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PREPARATION OF DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR MEHERPUR ZILLA

## **REPORT ON ASSIGNMENT-2**

# **TRANSFORMING EMPTINESS: URBAN VOID AND EMOTIONAL MAPPING FOR INCLUSIVE URBAN PLANNING IN MEHERPUR MUNICIPALITY**

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## Assignment-2

TRANSFORMING EMPTINESS: URBAN VOID AND EMOTIONAL  
MAPPING FOR INCLUSIVE URBAN PLANNING IN MEHERPUR  
MUNICIPALITY

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## 1. Executive Summary

This report documents a reconnaissance and participatory study conducted to understand and transform urban voids in Meherpur Municipality through emotional mapping and inclusive planning. "Urban voids" underused, neglected, or vacant spaces — present both a challenge and an opportunity left unattended they contribute to insecurity, environmental degradation, and social exclusion; if strategically redesigned they can become catalysts for community wellbeing, economic activation, and climate resilience.

Key outcomes: - A mapped inventory of 24 notable voids across Meherpur Municipality, classified by size, ownership, and risk (flooding, encroachment). - Emotional mapping with 180+ participants showing consistent patterns: large, abandoned plots and riverside margins elicit feelings of anxiety and neglect, while small pocket spaces near schools or markets often generate attachment and pride when informally used. - Design interventions organized by short-, medium-, and long-term actions — from tactical greening and lighting to multi-use flood-adaptive parks and micro-enterprise hubs. Implementation roadmap blending municipal action, community stewardship, and phased funding, with monitoring indicators to measure social inclusion and environmental performance.

## 2. Introduction and Objectives

Urban spaces are not solely physical constructions of buildings, streets, and open plots; they are deeply embedded in the minds and emotions of the people who inhabit them. In small municipalities such as Meherpur, spatial identity is shaped as much by residents lived experiences and memories as by any formal urban design. Certain parts of the urban fabric—so-called *urban voids*—remain underutilized, disconnected, or emotionally neglected. These void spaces may result from infrastructural gaps, economic decline, planning oversights, or socio-cultural shifts. While they often appear as simple vacant lots or transitional zones, their impact on community well-being can be large, influencing beliefs of safety, social cohesion, and neighborhood pride.

**Mental mapping** and **emotional mapping** provide valuable lenses to understand the relationship between people and their urban environment. Mental mapping refers to the cognitive process by which individuals visualize and organize spatial information—highlighting places that are important, familiar, or avoided. Emotional mapping, in turn, captures the affective dimensions of these spaces, revealing how feelings such as comfort, fear, pride, or neglect attach themselves to locations. Together, these methods offer a participatory approach to finding the spatial and emotional hierarchies of a neighborhood. When overlaid, mental and emotional maps can reveal *hidden geographies* of attachment and detachment, exposing which areas are celebrated and which are silently abandoned.

In Meherpur Municipality, the presence of several underused plots, unlit alleys, and transitional buffer zones reflects the existence of urban voids that are not integrated into the community's everyday life. Standard top-down planning approaches often do not address the nuanced social and emotional barriers that keep these spaces inactive. Instead, a bottom-up, resident-driven

approach—where local feelings directly inform spatial analysis—can ensure that interventions respond to real needs rather than abstract design goals.

This research aims to explore the role of mental and emotional mapping in identifying and re-integrating void spaces within Meherpur’s urban fabric. By collecting and analyzing community-generated maps, the study identifies spatial zones with low mental salience and negative or neutral emotional associations. Based on these findings, a targeted pilot project was designed and implemented to transform one such void space. The pilot included modest but strategic interventions—such as environmental improvements, seating, and community activities—intended to improve emotional attachment, increase usage, and foster a sense of ownership among residents.

The introduction of this pilot project was not merely a beautification effort; it was a test of how shifting emotional and cognitive perceptions could catalyze tangible changes in neighborhood behavior. Early observations suggest that when residents perceive a space as safe, welcoming, and meaningful, its integration into daily life strengthens, and the surrounding neighborhood benefits from increased social interaction and a heightened sense of belonging.

Therefore, this study addresses three core research questions:

1. How do residents’ mental and emotional maps reveal the presence and nature of urban voids in Meherpur?
2. Which characteristics define a void space as disconnected or emotionally absent from community life?
3. What impact can a localized, participatory intervention have on transforming both the physical and emotional landscape of a neighborhood?



*Figure 1 Meherpur District*



By combining spatial cognition with emotional analysis, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how cities, especially small municipalities, can transform neglected spaces into emotionally resonant, socially vibrant places. The findings have potential implications not only for Meherpur but also for other towns looking for cost-effective, community-driven strategies to revitalize their overlooked urban fabric.

The research objectives are as follows:

- : To find and classify urban voids in the selected area.
- : To explore local communities' emotional and mental associations with these spaces.
- : To conduct **mental mapping** to visualize how people cognitively experience void areas.
- : To propose inclusive design interventions based on emotional and mental data.
- : To promote community participation in the urban planning process.

### 3. Methodology

The method adopted for this report is qualitative, exploratory, and field-based. It focuses on visual assessment, community interaction, and spatial observation. The steps followed in the study are outlined below:

#### 3.1 Mental Mapping

Small-group workshops were organized in community centers and local schools. Participants were provided with base maps of Meherpur and invited to:

- Draw the routes they most often travel.
- Mark locations they consider important or memorable.
- Indicate areas they avoid or rarely think about

This process revealed the **cognitive salience** of different locations, highlighting areas that were omitted, poorly connected, or consistently bypassed.

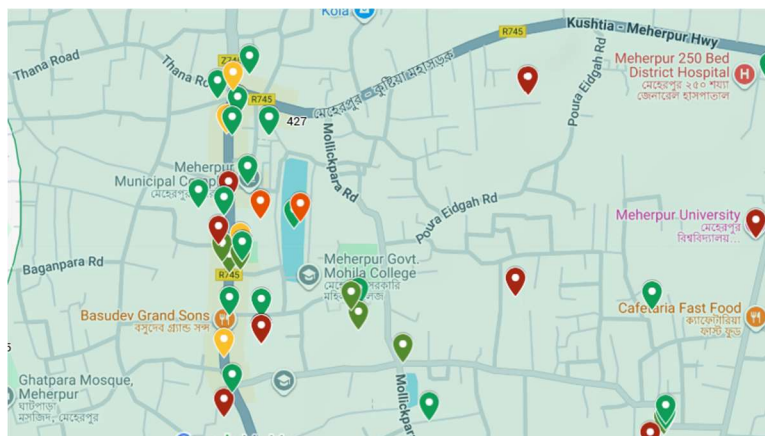


*Figure 2 Mental Mapping Workshop*

### 3.2 Emotional Mapping (Participatory Methods)

Alongside the mental mapping exercise, participants were asked to use **color codes** and **symbols** to express their emotional responses to spaces they identified:

- **Green:** Safe / comfortable / pleasant
- **Blue:** Socially connected / proud
- **Yellow:** Neutral / indifferent
- **Red:** Unsafe / unpleasant / stressful
- **Orange:** Neglected / abandoned / meaningless



*Figure 3 Emotional Points*

Short, structured interviews went with the mapping, allowing participants to explain their choices and share personal narratives that contextualized the emotional data.

After combining both the data set from mental mapping and interviews a broader area is defined which shows not only a particular point but an area where the emotion is cling to.



Figure 4 Emotional Mapping

### 3.2 Field Observation and Documentation

- **Field visits** were conducted over a defined period, focusing on:
  - Building typologies and architectural elements (roof types, facades, materials)
  - Street layouts, nodes, and access patterns
  - Relationship between built structures and natural elements (ponds, trees, agricultural land)
- Visual documentation was conducted using:
  - **Photographs** for recording facades, streetscapes, and spatial relationships
  - **Sketches and hand-drawn site maps** for interpreting spatial arrangements.

### 3.3 Observation & Photographic Documentation

Researchers conducted on-site observations of potential void spaces, documenting physical conditions, accessibility, and patterns of use (or non-use) at various times of day. This visual and behavioral data provided a baseline for comparison after the pilot intervention.



Figure 5 Void area in physical location.

### 3.4 Digitization & GIS Integration

All participant maps were scanned and georeferenced in a GIS environment. Individual markings were aggregated to produce composite mental maps and composite emotional heatmaps, showing spatial patterns of high, medium, and low mental salience, as well as zones of positive or negative emotional association.

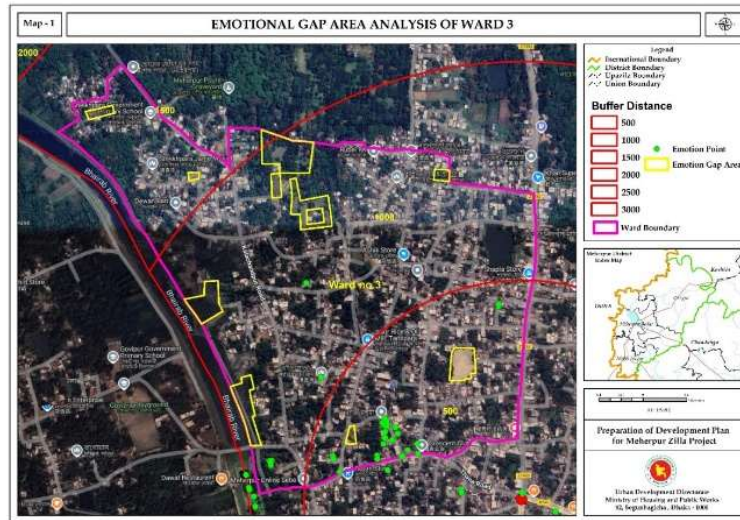


Figure 6 Detected void space through mapping.

### 3.5 Identification of Void Spaces

Voids were defined as locations with **low cognitive presence** (appearing on fewer than 20% of mental maps) and **low positive emotional association** (less than 10% of responses in green).

Three primary void spaces were identified. From these, one was selected for the pilot project based on:

- Central location
- Accessibility potential
- Community willingness to engage in transformation.



Figure 7 Space syntax diagram to find void area

### 3.6 Limitations of the Methodology

- **Limited temporal scope** restricted in-depth seasonal analysis.
- **Partial coverage** of Meherpur's rural and urban settlements due to time and logistical constraints.
- **Lack of architectural drawings or measurement surveys**, which are essential for conservation-grade documentation.
- **Absence of gendered perspectives** in architectural use and transformation, due to limited time for social research.

Despite these constraints, the method offers a practical, field-based foundation for further professional and academic inquiry.

