

**Discourses on “Youth Political Empowerment” in Kyrgyzstan: state, NGO,
political organization and beneficiaries- youth levels**

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by

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Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	2
ABSTRACT	3
INTRODUCTION	4
SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND ON YOUTH AFFAIRS	5
CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW	7
2.1 CONCEPTUALIZATION	8
2.2 AVAILABLE LITERATURE ON CENTRAL ASIA	9
2.3 AVAILABLE LITERATURE WORLDWIDE	11
2.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	12
CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY	15
2.1 RESEARCH DESIGN	15
2.2 SAMPLING STRATEGY AND UNITS OF ANALYSIS	16
2.3 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	19
2.3 ANALYSIS PROCEDURES	19
2.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH	20
CHAPTER 3: FINDINGS	20
3.1 PROMISING STATEMENTS	21
3.3 SUGGESTION GIVERS	23
3.4 BIG BROTHERS	26
3.5 IN THE SEARCH FOR SUCCESS	28
4.6 SUMMARY	30
CHPATER 4: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION	31
4.1 THE ORGANIZATION OF THE DISCOURSE: KEY SIGNIFIERS	31
4.2 SOCIAL LANGUAGES, SITUATED MEANINGS AND FIGURED WORLDS.....	34
CONCLUSION	35
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH	36
REFERENCES	37

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ABSTRACT

There are such slogans as “youth is the power”, “let the youth rule”, “youth is the future”, currently youth has been viewed as highly politicized, however marginalized in different cases. This research aims to present the existing discourses on youth political empowerment on state, NGO, political organization and youth-beneficiaries levels. The study illustrates the differences among four levels and discusses the key signifiers around the discourse.

Qualitative research methods are applied. The data is gathered from in-depth interviews with three stakeholders and from the content- analysis on existing laws, policies and reports on the level of the state. Discourse Theory by Laclau and Mouffe and Discourse Analysis by Gee are the theoretical frameworks of the research.

The findings show the differences in understanding the discourse, which are centered on the terms as politics and the state. Such variations are explained by social identities of the respondents and their belonging to certain organization.

Key concepts: *discourse, youth, youth political empowerment, Discourse Theory*

INTRODUCTION

The current works on youth in the Central Asia region are mostly concerned with the education, religious development, unemployment and migration. Nevertheless, in Kyrgyzstan youth has been most active in the two previous revolutions and as an outcome of the activeness the Ministry of Youth was formed in 2010. Exit Poll statistics show that the youth, mainly students, is the most active group during elections and other forms of political events (Exit Poll, 2005). There are several statements by government and reports that youth is politically active and empowered in Kyrgyzstan. However if to look on the common definition of political empowerment, which says that it is “the process of transferring various elements of power (resources, capabilities and positions) to those, who do not have it,” (Davi and Lakshmi, 2005), in Kyrgyzstan it cannot be observed because there is no youth representatives in the parliament, no heads or ministers of governmental bodies. In the law on elections there is the quota for youth representatives in the parliament; however the age limit is 35 years, whereas in the constitution youth is the population from 14 to 28. Currently the youngest representative in the parliament is 33 years old and is perceived to be youth representative even it is not in accordance with another law on the age.

Additionally such slogans as “youth is the future of the country”, “youth is the power”, “let the youth rule” are highly overused in contemporary Kyrgyzstan and other Central Asian countries. As a matter in fact, in the Central Asian region there is no evidence of support of these words. The term youth became much politicized because it constitutes 30% of the population (NHDR, 2010), the political organizations are opening youth wings, promoting youth leaders, NGOs organize summer schools, trainings and contests for youth empowerment, state organizes several agencies to empower youth. So they all are interested in political involvement of youth. However, youth being in involved in political

administrative positions is only 9% (NHDR, 2010). So what is being said and what is done are not necessarily the same when it is applied to youth empowerment.

My aim is to see how do four main stakeholders, which are the state, NGO, political organizations and youth beneficiaries, understand the term of “youth political empowerment”, which I think is the core problem for solving the problems on youth because main stakeholders understand differently the term and work differently and therefore there are no efficient results.

Therefore I aim to answer the following questions:

What are the discourses on youth political empowerment on state, NGO, political organizations and beneficiaries- youth levels?

What are the common and different understandings of the discourse?

Socio-economic background on youth affairs

Kyrgyzstan has faced several problems as economic, social and political after the collapse of the Soviet Union, there are current problems with youth unemployment: “every year anywhere between 50% and 80% of university graduates join the long list of unemployed youth” (Youth Policy in Kyrgyzstan, 2012), the problems of education, migration, religious extremism arise while talking about youth that is why many international donors have invested in Kyrgyzstan and opened NGOs, which would open a new opportunities for citizens and develop the civil society itself. The state was no longer able to provide the youth with spaces for development and entertainment and NGOs filled that empty spaces for youth (Krimse, 2010). Moreover, many scholars underline the danger of the youth to become nationalistic or religiously extremist Roche’s research in Tajikistan on youth violent bulge and religious extremism urge that, since we have similar conditions and historical background this can be the same for Kyrgyzstan as well. So having so many

problems related to youth in the region there have been opened Ministry of Youth and Youth Committee's in every region, which are highly criticized now for their inefficiency. It is believed that youth knows its problems better and they can solve it by themselves and therefore it needs to present themselves in the national decision-making bodies (Flere, Klanisek, Lavric et al, 2013).

Since the research aims to investigate the discourses on “youth political empowerment” on the state-level, the NGO level, the political organization level and beneficiaries- youth level, who participate in youth activities and are representatives of youth (from 18-28 years old). To investigate the discourses deeply in-depth interviews with representatives of three levels were conducted and the discourses on state level were analyzed through content analysis due to the inaccessibility of the state representatives. The gathered data is analyzed and discussed through the Discourse theory by Laclau and Mouffe and Discourse Analysis by Gee, which elaborate on the methodology of discourse study, theoretical explanations and analysis. The organization of the discourse and importance of the social identity while studying the discourses is underlined by the scholars and they provide explanations and tools for the analysis. The findings show differences in understanding among NGO and youth, and political organizations, whereas first two share more or less similar understand and the last has no strict meanings attached. The central terms, or “privileged signs” are politics and state around which the discourse is explained.

