

The Volunteer's Refugee Crisis

How Volunteers Working with Refugees on the Greek Island Lesvos
Make Sense of their Motivations and Experiences

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MSc Thesis Disaster Studies
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De Correspondent (2016). Retrieved on 08/05/2017, from:

<https://decorrespondent.nl/3998/wat-de-duizenden-vrijwilligers-op-lesbos-voor-de-vluchtelingencrisis-betekenen/1450670445928-7638f3a6>

“People talk about fortune seekers, but I think we are all fortune seekers in some sense. We all want the best for our children, a good education and the ability to earn our own money. In some countries the possibilities to achieve this are less common and in some countries these possibilities do not exist at all, because of war.”

“Mensen hebben het over gelukszoekers, maar ik denk dat iedereen een gelukszoeker is. Iedereen wil het beste voor z’n kinderen, iedereen wil een opleiding, en gewoon z’n eigen geld kunnen verdienen. In sommige landen is die mogelijk weer minder en in andere landen is die mogelijkheid er een soort van niet, omdat er oorlog is.”

Lily (September, 2017)

Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to analyse ways in which volunteers working with refugees at the Greek island Lesbos during the Refugee Crisis make sense of their motives and experiences. The volunteers tell their stories on what moved them to go to Lesbos, what experiences they had being a volunteer, what lessons they learned and reasons for returning to Lesbos in the future. Next to that, the changing dynamics on Lesbos between 2015 and 2017 regarding professionalization of organisations, camps, and the influence of this on the volunteer's experiences are discussed. Current literature on motivations of the volunteer tourist often uses fixed frameworks assuming the motivations of the volunteers are fixed. This research adds to literature by using the sensemaking as research tool allows getting deeper into the volunteers mind analysing their motives and experiences as part of an on-going process under constant change. This research does not categorizes the volunteer working at Lesbos as being volunteer tourism, however it does look at the basic tensions in the volunteer tourism debate and discusses in what ways the motives and experiences of the volunteer working at Lesbos fit into these. Qualitative research methods in the form of semi-structured interviews with 19 volunteers were applied in order to reach the research objective.

Key words: *Volunteer, Lesbos, Sensemaking, Refugees, Volunteer Tourism, Motivations, Experiences, European Refugee Crisis*

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Lastly, a major thanks to my lovely family; my parents, sisters, aunt and uncle. Thank you for the endless support even though you might have no clue what I am doing and for a place where I could find some rest now and then. All the insecurities and doubts I have of myself, you brush away with your unconditional faith in my abilities.

I did it!

Abbreviations

BWC	Because We Carry
MOTG	Movement on the Ground
MSF	Medicine sans Frontiers
NGO	non-governmental organisation
EU	European Union
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
IRC	International Rescue Committee
EASO	European Asylum Support Office
HAS	Humanitarian Affairs Segment

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1

Introduction

The first ideas for this thesis came even before I started this master programme. I did a bachelor in Tourism at Wageningen University, for which I wrote my thesis on volunteer tourism and the volunteer's motivations. I started the master international development studies with the intention to combine the knowledge I would gain in disaster studies with that I had of tourism. Volunteer tourism is a phenomenon that has interested me over the years as I saw many peers go on such a trip with all good intentions, however, I also learned during my bachelor that to make sure your good intentions will turn into good results it is important to think about where to go, with what organisation, and what goal. During my first year of the master the European Refugee Crisis was happening and all over the news and lectures. This crisis resulted in people going to the crisis areas, for example Lesbos, to help as a volunteer. For me this sounded as a new unfolding form of volunteer tourism, still in its infancy. I immediately knew this was the topic for me, who are those people and why do they decide to go help as a volunteer at Lesbos? And well, here we go!

At the end of the summer in 2015 everyone is talking about it, the so-called European Refugee Crisis. It is all over the news, the massive number of boats arriving into Europe and the huge amounts of people drowning at sea in an attempt to cross the Mediterranean Sea on a smugglers boat. Who are those people, why are they coming here in such massive amounts all of a sudden, and is it safe for us? Those are just a few of the questions people in Europe, in The Netherlands, had on their minds. Of course this migration flux crossing the Mediterranean Sea was not new at all, however the numbers in which this happened were (Baldwin-Edwards, 2006; Reinhard, 2016; European Commission, 2016; UNHCR, 2017). As a reaction to the news and the critique on and opposition towards refugees a group of people decided to go to Lesbos, the refugee hotspot in Greece, and volunteer.

Over the years, much has happened regarding the refugee crisis. NGOs were established, refugee camps were set-up, some stayed and some were dissolved, and in March 2016 the EU-Turkey deal was implemented. Arrivals declined again, news items on the topic became less and less, unfortunately one thing did not change, people are two years later still stuck on Lesbos in refugee camps waiting for approval of their registration, so they can travel further into Europe and ask for asylum. Over those two years, despite the situation going more to the background of everyday life here in the Netherlands people kept volunteering at Lesbos. Who are these people that decide to travel to Lesbos and

help refugees, what moves them in the first place and what is the experience of being a volunteer like?

This thesis will look at the European refugee crisis from the perspective of the volunteer working for an NGO helping refugees on the island Lesbos in Greece. What motivates the volunteer to participate in response to the refugee crisis? How do they make sense of those motivations and the experiences they have as volunteer? These are several questions that will be addressed in this thesis. The aim of this research is to find out what motivates volunteer workers to go to Lesbos and work with refugees via an NGO, what their experiences as volunteer are and how they make sense of these motivations and experiences. By using sensemaking as research tool the motivations and experiences are seen as part of a process the volunteer goes through and semi-structured interviews are conducted to analyse this process.

There is an on-going debate in volunteer tourism literature regarding the volunteer's motives and good doing. Much is written on volunteer tourists and their motivations being more altruistic or egoistic and the impact of the volunteer worker on the host community. Mostly, motivations are fit into existing frameworks, assuming the volunteers' motivations are fixed. By analysing the motives of the volunteer through sensemaking these are seen as part of a process the volunteer goes through including their doubts, fears, and struggles adding a new perspective within literature.

This thesis is structured as follows: First, the scene will be set. The European Refugee Crisis, EU-Turkey deal, and situation in Lesbos regarding camps, organisations, and rules will be sketched. This to make sure the reader steps into the story with all prior-knowledge needed. Second, the theoretical framework will be outlined. A short literature review on volunteer tourism, the volunteer tourist's motivations, and volunteer tourism outcomes, experiences and beneficiaries is done, the theory and research tool sensemaking is explained, and the research objective and research questions will be outlined. Third, the methodology of the research is discussed, the data collection including the qualitative data method semi-structured interviews, the snowball sampling, and analysis of the data is explained. Also, limitations of and reflections on the research are discussed. Then, the first empirical chapter will outline the changing dynamics on Lesbos through the eyes of the volunteers. Using the volunteers' stories to sketch an image of the dynamics on Lesbos over time and the impact of those dynamics on the volunteers' experiences are analysed. The second empirical chapter is an analysis of the sensemaking of the volunteer's pre-trip motivations. Why did the volunteer decide to go to Lesbos and in what ways do they explain their motives? The third, and last, empirical chapter analyses the volunteer's sensemaking of their experiences and personal transformation. Lastly, a conclusion will be drawn, including an answer to the research questions and short discussion.

2

Setting the Scene

This chapter will set the scene for this thesis, so the reader steps into the story to be told with all prior knowledge needed. First, the European Refugee Crisis will be explained and the EU-Turkey deal is outlined as it is of impact on the situation on the island Lesbos. Second, the situation on the island is explained, including the most important camps situated on the island. Lastly, the seven organisations that are most important for the thesis will be outlined.

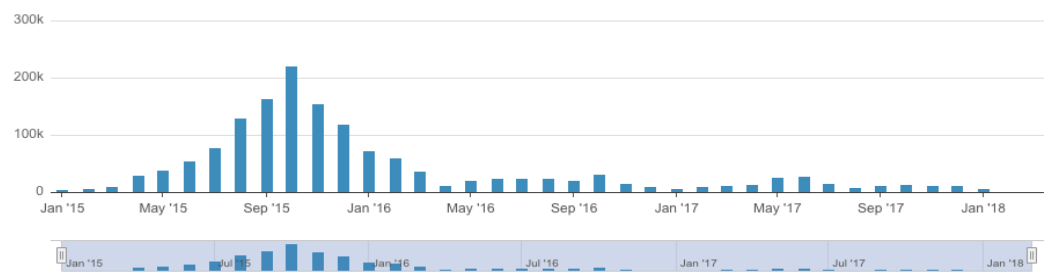
2.1 The European Refugee Crisis

The European refugee crisis is marked by the news about, and mostly the picture of, the body of a boy washing up a beach in Turkey in September 2015 (Reinhard, 2016). The stream of refugees trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea to get to Europe was not new by then (Baldwin-Edwards, 2006; Reinhard, 2016; European Commission, 2016; Gkionakis, 2016), however the massive numbers in which they arrived were new (UNHCR, 2017). This boy was only one of many refugees that did not survive the crossing of the Mediterranean Sea on an over capacitated human smugglers boat (UNHCR, 2017; Reinhard, 2016). Yet, this was the moment discussion raised in Europe about this so-called refugee crisis. The European news in 2015 was dominated by the refugee crisis (UNHCR, 2015a) and every individual European created an opinion on the way Europe was handling this crisis and had ideas on how they should be handling it instead.

The term “European Refugee Crisis” came up during this time, when the numbers of refugees arriving into Europe were higher than ever (Holmes & Castañeda, 2016; UNHCR, 2015a; European Commission, 2016). The term was picked-up by the media around September 2015 when this body of the 3-year-old boy washed up at the beach in Turkey (Reinhard, 2016). This term, however, is part of the discussion too. The European Refugee Crisis is a construct much more than an actual crisis. Therefore, over the course of the thesis different terms will be used to address the situation in the media referred to as the ‘European Refugee Crisis’. In this thesis when I speak of the European Refugee Crisis, or any other term referring to this phenomenon in Europe, I mean the impact of the massive amounts of refugees arriving into Europe over the last years and the pressures this awakened within the European borders, in the European news, during the European elections, and for the European population.

According to the UNHCR the sea arrivals of refugees into Europe peaked in 2015. With the largest peak in October of that year, when 220.579 refugees arrived over sea of which

211.663 in Greece (UNHCR, 2017), see figure 1. Overall, in 2015 over 1 million refugees arrived in the European Union, see figure 2, making this the biggest mass movement in Europe since World War II (European Commission, 2016). This growth in refugees arriving into Europe is largely due to the wars in Syria and Iraq, but also instability in countries as Afghanistan and Eritrea were of influence (UNHCR, 2015a).



1. Monthly sea arrivals 2015-2017¹

Previous years	Sea arrivals	Dead and missing
2017	172,301	3,119
2016	362,753	5,096
2015	1,015,078	3,771
2014	216,054	3,538

2. Yearly sea arrivals 2014-2017¹

End of 2016 and beginning of 2017, the news on and arrivals of refugees into Europe has calmed down (UNHCR, 2017; Aljazeera, 2016; Jauaiainen, 2017; Chtouris & Miller, 2017), see figure 1 and 2. For the first five months of 2017 the total number of refugees that arrived over sea into Europe was 70.877, which is less than the average number of arrivals per month in 2015 (UNHCR, 2017). However, end of 2017 numbers start growing again and more media starts to pick-up on the horrible situation refugees are living in at Greek refugee camps. (Al Jazeera, 2017; The Guardian, 2017; NOS, 2017; The New Yorker, 2017) One of the main reasons the refugee flow diminished in 2016 is the implementation of the EU-Turkey deal (Jauhiainen, 2017; Chtouris & Miller, 2017), which will be explained into more detail below.

2.1.1 EU-Turkey deal

The European Refugee Crisis came with large discussions in the media, in politics, and among the population. A very complex situation that entails many rules and guidelines, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to get into all those political issues regarding the refugees entering Europe over the last three years, however, the European Union (EU) – Turkey Deal is referred to in this thesis multiple times as it changed the situation in the camps at Lesvos, therefore, this deal will be shortly explained below.

¹ UNHCR (2018). Operational Portal: Refugee situations, Mediterranean situation. Retrieved on 22/02/2018 from: http://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean#_ga=2.127133837.1261200127.1493888915-

On March 20, 2016 the deal between the EU and Turkey was signed. This deal includes several measures in order to address the European Refugee Crisis. Overall, the deal entails, as Rygiel et al. (2016) explain it, a so-called ‘one-to-one initiative’, meaning that the EU returns unauthorized Syrian refugees that have travelled to Greece and for each returned refugee they will “resettle one Syrian Refugee from Turkey” (Rygiel et al; 2016: p. 316). The EU hopes with this deal to achieve the discouragement for refugees to take the dangerous trip to Greece (Rygiel et al; 2016, BBC news, 2016; Amnesty International, 2016), this intention seemed to have worked out as the refugee flux has decreased drastically after implementation of the deal. (UNHCR, 2018a) Of course, the deal comes with several regulations between the two parties involved, accordingly the EU will provide financial aid to Turkey for them to help the refugees in their country and there will be political concessions regarding Turkey’s entry into the EU (BBC news, 2016; Rygiel et al; 2016; The Guardian, 2016a). Next to that, priority will be given to refugees who have not tried to enter the EU illegally and the maximum number of resettlements is set on 72.000 total (BBC news, 2016).

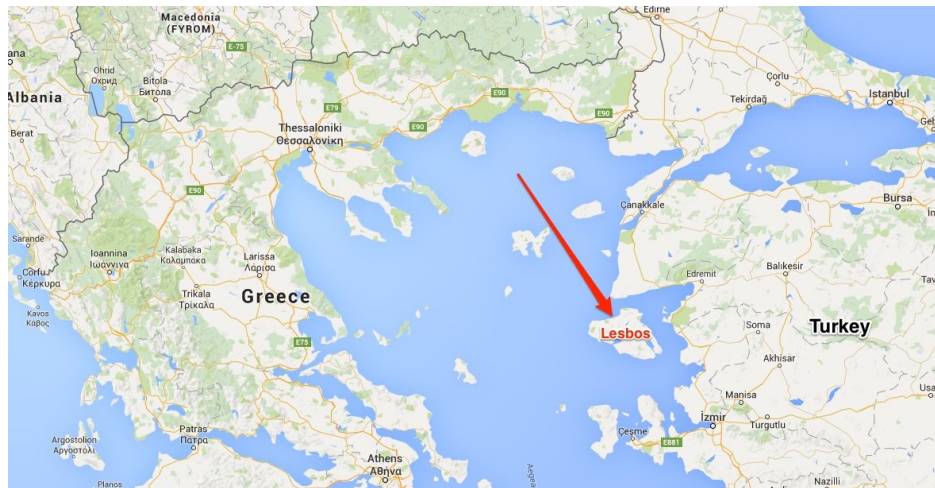
There has been a lot of critique regarding the implementation of this deal. This critique mainly points at the humanitarian situation in Turkey in which many refugees are forced to live and the EU turning its back to the refugee flux (Rygiel et al, 2016; the Guardian, 2016a; Amnesty International, 2016).

In chapter 5 the situation on Lesbos according to the volunteers will be discussed, they imply that the EU-Turkey deal has had quite an impact on the situation in the refugee camps at Lesbos, and refugee arrivals indeed declined in the period after the implementation of the deal. (Jauhiainen, 2017)

2.2 The case of Lesbos

This research focuses on volunteers that worked at the Greek island Lesbos. In order to understand their stories some background information on the refugee camps situated at and organisations operating on the island is crucial. In this section the situation on Lesbos will be sketched, so you, the reader, can step into my story with all prior knowledge needed.

This moment in 2015 when the Dutch news was overloaded with news on the refugee crisis was also the moment more and more people decided to travel to Lesbos, Greece to work as a volunteer to help the refugees arriving on the island after a long trip and with still a long trip ahead of them as the island is just a passage into Europe (European Commission, 2016; UNHCR, 2015a). Lesbos’ location in the Mediterranean Sea makes it one of the islands most crowded by refugees (UNHCR, 2017), see figure 3, as of the 1 million see arrivals in 2015, about 800.000 arrived in Greece of which over 500.000 at the island Lesbos (UNHCR, 2017; Jauhiainen, 2017). To give an idea of the impact of this amount of refugees, the small Greek island has a population of only 88.000 people (UNHCR, 2015b).



3. Lesbos' location in the Mediterranean Sea²

As shown on the map in figure 3, the island is situated close to Turkey and is, therefore, the perfect first stop into Europe for refugees fleeing via Turkey to Europe.



4. Overview Lesbos and zoom in on refugee area (Source: Google maps and Author)

Figure 4 gives an overview of Lesbos and a zoom in on the east coast at which the refugees arrive and the camps are situated. Number 4 shows the port of Mytilini at which most refugees arrive, number 3 is the capital of Lesbos: the town Mytilini, number 2 is refugee camp Kara Tepe and number 1 is camp Moria, which are the two camps most discussed in this research. The distance between the Port of Mytilini and camp Moria is about 10 kilometres and often walked by the refugees. The two camps Moria and Kara Tepe are in several ways very different from each other, the experiences of volunteers working at the different camps is partly shaped by the location they worked at during their trip. According to Jauhiainen (2017), and confirmed by participants of this research, the situation in camp Moria is much worse than the situation in Kara Tepe. Therefore, below both camps will be discussed to understand the similarities and differences between them.

² Business Insider (2015). Retrieved on 08/05/2017 from: <http://www.businessinsider.com/theres-chaos-on-a-greek-island-where-refugees-make-up-roughly-a-quarter-of-the-population-2015-9?international=true&r=US&IR=T>

Since early 2015 Lesbos has also known many short-term refugee camps. These were often transit camps along the coast where refugees would arrive, warm-up, have some food and drinks, and then travel to camp Moria. An example of such a transit camp is camp Oxy, which was situated at the parking lot of club Oxy along the coast of Lesbos. Refugees did not live at Oxy; they would rest a bit there and travel further on to camp Moria, the islands main refugee camp. Afghan Hill is an example of a refugee camp originating from need, as this was a non-formal camp that was situated on a hill next to camp Moria, as most Afghan people did not get into camp Moria they camped just outside of the camp, this became such a large group that several organisations started working there. However, since March 2016 it has been the two refugee camps Moria and Kara Tepe that hosted all registered refugees on the island Lesbos. Most of the participants of the research worked at either Moria or Kara Tepe, therefore an overview of the camps will be given below.

2.2.1 Camp Moria

Refugee camp Moria is the main camp at the island Lesbos (Stichting Bootvluchteling, 2018; Jauhiainen, 2017; Gkionikas, 2016) and is under supervision of the Greek authorities in cooperation with the UNHCR, head of the camp is the Greek police (Stichting Bootvluchteling, 2018). The camp is situated in a former military base and is marked by its high walls and wired fences all around the camp (Jauhiainen, 2017). The camp has the capacity to host about 2.000 refugees, however, this capacity has been almost constantly exceeded (The Guardian, 2017). In November of 2017 the camp is hosting around 6.000 refugees exceeding its capacity with almost 200% (The Guardian, 2017). According to Jauhiainen (2017) this over crowdedness comes with unrest, which is the main reason for the police running the camp.

Camp Moria is the official registration camp (Gkionikas, 2016), meaning that every arrival first needs to register at this camp before getting assigned to stay in either Moria or Kara Tepe. Originally, the camp was designed as a transitcamp to host refugees for one or two days before they travelled further to Athens (Jauhiainen, 2017; The Guardian, 2017). This means that the camp is not built to host refugees for the long period they are living there now. Facilities are lacking and more and more news sources picked up on the brutal situation people are living in at the camp. (The Guardian, 2017; Business Insider, 2015)

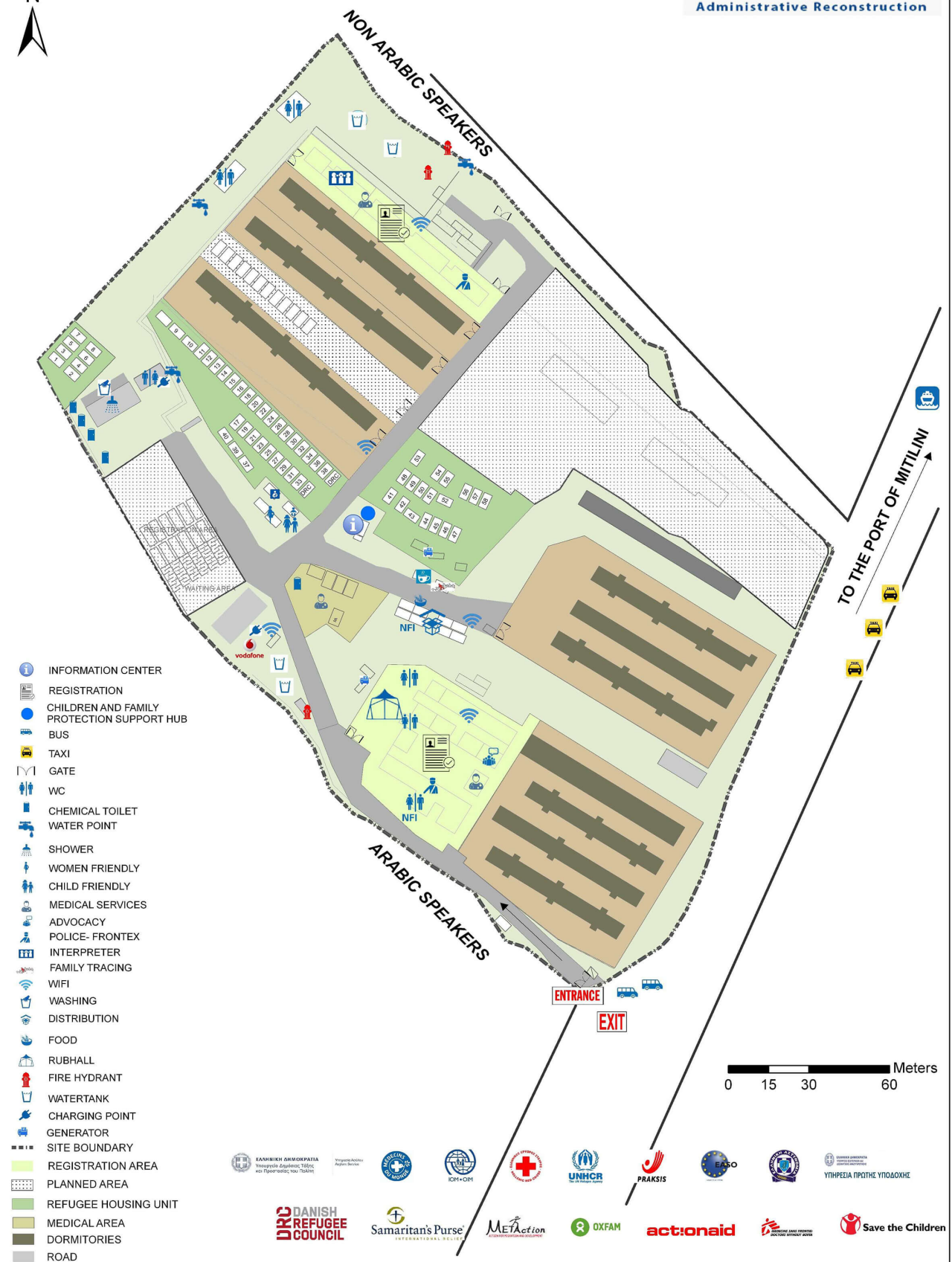
A map of camp Moria, see figure 5, is showing the different sections of the camp, in which the different groups or people, such as families, and cultures are separated from each other (Jauhiainen, 2017; UNHCR, 2016). This map is constructed in January of 2016 and includes a list of the organisations operating in the camp at that time. Aid in the form of tents and food is provided by the UNHCR, with the help of several other organisations providing volunteers. Unfortunately, this list figure 5 shows is now outdated and there is no newer overview to find on the situation with organisations at the camp.

