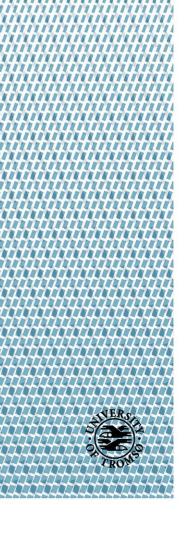UiT

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Nepotism, beyond good or bad

Exploring recruitment policies in international aid organizations in Kyrgyzstan

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ABSTRACT

While nepotism has been a pervasive social phenomenon in every culture, prevailing in family businesses - the topic has majorly been a taboo for academic research. It has been labeled as a discriminative practice in modern bureaucratic organizations. The development and international aid worldwide represent a large framework of bureaucracies and planning. Local cultures often represent a challenge if not an obstacle to the development practices and need a flexible approach.
Kyrgyz society has been historically organized around the concepts of clan and clan networking or social loyalty circles manifesting in various ways, including nepotism naturally. This powerful form of social organization survived through the years of the Soviet ideological and bureaucratic domination, which unknowingly strengthened it on many levels. The country's independence brought many international donors to the scene, heavily involved in the public financing sector.

This research was aimed at exploring the recruitment policies of international aid organizations in Kyrgyzstan to establish their awareness about nepotism as a challenge in the work practices. Recruitment staff was interviewed in the sampled organizations, representing various types of donor aid.

The study relies on the cross-disciplinary areas including anthropology, organizational studies, history and development studies to continue on the recent research series on the situated development around the world. The Weberian bureaucracy as an organizing principle in many modern organizations is considered as a culturally charged model based on the individualistic and rational set of values. The discussion stresses the importance of acknowledging the cultural differences in organizational practices, especially in the international development.

Key words: nepotism, international organizations, recruitment, culture and development, bureaucracy, international aid, clans, clanism, Kyrgyzstan

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Nepotism as a social phenomenon has been a feature of Kyrgyz society through generations. It can be traced to early nomadic formations many centuries ago and kinship bonds that persisted as a strong solidarity framework surviving through the seventy years of the Soviet rule. This historical and cultural core still has an extended effect in present time. National independence brought a new set of changes on social, economic and political levels. Existing social vulnerability still compels people to seek the help of informal social institutions, where traditional solidarity – *tooganchilik* can serve as a guarantee of mutual aid and social security (Temirkulov 2007:7).

Transition processes after the Soviet Union's collapse have led to the presence of international donors which created a different atmosphere and incentives for the country's development. It fostered the development of civil society and socially-oriented NGOs – activity aimed at 'democratization', transparency – bridging the country with new notions of Western democratic tradition (Schulte, 2008). Numerous governance, education and healthcare projects are being implemented in the country by various donor agencies. Many international organizations have established local departments in the capital - Bishkek. They attract personnel both of foreign and local origin, hiring for various staff positions from managers and consultants, to trainers and office keepers. International organizations aimed at the country's development potentially require a meritocratic approach in recruitment as reflected in their guidelines and policies. The successful cooperation between donors and national implementing agencies and staff has a significant meaning for the country's development (Tulegenov, 2008).

Throughout recent years, the non-governmental sector of the Kyrgyz Republic financed with grant money has become a real force significantly impacting social processes in the country, engaging people in civil initiatives ("NGO sector in data and facts …", 2006). At the same time, since 2005 the Kyrgyz people consider unemployment, corruption, and the economic development as the most relevant problems of the country (Schwegler-Rohmeis, 2013: 20). Corruption remains the biggest problem in Kyrgyzstan, as the country (in 2013) ranks in 150 place among 175 states in the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index[1].

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[1] see The Corruption Perceptions Index 2013 at http://cpi.transparency.org/cpi2013/results/#myAnchor1.

Poverty reduction and development have been the mottos of international organizations aimed at improving situations in many developing countries ever since the advent of the Bretton Woods system. NGOs nowadays represent a wide sector of development in Kyrgyzstan (Schulte, 2008).

As a student of the Master's studies in Peace and Conflict Transformation programme at UiT The Arctic University of Norway (in the city of Tromsø) and a Kyrgyz citizen, I became increasingly interested in topics of cross-cultural communication, role of culture and organizations in the development work. My work experience involved three donor aid projects (from 2007 to 2012) which focused on school education and public health in Kyrgyzstan. Familiarity with the setting and working format of our donor organizations were an asset in conducting this study within a limited amount of time.

My research question is:

To what extent have a selected number of international aid organizations in Kyrgyzstan developed awareness about nepotism as a possible challenge, reflected in their recruitment policies, in design and implementation?

My attitudes towards the awareness and monitoring of nepotism in international organizations are relatively open. There is an official handling of an issue reflected in anticorruption policies of sampled international organizations, some of which mention the word "nepotism" as one of the corrupt practices.[2] However in real human resources practice the degree of awareness may vary from hardly being addressed to the stage where there is an understanding of a common attitude about how to deal with nepotism as a challenge. The more the organization seems concerned about this, the more probably it is that they have designed a strategy meant to guide recruitment. This might be so even in cases where the word 'nepotism' is not mentioned directly in internal documents. However, even where a more or less coherent strategy to deal with this exists, it is not necessarily implemented, or perhaps not implemented to the full extent.

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[2] See http://donors.kg for the official websites of agencies operating in Kyrgyzstan

The thesis will consist of several chapters with specific functions. Chapter 2 will provide working definitions of nepotism and clanism with related examples from the Kyrgyz history; highlight the role of anti-nepotism policies for the non-profit sector; summarize the role and activities of international aid in Kyrgyzstan; and relevance of this study for the peace research. Chapter 3 will draw a theoretical framework featuring Weber's bureaucratic model, the role of recruitment in organizational practice on one hand; *clanism* as the Kyrgyz cultural core and the role of culture in development, on the other hand. Chapter 4 will stress the choice of research methods, techniques and literature; describe key methodological constructs of the research. Chapter 5 will present and analyze the data obtained during the fieldwork. Chapter 6 will summarize the research and draw conclusions.

Chapter 2. Background

2.1 Phenomenon with many faces

Nepotism as a social phenomenon can be found anywhere in the world, nevertheless it remains one of the least-studied subjects. The definitions of it vary from very broad such as "favoritism based on kinship" (Bellow 2003:11) to quite narrow to be used in this research. Simon et al. (1966:344) define it as "the bestowal of patronage by reason of relationship regardless of merit"; Padgett and Morris as "the practice of showing favouritism during the hiring process toward relatives or spouses of current employees in an organisation" (2005:30). For the purpose of this study, a working definition of 'nepotism' will be "the showing of special favour or unfair preference to a relative in conferring a position, job, privilege etc." (Jones 2012:2).

Previous findings concentrated on different angles of it and were presented mainly as case-studies by countries focusing on family-owned business (see Hayajenh et al., 1994; Sharma et al, 1996; Song and Werbel, 2007; Jang and Chung ,1997; Kuada, 1994; Osland et al., 1999). In fact, family-owned businesses are the only cases where nepotism is described as a mechanism, without being called as such (Sharma et al. 1996:23).

Although the issue is universal – a need in case-studies for comparative approach and analysis is strong (Vinton, 1998). In different parts of the world this phenomenon is associated with different attitudes and legal consequences ("Nepotism", 2009). The point of any social phenomenon as large as nepotism is its 'situatedness' in uniquely shaped environments (historically and culturally). The role of culture should not be overlooked, as it plays an enormous role in how nepotism is treated in individualist vs. collectivist societies (Wated and Sanchez, 2012:199-217). This deeper-level difference manifests itself when nepotism policies - a norm in any modern international organization – meet an environment where family bonds are a basis of collective survival penetrating all levels of social hierarchy (Hatch and Cunliffe, 2006). Talking on these terms – there is a conflict between inherent ways of 'doing things', a 'cultural' clash that can produce various outcomes. This study will approach the development from a cultural perspective. The focus of approach is on national history and culture in understanding potential conflicts and/or collisions in the country's development practices.

2.2 Role of relatives in Kyrgyzstan

The cultural and historical background of the Kyrgyz society speaks largely in favor of this practice – with *clanism* being its key feature (Stein 2012:2). According to Kathleen Collins, a prominent scholar who completed several works on Central Asian clan politics and regime transition - "clan is an informal social institution in which actual or notional kinship based on blood or marriage forms the central bond among members" (2002:142). Clans are identity networks consisting of an extensive web of horizontal and vertical kin-based relations. Originally coming from a culture of kin-based norms, such informal ties were a source of mutual support and survival back in nomadic times, and are still widely maintained amid the semi- modern Kyrgyz economy, where official bureaucratic institutions are weak and unstable (Ibid).

The Kyrgyz social structure was constructed from some forty different tribal unions (uruk) based on kinship relations. Each tribal union consisted of different kin subdivisions (top), which were united by imaginary, rather than real, kinship links. These tribal unions were united into three big confederations: On kanat (Right wing), Sol kanat (Left wing), and Ichkilik (Neither) (Temirkulov 2004:94). Originated from the needs of common practice, the clan-based self-organization of society perpetrated almost all layers of clan life and fostered its well-being, coherence and independence, serving as a basis for organizational, communal, security and legal activities. The economic basis of clan network was shared material resources, without which no clan connection could persist for so many centuries. Kyrgyz clanism was a good tool to unite people from the same clan, however on a national level – such unity was rather negative as narrow interests of particular clan contradict state and nation-wide interests in many ways (Djunushaliev and Ploskikh, 2000). The historical link between nepotism and cadres' policy in the Central Asian region can be traced throughout Russian and Soviet domination as presented in the next section.

2.3 Evolution of nepotism before and after the independence

The nature of Russian and then Soviet influence in the Central Asian region could be characterized as "indirect rule". In the 19th century, Russian tsarist colonialism and its attempts to introduce new local institutions were met with resistance from local elites, subjected to integration into clan-based institutions (Collins 2006:79).

The Soviet period is more relevant to my discussion, as it introduced several critical institutions aimed specifically at eradicating "pre-modern" social system of Kyrgyz, namely sedentarization, collectivization ("tribal policy"), nationalities policy and cadre policy. (Collins 2006:63-67). However, the whole period from 1917 through the 1950s was a story of clan adaptation and persistence. This happened due to three main reasons: 1) social system and extended family structure could not be destroyed; 2) clan organization was a strong cultural identity; 3) from the 1920s onward, clans had access to state resources that fostered their survival. Brezhnev' regime from the 1960s to the early 1980s made the clan structure even more consolidated with the "stability of cadre" policy. The governing structures were mainly staffed by Kyrgyz ethnic cadre without Europeans (Ibid). The failures of the Soviet policies in eradicating clans were the focus on 'the creation of nations', which did not exist in this vast geographical area under the Soviet rule. What existed and played a key role in shaping of local social, economic and political realms were mixed ethnic groups, or tribes and clans (Hirsch 2000:202-207).

The appointment and promotions of cadres to the Communist Party were guided by the Leninist doctrine and loyalty to the party, however informally nepotism was its dominant principle (Roy 2000: 100-114). Most of the sources on Central Asian history during the Soviet period stress that clanism was closely linked to politics because of the kin power distribution mechanisms where the top appointed persons engaged their extended family circles. The Stalininst leadership (1930-40s) applied methods to counter clan elites by reshuffling or replacing the cadres, which brought negative impact on the economy (mainly agricultural sector). Consequent regimes of Khrushchev (1953-1964) and Brezhnev (1964-1982) focused on stability and growth and "loosened the grip" on clan-infused cadres, slowing down turnover of clan elites significantly and bringing them back into force (Saadanbekov 2000:222-223).

