

Navigate the new normal for your industry at TNW Couch Conferences

(Best of 2019) Chinese vertical dramas made for phone viewing show the future of mobile video

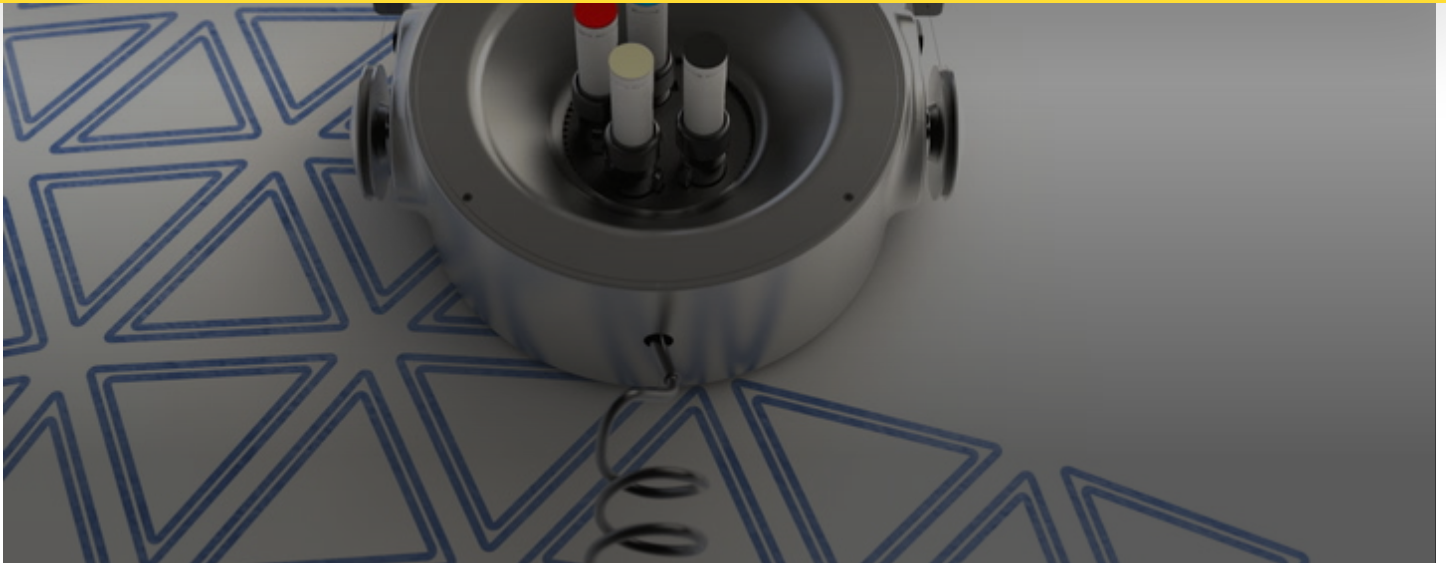
by HENRY SUNG — 9 months ago in WORLD



Mobile video is a big deal, but you don't need me to tell you that. Big Tech has been fast-moving into the mobile video space for a [few years now](#), and recently a slew of mobile-specific content has arrived.

Instagram launched IGTV in 2018, and is pushing creators to [explore what's possible](#) for mobile video. Netflix introduced vertical [30-second previews](#), and is now experimenting with mobile-first features like [vibrating movies](#). Spotify is releasing [vertical music videos](#). Snap is delivering plenty of premium mobile video content with its [Snap Originals](#), and has [more on the way](#).

Navigate the new normal for your industry at TNW Couch Conferences



TNW Couch Conferences

Join online workshops & real-time discussions on navigating the year ahead

[REGISTER NOW](#)

But compared to traditional videos which have been around [since 1895](#), mobile video is still a newborn baby. And for new parents, a good way to learn parenting is to look at what others are doing. On that note, mobile video producers should direct their attention to a format Chinese media companies have been experimenting with: the vertical drama (短视频; *shùpíngjù*).

Navigate the new normal for your industry at TNW Couch Conferences

[Sister](#) (我的男友力姐姐; *Wǒ de nányǒulì jiějiě*) and [My Idiot Boyfriend](#) (我的二货男友; *Wǒ de èr huò nányǒu*).

Soon after, iQiyi, a production company under the other Chinese giant Baidu, released the slice-of-life sitcom [Ugh! Life!](#) (生活对我下手了; *Shēnghuó duì wǒ xiàshǒule*) in the same year. Its sister series [Arg Director](#) (导演对我下手了; *Dǎoyǎn duì wǒ xiàshǒule*), a sketch comedy show exploring the genre tropes from Chinese TV, was released in 2019.