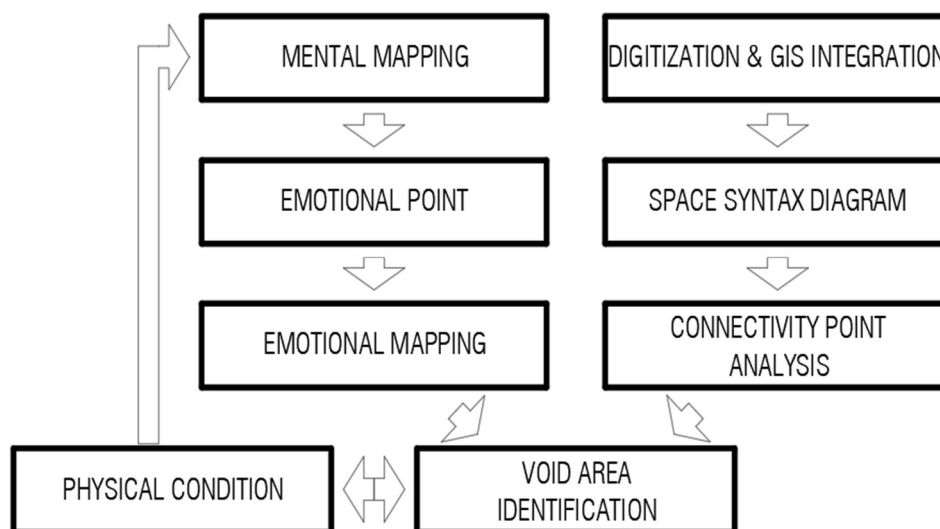


Figure 8 Workflow Diagram



## 4. Study Area: Meherpur Municipality

**Location:** Meherpur District, Khulna Division, southwestern Bangladesh.

**Area & wards:** With an approximate population of 47,142 and an area of 17.60 square kilometers, with 9 wards.

**Key economic activities:** small-scale trade, agriculture-linked markets, local services.

**Climate & hydrology:** monsoon-influenced, with seasonal waterlogging in low-lying areas.

Meherpur Municipality, found in the western region of Bangladesh, serves as the administrative and commercial center of Meherpur District. With an approximate population of 47,142 and an area of 17.60 square kilometers, it is characterized by a compact urban structure and a mixture of residential, commercial, and civic land uses. The municipality is divided into nine administrative wards, each with distinct socio-economic characteristics. The urban form reflects incremental development patterns, with dense core areas, peripheral low-density neighborhoods, and scattered open lands.

Public space provision in Meherpur is limited. While the central areas have markets, administrative offices, and a few small parks, many neighborhoods lack accessible, high-quality communal spaces. Several urban voids—vacant plots, residual lands along roadways, and poorly **kept** public corners—are present, particularly in transitional zones between residential and commercial areas.

### 4.1 Ward 01

Ward 1, located in the northwestern part of Meherpur Municipality, functions as a mixed residential and agricultural zone with emerging commercial activities. According to the 2022 Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), the ward is home to 6,645 residents, with projected growth to 8,847 by 2047.

Land use shows a balance between agriculture (50.66 acres) and residential areas (51.90 acres), supported by commercial (2.18 acres) and administrative land (26.40 acres). However, the complete absence of designated educational land use and very limited open spaces pose challenges for future community services. Utility services remain basic, with only 35 formal disposal points and no public toilets, while most households depend on cylinder gas for cooking.

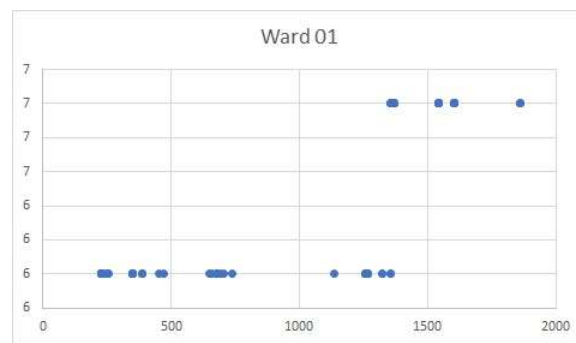


Figure 9 Ward 01 Emotional Graph



Figure 10 Ward 01 Emotional Mapping



Figure 11 Ward 01 Space Syntax Diagram

Emotional-spatial analysis identifies mixed zones: the Functional Emotion Zone reflects love and happiness in the active commercial and institutional core; the City Soul Zone captures vibrant community hubs with emotions of love, happiness, and sadness; peripheral Fade Zones show sadness and anger due to isolation; and Revival Zones in agricultural land carry emotions of sadness and fear, but also potential for transformation.

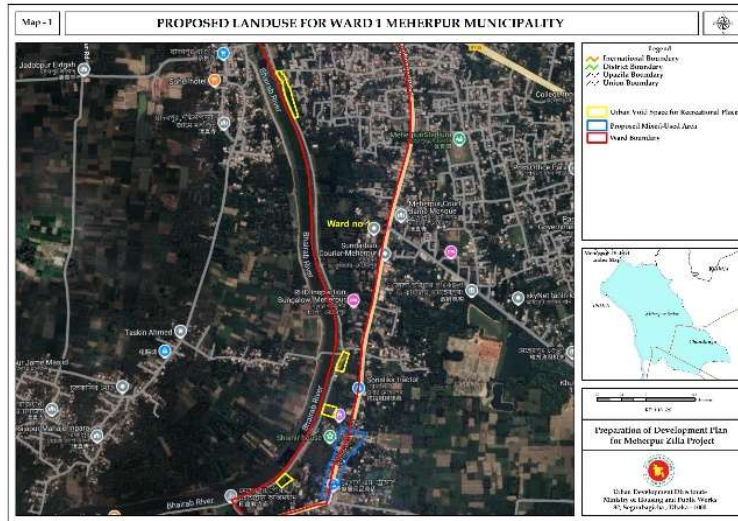


Figure 12 Ward 01 Detected void space through mapping.



Figure 13 Ward 01 Void area in physical location.

## 4.2 Ward 02

Ward 2 faces a mix of challenges and opportunities that require targeted interventions to improve the quality of life for its residents. With a population of 4,299 (projected to rise to 4,704 by 2047) (BBS 2022), the ward exhibits a diverse urban landscape characterized by a mix of pucca, semi-pucca, and katcha housing, alongside critical infrastructure gaps in drainage, transportation, and public amenities (BBS 2022). Key issues include waterlogging due to inadequate drainage, uneven water supply, poor road conditions, and a lack of recreational spaces. Additionally, the ward's high reliance on non-motorized transport (93.7%) and the disproportionate impact on female mobility highlight the need for inclusive planning (Socio-Economic Survey, 2025).



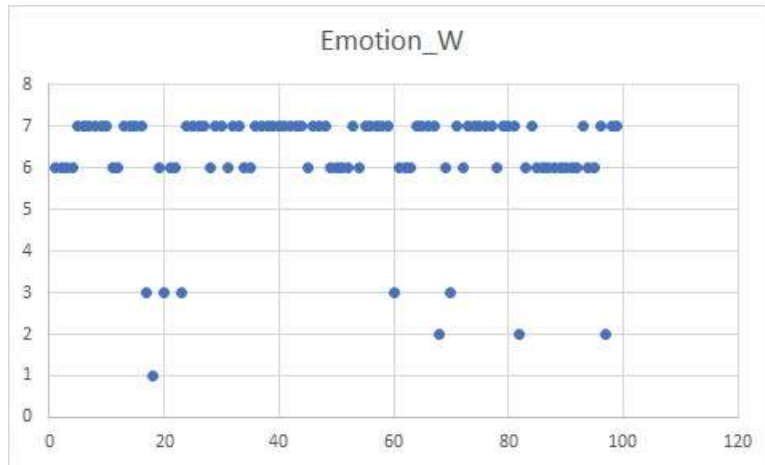


Figure 14 Ward 02 Emotional Graph

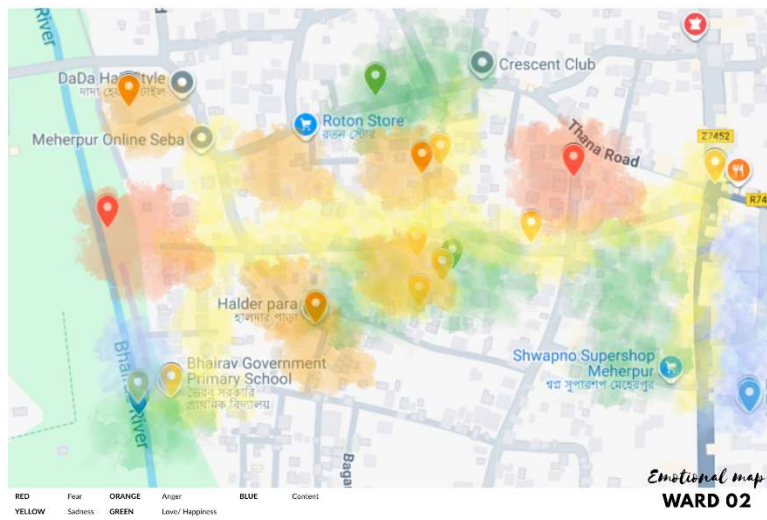


Figure 15 Ward 02 Emotional Mapping



Figure 16 Ward 02 Space Syntax Diagram

In Ward 2, emotional analysis mapped zones of positive and negative emotions, highlighting areas that induce feelings such as happiness or anger. Spaces falling outside these zones, known as Emotional Gap Areas, show low emotional engagement and are underutilized. To enhance the ward's livability, these gaps can be redeveloped into vibrant Urban Voids—public spaces, parks, recreational centers, and community activity zones—that encourage social interaction and strengthen residents' emotional connection to their surroundings.

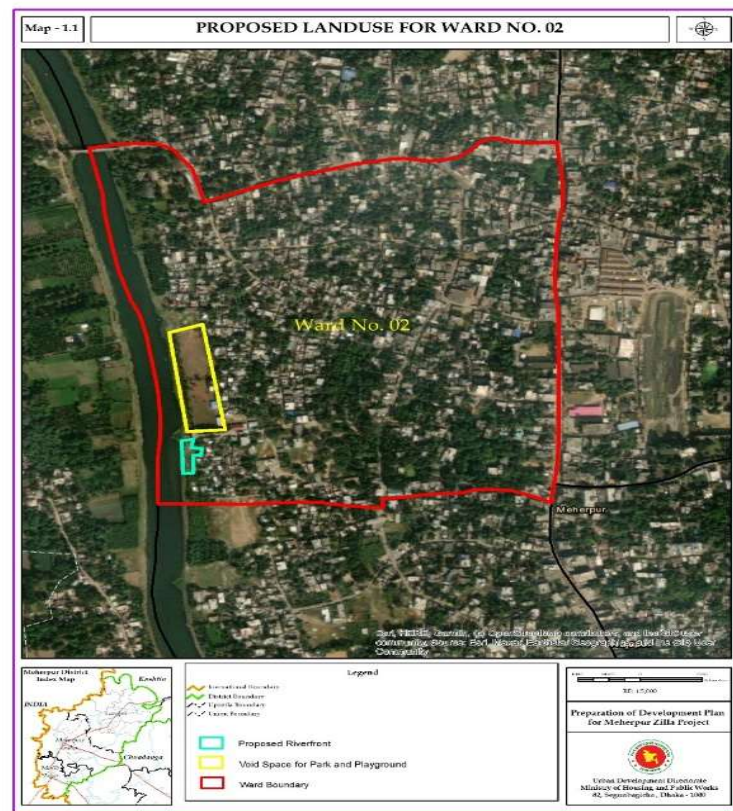


Figure 17 Ward 02 Detected void space through mapping.



Figure 18 Ward 02 Void area in physical location.

