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European Gathering 2024  
in Poland

# weaving common ground

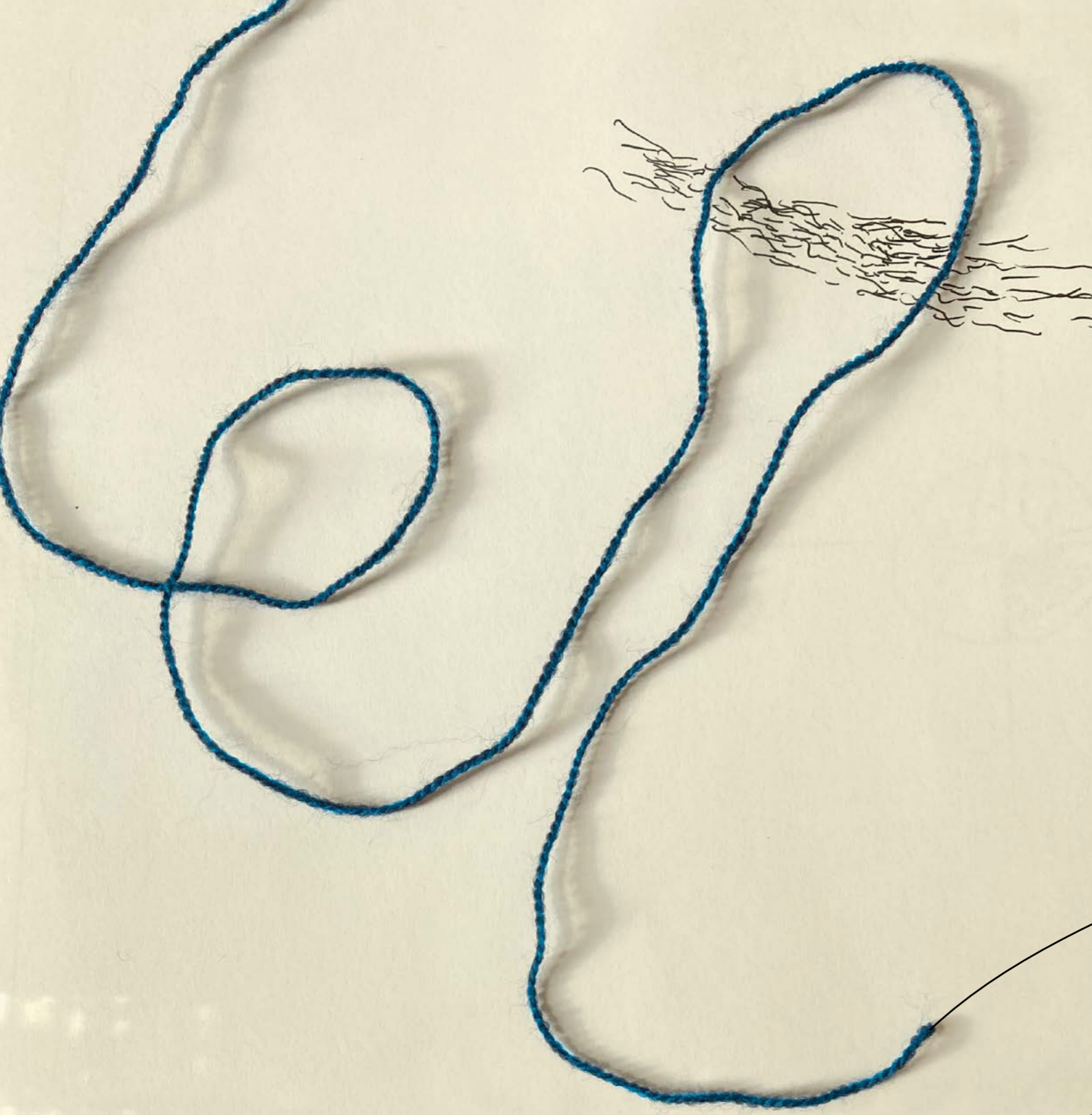
A EUROPEAN GATHERING OF SUSTAINABLE RURAL INITIATIVES

**28.11.–1.12.2024**



ekologiczny uniwersytet ludowy





Picture on the cover: Antje Schiffrers



Register now for the Rural European Gathering 2024 in Poland

**where?**  
the Ecological Folk High School, Grzybów, Poland

**who?**  
rural and urban stakeholders, farmers and food producers, policymakers, researchers, academics

**why?**  
we need to find common ground and goals, and look for partnerships



# weaving common ground

## A EUROPEAN GATHERING OF SUSTAINABLE RURAL INITIATIVES

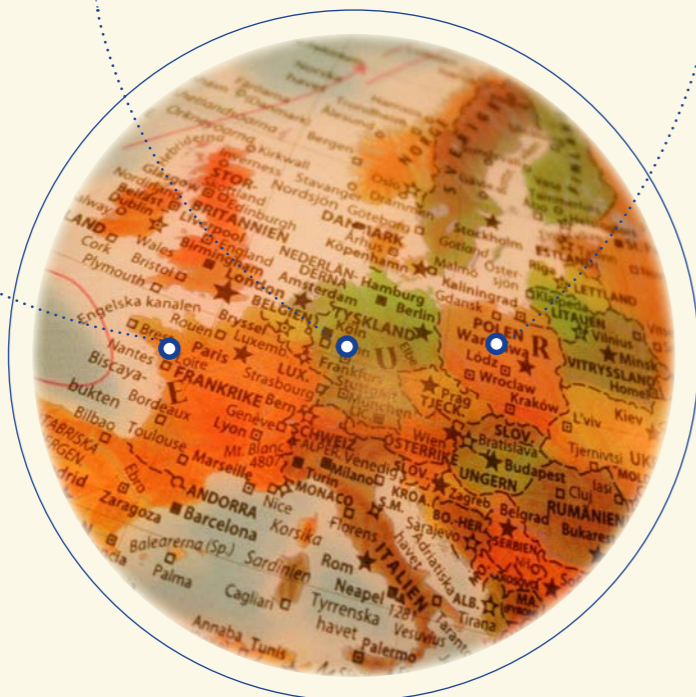
From Plessé to Marburg to Grzybów, this is the third in a series of annual European rural gatherings.

There are underlying structural problems in the agri-food system and in rural areas. And there are immediate manifestations of these problems – increasing polarisation, regulatory rollback and delayed agroecological transition.

**We need to find common ground and goals, and look for partnerships.**

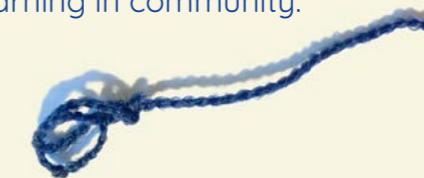
As this caravan of rural action winds its way across Europe, we have found that territories in all corners of the continent have something in common: together communities can cultivate a living and sustainable countryside through cooperation, coming out of our silos, experimentation and openness.

In Plesse, France, we found common ground for participatory democracy in local governance. In Marburg, Germany, we saw cooperation on a local food system between the city and countryside. In Grzybów, Poland, we want to learn about the transformative power of culture, education, and dialogue. At Weaving Common Ground – A European Gathering of Rural Sustainable Initiatives, connecting transnationally and from the local to European level, we will work together to...



