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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Developing Site Suitability Criteria for An Integrated Support Centre for Homeless Support in Kuala Lumpur

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ABSTRACT

The issue of homelessness is still evident in many parts of Kuala Lumpur, particularly in the centre city area where a large number of individuals who rely on public transportation to get around, have limited formal employment options, receive informal forms of assistance with food and other living expenses, and rely heavily on established support systems. The purpose of this paper is to develop and validate at the level of macro-sites a set of criteria for locating an Integrated Support Centre (ISC) for homeless support in Kuala Lumpur. For purposes of this study, an ISC is defined as a walk-in, low barrier, non-medical support centre that acts as a "front door" to provide support and linkages to additional resources such as basic support, referrals and more comprehensive service coordination. The initial criteria were based upon a literature review including relevant case examples and exploratory Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping. Two GIS maps were produced: a Hot Spot Density Map and a Hot Spot-Service Support Network Map. The proposed criteria were then validated using a survey of experts in the field from government, local authorities, NGOs, academics representing 10 different respondent organizations. Of these criteria, proximity to hotspots, access to public transit, safety and walk-in access were ranked highest. Therefore, this study provides evidence supporting the development of a locally relevant and validated framework for identifying potential sites for the placement of ISCs in order to facilitate increased transparency and relevance when selecting sites in Kuala Lumpur.

Contribution/Originality: This study contributes to the existing literature by developing and validating a locally relevant set of macro-level site suitability criteria for a low-barrier Integrated Support Centre in Kuala Lumpur. It combines exploratory GIS mapping with expert validation to support transparent, accessible, coordinated, and context-sensitive decisions when shortlisting homeless support locations.

1. Introduction

Homelessness remains an obvious problem in Kuala Lumpur, especially in central urban areas (Amir et al., 2024; Razak et al., 2022). There is assistance available for homelessness, however, the access to help isn't even across all locations. Location is critical when it comes to accessing walk-in support. If a centre is a long way away, difficult to find or appears to be dangerous then people are much less likely to go into the centre. (Canham et al., 2022; Radke & Mu, 2000). Additionally, if a centre is remote from other services the social workers at those centres may encounter challenges in linking clients to further support (Garcia et al., 2025; Witkowski & Liu, 2022).

This paper explores how to establish an Integrated Support Centre (ISC), for homeless people in Kuala Lumpur. When referring to an ISC in this paper, it refers to a non-clinical, low barrier, walk-in support centre. An ISC does not provide emergency shelter. Individuals may simply walk into an ISC and receive minimal level of support and linkages to formal services and referrals. Since an ISC relies heavily upon walk-in traffic and immediate links to other service providers, location selection is crucial to accessibility and effective service use (Garcia et al., 2025; Witkowski & Liu, 2022).

When selecting sites for actual projects, many times the decision is based on availability, affordability, and the perceived acceptability of the selected site in relation to the surrounding neighbourhood. While each of these factors are certainly important, using them as the sole bases for making decisions about where to locate an ISC may result in unequal decision-making unless there is a clearly defined set of criteria. A proposed site may appear desirable in terms of meeting stated goals and objectives on paper; however, once implemented it could prove difficult to access, violate zoning regulations related to land use, or exist in an environment that raises significant safety issues. Therefore, a simple and pragmatic list of criteria should be developed that reflects the unique characteristics of Kuala Lumpur (Garcia et al., 2025; Malczewski, 2024).

This article focuses on the macro-location aspects of site suitability. Macro-location is concerned with identifying broader geographic conditions that impact whether an individual has access to an ISC. Other criteria that relate to the macro-location include: adequate high-need area coverage; accessible via public transportation; walk-in accessible; universally accessible/OKU compliant; safe surroundings; proximal formal services; proximal community-based support networks; compatible with local land-use ordinances; preparedness of site; acceptance by local community; and operational feasibility. These macro-location factors are consistent with established approaches to land-use suitability analysis and homeless-resource-centre site selection (Garcia et al., 2025; Malczewski, 2024).

The objective of this article is to create and validate a set of site suitability criteria for establishing ISCs for homeless support in Kuala Lumpur. Four sequential steps were completed. First, relevant case studies and literature were reviewed to identify common

site selection factors for low-barrier supportive environments. Second, exploratory Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping was used to assess patterns of need and existing service delivery in Kuala Lumpur. Third, data from steps one and two were utilized to develop a preliminary set of macro-criteria for ISC siting in Kuala Lumpur. Fourth, an expert validation survey was used to determine which criteria are most relevant and most important for evaluating potential ISC sites. The primary output of this project is a finalized set of criteria that can inform the siting of future ISCs in Kuala Lumpur.

The remainder of this paper is organized into literature review, methodology, results, discussion, and conclusion sections.

2. Literature Review

This section examines the literature on planning and service for developing a location strategy for low-barrier homeless support facilities. Rather than provide an overview of all the homelessness policy in general, the goal here is to describe the rationale for locating an ISC with consideration for: proximity to potential walk-in clients; minimizing perceived risk or stigma associated with seeking assistance; integration with existing formal services; and coordination with local community resources. First, it identifies why there are specific siting issues when establishing low-barrier centres. Second, it discusses how urban planners use criteria to assess whether a site would be suitable for an ISC and translate those criteria into quantitative measures. Third, it identifies practical limitations applicable to Kuala Lumpur and other densely populated Asian cities.

2.1. Low-barrier homeless support centers and siting needs

A previous local study found that there was no single type of "support" and therefore using a social-ecological framework, Mohd Rom et al. (2024) have shown that effective response to homelessness requires not only support from the individual themselves, but also from their family and community, the organisation providing support, and the broader public system. Therefore, an ISC would serve as an entry point into a larger network of services. Once engaged in the centre, people could then be referred on to additional services including health services, welfare assistance, identification documents and other forms of formal support.

