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●公園に登場した「インターネット・オブ・シングス」

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「インターネット・オブ・シングス (IOT)」が普及した将来はコーヒーメーカーから暖房器具、食洗機、ドアから公共輸送機関に至るまでのありとあらゆるものがネット接続されるようになり、このような世界では街の機能も改善され、市民の携帯電話の GPS データから交通パターンを割り出し、渋滞を緩和するといったことも可能になると期待されている。

シスコは 2020 年までにはインターネットに接続される「シングス」が 500 億台を超えると予想する。

だが現状を見るとその認知度はまだまだ低い。この状況を変え、堅実に 1 つずつ「スマート」な都市を作ることを目指すのが MIT メディアラボから派生した新興企業、チェンジング・エンバイロメント。同社が先頃発表した「Soofa」は太陽電池を備え、ネットに接続された公園のベンチで、USB で携帯電話やタブレットなど充電することもできる。

先月、ホワイトハウスで公開された同製品はすでにボストン市内やその周辺で 10 台以上が設置されているとのこと。同社は現在 100 台ほどのベンチを出荷できる状態で、今後は欧州、アジアへの進出も計画している。

このベンチの特長は USB 充電できることだけではなく、ネット接続を活かして騒音レベルや大気の質といった環境データを Soofa ウェブサイトにアップロードできること。このようなデータをスマート都市の実現に活かすことこそが IOT としての真骨頂となる。

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(参考) 本件報道記事

Your park bench may be connected ; 'The Internet of Things' is starting to trickle down

Tyler Wells Lynch, Reviewedcom

Soon enough, everything from espresso machines to city transit systems will be connected. Traditionally "dumb" objects, such as doors, heaters and dishwashers, will come online, much as computers did with the advent of the internet.

The implications are huge. Cities will be smarter, using the GPS data from your phone to coordinate traffic patterns and ease congestion. Homes will be automated, with thermostats that respond to your presence and fridges that know when you're out of milk.

At least, that's the promise of the "Internet of Things."

Cisco predicts that by 2020, the number of "things" connected to the Internet will exceed 50 billion. Others feel that estimate is modest. But whatever the reality may be in 2020, here in 2014, progress is slow. Most people have only heard of the Internet of Things in passing, and couldn't describe it if you asked them.

But one Cambridge start-up is fed up with all the talk and wants to start building these smart cities we've always dreamed of, one "thing" at a time.

Changing Environments, an offshoot of MIT's famed Media Lab, recently released the Soofa -- a smarter take on the age-old park bench. It's a connected, solar-powered bench that can charge any USB-connected device. iPhones, Android tablets, Kindles and even digital cameras are all welcome. The only caveat is that users have to bring their own cables.

The first Soofa was unveiled at the White House last month, and since then more than a dozen have been planted in and around Boston, with each averaging about 17 charges per day. Changing Environments has roughly 100 more benches ready to go, and has its sights set on Europe and Asia as well.

But the ability to charge your phone from a solar-powered park bench is just the tip of the iceberg. Soofa's promise -- and the reason it's seen as an early, real-world example of the Internet of Things -- is its connectivity.

Each of the high-tech benches connects wirelessly to the Internet to upload environmental data (like noise levels and air quality) directly to Soofa's website. "We can measure how much solar power is generated, exactly how much shadow falls on the panels, and how many people are charging per day," Soofa co-founder Sandra Richter told us.

All that information is what drives -- or will drive -- the Internet of Things. The ability to accumulate environmental data and remotely translate it into useful information is the backbone of the smart city concept. And Richter thinks it's about time we start taking that concept seriously -- not just in Boston, but everywhere.

"There's no smart infrastructure in the city at the moment," she says, adding that smart traffic lights and even solar-powered trash compactors are notable but hardly transformative. "(Soofa) is a first step in terms of smart urban

furniture."

This initial stage is critical to the success of Soofa, smart home gadgets, and ultimately, the entire Internet of Things. It's about discovering what people really want from these smart devices.

"It's also just an exploration platform to see what sensors make sense, what people really want to know, and how can we make it as social as possible so that it's actually meaningful to people," Richter adds.

Soofa has the backing of big names such as Cisco, Verizon and MIT, but it's still just one "thing" in a vast urban ecosystem of dumb, disconnected devices. Even trying to conceptualize the vast infrastructural changes needed to make the smart city concept a reality is overwhelming. But that's why early innovators like Soofa are so important.

"I think that it's time that we stopped talking about the Internet of Things and just do it," Richter says. "For us, this is a first step toward connectivity that makes sense."

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