### LEARN IN THE FOLK HIGH SCHOOL WAY

For three days we will explore new ways of communication and learning through exchange of experience and sharing different perspectives, but also through art, singing, dancing and exploring the potential of learning in community.



### EXPLORE AGROECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Throughout Europe, many examples of good agroecological practices can be found: we will ponder how to inspire even more rural communities to consider such approaches, and investigate pathways towards agri-cultural, environmental and social system change.



### WEAVE COMMON GROUND

We will explore a metaphor for building dialogue and co-creative collaboration in rural communities: weaving. We will share concrete methods of cooperation already being practised in several European countries, including the Bioregional Weaving Lab project as it is unfolding in Grzybów.



### TAKE ACTION TOGETHER

We will stimulate partnerships and co-create common actions, recognising the important role that farmers play in society and in protecting our natural environment. As rural and urban people we take responsibility for creating a resilient and fair local and regional food system.

## A European Triangle for Rural Action

One of the driving forces behind the new political situation in the European Community is a growing tension between urban and rural people. In the countryside many feel disregarded and dominated by urban, global and digital modernity. They perceive national and European institutions as distant and cold, and blame politicians for ignoring their needs. People living in cities often see farmers as polluters and greedy receivers of subsidies. This alienation between rural and urban Europe and frustrations about politics have massively contributed to a radical shift to the right in EU member states and recently in the European Parliament.

