

Impacts of Value Co-creation in Rural Tourism Services: the case of a Santa Catarina farm hotel

Andrei Bonamigo^aCarlos Alberto Lidizia Soares^b

Abstract

Rural tourism constitutes an alternative for Brazilian socioeconomic development, as well as implies the mitigation exodus rural and is a strategy for regional development. In this perspective, value co-creation among rural environment players allows access to knowledge, information, and technologies through resources complementary, which bolster tourist activity development. Given the above, this study sought to diagnose, by means of a case study, the impacts of value co-creation in a farm hotel. To do so, two on-site visits were conducted at the farm hotel, in which participants provided interviews and document analysis. Data were then investigated by content analysis based on Bardin (2011). Based on the findings, a series of contributions arise from value co-creation in the surroundings of the Hotel Fazenda, as well as barriers, which presented themselves as hinderers of the value co-creation in rural service context. Value co-creation for the surrounding community allows to provide new experiences to the tourist, so that regional and cultural aspects, and typical food aspects of the region are disseminated. Value co-creation has proven to be a way to stimulate collaborative competitiveness, by sharing and complementing resources. On the other hand, the fragility of the adopted management and selection methods of actors for cooperation has been shown to be a risk, which can result in value co-destruction.

Keyword: Rural tourism; Agritourism; Tourism management, Hospitality; Cooperation.

Impactos da Cocriação de Valor em Serviços de Turismo Rural: o caso de um hotel-fazenda de Santa Catarina

Resumo

O turismo rural se apresenta como uma alternativa para o desenvolvimento socioeconômico brasileiro, bem como implica na mitigação do êxodo rural e é uma estratégia para o desenvolvimento regional. Nessa perspectiva, a cocriação de valor entre os atores do ambiente rural permite o acesso a conhecimento, informações e tecnologias por meio da complementariedade de recursos, o que implica no desenvolvimento da atividade turística. Diante do exposto, o presente artigo objetiva diagnosticar, por meio de um estudo de caso, os impactos da cocriação de valor em um hotel fazenda. Para atingir esse objetivo, foram conduzidas duas visitas *in loco* ao hotel fazenda, e entrevistas e análise documental foram fornecidas pelos entrevistados. Em seguida, conduziu-se uma análise de conteúdo baseada em Bardin (2011). A partir dos achados, evidencia-se um conjunto de contribuições advindas da cocriação de valor no entorno do hotel fazenda, bem como entraves à cocriação de valor, os quais se apresentam como inibidores no

a Doutor em Engenharia de Produção pela Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina. Docente do curso de Engenharia de Produção na Universidade Federal Fluminense, Volta Redonda, Rio de Janeiro, Brasil. E-mail: andreibonamigo@gmail.com

b Pós-doutorando em Turismo pela Universidade de Aveiro. Docente do curso de Turismo na Universidade Federal Fluminense, Niterói, Rio de Janeiro, Brasil. E-mail: csoares@id.uff.br

contexto do serviço rural cocriado. Os achados indicam que a cocriação de valor para a comunidade do entorno permite prover novas experiências ao turista, de modo que aspectos regionais, culturais e alimentos típicos da região sejam disseminados. A cocriação de valor demonstrou ser uma forma de estimular a competitividade colaborativa, pelo compartilhamento e a complementariedade de recursos. Por outro lado, a fragilidade nos métodos adotados de gestão e seleção dos atores para a cooperação tem se demonstrado um risco, que pode implicar na codestruição de valor.

Palavras-chave: Turismo Rural; Gestão em turismo; Agroturismo; Hospitalidade; Cooperação.

Los Impactos de la Cocreación de Valor en los Servicios de Turismo Rural: el caso de un hotel fazenda en Santa Catarina

