Changing Structure and Identity of Virtual Organizations:
The Case of the Hungarian Electronic Library

Preliminary draft

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Abstract

(Abstract is not available in this draft version yet.)

Introduction

Linux, Wikipedia and the file sharing communities are just the most prominent examples of the new logic of organization, production and control. While traditional companies are just experimenting with flexible and distance working, these communities has born virtual. While traditional companies often struggle with maintaining a common consciousness in a less bound form of work, these new, say organic communities are driven by the shared mission, vision and values. What kind of identity are these communities characterized of? Is this identity univocal? Does it change over time? We have started to study these questions at the Hungarian Electronic Library (ELIB) that is operated by the community of volunteers and contributors. This single case study is also exciting because after a half of a decade the ELIB were integrated into the traditional national library of Hungary.
Theoretical background

Identity may be studied at different levels (individual, group, industry, society), this paper is concerned with organizational (level) identity. In their seminal paper, Albert and Whetten (1985: 292) defined organizational identity as a set of claims and sustainable stories about the unique nature of an organization, with the notion that these claims are central, distinctive and enduring. However, recent publications point the problems of this definition:

- Identity is not exclusively central. Some organizations (e.g. universities, hospitals) are characterized by multiple and competing identities (Foreman and Whetten 2002). Or are these only a part (sub identity) of the whole of the identity in an organization? Competing identities typically contrast “ideological” commitment (traditions, altruism etc.) and economic rationality (profit-making, self-interest).
- Identity at some organizations (at least partly) reflects more on being similar to something than differing from others. Ravasi and Van Rekom (2003) argue that the essence of organizational identity is answering the simultaneous pressures for being similar and unique.
- Critiquing another aspect of the definition, there is a debate whether organizational identity can change, or identity is that which does not change even during a transition (Ravasi and Van Rekom 2003). Assumed that sub identities exist, their relative importance varies over time, leading to a shift in the overall organizational identity.

Organizational identity (as Schoemaker 2003 “translates”: own character) seems to be overlapping with other domains of management and organization in recent publications. Mission/vision, culture and image of the organization are the most emerging domains.

- Who we are, what kind of business are we in, what do we want to be, and what we stand for as an organization are frequently quoted questions related to organizational identity (e.g. Albert and Whetten 1985:265, Schultz, Hatch and Larsen 2002). These questions are also central in the strategy of the organization: a business model is constructed from the same questions (Magretta 2002), while vision and mission definitely provide/declare the answer of just these questions (Drucker 1973).
- Claims and stories, sense-making processes, norms and values are overlapping themes of organizational identity and culture. Identification (the degree to which a member defines himself or herself by the same attributes that he or she believes defines the
While organizational identity seems to be more internal than corporate identity, it also refers to the relationship between the organization and its environment (Schoemaker 2003). Organizational image, while covering the publicity of organizational vision, mission and culture, is closely connected with organizational identity. While Ravasi and Van Rekom (2003:123) suggest using organizational identity as an “umbrella concept”, Schultz, Hatch and Larsen (2002) enhanced the opportunity to develop the concept further, catalyzed by the denotation from the other concepts. In this paper we refer to organizational identity with the following assumptions.

- Organizational image is influenced by the organization, but defined by the audience eventually. Organizational identity is claimed by organizational members, but influenced by the feedback from the environment (what they think who we are).
- As multiple organizational image exist because of the multiplicity of audiences, so multiple organizational identity may exist defined by the competing or complementing thoughts about the “own character” in an organization.
- While organizational culture focuses on the meaning-making processes, these processes are only the background or the context of the organizational identity.
- While vision and mission motivate and mobilize organizational members and external stakeholders, organizational identity is the everyday rationale for contributing to the organization for each individual.