### 4.3 Ward 03

Ward 3, situated in the northern section of Meherpur Municipality, along the Meherpur–Gangni road corridor, serves as a gateway connecting rural areas to the municipal center. (Figure 1) It has a population of 3,449 (BBS 2022)—1,666 males and 1,783 females—spread across Tatipara, Kathuli Bus Stand, Khan Para, and Ber Para, which combine dense residential clusters, local markets, and roadside commercial strips. Population projections suggest a gradual decline from 3,186 in 2026 to 2,904 by 2046, showing demographic shifts.

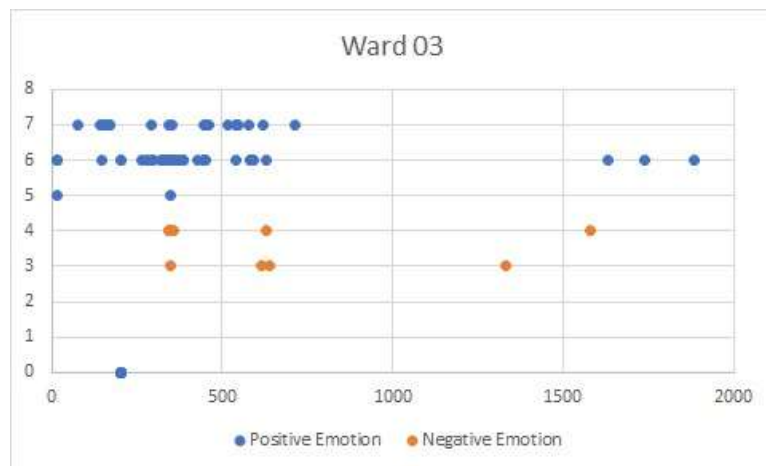


Figure 19 Ward 03 Emotional Graph

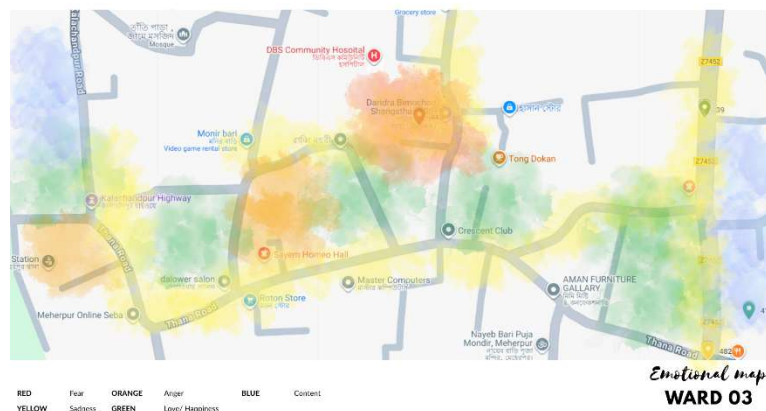


Figure 20 Ward 03 Emotional Mapping





Figure 21 Ward 03 Space Syntax Diagram

Emotional analysis of Ward 3 identified positive and negative emotion zones by mapping average distances to places evoking feelings like happiness or anger. Areas outside these zones—called Emotional Gap Areas—show little emotional engagement, indicating underused spaces lacking social or recreational activities. These gaps are targeted for Urban Void Development, transforming them into vibrant community spots like parks, play areas, or social hubs to boost emotional connection and improve the ward’s livability.

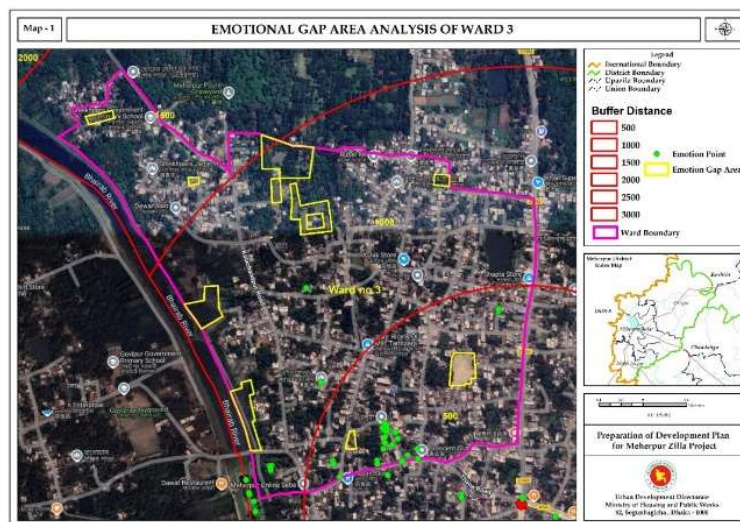


Figure 22 Ward 03 Detected void space through mapping.



Figure 23 Ward 03 Void area in physical location.

#### 4.4 Ward 04

Ward No. 04 of Meherpur Paurashava is a moderately developed ward with a strong socio-cultural base but limited physical infrastructure. The ward had a population of 7,988 people in 2022 (BBS, 2022), which is projected to increase to 17,360 by 2047, highlighting a significant growth trend and increasing pressure on land use, services, and infrastructure.

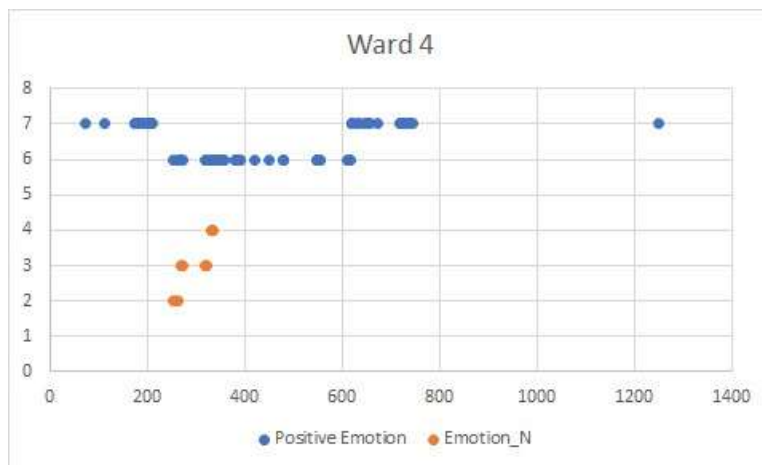


Figure 24 Ward 04 Emotional Graph

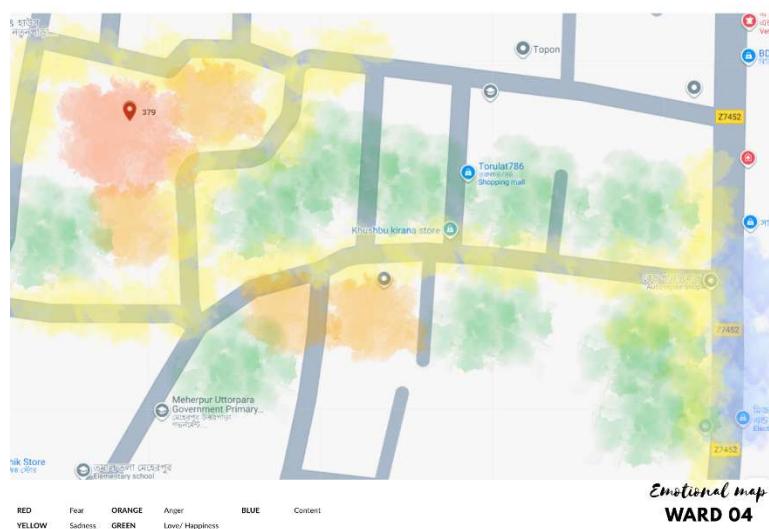


Figure 25 Ward 04 Emotional Mapping



*Figure 26 Ward 04 Space Syntax Diagram*

In Ward No. 04, the emotional void appears mainly in the outer areas where community interaction is low and spaces remain unused or neglected. These include vacant lands, abandoned ponds, narrow lanes without social activity, and roadside stretches dominated by traffic rather than people. Unlike the central zones with strong emotional attachment (homes, schools, bazaars), these void areas lack cultural or social meaning and are mostly used as pass-through spaces. With simple, low-cost interventions such as seating, greenery, play areas, or community corners, these emotional voids could be transformed into active and meaningful places for residents.



*Figure 27 Ward 04 Detected void space through mapping.*



Figure 28 Ward 04 Void area in physical location.

#### 4.5 Ward 05

Ward 5, situated in the central zone of Meherpur Municipality, is one of the most densely populated and economically active wards, serving as a focal point for residential, commercial, and social activities. The ward includes neighborhoods such as Dighir Para, T N T Para, Kashob Para, Chokro Para, Police Line Para, and Hotat Para, characterized by compact housing, roadside businesses, and small-scale service enterprises. With a population of 4,596 in 2022 (BBS, 2022), projected to reach 8,931 by 2046, the ward faces increasing density and rising demand for infrastructure and services.

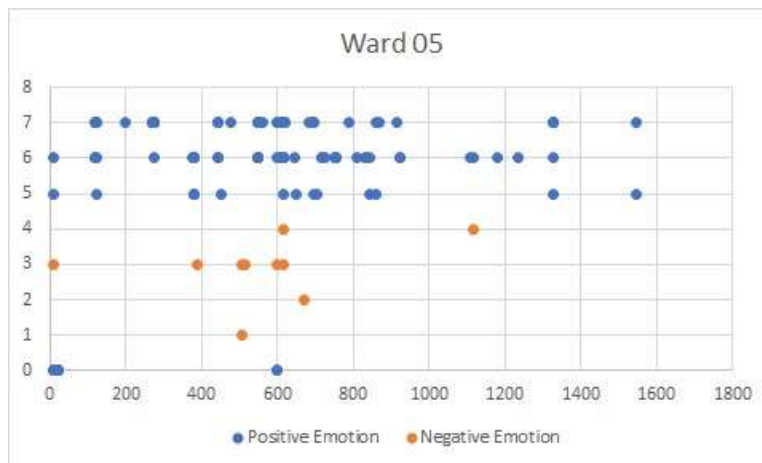


Figure 29 Ward 05 Emotional Graph





Figure 30 Ward 05 Emotional Mapping



Figure 31 Ward 05 Space Syntax Diagram

An emotional analysis of Ward 5 showed positive and negative emotion zones by mapping the average distances to places that evoke feelings such as happiness or anger. Areas outside these zones—called Emotional Gap Areas—show little emotional engagement, indicating underused spaces lacking social or recreational activities. These gaps are targeted for Urban Void Development, transforming them into vibrant community spaces, such as parks, play areas, or social hubs, to boost emotional connection and improve the ward’s livability.



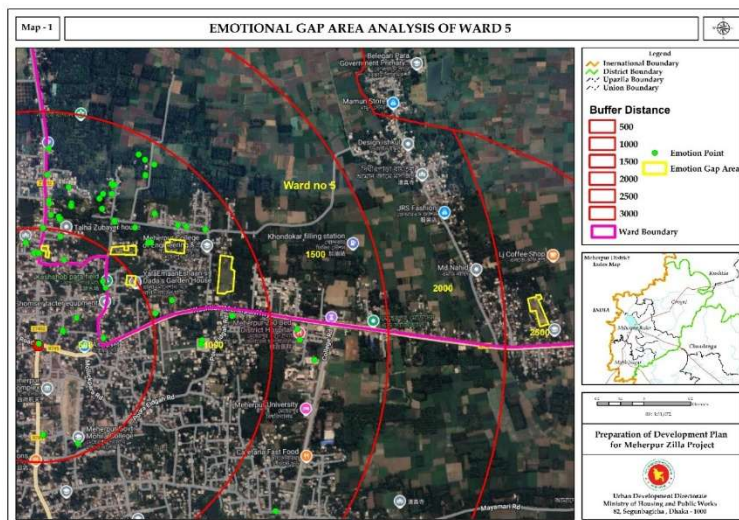


Figure 32 Ward 05 Detected void space through mapping.



