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Exploring the Image, Perceived Authenticity, and Perceived Value of Underground Built Heritage (UBH) and Its Role in Motivation to Visit: A Case Study of Five Different Countries

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Abstract: Underground Built Heritage (UBH) is a unique cultural and tourist resource, often with diverse values for tourists and the local community. The research on UBH requires an interdisciplinary approach, various techniques, and methodologies, with current literature mainly focusing on sustainability and conservation issues of these sites, their classification and definitions. This paper tends to fill in the research gap in this field, which is based on the fact that tourism and marketing issues in research of UBH are quite rare and often neglected, although such aspects are very important for heritage valorization. Thus, the principal aim of the paper is to explore how heritage image, perceived authenticity, and perceived value affect motivation to visit UHS (Underground Heritage Sites) and domestic visitors' loyalty. To explore this aim, the survey was conducted in five countries (Serbia, Poland, Bulgaria, Turkey, and Albania,) on five underground heritage sites. The study sample included 504 domestic visitors (residents of the country where the research was conducted) of underground heritage sites—Petrovaradian Fortress Military Galleries (Serbia), the Srebrna Góra Fortress (Poland), Roman City (Bulgaria), Göreme (Turkey), and BUNK'ART (Albania). The results show a significant positive influence of perceived authenticity on perceived value, heritage image, motivation to visit UBH sites, and loyalty. However, perceived value seems to be a stronger predictor of all analyzed constructs. Heritage image also showed significant positive effects on motivation to visit and loyalty. Theoretical and practical implications of results are discussed in the paper.

Keywords: Underground Built Heritage; cultural tourism; heritage image; authenticity; perceived value; motivation to visit

1. Introduction

UBH is a unique cultural resource, being a focus of many recent scholarly papers coming from the field of conservation, tourism, economy, IT, and many others [1–4]. Natural and man-made caves, underground burial sites, mines and quarries, other human-made caves used for habitation and work, subterranean infrastructures (cisterns, tunnels, ancient drainage systems, etc.), and ancient buried structures and settlements are examples of UBH site typologies [5]. As such, they represent very attractive cultural and tourism recourse, not only for foreign visitors but also for the local community and domestic visitors. Additionally, such sites are often located in the cities or their near surrounding,

which make them accessible and suitable for daily visits. Heritage tourism is the term used to describe travel that focuses on seeing historical and cultural sites. It has to do with traveling to engage in genuine experiences with the locations, events, and artifacts that reflect each place's cultural history and narrative [6]. Consequently, one of the key goals of heritage tourism is to give visitors trustworthy information about the location, so they may appreciate local art, architecture, and traditions. Thus, heritage image and perceived authenticity and value of the site are of immense importance for creating loyal visitors. Currently, one of the most common uses of these sites is tourism, leading to a significant increase in interest in their valorization [7]. However, the current literature on UBH mainly focuses on the sustainability and conservation issues of these sites [8–11], their classification and definitions [5], while studies focusing on the tourism and marketing issues of UBH are quite rare [12,13]. On the other hand, all of these studies recognize the value of these sites for visitors and the local community and the great potential for tourism valorization. As UBH represents a category of Cultural Heritage (CH) assets, the current knowledge, insights, and assumptions can be drawn from the literature on cultural heritage. Among the abundance of studies regarding cultural heritage, there are also those focusing on tourism and marketing issues, such as those connecting heritage image with perceived value [14] and heritage motivation [15,16], perceived value and visitors' loyalty [17,18], as well as perceived authenticity [16]. Also, one very recent study explored the serial mediating role of destination image and perceived value in the relationship between perceived authenticity and behavioral intentions, such as repurchase intention and recommendation in a cultural heritage destination, which was confirmed by the results of the study. The current study, however, contributes to the current literature as it is the first study to explore interrelations between perceived authenticity, perceived value, heritage motivation, heritage image, and visitors' loyalty to the underground build heritage sites in one single model. The study tends to explore how perceived authenticity and perceived value of the UBH site influence motivation to visit the site but also the perception of the heritage image. Furthermore, the study analyzes how these concepts interact to influence domestic visitors' loyalty to the UBH site. The focus of the study is on domestic visitors, including local communities, as it strives to form research-based suggestions for heritage managers to attract more local people to the sites.

In order to increase the validity of the results, the data were collected from five different UBH sites from five different countries: Petrovaradian Fortress Military Galleries (Serbia), the Srebrna Góra Fortress (Poland), Roman City (Bulgaria), Göreme (Turkey), and BUNK'ART (Albania). Finally, this is one of the rare studies focusing on underground build heritage from such aspect, making important practical implications for the sites.

2. Theoretical Background and Hypothesis Development
2.1. Perceived Authenticity

In order to comprehend visitors' travel experiences at historical sites, MacCannell [19] introduced authenticity from a sociological perspective. Authenticity has now been viewed by Rickly-Boyd [20] as a crucial issue and important principle that can aid in sustainable tourism, notably in the context of heritage tourism. Heritage tourism is a niche market, and cultural tourism is an industry that is quickly expanding [21]. Destinations with established cultural heritage are seeing an exponential increase in both forms of tourism and the number of visitors. Studies on cultural tourism continue to emphasize the importance of the authenticity issue [22]. Today's traveler is more sophisticated in their ability and desires to encounter the authentic. According to Sharpley [23], authenticity is an important concept in the sociology of tourism and plays a significant role in the marketing of cultural assets [24]. Authenticity is then only an expression used to justify the travel and customer preferences because the customer has a goal in mind and a desire to realize that vision [25]. Truth, history, customs, places, communities, and culture are connected to authenticity [26–28]. Cultural tourism, on the other hand, entails activities carried out by communities to display their way of life, history, beliefs, artifacts, and landmarks [29,30].

