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DECODING URBAN INCLUSIVITY

A SCOPING REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Cities Cities are branded as inclusive, but does this label reflect a genuine commitment to social justice or is it merely a city branding strategy? This scoping review (PRISMA-ScR) deconstructs the concept of the "inclusive city" through a triple dimension: theoretical-conceptual, practical (market), and technological (Generative Artificial Intelligence). Our findings reveal a fundamental discrepancy: the theoretical model of the inclusive city is incompatible with the logic of city branding and the algorithmic representation of the inclusive city. Urban marketing creates a hierarchy of marketable diversities, leading to diversity-washing. Simultaneously, Generative AI amplifies this vision, producing an aseptic and depoliticised iconography of inclusion with homogeneous spaces, artificial diversity, and a complete absence of conflict, community, and authenticity. We conclude that "algorithmic inclusivity" prioritises a market-driven vision, commodifying diversity and perpetuating a segregationist view under a facade of inclusion, which demands urgent critique and regulation.

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1. Introduction

For more than a decade, the transformation of major cities into sustainable and inclusive hubs has become a global aspiration on the urban agenda. This momentum is based on the need to evolve towards a green economic and social model, which should include the guidelines of the 2030 Agenda related to non-exclusion, gender equality, poverty eradication and social peace. The European Union has recognised the importance of these commitments, articulating them in the Amsterdam Pact through priority areas such as air quality, housing, the inclusion of refugees and migrants, and the sustainable use of resources. Along the same lines, in 2020 the European Commission promoted the Green City Agreement (GCA), a framework that urges cities to commit to a transition towards cleaner and healthier models, based on environmental improvement and circular economy policies (European Commission, 2020). However, despite the laudable nature of the objective, it is striking that major cities such as Barcelona, Lisbon, Paris, Rome, Budapest and Berlin have yet to sign up to this agreement, which invites deeper reflection on the real relevance of adhering to these principles.

Against this backdrop, the paradigm of the Right to the City is emerging strongly, understood as the collective right to inhabit, use, produce, transform, govern and enjoy fair, inclusive, safe and democratic urban settlements, conceived as common goods for a dignified life (UN-Habitat, 2016). This right is based on the fundamental premise that a city can only develop sustainably if it does so in the context of an inclusive, people-centred global economy. While instruments such as the Global Liveability Index have become benchmarks for measuring the quality of urban life, this work is critical of the concept of "liveability" as insufficient to capture true "inclusiveness", a notion that integrates more subtle and profound dimensions.

In this scenario, diversity is presented not only as an intrinsic value, but also as a key resource for the overall development of society. The central idea is that, when approached from intercultural principles of equality, non-discrimination and positive interaction, diversity can become an advantage for achieving better collective results s (Ely & Thomas, 2001). However, this potential clashes with the logic of inter-city competition, which has positioned *rankings* as simplified tools for measuring and marketing the quality of cities (Sabaté & Tironi, 2008). It is precisely in this tension between the transformative ideal of the Right to the City and the commercial logic of *city branding* that this article focuses its critical gaze to decode the meanings, uses and representations of urban inclusiveness in the contemporary context.

1.1. Justification

In the context of growing inter-urban competition, contemporary cities are being pushed to position themselves strategically on the new global map (Precedo et al., 2010). This struggle to distinguish themselves and attract capital, whether from investors, visitors or new residents (Ferreiro Calzada & Mendoza de Miguel, 2022), has prioritised urban positioning policies, often over economic-based strategic planning (Precedo Ledo et al., 2010). The boom in tourism, which has accelerated since the beginning of this decade, has profoundly altered the structure and dynamics of cities, creating an inherent tension between their configuration as global centres of attraction and the imperatives of real, rather than cosmetic, diversity. At the same time, artificial intelligence is emerging as a tool with transformative potential in urban management, from transport optimisation to the regeneration of critical areas through satellite mapping. However, its implementation is not without risks. As in other areas such as education, there is a latent danger that, far from correcting inequalities, AI will end up exacerbating them by widening existing gaps.

Given this complex scenario, this paper aims to critically analyse whether respect for diversity can be established as a key element in strengthening the cultural, social and tourist appeal of the city, integrating the paradigm of the right to the city into its own brand. To this end, we deploy a threefold analysis: we deconstruct the concept of the "inclusive city" in its theoretical, practical and technological dimensions; we explore the tensions between its abstract definition, its performativisation in the market and its algorithmic interpretation through the digitisation of

images. With these elements, we examine the instrumentalisation of diversity as a resource for *city branding* or *diversity washing*.

Consequently, the research is structured around three complementary dimensions: a theoretical dimension (the "What"), aimed at defining the constituent elements of the "inclusive city"; a practical dimension (the "How it is performativised"), which analyses the *city brand* as a commercial operationalisation of inclusivity; and a technological-representational dimension (the "How it is modelled"), which examines the interpretation, quantification and algorithmic representation of urban inclusivity by generative AI.

2. Objectives

2.1. General Objective

To critically analyse the concept of the "inclusive city" and the "right to the city" in order to deconstruct its multiple dimensions—theoretical, practical and technological—and understand how it is configured, commercially operationalised and represented in generative artificial intelligence.