Many publications of the 1990s suggested that adaptability is the key condition of outstanding performance in traditional organizations. Researches revealed the importance of flexible organizational structure and “virtualization” as a consequence. The term virtual organization refers to the placeless and timeless form of collaboration, where the coordination (and the control) is conducted by using an information and communication technology. However, the complexity resulted from the growth of organizational dimensions, the proliferation of informal and/or task-oriented workgroups, and the fluidity of organizational boundaries call for additional management attention and new coordination tools (Davidow and Malone 1992).
The new, generally accessible backbone infrastructure, the internet, gives additional impetus to the emergence and spread of flexible organizations. People who never met before start to follow a common mission and create a human network on the technical base. Though the routines and norms, which evolve over time, ensure some cohesion in these communities, their further expansion brings about serious management challenges especially on the structural side. Empirical evidence suggests that the fit between the developing network structure and the task characteristics is essential to achieve appropriate performance (Ahuja and Carley 1999).

Some virtual organizations are positively decentralized, while others are centralized. However, Barabási (2002) emphasize a third form. He emphasizes that the both of the first two is hierarchical because of their centre, their production and control mechanisms etc. The third form, the organic structure were proliferated with the Internet. (Note that this is not based on Burns and Stalker’s distinction between mechanistic and organic structures.) The technological reason of that is rooted in Baran’s (1964) memorandum, who described the characteristics of the centralized, decentralized and distributed network architectures. From the organizational point of view, the “distributed” structure of organic organizations contributes to its special characteristics concerning its core values, production, market performance, organization and leadership (Table 1).

Table 1. The hierarchical and the organic structure of organizations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Hierarchical</th>
<th>Organic</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Core values</strong></td>
<td>Profit maximalization for every participants</td>
<td>Limited revenue creation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emphasis on property rights</td>
<td>Reciprocity and trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Production</strong></td>
<td>Competition of integrated supply chains</td>
<td>Numerous participants with small, competence based contributions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Market performance</strong></td>
<td>Bargaining power against the market forces</td>
<td>Reflexive to customers’ needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quality assured with control</td>
<td>Problems of quality control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organization</strong></td>
<td>Growth is limited and expensive</td>
<td>Natural growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Top-down coordination</td>
<td>Multiply, redundant and horizontal communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership</strong></td>
<td>Need for managing from the center</td>
<td>Self-managed (volunteers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mistrust and reticence</td>
<td>Hospitality and experimentalism</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Research studies are not univocal about the effect of virtualization on organizational identity. In some cases identity was the main catalyst of collaboration and high performance in virtual organizations, while in other cases the dominance of electronic communication resulted in weaker coordination of actors (Wiesenfeld et. al. 1999). Schoemaker (2003:199) concludes, that “the rise of flexible organizations has created a kind of identity crisis for many organizations”.

Our research model completes the relationship between organizational identity and the virtual nature of the organization with a third factor. It assumes that the virtual nature of organization does not determine the role of organizational identity directly. This influence is dependent upon the structure of the organization, namely its hierarchical or organic nature (Figure 1).

After discussing the characteristics of the two above, one may conclude that identity crisis is more likely at hierarchical organizations, while identity could be the cohesive force in an organic one. Our research (the single case study) is not eligible to confirm this assumption. However, we will study the organization structure of ELIB believing that this is an important issue.

Figure 1. Effect of the structure on the identity in virtual organizations
Research questions and methodology

Our research questions are as follows:

(1) Is there organizational identity in virtual organizations?
   - Is there an overall organizational identity easy to recognize?
   - Are the organizational members’ notions of identity consistent?

(2) Does the organizational identity integrate virtual organizations?
   - If there are sub identities, what holds the organization together?

The virtual nature of organizations, i.e. the looser ties between the members brings up the first question. Is there an organizational identity, if the traditional fields, channels, and instruments of the evolution of the organizational identity do not exist? Maybe organizational identity is less consistent, or more implicit in such organizations? On the other side, if identity seems to be existed in a virtual organization, what is the role of it? Does it integrate organizations, i.e. is it an instrument that overcomes the coordination issues raised by the virtual nature? Are the sub identities (if exist) competing with each other, or they are more complementary?

