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# Family firms and regional context: literature overview, agenda framing and future research directions

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**Abstract** Recently family firms seen a delicate renewed interest in regional science, regional studies and economic geography and similarly, spatial and regional contexts have been addressed in family business studies. Those strands are driven by interest in the heterogeneity of family firms as the most common type of organization all over the world (family spatialities) and the heterogeneity of spatial and regional context as a significant selection filter for the behavior and performance of family firms (spatial familiness). This editorial addresses these unique settings of family firms and the nature of spatial/regional contexts in a greater depth, by providing a concise literature overview on contextualizing research, by presenting a star shaped model to systemize research around spatial and regional contexts, and by suggesting further research directions. Our proposed star-shaped model frames a holistic view on spatial and regional contexts though a scientific agenda that differentiates between theoretical explanations and modelling (*spatial concepts*), empirical descriptions and analyses (*spatial factors, spatial structures, spatial settings*), and policy recommendations

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All authors have contributed equally to the work (e.g. organization pertinent sessions at conferences (EURAM, RSAI, RSA, GCEG), acquiring potential authors, handling and reviewing papers, writing the editorial). For pragmatic reasons authors appear in alphabetical order.

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(*spatial policies*). These elements are shaped by scalar (*spatial frames*) and temporal frames (*spatial processes*). Most of these spatial building blocks and their interplay are explored by the articles in this special issue.

**Keywords** Family firms · Spatial/regional context · Spatial familiness · Family spatialities

“The family business is good for the country, because people spend their entire lives building a business that in turn serves the community” (Alcorn 1981, p. 18)

## 1 Family firms and regional context: a stony, but promising path

It is almost beyond expectations that the family firm, as the most common form of organization around the world (Suwala et al. 2024) has been mostly neglected in regional science, regional studies and economic geography (Stough et al. 2015; Amato 2020; Basco and Suwala 2020). Similarly, spatial and regional contexts have not been appropriately addressed in family business studies (Wright et al. 2014; Basco 2015; Basco and Suwala 2021).

There are various reasons for this. In the above-mentioned regional disciplines, dominant paradigms around knowledge-based and innovation-driven growing modern and networked societies framed within both the regionalization and globalization have brought interest in local, entrepreneurial, newly born, or regional small and medium enterprises on the one hand, and large, foreign, inter- or multinational companies on the other hand (Scott 1986; Sternberg 1989; Fritsch 1992; Taylor and Oinas 2006). At the same time, idiosyncrasies of family firms—such as ownership, governance, and management—along with fundamental operational and strategic concerns, including firm size and growth, succession, employee relations, and entrepreneurial spirit have been central topics in family business studies as they significantly affect firm behavior and performance (Tagiuri and Davis 1992; Chua et al. 1999; Basco 2013; Daspit et al. 2021).

Both the ‘middle ground’ and ‘family component’ of firms have been largely overlooked in regional disciplines, as well as external circumstances such as the (regional) context expressed in any type of spatiality in family business studies (Suwala et al. 2024). However, when looking closely at certain early, popular and enduring research streams in both fields, we found evidence that those circumstances have been implicitly acknowledged. Discourses around the Marshallian industrial district and its revival in Third Italy have emphasized the family (firm) in the regional contexts (e.g. Marshall 1920; Becattini 1978). Similarly, pioneering studies in the early years of family business research highlighted an open systems perspective, acknowledging the unique (local and international) contexts in family firms (e.g. Hollander 1983; Gallo and Sveen 1991; Kahn and Henderson 1992).

If we align with Yeung and Soh’s definition of the firm as “an organizational unit bringing together diverse social relations in which actors are embedded ... [and] these

relationships may be inter-personal relationships, family linkages or simply social ties” (Yeung and Soh 2000, p. 311), and center and enlarge this definition around the family component—which is exactly what Walther Isard et al. (1969) suggests in his *General Theory: Social, Political, Economic and Regional*—the following interpretation of family firms emerges. Family firms serve as the main driving force, vibrant agents, and a stabilizing glue in a spatially embedded orchestration of manifold relationships spanning the family, the firm, the local community and often even multiple generations through persistent local roots, spatial proximity and regional identity building.

