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The barriers to co-operation in the food safety system in Poland

Abstract

Objectives: The official food safety system in Poland is divided between a number of specialised inspection bodies. The effective implementation of the entire inspection and supervision process requires multi-direction co-operation. The aim of the study presented was the identification of the barriers to and boundaries of the inter-organisational co-operation between the inspection bodies involved in the official food safety process.

Research Design & Methods: Qualitative research methods: analysis of organisational documentation, industry reports, post-audit reports and in-depth interviews with employees of five inspection bodies.

Findings: The co-operation between the inspection bodies should be multi-threaded and multi-lateral. In fact, the mechanisms that encourage co-operation are relatively weak and there are numerous barriers between them. The lack of the inter-organisational co-operation is caused by various factors: cultural, social, political, legal, and organisational norms and values. The key source of the barriers is the fragmentary perception of the food safety supervision process by employees, which results from the lack of a systematic approach to this process. The employees of the inspection bodies perceive the remaining inspections as external entities and not co-workers taking part in a common process aimed at common good.

Implications/Recommendations: This article suggests some policy implications. The evolutionary solutions may include measures to eliminate the differences between inter-organisational co-operation postulated in legal regulations and real practices. The revolutionary activities may consist of building a comprehensive system of official food safety which will lead to consistent supervision over the entire food chain, and not only over the individual stages thereof. The construction of such a system may require changes in the number and the scope of tasks of the existing inspections.

Contribution/Value Added: The inter-organisational co-operation problems as part of the official food safety process are not specific to only the system in Poland: similar difficulties are found in many countries. Therefore these research findings have potentially wide application.

Article classification: research article

Keywords: inter-organisational ties, public management, food safety

JEL classification: H79, M54

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Introduction

The issue of inter-organisational co-operation¹ is widely explored in relation to the enterprise sector. Meanwhile, researchers indicate that the changes taking place in recent years in public management include, *inter alia*, the intensification of inter-organisational co-operation (Osborne, 2010; Wiatrak, 2006; Plawgo et al., 2006). Kożuch (2007) emphasises that co-operation is a precondition for achieving the objectives of every modern public organisation, but, at the same time, it is a factor that presents many difficulties. This is a particularly important problem in the system of official food safety, which in Poland involves five organisations (inspection bodies) which are subordinate to three ministries. Effective performance by the whole system requires co-operation between its participants.²

In Poland there has been for many years an ongoing debate around the weaknesses of the official food safety system, indicating that it requires numerous improvements, and perhaps also a fundamental change in structure. In the last few years several projects for change have been drawn up, but none of them have been fully implemented (Wojciechowski, 2014).

The aim of the study presented in this article is to identify barriers to inter-organisational co-operation between the Veterinary Inspectorate (IW) and other inspection bodies involved in the official food safety process. The scope of this article does not include co-operation with foreign inspection

¹ The authors understand *inter-organisational co-operation* as a relationship in which two or more entities engage in a mutually beneficial exchange leading to the achieving of common goals (Mattessich et al., 2001).

² One may wonder how much co-operation between inspection bodies that take part in the official food safety system is internal and external. However, one should note that individual inspection bodies constitute separate legal entities, and at the same time during the conducted research it turned out that the participants perceive each other as external entities.

bodies.³ The interpretative paradigm was accepted in the study; the research methods used included analysis of organisational documentation, industry reports, post-audit reports of the Supreme Chamber of Control (NIK), statements from experts and, above all, individual interviews with 56 employees of five inspection bodies.

Poland is an EU Member State and, according to the relevant international requirements, each and every Member State has to ensure the safety of the food produced or/and processed within its borders. Taking into consideration the fact that the food produced in any Member State can be freely transported to and sold and exchanged in every Member State, the official food safety system must provide full and thorough information concerning any given food item that is being introduced on the market. Thus, the functioning of the system in Poland is very much connected with food safety in all Member States. Therefore, the knowledge and awareness of the real and possible barriers in terms of inter-organisational co-operation may lead directly to the excellence of the national system, and, indirectly, to the system on the European and global levels.

