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STORIES OF THE SEA: REDISCOVERING WOMEN'S ROLE IN COASTAL TRADITIONS

Honoring the Past, Inspiring a Sustainable Future

PURPOSE

- Explore the hidden contributions of women in coastal communities
- Share personal stories and traditional knowledge
- Connect these legacies to modern sustainable practices



WOMEN'S TRADITIONAL ROLES IN COASTAL COMMUNITIES

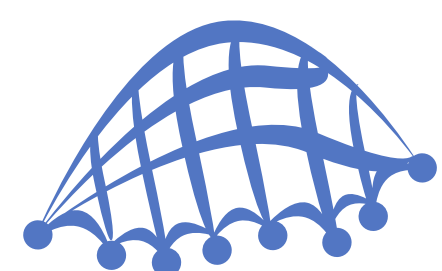


Fishing Tasks

Net Making and Repairing: Women were skilled in crafting and repairing fishing nets using natural fibers like flax and hemp. These techniques were passed down through generations, ensuring that nets were durable and effective. For net dyeing, women used natural ingredients (e.g., oak bark) to strengthen fibers and preserve nets.

Shellfish Gathering: Women and children often gathered mussels, clams, and cockles along the shoreline, as this activity provided an important source of nutrition and income for coastal families.

Preserving and Selling Fish: Salting, drying, and smoking fish to store them for winter months or trade was mainly the women's responsibility. Women played key roles in managing household economies and distributing catch at local markets.



MARITIME HOUSEHOLD AND ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTIONS

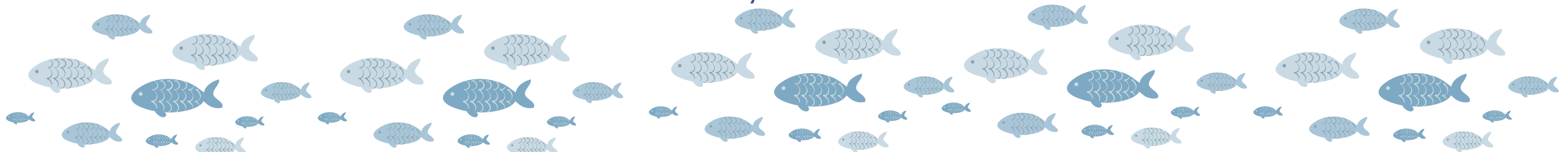


Managing Coastal Economies

Fish Processing and Trade: Women cleaned, processed, and packaged fish for sale or preservation. Regularly, coastal women established small businesses and bartered preserved fish for other goods.

Running Family-Owned Fishing Operations: When men were at sea for long periods, women managed the financial side of fishing enterprises. They handled bookkeeping, supply purchases, and the hiring of crew members.

Market Presence and Influence: Women were often the faces of local fish markets, negotiating prices and maintaining customer relationships, and their role in market dynamics influenced local economies and food security.



CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF WOMEN'S MARITIME ROLES

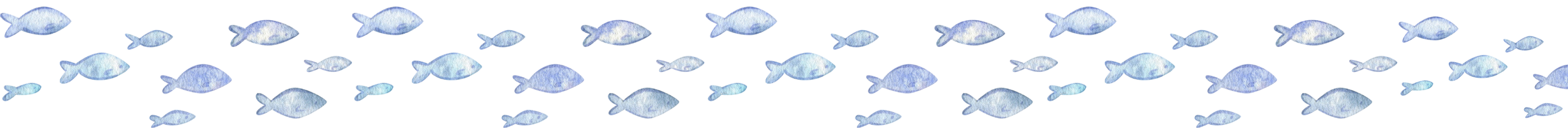


Traditions and Social Practices

Sea Songs and Chants: Women composed and sang songs related to fishing and coastal life, preserving oral traditions. Also, women taught the younger generations about maritime dangers and customs.

Community Gatherings and Festivals: Women played key roles in organizing fishing-related festivals and rituals. These events celebrated successful harvests, honored the sea, and reinforced community bonds.

Craftsmanship and Handicrafts: Women were the ones making baskets, fishing traps, and textiles used in maritime activities. This craftsmanship was passed down through generations, developing unique patterns and techniques.



