




Volunteer tourism and lived space: representations and experiences from Lesbos

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ABSTRACT

In recent decades, the island of Lesbos (North Aegean, Greece) has become a stepping stone on migrants' routes to Europe, attracting volunteer tourism aimed at providing support to migrants. Using the theoretical framework of Lefebvre's triad, we investigate Lesbos as a lived space for volunteer tourists, the representations of the island space they carry and their spatial practices not only as volunteers but also as tourists. The choice of where to go to volunteer depends upon wider geopolitical context, and volunteers' destinations (e.g. reception centres) are, *stricto sensu*, their working spaces. Nevertheless, during their free time, volunteers leave these spaces; specifically, we investigate this dimension of their experience. Through a survey, interviews and participant observation, we illustrate how volunteer tourists imbue the space of Lesbos with symbolic meanings, thus confirming their role in the humanitarian borderscape of the island; we further examine the ways in which they challenge the preconceived imaginaries of the island. Concurrently, we show how in specific places in the island's capital Mytilene, the lived experience of volunteers creates deep connections between volunteers, migrants and locals, to the point that some spaces are co-produced or deeply transformed by the presence and practices of volunteers.

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Introduction

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, and in particular over the past decade, Mediterranean islands on the southern and eastern borders of the European Union have become emblematic places due to the dynamics of migration (Bernardie-Tahir & Schmoll, 2015; Cuttitta, 2012). The case of Lesbos is archetypal of the so-called migrant crisis of 2015.¹ In that year, 500,018 people (UNHCR, 2015) from different countries, mostly from Syria, arrived on the island by way of Turkey, seeking protection in Europe (Figure 1): this number represents almost half of the total arrivals to the entire European Mediterranean area.



Subsequently, a number of people from all over the world gathered in Lesbos to volunteer in assisting migrants. This assistance can be considered a peculiar form of volunteer tourism that, unlike environmental or community development tourism, focuses not on the improvement of local conditions but rather on assisting migrants in transit.

Indeed, volunteer tourists are specifically in that destination as a consequence of the 'bordering'² process and the 'borderization' policies (Cuttitta, 2014) of the

European islands in the Mediterranean, and as argued by Pallister-Wilkins (2017), volunteers' 'humanitarian borderwork' is both a cause and an effect of borderscapes. The term 'borderscape' (Perera, 2007; Rajaram & Grundy-Warr, 2007) has been used to refer to a space that is

fluid and shifting; established and at the same time continuously traversed by a number of bodies, discourses, practices, and relationships that highlight endless definitions and shifts in definition between inside and outside, citizens and foreigners, hosts and guests across state, regional, racial, and other symbolic boundaries. (Brambilla, 2015, p. 19)

This notion does not neglect the normative aspect of the border and the state's power over it, but it encompasses the fact that borders are also inhabited by practices of struggle and resistance. Considering specifically the relations between space and humanitarian practices (which must respond to mobile bodies and needs), the concept of the borderscape is particularly appropriate (Brambilla, 2015; Brambilla et al., 2015; Brambilla & Jones, 2019; Pallister-Wilkins, 2017, 2018). Furthermore, the space in which volunteers live in Lesbos could be also thought of as a touristic borderzone.³

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The article is the result of fieldwork carried out by both authors and shared reflections; both authors have fully concurred with the findings. For what concerns the layout of the text, sections *Migrants' arrivals in Lesbos and the development of volunteer tourism, Is this volunteer tourism?, Literature review, Materials and methods* were written by Federica Letizia Cavallo; the section *Results and discussion* was written by Giovanna Di Matteo; Introduction and Conclusions were curated by both.



Figure 1. Principal migration routes in the Mediterranean Basin. Source: Elaboration of UNHCR data (<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean>) by Pamela Lillo.

Volunteers on Lesvos work for organisations that provide different kinds of assistance to migrants. Such volunteers are employed in various services, including boat-landing response, sea spotting, food and beverage provision, clothing distribution and storage, medical care, cleaning, translation and cultural mediation, legal assistance and educational and recreational activities. In some cases, volunteers operate in places that are enclaves of the global governance network managed by non-governmental organisations (NGOs); in other cases, they work in humanitarian initiatives not linked to NGOs. Regardless of the type of volunteer work and its specific location, the capital of the island, Mytilene, plays a key role as both a gateway and service centre.

The question we raise, from a human geography perspective, is how and to what extent the island can be considered for volunteer tourists involved in migrant support as a lived space in Lefebvrian terms (that is to say, a space of representation which is directly experienced through symbols and images) (Lefebvre, 1974/1994). In turn, we ask; what representations of the island do volunteers carry, and what direct experience of the island space do they live? How do they contribute to its borderscaping? Moreover, considering the centrality of Mytilene, what is their lived experience of the city? Behind these questions lies a more general one; how does volunteer tourism generate a situated lived experience of a social space?

To answer these questions, we focus on spaces separate from volunteer work itself, including both spaces where volunteers occasionally go for outings and

spaces where they regularly spend their spare time. Indeed, volunteers work almost exclusively within dedicated spaces, such as reception centres or facilities managed by NGOs. These are enclave spaces, which can be considered almost as ‘islands within the island’; volunteers spend most of their time in such spaces rich in meanings and apt to become rich in human relationships. However, an aspect that is often ignored in the literature is that volunteers make contact with the rest of the island during their free time. This contact occurs when they leave the heterotopic enclave spaces (Foucault, 1986) conceived for migrants and thus relate to the ‘normal’ island space through spatial dynamics and evaluations of attractiveness, which they sometimes share with ‘traditional’ tourists and other times develop in ways specific to the peculiar type of volunteer tourism they represent.⁴

We begin by briefly illustrating how the phenomenon of migration has affected Lesvos since 2015. We then explain why we conceived of the act of travelling abroad to assist migrants as a form of volunteer tourism. The work continues with a review of the literature on volunteer tourism and then focuses on the role of social space connected to volunteer tourists’ experience through the lens of Lefebvre’s spatial triad. The following section explains the study methodology and the methods employed to answer our research questions. Finally, we present and discuss the results of our survey regarding volunteers’ representations and experiences of Lesvos and Mytilene, with these representations and experiences subsequently being integrated with

knowledge and information obtained from interviews and participant observation.

Migrants' arrivals in Lesvos and the development of volunteer tourism

Lesvos is a Greek island located in the north-eastern Aegean Sea. With an area of 1,633 km², it is the third largest Greek island in size and the fifth most populated, with a total of 86,436 inhabitants (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2011). The island is located a few kilometres from Turkey, separated only by the Mytilene Strait, which is about 10 km wide. The capital, Mytilene, which has a population of 37,890 (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2011), is located on the eastern coast of the island.

Over the past two decades, Lesvos has seen an increasing number of people arriving from different countries. This number rose sharply in 2015, when 500,018 people (UNHCR, 2015) arrived on the island, representing about 59% of the total arrivals in Greece and almost half of the total arrivals in the whole European Mediterranean area (1,014,973 people) for that year (UNHCR, 2016).

Currently, four migrant reception centres exist on Lesvos (Figure 2):⁵ the first is in Moria (7.5 kilometres northeast of Mytilene), which is controlled by the EU

and the Greek government; the second is Kara Tepe (2.5 kilometres northeast of Mytilene), which is managed by the municipality of Lesvos; and the third is Pikpa, which is in the airport area and run by the organisation Lesvos Solidarity.⁶ A fourth, temporary centre, called Stage 2, is located in Skala Sykamineas, while the nearby Stage 1 has been dismantled.

