



Welcome to the STTAR Centre's 2026 Newsletter

The STTAR Centre celebrates its second anniversary!

Based on the pillars of interdisciplinarity, internationalisation and impact, the STTAR Centre has been operating as an open pool of researchers engaged in research and knowledge exchange (R&KE), which is intellectually ambitious in its approach as it will continue to shape theories, policies and practices.

With [members](#) from all over the world, we welcome scientists and practitioners from all disciplines, backgrounds, and geographical locations and aspire to further expanding our work beyond the Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities, particularly at a time when science based solutions may be needed to address climate change induced problems and make travel and tourism more sustainable and resilient.

Our vision is to produce world-leading, innovative and impactful research through interdisciplinary transformative approaches that rethink knowledge and practices in ways that are socially just, economically viable and environmentally sustainable. Our aim is to make a difference both to the quality of critical thinking about travel and tourism and the decision-making that underpins effective development, management and marketing practices and our understanding of their political, economic, socio-cultural and environmental implications.

Our work is organised across [five key themes](#) - **Consumption, Marketing and Management, Accessibility and Inclusivity, Travel Cultures, Politics, Policy and Practice, Authenticity and Experience Design**. We are also in the process of exploring two more thematic clusters – one on Digital Disruption and AI and another on Climate Change and Environmental Disruptions.



This Newsletter showcases some of the many R&KE inspiring and impactful activities initiated and delivered by our members. Through an eclectic and rich programme of work, the STTAR Centre's visibility and reach has grown substantially.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all that made this possible and I look forward to the STTAR Centre flourishing further in the near future, through the expansion of our membership and critical collaborations with partners around the world.

Professor Marina Novelli
Director STTAR Centre



STTAR Centre celebrates World Tourism Day 2025

Framing the future of tourism for sustainable transformation through collaboration and education



To mark World Tourism Day 2025, the Sustainable Travel and Tourism Advanced Research (STTAR) Centre at Nottingham University Business School brought together industry leaders, academics, and students to explore sustainable transformation in tourism. The event, aligned with the annual UN Tourism #WorldTourismDay on 27 September, served as a vibrant platform to explore the theme of sustainable transformation through tourism collaboration, education, and impactful research.

The day featured rich discussions and insights from leaders at including [Ian Corbett](#) (Head of Sustainability, [TUI](#) Group), [Elizabeth Baillie](#) (Sustainable Development Expert, [Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit \(GIZ\) GmbH](#)), and [Megan Powell Vreeswijk](#) (CEO, [Marketing Nottingham & Nottinghamshire](#)), who explored how sustainability must be mainstreamed into tourism experiences and made accessible to all travellers.

The event also included an inspiring careers panel facilitated by Dr [Abbie-Gayle Johnson](#), that encouraged students to embrace individuality and pursue meaningful paths in tourism, and concluded with the launch of the Nottingham Quest—an interactive initiative connecting students with the local tourism landscape. For full details read the [World Tourism Day 2025 news article](#).





~ RESEARCH IN BRIEF ~

Deputy Director of STTAR Centre Dr Carol Zhang's sabbatical bears its fruits through the award of a British Academy Grant.

A story from Deputy-Director of STTAR Centre Dr Zhang's study leave.

During her study leave, Carol Zhang engaged in a series of academic collaborations and research activities across leading institutions in Asia. Beginning in December at Hong Kong Polytechnic University, she worked with Professor Mimi Li on data collection planning and was nominated by Professor Honggen Xiao for the IACTS Outstanding Young Scholar award. In January, she explored executive education opportunities at Sun Yat-sen University. February and March involved idea generation and funding discussions at Yunnan University and Southwestern University of Finance and Economics, including a project on panda tourism and tourist misbehaviour, alongside data collection for a BA grant. Subsequent months saw collaborations with Ningbo Nottingham and Zhejiang University. In July, she presented at the APTA conference and visited Kyung Hee University for research partnerships. August marked a return to Hong Kong Polytechnic University for finalising research plans. She then became the Regional Editor for the Journal of China Tourism Research. Across all visits, Carol delivered seminars on identity theories in tourism using STTAR-centre resources, reinforcing both her academic identity and the centre's visibility.