From a site selection viewpoint, an ISC would need to be sited in an area of high-need, and ideally near formal services which would enable referral to occur quickly. An ISC should be avoided being placed in an isolated or hard-to-reach location. Safety and dignity also play a role in determining a suitable location for a low-barrier centre. As Hisham et al. (2025) reported in relation to transit-centre rehabilitation, support for homelessness in Kuala Lumpur should progress beyond immediate relief provisions and instead focus on building confidence, promoting social participation, and facilitating reintegration. If an ISC is established in an area perceived to be unsafe, chaotic or highly stigmatized, it is likely that potential users will avoid it; similarly, staff may experience difficulty establishing trust with service users.

Ultimately, the literature supports locating ISCs where they are easily accessed, provide a safe space to engage with service providers, and are well-connected to formal support services and community hubs enabling rapid referral. These requirements reflect many of the macro-criteria examined within this study.

2.2. Site suitability in urban planning

Once we have an understanding of what a low-barrier centre requires, the next concern is how planners transform them into a site-based choice. Essentially, planners determine if a location will work from day-to-day rather than simply being "close" to some other resource on a map. Typically, planners accomplish this by developing a small list of criteria. These commonly include access, linkages to services near the site, local environmental factors such as safety, and practical factors including cost and local acceptance.

Planners convert the criteria into comparable metrics by applying them to specific locations. GIS are commonly used for this task because they make identifying spatial relationships easier. Semborski et al. (2022) found in their systematic review that GIS was applied in homelessness research to identify gaps in services, evaluate access to healthcare, and facilitate service planning. Where individuals locate themselves and where services exist both influence who may have access to assistance.

In actuality, planners frequently utilize straightforward measures such as distance to public transportation, proximity to critical services, and hotspot maps. A local site assessment study demonstrates the importance of considering stakeholder preferences when selecting a site. The authors of a study examining the site selection for a day services facility in Norfolk (Witkowski & Liu, 2022), note that there is no single neighbourhood or street that would represent the "optimal" location for all users due to differing needs. However, the authors did demonstrate that differing stakeholder preferences could result in varying outcomes. For example, stakeholders ranked proximity to bus routes as highly important. This serves as a valuable reminder that while data are necessary, suitability also relies upon the values placed by stakeholders.

Studies examining the impact of planning decisions on the decentralization of homeless services provide additional examples of approaches taken by researchers. Researchers examining the effect of transit and mobility on decentralizing homeless services in Salt Lake County determined the accessibility of the services via analysing the relationship between the distances of each site and its respective destinations (Canham et al., 2022). Abstract concepts such as "accessibility," "connectivity," are converted to quantifiable metrics allowing comparison between potential sites.

Collectively, the above studies indicate that two primary methodologies are utilized by researchers. First, researchers begin with well-defined criteria. Second, researchers quantify these criteria creating comparable metrics across locations. Thirdly, researchers acknowledge that what constitutes the "most suitable" location will vary based on the priorities established by stakeholders. Given the findings from previous studies (García et al., 2025; Witkowski & Liu, 2022), this study utilizes a structured approach to defining criteria, followed by consideration of stakeholder priorities through expert opinion.

2.3. Kuala Lumpur and Asian city constraints

This subsection shifts from broad siting literature onto the larger scale of the city. The inner-city environment heavily influences both the nature of support services available to people experiencing homelessness and the ways in which homelessness occurs in Kuala Lumpur. As discussed earlier, the central Kuala Lumpur area, including Chow Kit, has many aspects that make it attractive to those who experience homelessness; informal

employment opportunities, free meals, transportation, and local support networks (Razak et al., 2022), all serve to explain why simply applying a siting strategy to Kuala Lumpur will require consideration of the spatial patterns of where people currently spend their time. Amir et al. (2024) further emphasizes the relevance of the Kuala Lumpur city centre due to its being home to the highest number of homeless people in Malaysia. Their research supports the assertion that Kuala Lumpur's city centre acts as a regular, everyday setting that street-based users rely upon for access to public amenities, transportation modes, and urban furniture.

However, while the city centre provides access to support services, there are very real dangers and limitations to accessing services within this environment. While Chow Kit is noted as an easily accessible location for those experiencing homelessness (Razak et al., 2022), it is also a place known for nighttime deviance and the presence of various levels of street level risk. Razak et al. (2022) describe the negative impacts experienced by interviewees regarding stigma, physical harm, loss of identification documents and interactions with law enforcement personnel. When a centre is placed in an overly risky environment people may choose not to utilize the centre or have difficulty attending on a consistent basis. Similarly, if a centre is located outside of traditional service delivery systems, resolving operational obstacles such as obtaining necessary documents may become increasingly difficult. This places a greater emphasis on developing centres that are situated in proximity to high-need zones yet offer safe environments and enhanced linkages to formal service delivery systems.

In addition, access to services is influenced by daily financial burdens and daily living infrastructures. Amir et al. (2024) indicate that one reason why some individuals elect to remain in public spaces is due to a desire to maintain proximity to their jobs thereby avoiding the expense of daily public transportation fares. Additionally, Amir et al.'s (2024) study identifies street environmental features such as seating, lighting and access to water as well as the role of transportation hubs in determining individual mobility and survival in urban core areas. All of these elements support the development of strategies designed to minimize travel burdens and promote walk-in utilization at service delivery points. For example, Zikri (2025) reported in a Malay Mail article about soup kitchen operations in Kuala Lumpur that NGOs concerned about availability and accessibility of shelter options for individuals experiencing homelessness. He stated that food distribution methods that funnel individuals into centralized routes do not address broader issues related to shelter availability and access particularly when existing shelters are located beyond reasonable walking distances from some homeless individuals' primary daily destinations (Zikri, 2025). Therefore, even if coordination among service providers is achieved, service availability remains limited unless service delivery sites are strategically positioned.

