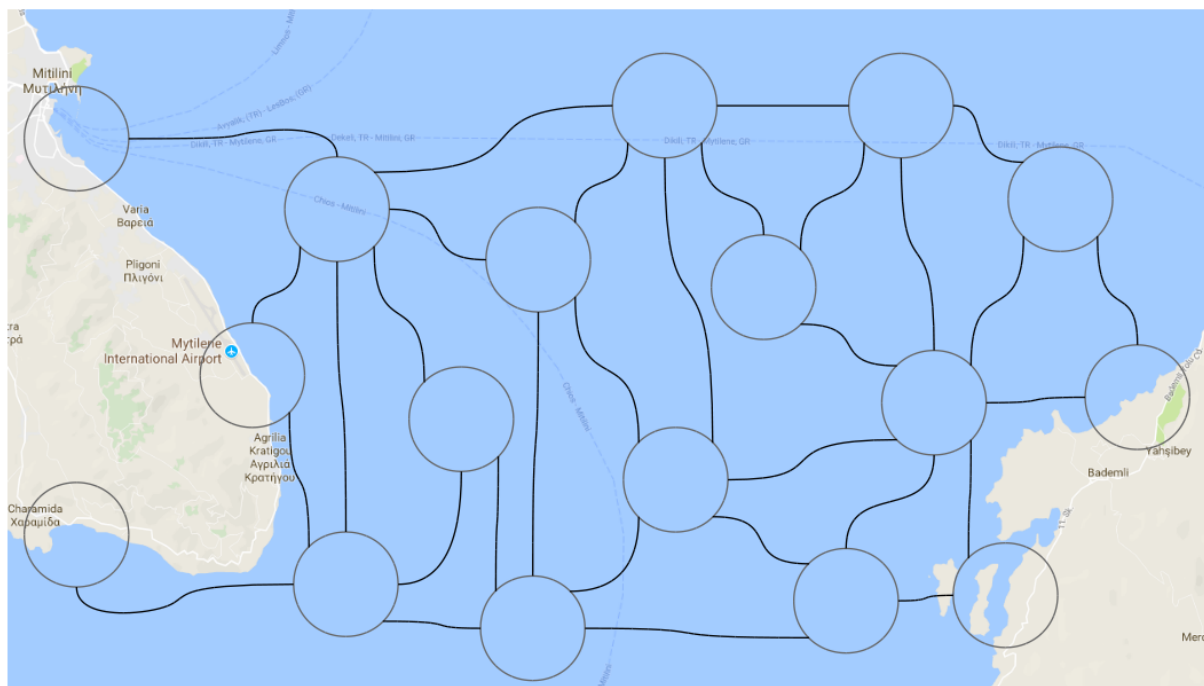


Episode 1: Turkey to Lesvos

We tell the truth through fictional stories.
We make people face reality through games.

The game and players

Volkerwanderung. Festung Europa. Balkan Trail. Turkey to Lesvos



Pre-prototype test gamefield. 3.08.2017. CC-BY-SA Volkerwanderung Game Collective

This episode tells us the story of a refugee boat, departing from the coast of Turkey and heading west, to the Greek Island of Mitilini (Lesvos). The episode can be played by one or two players.

Two players game

- Player A is trying to stop the boat from reaching Lesvos, by putting obstacles in its way. Every obstacle makes a damage to the boat, effectively killing several refugees on board. If the last refugee dies before landing on Lesvos, player A wins.

- Player B is trying get the boat to Lesvos with at least one survivor on board. It means using points of luck at every obstacle, to protect refugees from dying.

Two-player gameplay

Opening:

- Player A sets several obstacles at the map (in round spots). There is no obligation to put all available obstacles at once. Obstacles are put blank side up, so Player B does not see what is the damage value.
- Player B divides available amount of tokens between two categories: life points (number of people on board) and luck points. The proportion cannot be adjusted during the episode.



Turn:

- Player B assigns any number of luck points to next obstacle, by putting luck tokens aside. Then they turn the obstacle piece to see the damage level. If the damage level is lower or equal to the amount of luck assigned, the boat moves on top of the obstacle and all luck tokens go to the bucket (leave the game). If the damage is bigger than the amount of luck, the difference is covered by life point tokens. They also go to the bucket.
- If there is no more life points (refugees on board) available, player B lost and the boat is considered destroyed. If there is at least one survivor (life point) left, the game goes on.
- If the boat has landed on Lesvos, the game ends at this moment and the winner is announced.
- After player B makes their move, player A may put one or more obstacles on the map. Obstacles are always put the blank side up and once placed, cannot be moved.

Single player gameplay

In single player mode, the player only moves the boat. Instead of player A, the single player puts all obstacles on the map in a random way, not looking at the numbers. The rest of the gameplay stays the same.