This ‘orchestration of separated working tasks’ and ‘holding together’ (integration) of localized social relationships and spatial arrangements through family (firms) have been recognized a long time ago in regional disciplines. Alfred Marshall, in his classical take on (pre-)industrial districts, and later researchers within the realm of Third Italy industrial districts during the Fordist crisis of the 1970s and 1980s, highlighted exactly these constellations as successful regionally concentrated production hubs driven by family-owned and highly specialized small and medium-sized firms (Marshall 1920; Becattini 1978). These industrial districts were characterized as “clusters of small- family and craft-based firms in the rural areas (...) with petit bourgeois traditions, community-wide social and economic rules, and municipal mercantilist traditions, which are historically sedimented in particular areas” (Triglia 1990, p. 199) based on “partial division of labour (...) between individual members of the same family, between families, and between neighboring villages, or clans” (Marshall 1920, p. 113).

Although the family (firm) was also mentioned in similar spatial settings—e.g. the Wenzhou model or the Gnösjo Spirit (Yeung 2000; Wigren 2003; Wei et al. 2007) and partly in the territorial innovation model literature (including innovative milieus, clusters, regional innovation systems, and new industrial spaces, Sforzi 1989; Brinkhoff et al. 2015), the institution of the ‘family’ never achieved a decisive breakthrough. Instead, it was sporadically referenced in studies, intermingled with kinship and friendship relationships and often substituted, paraphrased or black-boxed as cooperation, trust, and reciprocity among spatially proximate economic entities, creating a so-called ‘local atmosphere’ (cf. original Marshallian ideas, Marshall 1890, p. 198; Hansen 1992; Basco and Suwala 2021).

In family business studies—a relatively young academic field—(spatial) contexts have been understood as (external) environments in early research (Davis and Stern 1980; Hollander and Elman 1988). One of the first studies to seriously examine the environment (understood as marketplace or macro-system level) is the PhD thesis of Hollander (Hollander 1983, p. 8, 42, 201). Hereby, “three major interactive components: the family, the business, and the environment with (...) relatively permeable boundaries” (Hollander and Elman 1988, p. 159) are envisioned. It was further apprehended that “the juxtaposition of open-systems theory with family systems theory seems to provide a way of viewing the elephant as a whole” (Hollander and Elman 1988, p. 159).

In this realm, the definition by Davis and Stern is helpful according to “a family firm, as a firm operating in a business environment is influenced by the forces of technology, environmental complexity, and uncertainty as any other firm (...)

external factors, [business] and family issues must be simultaneously accommodated to facilitate survival and growth” (1980, p. 209, add by the author based on the sentences in-between). In a similar vein, Hollander proposes that “a family business consists of two subsystems, the family and the firm, forming a macro-system which is responsive to the environment. Further, it is hypothesized that the application of systems concepts to the interactive process between the family, firm and environment will produce new understandings regarding their interrelatedness” (Hollander 1983, p. 42).

These relatively abstract conceptualizations of (spatial or regional) context as (external) environments were originally used as descriptive and ‘containerized frames’ or more precisely, scales (e.g. macro-system or level, Hollander 1983). However, not much rigor has been given to the very nature of (spatial) context in later studies and their existence has been simply taken for granted or paraphrased as ‘home’ for the local context (or environment) (Kahn and Henderson 1992) and as ‘doing business abroad’ for the international context (Gallo and Sveen 1991). This marks an early differentiation of spatial context.

Interestingly, only the (international) context (Gallo and Pont 1996; Okoroafo 1999; Graves and Thomas 2004), and to a lesser extent, the related concept of ‘home bias’ or ‘home region focus’ (Gomez-Mejia et al. 2010; Banalieva and Edleston 2011) has successfully generated a robust research stream that is older than a decade. This stream has often been published within the realm of international business studies and adjacent journals, authored by family business scholars. Today, international(ization) is by far the most extensively examined (spatial) context (e.g. Pukall and Calabro 2014; Arregle et al. 2017; De Massis et al. 2018; Hennart et al. 2019 among many others).

## **2 The contemporary re-discovery of the regional and family firms’ nexus**

Following the debate opened by Stough et al. (2015) and later expanded upon by Basco et al. (2021a) to advance the cross-fertilization between family business and regional disciplines, our approach here is to push this discussion forward by shading new light in a twofold and not mutually exclusive manner. Contemporary literature mainly addresses two perspectives when analyzing ‘family firms and spatial/regional context’ (Basco 2015; Basco and Suwala 2020, 2021). First, the regional context perspective that deals with ‘family spatialities’ in regional science, regional studies and economic geography. Second, the family firms’ perspective within management, organization and entrepreneurship studies that brings forward the concept of ‘spatial familiness’.

