Forests and Local People

A Community Based Transition Vision

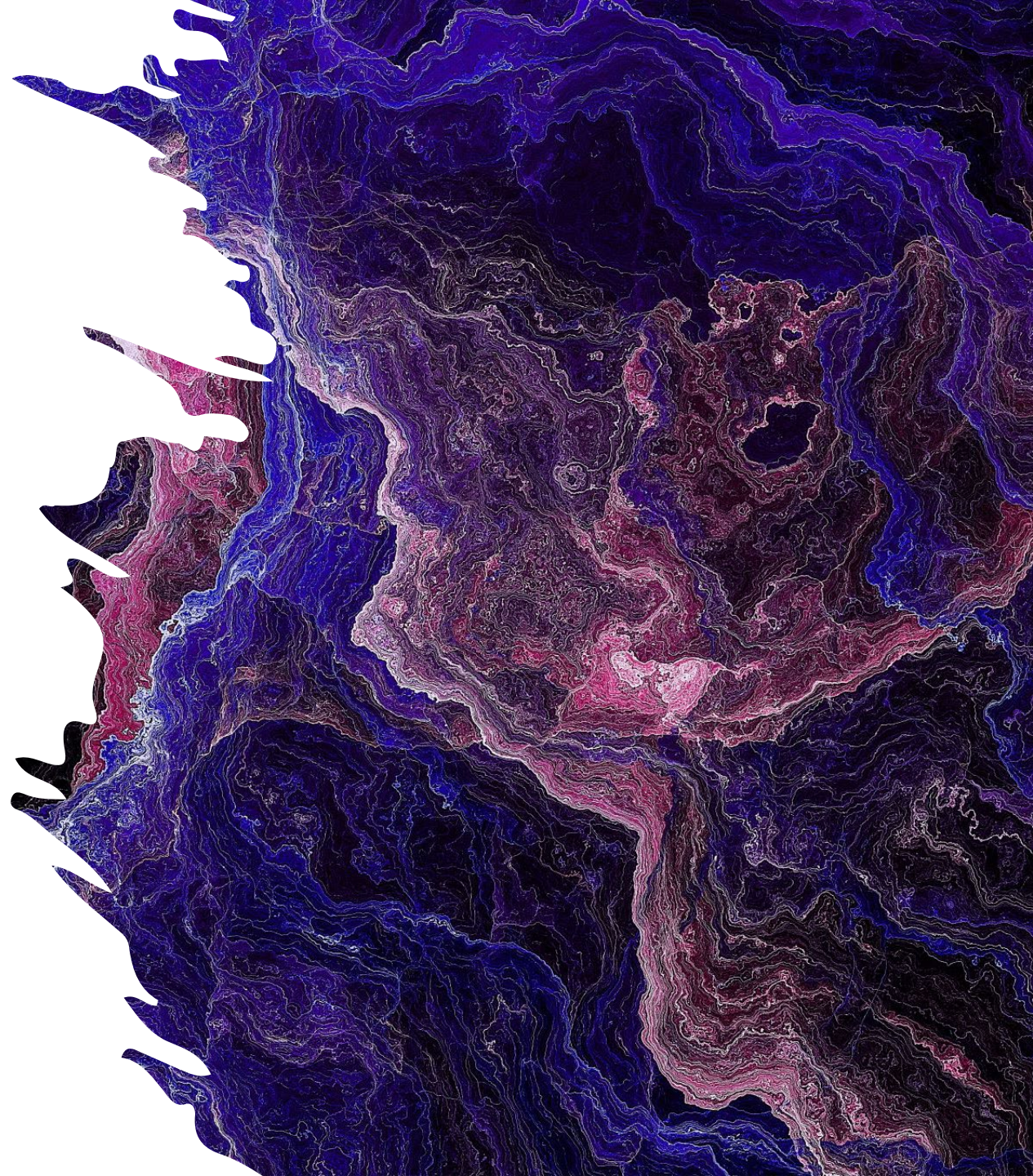# Ultimate Vision – *Marriage of Local and Global Actors*

