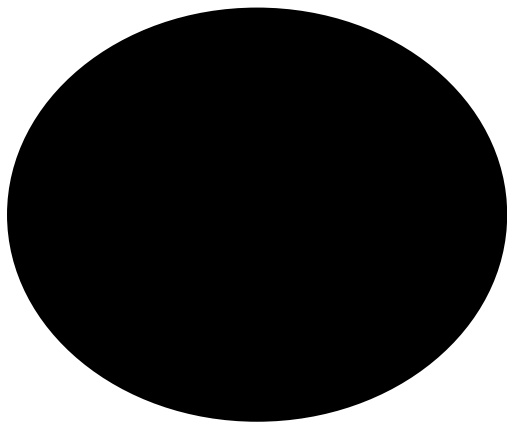


GLOBAL METRO MONITOR. LARGE URBAN ECONOMIES IN TIMES OF CRISIS

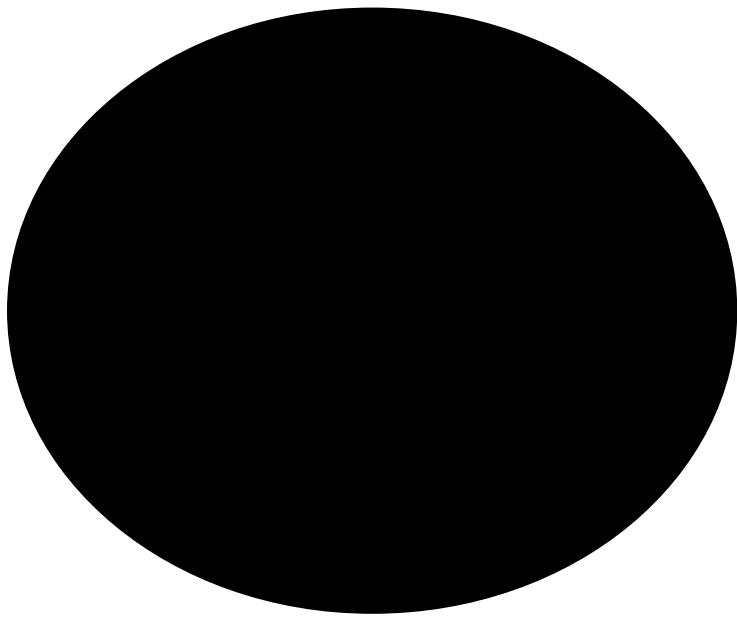
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Brookings has recently published an updated and expanded study [Global Metro Monitor](#) (PDF) for 2011, which I already commented on a while ago on the blog ([Studies on the impact of the crisis on cities worldwide](#)) in its previous edition. It is an effective work that helps to understand some clues about how the current situation is affecting (well, I think it is neither current - how many years have we been here now? - nor temporary) to the bases of the economies of the main cities of the world.

In addition to the document, an [interactive graphic](#) allows you to "play" a little with the data included in the report and make comparisons on the 200 cities included in the evaluation based on GDP per capita (income) and employment changes in the period 2010 to 2011. The big headlines of the report confirm, as they do not it could be otherwise, things that we already know or intuit about which parts of the world are better supporting this global crisis. Thus, **90% of the main metropolitan economies that are growing the most are outside of North America and Western Europe.** The good times of the world capitals of the last centuries are over. The report also detects another pattern that seems to suggest that large cities **whose economic structure is more dependent on commodities or financial services are managing to recover better from the crisis**, compared to cities whose sectoral mix includes components of educational, health or government services, which are suffering the most from the crisis.

It is a good work of statistical compilation and evaluation. Surely, we can say that, even in spite of having expanded the information base, it continues to seem like an excessively simple analysis of the **complex reality that is an urban economy** and even more so if these economies are so disparate. But it is always the toll to pay to make the data comparable and to include as many cities. We can also put on the table the inescapable problem of the **limits of the city**. What is a city and what criteria to follow when comparing them? Its administrative limits exclusively? In the case of urban economies, it is evident that it is a stable and defined limit, but that it excludes many keys to the economic behavior of large cities, which for the purposes of economic structure function as large agglomerations in which, let's say, the economy of Madrid it is integrated into that of Alcobendas. Statistics and functional reality have a complicated coexistence and the metropolitan factor -the real behavior of urban agglomerations- is not always easy to capture in this type of study, on all because when working with two hundred cities, the methodological complexity to obtain the data would surely alter the possibility of comparison. Thirdly, we could also think that the data offered by the report hide another complexity in its simplicity, by not capturing the dynamism of **urban centers**. Especially in the case of cities with a territorial space dominated by the sprawl, the behavior of the centers, much more dynamic than the industrial suburbs, can be hidden in the aggregation of the entire structure of the city. Lastly, it must be taken into account that the data used **refers exclusively to income in terms of GDP and unemployment**; without a doubt, two basic indicators to know the economic evolution, but they are clearly not enough to understand it as a whole. For this reason, in short, the data must be taken, as always, with some caution because considering other indicators, the relative positions of the cities could vary.



In any case, the **trends** indicated in the Global Metro Monitor seem consistent with the perceived reality. The transformation of the [global hierarchy of cities](#), the long way to go to recover employment and income levels prior to the crisis in almost all geographical areas, the importance of the composition of the sectoral structure to be able to better or worse withstand the periods of crisis, etc. Perhaps it is more interesting to explore the "abnormal" behavior of cities such as Bordeaux, Seattle, Nashville, which offer countercyclical indicators with respect to their countries, and to assess, for our closest environment, the significance of the variations in Western Europe.

For those who are more curious, the profiles of each of the cities are available to explore the data. In the case of Spain, we have considered **Madrid, Seville, Barcelona and Valencia** and the first image of comparison with the environment is not surprising. In fact, **all four are part of the list of the ten largest cities in the world that are experiencing the crisis the worst.**

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