Camp Moria has known a lot of unrest within the camp (Jauhiainen, 2017; Volkskrant, 2017), peaking in the summer of 2017 as several sites on the camp were set on fire by refugees (Volkskrant, 2017). Another source for the unrest was the rising hypothermia

during the cold winter in January of 2017, as a reaction to this there was an improvement of the living situation (Jauhiainen, 2017), exchanging tents for so-called iso-boxes, which are containers that are wind and waterproof and have a heater inside (Refugee Support, 2016). Another solution was the relocating of vulnerable cases, such as families with young children and women travelling alone, to camp Kara Tepe where everyone lives in iso-boxes and the living situation is much more safe and comfortable. (Hoe, 2017)

Moria is a closed camp, however, refugees are allowed to come and go as they wish. It is closed for outsiders; only registered volunteers and refugees can enter the camp. (Jauhiainen, 2017)

MORIA SITE- LESVOS, GREECE



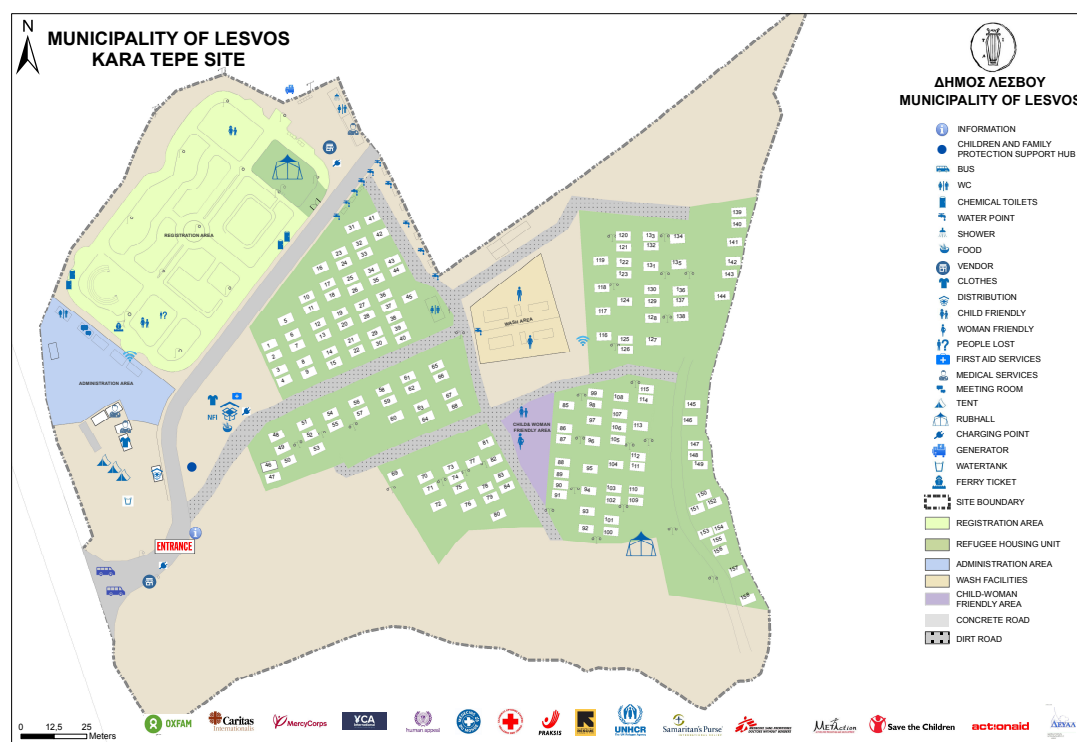
5. Map of camp Moria. (Source: UNHCR, 2016)

2.2.2 Camp Kara Tepe

Kara Tepe is the second largest, and since March 2016 the only other, refugee camp at Lesbos. The municipality of Lesbos authorizes this camp. (Jauhiainen, 2017) Like camp Moria the site is closed for outsiders, but refugees can come and go daily. The site is known for the better circumstances it provides and is much less often in the media compared to camp Moria. Therefore there is, unfortunately, also little inside information to find on the situation in the camp regarding facilities and numbers of refugees than there is of camp Moria.

According to Hoe (2017) the camp hosts mostly families, single mothers, and mental health cases. Hoe (2017) also discusses the promising situation in the refugee camp, for example every Saturday night there is a party to forget about the situation they are all in. The camps manager Stavros tries to make Kara Tepe more a community than a camp. Next to that there are iso-boxes as houses, clean toilets and access to electricity for the refugees. However, Hoe (2017) points out that this all should not be made more beautiful than it is: a horrible inhuman situation. People wait months or even years for asylum application to be approved or disapproved and are not allowed to work and move on with their lives during this time: they are stuck in Limbo.

Figure 6 shows a map of the refugee site Kara Tepe. This map includes a list of the organisations operating at the camp early 2016, which is unfortunately as well out-dated, however it shows the many organisations involved during this stage of the refugee crisis.



6. Map of refugee camp Kara Tepe. (Source: UNHCR, 2016)

2.2.3 Organisations

As a response to the refugees crossing the Mediterranean Sea in Greece, many new NGOs (non-governmental organisations) were established to help the refugees and the local population of Lesbos (Chtouris & Miller, 2017). These NGOs needed volunteer workers to come to Greece and help them in their mission. A few examples of large Dutch NGOs established in a reaction to the refugee flux at Lesbos are Stichting Bootvluchteling, Because we Carry (BWC), and Movement on the Ground (MOTG). There is no accurate information to be found on what NGOs are working on the island and in what camps at the moment, thus getting a complete picture is difficult. However, The Guardian states (2016b) that in January of 2016 81 organisations were operating on the island of which only 30 have registered with the local authorities. The first NGO that was established was The Starfish Foundation, which is founded by local restaurant owner Melinda McRostie. This foundation also created the transit camp Oxy, discussed in the beginning of this section, and is still active in helping refugees on the island. (Hernandez, 2015; The Guardian, 2016b)

As said, there is very little information to be found on what organisations are operating at Lesbos at what time and in which camp. The map of Moria and Kara Tepe, see figures 5 and 6, show a list of organisations that operate at that camp, however, the map is outdated and this list is no longer correct. In chapter 5 the ideas of the volunteers that participated in this research on what organisations work at the island and in what camp they work will be discussed. For now, the most important organisations will be highlighted, these are the organisations for which the participants have volunteered and the ones that are mentioned often in their stories.

The table shows the names of the organisations, when they were founded and their country of origin, a short overview of the activities the organisation provided over the years, and lastly what their current mission is at Lesbos. Stichting Bootvluchteling, Because We Carry, and Movement on the Ground are Dutch established organisations that originated as a reaction to the refugee crisis in Greece. Stichting Livingstone and EuroRelief work together in providing the trip to Lesbos. Stichting Livingstone is a Dutch foundation, which organizes working holidays all over the world for young Christians. The foundation is not actually situated at Moria refugee camp, but they organize trips for volunteers to work for NGO EuroRelief at the camp, so the two organisations form a collaboration. Home for a Day and Starfish are Greek established organisations both by restaurant owners that saw the many refugees arrive on the shore along their restaurant. These are the seven organisations that are most discussed within this thesis, as all participants of the research volunteered for one or more of the organisations.

Table 1: The 7 most important organisations for this research. (Derived from author's research)

Organisation	Originated	Founder/land of origin	What?	Now?
Stichting Bootvluchteling	2015 in reaction to the Refugee Crisis	Dutch	2015/2016: Giving aid at the shore. 2017: Medical aid at Moria/kara tepe 2017/2018: Psychosocial work at Moria	Psychosocial work at Kara Tepe
Stichting Livingstone	Existing before Refugee Crisis	Dutch	Organizes working holidays for young Christians all over the world.	One of their trips is 2-weeks working at refugee camp Moria at Lesvos, for which they cooperate with EuroRelief
EuroRelief	Existing before Refugee Crisis	Greek		Providing shelter, clothing, sanitation and much more in camp Moria
Because We Carry	2015 in reaction to the Refugee Crisis	Dutch	Providing breakfast and entertaining children among many other activities	Present in camp Kara Tepe
Movement on the Ground	2015 in reaction to the Refugee Crisis	Dutch by actor Johnny de Mol	Practical help: providing heaters, tents, etc.	Present in camp Kara Tepe
Home for a Day	Started in 2014 in reaction to first refugees arriving at Lesvos but developed over the years	Greek by restaurant owners Nikos and Katharina	Organizing workshops/ dinners for groups of refugees first at their restaurant and now at a new location	A day with workshops and dinner for the refugees to get out of the camp situation.
Starfish	2015 as a reaction to the refugee crisis	Greek by Melinda McRostie	Giving aid at the shore: food, dry clothes, etc.	Continue to fill the gaps

This third chapter outlines the objective of this research and the research questions to be answered, but first a literature overview will be given of the concept ‘volunteer tourism’ and motivations of the ‘volunteer tourist’. Volunteer tourism has been widely discussed in literature, as well as the motivations of the volunteer tourist. Volunteering with refugees in Lesvos is a phenomenon from the last two years; it has yet to be categorized as either volunteer tourism or anything else. However, it is interesting to compare the new factors of volunteer aid and that of the largely discussed volunteer tourist. Lastly, the approach of sensemaking will be explained as research tool and theory.

3.1 Literature Review

This section of the chapter will outline the relevant literature on volunteer tourism, the motivations of the volunteer tourist, the impact of volunteer tourism on host societies and the little that is written on volunteering with refugees in Greece.

3.1.1 Volunteer tourism

A specific sector within volunteering is volunteer tourism. Much is written on the concept (Wearing & McGehee, 2013; Elliot, 2008; Callahan & Thomas, 2005) and many associate the term volunteer tourism, or so-called voluntourism, very negatively, as the concept has been largely criticized within literature and media (Guttentag, 2009; Mostafanezhad, 2013a; Mustonen, 2006).

According to Wearing & McGehee (2013) the volunteer tourism sector expanded as a reaction to events, such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Could the European Refugee Crisis be another one of those events?

So, what is volunteer tourism exactly? Wearing, a well-known volunteer tourism scholar, defines the concept as follows:

The generic term ‘volunteer tourism’ applies to those tourists who, for various reasons, volunteer in an organized 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 environment.

(Wearing, 2001:1)

This definition does not clearly point out the motivations of a volunteer tourist, “for various reasons”. However, it is clearer on the activities of a volunteer holiday. This definition does apply to the volunteer working at Lesbos regarding the “aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society”, which in this case are the refugees living in Lesbos.

Other scholars made their definitions of the concept. For example, Brown (2005) looks at the concept from a travel agents perspective as she defines the concept as a “type of tourism experience where a tour operator offers travellers an opportunity to participate in an optional excursion that has a volunteer component, as well as a cultural exchange with local people” (p. 480). According to Callahan & Thomas (2005) volunteer tourism arose as a reaction to the search of the people for an alternative tourism experience. Sin (2009) states that the main goal of volunteer tourism is to benefit and bring positive impact to the local, or so-called host, community. Whether this actually is the case has been largely debated, as will be discussed in section 3.1.3.

Whether or not the European Refugee Crisis is another event that made the volunteer tourism industry grow and this type of volunteer work at refugee camps in Lesbos is a form of volunteer tourism is not the discussion that will be held in this research. However, the on-going debate in volunteer tourism is relevant for this research. The next sections will outline the literature on the volunteer tourist motives and outcomes of volunteer tourism and its relevance to the case of this thesis.

3.1.2 Volunteer tourist motivations

There has been a debate going on in volunteer tourism literature regarding the balance between egoistic and altruistic motivations of the volunteer tourist. I will shortly outline what is found in this debate, however, it is not the objective of the research to decide whether or not the volunteer is more altruistic or egoistic driven.

Sin (2009) finds that the motivations to participate in volunteer tourism are mostly about the urge to travel and explore an unknown destination. According to Wearing & McGehee (2013), the pre-trip motivations of the volunteer tourist are a combination of self-interest and altruism based motives, altruism in volunteer work is defined as “(...) those who devote their time, money, and other costs to volunteer in tourism do so only for the benefit of those who are in need” (Coghlan & Fennell, 2009: 378). Coghlan & Fennell (2009) agree with this combination as they state altruism is not the only motivation to become a volunteer, volunteer tourism can also be seen as non-altruistic as the volunteer’s costs of doing the work do not outweigh the personal benefits gained, referring to the high costs of a volunteer trip. According to Pan (2012), volunteer tourism allows the volunteers to give something to their host community, which is an act of altruism. However, by giving, they participate in “personal development, self-discovery and (re)-evaluating personal values” (Pan, 2012: 1493), which can be seen as an act of egoism. Hence, many scholars agree no volunteer does the work completely out of altruistic motives, there are always both altruistic and egoistic motives involved (Coghlan & Fennell, 2009; Pan, 2012; Callanan & Thomas, 2005, Wearing & McGehee, 2013). Sin (2009) found four main motives in volunteer tourism being: ‘the urge to travel’, ‘the

desire to help', to 'find out whether or not they can do this', and 'easier access than going as a tourist'. Surprisingly, the 'desire to help' was mostly mentioned in relation to the possible self-cultivation they could gain from the trip.

Within existing literature the volunteer tourist is often categorized into different boxes based on those two labels (Callahan & Thomas, 2005; Smillie, 1995; Wearing & McGehee, 2013). For example, volunteerism and voluntourism, volunteerism being more altruistic based volunteer tourism and voluntourism more egoistic based volunteer tourism (Brown, 2005). Brown & Morrisson (2003) labelled these two types as the 'volunteer-minded' and the 'vacation-minded' volunteer. Callahan & Thomas (2005) made a framework that includes three types of volunteer tourists: the shallow, intermediate, and deep volunteer tourist. It is argued that the altruistic "deep volunteer" is the focus of NGO's, while the more self-centred "shallow volunteer" is the target group of tour operators (Smillie, 1995). These are not boxes I want to put the volunteers working in Lesvos under, as I find this approach very black and white. However, they are interesting concepts on the different types of motivations a volunteer tourist has. Sin (2009) argues every volunteer's motivations are a combination of altruistic, self-cultivation, and leisure motivations, a statement with which I totally agree and will apply within this thesis research.

3.1.3 Volunteer tourism outcomes and experiences

Volunteer tourism literature outlines several experiences of the volunteer tourist and outcomes of volunteer tourism regarding the volunteer tourist and the host community, which will be shortly summarized below.

Wearing (2003) argues that volunteer tourism induces "positive changes" (in Sin, 2009: p. 482) within the volunteer tourist and the host community. However, there has been a lot of critique as well on the impact of volunteer tourism on the host society, which will be discussed later on in this section.

The individual experience of the volunteer tourist is shaped by several factors, such as "the interplay of his or her original motivations" and the "approachability of the local community" (Sin, 2009: p. 483; Brown, 2005). Sin (2009) discusses the role of the "self" and reflexivity in the volunteer's stories. She argues that the volunteers claim to gain a deeper understanding of the conditions at the local communities in relation to their own lives, a level of understanding that cannot be reached without going on the trip and have the experience. The volunteer tourists state that the lessons learned as a person during their volunteer trip are extremely valuable, however, they also reflected that these personal lessons they gained were not the only initial motivation for taking a volunteer trip (Sin, 2009). Brown (2005) states as well that volunteer tourists mention self-fulfilment and personal growth as main outcome of the trip. Sin (2009) reflects that disregarding those social self-development lessons the volunteer has learned they often did not continue in volunteer work after the trip, which is in contrast to other studies of volunteers who often do continue in volunteer work motivated by these lessons learned (Hodgekinson, 2003; through Sin, 2009). She also highlights the volunteer tourist's awareness of "having so much more" than the local community (Sin, 2009; Brown, 2005) and how this puts them in a superior position, a position they try to feel less guilty about

by giving to the locals. Sin claims that this entails the paradox that “volunteer tourism will almost always involve the ‘richer’ and the ‘better off’ providing aid to the ‘poor’ and ‘worst off’” (Sin 2009: p. 495).

Gutentag (2009) is one of the scholars that discuss the possible negative effects of volunteer tourism. According to him those are: “a neglect of locals’ desires, a hindering of work progress and completion of unsatisfactory work, a disruption of local economies, a reinforcement of conceptualisations of the ‘other’ and rationalisations of poverty, and an instigation of cultural changes” (Gutentag, 2009: p.537). In reaction also media picked up on the debate and brought the possible negative impacts of volunteer tourism to many people’s attention (Huffington post, 2012; OneWorld, 2014 and 2017; The Guardian, 2015 and 2016c), these are often focussed on volunteer tourism in orphanages. The critique focuses on volunteers lacking the right skills leading to projects that have little long-term impact. Volunteers often give things away, which destroys local markets and local economies suffer. It is often a one-way street, the tourist teaches and the host learns, while the tourist has as much to learn from the host as well. Who are we to think our way is the right way? (The Guardian, 2015 and 2016c; Huffington post, 2012; OneWorld, 2014) Regarding orphanage tourism, the children do not have a permanent caregiver, but see many volunteers come and go to whom they have to say goodbye. The living conditions within the orphanages are usually terrible, children get little personal attention, little screening, so anyone can get in and many of the children are actually sent to an orphanage by their living parents. Parents sent their children to an orphanage hoping they will be better fed and clothed, while in reality they often live poorly, as this works better with Western tourists (OneWorld, 2017).

Many scholars share the critique discussed above, while arguing volunteer tourism is as well a positive step within humanitarianism (Mostafanezhad, 2013b; Conran, 2011, Fee & MDee, 2011). Might volunteer work with refugees on Lesbos share the same critique or might it in the future?

Everingham (2016) criticises the existing literature on volunteer tourism for it being merely focused on the discussion whether or not the volunteer tourism experience is positive or negative based on the extent to which it helps local communities through applying existing frameworks. This approach to volunteer tourism using existing frameworks assumes that the volunteer’s experiences are fixed (Sin et al, 2015; Everingham, 2016). My research will add to the existing literature, as it does not use an existing framework to address the volunteer’s motivations and experiences, instead it analyses the sensemaking of the volunteer’s choices, motives, and experiences before, during and after their volunteer trip to Lesbos. A choice of approach that is missing in relevant literature nowadays and which will add a deeper understanding of the motivations and experiences and all that is going on by making the decision to undertake a volunteer trip working for an NGO in order to help refugees on the Greek island Lesbos. This deeper understanding is constructed by the sensemaking, as this allows us to see the volunteer’s motivations and experiences as an on-going process instead of being fixed. The struggles the volunteers face in relation to the tensions and paradoxes discussed in the media while making the decision to go, the experience of the trip, and

how to put these changing dynamics into words is the deeper understanding found by analysing the volunteer's sensemaking.

3.1.4 Volunteering with refugees

Very little relevant literature is to be found on the motives of volunteers to work with refugees in Greece. I expect the motives and experiences to be relatable to those of the volunteer tourist discussed above. However, it might be different as it is located within an emergency situation, other than the organized trips a volunteer tourist encounters on. The host – guest relation differs, as the volunteer helps the refugee, both are guests on Lesbos, with the Greek population being the host. The few articles that do outline this type of volunteering will be discussed below.

Chtouris & Miller (2017) researched the motives of volunteers to work with refugees during the European Refugee Crisis. According to them many volunteers mentioned the impossibility to remain passive after seeing the images of the situation in the refugee camps in the media. This feeling resulted in the motive to volunteer at the refugee camps in order to secure the human conditions in the camp. Chtouris & Miller (2017) as well argue that the volunteers gained access to the camps through NGOs. Often the volunteers created friendships based on their worries regarding the refugee crisis resulting in new practices or the originating of new NGO's in Greece. The experience of volunteering in a refugee camp gave the volunteer "a new dimension to their life and a sense of moral completeness which they previously lacked" (Chtouris & Miller, 2017: p. 70). People that decided to volunteer in Greece often experienced a period in their lives that lacks commitment and structure and are, therefore, in search of new opportunities. The decision to go to Greece and work with refugees mostly derived from a growing interest in the crisis and is hardly ever based on a complete plan. (Chtouris & Miller, 2017)

Nielsen (2016) wrote his master thesis on the motivations of volunteers working with refugees in Greece for Aalborg University in Denmark. He found in his work that volunteer's motives are a complex interplay of reasons; they do not have one fixed motive. He used the Volunteer Function Index (VFI), an existing framework, and categorized his participants within the themes of this index. My research will go further by analyzing the ways in which volunteers make sense of their experiences allowing me to see the motives and experiences as a process evolving over time, instead of categorizing them into a fixed framework. The theory of sensemaking as research tool will be explained into further detail in the next section.

The motives are analysed as being fixed, often put into existing frameworks, I agree with Nielsen (2016) that this is often not the case and that motives are a complex interplay of reasons. By analysing the sensemaking of the volunteer's stories the process of the pre-trip motivations, the changes within these motives as reaction to their experiences, and their legitimization regarding media. I do not think it is as fixed and static as existing literature is showing, by using the sensemaking approach I add to existing literature a new way of understanding motives and experiences of volunteers. Next to that, the existing literature often refers to the egoistic motives in a negative way, I do not agree

with this approach, as I think the egoistic motives are just as important and needed for the volunteer and the nature of the work.

3.2 Theory of Sensemaking

As briefly mentioned above sensemaking is used as a tool to understand the volunteer's train of thoughts regarding their motives and experiences. To completely understand the role of sensemaking in this study we have to ask: What is sensemaking exactly and how is it applied in this research?

