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ADAPTING TOURISM FOR A TRANSFORMING SOCIETY: PATHWAYS TO SUSTAINABILITY

Kwame Emmanuel Adu-Boahen

Centre for Sustainable Tourism and Cultural
Heritage Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Cape Coast, Ghana
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Abstract: Tourism does not exist in isolation it evolves in response to the shifting dynamics of society, economy, environment, and global crises. As societies face profound transformations driven by climate change, technological advancement, economic inequality, and global health challenges, the tourism industry must also adapt to remain relevant, resilient, and responsible. This paper explores how sustainable tourism can act both as a reflection of and a catalyst for broader societal change. It examines the dual transformation underway: how societal shifts are influencing the values, behaviors, and expectations of tourists and industry stakeholders, and how tourism itself must transform to align with sustainability goals. In an era marked by uncertainty and rapid change, fostering adaptive, inclusive, and forward-thinking tourism practices is no longer optional but essential. The study highlights key strategies for integrating sustainability into tourism development, policy-making, and business innovation, emphasizing the need for a holistic approach that supports environmental protection, cultural integrity, and social equity.

Keywords: Sustainable tourism, societal transformation, Tourism innovation, resilient tourism, Social change, Tourism policy, Environmental sustainability, Adaptive tourism practices

Introduction

It is a year since we marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Journal of Sustainable Tourism, noting then that as we “embark upon the next quadrant centennial... we recognize that the 25 years ahead present a new order of challenges confronting sustainable development and sustainable tourism”. Specifically, we acknowledged the urgency of the challenges we collectively face, that include poverty and inequality, food and water security, human health and well-being, socio-cultural change, clean energy, biodiversity, resource depletion and climate change, and the need for tourism scholars not only to produce world-class research, but also to ensure to the greatest extent possible that their research is disseminated across sectors of the economy, levels of government,

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and communities of policy and practice. As we embark on the next 25 years, it is evident that we are now urgently confronting the transformation of our societies and, inevitably, the transformation of tourism.

The urgency of the transformation is perhaps most vividly expressed by the concept of planetary boundaries (Figure 1). This framework recognizes that within the limits of the planetary boundaries, humanity can continue to develop and flourish, but transgressing the boundaries risks irreversible global environmental change (see Gossling & Hall, 2006). While the concept of planetary boundaries continues to be advanced through transdisciplinary research into socio-ecological systems (Stockholm Resilience Centre, 2017), it is cautionary to note that three of the nine boundaries (“novel entities”, “functional diversity” and “atmospheric aerosol loading”) are yet to be accurately quantified, two (“climate change” and “land–system change”) are in the “zone of uncertainty (increasing risk)”, and two (“genetic diversity” and “biogeochemical flows”) are already “beyond the zone of uncertainty (high risk)”. The transformation of our societies will be the litmus test for sustainable development over the course of the next 25 years. This is the challenge confronting a new generation of tourism scholars.

The extent of human influence on the biosphere is such that some now argue that Earth has entered a new geological epoch, the Anthropocene (Flannery, 2005; Ruddiman, 2005). The Anthropocene is generally considered to date to the 1950s, through the development of rapid industrialization and the proliferation of nuclear activity, which have shaped global systems in ways that are geologically long-lasting and in some cases irreversible (Fulton, 2017). The period from the mid-twentieth century is referred to as the “Great Acceleration”, during which global change in the form of population growth, urbanization and consumer demand accelerated at an unprecedented rate (Ho, 2012). The diverse manifestations of the Anthropocene, according to Carrington (2016), include among other things:

- Accelerated plant and animal extinction rates;
- Concentrations of climate-warming carbon dioxide increasing in the atmosphere at the fastest rate in 66 million years;
- Concentrations of plastics that in future will be identifiable in fossil records;
- Levels of nitrogen and phosphorous in soils due to fertilizer use that are likely to have the largest impact on the nitrogen cycle in 2.5 billion years;
- Permanent particulate sediment on glacial ice as black carbon from the burning of fossil fuels.

