Policy preferences & interests of for-profit actors in welfare markets: The case of Ireland's nursing home sector

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Over the last three decades, significant transformations have taken place in European LTC. Extensive literature has studied the mechanisms through which LTC has been transformed into a market product. A key consequence of the rise of LTC markets has been the significant expansion of private for-profit actors. Private for-profit actors are a crucial piece of the LTC reform puzzle and refer to commercial, for-profit companies that provide/operate/own LTC services/facilities in parallel to non-profit and public providers. LTC markets typically involve a shift of responsibility, resources, and power from the state to the private for-profit sector, but this is not a given, and for-profit actors are not a homogenous group.

The rise of myriad private for-profit actors in LTC markets challenges the typical ownership typology in existing literature (public, private, and non-profit), which fails to account for the variations of ownership within the private for-profit sector itself. Private for-profit actors now range from small "mom and pop" owners to global corporate operators and institutional financial investors. The influx of institutional investors (e.g., REITs, private equity, asset management companies) can be understood within the context of financialisaton in the welfare state, which has resulted in the restructuring of services and facilities into financial assets that can be bought, sold, merged, and acquired. However, there remains a striking lack of research that systematically examines the for-profit sector and its variegated actors.

Using the case study of Ireland's nursing home market, my project (1) examines the policy instruments that have driven its evolution and structure, and (2) identifies and explains the interests and policy preferences of the range of private for-profit actors. The paper is based on interviews with senior management figures at private for-profit firms and a comprehensive dataset that was compiled by Ireland's Health Service Executive (HSE) and supplied to the author. This dataset documents the annual government expenditure allocated to every private sector nursing home through the government's flagship LTC policy ("Fair Deal" -- Nursing Home Support Scheme). Conceptually, the project is framed within the literature on European welfare markets and the marketisation and financialisation of LTC.