Smaller players have also entered the vertical playing field with more modestly-scaled productions. A notable example is [Mr Yan Dong! Don't Come Over](#) (严董先生别过来; *Yán dōng xiānshēng bié guòlái*), a gay romantic series produced by Manman, an app dedicated to digital comicstrips. Popular video apps like Douyin (TikTok's Chinese version) and Kuaishou have begun curating professionally produced, scripted narrative content too.

What's remarkable about vertical drama is that it's not just any scripted content cropped for a vertical aspect ratio. These shows are specifically imagined for the mobile screen from the ground up. This is evident in three features they all share.

Navigate the new normal for your industry at TNW Couch Conferences

appetite for more.

This way, not only is a viewer much more likely to finish an episode, they're more likely to finish a whole season. With the bitesize episodes being snackable AND bingeable, vertical dramas lock in the viewer's attention with the same intensity as a tub of popcorn.

In the battle for mobile audience's fragmented attention, longform content can't compete: this is the Popcorn League (Note that as the vertical format requires you to hold the phone with one hand, it's taking one hand away from the actual popcorn, thus even winning half of THAT fight).

 iQiyi's Ugh! Life!

2. Vertical is treated as a genre


The great majority of vertical dramas released so far have a comedic dimension. This is, of course, by design: comedy is a genre known for conveying gratification in short bursts, and comedies typically have an emphasis on actors' facial reactions. Both of these elements are a great fit for mobile.

Just as television has properties that suit certain content better than feature films, so does vertical mobile video. Namely, the medium is good for a lot of intense, fast-paced, and personal moments. Specific narrative devices, such as characters' internal dialogues or a very abrupt turn of events, would be awkward and out of place when used excessively in longform storytelling.

However, these devices are the typical narrative building blocks in iQiyi's sitcom *Ugh Life!*, where characters in everyday situations often find extraordinary things happening

Navigate the new normal for your industry at TNW Couch Conferences

accounted for.

 A pilot episode for the show “Cursed to be Single” (单身狗的诅咒; Dānshēn gǒu de zǔzhòu)

3. A fragmented visual language

A combination of split screens, swipes, and quick cuts dominate the visual language of the vertical drama. This is, of course, a style appropriate for the short episodes and fast comedic rhythm of these shows. But it also allows each moment on screen to contain more information. While the vertical mobile video has very limited visual space for spatial context and mise-en-scène, it compensates by literally pushing double or triple the amount of visual information into focus. This results in a visually fragmented viewing experience that is nonetheless fluid and dynamic.

We can also consider the mobile screen’s form factor. The large film screen, through its overwhelming size, attempts to immerse the cinema-goer in another world. The mobile screen, which in this sense is the opposite of film, doesn’t concern itself with immersion, but rather provides a tiny surreal portal into the universe of its content. It is this surreal distinction of the small mobile display from its real world surroundings that allows viewers to accept its supernatural visual language: faster, denser, and more information-rich than the real world can offer.

It’s important to note these elements are not particular to a Chinese context, but rather they’re particular to the vertical mobile format. If we look at the Snap Originals released recently, we can actually find traces of the same features too. Mobile video is a new medium, but video creatives on both sides of the planet are beginning to figure out the things that work.

Navigate the new normal for your industry at TNW Couch Conferences

on [Twitter](#).

CREATIVE

CONTENT (MEDIA)

CHINA

ATTENTION

MEDIA OF CHINA

DISPLAY DEVICE

AUDIENCE

MEDIA (COMMUNICATION)

SHARE ON FACEBOOK (10)

SHARE ON TWITTER (90)

How the coronavirus pandemic might make our cities more sustainable

by [THE CONVERSATION](#) — 15 hours ago in [SYNDICATION](#)



Navigate the new normal for your industry at TNW Couch Conferences

frenzy so familiar to us all. The reality of lockdown is making ghost towns of the places we once knew. Everything we know about our urban world has come to a shuddering halt. For now.

The lockdown will, at some point, end. Urban life will begin to hum again to the familiar rhythms of work, leisure and shopping. This will be a huge relief for us all. Yet our towns and cities will never be the same. Indeed, things might get worse before they get better.

But it's also the case that other crises haven't gone away. Our relatively brief lockdown won't solve longer-term [urban problems](#): dependence on fossil fuels, rising carbon emissions, poor air quality, dysfunctional housing markets, loss of biodiversity, divisions between the rich and the poor, low paid work. These are going to need our attention again.

