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How does Logistics Outsourcing Influence Organisation Performance?

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to provide an understanding how logistics outsourcing leads to performance improvement from an organisational policy perspective. The paper aims to focus on the contribution and on the characteristics of logistics outsourcing (basic, customised and advanced outsourcing). The research provides an empirical analysis from a survey of 295 representatives of Slovenian organisations. Our intention is to focus on the outsourcing of logistics services, when a company decide to outsource a logistic service and which criteria or characteristics of such services are important for them. We found out that basic and advanced outsourcing services are closely connected to Slovenian organisations. The findings are useful for business practice in general and for managers, as they will better understand the influences of advanced outsourcing services as the key element of long-term supply-chain success.

Key words: *logistics outsourcing, optimisation, supply chain, outsourcing, performance*

1. INTRODUCTION

In a global and, at the level of economic development, diverse environment, outsourcing is becoming one of the core strategies of organisations in developed areas. The scientific literature in outsourcing is growing rapidly (Mantel et al, 2006; Ketchen and Hult, 2007; Bidwell, 2009; Mclvor, 2010; Marshall et al 2015), but despite this growth, little attention has been given to how logistics outsourcing influences organisation performance, from a policy perspective. Outsourcing is often regarded as a political act as it directly affects the power structures within the organisational hierarchy (Marshall et al 2015).

With the development of global competition, e-commerce and virtual organisation, logistics outsourcing has received more attention from academicians and practitioners.

Companies are complex social, economic and technical systems. One of the important ways to manage the complexity in companies is by outsourcing. The importance of outsourcing has increased considerably

worldwide and in Slovenia in the last two decades. More and more organisations are deciding either for outsourcing or insourcing, the scope of which has increased considerably, both with regard to the number of activities and to their complexity. Each participant (outsourcing and insourcing companies) in the outsourcing relationship needs two characteristics in order to be able to manage the complex problems of cooperation:

- specialisation and focus on core competences,
- the ability to participate creatively and to cooperate, leading to complexity.

However, we know little about the relationship between logistics outsourcing and company performance. Practically, this study can help organisations (managers) improve logistics outsourcing and inform them about how logistics outsourcing leads to performance improvements from an organisation policy perspective. This paper is organised as follows. After the introductory chapter, the second chapter discusses

the literature review and development of logistics outsourcing. Chapter three presents the research methodology. In the fourth and fifth chapters, results, findings and discussion are presented. The last chapter outlines the most significant conclusions and suggests a direction for future research.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In its outsourcing annual report for the year 2013, data analytics company Ernst & Young (2013) concludes that the outsourcing segment will keep growing steadily. Cooperation between respondents from eight participating countries provided the feedback that organisations on average expect and forecast outsourcing to grow by approximately 31.4 %.

With regard to outsourcing, interdisciplinarity is revealed through:

1. Economics: transactional cost, productivity, efficiency (Williamsons 1975; Dyer 1997).
2. Organisational sciences: managing complexity with hierarchy or with market (Chapman and Andrade 1998).
3. Management: company policy – current, developmental and basic (Barney and Arian 2001; McIvor 2010).
4. Marketing: marketing among companies, cooperative vs. competitive marketing, networks (Lei and Hitt 1995; Koong, Lai, and Wang 2007).

On the other hand, logistics services can definitely be classified as one of the most flexible industries. This industry requires constant and especially quick adaptation to ordering entities, in order to meet the needs of end consumers.

Logistics outsourcing refers to a wide range of services, including basic functional, special organisational and advanced supply chain, activities (Liu et al, 2014).

Eichelberger (2013) concludes that 2012 was the watershed year for a significant number of organisations that outsource services in the logistics industry. In his trends forecasts for 2013 and for the following years, he expects that outsourcing in the logistics industry will see a steady growth, and its evolution will be reflected in the heightening of the cooperative relation between partners across the whole supply chain.

