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These Were the Days of Our Lives! A Self-Enhancement Model of Revisit Intention for Warfare Heritage Tourism

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4 5 6 **THESE WERE THE DAYS OF OUR LIVES! A SELF-ENHANCEMENT MODEL OF** 7 **REVISIT INTENTION FOR WARFARE HERITAGE TOURISM** 8

9 **Abstract**

10 This paper addresses revisiting intention in warfare heritage tourism. Building on drivers related
11 to the psychology of the tourists, it develops and tests a moderated mediation model accounting
12 for self-enhancement, engagement, sense of belonging, and revisit intention. Two studies explore
13 the relationships among these constructs, sampling tourists visiting contemporary warfare
14 heritage sites (Cold War military installations). The results show that the sense of belonging
15 mediates the self-enhancement–revisit intention relationship and that engagement moderates the
16 mediation. Finally, results show that the relationships among the considered constructs do not
17 change for tourists living in the former western or eastern blocks and for tourists born before,
18 during, or after the Cold War era.

19
20 **Keywords:** Warfare heritage tourism; Self-enhancement; Engagement; Sense of belonging;
21 Revisit intention.
22
23

24 **1. Introduction**

25 Earlier studies in tourism have documented the importance of revisiting intention to the
26 destination's success (e.g., Um et al., 2006). However, research is ongoing on heritage tourism,
27 as it is polymorphous, and its implications vary among heritage destinations. Thus, recent
28 literature calls to address warfare heritage tourism settings and understand the tourist's
29 experience by taking a psychological perspective (Scarpi & Raggiotto, 2023).

30 In particular, warfare tourism experiences hold deep meaningfulness for visitors, related
31 to remembrance and commemoration of intense past events (Gielsing & Ong, 2016). Visiting
32 warfare tourism sites allows individuals to confront history and memory directly, leveraging
33 compelling meanings such as peace and solidarity (Williams et al., 2023), and could significantly
34 contribute to constructing and improving the self (Driessen, 2022; Hosseini et al., 2022).
35 Accordingly, the present research aims to study tourists' revisit intention in warfare heritage sites
36 and does so from the perspective of self-enhancement theory in psychology.

37 Self-enhancement is the feeling of coming closer to an ideal self (Raggiotto & Scarpi,
38 2021), personal growth (Laing & Frost, 2017; Skandalis et al., 2023) that illustrates a person's
39 desire to look for events that strengthen or enhance one's sense of self (Wien & Olsen, 2014). In
40 this vein, scholars in psychology have already addressed the drivers of self-enhancement (e.g.,
41 Emmons, 1996; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004) and settled that self-enhancement can be driven in
42 warfare heritage tourism by a desire for self-exploration (Mowatt & Chancellor, 2011; Winter,
43 2011), self-understanding (Upton et al., 2018), self-growth (Lee, 2016; Fallon & Robinson,
44 2017), and a need for reflection (Gielsing & Ong, 2016; Scarpi & Raggiotto, 2023).

45 Instead, assessing (and quantifying) the consequences of self-enhancement holds
46 paramount importance in the domain of warfare heritage tourism, for several reasons. Firstly, by

47 focusing on self-enhancement outcomes, researchers and practitioners gain valuable insights into
48 tourists' behavioral intentions and decision-making processes within this unique tourism context.
49 Exploring how self-enhancement influences revisit intention, emotional engagement, and
50 attachment to warfare heritage places provides useful knowledge for destination management
51 strategies, marketing initiatives, and visitor experience enhancement. Moreover, delving into the
52 consequences of self-enhancement sheds light on the transformative effects of warfare heritage
53 tourism on individuals' sense of identity, belonging, and emotional connection to historical
54 narratives. By examining these consequences, researchers can inform sustainable tourism
55 practices that foster meaningful and responsible visitor engagements with warfare heritage sites,
56 ensuring their preservation and continued relevance for future generations.

57 Therefore, the present research builds on the connection between warfare heritage
58 tourism and self-enhancement, assessing how it affects and interplays with tourists' sense of
59 belonging, emotional engagement, and revisit intention. Specifically, this research addresses self-
60 enhancement in contemporary heritage sites of the Cold War. It advances a conceptual model of
61 moderated mediation for revisiting intention addressing tourists' feelings of self-enhancement,
62 with the sense of belonging as a mediator and engagement with the history of the place as a
63 moderator.

64 The results corroborate the conceptual model and show that self-enhancement also occurs
65 in warfare heritage settings, drives a sense of belonging, especially when tourists feel emotional
66 engagement with the warfare heritage context, and ultimately determines revisit intention.
67 Furthermore, we find that the relationships do not vary between tourists who directly
68 experienced the historical period embodied by the heritage site versus those who did not, nor due
69 to the tourists' provenance. We conclude by discussing the theoretical and managerial
70 implications of the findings.

71

72 **2. Theoretical background**

73 *2.1 Self-enhancement theory*

74 The self-enhancement theory posits the existence of a fundamental human need to have a
75 positive self-image (Kwang & Swann, 2010). Building upon its long-standing tradition
76 recognizing the existence of a fundamental human need for protecting and improving the self,
77 the psychology literature established self-enhancement as a central goal of human existence
78 (Swann et al., 1989); notably, self-enhancement theory goes further, suggesting that self-
79 enhancement motives work as a continuous push to extend personal limits to grow as a person
80 and entails strong, symbolic meanings of identity construction and, particularly, of personal
81 growth (Allman et al., 2009; Raggiotto & Scarpi, 2022).

