

## INTERNATIONAL ZONE OF AUROVILLE

This compilation focuses on the planning and design aspects of the International Zone of Auroville, and is intended as an aid to planners, designers and decision makers who may be called upon to be involved in the manifestation of one area or another of the Zone.

Section B gives a description of some of the main elements currently in the course of development. These accounts are deliberately brief and intended as examples of the varied approaches. For a complete account of any of these projects, the interested readers should refer to their respective publications.

Section C provides some of the words of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother which are the underlying inspiration for these projects.

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For the Auroville International Zone Group

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The Land







The Model of Auroville : The International Zone is the triangle in the foreground

# **The Pavilions Area of the International Zone in Auroville**

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## A. Planning Aspects

### The Site

The International Zone of Auroville, radiating out from Matrimandir towards the West, is limited in the North and the South by the proposed Mahasaraswathi and Maheshwari Parks, in the West by the Green Belt and the Outer Ring Road. It comprises an area of about 68 ha, formed by the Crown Development with about 4.5 ha and the Pavilions Area with 63.5 ha (this does not include the “Unity Area” which lies between the Crown Development and Matrimandir).

The Zone is subdivided into the following areas:

- The Crown Road and the Crown Development (a ring-shaped chain of Institutional Buildings around the Unity Area with Matrimandir in its centre);
- The Pavilions Area (where Cultural Pavilions of the world are to be located);
- The area of the Visitor’s Reception Centre (close to the proposed Outer Ring Road);
- The proposed Traffic Exchange Node, located between the Outer Ring Road and the Visitors Reception Centre.

In addition, the main campus of CIRHU (Centre of International Research of Human Unity) is located in the Unity Area between Matrimandir and Crown Development.

The area is gradually sloping towards the West, creating a level difference of approx. 17 m between Matrimandir and Outer Ring Road.

A major canyon cuts through the Southwestern corner, separating the Visitor’s Centre and the Traffic Exchange Node. This fills up during the rainy season in November/December. There are two minor tributaries running towards it.

The tar road between the villages of Edyanchavadi and Kotakarai runs along the western border of the Zone. From here an earth-road connects the Visitor’s Centre, Bharat Nivas, Savitri Bhavan and Matrimandir.

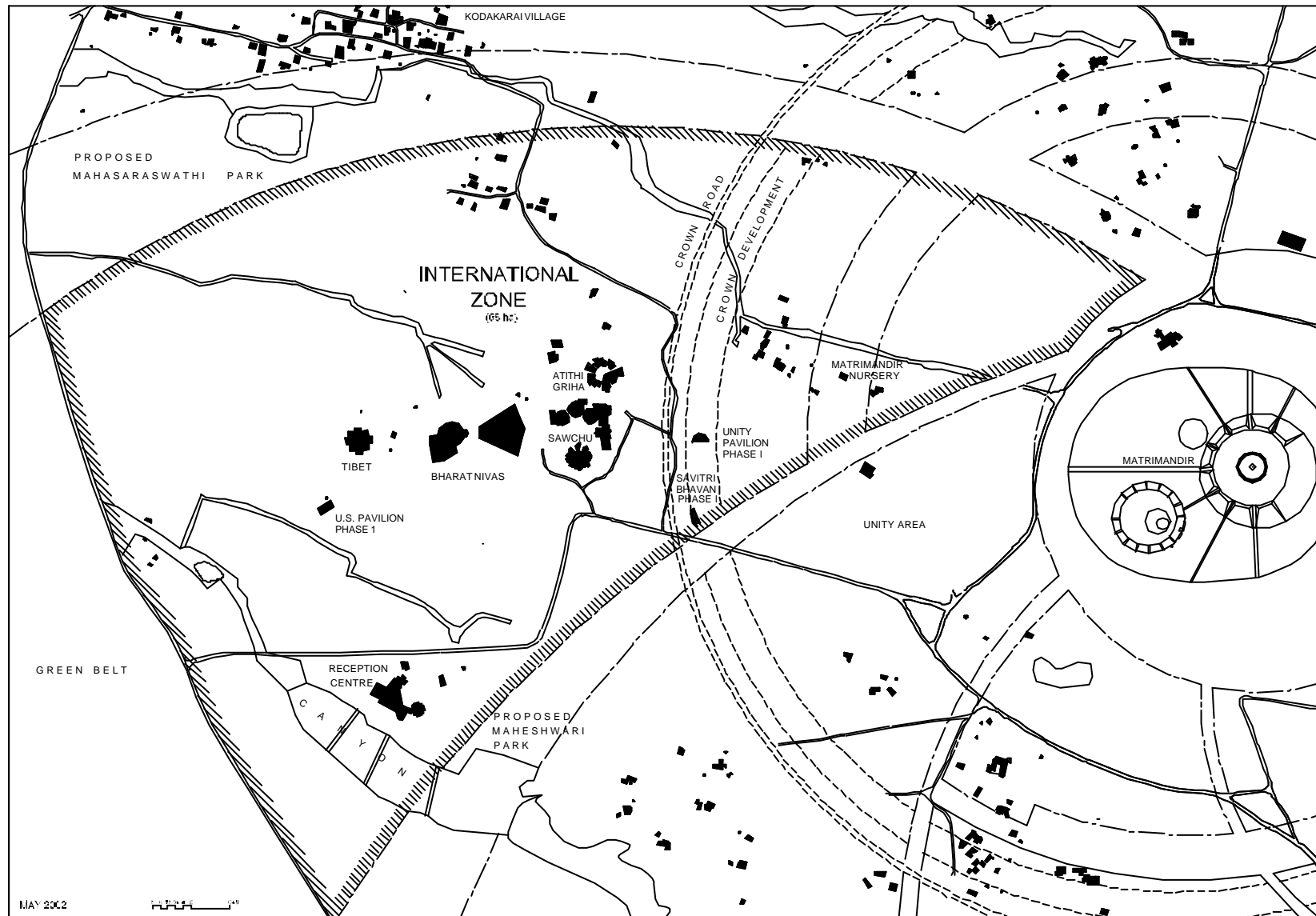


Figure 1. The International Zone of Auroville, existing situation, June, 2002

The existing permanent buildings are the Visitor's Reception Centre, Bharat Nivas Complex (the Indian Pavilion), the US-American Pavilion and the Tibetan Pavilion (both under construction), Savitri Bhavan (first phase completed) and the Unity Pavilion (under construction).

## **The Brief**

The pavilions will be a part of the faculty of "East-West & Human Unity" of the Sri Aurobindo Institute of Educational Research (S.A.I.I.E.R.).

The aim is to establish cultural pavilions in Auroville representing the different cultures of the world. They are expected to transmit to students, teachers, scholars and whoever is interested, the unique qualities of these cultures in a living, creative and experimental manner.

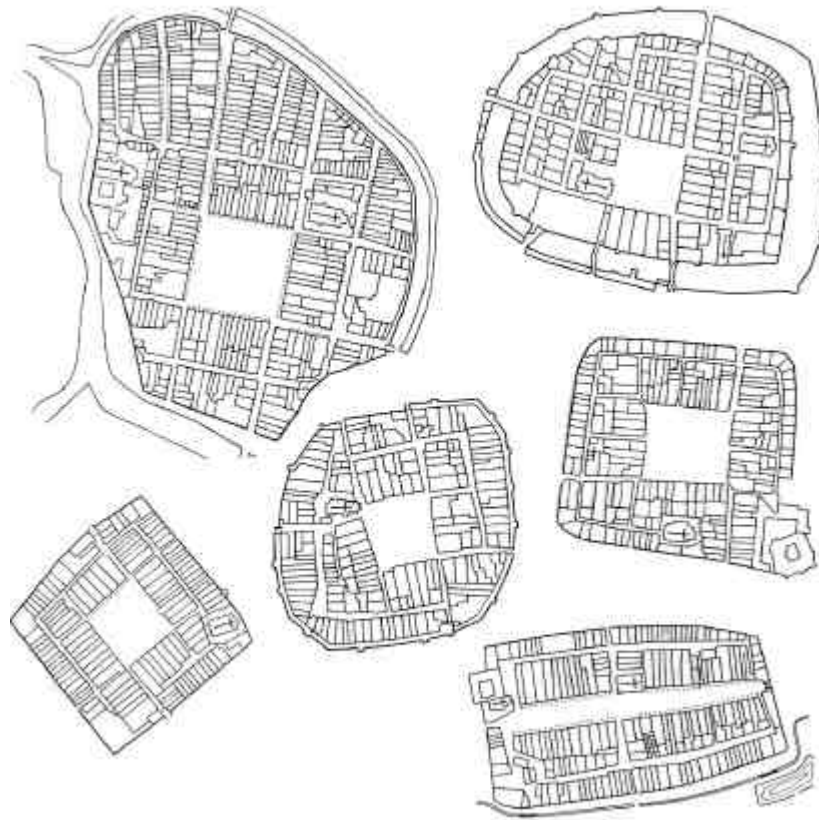
The Mother, Auroville's founder, has spoken of "a kind of permanent world-exhibition," (see annexe) but her words make it very clear that this project is part of an international educational centre and intended to be a very living area, more like a "cit  universitaire" than a formal exhibition ground...a place where all the colourful cultures of the world can come together in a vibrant harmony.

The planners should not attempt to reproduce on Auroville soil the pink, green, blue, purple and yellow of the ever-changing political map of the world (with dangerous "missionary" undertones) but allow a truer and more illuminating image of the complex cultural currents which have emerged in the course of human evolution up to the present, some of which probably contain yet-unexplored richness to contribute to the evolution of the future man.

Moreover, the extent of international participation, the expanse of the Pavilion Area, its speed of growth, its contents, future life and requirements in the context of the whole of Auroville, can today only be guessed.

This calls for open-ended planning, not a "frozen" master plan; for the postulation of a series of growth options, providing for a step-by-step development with the provision of possibilities for learning and change. No fixed and pre-conceived end-picture should be imposed.





