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Auroville: the city the earth needs – 'a successful case of changing the climate for holistic sustainable development'

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P57.21**Auroville: the city the earth needs - 'a successful case of changing the climate for holistic sustainable development'***Lalit Bhati**L'Avenir d'Auroville, Department of urban Planning, Tamil nadu, India*

All the problems of the humanity are essentially the problems of harmony – ‘Sri Aurobindo’ Innovative Integration is the Key element. Sustainability: An established necessity – It is all about developing a new mind set towards the harmonious co-existence of all. An absence of Shared Vision, sufficient and complete information base to be aware & make informed choices are to just name a few. It is highly appropriate to ponder on the question whether all the pieces of sustainable development puzzle can be put together without due emphasis & efforts in the direction of change in the consciousness of the mankind? The dynamic state of an awakened consciousness in this regard could be attained with an all round efforts, initiatives & participation by all. The concept of sustainability thus calls for common visions & integrative and ecologically sound initiatives. The Case of Auroville Township – Origin & Vision Auroville started with a Vision. In 1954 The Mother, the founder of Auroville, had envisioned that 'there should be somewhere upon earth a place that no nation could claim as its sole property, a place where all human beings of goodwill, sincere in their aspiration, could live freely as citizens of the world, obeying one single authority, that of the supreme Truth". Auroville, established in 1968, is a Universal Township near Pondicherry, South India. Auroville's ideals, innovative approaches & experiments in various fields of life have earned it a name synonymous to sustainable community living. It was completely barren land that has been transformed into a lush green forest within a small period of 20 years thus recharging the ground water table and creating a habitable environment for all. This Abstract aims at to share the ideals, organizational structure, activities and experiments & way of life in Auroville that are truly inspirational for all and have a great research and learning potential. As per Charter given by The Mother, Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole, it will be the place of an unending education and constant progress, a bridge between the past and the future, and be the site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an actual human unity. The Town has a proposed population of 50,000 in a circular form surrounded by the Green Belt covering 20 sq kms. Today, it has about 2,000 Aurovilian residents representing over 40 nationalities from all over the world. It is important to note that only 1200 adults are here who in turn provide the high quality & creative training and employment in different areas to 5000 people from surrounding rural areas. Entry to Auroville is a voluntary act. Legal Structure, Key Sustainable Activities - Auroville has UNESCO's endorsement 4 times in the past as a special project of great value to Humanity. In 1988, the Government of India passed the Auroville Foundation Act to safeguard its desired development. Aurovilians & its working groups have been engaged in various work areas and scale with high rate of true success and replicable potential. The main areas are self-organisation (& conflict resolution) , alternative education way – ‘no certificate’, ‘no money economy’, non-polluting handicraft and service oriented commercial units maintaining the basic collective services creatively and with dedication. Auroville has a pioneering and adventures status in experimentation & wide use of renewable energy (the biggest capacity installation of renewable energy options in Asia for this purpose), natural resource management, environmental restoration (thousands of Kms of check dams and bunding, almost zero runoff from Auroville lands, appropriate plantation and landscaping), organic farming, solid and liquid waste management, innovative architecture and low energy and appropriate building technologies, efficient and effective communications (Internal Intranet/forums, high connectivity of email and phone) etc. Constant Applied Research and Innovations - The small and growing township attracts researchers, students, professionals (numbering almost 1000 per year) from all over the world for learning and exchange. It is also termed as a 'Living Laboratory'. It has a very innovative and challenging built form for planning and urban design and very appealing and futuristic architectural examples. Auroville closely work with the surrounding native villages and takes active role and initiatives in larger Bioregional planning. It is also a reflection of a consciously growing society that in order to further strengthen the path of sustainable development and meeting the emerging requirements and issues, such a small number of people are constantly engaged in integrated researches and studies to have inputs for its future development. Auroville recently completed two Asia Urbs (EU co-sponsored) projects which successfully met its aims of having proper & detailed development databases in GIS, analysis and solutions for next 5 years in water, energy, housing, community facilities, traffic and transportation sectors. Please refer to the website link given at the end. Collectivity and Community Participation are key elements of way of life here. We already

prepared, in a participative way our Master Plan which has special legal approval too. Indian Town Planner's institute and other Authorities are promoting this Master Plan as role model for future development plans. Capacity Building, Replication Potential & Networking –Auroville, since very beginning, has been actively engaged in capacity building and replication efforts. Over the years Auroville has trained many government officials, State and City administrations, NGOs, institutes, students (national & international) in diversified sustainable activities, provided consultancy and also undertook and accomplished projects to replicate its lessons and findings. Even now, at the moment the State government of Tamil Nadu (State badly hit in South India by Tsunami) is in touch with Auroville to provide technical directions for shelter design in relation to appropriate building technology and cultural fabric of the affected people. We are also interacting with agencies of Central & State Government and of other nations as a 'Promising Resource Centre' to bring awareness by successful demonstration. There is always some programme/conferences/workshops/courses, year round, happening for the larger benefit of all. Recognition & Awards - Auroville has a small but very qualified and expert resource person base which offer its services on many fronts and have won many prestigious International awards like Ashden Awards ('Green Oscar') for Sustainable Energy 2004, The Club of Budapest adopted the Auroville project to 'become humanity's first universal city, the shared treasure of all nations and people, 'We the Peoples' 50 Communities award in the category of Human Settlements on the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the United Nations and in 1992: Hassan Fathi International Award for Architecture for the Poor to name a few. It is not very easy to capture and present the spirit and wonderful activities of Auroville in this limited space. I hope that this abstract serves this purpose up to a certain extent. I suggest the interested & concerned people to have a look at the website at <www.auroville.org> for a broader overview and other planning

(Master Plan, studies, reports etc) related documents can be seen/downloaded from http://www.auroville.info/ACUR/urban_research/activities.htm A Vision translated into a Concept and being transformed into an inspiring reality of universal value and 'changing the climate in its own context'.

Related Websites - Auroville Main Web Site: <http://www.auroville.org>

Auroville Township Master Plan Official Document: <http://www.auroville.info/ACUR/masterplan/index.htm>

Planning Related studies (under Asia Urbs) http://www.auroville.info/ACUR/urban_research/activities.htm