What we learned from

The First Three Auroville Citizen Science Studies:

Human Unity • To Be a True Aurovilian • Integral Yoga

A community edition of the 1st Living Laboratory Cycle (August-September 2026)

Pilot Phase: The 1st Living Laboratory Cycle

The aim of Citizen Science Online is to inspire a research culture within Auroville, based on the lived experiences of individuals dedicated to the Auroville experiment. As with any new initiative, a pilot phase is required to learn and refine the methods used and to understand how to foster meaningful participation.

For this initial pilot cycle, gathering participation proved to be a delicate and challenging endeavor. It highlighted the need to build trust, transparency, and shared meaning around CIRHU and its work to foster genuine willingness and interest in participating in CIRHU associated initiatives across the broader Auroville context. However, the Citizen Science Online initiative received positive feedback as a meaningful initiative for Auroville to be developed further.

Despite the modest numbers, this first phase has served as an invaluable pilot study - providing a testing ground to identify key aspects of its design to be refined. It also provided valuable feedback from community members, mainly helping to adjust online presentation, which we hope will resonate with community members who have yet to discover the project . While we will run the same three studies again and hope for wider engagement then, as part of the pilot we have analysed the data of this first round and wished to share them in this report. Although these findings reflect the personal experiences of a small group of individuals, they clearly demonstrate the direction, depth, and richness these studies can come to offer when 100, 500, or ideally the entire Auroville community chooses to participate in the future. Over time, the intention is for it to evolve into:

- A meaningful tool for participation, giving every Aurovilian an active voice to share their lived experiences of the collective Auroville experiment.
- A grounded source of research data, generating new, ongoingly updated, human-centred knowledge to help guide Auroville's vision/mission/development as a center for research in human unity for humanity and as a base for further research.
- To create an open window into the Auroville experiment, offering people around the world an honest, inspiring glimpse into the daily life, inner efforts, and challenges of Auroville, encouraging growing numbers of people from around the world who hold a true dedication and commitment to human unity to join in this universal experiment.

Introduction to the Studies

The first three Citizen Science studies, centred on Human Unity, To Be a True Aurovilian, and Integral Yoga - sought to offer insight into how Aurovilians are living in relationship with Auroville's ideals.

Auroville's Charter and The Mother's writings describe an ongoing experiment in human unity through unending education, conscious collective work and inner personal development. They offer the background for the three study themes. But the existence of a founding aim does not tell us whether it is being achieved today. The experiences shared by Aurovilians, former Aurovilians and Newcomers must be heard in their own terms.

The experiences shared highlight aspects like caring for others, working together, questioning oneself, trying to grow, and finding meaning in daily life. They also reveal disagreements, pressure, disappointment, and doubt. Often, hope and criticism appear in the same person's account.

The studies are not a poll on how Auroville is doing. They tell us what those who participated chose to share, and they raise questions worth exploring further together through continued and wider participation in the same studies to enrich the data.

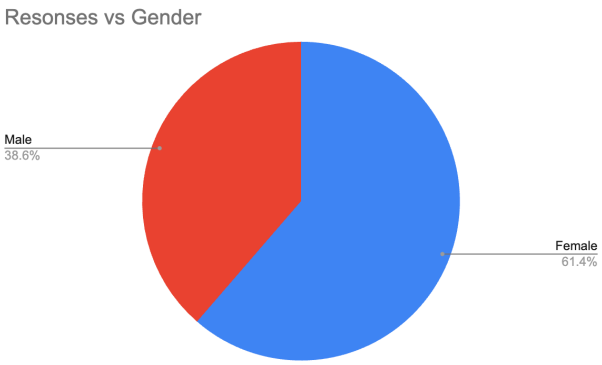
Participation overview:

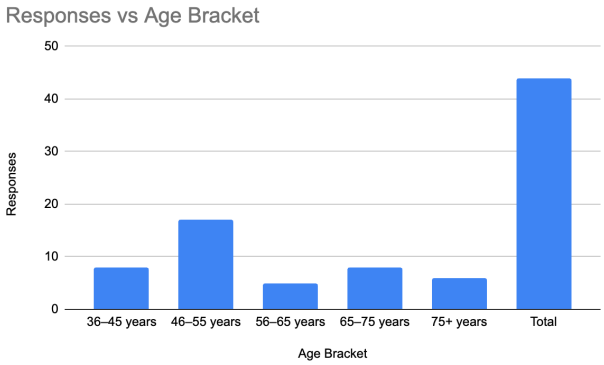
Based on the 1st Living Laboratory Cycle Qualitative Research Report dated 12 October 2026:

Study	Submissions	Reflections used
Human Unity	12	11
To Be a True Aurovilian	18	18
Integral Yoga	12	12
Total	42	41*

We received 42 submissions. A person may have answered more than one survey, so 42 submissions does not mean 42 different people. Of the participants 61.4 % were female and 38.6 % were male. There were no participants below the age bracket 36-45 years.