The Focal Point of the Medieval Town

However, the plan should not only give room for isolated pavilions, but also encourage other categories of development, such as

- Phase wise development of pavilions according to approved target-plans;
- Shared projects (such as the “Unity Pavilion” already under construction);
- Group projects with common facilities (such as a cluster of buildings with collective facilities for common use);
- First small beginnings (like a shop, a flat, an office or a guest house) for cultural groups to start work. (As in Pondicherry there are hostels for groups from Orissa, Gujarat, Bengal; or the “auberges” of different religious groups in Jerusalem, for example).

All these types of development should be allowed space within the plan, so that they can happen not only one after another but simultaneously according to the readiness and budget of the different participants, so as not to block or discourage any good effort or intention.

## The Concept

To provide a coherent framework that would allow all these types of participation to find an appropriate place, the concept of an urban web developing around focal points is proposed. The development of the areas for the Pavilions of the International Zone would then follow the structure and growth pattern of a city, a small town or a village, expanding from a centre or square (surrounded by public, shared buildings), providing identity, legibility and flexibility at the same time.

The emphasis is on allowing an organic process of orderly growth. It is a concept with centers, which provide identity, encourage collaboration and participation beyond the “national cultural pavilion”.

This model allows for different types of representations in time and space: first groping beginnings (which can progress in accordance with the ongoing work) as well as robust and determined initial statements.

In a situation where we do not know which cultural entities are going to wish to be represented, or when or how, this conceptual idea seems to be most appropriate. What is proposed now is a lay out which identifies major focal points, defines areas of influence or “magnetic fields”, the links and transitions between them, and the directions of growth. When a project is ready to manifest, a variety of locations can be identified and evaluated, resulting relations to others can be assessed, and an informed decision be taken.

Thus there is no need now to allot specific sites or plots for pavilions that have not yet reached the conception stage. If the main principles are clear, each one can join on different levels of readiness, where and as they feel most prepared.

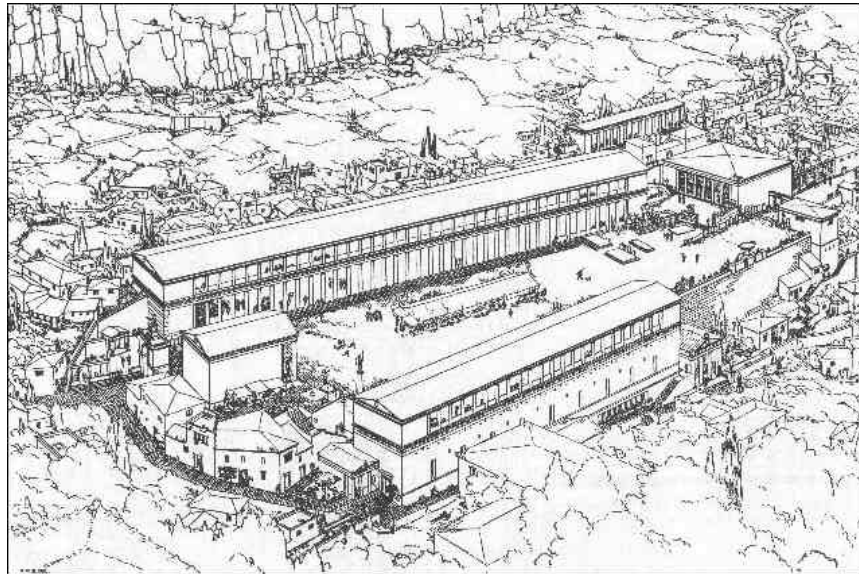
Ideally, the principal focal point would be surrounded and defined by larger public and highly-frequented shared buildings and facilities, such as halls for music, theatre, exhibitions and other events, libraries, restaurants, shops, etc., so as to create a lively public space and open air foyer, even and especially in the evenings.

The focal points will be related to cultural groupings that, because of their evolution through history, belong to “families”. It is proposed to subdivide the area according to continents.

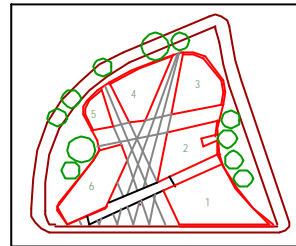
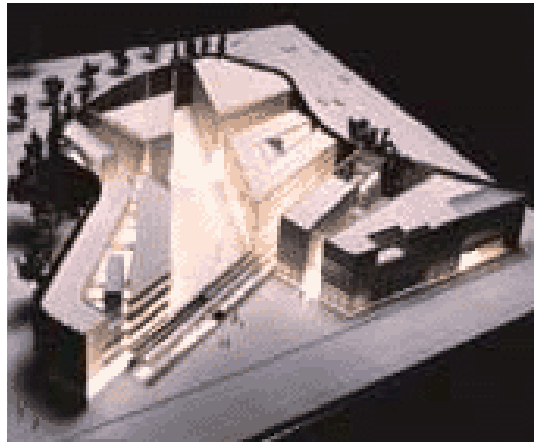
Each of the foci might have a distinctive form and character: The focal point for Europe, for example, could be the sort of colonnaded urban space that is found in so many European townships – The “Agora” of the Greeks, the “Forum” of the Romans, the Piazza or Town Square – a very European concept of urban space. For Africa it could be organic clusters around a “village maidan” or a “chieftain’s house”; for the Americas a “quadrangle” of a University Campus. Perhaps it is a “Mandala Garden” for Asia.

The formation of sub-centres is encouraged, such as for “Scandinavian Culture”, “Mediterranean Culture”, “Caribbean Culture”, etc.

Any rigid zoning is to be avoided. In the same way that no rigid borderline can be drawn around a continent (in a cultural sense), no sharp linear demarcations should define the proposed continental areas.



An Example of a Greek Agora



1. Common Facilities
2. Finland
3. Sweden
4. Iceland
5. Denmark
6. Norway

The Example of the “Nordic Embassies” in Berlin

The given borderlines, far from outlining continental “territories”, are necessary to allow calculations of planning parameters, such as available spaces, densities, building heights, etc.

The focal points, sub-centres and their connecting streets are supposed to form “public spaces”, providing ample opportunity for outside activities. For this to take place careful urban and architectural design has to happen, not only for single buildings, but also and especially for the spaces in between. The decision taken by the International Zone Group to base the mobility pattern of the Pavilions Area entirely on pedestrian movement is an indispensable precondition.

The absence of motorized traffic recreates the original friendship between street and surrounding buildings. It allows closeness and an intimate connection between the in- and outdoors, and, last but not least, human scale. These are factors fostering a vivid street life.

There are no residential areas defined within the lay out. Residences, hostels and apartments are best to be interspersed between other functions. The whole Pavilion Area is earmarked for “mixed use”, another important precondition for life (and security) in public spaces.

The proposed flexible planning approach and the concept of “mixed use” mutually support each other.

## The Lay Out

The Pavilion of India, “Bharat Nivas” already exists right in the middle of the development area.

The subcontinent of India has a special role to play. As the host of the whole Auroville project it rightly forms the centre. Around “Bharat Nivas” more pavilions of Indian culture are expected to come. The Pavilion of Tibet is already established there, its construction in the finishing stage.

All future buildings in this sector will be surrounded by greenery, forming a kind of central park for the zone as a whole.

In a semicircle around India four “focal points” are laid out: for the cultural entities Europe, Asia (incl. Oceania), the Americas and Africa (incl. Middle

