



Save park Ata-Turk

Green park- green town

Background information:

Bishkek is a capital city of Kyrgyzstan with one to one and half million inhabitants. Park Ata-Turk is one of the biggest parks located in the southern part of the city. Unfortunately due to mismanagement of the park and flourishing corruption in the country some parts of park were destroyed and land was given away for construction of buildings and houses. People started to really worry about the situation when they noticed that trees were being burnt at night and park was getting smaller at much faster speed. So the initiative group was finally created to take some action in protection of the park.



I joined the initiative group to lead all these activities. Initiative group consisted of about 10 to 15 people, mostly young people and residents who live nearby the Park. In this group, I was mainly responsible for providing “legal” support to the project, i.e., mostly drafting appeal letters and maintaining communication with government authorities.



Illegal construction on the land of the park

Objectives:

1. To consolidate group of active people (mostly city residents) who are indifferent to this issue in protecting the Park;
2. To draw people's attention to this problem through disseminating worrying information about the Park through local mass media and local internet forums;
3. To appeal to relevant state authorities requesting to take adequate and effective measures in ending the current destruction of the trees and ensuring the proper protection of the Park;
4. To conduct major clean up of the Park from garbage and plant new trees.

Activities undertaken:

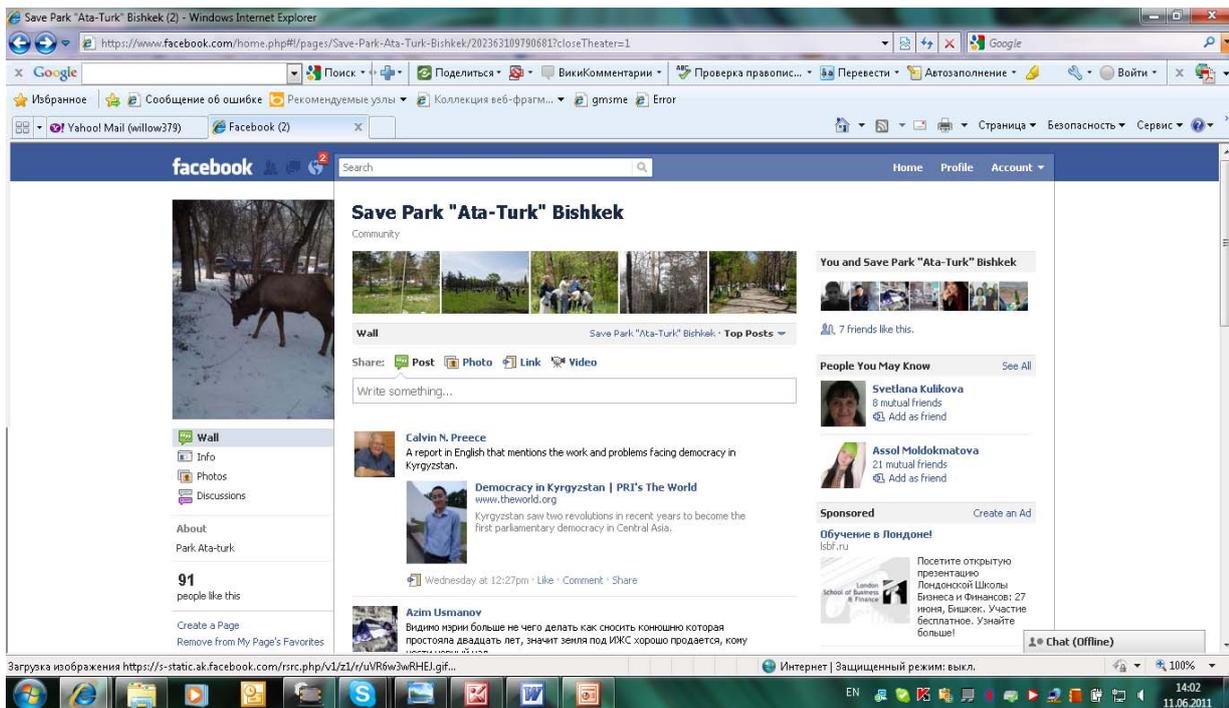


Tree planting: On 19 March we organized first major clean up of the Park and planted some trees that were brought by volunteers. About 50 people participated in the event. Some journalists also came to this event and this is how this issue received attention in the local media. Afterwards we divided into groups of 5-6 people to come every Saturday till the end of April to continue planting the trees and collect garbage. All together around 100 new trees were planted.

Letter writing: We wrote several open appeal letters/petitions to the President's office, to Members of the Parliament, Mayor's office and other government authorities. Around 400 people signed the petition. Some parliament members responded to our letters and we had a personal meeting with one of them on 1 April. During the meeting we asked the Parliament to conduct special investigation on this issue.

Raising awareness:

- The major platform for raising awareness and provoking discussion was local internet forum: dizel.elcat.kg
- Facebook page was created to post announcements, developments on the case, news, some pictures: Save Ata-Turk Park Bishkek – you are welcome to visit it ☺
- Local mass media: we invited journalists to a major clean up and tree planting activity
- Disseminated information through friends and colleagues



Everyone is welcome to visit facebook page created for this issue, it is called Save “Ata-Turk Park” Bishkek.

Accomplishments:

1. Planted around 100 trees and conducted several clean ups of the Park
2. General Prosecutor’s Office initiated criminal proceedings against some public officials who were engaged in corruption scheme: <http://eng.24.kg/bishkek24/2011/04/18/17600.html> (*this is a link to the news in English language*)
3. The issue has received broad coverage in local media and city Mayor promised in one of the TV shows to pay special attention to this case and take all measures to protect the Park: e.g. <http://eng.24.kg/bishkek24/2011/03/14/16831.html> (*article in English written by local journalist addressing the problem*); <http://www.theworld.org/2011/06/kyrgyzstan-democracy/>
4. Finally we managed to prevent further shrinkage of the Park by planting new trees

Challenges:

- No adequate response from state authorities: In our appeal letters to state authorities we asked number of concrete questions about the park such as the size or borders of the park, responsible agency for keeping it safe and clean, activities that have been undertaken in all these years in maintaining the park, information about the flora and fauna etc. However, we did not get adequate response to our questions. The state authorities failed to answer our questions and did not provide us with requested information.
- Confusion around the park: Too many interests are involved in this Park, too many people all of a sudden made statements and complaints about this situation. Some of those people do not relate to the initiative group on saving the Ata-Turk Park, e.g. there are some people who want to protect their small business located nearby the park (small shops) that were planned to be removed by construction companies, another group complained that city authorities want to remove another small entertainment facility located on some part of the Park. All these

conflicting groups create confusion around the park and the situation in general. So it is challenging to differentiate ourselves from other groups around this issue.

- Leaders of the initiative group are leaving – it is not clear, who will continue to guard the Park