

Where the Body Can Dwell: Multimodal Metaphors in Institutional Digital Communication

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How To Cite: Careddu, A. (2026). Where the Body Can Dwell: Multimodal Metaphors in Institutional Digital Communication. *Studies of Applied Linguistics in Asia*, 1(1), 126–137. <https://doi.org/10.53941/sala.2026.100011>

Received: 31 May 2026

Revised: 19 July 2026

Accepted: 28 July 2026

Published: 6 August 2026

Abstract: This article examines video-based multimodal metaphors in institutional digital communication, focusing on short videos produced by public administrations to represent motor disability. The article builds on previous empirical research on institutional video communication and develops *inhabitability* as an analytical criterion for evaluating inclusive public communication. *Inhabitability* refers to the capacity of a multimodal metaphor to offer represented subjects viable visual and narrative positions for self-representation, situated agency and symbolic belonging. The article presents a theoretical re-reading of institutional videos as public meaning-making devices drawing on multimodal metaphor studies, performativity theory, disability studies and narrative approaches to identity and positioning. The article argues that institutional videos construct recognisable disability positions through recurring multimodal metaphors; that recognisability is often supported by restrictive visual and narrative scripts of heroism, assistance, overcoming or passive inclusion; and that inclusive communication requires metaphors that represented subjects can occupy as resources for self-narration, agency and belonging. Motor disability is treated as a significant case because its public representation is organised through visible bodily markers, movement, accessibility, autonomy, dependence and assistive devices. The article concludes that *inhabitability* provides a conceptual tool for assessing the inclusive quality of multimodal metaphors in public communication. This piece contributes to the study of metaphor, visual language and institutional digital communication by shifting attention from the recognisability of represented subjects to the symbolic positions made available to them.

Keywords: multimodal metaphor; institutional digital communication; motor disability; visual language; public communication; *inhabitability*

1. Introduction

Short institutional videos produced by public administrations have become a significant site of multimodal meaning-making in digital public communication. Circulated through websites, social media platforms and awareness campaigns, these videos address broad and heterogeneous audiences through condensed visual and narrative forms. Their communicative force depends on immediacy: in a limited duration, they organise a social issue, identify relevant participants, guide the viewer's affective orientation and make a public message intelligible. In this context, images, bodies, gestures, spatial arrangements,

objects, camera angles, movement and narrative sequencing acquire pragmatic relevance. They participate in the production of public meaning and contribute to shaping the conditions under which social subjects become recognisable within public discourse.

This article examines video-based multimodal metaphors in institutional digital communication, focusing on short videos produced by public administrations to represent motor disability. Motor disability is a particularly significant case for the study of visual and multimodal metaphor because its public representation is frequently organised through visible bodily markers, mobility aids, spatial



obstacles, gestures of assistance, trajectories of movement and contrasts between autonomy and dependence. These elements can produce recurrent metaphorical configurations: inclusion as access, life as a journey, disability as obstacle, agency as upward movement, participation as overcoming, and social value as resilience. In short institutional videos, such configurations often operate implicitly and orient interpretation through familiar visual and narrative patterns while remaining unspoken as metaphors.

The article is based on Charles Forceville's work on pictorial, visual and multimodal metaphor (Forceville, 1996, 2006, 2020, 2024; Forceville & Urios-Aparisi, 2009). Forceville's approach is especially relevant because it treats metaphor as a phenomenon that can be realised across different semiotic modes, including images, moving images, sound, gesture and narrative organisation. His Relevance Theory-based account also foregrounds inference, context-dependence and pragmatically achieved interpretation. This article develops that line of thought in relation to institutional videos on disability representation. The question addressed here concerns what happens when the multimodal figurations produced by public institutions generate recognisable meanings for general audiences while offering represented subjects symbolic and narrative positions that may be difficult to occupy as resources for self-representation.

This point requires a distinction between cognitive environments and contextual assumptions. In Relevance Theory, a cognitive environment refers to the broader set of assumptions manifest to an individual, including cultural, biographical, encyclopaedic, bodily and experiential knowledge. Contextual assumptions are the more specific assumptions activated in a particular act of interpretation. In institutional videos about motor disability, this distinction is crucial because general viewers and disabled viewers may draw on different cognitive environments when interpreting the same visual metaphor. A staircase, a wheelchair, a hospital-like bed, an office corridor, a gesture of assistance or a narrative of overcoming may be immediately accessible to a general audience through culturally familiar scripts. For people with motor disabilities, the same cues may activate a more complex experiential field involving accessibility, dependence, autonomy, fatigue, social exposure, medicalisation, architectural barriers and repeated experiences of being represented from the outside. The interpretative problem therefore concerns the relation between public recognisability and situated self-representation.

The genre and medium of these videos also matter. Institutional videos are not feature films, documentaries or artistic works: they are short public communication artefacts, usually designed for clarity, circulation and rapid uptake. Their social media circulation intensifies the need for recognisable framings, memorable images and emotionally legible narrative arcs. This genre favours condensation and simplification that, in the representation of disability, often

draws on familiar scripts of heroism, assistance, overcoming, gratitude or passive inclusion. These scripts can make disability publicly legible while also narrowing the symbolic positions available to disabled subjects. The central question concerns therefore the kind of position that the video makes available to the subject it represents.

