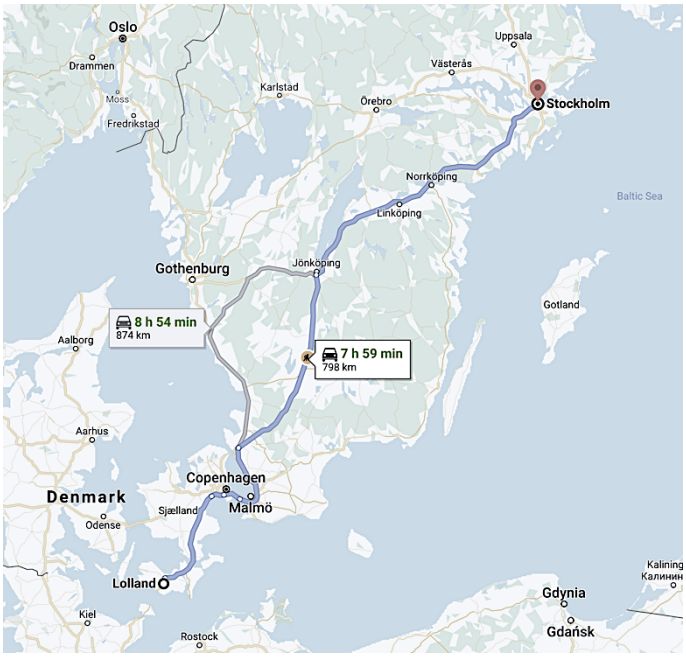
Community in the Age of *Datascape*

c/o Faisal U-K



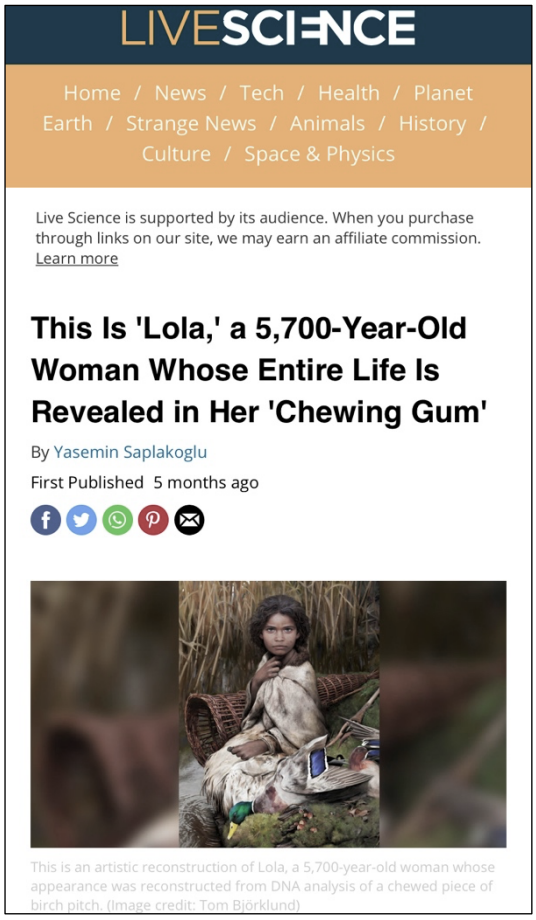
(Image: Google Maps)

Living 800 km apart, two young girls grappled with adolescence as they struggled to have their voices heard by their *communities*. But this is not a story about young girls, or about adolescence, oh no no no; this is a story about *community, space,* and *datascape*.

The fourth largest island of Denmark is called Lolland, and that is where our first specimen, I mean character (ehem), lived. She was a young girl who lived an average life for the most part, apart from her obsession with chewing gum. She would normally wake up very early, just after sunrise, in the small house she lived in with her parents and siblings. Every day she could see the traders loading up their cargo ready to set off on a journey, and she hoped she could join them, she had never left her small village, the only things she had ever heard about the outside world were folkloric tales and the bits of stories she'd hear from the traders while eavesdropping. This is all she knew, this was her *community*, but she was dying to see the world!

Just 800 km away in the popular city of Stockholm, Sweden, our second girl was wide-eyed and well-travelled, but long before she ever stepped foot outside of Sweden, she was already part of multiple *communities* and was well informed about everything happening all over the world. She never felt restricted to her city, she always felt like a global citizen, so what exactly is this dichotomy between the two? What has allowed one girl to be global citizen, while the other was restricted to her immediate *community*?