82 The outcome some tourists seek, consciously or unconsciously, is self-enhancement,
83 becoming more like the ideal version of oneself (Choi et al., 2020). In this vein, Brymer &
84 Houge Mackenzie (2016) discovered that people use terms like ideal self, self-realization, and
85 self-fulfillment to characterize experiences related to self-improvement. During these
86 experiences, people picture themselves reaching their boundaries and pushing them forward
87 (Shoham et al., 2000). Accordingly, the self-enhancement theory postulates that individuals
88 strongly desire to increase the positivity of their self-views (Leary, 2007; Raggiotto & Scarpi,
89 2022). Thus, they constantly seek experiences that help them reach a better self (Allman et al.,
90 2009).

91

92

93 2.2 Warfare heritage tourism and self-enhancement

94 Tourism experiences help individuals build, preserve, and create elements of their identities,
95 which are psychological processes of one's self-enhancement (Causevic & Lynch, 2011; George
96 & George, 2004). Accordingly, researchers indicate that expressing and enhancing the self is a
97 key motive for individuals to pursue tourism (Boksberger et al., 2011).

98 Thus, tourism experiences can carry relevant symbolic meanings for individuals' self-
99 construction (Laing & Frost, 2017; Skandalis et al., 2023), and motives related to the assessment
100 and improvement of the self have been highlighted as powerful drivers of tourist behavior
101 (Desforges, 2000) in a variety of contexts, ranging from sports tourism (Raggiotto & Scarpi,
102 2021) to luxury tourism (Seo et al., 2019).

103 Visiting contemporary heritage sites is highly symbolic and entails meanings related to
104 self-enhancement (Gieling & Ong, 2016). Unlike traditional heritage tourism, which may focus
105 on celebrations or cultural festivities, warfare heritage tourism takes a reflective approach: it
106 looks into the tragedies of conflict, giving tourists an exceptional chance to commemorate and
107 remember (Hosseini et al., 2022). The social meaning of warfare heritage encompasses various
108 dimensions influencing how societies perceive, interpret, and engage with their past military
109 experiences and artifacts.

110 Warfare heritage is critical in shaping a nation's historical memory and collective
111 identity. It helps people understand and relate to a country's past, emphasizing heroic narratives,
112 sacrifices, and struggles that have contributed to national identity. Preserving and showcasing
113 warfare heritage through museums, monuments, or educational programs fosters a deeper
114 understanding of the consequences of conflict, promotes peace and diplomacy, and raises
115 questions about the ethics of warfare, the impact on civilians, and the changing perceptions of
116 violence and conflict resolution throughout history. It prompts discussions on international law,
117 human rights, and the moral dimensions of armed conflicts and helps to promote peace,
118 reconciliation, and a better understanding of our collective history.

119 Warfare heritage tourism experiences might become part of one's life story (Poria et al.,
120 2006): a major motivation for tourists' engagement in warfare heritage tourism relates to
121 reinforcing the individual self (Fallon & Robinson, 2017). For instance, war tourism is central to
122 developing self-identity processes (Hosseini et al., 2022), self-understanding (Winter, 2011), and
123 self-exploration (Mowatt & Chancellor, 2011). Similarly, in their study on war heritage tourism,
124 Upton et al. (2018) emphasize how the close contact between tourists and war heritage triggered
125 deep processes of self-reflection. Moreover, Gieling & Ong (2016) report that war heritage
126 experiences contribute to an individual's identity. Warfare heritage tourism involves engaging
127 with historical narratives and sites inherently imbued with bravery, sacrifice, and resilience
128 themes. Visitors to warfare heritage sites often encounter stories of individuals who faced
129 extraordinary challenges and made significant sacrifices during times of conflict. This immersion
130 in the historical narratives of armed conflict offers a distinct opportunity for individuals to derive
131 feelings of self-enhancement.

132 Thus, warfare heritage tourism can trigger profound psychological processes of forming
133 and negotiating the self (Lee, 2016), potentially leading to intellectual and social growth.
134 Furthermore, stories of resilience and heroism in the face of past horrors can foster an uplifting
135 sense and boost feelings of self-enhancement by association with historical figures or narratives
136 highlighting human strength and virtue. So, warfare tourism can emphasize positive aspects of
137 heritage, such as achievements, cultural contributions, or heroic figures (Gieling & Ong, 2016),
138 positively inspiring visitors and leading to self-enhancement.

139 In summary, warfare tourism significantly contributes to the processes of construction of
140 the self by confronting individuals with a tangible history of the tragedies of war (Driessen,
141 2022) and leveraging compelling meanings such as peace, memory, and identity (Brown &
142 Arriaza, 2018; Williams et al., 2023). Overall, the experience of warfare tourism contributes to
143 the development of the self (e.g., Brown & Arriaza-Ibarra, 2018; Driessen, 2022).

144

145 *2.3 From self-enhancement to revisit intention*

146 The uniqueness of warfare heritage tourism's potential for self-enhancement lies in the
147 emotional and identity-related significance of the historical narratives encountered at these sites
148 (Mowatt & Chancellor, 2011). Specifically, the link between self-enhancement and revisit
149 intention in warfare heritage tourism can be understood through the psychological mechanism
150 underlying individuals' desire to repeat an activity to bolster their self-esteem. Warfare heritage
151 tourism allows visitors to engage with historical narratives imbued with bravery, sacrifice, and
152 resilience themes. As individuals immerse themselves in these narratives and connect
153 emotionally with the stories of those who participated in past conflicts, they may experience
154 feelings of enhanced self-esteem. This sense of self-enhancement arises from recognizing shared
155 values and identities with the individuals who shaped the course of history and from
156 acknowledging one's ability to engage with and understand complex historical events.

157 Psychology scholars suggest that self-growth drives individuals to repeat activities that
158 enhance their self-worth (Crocker & Park, 2004). Thus, tourists who derive feelings of self-
159 enhancement from their warfare heritage tourism experience should be more likely to revisit the
160 destination because revisiting the warfare heritage destination offers an opportunity for
161 individuals to reaffirm and strengthen their sense of self-worth by reconnecting with the
162 historical narratives that resonate with their identity and values.

