

## WHY DO MICRO AND SMALL SIZED TOURISM ENTERPRISES COOPERATE?

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*This paper aims to analyse the main reasons for the occurrence of cooperation between SME in tourism as well as the criteria for partner selection, based on distinct theoretical approaches. Companies established in the main tourist destinations of a route located on the north coast of Brazilian northeast were investigated: Jericoacoara (CE), Parnaíba (PI) and Barreirinhas (MA). The qualitative study counted upon 27 in depth interviews with entrepreneurs selected based on their participation on cooperation in the Route. The analysis technique used was discourse analysis supported by Nvivo. The main findings reveal few family and friendship ties prior to the business partnership and also suggest that cooperation tends to occur between small groups of direct competitors in a destination. There is evidence that the reasons for cooperating vary accordingly to the cooperation actions, which are also diverse. Regarding the partner selection three are the main criteria: (i) service quality and similarity, (ii) good relationship, friendship and trust and (iii) past experiences and reputation. The data support the conclusion that the SME cooperative behavior cannot be explained exclusively by one theory, considering other elements such as individual interests, as well as collective matters, personal values and affective social ties.*

**KEY WORDS:** *Cooperation, relationships, micro/small sized enterprises, tourism, Rota das Emoções.*