The structure of the paper is in the following structure: firstly conceptualization of the key terms, available literature on the topic in Central Asia and worldwide are described, next, second chapter elaborates on methods and methodology of the research, following are fourth and fifth chapters on findings and discussions, and the last section is on the conclusions from the research.

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

The research aims to investigate discourses on “youth political empowerment” on state, NGO, political organization and beneficiaries- youth levels. In the Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan NGOs play a big role in the process of raising the civil activism, empowerment and civil society development (Krimse, 2010) and the state is one of the main responsible bodies for developing the youth, the three groups are the main stakeholders in youth development. The importance of the research is that it contributes to the understanding of the current situation on youth political development; observes the similarities and differences among these stakeholders. To understand the current situation on youth the concepts such as political empowerment, youth, and discourse, available literature on Central Asia and worldwide will be discussed in the following chapter, and The Discourse Analysis by Laclau and Mouffe (1995) and Discourse Analysis by Gee (2011) will be described in terms of theoretical framework of the research.

Several researches were conducted on youth culture and globalization (Krimse, 2010; Roberts, 2010), youth bulge and violent conflicts (Roche, 2009), international organizations and youth (Krimse, 2010) but very little attention was paid on the political involvement and empowerment of youth as a decision-making cohort. In order to understand the ongoing issue with youth political empowerment in Kyrgyzstan the concept (discourse) itself must be studied because it will show the attitudes and understandings of the main three actors in the field as state, NGO, political organization and youth itself. To understand the topic better the concepts “youth”, “political empowerment” and discourse are introduced. There is no definition of the term “youth political empowerment”, that is why they will be defined separately and the definition will be provided in the end.

2.1 Conceptualization

There are several approaches to define **youth**- age; psychological, physiological, social and cultural, religious, merit, etc. It is commonly described as a period from childhood and adulthood, but then there is a question: when one becomes an adult and no longer a child or adolescent. According to the UN report, “youth” is the population in the age between 14-28 years. Nevertheless, in different societies it varies depending on culture, religion, and politics. There are certain religious rituals and acts through which a child can be accounted as young or as an adult (Roche, 2009).

According to Durham youth is a social shifter through, which stands as an independent social group, “to call someone youth is to position him/her in terms of variety of social attributes, including not only age but also independence-dependence, authority, rights, abilities, knowledge, responsibilities and so on,”- Durham (2004). In her longitudinal study of the disappearing youth in Botswana, she touched several cultural aspects of youth she underlined that over time the criteria changed to define one as a youth representative. Also it is important to distinguish young people and youth, which means, in some period the concept of youth can be shifted dramatically. The idea is shared by Sukarieh and Tannock (2008), in the article “The World Bank and the New Global Youth Empowerment Project” they share an idea that the concept “youth” and “youth empowerment” vary from time to time shifting the importance based on the capitalists since the world is neoliberal now, depending on the demand of the job market the criteria can be changed.

Nevertheless, the research is based on commonly accepted UN definition, youth is the population between 14 to 28 years, and the approaches by other scholars are taken into account.

Empowerment is a process that allows youth to obtain access to and control of resources as education, finances, information, space, it is “the redistribution of power that

challenges patriarchal ideology,”- Davi and Lakshmi (2005). Political empowerment is a process of increasing the participation of certain groups in the decision-making processes (Davi and Lakshmi, 2005). There are six mechanisms for fostering empowerment: knowledge, agency, opportunity, capacity building, resources and sustainability (Hennink, Kiiti, Pillinger, & Jayakaran, 2012). So **youth political empowerment** is the process of obtaining access and control of resources and participation in decision-making processes by youth from 18 to 28, because a person can become legally politically active from the age of 18.

Discourse, generally, refers to the speech patterns and usage of language, dialects and acceptable statements, within a community (Foucault, 1994). It describes the conversation and the meaning behind them by a group, who holds certain ideas in common (Dijk, 2004 and Foucault, 1994). In the research the discourse will be grasped from interviews with respondents, state and NGO reports and policies on youth in Kyrgyzstan.

2.2 Available Literature on Central Asia

Most of the researches related to issues of youth in Central Asian region are on religious impacts (Roche, Krimse, Safovudinov), on youth unemployment (Safovudinov, 2013), violence (Roche, 2010), education, culture and identity development (Krimse, 2010). There is a lack of literature on youth political empowerment that is why different perspectives on youth and political empowerment will be discussed. The researches related to my topic were done separately on youth, on youth and government, on NGO and youth. The articles by Krimse (2010), Roche (2009), Safavudinov (2013) and Aalto (1975) on youth, NGO-state relationship and youth empowerment will be described.

Krimse looks at the influence of NGOs on the development of youth and youth organizations in Osh, he provides an alternative view that NGOs do not destroy the national identities but provide the space for leisure for youth because the government cannot do that.

NGOs he state that they create and open opportunities for youth to develop and realize their fantasies (Krimse, 2010). The article supports that NGOs play a big role in the development of youth in the region therefore it supports researching the NGO discourses because they influence the minds of young people through raising awareness, engaging into different activities, creating opportunities for social entrepreneurship, in other words empowering youth. He suggests regarding IOs as supporters and one of the main stakeholders on youth social development.

Jaborov Safavudinov (2013) in his article “Youth radicalization in Tajikistan: causes, consequences, and challenges to address” states that youth is regarded as a danger to society and state development in Tajikistan, and it is regarded as the radicalized group in the region due to the lack of extracurricular activities, low levels of education and the religious development of the region. The illegal religious studies are regarded as a sign of radicalization of youth, however he suggests that in order to deal with the problem the term must be conceptualized, he criticizes the inability if the state to create the job opportunities and secular education for the youth and also hiding the true statistics on unemployment and crime rates (Safovudinov, 2013). Due to such attitude by the government the youth are not active in the process of decision making and solving its own problems, he underlines several reasons: economic inability of the state, migration, low education level, religious extremism. As an alternative he suggests to include youth into decision making and discussing the problems of it.

Sophie Roche (2009) in the article “From youth bulge to conflict: the case of Tajikistan” discusses the current situation with youth and the high level of violence among it. The research has several approaches observation, content analysis (historical background explanation) and in-depth interviews. The article helps to see the ways of doing content analysis, which is a part of my methodology. Roche conceptualizes youth through underlying

social, cultural and religious aspects of the definition. Further she relates the youth with the current state development and the Soviet past with the Komsomol party, which was the main organization responsible for youth development. She argues that the youth bulge problem is not an outcome only of religious movements or economic failure of the state, but suggests to have a multidisciplinary approach in order to understand the problem, which is also required in my case because talking and discussing discourses requires the creation of the full image of the issue and the explanations for it, which cannot be driven from one social phenomenon.

