have strong economic activity; while in smaller cities there is a limited training offer, and a restricted economic activity. Finally, the differences are also evident between sub-sectors. Some sectors in Colombia have a marked development path; such as the film, publishing or design sectors, whose needs are different from those of other sub-sectors which are less well developed in a professional capacity and other sub-sectors do not enjoy as much strong public support as the performing arts.

Gaps between higher education and cultural sector needs

In Colombia people interested in a career in the cultural sector usually pursue an education in the arts, social sciences, or humanities (political science, history, anthropology, sociology, literature). The interviews and focus groups conducted in this research project showed that within these programmes students receive training on the respective theory of their discipline, and acquire very few practical skills that might be useful to them in running a cultural project or enterprise. Those who pursue an arts degree (theatre, music, film, visual arts) receive training in creation and performance; however, few universities and institutions offer programmes in the technical areas necessary for the production and distribution of cultural content.

If a college graduate decides to work in an institution or enterprise within the cultural sector, it is very likely that their skills will not be sufficient to meet the specific technical demands of the company. For this reason, many Colombian cultural institutions hire workers who have not had proper training, who acquire necessary skills through on-the-job training to accomplish the technical trades to support the production and circulation of cultural goods and services. However, in an increasingly specialised market, this type of workforce is less qualified to cover the needs of the most demanding cultural productions. In recent years, the cost of cultural consumption in Colombia has increased and, therefore, consumers expect higher quality products. At the same time, there is a growing offer of international productions and shows in the country. The Colombian technical workforce rarely has the necessary expertise that these international productions demand; for this reason, it is necessary to hire experienced technicians from abroad, which raises the production costs.

Cultural management needs

The data gathered through the interviews with cultural entrepreneurs showed a variety of needs related to management. First, cultural managers lack a long-term vision of financial sustainability. Most cultural enterprises in Colombia are short-term projects that seek to fulfil a creative objective and its costs of production. There are few cultural enterprises with a long-term plan, a diversified and continuous offer of products that satisfy market needs, and who are capable of achieving sustainable patterns of income over operating costs. In this regard there is a general gap in the financial structuring of cultural enterprises and their business vision.

Another widespread finding is that cultural companies in Colombia lack a business strategy that takes into account the entire value chain. Labour and resources are primarily invested in the stages of creation and production. Meanwhile, few resources are invested in the distribution and marketing of

cultural content. The strategies used to reach specific audience segments are then very limited. This highlights the general need to develop skills in marketing and audience development strategies in relation to cultural goods.

For the most part, university programmes related to the cultural sector do not offer modules related to entrepreneurship and business management. The educational system introduces creators to the cultural market without the necessary tools to manage a sustainable productive project. For this reason, many cultural enterprises in Colombia are created, but very few achieve economic sustainability in the long term.

The lack of management skills is equally acute among professionals who already work in cultural enterprises. Many managers run their cultural companies based on their empirical knowledge of the sector. Only a handful of professionals have developed specific management skills, such as; financial structuring, negotiation, and marketing strategies, among others. For this reason, many large-scale projects in Colombia face great challenges achieving economic sustainability.

In addition, public cultural policy has been gaining importance in Colombia, primarily at the national level with the work of the Ministry of Culture, and in big cities like Bogotá and Medellín. However, the research highlighted that few decision makers in culture have the specific training required for these positions. These decision makers lack knowledge of the regulations, design of mechanisms to implement policies and programmes, project evaluation, audience development, among many other aspects for governance of the cultural sector. Training these professionals must be a priority.

Technical needs for the cultural sector

The research showed a series of technical skills gaps throughout the sub-sectors. In the case of **music**, this report shows that activities related to the production and circulation of music are carried out without any formal training and therefore tend to have sub-par standards, primarily in concert production. Trades such as stage managing, live sound engineering, stage production, are often lacking. In the field of concert management, few know how to develop strategies for budgeting, ticket sales, or tour management among others that are necessary to ensure the sustainability of the concert activity.



Film technicians in Colombia have been trained primarily through informal on-the-job training for television and advertising productions. There are few certified technicians who can reach the quality standards required in increasingly demanding national or international film productions. For this reason, in several cases, foreign productions bring the heads of their technical departments from abroad to meet more specific needs. Among the variety of skills needed in film production activities, the most urgent gaps and shortages were found in everything related to the production co-ordination, including: field production, artist management, and location management.

The **design** sector in Colombia has been mainly driven by the textile and fashion industry. The textile and fashion sub-sector has large gaps in the design process and product development. In many cases many of the required activities are not carried out by fashion designers, but by other people according to the requirements of manufacturing operations. Therefore, there are major deficiencies in the development of creative innovations with high added value. The research also identified that one of the scarcest skills in fashion design is pattern cutting, a skill which is key to the sector; a good design with a poor patterning is condemned to be a mediocre product.

