Role theory: A conceptual framework for the constructivist foreign policy analysis?

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Abstract

Role theory is a conceptual framework with long history in the field of Foreign policy analysis. In order for us to explain and understand the foreign policies of nation-states, the role theory focuses on the reasoning of national political elites, their understanding of the international system and the perceived role of their own states within this larger system. Despite its conceptual rigor, methodological openness and rich empirical applications, the role theory seems to be neglected by the mainstream scholarship.

This paper maps the epistemological underpinnings and the conceptual outfit of the role theory in order to discuss the promises and pitfalls of applying role theory in the constructivist foreign policy analysis. The stress will be put on constructivism as a broader (meta)theoretical approach. The role theory will be presented as a bridge between FPA and constructivist school of IR.

Keywords: role theory, epistemology, ontology, national role conception, foreign policy analysis, constructivism

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Foreign policy analysis attracts the attention of the scholarly community despite the theoretical arguments about the decline of state actors in what some describe as post-westphalian international order. Some scholars even argue that after the end of the Cold War, the foreign policy analysis underwent a revival (Hudson – Vore 1995).¹

There is an ongoing lively debate about the objectives, sense theoretical toolbox of the foreign policy analysis discipline. (Kubálková 2001b; Hudson 2007; Smith – Hadfield – Dunne 2008).

This paper has two objectives. First it contributes to the debate about the theoretical tools of the FPA discipline. Second it presents a role theory as a theoretical and conceptual tool for the analysis of the foreign policy. Role theory is a long-established conceptual tool for the foreign policy analysis. While its analytical potential is high, only recently we have witnessed a revival of the role theory (see especially Aggestam 1999; Elgström – Smith 2006b; Thies 2010; Harnisch – Frank – Maull 2011). This paper aims to contribute to the renewed debate about the theoretical merits and metatheoretical underpinnings of the role theory. I will discuss the strengths and weaknesses of using the conceptual framework in constructivist role-theoretical foreign policy analysis. I will argue that thanks to its strong conceptual tools and sound epistemological and ontological assumptions, role theory represents a fruitful tool for a constructivist foreign policy analysis.

The structure of the paper is as follows. First I will introduce the intellectual sources and inspirations of the role theory. The second part introduces the key concepts offered by the role-theoretical conceptual framework. The third part explores the metatheoretical starting points of the role theory. I will set this conceptual framework into contemporary debates between explanation and understanding (epistemology) and between individualism and holism (ontology). The fourth part summarizes the criticism of some FPA scholars towards IR constructivist and the criticism of IR theorists (Wendt) towards FPA approaches, namely his criticism towards Holsti’s formulation of the role theory. I will conclude this section by showing what the contemporary (re)formulation of the role theory offers to overcome this rifts and critique. In my concluding remarks, I summarize the arguments from the previous sections in order to present the role theory as a tool suitable for the constructivist

¹ According to Hudson and Vore, the collapse of the Soviet block made the actor-specific theory of FPA more germane for the study of contemporary issues (Hudson – Vore 1995: 222).
foreign policy analysis. I will present the role theory as a bridge between constructivist IR theory and foreign policy analysis.

The emergence of the role theory and its intellectual sources

Role theory was first introduced in 1970 by Kalevi Holsti in his seminal article *National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy* (Holsti 1970). Back in 1970, Holsti lambasted the “unnecessarily crude” portrayals of the national roles and too strong preoccupation with national role types germane to then structural conditions (such as bloc, leader, satellites, allies, and non-aligned). Such typology ignores the great variety of roles that smaller states play in the system and in various regions (Holsti 1970: 234). At a time of structuralist analyses of foreign policy, Holsti tries to refocus the attention of the discipline towards the domestic sources of foreign policy behaviour.

On the most general plane, role theory has been inspired by sociological and social-psychological theories about the role of individual in the society (Kirste – Maull 1996: 286). The original paper by Holsti draws heavily on Mead’s symbolic interactionism (Mead 1934), long before Wendt picked symbolic interactionism as a core principle of his constructivist theory. Holsti relies on George H. Mead (1934) and his study of the impact of the behaviour of "others" on an individual's self-conceptions and his conceptual distinctions between the “self” and the “alter” (Holsti 1970: 237). Symbolic interactionism remains the most important source inspiration for role theorists up until today (Harnisch 2011).

Social-psychological and sociological theories about the role of individual in the society are applied in the explanation of the behaviour of the state. Role theorists argue that by providing the sense of purpose of the state in international community, national role conceptions endow the state with a sense of selfhood, identity. “Without [the sense of identity, individuals] cannot order their environments and consequently find social behavior intolerably difficult to understand and manage” (Chafetz 1997: 664). According to Chafetz, the same process occurs within the states.

In this sense, role theory is just another example of anthropomorphic theory (Escudé 1994). It is built around an anthropomorphic assumption that we can draw an analogy between individuals (in a society) and a state. This assumption (some would say
fallacy) allows us to “import” social-psychological and sociological theories into the disciplines of international relations and foreign policy analysis. At the same time, the role theory steers clear of the trap of treating states as some kind of unitary actors - “black boxes” (see bellow).

Conceptual framework of the role theory

National role conceptions

Role theory explains the foreign policy behaviour by exploring the roles (for the overview of the definitions of "role" see Le Prestre 1997a: 3-4) played by individual countries in international system. The conceptual framework of the role theory has evolved through time as new concepts have been added. The key concept of the role theory is national role conception (NRC) introduced by Holsti. He defines the national role conception as “the policymakers' own definitions of the general kinds of decisions, commitments, rules and actions suitable to their state, and of the functions, if any, their state should perform on a continuing basis in the international system or in subordinate regional systems. It is their "image" of the appropriate orientations or functions of their state toward, or in, the external environment.” (Holsti 1970: 245-246). This definition has been widely accepted by other role theorists. For example Ulrich Krotz thirty years later defines the national role conceptions as “domestically shared views and understandings regarding the proper role and purpose of one’s own state as a social collectivity in the international arena.” (Krotz 2002: 6).

NRCs induce preferences and motivate wills, goals, and actions. Often, interests and policies that derive from NRCs are viewed as normal, right, and intuitively plausible within the respective country. According to Le Prestre, “the articulation of a national role betrays preferences, operationalizes an image of the world, triggers expectations, and influences the definition of the situation and of the available options” (Le Prestre 1997a: 5). At the same time, national role conceptions “make [certain] interests and policy options intuitively implausible, categorically exclude them as wrong or unacceptable, or make them unthinkable” (Krotz 2002: 8). National
role conceptions are a product of domestic socialization processes – they give meaning and purpose to the foreign policy.

One role or many roles?

As noted by Glen Chafetz, “actors usually have multiple roles that vary in overall importance (centrality) and according to the situation (salience)” (Chafetz 1997: 664). This argument is supported by Holsti’s original empirical analysis. He confirms that on the lowest level of a day-to-day politics actors normally have several different roles in the international system and its subsystems (Holsti 1970: 277-278). Role theory thus reflects the arguments made by James March and Johan Olsen that “humans maintain a repertoire of roles and identities, each providing rules of appropriate behavior in situations for which they are relevant (March – Olsen 2004: 7).

On the other side, some researchers adopt the single-role assumption that the foreign policy as such is on the highest plane guided by a shared, historically constituted role (vision of a national mission) which is relatively stable and coherent across time, context and circumstances. The analysis of such dominant, overarching shared view and understanding regarding the proper role and purpose of one’s own state as a social collectivity in the international arena can be challenged for being overly generalizing. By looking for commonalities in the national elite’s world-views and visions of the national mission, one inevitably puts aside differences in the political elite’s foreign policy priorities. On the other side, the single-role assumption allows us to trace and explain long-term patterns in the foreign policy of the state and identify ideas (discourse) shared even among national politicians with different political preferences in everyday foreign policy making. Such “within the case generalizations” make sense especially in comparative foreign policy analyzes (such as Krotz 2002).

Other concepts of the role theory

Even though the national role conception represents the key concept of the role theory, it is not the only one. While the national role conception is a "ego's" own conception of his position and function, the term role prescription has been
introduced to capture the alter’s prescriptions. Holsti defines role prescriptions as norms and expectations cultures, societies, institutions, or groups attach to particular positions (Holsti 1970: 239). Role prescriptions emanate from the external environment. In the constructivist language, role prescriptions are intersubjectively shared norms and expectations which form the (social) structure of the international system. Even though the term role prescriptions has been introduced in the role theory since its very beginning, the structural source of the national roles (role prescriptions) has been sidelined (Holsti 1970: 239-240, 243) and hardly utilized in role-theoretical empirical analyzes. It took some time before role-theorists acknowledged the analytical value of the role prescriptions and of the structural dimension of the role theory (Walker 1987b; Walker – Simon 1987). Contemporary role-theorists not only acknowledge (on a theoretical level) that roles are determined both by an actor’s own conceptions about appropriate behaviour and by the expectations, or role prescriptions, of other actors (Elgström – Smith 2006a: 5), but they include role prescriptions into the design of their empirical analyses. The inclusion of the role prescriptions into the research design is in line with the tenets of symbolic interactionism and with the constructivist arguments that roles are institutionalized in social structures (Wendt 1999: 227).

Stephen Walker a Sheldon Simon introduced another structural concept into the framework of the role theory: role set (Walker – Simon 1987; see also Singer – Hudson 1987). Role sets can be defined as a set of actors positioned as “significant Others” and the web of mutual roles in the system. It is a web of mutual expectations which, according to Walker and Simon, represent a dynamic and interconnected system (Walker – Simon 1987).²

The last term is national role performance. National role performance denotes concrete foreign policy decisions and actions. National role performance encompasses the attitudes, decisions, and actions governments take vis-a-vis other actors in order to implement the role (Holsti 1970: 240; see also Aggestam 1999).

Empirical analyzes relying on the concept national role conceptions usually rely on the single-role assumption, they try to discover domestically shared ideas about the purpose and role of the state in international arena and they try to illustrate and

² In some literature, the term role set is simply denoting the set of roles played by a particular state vis-a-vis the spectrum of other actors (Le Prestre 1997b).
explain the continuity in the foreign policy behaviour (national role performance) (Krotz 2002; see also Hudson 2005; Le Prestre 1997b). On the other side, analyzes operationalizing the concept of role prescriptions are better equipped to capture and explain changes in roles and role performance (foreign policy behaviour). For example, Walker and Simon claim that actors do from time to time experience role conflict. Role conflict is defined as “a situation in which multiple roles are elicited by competing or conflicting expectations, cues, and conceptions” (Walker – Simon 1987: 142). This conflict can have the form of a clash between contradicting national role conceptions and role prescriptions (role expectations) or as a clash between two competing role prescriptions. Walker and Simon convincingly argue that the structure of the role set is a product of this role-location process, as countries enact roles and attempt to cope with role conflict (Walker – Simon 1987: 159). If some individual member of the system, in an attempt to solve his own role conflict, changes the role he plays in the system, the whole role set changes as other members of the change their roles and expectations in response.

Meta-theoretical assumptions of the role theory

This section of my paper tries to identify the epistemological and ontological assumptions of the role theory, its position in contemporary meta-theoretical (epistemological and ontological) debates. A good starting point is the classification of approaches to the study of foreign policy by Walter Carlsnæs (2002). In line with the categories developed by Hollis and Smith (1990: 5) Carlsnæs distinguishes four basic approaches to the study of foreign policy according to their epistemological assumptions (objectivism vs. interpretativism) and ontological assumptions (holism vs. individualism). Objectivist-holistic approaches (i.e. various strands of realism and neorealism) offer a structural perspective on the foreign policy. Objectivist-individualist approaches (such as bureaucratic politics approaches, liberal approach) see the foreign policy from the agency-based perspective. On the intersection between holism and interpretativism lie the approaches (such as social constructivism or discursive approaches) representing the social-institutional perspective.
Hollis and Smith distinguish explanation and understanding as two basic epistemological positions. Explanatory approach (objectivism in Carlsnæs' words) is inspired by natural sciences and looks for causal relations within the social reality (Hollis – Smith 1990). On the other side, „interpretivists rely on reconstructing the intersubjective meaning of that structure for the subjects of interest“ (Hopf 2007: 64; see also Hollis – Smith 1990; Drulák 2008: 19). The goal of interpretativism is to reconstruct and understand the way people make sense of the social reality and on this ground understand the behaviour of individuals and collectives. While some authors argue that the two meta-theoretical questions are interrelated (ontological position predestines the epistemological choice) (Barša 2009), Carlsnæs agrees with Hollis and Smith that ontology does not presuppose epistemology and thus we can distinguish four basic combinations (meta-theoretical perspectives).

**Epistemology**

The epistemological position of the role theory is, according to Carlsnæs, quite clear. It is an example of interpretative perspective. Role theory seems to favour domestic sources of foreign policy and at the same time (given its roots in symbolic interactionism), role theory produces interpretative knowledge rather than causal explanations. Role theory allows us to reconstruct the meaning attributed to *national role* by the domestic elite (individual national foreign policy-makers) (cf. Carlsnæs 2002: 241). Carlsnæs' classification corresponds to the original analytical intentions of those who designed the role theory. According to Stephen Walker, role theory offers a thick description. The theoretical function of role theory is not to codify abstract regularities but “to make thick description possible, not to generalize across cases but to generalize within them” (Walker 1987a: 255; see also the definition of intrinsic case study in Stake 1995; Kořan 2008). In line with its epistemological underpinning, role theory is more suitable for answering the *How possible?* questions rather than the *Why?* questions. Role theory follows the tenets of interpretative research design which according to Roxanne Doty entails examines the “background of social/discursive practices and meanings which make possible the [foreign policy] practices as well as the social actors themselves [...] how meanings are produced and attached to various social subjects/objects, thus constituting particular
interpretive dispositions which create certain possibilities and preclude others” (Doty 1993: 298).

**Ontology**

Walter Carlsnæs, following Hollis and Smith (1990), distinguishes two basic ontological positions: holism and individualism. In a simple language, “holism holds that the effects of social structures cannot be reduced to independently existing agents and their interactions, and that these effects include the construction of agents in both causal and constitutive senses” (Wendt 1999: 26). The dynamism of social systems can always be traced to the evolutionary changes on the level of self-reproducing structures (Guzzini 1998: 197). On the other side, individualists claim that individuals are ontologically primary, all social phenomena (incl. institutions, norms and culture) are intended or unintended consequences of (aggregated) behaviour of the individuals. “Social scientific explanations should be reducible to the properties or interactions of independently existing individuals” (Wendt 1999: 26).

Walter Carlsnæs puts the role theory unambiguously into the individualist box. Insofar as the role theoretical analyzes focus on “the reasoning of individual national foreign policy-makers” (Carlsnæs 2002: 241), role theory exemplifies the bottom-up *individualist interpretative approach* which is concerned to “understand decisions from the standpoint of the decision-makers by reconstructing their reasons” (Hollis – Smith 1990: 74).

Holsti (1970) and most of the empirical applications of his conceptual framework (Le Prestre 1997b) did not incorporate role prescriptions (external expectations) into their research designs and their empirical analyses focus solely on the domestic sources of national roles – on the policymakers’ own understandings regarding the proper role and purpose of one’s own state as a social collectivity in the international arena.

**Role theory as a conceptual framework for the constructivist foreign policy analysis**

The formulation of a constructivist foreign policy theory is one of the hotly debated tasks in the discipline (Kowert 2001; Rittberger 2004; Boekle – Rittberger – Wagner
According to Rittberger, though research on foreign policy has become influenced by constructivist thinking, too, a testable and coherent foreign policy theory has been missing" (Boekle – Rittberger – Wagner 2001: 105). The formulation of the theoretical framework for the constructivist foreign policy theory was met with several difficulties. In this section of my paper, I will describe what some authors (Kubálková 2001a) call a (artificial) rift between foreign policy analysis (FPA) and the discipline of international relations/international politics. I will summarize Kubálková and Smith’s criticism of IR constructivist and the criticism of IR theorists (Wendt) towards FPA approaches, namely his criticism towards Holsti’s formulation of the role theory. I will conclude this section by showing what the contemporary (re)formulation of the role theory offers to overcome this rifts and critique.

The utilization of constructivist approach in the foreign policy research is broadly discussed in the book by Vendulka Kubálková and her colleagues (Kubálková 2001b). Kubálková starts her argumentation by looking at the general issues of the evolution of the two (sub)disciplines: foreign policy analysis and international relations (international politics). I will not go into the details of the history and intellectual sources of the two (sub)disciplines. For us it is important to note that according to Kubálková, the observed split between the foreign policy analysis and the international politics 1) is to a large extent artificial (see also Houghton 2007) and 2) is (among other things) follows from different ontological and epistemological preferences of the two disciplines: the agent – structure debate (individualism vs. holism).

The foreign policy analysis traditionally prefers an actor perspective, favouring an individualist ontology. It “directs attention to the attributes of states as units in order to explain state behaviour” (Kubálková 2001a: 15), it proceeds from the parts to the whole, at the same time trying to “move inside the black box” of the states’ decision-making process. On the other side, the theory of international politics tends to adopt a structuralist ontology, accepting the assumptions of state-as-person (see also the critique of the IR theory’s "anthropomorphic fallacy" in Escudé 1994). Theory of international politics usually treats states as “actors” – as some kind of black boxes, focusing on the relations of states and the international system’s attributes (Kubálková 2001a). This genetic code was implanted into the IR discipline in the
aftermath of the second debate (behavioralist turn) and more specifically with the seminal book *Theory of International Politics* by Kenneth Waltz (1979).

