



UNIVERSITÀ
di VERONA

Dipartimento
di SCIENZE UMANE



Arendtian Counciliarism: Visions and Care for Democracy

Hannah Arendt Center for Political Studies

25-27th June 2025, University of Verona

To commemorate the 50th anniversary of Hannah Arendt's death, this conference aims to explore a largely overlooked theme in Arendtian political thought: the proposal of a federal council system. Her vision is primarily examined in *On Revolution*, where Arendt's famous comparison between the American and French Revolutions culminates in a celebration of the rare historical appearance of such system, reflecting her "romantic sympathy" for it, while also making clear the effort she makes to envision new local, participatory, and radically democratic institutions.

By highlighting a political constellation of events ranging from the Athenian city-state and medieval municipalities to the Roman Republic, Thomas Jefferson's townships, the Paris Commune of 1871, Rosa Luxemburg's council communist tradition, the establishment of Jewish kibbutzim in the early 1930s and 1940s, concluding with the Hungarian Revolution in 1956, the reason why Arendt presents these historical examples to such an extent can be traced to the desire to advocate for a possible rehabilitation of a participatory, and radically active democracy which would correspond with democracy's nature herself.

While Arendt critiques modern representative politics, which are based on the party system and the principle of sovereignty, the council system works as a counter-argument that envisions a democratic body politic grounded on political equality, plurality, and more importantly, on the civic engagement and shared deliberation of the people in the public sphere. In this context, the proposal of the council system not only puts the entire conceptual framework of Arendt's political thought into a different perspective—such as her notions of foundation, constitution, institution, revolution, the promise of politics and freedom, and her distinction between the political and the socio-economic realms—but also raises the question of whether this council tradition still operates as an alternative to our current neoliberal scenario.

To investigate the theoretical potential and limits of this proposal — in and beyond Arendt — the organizers welcome contributions on topics including, but not limited to:

- The different elements of Hannah Arendt's tradition of the council system (socialist, jewish, republican)
- The hidden tradition of the *polis* and *civitas*: a common path to the councils?
- Foundation and institution: the ontological core of the council tradition
- Between freedom and authority: is it possible to constitute political action? The problem of the *constitutio libertatis*
- Historical appearance of the councils. The meaning of the revolution in Arendt's political philosophy
- The institutional frame for political action: Arendt's Constitutionalism in light of the council system
- Councils' electoral system: deliberation, persuasion and integrity
- Councils as institutional models: exemplarity or normativity?
- Hannah Arendt and the neglected account of the Workers' Councils and of the social question
- From local to center: The councils as a "reticular society"
- Participatory democracy vs. representative democracy. The fate of the council system
- The critique of the nation-state model and the federalist alternative
- Different views of conciliarism: Arendt's interpretation of the councils and other accounts of council democracy and council socialism/communism
- Council democracy and radical democracy: are they alternatives?
- From theory to praxis: contemporary instances of practices of participatory democracy
- Hannah Arendt as a thinker of institutions

Deadline for submission: 15th January 2025

Results will be communicated by the **1st March 2025**

Submit a 250-word abstract, prepared for blind review, as a Word document or PDF to councilsarendtverona25@gmail.com

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