

# Visitors Flock to Miyakonojo City Library

---Former shopping mall turned into library  
and place of relaxation for citizens---

In a provincial city in Japan, a former shopping mall that had closed down has been turned into a bright and spacious city library, and the new facility is proving to be a great success. Just eight months after the library opened, the total number of visitors passed the 850,000 mark. The secret of the library's popularity lies not only in its pleasant atmosphere but also in its numerous schemes designed to make both adults and children love books.

Miyakonojo, which is the second largest city in Miyazaki Prefecture and is situated close to Kagoshima Prefecture, has lively agriculture and agricultural product processing industries. The newly opened library in the center of the city is currently attracting a lot of attention.

Miyakonojo City Library can be reached in about 15 minutes on foot from JR Nishi-Miyakonojo Station. The main means of transportation there are car, bicycle, or bus, which runs along a national road. On both weekdays and weekends, old and young, male and female citizens alike flock to the library, together with visitors from as far away as Kagoshima Prefecture. As of the end of December 2018, the library, which only opened in April of that year, had had a total of about 872,000 visitors; it expects the number to reach the one million mark by the end of March 2019.



Exterior of Miyakonojo City Library in the center of the city in Miyazaki Prefecture (Photo: Yuiko Sugawara)

One of the reasons for the library's popularity is that, unusually for such a facility, it has a very open and spacious structure. It was actually realized by renovating a former shopping mall. The building, which was originally completed in 2004, previously had an atrium hall with a clock tower in the middle on the northern side and a passageway lined with specialty stores on the southern side.



**The atrium hall as seen from the 2F passageway (Photo: Yuiko Sugawara)**

The renovation of the building left the spacious hall as it was and, instead of specialty stores, lined the passageway with bookshelves arranged in such categories as industry and the arts. The concept of the library was to reproduce the feeling of having a pleasant stroll along a street. Like the show windows of stores, the bookshelves lining the passageway have displays of recommended books in each category, which guide visitors toward the bookshelves beyond.