Figure 33 Ward 05 Void area in physical location.

#### 4.6 Ward 06

Ward 6 of Meherpur Municipality is a rapidly developing urban area that faces both opportunities and challenges as it adapts to the growing demands of its population. The population, recorded at 3,749 in 2022, is projected to double by 2043, reaching more than 15,000 residents. This demographic pressure underscores the urgent need for strategic planning in infrastructure, services, and livability. From a physical perspective, the road network extends to approximately 19.36 km, but with a high share of earthen and poorly maintained roads, connectivity remains weak and vulnerable during the monsoon season.

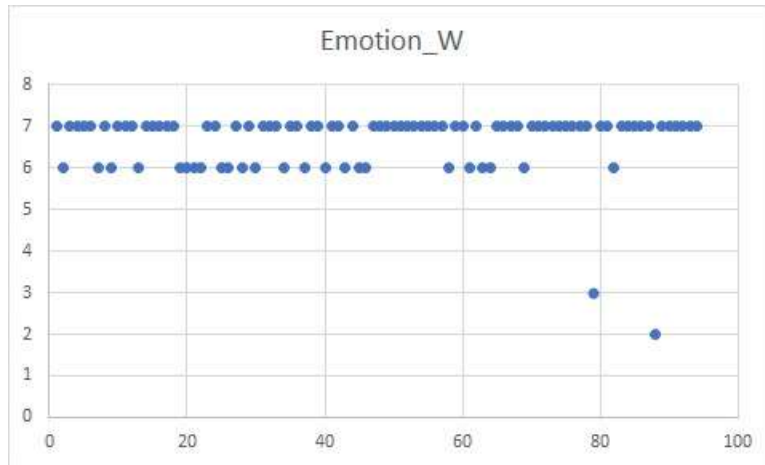


Figure 34 Ward 06 Emotional Graph

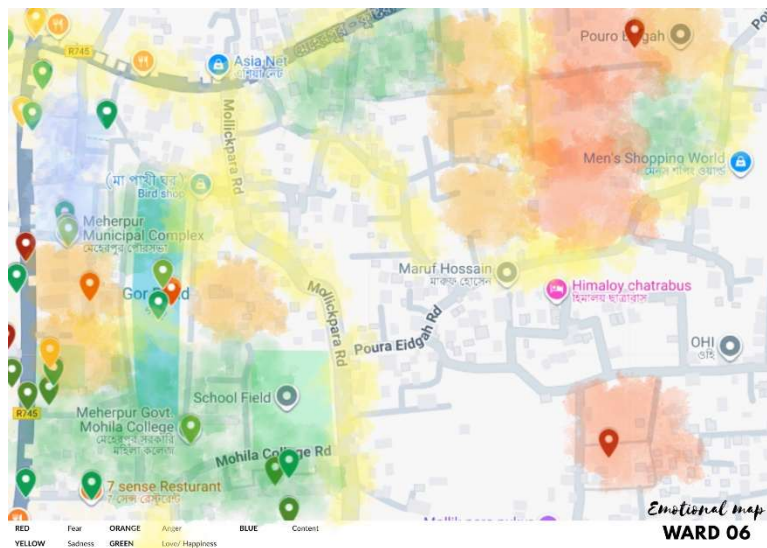


Figure 35 Ward 06 Emotional Mapping



Figure 36 Ward 06 Space Syntax Diagram

Emotional analysis of Ward 6 identified zones of positive and negative emotion by measuring average distances to places that evoke feelings like happiness or Fear. Areas outside these zones—called Emotional Gap Areas—show minimal emotional engagement, indicating underused spaces lacking social or recreational activities. These gaps are targeted for Urban Void Development, turning them into lively community spaces such as parks, play areas, or social hubs to foster emotional connections and enhance the ward’s livability.

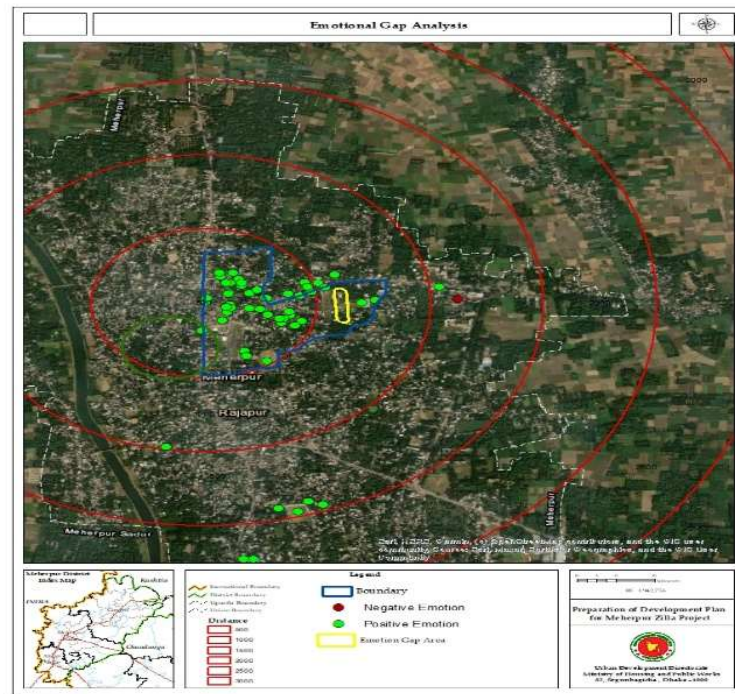


Figure 37 Ward 06 Detected void space through mapping.



Figure 38 Ward 06 Void area in physical location.



#### 4.7 Ward 07

Ward 7, located in the northeastern part of Meherpur Municipality, serves as a vital area for local and regional connectivity, positioned near key transport corridors and community centers. According to the 2022 data from the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), the ward is home to 6,627 residents, with high-density settlements in areas like Dighirpara and Kasaripara. The ward's economy is largely driven by small business owners, service providers, and informal sector workers.

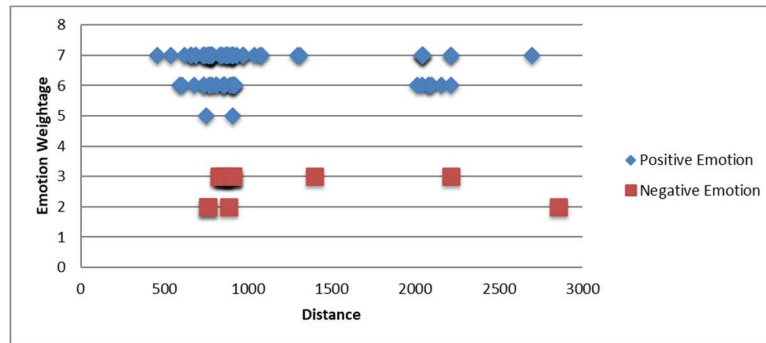


Figure 39 Ward 07 Emotional Graph

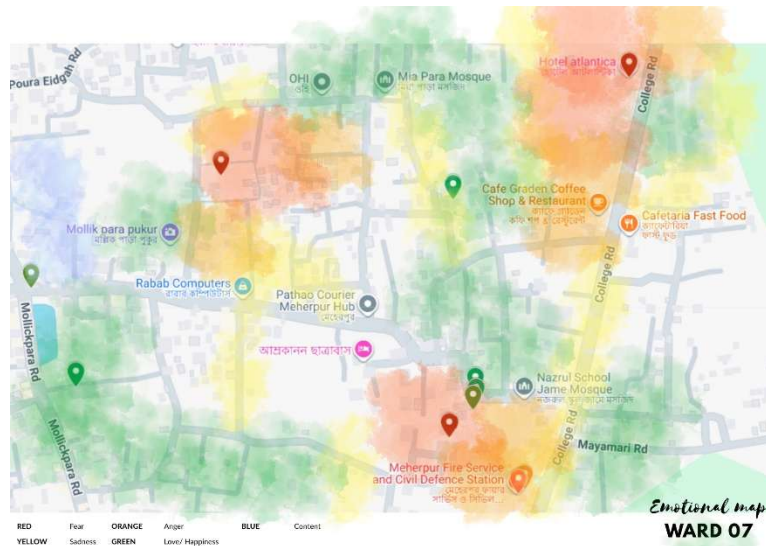


Figure 40 Ward 07 Emotional Mapping



Figure 41 Ward 07 Space Syntax Diagram

The emotional analysis of Ward 7 reveals distinct positive and negative emotional zones based on the proximity to places that evoke emotions such as happiness or anger. These zones were identified by mapping the average distances from key locations, highlighting areas where residents feel a stronger connection or emotional attachment. However, areas located outside these emotional zones, termed as Emotional Gap Areas, show limited emotional engagement, indicating underutilized spaces that lack social or recreational activities.

By transforming these neglected spaces into dynamic community hubs—such as parks, play areas, or social gathering spots—we can foster stronger emotional connections within the community. This initiative aims not only to address the spatial voids but also to improve social interactions, emotional well-being, and the overall livability of Ward 7. The development of these areas is a key step towards enhancing the quality of life and creating a more inclusive and vibrant urban environment.

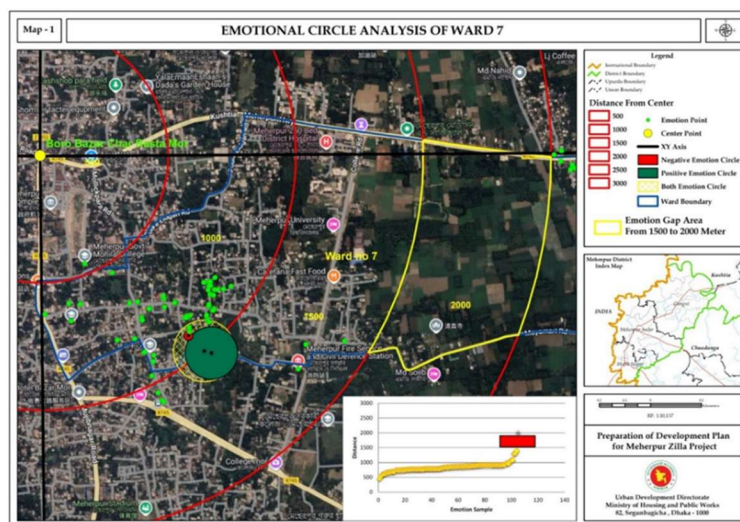


Figure 42 Ward 07 Detected void space through mapping.



Figure 43 Ward 07 Void area in physical location.

#### 4.8 Ward 08

Ward 8, located in southern Meherpur Municipality near the Kushtia–Chuadanga highway and the central bus terminal, is a vital hub for local and inter-district travel. It has 4,405 residents (BBS, 2022) concentrated in dense neighborhoods such as Bus Stand Para and College Para, with the population projected to reach 5,900 by 2047 (density rising from 6.72 to 9.09 persons per acre). Water supply is generally stable but unevenly distributed in central areas, and recreational facilities are extremely limited, with only 0.33 acres of open space available for public use.