2.2. Specific Objectives

1. Identify the key dimensions that define the inclusive city model.
2. Understand the limits of city branding in relation to comprehensive inclusivity.
3. Visualise the results of generative artificial intelligence related to inclusive cities.

2.3. Research Questions

RQ1. What characterises an inclusive city? How can diversity become a differentiating factor in the configuration of inclusive cities?
RQ2. Is there a hierarchy of diversity in the process of building a city's destination image?
RQ3. How does generative AI present the inclusive city?

3. Methodology

This work is a scoping review, complemented by a qualitative analysis of the content generated by a sample population of tools that use artificial intelligence, in order to obtain meaningful results to answer RQ3. The Prisma ScR checklist guided the scoping review to answer RQ1 and RQ2.

3.1. Scoping Review

The research was designed as a scoping review of the academic and regulatory literature. To ensure the most up-to-date analysis, a four-year study period (2022-2025) was defined, allowing the most recent developments in the subject area to be captured. The data collection strategy combined consultation of the main bibliographic databases—SCOPUS and ProQuest—selected for their prestige and comprehensive coverage of academic publications, with a review of documentation from public and private organisations. A systematic search of both databases yielded an initial corpus of 344 indexed publications (97 in SCOPUS and 247 in ProQuest), identified by the presence of the central terms of the research in their titles, abstracts or keywords: diversity, right to the city and *city branding*.

To answer the third research question, a structured plan is implemented to contrast the theoretical (RQ1) and practical (RQ2) findings with the visual representation generated by AI.

3.1.1. Eligibility Criteria

Full-text articles available, peer-reviewed. The exclusion and inclusion criteria were as follows:

Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Specific cause

Inclusion	Focused on European countries. Peer-reviewed. Published between 2022-2025. Works in the field: "Social Issues" or "Social Sciences
Exclusion	Religious themes Zoology and botany Associated with the pandemic Robotics and programming Medicine and mental illness Human resources management Sport

Source: Own elaboration, 2025

3.1.2. Sources of Information

The Scopus and Proquest databases were used. The final databases were established in September 2025. Web of Science was discarded because the results obtained were not significant. Furthermore, the reference frameworks were compared with the guidelines of international and European public bodies.

3.1.3. Search Strategy

The concept of "diversity" yielded a large number of studies related to different types of diversity, with a specific focus on demographic, identity, knowledge, ideas, cultural or artistic diversity, etc. However, our interest was to search for the abstract diversity of representation of everyone in the city, so we decided to use the command "inclusiv*", which is the affirmative form of diversity and is associated with the "right to the city". The AND operator was used to include the terms "right to the city" and "inclus*". This operator was also used to integrate the educational level "social issues" and the word "City Branding" into the study.

Table 2. Search strategy

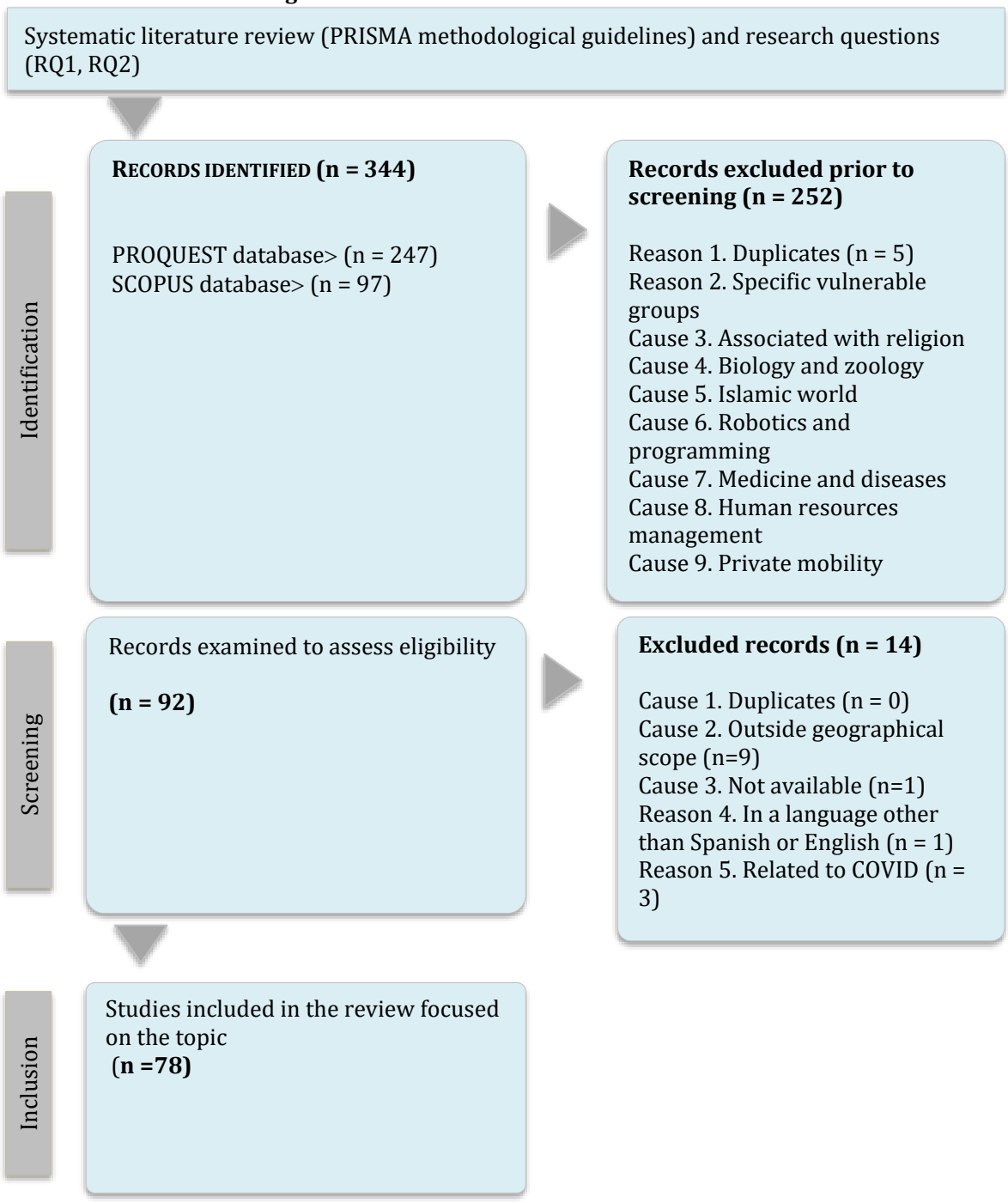
	Search strategy
Scopus	Journal articles (DOCTYPE, "ar") published between 2022 and 2025 (PUBYEAR > 2021 AND PUBYEAR < 2026) containing the words "inclusiv*" and "right to the cty" in the title, abstract or keywords (TITLE-ABS-KEY (inclusiv*) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (right to the city)). In addition, results were limited to documents affiliated with institutions in European countries.
Proquest	("city brand" OR "destination image") AND (location.exact("Spain" OR "Europe") AND at.exact("Feature" OR "Article") AND PEER(yes))