Until the end of 2015, migrants left the island in compliance with an expulsion order stating that the person issued with such an order had to leave the country within 30 days. Migrants then used this paper to leave Greece and continue to other European countries. This state of affairs changed in September 2015 with the establishment of Lesvos as an EU *Hotspot*⁷ and again in May 2016 with the EU-Turkey agreement aimed at stopping migrant's journeys in Turkey (Tsilimpounidi & Carastathis, 2017). The number of new arrivals in Lesvos decreased drastically after 2016 (11,570 arrived in 2017; 15,034 in 2018). However, people were detained in Moria or stuck in the various reception centres for months or years; many remain so even now.⁸

In the summer of 2015, the international attention that the island received increased exponentially with the increasing number of migrant landings. Lesvos began to attract the attention of a number of national and international NGOs, grassroots organisations and activists from all over the world (Tsilimpounidi & Carastathis,

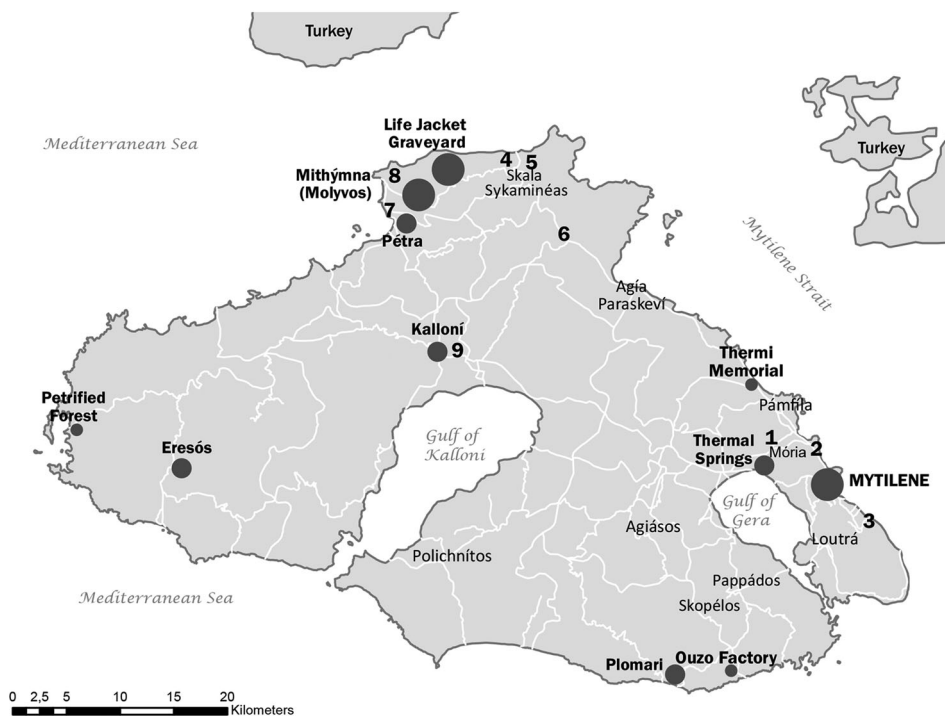


Figure 2. The island of Lesvos. Depicted are the island's principal settlements; the migrant reception centres (1- Moria; 2- Kare Tepe; 3- Pikpa; 4- Stage 1, now dismantled; 5- Stage 2); and the places visited by volunteer tourists (see sub-section 'Volunteers' Destinations in Lesvos'): small dot ≤ 19 visitors; medium dot 20–45; large dot ≥ 46. Source: Elaboration of authors' data by Pamela Lillo.

2017). After the first phase of spontaneous reaction, organisations began to structure their work, consequently also structuring the recruitment of volunteers through conventional and social media campaigns and other forms of publicity. No official public record exists of all NGOs and other groups that have worked in Lesvos since 2015, partly because many were created *ad hoc* (Kitching et al., 2016) and did not register with local authorities. In May 2018, we were able to count 54 organisations operating on the island. Most of these organisations were based out of Mytilene and generally worked in one of the three north-eastern reception centres. Some were located in the northern part of Lesvos, mainly in the village of Skala Sikamineas (Figure 2).

Kitching et al. (2016) have estimated that between 2,060 and 4,240 volunteers worked on Lesvos from November 2014 to February 2016. However, in May 2018, the Coordination Committee for the Registration, Coordination and Evaluation of NGOs of the Secretariat General for the Aegean and Island Policy stated that there may have been 114 NGOs operating out of Reception and Identification Centres as well as 7,356 volunteers from 2016 onwards, although they also state that this number has not been verified (Refugee Observatory, 2018). Nonetheless, the information usefully presents an idea of the large number of actors who have passed through Lesvos to support migrants in recent years.

Is this volunteer tourism?

The phenomenon of travelling abroad as a volunteer started at the beginning of the twentieth century. It is rooted in projects such as the US Peace Corps, the UK's Voluntary Service Overseas programme and the Australian Volunteers Abroad, even though those projects differ from paradigmatic contemporary volunteer tourism (Brown, 2005; Butcher & Smith, 2010, 2015; Guttentag, 2009; Wearing, 2004). Forms of humanitarian and international volunteering take place in various locations (largely, but not exclusively, in the global South) and involve a range of different projects. Starting in the late 1990s, various scholars began to consider this phenomenon to be volunteer tourism.

The most widely recognised definition (Wearing, 2001) states that volunteer tourists are those:

who, for various reasons, volunteer in an organised way to undertake holidays that might involve aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments or research into aspects of society or the environment. (p. 1)

Since this first definition, the concept of volunteer tourism has been both widened and nuanced. Indeed,

volunteer tourism has been presented under various labels, such as 'alternative tourism' (e.g. Guttentag, 2009; McIntosh & Zahra, 2008; Uriely et al., 2003; Wearing, 2001, 2004; Wearing & Neil, 2000), 'new tourism' (Poon, 1993), 'niche tourism' (Novelli, 2005) and 'new moral tourism' (Butcher, 2003), among others (Butcher & Smith, 2010; Rogerson, 2011; Scheyvens, 2007; Stoddart & Rogerson, 2004; Theerapappisit, 2009).

As argued by Callanan and Thomas (2005), the range of projects that fall under Wearing's definition is wide, and it is not easy to establish precisely what can be encompassed within the category of volunteer tourism. The particular practice of travelling abroad with the aim of working, unpaid, to support transiting migrants in critical situations could be simply framed as 'international volunteering' or 'international service'. Nonetheless, we believe that framing it within the field of volunteer tourism is not only formally correct but also particularly promising in terms of opening new avenues of reflection on this phenomenon.

Firstly, this kind of activity technically falls under the definition of tourism provided by the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO);⁹ more specifically, it accords with Wearing's aforementioned definition. This is true even if, of course, we are dealing with a liminal form of tourism. Moreover, it should be considered that some authors choose to refer to international volunteering in Lesvos as 'volunteer tourism' or 'voluntourism' (Guribye & Stalsberg Mydland, 2018; Knott, 2018; Trihas & Tsilimpokos, 2018). Along the same lines, we believe that it can be conceptualised as a sub-type of volunteer tourism, even if it is a peculiar (and more recent) one compared to the typical environmental or community-oriented volunteer tourism.

Certain evidence can be called upon to support this point: for example, many volunteers openly declare that the time spent in Lesvos corresponds to their holidays; moreover, during their spare time, they tend to explore the island, embracing tourist practices, motivations and destinations (just as happens with more consolidated forms of volunteer tourism). In addition, we found that some volunteers chose Lesvos (and not other European migrant crisis areas, such as Calais, to mention just one) partly because of local touristic pull factors (and a few NGOs used these factors to recruit volunteers). In general, many have remarked upon the attractiveness of the island, referring to natural and cultural heritage prominent in a consolidated tourist imaginary.

Given also the average length of stay, the skills required of the work and the motivations for volunteering in Lesvos, we draw on Callanan and Thomas's (2005) proposal of three shades of volunteer tourism ('shallow',

'intermediate' and 'deep') to argue that the phenomenon in Lesvos is best considered intermediate or deep volunteer tourism. A similar argument has been made by Daldeniz and Hampton (2011), who distinguish between 'VOLUNtourists' and 'volunTOURISTS'. In our case, the emphasis on the VOLUNtourist nature of the interviewees does not blur their 'tourist identity' but renegotiates it in a particular way.

Above all, we argue that in considering this practice to be volunteer tourism, we do not mean to strictly categorise it in opposition to other social-spatial practices. On the contrary, volunteer tourism challenges the dichotomies rooted in traditional tourism studies such as work/leisure, host/guest, outsider/insider, and so on; unsurprisingly, though, volunteer tourists frequently do not see themselves as holiday-makers, but rather as volunteers who travel to 'work; not just be tourists' (McIntosh & Zahra, 2007, p. 546). This self-conception fits perfectly (as was often stated in our interviews) with the peculiar form of volunteer tourism aimed at assisting migrants in transit. Significantly, volunteering has been considered by Wilson and Musick to be a form of 'leisure as work' and 'work as leisure' (1997, p. 696), which is close to Stebbins' definition of 'serious leisure' (1996). In turn, Uriely et al. (2003) study the phenomenon as a type of postmodern tourism, seeing it as part of horizontal de-differentiation processes (Munt, 1994; Urry, 1990) in which conventional differences between various fields of social activity are progressively diminishing.

Literature review

Volunteer tourism and its spatial dimension

After the seminal work cited above, scholars' attention to volunteer tourism increased notably;¹⁰ nonetheless, McGehee (2014) affirms the persistent need for new approaches and theories, including ones drawn from geography. Many authors have underlined the positive impacts that can stem from volunteer tourism: from volunteers' transformational self-renewal and deep personal changes (McIntosh & Zahra, 2007; Stebbins, 1992; Wearing, 2001) to volunteers and locals' mutual enrichment through intercultural exchange (Wearing, 2001) along with strides made in environmental conservation or community empowerment in volunteer tourists' destinations (Brown, 2005).

As recalled by Schwarz (2018) and McGehee (2014), however, from the early 2000s to the late 2010s scholars gradually shifted from advocacy, considering volunteer tourism as an ideal activity, to caution and critique. Volunteer tourism has attracted strong criticism, mostly relating to the commodification of a 'humanitarian

industry' that encourages a neoliberal economic and moral order, to the threat of neo-colonialist practices (Butcher, 2003; Butcher & Smith, 2010; Mostafanezhad, 2014; Sin et al., 2015), to mechanisms reproducing dependency and 'otherness' (Guttentag, 2009) or producing new forms of policing through the care-control nexus (Pallister-Wilkins, 2017), and to widespread unprofessionalism (Guribye & Stalsberg Mydland, 2018; Guttentag, 2009; Simpson, 2004). Moreover, considering volunteering with migrants in transit in a critical area such as Lesvos raises certain specific problems, such as the inadequacy of (or complete lack of) cooperation with local stakeholders and attention to locals' needs and the negligible awareness of other initiatives taking place in the same region (Guribye & Stalsberg Mydland, 2018; Kinsbergen et al., 2017).

If the existing literature on volunteer tourism is broad, reflections concerning migration and the refugee crisis in Europe and its borderized spaces (such as Lesvos, Lampedusa, Calais and Ventimiglia) are even more expansive. In contrast, research focused on volunteering at the places where migrants arrive or through which they transit is less well-developed (Chtouris & Miller, 2017; Guribye & Stalsberg Mydland, 2018; Kitching et al., 2016; Rozakou, 2012, 2016; Sandri, 2018; Skleparis & Armakolas, 2016). Attention to this phenomenon from the perspective of volunteer tourism has, furthermore, been generally lacking (Knott, 2018), especially as the phenomenon is spatially conceived.

Drawing on Sin et al. (2015), we endorse the importance of investigating volunteer tourism spatially, which means considering this activity as a place-based and situated phenomenon. The context in which volunteer tourism occurs and its spatial and territorial contingencies is pivotal. The concepts of space and place are fundamental not only because tourists physically spend their vacations in a place (which differs from the usual places of their everyday lives) but also because of the relationships that they construct with and within that space. Volunteer tourism destinations can be considered what Edensor (2000) calls 'heterogeneous spaces', suitable for satisfying the growing demand for tourist experiences that are both immersive and multisensorial. These spaces challenge visitors' consolidated knowledge structures and push them to continually re-perform their identities as tourists (Sin, 2009). Therefore, a volunteer tourism experience presages a 'new understanding of places' (Sin, 2009, p. 492).

Another aspect of particular interest is the need to move away from the idea of the volunteer tourist 'simply visiting or "passing through" a place as an "outsider"' (Wearing et al., 2017, p. 516). Firstly, volunteer tourists spend time living and working in a community

(Wearing et al., 2017), which creates a strong connection with and within those spaces in which they live. Secondly, volunteer tourism can be framed in the context of the contemporary global 'geographies of care' (Conradson, 2003) which can bind people and places socially and spatially distant from one another. In this way, 'relations and practices of care [...] are implicated in the production of particular social spaces' (Sin, 2010, p. 985).

At the same time, volunteer tourists' caring performances mostly occur through the mediation of NGOs. This key element of the spatialisation of the phenomenon also centres on the transnational scale: the process of 'NGOzation' (Kapoor, 2013; Roy, 2012) is a form of transitional governmentality (Sin et al., 2015), and volunteer tourists are mobile actors within the new spaces of global governance (Sin et al., 2015; Mostafanezhad, 2014). For volunteer tourists, their experience is a way by which to 're-imagine their ability to participate in and change global space through their international volunteering experience' (Mostafanezhad, 2014, p. 112), and considering them as political actors opens two possible lines of enquiry: volunteers may be looked at, first, as cooperating with border regime practices (Trubeta, 2015) or, second, as challenging them by 'simply being in the camp' (Sandri, 2018, p. 71). We investigate the position of volunteers when they are 'out of the camp' in spaces on Lesbos not explicitly devoted to migrants and people working in their interests; when in such spaces, volunteers are not called upon to perform the practices of care, but this 'time off' does not mean that they abandon their 'volunteer identity'.

Applying Lefebvre's spatial triad to volunteer tourism: the premises

'If space embodies social relationships, how and why does it do so? And what relationships are they?' asks Lefebvre (1974/1994). Preston (2003) argues that space plays a crucial role in structuring the way people think and that the physical spaces that surround people are profoundly embedded people's identities. From this point of view, geographical space is neither neutral, passive nor a mere background to action (Tilley, 1994). Furthermore, other authors underscore the relational aspect of space. Massey (2005) describes space as a 'product of relations-between' (p. 9) that is continuously produced and reproduced. Similarly, Rose (1999) states that relations not only occur in space but also contribute to its creation: 'space is a doing' (p. 251).

According to Lefebvre (1974/1994), space (considered as a process rather than as an object) is central to our experience of the world, and every experience is

contained within three interrelated aspects (in the sense of spheres or facets) that constantly interact in the production of space: the 'perceived space' (the sphere of day-to-day spatial practices), the 'conceived space' (the sphere of abstract and rational representations of space, such as in urban planning) and the 'lived space' (the space of representation directly experienced through symbols and images and desires).

As noted by Pierce and Martin (2015), since the turn of the twenty-first century, the Lefebvrian spatial triad has been embraced and variously interpreted and reworked by many scholars, especially by geographers criticising the spatialities of capitalism, including Merrifield (1993), Soja (1996) and Harvey (2001). Among other interpretations, Watkins (2005) considers the perceived space as consisting in the spatial practices of the daily routines and the social conventions of behaviour accepted within a certain environment. These dynamic practices play the role of mediators between the other two aspects of space – conceived and lived – holding them together but also keeping them separated (Cloke, 2006). The second element, the conceived space, is the dimension of the conceptualisation of space, comprising codifications and abstract representations. These representations are the 'logic and forms of knowledge, and the ideological content of codes, theories and the conceptual depictions of space' (Shields, 1999, p. 163). They are also rational, intellectualised and official notions serving the analytical and administrative ends of technocrats (Leary-Owhin, 2016). In other words, power is embedded in conceived space (Merrifield, 2000). Nonetheless, the conceived facet of space, despite often being an expression of hegemonic power, can also involve mental inventions, spatial discourses and imagined landscapes (Borelli, 2012) that can open new possibilities and meanings in spatial practices. Finally, the last aspect of space – the lived space – is the 'alive' face of space: it is the realm of passion, action and lived situations, essentially qualitative, fluid and dynamic (Lefebvre, 1974/1994). It is the level at which the conceived space seeks to change and appropriate (Lefebvre, 1974/1994). In other words, it is a multi-layered combination of signs and symbols by which people understand the world, which 'the conceived, ordered, hegemonic space will intervene in, codify, rationalise and ultimately attempt to usurp' (Merrifield, 1993, p. 523).

As argued by Lefebvre (1974/1994) himself, this triad, if treated exclusively as an abstract model, loses its force, and it must therefore be applied to concrete cases. The triad has been employed as an interpretative tool in tourism studies: for instance, Wolfel (2016) applies it to the multilayer touristic Munich, while Cloke (2006)

draws on Lefebvre's triad to show how – if capitalism tends to give prominence to the conceived realm transforming the rural into a commodity – it is possible to enrich a rural space with different identities and free it from conceived space through new tourist practices (such as tasting local products as well as performing creative practices such as fishing or country-style cooking). Mostafanezhad (2014) refers to the commodification of the volunteer tourism experience as part of the 'spectacle of popular humanitarianism' and considers these spaces in Lefebvre's (1974/1994) terms as the materialisation of 'commodified aid oriented activities' (p. 112).

In our case, we apply the triad to the humanitarian borderscape of Lesvos to investigate the various levels of this borderscaped space's construction and to identify how the lived and perceived facets of space are often subsumed under what is conceived (for example, by EU policies, the local administrations and the governance of NGOs). We then aim to individuate those lived-space practices that can release certain spaces from the normativity of the border, enabling the encounter between volunteer tourists, locals and migrants.

The relevance attributed to space, together with the theory developed by Lefebvre, can be connected to Wearing's analysis of the importance of space in the experiences of volunteer tourists.¹¹ In the discussion section, we will show how and where in Lesvos volunteer tourists' 'doing' and 'interacting' co-construct spaces where the Lefebvrian dimension of lived space regains prominence.

Materials and methods

The methodological approach that shapes our research is phenomenological (see Creswell, 2013) and draws on a range of qualitative methods. To answer our research

questions, we created an online survey using Google Forms. Our aim was to engage people who had volunteered. We used accidental sampling,¹² which has been proven suitable when the population of a survey is not defined (Battaglia, 2008; Dörnyei, 2007; Etikan et al., 2016) due to the impossibility of measuring and contacting the entire target population in that scenario.

The survey was carried out from February to July 2018. A total of 40 organisations were contacted by email¹³ and asked to forward the questionnaire to their past and present volunteers. A link to the survey was also posted on the Facebook page *Information Point for Lesvos Volunteers*.¹⁴

The questionnaires were distributed after an initial period of fieldwork aimed at exploratory observation (Morange & Schmoll, 2016). Firstly, the questionnaire was useful to establish first contact with volunteers in order to frame the context. Moreover, the questionnaire was intended to reach a wide range of volunteers who had stayed on the island since 2015 in order to understand their representation of the island and where they had spent their free time. Furthermore, we used the survey to prepare and gauge the questions for the interviews that followed in a later phase of the research. In this paper, we primarily make use of the answers received through the survey, integrating them with insights derived from the interviews when appropriate. The questionnaire was written in English and was composed of 30 questions, divided over four sections: general information, volunteering in Lesvos, Lesvos and Mytilene and the volunteering experience. We used a mix of closed questions (checkboxes and multiple choice) and open questions as well as some combination questions. This variety of question types allowed us to measure trends among the respondents, to give voice to them, to obtain a broader point of view on certain

Table 1. Survey respondents' personal information, length of the stay and site of accommodation.

Respondents' Age		Country of Origin		Length of the Stay		Site of Accommodation	
18–23	8	Netherlands	17	1 week	5	Mytilene	49
24–30	24	USA	13	2 - 3 weeks	25	Skala Sikamineas	13
31–40	8	UK	12	3 + weeks	6	Molyvos	5
41–50	9	Germany	5	1 - 3 months	18	Kalloni	3
51–60	7	Spain	4	3 - 6 months	7	Other	6
61 +	14	Australia	3	6 + months	12		
Not declared	3	Norway	3				
		Canada	2				
		France	2				
		Greece	2				
		New Zealand	2				
		Austria	1				
		Belgium	1				
		Ireland	1				
		Italy	1				
		Poland	1				
		Sweden	1				
		Switzerland	1				
		Syria	1				

Note: Three of the respondents had more than one accommodation during their stay.

topics and to put the respondents in the position of questioning the questionnaire itself through alternative interpretations, insights and justifications (McGuirk & O'Neill, 2005/2010).

Overall, 73 questionnaires were completed (general information about the respondents is reported in Table 1). The respondents had volunteered on the island between July 2015 and the summer of 2018.¹⁵ Most of the respondents were on Lesbos for between two and three weeks. It should be considered that the length of the volunteers' stay depends not only on the availability of the volunteer but also, often, on the rules and guidelines of the organisations and associations. Most volunteers were accommodated in the capital, Mytilene, where they also worked.

In addition, the authors also spent various research periods in Lesbos between January 2018 and June 2019. During these visits, 30 semi-structured interviews were conducted with volunteer tourists.¹⁶ The interviews investigated in greater depth certain elements that had become prominent in the survey analysis, such as where volunteers spent their time; they also focused on volunteers' practices in and their attitudes towards those spaces.¹⁷ In both the questionnaires and the interviews, we used qualitative content analysis to classify, summarise and tabulate the data.¹⁸

While in Mytilene, we practiced participant observation, taking part in several activities alongside volunteers during their free time at the Mosaik House support centre, at the beach or in the evening; following their road trips around the island; and sharing an apartment with one of the volunteers. Furthermore, one of the authors worked as a volunteer for two organisations for a total of four weeks. These practices allowed the authors to gain insight into volunteers' interactions and relationships with and within the space of the island.

Results and discussion

Lesbos through the volunteers' eyes: representations of the island space

Considering volunteer tourism as a place-based phenomenon (Sin et al., 2015), and keeping in mind that spaces 'take their meaning from the people who, and elements that, occupy them' (Wearing, 2001, p. 112), we attempted through our survey to understand what symbols and representations volunteers associate with the island of Lesbos. We analyse how, for each representation, the relative pre-eminence of one facet of Lefebvre's triad emerges and overtakes the others (which are always presents as co-existing and inter-related dimensions of space). We then investigate how these representations intertwine with the direct

experience volunteers have of the island as a whole (including specific touristic destinations) in order to understand volunteers' relationships with the island space. Considering the different dynamics implied in the shift in scale from the entire island to the capital city, we follow the same process in the next subsection, specifically referring to Mytilene.

What constitutes the level of the conceived space from our perspective must be specified. Because of our focus on volunteer tourism, in this level we include the process that created the preconditions for volunteers to travel to the island and how the island space is rationalised and conditioned by policies that, on various levels, establish where and under what conditions volunteers can or cannot access certain spaces, what they are allowed or not allowed to do in those spaces, and when. Furthermore, this aspect of space includes the circumstances that determine where volunteers find accommodation, how they move from one place to another on the island and how and where they spend their free time. Finally, another aspect of the conceived space that we will consider is the stereotype of the idyllic 'Mediterranean island' that is often present in the tourism-oriented production of the island space.

From the answers that volunteers provided,¹⁹ it was possible to identify six main categories of representation of Lesbos (Figure 3). Not every answer provided has been categorised univocally, as some of them engaged more than one category. In order to categorise them, we broke the answers into 92 thematic statements.

The first category identified is the humanitarian representation of the island. This representation emerges, for example, in the words of one volunteer who associates Lesbos with the word 'humanity'. In another participant's words, Lesbos is 'a safe haven for refugees'. For others, it is 'a place of intense need and compassion', 'a place filled with helpfulness'. Still others emphasised the aspect of 'contributing' and 'working for a good cause'. When volunteers represent Lesbos in this way, they engage their personal lived humanitarian space and the strong feelings they associate with it, such as compassion, but they also embrace the conceived space of the institutionally borderized island and even more so the conceived space of the humanitarian NGOs' governance and the popular humanitarian gaze (Mostafanezhad, 2014).

A second category of representation, appearing in 17 responses, refers to the beauty of the island. These responses show how, even though the goal of volunteers is to assist migrants, the awareness of being on a 'beautiful island' – a Mediterranean tourist destination – emerges. This element also occurred during the participant observation: during informal conversations while

What does Lesvos Represents for You?

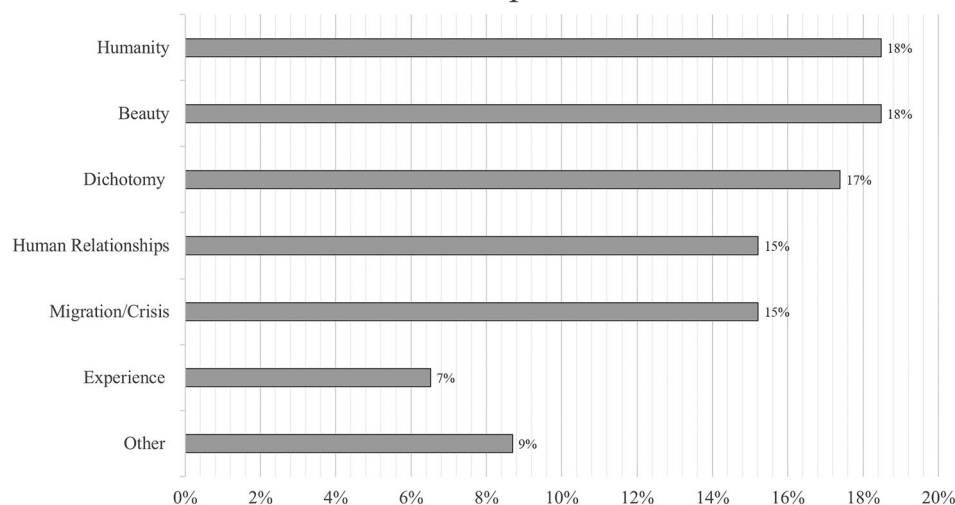


Figure 3. Selected Categories of Representations of Lesvos. Source: Author's data.
Note: The sum of the percentages shown totals 99% due to the rounding of decimal points.

driving to our destinations, many volunteers would comment on the beauty of the landscape or the fascination held by the ancient villages we would pass. This element was also reflected in the interviews: 'The place where I go swimming – it's so beautiful, the colours, the combination of colours of the ocean and then the sky or the clouds, and the flowers, and the rocks.'²⁰ Even if they perceive some landscape features aesthetically during their daily routines, the dimension of the lived space, in particular, allows them to 'feel' the beauty. Nonetheless, we do not underestimate the degree to which volunteers may also have internalised (and therefore projected on Lesvos) the commodified image of 'the Mediterranean island' as conceived by destination marketing and branding.