Lastly, Kuala Lumpur has significant social and political restrictions affecting where service delivery organizations can locate. Sibley et al. (2025) discuss anti-homeless NIMBYism as neighbourhood opposition to low-income housing and social services based on concerns regarding neighbourhood characteristics, safety and property values. Webb and Dej (2024) state that stigma contributes to how visibly homeless people act in public space as they modify their behaviour so as not to draw unwanted attention and discrimination. Therefore, community acceptance is not merely a "soft" issue, as it can determine whether a facility opens, continues operation and operates safely.

Collectively, these studies demonstrate why Kuala Lumpur requires a valid siting framework developed specifically for the city. A generic approach may fail to account for

the complexities associated with densely populated inner-city conditions, daily access barriers and stigma-driven resistance. A KL-specific framework would assist city planners and service agencies to strike an appropriate balance between serving proximate populations with safe and equitable access to services, strong connections to formal service systems and operational feasibility.

3. Study Context

3.1. Kuala Lumpur study setting

Kuala Lumpur was chosen as the focus of this study because it is both Malaysia's capital and its largest urban centre. As such, Kuala Lumpur features a densely developed urban area with a high number of service provision sites and identifiable concentrations of street-based homelessness in several inner urban districts. When considering siting an ISC, issues related to availability of space are not just technical or logistical considerations, but also relate to accessibility, safety, service linkages, regulatory requirements and day-to-day travel within the city.

In addition, due to its extensive rail system and public transportation options in the central business district, the ability of individuals to physically access an ISC site is also likely to influence their decision about visiting the site. Thus, while a site may be theoretically accessible, if it is not easily accessible by public transport, it may not operate effectively in reality. The overall planning structure of Kuala Lumpur also restricts the range of activities that can take place at a given site in terms of land use classification and compatibility with adjacent uses and development controls. Therefore, selecting an appropriate site for an ISC will be significantly more complicated than simply identifying the physical location of the proposed facility.

While street homelessness in Kuala Lumpur is visually apparent, the data concerning this phenomenon remain limited. However, data derived from public discussions of homelessness and service records indicate that homelessness tends to occur in greater numbers in central urban locations, particularly those locations that offer access to employment opportunities, informal income activities and support services. Previous research into homelessness in Kuala Lumpur has identified specific locations such as Chow Kit, where survival strategies can be pursued on a daily basis in conjunction with frequent interactions with agencies providing assistance and outreach programs. Therefore, a site suitability study of homelessness in Kuala Lumpur needs to account for a defined geographic pattern of need, rather than treating the city as having no social variation.

3.2. Definition and scope of the Integrated Support Centre (ISC)

In this research, the ISC is described as an easily accessible and easily used, walk-in centre providing services for individuals who are homeless. It will have no sleeping accommodations and cannot offer medical care or clinical treatment. Rather, it serves as a "doorway" to facilitate users' first contact with local service providers.

Publicly available information regarding Medan Tuanku's Pusat Khidmat Gelandangan provides evidence of at least one functioning low-barrier service location within Kuala Lumpur. The centre offers food distribution, basic facilities such as toilets and showers, space for NGOs, health screening, and some temporary resting opportunities for users.

While the service point accommodates some level of respite and is open during daytime hours, its ability to accommodate users for extended periods of time appears limited and is not comparable to a full-service residential shelter model. Therefore, this demonstrates that a day-based and low-barrier service delivery model is applicable to Kuala Lumpur, while highlighting the need for clear guidelines regarding future service point development and integration into existing social service systems.

This study proposes using the ISC as a conceptual framework rather than replacing Pusat Khidmat Gelandangan Medan Tuanku. Based upon this research context and service definition, the following section describes the methodology applied to create and validate the ISC site suitability criteria.

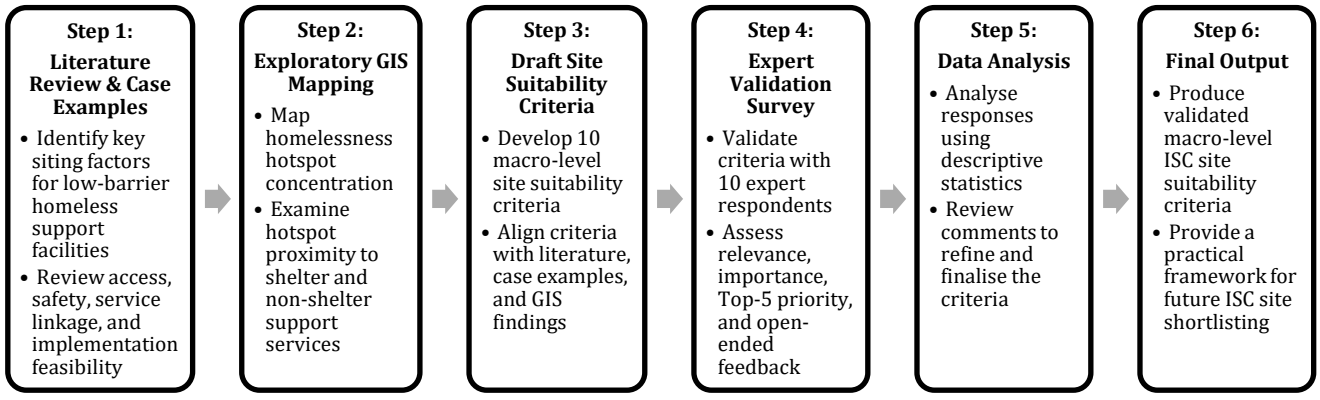
4. Methodology

4.1. Research Design

This study used a methodology which combined a criteria development and expert validation. The objective of the study was to generate a list of site suitability criteria for an ISC, for individuals who are experiencing homelessness in Kuala Lumpur. Rather than identifying a preferred site for a new centre, the focus of the study was to provide a validated set of criteria that could assist future site assessments.