**Exterior of the shopping mall before renovation (Photo: Miyakonojo City)**

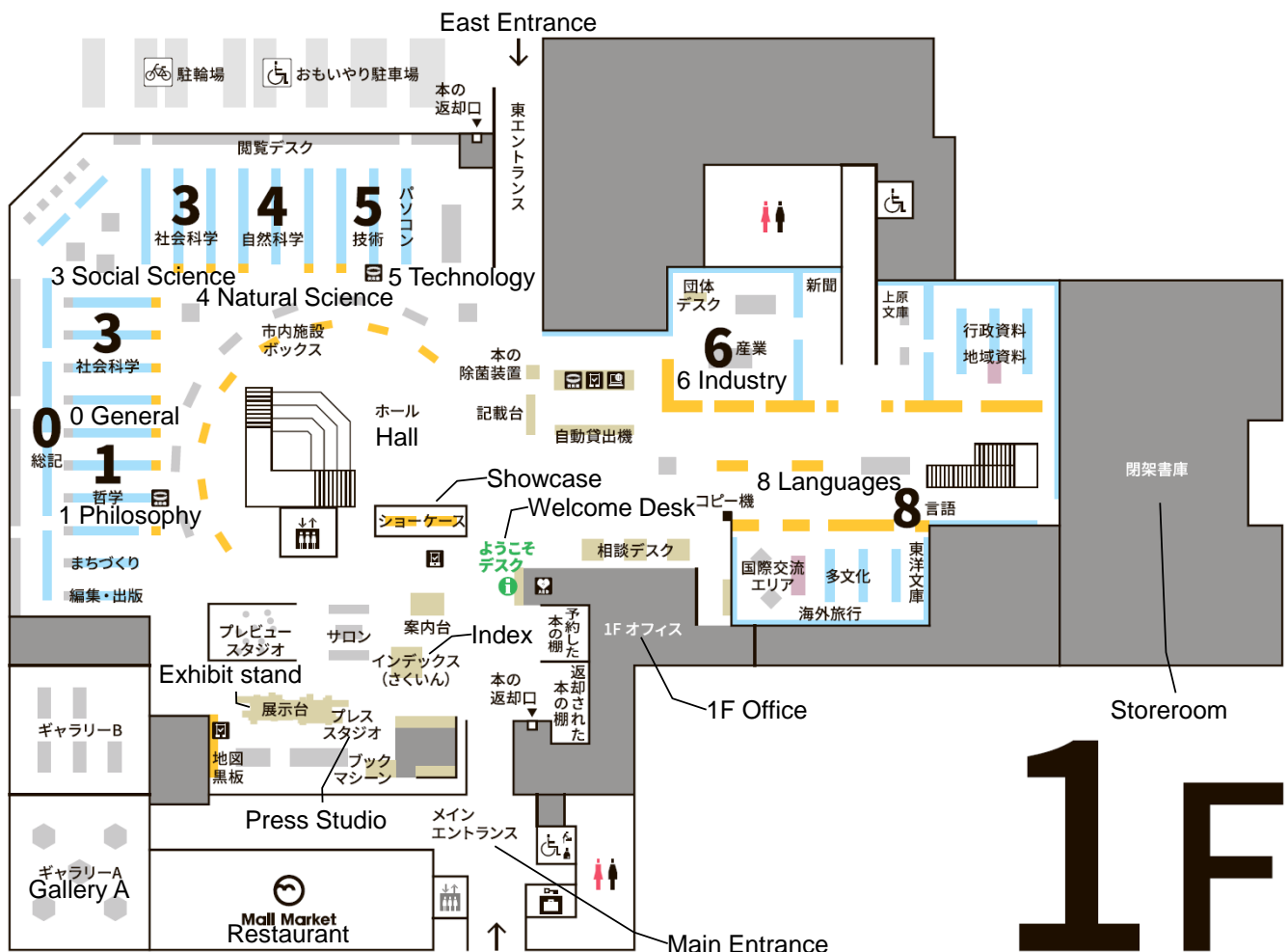




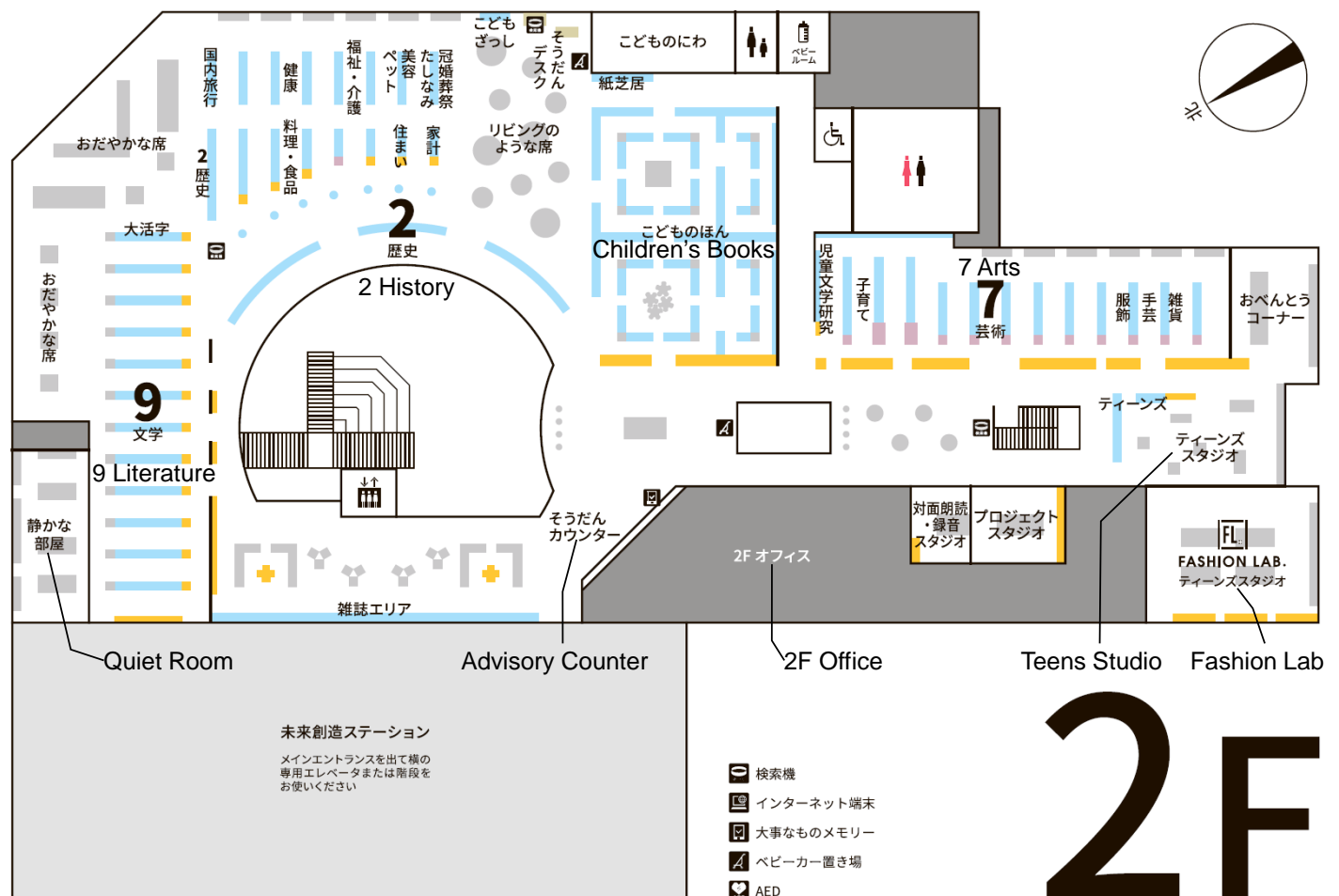
The hall seen from the ground floor. The clock tower remains as it was, but the escalators have been replaced by large forked stairs. (Photo: Yuiko Sugawara)



