

## **The Intellectual History of Cities**

### **I. Purpose**

The purpose of this research project is to sketch the broad intellectual history of the role self-governing cities have played in economic and political development, from ancient times to the present.

The aim should be to provide short summaries and excerpts of the most important strands of thought from the most integral thinkers on cities, in one central document. These summaries—strung together in one tapestry across time—should weave a story of how self-governing cities throughout history have kick-started commercial development, which in turn fostered economic and political development. Readers should be left with the sense that the intellectual tradition behind the charter cities movement—rather than being novel, weird, or avant-garde—is, in fact, one of the oldest and most well-established traditions in international development, and that this tradition has, for some reason, been lost in the modern development discourse. It should also reaffirm to readers that CCI is at the forefront of working to reinsert this tradition, and by doing so, forging a new future of development by better understanding its past.

For those interested in pursuing such a project, please get in touch with CCI staff—in particular, Kurtis Lockhart ([kurtis@cci.city](mailto:kurtis@cci.city)) and Jeffrey Mason ([jeffrey@cci.city](mailto:jeffrey@cci.city)). When reaching out please send over both a CV and a short cover letter explaining why you’re the right person to tackle this project.

### **II. Preliminary Reading List**

#### **Classics**

- Socrates, Plato: *The Republic* should more aptly be called *The City State*, as the optimal Republic they discuss is a city-state not dissimilar to those that prevailed in ancient Greece at the time (especially see Book IV) [here](#).
- Montesquieu’s *The Spirit of Laws*.
- Adam Smith’s chapter on European free cities in *The Wealth of Nations* (especially Book III, Chapter III ‘Of the Rise and Progress of Cities and Towns, After the Fall of the Roman

Empire’; and Chapter IV ‘How the Commerce of the Towns Contributed to the Improvement of the Country’) [here](#).

- Madison, Hamilton, and Jay’s *The Federalist Papers*
- Alexis de Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*, especially the chapters on local governance.
- Karl Marx on the rise of the bourgeoisie (middle class) in cities.
- Henry George’s *Progress and Poverty*.
- W.E.B. Du Bois’ *The Philadelphia Negro*
- Max Weber’s *The City*.
- Henri Pirenne’s *Medieval Cities* (especially chapter 7 on ‘Municipal Institutions’) [here](#).
- See Alan Ryan’s *On Politics* for summaries of Bartolus on Italian City-States (p 279-287) and of Machiavelli (p. 354-389) [here](#).

### **Modern Books**

- Jane Jacobs’ *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (especially Part 4, Chapter 21 ‘Governing and planning districts’, p. 405).
- Robert Caro’s *The Power Broker*
- Albert Hirschman’s *The Passions and the Interests*.
- Elinor Ostrom’s *Governing the Commons*.
- Hendrik Spruyt’s *The Sovereign State and Its Competitors* [here](#).
- Robert Putnam’s *Making Democracy Work*.
- North, Wallis, and Weingast’s *Violence and Social Order* [here](#).
- Ed Glaeser’s *The Triumph of the City*.
- Francis Fukuyama on the importance of free cities to political development in *The Origins of Political Order* (p. 410-413); and *Trust*.
- Raghuram Rajan’s *The Third Pillar*.

### **Recent Academic Papers/Books**

- Joseph Henrich’s *WEIRD People in the World* on the role of charter towns and medieval, self-governing cities in the rise of Europe.
- Zingales, Guiso, Sapienza (2014) (“[Long-Term Persistence](#)” aka “Was Putnam Right?”)

- David Stasavage’s *The Decline and Rise of Democracy* (2020); Stasavage (2014) (“[Was Weber Right? The Role of Urban Autonomy in Europe’s Rise](#)”); Stasavage (2017) (“[When Inclusive Institutions Failed: Lessons from the Democratic Revolutions of the Middle Ages](#)”); Stasavage (2007) (“[Cities, Constitutions, and Sovereign: Borrowing in Europe, 1274-1785](#)”);
- Siqi Zheng & Zhengzhen Tan’s *Toward Urban Economic Vibrancy* [here](#).
- Yuen Yuen Ang’s *How China Escaped the Poverty Trap* [here](#).
- Alain Bertaud’s *Order Without Design* [here](#).
- Jacob (2010) (“[Long-Term Persistence: The Free and Imperial City Experience in Germany](#)”)
- Noah Nathan’s *Electoral Politics and Africa’s Urban Transition* [here](#).