‘Family Spatialities’ refer to the diverse types (e.g., locations, places, landscapes, and territories) and scales (e.g., local, regional, (inter-)national, and global) of spaces, each with a distinctive logic that influences family firm behavior (Seaman 2012; Suwala and Oinas 2012; Basco and Suwala 2020). ‘Spatial familiness’ is defined as a “spatially embedded, distinctive bundle of resources and capabilities arising from family involvement, family aspiration, family-based organizational identity,

and family embeddedness in multi-scalar contexts” (own elaboration based on Habbershon and Williams 1999, p. 11; Weismeier-Sammer et al. 2013, p. 174; Basco 2015, p. 267). Both ‘family spatialities’ and ‘spatial familiness’ are the fundamental sources of firm and spatial heterogeneity (Basco and Suwala 2020, p. 194). Against this background, Basco and Suwala emphasize the need for “more interdisciplinary work to address research gaps and exchange insights on theoretical, empirical, and practical grounds to better investigate the phenomena of ‘spatial familiness’ and ‘family spatialities’” (2021, p. 23). This call serves as the foundation of this special issue.

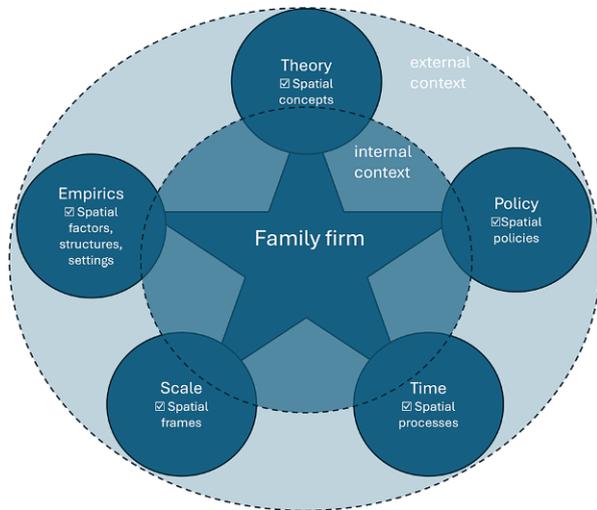
To explore these unique settings of family firms and the nature of spatial/regional contexts in a greater depth, we provide a concise literature overview on contextualizing research in this realm before presenting our own framework.

Contextualizing ‘research objects’ has recently gained importance within management, organization and entrepreneurship studies in general (Johns 2006; Welter 2011; Hällgren et al. 2018) and family business studies in particular (Wright et al. 2014; Krueger et al. 2021). Various types of contexts have been acknowledged in family business studies, including organizational, institutional, cultural, social, temporal and/or spatial context (Amato et al. 2022; Soleimanof et al. 2018; James et al. 2021). The spatial or regional context or better the link between family firms and spatial/regional contexts, the focus of this special issue, has been approached in manifold ways. To understand our new framework we aim to provide, let us first summarize how the regional context has been addressed so far.

- Anecdotal tales and consulting experiences (e.g., “family businesses often follow strategies that are narrowly focused on customer needs in local markets” (Gallo and Sveen 1991, p. 183)), assumptions (e.g., “family businesses are more embedded within the regional community than their non-family counterparts” (Bird and Wennberg 2014, p. 424)),
- Literature-based hypothesis creation (e.g., “family firms appear to be more capable than non-family firms to translate spatially embedded resource endowments into growth performance (...) positive effect of increasing local embeddedness on business growth is higher among family firms in comparison to nonfamily firms” (Baù et al. 2019, p. 375)),
- Model building (e.g., ‘multiple level embeddedness contexts of family firms’ (Basco 2017a, p. 249) or ‘tree model’ where the place attachment of the owning family portrays the ‘local roots’ of the firm (Amato and Patuelli 2023, pp. 57–58)).