In developing the criteria, there were two key sources of input. First, exploratory GIS mapping of homelessness hotspots, existing support services, and distance relationships were undertaken. Second, an expert validation survey was completed. The steps involved in conducting the research are shown in the summary diagram below (Figure 1). The diagram illustrates how the initial research phases of literature review and exploratory GIS mapping activities, were followed by criteria generation and expert validation.

Figure 1: Overall research workflow for developing and validating ISC site suitability criteria



4.2 Exploratory GIS mapping

A total of two preliminary GIS maps were generated. The first map was a 'Hotspot Density Map' which identified geographic locations at which homeless people were concentrated. The second map was a 'Hotspot-Support Service Proximity Map'. In this latter GIS map, the relationships between several large hotspot clusters and their proximity to shelter

and non-shelter support services, were evaluated within Euclidean radii of 200 meters and 500 meters respectively.

GIS mapping enabled identification of patterns such as spatial distribution, service coverage, and possible access barriers. These patterns assisted in framing both the content and structure of the draft criteria.

4.3. Development of site suitability criteria

Draft criteria were generated by integrating information gathered during the literature review phase, case studies, and results obtained from the preliminary GIS mapping. Macro-site suitability represents larger-scale locational considerations that impact upon whether an ISC may be accessible; accepted into operation; linked with other supporting services; and operate successfully within its urban context. The criteria consist of hotspot density proximity, access to public transportation, walk-in accessibility, universal accessibility, safety, proximity to formal support services, proximity to community support hubs, zoning/permitted use, site readiness/community acceptance, and affordability of operational costs.

Table 1 provides a detailed listing of all 10 macro-level site suitability criteria used in this report.

Table 1. Macro-level site suitability criteria used for expert validation

No.	Macro-level Criterion	Definition in this study	Basis for inclusion
1	Near hotspots / high-need zones	The ISC should be located close to areas where homelessness is visibly concentrated.	Hotspot concentration and low-barrier access
2	Public transport access	The site should be reachable through nearby rail, bus, or other public transport services.	Urban mobility and service accessibility
3	Walk-in accessibility	The site should be easy to reach on foot from nearby hotspot areas.	Short-distance access and walk-in use
4	Universal / OKU access	The site should be accessible for users with mobility limitations or disabilities.	Inclusive access and practical usability
5	Safety of surroundings and site	The surrounding area should be reasonably safe for users, staff, volunteers, and nearby communities.	User trust, staff safety, and reduced risk
6	Near formal services	The site should be reasonably close to health, welfare, documentation, or other government-related services.	Referral support and case coordination
7	Near coordinated community support hubs	The site should be connected to nearby NGOs, aid providers, or community-based support services	Service coordination and support network linkage
8	Zoning and permitted use	The site should be compatible with land-use, planning, and approval requirements.	Planning control and implementation feasibility

9	Site readiness and community acceptance	The site should be realistic to activate and less likely to face strong local resistance.	Local feasibility and stakeholder acceptance
10	Operating cost affordability	The site should be financially realistic to operate and sustain.	Long-term operational feasibility

4.4. Expert validation survey

As has already been mentioned, the draft criteria were validated via a stakeholder survey. Survey questionnaires were distributed to a targeted group of stakeholders whose professional backgrounds had some direct relevance to homelessness services, welfare support, urban planning, the built environment, and community-based interventions. A total of 10 expert respondents participated in the final data collection effort.

The broader validation tool also contained additional items relating to ISC premises readiness. However, since this article specifically focuses on macro-suitability criteria for site selection, these items will not be reported here.

Respondents were requested to verify whether each of the 10 macro-level criteria listed in Table 1 represented an applicable factor in determining suitability for an ISC. Additionally, respondents were required to rate each criterion on a five-point scale, where 1 = Not important and 5 = Very Important, and indicate which of the top-five criteria they believed would represent the most critical. Respondents were also given the opportunity to comment regarding ambiguous, overlapping, omitted, or superfluous terms. After compilation of all respondent feedback in a single response file, the collected data was analysed.

4.5. Data analysis and ethical considerations

The analysis of the survey data incorporated both descriptive statistical techniques and qualitative thematic reviews. The mean rating, median rating, and proportion of higher ratings for each of the macro-criteria established their relative levels of importance among the respondents. Rankings were created for the macro-level criteria based on their relative importance according to the mean ratings assigned by respondents. Frequency counts were conducted to determine which criteria respondents felt most strongly about in relation to their top-five selections for "most critical" criteria.

Qualitative thematic analyses were applied to respondent comments regarding unclear, overlapping, absent, or unimportant items. Results from both quantitative and qualitative methods were synthesized to conclude the generation of a final version of the macro-level site suitability criteria. No inferential statistical tests were performed as part of this study as the primary intent was not for statistical generalization purposes. The primary purpose for conducting the survey was to use respondent expertise for validating and refining the generated criteria.