He also emphasises that factors, such as technology, innovations and business cooperation transparency, will significantly affect the logistics services industry in the years to follow. In addition, because of the instability of oil by-products, market and increasingly restrictive environmental legislation, adaptation to the use of natural gas as an alternative motor fuel will require more attention. Logistics outsourcing can reduce non-core business investments (Razzaque and Sheng, 1998), improve logistics performance (Chen et al, 2010) and customer service (Skjoett-Larsen, 2000).

2.1 Outsourcing in Slovenia

Outsourcing is not a novelty for the Slovenian economy. During the period between the First and the Second World Wars, the transfer of production (textile, steel industry, chemical industry, etc.) from more developed countries was the basis for the beginning of industrialisation.

Numerous collaborations appeared during the time of Yugoslavia providing domestic supplies based on trade in goods with foreign partners. Some foreign partners expressed huge interest in trading on the Yugoslav market. In the environment of ex-Yugoslavia, Slovenian companies had a number of signed agreements on long-term production cooperation that were usually based on non-discriminatory terms. On the other hand, there was a considerable amount of discrimination between Slovenia, which had a surplus of foreign currency and established cooperation, and the less developed areas of Yugoslavia, which entered international trade under discriminatory terms.

A large portion of Slovenian exports was based on forms similar to outsourcing – production of components, materials, etc. for foreign producers, on the so-called wage labour (Ger. Lohnarbeit). Parties in many such relationships became, after investment in knowledge and capital, more and more equal and the basis for present international trade. In the environment of ex-Yugoslavia, Slovenia became much more developed than the other republics that made up Yugoslavia, due to such developments, which brought about substantial economic advantages (through disparity of domestic currency, a large and protected market, etc.).

At Tomos, a producer of motorbikes and outboard engines from Koper, a cooperation agreement was signed with the French company Citroën in 1959. In 1960, the assembly of first AZ vehicles was introduced. Cooperation focused mainly on products of higher value, such as starter motors made by Iskra from Kranj, headlights produced by Saturnus, wiring harnesses produced by Elektrokontakt from Zagreb, tubes from Pančevo and key locks produced by Lama from Dekani. Vehicles were also assembled in cooperation, such as the Ami 6 model, as well as individual DS car model. In 1980, a highly successful Slovenian and Yugoslav company, Iskra, employed 29,000 workers and was the most important company in the electrical industry in ex-Yugoslavia.

2.2 Trends in logistics outsourcing

Logistics outsourcing is defined as “multiple logistics services provided by a single vendor basis on a contractual basis (Razzaque and Sheng, 1998).

Furthermore, logistics outsourcing refers to a wide range of services, from basic to advanced supply chain activities. However, there are no discrepancies in organisations with the trends set on the European level. Lofvers (2013) defines the trends in the logistics industry:

- approach to the customers' needs,
- net economy,

- costs pressures,
- shortage of suitable personnel,
- sustainable development orientation.

Liu et al (2014) propose that process coordination and information sharing – as an integrative mechanism – can facilitate the logistics outsourcing of third-party-logistics (3PL) users. This in turn leads to performance improvements. Process coordination refers to the synchronisation or integration of business flows between two organisations (Samaddar et al., 2006). Huo et al (2013) say that process coordination enables the supplier to be involved in various processes of focal firms, reducing transaction costs and improving financial performance. Joint planning defined as “collaborations among trading partners to develop various plans such as production planning and scheduling, new product development, inventory replenishment, and promotions, is an effective operational and strategic level coordination mechanism for improving performance (Aviv, 2001; Cai et al., 2010).

Aghazadeh (2003) listed 19 logistics outsourcing practices most frequently used by large American manufacturing organisations, including direct transportation services, warehousing management, shipment consolidation, freight payment, etc. Practices including order processing, vendor management, practices intended to improve customer services, flexibility were listed by Rajesh et al. (2011). According to Liu et al (2014), Hsiao et al (2010) and Halldorsson and Skjott-Larsen (2004), outsourcing can be classified into three types:

- basic - low-level, value-added logistics services, such as transportation, warehousing and delivery services,
- customised – special logistics requirements, such as the express delivery of documents, components and consolidation; requires tangible resources, such as informational processing and decision support systems, and intangible resources such as professional knowledge and specific programs;
- advanced – strategic decisions for the entire supply chain, includes order processing, packaging, labelling, and the improvement and optimisation of logistics information systems.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to focus on outsourcing of logistics services. When a company decides to outsource a logistics service, which criteria or characteristics of such services are important for them? Or, alternatively, in which ways are companies that need logistics services as an outsource. We believe that there are some specific characteristics that are important to companies that need to outsource services. Furthermore, we are interested in how the specific characteristics of outsourcing are correlated. In order to answer our research questions we conducted a study which entailed an online survey as a data collection technique.