Bringing the local together with broader scale actors to

- Meaningfully supplement local resources and knowledge

&

- Contribute to global concerns thru improved management & conservation

Accomplishing this integration - this *marriage* – is difficult, given the sociocultural diversity and dynamism 'out there'
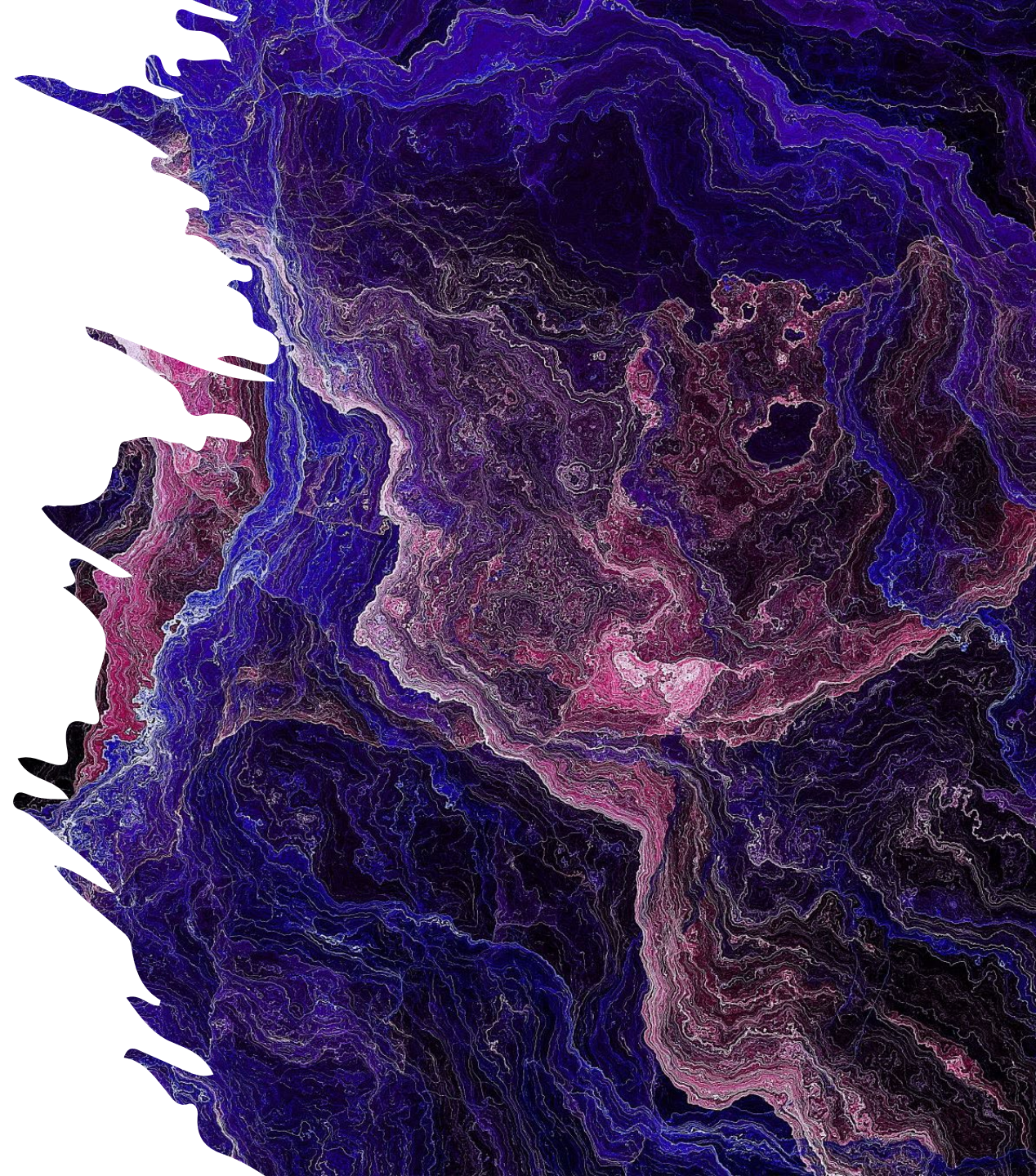
To achieve just & sustainable forest management

**We must
tailor our actions to local human & forest contexts**
(silver bullets are rare),

meaningfully integrate local communities in forest management,

&

reduce unthinking colonialist actions & assumptions

Roadmap:

- A 2000s vision of the local
- A 2020s revisit to earlier primarily local projects
- Our own roles in global inequities & the need to 'decolonize' *ourselves* to better manage
- Two baby steps for addressing this

Vision: The *Local*

- A world where local communities (in all their diversity) would:

  - have significant voice in decision-making about local forests;

  - identify their own shared goals, use their own knowledge, & address their own needs.