It is this little thing we call the *internet of things*.



(Image: Live Science)

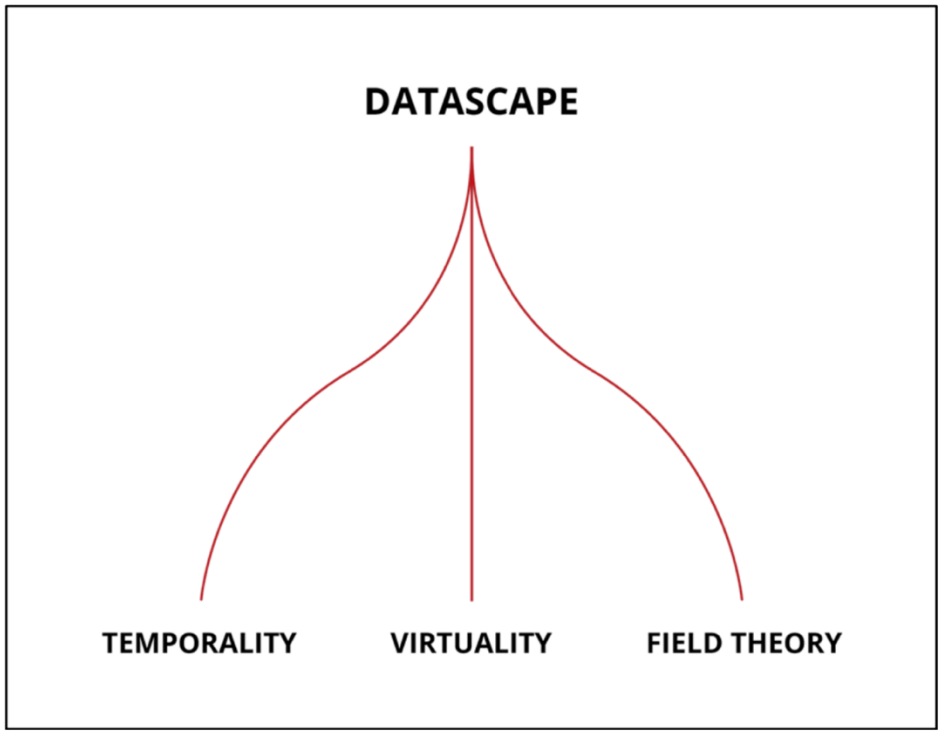
(Image: New Scientist)

The first girl, from Denmark, is called Lola (named after the island of Lolland) and she lived about 5,700 years ago and was identified by scientists by a single piece of gum. Lola, like most Neolithic girls, had no access to the internet and therefore her understanding and experience of *community* was restricted to her geographical expanse. The second girl is Greta Thunberg (known to some as 'the savior'), a teenage girl who was the daughter of an opera singer and an actor. She began challenging her parents about climate change after learning about its apparent danger, and after 2 years of trying, to no avail, she got inspired by the school-shooting protests in the US (March For Our Lives) to start her own strike. Later that year, in August 2018, young miss Thunberg decided not to return to school in the ninth grade until the Swedish general elections a couple of weeks later. Of course, she took to social media (Instagram and Twitter) to document this protest, which quickly gained steam, and the rest was history.

Now why in the world are we discussing the lives of teenage girls in an article about *communities*? The answer is simple – because Lola and Greta represent the quantum shift between *old community* and *new community*. Lola might have been just as altruistic, just as intelligent, and just as ambitious as Greta, but without this little technology we call the internet, those are just distant dreams. These two Scandinavian girls, close in *space* but distant in time, symbolize the psychosocial dynamic of what a society was and has become. Lola's *community* was very

specifically and explicitly defined by proximity; regardless of her interests or any other demographical markers, her *community* would have been unequivocally (geographically) local. While Greta's simple interest in climate led her to creating one of the world's largest *communities* almost overnight, as a result of a few pictures uploaded online.