As for the third category, we found that many people used expressions of dichotomy to describe the island, usually underlining the contrast between the beauty of the natural landscape (as connected to the previous category) and the ugliness of migrants' conditions.²¹ For example, it was said that Lesvos has 'two faces: a beautiful island, with amazing nature, but also the most horrible living conditions I've ever seen in refugee camps' or that Lesvos encompasses a 'sharp contrast of natural beauty and human tragedy and misery'. Others defined it as encompassing 'beauty, hope and despair' or combining 'a place of incredible beauty with incredible suffering'. The same dichotomic perception was expressed in other cases as a political contrast between 'bad institutions and good people', such as in the statement describing Lesvos as a 'limbo between the failing of the European Union and solidarity'. With such dichotomic representations, volunteers express their awareness

of complex facets of space involved in their experience: they alternate between the conceived aspect of the bordered Lesvos and the lived dimension of affections (on one hand) and beauty (on the other). However, the dichotomy between beauty and hardship in the situation can also be interpreted as a short circuit between two conceptualisations of space: the touristic Mediterranean island and the bordered island.

In a fourth category of representation, volunteers associated the island with human relationships. Lesvos becomes 'home' to volunteers – as one volunteer stated – because of the relationships they build there: 'I left my heart on Lesvos, mostly because of the people I met'. MacCannell (1992) claims that the 'true heroes' of tourism are people who know 'their future will be made of dialogue with their fellow travellers and those they meet along the way' (p. 4). Human relationships and encounters (Bruner, 2005; Simoni, 2014; Tonnaer, 2010) are (or should be) central to every touristic experience, and as Wearing (2001; see also Madsen Camacho, 2004) remarks, these interactions are also a fundamental part of the volunteer tourism experience. Here, the domain of lived space (of the spatialised lived situations shared with others) gains prominence, while the conceived bordered/humanitarian Lesvos remains in the background.

The fifth category associates Lesvos with migration, usually related to the concept of crisis and emergency. For example, one participant said that Lesvos represents 'a humanitarian crisis' or 'the frontline of the refugee crisis', as well as a 'complex emergency context'. This category of representation is the only one that tends to convey a negative image of the

island, which is unsurprising, considering volunteers' motives. In this category the facet of conceived space is predominant.

The final group of answers relates Lesvos with the volunteers' important personal experiences. For one participant, it was 'the beginning of a new path'. For another, it was 'an experience ... It's tough to say' or even 'maybe the most powerful experience of my life – a really hard experience but a beautiful one at the same time'. Tourist experiences are also formative moments. Tourists 'launch themselves into a journey of personal discovery' (Wearing, 2001, p. 9), and volunteer tourism gives them the chance to experience travel as a means of self-change that is more likely to be permanent than that induced by other forms of tourism. It is not surprising that, in these answers, as in those related to the fourth category, the dimension of the lived space is prominent.

The six categories of responses overall suggest that the representations of the island reported by volunteers are often symbolic, sometimes even idealistic. These representations seem related to volunteers' preconceived images of Lesvos as the 'island of the refugee crisis', which is, of course, connected to their roles as volunteers and to the reasons they are there. On the one hand, Lesvos' space emerges as border of Europe and symbol of the migratory crisis, which is to say that the prevalent Lefebvrian facet is the conceived space, which embeds in Lesvos the institutional power of the EU and the non-governmental power of NGOs. Nonetheless, from these answers, the aspect of volunteers' lived space also emerges: they mention what they experienced and lived, and they underline the beauty of the island or the relationships they built there. For example, those answers that define Lesvos as 'home' are the expressions of a spatialised social interaction that is neither ideologically connoted nor pre-constituted but rather shaped through affection and a sense of belonging. A peculiar element which exemplifies the entanglement of the two aspects of space that emerge more clearly in this sub-section (the conceived and the lived) is the category we call 'dichotomic': a place that is meant to be conceptualised as 'the' border, the symbol of the crisis, is discovered to be beautiful and enjoyable to live in. In many interviews, this is felt as a moral clash, expressed through a sense of guilt in affirming that part of the experience is enjoying free time outside work. One interviewee expressed this tension as follows:

It is nice, but it is a bit weird. And there is nothing bad about it, of course you're allowed to go out ... and everyone who comes here is not getting paid and volunteers are doing something for a good cause and ... it's nice weather so it's ok to go out on Saturdays and it's just a big bonus, but it still

gives that weird feeling [...] like if you're volunteering and you're not suffering it's like you're doing something wrong almost.²²

Volunteers' destinations in Lesvos

We further investigated how these representations are connected with volunteers' direct knowledge and experience of the island in its different spaces and territorial features. As mentioned previously, our analysis focuses on their destinations as tourists; during our field observations we noticed that volunteers usually explore the island on their days off. Therefore, most of them, staying for a relatively short time, have the chance to visit one or two areas of Lesvos, as also shown by the results of the survey. The visited places are shown in Figures 2 and 4.

Most respondents (46 volunteers or 63% of the total) visited Mithymna, often referred to by its ancient name Molyvos, the best-known heritage town on the island. Aside from Molyvos, other tourist sites were visited by volunteers (see Figure 4). The choice of this type of destinations is noteworthy because it shows how the interests of this peculiar type of tourist align with those of any other tourist. Indeed, during their free time, volunteers are foreign visitors receptive to the attractions the island offers. Without doubt, the conceived tourist space (based on 'must-see' places) plays a role in their choices when they break from their volunteering function.

The second most visited place was the so-called 'life jacket graveyard', a landfill where innumerable quantities of life jackets used by migrants have been dumped (51% of volunteers went there) (Figure 5).²³

From 2015 onward, press from all over the world started publishing photos of this 'heart-breaking mountain' (as a volunteer called it in the survey), which quickly attained the status of a symbolic place. Today, it even receives reviews and ratings as a 'spontaneous monument' on Google Maps.²⁴ This is indicative of how interest in the phenomenon of migration leads to the transformation of the role and attribution of significance to certain places. In this case, a landfill becomes an attraction or a place of interest for journalists, tourists, researchers and, most of all, volunteers, to the point of becoming a symbol of the migrant crisis. The mediatisation of this site, as argued by Mostafanezhad (2014), is central for the interiorisation of the 'popular humanitarian gaze' (p. 114) as well as of the 'tourist gaze' (Urry, 1990).

A few participants, both in the questionnaires and in the interviews, said that the life jacket graveyard is the only sight they saw on the whole island. It is interesting

Where did you go in Lesvos?

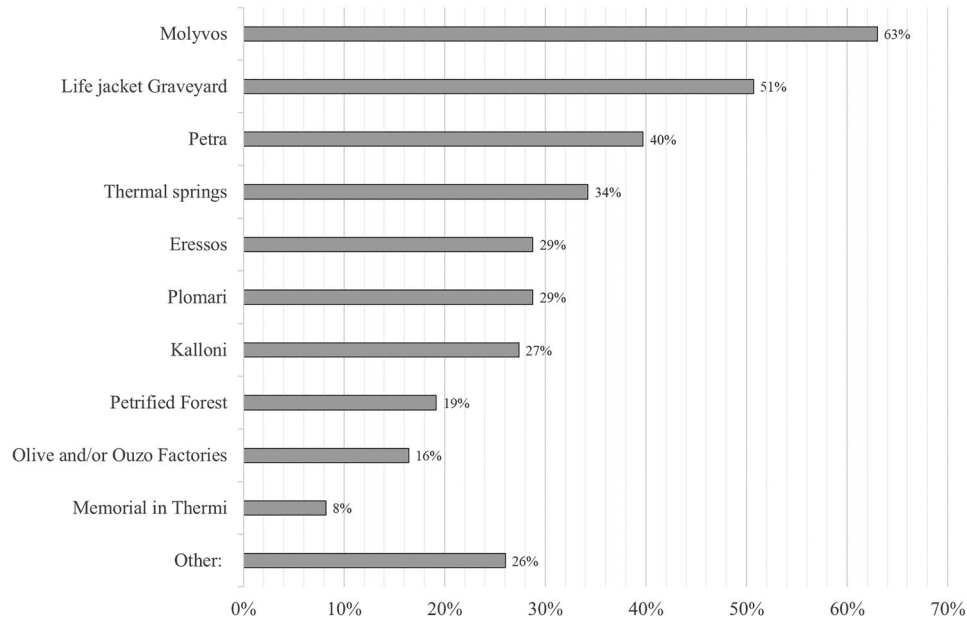


Figure 4. Places on Lesvos visited by volunteer tourists. Source: Author's data.