Dr Carol Zhang, Deputy Director of the STTAR Centre, was awarded a prestigious grant from the British Academy to lead a comprehensive study on women's entrepreneurship in rural China. This significant project is a collaborative effort with Dr Xinrui Wang from Sun Yat-sen University in China and Professor Micheal Zisuh Ngoasong from the University of York, combining expertise in regional development, gender studies, and business management. The research initiative officially commenced with a stakeholder engagement event on 2 April 2025. Organised in partnership with the local government, the event brought together local women entrepreneurs to facilitate a dialogue on women empowerment. Participants shared their personal experiences and discussed practical strategies for fostering female-led businesses through sustainable and collaborative tourism models.





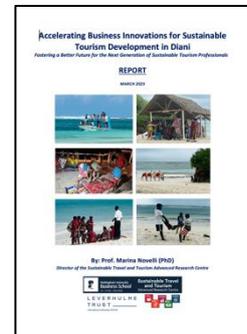
When research meets destinations' real needs

A story from Director of STTAR Centre Professor Novelli's Leverhulme International Fellowship experience in Kenya.

Between February and June 2025, as part of her [The Leverhulme Trust International Fellowship](#), Professor Marina Novelli worked closely with the [Diani Beach Based Safari Sellers Group](#) and [Joan Ndung'u](#) in the co-creation and delivery of a capacity building programme on [Accelerating Youth Entrepreneurship in Tourism for Sustainable Development](#). The project enabled the creation of a new youth-centred sustainable tourism ecosystem and changemaking practices in Diani. The outreach activities have been far reaching in terms of research, knowledge exchange and peer-to-peer capacity building, cascading to 1000 learners of all ages in both formal (i.e. HE and TVET institutions) and informal settings (i.e. public, private and third sector organisations). contributing to SDGs 4, 5, 8, 12,13 and 17.

A direct outcome of this project was Professor Novelli's briefing report, *'Accelerating Business Innovations for Sustainable Tourism Development in Diani - Fostering a Better Future for the Next Generation of Sustainable Tourism Professionals'* for the Kwale County of Kenya (May 2025), identifying key priorities, which are informing the Diani Beach Management Plan, currently in development.

A spin-off of this collaboration, the organisation was supported by one of our [Nottingham University Business School's](#) MSc Marketing students in creating their first website under the guidance of my colleague [Dr Amir Homayounfard](#).



The Chairman of Diani Beach Based Safari Sellers Group Masudi R. Mwamnyendes said:

"Professor Marina's capacity-building workshop at Leopard Beach Resort, Diani ignited a fire in our group, shifting focus to 'beach cleaning' and 'community empowerment'. As a direct result of this workshop, we launched a monthly beach clean-up drive funded entirely by our members' contributions. We took stock of the challenges at community level and engaged in community-based activities including a programme of support for poor families, providing food parcels and school stationaries, sourced from the same fund. Our community outreach programme is aimed at identifying ways to engage local youth and women in creating profitable businesses by sharing our 30 years of experience in the destination. Our Vision is to Keep Diani Beach safe, clean, and inclusive, where tourism thrives hand in hand with community wellbeing and environmental sustainability for residents, tourists, and future generations."



Workshop with [Diani Beach Based Safari Sellers Group](#)



The critical role of inter-organisational collaboration

STTAR's Industry Board Member Elizabeth Bailie's research on social innovation at the University of Cambridge highlighted how inter-organisational collaboration can be critical for scaling evidence-based innovations in the response to extreme poverty on the African continent.



When thinking about inter-organisational collaboration within the tourism sector, we can think about certain challenges facing national parks on the African continent as an example. We risk losing the authenticity and quality of the tourism experience when many tourists are flocking to one endangered animal. Tourism infrastructure and activities can impact the migration patterns of some of the Earth's most endangered species and tourism can be damaging the natural environment through land degradation and pollution.

Sustainable tourism requires collaboration to overcome these real-life challenges – between local communities, business owners, private sector bodies, education establishments, governments and a web of international companies and agencies. Elizabeth's research highlighted how not only is collaboration important for scaling impact, but also that when individual members of staff move between different organisations, this may help leverage adoption of certain evidence-based solutions to particular social problems.

