SAIER and Bajaj Auto CSR, 2017-18

Upcycling Studio Gallery and Permanent Exhibition

Amount allocated: Rs. 7,19,500

Abstract:
Our experience during the 3 weeks of workshops of 'Litter-Free Auroville 2017' showed us that there is a need for people to learn and understand more about environmental issues. We saw that it was possible to make them appreciate things upcycled from ‘waste’ and to change their conceptions of waste, in a joyful and creative way. With this project we will build a permanent exhibition at the Visitors’ Center where Auroville’s many daily visitors can see creations made out of 'waste', learn about environment issues, and start changing behavior patterns towards a better planet. We also find that making useful things out of ‘waste' offers ideas and opportunities for creating new jobs. Our gallery and exhibition will be a place where visitors can create and play in order to produce new things and change their way of dealing with waste.

Q2 report (July – September 2017):

This project is happening at the Visitors’ Center in Auroville. To build the Upcycling Studio kiosk, the Visitors’ Center needs the building permission from Auroville’s Town Development Council, and this is in progress. We now have the final technical drawings from the architect, so once the permission is obtained, construction will begin.

We started to work with the different actors who will participate: the units engaged with sustainability who will be represented in the permanent exhibition, and the upcyclers and artists who will be involved with the gallery. We are 10 people already; more will join.

Q3 report (October – December 2017):

- The building construction has started in the space allocated to us at the Visitors' Center. We have been documenting the construction.
- We have made the list of the panels for the permanent exhibition, and started to decide what will be the main lines of their content.
- We have been coordinating with another team who is making an exhibition about the
Auroville units and the bioregion.

- We have been gathering all the persons potentially interested in producing items from waste, for the Upcycling Kiosk to be filled with different things. We have been explaining to them our cooperative project.

Reflections:

Overall through this project we are learning about including more people, each one with his own products, about sharing and about keeping the future project running according to the Auroville spirit.

Q4 report (January – March 2019):

- **The building construction** was finished at the end of August 2018, but with no windows and no door... Then we started to put a glass bottle window, a wood window, some wooden doors and to make some upcycled furniture for the shop. For example, we did buy lightbulbs, but we handcrafted the lamps. Some 10 tetrapak podiums were made as a display to show the products. Marc with the help of the Auroville unit Aureka made a big glass table which presents numerous objects. Electricity was settled in late November, and the UPS system is now functioning.

- **Opening of the shop:** we managed to open to the public on the 9th of November 2018. Everything was ready and we have been welcoming visitors ever since. At the kiosk we present the research done by WasteLess (see Project #13 of this report), their game 'kNOw PLASTICS' and their Garbology 101 curriculum. We have some design books on display if people want to get inspired and see how they can make some simple furniture. The team members present at the kiosk provide explanations about every object and sometimes about Auroville as well.

- **Exhibition:** the panels are almost ready for the permanent exhibition. They were reviewed by the Visitors’ Center team and are being finalized.

- **Coordination:** We have been coordinating with the bioregion exhibition team. All Upcyclers are coordinating to keep the shop open in a spirit of cooperative management.

Overall outcome:

The overall outcome of this project is a place where visitors can change the way they see waste. Some have been very enthusiastic:

- We had a proposal to put our objects in a resort shop in Goa.
- Regularly we have some questions about how to make the objects on display and about workshops; some visitors said they will come back to take a workshop.
- Some people want to open this kind of shop in their own town. Most of them are from big cities like Mumbai or Bengaluru.

We have been welcomed by the Visitors’ Center which hadn't until now such a place for 'alternative shopping'.

Reflections and lessons learned:

- You need some help when you want to do everything by yourself. We are happy to have a Wellwaerts full-time volunteer and some other part-time volunteers helping at the kiosk. We have also had some very welcome help from a network of Aurovilians. The Upcycling team is small and when adding other activities to a very busy timetable, it is important to be realistic about the commitment each person can make.
- A lot of satisfaction comes once the place is set up and people find it to be great! It is worth the effort.
Upcycling Studio Gallery open to visitors