

University of Amsterdam

Working for KidZania's "Better World":

Ideology, Play, and Nation

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Introduction

KidZania's Infrastructure of Subjugation



Figure 1: KidZania Dubai <https://www.viator.com/>

Founded in 1997, KidZania is an international children's entertainment complex, spanning over eighteen countries, with over 27 locations, from China, Japan, India, Egypt, the UK, and the US, to Turkey, Vietnam, and more. Inside each KidZania venue is a mini "cityscape," scaled and sized for children. KidZania uses, as their website puts it, "ultrarealistic role-play," so that "children learn about different careers, the inner workings of a city, and the concept of managing money," with the goal being to "empower kids, giving them the confidence to be their best selves, and inspiration to be great global citizens" ("What is KidZania?"). Once participants have gone through the KidZania airport and been separated from their parents, they explore different careers, such as firefighter, journalist, and factory worker. One of KidZania's main characteristics is urbanism and the "city setting." As their website puts it "The physical space in which every KidZania metropolis comes to life is a kid-

sized fabricated replica of a typical city. The city plan is one big environment made up of many small environments replicating a thematic mix of industry sectors” (“What is KidZania?”).



Figure 2: KidZania Noida <https://www.thestatesman.com/>

In other words, within KidZania, there is no room for rural or naturally-leaning activities; the jobs performed by children are limited to mechanized labor which serves only to maintain public and economic order in modernist society. KidZania’s labor does not exist in a vacuum but instead constitutes a concrete economic base; “each KidZania city operates with a proprietary currency, named ‘kidZo” (“What is KidZania?”). Through and within this economic base, KidZania recreates, as Althusser would put it, the “reproduction of conditions of production” (1). KidZania’s recreation of capitalist relations is not only intertwined with but is also the foundation for its modes of subjugation, showcasing the “neoliberal economization” of democracy and power (Brown, 32). On the one hand, these modes of social formation are

held together by material practices and ideological structures, and on the other, by illusionary and narrative imaginings, namely those related to freedom, community, and independence.



Figure 3: Supermarket in KidZania Seoul <https://www.theglobetrottingfamily.com/>

KidZania's world is not only made up of institutions that aim to reconstruct 'free' market relations; its venues also have police stations, courtrooms, and newsrooms, which replicate the Repressive Apparatus and Ideological State Apparatuses—the superstructure. In this sense, KidZania's recreation of a 'cityscape' can more accurately be described as a template for general ideology and a 'how-to' form a modern subject. Moreover, each KidZania venue is part of a "utopian" nation and a "better world" ("Our Ztory"). The fictional history of KidZania's nation is that "Kids wrote a proclamation of their independence from adults, an unequivocal announcement of their new world's existence, forming a Nation with States and a government was the ultimate solution" ("Our Ztory"). The use of a fictional history and a national identity within a complex whose overall goal is to teach children manual labor is puzzling, and hints towards the necessity of nationhood in the formation of the worker-subject.

In this sense, KidZania is a complex that showcases the interconnection of nationhood, capitalism, and ideology. The complex’s international and borderless ‘nation,’ however, goes beyond what Anderson would describe as a “limited” and sovereign “state” (6), instead fitting more into Auge’s description of an Empire (114).



Figure 4: Police Department in KidZania Koshien

<https://www.kidzania.jp/en/koshien/activity/police-department.html>

As a former KidZanian, I loved being granted the freedom of a fake bank account, working in a chocolate factory, and using my money to buy trophies. KidZania offers children a dose of adulthood that they see as markers of independence under the guise of role-play. This points out another important tension within KidZania; it represents the performance of capitalist labor not only as an expression of freedom, but also as “fun.” This fun is also at odds with their value of education and “experiential learning” (“What is KidZania?”), which teaches children the practices of a worker-subject-citizen. Within this complex, both education and play is corrupted by the gamification of work relations. Encountering KidZania now, as an adult, is quite a harrowing experience. The idea of children enclosed in a mini-cityscape with a sky-painted dome, learning about monetary regulations, and becoming “great global citizens”

(“What is KidZania?”), is dystopian and terrifying. When I first encountered this object, I wanted to focus on the children, why they enjoy pretending to be adults so much and how they feel when role-playing the tasks of adulthood. As I learned more and more about KidZania, however, I realized that the complex is not about children, their needs, or their “natural” behaviors (“What is KidZania?”). KidZania is not geared towards creating a world for children, but rather creating a world for the formation of adults, and as such, tells us a lot more about the ‘real’ world, which it recreates, maintains, and reshapes, than it does about the children who populate it.

From Worker to Subject

KidZania's "Eternal Idea of Freedom"

KidZania replicates work relations and attempts to alienate these practices from those of subjugation, posing the question of whether labor relations can ever be separated from ideology and hegemony. Through KidZania's economy, it aims to teach "financial literacy by contributing to a child's understanding of the economic cycle" ("What is KidZania?"). Children learn about "monetary management by earning kidZos through employment, letting them acquire goods and services as customers, saving into bank accounts, investing long term, paying taxes, and giving back to the community through donations" ("What is KidZania?"). Children "*reap the benefits* of the working world by being paid for the activities," KidZania writes, "as part of the city's supply and demand economy" ("About KidZania"). Althusser would describe this as the "reproduction of conditions of production," which make up the "productive forces" and the "existing relations of production" (2). Althusser explains that giving the productive forces wages is "giving labor power the material means with which to reproduce itself" (4), but notes that wages are not sufficient to produce labor power (5). As Althusser explains, workers also need to be educated and taught the "rules of good behavior, i.e. the attitude that should be observed by every agent in the division of labor, according to the job he is 'destined' for: rules of morality, civic and professional conscience, which actually means rules of respect for the socio-technical division of labor and ultimately the rules of the order established by class domination" (5-6). Here, Althusser points out how performing capitalist labor is entrenched in subjugation's behavioral, ordered, and moral conditioning and that capitalist modes of social formation, such as KidZania's, are fundamentally based on "a reproduction of submission to the ruling ideology for the workers" (6). These rules of good behavior, morality, and structure, which foster a submission to the ruling ideology, however, are less apparent in KidZania, concealed by concepts of independence and freedom.

KidZania promotes the idea that children have the “power to be self-determining, unique, and free,” which they define as a right “grounded in the eternal idea of freedom: the power to act, to speak, and to think as one wants without hindrance or restraint” (“Our Ztory”). To Althusser, this concealment of submission through an illusion of freedom is central to subjugation and the reproduction of capitalist relations. As Ferretter explains it in his analysis of Althusser’s theories,

The concept of the subject is one in which an individual human being is believed to be the independent origin of her own thoughts, actions and emotions [...] For Althusser, as we know, societies consist of a complex set of relations between the mutually interacting practices by which they are constituted. Individuals do not determine these practices or their relationships; rather, the practices and their relationships determine the lives of the individuals within them. The concept of the free and self-determining subject is therefore an ideological concept. In reality, each human being exists as an individual inserted into the complex set of practices (determined in the last instance by the economy) by which her society produces the material conditions of its members’ lives. (88).

Through Ferretter's explanation, KidZania’s depiction of freedom as the right to be self-forming is revealed as a ruse central to the formation of a subject’s imagination. The way in which this idea of freedom animates the illusion of a self-forming subject is especially relevant to KidZania’s separation of the world of children from the world of adults. KidZania is supposed to be a “world where kids could think and act independently from adults” (“Our Ztory”), whereas it does not offer any possibility for kids to create a ‘new’ world. The world KidZania creates *for* children, separated from adults, is only a “replica” of the ‘real’ world, where children have “adult-like experiences” (“What is KidZania?”) This illusion of self-formation is a palpable demonstration of how individuals do not precede nor form the practices

they are implicated in, but instead, the practices precede them and *form* them. In this sense, KidZania pre-making a set of practices for children and labeling their involvement as an act of freedom indicates how the illusion of self-formation is used as an ideological tool to frame the subject's "imaginary relationship" to "their real conditions of existence" (30). This "(imaginary) relationship of individuals to the relations of production" is where ideology takes shape for Althusser (32).

In addition to Althusser's idea of freedom being an ideological framing tool, Foucault's concept of governmentality is also relevant to KidZania's fictional idea of self-governance. Foucault's concept of governmentality is concerned with understanding liberalism, which "differs from reason of state in that it starts from the assumption that human behavior should be governed, not solely in the interests of strengthening the state, but in the interests of society understood as a realm external to the state" (Rose et al., 3). Governmentality is more appropriate to KidZania as the complex avoids notions of strict obedience and claims that its practices benefit its participants. Within this idea of governmentality, the argument is that "technologies of the self were formed alongside the technologies of domination such as discipline. The subjects so created would produce the ends of government by fulfilling themselves rather than being merely obedient" (Rose et al., 10). In this sense, Foucault's notion of governmentality decenters state power and focuses more on the illusion of self-formation, extending Althusser's idea of subjects who "work by themselves" (46). Governmentality perfectly aligns with KidZania, in which it is taken to its full expression. KidZania's fictional history puts the power back in the children's hands, to teach kids "the value of independence, empowerment, and leadership" so that they "become aware of the benefits of involvement in their communities" ("Learning at KidZania"). KidZania is not completely wrong in implying that it offers its participants a sense of autonomy; this sense of autonomy, however, is a matter of *self-subjugation*. It is important to note that though KidZania reconstructs the world of adults

and its systems of adult subjugation, it is exclusively geared towards children. KidZania mediates this discrepancy by turning the illusion of self-formation into a *game* through activities of ‘role-playing,’ which we will explore in a later chapter.