WHY WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTIONS WERE OVERLOOKED

Male-Dominated Historical Narratives

Fishermen vs. Fishwives: Because the historical records focused on male fishermen's role at sea, ignoring the behind-the-scenes contributions of women. Also, women's work was seen as an extension of domestic labour rather than a form of skilled labour.

Lack of Formal Documentation: Women's skills and stories were preserved orally rather than in written records, and early historical accounts rarely acknowledged women's role in sustaining the fishing industry.

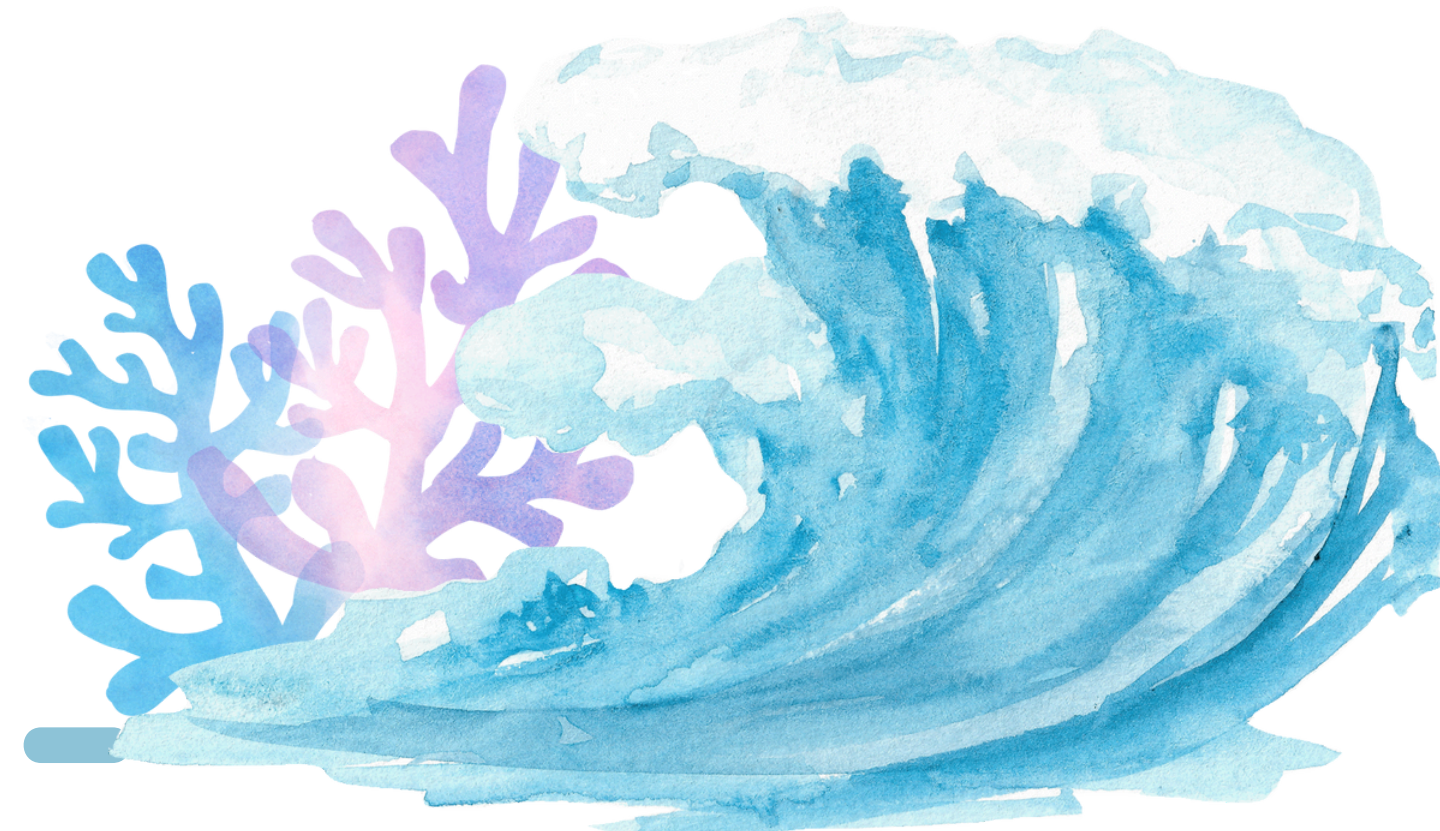


WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN COASTAL COOPERATIVES AND TRADE

Female-Led Fishing Cooperatives

Community-Based Management: In some places, women led local fishing cooperatives, setting prices and negotiating trade agreements. Their work helped ensure the fair distribution of resources and income within the community.

