

Political-sponsored institutionalization of the Italian Resistance.

The Institute Alcide Cervi. 1972-2008

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Abstract

The research aims to reconstruct the history of the Alcide Cervi Institute from 1972 to 2008 in order to study the institutionalization process of the Italian Resistance and its relation to left-sided political parties. The objective of this study is to gain insight into the ways in which political processes, including decision-making and funding strategies, may have influenced the manner in which the Cervi brothers' story was utilized in the national memory competition, through a political-sponsored cultural institute.

The Alcide Cervi Institute represents an insightful case study for investigating the interplay between history and power dynamics. The execution of the seven Cervi brothers in 1943 by the fascist regime became a symbol of the Resistance in the Italian Republic. The intricate process of commemorating, memorializing, and institutionalizing this event on a national level, involving political parties, associations, and witnesses, reached its culmination in 1972 with the foundation of the Institute. The dichotomy between the national vocation of the Rome Office and Reggio Emilia will be the focus of our analysis. In 2008, the House Cervi in Gattatico became the epicenter of the Institute, serving as a center for memory, commemorations, cultural and research activities, a museum, an archive, and a library.

The study relies heavily on the mapping and use of unpublished records related to the administration of the Institute Cervi and conserved, uncataloged, in its current archive. These include all the resumes of the Associates' Assembly and the Administration Committee, as well as part of the budget and the folders related to cultural initiatives, from 1972 to 2008. In addition to the aforementioned sources, photographic and video material, as well as national and local press, have been integrated to assess the political engagement and the role of the Institute in the public sphere.

The involvement of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and its successors in the Institute will be examined concerning the broader political context of the Italian Republic: the critical phases of the Resistance Memory Wars, especially the passage between 1989 and the end of the so-called First Republic in 1994, will be entangled with the development of the Cervi Institute structures and functions. This perspective will facilitate a critical examination of the shift from an initial emphasis on academic output to the proliferation of public events during the 1990s. A more nuanced comprehension of how Resistance memory is shaped and disseminated will empower public historians to facilitate responsible contributions by public-funded institutions toward collective memory.

Dedication

To my mother Elvira, who always supported my efforts.

Heartfelt thanks.

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Abbreviations

AAMOD, *Archivio audiovisivo del movimento operaio e democratico* (Audiovisual archive of the labor and democratic movement)

AIAC, *Archivio Istituto Alcide Cervi* (Alcide Cervi Institute Archives)

ANC, *Alleanza Nazionale Contadini* (National Farmers Alliance)

ANPI, *Associazione Nazionale Partigiani Italiani* (National Association of Italian Partisans)

CDA, *Consiglio di Amministrazione dell'Istituto Alcide Cervi* (Administration Committee of the Alcide Cervi Institute)

CIA, *Confederazione Italiana Agricoltori* (Confederation of Italian Farmers)

DC, *Democrazia Cristiana* (Christian Democracy)

FGCI, *Federazione Giovani Comunisti Italiani* (Federation of Young Italian Communists)

INSMLI, *Istituto Nazionale per la Storia del Movimento di Liberazione in Italia* (National Institute for the History of the Liberation Movement in Italy)

PCI, *Partito Comunista Italiano* (Italian Communist Party)

PDS, *Partito democratico della Sinistra PDS* (Democratic Party of the Left)

PRC, *Partito della Rifondazione Comunista* (Party of the Communist Refoundation)

PSI, *Partito Socialista Italiano* (Italian Socialist Party)

RAI, *Radiotelevisione Italiana* (Italian public Radio and Television)

Note on translations

All the translations of the original quotations from the Italian language into the English language have been done by the author of this thesis.

Introduction

Author preface



Figure 1. The Reggio Emilia's partisan Giglio Mazzi speaks on the Liberation Day Fest in House Cervi. A Communist Red Flag emerged from the public. House Cervi, 25 April 2022.

“Now... and always... RESISTANCE”

The 25 April 2022 Liberation Day from Nazi-fascism, at House Cervi, was, as every year since 2004, a mass public Fest.¹ The house, thanks to performances but, above all, to the memorial value of the building itself, was populated by people from all over Italy, for a celebration based on the values of the Resistance. The event, which reads “100 years of antifascism” on the playbill, was sponsored by numerous local administrations and was attended by a large group of institutional greeters from the Democratic Party, in an

¹ The materials uploaded on the website related to the celebration of 25 April 2022 are an interesting base of visual data to start this discussion. See ‘Festa della Liberazione a Casa Cervi: il 25 aprile 2022 di nuovo insieme!’, *Istituto Alcide Cervi* (blog), accessed 2 November 2022, <https://www.istitutocervi.it/25-aprile-2022-casa-cervi>.

appropriation of values and symbols that pointed, in their speeches, to respect for democracy, civil rights, and freedom.