Figure 44 Ward 08 Emotional Graph



Figure 45 Ward 08 Emotional Mapping

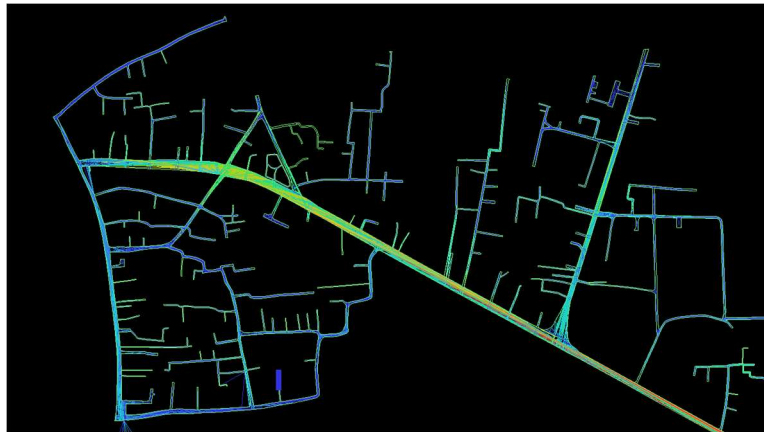


Figure 46 Ward 08 Space Syntax Diagram

Emotional analysis of Ward 8 identified positive and negative emotion zones by mapping average distances to places evoking feelings like happiness or anger. Areas outside these zones—called Emotional Gap Areas—show little emotional engagement, indicating underused spaces lacking social or recreational activities. These gaps are targeted for Urban Void Development, transforming them into vibrant community spots like parks, play areas, or social hubs to boost emotional connection and improve the ward’s livability.



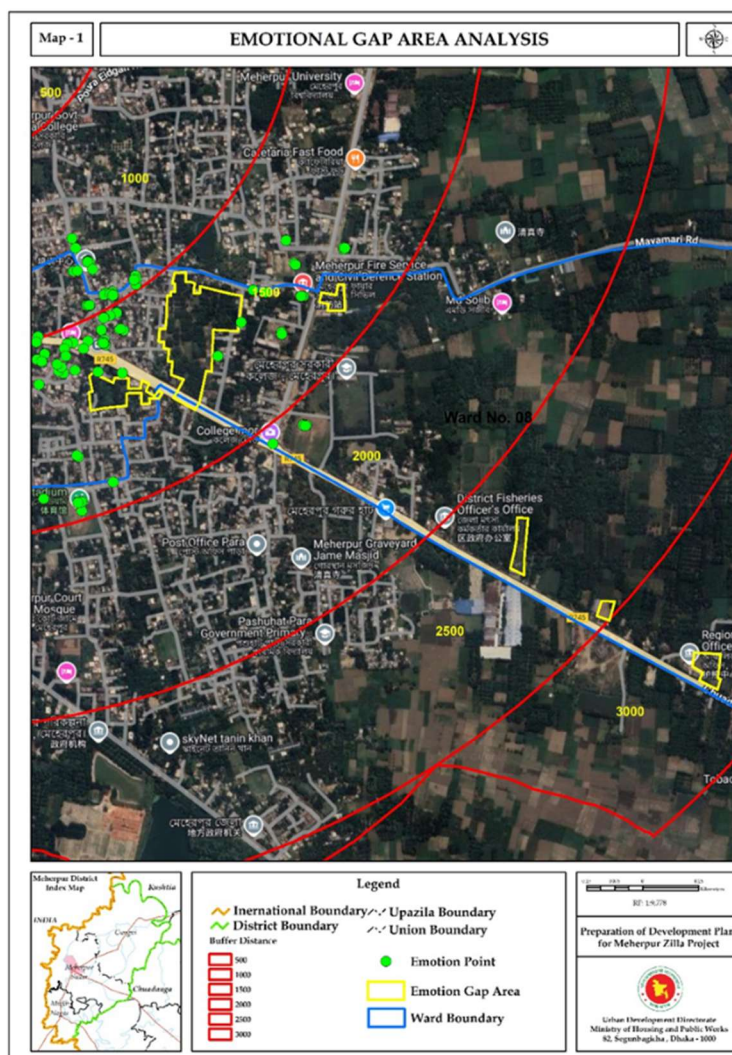


Figure 47 Ward 08 Detected void space through mapping.



Figure 48 Ward 08 Void area in physical location.



#### 4.9 Ward 09

Ward No. 09 spans a total area of 659.01 acres and has experienced steady demographic growth over the past decades. The population increased from 5,629 in 2011 to 6,929 in 2022 (Source: BBS,2022), with projections estimating further growth to 8,370 in 2032 and 10,303 in 2043. This consistent upward trend highlights the rising demand for housing, infrastructure, and essential services in the ward.

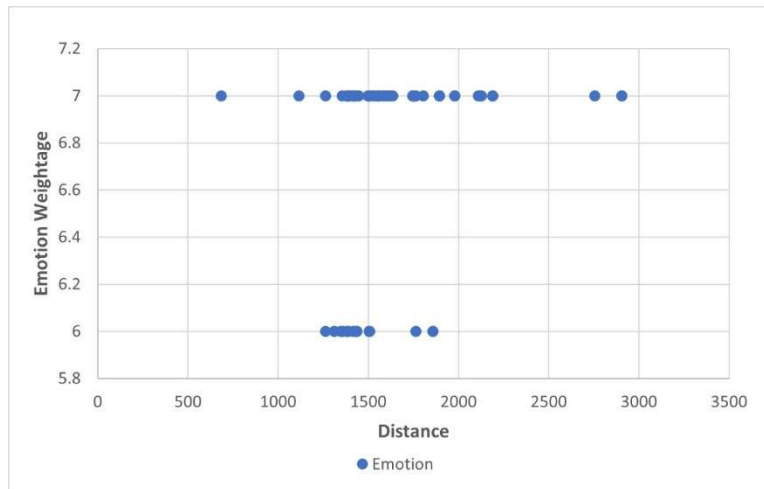


Figure 49 Ward 09 Emotional Graph

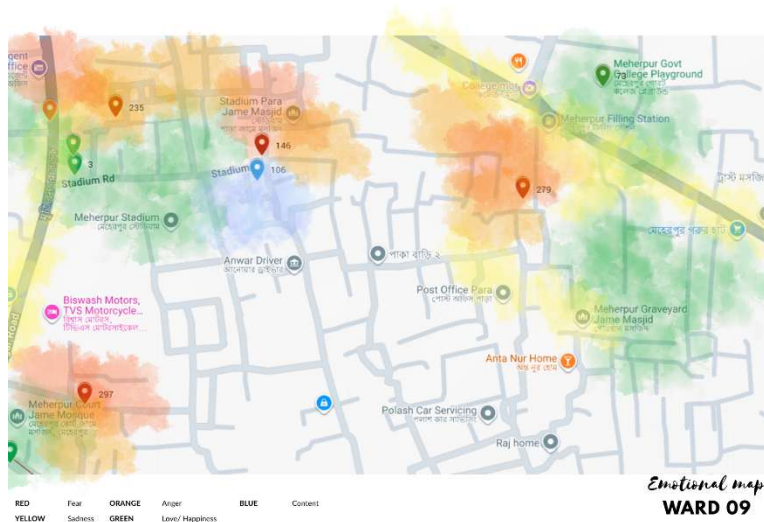


Figure 50 Ward 09 Emotional Mapping



*Figure 51 Ward 09 Space Syntax Diagram*

An emotional analysis of Ward 9 identified zones characterized by positive and negative emotions through the measurement of average distances to locations that evoke feelings such as happiness and love. Areas outside these zones, referred to as Emotional Gap Areas, exhibit minimal emotional engagement, indicating underutilized spaces devoid of social or recreational activities. These gaps are designated for Urban Void Development, transforming them into vibrant community spaces such as parks, play areas, or social hubs to promote emotional connections and improve the ward's livability.

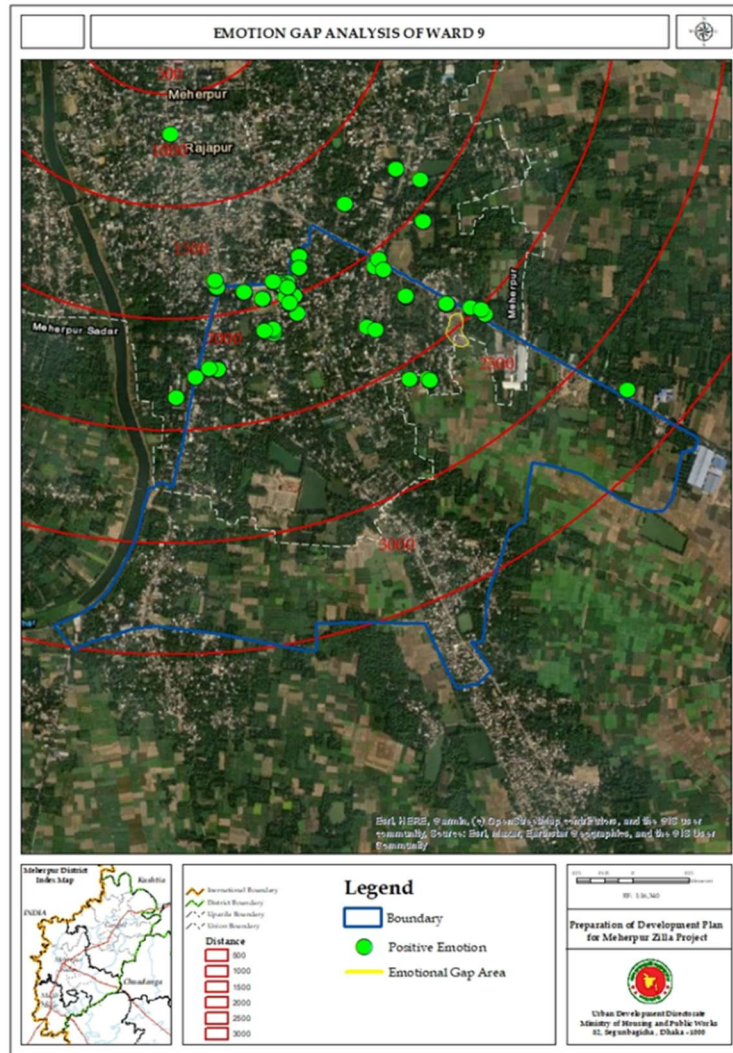


Figure 52 Ward 09 Detected void space through mapping.



Figure 53 Ward 09 Void area in physical location.

#### 4.10 Justification for Selecting Meherpur Municipality

The choice of Meherpur Municipality as the study area was based on the following factors:

1. **Manageable Scale for Pilot Implementation** – The small geographic and population size allowed for detailed mapping and close community engagement within available research resources.
2. **Diversity of Urban Voids** – Preliminary field visits identified a variety of void types, including unused municipal plots, neglected open corners, and road side gaps, making the area suitable for comparative analysis.
3. **Community Willingness** – Local stakeholders, including the municipality, community leaders, and residents, expressed interest in participating in a participatory mapping and pilot improvement project.
4. **Replication Potential** – As Meherpur shares socio-economic and spatial characteristics with many small municipalities in Bangladesh, lessons learned here could be replicated in similar contexts nationwide.
5. **Absence of Formal Public Space Development Plans** – At the time of study, Meherpur lacked a comprehensive urban public space policy, offering an opportunity to test grassroots-led planning approaches.