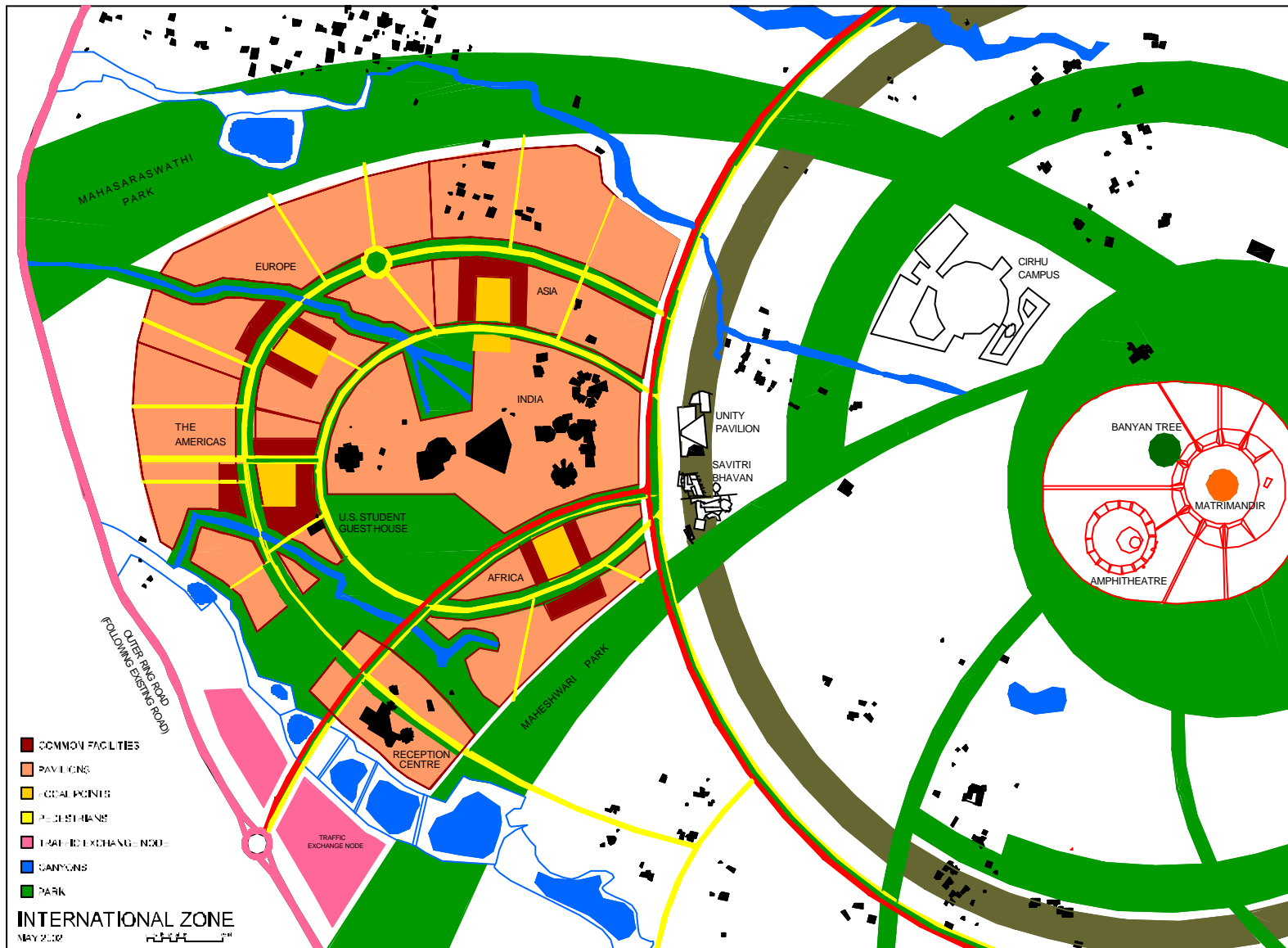


Figure 2. International Zone of Auroville : Landuse Plan

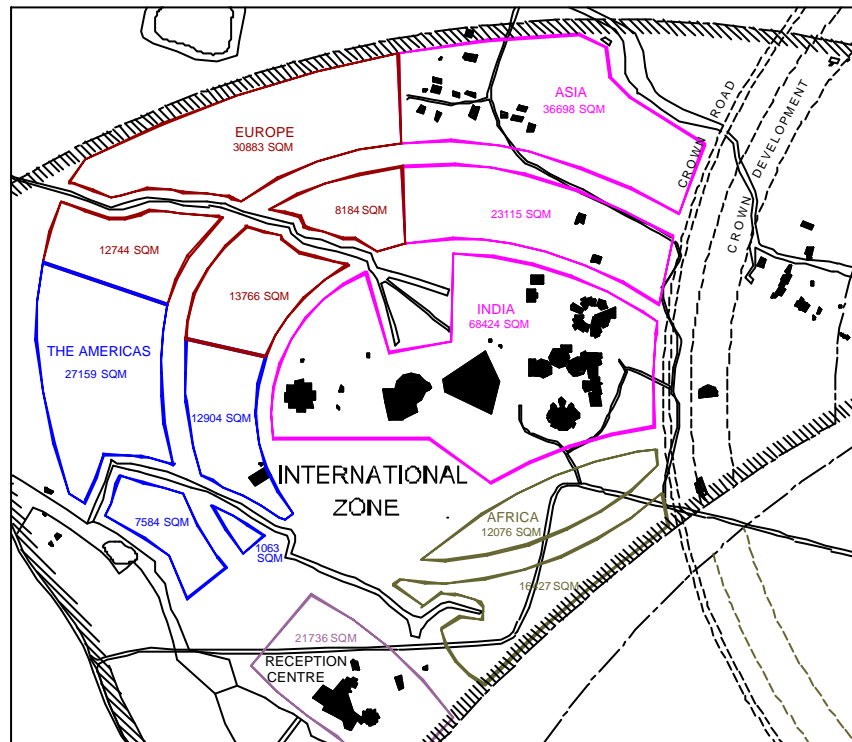


Figure 3. International Zone of Auroville : Areas

East). These continental areas are arranged roughly in the sequence they appear on a world map. The focal points, central open areas designed as “public spaces”, serve as nodes from which development can start and move outward: it is the concept of the growth of a village or small town that takes place around a square or market place.

These centres will be surrounded by the most important public buildings (such as music- or exhibition halls, etc.) but also by multipurpose structures, allowing “mixed use” (such as book shops, cafes, offices, hostels, even language schools etc.). Here floor area and subdivisions should be as flexible as possible so that they can easily be altered according to need. These structures are important since they allow variety, flexibility and invite many colourful participants in the very centre, throughout the day. This creates life and helps to avoid “dead facades”.

Very small first beginnings by cultural groups who are naturally uncertain about their contribution, future progress and finance, especially deserve encouragement. As we know, a small seed might grow into a big tree. They are invited to participate in one of the above mentioned multipurpose structures at the main square. But an alternative to accommodate such first small initial efforts could be offered in the form of a small street for uses like row-houses, galleries, shops, etc. This street with its own special atmosphere should be well connected to the main square (=focal point).

When the first step proves successful and new perspectives and financial means become available, an expansion in the form of a new and bigger “plot” could be “acquired”, and the old one either passed on to a “beginner” or kept as a subsidiary. The concept of an urban web allows this easily and flexibly.

Or participants might gather other members of their cultural family and create a sub-centre around a little “plaza” or courtyard, within easy walking distance of the main focal point, utilising commonly shared facilities to save cost and thus forming a “public space”. Why shouldn’t “Mesoamerican Culture” or “Islamic Culture”, etc. come together in this way? It is worthwhile to look at the recently inaugurated “Northern Embassies” in Berlin, where the Scandinavian countries have joined forces for exactly such an approach. (see p.6)

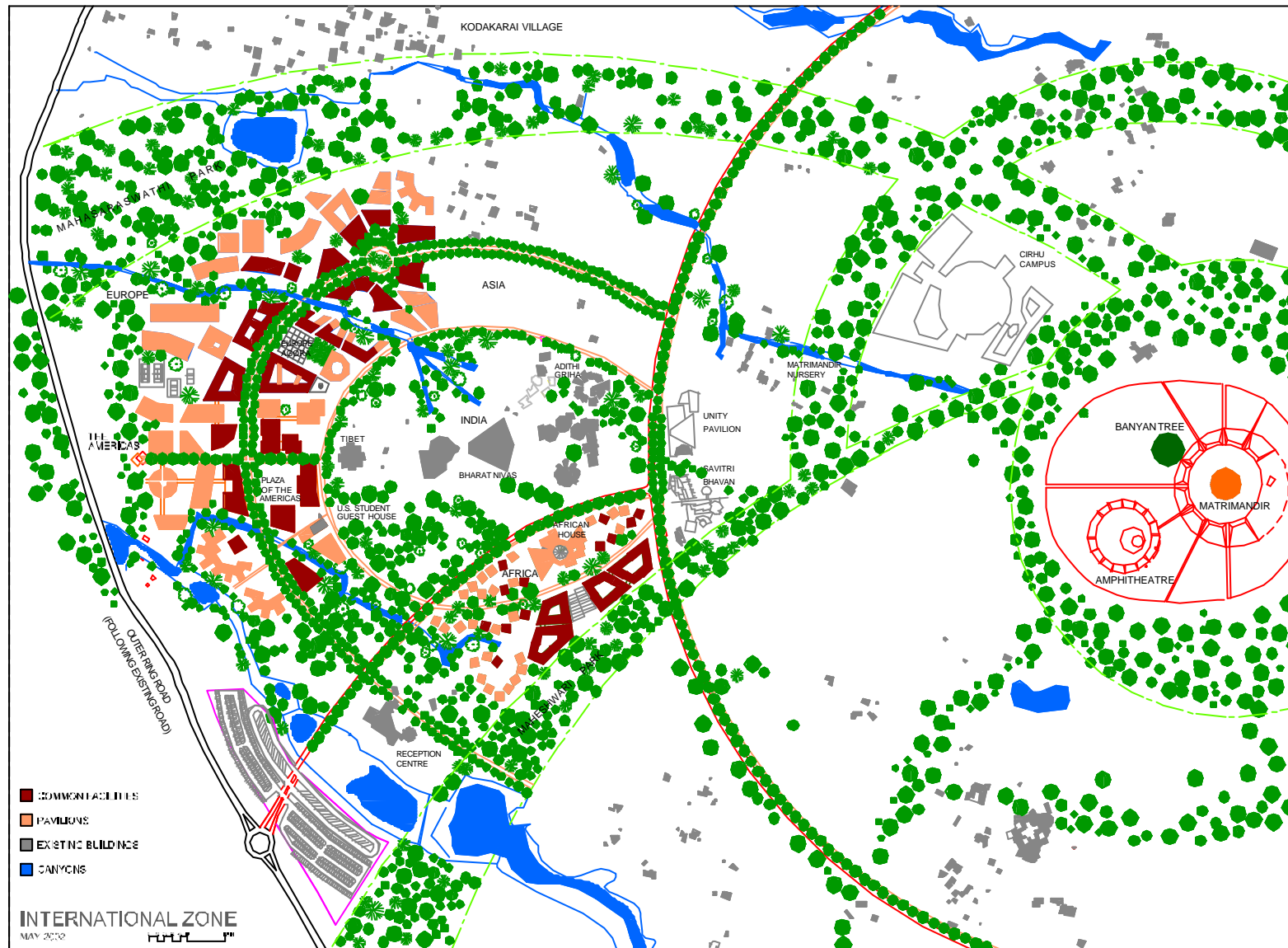


Figure 4. International Zone of Auroville : Site Plan  
(A Proposal for "Asia" is in the design stage)



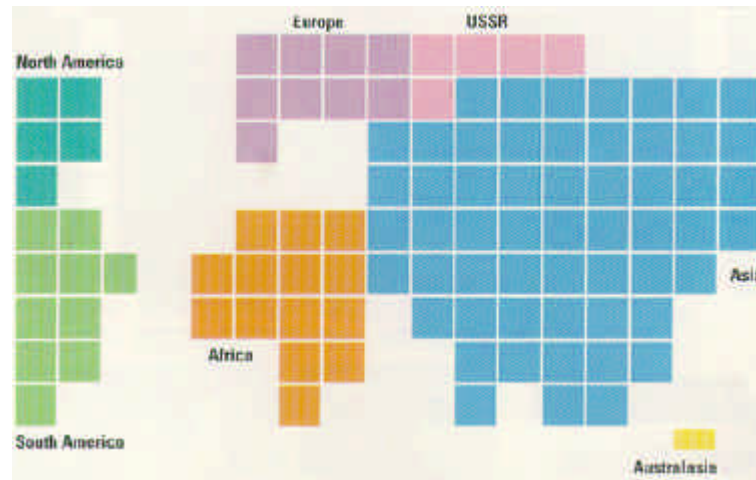


Figure 5. Population by Continent  
(Each square represents 1% of the world total in 1990)

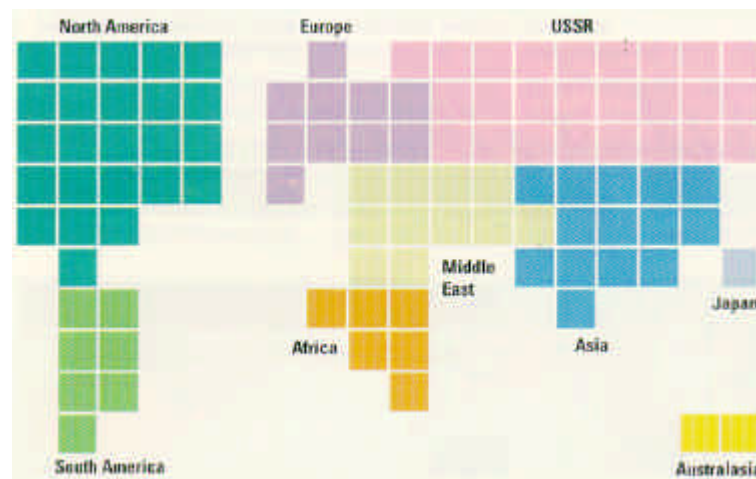


Figure 6. Production by Continent  
(Each square represents 1% of world energy production in 1990)

## Area Subdivision

After subtraction of major street areas there are 27 ha available to be occupied by pavilions.