The most explicit reference to Resistance activity is given by someone who, that memory, experienced it first-hand, namely Giglio Mazzi, partisan of the 37th GAP “Vittorio Santini”, representing the continuity between a lived antifascist Resistance and the future. A Red Flag, which comes from the public, with clear references to the hammer and sickle of old and disappeared Italian Communism, in an effect of 'nostalgia', reminded me of Focardi Memory Wars about the Resistance memory that I perceived during the long years of the center-right Berlusconi governments.

The main question that came immediately to me was: why someone should raise this flag in 2022 Italy, in connection with the main celebration of the Italian Resistance? And, also, why do it in a countryside house near Reggio Emilia? Who are the actors that organized this event there? For which purpose?

The truth can be found in the long process of memorialization and institutionalization that the Cervi brothers' story underwent. This was the result of a memory confrontation that placed the Resistance at the heart of the national building debate of the post-fascist Italian Republic.

Only by grasping how the PCI made a decisive contribution to this process can we fully comprehend why this memory and the House survived through the second half of the 20th century and have been so vividly preserved to this day.

In his testimony, Alcide Cervi—the father who witnessed the sons' story—explicitly stated his desire to ensure the survival of his family's memory into the future:

“I have been thinking a lot lately about the future of the collection of memories and testimonies of the holocaust of my sons who have, in the course of these last few years, valiantly supported me. The number of people who come to pay their respects is continually increasing, and I, free from other occupations due to my age, do my best to illustrate their value; however, it is not always possible to listen to everyone and, on the other hand, I cannot ask my parents to join me, busy as they are with the work of running the farm.

Will what has been collected and preserved over so many years of patient work be dispersed at some point, I asked myself? Won't there remain a concrete trace to indicate to the people the path trodden by my seven sons and the significance of their sacrifice?

I found the answer in thinking that the [Gattatico] Municipality where we were born, the [Reggio Emilia] Province, to whose name we always, when we are far away, return, do not perish.

Men pass away, but institutions remain, even if, as sometimes happens, they are transformed.”

Cervi Alcide, *Donation letter of the “Cervi” Museum*, 18 September 1964.²

As a historian, I believe it is crucial to understand who is behind the use of history and its memory. This understanding is essential for analyzing the past critically and contributing responsibly to the writing of history in the present. The memory of the Resistance in the 21st century cannot be understood without exploring the reasons why political power, witnesses, and the public interact in creating and shaping the collective memory of their time. This is why I felt it was so important to study the Institute Alcide Cervi from an inside perspective.

Research aims

By reconstructing the history and activities of the Alcide Cervi Institute, I aim to investigate the extent to which the memory of Resistance continues to inform and contribute to the political discourse of the Italian Republic after the Second World War.

In essence, I will demonstrate how political actors were instrumental in the institutionalization of the Resistance in cultural institutes through memory politics, decision-making processes, and funding policies. To this end, I will examine the role of the State and political parties in their local and national expressions, with a particular focus on the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and its successors, in the process of memorializing the history of the Cervi family.

² Archivio Istituto Alcide Cervi (AIAC), found “Archivio Documentario della Famiglia Cervi, Series “Azienda Agricola Cervi ai Campi Rossi (1937-1970), Folder 5, “I Poderi dei Cervi (16.11.1920 – 29.01.1973)”, Accettazione *donazione del Museo “Cervi”, Estratto di Verbale di deliberazione del Consiglio Provinciale di Reggio Emilia, 5 Ottobre 1964.* [bold text underlined by the Thesis Author].

My thesis, through an overview of the Cervi family's politicized memorialization up to 1970 and the subsequent institutionalization of this process from 1972 to 2008, seeks to elucidate the factors that led to the Cervi family's memory becoming an institutionalized aspect of Italian history. This involves examining the roles played by various political actors in this process, including their influence on the foundation of the Institute, its structure and activities, and the purposes for which the Cervi family's history has been used in the broader context of the "memory wars" about Italian Resistance.

This perspective, situated at the nexus of national and local authorities, finds itself inextricably intertwined with the evolution of the broader political context, encompassing the rise of memory confrontations in the Italian Republic and the evolution of the European perception of memory.

The study will focus prevalently on the following research questions:

- How the memory of the Cervi public memory was constituted? Which were the main elements that were memorialized as symbols of antifascism and the Italian Resistance? How did the State and Political Parties, especially the PCI, contribute proactively to the memorialization process up to the late 1960s?

- Who were the main actors who promoted the foundation of the Alcide Cervi Institute in 1972? Why was it founded, and on which cultural heritage? How did it work? How did politics interact, through decision-making processes and funding dynamics, with the structure and functions of the Institute? How did the dualism between the Rome Office and Reggio Emilia characterize the Institute's life and activities?

