

Alejandro Aravena: Re-materializing Construction? Labels and videos

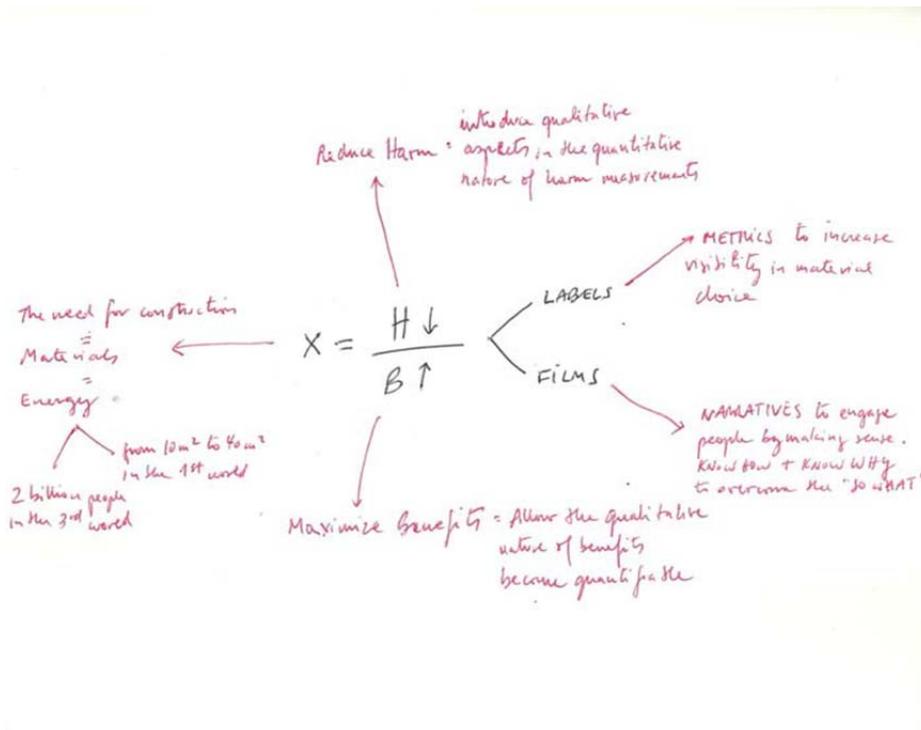
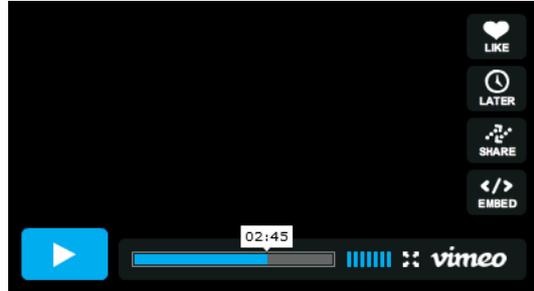
The need to build is overwhelming. In the developed world, built space has grown from 10m² per person in 1900 to 40m² per person nowadays. In the developing world, 2 billion people will need to be accommodated in cities by 2030. Both of these will require materials, a lot of them. And materials will in turn require energy to be produced, transported and assembled. This is a fact; it will happen whether we want it or not.

Therefore, it is desirable that we reduce the harm and simultaneously maximize the benefits that this need for construction will inevitably produce for our societies and our environments. How do we choose a building material that reduces harm, or one that maximizes the benefits?

In order to reduce harm, we have to start by introducing more qualitative aspects into a field that tends to focus only on the quantitative aspects of a material's negative environmental impact. Given that the reduction of harm uses the "weak force of responsibility," introducing soft data may allow the real complexity of sustainability to become more evident in measuring one material against another.

In order to maximize benefits, we have to find a way for qualitative benefits to become more quantifiable. Given that maximizing benefits follows the "strong force of desire", introducing indices and rankings may allow material choices to become comparable and therefore more mainstream (objective).

There are two ways to allow for more conscious material choices: people choose either what can be easily compared or what makes sense. In order to tackle the first option, one could think of introducing labels that make "energy facts" visible. The same way the food industry has standardized nutritional facts, materials should have metrics that specify carbon footprint, watts used in production, or tons of CO² emitted from source to the sales point, in order to make them comparable. In order to deal with the second option, consumers, professionals, and clients should have access to know-why from the construction industry in addition to the know-how. In both instances, the narrative is critical in allowing people to overcome the "so what" question: perhaps they may come in the form of short films.



What is the problem (X)?