Consequently, a territory or community is regarded as authentic if it preserves and upholds the customs, rituals, traditions, and language of its indigenous peoples [31]. Because of this, authenticity is directly tied to locals' daily life and has a big impact on how well tourists are treated, how happy they are, and even how a place is seen [24]. A way to strengthen local community identity is through heritage tourism, which highlights the various stages of its historical evolution, technological advancements, types of work, and socioeconomic changes that have taken place over time [32]. It will be pertinent to evaluate the significance of authenticity in this heritage typology, given that for certain authors [28,33], authenticity has been a key topic of discussion in heritage tourism. Authenticity is a largely debated characteristic of heritage sites and is definitely an attractive factor, especially for foreign travelers in search of cultural attractions. However, authenticity is also a very important attractive factor for local communities and domestic visitors as it helps in preserving a local way of life, history, and tradition, by keeping the original purpose and appearance of the site and its connection to local people. This paper also suggests that authentic sites could provoke the identification and loyalty of domestic visitors.

The four constructs Kolar and Zabkar [24] identified as the foundation of their approach are cultural motivation, objective authenticity, existential authenticity, and loyalty. According to their research in Europe, cultural motivation has a favorable impact on both existential and objective authenticity, and these two types of authenticity have a direct, positive impact on loyalty.

It is logical to assume that in the context of cultural tourism, high perceptions of objective authenticity, positive assessments of architecture, materials, resource presentations, and activities, all positively influence perceptions of existential authenticity and can favor visitors' feelings of connection to, and immersion in, the local culture. Zhou et al. [34] tested the basic model of authenticity in the context of the Chinese calligraphic landscape and added "attitude", a new concept, to it. Findings imply that "attitude" has a favorable impact on both existential and objective authenticity. While motivation has a negligible impact on existential authenticity, it has a considerable beneficial impact on objective authenticity. The European study found that both types of authenticity are positively impacted by motivation. In the European study, existential and objective authenticity have a direct and favorable impact on loyalty, whereas, in the Chinese study, existential and objective authenticity have a negligible impact on loyalty. Nguyen and Cheung [16] identified four aspects of Chinese visitors' perceived authenticity toward historic events in their measuring model: objective authenticity, constructive authenticity, existential authenticity, and contrast to expectation. As this model has been already tested in relation to heritage and seems to be comprehensive, it was chosen for measuring the perceived authenticity of UBH in this study.

According to earlier studies [15,35], heritage tourists are driven by a variety of reasons, including the need for amusement, a sense of personal attachment, and the pursuit of knowledge. The term "heritage motivation" describes a visitor's desire to discover the history and culture of the cultural site. Previous studies have demonstrated that tourists' desire to see cultural and historic places influences their perception of authenticity [24,36]. However, in this study, we argue that perceived authenticity is a motivating factor for tourists to visit heritage sites, as they prefer sites that are authentic to those fabricated tourist attractions. Moreover, previous studies [37,38] show the positive effect that authenticity has on destination image, while the study by Atasoy and Eren [38] also shows that authenticity positively affects perceived value.

A few studies looked at the relationship between loyalty and authenticity in the context of heritage, but it is unclear how different kinds of authenticity affect loyalty. Kolar and Zabkar [24] used a sample from 25 European Romanesque historic sites and examined the effects of motivation, object-based authenticity, and existential authenticity on loyalty. They discovered that both of these factors were effective predictors of loyalty. Bryce et al.'s [39] study at a Japanese heritage site produced similar findings. However, Zhou et al. [34] extended Kolar and Zabkar's [24] model by including the attitude variable

and found no significant influence of existential authenticity on loyalty in the context of the Chinese calligraphic landscape. In addition, Yi et al.'s [40] operationalization of existential authenticity into intrapersonal and interpersonal authenticity showed that while interpersonal authenticity does not affect destination loyalty, intrapersonal authenticity does. The results of earlier studies on the nature of the relationship have been inconsistent; therefore, more research is needed to determine how different types of authenticity affect loyalty.

Thus, we can suggest the following hypotheses:

H1. *Perceived Authenticity has a positive influence on Perceived Value.*

H2. *Perceived Authenticity has a positive influence on Motivation to visit heritage sites.*

H3. *Perceived Authenticity has a positive influence on Heritage Image.*

H4. *Perceived Authenticity has a positive influence on Loyalty.*

2.2. Perceived Value

Based on views of what is supplied and received, perceived value is described as "the consumer's overall opinion of the utility of a product (or service)", specifically, a trade-off between perceived gains and perceived costs [41,42]. This understanding of value as a trade-off, or an assessment of what is provided in exchange for what is received, has established a solid foundation for value literature and is pervasive in most upcoming studies [43,44]. The appraisal of a location's overall value from the viewpoint of a traveler is completed in light of the advantages obtained therefrom [45]. A person's value perceptions are the result of an appraisal of cost/gain that yields an estimate of the value gained through travel. From this, we can conclude that visitors' perception of the site's value affects their motivation to visit it.

Studies carried out in various circumstances have revealed variances in perceived value aspects. In a study of packers, Sánchez et al. [46] hypothesized that perceived value has six dimensions: functional value, emotional value, social value, functional value of travel agencies' liaison staff, and functional value of travel package prices as items. Five elements of perceived value were identified by Huang and Huang's [47] study on tourists' perceptions of worth: perceived quality, emotional value, social value, perceived economic cost, and perceived non-monetary cost. The six aspects of perceived value that Wang et al. [48] further suggested are environmental value, characteristic value, service value, management value, knowledge education value, and cost value. Zhang et al. [49] developed a measurement scale for the perceived value of a World Heritage Site consisting of functional, monetary, brand, emotional, and social value, and this scale was used in this study as it seems to be particularly relevant to the context of UBH. Their study showed that perceived value has a positive impact on behavioral intentions, which is similar to the concept of loyalty that we use in this study. Moreover, in a study on the experiences of tourists on Hainan Island, China, Sun et al. [50] discovered that the perceived value of the travel experience was a substantial and favorable predictor of customer satisfaction, which in turn increased consumers' loyalty. Thus, it can be suggested that:

H5. *Perceived Value has a positive influence on Heritage Image.*

H6. *Perceived Value has a positive influence on Motivation to visit heritage sites.*

H7. *Perceived Value has a positive influence on Loyalty.*

2.3. Heritage Image

Understanding how a visitor chooses their destination is largely dependent on the concept of image [51]. According to Rindell [52], the definition of heritage image is "the temporal dimension in the tourist's experience of cultural heritage places". The idea was developed using the results of empirical investigations that emphasized the corporate

image of the consumer [53]. The quality of the visitor and destination experience has been strongly correlated with heritage image [54].

When tourists perceive cultural heritage places, the legacy picture expresses the temporal dimension [55]. This idea was developed in light of the results of an empirical study on the corporate image of consumers. According to Rindell [52], the concept of heritage image is constructed from the tourist's past experiences connected to cultural heritage places from various sources over time. The idea of a heritage image is put out as a helpful conceptual framework for comprehending how historical influences affect how people develop their current heritage images. Suhud et al. [56] showed that heritage image affects visiting intention and motivation, while Meng et al. [57] assert that destination image has an indirect impact on post-purchase behavioral intentions as well as a positive impact on perceived value. The destination image has a direct impact on visitor behavior before, during, and after the visit, according to Taşç and Gartner [58]. This also includes visitors' desire to revisit the place (loyalty). Based on the results of earlier studies [28,59], it is hypothesized that cultural heritage may enable visitors to forge deeper emotional connections with their past and with historical and cultural elements like authenticity, well-known figures, and traditions, among others. Based on the above-mentioned, we can propose the following hypotheses:

H8. *Heritage Image has a positive influence on Loyalty.*

H9. *Heritage Image has a positive influence on Motivation.*

2.4. Heritage Tourist Motivation

Understanding visitor actions requires consideration of motivation [60]. Depending on their actions, visitors to a heritage site may have high or low cultural objectives. They are motivated by cultural aspects, including taking part in festivals, admiring old buildings, and experiencing local cultures [61,62]. Cultural motivation can be thought of as a collection of intellectually grounded, interconnected interests in heritage, history, and culture [24]. The term "heritage motivation" describes a visitor's desire to discover the history and culture of the cultural site. Basic motives for visiting heritage sites are unwinding mentally, having fun with companions, learning new things, and expanding one's knowledge [63]. Tourists who are interested in historical sites are drawn to them for a variety of reasons, including amusement, emotional attachment, and learning [15,16].

2.5. Loyalty

Loyalty and future visitor behavior are highly correlated. Consumers' intents to re-purchase goods or services and the results of their decision-making processes constitute loyalty [34]. Most people believe that loyalty is a two-dimensional notion that includes behavioral loyalty and "repeat purchase intention", along with attitudinal loyalty to service [34], as well as "a person's positive feeling about a place" [24,34]. Due to higher prices for consumers to repurchase goods and services and the usage of one-off service recovery mechanisms in the tourism industry, it is more challenging to study customer loyalty [24,34]. Both the desire to return and the suggestion of others serve as measures of loyalty [64].

As a result of seeing the various cultures present in the city, the visitor experiences distinctive values during their visit. It was noted that the heritage sites' preservation and cleanliness, as well as their accessibility in a welcoming historic center, were all advantages for visitors. According to research by del Río et al. [65], Córdoba unifies and connects the traveler with the destination, enhancing city loyalty. The findings of this study suggest that visitor satisfaction has a favorable impact on destination loyalty, which motivates visitors to visit the destination again in the future and to tell others about it when they go home. In a place where numerous civilizations have interacted and left significant landmarks that serve as reminders of those cultures, this study identifies the factors most likely to boost the fervor of heritage visitors.

Finally, we can suggest the following hypothesis:

H10. *Motivation to visit UBH positively affects Loyalty.*

The proposed relationships are shown in Figure 1.
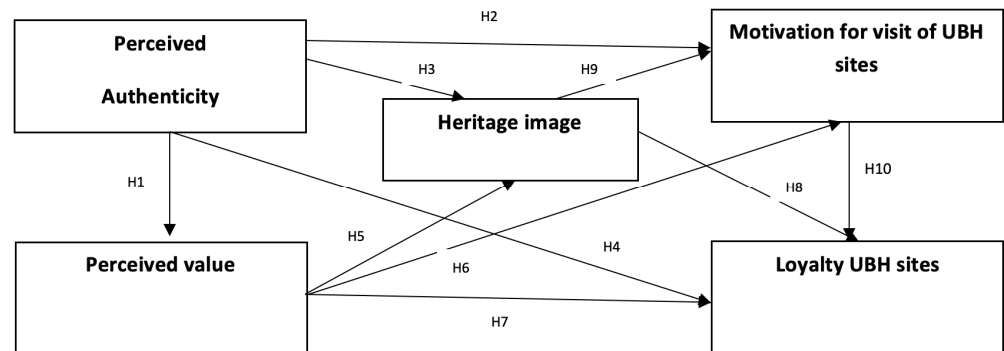
Figure 1. Proposed hypothesis of the research model.

3. Study Area

The survey has been completed on five different UBH sites in five countries (Figures 2 and 3). The analyzed sites will be briefly described in the following text.

Figure 2. The study area (sources: authors).

Figure 3. **1**—Petrovaradin Fortress (source: Reprinted/Reproduced with permission from Lazar Lazić); **2**—The Srebrna Góra Fortress (source: Reprinted/Reproduced with permission from Grzegorz Basiński); **3**—Roman city (source: Petja Ivanova-Radovanova); **4**—Göreme (source: Müge Akkar Ercan); **5**—BUNK'ART (source: Ermelinda Kordha Tolica).

Petrovaradin Fortress (nicknamed "Gibraltar of the Danube") is located in Petrovaradin, a part of the City of Novi Sad, Serbia (Figure 3-1). It is situated on the Danube River's right bank. It is one of the best-preserved fortifications in Europe and represents a great example of military architecture. The fortress was built between 1692 and 1780, covers an area of 112 ha, has 10 gates, 12,000 loopholes, and places for 400 cannons [66,67]. The Austrians began to build fortifications according to contemporary standards for defense against the Turks. There was never again a threat from Turkish forces once the Petrovaradin Fortress was finished. For the underground construction, 40 million bricks were used. The

underground military galleries have four floors. The total length of underground communications and chambers is allegedly 16 km [67,68]. About a kilometer of underground military galleries is located within the exhibition of The City Museum of Novi Sad. According to estimates, underground military galleries can house more than 30,000 people in case of an emergency [69]. The fortress is the Novi Sad's most significant tourist attraction. It houses the Academy of Arts, The City Museum of Novi Sad, the Historical Archives, the Equestrian Club, the Shooting Club, the luxurious Hotel "Leopold I", and several restaurants with a panoramic view of Novi Sad [70]. The EXIT festival, one of the most significant music festivals in Europe, is also held at the Petrovaradin Fortress. According to Tomka and Kisic [71], the fortress is known for its multiculturalism, which is shaped by a variety of religious, civic, artistic, governmental, military, and business players as well as their social relationships. Over 600,000 people have come to this location in the past 10 years. The Petrovaradin Fortress was included in the Republic of Serbia's list of Spatial Cultural-Historical Units of Great Importance in 1991 [72].