163 Accordingly, we posit that warfare heritage tourists are inclined to revisit destinations
164 where they have experienced a boost to their self-esteem through engagement with the historical
165 narratives of armed conflict because warfare heritage tourism satisfies their psychological needs
166 for reflection (Gielsing & Ong, 2016; Scarpi & Raggiotto, 2023; Upton et al., 2018) and self-
167 growth (Fallon & Robinson, 2017; Lee, 2016; Winter, 2011).

168 Hence, there should be a link between self-enhancement and revisit intention in warfare
169 heritage tourism because of the emotional and identity-related experiences encountered at these
170 sites. In particular, revisiting warfare heritage sites is driven by more than just personal
171 enjoyment; a deep emotional and psychological attachment to the historical narratives and
172 individuals involved drives it. This emotional and psychological connection is where feelings of
173 self-enhancement originate, as individuals reaffirm their identity and values through engaging
174 with historical events and fostering the psychological connection to the historical narratives of
175 the sites. In this vein, recent literature suggests that the warfare heritage tourism experience
176 might facilitate transformational processes centered on self-reflection and personal
177 transformation (Weaver et al., 2018; Oren et al., 2021).

178 Therefore, while previous studies in other tourism contexts suggest the possibility of a
179 relationship between self-enhancement and revisit intention, the unique context of warfare
180 heritage tourism, due to its deep significance for the individual self, adds layers of emotional
181 depth, personal connection and historical significance that distinguish it from other forms of
182 tourism (Mowatt & Chancellor, 2011; Gielsing & Ong, 2016; Oren et al., 2021).

183 Based on these considerations and the specific dynamics of warfare heritage tourism, we
184 posit the following:

185 **H.1:** Self-enhancement positively impacts revisit intention to warfare heritage sites.
186

187 *2.4 From self-enhancement to the sense of belonging*

188 The sense of belonging encapsulates the emotional connection and identification a traveler
189 cultivates with a destination (Hung et al., 2019; Jepson & Sharpley, 2015) and is regarded as the
190 result of a sophisticated assembly of experiences, materials, and affective, social, and material
191 resonances. (Raffaetà & Duff, 2013). In warfare heritage tourism, these psychological processes
192 of connection, identification, and assemblage acquire an even deeper meaning (e.g., Dresler,
193 2024) because warfare heritage tourism, with its emphasis on sites imbued with the legacy of
194 past battles and military struggles, offers a unique avenue for tourists to forge or reinforce a
195 shared heritage tied to the visited site (Wood, 2020).

196 In this vein, past research suggests that tourism set in places that witnessed disastrous
197 events (such as battles) in the past can trigger feelings of empathy and self-reflection in visitors,
198 which, in turn, stimulate a sense of belongingness to a place (Zhang et al., 2023; Wang et al.,
199 2024). This may manifest in personal memories or a collective identity intertwined with the
200 historical narrative of the locale (Scarpi & Raggiotto, 2023). Recent research consistently reports
201 that the symbolic significance of warfare heritage sites helps build social and individual
202 identities and shared memories of the collective past (Dresler, 2024). Those experiences hold the
203 potential to deepen tourists' sense of belonging not only to the visited site but also to the broader
204 hosting destination (Wang et al., 2024).

205 Thus, the emotional resonance evoked by warfare heritage sites can catalyze the forging
206 of deep-seated connections between visitors and the location (Gieling & Ong, 2016).
207 Accordingly, recent studies in psychology advance the theoretical suggestion that a strong sense
208 of belongingness can originate from feelings of self-enhancement (Mannarini et al., 2021),
209 especially when those feelings originate from living an experience (Chen et al., 2022).

210 Based on these considerations, we propose that the feelings of self-enhancement evoked
211 by visiting sites steeped in the history of armed conflict can catalyze a transformative process.
212 And we advance that, rather than existing in isolation, these feelings have the potential to evolve
213 into profound positive perceptions and associations with the place hosting such sites. Thus, we
214 contend that the strength of such a connection is contingent upon the degree to which the visit
215 contributes to one's sense of self-enhancement. Accordingly, our second hypothesis underscores
216 the transformative potential of tourism experiences rooted in the historical legacies of armed
217 conflict, wherein feelings of self-enhancement serve as catalysts for developing profound
218 emotional and psychological connections between the visitors and the hosting destination.

219 Accordingly:

220 **H.2:** Self-enhancement positively impacts the sense of belonging to warfare heritage
221 sites.
222

223 *2.5 The role of warfare heritage engagement*

224 Engagement refers to the consumers' active, rather than passive, approach toward objects: it
225 stands for the positive cognitive, emotional, and behavioral activity associated with or occurring
226 during key consumer-brand encounters, increasing consumers' connectedness to brands and
227 events (Hollebeek et al., 2014; Sprott et al., 2009).

228 In the tourism literature, scholars have devoted considerable attention to engagement,
229 considered a relevant predictor of tourists' attitudes, revisit intention (So et al., 2014), and
230 attendance (Regan et al., 2012). In particular, past research in heritage tourism considers

231 engagement toward the historical period embodied by the heritage destination. This particular
232 form of engagement is known as heritage engagement; it refers to consumers' desire to
233 participate in the heritage of a brand (Balmer & Balmer, 2013) or place (Bryce et al., 2014). So,
234 heritage tourism becomes a process and a consumable experience when there is engagement
235 (Ashworth, 2014).