In order to achieve a deeper understanding (instead of give a statistical answer on these questions) we conducted a single case study research. Our special interest tended to organizations evolved from virtual communities born on (and held together by) the Internet. ELIB, one of the leading cultural content providers on the Hungarian Internet, is a multi-layered organization, with many virtual relationships, voluntarism, but more or less integrated in one of the most bureaucratic organizations of Hungary, the National Széchényi Library.

We have a long term relationship with the observed organization. The fact, that one of the founders of ELIB is closely related to one of the authors is an opportunity for the deeper understanding. The direct research started with preparing a Harvard-type case study for educational purposes in 2003. This research and its follow-up in 2004 focused on organizational, leadership strategic and IT issues. The research continued with further interviews in 2006. One result of this is a master thesis by Orsolya Virág about the integration role of organizational culture at ELIB. This paper utilizes the evidences archived from the former fieldworks and also some additional data collections.
We followed the methodological recommendations of Ravasi and Van Rekom (2003:125). During the data collection we studied the detailed internal archives of ELIB (including their mailing lists), conducted face-to-face or virtual interviews with more than a dozen member of the organization. The data analysis focused on the description, i.e. on the search for characteristics, dimensions and metaphors. “Identity is made operational by evoking metaphors that facilitate common understanding (or illuminate differences) among organization’s constituents” (Young 2001:143). Validity of the organizational identity researches is still an open issue. During the data collection we used the method of triangulation: we contrasted the statements on the same thing from different sources. The validity of the evolved metaphors may be rooted in one of the following criteria: it is known to the audience, it is credible, or it provides a clear explanation to unexpected behaviors.

**Development of ELIB**

The idea of founding ELIB was born in the mind of three persons coming from different fields all of which related somehow to the world of libraries.

- István Moldován was occupied in literature monitoring and computerized bibliographic research for more than ten years in the Central Library of the Budapest University of Economic Sciences.
- Károly Kokas was the vice-director of the library of the University of Szeged.
- László Drótos’ activity led him to the library of the University of Miskolc. He worked as a geologist for eight years. Since 1982, he has been working with computers.

In 1993, when ELIB was founded, arts were represented by Kokas, economic sciences by Moldován, while technological sciences by Drótos.

In the spring of 1994 a proposal about the founding and the regulation of the operations of ELIB was finished. The proposal was stimulated by a financial support offered by the National Information Infrastructure Development Program (NIIF) to applicants who provided contents on the internet in Hungarian language. Finally, it was not financial, but technical support which was offered, and the ELIB won the possibility to store data and documents on the central server of NIIF from 1994.
The building-up of the service was launched one year later, and in 1996 the development of the World Wide Web version also started (http://www.mek.iif.hu). In the following six years the number of accessible documents increased to several thousands thanks for the mass of volunteers and supporting organizations. During that time the number of visitors increased to 60-70 thousand a month. Since that time the ELIB has been storing solely those scientific, educational or cultural documents which are written in Hungarian language or has a Hungarian or Central-European relevance, while EPA (Electronic Archives and Database of Periodicals) has been the place for electronic newspapers and periodicals. (Some words and screenshots about the history of ELIB is to be read in English at: http://www.elib.hu/html/torteneteng.html).

The collection of ELIB is open for all documents which are generally collected by libraries provided their distribution is not prohibited and protected by copyright laws. In harmony with these, the meaning of quality in ELIB regards mainly the quality of text and proofreading, so it is more about the way of presentation, and less about the content.

By 1999 ELIB had reached the limit in several aspects such as the size of database, the number of volunteers and users where the founders considered inevitable to force activities in a more regulated organizational framework. With the help of ELIB community the Public Socitey for ELIB was founded with 40 members. The original goal was to encourage the foundation of other electronic libraries in Hungary, and to provide framework for finding financial sources. Since that time, the goal of the society has changed. In 1999 István Monok, who knew well Károly Kokas from Szeged, was appointed to be the director of the National Széchényi Library, and the ELIB was incorporated into the organization of the National Library. Thus, the ELIB Department with two employees came into existence within the building and the organizational framework of the National Library.

