

Call for papers:
Reconceiving Business Corporations in Times of Political Contestation

Conference, 22-24 May 2025, Utrecht, The Netherlands.

Organizers: Rutger Claassen & Ugur Aytac
Utrecht University

Over the last decade, societal scrutiny about the role and power of businesses has increased. From politicians to protest movements, from investors to influencers, many actors have geared their demands to reform corporate capitalism and render its power more accountable to the public, whether it be for the sake of the climate transition, the safe development of artificial intelligence, world-wide availability of vaccines, or sustainable finance. These demands also raise the question of how the institutional agency of business corporations should be revised, and what goals they should be made to pursue. In response to such pressures, the US Business Roundtable in 2019 famously dropped shareholder value maximization from its 'corporate purpose' statement and moved to stakeholder capitalism. The EU legislated to enforce corporate reporting on sustainability issues and responsibility for due diligence in the supply chains. But in recent years, these movements towards greater social embedding of business also met with resistance. US republicans pushed back against investors following ESG criteria ('woke capitalism'), Exxon Mobile sued its activist shareholders. All in all, the role of business is politicized, with uncertain outcomes.

In academia, these developments have led to new debates about corporations' role in politics, corporate personhood and purpose, corporate governance and different corporate forms transforming decision-making structures such as social enterprises, coops and steward-owned companies. How to interpret the current moment? Have corporations become too powerful? How are they run, and for whom should they be run? What avenues for reform are open? To address these issues, an interdisciplinary conversation is needed. This conference brings together scholars working in a diversity of disciplines, such as law, philosophy, economics, political science, management and organization studies, and business ethics. We welcome contributions about a wide range of topics within the conference theme.

Keynotes will be held by (bios included at the end):

- Lisa Herzog (University of Groningen)
- Leo E. Strine, Jr. (Wachtell, Lipton, Rosen & Katz)
- Blanche Segrestin (Mines Paris – PSL)

The conference will take place from 22-24 May, in a conference center near Utrecht, the Netherlands. It is organized and sponsored by the ERC project '[The Business Corporation as a Political Actor](#)' (based at Utrecht University) so that no conference fee applies, and all lunches and dinners are paid for. When accepted,

you can book a night at the conference hotel on your own expenses (between 100-120 euros per night).

We have slots available for both presenters and participants who want to attend without presenting a paper.

- If you want to present a paper, please send an abstract of 200-400 words to businesscorporation2025@gmail.com by January 10, 2025. Applicants will be notified of the outcome of their application February 1. Presentations will be bundled in panels of three presenters. You can also send in a proposal for an entire panel of three contributions.
- If you want to attend the conference without presenting a paper, please send a 200-300 word statement of your background and motivation to the same email address.

Keynote speakers:

Lisa Herzog is a Professor of Political Philosophy at the University of Groningen, working at the intersection of political philosophy and economic thought, serving as Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy and Director of the Center for Philosophy, Politics, and Economics at the University of Groningen. She holds a D.Phil. in Political Theory from the University of Oxford, where she was a Rhodes Scholar. Herzog's research explores the philosophical dimensions of markets, liberalism, and economic democracy. Her latest book is *Citizen Knowledge: Markets, Experts, and the Infrastructure of Democracy* (OUP). She is also co-editor of the *Review of Social Economy* and has held fellowships of Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin and Hamburg Institute for Advanced Study.

Leo E. Strine, Jr. is of Counsel in the Corporate Department at Wachtell, Lipton, Rosen & Katz. He was the Chief Justice of the Delaware Supreme Court from early 2014 through late 2019. Before becoming the Chief Justice, he served on the Delaware Court of Chancery as Chancellor since 2011, and as a Vice Chancellor since 1998. In his judicial positions, he wrote hundreds of opinions in the areas of corporate law, contract law, trusts and estates, criminal law, administrative law, and constitutional law. He taught various corporate law courses at the Harvard and University of Pennsylvania law schools, and now serves as the Michael L. Wachter Distinguished Fellow in Law and Policy at the University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School and a Senior Fellow of the Harvard Program on Corporate Governance.

Blanche Segrestin is Professor in Management Sciences at Mines Paris – PSL University, where she co-holds the chair “Theory of the enterprise. Models of governance and Collective Creation”. Her research focuses on the modern enterprise, its creative power, and its implications for corporate governance and corporate law. She is co-author of several award-winning research books, including « Refonder l’entreprise » (2012) with A. Hatchuel, which has inspired the French law that introduced the « société à mission » in 2019. She is now member of the scientific committee of the Communauté des entreprises à mission (CEM).