The democratic ideology of the Kyrgyz first president – Askar Akayev, imposing democratic institutions began to erode by 1995, when clans that brought him to power started to oppose those reforms (Collins 2006:225). Clan nepotism has defined the allocation of public resources (Ibid: 241).Clan support was crucial for any political leader, as could be observed during the regimes of Akayev (Northern clan) and his successor Bakiyev (Southern clan).

2.4 Finding my thesis

Nepotism in my country has been covered by some surveys (Temirkulov, 2002 and 2006) but mainly exists as a point of attack by media during parliamentary pre-election battles or being a part of informal life of citizens.[3] Qualitative research of nepotism in the context of donor activities in the republic is non-existent. International development organizations and their high professional competence standards represent another dimension from what has been already covered in the previous research. Professional setting created by donors serves high humanitarian goals on non-profit basis and stands in contrast with the private sector where hiring family members can be a natural part of the recruitment strategy.

Perceptions of nepotism in international aid projects became of particular interest to the present study. As development donor agencies build their way in countries with striking historical and cultural differences, they use values that often do not mend with the local values which cause bumps along the road.

Intercultural cooperation and communication is one of the peaceful forms of co-existence. As underlined by Geert Hofstede (2010:4): "Questions of economic, technological, medical, or biological cooperation have too often been considered as merely technical. One of the reasons why so many solutions do not work or cannot be implemented is that differences in thinking among the partners have been ignored". Amartya Sen (2004:37-38) also stressed the role of culture vs. the economists' skepticism towards it, indirectly reflected in the outlooks and approaches of institutions like the World Bank. The challenges of development and economic strategies require investigation of how culture should be taken into account (Ibid). A cross-cultural research rises up many further questions as we see our world change with modernization and standardization. Is there a global culture? How cultural differences matter? Can we talk about universality of values as the world grows more interdependent? These and many similar questions arise in direct relation to the peace and development studies.

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[3] see Knyazev, A. (2012, December 14) Киргизия на рубеже веков: возвращение к родовым порядкам.[Kyrgyzstan at the turn of centuries: a return to the clan traditions] Available: http://www.polit.kg/print/3/180; Orozobekova, C. (2010, December 15). The Deep Roots of Nepotism in Central Asia. Available: the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty website http://www.rferl.org/content/deep_roots_of_nepotism_in_central_asia/2249061.html

2.5 International non-profit organizations in Kyrgyzstan: picture nowadays

2.5.1 On development directions[4]

International aid organizations in Kyrgyzstan are divided and operate along two lines: economic and socio-political. The economic sphere involves: agricultural and rural development, road construction, renovation of schools, support of small businesses etc. The socio-political sphere involves: support of democratic reforms and civil society/NGO capacity building, healthcare, humanitarian aid, education and culture. All levels of society are covered by donors supporting programs and projects implemented by the government, local communities, entrepreneurs, women, children, and mass media.

The majority of international aid organizations are working on a grant-basis, where beneficiaries are either NGOs or projects established under different ministries: 1) NGOs are beneficiaries to NGOs; 2) grants are provided to projects established under ministries.

Their influence and standing, how beneficial, and in what ways disadvantageous they are to the Kyrgyz society were points of wide discussions ever since they were established.

Recently, interviews on the role of international aid organizations were given by a range of Kyrgyz experts and analysts, directors of NGOs and public foundations; advisers to the programmes in those organizations linked to the ongoing debates about the topic. Those interviews and opinions reflect the controversial reality linked to the efficiency of donor aid as a whole, focusing on main challenges and problems, acknowledging positive and negative aspects:

2.5.2 On the general impact[5]

Kyrgyzstan has declared itself a democratic country after independence in 1991. Every democratic country has state, business and non-commercial sectors. In Kyrgyzstan, the majority of NGOs are financed by foreign donors. Without foreign aid, this sector would not have existed. In the worldwide practices, the NGO sector receives over a half of its funds from entrepreneurial activities and around 30% from government contracts. In Kyrgyzstan,

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[4] this section was guided by the full article: Роль, значение и практика деятельности международных организаций в Кыргызстане [Role and significance of international organizations and their activities in Kyrgyzstan] (2005, November 4) Available from http://analitika.org/kyrgyzstan/kg-society/2087-20051104013945115.html (last accessed 10-11-2012)

[5] this and part of 2.5.3 section are based on the full report: Кыргызстанские эксперты о роли международных организаций [Kyrgyzstani experts on the role of international organizations] (2012, August 8) Institute for Public Policy website. Available: http://www.ipp.kg/ru/news/2443/ (last accessed 12-12-13)

even commercial organizations barely survive, as the tax system is not optimized and does not support entrepreneurship. Socially-oriented initiatives financed by the government have been launched only recently.

International aid organizations support the NGO sector, healthcare, rural economy and disaster risk management. Many of them help children, disabled and elderly people and protect the environment. For example, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) solely is implementing over forty projects in different spheres aimed at the development of the country. The majority of aid projects reflect the actual problems in Kyrgyzstan: for instance, reforms in education and healthcare systems, financing construction of the infrastructure objects, renovation of schools etc.

The country budget is composed of funds from the World Bank (WB), Asian Development Bank (ADB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF). Development programs provide a large number of workplaces and develop local personnel. As summed up by Pavel Dyatlenko, Expert of "Polis Asia" center: "…international organizations in Kyrgyzstan are fostering progressive social, political and economic reforms, support initiatives of Kyrgyz activists, public organizations and local communities" (Кыргызстанские эксперты о роли…", 2012).

On the other side, constant flow of grants and humanitarian aid creates 'dependency mentality' and consumer sentiments among political elites and a part of the society, weakening their motivation for self-development and initiatives. As noted by Shamil Ibragimov, Executive director of "Soros Foundation Kyrgyzstan", a large part of grant beneficiaries prove to be weak in applying funds efficiently.

Experts agree that that efficiency of aid organizations should be analyzed separately from each other. Each structure has its own stronger or weaker monitoring and evaluation procedures. However, qualification of cadres is mentioned as one of the weakest points.

International projects were not suited to the country's reality from the beginning, says Dmitriy Orlov, general director of the analytical center "East-West Strategy": "None of the projects took into account the country specifics, guided by the principle: "Everything must be in accordance with the Western standards" (Ibid). He further notes that Kyrgyz history, level of economic development, ethnic diversity or Kyrgyz social structure were not considered.

Anar Musabaeva, a political analyst, acknowledges the importance of research on the impact of international aid projects, which is new, especially on how they influenced the values, relationships and the social structure in general. She underlines that the critique related to non-sensitivity of aid organizations to the local context and real needs of people is partially justified, and that international organizations are not always spotless role models for transparency or absence of corruption (Ibid).

As can be seen from the above, current accounts on the role of international organizations are directly connected to the current social and economic realities of Kyrgyzstan. The issues seem to reinforce each other barred by formalities on one hand, and informalities on the other. Human resources represent the ultimate force responsible for the implementation of the development agenda.

2.6 Anti-nepotism policy as an integral part of non-profit practices

While nepotism is dominant and positively viewed in the family-owned businesses, large corporations and nonprofit organizations are majorly against it, especially those financed by donations – because of the increased need for donor's accountability: donors, nonprofit banks, sponsors specify the need in policy; and nepotism can reduce the quality of work or undermine the support of non-preferential employees (Sandilands, 2012). All nonprofit policies should typically include measurements for success and penalties that apply for contravention in advance, so as staff is aware of the risk (Ibid). "Mother, father, husband, wife, children, and siblings are considered immediate family", however organization might add extended family relationships (Barbeito, 2004:37).

As stated by Mackey (2013), although each non-profit organization is unique, there are key policies that guide employees in making decisions and fulfilling the organization's mission. Policies managing nepotism are among them: conflict of interest, granting of contracts and hiring of staff and volunteers – as typical. As further explained by Sandilands (2012), a conflict of interest and a hiring policy prohibit stakeholders from appointing family or friends into positions where they get payments or receive employee benefits; while the granting of contracts policy "outlines a procurement process that ensures the work is not awarded to a family member or friend" (Sandilands, 2012). Anti-nepotism sections to the policies or a separate one are created by organization.

Chapter 3. Theory and conceptual framework

The theory chapter aims at presenting key concepts to be used in the research, interlinks between them and a theoretical model as a basis. The chapter will: 1) look at international organizations as bureaucratic frameworks and stress the main features or principles according to Max Weber's bureaucracy concept; 2) draw lines between development and culture – why culture in national context matters for development projects; 3) show with examples how Kyrgyz clanism as cultural core contradicts some of the main principles of development organizations.

Kyrgyzstan as one of the post-Soviet countries had its own unique path of development after the Soviet system's collapse. The twenty two years of independence have been both a continuum of post-Soviet legacy and immersion into the new economic and political conditions. After the regime's collapse, Kyrgyzstan became a recipient country of multilateral aid, signed and ratified various international conventions and treaties – all of which involved introduction of external planning mechanisms merged with cooperation and planning on the domestic side. The link between culture and development policy should be stressed first here. Discussing policies and planning theory in general, Abram points that they are in general exclusive of non-rational human elements which contradict central rationalities of the planning, therefore it is important to approach culture as a concept "in its own right, one with a social history and a world of analysis at its service" (2011:xi). Planning is an essential tool of any government, company, organization. For development goals – planning policy and procedures are especially critical. And the relation of culture to it can be best explained by Friedman: planning cannot be universally rational but has particular histories in different locations (Abram 2011:1). The main emphasis of the planning theory is to build bridges, open communication, but in order to do that historical perspective and theoretical critique must be taken into account (Ibid:2). Planning framework, bureaucratic norms (to be further discussed) as a rational scenario, a tool of adjustment is important for the present study. Herein, a conflict that arise when different planning paths meet - is at focus, as observed in development studies worldwide (Bear and Feuchtwang 2009; Cowherd 2005; Watson 2003; Appadurai 2004 - to name few examples). The wave of skepticism to development interventions and involvement of 'cultural consultants' in development projects started in late 1970s, reshaping the 'old' orthodoxy of development. The importance of "indigenous knowledge" was stressed. (Henkel and Stirrat 2002:168). Hoben (1982) calls these studies

evolving around the institutional context of development issues in the developing societies-their unique cultural and social landscapes (Ibid: 169)

Recruitment constitutes an essential part of bureaucratic functioning. While it has a specially defined role in a bureaucratic model, a stage impacting the overall efficiency of organization – in Kyrgyz social context recruitment has been historically linked with nepotism. International organizations, however, have anti-nepotistic policies that were developed mainly for the context of Western society.

The discussion will be attached to examples from Kyrgyz social realm to stress the importance of cultural factor in organizational management for development goals.

3.1 Weber's concept of 'bureaucracy' and international organizations

The formal organizations both as a concept and a reality emerged largely as a result of industrialization in the Western society (Henslin, 2012). The rationalization of society as a historical shift in people's thinking and behavior is associated with modernization and accompanying it economic processes, and involves many characteristics of a contemporary world where bureaucracy is a main form of organizations (Ibid). The term itself, definition and list of characteristics originated in the magnum opus "The Economy and Society" (first published in 1922) of Max Weber. The six main operation principles of a bureaucracy are: 1) a clear hierarchy with top-down assignments and bottom-up accountability levels (pyramid); 2) a division of labor; 3) written rules; 4) written communication and records; 5) impersonality; 6) merit-based recruitment of workers. He believed that formal organizations tend to develop into bureaucracies and in general, large organizations tend to be more bureaucratic (Weber, 1978). International aid organizations in this sense are large bureaucracies operating in different developing countries around the world. Weber linked the advance of bureaucratic organization with its "technical superiority", framework of organization strictly oriented on the result and thus being universal (Downs, 1967). The bureaucratic model is important because, by and large, international organizations generally strive to uphold the main characteristics described by Weber.