In a more systemic manner, spatial context is considered as a multi-scalar (Basco 2017a; Selcuk and Suwala 2020), multi-functional (Basco 2017b) and even methodological and theory-building entity (Gomez-Mejia et al. 2020; Amato et al. 2022). Whereas Selcuk and Suwala (2020, p. 6) develop a multi-stakeholder (actor, family, community) and scalar (micro, meso, macro) context framework for migrant family entrepreneurship, Basco (2017b, p. 249) highlights the manifold situational, contingent, and path-dependent facets of context. An interesting approach to spatial context is proposed by Gomez-Mejia et al. (2020, p. 133); they differentiate between ‘context by sampling’, ‘context by comparison’ and ‘context by theorizing’, thereby attributing a non-universal and relational meaning to context beyond black-boxes

**Fig. 1** Star model of family firms and spatial context (own elaboration)



and containers for operationalization, as the level of reference (see also Krueger et al. 2021).

Against this background, and although there is no coherent framework on spatial/regional contexts, we aim to systematize, apply, and continue work done by Basco and Suwala (2020, 2021), who provide a literature overview on family firms and spatial/regional context. In pursuit of this goal, we propose the following ‘star model’ (Fig. 1).

The five prongs of the star and the surrounding circles are equally important, interwoven in reality with permeable borders between internal and external spatial contexts within and beyond the firm, yet they delineate different logics. The three upper prongs (theory, empirics, policy) outline a traditional scientific approach, focusing on description, explanation, and design. In our understanding spatial context serves multiple functions: it enables theoretical explanations and modelling (*spatial concepts*), supports empirical descriptions and analyses (*spatial factors, spatial structures, spatial settings*), and informs policy recommendations (*spatial policies*). These elements are shaped by scalar (*spatial frames*) and temporal frames (*spatial processes*).

In general, various approaches and perspectives towards spatial/regional context are conceivable. Deductively by tracing the history of thought in regional disciplines or family business studies, or inductively by analyzing papers and articles, given that the nexus is novel. Moreover, depending on the focus, one can adopt a theoretically informed approach (e.g., modeling and identifying for universal circumstances), a practice-based approach (e.g., hands-on experience and management advice), a policy-based approach (e.g., following a certain agenda—growth, employment, well-being), or a combination of these approaches.

As there exists literature that addresses each of these prongs in other research (in particular Basco and Suwala 2020, 2021, pp. 21–22), we will now focus on investigating the idiosyncratic meaning of each circle for contextualization, with

an emphasis on (external) spatial/regional contexts<sup>1</sup> and cite selected literature to exemplify their significance<sup>2</sup>.

**Theorizing context** establishes the ontological and epistemological foundations and implies a specific contextual logic for underlying models. In this realm, various *concepts of space* have been developed and applied in the context of family firms, such as abstract, relative, relational or topical spaces (Suwala 2014, 2021; Amato 2020; Basco and Suwala, 2020, 2021; Amato and Patuelli 2023) or conceptual, cultural, community, and contingency spaces (Seaman 2012, 2013, 2015). For example, Krueger et al. (2021, p. 3) use relational space for contextualizing family firms in the Arab world.

**Empirically investigating context** is by far the most extensive strand in literature. *Spatial factors* and/or variables are primarily used to measure and/or compare contextual dimensions affecting family firms themselves or their impact on a desirable (regional) outcome such as employment (Backman and Palmberg 2015; Amato et al. 2021), innovation (Block and Spiegel 2013; Berlemann and Jahn 2016), productivity (Adjei et al. 2016; Adjei and Eriksson 2021; Amato et al. 2023), exports (Amato et al. 2020; Basco et al. 2023), (regional) performance (Murithi and Beta 2021) or growth (Adjei et al. 2019). The *spatial structures* or *settings* strand exemplifies how regional context is influenced by family firms and/or is influencing family firm in specific territorial arrangements such as industrial districts (Cucculelli and Storai 2015; Pittino et al. 2021), networks (Seaman et al. 2017; Ghinoi et al. 2024) and/or clusters (Grashof 2025 in this issue; Mendes et al. 2025 in this issue). Hereby, certain contextual and spatially driven self-reinforcing mechanism (see for overview Suwala 2023) such as (spatial) embeddedness (Basco 2017a, b, 2024; Bau et al. 2019; Selcuk and Suwala 2020; Bichler et al. 2022), urbanization/agglomeration economies (Bannò et al. 2020; Basco et al. 2021b), proximity (Kahn and Henderson 1992; Adjei et al. 2016; Martyniuk and Gierusz 2016) as well as local roots and/or place attachment come into play (Amato and Patuelli 2023; Amato et al. 2024).