Literature review

The importance of co-operation in the official food safety system

Food safety is understood as ensuring that food does not cause any harmful effects on the health of the consumer, provided it is prepared and consumed as intended (Knechtges, 2012). In Polish legislation (Ustawa, 2006) food safety is defined as all conditions and actions that must be taken at all stages of the production or trading of food to ensure human health and life.

To ensure food safety, it is vital to have a process which ensures that food is safe and does not pose a threat to human health (Federal Ministry

³ Inspection bodies from Member States co-operate with each other in the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed.

of Food and Agriculture [Germany] 2016). In turn, the efficient performance of this process requires appropriate organisation of official food inspection services. This issue is addressed by researchers around the world. This is due to, *inter alia*, many changes made in recent years in the organisation of national services, which in turn is often the result of crises related to food safety, such as scandals involving BSE (“mad cow disease”).

Lie (2010 and 2011) draws attention to the involvement of many public entities in the official food safety system. The precondition for achieving the objectives of the system becomes the creation of mechanisms of inter-organisational co-ordination, which encourages the participants of the process to co-operate. The researcher analyses the functioning of such mechanisms in Norway and New Zealand, before and after reforms of the relevant organisations. A publication by Ansell & Vogel (2006) is similar in nature, analysing the reforms in the official food safety systems in a number of countries (*inter alia* France, Germany and the UK). Barling et al. (2002), when analysing the British system, indicate that the issue of food safety requires co-operation between and integration of many different organisations. Lie emphasises that integration should cover not only the organisation of the system, but also individual policies, for example in the areas of health, trade, foreign policy, agriculture, fishing and consumer protection (Lie, 2010). An organisational solution that is often used in practice is the creation of “regulatory agencies” (Gilardi, 2004; Jordana & Sancho, 2004).

In Poland, the official process of ensuring food safety is carried out by five main inspection bodies⁴: the State Sanitary Inspectorate (PIS); the Veterinary Inspectorate (IW); the Trade Quality Inspectorate for Agricultural and Food Products (IJHARS); the State Plant and Seed Protection Inspectorate (PIORiN);

and the Trade Inspectorate (IH). The inspection bodies are subordinate to the Ministry of Health (PIS), the Office of Competition and Consumer Protection (IH) and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (the other three inspectorates). It should be emphasised that food safety is only part of the duties of IJHARS, PIORiN and IH.

The inspections were separated on the basis of two criteria:

- the type of food (of plant or animal origin);
- the stage in the process of creating and distributing the food product (cultivation/slaughter, production, processing, transport, sale).

Not always are the accepted criteria adapted to the market and technological realities. This applies to composite products containing both plant and animal components, e.g. fish oil in capsules and ready-to-eat products of meat origin. In this case, there is a risk that the product will not be covered by supervision or duplication of tasks. In turn, the separation of control over the food chain between five inspectorates hampers the free flow of documents and data about the given product and the inspected entity. In this way, none of the organisations have full information about the entire process of creating and distributing a food product (Jendza, 2015). As a result, despite the precise division of tasks between individual inspectorates, the co-ordination of activities and active co-operation between these organisations become extremely important. Co-ordination can be understood as co-operation between inspection bodies, which results in the exchange of resources, such as knowledge and information during every stage of the official process of ensuring food safety.

Co-operation between the food safety inspection bodies is one of the key elements of the content of numerous European and national regulations, according to which appropriate procedures should be established in the Member States regarding the co-operation of inspection bodies performing inspections at individual stages of the food chain (Regulations No. 882/2004, 178/2002, 854/2004, 852/2004, 853/2004). The requirements which are set forth in these documents have been implemented

⁴ There are some additional smaller inspections, e.g. Military Veterinary Inspectorate, Military Sanitary Inspectorate, Inspectorate of Sea Fishing, Chief Pharmaceutical Inspectorate.

into Polish law. According to Polish food law the co-operation between these entities, as public administration units, can take various forms, e.g.:

- providing information about threats and suspected threats, and breaches of law, via information exchange systems;
- organising and conducting joint inspections;
- the joint withdrawal from the market of food products that may pose a threat to human life and health;
- sharing information, documents, decisions and resolutions;
- mutual use of resources in situations of threat to sanitary/veterinary safety;
- organising and conducting joint training;
- co-operation of laboratories operating in inspection bodies.