### 5. Contextual Background

#### 5.1 Historical & Cultural Overview

Meherpur, a municipality in the south-western part of Bangladesh, holds deep historical and cultural significance. It is widely recognized as the site where the first Provisional Government of Bangladesh was formed in 1971, embedding it with national memory and symbolic value. The town's cultural identity is expressed through community festivals, traditional crafts, and collective memories of its liberation history. Local landmarks, religious institutions, and public squares further reinforce a sense of belonging and continuity, anchoring residents to both their heritage and evolving urban identity.

#### 5.2 Urban Morphology and Land Use

The morphology of Meherpur Municipality reflects a blend of rural settlement patterns and emerging urban structures. Its compact size and organic street networks are interspersed with administrative buildings, marketplaces, educational institutions, and residential areas. The presence of underutilized land parcels, abandoned plots, and fragmented open spaces contributes to the formation of urban voids. In many cases, these voids are by-products of unplanned growth, outdated zoning practices, or infrastructural gaps. At the same time, agricultural peripheries and transitional lands surrounding the urban core provide both challenges and opportunities for integrated planning.



### 5.3 Socio-economic Snapshot

The socio-economic profile of Meherpur is characterized by small-scale trade, agriculture-linked livelihoods, and a growing service sector. While the municipality receives help from cross-border economic flows and local entrepreneurship, it faces constraints in employment diversification and infrastructure provision. A sizable part of the population relies on informal sector activities, which are often spatially clustered in markets and transport nodes. Socially, the city reflects strong community bonds but also disparities in access to education, healthcare, and recreational facilities. These socio-economic dynamics influence how residents perceive and use urban spaces, shaping emotional responses to both active areas and neglected voids.

## 6. Mapping the Emptiness: Identifying Urban Voids

### 6.1 Definition and Typology of Voids

Urban voids are spaces within the municipal fabric that remain underutilized, abandoned, or disconnected from the flow of everyday urban life. These may appear as residual land from infrastructural projects, derelict industrial plots, unplanned open fields, or fragmented in-between spaces. In the context of Meherpur, voids can be categorized into three primary types:

- **Residual Voids:** Leftover spaces at road intersections, beside canals, or near transport corridors.



*Figure 54 Riverside voids.*

- **Abandoned or Derelict Sites:** Vacant plots from stalled developments, disused facilities, or neglected buildings.



*Figure 55 Neglected space.*

- **Transitional or Peripheral Lands:** Agricultural fringes or peri-urban lands awaiting conversion into structured urban uses.



*Figure 56 Agricultural fringe area.*

This typology helps in framing a more nuanced understanding of emptiness—not merely as absence, but as latent potential for transformation.

## 6.2 Inventory of Voids in Meherpur Municipality

An inventory was prepared through field surveys, participatory mapping, and GIS analysis. Preliminary findings reveal:

- Several small-scale residual spaces around **bustee settlements, road junctions, and market peripheries**.
- Medium-sized abandoned plots found close to the **administrative core and transport nodes**, often encroached upon for informal uses.
- Larger transitional lands on the **edges of the municipality**, currently used intermittently for agriculture, or left idle.

Each void was classified by size, current use (if any), ownership status, and degree of community engagement, forming a structured database for future planning interventions.

### 6.3 Spatial Distribution & Accessibility Analysis

The spatial distribution of voids shows a pattern of fragmentation, with smaller voids dispersed across the inner city and larger voids concentrated along the periphery. Accessibility analysis using **space syntax diagrams** indicates:

- Central voids, though limited in size, are highly accessible and visible, making them strategic for immediate community interventions.
- Peripheral voids, while larger, remain poorly connected and less integrated into the urban movement network, requiring infrastructural support to activate.
- Certain voids overlap with zones of negative emotional perception (fear, neglect, insecurity), highlighting the need for socio-spatial integration.

This analysis underscores that voids are not evenly distributed nor equally accessible planning must therefore prioritize interventions based on both spatial integration and emotional significance.

## 7. Emotional Mapping Results

### 7.1 Method Summary

The emotional mapping exercise was carried out through a series of workshops and walking interviews with diverse community groups. Over **180 emotion-pins** were collected and linked with qualitative comments, representing lived experiences and perceptions of different urban spaces. Special sessions with **children and women's groups** were conducted to ensure inclusive representation, as these groups often experience the city differently highlighting issues of safety, accessibility, and play.

### 7.2 Emotional Categories Used

The study employed emotional categories developed in the methodology (see Section 4.2), distinguishing between:

- **Positive emotions** (safety, joy, pride, attachment)
- **Negative emotions** (fear, neglect, discomfort, insecurity)
- **Transitional/ambivalent emotions** (mixed feelings depending on time, use, or conditions)

These categories allowed for nuanced interpretation of how voids and active spaces are experienced by residents.

### 7.3 Key Findings — Emotional Hotspots & Coldspots

The mapping revealed clusters of emotions that highlight both opportunities and challenges for urban planning:

- **Hotspots (positive attachment):** Small shaded courtyards near schools; lively market edges with active social interaction; temple precincts and religious gathering areas.
- **Coldspots (negative feelings):** Large fenced vacant plots perceived as threatening; derelict and abandoned buildings; dimly lit underpasses and poorly maintained alleys.
- **Transitional spots:** Riverside edges where visual appeal and open vistas inspire positive feelings, but seasonal flooding, poor access, and inadequate infrastructure create anxiety—especially during the monsoon.

### 7.4 Vulnerable Groups’ Perspectives

Emotional mapping further revealed differentiated needs across demographic groups:

- **Women:** Emphasized the importance of lighting, visibility, and mixed uses (vendors plus seating) for creating safety and comfort. They highlighted formalized access routes as crucial for everyday mobility.
- **Children:** Expressed joy when meeting small green patches and shaded areas near schools. They identified a strong need for safe, dedicated play spaces and voiced fear of empty lots where strangers tend to gather.
- **Elderly:** Preferred shaded seating areas, gentle slopes, and accessible paths that encourage social interaction without physical strain. Their comments emphasized comfort and inclusivity in the design of public spaces.

## 8. Synthesis: Emptiness Links to Emotion and Inclusion

### 8.1 Patterns & Correlations

The integration of emotional mapping with spatial analysis reveals strong connections between void characteristics and community perceptions:

- **Larger unused plots** often correlate with heightened reports of anxiety, insecurity, and neglect. These spaces tend to accumulate litter, attract anti-social activities, and reinforce feelings of exclusion.
- **Smaller, informally used voids** frequently generate pride and positive attachment when community members exercise stewardship—through gardening, informal play, or temporary market activities. This demonstrates that scale and activation are critical determinants of whether a void is perceived as threatening or empowering.

### 8.2 Case Vignettes

To illustrate these linkages, several case-specific narratives are highlighted:



- **Market-edge Lot:** Currently activated by informal vendors who bring vitality and social interaction. Residents associate this space with energy and convenience. *Planning implication:* formalize vending clusters, improve sanitation, and provide basic infrastructure (water points, shading, seating).
- **Riverside Margin:** A visually attractive location valued for its natural beauty, yet physically cut off due to lack of access and seasonal flooding. *Planning implication:* introduce stepped embankments, seasonal seating, and pedestrian-friendly connections to integrate the riverfront into daily urban life.
- **Abandoned School Field:** Centrally located yet underused, generating feelings of waste and insecurity. *Planning implication:* redevelop as a community-managed pocket park with children's play equipment and flexible space for weekend markets or cultural events.

## 9. Design Strategies & Intervention Framework

### 9.1 Principles for Inclusive Transformation

The design framework is guided by principles that prioritize social equity, resilience, and collective ownership:

- **Do no harm:** Protect existing informal livelihoods by integrating or relocating them sensitively, rather than displacing without alternatives.
- **Incrementalism:** Begin with small, low-cost pilot interventions that can be scaled up over time based on community feedback and success.
- **Multi-functionality:** Ensure that spaces are designed to serve diverse needs—play for children, vending and markets for livelihoods, resilience against floods, and venues for cultural or civic events.
- **Gender-sensitive design:** Incorporate lighting, clear sightlines, and female-inclusive programming to create environments where women feel safe and welcome.
- **Community stewardship:** Establish co-management models where residents, traders, and local institutions share responsibilities, with rotating maintenance duties to foster accountability.



*Figure 57 Minimal intervention using color and temporary structure 01*



*Figure 58 Minimal intervention using color and temporary structure 02*

## 9.2 Tactical Urbanism & Quick Wins

Short-term, low-investment strategies can demonstrate immediate change and build momentum:

- Organize **clean-up drives and mural projects** in neglected plots to strengthen community ownership.
- Install **temporary seating, planters, and solar-powered lighting** in selected voids to improve usability and safety.
- Pilot **weekend pop-up markets** in underused lots, testing the potential for micro-enterprise and local economic growth.



Figure 59 Pop up market option.

### 9.3 Medium-term Design Proposals

As confidence and resources grow, medium-scale interventions can reshape the character of key voids:

- Develop **formalized pocket parks** equipped with play structures, shaded native tree plantings, and permeable paving to enhance resilience.
- Introduce **market-infill designs** with modular stalls, lockable storage, and shading, enabling small traders to operate with dignity and efficiency.



Figure 60 Pocket Park.

### 9.4 Long-term Strategic Proposals

For sustained transformation, long-range planning should integrate voids into the municipality's structural framework:

- Create a **riverfront promenade** with flood-adaptive terraces, pedestrian walkways, and cultural activity nodes that reconnect residents with the river.



- Establish **green corridors** linking schools, markets, and municipal buildings, enhancing walkability, ecological resilience, and social cohesion.



Figure 61 Promenade.

## 10. Detailed Project Ideas

### 10.1 Pocket Park (Ward 3 – Void A)

- **Area:** 0.6 acre
- **Features:** Children's play area, elders' seating, open-air classroom, native shade trees, and a bioswale for stormwater management.
- **Phasing:**
  - *Phase 1:* Clean-up and installation of basic seating and pathways.
  - *Phase 2:* Tree planting, installation of play equipment, and landscape enhancement.
  - *Phase 3:* Solidify governance through community stewardship, maintenance schedules, and monitoring.

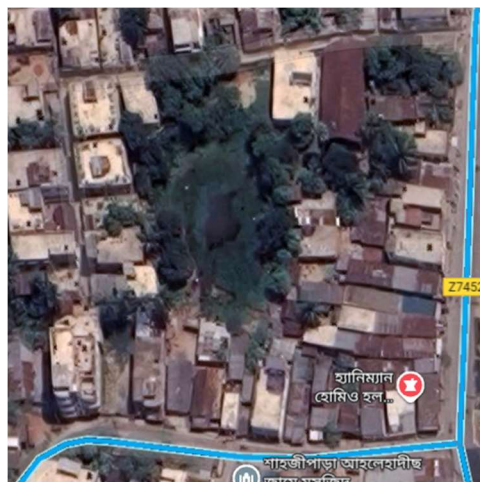


Figure 62 Void area for pocket park.