*Foreign policy analysis criticise IR constructivism*

After the emergence of constructivism in the discipline, Kubálková and other FPA scholars expected that constructivists would lean towards the foreign policy analysis and the individualist end of the agent – structure debate (individualist – holist dichotomy). “The constructivists [initially] applaud the tendency of FPA to look for the agent – the foreign policy maker wherever he/she might be found [yet at the same time they insist that] agent and structure should never be torn apart nor should one be given priority over the other” (Kubálková 2001a: 19).

Despite hopes of Vendulka Kubálková and other FPA scholars (Kubálková 2001a; see also Houghton 2007: 34; Morales Hernández 2006: 2), a lot of constructivists paradoxically took the holistic (structuralist) position. The more structuralist approach is preferred by influential constructivist authors like Alexander Wendt (1999) or Peter Katzenstein (Jepperson – Wendt – Katzenstein 1996) whose epistemological and theoretical assumptions are adopted by other contemporary scholars of international relations.

Vendulka Kubálková (2001a) and Steve Smith (2001) focus their critique on Alexander Wendt as a representative (and originator) of the constructivism’s deviation from a more FPA friendly (read: more individualist) position towards Waltzian structuralism. Wendt at the very beginning of his *Social Theory of International Relations* (1999), we repeatedly stresses that “[L]ike Waltz, [he is] interested in international politics, not foreign policy” (Wendt 1999: 11). In fact, the purpose of Wendt’s book is to challenge *theoretical* arguments while keeping (some of) the meta-theoretical assumptions (positivism and structuralism) of the *Theory of International Relations* (Waltz 1979) intact.

Vendulka Kubálková and Steve Smith criticise the anthropomorphic model of the state (introduced by Waltz and largely adopted by Wendt) and the related structuralism of the Wendt’s theory of international relations.³ Steve Smith criticises Wendt especially for treating the states as “black boxes” which is at odds with the

³ The excessive structuralism of Wendt’s constructivism has also been criticised (among others) by Erik Ringmar (1997: 108).
tradition of the foreign policy analysis which always tried to open these black boxes and analyse the decision-making process. According to Wendt, certain type of identity is intrinsic to actors (states), their identity changes only through interstate interaction. According to Smith, these theoretical assumptions make it impossible to apply Wendt’s constructivism in a foreign policy analysis (Smith 2001: 45-50; see also Braun 2009; Morales Hernández 2006: 3-4).

**IR constructivists criticize the FPA and the role theory**

In line with Carlsnaes’ classification of the role theory as an *individualist interpretative approach*, IR constructivists treat the role theory as an actor-based perspective. Alexander Wendt, who otherwise praises the role theory for introducing symbolic interactionism into the field (Wendt 1992, 1994, 1999; see also Kowert 2001), criticizes Holsti for emphasizing “the agentic, role-taking side of the equation [...] at the expense of the structural, role-constituting side, which strips the concept of role of much of its interest” (Wendt 1999: 227-228). Similarly, Audie Klotz criticizes Holsti for excessive focus on individual motivation and cognition at for ignoring the congruence in shared norms which form the backbone of dominant ideas and knowledge (Klotz 1995: 32). To sum up the critique, IR constructivists castigate the role theory for orientation on subjective, rather than intersubjective ideas. Role theory seems to forget that national identity and role is not only about inner experience of the state elites (national role conceptions), but also about the structure of expectations of the wider international environment (role prescriptions).

Wendt and other critics are to some extent right. The theoretical and conceptual model introduced by Holsti (1970) in fact incorporates not only actor-centered national role conceptions (domestically shared visions about the role and purpose of the state in international arena), but also structural role prescriptions (expectations of others) (Holsti 1970: 239-247). But this socio-psychological theoretical model was not fully translated into Holsti’s research design for an foreign policy analysis. Even though role the agent-society relationship plays a crucial role in the original Mead’s social psychological theory (Harnisch 2011), Holsti depreciated the impact of society on the formation of national roles in the international context. In his own words, “the expectations of other governments, legal norms expressed through custom, general usage, or treaties, and available sanctions to enforce these, are ill-defined, flexible, or
weak compared to those that exist in an integrated society and particularly within formal organizations” (Holsti 1970: 243). In a rather neorealist fashion he also refers to the lack of institutions, acute international conflict and the “fact of sovereignty” as the factors behind the precedence of policymakers’ role conceptions over externally derived role expectations. Here lies the rift between Holsti on one side and the English School and constructivist IR on the other side which has been reproduced in some of the empirical analyses.

