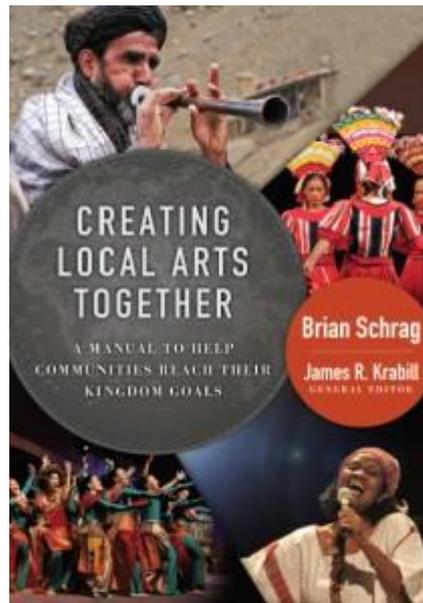

***A Review of: Creating Local Arts Together:
A Manual to Help Communities Reach their Kingdom Goals.***

by Brian Schrag, James R. Krabill (ed.)

Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2013. 316 pages

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Brian Schrag's *Creating Local Arts Together* manual has both a stirring and exhilarating effect as the reader envisions the possibility of a community's arts used for the purposes of God's kingdom and, at the same time, is thorough and informative with respect to the research process involved in getting to know the arts and worldview of a community.

The method of *Create Local Arts Together*, also called *cocreation*, emphasizes working together with local communities to develop their art forms to be used for kingdom goals. The manual grew out of a need to understand the process of creating art across cultures, including the need to research various art forms, such as drama, dance, verbal art, visual arts and music and develop language to speak about them. The manual is a response to the growing conviction of the author that arts should not be limited to music and songs in a church service, but that the arts belong in the larger context of realizing signs of the kingdom of God, such as justice, shalom, identity and church life. The purpose of the manual is to "spark artistic creativity that feeds into God's expansion of his kingdom" (12).

The intended audience is cross-cultural workers, such as missionaries and aid workers, but the manual is also profitable for any individual who is concerned with seeing the arts used for the glory of God and the extension of his kingdom. It is beneficial, when reading this

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manual, to have some ethnographic research training, as well as artistic background, but not necessary, as the manual guides the reader step by step through various research activities. The premise for this *cocreation* manual is that the main role of the ‘outsider’ is to be an “Arts Advocate” which means “to help *others* make new things in genres they already know” (15). By using the approach *Find it – Encourage it*, the Arts Advocate promotes the creation of local arts, instead of importing western art forms, or creating hybrid art forms between local and foreign forms for ministry purposes (14).

It is clear that the author is especially concerned with preserving and developing traditional art forms of ethno-linguistic communities as a reflection of God-given creativity. Schrag is hopeful that the seven step process of *cocreation* will lead to more expressions of God’s kingdom on earth, but also realizes that there are forces at work which opposes God’s purposes. This perspective reflects the author’s biblical worldview that accounts for both good and evil in societies.

The introduction, called Prepare Yourself, is a great starting point for an overview of the *cocreation* process, and the premises it its build upon. It models the seven steps in *cocreation* through *glimpses*, which are short stories from the field that highlight some of the challenges and possibilities of the process of encouraging the creation of local arts for the kingdom of God.

The manual contains seven sections which correspond to the seven steps of Creating Local Arts Together. They are:

- 1) Meet a community and its arts
- 2) Specify kingdom goals
- 3) Select effects, content, genre, and events
- 4) Analyze an event containing the chosen genre
- 5) Spark creativity
- 6) Improve new works
- 7) Integrate and celebrate for continuity



Section one provides an initial overview of the research topics as well as research methods that are further outlined in section four. The importance of building relationships, celebrating the arts, and being motivated by love for the community is stressed.

In section two, the author invites the reader to “stir your imagination in ways that release aromas of the kingdom of God, awakening your hunger for heaven” (42). This section describes six kingdom goals: Identity and Sustainability, Shalom, Justice, Scripture, Church Life, and Personal Spiritual Life, and how a community’s arts can be used to reach those goals. A wide variety of examples where this method has been used successfully makes up the majority of this section.

Section three integrates the community's arts and the kingdom goals through a process which enables the community to select kingdom goals they wish to work towards, and discuss how the arts can help them get there. This process includes choosing the content of the arts, as well as the genre best suited for the chosen purpose. The community also identifies the event which is best suited for displaying or integrating the art form. Connecting the art form with a event facilitates awareness in the community of the newly created performances or pieces of art.

Section four contains the longest portion of the manual, and provides the reader with tools for in-depth research of a community's arts, and events. The first research activity is to describe the art form through various lenses: Space, Materials, Participant Organization, Shape of the Event through Time, Performance Features, Content and Underlying Symbolic Systems. Here the manual provides helpful information on the categories of various art forms in order to give the arts advocate a language to describe the arts form. Furthermore, the manual supplies abundant research questions and suggestions for how to relate the various art forms to the broader cultural context. The last part of this section takes a deeper look at the arts forms currently used in the church and how it relates to the arts forms in the broader cultural context. The manual envisions a process where the Christian community evaluates the current forms of worship including their approach to multi-cultural worship, which will in turn lead to a broaden appreciation of the arts, and exploration of ways to reach kingdom goals in their community by using the local art forms.

Section five offers a host of activities that will spur the creation of new pieces of arts, music or performance. Each activity is briefly described, including suggestions for participants and tasks to accomplish. These activities include: Commissioning, Workshops, Showcase Events, Mentoring, Apprenticeship, Publications and Creators' Clubs.

Section six underlines the importance of evaluating and improving new products to ensure quality and acceptability. The author outlines a process based on critical contextualization for evaluating and transforming the art forms to be used for Kingdom of God purposes. For Scripture-infused products, the manual suggests three levels of quality checking: self-check, consultant-check, and community check to ensure Scriptural fidelity, high standard of the Art form used, and successful communication of content.

In section seven, the manual helps the reader to discern together with the community which art forms to work with, and to plan for continuity. The manual suggests that the Arts Advocate work to encourage art forms that are 'heavenlike', and unique, in addition to considering reviving struggling art forms.

The appendixes include a quick reference to the steps involved in the *Create Local Arts Together* process, as well as a template for beginning a Community Arts Profile.

Why this manual is helpful for a Scripture Engagement worker:

- It casts a vision for integrating faith, culture and arts based on a holistic perspective on using the arts to both bring people closer to the kingdom and to bring the reality

of God's will on earth. The excitement of the author is contagious, and it renews the desire of the reader to be part of the meaningful task of working towards the reality that "all cultures are using all their gifts to worship, obey and enjoy God with all of their heart, soul, mind and strength (Mark 12:13)" (10).

- Its approach is broad enough to be useful both in a Christian community, as well as, in other contexts. A key partner of the Arts Advocate is the local church whose members seek to use their gifts for the kingdom. Yet, the seven steps of cocreation are useful in a context where a community regardless of religious affiliations seeks to "build a better future" that integrates aspects of the signs of the kingdom such as justice, shalom and identity and sustainability.
- It equips the Scripture Engagement worker to encourage the local creation of Scripture infused arts which in turn will provide people with the opportunity to "encounter God's Word in life-changing ways "(Scripture-Engagment.org). This is done in the manual by:
 - a) Providing detailed ethnographic research methods, including relevant research questions and research activities such as interviewing, participating, and observing. It includes how to go about the daunting and existing task of documenting a community's art forms. Section four supplies detailed information on, and research questions related to music, dance, drama, verbal arts, and visual arts. The manual also gives helpful references for further information in these art forms.
 - b) Making community participation foundational by adopting the approach of *cocreation* of local arts. It encourages involvement from the community; its artist, elders, church leaders and others in all the seven steps of *Create Local Arts Together*.
 - c) Emphasizing that the Arts Advocate' builds relationships with the community by becoming their friend, and lets the process of *cocreation* flow out of the networks he or she establishes in the community.
 - d) Sketching a method for transforming cultural arts in order to avoid the use of art forms that lead to syncretism or irrelevance.

I highly recommend *Creating Local Arts Together* to anyone interested in seeing the Arts redeemed and used for the Kingdom of God.

For more details: <http://ethnodoxologyhandbook.com>

This document is available for download at: <http://www.scripture-engagement.org>

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