



# report

4 December 2016 – 8 January 2017

# Auroville EDE 2016

Pitchandikulam Forest, Auroville



**EDE**  
ECOVILLAGE  
DESIGN  
EDUCATION

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## Wing/EDE Auroville EDE 2016



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*The powerful opening ceremony of the 2016 Auroville EDE, welcoming all participants, greeting our host community of Pitchandikulam Forest, and creating the first connections for our five-week journey. The ceremony started and ended with heavy rain, a beautiful gift.*

### Course Overview

**The Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) Auroville desk, based in Pitchandikulam Forest and YouthLink, successfully designed and hosted a five-week Ecovillage Design Education Course running from the 4th of December 2016 to the 7th of January 2017. The course "campus" was located in the lush afforested natural setting of Pitchandikulam Forest, a well-respected center for ecological restoration and education in the region, one of the oldest communities within Auroville, and current site of the GEN Auroville Desk (<http://www.pitchandikulamforest.org/PF/>).**

With 35 participants coming from Auroville, its bioregional villages, as well as Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Bangladesh, South Africa and many countries in Europe, the group was incredibly diverse and rich in age, culture, history and knowledge. The skilled group of facilitators included lead facilitator, Ethan Hirsch-Tauber, Auroville pioneer and Pitchandikulam founder, Joss Brooks, Youthlink Founder and Coordinator, Kavitha Urvase Selvaraj, GEN Desk Coordinator, Nikethana Venkatesan, permaculturist, Riccardo de Amici, and economic expert, Michael Marco Manger. More than a dozen other guest speakers and facilitators from within Auroville led specific seminars or site visits during the course.

While many classes were held in our classroom at Pitchandikulam Forest, much of the EDE involved journeying out into the larger community of Auroville and its bioregion to visit other sites and learn through experience. The course followed Gaia Education's sustainability mandala with one week focusing on each of the four dimensions, flowing from Social, to Ecological, Economic, Worldview and ending with a week of hands on practice with Integrated Design. General feedback from the course was highly positive, with most participants feeling very satisfied with the overall program. Key learnings focused on the building of community within the group versus content delivered in classes. Several key connections within the Asian network of ecovillages were created and projects have emerged that are in various stages of implementation.

This course was made possible through the joint efforts of Pitchandikulam Forest and YouthLink. Youth from Auroville were involved in the process of course design and implementation, under the guidance and expertise of Pitchandikulam Forest. Important roles to mention are Ricci, Nikki, Michael, Natasha, and Kavitha for design of the course curriculum and Ramanan, Sathish, Anais, and Karthik for logistics-related work. Finally, video and photography were beautifully held by Serena and Genie.

### Links to explore:

- 1) Trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9yf5kKNK98A>
- 2) Teaser: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OqIPd2oa5V0>
- 3) Final Documentary: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4a9vx0U6Exg>
- 4) EDE Article on PF Blog: <https://pitchandikulamblog.wordpress.com/2017/01/28/reflections-on-an-eco-village-design-education-course/>
- 5) Photo Album of the EDE:  
[https://www.facebook.com/eugy.dumont/media\\_set?set=a.10154935963443308.1073741837.574728307&type=3](https://www.facebook.com/eugy.dumont/media_set?set=a.10154935963443308.1073741837.574728307&type=3)

### Participants

Number of participants: 36

Number receiving certification: 32

Age range: 17-63

Gender ratio: 14F:18M (certifying), 3F:1M (not certifying)

Countries represented: 13: India (20), Germany (3), Sri Lanka (2), South Africa (2), France (2), Bangladesh, Bhutan, Italy, Russia, Sweden, Switzerland, UK, USA

Ethnicities and background: Tamil (16), Aurovillians (13)





We had a very diverse group of participants from around the world. About two-thirds of the group was from the local bioregion, while the others came from mostly Europe and other parts of Asia. This wide range of



nationalities and backgrounds fit very well with the higher intention of Auroville, to create an international community where human unity can be celebrated, through diversity. This allowed for much learning within the group, while addressing the challenge of different cultural backgrounds. Three participants could not complete the course due to external personal issues, and one who could only attend half of the program due to scheduling. We consider this a high success rate in terms of certification.