During the last years the ELIB further increased its collection. Since 2001 the department has its own server which can be accessed at http://mek.oszk.hu. The ELIB Department expanded its activity on other fields as well. ELIB operates or contributes to several related initiatives. These are the following. The EPA (Electronic Archives and Database of Periodicals), the information service know as LIBINFO, the electronic library for the blinds, the mirror servers of ELIB for trans-border activities, the program of digitizing the core Hungarian-speaking publications (Hungarology Digitizing Program), the Fine Arts in Hungary online exhibition.
(Hung-art), the topic map (technology and applications), the electronic library system (called eleMEK) and an educational version for eleMEK-users. The newest initiative is the establishment of the Hungarian Internet Archive, because the preservation of the digitally published contents is unsolved as yet.

The Society gathers together twice a year on the occasion of the compulsory general assembly. It has important role from several aspects. On the one hand, it opens possibilities which are unavailable as part of the National Széchényi Library. On the other hand, it provides powerful driving force as the Society is the place of several experimental ideas (such as the LIBINFO or MIA) which are later incorporated into the services of the National Széchényi Library or the ELIB Department. And last, but not least, “it provides an external aspect of the game of adapting to the national library and to the service of the national cultural assets”, as it was said by one of the workers.

Table 2. Evolution of ELIB

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>“Internet Pioneers”</th>
<th>“E-Lib Community”</th>
<th>“National e-Library”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main theme</td>
<td>Novelty</td>
<td>Expansion</td>
<td>Extension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product</td>
<td>500 documents, Gopher file archive</td>
<td>2000 documents, HTML website</td>
<td>3750 high-quality documents, 892 periodicals, software etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Organization”</td>
<td>Loose virtual network, small community</td>
<td>Virtual community (core and periphery)</td>
<td>Dept. in NSzK, contributors, volunteers, association</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Organization of ELIB

After the “Internet pioneers” period of ELIB, incipience form of specialization and leadership evolved. While the number of the volunteers still increased, the faster growing readership became less involved in to the development of the library. Some members specialized on a particular task were selected from the volunteers, they became permanent contributors. The contribution of the founders shifted from operative tasks (scanning, proof-reading, HTML-programming) to management, coordination and fundraising. The multilayered organization of ELIB remained (and evolved further) after taking into the National Széchényi Library of Hungary (Figure 2).
The national library of Hungary was founded in 1802. It owes its establishment and name to a highly patriotic Hungarian aristocrat, Count Ferenc Széchényi. Since 1985 it operates in the Buda Castle Palace, one of the most known emblem of capital Budapest and Hungary. The main task of the National Széchényi Library is to collect, process and preserve all the written heritage of Hungary and all documents pertaining to it. At present the library has holdings of about 7 million units of which more then 2 million books. This heritage and this amount of documents were resulting in a highly conservative organization. The philosophy is the preservation (rather than the sharing), dominant is the long term perspective (rather than the fast adaptation of new trends), the operations are conducted by following the rules (rather than the creativity and intuition).

Originally, ELIB was operating under the supervision of the Director of Informatics in the National Széchényi Library. Obviously, an electronic library is a part of the collections and not one of the IT-developments in a national library. Therefore, the E-lib Department rearranged to the Director of Collection Development and Cataloguing. This made at the other departments possible to familiarize with the “queer fishes” tinkering with the new technology at the E-lib Department.