The model in its nature is universal and the ideal structure of it is 'cemented' in the six principles above. Deva underlines the fact that schools of business and public administration continue to teach the pragmatic doctrine that the bureaucracy is a rational and neutral

instrument of development and general welfare (1986:149). The main drawback of this influential theory is its natural limitations as of any ideal type model when applied to actual social set-ups (Ibid). There are various examples when bureaucratic organization was historically alien to some countries, was not a part of the public administration logic, because the ideal fundamental principles such as rules, professionalism and impartiality implied by the model – were challenged (Olsen 2007:20). Corruption, incompetency, uncontrollability, malfunction of laws and other variables are among the major obstacles to proper functioning of bureaucracy in those environments (Ibid).

According to Downs (1967: 24-32), utilitarian rationality accumulates human resources to achieve organizational ends as efficiently as possible, stressing the importance of organizational rules. A strictly hierarchical system as bureaucracy requires, first of all, compliance to its set of goals that bureaucrats need to achieve – delimiting personal from organizational (Ibid: 80-100). In theory of social reciprocity of a cultural anthropologist Marshall Sahlins, in societies where kinship links play predominant role in social organization (earlier stages of industrialization) such approach can be overwhelmingly alien, akin to treating in-group members as strangers (Sahlins 1972:196-201).

Jewson and Mason stress that recruitment is conventionally conceptualized as a selection of individuals competing one with another in a free unfettered market, invoking technical and universalistic criteria of suitability (1986:47). Providing examples of complex social reality reflected in the choices made by recruitment officers, they assume that "rational-legality is not an inevitable outcome of the exigencies of modern technologies and organizational forms" and that bureaucratic organizations are "structures of domination that are shaped and influenced by the societies in which they are located"(Ibid: 56).

Recent studies of development projects around the world have supported this argument in various ways. The culture and difference in societal organization and customs all play role when it comes to dealing with formalities 'imported' as a part of a larger bureaucratic machine.

3.2 How culture matters for development projects
'Development' as a concept started to dominate the lexicon of international relations since 1949 shortly before the decolonization process and became synonymous with Western-style

modernization (Eade 2002: ix). The widespread poverty (underdevelopment) associated mainly with globally agricultural 'South' as opposed to industrialized 'North' – was meant to be fought with development assistance that implied economic growth in the countries receiving aid (Ibid). Multilateral institutions such as the World Bank, the United Nations (UN) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) were global 'conductors 'of development processes affecting millions of people worldwide. Such approach prioritized technology and knowledge, central role of development experts and stressed the results of projects, material over cultural (Verhelst and Tyndale 2002:2). Over the past twenty years, the approach in development imposed the cultural norms of the development institutions as though they were universally valid, providing examples of Maya and Maasai indigenous peoples to name few, who opposed the rapid spread of Western values and lifestyles (Ibid). One can see that rigid development frameworks bring about many challenges associated with a variety of local differences, starting from religious beliefs and historically shaped ways of living, or the cultural core.

Development policies and practices have majorly been normative. Tucker (1996: II) and Powell (1995) argued that greater economic power plays a missionary role to intervene in the lives of poorer bearing superior wisdom. In the development literature – every case is unique, many contributors to the topic describe both successes and failures of development programmes along with some core cultural features of the societies where interventions took place (see Peel 1978; Watson 2003; Eade eds. 2002; Oware 2005; Appadurai 2004, to name few).

So what is culture? And how does it matter for development?
Culture is a very broad concept and it is necessary to select a context to approach it for a relevant answer. We can examine culture specifically related to development. First of all, in terms of challenges that development policies and norms create when 'meeting' cultural phenomena on site. As can be illustrated by many examples, and summed up in a worldwide trend: there is a widespread rejection of   "the monocultural development model" represented by economic globalization, involving opposition to the dominant rationality (Eade 2002:xi). Global organizations operate differently in various countries yet preserving their own organizational styles: employees are part of their cultural institutions such as family, community etc., however when joining an organization their cultural backgrounds meld with organizational values and requirements (Hatch and Cunliffe, 2006:175).

Geert Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory on organizational culture is very relevant here as he explored national cultural influences on organizations in fifty countries and three regions (Ibid: 181). Studying international subsidiaries of various companies, he established that organizational culture of those varied according to the national cultural contexts along the four dimensions: 1) power distance (hierarchical relationships); 2) uncertainty avoidance (level of formalization and standardization); 3) individualism vs. collectivism; 4) masculinity vs. femininity; and 5) long-terms vs. short-term orientation (Hofstede, 2001). His model delineates dimensions through which culture influences organizations, underlying the importance of core social beliefs and norms. For nepotism, in particular, the two most relevant out of Hofstede's dimensions are: collectivism vs. individualism and power distance.

According to Hofstede (1984), collectivist cultures highly value loyalty, commitment and relationship building because collective identity is more important than individual one. Power distance shows the comfort level of society members with inequality and autocratic processes (Dickson, M. et al. 2012: 121). Dickson et al. further suggest that both collectivism and high-power distance can naturally lead to nepotism in organizations, when extending family networking or tolerance of leader's power in organizational practices become "an accepted reality" rather than "a cultural conflict" (Ibid). Jewson and Mason conceptualize the principles of recruitment dividing them into: *individualist*, or those "which involve a judgement about individual skills and personal attributes. The locus of such skills, abilities and talents are assumed to be the individual person"; and *collectivist*, or those which "predict job performance on the basis of putative group membership. Here applicants are selected or rejected for employment because of their assumed membership of social categories rather than because of individual talents" (1986: 45).

The available research divides the issue of nepotism broadly in two perspectives: in *developed* vs. *developing countries*. Studies provided by Robinson (2008), Arasli and Tumer (2008), Abdalla et al. (1998) stress that when societies culturally accept nepotism, it causes counter-cultural struggle on part of organizational management – especially true for large bureaucracies: corporations, big firms and organizations (Dickson et al. 2012:120).
Earlier case-based analysis highlights that culture should be viewed as rationality of its own. The most relevant definition was provided by Verhelst and Tyndale: *"culture is the complex whole of knowledge, wisdom, values, attitudes, customs and multiple resources which a*

community has inherited, adopted or created in order to flourish in the context of its social and natural environment" (2002:10).

If one takes a holistic approach by Caxton (2000:26-27) on development models: the role of culture is to define which choices people will make when facing challenges from the environment, which can be hindered when culture is silenced by externally/artificially propagated decisions (Eade 2002:xii). The report published by the World Bank a while ago found that "the socio-culturally compatible projects studied had twice the average rate of return of the non-compatible ones" (Verhelst and Tyndale 2002:4). The history of development has both positive and negative examples of using the knowledge of culture to integrate communities into the programmes. Negative experiences were associated with cases where the use of culture was purely instrumental as in the case with NGOs set up in African countries attracting people to participate using high communal involvement, while overlooking a network of complex loyalties that were more important than financial considerations for people (Ibid:7). The positive examples include complementary roles of projects to local cultures: e.g. where figures of authority were trained modern technological, medical, agricultural knowledge and used their influence in communities to pave the way for improvements of lives (Ibid).

There are growing examples of successful mixes of local tradition with imported modernity; business management and family-like bonds; and Western development with local rationality, as demonstrated by Popular Market in Mexico City, oxen project in Congo and women producing chapatti in Mumbai (Verhelst and Tyndale 2002: 12-13).

3.3 Kyrgyz case: clanism as a cultural core
Collins (2006) provides the most references and accurate definition of what is a clan in the Central Asian context and Kyrgyzstan in particular, distinguishing it from corruption, clientelism, tribalism and blat. The conceptual meaning is very important to establish first to see the essence of the phenomenon. It is interesting to mention Max Weber (1978) here, as he assumed that clan networks existing in nomadic regions of Eurasia will disappear in modern states and institutionalized politics. However, as can be asserted from the realities of Kyrgyz politics, economics and social life – clans can act as substitutes of political organizations and play critical role in all these spheres (Collins 2006:17). Collins' definition of a *clan* is:

"informal organization built on extensive network of kin and fictive, or perceived and imagined, kinship relations" (Collins 2006:24).

Clan, thus, forms an identity based on kinship with network as a core organizing principle. She stresses the neutrality of a term because clanism can have both positive and negative effects, being nor 'primordial', inherently negative or undemocratic in its nature. An earlier research on kinship ties, nomadism and tribes (Humphrey and Sneath 1999; Tapper 2001; Lindholm 1986; Edgar 2006) have contributed to the overall theoretical foundation of the term and allowed to delineate key characteristics of a clan (Ibid: 17-34):

1)   Both vertical and horizontal bonds, "linking elites and nonelites", across class lines. Nucleus like structure with core kin in the center and extended circles of kin relations including marriage, close friends and their relations;

2)   Internal clan norms.

•   Acceptance of social hierarchy within a clan. The mutuality of power and compliance, when clan serves as an informal social protection to its members meaning unequal or at times exploitative relations between elites and nonelites.

•   In-group reciprocity and loyalty (patronage) – strong ties to protect its members. Repeated, frequent interaction among members forming trust essential for mutual reciprocity and interdependence;

3)   Rational motivations. Elites need the support of their networks to protect the clan, distribute the benefits of power, access to resources (political and economic influence). Nonelites need patrons/clan elite in finding employment, gaining access to education, obtaining "goods in economy of shortages" as well as social/political advancement.

4)   Strong collective identity. Social pressure, shame are used to maintain loyalty. Nonelites would struggle being outsiders, since you must have a kin basis for membership/association with another clan. Reinforced collective identity is based on psychological and socioeconomic dependence upon each other within a clan.

5)   Durability in time and space that can be explained by exchanges between clan members in every sphere of life (social, economic, political), the strongest 'glue' being familial ties. A historical continuity is observed where pre-colonial tribal kinship links and a way of survival based on these links remained present during the Russian colonial rule, the Soviet rule (in invisible manner) and made its way through to the present.

As can be seen from the above, the clan is an example of collectivist culture and thinking, supported by repeated reciprocity that becomes a norm. "The modernity of tradition" as coined by Rudolph and Rudolph (1967) are what Central Asian states represent, because post-Soviet clans are less traditional than African or Middle-Eastern ones due to their Soviet and post-Soviet development (Collins 2006:16). Lauth's passage on informal institutions (his categorization is broad: formal vs. informal) is very relevant here: they (informal institutions) are based only on the fact of their existence and effectiveness, their power of sanction is linked to exclusion mechanisms leading to less chances of gaining access to goods and services. "Informal institutions are equally known and recognizable publicly; however, they are not laid down in writing" (Lauth 2000:24) – which makes them difficult case for legal state formalities, and bureaucracy in a larger sense.

3.4 Implications for recruitment in international organizations

Recruitment, ideally, "is a system of selection based on fixed rules stipulating the skills and training essential for entry into an occupation… in opposition to favoritism and personal considerations" (Gusfield 1958:525). Whoever meets the stated technical requirements is presumed to have equal access to the field, a fundamental recruitment approach in Weber's bureaucratic model. Criteria for admission being narrowed down to specific skills thus implies the absence of requirements such as kinship, life style or else not formalistically linked to the job position (Ibid). Nepotism is prohibited as "the showing of special favour or unfair preference to a relative in conferring a position, job, privilege etc." (Jones 2012:2). To grasp the decision-making associated with recruitment and see a place for nepotism there, the definition of Jewson and Mason will be used for this study:

> *"the entire process of allocating persons to occupational tasks and functions within an institution or organization. It includes, therefore, firing as well as hiring, redundancy and dismissal as well as promotion and grading…all recruitment processes entail the distribution of rewards and opportunities to some people whilst simultaneously denying them to others"* (1986: 44).

Employment policies in international aid organizations operate with terms that need to be viewed through the cultural 'lenses' to reach the comparative meaning and implications for the situated context, otherwise much confusion will arise. While recruitment in international organizations utilizes a merit-based approach, emphasizing the negative and illegal connotation of terms "corruption", "nepotism", "favoritism" [6]and such, those same concepts can often be features of clan networking.