First, I found the meaning of sensemaking in the Oxford English Dictionary finding the following: “[*noun*] the action or process of making sense of or giving meaning to something, especially new developments and experiences”. This definition is vague about the process of sensemaking or the way in which sense is made, but in its core explains the idea of the concept. The volunteers working with refugees at Lesbos go through many new developments experiences of which they make sense in their stories. Fortunately, I found more clear explanations within literature. Weick et al. (2005) define sensemaking as “the ongoing retrospective development of plausible images that rationalize what people are doing” (p. 409). Hence, sensemaking is about finding logical explanations to one's actions (Taylor & Van Every, 2000). Sensemaking is an issue within communication, within talk (Weick et al.; 2005), so it is within the story the interviewees tell where the sensemaking takes place. This means that sensemaking is also a reaction to the person the story is told to, in this case me: the researcher.

Two questions are addressed by sensemaking: ‘What is going on here?’ and ‘What do I do next?’ (Weick et al; 2005). These two questions are what entail the sensemaking in the volunteer's stories. They explain what they think is going on and how they have reacted to this in their stories, without being aware they are answering those questions.

Weick (1995) identifies seven properties of sensemaking: identity constructing, retrospection, enacting, social context, ongoing understanding, cue extracting, and plausibility (Muhren et al., 2008). These seven properties together clearly outline what sensemaking entails. For this research the properties identity construction, retrospective, social context, and plausibility are relevant; therefore they will be explained in more detail. **Identity construction** explained by Weick (1995, p. 20) as “the sensemaker is himself or herself an ongoing puzzle undergoing continual redefinition, coincident with presenting some self to others and trying to decide which self is appropriate”, meaning for this research that the volunteer workers are constantly redefining themselves and how they want to present themselves to others. The ways in which they explain their motives, actions and experiences is part of this identity construction. The second property, **retrospective**, is relevant for this study as the participants are asked to retrospectively tell about their motives and experiences. According to Weick (1995, p. 24) “people can know what they are doing only after they have done it”, the volunteers reflect backwards on their experiences meaning that factors after the experience are of influence on their sensemaking of it (Weick, 1995), such as reactions of friends and family or media reports. In retrospective the process is matched with the outcome. The

timespan of the retrospective sensemaking differs per participant of this study from days, to weeks, to months, or even years between the experience and the interview. This means that some of the participants have had many more factors to influence their sensemaking than others. **Social context** can be implied in several ways within this research. The way in which a story is told is contingent on the social context of the speaker (Weick, 1995). People adapt their stories to their audience, in this case me the interviewer and the academic world in which this thesis is written. However, within their stories people as well socially construct their stories towards friends and families. Do they feel obligated to explain certain motives, actions, or reactions to their experiences in a certain way to the interviewer or talk about how they would explain this to friends and family is an interesting dynamic of the sensemaking tool for this research. Lastly, the property **plausibility** is of relevance to this research. As Weick (1995) explains that accuracy of the story is not necessary in sensemaking, it is about the explanation and reasoning behind the story. Within this research volunteer's stories might not be completely based on facts, however it is about why they tell something and why they might exaggerate rather than whether it is plausible or not.

The volunteer worker uses sensemaking in telling their story and by explaining their motivations and experiences volunteering on Lesbos. I am interested in how they rationalize their own story, and what they find 'logical explanations' to their actions. These rationalizations say a lot about the issues the volunteer struggled with and what they find of importance to rationalize, unfolding their doubts and insecurities within their own choices. As Weick et al. explain: "The language of sensemaking captures the realities of agency, flow, equivocality, transience, reaccomplishment, unfolding, and emergence, realities that are often obscured by the language of variables, nouns, quantities, and structures" (2005; p. 410). By analyzing the sensemaking of the volunteer's stories, their explanations of their motivations and experiences, I go deeper into their minds than by only analyzing the said motives and experiences.

3.3 Scope of the Research

This section of the research outlines the research objective, the academic and social relevance of this research. Further, the research questions that will be answered over the course of the thesis will be defined.

3.3.1 Research Objective

There is much to find on the volunteer tourist's motivations and the phenomenon of volunteer tourism. The volunteer work at Lesbos has yet to be categorized as volunteer tourism. However, that is not the aim of this thesis, it is not about deciding whether or not this is a form of volunteer tourism. The volunteer researched in this thesis is different than the one discussed as the volunteer tourist, because it is within a humanitarian context. The tourist is still missing in the volunteer, still as it might develop over time into volunteer tourism or volunteer tourism initiatives might be established at Greece over the next years. Within this research I aim to find the volunteers motivation,

their sensemaking of these motivations and experiences, and to find in what ways these overlap with the knowledge there is on volunteer tourist motivations and experiences. Literature lacks qualitative research on the motivations of volunteers that in reaction to the European Refugee Crisis went to volunteer in Greece in order to help refugees. The existing literature on volunteer tourist motivations is based on providing several themes of motivations from both qualitative and quantitative research. By focussing on the sensemaking by the volunteer of his motivations and experiences instead of scheming motivations a deeper understanding will be reached on these motives and reasoning behind these motives of the volunteer. By other approaches the motives or impacts are often labelled negative, while by the sensemaking approach the process shows that the volunteer struggles with these factors as well and their intentions are made clearer shown as a process. What is added to literature with this thesis is the sensemaking approach analysing the motivations and experiences of the volunteer as a process that is under constant change, instead of being fixed and put into certain themes or frameworks. Hence, by using sensemaking the struggles the volunteer goes through making the decision to go, legitimizing their motives to themselves and outsiders, the changing dynamics in their own thinking and motives as a reaction to the experiences of the trip, and difficulties of putting this into words will be found. Showing that the motive is only one thing, created by many influences, and goes much further than fixed themes.

By analysing the sensemaking of the motives and experiences of this group of people NGOs might be able to take these experiences and struggles into account when recruiting new volunteers. Also, volunteers play a large role in the organisation of the refugee camps in Europe, by creating a better understanding of their motives and train of thoughts regarding the situation of all parties involved in the refugee camps, communication and organization can be improved. Lastly, by explaining the train of thoughts every volunteer goes through and different experiences and struggles that come with the decision of becoming a volunteer before and after the trip, but also the overall positive experience disregarding everything negative that happens when working in Greece I hope more people get motivated to become a volunteer in Greece. There is much going on in the world and often organisations cannot be at every crisis on time, volunteers are the ones who fill the gaps during these early stages of crisis and continue running the machine when more professional organisations arrive by working for them, they are needed in times of crisis. Accordingly, I hope this thesis reaches possible new volunteers, NGOs operating in Lesvos or elsewhere in refugee camps across the world, and anyone else interested in the topic.

3.3.2 Research Questions

The following research questions will be studied:

How do people who volunteer to work with refugees on the Greek island Lesbos make sense of their motives and experiences?

- In what ways does the nature of the volunteer's engagement shape the volunteer's experiences?
- In what ways do the volunteers make sense of their own motivations and experiences?
- How do these motivations fit into the basic tensions around volunteer tourism?

By answering these research questions the objective of the research will be reached.

4

Methodology

In this section, the methods of data collection and analysis will be described. To find the motives and experiences of the volunteers qualitative research methods were applied. These qualitative methods and analysis of the data collected will be explained into more detail below. Lastly, I will reflect on the thesis process and discuss the limitations.

4.1 Data Collection and Analysis

The data for this research was collected in The Netherlands between August and October 2017; over this time I conducted 17 interviews with a total of 19 participants. The research has an exploratory approach, with as qualitative research method semi-structured in-depth interviews. In this section the method of semi-structured interviews and sampling of the interviewees will be explained.

4.1.1 Semi-structured interviews

To analyse the motivations of people is a difficult thing to do. I took it a step further as I analyse the ways in which volunteers make sense of their own motivations and experiences. To do that I used qualitative research methods, which allow the interviewer to get deeper into the mind of the interviewee (Streubert Speziale & Carpenter, 2007). I chose to do semi-structured in-depth interviews with former volunteers, because I wanted to analyse their way of telling their own story the interviews were semi-structured, it was important to let every participant tell their story and adapt my questions to that story. A list with interview questions was made, however, each interview was different. New questions were formulated in reaction to the participant's story and questions were answered without them being asked by the interviewer. The list with interview questions helped me to ensure the main issues were covered during the interview and to bring the interview back on topic when the interviewee meandered off. All interviews except for two were individual semi-structured in-depth interviews. The other two were couples that went on the volunteer trip together, a father and daughter and two friends. The initiative for the double interview came from the participant that was contacted. I firstly had my doubts as individual interviews allow me to get deep into personal matters (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006), however, the participants were very close and comfortable with each other and them reacting to each other gave new insights.

The average length of an interview was between 1 and 1,5 hours, with the shortest interview lasting for about 50 minutes and the longest for almost 2 hours. All interviews were recorded in order not to lose any details. As interviewer it was my goal to create a

safe and comfortable environment in which the interviewee would open up and tell an honest story. I tried to achieve this by going to their hometown or even to their home, by telling them about myself, and by being sincerely interested in their story.

An average interview started with some small talk to get to know one another and become a bit comfortable. I explained my study, interest for the subject, and purpose of the interview to the interviewee. I asked them to talk as much as possible about their motives and experiences, to tell me all the stories that came to mind, and asked for their permission to tape the interview. I, then, started by asking about the first trigger, the moment they started thinking about becoming a volunteer, a first step into their story and they started talking. I listened to the stories they told, asked follow-up questions when needed and when I felt like we went too far of subject I asked questions to guide the interview back on topic. Hence, I, the interviewer, would elicit information from the interviewees by letting them tell their story encouraged by questions regarding information I would like to gain.

4.1.2 Sampling

In this research I consciously chose to only interview native Dutch speaking volunteers that went to Lesbos to volunteer with refugees. This was in order to remove as many barriers as possible, to make it easier for them to tell their story and put their ideas, motives, and experiences into words. Next to that, I also decided not to sample on gender or age, as this would not add anything extra to the research. Snowball sampling was chosen as the most suitable way to get to the volunteers. The first step into the snowballing was made by contacting organisations that hosted volunteers at Lesbos and by contacting people that had written blogs on their volunteer trip to Lesbos in the paper or online. I found my first participants by contacting the writer of a blog on volunteer work in the Dutch newspaper *Het Algemeen Dagblad* and with the help of the organisation *Stichting Livingstone*. Those participants helped me with the contact information of potential new participants. However, the most effective way turned out to be a shout out on my Facebook page. The message in which I asked for people that volunteered in Lesbos was shared by my Facebook friends and for several weeks people that went to Lesbos or knew people that went there kept responding to that message. I no longer had to search for participants, they came to me. After taking 17 interviews with 19 participants, found by Facebook and with the help of the volunteers I interviewed, I decided this was enough. I had a lot of data, almost 300 pages of transcribed interviews, and more than enough information to write a feasible thesis. An overview of the participants of this research, their research location, date of the trip, and more is to be found in table 2. All names of the participants of the research are replaced by pseudonyms in order to guarantee anonymity. These pseudonyms might be traceable for insiders of the research, as many knew each other from the Lesbos volunteer community and information outlined in table 2 might be enough for them to know the person behind it. However, they are not traceable for outsiders of the research.

Another conscious decision was that of staying in The Netherlands to gather all data for the research. As the story to be told in this thesis is on the ways in which the volunteers make sense of their motivations and experiences by staying in The Netherlands, and thus

not seeing them at work in Lesvos, I, the researcher, would remain as unbiased as possible. By not creating my own image on the working situation, the type of volunteers working in the camps, the organisations operating there, and experiencing this trip myself, but by relying only on the stories of the participants I will be able to analyse their stories and sensemaking of their motives and experiences without reflecting on my own ideas of the situation on the island and the volunteers working there, it will give a more transparent reflection on the process the volunteers go through during this trip and the struggles they face trying to legitimize their choices and motives towards themselves, friends and family, and to me. As Weick (1995) explained sensemaking is about the ways in which a story is told, rather than the plausibility of the story. Next to that, by not going to Lesvos the participants of this research have been to Lesvos over a wider time range. I have interviewees who spent a week at Lesvos in 2015, people who went in early 2016 and returned later that year or in 2017. Whilst, as I had done research over the course of three months during the summer of 2017 I would not have had participants that only went in 2015 or 2016. This division turned out very interesting as the situation on Lesvos is constantly changing, which influences the volunteer's experiences.

4.1.3 Analysis

As part of the analysis I transcribed all interviews in order to find overlaps and interesting quotes. The transcription process came paired with a combination of thematic and structural narrative analysis (Riessman, 2005). It was very difficult to sketch an image through existing sources on the situation in Lesvos and the volunteers working there. This means there was not a standard story to compare the stories of the participants of the research with. However, it is not the goal of the research to sketch this image, its goal is to show the process of the volunteers' sensemaking on the situation, their motives, and their experiences. So, how they reflect on this image rather than what is the image.

I coded mostly on the three themes I chose as empirical chapters: changing dynamics on Lesvos, sensemaking of motivations, and sensemaking of expectations and experiences. So, how do you code sensemaking? The coding evolves from the material, an inductive approach. Significant issues regarding the three themes of the empirical chapters were highlighted. I searched for patterns within the data, so what do the participants discuss, what overlaps, and does it fit within one of the three themes. Sensemaking takes place within the stories of the participants. Therefore, quotes are one of the most important assets of the research. The quotes in which sensemaking can be best analysed are found back in the empirical chapters. Sometimes many of the volunteers talked about the same issue and a choice had to be made for the most suitable quote to use. This decision was based on the quote that best showed the struggles the volunteer went through during their sensemaking process. Hence, the story is build upon the participant's quotes, as this is where the sensemaking takes place. When participant's stories overlap this is mentioned in this analysis, as is when they do not overlap.

4.2 Reflections and Limitations

Doing research comes with several limitations. Within this section of the chapter I reflect on the research and its limitations. Next to that, the ethics regarding the research will be shortly discussed.

Firstly, it is important to take into account the role of the researcher in the research. I, the researcher, am part of the social world I study (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2008). Therefore, the research cannot be seen separately from my own personal background. Next to that, my presence must not be underestimated as well, as it can influence the interviewees in how they act and react during the interview.

Listening to the recordings of the interviews during the transcription process of the data made me hear the stories in a completely different manner than during the actual conversation. I noticed that some of the interviewees talked about facts, such as numbers of refugees in the camps that seemed extremely high. Soon I realised this is their way of trying to make clear the intensity of the situation going on in Lesbos. Also, some of the interviewees overly pointed out and explained the ways in which they helped people, their ideas and initiatives, this over legitimizing of their role at the island might be part of their own search towards being of help and part of the solution in this giant problem in Lesbos. The participants talked about their trip to Lesbos often with great passion, during the interview I got sucked in their stories and felt much sympathy for the interviewees. Different during the recordings was that without the interview atmosphere I became more aware of this over legitimizing and wondered to what extent this was true. However, as discussed in chapter 3, the way in which the story is told is more important than the plausibility of the story (Weick, 1995). Overall, the participants of the research were very eager to talk and share their experiences. My decision of staying in The Netherlands and not seeing the volunteers at work made it, however, impossible to check these stories, facts and anecdotes shared by the interviewees.

Taking in-depth interviews and asking about people's motivations and experiences assumes that people are able to put this into words and reflect on their own behaviour. In practice this turned out to be quite difficult for many of the interviewees.

Furthermore, the decision for snowball sampling made that many of the participants were the same type of people as they were friends of each other and travelled with the same organisation often for the same reasons. There must be a large group out there that did not get covered in the sample size of this research, which were mainly 35+ers travelling with Because We Carry and 20+ers traveling with EuroRelief/Livingstone. However, in general I do not think this changes the picture much, but it might be interesting for future research to find new groups of volunteers.

Another limitation of the research is the language, meaning that the quotes used in the thesis are firstly paraphrased from spoken into written language, deleting the 'uhms' and making complete sentences. Secondly, all interviews were taken in Dutch and therefore are translated into English, in the translation sometimes the essence of the story might get lost.

4.2.1 Ethics

As mentioned above the participants of this research were very eager to talk and share their stories. As reaction to my Facebook post they found me rather than I found them, because of this eagerness to share. Most of them mentioned that because of the lack of valid information on the situation in Lesvos produced by the media, they felt like people no longer knew the situation at the island is still the same as two years ago. Refugees are arriving and waiting for months in horrible circumstances for their registration approval. They want to share their story, because every possibility to show this to people is one to take.

Volunteers are needed at Lesvos and harder to find than two years ago. I am not sure whether or not this thesis will reach the amount and sort of people they hope they can reach. Also, this thesis is focussed on their motives and experiences rather than discussing the situation on the island. However, by sharing their stories with me they definitely motivated me to become a volunteer at Lesvos in the future. Their stories were very sincere and the passion with which they shared their experiences good and bad was very inspiring resulting in me sharing my motives to go in the future with my friends and family even motivating some of them to join. They knew the outreach of this thesis might not be large, but are willing to take every possibility and help everyone that does bring out their stories and who knows maybe one of you, the readers, gets inspired to become a volunteer as well.

My goal in telling this story is to stay as close as possible to the stories of the volunteers. This is partly done by using lots of quotes over the course of the thesis. It is, however, the story of 19 people combined and my interpretation of this. I stayed as close as possible to the quotes of the participants and analysed them by my interpretation always having the setting of the interview and the person who spoke the words into mind. Questions like ‘will they recognize themselves herein?’ and ‘does this story harm someone?’ were constantly on my mind during the writing process.

Table 2: Overview of the participants (by pseudonyms) of the research

Who	When	With	How long?	Religious?	Age	More than once?	Camp	Date interview
Amelia	Jan. 2016	BWC	1 week	No	42	Yes (to Calais)	Afghan Hill	14/08/'17
Olivia	Jan. 2016	BWC	1 week	No	50	No (yes: refugee work at home)	Afghan Hill	14/08/'17
Isla	Mei 2017	BWC	1 week	No	47	No	Kara Tepe	31/08/'17
Oliver	June 2015 (9 months)	Starfish; Alone; Livingstone/EuroRelief	9 months first time; then 2-3 weeks each time	Yes	20-21	Yes (7x)	Oxy; Moria	04/09/'17
Emily	Maart 2016 (met Ansje)	BWC; Nikos (okt 17)	1 week	No	63	Yes	Afghan hill; Kara Tepe; Nikos	05/09/'17
Poppy	Zomer 2016+2017/ feb/maart 2017	Livingstone/EuroRelief	2x 2 weeks; 1x a month	Yes	19-20	Yes	Moria	05/09/'17
Ava	Jan. 2016	BWC; alone; Nikos	Between 1-3 weeks	No	51	Yes (also refugee work at home: appr. went 13x)	Kara Tepe; Nikos	06/09/'17
Isabelle	Nov. 2015	Stichting Bootvluchteling	1 week	Yes	21	No	Kustlijn/ Oxy	07/09/'17
Jack	Nov. 2015	Stichting Bootvluchteling	1 week	Yes	50	No	Kustlijn/Oxy	07/09/'17
Jessica	Maart; juli; sept 2016	BWC; Nikos (okt 17)	1-2 weeks	No	61	Yes (3x in 2016)	Afghan Hill; Kara Tepe; Nikos	14/09/'17
Harry	Aug. 2016+2017	Livingstone/EuroRelief	2x 16 days	Yes	19-20	Yes	Moria	15/09/'17
Jacob	Jan. 2016; kerstvakantie 2016/17	Livingstone/EuroRelief/ st. bootvluchteling	2x 2 weeks	Yes	28-29	Yes	Moria	19/09/'17
Lily	Juni/juli 2017; aug/sept 2017	Livingstone/EuroRelief	2x 4 weeks	Yes	21	Yes	Moria	20/09/'17
Sophie	Okt. 2016; Okt. 2017	BWC; Nikos	1 week	No	39-40	Yes	Kara Tepe	21/09/'17
Grace	Zomer 2016	EuroRelief	2,5 weeks	Yes	20	No	Moria	22/09/'17
Charlie	Juli 2016	BWC; MOTG; Nikos; SwissCross/One Happy Family (nov 17)	1-4 weeks	No	41-42	Yes (5 missions in 1,5 year)	Kara Tepe; Nikos	26/09/'17
Mia	Mei 2017	BWC	1 week	No	18	No	Kara Tepe	27/09/'17
Evie	Feb. 2017	? in een warehouse	1 week	No	24	No	Warehouse	02/10/'17
Ella	Dec. 2015	Starfish/MOTG	2 months	No	18	No	Haven; Moria	04/10/'17

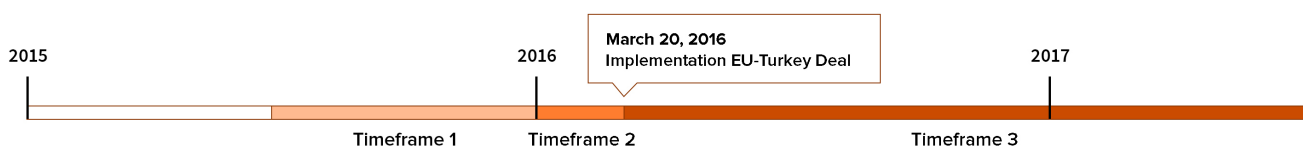
5

Changing Dynamics at Lesvos Through the Eyes of the Volunteers

Each participant has his or her own story on why they decided to go to Lesvos and work with refugees, and why they did or did not decide to return in the years after their first trip. Before the data collection period I had not considered the changing dynamics at Lesvos over the years being an important factor in the story that is to be told in this thesis. However, early in the data collection process I found that the story of each participant regarding the sensemaking of their experiences are shaped by the situation on Lesvos at that time and by factors such as the location they worked at and the organisation they worked with. The stories of people going to Lesvos end of 2015 till beginning 2016 are drastically different from the stories of people going to the same place a year later, meaning that their experiences and motivations whether or not to return are based on a very different situation of events. This chapter will go over these changing dynamics and the different natures of the volunteer's engagement on the island Lesvos time wise, based on the participants stories, which starts early summer of 2015 and ends late summer 2017. So, a timespan of roughly two years will be covered, which is separated into three timeframes, see figure 7.

1. 2015: The beginning of the crisis
2. First three months of 2016: Structure is developing
3. March 2016 onwards: Implementation of the EU-Turkey deal

This last timeframe outlines the EU-Turkey deal and the big change, or even a turning point, it was on the situation on Lesvos, more on this deal is to be found in chapter 2. Also, over time organisations go through a process of professionalization, which mostly contains new rules and structures creating a different experience for the volunteer.