*Our big, beautiful, diverse group of the 2016 Auroville EDE*

## Course Rhythms

The course was five weeks long, Monday through Saturday, with free Sundays. Each day started at 6:30 with a morning activity, either a local South Indian martial art (Kalaripayattu) or Awareness through the Body (ATB). Breakfast usually consisted of tropical fruit, a local Tamil dish, and bread and jam. At 8:45 the group would come together for a morning circle for sharing and announcements, followed by a game or song. Class generally started at 9 am, held by a course facilitator or guest presenter and generally ended between 12:30 and 1 pm, followed by lunch. A second class session started between 2 and 3, and would continue until 6 or 6:30, with dinner at 7 pm. Some evenings were free while many others were open for an evening session, ranging from watching a relevant film to group dynamics time using Council. Total hours of content were 120.

EDE DAILY SCHEDULE	
6:30 am	MORNING PRACTICE
7:30 am	BREAKFAST + SEVA
8:45 am	CIRCLE
9:00 am	MORNING SESSION
12:00 pm	SEVA + LUNCH
2:00 pm	AFTERNOON SESSION
5:30 pm	SEVA + GROUP TIME
6:30 pm	DINNER
8:00 pm	EVENING SESSION (SOME DAYS)
MORNING PRACTICE:	
Mon, Wed, Fri - Awareness thru the body (ALONG)	
Tue, Thu, Sat - Kalaripayattu (BAMELA)	



## Highlights & Challenges of Each Dimension

### Social

The Social Dimension functioned as the opening of the EDE, and was therefore a crucial time for the group to meet, form community glue (group bonding), and start to learn different ways of living together. The week was held by a team led by Ethan, the EDE's lead facilitator, who also has many years of work in community building education. Kavitha and Nikki of the GEN AV Desk and YouthLink also played key roles in introducing the course, all whilst holding the huge work of logistics, making international participants feel at home and integrating Aurovillian and Tamil participants.



*One of the first classes of the Social Dimension, in which the group played a fun game, the Durdians, to experience Building Community and Embracing Diversity*

Much class time during the week occurred in Pitchandikulam as the group needed to be together, play games, and get to know one another before venturing out into Auroville. During the week we explored the social dimensions of community building, looking at the complexity of Auroville's social landscape, its history and current layers. We learned about community building and diversity through a fun cross-cultural game with follow-up discussion. We studied governance, decision-making models, and leadership in both a general and Auroville context. One

day was dedicated to Indian and Tamil social structures, as well as local ritual, art and tradition through practicing kolams and stick dances. We also had a full day of conflict resolution, seeing how it applies in Auroville, and how it can be used in community to build trust. Throughout the five weeks we regularly used 'Council', as a method of community sharing, connecting the group, and getting to know one another through deep listening.

### Quotes from participants about the Social Dimension:

"I have seen what a group of individuals within a collective can create, innovate and give life to. I deeply resonate with this sort of lifestyle, and will now further my exploration in community life."

"Looking at the other with compassion and contributing to their well-being, through developing the skill of empathy, is crucial for the building of a community."

"No victim = no conflict"



*EDE participants tried the delicate act of kolam design, a traditional Tamil art form and meditative practice*





## Ecological

The second week, the Ecology dimension gave us the opportunity to really delve into the bioregion and the ecological work of Auroville. The week was led by Joss, a highly- experienced reforestation and ecological restoration expert, Ethan, an ecological educator who facilitated much of the course, and Ricci, who specialized in food and permaculture.



