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Introduction: social investment: a buzzword – but has it reached the stakeholders?

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Social investment has been a buzzword in political rhetoric over the last 10–15 years – and a substantial number of articles and books on the subject has emerged. In 2017 alone, google scholar returns 5070 elements using 'social investment' as search term. Naturally, they are not all dealing with social policy, and even less with long-term care for elderly persons. Social investment has been seen as a new response to meeting needs, sometimes even as part of the debate on the third way in welfare states development, and also as a reaction to New Public Management and neo-liberal approaches to welfare states development.

Furthermore, the literature on social investment often focuses on social services and activities where there is a possibility of long-term impact of an investment, for example, in relation to day-care for children. These long-term impacts might not always be the case if discerning effect of investment in long-term care as a consequence of the lower number of years where the investment can work, including that some might die suddenly even after an investment takes place. Stakeholders perception of and understanding of social investment is often not taken into consideration and analysed in relation to impact.

The articles in this themed section, based upon research in a Horizon 2020 project 'SPRINT', try to depict and investigate if and how stakeholders in different welfare states, with very different approaches to long-termcare know about social investment. The countries under consideration are Denmark (Nordic), Portugal (Southern Europe) and Lithuania (Eastern Europe). They have different state emphasis on delivery of care and different traditions, although in all countries civil society is an important aspect in the daily support of older people.

The articles show that remarkably, the concept of social investment as such is not widely recognised among stakeholders, which here consist of a broad group of institutions, actors and organisations. However, when discussing different kinds of interventions and the way they might work in practice, stakeholders appear to have an understanding what social investment represents, and, also that it is something which they support as a way to improve long-term care. Therefore, social investment, without being recognised as a formal policy aim, is certainly recognised as an idea informing practice among those interested and involved in long-term care delivery in very different welfare states. This finding suggests that more abstract policy 'ideas' do influence the direction of development of welfare states on the ground.