Prague Speech, 10.03.2010

Hello, my name is Alexey Sidorenko.I work as an editor at Global Voices Online. I’m here because of the Help Map.ru, an online Ushahidi-based project dedicated to wildfire management in Russia.

How it all started? After a month of unusually hot weather the wildfires broke out simultaneously in many parts of Russia. Combined with the degraded system of wildfire protection, and the inability of the government to fully cope with the disaster bloggers started to create online solutions for coordinating wildfire management. First there were messageboards, then LiveJournal communities, then 2 bloggers, among them Gregory Asmolov have thought of using Ushahidi, a free platform for mapping crowdsourced information.

On August 1, 2010 Gregory wrote me: “Hey take a look at Haiti Ushahidi, can we do something like this?”

My first reaction was quite skeptical: “No, it would take us at least a month to make it work.” Gregory, however, insisted on me taking a look at the platform. After taking a second look I said, well, we can actually start it pretty fast. Then, as we did it, it became clear that it could actually work!

So, shortly after registering a domain, installing the system we figured out that we needed help and we needed it urgently. So I published an announcement saying we need moderators to process the reports, designers for the logo, programmers to kill bugs, and so on and on. About a hundred people replied that they want to help. After some time passed the group of 10-20 people had been formed.

What was our mission? Well, first of all, to organize information chaos that was in the Internet at that time (I’m not even speaking about TV – hesitated to acknowledge the scale of the problem). And that’s what we did: copying messages from all possible sources – blogs, communities, message boards.

The first week was dedicated only to this. Then Gregory suggested that we need to extend. Organizing information isn’t enough, we need to connect people, bridge those who want to help and those who need to help. This way we organized the Coordination center.

[Glafira]

Help Map became the first implementation of Ushahidi in Russia. The idea of crowdsourced mapping all kinds of things became so catching that now you can find projects that map illegal casinos (you can use the tool for various reasons ;) ) to police brutality.

These projects live and die, some, however, those projects that have one feature in common is the community behind them. The tools can be various. The most important are the people and their vision of what these tools can do.