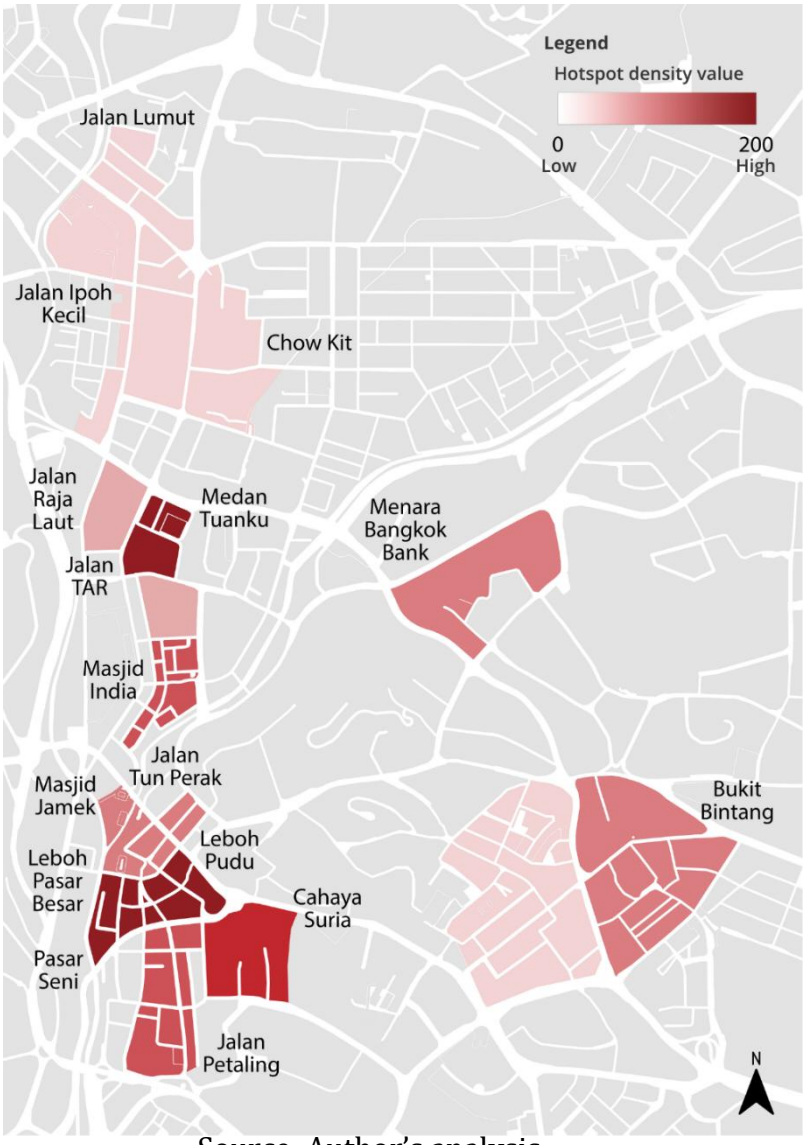
Participation in the survey was voluntary. All responses were aggregated prior to being analysed. No identifiable information regarding individual participants was provided in this report. The output from this study is a validated set of macro-level site suitability criteria, not a recommended site.

5. Results

5.1. Exploratory spatial findings

Two exploratory GIS maps have been developed to help clarify the geographical context of where ISCs can be sited in Kuala Lumpur. Those two maps are the Hotspot Density Map and the Hotspot-Support Service Proximity Map. As shown in Figure 2, the Hotspot Density Map indicates that homelessness hotspots in Kuala Lumpur are generally situated along the corridors in a few inner-city areas. The greatest concentrations of these areas include Chow Kit, Medan Tuanku, Masjid India, Pasar Seni, Lebuh Pudu, Jalan Petaling and Bukit Bintang. These areas tend to provide access to public transportation, commercial activity, food sources and existing social networks which support homeless people. Thus, this pattern suggests that ISC siting criteria should take into account real high-need zones rather than relying on general administrative boundaries.

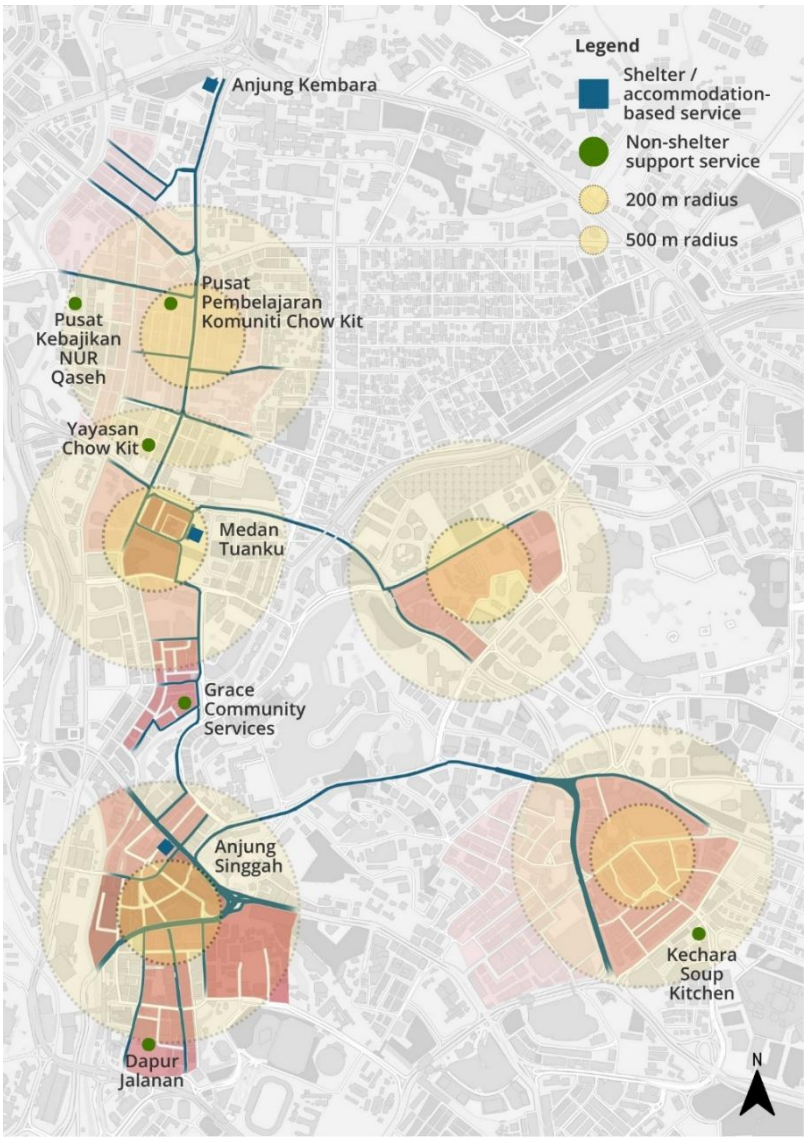
Figure 2: Hotspot Density Map of homelessness concentration in Kuala Lumpur



Source: Author's analysis

As shown in Figure 3, the Hotspot-Support Service Proximity Map illustrates how major hotspot clusters relate to selected shelter and non-shelter support services using 200 m and 500 m Euclidean radii. According to the map, there are different relationships between major hotspot clusters and shelters versus non-shelters. Accommodation based services, such as Anjung Singgah and Pusat Khidmat Gelandangan Medan Tuanku, are often found at either within or close to several of the concentrated hotspot area. In contrast, larger shelter provision such as Anjung Kembara, is located outside of the walkable radius of many central hotspot clusters. Therefore, it appears that there are inequitable levels of proximity to shelters, hence service scale should be considered in conjunction with location.