Freedom to Be “Participatory in Life” (The Economy)

Not only is this illusion of freedom pivotal to KidZania’s construction of its subjects, but it is equally central to the construction of its workers, exemplified by how the complex describes social freedom as only obtainable through participation in the capitalist system. As KidZania puts it, freedom is equivalent to the right to work “independently,” be “responsible,” and “participatory in life” (“Our Ztory”), which in KidZania is the economy. Paradoxically, independence *depends* on the performance of labor and participation in the economy “around which the experience of KidZania lies” and through which one can “assert themselves” (“About KidZania,” “Our Ztory”). As Marx puts it, being a “free man” means to “dispose of [one’s] labour-power as [one’s] own commodity,” “instead of being in the position to sell commodities in which [one’s] labour is incorporated, [the laborer] must be obliged to offer for sale as a commodity that very labour-power, which exists only in his living self” (1867). Here, Marx demonstrates how under capitalist rule, freedom is the freedom of selling one’s labor power. In this sense, the illusion of freedom not only ties together the position of a worker and a subject, but the former and the latter also simultaneously form each other. It is here that the concept of freedom is converted into an ‘obligation’ for Marx. What is important to note is KidZania’s depiction of freedom through the language of capitalism. Within KidZania, all human practices, from play to work to nationhood, face “neoliberalism’s ‘economization” (1), as Wendy Brown puts it in *Undoing Democracy: Neoliberalism’s Remaking of State and Subject*. Brown explains that “neoliberal reason, ubiquitous today in statecraft and the workplace, in jurisprudence, education, culture, and a vast range of quotidian activity, is converting the distinctly political character, meaning, and operation of democracy’s constituent

elements into economic ones” (17). KidZania takes this economic conversion for granted, not acknowledging it as a reframing of politics or democracy, which indicates how the economization of citizenship and freedom have become normalized in the ‘real’ world.

KidZania shows how we have shifted from Althusser’s concept of strict obedience and submission to the state to a more liberal structure of docile compliance, masked by an even more explicit illusion of freedom, participation, and consent. Foucault’s theory of governmentality further reveals how KidZania’s notion of freedom and self-governance is an illusion that serves to mask structures of submission to the ruling ideology. Moreover, this illusion of freedom for a subject translates, under capitalist regime, to a freedom to sell one’s labor power, tying together the position of a worker and a subject. KidZania’s depiction of this freedom through the lens of capitalist labor; the idea that work is synonymous with freedom and independence, only further shows the intertwining nature of capitalist structures and subjugation. In this sense, the way in which KidZania recreates capitalist relations and promotes the performance of labor is inseparable from the way it forms modern subjects. KidZania attempts to separate the material practices of labor from hegemonic structures by depicting those labor practices as expressions of freedom, but in doing so, only illustrates how modern subjugation operates under the guise of a submission to one’s self, presenting labor as an act of self-amelioration.

From Subjugation to Ideology



Figure 5: Courthouse ISA in KidZania's Ztory <https://kidzania.com/en/ztory>

The “Pure Dream” of a “Better World”

As its tagline “Get ready for a better world!” implies, KidZania posits itself as a “well-functioning, ideal world,” because it ignores “race, religion, and cultural differences” (“Our Ztory”). KidZania is “Unencumbered by race, religion, or culture, the spirit of [KidZania’s] idea [transcends] even geography to be rooted in a utopian vision of what a well-functioning, ideal world could be” (“Our Ztory”). In this sense, KidZania claims that ideologies centered around difference are the root of inequality and that in “ignoring” them, “social equality” is reached (“KidZania Story Istanbul”). While KidZania might be free of *ideologies*, it is the materialization of Althusser’s theory of “ideology *in general*” (Althusser, 27). In other words, while KidZania depicts ideology as an abstraction, claiming that capitalist relations, once stripped of difference, are the only fair and efficient parts of society, Althusser shows that those

very capitalistic practices are inherently hierarchical, forming the template for ideology and social inequality.

Althusser's theory distinguishes between "ideology in general" and "particular ideologies [...]" (religious, ethical, legal, political); whereas "there can be no question of a theory of ideologies in general, since ideologies (defined in the double respect [of region] and class) have a history," there is a "theory of ideology in general" (27). This theory of ideology in general is "one of the elements on which theories of ideologies depend" (27). In this sense, Althusser's theory of an 'general' ideology acts as a template onto which all ideologies are implanted. Althusser puts forward this theory based on two main theses. The first is that "ideology is nothing insofar as it is a pure dream (manufactured by who knows what power: if not by the alienation of the division of labour, but that, too, is a negative determination)" (28). The second is that "ideology has no history, which emphatically does not mean that there is no history in it (on the contrary, for it is merely the pale, empty and inverted reflection of real history) but that it has no history of its own" (28). In the first instance, this emptiness of ideology, described as a pure dream, is embodied by KidZania's capitalist utopia of a "Better World". Though KidZania's fictional history and slogans constantly call the institution a "better world" ("About KidZania, "Our Ztory," "Learning at KidZania"), nothing about its values or structure differs from the 'real' world, remaining an empty dream.

In the second instance, KidZania puts forward the idea that it is an a-historical institution, wiped of all social contingencies, a ruse that Althusser describes as central to his theory of general ideology. Just as KidZania externalizes all injustices and history associated with race, religion, class, and gender, Althusser describes that "Ideology in general has no history, [...] its history is external to it" (29). By this, Althusser means, on the one hand, that ideology externalizes history, and consequently injustice, by claiming itself to be separate from

these histories of injustices, an argument reminiscent of KidZania's explicit negation of difference. On the other hand, Althusser explains that ideology has no history because its structures, having always existed, are not tied to any specific moment in time. As Althusser puts it, ideology is "endowed with a structure and a functioning such as to make it a non-historical reality, i.e. an omni-historical reality, in the sense in which that structure and functioning are immutable, present in the same form throughout what we can call history" (29). In this sense, this a-historical claim and empty dream, together with omni-historical functionings, is the basic mode of operation for ideology, and also for KidZania. KidZania is the materialization of Althusser's theory of ideology in general not only in the way it intentionally and deceptively alienates history, in an attempt to naturalize itself, but also through its immutable structures, which it depicts as eternally functional and equitable.

KidZanian Institutions

Ideological State Apparatuses

These two theses of ideology being a pure dream and an anti-historical reality express the unconscious and eternal nature of ideology in its relation to subjugation. In its abstract expression, "Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (Althusser, 30). This imaginary relationship, as we have seen in the previous section, represents the illusionary concept of freedom or self-governance for a subject. Moreover, Althusser argues that general ideology, in all its eternality and emptiness, also has a *material* existence. Althusser insists on this materiality, arguing that "ideology always exists in an apparatus, and its practice, or practices. This existence is material" (33). This materialization of ideology is represented by the Ideological State Apparatuses, which Althusser defines as "the realization of an ideology (the unity of these different regional ideologies – religious, ethical, legal, political, aesthetic, etc. – being assured by their subjection to the ruling ideology)" and as "a certain number of realities which present themselves to the

immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialized institutions” (33, 14). Althusser goes on to list a number of these Apparatuses, the majority of which exist in KidZania. In the Delhi location for instance, as can be seen on their VR portal, KidZania houses:

- the educational ISA:



Figure 6: “University” in KidZania Delhi NCR

<https://india.kidzania.com/en-in/pages/kidzania-india-360-virtual-tour>



Figure 7: "Kindergarden" in KidZania Delhi NCR

<https://india.kidzania.com/en-in/pages/kidzania-india-360-virtual-tour>

- the trade-union ISA:



*Figure 8: "Employment Office" in KidZania Delhi NCR
<https://india.kidzania.com/en-in/pages/kidzania-india-360-virtual-tour>*

- the communications ISA:



Figure 9: "Newspaper Bureau" in KidZania Delhi NCR

<https://india.kidzania.com/en-in/pages/kidzania-india-360-virtual-tour>



Figure 10: "Radio Station" in KidZania Delhi NCR

<https://india.kidzania.com/en-in/pages/kidzania-india-360-virtual-tour>

- the cultural ISA: (“Acting Academy Bollywood,” “Dance Academy,” “Camlin Art Craft and Painting Studio”, “Animation Studio,”)