236 In particular, we focus on engagement in warfare heritage tourism, representing a distinct
237 consumer interaction with historical periods and destinations associated with military conflicts.
238 The uniqueness of engagement in warfare heritage tourism lies in the emotional complexity:
239 Warfare heritage evokes a wide range of emotions, including patriotism, sorrow, pride, and
240 reflection. Visitors may experience complex emotions as they engage with the historical
241 narratives, artifacts, and landscapes associated with past conflicts. This emotional complexity
242 sets warfare heritage engagement apart from engagement with other types of historical or
243 cultural attractions and can blend uniquely with self-enhancement.

244 Furthermore, unlike generic heritage tourism, warfare heritage tourism often involves
245 individuals connecting with their personal or familial histories. Visitors may seek out sites or
246 exhibits related to specific battles, military units, or ancestors who participated in past conflicts.
247 This personal connection adds a deeper layer of meaning to the engagement experience so
248 warfare heritage engagement could foster a sense of personal relevance and connection to the
249 historical narrative and visitors' sense of belonging. In addition, warfare heritage tourism forces
250 visitors to confront past conflicts' moral and ethical dimensions. Visitors may grapple with
251 questions of justice, sacrifice, and the human cost of war as they engage with exhibits or
252 memorials commemorating military history. This moral and ethical dimension distinguishes
253 warfare heritage engagement from engagement with other historical or cultural heritage types.

254 Finally, warfare heritage engagement, differently than other types of engagement in
255 tourism, offers opportunities for reflection, and dialogue about the legacies and broader
256 significance of past conflicts. This reflective process may shape individuals' responses to self-
257 enhancement motives, influencing how self-enhancement impacts their sense of belonging
258 within the wartime historical context.

259 In summary, the unique emotional and interpretive frameworks presented at warfare
260 heritage sites may shape individuals' perceptions of self-enhancement and its relationship to
261 belonging, thereby moderating the strength or direction of this relationship. Accordingly, we
262 advance that:

263 **H.3.** Warfare heritage engagement moderates the relationship between self-enhancement
264 and one's sense of belonging so that high levels of warfare heritage engagement increase the
265 sense of belonging attributable to self-enhancement.

266
267 By considering engagement in warfare heritage tourism as a moderator, we explore how
268 the unique characteristics of warfare heritage engagement interact with individual psychological
269 processes, such as self-enhancement motives and a sense of belonging. This approach allows for
270 a nuanced understanding of how engagement in warfare heritage tourism contexts influences the
271 psychological mechanisms underlying visitors' experiences and behaviors.

272
273 *2.6 From the sense of belonging to the intention to revisit warfare heritage sites*
274 We advance that tourists' sense of belonging plays a pivotal role in shaping their intention to
275 revisit warfare heritage sites and that some reasons are unique to this type of tourism. Warfare
276 heritage sites are imbued with the historical legacies of armed conflicts: as visitors immerse

277 themselves in the narratives of courage, sacrifice, and resilience that define these landscapes,
278 they develop a profound emotional connection to the stories of the past. This sense of belonging
279 is not merely a fleeting sentiment but a deeply ingrained bond that intertwines their identity with
280 the historical narratives of the site (Gieling & Ong, 2016).

281 Thus, in warfare heritage tourism, the significance of events allows individuals to imbue
282 places with meaning and memories rooted in the historical narratives of armed conflict.
283 Specifically, the process of bringing together individual and social experiences and affective
284 resonances to give locations a personal meaning is particularly relevant in the context of warfare
285 heritage tourism (Raffaetà & Duff, 2013), where tourists can construct and negotiate societal and
286 individual identities, validate historical events, and foster memories of the past (Dresler, 2024).
287 Unlike other tourism experiences, the sense of belonging in warfare heritage tourism represents a
288 deeper, more enduring connection that transcends the mere enjoyment of the tourist experience
289 (Gieling & Ong, 2016) as tourists connect emotionally with the stories and experiences of those
290 who participated in the events. This sense of belonging emerges from the recognition of shared
291 identity traits and values between the visitors and the historical narratives of the site, ultimately
292 enabling individuals to see reflections of their own identity within the site (Hung et al., 2019;
293 Laing, 2017).

294 Psychology theories support the notion that humans are inherently motivated to maintain
295 connections with environments where they feel a sense of belonging, as it fulfills fundamental
296 psychological needs for attachment and identity affirmation (Jetten et al., 2012; Baumeister &
297 Leary, 2015). Set in the context of warfare heritage tourism, such consideration highlights that
298 tourists' sense of belonging to the site represents a form of attachment to the historical narratives
299 and the community of individuals who participated in the events. Furthermore, as individuals are
300 driven by the desire to reconnect with the historical narratives that resonate with their identity
301 and values (George & George, 2004), the sense of belonging could drive revisit intention through
302 a desire to deepen one's understanding of the historical events, to pay respects to those who
303 sacrificed, or to honor the legacy of the past.

304 Accordingly, we advance that, in warfare heritage sites, visitors seek to reconnect and
305 establish a link with the stories that have become ingrained in their identity. The outcome of the
306 significance-building process that tourists perform in warfare heritage sites is to catalyze the
307 desire to revisit the sites. Thus:

308 **H.4:** Sense of belonging positively impacts revisit intention of warfare heritage sites.

309

310 This hypothesis underscores the transformative power of the sense of belonging in shaping
311 tourists' behavioral intentions in warfare heritage sites, highlighting its role as a driving force
312 behind the desire to revisit sites imbued with the historical legacies of armed conflict.

