Intro: about *Next 5 Minutes*

What is The Next 5 Minutes?

"The Next 5 Minutes is a festival on art, politics, activism and media. A general role is played by Tactical Media, a term that was born at the first Next 5 Minutes conference in 1993."

"The term 'tactical media' refers to a critical usage and theorisation of media practices that draw on all forms of old and new […] media for achieving a variety of specific non-commercial goals and pushing all kinds of potentially subversive political issues. […] Think about activists that use cheap digital video camera's and distribute their video's on the internet. Think about low-power FM radio transmitters used by anti-globalisation activists. Think about computer programmers that develop free and open-source software. […]Thinks about media artists that express their concerns about current political issues."

Who is behind N5M?

"We're not an institution, nor an organisation or a company. We are an informal coalition of people who all have our own networks, activities and projects. Once every few years, when we feel there is a need, we organise the event."
The Next 5 Minutes is organised by a lot of people, working independently or for various organisations. It is a project of the political-cultural center De Balie (Amsterdam), De Melkweg (Amsterdam), Paradiso (Amsterdam), Waag Society (Amsterdam), ImagineIC (Amsterdam) and Montevideo/TBA (Amsterdam). But most participants come from outside NL, all over the world…

We can identify them as a growing network of members of the "global civil society" (representing its radical branch, anti-government and anti-market).

Funding from the festival itself come from dutch NPO-NGO's, foundations and governmental bodies (HGIS-Culture program of the Dutch Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Education Culture and Science, Mondriaan Foundation, VSB Fonds, The Amsterdam Fund for the Art (AFK), NOVIB and Hivos).

But essentially, the participants in the festival have their own funding for their projects, which are always taking place in the web of the informal economy of their local places. Most editors are not financed by institutions. According to editor D. Garcia, "the festival can be seen as parasitic rather than institutional".

This is *essentially a third sphere[1] phenomenon*…

- The festival had only a handful of paid-personnel (it seems only 2 got full wages), and relied heavily on several dozens volunteers [about 40]
- It is based on participative activities at the local level (a web of social relationships, local civil society and solidarian economy)
- They promote third sphere values (see next section)

[+ Oppositions to govt. and market sphere values]

- The main mission: a media platform independent from Market and Govt.
- Political independence from all govts, political criticism, no political compromises and no nationalism
- Ideological independence from the market-sphere, criticism of big corporate power, against market-individualism and against market-competition.

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[1] 'Third Sphere' referring to a concept of the economist Arjo Klamer (see his website: www.klamer.nl)

The values of the N5M: How they influence the objectives and the organization of this festival

[Based on the answers to the questionnaire]

What values are promoted?

- Create new types of *freedom, expression and ability* [not an assumption of given freedom, a freedom of the self-construction, against market-ideology … a more anarchistic value of freedom, with quotes such as "Chaos is good"]
- *Care* about foreigners, worldwide-fraternity [= good old internationalism and cosmopolitanism]. *Globalism from below*
- Collaborative and experimental art and political activism: 3 basic values : *Do-It-Yourself* , *Participation* and *social awareness*
- *Open media* (independent alternative NGO-NPO information and reflection) [give an audible voice to the Third Sphere] Typical quote: "don't trust the big guys". Or said in a longer way by editor E. Kluitenberg: "The festival is sceptical towards institutional, programmatic (esp. party-politcal) value systems, and authoritarian systems of thought, as well as the illusion of objectivity of journalistic media."

What kind of *objectives* do these values call for?

- *Networking* : build generative/creative connections, the "alternative university of the world" (editor D. Garcia): "The objectives of the festival are to create the *space* for groups and individuals who *share the values* expressed above to *experience* and *critique* each other's recent activities and optimally *launch new campaigns* and *create innovations* in theory and practice."
- Promote *Do-It-Yourself skills* and provide *DIY-tools* to promote the expansion of subjective direct-expressions [cf. Indymedia]
- Thus *link content-production* techniques and makers *with medium-production* techniques and makers
- *Openness* : as little filtering as possible ("everybody should be heared"), a *free public space*
- Provide a *political forum* about world-issues, from a *glocal* perspective

What kind of *organization* did these values and objectives call for?
<u>Before the festival:</u>

- *Tactical media labs* located around the world (financed locally) developing on common themes from local perspectives
- *Online Discussion* about the outcomes of the *TML*s through a network of international editors

<u>The Festival:</u>

- Generally: provide space, equipment and technical support, "but let the participants themselves be responsible for the product." And offer informal spaces and atmosphere to allow social contacts and networking (ex: the camp-site at *het buitenland* and the post-festival activities)
- An emphasis on *workshops* (*Tool-builders fair*) and *DIY-debates and shows*
- *Political debates* and sessions ("not only about obvious conflicts and problems, but also on defining problems as well").
- The construction and use of free '*autonomous zones*' (also a common wish: "Don't plan too much", let things come and people improvise.)
- The construction of a permanent *open media database* (with various formats)

The organizational problems these constraints bring upon the festival

- This festival is *not accessible to the general public*: physically (working as a closed microcosm) and intellectually (not easily understandable)… (although some editors claim to have a "less well developed desire to open up discussions to a wider public"). This can be justified, though, as such festivals being an intermediary step in the diffusion of open media.
- Because of the previous, the festival couldn't expect many paying visitors (also repelled by the absurd pricing-policy: pay-per-day or passepartout _and paying high prices for something difficult to 'figure out what it is'…)
- The organization is "*inherently problematic*, as it almost *precludes editorial filtering* [… which] made the festival complex, *fuzzy* and nearly impossible. It is not advisable to take this approach to other, more regular types of art/media/culture festivals" (editor Kluitenberg).
- Because of the previous and the first problem, the introductory texts to the festival were theoretical and obscure. A volunteer noticed: "If the Volkskrant phones you with the question: 'what is this festival all about?' while they received information beforehand, something is wrong."
- This also brought about some tension between practically-oriented activists and inspired intellectuals…
- … and some would feel that the editors have too much power already ("Godfathers")
- The tools builders fair was far too technical for many people, although they appreciated to have workshops on tools (the presenters were tool-builders, not pedagogues…)
- Because of the Tactical Media Labs happening beforehand, some visitors felt uncomfortable entering a conversation that "started half a year ago" [To put the visitor into the *conversation* is not easy.]
- In addition to all that, there were technical difficulties with open source software (wonderful but always 'in development'…)

Elements for conclusion

The people at *N5M* have understood the value of *networking* for fostering creativity and reinforcing their voice; but it's a loose and large network as alternative to the clan. Very motivating and inspiring indeed, with maybe some regional clans building up through the Tactical Media Labs (although it's not yet clear at this stage). There is also a clan possibly being built among the international editors (which could risk being cut out from the others…).

Sources:

- Documentation and website of N5M

- Own experience as volunteer at the N5M 4th festival (September 2003)

- Answers to a questionnaire (by 2 main editors and by 4 volunteers at n5M _my thanks to them…)

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