Economic Decision-Making: Women controlled the flow of money from fishing activities, reinvesting profits into the community and they organized collective purchasing of supplies, reducing costs for local fishing families.



WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN COASTAL COOPERATIVES AND TRADE



While specific documented stories of individual Cypriot women in coastal traditions are scarce, women have historically played vital roles in Cyprus's fishing communities, particularly in pre- and post-harvest activities. Their contributions, though often underrepresented in official records, have been crucial to the sustainability and economic viability of these communities.

Roles of Women in Cypriot Fishing Communities

Pre-Harvest Activities: Women have been involved in preparing fishing gear, such as mending nets and maintaining equipment, ensuring that vessels are ready for successful fishing expeditions.

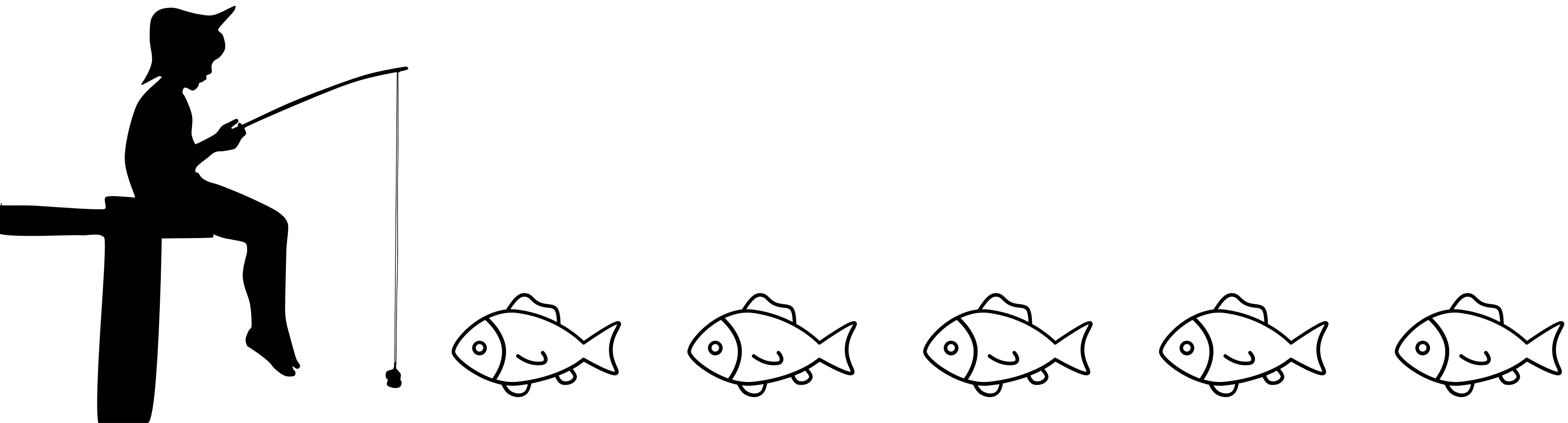
Post-Harvest Processing: After the catch, women typically handle sorting, cleaning, processing, and marketing the fish. Their expertise in these areas ensures the quality of seafood products and contributes significantly to household and community incomes.

Administrative Responsibilities: In family-run fishing enterprises, women often manage bookkeeping and other administrative tasks, providing essential support to the business operations.



CHALLENGES AND INVISIBILITY

Despite their substantial contributions, women's roles in **Cypriot** fisheries have often been informal and unrecognized in official statistics. This lack of formal acknowledgment has led to challenges in accessing social security benefits, professional training, and participation in decision-making processes within the sector. The invisibility of women's work is a persistent issue in both the Mediterranean and Black Sea regions, influenced by gaps in legal frameworks concerning women's roles in the sector.