Figure 3: Hotspot-Support Service Proximity Map



Source: Author's analysis

Additionally, the Hotspot-Support Service Proximity Map illustrates that non-shelter support services are dispersed among many hotspot areas. Non-shelter support services tend to focus on providing food distributions, outreach programs, educational opportunities and community support, whereas they do not typically provide direct shelter accommodations. Therefore, while some hotspot areas will likely have support

services located in close proximity to them, it does not follow that those same hotspot areas will have similar types or scales of shelter accommodations. Hence, in addition to considering the quantity of services available for homeless populations, consideration of the type of services and their proximity relative to potential users will need to occur.

In summary, the maps illustrated three primary geographical concerns regarding: high densities of hotspot areas, inequitable proximities of shelters, and variations in the type and scale of support services available for homeless individuals. As a result, these findings support siting criteria for ISCs based upon proximity to hotspots, walk-in accessibility, public transportation options, proximity to formalized services and proximity to coordinated support services.

5.2. Respondent profile summary

A total of 10 expert respondents completed the validation survey. Respondents came from 4 organisational types: Government Ministries/Agencies, Local Authority, Non-Government Organisation (NGO) and Academia/Research. Although the number of respondents is limited, this provides an appropriate amount of relevant expert validation to confirm whether the ISC site suitability criteria are valid.

In addition, most respondents indicated they were knowledgeable about homelessness services in Kuala Lumpur. Among the nine respondents who were asked how well they knew homelessness services in Kuala Lumpur, nine scored their knowledge at 4/5 or higher. Only one respondent answered lower at 3/5. It appears therefore that all respondents have enough contextual knowledge to evaluate the proposed criteria. Table 2 summarises the respondent profile.

Table 2: Respondent profile summary

Profile item	Result
Total respondents	10
Ministry / government agency	4
Local authority / PBT	2
NGO / charitable organisation	2
Academia / research	2
0-5 years experience	6
6-10 years experience	1
16 years and above experience	3
Familiarity with Kuala Lumpur homelessness services rated 4-5 out of 5	9

5.3. Relevance screening results

Overall, the results from the relevance screening indicated very strong levels of agreement with all 10 of the proposed macro-level criteria for assessing ISC site suitability. In fact, nine of these criteria were assessed as being highly relevant, with 90% or 100% agreement.

Six of the 10 criteria were universally agreed upon rated as "relevant" by every respondent. These included being close to hotspots or areas of high need, having access to public transportation, having a direct means of accessing the site, providing universal/OKU access, providing a safe environment surrounding the site, and ensuring

the site is ready for operation along with community acceptance. This indicates that there was very strong expert support for those criteria related to access, safety and practicality. Three of the remaining criteria were also found to have very strong agreement with 90% of respondents rating them as relevant. These were proximity to coordinated community support hubs, zoning and permitted use and operating cost affordability.

The findings indicate that respondents also recognized the importance of service coordination, planning controls and cost viability. Only one criterion had less than 90% relevance agreement. Proximity to formal services had 70% relevance agreement. While this was less than the other criteria, it was considered acceptable as the connection to formal services would likely be important in relation to referrals and case management. The open-ended comments did not provide any evidence that any of the macro-level criteria should be deleted.

As such, based on the relevance screening, all 10 of the macro-level criteria will be used to develop the final site suitability framework. The detailed relevance screening results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Relevance screening results for macro-level site suitability criteria

No.	Macro-level Criterion	Relevant, n	Relevant, %
1	Near hotspots / high-need zones	10	100%
2	Public transport access	10	100%
3	Walk-in accessibility	10	100%
4	Universal / OKU access	10	100%
5	Safety of surroundings and site	10	100%
6	Near formal services	7	70%
7	Near coordinated community support hubs	9	90%
8	Zoning and permitted use	9	90%
9	Site readiness and community acceptance	10	100%
10	Operating cost affordability	9	90%

5.4. Importance ranking and Top-5 frequencies

After the relevance evaluation, respondents evaluated the importance of each macro-criterion with a five-point scale. The outcomes show that all 10 criteria received mean values greater than 3.00. Consequently, the macro-criteria were generally perceived as being very important regarding suitability for an ISC site.

With respect to the highest mean value, it is recorded that "safety of surroundings and site" had a mean value of 4.00. Following this were "walk-in accessibility", "site readiness and community acceptance" with each receiving a mean value of 3.80. In addition, both "public transport access" and "universal / OKU access" also ranked high at 3.7. The findings therefore suggest that the respondents assigned a relatively strong weighting to issues relating to safety, access and practicality concerning the suitability of sites. The complete importance ranking of the macro-level criteria is presented in Table 4.

In addition, respondents were requested to identify which five criteria they believed were the most critical. The most frequent selection of the respondents was "near hotspots / high-need zones", selected by seven respondents. Second to this was "public transport

access", selected by six respondents. Both "safety of surroundings and site" and "walk-in accessibility" were selected by five respondents.