Figure 63 Conceptual diagram for pocket park.

## 10.2 Micro-Enterprise Hub (Bus Stand Adjacent — Void C)

- Modular stalls for small vendors.
- Shared storage and waste management systems.
- Integration with local micro-credit schemes to support entrepreneurship.
- Flexible design to allow temporary markets, workshops, or cultural activities.

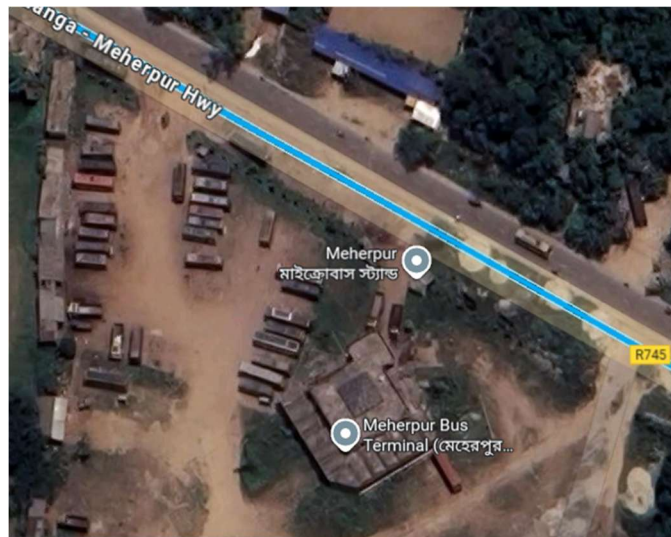


Figure 64 Void area for pop up market.





Figure 65 Conceptual sketch for pop up market.

### 10.3 Riverside Memory Node

- Small amphitheater for cultural programs.
- Viewing platforms along the river edge.
- Concessions, shade pergolas, and seating to encourage leisure and interaction.
- Seasonal flood-adaptive features to maintain usability throughout the year.

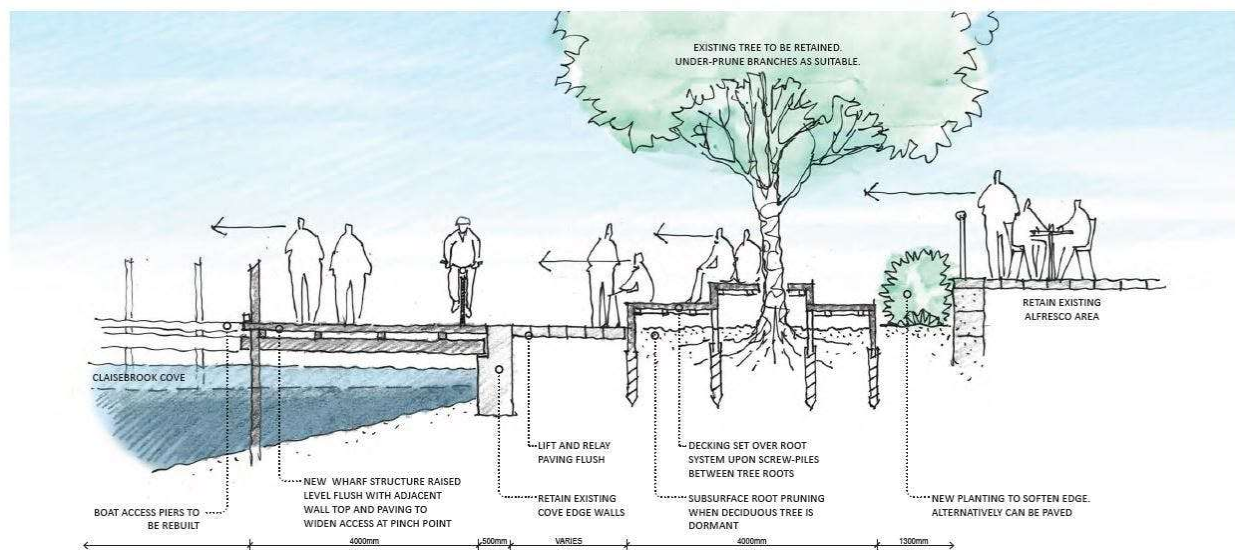


Figure 66 Conceptual section for riverside development.

### 10.4 Connectivity Interventions

- Short pedestrian links connecting voids to adjacent streets and amenities.
- Raised crossings at key junctions for safety.
- Signage and wayfinding to improve navigation.
- Night-time lighting to enhance security and usability.

## 11. Social Inclusion & Governance

### 11.1 Participatory Implementation Mechanisms

Effective transformation of urban voids requires active involvement of residents and stakeholders. Proposed mechanisms include:

- **Steering Committee:** Comprising ward members, women's group representatives, youth leaders, and the municipal engineer to guide planning, monitoring, and conflict resolution.
- **Community Stewardship Model:** Assign caretakers for each site with a small honorarium, funded through micro-leases of vending or activity spaces, ensuring local ownership and accountability.
- **Feedback Loops:** Regular community meetings and participatory monitoring to adapt interventions based on user experience.

### 11.2 Roles & Responsibilities

Clear delineation of roles ensures that governance is collaborative and inclusive:

- **Municipality:** Formalize land tenure, provide basic infrastructure (drainage, lighting, pathways), and facilitate legal and administrative processes.
- **NGOs / CBOs:** Mobilize local communities, conduct training for stewardship, and mediate conflicts or disputes.
- **Community:** Engage in daily maintenance, organize programming, and manage minor revenue collection for upkeep and micro-events.

### 11.3 Funding & Phasing Options

A phased approach aligns financial planning with implementation capacity:

- **Phase 0 (Planning/Permission):** Supported through municipal budget and small donor grants to cover surveys, design, and permissions.
- **Phase 1 (Tactical Interventions):** Utilize local volunteers and micro-grants to implement quick wins, such as seating, planters, or pop-up markets.
- **Phase 2 (Construction/Medium-term Implementation):** Funded through municipal capital and development partner contributions, enabling construction of pocket parks, market hubs, and riverside interventions.

## 12. Monitoring, Evaluation & Indicators

### 12.1 Social Metrics

To evaluate the social impact and inclusivity of interventions:

- **Perception Surveys:** Conducted quarterly to assess residents' sense of safety, attachment, and satisfaction with transformed spaces.
- **Footfall Counts:** Track usage patterns, identifying peak times and user demographics.
- **Gender-disaggregated Use:** Monitor participation of women, children, and elderly to ensure inclusive access.
- **Micro-enterprises Supported:** Count number of vendors or small businesses operating in redeveloped spaces and their economic outcomes.

### 12.2 Spatial Metrics

To measure the physical and functional improvements in urban voids:

- **Area of Public Open Space Added (sq.m.):** Document newly activated or formalized spaces.
- **Tree Count & Green Cover:** Quantify plantings to assess environmental enhancement and shading provision.
- **Improved Permeability Percentage:** Measure changes in walkability, connectivity, and access across transformed voids.

### 12.3 Environmental Metrics

To evaluate ecological and environmental performance:

- **Drainage Performance During Monsoon:** Monitor effectiveness of bioswales, permeable paving, and flood-adaptive designs.
- **Reduction in Informal Dumping Incidents:** Track changes in waste accumulation and maintenance efficiency.
- **Microclimate Benefits:** Assess temperature moderation, shading, and comfort in greened or landscaped voids.

### 13. Policy Recommendations

To ensure the long-term sustainability and inclusivity of urban void transformation, the following policy measures are recommended:

- **Adopt a Municipal “Void Activation Policy”:** Establish clear guidelines for temporary use of vacant plots, defining the roles of community members, municipal authorities, and vendors. This policy should formalize rights and responsibilities for stewardship, maintenance, and activation of voids.
- **Integrate Emotional Mapping into Ward-level Development Plans:** Systematically include residents’ emotional and perceptual data when planning public spaces, ensuring that social inclusion, safety, and community attachment inform infrastructure and land-use decisions.
- **Enable Flexible Leasing for Micro-entrepreneurs:** Provide modular, temporary, or seasonal leasing options for vendors and small businesses in repurposed voids, encouraging livelihood generation while maintaining space adaptability for multiple functions.
- **Encourage Multi-stakeholder Governance:** Mandate collaborative frameworks where municipal authorities, NGOs, and community groups share decision-making and oversight for public space management.
- **Incorporate Incremental and Resilient Design Approaches:** Promote policies that support low-cost pilot interventions, flood-adaptive infrastructure, and scalable strategies, allowing phased transformation of voids without large upfront investments.
- **Monitor & Evaluate Urban Activation Programs:** Institutionalize monitoring systems that track social, spatial, and environmental indicators to continuously assess the effectiveness of void activation policies and interventions.

## 14. Conclusion

Urban voids in Meherpur Municipality represent more than mere vacant or underutilized land; they embody latent potential for enhancing community wellbeing, resilience, and social inclusion. This study demonstrates that by **integrating emotional mapping with spatial analysis**, planners and municipal authorities can understand how residents perceive and experience these spaces, identifying hotspots of pride, coldspots of neglect, and transitional areas with untapped potential.

When combined with **tactical design interventions**—ranging from quick-win actions like temporary seating and pop-up markets, to medium-term pocket parks and micro-enterprise hubs, and long-term strategies such as riverfront promenades and green corridors—these voids can be transformed into multifunctional, vibrant, and inclusive public spaces.

Furthermore, **participatory governance models** that empower community stewardship, involve women, children, and youth, and integrate NGOs and municipal authorities are critical to sustaining these transformations. By following incremental, resilient, and inclusive approaches, Meherpur Municipality can convert emptiness into socially productive spaces, fostering a stronger sense of belonging, safety, and civic engagement among residents.

In essence, urban voids, when thoughtfully analyzed and strategically activated, can become catalysts for **inclusive urban development**, reinforcing both the physical and emotional fabric of the city.



## 15. References & Further Reading

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10. Choudhury, M.A., “Urban Voids and Community Wellbeing in Secondary Cities of Bangladesh,” *Asian Journal of Urban Studies*, 2021.
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12. RTM Consultancy, *Reconnaissance Report on Meherpur Municipality Voids and Emotional Mapping*, Internal Publication, 2025.

### Online Resources & Tools:

13. OpenStreetMap Contributors, *Meherpur Municipality Spatial Data*, <https://www.openstreetmap.org>, accessed September 2025.
14. Space Syntax Lab, *Space Syntax Methodology and Tools*, <http://www.spacesyntax.com>, accessed September 2025.

## 16. Annexes

### Annex A- Workshop Materials

#### Emotional Mapping Questionnaire

##### Section A: Background Information (Optional, Anonymous if Needed)

1. Age: \_\_\_\_
2. Gender: \_\_\_\_
3. Occupation: \_\_\_\_
4. How long have you lived/visited this area? \_\_\_\_

##### Section B: Spatial & Emotional Experience

###### 1. Location Identification

- Which part of the city/area do you usually visit most? (e.g., market, park, roadside, square, waterfront)
- Please mark/point on the provided map if possible.

