



## Final conference

# Rebalancing Democracy and Capitalism: A Critical Dialogue Conference

16-18  
SEPTEMBER  
2025

University of Pisa  
Le Benedettine  
Conference Center

Piazza San Paolo  
a Ripa D'Arno, 16  
56125, Pisa - Italy

The [Rebalance project](#) invites scholars to participate in an in-depth meeting at the University of Pisa, exploring the tensions and possibilities at the intersection of democracy and capitalism.

The relationship between these two foundational systems is under increasing strain, as economic inequality, corporate influence, and democratic backsliding reshape political and economic landscapes worldwide. This conference seeks to foster a critical and constructive dialogue on how democratic principles can be preserved and strengthened in market economies.

## Keynote Speakers

[Anita Ramasastry](#), Henry M. Jackson Professor of Law and the Director of the Sustainable International Development Graduate Program at the University of Washington School of Law.

[Theo Jaekel](#), Founder and Business & Human Rights Advisor, Jaekel Consulting.

[Edoardo Mollona](#), Full Professor, Department of Computer Science and Engineering at University of Bologna. Coordinator of the Horizon Europe INCA project - Increase Corporate Political Responsibility and Accountability.

## TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 16

## Conference Schedule

- **13:30 – 14:00** | Registration & Welcome
- **14:00 – 14:15** | Opening Session ([Elisa Giuliani](#), University of Pisa)
- **14:15 – 15:45** | Session I – **Business, Lobbying, and Policy Innovation in the EU**  
Moderator: [Thalita Kalix Garcia](#), Hertie School
  - [Tim Bartley](#) (Stockholm University), [Maria-Therese Gustafsson](#) (Stockholm University) et al. 'Business Positions on Regulatory Expansion in the EU'
  - [Sasha Piccione](#) (University of Venice Cà Foscari) et al. 'Networks of Lobbying Within the European Union'
  - [Rachele Cavara](#) (University of Venice Cà Foscari) et al. 'Agency in Business-Government Interactions: Euro 7 and the Watering Down of Sustainable Regulations'
- **15:45 – 16:15** | Coffee Break
- **16:15 – 17:45** | Session II – **From Corporate Accountability to Civic Resilience: Emerging Challenges and Insights**  
Moderator: [Federica Nieri](#), University of Pisa
  - [Alexandra Grammennou](#) (ZHAW School of Management and Law) 'The Evolution and Effectiveness of Human Rights Due Diligence for Multinational Corporations: Pathways for Future Research from a Systematic Literature Review' (PhD Paper; Discussant: [Tim Bartley](#))
  - [Nadia Bernaz](#) (Wageningen University), [Chiara Macchi](#) (Wageningen University), [Olena Uvarova](#) (YAROSLAV MUDRYI National Law University, NLU) 'Corporate Actors' Impact on the Rule of Law: Pilot Study in Four European Countries'
  - [Inna Melnykovska](#) (European University Institute) 'Beyond the Rent-Seeking: Resilience and Civic Transformation of Ukrainian Business'

- **17:45 – 19:00 | Policy Roundtable: From Competitiveness to a Responsible Business Agenda**

Moderator: **Lorenzo Pellegrini**, Erasmus University Rotterdam

**Nadia Bernaz** (Wageningen University), **Olena Uvarova** (NLU), **Tim Bartley** (Stockholm University), **Elisa Giuliani** (University of Pisa), **Francesco Zirpoli** (University of Venice Cà Foscari), **Francesco Rullani** (University of Venice Cà Foscari), **Andrew Crane** (University of Bath), and **Johanna Mair** (Hertie School) will reflect on the key policy implications of their research and outline a policy roadmap to rebalance business and capitalism

**Evening**

- **20:00 | Dinner**

Participants: Free evening to organize their own dinner

Steering Committee Members and Invited Speakers: Separate dinner (location TBC)

**WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 17**

- **8:45 – 9:45 | Steering Committee Meeting** (Restricted to Steering Committee members, open to interested Rebalance members)

**Morning**

- **10:00 – 11:00 | Keynote Session I – Theo Jaekel** (Jaekel Consulting)  
**Business and Human Rights: An Effective Framework or a Corporate Figleaf?**

Moderator: **Flaviano Bianchini**, Source International

- **11:00 – 11:30 | Coffee Break**

- **11:30 – 12:30 | Keynote Session II – Edoardo Mollona** (University of Bologna)  
**What do European Media Say When They Talk About GAFAM and How This is Politically Relevant?**