A link to the survey was sent to 6,201 organisations which represent the total population. Of this number, the Slovenian Chamber of Commerce provided 5,895 e-mail addresses and the Chamber of Craft and Small Business of Slovenia provided the rest. Due to different technical limitations, 5,626 organisations received the invite to participate in our survey. The response rate was 4.7 %, providing us with 295 completed questionnaires. The survey was available online from December 2014 until March 2015.

The questionnaire included 12 questions divided into three groups: the first set was composed of general questions about the company, the second set of questions were about the outsourcing of logistics services and the third set of questions were about outsourcing of IT services. In this paper, we focus on the second set of questions.

The reliability of the measurement instrument was also tested by applying Cronbach's alpha method. In general, the instrument is reliable, having the value of α coefficient over 0.8 (Field 2009, 673–675). Items dealing with outsourcing of logistics services were also reliable (see Table 1).

Table 1. Reliability – Outsourcing of logistics services

	<i>Cronbach α</i>	<i>No. of Items</i>
Types of logistics services	0.818	6
Characteristics of the logistics services	0.873	8

After the data collection phase, the data were imported into the statistical package SPSS which was used for further calculations. T-test (with significance set to 0.05) was used in order to check for a significant difference between groups.

The Pearson correlation analysis was computed for testing the level of correlation.

4. RESULTS

The largest percentage of organisations in the sample is in manufacturing industries (19.9 %), followed by other activities (14.3 %), trade, maintenance and repair of motor vehicles (12.8 %) and the information and communication sector (11.7 %).

Most of the organisations in the sample are micro-enterprises (45.1 %), followed by small organisations (35.2 %), medium-sized (15.1 %) or big (4.6 %). In the sample, the percentage of micro and small-sized organisations is under overestimated compared to the population data. The majority of the organisations have their registered headquarters in the Central region (45.5 %), followed by the Upper Carniola region (10.5%), the Savinja region (9.8 %) and the Drava region (8.4 %).

In Figure 1 we can see that three quarters (75.3 %) of organisations in our sample stated that they are making use of outsourcing within their organisations and that 55.6 % of the organisations are making use of outsourcing of logistics services.

However, when we asked if they intended to change a logistics services provider, 17.7 % of respondents

confirmed that they would change a provider either in the short (7.5 %) or in the long run (10.2 %).

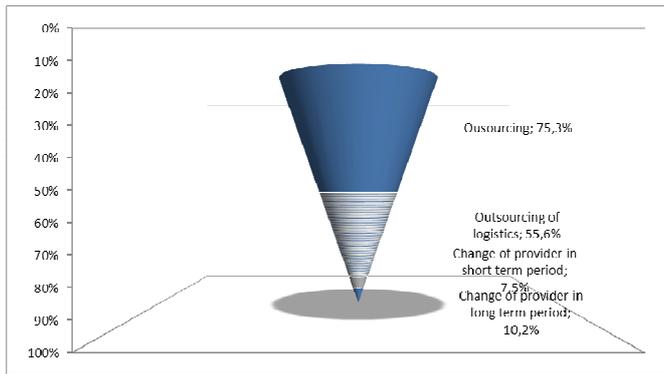


Figure 1. Outsourcing funnel

We asked the survey respondents to assess to what extent does their organisation agree to use (in the short-term or medium-term plan) one of the following services in the context of logistics services, where 5 indicated the highest agreement with the statement. Companies are above average (the total average is indicated by the dotted line) interested in Express freights and shipments, followed by the Transport function (planning, organising schedules).

