



# Auroville - a way forward!

collaborative sessions, january 2019 - some results



## a big challenge!

Altogether, more than 200 people took part in six days of the “Collaborative January Sessions” including Auroville residents, members of Auroville’s key working groups and local projects, and a few regional network partners. As a gift to the Auroville community at the end of Auroville’s Golden Jubilee year, a team of international senior town-planners, specialising in healthy placemaking, sustainable masterplanning and collaborative community planning contributed their skills and expertise. The team was supported by Auroville International (AVI).

The main objective of the project was to support L’Avenir/TDC planning office in planning for Auroville’s future growth. Preparatory talks with L’Avenir members and other Aurovilians from different working groups helped to define the major challenges Auroville is presently facing; crucially, Auroville’s call to “boldly spring towards future realisations” seems to be stifled by long, tiring debates and difficult decision-making on each small step. Former enthusiasm has given way to feelings of fatigue and frustration.

The “Collaborative Sessions” were organized to enable the participants not only to express their concerns, but also their hopes and dreams and to collaboratively develop ideas and concrete steps for “a way forward!”. Inspiring presentations from the visiting team members and their skilled guidance in all “hands-on” group sessions helped define a strategy for a future process of participatory planning, which could help to unblock individual and collective potential. The process could also help create a more appropriate governance structure and, most importantly, build consensus on an urgently needed and commonly agreed and supported Auroville masterplan.

*“We sincerely hope that the initiative has helped to bring us closer together and given us new energy towards the manifestation of the Mother’s dream.”  
(Auroville Council)*





# key themes

# good governance

## problems – dreams - solutions

Reflecting on Auroville’s past, present and future, the workshop participants expressed their hopes, wishes, observations and aspirations, but also criticisms and frustrations. The visiting team distilled the following themes from the participants’ contributions during the plenary sessions, the reports of the “hands-on” planning tables, the presentations of the focus groups and the respective feedback sessions.

### 1. declining unity

- Aurovilians have achieved great things in the last 50 years by working as a community to realise the Mother’s vision.
- Their remarkable achievements include building the Matrimandir, replanting the forest and developing an eco-friendly community with a strong spiritual life, but there is now less unity and common purpose which is slowing the process of developing the city.

### 2. fixed or evolving galaxy

- There is tension between people who believe Auroville should be built out exactly as represented in Roger’s 3d Galaxy model and others who think the masterplan should evolve to reflect what we have learned about urbanism and eco-friendly design over the past few decades.
- Ideas about integrating the forest and small-scale agriculture into the city, using vegetation to conserve water and achieving natural cooling of buildings and spaces were explored at the Charrette.

### 3. growth target

- The community is divided over the need for, and viability of a city of 50,000 people.
- While some are strongly committed to this aim, others are concerned about the impact on the limited water resources and natural environment and would like to re-evaluate the target to reflect current and predicted physical, social and economic conditions.

### 4. shortage of professional skills

- There are not enough active community members with the expertise needed to build the city and develop the society, which places an excessive burden on a few people who are active and have the expertise.



- People with skills in holistic town planning and joined up strategic thinking at a city scale are particularly needed and lack of funding prevents bringing in paid expertise from outside.

### 5. youth

- Young people have great respect and affection for the pioneer generation but feel disengaged from the decision-making process.
- They have their own issues such as a lack of affordable accommodation but also feel they could bring a new perspective on issues facing the whole community and help resolve potential conflict by reaching out to youth in the bioregion.
- They would like to be better equipped for their role as future custodians of Auroville and have constructive ideas for how this could be achieved.

### 6. community participation

- There is a desire for more active participation in the planning process and interest in continuing the focus groups that emerged from the Charrette and enabling them to influence the evolving Galaxy plans.
- Involving stakeholders in planning a pilot project using the charrette methodology could demonstrate a new way forward.

### 7. economy

- The vision is to develop an internal economy, but Aurovilians are still heavily dependent on aspects of the external economy.
- A new economic model is needed in the medium term.
- There is potential for education to make a major contribution in the future based on Auroville’s unique offering.

### 8. mobility

- The vision is for a walkable city with people getting about by walking, cycling and public transport powered by green energy.
- Today motorcycles and petrol-powered vehicles are making roads dangerous and as the city grows this will get worse and also lead to polluted air.
- Sustainable public transport is needed linking settlements within the bioregion with Pondicherry and each other.

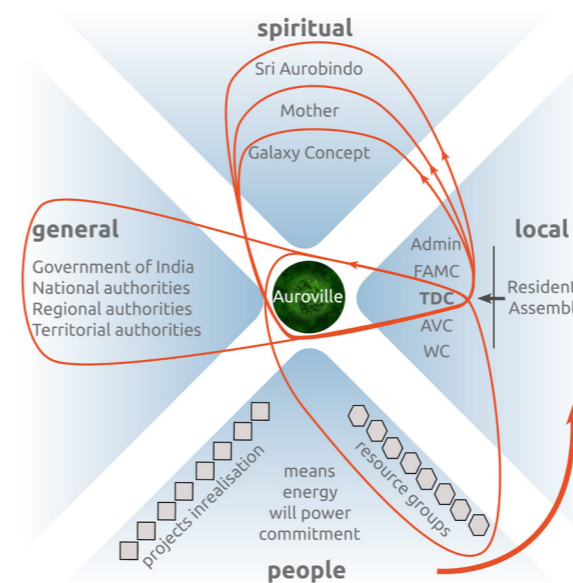
### 9. relationship with bioregion

- There is pressure on land from Tamil villages with rapidly growing populations and although Auroville is growing more slowly it strives to protect land from encroachment to allow for future growth.
- All communities in the bioregion share a scarce water source.
- There is an urgent need to cooperate with villagers to develop a water conservation and storage strategy as well as protecting against pollution, conserving nature and resolving conflicts over land. No water – no Auroville.

## the ultimate mission

As if the environmental, cultural and ground conditions for physically anchoring the Auroville vision weren’t difficult enough, living up to the Mother’s dream of building a “universal town where men and women of all countries are able to live in peace and progressing harmony, above all creeds, all politics and all nationalities” (Mother’s message of 1965) proved to be even more challenging.

There was and still is enormous willingness and enthusiasm of individuals, who have admirably committed their lives to realising the Auroville dream, but who are still human beings struggling to understand and incorporate what it means to become “a willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness.” (Auroville Charter)



## a truly difficult task

The practice of delegating planning and implementation to residents’ committees and working groups has shown its limitations over the years. L’Avenir/TDC, which is expected to carry out town-planning tasks described the difficulty of having comply with the following four major forces,

- the **spiritual** targets as concluded from Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy, from Mother’s vision and from the Galaxy concept of Roger Anger
- the **general** laws and planning requirements of India as well as of the regional and territorial authorities
- on the **people** level: the expectations of Auroville individualists, specialists and residents’ resource groups
- the **local** Auroville Residents Assembly, which commissions planning tasks but can dismiss them if not satisfied with the results.

The forces were visualised in a diagram by Andreas von Zadow, specialist in urban and organisational change processes, who facilitated the governance group. To burden a single team with this task, neither appropriately staffed nor skilled, appears to be a virtually impossible undertaking. Townplanning, as was explained during the workshop, involves consideration of complex technical,



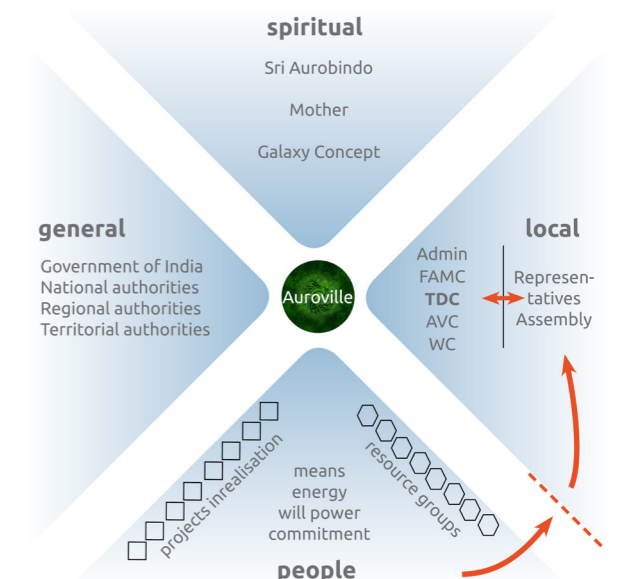
*“Rekindle the adventure spirit!”*

physical, economic, social, functional, ecological, aesthetic and spiritual issues. No wonder many L’Avenir teams have tried hard but finally given up, burnt out and frustrated. No wonder the selection of a new team is difficult for the same reasons.

## some reform urgently needed

Participants of the governance focus group said what a relief it was for them to speak out on the obvious limitations and challenges in the Auroville administration, and the need to reform the selection process was highlighted. The Residents’ Assembly, a heterogeneous body in which all Aurovilians have the right but not the obligation to take part, was also considered by some as an impossibly unwieldy forum for negotiating complex decision-making.

While it is desirable for Auroville’s population to undergo considerable expansion, some other form of representation has to be found in order to keep governance manageable and functioning. Why not start experimenting with new formats now? Some kinds of representative and appointment systems could be considered to establish more appropriate governance structures, functioning as reliably supportive partners for Auroville’s administrative and planning bodies.





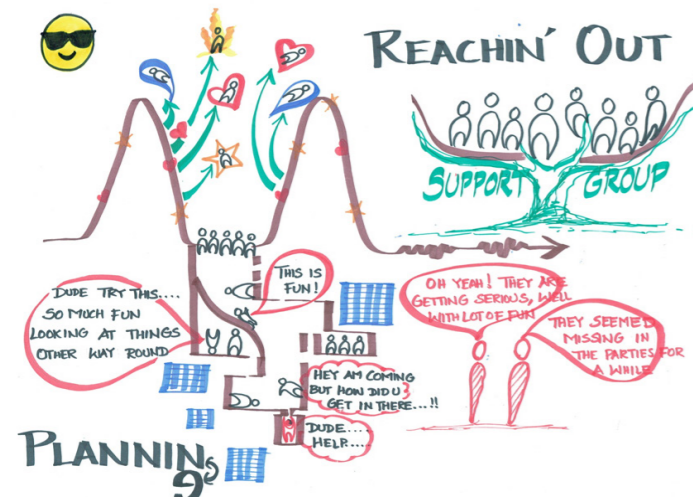
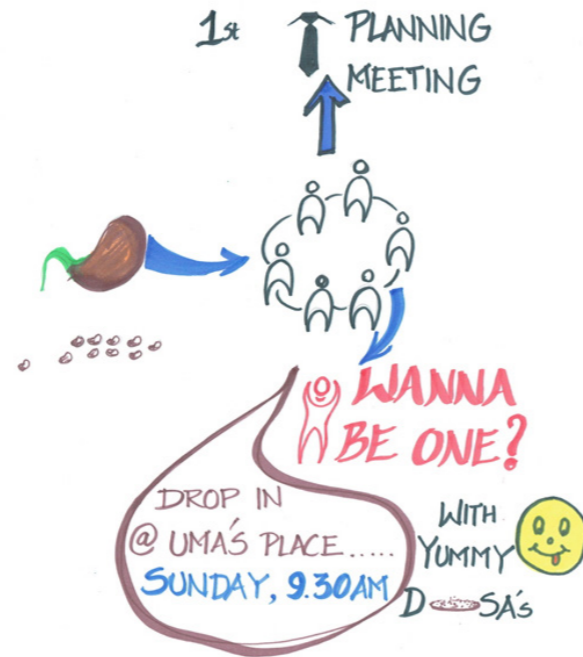
# widening participation

## youth, Tamil neighbours and bioregion

Clare San Martin's presentation on the Liberties in Dublin, illustrated how community planning had helped overcome opposition to development by building consensus on a Local Area Plan that delivered new green spaces, sustainable transport infrastructure and community facilities alongside new homes and employment space. Feedback after the presentation showed an appetite for using some features of the Liberties process in Auroville to widen participation and build consensus on future plans.

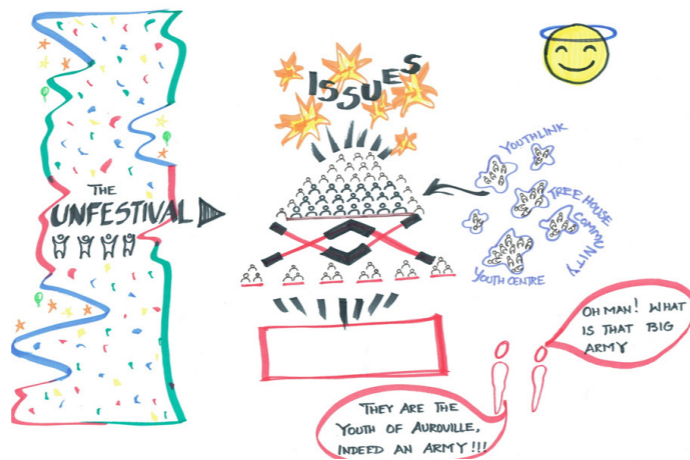
During the sessions, a group developed ideas for more effectively engaging Auroville's Tamil neighbours and younger Aurovilians in the planning process. Representatives of the Tamil community highlighted the urgency of working together to accommodate the needs of both communities through joined up strategies for water conservation, transport and population growth.

*"Villager's dreams are different from Aurovilians' – we need to find a way we can both fulfil our dreams!"*



### participation in the pilot project

- consult key stakeholders and get buy-in to the concept
- hold a Charrette using hands-on-planning to generate ideas
- explore viability and deliverability of different options
- re-consult stakeholders
- develop detailed design
- hold a public exhibition with opportunities to talk to the design team
- analyse feedback
- finalise the design



Many younger people felt disengaged from the decision-making process but believed they could bring a fresh perspective to many of Auroville's big challenges. A programme of outreach activities designed to encourage more young people to take part in discussions on important issues was mapped out. This focused on making participation more fun by holding meetings in different venues and mixing activities such as movie nights, music events and building sand castles on the beach with serious debates.

A big event, the "Unfestival", was proposed and initial meetings to plan for this have already taken place - with the added draw of delicious dosas kindly provided by the host. A key aim of the outreach is to establish a Youth Forum which will include all youth groups currently active in Auroville as well as attracting new people. Links between the Youth Forum and Working Committee were proposed with opportunities for 2-3 Youth Forum members sitting in as observers before becoming full members of the Committee.

## healthy placemaking

In parallel with the rich background of ideas that circulated during the collaborative workshops, in the course of 4 days this design process evolved from Healthy Placemaking to a Pilot Project.

It began with Fred London's presentation setting out urban planning principles for the creation of environments that can promote the health and well-being of people of all ages and from all walks of life. By installing the health of citizens the world over as a top priority, we will make choices that result in genuinely sustainable and healthy places in which to live, on a planet that is itself healthy.

Feedback from the audience was in support of Auroville having a non-motorised, non-polluting city centre, with neighbourhoods connected by walking, cycling and public transport and citizens working collaboratively towards shared goals. Participants were in favour of local design projects in key locations to encourage progress towards the creation of an integrated structure for Auroville.



## Auroville/ village transition concept

- 1 green-blue canyon
- 2 new Coach Park to limit heavy traffic on quiet route
- 3 existing Visitors Centre car park reduced
- 4 quiet movement system from new coach park to Visitors Centre and Matrimandir - may eventually become a loop
- 5 enhanced footpath from Edayanchavadi to Auroville
- 6 meandering route lined with shops and kiosks through mixed-use neighbourhood.
- 7 new shared blue-green space incorporating Terra Preta
- 8 new built frontage for village incorporating sanitation facilities to serve Edayanchavadi
- 9 new urban square at crossing of footpath and traffic-calmed street

# healthy placemaking

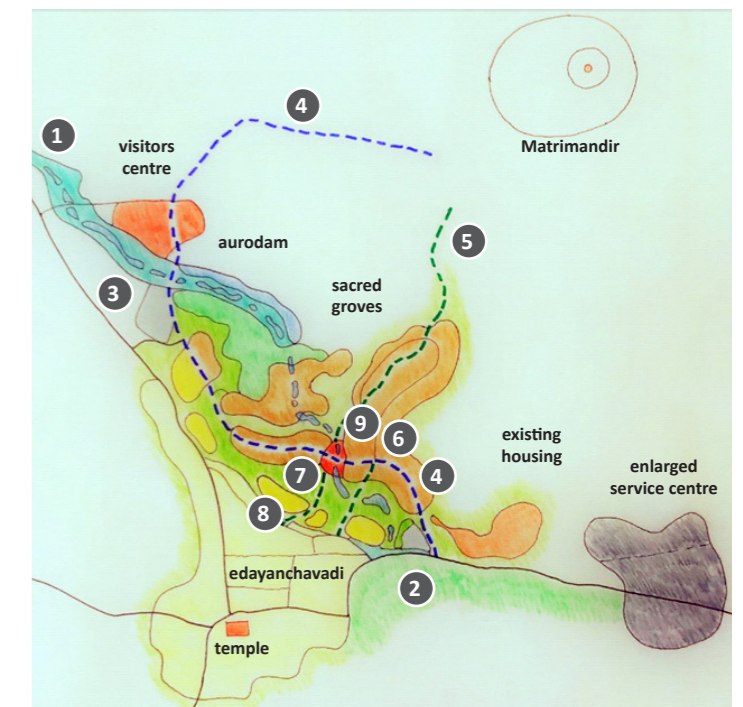
## fusion, not confusion!

The next stage was a Hands-on-Planning workshop focussed on the need for Auroville to collaborate with the Tamil villages in the bioregion in tackling water conservation, ground pollution and transport management. Concentrating on what they have in common, rather than their differences, the skills of the two groups can constitute a formidable, complementary partnership that combines the Aurovilians' expertise in sustainable technologies with the Tamil villagers' entrepreneurial pragmatism.

## the pilot project

A major success of the sessions was consensus on a pilot project that would create a shared recreational green space for Tamil villagers and Aurovilians as well as addressing a series of associated issues. A concept design developed using Hands-on-Planning demonstrated how an integrated approach could work. It would enable the Tamil villagers to expand their village sustainably with new buildings incorporating water management and sanitation infrastructure, whilst the city planners could establish a sustainable movement strategy that would ease congestion in Edayanchavadi and create a circuit for electric vehicles to serve primary destinations in Auroville for the benefit of tourists and residents alike.

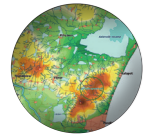
*"Connect communities by investing in paths and roads for cyclists, pedestrians and shared transport that arrive at lively public spaces!"*



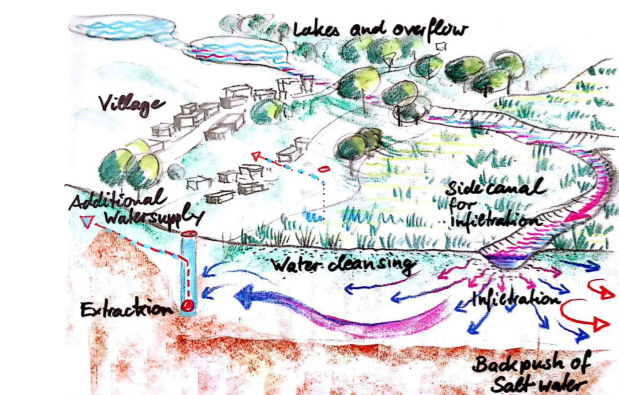
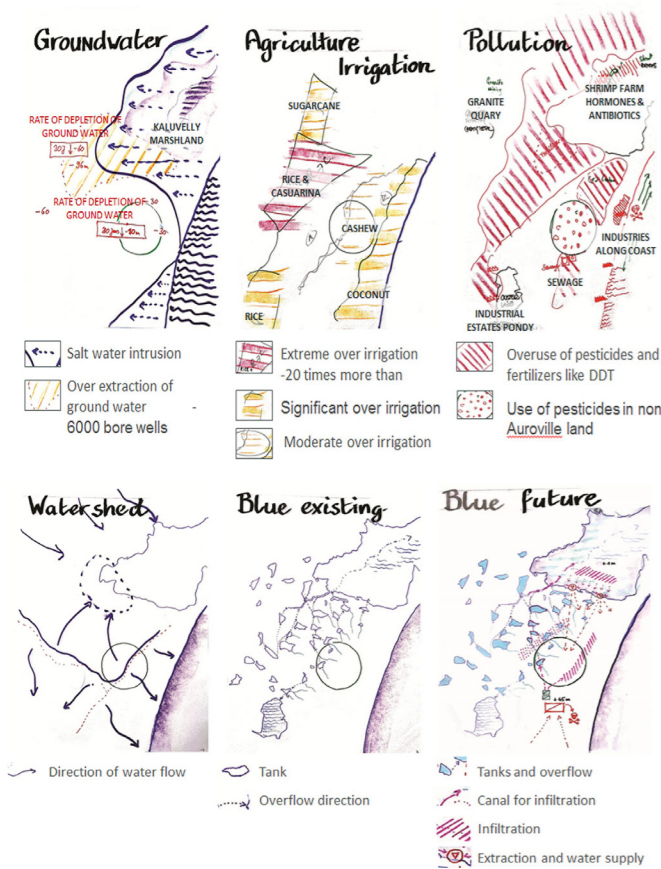


# water & green

## the big picture - Auroville bioregion



Auroville's Water and Green factors cannot be understood without studying synergy effects with the surrounding region, which is of vital importance for Auroville. We explored the potentials and challenges of the region including the interrelation between climate data, rainwater contribution, agricultural use in the past and present and their impact on the state of groundwater resources, rivers, streams and reservoirs. We looked into challenges such as seawater intrusion, growing salt concentration of previously fresh groundwater and also discussed the soil conditions as well as specific sources of pollution. Finally we focused on possible solutions such as the infiltration of treated sewage to recover the aquifer and press the seawater back. In this way we could contribute to a more regenerative, sustainable agriculture and Auroville would not only do its own homework but could also be a model for the entire bioregion.

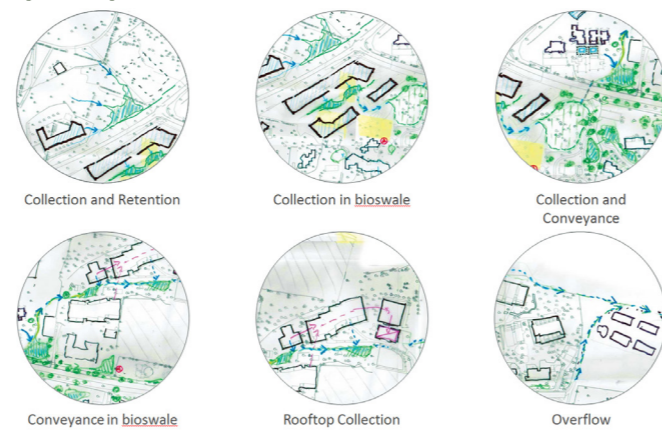


## the neighbourhood - residential zone



Rainwater harvesting is not just an option but a necessity in Auroville and the region. In this group working on Water and Green, Herbert Dreiseitl, international pioneer of Water Sensitive Urban Design (WSUD), and the participants explored the options and local integration of rainwater catchment, treatment and storage. Focusing on the Industrial Zone we developed a "Treatment Chain" for the final reuse of water for Auroville. Most important, beside the hydrological conditions, topography and catchment structure, is the innovative and sensible integration into the urban structure and the development of an open space and greenery concept. Multifunctional and seasonal systems were discussed and should be further explored.

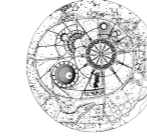
### principles



### collection integrated in landscape



## the heart - Matrimandir



From the beginning Water and Green has been the central language for livability in Auroville and also for the reconnection to the spiritual world beyond purely physical parameters. Especially on the way towards its center, the Matrimandir, water is planned to become a transformative threshold, like in many religions and traditions of human wisdom. Following intense group discussions, Herbert sketched a possibility to bring Mother's vision into a workable design solution. It is focusing on the spiritual gesture and metamorphic character of water but also on the practical implementation based on modern technology and knowhow. These ideas have to be developed further and could be easily implemented.

*"Water can be a fantastic teacher!"*

### how to bring healthy vibrant water systems to the Matrimandir that can work?



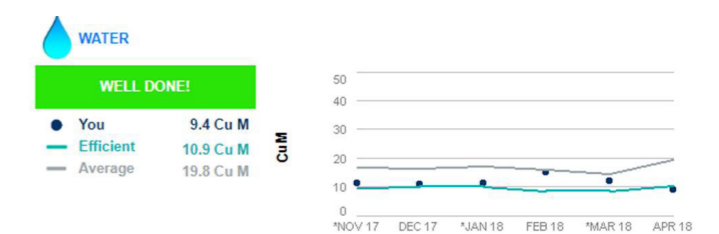
# water & green

## the people - education & awareness



Many water concepts and technical systems have already been considered and were partly implemented in Auroville. We discussed the challenges and reasons for failures. Experience shows that professional policy development and empowerment, accompanied by reliable consensus and decision-making, is often missing. We discussed better methods to implement stakeholder involvement, public awareness and coordinated actions in order to bring a holistic water system to reality. Water does not care about opinions and political boundaries. Aditi, who is presently doing her PHD on the water system of Auroville, was encouraged by the group to follow up on this topic. Finally, better ways of management and maintenance were discussed as most critical components of a long lasting successful water culture in the whole of Auroville and its bioregion.

*"Let us focus on the magic and sacredness of water in every possible way – artists, schools, communities, planners to come together in events celebrating water!"*





# holistic town-planning

## an exercise for a way forward

Led by Joachim Eble, the “Holistic Town-Planning” group experimented with the introduction of a new holistic concept for Auroville’s unfolding as a “city of progressive harmony”. It formulated three aspects of an Integral Planning Spiral:

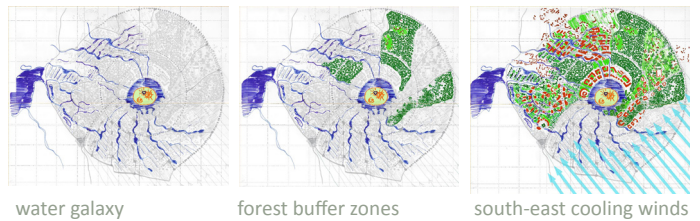
1. Spiritual aspects – calling for inner receptivity, collective concentration, earth healing ceremonies, geomantic reading
2. Aspects of Nature – calling for environmental sustainability, reading of a site, bioclimatic response, blue-green infrastructure, circular economy, smart grid, post-fossil mobility
3. Human aspects – calling for an approach integrating socio-ecological sustainability, sharing economy, decentralized mixed-use development, appreciation of urbanism, city of short distances, learning society, healing living space.

The participants agreed that change can only come from within, and that it needs to start NOW. To overcome the “silo thinking” in Auroville, Aurovilians could eventually agree on a research project or the elaboration of a feasibility study involving all parts of the community in a participatory process. A second triad of guiding principles was specified:



- To appreciate and consequently pursue the galaxy concept whilst envisioning a healthy and healing society, with the field of force of Matrimandir as the source of this spiralling energy.
- To appreciate and include what has been created up to now. The living diversity of the urban framework, its grown social fabric, the achievements in afforestation and the experimental expressions in landscaping and architecture should be respected instead of being submitted to rigid planning.
- To acknowledge that the concept of a “city the earth needs” has to take into account all planetary upheavals since its inception, with regard to space, climate, natural resources, etc.

This double triad was analysed and integrally linked in a metamorphic process. The result should NOT be seen as a master-plan idea, but as an experimental model for the way Auroville could become a city. The illustration is full of inadequacies, not only in terms of urban planning and design but also because it lacks any basis in geomantic planning. Still to be examined are the assumptions and hypotheses regarding bioclimatic details, topography, water management, accessibility and land ownership.



*“It was important in the workshop to weigh heart, hand and brain equally in order to reconnect the very dominant mental tradition of preservation of the Auroville society with the soul of the place!”*

## Auroville experimental model

- 1 spiritual centre Matrimandir
- 2 cooling lake at Matrimandir
- 3 waterscape galaxy
- 4 forest buffer zones
- 5 existing settlements inside forest buffer zones
- 6 administrative zone: mixed-use city centre
- 7 international zone: global garden & mixed-use campus
- 8 cultural zone: campus park & campus city
- 9 co-operative buffers around village Bharatipuram
- 10 economic zone: water harvesting, green infrastructure & mixed-use campus
- 11 south-east-ocean winds cooling the city
- 12 residential zone: blue-green infrastructure, urban gardening, terra preta soil improvement
- 13 field of force: mixed-use city, bioclimatic galaxy
- 14 city arrival: welcoming reception