- In which ways did the memory wars impact 1989, the end of the First Republic, and the crisis of the party system in Italy impact Institute Alcide Cervi? How did they impact the Institute's development and the shift from an academic focus to promoting a public dimension of Resistance? Why the Institute was centralized, in 2008, around the House Cervi, in Gattatico?

Research context and literature review

Italy: a Republic founded on the Resistance or a Memory War?

“Should the national holiday of April 25 be abandoned, as many have suggested? I sincerely hope not. By continuing to commemorate the liberation from Nazism and Fascism and its key role in rebuilding their country, Italians may yet come to understand the Resistance as a movement of a (mainly) virtuous minority that was full of contradictions and problems, but that made an important contribution to bringing to an end the most violent conflict of the modern era.”³

The provocation of the British historian Philip Cooke, related to the Celebration of Liberation Day in Italy, is an interesting point to start the debate about the political meaning of the Italian Resistance. If, in the early 1990s, the fall of the party's system, the 1989 and the end of the Soviet bloc changed the structure of the legitimization of the Italian Democracy, after twenty years of “Berlusconism”,⁴ the situation evolved considerably: the end of the First Republic, or “Party's Republic”, and the start of a new ideological battle between anti-Berlusconism and anti-communists, brought the political debate to new frontiers.

To understand how the Resistance was at the base of the Italian Republic and how the anti-fascist narration of the War was fundamental during the second 20th Century is necessary to understand what the movement was and who actors were involved. Following the definition of Varriale:

“The Italian Resistance movement was a heterogeneous and temporary coalition of networks and individuals that fought against the German and Fascist troops between September 1943 and April 1945. The Resistance soon became a

³ Philip Cooke, *The Legacy of the Italian Resistance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2011), 193, <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230119017>.

⁴ See Giovanni Orsina, ‘The Republic after Berlusconi: Some Reflections on Historiography, Politics and the Political Use of History in Post-1994 Italy’, *Modern Italy* 15, no. 1 (February 2010): 77–92, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13532940903488713>.

political myth of the new democratic Italy: a ‘Republic founded on the Resistance’.”⁵

The main reason behind the strong connection between the Resistance and the Constitution is represented by the political parties involved in the movement in the crucial last years of the war and that represented the, as we saw, heterogeneous, opposition to the Fascist rule of Mussolini in the previous twenty years. The National Liberation Committee (CLN), founded in Rome on 9 September 1943 and, consequently, with representations on a local level, represented the main forces against Italian Fascism: the Italian Communist Party (PCI), the Christian Democrats (DC), the Action Party (PdA), the Italian Liberal Party (PLI), the Italian Socialist Party of Proletary Unity (PSIUP) and the Democratic Labour Party (DL).⁶ The parties had a unity of action to lead the political and military Resistance: the aim of freeing Italy from the nazi-fascist occupation and showing the contribution to the war of liberation as Ally co-belligerent was at the center of the political agenda of the CLN. After the National Insurrection of 25 April 1945, the CLN got government roles, nominating Presidents of the Government, Bonomi, Parri, and De Gasperi, up the elections of 1946, with the following winning of the Republic on the Monarchy and the creation of the National Constitutional Assembly. That organism, which saw the mass participation of the parties involved in the Resistance movement, despite the huge contraposition between PCI and DC due to the contrast of the oncoming Cold War, developed the Constitution on the idea of a democratic Italy based on strong anti-fascism as a unitary element.⁷

Despite this Constitutional compromise, with the elevation of the Resistance as a pivotal moment for the redemption of the country and for actualizing the shift to a democratic Republic, the Italian National Government failed to make this memory uncontested, as, for instance, for Dogliani, happened in the France case.⁸ Instead, the Italian Resistance during the Second World War and its legacy will cross all the Italian Republican story up to the recent days, on the edges of the political national and local debates. This process, described by Filippo Focardi in a lucky

⁵ Andrea Varriale, ‘The Myth of the Italian Resistance Movement (1943–1945): The Case of Naples’, *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte* 27, no. 2 (2014): 384.

⁶ See ‘Natura e funzione storica dei comitati di liberazione nazionale’, in Enzo Collotti, Fedriano Sessi, and Renato Sandri, eds., *Dizionario della Resistenza*, vol. I (Torino: Einaudi, 2006), 229–41.

⁷ At this regards it is important to underline that the process of acquisition of the Resistance movement as a base for the country democratization was controversial and complex. For a detailed framework, see Michela Ponzani, ‘L’eredità della Resistenza nell’Italia repubblicana tra retorica celebrativa e contestazione di legittimità (1945-1963)’, *Annali della Fondazione Luigi Einaudi* 38, no. 38 (2004): 259–307.