Disability studies has long shown that media representations of disabled people are shaped by recurring visual and narrative conventions. Barnes (1992) analysed disabling imagery in the media and offered principles for more responsible representation. Garland-Thomson (1997, 2005, 2009) examined the cultural construction of disabled bodies and the politics of looking. Mitchell and Snyder (2000) showed how disability often functions as a narrative device within cultural texts. Vidali (2010) demonstrated the importance of interrogating ableist assumptions within theories of metaphor themselves. Danforth (2007) further showed how disability-related categories can be structured through conceptual metaphors in institutional contexts. These contributions clarify why disability representation must be treated as a problem of meaning-making, visual organisation and social positioning, and also show why motor disability cannot be approached as a neutral visual theme in public communication. Its representation is entangled with wider assumptions about normality, movement, independence, productivity, vulnerability and social value.

The theoretical orientation of the article is also informed by the philosophy of language, especially the pragmatic and performative tradition inaugurated by Austin's account of language as action (Austin, 1962) and developed through Butler's theory of performativity (Butler, 1990, 1993). Communicative forms act within social life. They contribute to the stabilisation of recognisable identities, bodily norms and public expectations. In institutional communication, repeated visual and narrative patterns can acquire normative force because they participate in defining which forms of disability become intelligible, acceptable and emotionally legible. From this perspective, multimodal metaphors in public videos are not decorative devices. They are public meaning-making structures that help organise the field of recognition.

Building on these premises, the article develops *inhabitability* as an analytical criterion for evaluating video-based multimodal metaphors in institutional digital communication. *Inhabitability* is not an intrinsic property of a metaphor, a psychological state of identification, or a general measure of positive representation. It is a relational quality that emerges between the symbolic position constructed by a multimodal text, the social and narrative scripts through which that position becomes intelligible, and the represented subjects who may be called upon to recognise, occupy and reuse it. A position is inhabitable when it offers those subjects a viable basis for self-representation, situated agency and symbolic belonging without requiring them to accept a reductive account of

themselves (Hill, 2024). In this sense, recognisability and *inhabitability* refer to distinct, although connected, dimensions of representation. Recognisability concerns whether a subject can be rendered culturally intelligible within available visual and narrative conventions; *inhabitability* concerns whether the terms of that intelligibility can plausibly be appropriated as resources for self-narration. A viewer may identify with a represented character while rejecting the ideological script within which that character is positioned, just as an apparently positive portrayal may remain difficult to inhabit when dignity, inclusion or social worth are made conditional upon exceptional achievement, heroic overcoming, dependence on assistance or passive incorporation. The question, therefore, is not simply whether disabled subjects can recognise themselves in an institutional video, but whether the position through which they are made recognisable leaves room for complexity, agency and alternative forms of self-understanding. *Inhabitability* shifts the analysis from the visibility of represented subjects to the normative and performative conditions under which they are invited to become intelligible: whether a multimodal metaphor makes available a position they can occupy and transform, or whether it fixes them within externally produced scripts that constrain the ways in which they may narrate themselves and relate to their public image.

The article is based on previous empirical research on institutional videos representing motor disability, which examined four short institutional videos and investigated how disabled and non-disabled viewers interpreted recurring multimodal metaphorical configurations. The present article develops the theoretical step that follows from that work: the need for a criterion capable of evaluating the inclusive quality of the metaphorical positions produced by institutional videos. The research question guiding the article is how can multimodal metaphors in institutional digital communication become symbolic resources for self-representation, agency and belonging? In this article I argue that multimodal metaphors become such resources when they construct inhabitable visual and narrative positions.

The article proceeds as follows. The next section describes the methodological grounding of this research, the previous empirical research from which the present theoretical argument develops, and the institutional video materials that motivate the analysis. The Results section identifies the main conceptual outcomes of this re-reading: the role of short videos in producing immediate recognisability, the limits of recognisability as a criterion for inclusive communication, and the need for *inhabitability* as an evaluative category. The Discussion develops *inhabitability* in relation to multimodal metaphor theory, performativity, disability representation, narrative positioning and symbolic resources. The conclusion summarises the contribution of *inhabitability* to the research of video-based metaphor, visual language and inclusive institutional communication.

2. Materials and Methods

This article is developed as a theoretically informed re-reading of a broader empirical survey-based investigation into video-based multimodal metaphors in institutional digital communication which formed part of my PhD (as my thesis has not been published yet, in this section I summarise materials, methodology and findings of the thesis.). In particular, such study examined how short videos produced by public administrations represent motor disability through recurring visual and narrative configurations, and how these configurations are interpreted by disabled and non-disabled viewers. The present article takes it as its point of departure and develops a further conceptual question: how can multimodal metaphors in institutional videos become symbolic resources for self-representation, situated agency and belonging? The methodological aim is therefore to articulate *inhabitability* as an analytical criterion for evaluating the inclusive quality of metaphorical terms and expressions in public communication (Davies & Harré, 1990; Somers, 1994; Zittoun, 2007; Postan, 2022).

The empirical background consists of four short institutional videos: *Scegli il Servizio Civile* (Italian Government, Department for Youth Policies and the Universal Civil Service and Department for Information and Publishing, 2025), *The Eyes* (LADAPT, Association for the Social and Professional Integration of Disabled People, France, 2024), *It's Everyone's Journey* (Government of the United Kingdom, Department for Transport, 2020) and *Share Aware* (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, United Kingdom, 2017). These videos were selected in the previous research because they are publicly circulated institutional materials, address a general audience, and represent disability through recognisable multimodal configurations. They belong to a communicative genre characterised by brevity, immediacy and public orientation. Their function is informative and persuasive at the same time: they present a social issue, offer an affective orientation, and invite viewers to recognise a particular interpretation of disability within a limited audiovisual format. For this reason, they are well suited to the analysis of metaphor in public digital communication. Their meaning is produced through the interaction of moving images, bodies, spatial arrangements, gestures, objects, rhythm, editing and narrative progression (Arnheim, 1969; Forceville, 2020, 2024; Bateman & Wildfeuer, 2014).

