

Is The Metaverse The Last Hope For Disappearing Countries?

By Zofia Hardek



Tuvalu's digital twin

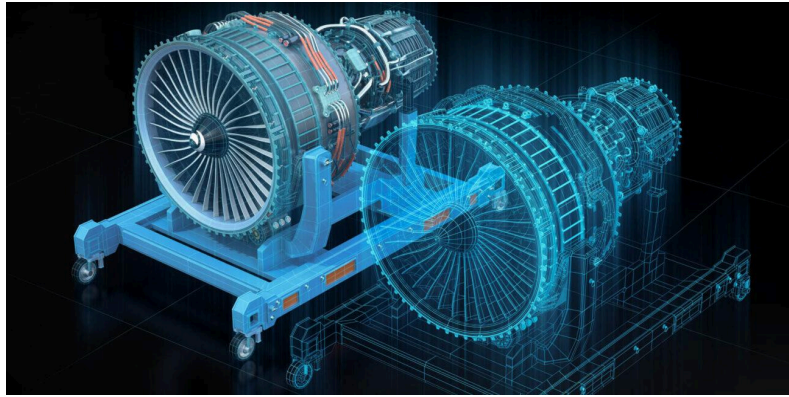
Whenever I ask people about the future of Virtual Reality, the answers are the same. They say “Right now, it’s just not possible for the technology to be useful” and often accentuate its obscure negative effects. Not so long ago, I would have agreed with them, however, it occurs that the future has come. Metaverse has become a salvation for people in danger of losing their identity, like Tuvalu’s citizens.

Tuvalu’s Dramatic Situation

This island country lies in a Polynesian subregion. It is considered the first to disappear due to climate change. Right now, the water level on Earth is rising, and in three decades, Tuvalu might be inhabitable, which is a big problem for the nation. According to the definition established at the Montevideo Convention, a country must have its territory to exist and to be considered by other nations. With the capital city underwater, Tuvalu will vanish from the maps. With a rich, beautiful culture, and a strong nation, the citizens couldn’t accept this fate. That’s why Tuvalu’s government has decided to create the digital twin of their land.

Digital Twin

This topic is a good excuse to learn more about words connected to virtual reality. Metaverse is the world depicted in a VR headset when you’re online. The idea is to meet, live, and do things with your friends online. A well-known example of the early version of the metaverse is Roblox, where you can play with other people on the maps and, potentially, spend time with them at your virtual home. That leads us to another important term, digital twin.



Digital twin (production-manager.pl)

Do you remember dinosaurs from *Jurassic Park*? They were clones, exact replicas of real animals that lived centuries ago. It's the same case with digital twins. They are imitations of real-life objects. Being made by obtaining real-time data, they contain the same qualities as their real-life counterparts, and this is the key in Tuvalu's case.

Digital Country

Even if that's not the ideal solution, the bare concept is interesting. During COP27, a climate conference held by the UN, Simone Kofe, a Tuvaluan politician, delivered his speech from the prototype of the digital country, made by Accenture Song. They decided to duplicate Te Afualiku Island because it's going to be the first to vanish. The creators focused on an exact imitation of the physical aspects of the land. Using movie-quality videos and photos of the islet, the studio managed to create animated ocean waves and currents and, what's more, to accurately represent how the light bounces off the island's objects at any time. Because the process of moving the country to the Digital World is complex, Tuvaluan is duplicating important documents, family albums, and everything connected to their culture.



Simone Kofe giving the speech (source: youtube)

What Will The Future Bring?

Although the idea is being realized, the government of Tuvalu still describes it as “plan B”. Currently, Tuvalu is focused on spreading awareness about climate change and motivating others to prevent it by implying sustainable solutions. This was also a reason for bringing up this topic at COP27. However, if the worst comes, 26 countries have agreed to recognise the digital twin. Moreover, other Pacific territories have started to study the concept on their own, because they are also at risk of losing their identity. The future will show if the digital country will become a reality, but now we know the Metaverse will be important.

References:

1. <https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metawersum>
2. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/bernardmarr/2022/05/16/the-10-best-examples-of-the-metaverse-everyone-should-know-about/>
3. <https://www.ibm.com/topics/what-is-a-digital-twin>
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jun/27/tuvalu-climate-crisis-rising-sea-level-s-pacific-island-nation-country-digital-clone>
5. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tuvalu#Society>
6. <https://www.accenture.com/us-en/case-studies/technology/tuvalu>
7. <https://www.govtechreview.com.au/content/gov-geospatial/news/26-countries-recognise-tuvalu-s-digital-sovereignty-764474170>