World Heritage: from shared global resource to market asset?

The United Nation Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is Paris-based specialized agency of the UN, whose task is to create the conditions for dialogue among civilizations based upon respect for commonly shared values. While at the beginning UNESCO was known for its programs on education, in the past decades the international protection of heritage, know as World Heritage, has become its flagship program. The World Heritage Convention, adopted in 1972, established a mechanism for funding through the contributions of the State Parties to the Convention to the World Heritage Fund. While World Heritage is conceptualized as a global intergovernmental responsibility, chronic lack of funding has impeded the fulfillment of UNESCO’s mission to safeguard these outstanding World Heritage sites. Thus, in recent years heritage preservation is increasingly identified as an activity that stimulates public-private sector partnerships and economic development, through tourism and urban revitalization, rather than an irreplaceable resource to conserve for the wellbeing of the entire humankind. My research emerges in the wake of this contradiction, attempting a nuanced understanding of the ways in which market-oriented public-private partnerships impact UNESCO World Heritage policies.