Table 4. Importance ranking of macro-level site suitability criteria

Rank	Macro-level criterion	Mean	Median	Rated 4-5, n
1	Safety of surroundings and site	4.00	4.0	6
2	Walk-in accessibility	3.80	4.0	6
3	Site readiness and community acceptance	3.80	3.5	5
4	Public transport access	3.70	4.0	6
5	Universal / OKU access	3.70	3.5	5
6	Near hotspots / high-need zones	3.60	3.5	5
7	Zoning and permitted use	3.60	3.5	5
8	Operating cost affordability	3.50	3.5	5
9	Near formal services	3.40	3.0	4
10	Near coordinated community support hubs	3.30	3.0	4

The Top-5 ratings indicate that experts gave their greatest emphasis to reach, access, safety and feasibility. Although the criteria "near to formal services" and "near coordinated community support hubs" produced low mean values, many respondents still selected them as critical. Therefore, service linkage continues to be relevant although access and safety may be emphasized more strongly. The Top-5 selection frequencies are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Top-5 critical macro-level criteria selected by respondents

Rank	Macro-level criterion	Selected in Top-5, n	Selected in Top-5, %
1	Near hotspots / high-need zones	7	70%
2	Public transport access	6	60%
3	Safety of surroundings and site	5	50%
3	Walk-in accessibility	5	50%
4	Universal / OKU access	4	40%
4	Site readiness and community acceptance	4	40%
4	Operating cost affordability	4	40%
4	Near coordinated community support hubs	4	40%
5	Near formal services	3	30%
6	Zoning and permitted use	1	10%

5.5. Finalised macro-level site suitability criteria

The 10 macro-level site suitability criteria identified from both relevance and importance have been used to create the final criteria framework for ISC locations. These final criteria were developed with reference to five major siting concerns: proximity to need, accessibility, safety, service linkage, and feasibility of implementing an ISC. In combination, the criteria represent a useful structure for short-listing potential sites for ISCs in Kuala Lumpur. The criteria enable evaluation of potential sites based upon their availability, cost, accessibility, safety, service linkage, planning suitability as well as local feasibility. In this way, they facilitate a more structured and context-specific approach to identifying locations for homelessness-related support services in Kuala Lumpur. The

finalized macro-level site suitability criteria and their respective site suitability focus are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Finalised macro-level site suitability criteria

No.	Final Criterion	Site suitability focus
1	Near hotspots / high-need zones	Ensures the ISC is located close to areas where homeless presence is concentrated
2	Public transport access	Supports access through nearby rail, bus, or other public transport routes
3	Walk-in accessibility	Allows users to reach the centre easily by walking from nearby hotspots
4	Universal / OKU access	Ensures the site is reachable and usable for people with mobility limitations
5	Safety of surroundings and site	Reduces risk for users, staff, volunteers, and surrounding communities
6	Near formal services	Supports referral to health, welfare, documentation, and government services
7	Near coordinated community support hubs	Strengthens links with NGOs, aid providers, and community-based support
8	Zoning and permitted use	Ensures the site is compatible with land-use and planning requirements
9	Site readiness and community acceptance	Considers local acceptance, readiness to operate, and reduced risk of resistance
10	Operating cost affordability	Ensures the site can be sustained within realistic operational limits

6. Discussion

6.1. Site suitability as more than site availability

A key finding of this research is that selecting a site for an ISC in Kuala Lumpur cannot simply be reduced to identifying a readily available building or vacant area. While availability, affordability and local acceptance are significant, they alone do not provide sufficient information to determine site suitability. For example, while a site might be available and affordable, it could still be unacceptable due to difficulties accessing the site, hazards associated with approaching the site, lack of links to service delivery networks or failure to comply with relevant planning controls.

These observations lend support to the conceptualisation of site suitability as a systematic process for screening potential sites. Specifically, an acceptable site will ideally be located near other high need areas, accessible by public transport, safe to travel to, serviced by both formal and informal support networks and feasible to deliver support from. This reflects the way in which site selection literature assesses suitability against multiple criteria, rather than solely one location characteristic (Witkowski & Liu, 2022; Garcia et al., 2025).

As a result, the developed framework is to assist in providing greater clarity for earlier assessment of potential ISC sites. It enables decision-makers to evaluate different potential sites based on common criteria prior to choosing a final site. As such, the framework assists in creating greater transparency, consistency and responsiveness to the practicalities of homeless support in Kuala Lumpur.

6.2. Hotspot proximity and low-barrier access

Beginning with the Top-5 selection, the largest number of first choices related to being "near hotspots" or "high-need" locations. This indicates that the expert panel views being proximal to need as a primary consideration for ISC location. This is relevant to the role of the ISC as a walk-in, low-barrier resource.

This finding is supported by GIS analyses which found that homelessness hotspots in Kuala Lumpur exist primarily in several central business districts such as Chow Kit, Medan Tuanku, Masjid India, Pasar Seni, Lebuh Pudu, Jalan Petaling and Bukit Bintang. Many of these areas have access to public transit, commercial resources, food sources, informal employment and other forms of aid. This reflects prior research that has identified that the prevalence of street-based homelessness in Kuala Lumpur is influenced by daily survival needs, urban amenities, mobility and access to supportive services than simply lack of affordable housing (Amir et al., 2024; Razak et al., 2022).

Although being in proximity to hotspots is a significant factor to consider for selecting an ISC site, it is not the only one. In addition, the maps clearly indicate that proximity to a hotspot does not necessarily equate to having equal levels of all types of support available at that site. Therefore, both respondent priorities regarding proximity to public transit and walk-in accessibility are explained.

Finally, the Hotspot-Support Service Proximity map demonstrates the importance of proximity to hotspots for an ISC's potential effectiveness. The two radii shown represent 200 meters for highly proximal service delivery and 500 meters for wider walking access. Both of these radii are exploratory and illustrative of how ISC location can be analysed relative to movement patterns.

Overall, the findings from this study demonstrate that an initial consideration in determining an ideal ISC site should be its proximity to hotspots. However, the suitability of a site must also include considerations regarding whether or not it can be accessed via public transportation or by walking.