⁸ See Patrizia Dogliani, ‘Memoria e storia pubblica: Resistenza in Italia e in Francia’, *Storica* 34 (Anno XII 2006): 73–119.

publication in 2005 as “Memory War”, gives historians an interesting starting point for comparing the development of the Italian Republic's political environment with the use and resignification of the Resistance.⁹ In his analysis, Focardi individuated five distinguished phases: the origins of the anti-fascist narrative of the war (1943-1947); the crisis of the antifascist hegemonic narrative due to the Cold War dynamics (1948-1953); the holding and revival of a national antifascism in the years 1953-1960; the affirmation of the ‘anti-fascist paradigm’ and the comparison, due to the rise of the PCI in the local administrations, between “Red Resistance” and “Tricolour Resistance” (1960-1978); the challenge to the public memory of the Resistance, from Craxi to Fini's “reconciliation” proposal, passing through the Berlusconiism (1978-1999); President Ciampi and his tentative of re-founding of the memory of the Resistance, from 1999. A few years later, in 2011, Philip Cooke, a historian of Italian studies, published a book on the Legacy of the Italian Resistance. His book proposed:

“1. to investigate the various ways that the Resistance movement in Italy has impacted Italian politics, society, and culture over the period from 1945 to the present day; 2. to examine the means of transmission of the Resistance legacy via a range of different “vectors” (Rousso’s term). Vectors include partisan associations, political parties, key individuals (e.g., Pietro Secchia, Piero Calamandrei, Paolo Emilio Taviani, Ferruccio Parri), journals, and a range of media (historiography, films, literary texts, memoirs, and so on); 3. to explore the ways in which the Italian State has (or has not) attempted to create a national Resistance memory and how this has conflicted with the regional and highly “localized” nature of the Italian experience; 4. to investigate the issue of the Italian Communist party’s supposed “hegemony” of the Resistance by looking at the way the PCI and other political parties have themselves used, abused, or manipulated the Resistance legacy over the long term; 5. to create a way of understanding this impact that draws together, and reflects critically upon, the now large corpus of research on the interaction of history and culture and the “public use” of history.”¹⁰

⁹ See Filippo Focardi, *La guerra della memoria: la Resistenza nel dibattito politico italiano dal 1945 a oggi* (Roma: GLF Ed. Laterza, 2005).

¹⁰ Philip E. Cooke, *The Legacy of the Italian Resistance*, 1st ed (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 3–4.

The study, following a periodization similar to the one proposed by Focardi, achieved the goals and, at the same time, opened the debate on the actuality of the Resistance's use in the public sphere, creating a dialogue with *Italy's Divided Memory* published, in 2009, by John Foot.¹¹ There, through an analysis of memorials, commemorations and stories, Foot explained and underlined the origin of the concept of divided memory in the Italian post-WWII context, which helps understand the mechanics behind the Resistance polemics across the second half of the Century.¹²

So, why, as Cooke historian provocatively proposed, the Resistance values, such as its celebrations, are risking disappearing in the 21st Century? The extreme competitive paradigm of the politics of memory, which was a focal point of the Right and Populist governments of Silvio Berlusconi, from 1994, put in crisis the role of the State as “institutional interpreter of the republican and constitutional patriotism” in advance of a plurality of new form of celebrations that come from political actors, civil society and the artificial creation of a new European Identity based on the Trauma: this *agone*, related to the civil calendar, the day of Remembrance for the Foibe, the Shoah memory and the dates dedicated to the victims of Terrorism and Mafia, inclined the post-World War II's idea of the civil religion of the Italian Republic based on the triple concept of “Risorgimento – Resistance – Constitution”.¹³

In this 1990s framework, the narration of the Italian Resistance, in the fracture between myth and memory, which evolved in different ways with the story of the Italian Republic itself, faced a turbulent phase.¹⁴ First, Claudio Pavone inaugurated the academic and political debate about rethinking the nature of the partisan conflict between 1943 and 1945 as a Civil War.¹⁵ Secondly, the concept of antifascism, after the debate started by the historian Renzo De Felice, was put at the center of the critiques of the historiographical discussion.¹⁶ Due to the evolution of the totalitarian scheme to define unifying characteristics for Eastern and Western Europe, to facing the dualism communism-fascism, the rituals related to the Resistance suffered an evolution: the places of memory were, in part, re-discussed and connected with the deportation symbols, and,

¹¹ See John Foot, *Italy's Divided Memory* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2009), <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230101838>.

¹² Foot, 8–17.

¹³ Maurizio Ridolfi, ‘La Resistenza nella rappresentazione delle istituzioni: celebrazioni, calendari civili’, Aldo Agosti and Chiara Colombini, eds., *Resistenza e autobiografia della nazione: uso pubblico, rappresentazione, memoria* (Torino: Seb 27, 2012), 57.

¹⁴ For an history of the evolution of the politics of memory and the celebration of the Italian Resistance see Cooke, *The Legacy of the Italian Resistance*, 2011; Focardi, *La guerra della memoria*.

¹⁵ See Toby Abse, ‘Claudio Pavone, *A Civil War: A History of the Italian Resistance*’, *European History Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (October 2014): 772–74, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265691414547183ad>.