This space used to be occupied by specialty stores. On the 1F there are books arranged in such categories as industry. The design took advantage of the wide passageways that existed in the shopping mall days and the atrium, brightly lit by the sunlight pouring down from the skylight. (Photo: Yuiko Sugawara)



1F ground plan (Taken from pamphlet of Miyakonojo City Library)



2F ground plan (Taken from pamphlet of Miyakonojo City Library)

## Chatting permitted in popular lively hall

The building has a total area of about 9,200 square meters, and the height of the ceiling in the hall is about 18 meters. It is a spacious and grandiose structure, with sunlight pouring down from the skylight at the top of the ceiling. It would surely be difficult to create such an open atmosphere in a newly built library.



The hall as seen from the 2F. Soft light filters through a membrane ceiling hanging from the ceiling.  
(Photo: Yuiko Sugawara)

While visitors must not make a racket in the library, one of its unique rules is that chatting is permitted. The hall is a place of moderate exuberance where you can hear the voices of children, the tapping of keyboards, the sound of walking, and so on. For people who want to concentrate on reading, there is a place called the Quiet Room, where talking and the use of personal computers is prohibited.





**The arc-shaped bookshelves on the 2F house history books arranged in chronological order. The lower shelf has books on world history, the middle shelf on local history, and the top shelf on Japanese history. The library is also scheduled to display contents on local history made by citizens in the Press Studio here. (Photo: Yuiko Sugawara)**

The city government, local Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and others collaborated in planning the building's renovation, eventually deciding to use the land covering about 1.2 hectares and the building to construct a total of eight facilities, including the library and a child-raising support facility. It was also decided to give the overall structure, which was formally known as the Miyakonojo City Central Area Core Facility, the nickname of Mallmall.

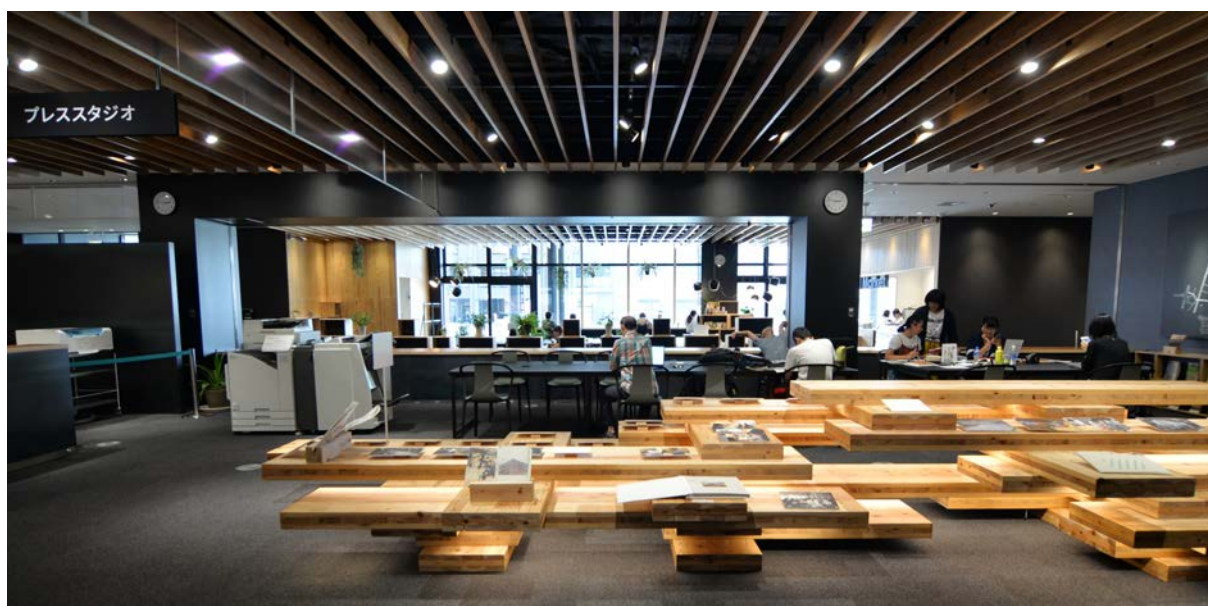
After the green light was given, a local consortium (Masuda Daikyo Kento Atelier Takumi Consigned Work Joint Venture) took charge of the structural design of the shopping mall's renovation, and Aida Atelier, Inc. of Tokyo provided overall supervision of space design.

Mr. Hideyuki Morita, chief executive officer of Manabinotane Co., Ltd., served as the overall producer of the project. Mr. Morita had been involved in several such projects before then, including the Sendai Mediatheque in Sendai, Miyagi Prefecture, and Musashino Place in Tokyo's Musashino City, so he certainly knows a lot about library building. Both of the mentioned cultural facilities have proved to be immensely popular and are used by many citizens, and they have been highly acclaimed for their architectural merits as well.

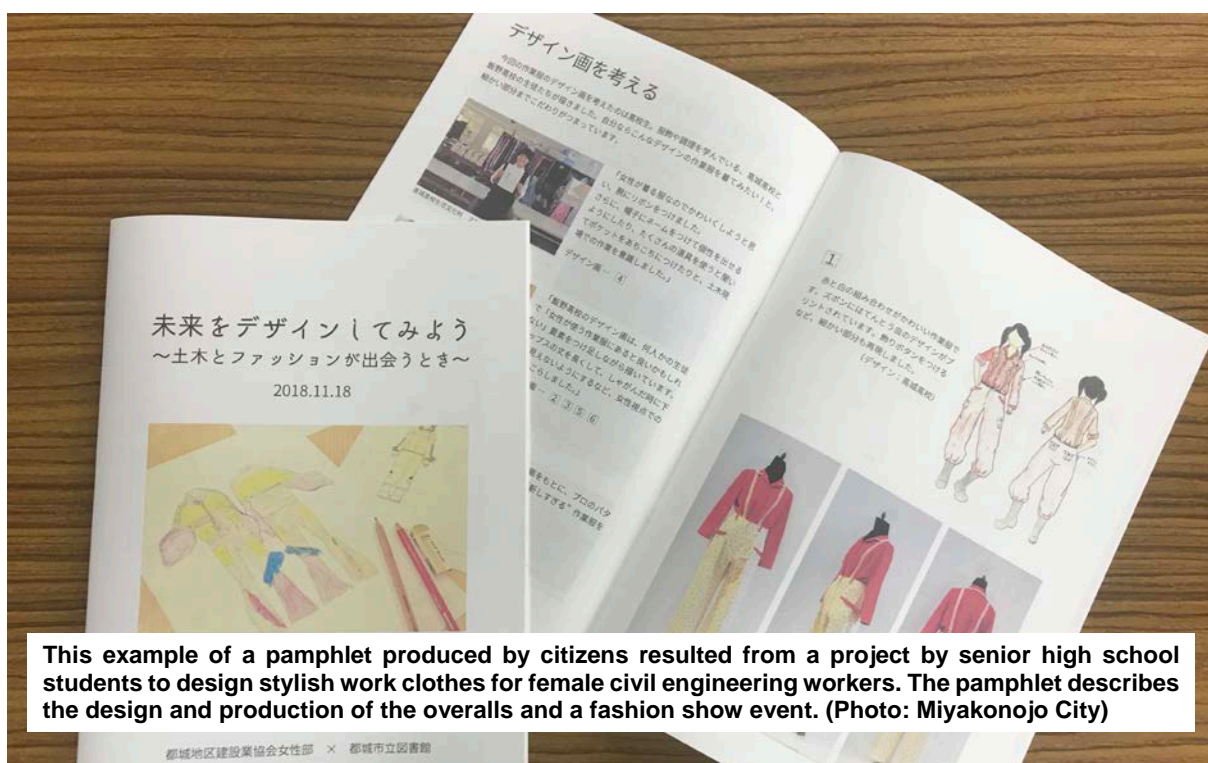
## Numerous schemes popular among adults too

Another reason for the popularity of the Miyakonojo City Library is the provision of numerous schemes that are rarely seen in conventional libraries. “One of the missions of a library,” explained Mr. Morita, “is to be a place that records and transmits the community’s memory. Generally speaking, it is said that only around 20% of people like books, but we must create a place where at least 60% to 80% of the citizenry comes here.”

Among the main schemes that adults also can enjoy is the Press Studio, which is situated near the main entrance. At Miyakonojo City Library, the concept is that visitors not only read books but also can express themselves. Citizens are able to edit and print things about the local community that they think are important and produce original pamphlets or other materials. Resulting documents are displayed on top of the bookshelves or the exhibit stands assembled from cross-laminated timber (CLT) made from boards of cedar grown in Miyazaki Prefecture.



In the center of the Press Studio on the 1F there are exhibit stands using CLT. On the blackboard to the right there is a map of Miyakonojo City and a map of the library's vicinity, and local information is added in chalk. (Photo: Yuiko Sugawara)



This example of a pamphlet produced by citizens resulted from a project by senior high school students to design stylish work clothes for female civil engineering workers. The pamphlet describes the design and production of the overalls and a fashion show event. (Photo: Miyakonojo City)



Another attraction for adults is the Index corner, which is situated between the Press Studio and the passageway. Here stamps with two-dimensional barcodes are available for each index word, such as “outdoor,” “souvenirs,” or “speaking skills.” Visitors select a word that catches their attention and press the stamp onto notebook or memo paper. At the same time as collecting word stamps, if visitors scan the barcode on a tablet terminal inside the library or on their smartphones, the system introduces related books in the library. In accordance with the wishes of visitors, the library plans to increase the number of words in the future.



The Index corner features word stamps arranged around a pillar. The intention here also was to hide the thickness of the existing pillar. (Photo: Yuiko Sugawara)

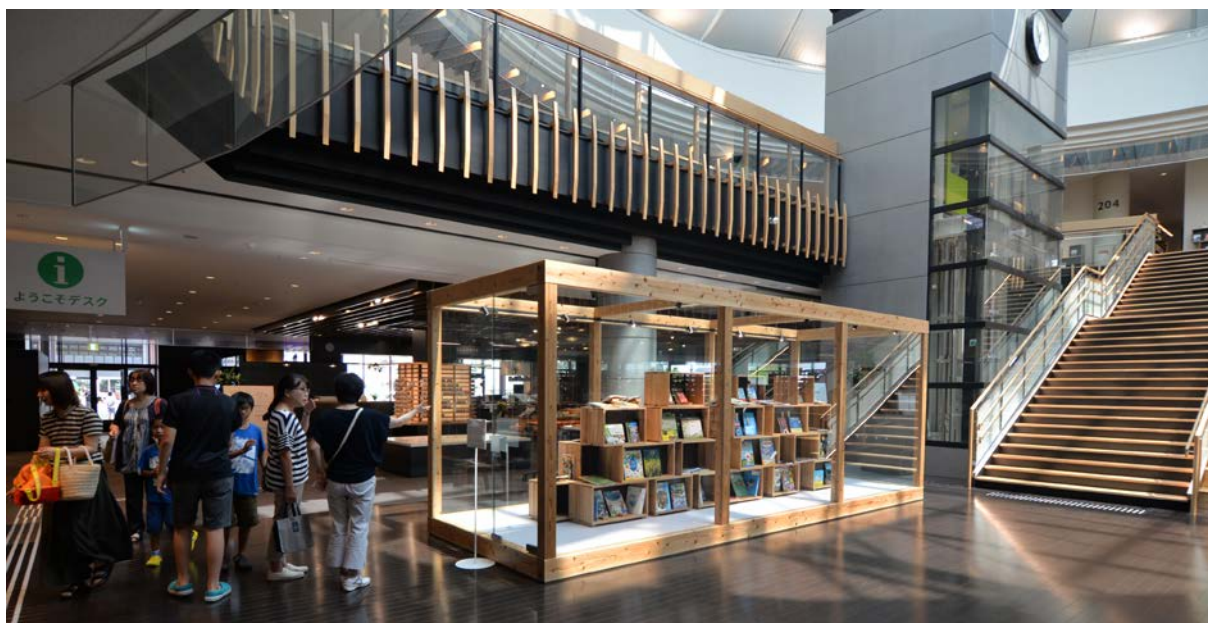


There is one stamp for each index word. In accordance with the requests of citizens, the library plans to increase the number of words. The person on the right is Mr. Akihito Yokoyama, deputy head of the Commerce and Industry Policy Division of the Miyakonojo municipal government, who explained that the use of the plaza and the other facilities, such as the child-raising support center, have had a multiplier effect in increasing the number of visitors to the library. (Photo: Yuiko Sugawara)

If you proceed into the hall, on the side you will see the Showcase, which is a display case surrounded by a rectangular cedar frame and reinforced glass that measures about two meters in width, about two meters in height, and about six meters in depth. It contains samples of books that the library has not yet purchased.



Visitors can enter the case, have a look at the books, and vote by, for example, inserting a bookmark. When deciding whether or not to purchase a book, the library takes its popularity among visitors into account. So rather like voting in the “general elections” held to select the most popular members of an idol girls’ group, citizens can have fun recommending books themselves.



If visitors request to do so at the reception, they can enter the glass Showcase. (Photo: Yuiko Sugawara)

“We want citizens to understand the system of first of all having sample books and then the library making its choice,” explained Mr. Morita. “If the library cannot purchase a book for budget reasons, the citizens can buy it themselves at a bookstore and then donate it to the library. If that kind of feeling can be nurtured, then maybe book circulation in the city as a whole will improve.”

### Teenagers-only space on 2F

On the southern side of the 2F, at the back, the place that used to be a food court in the shopping mall days has been turned into the Teens Studio equipped with tables and chairs. Only teenagers are allowed to use this space, where they are encouraged to give and take with their peers, help one another, and grow.

One might imagine that a place for teenagers only would be boisterous, but actually, when I visited, I found students quietly concentrating on their reading or other tasks, helping each other with their homework and looking up things themselves.



In the Teens Studio, everyone is busy with their studies or research. The space in the background is the Fashion Lab. (Photo: Yuiko Sugawara)

Furthermore, inside the Teens Studio, there is a glass-walled workshop called the Fashion Lab, where, with the full cooperation of an actual fashion brand, students can experience making Western-style clothes, such as T-shirts and one-piece dresses. When the space is not being used for this purpose, students can enter the room to chat.



**Inside the Fashion Lab, which is used not only for making clothing and accessories but for other events as well. (Photo: Yuiko Sugawara)**



**Scene of an event in the Fashion Lab (Photo: Miyakonojo City)**

“Some people might wonder why a library needs such a fashion lab,” Mr. Morita said, “but I think it’s necessary to encourage youngsters to challenge real activities. Selecting what you yourself will wear is really important in forming your identity.”



And he went on, "When I am doing agricultural work in the field, I myself often read books about the subject. But things don't always go according to the book, so I have to do some more research. You read a book, put the contents into practice, and if things don't go well, do some more investigating. It's important to give youngsters the experience of going back and forth and show them that you can't accomplish things with just a single book or smartphone."



**The 2F passageway: The library maintains the width and skylight of the shopping mall days, thereby creating a sense of spaciousness that usually cannot be seen in newly built libraries. (Photo: Yuiko Sugawara)**

The idea that a library is a place for quietly reading books is perhaps a little outdated now. A library is not only a place for reading but also a place where people gather to transmit the latest information about the community and engage in self-expression. And it is a place for communication, where the library and the local government pick up this information and reflect it in daily life. Libraries are continuing to evolve as hubs of the community.

(Written by Yuiko Sugawara, *Nikkei Architecture*)

#### *Nikkei Architecture*

Launched in 1976, *Nikkei Architecture* is a general architectural magazine that carries wide-ranging information from social and economic trends surrounding the architectural world to practical management, including specialized areas like design, structure, and construction. The magazine has about 30,000 readers involved in architecture, including qualified first-class architects, architecture companies, and government officials. As well as the magazine, the Nikkei xTech website provides timely information on the latest trends too.

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