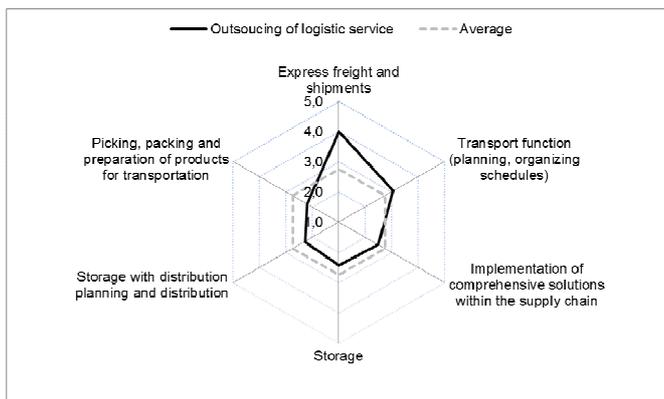


Figure 2. Use of logistics services as an outsource

Next, we take a closer look at the 55.6 % of organisations that outsource logistics services. Table 2 shows the correlation matrix between logistics services that are important for such organisations. All bivariate correlations are statistically significant.

Table 2. Correlation - Use of logistics services as an outsource

		Storage	Storage with distribution planning and distribution	Picking, packing and preparation of products for transportation	Transport function (planning, organizing schedules)	Implementation of comprehensive solutions within the supply chain	Express freight and shipments
Storage with distribution planning and distribution	Pearson Correlation	.841**	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000					
Picking, packing and preparation of products for transportation	Pearson Correlation	.720**	.786**	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000				
Transport function (planning, organizing schedules)	Pearson Correlation	.229**	.273**	.219*	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.009	.002	.012			
Implementation of comprehensive solutions within the supply chain	Pearson Correlation	.356**	.488**	.454**	.389**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000		
Express freight and shipments	Pearson Correlation	.208*	.298**	.177*	.474**	.221*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.017	.001	.043	.000	.011	

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
 * . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

We can see (Table 2) a strong positive correlation between storage and storage with distribution, planning and distribution ($r=0.841$, $sig=0.000$), as well as between storage and picking, packing and preparation of products for transportation ($r=0.720$, $sig=0.000$). There is a strong positive correlation also between picking, packing and preparation of products for transportation and storage with distribution, planning and distribution ($r=0.786$, $sig=0.000$). There is a semi-strong positive correlation between implementation of comprehensive solutions within the supply chain and storage with distribution, planning and distribution ($r=0.488$, $sig=0.000$) as well as with picking, packing and preparation of products for transportation ($r=0.454$, $sig=0.000$). Correlation also is evident between express freights and shipments and transport function (planning, organising schedules) ($r=0.474$, $sig=0.000$).

Next, we asked the survey respondents to assess how important a number of characteristics are to their organisations when they cooperate with external providers of logistics services, where 5 means very important. Of above average importance are the characteristics "Swift and efficient response", "Quality of service", "Cost-effectiveness / affordability", "Ability to adapt to the process of the client".

Table 3 shows the correlation matrix between the characteristics of logistics services that are important for the organisations. All bivariate correlations are statistically significant.