The 11 employees at the E-lib Department are totally different to the whole of the National Széchényi Library. They are seeking for new challenges constantly; their main leaders are the readers and their needs and wants. They do not care about their job descriptions; and they forced to achieve a special permission that allows them to work in the strictly secured
building (the castle) even at weekends. However, some specialization evolved in the last few years even in this department. Three librarians are working on the homepage www.elib.hu. László Drótos is a distant worker from city Miskolc and organizes the entire operations and the developments, their colleagues deal with the acquisitions, the editing and the processing. Two persons are engaged in the Electronic Periodical Archive. Four employees manage various tasks of the digitalizing processes related mainly to the other departments of the library. See the detailed organizational chart in Appendix 1.

Beyond the full or part time employees, there are several contract-based contributors of ELIB. Originally they were volunteers, but the scale of their contribution exceeded a level of activities. That is, the most active volunteers that produced an outstanding level of quality became ordinary contributors. Most of them (12) are proof-readers and compares the digitized version to the original printing. Three contributors are engaged in document format processing. One subcontractor is the administrator of the IT systems at ELIB, while the other deals with the programming.

Interestingly, the contract-based employment seems to be gather attention at the more bureaucratic departments of the National Széchényi Library too. However, this trend is not only the consequence of the academics’ vision of the flexible work, and even not to explain with the evolution of the national library (as it is in the case of ELIB). Even more it is a consequence of the pressure on public institutions. That is, public institutions have to rationalize the workforce and the operations. While the ELIB department is slightly extending (about one new employer per year), payroll of the whole library is increasingly shorter.

During the first years of operations, E-lib was leaning on the work of the volunteers. Because the households were not equipped with scanner, the volunteers typed in their favorite books from the first letter to the final. Almost all documents on ELIB were prepared by volunteers. This has been changed later. Classic literature is scanned mainly by volunteers, but other sources of digitized content evolved. The dominant sources of the technical and the contemporary literature are the authors and the publishers, voluminous reference books are purchased from professional digitalizing companies. The community of more than 150 volunteers is very important still. Their comments and feedbacks, creative ideas and recommendations are useful in order to remain a “sense and response” organization (see Haeckel and Nolan 2003).
Recently one of the community members is bethinking himself of developing a solution for mobile phones. He is working on the XML versions of the ELIB documents, and believes that he could write a WAP or Java program that “translates” these XML documents to cellular phone-capable XHTML form. Another contact is a writer who developed a bookshelf-simulator for his homepage and offered to adapt it at ELIB too.

At the time when ELIB was seeking for the appropriate organizational background the founders managed to set up the ELIB Association. Members are librarians, libraries and many other individuals of the community. It organizes professional events in order to be (more) recognized and it is also a channel for fundraising activities. However, the role of the association reduced as the National Széchényi Library were taking in ELIB.

The originally organic structure of ELIB has changed after the integration into the hierarchical National Széchényi Library. However, after 6 years after, more characteristics of the initial organization remained. ELIB with its different layers of members provides a mixed hierarchical-organic form (Table 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3. Hierarchical and Organic characteristics of ELIB</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Core values</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Production</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Market performance</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organization</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership</strong></td>
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Shifts in the organizational identity at ELIB

ELIB has a well-known image in the Hungarian internet-scene. This electronic library is one of the first content providing initiatives on the Hungarian web. It is also famous for its community that strives to fill the Internet with Hungarian contents and to spread the Hungarian culture around the world. Initially, ELIB was “the community of enthusiasm”.

“We were delighted at the richness of the Internet. It was a very friendly medium of information. We liked that it is free, built on reciprocity and helpfulness. We felt that it offers great opportunities to do something valuable.” (Drótos, co-founder of ELIB, employer at the ELIB department)

The value offered by this experimenting community were Hungarian books that one may want to read on the Internet. That is, the most beloved novels, relevant textbooks, and even white papers about the Internet were the first documents published by ELIB. This is the traditional logic of the collection development of the public libraries. Classic values of public libraries like serving and consulting the “clients” or the popularization of culture also characterize the history of ELIB.