¹⁶ See Renzo De Felice and Pasquale Chessa, *Rosso e nero* (Milano: Dalai Editore, 1997).

on the other hand, contested with the tentative of creating places and dates of counter-memory and legitimize former fascist ideological position.

Moreover, if, in the immediate post-war period, the history of the partisan movement as a military actor, was construed as a factor behind the European integration process,¹⁷ this narrative has been overcome by the rise of the *Shoah* as a platform of transnational memories since the 1980s.¹⁸ For Enzo Traverso:

“[...] the memory of the Holocaust came to the fore at a time when history was being rewritten by making the Resistance the main responsible in the 'death of the fatherland' and attributing to the 'boys of Salò' the role of defenders of national unity. [...] in Italy, the emergence of the Shoah in public space coincided instead with the rehabilitation of fascism. [...] the anti-fascist memory was called into question, seen as totalitarian by some, unpatriotic by others.”¹⁹

To survive this phase, the most important Italian Institutions related to the memory of the Resistance, often financially connected with the local political entities – and, so, with the parties that lead these – experienced an important transformation after the 1990s. In a tentative change and survival, these places tried to become platforms of universal values based on the antifascist experience: democracy, peace, and freedom were used as the three keywords to expand and decontextualize the Resistance narration. In the heterogeneous war of memories, in the 21st century, the public debate formed around these places, for intrinsic meanings and external actors that interact with, put the account related to the Resistance in the actual times.

But how were these institutions founded, and what role did politics of memory play in their creation? How were they connected with the Resistance? And most importantly, why did political actors have such an impact on their continued existence over time? In the next section, we will explore this process of institutionalization in more depth.

¹⁷ Regarding this topic, see the acts of the 2^o International Congress of the European Resistance organised in 1961 in Milan. Istituto Nazionale per la Storia del Movimento di Liberazione in Italia, *La Resistenza Europea e Gli Alleati* (Milano: Lerici, 1962).

¹⁸ See Luca Baldissara, 'Politiche della memoria e spazio del ricordo in Europa', *Il Mulino* 1 (2016).

¹⁹ See Enzo Traverso, 'Le memorie dell'Europa. La fine del 'principio speranza' ', Filippo Focardi and Bruno Groppo, eds., *L'Europa e Le Sue Memorie. Politiche e Culture Del Ricordo Dopo Il 1989* (Roma: Viella, 2013), 294.

“A look at the institutional settings for historical research in the present world confronts us with myriad private and public institutions—archives, libraries and research institutes—often highly specialized and serving the interests of a rather small clientele of experts or specialists. In many democratic countries, a kind of official pluralism exists that has given birth to a specific kind of historical institute managed and financed by political parties, NGOs, private associations or religious organizations and all bound more or less strictly to partisanship and a particular world view, ideology or religious belief. Many of them are legally instituted as foundations. This pluralism is particularly strong in the field of contemporary history, everywhere the quintessentially political element of public history.”²⁰

This was the portrait that German social historian Raphael Lutz had done introducing Institutionalization processes in the present days. Starting from the assumption that the State is still entangled with history-writing and memory use processes, in a 2018 book chapter called *State Authority and Historical Research: Institutional Settings and Trends Since 1945*, he identified two types of institutional settings for historical research institutions before the Second World War: a “State-Centered” and a “Liberal-Societal”.²¹ A third one, the “Soviet-centered”, based on a Marxist-Leninist vision of historiography and led by the State, exploded in the interwar period. Through investigating entanglements between these two models, and analyzing the public intervention after 1945, he found strong connections between history, political environment, and nation-building. What surprises us most is how the Western World and the Socialist States converge differently on the issue of using history for public purposes. As Lutz said:

“The first 25 years after the end of the Second World War may be regarded globally as golden years of state-sponsored historiography. As we have seen, both camps of the Cold War diverged fundamentally in defining the limits of

²⁰ Raphael Lutz, ‘State Authority and Historical Research: Institutional Settings and Trends Since 1945’, in *The Palgrave Handbook of State-Sponsored History After 1945*, ed. Berber Bevernage and Nico Wouters (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2018), 209, https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-349-95306-6_11.

