Overview of the dissertation of Raphaëlle Mattart

Family constitutions are largely conceptualized as monolithic, thereby ignoring the fact that they are as heterogeneous as the families that developed them. Using conceptual and empirical analyses, this dissertation disentangles the family constitution mechanism, as a process and a document. In a nutshell, this dissertation attempts to give a better understanding of the different purposes pursued by families when adopting such documents, how these documents are developed, how the content is articulated (and why) and in particular the effects of family constitutions on the family and the family business.

Chapter 1 is based on a conceptual approach that reviews the insights on family constitution, but also highlights its main roles and theorizes them under different theoretical perspectives. In that vein, the main role of avoiding conflicts, when analysed under the agency theoretical lens, allows to categorize the constitution as a control-oriented mechanism aimed at clarifying the rules, while the role of fostering support and unity in the family, when analysed under the stewardship theoretical lens, allows to categorize the constitution as a support-oriented mechanism, enhancing alignment towards a shared vision.
Chapter 1 offers therefore an integrative theoretical framework that brings out a comprehensive perspective on the roles of the mechanism – as a process and a document – while allowing its differences to be understood.

Building on this integrative theoretical framework, *chapter 2* empirically disentangles the drivers of family constitution development towards one role or another. Using a multiple case study methodology mixing deductive and inductive approaches, via a summative analysis on family constitutions' content and a template analysis on family members and practitioners' interviews, this chapter offers original empirical insights. The findings uncover that drivers are constituted by family members' motivations but also by specific writing patterns during the writing process. Furthermore, it highlights that depending on various combinations of a family's motivations and writing patterns, constitutions can be mainly either control- or support-oriented, but can have an equilibrium between both roles, in an and/and approach. Specifically, the summative content analysis highlights that the content vastly varies, while the template analysis of interviews highlights that motivations are larger than what the literature presupposes. A major element brought out in the chapter is the revelation that the writing process also influences the document towards one role or another, in different ways. Having synthetized these findings in an integrative framework, chapter 2 offers an analytical schema answering the *why* of family constitutions implementation, and goes further by indicating pathways of understanding on how it goes into one role or another.

Chapter 3 inductively investigates the effectiveness of the family constitution's implementation in organizing the family within the business. Using case study methodology, it challenges the supposed inherently homogeneous positive outcomes of constitutions in structuring families in business by scrutinizing the differences between what is said – via a thematic content analysis of constitutions - and what is done – via a thematic analysis of family members interviews. This chapter offers an alternative perspective on the outcomes of family constitutions. It illustrates that family constitutions can lead to different outcomes, that are linked to different

considerations of the constitution - which may be a paper in action or a dead document - and depend on the significance of the gaps between what the constitution says and what the family actually does. Interestingly, this inductive content analysis suggests another original perspective on the content of family constitutions, based on the identification of major common transversal dynamics, rather than focusing on section labels, which are subject to standardisation.

Together, the three chapters create keys to unlock the black box of family constitutions, on both a conceptual and an empirical level. By adopting a transversal scientific approach across the chapters, this thesis attempts to lay the foundations for a new understanding of the constitution, not by considering it as an abstract concept that cannot be disentangled, but rather as a tangible tool. This analysis takes into consideration and gathers different prisms, each corresponding to a different chapter. The dissertation is constructed in such a way that both the research theme and the research protocol are therefore homogeneous and transversal, adopting a major qualitative approach which is under-represented in family governance research (Miller et al., 2017; Suess, 2014) and needed to provide new insights related to the understanding of the dynamics inherent to the study of this family governance mechanism.