The images of last winter's farmers' protests, the sometimes threatening and hateful slogans posted on social media and demands for a radical rollback of EU and national agri-environmental policies have disturbed many ecologically and socially aware people. How could there be common ground with such demands? Similarly, farmers often feel confronted with moralising nature conservation and animal welfare movements that are oblivious to the hard work of farmers and the true value of food. Discourse about multicultural society, migration and marginalised groups often triggers incomprehension and fear in rural but also urban communities.

Withdrawal into closed bubbles of the convicted may provide satisfaction that seems almost impossible to achieve through constructive dialogue. Popular contempt for politics will not bring about improvement. Withdrawal and confrontation will only lead to more fear and aggression, losing sight of the actual causes and drivers of increasing urban and rural despair. Neither those who protest against asylum centres in their rural communities, nor those who oppose a "fortress Europe" against refugees are causing people to flee their homes in other parts of Europe and the world. Neither environmentalists, animal rights activists nor radicalised farmers are responsible for European and national policies which drive farms to ruin.

We do not have to like each other to recognise that. And to take action for the better. What if food activists made common cause with farmers challenging the market power of agribusinesses and food discounters? What if farmers joined protests against migrant slave labour in vegetable production or against privatisation of water? What if climate activists backed the demand for fair community share in rural solar and wind energy? What if we took joint action against junk food which undermines our local food systems?

If we want to get out of this dead end we need to respect each other. We need to find common ground and goals, and look for our main opponents and partners. What do self-determination and autonomy mean to us? What does home mean? Will farming be improved by supposedly intelligent machines and algorithms that we do not control? Will rural and urban people find common ground to make peace with nature and with each other? Exciting questions. Perhaps the triangle of our experiences in France, Germany and Poland that closes in Grzybów will open up something like a Weimar Triangle for our European countryside and cities.

**It would be encouraging for all of us in these times of crisis. Join us to take action!**

## A Local Triangle for Rural Action

In Grzybów we have built our local community on three pillars: learning – doing – and sharing. With this we follow N.F.S. Grundtvig's personal and community development principles. Grundtvig was a poet, philosopher, pastor, and politician, but also a forerunner of a movement in Denmark in the 19th century, which later spread out into all Scandinavia: Folk High Schools for rural communities.

Folk high schools were the answer to numerous crises of the time, political, economic, cultural and social. Grundtvig's teaching was about preparing peasants and rural people for an active civic life but also about developing and improving agricultural methods. Democracy in Denmark was still in its infancy, conflicts about farmers' rights were widespread, the social position of farmers was very low and they were not prepared to represent the peasants in the newly established parliament. Grundtvig wanted to support rural people in finding their own vocation and strength by working and learning together on their farms and in their communities. He called this approach *livoplysning*, personal "enlightenment" and *folkeoplysning*, community and people's "enlightenment", both closely linked to each other. At our Ecological Folk High School in Grzybów we teach, learn and share our ideas according to this philosophy and spirit.

Today we face comparable crises in our villages as in Grundtvig's day. We believe that we need new ways of overcoming conflict and confrontation. We need new means to discover the strengths in ourselves and in others, to appreciate our roots, our cultural and historical heritages. We need to find partners to jointly seek solutions, and to strengthen the spirit of community in times when people seem to care more for themselves. Regarding the crises we face in how we relate to nature, we need to further develop *naturoplysning*, Nature "enlightenment", accepting that we are connected to and deeply dependent on Nature. We need a new understanding of the Anthropocene we are in, and the limits of human existence in a world of climate change and loss of biodiversity. But we also see that crises are an opportunity for development.

We envisage the local and European gathering in Grzybów as a three-day "course" in Grundtvig's *folkehøjskole*. We will sit down at the table with our opponents and with our allies in rural struggles, and find out what we have in common and what not. After we have met we might even take action together to improve life in our villages and farms. We will begin each day by singing to experience a deeper level of emotional connection through voice. We will invite you to weave with us, literally and metaphorically, a new fabric of understanding, so that we can then learn to differ beautifully in community – as the European Union's motto says: "united in diversity". With the invitation to the Grzybów community triangle, we wish to remind ourselves and our guests of the values and virtues we share and to discover the power of storytelling, poetry, art and dialogue for the better of all. We will use all our senses in sharing what we can do to cultivate what we have in common and to let go of what destroys our common sense.