How can this area be subdivided, how much should be assigned for each continental family, keeping in mind cultural value and importance? How can cultural achievement be measured and expressed in area? Or can it simply be done according to demographical data, e.g. population figures? (In this case 60% of the land would have to be allotted to Asia). To what extent should one allow wealth or productive potential as a factor, since availability of funds usually determines development? Surely it wouldn't be right to distribute the land equally according to the number of nations.

To cut a difficult question short, which would require much more research, it is suggested to multiply population and production figures and share the available area proportionately. This leads to the following result:

Asia 12.9 ha (48%); Europe 6.5 ha (24%); The Americas 4.9 ha (18%); Africa 2.8 ha (10%). (fig. 7, p.12)

## Density

Certain densities need to be fixed in order to monitor growth and to allow for future development. Uncontrolled "sprawl" would not be a desirable end-picture.

If we assume an average building height of 2 storeys (envisaging 3 storeys around focal points and 1 to 2 storeys at the periphery), deduct about half the area (for access roads, public spaces, green areas, technical infrastructure, etc.) and decide on an average ground coverage of 50%, the maximum area to be built up would amount to roughly half the area available (Floor Area Ratio = 1).

With these parameters we arrive for the final stage at a possible maximum of 69,000 sq.m. for Asia, 35,000 sq.m. for Europe, 25,000 sq.m. for the Americas and 15,000 sq.m. for Africa. These figures are built up (gross-) areas. To calculate carpet areas, 25% to 35% has to be deducted.

According to the Auroville Master Plan 2001 not more than 600 permanent residents are foreseen in the area. But in addition we expect in the final stage more than 7,000 persons regularly working there. This figure includes gardeners, watchmen and regular students, but not casual visitors.

These calculations are first assessments and need further discussion. They have only a preliminary value. They are meant to give an idea of the dimension and magnitude. A meaningful decision on a reference plan depends not only on questions of height development, densities or aesthetical concepts, but most of all on considerations of land-use, particularly on the extent to which housing is allowed to be integrated within envisaged “mixed-use” areas.

## Visitor's Reception Centre

The International Zone is considered to be the main “gate” to Auroville. Visitors who are interested in Auroville will make a first contact in info-centres located in Pondicherry, in Promesse on the Madras Road, as well as in Mudaliar Chavadi on the East Coast Road, before they arrive in the International Zone.

The existing Visitor's Reception Centre – located between the areas of the Americas and Africa – is the showcase of Auroville and the place of contact for people wishing to know more about Auroville, its background and aims, people and activities. It is in the process of being greatly enlarged not only to serve as a protective buffer to the interior of the township, but also to fulfil its educational purpose by providing all the means of thorough information.

About 20,000 sqm. of area is reserved for the development of the Visitor's Reception Centre; this provides the possibility of about 11,000 sqm. built-up area as a target figure.

Here the future development as “the gateway to Auroville” is most difficult to foresee. We therefore recommend to leave ample space for the unexpected. This is manifested in the proposed green area leading from the main canyon up to the Bharat Nivas buildings. (fig. 2, p.7)



Existing Visitor's Reception Centre

	A		B	C	D	E	F	G	H
	Usable surface area as per landuse plan (sq.m.)	%	to compare : population x production %	25% of A green spaces in built up areas (sqm.)	15% of A technical infrastructure (sqm.)	A-(C+D) surface available for buildings (sqm.)	90% of E net surface area (less minor access rds.) (sqm.)	built up area (coverage 50%, FAR=1, no. of floors=2) (sqm.)	No. of places (based on 45 sq.m. floor area/per.) (nos.)
<b>ASIA</b> (Incl. Oceania)	1,29,003	47.5	45	32,250	19,350	77,403	69,663	<b>69,663</b>	1,548
<b>EUROPE</b> (Incl. Russia)	65,577	24.1	23	16,394	9,836	39,347	35,412	<b>35,412</b>	787
<b>THE AMERICAS</b>	48,710	17.9	21	12,177	7,036	29,227	26,304	<b>26,304</b>	584
<b>AFRICA</b> (Incl. Middle East)	28,503	10.5	11	7,126	4,275	17,102	15,392	<b>15,392</b>	342
<b>TOTAL</b>	2,71,793	100	100	67,947	40,767	1,63,079	1,46,771	<b>1,46,771</b>	3,261
<b>RECEPTION CENTRE</b>	21,736			5,354	3,260	13,042	11,738	<b>11,738</b>	261
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	2,93,529			73,381	44,027	1,76,121	1,58,509	<b>1,58,509</b>	3,522

Note:

We have to expect an additional equal number of people working outside buildings as gardeners, watchmen etc.; this would sum up to a total of 7,000 persons working in Pavilions Area and Reception Centre. Amongst them, 600 will be residents (in correspondence with the Auroville Master Plan).

Time horizon: after 5 years: 200 pers., after 10 years 1,000 pers., after 25 years 7,000 pers.; there are at least 2,000-3,000 visitors/day to be expected after about 15 years.

These figures do not include Unity Pavilion, Savitri Bhavan, C.I.R.H.U.

Figure 7. International Zone of Auroville : Landuse, Densities and no. of Residents or Workplaces (incl. Visitor's Reception Centre)

## **Circulation Pattern**

The International Zone is conceived as a pedestrian area with restricted access for motor vehicles.

Aurovilians on their way to the International Zone will take the public transport system circulating along the Crown Road, to arrive at a stopping point near Savitri Bhavan or Unity Pavilion. From here it is easy walking distance to reach all points of the Pavilion Area.

Guests and visitors arriving in Auroville's International Zone in buses, cars or two-wheelers will be received at a transport mode exchange area, located between Visitor's Reception Centre and Outer Ring Road. Here parking facilities for buses, cars and two-wheelers will be offered and guests and visitors will be distributed to pedestrian boulevards, cycle paths or Auroville's public transport system, consisting of non-polluting shuttle buses. Cycles for rent can also be obtained at this point. One arrives at the Visitor's Reception Centre after crossing the canyon; from here the centres of the different continental areas can be reached via shaded alleyways within a few minutes walking.

## **Implementation Process**

After a decision on general layout, land use and circulation, design proposals will be invited for the four focal points, based on possible scenarios of future requirements.

This can be achieved by asking young planners and architects from the different cultural areas, who are best able to express the spirit of their continent, to work on the urban design.

After approval, a few development principles and bye laws need to be laid down (land use, sequence and character of public spaces, heights and density, building types, choice of materials, etc.) as well as priority areas and –phases to be defined in each continental sector, for the different categories of development.

These parameters will be the base for the architects' brief and detailed work on building design.

## B. The Beginnings

### Asia

The area representing Indian Culture will have a special significance. Since Auroville manifests on Indian soil, its host country India will be located in the centre of the International Zone; it will also form the heart of the Asian development.

This does not exclude the formation of sub centres, e.g. for Chinese Culture or Pacific Culture.

### India

Bharat Nivas, the Pavilion of Indian culture, started the building activity in the pavilion area of the International Zone. Though still ongoing, there are a multitude of activities. A couple of earlier buildings as well as new ones are in use since many years already.

The Sri Aurobindo Auditorium (with 850 seats) is the focal centre. It has been the venue of several International Seminars, a wide range of dance and theatre presentations, music recitals, workshops, art events, film festivals and lectures. It plays a major role in the daily life of Auroville.

Kala Kendra is located in the adjacent circular building. A centre for Arts of India is being set up here, where artists are offered studios and workshops for studies and experiments in the various arts and techniques of India. There is also an art gallery nearing completion.

Another building, Gnana Vijnana Kendra, is dedicated to research in Indian Culture. It houses a select library on Indian Art, Classical texts, culture and history. Seminars, workshops, language classes and exhibitions are being organised here for interactions between Aurovilians and visiting Indian personalities from culture and science.

A new building, the “Sri Aurobindo Centre of Human Unity”, plays an important role as a meeting place for the use of Aurovilians. Nearby Atithi Griha guesthouse allows to accommodate 30 persons.

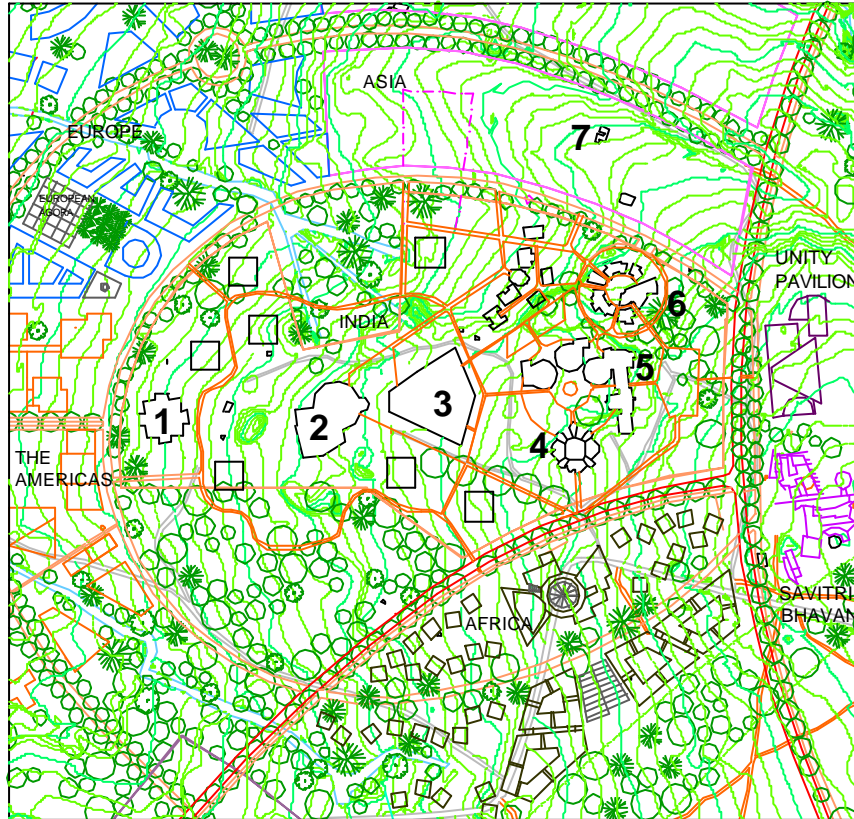


Figure 8. Bharat Nivas area (1.Pavilion of Tibetan Culture, 2.Kala Kendra, 3.Sri Aurobindo Auditorium, 4.Sri Aurobindo World Centre for Human Unity, 5.Gnana Vijnana Kendra, 6.Atithi Griha Guest House, 7.Tamil Heritage Centre)





His Highness the Dalai Lama laying the foundation stone for the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture

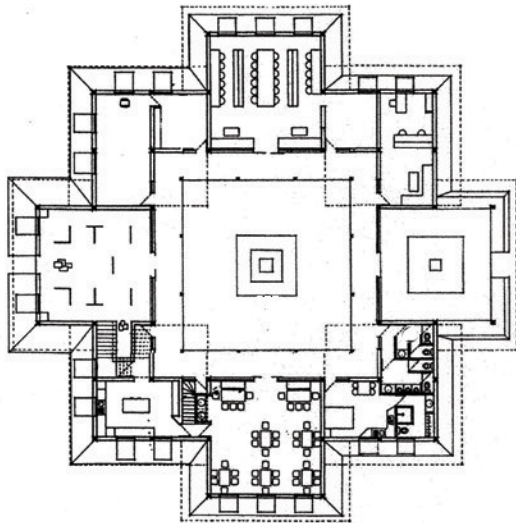


Figure 9. The Pavilion of Tibetan Culture : Ground Floor Plan

### Tibetan Culture

On Christmas 1993, His Holiness the Dalai Lama came to Auroville to lay the foundation stone of the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture in the International Zone of Auroville. He personally contributed Rs.1,20,000 towards its manifestation.

Though the construction of the pavilion is not yet completed, cultural activities are held there regularly in order to open a window on the ancient culture of Tibet and to reflect the aspirations and achievements of the Tibetan people and the contribution of their culture to the world. Also, many Tibetan students have been trained in different skills like appropriate building technology, afforestation and environmental protection, etc.

Already in 1973, while visiting the Ashram in Pondicherry, the Dalai Lama had said:

*"We are deeply impressed by the spiritual aim behind the building of an international city called Auroville. The importance of the effort to achieve human unity and international co-operation by the creation of such a city cannot be over-emphasised: nor can we neglect the benefit to be acquired from it. We are therefore very keen to be the first country to build a Pavilion. We understand that this Pavilion will be dedicated to the essence of Tibetan Culture in an effort to show that out of the diversity of world cultures, these pavilions can help to create a new harmony towards world human unity".*



## Africa

It is proposed to subdivide the African Area (which includes the Middle East) as follows:

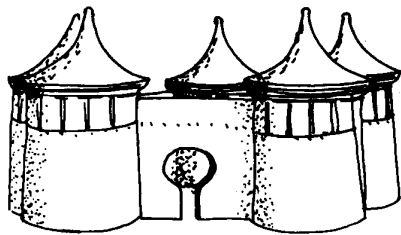
- The Africa House in central position;
- An area predominantly occupied by the cultural representation of the Middle East and the North Africa;
- An area predominantly reserved for the pavilions of the sub Saharan cultures.

A look at the architectural history and expression of these geographical areas reveal distinctive different traditional architectures and urban design principles.

In the Southern African and sub Saharan countries the building tradition is based on the village culture, which has produced an amazing number of impressive variations of the “hut”-theme – single standing or grouped in compounds, sometimes around a huge common assembly hall or a chieftains residence – always crafted with excellent workmanship and skillfully executed details in carved wood or bamboo-related materials.

The Middle East and North Africa show a different picture. Here, due to an arid climate and a scarcity of timber, mud is the major building material, leading to a built environment that is completely different in atmosphere and appearance. The two storied-building is the norm (except occasional high-rises as in Yemen), forming relatively closed façades along narrow lanes, but opening towards cool and shady courtyards. The woodwork is restricted to intricate latticework in doors and windows, apart from the larger sections of necessary roof beams; where those are difficult to obtain the culture of the vault and dome has become a tradition.

In the African area of the International Zone these traditional building cultures must find their modern and appropriate expressions.



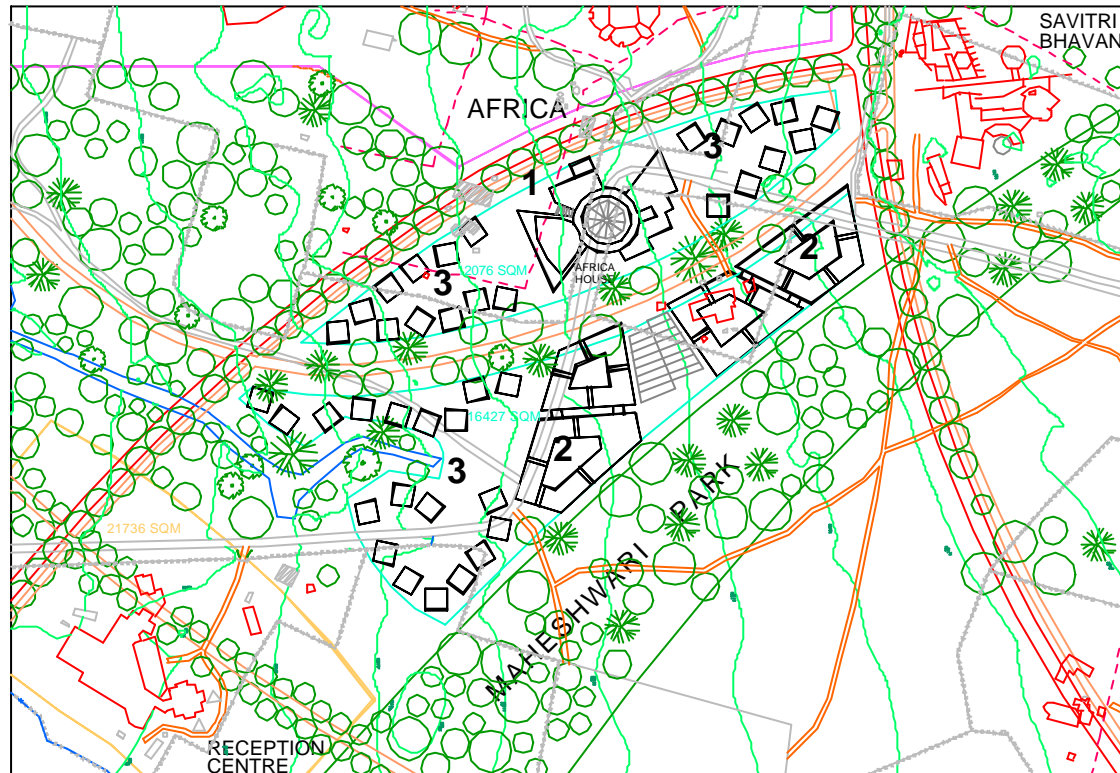


Figure 10. The Africa Zone (1. Africa House, 2. North Africa & Middle East, 3. Sub Saharan Africa)