Source: Own elaboration, 2025.

3.1.4. Selection and Evaluation of Sources

Taking the above into account, a total of 344 results were obtained, initially discarding 252 records, 5 of them due to duplication and the remaining 247 due to one of the aforementioned reasons for exclusion. Subsequently, another 14 results were discarded due to unforeseen aspects such as the language of the publication, inaccessibility or the geographical scope of the study. The studies included in the review are 78, as shown in the following figure:

Figure 1. Source Selection and Evaluation Flow.



Source: Own elaboration, 2025.

3.1.5. Selection of Sources of Evidence

The studies analysed were as follows, classified by area of study or field of knowledge

RQ1. Results by category

Areas of study	No.	Title
Inclusion, Accessibility and Urban Design	10	1. Accessibility of Dutch Public Space: Regulations and Local Actions by Pedestrians with Disabilities 2. Gendered space: associations between urban environments and gender social categories

		3. "A framework to analyse inclusion in smart energy city development: The case of Smart City Amsterdam" 4. Age-Friendly Cities. Designing urban space as a place of well-being 5. Towards child-friendly and walkable cities: Children's insights on neighbourhood design **6.** Challenging Child-Friendly Urban Design: Towards Inclusive Multigenerational Spaces 7. Inclusion as a Value in Participation: Children's Councils in Spain 8. What Would an Inclusive City for Gender and Sexual Minorities Be Like? You Need to Ask Queer Folx! 9. The inability of Turkey and Istanbul to institutionalise children's participation in urban planning: A policy analysis study 10. Designing Inclusive Urban Places
Migration, Digitalisation and Governance	6	11. Resisting Racism and Marginalisation: Migrant Women's Agency in Urban Transformation in the Los Pajaritos Neighbourhood 12. Urban integration of forced migrants: lessons from Canada and Ukraine 13. People-Centred Smart Cities: An Exploratory Action Research on the Cities' Coalition for Digital Rights 14. How to Create and Foster Sustainable Smart Cities? Insights on Ethics, Trust, Privacy, Transparency, Incentives, and Success 15. Introduction to the Special Issue on Citizen Centricity in Smart Cities 16. Active transparency in Spanish city councils: diagnosis and exogenous determinants of e-accessibility; Inclusive active transparency in Spanish city councils: diagnosis and exogenous determinants of e-accessibility
Urban concepts and challenges	5	17. Rethinking urban utopianism: The fallacy of social mix in the 15-minute city 18. Active ageing and urban policies: space as an instrument for an inclusive and sustainable city 19. Women and cities. The conquest of urban space 20. Get out of childism?; Afterword. Ending infantilism? 21. Challenges in the design and implementation of sustainable, accessible and inclusive smart cities

Source: Own elaboration, 2025.

RQ2. Results by category

Areas of study	No.	Title
City Branding or Place Branding	9	22. The role of future generations in place branding: the case of Huelva city. 23. Repositioning the city brand in the face of the energy and ecological transition paradigm. 24. Place branding approach within functional urban areas—evidence from Poland. 25. City branding and its economic impacts on tourism. 26. The role of urban brand measuring tools in grounding the strategic actions for promoting cities. 27. From place branding to community branding: a collaborative decision-making process for cultural heritage enhancement. 28. A systemic approach to city image building. The case of Katowice City. 29. Improving the profile of European tourist destinations through the European tourism indicators system.