# Programme

## 28.11 Thursday

**16.00 – 18.00**

Registration

**18.00 – 19.00**

Supper

**19.00 – 20.30**

Warm welcome – Ewa and Peter Stratenwerth, Hannes Lorenzen, governor of Mazovia province Adam Struzik (TBC) and representatives from Marburg, Plessé and Płock region

**PANEL DISCUSSION:** Weimar Triangle on Rural Perspectives

**20.30 – 21.00**

“Threads of Togetherness” – invitation and introduction to weaving artcraft – Agnieszka Niwińska

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Trip 1. Organic farm as a base for education and social activity – the host presentation. Ecological and Cultural Association “ZIARNO”, Ecological Folk High School Foundation in Grzybow, visit on Ewa’s and Peter’s Stratenwerth farm.

Trip 2. Region’s history, (agri)culture and tradition – The open-air museum of the Vistula settlement in Wińczemin Polski

Trip 3. Newcomers of rural life. Organic farm start-up challenges and opportunities – visit on “Pazikoland” – Magdalena’s and Kamil’s Pazik farm

## 29.11 Friday

**8.00 – 8.45**

Breakfast

Registration for latecomers

**8.45 – 9.45**

Kick off the day – singing and getting to know each other – moderators – Anna Długosz, Bernadeta Gołębiowska, Joanna Zatylna

**9.45 – 10.00**

The role of virtues in building dialogue – Ewa Smuk-Stratenwerth

### Session 1. Roots of the Region

**10.15 – 14.00**

Discovering the region – field trips in 2 groups

Group 1 – moderator – Kinga Treder

Group 2 – moderator – Joanna Zatylna

10.15 – 11.00 Trip 1*	10.15 – 11.30 Trip 3
11.00 – 12.15 Trip 2*	11.30 – 12.30 Trip 1
12.15 – 14.00 Trip 3*	12.30 – 14:00 Trip 2

**14.00 – 15.00** Lunch

### Session 2. Sprouting Seeds – recognizing the challenges and looking for solutions

**15.30 – 16.30**

- Sharing impressions of the visits – moderator – Alison Brogan
- Introduction to workrooms – moderator – Louise Kelleher

**16.30 – 16.45** Coffee break

**16.45 – 18.15**

**WORKROOM 1** – From Plessé to Marburg to Grzybów – Nurturing Shoots of Sustainability – moderators – Plessé Municipality (France): Thierry Lohr, Vincent Gaudin, Rémi Besle. kollektiv von Morgen (Marburg, Germany): Merle Drusenbaum, Almut Busch, Ann-Marie Weber. Ecological Folk High School (Grzybów, Poland): Ewa Smuk Stratenwerth

**WORKROOM 2** – Bioregional Weaving Labs as an option for rural development – moderators – Noa Lodeizen, Karin Müller, Joanna Zatylna

**WORKROOM 3** – Farmers, rural communities and the rest of society – how to build common ground? – moderators – Hannes Lorenzen, Peter Stratenwerth

**18.15 – 19.00**

**PLENARY** – sharing the results – moderator – Louise Kelleher

**19.00 – 20.00** Supper

**20.00 – 23:00**

**SOCIAL EVENT** – traditional dancing and singing Niwinski’s Band and Piotr Zgorzelski – dance leader

## 30.11 Saturday

**8.00 – 8.45** Breakfast

**8.45 – 9.00**

Opening the day with singing – Anna Długosz

### Session 3. Fruits of Knowledge

**9.00 – 9.15**

Introduction to workrooms – Natasha Foote

**9.15 – 10.45**

**WORKROOM 4** – Can Grundtvigian pedagogy help in times of crisis? – moderator – Ewa Smuk-Stratenwerth

**WORKROOM 5** – From commodity to rights – how is agroecology a driver for food system change – moderators – Andrea Ferrante, Kinga Treder