7. Visualisation of the three timeframes (Source: Author)

The 19 participants of this research worked for six different organisations based in Lesvos. Some of them changed organisation during their trip, or for a second trip, others stuck with their first and thus only organisation, all for different reasons. Those five organisations are just a few of the many organisations operating in Lesvos. Organisations

that changed location, mission, or even decided to withdraw from operating in Lesvos over the years. It is very difficult if not impossible to find a clear overview of all organisations operating on the island where and when, which is why the stories of the participants are often the only data regarding this subject. Unfortunately, they could as well not give a clear overview of the organisations operating in the camps, as there are just too many. Focus, therefore, will lie with the five organisations the participants volunteered for: Stichting Bootvluchteling, Stichting Livingstone/EuroRelief, Because We Carry, Movement on the Ground, and Starfish, together with the organisation Home For A Day, which is often mentioned in the volunteer's stories. A short overview of the organisations discussed in this chapter is given in chapter 2.2.3.

The structure of this chapter is first the dynamics regarding the situation in 2015 will be discussed. Second, the situation between end of 2015/early 2016 and March 2016 is outlined. Lastly, the situation between the implementation of the EU-Turkey deal in March 2016 and the end of the summer 2017 is explained. This all is discussed through the eyes of the volunteers.

5.1 Timeframe 1: Beginning of the Crisis

This story, thus, starts in 2015 the year in which more than a million refugees arrived over sea with the peak in the fall of that year (UNHCR, 2018a), of those million refugees about 500.000 arrived to Greece on the island Lesvos only (Jauhiainen, 2017), due to its practical location along the Turkish shore. (UNHCR. 2018b; Jauhiainen, 2017) During this first year the crisis is in the hands of the volunteers, as perfectly described by Hernandez (2015) in a guest blog for the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, or as he calls it “humanitarianism without humanitarians” (p.1). His blog describes the organisation Starfish, which is established as a reaction to the arriving refugees on Lesvos by a local woman Melinda McRostie and is the first organisation running on volunteers without any professional skills within health, migration, or anything related to the situation developing on Lesvos at that time. Two of the participants of this research, Oliver and Ella, spoke about volunteering for Starfish in the fall of 2015 during their stay in Lesvos. Oliver and Ella, together with Jack and Isabelle are the volunteers that worked on Lesvos during this first timeframe. Oliver started in the summer of 2015 staying for several months as the refugee flux evolved, Ella volunteered for two months starting early December 2015 and volunteers Jack and Isabelle, who are father and daughter, worked for a week on Lesvos late November 2015. Late 2015 the time Ella, Jack and Isabelle arrived in Lesvos the first timeframe was slowly evolving into the second timeframe in which professional humanitarian aid organisations are starting their work at Lesvos. This first timeframe focuses on the dynamics on Lesvos in 2015, the establishment of new NGOs as a reaction to the refugee flux and the changing situation regarding the refugee camps. So, in the beginning there was a lack of professional help, which led to the establishment of new NGOs and aid organisations by volunteer workers at the island. This section will discuss the experiences of the volunteers regarding these dynamics on Lesvos.

The main refugee camp on Lesbos then was and still is camp Moria (Stichting Bootvluchteling, 2018; Jauhiainen, 2017), besides Moria several other camps were established and dissolved within the two years this story takes place. In the beginning of 2015 there was camp Oxy, which was situated at the parking lot of a nightclub called Oxy, hence the name. Camp Oxy was set-up by Starfish founder Melinda McRostie and, thus, run by volunteers. Oliver and Ella were the only two participants in this study that have worked in and around camp Oxy. This camp was dissolved at the end of 2015 and replaced by another camp, camp Apanemo (Hernandez, 2016). Oxy was located next to the beach where many refugees arrived on shore, as was Apanemo. Being a transit camp it was not built to host refugees more than a day, some who arrived late could spend the night. It was a camp at which the refugees could get some rest, food, and dry clothes before being transported by bus or walking to camp Moria, which was approximately 10 kilometres and is the place all refugees need to go for registration. Camp Apanemo replaced Oxy at the end of 2015 and was run by the International Rescue Committee (IRC), thus a professional organisation took over from the new organisation established as a reaction to the refugee flux entering Lesbos. However, the Starfish Foundation remains active at the shore and later on in camp Moria. (Hernandez, 2016)

Oliver is the participant of this study that was first to go to Lesbos, however his story is a bit different than that of the others, as he went there for an internship at a small architect company, he was a student of architecture at the time, and rolled into volunteering during his stay. He arrived on Lesbos in June of 2015 and did not think about the refugee crisis and the role of Lesbos within this crisis until he speaks to a few foreign volunteers. He arrived on Lesbos before the news on refugees exploded in The Netherlands, which is probably why he arrived blank at the island.

“On a Friday night when I am at a local beach bar I see a group of youngsters sitting together, they were Danish, German, American all different backgrounds together. I walk over there and ask if they are on a holiday and they say to me that they are here for refugee work. I react a bit surprised, because I did not see much of this by then, but I am immediately interested. Thereafter, we talked all night about what motivates them to do this work and what was actually happening causing refugees to come in the first place.”

Oliver (September, 2017)

As Hernandez (2015) discusses in his blog, Oliver also tells the story of Melinda, the restaurant owner of Australian origin, who lives along the coast of Molyvos from which she saw the many refugees arrive over time and as a reaction established the organisation Starfish, the organisation Oliver volunteered for in the beginning of his stay. He also talks about the little to no organisations operating in those early stages of the refugee crisis, or the ‘humanitarianism without humanitarians’ as Hernandez (2015) calls the situation back then.

“There were at that time little to no organisations and they were reliant of the tourist that felt for the situation or of the few volunteers that were there at that time and wanted to help.”

Oliver (September, 2017)

Ella stayed in Lesvos for over two months from early December 2016 until beginning of February 2017. She also started as a volunteer for Starfish, however, she wanted to work for a Dutch organisation called Stichting Bootvluchteling for whom she could not volunteer, as she was not yet 18 years old at the time. This means that at the end of 2015 more professional organisations were established in the form of NGOs. She knew Oliver from high school and contacted him before going to Lesvos, which is how she ended up working for Starfish. Ella also confirms Hernandez (2015) story on the lack of professionals and the situation depending on volunteers during this peak within the refugee flux.

“Well, we came there and I found it very unstructured and inefficient, which was not the fault of the organisations, genuinely not, because they did everything within their power. It was the organisation from the Greek government and Europe...everything was just dreadful. Everything was done by volunteers and rested on them, but at the same time you were held back from all the things you wanted to do and achieve.”

Ella (October, 2017)

There were two more participants volunteering in 2015, father and daughter Isabelle and Jack. They, in contrast with Ella, did volunteer for Stichting Bootvluchteling and made long days on the beach waiting for boats to arrive, helping the refugees come to land and giving them water, food, a blanket, dry clothes and more. Being a volunteer for this NGO during this timespan meant carrying out the tasks described above; the beach was your office. However, over time as arrivals declined and other, more professional, organisations took over, Stichting Bootvluchteling became an organisation providing first aid in refugee camp Moria and the second refugee camp at the island: Kara Tepe. In January of 2018 they changed their mission again to psychological help in refugee camp Moria, withdrawing help from Kara Tepe. However, they hope to make a restart with their medical mission in May 2018 (Stichting Bootvluchteling, 2018).

Overall, working as a volunteer at Lesvos during this first timespan meant working long days, little structure, and hard work. Moria was the main refugee camp, however, several transit camps popped-up and disappeared during this time. Volunteers worked mostly along the shore and later on also in the camps. Organisations were established, such as Stichting Bootvluchteling and Starfish, as reaction to the crisis and professional organisations, such as MSF and the UNHCR, came overtime. The first trimester of 2016 the professionalization of organisations started, this time is discussed below through the eyes of the volunteers working at Lesvos at that time.

5.2 Timeframe 2: Structure develops on Lesbos

During this short period between the end of 2015 and March of 2016, or the implementation of the EU-Turkey deal, the situation on Lesbos became more organised and dynamics within the camps and organisations changed. Volunteers Amelia, Olivia, Emily, Ava, Jessica, and Jacob took their first volunteer trip to Lesbos in this timeframe. Oliver and Ella were still working at Lesbos at that time as well.

As discussed above other camps have existed next to Moria, an example is Afghan Hill, which is the camp that participants Amelia and Olivia worked at during their trip to Lesbos in January of 2016. As there is very little information to be found about this camp, the stories of these two participants are very interesting.

Amelia, “Moria is the camp where you get your papers with which you can travel further and that was for several nationalities: Syrians, Iranians, Eritreans or so...”
Olivia, “Yes, they could travel on... they are so-called recognized asylum seekers and the Afghans are not, so they were stuck at this hill next to camp Moria, which was thus named Afghan Hill.”

Amelia & Olivia (August, 2017)

As told by Amelia and Olivia Afghan Hill derived its name from its location and the main group of people staying there: Afghans on the hill next to camp Moria. Those were mainly Afghan people as they could not get into camp Moria and therefore ended up there. However, this camp was dissolved in March 2016 when the EU-Turkey deal was closed. From then on Moria and Kara Tepe were the two main refugee camps at Lesbos. These are the two camps most of the participants worked at and the main locations this story will take place. Volunteers Emily and Jessica worked for BWC in March of 2016, Jessica explains her first impression of what she calls Moria, but probably was the Afghan Hill Olivia and Amelia worked at as well a few months earlier.

“Well, we knew that we would hand out breakfast for BWC, but I did not really know what to expect further on. The first time I was there we were at camp Moria, which then was an open refugee camp. It was just situated in an orchard, an olive grove. There were many tents all close together, it kind of looked like a festival site.”

Jessica (September, 2017)

Another factor influencing the volunteer’s experiences was the establishment of more rules and guidelines within organisations. In January of 2016 friends Amelia and Olivia went to Lesbos as part of a Because We Carry team. They and the other participants volunteering in 2015 – early 2016 got very little guidelines on behaviour pre-departure. However, the participants going during a later stage of the crisis talked about pages full of guidelines on behaviour, clothing, and more, which they received when applying as volunteer. This shows the development and professionalization of the organisations over

time. Hernandez (2016) affirms this as he discusses the professionalization of organisations starting in December 2015. The workdays of the volunteers working during this timeframe were long, with little spare time, and lacked a good structure. Olivia explains the main task they had, which was distributing food.

“Of course we had a task, which was distributing food. But you never know how many people would come. You couldn’t know. So, sometimes you were waiting with tons of food in an empty tent, which is of course such a waste. Much of the food was thrown out, such a waste. So, you had camp Moria and we were at Afghan Hill and if we had a lot of food left over we went to the camp and we handed it out to people who were in line for registration.”

Olivia (August, 2017)

As Olivia explains the refugees would come to a tent to get their food, they had to wait in line, while in the last timeframe food is distributed along the refugees by going by their houses. Another important task she talks about, as a reaction to these queues, was crowd-control. By crowd-control is meant the keeping under control of large amounts of people in line, solving problems, and do anything to keep the people calm and manage the crowd. Also, Emily mentions crowd-control; according to her this was the most important task they had.

“Well, there was a big food tent, in which the food was prepared as well, and about half an hour before the food was served, although served may not be the right word, well then the tent was closed and everyone had to in line outside between the gates... and they all were very strict with time. First I found it a bit childish I mean the food was ready so just hand it out to the people. But the reliability... so people that came later wouldn’t be left without food. So, we had to stand outside with these queues, which got very long. Sometimes it rained and we had to hand out ponchos, but we also had to keep a positive ambiance within the group and correct people that were cutting line and so on, so people would not manage those things themselves. This went very well I thought. It was very intense work, but I got a huge kick out of it. Also, the working with all these different people, English men, wherever they came from, Germany...”

Emily (September, 2017)

According to a map of Moria, see figure 5, made in January of 2016 by the UNHCR there were far more organisations operating in the camp at that time than there are now, 16 in total including the UNHCR and the Greek authorities (UNHCR, 2016). The many young Dutch volunteers working in Moria come from Stichting Livingstone. This foundation organises volunteer trips all around the globe and as a reaction to the refugee crisis also started organising trips to Lesvos. They gather teams that go on a two-week trip to Lesvos to work for EuroRelief at camp Moria.

The first connection between EuroRelief and Stichting Livingstone was participant Oliver. He got in contact with EuroRelief during his stay at Lesvos and knew Stichting Livingstone as a good friend of him was working there.

“Well, I got to know EuroRelief a bit over there and subsequently made the connection with Livingstone, so I made the connection to link Livingstone to EuroRelief. Together with Hessel we set up those trips and it ran very quickly actually via EuroRelief. Ever since I have worked for EuroRelief in Moria.”

Oliver (September, 2017)

Several of the volunteers that worked during this timeframe also experienced working along the shore helping boats arrive on to Lesbos. Jacob worked for Stichting Bootvluchteling this first time and, thus, worked along the shore. Amelia and Olivia worked for BWC and did go to work at the shore, however their main work was at Afghan Hill. Over time the work mostly took place within the camps, as since the implementation of the EU-Turkey Deal boat arrivals declined drastically. Organisations such as Stichting Bootvluchteling as a reaction to this decline changed their mission; they for example started a medical mission in camp Kara Tepe and Moria (Stichting Bootvluchteling, 2018). Jessica and Emily worked at Lesbos for BWC when the EU-Turkey Deal was enclosed; they saw immediate change occurring on the island.

“[...] it was one of the last days of our stay when the Turkey deal happened. We were, thus, at this orchard, which was located next to an old prison aside Moria and these people were deported to this prison. We actually saw a day after the deal was enclosed barbed wire put on the fences. Yes, the days after the deal they were doing that, I found it an intense week, a very intense first week.”

Jessica (September, 2017)

As Jessica explains the Deal had an impact not only on the boat arrivals, but also on the situation in the camps and for the organisations. This deal, therefore, is the start of the last timeframe outlined in the next section.

5.3 Timeframe 3: Implementation of the EU-Turkey Deal

This last timeframe is covering the largest time period. On March 20th 2016 the EU-Turkey deal was implemented causing several changes at the camps, within organisations, and thus for the volunteers working at Lesbos. This moment is the start of this timeframe, which ends late summer of 2017; the latest moment participants of this research took a volunteer trip to Lesbos before being interviewed.

Between March 2016 and the summer of 2017 as a reaction to the EU-Turkey deal boat arrivals at Lesbos declined drastically (Stichting Bootvluchteling, 2018; UNHCR, 2018a). This meant that volunteers no longer worked at the coastal shore of Lesbos helping boat arrivals, but all were placed in either refugee camp Moria or Kara Tepe depending on the organisation they worked for. Emily and Jessica were at Lesbos volunteering for Because We Carry at Kara Tepe when the EU-Turkey deal was made. They saw things change immediately during that week as discussed in the previous section. During this time Afghan Hill was dissolved and organisations as Because We Carry and Movement on the Ground relocated permanently to camp Kara Tepe, which changed a lot for the

volunteers working for those organisations. As Amelia, Olivia, Emily and Jessica explained working at Afghan Hill mostly consisted of random tasks that changed daily, outlined in section 5.2, working for Because We Carry at Kara Tepe from March 2016 onwards became much more structured.

“Around 7am we had to distribute breakfast. First prepare it and then distribute breakfast. After that you prepared everything to entertain the kids... which you did for a few hours, then you did several other activities. Sometimes you already started a small project to continue working on.”

Evie (October, 2017)

The daily routine Evie discusses above is what all participants that volunteered for Because We Carry between mid-2016 until the fall of 2017 have sketched as an average day. They would first prepare and then bring the breakfast to the refugees, after which they would entertain the kids for a few hours, followed by working on any project that was going on at the time of the trip. An average day lasted between 7am and 2pm, according to Evie, leaving a lot of spare time to relax and discover the island. This is in big contrast with people volunteering before March of 2016. Their days were much less structured and working days lasted sometimes for 12 hours. Another important difference is that of camp Kara Tepe and Moria, the two camps are very different and these differences influence the experience of the volunteer worker. Opposed to Kara camp Tepe in Moria less and less organisations are left to arrange all the work that has to be done there as a consequence of the EU-Turkey deal. The working days for volunteers working at Moria became even longer and more exhausting. One of the large organisations operating in Moria, Doctors Without Borders, as a reaction to the EU-Turkey deal decided to withdraw their operation from the island (MSF, 2016). Since then more and more organisations followed in their footsteps leaving the same amount of work to fewer and fewer organisations. EuroRelief, the organisation operating in Moria for which six participants volunteered, is one of the few organisations left in the camp. At the moment it is even the largest organisation operating in the camp, according to the volunteers who have worked there recently.

“EuroRelief is the biggest organisation operating in the camp at the moment. The NGOs who are working at Moria with volunteers are Stichting Bootvluchteling, Save The Children and EuroRelief... I think those are the only ones. However, I am not sure whether Save The Children works with volunteers, they are all professionals I think. Stichting Bootvluchteling had between 4pm and midnight the medical shift at the camp, so they only did medical stuff and also teaching I think. Save The Children only works in Section A where the official families live. When I arrived in June that was the only section hosting families, but today they live throughout the camp, anywhere there is space. Anyhow, they take care of mothers with babies and pregnant women and make sure they have everything they need, especially food. EuroRelief takes care of accommodation, cleaning, new arrivals, a little bit of everything. You also have the UNHCR, but they, well they are the UN, and they arrange all kinds of stuff. There is Voltex and the police who

take care of the first registration of the new arrivals and you have EASO who take care of asylum interviews and so on. Also, you can only enter the camp if you are with one of the organisations.”

Lily (September, 2017)

Oliver also speaks of EuroRelief being the head coordinator in the camp at the moment and the main tasks this responsibility comes with.

“EuroRelief is responsible for the distribution of food, drinks and clothes. Also, they arrange everything around the building of tents and the repairing and maintenance of them, but also security at the gates. The houses of the people... so at this moment the tents are no longer there they are replaced by isoboxes, containers. The camp has been burned down three times, so it changed a lot. The newcomers first have to go to new arrivals where they receive a meal; they can stay there for a few nights until they are assigned a fixed spot in the camp. That is also what EuroRelief does. So, everything to provide the people with their basic needs, that is what we volunteers are busy with.”

Oliver (September, 2017)

Hence, Moria has gone through several transformations over these two years, regarding both organisations and infrastructure. There is a lot of critique regarding the situation in the camp coming from both the participants and the media (The Guardian, 2017; NOS, 2017; Al Jazeera, 2017; Jauhiainen, 2017). The main reason for a lot of the critique is the living situation of the refugees, some of who stayed for over a year in the camp. Moria is designed to be a transit camp for refugees to stay for one or two days while going through registration before being departed to Athens (The Guardian, 2017). Therefore, it lacks the infrastructure to host people for such long periods, as the refugees were not supposed to stay for longer than a few days the camps is not built to host as many refugees as there are now. Many volunteers speak about the camp being overcrowded. In November of 2017 the Guardian posts an article on the subject in which they discuss the capacity of the camp. As the camp is built to host 2.000 refugees and is hosting 6.000 refugees in November of 2017 (The Guardian, 2017) the camps capacity is exceeded by 200%, see also section 2.2.1.

According to participant Poppy, who has volunteered for EuroRelief in the summer of 2016, the beginning of 2017 and the summer of 2017, things were very different the second time she returned to camp Moria, much more tension between the refugees was felt within the camp, there was more violence, she even lost all her belongings in a fire started by refugees. This was, according to her, the result of the replacement of almost all women, children and families to camp Kara Tepe, meaning that Moria was left with mostly single men. Kara Tepe, being a safer and better-organised camp than Moria, became the host of the vulnerable cases.

“During that winter several people had passed away, due to hypothermia and such. So, they said to replace all tents by containers, thus, the families had to go to Kara

Tepe and the men went inside.” [...] “There was more reciprocal tension. No more women, so no more distractions.”

Poppy (September, 2017)

Refugees are hosted both in tents and iso-boxes in camp Moria, while in Kara Tepe everyone is hosted in iso-boxes (UNHCR, 2017). More and more tents changed into iso-boxes over time. Especially, as during winter people died from the cold in those tents, as Poppy explains above. There was a dome within camp Moria at which the men were hosted during this cold winter before there were enough isoboxes to host everyone in.

Participants talked a lot about the lack of media attention for the crisis in Lesvos and the horrific situation at Moria. However, during the data-gathering period more news items appeared on those topics, most likely because the boat arrivals were rising again. One item that got a lot of attention was a short movie posted by Dutch news platform NOS (2017). It shows a male refugee from Afghanistan showing the iso-boxes they live in with too many people, the only shower they share with all people on that level of the camp, and how they cook on a heater. For most people in The Netherlands very shocking images too see, people have been and still are living like this for over a year. However, participant Lily could not be completely happy with this new attention for the situation in Moria, she explains below why.

“The frustrating thing about this film posted by the NOS was that those men are indeed having a rough time, but it is by far the worst that is happening in the camp. There are families with young children who live in a tent with four other families and... this were all single men from Afghanistan who live in these containers that are wind and water proof, but there are also families, say four families who live in a tent, which is four by four meter who have zero safety when it rains, it won't be dry... they do have electricity though, we make sure they do.”

Lily (September, 2017)

Lily explains above the horrific situation people are living in in camp Moria during the summer of 2017 and her dissatisfaction with the news item on the NOS as the situation is much worse than they showed. Her description of the camp also shows the deteriorating situation in camp Moria, such as people living in tents again and families living in the camp again. However, many of the volunteers were happy to see this new media attention for camp Moria and the situation on Lesvos. Later on in 2017, more and more was written on the situation in Moria by several news platforms, such as The Guardian and The BBC. The interviews for this thesis, however, mostly took place in September before this media attention started. Therefore, other participants of the research complained about the fact that before this video the only news items on camp Moria were about the extreme events regarding behaviour of the refugees and therefore not an embodiment of the actual situation. For example, there were a lot of news items on the fires started by refugees in the summer of 2017. Poppy was the participant who volunteered at Moria during this time.

“I lost all my stuff in the fire... and well a week later there were again fights, so the police used tear gas and they threw rocks at the police. Very intense. Thus, you see how they lose hope and well they just want the freedom to travel through all of Greece, they do not want to be stuck on Lesbos... and at some point they become hopeless and just one thing has to happen to make them go wild.”

Poppy (September, 2017)

Sophie, who worked at Kara Tepe and not Moria, also had her opinion on this situation taking place in Moria.

“I get why they do it, you know. They are stuck there waiting, they get no notice on how things are going, the Greek barely know themselves, and they just sit there waiting with so much lack of clarity. So much is not arranged, there is little to eat, little water, you have to sleep on the floor of a tent. I do not find it strange that at some point this explodes... and the news reports it as: refugees started fire, they are so ungrateful, be happy that you get something...you know.”