The Srebrna Góra Fortress (Figure 3-2) has been selected for the study due to its unique role as a cultural heritage site in Europe and one of the most important attractions of Lower Silesia (Poland). As one of the biggest structures built in the mountain area, combining history and nature, it has become a tourism attraction and one of the most representative UBH in Poland, addressed to both individual tourists and organized groups. The popularity of this complex has increased in the last few years, thanks to the revitalization process and organized thematic events.

The Srebrna Góra Fortress is an exemplary, 18th-century mountain fortress—a complex of defensive buildings [73]. It was erected near the mining town of Srebrna Góra founded in the 14th century due to the presence of silver [74]. The role of this structure was to strengthen the defense system of the southern border of the Silesian province against the attack of the Austrian army. With a length of almost 3 km and an area of about 100 ha, this structure was one of the biggest and most modern mountain strongholds in Europe in the 18th century. It was planned with the principles of the Old Prussian school of fortification [75], including a system of underground corridors, tunnels, and posterns located on three floors. The fortress was independent and self-sufficient—that is, 3756 soldiers could stay inside for a siege of 3–5 months. The fortress was the only one in Silesia never to be conquered. At the end of the 19th century, it became a tourist attraction.

The Srebrna Góra Fortress has been listed in the Register of National Monuments since 1961. As a unique object of cultural heritage, it was also, together with the remains of a disused rack railway and historic silver mines, included in the first Fortress Cultural Park established in Poland in 2002 for comprehensive protection and revitalization of this complex and its surrounding landscape [76–78]. Tourists can visit the exhibitions, explore underground corridors and nooks, or enter the embankments from which a great view of the surrounding landscape spreads. Very popular are thematic events and educational workshops. The offer is directed at individual tourists and organized groups, people of all ages, and the stronghold can be visited every day, all year round, including night tours.

Roman city (Figure 3-3). The archeological exhibition "Ancient Serdica" represents the largest-scale archeological excavations of the city, and Baslica "Saint Sofia" with the necropolis lying underneath is one of the most precious relics that gave the name of the city of Sofia from medieval times. Both parts of the archeological complex are the most representative UBH sites located in the very heart of the capital city of Sofia and are very important for the cultural life of the local community and the history of the nation, which is why they were chosen for this research. The ancient archeological complex "Serdica" combines areas with various purposes, divided into two main parts. The first one is the "Largo" zone which integrates the unearthed archeological remains into a site for cultural and art events. Rich and very well-preserved remains of seven streets and two early Christian basilicas unearthed on 6000 sq.m can be still seen here [79]. Sections of buildings from the 2nd to 3rd century and representative artifacts and interesting remnants from everyday life in ancient Serdica are exhibited in different parts of the complex [80,81]. The

second part considered is the Byzantine Basilica "Saint Sophia" with the necropolis lying underneath. The Basilica is one of the most precious relics of Serdica, closely related to the Early Christian period of the Roman Empire. Over the centuries, a series of subsequent churches were built on the site of the original 4th-century church. The most recent Saint Sofia Church is the fifth iteration of a religious building and was constructed during the middle of the 6th century when Bulgaria was under the reign of Byzantine Emperor Justinian I. The name of the city Sofia dated in the 14th century comes from the name of that church. The large-scale archeological excavations of the cemetery started in 1910–1911 [79]. Following the long process of excavations, the process of adaptation of the archeological level in the space under the floor of the St. Sophia Basilica had been completed in 2009–2011. Currently, the ruinous 50 burial tombs from the 4th to 5th century, the undercroft features mosaics from the floors of the previous churches with traces of frescoes, and other ancient artifacts are carefully unearthed and preserved [82]. Sections of each level are properly fitted with transparent flooring to reveal, protect, and exhibit the surfaces below and are open to the public. The ancient archeological complex and Byzantine Basilica "St. Sophia" are located in the heart of the cultural and political center of the capital city of Sofia and are highly valued by the local community, visitors, and tourists.

Göreme, a small town in Cappadocia (Turkey), is famous for its moon-like landscape and "fairy chimneys", i.e., giant rock cones (Figure 3-4). The identity of the town is characterized by the natural landscape formed by giant rock cones, hollowed rocks to construct cave dwellings, stables, and cave churches [83], and a Byzantine monastic settlement built between the 4th and 13th centuries [84]. Following the Seljuk and Ottoman Empires' hegemony, in the Turkish Republican period, Göreme became a farming village. In the 1950s, the Turkish government turned this Byzantine monastic settlement into an open-air museum and restored the natural, archaeological, and historical heritage [84]. The museum became a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1985 [83]. Since then, the Göreme Open-Air Museum and National Park have become the main tourism destinations, hosting more than 1 million tourists annually [84,85]. Tourism is the driving sector of the local and regional economy. Since the 1980s, Göreme has transformed rapidly with the increasing underground heritage visits and the emergence of boutique hotels, cave hotels, and pensions, offering tourists a mixture of traditional and modern lifestyles. Together with its UBH culture, the town also has been attracting tourists with its wineries, restaurants, jewelry and souvenir shops, and pottery and ceramic workshops [84], as well as hot balloon tours, ATV and horse rides, jeep safaris, and trekking tours on alluring valleys and mountains. UBH also acted as the catalyst for developing the entertainment sector, gastronomy and wine culture, sports, art, and cultural events.

Göreme is one of the most attractive tourism destinations in Turkey and the Cappadocia region with its UBH background among international and domestic tourists that makes it worth examining with its image, perceived authenticity, and perceived value. Apart from 2020–2021 and 2016–2017, the Göreme Open-Air Museum, thereby Göreme town, has been receiving over 1 million tourists since 2014 owing to its UBH assets and values [85].