So, as you think about graduating from university and are assessing your career options to become sustainable tourism heroes of the future, please consider:

1. *How might you be able to use data support your career decisions to maximise your social and environmental impact?*
2. *What would it look like for you to move between different types of organisations with the idea of scaling impact of sustainable tourism?*

Sustainable Travel & Tourism Africa (STTA) Launches Sustainable Tourism Trends 2026

On 20 January 2026, under the leadership of Judy Kepher Gona (Nottingham University Business School Honorary Professor and STTA Industry Board member), STTA released its much-anticipated list of Sustainable Tourism Trends 2026. At the launch, Judy Kepher Gona emphasised that sustainability is at a crossroads and called for intentional action by all actors and for verifiable impact. The trends highlight the urgent need for credible data, inclusive governance, and innovative financing to ensure tourism delivers net-positive outcomes for communities and ecosystems.



Key Trends include:

- Standardised impact measurement to restore trust in sustainability data.
- A shift from awards to credible reporting systems.
- Growth in heritage, ancestry, and faith-driven travel.
- Community stewardship redefining governance and impact.
- Adaptive use of community spaces for MICE activities.
- Blended capital supporting socially accountable tourism enterprises.
- MSME integration through digital innovation.
- Storytelling backed by authentic experiences and impact dashboards.
- Rise of mid-scale excellence and short-term rentals.
- Gen Z travellers driving demand for short, frequent, multi-stop journeys.

Please use the following link to [access the webinar](#).



~ EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENTS ~

Dr Abbie-Gayle Johnson joins Global Panel on the Future of Travel and Tourism at the World Travel Market 2025

On Tuesday, 4 November 2025, STTAR Centre member Dr Abbie-Gayle Johnson, and Assistant Professor in Marketing at Nottingham University Business School, represented the Caribbean perspective at the World Travel Market (WTM) in London. WTM, established in 1980, is one of the world's leading events for the travel and tourism industry, bringing together global experts to share insights and shape the future of destinations and businesses.



Dr Johnson contributed to the panel discussion “The Global South and the Future of Travel and Tourism”, alongside Adama Bah (Institute of Travel and Tourism, The Gambia) and Mohammed Alshabaili (Saudi Arabia's Quality of Life Program). The session was moderated by BBC journalist Carmen Roberts. For more information, please read the [full article](#).

Professor Novelli speaks at the G20 Financial Inclusion and Women Empowerment summit in South Africa



Professor Novelli was invited as keynote speaker at the G20 Financial Inclusion and Women Empowerment Summit in South Africa. In this exclusive interview, she shared insights from her presentation and her rich career experience spanning more than 20 years, during which she has advised numerous women in tourism and beyond, as well as international organisations including the World Bank, EU, UNESCO, and UNWTO. Use the following link to [view the full interview](#).

STTAR Industry Board Member Jon Danks' work in Uganda Queen Elizabeth National Park bears its fruits.

The two-year ban on UK nationals visiting Uganda's Queen Elizabeth National Park was lifted in December 2025. Jon Danks, STTAR Centre's industry board member works as an advisor to the Uganda Government Ministry of Foreign Affairs, supporting the sustainable growth of its tourism industry sector. The UK Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) had implemented restrictions for travel to this key region of Uganda in 2023 following a security incident. Following a recent review, and through strong collaboration, the lifting of restrictions will restore stronger commercial interest in the region, particularly for operators focused on the positive cyclical impact of investment towards community and wildlife. For more details, [read the full article](#).





Professor Novelli invited to be part of the ‘We The UAE’ - Economy and Tourism Strategic Intelligence Council

As part of her five day visit to Dubai and as a side event to the WEF Global Future Council (GFC), on the 13 October 2025 Professor Novelli was one of 100 leaders and experts from 80 entities invited to contribute to a strategic dialogue to co-create the 2025/26 UAE National Visitor Economy Strategic Plan and shape a future-proof travel and tourism sector in the UAE and beyond. Read more [about the event](#).



In her capacity as council member of the WEF GFC on the Experience and Lifestyle Economy, she also contributed to shaping the agenda of the GFC addressing pressing issues of climate change, geopolitical instability, economic and environmental degradation, and the future of work. This work will inform the on-going efforts aimed at unlocking the potential of 24-hours cities, the WEF Davos Agenda, and policy priorities of interest to other global institutions, including UN Tourism.

