

Preface

The relation between government and the economy and the role of government in economic life have been in a state of flux. In the old “developed” world, the paternal role of government is receding and the power of government is bifurcating. Supra national organizations—the EU and the WTO, for example—exert more influence over economic life. Simultaneously, regional governments have emerged to provide public services to local populations. In some European countries, economic decision making has simply fled the nation state, to international and to local organizations.

In the new “developing” world, the paternal role of government has become stronger with economic modernization, and questions are raised about the ability of these countries to decentralize enough to be responsive to local needs.

Beginning in 1991, the Institute for Futures Studies in Stockholm convened a series of conferences to consider these issues. Meetings were held in Europe, North America and Asia among a broad range of policy makers, journalists, and academics. The objective of this series of mini conferences was to encourage comparative explorations of the links between economic regionalism and government behavior. The papers in this volume are one output of this set of conferences. The papers report theoretical and empirical perspectives on regionalism and development.

The papers in this volume are drawn on the disparate experiences of Malaysia and California, Belgium and Sweden, and the essays are meant to be illustrative rather than comprehensive. Nevertheless, several common themes emerge.

Most important, these essays illustrate the tension between decision making at the very local level and a more comprehensive and centralized approach to the public fisc.

The authors and editors are grateful to many colleagues who took part in meetings over an extended period and who organized the series of conferences. Special thanks go to Gunvor Albihn for efficient organization of the work with the manuscripts, to Katri Saari for substantial editorial support, to Johan Laserna of Svensk Bokform, Lund, for typesetting and to Anna-Sofia

Maurin and Rebecka Schweder for the preparation of the indices of names and subjects.

We would also like to express our gratitude to the Swedish Federation of County Councils for their financial support of this project.

*Stockholm and Berkeley
December, 1996*