EFFORTS TOWARD RECOGNITION AND EMPOWERMENT

To address these challenges, regional networks like **AKTEA**, the European network of women in fisheries and aquaculture, have been working towards the formal recognition of women's roles in the sector. **AKTEA** aims to ensure access for women in fishing communities to decision-making processes at both national and EU levels. Their efforts include creating platforms for exchanging experiences, promoting the sustainable development of fisheries, and fostering women's confidence.

Read the full AKTEA Study [here](#).

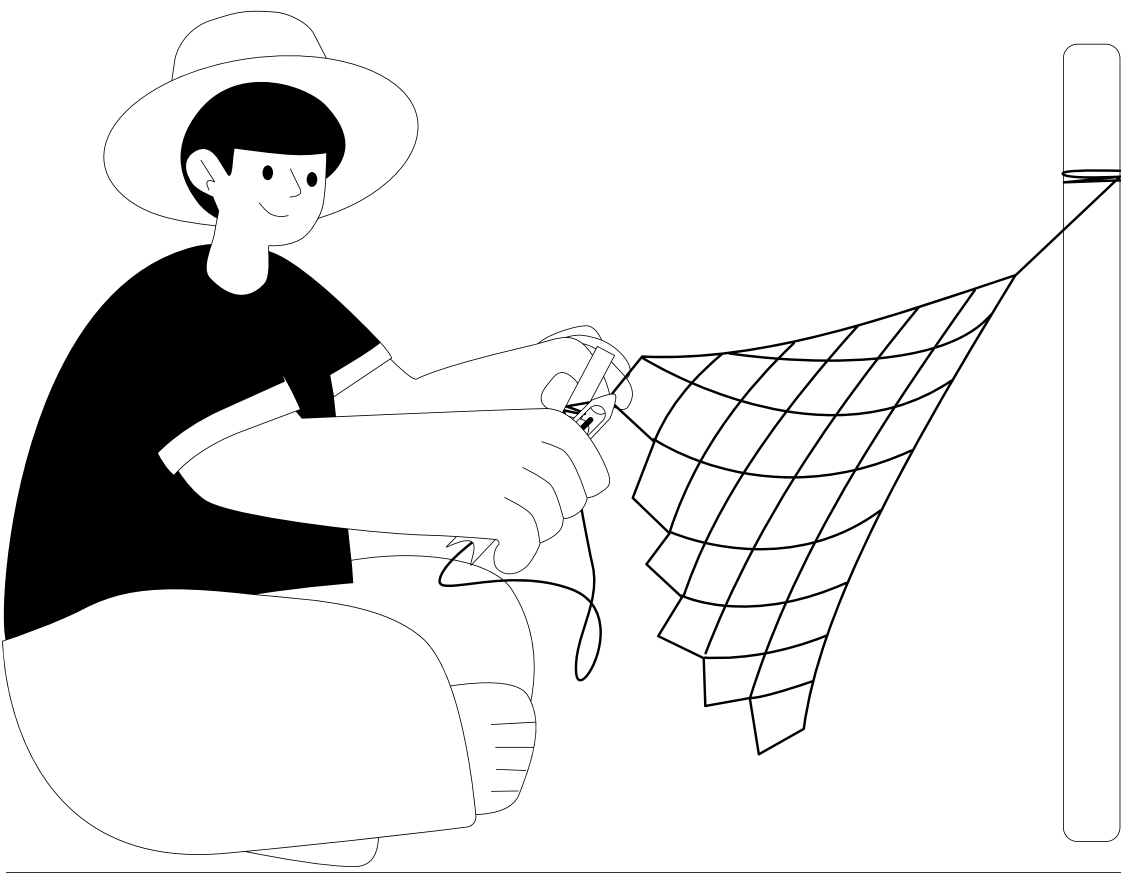


REVIVING TRADITIONAL FISHING AND COASTAL SKILLS IN CYPRUS



Net Making and Repairing

Handcrafted Fishing Nets: Women in Cypriot coastal villages traditionally crafted and repaired fishing nets using natural fibers like flax and cotton. Net making involved specific patterns adapted to the type of fish being targeted, usually passed down through older women to younger generations through hands-on training.