*One Human Unity study submission mainly commented on the questionnaire itself. It is counted among the 42 submissions but not among the 41 reflections used to understand the survey themes.





Outcomes of the Studies

1. Human Unity (study #1)

The Human Unity study asked about experiences of unity in and beyond Auroville, what makes unity possible, how people contribute to it, and what gets in the way. 11 reflections addressed these questions.

Caring for someone can bring people together

Several people remembered support given during injury, illness or a death. People helped with time, presence, practical action or money for care. For those who described these moments, unity was not just an idea: it was visible in what people did for each other. These accounts make practical action, presence and care visible, but they also place unity under conditions of need rather than claiming it is continuous.

> *"People gather themselves and support people in need with care, their presence, compassion and funds for the medical care. Just to be here for each other."*

But some asked a difficult question: why can cooperation happen more easily during a crisis than in daily community life?

Inner effort matters - and so do the ways we work together

For some respondents, unity starts with watching their own reactions, listening, becoming more patient and treating people with respect. Importantly, the experiences shared do not suggest that people should simply work on themselves and ignore problems around them.

> *"My personal work is constant, in trying to observe my thoughts, feelings and to be conscious in my actions."*

Other respondents drew attention to shared projects, schools, meetings, decisions and the wider arrangements within which people cooperate. However, while some people described meetings as helpful; others found them divisive. They felt present ways of organising community life make cooperation harder.

Human unity does not mean exactly the same thing to everyone

The way human unity was understood varied across responses - from a deep spiritual connection, to respect across differences, to working effectively together.

> *"The shared collective work becomes a motivation for the inner, personal work."*
>
> *"Human Unity does not mean uniformity, permanent agreement or the disappearance of differences."*

Some participants described important experiences outside Auroville too. One did not feel able to claim a personal experience of unity at all.

This leaves a useful conversation open: when we say "human unity", are we speaking about kindness, a feeling of connection, a shared practice, or a more lasting change in how people live together? Or does human unity - as experienced in Auroville - encompass all these aspects? The experiences shared do not provide one uniform answer, but perhaps they all contain elements of human unity that can come together to form one overarching understanding.

What we can take from the experiences shared

Care, personal awareness and shared work all matter to some participants. But moments of solidarity might not be proof that human unity has been achieved in day to day life; nor does disagreement automatically mean unity is absent.

2. To Be a True Aurovilian (study #2)

This study invited people to reflect on coming to Auroville, staying or leaving, work, growth, difficult experiences, and what being a "true Aurovilian" means to them. 18 people shared their experiences.

The word "true" can inspire people - and divide them

Some participants understood being a true Aurovilian as a personal commitment to honesty, growth, responsibility, service and care. Others placed more weight on actually living here and contributing to the work of the community.

Several resisted the idea that anyone can draw a clear line between "true" and "not true" Aurovilians. They worried that the label could be used to judge or exclude others. Yet, a person could reject the label while still expecting a great deal from their own actions.

Commitment takes more than one form

People spoke about doing daily work carefully, serving others, contributing time, energy or money, being sincere and noticing their own motives. Some described inner work and outward responsibilities as inseparable.

> *"My inner work is not separated from my daily life. It is to strive for perfection in all details."*

One person's work may be a service, another's livelihood, another's way of growing inwardly - and sometimes all three. Some did not identify with the spiritual language commonly used in Auroville, even while describing a strong commitment to personal change.

People can love Auroville and still struggle here

Several participants valued the collective aspirations while also describing tiredness, frustration, disappointment, rejection or worries about material conditions. Some wondered whether Auroville was helping their growth at this time. Others stayed because their commitment to the place and its aims remained strong.

These experiences cannot be divided neatly into "supporters" and "critics". Participants shared experiences of gratitude, belonging and concern all at the same time.

People draw on different sources

Some participants referred to the Charter, the Mother's writings or memories of earlier Auroville. Others relied on their conduct, personal experience, reflection or a quieter inner sense. Some were unsure how anyone could confirm whether their experience was genuine.

What we can take from the experiences shared

Belonging is connected with aspiration, action, place, memory and relationships. It can also involve disagreement. Rather than asking who qualifies as "true", the experiences shared invite us to ask what helps people act sincerely, take responsibility, feel included and continue growing.

3. Integral Yoga (study #3)

This study asked what Integral Yoga means to people, how they practise it, what changes or difficulties they notice, and what supports them. 12 people shared their reflections on this.

Practice is often part of ordinary activities

Many people described Integral Yoga through everyday awareness: remembering to pay attention, noticing thoughts and intentions, acting with care, trying not to cause harm, or looking at themselves more closely. Some used philosophical or spiritual terms; others wrote about small daily actions.

> *"Integral yoga for me is about doing every aspect of life with awareness, my practice happens every time I remember.... Because I integrate it in daily life."*

This does not mean everyone follows one method. The words "awareness" and "daily life" may describe quite different understandings and practices of Integral Yoga, and a brief written answer cannot show the full range of someone's practice.