313

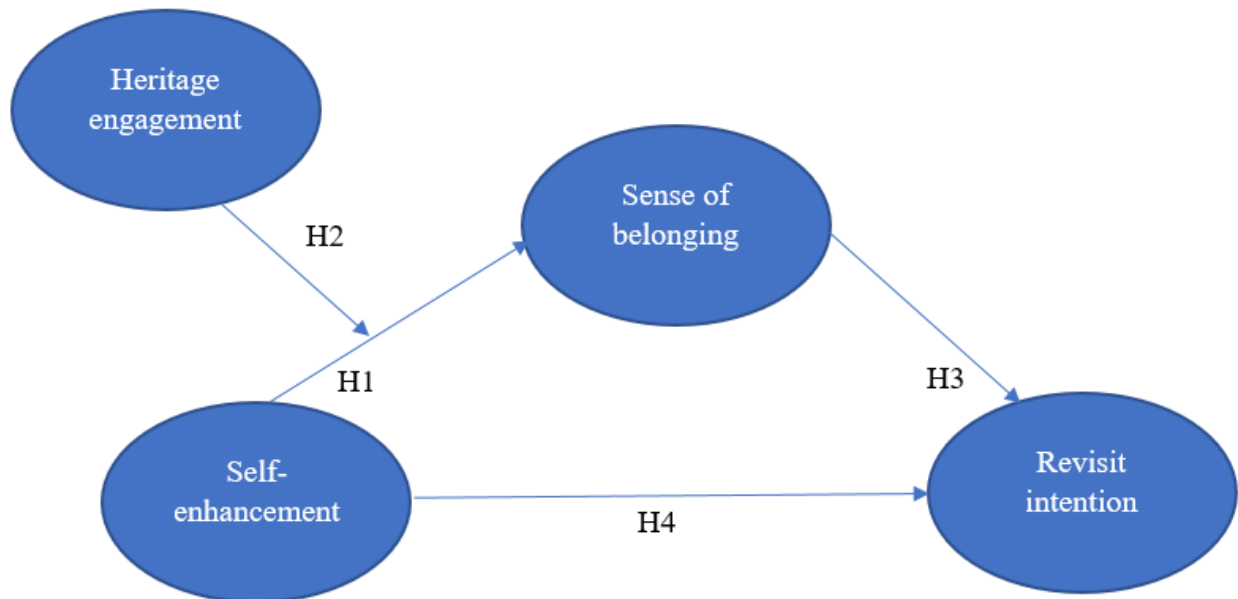
314 *2.8 The conceptual model*

315 Recent studies in tourism have called for addressing tourists' behavior from the perspective of
316 tourists' psychology (Scarpi & Raggiotto, 2023). In this vein, our hypotheses link tourism
317 literature on heritage to the psychological literature on self-enhancement theory. By doing so, we
318 provide a psychology-based explanation for individuals' intention to revisit a heritage
319 destination, using insights from psychology to understand better why such intention might
320 develop.

321 Our conceptual model hypothesizes that feelings of self-enhancement developed during a
322 tourism experience can activate other psychological processes related to a sense of belonging.

323 Furthermore, we posit that tourists' engagement with history strengthens the process through
324 which self-enhancement leads to a sense of belonging. Finally, we posit that tourists' sense of
325 belonging leads to the intention to visit the destination again. This set of relationships, formally
326 advanced through four hypotheses, translates into the moderated mediation model shown in
327 Figure 1.

328 **Fig. 1.** The conceptual model.



329
330
331

3 Study 1

3.8 Participants and measurements

334 A market research company provided a panel of 350 participants (mean age = 28.19; 36%
335 females) who answered an online questionnaire. To qualify, participants had to have visited a
336 local Cold War facility as tourists during their last vacation. We chose Cold War facilities as
337 heritage tourism destinations because of their density, particularly in Europe, and historical
338 significance. Furthermore, the Cold War refers to a recent past (1947-1991). By considering the
339 Cold War heritage destinations, we can compare the perceptions of tourists who personally
340 experienced the times celebrated by the heritage site and those who did not.

341 Furthermore, European countries tend to be relatively close to each other geographically.
342 Hence, several countries of rivaling blocks were close (e.g., NATO Italy and communist
343 Yugoslavia) or extremely close (e.g., the cities of Berlin, Germany, and Gorizia/Nova Gorica,
344 Italy, were split into two halves). Such proximity made the Cold War an everyday reality for
345 millions of people. It shaped the planning of cities (e.g., to account for military installments),
346 people's jobs (as many works were related directly or indirectly to the presence of military
347 personnel), and their shared fears of a possible invasion (e.g., the Stay-Behind intelligence
348 program; Nuti & Riste, 2007). This allows for the comparison of tourists from one and the other
349 block as a further possible insight into what other types of heritage sites might not offer.

350 The questionnaire was pretested with 40 respondents (not included in the analysis) to
351 ensure the questions were clear. The questionnaire asked respondents about their self-
352 enhancement (Shoham et al., 2000), sense of belonging (Hung et al., 2019), revisit intention
353 (Jang and Namkung, 2009), and engagement (Spratt et al., 2009). Social desirability (Fischer &

354 Fick, 1993) was also measured to test for social desirability bias. The questionnaire items are
355 reported in the Appendix (Table A.1).

356 All items were measured using a 7-point Likert scale. Finally, respondents reported their
357 demographics, were thanked, and debriefed.

358

359 *3.9 Model estimation procedure*

360 Non-normality of data distribution emerged from the Shapiro-Wilk test. We, therefore, used
361 structural equation modeling to test the hypotheses, using SPSS AMOS 25 and the
362 asymptotically distribution-free estimation technique suitable for large, non-normally distributed
363 samples (Byrne, 2013).

364 Sense of belonging was entered as a mediator of the relationship between self-
365 enhancement and revisit intention; engagement in historical events was entered as a moderator of
366 the left branch of the model.

367 Respondents' age, gender, and provenance were entered as covariates in the model. In
368 particular, age was split age based on whether the respondents could have personal memories of
369 the Cold War era, given that the Cold War era refers to the 1947-1991 period. Psychology
370 scholars agree that explicit memories usually start around the 7th year (Peterson et al., 2005); we
371 considered 1984 the birth cut-off year. Provenance was split between countries that belonged to
372 the former Western and Eastern blocs.