The four videos have been chosen as select representations of different aspects relevant to the lives of both persons with disabilities as well as persons without disabilities who may happen to interact with disabled individuals. The videos are all part of institutional communication campaigns; such institutions were all European so that they could be consistent with the daily experiences of the respondents to the surveys. The videos offer different configurations of motor disability. Some foreground assistance, access or service provision; others organise disability

through professional struggle, public participation, journey, risk, awareness or social responsibility. The videos are treated as instances of a wider institutional practice: the use of short audiovisual texts to make disability intelligible to broad publics. In this sense, the material allows the article to examine how public administrations use video-based multimodal metaphors to condense complex social experiences into immediately recognisable visual narratives (Forceville, 1996, 2006; Forceville & Urios-Aparisi, 2009; El Refaie, 2003).

The selected videos differ in their use of language: one is silent, one contains Italian narration, and two use English. These differences do not, however, materially affect the present analysis. The central metaphorical configurations examined here are conveyed through broadly recognisable visual, narrative and embodied structures rather than through language-specific expressions or culturally untranslatable

verbal formulations. Spoken language contributes to the framing and affective orientation of particular sequences, but it does not determine the underlying source–target relations on which the analysis relies. The videos can therefore be compared at the level of their multimodal construction without presuming linguistic equivalence in every detail.

Table 1 below summarises the four institutional videos that constitute the empirical background of the conceptual re-reading (The descriptors indicate the analytical role of each video within the conceptual re-reading. They do not represent statistical scores, but summarise the extent to which each video constructs disability as a performative, visually recognisable and metaphorically organised subject-position.). The table does not reproduce the full empirical analysis, but identifies the communicative function and main multimodal configuration of each video in relation to the argument developed in this article.

Table 1. Videos.

Macro-Theme	<i>The Eyes</i> ^a	<i>It's Everyone's Journey</i> ^b	<i>Scegli il Servizio Civile</i> ^c	<i>Share Aware</i> ^d
Performativity of disability	Medium/High	High	Low	Absent
Visual Accuracy and Identity Recognisability	High	High	Low	Absent
Visual Metaphors and the Imaginary of Disability	Medium/Stereotyped	High	Low/Stereotyped	Absent

^a *The Eyes*: [https://youtu.be/sqkT7KS9FQg?si=sOMYTts-o4HO3G_r](https://youtu.be/sqkT7KS9FQg?si=sOMYTts-o4HO3G_r;); ^b *It's Everyone's Journey*: <https://youtu.be/PDsFeHAQ6nY?si=2S4rAN0sTF5uIEmQ>; ^c *Scegli il Servizio Civile*: <https://youtu.be/ZVMOKS807i0?si=skhteGJdePRcQyjh>; ^d *Share Aware*: <https://youtu.be/LqqnxQzz17c?si=ic2ySV1SCj0H11wc>.

The empirical research referred to in this article was based on the submission of Likert-scale questionnaires to two groups of viewers: participants with motor disabilities and non-disabled participants. The questionnaires explored perceived adequacy, representativeness, positivity, stereotyping and identification in relation to the selected videos. The metaphorical level was analysed in advance through multimodal metaphor theory, especially Forceville's approach to pictorial, visual and multimodal metaphor (Forceville, 1996, 2006, 2020, 2024), while the questionnaire avoided direct reference to metaphor. This design allowed me to observe how viewers engaged with visual and narrative configurations without being explicitly prompted to identify metaphorical structures (Bort-Mir, 2019; Forceville, 2024).

The analytical procedure adopted in this article goes through four stages. First, I identify the multimodal metaphorical configurations through which the institutional videos make motor disability publicly recognisable. These configurations include journey, access, obstacle, overcoming, assistance, autonomy, dependence and social participation (Kövecses, 2010; Forceville, 2020; Vidali, 2010). Second, I examine the symbolic positions that these configurations make available to the represented subject. The analysis therefore asks whether the disabled person appears as an autonomous agent, a recipient of help, an inspirational figure, a vulnerable subject, a public participant, a professional actor, or a body made legible through external intervention (Barnes, 1992; Garland-Thomson, 1997, 2005; Mitchell & Snyder, 2000). Third, I interpret these positions through performativity theory, disability

studies and narrative approaches to identity and positioning (Davies & Harré, 1990; Somers, 1994; Bamberg, 2011). Fourth, I develop *inhabitability* as a criterion for evaluating whether these metaphorical positions can function as viable resources for self-representation, situated agency and symbolic belonging.

The purpose of this procedure is to build an analytical category from the dynamic that emerged in the previous research between recognisability and adequate self-representation. The category of *inhabitability* is therefore constructed through a dialogue between empirical observation and theoretical elaboration. Multimodal metaphor theory provides the tools for identifying how metaphor operates across modes in video (Forceville, 2006, 2020; Forceville & Urios-Aparisi, 2009). Relevance Theory clarifies the role of inference, cognitive environment and contextual assumptions in interpretation (Sperber & Wilson, 1995; Forceville, 2020). Performativity theory explains how repeated visual and narrative forms acquire normative force (Austin, 1962; Butler, 1990, 1993). Disability studies situates the analysis within the politics of representation, misrecognition and embodied social experience (Barnes, 1992; Garland-Thomson, 2009; Fricker, 2007; Vidali, 2010). Narrative and positioning theories clarify how public representations offer, restrict or assign positions from which subjects can understand and narrate themselves (Davies & Harré, 1990; Somers, 1994; Zittoun, 2007; Postan, 2022).