Figure 11: "Theatre" in KidZania Delhi NCR

<https://india.kidzania.com/en-in/pages/kidzania-india-360-virtual-tour>



Figure 12: "Stadium" in KidZania Delhi NCR

<https://india.kidzania.com/en-in/pages/kidzania-india-360-virtual-tour>

- the legal ISA:



Figure 13: "Court House" in KidZania Delhi NCR

<https://india.kidzania.com/en-in/pages/kidzania-india-360-virtual-tour>

On the cohesiveness of ISAs, Althusser writes “As a first moment, it is clear that while there is one (Repressive) State Apparatus, there is a plurality of Ideological State Apparatuses. Even presupposing that it exists, the unity that constitutes this plurality of ISAs as a body is not immediately visible” (15). Here, Althusser points out how the plurality of ISAs cloaks the unity of their purpose, which is to maintain “the economic dominance of the ruling class or class alliance, through ideological discourse” (Ferretter, 84). The VR portal of KidZania visibilizes this unity as it groups different Apparatuses together in a scannable form:

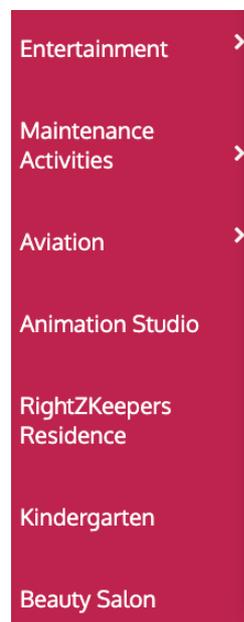


Figure 14: "Table of KidZanian ISAs" in KidZania Delhi NCR

<https://india.kidzania.com/en-in/pages/kidzania-india-360-virtual-tour>

Althusser’s argument that the functioning of ISAs is concealed by their “multiple, distinct, ‘relatively autonomous’ forms is also showcased in KidZania (19). Through KidZania’s diverse ISAs, “Children are free to explore the city on their own, put themselves in someone else’s shoes, wear costumes, use props, communicate and make decisions.” In this sense, KidZania represents the diversity of its ISAs as an indication of autonomy and freedom of choice, another expression of freedom through the language capitalism. These apparatuses not only create a sense of freedom through subjugation for the children, but also a false sense

of ownership. Children are made to believe that these ideological state apparatuses belong to the public, that they belong to a world ruled by children, and serve the interests of a community. In this sense, KidZania completely ignores the distinction between public and private institutions. And though Althusser notes that “It is unimportant whether the institutions in which [ideological state apparatuses] are realized are ‘public’ or ‘private’. What matters is how they function” (16), I argue that the very distinction between public and private institutions is indicative of the *lack* of freedom within a capitalistic society, within which accessibility is marked by one’s socio-political position. To neglect this reality, to deny children knowledge of this, is to omit a crucially unfair aspect of the world. In this sense, the way in which KidZania’s ISAs form a sense of free mobility and ownership for its participants cloak the power relations and dominant ideologies which animate these institutions.

Paradoxically, as can be seen in the images above, KidZania’s ISAs are explicitly tied to the interests of the state and the ruling ideology. In figure 12, for instance, the orange poster plastered on the safety walls of the stadium reads “Go KidZania!” This showcases how ISAs serve to give the nation-state a sense of cultural richness, diversity, and power, through the work of its subjects. Also notable in the images is the relationship between nationalist sentiments and capitalism, as the “Go KidZania!” posters sit nudged between Adidas advertisements. When KidZania was asked why it replicated such advertisements, KidZania answered that “You need the real names to authenticate the content” (Jeffries). The truth, of course, is that the Adidas advertisements are not ‘fake’ ads in the name of realism, but instead do the work of real advertisements. KidZania hides behind claims of replication and realism to carry out the work of the outside world. This aim of realism is another paradox within KidZania. Though committed to “each region, culture, geography” that it occupies, every KidZanian venue sports the same architecture. The courthouse (see fig 13), for instance, located in Delhi, looks nothing like an Indian courthouse, instead replicating a Judge Judy-like

courtroom inspired by American pop-culture. The same can be said about the KidZanian theater (see fig 11), which features a vintage marquee at its entrance. This signage, scarcely found today, even in modern American theaters, instead communicates a globally recognizable American architecture, nostalgic of the past. The architecture used in KidZania showcases how KidZania is not “realistic,” but instead replicates the ruling ideology used in spacial production, which is Americanized and globalized. In this sense, KidZania orders its subjects with a sense of cohesiveness that is maintained by an aesthetic of urban and capitalist sterility, which betrays the localities it vows to respect, as globalized capitalism usually does. While this cohesiveness ties all of its ISAs together, the diversity of the apparatuses create an illusion of self-formation for KidZania’s participants. KidZania, which is stripped of ideas of race, gender, and religious difference, shows how ideology perpetuates submission to social order and state (or community) power through its *material* structures.

Repressive State Apparatus (Community Helpers)

Another way ideology functions is through the Repressive State Apparatus (“the police, the courts, the prisons”) (Althusser, 10). Althusser explains that “the Repressive State Apparatus functions ‘by violence’, whereas the Ideological State Apparatuses function ‘by ideology’” (16). KidZania too houses the Repressive State Apparatus, such as “Police” and “Crime Scene Investigators” (“360 degrees Virtual Tour KidZania India”).



Figure 15: "Police" and "Crime Scene Investigators" in KidZania Delhi NCR

<https://india.kidzania.com/en-in/pages/kidzania-india-360-virtual-tour>



Figure 16: "Police Department" in KidZania Koshien

<https://www.kidzania.jp/en/koshien/activity/police-department.html>

It is important to note that KidZania settled on the less aggressive label “Community Helpers” to describe the Repressive State Apparatus (“360 degrees Virtual Tour KidZania India”). Whereas “the Arts” are dispersed under different sectors such as “Entertainment,” and various job roles are grouped under categories like “Stores,” “Shops,” and “Factories;” the “Community Helpers” are grouped under the same category (“360 degrees Virtual Tour KidZania India”). This grouping reveals that these ‘Community Helpers’ “constitute an organized whole whose different parts are centralized,” just as Althusser describes the Repressive State Apparatus (19). Moreover, grouping the Repressive State Apparatus under the label of “Community Helpers” is an explicitly ideological decision that aims to frame state power as helpful to its subjects. Why isn’t the “Medical” section (“hospitals,” “emergency rooms,” “dentists”), or the “Charitable Organization Institute” labeled as “Community Helpers”? This labeling is a way of teaching children to respect and honor the Repressive State Apparatus. Not only that but this decision to label the Repressive State Apparatus under “Community Helpers” ties back to the discussion of Foucault’s governmentality, whereupon the state is decentered, ideology is denied, and social conditioning is reframed as being for the sake of the ‘community.’ Althusser points out that this negation of ideology is a product of ideology, as he puts it; “One of the effects of ideology is the practical denegation of the ideological character of ideology by ideology: ideology never says, ‘I am ideological’” (41). KidZania contradicts itself again, however, as the police station sports the KidZanian flag over at the entrance, revealing that its function is not to help the community, but instead to reaffirm state authority.

KidZania, the Educational Apparatus

Althusser also explains that the Church, once a dominant ideological state apparatus, was replaced by the educational state apparatus (21). Within this apparatus, the goal is to reproduce “capitalist relations of exploitation” under the guise of being “a neutral environment

purged of ideology” (23, 25). KidZania’s exclusion of the religious state apparatus is not only proof of the religious apparatus’s denotation as a dominant ideological tool, but KidZania’s entire franchise exemplifies how the educational state apparatus came to take its place. Indeed, KidZania is not only a reproduction of all relations in the ‘real’ world, but is also, to the ‘real world,’ an educational state apparatus. In this sense, KidZania is a “school,” that “takes children from every class at infant-school age,” between the ages of 1 and 14, “when the child is most ‘vulnerable’” to “drum into them [...] a certain amount of ‘know-how’ wrapped in the ruling ideology” (24). Through this doubling effect, KidZania acts as a microcosm of capitalist labor and capital, yet it also teaches its mechanism in an unconscious mirroring expression. As Althusser put it, “all ideology is centered,” “the Absolute Subject occupies the unique place of the Centre, and interpellates around it the infinity of individuals into subjects in a double mirror-connexion such that it subjects the subjects to the Subject” (45). Althusser adds that “caught in this quadruple system of interpellation as subjects, of subjection to the Subject, of universal recognition and of absolute guarantee, the subjects ‘work’, they ‘work by themselves’” (46). Through this lens, KidZania is not only a materialization of general ideology and its double-mirrored structure, acting as an educational apparatus, but is itself also a product of such an ideology, having embodied the “concrete forms” of ISAs (46), replicating what it has been taught, *KidZania works by itself*.