6.3. Service linkage and coordinated support

In short, the ISC is not designed to replace current emergency centres, shelters, hospitals, welfare offices or NGO services. Rather the ISC acts as an access point where users may get their immediate needs met and then referred appropriately. Thus, if a proposed centre is placed in a high-needs area but has no connections to other support systems, it will provide initial entry points but likely have difficulty progressing the user's situation.

This rationale is supported by the data. As shown, proximity to community support hubs, with relevance agreement of 90%, supports the idea that coordination with existing organizations and service delivery systems is essential to the success of an ISC. In Kuala Lumpur, homelessness support typically includes contributions from government agencies, local municipalities, NGOs, volunteer groups and community organizations. Therefore, an optimal location for an ISC would serve to facilitate collaboration among such groups rather than operate independently.

Although proximity to formal services received lower relevance agreement at 70%, it was still considered sufficiently relevant for retention. Formal services continue to be required

for both referrals and coordination of care. Homeless individuals require assistance on issues such as health, welfare, documentation, employment, housing, and legal concerns. All of these require formal agency involvement. Therefore, an optimal location for an ISC should allow for efficient connection with the proper formal agencies.

Additionally, while there appears to be a relationship between the existence of certain types of services near hotspots and the availability of others, there are areas of hotspot that have limited accommodation-based services relative to other parts of the city. When considering potential ISC locations, consideration should include; does a service exist within reasonable distance? What type of service is being provided? How large is the service provider? How well do they link users into broader support pathways?

A properly located ISC should assist in connecting users into the support system more easily, and assist service providers in working more effectively together. In particular, in cities like Kuala Lumpur, fragmentation of services complicates movement from first contact to ongoing assistance.

6.4. Implementation feasibility in Kuala Lumpur

A final group of factors identifies those which will provide evidence of potential for successful implementation. A site may have good location characteristics, accessibility, connections to needed services, yet may not be usable due to inability to zoning restrictions, lack of site preparation, lack of community acceptance or high costs of operation.

In terms of zoning and permitted use, the ISC must comply with all local zoning and land-use ordinances. By assessing each item early, agencies can eliminate what appear to be attractive sites based upon physical location, but are impractical to develop.

The factor of site readiness and community acceptance was ranked very highly by respondents in terms of importance. Respondents recognized the significant social and operational barriers associated with providing supportive services for the homeless in a densely populated urban setting. When there is significant opposition from the community (either through formal objections to the proposal or through political action), a facility may never be developed or once developed may be closed. Literature has documented examples of "anti-homeless" NIMBYism where communities object to facilities serving the homeless out of fear of negative impacts on their neighbourhoods including loss of character, reduced property values, decreased safety and perceived disruptions to the social order. Furthermore, stigmatized attitudes toward visibly homeless people in public spaces also contribute to this issue (Sibley et al., 2025; Webb & Dej, 2024). As such, community acceptance must be viewed as more than simply a secondary consideration, rather as an indicator of whether the chosen site is viable.

Finally, operating cost feasibility is another operational reality facing many agencies and NGOs. While a site may be ideal in terms of its location, it may not be economically feasible to rent and then operate. Rather, a combination of considerations regarding access, safety, service linkages and planning compliance must be weighed against operational realities when evaluating site feasibility.

Ultimately, the inclusion of implementation feasibility strengthens the overall framework by bridging spatial suitability with actual project realities. As such, given the unique

constraints present in Kuala Lumpur, this consideration is particularly important. Therefore, the final framework will allow agencies to evaluate not only where an ISC should be located but also whether the selected site can actually be successfully established and operated.

7. Conclusion And Recommendations

This study provided and evaluated macro level site selection criteria for a site for an ISC, which would provide support to homeless people in Kuala Lumpur. Therefore, the objective of this study was not to identify one specific site but provide a structure for future ISC site selection processes.

The results indicate that when establishing a low-barrier and walk-in support centre, the location must take into consideration the spatial distribution of homelessness in the city. These preliminary results suggest a siting strategy that takes into account the location of need, types of service available and distance to services including shelters and potentially coordinating needs among them.

Expert validation supported the importance of 10 macro-level selection criteria. When combined, the criteria represent five major categories in selecting a site for the ISC: Proximity to Need, Accessibility, Safety, Service Linkage, and Implementation Feasibility. Together, these categories demonstrate that the selection of a site for the ISC is about finding a balance between providing accessible support to users; supporting walk-in access, linking users to support services, fulfilling planning obligations, and creating conditions that ensure that the site selected will be acceptable and sustainable.

The primary contribution of this study was developing a locally validated selection framework for siting low-barrier homeless support centres in Kuala Lumpur. The framework can assist agencies, planners, local authorities, NGOs and others involved in assessing potential ISC sites. In addition, the framework will support transparency in the decision-making process by making clear what is being used as the basis for evaluating and comparing potential ISC sites.

Based on this study, the recommendations for future research include; Future assessments of potential ISC sites should begin with proximity to homelessness hotspots and walk-in accessibility since these two criteria directly relate to the low-barrier nature of the centre; Assessments of potential ISC sites should consider linkages to accommodations-based services, formal services, and non-shelter community support services so that users have access to a broader network of support beyond just the centre; Planning and implementation issues such as zoning, community acceptance, and operational costs should be assessed early in the evaluation of potential sites rather than waiting until a site has already been selected.

Potential areas for further research using the framework include applying the selection criteria to candidate sites in Kuala Lumpur using weighted GIS analysis, stakeholder rating methods or field-based evaluations. Additionally, future research could examine if similar criteria may be applicable in other Malaysian cities with differing urban structures and support systems.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

The researchers followed the research ethics requirements approved by the IIUM Research Ethics Committee (IREC), International Islamic University Malaysia (Application No. IREC-2026-1203), All procedures performed in this study involving human participants were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee. Electronic informed consent was obtained from all respondents through a required Google Form item confirming their voluntary participation and understanding that their responses would be reported.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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