A central methodological assumption of the article is that video-based metaphors in institutional communication must be analysed in relation to medium and genre (Forceville, 2024,

2025). The videos considered here are short, digitally circulated and institutionally authored, and their meanings are shaped by the expectations attached to public campaigns, social media communication and administrative messaging. These genres favour clarity, emotional accessibility and rapid recognition, and also encourage the use of familiar visual patterns. In the case of motor disability, such patterns often rely on visible signs of mobility, assistance, effort, spatial access and bodily difference. The analysis therefore treats genre as part of the metaphorical process, because the institutional and digital format influences which metaphors are selected, how they are made recognisable, and how they position the represented subject (Bateman & Wildfeuer, 2014; Forceville, 2020).

The article also adopts an epistemic orientation based on situated knowledge (Fricker, 2007; Kafer, 2013). The representation of motor disability in public communication involves bodily, spatial and social experiences that are not fully accessible through external observation alone. Mobility aids, accessible environments, gestures of assistance, architectural barriers and public exposure carry different meanings depending on the viewer's cognitive environment and embodied experience (Sperber & Wilson, 1995; Gallagher, 2006; Forceville, 2020; El Refaie, 2019). For this reason, the evaluation of institutional metaphors requires attention to the relation between externally produced visual narratives and the self-representational needs of the subjects represented (Barnes, 1992; Garland-Thomson, 2005; Vidali, 2010). *Inhabitability* is proposed precisely at this point: as a way of asking whether a public metaphor offers a symbolic position that can be recognised, occupied and used by those whose experience it claims to represent (Davies & Harré, 1990; Zittoun, 2007; Postan, 2022).

The concept of representational *inhabitability* can be generally applied to audiovisual representations of disability through a staged procedure, which would begin by reconstructing the audiovisual discourse, to then identify relevant metaphorical configurations, examine the subject-position produced through their interaction with narrative,

generic and affective structures, and finally evaluate the *inhabitability* of that position. The first stage establishes a video's communicative and textual conditions, including genre, purpose, audience, platform, cultural context and narrative organisation. The video is then divided into meaningful units, such as shots, phases of action or changes in perspective. Each unit is analysed in relation to participants, actions and social relations, together with framing, editing, movement, gaze, gesture, space, language, voice-over, sound, music, colour and rhythm. The aim is to explain how these resources combine across time to shape interpretation. The second stage asks whether the video supports a metaphorical construal. The analyst identifies target and source domains, establishes the direction of the mapping, and specifies the properties, actions, values or emotions transferred between them. These claims must be grounded in concrete audiovisual evidence. Metaphors should be distinguished from broader narrative scripts and cultural frames such as heroism, overcoming, dependency, gratitude or interdependence, although metaphor may contribute to their activation. The analysis then reconstructs the subject-position through which the disabled person becomes intelligible, for example as agent, recipient, survivor, beneficiary, citizen or ordinary participant. *Inhabitability* is assessed by asking what aspects of the subject become perceptible, what forms of agency and relationality are supported, whose perspective organises the scene, how assistance is represented, and whether participation depends on environmental accommodation or individual adaptation. The central issue is the symbolic cost of occupying the position offered. *Inhabitability* is greater where the representation supports complex, situated and revisable forms of self-narration. It is more restrictive where recognition depends on autonomy, productivity, resilience, gratitude or exceptional achievement. *Inhabitability* therefore describes not the positive tone of a representation, but the range, conditions and costs of the positions it makes available for appropriation and reuse. Table 2 below summarises the procedure:

Table 2. Analytical procedure.

Analytical Dimension	Guiding Question	Analytical Focus
Construction of the subject-position	What subject-position does the video make available to the disabled person?	The role from which the represented subject becomes visible and intelligible, such as agent, recipient, beneficiary, survivor, inspirational figure, citizen or ordinary participant.
Multimodal construction	Through which audiovisual resources and metaphorical configurations is this position constructed?	The interaction of framing, editing, camera movement, bodily action, gaze, gesture, speech, written language, sound, music, rhythm and spatial organisation.
Conditions of intelligibility	What must the subject accept in order to become intelligible within this position?	The expectations, values and narrative scripts attached to recognition, including autonomy, productivity, resilience, gratitude, dependence or exceptional achievement.
Potential for appropriation	Can this position be appropriated and reused by the subject as a resource for self-representation?	The extent to which the position enables self-narration, self-definition and the articulation of desires, experiences and interpretations without requiring the acceptance of a reductive account of disability.
Range and limits of inhabitable possibilities	Which possibilities of existence, agency and belonging does the position make available, and which does it restrict or exclude?	The range of embodied identities, social relations and forms of participation that the representation renders possible, intelligible or unavailable.

3. Conceptual Analysis

The results presented in this section are conceptual findings derived from the comparative re-reading of the four institutional videos and from the interpretative tensions identified in my previous research. They do not introduce a new dataset or a new statistical analysis. Their purpose is to clarify what the previous investigation makes visible for the theoretical study of video-based multimodal metaphors in institutional digital communication. Five results emerge from this re-reading. First, short institutional videos produce public recognisability through compressed metaphorical scripts. Second, video-based metaphors assign subject-positions to disabled people within the narrative. Third, visibility, recognisability and inhabitable positioning operate at different levels. Fourth, the same multimodal cues may align differently with the cognitive environments of general viewers and of represented subjects. Fifth, *inhabitability* emerges as a criterion for evaluating the inclusive quality of metaphors circulated by public administrations.