Techniques and Dyeing: Natural dyes made from local plants and minerals were used to strengthen and protect nets from saltwater damage. The patterns and dyeing methods were unique to different coastal communities, creating a form of cultural identity.

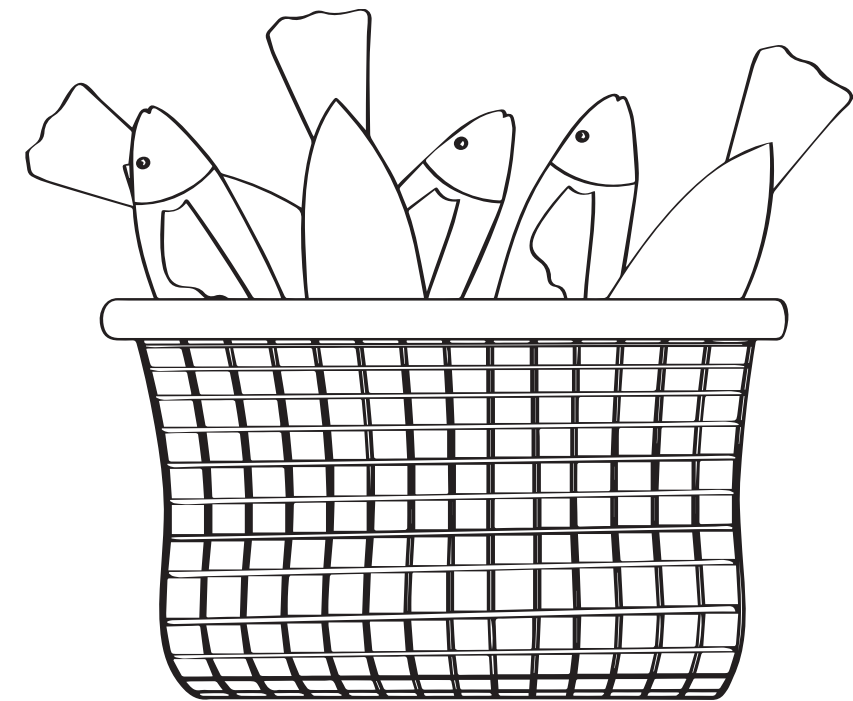
REVIVING TRADITIONAL FISHING AND COASTAL SKILLS IN CYPRUS



Basket Weaving and Trap Making

Weaving Fish Traps (Poulia): Women crafted fish traps from reeds and thin branches, known locally as "poulia". These traps were designed to catch smaller species like mullet and sea bream.

Baskets for Fish Transportation: Handwoven baskets were used to transport and store fresh and dried fish. The designs varied from village to village, reflecting local traditions and available materials.