²¹ Lutz, 211–12.

political control and interventionism, but they shared a consensus about the primordial importance and interest in the nation's past (that could imply a strong dissent about the narratives for this public history). All helped to create a kind of “natural” harmonious co-operation between the majority of professional historians and the ruling political classes in their countries.”²²

Despite this view, it's interesting how the 1980s and 1990s, impacted these two words differently: if, in the Western Democracies, where the history-writing became more fragmented, with the rise of new social and unseen actors, gradually, the politics that tried to centralize the history institutionalization, as well as the public sponsored intervention, suffered a general decline, in the former Socialist country the situation went on the opposite, with a renaissance of nationalism and State interventionism. It is the case, for instance, of the foundation of numerous Institute for the National Remembrance from the late 1990s in the ex-Soviet countries.²³

But how did Italy engage the issue of institutionalizing the Resistance after the Second World War? How were these cultural Institutions born? And how politics were involved in this process? Lucia Zannino and Maria Pia Casalena, in 2016, with a contribute called *Gli istituti culturali tra Stato e Regioni* (Cultural Institutes between State and Regions) defined, with statistical data, the main mechanisms and law that, in the Italian Republic, let that organization born, working and survive.²⁴ But, for a better understanding of those dynamics, let's take briefly the example of the network of the Institutes of Resistance, which was founded after the Second World War as an answer to save and preserve the materials and the memory of the Italian Resistance.²⁵ The National Institute for the History of the Liberation Movement in Italy (INSMLI) was created in Milan in 1949, from the initiative of three regional Institutes in Piedmont, Lombardy, and Liguria. While in other countries in Europe, for instance in France, this safeguarding process was guaranteed by the State, through the creation of a *Comité*

²² Lutz, 225.

²³ See Peter Apor, Sándor Horváth, and James Mark, eds., *Secret Agents and the Memory of Everyday Collaboration in Communist Eastern Europe* (London, New York: Anthem Press, 2017).

²⁴ See Lucia Zannino and Maria Pia Casalena, 'Gli istituti culturali tra Stato e regioni', in *L'Italia e le sue Regioni. L'età repubblicana*, ed. Mariuccia Salvati and Loredana Sciolla (Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana - Treccani, 2016), 583–99.

²⁵ See Gaetano Grassi, ed., *Resistenza e storia d'Italia. Quarant'anni di vita dell'Istituto nazionale e degli Istituti associati 1949-1989* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1993); Enzo Collotti, 'L'Insmli e la rete degli Istituti associati. Cinquant'anni di vita', *Italia Contemporanea* 219 (June 2000); Claudio Pavone, ed., *Storia d'Italia nel secolo ventesimo. Strumenti e fonti. 2: Istituti, musei e monumenti, bibliografia e periodici*, Pubblicazione degli archivi di stato Saggi 87 (Roma: Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali, Dipartimento per i Beni Archivistici e Librari, Direzione Generale per gli Archivi, 2006).

d'histoire de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale (World War II History Committee) in 1951,²⁶ Italian Institutes were privately founded but mostly publicly financed. The reason is to find in the first proposers and the foundation policy. The first aim, to preserve and collect the material about the Resistance, was pursued especially by the partisans and politicians connected with the CLN and who were also, connected to political parties, the main founders – with a significant role of Ferruccio Parri, former prime minister, and the Action Party. The same leading position that in France was taken by the State, as we anticipated before, as in the interpretation of the Resistance during the world conflict, in Italy was left in part to the private initiative, therefore the promoters were involved in the new democratic local administrations, in the parties, and the partisan associations.²⁷ The network, in 1988, was composed of 53 associated Institutes and structured on one National Institute, based in Milan, Regional Institutes, and Provincial ones.²⁸

The example related to the Institutes of the Resistance introduced two main issues related to the relation with political actors and evaluating their impact on the Institute's life and functions. While Muller, in 2002, argued that “there have been almost no studies of the nexus between memory and political power”,²⁹ for Miller, in 2012, the applicability of the notion of “history politics” is valid only for democratic societies, or, at least, for pluralistic ones, while the dictatorial ones don't need it in the name of the monopoly of the memory.³⁰ What comes from this is that in the Italian Republic, despite the inference of the Cold War, several political actors could influence these politics. As Gilda Zazzara, historian, argued in his book *La storia a Sinistra* (History on the Left), Foundations, Cultural Institutions, and Universities, through the help of militant historians and antifascist parties, became the intellectual and public memory promoters of a Left-side historiography during the Second 20th Century.³¹

This political influence, expressed in the cultural output of these institutions, could not be

²⁶ The *Comité d'histoire de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale* was created in December 1951 from the merger of the Commission d'histoire de l'occupation et de la libération de la France (CHOLF) and the *Comité d'histoire de la guerre*, created respectively in October 1944 and June 1945 to preserve the memory of the years 1939-1945. Attached to the Presidency of the Council and equipped with a large network of correspondents in the provinces, this new organization, headed by the historian Henri Michel, was mainly responsible for collecting testimonies on various aspects of the Resistance and the Occupation, while coordinating investigations and publications on the Second World War. See Henri Michel, ‘Le Comité D'histoire De La Deuxième Guerre Mondiale’, *Revue d'histoire de La Deuxième Guerre Mondiale* 31, no. 124 (1981): 1–17.

²⁷ For an introductory comparative study related to the politics of memory related to the Resistance in Italy and in France see Dogliani, ‘Memoria e storia pubblica: Resistenza in Italia e in Francia’.