2.3 Available Literature Worldwide

The issue of political participation of youth has been studied widely in the Western world; the studies were conducted from different perspectives on the voting behavior, participation in elections, involvement in municipal work, interest in the politics of their country and international politics. In this subchapter the works of Aalto (1975), Flere et al. (2014), Hart (1992), and Mantyla (2013) are introduced.

Aalto in 1975 conducted research on the participation of Finnish youth in municipal affairs; he studied the informal youth organizations, which strive for decision-making participation in the municipality. He conducted interviews with more than 70 organizations and drew conclusions on the importance of the state in raising the issues of youth and giving it an opportunity to participate. His research discusses the “participating democracy”, which requires the participation of youth in the politics of the country and also the vision of youth itself towards the issue. He states that the youth organizations are not well developed and not empowered due to discontinuity of the projects, indifferent attitude of the youth and high dependence of the organizations on the government due to lack of power, money and clearly defined positions and tasks. So the main point is that its is not about the quantity of the organizations n the country but it is more about the efficiency, sustainability and power management by the government and sharing this power with the youth.

Flere et al (2013) in the report on Slovenian Youth underline the importance of participation of youth in the development of the country and its democratization. They state that there are several problems why youth does not involve in politics: not feeling represented, not believing to be heard and not being influential in the politics even though they enter it, also because of the distrust in institutions. The paper is policy based and it provides recommendations for further enhancement of the situation but on the other side they underline important aspects, as mentioned above, in the youth political involvement. The process is two sided one conventional and unconventional, in the first it is just participation in elections and being informed, the second is political engagement and the authors state that the first is dominant and mixed while explaining the political engagement.

Roger Hart in his work on the ladder of youth and child involvement explains the different levels of young population participation in democratic processes of the country. He underlines two steps: participatory and non-participatory. He divides the steps of involvement into 8 major steps starting from manipulation to child initiated plan and equal decision-making with adults. Even though his approach focuses on child, it can be applied to youth representatives as well.

The abovementioned articles elaborate on different scientific approaches on studying youth development in the region and help to build the multidisciplinary approach by taking an account of economic, social, cultural, religious and political factors in the process of describing discourses on youth political empowerment.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

The studies of the discourses have been popularized in the recent decades and there are many works, which deal with the linguistic, lexicon and grammar aspects of the discursive world. However, for the purpose of theoretical framework of the following

research the work of Laclau and Mouffe on Discourse Theory is applied. Additionally the Discourse Theory by Gee is used for explanation of the gathered data.

In an attempt to explain discourses the work of Michel Foucault on “The order of discourse” (1970), “Power and Knowledge” (1980) must be discussed because it was the groundwork for starting to explore the discourses. According to him discourse is the speech patterns and usage of language, dialects and acceptable statements, within a community, which shapes the individual and the surrounding. Foucault (1970) mentions discourse in different terms relating it mainly to knowledge and power. He (1970) states that “in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality”. Foucault (1970) rejects the idea that the speeches, ideas, attitudes, in other words discourses, are randomly created and that they are appearing and disappearing on free flow. He argues that the discourses carry deeper meanings than of what we attach to them, and it is not a direct meaning rather the meaning why it was created. The power, which he mentions, is not a direct power of certain institution, but he states that the power itself is institutionalized and the discourse itself a power, “which is to be seized” (Foucault, 1970).

Laclau and Mouffe take the ground from Foucault’s understanding of the discourse and from the Marxist perspective. Their starting idea is that discourses construct the meaning of the social world; *the process is never a close entity* (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2000). They believe in the ongoing struggle of the discourses to create the hegemony, which is the dominance of one particular perspective, unlike Gramsci Laclau and Mouffe believe that there the hegemony created by the discourse, not the coercive force (Laclau and Mouffe cited in Jorgensen and Phillips, 2000). The hegemony is ‘the expansion of a discourse into a dominant horizon of social orientation and action by means of articulating unfixed

elements,' -Torfining (1999). The scholars believe that discourses are “created, maintained and changed in myriads of everyday practice,” - Jorgensen and Phillips (2002). The discourses are never static; they change over time, by being used to the interest of certain groups. In this sense Laclau and Mouffe use such terms as hegemony and hegemonic intervention, and myth and social imaginary. The first two represent the struggles over certain idea and hegemony of that idea and it becoming normalized. Whereas, myth and imaginaries are visions of the ideal world, which are shaped by certain group, and perceived to be the ideal image, which influences the discourses within the community. However, in this paper to explain their idea on discourse and explain the data the organizations of the discourse, which include key signifiers: nodal point, floating signifier, element, and moments, will be applied.

Nodal point is “the privileged sign around which other signs are ordered; the other signs acquire their meaning from their relationship to it,” -Laclau and Mouffe (cited in Jorgensen and Phillips).

Floating signifier refers to the ongoing conflict between different discourses to fix the meanings of signs (Laclau and Mouffe cited in Rear, 2013). **Elements** are the signs, which meanings have not been fixed (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002); when the meaning is fixed it becomes a **moment**. Elements, which do not have attached meaning and different based on the ascription to it, are also floating signifiers.

The Discourse Analysis by Gee distinguishes the differences between the Discourse (big D) and discourse. Big D means the focus on the fact that people mean things by speaking to each other, there is always more than just words or just language. The social background of the person, the belongings to certain group influence on the meanings attach to it. For Gee (2011) “discourse are about being “kinds of people””.

He states that to understand what a person saying it is required to know who is speaking, it is important to know the identity of the person (Gee, 2011). He relates to the term **social languages**, which mean the styles and varieties of a language, which are accepted and associated with a certain social identity (ibid.). The point is to understand the social identity of the person, his position and then analyze the discourse.

Another term pointed by Gee is **situated meaning**, which are the situations when talks take specific meanings depending on the context. Additionally, he stresses on the term **figured world**, which is “a picture of a simplified world that captures what is taken typical or normal,”- Gee (2011). The main message of Gee in Discourse Analysis is not to accept the language as it is without taking an account of the social identity, accepting the “normality” and bearing in mind the social language and identities of the person.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

In order to answer the research questions and gather rich data on the topic qualitative research methods were chosen. In-depth interviews with three stakeholders: NGO, political organization and youth- beneficiary’s representatives, which are going to be chosen through purposive sampling strategy, and content analysis on state level, will be conducted for this research. My aim is to see how these four groups understand the youth political empowerment, how they see it working in Kyrgyzstan and how they see its future development. Qualitative research methods allow the researcher to probe for answers (Babbie, 2005), to gather rich and full data, which is essential for my study. It requires big narratives by the respondent, which gives their full vision of the discourse. Another positive

side of in-depth interviews is getting to meet face to face with the respondents, see their expressions and take field notes, which will be very important in the process of analysis.

The process of youth empowerment is not a one day process; it has different effects from the history, Soviet history, National Youth Policy, NGO reports, advocacy by youth. To shed more light on the development of this issue in the country and to explain the current situation content analysis is necessary because it allows studying the issue based on secondary source data, which help to deepen the knowledge in the field (Babbie, 2005). It helps to review and analyze the data in the past including laws, policies, news, speeches. The study of the state level is based on content analysis only due to the inaccessibility of the state representatives. This is the obstacle and also the strength of the research because it provides the discourses on paper-based form, which are essential in relation to the state's policy and the empowerment process itself.

2.2 Sampling Strategy and Units of Analysis

The sampling strategy will be the purposive sampling with semi-structured interviews. Purposive sampling is the sample based on choosing appropriate respondents by the researcher. There are many activists working on the topic in the government, NGO and among youth, I want to interview only those, who are involved in long-term projects, participated in political events and other social activities for empowerment. The reason is that they will have experience, more information and they will have their own ideas on developing this and critiques. The respondents will be the representatives of youth, who are from 18 to 28. I am interested in their opinions because they are the stakeholders and all are beneficiaries of their activities so they are not just observers but also affected by youth empowerment.

Additionally, the sampling strategy has snowball sampling features the people, who I knew were interviewed and then they suggested further interviewees, those, who are active in the field. First respondent was my acquaintance and she suggested the person from NGO, and it went on and on from respondent to respondent. As for political organization representatives I have contacted them through their Youth Wing Facebook Page, got the contacts of leaders and arranged interviews.

Thus, there are four units of analysis: NGO workers, political organization leaders and member, youth beneficiaries and state documents. The reason for choosing is that they are the four main active groups. Government is responsible for making efficient policies and raising the issues, there are different state bodies, which are responsible for youth empowerment: Ministry of Youth, Ministry of Social Development, City Halls. In Kyrgyzstan there are many non-governmental organizations, which are very active in raising the issues of the youth (Krimse, 2010), which have different activities for youth development such as Youth Parliament, School of Public Policy, Democracy Summer School, which are done mainly by IRI (International Republic Institute), IPP (Institute of Public Policy), NDI (National Democratic Institute), UNDP (United Nations Development Program in Kyrgyzstan). Political organizations play an active role currently involving in discussions, organizing community service events, creating youth wings, which recruit youth for political participation. In the research the representatives of political organizations are the members of youth political wings. Youth beneficiaries will be those, who are involved in different type of empowering activities, who have experience and have an idea about the youth empowerment. They will be chosen accordingly:

- 1) NGO level (Youth Organizations, experts) - leaders and volunteers, they can be both from governmental and non-governmental organizations. I have interviewed three people: Soros Foundation/IRI/IPP representative, Youth Analytical

Club and NGO representative. NGO representatives are young activists, who work for organization and also volunteer and/ or involved in different activities. They are from SOROS Foundation, Youth Action Fund Program coordinator and she is also the member of Youth Parliament 2014, second interviewee from Youth Analytic Club coordinator, and another one from the Institute for Public Policy, the member of Youth Parliament 2014. Three respondents were recommended by several people to me, and during the interviews they were mentioned as active participants in the sphere of youth development, the purpose for choosing these interviewees was their active participation, their interest on the current politics, they have written or blogged on current situation on youth policy.

2) State level: Ministry of Youth Affairs representative, and the department for youth affairs at Jogurku Kenesh, also young Deputies were intended to be interviewed. Unfortunately it was not possible, the Ministry of Youth workers are prohibited to give interviews, and the Committee on youth affairs was not reached. Therefore the findings on the discourses on state level are mainly driven from secondary source data as policy, law and reports.

3) Political Organization level- members or leaders of youth political wings. Currently every party has a youth political wing, the interviews were held with the leaders of 3 youth political wings (Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan, Respublika, AkShumkar). As representatives of political organizations three people were interviewed: interviewee #4, who is the leader of Respublika Political Party Youth Wing (RPPYW), interviewee #5 , the leader of Ak-Shumkar Political Party's Youth Wing (ASPPYW) and interviewee #6, a worker in the ministry of Economics and the member of SDPK Youth Party Wing. The reason for choosing interviewee #6 was because he was told to be an active governmental worker and a member of youth

political wing, who is active and interested in youth policy in Kyrgyzstan and also a representative of youth himself.

4) Youth level- 3 interviews with youth- beneficiaries were conducted. They were chosen following the same purpose: representatives of an active youth, who have participated in different range of activities for youth empowerment organized by both the state and the NGO. 3 interviewees are the members of current Youth Parliament and university students.

2.3 Ethical Considerations

The respondents were informed about the aims and goals of the research.

Interviewees were given the informed consents, which included the objectives of the research, note on the issue of confidentiality and anonymity. To follow the rules of confidentiality all respondents were numbered according to the order interview was taken.

The interviews took place according to the preferences of the respondents, mainly in their work places. All interviews were recorded with the permission of the interviewees.

2.3 Analysis procedures

All the interviews were transcribed and coded, and it will help to proceed to Critical Discourse analysis, which is the study of text, talk, emerging from critical linguistics and from a socio-political communication (Dijk, 1997). CDA requires the attentive review by the researcher, to look further the phrase and an ability to combine It is about emphasizing ideologies, attempts to uncover hidden or not immediately obvious things and discursive means of social influence (Dijk, 1997). Limitations of the research are the time limit of the project to interview more respondents and review the secondary sources on the issue, inaccessibility of the state representatives on youth issues.