Moderator: **Francesco Zirpoli**, University of Venice Cà Foscari

- **12:30 – 14:00 | Lunch and free time**

**Afternoon**

- **14:00 – 15:30 | Session III – Understanding Corporate Behavior on Human Rights: Evidence and Analytical Tools**

Moderator: **Maria-Therese Gustafsson**, Stockholm University

- **Belle Benckendorff** (Business & Human Rights Resource Centre): 'From Allegation to Response: Documenting Corporate Human Rights Performance, Practice, and Policy Globally'
- **Elena Assenza** (University of Pisa) 'A Novel Database on the Human Rights Abuses of EU-Based Multinational Enterprises (MNEs): Preliminary Evidence and Methodological Considerations'

- **Verdiana Morreale** (University of Pisa) et al. 'Stakeholder Management under Extreme Conditions: CEOs and the Practice of Silencing Corporate Opponents'
- **15:30 – 16:00** | Coffee Break
- **16:00 – 17:30** | **Rebalance Business Contest**  
Moderator: **Elena Piani**, Piani Projects
  - **Cecilia Maas and Bastián Silva** - Aureka
  - **Himanshu Panday** - Dignity in Difference
  - **Moritz Maximilian Simon** and **Emilio Gonzalez** - E4RTH

Introduction by Flaviano Bianchini (Source International) followed by the three Business Contest finalists' presentations.

#### Evening

- **19:00** | Buffet & Award Ceremony, [Bistrot dell'Opera](#)  
(Piazza del Duomo, 23, 56126 Pisa)
  - Awards: **Contest Winner and Best PhD Paper**

### THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 18

#### Morning

- **09:30 – 10:30** | Session IV – **Alternative Organizing**  
Moderator: **Zena Al-Esia**, University of Bath
    - **Johanna Mair** (Hertie School) et al. 'Reimagining Capitalism – Variety of Democratic Organising and its Reverberations Beyond Organisational Boundaries'
    - **Francesco Rullani** (University of Venice Cà Foscari) et al. 'A Best Practice at Work: How Multistakeholder Partnerships Across Sectors are Structured to Achieve Democratic Empowerment of Marginalized Communities'
  - **10:30 – 11:30** | Session V – **Political Accountability and Local Responses to Power**  
Moderator: **Kostas Iatridis**, University of Bath
    - **Giulia Rossello** (University of Pisa) et al. 'Dust and the City: Corporate Emissions and Electoral Discontent'
    - **Lorenzo Catalano** (KU Leuven) 'The Politics of Local Spending: Municipal Budget Responses to Federal Election Results' (PhD Paper; Discussant: **Mauro Sylos-Labini**, University of Pisa)
  - **11:30 – 12:00** | Coffee Break
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- **12:00 – 13:00** | Keynote Session III – **Anita Ramasastry** (University of Washington) **Looking Backward in Order to Move Forward in the Business and Human Rights Movement**  
Moderator: **Chiara Macchi**, Wageningen University

- **13:00 – 14:00** | Lunch

**Afternoon**

- **14:00 – 15:00** | Session VI – **Corporations in Contentious Politics: Responding to Populism and Extremism**  
Moderator: **Giulia Rossello**, University of Pisa
    - **Ayse Yorgancioglu** (University of Bath) et al. 'Corporate Responses to Populist Movements'
    - **Michelle Meggle** (University of St. Gallen) 'Corporations as Political Actors: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Firms' Engagement Against Right-Wing Extremism in Germany' (PhD Paper; Discussant: **John Murray**, Stockholm University)
  - **15:00 – 15:30** | Coffee Break
  - **15:30 – 17:00** | Session VII – **Corporate Governance and the Crisis of Democratic Values**  
Moderator: **Rachele Cavara**, University of Venice Cà Foscari
    - **Xu Kang** (Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg) 'Asymmetric Co-Regulation: Corporate Political Engagement in China's Labour Reform' (PhD Paper; Discussant: **Andrew Crane**, University of Bath)
    - **Federica Nieri** (University of Pisa) et al. 'When Businesses Violate Human Rights and Dodge Taxes: The Dual Crisis of Democracy'
    - **Sanna Strom** (London South Bank University) 'Alternatives to Shareholder Primacy: A PhD Project Overview'
  - **17:10 – 17:30** | Conference Wrap-Up and Conclusion
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## List of Participants:

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