



University of
Zurich^{UZH}

Newsletter URPP Human Reproduction Reloaded | H2R



We are pleased to share our second newsletter of the University Research Priority Program (URPP) "Human Reproduction Reloaded | H2R". In this latest edition we put a spotlight on our newly joined assistant professors, Prof. Dr. Alice Margaria and Prof. Dr. Tommaso Cavazza, who have joined us this April. They were gracious enough to answer some of our questions regarding their experiences here at the URPP H2R, their plans on upcoming research and living in Zürich. At this point, a warm thank you to both again!

As before, this newsletter will provide an outlook for our upcoming events in 2023. We hope that you will find this helpful in planning the forthcoming months ahead. The newsletter also highlights our researchers' current publications, working papers, and the URPP's Best Researcher Award. We invite you to visit our website, [URPP Human Reproduction Reloaded | H2R](https://www.urpp.h2r.unizh.ch/), to get all the information on our activities and current research.

Nina Jakoby (Management)

Zurich, September 2023

[URPP Human Reproduction Reloaded | H2R](https://www.urpp.h2r.unizh.ch/)

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Interview with Assistant Professors Prof. Dr. Alice Margaria and Prof. Dr. Tommaso Cavazza

This April we welcomed our Assistant Professors Prof. Dr. Alice Margaria, focusing on "Legal Issues in Reproduction and Human Genetics" in sub-project 1 [Normativity of Human Reproduction](#), and Prof. Dr. Tommaso Cavazza, focusing on "Reproductive Medicine and Genome Editing" in sub-project 4 [CRISPR Technology in Human Reproduction - An Interdisciplinary Approach](#).

After their first semester as assistant professors at the University of Zurich and as members of the URPP Human Reproduction Reloaded | H2R, we asked them how they experienced the start at their new workplace, plans on upcoming research, and living in Zürich. Here are the answers to our inquiries.

Looking back over the last months, how did you experience your start at the University of Zurich and the URPP H2R?

Alice Margaria: Starting at a new institution always involves acquainting oneself with new practices, structures and organisational approaches. This was especially the case for me, being unfamiliar with the Swiss (German) academic system. I am fortunate to have received ongoing support, and H2R has been particularly important in making me feel 'at home'. The topics discussed within H2R resonate deeply with me, as they align closely with the focus of my work spanning the past decade, and the collegial spirit animating the group made a difference at the human level.

H2R is a dream come true for scholars working across disciplinary boundaries, like myself. It provides the conditions for truly interdisciplinary exchanges in a complex field, like human reproduction, where insights from diverse areas are essential to move discussions forward. I look forward to growing and flourishing in this unique environment!

Tommaso Cavazza: A new start is always exciting and challenging. Thanks to the support of my department and the URPP H2R, I managed to get my lab running fast, and now we are about to start with live microscopy experiments.

The H2R activities have been very thrilling. They gave me the chance to discuss how my research field impacts, and will impact, society, but also how researchers of other disciplines approach the topic. These discussions are great for scientists with my background: we spend long hours in the lab, lost in our experiments, and we may forget to think about how our work impacts society. H2R is an exciting project, and I hope my contribution to the discussions will help to build interdisciplinary bridges and reach our ambitious aims.



Please tell us about your current research concerning the URPP H2R and give us an outlook on your plans for the coming semesters regarding projects and research.

Alice Margaria: My work lies at the intersections of family law, diversity and human rights. One of the projects I am leading, “Who is the Court for? Bringing the Human Back into Human Rights”, explores the approach of the European Court of Human Rights to family diversity, in particular unconventional forms of fatherhood resulting from trans* procreation and surrogacy. To this purpose, I have interviewed a variety of actors involved in cases before the European Court of Human Rights, such as judges, lawyers, and NGO representatives, to understand how reproductive rights are litigated, and what space is given to the human stories and experiences of the families involved.

Over the next months, I will also continue my research on trans* parenthood, tracing the cis and heteronormative powers of legal frameworks through the experiences of trans* fathers who gave birth to their children and are (incorrectly) registered as legal mothers of their children. It’s evident that the law remains an extremely gendered institution, and this results in the lack of (full) legal recognition and protection for many contemporary families created through ART. My research tries to flag this out, sustained by empirical data, and hopes to inspire more inclusive and sustainable future law-making.

Moreover, in the following semester, I will offer a course on Ethics, Law and Reproduction, made possible also by the support given by the Ethics Commission of UZH. It will be a collaborative endeavour, as many colleagues of the URPP will contribute by sharing their expertise on some of the topical questions surrounding reproduction. I am sure it will be a fun experience for students as well as for us of the H2R!

Tommaso Cavazza: Human embryogenesis is highly inefficient. This is one of the causes of the low success rate of assisted reproductive technologies. My research focuses on understanding the causes of early embryonic failure and how techniques to modify the genome can improve embryogenesis efficiency. To achieve these goals, my lab uses early bovine embryos, high-resolution live microscopy, and proteomics and genomics techniques. In the long term, I hope that my lab’s findings using the bovine system will lead to improvements in fertility treatment and give the chance to conceive to those suffering from infertility.



Besides the University of Zurich as your new workplace, the city and the canton have become a part of your daily life. How do you experience working and living (do you?) in Zurich?

