WHEN CARE ISN’T ENOUGH:
Perceptions of Stewardship in a Vanishing Basin

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Konya Closed Basin, Turkey



What Daloglu keeps coming back to is Professor Joan Nassauer’s point that care is something landscapes communicate visibly, and that this has real sustainability consequences. It helps explain why an agricultural landscape can be full of visible, genuine care and still be unsustainable at a larger scale, and it points toward what’s still missing; a shared language of stewardship, one that could connect what a farmer sees in a single field to what the basin needs to survive.

The Konya Closed Basin sits on Turkey’s central plateau, a semi-arid steppe which functions as one of the country’s most important agricultural regions. Over the past several decades, that closure has become a crisis. Decades of expanding irrigated agriculture, much of it unlicensed well pumping, have drawn the water table down so far that hundreds of sinkholes now swallow fields, roads, and occasionally livestock. There are estimated to be more than 200,000 unlicensed wells across the basin; the irony is that the fields drawing the basin toward collapse are a source of pride for its farmers.

Farmers in the Konya Closed Basin are not indifferent to their land, and the country as a whole takes real pride in the basin’s productivity. Lush, uniform, intensively irrigated fields are read locally, by farmers, by policymakers, by the public, as a proof that the country feeds itself. But it also means that the very cues that signal success and care at the field or national scale are the same ones driving basin-wide depletion.

This research effort aims to make that scale mismatch visible. Combining hydrogeological and socioecological modeling with participatory scenario and futures work, Daloglu brings farmers, irrigation associations, and water managers together to explore how the basin might look decades from now under different water-use pathways, and how differently stewardship is understood across these groups. In these sessions, Daloglu watched a farmer and a water official describe the exact same field in completely different terms, one as evidence of hard work, the other as a liability the basin can’t afford. In this research, the focus on whose care counts, whose doesn’t, and why individually rational, well-intentioned land management can still add up to collective loss becomes clear.



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