

Understanding Audiencing: ethnographic insights from the heritage sector

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Abstract

In this presentation, I will argue for the need for understanding wider processes of ‘audiencing’ rather than mere ‘audiences’. In doing so, I want to stress the need for attending analytically to the wider situational contexts and frameworks that surround any given audience and its relations – social, material, temporal – to whatever ‘it’ is witnessing.

I draw on several years of anthropological research devoted to the exploration of heritage sites and museums as complex locales of interaction between ‘hosts’, ‘guests’ and ‘places’, including classical ethnographic tools but also more unusual video methodologies. As symbolic localities that explicitly relate to past histories and narratives of identity, heritage sites constitute complex cultural prisms through which we may study the detailed entanglements between human communities, particular places and points in time. Addressing various visitor practices and perceptions at such sites, I will attend both to the qualitative challenges connected to this kind of research and, briefly, present a few key findings on ‘audiencing’ from the historic (1864) battlefield of Dybbøl in the Danish/German borderland.