²⁸ Pavone, *Storia d'Italia nel secolo ventesimo*. 2, 133.

²⁹ See Jan-Werner Muller, ed., *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

³⁰ Alexei Miller and Maria Lipman, eds., *The Convolutions of Historical Politics* (New York: Central European University Press, 2012), 3.

³¹ See Gilda Zazzara, *La storia a sinistra. Ricerca e impegno politico dopo il fascismo* (Roma: Laterza, 2011).

understood without looking at the decision-making process inside and, especially, at the founding mechanics. Especially the money provenance tells us more about the sustainability of cultural organizations. The Keynesian active role of the State in choosing cultural politics is underlined in the major work *The Palgrave Handbook of State-Sponsored History After 1945*, published in 2018: in the introduction, Berber Bevernage and Nico Wouters investigated and defined the concept of state-sponsored history as a much more diverse and complex series of processes and outcomes of direct and indirect state influence on the construction of history and public memory. In doing so, they aim to provide the first systematic integrated analysis of the role that States, or political actors, have played in these processes since 1945.³² As they argued, since the First World War:

“[...] most countries created specific institutes and/or temporary structures such as commissions to gather documents and publish sources and national histories, first to legitimise the war effort, afterwards to lay claims to post-war reparations, and finally to organise history and public commemoration.”³³

It’s interesting to note that, as we saw before with Lutz, after 1945, “national state-sponsored history was increasingly challenged by supranational and subnational groups and organizations which contested the absolute sovereignty of the nation-state in relation to history and memory.”³⁴ Especially in the new European Western democracies, where the Welfare State was at the base for giving the Italian Republic a proactive role in cultural policies, this involvement was fractionated, due to the nature of the funds' provenance. As the economist Trimarchi underlined, the dualism between national and local authorities, as well their political goals, as well as a certain degree of autonomy in financing a local cultural agenda through yearly subsidies, given the chance to Parties that have never been actively in the national government, such as the PCI, having a projection, especially from the late 1960s, on a local level.³⁵

To understand how money was fundamental in practicing cultural strategies, let’s take again the case of the Resistance Institutes: economically independent, despite their private nature, they were financed from a plethora of State and local public annual subscriptions and worked

³² Berber Bevernage and Nico Wouters, eds., *The Palgrave Handbook of State-Sponsored History After 1945* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-349-95306-6>.

³³ Bevernage and Wouters, 14.

³⁴ Bevernage and Wouters, 15.

³⁵ See Michele Trimarchi, *Economia e cultura: organizzazione e finanziamento delle istituzioni culturali*, 3. ed, Economia e finanza pubblica ; 15 (Milano: Angeli, 2002).

with the help of employees detached from these authorities. So, the functionality of the single Institutes was strictly related to the funds and the support received, especially from the local authorities. It's immediately clear that the change of money was strongly connected with the territory and with the evolution of the local political environment. In 1967 and successive, a national law tried to give the National Institute, a focal role of leadership,³⁶ bringing two important developments to the organization. First, a stable amount of money for the Institutes and, second but not least, the chance for the National Center to create a central scientific program. The recognition from the Italian State has other direct consequences: an informal reconnaissance of the collection conserved as a national value and the explosion of the number of provincial Institutes as a matter of local pride. At the same time, the National Institute has been placed under the supervision of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, its budgets were audited by the Court of Auditors, and it was obliged to send an annual report to Parliament on its activities.

By the way, during the 1980s, the lack of increase of the State funds, the prevalence of the funds coming from local authorities, and the political influences on the research on a local level (related also to the different periodization of the foundations of the new provincial institutes) was a real trial for the National management and the harmonization of the national project of research, resulting in the prevalence of localism.³⁷ It is also important to insert the Institutes in the debate about the Italian Resistance, and, also, with the left parties and their cultural policies.³⁸ The Institutes represented not only a research center but also a tool to develop new ideas and perspectives about the Italian Resistance. That idea is clear looking at the work of the historians who lived a section of their careers inside or collaborating with the organization.³⁹ The celebrations related to the 25 April, especially during the decennial's anniversaries, still open numerous debates in which the Institutes, over the generally high political presence in their decision-making processes, took an important role in the defense of the Resistance.

As we understood, public money was fundamental. The network of the Resistance Institute is only one of the ways, probably the major, in which politics were involved, directly and

³⁶ 'Legge 16 gennaio 1967, n. 3, "Riconoscimento giuridico dell'Istituto nazionale per la storia del movimento di liberazione"', *Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana*, 26 January 1967, 460–61.

³⁷ See Collotti, 'L'Insmli e la rete degli Istituti associati. Cinquant'anni di vita'.

³⁸ See Zazzara, *La storia a sinistra. Ricerca e impegno politico dopo il fascismo*.