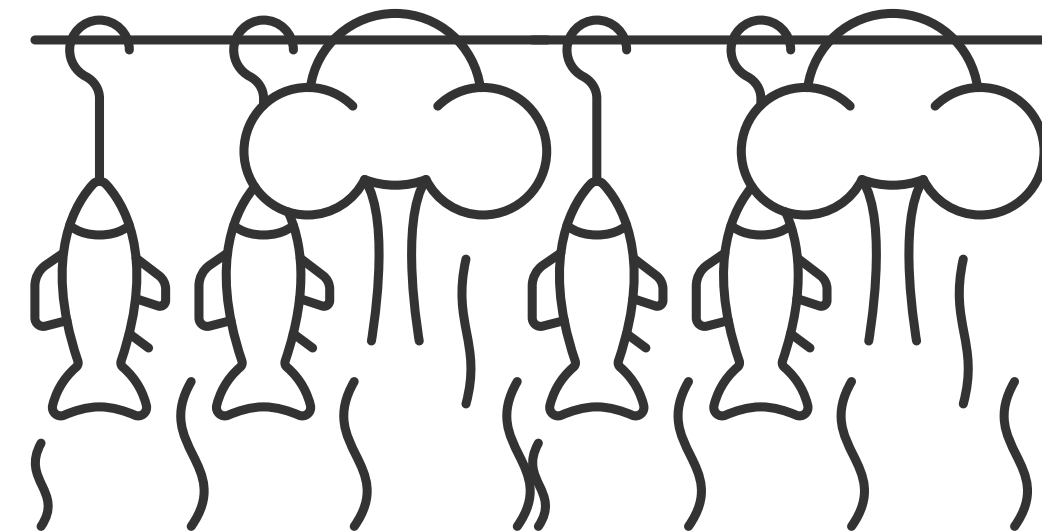
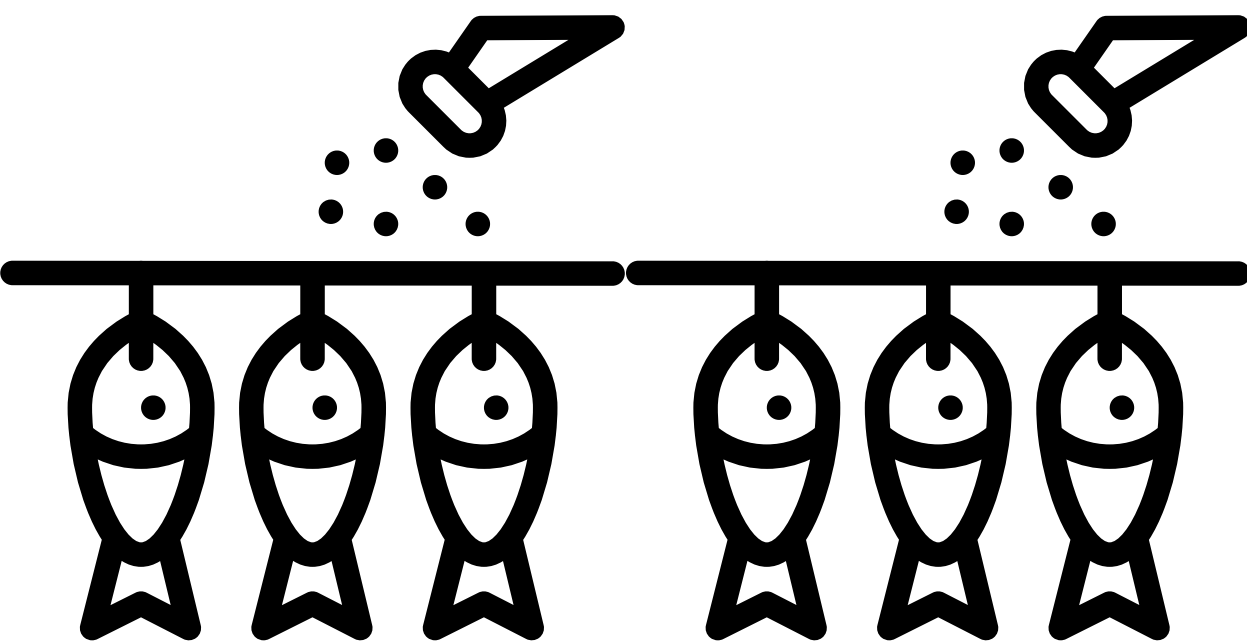


TRADITIONAL FISH PROCESSING TECHNIQUES IN CYPRUS

Salting and Drying Fish

Salting: Women were responsible for preserving fish through salting, a key method for long-term storage. Fish like anchovies and sardines were layered with coarse sea salt and stored in clay pots.

Drying and Smoking: Fish were sun-dried on wooden frames or smoked over low fires using olive or carob wood. Dried and smoked fish were often sold at markets or exchanged for other goods.



TRADITIONAL FISH PROCESSING TECHNIQUES IN CYPRUS

Fish-Based Recipes and Preservation

Traditional Recipes: Cypriot women created recipes using salted and dried fish, such as:

- Liokafta – sun-dried fish served with olive oil and lemon
- Pastos Gavros – salted anchovies served with local herbs

These recipes connected families to their maritime heritage and ensured nothing went to waste.

