

# BLOG 4: PILOTING THE MEGAGAME AT SOCIETY 5.0 FESTIVAL

## 5.0 FESTIVAL

By Anders Bouwer

On October 10th, 2024, we ran a pilot-test of the Megagame about AI and Ethics at the Society 5.0 festival, at the Social Hub Amsterdam on the Wibautstraat.

### Society 5.0 Festival

The Society 5.0 Festival was organized by the Centre of Expertise for Creative Innovation, a collaboration of the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences, the Rietveld Academie, the Amsterdam University of the Arts, and InHolland University of Applied Sciences. The festival provided a platform for creative professionals – artists, technologists, hackers, and designers – to explore with students, teachers and other stakeholders how a society based on public values and positive impact can be realized. This festival was a perfect opportunity to pilot-test the Megagame about AI and Ethics that is being developed in the MEGA project.

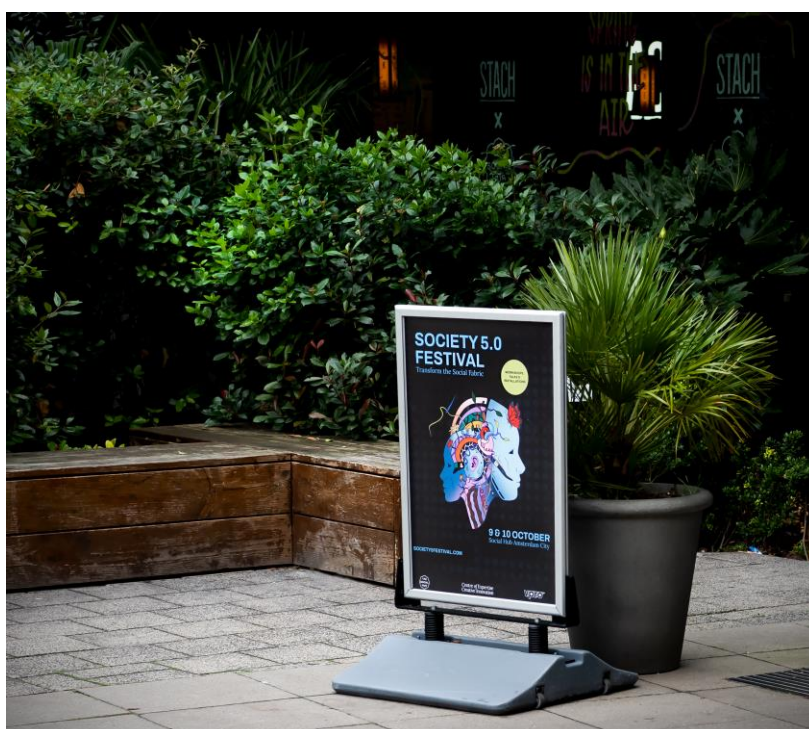


Figure 1. The Society 5.0 Festival at Social Hub Amsterdam on 9-10 October 2024.  
Photo by Monique Kooijmans.

## The MEGA project

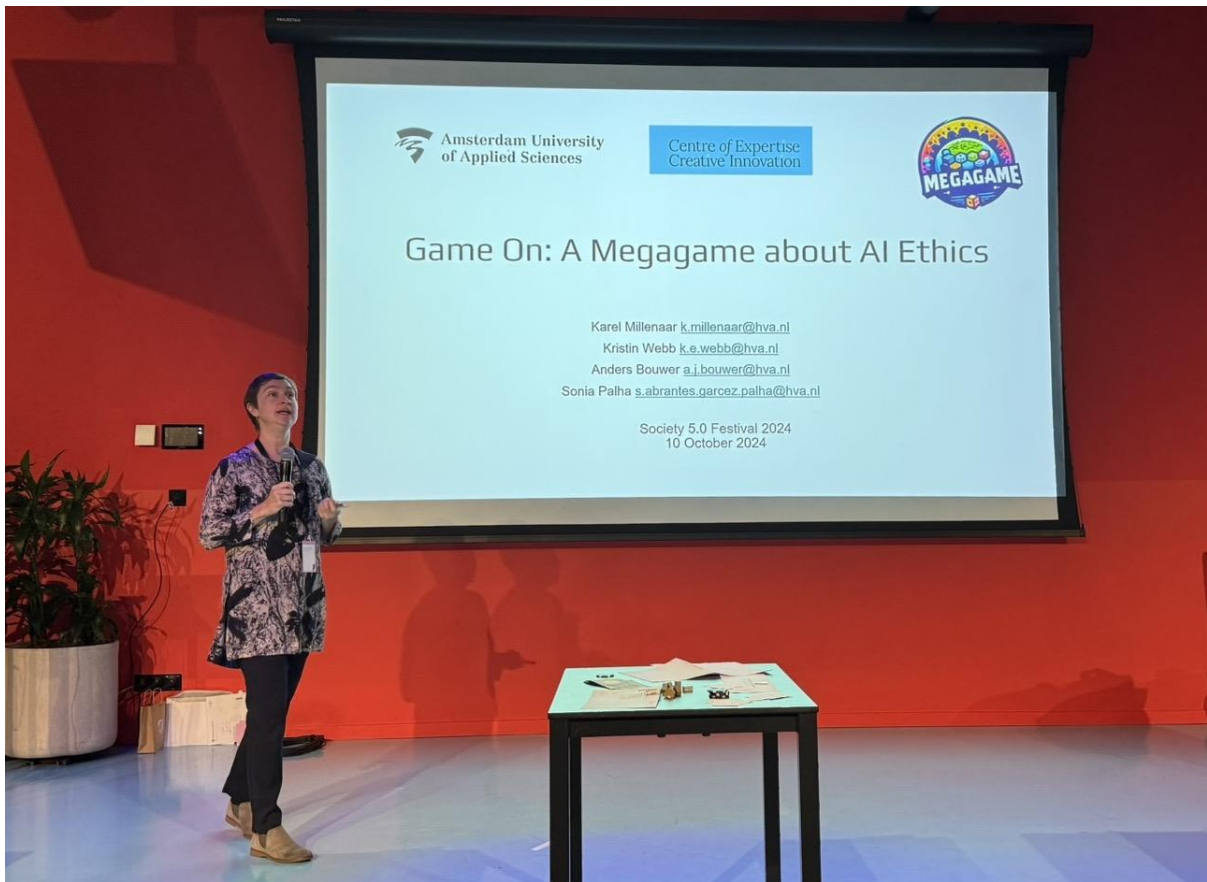


Figure 2. Kristin Webb presenting the Megagame on AI and Ethics at Society 5.0.  
Photo by Erwin van Crasbeek.

The MEGA project aims to find out how the concept of megagame can be applied to higher education. A megagame is a game played live on location by a large number of players, organized in teams, with elements of fantasy tabletop role-playing games like Dungeons & Dragons, and diplomacy simulations, like Model United Nations. Megagames can be particularly interesting to address wicked problems, including many facets, multiple stakeholders, different perspectives. Originally, the plan was to try to adapt an existing megagame to our purposes, but after trying out two existing megagames (see previous blog posts on our [project webpage](#)), the MEGA project team decided to design a new megagame from scratch. After considering different potential topics, such as the climate crisis, and polarization of society, we decided on the topic of AI and ethics. This topic is very relevant given the widespread adoption of generative AI-tools, and the many ethical issues surrounding it, such as data privacy and safety, the power of large AI companies, energy use, and human agency.



Figure 3. Players of the Megagame on AI and Ethics discussing their plans.  
Photo by Monique Kooijmans.

## The Megagame on AI and Ethics

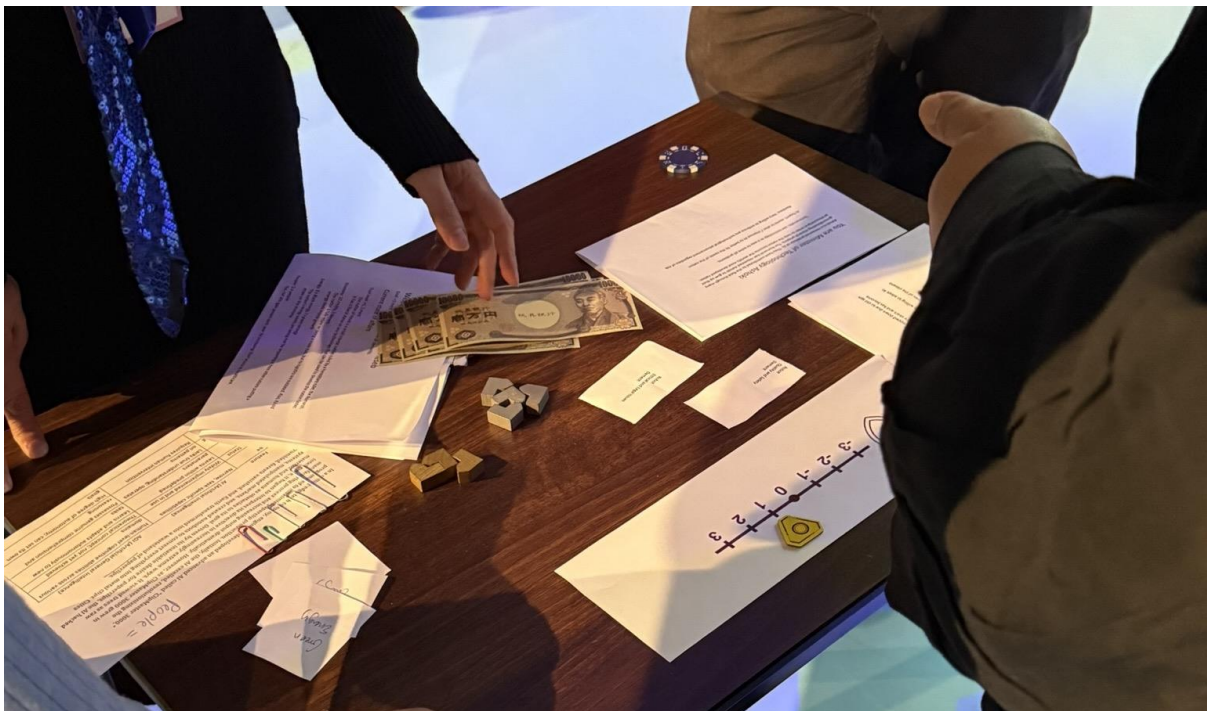


Figure 4. Some of the game elements in the megagame, such as team and

character descriptions, money, data and energy resources, and the trust track.