The coronavirus crisis has offered a new perspective on these problems - and the limits of the way we have run our urban world over the last few decades. Cities are key nodes in our complex and highly connected global society, facilitating the rapid flow of people, goods and money, the rise of corporate wealth and the privatization of land, assets and basic services. This has brought gains for some through foreign travel, an abundance of consumer products, inward investment and steady economic growth.



Navigate the new normal for your industry at TNW Couch Conferences

can be left exposed with little protection.

This model has the perfect conditions for creating a crisis like coronavirus. It's also really bad at dealing with it. So something else is required to guide us into the future. The old story - in which cities compete against one another to improve their place in the global pecking order - was never great at meeting everyone's needs. But now it's looking very risky, given the need for increased cooperation and local resilience.

After coronavirus, a key question emerges: what in essence, is a city for? Is it to pursue growth, attract inward investment and compete against global rivals? Or is it to maximize quality of life for all, build local resilience and sustainability? These are not always mutually exclusive, but it's a question of regaining balance. Beyond politics and ideology, most people simply want to be safe and healthy, especially faced by future threats, be they climate, weather or virus related.

Over the last 20 years as an urban geographer, I have been learning what needs to change to make cities more sustainable, green, fair and accessible. Recently, I described this in [a book](#) alongside a [guide for civic leaders](#) on how to tackle the climate emergency. Now, the lockdown has thrown us all into a real-time laboratory full of living examples of what a more sustainable future might look like. We have a perfect opportunity to study and explore which of these could be locked in to build sustainable, and safer, cities.

This has already started. Many things have become possible in the last few weeks. In many places, rapid changes have been unleashed to control the economy, health, transport and food. We are surrounded by fragments of [progressive urban policy](#): eviction cancellations, nationalized services, free transport and healthcare, sick pay and wage guarantees. There is also a flourishing of community-based [mutual aid networks](#) as people volunteer to help the most vulnerable with daily tasks. Yesterday's radical ideas are becoming today's pragmatic choices.

We can learn a lot from these crisis-led innovations as we create more permanent urban policy choices to make life more pleasant and safer for all. Below I discuss a few key areas of city life that are currently providing some options.

Breaking car dependency

Many people around the world are currently surrounded by much quieter streets. This presents us with a huge opportunity to re-imagine and lock in a [different kind of urban mobility](#). Some cities are already doing so: Milan, for example, has announced that it will turn [35km of streets](#) over to cyclists and pedestrians after the crisis.

Navigate the new normal for your industry at TNW Couch Conferences

[up to 60%](#) between now and 2050, may be key to avoiding dangerous levels of global warming.

As I have [previously outlined](#), this reduction would address many longstanding urban policy concerns – the erosion of public space, debt, the shift to out of town retail centers and the decline of local high streets, road deaths and casualties, poor air quality and growing carbon emissions. Accessible, affordable, zero-carbon, [public transport](#) is key to supporting a less car dependent urban future.

This crisis has revealed the significant inequalities in people's ability to move about cities. In many countries, including my own (the UK), deregulation and privatization has facilitated corporate operators to run bits of the transport system in the interest of shareholders rather than users. Millions face [transport poverty](#), where they can't afford to own and run a car, and lack access to affordable mass transit options. This has taken a new twist during this crisis. For many vulnerable people, whether there is a transit system to access hospitals, food and other essential services can be a matter of life or death.

COVID-19 has also highlighted how key workers underpin our daily lives. Creating good quality affordable transport for them is therefore [crucial](#). Some awareness of this existed before coronavirus: in 2018 [one French city](#) introduced free buses, while [Luxembourg](#) made all its public transport free. But in the wake of the current crisis places across the world have been creating free transit, especially to [key workers](#) and for [vulnerable people](#).

To meet ambitious targets for emission reductions, there needs to be [a significant shift](#) away from personal car use within a decade or so. The pandemic has offered insights into how this could be achieved through limiting car use for essential uses and those with mobility issues, with affordable public transport becoming the new norm for most people in cities.

Building active travel networks across regions also makes more sense than ever. [Bikes](#) have been seen by many places as [better options](#) for getting around. Walking and cycling infrastructure can play a huge role in getting people around effectively and also [making them healthier](#).

The inadequacies of pedestrian space have also been revealed, especially for effective social distancing. To build in future resilience, there's a strong rationale for [creating generous pavements and sidewalks](#) that take space from motor vehicles. And, given there are around 6,000 pedestrians killed or seriously injured in [road accidents](#) every

Navigate the new normal for your industry at TNW Couch Conferences

Such reductions are particularly key given that worse air quality could [increase the risk of death](#) from COVID-19. Given the [health and social care costs](#) associated with dealing with poor air quality, current increases in [cleaner air](#) need to be locked in to reduce the burden on health services for the future.