Examples of the Traditional Architecture of sub Saharan Africa



Examples of the Traditional Architecture of North Africa and the Middle East

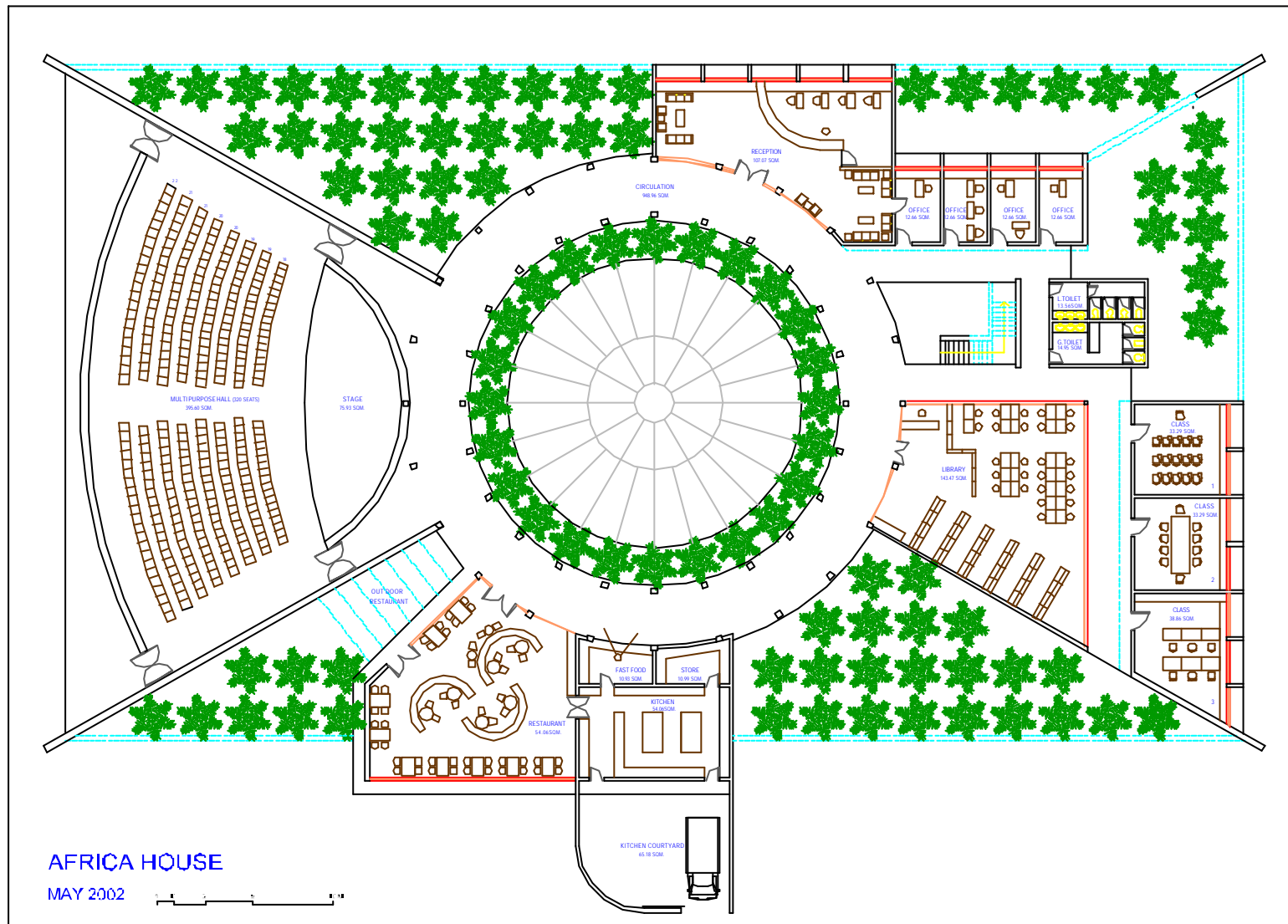


Figure 11. A Proposal for Africa House : Ground Floor

## The Americas

As a Master Plan for the American area, the idea of the “campus” has been explored. The campus as a development plan is a very flexible model; it can easily be expanded, condensed and adapted to any future need. Single standing buildings, sometimes connected by covered walkways, are arranged around interlocking green quadrangles or “quads”, with the biggest one, surrounded by the most important and shared facilities, forming the centre. The campus is entirely based on pedestrian movement and is accessible from all sides.







The proposed design

### The Student Guest House of the U.S. Pavilion

The Design/Build Program of the University of Washington provides student designed and built structures that utilize appropriate technologies and sustainable building practices. The local community and local artisans are involved in the building process, so that a sustainable building emerges that is suitable to the local environment.

The U.S. Pavilion group in Auroville, recognizing the opportunity that was presented, took the initiative and invited the Design/Build Program to construct a student guest house for the Americas area - conceived as a first building of the U.S.A. Pavilion complex.

On January 4th, 2002, Auroville welcomed 32 students, 5 professors and 5 teaching assistants from the University of Washington, Seattle to begin construction of the first phase of the U.S.A. Pavilion – the Student Guest House.

The building is being planned for groups of up to 12 people. Its orientation is based not only on the considerations of seasonal climate and monsoon, but also with a flow of space that will open out to include future neighbors of the Americas site. Gradually, as the project proceeds, the design of the main structure of the U.S.A. Pavilion will emerge. This first space will express and contain the vibration of the U.S.A. in a living and evolving way as students, researchers, and artists come to stay, learn and contribute to Auroville.



The start of the construction site of the Student Guest House of the U.S. Pavilion, Jan., 2002

## Europe

The Agora of the European cultures cannot be an imitation of historic market places. Learning from the past, it must be an expression of the “Here and Now”, and rather point towards the future.

The design should fulfil the following preconditions:

- It should provide a sense of enclosure. As the inside of the buildings, the outside too must be well articulated and designed into a space or “room”, this is where the art of urban design comes in;
- The place must be well protected from motorized traffic; absolute pedestrian priority is a must;
- There should be “mixed use”. Variety and difference is welcome. The principles of segregation and zoning result in a loss of social living qualities;
- The surrounding buildings should not only consist of freestanding Pavilions, there is also a need of flexible multipurpose structures.
- “Incrementality”, the possibility of adding on building blocks of different sizes, would be a great advantage;
- The surrounding buildings must show architectural unity; Different architects and expressions should be allowed; but their designs should observe a couple of unifying “bye-laws”, (e.g. building lines, building heights, arcades or columns in the ground floor, materials, etc.).
- There should be shade, so that the outdoor space can be used throughout the day. Trees are recommended, but also colonnades, like the “stoa” of the Greeks, or the arcades around a medieval market place.



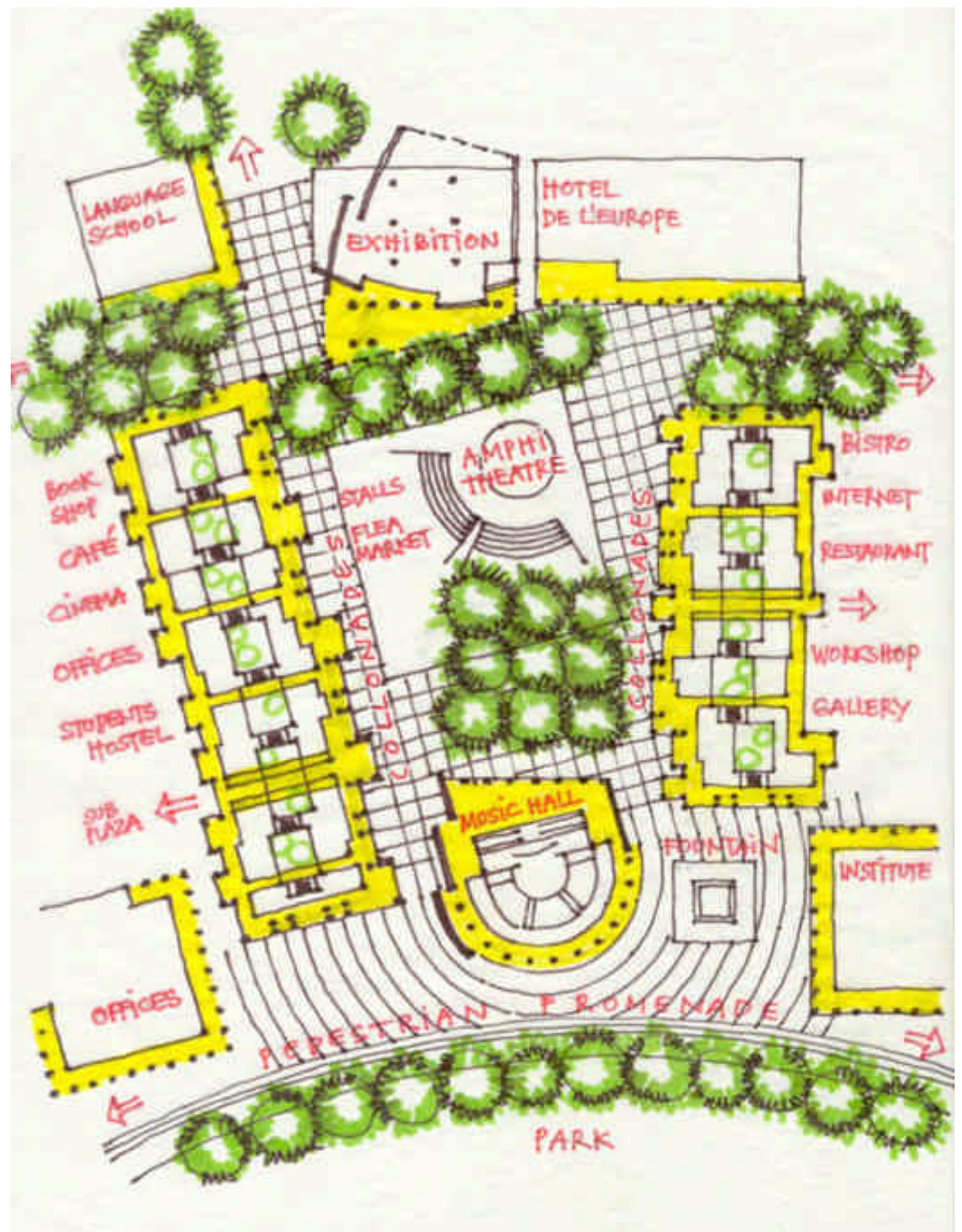


Figure 12. Concept Sketch of the European Plaza



*"...it's around 6 o'clock in the evening, and people are drifting into the "Place de l'Europe": Students on their way to or from their classes or hostels in the back lanes, researchers emerging from the libraries, a group who've been playing cricket on the field behind the British Pavilion, others who plan to move on to the Swedish film or a concert being given by a German string quartet, and have come early to enjoy this convivial hour ... people are sitting on benches under trees, or on the steps of the colonnades, chatting, listening to some musicians from Prague who've brought their instruments out onto the square, or playing "tavli" at the tables of the Greek cafeneion. Delicious smells are wafting from one the the restaurants - it's Hungarian night tonight. Under the colonnade the lights are coming on : shops and stalls offering books in many languages, art, handicrafts, CDs ... at the art gallery a Tiepolo exhibition is announced for next week. And mingling with the crowd are tourists who have strolled over from the Visitor's Information Centre to enjoy a taste of the best of European culture at first hand..."*

## **Great Britain**

The British Pavilion will help to define the central “agora” which forms the focal point of the European Area. This means that the planning and design of the pavilion would take into consideration the facilities being provided by other European cultures, with the aim of manifesting a very diverse and fascinating “townscape” of activities and buildings.

The activities of the British Pavilion – studies and research in English language and literature as well as in British history and culture – will benefit Auroville youth, Aurovilians, students from educational institutions of the area as well as from elsewhere in India and from around the world.

