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Idiots are invincible

Greek author, psychologist and lecturer Dr Angelos Rodafinos talks about settling into Australia and his books on change management and self improvement

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8 Aug 2013

DOROTHY HATZOPOULOU

Psychology professor and author Dr Angelo Rodafinos is one of Greece's success stories in Australia. Uprooting himself from a well-paid job in Greece for ten years as the head of the Psychology Department at the International Faculty of the University of Sheffield in Thessaloniki, Dr Rodafinos made a go of it in Australia. Now you can find him set up in Melbourne as the Program Director of Social studies at Swinburne Online University, happily riding his bike everywhere and working on his next novel.

In my discussion with Dr Rodafinos, we talk inspiration, making it in a new country and what Greece can do to change its bleak position.

DH: You chose to pursue your Doctoral studies in Australia, despite UK and USA University offers. What made you choose Australia?

AR: For a 23-year-old Greek kid whose travel was limited to the Balkan countries, the US was a cultural shock and an amazing educational experience. Australia topped it with its amazing landscapes, the beaches, and the weather (remember, I was not in Melbourne back then). I then told myself, this is the place I want to live in twenty years, or if things in Greece or Europe go astray. Nearly twenty years later I returned.

DH: Did you find it very different second time around after 20 years?

AR: I am not sure if things were different or I was different; the second is more likely. The eyes of a professor are very different to those of a student in many ways. Unfortunately, the same goes for the hair and other parts of the body. The energy and enthusiasm that helped me get along in those years were substituted by some experience and confidence that I can make it. I didn't know anyone both times. I am probably the only Greek who did not have an uncle or a cousin in Melbourne. As a result, I've spent many afternoons riding my bike or walking alone in the streets of Melbourne. We spend most of our lives in the company of Our Majesty; we better learn to get along with ourselves, wherever we are.

DH: What is it that you enjoy most about Melbourne? Can you give us your view of the city?

AR: It's easy to describe it to you, but hard to give a Greek an idea of what this city is like. Then again, Greeks who were born here can't appreciate certain things or imagine what impresses us. In a sentence, if a city can be a paradise-city, perhaps Melbourne would be it. Yes, there may be bad parts, but when you compare it to the average South European city, it wins in all areas. For instance, in the two large Greek cities we have forgotten what the wet ground smells like after an autumn rain. The pollution, the dust and the noise is just unbearable, but one doesn't realise it, until s/he sees what it could be like, that is, when one visits Melbourne. For a period I thought that cars are not equipped with horns/claxons in Oceania. Buildings and houses are incredible, street art, space, roads, bike paths and footpaths (hard to find in Greece - they are full of illegally parked cars, scooters and commercial signs), air, parks and trees, smells, people exercising everywhere, colours, events, restaurants, safety, buskers (but very few beggars), the whole atmosphere of a large and alive multicultural city that has a bit of everything to offer to the resident or the visitor.

DH: Unlike many people who have come here recently looking for work, you were 'snatched' from Thessaloniki, by one of the best universities in Melbourne for the post of Program director of Social Studies. Are you enjoying your new career and are you happy you moved to Melbourne?



(<http://neoskosmos.com/news/sites/default/files/2013/August/IdiotdInvincible.jpg>)

Dr Angelo Rodafinos

AR: I guess it was an experiment. I did leave a prestigious job as the Head of Psychology Department at the International Faculty of Sheffield University, and got into another career with different and, dare I say, better prospects: the future of education is online. Am I happy? Happiness is usually something you take with you wherever you go, but yes, Melbourne does help in many ways. The problem is that one of the most important factors for happiness is social relationships, and unfortunately I also left my family, friends, relationships and social network. I also left behind material possessions such as the furnished apartment I just paid off, my car, etc. Now, material possessions are not that important, as long as the basic needs are satisfied, but it does take time to build a new social network. People here are really friendly and interesting. As soon as one acquires the confidence to go out and talk to strangers, relationships are formed.

DH: Do you find the working environment here very different to the one of Greece and in what ways?

AR: Yes, I do! People ride their bikes to work, the company offers breakfast and fruit, the need for hierarchy is not as strong, everyone is polite and respectful while at the same time more relaxed - keep in mind that there is financial prosperity and growth.

DH: If you had a chance to make a few drastic changes in Greece what would those be? Given that you had choice in all areas, political, industrial, artistic, cultural, academic, etc.

AR: Great question. Where would one start though... I guess meritocracy would make the top five, fighting corruption and law enforcement, smoking, racism, respect for the environment. I would send all Greeks for a month abroad (expensive and unrealistic solution) or expose them to the values and life in other societies via cultural and educational campaigns.

DH: Your lectures have made you a popular public speaker. What are your lectures about?

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