*EDE participants spend a morning at Solitude Farm and Organic Kitchen, working together to create a banana circle garden, a fun and effective permaculture technique*

This week was very much site visit-based where we saw many different places, with each day focusing on a different topic: exploring local, organic food and farming, through Solitude Farm and Auro Orchard, green building focused on earth and bamboo construction through visiting Sacred Groves, the Earth Institute and Bamboo Centre, a day-long exploration of the surrounding bioregion looking at the remnants of ancient protected forests, local temples, and the

immense challenges of rampant development in the modern world, and finally engaging with possibilities of

restoration ecology through the work of Pebble Garden, Sadhana Forest and our host site of Pitchandikulam Forest. We spent one day in the classroom talking about energy, ranging from community-specific solar design, to long-term community-wide solutions.

The ecological week took us to the highs and lows of the extremity of humanity's current situation of potential ecocide, while looking at some of the numerous, practical, local solutions, which already exist and can be implemented immediately.

### Quotes from participants about the Ecological Dimension:

"This dimension has fueled my fire for forest restoration in Tamil Nadu, and I will commit to this now."

"Extensive damage is being done to natural biodiversity, and there is an urgent need to educate everyone on this topic at the different levels of society."



*EDE participants visit a sacred temple grove, one of the few remaining stands of Tropical Dry Evergreen Forest, the indigenous ecosystem of the Tamil Nadu coast*





## Economic

The Economic Dimension can be the most difficult week for some, and at the same time, the most fascinating. The week followed the long arc of looking at the current global economic system and its major flaws, to understanding the need and potential for alternative economic systems. Auroville and its numerous economic frameworks, as well as the context of Tamil Nadu and India offered many examples to examine for more detail and practical understanding.



*The EDE group tours Auroville Paper, an example of local sustainable enterprise*

The facilitator for the week was Michael, who has a strong background in economic systems, and brought in many experts on the different areas in order to create a very diverse and informative schedule. Each night of the Economic Week a different film was offered which connected to the current course material.

After the first days engaging with the complexities of the world economy, we then looked critically at Auroville's local economy with site visits to the local cooperative and free store – Pour Tous Distribution Center (PTDC), as well as local businesses Auroville: Paper Factory and Aquadyn. On another day we explored the local Indian economy with site visits to the Sustainable Livelihood Institute and Auroville Village Action Group and time surveying some local village enterprises. We also later looked at social enterprises on a visit to Nadukuppam, a local-enterprise based model in rural Tamil Nadu. We ended the week by examining gift economy and more alternative economic systems in other ecovillages.



*EDE participants conduct interviews with small businesses in the local Tamil village of Edyanchavadi to gain an understanding of the regional economic system*

### Quotes from participants about the Economic Dimension:

"I am entirely convinced that money is no longer viable and that we need to transition to alternative economic systems, and there are many to explore. Systems are collapsing around us terribly fast; a new world demands a new approach to life in an integral manner."

"[It] widened the picture that we have so many more economic systems possible that we could experiment with. Really inspiring and eye opening."





### Worldview

In the fourth week of the EDE, we examined the various structures and beliefs that shape our worldviews, our consciousness, our actions and the way we address reality. The week was held by Ethan again, with many guest speakers and site visits as well as a few timely breaks in the usual weekly rhythm. Primary among these was a two-day retreat to Nadukuppam Ecological Education Center, located in a rural Tamil village where Pitchandikulam has worked with the local school and also encouraged sustainable enterprise with herbal medicine and spirulina. The trip allowed for a lot of free time and exploration but also included classes on Shadow Work and Deep Ecology and gave opportunities for tree planting and learning about traditional Tamil village life.



*The group visited a local Hindu temple around which has grown a protected sacred grove, showing where religion and ecological worldview come together.*



*The closing ceremony of the EDE, held under a huge banyan tree in Pitchandikulam. Connection to nature and the power of ceremony are keys to creating a worldview where regenerative human habitation on Earth is possible.*

Other key sessions for this dimension included an afternoon discussing 'invisible architectures', the inner programming which we are frequently unaware of, an introduction to Ayurveda, an ancient Hindu system of medicine, and a visit to the Sri Aurobindo ashram (out of which Auroville emerged) and school. All of these sessions allowed us to look at different perspectives for understanding reality, and the ways in which we perceive it.

### Quotes from participants about the Worldview Dimension:

"We are all sharing the same vision to contribute to change, which would in the end create a true shared future."

"Our perceptions about development must change and need to consider gross national happiness as our development philosophy."

"Talking to nature is possible."

"Balance: Individual-Group, Conscious-Unconscious, Me-You"





## Integrated Design

The final week of the EDE allowed participants to work together to design and plan a project of their own, as a way to integrate their learning and practice putting the tools they learned to use. Practically this involved creating smaller groups after self-selecting from a list of possible projects that participants wished to implement. We then entered a five-day process of using a tool known as Dragon Dreaming to design these projects. Dragon Dreaming, created by visionary John Croft and based on Australian aboriginal wisdom, follows a continuous cycle of dreaming, planning, doing, and celebrating to move projects along and keep them inspiring, whilst maximizing the skills of each participant. One focus that is frequently forgotten in projects is celebration, which is deeply needed for maintaining the energy and excitement of all involved.



*Members from the Joy of Impermanence team use Dragon Dreaming to turn their collective dream into a plan*

The four selected projects were quite inspiring and diverse in their range of intentions. One group designed (from scratch) a role-playing game exploring interconnectedness in ecology. Another group built upon existing plans and reimagined the possibilities for 'The Hive', a project of Auroville youth to create a space for education and communal living. A third group followed the impulse to start another new community in Auroville called the 'Joy of

Impermanence'. The fourth group used the

existing model of Pitchandikulam to design a new center inspired by this work. The week culminated in a final presentation to the Auroville community, giving the group time to reflect on the whole course and to share it with our gracious hosts.

### Quotes from participants about the Integrated Design:

"Collective dreaming and visioning and space for everyone's aspiration in designing is vital."

"People need to learn about system design in order to help develop projects."

"Everyone needs the knowledge and skills of system design to think of alternative solutions to the current social, economic, and ecological problems we are facing."

"Dreaming together is key to a NEW world."

## Lessons Learnt - notes for future benefit

What could help future EDE's from your experience? What were your biggest learnings?

Our schedule was simply too full. We needed more down time and open space for group processing to maximize the learning experiences for participants. We simply tried to do too much in too little time. So a key recommendation for future courses is to limit hours of class time to a certain number per week to prevent overfill.

Our course size of 36 was also quite big. It was a very diverse group, and very inspiring, but at times we may have had too many people to make an ideal experiential learning environment. For such an intense community experience, more than 25 seems unrealistic for future courses, and less than 25 seems much more reasonable.

Another recommendation is to have co-facilitators for many classes/group times, as the responsibility and energetic demand is quite high for one person.

## Key Trends from the Gaia Education Survey Monkey Evaluations

On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is "not at all" and 5 is "very much", participants (28 out of 32) rated aspects of the course as follows:

	1	2	3	4	5
The course met my expectations	0%	3.6%	3.6%	64.3%	28.6%
The course delivered what it advertised	0%	3.6%	7.1%	53.6%	35.7%
The course was well organised	0%	3.6%	7.1%	50.0%	39.3%
The learning outcomes were fulfilled	0%	3.6%	10.7%	57.1%	28.6%
The Overall Quality of the EDE Programme	0%	0%	3.6%	60.7%	35.7%
The Organisers of the Programme	0%	0%	3.6%	42.9%	53.6%

### **Quotes from Participant Written Evaluations:**

"This has been a deeply moving experience filled with many stimulating challenges and lessons that will fuel my fire for months to come."

"This is really a wonderful course, and I enjoyed it very much. I request to develop the training module in my language also. I would like to convey my thanks to GEN & GENOA both for this wonderful work, globally."

"I wish this course to continue every year; it would help more people to know and follow an eco-friendly life."

"Excellent and decisive experience"

"I want to practice concepts I learned from the EDE in my daily life with my family."

"I am fulfilled and inspired."

There are, of course, a wide variety of quotes giving feedback to the course, ranging from critical to reflective, to highly praiseful. The most glowing reviews are included here because these were the clear majority of reviews, and most critical feedback was quite specific rather than general. There does seem to have been a wish for the different topics to go deeper (especially Sociocracy). Overall, it appears that participants were highly appreciative of the course.

## **Summary of Projects/Activities Participants Intend to Engage in, Inspired by Their Attendance in the Course**

### **Joy of Impermanence (JOI)**

Joy of Impermanence is a project started by youth, which initially aims to provide affordable housing for anyone interested to build themselves, and to help build for others. The idea came to life during the Auroville EDE. JOI embraces the idea of impermanence as a spiritual concept of detachment from possession. JOI hopes to build a sense of trust and abundance in Auroville. It will ideally provide a space to experiment on self-sufficient, closed-loop, low-technology, post-monetary systems and collective intelligence. JOI would become a platform to provide and protect space in Auroville to create impermanent communities until more permanent structures are ready to be started.

### **The HIVE**

The HIVE project was envisioned in June 2015, by YouthLink's core team who wrote a proposal for Auroville's 50th Anniversary (2018) proposals call. The idea was to construct a space, "for the youth, by the youth." The Auroville EDE was an opportunity for the key organisers of the project to reevaluate the project design and plan for the next steps to build energy and excitement for the project. All youth who have been brought up in Auroville and who care about our community's development have been invited to participate in designing this space.



YouthLink is proposing to build a Phase 1 for Auroville's 50th Anniversary in 2018, so that it can become a space to welcome young energy to build the next fifty years of Auroville. The proposed design includes a multi-purpose gathering/presentation/performance space, a resource center/lounge, open-plan office space for start-ups, housing for visiting youth groups and caretaker facilities, with a strong emphasis on sustainable design.

## Other Projects

Several other projects have been inspired by the EDE in Auroville. Course participants from Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Bhutan have plans to create projects that connect to the ecovillage network in Asia (GENOA). In Sri Lanka, one participant has land and aims to build an education center for youth. Bhutan and Bangladesh both have ecological-based projects which have already started, and will now have new inspiration based on the course. Multiple other project seeds have been planted in the Auroville area, ranging from a sustainable t-shirt company to a center for therapy and healing with horses. Several of the attendees from Europe also began imagining how they wish to carry their learning from the course to create community-based projects back home.



*Final moments of the closing ceremony of the 2016 Auroville EDE: so much gratitude!*





## Concise Financial Information Showing Income/Expenditure

The EDE participants paid on a sliding scale according to their means (from 50 to 1300 Euros). It was heavily subsidised for local and Aurovillian participants who made up 50% of the course. Organisers spent the year prior to the course fundraising to cover the remainder of course expenses.

SUMMARY OF EXPENDITURES FOR 2016 AUROVILLE EDE, PITCHANDIKULAM FOREST		
EXPENDITURE	AMOUNT (in Indian Rupees)	Approximate AMOUNT (in Euro)
Food Expenses	1,78,252.00	2,603
Printing & stationary	9,098.00	133
Contribution for PF Guest house	2,38,400.00	3,481
Contribution for Auroville (Guest Central Fund)	1,03,000.00	1,504
Contribution for Venue hire	1,35,600.00	1,980
Travel & vehicle hire charges	53,134.00	776
Faculty charges	2,20,000.00	3,212
EDE organisation staff expenses	3,10,000.00	4,526
EDE Logistics (2 months)	30,000.00	438
Gaia Certification charges	20,000.00	292
Infrastructure expenses	1,21,587.00	1,775
Total expenses	14,19,071.00	20,719
INCOME		
EDE Course Participant Contribution	7,75,431.00	11,322
EDE - Fundraised	6,59,756.00	9,632
Total Income	14,35,187.00	20,954