373

374 *3.4. Results: Questionnaire and scales*

375 Following Kock (2015), we used SPSS's collinearity diagnostic to ensure that common method
376 bias wasn't present. The VIF values ranged from 1.17 to 1.76, well below the cutoff of 3.

377 Consequently, common method bias is not a concern in the model (Kock, 2015). Following
378 Tussyadiah et al. (2018), we ran Harman's one-factor test, with the number of factors in an
379 exploratory factor analysis constraining to one. The results show that a single factor could
380 explain significantly less variance in the data and well below the recommended threshold of
381 50%. Social desirability was added to the model as a covariate. The coefficients exhibited non-
382 significant results, with p-values ranging from .34 to .66, further diminishing concerns about
383 social desirability bias (Holbrook & Krosnick, 2010).

384 Finally, Cronbach's alphas range between .72 and .94 were obtained using a CFA with
385 AMOS 18 ($\chi^2/df < 3$; RMSEA = .07; CFI = .90), supporting the validity of the measures.
386 The details are reported in the Appendix in Table A.1.

387

388 *3.5. Results: Model estimation*

389 The goodness-of-fit statistics show that the suggested model fits the data reasonably well (χ^2/df
390 < 3 ; RMSEA = .07; $p(\text{RMSEA} < 0.05) < 0.001$; NNFI, CFI = .92). The path estimates show that
391 revisit intention is driven by a sense of belonging ($\beta = .35$, $p < .001$), which in turn stems from
392 self-enhancement ($\beta = .21$, $p = .004$). This evidence supports H2 and H4. In particular, it proves
393 that self-enhancement is a significant construct that helps predict tourists' behavior in heritage
394 tourism. Furthermore, in line with our conceptualization, engagement exerts a significant
395 moderation effect on the relationship between self-enhancement and the sense of belonging ($\beta =$
396 $.04$, $p = .03$). This evidence supports H3.

397 Given the significant direct effect of self-enhancement on revisit intention ($\beta = .26$; $p <$
398 $.001$), which supports H1, tourists' sense of belonging partially mediates the relationship
399 between self-enhancement and revisit intention. Accordingly, high revisit intention emerged for

400 tourists who exhibited a high sense of belonging from feelings of self-enhancement, especially
401 when they were highly engaged in the history of the place. In summary, these results extend
402 previous studies on heritage tourism, taking the perspective of tourists' psychology and showing
403 the relevance of developing feelings of self-enhancement as a driver of revisit intention.

404 Table A.2 in the appendix lists the structural model results graphically presented in
405 Figure 4. Overall, the results from the model estimation support Hypotheses 1 through 4,
406 showing that the sense of belonging mediates the relationship between experience self-
407 enhancement and revisit intention. The results also show that heritage engagement moderates the
408 relationship between self-enhancement and the sense of belonging. The highest revisit intention
409 was observed for individuals who experienced self-enhancement, were engaged in the place's
410 heritage, and developed a sense of belonging toward the location.

411 No significant effect emerged for age, gender, and provenance, as these covariates were
412 not significant. This evidence further supports that the relationships evidenced by the model are
413 generalizable and not due to a specific tourist group: the results are not affected by respondents
414 having or lacking personal memories of the Cold War era or coming from former Eastern and
415 Western Cold War blocs.

416 417 **4. Study 2**

418 *4.1. Participants and Context*

419 We carried out Study 2 to provide external validity and confirm the findings from Study 1. In
420 Study 2, we administered the same questionnaire for Study 1 to 250 visitors at a former Cold
421 War military base in Italy. The base was strategically important and responsible for defending
422 the Italian skies from potential attacks from Warsaw Pact countries. The original military
423 equipment is nowadays on display, as the base was restored and opened to the public as a Cold
424 War museum to preserve the historical heritage and promote events related to the Cold War.

425 426 *4.2. Results: scales and model estimation*

427 The validity of the measures is supported by Cronbach's alpha ranging between .75 and .93, and
428 the results from the CFA analysis ($\chi^2/df < 3$; RMSEA = .07; CFI = .91). Details can be
429 found in the Appendix (Tables A.1 and A.2). The goodness-of-fit statistics for the multiple
430 moderated mediation model indicate a more than acceptable fit ($\chi^2/df < 3$; RMSEA = .07;
431 $p(\text{RMSEA} < 0.05) < 0.001$; NNFI, CFI = .93). Results are shown in figure 4.