The first result concerns the relation between brevity, genre and metaphorical compression. The videos considered here belong to a communicative form shaped by institutional authorship, digital circulation and rapid uptake, and their meanings must become accessible within a limited audiovisual sequence. This genre favours condensed metaphorical scripts, through which complex social relations are organised by familiar visual patterns: journey, obstacle, assistance, struggle, access, participation, risk or exclusion. These scripts work across modes: a body's movement, a spatial arrangement, an object, a gesture, an editing choice or the absence of a body from the frame can guide interpretation as strongly as verbal language. This confirms Forceville's claim that visual and multimodal metaphors are realised through the interaction of modes and must be analysed in relation to medium and genre (Forceville, 2006, 2020, 2024, 2025; Forceville & Urios-Aparisi, 2009). In institutional videos, metaphor becomes a pragmatic device for producing public recognisability (Bateman et al., 2026).

The second result concerns the production of narrative subject-positions. In this analysis, metaphors are understood as multimodal configurations that organise narrative scripts and positions through recurring visual relations. The four videos offer different positions to disabled subjects. *The Eyes* constructs disability through a narrative of professional struggle. The disabled woman is presented as a fighter and a winner: she confronts workplace prejudice in order to reach the goal of promotion. The metaphorical script is organised around combat, resistance and achievement. The video grants agency to the disabled subject, and that agency is channelled through effort against an external obstacle. The woman becomes recognisable as worthy because she persists and succeeds. This configuration produces a strong and legible

narrative arc, especially for a general audience familiar with stories of resilience and overcoming. Its ambivalence lies in the fact that empowerment becomes visually available through a demanding script of struggle and victory.

It's Everyone's Journey produces a different configuration. The disabled person is represented with agency, autonomy and participation, while the narrative focus remains on society as a whole. Disability appears within a shared social world, rather than as the central problem of the video. The disabled subject is part of the narrated society, participates actively in it and occupies a position that is visible without becoming morally exceptional. The journey metaphor is distributed across the collective scene: mobility, access and participation concern the public environment and the community. The disabled person appears as a social actor among other social actors. The metaphor supports belonging through participation, and the video's recognisability derives from shared movement through public space.

Scegli il Servizio Civile organises disability through a script of assistance. Disabled people are represented primarily as elderly bodies needing help. They are placed in the background or near the margins of the narrative field, while agency is assigned to the young people who provide support. Movement through society becomes possible through the intervention of others. The metaphorical structure links civic value to service, youth, assistance and care. Disabled and elderly bodies function as the condition through which the civic agency of the volunteers becomes visible. Their own perspective remains visually and narratively underdeveloped, while their presence gives moral and social meaning to the action performed by others (Ahmed, 2004). This configuration is significant because inclusion is represented through help, while agency is displaced away from the represented disabled subjects.

Share Aware presents a fourth configuration: representational absence. The society constructed by the video does not include disabled people within the visible narrative world. Disability is not positioned through heroism, assistance or autonomy; it is omitted from the social field made available by the video. This absence has analytical importance because institutional communication can shape recognisability through exclusion as well as representation. A video may produce an image of social life, public responsibility or collective awareness while leaving disabled subjects outside the imagined community. In this case, the metaphor organises society without assigning a visible place to disability. The result is a form of symbolic non-positioning: disabled people are neither stereotyped within the video nor offered a narrative space from which they can appear as participants in the represented social world.

The third result concerns the difference between visibility, recognisability and inhabitable positioning. The four videos show that the presence of disability within a visual text is not, by itself, a sufficient indicator of inclusive

representation. *The Eyes* gives disability strong visibility and clear agency, while the agency is structured through combat and exceptional success. *It's Everyone's Journey* gives disability a less spectacular position, while the subject appears integrated within a broader social narrative. *Scegli il Servizio Civile* includes disabled and elderly bodies visually, while assigning agency elsewhere. *Share Aware* constructs a public social world from which disabled people are absent. These differences matter because visual inclusion can coexist with a restricted narrative position. A represented subject may appear clearly in the video and still be positioned through a demanding or externally produced script. A represented subject may appear briefly and occupy a more viable position if the narrative allows agency, participation and belonging.

This comparison shows that recognisability has different qualities. In *The Eyes*, recognisability is dramatic: disability becomes intelligible through conflict and victory. In *Scegli il Servizio Civile*, recognisability is assistential: disability becomes intelligible through need and care. In *It's Everyone's Journey*, recognisability is participatory: disability becomes intelligible through shared access and collective movement. In *Share Aware*, recognisability is withheld because the social field excludes disabled subjects from visibility. These configurations demonstrate that recognisability carries an implicit theory of the subject: who acts, who receives action, who overcomes, who belongs, who remains peripheral and who disappears from the frame. This point connects the analysis of video-based metaphor to positioning theory, where discourse is understood as producing positions from which subjects can be described, recognised and made intelligible (Davies & Harré, 1990; Somers, 1994; Bamberg, 2011).