In pursuit of our *mainly local* vision of 2000, we

Developed & tested an approach we hoped would also be replicable.

One we hoped would highlight & build on local capabilities & goals.

We called it Adaptive Collaborative Management (ACM).

We tested it in 11 countries in the early 2000s – briefly outlined below.

We were pleased with many of our results.

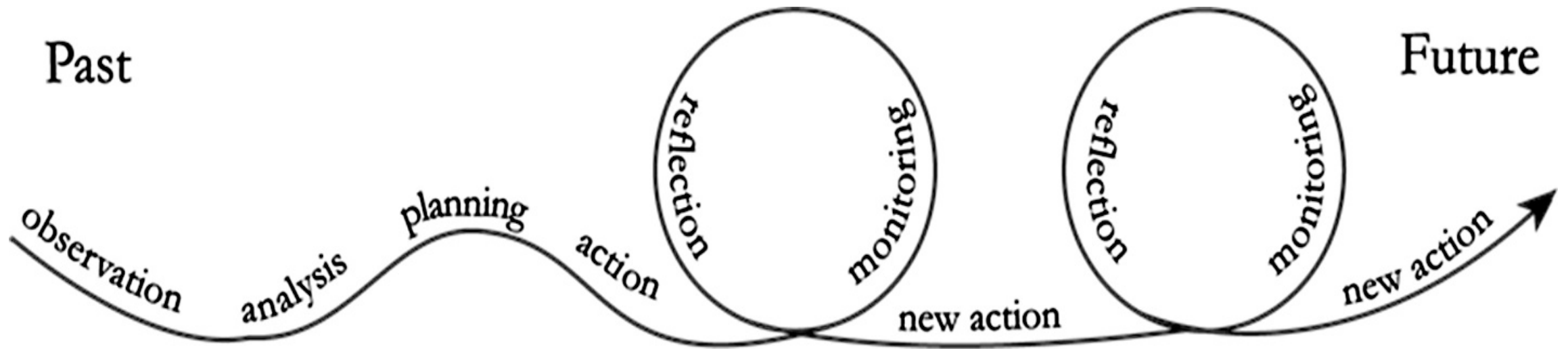# The approach used participatory action research ('The Worm')

Figure 2.1. PAR cycle

Created environments where people (incl. the marginalized) could:

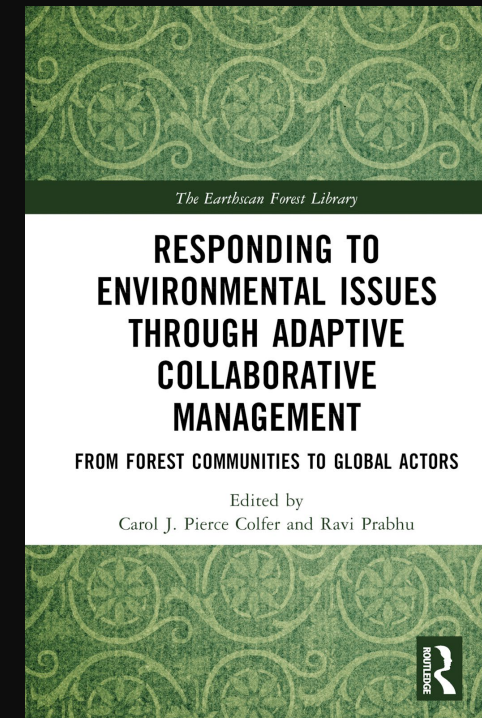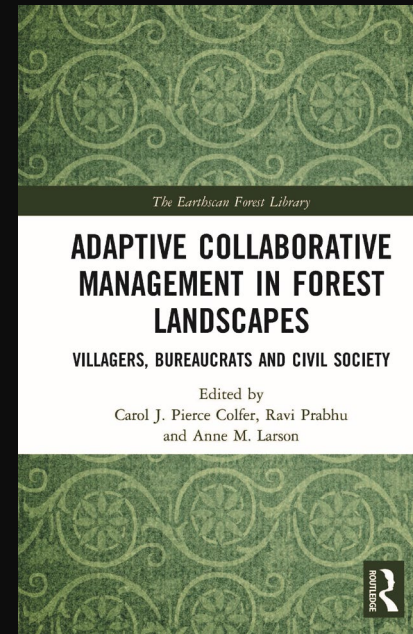| analyze and critique their own systems objectively, | speak up safely (from local to broader scales), | participate in equitable planning, | monitor their own collaborative efforts well, and | network with broader scale actors |