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[6] for related definitions of corruption and nepotism see *Procurement Guidelines*, Asian Development Bank. Philippines. April 2010; *Guidelines on the Use of Consultants by Asian Development Bank and Its Borrowers*, Asian Development Bank, April 2010; *United Nations Procurement Manual, Revision No. 6*, United Nations, March 2010.

Clan networks are often confused with many concepts such as 'clientelism' and 'corruption' (Collins 2002:143). Differentiation is important, because for an outsider the borders between these notions are blurred. The general distinction as put by Collins lies in the nature of 'corruption and 'clientelism/patronage' – being informal institutions/practices, unlike clans – which are identities/organizations (2006:38). However, clientelism and corruption can be a part of high-level clan politics and are variations of behavior exhibited by clans (Ibid: 40).

Nepotism is reported to be widespread in organizations in developing countries however its research from the perspective of cross-cultural management is very scarce (Kragh, 2012). Kragh draws on examples from Africa and Latin America, stressing that norms and principles typical of industrial society are not developed in the countries at the earlier stages of industrial development where tribal social morals still play central role for managers and employees, nepotism is a common phenomenon there. Unlike Collins, he is congruent with classical sociology views on culture like Max Weber, Durkheim and Tonnies, and modernization theory in general, where society will eventually 'lose' its cultural traits (tribalism) in the face of industrialization. "Nepotism produces a behavioral ambiguity that both local and expatriate managers are likely to face in organizations in developing countries" (Kragh 2012:248).

The only small qualitative study on nepotism geographically and culturally close to Kyrgyzstan, was conducted by Minbaeva (2013) in neighboring Kazakhstan. The patterns bear many similarities with Kyrgyzstan overall touching upon public and private spheres. She made a point about the Western multi-national corporations (MNCs) and their response to clanism reflected in human resources management. Her observation is that while MNCs have succeeded "in limiting the influence of clanism in their subsidiaries to a certain extent, clanism might in actuality have become less visible and, therefore, less manageable in these companies. Indeed, some interviewees were unconvinced of the ability of formal western practices to fight clanism" (Minbaeva, 2013).

The effects of nepotism can be different, akin two sides to a coin. Examples from fieldwork experience and informal sources can demonstrate such ways.

3.5 Summary

Cultural and anthropological perspectives are gaining increasing attention in the organizational theory. Clanism in Kyrgyzstan is one of the cases that do not fit the existing concepts of Western organizational research. Any large bureaucratic organization as an ideal type can create ambiguous situations outside the context it was originally evolved in, outside

its own "culture" so to say. The Soviet bureaucratic machine once also tried to "tame" clans with formal means; however they still exist perfectly adapting to new circumstances dictated by current economic realities. This highly adaptive nature of clanism should be taken into account for the development efforts.

The dominant ideas and ways of doing things can come from the outside but culture is all about meaning for its people (Verhelst and Tyndale 2002:13). The culture and development are closely interlinked (Sen 2004:17), culture matters as a creative way to improve people's lives. Its force is in its ability to survive through periods of alien ideological domination and to transform, most importantly, picking the necessary and dropping the obsolete. Thus, it can be seen as a self-enforcing cycle of change. As culture's main goal is the survival of its own people: it represents a continuous source of ideas for the development. While, bureaucracy as presented in Weber's model is rather an ideal, its postulates are propagated in international organizations worldwide. The recruitment part can be called the most untouched principle of all, since a merit-based approach, unambiguous as it is – calls for technical characteristics and completely excludes all other ones pertinent to social beings.

It was important to stress the narrowness of some concepts in this chapter (e.g. clanism, culture in development, recruitment) linked to the contexts (Kyrgyzstan, modernity).

The past fifty years have added new cultural debates in planning of development. In this relation, Young echoes the views of the international organizations on this new "positionality" for planning: "the integration of culture into practical planning is perhaps the most important challenge in existence of planning today, and into the foreseeable future" (Young 2008:77).

Chapter 4. Methodological framework

This chapter aims to address methodological aspects of the research including: choice and use of the method and data collection techniques, information about interview participants, ethical and other considerations.

Qualitative research method was preferred as it focuses on meanings, understanding and facets of a particular issue (Rubin and Rubin, 2005), on "depth rather than breadth", where the aim is to produce Geertz' *thick description* – "rich accounts of details of a culture" (Bryman 2008a:378). Nepotism as a sensitive topic is a common phenomenon yet concealed and avoided to be discussed (Jones, 2012) which requires a different level of interaction than in quantitative method. People will be expected at a certain point to describe their experiences, give examples and share attitudes. Field research based on qualitative methods has often been a method of choice when studying sensitive topics (Lee 1993:119). Compared to quantitative approaches, interviewing values the context and nuances in the stories of people interviewed: exploring contradictory concepts, "points out the missing and the subtle, as well as the explicit and the obvious"(Rubin and Rubin 2005: viii). In addition to interviewing, publicly available documents and materials will be analyzed.

4.1 Study area

The study area is anti-nepotism policy in three international aid organizations based in Bishkek (capital), covering particular aspects such as: how organizations deal with nepotism with particular focus on the recruitment process; whether they see it as a challenge, supplied with information about any particular cases or examples (see interview guide in Appendix I). The in-depth interviews with a purposefully selected sample of organizations and people allowed to make the research experience richer than a simple questionnaire that excludes personal interaction. Each methodological point will be further discussed and explained as well as why some techniques were preferred over the other. But first of all, on the location of the study.

Bishkek, the capital city of Kyrgyzstan, is a hub with the country offices of all international aid organizations, running their projects under the different ministries and coordinating work of grant-based NGOs. While Northern and Southern regions of the country have their own share of NGOs and local project units – the capital is treated as a separate geographical category concentrating the majority of NGOs ("NGO sector in data and facts…", 2006 : 8).

As coordinating units and main offices with recruitment departments are located in Bishkek – it was chosen as a fieldwork target.

4.2 Informants: selection and size

Purposive sampling often occurs at more than one level (Bryman 2008a:375). Organizations and informants were selected according to this technique - "the deliberate seeking out of participants with particular characteristics, according to the needs of the developing analysis" (Lewis-Beck et al. 2004:885). The aim of purposive sampling is to produce a sample that can be logically assumed to be representative of the population, by applying expert knowledge of the population to select in a nonrandom manner a sample of elements that represents a cross-section of the given population: seventeen organizations in this study (Battaglia 2008:646). It is subjective sampling, "most appropriate for the selection of small samples often from a limited geographic area or from a restricted population definition, when inference to the population is not the highest priority" (Ibid). Study area made this technique a natural choice. Anti-nepotism policy was reviewed in different donor settings, or different types of organizations. Different or similar approaches and attitudes towards the policy across organizations were to be discovered.

The donor community in Kyrgyzstan is diverse. There are seventeen international donor organizations responsible for numerous development activities across the country based in Bishkek ("Agencies", n.d.). Their common feature is non-profit development orientation, while the differences lie in their *organizational structure*, i.e. banks, embassies, international organizations, international programmes, foundations; and *types of implemented activities*: projects, grants, loans. Each organization has its own set of goals, operating according to their particular working forms, mechanisms and schemes in certain priority areas ("Роль, значение и практика…", 2005). To make this sample as representative as possible and reflect these differences, three organizations were chosen: a bank, an intergovernmental organization and a foundation. The sample also embraced two additional criteria: scope of grant aid and variety of development agenda issues. The preference was given to the most involved organizations with relatively greater weight in the development work as compared to other donors. Thus, three sampling criteria were: type of organization, aid size, and broad development agenda.

A useful feature of purposeful sampling is that the researcher can make own judgement on which cases will be the most useful based on particular focus of the study (Bloor and Wood

2006:154). Samples must be selected strategically: to be relevant to the research questions and to reflect a variety of key characteristics in the resulting sample (Bryman 2008a:415). Interview's credibility is enhanced when participants are experienced and have first-hand knowledge ("in the appropriate position") on the researched issue; furthermore, they should supply varied perspectives (Rubin and Rubin 2005:65-67). In order to avoid a single perspective, informants were picked from different organizational levels. Each organization was represented by two persons. They were drawn from human resources staff or personnel directly involved in the recruitment and selection of cadres in these three organizations – as potentially the most knowledgeable persons within each organization about the subject.

The initial plan was to interview recruitment personnel at different hierarchy levels: one from the main office and one from the NGO or project level – to be able to compare outlooks on the topic. While main offices are located in Bishkek, many actual projects and NGOs financed by organizations are located throughout the country. Thus, the interviewed could potentially shed light on their experience in different geographical areas. My aim was to include different donor structures and different-level recruitment personnel.

4.3 Data collection techniques: semi-structured interviews and documents
Conversations with follow-up questions are the essence of an interview – one of the most widely used qualitative research techniques. It is flexible and requires spotted amounts of fieldwork time unlike ethnography and participant observation (Bryman 2008a:436).

Semi-structured interviewing was chosen mainly because it combines discussion of specific research themes and leaves space for variation of interview flow, adding or changing questions (Ibid: 438). My interview guide contained key questions for all participants – to compare cases – but was open to change based on answers and reactions. The aim of the interviews was to find out the official standing on the policy and "to generate interviewees'" accounts of their own perspectives, perceptions, experiences, understandings, interpretations, and interactions" (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004:1021). The strength of this technique is trying to embrace "events and experiences that are important from the interviewees' point of view, that are relevant to the research but have not been anticipated, or that are particular to interviewees' own biographies or ways of perceiving" (Ibid:1022). Semi-structured interview is more suitable for a sensitive topic as it establishes an equalized power relationship where personal and sensitive information can be shared with lesser constraint (Ibid).

A digital audio-recorder was used as a usual tool for interviews with prior consent – to have a full account of conversations and stories and easy repeated access for later analysis (Bryman 2008a:451). It was expected that some participants might refuse to be recorded or will still feel discomfort from being recorded (Ibid: 452). This is further described in Section 3.6.1.

Internal documents of organizations related to staff recruitment and administration were asked for as additional sources of data.

4.4 Conducting interviews

Gaining access to a social setting that is relevant to the research problem is one of the key steps, especially in closed settings such as the majority of organizations (Bryman 2008a:403-405). Permissions to conduct interviews were obtained within an extended timeline from March till July of 2013. Official letters presenting information about the research and the researcher and ethical guidelines were sent, followed by phone calls to the respective agencies.

Six interviews in total were conducted in June and July of 2013 in the offices of the organizations, two people from each. Interviews were taken in Russian and lasted from thirty minutes to one hour. Three organizations differed greatly in how research was met. The first organization was more open in cooperating with me as a researcher: two informants provided the richest material including stories, putting emphasis on transparency of their organization, seemed open and more relaxed about the interview. Some stories told were put as notes off-the-record, more information was provided once interviews were over.

It took more time to get access from the other two organizations.

Informants in the second organization were friendly and polite; conversation covered formal part of inquiries and did not include any life examples. It took the most time to gain access from the third organization. Both persons refused to tape conversation, one of the interviews lasted around thirty minutes as the informant seemed tense and asked counter-questions. A detailed account of interviews can be found in the Data Presentation and Analysis chapter.

The interviews were structured in a way of proceeding from general themes in the recruitment processes towards more sensitive ones: 1) finding out about what are the guiding principles in recruitment in organization; 2) what challenges they encounter in the process; 3) does anti-nepotism policy exists; if yes - how is it implemented; 4) asking to provide examples if such

policy was violated; what are the measures undertaken by the organization in such cases; 5) is nepotism seen as challenge; plus other questions based on the responses to the key questions. Interviews have supplied the research literature with empirical data and examples of technical nature, i.e. the anti-nepotism policy as internal procedure/its peculiarities, and examples of effect of this policy in the situated cultural environment.