Olive Oil Preservation: Fish were sometimes preserved in olive oil, enhancing flavor and extending shelf life. This method allowed families to store fish for months and trade preserved fish with inland communities.



RESTORING MARITIME KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS



Intergenerational Transfer of Knowledge

Learning from Elders: Women in fishing communities have been crucial in passing down fishing-related skills and cultural practices. Oral traditions and hands-on learning sessions between grandmothers and grandchildren were common.

Storytelling and Cultural Identity: Women shared maritime knowledge through storytelling and song. Stories often included lessons about seasonal fishing patterns, tides, and marine safety.



RESTORING MARITIME KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS



Community-Based Initiative

Fishing Festivals and Workshops: Revived fishing festivals now feature demonstrations of net making, fish processing, and cooking. Local schools and cultural centers have begun organizing workshops where older women teach younger generations these traditional skills.

Women-Led Cooperative Programmes: In some Cypriot coastal villages, women have started cooperative programs focused on traditional fishing and processing methods. These initiatives help preserve cultural knowledge while creating economic opportunities for women.



LINKING TRADITIONAL SKILLS TO MODERN SUSTAINABILITY



Eco-Friendly Fishing and Sustainable Practices - Tourism and Cultural Heritage

Sustainable Fishing Techniques: Traditional Cypriot fishing practices involved using small nets and traps to avoid overfishing. Women encouraged seasonal fishing to protect marine populations.

Marine Conservation and Coastal Care: Some women-led cooperatives are involved in marine conservation projects. Efforts include cleaning beaches, protecting local seagrass beds, and restoring traditional fishing zones.

Sea-to-table experiences: Women in coastal communities have begun offering sustainable seafood experiences to tourists. Cooking classes, fish processing workshops, and seafood tastings create new income streams while preserving traditional practices.

Promoting Women's Maritime Heritage: Cultural museums and maritime centers in Cyprus have started showcasing the contributions of women in fishing communities. Exhibits on net making, fish processing, and coastal life highlight the vital role of women in sustaining Cyprus's maritime economy.

EMPOWERING WOMEN IN CYPRUS'S COASTAL COMMUNITIES

Women's Role in the Fishing Economy

Fish Processing and Trade: Cypriot women have long been central to fish processing, preservation, and trade. Women in coastal villages like Larnaca and Paphos were responsible for preparing and selling salted and dried fish at local markets. Their expertise ensured that products met high standards, supporting both family incomes and local economies.

Fish Market Management: Women in Cyprus often managed market stalls, negotiating prices and ensuring fair trade. Fishwives were known for their sharp business sense and ability to secure good deals with buyers.



ENCOURAGING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN MARITIME DECISION-MAKING



Increasing Representation

AKTEA Network and Advocacy: The AKTEA network (European network of women in fisheries) has been working to give women a stronger voice in decision-making at the EU level. AKTEA promotes policies that officially recognize women's contributions to fisheries and ensures their participation in policy formation.

Women in Leadership Positions: Some women in Cyprus have started participating in local fishing councils and cooperative boards. Their involvement is helping to introduce more balanced and sustainable fishing policies.



MODERN INITIATIVES INSPIRED BY TRADITION



Eco-Friendly Fishing Practices

Sustainable Net Use: Traditional net-making techniques are being adapted to reduce environmental impact. Women are leading efforts to develop biodegradable nets and reduce plastic pollution.

Seasonal and Species-Specific Fishing: Traditional knowledge about fish migration and seasonal patterns is being used to prevent overfishing. Women's input has been critical in designing marine protected areas and setting sustainable quotas.

Coastal Cleanups and Protection: Women-led community groups are organizing beach cleanups and marine restoration projects. In areas like Latchi and Ayia Napa, local women have been key figures in protecting seagrass beds and marine biodiversity.



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REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- Do you know any similar stories in your community?
- How can traditional skills and practices support modern sustainability?
- What steps can we take to empower women in coastal economies today?

Let's use the **Experiences, Memories and Traditions Sheet** to reflect on the traditions women carry on to the next generations.



EXPERIENCES, MEMORIES AND TRADITIONS SHEET



THANK YOU



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