Such drivers of environmental change draw the temporal dimension of popular approaches to sustainability into deep question (Spector, Higham, & Doering, 2017). The framing of sustainability

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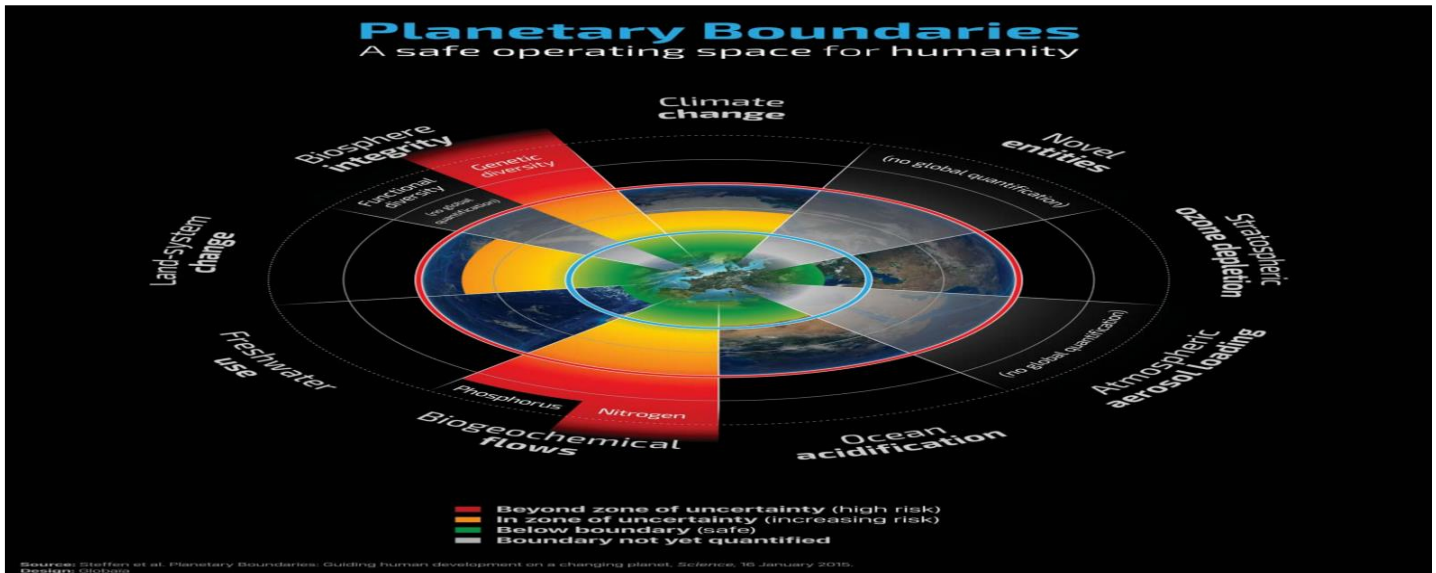


Figure 1. Planetary boundaries

Source: Steffen et al. (2015). Credit: F. Pharand-Deschênes/Globafra for Steffen et al. (2015).

Within the context of “future generations” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987), is inadequate in light of the fact that:

we use non-renewable resources such as oil that were millions of years in the making, a Styrofoam cup used today will outlive us by over 400 years, the half-life of the plutonium-239 used in the production of nuclear weapons is 24,100 years, and 25% of the carbon compounds associated with global warming will still be in the atmosphere 30,000 years from now. (Spector et al., 2017, p. 275)

The reality is that we are consuming resources that have been created through millions of years of geological processes, and in doing so, we are creating material environmental impacts that will outlive us by tens or hundreds of thousands of years. Political cycles of 3–5 years, and policy horizons that project a largely unchanged global system to 2030, 2050 or 2100, are clearly an exercise in futility in the absence of system transformation (Morton, 2010).