Reflection Group: Thematic Representativeness of Cultural Routes of The Council of Europe



Towards a better programme (Paris, 15 December 2025): “An interpretation of the programme as a contribution to Europe’s cultural identity” by Leonardo Porcelloni

The European Institute of Cultural Routes invited Leonardo Porcelloni to deliver an opening contribution to support the launch of the Reflection Group’s work. The invitation framed the intervention as an expert, outward-looking reflection on the role of the Council of Europe’s Cultural Routes Programme within today’s wider landscape of culture and heritage policies and initiatives.

The contribution positioned Cultural Routes as a network-based framework through which Europe can be made “legible” via shared heritage narratives and practices of mobility. It connected the Group’s core concern with thematic representativeness to broader issues that the Programme increasingly faces in governance terms: how routes translate values into action across the core values of the program; how different forms of heritage (tangible and intangible, cultural landscapes, and contemporary practices) and different territories are made visible or remain marginal; and how the Programme relates to current European policy drivers and societal challenges, including accessibility and demographic change, digital mediation of heritage experiences, the revitalisation of inner and peripheral areas, and tourism pressures. For more information, [read the full story](#).



~ APPOINTMENTS, AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS ~

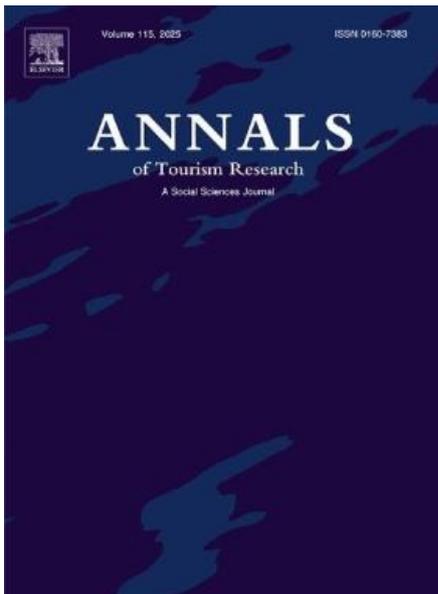
Judy Kepher-Gona appointed as Nottingham University Business School's Honorary Professor in Sustainable Tourism

[Judy Kepher-Gona](#), STTAR Centre Industry Advisory Board member, was appointed [Honorary Professor](#) of [Sustainable Tourism](#) at [Nottingham University Business School](#) for a period of three years from August 1, 2025.

This prestigious appointment is a testament to Judy's unwavering dedication, thought leadership, and outstanding contributions to advancing sustainable tourism cross Africa and beyond. In this new role, Judy will create a valuable bridge between academic research and industry practice, paving the way for innovative, collaborative solutions in sustainable tourism.



Professor Jillian Rickly – Appointment as EIO of Annals of Tourism Research from January 2026



[Annals of Tourism Research](#) is a leading journal in tourism studies (16.2 CiteScore, 7.8 Impact Factor).

Embracing a full range of social science disciplines and promoting multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary research, the journal is driven by the ambition of extending the influence of tourism scholarship beyond academia and to foster its real-world impact on industry practices and public policy.

Jillian will be working alongside Professor Gang Li (University of Surrey) to introduce several new initiatives at the journal and further build its reputation as a leader of impactful scholarly research.

Jillian's appointment is a significant recognition of her contribution to the field of tourism research, particularly in the areas of tourists' experiences, tourism geographies, lifestyle mobilities and accessible tourism.



Professor Novelli is appointed as Chair of the UN Tourism/World Committee on Tourism Ethics 2026/2029, Member of the WEF/GFC on the Experience and Lifestyle Economy and REF 2029 Criteria Setting Evaluation Panel

Established in 2003, the World Committee on Tourism Ethics (WCTE) is an independent and impartial body that works with UN Tourism (formerly the UN World Tourism Organisation), a specialised Agency of the United Nations that promotes responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism. The WCTE promotes and shares the principles of the [UN Tourism Global Code of Ethics for Tourism](#). It is also responsible for how these principles are applied across the sector. Read more in the [featured news article](#) published by the UN Tourism.



The Global Future Council on the Experience and Lifestyle Economy focuses on the profound transformation experienced by the retail, tourism, hospitality and entertainment sectors, driven by rapid technological advancement. Members of this council are exploring strategies to reinvent the consumer experience by developing sophisticated and personalised approaches. They also represent a group of key stakeholders committed to the creation of resilient economic systems and enhance quality of life and respond effectively to global disruptions. Professor Novelli's work is featured in a recent [interview](#) and featured in a [WEF short documentary](#).