It would be obvious, therefore, to say that inspection bodies with common or similar goals achieve better results when they co-operate with each other and provide mutual assistance than when each of them operates in isolation (Leoński, 2004), thus it seems that this assumption of inter-organisational co-operation constituted the basis of the aforementioned legal acts.

Barriers to inter-organisational co-operation in management theory

The issue of inter-organisational co-operation is undertaken in relations to various entities. In their research Adamik and Matejun (2010) analyse the co-operation of enterprises with business environment institutions. Research on inter-organisational co-operation in the SME sector has been conducted by Ernst (2000), Zeng et al. (2010), and Ujda-Dyńska (2013). Ujda-Dyńska (2013) emphasises that these entities, due to their numerous developmental constraints, can benefit most from shaping the inter-organisational co-operation. Many researchers (Geisler, 1995; Veugelers & Cassiman, 2005; Bryła et al., 2013; Cyran, 2015; Kopeć, 2013) deal with the problem of co-operation between universities and the economic environment, in particular analysing barriers that hinder such co-operation.

Research on inter-organisational co-operation for many years has also been conducted in the public sector (e.g. Tung-Mou & Maxwell, 2011; Casalino et al., 2014; Kożuch & Sienkiewicz-Małýjurek, 2016).

Inter-organisational co-operation, which has a durable, long-term nature and is treated more strategically, leads to the creation of cross-organisational links. Czakon defines inter-organisational ties as such interactions between entities in which information, material or energy exchange takes place, and exchange parties' manifest mutual engagement. Inter-organisational ties are long-term, non-hierarchical and non-capital (Czakon, 2007).

Adamik (2009) emphasises that such bonds will function properly when:

- there will be a smooth two-way exchange between the partners of the bond, i.e. material, energy and information flows;
- due to the active involvement of the parties the existing relationship will be deepened and expanded;
- the parties will try to enrich this exchange as much as possible;
- reciprocity will be realised, i.e. symmetry of commitment, significantly related to the community of realised goals.

When describing agreements and relational strategies, the author points out such features as: two-sidedness, equality of the parties, and common goals. On the other hand, De Rond & Bouchkhi (2004) indicate that there is some equality of parties in some inter-organisational ties, but effective ties can also be based on domination by one of the parties, as long as it is accepted by other participants of the ties. Klimas (2015) indicates that the prerequisite for initiating inter-organisational ties is that the organisation has a relational competence.

Research on barriers to inter-organisational co-operation presents diverse results. For example, in the SME sector the most significant barriers identified were (Adamik, 2009): unwillingness to share information and resources; partners' poor involvement in joint ventures; a partner's

dominance; and poor preparation with regard to managing relationships of co-operation. Other barriers included: problems with the adaptation of partners to mutual needs; differences in perception of the essence of a partner relationship between partners; cultural distance; higher operating costs; longer decision-making time; and lack of informal contacts.

In turn, among the barriers to establishing and conducting co-operation between universities and businesses, one finds mentions of: mentality barriers (cultural); organisational behaviour barriers; information barriers; financial barriers; organisational barriers; and legal barriers (Santarek et al., 2008).

Kamiński (2017), pointing to the barriers of co-operation between the cultural and education sectors, lists: mutual perception of "culture" and "education"; communication problems; attempts to dominate co-operation; fears of stronger partners; fears that co-operation will not bring them benefits; inability to share successes; and lack of trust and openness.

Research on inter-organisational co-operation in the public sector has been carried out by Sienkiewicz-Małýjurek (2014). This researcher identified a number of problems related to co-operation in the public security management system, which includes a number of entities. The work mentions, *inter alia*, technical barriers (IT systems), financial barriers, insufficient number of procedures facilitating co-operation, encapsulation of information in units, and various assessments of the importance of a given issue in different units.

Thomson & Perry (2006) identified five dimensions crucial for co-operation in public management: governance, administration, organisational autonomy, mutuality and norms. They emphasised that the process of collaboration should be the result of a more systematic approach.

Klimas (2015), based on a review of research, indicates as the most important of the many barriers to initiating co-operation ties those related to human capital. The author mentions, *inter alia*, the resistance of employees to changes, a lack

of trust towards potential co-operation partners, excessive cultural dissonance of human resources, varied levels of engagement and quality of human capital, communication difficulties, and mental-cognitive differences between employees.

