

From disaster-affected areas to space: a space industry cluster model from Fukushima through public-private partnership

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Case Overview

This case is based on the "Fukushima Space Conference" and established a public-private partnership model linking post-disaster recovery with the promotion of the space industry. The conference was held offline and limited to in-person participation. Many people involved in the space industry visited the city, which was forced to evacuate due to the tsunami damage and nuclear accident caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake. Seeing the vast coastal land damaged by the tsunami firsthand, they recognized the potential of the space sector to create new industries and contribute to regional recovery. Further discussions on concrete measures led to the acceptance of demonstration projects and the establishment of R&D bases and factories.



Residents looking up at the sky in a tsunami-affected area

Key points regarding receiving the award (Comments from the selection committee)

As part of post-disaster recovery, this initiative has created new flows of people and opportunities for industrial creation, which is highly commendable.

By forming a community that brings together industry, academia, government, and the private sector, it promotes both recovery in disaster-affected areas and the development of the space industry. As a result, eight space startups have established bases in the area, attracting private investment and conducting rocket launch demonstrations. These achievements in building a space development hub are highly commendable.

Concrete Results

1. Contribution to creating new areas for space development and utilization

The vast land designated as a disaster hazard area, where housing reconstruction was restricted following the Great East Japan Earthquake, was linked to the space industry's challenge of "a shortage of demonstration sites." By reframing it as "an optimal location for rocket launches," this initiative enabled the early realization of suborbital demonstrations, contributing to regional recovery. In addition, a community sharing the same vision was established to turn this idea into reality. The "Fukushima Space Conference" was intentionally limited to in-person participation, fostering strong trust between the public and private sectors and functioning as a foundation for collaboration. Discussions at the conference on challenges facing Japan's space industry led to cooperation among government, research institutions, companies, and local residents, resulting in approximately JPY 10 billion in new private investment.

2. Contribution to expanding the space development and utilization market

Eight space startups and four new space-related R&D bases have been established in Fukushima and factory construction for mass production underway. Furthermore, in 2025, Mitsubishi Logistics began full-scale operations of "MLCSPACELAB," Japan's largest space-focused incubation facility, further accelerating the industry cluster.

The location of the space industry is also having ripple effects on the regional economy. Through relationships built at the conference, a new supply chain for space-related parts procurement has been established with approximately 30 local companies in Fukushima. Interest in the disaster-affected coastal region is increasing both domestically and internationally, including visits by companies from Japan and overseas.

3. Contribution to the advancement of the economy and society

The "Fukushima Space Conference" has grown into a major event, attracting more than 400 participants from across Japan to Odaka Ward in Minamisoma City, a community of 3,800 residents.

Rocket Launch Demonstration Project: Through its acceptance, the project generated a total of 440 overnight stays in the disaster-affected area, bringing significant economic benefits to the local community. It also demonstrated the potential of the area as a suitable launch site facing the Pacific Ocean.

Satellite Data Utilization: It demonstrated that satellite data can reduce the burden of crop conversion verification on farmland. This also led to the relaxation of visual inspection requirements and became a case of reviewing analogue regulations.

Incubation Facility Location: The largest facility in Japan specializing in the space industry has been established and incorporated into the blueprint for industrial development under the Fukushima Innovation Coast Framework, a guideline for post-disaster recovery. The initiative is also expanding into broader industry clustering across the Tohoku region through collaboration with Noshiro City and Kakuda City, where JAXA's demonstration bases are located.

4. Contribution to technology

In the transportation sector, securing sites for demonstrations and factories has been an urgent issue, traditionally handled by operators themselves through negotiations with landowners. Demonstrations also required coordination with government agencies and private organizations for as many as 30 procedures. By supporting much of this burden at the regional level, space companies are now able to focus on research and development, improving the efficiency of R&D and demonstrations. This public-private framework for addressing issues and the administrative support system have been highly regarded by space startups, which note that "administrative decision-making proceeds at the same speed as venture companies." The rocket launch demonstration was realized in just 11 months after its possibility was suggested at the first conference.

5. Contribution to promoting public understanding and human resource development

The "Fukushima Space Conference" has generated strong demand for study visits and training sessions. To deepen understanding of the background behind why vast land areas emerged along the coast, activities in which disaster survivors themselves guide visitors are also emphasized. At the conference, local residents with different perspectives also participated as speakers, sharing challenges in implementing science and technology in society and discussing engagement with local communities.

During rocket launch demonstrations, local high school students observe the assembly process and participate in follow-up outreach classes. At local childcare centers, children who once built trains and robots with blocks now build and launch rockets, growing up in a world where rockets are a normal part of life.