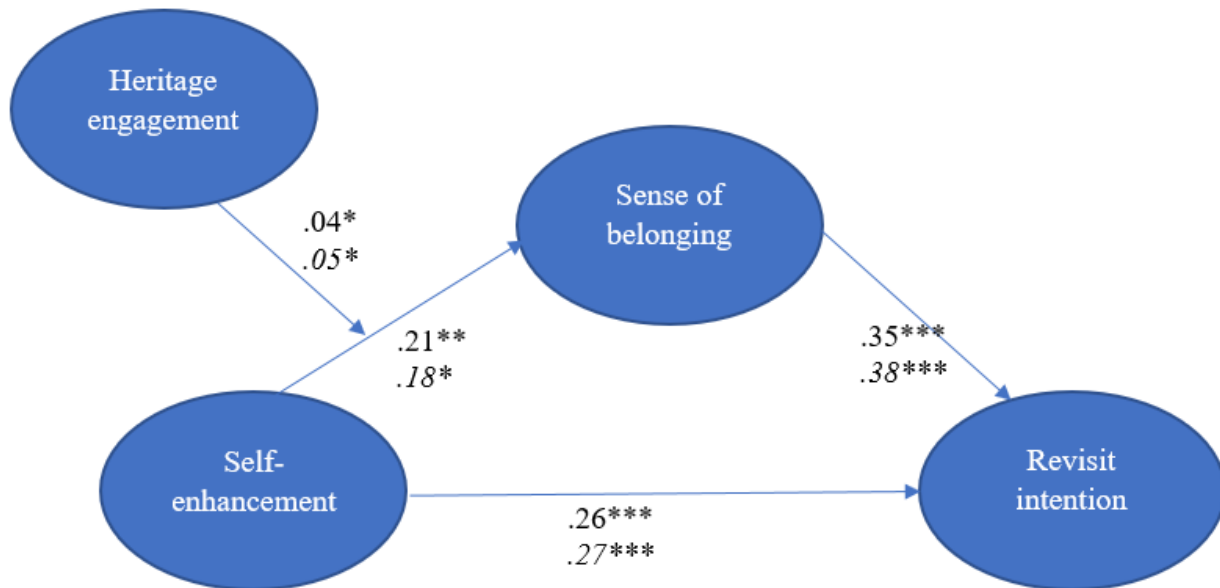
432 In detail, self-enhancement led to a sense of belonging (H2: $\beta = .18$, $p = .03$), which
433 affected revisit intention (H4: $\beta = .38$; $p < .001$). As in Study 2, engagement moderated the
434 relationship between self-enhancement and sense of belonging (H3: $\beta = .05$, $p = .03$). Again, a
435 significant direct effect emerged between self-enhancement and revisit intention (H1: $\beta_1 = .27$; p
436 $< .001$), supporting partial mediation.

437 Overall, the findings from Study 2 support the theoretical model and hypotheses 1
438 through 4, providing external validity to the findings that emerged in Study 1. The findings from
439 Study 2 are reported in Table A.2 in the appendix and presented graphically in Figure 4.

440 Overall, the findings converge with those from Study 1, providing more robustness and
441 ecological validity from a second independent sample of tourists. The results of Study 1 and
442 Study 2 are shown in Figure 4.

443
444

Fig.4. The model with estimates



Note: Study 1, N = 350; Study 2 (*Italics*) N = 250. * = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$; *** = $p < .001$

As in Study 1, neither age, gender, or provenance emerged as significant covariates.

5. Discussion

Heritage survives in the cultural landscape thanks to many dismissed sites, some of which were only officially revealed, opened, or discovered in recent years. Several Cold War facilities, for instance, were secret military installations until the early 1990s; Pompeii excavations have brought to light new boroughs of the Roman city, etc. Heritage sites are increasingly being converted into cataloged touristic attractions (e.g., coldwar sites.net lists those in Europe) and represent a form of fast-growing local tourism that is becoming particularly relevant (Financial Review, 2020).

5.1. Theoretical contribution

The present research examines warfare heritage tourism from the theoretical standpoint of self-enhancement theory. By offering a more psychological perspective of visitor behavior at heritage sites, focusing on their feelings and inner drivers, this research extends the current knowledge of heritage tourism. In particular, it extends the literature on the psychological mechanisms through which war heritage tourism affects the development of the self. On the one hand, the results of the present study support the relevance of war heritage tourism in the psychological construction processes of the self. However, on the other hand, they advance extant knowledge by connecting heritage tourism with self-enhancement theory and focusing on the consequences, rather than the antecedents, of self-enhancement feelings in tourists. Instead, extant studies largely focus on the implications of war heritage tourism, such as its contribution to developing the national identity, Gieling & Ong, 2016; Packer et al., 2019), or on the reasons why warfare heritage helps identity construction (Driessen, 2022; Hosseini et al., 2022; Upton et al., 2018), rather than its consequences on revisit intention and place belongingness. In addition, the present research is among the few providing insights backed by empirical evidence on contemporary heritage

475 tourism, for which, so far, the literature has mostly provided conceptual and qualitative accounts
476 (e.g., Williams et al., 2023; Earl & Hall, 2023).

477 In addition, the present research provides some comparisons based on tourists' direct and
478 indirect experiences of the warfare events being remembered in the tourist site and whose side of
479 the war today's visitors were in the time of war. This approach is novel in warfare heritage
480 literature. It sheds new light, showing that tourists' experience visiting a warfare heritage site
481 does not differ due to tourists' age or provenance, meaning it is up to practitioners to shape,
482 select, and manage prospective tourists' motivations.

483 This evidence sheds new light on the psychological mechanism through which self-
484 enhancement leads to a sense of belonging and develops into a revisit intention. In particular, it
485 allows one to read previous findings in warfare heritage literature from a new perspective: self-
486 understanding (Winter, 2011), self-exploration (Mowatt & Chancellor, 2011), self-reflection
487 (Upton et al., 2018), and self-growth (Lee, 2016) all refer to internal factors compelling
488 individuals to seek personal development and growth through their visit: self-enhancement. Our
489 results strengthen the idea that warfare heritage sites can offer historical insights and enhance
490 visitors' self-enhancement through intellectual, emotional, and moral growth. Moreover, our
491 findings advance that, contemplating their thoughts, emotions, and experiences during the visit,
492 tourists engage more in-depth with the historical context, empathize with past events, cultivate
493 engagement, and reflect on the consequences of warfare.

494

495 *5.2. Managerial contribution*

496 Our findings suggest that revisit intention can be activated through drivers related to the self and
497 the self in connection with the place. According to our results, self-enhancement, belonging, and
498 engagement trigger positive outcomes such as revisiting intention. For instance, real-life
499 experiences that reinforce sites and artifacts (like memorabilia or documents) might strengthen
500 tourist engagement with historical heritage, stimulate tourists' feelings of self-enhancement, and
501 cultivate stronger psychological bonds with the place and its people.