Materials and methods

The aim of this study was to identify barriers to inter-organisational co-operation between the Veterinary Inspectorate and other participants in the official process of ensuring food safety. For this study the authors decided to adopt the dominant interpretative paradigm. In this approach it is not assumed that reality is objective, measurable and described by means of universal laws. It is assumed that reality is constructed socially, and for the determination of the actual manner of co-operation and barriers to establishing and functioning of co-operation, the convictions of the inspection units are the element determining the construction of mutual relations (Hatch, 2002; Jemielniak, 2012; Smircich & Morgan 1982).

The Veterinary Inspectorate is an institution responsible for the safety of all products of animal origin, and therefore for human and animal health in Poland. It employs 5,000 people at the central, provincial and poviat levels. The performance of its tasks requires co-operation with three of the four other main food safety inspection bodies in Poland and many other institutions.

This article partly uses the results of tests carried out in units of food safety inspection bodies, the purpose of which was to learn about the conditions for the functioning of these units and to examine their preparation for the performing of tasks in the conditions of the changing external environment. The research was carried out from 2012 to 2015 in two stages. The first stage concerned the analysis of the organisational (internal and external) documentation used by the inspection bodies during the performance of tasks. In addition, industry reports, post-audit reports of the Supreme Audit Office and expert statements were analysed. In the second stage in-depth interviews were

conducted with employees of inspection bodies. The selection of units of these bodies was deliberate, because the type of inspection, management level and location were taken into account, which means that the units selected for the study were located in different provinces of the country. A total of 56 interviews were conducted with employees of inspection bodies performing various functions at different levels of central, provincial and powiat management (tab. 1). This allowed for extending the study of inter-organisational co-operation to include internal co-operation within inspection bodies. A standard protocol (a scenario with questions) was used in interviews.

All examined organisations have common features. First of all, they are public administration and inspection units specialising in supervision and inspections in a specific scope. They all carry out their tasks in similar legal, political, economic and cultural conditions. Therefore, the essence of the research was not to conduct interviews in each unit (of a certain type or

level), but rather the main issue was to get to know the meanings that that employees of these institutions give to the conditions and processes in which they participate. However, due to the fact that the research was conducted in different types of units, it was possible to discover their diversity: to compare the meanings and check if there are differences between them and if so, what those concern.

Interviews were recorded and 53 hours of recorded conversations were obtained, which were subsequently transcribed. The research material obtained in this way was analysed both in terms of the content of the statement (preliminary analysis) and the view of the organisational reality (proper analysis) (Polanyi, 1997). The creation of a list of intermediate threads, which were then ordered, was the result of this stage, thus creating the main cognitive categories. This article describes one of many threads selected during the research analysis concerning inter-organisational co-operation between inspection units.

Table 1. Number of interviews conducted

Level of management / position	IW	PIORiN	IJHARS	IH	PIS	Total
Central	1	2	–	–	–	3
<i>Chief Inspector</i>	–	1	–	–	–	1
<i>General Director</i>	1	1	–	–	–	2
Provincial	8	14	3	2	7	34
<i>Provincial manager</i>	3	2	2	–	1	8
<i>Head of department</i>	3	4	1	1	2	11
<i>Inspector</i>	2	8	–	1	4	15
Powiat / branch	10	Lack of this level			9	19
<i>Powiat manager</i>	3				1	4
<i>Head of department</i>	2				1	3
<i>Inspector</i>	5				7	12
Total	19	16	3	2	16	56

IW – Veterinary Inspectorate, PIORiN – State of Plant Health and Seed Inspectorate, IJHARS – Trade Quality Inspectorate for Agricultural and Food Products, IH – Trade Inspectorate, PIS – National Sanitary Inspectorate.

Source: own study.

Results and discussion

The formal scope of co-operation of the Veterinary Inspectorate with other inspection bodies

The examination of legal acts and organisational documentation of inspection bodies shows that the activities undertaken in the framework of inter-organisational co-operation between the Veterinary Inspectorate and the State Sanitary Inspectorate are described in the most comprehensive manner. They concern the preparation of lists of establishments at which food of plant and animal origin is produced, processed or stored. In addition, these units may organise joint training on the functioning of the food safety systems, including the HACCP system. They can also appoint their representatives to the examination boards in the field of basic hygienic issues. These units are required to provide information on cases of zoonotic diseases and food poisoning, mutually

agreeing the official food inspection plans. In addition, IW co-operates with the Chief Sanitary Inspector in the field of providing information on dangerous food products and animal feeds.