Althusser adds that the educational state apparatus has coupled with the family state apparatus, just as the Church used to, whereby parents “open up for them the path to the freedom, morality, and responsibility of adults by their own example, by knowledge, literature and their ‘liberating’ virtues” (25). Though KidZania aims to separate the child from the parents, as adults are not allowed to accompany their children past the gates of the KidZania airport, this partnering with the parental role is identical to that of an educational institution. Leaving their kids at KidZania, parents can watch their children through “viewing windows,”

just as one would at a school play (“Spending Time: Guardians”). Though KidZania functions with approval from the family apparatus as does the educational apparatus, it also depicts separation from the family apparatus as a form of independence for participants. “How refreshing, I say, that in the age of helicopter parenting, children are being separated from cosseting, overbearing adults,” writes Stuart Jeffries for *The Guardian*, with KidZania agreeing that “Parents are an impediment.” It is unclear whether this indicates that the family apparatus is becoming less strict, or whether it only *seems* less strict in comparison to escalating forms of capitalism and subjugation in educational institutions. Whatever the case may be, KidZania’s cooperation with parents to instill in children the “know-how” of capitalistic relations showcases its role as an educational state apparatus in and of itself.

There is a fascinating modern contradiction within KidZania. On the one hand, KidZania acknowledges that the world *is* unjust, that “something must be done,” and has the ambition to rebuild, revolutionize, and unionize. On the other hand, KidZania replicates the circumstances of injustice which it criticizes in its foundation. In this sense, KidZania embodies Žižek’s idea of “ideological cynicism” (Sharpe). Within Althusser’s notion of ideology, “an individual is wholly ‘interpellated’ into a place within a political system by the system’s dominant ideology and ideological state apparatuses” (Sharpe). Žižek, however, “contends that the formula describing the operation of ideology today is not ‘they do not know it, but they are doing it,’ as it was for Marx. It is ‘they know it, but they are doing it anyway’” (Sharpe). This notion of ideological cynicism describes the dissonance that KidZania embodies. The difference between KidZania, the institution, and the participants of KidZania is that the latter don’t ‘know’ what they are doing, they actually might not even know that there is anything that needs changing in the ‘real’ world. This is the most troubling aspect of KidZania as an educational institution; its vague implication of some external injustice, and its representation of the very structures which create that injustice *as* the solution, for *children*. And though

KidZania would like to depict this education as un-ideological, its claim of ahistoricism and its recreation of ISAs reveal it to be a materialization of Althusser's general ideology. Moreover, its labeling of the Repressive State Apparatus as 'Community Helpers' shows that its form of education aims to create submission to the ruling ideology, just as its architecture recreates dominant, Americanized spaces in which urban, global subjects can be formed. The way in which KidZania interpellates subjects, however, points out an important shift in ideology, which is the increased focus on activity. And the way it interpellates *children* using fun, games, and role-playing, turns play into a coercive incentive for children to participate.

Activity and Play



Figure 17: "Fun For All the Family" Kids Pass KidZania
<https://www.kidspass.co.uk/news/2017/9/14/kidzania---fun-for-all-the-family>

“Edutainment”: Gamification and Ideology

Now that we have covered how KidZania’s subjugation relies on the illusion of freedom and self-governance created by the diversity of its institutions, which represent general ideology’s immutable structures, we will now further explore the concrete and repetitive practices within those institutions. Althusser explains that “ideology talks of action,” whereas he talks of “actions inserted into *practices*” (35). In this sense, Althusser explores ideology as the physical actions subjects perform in a set of *practices* to illustrate ideology’s material existence. The set of practices in the case of KidZania is the practice of “play.” The only form of play in KidZania, however, is ‘role-playing’ the various forms of capitalist labor, whereby children have “adult-like experiences while assuming the role of firemen, construction workers, police officers, and fashion designers, among others” (“What is KidZania?”). In this sense, not only does capitalism animate and corrupt play within KidZania, but play also animates capitalism. KidZania uses the term “Edutainment” to describe it; “To explain the word simply,

it means presenting the educational concept in an entertaining fashion” (“Edutainment Through Role Playing”). Here, role-play can be seen as animated in the first instance by education, and in the second, by ‘fun.’

The notion of education gives a different meaning to Althusser’s description of “practices.” The use of the term ‘practice’ in the case of KidZania is two-fold: it implies not only “the act of doing something” but also the training, the performance of an activity “in order to become skilled at it” (Cambridge). In this sense, children participating in the practices of capitalism in KidZania are *becoming* subjects and *practicing* subjugation; KidZania is a *practice of practices*. This is reminiscent of Brown’s argument that “Neoliberalism is a distinctive mode of reason, of the production of subjects, a ‘conduct of conduct’” (21). The double meaning of “practice” in KidZania points out a contradiction in the complex and in the mechanism of social formation as a whole. On the one hand, KidZania takes the system of subjugation for granted, claiming to be an ideology-free replica of “real-world fun” (“What is KidZania?”), naturalizing capitalism and its practices. On the other hand, KidZania admits that subjugation needs to be “practiced,” and that it is a learned skill, not a given or natural one, and that these children are a *work in progress*. Another paradox is that KidZania’s practices, which are the performance of labor, are fuelled by concepts of play (role-play) and fun. As KidZania says, “role-playing” is simply “*presenting* the educational concept in an entertaining fashion” (“Edutainment Through Role Playing”). Indeed, within KidZania, fun is constantly alluded to, but never materializes, just as freedom is always implied. If children naturally perform role-playing and “only need to watch an adult doing something before beginning to imitate them” (“What is KidZania?”), why is there such a focus on the “fun” of it? Why can’t KidZania simply depict itself as a site where children can carry out their supposedly natural desire for mimesis? I argue that this focus on play and fun aims not only to cloak KidZania’s ideological

goals but also to create incentives for its participants. In this sense, play and gamification act as a means to mask ideological goals, as well as a tool for the application of ideology.

This animation of work relations through “fun” is what Jagoda calls “gamification.” Jagoda defines gamification as “a condition of seepage through which game mechanics and objectives come to constitute the work, leisure, thought patterns, affects, and social relations of the overdeveloped world” (116). In other words, gamification is the use of “action-oriented mediations” and “game mechanics in traditionally nongame activities” (116). One supporter of gamification says that “‘reality is broken’ and can be saved only through games that turn ‘a real problem into a voluntary obstacle’ and activate ‘genuine interest, curiosity, motivation, effort, and optimism’ among their players” (115). The reasoning of this supporter which alludes to reframing “reality” is reminiscent of KidZania’s rhetoric that “things were just not going as well as they could” and a new “imagining” created a “better world” (“Our Ztory”). The supporter’s emphasis on activating ‘interest’ echoes KidZania’s discourse; ‘edutainment’ “keeps children involved both mentally and physically by presenting them with challenges in both these categories” (“Edutainment Through Role Playing”). What this supporter points out, however, is that the gamification employed by KidZania reframes the “real problem” into a “voluntary obstacle.” Instead of creating a “better world,” KidZania only creates ill-founded “interest, curiosity, motivation, effort, and optimism’ among their players” for the game replication of the real world. As Jagoda puts it, gamification “perpetuates hierarchy under the guise of games that are fun, interactive, and productive of extrinsic rewards” (143). In this sense, KidZania’s “edutainment” subjugates children under the guise of neutral education, as an educational apparatus does, and also uses the illusionary “fun” of gamification to encourage children’s participation and mask the ideological underpinning of that participation.

As Jagoda explains it, these gamified practices are not only a way of creating incentives for their participants but also a way to “mediate the contradictions and dissonances of postindustrial life” (120). KidZania’s use of the “kidZo” currency, “pazzport,” and “rightZ” go on to construct an environment that is disconnected from the outside world and its injustices. Similarly to KidZania’s ahistorical and anti-ideological persona, this “fun” and fictional atmosphere acts as a way to cloak and escape from external dissonances. Furthermore, the term “role-playing” acts, for KidZania, as a way to cloak itself from any responsibility for the system it has built. “Role-playing” implies that children are playing roles that are already out there, in the real world, KidZania is only an “aspiration to take [role-playing] to its maximum expression” (“What is KidZania?”) And in a sense, KidZania is not wrong in implying so. Mimesis is not unique to KidZania, but is instead central to the organization of “ways of doing, making, seeing, and judging;” mimesis “is first of all a fold in the distribution of ways of doing and making as well as in social occupations” (Rancière, 22). In this sense, the core concept of KidZania, mimesis, is not an original one, but is instead a mimesis of mimesis.

The Organization of Activity

Jagoda adds that games “serve as an organizing principle” (120). This organizational principle is central to KidZania’s complex and intertwined with its concept of freedom. Though KidZania posits itself as a “7,000 square meters” complex that “kids can independently explore,” the institution is carefully organized so that it can only be explored *if* you follow the rules and regulations of the practices set out for you (“What is KidZania?”). Upon entering a “KidZania venue, each child [receives] 50 kidZos at the airport” which they must deposit at the bank or spend on goods (“General Info”). Next, kids “earn more kidZos by working at selected establishments (activities), while other activities require kids to spend kidZos” (“General Info”). While working, children are accompanied by “Zupervisors,” who are “fully trained adults who are there to support children and help them accomplish their tasks while

they work and play” (“What is KidZania Dubai”). Each activity is described by how much time it takes, how much money a child earns (or spends), as well as the recommended age for the activity in question. In this sense, the practices are much more organized than they might seem; order, and not free exploration, is the prevailing principle.