502 Thus, practitioners should help tourists reach a sense of self-enhancement and develop
503 compelling relationships with the place to obtain a loyal customer base. They could do so by
504 helping tourists engage with the location's history. For instance, managers could provide videos,
505 movies, posters, military uniforms, etc., to enhance visitors' emotional connection. Engagement
506 and the sense of belonging might also be bolstered by providing information, readings, examples,
507 and old newspapers and using innovations such as augmented reality and virtual reality to foster
508 greater interaction between the visitors and the site. These elements could also help enhance the
509 likelihood that tourists' prevailing motivations are internal rather than external, which our results
510 show to strengthen further the paths leading to revisit intention. Overall, the results of this
511 research may suggest to practitioners that, to harness the engagement of tourists, it may be
512 crucial to make them feel part of something bigger (i.e., a place, a community, a shared heritage).
513 According to recent data, it is something that tourists expect and look for and will likely shape
514 the industry's future (World Economic Forum, 2022).

515 Of course, the notion that tourists' sense of belonging and engagement are crucial for
516 tourism is not new. However, Cold War tourism differs as practitioners may count on a potential
517 key resource unavailable in other heritage tourism settings, like historical re-enactments. That is,
518 living people who directly experienced the Cold War events and many of its well-preserved
519 artifacts. For example, consider former military bases that hosted missile batteries during the
520 Cold War. Several local people served as military personnel in these bases, which held a key

521 strategic role in some countries within the NATO defense system. These people, now retired,
522 still represent a unique source of living memories, having witnessed secret military procedures or
523 simply everyday life protocols during the Cold War. As such, they can contribute to developing a
524 sense of belonging (e.g., providing relatable memories) and help tourists immerse themselves in
525 the period. In conjunction with popular movies, books, and video games set during the Cold
526 War, these witnesses can help enhance visitors' engagement with the historical period and sense
527 of belonging to the destination, further contributing to revisit intention.

528 Finally, the touristic conversion of heritage sites may represent important opportunities
529 for sustaining proximity tourism, helping reposition destinations toward more feasible models of
530 touristic development. In particular, heritage destinations could cushion tourism operators in the
531 short term and serve as a vital resource in the long run. In this vein, ensuring the cooperation of
532 national authorities might be highly beneficial to engagement in heritage sites. For instance, the
533 former underground headquarters of NATO Land Forces Southern Europe in Italy is being
534 transformed into a tourist attraction.

535

536 **6. Limitations and future research**

537 In this study, we addressed traditional heritage tourism in settings where official touristic
538 activities are carried out based on structured programs of recovery and touristic conversions of
539 sites. Notably, about 5% of our respondents visited sites that have not been officially opened to
540 the public.

541 Typically, such sites are still under formal military control but are no longer on active
542 duty and are officially inaccessible, having been abandoned for decades. This small percentage
543 of our sample reveals a possible limitation of our study as we needed to account for an
544 unconventional form of tourism like urban exploration. Urban exploration activities seek to
545 locate, explore, and record abandoned and restricted structures of contemporary society (Bennett,
546 2011). Dismissed sites are popular among urban explorers, with some specifically focusing on
547 exploring abandoned structures (Bennett, 2011). Hence, further research on heritage tourism
548 might maintain the same self-enhancement perspective of our study to explore the perspective of
549 urban explorers, albeit with the application of different theoretical lenses (concerning voluntary
550 risk-taking behaviors).

551

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716
717 **APPENDIX**

718
719 **Table A.1.** Questionnaire items

	Cronbach alpha	
	S1	S2
REVISIT INTENTION (Jang and Namkung, 2009)	.72	.75
1. I would like to come back to [Tourism Destination X] in the future.		
2. I plan to revisit this heritage tourism destination in the future.		
3. I would recommend this heritage tourism destination to my friends or others.		
SENSE OF BELONGING (Hung et al., 2019)	.86	.85
1. I feel a strong sense of belonging to [Tourism Destination X].		
2. I feel I am a member of [Tourism Destination X]'s community.		
3. I feel other [Tourism Destination X] community members are my close friends.		
4. I feel I belong to this place.		
ENGAGEMENT (Spratt et al., 2009)	.94	.93
1. I have a special bond with the history of [Tourism Destination X].		
2. I consider [Tourism Destination X]’s history to be a part of myself.		
3. I feel as if I have a close personal connection with [Tourism Destination X]’s history		
4. I can identify with [Tourism Destination X]’s history.		
SELF-ENHANCEMENT (Shoham et al., 2000)	.89	.88
1. I am a better person than I was when I came to this place.		
2. I think more highly of me since I came to this place.		
3. This place has changed my perspective		
4. Visiting this place helps me become better.		

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Table A.2. Structural equation modeling results.

Hypothesis	Path	Study	Estimate (SE)	<i>p</i>
H2	Self-enhancement → Sense of belonging	S1	0.21 (0.07)	= 0.004
		S2	0.18 (0.08)	= 0.03
H3	Moderation1 by Heritage engagement	S1	0.04 (0.02)	= 0.03
		S2	0.05 (0.02)	= 0.03
H4	Sense of belonging → Revisit intention	S1	0.35 (0.07)	< 0.001
		S2	0.38 (0.08)	< 0.001
H1	Self-enhancement → Revisit intention	S1	0.26 (0.06)	< 0.001
		S2	0.27 (0.07)	< 0.001

725 Study 1: Fit: $\chi^2/df < 3$; RMSEA = 0.07; $p(\text{RMSEA} < 0.05) < 0.001$; NNFI, CFI = 0.92.

726 Study 2: Fit: $\chi^2/df < 3$; RMSEA = .07; $p(\text{RMSEA} < 0.05) < 0.001$; NNFI, CFI = 0.93.

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