**Politically designing context** explores how context such as regional laws, regulations, statutes or in general institutions (*spatial policies*) affect family firms (Glassop and Graves 2010; Basco and Bartkevičiūtė 2016; Ricotta and Basco 2021; Basco 2024; Sacristán-Navarro et al. 2025 in this issue). Conversely, it also examines how family firms shape and influence their local and regional environments, as well as

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<sup>1</sup> Internal spatial (and regional) contexts will be mentioned where applicable. Examples for internal spatial (and regional) contexts to the firm can be the organization and design of the workplace in the factory (e.g. 5S system within lean manufacturing) that allows for the efficient use of space or economies of scale and/or scope (e.g. Suwala et al. 2022).

<sup>2</sup> It has to be mentioned that most articles encompass more than one type of context. Since we do see a growing overlap between both disciplines, we do acknowledge this new regionally-informed contextual research on family firm and do not separate the origins in the studies as done in Basco and Suwala (2021). A new hybrid generation of researchers such as Adjei et al. (2016, 2019) or Amato et al. (2021, 2022, 2023) binding both disciplines is moreover on the rise.

institutions setups, by tailoring spatial policies to their needs (Albers and Suwala 2021a, b; Graffenberger and Görmar 2021; Rietmann 2023).

**Scales** serve as *spatial frames* for contextualization by sampling in order to delimit spatial entities of investigation. They can span from local (Seaman et al. 2017), regional (Banalieva and Eddleston 2011; Welch et al. 2025 in this issue), national (Chang et al. 2008; Arteaga and Basco 2023; Beck et al. 2025 in this issue), international (Pongelli et al. 2019) or global levels (De Massis et al. 2018). Similarly, micro-, meso-, and macro-levels function as multi-scalar categorization measures (see Basco 2017a, b; Selcuk and Suwala 2020; Basco et al. 2021a). Another approach to spatial structures involves examining specific locations (e.g., Wenzhou, Yeung 2000; Gnosjö, Wigren 2003; sparsely populated regions, Lundberg and Öberg 2021), broader regional classifications (e.g. Europe, Cappelli et al. 2021; Southeast Asia, Samphantharak 2019), or linguistic or cultural areas (e.g. Central-Eastern Europe, Domanska et al. 2023; Latin America, Müller et al. 2018; Iberoamrica, Gomez-Mejia et al. 2020).

**Time** functions as a crucial dimension for establishing temporal frames in contextualizing *spatial processes*. This dimension adds dynamism to research by incorporating vertical perspectives (e.g. global value chains, Debellis et al. 2024; sourcing strategies, Pongelli et al. 2019) horizontal perspectives (e.g. regional networking, Tuitjer and Küpper 2022) or longitudinal spatial perspectives (e.g. Fernández-Pérez 2002) on family firms. Among the most extensively research topics is the process of internationalization of family firms, which explores determinants, pathways, and outcomes among many other dynamic dimensions (e.g. Gallo and Pont 1996; Graves and Thomas 2008; Arregle et al. 2017; De Massis et al. 2018).

In a broader sense, tensions between various spatial frames (home, territory or locality vs. internationalization or globalization) (Baschieri et al. 2017; Kano and Verbeke 2018; Hennart et al. 2019; Bau et al. 2021; Ranfagni et al. 2021) illustrate complex space-time processes. Finally, several models aim to systematically explain the relationship between family firms and regional context, such as the regional familiness model and the spatial management model. These models integrate various building blocks, including spatial factors, processes, concepts, scales (Basco 2015; Suwala 2021; Basco and Suwala 2020, 2021).

### 3 Contributions of the articles in the special issue

While diverse in scale and scope, the five studies in this special issue highlight the family business and spatial/regional context nexus. All studies are empirical in nature, leveraging large quantitative datasets through rigorous econometric methodologies and incorporating multiple dimensions of spatial context for their research purposes.