Role:

Explorer

Activity Description:

Visitors explore the ins and outs of the air conditioning system of commercial buildings.

Activity Duration:

10 minutes

Economy:

Earn 5 kidZee



*Figure 18: Description of Role-Playing Activity in KidZania India
<https://india.kidzania.com/en-in/activities>*

Auge argues that this sterile and highly-ordered organization of movement is an attribute of supermodernity’s non-places:

The real non-places of supermodernity—the ones we inhabit when we are driving down the motorway, wandering through the supermarket or sitting in an airport lounge waiting for the next flight to London or Marseille - have the peculiarity that they are defined partly by the words and texts they offer us: their 'instructions for use', which may be prescriptive ('Take right-hand lane'), prohibitive ('No smoking') or informative ('You are now entering the Beaujolais region'). (Auge, 96).

In the case of KidZania, rewards take the place of instructions as described by Auge, though they similarly create the architecture of a non-place that controls mobility. In this sense, KidZania’s architecture, symptomatic of its capitalistic and modernist goals, impedes

the freedom it claims to offer children, which reveals the organizational purpose of its activities. Not only does activity organize the children's movement and practices under the guise of freedom, but they also have a community-building element, as the professor in Jagoda's article mentions "the grouping of students into "guilds" (115). KidZania too stresses that collaborating and forming "social skills" are important elements of its role-playing activities ("Learning at KidZania"). One major aspect of "edutainment" is "socialization," which "contribute[s] in social improvement through [...] learning activities and make kids feel part of a community that can make the world a better place" (Learning at KidZania). Here, the intertwining of role-play and socialization further constructs the illusion of a community through which socialization is seen as a benefit to society. Althusser, however, would argue that this form of interconnected role-play is a way to teach "the requirements of the socio-technical division of labour, its different 'jobs' and 'posts'" (5). In other words, the sense of socialization is a way of teaching children that they have different roles in the system and that together they *work* as a part of a bigger whole. The way in which activity is used to control movement and practices, as well as create interconnection between its participants is relevant to what Jagoda describes as a shift in ideology:

These technological shifts in communications models have corresponded with comparable changes in economic and social life. If an earlier stage involved a transformation from 'being into having,' and the society of the spectacle entailed, for Debord, a movement 'from having to appearing,' then our moment suggests another notable movement from appearing to interacting. Images, of course, remain of critical importance in the present, but ideology depends more and more on activity. Again, this quality, which is so central to games, differs from the society of the spectacle, in which the activity of capitalist production generates consumer inactivity. Today, technology promotes not idleness but so-called interactivity (121-122).

In this extract, Jagoda makes two extremely fruitful arguments. The first is that there has been a shift from “appearing” and “images” or ‘imaginary relationships’ (30), as Althusser would put it, to more active, ideology-forming interactions. In this sense, ideology depends more on activity. The second argument Jagoda makes is that the “separation” described by Debord, or the “division of labor” described by Althusser, has been replaced by “interactivity.” “While the society of the spectacle was founded on separation, our networked world is predicated on a material infrastructure of interconnection” (119), Jagoda writes. These arguments of ideology relying on activity in a “material infrastructure of interconnection” perfectly describe KidZania, a complex of material and organized activity that aims to keep children ‘involved.’ We will now see how this activity is more specifically tied to ideology and subjugation. We discussed in a previous section how KidZania operates as an educational state apparatus to the real world, teaching children how to be subjects, and earlier in this section how KidZania is a practice of practices, we will now further explore how activity is used as tool of subjugation, cloaked by gamification and ‘fun,’ though it explicitly partners with capitalistic education.

The Productivity and Profitability of Play

On role-playing, KidZania’s website writes: “As Aristotle once said, ‘for the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them’ (“About KidZania”). This illustrates not only how “role-playing” has the aim of teaching children how to mimic capitalist relations, but showcases how this form of subjugation utilizes activity and interaction. Moreover, KidZania’s “role-playing” places such an emphasis on *function*, as if parents need to be sold on *why* their children should be playing. On play, Huizinga writes that there have been many “attempts to define the biological function of play,” all of which “have one thing in common: they all start from the assumption that play must serve something which is *not* play” (2). Indeed, this is what KidZania does, it ‘sells’ play, utilizing its representative and

educational aspects, turning it into mimetic role-playing, and as you would market any product that you sell, gives it a purpose and a function. KidZania's website justifies the "benefits of role-playing," writing that "role-playing is fun – and has very positive learning, psychological and motivational benefits" ("About KidZania"). The first part of this description about the "fun" of play is such a throw-away and short comment and the use of the hyphen, which communicates an abrupt interruption, shows that the "playing" aspect of role-playing is secondary to its educational aspects. "Role-playing is fun," says KidZania—not that it matters, what matters is that it is *productive*. As an article by the Guardian states, children entering KidZania receive "the greeting from adult staff: 'Have a productive day!'" Corrupted by KidZania's ideological, capitalistic, and educational aims, "role-playing" is infested with this necessary productivity and governed by a measure of growth and profitability. What play produces in this context is the performance of capitalist identity, or as they put it, the need to be "participatory in life" ("Our Ztory"). This again brings up Brown's argument of "neoliberalism's "economization" of political life and of other heretofore noneconomic spheres and activities" (17). It is in the context of this function that "fun" is revealed to be as illusory as the concept of freedom is, and education becomes a mode of subjugation. As the Dallas KidZania website puts it; "KidZania is not like other entertainment parks. Here we do not indulge in children's whims — instead we offer them useful knowledge, experiences and a chance to be independent" ("About Us"). Indeed, KidZania does not tolerate silly children and

their “whims,” it is an institution where children are ordered, organized, and taught (but don’t tell them that).

Take for instance, figure 19, titled by KidZania a “census board” for the role of a “courier agent,” which involves “receiv[ing] packages and deliver[ing] them by determining their routes” (“General Info”). Interestingly, the productive function of this activity is not only measured through the “expertise” and “learning” gained, which in this case is knowledge of the “mail system and package delivery,” but is also measured through certain “values” and “skills develop[ed]” (“General Info”). In this sense, KidZania shows that participating in such an activity is not only about creating knowledgeable workers but also about forming subjects with a sense of “generosity,” “integrity,” “respect,” “responsibility,” and “gratitude” (“General Info”). Just as Althusser illustrated; wages are not sufficient in the formation of the subject, one must learn the moral rules that form submission to order (5). Moreover, it is important to bring up again the notion of organization and order when it comes to this graph. Whereas

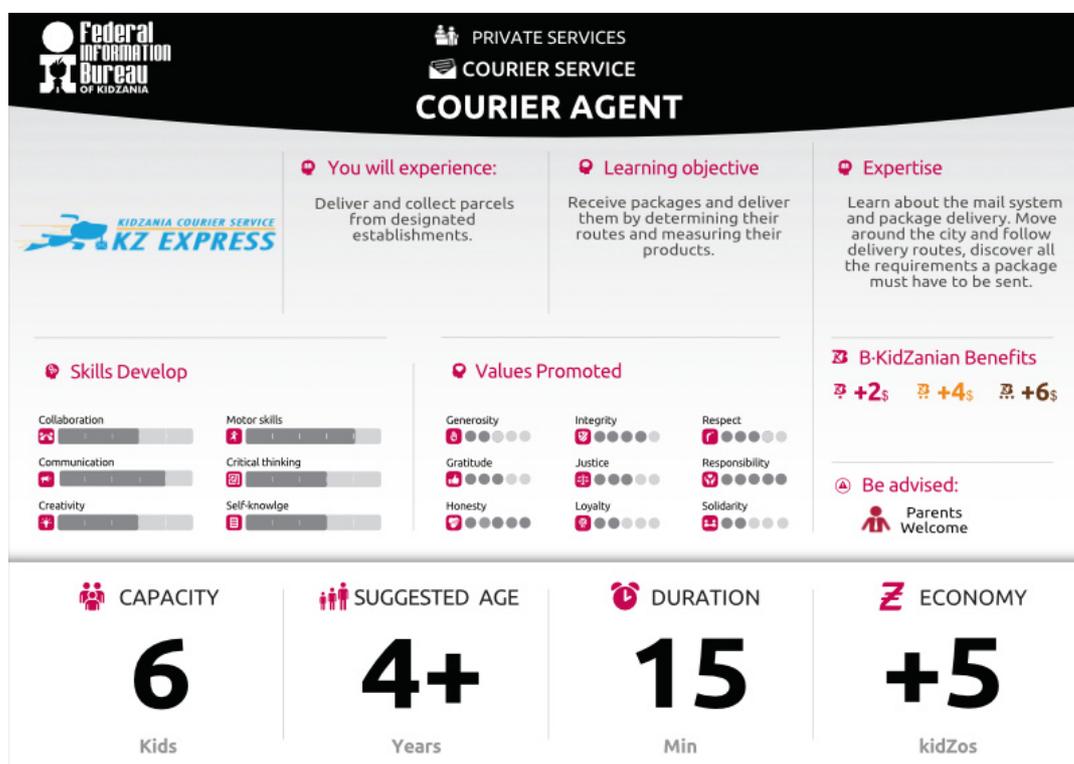


Figure 19: "Census Board for Courier Agent" in KidZania Kuala Lumpur
<https://www.kidzania.com.my/generalinfo>

it

seems that they don't even have a say on *what* skills to develop within any given activity; instead, they are told what they will develop, how long it will last, what age is suggested for the activity, the capacity of each activity, and how much they will be paid. This demonstrates that much like its concepts of self-governance, independence, and freedom, the 'fun' of KidZania's 'play' serves as nothing more than an illusion for its participants, and showcases Jagoda's argument that games serve an "organizing principle" in an ideology of activity that uses a "reward" system.