BUNK'ART is an expo art museum designed as a project to open for the public one of the most important UBHs of the communist regime in Albania (Figure 3-5). It originally was built as a military atomic bunker of the dictator Enver Hoxha. There are two important points in this project, which are BUNK'ART 1 and BUNK'ART 2 [86]. BUNK'ART 1 is dedicated to the history of the communist Albanian army and the daily life of Albanians during the years of the regime. BUNK'ART 2 reconstructs the history of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Albania from 1912 to 1991 and reveals the secrets of the "Sigurimi I Shtetit", the spy secret agency [87]. The UBH that is an object of this study is "BUNK'ART 1", which is in the center of Tirana, the capital city of Albania [88]. It is an illustration of the mentality of the socialist regime, but also in some cases, it raises the issues of nostalgia for that period [89]. It is visited by many foreign tourists and is included in most of the tourist packages of Albanian tour operators. Located in the center of the capital, near the Ministry of Defense headquarters, it is important even for the local community as well

as many stakeholders, interested in the Cultural heritage in Albania. On November 2014, the "BUNK'ART" opened its doors as a museum. More than 60,000 people visited the site until January 2015. In 2016, statistics showed that BUNK'ART 1 and BUNK'ART 2 welcome 150 visitors a day. According to Director for Cultural Heritage and Tourism at Tirana Municipality, the highest number of tourists came from Europe, then from Asia and Australia. However, there are also Albanian tourists, mostly young and school students who want to learn about the past and the socialist regime. While in 2016, there were a total of 300,000–400,000 tourists visiting the site; in 2019, there were 300,000 only in the first six months and after the pandemic, the tourist number raised more than 600,000 [90]. From the statistics of cultural monuments visits, the percentage of foreign visitors who visited museums raised from 20% in 2020 to 44.7% in 2022 [91]. The reason why this site is chosen for Albania is that it is stated by the municipality of Tirana and the Ministry of Culture as the most visited cultural heritage in Albania by Albanian and foreign tourists. TripAdvisor, the world's most important travel information website, gave the "Travelers' Choice 2022" award again in 2022 to BUNK'ART 1 and BUNK'ART 2 as the most preferred by tourists. They are also positioned in first and second places among the most-rated places in Albania by tourists from all over the world. BUNK'ART 1 and BUNK'ART 2 are the only Albanian museums that have received this award.

4. Methodology

4.1. Instrument

The instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of several parts: the first part contains questions related to sociodemographics: gender, age, education, and monthly income, including the question of how often they visit heritage sites when they travel.

The second part is related to the questions measuring the perceived value of the site. The respondents evaluated on a scale from 1 to 5 (1—I strongly disagree, 5—I strongly agree) their level of agreement with the statements related to the perceived value of the site they visited. For measuring perceived value, the scale of Zhang et al. [49] is used. The third part is related to measuring Perceived Authenticity. The scale adapted for this paper is the scale developed by Nguyen and Cheung [16]. The fourth part of the questionnaire was focused on measuring motivation for visiting heritage sites. The scale used for measuring it was adapted from Poria et al. [15]. The fifth part of the questionnaire focused on heritage images, and the scale used to measure it was adapted from Wu and Li [14]. Finally, the last part of the questionnaire is related to loyalty. Loyalty has been measured by four statements: I would visit this site again, I would recommend my friends to visit this site, I would share my positive impression about the site with other people, and I would share my impression about the site via social media.

4.2. Participants

The survey research included a total of 504 participants. The participants reside in five countries—Serbia, Poland, Bulgaria, Turkey, and Albania. The method for inclusion of participants in the research was that: (1) they are older than 18 and (2) they are domestic visitors (residing in the country where the site is located). The study included domestic visitors as it strives to provide suggestions (based on the research results) on how the site managers could attract more domestic visitors including local communities and increase their perceived value, authenticity, loyalty, motivation, and perception of heritage image. The convenience sampling technique was applied to collect the study sample—this meant that visitors who were willing to participate in the research and fulfilled the mentioned two conditions were included in the research. The characteristics of the sample are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of the respondents (N = 504).

Country of Residence (%)	Education (%)
Serbia 20.44	Elementary school 0.9
Poland 19.84	Secondary school 25.4
Bulgaria 19.84	Higher school 13.9
Turkey 20.04	Bachelor 53.8
Albania 19.84	Master, PhD 6
Gender (%)	**Monthly income (%)**
Male 35.5	Below average 33.4
	Average 45.2
Female 64.5	Above average 21.4
Age	**How often do you visit heritage sites when you travel? (%)**
	1. Very rarely 0
	2. Rarely 0
	3. From time to time 48.2
Mean 35.04, Std. 14.39	4. Often 41.3
	5. Very often/regularly 10.5

The study sample consists of more female respondents (64.5%) than males (35.5%). The average age of the sample is 35.04 years. The majority of respondents are highly educated, as most of them have a bachelor's degree (53.8%). Moreover, the majority of them have an average monthly income (45.2%).

Regarding their travel habits, the majority of respondents are visiting heritage sites from time to time (48.2%) and often (41.3%).

4.3. Procedure

The questionnaire has been conducted from June 2022 to January 2023 in five countries and on five different underground build heritage sites: Petrovaradian Fortress Military Galleries (Serbia), the Srebrna Góra Fortress (Poland), Roman City (Bulgaria), Göreme (Turkey), and BUNK'ART (Albania). The questionnaire was translated into the native languages of the respondents. The survey has been completed on-site with the help of tourist guides and management of the site, who have distributed the surveys. Moreover, researchers themselves have approached the visitors with requests to fill in the survey. The respondents were informed about the main purpose of the research and that participation is voluntary and anonymous.

4.4. Data Analysis

The data were processed in AMOS software (IBM Corp. Released 2019. IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 26.0. IBM Corp, Armonk, NY, USA), and the method used to process the data is descriptive statistics and SEM (structural equation modeling).

5. Results

5.1. Descriptive Statistics and Model Validity

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for all the variables in the model with mean value, std, and reliability coefficient. The highest mean scores for authenticity are for Objective and Existential Authenticity, while emotional value is the highest ranked within the perceived value of the site. It is also important to highlight that respondents have a high perception of the heritage image and quite high loyalty to the site.

Cronbach α is ranging from 0.731 to 0.932, meaning that all scales used in the research are reliable (coefficient above 0.7). Moreover, the table presents AVE and CR for all variables.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and reliability of the scales.

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	Cronbach α	AVE	CR
Objective Authenticity	4.3088	0.86141	0.884	0.47	0.086
Constructive Authenticity	3.5772	0.88164	0.787	0.45	0.080
Comparison Authenticity	3.9572	0.97404	0.847	0.44	0.061
Existential Authenticity	4.2525	1.10298	0.731	0.43	0.087
Functional value	4.0021	0.88943	0.932	0.51	0.89
Monetary value	3.5446	0.78016	0.787	0.45	0.82
Emotional value	4.1717	0.84970	0.918	0.56	0.88
Social value	2.9774	1.07025	0.822	0.55	0.79
Brand value	3.7404	0.88759	0.819	0.47	0.78
Loyalty	4.0357	0.97092	0.882	0.75	0.92
Heritage image	4.2566	0.86985	0.823	0.74	0.89
Motivation to visit a heritage site	3.5806	0.78934	0.895	0.46	0.93

Calculating the score of the average extracted variance allowed for the examination of the convergent validity of each dimension (AVE, see [92]). When all item-to-factor loadings are significant and the AVE score is higher than 50 within each dimension, a substantial amount of convergent validity is attained; nevertheless, AVE scores higher than 40 are still acceptable if composite reliability (CR) is higher than 60 [92,93]. All dimensions had AVE and CR values above 40, which suggests good convergent validity, according to the results (Table 3).

Table 3. Correlation estimates and average variances extracted.

	L	I	M	OA	CA	COMA	EA	FV	MV	EV	SV	BV
Loyalty (L)	*0.75*											
Heritage image (I)	0.37	*0.7*										
Motivation (M)	0.14	0.25	*0.46*									
Objective Authenticity (OA)	0.22	0.40	0.16	*0.47*								
Constructive Authenticity (CA)	0.10	0.17	0.03	0.27	*0.45*							
Comparison Authenticity (COMA)	0.18	0.17	0.03	0.38	0.150	*0.044*						
Existential Authenticity (EA)	0.21	0.23	0.05	0.40	0.16	0.37	*0.043*					
Functional value (FV)	0.22	0.33	0.11	0.44	0.20	0.26	0.29	*0.51*				
Monetary value (MV)	0.02	0.09	0.00	0.17	0.03	0.09	0.07	0.24	*0.045*			
Emotional value (EV)	0.24	0.30	0.09	0.40	0.16	0.23	0.33	0.46	0.16	*0.56*		
Social value (SV)	0.01	0.02	0.00	0.04	0.00	0.06	0.07	0.10	0.05	0.14	*0.55*	
Brand value (BV)	0.17	0.20	0.04	0.17	0.03	0.19	0.17	0.26	0.06	0.33	0.15	*0.047*

Note: Italics indicate average variances extracted (AVEs).

Then, discriminate validity was examined by contrasting the squared correlation estimations between the latent constructs with the average variances extracted (AVEs) for each latent factor. When the AVEs are bigger than the squared, Fornell and Larcker [92] observed that discriminatory validity is ensured.

The range of squared correlations based on total scores is from 0.00 to 0.046, which is lower than AVE. Thus, the results confirm that all dimensions have sufficient discriminant validity [92,94].

5.2. The Results of the ANOVA Test

In order to test differences between different countries regarding the perception of different constructs analyzed in the paper, an ANOVA test has been conducted. ANOVA test revealed the statistically significant difference between countries regarding all analyzed constructs (Table 4).

Table 4. The results of testing the difference between countries (ANOVA test).

Variables	F	Sig.	Post Hoc *
Loyalty	31.311	0.000	1 > 2, 3, 4, 5 3 < 1, 2, 4, 5
Heritage image	33.296	0.000	1 > 2, 3, 5 4 > 1, 2, 3, 5 3 < 1, 2, 4, 5
Motivation	41.662	0.000	3 < 1, 2, 4, 5 2 > 1, 3 2 < 4, 5 4 > 1, 2, 3, 5 5 > 1, 2, 3
Objective Authenticity	49.26	0.000	1 > 2, 3, 4, 5 3 < 1, 2, 4, 5
Constructive Authenticity	3.372	0.01	3 < 1, 2, 4, 5
Comparison Authenticity	20.535	0.000	5 > 2, 3, 4 1 > 2, 3, 4, 5
Existential Authenticity	22.586	0.000	1 > 2, 3, 4, 5 3 < 1, 2, 4, 5
Functional value	42.497	0.000	1 > 2, 3, 4, 5 3 < 1, 2, 4, 5
Monetary value	81.229	0.000	4 > 2, 3, 5 2 < 1, 3, 4, 5
Emotional value	26.513	0.000	1 > 2, 3, 4, 5 3 < 1, 2, 4, 5
Social value	6.603	0.000	4 > 2, 3, 5 2 < 1, 3, 4, 5
Brand value	9.769	0.000	1 > 2, 3, 4, 5 4 > 2, 3, 5

* 1—Poland, 2—Turkey, 3—Albania, 4—Serbia, 5—Bulgaria.

ANOVA with LSD post hoc test revealed that respondents from Poland tend to be more loyal to the UBH site than respondents from other countries. On the other hand, respondents from Albania tend to be the least loyal to the site.

The post hoc LSD test revealed that respondents from Serbia have a higher perception of UBH heritage image than respondents from all other countries, while respondents from Albania have the lowest perception of heritage image. Respondents from Poland also have a higher perception of heritage image compared to respondents from Turkey, Albania, and Bulgaria.

Regarding motivation to visit, respondents from Serbia score the highest values compared to the other countries, while respondents from Bulgaria are in second place. Respondents from Albania are, however, less motivated than all other respondents.

Objective Authenticity is the highest perceived by respondents from Poland and the least by respondents from Albania. Constructive Authenticity has been the lowest assessed by Albanian respondents compared to others. Comparison Authenticity is the highest perceived by respondents from Poland and then from Bulgaria. Existential Authenticity is perceived the highest by respondents from Poland and the least by respondents from Albania. The same result is also for perceived functional values. Regarding monetary value, it is the highest perceived in Serbia and the lowest by respondents in Turkey. Emotional value is again least perceived in Albania and highest in Poland. On the other hand, social value is the highest perceived in Serbia and the lowest in Turkey. Finally, the brand value is the highest perceived in Poland and then in Serbia.

