Philippe Block: How to make sustainability sexy?

The Roundtable made entirely clear to me that some of the largest challenges to building (our cities) better are not necessarily the development of novel and appropriate technologies and solutions, or improved strategies, policies and measures, but rather finding competitive, transferrable, attractive and safe mechanisms to getting them implemented.

Competitive
In most situations, a sensible, i.e. sustainable, solution is not necessarily the cheapest option. How can we make the non-financial benefits measurable, tangible, accountable, and exposed? Are the benefits even measurable? Furthermore, do we have numbers to compare (cf. John Ochsendorf's "How much does your building weigh?") and what should be considered? Do we need to develop metrics or ratings? These are prone to being misused.

Transferrable
Iconic or exemplar buildings will indeed be important sources of inspiration and references for architects and engineers, but what about the 95% of the world that builds without using an architect or engineer, those who are not exposed to this knowledge? How can these people, who clearly have a tremendous impact on the built, and by extension overall, environment, be made aware of improvements that make a difference?

Attractive
Is it sufficient to try to argue for other measures than cost? Should we not develop exciting sustainable design solutions despite the fact that they might be more expensive? What can trigger people to want it?

Safe
Pushing the limits and leading by example bring with it the danger that concepts are not properly implemented in future imitations. Particularly for structural innovations, efforts need to be made to develop strategies to provide safe technology transfer and sustainable capacity building for those who want to follow but do not have the means, background or capacity.

New urban low-cost housing in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, copies our building methods. For this, practically all materials need to be imported and are thus expensive and polluting. New (non-reused) Eucalyptus wood is used in an unsustainable manner as falsework.