Analysis included 5 steps: transcribing the data, filtering gathered content, coding, checking reliability and biases, implying theory. After all the interviews were conducted they

were transcribed right after they were conducted in order to hear them again and not to repeat the mistakes done in the previous one. The third step, coding, involved underlining important data, which was useful for analysis for disproving or proving the hypothesis. The fourth step was checking the reliability and biasedness of the data. It is very hard step because sometimes it is done unconsciously and it depends only on the researcher. The analyzed data was organized as a chapter on findings and it was explained by the Discourse Analysis by Laclau and Mouffe and the Discourse Analysis by Gee, which provide explanations on macro and micro levels, one by building the picture of the discourses of and around the youth political empowerment, the second explaining the reasons and motivations of each stakeholder and taking an account of the social background of the respondent.

2.4 Limitations of the research

As of any other research there are several limitations in this study. The major limitation is inaccessibility of the state representatives and lack of empirical data on the level of the state, however this could be perceived as an advantage because the content analysis represented the discourses on the paper basis, also illustrates the reality, which exist on the level of official documents. However it is still the lack due to impossibility of full comparison between the representatives of three other groups.

CHAPTER 3: FINDINGS

The aim of the research is to illustrate the discourses on four levels, to create the picture of the current situation on youth political empowerment and see whether four stakeholders share different ideas or have common understanding of things on the issue. This chapter provides the result of the findings gathered from in-depth interviews with NGO representatives, youth beneficiaries, political organization representatives, the state's position on the issue is analyzed through documents as State Youth Policy, State Youth Policy Implementation Strategy till 2015, Youth and Public Policy in Kyrgyzstan and UNDP

report. Before proceeding to the description of the findings of the research the common definition of political empowerment must be mentioned, which is “the process of transferring various elements of power (resources, capabilities and positions) to those, who do not have it,”(Davi and Lakshmi, 2005) which is the youth in my case. To grasp the full image of the understanding of the discourse I have asked my respondents different range of questions on general background of the respondent, understanding of the discourse, the role of government and NGOs on youth political empowerment and the responsibility for it. There are three general patterns, which were mentioned on NGO, political organization and youth levels:

1. Youth as a decoration or as a tool in current politics of Kyrgyzstan, it was emphasized by NGO representatives and youth beneficiaries that youth is being used for different purposes but not heard while sharing their opinion because in the politics there is no space for them;
2. The state as a main responsible body for empowering the youth and involving it in political activities;
3. Education as a major factor to influence youth political empowerment, however current inability of the state to employ educated people questions its importance and efficiency because politics in Kyrgyzstan is corrupted and not merit based.

Besides these three patterns, the role of the state as a responsible body and also as a failed one was mentioned during the interviews. To elaborate on the general patterns I will discuss each group and specific features within each one.

3.1 Promising statements

On the level of the government there are different promoting and motivating laws and policies, which are written in the State Youth Policy

(Gosudarstvennaya Molodejnaya Politika), Law of Kyrgyz Republic on State Youth Policy, State youth policy implementation strategy until 2015. Generally, the state's objective is as follows:

“The main objective is **the development and realization of the potential of young people as part of a progressive society, capable of making a significant contribution to the socio-economic and cultural development** of the Kyrgyz Republic”. (State youth policy implementation strategy until 2015).

In all the 3 documents of the state the youth is perceived to be an important part of the population, which leads the country to progress. The state prioritizes education, spiritual and patriotic development, protection of health and promotion of healthy lifestyle, provision of economic independence. The law on the basis of youth policy of Kyrgyz Republic states:

Achieving this goal [empowering youth] through the following objectives:

- 1) creation of conditions for the participation of young people in the system of social relations;
- 2) the formation of spiritual and moral values and culture;
- 3) education of young people in the spirit of patriotism and respect for his native country;
- 4) health and access to health services ;
- 5) creation of conditions for education and vocational training;
- 6) promoting employment and social protection ;
- 7) facilitating the implementation of initiatives, which are socially useful;
- 8) assist in creating the conditions for leisure and development of creativity;
- 9) prevention of negative phenomena among young people ;
- 10) involvement in the process of society and the state, education civil liability.

So the state tries to touch every sphere of youth development starting from physical training and ending with spiritual values. Among the objectives there are 2, which are related to the political and public involvement of youth.

There are several agencies to empower youth on the mentioned issues such as Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health and main responsible body is the Ministry of Youth and committee on Youth Affairs under Jogorku Kenesh. It is supposed that having so many agencies would lead to certain development on the issues with the youth in the country, however the reviewed literature and reports show the failure of the state, which leads to the conclusion that laws and policies are left as promising statements only. It was stated by all of the respondents that law and policies in the country are in so called good shape but the implementation of them is very weak and sometimes there is no implementation of laws and policies and they are left only on the paper, de juro.

3.3 Suggestion Givers

As my main goal was to investigate the discourses on YPE I asked my respondents how they understand it. Commonly for NGO representatives it was described as participation of youth in decision-making processes and empowering them through education. One of the answers was as follows:

“There are several definitions, for me it is when young people **have a choice and also opportunities to be a part of political parties, to influence decision-making processes directly**. Maybe through public hearings, writing recommendations to JK or any other institutions. Also it **includes education**, they have to be educated and know what is going on in Kyrgyzstan and around the world, to be the rational member of society.” (Interviewee #1, 28.01.2014).

The respondent understands the YPE in terms of participation in decision-making process and youth being a part of the government, but as the precondition for becoming the decision-maker, respondent points out the education. Another answer was:

“If to say, I want to increase my political potential, it is a system of knowledge about the political system, **and we make him the state manager and give an opportunity for youth to participate in decision-making**. So the citizen can participate in identifying the problems, in deciding and the implementation. We must listen to young people, as a beneficiary and public servant. But the realities of current politics and system of Kyrgyzstan does not simply allow. And you probably hear about corruption, kinship and these are the obstacles.” (Interviewee #2, 30.01.2014)

The respondent understands YPE as a process of making youth an active participant in decision-making processes, it is underlined that it must to be done by someone, which was clarified later as a state and NGOs. But taking an account the current conditions, which would be the situated meanings by Gee, respondent underlines obstacles, which are the barriers for youth political empowerment as current state of politics.

Generally, NGO representatives understand YPE as a process of empowering youth to participate in decision making process through providing opportunities in education and political socialization, however they presuppose its impossibility due to the ongoing situation in politics of Kyrgyzstan, which is corrupted and kinship based.