Alice Margaria: Zurich was, definitely, a positive surprise. The city's welcoming attitude and open-mindedness haven't escaped my notice – a delightful experience, particularly for someone arriving from abroad, such as myself. At the same time, Zurich maintains a local vibe, which makes the city a harmonious blend of authenticity and innovation!

Tommaso Cavazza: Zurich is amazing. I have two small children, and we explored the city by visiting Badis and Gemeinschaft Zentrums, especially those with animals. I look forward to the children growing up a bit and going with them to the wonderful mountains around us!

New publications 2023

Alaattinoğlu, Daniela, Alice Margaria, & Stefano Osella (2023). Introduction: Trans Identities and the Law. In *International Journal of Constitutional Law*, Volume 21, Issue 2, 569 – 573. [Link](#)

Alaattinoğlu, Daniela & Alice Margaria (2023). Trans Parents and the Gendered Law: Critical Reflections on the Swedish Regulation. In *International Journal of Constitutional Law*, Volume 21, Issue 2, 603 – 624. [Link](#)

Braunschweig, Michael U. (2023). Rezension "Liberale Eugenik? Kritik der selektiven Reproduktion", von Robert Ranisch (2021). In *Ethik in der Medizin* (2023), 02.01.2023. [Link](#)

Mathis, Nicolas, Ahmed Allam, Lucas Kissling, Kim Fabiano Marquart, Lukas Schmidheini, Cristina Solari, Zsolt Balázs, Michael Krauthammer & Gerald Schwank (2023). Predicting Prime Editing Efficiency and Product Purity by Deep Learning. In *Nature Biotechnology* (2023). [Link](#)

Peter-Spiess, Marie-Hélène (2023). A.L. v. France: Domestic Surrogacy, Genetic Fatherhood and the Best Interests of the Child. In *Strasbourg Observers*, 10.02.2023. [Link](#)

Spiekerkoetter, Ute, David Bick, Richard Scott, Henrietta Hopkins, Tanja Krones, Edith Sky Gross & James R. Bonham (2023). Genomic Newborn Screening: Are We Entering a New Era of Screening? In *Journal of Inherited Metabolic Disease (JIMD)* 2023, 1 – 18. [Link](#)

H2R Working Paper 01, **Natacha Tang (2023):** Governance of Heritable Human Genome Editing – Developing a Regulatory Framework for a Transformative Technology. [Link](#)

Find all publications [here](#)



Upcoming events fall semester 2023

Tuesday, 19.09.2023, from 16.15 to 17.45: Guest lecture by Dr Clemen Heyder (Georg-August-Universität Göttingen) «Die Eizellspende als Herausforderung für die liberale Gesellschaft» with co-presentation by Dr. Michael Braunschweig on the legal situation and ethical debate in Switzerland. This event will be online. [More information](#)

Thursday, 26.10.2023, from 12.15 to 13.30: Brown Bag Lunch with Prof. Dr. Alice Margaria “Trans*(forming) Legal Parenthood?” chaired by Agnes Kandlbinder, PhD candidate in the URPP sub-project 4 CRISPR Technology in Human Reproduction. The event will take place in person at the University of Zurich. If you are interested in attending, please register on our website. [More information and registration](#)

Monday, 13.11.2023, from 16:15 to 17:45: Guest Lecture «Doing infertility/Unfruchtbar sein - Deutschland, 1870-1935» by Dr. Christina Benninghaus, moderated by Sabine Stettler. Christina Benninghaus joined the Interdisciplinary Centre for Gender Studies at the University of Bielefeld in January 2022. From 2017 to 2021, she taught at Wadham College, University of Oxford, as Pat Thompson DAAD Fellow and Tutor in Modern History. [More information](#)

Thursday, 16.11.2023, from 16.15 to 17.45: Book talk "Intimate Strangers - Commercial Surrogacy in Russia and Ukraine and the Making of Truth" by Dr. Veronika Siegl. She is a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Geography, University of Bern, and the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Vienna. She has published articles in journals such as the Anthropological Journal of European Studies and Curare. Journal of Medical Anthropology*, and is co-editor of the photo-text book Hope. The talk will take place in person at the University of Zurich. [More information](#)



Researcher Awards

The Best Researcher Award 2022 of the URPP H2R was granted to Dr Estelle Fragu and Marie-Hélène Peter-Spiess. Thank you for your great achievements in research and congratulations!

Congratulations also to Fiona Behle (PhD, SP1, project title: "Ewig bindende Sorge – über die Eignung des abstammungsrechtlichen Statusrechts, plurale und relationale Konzeptionen von Elternschaft abzubilden") and Eleonora Ioannidi (PhD, SP4, project title: "Improving transient expression levels of prime editors using circular RNAs for permanent gene correction at therapeutically-relevant doses") for being awarded the UZH Candoc Grant! With the UZH Candoc/Postdoc Grant, the University of Zurich supports its young academics at the doctorate (Candoc) and postdoc levels. UZH Candoc Grants support promising young scientists carrying out an excellent dissertation project at the University of Zurich.

Stay updated on our website [URPP Human Reproduction Reloaded | H2R](#) and social media channels!

