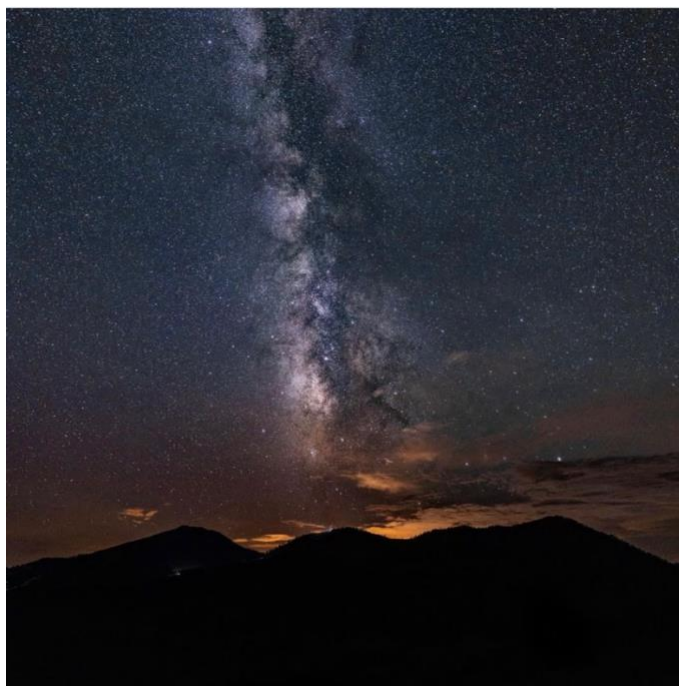

EXPERIENCES IN ENDOBIOGENY



Source: Astrophotography in Greece by Michele Lorrusso

ILLUMINATED BY THE DARK SKY

Vasiliki Delengos

As summer was ending, my mind wandered back to the most memorable moments experienced in those warm months: the sea and the starry night sky. I have spent nearly all my summers in the Peloponnesian peninsula of Greece, my ancestral home. I loved camping on the Greek islands with family and friends. Immersing myself in nature, I disconnect from the repetitiveness of everyday life. For me, the most magical experience is stargazing. The Greek islands are known for their exceptional conditions for stargazing due to low light pollution and clear skies. I'll never forget the first time I camped in Greece and saw the sky from my tent in wonder. The stars, shining in their brilliance outnumbered the islands of darkness.

What a contrast from the Greek islands to Long Island, New York. Growing up in Brooklyn, like many urban areas, light pollution impairs stargazing

conditions. There is no sense of wonder—nothing to wonder about—in the haze of 24/7 artificial lighting. Of course, public lighting has become necessary for the functionality and safety of most urban areas, but it negatively impacts more than just the visibility of the stars. According to Samantha Tracy at the Harvard School of Public Health, extensive exposure to artificial light at night, specifically blue light, can disrupt the body's natural circadian rhythm. This, in turn, impairs sleep quality and duration, contributing to negative health outcomes.¹

The [International Dark-Sky Association](#) is a non-profit organization devoted to conserving and protecting the night sky all over the globe. Its primary goal is to combat light pollution, also known as the excessive or misdirected light that obstructs the night sky's inherent darkness.² By raising

awareness, developing, and promoting lighting guidelines and standards to minimize light, as well as advocating for the adoption of light pollution regulations and policies, IDA hopes to safeguard the night sky and promote ecological and human well-being.

I recently visited Sedona, Arizona, a Dark Sky Community recognized by the IDA. Before travelling there, I had never heard of such a concept. In Sedona there are very few traffic or streetlights. At first, I didn't think much of this because of my numerous trips to places in Greece with similar conditions. But, after my first night in Sedona, I realized why the city embraced the dark sky movement. The visibility and the quality of the night sky was breathtaking. The abundance and brightness of the stars was a sight to behold. I was even able to spot whole constellations—all thanks to preservation of the night sky by limiting artificial light.

Since my experience in Sedona, I was pleasantly surprised to learn that in [June 2023](#), Aenos National Park in Kefalonia, Greece was recognized by IDA. While it's no surprise given the abundance of dark sky areas in Greece, it was the country's first certified International Dark Sky Park.³ Aenos was established as a national park in 1962. Its

primary mission is to safeguard the *Abies cephalonica* ([Cephalonian Fir](#)), a species native to Greece. Additionally, the park was established with the aim of preserving its diverse and abundant range of plant and animal life. Now, it is also recognized for its extraordinary starlit nights and preserved nocturnal environment. Two future initiatives of the International Dark Sky Park involve deploying recently acquired equipment for ongoing light pollution monitoring and attentively overseeing the adoption of LED public lighting to preserve its night skies.⁴

A natural, dark, and quiet environment is beneficial to all living systems. It brings a sense of peace, coherence, and harmony. We thrive and reach optimal potential in such an environment. Perhaps more importantly, it allows us to dream and nourishes us with wonderment of the vastness of the universe. There is something so primal and fundamental for us to connect with nature, to the world outside of ourselves, and slow down the pace of our lives. For the health of your community, get involved with the International Dark Sky Association and become a catalyst for change! ✨

About the Author

Vasiliki Delengos is a Master of Public Health student and the managing editor of Living Systems Periodical. Her journey into public health began with a realization that the well-being of individuals and communities is intrinsically linked to the health of their planet. She works closely with Dr. Kamyar Hedayat and the periodical's section editors to cultivate a community of shared knowledge and collective wisdom, with the aim of enhancing the well-being of individuals and the planet.

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