Another shared opinion was that currently youth political empowerment in Kyrgyzstan is struggling because youth is perceived only as an instrument for certain activities as meetings, rallies, pickets, protests and is devalued by the government:

“More it(youth) is **used**, perhaps as a **political tool**, not as a specialist, youth whenever we say young people in politics, it is not taken as a constructive but rather as destructive at rallies, pickets, some shares. ... In rallies young people are more influential. If you scream and block roads, you'll be heard more than you will write a super job analysis. You know, this is because of the politics we have, where you are not awarded for your education but rather for such demonstrative things. ”
(Interviewee #3, 30.01.2014)

The respondent says that youth is the tool, which is used for populist purposes as a crowd, the values in the society have changed and being a protester is much efficient to become politically empowered rather than through education and it allows them to enter politics, which are not merit based fair to say. Another respondent shares the following opinion:

“They (youth) are just being as a decoration, we have young people, we treat them well, we have this young political parties, etc. I met some people from these political parties, young deputies and they say that they don't have enough experience and they are still learning. I think that is just to justify adults. I cannot say that we don't have enough knowledge in comparison with deputies, who graduated Tech Univeristies, or worked in factories... And they are those, who have no idea about the youth now. But

they are there and youth still underestimates themselves to be in politics of the unfairly shared idea.” (Interviewee #1, 28.01.2014)

The interviewee agrees that youth is being used as “decoration” but elaborates further that youth is believed to be inexperienced and uneducated, when in fact they are not. This illustrates the influence of the discourse created on the actions taken by the actors and it’s some kind of hegemony by stating and underlining the youngness and freshness of youth to participate in political activities. Third respondent states:

“It is not new to anyone that today politicians and the political leaders use the youth, they represent them just to show of and to create the image of a democracy, when matter of fact they are being puppets in the hands of others. There are many bright youth representatives but they either go abroad or join the parties and do what is needed. They are sold because this is the harsh reality.” (Interviewee #3, 20.03.2014)

So they share an opinion that youth in Kyrgyzstan is not politically empowered and is being used and even it meets different barriers in the process of empowerment; the prognoses for the nearest future are very negative. This is explained by the current state of the politics, where youth perceived as not worthy of being heard and where the moving up is very blurred and non-transparent

NGO representatives share the opinion that government should implement the “right” policies for youth to develop them politically and that the main responsible body is the state, which is failing to manage their tasks. It is interesting that the respondents did raise the importance of the work of NGOs in empowering youth but did not take the responsibility on how it is going on now and introduced NGO part only as suggestion givers. Interviewees mentioned such obstacles as corruption on the way of political empowerment, non-transparency of the career development, non existence of social lifts, which would motivate youth to go to governmental work, low salaries. The NGOs take the distance relationship with the process and the outcome because most of the NGOs deal with the problems mentioned by them but do not take the responsibility for it. On the other hand the

representatives of the political organizations have almost the same attitudes towards NGO workers but vice versa. To compare the views of two groups below the perceptions of political organization representatives will be described.

3.4 Big brothers

If NGO representatives shared common opinions on YPE, political activists commonly understand it as an increasing of educational level of the society, but in general they have different descriptions:

“I think it is when youth is well represented in the government and after that opportunities for others (youth) it would increase. There are no social lifts for the growth of youth in politics, maybe it is when there are social lifts for youth in politics.” (Interviewee #4, 01.02.2014)

“I think a more active position is played by youth. Perhaps we should go from quantity to quality, should not be just slogans should be specific programs, proposals for reform. Very low level of culture in general society, we must be able to convey it in an accessible language. But I cannot see people, who have offered these updates in current politics of Kyrgyzstan.” (Interviewee #5, 05.02.2014)

The answers were vague and not clear, which means that there is no clear understanding of the term, therefore I asked the respondents how empowered they are and how is it shown in their political parties and what kind of activities are organized to empower them.

Interestingly the Youth Wing representatives replied that they are empowered because they can directly talk with the deputies, Jogorku Kenesh members and share their opinions but do not get to participate in the final decision making process, when I asked them to give an example of their suggestions both respondents said about elections and promotions. The RPPYW leader responded in the following way:

I: Your youth wing is a political organization; do you have activities that enhance the political potential of the youth?

R: Well ... like ... I come here to meet with MPs on the ground in local Kenesh , our representatives will participate in the elections , and the training takes place . Then there is the opportunity to participate in activities on behalf of the wing. And it provides a chance to run in elections.

I: Can you participate in decisions on bills or something else?

R: We've got a very good practice, if we have any suggestions, we can directly apply to the deputies in LC,SC, and MC. But in general, the development of the KR party system is at an early stage.

I: Could you give an example of a successful implementation of your ideas?

R: We have been involved during the development of the campaign, and made their ideas. For example, we suggested ... I can not remember one ... Developing campaigns guys from our wing, who are experts in their field, make suggestions. Specifically... now I can not call it.”(Interviewee #5, 05.02.2014)

The leader of ASPPYW, said:

“I get to talk with the party members, get their advices and share my own opinion. If I want to implement something I do not have to ask for permission from party leader unlike other parties. Also I worked during the city elections and ran my own headquarter”. (Interviewee #6, 20.02.2014)

The opportunity to participate in the elections is perceived as an awarding thing for being a member of the party because according to the words of the respondents they do not receive any money from party and believe it to be a social lift for further political development, whereas NGOs are destructive forces, which slowdown the development of youth.

If the NGO representatives blamed the state for failing to develop the youth, political organization representatives think that NGO activities slowdown the process:

“These NGOS have no activities besides raising the leadership skills, what for do we need so many leaders?! There are Youth Parliament, Youth Government, Youth something else and they destruct the unity. Why do not they build the schools or hospitals? Any ways these youth leaders cannot do anything because they do not know how. But, for example Omurbek Babanov brought great changes while he was a prime-minister because he has an experience and vision. And when there are such people others, for example youth, should work for them” (Interviewee #6, 20.02.2014)

The respondents criticizes the work of NGO on doing so many leadership programs, which are not needed currently for the country because there are more important issues as lack of education, unemployment, while having the obstacles in the country, YPE should not prioritized rather they should work on the more important issues. Thus, the respondent states

that youth should not participate in the decision-making due to its inexperience but should implement.

“In my understanding, we all work poorly. We have not developed an attractive idea after which the youth would follow. Now the youth is for bandits, absorbs criminal subculture. The politics are not attractive for youth because it does not benefit them as fast as criminal activity. But if to generalize the politics here is very corrupted still, maybe a little less but corruption exists... While there is no idea, probably so if generalize the work of all of us, especially NGOs and the state, is inefficient.” (Interviewee #5, 05.02.2014).