Jagoda writes that "play is never pure. It is inherently precarious in its oscillation between imagination and materiality, individual creativity and social interplay, and enactment of and experimentation with the world," which makes play "a space of potential, one that is so often undone by the ludic sterility of gamification" (144). Unfortunately, KidZania's rigid architecture of control leaves little to no room for the precariousness and uncertainty of play. Its gamified capitalist activities only promote "repetitive grinding, achievement-based operant conditioning, and dopamine-fueled goal orientation" (115), stripping any sense of autonomy or creativity from its participants. What a shame it all is. I would argue, in agreement with KidZania, that a better world *should* be constructed and that children should be in charge of it. I have imagined what such a world would look like and how it would work—or rather, *not work*—perhaps children would paint the walls, or tear them down altogether, surely they would play nonsensical games that have no discernable purpose, they would bring trees into the living room and take their dishes to the garden. That is the wonderful and magical thing about children's games and—they take what they know and express it in utter absurdity, they turn the world on its head. I would love to visit a world like that, but that's not what KidZania is. As I said at the beginning of this thesis, KidZania is not about children, what they want, or what they can create, it's about teaching them the rules of our world.

Nation and Ideology

An Imagined Community of Non-Places

KidZania's website, under "KidZania Nation," outlines the complex's "Ztory:" "The time had come. Enough was enough. Something had to be done and kids were the ones to do it. The history of KidZania starts like all great stories start, with idealistic passion and an unwavering spirit that was stimulated by a communal desire to create something better" ("Our Ztory"). One major paradox of KidZania's nation is its material uselessness. As a complex centered around material labor, the constitution of a fictional historical past (a Ztory), the establishment of RightZKeepers (guardians of rights), national symbols, monuments, and holidays, seems utterly unnecessary. This brings to the forefront the relationship between KidZania's supermodern, globalized capitalism and KidZania, the imperial nation. Another tension within KidZania is between its local enclosures and its global identity, which makes it difficult to define as a nation. In the Introduction of *Imagined Communities*, Anderson explains that this difficulty is central to the idea of a nation; "Nation, nationality, nationalism [have all] proved notoriously difficult to define":

The creation of these [concepts] towards the end of the eighteenth century was the spontaneous distillation of a complex 'crossing' of discrete historical forces; but that, once created, they became 'modular,' capable of being transplanted, with varying degrees of self-consciousness, to a great variety of social terrains, to merge and be merged with a correspondingly wide variety of political and ideological constellations. (3-4).

Anderson defines a nation as "an imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (6). Anderson explains that "It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (6).

Anderson is quick to clarify, however, that the “imagined” dimension of the nation is not a “fabrication” or “falsity,” but a “creation” (6). In this sense, Anderson centers the imagined dimension of a nation as key to the creation of a sense of community. Moreover, Anderson writes,

[Nation] is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings. (7).

On the one hand, this excerpt brings into focus the ‘normative’ aspect of KidZania’s nationhood; how its imagined dimension forms a constructed sense of community and national consciousness or as Anderson puts it, “kinship” (6). On the other hand, it brings into focus an aspect omitted within KidZania. As Anderson writes, “These deaths [from war] bring us abruptly face to face with the central problem posed by nationalism: what makes the shrunken imaginings of recent history (scarcely more than two centuries) generate such colossal sacrifices?” (7). It is these deaths, wars, and pain caused by nationalism that calls into question its structures, which is why it is so telling that KidZania opted to exclude all mention of such happenings. Similarly to how KidZania excludes race, gender, religion, and history, the omission of war, death, and sacrifice forms an *illusion* of a utopian nation while maintaining the structures key to its injustices. This omission, also similar to how KidZania labels its Repressive Apparatus as ‘Community Helpers,’ has the ideological aim of creating unsuspecting and uncritical subjects.

Though Anderson applies his theory to grassroots nationalisms, and the object of analysis here is a corporate nationalism with a commercial purpose, Anderson’s work

highlights how a community is held together by an imaginative dimension of limitation and interconnection. In this sense, KidZania transplants nation's capacity for creating a *sense* of belonging. In the case of KidZania, however, this belonging is especially forged as it does not relate to a place with relational and historical contingencies. Instead, KidZania borrows nationalist dimensions and transplants them onto its non-place venues. Auge explains that while an "'anthropological place' is formed by individual identities, through complicities of language, local references, the unformulated rules of living know-how; non-place creates the shared identity of passengers, customers or Sunday drivers" (101). Unlike anthropological places, KidZania is a place "where people do not live together" (107), but instead are inherently transitory. In this way, KidZania communicates the modern struggle of having to maintain the concept of a nation. The material uselessness of KidZania's nationalist dimension shows how in the modern world, we take nation as a given; "everyone should, will 'have' a nationality, as he or she 'has' a gender" (5). At the same time, KidZania also showcases the struggle of maintaining such an imagined community in a world where non-places are proliferating; non-places which are not conducive to the sense of social interconnection necessary for an imagined community. The result is a place like KidZania, where the vague notions and tools of nation are maintained yet its incoherence and irrelevance are blatantly apparent. In this sense, KidZania's commercial nationalism is simply the state of nationalism under late stage capitalism.

“The Time Had Come”: Ztory’s Narrativity



Figure 20: Ztory Narrative Chronology
<https://kidzania.com/en/ztory>

KidZania’s Ztory is embellished with modes of storytelling and narrativity which gives participation in the nation a sense of meaning, much like ideology gives the subject the goal of becoming a Subject and of being a work in progress. As the Ztory goes, KidZania started because “kids got inspired,” “Looking at the way the adults were running the world had become an exercise in exasperation” (“Our Ztory”). In this first section, KidZania creates a story fuelled by ambition, inspiration, and most importantly, collectivity. “And it didn’t happen just in one place, KidZania writes, it occurred in the minds of numerous cultures across every continent” (“Our Ztory”). Now, this inspiration turns to a national (or actually, transnational) consciousness. “The birth of their idea was the result of likeminded thinking, a state of mind, more than a physical place. It was the collective thinking in the imagining of something better by kids all over the world that led to its creation,” KidZania writes (“Our Ztory”). Similarly to one of Anderson’s examples, there is “national imagination at work [...] that fuses the world inside the [story] with the world outside” (30). This imagining of time and narrativity creates a connection with the past and with the community from which it came, a sense of continuity which is an attempt, here an utterly fictional one, to create *meaning*. Rancière frames this “meaning” as a necessity in *Distribution of the Sensible*. In the chapter “Is History a Form of Fiction?” Rancière analyzes “the relationship between history and historicity, that is to say the relationship of the historical agent to the speaking being” and “the relationship between fictional rationality and the modes of explanation used for historical and social reality, the

relationship between the logic of fiction and the logic of facts” (35). Rancière writes that “the ‘empirical’ bears the marks of the true in the form of traces and imprints. ‘What happened’ thus comes directly under a regime of truth, a regime that demonstrates the necessity behind what happened” (38). This necessity is at the core of KidZania’s chronology, which is led by “something [that] *had* to be done,” to create “something better.” Far from a history, the “Ztory” demonstrates, in its use of fiction, how empirical historicity utilizes modes of storytelling and narration, to justify the necessity of the past and to conjure respect and gratitude for, and acceptance towards the present.

Furthermore, it was not enough for KidZania to create a fictional history, it had to give its history a forged sense of *antiquity*.



Figure 21: KidZania Ztory Banner
<https://kidzania.com/en/ztory>

As seen by the graphics included on the website, KidZania showcases one of the contradictions Anderson brings up in his Introduction: “The objective modernity of nations to the historian's eye vs. their subjective antiquity in the eyes of nationalists” (5). This subjective antiquity goes hand in hand with the need for continuity, history, and imagining of time, and is a way of teaching children that nationhood is eternal. Similarly to KidZania’s ideology tells subjects ‘Yes, that’s how it is, that’s really true!’ (Althusser, 12), and its capitalist system helps

children find out who they are *supposed* to be, the fake antinuity of KidZania's nation shows how nation is one of those "taken-for-granted frames" that operates under "self-evident plausibility" turning "chance into destiny" (Anderson, 12).