Following from her previous appointment for the REF 2021, Professor Novelli was selected again to serve as member of the UOA 24: Sport and Exercise Sciences, Leisure and Tourism sub-panel. Read more in the [University of Nottingham announcement](#).

University of Nottingham Sport has been confirmed as the Official Volunteering and Workforce Development Partner for the World Masters Ultimate Club Championships 2026 By Christine Bailey



Reinforcing its commitment to community engagement, leadership development, and major sporting events, the University of Nottingham Sport secured this prestigious collaboration. This is part of a broader Major Events Volunteering Pilot Project supported by the East Midlands Combined Authority (EMCCA) and Nottingham City Council, funded from the UK Government through UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and aims to engage local communities and provide opportunities to learn, develop and gain new skills. This announcement reinforces Nottingham's commitment to hosting major events that deliver positive social impact. Read the [full news article](#).



Dr Carol Zhang is the recipient of two prestigious International Recognitions

Carol is an internationally recognised researcher specialising in place marketing, heritage, and identity. She is known for her interdisciplinary approach, drawing on theories from marketing, social psychology, nationalism studies, education, cultural studies, and gender research. Building on these perspectives, her work explores how socio-political changes shape identities and influence relationships between people and place in the context of international tourism. Since completing her PhD in 2017, and despite taking



maternity leave in 2022, Carol has published 34 articles, including 13 in ABS-4 ranked journals. Her research excellence has been consistently acknowledged at national and international levels, earning prestigious awards such as the **Outstanding Young Scholar Award (2025)** from the International Association for China Tourism, and the **Outstanding Young Scholar Award (2026)** from the International Association for Tourism Studies. The latter is an honour bestowed on only three scholars worldwide every other year through a rigorous global selection process.

Professor Novelli receives two prestigious Awards for the impact of her research and external engagements



Professor Novelli was the recipient of two prestigious award: the [2025 John Rooney Award](#), and the [2025 PRME Award for Outreach and Partnership](#) in recognition of her extensive impactful and sustainable outreach efforts, achieved through partnerships in the tourism sector. PRME is a United Nations-supported initiative of the [UN Global Compact](#), and awards business and management schools for their excellence in embedding sustainability and responsible

management practices into business education. Read the [full news article](#).

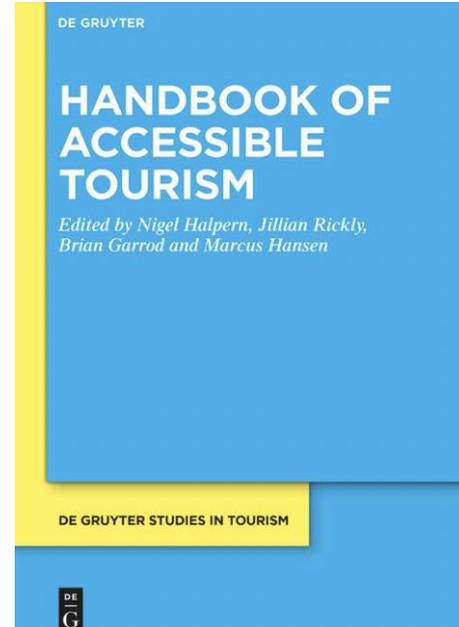
~ RECENT BOOKS ~

Handbook of Accessible Tourism

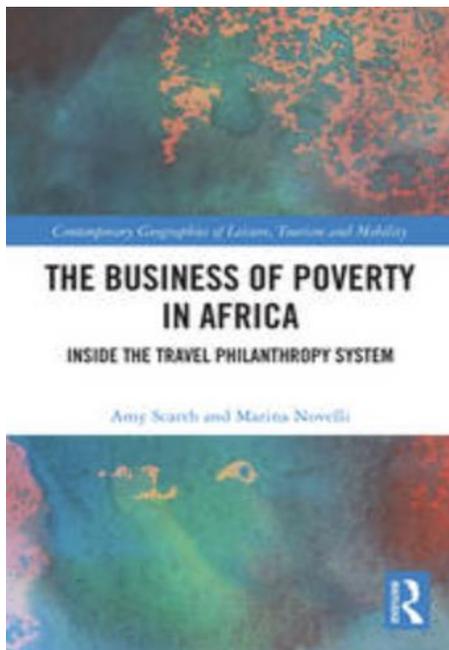
[Jillian Rickly](#), Professor of Tourism and Head of Department (Marketing, Tourism, and Analytics), and theme lead for accessibility and inclusivity at the STTAR Centre, has co-edited the first-ever handbook on accessible tourism.

