

Impact Assessment Report

Long-term effect of Auroville Green Practices Summer School (2014-2015)
on participants' professional and personal lives



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Auroville

Auroville is a growing international township near Puducherry on the Coromandel Coast of India. Spread over more than 4000 acres for an intended population of 50,000 residents, it is an inspiring model for sustainable practices and ecologically responsible living. Founded in 1968, Auroville is based on the vision of The Mother and Sri Aurobindo and is endorsed by UNESCO and Government of India as an ongoing experiment in human unity. The Auroville Foundation was established in 1988 by an Act of Parliament of the Government of India. Over the years, Auroville has won international acclaim for its efforts in social and environmental sustainability. The current population of Auroville is over 2200 residents from approximately 48 nations.

Auroville Green Practices (AGP)

Auroville Green Practices (AGP) is an experiential learning program and educational platform developed by Auroville Consulting in 2010, designed for the exchange of knowledge, resources and education in 'green practices'. Located in Auroville, AGP has been developed in an exemplary setting. It aims to further research, and promulgate and nurture the relationship between healthy people, sustainable habitats and a green planet.

Through first-hand and hands-on experiences, students acquire skills and knowledge outside of the traditional academic classroom setting. By bringing together students, practitioners, professionals and researchers in a common physical space to learn, share and build habitats that are sustainable – ecologically, socially and economically, this teaching method ensures lasting impressions. Through meeting and training with young scholars such as engineers and constructors, AGP plants significant seeds of change and paves the way for new greener practices of designing, planning and working sustainably for the next generations to come. Against the backdrop of Auroville's Charter, the vision of AGP is to create a knowledge-based enterprise of excellence, and facilitate an exchange between Auroville and the outside world around unending education, bridging the past and the future, as well as spiritual and material research. AGP aims to bring together various stakeholders to envision future townships that offer a habitat that is ecologically, socially and economically nurturing.

Through its active work ensuring that efforts are continuously enriched with the newest knowledge and research as well as documented and shared through a two-way flow of exchange with a global audience, AGP provides excellent educational opportunities in sustainability sciences. AGP offers education and training on topics of responsible energy management, waste management, water management, organic farming and food production, climate responsive and green architecture, responsible fashion and the cotton value chain, ecological restoration and landscaping, social and ecological business practices, and greenhouse gas accounting for organizations and cities. Around these topics, AGP offers both training modules in the form of workshops (upto 6 days duration) and summer schools (upto 3 weeks duration).

AGP Summer School

The AGP summer school program is an initiative using Auroville and its outstanding experience in human unity and sustainable living as a platform for the learning and personal growth of students from around the world. The program is based on a 3H approach that nurtures Hands (skills), Head (competences) and Heart (inner capacities) of all participants.

The summer schools are held on an annual basis with a three week duration. Students learn in an experiential and cross-disciplinary educational environment to connect theory and hands-on application with core human values such as justice, dignity and unity.

Overview of AGP Summer School Programs 2014 and 2015

3H Summer School 2014: From Cradle to Cradle – Building for Responsible Consumption

The participants designed and built a bamboo kiosk for the Auroville Visitors' Centre which served as a small exhibition stand within an existing outdoor expo on sustainable products that Auroville has to offer. After building with bamboo and learning about the practical implications, the participants designed a movable cart for fruits and vegetables. The design exercise helped the participants play with design.

3H Summer School 2014 - [Publication](#) | [Documentary Video](#)

3H Summer School 2015: Unity and Diversity – Building for Cultural Encounters

To accelerate the manifestation of the African House, temporary structures that can host events and accommodate visiting students were included in the masterplan. The summer school program supported the African Pavilion group in the design and building of temporary structures such as community hall for events, kitchen, a compost dry toilet, an open to sky bathroom and three student cottages.