Sophie (September, 2017)

Sophie worked at Kara Tepe during this third timeframe, just like five other participants of the study. Kara Tepe is mostly seen as the good camp at Lesbos compared to Moria (The New Yorker, 2017; Jauhiainen, 2017). Activities are hosted for all groups living in the camp, there is a playground, every week a party is organised, and there are many other activities for refugees to participate in. Kara Tepe hosts mainly families and vulnerable cases, like single mothers, children, or people with mental health problems, as discussed above (The New Yorker, 2017). However, just like Moria it has been overflowed with refugees over the last years. According to Lily who worked at camp Moria for two months in the summer of 2017 this big contrast between Moria and Kara Tepe is for a reason:

“That is because Kara Tepe picks the people that live there. So, everyone goes to Moria first, you do not have control over the people there, and Kara Tepe has a list with people living in Moria and chooses the families that go there. Hence, there are only families living in Kara Tepe, it is just much better organised, there are playgrounds. I have never been there myself, but I saw it from a distance and heard stories about it. We were always very happy when people went to Kara Tepe. I have brought families to Kara Tepe a few times. People living in Kara Tepe have it pretty good.”

Lily (September, 2017)

Comparing the stories of participants working in Moria and Kara Tepe the contrast could sometimes not be bigger, especially over time as the situation in Kara Tepe gets getting better while in Moria it is worsening. The experiences and the sensemaking of those experiences by the volunteers are strongly influenced by the camp they worked at during one of the timeframes explained in this chapter. For Kara Tepe it is, just as for Moria as discussed in the previous section, unclear exactly what NGOs and other

organisations are operating within the camp. However, in comparison to Moria, Kara Tepe is still overflowing with organisations, the cooperation between all those organisations is also a point of critique for some of the volunteers, one of them is Charlie who explains his critique below, while others complimented the way of collaboration between all the different parties involved.

“See, you have Kara Tepe, because Moria I have only been once illegally for a short moment, at which 16 NGOs work in a vacuum instead of cooperating. Stavrous, head of the camp, tries his best to let people collaborate and to let the different organisations connect to each other. There is a weekly meeting, however nine out of ten people working for an organisation feel like they know better, which results in them working side by side instead of together. Yes, HSA (Humanitarian Support Agency) is head of clothing, but we have seen such a mess there, it is better if we do it ourselves. No, you should help HSA with sorting the clothes making sure to get rid of the trash, leaving the clean and whole clothes for the refugees, instead of putting each other down.”

Charlie (September, 2017)

The stories of the volunteers who have worked at Kara Tepe regarding the situation in the camp and the compositions of their workdays are very similar. As most people volunteered for the organisation Because We Carry their tasks and daily routines were the same, distributing breakfast and playing with the kids being the main activities, as discussed before. The seemingly stable situation in the camp made many participants think about changing location and/or organisation for future trips, an interesting development. Thus, many of the participants that worked at Kara Tepe talked about finding another project or location for their next trip at which they feel help is needed more urgently. Many found this in the organisation Home for a Day, which will be discussed into more detail below. One of the participants that talks about not going back to Kara Tepe for the reason mentioned above is Jessica:

“I would like to go to other camps where the situation is... I didn’t tell yet, but Kara Tepe is a pretty good place. They have a beautiful yard, aerobics class is organised, yoga class as well, soccer training, which I think is great. However, there are many other camps where the situation is bad and actually I think that help is much more needed there. So, I would eventually like to go to one of those camps and do more basic work.”

Jessica (September, 2017)

As said before the professionalization of organisations was for some volunteers a reason to no longer join those organisations when going on a trip to Lesvos.

“For Stichting Bootvluchting you had to apply and go through a quick screening process, however this was not very strict. A few years later I checked this again, I think it was last year that it had changed again, there were more requirements a

volunteer had to fit. We went in the period that you could go for a week, but I think you have to go for a longer period now.”

Isabelle (September, 2017)

The most discussed and criticised rules are those about contact between refugees and volunteers. EuroRelief, for example, does not want female volunteers interacting with male refugees, according to the volunteers working for the organisation. Oliver explains it clearly below.

“You have to be registered with EuroRelief, you have to apply as volunteer at their website and you get several trainings. If you go there they will explain you about the cultural differences, for example. A man may not speak with the women, women may not speak with men, or visa versa, don’t be in the same room together and don’t hang out together. When I see you, a woman, as a volunteer talk to a group of men I will go up there and take over the conversation. They will also tell about the activities we do, the tasks we have as volunteers. The things you can and cannot do. So, basically several rules that are applied in the camp, to initially ensure your safety, but also that of the refugees.” [...] “You have to 18 years or older and there is a code of conduct regarding clothing, which you need to sign. Arms need to be covered, no tight yoga pants, and ankles need to be covered, this is very important. It’s not that you need to have a certain degree or education to become a volunteer. That would make it too difficult to recruit volunteers in the first place.”

Oliver (September, 2017)

Several participants who volunteered for Because We Carry talk about changes in the rules regarding volunteer-refugee contact over time. This new rule that was established during the professionalization of the organisation made some participants decide no longer to work for this organisation in the future. Ava talks about a friend of hers getting kicked out of Kara Tepe by Because We Carry, because she had too intense contact with refugees.

“So, you are not allowed to have contact with the refugees. How is that possible? You can only really work for the people if you get in contact with them.” [...] “A friend of mine who has been back for a couple of weeks, returns to Lesbos next week to stay for half a year and she is going to stay with an organisation in Mytilini. She got kicked out of the camp by BWC, because she hung out with the refugees too much, and that has happened more often.”

Ava (September, 2017)

This professionalization of organisations including the changing rules and routines and in search of places where help is needed more drastically many participants chose to, if they go for a next time, volunteer for the new organisation Home for a Day. This organisation is set-up by restaurant owner Nikos and his wife Katerina. The participants that volunteered with Because We Carry had a daily routine of dining at their restaurant,

which is how they got in contact with Nikos and his plans to help the refugees at Lesvos. Participant Jessica is one of the volunteers that choose to work for Home for a Day. She perfectly describes the intentions of the organisation, led by Nikos and Katerina.

“I choose this time to help Nikos. He has a restaurant at Lesvos at which from the beginning volunteers had dinner and sometimes also people from Kara Tepe, he lets them cook now and then. They started doing more, so now every night he gets people from Moria, the camp where the situation is horrible, so he picks up a family or group of men from there. I don’t know how he arranges who may come and everything, but they cook for them, they don’t have to pay, it’s to give them a normal night for once. They eat at a table, get a good meal, children can play, they can talk to other people than the people living in the camp, things like that. He picks them up and brings them back. Recently, he started making food packages as well, because there are a lot of people living outside of the camps. For them he makes food packages, containing some potatoes and stuff so they can prepare their own meal. With some money help he was able to rent and renovate another premises, for which I contributed as well. That is now his restaurant, it is a bit bigger and better, but I think he owns the old premises, or maybe he rents it as well, but there he is building a workshop area that will be finished by the time I get there this October. It is intended that refugees can teach each other skills there, so they can move on... I am very excited to experience that. Those two people are like angels, incredibly sweet. Oh and they do clothes too. They have a small clothing shop at which the people can get free clothes, whatever they need.”

Jessica (September, 2017)

More and more people picked up on the help Nikos and Katerina have been giving to refugees since 2014. A short video of the two telling about their foundation went viral as it was watched over 3 million times in a week when posted on the Facebook page of AJ+ (Pappaspost, 2018). They also play a large role in the Dutch documentary ‘De Deal’ on the EU-Turkey deal 1,5 years after its implementation.

5.4 Conclusion

All together, the changes that happened in Lesvos in the period 2015-2017 were a combination of the professionalization of organisations and the impact of the EU-Turkey deal. The volunteer’s experiences are shaped both by these impacts as well as the dynamics within the different camps.

The volunteers working at Lesvos in the early stages of the refugee crisis mostly experience chaos, long workdays, either work in camps or at the shore, while volunteers later on have more stability in their volunteer experience. They have a daily routine, no longer work at the shore, and have more free time.

The big contrast between refugee camp Kara Tepe and Moria make that the stories of the volunteers of each camp differ. As the humanitarian situation in Kara Tepe became

better over time, that of Moria only got worse. Leaving only a few organisations willing to operate in the camp. For the volunteers working at Moria this motivates them even more to keep coming back, they felt needed.

Whilst, in Kara Tepe the change in rules and guidelines of the organisations and growth of Kara Tepe into a stable camp were of impact on the experiences and future decisions of the volunteers. This makes many participants that went late 2017 decide not to go back there, but to find projects in “bigger need” of their help.

Interestingly, those changing dynamics, thus, impacted the motives of the volunteers to return to Lesvos. They also had an impact on their experiences and the sensemaking of those motivations and experiences. This will be discussed in the next chapters.

6

Making Sense of Pre-Trip Motivations

Each participant has his or her own reasons for deciding to go to Lesbos and work with refugees. Some have thought those motivations through for months, while others were more impulsive in making decisions regarding their trip. Either way, each participant goes through a process of sensemaking of his or her motivations. This can be found in their way of talking about their motivations. How do they explain their motivations to themselves, their friends and families, and the researcher? Are they pressured in legitimizing their motivations? If yes, who or what makes them feel pressured?

When they decide to go to Lesbos other decisions must be made too, such as for how long and with what organisation. The motivation behind those two factors are often linked. This often goes the other way around as well; motivations behind organisation and duration of stay are the factors behind the final decision to go.

What were the first triggers to go, why did they eventually decide to go, whom were of influence during the decision-making process, why did they go back, and what were their goals before departure. Do their stories change over the course of the interview? These are the questions that will be answered in this chapter.

First, the triggers leading to the decision to volunteer at Lesbos will be shortly discussed. Second, the motives and sensemaking of the motives is outlined. Third, the secondary motives and sensemaking of these motives is discussed.

6.1 Triggers leading to motives

The first trigger, the moment you start thinking about actually going to Lesbos and work as a volunteer, no concrete plans or realistic ideas, it even seems impossible because of money, family, work, or other obligations at home, however, your mind starts spinning, what if, how and why. This moment is what all volunteers experienced before their trip. Asking about this trigger is mostly an entry towards the volunteer's motivations. Most participants refer to the news when asked about the first trigger, specifically the summer and fall of 2015, the time the refugee crisis was all over Dutch news and social media. Videos of the many overcrowded boats arriving at the shores, numbers of lives lost at sea, and shout outs for volunteers are the images that started this first trigger for most participants of this research.

“I think it were all these boats that became bigger, more, and more packed. Also, the iconic image, the one we all know, the image from above, the continuous flow of completely stuffed boats arriving into Europe. The idea of actually taking your

kids and get on one of those rickety boats in search for safety, or at least get away from where you are, despite of the refugee's motivation. At some point all I could do was cry when I saw these images. I really felt it, unlike I had felt any other news item before."

Amelia (August, 2017)

The image Amelia sketches here is an image most participants talked about when asked about the first trigger. The news of the refugee crisis came closer than that of the other crises in the world, this will be further discussed in the next section of this chapter. Some, such as Ava and Sophie, talked about more precise moments in the news. For them this was the news item on the body of the Syrian boy washing up a Turkish beach in September of 2015. The urge to go is mostly described as a feeling that popped-up when watching these images on the news.

Most of the female participant travelling with Because We Carry talked, like Amelia says above, about the obligation of family. Many have small or teenage children and a husband, not something you just leave behind for a few weeks. Motives for duration of stay will be further discussed in section 6.3.1. Contrarily, having a family was often what they implied as the main reason for going, as they could not imagine seeking refuge with their family themselves. So, a process of identification took place.

Others, such as Lily, did not experience a moment of trigger in the way described above, as they were in search of an experience of such type when finding the possibility of volunteering on Lesbos.

"I finished my bachelor in July, of course I saw that coming, so I thought about the vacation time I would have and decided I wanted to do something useful and adventurous. A friend of mine posted on Facebook that EuroRelief was searching for volunteers, which I found interesting. She shared the post of the organisation with in the caption to call her if you had any questions. So, I called her and heard some of her stories and some practical issues I asked about and thought, well, let's go. So, I booked a ticket for the first four weeks."

Lily (September, 2017)

Lily was in search of something useful and adventurous. She found those criteria in the opportunity to work at Lesbos.

6.1.1 Social motivation

For their first trip to Lesbos, 13 out of 19 participants did not go alone, but with either friends, family, or acquaintances that shared the same interest. Very interesting as for many this social motive was what convinced them to go, the final trigger that made them decide to book the trip.

“[...] and then I heard that Rick and Melissa and some other friends were going there. It was not possible for me to join at that time, but it made me realise that was it, I want to be a part of that.”

Ava (September, 2017)

“I would have gone anyhow, but it was just easier to go with her.”

Emily (September, 2017)

“My daughter was about to turn 18 and talking about wanting to go to Cambodia to do volunteer work. So, I thought if she wants to go there she could join me as well doing volunteer work at Lesvos, which she indeed wanted. Then my mom heard about our trip and decided to join as well. Even more beautiful, three generations together.”

Isla (August, 2017)

“Well, I thought it would be very beautiful to do something like that and well I found it quite risky to let Isabelle go alone of course. So, I asked her if she would mind me joining her and she was immediately excited about it of course.”

Jack (September, 2017)

When asked, all said that they would have gone alone if no one would have joined them, or whom they could have joined. However, they often mention that it was easier to go together, it was easier to make the decision, and easier to tag along than to go through the process by themselves. For many the story of others that went to volunteer at Lesvos was part of the first trigger to start thinking of going themselves, as Olivia discusses below. It made the idea or dream to go more realistic, it made them realise it was actually possible to go there and help.

“Well, somebody went as the first one I knew to Lesvos and it made me think he is really going there, he is really going to help. I was a bit distrustful. I thought he is going for his own ego, but he was going anyhow, so I was also a bit jealous or something. I was impressed, he had guts. So, that is when it all started and then Barbara went with a team of Because We Carry and asked for me to join, but it was too soon for me then. A couple of weeks later Amelia asked me to join the January team and then it was good. It felt good by then and I also discussed with the AD to write an article on my trip, which made it complete for me. I could go with good decency towards myself. Not out of hysteric impulse, but the picture was complete.”

Olivia (August, 2017)

As I see it, the decision to go to Lesvos comes with many doubts for the volunteers. It is a big step to take and knowing people that go whom they can join makes this step a bit easier. Others do it, so they can relate to them instead of being totally depend on their own reasoning to go. Next to that going together may feel safer than going alone, you can

share the journey, your doubts and fears, have someone to fall back on, and someone who shares your perspective on the situation.

Olivia was one of the participants of this research that deliberately decided to go. She thought about her motives for a few months before making the decision to go as she explains above. Being a journalist she wrote an article on volunteering at Lesbos for the Dutch newspaper ‘Het Algemeen Dagblad’. In the next section this time of decision-making will be further discussed together with the sensemaking of the motivations of the volunteers. Talking about the first triggers quickly resulted in the volunteers discussing their motives and their explanations of these motives.

6.2 Main motives and sensemaking

Motives are a very difficult factor to analyse. Mostly, because the participants found it difficult to put their own motivations into words and described often a feeling, which they called an urge to help. Where this urge came from was more difficult for them to put into words. For some this urge came from their religion, others felt like they owe it to humanity, being lucky to be born in The Netherlands where there is no war or hunger, where it is safe, or it was a combination of the two. The debates on the refugee crisis in Europe and the many opinions of everyone in the country about those people coming to Europe also made participants curious. Curious about those people from this other culture. What are they really like and are the stories true? This curiosity was for many a motivation to go and find the answers to those questions.

“[...] the most important part is well... out of empathy to say it like that or compassion, just wanting to help, support people and also show them... because when they arrive here they get such a load of negativity upon them... showing them there are also people who see them as human beings. That is the most important factor what I also wrote in my first piece on going to Lesbos. They are humans just like you and me who want a future for their children and a safe world, who want to contribute... and well most want to return to their home country and rebuilt it as soon as this is possible.”

Sophie (September, 2017)

There is a field of tension between the urge to help and other motives that are mentioned above to become a volunteer. Every volunteer moves within this field, some more aware of their place in this tension field than others. This movement of the volunteers within this field of tension and their sensemaking of their motivations is discussed in this section, starting with the volunteers either taking the time to think about the possibility of going to Lesbos or diving into the opportunity.

6.2.1 Thinking vs. Diving

There are two types of participants in this research: the ones that dive into their adventure to Lesbos and the ones that think and re-think about the possibility to go for a few months or even years. So, the time between the trigger and the actual decision to

go varies widely. This last type all had their reasons for taking this time before making the decision. Grace, for example, was busy with her study:

“I thought about applying for a trip for a long time. In my heart I felt the desire to go for a while, I think since a year before I went. Approximately when the news shared the first refugees arriving at Greece, so maybe even two years before. The time it became more intense and society started thinking about what to do with this, that is when I thought we should help those people, because I found the images on the news very intense and wanted be of help in it. I let a year go by, I was busy with study, internship, and other activities. So, I did not do anything for a long time and therefore it faded into the background. Then I saw a trip on my schools Facebook page asking for students to join them to go to Lesbos in 2016. I thought this is a nice opportunity, because I go with something familiar, with an organisation, so applied for the trip. I doubted for a second, because I did not know anyone on this trip, do I want this... But soon realised I liked it more that way, getting to know new people who all share the same goal, we really want to help and not go on a fun trip, so I applied.”

Grace (September, 2017)

Grace discusses the other priorities in her life before the idea to go to Lesbos could fully be explored. She also talks about it being a beautiful opportunity as she could go with a ‘familiar’ organisation, which implies a search for safety she takes into notice during her decision making process.

Isla has a very different motivation for taking about two years to put the trigger into action. She is mostly concerned with her personal characteristics and being mentally ‘ready’ to be of help at Lesbos. Next to that she, like Grace, had priorities as family and work at home.

“The moment the refugee flux started moving and it was all over the news is when I already thought about what can I do.” [...] “But, yeah what can you do. I am a mother of three children, I have job, find myself a very sensitive person, so quickly thought that is not for me, let someone else do it. I was afraid I would not be able to handle it, that I was unable to go and would find it far too sad all together.” [...] “Those were of course also the stories I read on Facebook. At that time there were several studies warning you to not get carried away and saying the trouble would start when you get back home.” [...] “Then an acquaintance introduced me to BWC, she went as one of the first ones and was very positive.

She said: Have you always wanted to do something but are unable to go to Lesbos, support me, support me by donating money. That is when I thought, of course that is also a possibility, so that is what I did in the first place. It was very concrete where your money went, at that time it was the baby carriers, breakfast, food, and first aid kits. The fact that I knew her made it easier to donate money as well, you trust them. At some point... well I just could not let it go. My husband and I went to a city in Germany where we saw many refugees and the thought of

them coming all this way and no longer living in refugee camps I found beautiful and at the same time disturbing, for the first time I thought about going there myself. That and the several shout outs for volunteers to come to Lesbos by BWC made me think maybe I should just do it. I let that thought simmer for a while until at some point I just thought I am going to do it, which was in the winter of 2016, but I would go during the holiday break in May 2017 as I am a teacher.”

Isla (August, 2017)

Isla makes sense of her initial decision to not go by explaining that she as a person would not be right for the job, and it therefore being better that others do the work. While finding comfort and a way to sooth this feeling of wanting to help in the opportunity to donate money to an acquaintance who is going to Lesbos, which is of course another way to help. The idea of not being the right person, a too sensitive person for volunteering at Lesbos she gets from studies she has read online on the impact of the work on the volunteer. Isla is here reflecting on her younger self as discussed as the retrospective property of Weick’s seven properties of sensemaking (1995), matching the process with the outcome. She adds that BWC was in need of volunteers, or at least asked for people to volunteer, this implies that she takes into account the needs of the situation and organisation in her final decision.

Interestingly, the time of thinking not necessarily was a factor of going alone or with a friend, as discussed in the earlier section. Isla was one of the participants, just like Olivia, who found comfort in taking a friend or family member. While Grace decides to go alone as a result of this process of thinking, wanting to make sure her focus stayed with bringing help.

For others this period of decision-making barely existed, they dived into this adventure without thinking it over too much.

“What was for you the first moment of trigger that made you think about actually going to Lesbos?” Poppy, “Well, there wasn’t such a moment actually. I saw Wilco post a message on Facebook saying he would go to Lesbos to help in a refugee camp next month on which I responded wishing him good luck. We started talking and I asked him what such a trip costs, he named the price and that part of it was financed through crowdfunding making it not too expensive. He said: Come with me! No, that is not for me, I will never do that. I have no affinity towards refugees, not at all. Then I started reading into the subject and thought this might be cool. So, I discussed it with my dad and boyfriend whether I should go or not and they said well for this price, two weeks, it won’t do you any harm so just do it.

Thus, I applied and went to Lesbos for two weeks. I did not really think it through, I just did it.”

Poppy (September, 2017)

Poppy even skipped the moment of trigger as she heard about the opportunity via Facebook and decided to dive. For her money was the most important factor in making the decision to go. However, this first trip opened up a whole new world for her and she

went back for two more times over the last year. Interestingly, Poppy's motives for her first trip were mainly egoistic based. She did not have any interest in refugees or the situation going on in Europe, she mainly found it a great opportunity for herself. Poppy and Isla on first instance did not think they would be right for the job. Poppy reflected this on her disinterest towards the situation and Isla reflected this on her personal characteristics regarding her emotional stability. Poppy's decision to go was stimulated by this urge she felt to help, while for Poppy this first decision was largely based on having a great opportunity for herself. These are two opposites within this tension field of motivations volunteers move within. Some of the participants, like Poppy and Isla, were not that aware of this tension field. Olivia, on the contrary, was the only participant that was very consciously thinking over her own motives in relation to tourism, altruism and egoism before deciding to go to Lesvos. She was extremely aware of this tension field of motivations. She was the only participant who consciously thought about taking part in volunteer tourism and what the possible effects of this could be, but also who saw this mainly as a negative factor to which she was not sure she wanted to be linked. She discusses very clearly her struggles with her own motives, as she did not want to go for mainly egoistic reasons.

“I was distrustful towards my own motivations. I thought: Why do I want this?
To make me feel better about myself, or do I really want to contribute?”

Olivia (August, 2017)

She found answers to her own questions, or moreover, she found peace with her own motives and decided to go to Lesvos.

“Yes, I went... why I went is twofold. Firstly, because I could not watch idly and secondly, because I wanted to feel like a hero for a little bit.” [...] “... and I still do it, because I am in contact with this Syrian family for who I now and then help out with the kids or give them language lessons... Why do I do it? For the same reasons, because I want to do something, I like them, but it also makes me feel good.”

Olivia (August, 2017)

Olivia is very busy with her identity construction in her stories, or moreover, she explains the struggles she had regarding her identity construction (Weick, 1995) and how she found her way in this. Olivia was certainly not the only participant of this research that struggled with the balance between altruistic and egoistic motives. However, she was the only participant that thought about it this consciously and one of the few that before departing admitted to herself she was doing it for her self, too. Some of the others seemed to realize this division in motivations during the course of the interview or after or during their trip.