The stories of Lola and Greta can also help us understand the framing of *space* within architecture. In 2018 I wrote a paper titled '***Datascape: The 21st Century Concept of Space***' which studies how and why we view *space* the way we do, and proposes a new conception called *datascape*. In this paper I identified Isaac Newton, the genius who taught us about gravity, calculus, optics, motion, and mechanics (most of which he accomplished by the age of 25!), as the culprit in my investigation. The current understanding that *space* is static, eternal, absolute, flat, empty, 3-dimensional, and sometimes even nonphysical and nonexistent, comes from Newton and his contemporaneous buddies Leibniz and Kant. And although the science and philosophy disciplines have moved on since, us architects seem to still hold on to this antiquated understanding and continue to design *spaces* with Lola's understanding of *community*. What I propose in the paper is a new, updated, outlook which incorporates 3 components; temporality, virtuality, and field theory. The term '*datascape*' is a compound term I first coined in 2017; it combines the words 'data', which represents information to be absorbed, and '-scape' which represents a scenery (physical or virtual). This compounding of words results in one that innately defines an information-rich medium, an entity that is full, fluid, expansive, and 'timemore' (no, not timeless, timemore!). This new word is interchangeable with *space* but is unique to architecture and the design disciplines. I present to you, *datascape*.



(Image: Datascape: The 21st Century Concept of Space, Faisal U-K, Dubai, 2018)

In order to formulate this new outlook I studied theories from a myriad of disciplines including Minkowski's ***spacetime***, Einstein's ***relativity***, Penrose's ***orch-or theory***, Weinstein's ***geometric unity***, Hoffman's ***interface theory***, Harman's ***speculative realism***, Ghazali's ***occasionalism***, Bostrom's ***simulation argument***, Boroditsky's ***cognitive research***, Lynn's ***animate form***, and Schumacher's ***field theory*** and ***cyberspace research***, among many others. But I will not bore you with the details or quiz you on them. What is important to note is that all of these fields, from quantum physics to philosophy, at the very frontiers are proposing a completely new framework of what we once understood as '*space*', and I tried to synthesize, simplify, and contextualize those theories in a way that could advance architecture into the leading discipline it once was.

Two years later, the COVID-19 pandemic has put a spotlight on the second component of *datascape* – virtuality – the medium that Greta's *community* was built on. And it has reminded the world of the *communities* that continue to exist regardless of the global lockdown. Schools continue to operate, offices continue to meet, friends continue to communicate, media platforms continue to broadcast, artists continue to perform live, and Jeff Bezos continues to amass billions. How? Because we have been living in the virtual world (we thought was a distant future) for many years now. Virtuality is synonymous with VR goggles in many people's minds, but in fact every morning when you wake up and open your Instagram app you are entering the virtual realm.

(Image: vNREN)

Definition (Merriam-Webster)

community *noun, often attributive*

*com·mu·ni·ty | \ kə-ˈmyü-nə-tē *
plural **communities**

1 : a unified body of individuals: such as

> **a** : the people with common interests living in a particular area
> *broadly* : the area itself
> *// the problems of a large community*
>
> **b** : a group of people with a common characteristic or interest living together within a larger society
> *// a community of retired persons*
> *// a monastic community*
>
> **c** : a body of persons of common and especially professional interests scattered through a larger society
> *// the academic community*
> *// the scientific community*
>
> **d** : a body of persons or nations having a common history or common social, economic, and political interests
> *// the international community*

Not too long ago *community* meant *geography*. Full stop. It represented a group of people that were defined in one way or another based on their physical location, and how close they were. Today, not only is it *not* geographical, but it has become virtual and more intersectional than ever. Meaning? Well the flat earth *community* (bear with me) isn't particular to any one place/city/country/continent, they are a tight-knit *community* located all around the globe (ironically!). People are also now part of several *communities*; politically, ideologically, religiously, culturally, racially, educationally, occupationally etc. There is a young Estonian programmer somewhere who is a Harvard alumni, an Orthodox Christian, a democratic socialist, a Weeknd fan, and part of the Asshole Army of the Flagrant 2 podcast – so he is part of several *communities* simultaneously, and these *communities* are not defined by physical/geographical boarders, just like Greta's. How is this possible? #BecauseTheInternet (in the most Childish Gambino-esc way). Without these photons moving at ~300,000 km/s in the form of what we call radio waves, none of this would be possible. The virtual world isn't just what you get when you wear VR goggles or what you see in Ready Player One, it's all of this – everything that hacks the traditional *spacetime* we know – and *communities* are being defined by it every day. So there's more to *space* than we intuitively think, and that's why I developed the concept of *datascape*, and why I am now part of a collaborative initiative between 6 avant-garde architecture platforms that are leading the transition from the physical to the virtual by creating the very first architecture-led virtual world.

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