4.5 Field experiences

4.5.1 Ethics and sensitivity

While there is no definitive list of sensitive topics, sensitivity often emerges out of the relationship between the topic under consideration and the social context within which that topic is studied (Lee 2004:1022). As can be inferred from the Chapter 3, nepotism is generally treated as a sensitive topic especially in the modern bureaucratic setting as one of the forms of discrimination.

According to Raymond Lee, sensitive topics raise sometimes difficult issues related to the ethics, politics, and legal aspects of research (Ibid). Nepotism is closely linked to corruption (see Background chapter). The researcher of sensitive topics may need to be more aware of "the irethical responsibilities to research participants than would be the case with the study of a more innocuous topic" (Ibid: 1023). Special care might need to be taken, for example, with anonymization and data protection. While the topic is sensitive in the world of corporate business and established world of Western human resources management practices – nepotism as such became also "sensitized" historically in Kyrgyzstan in line with Soviet attempts to eradicate tribal connections and loyalty schemes (see Chapter 2). The methodological assumption was that only utmost anonymity will allow to obtain information on the topic and expect cooperation. This consideration was equally a part of the ethical strategy of conducting social research consisting of four main areas as delineated by Diener and Crandall (1978): harm to participants, informed consent, privacy and honesty (Bryman 2008b:118). With regard to potential harm to participants from unawareness, providing informed consent forms is a good way for participants to make an informed choice, foresee implications about participation in a research (Ibid:123). In order, to make research safe, interviewees were informed in advance that:

1) their participation in the research is voluntary and they may withdraw at any time; only researcher will have access to the obtained data (Kvale 1996:112, 154);

2) all information provided would be kept anonymous and confidential. Names of organizations; names, gender, and age of interviewees were concealed – and this pre-condition of data gathering was explicitly stated in the beginning of each interview. It was told that information about organizations and people interviewed will be presented in a non-identifiable way to the reader. Therefore, in the Data Presentation and Analysis part, I will only use terms: Organization A, B.. ; Respondent A, B…and so forth - for differentiation;

3) thesis and/or parts of it will not be published in any mass media source;

4) any internal documentation provided to the researcher will not be replicated, and will be used only for familiarization;

5) all audio recorded data will be destroyed after transcription.

Notably, interviewees appeared more relaxed once those points were stated. They told that their organizations were regularly contacted by mass media, independent researchers, and surveys from various agencies. However some of them seemed to be reluctant about such requests as can be seen in the interview analysis.

4.5.2 Neutrality

Jones stressed the need in a value-neutral description of nepotism as opposed to a predominantly negative perspective (2012:5). As discussed in the Chapter 3 – this phenomenon should not be viewed outside of its context, as assigning labels to it will lead to a biased vision. Bryman talks about possible need in a specific role or "image" for participants in closed settings based on observations (2008a:409). Even though researcher's familiarity with environment can guarantee cooperation and safety, things can go unpredictable because of suspicion, sudden political changes and traditional conservatism (Gokah 2006:64). My neutral academic position and university-level of research was stressed in the beginning of the interviews. This measure proved to be efficient, because as stated earlier donor organizations were being often contacted by local mass media and different research agencies with later publication of obtained results. Therefore, it appeared that a student researcher was presenting much less discomfort to them.

As emphasized by Bryman, it is not completely feasible to provide participants with a full account about your research (2008b:125). However, keeping your research strategy in line with a basic "no-harm" research principle especially in compromised settings– can be a basic

rule (Bøås et al. 2006:75). As noted by Sluka, professing neutrality may or may not be a good danger management strategy (1995:287). Despite the nepotism being viewed negative generally, its nature depend a lot on the setting it occurs in (Mulder 2012:220). For example, in collectivist cultures, it is a part of a broader cultural framework (Wated and Sanchez 2012:200-201). Looking for a 'norm' in this regard would be looking for a one-sided perspective – a point implicitly made during all interviews to reassure in the value-neutral approach towards the topic.

4.5.3 Insider and outsider perspectives

Literature on insider and outsider perspectives provides a distinction between them, but foresees situations where these dimensions can overlap in a single research (Rabe 2003:150). Proponents of an 'outsider' status link it to a greater research objectivity and authenticity of the obtained knowledge, where the research group is seen through the impartial lenses. 'Insider' advocates see belonging to the researched group as an advantage, where same language and knowledge of culture can provide a deeper insight (Kikimura 1998:140-141). Aspects that made me an insider were: coming from the same country, speaking the same language, having work experience in aid projects, familiarity with procedures of some aid organizations. The last two aspects interviewees were not informed about, but this 'insider' knowledge made me feel more prepared and comfortable towards the setting and topics of discussion, made search of particular documents easier because I was familiar with some of them. Outsider perspective was blurred by several factors. We could not discuss our belonging or not belonging to any clan, or the issues of how we benefited or not benefited from being a part of this social structure. This area remained obscure for the entire period of the study. Furthermore, the ethnic composition of informants was diverse and included not only Kyrgyz people (see Chapter 5).

All interviews were transcribed and translated from Russian (my native language) to English by myself. As English is the working language in all of these organizations – it was easy to refer to some typical organizational concepts without being misunderstood, which was an asset.

4.6 Challenges and reflections

4.6.1 Refusals to be recorded and provide documents

Informants from the third organization refused to be taped. Interview notes were taken during conversation. Nevertheless, both interviews were important part of the fieldwork, since they contained valuable information for interpretation. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) note that oftentimes interviewees start to provide revealing information once conversation is off-the-record (Bryman 2008a:456). This proved to be true in this study. There was a degree of skepticism towards being taped and the informants who were recorded might have felt freer off-the-record, even though they agreed to do this. As a result, their responses could be not as open or full, and some information might have been left out of reach. In general, informants seemed to be constrained at the beginning of the interview, but seemed more relaxed towards the end. Some key examples from the NGO and project practices were revealed once the recorded conversation was over.

Only one organization provided the conflict of interest policy under condition of non-disclosure – only "for familiarizing" purposes. As the research request letter asked for "internal documents related to recruitment and administration", informants later explained that their organizations did not provide any internal documents for outsiders in principle. However, it seemed that the only document they could provide was the conflict of interest policy itself, which was quite typical and read almost identical in all organizations, as described by informants. For general recruitment guidelines including statements on types of discrimination, I was referred to the official websites of organizations.

The allocated time for fieldwork did not allow expanding number of participants due to the waiting process for the research permission. Research could potentially involve actual NGO members – for another (grassroots) perspective on the policy. However, along with this reason, I was guided by 'quality over quantity' approach, allocating more time to prepare for and analyze interviews (Kvale 1996:103).

A thorough data analysis will be presented in the Chapter 5, where ongoing ethical issues will be touched upon as well.

4.7 Selection of sources

The sources used in the research could be broadly categorized into the following sections:

1) organizational culture and human resources practices; 2) anthropological studies, scholarly articles, books; 3) official information about international aid organizations operating in Kyrgyzstan; 5) reports from organizations/independent agencies/experts, statistical data, surveys; 6) news articles (both national and foreign).

The guiding principles in selecting the sources were: 1) credibility and objectiveness (scholarly sources, news agencies with reputation and standing); 2) variety (to consider different viewpoints); 3) time-span (to reflect up-to-date developments towards the issue, especially for reports);

The topic of nepotism appears to be a cross-cultural one, yet it is labeled as a discriminative recruitment practice only in the Western organizational literature. The literature on examples of nepotism proved to be very diverse – in terms of geography and types of organizations involved. The main challenge was to develop narrow meanings of the theoretical constructs for this particular study, taken from across various topical areas. A discourse analysis approach was used to see through the contexts of every concept evolved in. Another concern was the biased nature of many documents especially those publicly available information and official documents such as the mission, goals and anticorruption policies of the organizations, which could only be viewed as guidelines towards the actual reality. At the same time, reports and views of experts to reflect on this reality - were of broad origin, including those of independent experts and analysts, or representatives from both government and international development sectors in Kyrgyzstan. The research approaching nepotism free from prejudice in the context of development is very new. The taboo nature of the topic and its widespread appearance in many organizations kept it relatively untouched for the academic scrutiny.

Interviews complemented resources with internal organizational outlook on the topic: providing both official and sensitive information that was not otherwise available for public search.

Chapter 5. Data Presentation and Analysis

This chapter will cover the fieldwork results and their analysis. Key categories: the main recruitment strategy and challenges, anti-nepotism policy and its mechanism, whether nepotism is seen as challenge, and relevant examples or stories from the work practice of informants - will be presented and discussed. These categories represent different angles essential to observe the policy in link with the theory and concepts provided earlier. The data will be supplied with comparative examples from the existing academic works.

Following the ethical guidelines, organizations and respondents will be marked as Organization A, B and C; and Respondent A1, A2; Respondent B1, B2 and Respondent C1, C2 respectively. The research question is, once again: ***to what extent have a selected number of international aid organizations in Kyrgyzstan developed awareness about nepotism as a possible challenge, reflected in their recruitment policies, in design and implementation?***

5.1 Presentation of organizations and informants

The information in this sub-section will be only general due to ethical considerations. As stated earlier, three types of organizations were represented in this study: an intergovernmental organization, a bank, and a fund. Job functions of informants included: administration and implementation of the entire recruitment process, grant management, and coordinating thematic section in one of the donor projects. All these functions involved direct or indirect past and ongoing recruitment processes in these organizations. Recruitment was analyzed at different organizational levels, for instance, one respondent could oversee the recruitment in the main office, while the other administer or participate in lower-programme/project level. All six informants were citizens of Kyrgyzstan with mixed ethnic background, the majority of them were women.

5.2 Main employment policy lines. Priorities in the recruitment strategy[7]

For the research it was important to see what is guiding organizations in the selection for their job positions and what emphasis if any they assign to their selection criteria.

Informants from Organization A stated that one of the priorities guiding recruitment is an applicant's motivation to work in the organization for a long time, be qualified, "*performing*

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[7] Employment policies are important legal aspect of every organization. They explain how to deal with arising issues, how to operate in a fair way towards employees and should be reinforced in a variety of contexts (e.g. the recruitment and selection process, equal opportunity policy, code of conduct and many others). See Patel 2010.

work diligently and being quickly integrated in the team". Respondent A1 pointed at almost absent turnover and stable staff working from 5 to 10 years and over. All employment policies are laid out in the general recruitment rules, resignation rules, work schedule rules, vacation and sick leaves; each position has its own developed requirements and responsibilities.

In Organization B, informants named the guiding recruitment strategy as non-discrimination by race, gender or nationality: "*We even try to hire people to represent nationalities of our country. If there are potential workers with similar qualifications, and some ethnic nationality is less represented in our organization – we will make everything possible to hire this person, so we don't have only single ethnic nationality representatives"*. The most qualified staff with work experience is prioritized: "*...we usually take people for less qualified positions even with secondary education, but still with work experience. Or professional staff – they need to have a Master's degree"*. Other recruitment principles were transparency, creation of favorable competitive environment, just remuneration of staff, i.e. each staff member is evaluated according to their workload/his or her qualification requirements, and compliance with organizational rules.

Respondent B2 described the recruitment process at the program level in details, stressing transparency, honesty and objectivity as main recruitment guidelines. The process is hierarchical and has independent commission with at least 3 persons established for each stage. For example, candidates are shortlisted by one committee, written tests are conducted by another committee, interview panel also consists of new persons. Afterwards, the final decision is to be made by the main office, where all folders are forwarded. Strict compliance to the terms of reference is another selection criterion.