3.5 In the search for success

As representatives of youth beneficiaries I have interviewed 3 people, who are the participants of different kind of activities organized by the state and NGOs, they are the beneficiaries of the policies implied by the government and of activities by both stakeholders. Two respondents are members of Youth Parliament, one respondent is a participant of Summer Schools on Public Policy and School of Democracy.

Surprisingly two respondents, who have participated in different kind of activities on empowerment, struggled to answer the question on how they understand the youth political empowerment:

“I do not know ... I cannot imagine that the voice of youth to be heard. I do not understand the establishment of state authority, it will not work, and as everyone there will be officials, not only younger but mostly older. Look at the situation now can you imagine the youth to work efficiently, the politics will eat them.” (Interview#7, 25.01.2014)

The interviewee referred to the current situation on the youth participation and saw no hope in the efficient work of the youth in politics. However, when I repeated the question and again and asked for clarification the following answer was given:

“It is when youth **equally participates** with adults in the decision-making processes **heard and evaluated equally**, depending on the idea not the age. We cannot just listen to someone and do what he says because he/she is young or old, we should be basing on the work and idea.” (Interviewee #7)

The respondent clarifies the idea of YPE by stating that it is participation in decision-making processes and underlines another important issue being based on the work not the certain criteria.

The youth beneficiaries pointed out the importance of participation of youth in politics of Kyrgyzstan but all of them had very pessimistic attitudes towards it because they believe that the government's interest is not letting the new forces and new ideas enter the politics, which opens opportunities to control resources, regulate laws. One of the respondents stated as follows:

“What about young people in the government I think that this Parliament and the powerful people who sit -never will let them in. About youth they have all only in words. Well, maybe, there is still being a couple of cloned copies of senior Baykeshek- Deputies” (Interviewee #8, 20.01.2014).

So the respondent thinks that there can be youth representatives only if they represent the interests of the ruling elites. In general youth beneficiaries view YPE as something not possibly and hard to understand thing for Kyrgyzstan because current conditions do not provide opportunities to create the space for youth and for its development according to their words. However they all still participate in the different range of activities related to political empowerment and when I asked them why, they answered that it makes good points in their CV, opens up new social networks, teaches how to interact with officials and how to propose one's ideas to them correctly. So the activities are not for their political empowerment strictly but rather for their own development and success:

“You know, I don't really like politics and all that stuff, but I want to meet new people, who have social networks and who later will be working in the sphere if later I open a business they can help me.” (Interviewee #8, 20.01.2014)

Regarding the role of the state beneficiaries responded that the role of the state should be the most important in the development and it should be responsible for this, however

today it is taken by the NGOs. They stated that currently NGOs give more effort and resources to develop the youth and they also questioned how efficient is the help:

“NGOs, play a big role in the development, they international donors invest but why do they do that. Why would the second country, which is across the sea, want to invest on some small place in Asia? They probably have their own benefits. While analyzing I thought that they break up the youth through implementing pro-western, pro-eastern, pro-Russian, pro-Turkish ideologies, which create the clashes between the youth, they never be able to understand each other because they have different views toward the world. And it is surprising that the state is passive in this case and takes no stand. I think state has failed to assure youth with confidentiality in the future development that is why youth believes in different international ideas.” (Interviewee #9, 10.03.2014)

The youth believes that currently the state did not make enough effort to support them and the Ministry exists only on paper and does not do the systematic activities, which could change the status quo in Kyrgyzstan:

“Yes, they create the Ministry but it does not do anything except weddings and marrying 50 couples, who divorced the next day. They do not want to work with the youth, they take all the grants to themselves and we don't like it.” (Interviewee #7, 25.01.2014)

The shared opinion was also that the Ministry should be closed and the new more responsible body with the youth representatives should be opened.

Another pattern, which was found during the interviews, is the individual desires and goals of the representatives of the 3 levels, while asking what they have gained from their experience, I received such answers as a good point in the CV, new social networks, trying one in different areas. But as the product of the empowerment they mentioned the desire to work for the state and for its development, so there is the contradiction between what they want and why they really do it.

4.6 Summary

The findings show that there are different types of discourses on four levels and within each one they attach different meanings to the words. The state has beautiful terms and policies for youth, which exist only on paper. NGO accepts the role of the state as a

failing one and takes the distance from the responsibility on the issue and believes that YPE is a participation in decision making processes. While Political Organization members relate it closely to the education and upbringing and blame both NGO and the state for not coping with the problem, being a part of the political organization they underline such obstacles as corruption, kin relationship importance. Youth beneficiaries are sort of lost in the scope of different discourses; however they attach more or less clear meaning to YPE, which is also participation in decision-making processes for them, and they accept the NGO and the state as institutions, which are not successful on the issue. So each level has own justifications and the side to blame for not coping, and sadly everyone recognizes the problem and accepts it, so in some case it became normalized. To explain the findings and shed the theoretical light on the data the Discourse Theory and Discourse analysis is applied in the next chapter.

CHPATER 4: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The chapter aims to present the analysis and discussion part of the paper by analyzing the findings gathered from interviews of NGO, political organizations and youth-beneficiaries and content analysis of the laws, policies and strategy of the state regarding youth policy. The chapter consists of two parts, accordingly to two theories used: Discourse Theory by Laclau and Mouffe and Discourse Theory by Gee. The first part will present the implication of tools of Discourse Theory, which are the nodal point, floating signifier, elements and moments in relation to discourses on youth political empowerment. The second part of the discussion will elaborate on the explanation of the existence of different discourses

4.1 The organization of the discourse: key signifiers

In the Discourse Theory Laclau and Mouffe underline major signifiers in the process of organization of the discourse, such as nodal point, floating signifier, moments and

element. As mentioned in the Chapter 2, nodal point is the central point around which discourses are creating certain meanings. In the research major two modal points were underlined: “**politics**” and “**state**”. The politics and the state were mentioned in all the interviews while trying to explain the concept of youth political empowerment, all respondents referred to these two terms. The following words were common while explaining the youth political empowerment in Kyrgyzstan, the issue with the youth policy:

Politics	State
Corrupted Non-transparent No social lift Based on social networks and kinship Not rewarding Not merit based	Responsible Must do Obligated Should provide Failed Non-systemized Without ideology

Table 1. Most common words while describing YPE

The nodal points were used as a justification for current non-participation of the youth in current political activities in the country. They indicate the central points of the discourse because through attaching meanings to these and explaining the situation in politics and the state respondents explain the youth political empowerment as being this or that kind. Even though there are different understanding of YPE, the claim on the politics and the state are similar. The words in the table are rather negative than positive and are perceived as obstacles for youth while trying or creating youth political empowerment.