The first paper, “*Familiar but also radical? The moderating role of regional clusters for family firms in the emergence of radical innovation*” by Grashof, examines

the moderating role of regional clusters on the innovative performance of family firms. Grashof shows that in spite of the inconsistent findings regarding family firms' innovative performance, regional context matters for radical innovation. Using German firm-level and innovation data from the ORBIS and PATSTAT databases respectively, Grashof investigates under which regional settings family firms are more likely to create radical innovations than non-family firms. He finds that family firms are less capable of creating radical innovation than non-family firms on average due to risk aversion and the desire to preserve the firm's socio-emotional wealth. However, when located in regional clusters the likelihood for family firms to create radical innovations increases due to their stronger embeddedness in local and regional innovation networks compared to non-family firms. For policy makers, Grashof accentuates that their measures (e.g. technical services and advice) should primarily tackle the risk avoidance of family businesses. In summary, Grashof (2025) contributes in his empirical paper to the strands around *spatial factors*, *spatial settings* and *spatial frames*. When looking for a desirable (regional) outcome such as (spatially-bound) radical innovation (*spatial factor*), he uses the moderating and contextual role of regional clusters (*spatial setting*) while measuring and comparing family firms against a specific *spatial frame* (Germany) and other contextual dimensions (non-family firms, firm size) (context by sampling).

The second paper, "*The speed of internationalization in regionally clustered family firms. A deeper understanding of innovation activities and cluster affiliation*" by Mendes, Braga, Silva, and Braga, investigates how innovation activities and regional cluster affiliation condition the relationship between family involvement in ownership and management and post-internationalization speed in family firms. Based on the argument that the relationship between family involvement and post-internationalization speed is contingent on the level of family firm's embeddedness in regional clusters, they used internationalized Portuguese family businesses to show that, higher levels of family involvement in ownership and management lead to a lower post-internationalization speed. However, if family businesses are located in a regional cluster and/or are engaged in innovative activities, they have a lower propensity to slow down the post-internationalization process than their non-clustered and less innovative counterparts. Mendes et al. (2025) elucidate that policy makers can enhance post-internationalization speed and competitiveness of family firms by ensuring the provision of regional productive factors and encouraging interactions among regional actors. By and large, Mendes et al. (2025) bring novel empirical evidence on *spatial factors*, *processes*, *frames* and *spatial settings*. The desired (regional) outcome are innovation (*spatial factor*) and a higher speed of internationalization (*spatial process*), they use the contextual role of clusters (*spatial setting*) against a specific *spatial frame* (Portugal) and other contextual dimensions (family involvement in ownership and management) (context by sampling and theorizing).

In the third paper, "*Context matters! Insights into family ownership of listed firms across Europe*", using institutional and economic development frameworks, Sacristán-Navarro, Martínez-García, Basco, and Gómez-Ansón postulate that in developed economies where economic development is robust and formal institutional voids are less, there is an interaction between culture (informal institution), the qual-

ity of formal institutions and family ownership in businesses. Employing a sample of listed firms from 17 European countries, Sacristán-Navarro et al. find no causal relationship between economic development and family ownership, but underline that weaker formal and stronger cultural institutional contexts lead to an increase in family ownership in listed businesses. They further conclude that culture becomes more important in influencing family ownership as the quality of formal institutions increases. Overall, Sacristán-Navarro et al. (2025) show that regional context theorizing (in this case approximated by formal and cultural/informal institutions and economic development) is important for family business performance and survival, but also relevant when studying family ownership or explaining the uneven spatial distribution (*spatial structure*) of ownership within family businesses in Europe (*spatial frame*).

In the fourth paper, “*Regional labor market integration of women and gender diversity in the management of mid-sized firms: are family firms different?*”, drawing on institutional theory, Welch, Ahrens, and Block investigate how regional institutional context in terms of the integration of women into the local labour market influence the share of women in management or leadership positions in both family and non-family firms. Relying on a large sample of mid-sized German firms across 400 regions, Welch et al. (2025) find a positive relationship between regional labour market integration of women and their proportion in management or leadership positions in mid-size firms. However, when differentiating between family status, they outline that this positive effect of women labor market integration on the share of women in management positions is less pronounced in family firms as compared to non-family firms. A plausible reason for this finding is that family firms’ unique emphasis on preserving long-term family control and influence outweighs external pressures to promote gender representation and may reduce the relevance of regional institutional factors aiming to enhance women participation in management. Overall, Welch et al. (2025) show that while the integration of women into the regional labor market influences their career ambitions, such regional institutional effects are less influential in family firms. The desired (regional) outcome are regional labour market integration of women (*spatial process*) and their share in management positions, they use the contextual role of labour market regions (*spatial setting and frame*) against a specific *spatial frame* (Germany) and other contextual dimensions (family control, gender diversity) (context by sampling and theorizing).