Moreover, this forged connection with the past is also a way of imagining subjects into existence. As Rancière writes, "They draft maps of the visible, trajectories between the visible and the sayable, relationships between modes of being, modes of saying, and modes of doing and making. [...] adapted to the natural cycles of production, reproduction, and submission" (39). This imagining seeks to form and shape the citizens it addresses, "However, these locutions take hold of bodies and divert them from their end or purpose [...] Therefore, they do not produce collective bodies. Instead, they introduce lines of fracture and disincorporation into imaginary collective bodies" (Rancière, 39). Rancière's argument here brings attention to how the order or 'transplantation' of historical imaginings *organize* the public as a collective, though at the same time, it does so unevenly, creating instead a subject torn between wholeness and fragmentation, between collectivity and individuality. This outlines the reflexive movement between nationhood and subjugation; to 'think' a nation, one must be subjugated in order to take the nationalist imagining for granted, and the nationalist imaginings, in return, form a sense of meaning and community essential to the formation of the subject. Moreover, KidZania's use of historicity is intertwined with fictional narrativity to create national imaginings, and its use of cosmology, temporality, and continuity give a sense of meaning to those imaginings.

The Empire of KidZania vs. Locality

KidZania's Ztory not only focuses on creating a connection with a fictional past, but also expresses a desire for finality, the same desire to "jump beyond [one's] epoch" that Marx "scoffed at" (33), as Castoriadis writes. This jumping past history is animated by a capitalist

conception of human nature which blames culture for injustice, it is a “claim that the manner, which differs so widely from one society to another and from one epoch to another, of living these relations is of no importance” (Castoriadis, 27). “It is the invention of another unconscious beneath the unconscious, the unconscious of the unconscious, which would be at once 'objective' (because totally independent of the history of subjects and of their action) and 'rational' (because constantly directed towards a definable and even measurable end, the economic end)” (Castoriadis, 27). KidZania, as a complex, expresses the desire for history to stop, just as its architecture and organization creates non-places with no historical contingencies. KidZania does not offer a solution to injustice, but a solution to difference, a difference that impedes the flow of global markets.

On the one hand, KidZania is a very *enclosed* complex, “steeped” in ideology (Althusser, 6), each venue’s topography carefully delineated and fenced, with the trademark painted sky.



Figure 22: KidZania Tokyo

<https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2014/nov/14/kidzania-theme-parks-tokyo-london>

On the other hand, KidZania’s nation is not “limited” in the way that Anderson describes (5). As the Ztory goes, “The spirit that drove the kids to want to take action was the same spirit that ultimately drove them to call themselves a Nation: their ideals were universal, where no geographical boundaries defined them, physical borders were nonexistent and no

cultural differences restricted them”. KidZania explains that it wanted to be a “place all kids could call home no matter where they actually lived” (Our Ztory). These notions of a globalized utopia and a vague transnational identity only create an empty sterility within KidZania, reminiscent of Auge’s writing on non-places. While we have compared individual KidZanian venues to non-places, the connection between these venues which constructs the utopian nation of KidZania is more of an “Empire”:

Empire, considered as a 'totalitarian' universe [...] is that of a universe where nobody is ever alone, where everyone is under close control, where the past as such is rejected (has been swept away). Empire, like the world of Orwell or Kafka, is not premodern but 'para-modern'; a botched modernity [...] Blind to the acceleration of history, it rewrites it; it protects its subjects from the feeling that space is shrinking by limiting freedom of movement and information [...] it removes the individual reference from its ideology and takes the risk of projecting it outside its frontiers: a shimmering figure of absolute evil or supreme seductiveness. (Auge, 114).

Here, Auge’s concept of Empire turns KidZania’s depiction of “a place all kids could call home” to “a universe where nobody is ever alone, where everyone is under close control” (Auge, 114). A place where “ideals were universal” becomes a place “where the past as such is rejected (has been swept away)” (Auge, 114). KidZania’s Ztory, championed by a desire for finality and change, along with its supermodern architecture becomes a protection of “subjects from the feeling that space is shrinking by limiting freedom of movement and information.” Within this lens, KidZania’s utopia where “physical borders were nonexistent and no cultural differences restricted them,” can more accurately be described as a Western Empire of domination. In this sense, Auge’s notions of supermodern non-places and Empires prolongs Althusser’s discussion of capitalism’s universality. The way in which KidZania’s nation is

more similar to an Empire expresses how the imaginative elements of a nation's sense of limitation and interconnection is, in the modern world, simultaneously haunted by the need for a boundaryless global market. The Ztory, paradoxically, after having rejected geography and the establishment of borders, discusses the foundation of a city:

The kids were now set to getting ready for a better world. The world they envisioned demanded their preparation. This required the creation of a special place just for them. They had already declared their independence. Crazy as it sounded, now they would found a city. They chose the idea of creating their own city because cities are places where people live, interact and work independently while contributing to a greater whole. Surely their world would want to foster a similar degree of cooperation and interaction. And cities were also the kind of place where people could make friends, share ideas and care for those around them. (Our Ztory).

Here, it becomes obvious how KidZania aims to subjugate its participants through the discourse of nationalism, and the role of urbanism within this sense of belonging. Through the national imaginings of community connection, KidZania depicts the "city" as the supreme place for all social practices. As KidZania says, "cities are places where people live, interact and work independently while contributing to a greater whole. Surely their world would want to foster a similar degree of cooperation and interaction" (Our Ztory). Similarly to how Augé defines non-places through the definition of anthropological places, KidZania implicitly describes the rural through its definition of the urban. The rural is what a city is *not* and functions *not* how a city functions. The rural is *not* a place of "cooperation and interaction," it is *not* a place "where people could make friends, share ideas and care for those around them" (Our Ztory). In this sense, the rural here becomes an undemocratic, uncivil, *cold* place, ironically in contrast to KidZania's description of a city.

Not only that, but KidZania completely omits the rural and its practices; the rural is antiquated, irrelevant, and unproductive—not even worth mentioning. Not only does KidZania aim to form metropolitan subjects unfamiliar with the rural and comfortable in the urban, but it also aims to form subjects with a sense of universal and *global* belonging, opposite to a sense of local belonging. It is in this way that KidZania’s nationalism intersects and forms its global capitalism, and its global capitalism forms its nationalism. KidZania’s capitalistic mentality forms the idea that culture and cultural differences are the root of injustice, and its nationalism constructs capitalistic sites as places of belonging and democracy. To the outside world, KidZania depicts how global capitalism needs an easy flow of free-market relations, meaning less borders, less locality, and more easily-accessible cities. Internally, within KidZania, this globalized, borderless nationalism enables the corporation to create a brand that surpasses all borders and marketplaces, as well as appeals to international investors.

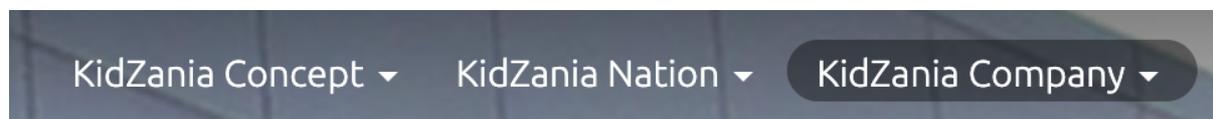


Figure 23: Website Banner of kidzania.com

“B-KidZanian”: The Corporation of Nation

The next section in the Ztory tells us that a “government was established.” The Ztory has come a long way since the humble beginnings of childish inspiration, and KidZania’s government is now made of a “legislative branch” and “an administrative branch,” within which the “state government” is responsible for “the incorporation of Industry Partners and regularly reporting to its CitiZens and Government collaborators on the State progress” (Our Ztory). It seems KidZania recognized the discrepancy between a world for kids, and a world for companies, opting to fictionally intertwine the two. Indeed, the globalized world of KidZania is sponsored by over “850 global and local organizations around the world,” such as

DHL, Honda, Sony, Danone, and many more (“Purpose Partners”). This is where the globalized, borderless nation starts to make a little more sense as it serves as a blank way to unify a company that is merely a collection of international sponsors. Indeed, even transnationality is up for sale:

As members of B-KidZanian, kids get their own PaZZport and can also get a special hologram sticker for each KidZania visited around the world. Kids will receive a unique stamp in their PaZZport for participation in selective activities in our Cities – more stamps mean more exciting benefits! (“B-KidZanian”)



Figure 24: Website Banner for B-KidZanian Loyalty Program
<https://kidzania.com/en/b-kidzanian>