to analyse in this specific case the interplay of the three levels of Lefebvre's triad. On the perceived level, it is clear that most volunteers go to see it and therefore have a direct experience of it. On the level of conceived space, the life jacket graveyard is considered a must-see place: said one volunteer, 'quite a lot of those who have been before said "you just have to go there"',²⁵ and said another, 'I think it was important to go because then I could maybe get an idea of the

magnitude of the problem'.²⁶ It is a perceived duty that confirms the role of volunteers as part of the humanitarian borderscaping of the island. This last remark is also proven by the institutionalisation of the visit by some NGOs, which organised tours for their volunteers. The need or duty to visit this area can be interpreted as evidence of the humanitarian space of Lesvos as conceived by NGOs (a response to the borderized space conceived by EU policies). Thus, such visits are also staged



Figure 5. The life jacket graveyard. Credit: Oliver Zimmermann.

performances of the roles of volunteer tourists, influencing how they perceive and move through the space and shape their experiences (Bruner, 2005; Crang & Coleman, 2002; Tonnaer, 2010). Finally, on the level of the lived space, on the one hand are those volunteers who lived it emotionally (praying, crying or just walking silently and gravely while on the site); on the other hand are those who challenge the 'imposed' symbolism of the site to bring to the foreground the human relations built in the space of the island: 'For me ... it was simply ... just a dump. It didn't give me much. [...] What touched me more was my experience with the people in the camps, listening to their stories ... I didn't get the depth of this phenomenon from the life jacket graveyard, but I got it from the people I met'.²⁷ Others also challenged the site and the popular humanitarian gaze on it (Mostafanezhad, 2014), underlining the danger of the stigmatisation of migrants. As Kaayn said, 'I feel like ... it has the potential to create that idea to make the situation seem more like "those poor refugees"'.²⁸ In general, we argue that a relevant number of volunteers (among them 51% of our participants) go where the representation of Lesvos they embrace is confirmed, made visible and somehow sacralised: an informal cemetery where objects (here, life jackets) stand for people's bodies, evoking their suffering or death. Thus, the life jacket graveyard stands as a place in which the conceived and the lived facets, meaning the normative and NGOised aspect of the migrant crisis and the emotional side peculiar to every single volunteer, can balance.

It must also be noted that most of the places visited by volunteer tourists during their stays on Lesvos are located on the part of the island that has been more involved in the arrival and passage of migrants, namely the northern and eastern coast and the main road that goes from Mytilene to Kalloni. In certain cases, it seems that volunteers embark upon a 'classic volunteers' tour' of the north of the island, where the principal destination is the life jacket graveyard, while other attractions are the landing coast nearby Skala Sikamineas, the town of Molyvos, and the beach of Petra; the visiting of this area is partly favoured by the geographical position of these sites, but it is also, once again, a practice they are supposed to engage in as volunteers.

We got shown the path that refugees first took when they had just arrived in the north [...] we went along the road, and we were shown where people made bonfires, so that people were able to see them during the night and ... basically a lot of stuff from the beginning when people were arriving on Lesvos.²⁹

On the scale of the island as a whole, the direct experiences volunteers have outside their working places is necessarily partial, sporadic and limited in space and

time. Considering volunteers' trip destinations and spatial practices, Lesvos appears as a 'halved island', shrunk to the spaces and networks related to migration hotspots, while the rest of the island is blurred, lost or simply ignored (see Figure 2).

The inordinate priority assigned to some places over others shows how the level of conceived space seems to eclipse the other two Lefebvrian levels of perceived and lived space. Indeed, volunteers, even when visiting the island as tourists, go to certain areas identified as representative of their role there. These experiences have important consequences also on the level of the construction of a 'transnational imagined community' (Anderson, 1983/1991) of [...] responsible tourists' (Mostafanezhad, 2014; see also Di Matteo, *in press*). In doing so, they contribute with their practices to the construction of a borderscape, meaning a space continuously negotiated and produced by a variety of actors where border practices occur (Brambilla, 2015). Volunteers' answers are expressions of their mental images of Lesvos, influenced by the geopolitical and social discourses acting upon their representations of the island's space. However, volunteers also challenge the space as it is pre-conceived in prominent humanitarian discourses, as observed in some cases at the life jacket graveyard.

A focus on Mytilene: representations and spatial practices

Following the overview of the island of Lesvos as a whole, this section focuses specifically on the capital city. For various reasons, we decided to look specifically into the relationship between volunteers and the urban space of Mytilene. As mentioned previously, this is the geographical area in which migrants converge. Three reception centres are located here, including all of the services people regularly need, as well as the port and the airport serving the island. For these reasons, most volunteers work in and near the town, and 65.7% of them found accommodation there. The questionnaires and interviews were analysed to understand volunteers' representations of the city. In the survey, we asked for a definition of Mytilene and categorised the responses, as in the previous section.

We identify seven categories of responses. The first three are comparable to those categories found already for Lesvos as a whole. Some volunteers' definitions focus on human relationships (15 answers). For example, they reported that in Mytilene it is 'easy to feel at home' and that it is 'welcoming' and 'friendly'. Finally, three volunteers underlined the 'mix of volunteers, locals and refugees and the relations between

those groups'. In this sense, Christos's remarks serve as an example:

It's nice to see how people from all around the world, including Greeks, gather up in such very nice, chilled places, to work, have coffees, socialise. And I like to spend my time here at Bobiras.³⁰ I like places where there are nice music, a nice environment, open-minded people, or people that try to be open-minded at least.³¹

In this case, as previously mentioned, the dimension of lived space seems dominant. Significantly, this representation is noticeably more relevant on the scale of the town than on that of the island as a whole. Mytilene is the place not only where volunteers sleep and eat, but also where they gather to socialise.

A second group (10 answers) provided migration crisis-centred definitions, with particular attention to crisis management and its effects on the town. For example, one volunteer described Mytilene as filled with 'protests and dramatic attempts at reclaiming dignity by refugees', underlining the 'growing dissatisfaction of locals with the way the EU is handling the refugee crisis'. Another respondent described it as 'a city that has become the chessboard for international politics' and simply as 'tense' and 'in conflict due to the dire situation'. Reading through these representations of the town, we can see the clash between the conceived, normative and, to some extent, oppressive space with the will to find a response or just an outlet from it. The three levels of Lefebvre's triad unfold with all their conflicts: the perceived social tensions and unrest (for example through the occasional demonstrations occurring in the town), the conceived space, informed by the institutional control of the 'chessboard', and the lived space in which to affirm migrants' dignity.

The third category (8 answers) restates the existence for Mytilene of the same dichotomic discourse already found for Lesvos. Again, the respondents highlight the contrast between the beauty of the place and the difficulty of the situation. For example, the respondents describe the island as 'beautiful, but fractured, and under pressure' or 'a sad mix of angry Greeks, desperate migrants, beautiful small towns'. On a different level of contrast, someone observed that the town is 'a hospitable place for young people, tourists, but lacking the same hospitality for refugees'.

Nevertheless, volunteers also provided definitions of Mytilene that differ from their representations of Lesvos. We found two almost antithetical groups of answers. Some of the respondents defined Mytilene as a 'hectic town' (12 answers): 'chaotic', 'lively and loud' and even 'aggressive'. In their interview, Sara and Kath said 'for us, one week Mytilene time is one month, and

one month Mytilene time is one year'. Conversely, others (11 answers) described the town as 'small, provincial', or 'cute, provincial, calm' or, again, as a 'quiet town' (comparison with the different places from which volunteers come may have influenced their answers). Here, we can say that the perceived aspect of space is preeminent; Mytilene is perceived differently by each volunteer based on his or her individual experiences.

Finally, the last two categories into which we divided the answers are divergent: some 22 volunteers described Mytilene as a 'beautiful/idyllic fishing port', or as 'picturesque', 'ancient and beautiful', and 'quaint'. Thus, the perceived and lived aesthetic, as well as the conceived ideal of the island town, once again influence volunteers' representations of Mytilene, as for Lesvos as a whole. In contrast, others (10 answers) described it from a very practical point of view: 'small, but just big enough to provide all essential services', with 'friendly shopkeepers and hotel staff' or with 'cosy bars and nice cheap restaurants'. In addition, one volunteer said that Mytilene was 'the less provincial part of the island. The centre of commerce, tourism, a thriving port town'. The perceived facet of space, expressed through the elements of the daily routine, are again the most relevant. In general, the volunteers' images of Mytilene were more practical and realistic than the symbolic representations of Lesvos as a whole.