To fulfil these objectives, it is proposed to provide in the British Pavilion apart from library and reading room, classrooms and guest accommodation in a “British Inn”, a games collection, a bookshop, a beautiful shady garden with roses (where British teas can be served), playing fields and a small theatre with a very special atmosphere.

The main entrance to the British House should be on the Agora. The building can be several storeys high (3 – 4) and have an urban character, with the garden and then the playing fields behind, away from the square.

## **Russia**

There is a regular weekly meeting of a Russian Pavilion group in Auroville. After receiving a significant donation, sufficient to start infrastructure first phase of construction of the pavilion, the foundation stone was laid on February 21, 2002.

On this occasion the Consul General from Chennai read the following message of the Russian Ambassador to India: “...*the Embassy of the Russian Federation and the Russian Cultural Centres in India will render all assistance in the establishment and work of the Russian Pavilion in Auroville.*”

For the time being the Russian Pavilion group is preparing a competition amongst architects in Russia for the best design of the pavilion.



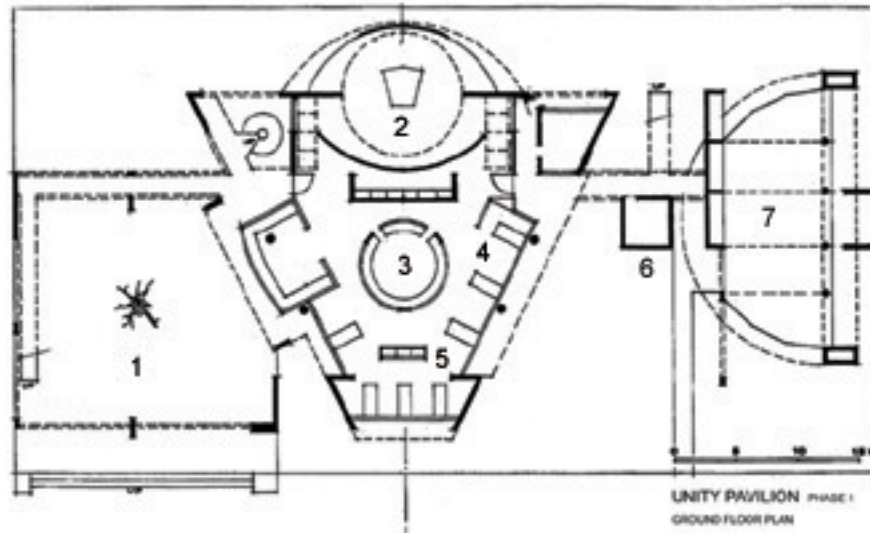


Figure 13. Unity Pavilion : Ground Floor Plan (1. Entrance Plaza, 2. Hall of Peace, 3. Internet, 4. Work Stations, 5. Planning, 6. Utilities, 7. Offices)

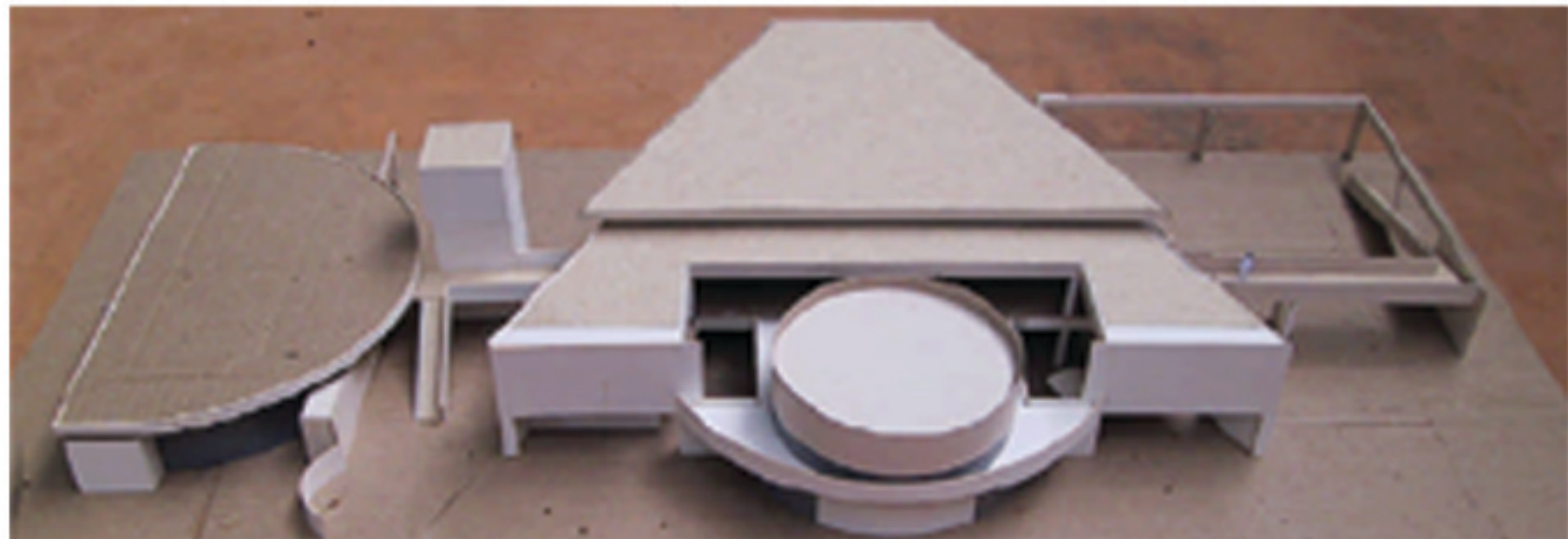
## The Crown Development

### Unity Pavilion

In the Crown, next to Savitri Bhavan, construction has started of the first Phase of the Unity Pavilion. It will contain in its final stage a multipurpose hall, exhibition space, shared offices and a guest house, apart from the necessary services. It will also integrate the "Hall of Peace".

The Unity Pavilion is expected to act as a seed and catalyst for the growth of the International Zone. The focus of the work will be the collaboration, development of the continental areas and interaction of cultures that defy national borders. It will give the pavilion groups a platform for working closely and sharing information.

Proposed major activities of the Unity Pavilion comprise the organisation of student exchange programmes and research into topics such as Human Unity, World Peace, East West relations, Sustainable Development and Human Potential.

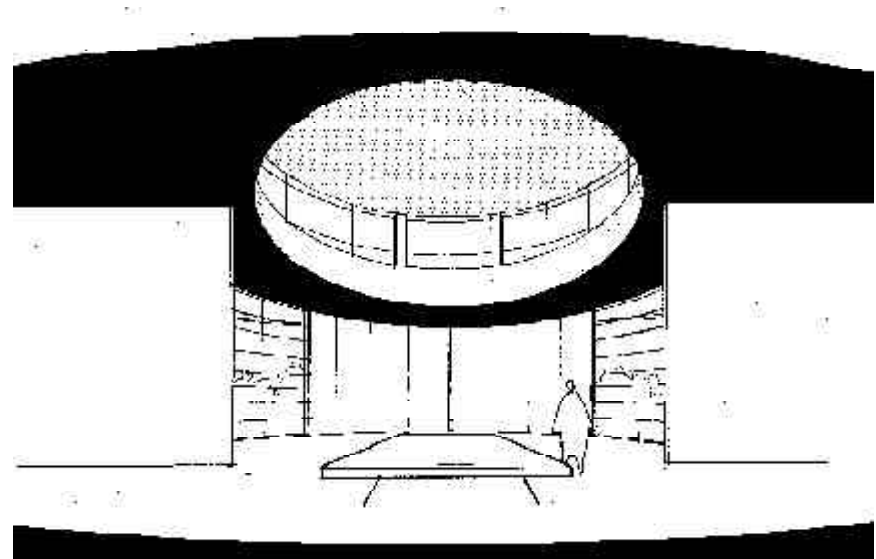


## Hall of Peace

George Nakashima, a gifted American architect and woodworker dreamt of offering each continent of the world a Table for Peace, crafted from two great, 300 year old eastern Black Walnut trees, as a symbol of humanity's aspiration for peace between the peoples of the world, for love for all mankind, for peace within oneself. The first Peace Table was placed at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City. A second, dedicated in 1995, was installed in The Academy of Fine Arts in Moscow, June 2001. February 29, 1996, marked the inauguration of the third table in Auroville. It is temporarily housed at the Centre of Indian Culture, until it is installed in the Unity Pavilion's Hall of Peace.

The Table will be surrounded by walls of porous and luminous "Light Matter" created by Auroville artist Pierre le Grand. The intention is to create a simple and artistic environment which generates an atmosphere of peace, inwardness, lightness and beauty.

The space is intended to be used for dialogues on Peace, for meetings and presentations, as well as for gatherings of the International Zone.



The Hall of Peace

### **Savitri Bhavan**

Savitri Bhavan is located in the Crown next to the Unity Pavilion. It has been created as a unit of SAILER, (Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research) to be a focal point for Sri Aurobindo and The Mother studies in Auroville.

The first phase of the Savitri Bhavan complex was inaugurated on August 8, 1999 by Dr. Nirodbaran. This building, comprising a small reading-room, a multi-purpose hall, and an archive cum working space for a growing team, has provided a base for a varied program of activities. In addition to guest-speakers, regular study-groups and courses, exhibitions, video or slide-shows and publication of quarterly journal "Invocation", Savitri Bhavan staff provide assistance of many kinds to students, translators, researchers and other enquirers.

The Savitri Bhavan complex in its final stage is intended to provide a library, meeting hall, classrooms, research facilities, administration and a hostel for visiting researchers and students. An important part of the new complex will be space for storing and exhibiting about 600 paintings on Savitri (which have been entrusted to Savitri Bhavan, prepared by Huta under the guidance of the Mother from 1961 to 1970).

Savitri Bhavan is open to anyone who would like to know more about the aims and ideals of Auroville and its programme of research towards the manifestation of human unity.