The scale and urgency of the transformation that is now underway underscores the importance of global governance and national leadership, which Boston (2017) argues highlights the critical roles of government, business and civil society to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (2015– 2030). Boston (2017) offers a range of critical observations of the SDG pathway to 2030 (United Nations, 2015). First, he argues, it is critical that national governments give urgent consideration to their (national/regional) prioritization of the SDGs. The applicability and urgency of SDGs offer sharp regional contrasts between, for example, regions that face the challenges of eliminating hunger (SDG2 Zero Hunger) and regions that have food surpluses. No less important are the SDGs of high relevance to industrially developed nations, such as Responsible Consumption and Production (SDG 12) and Climate Action (SDG13). It is necessary for governments to identify priority SDGs based on national/regional context, establish indicators and align government statistics and data-sets, and to

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accurately measure and publicly report progress against key indicators. The “Great Acceleration” has also been associated with “black swan” events, described by Ho (2012) as hard-to-predict events with large impacts. Some such events are impossible to foresee and have fundamentally system-changing consequences (see Orchiston, 2012). Further, the history of humanity shows that we have been more adept at recovering from disasters after they have occurred than in preventing disasters from occurring. Hence, the challenge is to determine the reasons for inaction and how to design effective responses that build resilience to future black swan events (Klein, 2015). It is clear that the United Nations SDGs point us in the direction of transformation, as do global agreements such as the Paris Climate Accord (2015), but it is critical that governments respond and align to the SDGs (Klein, 2015). Boston (2017, np) argues that this will require “...new governmental architecture that can give expression to the SDGs” which, in turn, will necessitate a shift away from narrow measures of progress. Currently “progress” is measured primarily in terms of gross domestic product (GDP). Boston (2017) urges the adoption of a holistic system approach based on new measures that may include sustainable human well-being (based on collective intergenerational wellbeing), sustainable ecosystem services (based on biophysical limits that recognize tipping points and accommodate uncertainty and resilience), social cohesion and equity, and living standard measures. The necessary policy changes reflect Klein’s (2015) Leap Manifesto. They include pricing the externalities of production, institutional architecture to address climate change (such as the zero carbon targets of northern European vanguard governments), national strategies for climate change adaptation and sustainability accounting for business communities.

These policy developments require greatly improved capacities for anticipatory government to address the failure of governments operating within 3- to 5-year electoral cycles. Rokstrum (2017) argues that a 25-year wait between the production of evidence of a problem and the policy response is not an untypical delay. Such a delay to action is exacerbated by the “creeping” nature of problems such as obesity, transport congestion and climate change (Boston, 2017). Given that the Journal of Sustainable Tourism has now moved beyond 25 years from its first discussions of the challenges to sustainability through tourism, it is perhaps cause for some optimism that the time for change is upon us. It does also demonstrate the importance of the work we do as academics in adding to the scientific base of evidence even when it appears that change is not coming.

The extent to which governments are responding to the challenge and engaging with the SDGs varies enormously. Anticipatory government in the social democracies of northern Europe has taken the form of high-level political vision, the restructuring of government agencies and committees to align with the SDGs, the development of national plans and strategies, parliamentary scrutiny, active engagement with business and civil society, and public reporting (Boston, 2017). Germany, Finland and the Scandinavian countries represent the vanguard (Milbrath & Fisher, 1984) in terms of anticipatory government. Norway’s plan to completely ban petrol-powered cars by 2025, described on Twitter by Elon Musk as “an amazingly awesome country” (Staufenberg, 2016), is an example of national policy directions that align with the United Nation’s SDGs.

Elsewhere in the developed world progress has been much less encouraging? While Obama championed the commitment of the United States to the Paris Climate Accord, the Trump Administration has adopted a deeply entrenched position of climate denial, despite the objections of many city and state governments in the United

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States. Britain's 2016 Brexit referendum has effectively derailed political progress on all fronts, and the process of enacting Article 50 will further detract from political progress over the next two years and beyond. In New Zealand, it is now widely recognized that climate change will over the next 50–100 years be associated with damaging storms, increased flooding, decreased soil moisture, rising snowlines and sea-level rise (Hopkins, CampbellHunt, Carter, Higham, & Rosin, 2015). Under the circumstances, the absence of political engagement to address the climate-related SDGs is described by Boston (2017, np) as a “lamentable situation”. To date, New Zealand's National government has driven high growth in an economy that is built upon energy-intensive agriculture, deep sea oil exploration in the Southern basin and high-energy international tourism (Boston, 2017). The recently elected Ardern Labour government (23 September 2017) signals a shift in commitment to anticipatory government and the SDGs in New Zealand.

