

Dream and reality of the Koza Music Town, Okinawa, Okinawa, Japan.

Harumichi YAMADA (Tokyo Keizai University)

The Koza Music Town (KMT) is a small redevelopment complex on the corner of Goya intersection in the downtown of Okinawa city, Okinawa prefecture. Completed in 2007, the complex features Oto-Ichiba, a venue for performances, and other facilities include small offices, shops, flats, and parking block. While Oto-Ichiba is owned and operated by the city authority, other parts of the complex are separately owned.

The downtown of Okinawa city, formerly known as Koza city by 1974, is famous for its unique cultural traditions relating to music. “Koza Music Town” may be a phrase to describe an aspect of socio-cultural history in Koza after 1945. KMT is expected to be a symbol of the town in varied ways.

Koza has been famous for *Eisa*, a sort of bon dance performance diffused through 20th century, and modernized or stylized later in the century. The largest all-Okinawan *Eisa* event has been held in the city every summer since 1956.

The city used to be famous or notorious for its nightclubs and other entertaining businesses largely serving US military personnel from bases around, including USAF Kadena air base. Such circumstances incubated many rock bands and musicians, especially in 1960s and 1970s, and some of them later gained nationwide fame as stars of Okinawan rock music.

Another musician who had strong ties with Koza was Rinsuke Teruya (1929-2005), one of the most talented local vaudevillian in the postwar Okinawan entertainments, who named himself as the lifetime president of Koza Independent State and had provided shows at his own private theater in Koza for a long time.

More recent example of local musicians who gained national fame is the Orange Range, whose members stay around Okinawa city even after their nationwide success in 2000s.

While KMT is intended to become the hub for tourists and other visitors to the city who are attracted by local music traditions and events, its function seems to be limited by insufficient visibility of those traditions, and the lack of noticeable connections with other music facilities within the downtown.

Local people, especially shop owners, often criticize the city office for inadequate commitments and financial supports. However, another opinion, also heard locally, points out that small local businesses are dependent upon public supports and subsidies too often, too much, and their moral hazards are hardly negligible.

The city itself has been heavily dependent upon financial supports from the national government. Local development or redevelopment plans are often materialized when policies of the national government allow the city some substantial financial supports. Projects are often criticized for poor visions in planning and financial difficulties experienced later. The most controversial case of Korinza, a commercial complex with a theater opened in 1997, has caused the city a big trouble with potential loss of several billion yen.

KMT was a result of generous financial supports from the national government first authorized in 1999. After the opening in 2007, tenants of KMT have come and gone so often, so quickly. Some tenants, a record shop and a music bar, were nicely fit for the concept of “music town”, but had gone. Meanwhile, a gaming arcade now occupies substantial portion of KMT, although local education groups and some city councilors opposed the plan to include it in KMT. While KMT barely filling spaces to let, by inviting offices of semi-public organizations, the concept of “music town” seems to be challenged by the reality.