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POLAR FRONTIERS, POLAR ORBITS: THE VERTIGINOUS RISE OF ARCTIC COMMERCIAL  
SPACEPORTS

**Abstract**

A rush is underway to build spaceports across the Arctic and sub-Arctic. These infrastructures are intended to support the commercial satellite sector and launch satellites into polar orbits. Since Earth-observing satellites pass more over the polar regions than anywhere else, the Arctic bears a disproportionate burden of the construction of spaceports and ground stations, whose antennas downlink data from overpassing satellites. Seven spaceports are proposed in the UK, which aims to be the global leader in spaceports by 2030, one in northern Norway, and one in Sweden. Arctic spaceports are remote and being built on and near Indigenous and rural lands. This distinguishes them from traditional “portal infrastructures” like maritime ports and airports, which are built in urban hubs to connect people. Spaceports are instead being constructed to move machines and data. Governments and investors alike are promoting them as as transformational infrastructures that will upskill economies and rocket countries into the New Space Age, which commercial actors dominate. Yet the little-used Pacific Spaceport Complex, which opened on Kodiak Island, Alaska in 1998, offers sobering lessons in the realities of spaceport development and impacts on local communities. Current plans to expand operations – notably, without the construction of any additional accommodation – face local pushback due to frustration with launch-related road and beach closures, explosions, and pollution. In this talk, based on fieldwork in Kodiak, Alaska and interviews with local stakeholders, I will examine both the promises and pitfalls of spaceports in the New Space era.