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First International Conference on Information Literacy

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Standing in one of the most modern university libraries of Romania it is an honour and a pleasure for me to welcome all of you at the beginning of the "First International Conference on Information Literacy". If I am informed correctly this is for the first time that a conference on this important topic is arranged in Romania. I congratulate you, Prof. Oprean as the Rector of Lucian-Blaga-University and you, Dr. Volovici as the Director of this distinguished library for having initiated and successfully organized such an important scientific event taking place only a relatively short time after finishing your new library building.

Information literacy, competence in information – what does that mean, and who owns it? I am pretty sure that both questions are difficult to answer, at least probably not by me as a mathematician. But I am a little bit thinking of my own field of research, number theory. Since the outset of philosophical disputes about the meaning and the origin of numbers it has not been possible to find an answer to this problem which satisfies all scholars. But nevertheless mathematicians do and did not care too much about philosophical subtleties, just worked with numbers since thousands of years and found beautiful results and theorems.

Maybe things are similar with information literacy. All of you know that our society is endangered to get drowned by too much information. The increase of information in the near future will only be measurable in googols: A "googol" means 10^{100} and, by the way, googol is the origin of the much more famous word "google" which in some sense has become synonymous with information. Many people are afraid that most of us will not be able to handle the steadily growing flood of information. In a recent book, which became a bestseller in Germany, the author claims information may deprive mankind of its free will. He, moreover, claims that mathematical algorithms for instance in the area of datamining are going to determine our behaviour. Of course, this danger may exist, but I

would say - not necessarily. To mention a simple example: Nowadays the time before all kinds of elections is filled with predictions about the eventual outcome of the election. Does this necessarily mean that I am not free to put my cross on the ballot wherever I want to have it? I am much more afraid of such internet platforms as "Facebook" or "StudiVZ" and similar ones to which you deliver your most personal and often enough intimate data only to find out later that it is nearly impossible to extinguish them – they live with you and probably longer than you in the universe and they do not develop in the same way as you develop as a personality during your lifetime, meaning that there exists a wrong picture of you. Such kind of personal exhibition is much more dangerous than trying to check critically the background and use of the daily information we are fed with.

Talking in a library, even in a university library it is worth reflecting about the difference between "knowledge" and "information". Certainly both of them can be transformed into each other: Knowledge in a certain context may become an information, and information, the other way around, may crystallize into knowledge. But in my opinion they are different in their essence. Knowledge is the basis to understand and to judge information. The information about the collision of two highly energetic particles in the Large Hadron Collider in Genf is not worth anything if you don't know the long lasting search of physicists for an understanding of matter in general. The news about a new largest prime number can only be understood if you have a sound knowledge of mathematics and certain applications of number theory to cryptography. There are other examples from all kinds of other fields, from the study of languages, from history and many more. Such knowledge can only be acquired by studying books, journals or scientific papers and these are provided by a well equipped university library. Therefore, by the way, it is necessary to have a sound budget for a library and it is also vital to have enough well educated specialists to decide about new and necessary acquisitions of books and journals. These things are expensive but without having and paying for them research and good teaching are impossible.

I am well informed that I am not the only one to welcome you. So let me stop here. I am not sure if you could draw any information out of what I said. I hope and wish the conference that at its end all of you will have more information about what is information literacy.