> *...if it says "education in social sciences" – you got to have it. If it says "work experience not less than 3 years in certain field" – you got to have such experience. What I like the most is that everything is specified very clearly and concisely. If you are a match – you are a match, if not – then sorry. And most importantly, our selection is conducted objectively. We know how the selection is made in the state institutions, local administrations, local organizations – all based on clientelism, connections. Here as a rule, we don't have it and is punished seriously, if someone is interested. All commission members sign a declaration that they undertake an independent decision and don't have any interest in any candidate. We have a single standard form of conflict of interest"* (Respondent B2).

Informants from Organization C also stated that they prefer *"best talents",* and that in this aspect they probably have the same requirements as most of international organizations. As for priorities, the terms of reference was an ultimate referral point; women were encouraged to apply, although most managerial positions are occupied by men in organization.

As can be seen from the above, a clearly merit-based approach was stressed as a guiding recruitment principle in all organizations, seconded by work experience and a long-term organizational commitment. Such recruitment is a good example of the formal bureaucratic rationality (Weber 1978: 225). As can be inferred from their answers here and further on, informants (from Organization B in particular) described themselves as following organizational rules precisely, avoiding risks and seemed to be integrated into the ethos of rule-based organizational behavior – all highly indicative of a 'classic' bureaucracy (Weber 1978:987-90).

5.3 Main challenges in the recruitment

All three organizations shared a concern about finding qualified staff for particular positions.

According to Respondent B2 many mature professionals (engineers, technicians, philologists or historians) were educated during the Soviet time and are fluent only in Russian and Kyrgyz; their diplomas mismatch the international job requirements. Also, there is an increasing number of newly graduates from the Western universities with good English skills but lacking sufficient work experience.

The discrepancy that causes organizations to repeatedly call for some positions arises because of the requirements produced by international organization on one hand, and realities of Kyrgyz labor market on the other. The main requirements typically include: having a specialization in the announced field, around 5-6 years of project experience, fluency in three languages: Russian, Kyrgyz and English and ability to work with budgets. These characteristics are often hard to be embodied by one concrete person.

In Organization B, informants reported to deal flexibly with such cases by examining the market situation first and then reformulating the terms of reference, so actual people can apply; furthermore a scale of English fluency was established for every position. It could be not mandatory in some cases.

These adjustments demonstrate, first of all, that functional specific criteria of suitability deviate from those originally 'prescribed' by the bureaucratic mechanisms. It can be said, that de facto, recruitment criteria for some positions is a subject for internal ad hoc change due to the local circumstances.

5.4 Is there an anti-nepotism policy and how does it work?

When asked about anti-nepotism policy, all three organizations pointed to the conflict of interest policy, which foresees situations of the familial engagement in the work process.

Most nonprofit discussions about conflicts of interest are associated with any sort of financial benefit to board members of staff – detrimental to the organization. Masaoka (2010) includes classic examples of such violations: "the nonprofit buys something unnecessary or overpriced from a board member's business, or the nonprofit hires an unqualified, overpaid family member of the executive director", or even the least talked about: when the potential benefit/conflict for a board member is also a parent/client/beneficiary. These and other examples demonstrate how subtle and versatile situations can occur around the policy in practice (as in section 5.5). According to Aldridge (2011), conflict of interest policies are applicable to all hierarchical levels: to directors, officers, and employees in order to monitor relationships that can lead to a potential conflict of interest (volunteers often excluded). Therefore, it is usually required to disclose the existence of familial relationships between co-workers.

Job applicants in all three organizations have to fill the internal form and state absence of conflicting interests with the organization. As explained by Respondent A1:

> *"It means that his/her relatives do not work here; and organizations where his/her relatives work – are not recipients of our grants; in case they are – it needs to be stated. Then every year we fill out a special form where he/she should indicate: 1) was there any conflict of interest; 2) his/her relatives and their work places, so that these organizations are taken into consideration by [Organization A] when providing the grant or contract for services/supply".*

The form-questionnaire was forwarded to Organization A from New York and it has quite simple, tabulated format and several questions, for example: 1) Does any of your relative work in organization that received or will receive a contract or grant (answer Yes or No). If yes, you should describe in detail, whether you are aware of the potential conflict of interest (answer Yes or No). On the next page you should list all your relatives who are members of some board, Supervisory Board or any organization. There is another point where Organization A asks to indicate all close relatives who work in any kind of organizations, for example – brother works in a bank, sister in the UN agency. The process is tracked regularly: *"We update this form every year and request the same form from the Supervisory Board and expert committee",* because *"Such cases occur from time to time, here and there. This is why*

we have such policy. And we need to remember this, as it is a very important issue; we are given the grants, so we trying to track this" (Respondent A1).

Respondent B1 said that according to their policy, the closest relatives, such as mother, father, sister or brother are prohibited to be employed by their organization. When applying for a position, candidates need to indicate whether they have relatives who work in Organization B and affiliated offices, and what positions they hold. The contract with an employee who hid this detail would be terminated. *"... husband and wife can work here, but not under direct supervision of each other – different projects or agencies – yes".*

Respondent C1 asked me what a 'conflict of interest policy' is. After my explanation, it turned that there is such policy (a part of the contract) and it is very strict: people who sign it are fully aware of the consequences. Respondent C1 has worked in this position for fourteen years since the organization was opened but surprisingly admitted that never signed this policy and did not explain why.

As for special monitoring mechanisms, organizations A and B reported to have electronic databases that show their staff workers and affiliated relatives and their work places.
"If you click on the person you can see that he has a daughter, working at some organization, which applied for a grant" (Respondent A1).

> *"All our recruitment is made in the automatized web-oriented internal system – all information is there... when I type in the last name in the system, people associated with this last name appear immediately. The other issue is that in Kyrgyzstan there are often many different last names in one family. So in this case we cannot track. However, this is entirely a worker's responsibility, if such information will be accidentally found out. But I think it is hard to conceal such information".* (Respondent B1).

Mechanism of resolving a potentially arising conflict of interest was described in Organization A:

> *"For example, staff member's mother works in NGO, and this NGO applies for our grant – this stuff member notifies us by filling other form. Some interests of staff members involved are being reviewed by our director. Meaning that director should be notified and then decide what to do with an entire situation. If it involves members of expert committee, e.g. daughter of an expert works in some organization, for example – free legal clinic and the same organization applied for a grant in [Organization A]. This expert must state this and that woman (daughter) also must state about it in a form – there is a section where a person must state that his/her relative works here. Then this expert is being removed from our discussion, and does not participate in the discussion, after that the issue is forwarded to the Supervisory Board. Conflict of interest in the Supervisory Board is also reviewed, we have a committee for conflict of interest located in New York and the document is sent there."*

The most important part of it is the disclosure by the staff worker of such conflict of interest: *"If a person hides this fact – it leads to the disciplinary responsibility, up to termination of employment. People are aware about their responsibility in this regard and treat it seriously. If any question arises, they come immediately, discuss it and we document it, launch the process, track this seriously"* (Respondent A1).

A very important point to note is two levels of recruitment and selection: for the main office and for the associated NGOs and projects. In all three organizations, selection of staff for the main office includes a thorough multi-stage process involving different evaluators. As for the recruitment of staff in NGOs and projects – it is decentralized. Organization A, however, tracks conflicts of interest in the financial reporting documents; informs NGO members about it. In Organization B it was reported that: *"Selection in the projects is decentralized, the only requirement is for our main office representative to attend all stages of this process"* (Respondent B1). Similar situation was in Organization C.

To sum up, conflict of interest policy in the organizations envisages three nepotism-linked situations, as described by Barbeito (2004:37): 1) staff person cannot hire a relative; 2) one relative cannot supervise another relative; 3) related persons will not be involved in evaluating each other's job performance or in making recommendations for salary adjustments, promotions, or other budget decisions. Further on, there is a clear hierarchical aspect to how the conflict of interest is being resolved, described in Organization A – formalized, standardized, impersonal and clearly bureaucratic (Olsen 2005: 2).

5.5 Do they see it as a challenge/problem? (especially in relation to clanism in the country)
As for the violations of the policy, some respondents said they had experience of dealing with such cases, while others reported none.

In Organization A, the anti-nepotism policy has always existed however it became a part of thoroughly laid out procedures in response to occurring conflicts of interest only since 2008. Respondent A1 recalled the gravest case from 2007 when daughter did not indicate her mother who worked in the organization. Another recent case involved a member of expert committee who got *"caught"*. Expert committees and their members are special targets of the anti-nepotism policy, because their mission is to evaluate grant applications for programs. *"Every program that we are giving a grant to has a committee with up to 5 members. So they gather, collect all applications, evaluate them – it depends on them whether organization will*

receive money. They are decision makers, it is a big responsibility and they should understand that conflict of interest should not be taken lightly". When asked whether the form adds transparency to the recruitment process, Respondent A1 replied that *"the only thing concerning me is that experts are dishonest. They do not indicate their kinship, and we cannot force them because it is private information and we cannot interfere in their private lives. Those, who understand – indicate them, as it will pop out anyway"*.

Effects of nepotism on organizational practice can be called mixed. In some cases of family-owned enterprises – it proved to be efficient, in some cases – not. But the overall feel of nepotism' impact remains negative (Jones 2012:2-3, 43-45). A dominant negativity associated with the term is linked to a "non-objectivity" of employment measures based on kin, rather than professional skills (Yeung, 2000). "Nepotism is thus seen as a double-edged phenomenon: on the one hand it consists in preferential treatment of one's in-group, and on the other it is a deviation from the norms of equal treatment of all according to utility and justice" (Kragh 2012:249).

Respondent A2 shared a twofold view on the policy, where NGOs are prone to violations more often than not:

> *"I do not consider it a problem; it is not a qualitative characteristic – good or bad. The question is what impact it has on the job. If a staff worker is a "deadhead" who does not do anything, merely concentrating resources in one's hands, one family, without working – this is bad. I think the challenge here compared to business is that in private sphere – conflict of interest is called a family contract, family business, it is even honorary. Because people are aimed at gaining profit; working badly means leaving family hungry. NGO – is money that does not need to be returned: with or without interest rate, it means freedom in executing one's so-called tasks. It allows more opportunities to manipulate such funds, and when one family manipulates them – it is easier not to perform the expected work, because the social sector is a long-term concept, almost unmeasurable".*

Respondent A2 sees nepotism as a problem in small organizations, because then it can be linked to the family profit. This observation corresponds to the previous studies by Bratches (1986) and De Paola and Scoppa (2003) holding that larger organizations have less nepotism, as their bureaucratization level increases (Mulder 2012:236).

An interesting reflection on the policy in the conditions linked to clanism was expressed:

> *"To fight it in our country is akin to standing against the coming train with hayforks, in my opinion. And in reality it is very complex, we have explained to our donors that in our country, in Central Asian countries, it is probably inapplicable practice because population is small, everybody communicates with each other, and those from the same area of activity know each other".*

Respondent A2 further notes that conflict of interest is a tool for abuse and from financial and administrative points of view - mechanism of control is always needed. The issue was included in their questionnaire while visiting NGOs. Before providing a grant, Organization A requires information about any relative who works for their organization (including in grant-recipient NGOs). Reaction of NGO people towards the policy usually is: *"What? Who are we going to work with then?" They are simply confused when we ask them everyday – do you know what is a 'conflict of interest'? I also think that the country's mentality fosters the existence of such conflicts of interest",* which can be attributed to the fact that: *"Often, NGOs are created because people think that you do everything yourself: husband is a manager, wife is a financial manager, and vice versa".*

Respondent A1 added that people are afraid of this policy for some reason, which is also negative for them as a donor organization. Respondent A2 stated that nepotistic cases constitute 70% at NGO level, mainly because of the density of kin population in smaller areas like village, rural communities compared to the capital.

"There are many schemes, thanks to our experience (laughs). *As report recipients, we see that people's fantasy is unlimited. Starting from the point, that children and parents have different last names, they buy things from each other and then write off the items".*

Furthermore, a mixture of public with private is common:

"For example, manager has a canteen, and he should not use it through grant money".