3H Summer School 2015 - [Publication](#) | [Documentary Video](#)

Objectives of impact assessment

This report provides an overview of the AGP summer school programs held between 2014 and 2015, capturing the 5-year journey of its participants, post-summer school. It assesses the long-term impacts that participation has had on program attendees through qualitative research in which participants are interviewed or respond in written format to open-ended questions.

The main objective of the assessment is to investigate and document the AGP trainings' potential for creating positive and lasting change in the lives of the participants; both in their career and personal lives. This exercise serves as an internal learning for Auroville Consulting, provides input for future planning and implementation of workshops, as well as serves as documentation and a summarised overview of the regular workshops.

Furthermore, the latter will provide a documented overview of past events to be used for external collaborations and fundraising.

The results of this analysis indicate that the AGP summer school is a high-impact program that has significantly shaped the professional and personal lives of participants.

Methodology

Material for this assessment was gathered in two steps. First, a desk-based compilation of materials and data of the workshops was carried out and reviewed. This was used primarily to assess the numbers of workshops carried out, the content of the workshops, the number of participants and provide some idea about the background and profiles of the participants. Furthermore, documents, publications and evaluations sheets have been reviewed.

Secondly, a qualitative investigation was carried out in which workshop participants from 2014 and 2015 were contacted and interviewed. The interviews were semi-structured and guided by certain priorities of inquiry, but otherwise allowing open-ended reflections about what, if any, difference or impact the workshops have created in the participants' present work and personal lives. The semi-open structure of questions allowed the candidates to reflect on the "how" but also on "why" AGP has had an impact, if any, on their lives.

Year	No.of participants	Workshop days	Workshop theme
2014	22	21	From cradle to cradle; building for responsible consumption
2015	9	21	Unity and diversity; building for cultural encounters
Total	31	42	

Figure 1- Overview of participant number by year



Figure 2 - Overview of participant profiles, place of residence, and current occupation.

