



• Aryeh Cohen

The City Run By Children

Imagine a city run by children! Welcome to KidZania! Instead of an amusement park with the usual activities, this fictional for-kids-only city allows children to immerse themselves in a make-believe but incredibly realistic environment that gives them a taste of adult life. Here they work as government officials, pilots, police officers, doctors, pizza shop employees, etc. to earn pretend currency so they can buy things at pretend stores or put their earnings in saving accounts. While the park itself is alluring and fun and its advocates bill it as a great educational tool, not everyone is enamored of the idea. Read about this fascinating and controversial city run by children.

“Yanky, I can’t be Hatzolah now because I have to go to the bank to take care of some important business.”

“Ok Moshie, while you’re at the bank I’ll arrange a permit for a new building for my offices.”

“Great, Yanky! Tomorrow I’m flying to China. I’ve got a huge deal to settle.”

“Really? Too bad. Tomorrow I have an appointment with the mayor.”

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Sounds like a typical conversation between seven-year-olds? Usually, adults who overhear this kind of talk among children can’t help but smile. It’s cute to observe kids making imaginary forays into the world of adults to play out their fantasies. At KidZania, though, it is no fantasy.



A proud citizen of KidZania.



When you arrive at KidZania you must first go through the airport where you are greeted warmly by airport officials.

Here children can turn their fantasies into realities. Not only can they, but they are encouraged to do so. They are provided with the necessary accessories and even the atmosphere to feel big.

Like other cities—after all, KidZania is a city like any other—you enter through the airport where you will be given a friendly welcome by airport staff. They may be any age between four and twelve.... You have to buy a ticket from the travel agents—children again. Finally, you board the plane, take your seat and listen to the greeting message from the child flight attendant telling you to enjoy your flight.

The child-pilot navigates the skies expertly and within minutes you are in a new country, KidZania. What is the first thing you would normally do in a new country? Acquire local currency. So you walk into a bank and exchange your greenbacks for local money. Here that means “kidzos.” Every child is handed 50 kidzos upon arrival to help them start out in their new world.

Want to become a citizen? After all, what kid wouldn’t? No problem. KidZania offers citizenship papers. In other countries the wait may take years, cost hundreds and includes a proficiency test in local history. Not so in KidZania. You can earn your citizenship on the spot for just three kidzos—and it will be recognized at any KidZania location round the world. You are issued a passport with your name and birth date printed inside along with your photo.

As in other countries, there is a measure of discrimination involved. If you forego citizenship you will notice that citizens receive preferential treatment. A citizen will earn more at the same activities than a non-citizen and may receive a larger slice of pizza at the local pizza store. (This pizza, of course, is baked by KidZania residents, i.e., children.) It is little wonder that most children shell out those three kidzos for the rights of citizenship.

Of course, the government does not reveal the true, nefarious purpose of the passport, which is to build itself a loyal support base of children. This passport is



A busy street scene at KidZania.

stamped after each activity in KidZania in which the bearer participates. The next day the child will have something to show off to his friends on the block or at school, which automatically generates more citizens for KidZania (and money for its adult operators).

Regardless of whether they choose citizenship or not, every child who visits KidZania receives a bracelet. This ensures that they remain within the “safe zone.” If a child steps outside, the bracelet will trigger an alarm. This is a vital precaution since children at KidZania are not under parental supervision. The entire point of KidZania is that it gives children a chance to be “real” moms and dads while their parents enjoy the freedom to relax or shop without children under tow.

The bracelets serve a secondary purpose as well, which is not discussed openly. Each contains a barcode which must be scanned before any KidZania activity. The information is automatically entered into a computer system that updates the managers about which activities children prefer and how long their interest lasts at any particular task.



KidZania city center.