Sea fisheries inspectorates should also co-operate with IW in the area of organising and conducting joint inspections, providing information on suspected violations of fisheries regulations and veterinary requirements. While the co-operation of IW inspectorates with IJHARS units should consist of (in particular): organising and conducting joint inspections of premises used for storing or processing fishery products; and providing mutual information on infringements of fisheries regulations (Jendza, 2010).

On the basis of the analysis of legal acts, it can be concluded that co-operation between inspection bodies that supervise and inspect the successive stages in the production process, processing, distribution and sale of food should be multi-threaded and multi-lateral (Fig. 1).

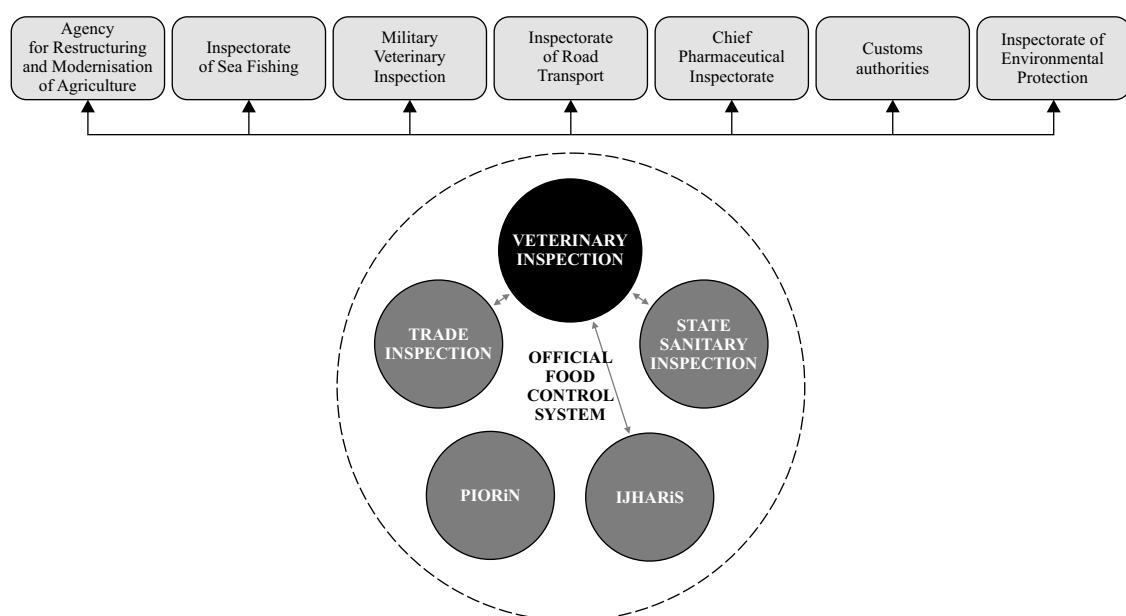


Figure 1. Co-operation of inspection bodies supervising food safety in the light of legal provisions

IJHARS – Trade Quality Inspectorate of Agricultural and Food Products, PIORiN – State Plant and Seed Protection Inspectorate.

Source: own study.

The actual scope of co-operation of the Veterinary Inspectorate with other inspections

The research was carried out at both the provincial and poviat levels. The research shows that voivodeship inspectorates of the Veterinary Inspectorate (provincial level):

- did not co-operate or very rarely co-operated with units of other inspection bodies responsible for food safety, even when the scope of supervision or inspections coincided with the selected areas;
- more often undertook co-operation with bodies supporting their functioning, e.g. with the Police, than with units of other inspection bodies;
- if co-operation with units of other inspection bodies was undertaken, a written form of communication was used, while all forms of communicating the information were used with poviat units and other voivodeship units of own inspection and with the Police (direct contact, e-mail, fax, letters, etc.);
- practically did not co-operate with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, to which they are subject.

It was interesting that even internal co-operation between different provincial (voivodeship) inspectorates of IW has been rarely engaged in.