Aviation has taken a hit, with [total flights](#) declining by more than half during the crisis. This offers a glimpse of the types and volumes of flying that might feel surplus to requirements in the future.

Cities will need to move quickly to lock in these lower mobility expectations, especially low car volumes, less aviation, quality affordable mass transit and active travel. We are all living the reality of simply travelling less, and shifting activity online. This is a huge opportunity to review working practices, leisure and retail habits, and argue for spending to support affordable and sustainable travel for all.

The socially useful city

We have become used to the shortcomings of the modern city economy – low paid and precarious jobs, independent businesses squeezed out by large corporations, land and resources shifting from private to public hands, growing divisions between rich and poor neighborhoods. Coronavirus has thrown many of these into stark relief.

Low earning workers, especially women, have few options but to continue working and be [exposed to infection](#), hospitals struggle for [basic equipment](#), those in higher income neighborhoods have [better spaces](#) for exercise and leisure.

But what has been most staggering about the response to the crisis is the rapid uptake of measures that only days ago would have been [unthinkable](#): mortgage and rent holidays, statutory sick pay, shifts to nationalize services especially health and transport, wage guarantees, suspending evictions, and debt cancellations. The current crisis has started to rip up ideas led by the free market.

We now seem to be revaluing what matters. Rather than being considered low skilled extras on the fringes of the economy, key workers, especially in health and food, [are being revered](#) for the role they play in supporting our wellbeing. Local shops are experiencing [renewed support](#) as they offer stronger personal connections and commitment to their community. These tendencies are an opportunity to restructure high streets and create diverse local markets which can meet community needs and build resilience to weather future crises.

Navigate the new normal for your industry at TNW Couch Conferences

tested payment to every individual as a right of citizenship. The [spanish government](#) has agreed to roll out such a scheme nationally as soon as possible, and there is [sustained interest](#) in many other places.

The idea of a minimum income guarantee is also gaining momentum; a renewed interest in the idea of a universal and unconditional safety net that can offer dignity and safety and offer options for more [sustainable living](#).

The [social economy](#) can provide further insights for refocusing city economies after coronavirus. Made up of community businesses, co-operatives and voluntary organisations, this social economy creates goods, services and employment that are more locally based, and community grounded in a [range of areas](#): renewable energy, sustainable housing, food and micro finance. They build in benefits including local employment and procurement, fairer pay, better conditions, sustainable resource use, democratic accountability, and a commitment to social justice.

Derelict buildings and [land banked](#) by large scale developers could be [redeployed by community organisations](#) to build [local resilience](#) through community farms, renewables and housing, as well as leisure, local biodiversity and carbon storage.

Navigate the new normal for your industry at TNW Couch Conferences

 Lilac Leeds, a housing cooperative. © Andy Lord, Author provided

It's also clear that parts of the economy, such as gambling and advertising corporations, bailiffs and corporate lobbyists, are less socially useful than others. There are signs of how the economy can change in positive directions. Many firms are temporarily shifting to [more socially useful production](#), making, for example, hand sanitizer, ventilators and medical wear.

These short term glimpses of a more socially useful economy should provide inspiration when considering future urban economic planning. Factories might transition to manufacturing wind turbines, e-bikes, insulation panels and heat pumps. And excess downtown corporate office space or luxury apartments could be retrofitted to support socially useful activities – key worker accommodation, libraries, creches, day centers, colleges for transition skills, and co-working spaces.

A green urban commons

Further greening of cities after coronavirus would offer real and widespread benefits. During lockdown, many people are more aware how little [green space](#) they have access

Navigate the new normal for your industry at TNW Couch Conferences

Diverse green spaces directly underpin our [emotional and psychological wellbeing](#) and offer a range of [positive effects](#) on carbon sequestration, air purification and wildlife preservation.

Neighborhood design [inspired by nature](#) can support this. Interweaving the places we live with extensive natural spaces linked to active travel opportunities can reduce car dependency, increase biodiversity and create options for meaningful leisure on our doorsteps. They can also incorporate local food production and features to cope with flooding, such as sustainable urban drainage and water gardens, further increasing future crisis resilience.

There's also a strong rationale for prioritizing street-by-street retrofit. In the event of future lockdowns during cold months, warm, low energy and well insulated homes can help reduce other problems around fuel poverty and [excess winter deaths](#).

