

# **Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft And What It Has To Do With The Children's Museum of Pittsburgh**

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The purpose of this paper is to describe Ferdinand Tonnies' theory of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft and to prove that this theory does have something to do with the Children's Museum of Pittsburgh.



Tonnies' definition of the Gemeinschaft is that of a small, close-knit community, often found in rural areas, in which strong personal bonds unite its members. (Schaefer) One might look at the family and home as being the Gemeinschaft. Family members are close-knit and have similar backgrounds and life experiences. In the home, family members take on particular roles such as father, mother, son, or daughter.

Tonnies' definition of the Gesellschaft is that of a community, often urban, that is large and impersonal, with little commitment to the group or consensus on values. (Schaefer) One could look at going to work as going to the Gesellschaft. The workplace is less personal than home life.

Let's apply Tonnies' theory of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft to that of the traditional family. The traditional family consists of the father, mother, son and/or daughter. The mother's job within the family is to stay at home (the Gemeinschaft ) and take care of the children and housework, while the father's job is to go to work (the Gesellschaft) to make money to take care of the family as a whole.

If the mother's job is to stay at home in the Gemeinschaft, then we can look at her visit to the Children's Museum of Pittsburgh in two ways. On one hand, since she is leaving the home to go to a place that is different and full of strangers, who's values might be different



than those of her own, we could say that she has left the Gemeinschaft (home) to go to the Gesellschaft (the museum). On the other hand, we could look at her visit to the museum as still being in the Gemeinschaft because she is still doing what she always does at home, and that is to entertain her children. She is still assuming the role of mother whether she is at home with her children or at the museum with them. This same theory can be applied to the children as well. Although some of the things they do at the museum are the same things they do at home, by visiting the museum they are in a new place which teaches them new things. Those who work at the museum could look at it as if they were entering the Gesellschaft because this is where they work.



The Children's Museum of Pittsburgh should not be looked at as if it were just a playground. It is a museum in terms that its purpose is to teach children how things work, but in a fun way. It is set up in sections pertaining to different age groups. Also, each

section has its own theme.



One section is completely devoted to Mr. Roger's Neighborhood. Mr. Roger's neighborhood has a lot to do with Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft. Mr. Roger's would come home to the Gemeinschaft from the Gesellschaft of work on his lunch break to entertain the neighborhood children. The neighborhood itself is a Gemeinschaft because it consists of close-knit community members. Once Mr. Roger's lunch break was over, he would leave the Gemeinschaft of home to go back to work in the Gesellschaft. Mr. Roger's entire day consisted of going back and forth between the Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft. These example prove that Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft do have something to do with the Children's Museum.



### **Works Cited**

Schaefer, Richard T. Sociology Matters. Third ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008.