Organized leisure activities in early childhood and social inequalities in cognitive and social skills
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Background:
• Organized leisure activities have several benefits for children’s skill development (Covay & Carbonaro 2010, Cabane, Hille and Lechner 2016)
• However, too much structured leisure time activities may lead to stress and lower creativity of children (Lareau 2002)
• Children of higher social classes are more often enrolled in organized leisure activities (Schober & Spieß, 2013)
• Hence, organized leisure may represent educational reproduction mechanisms
• Most research focused on adolescence, yet “investment” in early childhood may be particularly beneficial (Cunha et al., 2006)
• Little research is based on German data

Research questions:
1. To which extent is enrollment into organized leisure during childhood related to children’s cognitive and social skills?
2. To which extent does enrollment into organized leisure mediate the relation between parental socioeconomic status (SES) and children’s cognitive and social skills?

Theoretical model:
Lareau’s (2002, 2011) argument

Hypotheses:
H1 Enrollment into organized leisure is related to higher cognitive skills.
H2 Enrollment into organized leisure is related to higher social skills.
H3 Enrollment into organized leisure partially mediates the association between parental socioeconomic status (SES) and children’s cognitive skills.
H4 Enrollment into organized leisure partially mediates the association between parental socioeconomic status (SES) and children’s social skills.

Data and Operationalization:
• German National Educational Panel Study (NEPS)
• Starting cohort 2 “Kindergarten”
• Two measurement time points: age 5 & 7
• 343 parents and their children in preschool (with multiple imputation)

Summary:
• Music participation, but not organized leisure activities in general, explains the relation between parental SES and cognitive skills
• Non of the organized leisure activities (w2) is positively related to social skills (w4), in fact, sport enrollment is negatively related to social skill ratings
• The results suggest that future studies should pay close attention to the type of organized leisure examined

Limitations:
• Small sample
• Exact type of organized leisure unclear (e.g., type of sport)
• Hours spend on each activity unknown
• Only subjective measures of concentration & social skills