###### 2. General Feelings in Space

- How do you feel when you are in this place? (Select all that apply)
  - ☐ Happy
  - ☐ Calm/Relaxed
  - ☐ Connected/Attached
  - ☐ Energetic/Excited
  - ☐ Nostalgic
  - ☐ Lonely
  - ☐ Unsafe
  - ☐ Anxious/Overwhelmed
  - ☐ Bored/Indifferent
  - ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

###### 3. Intensity of Emotions

On a scale of 1–5, how strong are your emotions when you are in this place?  
(1 = very weak, 5 = very strong)

###### 4. Emotional Triggers

- What specific elements trigger these feelings?
  - ☐ Buildings/Architecture
  - ☐ Open Space/Greenery
  - ☐ Crowds/People

- ☐ Noise & Smell
- ☐ Traffic & Movement
- ☐ History/Memory
- ☐ Activities/Events
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## 5. Positive & Negative Associations

- Describe one **positive memory** you have in this space: \_\_\_\_\_
- Describe one **negative memory/feeling** you have in this space: \_\_\_\_\_

## Section C: Mental Mapping & Attachment

### 6. Personal Connection

- Do you feel a personal attachment to this place?
  - ☐ Strongly Yes
  - ☐ Somewhat
  - ☐ Not really
  - ☐ Not at all

### 7. Mental Image

- If you close your eyes and think of this place, what three things come to mind first?
  1. \_\_\_\_\_
  2. \_\_\_\_\_

### 8. Place Identity

- Do you think this place reflects the identity of your community? Why or why not?

## Section D: Improvement & Future Vision

### 9. Desired Change

- What would make this place emotionally more positive for you?
  - ☐ More greenery
  - ☐ Better seating/resting spots
  - ☐ Safety & security
  - ☐ Cultural/Artistic activities
  - ☐ Noise reduction
  - ☐ Cleanliness

### 10. Open Reflection

- If you could describe this place in one **word** or **short phrase**, what would it be?
- If you could redesign this space emotionally, what would you change?

## Annex B- Void Inventory

Category	Key issues	Opportunities	Priority Wards
Vacant Lands	Dumping, insecurity, mosquito breeding	Pocket parks, micro-enterprise hubs	2,3,4,5,7,8,9
Derelict Structures	Crime, unsafe, underutilized central land	Youth/community hubs, mixed-use centers	2,4,6
Underused Institutional Land	Restricted access, inequity	Shared recreation, weekend markets	2,5,7,8
River/Canal Edges	Encroachment, flooding, dumping	Ghats, promenades, resilient infrastructure	1,2,3,4
Transport Voids	Chaos, pollution, unsafe for pedestrians	Formal vending, green buffers, rest nodes	5,7,8,9
Transitional/Edge Voids	Blight, tenure insecurity, unfinished spaces	Infill housing, community gardens	4,5,7,8
Infrastructure Voids	Dim, unsafe, waterlogging	Linear parks, solar-lit mobility corridors	1,2,3,6,9

## Annex C- Sketches & Concept Diagrams

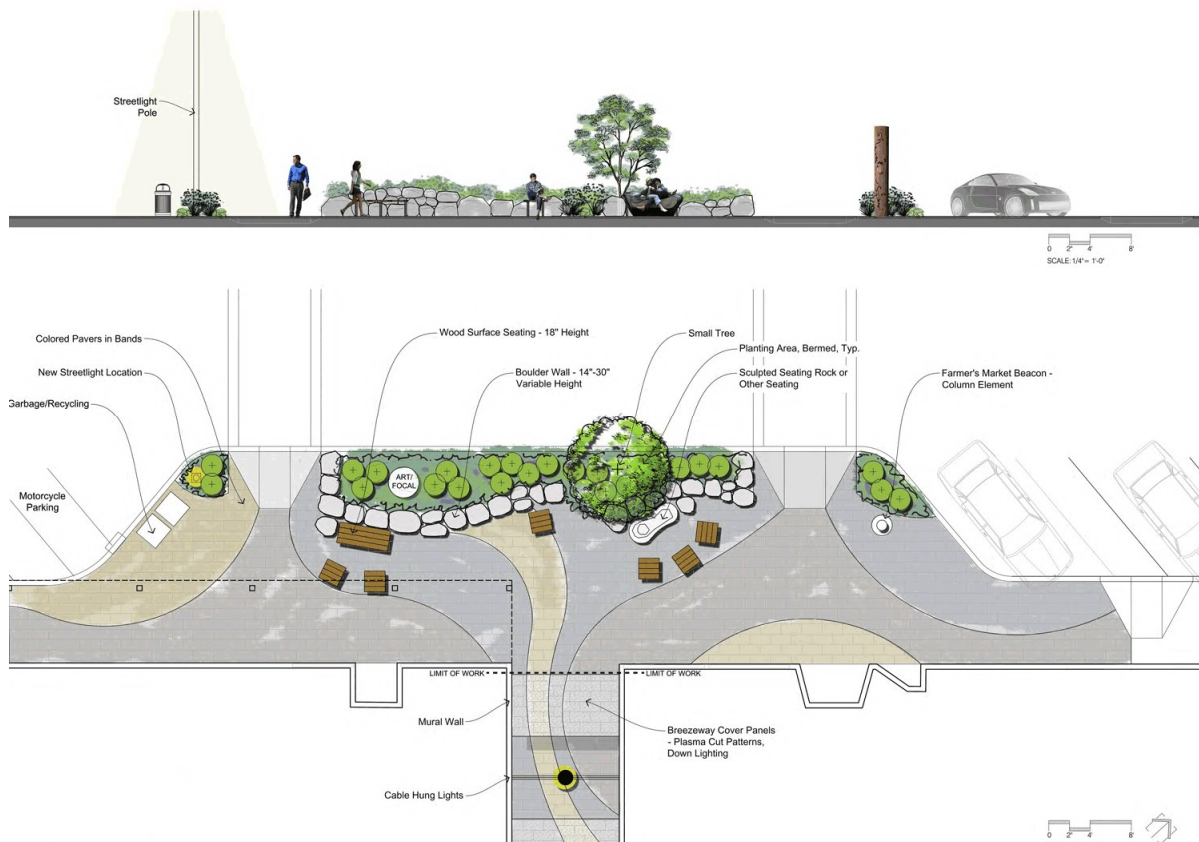


Figure 67 Conceptual diagram for roadside void area development.

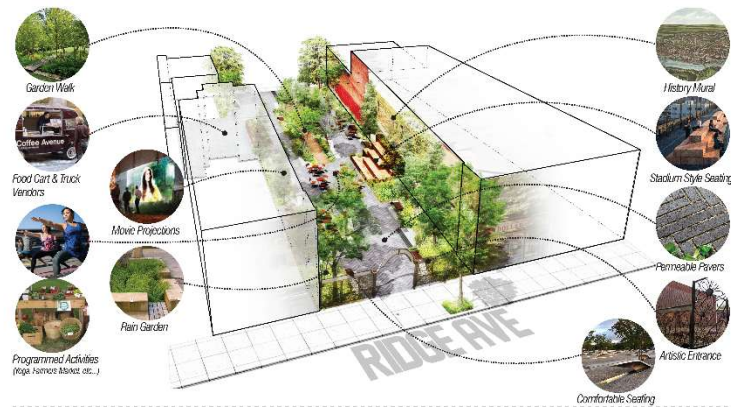


Figure 68 Conceptual diagram for pocket park.



Figure 69 Conceptual diagram for youth hub.

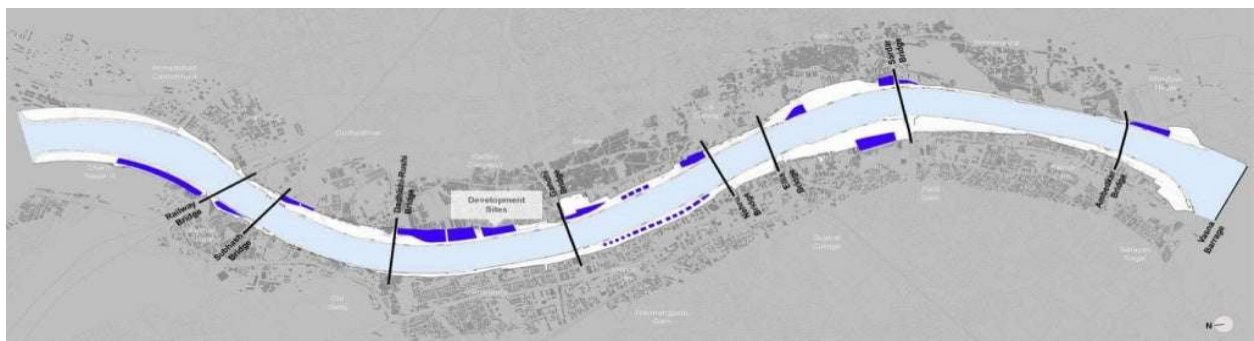


Figure 70 Conceptual diagram for riverfront development.



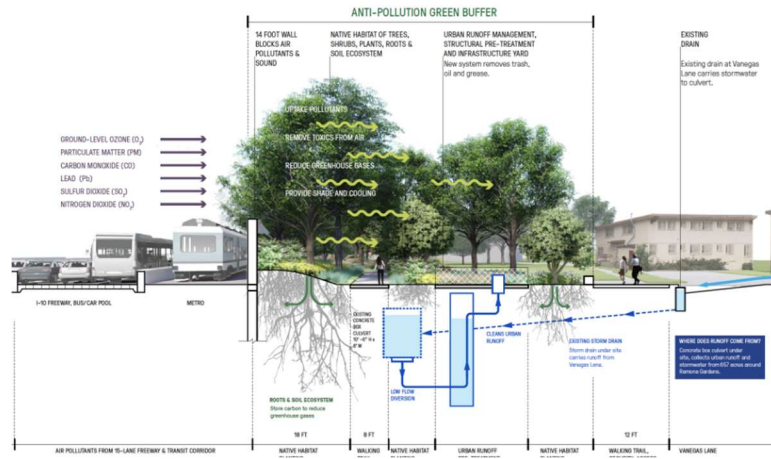


Figure 71 Conceptual diagram for green buffer area.

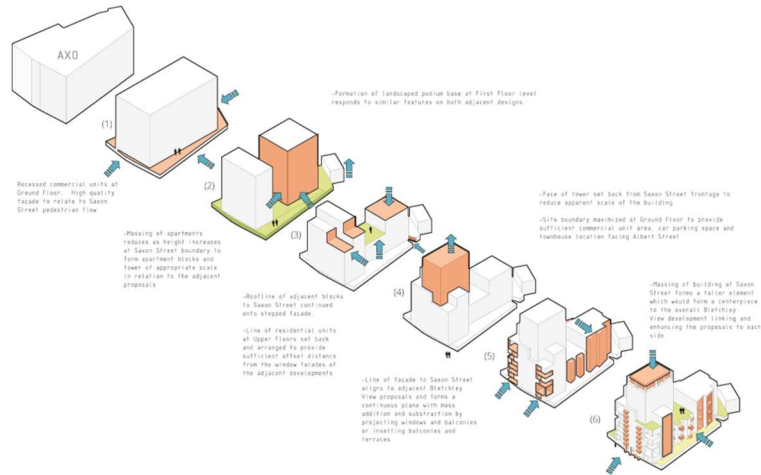


Figure 72 Conceptual diagram for infill housing.