

Petroleum as a challenge to arctic societies: Ontological security and the oil- driven 'push to the north'

This paper uses the 2014–2015 plunge in oil prices as a linchpin for understanding how petroleum development represents a challenge to Arctic societies. Analysis of media discourses, grey literature and fieldwork material from 2013 to 2017 compared with previous work in the region shows that the 75% price decrease in oil price brings into stark relief the perceived level of ontological security that future petroleum economies in Northern Norway, Alaska and Greenland provides. The findings reveal that while the communities in each location find themselves along different timelines of the petroleum economy, there are transferable insights that can benefit other communities influenced by (the potential for) petroleum development in both the Arctic and beyond, in particular concerning the way in which specific ideas about oil and oils future features as contributing to or diminishes ontological security perceptions on the ground. The goal of this paper is to deepen the comparative analysis of research on tensions in Arctic communities as petroleum is perceived as either strengthening or threatening future ontological security in the region. The discussion considers the consequences of path dependent petroleum economies, and how perceptions on alternative futures can fruitfully be introduced into petroleum-dominated narratives about viable Arctic futures.

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