The mission statement of ELIB enhances the future of the libraries and the librarians (see Appendix 2). While the Internet is an important theme still, a more complex process of changes in the role of the libraries is emphasized. It is about the core values of a library, the changing reader habits, emerging multimedia opportunities etc. Therefore it is noticeable a certain shift in the driving values and the organizational identity of ELIB (Table 4).

“We are marching on a common goal that is never to fulfill. This is the front of the infinite path still. Digitalization never ends.” (Librarian at the ELIB Department)
### Table 4. Identity Evolution at ELIB

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Label</th>
<th>“Internet Pioneers”</th>
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<td>Loose virtual network, small community</td>
<td>Virtual community (core and periphery)</td>
<td>Dept. in NSzK, contributors, volunteers, association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driving values</td>
<td>Content sharing Pioneering the Internet</td>
<td>Spreading the masterpieces of Hungarian culture Contributing to the Internet</td>
<td>Developing the library of the 21st century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity function</td>
<td>Trigger, that brought enthusiastic people together and helped to inaugurate the community</td>
<td>Glue, that stick the members together and support its growth</td>
<td>Instrument, that drives and coordinates the everyday operations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>E-mail, mailing list</td>
<td>E-mail, mailing list</td>
<td>Face to face, e-mail, chat, mailing list, newsletter, groupware</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the course of time the operations at ELIB also has changed slightly. Not only new communication forms (face to face communication, internal chat and a groupware application) evolved, but specialization and professionalism became also more extensively.

“We try to make our activities more ‘industrial’, that shifts the operations to be more institutionalized (and impersonal).” (Moldován, co-founder of ELIB, head of the ELIB Department)

### Organizational sub-identities at ELIB

The role of identity at ELIB is better to understand if we study the narratives of the members from different layers of the ELIB organization separately. We present the specialties in the identity of the volunteers first, then we turn to the ELIB Department, finally we enhance the perspective of the founders still active in the orientation of ELIB. (From the organizational layer “Subcontractors” not enough information was collected, but we suggest that their aspirations are likely to be similar to the employers at the ELIB Department.)
Volunteers

Enthusiasm over and the sympathy with the initiative are the main motivation for joining ELIB as a volunteer. They are driven by charitable intent, the love of books, the love of libraries, and the respects to the librarians’ profession. Volunteers apply with e-mail or the mailing list continuously with the intent on contributing.

“I liked the idea that with ELIB it is possible to read books for free. I can help to make even more people to read.” (Volunteer)

“It is a sound attitude of people to be to one’s profit and to work on something that is worthwhile. The Internet is a very good instrument to offer thousand ways for fulfilling this wants. And ELIB creates a frame, an opportunity for expanding such wants.” (Moldován)

This is sort of hobby characterized by the collectors’ passion and the pride they feel every time when somebody download the document they were contributing to.

“Somebody is fishing while the other is repairing his or her car in his or her leisure time. I am just scanning books.” (Volunteer)

“I follow my own program at home. That means that I processed about 25,000 pages in the last two years. A part of it, that is when no copyright problem arose, I offered for ELIB as a “public domain”.” (Volunteer)

The driving values of the volunteers are similar to the values of the ELIB. That is mainly the preservation of the Hungarian culture for the digital age.

“I think that the maintenance of the “greatest masterpieces” and the care of the traditions and the national-historical consciousness is the most important. In other words we have to maintain the “islands of culture” against the “mass culture”.” (Volunteer)

“Yes, I have read the mission on the homepage and I completely agree. If all the people in Hungary would type in only one book per year, 10,000 books would be uploaded yearly that would be a solution for the problem in few years. There are so few of us.” (Volunteer)
However, the role of the volunteers in the operations of ELIB becomes questionable as the scale of the production increases. One of the librarians in the ELIB Department criticized the application of self-appointed writers and publishers.