There is a large debate going on in literature on the motives of the volunteer tourist and the balance between altruistic and egoistic motives. I do not think anyone volunteers completely out of altruistic motives. Therefore, I do not want to categorize the volunteers

into these boxes. However, the similarities and differences in the motivations of volunteer tourist and the volunteer working with refugees in Lesvos are interesting to discuss. More on this urge to help the volunteers experienced will be discussed below.

6.2.2 Identification resulting in empathy

Many of the participants of this research talked about how this refugee crisis, this situation in Lesvos, came closer to them than any other crisis in the world. This identification triggered for them an urge to help, because they could relate to these people. Many asked themselves the question: What if it was me? This feeling can also be described as empathy. The participants of this research also outlined Empathy as one of the most important factors any volunteer should possess. However, it can be discussed whether there should be a balance, as too much as well as too little empathy are described as factors no volunteer should possess. Not all of the participants experienced this identification before deciding to go to Lesvos for the first time, for example Poppy has different motives as discussed in the previous section, however for most this urge was a big part of their motives.

“Well of course you saw a lot of items on the news two years ago, or 2,5 years ago when it was very intense with many refugees, people and boats. The image that many recall is that of the little boy that washed up a Turkish beach, which is where it started for many people. That is when I thought oh my it is really close. I mean there have always been refugees and crises in the world, but because it came so much closer to home it made me think I should do something with this, but what I do not know yet. There are many refugee camps in Greece, which is a relatively safe country to possibly go give aid and there are many refugees stuck there at the moment because of the Turkey deal. This wasn’t something very concrete yet, however I did already feel like I wanted to contribute [...]”

Sophie (September, 2017)

Sophie is explaining above her motivation coming from empathy she felt for the refugees and this urge to help caused by that. At the same time, she mentions Greece feeling like a safe place to go for help, referring to her own safety. She as well explains the cause of this empathy might be because it was so close to home, a factor that for many of the participants of this study became a motivation. Lily, Olivia and Amelia also discuss the identification turning into empathy for the refugees below.

“My parents were in contact with Syrians and I find that purely the fact of being born here giving me so many privileges in comparison to people that are born elsewhere is something very unfair.”

Lily (September, 2017)

Olivia, “Yes, but that makes sense you know, we are just sitting here all together having such good lives. Why can only we have this?” Amelia, “Yes, I mean it is just a difference in geography us being born here, that is the only difference.”

Olivia, “I mean if I was born there I might have been a Muslim, or I probably would have been.”

Olivia & Amelia (August, 2017)

This feeling described by Lily, Olivia and Amelia is what most participants talked about. This feeling of unfairness, of being lucky, and the urge to help that comes from this feeling. These ideas on geography being the factor of happiness, a very intangible phenomenon, is one of the main causes of this urge to help. As there are no logical reasons for this phenomenon, they feel like it could have been them, the only thing different about their lives and that of the refugees is geography.

6.2.3 Curiosity

The moment the first trigger for most participants occurred, the summer/fall of 2015, was the moment media in The Netherlands was overloaded with news on the refugee crisis and a lot of critique arose. Critique on the handling of the crisis by the EU, but also on the refugees and their culture that is much different from ours. This unfamiliar culture, which we know so little about, scared people mostly, so-called xenophobia (SOURCE). All these stories and opinions made participants Jacob, Ella, Sophie, Mia, Evie curious about these people instead and one way to really get to know this culture and the situation was by going to the hotspot in Europe, the entrance for most refugees into Europe: Lesvos.

“There are two main reasons why I went there. Firstly, I am a raised Christian, so I see it as my Christian duty to be there for my neighbours. Secondly, I think I was slightly prejudiced that people were coming for money, that they are fortune seekers, why do they want to come here, why can’t they stay where they are. Thus, I was sort of prejudiced, I was just curious and wanted to see it with my own eyes... in the media you only hear the misery and when there are riots, they are framed in such a negative manner. The fun and good things you never hear on the news. So, I thought I want to go and see with my own eyes what the situation is like.”

Jacob (September, 2017)

Jacob describes this curiosity he felt perfectly above. For him this curiosity to the unfamiliar was one of the two main reasons to go to Lesvos and do volunteer work at a refugee camp. He is very aware of the prejudice he had towards the refugees and very open and honest about it. Within the tension field he expresses his urge to help on the one hand, relating this to his religion, which will be further discussed in section 6.2.4, and his curiosity towards the unfamiliar on the other hand. He was not the only one who felt like this and for whom this curiosity was intense enough to decide to go on a volunteer trip to Lesvos, Sophie felt the same.

“[...] you hear so much in the media of course on them being fortune seekers and having bad plans... it made me think it couldn’t be that bad, because you don’t take your kids for no reason on this dangerous journey, but I was curious about

this as well. Of course, you know there is war and you see all the images, so it is not a surprise that people flee, but why do they come this way... and all those negative stories, they can't be right, but I don't know because I don't know anyone."

Sophie (September, 2017)

Most participants did not directly mention curiosity as one of their main motivations. However, when asked during the interview they did agree with this term for being a motive. So, Sophie and Jacob are in this case aware of this motive and reasoning behind their decision to go to Lesvos. Sophie reflects back to the children and refers to them as reason why she could not believe the critique the media was spreading. Her story implies her having a lot of questions regarding the situation and she thinks or hopes by going there to get answers.

As Jacob mentions above, religion is a driving force to become a volunteer. He was not the only one who found motivation in his religion, however is there a big difference between the motives and sensemaking of these motives of religious and non-religious volunteers? This will be discussed below.

6.2.4 Role of religion in sensemaking

Eight out of the 19 participants of this study were Christian and the other 11 respondents were non-religious. The religious participants found their motivation for going to Lesvos for a large part in their faith. They see it as their duty to be there for their neighbours and took the opportunity to go to Lesvos motivated by those words, a phenomenon also discussed by Madziva & Chinouya (2017), according to them "Christianity [...] plays a big role in volunteering as it encourages showing love and compassion with God giving the ultimate reward in the afterlife or strength to overcome difficulties such as those faced in caring for children amid limited financial resources" (Madziva & Chinouya, 2017: p. 1130).

Father and daughter Jack and Isabelle were two of the participants that were motivated by their religion.

"We are raised Christians, so it is also something that derives from our faith. In Christianity it is a duty to be there for your neighbour, a point at which you always feel like you are failing. Yes, you do enough and you have to be careful not to act only to soothe your moral sense, but still it is a duty to be there for your neighbours. When you see all those images you start thinking about ways in which you can help and that is when this comes along, that is just how it is."

Jack (September, 2017)

Jack describes the duty you have as a Christian to be there for others, a point which is hard to live up to according to him. The danger is to not only do it to "soothe your moral sense", which is an interesting statement that may have derived from the social context it was said in, as Weick discusses in his seven properties of sensemaking (1995), because the volunteer tourism sector had been discussed earlier on in the interview

regarding the critiques and debate on altruistic and egoistic motives. Mentioning this implies that he felt he needed to say that only fulfilling this duty is not enough, you have to sincerely help, because you want to, not because you need to. This is something that is on his mind, when making or at least explaining the decision to volunteer at Lesvos. He is aware of this field of tension, however does not think it over too much and quickly moves on.

Stichting Livingstone and EuroRelief are Christian organisations, however, non-religious volunteers are also welcome to work for them. Vivian refound her faith during her trip to Lesvos with Stichting Livingstone working in an all-Christian group of youngsters. Below she explains in what ways her faith is part of her motives.

“[...] the last times I definitely thought about it as my duty as a person to help my neighbours so to say, also because I have such a good life and they don’t I can give a little bit of my time to them. That definitely has to do with it. I have to say that especially the last time I took a lot of strength from it, which was very special, because I have been religious my whole life, but never really acted upon it. But, the first time at Lesvos I refound my faith. It developed so to say. That is also why it is a special place for me. The group I travelled with mainly caused this. We had a group of 18 people divided into three groups of six. [...] We had many good conversations together and that is also why...well I felt God’s presence there...”

Poppy (September, 2017)

What is interesting about the motives of non-religious and religious participants in this research is that they are mostly the same. They all speak of this urge to help, the empathy they feel for the refugees, and the feeling that it could have been them, which is further discussed in section 6.2.2. Yet, the religious people clarified their motive to go by being Christian as it is the basic of their religion to help where it is needed, therefore they could not only watch and decided to go help themselves. The non-religious participants had all the same feelings, but mostly linked it to their personality or background. Not being able to link it to faith made it for them very difficult to give an explanation for those feelings and the decision to eventually go and help.

“[...] I have a good life you see, I have it financially good and why would I only live for myself if it is my purpose here on earth to take care of others as well. So, I really see it as my calling, as my duty. Especially, from a Christian point of view, you just have to help the people there and this gives you a great feeling that you can give them a smile, that is the most important thing to me.”

Jacob (September, 2017)

Jacob puts clearly into words what is described above.

Stichting Livingstone/ EuroRelief is all about religion and faith. However, they are very strict on evangelizing at the refugee camp that is not where they stand for, as explained by Harry below.

“EuroRelief is a Christian organisation, but you are not supposed to evangelise within the camp. That you just come there with your bible and hand them out so to say. That is not their intention at all and those people do not want that. That is actually very beautiful them saying let’s express our beliefs in our acts. So, they can see in our behaviour that we are Christians, that we are there for our fellow man and if they want to know something about our religion that is a nice starting point to talk about religion.”

Harry (September, 2017)

Harry is a very interesting participant of the research as he above clearly describes and empathizes with the rules on evangelizing in the refugee camp, while during the interview he also talks about his future dream of becoming a missionary. He was also surprised by the realisation that non-Christian people as well go to Lesvos to volunteer, that it is not just Christians who have this drive to help others in need.

Overall, what struck me is how the religious volunteers talk about helping others as being their duty. To me duty is something you have to do, not necessarily something you want to do in the first place. However, most participants were or became very passionate about the situation at Lesvos and the refugees. Them in search of fulfilling this duty is what brought them to Lesvos in the first place, it is what made them doubt less about the decision to go. They would not only think about going but driven by their beliefs would act upon this feeling. Moreover, the drive of religious and non-religious participants was overall the same, however, their justification differed.

6.3 Secondary motives and sensemaking

There are some motivations directly based on going to Lesvos as a volunteer. This decision comes, however, with more factors that ask for motivations such as, what organisation to go with and for how long to go to Lesvos. The secondary motivations on which participants based their decisions on these topics are often interlinked and influence came from different factors, such as friends and family, rules and guidelines put up by the organisation, or commitments back home. These secondary motives are about the realisation of their trip to Lesvos within real life.

One important decision that had to be made was the duration of the stay at Lesvos. There was a wide range in duration of the trips taken by participants of this study. An important factor in this decision was the organisation they worked for. For example, Because We Carry works with weekly teams and Stichting Livingstone organizes two-week trips. However, often the decision for organisation was based on the length of the trip they wanted to take, so it worked the other way around as well. Important factors in

deciding how long to go were age, health, work, and study. Age mostly because people over 35 often have a family at home, meaning that a week was for them a long enough getaway from them. While volunteers in their twenty's often had a few weeks left at the end of study or during summer and no obligations at home making it possible to go for three weeks or more. Contrarily, study could as well be the factor that made a long stay not possible. Hence, all different factors at home influenced the decision for organisation and duration of the stay or even made the idea of going reality. For example, all these obligations at home, such as children and work, makes it impossible to leave for a longer period of time, the possibility of going on a one week trip with BWC makes it possible to go either way.

Interestingly, a lot of people talked about the one- or two-week trip being too short to make an impact. Some even talked about it being more devastating for the people there, mostly children, than helpful.

“Well, I think that two weeks was a bit too short. You just get to know those people and then you leave without being able to actually do something. You started these small projects but cannot finish them. I think that if you go for about a month or two that would be perfect.”

Mia (Oktober, 2017)

“The first time a week was long enough, but the other times it was too short. The first time was just handing out food and I barely talked to anyone, I talked with volunteers, but not with refugees. The other two times we did breakfast at Kara Tepe and playing with the kids and I find this with those kids... that is just horrible that you leave again. You see those kids developing begging behaviour as well. There were always volunteers handing out presents, it drove me crazy haha.”

Emily (September, 2017)

However, they could not go for longer, as their priorities were with family, work, or study at home. They legitimized their decision for going one or two weeks by explaining it was better than not going at all. Volunteers were needed, so each week was something. Also, they often legitimized their decision saying that by returning multiple times in about one and a half years for one or two weeks is the same as staying for a longer period, as people got to know you and were happy to see you returning. It made them trust people again, so in the end it was all in the best interest for the refugees. Hence, often the short duration of the trip was criticised by the volunteer, after which they started explaining why they decided to go for that period of time anyway.

“On the one hand there is this protocol from Because We Carry saying to not create expectations with the people you meet about friendships and returning. But I'm like if I know I can come back, if I know I can return a couple times per year and give people the feeling that they are not forgotten... even though a friendship is flexible, you can count on it, apart from the messages on Facebook, to see me live again. That gives people trust and hope. So, I stayed in touch with a lot of

people through Facebook. I have about 80 Facebook friends that lived at Kara Tepe or I met on Lesbos and they know Charlie doesn't say goodbye, Charlie says see you later and lives up to that."

Charlie (September, 2017)

Returning to Lesbos was also often based on those factors explained by Charlie. For the people who decided not to return obligations as work and study were named as reason, as they would like to return to Lesbos in the future.

Another important factor in the decision for duration of the trip was money. Money was also one of the reasons people chose for a certain organisation. For Lily and Ella money was one of the motivations behind prolonging their stay. Ella went back home for two weeks and then returned back home for another month of work.

"I was planning to go there for four weeks, so I went and came back after four weeks thinking I don't want to go back home, but I had to, because I had camp week in The Netherlands. I stayed in contact with a girl who was still there and she said jokingly to me to come back, which is when I thought why not. I still had about four more weeks of vacation time, so I thought they need the help and I have the time and the costs you have any way, so let's just go. So, I went back for four more weeks."

Lily (September, 2017)

Lily stayed for another month at the camp instead of travelling as her first plan had been.

"I went there with I don't know a couple of thousand euro's, but I saved a lot and wasn't sure what I wanted to do with it and then I thought well this is also for a good cause. So, I spend about half of my savings after a month working there and I doubted to go travelling or stay for another month. So, I thought what would make me happier... I think staying here will make me happier, so I did. I stayed until I had just enough money left to buy a plane ticket home haha."

Ella (October, 2017)

For others money was the factor that made them definitely decide to go. Several participants of the research that worked for Stichting Livingstone mentioned the low costs of the trip when travelling with that organisation making the decision to go easier.

6.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, there are many factors that influence the decision of a volunteer to go to Lesbos. Resulting in a field of tension between the urge to help, a feeling almost every volunteer discussed, and other motives for going. All volunteers move within this field of tension, however everyone moves differently. Some participants, such as Olivia, were

extremely aware of the field of tension, while others explained their moves within this field with less awareness.

This chapter clearly outlines the struggles every volunteer encounters during the process of deciding to become a volunteer, and by trying to put this into words. A process that shift and shapes over the course of the trip throughout the volunteer's experiences, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

7

Making Sense of Experiences and Transformations

The previous chapter discussed the participant's motives to do volunteer work with refugees at Lesvos. Those motives came often with ideas and expectations of the situation in Lesvos and the role they could play as a volunteer in this situation. The trip itself was often an experience that differed in many ways from any of the expectations the volunteers had pre-trip. These experiences were the basis for the decision whether or not to return to Lesvos as a volunteer. This chapter will dive into these experiences and the ways in which the volunteers make sense of them. Their sensemaking of the experiences they had and the transformations they go through as a person show the struggles that came with the process of being a volunteer. The surprises and realisations of certain aspects of the trip relate to the pre-trip expectations they had either consciously or unconsciously. Next to that, the decision of becoming a volunteer is often linked to a certain goal they want to achieve to make their trip a success. Experience showed whether or not these goals were realistic to achieve, which may have led to the adaptation of their goals to these experiences. In what ways do the volunteers make sense of their experiences and transformations?

The chapter is divided into three subsections: Firstly, goals in relation to the experiences will be discussed. Secondly, the transformative experience of the volunteer is outlined and lastly the experiences and expectations are analysed in regard to sensemaking.

7.1 Experiences vs. pre-trip goals

As discussed in the previous chapter the decision to go to Lesvos and work with refugees is based on several motivations. Making this decision also comes with ideas on what you want to achieve or realise during your trip as a volunteer, so-called goals to fulfil in order to make your trip successful. These goals are based upon expectations the volunteer has of the situation and his or her role within that situation at Lesvos. The volunteers have ideas on what they want to bring to the scene and the refugees there, but also about what they want to gain themselves. However, experience as a volunteer might turn out different and goals may be adapted during the trip. Not every participant of this research thought about goals as much as the other, however they all did think about it for a little bit as it was often a question asked by the host organisation as well. The goals the volunteers started with were not always achieved or the trip brought them even more than they could have expected before departing. Those extras were often reason to return to Lesvos as a volunteer in the future. When asked if they would recommend anyone to go on the same trip each and every one of the participants said yes. These

goals, new goals, motives to return, and positive recommendations, and the ways in which the volunteer makes sense of all this will be discussed in this section of the chapter. Amelia describes her expectation below.

“I was strongly attracted to Lesvos, because I felt like at that moment it was acute. I had the hope it might be something temporarily and that we would really put something together. I thought we would bring in a couple of 100 of those boats and then it would be done, all those people will be here and it will stop. Very naïvish and at the same time realising, but maybe really when I came there, how apocalyptic it was, such an unimaginable amount of people.

Amelia (August, 2017)

Amelia describes above her idea of the crisis when she decided to become a volunteer. This image she describes of it being acute and temporarily and therefore going there came with the expectation and goal to “really put something together” implies that she thought to be part of the solution to the whole crisis going on at Lesvos or even Europe at that time. This idea of being part of the solution and the experience leading to the realisation that they are not or that there may not even be a solution is what more participants experienced.

“Yes, I did think I will go there and, I don’t know, change everything or something. At the end that’s of course not the case at all... You just work your shifts for two weeks and then you go home. You’re not changing anything doing that... you just let it run. I was definitely a bit mistaken about that.”

Harry (September, 2017)

Even though this initial idea did not work out, as Harry describes above, 11 participants of the research did decide to return to Lesvos. This decision was based on the experience they had the first time and the fact that they felt needed and effective during their stay even though they could not solve the problems going on there and in Europe regarding the crisis. So, where did they get this feeling of being needed and useful from? Well, they often found it in personal contact and friendships they created with the refugees living at Lesvos. A perfect example of this phenomenon is Ava, she has returned to Lesvos for about 13 times and counting, over the years she found her passion in being there for refugees either at Lesvos or in The Netherlands, offering them a hand, finding their power, but never giving them money. Her initial goal she describes below.

“Initially, I went there just to help people. I mean, I have a good life, I have three children, I am a single mom and I thought what would I do if I had to leave everything and how nice would it be if someone would help me. So, that was the reason actually. [...] Yeah and I have been homeless myself in The Netherlands with my children, so I know a little bit how it feels. So, I think that is also part of the motivation.”

Ava (September, 2017)

So, very broadly her initial goal was to “just help people”, based on this identification discussed in chapter 6. This may seem vague and broad, however, it clearly explains the road Ava took over the two years she has been going to Lesbos as a volunteer. As she cannot solve the problems in the camps, in Europe or in the home countries of the refugees, to achieve her goal to help people she focuses on the people. She became friends with many refugees, slept illegal at camps in Greece, took refugees in her home, and helps them to practice their passion. She has decided to distance herself from organisations, such as Because We Carry as they would not allow such intense relationships with refugees as she is having, which is part of the professionalization of the organisation discussed in chapter 5. All this implies her not finding the satisfaction she wants in just helping at the camps, she wants to see progress, thus, she focuses on individuals, which is the only way to actually be part of a solution and see progress in this major crisis. Below some quotes to express her input and involvement in the situation:

“Look, I have a list of people whom I have been seeing for over a year already and this morning I got a message again saying ‘Oh I miss you, when are you coming back to Lesbos’, you know. So, that ... and the only thing you do is listen to their story, have dinner together once, and just like I said I don’t give money, I want to collect things, also money, but I don’t just go their with my own money and give that. Because, I belief that people should be self-sufficient, thus also should be put in their power and yeah those kind of people I do find, and I try to put them in their power.”

Ava (September, 2017)

“You can only really work for people if you get in contact with them. I very much believe that these people the longer they are stuck there the more trauma’s they will get. You can keep them busy with anything and everything, but it is just filling up time and the moment they are at their house, or hut or camper or whatever they call it these days, in silence that is when the emotions will come out anyway. How many times I haven’t gotten messages from boys who live there with whom I banded quite good, who suffer from something and I will call them and we will talk for 10 or 15 minutes and then it’s just... then they just feel a bit unloaded.”

Ava (September, 2017)

Her involvement may seem intense, however, she is one of just a few participants that actually criticized the approach of organisations and made the decision to take her own path. The last times she went to Lesbos without pre-joining an organisation and she went to help Home for A Day, the organisation of restaurant owners Nikos and Katharina discussed in chapter 5. Her main critique is with the lack of focus on mental help for the refugees, discouraging volunteer-refugee contact according to her does not help with mental problems either. She goes as far as stating that NGOs want to keep the refugees dependent:

“[...] what strikes me most is that it seems like they want to keep people dependent, because if they are dependent they still have an NGO.”

Ava (September, 2017)

“[...] I see that helping alone doesn't work. [...] Look, initially people need that. They are tired, overly tired, then it's nice to have a warm welcome and being pampered for a bit. But, after that and definitely when people are stuck at one place for so long, that doesn't work anymore.”

Ava (September, 2017)

Other participants had more basic and achievable goals, mostly about helping the refugee or just giving them a good experience. The volunteer is in search of usefulness and fulfilment during their trip, which is often a conformation of them achieving their goals.

“[...] If I can bring a smile to the face of one refugee my trip will be successful.”

Poppy (September, 2017)

“Just roll up one's sleeves and see what I can do for these people. That.”

Jessica (September, 2017)

Poppy's goal about making just one refugee smile again implies that she went there to give the refugee a good experience and let them forget about the misery they went through and are still going through. While Jessica's goal is much more practical in the sense that she wants to help to keep the organisation in the camp going. Both of these goals are mentioned by many of the participants, but often as part of the experience and as reason to return. They feel needed, as the food needs to be distributed, therefore volunteers are needed. The experience they had whereby they had fun with the refugees often made them want to go back. Unlike Poppy for most of the refugees this experience came unexpected, but was highly valued.