In the fifth paper, “*Brazilian large family firms & non-family firms. Bridging regional context and top management team gender diversity*”, drawing on the argument that the regional context in which the family business operates can have influence on the business, Beck, Park, Silva, Meurer, Bubeck, Riefolo, Baumgardt, Suwala, and Ahrens investigate how family firms and gender diversity in top management relate to the geographic location. Using a sample of over 2.8 million active Brazilian companies from the Moody’s Orbis Generics database, Beck et al. (2025) find that family firms are predominantly prevalent in rural regions explained by family firms’ local roots to the social and cultural fabric of the local community. They also point out that family firms have higher proportion of gender diversity in top management, which is explained by family firms’ desire for long-term orientation and focus on legacy. Finally, Beck et al. (2025) find that region-specific characteristics like culture,

social, and economic disparities influence gender diversity in Brazilian family firms. For instance, regions characterized as having higher masculinity and greater power distance have lower female representation in top management in family firms than regions characterized as having egalitarian values. Beck et al. (2025) demonstrate the importance of considering regional, sociocultural, and economic factors when analyzing the desired (regional) outcome of gender diversity in family businesses (*spatial factor*). They use the contextual role of culturally and spatially differentiated regions (*spatial setting and frame*) against a specific *spatial structure* (urban vs. rural) and *frame* (Brazil) and other contextual dimensions (large firms, non-family firm) to showcase the influence of regional context (context by sampling).

#### 4 Discussion and future research directions

The contemporary re-discovery of space in family business research studies and family firms within spaces have recently connected regional disciplines with family business studies and vice versa (e.g. Basco and Suwala 2021). In this sense, this special issue contributes to bridge and further connect both fields. Our ‘star model’ provides a straightforward framework with a holistic approach towards spatial contexts through theoretical explanations and modelling (*spatial concepts*), empirical descriptions and analyses (*spatial factors*, *spatial structures*, *spatial settings*), and policy recommendations (*spatial policies*). These elements are shaped by scalar (*spatial frames*) and temporal frames (*spatial processes*). There are various benefits for authors to use this model. Probably, the most important is that they can position their research with family firms and spatial contexts and contribute to specific conversation within each of the several prongs of the star and the nexus as a whole phenomenon.

Taking the five prongs of the star, we do see the following future research directions. Within the theory and *spatial concepts*, we consider the systemization of self-reinforcing mechanisms between family firms and regional contexts (e.g. home region bias/family residence/ancestral home, local roots, embeddedness, different types of family proximities) as an interesting path to follow in the future. This adds to the general understanding of family spatialities and spatial familiness. Within empirics and *spatial factors*, *structures*, and *settings* there is a lot of ground to cover. Such as digitalization/AI and family firms: is this the end of geography (*spatial factors*) for the locally embedded family firm or the rise of locational (informational) advantages!? How do polycontextualities/multilocality of the family firm members or patch work families affect the spatial organization of firm? Are the ‘family effect’ and the ‘spatial settings effect’ in networks, districts, RIS and clusters complements or substitutes? The *spatial policy* issue arises around the new geopolitical tensions and how family firms deal with it? Are there unique corporate/family spatial responsibilities when tailoring (regional) policies? How about family firms and regional sustainability transitions?! There are certain spatial frames (*scales*) such the global south and family firms, and temporal frames (*spatial processes*) such as how family firms stabilize geographical proximity and therefore *spatial structures* across generations, within internal and external business networks that need addi-

tional consideration. Both space-time can be often combined within family firms and (de-)globalization on value chains or sourcing strategies, the 15 min city or rural regions and local sourcing for family firms. Last but not least the dark side of spatial and/regional context and family firms: regional lock-ins, sclerosis, and regional and family path dependence, or regional decline and displacement require more attention.

To end with, we do extend the call made by Wright et al. “There has been increasing attention to the heterogeneity of family businesses but recognition of the heterogeneity of the [spatial/regional] contexts in which family firms operate is only now emerging” (2014, p. 1247, in brackets added by authors). However, more work needs to be done to understand how spatial and regional context influences and is influenced by family firm behavior and performance.

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