
Dr John RT Bustard
Ulster University Business School
Email: j.bustard@ulster.ac.uk

Emerging Scholar Profile

My passion for exploring experience co-creation in tourism extends to my time building a Tourism Technology start up in Belfast called Awakin.com. Building and launching the world's first commercially available GPS trail in 2005 which celebrated Titanic in her birth city, was the beginning of a love affair with exploring ways to enable visitors to enjoy their destinations pre, during and post trip. These early experiences of augmented reality and ICT leveraging IoT through mobile devices was and remains an exciting space to work in. Whilst building these earlier experiences I often found myself called to supporting lecturers and researchers and facilitating workshops in academic settings. It was at this time that I developed an insatiable appetite for the opportunities and exploration encapsulated by universities. I felt called to deepen my understanding of 'why' experiences are so central to our collective passion for tourism and events and from then on, I was hooked on academic enquiry. My classroom collaborations with Dr. Peter Bolan at Ulster University (an esteemed Film Tourism researcher) led to his suggestion I take up a PhD, which I duly did in 2015 and from there forward I focused on mobile technology impacts on event experiences. Having worked with Ireland's largest outdoor sporting event (The International NW200) in the near past through developing their mobile strategy through an Innovateus project, I reconnected and developed a new research relationship with the event team and we all got enthused about further research into value co-creation with fans through ICT.

I was awarded my PhD in July 2019 for my thesis "The Smart Event Experience: A Many-to-Many Co-creation" which was a challenging but richly rewarding personal experience in developing and sharpening my capabilities in this new domain. The period was littered with opportunities to meet wonderful people who also share a passion for exploring new experience phenomena facilitated by technology, particularly those occurring in the realm of both tourism and events. In 2016 I attended my first ever ENTER conference in Bilbao and immersed myself

in the collegiate atmosphere of interest generated in tourism technology by IFITT members who are by far in my experience, the greatest minds in the discipline from around the globe. I engaged like a child in a sweet shop, in particular, I remember with fondness getting feedback on my poster presentation at the PhD conference and being in awe at my proximity to a wealth of learned minds that I'd read much of. Prior to visiting the event I noted that an Innovation Award had been created to seed ideas within the community 'to foster innovation and strengthen the strategic development of IFITT.' I felt that my experience with app development in the tourism and event space offered an opportunity to create a platform specifically for better pedagogy and research around the use of mobile apps in such contexts. This led to my being awarded the inaugural IFITT innovation award to build RAPORT (Rapid App Prototyping Open-innovation Resource Toolkit), which I duly delivered between 2016 and 2018 and engaged with dozens of members of the community who secured licenses to explore the platform's potential for research and pedagogy.

In 2018, I was honoured to be asked to contribute at IFITT's inaugural EIFMeT event at the University Eberswalde, Berlin, Germany, which offered specialised e-tourism topics to masters level students from around the globe in a one week block. This ERASMUS supported event was a wonderful opportunity to share knowledge and insights with inspired students and to gain new knowledge through collaborative activities with a highly specialised group of e-Tourism researchers. Above all, at a time when the political ability in my native home is weakened, divided and deeply introspective, events such as EIFMeT are windows into a more positive and hopeful global potentiality, where ideas and innovation seeded in collaboration, like a rising tide, can lift all boats.

As I write we are completing the second year of the SNAIP-DC Project which is a Research Challenge Fund Project and stands for 'Serviced & Networked Artificial Intelligence Project for Destination Competitiveness'. More details on the project can be found at 'responsibleai.home.blog'. The project has been exploring assistive intelligence through the implementation of destination chatbots within an event context in the Causeway Coast & Glens Destination of Northern Ireland and has a team of researchers from across the UK and Europe engaged in considering the potential and impact of AI within the event tourism context.

Being a proud European at heart, I am grateful for the opportunities that being connected by IFITT across the world afford me and I look forward to future collaborative opportunities in researching technology in tourism and event contexts with this wonderful research community and beyond.