		30. Student mobility - attractiveness and premise of improving the city image. Case study: Alexa
Destination image	5	31. Influence of cultural background on visitor segments' tourist destination image: a case study of Barcelona and Chinese tourists 32. Perceived sustainable destination image: implications for marketing strategies in Europe. 33. The methodology of sociological discourse analysis in tourism studies: the process of transforming the tourism image and its relationship with loyalty. 34. Understanding the tourist's decision when choosing accommodation: the impact of image. 35. From mining to tourism: assessing the destination's image, as revealed by travel-oriented social networks
Sustainability and sustainable tourism	12	36. Sustainability in purpose-driven businesses operating in cultural and creative industries: insights from consumers' perspectives on società benefit. 37. Tourism in the era of social responsibility and sustainability: understanding international tourists' destination choices 38. Economic results and corporate social responsibility in the tourism sector. A study of the world heritage city of Cáceres 39. Influence of sustainability practices and green image on the re-visit intention of small and medium-size towns 40. Becoming a developed and sustainable destination: the Siberia biosphere reserve in Spain 41. How do cities of different sizes in Europe work with sustainable development? 42. Sustainable tourism, social and institutional innovation—the paradox of dark sky in gastrotourism 43. Congress tourism: characteristics and application to sustainable tourism to facilitate collective action towards achieving the SDGs 44. Modelling nature-based and cultural recreation preferences in Mediterranean regions as opportunities for smart tourism and diversification 45. Is gastronomy a relevant factor for sustainable tourism? An empirical analysis of Spain's country brand 46. Food festivals and the development of sustainable destinations. The case of the cheese fair in Trujillo (Spain) 47. Contributions of sustainable tourist behaviour in food events to the cultural identity of destinations
Culture and Heritage	7	48. Tangible and intangible heritage of Ibiza (Spain) and its potential to be valued as a tourist offer 49. Emotional experiences through the eyes of culture and creativity, a new paradigm for urban tourism? 50. Creative industries as part of a sustainable urban development strategy: Vilnius City case. 51. Perceptions of cultural tourism resources: analyses based on tourists' online travel notes 52. The internal demand for cultural tourism: understanding satisfaction and loyalty to destinations in Spain through a non-linear structural model 53. Bringing back the spatial dimension in the assessment of cultural and creative industries and its relationship with a city's sustainability: the case of Milan 54. The effect of cultural city on regional activation through the consumer reactions of urban service

Technology and Big Data	8	55. Conceptual framework and prospective analysis of EU tourism data spaces 56. Exploring the hotel experience in a cultural city through a UGC analysis 57. Social media impact of tourism managers: a decision tree approach in happiness, social marketing and sustainability 58. Using big data to measure tourist sustainability: myth or reality? 59. Can tourist attractions boost other activities around? A data analysis through social networks 60. Integration and differentiation: comparison of photography behaviours using unmanned aerial vehicle data in China and Europe 61. The role of augmented reality in destination branding 62. The smart scenario and its derivatives in the online marketing strategy of tourist destinations. The case of the Valencian Community
Destination management and governance	4	63. Innovation perspectives in local administration at the beginning of the "age of cities" 64. Erasmus students' experiences as cultural visitors: lessons in destination management 65. Congress tourism: characteristics and application to sustainable tourism to facilitate collective action towards achieving the SDGs 66. Sanctuary cities: what global migration means for local governments
Tourist behaviour	5	67. Demographic capital and the conditional validity of SERVPERF: rethinking tourist satisfaction models in an emerging market destination 68. A netnographic study to understand the determinants of experiential tourism destinations 69. The relative importance of volunteer tourism (sustainable/pro-social form of tourism) motivation factors for young tourists: a descriptive analysis by continents, gender, and frequency 70. Immigration and the competitiveness of an island tourism destination: a knowledge-based reputation analysis of Lanzarote, Canary Islands 71. European tourists' interest in non-European destinations
Economic impact	4	72. Hotel profitability in Spain: impact of the location of tourist destinations 73. Panel analysis on the tourism sector of selected Mediterranean countries 74. Direct economic impact of tourism on world heritage cities: an approach to measurement in emerging destinations 75. Quantile Granger causality between clean energy and tourism stock indices: evidence from regional markets
Event and festival tourism	3	76. Music festivals in small and medium-sized Spanish cities: between place dependency and spatial unboundedness, ongoing festivalisation and processes of financialisation 77. Food festivals and the development of sustainable destinations. The case of the cheese fair in Trujillo (Spain) 78. Contributions of sustainable tourist behaviour in food events to the cultural identity of destinations

Source: Own elaboration, 2025.

3.1.6. Data Extraction and Analysis

Extraction. Tables are used to collect data from each source: authorship, year, type of source, objectives, methodology, study population, main key concepts and findings relevant to the RQs.

Data analysis. Each publication is examined to identify patterns, trends and areas of focus in the period 2022-2025. Once synthesised, the findings provide an overview of the current state of the art, highlighting the growth in the number of studies and their impact in the context of artificial intelligence.

3.2. Complementary Qualitative Analysis

This will be carried out to contrast the findings obtained in the scoping review with the images generated by artificial intelligence in order to answer these two questions:

1. Does the characterisation made by generative AI correspond to a model of an inclusive city?
2. Is AI prioritising aspects of a market economy over urban inclusion?

3.2.1. Research Plan

A sample of images is selected from generative AI image tools available in the European Union.

Table 3. Tools for image generation with artificial intelligence

Digital tools used in the study		
Gemini	Skywork	Copilot
Canva	OpenArt	Microsoft Designer
ChatGPT	Bing	Frepik
Reve	Recraft	Pixlr

Source: Own work, 2025

To extract this information, the above sources are asked to provide a panoramic image of an inclusive city, in order to learn about its architecture, transport system, accessibility, green spaces and, in general, the city as a whole, as well as the characteristics of its residents. To avoid creating comic-style images, the command "with real people" is used. If the image does not allow people to be distinguished due to the distance of the shot, it will be ordered to be created from a "closer" position.

3.2.2. Observation and Evaluation

Each image will be evaluated independently by both researchers on a coded scale (-2 to +2), comparing the presence of key variables derived from the characterisation findings of RQ1 (e.g. green spaces, body diversity, accessibility) and RQ2 (e.g. tourist ideal, city branding).

3.2.3. Results report

A summary of the most significant findings will be presented, along with a report of conclusions that will attempt to provide a comprehensive response to RQ3. The results will also be presented graphically (Figure 3).

4. Research Results

4.1. What Characterises an Inclusive City? How can Diversity become a Differentiating Factor in the Configuration of Inclusive Cities?

The review and analysis of the publications identify a set of common distinctive characteristics that serve to uncover the contemporary meaning of an inclusive city. Some of these elements are

cited more frequently, as shown in Figure 02, but together they represent the paradigm of an inclusive urban model. It should be noted that the different authors analysed consider that the planning and management of an inclusive city should be done horizontally, but most approaches remain top-down: a few people in charge decide on a model or plan, implement it and communicate it to stakeholders (Riedmann-Streitz, et al, 2025). Instead, the development of urban areas should be based on a grassroots approach that focuses on the participation of existing grassroots movements (Casarin et al, 2023).

A concrete example of this model, integrating all stakeholders into its planning, will become clear below when its specific features are examined.

It makes no sense to talk about an inclusive model and neglect the protection of the rights of vulnerable groups, but the inclusive model goes beyond that, as it reinforces the need to empower and strengthen their sense of belonging to the community by giving all groups a relevant voice in the construction of the city. It is necessary to protect the concept of inclusion to prevent it from becoming generic, and if the objective is to break down unequal power relations, it should be accompanied by reflections based on experiences of exclusion (Duplan, 2023).

In all these cases, it is highlighted that all groups have a common trigger: the need to participate openly in the transformation of the city to which they belong and which, at the same time, also belongs to them.

The term "participation" is one of the most repeated in the research and may be the key to strengthening an inclusive system, i.e. giving a voice to and listening to the parties, identifying their needs and building the city in such a way as to address all these shortcomings, while encouraging their active participation in decision-making, initiatives and urban policies.

The development of disadvantaged urban areas must be carried out from a grassroots approach that focuses on the participation of residents in the decision-making process (Casarin et al, 2023). Inclusion involves two key aspects: involving all stakeholders and addressing inequality. First, it is crucial to find a strategy to involve everyone in a project. Secondly, inclusion is considered synonymous with addressing inequality (Noori et al, 2025).

Citizen participation can take many forms, whether it be grassroots participation where people organise and form their own communities to transform their environment through collective action and solidarity, or participatory democracy, where every citizen can take part in relevant aspects of the management of their city, while increasing their sense of empowerment in public affairs.

ICT and artificial intelligence offer multiple opportunities to improve the transparency of public institutions, as well as citizens' access to public information and their participation in decision-making (Franco Escobar, 2025).

Transforming the city to meet social, economic and environmental needs by listening to stakeholders is an inclusive regeneration process. The process of forming sustainable, participatory and inclusive urban and social development circles can help to strengthen or rebuild a sense of community and belonging (Carrera, 2023). This will involve addressing a wide range of requests, from mobility, care, safety and proximity to an environment adapted to changing needs and an equipped public space that improves accessibility, including control measures to remove obstacles, but also urban green spaces, leisure and social opportunities (Carrera, 2023) (Houtzager & De Vos, 2025).

The review also highlights the need for children to participate in urban planning and design processes (Michail et al, 2025). Cities are largely designed by adults, reflecting adult values and needs. This often overlooks the nuances of children's real experiences and the spaces they use. The management of urban spaces plays an important role in the design of an inclusive and age-friendly city (Carrera, 2023).

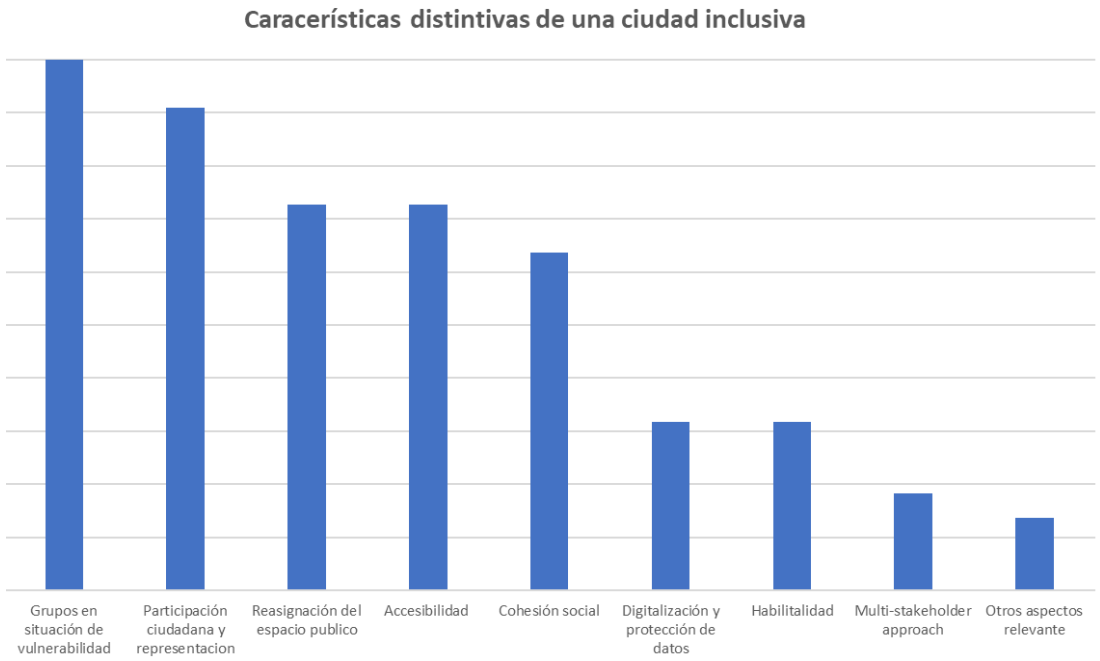
Long-term structural transformations can only occur through universal accessibility, that is, when people in stigmatised and marginalised areas are given the same opportunities for education, housing, healthcare, employment and access to services as their counterparts in other areas of the city (Casarin et al, 2023). There are specific recommendations for improving accessibility, including guidelines for the design of outdoor spaces and control measures to remove obstacles (Houtzager & De Vos, 2025).

Social cohesion is another element that is conducive to improving citizens' affinity for the need to pool the perspectives and practices of social workers, residents and communities in building coexistence. Shared values, trust, solidarity and citizen participation have a positive influence on the sense of belonging to the community.

The development of disadvantaged urban areas must be carried out from a grassroots approach that focuses on the participation of residents in the decision-making process, involving existing grassroots movements (Casarin et al, 2023).

In the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods, cultural practices contribute to the creation of an intercultural melting pot that revitalises these spaces, bringing new expressions, knowledge and community dynamics. Thus, far from being static enclaves of exclusion, these territories become spaces for exchange, creativity and resistance, where culture becomes a key tool for integration and empowerment. López-Montero & Sianes, 2025). By breaking down the characteristics of an inclusive city, it is possible to identify a stakeholder perspective, where the rights and needs of all parties involved in urban management must be taken into account.

Figure 2. Distinctive characteristics of an inclusive city



Source: Own elaboration, 2025

4.2. Is there a Hierarchy of Diversity in the Process of Building a City's Destination Image?

The results focus on the relationship between tourism, sustainability and urban development. The aim is to determine whether there is a relationship between the essential elements that make up an inclusive city and the contemporary design of cities that are attractive to tourism in order to position themselves as centres of attraction. When contrasting the inclusive city with the construction of the destination image or "*city* brand", we observe that the inclusive city is not a term developed in the tourism narrative, despite the fact that it is based on the idea of attracting "development" to cities that manage to position themselves internationally, promoting investment and local tourism. We find, in general terms, that the promotion of the destination image does not include the paradigms of an inclusive city, and the results even show that market needs are opposed to the characterisation of an inclusive city.

The studies analysed focus mainly on the economic, cultural and environmental aspects of sustainability, but do not take a position on equity or social inclusion from a diversity perspective. The categories we identified are related to *city* branding or *place* branding; *destination* image;

sustainability and sustainable tourism; culture and heritage; technology and Big Data; destination management and governance; tourist behaviour; economic impact; and event and festival tourism.

Only six of the 58 articles found address dimensions of inclusivity without necessarily using the concept of "*inclusive city*", but rather through atomised concepts such as cultural diversity, welcoming migrants, cultural intelligence or adaptation to different visitor profiles, whose common denominator has to do with tolerance as a neutral form of relationship and with inclusion, in a proactive sense. We note that these articles, which represent the most advanced perspectives on the concept of the inclusive city, focus on the intercultural and visibility aspects, which are profitable in terms of marketing, but fail to integrate the inclusive city into all the components we analysed in RQ1 in order to connect it in terms of market positioning through city branding.

In the case study on Milan (Bertoni et al., 2021) diversity is considered an element that shapes the "*enabling environment*" that fosters creativity and urban sustainability. Although the *Cultural and Creative Cities Monitor* (CCCM) evaluates European cities and recognises that cultural, ethnic and ideological diversity contributes structurally to sustainable urban development, its focus is not on material social inclusion, but on visible diversity that allows coexistence in the city's common spaces. In Spain, city branding prioritises pop, rock and other urban music festivals that are disconnected from local traditions, such as jazz, flamenco, traditional music, etc. (Vázquez-Varela et al., 2025).

