

# Making Place for Space a History of 'Space Town' Kiruna 1943–2000

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**Abstract**

Science and technology have a tendency to clump together in places where they spawn other forms of societal activities. Sometimes these places become famous through processes known as place-making, or the social construction of place. Because the scientific and technological activities affect the places, and the places conversely affect the science and technology, it is relevant to study how and why these connections emerge.

This dissertation examines the particular case of the northern Swedish town of Kiruna, which has become known for being a 'space town' because of its scientific, technological, and other activities that relate to the near space around the earth. The overall objective is to analyse the processes underlying the making of Kiruna as a space town in the period 1943–2000.

Five parts make up the study. First is an examination of how the development of space physics research in Kiruna led to the setting up of a scientific observatory. The second part studies how the Swedish participation in the European Space Research Organisation made Kiruna the place for a rocket base. Next follows an analysis of how local business efforts contributed to forming a new satellite technology business and the Space House office building. The fourth part concerns how the visions to establish a space 'university' eventually led to the emergence of the Space Campus. Last is an epilogue that briefly analyses the space tourism efforts in Kiruna.

A central finding is that the space town has emerged as the result of entwined processes where, on the one hand, ideas about the near space around the earth have led to new activities and physical structures, and, on the other hand, these new activities and built structures conversely have inspired to new ideas. Of importance is also the geographical place where these developments have occurred. Here, a reoccurring argument to placing the activities and structures in Kiruna was the town's geographically favourable location for specific scientific and technological activities.

Another finding is that the development has gradually led to the emergence of a kind of identity or notion of Kiruna as a particular place for space activities. Although this form of place-making has occurred largely through spontaneous processes, it was also the result of intentional efforts.

Together, these different place-making processes have formed the 'space town' of Kiruna.

**Key words:** history of science, history of technology, space physics, space science, space technology, geophysics, cultural geography, place-making, regional identity, Kiruna, Sweden, 20th century.

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