The experience that gave the volunteer something extra as a person and stayed with them the most, had always to do with the contact between volunteer and refugee. This, for some, quite intense contact was an experience they did not consider before departing. For some of the volunteers that were motivated to go to Lesvos out of curiosity this contact made them view the situation completely different. For all participants that have returned to Lesvos over the years, this intense contact and the friendships they have built with refugees staying at the camps was their main motivation for returning. For some these friendships continued via technology when back home, for others these friendships were mainly something at Lesvos during that time. In this contact many volunteers found the fulfilment and feeling of usefulness they needed.

“The warmth and thankfulness shows how much they appreciate you helping there. Oh and actually, how can I think about this later, some of them have learned quite some English so you'll be fine, but they also really like to sing and dance and at that first Sunday the first group would leave and we were there as

new group and the old group took the breakfast boys to have lunch at the restaurant of Nikos and Katherina. So, we are sitting at a table and at some point they start singing a song in Farsi, you know the Afghan boys, and you don't understand a word they say, but you feel it very intensely and a few of us were actually crying... you just feel what it is about. So, at the end we asked them what's it about and it was about the loss of a loved one and never being able to see them again and that was clearly felt."

Sophie (September, 2017)

Sophie describes above how she felt the warmth and gratefulness of the refugees, she did not expect to have such intense and emotional contact with people whom you cannot understand. An experience shared by many others.

"I did not expect that you could have such intense contact with people whom you barely understand."

Ava (September, 2017)

The people who have returned to Lesvos often talk about the refugees as their friends and the religious participants of the research call them their brothers and sisters. Very intense feelings that came unexpected as the refugees and volunteers can often barely understand each other. Interestingly many of the participants talk about keeping their distance when they have returned to The Netherlands, an exception here is participant Ava, however they often keep track of each other through social media. The, overly, discussing and search for approval and usefulness can be linked to the critique on volunteer tourism and the impact of the volunteer tourist of being of actual use. This comes forward within the sensemaking, as well as their construction of identity of doing good (Weick, 1995).

The goals turned out in sometimes very different experiences, however, for all this trip to Lesvos was a transformative experience, which will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

7.2 A transformative experience

All participants talk about what the trip has meant to them, in what ways it changed them personally in their thinking and acting, and sometimes even changed their life goals or helped them find these life goals. This personal development is for them highly valued and often the main reason for them to recommend this trip to others. In accordance to the statement of Brown (2005) regarding the volunteer tourist, the volunteer worker at Lesvos, as well mentions self-fulfilment and personal growth as a main outcome of the trip in many of the cases. This section of the thesis will go into this transformative experience and the sensemaking hereof by the volunteer.

An interesting change happened to the volunteers that initially went out of curiosity, the experience made them see the whole situation differently. Oliver explains this phenomenon in a drastic manner.

“Look, everyone has his or her own opinion and I think that you need to experience it. I am convinced that if I could take Geert Wilders for a week he would also understand, because you need to have seen it and you have to experience. Well, you cannot experience, but you have to see how these people struggle day by day trying to survive and well than you will understand.”

Oliver (September, 2017)

I found Oliver a fascinating participant of this research as during our interview he came with a PowerPoint presentation, making it difficult to actually have a conversation, as it felt like he was giving me a rehearsed talk. He explained he also talked about his experiences as a volunteer at high schools, so it probably was indeed a rehearsed talk. In this talk he was very much on the side of the refugees, framing himself as ‘representative of refugees’ in the way he talked. It felt like he was trying to convince me about the good nature of the refugee and the many reasons why I should do volunteer work at Lesvos as well. He did this by giving many random facts and showing pictures. This implies he is very passionate about his work as volunteer and the refugee situation on Lesvos. I was not always convinced his stories and facts were completely true, however like Weick’s (1995) property of plausibility states, it is not about the accuracy of the story it is about the explanations and reasoning behind it. Most of the participant became ‘representative of the refugee’, which might have been a big part of the reason they agreed to do the interview in the first place. They take this ambassadors role upon themselves back in The Netherlands. However, Oliver was extreme in his behaviour, shown in his quote on reasons why everyone should become a volunteer at Lesvos below.

“You find yourself in such a different world and you gain so much beauty out of it. It is good in all possible ways: for your English, for your communication, you get to know different people, you see different cultures, you learn something about the world, you are at a beautiful island, with the amazing Greek culture, everyone and everything is nice and just to be able to something like this for two weeks or a year or even longer is absolutely beautiful.”

Oliver (September, 2017)

Within this statement Oliver sketches an overly positive image of being a volunteer at Lesvos, it seems like he wants to convince you to go to Lesvos, by completely blocking out the poignant sides of the experience and making it sound like the perfect holiday experience. Oliver has found his passion in being a volunteer at Lesvos and even states that he will go and live there in the future, he has returned to Lesvos many times over the last two years. His intense commitment is outlined in the few words below; his personal transformation might be the most extreme, from being an architecture intern to wanting to live at Lesvos working with refugees.

“Yes, I wouldn’t stay for anything in The Netherlands, even if I had to spend the rest of my life in camp Moria, I would still go.”

Oliver (September, 2017)

Many of the participants of this research decided to return to Lesvos for a second time or some for even more times. As discussed before they mainly motivated this decision on feeling useful and the personal fulfilment they got from the first trip they took. Those feelings were often based on the thankfulness and hospitality they received from the refugees. Each participant was asked whether or not they would recommend anyone to take the same trip as them, and each participant said yes. This was mainly motivated by the personal growth they experienced during their time as a volunteer.

Olivia, “Of course, something interesting is happening to yourself as well and that was of course very valuable for myself. Because, you think you have quite an altruistic personality and well that is pretty disappointing.” Amelia, “All those things that you just get thrown back to depending on yourself and each other and, well, that definitely brought me something. But, what struck me the most is that I still don’t understand the whole situation and at the moment it is quite intense again.”

Olivia & Amelia (August, 2017)

“Well, I did not really know what to expect, but it could neither disappoint or become better. But, I have to say that the experience really changed me as a person. I am thinking more realistically about the whole situation, but also how good my life is, I became more thankful for what I have. But, I also found my passion, what I want to do.”

Poppy (September, 2017)

“I also think that you start to appreciate these people for who they are, how they are, how they stand with their beliefs, for me religion is also very important. Although, Christian and Muslim are of course two completely different religions, but that doesn’t mean that they are less for us. Many times it’s on both sides you know, Christians and Muslims say no good about the other religion. Actually, religion should not be standing in between us; we are one and the same. We are all, let’s say, friends and brothers of each other and we should accept each other therein. I do think that it is mostly fetching mutual respect. That you understand why these people do those things, because you know the underlying thought that it is part of their culture or something like that.”

Jacob (September, 2017)

Olivia, Amelia, Poppy, and Jacob discuss some of the personal lessons they learned being a volunteer, the transformative experience the trip was for them. Olivia and Amelia are very self-analysing as they mainly were shocked by their own egoistic motives. What Poppy describes is what many of the participants discussed, the thankfulness she felt for all the things she has being born in The Netherlands. Those lessons were also mainly the

argument for recommending anyone to become a volunteer. Which are, thus, often mainly self-development reasons and not per se altruistic reasons, however the need for volunteers is also often mentioned. Jacob as well discusses the personal lesson he learned, to become more accepting of other cultures and religions.

All participants of this study would recommend a volunteer trip to Lesvos to everyone, which implies them having enjoyed the experience in such a way that others should experience it too. The reasons they gave for the recommendation were two-folded, the personal transformation, as discussed above, played a large role. Next to that, the need for volunteers by the organisations in Lesvos was often mentioned as well.

Isabelle, “It makes you aware of how good your life is here and that those people don’t do this without reason...” Jack, “Yes, but I also think that help is needed there. It’s just really needed and like I said if there would be fewer requirements... I would also want to go for another time. I mean I wouldn’t say no in the future, I really believe that the planning must remain full so to say.”

Isabelle & Jack (September, 2017)

“Because for one thing it is needed. It is needed for the refugees. As a person you will go through a development whether you want to or not. Mostly positive I think. You can find out after two weeks that it might not be for you, but often they grow in compassion for those people and I find that very important. They are useful; they feel useful whether you are lonely in The Netherlands or you are struggling with things, you can really be there for someone there and that is very important. It is also important to come in contact with different cultures and see the human in the refugees.”

Harry (September, 2017)

Isabelle and Jack and Harry name both of these experiences that form the recommendation for others. Isabelle first mentions the personal lessons and transformation experienced by becoming a volunteer; Jack adds the necessity of volunteers regarding the situation on Lesvos. He points back to the professionalization of NGOs as being the reason for him not to return to Lesvos for now. Harry firstly mentions the need of volunteers at Lesvos, quickly followed by the personal transformation of the volunteer. He clearly finds this last one the most important development of the volunteer experience. Several other participants also are focussed more on the personal transformation they went through as volunteer as the reason to recommend the trip to others.

“The experience is just very good. Yes and well I think it’s a great experience, because you can see it with your own eyes. Some people start looking at it differently than they did before, because you start looking differently at this society and well the whole consumer society we have here. I just think it’s all good for your own development, if you can speak of that, for your own view on the world.”

Jessica (September, 2017)

“Because it’s good for you, a beautiful experience from which you learn a lot about ways to deal with people and you learn to be humble as well. But also the many people you get to know there and you can really make a difference. [...] So, actually just because it’s needed and because you learn a lot from it, it’s a beautiful experience.”

Lily (September, 2017)

“I do think that for a lot of people it would be could to go there, to realise what all we have here. [...] I wouldn’t say recommend, but more grant because of all you learn about your own life and about those people, receiving the thankfulness and just being useful.”

Sophie (September, 2017)

As discussed above thankfulness and feeling useful are important lessons the volunteers learned from their experience. As discussed in chapter 6, thankfulness for being born in The Netherlands was often a motive to go to Lesbos in the first place. This motive has been reinforced by the experience the volunteers had on Lesbos and it was often mentioned as result of the overall experience of the volunteer, an experience, according to them, anyone should have, a lesson everyone should learn. This recommendation reflects what the volunteers found the most valuable about the experience, which is thus often the personal transformation. The trip opened their eyes in several ways, an experience they want others to have as well. This explains as well the ambassadors’ role many took after the first trip, feeling like they are a representative of the refugee.

These reflections and experiences were for many of the participants of the research of such value that they decide to return to Lesbos, and keep returning over the years.

“It’s something that will never be finished and it’s not up to me to finish it or to solve all the problems. But, it has just moved me and touched me in such a way that it became my call of duty, my calling.” [...] “This is because of the thankfulness you receive in return. The social aspect, cosiness, and well mostly I think so they forget the situation they are in for a moment, they feel human again. It’s not disgraceful when we play soccer with 50 people the entire Sunday, we make sure to have enjoyable games from beginning to end, we make sure there are food and drinks, that’s just amazing for those guys. They can be themselves again for a moment without being scared of what’s going to happen and what’s coming. Of course the whole situation is hopeless, but that is why I think I can be there for them and why I want to help where I can.”

Oliver (September, 2017)

“But what maybe struck me the most and I find that the most important aspect, even though they are in this extremely bizarre situation through sports you can really give them joy. The first trip we played an hour of volleyball or football almost every day and you could see them blossom. [...] that is where you can let them

forget about their situation and that was really beautiful. That was maybe even my main motivation to return the next year. I thought I cannot change everything, but I can let them smile again.”

Harry (September, 2017)

The motivations some participants, like Poppy’s as discussed previously in this chapter, had pre-trip, like letting the refugees smile again, many volunteers developed through the experience of being a volunteer and became the reasons for many of the participants to return to Lesvos. For them this fun they had together with the refugees was a conformation for being valued at the camp.

Some of the volunteers found their calling in being a volunteer at a refugee camp in Lesvos. Volunteers Poppy, Evie, Oliver, and Ava found their passion in life, the thing they want to continue working and studying in. More volunteers continued working with refugees either by returning or engaging with organisations in The Netherlands.

7.3 Experiences, expectations and sensemaking

Every volunteer creates expectations before departing on their trip. For some those expectations were easier to put into words than for others. Many participants discussed their expectations when telling about their experiences at the field, the things they were shocked about or found surprising tell something about what they were expecting. During analysis of the data I found that the participants discussed two types of expectations: firstly, the ones that represent the situation in Lesvos, for example about the refugees, the camps, and the other volunteers. Secondly, the expectations about themselves and their way of handling and reacting to the different situations they are put in, often these two types of expectations are linked to each other. Evie, a participant of the research who worked in a warehouse and not in one of the refugee camps, discusses both types of expectations below.

“I sort of had this idea like they were pitiful people... and that was so not confirmed. By the way, mostly not even by things I saw myself, but by other volunteers who shared their experiences with me. For example, during lunch in the warehouse we would share stories, well I mostly listened. People talked about them not being pitiful people and they don’t want to be seen like that either you know. They are people who had a very rich and beautiful life, which BAM disappeared like that. People who came with loads of money... that was maybe the biggest expectation I unknowingly had. I thought wauw this was wrong of me, also from a sociologist point of view, I did not go in very objectively. How could I have seen it like that?”

Evie (October, 2017)

So, on the one hand Evie talks about this subconscious expectation she had on the refugees being pitiful, which was changed by the many stories she heard of volunteers that did work at the camps. On the other hand she discusses the sort of disappointment she felt in herself for having this unconscious expectation, which can imply that she did

not expect herself to have this sort of assumptions of the refugees. So, the experience made her realise what she was expecting in the first place.

Ella talks about having a failed expectation of herself as well.

“At first I worked a lot in the harbour, but the week I started working there, or the two weeks, quite a lot of people drowned and some pretty heavy stuff happened. A child I took from a lifeboat just died in my arms. Yeah that is... heavy. You bring him to an ambulance, but you already know it's too late. Well, it was I think my second day when that happened. Well, I couldn't really handle that so to say, which I didn't expect. So, I said to myself, I don't know maybe very selfish, but I can't handle this. I did that for two weeks after which I cried while Skyping with my parents, because I just wanted to leave... eventually I went to Moria.”

Ella (October, 2017)

Ella was one of the participants that worked along the shore at the end of 2015. She was at Lesvos during the end of the first and beginning of the second phase discussed in chapter 5. During her time at the shore she experienced things, such as the dead of a child in her arms, that had such an emotional impact on her making her decide to change her location to camp Moria for her own health. While telling this story she legitimizes her decision by saying: “maybe it is very selfish of me”, implying that she feels like she should have stayed for the refugees, almost attacking herself for making this decision, choosing for herself. She did not expect herself to react like this on the situation at the shore of Lesvos and felt disappointed for not being the person she did expect or hoped she was. These two examples show the impact of the experiences on the volunteer mentally and the guilt they feel for expecting otherwise. As Ella discusses it was definitely not all fun and games. However, many volunteers also speak with surprise about the often-good atmosphere at the camp, so an expectation they had about the situation that turned out different in a more positive way, like Emily explains below.

“Well, the cosiness is something I never expected. How much fun it is for yourself to do, I never expected that. Or never expected, I did not go there reluctantly otherwise I would not have gone. But, the cosiness and fun between the people in particular.”

Emily (September, 2017)

The surprise Emily felt for the cosy atmosphere at the camp and the fun she had working there was an experience more participants share. However, these were mostly all volunteers who have worked at camp Kara Tepe, or volunteers who worked in early Moria and also described the changes in atmosphere over the years, the differences between the two camps have been discussed into further detail in chapter 5. Unconsciously they did not expect it to be so much fun for themselves and with the people both working and living at the camp. Isla describes this atmosphere of the people in the camp as well.

“It was also very beautiful. There was a party every Saturday for the entire camp, the women, men and children. For us it’s mostly keeping an eye on the strollers, the parents went completely crazy, which you want them to do. I still get Goosebumps thinking about it. All those nationalities together holding hands making the heart sign.”

Isla (August, 2017)

Participant Jack discusses the unexpected extra’s he did not consider before leaving for Lesbos, like the impact on the local population and the environment.

“When you see what this all means for the local population. That is also something you learn there. The tourism industry is completely gone and those people are also very happy for you to stay in their hotel for a week, eat at a restaurant, because otherwise they would have no income at all. Greece itself is of course financially aground, so those people suffer too. However, if you see the entire coastline covered in life jackets, it’s just one orange glow 10 km long. That’s also environmental problems what you see there, broken rubber boats, outboard engines leaking oil, everything just lies along the shore, a huge pile really.”

Jack (September, 2017)

7.3.1 Perspective of Misery

In line with the camp ethos, what was as well interesting when asking about expectation, experiences and whether the experience was better or worse than expected is that several participants of the research talk about the experience of the situation in the camp being much better than the expectations they had pre-trip. Lily, who worked at camp Moria, was one of the participants that questioned this first impression.

“I thought there would be a lot of misery and that it’s a pretty intense situation in a refugee camp. I expected people living in tents and it all being very heavy and when I came there I found it better than expected. But... when after a while you realise, or I realised that the people may not be living in tents, at least they weren’t then now there are many people living in tents again, but they are still stuck there in packed isoboxes and those buildings and containers. [...] EuroRelief had a clothing container, so people could get clothes every few weeks and every day they got three meals arranged by the government and people were, thus, living in isoboxes. I expected there to be more chaos so to say, that it would be less organised... and well those things were organised. But still, if you walk through the camp you start thinking like the food is not something I would like to eat for a year, and the clothing container closed, so that’s over. It’s dependent on gifts from people now. The camp wasn’t as full as it is now, so now people are living in tents again and the people that are living in isoboxes live there with 20 people on a surface you don’t want to live on with 20 people. Yes, so at first sight it seemed to be quite good, but...”

Lily (September, 2017)

However, there are also volunteers who did not question this first impression, and sometimes it felt like they lost the perspective of misery. These were, however, mostly participants who, as mentioned before, worked at camp Kara Tepe during the third timeframe discussed in chapter 5. One of those participants was Isla, who worked at Kara Tepe in May 2017.

“I have seen much on TV and so I went to Lesvos at which you have camp Moria, which is hell. Large gates with barked wire and many depressed boys. So, that was the image I had. Plus all the warnings you get pre-trip... Don’t let it get too close to you, indicate on time when you cannot handle it anymore. I thought my God what are we up to and then we arrive there and it is such a beautiful camp. It is just well designed and it was already a running machine. [...] Thus, you do of course have this image and you saw pictures making you think they show it like that probably a bit better than reality will be. Well, it was 100 times better than expected, it really was. This may sound awful, but it really was a relieve haha. They just got isoboxes, so there were no tents. There was a small Wi-Fi point, large washrooms, well it was a luxury camping so to say.”

Isla (August, 2017)

Isla is certainly not the only participant that mostly felt relieve when first arriving at Lesvos. She describes being relieved by the infrastructure in the camp, as there are several facilities and most people no longer live in tents but so-called isoboxes. Her initial expectations were based on the images she saw of camp Moria, images she still assumes are true, as she has never been to the camp herself.

Participant Oliver, who worked mostly along the shore and in camp Moria, goes as far as stating that the refugees have been through the hardest part of their journey.

“Well yes they certainly still have a long road ahead of them, a very heavy road. I do think that the hardest part is over, though. Here they will probably get robbed or threatened, but the stories I heard of people travelling from Syria through Turkey at the shore of Turkey, how they are treated by smugglers.” [...] “In Moria there are people who have been there for 18 months already. That is just immense long. But no bombs are dropped, there are no shootings and that is, well it’s terrible what they go through there as well, also in the camp, for the large part psychological because of the things they saw and experienced. But it’s no longer life threatening.”

Oliver (September, 2017)

Based on the stories that the refugees have told him Oliver states that the refugees have been through the hardest part of their journey. His arguments for this statement are all based upon safety. It is, according to Oliver, no longer a life-threatening situation the refugees are in, no more bombs and no more shootings. This implies that Oliver bases his idea of misery upon safety. He states it very static, however he does find the situation in the camp terrible and realises many refugees have psychological issues, it is just not as

terrible as it has been before they arrived in the camp. This quote is another example of his extreme way of outing things, but he probably just wants to show what horrific experiences the refugee goes through before even entering Europe, as discussed in Weick's property of plausibility (1995). Later on in his story he contradicts this as he explains what it is the refugees are looking for:

"They are looking for what we have but don't realise and that's just it, that's just it." *So, what is this according to you?* "Well, you have several different refugees: economic, war, political, poverty, climate, and often they are seen as one and the same, those refugees or those black people. What are they looking for... well that little bit of peace and quiet, of happiness, what we have but don't realise. So, the things we turn into First World Problems that is what they would like to have not as a problem. Well, that is for them the primary reason for coming in the first place." *What do you mean with peace and quite, like safety?* "Safety indeed, but also to feel human again, because that is impossible in such a camp, at the Turkish shore, with the smugglers, and at their country of origin. Because the situation is so serious that they can't stay or stay in safety. They cannot live in peace as we are so used to... I think."

Oliver (September, 2017)

7.3.2 Surprising experiences and sensemaking

The participants of this research were full of stories about their experiences: the doubts, the surprises, conversations, and people they met being a volunteer. The refugee camps in Lesvos are filled with refugees from all over the world, mostly Syrian and Afghan, but also Nepalese, Moroccan, and Eritrean next to many others. The volunteers working in the camp are also coming from all over the world and they are all situated in host country Greece. All those cultures coming together were the basis of many of the stories the participants told. Safety is one of these topics that created surprising experiences for several volunteers. Some of the participants thought about safety pre-trip, while others did not think about it that much. Some expressed their surprise by how safe they felt walking alone through the camp, like Harry who worked at camp Moria during the summer of 2016 and 2017.

"That's the bizarre thing. You feel... even though one day there might be a 1000 man rioting and the other day nothing happens, you still feel completely safe. Of course they say in the beginning not to walk alone blah blah blah, but it's nonsense you know, you can walk alone easily and they know that. So, I feel 100% safe.

That's fun you know that you just go in with someone and think by yourself they could murder me easily and it will take hours before someone knows where I went, but that's not a concern at all, which is very beautiful."

Harry (September, 2017)

Harry discusses here how safe he felt at the camp, even though his experience with rioting during his stay. He was clearly analysing this phenomenon of safety before and during his trip, as he discusses the thoughts going through his head about murder when entering someone's home. Amelia and Emily discuss their feelings of safety below.

“At one point I felt completely pleasant at the camp, I felt safe. I actually thought that we might feel unsafe mostly, that there might be lots of groping or you know that you could not walk in the dark, because it’s some kind of hell. That was not the case at all, those people were very friendly and sweet and it is very safe.”

Amelia (August, 2017)

“I remember a moment at the first camp where there were Dixie toilets and I had to walk past a group of men who were sitting around a fire and I noticed that I felt completely safe to just walk around here. So, apparently it was on my mind. Here in The Netherlands I wouldn’t walk past a large group of men that easily, you always get something.”