As a possible solution arising out of the inevitability of nepotism, Respondent A2 found a flexible approach on the grassroots level:

> *"Being a donor organization, we tell them: it's not a qualitative characteristic. We are simply bound to provide transparency. And if you perform a good job with your mom, brother or husband, please do, if it doesn't contradict the program goals, your project goals - we are fully supporting it. You are strengthening the family, goal-oriented, united, but if it's at the project expense and used as a cover – it is certainly not good".*

Conflicts of interest in NGOs (as small sub-units) are the hardest to be revealed so Organization A is entirely focused on their financial reporting rather than tracking their kinship links.

Likewise in other studies, nepotism had dubious nature, labeled both as positive and negative practice because while motivating employees, strengthening their corporate spirit and level of loyalty; it can at the same time demotivate employees-outsiders, loosen their commitment, put

them under more pressure and affect impartiality of corporate decision-making (Abdalla et al. 1998, Arasli et al 2006, Ford and McLauglin 1986, Padgett and Morris 2005).

As for other important remarks from Organization A, related to the points made about clans in Chapter 3:

• At the grassroots level people do not have any idea about what are the forms for, why they should be used; forms are met with a bit of opposition. For example, if a person who visited an NGO looked like a "foreigner", people in villages who wanted to start a project reversed to Kyrgyz (assuming "foreigner" will not understand). On such occasions people openly expressed concerns among each other over filling this form, e.g. that their familial activity "would not work" etc.

• But, on the contrary, there were cases in rural areas where project participants asked the organization to apply the procedure of conflict of interest, because they felt pressured to use grant money for the family purposes by their relatives.

As could be inferred from the above, Kyrgyzstan as a small state cannot escape nepotism in organizational practices, as "establishing professionalism and institutionalization are quite difficult in these workplaces…since employees tend either to be related or to know each other personally" similar to Arabic cultures in small states (Arasli and Tumer, 2008:1238). Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter 3, the general picture of Kyrgyzstan should be always conceived from two perspectives: formal and informal. With regard to nepotism, legal framework on the national level covers non-commercial organizations, specifying the conflict of interest and how it should be resolved.[8] Citing official reports and statistics, Engvall stresses that de jure, "Kyrgyzstan's leaders have created institutions and organizations that are consistent with international conceptions of modern statehood and the formal trappings of industrialized democracies. In comparison to the other countries in Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan has generally been given a favorable assessment regarding market economic reforms, political liberalization and the extensiveness of the legal framework" (2011:13). The culture, mentality and informal practices as can be seen in examples from Organization A, depict the realities that recruitment officers have to face in one way or another.

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[8] see Law No. 111 "On non-commercial organizations of the Kyrgyz Republic" of 15 October 1999

The most balanced and open attitude towards nepotism was observed in Organization A. While acknowledging its positive and negative sides, workers seemed to have a clear view on Kyrgyz society realities based on the work observations and situations. Their position was not to "fight it" but rather keep it in track to avoid grave violations or abuses leading to financial losses of organization. The interviews with Organization A provided the most "spontaneous, rich, specific, and relevant answers" with informants being very involved and contributive, and interviews in general, being "self-communicating" – serving a good indication of quality according to Kvale (1996: 145).

In Organization B, Respondent B1 shared that attempts to violate the policy exist: "*To be honest, we are all people and there are cases when someone tries to get involved in the process. But our system is good because of the transparency principle that we try to fully comply with,"*…and after describing a multi-stage recruitment process involving many people, added: *"Ideally, in theory, it should eliminate any conflict of interest".* However, Respondent B1 did not see it as a problem, as: *"Normally, people working here know about these rules and procedures",* and could not name any cases when people were trying to get a job through their relatives. They have relatives working together as cousins, *"not reporting to one another, of course. Spouses can work here, only if there is no conflict of interest".*
When talking about the internal electronic database, however, Respondent B1 pointed on the issue that it is impossible to identify a person's kinship links by his/her last name, as *"...in Kyrgyzstan there are often many different last names in one family. So in this case we cannot track. However, this is entirely worker's responsibility, if such information will be accidentally found out. But I think it's hard to conceal such information".* The issue with nepotism is said to be taken very seriously, equivalent to a fraud and leading to the dismissal of the worker. This difficulty to track kinship links was also the major concern during the Soviet times' bureaucracy and elections to the Communist party as demonstrated in Chapter 2 that was countered by rotation of local cadres.

Similar to A, respondents from Organization B, reported that conflict of interest policy was simpler years ago, but situation changed with time. From the discussion it could be inferred that as more people became involved in the process of receiving grants, opening NGOs or applying for main office positions – more the upper management of organizations seemed to respond by introducing concrete measures and procedures of tracking the conflicts of interest.

"There haven't been any conflicts of interest for a long time, but recently it became massive. Because life changes, and even if person concealed it before, it will eventually become evident, because our system allows to track grant history of organizations. For example, in grants, we can see the persons involved. Our city is small, even if in the beginning people get away – the truth comes out later on. Fortunately, there is a very small number of cases like this" (Respondent A1).

While the situation was coherently explained in Organization A, other two organizations refrained from providing more than official information on the matter: which could be read as 'there is a policy and it works well'. In Organization A informants acknowledged the issue clearly and took steps to counter potential abuses through financial checks, while in Organization B it was not evident that they took similar steps to check on their grantees' financial performance. In Organization C, very short answers were given describing only one's immediate work responsibilities.

Dwivedi calls nepotism "a form of strict family obligations" in societies where primary associations are dominant (1967:248). Moreover, not resorting to nepotism or resisting to bribery may be seen as avoidance of customary citizenship. The relatives of the person in certain beneficial job position "do not consider the exploitation of a relative's official status as something bad or unethical". The ascriptive considerations are fostering the bureaucratic corruption (Ibid).

Two sets of values or two different sets of ethics often put a bureaucrat in a traditional society in the ambivalent position, observes Morris-Jones (1971:61). On example of Indian bureaucrats, he points that arising double standard influences the recruitment and selection process. While adhering publicly to the Western merit-based recruitment, they subscribe to ascription-oriented standards privately (Ibid: 62-63).
By analogy, this dilemma could be potentially faced by bureaucrats in international aid organizations in Kyrgyzstan, creating an identity crisis.

The social, economic, political and cultural environment of Kyrgyzstan influence development efforts in the country. "Bureaucratic corruption cannot be studied separately from political corruption" stresses Dwivedi (1967:253), as to hint on the deep causes of an ethical conflict. Continuing on the importance of the normative context, two perspectives are worth to be mentioned again in line with Chapter 3: individualist and collectivist. Levi and Sherman (1997) stressed that in the former, bureaucrats should be insulated from the demands

of powerful governmental officials and societal actors; rational actor behavior is guiding the compliance with institutional mechanisms of checks and balances, underlying the autonomy of the individual (Olsen 2007:28). This might prove to be difficult in the collectivist societies, where "formally organized institutions of government are not epiphenomena of social and economic forces or individual preferences" (Ibid). This can lead to a greater degree of abuse of the public office positions, especially in societies with an extended family circle as a strong social nucleus.

Another perspective on the issue could be brought in on example of the foreign aid bureaucracy machine itself. William Easterly reviewed and analyzed the foreign aid bureaucracy and how much confusion and inefficiency it actually brings, by reviewing foreign aid de jure and de facto, points that the "reorganizations" of aid agencies happen in order to continuously justify flow of resources to the poor countries (2002:15). Notably, more detailed measures and procedures guiding the conflict of interest were introduced after the reorganization that took place in Organizations A and B around five years ago. They incurred changes in the office leadership and some key staff and were a part of the broader reorganization in those organizations. This instrument of reorganizing aid agencies makes programs nominally "new and improved", however aid bureaucracies put little focus on the ex-post evaluation. Easterly argues that "the environment that created aid bureaucracies led those organizations to…put enormous demands on scarce administrative skills in poor countries" (Ibid).

Informants also made clear that proper financial reports matter the most to the donors. Such misplacement of the accent from the actual service delivered to the money disbursed was underlined by Easterly. Aid bureaucracy is seen as something artificial and inept to deal with real problems in poor countries, staying "remarkably persistent" despite numerous reforms throughout its fifty year history (Ibid: 5). Putting emphasis on the outputs and 'reportable' successes – the foreign aid bureaucracy spins in self-creating circles. Citing Pritchett and Woolcock (2002), Easterly adds that classic top-down bureaucracies such as aid agencies tend to favor "highly visible" top-down bureaucracies to deliver services in poor countries, even without conditions for creation of such (Ibid:10).

Hofstede in analyzing 'intercultural encounters' or cultural differences in international organizations pointed that "Western political axioms cannot be applied to non-Western countries and are not helpful as global guidelines"(2010: 414). He further stresses that

confederations such as the United Nations should not have a dominant national culture, but the problem lies in the daily operations of such organizations in which "people are supposed to represent not their countries but the organizations as such" – as demonstrated by stories of the informants (Ibid: 415). The main challenge in international aid organizations is the local adaptation of different cultures and establishment of shared practices. As pointed in the sub-section 5.3 above when it comes to the recruitment – officers modify the terms of reference to meet local realities, they simplify some procedures, work with local population on the shared terms and meanings. It can be seen that the work is done towards emerging mutual understanding. Referring to the Chapter 3, differences in nationality within international organizations affect the *process* and the *content* of the organization's work including bureaucracy functions (Ibid: 416).

Reflecting on the role of bureaucracy in the international development started in the Chapter 3, the findings of this study point at the continuous rediscovery of Weber's analysis of bureaucratic organization. Most importantly, such rediscovery covers: a) including bureaucracy as an institution and not only an instrument, b) consider case-studies in their time and context, c) take into account the political and normative order bureaucracy is part of (Olsen 2005:19). Olsen stresses that bureaucratic organization is not a panacea to all challenges of public administration, but rather a part of "a repertoire of overlapping, supplementary, and competing forms" referring mainly to contemporary democracies (Ibid: 1).

As underlined by Hofstede, the existence of cultural mental programs were not duly addressed in the practice of the countries' development, while the only mental programs used in development planning were those of the donors (2010:417). As can be inferred from the Chapter 3, intercultural cooperation needs a necessary component of local adaptation. This can be observed to the greatest extent as portrayed in Organization A. Organization B and C in comparison, put emphasis rather on the formal practices and policies. They claim that the recruitment is formally insulated from any attempts of discrimination based on kinship.

5.6 Working in international organizations
On example of sub-Saharan Africa and other poor countries around the world, Kolstad et al. (2008) stressed that anthropology provides key understanding of socio-cultural norms;

strategies of living employed by people; and link of these norms to broader issues like corruption. He underlines the role of informal practices embedded in social life such as social networks and exchange as a mean to cover social and material needs and issues they create when public and private spheres merge as a result. Socio-cultural norms are never still, changing alongside the economic and political transformations – but prone to direct external-led change (Ibid).

In Kyrgyzstan, clan networks have penetrated the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government (Collins 2002:146). Despite the efforts of the Soviet administration, clan links survived collectivization era and found their way into the Soviet nomenklatura elections, as identity of clan members was difficult to track down and appointment of close relatives in different positions was practiced by political elites during the Soviet times and is practiced still (Temirkulov 2004:94, 97). As one can infer, bureaucratic 'ideal' recruitment was not the case in the public administration sector.

Issue of nepotism is quite politicized in Kyrgyzstan. Temirkulov draws on many examples of how the legislative branch of power (parliament and local administrations) in Kyrgyzstan becomes "a real battlefield" for many clan networks (2004:96). Covert and less transparent institutions of power abuse require more empirical analysis, one of such being – personnel policy in state institutions (Ibid: 97). Open competition for positions is thus limited, this practice being widely applied in lucrative institutions such as "customs, fiscal administrations, and car-inspection" (Ibid). The problem of nepotism is thus closely linked to a problem of corruption. Elements of nepotism are used as triggers for corrupt practices. Temirkulov calls personnel selection in state bodies - "an area where nepotism flourishes most actively" (2007:15).

