

Are trips to Auschwitz the panacea for a history sick society? A Case Study of Italian memorial trains to Auschwitz, **Laura Fontana, Shoah Memorial of Paris (Mémorial de la Shoah)**

Should historical knowledge of the Holocaust be facilitated, if not even generated, by collective trips to mass murder sites?

My paper will focus on the Italian memorial trains to Auschwitz, which have become a very popular phenomenon, still unparalleled in Europe. Namely, I will argue that they are an example of deterioration of Holocaust teaching by analyzing the three key following aspects:

1) Is the primary goal of this initiative teaching history or promoting moral education? Teaching the Holocaust by visiting Auschwitz implies the overlap of different parts of the same history. Believing that a site visit is enough to generate a meaningful civilizing impact on the visitors means trivializing Auschwitz. On the one hand, the preparatory work for a trip there cannot include the teaching of the Holocaust in its full complexity. On the other hand, any content selection will obviously influence the students' historical perception.

2) Both pedagogy and methodology would need more accuracy because most teachers taking part in these projects tend to have a passive attitude arising from their choice to leave their educational responsibility in the hands of the organizers, therefore renouncing to coordinate by themselves the learning process of their students. Moreover, the tight schedule does not favour the historical understanding that would require, instead, longer times for specific individual reappraisal work.

3) The use of an unsuitable language not only results from a lack of precision in defining the historical facts (mixing of political deportation, forced labour and extermination of the Jews) but also leads to a universally moralizing effect of the Holocaust. In particular, the use of a too general vocabulary (including terms like: *human beings*, *victims*, *innocent people*) risks overlooking and minimizing the specificity of the genocide. Such a language prevents students from understanding that the Holocaust victims were the Jews and that they were murdered just because they were born Jews.

Given the great success of the memorial trains initiative and its strong connection with the teaching of history, it is essential to consider how teachers respond to the major challenge they are faced with: combining good history teaching with the moral lesson of Auschwitz. |

Laura Fontana is considered to be one of the Italians leading Holocaust educators with more than twenty-five years of teaching experience. Since 1999 she has been in charge of an educational program named Education and Remembrance for the Town of Rimini.

She has coordinated and led many international seminars, developed a variety of pedagogical units, lectured and written widely on all aspects of Holocaust education in Italy, France and Israel. From 2007-2010 she was appointed Director of the Historical Institute of Resistance of Rimini. She joined Mémorial de la Shoah of Paris in 2008 as the head of its newly founded Italian Department. In 2013 she was appointed by the Mémorial de la Shoah as scientific coordinator of the European project EHRI, European Holocaust Research Infrastructure. In this capacity, she is responsible for developing educational materials and for coordinating seminars, workshops and summer universities for Italian teachers and educators. She is the author of several essays and articles in Italian, French, English and Hebrew. Her recent research focuses on the Jewish athletes during the Nazi period and on the Nazi language.