“We do not need the volunteers, that is to say more volunteers apply than that would good for us. What we receive is often a junk that nobody would publish as a paperback.” (Librarian at the ELIB Department)

The ELIB Department in the National Széchényi Library

Workers at the ELIB Department had all internalized the goals of ELIB. This is a workplace that attracts librarians with a certain interest. They are all conscious of the novelty and the importance of their work; that is to developing the library of the future. This is resulted in a strong commitment and cohesion of the librarians of the ELIB Department.

“This is an exciting and novel challenge, completely different from the traditional librarian work. By the way, it is possible to make some extra money here, a thing that is not typical for other librarians.” (Drótos)

“This is not only a job but a profession on the one hand and a challenge on the other. The commitment is 100%, concerning everybody at the department.” (Moldován)

The regulation of the activities at the ELIB Department is best characterized by the clan control discussed by Ouchi (1980). As it was said by the workers of the department, the identification with the values and goals of ELIB had already happened before joining the organization. The department is said to have a very open, relaxed and communal atmosphere which makes the adaptation of new workers very easy. Leaving the department happened only once.

“In that case, it quickly turned out that he/she does not fit into the culture of the community. He lacked for that commitment which characterized the others.” (Librarian at the ELIB Department)

However, the identity of the department is not completely univocal. The informal, unregulated and collective nature of the work changes slightly as the relationship with other departments of the National Széchényi Library intensifies. On the other side, the risks of the clan control described by more researchers also appear sometimes. Workers are overworked; the boundary between the work and the personal life became blurred now and then.
“The ELIB Department also had to adjust its mentality in order to fulfill the requirements of the being a part of a national library”. (Librarian at the ELIB Department)

“Everybody is working beyond their power here. We are all very conscientious. If something cannot be finished during the working hours the sequel is at home. Our organization is badly organized, but the people who are working for it compensate it with their qualities.” (Librarian at the ELIB Department)

Founders

The founders got interested with the Internet when it was primarily a place for academics, universities and libraries. It is easy to recognize the similarities between the librarian thinking and the Internet of that time. Content and the content sharing are essential in both cases. Both offer this for free (or for a flat rate of the access). Both hold a community together building on the common interest or affinity.

“One found themselves in a community where everyone was affected by some original ethics of being librarian, the ethics of serving.” (Moldován)

The founders emphasize that during the history of ELIB they never knew exactly what will they do some years after. The Gopher archive changed to an electronic library suddenly. Later the library started to operate as an experimental laboratory that is experimenting with novel technologies continuously, trying to sense (and response) the future trends. While Moldován the head of the department visions the fundamental transformation of the library services, the other founder Drótos is thinking are about the combining of various emerging technologies (topic map, new internet protocol, digital formats and metadata) and the electronic library. Moreover, they are working on these ideas systematically. (Note that in spite of their fascinating visions, both “leader” is extremely humble.) According to their latest development we assume that their vision is to transfer the traditional contents into the “digital world” and the preservation, systematization and enrichment of the digital contents.

“The ELIB Department is a “pilot plant” where the library of the future and the future of the library is in the making, and I think that it is exciting in itself. We have to rename us to “Digital Preserving Department” in the National Széchényi Library, because it would represent more what we actually do” (Drótos)
The metaphors of organizational identity of ELIB

Reviewing the image and the mission of ELIB and also the sub-identities which are rather different emphases, we suppose that not the “building the library of the 3rd millennium” is the most general component of the identity at ELIB. The main metaphor of ELIB’s organizational identity is the “community that serves social objectives”.

The community that serves social objectives

This commonality was found at all the layers of the ELIB community. For volunteers, serving is basically their hobby, a form of their self-expression. Subcontractors are also motivated by this superior intention. Librarians at the ELIB Department agree that the function of the library is more than just offering given services. The founders proudly speak about ELIB as a community (and not “only” a library). Another recurring self-interpretation is related to mediating something valuable.