The testing of the countries' differences in the perception of different constructs has shown that domestic visitors in Poland and Serbia tend to have higher perceptions of the authenticity and value of the site but also heritage image, loyalty, and motivation. On the other hand, respondents from Albania tend to show the lowest values and perceptions on all analyzed constructs.

5.3. The Results of the Path Model

In order to test the hypothesis, structural equation modeling (SEM) in AMOS software was applied. The path analysis was applied to test the proposed relationships.

Firstly, all proposed relationships were tested and model 1 did not result in a satisfactory model fit. Firstly, the insignificant relationships were removed: Existential Authenticity to Heritage image; Emotional value and Monetary value to Heritage image; Existential Authenticity to Motivation; Emotional and Brand value to Motivation; Motivation to Loyalty; Functional and Brand value to Loyalty; Objective and Constructive Authenticity to Loyalty. Moreover, the mortification indices suggested adding a regression between Constructive Authenticity and Social Value. After running the model, the fit indices were improved but still did not provide a satisfactory fit (Table 5).

Table 5. Fit indices of the structural model.

Model	S–Bχ^2	df	χ^2/df	RMSEA (90% CI)	SRMR	CFI	NFI	NNFI
1	611.647	22	27.80	0.231 (0.215–0.247)	0.256	0.807	0.804	0.810
2	473.201	30	15.773	0.171 (0.158–0.185)	0.233	0.855	0.849	0.857
3	70.114	25	2.85	0.060 (0.044–0.077)	0.034	0.985	0.941	0.985
4	79.309	29	2.73	0.59 (0.043–0.074)	0.036	0.984	0.963	0.984

Note: S–Bχ^2 in model 4 is insignificant.

The modification indices then suggested excluding several insignificant relationships: Comparison Authenticity to Heritage image and Motivation; Functional Value to Motivation; Social Value to Loyalty.

The modification indices also suggested including relationships between Objective Authenticity and Monetary value, Emotional value, Social value, and Brand Value; Existential Authenticity to Functional value and Emotional value; Constructive and Comparison Authenticity to Brand Value. After running model 3, it showed satisfactory fit indices. However, a few more changes needed to be made: insignificant relationships between Objective Authenticity and Motivation; Existential Authenticity to Loyalty and Monetary Value; as well as Objective Authenticity and Social Value.

The final relations of the model are presented in Table 6.

As it was proposed, the model showed a significant positive influence of Authenticity on the Perceived Value of the UBH site and the H1 was confirmed.

Table 6. The significant relationships in the final model.

Confirmed Direct Significant Relationships			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	*p*
Constructive Authenticity	→	Social value	0.458	0.046	9.917	***
Objective Authenticity	→	Brand value	0.226	0.05	4.561	***
Objective Authenticity	→	Functional value	0.678	0.033	20.486	***
Constructive Authenticity	→	Brand value	0.137	0.042	3.262	0.001
Comparison Authenticity	→	Brand value	0.175	0.041	4.251	***
Objective Authenticity	→	Monetary value	0.381	0.037	10.377	***
Objective Authenticity	→	Emotional value	0.523	0.038	13.816	***
Existential Authenticity	→	Emotional value	0.113	0.026	4.365	***
Objective Authenticity	→	Heritage image	0.392	0.049	8.077	***
Constructive Authenticity	→	Heritage image	0.093	0.04	2.332	0.02
Functional value	→	Heritage image	0.224	0.046	4.899	***
Brand value	→	Heritage image	0.176	0.039	4.517	***
Social value	→	Heritage image	−0.088	0.031	−2.832	0.005
Heritage image	→	Loyalty	0.395	0.035	11.212	***
Constructive Authenticity	→	Motivation	0.272	0.034	8.003	***
Monetary value	→	Motivation	0.168	0.035	4.795	***
Social value	→	Motivation	0.156	0.027	5.707	***
Monetary value	→	Loyalty	−0.098	0.035	−2.754	0.006
Emotional value	→	Loyalty	0.177	0.038	4.614	***
Comparison Authenticity	→	Loyalty	0.138	0.03	4.617	***
Heritage image	→	Motivation	0.268	0.033	8.08	***

Note: *** *p* < 0.01.

Authenticity (Objective and Constructive) and Perceived Value (Functional, Brand, and Social) showed to positively influence Heritage Image (H3 and H5 were confirmed). Motivation to visit heritage sites showed to be influenced by Heritage Image, Constructive Authenticity, Monetary value, and Social Value, so H2, H6, and H9 were confirmed. Finally, loyalty showed to be positively influenced by Monetary value, Emotional value, Comparison Authenticity, and Heritage Image (H4, H7, and H8 were confirmed). As mentioned in the beginning, the relationship between Motivation and Loyalty was insignificant, so Hypothesis 10 was rejected.

6. Discussion

In the scarce literature dealing with UBH from the aspect of visitors, this paper makes an important contribution to the theory. Firstly, this is a pioneer study to explore the interrelations between perceived authenticity, perceived value, heritage motivation, heritage image, and visitors' loyalty to the underground build heritage sites in one single model. The paper provided better insights into the analyzed constructs and their dimensions in the context of UBH. Moreover, the research instrument was implemented on five different UBH sites in five countries, which makes this study more reliable and increases the generalizability of the results.