It was important to include this dimension in the research to let informants express their opinions. Their answers could provide indirect information on the awareness about the issue of nepotism as Kyrgyz citizens. My assumption was that they worked in different settings – not only international organizations - in Kyrgyzstan, so I asked them to tell do they like their current job, why, what was their previous work experience, and in what ways was it different (only information related to theoretical and conceptual research framework is provided below).

All respondents shared opinions on their previous work experiences that took place in Kyrgyzstan. Respondent A1 had worked in a well-known multinational business before. She finds her current job challenging as interests of both employee and employer should be balanced, which involves many potentially conflictuous situations. Respondent C1 shared that would never work for the government because of the corruption (giving example of a close person working there).

Informants from Organization B shared that their international office experience is very interesting, an excellent school and a prestigious place to work in. They noted a very high level of bureaucratization that they had to adjust to and a 'humane' approach: *"...we have very complex and rightful procedures. It requires a long time for a person to familiarize and get used to them"* (Respondent B1), and *"I like that the human being as such is respected here, human rights are respected. If we have a right for a leave – we use it, if we have a right for a maternity leave – we use it. No one hold us and keeps us at work in late hours against our will. As I said it's an excellent school. So once people leave this place – leave it trained, accustomed, and cultivated as cadres"* (Respondent B2).

They shared positive experience about staff trainings: *"Work is interesting because there is a strong theoretical base in organization. We always have some policies, especially lately: our management changed recently and they try to modernize the Human Resources department itself, regularly issuing some documents, policies; it is quite interesting. There are opportunities to attend various trainings, both online and real trips"* (Respondent B1).

Respondents acknowledged the existing differences between private, public and international aid work settings. They see their current work places as more just, fair and transparent environments with many opportunities for personal and professional development.

Provided the theoretical framework on the pervasive nature of clans in Central Asia, one could compare international organizations with the Soviet bureaucracy. Comparison here is narrowed down strictly to two aspects, namely: ideological influence and financial aid. The organizational similarity is strictly coordinating involvement of the upper management in the region as country directors, with Kyrgyz nationals appointed to all other positions in the hierarchy (including public agencies). The point of comparison is to demonstrate that international organizations represent hierarchical structures providing subsidies on the national level, through local government. While being distanced with headquarters overseas,

international organizations in many ways depend on the local staff to implement its budgets. This similarly could involve clan elites as the means of distributing resources as during the Soviet chronology. Since clan is an extended network both vertically and horizontally – international organizations in the small republic cannot be the exception from the rule. They also represent part of this network simply by employing Kyrgyz nationals. In the same manner, international organizations as the Soviet bureaucracy are aware of this feature, and the detailed procedure (improved with time as reported by informants) of listing all your relatives and keeping them in internal databases can be seen as external measure to keep the awareness high.

5.7 Reflections

In order to avoid arbitrary interpretations, the interview main categories were explicitly connected to the theoretical framework and follow-up questions traced the meaning informants put into their statements (Kvale 1996:212). Therefore, the interpretations represent a weighted balance between the three contexts of interpretation: self-understanding, critical commonsense understanding and theoretical understanding as put by Kvale (Ibid:214).

As for the quality of interviews, the highest degree of openness and cooperation was observed in Organization A, followed by B and C.

Organization C remained the most covert in terms of information sharing. It could entail different interpretations. Informants for some reason seemed quite wary about interview from the beginning. Many interpretations could be given to explain that, but it would be impossible to test them since my contact with this organization was limited. One of their informants asked me to send my thesis for familiarization and asked what a conflict of interest policy was about. Coupled with general attitude of closeness and suspicion demonstrated in Organization C, one could infer that informants were reluctant to discuss the matter. I do not know whether it was the common attitude towards all external researchers or surveys, or the reaction to this topic of study. In comparison, the other two international organizations showed more transparency and cooperation. From the point of personal communication, informants from Organization C seemed less professional in the way they treated researcher, by showing open suspicion and being very tense as if the research posed some danger. The questions, however, were impersonal, covering organizational ethics and directly linked to the job responsibilities of informants. While acknowledging existence of corruption in government agencies,

respondents from Organization C refrained to comment on nepotism as an issue in their organizations on project level, as in Organization A.

Kyrgyzstan went through different stages of state-building with the Soviet bureaucratic model as the point for departure towards the present model which can be associated with the 'shadow state', where there is a formal institutional/organizational façade and informal private networks as real authority wielders (Engvall 2011:30). As could be observed from the study, the bureaucracy brought by international aid organizations represents "a state within a state" so to say. While constituting the substantial part of the public financing share, international aid organizations carry the accountability frameworks with clear, at least formally, characteristics of the Weberian bureaucracy.

Chapter 6. Summary and conclusion

This thesis aimed at exploring the level of awareness about nepotism in recruitment policies and practices of three international aid organizations in Kyrgyzstan. The research question was: **to what extent have a selected number of international aid organizations in Kyrgyzstan developed awareness about nepotism as a possible challenge, reflected in their recruitment policies, in design and implementation?**

The semi-structured interviews were conducted with staff members directly or indirectly involved in overviewing and implementing the recruitment process. The issue of nepotism was approached from the socio-anthropological perspective with clanism as a central cultural feature of the Kyrgyz society. The development context and international donor organizations in particular were approached with Weber's model of 'ideal-type' bureaucracy. The analytical discussion emphasized the role of cultural dynamics in the development, with individualist vs. collectivist normative contexts as the main divide.

All organizations reported to abide by the meritocratic principle of an 'ideal' recruitment. All informants stressed professional skills and work experience as their main selection criteria. However, finding qualified staff for specific positions was amongst the major concerns in all organizations due to the contradictory nature of requirements by international organizations put in the context of the Kyrgyz labor market. The terms of reference generally proclaim a Western type of education (Bachelor's or Master's degrees), good knowledge of English language and substantial project experience. In reality organizations have to modify these requirements to be able to attract specialists with Soviet/post-Soviet type of education, out-of-project work experience and below-the-requested levels of English fluency.

The anti-nepotism policy exists in all of the organizations and is called a "conflict of interest policy": all employees have to fill related form and indicate places where their closest relatives currently work, and that they will not have a conflict of interest when entering the job. While the form existed since organizations were established in Kyrgyzstan, over time some changes and reforms were brought to it, making it a more detailed bureaucratic procedure in Organization A with stricter monitoring mechanisms. Two organizations (A and B) have internal databases containing all full names of interrelated persons, which allows to keep a record of the 'flow' of relatives in the workplaces and elicit conflicts of interest.

Informants stressed that it is an entire responsibility of job applicants to indicate their relatives.

All international aid organizations in Kyrgyzstan cooperate closely with national agencies: ministries, local administration units and other state bodies, which are generally reported to lack equal opportunity for job applicants.

It appeared that the recruitment for the positions in the main offices of international organizations in Bishkek (the capital) has a stricter control mechanism according to informants. The units such as NGOs can potentially be more prone to nepotism, because of decentralized nature of recruitment. When the grants are given to NGOs who operate autonomously in their local environments (villages, towns), nepotism can occur in sub-contracting or short-term jobs for the project – making it less likely to be tracked.

The awareness on the nepotism was high in Organizations A and B, reflected accordingly in their recruitment policies and practical examples. It could also be inferred that a greater bureaucratic transparency exists in the main offices of Organizations A and B. Informants from Organization A saw nepotism as an unavoidable feature in rural areas with less likely occurrence in the capital city, and underlined the positive role of bureaucracy in keeping the conflicts of interest under control. Informants from Organizations B and C did not see nepotism as a challenge: the former – due to the strong procedural control; the latter did not recognize it as a part of their organization. The level of cooperation from Organization C and several controversial statements from its informants could be interpreted as existence of nepotism on higher hierarchical levels, which made this case a closed and non-approachable one. No additional empirical information was provided in Organization C, although the policy was reported to be there.

The study presented some contrasting examples of cooperation and openness toward nepotism as a research topic. The open attitude in the most cooperative organizations could be attributed to their major reorganizations taking effect several years ago.

Kragh suggested four managerial approaches toward nepotism in organizations with regard to developing countries: "managers can accept nepotistic ambiguity; they can attempt to strengthen the modern organization; they can use the tribal and peasant norms underlying

nepotism as the basic principle of the organization; or they can codify the preindustrial norms and make them part of the formal organization" (2012: 247). The general approach suggested by this scholar is to increase transparency on the cultural causes of this phenomenon, by changing the attitudes and omitting the stigma (as in Western organizational culture).

International organizations break in or interrupt the internal rhythm of clan social organization with the formal practices and norms built on the foundations of egalitarianism and individualism first of all. On a daily basis, these ideological 'tensions' can manifest in mocking of 'conflict of interest' standard policy by rural grantees in villages where everyone is your relative (see Chapter 5). But the dialogue is very important. As stressed by Hofstede, "public and nongovernmental organizations that span national boundaries depend, for their functioning, entirely on intercultural communication and cooperation" (2010:415).

Collins stresses that a society's role in democratization was traditionally analyzed through class, parties and labor – types of formal social organizations that are simply irrelevant in Central Asia since independence (2006:10). In Central Asia, states and nations remain weak as state formation was delayed until the late twentieth century. This and shortage economy had only reinforced clan organization (Ibid: 330). The prospects for the post-Soviet Central Asia on the breakdown of clans varies from country to country; economic development and the rise of an individualist and market economy may be more likely "to transform clan identities and clan politics than the factors that were central to the decline of clans in the West European context" (Collins 2005:48).

The Weberian bureaucracy was provided as a model to reflect on the holistic visions prescribing a single dominant model. Development models were long sought to be a part of the global economic history and bearers of a certain cultural heritage including values and norms. However, the many contexts specific to a region, country, history and culture have added a contrasting story of a merge of different values and norms (Olsen 2007:25). While none of these norms can be called superior, in technical terms bureaucratic form of organization dominates the development scene causing many ups and downs along the way.
As for the case of Kyrgyzstan, a small country with a unique history of social organization, nepotism cannot be labelled as such and has to be approached through value-neutral lenses. As stated by one of the informants, clanism has to be accepted as a core of Kyrgyz society and combined with project goals in a mutually beneficial way. International organizations

have already played a role of uniting the differences: nepotism in its pure form is not possible in these organizations unlike in government of private sectors as shown above. Paradoxically, these workplaces can present opportunities for professionals in Kyrgyzstan who would not be otherwise accepted for a job due to the lack of right connections in other spheres. They contributed to the technical and bureaucratic advancement of many people: project/program staff attends trainings/workshops to increase their knowledge on management, team work, and other important parts of corporate values; at the same time there are trainings for the narrow specialists with exchange trips to the countries which can provide hands-on experience on certain aspects of their project work. Or at least, this was the formal picture obtained during the fieldwork. Meanwhile, cultural dynamics remains a big part of the working process in a development projects in Kyrgyzstan as shown by the research.

Hofstede calls *awareness* as the first step in the intercultural communication, followed by knowledge and skills (2010:419). Flexibility of approaches in intercultural cooperation represents an entire dimension to be studied, as various cultural contexts represent case-studies for organizational practices. As a result of intercultural encounters, the history of development is growing with new themes for research, in line with the constant rediscovery of bureaucracy as a concept. As reflected on the role of culture in development by Amartya Sen: "There is no particular "compulsion" either to preserve departing life styles, or alternatively, to adopt the newest fashion from abroad, but there is a need for people to be able to take part in these social decisions…There are institutional demands for cultural democracy" (2004:20).

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