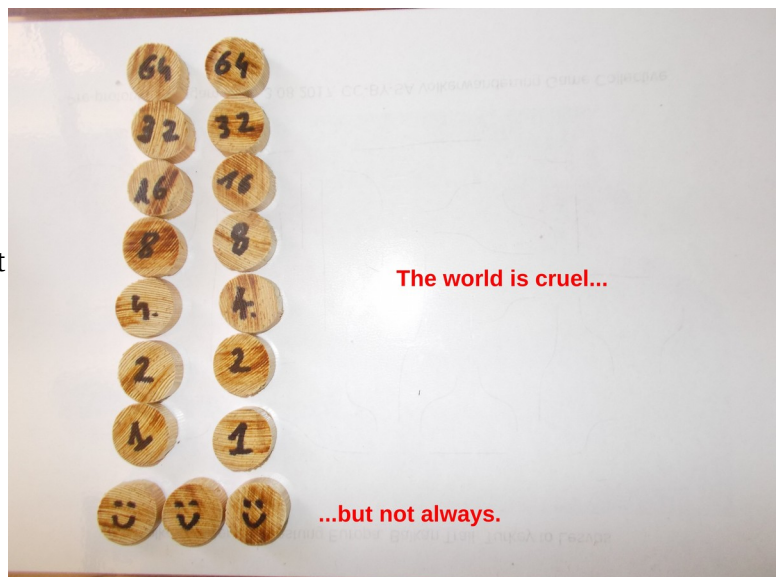
Game hardware

The board

The gameboard is actual map of the area between Lesbos and Turkish coast, with a network of interconnected spots, creating the sea routes the boat will follow.

Obstacle pieces

In later version the obstacles will be storyfied (sharks, gangsters, Frontex patrols, Coast Guard, police etc.). For now, they are identified by the level of damage they do (two sets, each having damage values of 32,16,8,4,2 and 1 point plus three “grace pieces” of zero damage).



Boat piece

Single distinct piece, symbol of the boat full of refugees.

Tokens, token box and bucket

- **There are 150 tokens** that are used to count points of life (refugees surviving on board) and luck (needed to overcome obstacles without refugees dying). The tokens are uniform and the player is free to decide how to split them in these two categories.



So we may have a single refugee with 149 points of luck, or 150 refugees with no luck at all. And everything in between.

- **Token box** is divided in two parts: life and luck. This is where the tokens go before the game starts.
- **The bucket** is the container where spent tokens go. Its lid is used as a temporary token container, when several luck points are assigned before checking the obstacle.

Future developments

Storyfication

The overall goal of the project is to convey certain message and experience through the storytelling means, using game convention as a vehicle. That means a lot of storytelling to be done, both in the visual layer and textually, as companion readings and expanded description of game elements. As soon as we have the game mechanics tested and approved, there will be time for telling stories. **The principle we try to keep is to tell the truth through fictional stories and let people experience reality through playing the game.** Our goal is to give this chance to both sides: those who believe refugees should be accepted and supported as the victims (and, by assumption, ones that are morally better than their oppressors) and those who believe refugees should be stopped as a threat to European life, values and social cohesion.

Obstacle upgrades and boat boosters

If the tests show it is needed, player A will be given option to upgrade their obstacles. It can be useful if/when we introduce meta-narrative, allowing players to run the same episode several times, to increase number of refugees waiting on Lesbos to hit the road North. This will certainly be useful for the meta-storyline.

Boat boosters have also other role. There are stories from the refugees that are suggesting almost divine interventions, including – quite archetypal in European tradition – interventions of dolphins, helping people at sea.

As storytellers, we believe we should not only honor those stories, but include them into the canon. We are creating

Information-complete or not?

As we are trying to tell the real-life stories, we need to decide how do we want to convey the complexity of life. Some time down the development path, we will be able to re-create complexity by sheer number of human (and otherwise) players contributing to MMORPG reality, online and in

real time. For the board game, we have to emulate it, using random factors, incomplete information or both. In this version, to emphasize inequality between refugees and the establishment (EU and its agents) we decided to use information inequality. Player A knows what obstacles (damage-wise) they put on the map and where. They also are free to place more of them, as the boat advances. Also, Player A is aware of the amount of life points and luck points available for player B. We hope that playing tests will show us if this is appropriate. We can always introduce random tests to balance this kind of inequality, but I consider it the last resort.

More episodes and meta-storyline

“The Balkan Trail” is intended as a medium-sized campaign, depicting crucial stages of refugees journey as it happened in 2015, across Greece and the Balkans, to the then-welcoming Austrian border. We are reaching out to the people who were on the ground during that phase (refugees and their supporters), to obtain their help in creating the relevant narrative. We will then try to translate them into the language of game, effectively creating the “mythology” of The Balkan Trail. Approaching the problem in a “bottom-up” methodology, we shall make player face the migration as what it really is: not a “crisis”, but a tectonic shift, reshaping human civilisation.

Video game

Volkerwanderung, as a project, aims to create a vast online realm, called MMORPG (Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game), to depict global reality of migrations, as we can see it now (if we want to) and as we are going to experience it for the decades to come. “The Balkan Trail” is just the first take, a teaser, a mockup. If everything goes well, we will be able to spread it as a board game, but very soon it should become the first part of an epic video-game series, showing dawn of Festung Europa and those who were in a right time and place to confront its making.