Resumen

El turismo rural es una alternativa para el desarrollo socioeconómico brasileño, pues implica la mitigación del éxodo rural y es una estrategia al desarrollo regional. Desde esta perspectiva, la cocreación de valor entre los actores del medio rural permite el acceso al conocimiento, la información y las tecnologías por medio de la complementariedad de recursos, lo que implica en el desarrollo de la actividad turística. Dado lo anterior, este estudio tiene como objetivo identificar los impactos de la cocreación de valor en un hotel rural a partir de un estudio de caso. Para ello, se realizaron dos visitas *in situ* en el hotel rural, se hicieron entrevistas y análisis de documentos de los entrevistados. Luego se llevó a cabo un análisis de contenido basado en Bardin (2011). Los hallazgos posibilitan destacar una lista de contribuciones de la cocreación de valor en el entorno del hotel rural, además de obstáculos que se presentaron como inhibidores en el contexto del servicio rural cocreado. Los hallazgos indican que la cocreación de valor con la comunidad circundante le permite brindar al turista nuevas experiencias, de manera que se difundan aspectos regionales, culturales y gastronómicos típicos de la región. Esta es una estrategia que estimula la competitividad colaborativa mediante la compartición y la complementariedad de recursos. Por otro lado, la fragilidad en los métodos adoptados de gestión y selección de actores para la cooperación fue un riesgo, que puede implicar en la codestrucción de valores.

Palabras clave: Turismo rural; Gestión turística; Agroturismo; Hospitalidad; Cooperación.

INTRODUCTION

Brazil brings together thousands of rural properties with natural, cultural value, and gastronomic riches that allow the rural tourism activities development (Brambatti & Nitsche, 2018; Oliveira et al., 2020). Although rural tourism is considered with potential growth in the country, some inhibitors linked to the lack of management in the service process and waste management a barrier to rural tourism (Dreher & Kraisch, 2009; Rocha, 2014).

In this sense, de Mendonça (2006) considers the tourism sector not to manage the several provider services and activities the sector sells. In the other words, the manager only transports tourists to know the attractions, this way, brings tourists to the product and not the product to the tourist. Accordantly with Mota (2001, p. 127), the tourist product can be amplified, once they comprehend “the combination of tourist goods and tourist services, which together through interaction and interdependence relationships, become extremely complex in a tourist destination”.

Based on exposure, the value co-creation among the multiple players in rural tourism has been receiving attention in currently literature (Carvalho et al. 2021; Taveira et al., 2020), once the value co-creation allows for the development strategies for transpose the sector problems, increasing the value perception for the clients and consumer, sharing risks and advantages among the partners, via collaborative activities, in a relation win-win (Ruiz-Rea et al., 2020; Bonamigo & Mendes, 2019; Bonamigo et al. 2021).

The rural tourism exposes a lack linked the management integration lack for extending value perception for clients and consumer, in the other hand, this sector demand interaction among the actors, for the resources complementarity (Mendonça, 2006; Pimentel et al. 2017). This inhibitor prevents the actor's sharing knowledge, information, and complementary resources to create new experiences for users (Bonamigo et al., 2021).

Based on exposure, this study aims to diagnose, through a case study, the impacts of value co-creation in a Hotel Farm. From the findings, expect to be possibly identified the advantages and disadvantages of value co-creation in tourism service rural, listing the elements for guide project futures based on cooperation through multiple actors and supporting the maker-decisions in the rural tourism sector. Then, this exploratory research allows improving the understanding of relations in rural tourism, based on a holistic approach by collaboration among multiple actors in this sector (Vergara, 2009).

Based on exposed, this study deal with problem linked the lack of cooperation among hotels farms with the local actors, government, tourists and around community (Wilson et al., 2001; Rosalina et al. 2021). Since the limited interaction inhibits the complementarity of resources among the parties, which can jointly provide new experiences and services. Thus, the study is justified in elucidating how the value co-creation has impacted the organizational context of a farm hotel.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Value co-creation in services

In tourism activities value creation has a basic function, once allowing maximization of the experience economy. This way, the value co-creation comprehends a key factor for new experiences, that stimulate the major involvement among the parts (client and provider), this involvement creates value for the consumers (Carvalho et al. 2021; Almeida & Campos, 2020). In this way, value co-creation allows companies to obtain customer loyalty and satisfaction as a competitive advantage, as well as making it difficult for competitors to imitate them (Porter, 1985).

The Service-Dominant Logic (SDL), proposed by Vargo et al. (2004), exposes the idea of value co-creation as a dialogic process, in which consumers and companies interact to create value, in this way the company controls the production process and can give space for the customer to join it as a co-producer of resources, the customer controls the value creation process and can invite the service provider to join this process as a value co-creator (Lima Dantas et al. 2020).

