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Ecumenical transition – a conversion from bewilderment to hospitality. Deconstructing and reconstructing transitions of the ecumenical landscape in Gästrikland, Sweden, 1945—2010

The revival movements in Sweden during the late 19:th century and early 20:th century resulted in the founding and formation of several more or less independent Christian denominations. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Sweden had to face the rise of competitive organizations, eager to convert its members into a more revivalistic mode of Christian life. Some remained faithful to the Church of Sweden, others entered a history with many years of conflict and mutual distrust.

In the late 20th century, the denominational map was rewritten, locally, regionally and nationally. This ecumenical process, with international influences, was embraced by most of the denominations within mainline Christianity in Sweden, including the Church of Sweden and several of the now called Free churches. The devoted ecumenical spirit was celebrated in various ways, including organizational, confessional and devotional manifestations with national impact. Still, with the coming of the 21st century, many noticed what has been known as an “ecumenical winter”.

This paper focuses on the failures and successes of the ecumenical progress between the local protestant congregations in the Gästrikland region. In so doing, the national confessions of ecumenical devotion will be deconstructed in the regional context through the key factors of historiography, conventions, practice, contract, circulation and memory. The local examples will serve as means to reconstruct the decisive moments of transition and transformation towards local cooperation, agreements and organizational unity between churches.