Solution: role theory in its most recent reformulation

I would like to argue, that first, role theory can provide a basis for a constructivist foreign policy analysis and close the gap between the FPA and constructivist IR theory mentioned by Kubálková and her colleagues. Second, since the current reformulations of the role theory take into account the structural sources of national roles, the above-mentioned critique from Wendt no longer applies. First, role theory remains faithful to the original aim of the FPA. Unlike IR constructivism, it opens the “black box” of the state’s decision making process. At the same time, it does have the same roots as IR constructivism: social psychology and Mead’s symbolic interactionism. In fact, as Wendt acknowledges, his formulation of IR constructivism has been inspired not only by Mead (Wendt 1999: 142 and elsewhere) but also by Holsti’s application of Mead’s symbolic interactionism in the FPA (Wendt 1999: 227). Thus, role theory is a good candidate “the base for a convergence between constructivism and FPA’s more “traditional” approaches” (Morales Hernández 2006). Role theory is a good corrective of the constructivist dismissal of agency in favour of structure which has been criticised by Kubálková and Smith.

Second, even though Holsti originally downplayed the impact of the international structure on the national roles, the later role theorists acknowledged the importance of external expectations in full. Stephen Walker explored the impact of structural factors (external expectations) on a theoretical level and at the same time he incorporated these factors into the research design for his empirical analyses (Walker 1987b; Walker – Simon 1987; Walker 1987a; Singer – Hudson 1987; Walker 1992). Some time later, new generation of role theorists, namely Ole Elgström and Lisbeth Aggestam, discussed the ontological agent – structure dilemma in a greater length.
At the end of the day, they adopted a typically constructivist solution: structurationism. The role-theoretical framework of Lisbeth Aggestam incorporated the structural dimension of roles (neglected by Holsti) and accounted both for the individual and for the structural sources of national roles (Aggestam 2006: 14-18, 1999). These role theorists definitely do not share Holsti’s argument that shared ideas at the international level are not thick enough to support roles. Most recently, Sebastian Harnisch wrote a longer piece exploring in a deeper detail the influence of Mead’s ideas on the role theory. One of the key contributions of his text is a full appreciation of the structuralist aspect of Mead’s symbolic interactionism (Harnisch 2011).

Concluding remarks

To sum up, the contemporary (re)formulations of the role theory offer a perfect theoretical base for the constructivist foreign policy analysis due to its 1) intellectual roots in the symbolic interactionism, 2) rich conceptual toolbox, 3) meta-theoretical (epistemological and ontological) assumptions and 4) role theory’s the ability to build a bridge between IR constructivism and FPA. Role theory takes the full advantage of Mead’s symbolic interactionism which lies at the core of most constructivist theorizing. Thanks to the long intellectual history of the role theory, its concepts are well developed and clearly defined. Role theory offers a ready-made conceptual toolbox for anyone pursuing a constructivist foreign policy analysis. With regard to the meta-theoretical assumptions, role theory leans towards the interpretative end of the epistemology spectrum. In its contemporary (re)formulation, role theory occupies a middle position on the ontological spectrum between individualism and structuralism (holism). Thus, role theory’s meta-theoretical assumptions are in harmony with the meta-theoretical assumptions of the IR constructivism. Nevertheless, role theory’s interpretative epistemology seems to be more in line with the interpretative/reflexive/critical strand of constructivism and less

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4 Though, one must agree with the complaint of Cameron Thies that only few analysts take advantage of the range of concepts offered by the role theory (Thies 2010). For an overview of the existing empirical applications of the role theory see the chapter by Cameron Thies (2010) or my older article (Beneš 2010).
suitable for the positivist/modernist/conventional constructivism.\textsuperscript{5} Last but not least, the latest (re)formulation of the role theory is immune to the criticism from the side of IR constructivist (see the Wendt’s critique of Holsti discussed above) and at the same time the role theory has the ambition to bridge the gap between actor oriented FPA and more structural IR constructivism.

\section*{Literature}


\textsuperscript{5} For the classification of the various strands within constructivist theorizing see for example Hopf (1998) or Smith (1999).


• Rittberger, Volker (2004): Approaches to the Study of Foreign Policy Derived from International Relations Theories. *Tübinger Arbeitspapiere zur Internationalen Politik und Friedensforschung*, No. 46.