In terms of tourism, this shift in direction will require a commitment to move beyond steady-state tourism, the redefinition of spatio-temporal system boundaries, an appreciation of complex socioecological systems and the accommodation of global environmental forces. This shift will need to be led by the large tourism organizations representing the sector where there has been significant change in 2017, specifically to the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) and the UN World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO). These two organizations have previously worked closely under David Scowsill and Dr Taleb Rifai. The new leader of the WTTC, Gloria Guevara, a former Minister of Tourism for Mexico, has pledged to maintain close relations with the UNWTO and ensure that the messages between government and private sector are aligned. Already, WTTC has said that it wishes to accelerate to a new level of activity and move from advocacy into taking action on issues that matter for the sector overall. The organization, which represents more than 150 travel brands across an array of industries from car hire and GDS to airlines and hotels, does not produce standards, quality assessments or training, and has historically been much more of a high-level networking organization. While it has produced globally comparable economic data on the contribution of travel and tourism, evidence of policy change as a result of the promotion of this data at government level has been difficult to find.

While it is highly commendable that the WTTC wants to take more action, of key importance will be how widely the net is cast in terms of the issues where action will be taken. Recent focus on overcrowding in tourism destinations has led to a rush to examine this issue and declare this as the number one issue facing the industry. One of the interesting features of the nine planetary boundaries is that the human population is not referenced as a boundary that threatens the geo-physical future of the planet. Instead, the human population is seen as requiring to fit within the planetary boundaries, to find its accommodation within the spaces and limitations of the planet. In this sense, the challenge for over-crowding in tourism is how to live within the means of the destination, rather than have the destination expand and accommodate the needs of the sector. Further, it would be encouraging to see international organizations supporting sustainability initiatives that go beyond being of immediate, or even direct benefit to the tourism sector, but to society in general. In this way, tourism could show it is moving beyond a corporate social responsibility, and instead to a corporate social relevance, whereby the sector shows how it is relevant to a future world with limited boundaries.

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At the UNWTO, Zurab Pololikashvili, a former minister in Georgia, the Georgian ambassador to Spain and permanent representative to the UNWTO in Madrid has been elected as the Secretary General designate for the UNWTO. He will assume the role of Secretary General on 1st January for a four-year term. UNWTO represents the governments of 158 UN member states, with notable absences of large travel and tourism generating countries like USA, UK, Australia and Canada. He will be keen to attract new countries to join as members in order to strengthen the finances of the organization and to enhance the mandate of the UNWTO as representing tourism at a global level. Proving the relevance of the work of the UNWTO will be key to this. Mr Pololikashvili has already stated his interest in security, investment and climate change and wants to host annual ministerial meetings on these issues, alongside developing policy guidelines on destination management.

This year has also formalized the coordination and cooperation of these two organizations, together with the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA), the Pacific Asia Travel Alliance (PATA) and the World Economic Forum (WEF) to create an alliance of associations called Uniting Travel (formerly known as the Global Travel Association Coalition). Led by the leaders of the associations, this potentially offers a major step forward in coordinating and supporting the messaging and best practices of leading travel and tourism associations. Uniting Travel is not a brand which will have significant public exposure. Instead, it is a vehicle to coordinate activity, communications and advocacy across the member organizations. The goal is a united, focused global travel and tourism sector that speaks with one voice and acts in unison on the major issues.