In turn, poviat units of the Veterinary Inspectorate:

- did not co-operate or very rarely co-operated with units of other inspection bodies responsible for food safety;
- co-operated with other poviat IW units (internal co-operation) and units supporting their work more often than the provincial inspectorates;
- used a more direct form of communication during co-operation than that used by provincial units.

The research also shows that most often the co-operation with units of other inspection bodies was engaged in due to the existing legal provisions, e.g. regarding the transfer of inspection documents or information about the inspected entity and about products that do not meet the requirements (forced

co-operation). However, in general, inspection bodies did not co-operate with each other during the execution of projects or the performing of tasks within inter-organisation inspection teams, they also performed joint inspections very rarely (i.e. there was a lack of voluntary co-operation).

Barriers to inter-organisational co-operation between the Veterinary Inspectorate and other inspection bodies

The analysis presented above referring to the formal aspect of co-operation shows that the organisational documentation, in a general way, describes with whom the Veterinary Inspectorate should co-operate during the performance of tasks and what actions it should take as part of co-operation. Meanwhile, the conducted research shows that inspection bodies, at various levels of management, did not or only very rarely decided to engage in inter-organisational co-operation. At this point a question should be asked about the reasons for the discrepancy between the officially formulated postulates and real practices. When identifying the barriers of inter-organisational co-operation, the classification proposed by Santarek and his team (Santarek et al., 2008) has been used. The description of barriers is the result of the conducted studies.

The first of the barriers is of a semantic nature, concerning concepts and the interpretation thereof. In individual legal acts regulating the operation of individual inspections non-homogenous terminology is used when defining the scope of tasks and competence thereof. The result is that there are numerous doubts and interpretation problems (Wojciechowski, 2014, p. 55), which has a negative effect on the mutual understanding of employees of various inspection bodies. In addition, it is worth noting that legal acts regarding the official system of ensuring food safety were issued “in relation to the achieving or performing of various goals and tasks, among which protection of food safety or food quality is, in most cases, one of many actions of bodies appointed under these acts”

(Wojciechowski, 2014, p. 64). This means that individual inspection bodies had various, often divergent priorities in their activities.

The diverse organisational structure of individual inspections was the organisational barrier to establishing co-operation. The field structure of individual inspections was non-homogenous, due to the different number of levels and the legal situation: some field inspections are governed by a unified administration and others in a non-uniform way. This made it difficult for field inspectors to identify partners for co-operation in other inspection bodies.

The organisational and legal barriers are not the only reasons for the very limited inter-organisational co-operation. The conducted study also identified process, cultural and information barriers, as well as organisational behaviours. The following were most frequently noted among them:

- fragmentary perception of the official system of ensuring food safety by employees;
- not recognizing the stages of the process for which other inspection bodies are responsible;
- conviction about self-sufficiency and, as a result, feeling a lack of need for co-operation;
- lack of experience of co-operation with other units;
- negative experiences related to co-operation;
- perception of other units as rivals and not as partners (“us vs them” syndrome).

A more detailed list of diagnosed barriers can be found in Table 2.

Many of the barriers listed above have been previously identified by other researchers (e.g. Kamiński, 2017; Sienkiewicz-Małýjurek, 2014). As noted by Klimas (2015), the most important barriers are those related to human capital.

Table 2. Barriers to undertaking and conducting inter-organisational co-operation between the Veterinary Inspectorate and other inspection bodies

Barrier category	Barrier description
Mentality barrier (cultural)	Perception of other units as rivals Lack of atmosphere of trust, respect and openness
Barrier of organisational behaviour	Lack of or unfavourable experience of co-operation with other units Failure to notice the benefits of co-operation Employees' fear of more work as a result of establishing co-operation Inter-level misunderstandings and desire to please the decision-makers
Information barrier	Lack of knowledge among employees about the scope of supervision of other inspection bodies Lack of knowledge about whom to contact Lack of developed informal channels
Process barrier	Division of the supervision process into fragments carried out by various inspections Fragmentary perception of the process of food safety supervision (through the prism of own inspection)
Political barrier	Political appointment of key decision makers at the level of voivodeship (provincial) inspectorates limits engaging in co-operation
Organisational barrier	Non-uniform field structure of individual inspections (no equivalent to contact at a given level of an organisational structure)
Semantic barrier	Different understanding of terminology in the legal acts regulating the operation of individual inspection bodies
Legal barrier	Divergent priorities in the operations of individual inspection bodies Lack of detailed legal regulations concerning co-operation Fragmentary definition of tasks for inspection

Source: own study.