The other aspect we considered is where in Mytilene volunteers spent their spare time, investigating their spatial practices as tourists within the town. Of those people who did not stay in Mytilene during their time on the island (24 volunteers), 18 said they spent time in the town. This means that approximately 84% of the respondents spent time in Mytilene during their stay on Lesvos.

The majority spent most of their free time in taverns, bars or restaurants, public spaces or shops and supermarkets, as shown in [Figure 6](#). Most of those who had their accommodation in Mytilene also claimed to spend time at the local beaches (the most frequented ones are along the street leading to the airport and by the port).³² The perceived space of the town emerges from people's daily activities: shopping and eating, as well as resting. What we want to highlight is that some establishments were identified as having been preferred over others, in particular because they are considered refugee-friendly. Many volunteers were used to meeting in these places. Among the most well-known is a bar called Kafè P:

There is a sticker on the door that sums it up: it says 'Ferries, not FRONTX'.³³ So, they are very open-minded: people can come here just to get water. They

Where Did You Spend Your Free Time in Mytilene?

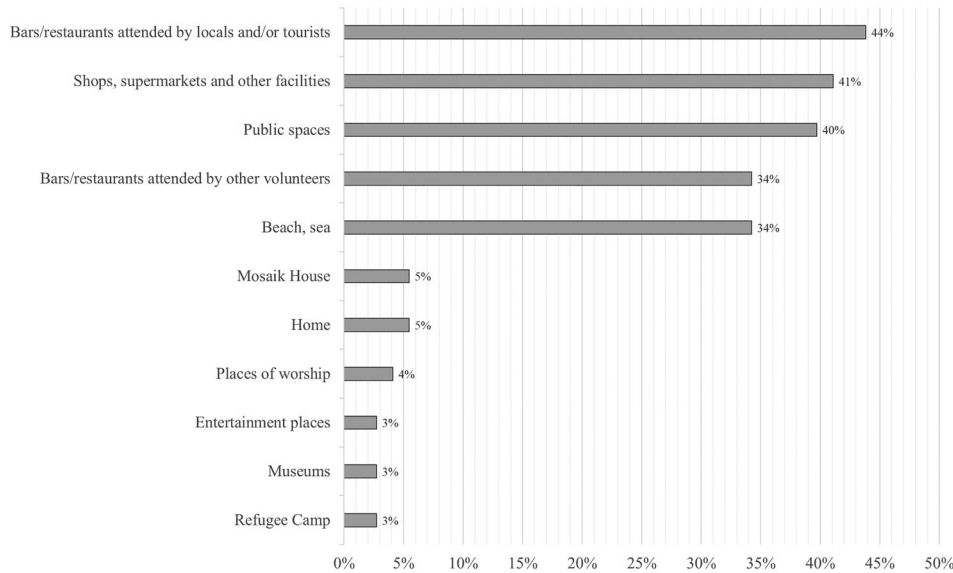


Figure 6. Places attended by volunteer tourists in Mytilene. Source: Authors' data.

did a lot during the hardest time, they did a lot of different things, they were always very nice, it's a safe place.³⁴

Some of the other bars here are not super happy about the refugees, so at least here you can talk about everything [*she points at some other people working for an NGO sitting at the bar – AN*]. It's just a place for everyone, a sort of meeting point.³⁵

The same can be said of the restaurant Nan, which was opened by a group of local activists (who also supported the opening of the Pikpa Reception Centre) and which soon became well-known among volunteers. As they state on the Facebook page of the restaurant,

Nan is a café-restaurant in Mytilene, which was founded by four women with the aim of working together to find solutions to benefit both refugees and local people. Nan restaurant is a project which could never have happened without donations from organisations and friends, and without the help of volunteers.³⁶

Its relevance is confirmed by volunteers as well:

I think Nan is absolutely a place where international volunteers go, because it not only fits with the mentality of why people are here, but also the food is good. I think it has a really good reputation amongst international volunteers.³⁷

Another establishment frequented by volunteers was Bobiras Café, located, like the other two, in the city centre. It is considered a friendly and safe place for migrants and volunteers alike.

There are other key places in volunteers' life in Mytilene apart from restaurants, bars and cafés: for example, Sappho Square, the central square of the town, where volunteers distribute food to migrants in critical times and where they gather for demonstrations. The posters left up on the walls of the city constantly reiterate the latter use of the square. A final place worth mentioning is Mosaik House, a support centre opened in July 2016. Here, migrants, volunteers and people from Mytilene can meet, take part in activities and spend time together. Even though only four of the respondents to our questionnaire said they often spent time there, participant observation indicated that numerous volunteers attended, for example, Greek language classes, yoga classes or other activities arranged by the centre.

Considering the observations made thus far, it seems that the three Lefebvrian aspects of space – its perception, its representations and its lived experience – create positive synergy, since those spaces are not only frequented by volunteers but also created and transformed by social encounters among volunteers, migrants and locals. If the level of the lived space, as suggested by Watkins (2005), enables those unconventionalities that are an essential aspect of social encounters, this function emerges as particularly evident when considering the scale of Mytilene.³⁸

We have underlined how the experience of the city is more direct and rooted in commonplace experiences. This is why volunteers often report an image of the city that is connected to very practical elements of their experience there. Here, from a certain point of view,

the level of the perceived space seems dominant. The conceived space is defined, directly or indirectly, either by an authority or by logistical factors that determine where and how volunteers work and live, as well as what is accessible to them and what is not. As for the third Lefebvrian level, the lived space is enhanced where volunteers build relationships that challenge and have the potential to deeply change the space they live. Places such as Nan, Bobiras or Kafè P make these lived spaces' dynamics tangible. These specific spaces in Mytilene are particularly dense with relational and identity-centred meanings, where spatialised practices take place that do not exist in other spaces of the island.³⁹ The presence of volunteers not only brings a physical transformation of the space but 'also alters the imaginative, affective, sonic and social qualities of this space' (McCormack, 2008, p. 1823) through the networks and relations they build. Moreover, connections with people and places are created through immaterial ties so that volunteers make those places 'theirs' and perceive them as 'safe' and as 'home'.

As such, certain spatialised glocal⁴⁰ practices involving locals, migrants, activists and volunteers from all over the world (without eventually excluding traditional tourists) can take place only there. For example, at Nan's, people coming from diverse backgrounds can work together, cook traditional food from their own home countries together with local activists, resulting in the creation of a place where the phenomenon of migration and the people who are part of it, in particular migrants and volunteers, abide in an environment of normality among local and tourists. In this sense, volunteer tourists, locals and migrants move into each other's spaces and transgress a prevailing 'spatial pattern' (Bruner, 2001, p. 895), 'reaching together beyond the limit of the borderzone and moving relations from "performance time" to "real life"' (Simoni, 2019, p. 115).

Conclusions

Since our first fieldtrip to Lesvos, we had the feeling that the presence of international volunteer tourists was not only impacting migrants' conditions but also contributing to changing the fluid and transformative island space. To understand the manner and extent of this impact, we distributed a questionnaire, conducted interviews and engaged in participant observation, interpreting the results through the lens of the Lefebvrian spatial triad and seeking to unpack the various levels involved in the construction of space and to understand volunteers' roles in this process. Even if volunteer tourists primarily experience the spaces of reception centres and related facilities, we chose to investigate their relationship to,

using Foucault's (1986) term, 'normal' island spaces – that is, spaces outside the enclave heterotopic spaces specifically conceived for migrants. We thought that 'non-migrant-oriented' spaces, with their liminal nature with regard to volunteers' motivations and presence on Lesvos, could unveil less evident processes involved in the construction of space. At the beginning of this paper, we asked ourselves how volunteer tourism generates situated lived experiences in the spaces where it takes place, and we believe that the case of Lesvos shows that the answer is multifaceted. As shown in the discussion, even if volunteers' relationships with the island are often sporadic or superficial, at other times they transform, or co-construct, certain spaces which turn out to be deeply connoted by their lived experiences and practices. A clear example is the life jacket graveyard, which, from being a landfill, became an informal memorial through volunteers' civil pilgrimages. Moreover, even if conceived space (embedding both institutional and non-governmental spatial codification) is dominant in a borderized and humanitarian island, the dimension of lived space gains pre-eminence through volunteers' spatial practices, which can release the space from the normativity of the border, enabling a more creative and participatory co-construction of space.