The fourth result concerns the relation between cognitive environment and symbolic position. The same multimodal cue can activate different interpretative fields for different viewers. A staircase, a wheelchair, a workplace, an elderly body, a gesture of assistance or a journey through public space can be processed through culturally available assumptions by a general audience. For people with motor disabilities, the same cue may activate embodied, biographical and social knowledge concerning accessibility, fatigue, dependence, exposure, autonomy, architectural barriers, medicalisation or repeated misrecognition. The divergence between cognitive environments matters because a metaphorical script may be easily recognisable for the public and self-representationally constraining for the represented subject (Sperber & Wilson, 1995; Forceville, 2020; El Refaie, 2019).

The videos therefore reveal a central issue for institutional communication. Public administrations often use familiar visual metaphors because they make messages accessible to broad audiences. Familiarity can support clarity, emotional legibility and rapid circulation. The same familiarity can also reproduce inherited scripts of disability: the fighter who deserves recognition through victory, the assisted

body waiting for help, the marginal subject placed in the background, or the absent citizen excluded from the imagined community. These externally produced positions can affect the subject's relation to the public image by making recognition available through roles that are socially familiar and self-representationally constraining. Because public administrations speak from a position of institutional authority, the metaphorical positions they circulate may acquire particular force in shaping shared expectations about disability, agency and participation.

The fifth result, and the most important for the present article, is that *inhabitability* emerges from the comparison between the positions produced by the videos. *It's Everyone's Journey* offers the clearest example, within this corpus, of a more inhabitable model because the disabled subject appears as an active participant in a shared social world. The video gives disability a place within collective mobility and public participation. *The Eyes* offers a more ambivalent configuration: it gives the disabled woman agency, while that agency is channelled through combat and success. *Scegli il Servizio Civile* offers a weakly inhabitable model because disabled bodies are visible, while their narrative function is tied to the agency of helpers. *Share Aware* offers the most problematic case because the represented society lacks disabled participants altogether.

The comparison allows *inhabitability* to be defined with greater precision. An inhabitable video-based metaphor provides a symbolic position that the represented subject can recognise, occupy and potentially reuse for self-representation, and supports agency through ordinary participation, relational presence, situated action and symbolic belonging. Moreover, an inhabitable video-based metaphor represents assistance as part of social interdependence, accessibility as a condition of shared public life, and disability as one of the possible ways of inhabiting the social world. The concept of *inhabitability* therefore concerns the relation between visual metaphor, narrative position and self-representational viability, as it asks whether a public video offers the represented subject a place within the narrative that can become a resource for self-description, rather than a role imposed from outside.

These results are conceptual, but they arise from concrete differences among the four videos. The analysis shows that public institutional videos can produce disability through at least four metaphorical positions: the victorious fighter, the active participant, the assisted body and the absent citizen. Each position has different implications for recognisability, agency and belonging. The concept of *inhabitability* makes these differences analytically visible, providing a way of asking whether the metaphor created by a short institutional video offers the represented subject a viable place within the public narrative. This question is especially important for digital communication produced by public administrations, because such videos do more than circulate information. They shape the visual and narrative conditions through which social groups become publicly imaginable.

4. Discussion

The results of the conceptual re-reading indicate that the inclusive quality of video-based multimodal metaphors depends on the symbolic position they make available to the represented subject. *Inhabitability* names this quality. In the context of institutional digital communication, it refers to the capacity of a video-based multimodal metaphor to offer represented subjects a viable visual and narrative position for self-representation, situated agency and symbolic belonging. The concept brings together three dimensions: the possibility of recognising oneself within the representation, the availability of a position from which agency can be articulated, and the construction of a symbolic place within the public narrative. In the case of motor disability, this criterion concerns the relation between public images, embodied experience, and the possibility of occupying a representation without being confined to externally produced scripts of heroic resilience, passive dependence, gratitude, assistance or disappearance from the social scene.

This proposal develops the evaluative reach of Forceville's approach to visual and multimodal metaphor. Forceville's work provides the methodological basis for analysing how metaphor can be realised across image, sound, gesture, movement, spatial arrangement and narrative sequence (Forceville, 1996, 2006, 2020; Forceville & Urios-Aparisi, 2009). His recent work on commercials and feature films also clarifies the importance of medium and genre for the interpretation of audiovisual metaphor (Forceville, 2024, 2025). This point is central for institutional videos produced by public administrations, because their metaphors are shaped by short duration, public address, digital circulation and immediate intelligibility. The genre invites recognisable scripts and favours images that can be processed rapidly by general audiences. The category proposed here follows this line of thought and asks a further evaluative question: once a metaphor has produced public recognisability, what kind of subject-position does it make available within public communication?

Forceville's Relevance Theory-based account foregrounds inference, context-dependence and cognitive environment (Forceville, 2020; Sperber & Wilson, 1995). In disability representation, these elements acquire specific ethical and philosophical significance. General audiences and represented subjects may share the immediate contextual assumptions required to interpret a video, while drawing on different cognitive environments. A wheelchair, a staircase, a workplace corridor, a hospital-like bed or a helping gesture can work as rapidly accessible cues for a broad public. For people with motor disabilities, the same cues may activate embodied memories, social exposure, fatigue, negotiations of dependence and autonomy, architectural barriers, medicalisation, accessibility practices and repeated experiences of being viewed through external frames. The distance between public legibility

and represented experience is the space in which *inhabitability* becomes analytically necessary.

The distinction between recognisability and *inhabitability* clarifies this point. Recognisability concerns the public legibility of a represented subject: the subject becomes intelligible through a socially available frame. *Inhabitability* concerns the viability of the position through which that legibility is achieved: the subject can use the position as a resource for self-narration, or experiences it as a constraining frame imposed from outside. This distinction explains why a video can be emotionally clear, institutionally appropriate and visually effective while producing a limited symbolic place for the person represented. The public message may succeed in making disability visible and meaningful to general viewers, while the metaphorical position offered to disabled subjects may remain narrow, demanding or misaligned with their own forms of self-understanding.