The fragmented perception of the official system of ensuring food safety by employees was a specific barrier to the studied units. This is a problem that, in the opinion of the authors, should be treated as a separate category: a process barrier.

The barriers of co-operation described above caused the inspection bodies to co-operate with each other very rarely, more often co-operation was established within the organisation: between powiaty, or between the voivodeship (provincial) and powiat levels. Most often, inter-organisational co-operation was enforced by legal regulations. What is interesting is the fact that inspection units engaged in external co-operation more often with bodies “supporting” their work, for example, with the Police or the Road Transport Inspectorate, than with other inspection units of the official system for ensuring food safety. Activities involving joint inspections or the execution of other joint projects improving the functioning of units were not carried out at all. It can be concluded that identified barriers block both voluntary and forced co-operation.

Policy implications

Inter-organisational co-operation problems between parts of the official system of ensuring food safety are not specific only to the system in Poland. Similar difficulties are observed in many countries. Therefore these research findings have potentially wide application. The actions aimed at improving the process of ensuring food safety may be of an evolutionary or revolutionary nature.

Evolutionary solutions may include measures to eliminate the differences between inter-organisational co-operation postulated in legal regulations and real practices. Their goal should be to clear the co-operation channels between the five existing inspectorates.

Revolutionary activities may consist of building a comprehensive system for ensuring food safety which will lead to consistent supervision over the entire food chain, and not only over individual stages of it. The construction of such a system

may require changes to the number and the scope of tasks of the existing inspections bodies. Inter-organisational co-operation problems as part of the official system of ensuring food safety are not specific only to the national system. Similar difficulties were noted in many foreign systems made up of a number of entities. In the search for solutions, quite radical actions have been being taken that involve the consolidation of inspection bodies into one organisation consisting of central body and field bodies.⁵ However, when deciding on the integration, one should consider change not only in the legal or structural terms, but also think about the mechanisms for combining these inspection bodies in mental terms or organisational behaviour. It should be made ensured that the “islands” isolated from each other are not formed within the integrated organisations but that the institution instead operates as one “body”.

Conclusions

In these times of the rapidly changing global environment and the introduction of new food products and production technologies, “acting alone” has no reason for existence, while joint action based on equality and appreciation of the importance of each inspection body is a strength. Meanwhile, the research conducted shows that there is a significant discrepancy between legal regulations which set out the rules of co-operation of the Veterinary Inspectorate with other inspectorates and the actual inter-organisation co-operation (not) engaged in as part of the process of ensuring food safety.

⁵ In the last twenty years, such changes have been introduced in, *inter alia*, Denmark (1997), Canada (1997), Ireland (1998), the UK (2000), Finland (2002), the Netherlands (2002), Germany (2002), and New Zealand (2002); see Wojciechowski, 2014, p. 64. Mergers of existing inspection bodies may pose some risks, in particular disturbances in operational activity during the integration phase, increased bureaucracy, and internal competition between combined entities.

The lack of co-operation in accordance with the formal guidelines is due to cultural conditions, organisation, information, processes, legal and organisational behaviour. It seems that the key source of barriers is the fragmentary perception of the food safety supervision process by staff, which results from the lack of a systematic approach to this process (i.e. a process barrier). The tasks within the process are clearly divided between the participants, and the employees of the inspection bodies focus on their own activities, without being involved in the work of other inspection bodies. However, the stages of the inspection process are interrelated and their effectiveness would be higher if inter-organisational co-operation took place. However, the mechanisms that encourage co-operation are relatively weak, and there are numerous barriers to co-operation between inspection bodies. As a result, each inspection body focuses on its own goals, which does not mean that the goals of the whole process are achieved. As a consequence, employees of inspection bodies perceive the other inspection bodies as external entities and not colleagues taking part in a common process. Therefore, it is difficult to talk about the official system of ensuring food safety, but rather about isolated inspection bodies.

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