Special mention should be made of sanctuary cities (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2020) because they connect with deeper layers that lead to social inclusion as part of the brand and where local public administration's position themselves as safe spaces within more restrictive national contexts, such as San Francisco with regard to the gay community or Barcelona in terms of hospitality.

Among the good practices are studies related to "*cultural intelligence*" (Bobanovic & Grzinic, 2019), which focuses on the importance of educating students in multicultural inclusivity to promote globally engaged citizenship.

4.3. How does Generative AI present the Inclusive City?

The following key observations stand out in the analysis of the sample of AI-generated images:

1) Neighbourhood culture does not exist. Neighbourhood culture is barely represented in one image (8%).

2) Biased representation of diversity. In sample 2, where AI understands gender inclusion to mean showing a frontal image of only Caucasian, blonde, attractive women with purchasing power. Although a black girl also appears, she is in the background.

3) Children do not have their own space in public areas. Although children are represented, when analysing the variable "allocation of spaces", only one image (8%) shows a public space adapted for them.

4) Green space is not very green. Ten images show green spaces, of which 70% consider green space to be a row of trees.

5) Cities without cars or public transport. Urban mobility is barely represented; only one photograph shows an image of public transport (8%), cars do not appear, and bicycles are the only means of urban transport portrayed in 42% of the images.

6) Absence of the LGBTI community. None of the images show a couple from this community.

7) Ethnic underrepresentation. Although all the images represent ethnic minorities, as with gender, only one particular ethnicity is represented and others are underrepresented.

8) Representation of older people vs adults. Older people are represented in 59% of the images, while people aged between 25 and 45 appear in all the slides.

9) Overrepresentation in image generation. The same is true for people with disabilities, who are represented in 59% of the total samples. However, image 7 shows four people with disabilities out of the seven people in the picture. The overrepresentation of a group was also identified in image 2, which only features women, as in sample 12, where all the people are of Latin American origin.

10) No access, but no barriers.

11) Homogeneity in construction. Ninety-two per cent of the cases symbolise similar skyscrapers that could exist in a large city capital, but neighbourhoods are not represented.

12) Inclusive cities for people with economic resources.

13) Postcard image.

Consequently, this analysis reveals a profound discrepancy between the concept of an inclusive city and its algorithmic representation, which is characterised by a superficial and commercial vision. A diversity of scripts for film sets is detected, where gender and ethnic inclusion is apparent but lacks depth. In some cases, the images tend to show young, attractive women with high purchasing power as the tourist archetype. At the opposite extreme, we identify a pattern where AI, in an attempt to correct biases, generates images with a numerical overrepresentation of certain groups, such as people with disabilities or African-American women, in an unnatural and excessive way, creating a new stereotype. There is a total absence of representation of the LGBTI community and an underrepresentation of adolescents. Diverse (non-normative) bodies are virtually absent, homogenising body image towards a commercial aesthetic ideal.

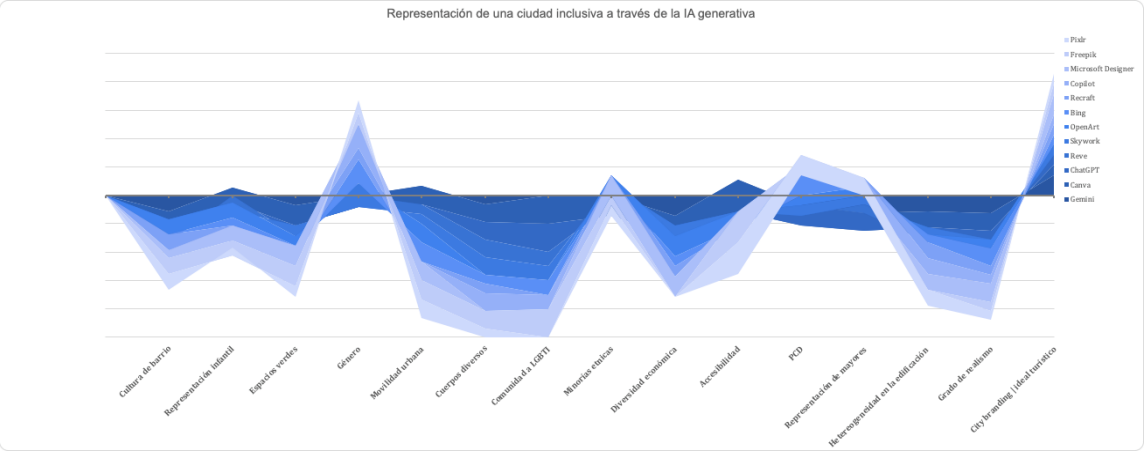
"Neighbourhood culture" is non-existent, as the scenes take place in generic urban centres reminiscent of the financial districts of large capitals (e.g. Madrid, Paris, New York), omitting, except in a single result, humble, marginalised neighbourhoods, community collaboration or any socio-economic heterogeneity.