The global, transnational citizenship outlined by KidZania showcases three important intersections. Firstly, this form of citizenship highlights the intersection between nationalism and capitalism, which creates an economization of citizenship. As KidZania illustrates, citizenship is treated as a commodity, valued based on the privileges it offers. Though you cannot per se ‘purchase’ a nationality as you can in KidZania, you can purchase it with your time and dedication to a job post. Military or diplomatic passports, for instance, offer access to a streamlined visa process, priority processing at the airport, and enhanced security and

protection. In this sense, the absurdity of KidZania's economization of citizenship, when analyzed more closely, sheds light on the inherent nature of citizenship as a commodity. Moreover, KidZania's borderlessness and treatment of localities as collectible trinkets reveals how globalization depicts the world through the lens of infinite possibilities, symptomatic of capitalism's insatiable thirst for opportunity. As Mezzadra and Neilson put it, "the heterogenization of global space implies on the one hand an *explosion* of established nation-state geographies and on the other hand an *implosion* that forces seemingly discrete territories and actors into unexpected connections that facilitate processes of production and labor exploitation" (Mezzadra and Neilson). In KidZania and elsewhere, there is no room for localities that do not participate in the global market, similarly to how subjects must be just as internally subjugated as they externally subjugated in relation to their community, a locality cannot exist in its own right. KidZania elaborates on the process of its citizenship, writing:

As kids acquire more skills and earn more stamps they will be able to advance through the three levels of B·KidZanian: Naturalized CitiZen, Distinguished CitiZen and Honorable CitiZen. These levels offer different benefits for our CitiZens, including better wages, special discounts at the National Store and special activities for selected CitiZens. ("B-KidZanian").

This idea that "more stamps mean more exciting benefits!" represents the third intersection ("B-KidZanian"), where gamification, citizenship, and capitalism meet once again. Not only is the performance of citizenship gamified through the acquisition of "stamps," but it is also animated by the "repetition and competition [...] of advanced capitalism" (118), as Jagoda puts it. Not only does this way of socializing children normalize social hierarchies of "naturalized," "distinguished," or "honorable" citizens ("B-KidZanian"), but it also teaches children that such order is the baseline for an efficient society and that they should aim to go

up the ladder. Moreover, children are taught not *only* that the more you work, the more “exciting benefits” you have, but that such a system is fair. Ironically, even within KidZania, this is untrue, since you cannot simply work for a citizenship but must instead purchase a passport.

On the one hand, KidZania's nation, from its twisting of destiny and meaning, to the economization, commodification, and gamification of its citizenship, and its valuation of the global and the urban over the local and the rural, socializes children to suit dominant modes of production and builds respect for those modes of production. On the other hand, the complex is not exactly lying when it claims that it's “opening children's eyes to the realities of life” (Jeffries), though it certainly is wrong in claiming that KidZania is a “better world.” This claim of being the best possible place, however, is yet another example of how the Western, urbanized, capitalized world masks its inequality. In this sense, KidZania's fantasy of the dissolution of struggle through assimilation is reminiscent of *The End of History*, by which Fukuyama meant “the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.” Though KidZania posits itself as a revolution of the world as it is, its fictional reimagining only serves as a reassertion of dominant ideologies which creates a space where there is no room for struggle, and thus no room for evolution.

Conclusion

KidZania attempts to isolate the practices of capitalism from those of subjugation. The way it defines freedom as the right to participate in the economy, however, reveals how inseparable and reflexive the structures of subjugation and capitalism are. Being a free subject, under capitalist rule, means being free to sell one's labor power. Moreover, *in order* to be a free subject, one *must* sell one's labor power. The benefit of the working world is freedom and freedom is participation in the working world. In this sense, the formation of the worker-subject relies on this never-ending chase of freedom. KidZania, in its replacement of goals of subjugation with illusionary self-formation, reveals how modern subjugation increasingly relies on an illusion of self-determination, whereby subjects "produce the ends of government by fulfilling themselves rather than being merely obedient" (Rose et al., 10). This illusion of self-formation is efficiently manipulative, making subjects believe they are working towards self-improvement and not towards the maintenance of external order.

KidZania also operates under the claim of being un-ideological by externalizing history and ignoring "race, religion, and cultural differences" ("Our Ztory"). This attitude treats difference as the perpetrator of inequality and puts forth universality as the solution. In this way, KidZania pretends that ideology and social inequality exist in ideas of difference, and not capitalistic practices of hegemony. In doing this, KidZania claims that capitalist practices and nationalistic narratives are the only fundamental and equitable parts of society. Althusser, however, argues that this very externalization of history is at the core of general ideology, which in its negative determination, is an empty dream. The latter is at the core of KidZania's ambitions for a "Better World," which are undone by KidZania's replication of ideology's immutable structures. Through KidZania's diverse ISAs, the complex further offers its participants an illusion of self-formation. Within these institutions, children are 'free' to roam and subjugate themselves. No matter what career the children decide to take up, however, the

goal remains the same; the socio-technical division of labor, and the intertwinement of different professions to create an urban, globalized community. On top of being a microcosm of general ideology, KidZania also acts as an educational apparatus in and of itself, teaching children how to navigate “real-life situations” (About Us). In this way, KidZania externalizes the structures that it teaches and recreates, functioning under the excuse of mere replication, though it is responsible for naturalizing these structures in the eyes of children.

Though Althusser touched on practices being a materialization of ideology, parallel to ideology being a representation of a subject’s relationship to his real conditions of existence, KidZania’s highly regularized architecture and its gamified work relations hint at a shift in the mechanism of ideology. As Jagoda shows, gamification is increasingly seeping into work practices just as work practices are seeping into games. KidZania’s “real-life situations” are animated through their ideology of ‘edutainment.’ Far from fun, however, the “game” aspect of these practices (game-based language, wages as rewards) act as instructions which organize the movement and participation of children, depicting order as “fun.” Parallel to its organizational effect, gamification also inflicts on play a necessity for productivity and profitability, whereby children’s practices are economized. This gamification showcases a shift towards an ideology increasingly reliant on interconnection and activity. Games, and KidZania by extension, have a reflexive relationship with the environment they interact with; they are “both the outcome and the goal of the dominant mode of production” (Jagoda, 119). A big part of the organizational aspect of KidZania is its sterile architecture; KidZania organizes children into a specific environment-specific because of its predictable, organized, and regulated practices—yet vague in its character, each KidZania is a globalized city. The sterility of KidZania’s complex turns each venue into a macro-non-place, made up of many non-places. This hints at an escalation of Auge’s arguments, whereby non-places are no longer permeating public spaces, but instead have become the norm.

Even in the context of a global utopia, KidZania maintains the concept of conventional nation, nationhood, and nationalism, which shows how the modern world finds the idea of a nation to be an unavoidable given. KidZania also showcases how the modern world struggles to maintain the sense of imagined community central to nationhood due to the proliferation of non-places by global capitalism. The fact that KidZania felt nationalist relations were indispensable to the replication of capitalist relations, however, showcases nation's relevance not only to a citizen's life, but to a subject's imagining. In the modern world, one cannot be a worker without being a subject, cannot be a subject without being a citizen, and cannot be a citizen without being a worker and a subject. In this sense, KidZania showcases the modular elements of ideology and creates a complex for their intersection. KidZania shows that a sense of national community, a depiction of time, history, and narrativity are pivotal to a subject's imagining. Time creates a chronology that gives a cosmological meaning to the subject's spatio-temporal position. Empirical history creates a necessity for the past and an acceptance for the present, and narrativity creates a "national imagination" which positions subjects as citizens in relation to others. As Rancière points out, however, empirical history does "not produce collective bodies. Instead, they introduce lines of fracture and disincorporation into imaginary collective bodies." In this sense, KidZania's nation, though it tries to create order, just as its practices of gamified capitalism and self-formation do, only creates endless contradictions for its unevenly formed subjects.

KidZania also shows the late 90s and 2000s introduced a shift towards a boundaryless Western universality, or Empire, that functioned against cultural differences, *for* globalized free-market relations. This focus on obliterating local differences in the name of universal capital is exemplified by KidZania's focus on "cities" which it depicts as "places where people live, interact and work independently while contributing to a greater whole" (Our Ztory), in contrast to local, rural places. In this sense, KidZania's nationalism is universalised and

urbanized to suit global market relations. This aims to subjugate a specific type of urban worker-citizen with a sense of global belonging—meaning a sense of belonging to dominant modes of production. For KidZania as a corporation, this fictional nationalism creates a brand that can easily fit into any metropolis. This paired with the fact that it recreates cityscapes essentially means that KidZania’s brand builds cities within cities which can be sponsored by the same companies dozens of times over. Not only are KidZania's venues a replication of cities, but each KidZania is also a replication of another KidZania. In this sense, KidZania also represents the endless proliferation of non-places under the global capitalist Empire. Within this corporate lens, KidZania’s nationality is also treated as a commodity which can be bought. Though this commodification citizenship is not unique, it does naturalize this economization to children, just as it naturalizes ideology.

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