**WORKROOM 6** – Intergenerational dialogue in farmers’ lives – moderators Wojtek Mejr, Simone Matouch and Elena Ambühl

**10.45 – 11.15** Coffee break

**11.15 – 12.30 PLENARY** – sharing the results – moderator – Natasha Foote

**12.30 – 13.00**

Introduction to diversity exhibition – Adèle Pautrat

**13.00 – 14.00** Lunch



# Programme

## Session 4. Sharing seeds

**14.00 – 15.00**

Seed exhibition and exchange – moderators – Adèle Pautrat, Agnieszka Markowska

**15.00 – 16.00**

What will our next steps be? – summarizing session, tracing the gathering lifeline – moderators – Wojtek Mejor and Ashley Parsons

**16.00 – 16.30**

Evaluation and presentation of our weaving artwork – moderator – Agnieszka Niwińska

**16.30 – 17.00**

Coffee break/seed exchange

**17.00 – 18.00**

Presenting the conclusions. What's next? – moderators – Hannes Lorenzen, Ewa Smuk Stratenwerth and Andrea Ferrante

**19.00 – 19.45** Supper

**20.00 – 22.30**

Long night of farmer's films / Films from Grzybów – moderators – Antje Schiffers and Anka Wikińska

## 1.12 Sunday

**8.00 – 8.45**

Breakfast

**8.45 – 9.00**

Opening the day with singing – Anna Długosz

**9.00 – 13.00**

**OPTION 1:**

Coffee and chat at the Ecological Folk High School

**OPTION 2:**

Visit the main city of the region – Płock: Płock Cathedral – the Cathedral of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Folk Art Museum, Art Nouveau in The Mazovian Museum in Płock

Please notify us your chosen option via the registration form or by email

**13.00** Farewell lunch

### Call for contributions! Agrobiodiversity Fair

During Session 4 on Saturday, November 30th, we will share with you some good stories on the preservation, development and use of free seeds in Europe. To make this moment a collective tribute to cultivated biodiversity:

- **Bring your own seeds to swap!**

Let's scatter the seeds of cultivated biodiversity

- **Bring your best specimens of traditional edible plants!**

Let's demonstrate the wealth that European gardens and fields have to offer!

## Getting here

**Arrival times:** Registration is at 16:00 – 17:00 on Thursday November 28th, so please try to arrive in Sochaczew train station by 15:00. We understand that this may not be possible for everyone and will accommodate arrival times once you inform us.

**Arriving by rail Sochaczew** is the nearest train station to the Ecological Folk High School in Grzybów. We will provide ground transport from and to Sochaczew train station (approx. 30 minutes by car). Please let us know your arrival times.

**There is the Sleeper train** from Brussels to Berlin (via Antwerp, Roosendaal and Utrecht), which may be useful for some European participants (tickets via [European Sleeper](#)). From Berlin you can travel to Kutno and then to Sochaczew (tickets: [Deutsche Bahn](#))

[Trainline](#) can be a useful website for booking long distance rail travel. You won't find routes to Sochaczew on it, but you will find options for Kutno and Warsaw, from where you can catch connecting trains to Sochaczew.

**Arriving by air** If you fly into **Warsaw or Modlin airports** you can travel onwards by train to Sochaczew, where we can collect you (train tickets: <https://www.intercity.pl/pl/>)

**Your Departure:** You will see in the programme that on the final day of the gathering (Sunday December 1st) we are offering participants the option to take part in a visit to the city of Płock for some sightseeing and lunch together before parting ways. If you choose to partake in this activity, arrange your departure from Płock train station. We will arrange transportation to Płock, you will bring all belongings with you and continue your homeward journey from there.

Participants who have long journeys and tricky connections may prefer to start their journey earlier in the day, or to have a relaxing morning at the Ecological Folk High School before leaving. For those participants we suggest that you do not travel to Płock on Sunday morning but stay in Grzybów, where we will host a morning of coffee and chatting. This will be an opportunity to solidify connections made over the previous three days in a relaxed setting. If you stay in Grzybów, arrange your departure journey from Sochaczew and we will bring you to the train station in time for your travels.

Please let us know your arrival, departure and whether or not you are participating in the visit to Płock via the registration form, or by emailing Alison – [research@arc2020.eu](mailto:research@arc2020.eu) directly.

Call for Contributions!

ORGANISERS:

WITH SUPPORT FROM: