Case study on the experimental township of Auroville in South India: An experiment in spirituality, sustainability and circular economy

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Figure 1: Auroville on Google-Earth 2018

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I hereby declare that the work submitted is mine and that where I have made use of another’s work, I have attributed the source(s) according to the Regulations set in the Student’s Handbook.

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Abstract

This dissertation was written as part of the MSc in Environmental Management and Sustainability 2017-18 at the International Hellenic University. The case study that is conducted in this paper outlines the existence and progress of the experimental township of Auroville in south India. Auroville is a live experiment on human unity, sustainability and circular economy. It is a living body which went and is going through constant changes since 1968, in order to approach its fundamental goals, co-existence in harmony, sustainably and ultimately free from conventional ways of living in nowadays society. It is not a common community from a philosophical point of view, but faces all the common problems of a modern society does, since it consists of imperfect humans who just try to seek other kinds of solutions. Auroville has some major accomplishments in sustainability that can boast about, even though this was not the main reason of its foundation, it proved that it is a crucial element of its success so far. The township of Auroville, which is probably the largest intentional community by now, is another proof that solving a problem which may be environmental, financial, social, should be approached in a wholistic way so the solution is given from a multi-dimensional scope. More importantly, the social factor is stressed out and seems to be the beginning of any solution. After all, social means human and humans are the ones who create and destroy.

Keywords: Auroville, spirituality, sustainability, circular, economy

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Preface

During my research for this case study the major problem was to find adequate and reliable sources. It is a topic that not many has been written about and it is not that widely known. On the other hand, it was an enlightening experience through which I discovered a world I have never heard before and had the opportunity to learn about a society which differs from most societies we might have seen and experienced. Unfortunately, I could not visit the actual place during my research but I am sure that I will try my best to visit it even after this thesis.

Firstly, I want to thank my childhood friend Danai, who knows me well enough to share with me an article about Auroville and be my inspiration and starting point of this case study. Secondly, I am thankful to my supervisor Dr. Mavragani, who generously offered her help throughout my writing and my family and friends who supported me in any possible way.
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**Introduction**

This thesis is going to be an effort in learning more about the experimental township of Auroville in south India. It will be a research on all possible sources for obtaining information about the related town, its achievements and its failures. All people of social, environmental, financial and educational sectors who are open to alternative ways of thinking and acting might share an interest with this case study. This research can be possibly used in further qualitative and quantitative research as a source of collected information from a variety of sources, providing information on a wide range of different areas and ultimately an overview of this experiment as a whole. The focus of the study is to find out more information about the society of Auroville, its sustainability achievements and its economic development.

![Figure 2: Matrimandir in Auroville](image)
Chapter I

This chapter provides with information about what has been written about the topic, the aim of the study and the methodology which has been followed.

**Literature Review**

This case study aims to examine in depth the experimental township of Auroville in south India (map: [https://aurovillehub.wordpress.com/where-is-it-happening/where-is-auroville/](https://aurovillehub.wordpress.com/where-is-it-happening/where-is-auroville/)), its survival, challenges and contributions not only to the place in which exists, but also to India in general and the rest of the world. A tendency in emphasizing the sustainability achievements of Auroville ([https://www.auroville.org/](https://www.auroville.org/)) has been observed, with the majority of findings to assent to the positive contribution of the experiment in general terms. Less positive concluding findings were fewer in number and they will be included in the study. The sources chosen attempt to cover all aspects of the experiment, spirituality, sustainability and circular economy being the three pillars of the project. A number of sources present interviews from people that live there or visited throughout the time of its existence, which is one of the main reasons these sources are preferred. Sources were not abundant since the project is not widely known and relatively few are the findings of the related topic.

Sources related to the spirituality of the place and its people are first approached since this is one of the most important characteristics of this community, if not the only one, that separates it from other similar communities that may exist in other parts of the world. Hence, it is crucial to first understand the core idea and spiritual basis of the project and then delve into the other main traits of it.

During the research, sources such as dissertations, reports, articles and books appeared. Most of them had to introduce the way this township was created and which ideology was based on. Henk Thomas and Manuel Thomas (2013) in their book “Economics for People and Earth: The Auroville Case 1968-2008”, as other sources such as the “Embodiment of Sustainability in Auroville” by N.K.M de Jonge (2016-2017), the “Auroville: A Practical Experiment in Utopian Society” by Suryamayi Aswini Clarence Smith (2015), “A Spiritual Journey to the East” by Camilla Gjerde (2013), the “Auroville: One for All-All for One” by a research team of the FLAME School of Liberal
Education (2010-2011), begin their story with an introduction of the spiritual background of the founder and the township itself. Even though each one of them may have different final objectives, they all show the importance of distinguishing the bedrock of this experiment. Which essentially is the vision of an Indian philosopher, guru, poet and nationalist Sri Aurobindo and Mirra Alfassa who was a spiritual guru, an occultist and collaborator of Sri Aurobindo, later called the Mother. The vision was clearly stated by Mirra Alfassa found from the UNESCO Courier’s writer Soliman Loftallah (1998, pp.48) to build a “universal town where men and women of all countries are able to live in peace and progressive harmony, above all creeds, all politics and all nationalities. The purpose of Auroville is to realize human unity.” Sustainability is a category that Auroville has accomplished a lot and many sources reveal the achievements of entrepreneurs living and working in the community. Henk Thomas and Manuel Thomas (2013), Nandini Gangopadhyay and Dr. Premangshu Chakraborty (2015) in their report on “An Alternative Model of Sustainable Living: the case of Auroville in India”, the Annual Report and Accounts (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2015-2016), N.K.M de Jonge (2016-2017) by her master thesis after visiting Auroville and interviewing residents, are some of the sources that exhibit sustainability experiments and accomplishments. Examples are the agriculture, forestry, industry and rural developmental projects (Gangopadhyay and Dr. Chakraborty, 2015).

In search of information for the economic aspect of the whole experiment and its relation with currency, work force and trade, few of the illuminating sources were the Henk Thomas and Manuel Thomas (2013) book since their research purpose was to shed light on the economic patterns followed by the community throughout a period of forty years, and the “Study of Industries in Auroville” conducted by Sri Mayapur Master Plan Office. As far as tourism is concerned, the “Tourism Survey for Puducherry (Jan-Dec 2014)- Final Report” by Ministry of Tourism (2014), is a main source of information along with previously mentioned sources where tourism of the area is referred.
Vision - Ideology

Sri Aurobindo had presented his primary ideological contributions to Auroville's creation which were: (i) the existence of Divine, feminine energy between the physical and psychic reality, (ii) the progressive evolution towards a transformed consciousness which will participate in and reflect the Divine energy, (iii) the “descent of the Supermind”, which Sri Aurobindo believed in, proposed that the evolution of mankind requires transformation of matter such that both body and mind, physical world and consciousness, are inextricable in the evolutionary process, and (iv) the spiritual work in the world (integral yoga, karmayoga) will accelerate the evolutionary progress towards its inevitable end of human transformation (Gjerde, 2013). Auroville, along with the Ashram in Puducherry, represent Sri Aurobindo's spiritual philosophy as they are the mini-worlds in which several hundred people drawn from most of the nationalities of the world are laying the foundations of the “Community of Gods” that he envisaged (UNESCO Courier, 1972).

Alfassa's following words which derived from one of her “dreams” were “In brief, it would be a place where the relations among human beings, usually based almost exclusively upon competition and strife, would be replaced by relations of emulation for doing better, for collaboration, relations of real brotherhood.” (Mother on Auroville, 1977, pp.7). These kinds of spiritual notions already existed before the construction of Auroville and recorded dialogues of the leading figure, the Mother, enhance the proof of the spiritual birth of Auroville itself. The Mother’s answers to the subjects of a seminar follow:

1. How can humanity become One?
   By becoming conscious of its origin.

2. What is the way of making the consciousness of human unity grow in man?
   Spiritual Education, that is to say an education which gives more importance to the growth of the spirit than to any religious or moral teaching or to the material so-called knowledge.

3. What is a change of consciousness?
   A change of consciousness is equivalent to a new birth, a birth in a higher sphere of existence.

4. How can a change of consciousness change the life upon earth?
A change in human consciousness will make possible the manifestation upon earth of a higher Force, a purer Light, a more total Truth. (Guigan, 2016)

In the findings concerning the beliefs and visions of Sri Aurobindo and Mirra Alfassa, we explore the early ideas of these spiritual leaders of an ideal world where people would live in according unity. Sri Aurobindo (1997, pp.47-48) writes “The individual too cannot flourish by himself; for the universal, the unity and collectivity of his fellow-beings, is his present source and stock; ... It is the old Indian discovery that our real “I” is a Supreme Being which is our true self and which it is our business to discover and consciously become and, secondly, that that Being is one in all, expressed in the individual and in the collectivity, and only by admitting and realising our unity with others can we entirely fulfil our true self-being”. In Gilles Guigan’s Book 3 (2016, pp.4) an excerpt from a conversation on March 20th 1965 between Alfassa and her disciple, the French author Satprem, reveals “... if we rely on what Sri Aurobindo said, time is clearly very short; if the supramental forces have to effectively dominate (maybe not outwardly, but effectively) life on earth in 1967, that doesn’t leave much time.... […] It doesn’t seem possible to me (though I don’t know), it doesn’t seem possible to me that the state of the earth is adequate to justify an integral transformation. As for Sri Aurobindo, he used to say that it would come in stages, that there would first be a sort of small formation, or a small creation that will receive the Light and be transformed, and that’s what will work as a leaven for the general transformation”.

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Figure 3: Sri Aurobindo

Figure 4: Mirra Alfassa or the Mother
Sustainability

Henk Thomas and Manuel Thomas (2013) present their aim of their study when explaining the various methods that have been used to ensure the multifaceted approach of their research, while their goal is to analyze Auroville’s economy. Among the immediately related economic aspects which were aimed to be analyzed, a whole chapter is dedicated to several case studies that showcase the numerous achievements of Auroville in sustainable development. Agriculture, forestry, food and water, arts, architecture and construction, electronics and technology and services are all areas that introduce Auroville’s sustainable approximation of progress.

Gangopadhyay and Dr. Chakraborty (2015) begin their report by mentioning a brief history of Auroville, the lush forest that used to exist 250 years ago and how extensive deforestation had led the area that was used to build Auroville, to a bare, arid land. Aurovillians with around villagers came together to plant trees, build bunds to store water and farm in order to restore the land. The two writers continue referring to specific categories separately, such as the afforestation initiated in the early 1970’s in which Indian government offered a continued grant for 5 years, and the focus of Aurovillians on the reintroduction of the Tropical Dry Evergreen Forest indigenous to the area. Moreover, the Ethno- Medical Forest, the Auroville Botanical Garden, the sustainable farming, the soil and water conservation, the renewable energy, the waste water treatment, the sustainability in building technology, the sustainability options for daily life, the community recycling and reuse projects are all areas that are covered in the report. N.K.M de Jonge (2016-2017, pp.23) visited Auroville and one of her interviewees, Aurovillian herself, responded on the sustainability matter concerning Auroville as an ecovillage “Auroville is a spiritual but also an alternative society. The society outside was not what we were looking for in our lives, the manifestation of the world outside was terrible for us. It didn’t correspond to anything we aspired for in terms of relations among people and relations with the planet. Also, what is the role of a human being? If it is as a machine that makes money and then spends it, for us that was not our role in life”. The above statement came to a kind of a contradiction with the one that was expressed by another 3rd generation Aurovillian “People don’t like the word ‘ecovillage’ because it says we’re a village and the Mother said we’re a township. And they don’t like the word ‘eco’ because it does not include spirituality, they are very
critical about it. They say: 'we're not just an ecovillage, we're so much more!' I don't really have a problem with the word. I think maybe at the moment we are an ecovillage because we're still so small and our strength is being green. But it's just a label, it doesn't matter". Through this research we manage to see some first-hand claims from people that live there and experience Auroville in a way no one does.

Economy- Tourism

An important information gathering and contribution comes from Henk Thomas and Manuel Thomas (2013, pp.20), where they provide us with a study which is an "optimal mix of qualitative institutional characteristics with a quantitative analysis of Auroville's economy". The writers confirm that studies and research on Auroville are limited with some good quality exceptions such as the sociological study of Stuart Leard and the essay of Bindu Mohanty on the spiritual ideals of Auroville. They continue by stressing the absence of in-depth research on economic Auroville, where terms like "social ownership", "social commitment" and "no-money-circulation" appear in the core ideas of how Aurovillians should see prosperity and growth. Thus, they admit the shortcomings that the readers may come across since not only there was a lack of methodology and data, but also as the writers put it (2013, pp.20) "no justice can be done to an analysis of the creation of ecological 'capital' that in the long run may represent Auroville's most important contribution to the world at large". Their study is based upon the comparison between Auroville's complex record with other meso-level systems, such as Mondragon Corporation Cooperativa (MCC)\(^1\) and the cooperative movement of Saskatchewan in Canada\(^ 2\) and not on comparisons of Auroville units with enterprises in the wider market economy. Sri Mayapur Master Plan Office had conducted a study of industries in Auroville which shed light on the role of entrepreneurship, the legal structure and organizational form, the types of industries that run in Auroville, their achievements and their failures.

Concerning the tourism sector in the greater area of Puducherry and specifically Auroville, what has been found was mainly a handful of surveys and articles providing

\(^1\) the embodiment of the co-operative movement that began in 1956, the year that witnessed the creation of the first industrial cooperative in Mondragón in the province of Gipuzkoa

\(^ 2\) In 1911 Saskatchewan farmers, aided by the provincial government, organized the Saskatchewan Co-operative Elevator Co. [https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/co-operative-movement](https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/co-operative-movement)
with some opinions and statistics about the recent situation with tourism development and tourists’ point of view. Renganathan et al. (2018), study the opinions of tourists about Sri Aurobindo Ashram\(^3\) in Puducherry. In “Tourism Survey for Puducherry (Jan-Dec 2014)- Final Report” (Ministry of Tourism, 2014) among the references and stats about Puducherry and its tourists, one can find relevant information about Auroville. Another report that focuses on a specific area of Puducherry- tourism is “Grey Tourism- An Opportunity for New Tourism Market in Puducherry” by Dr. Sibi P.S (2017), where the niche market of third age people is studied. In the introduction Dr. Sibi P.S (2017, pp.65) writes “Interestingly, Puducherry, one of the popular beach destinations in south India and the former French colony which attracts thousands of young domestic and international tourists, is a preferred destination for senior citizens too”.

Taking everything into account, sourcing all the necessary information to cover the issue in a wholistic way, sources such as the ones mentioned above try to provide with different perspectives the story of this community and its people. In this case spirituality, sustainability and circular economy with a reference to the tourism aspect of the place, are going to be studied, aiming at the discovering of the feasibility of such experiment somewhere else and its possible success.

**Purpose of the Research**

The research goal of this dissertation is initially to learn and explain the situation of an experimental township in India, which refers to the past but also the present and the future since it can help us learn new methodologies and systems of a society and the applicability of them in the future. In this way, through this research we can initially obtain an overview of the situation and how such experiment can be of use in other cases.

**Methodology**

The research will be secondary since most part of the dissertation will expose findings from primary research sources. Hence, it will be based on qualitative research with

\(^3\) Traditionally, an ashram-Hindi (Sanskrit ashrama or ashramam) is a spiritual hermitage or a monastery in Indian religions. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashram](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashram)
possible quantitative research findings fortifying the data already attained. In consideration of the limited number of sources found during the research, secondary sources will also be used. Sources that provide interviews from people that live in Auroville will be of great use, considering the restriction of the geographical location and the feasibility of travelling to India and obtaining the interviews or conducting the research in general on the spot.

The limitations of this methodology are mainly the dependency on subjectivity of each writer providing qualitative research, as well as the ambiguities which may be included in the analysis given the tendency of human nature and language. Additionally, in the effort of offering a wholistic point of view on the subject, all issues will be analyzed with specific areas in the spotlight. Consequently, issues that might require more attention will not be covered as much. In view of the qualitative outcome, the findings will not be tested to distinguish whether they are statistically significant or due to chance. This is the reason, whenever possible, quantitative research will be used expecting a more balanced conclusion.
The analysis of Auroville follows, with spirituality, sustainability and economy being the main three pillars of the study.

**How did the experimental township of Auroville become real?**

“First deepening man’s inner experience, restoring perhaps on an unprecedented scale insight and self-knowledge to the race, it must end by revolutionising his social and collective self-expression” is a defining sentence in the book where Sri Aurobindo (1997, pp.33) describes his early ideas about self- development and society. A man initially involved in politics in India, after being imprisoned due to accusations of planning and overseeing an attack against two British nationals, he went through a radical change in his way of viewing life and oneself through spiritual experiences and realizations (Autobiographical Notes, 2006). In compilations of his writings such as the Essays in Philosophy and Yoga ancient Greek thinkers can be found, as their intuitive approach and a logic which was characterized by acuteness and intellectual openness approached Sri Aurobindo's own views. He expresses his great interest in Heraclitus being an aphorist\(^4\) philosopher and combining the modern intellectual stimulativeness with the psychic and intuitive vision of the Mystics (Essays in Philosophy and Yoga, 1998). Sri Aurobindo recognizes Heraclitus' ideas about everlasting change and the fire as the creative force, as well as acknowledges other philosophers such as Plato, Plotinus and Nietzsche (Huchzermeyer, 2016). During his years in England he learned Greek, started reading English poetry and familiarized himself with German and Italian languages (Heehs, 2008). He was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1943 and for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1950 (Nomination Database, 2016). Among all his philosophical writings which blend the eastern spirituality with the western evolutionary thinking, Sri Aurobindo had the initial vision of a place such as Auroville since he saw unity in diversity of individuals and collectivities and the constant, mutual enrichment of both (Hemsell, 2014). In Ideal of Human Unity Sri Aurobindo (1970, pp. 398-400) writes “…Therefore it would seem that the ideal or ultimate aim of Nature

\(^4\) An aphorism (from Greek ἀφορισμός: aphorismos, denoting “delimitation”, “distinction”, and “definition”) is a concise, terse, laconic, and/or memorable expression of a general truth or principle. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aphorism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aphorism)
must be to develop the individual and all individuals to their full capacity, to develop the community and all communities to the full expression of that many-sided existence and potentiality which their differences were created to express, and to evolve the united life of mankind to its full common capacity and satisfaction, not by suppression of the fullness of the life of the individual or the smaller commonalty, but by full advantage taken of the diversity which they develop. This would seem the soundest way to increase the total riches of mankind and throw them into a fund of common possession and enjoyment”.

Sri Aurobindo had entrusted Mirra Alfassa with organizing the day-to-day activities of his residency which gradually developed to an Ashram. She ended having many politicians and other important personalities visiting her for guidance, including Dalai Lama and Indira Gandhi (Vrekhem, 2004). Alfassa embraced and followed Sri Aurobindo’s ideas and philosophy on the Divine Life even after his death, until she describes a “dream” of hers which was published in 1954 and explained the vision of a place where humans can live freely as global citizens leading a life with aspiration, concord and harmony, always abiding by a single authority, the supreme Truth (Mother on Auroville, 1977). In the same document more of her perspectives on Auroville can be found, such as the spirit and the will for progress vanquish the superficial satisfaction of desires and material enjoyments in such place. The education is an everlasting feeding of the soul without examinations and certificates. Work has the objective of serving and organizing the community from which all benefit equally, while it is the means whereby people can express themselves, develop their capacities and possibilities. Work for survival is not an issue anymore. Therefore, all beauty laid in diverse art forms is available to everyone without social or financial restrictions. Money is not the dominant purpose of life but instead the individual merit. She continues by acknowledging that the earth is not ready to realize such community, considering that mankind does not have the knowledge to understand and accept such concept. Hence, she calls it a dream (Mother on Auroville, 1977). The Mother, as she was known by everyone, had stated once that India is the representation of all human struggles on earth, this is why she needed to find the cure there. This is why the location of Auroville was chosen to be India (Bindu, 2004). In 1964, the Mother finally initiated the project of Auroville when the Sri Aurobindo Society (SAS) purchased the

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first plot of land in the area of the state of Tamil Nadu (Guigan, 2016). In the archives where Guigan (2016) concentrated all of Alfassa’s writings, it is known that the financial support for this fundamental prerequisite of obtaining land to build a township was provided by donations from people that shared the same ideals either planning to merely help the realization of Auroville or to live there. Additionally, the government gave funds, partly grants and partly repayable, free of interest loans. After Roger Anger, French architect, was assigned to design the township the master plan was created. In 1965, the efforts of affiliating Auroville with UNESCO as a non-governmental organization commenced, succeeding its goal during the same year (Guigan, 2016). The inauguration of Auroville took place on 28th February 1968, with a ceremony where Alfassa shared the following message:

“Greetings from Auroville to all men of goodwill. Are invited to Auroville all those who thirst for progress and aspire to a higher and truer life.” (Mother on Auroville, 1977).

Then she announced the Auroville Charter in which these four rules would be the guide of all Aurovillians, since she aspired a place free of existing laws and regulations because she firmly believed such place to exist and progress needs to be out of the conventional limitations of society (Guigan, 2016).

AUROVILLE CHARTER

1) Auroville belongs to nobody in particular. Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole. But to live in Auroville one must be the willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness.

2) Auroville will be the place of an unending education, of constant progress, and a youth that never ages.

3) Auroville wants to be the bridge between the past and the future. Taking advantage of all discoveries from without and from within, Auroville will boldly spring towards future realisations. 4) Auroville will be a site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an actual Human Unity.

28.2.1968* (Mother on Auroville, 1977)
According to Mother’s initial perceived plan of how Auroville should be laid out, Roger Anger designed the renowned Galaxy plan which is essentially the Masterplan of the township. Intending to be a ‘city of the future’ or the ‘city the earth needs’, Auroville’s basic structure consists of Matrimandir, or the ‘soul of Auroville’ and the Peace area, which is in the center of the round ‘galaxy’ (The Galaxy concept of the city). The official website of Auroville provides with a variety of information such as how the city is laid out, for example, from Matrimandir four zones extend and they all end up to the Green Belt which surrounds the whole city and is comprised by forests, farms and sanctuaries. The four zones are the Residential Area where the Aurovillians live, the Industrial Area where small- medium scale industries, training centres, arts and crafts and city’s administration are located. There is the International Area where national and cultural pavilions can be found to manifest human unity in diversity and the value of contribution of different nations to humanity. Lastly, there is the Cultural Area which is dedicated to facilities where applied research in education and artistic expression take place (Auroville in Brief).
From a survey on nationalities (2018) we know the population in Auroville started with as low numbers of residents as 400 in the first 20 years, but it rose up to 2800+ as of January 2018. Currently, there are 54 nationalities with Indian, French and German to be the dominant first three (Breakdown by Nationality, 2018). The intended population number since Alfassa started planning the city was 50000 (Auroville in Brief). Official languages are Tamil, English and French (Wikipedia).
After Alfassa’s death in 1973, daily turbulence in the society of Auroville was common so the residents appealed to the government for intervention (Wikipedia). Until 1979 all assets of the township belonged to Sri Aurobindo Society in Pondicherry (Wikipedia). In 1980 the Government of India passed the Auroville Emergency Provision Act through which it became responsible for the township’s management (Wikipedia). In 1988 the Indian Parliament passed the Auroville Foundation Act which concentrated the authority over all movable and immovable assets (Auroville Foundation Act 1988). The Auroville Foundation consists of three bodies: The Governing Board; the Residents’ Assembly and the Auroville International Advisory Council (The Auroville Foundation Act). Through the Act, Auroville was an established separate entity since Supreme Court ruled that the township was not a religious institution based on itself, the founders and UNESCO’s definition of a non-political and non-religious establishment (Minor, 1998). Distinguished members of the Advisory Council include the Nobel Laureate, economist and philosopher Amartya Sen; and UNESCO Director-General Federico Mayer (International Advisory Council). The Foundation conducts fundraisings and receives grants from the government and UNESCO (Annual Report, 2015-2016).

Figure 8: Auroville Foundation Structure
Education corresponds to Mother’s ideal about the unending growth of the consciousness and free progress of the educational system. As once she said “one must help the student to become, as much as possible, what he can and wants to be... The child is not only a mind to be trained, but a consciousness that must be helped to grow and widen itself” (CWM vol12). As of an education survey for the period 1968-2013, the results showed a general positive view on their upbringing in Auroville considering it beneficial and an educational experience itself. Freedom, openness and support are some of the most valued qualities according to the people surveyed. Nevertheless, the majority of respondents suggest that Auroville should move forward to international accreditation (Auroville Education Survey, 2016).

Apart from challenges in the management as a whole that Auroville met in the early days, challenges on specific matters or everyday life continue until nowadays. Having mentioned education above, records have been found to show young Aurovillians’ disappointment when it comes to decision-making concerning Auroville. Youth had stated that is feeling silenced and even though making money is considered a taboo, it is the main factor that makes someone the decision taker (Devine, 2009-2010). A PhD dissertation on Auroville (Pillai, 2005) presents Aurovillians’ frustration in the fact that they felt there has been an emphasis on money in the community and the misuse of money by some individuals. Incidents of violence was another issue that had to be dealt with, since Aurovillians and villagers happened to be victims. The important relations between the ‘white’ and the Tamil Aurovillians and the villagers in the surrounding area is a subject that much has been written and talked about. There are plenty of sources that depict a rather negative perception of the ‘white colonization’ in Auroville and their indifference for the local people and culture, while there are others which show that the intentions of ‘white’ people were not malevolent and these relations were not that bad as it is portrayed elsewhere, having both sides gaining mutual benefits (Pillai, 2005). Another challenge is the difficulty that Auroville meets with the fulfillment of the Master plan, which sets the population of the city at 50000 residents, but it does not have enough funds to purchase the land it needs due to the rising prices of land in the last decade (Lands for Auroville). As of personal statements of Aurovillians in a documentary presenting Auroville’s achievements and difficulties people, and many that were there since the beginning, express the reality of things
admitting that whatever one can meet in an outside society he can also meet it in Auroville. Decisions are taken while trying to come to a consensus, everyone has a say to all issues, in a lawless community it is a challenging situation to finally come to a conclusion. A major socio-economic observation of an early Aurovillian raises the fundamental differences between the two primary groups in Auroville, the local villagers from the surrounding area and the Aurovillians coming from Indian cities or other developed countries. The first ones now having the chance to provide material safety and secure survival for their families and themselves, whilst the second ones having been provided this safety in their initial birth-place they were ready to go beyond that. Two stages in life that follow a different pace towards consciousness and oneness. Following this observation comes the challenge of human unity in diversity, given the fact that the variety of people’s backgrounds bring a lot of contrasts which put more hurdles in achieving the harmonious co-existence (Buhrman, 2009). Nevertheless, this new experiment brought the ‘act and react’ as it would be normally expected in societal relations and not only. As a township created from literally zero, based on high ideals about individual spirituality and collective life with the guiding goal of human unity and not human authority, conflicts are bound to be inevitable in an imperfect world.

“Auroville is an experiment in collective realization” The Mother (Bindu, 2004, pp.32)

Sustainability in Auroville

Albeit Auroville’s existence was inspired by the need of spiritual awakening and guidance, the need of an inspirational place followed where the people with common aspirations could live and work together towards the common goal. Therefore, societal challenges are followed by sustainability challenges since unity is not only to be achieved among humans but also among humans and nature, in other words, the challenges of humans living in harmony with nature while they continue growing inwards and outwards. The Auroville Center for Scientific Research (2014) informs that the difficult tasks of sustainability started from the very beginning, in view of the barren plateau which had been purchased in order to start building the new city.
A desert mainly due to extreme deforestation was about to be transformed into a lush green forested area and become the first big success of Auroville as an environmental project. It was succeeded by planting trees to improve soil fertility. The first Aurovillians realized that building bunds to store water was a necessary step to stop the rain washing away the top soil, which contained nutrients precious for plants and could hold the moisture, and subsequently the creation of ravines. Water management was essential to recreate the forest around Auroville according to Alfassa’s plan of the city, since this could also recharge the underground aquifers of the region. (Auroville Center for Scientific Research, 2014)
During the 50 years of existence and experimentation, Auroville has achieved various accomplishments in environmental management and sustainability. As reported by Auroville Outreach Media (2017), which is the most recent compilation of all sustainability projects, commercial units and services in Auroville until now, several of the running projects are categorized as follows:

- **Centers of Sustainable Development**

Auroville Center for Scientific Research (CSR) was founded in 1984 and is an international organization that works on sustainable development projects in fields such as renewable energy systems, appropriate architecture and building technologies, wastewater recycling and sanitation, and the communication of these technologies to other interested parties through training programs (Outreach Media, 2017). It functions as a research trust under the Auroville Foundation (CBERD Research Project, 2012-2017). Auroville in its website makes known its exceptional realizations such as the international workshop in 1992, where waste water recycling and the use of cost-effective building materials like ferrocement\(^5\) were recognized (Hassan Fathy International Award), the construction of the Solar Kitchen which is equipped with solar collector and provides with 30% of the energy needed to serve around 1000 meals per day. Among other awards, CSR won the Best NGO in the Renewable Energy Sector in India in 1997 by the Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency and Aurore (the sister trust of CSR) received the Ashden Award for sustainable energy in 2004 for installing solar devices around India (Auroville CSR). In water waste treatment Sobo’s and Hoberg’s (2010) paper mentions that CSR used the Integrated Decentralized Waste Water System (DEWATS) for simple and affordable systems. For commercial places they designed a cylindrical vortex system so they take advantage of the centrifugal forces to filter and oxygenate the water (Sobo & Hoberg, 2010).

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\(^5\) is a form of thin-shell construction that uses standard Portland cement, usually mixed with plaster sand (lime or cement, sand and water) (https://wiki.opensourceecology.org/wiki/Ferrocement)
Figure 11: Visitor’s Center in Auroville

Auroville Visitor’s Center is a complex of buildings to provide service to visitors and Aurovillians. It is an example of compressed earth blocks and prefabricated ferrocement usage (The Hassan Fathy Architecture for the poor Award, 1992), solar, wind and biomass energy, water management and recycling techniques combined altogether in construction of a public place. (Auroville Visitor’s Center)

earth&us provides services such as Life Cycle Analysis, eco-efficiency, product rating and behavior change. Hence, they contribute in the consultancy towards a sustainable functioning of businesses and organizations. Auroville Consulting is another consultancy service which specializes in landscaping, green buildings, renewable energy, waste management etc. (Outreach Media, 2017)

- Farms and Gardens

Farms and gardens are immediately related with each other, and in Auroville by now there are numerous paradigms of sustainable works. The catalogue from Outreach Media (2017) includes all projects of Auroville, where it is clear that a number of farms have been created from the beginning of the township with Annapurna Farm to be the first and now the largest farm of Auroville. Organic methods only are allowed and rice is the main crop farmed with rainwater catchment ponds. The methods applied for electricity and water are solar and diesel-powered pumps and it is where they use and
maintain non-hybridized seeds stock. Mulching and BRF\textsuperscript{6}, compost, rotations and associations, green manures, Effective Microorganisms technology, drip and flood irrigation are some of the ways of farming in most farms in Auroville. Permaculture, natural farming and agriculture projects run in Solitude farm (Outreach Media, 2017). Convincing local farmers to use organic ways in their farming was an arduous task from the beginning, but in time progress took its place and by now most farmers adhere to eco-friendly technologies (Gangopadhyay & Chakraborty, 2015).

Gardens such as Botanical Garden serve to conservation and expansion of the Tropical Dry Evergreen Forest (TDEF) vegetation, through their nurseries, seed savings and training programs (Outreach Media, 2017).

- Forests and Sanctuaries

Among several forests existing now, Pitchandikulam Forest is one of the first efforts of early Aurovillians to regenerate the area of Auroville and succeeded to become a seed bank and a center of education and consultancy for sustainable practices especially on wasteland and wetland regeneration (Thomas & Thomas, 2013). Indigenous medicinal plants are also part of the forest consisting the Medicinal Plant Conservation Park (Gangopadhyay & Chakraborty, 2015). Sadhana Forest won third place in the Humanitarian Water and Food Award 2010, on account of the afforestation of an arid 70 acre-land with more than 18000 TDEF plants (Outreach Media, 2017). They use composted human waste as fertilizers, and pits, bunds and earth dams to store rainwater. For electricity, solar energy is the sole source (Gangopadhyay & Chakraborty, 2015).


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Achievements on energy, construction and waste

Via Outreach Media (2017) we are aware of more specialized units that produce components for renewable energy systems, Auroville Energy Products (AEP) produces solar change controllers, inverters, hybrid wind/ hydro/ diesel controllers etc. EVFuture is another unit which focuses on the electric two- wheeled vehicles that are essential in the transportation of all Aurovillians and local villagers (Outreach Media, 2017). In construction Auroville Earth Institute (AVEI), which is a non- profit organization registered under Auroville Foundation, united with CSR to construct a manual press to make Compressed Earth Blocks (CSEB)\(^7\) being an eco- friendly building material since it uses the lowest energy of any building material (Sobo & Hoberg, 2010). The ferrocement\(^8\) AVEI adapted was an additional success due to its cost- effectiveness, durability and efficiency (Sobo & Hoberg, 2010). Solid and water waste management have been of great importance and all individual and group units do their part to deal

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7\(^{7}\) made of chicken mesh plastered in mortar (cement, sand and water). (Gangopadhyay & Chakraborty, 2015)

8\(^{8}\) is a building material made primarily from damp soil. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Compressed_earth_block#Advantages
with it. Specific examples known through the catalogue (2017) such as Eco-Femme, Upasana and Upcycling Studio develop cloth washable menstrual pads, awareness about textiles and use of traditional Indian textiles, and practice the reduce-reuse-recycle respectively. Not to be forgotten, Sacred Groves is a project which aims to reusing waste building rubble, tetra pak cartons and petrol pump pipes as well as recycling wood (Outreach Media, 2017).

![Figure 14: Auroville 2018](image)

**Acceptance by the locals**

Gangopadhyay and Chakraborty (2015) in their research paper include a survey they conducted in two villages of Auroville bioregion, aiming at finding out what the villagers think about Auroville's influence on them concerning sustainability. The results showed that villagers acknowledged the improvement of their area which became greener, the soil became of better quality, the water was not that scarce any more, several farmers have started following already organic farming and their surroundings were cleaner than before. On the other hand, they struggle with the maintenance of green areas mainly because of grazing, many of them keep using chemical fertilizers for high yield and lower costs, it seems that is hard to abandon the old habits of littering and emptying garbage in public places and a decrease in agricultural workers was observed due to the increase of women and youth absorbed by Auroville or nearby towns in other sectors such as service etc. In conclusion, the main hindering of progress, according to the survey and as mentioned above referring to challenges by an Aurovillian, is the different life stages of villagers and Aurovillians.
as the first ones just now are able to enjoy material safety and prosperity, while the second ones having that safety from the start they are trying to go further. (Gangopadhyay & Chakraborty, 2015)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STAGES OF HUMAN SOCIETY</th>
<th>DEVELOPMENTAL TOOLS / RESOURCES</th>
<th>DEVELOPMENTAL METHODOLOGY</th>
<th>OUTPUT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TRIBES</td>
<td>STONE TOOLS AND WEAPONS</td>
<td>GROUP HUNTING</td>
<td>LOSS OF MEGA FAUNA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGRICULTURE</td>
<td>SETTLEMENTS / METAL</td>
<td>MONOCULTURE</td>
<td>LOSS OF BIODIVERSITY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RELIGIONS</td>
<td>HIERARCHICAL SOCIETY / URBANIZATION</td>
<td>INTERNAL EXPLOITATION</td>
<td>FEUDALISM / SLAVERY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INDUSTRIAL</td>
<td>COLONIES</td>
<td>EXTERNAL EXPLOITATION</td>
<td>STEALING FROM OTHER CULTURES / PEOPLE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POST INDUSTRIAL</td>
<td>FOSSIL ENERGY</td>
<td>EXPLOITATION OF THE PAST</td>
<td>STEALING FROM THE FUTURE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 15: From the Auroville Green Practices Seminar, 2010

**Economy and tourism in Auroville and the surrounding area**

“The conflict about money is what might be called a “conflict of ownership”, but the truth is that money belongs to no one. This idea of possessing money has warped everything. Money should not be a “possession”: like power it is a means of action which is given to you, but you must use it according to... what we can call the “will of the Giver”, that is, in an impersonal and enlightened way. If you are a good instrument for diffusing and utilising money, then it comes to you, and it comes to you in proportion to your capacity to use it as it is meant to be used. That is the true mechanism.”

Mirra Alfassa, The Mother 1968 (Mother on Auroville, 1977)

Before further economic analysis is executed, it is worth mentioning the similarities that have been observed between the Auroville communal theory and system with other theories which have been known throughout time. Karl Marx in the Manifesto of the Communist Party (1969, pp.22) explains that “the distinguishing feature of communism is not the abolition of property generally, but the abolition of bourgeois
property”. He also stated (1969, pp.24) “Communism deprives no man of the power to appropriate the products of society; all that it does is to deprive him of the power to subjugate the labour of others by means of such appropriations”. These claims appear to be comparable with Auroville’s ideals on ownership and money matters. Mother though, had clarified that “It is a sort of adaptation of the communist system, but not in a spirit of leveling; according to the capacity, the position—not the psychological or intellectual, but the inner position of each one” (Mother on Auroville, 1977). Having the above mentioned, an analytical overview follows to present the economy in Auroville.

- For All/Pour Tous Distribution Center (PTDC)

For All was the first attempt in 1974 of collective distribution of food and sundry items avoiding the circulation of money. This was achieved since in the early years Aurovillians did not receive directly the funds for their needs, but instead the funds were distributed collectively into the For All account (Clarence-Smith, 2016). Various financial scarcities and attempts to deal with obstacles, led to altering the collective funding into an individual deposit of funds in individual accounts as Thomas H. and Thomas M. (2013) reveal in their book. While Aurovillians continued using the list of necessities, these individual funds should have been deposited in advance so For All could purchase what they might need. Aurovillians disappointed by the situation of still getting involved in purchasing exchanges, proceeded in the foundation of Pour Tous Distribution Center in 2006 which it would function as a cooperative where its members would contribute a monthly amount of money and can obtain whatever they might need, without the restriction of the specific amount deposited but of the feeling of buying what one needs and not what one can (Thomas & Thomas, 2013). Eventually, Clarence- Smith’s (2016) research shows that it worked and it is supported by the Central Fund, all items do not bear prices, no bills on check- out and products of Auroville are prioritized. Aurovillians seem to generally acknowledge the efforts of PTDC to promote conscious ‘purchasing’, while opinions differ on PTDC as an economic model. Supporters claim that it was indeed a pioneering step towards an economy without money exchange, whereas others believe it fails to approach this model since
the members still need to contribute money, and in case their expenses surpass their budget they need to contribute more (Clarence-Smith, 2016).

- Auroville’s Legal Structure/ Organizational form

As mentioned earlier, Auroville Foundation Act in 1988 made Auroville a legal entity under the Indian Ministry of Education. Through governmental sources (1988) and Thomas and Thomas (2013) book on Auroville’s economy it is noted that the Auroville Foundation owns and has the judicial power of all Auroville assets and activities. Apart from the three authorities which is consisted of, the Governing Board (two government representatives and five dedicated to Auroville ideals members), the Residents Assembly and the Auroville International Advisory Council, there are two committees which play a significant role in the economy of the township, the Finance Committee and the Funds and Assets Management Committee (FAMC) (Thomas & Thomas, 2013) (Government of India, 1988). In the Industries of Auroville document we learn that when someone wishes to open a business unit, the unit will be put under a trust and the entrepreneur (executive) becomes the trustee, all parts of the Auroville Foundation. The executives have freedom in taking decisions except for handling or owning immovable property and assets which belong to Auroville Foundation. The Foundation is exempt from income tax and sales tax is only paid to the Indian Government by the units independently on items sold within India. Auroville Board of Commerce (ABC) acts as a regulator of commercial units, monitoring their finances and cooperating with FAMC (Industries in Auroville).
Central fund

It was founded in 1989 and it is the financial resource of Aurovillians which on one hand, is financed by commercial units and income-generating services (Central Fund Incomes), while on the other hand, it allocates the basic income to the service sector and supports community development (Central Fund Expenses). All through a representative group of community members, the so-called Budget Coordination Committee (BCC Auroville). It was decided that the financial channels that result in Central Fund should donate the 33% of the previous year's total surplus (net profit) as a ‘contribution’. Significant role plays the Unity Fund, a part of Financial Service which receives and allocates to Aurovillian trusts, projects and units all internally generated

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9 Service sector operates for the needs of Aurovillians, without the intention to generate profit. (Thomas and Thomas, 2013) They are either free for Aurovillians or require a fixed contribution. (Clarence-Smith, 2016)

10 consists of Auroville Fund/Unity Fund and Auroville Maintenance Fund; both units operate under the Auroville Foundation, deal with Auroville’s internal finances, and are collectively referred to as Financial Service. (Thomas and Thomas, 2013)

11 There are currently over 20 trusts operating in Auroville. Set up under the Indian Trust Act within the overall framework of the Auroville Foundation, the trusts are responsible for proper management of the funds and assets of Auroville’s commercial, research or service units, for which they individually provide legal umbrellas. [https://www.auroville.org/contents/2831](https://www.auroville.org/contents/2831) (Last updated: Oct 19, 2016)
income from commercial units, donations and grants. Financial Service receives interest from outside banks and contributes to Central Fund as well, creating a marginal source of resources for the local economy. Apart from Central Fund Incomes and Expenses there are the Reserves, which was created out of necessity for guaranteeing household incomes for a minimum period of time. (Thomas & Thomas, 2013)

**Unity Fund Income: 2014-15**

![Unity Fund Income Chart]

- **Total Income** = Rs 59.9 crores ($8.9 million, €8.0 million)
- **Per Capital Income** = Rs 2.5 lakhs ($3,730, €3,330)

Figure 17: Unity Fund Income (1 lakh= 100000)

- Employment / Industries

As Thomas H. and Thomas M. (2013) mention in their book, the first three decades until 1998 there was a development in the surrounding villages due to the increasing employment from Auroville. The decade that followed Auroville faced the saturation of workers supply and the insufficient wages offered to the village workers since there was a wage rise in the wider labour market. A milestone on confronting problems and representing workers’ interests was the Small Employer’s Welfare Administration (SEWA). Furthermore, a tension between the job supply and work demand by Aurovillians surfaced on account of the budget limitations of the Central Fund which
provided the city services with the maintenance and thus, the workplaces and job positions were influenced by it. Consequently, the issue of to what extent an individual can pursue the ‘yoga of work’ in Auroville was crucial. The industries evolved in Auroville are plenty with main categories: Textiles, food and water, construction, handicrafts, electronics and service such as guest houses. Agriculture was the commencing power of Auroville and still remains a fundamental source of production. (Thomas & Thomas, 2013)

➢ Macro-characteristics of economy in Auroville

Regarding the commercial units, their gradual success was gained by means of exports and domestic Indian economy. Additionally, the production of commercial units is supported by low capital involvement and high labor intensity. In service units the contrary is observed, and their economic value is grown on the aggregate and per capita basis. This is an outcome of the increased inflow of grants and donations. Underlining inference is that the commercial domain depends on the niche markets, while the service domain depends on donations, grants and internal subsidies. (Thomas & Thomas, 2013)

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12 Basic income (Thomas and Thomas, 2013)
13 “To live in Auroville means to do the Yoga of work. So all Aurovilians must take up a work and do it as Yoga.” Mother, 1973(Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1977) To find spirituality, creativity and consciousness through work of one’s own interest.
2. FINANCIAL INFORMATION

a) Donations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Remarks on Auroville’s Economy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Income Tax exempted under section:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 80 G – General Donation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 35 (1) (ii) – Scientific Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 35 (1) (iii) – Social Science Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Other Donations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

b) Annual Grants-In-Aid

The Central Government supports the Foundation with annual grants for two purposes: (1) the "Plan Grant" for the Development projects under the Five Year Plan; and (2) "Non-Plan Grant" to meet its establishment and the running costs of the Secretariat of the Foundation.

During the year, the Central Government gave Grant in aid under

- Plan ‘General’ | ₹ 260 lakhs |
- Plan ‘Capital’ | ₹ 1040 lakhs |
- Non Plan | ₹ 200 lakhs |

c) Income generated by Auroville

Surplus of income over expenditure internally generated - ₹ 1891 lakhs

Figure 18: An example of Financial Information for the year 2015-2016 (1 lakh= 100000)

Remarks on Auroville’s Economy

Throughout the economic history of Auroville, it is witnessed a row of changes which puts Auroville in different situations. Initially, the township was controlled by outside factors mainly the SAS, then commerce and individual development took the lead, the collective institutions in an effort for a structured model followed and during the fourth decade the attention was concentrated on the welfare state. As an economic model, production consisting of commercial and services domain has been expanded even though organizational structure was problematic. Distribution of goods and services is a sector that many experimentations took place, such as the For All/ Pour Tous Center, which led to a few steps closer to the ideals of Auroville. Finances present extraordinary interest since in Auroville there was and still is (up until 2008) limited access to bank loans. Hence, Auroville’s economy counts on labor and knowledge,
grants, donations and re-invested surplus of the commercial units in order to expand themselves. (Thomas & Thomas, 2013)

Tourism
Sources in relation to tourism were few to begin with. Interest in Auroville because of its experimental nature as it progressed through time is surely piqued particularly the recent decades. Despite Auroville’s purpose of not being primarily a tourist destination, there are Aurovillians who consider tourism a potential which can induce the township’s independence from donations and bring it closer to self-sufficiency (Thomas & Thomas, 2013). Other residents of Auroville deem tourism as a distraction especially when not the ‘right’ tourists enter the town, as it is noted in document related to visitors (2009). This issue has been stated in the past when efforts have been put to solve it, for example to create application forms for the tourists to fill out so they can clarify the purpose of their visit, or expanding volunteering possibilities with low-cost accommodation which has already been accomplished nowadays. Some Aurovillians see this contradictive situation as an opportunity to search solutions inward and question themselves who is the real problem and why are they there in the first place (Visiting Auroville, 2009). It is also noticed in Gjerde’s (2013) research that the rising tourism in the area led to the establishment of almost all kinds of accommodation with different price range and attracts visitors from India and beyond. A large portion from the number of visitors has the environmental motivation and is willing to participate in volunteering programs while others visit for leisure (Gjerde, 2013). Via a tourism survey conducted for the year of 2014, it is noticed that Auroville comes second as a most visited destination of the broad area of Puducherry (Tourism Survey, 2014).

14 The ones that share common ideals with Auroville, or are open to meet other forms of society which do not follow conventional living. (Visiting Auroville, 2009)
### Most visited tourist destination of Sample Visitors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most Visited Tourist Destination</th>
<th>%age of Visitors</th>
<th>%age of Domestic Overnight Visitors</th>
<th>%age of Domestic Day Visitors</th>
<th>%age of Foreign Overnight Visitors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Aurobindo Ashram</td>
<td>30.4%</td>
<td>32.6%</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>45.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auroville</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
<td>20.2%</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td>40.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamaal Mosque / Meeran mosque /</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuthbha Mosque / Mulla Mohammed Mosque</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karaikal Sandy Beach</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karaikal Ammayar Temple</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plage Paradise</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lord Saneswara Temple</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* is based on no. of visits as obtained from Short Survey at Tourist Destinations.

Figure 19: Table for most visited destinations in Puducherry broad area for 2014
Auroville and other Eco-communities

Eco-places exist around the world for decades now and it is not a new idea of few people willing to live sustainably, rather an old found solution to men’s greediness and ignorance which mostly began in the 60s and 70s. Examples of green communities worldwide are Chrystal Waters Ecovillage in Australia, Ecovillage Ithaca in New York, Finca Bellavista Treehouse Community in Costa Rica, Sieben Linden in Germany, Tamera in Portugal, Skala Thessalonikis and Free and Real- Telaithrion Project in Greece are some which show the efforts of small groups of people realizing their need of a more sustainable lifestyle. Various intentional communities like the above mentioned, aim at the promoting and emphasizing in greener ways of life and evolution focusing in sustainability matters in multiple areas such as farming, energy etc. There are also eco-communities like the Findhorn Foundation in Scotland, Damanhur in Italy, Sarvodaya in Sri Lanka and Auroville in India which combine spiritual and ecological purposes trying to achieve progress not only through common sustainable ways, but also through inner, spiritual growth. Via Global Ecovillage Network (GEN), it is made known that it is actually hard to estimate how many ecovillages might exist at present, but according to rough estimations, ecovillages might come up to 15000 worldwide. Regarding their size, the majority of them hardly exceeds 500 residents (Εμμανουήλ, 2016) which makes Auroville the most populated eco-community with 2700 residents (contacted with GEN, 03 Jan 2019). Additionally, it is noticed that the place with most ecovillages per capita in Europe is Denmark, which has in total around 10 ecovillages at least until 2013, while in an interview of one of the founders of the Danish ecovillage Hallingelille, she admitted that in their beginning there was no government interest and support (Haffar, 2013). That is a recurring phenomenon, since plenty of such intentional communities are not

15 is a planned residential community designed from the start to have a high degree of social cohesion and teamwork. The members of an intentional community typically hold a common social, political, religious, or spiritual vision and often follow an alternative lifestyle. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intentional_community)

16 connects all communities and builds bridges between them and governments and NGOs in order to develop strategies for accomplishing the transition to volatile and sustainably progressive communities. (https://ecovillage.org/about/about-gen/)

supported by governments or organizations which leads to failure or maintaining the communities at low numbers of residents. This is also observed in Greek eco-communities where due to lack of government support, the residents need to put much personal effort and use personal sources to make it all possible (Εμμανουήλ, 2016). Auroville on the other hand, had the government’s support from the early days and the acquisition of land was not that big of a problem as there was plenty and at the time was useless. The survival of communities alike, really much depends on the constant financing source, and many depend on exports of their fine goods or like-minded people’s donations. Findhorn Foundation for example, presented a situation in which it faced the scarcity of income and its dependency on its conferences and workshops for the beginning (Clay, 2017). Similarly, Auroville except for the grants and donations it receives, which is a dependency that worries its people, the residents managed to create a name for themselves for their fine, eco-friendly exported products. Tourism as well has been proven that helped Auroville, and it is not the only case (Thomas & Thomas, 2013). Other examples of intentional communities which had religious core seem to have vanished early since there was a tendency of suppressing the individuals, while nowadays the communities which aim at spirituality as a way to freedom and inner peace is more needed by modern people (Clay, 2017). Auroville manages to offer spirituality through its founders and their great vision for human unity which surpasses religions and beliefs on a microscopic level, it goes beyond that trying to achieve unity within oneself and with others based on equality and harmony. The eminent role of the influence the founders had before the building of the community is something to be carefully noticed. Even though such communities were often misunderstood, given the location of Auroville where in Asia spirituality is far more embedded in the cultures and minds of its people, Sri Aurobindo and Mirra Alfassa were respected by many as it is mentioned previously and already had an undoubtful status and impact on others. Abiding to the region’s regulations is another important issue that prevents the creation of communities, such as the ecovillage Lifechanyuan in China where the local authorities opposed to the community and forced the evacuation of the area (Ecovillage in China GEN, 2014). Auroville on this matter had ensured its autonomous state on many aspects like Auroville’s market or the Auroville Foundation which is an autonomous body. But it is clarified that the
The purpose of the town is not to be autonomous in a sense of independency which breaks off relations with the outside (Thomas & Thomas, 2013). Another factor that might cause the failure of such community is internal conflict. In Datla’s (2014) research it is stated that the contradictions and the absence of regulations cause an arduous decision-making process, on one hand there is freedom of expressing ideas by all, but on the other hand too many ideas which makes it harder to reach a common ground. The fact that Auroville is an ongoing experimentation laboratory, makes some Aurovillians believe that it will help finally reach a resolution to the problem of conflict. As mentioned in a survey the “flexible structure, freedom as practiced in Auroville, no private property, a spiritual vision, a dynamic goal” are features that other intentional communities may be lacking of and could be incorporated further in communities and organizations (Datla, 2014).

Figure 20: GEN and GAIA in Auroville
Conclusions

Auroville has been an excellent example of a real effort for change, and the fact that till now never ceased to exist and is an experimental ground on all possible levels is an outstanding achievement. It managed to grow its size, even though not up to the desirable number, to try out many ways to improve life quality given the space available and be innovative especially on sustainability and environmental matters, to work on spirituality and human unity among people of various backgrounds and beliefs and to continue battling conventional economic systems which their sole objective is making more money. It has been said that Auroville is a utopia, or more precisely a failed utopia, but as an Aurovillian put it “People sometimes come to Auroville and don’t understand... why we haven’t achieved the utopia we dreamt of... And that’s understandable that they don’t understand. But I don’t think it’s important that we haven’t achieved anything... to that level... what’s important...is that we’re... waking up every morning and trying” (Clarence-Smith, 2015, pp. 40). Disappointments from same Aurovillians are also expected as they express their dissatisfaction with the societal and sustainability progress of the township. Jonge’s (2016-2017) fieldwork revealed that there are still cars used in the town, garbage can still be found specially in the surroundings of Auroville, a high percentage of food is still imported from the outside, there are people who smoke, drink alcohol and eat meat which are supposed to be deterrents to spiritual growth. All while an Aurovillian expresses her view on how people in Auroville are separated as conventional and greens “The greens are looked at as hippy-type idealists, dreamers, unrealistic and definitely not taken very seriously. Certainly, we’re more conscious than the average person out there on the whole, but these dynamics are present in Auroville” (Jonge, 2016-2017, pp.35). Obviously, this is not what an intentional community needs to grow, but unfortunately this is a recurring attitude towards the people who strive for a different other than conventional future.

Gus Speth18, once said “I used to think that top environmental problems were

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18 environmental advisor to Presidents Carter and Clinton, founder of the Natural Resources Defence Council and World Resources Institute, administrator of the U.N. Development Program, dean of the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, now a professor at Vermont Law School, and distinguished senior fellow at Demos. ( https://grist.org/climate-energy/gus-speth-ultimate-insider-goes-radical/ )
biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and climate change. I thought that thirty years of
good science could address these problems. I was wrong. The top environmental
problems are selfishness, greed and apathy, and to deal with these we need a cultural
and spiritual transformation. And we scientists don’t know how to do that” (Interview
with Curwood, 2016). This statement is an incredible realization from a different
standpoint, which does not appear that often in the scientific or political circles. Speth
continues emphasizing the necessity of value change in order to have essential
environmental progress, and this leads to the deep systemic change which will create a
new political economy. Coming together for demanding change is one way that Speth
suggests that will bring the change desired, looking back in history this was always the
way to provoke change like the civil rights movement (Interview with Stephenson,
2012). Jacque Fresco in his response to the award he won for City Design/ Community said “... I concluded it was the social design that create the unnecessary human suffering...” (UN award to Fresco, 2016, 3:40). Peter Joseph in an interview explains “... Any student of history will see that social inequality by whatever perceived level, whether it is economic, racial, nationalistic, or Aborigines versus settled, all of that has produced conflict. And what is the root of that? Exploitation... So, you have to change the social system... if you want to change the way people think, if you want to change their general incentives, you have to change the structure that is organizing them... It achieves a new level of consciousness, awareness” (Interview by Lee Camp, 2017). Buckminster Fuller quoted “You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete” (Sieden, 2012, pp. 358). These are some of the people that put forward and above anything else the prerequisite of social reform, something that Auroville
represents in its core and takes it to a deeper level of individual at first and consequently of collective reform.

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19 was an American futurist and self-described social engineer. Self-taught, he worked in a variety of positions related to industrial design. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacque_Fresco](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacque_Fresco)

20 is an American independent filmmaker and activist. He is best known for the Zeitgeist film series, which he wrote, directed, narrated, scored, and produced. He is the founder of the related The Zeitgeist Movement. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Joseph](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Joseph)

21 was an American architect, systems theorist, author, designer, inventor and futurist. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buckminster_Fuller#Bibliography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buckminster_Fuller#Bibliography)
The beginning of a reformed micro-society can be an educational institute, since it usually has support either governmental or not, it can have influential people who can bring support and spread the message, it has already the premises and it can acquire more land via its linkages and financial support. As it is noticed from a recent educational survey in Auroville, people there believe that the youth should have more options and not feel ‘stuck’ in Auroville if they wish to explore what there is outside (Auroville Education Survey, 2016). That shows the inevitable course of progress towards the pursuit of common and diverse ideas amongst people. Work towards educational institutions open to diversity and motivation to look for something unconventional is crucial, change does not come from conformism but from the need to make a break through. If education, always with the broader meaning of developing oneself along with obtaining knowledge, cannot offer the ground for endless experimentation and open-mindedness, then what will do?
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