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Urban Sustainability in the Age of Climate Justice

How are scholars going to write about cities in the era of global warming? The conceptual tools of urban environmentalism—such as ecological footprint, urban metabolism, or closed-loop economies—have had some influence on the “sustainable cities” movement, but the new demands for climate justice require us to show that what happens in any one city in the global North has direct consequences for populations in the global South. This paper describes my ethnographic efforts in Phoenix, Arizona (one of the world’s most unsustainable cities) to respond to that demand. It focuses on some of the methodological challenges that have arisen in my research and suggests ways of meeting them.