Work can support practice - or make it difficult

For some participants, work becomes part of spiritual practice when done with attention, dedication or without seeking personal reward. Others felt that imposed work or a lack of freedom could weaken the sense of offering. Some wrote about financial or visa pressures that make it harder to keep their attention on inner growth.

Growth is often slow and unfinished

People described making an effort again and again, learning from mistakes, practising patience and wondering how change happens. One person did not see yoga as a method for overcoming particular problems. Some were concerned with deeper meaning rather than solving daily difficulties.

These accounts invite humility. They do not reveal a shared series of stages that everyone must pass through, and they offer no basis for measuring one person's spiritual progress against another's.

Outside pressures and inner focus

Alongside concerns about imposed work, limited room to experiment, rules, relationships and practical insecurity, other participants focused on quiet conduct, faith, patience or the wish to slow down.

What we can take from these replies

The participants describe many ways of trying to live Integral Yoga. For some, spiritual attention and daily responsibilities are closely linked; for others, practical demands make that connection difficult. The experiences shared do not point to a linear path of progress, but show how Integral Yoga is lived uniquely through individual effort amid real-world challenges. They remind us that to give space for diverse expressions of practice requires patience, humility, and space for inner growth within daily life.

4. What connects the three studies?

Daily work is one important meeting point

Across the three studies, people highlight work as a place to contribute, meet differences, practise attention and grow. At the same time, some say that pressure, imposed duties or practical uncertainty can make this harder. An important next question is not simply whether work matters, but under what conditions work becomes meaningful - for human unity, to be a true Aurovilian, and to practise Integral Yoga.

Belonging and freedom both matter

Some worry that strict definitions of a “true Aurovilian” can divide people, while others do want clarity about commitment and responsibility. In the Human Unity study, people question how to live with differences. In the Integral Yoga study, some want more room to experiment. The freedom to experiment, while remaining committed to a common project, seems to emerge as a central concern.

Dedication and criticism can live side by side

A person may value the founding ideals and still feel that current ways of working need to change. Another may feel nourished by Auroville while questioning whether their growth is happening as hoped.

Participation in the Studies

Emails were sent to personally invite randomly selected adults from the Auroville directory, aiming to ensure a sample that reflects the community's cultural diversity. Additionally, open invitations were posted on Auroville’s communal notice boards to encourage engagement. As the Auroville directory was used as the main source to identify participants, younger residents, newcomers and former Aurovilians were not the main focus group at this first stage, limiting participation. As the studies asked for answers in English, this may also have excluded individuals with other native tongues from participating.

Learning from the Pilot Phase

- In-person communication with individuals is needed at this point to bring trust and inspire participation. The Citizen Science team is looking into how to address this for the coming Living Laboratory Cycles.
- For the next Living Laboratory Cycle, the aim is to encourage participation across a broader spectrum by actively inviting younger residents, newcomers, and former residents to contribute their experiences.
- Participants in the next Living Laboratory Cycle are welcome to share their responses in their native language, as AI translation will be used to translate all contributions into English prior to analysis.

Review Process for the Studies

Each participant in the Citizen Science Online studies was given one open text box and could write in their own way when sharing their experiences. Members of the research team read the full response, looking for ideas that appeared more than once, different meanings, and replies that did not fit an easy conclusion. AI was used for the initial analysis. The three studies were first considered separately and only then compared. Because respondents could appear in more than one study we do not know how many different individuals took part of those who chose to participate. We cannot calculate what percentage of Auroville holds a particular view. 41 submissions selected “Aurovilian” as the community connection and one Integral Yoga submission selected “Newcomer”. These are unchecked form selections, not proof of identity.

The studies did not include follow-up interviews or direct observation. They could not independently check accounts of particular events, work pressures, exclusion, community arrangements or spiritual change. Even without names, an unusual event or personal history may allow others to recognise a participant. The report avoids linking quotations with demographic details and does not repeat a recognisable injury account in full.

A note on this edition

This community edition is an accessible rewrite of “Auroville Citizen Science 1st Living Laboratory Cycle Qualitative Research Report: Human Unity, To Be a True Aurovilian and Integral Yoga”, dated 12 October 2026. It follows the original findings and recommendations, but omits the detailed source-code tables, direct participant quotations and full academic reference list. It does not introduce new research, independent checks or claims about the wider community. AI assistance was used in the research process for file inspection, comparison, checking excerpts and drafting, as described in the original report.

For detailed methods, source references and the full evidence trail, consult the original 1st Living Laboratory Cycle Qualitative Research Report and its companion evidence workbook.

This pilot phase has provided the opportunity for the Citizen Science team to explore how to process, analyse and share the data provided in the format chosen for the pilot studies, and make adjustments and improvements in the google forms for the next Living Laboratory Cycle.