Butler's theory of performativity gives this distinction its normative force. Repetition stabilises the conditions under which bodies, identities and forms of agency become intelligible (Butler, 1990, 1993), and institutional videos participate in this process because they circulate as authorised public representations of social life. Public administrations speak from a position of institutional legitimacy; their images and narratives therefore contribute to the shared vocabulary through which citizens learn to recognise disability, inclusion and participation. When short public videos repeatedly associate disability with heroic struggle, dependence, assistance, inspiration, vulnerability or absence, they help define the visual grammar through which disabled subjects become publicly imaginable. The normativity at stake is performative: it operates through the reiteration of visual and narrative forms that make some subject-positions familiar, desirable and emotionally accessible.

This performative force becomes especially powerful in digital and social media contexts. Short videos circulated on institutional websites, campaign pages and social platforms must become legible before viewers disengage. Their brevity and shareability intensify reliance on familiar scripts, memorable images and affectively direct narrative arcs. For public administrations, this creates a communicative challenge. A familiar metaphor can make a message accessible to a general audience, while the same familiarity can reproduce inherited roles: the fighter who deserves recognition through victory, the assisted body waiting for help, the grateful beneficiary of institutional care, the inspirational figure whose value lies in resilience, or the absent citizen excluded from the imagined community. These positions shape the subject's relation to public self-image by making recognition available through roles that are socially familiar and self-representationally constraining.

Disability studies provide the critical underpinning for analysing this representational tension. Barnes (1992)

showed how media imagery can reproduce disabling assumptions. Garland-Thomson (1997, 2005, 2009) demonstrated that disabled bodies are culturally constructed through practices of looking, staring and visual classification. Mitchell & Snyder (2000) showed how disability often functions as a narrative device that sustains the development of a story while reducing disabled embodiment to a narrative function. Vidali (2010) argued that metaphor theory itself must attend to ableist assumptions embedded in claims about bodily knowledge and conceptual structure. These contributions allow the present article to treat motor disability as a theoretically significant case for multimodal metaphor analysis: the body is visible, spatially positioned and narratively coded, while the meaning of that visibility depends on wider assumptions about autonomy, dependence, movement, productivity and social value.

The narrative dimension of disability representation strengthens this argument. Smith & Sparkes (2008) show that narrative can make a substantial contribution to disability studies because stories shape how disability is understood, lived and socially positioned. Hydén & Antelius (2011) further develop an embodied conception of narratives, showing that stories are not purely textual structures but communicative practices based on bodily, relational and social experience. These perspectives are highly relevant for video-based metaphor (Forceville, 2024; Poppi & Urios-Aparisi, 2018). Institutional videos produce stories through bodies, spaces, movements, objects and sequences. Their narratives give viewers a way of understanding disability, and they give disabled subjects a possible place within the public account of disability. The quality of that place determines whether the metaphor can become a symbolic resource for self-representation.

Positioning theory and narrative identity studies help specify this point. Davies & Harré (1990) describe discourse as a practice through which subjects are positioned, while Somers (1994) links narrative identity to social action and relational location. Bamberg's work on narrative positioning clarifies how identities are negotiated through available narrative forms. Zittoun's account of symbolic resources shows how cultural materials can support meaning-making in lived experience (Zittoun, 2007). Postan's work on embodied narratives offers a further foundation for thinking about self-narratives as lived, situated and inhabitable (Postan, 2022). These approaches converge on a central claim for the present article: public metaphors matter because they create positions that subjects may be invited, pressured or enabled to occupy.

The four videos discussed in this article illustrate different degrees of narrative viability. *It's Everyone's Journey* offers the strongest example within the corpus because agency is distributed across the social world. The disabled subject is visible, active and ordinary within a collective narrative of mobility and public participation. Accessibility becomes part of a shared civic environment. *The Eyes* grants agency to the disabled protagonist, while

that agency is channelled through the demanding grammar of struggle and victory. *Scegli il Servizio Civile* includes disabled and elderly bodies, while narrative initiative belongs primarily to young helpers. *Share Aware* constructs a social world in which disabled participants have no visible place. These differences show that metaphors vary according to the type of public position they produce: active participant, victorious fighter, assisted body, absent citizen.

The case of motor disability makes the stakes of this variation especially clear because the represented experience is linked to space, movement and bodily action. Gallagher's account of embodiment shows that bodily experience structures perception, action and self-relation (Gallagher, 2006; El Refaie, 2019). For people with motor disabilities, public space is encountered through accessibility, barriers, assistive devices, fatigue, social attention, dependence, interdependence and negotiation. Institutional videos that represent motor disability therefore work with signs carrying dense experiential meanings: stairs, ramps, pavements, workplaces, buses, beds, corridors, hands, wheels, doors and thresholds. These signs can support viable public narratives when they are organised around situated agency, shared access and social participation, but they can also narrow the narrative field when they turn the disabled body into an emblem of need, obstacle, inspiration or institutional benevolence.