In this way, the “adaptation of goods or products as if they were made to measure” changes its understanding, under the bias co-creation value, which comprises “the process by which customers interact with the company and generate their own experiences”, the benefit and experience from the customer’s perspective is predominant (Binkhorst & Dekker, 2009, p. 313).

Thus, value co-creation allows the interaction and complementarity of resources with different actors that make up the sector of the economy, such as public and private organizations, among others, which can obtain/generate joint benefits through the sharing of their assets. In this sense, the tourism sector presents weaknesses, which the value co-creation allows to contribute to overcoming the obstacles related to resources complementarity (Costa, 2021; Reis et al., 2021; Bonamigo et al., 2022a).

For Aquino et al. (2020), the value co-creation process occurs at different times, among them: before, during and after the service provided, in order to meet the experience of consumption of the service offered. In this sense, for the authors, identifying how was provide the service and evaluating the experience provided to the customer from a co-creative perspective is a fundamental factor to ensure that the customer or user experience has been achieved under acceptable conditions.

In this sense, Grönroos (2012) considers that a value co-creation includes all the elements necessary to understand, plan and respond to customer-company interactions in order to support the value creation for both, since co-creation occurs through the sharing of resources and communication between the parties.

According Bonamigo & Mendes (2019), the value co-creation exposes a conjunct of advantages for the actors, as the risk sharing, collaborative investments and competitive advantages. For the other hand, lack of criteria for selection partner and opportunisms are a problem that the focal actor need attention for avoid the value co-destruction among the actors.

The rural tourism segment

Tourist destinations can be considered autonomous strategic business units oriented to the community, which encompasses numerous groups of stakeholders (Flagetad & Hope, 2001) that, over time, tend to increase. For Chonchol (2005), with the advent of reduced employment in agriculture in the global context, the main challenges are linked to generating employment and income alternatives for the rural population, to reduce the rural exodus that has been happening in recent decades.

Although rural tourism activity in Brazil is recent, growth is constant, as tourism is a social phenomenon that involves personal fulfillment, recreation, and a break from routine. This activity allows for an increase in demand for local products, greater collection of taxes and fees, as well as complementary effects, for the exchanged experiences, for all the relationships that start through tourism (Oliveira et al., 2007).

In this way, rural tourism is a complex sector, which demands a holistic look, so that it reflects public, private, and academic institutions, such as rural tourism in family agriculture, community tourism, and locally based tourism, among others (Candiotto, 2010).

Although rural tourism is complete and challenging for integrated management, it has potential and is a source of income for the small farmer, who goes beyond the primary activity of agricultural production to promote local values, based on cultural, historical, and gastronomic aspects of the areas. rural areas (Oliveira et al. 2017). Therefore, for Silvestre (2018, p. 6), “family farmers should take ownership of knowledge about service administration and marketing critically and consciously”.

In this sense, the transition from the commercialization of low-value-added agriculture to an economy based on the economy arising from rural tourism passes through factors of resistance to culture, knowledge, and strategies for the management of the rural tourism service (Silvestre, 2018).

Facilitators of value cocreation in services

The value co-creation among actors has benefits in the services organizations, as e.g., the solutions creations for provide better experiences for the consumers or clients (Jaakkola & Aarikka-Stenroos, 2019). In addition, organizations with B2B (Business-to-Business) relationships can use the knowledge and information exchanged during the interaction to gain a competitive advantage or provide better experiences for the clients or consumers (Schwetschke & Durugbo, 2018).

In this sense, Bonamigo et al. (2020) recognized eleven facilitators for stimulate the value cocreation among multiple actors. They are: (1) involvement of actors; (2) synergy among Participants; (3) resource complementarity; (4) personal relationships between actors; (5) value compatibility; (6) specialized knowledge; (7) trust; (8) geographical proximity; (9) information exchange through technology; (10) the establishment of a network; (11) governance.

The strategy for stimulate the value cocreation in tourism service can be based on smart services. The so-called smart services, with digital technologies provide the improvement of existing services and options for improve the experience of tourist in farm hotel. From this perspective, the adoption of digital technologies is a key factor that in the farm hotel studied is superficially explored (Monteiro, 2020). For example, the new service based on the collection and data management for perform new the tourist experience. Thus, the industry 4.0 technologies have been transforming the services business via (Bonamigo & Frech, 2020, p. 2).

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

The present study, with a qualitative approach, used semi-structured interviews as instruments for empirical data collection. From the perspective of Patias & Von Hohendorff (2019), qualitative research brings together the interpretation of multiple and subjective realities, valuing the perceptions and experiences of the studied public.

Regarding the use of semi-structured interviews in this study, this resulted from the possibility of introducing questions considered relevant to the investigation, aiming to clarify the arguments presented by the research subjects on the subject addressed (Boni & Quaresma, 2005). Thus, the interviews were conducted by a script containing previously established questions applied between December 2021 to January 2022.

Since the study aimed to diagnose the impacts of value co-creation in a farm hotel located in the west of Santa Catarina / Brazil. To achieve this objective, a case study was carried out, based on four steps, based on Yin (1994).

The first step consisted in selecting the case study, which comprised a farm hotel with more than 10 years of activities. The choice of the case study was based on the convenience of the researchers due to the history of Hotel Fazenda, which has conducted initiatives for value co-creation, which have shown evidence of success and failure (value co-destruction) in their cooperation in recent years.

Concerning the profile of the hotel studied, its structure includes space for holding events, such as weddings, graduations, and birthday parties, in addition to its attractiveness, a country kitchen, which includes typical dishes of the region in which it is located, in the state from Santa Catarina. In summer, the hotel has a greater flow of tourists, due to aquatic entertainment and wet bar. In addition, it includes attractions in nature, via trails, fishing ponds, ecological tours, horseback riding, and a camping area.

The team is centered on the owner's family workforce and a team of five permanent contractors and dozens of employees hired on demand for the hotel activities. The latter is predominantly the labor of the community surrounding the hotel, which are farmers who work at the hotel as a supplementary income activity.

The farm hotel is characterized by the collaborative action between multiple players for the value co-creation, such as consultants, the surrounding rural community that develops collaborative services for joint gains, such as infrastructure, community initiatives for the well-being of tourists, as well as collaborative partnerships with the tourism office of the municipality where the farm hotel is located.

In the second research step, we built and calibrate an instrument for the data collected. This semi-structured questionnaire was developed based on Bonamigo & Mendes (2019). The adaptation of the aforementioned questionnaire is justified by the scope and similar objectives in both researches. Although Bonamigo & Mendes (2019) sought to evaluate the co-creation of value in a business consulting services company, in the present study, it is directed to the rural tourism services sector. The questionnaire was evaluated by two experts in rural tourism. Incremental adjustments were added to the instrument. The questionnaire is shown in Appendix A.

The third step, comprehended the data collecting in loco by researchers. We interviewed the Owner of Hotel Fazenda (PHF), a Customer Serving Collaborator of Hotel Fazenda (CHF) and a Service Provider of Hotel Fazenda (PSHF). This last is a partner in a local community. Besides, was data collected via researchers' direct observation and documental analysis through the internal documents, reports, websites, and social media available by the farm hotel.

In the last step, we performed the Content Analysis based on Bardin (2011). Firstly, the data collection was transcribed in an electronic spreadsheet, then the data were organized, and grouped the context units with a strong relationship were grouped. Finally, the units of analysis (*a posteriori*) were defined to support the textual script. The units were defined as: Co-creation advantages, complementarity of resources, user experience, opportunism, value co-destruction, incompatibility of actors, centralized leadership and the actor's orchestration problem.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on the findings arising from the case study strategy applied at the farm hotel, it was possible to expand the depth and detail of the implications of the value co-creation among actors for the rural tourism segment (Vergara, 2005).

When questioning the PHF about partnerships made in recent years, it mentioned that *“most of the time we had difficulties in forming partnerships, as opportunism and the difficulty in maintaining an integration between our work system and that of the partners generated several problems”*. In this sense, opportunism is an obstacle to value co-creation, which can generate impacts contrary to the value co-creation (Todeva & Knoke (2005); Razmdoost & Mills (2019), i.e., the value co-destruction among the actors (Bonamigo et al. 2020; Bonamigo, 2022).

When interviewees mention partners, they refer to actors in the business ecosystem, such as suppliers, and the surrounding community, among other stakeholders. In the fragment exposed by the PHF, it refers to a tourist agency. According to Codá et al., (2020) the value co-destruction brings together the imbalance between the actors that together co-create value, which can occur at different stages of the service offer. For the authors, co-destruction implies collaborative destruction and/or a decrease in value by providers and customers in the interactive context among the parties.