20 years later

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ADAPTIVE COLLABORATIVE MANAGEMENT IN FOREST LANDSCAPES

VILLAGERS, BUREAUCRATS AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Edited by
Carol J. Pierce Colfer, Ravi Prabhu
and Anne M. Larson

The Earthscan Forest Library

RESPONDING TO ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES THROUGH ADAPTIVE COLLABORATIVE MANAGEMENT

FROM FOREST COMMUNITIES TO GLOBAL ACTORS

Edited by
Carol J. Pierce Colfer and Ravi Prabhu

Findings

- Impressive accomplishments and insights were documented in these books and useful methods explained and explored

- Impressive skills were learned, local management progress was observed.

- We still need the kinds of successes the teams documented!

BUT

Islands of Success in a Sea of Failures

Wider scale actors had also *adversely* affected broader local landscapes, e.g.,

- Government & industry replaced surrounding forest in Sumatra with oil palm

- National political and economic chaos obliterated many local successes in Zimbabwe

For healthy forests & people, we need to expand beyond the community half of this vision

We will need to *facilitate* iterative & collaborative action – 'the worm' - at broader scales

&

stimulate egalitarian collaboration between communities & broader scale actors

We [the privileged] need a shift in our own thinking

- From '**_power over_**' To '**power with**'

- From **universal** to **place-based** solutions

- From '**We know the answer**' to '**Let's find out together**'

"Decolonization" for better forest management

Despite a reluctance to use grand words like colonialism and decolonization…

Tom Pepinsky (2023) convinced me of their utility as 'shorthand' for obvious inequities we easily recognize in forests, communities, and beyond.

He identified & explored four elements that implicate us all in today's colonialism.

Four arenas ripe for decolonization

1. Narratives – stories we are told (& tell ourselves) about other peoples, our relationships with them.
2. Institutions – many rooted in the colonial past.
3. Ideas – what we learn in school & from our research, the very concepts we use.
4. **Persons – we ourselves** have grown up in a world of colonial detritus, we act in it, we are affected by it.

This inheritance is inadvertently & routinely replicated in our own actions & assumptions.

Two [of many?] baby steps underway

How can we more clearly specify how decolonization works, make it more concrete, see how it affects people and forests – to allow us to change our own roles?

- Ojha et al. urge *us* - academics, practitioners, policymakers - to take more active roles.

- My own effort: linking American enculturation with subsequent forest policy & action

Ojha, an early Nepal ACM member, introduced 'critical action intellectuals' (CAI)

"CAI trigger transformative change by shifting policy discourse, generating alternative evidence, and challenging dominant policy assumptions, whilst aiming to empower marginalized groups." (Ojha et al. 2022)

We need more investigations of narratives, ideas, & institutions from a decolonizing perspective

Seeking the US roots of our own inequalities

- 3 years of ethnographic research in Bushler Bay's community and school (1973-76)
- 'Hidden Curriculum' in American schools that reinforced colonial attitudes in the **children** of that era

*How have such childhood experiences affected world views & related forest policy/action, of **today's adult** Americans overseas?*

Can knowledge of this US background help us decolonize American actions, collaborate more effectively & justly?

Three key elements in Bushler Bay's 'hidden curriculum'

1. Institutional/structural – age, gender, the definition of one community segment (loggers) as inferior to the other (USFS)

2. Values – the meshing of efficiency, productivity & time management; the emphasis on competition over cooperation; ambivalence about hierarchy vs. democracy

3. Symbolism – bringing structure & values together to provide meaning.

Can we decolonize sufficiently?

As Pepinsky notes, the pervasiveness & interconnections among these features (the narratives, institutions, ideas and persons) make effective resistance very difficult.

Our own assumptions, such as those portrayed in US schools, likely serve as blinders.

But if we hope to create these **local-global marriages** – key to community & forest welfare - then understanding & working with communities, though vital, is not enough.

We also must understand **ourselves** & make the needed decolonizing changes so that equitable collaboration & shared learning – vital to the vision – truly occur at all levels.

Thank you.

Comments welcome