## **C. The Inspiration**

### **Words of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother related to the International Zone**

The conditions in which men live on earth are the result of their state of consciousness. To seek to change these conditions without changing the consciousness is a vain chimera. Those who have been able to perceive what could and ought to be done to improve the situation in the various domains of human life – economic, political, social, financial, educational and sanitary – are individuals who have, to a greater or lesser extent, developed their consciousness in an exceptional way and put themselves in contact with higher planes of consciousness. But their ideas have remained more or less theoretical or, if an attempt has been made to realize them practically, it has always failed lamentably after a certain period of time; for no human organization can change radically unless human consciousness itself changes. Prophets of a new humanity have followed one another; religions, spiritual or social, have been created; their beginnings have sometimes been promising, but as humanity has not been fundamentally transformed, the old errors arising from human nature itself have gradually reappeared and after some time we find ourselves almost back at the point we had started from with so much hope and enthusiasm. Also, in this effort to improve human conditions, there have always been two tendencies, which seem to be contrary but which ought to complement each other so that progress may be achieved. The first advocates a collective reorganization something which could lead to the effective unity of mankind. The other declares that all progress is made first by the individual and insists that the individual should be given the conditions in which he can progress freely. Both are equally true and necessary, and our effort should be directed along both these lines at once. For collective progress and individual progress are interdependent. Before the individual can take a leap forward, at least a little of the preceding progress must have been realized in the collectivity. A way must therefore be found so that these two types of progress may proceed side by side.

It is in answer to this urgent need that Sri Aurobindo conceived the scheme of his international university, in order to prepare the human elite who will be able to work for the progressive unification of mankind and be ready at the same time to embody the new force which is descending to transform the earth.

The most important idea is that the unity of the human race can be achieved neither by uniformity nor by domination and subjection. Only a synthetic organization of all nations, each one occupying its true place according to its own genius and the part it has to play in the whole, can bring about a comprehensive and progressive unification which has any chance of enduring. And if this synthesis is to be a living one, the grouping should be effectuated around a central idea that is as wide and as high as possible, in which all tendencies, even the most contradictory, may find their respective places. This higher idea is to give men the conditions of life they need in order to be able to prepare themselves to manifest the new force that will create the race of tomorrow.

All impulsions of rivalry, all struggle for precedence and domination must disappear and give way to a will for harmonious organization, for clear-sighted and effective collaboration.

To make this possible, the children should be accustomed from a very early age not merely to the idea itself, but to its practice. That is why the international university centre will be international; not because students from all countries will be admitted here, nor even because they will be taught in their own language, but above all because the cultures of the various parts of the world will be represented here so as to be accessible to all, not merely intellectually in ideas, theories, principles and language, but also vitally in habits and customs, art in all its forms – painting, sculpture, music, architecture, decoration – and physically through natural scenery, dress, games, sports, industries and food. A kind of permanent world-exhibition should be organized in which all countries will be represented in a concrete and living way. The ideal would be for every nation with a well-defined culture to have a pavilion representing that culture, built in a style that is most expressive of the customs of the country; it will exhibit the nation's most representative products, natural as well as manufactured, and also the best expressions of its intellectual

and artistic genius and its spiritual tendencies. Each nation would thus have a very practical and concrete interest in this cultural synthesis and could collaborate in the work by taking responsibility for the pavilion that represents it. Living accommodation, large or small according to the need, could be attached, where students of the same nationality could stay and thus enjoy the true culture of their native country and at the same time receive at the university centre the education which will introduce them to all the other cultures that exist on earth. In this way, international education will not be merely theoretical, in the classroom, but practical in all the details of life.

The first aim will therefore be to help individuals to become aware of the fundamental genius of the nation to which they belong and at the same time to bring them into contact with the ways of life of other nations, so that they learn to know and respect equally the true spirit of all the countries of the world. For, in order to be real and workable, any world-organisation must be based on this mutual respect and understanding between nation and nation as well as between individual and individual. Only in order and collective organisation, in collaboration based on mutual goodwill, is there any possibility of lifting man out of the painful chaos in which he finds himself now. It is with this aim and in this spirit that all human problems will be studied at the university centre; and the solution to them will be given in the light of the supramental knowledge which Sri Aurobindo has revealed in his writings.

...

Just as each individual has a psychic being which is his true self and which governs his destiny more or less overtly, so too each nation has a psychic being which is its true being and moulds its destiny from behind the veil: it is the soul of the country, the national genius, the spirit of the people, the centre of national aspiration, the fountainhead of all that is beautiful, noble, great and generous in the life of the country. True patriots feel its presence as a tangible reality. In India it has been made into an almost divine entity, and all who truly love their country call it "Mother India" (Bharat Mata) and offer her a daily prayer for the welfare of their country. It is she who symbolises and embodies the true ideal of the country, its true mission in the world.

...

One would like to see in all countries the same veneration for the national soul, the same aspiration to become fit instruments for the manifestation of its highest ideal, the same ardour for progress and self-perfection enabling each people to identify itself with its national soul and thus find its true nature and role, which makes each one a living and immortal entity regardless of all the accidents of history.

The Mother  
*An International University Centre, (MCW 12, p.47-50)*

International Zone: Pavilions of all the countries which present their customs and cultures.

The Mother  
*Spirit of Auroville, p.10-11*

The international section: we have already approached a certain number of ambassadors and countries for each one to have its pavilion - a pavilion from every country. It was an old idea. Some have already accepted, so it is on the way. Each pavilion has its own garden with, as far as possible, a representation of plants and products of the country which it represents. If they have enough money and enough space, they can also have a sort of small museum or permanent exhibition of the country's achievements. The buildings should be constructed according to the architecture of each country - it should be like a document of information. Then, depending on the money they wish to spend, they could also have accommodation for students, conference-rooms, etc., a cuisine of the country, a restaurant of the country – they could have all kinds of developments.

The Mother  
*On Auroville, p.59-60*

It is no longer towards division and difference that we should turn our minds, but on unity, union, even oneness necessary for the pursuit and realization of a common Ideal, ... East and West could be reconciled in the pursuit of the highest and largest ideal, Spirit embrace Matter and Matter find its own true Reality and the hidden reality in things in the Spirit.

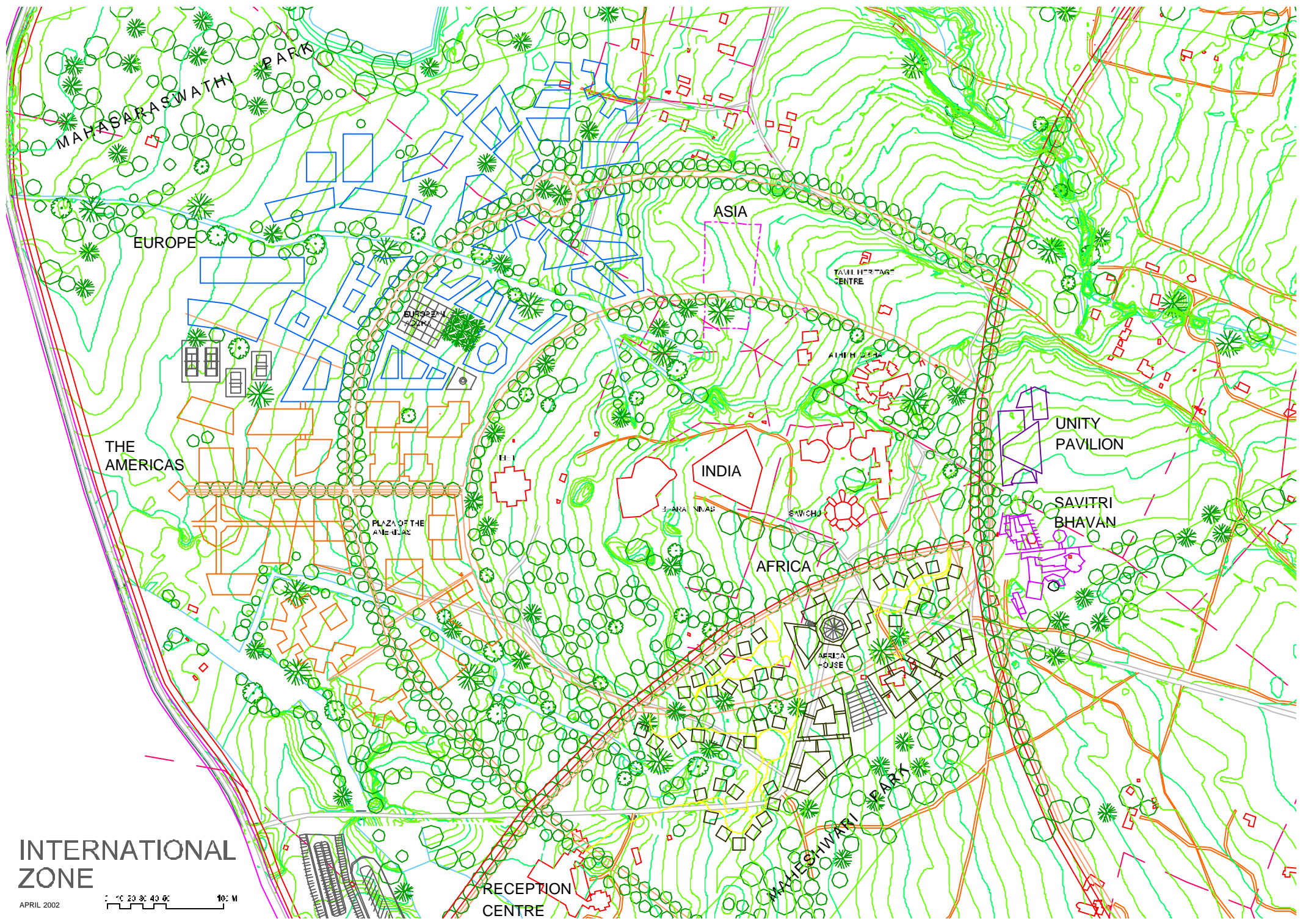
Sri Aurobindo  
*Message to America 1949, (SABCL 26, p.413-414)*

The earth is in travail now of one common, large and flexible civilisation for the whole human race into which each modern and ancient culture shall bring its contribution and each clearly defined human aggregate shall introduce its necessary element of variation.

Sri Aurobindo  
*The Ideal of Human Unity (SABCL15, p.300)*

## D. For more information

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