Emily (September, 2017)

Interesting here is the, either expected or unexpected, assumptions of insecurity in the camps related to being a woman and the realisation of the assumption when it turned out to be very safe. Emily here relates this experience to the situation in The Netherlands and concludes that she felt safer at the camp than on the streets in her home country. This comparison implies the assumption of the camp being more insecure than the streets in The Netherlands. Ava discusses this, to her as well surprising realisation, as well. For her this realisation was one of the reasons she found her passion in helping and working with refugees.

“I just noticed that the situation sketched in The Netherlands is not a good representation of the actual situation there. [...] There is a lot of aggression towards Muslims of course. Much fear. Mainly fear that is created by publicity and media. When we came back after a week, well you know it was a mixed feeling of beautiful solidarity and many things done with the Greek population and helping many people. At some point when we were there the ferries were on a strike, so more people came and everyone was very friendly, saw a lot of fear, a lot of misery as well. What you notice is those people are happy with what you give and that can be just a hug and then you return and you see demonstrations against asylum centres. There were these people well I call them pigheads who... and Wilders being very active and at that point I felt more scared in The Netherlands than I did there, which was a weird phenomenon for me too. I was thinking about how I walked between all those people who lost everything and that I came back and thought I find this a much scarier place.”

Ava (September, 2017)

Ava discusses the transformation she went through in perspective towards her own culture. When asked about culture and whether or not they were aware of the differences in culture between volunteer and refugee most volunteers explained the thankfulness they felt for being born in The Netherlands. Olivia and Amelia were very aware of the privileges they have being Dutch opposed to the refugees, their experience regarding culture was opposite of that of Ava.

Are you much aware about your ethnicity, being Western? Olivia, “Yes, very much.” *Why is that on your mind?* Amelia, “Because you are everything they are not, in their eyes you are everything, or have everything what they don’t have and you cannot explain that we are not emancipated enough, that we also don’t have money. All those things, all those differences in ethnicity that’s just very complex.” Olivia, “And at the same time you also thought wait a minute guys! You know hahaha. Also secretly. Of course.” Amelia, “Yes, and still, I still think that. Stop it.” Olivia, “That you become a bit protective or something. That you think what are you all doing here, with so many. That I found very confrontational as well.” Amelia, “Yes definitely, I mean there have been terrorist attack since then of course, quite a lot in Europe. I don’t say that I become more coloured, because I think... I mean look at America those neo-Nazis, I mean they are hidden everywhere. The extremists also come from these countries. But, it has actually become more complex in my head the whole situation and why I cannot do anymore at the moment.” Olivia, “No and the welcoming at the border. When I was standing there I thought well... Welcome, but only than realising what that implies. It’s not about well you are here, but it is only starting. That is very clear.” Amelia, “And knowing that almost nothing succeeds. Of course there are success stories in the media of young boys who are studying to become a doctor now and who got a scholarship for a job or whatever. But in general the largest part are still in asylum centres, miserable.” Olivia, “Yes, they do it for their kids.”

Olivia & Amelia (August, 2017)

Olivia and Amelia interestingly discuss the protective feelings they had towards their home country seeing all those refugees arrive on shore at Lesvos. However, by adding the “secretly” it is implied that having those thoughts is not what they want to share, they are maybe a bit ashamed of it. By explaining that they felt like they are everything the refugee wants to be Amelia implies that she feels uncomfortable in her privileges at that place. She also implies that she thinks the refugees are in search of mostly wealth, and other aspects we have, something participant Oliver discusses as well. Olivia explains the confrontation she felt with herself by having those protective feelings.

Olivia and Amelia were at Lesvos in the second phase discussed in chapter 5. They worked both at Afghan Hill and along the shore for organisation Because We Carry. The refugee stream overwhelmed them and Amelia & Olivia see it as a phenomenon that skips a generation. Parents take this trip and sacrifice their happiness for the wellbeing of their children.

Amelia, “It’s just a mass movement. Really a mass movement and you see that people stop thinking for themselves, but really for their children. It’s an evolutionary phenomenon you see happening there.” Olivia, “People come all this way for survival of the species.”

Amelia & Olivia (August, 2017)

Another unexpected experience for them was the sometimes absence of thankfulness from the refugees, which is in contrast to what other participants shared. They perfectly explain the frustration they sometimes felt as a volunteer, as it is often no more than doing dirty work, making long hours, and not always getting the appreciation you seek.

Olivia, “And then you stood there cleaning up their mess, because it was one big mess. You were cleaning up their mess and they were looking at you like what are you doing. WELL, CLEANING UP YOUR MESS hahaha.” Amelia, “Yes and a minute later they just throw it back on the ground. That frustrated me immensely.

I was like I am here and my child is at home alone and I am here for you, you know, be a bit grateful. You assume of course that it will be only gratitude, but it’s not.” Olivia, “I found that actually very good.” Amelia, “Yes it was good and it made the reality check for us of course and we laughed so much, also because you need to unload now and then. Sometimes you just stupidly start hugging people.

And you know sometimes I was just angry, because there are all these Roma’s earning money on telephone cards or illegal money exchange or they steal people’s phones. Well, that made me furious. I did not expect there to be such a mini-industry already. But also one son death is another man’s bread. Guys are strolling the beaches searching for boat engines. As soon as a boat arrives someone takes the engine and he doesn’t think about people leaving the boat first, no the engine must be taken, because that’s worth money.” Olivia, “The last man barely left the boat or the boat was dismantled within five minutes.”

Amelia & Olivia (August, 2017)

Olivia & Amelia had in some aspects a very different experience and mindset than many other participants of this study, which partly has to do with the timeframe they took the trip in, beginning of the second timeframe as discussed in chapter 5. Their openness and revelations were very interesting. They both did not return to Lesvos, however they maintained working with refugees either in The Netherlands or elsewhere in Europe. Olivia & Amelia were not the only participants that sometimes felt uncomfortable in their role as volunteer. Emily clearly explains the struggles she sometimes felt in her role as volunteer in relation to the refugees living in the camp.

“One of the tasks was at some point to do lice control. You had to go by all the tents, knock on doors and explain what you came for with hands and feet, although sometimes there was text in Arabic and Farsi for when the lice control came, or demonstrate with a comb on each other. I thought those people didn’t ask for this and every idiot knows how to take care of lice... so, I found it actually a bit embarrassing to do. Because... imaging someone knocking on your door saying they are lice control hahaha. I think it’s a good thing that people know we have lice combs for if you have lice, well you will notice soon enough, I found it very patronizing.”

Emily (September, 2017)

The situation Emily explains above is a situation sketched by more of the participants. The balance of power between the volunteer and the refugee or the lack in balance of power. As volunteer you have a supervising role, which includes distributing food, assigning homes, and other tasks such as the lice project. At the same time you are in good contact with many refugees and working with some of them. Emily, as well as other participants of this research, struggles with her role in being a supervisor to people who she wants to see as her equals and visa versa.

What many of the volunteers also experienced as a surprise was the mutual hatred among the refugees with different cultural backgrounds. Harry explains the situation clearly below.

“Yes, the mutual hatred. I thought you are all from the Middle East, which is a very negative image of them all coming from the Middle East to here and then start fighting and arguing together. But, what we don’t realise is the extreme hatred there is between Iran and Afghanistan I believe. If you put all those ruffs together, without a wife or family or responsibility, well then it goes wrong. That shocked me quite a bit, I really thought: come on just act normal. I also saw one Afghan kid running on the street and there were all these mothers there from Iran children or so, I am not sure whether the countries are correct, but at some point those children start hitting and kicking that one boy and those moms see it happen and let it because it’s normal. That’s when I thought what a bizarre culture. And of course our culture, the Western culture isn’t always the best too, but it is much more sophisticated so to say. As parent you don’t let your child fight with other people or with other ethnicities, well I just find that bizarre. Then you hear those stories on them slaughtering farmers’ goats at a surrounding village and eat them... you know it’s difficult to judge from here, but it’s just a very different culture and that’s different than I expected.”

Harry (September, 2017)

This hatred between the different cultures in the camps is discussed by more of the participants, whom, just like Harry, did not consider this cultural aspect before going to Lesvos. Harry talks about the situation as he experienced it in camp Moria, where a majority of single men lives. However, participants working at Kara Tepe also experienced this mutual hatred while working with the children.

7.4 Conclusion

The participants embarked on their trip to Lesvos with several goals and expectations and came back with many new, sometimes unexpected, experiences. Goals were often changed or reframed, including mostly a feeling of usefulness and fulfilment to be found in the refugees’ thankfulness and enjoyment. Overall, the most valued experiences were the relationships that were built with the refugees living in the camps, the fun they had working as a volunteer, and the personal lessons they learned during the trip. These were all, for many of the participants, new motives for returning to Lesvos or to continue

working with refugees either there or at home. Also, the thankfulness of the refugees for their work and the need of volunteers by the organisation were an important factor in the decision to return.

Being a volunteer at a refugee camp at Lesvos comes with many struggles and is a process in itself. Struggles regarding their role as volunteer, as Westerner or as woman. For many volunteers the experience changed their perspective on the refugees, Europe handling the crisis, or even their own culture. An experience they value highly and recommend any other to have as well. Most volunteers frame themselves as ambassadors for refugees in the sensemaking of their stories. The volunteers are constructing an identity (Weick, 1995) of 'doing good' within their stories and sensemaking, which might link to the critique on the impact of volunteer tourism on host communities.

8

Conclusion, Discussion, Recommendations

In the last chapter of this thesis first an answer to the research questions will be formulated. To refresh, the main research question of the thesis is:

How do people who volunteer to work with refugees on the Greek island Lesvos make sense of their motives and experiences?

Second, the findings of this research will be discussed in relation to existing literature including recommendations for future research.

8.1 An answer to the Research Questions

When I started this research I was wondering what exactly is on the volunteers mind when deciding to become a volunteer and how their motives and ideas are influenced by the experiences they have during the trip. I did not agree with the existing literature making fixed themes, I felt like it is more complex than that. By choosing the sensemaking approach I aimed to analyse the motives and experiences of the volunteer as part of an on-going process, before, during, after the trip and even during the interview.

There were 19 participants taking part in this research, each with their own story, their own ideas, reasons, motives and experiences. They each have a different background, age, job or study, and perspective on life. They went to Lesvos over a timeframe of two years, working for several different organisations, and at different locations. Soon in the data gathering process I realized how the time of working at Lesvos, the organisation, and mostly the location were of influence on the volunteer's experiences and their sensemaking of those experiences. Therefore, three timeframes were defined: (1) the beginning of the crisis (2015), (2) Structure develops on Lesvos (Jan- March 20th 2016), and (3) Implementation of the EU-Turkey Deal (March 20th 2016 onwards).

The first timeframe includes the upcoming of the first NGOs on the island. During this time there was a lot of chaos, little official organisations, and many volunteers from all over the world of which some founded an NGO. The second timeframe is a short one and only includes the first three months of 2016. During this time more structure was established on Lesvos regarding the many organisations and volunteers. The organisations mostly worked at the camps and had several tasks for the volunteers to work out. In March of 2016 the EU-Turkey deal was implemented changing a lot on the island for both the refugees and the volunteers. Therefore, the third timeframe starts

after the implementation of this deal. The deal meant the shutting down of Afghan Hill, and organisations such as Because We Carry and Movement on the Ground transferring their work to Kara Tepe. In camp Moria many of the organisations, such as Médecin sans Frontiers, as a reaction to the deal withdrew from bringing their services to Lesvos. This meant that camp Moria was being led by fewer and fewer organisations after March 2016. Also, boat arrivals declined meaning that NGOs, such as Stichting Bootvluchteling, changed their mission and volunteers no longer worked along the shore at Lesvos.

During this last period the NGOs working at Lesvos professionalized, which for many of the volunteers was a reason not to return working for these organisations. However, while in Kara Tepe the situation kept getting better, in Moria the opposite was happening. This meant that many volunteers had different experiences based upon the location they worked at. Volunteers working at Kara Tepe during the third timeframe were overall very positive about the camp, how it was arranged and the living situation for the refugees. This in return often made them feel less useful and needed, making them rethink returning to Kara Tepe and searching for new opportunities to help, often found in the NGO Home for a Day. This feeling of usefulness and personal fulfilment was what many volunteers found in the contact they had and friendships they built with the refugees living at Lesvos. These relationships were highly valued by the participants and led to several developments for the volunteer. They experienced a personal transformation, one more intense than the other. However, they all learned much about their own culture, this other culture, they learnt to appreciate more what they have, and to give to others. For some this transformation opened up new worlds, new carriers, and new future dreams. For all this was a highly valued experience, one everyone should have.

The professionalization of NGOs over time also awakened a lot of critique from volunteers, mostly working for BWC. The strict rules on volunteer-refugee contact were for some a reason not to return to Kara Tepe in the future, but to find new projects instead. Several volunteers had the expectation to change something in the refugee crisis, maybe to even solve it. Upon arrival they soon realized their impact was very little to none on this crisis that may not even have a solution. However, the feeling of usefulness and fulfilment they found in personally helping the refugees, by building friendships and relationships with them. By helping one they could see the progress and impact of their help, even if it was just to let them smile or forget their troubles for a little while, it helped.

Motivations of the volunteers were mostly described as an urge to help, caused by a feeling of unfairness and being lucky. The volunteers talked and explained much about this identification they felt for the situation on Lesvos and the situation the refugees were in. This was often triggered by the news, which showed the many over-crowded boats arriving in Lesvos. It felt unfair, because it could have been them, they felt lucky for being born in The Netherlands, as they explained geography was the only difference between the refugees and them. This situation happening was not new, however, it came

closer to home than ever creating these forms of identification leading to a motive for volunteering. Interestingly, the religious volunteers and non-religious volunteers often described this same feeling. However, Christians linked this quickly to their faith and all that this stands for, while non-Christians struggled when trying to explain their feelings and motives. Some thought those feelings and ideas through for months or years, while others quickly acted upon them. Olivia even discussed a fear she felt for becoming a so-called volunteer tourist, which she related as a bad thing and very egoistic motive. Others were not that extremely aware of this factor, they sometimes added factors to imply they are not just doing it for themselves, or excused themselves for certain phrasings or outings. The link to the debate on Volunteer Tourism will be further discussed below.

8.1.1 Linking to the debate on Volunteer Tourism

Volunteer tourism is debated on the balance between altruistic and egoistic motives of the tourist. As stated before, this thesis does not aim to label the volunteer work with refugees at Lesvos as volunteer tourism. Also, the labels on more altruistic or egoistic motivated volunteer tourists will not be enhanced as both motivate all. However, the findings in the large collection of volunteer tourist motivations research are interesting to analyse in relation to the findings of this research. There are several overlapping factors between the two. However, there are differences between them as well.

The on-going discussion in volunteer tourism literature is in regard to whether the volunteer tourist is more altruistic or egoistic motivated. As many scholars conclude, a volunteer tourist is always motivated by both factors (Coghlan & Fennell, 2009; Pan, 2012; Callanan & Thomas, 2005, Wearing & McGehee, 2013), a statement which in this research is a given. I do not want to discuss whether or not the volunteer is more altruistic or egoistic motivated and which one of those is better, the basis is that every volunteer is motivated both ways. The main motives regarding identification leading to feelings of unfairness, being lucky, and an urge to help, all are a reflection of the lives of the refugee on the volunteer's own lives. The statement of Wearing & McGehee (2013) discussing that the pre-trip motivations of the volunteer are a battle between altruistic and egoistic factors is reflected in the pre-trip motivations of the volunteer worker at Lesvos. This battle was for some much more an actual battle than for others. Some thought for months about their own intentions and for approval of themselves being okay with not being completely altruistic motivated, while others were immediately in peace with this battle.

The critique on volunteer tourism regarding the impact of the volunteer tourist on the host community often discussed in literature and media was not something the volunteers working at Lesvos outlined. However, their overly explaining of their 'doing good' might be a reaction to this critique in the media on the good doing of the volunteer tourist. The volunteers working at Lesvos did not need specific skills, and the humanitarian context of this type of volunteering differs a lot from the organized volunteer tourism trip. In comparison with the volunteer tourist projects discussed in literature this volunteer work was much less organised or working towards an end. The volunteers came to fill in the gaps, not to start and complete a project. Brown (2005) states that most volunteer tourist mention self-fulfilment and personal growth as main outcome of their trip, this very much aligns with the personal transformation mentioned

as most valued outcome of the volunteer's experience. The volunteers self-development resulted from the contact with the refugees and the horrifying situation they were in, which led to them helping the refugees more intensely, creating new ideas for the existing projects, and continue to help when back home. In contrast with the volunteer tourist who very rarely continues in volunteer work after their trip (Hodgekinson, 2003; through Sin, 2009).

Sin (2009) discusses in her article "Volunteer Tourism – Involve me and I Will Learn" the role of "self" and reflexivity on the volunteer's stories, that they aim to get a deeper understanding of the conditions of the local communities in relation to their own lives that cannot be reached without going there. This finding reflects perfectly in the volunteer's stories of this research. They discuss the impact of them actually being there and experiencing the situation on their view of the discussion and how you "have to experience it" before really knowing what it is like.

Overall, there is a basic resemblance of the volunteer tourism literature and the finding of this research. The biggest difference lies with the volunteer tourist booking the trip with the aim of combining work and vacation, while the volunteer worker going to Lesvos does not aim for vacation when booking the trip. This results in a difference in several motives, however, there are many similarities as well. The main similarity lays with the volunteer worker, just like volunteer tourist, goes through a process of self-development often mentioned as main reason when recommending the trip to others. I would not treat this volunteer work as volunteer tourism completely, but more as humanitarian volunteer work. It can be related to the discussed 'deep-volunteer' (Smillie, 1995) and 'volunteer-minded' volunteer (Brown & Morrisson, 2003). I feel like the tourist is missing in the volunteer and therefore would not label it as volunteer tourism just yet. However, it has potential for the development of volunteer tourist trips in the future.

8.2 Discussion and Recommendations

So, what does this mean? The findings by Chtouris & Miller (2017) regarding volunteer's motivations are mostly confirmed by this research. Volunteers were unable to remain apathetic when watching images on the news regarding the crisis resulting in them becoming a volunteer. The volunteers were often in search of new opportunities when deciding to go the Lesvos and hardly ever had a complete plan. (Chtouris & Miller, 2017) For the many literature there is on volunteer tourism and motivations of the volunteer tourist this research adds another level in analysing the experiences and motives in relations to the sensemaking of the volunteer. It shows the process the volunteer goes through making the decision, legitimizing this decision to themselves and others, processing the experience, creating new motives and goals through these experiences, and all the struggles that come with this process, the volunteers' relation towards the refugee, their own culture, and explaining their experiences and motives to others. The main outcome is the highly valued personal transformation the volunteer goes through, and the continuous search for usefulness and self-fulfilment in their journey as volunteer.

Some volunteers learned to accept the access of these factors; others take some distance after the trip afraid to get in too deep, and for others it remains to play a large or even the largest role in their lives.

The comparison of the volunteers of this research with the so-called volunteer tourist adds a new dimension to literature. There has been a lot of critique on volunteer tourism and the impact of the volunteer tourist on host societies in the media, which also resulted in people deciding not to go to Lesbos caused by the association with volunteer tourism. I am now talking about the failed cooperation between travel organisation Sunweb and airline Transavia to establish more and cheaper flights to Lesbos in winter for volunteers. The association with volunteer tourism resulted in the cancellation of the project within the first year due to a lack of interest (Volkskrant, 2016; NOS, 2016). I agree with the critique discussed on volunteer tourism, it is important to ensure the host community is benefitting from the volunteer tourist and the other way around. However, there are many forms of volunteer tourism, or volunteering in general, that are good in nature and people should not be discouraged to take part in this sector. If people had not decided to volunteer at Lesbos no one would have filled the gaps during the beginning of the crisis and still the camps are running mostly on volunteers hired by NGOs. The professionalization of NGOs and thereby coming establishment of rules regarding refugee-volunteer contact might be in consideration of the critique regarding volunteer tourist impact on host communities, a very interesting phenomenon for future research. This research shows that there are indeed similarities between the two types of volunteering, however, it as well shows the lack of the vacation part of the volunteer trip discussed in this thesis. It is definitely an interesting discussion for future research whether or not this form of volunteering abroad fits the term volunteer tourism. With this research I hope to show that the struggles of altruistic and egoistic motives fit every volunteer either conscious or unconscious. Being more egoistic than altruistic motivated is not a bad thing, as shown by the life changes and new motives the volunteers created through their experiences. Doing a good thing based partly on egoistic motives is still doing a good thing. However, as said before it is important to think about your impact on the host community and make sure you are indeed doing a good thing. Research should step away from the fixed frameworks in the volunteer tourism literature, as more research is needed to understand the processes the volunteer goes through discussed in this thesis.

I do not regret my decision to stay in The Netherlands as the volunteers' stories could not get mixed with my own image of the situation on Lesbos. It was not about the accuracy of the story; it was about the reasoning behind it by the volunteer (Weick, 1995). Therefore, going there would have probably given me the same outcomes. However, if I went there I would have gotten the stories of volunteers within the same small timeframe. It was difficult that people had such different experiences based upon the timeframe they went to Lesbos or location they worked at. Future research can focus on picking a certain timeframe and location and focussing on that, to give a more comprehensive research on that volunteer. Nevertheless, the differences regarding

developments over time occurring in Lesvos over the years are extremely interesting and might be another opportunity for future research to dive into.

When starting this thesis I had a very strong opinion regarding volunteer tourism and the volunteer tourist. I did not agree with it being all bad, I just found that it is very important that before someone engages in such work they do enough research. If you really want to help, you make sure you going there results indeed in helping. The rejection of the deal Transavia and Sunweb made is in my eyes a reflection of lack of research by the volunteer, it is entirely based on the critique regarding volunteer tourism and not diving into the exact situation going on at Lesvos. The critiques on volunteer tourism are not of relevance at the situation at Lesvos today, volunteers were and are needed to keep the camps running. I was curious to this volunteer and their reasoning behind their trip and the experiences they had. During the conversations I quickly learned that many people dived into the experience without thinking it through. However, these people were going to Lesvos for all the right reasons, both egoistic and altruistic. People were needed at Lesvos to organise the situation and they actually went. I do feel that it is important to join an organisation and learn about the situation and different cultures. Mostly, because otherwise the chaos just turns into a bigger chaos, it needs structure and organisations is one way towards more structure. Therefore, it will be interesting to focus on the organisations in future research, their role at the island, their struggles, and professionalization from their point of view. Overall, I became less critical towards the whole situation and less critical towards the volunteer. However, it is important that we remain critical, because it is a difficult situation and these people are vulnerable. People going there, getting in good contact, and learning from each other is, however, extremely beautiful and hopefully a little light in the long road ahead of them.

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