The handbook includes 35 chapters from 69 contributors globally, providing a foundational resource for researchers, students, advocacy groups, industry practitioners and policymakers interested in improving the accessibility of the tourism and travel sector for people with disabilities.

With 16% of the world's population living with a disability, representing an estimated £14.6 billion in tourism spending, accessible tourism isn't just about equity, independence, and dignity, but also about creating opportunities. Read more in [Jillian's blog](#) about building a more inclusive future for travel.



The Business of Poverty in Africa: Inside the Travel Philanthropy System



In [Scarth, A. and Novelli, M. \(2025\) *The Business of Poverty in Africa: Inside the Travel Philanthropy System*](#) (Oxon: Routledge), an in depth and empirically grounded critical assessment of the topic is presented.

Focusing on the hidden layers of the giving and receiving economy in Africa's tourism destinations, *The Business of Poverty in Africa* examines the beliefs, incentives and contradictions that shape travel philanthropy, and links them to the wider issues of aid and sustainable development systems. The book addresses several questions that many may prefer to ignore. For example:

- Do travellers' donations do more harm than good?
- Does 'doing good while travelling' truly have the impact we think?
- What if 'the beneficiaries' were not as passive recipients of aid as we may think, but rather active agents in the gift giving process?
- What if 'poverty' was being commercialised, would it matter?

For anyone serious about change and the world of philanthropy in Africa, it's an invitation to look deeper, think harder and rethink the business of giving and receiving altogether. The book presents many areas ripe for further investigation.



Bridging Past and Present Mobilities: A New Book on Cultural Routes, Slow Tourism, and Pilgrimage

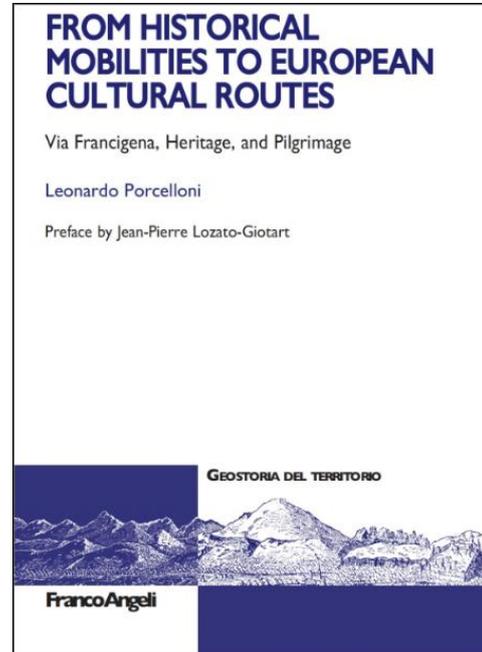
In this book *From Historical Mobilities to European Cultural Routes. Via Francigena, Heritage, and Pilgrimage* (2025, FrancoAngeli, Milan)

Leonardo Porcelloni reflects on how ancient road networks should be understood not as static remnants of the past, but as living spatial and cultural systems that continue to shape landscapes, identities, and travel practices.

The volume focuses on the Via Francigena: originally a fragmented medieval network linking northern Europe to Rome, later reconfigured as a transnational Cultural Route of the Council of Europe and increasingly associated with pilgrimage and slow tourism. The author uses this transformation to discuss both the opportunities and the tensions that arise when deep-rooted mobility infrastructures are translated into contemporary institutional frameworks, heritage narratives, and tourism strategies.

Drawing on historical geography, spatial analysis (including GIS), and field-based ethnography, the book proposes an interdisciplinary approach to the “routescape”, conceived not as a simple itinerary but as a territorial process produced by layered histories, governance choices, and diverse mobilities.

Overall, the book argues that the rediscovery of medieval routes is never merely a matter of tracing or restoring a line on the ground, it is a process of selective memory, institutional codification, and socio-spatial negotiation. The Via Francigena is treated as a lens through which to engage broader European debates on heritage governance, identity-making, and sustainable mobility.



For more information about the STTAR Centre:

