

## RE-CREATING THE CITY

**In the view of the architect, Richard Rogers, the city offers a “fundamental dichotomy” with “its potential to civilise and its potential to brutalise”. Dramatic evidence of the power of both of these impulses abounds: urban problems are so grave and better options so full of promise. As a result very many people of goodwill are concentrating their energies on developing the civilising and culture-enhancing potential of the city. There must now be hundreds of thousands of initiatives in cities in every continent that focus upon awakening and strengthening the spirit of community. These efforts are immeasurably aided by the growing recognition that real and lasting progress depends upon genuine public participation in city planning, design and interaction.**

As the previous issue of the Newsletter pointed out, we are fast becoming an urban species. When the century began only fourteen per cent of the world's population lived in cities. When the next century begins, the figure will be close to fifty per cent, and growing. Considering this extraordinary change in how and where so many of us now live, it is hardly surprising that the city is in crisis.

In so many ways the culture of the modern industrialised city has fostered self-centredness and an unsustainable way of life. Urban poverty and unemployment; unplanned and chaotic growth; rising crime rates; polluted air and water; harsh and unfriendly streets; development that is driven by the ethos of consumerism – all are ingredients for disaster. These problems breed intolerance, frustration and indifference to the needs of others. They repress the kinder qualities of human nature.

Yet it is the intense concentration of people that also makes the city “a place for multiplying happy chances and making the most of unplanned opportunities”, to use the words of the historian of city planning, Lewis Mumford. French historian Ferdinand Braudel writes of towns and cities as the “electric transformers” that “constantly recharge life”. This image offers valuable insight for it gives emphasis to the abundant energy of the city – energy that is being directed into vigorous and skillful efforts to develop a civilising community spirit by local citizens, planners, economists, business people, public health officers and others. Where these efforts are successful not only is the city emerging as a centre for the development of community but it is also, in the process, becoming the place where participatory democracy is taking root.

In this issue of the Newsletter we feature the re-creating process that is gaining in momentum through the work of people of goodwill inspired by the vision of the city as a place of close-knit, sustainable, life-enhancing communities.

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# RIGHT RELATIONSHIPS

Those of us who live in the intense concentration of human energy that is the modern city face the challenge that it is here in our local streets and in our often pressured workplace that we need to demonstrate the spiritual vision that inspires us. The Ageless Wisdom in its many forms stresses the primary importance of expressing love and goodwill in our daily relationships. "Love thy neighbour": Is this fundamental spiritual directive reflected in our personal involvement in our local city community? How well do we know those who live nearby? Do we support local shops, the local post office, the occasional community event?

"The path of life is one of mutual help" affirms the Agni Yoga teaching.<sup>1</sup> In our busy life we may think we don't have time to offer a helping hand to a neighbour or a colleague at work even if it's a particular circumstance that speaks immediately to us. Yet the bonds we forge through mutual help can tap another dimension and release spiritual energies that deepen friendship and the sense of belonging.

The psychiatrist, Scott Peck, is one of many servers who is helping to awaken the spirit of community and deepen understanding of its dynamics both through his writings, and his work with The Foundation for Community Encouragement.<sup>2</sup> With small groups he explores how to build a group spirit in many different settings. Commenting in one instance on how to improve relationships in a business organisation, he highlights the quality, "organisational courage". He writes: "The giant steps forward in the community building process are taken by those individuals of such courage that they are able to risk speaking at a level of vulnerability and authenticity at which no-one in the group has spoken before."<sup>3</sup> Others will follow this lead, and soon everyone in the group will be talking and relating at a deeper level. This process can be as effective in creating a community spirit in a neighbourhood initiative as in the business world.

On the outer level of human interaction one of the most positive aspects of city life across the globe is the emergence of citizens' groups which are initiating changes in the neighbourhood and campaigning for urban development policies that will make their communities better places to live in and more environmentally sustainable. Most people will know of volunteer groups in their area which work to improve race relations, provide conflict resolution services, help to care for and develop such community resources as schools, libraries, parks and playgrounds, clean up the environment, build community gardens on vacant spaces and recycle rubbish.

These groups generate an atmosphere of goodwill and lift the quality of community life.

In addition there are groups and initiatives that serve to address more subjective levels of community awakening. Groups that work together in prayer and meditation to strengthen the flow of love and light can play a vital role in helping to improve the atmosphere so that outer initiatives will be more effective.

In the books by Alice Bailey the many different spiritual objectives of our time are seen to come together in the goal of creating right relationships within humanity, and between humanity and the other kingdoms of nature. From such a perspective we can see how the recognition of the spirit of community as a key to urban renewal is a profoundly significant one. This recognition – that our sense of belonging and caring for each other has to be the bedrock in which all efforts to renew our cities have their foundation – gives priority to the quality of human relationships which each of us create in our interaction with family, friends, neighbours, colleagues and fellow citizens. It evokes recognition of personal responsibility and its central place in what can seem the almost overwhelmingly impersonal and chaotic issues of urban renewal.

<sup>1</sup> *Community*. New York, Agni Yoga Society, 1926

<sup>2</sup> The Foundation for Community Encouragement (FCE), PO Box 449 Ridgefield, CT 06877, USA.

<sup>3</sup> M. Scott Peck, *A World Waiting to be Born*. London, Rider, 1993 & New York, Bantam, 1993, p.365.

*What are right human relations but love among [people], groups and nations?*

*"Right human relations" is not simply goodwill, as people seem to think; it is a product or result of goodwill and the instigator of constructive changes between individuals, communities and nations.*

Alice Bailey

*A true community can begin to evolve only if the citizens themselves are involved in building it up. A 'Master Plan' unconnected with the people, with its unpleasant undercurrent of 'mastery', can tear a city apart more easily than it can build a better one. For that, citizen involvement is the only creative route.*

Barbara Ward

# THE CITY IN AN AGE OF TRANSITION

In the previous issue of the Newsletter we reported on the rapid growth of cities that has characterised the final decades of this century. Due to the population explosion and mass migration from rural areas beset by poverty Third World cities are growing at an alarming pace. Every ten to fifteen years their combined population doubles. In 1950 New York was the first and only megacity with a population of over ten million. There will be 24 of these by the year 2,000 – 19 in the developing countries and only five (Tokyo, New York, Los Angeles, London, Seoul) in the industrialised and newly industrialised states. In North America and Europe there is no common pattern – some established cities are declining in population while new cities are experiencing a rapidly growing population. But even those cities that are losing people are extending outwards with new suburbs, business parks and shopping centres.

So what does this extraordinary phenomenon of the rise of the city mean in an age of transition? *Time* magazine summed it up. A 1993 edition featured in bold headlines on the cover: “Megacities: The world’s sprawling urban centres are rife with problems – and filled with promise.” On the inside pages this contrast between problems and promise was put more starkly: “Does the growth of megacities portend an apocalypse of global epidemics and pollution? Or will the remarkable stirring of self-reliance that can be found in some of them point the way to their salvation?”

## Cities in Crisis

The problems are horrendous. In the Third World it is essentially a crisis of poverty. Cities have grown at an explosive rate without planning or co-ordination. On average one half of all urban dwellers live at a level of extreme poverty – in Calcutta it is two-thirds and in Addis Ababa the proportion rises to four-fifths. It is in the illegal squatter camps that the poverty is mostly concentrated. Those who live in Third World cities and who have little or no income are unable to obtain land or housing by legal means. Their only choice is to live in the squatter settlements. Here there is at least the chance to build a basic, rough shelter. More often than not there will be no supplies of clean running water, sanitation facilities will be inadequate, transport to whatever work can be found will be harrowing and extremely time-consuming, there will be endemic lawlessness, and the pollution levels in the atmosphere and water will pose a serious threat to health. It is not surprising that *Time* should highlight the very real dangers of epidemics as the nightmare scenario.

There is crisis, too, in the cities of the industrialised world. As the Housing Director of the hard-pressed Scottish city, Glasgow, commented at a recent UNDP conference, the problems facing cities in different parts of the world “are not different in kind, but different in scale”. Many of the cities of North America, Europe and Australasia now have areas of concentrated poverty where there is high unemployment,

homelessness, poor health facilities and where crime is out of control.

Throughout the developed world the automobile poses a key problem. In the World Watch Institute’s 1992 *State of the World Report*, Marcia D. Lowe writes that “many of the world’s cities have allowed the automobile to shape them. Few could foresee that this orientation would plague cities with traffic jams, deadly accidents, noise, and smog, while marginalising people who do not own cars”. A survey by the Healthy Cities project in the London Borough of Camden found that traffic noise and pollution was cited by 70% of those interviewed as the greatest single cause of stress. The growth of suburbs and vast shopping centres on the outskirts of cities adds to the dependence on cars and further encroaches on the countryside.

## Building Community

These problems loom large in media stories. But to focus on the problems alone is to get a lop-sided view. It ignores the positive. It ignores what we like about our cities. And it ignores all the growth points where new values are transforming cities. To find what is genuinely new and fresh in the city environment we need to look not so much at outer, material initiatives (new urban centres, big buildings, new roads) but rather at initiatives (which may involve buildings and material developments) that have as their focus a concern to build the sense of community, an atmosphere of goodwill, a culturally creative and inspiring environment and a humane and secure place in which to live.

In an article on United States’ cities in the *Utne Reader*, Sam Smith writes of the human dimension that offers the hope for big city America. In response to the Los Angeles riots of 1992 he asks: “How could we turn South Central L.A. into a good place to live? It is a revolutionary question because, by asking it, we bring the people of South Central L.A. out of the shadow of stereotypes, statistics and sob stories. We begin to view their problems as we might that of a neighbour rather than of an abstract crisis to which we must dutifully but futilely tithe in the name of doing something. The people living in a poor community like South Central L.A. are mostly normal people in abnormal circumstances.”

New thinking on cities begins here, with people and their empowerment. In the squatter settlements of the Third World in particular it has been this approach that has brought the greatest rewards. There are many examples of neighbourhood groups working together using whatever resources are available to improve their houses, clean up streets and create a more habitable environment. Where local people are involved, making the decisions and choosing the developments most urgently needed, the atmosphere of community is enhanced. City planners and development agencies are increasingly looking to ways of harnessing the energy and creativity of local people. The Kampung Improvement Pro-

ject of Jakarta, for example, gives squatters title to plots of land in return for an agreement that residents will help build footpaths, improve drainage and reduce garbage.

Through the seventies and eighties city planning in Europe, North America and Australasia has mainly been driven in the main by business and market forces. Wider community needs have on the whole been ignored. Now this is changing as concern for the health of the community becomes a priority. New thinking on the social, economic and cultural transformation of cities emphasises the involvement of residents and the fostering of local initiative and innovation. Thus, local elections in San Francisco are no longer solely concerned with electing representatives to public office. Residents are given the opportunity to vote on a choice of development plans and such issues as the amount of office space which should be available in their neighbourhood.

Increasingly the economic health of the nation is seen to depend upon the vitality and creativity of cities. As Charles Londry and Franco Bronchini write: "One of the most striking trends across the world is the rebirth of the city as the driver of economic and cultural change." Again the focus is on harnessing the energy and creativity of local people. Sam Smith's comments on depressed US inner city regions apply equally to any area of the world: "The key to urban economic revival is the development of self-generating economies. Small business is at the heart of self-generating economies, as local people are hired and then can keep the money in the community by spending it at other small businesses." He quotes Jane Jacobs who points out in *Cities and the Wealth of Nations*, that "economic life develops by grace of innovating".

## Environment

Richard Rogers has recently written that it was for him, as an architect, a "shocking revelation" when he realised "that the world's environmental crisis is being driven by our cities". Modern cities consume vast quantities of natural resources and they generate catastrophic pollution. Yet, as he goes on to point out, cities are also emerging as centres of hope where "scientists, philosophers, economists, architects and artists, often working with local communities, are now using a global perspective to explore strategies to sustain our future". It is in experimental urban plans that such cities as

Curitiba in Brazil, Lille in France and Adelaide in Australia are pioneering a future of sustainable development.

One key to new thinking on the environment and on building a healthy community is a focus on public transport systems that meet the needs of people and reduce the dominance of cars in the city. Across the world forward looking cities are investing in trams, trains and buses that provide transport at an affordable price. Inner city areas are being closed to cars and opened up to pedestrians and cycle tracks are being created through busy streets. Such action not only helps the environment and cuts down on pollution – it also creates people-friendly public spaces.

Throughout the world, enlightened urban planners are focusing on the development of neighbourhoods where residents have less need to travel long distances to work or to shop. The idea is to stop cities sprawling out into the surrounding countryside by transforming existing areas into high density housing (with welcoming streets and walkways); parks and public spaces; neighbourhood shops, light industry and offices. Thus the city of the future becomes a network of more self-reliant, more village-style communities where there is less dependence on cars.

As cities compete with each other to attract investment and industry in the global economy they are recognising the importance of a creative and stimulating environment. Art and architecture have a key role to play in generating an atmosphere of vitality and cultural richness. Barcelona, Glasgow, Singapore, Osaka and Sydney are often cited as vibrant centres of art and innovation. Across the United States symphony orchestras have been formed and major art centres like the Kimbell Museum in Fort Worth have been built.

Perhaps our greatest need in this transition period is to generate a positive far-sighted vision of the city of the future. Can we imagine the wonders that an architectural renaissance would bring, with public buildings and private dwellings that lift the spirit and inspire? Can we imagine cities where the diverse ethnic groups live together in harmony and enjoy a full and creative interaction? Can we imagine cities that bring the country into the city streets – with abundant trees and community gardens? Cities in the future can be models of equity and conviviality – experiments in cities around the world are already pointing the way towards these future centres of light.

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*Allowing urban development to spread out upon undisturbed land exacerbates automobile dependence and destroys the natural environment. Yet it is impossible to truly halt development; prohibiting growth in one jurisdiction merely shifts it to neighbouring areas. The key to a livable and viable future for the world's urban areas is neither to encourage sprawled growth nor to try to stifle growth altogether – but rather, to encourage compact growth.*

*Forward-looking municipalities from Toronto to Sydney to Curitiba, Brazil, have discovered that compact development can accommodate expanding populations without despoiling the surrounding environment. These cities are actually using urban growth to their advantage: for example, compact development, by making public transit, cycling, and walking more practical, reduces reliance on cars so that less energy is used and less pollution generated. Filling in their under-used space has allowed these cities to become more pleasant and convenient places to live. With less space paved over for parking lots and urban highways, more room is available for homes, workplaces, and green space.*

Marcia D. Lowe



# SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY

Throughout the world there are countless examples of local groups inspired with the idea of transforming the urban environment by developing neighbourhoods that are models of sharing, co-operative living and the respect and conservation of the natural world.

Many inner city areas have benefited from citizens working together to build and maintain community gardens. One inspired initiative in Detroit is based on senior citizens, 'Gardening Angels', who "provide the hope, a positive example, time-tested knowledge, and patience" to start community gardens and oversee them. Writing in a recent issue of *In Context* Jim Stone reports that the movement began in Detroit when 74-year old Lillian Clark ran out of space in her own garden. She began planting in an adjacent vacant space and others joined her. Since then over 150 similar gardens have been started in the city by Gardening Angels. "Gardening builds community. Three, even four generations join together. The subcultures of fear, violence, and apathy from an instant, disposable lifestyle are broken. People take pride in feeding their family from their own gardens."

Sustainable community networks focus on a wide range of projects. Attention is often given to the local economy – supporting local businesses, fostering employment opportunities and perhaps establishing Local Economic Trading Systems (LETS) where a special currency is used as a means of bartering goods and services. LETS currencies are particularly well established in Canada, the UK, Australia and New Zealand.

Sustainable community networks are also concerned with housing developments that foster a strong community spirit and, above all, conserve and protect the natural environment. There are numerous examples of model housing developments in cities of the developing as well as the industrialised world. Villa el Salvador on the outskirts of Lima, Peru, is a settlement of over 200,000 low-income people. They have joined to form one of the world's largest self-help housing co-operatives. In 1970 poor people occupied government-owned land in the area which was, at that time, predominantly desert sand. Soon after, the government began to support the self-build, co-operative approach of the settlers. While managing their own local affairs, and developing roads, water and electricity supplies and community facilities the residents also chose to make a priority of planting trees and gardens. Today a township on the edge of a city has been built and, in the process, as Herbert Giradet reports, "the desert has turned green".

One approach to community building, co-housing or co-operative housing, has been pioneered in Denmark. Building sites on derelict land in cities, or on the outskirts, are developed to provide a balance between privacy and communal living. Families each have their own small affordable house but shared community facilities (guest rooms, dining halls, workshops, children's playrooms etc) are also built and

jointly owned. Community members eat their evening meal together, either every night or one or two nights a week. Houses are located in such a way as to promote interaction in the courtyard or street. Residents participate in all aspects of designing the project and they share in managing it. There are over 250 co-housing communities in Denmark, ranging in size from 6 to 80 households, and new communities are being designed and built in the United States and elsewhere.

A 1993 issue of *Co-op America Quarterly* featured an article on four volunteer sustainable community groups in the United States. One of the groups is the Florida House Foundation in Sarasota, Florida. Sarasota, one of the fastest growing urban areas in the United States, faces a potential water shortage. The Foundation has built two houses that are models for the conservation of water, energy and waste and for reducing the use of toxic materials. The homes, designed by volunteer architects, were funded by grants from local industry and government.

A sub-committee of the Florida House Foundation, Sustainable Urban Rural Enterprise (S.U.R.E.) works with city planners and business to promote environmental principles. As a result of S.U.R.E. activities the county adopted an economic development plan which states that Sarasota County's economy will emerge as a model of a sustainable community.

Anne Zore writes: "S.U.R.E. is encouraging Sarasota to capitalize on its strengths: a highly developed arts and research community. As a result, leaders are considering how to develop a knowledge-based economy, attracting think-tanks, research institutions and information industries. S.U.R.E. hopes that the Florida House model homes will make Sarasota a centre for sustainable design and increase tourism by attracting sustainable organisers and design professions." Florida House also runs a public education programme on sustainability issues with conferences and meetings where local residents are invited to create a vision of Sarasota in the year 2020.

In Adelaide, Australia, a citizens group, Urban Ecology Australia, and Ecopolis Pty. Ltd., an ecological architecture, planning and design consultancy, have launched the Halifax Eco-City Project. On a 2.4 hectare inner city site plans are well under way to build the Wirranendi community with 350-400 dwellings and an estimated population of 800 people. The project aims to heal and sustain the natural environment which had been seriously contaminated during the site's earlier use as a tannery, bitumen plant and Adelaide City Council depot.

In 1994 The Halifax EcoCity Project received the inaugural 'Worlds Best EcoCity Project' award. Features of the design include: biological treatment and recycling of grey water and sewage; close proximity to public transport; no through traffic (the development will have underground and peripheral parking); greenery on balconies, roof gardens and courtyards which will help cool the urban environment as well as attracting animals and birds; use of solar photovoltaic panels which

will make Wirranendi a power station in its own right; use of only non-toxic building materials; financed in the main from ethical investment sources – a LETS system already operates; the labour-intensive development work will generate added employment opportunities. Wirranendi is being designed through community participation. Almost 700 people have registered an interest in living in the community and over 60 households are participating in a 'Barefoot Architecture' programme "where residents participate in the design of their dwellings whilst learning about the demands of construction, planning and ecology".

A unique aspect of the Halifax project is that development of the inner-city site is being accompanied by work on

a 1,000 acre rural site where permaculture designs are being used to re-establish original vegetation to land which had been over-exploited by its previous owners.

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## CURITIBA

Situated in the south of Brazil, Curitiba is the country's fifth largest city. Like most Latin American cities it has experienced a rapid increase in population since the 1960s due to migration from rural areas. In 1991 Mayor Jaime Lerner estimated that "something like 80%" of the population earned as little as \$500 a year. But Curitiba is not in any way a typical city. Around the world it is cited as a model of urban planning and environmentally sustainable

urban development. Indeed one of the problems the city faces is that it is so successful that it is now attracting an ever increasing number of migrants.

The city's enlightened development plans began in 1970 under Jaime Lerner's visionary leadership. People's needs are at the heart of the plan. Low-cost programmes focused on building parks, housing the poor, providing an efficient waste disposal system, sponsoring centres for the arts and recreation, and developing a unique mass transport sys-

tem. Lerner has been quoted as saying that: "Services like parks and high quality public transportation give dignity to the citizens and if people feel respected they will assume responsibility to help solve other problems."

Old buses have been converted into mobile classrooms where poor migrants learn new skills that can help them to earn a living. Street children are offered apprenticeships where they work half-time in return for meals, a stipend and schooling. Shanty towns have grown →

### THE GREAT INVOCATION

From the point of Light within the Mind of God  
Let light stream forth into the minds of men.

Let Light descend on Earth.

From the point of Love within the Heart of God  
Let love stream forth into the hearts of men.

May Christ\* return to Earth.

From the centre where the Will of God is known  
Let purpose guide the little wills of men –  
The purpose which the Masters know and serve.

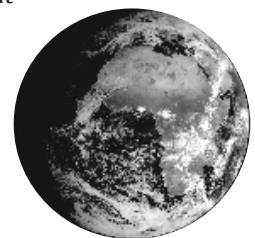
From the centre which we call the race of men  
Let the Plan of Love and Light work out  
And may it seal the door where evil dwells.

Let Light and Love and Power restore the Plan on Earth.

*\*In some translations of the Great Invocation the name by which the Coming One is known in different religions is used, eg. the Lord Maitreya, Krishna, the Imam Mahdi and the Messiah.*

## WORLD INVOCATION DAY

To build a more just, interdependent and caring global society what humanity needs above all, is more light, love and spiritual will. On Saturday, 1st June, 1996 people of goodwill from all parts of the world, and from different religious and spiritual backgrounds unite in invoking these higher energies by using the Great Invocation. Will you join in this healing work by including the Great Invocation in your thoughts, your prayers or your meditations on World Invocation Day?



**SATURDAY 1st JUNE 1996**

up on hilly areas that are inaccessible to the city's large waste collection trucks. These areas are kept clean in a novel way: families who deliver their garbage in sacks to depots receive, in return, bags of groceries and vegetables.

Large disused factories have been converted: an old gunpowder depot is now a theatre; a glue factory has become the Creativity Centre for children's art; an army headquarters has been transformed into the Cultural Foundation headquarters. Busy city streets have been pedestrianised and are now public spaces of vitality enjoyed by all the residents. *Time* reported that, while in 1970 the city had 0.46 m<sup>2</sup> (5 ft<sup>2</sup>) of open space for every citizen, by 1993 it had 51 m<sup>2</sup> (550 ft<sup>2</sup>). It contrasted this with New York City with 14.5 m<sup>2</sup> (156 ft<sup>2</sup>) of open space per capita.

Much of Curitiba's planning has centred around its transport system. In the 1970s a major road system was constructed, with wide arterial routes dividing into three sections: high-speed traffic; slower local traffic; and an exclusive central lane for express buses. Every 400 metres bus stations were built with newspaper stands, postal facilities and pay phones. Land for housing was purchased along these routes and the city settled 17,000 lower income families giving them easy access to the bus system. One standard fare is charged for each trip. As lower-income people live furthest away from the city centre the "social fare" means that shorter routes subsidize the longer routes.

Transport policy has also focused on a bicycle network. By 1991, 53 kilometres of cycleways had been constructed with a further 121 kilometres planned. Mayor Lerner writes: "This programme also calls for the implementation of bicycle parking lots, repair shops, bars, newsagents, meeting points and other attractions along the bicycle networks."

Curitiba's remarkable development plan has, wherever possible, used low-cost appropriate solutions to the problems of the modern rapidly growing city. The bus network was installed in six months adapting roadways that already existed and avoiding the massive investment in finances and time that would have been needed to create a subway system.

## LILLE

The French city of Lille (population 1.2 million) is often cited as a model for environmentally sustainable urban development, with particularly innovative

approaches to transport and waste disposal. Following a local campaign, French Railways was persuaded to run its new high speed channel tunnel link with Paris and Brussels through the centre of Lille, rather than outside it. Built in an area of derelict land in the city centre, the station complex has become a base for a range of environmentally sensitive community programmes. It incorporates a commercial, conference and cultural centre and is surrounded by a new 10 hectare (24 acre) city park. In addition to offices the complex provides housing with car parking spaces below ground.

Public transport has high priority in Lille. The station complex provides access to a new computerised underground metro (LAV – Light Automated Vehicle) system which functions without drivers and guards and an upgraded tramway system with raised platforms providing access for wheelchairs and the elderly. The LAV metro has been copied by other cities in France and elsewhere, including Chicago and Taipei. It has 36 stations, takes over 45 million passengers a year, and new stations are still being opened. Bus services also operate in the city. Some are now fuelled by methane gas from sewage and water purification plants.

The bus, tram and metro network is supplemented by a personal taxi service in outlying areas. A standard price ticket (7.50 francs/\$1.40) will take a passenger by taxi to their nearest public transport stop and on to a final destination anywhere in the system.

Besides transport, Lille is pioneering new approaches to waste disposal. In partnership with national environmental organisation, Eco-Emballages, the city has developed an integrated approach based on the slogan: "throw away less, sort more, process better". French packagers and makers of packing materials pay Eco-Emballages a contribution on each pack they make and over the next 10 years the group has been asked by 100 local authorities to process three-quarters of all their packaging waste.

Householders sort waste into two categories (bio-degradable and others). The non-biodegradable is then mechanically sorted at the most technologically advanced receiving centre in Europe into a wide range of recyclable products. The process employs teams of formerly unemployed workers who spend 20 hours per week in waste-recycling and 20 hours in retraining for new skills. The city's first recycling plant produces 45,000 tonnes of recycled materials a year and a new plant, soon to be built, will double that.

The Lille experiments in transport and waste disposal are being watched closely by cities throughout Europe and across the world.

(Adapted from *People & the Planet* Vol 4, No 1 1995)

## AUROVILLE: CITY OF HUMAN UNITY

Auroville is a pioneering experiment where people from all over the world are seeking to create a city of the future that will be a model of human unity and of unending education. The name, Auroville, is taken from Sri Aurobindo whose teachings on Integral Yoga and the awakening of the Supermind led to its formation. The future city was founded in 1968 by The Mother, a French woman who worked closely with Sri Aurobindo and continued his work. Its visionary charter states, among other things, that: "Auroville will be a site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an actual Human Unity."

Situated on 2,600 acres in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, it consists at present of a number of settlements of experimental communities of Aurovillians who have come from different parts of the world and who live side-by-side with approximately 30,000 Tamil villagers. In 1993 there were over 800 resident Aurovillians. Considerable progress has been made in developing the infrastructure of the future city and in pioneering new approaches to: education; building; organic agriculture and environmental regeneration in the green belt which will surround the city; development work with local villagers; and experiments in communal living. Current projects include construction of a solar kitchen to cook for 1,000 people, the creation of bicycle paths throughout the area, and a collective housing project with common services (incorporating waste water recycling and renewable energies) for 300 people.

In 1968 the land was suffering from two hundred years of deforestation and poor land management. Following a massive tree planting programme the ecology of the area has been transformed from a semi-desert ecosystem to an emerging forest. Tree planting has been combined with the development of organic farms and the growing of food for the community.

Sri Aurobindo writes: "The object of the yoga is to bring down the supramental consciousness on earth, to fix it there, to create a new race with the principle of the

supramental consciousness governing the inner and the outer individual and collective life." Buildings reflect this spirit. Principles of appropriate technology and energy efficiency are used to create innovative structures of remarkable beauty. Auroville is a centre of creativity and of excellence – research and experimentation in appropriate building design and technology, along with work in forest regeneration, is widely studied by experts from around the world.

At the centre of what is to be the future city of Auroville is a building, the Matrimandir, which is to be a symbol of "the Divine's answer to man's aspiration for perfection". The Mother stated that the Matrimandir is to be "the soul of Auroville". Construction of the massive dome (30 metres above ground) began in 1972. The dome houses a vast meditation room and is to be surrounded by a lake and twelve flower gardens. Most of the structure of the building has now been completed and the gardens are being landscaped. The outer skin of the dome is to be covered with gold discs and this is the final major task yet to be completed.

The General Assembly of UNESCO unanimously passed in 1966, 1968, 1970 and 1983 resolutions of support for Auroville, inviting "member states and international non-governmental organisations to participate in the development of Auroville as an international Cultural township designed to bring together the values of different cultures and civilisations in an harmonious environment with integrated living standards which correspond to man's physical and spiritual needs". Auroville's International Advisory Council, which is chaired by Professor

Ervin Laszlo, includes among its members Federico Mayor (Director-General of UNESCO) and Hanne Strong (wife of UNCED Secretary-General, Maurice Strong).

Auroville Secretariat, Bharat Nivas,  
Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu, India.

## HABITAT FOR HUMANITY

Habitat for Humanity International (HFHI) is an outstanding example of goodwill action in the field of housing and community-building. A non-profit ecumenical Christian organisation, HFHI has, since its establishment in 1976, been responsible for building approximately 30,000 houses around the world, providing over 100,000 people with secure, sound affordable housing.

There are a number of keys to Habitat's work that make it, in Coretta Scott King's words, "a vibrant testament to the power of love in action". The movement is based on volunteer labour and donations of money and materials. Local groups throughout the USA (where there are over 1,000 affiliates) and in more than 40 nations consist of volunteers who raise funds, help choose low income families to benefit from houses, and give their time working on the building projects. The labour on Habitat projects is all given freely.

HFHI homes are not given to those in need. Each family makes a commitment to invest hundreds of hours of labour in the building of their house and other houses. They also purchase the house. Habitat houses are sold with no profit and families

are offered affordable interest-free loans. Mortgage payments go into a revolving Fund for Humanity which is used to build more houses.

In the US a 3-bedroom Habitat house costs the home-owner, on average, \$34,300 and mortgages are typically spread over a 20 year period. In developing countries the costs vary between \$500 to \$3,000. US affiliates tithe 10% of their cash contributions to Third World Habitat projects. While building in economically poorer countries is largely financed from these contributions, national organisations are still required to raise as much of the funds locally as possible.

One HFHI affiliate, Homestead Habitat for Humanity, has applied the Habitat principles to a wider programme of community building and ecological responsibility. In 1993 the group began construction with low-income families of a 200-home model community in Florida, Jordan Commons. Pioneering 'new urbanist' neighbourhood designers contributed their services to the project without charge. Jordan Commons features: pedestrian-friendly streets; parks and playing fields; porches and kitchens in the front of houses so people are aware of what is happening in the streets; a self-contained sewage treatment plant using discharged water to maintain playing fields and open spaces; low-cost solar water heaters; and energy efficient buildings.

Habitat for Humanity International, 121 Habitat Street, Americus, GA 31709-3498, USA. T: (+1 912) 924 6935. Fax: (+1 912) 924 6541.

Homestead Habitat for Humanity, PO Box 1509, Homestead, FL 33090-1509, USA.

## *helping to build right human relations*

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