The study thus revealed the important relationships that were not explored in the previous studies of cultural heritage in such a way and in such detail. Firstly, the study showed that Perceived Authenticity is a strong predictor of Perceived value related to the UBH site, especially of Brand and Emotional values, but also Social, Functional, and Monetary values. Although the study of Atasoy and Eren [38] revealed a direct and positive effect of

perceived authenticity on perceived value, they did not provide detailed information about the interrelations between specific factors of dimensions. The current study indicates that the strongest predictor of the Perceived value is Objective Authenticity, which refers to the resemblance of the site to its original site, having documented history, being ancient, and being preserved from the actual period. This could be especially important in the context of domestic visitors who will value more such sites. This was also empirically proven, as the perception of Objective Authenticity positively affects the Functional, Monetary, Brand, and Emotional values visitors attach to the site. Constructive Authenticity, referring to the site's connection to the local community in terms of it presenting the idea of local culture, that it is still in use for original purposes, representing the local community and local ways of life, etc., affects visitors' perception of Social and Brand values. This might be because the perception of authenticity of the site influences how other people see us and how others perceive the brand of the place, so in the context of domestic visitors, the brand and social values of the site might be higher for those sites that are very related to the local way of life. Comparison Authenticity, which refers to our perception of the fact that the site is the same as they expected and heard, predicts the Brand value of the place, which is a quite logical finding as the trustworthiness of the information we receive about the site shapes the awareness and brand value of the site. Existential Authenticity, which is strongly related to their feelings about the site, is predicting the Emotional value visitors give to the site. The results also showed that Objective and Constructive Authenticity is a predictor of Heritage Image, which is a similar finding of Atasoy and Eren [38] who revealed that perceived authenticity has a significant positive and direct influence on destination image and perceived value, although the current study provided more detailed insights into the types of authenticity as influencing factors. The study also showed that Heritage Image is positively influenced by perceived value, specifically Functional, Brand, and Social values. Moreover, Heritage Image showed to be a predictor of motivation to visit UBH as well as visitors' loyalty. Thus, maintaining a positive image of UHS affects domestic tourist motivation to visit such sites and to return to these sites. Similarly, the study by Wu and Li [14] showed that heritage image affects visitors' behavior intentions, which are similar to loyalty. Motivation to visit UBH is also influenced by Constructive Authenticity as well as Monetary and Social values, meaning that social and financial components are the major factors influencing motivation or demotivation for visiting UBH. This is contrary to the findings of Nguyen and Cheung [16] who discuss that heritage visitors' motivation influences the perceived authenticity of the site. The current study argues that perceived value and perceived authenticity impact visitors' motivation, as such perceptions exist long before the actual site visit. Poria et al. [59] also claim that heritage motivation is influenced by the perception of the site, stating that, for instance, the more visitors consider the location to be a part of their past, the more interest they demonstrate in learning, experiencing an emotional connection, and feeling linked to their heritage, etc., which supports our claim. Apart from Heritage Image, the results show that visitors' loyalty is also influenced by Monetary and Emotional values, as well as Comparison Authenticity (comparing the site with our previous perception of it). This is an important finding that shows that UBH sites need to take care of the value for money they provide to visitors together with maintaining how they feel at the site, as this will influence their return to their destination. The study by Chen and Chen [17] also revealed the direct impact of perceived value and authenticity on behavioral intentions, which is a similar construct to loyalty and can support this finding. Additionally, Wang and Leou [18] also argue that perceived value positively affects destination loyalty. Apart from these results, it should be noted that motivation to visit sites as well as loyalty could be also affected by other factors, such as travel budget (which might be connected with how they perceive the monetary value of the site), staycations (especially for the COVID-19 period, which influence people visit more domestic sites), and visits with partners/friends/family to these sites next to their home areas (which could be reasons for traveling to them and inducing loyalty towards these sites). All of the concepts investigated in the study, especially motivation, loyalty, and heritage image, are dependent

on many different factors, so they should be taken into consideration while discussing the findings.

Apart from theoretical contributions, the study also has important practical implications. Firstly, preserving the authenticity of the site should be a priority of heritage managers, due to its immense importance and influence on all studies constructs, especially the perceived value of the site and heritage image. For domestic tourists, site authenticity is of immense importance. Perceived value and heritage image of the site also showed to be an important predictor of loyalty of domestic visitors. Specifically, by proper maintenance of the perception of the site as reasonable in terms of the price and value in a social context (an attractive place that makes visitors popular and better accepted by others), the site managers will motivate tourists to visit the site. Furthermore, the co-creation of an experience that awakes positive emotions among visitors and creates emotional value could influence repeated visits. This could be performed by introducing and promoting more "life-participating" activities or introducing new technologies in the interpretation and reconstruction of the site as it used to be.

7. Conclusions

As mentioned before, the study revealed the existence of causal relationships between perceived authenticity and perceived value of the UBH site and revealed how these constructs influence the motivation to visit and the perception of the heritage image. Moreover, the study confirmed that domestic visitors' loyalty to the UBH site is dependent on the perception of authenticity, the perceived value of the site, and the heritage image. Nine out of ten hypotheses of the study were confirmed, thus contributing to the scarce literature on tourism and marketing issues of UBH sites.

Apart from the plethora of theoretical and practical contributions of the study, it also has certain limitations. Firstly, the current study was focused only on domestic visitors to the sites; as in this study, the authors wanted to check how the explored constructs are related in the context of domestic visitors and local communities, which are very important visitors of UBH sites. On the other hand, we acknowledge that the results might be different on the sample of foreign tourists, as they often have different perceptions, feelings, and knowledge bases about the sites. Thus, this issue should be included in future research to re-test the relationships that the study revealed. Domestic and foreign tourists may also differ in their perception of the site, motivation, and heritage image, so the model may be different in the case of these two groups. Moreover, the study did not collect information on whether respondents are residents or they are coming from other parts of the particular country. Such differences between those two groups of respondents would be interesting to test in future research. As mentioned before, some of the study constructs could be dependent also on other factors, such as travel budget, staycations, and accompanying persons, so future research should consider and explore their influences.

Also, the current study did not analyze the differences in the model that may occur in the case of different UBH site types included in the research. Thus, future research will be directed towards testing the differences between countries (different UBH sites), specifically by applying the multigroup analysis.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Our research involves humans, but not as experimental research, rather as a part of survey research, which is anonymous and does not involve collecting any personal data of respondents. As such, this kind of research does not require special Ethical Committee approval in Serbia, where the research was conducted, as it is in line with the national Law on Personal Data Protection (The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, number 97/08; further: The Law). The national Law on Personal Data Protection is aligned with the current standards of the relevant European documents, particularly with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The Law applies to the processing of personal data in the context of the activities of an establishment of a controller or a processor in the Republic of Serbia, regardless of whether the processing takes place in the Republic of Serbia or not.

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