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Profile - Roman Gerodimos, PhD**Date:** Mar 28 2012**By:** [Andrea López-Portillo](#)[Printer-friendly version](#)

Roman has attended the Salzburg Academy in several occasions. He is a Senior Lecturer in Global Current Affairs in the Media School at Bournemouth University. He holds a BSc in International & European Studies (2000, Panteion University of Social & Political Sciences, Athens, Greece); an MSc in European Politics & Policy (2001, London School of Economics); a PG Certificate in Academic Practice (2006) and a PhD in Political Communication (2010, Bournemouth University).

Roman's work focuses on emerging patterns of civic engagement and behaviour with particular reference to the phenomena of globalisation, extremism, consumerism and online mobilisation. He is also interested in the relationship between Europe's urban landscapes, public sphere/spaces and civic culture. Visit Roman's lab

Salzburg Academy: Roman, please tell us more about your work and other professional activities.

Roman Gerodimos: My research focuses on three main themes, which are distinct but also inter-related. The first area I am looking at is civic engagement with global current affairs, which examines the role that citizens can play in international affairs and diplomacy, especially given the emergence of global web movements, such as Avaaz.org. It is also about empowering students and young people to engage with the world at large, through global learning and global citizenship.



The second theme of my research is the increasingly embedded role of new media in young people's everyday lives and the impact of that relationship on the public sphere and the civic culture. Has our dependence on media and our withdrawal to the private and domestic spaces of the wired home led to our disengagement from actual public spaces? Are we in danger of falling into habitual, escapist and convenience-oriented patterns of media use, which are designed to reassure us and reaffirm our beliefs, rather than interacting with people, places and situations that challenge us? Finally, I am also interested in the emergence of extremism in Europe. At a time when many people are cynical about politics and government, extremism seems to be emerging as the dominant ideology of the 21st century. It's an ideology based on populism, ignorance, laziness and fear – which sadly are some of the commonest and darkest human traits. I am trying to understand the social and political roots of that phenomenon, especially in Greece, where I come from. These three themes are, essentially, all about the state of liberal democracy in the 21st century, as well as the opportunities and challenges facing it in a context of increased consumerism, individualism and anti-institutionalism.

The role of the media – especially the internet – is obviously central to all three themes, so I am currently co-editing a book on the role of the media as agents of civic (dis)empowerment, while later in 2012 I will also be co-editing a book on the politics of extreme austerity in Greece. This has been an historic period for Greece and the Greek Politics Specialist Group (GPSG) of the UK's Political Studies Association, which I founded in 2004, has actively engaged with the academy and the media in order to monitor and interpret the crisis and the latest political developments.

SA: What are your aspirations both as an individual and as part of a community?

RG: I've been really passionate about politics and international affairs since I can remember myself and I've spent the last seventeen years researching various aspects of governance, citizenship and public communication both at national and international contexts. I truly believe that civic engagement and advocacy can make a huge positive difference to issues such as peace, development and environmental sustainability. We should encourage citizens to realize their own responsibilities and civic duties, in addition to their rights and consumer choices. So, my aim is, on the one hand, to better understand how citizens can be motivated to develop their social and civic capital. On the other hand, I'm keen to put academic knowledge into practice, so I've always tried to support initiatives that help share ideas, stimulate dialogue and create awareness, especially on global issues.

SA: What is your view of the Academy, and how does it relate to the previous point?

RG: I am thrilled and honored to be part of the Salzburg Academy on Media and Global Change. It is an extremely important project that has been having a profound impact on the lives of everyone involved – faculty and students alike. Each session produces a range of learning materials and multimedia artifacts, which are freely available to students and teachers around the world. We also engage in global research projects, which have been advancing our understanding of the role of media in everyday life. Academy fellows are global citizens who act as ambassadors for greater inter-cultural understanding and global awareness. I feel that the Academy's work on bringing together people from all over the world, facilitating robust debate and encouraging greater media literacy is really an ideal model of what should and could happen on a much bigger scale. If we can enable young people from different parts of the world to convene in meaningful discussions regarding some of the main challenges facing the world today – including issues related to international relations and diplomacy, which are traditionally detached from ordinary citizens – this could potentially provide a crucial means of voice and legitimacy at the global level.



SA: When it comes to the impact that media has on society, what do you think should change to have a positive impact? (This change can be in media outlets themselves, about empowering people, etc).

RG: One of the most important functions of the media is to educate us and enable us to come across voices and opinions that we wouldn't normally encounter – perspectives that challenge us and take us out of our comfort zone. In a highly customized and segmented online environment characterized by information overload and compassion fatigue, it is extremely important to find new ways of engaging audiences. This requires developing innovative forms of storytelling that employ visual, as well as textual, elements; narratives that are emotionally as well as intellectually stimulating; media texts that challenge genres and traditional cultural boundaries. In other words, the production of media messages ought to acknowledge the fundamental shift in the way people consume and use the media, otherwise people just won't engage.

At the same time, it is vital that we support media literacy across the board, starting from primary education and all the way up to university and beyond – it's a lifelong process, really. If you think about the amount of time an average person spends using media of any form, then our investment in terms of media literacy, civic support and public service ought to match that.

SA: Do you think young people feel disengaged civically? Why? How could this change?

RG: The easy answer to this question would be to blame it on the politicians and the media. Certainly, they both have some responsibility for the phenomena of mistrust and cynicism that are prevalent not just in Europe or the US but across many political systems. However, citizens ought to take responsibility for their actions or inaction, as well. Perhaps citizens in liberal democracies got used to being provided with rights and consumer choices and forgot that they also have responsibilities – they have a duty to respect their fellow citizens, a duty to be informed,



a duty to participate and fight for their own welfare. I don't accept the theory that puts all the blame on the system – the information is out there if you are motivated and able to find out, and there are millions of ways in which we can make a difference at every level. It doesn't have to be about changing the world, it could just be about changing our street – that's how it starts. So, while government, media and other institutions should facilitate awareness and participation, it is ultimately the citizens' responsibility to take ownership of their communities and lives. I think there is a fundamental problem in our current relationship to government – viewing it as an outside or superior factor – as "the other". We have to think of the political system as something that we have a stake in, and no one can take this away.

SA: What is the first step towards becoming a global citizen? What is the most valuable advice you could give a person in order to become a global citizen?

RG: I think it all starts with awareness and being inspired. There's countless ways to learn about issues and different people get inspired in different ways. For some it comes from their teachers or professors; for others, it may be a fictional program that they watched on TV or a book that they read. Perhaps the easiest, cheapest, most stimulating and most effective means of becoming a global citizen is to read a good newspaper every day. We have underestimated the value of getting a digest of current affairs, put together by trained professionals, on a daily basis. It really works!

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