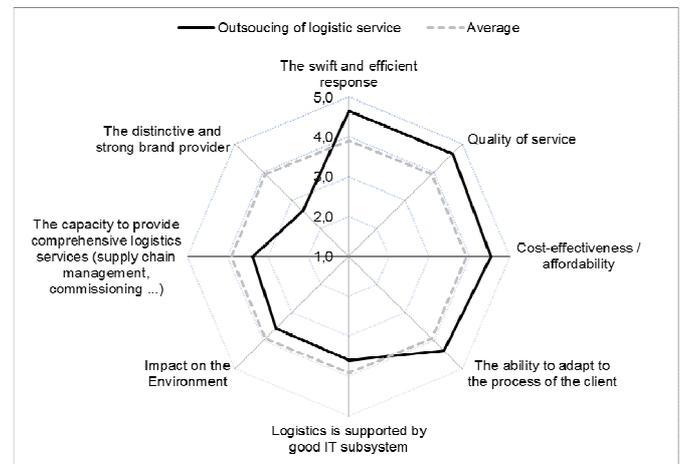


Figure 3. Characteristics of logistics services

Table 3. Correlation - Characteristics of logistics services

		Cost-effectiveness / affordability	Quality of service	The swift and efficient response	The ability to adapt to the process of the client	Impact on the Environment	The capacity to provide comprehensive logistics services	Logistics is supported by good IT subsystem
Quality of service	Pearson Correlation	.766**	1					
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000						
The swift and efficient response	Pearson Correlation	.730**	.846**	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000					
The ability to adapt to the process of the client	Pearson Correlation	.532**	.707**	.705**	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000				
Impact on the Environment	Pearson Correlation	.312*	.420**	.427**	.525**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000			
The capacity to provide comprehensive logistics services	Pearson Correlation	.266*	.353**	.326**	.507**	.397**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.000	.000	.000	.000		
Logistics is supported by good IT subsystem	Pearson Correlation	.331*	.382**	.377**	.359**	.394**	.646**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	
The distinctive and strong brand provider	Pearson Correlation	.165	.137	.128	.228*	.407**	.569**	.528**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.061	.124	.151	.010	.000	.000	.000

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 shows a strong positive correlation between cost-effectiveness / affordability and:

- quality of service (r=0.766, sig=0.000),
- swift and efficient response (r=0.730, sig=0.000),
- ability to adapt to the process of the client (r=0.532, sig=0.000).

There is also a strong positive correlation between quality of service and:

- swift and efficient response (r=0.846, sig=0.000),
- ability to adapt to the process of the client (r=0.707, sig=0.000).

In addition, we have the same strong positive correlation between swift and efficient response and ability to adapt to the process of the client (r=0.705, sig=0.000).

There is a semi-strong positive correlation between ability to adapt to the process of the client and:

- impact on the environment (r=0.525, sig=0.000)

- capacity to provide comprehensive logistics services (r=0.507, sig=0.000).

Correlation is also evident between capacity to provide comprehensive logistics services and:

- logistics is supported by a good IT subsystem (r=0.646, sig=0.000)
- distinctive and strong brand provider (r=0.569, sig=0.000).

The item measuring the level of distinctive and strong brand provider is correlated with logistics is supported by a good IT subsystem (r=0.528, sig=0.000).

In Table 4, we see a semi-strong positive correlation between storage with distribution, planning and distribution and capacity to provide comprehensive logistics services (r=0.410, sig=0.000) as well logistics supported by a good IT subsystem (r=0.334, sig=0.000).

Table 4. Correlation between use of logistics services as an outsource and characteristics of logistics services

		Cost-effectiveness / affordability	Quality of service	The swift and efficient response	The ability to adapt to the process of the client	Impact on the Environment	The capacity to provide comprehensive logistics services	Logistics is supported by good IT subsystem	The distinctive and strong brand provider
Storage	Pearson Correlation	,105	,144	,050	,063	-,074	,269**	,249**	,119
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,223	,096	,565	,468	,389	,002	,003	,169
Storage with distribution planning and distribution	Pearson Correlation	,077	,156	,096	,125	,049	,410**	,334**	,221
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,376	,076	,277	,154	,573	,000	,000	,011
Picking, packing and preparation of products for transportation	Pearson Correlation	,085	,130	,060	,037	-,055	,265**	,169	,079
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,324	,137	,494	,669	,524	,002	,050	,364
Transport function (planning, organizing schedules)	Pearson Correlation	,118	,145	,158	,091	,055	,236**	,234**	,147
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,177	,099	,072	,303	,532	,007	,007	,093
Implementation of comprehensive solutions within the supply chain	Pearson Correlation	,159	,129	,075	,153	,061	,383**	,219	,255**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,067	,140	,393	,079	,487	,000	,011	,003
Express freight and shipments	Pearson Correlation	,238**	,201	,272**	,193	,091	,142	,204	,125
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,005	,019	,001	,024	,286	,097	,017	,143

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Outsourcing is a special cooperative strategy involving important strategic decisions of the organisation. Organisations can exploit various external resources to obtain competitive advantages through outsourcing. Flexibility and efficiency are the priorities of basic and customised outsourcing, while providing the best solutions for customer services and improving responsiveness are the main considerations in advanced outsourcing.

The results shows that express freights and shipments, followed by the transport function (planning, organising schedules) improve basic and advanced outsourcing. Outsourced basic and advanced services are closely related to day-to-day processes, are simple and low-added value, but still beneficial. On the other hand, advanced outsourcing needs more effort.

The research results show that implementation of comprehensive solutions within the supply chain are less important for the organisations. It is necessary for managers to analyse the features, risks and

opportunities of each activity, and to invest resources, knowledge and trust to improve outsourced logistics service performance.

Responsiveness requires a high level of tacit knowledge and integrative skills (Halldorsson and Skjott-Larsen, 2004). Outsourcing has a powerful impact on the formation and subsequent implementation of organisation policy. For organisations, it is important to move on to advanced outsourcing, and improve responsiveness in logistics and supply chain management.

For Slovenian organisations, it is important to continue with customised outsourcing which reduces investment in non-core business activities. Furthermore, market advantages, information sharing and process coordination should be considered as the next step, ultimately reaching customised outsourcing.

Collaboration between organisations in the supply chain is likely to be successful in the long run only if it constantly offers its customers in exchange relationships bigger and better benefits than their competitors. The basic capabilities of an organisation

can be all components of corporate strategy or synergistic combinations thereof, which contribute to the performance of the company – its aims, strategies used to achieve those aims and any of the components of the company strategy, i.e. activities, structure and resources.

6. CONCLUSION

Outsourcing can be a fatal strategic decision for both organisations. In outsourcing relationships, the short-term interests of outsourcers often prevail (cost reduction, transfer of unattractive or environmentally hazardous activities, acquiring short-term capabilities etc.). Outsourcers often find such suppliers who are facing a latent or potential crisis and have no other choice than to enter an outsourcing relationship if they want to survive (this is often the case in ex-Yugoslav countries).

The research more specifically examines the characteristics of the market of logistics services solutions and by analysing statistical data finds sector promising growth. The results provide additional meaning and value, as some of the customers views in the terms of potential business cooperation were identified through a survey.

In the process, both companies, in their own way, try to cater to their interests. Interests can be mutual or opposed to both parties, long or short-term. Those based on needs are short-term and those founded on values are, as a rule, long-term. Further research can be directed in a different way, for example, it could look at what delivers long-term success as opposed to short-term gains.

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Kako logistički outsorsing utiče na performanse organizacije?

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Primljen (11.04.2015); Recenziran (12.08.2015); Prihvaćen (03.09.2015)

Apstrakt

Svrha ovog istraživanja je razumevanje načina na koji logističke usluge trećih lica dovode do poboljšanja učinka iz perspektive organizacione politike. Cilj rada je da se pozabavi doprinosom i karakteristikama logističkih usluga trećih lica (osnovno, prilagođeno i napredno angažovanje trećih lica). Istraživanje daje empirijsku analizu na osnovu ankete u kojoj je učestvovalo 295 predstavnika slovenačkih organizacija. Naša namera je da se usredsredimo na angažovanje spoljnih pružalaca logističkih usluga, na to kada se neka kompanija odlučuje da angažuje spoljne pružaoce logističkih usluga, te koji kriterijumi ili karakteristike takvih usluga su za njih važni. Utvrdili smo da su osnovne i napredne usluge trećih lica blisko povezane sa slovenačkim organizacijama. Ovi nalazi su korisni kako za poslovnu praksu uopšte tako i za rukovodioce jer će bolje razumeti uticaje naprednih usluga trećih lica kao ključnog elementa dugoročnog uspeha lanca snabdevanja.

Ključne reči: *logističke usluge trećih lica, optimizacija, lanac snabdevanja, usluge trećih lica, učinak*