The CHF mentioned that *“we have already had activities in the form of collaboration with other companies, this was informal, but I see it as advantageous for the business”*. Thus, it is observed that the intention of the parties when interacting, the service systems probably intend to co-create value instead of co-destroying it, however, there are risks in this context that need to be managed (Codá, Farias & Dias, 2020; Bonamigo et al., 2020).

When asked to report an example of these difficulties, the PHF stated that *“one case was critical with a travel agency. We presented a dynamic of work and management and it came with actions and closing of reservations outside our standards, a factor that generated dissatisfaction for our customers and we chose to end the partnership relationship with this travel agency”*

Regarding, the CHF considered *“the commitment of the parties to results I think has been the biggest problem”*. For Bonamigo et al. (2020) the incompatibility among the actors is one of the main obstacles to value co-creation. Thus, organizational differences, divergent organizational cultures, and company size are impact factors that imply the collaborative development of the parties (Wang et al. 2018).

To mitigate this obstacle, Bonamigo & Rodriguez (2017) point out that sharing the same vision and similar organizational values are factors that imply mitigating the interaction risks among multiple actors that interact collaboratively.

Based on Bonamigo et al. (2022a), once the actors be orchestrated, is possible stimulate the resource complementarity and competitive advantages created, based on knowledge, information, people and equipment. In the other hand, if the farm hotel lacks skills to lead instabilities among the participants the actors' behavior and orchestrating can provide weak the resources complementarity.

Regarding the advantages of working collaboratively, the PHF reported that *“I see advantages, we have partners and farmers in the surroundings who cooperatively work with us, which is advantageous for us, because the simplicity and attention*

they receive from the farmer, it is pleasant for our customers, and for the surrounding farmers it is a complementary income to work in this partnership with us”.

From this perspective, value co-creation allows the resources complementarity, such as knowledge, information, and the development of complementary skills, which the organization that acts individually is limited (Fernando & Las Casas, 2018). In addition, the creation of the competitive differential makes it difficult for competitors to imitate the competitive differentials provided by them (Dal Bó et al., 2017).

The CHF mentioned that “the work culture in the form of partnerships or, as I said, co-created, is an uncommon factor in our region, but it is good for everyone because, with the current situation where we have more jobs and development, everyone will have advantages”. In this sense, culture is a factor that implies the commitment and management of adverse conditions for value co-creation and implies the generation of experiences for the user of the service provided (Cova, Dalli & Zwick, 2011).

Regarding the partner selection criteria, the PHF mentioned that “it is difficult to define this, but we need people who are reliable and committed to the partnership so that everyone sees the benefits”. The CHF pointed out that *“having dedicated people with experience and competence for what they set out to do is enough”*. When questioning the PSHF about criteria for choosing to co-create value, it considered *“I don’t have a formed idea about it, but I think sincerity and transparency are the basis for any business”*.

Based on what was exposed by the interviewees, the definition of actor selection criteria is something emerging for those involved in the farm hotel. On the other hand, it can be observed that the lack of clear criteria for partner selection is a risk factor for the effectiveness of value co-creation, which can imply the value co-destruction (Bonamigo, Martelotte & Mourão, 2022).

When questioning the PSHF about its perception of collaborative partnerships and the identified advantages, it was exposed that *“the farm hotel project has brought many gains to our community, we have a historical and natural legacy that many had no idea there was in our community, in our region and is now well known. We have work opportunities, which helps us in our livelihood and our children have this place that has work opportunities, for us, it’s just advantages, we even manage to put products of our property for sale, here near the road for sale to tourists who pass through here, such as grapes, colonial wine, cheese, corn and salads that we produce”*. Thus, we can be observed that the co-creation of value positively impacts the mitigation of rural exodus, as well as the rural tourism development (Candiotta, 2010).

Regarding the value co-creation disadvantage, the PSHF mentioned that *“if we had a large structure, the results would be better, but it is not always possible to meet what farm hotel demands of us, due to our small structure, thus, leveling the partners to collaborate is a problem that I see as a disadvantage”*. Therefore, it is evident that the incompatibility among the actors to co-create value was presented as frequent from the interviewee’s perspective

For Lorgnier & Su (2014), this obstacle is characterized by the lack of relationship asymmetry, that is, one actor may have more advantages than another in the value co-creation process. On the other hand, a way of mitigating this obstacle may be linked to the standardization of service processes between the parties, so

that instabilities and the definition of a priori criteria, based on contracts, mitigate the risks of value co-destruction among the actors (Braga et al, 2021).