This moment offers a real opportunity to lay the foundations for a new deal for nature and animals. This is more important now than ever. Animals and wildlife, normally in [rapid decline](#), are finding ways to [regain a foothold](#) in this respite of human activity – but they may be [further threatened](#) when lockdown comes to an end. Ways to create a more equal balance with our fellow species include [expanding habitats for wildlife](#), restoring damaged natural areas, reducing dependency on intensive animal farming as well as meat-based diets.

Navigate the new normal for your industry at TNW Couch Conferences

 Nature city: a vision. © James McKay, Author provided

In addition, [researchers](#) are starting to understand how [zoonotic diseases](#) (those transferred from animals to humans) like COVID-19 may be a hidden outcome of the global scale of human development. A recent report by the [UN Environment Programme](#) explored how the rapid growth of urban populations across the world along with reductions in pristine ecosystems, are creating opportunities for pathogens to pass between animals and people. Regenerating and protecting natural spaces could be a key part of future disease resilience.

What next?

COVID-19 clearly presents a significant juncture. There is still trauma and loss ahead. There may be market collapse and a prolonged depression. There are also tendencies towards political and corporate bodies [exploiting this crisis](#) for their own ends.

For our urban world this could mean more of the negatives discussed earlier – insecurity, privatization, division and authoritarianism. And as lockdown ends, there may be a

Navigate the new normal for your industry at TNW Couch Conferences

cities to open up new possibilities and reimagine during the crisis. Learning is locked in and scaled up to create a fairer, greener, safer urban future. We can all live well, and even flourish, in cities even if we have and do a [little bit less](#) of the things we have become used to. Revaluing what's important - community, friendship, family life - allows us to see how much we already have that can [improve our wellbeing](#).

Often ideas start to converge under a single banner. Many in this article can be understood through the idea of the [Green New Deal](#) - a proposed set of policies to tackle climate change and inequality, create good jobs and protect nature. It's an approach which has a lot to offer cities after this coronavirus crisis. It points to an urban economy based on key foundations of public services, an economy operating within the ecological limits of our precious biosphere, with a social safety net for all. These ideas are now being seriously considered by some cities, such as [Amsterdam](#), as they think about how to rebuild their economies.

Navigate the new normal for your industry at TNW Couch Conferences

 Allotments in an old airport: Tempelhofer Feld, Berlin. Matej Kastelic/Shutterstock.com

How city governance responds in this crisis and afterwards will be key. There will certainly be a much bigger role for the state, and this might be more authoritarian as recent [emergency powers](#) over border controls, surveillance and enforced quarantines attest.

But there is a way of countering these tendencies – by creating an enabling, responsive, participatory state where solutions are reached with citizens, rather than imposed on them. A meaningful [state-civil society](#) contract means the state can act powerfully but also take the side of citizens, through, for example shifting assets, resources, taxes and welfare in their favor. We are seeing glimpses of this already through a [new municiplism](#), with Barcelona as one of the leading examples.

It's difficult to predict how things will actually turn out in such a fast moving environment. What I have presented here are some glimpses of doable, commonsense actions that could be used to build sustainable cities out of the coronavirus crisis.

Navigate the new normal for your industry at TNW Couch Conferences

2. Subsidise free buses for key workers, and re-regulate public transport to create affordable, zero-carbon mass transit
3. Trial wage guarantee or basic income schemes to make sure no one is left behind
4. Shift subsidies to promote socially useful production
5. Plan to ensure homes are warm and comfortable for any future crises
6. Allocate unused land for exercise, leisure, wildlife and biodiversity
7. Support community businesses and provide land to increase the supply of local food
8. Commit to speed reductions to reduce deaths and ease the strain on health services
9. Create more support for local businesses and invest in local shops and high streets
10. Use indicators to count the things that matter, especially unpaid care work, key workers, quality of life, and environmental protection.

This article is republished from [The Conversation](#) by [Paul Chatterton](#), Professor of Urban Futures, [University of Leeds](#) under a Creative Commons license. Read the [original article](#).

Corona coverage

Read our [daily coverage](#) on how the tech industry is responding to the coronavirus and subscribe to our weekly newsletter [Coronavirus in Context](#).

For tips and tricks on working remotely, check out our Growth Quarters articles [here](#) or follow us on [Twitter](#).

[WORLD](#)[CORONAVIRUS](#)[FUTURE](#)[SUSTAINABILITY](#)[PUBLIC TRANSPORT](#)[COMMUNITY](#)[SHARE ON FACEBOOK \(2\)](#)[SHARE ON TWITTER \(55\)](#)

Navigate the new normal for your industry at TNW Couch Conferences