An idyllic and unrealistic vision of mobility is projected: there are no cars, public transport is almost non-existent, and bicycles and pedestrians are the only means of transport in a continuous space without pavements, roads or uneven surfaces. Although present in most of the images, green spaces are reduced to decorative elements (rows of trees) rather than functional, community spaces or spaces integrated into neighbourhood life. The buildings are homogeneous (92% of cases), showing "similar skyscrapers" and prioritising a globalised and commercial aesthetic over local identity and architectural diversity. The environment, clothing (jeans being the norm) and general setting convey a high or medium-high socioeconomic status, with no representation of poverty or economic diversity.

The whole resembles a postcard or model, where all the characters smile, eliminating any trace of conflict, authenticity or social complexity that characterises inclusive urban life.

In light of these findings, we conclude that the generative AI's representation of urban inclusion does not correspond to the theoretical model nor does it address its real challenges. On the contrary, AI prioritises a market-driven, marketable and aesthetically aseptic vision that objectifies diversity, transforming it into a superficial visual element ("diversity washing"); omits citizen participation and the equitable reallocation of space, and conveys a commercialised vision of the cultural context, focusing on buildings, with a sense of homogeneous context that jeopardises genuine cultural diversity and perpetuates a segregationist vision under the guise of inclusion.

Figure 3. Evaluation of AI-generated images regarding the representation of an inclusive city.



Source: Own elaboration, 2025

5. Discussion

This research started from a central question: whether the commitment to diversity in contemporary cities responds to a genuine desire for social justice or whether, on the contrary, it has become just another city branding resource, susceptible to leading to a conceptual emptying closer to "diversity washing". The results obtained in the three dimensions of analysis allow us to offer a nuanced response.

Firstly, the deconstruction of the concept of the "inclusive city" (RQ1) reveals a holistic transformative model that demands a redistribution of power, substantive citizen participation and the guarantee of universal rights. This ideal is in direct opposition to the operational reality we identify in the field of city branding (RQ2), since, in the narrative of urban positioning, inclusion is not presented as an end in itself, but as a means to achieve competitive advantages. Diversity is commercialised, prioritising the visibility of certain aspects that are easy to communicate, such as interculturalism or tolerance, which can be offered as added value to attract talent, investment and tourism, while avoiding more conflictive or structural dimensions of inequality, such as the fight against aporophobia. (Jokela, 2020) (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2008) The case of "rainbow cities" or sanctuary cities is paradigmatic, since while their membership in these networks projects an image of modernity and openness, the absence of adequate frameworks, as in Madrid or Lisbon, suggests that real commitment may be subject to political or market calculations, highlighting the gap between form and substance.

This tension between the substantive and the symbolic is amplified in the technological dimension (RQ3), as generative artificial intelligence, when consulted about inclusive cities, presents us with an iconography of modernity focused on buildings or green spaces, with an aseptic and depoliticised vision of inclusion. AI acts as a mirror that amplifies the biases present in the data with which it is trained, offering a representation that ignores the diversity of bodies, grassroots community processes, social conflict and demands for spatial justice. Not only does it fail to correct the dynamics of "diversity washing", but it also creates a standard of "algorithmic inclusivity" that is as visually appealing as it is devoid of political content.

The recognition of initiatives such as the European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity awards demonstrates institutional progress, but the risk of instrumentalisation persists. "Rainbow capitalism" or "pinkwashing" serves as the commercial appropriation of social causes, generating disenchantment in the communities targeted by these policies, who perceive how their struggle is being turned into a marketing slogan. Aporophobia, the structural rejection of people living in poverty, is the clearest limit to this market inclusion; it is the diversity that no one wants to see and that no urban branding is interested in promoting or reversing (Suberviola & de Azevedo, 2024). These findings can be interpreted as evidence of a structural exclusion of forms of diversity that cannot be commercially exploited, particularly poverty, which aligns with the concept of

aporophobia (Cortina, 2017) and with urban critiques of the invisibilization of undesirable populations (Zukin, 2011).

6. Conclusions

The triangulation of the three dimensions of study—theoretical, practical, and technological—reveals a fundamental discordance: the comprehensive and radical model of RQ1 is incompatible with the superficial and selective logic of city branding (PI2) and with the algorithmic representation of AI (RQ3).

Theory (RQ1) proposes a complex and fair model of an inclusive city.

Practice (RQ2) reveals that the market (city branding) simplifies, hierarchises and commercialises it, leading to an image laundering of diversity.

Technology (RQ3) seems to act as a lens that amplifies and solidifies this commercial and superficial vision, a risk that must be warned against and regulated.

There is a total disconnect between the theoretical concept of an inclusive city and its operationalisation in *city branding* strategies. Urban marketing prioritises diversity as a commercial resource, leading to the hierarchisation and atomisation of diversities. We warn against "*diversity washing*" to position a city's image as a justification for promoting development.

For future lines of research, we recommend investigating the use of specific AI in the generation of city branding narratives and its impact on the public perception of inclusivity and delving deeper into the "geography of diversity washing", identifying which diversities are systematically promoted and which are rendered invisible in the global urban imagination.

The "inclusive city" is a holistic concept that goes beyond non-discrimination and is articulated around eight key dimensions that interact with each other. We propose addressing urban polarisation through a holistic approach that considers the "right to the city *as a whole*".

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