According Plé & Cáceres (2010, p. 431), the value co-destruction has been defined as “an interaction process between service systems that results in a decline in at least one of the system’s wellbeing (which given the nature of the service system can be individual or organizational)”.

In this sense, the cooperation among the actors no add value, is a disadvantage for the farm hotel. The value co-destruction can happen in three moments. Before collaboration, during collaboration and after collaboration. This way, the cause is linked the absence of information from the partners, insufficient level of trust, mistakes, inability to change (Järvi et al., 2018).

This way, in the farm hotel, the value destruction produces negative experiences for the customers or partners in value co-creation relationship (Prior et al. 2016).

Based on finds, we can be observed that the value co-creation in farm hotel studied has presented challenges to be overcome from the management service perspective. From the orchestrating approach to the relationship of value co-creation, beneficiaries demand constant education/routine planning to overcome the adverse factors of interaction among the parties (Kelleher et al. 2020).

For Bonamigo et al. (2022a), the actors’ selection for the value co-creation based on criteria positively implies the orchestration of the relationship between the parties, so that the actor’s profile is analyzed under established criteria to mitigate risks and avoid the value co-destruction among the parties.

CONCLUSIONS

The present study aimed to recognize via study case the managerial implications of the value co-creation in a farm hotel. From the rural tourism services approach, it can be observed that positive impacts can be generated for the parties that together co-create value, including access to resources, such as the case in the farm hotel. In addition, it allows for promoting actions aimed at regional development, thus, partnerships with the surrounding community can be generated and experiences based on the region’s culture are provided to tourists so that the experience lived at the farm hotel can be stimulated.

On the other hand, there are obstacles that need to be overcome in the value co-creation process, among them the definition of criteria to select partners for the value co-creation in rural tourism, which directly imply the compatibility of the partners that will generate joint collaborative actions with farm hotel.

Based on the findings this study, it can be observed that the actors’ orchestration for the value co-creation is incipient and has potential for development in rural tourism. In the analysis of the digital media of this hotel, outdated content can be observed and limited interaction between partners and customers, which indicates weak engagement among the multiple actors that may co-create with the farm hotel.

From the hospitality perspective, the value co-creation in rural tourism is presented as a strategy to rescue cultural aspects present in the community that is in the surroundings of organizations focused on rural tourism, however, inhibited by fragile interactions between the actors, in the other words, the co-creation

happens informally. The value co-creation in the case analyzed, this was presented as a potentiality for the hospitality, so that the cuisine, the practices of food production and experiences provided by the surrounding community stand out as a competitive differential of the hotel being studied.

Additionally, in the case analyzed and by the document analysis conducted, it is evident that the value co-creation actions presented by the interviewees are sporadic, in addition, it was observed that the partners who co-create value are from the enterprise surroundings. In this sense, this study contributes to the literature and the empirical bias, as it presents a gap related to the lack of a structured process for the value co-creation, so that it agglutinates: actor selection criteria, performance metrics, contract construction with liability terms so that co-destruction risks are mitigated.

This study is limited to a single case analyzed. Thus, the finds cannot be generalized to the entire context of rural tourism in Santa Catarina state. However, future studies can be carried out within several Brazilian states to compare the value co-creation context in different regions, as well as identify lessons learned in each farm hotel to generate knowledge and a list of best practices for value co-creation can be listed. Another future study could aim at building a guide with guidelines to support hotel and farm managers in the value co-creation, based on management elements, digital technologies, and complementary resources linked to the actor's orchestration for the value co-creation together.

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Andrei Bonamigo: Definição do problema de pesquisa e objetivos, desenvolvimento da proposição teórica, realização da revisão bibliográfica e fundamentação teórica, escolha dos procedimentos metodológicos, coleta e análise de dados, elaboração de tabelas, gráficos e figuras, realização de cálculos e projeções, redação e adequação do manuscrito às normas da RTA.

Carlos Alberto Lidizia Soares: Análise de dados, revisão crítica, redação e adequação do manuscrito às normas da RTA.