Uniting Travel's one major issue of advocacy will be on border security and travel facilitation, but it will also provide communications support for its other four areas identified in the Agenda for Growth and Development (Travel Facilitation, Infrastructure Development; Environmental Sustainability, Investment in People). Clearly, the advantage of the creation of such a unified coalition of the world's travel and tourism organizations is the potentially powerful effect it could have in driving change in sustainability. The risk of course is that co-ordinating these organizations means moving at the speed of the slowest mover and action on sustainability becomes limited. Another interesting development this year has been the creation of the Chinese-led and Beijingbased, World Tourism Alliance. The World Tourism Alliance (WTA) sees itself as a global, comprehensive, non-governmental, not-for-profit international tourism organization. Its chair is Duan Qiang of the Beijing Tourism Group (and also the World Travel & Tourism Council's vice chair for China), which had its origins as a state-owned enterprise, so is likely to have strong governmental support. Its 89 founding members are national tourism organizations, influential tourism companies, think tanks, international organizations and research institutes. More than 60% are based outside of China. The WTA was in many ways a natural outcome from a country that has become increasingly influential in the development of the world tourism industry and perhaps felt its interests have not been sufficiently represented by existing organizations. Clearly both WTTC and UNWTO will be concerned by the creation of this new organization and how they can work together. However, given the Chinese government's increasing attention to sustainability and its focus on shifting away from fossil fuels, the creation of the WTA does perhaps give some hope for a more action-oriented approach to sustainability in tourism.

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A review of the functions and membership of the Journal of Sustainable Tourism editorial board was undertaken in September 2017. First we acknowledge the commitment, time and energy that editorial board members have invested in the journal. With a 2016 Impact Factor of 2.978, and a ranking of 5/45 in the Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism journal list, the success of the journal is due in no small part to the commitment and hard work of the editorial board, and those who have contributed their expertise to the peer review process. Twenty-eight editorial board members have renewed their commitment to serve the journal over the next five years, and 18 new editorial board appointments have been made for the five-year period 2018–2022, and we are delighted to now confirm a new editorial board of 43 members. In confirming the new editorial board, we acknowledge the outstanding service of 11 long-standing editorial board members, some of whom have served on the editorial board since the Volume 1 (Issue 1) was published in 1993. We thank them for the diverse and valuable contributions to the journal and wish them well for the future; Richard Butler, Erik Cohen, Paul Eagles, Mike Fabricus, William Gartner, Chris Ryan, Trevor Sofield, Hugh Somerville, Louis TwiningWard, David Weaver and Betty Weiler. This year we have also noted with great sadness the passing of Susan Moore, a long-standing editorial board member.

A criteria-based approach was adopted to review and consider the Journal of Sustainable Tourism editorial board; those criteria include papers submitted /published in the Journal of Sustainable Tourism (total career), reviews invited/accepted (total career; and last five years), guest editorship of special issues, publication record in the field of tourism and sustainable development (last five years) and h-index. More general criteria included subject and methodological coverage, disciplinary perspectives, gender balance and regional/geographical coverage. The outcome of this process is an editorial board that is comprised of disciplinary researchers who have led the field in recent years, and will continue to lead the field over the next five years. On this basis we are pleased to confirm the newly appointed editorial board members: Stewart Barr, Bynum Boley, Scott Cohen, Alexandra Coghlan, Tim Coles, Simon Darcy, Tsung Hung Lee, Ljubica Knezevic, Juan Luis Eugenio-Martin, Joseph Mbaiwa, Mary Mostafanezhad, Paul Peeters, Lisa Ruhanen, Regina Scheyvens, Emma Stewart, Homer Wu, Honggang Xu and Chaozhi Zhang. These editorial board appointments were made based first and foremost on scholarly merit, representing a new generation of leading sustainable tourism scholars.

We have sought the active leadership and direction of editorial board members, and the commitments of editorial board members include the review of five manuscripts per annum,¹ the submission of theoretical and/or empirical research contributions to the journal, the development of timely proposals for special issues as a means of leading and directing the field of scholarship, to support the journal by encouraging colleagues and those in their wider networks to direct high-quality manuscripts to the journal, and to promote the endeavours of the journal.