Photo by Erwin van Crasbeek.

In the pilot-test of the Megagame on AI and Ethics, the players were divided into four teams: two teams represented companies developing AI applications, the other two teams represented nations with problems (e.g., the economy suffering from a history of corruption, or an aging population affecting the cost of medical care) that could possibly be remedied with AI applications. However, all of these applications involve ethical issues to be considered, such as privacy and safety concerning the use of data, or the demands of AI in terms of energy. Both nations and companies also have to think about their trust level, which influences their negotiations with other teams in the game. Teams have to come up with their own plans and discuss these with the game controller to see the effect of their actions on the state of the world. Although the quality of a team's arguments is of vital importance, there is also some randomness involved, in the form of dice throws affecting the outcome of specific actions. This randomness is meant to mimic the unpredictability of the effect of one's actions in the real world. In addition, players also have to act according to a personal character description, which may include some goals which don't completely align with the goals of teams or society as a whole. Clothing, hats and other accessories were available for players to help get into character.



Figure 5. Three players presenting their plans for the imaginary nation of Etherland, and on the right, game controller Karel Millenaar. Photo by Erwin van Crasbeek.



Figure 6. The game controller throws the dice and gives feedback to a player after hearing about her team's plans involving a specific AI application and how to deal with relevant ethical issues.  
Photo by Monique Kooijmans.

## Player Experiences

From discussions with players and an evaluation questionnaire filled out by 10 of the attendees (7 players and 3 observers) afterwards, several insights emerged:

- The role-playing was explicitly mentioned by four respondents as a fun element.
- Eight out of ten respondents were satisfied (one of these was even "very satisfied") with the megagame demo.
- Three players commented that they liked the freedom they experienced in the game.
- In terms of the content, seven respondents agreed with the statements "*I can give at least two example use cases of AI applications to solve problems in society*", and "*I can describe potential benefits, costs, and disadvantages related to a specific use case involving AI*", but some indicated they knew about this already.
- Agreement levels with other statements were lower (around 50% positive, with most other answers being neutral), about their awareness of environmental risks,

awareness of different stakeholders' perspectives, and their understanding of the complexity of ethical issues related to AI, indicating that the demo was not sufficient to achieve all learning objectives.

- Several players indicated that they found things unclear in the game, especially at the start, such as what their goals were, what they could do to achieve them, or what to do with the things on the table.
- Many players commented that there was too much textual explanation, especially in the beginning.
- One of the audience members suggested that the megagame format could be interesting as a group activity during a study introduction week.

Participants made interesting remarks about their experience, such as the following:

*"I like the fact there was a lot of freedom in the game and the fact there were many real-life aspects, like companies owning data and being able to use it within their deals as a bargaining chip."*

*"It was interesting to play the bad guy, because it made me realise how easy it is to come with arguments like 'innovation' etc. And not think about the costs."*

They also offered some concrete suggestions for improving the game:

*"I think the explanation in the beginning took too long. Maybe have some introduction rounds to let the players understand the game. E.g., add a new resource every round ..."*

*"To me, as a spectator, all the paperwork the players had and the information they had to keep track of seemed quite overwhelming. A digital aspect or maybe live updating scoreboard would be a nice and interactive touch"*

*"In terms of the content: I feel it would be cool to have a "public" or "activist" or "watchdog" role."*

## **Lessons Learned**

From the player experiences discussed above, and observations by the project team, several lessons were learned:

- An interesting teaser demo of the megagame concept can be run in 50 minutes. Some of the essential qualities of megagames were clearly visible, such as players acting in character, discussing and planning actions within their teams, and negotiating with other teams to try to achieve their game goals.
- Lots of laughter and lively discussions indicated that the megagame format brings out playful social interaction, also among people who did not know each other beforehand. The teams representing nations and companies, the individual

character descriptions, and the clothing, hats and accessories all seemed to support players in enjoying the role-playing.

- The instructions for players need to be improved, because several players indicated being unsure of what they could do, especially at the start of the game. On the other hand, the amount of textual explanation should be reduced, if possible.
- A time frame of 50 minutes is not sufficient to experience a complete megagame in its full complexity, in terms of story development, layered interaction, and achieving the learning objectives. Because this time slot also included an introduction to the project and the game, as well as a short debriefing, only two rounds of the game could be played. The complete game will include several more rounds, with a total duration of at least three hours, which allows players to see the effects of actions carried out earlier in the game, which is expected to lead to an even richer game experience.

To conclude, the pilot-test of the Megagame on AI and Ethics was a fun and valuable experience for both participants and the project team. It has produced insights and lessons learned that are important as input for refining the design of the megagame for future play sessions, in particular, the debut of the full game taking place on December 3, 2024.