A key issue facing the **publishing** sub-sector is digital content editing. The Colombian publishing industry does not have a solid plan for the creation and editing of digital content. Usually this requires the convergence of knowledge about various types of content: text, music, and audiovisual. For this reason, educational programmes with an interdisciplinary approach are required in Colombia, prioritising spaces for practice and knowledge exchange with individuals or organisations with successful experiences in the UK.

This research found that most people working on technical aspects within the **performing arts** sector in Colombia received training on-the-job rather than through specialised training. There is a clear lack of skills within the technical skills sub-sector; young people do not have the training required to take the jobs offered according to these needs, therefore these positions are held by individuals who have held these positions for years and learned their craft through their daily work. There are training deficiencies in various technical areas such as lighting and sound for theatre. Respondents identified that the most significant deficiency is in the area of stage production. This area includes expertise in set design, props management, lighting design and costumes, among many others. These are the areas that Colombian technicians struggle with when they face complex and innovative productions.

In the **visual arts**, although the country has a significant number of curators, mainly with training as artists, there are deficiencies in the production of visual arts exhibitions. Curators and artists must assume the role of producers, and hire technicians with no training to set up exhibits. Most of the time, these technicians fail to understand and implement the vision of the artist or curator. There are only a few exhibition producers who are specifically trained to establish a bridge between artistic and conceptual needs of the artist and curator, with the practical skills of a technician on lighting, sound, electricity, space design, etc. Therefore, very few galleries and fairs have a trained and skilled producer. The research also highlighted a lack of companies specialising in transportation and housing of art works. Galleries, museums and fairs must hire regular

moving companies to transport art works to warehouses where all kinds of objects are stored. Of course, transport and storage conditions of these works are not optimal from the standpoint of space, treatment, temperature, and light, among others.

A skill shortage across all the sub-sectors is the lack of basic and technical English. Many of the professionals do not speak, nor know the appropriate language of their trade. The interaction between foreigners and locals in the cultural sector in Colombia is a growing trend as more international productions (music, film, theatre) visit the country. Colombia has recently begun to export cultural productions, and the lack of appropriate English has become a major obstacle for cultural producers who are trying to internationalise.

© Lukas Jaramillo/British Council





© Lukas Jaramillo/British Council

Conclusion

General considerations

The importance of technical trades:

One of the most frequent recommendations that emerged from the research stated that any implemented programme should highlight the importance of technical trades in the cultural sector. Many of the participants in the research project recognise the experience and quality that technical trades have in the UK, not only in the cultural sector, but in the general economy. In Colombia technical skills don't have the same status as academic knowledge, and their strategic importance in society is not recognised. The cultural sector agents consulted therefore ask for training programmes with recognition and high quality standards which make the courses comparable to academic university degrees, and recognisable by employers.

Balance between theory and practice:

Another important recommendation from the research participants is that any kind of training programme to strengthen the skills of the cultural sector agents must balance theoretical concepts with activities to implement this knowledge. Educational institutions in Colombia have been primarily concerned with providing students with a strong academic foundation, but, as a result, they lack the practical skills that the cultural sector needs. Therefore, many

graduates do not meet the requirements that businesses and institutions are looking for in employees. The structure of a training programme must therefore include theoretical and applied cycles, which can happen through the partnership with different companies and institutions of the cultural sector.

Learning by doing: Following the previous line of thought, participants in the research project recommended that all academic training programmes should include a closing cycle of internships at cultural institutions or companies, where students can acquire skills by performing specific tasks on real projects. The purpose of this strategy is that students can implement their academic training by solving day-to-day problems in the cultural sector. At the same time, the strategy would create a bridge between education and the labour market.

Sharing knowledge: Research participants also valued knowledge and exchange of best practices, especially in dynamic technological fields, which still do not have established unique training and performance parameters. The cultural sector is undergoing a rapid transformation process due to digital technologies. Such dynamics apply to creation, production, and circulation of content.

Online training versus classroom

training: The report proposes to assess the feasibility of implementing programmes that blend online and classroom modules. In general, modules addressing theoretical and conceptual issues could be implemented through an online platform where British teachers and experts deliver lectures. The practical modules which need physical platforms, such as technical training programmes must be implemented in person through intensive workshops in Colombia with British and Colombian experts.

Infrastructure: While the infrastructure required for business and management for the cultural sector programmes is minimal, technical programmes require special classrooms with the required equipment. For this reason, it would be beneficial to develop partnerships in Colombia for each

of the training modules. These partners could be universities or companies who already have the necessary infrastructure.

Certification: It is necessary to evaluate the possibility of providing some kind of formal certification to the students in the proposed programmes. The research showed that students and employers require a certificate that guarantees the technical skills of agents in the cultural sector. In order to do so, it is necessary to address the Ministry of Education and secretaries of education of each city regarding the regulation necessary to grant technical training and education certificates. Another option is to work in partnership with educational institutions who already issue these qualifications.

© Lukas Jaramillo/British Council

Several suggestions have been developed to help meet the skills needs that were identified from the research.

Models for programmes in cultural management

Business management in the cultural sector: As the data gathered showed a lack of business management skills across the cultural sector, and a general lack of education programmes in this field, this programme aims to strengthen these skills in various cultural sub-sectors. It is aimed at people who already manage or intend to manage cultural companies and projects, and who already have basic training or experience in this area and need to acquire further tools to shape their work strategies. It is also aimed at intermediaries in the cultural market such as music representatives, managers, agents, audiovisual executive producers, etc.

Cultural marketing and audience development: This programme is a response to the widely identified need to develop skills for structuring strategies to reach audiences for cultural products effectively. It should be aimed at producers and cultural mediators of any cultural sub-sector with the aim of developing strategies for effective marketing of cultural products and services.

This type of training programme would also be useful for government officials working in the design of cultural policy, who have the challenge of designing effective strategies to develop diverse, eager, and critical audiences. Some of the priority content identified through the research for this programme should include knowledge about consumption of cultural goods and services behaviour, market research techniques, including quantitative and qualitative methods, strategic planning of marketing, digital marketing, and strategies for developing collaborative networks.

Heritage and sustainable tourism: Colombia is a country full of expressions of cultural heritage. This can be seen in big events like carnivals and festivals, to small customs and cultural landscapes. Despite the large-scale tourist appeal of cultural heritage sites, the interviews and focus groups showed that these are often poorly managed from an administrative perspective, and lack a long-term vision which seeks its preservation

and sustainability. If a programme were to be developed in this area it should be aimed at producers and cultural mediators working in tourism companies, heritage and arts professionals (curators, anthropologists, etc.), and government officials. The contents of a programme should include knowledge on market trends on tourism, financial structuring of projects (budgets and income), project funding strategies; marketing strategies for heritage experiences, and strategies for associative and collaborative work.

Cultural policy design and implementation: Cultural policies in Colombia are designed and implemented by people who have been trained in the arts, or by cultural producers without any training in public administration and policy development. At the same time, this research showed a lack of education programmes on cultural management and policy. It would therefore be useful to develop a year-long programme aimed at training government officials in these areas where skills are lacking. The programme could have a basic conceptual module which covers the basic aspects of cultural policy: design, mechanisms, assessment, impact analysis, associative and collaborative work strategies. The second module would be constituted by an internship at a Colombian

government institution, and an exchange programme with UK institutions could also be considered. Some potential partners, which might allow the internships and co-financing of the programme are the Ministry of Culture, Secretariat of culture, recreation and sport, and other secretaries of culture at the national level. This programme should be implemented in Bogotá where most of the potential students are located.

Models for programmes in technical trades

Co-ordination of audiovisual production (film, television, web): With the development of the Colombian audiovisual industry and increasing domestic production of films and international productions in the country, demand for production co-ordinators for film, television and web has increased. Therefore, a technical programme, with conceptual and practical elements with internships at companies is necessary in Colombia. This programme should include fundamental topics related to knowledge about field production, budgeting, monitoring equipment, filming locations management, co-ordination of artistic departments, among other practices. All with a comprehensive management of technical English for film production.

Live music production: As the music sector grows in Colombia and more foreign artists tour the country, a technical programme aimed at technicians and music producers in cities with a strong music industry: Bogotá, Medellín, and especially Cali, Barranquilla, San Andres and Providencia, as well as graduates of creative careers and colleges. This programme will help meet the needs of concerts and musical events.

Design and stage production:

The research identified that, while live events were commonplace across Colombia, the quality of production is not consistent. A technical programme needs to meet the needs not only of the large theatres and venues for stage shows, but also the needs of festivals and parades throughout all the cities included in the study. The programme would include a theoretical module and a practical one with internships at festivals and theatres in Colombia. It would be aimed at technicians and producers of shows and events, as well as college graduates. The programme should include: knowledge and skills

for set design, lighting design, sound design, costume design and makeup, props and stagecraft, digital technologies (bitmapping etc.), and atmosphere design and ephemeral architecture for outdoor events.

Fashion design and pattern:

There is need for a technical programme, which would aim to meet the needs of the design sector in terms of innovation and creativity and production quality. It is aimed at technicians, designers, and workers in the textile and fashion industry, as well as college graduates in creative areas.

Production for the visual arts:

There is need for a technical education programme for artists, curators, stage technicians, and college graduates of creative areas, which aims to fill the gaps in production in galleries and art fairs in Bogotá. The modules should include theoretical and practical training about materials for exhibition; production roles; different exhibition formats and display, public knowledge of art, and project structuring.

© British Council 2016/G197

The British Council is the United Kingdom's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities.