Our research reveals that volunteer tourists' presence and practices do not act isotropically on the island space; rather, their changing and challenging potential is expressed in certain areas and specific places. In particular, it is through a change in scale (from the entire island to the urban scale of Mytilene) that the dimension of the lived space becomes dominant. Particular spaces in Mytilene, through volunteers' practices, relieve the normativity of the border (whether institutionally or humanitarily conceived), enabling encounters between volunteers, locals and migrants in a context of normality and sharing. This relief does not neglect the strong powers in play or the control exercised, by both volunteer tourists and their humanitarian gaze, on migrants as well as on the local population; however, some volunteers' spatial practices serve to re-negotiate the balance between perceived, conceived and lived space, thus informing spaces with a different identity.

Therefore, from a general perspective, we argue for the importance of considering volunteer tourists' practices and performances outside of their working space and time. As mentioned previously, it has been argued that volunteer tourism can 'make a difference' (Wearing, 2001) for the community it is meant to support (in our case, for migrants) or for the environment it is meant to protect, as well as on a personal level, thanks to its self-transformative potential. Our research contributes to the existing literature by drawing from the lived experiences

of volunteers in the island and investigating how it contributes to changes in the island's spaces. We found that volunteers may first 'travel to Moria' but that they then arrive in Lesvos – and together they change it. What we argue, thus, is that volunteer tourism can influence the co-creation of space in a wide and complex sense that exceeds volunteer tourism's specific goals, fields of action and working spaces. We are aware that this work has limitations and could be further expanded; in particular, we would like to identify two directions for future research: on the one hand, widening the scope of the actors taken into account, embedding 'traditional' tourists', migrants' and locals' lived experiences and representations of the spaces of Lesvos; on the other hand, broadening the analysis to compare Lesvos with other borderscaped areas.

Notes

1. The term 'migrant crisis' (or 'refugee crisis') is prominent in mainstream discourse, being used in the media and by NGOs, policy makers and scholars. Various aspects of this terminology have been criticized. Firstly, migration is a historical constant, while the concept of crisis is usually applied to a specific, and often sudden, emergency. Secondly, the response to a crisis tends to be punctual, while migration must be addressed through more long-term global, structural, political and cultural instruments (see, for example: Alcalde, 2016; Brambilla & Jones, 2019; Iliadou, 2019). Nevertheless, it is clear that what took place in 2015 in Lesvos was an unprecedented situation that the island was not ready to deal with.
2. The literature covering the notion of borders, bordering, borderzones and borderscapes is a rich and multifaceted one spanning multiple disciplines. In the field of geography, the concept of the border has changed over time from being conceived as a fixed and state-centric line to a mobile and processual one, shifting from the concept of border to that of bordering (among others: Paasi, 1998; Van Houtum & Van Naerssen, 2002; dell'Agnese & Squarcina, 2005; Newman, 2006; Brambilla et al., 2015).
3. The notion of the touristic borderzone was first theorised by Bruner (1996, 2005), who defined it as 'an empty stage waiting for performance time; this is so for both the audience of tourists and for the native performers' (Bruner, 2005, p. 192). Borderzones in this sense are close to Rosaldo's 'borderland' (1989) and Pratt's 'contact zone' as well as Bhabha's 'third space' (1994). Indeed, these are conceived as spaces of encounter, with a recognition of the power dynamics taking place within them. Moreover, Simoni (2019) argues that the touristic borderzone is a powerful instrument of analysis which identifies and emphasizes the 'creative generative qualities of the touristic encounter' (p. 113).
4. Notably, our focus on time and spaces which are separate from the volunteer work itself does not correspond to the absence of elements of attractiveness and, in some cases, commodification engaged by organisations

related to volunteering. Many of the characteristics identified in this sense for other forms of volunteer tourism are present in Lesvos as well. The volunteer tourism experience encompasses every moment of the stay. For the purposes of this study, the decision to distinguish between the time spent in and out of work must be understood as a useful analytical ploy, keeping in mind that these times, spaces and interactions are fluid and not always strictly distinct.

5. Implemented in early 2020, the construction of a new closed facility had been announced by the Greek government at the end of 2019.
6. <https://lesvossolidarity.org/en/>.
7. A *Hotspot* is 'an area in which the host EU Member State, the European Commission, relevant EU agencies and participating EU Member States cooperate, with the aim of managing an existing or potential disproportionate migratory challenge characterised by a significant increase in the number of migrants arriving at the external EU border' (Art. 2 (10) of Regulation 2016/1624, European Border and Coast Guard Regulation).
8. Greece has amended its legislation on asylum with decision no. 4375 of 31 May 2016 of the Asylum Service that imposed upon the newcomers the so-called geographical restriction, namely, the obligation to stay in the Aegean Islands of Lesvos, Samos, Rhodes, Kos, Chios and Leros until the end of the asylum request process. Between the end of 2019 and the beginning of 2020, the number of arrivals rose again, and the current situation on Lesvos is critical. In February 2020, 21,725 people (National Coordination Center for Border Control, Immigration and Asylum, 2020/02/09) were in Lesvos. Unfortunately, our request to the Secretariat General for the Aegean and Island Policy for access to updated data has been repeatedly rejected. Since February 2020, almost every organisation has temporarily suspended its work for security reasons due to the outbreak of protests for the construction of a new reception centre. Immediately after, the presence of volunteers was hindered by the Covid-19 pandemic.
9. UNWTO conceptualizes tourism as a 'social, cultural and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes' (UNWTO, n.d., (www.unwto.org/glossary-tourism-terms)).
10. This is proven, for example, by monographic issues of the international journals *Tourism Recreation Research*, 28: 3, 2003 and *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 22: 6, 2014.
11. Wearing states that social value is formed by the interaction between people and spaces, and the meaning of spaces is created by the people and elements occupying them. This interactive aspect can be described as a social process in which a place is a material resource that gains social significance for a certain group of people (Wearing, 2001).
12. Accidental sampling 'is a type of nonprobability sampling where members of the target population that meet certain practical criteria, such as easy accessibility, geographical proximity, availability at a given time, or the willingness to participate are included for the purpose of the study' (Etikan et al., 2016, p. 2).
13. Of 54 identified organizations, 9 did not work with volunteers and 6 could not be contacted.

14. Information Point for Lesvos Volunteers Facebook, n.d. (www.facebook.com/groups/informationpointforlesvosvolunteers/).
15. More than half of the respondents (38 out of 73) had volunteered in Lesvos in 2018, while 11 had worked in Lesvos in 2015; 18, in 2016; and 22, in 2017.
16. Most of our interviewees in the semi-structured interviews consented to appear by name; in two cases, we were asked to use pseudonyms. The questionnaires were answered anonymously.
17. A particular focus was placed upon sites of memory such as the life jacket graveyard, but in this paper we do not closely examine this focus. (For more on this aspect, see: Di Matteo, in press).
18. In the following sections, we explicitly reference only the categories identified in the questionnaires, as this is the primary data we have chosen to use in this specific work.
19. Seven respondents did not answer this question.
20. Interview with Kasha, 24/05/2019.
21. Please note that when the concept of 'beauty' was associated with another dichotomic concept, the expression was assigned only to the category of dichotomy.
22. Interview with Nicolay, 11/06/2019.
23. Similar, but less important in our survey (six volunteers went there), is the small memorial in Thermi dedicated to migrants who lost their lives during a shipwreck in 2013.
24. www.google.com/maps/place/Lifejacket+Graveyard/@39.3643872,26.1998616,17z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m5!3m4!1s0x14ba9b1eb98bc80d:0xd6a2a8f241ee423c!8m2!3d39.3643872!4d26.2020503
25. Interview with Ottar, 14/05/2019.
26. Interview with Isabel, 20/05/2019.
27. Interview with Clara, 29/05/2019.
28. Interview with Kaayn, 16/05/2019.
29. Interview with Kaayn, 16/05/2019.
30. Bobiras is a café located in the city centre.
31. Interview with Christos, 02/06/2019.
32. Those whose accommodations were outside of town probably did not because they had the opportunity to go swimming in other areas of the island.
33. Initiative endorsed by organisations such as Watch the Med, Alarmphone, Seawatch and Jugend Rettet (WatchTheMed, Alarm Phone, 2015).
34. Interview with Kath, 22/05/2018.
35. Interview with Sara, 22/05/2018.
36. Nan restaurant Facebook, n.d. (www.facebook.com/nanrestaurantlesvos/).
37. Interview with Kaayn, 16/05/2019.
38. The division between the space of the island and the space of the city is simply a tool that helps us with the analysis. Of course, on the one hand, those two scales are interconnected; on the other hand, it is natural that the urban space is lived differently than is the non-urban island space.
39. An exception could be the village of Skala Sykamineas, where a number of volunteers work and live. Here, the relationship they build with the village and its habitants is particularly strong, though it was not investigated in depth for this specific piece of work.
40. We use this term to refer to 'both global and local' (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d. <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/276090?redirectedFrom=glocal&>).

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