Digital preservation of the Hungarian speaking cultural heritage

The digital preservation spreads the culture and the literature that are absolutely important for almost all members of the ELIB organization/community. Volunteers often select to digitize something they assume to be valuable. The workers at the department also committed to the representation of national/cultural values. Although some new initiatives (e.g. archiving everything from the Hungarian web) are beyond this scope, the vision of the members focuses on the cultural content (no matter if it would be literary, fine arts or other). However, this metaphor poses the problem of mass production; thereupon the original role of the volunteers became questionable.

Working on something that we do not know what will be actually

Basically the founders, but not only they, are strongly engaged in visioning the future of the libraries. They are seeking for the new but yet unidentifiable future “constellations” of libraries and technology. They seize the latest shifts and developments in needs, opportunities and developments and immediately think about the implementation into their practice at
ELIB. However, it potentially could alienate some organization members who do not really enthuse over every emerging technology.

**Discussion of the identity and the organization**

ELIB is growing fast still and launches and launches new experiments and projects. Therefore organizational challenges changes too. ELIB is catalyzing some changes in the working attitude of the National Széchényi Library, but the national library influences the practices of the ELIB Department too. The following questions arise:

- ELIB is halfway from the independent community to the complete inclusion into the national library. Will ELIB go further on this way? Or returns to the more independent situation, e.g. starts extensively fundraising activities, e-business, or simply returns to the low-cost starts?
- While the core values of ELIB are rooted in its organic organizational forms, the mass production and the integration with the national library could pose a more hierarchical organization. Is the hybrid form of ELIB a transitory organizational form? If yes, which form will be dominant at the end: The hierarchical or the organic one?
- The changes in the nature of the activities decrease the importance of the “volunteers” layer of the organization. Simultaneously, more community websites (Wikipedia: an organic encyclopedia, MetNet.hu: a project of amateur meteorologists etc.) appeared on the Internet, that makes the volunteers possible to rearrange their efforts on other “socially useful” sites.

We believe that one of the cohesive forces in this ambivalent strategic-organizational situation is the organizational identity. While the members formulated some differences, there is a common core in the organizational identity that holds ELIB together. This core is the community that mediates (cultural-literary) value on the Internet. Sub-identities “translates” this core to the different layers of the organization, and none of them is contradicting to the “general” organizational identity.

It seems to be irrelevant that the organizational relationships are face to face or virtual. “Distant workers” and employees in the Buda Castle Palace share the same mission, culture and identity. This is because the history of the organization. ELIB was born as a virtual organization. While hierarchical organizations often suffer from loosing control and identity
during the process of virtualization, in this organic community identity is the basis of activities and control. Even at the time of integrating into a historical hierarchical organization. However, a further growth, or an opening for ever wider development portfolio could undermine the one and a half decade old community-based organizational identity.

Appendix 1. Organization Chart of ELIB
Appendix 2. Mission statement of ELIB

“The library of the Future, the future of the Library”

The Hungarian Electronic Library department of the National Széchényi Library works on the reinterpretation of the word: “library” as a place of archives and services, in the virtual environment of the Internet. Therefore, we build and maintain collections, develop and run various services, adopt international standards and best practices, permanently make experiments with the utilization of new technologies for library purposes. We place particular emphasis on the problems of electronic publishing, the methods of long time digital preservation, and the digitization of old and rare printed material; also we encourage the evolution of a co-operating network of Hungarian e-libraries by sharing our experience and technique with others.

Beside research and development we operate one of the largest content service on the Hungarian Internet as a free “public library” of monographic and periodical digital documents (ELIB and EPA) containing educational, scientific and cultural publications. There are several partner institutions, external contributors and volunteers behind the growth of these collections. We develop our library services with special care of the needs of people with disabilities and Hungarians living outside our borders. Another important aspect is to help our readers find relevant information and to pay attention to their remarks and requests. Our collections are open and can be connected with other Hungarian or international systems to be part of a global digital knowledge base in the future.

So the mission of the Hungarian Electronic Library department is to give a new meaning and image to the words “library” and “librarian”; to develop new services suitable for the needs of the knowledge-based society in the 3rd millennium.
References