Whereas coming to the central point of the research, youth political empowerment, respondents of Political Organization level mainly struggled to answer and define the term, on the level of the state there is no such term and it is hard to say the perspective of the state on the discourse because there is no interview and no official documents by the state on the youth political empowerment. Therefore, on the level of the Political organizations some share the vague meaning of YPE; others turn to refer to the political situation in the country.

Thus, YPE on the level of the political organizations is the **floating signifier** because it has no clear meaning attached to it and while giving answers the respondents caught themselves being confused in their own words by saying “it cannot be generalized”, “it depends”, etc.

However, the representatives of NGO and youth-beneficiaries have an understating of the term close to the one provided in the chapter on literature review. Therefore, it can be stated that on the level of NGO and youth-beneficiaries the discourse is **the moment**, which is more or less clearly explained by respondents as participation in decision-making processes. But as stated by Laclau and Mouffe the transition from element to moment is always in flux.

Regarding the hegemony and hegemonic intervention currently there is no such phenomena in relation to the discourse of youth political empowerment, there are any conflicts or contradictions in meanings. This could be explained by the comparatively newness of the discourse and it being not so important in the current situation in different organizations because as respondents pointed there are many problems relating to youth as unemployment, criminality, religious extremism and migration. There are other hegemonic interventions, which shift the attention from the political empowerment to socioeconomic problems of the society and it is commonly accepted that in evaluating the two second is of a much priority.

It is interesting to observe that the two main organizations, which were supposed to be the ones, who create the condition for youth political empowerment and those who are empowered are the ones, which have the vague or no understanding of the term. The differences among these levels can be explained by the Discourse Analysis by Gee, where he stresses on the social identity and its relation to the discourse.

4.2 Social languages, situated meanings and figured worlds

According to Gee, to analyze the discourses the social identities of the speaker must be considered. In the cases of this study, all respondents are representatives of youth however represent different organizations and while analyzing the results the impact of their identities on the understanding of the discourse can be observed. While discussing social languages Gee underlines the usage of the language by certain representative of social identity. In the case of studying four levels there are the differences, which can explained by the term. While discussing the importance of the youth political empowerment the NGOs referred to the participation, civic engagement and the importance of developing the civil society, as it is one of the main tasks of NGOs in Kyrgyzstan, which spread such kind of values and (Krimse, 2010). They learn and participate in the schools on democracy, public policy and youth activism and involvement. The same is applicable to youth-beneficiaries, who are also participants of the same activities, therefore understanding of the term are similar to these two groups.

As for Political Organizations, which are in the environment of the deputies and so called role models, there is certain meaning fixed regarding the YPE. In the interviews the “**situated meanings**”, which requires the attention on the context, where the text is being said, are presented by the respondents. While talking about the general deputies and politics respondents blame the politics and state for being corrupted and as failed, however while talking about their own party, which is also a part of current politics, they say about the greatness of their leaders and their importance in the development of the country. While having such images of their leaders as “true leaders”, “patriots”, “qualified” they create the “**figured world**”, when the rule by the adults is perceived as normal and typical, such figured world is also applicable to the NGO and youth-beneficiaries, when they say that youth

political empowerment should be this way but the fact that there are no youth representatives is okay.

So according to Gee belonging to the certain organization shapes the discourse and while analyzing the meanings attached to it social identity and the context must kept in mind. In this research social identity of the respondents as students, NGO or political organization representatives influence on their understanding of the discourse. Depending on their social language they explain certain facts and provide different justifications.

CONCLUSION

The study shows that there are different understandings of YPE but generally it could be summarized as a participation of the youth in the decision-making process and educating youth. All levels perceive the state to be the responsible body, which is currently failing to cope with its duties. The situation requires attention of the all stakeholders because everyone accepts the problem and does not take any action because of the existence of such discourses as an inability of the youth to become politically empowered, corruption of the system and non-transparency of career development. Almost all the respondents believe that YPE is not possible in the nearest future, which supports the reports by IDEA (2012) and NHDR (2010).

Discourse Theory illustrates the key signifiers and Discourse analysis provides the explanation for variations and existence of situated meanings and figured worlds. The key signifiers are the politics and state, and the key term YPE is a moment on the level of NGO and youth-beneficiaries and on the level of Political organization it is a floating signifier, which does not have a fixed meaning, has a vague explanation and still open for discussion. Within the context of socioeconomic situation of Kyrgyzstan YPE is not the priority due to existence of other problems, which are faced not only by youth but other groups of the country as unemployment, criminality and religious extremism. Due to this there is no

hegemony or hegemonic intervention within the discourse.

Recommendations for further research

For further inquiry of the topic and building a broader picture on the discourse of youth political empowerment I would suggest to study the discourse on the level of the state, adults and non-active youth representatives because in this research only participants of youth empowerment activities, workers in this sphere were interviewed. It would be important to study the discourse on other levels and see the organization of the discourse and also influence of the social language on the understanding due to the broader range of social identities in the further study.

Additionally, quantitative research on the attitudes of the population on the YPE of the population would be important because it provides the perceptions, which could predict the further development on the issue. Based on my research it is hard to draw predictions and generalities due to comparatively small sampling size and under-representativeness of other groups.

Also as a further suggestion for the improvement of the youth political empowerment in Kyrgyzstan round table of all the four stakeholders and the future systemized work would be suggested in order to make a change in the sphere because as long as they have different misunderstandings the work will not be as efficient as it could be if they worked together. It would be recommended to adopt the law on the election quotas because the age limit in the law does not constitute other law on youth policy, where in the first the age limit is 35 and the youth itself is the population from 14 to 28.

The issue of youth political empowerment is an important part of democratization of the country and its further development (Flere & et al. 2013; NHDR 2010, Esengul et al, 2013). The current study shows the difference in understanding on the term and also

pessimistic and hopeless beliefs on the future development due to current situation within politics and the position of the state. It would be recommended to conceptualize the term and create policies for future strategic implementation of the concept.

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