Of equal importance has been to give consideration to what we would like to offer editorial board members in return in recognition of their service to the journal. These have been discussed and supported by the Managing Editor of the Journal of Sustainable Tourism and the publisher (Routledge Taylor and Francis) and include the opportunity to publish one article per year as a Free Access article; free online access to the journal, the opportunity to lead the field by proposing special issues and to write review articles or specially commissioned works, and the recognition of being associated with the leading journal in the field of tourism and sustainable

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development. In creating a new Editorial Board for the coming five years (2018–2022), we intend to ensure that one editorial board member is included among the three referees that review each paper that crosses the editor's desk and enters into peer review. This will allow us to guarantee that all papers that are published in the Journal of Sustainable Tourism are reviewed by one of the two co-editors and one editorial board member, as well as two additional referees. We believe such a commitment to rigorous reviewing is much needed in academia and will help the Journal of Sustainable Tourism to continue to lead by example.

The Journal of Sustainable Tourism now publishes 12 issues per annum, and within this flow of manuscripts, we seek to publish three to four special issues per annum. Special issues continue to serve an important role for the Journal of Sustainable Tourism given the focus that can be directed towards critical issues in the field via the timely publication of special issues. In 2017, the Journal of Sustainable Tourism published three special issues including: Violence and dispossession in tourism development: a critical geographical approach, guest editors: Jennifer Devine and Diana Ojeda – Volume 25 (Issue 5); Marketing for Sustainable Tourism, guest editors: Xavier Font and Scott McCabe – Volume 25 (Issue 7); and Protected Areas & Neo-liberal governance policies, guest editors: Hubert Job, Susanne Becken and Bernard Lane – Volume 25 (Issue 12).

Four special issues are forthcoming in Volume 26 (2018). These include special issues on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), guest editors: Xavier Font (University of Surrey) and Jennifer Lynes (University of Waterloo); Political ecology of tourism in the Anthropogenic: Global imaginaries and local realities of planetary socio-environmental change, guest editors: Mary Mostafaez (University of Hawai'i) and Roger Norum (University of Leeds); Desirable Transport Futures, guest editors: Paul Peeters (NHTV Breda), Scott Cohen (University of Surrey), Eke Eijgelaar (NHTV Breda), Stefan Gössling (Lund University) and James Higham (University of Otago); and Benefit Sharing, guest editors: Sue Snyman (Wilderness Safaris) and Kelly Bricker (University of Utah). The co-editors encourage the preparation and submission of special issues proposals; guidelines for proposing a special issue of the Journal of Sustainable Tourism are now available on the journal website.²

In 2017, we have also embarked upon a new initiative; a special issues series has been established with the strategic objective to specifically address a critical issue of importance to the field of sustainable tourism, and to bring new authors, reviewers and readers to the journal. The first series will address Tourism and Sustainable Transportation (2019–2022), and we are delighted to confirm the appointment of Dr Debbie Hopkins (Transport Studies Unit, School of Geography and the Environment, University of Oxford) as associate editor of the Journal of Sustainable Tourism to edit this series. The announcement of this series and first call for papers is now available,³ with the first of this series of special issues scheduled for publication in 2019.

In another notable new milestone, in August 2017, the Journal of Sustainable Tourism entered the Twitter sphere, with the appointment of Shahab Pourfakhimi (University of the Sunshine Coast) as Social Media Editor. The Journal of Sustainable Tourism Twitter handle (@JSust Tour) will serve as a high-profile point of dissemination of papers when they are published online, and we now ask authors to provide tweets (in text, image and video forms) when their papers are submitted, to help us to disseminate published papers widely. Acceptance emails now provide detailed guidance and advice on the preparation of tweets. We are keen to build the followership of

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the journal's Twitter feed, and to support this initiative and improve access to published papers, we have developed two promotions; #Editors Selection and #JOST Free Friday which will offer selected papers free access for a month following online publication.

We have noted with some optimism in this editorial that times of change are upon us. The transformation of societies is underway, and tourism is implicated in the sustainability transformation in terms of both cause and effect. It is at this time of accelerating change that the Journal of Sustainable Tourism is also undergoing significant transformation. Yet much remains unchanged. The Journal of Sustainable Tourism continues to receive high levels of submissions (the journal receives 450–500 full paper manuscripts per annum), and our commitment to the pursuit of rigorous evidence, critical understandings and timely interventions remains unchanged. There are signs that the work of many scholars is beginning to have an impact on world leaders. We must keep pushing ourselves to produce and communicate ever more rigorous and valuable research.

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