This point has direct consequences for the production of public communication. *Inhabitability* has analytical value and practical implications for the design of institutional video communication, as it asks communicators to examine the symbolic position created by the metaphor, the forms of agency made available, and the relation between the public message and the lived knowledge of the people represented. Fricker's account of epistemic injustice is relevant here because it shows how people can be wronged in their capacity as knowers when their experience is excluded, discredited or unavailable within shared interpretative resources (Fricker, 2007). Applied to institutional communication, this means that disabled people's embodied, social and interpretative knowledge is necessary for creating metaphors that can function as public resources for self-representation. This point also resonates with disability activism and with the political importance of self-representation in disability studies (Barnes, 2007; Kafer, 2013; Shakespeare, 2013; Trevisan & Farinosi 2024).

For public administrations, the practical implication concerns the quality of the narrative imagination mobilised in digital communication. Generic positive imagery, emotional appeal and the visibility of disabled bodies provide limited guidance for inclusive representation. Institutional videos need metaphors based on situated visual and bodily knowledge of the experience represented. In the case of motor disability, this means attending to access, fatigue, mobility, interdependence, social exposure,

built environments, ordinary participation and the plurality of disabled lives. Short videos designed for social media can still be immediate, clear and memorable when they represent disabled people as participants in shared social worlds: users and makers of public space, professionals, citizens, friends, decision-makers, recipients and providers of care, subjects whose agency includes autonomy, interdependence, vulnerability, competence, desire and ordinary life.

The need for inhabitable metaphors is therefore also a need for new public narratives. Public communication gains inclusive force when it expands the metaphorical repertoire through which disability becomes intelligible. Heroism, assistance, overcoming and vulnerability may describe aspects of some experiences, but they become restrictive when they organise the whole grammar of public recognisability. More plural metaphors can represent disability through participation, relation, access, interdependence, spatial negotiation, creativity, expertise, ordinary citizenship and shared world-making. In this sense, *inhabitability* refines the relation between metaphor and inclusion, asking whether the visual and narrative framework offered by a public video can sustain the subject's own self-description, agency and belonging.

The concept sits at the intersection of multimodal metaphor studies, philosophy of language, disability studies and applied analysis of public communication, and extends multimodal metaphor analysis by adding an evaluative question that becomes necessary once metaphor is treated as an inferential, genre-sensitive and publicly situated meaning-making device: what kind of place does this metaphor give to the subject it represents? In institutional digital communication, the answer has particular importance because public administrations help shape the imaginative and affective repertoire through which citizens understand disability, inclusion and participation. Public communication becomes genuinely inclusive when the metaphors it circulates can be inhabited by those whose lives they claim to represent. Inhabitable metaphors give represented subjects a place from which to appear without being reduced, to act without becoming exceptional, and to belong without being absorbed into someone else's narrative of inclusion.

5. Concluding Remarks

This article has proposed *inhabitability* as an analytical criterion for evaluating video-based multimodal metaphors in institutional digital communication. *Inhabitability* makes visible the symbolic place that institutional metaphors create for the subjects they represent. Applied to short videos produced by public administrations, the concept allows inclusive communication to be assessed through the quality of the subject-position produced by a video, alongside its clarity, recognisability and emotional accessibility.

Motor disability provides a particularly significant case for this analysis because its public representation is organised through visible bodily markers, spatial arrangements, mobility aids, gestures of assistance, trajectories of movement and narratives of autonomy or dependence. In video-based communication, these elements can become part of powerful multimodal metaphors. They can make disability immediately intelligible to general audiences while assigning positions such as the victorious fighter, the active participant, the assisted body or the absent citizen. These positions have different implications for agency, self-representation and belonging.

The article proposes treating the inclusive quality of video-based metaphor as a question of symbolic position, alongside visibility, clarity and positive representation. Recognisability concerns the public legibility of a subject within a shared visual and narrative frame. *Inhabitability* concerns the viability of that frame for the subject represented. This distinction is especially important in institutional communication, where public administrations circulate images that contribute to the civic imagination of disability, inclusion and participation. A metaphor gains inclusive force when the represented subject can occupy the position it offers as part of their own self-narration, through agency, plurality and belonging.

This also contributes to multimodal metaphor studies by extending attention from the identification and interpretation of metaphor to the evaluative question of what kind of public subject-position a metaphor produces. This development remains based on Forceville's work on visual and multimodal metaphor, medium, genre and inferential interpretation, while bringing that tradition into dialogue with performativity theory, disability studies, narrative positioning and symbolic resources. In this sense, *inhabitability* offers a bridge between philosophy of language, visual communication and applied analysis of institutional discourse.

Future research can develop this criterion in two directions. First, it can test and refine *inhabitability* through broader analyses of institutional videos across different public sectors, including health, education, employment, accessibility and civic participation. Second, it can examine how cultural, administrative and visual traditions shape the *inhabitability* of disability metaphors in different public communication contexts, including Asian and European institutional settings. Such work would clarify which metaphorical patterns recur across institutional communication and which depend on specific cultural, administrative and visual traditions.

The analysis suggests that inclusive public communication depends on metaphorical imagination: the capacity to create visual and narrative models that make disability publicly intelligible while offering disabled subjects a liveable symbolic place within that public account. Public videos shape how societies learn to see bodies, agency and participation. Inhabitable metaphors matter because they

give represented subjects a place from which to appear, act and belong within the narratives that claim to speak about them.

Funding

This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement

The study conducted during my PhD which underlies this paper was conducted according to the guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Ethics Commission of the University of Cagliari (protocol number 0146246 of 4 June 2025).

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement

My thesis, the data of which this article refers to in Section 2, is available at the University of Cagliari library upon request.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Use of AI and AI-Assisted Technologies

No AI tools were utilized for this paper.

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