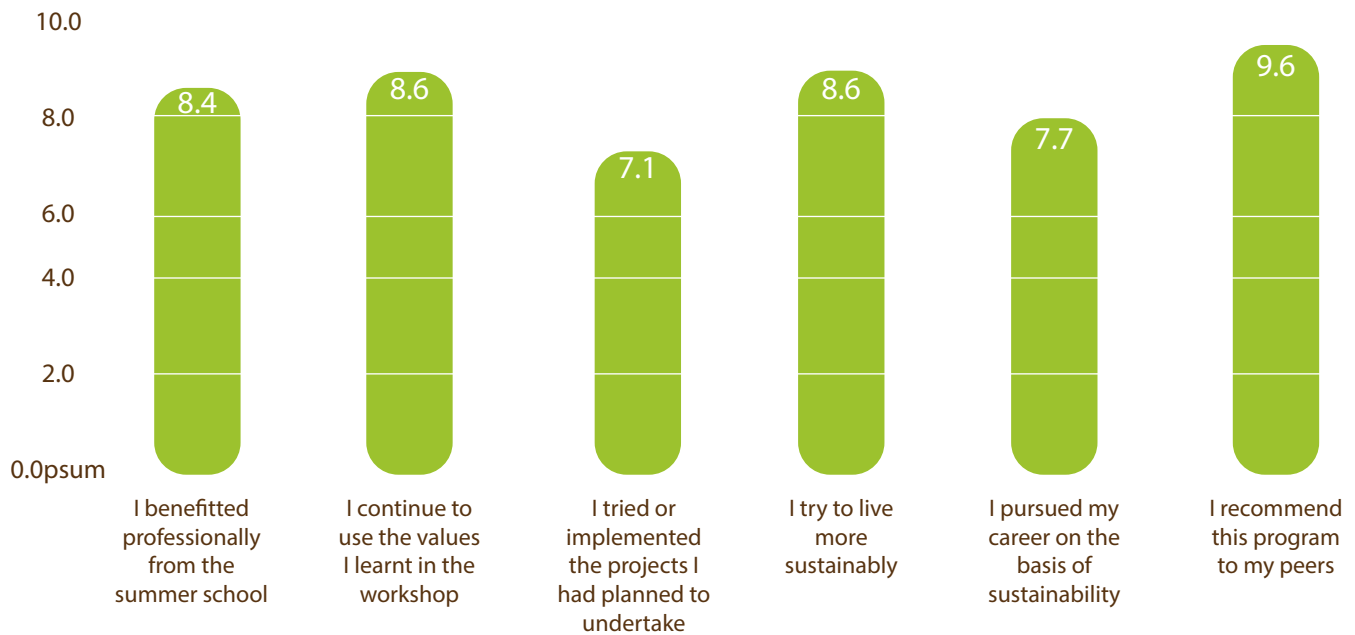


Figure 3 - Cumulative feedback from participants

Analysis

Quantitative analysis

Representative sample and statistical significance of answers

Figure 1 highlights that over the course of 2014-2015 there were a total of 42 workshop days attended by a total of 31 participants. The interview response rate of 48% renders the sample size highly representative.

Figure 2 shows that of the 15 participants that were interviewed, their current country of residence is across 6 different countries, namely India, Australia, US, Canada, Italy, and Singapore. This highlights the international nature of the respondents.

The answers collected from participants indicate statistical significance and high levels of convergence, ranging from 71% to 96% agreement. Figure 3 illustrates the results of a ranking system that the participants were asked to provide on a set of questions. From this it can be seen that the two highest-scoring answers relate to the values that the participants learned during the summer school (column 2), as well as the impact it had on them in the form of making efforts to live more sustainably (column 4), followed closely by indicating that the summer school benefitted the participants in their

professional lives (column 1).

The answer with a near-unanimous highest ranking (14 out of 15 gave a 10 ranking) was the question of whether participants recommend this program to their peers. This is a significant indicator of the success of the summer school in terms of its long-term impact.

Interestingly, 7 out of 15 participants pursued higher studies in the field of design and/or sustainability, while 8 are currently professionally engaged in the same field of design and/or sustainability.

Qualitative Analysis of Feedback from Participants

Upon reconnecting with their summer school experiences, the participants assessed how the summer school helped them in their careers and personal lives.

The responses and perceived impact of the AGP summer school that each participant attended can be broadly categorised in three main themes:



Hands-on experience during the summer school acted as a catalyst for inspiration, approach, professional development and study/career- choice

Gaining of a wider perspective about sustainability and the impact of personal choices



Self-development, self-realisation and teamwork

1. Hands-on experience during the summer school acted as a catalyst for inspiration, approach, professional development and study/career- choice

Eight out of fifteen respondents indicated that their participation in the AGP summer school was a significant factor in determining or strengthening their resolve in their career choice or helping them in their respective careers, or even in their approach to their careers. One of the respondents says: *"I think it was the starting point for me to spark my curiosity in finding my niche as an architect,"* while another explains: *"The workshop has helped me explore new areas in the professional arena."*

In terms of approach to architecture, a respondent highlights: *"The workshop opened me up to the idea of cohesiveness and a multidisciplinary approach to my work,"* while another adds: *"The AGP workshop also taught me to broaden my horizons and to have multiple approaches to solve certain problems."* And lastly:

"It allowed me to think big in terms of the scale of the project (...) and to have a cradle to cradle approach and I apply that to all my work, designs, illustrations or any other personal projects possible."

On the topic of approach to design a respondent indicates: *"The workshop helped me undertake a holistic and sensitive approach towards my role as a designer,"* while another participant answers:

"(I learned that) one should play and experiment with the aesthetics of the design once the functionality is fulfilled. Since then, whatever design projects I lead or I am a part of, after 6 years still I try to follow those words and try to play with design."

In terms of study choice, a respondent says: *"The experience in Auroville made me understand my*

inclination towards sustainability and I dedicated myself to pursue my masters in the same field."

One of the answers also highlights the relevance of AGP's summer school in terms of introducing the concept of sustainability:

"The thing that stuck with me was the closed loop system and sustainability. (...) The summer school and Auroville was the first time I got introduced to this concept, and it was a big part of my statement of purpose when I applied for masters."

These eight respondents' answers indicate that the AGP participants carry some of the lessons from the summer school and apply them in their professional life, 5 years later.

2. Gaining of a wider perspective about sustainability and the impact of personal choices

Ten of the fifteen respondents highlight that the AGP summer school taught them to look at sustainability and diversity in a holistic and multidisciplinary approach, while exploring the relevance of sustainability science, including personal choices. For example, a respondent says: *"Auroville gave me a perspective on how to approach a problem differently so that you don't create the problem in the first place."*

In terms of life-lessons, a respondent answers:

"I try to think in the same way in all my different jobs, to find balance, respect and comprehension in a holistic view, especially talking about those different subjects I work in, as the different parts of a unique culture that I teach/use."

One of the respondents pinpointed to the lesson that sustainable architecture goes beyond the material used:

"I loved the way everything was connected, and the idea that working in architecture with natural material is not something only about the construction system at all, but it is only one small aspect of a bigger view about everything."

Another respondent makes the link between the material used and its impact on the environment:

"I surely am more concerned about the

environment and learning all those things made me realise the need to save our planet and that workshop helped me know all the alternative methods I can use which are more sustainable and safer for everyone."

Another participant highlights the link between cultural diversity and sustainable architecture:

"The workshop helped me in understanding the impact of sustainable architecture and the importance of unity in cultural diversity. I have been inculcating these important factors learned from the workshop into my working/study experiences since. (...) This workshop did change the way I used to think about design and living combined."

Capturing the theme of gaining a wider perspective, this respondent illustrates:

"It was the sustainability aspect, and Auroville being an experimental township, and the concept always fascinated me; and I was very glad I could experience it. To me it was a shift in perspective, and had a strong impact in a lot of other things in life (...) I realised how wasteful we are, and very sustainable ways to tackle it."

And, lastly, encompassing all the elements of value of the Auroville-based summer school, one participant describes life in Auroville, even to the extent of being overwhelming:

"The program and the city itself, Auroville, completely changed my perspective towards sustainable living. It gave a better understanding of being responsible for how our little efforts can contribute towards a better world. It gave me the real idea of how the city can function. Living there for about a month, among people from different backgrounds, cultures, and nationalities in such a close-knit community was very overwhelming."

3. Self-development, self-realisation and teamwork

The third theme identifiable from the wide range of answers is the theme of self-development.

Eight of the fifteen participants directly indicated that one of the high-impact aspects of the summer

school was the learning they experienced in the area of inner growth and self-development. Ranging from participants experiencing new-found confidence in their choices, vision, meaning, insights, worldview shifts, realisations, answers, and a better understanding of self, the long-term impact of the summer school was strongly felt and communicated. This is perfectly exemplified with this participant's answer, illustrating a particular aspect: *"(I learned about) Listening. When a person is in conversation, to really listen to them (...) Not just leadership but the core values like compassion, integrity, listening."*

Highlighting that the summer school triggered a new-found confidence:

"Attending the workshop gave me unrecognized confidence to pursue this form of Architecture in my near future. The workshop changed my perspective towards life and life forms and I have been working towards sustainability since then."

Relating Auroville's spiritual backbone of Human Unity one of the participants explains the impression it made:

"Actually the combination of the workshop with staying in Auroville changed my vision and perspective on life and work. Design, construction and materiality with bamboo was of course new for us. It was other things also like other building visits, meeting people from various parts of the world all living in an area and everybody's mind are aligned to one conscious thought - Sustainable Humane Living. It was good to see that so many knowledge-full people from different parts of the world have left their comfortable and chaotic city life for a new, very much less chaotic, and a slower paced life."

Besides also identifying Human Unity as Auroville's linchpin, another respondent points to changes in inner attitude:

"I really loved all the way the workshop pushed us to think deeply about the meaning of every single different activity we did but at the same time to focus on what each of them meant for us, and on three words we had to choose to define ourselves. I definitely

gained a new perspective on things. Quite often I recall to my mind my three words, what I stand for. And I try to keep them in my life, and to remember that I chose them. (...) I also loved that we got in touch with people from all over the world, who came there only for an idea and decided to stay in order to participate. I was really also surprised by the Matrimandir and the spiritual activity: I'm not a religious person, but I felt right to keep silence, meditate and respect the Others, everywhere in Auroville."

Pointing to the self-development tools learned during the summer school, three respondents underline learning about team-work and depicted still remembering specific tools and exercises that were provided to them:

"I have been using the building techniques and the personal development exercises that I learnt in the workshop, till date. (...) I think the thing that stayed with me the longest was the self-discovery. I learnt how to work with a team of strangers and create a structure from nothing."

"It was a great time to work as a team which I never really did before and the best thing was meeting new people. I still mention things I learnt there to my family or friends whenever such a topic arises."

"I was looking forward to this interview because the summer school impacted a lot in my life and in my personal life (...) The workshop was a big exercise for my brain. I learnt how to control my brain in a way you think or work on your actions (...) Especially in consciousness, how to be conscious, how to be like Gandhiji's talisman, like how your thoughts and actions are going to impact someone who is in need. Personally, I try to connect and be more conscious. Whenever I try to do a presentation, or one of my projects, I try to be conscious. I learnt that in Auroville."

Conclusion and discussion

As can be seen by the answers of the respondents, the impact of the Auroville Green Practices summer school is significant. The participants are able to illustrate with detailed examples and insightful anecdotes exactly how and why the summer school program has greatly improved and impacted both their professional lives as well as their personal lives.

Possibly the most identifiable aspect that has impacted participants' lives is the immersion into Auroville and its spiritual and research values, contact with Aurovilians, with other participants, as well as the method by which the AGP summer school program is designed and taught. Combining personal interactions, team work, self-improvement exercises, and high level of exposure to new people and places yields a high-impact program that makes every encounter count towards a learning experience - be it a sharing of a meal, a physical exercise class, a journaling exercise, or a hands-on construction project.

It remains to be seen in further analysis to what extent attendance in the AGP summer school has a direct correlation with the students choosing to pursue sustainability sciences or to engage professionally in sustainability. Indicators of the above could be developed and tested on further student batches.

Appendix

E-mail sample sent to respondents

Dear XX

My name is Cecilie and I write to you from Auroville Consulting where I am currently looking at the long-term impacts of our past workshops and summer schools.

I write to you and a selection of other individuals because I can see that you have participated in the AGP summer school in 2013, five years ago. In the publication that was made after the workshop you have written a statement about yourself and your learning, which I find very genuine and sympathetic.

If you agree, I would like to include this statement in my impact assessment and I would ask you to write a similar statement (as of today!) of how the summer school has benefited you in your life and work during the past five years. This would be an invaluable help for Auroville Consulting to gain an insight into what positive, lasting change our workshops and summer schools are creating.

Please find below this email what you wrote in your statement from 2013.

I would be grateful if you would write something, which includes some or all of the following reflections:

Where do you currently live?

What is your occupation/study nowadays?

Have you used any of the things you learnt at the AGP summer school till today?

What do you use, for example?

What made the biggest impression on you during your participation in the workshop, which you still use or reflect about?

Would you say that the workshop changed anything in your life and/or your work practices up to today?
Do you feel that you gained a new perspective on things?

Do you feel that something could have been done to make your experience of the workshop (even) better?
What would you improve about the workshop according to your experience?

Please give as many examples as you would like!

I hope you will help us understand and promote what Auroville Consulting is contributing towards a greener, better planet for everyone to live in.

In case you are more comfortable speaking with me in person I am very happy to give you a call and have a chat within the next couple of weeks. Let me know!

Thanks in advance.

Warm regards,

For Auroville Green Practices,

www.agpworkshops.com