³⁹ The key point of this debate started with the operation of Guido Quazza. See Guido Quazza, *Resistenza e storia d'Italia: problemi e ipotesi di ricerca* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1976); Also Massimo Legnani proposed singular studies on the Resistance experience. See Massimo Legnani, *Politica e amministrazione nelle repubbliche partigiane* (Milano: Istituto nazionale per la storia del movimento di liberazione, 1968); By the way, the key text that started in the 1980s the discussion related to the contrasts of the Italian Resistance was, for sure, the Pavone's one. See Claudio Pavone, *Una guerra civile. Saggio storico sulla moralità nella Resistenza* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1991).

indirectly, in shaping activities and functions of cultural institutions related strongly to the Resistance. The Institutes that are part of the network consider the Resistance Archives as a material place of memory to be conserved, promoted, and transformed in values. But what happens with a memory structured on a history of Resistance represented by a family massacre and memorialized through a long-term PCI propagandistic campaign? The case study of the Institute Alcide Cervi will help us to investigate, tangentially, institutionalization processes, political engagement, and the evolution of the Italian Republic.

Resistance places of memory from national to local: the Emilia Romagna dimension.

After the Second World War, the Resistance in Italy was used by the political actors in a heterogeneous plethora of forms. Understanding how these locations were used and contextualized is needed to come back to the origin of the related studies. For Ersilia Alessandrone Perona the historiographical interest in the research of the spaces of memory of the Italian Resistance started after 1989, with the end of the Soviet bloc and the necessity of giving a new urban development to the places with a so recent communist past. This necessity brings to the diffusion, in all of Europe, of new symbols, ready to affirm alternative memories up to that moment, minoritarian⁴⁰. The initiator of this new phylon of research, the French Pierre Nora, had taken with good anticipation this phenomenon, through the realization of the volumes related to the concept of “lieux de mémoire.”⁴¹

The “Patria” religion in Italy after 1945 was inspired by the classical narration of the Risorgimento politics, based on the cult of the death for the country: sacraria of the fallen, statues, toponymy, and commemoration stones. This kind of communication and sacralization of memory, neither a change of symbols, was improved from different subjects, private and public ones, bringing a double development. In this sense is clear why the first decision from the State was to give importance to places that could be, in the long term, the “temples” of this memory. The Fosse Ardeatine monument, the first sponsored by the State, created from 1949

⁴⁰ Ersilia Alessandrone Perona, ‘La Resistenza e i suoi luoghi di memoria’, Agosti and Colombini, *Resistenza e autobiografia della nazione: uso pubblico, rappresentazione, memoria*, 80.

⁴¹ See Pierre Nora, ‘Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire’, *Representations* N. 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory (Spring, 1989) (1989): 7–24.

to 1951, was focused on the cruelty of the Germans instead of the one of the Italian Fascists⁴². At the same time, starting from the late 1940', the former partisans, with the political support of local political formations, first, the Communists, started to create little monuments in important places of the Resistance actions or memorials of traumatic stories of violence committed by Italians and Germans - that was only rarely called "Nazi" -. This bipolar politics of memory, from above and from the bottom, gives the sense of the contradictory debate that influenced – and blocked - the creation of a common narrative related to the Italian Resistance.

On the other hand, the role of the State is clear looking at the war of memory that crosses the years of the Republic. The two aims of the Resistance during the First Republic, the prevalent governmental one, led by the Christian Democratic Party, based on the idea of second Risorgimento, and the patriotic values, were juxtaposed, in a war of dates and appropriations, to the revolutionary version of the Resistance as a communist initiative and a prelude of a general insurrection. As Paolo Pezzino remembers, "the Communist Party always considered antifascist unity as the context in which to develop its political position". And, related to the concept of Antifascism, Pezzino said that "today there is a tendency to revalue the theses of historians such as Furet and Nolte, who considered antifascism the Trojan horse of Italian communism."⁴³

In the creation of this mythology related to the Resistance, in the light of the historiographical and political debate, the role of the locations of partisan actions and traumatic happenings of the war period was crucial, especially in the creation and stratification of the discussion in Italian public opinion. Especially in Emilia Romagna, where the map of the Resistance was strong and extended, and the Communist party led a major part of the partisans' formations during the war and of the municipalities during the First Republic, the intervention of the local authorities and the civil society was particularly felled.

As reported in the Regional Statute of 2005, Emilia Romagna:

“[...] is founded on the values of the Resistance to Nazism and Fascism and the ideas of freedom and national unity of the Risorgimento and is based on the

⁴² Ersilia Alessandrone Perona, 'La Resistenza e i suoi luoghi di memoria', Agosti and Colombini, *Resistenza e autobiografia della nazione: uso pubblico, rappresentazione, memoria*, 84.

⁴³ Paolo Pezzino, 'The Italian Resistance between History and Memory', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 10, no. 4 (1 December 2005): 403, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13545710500314090>.

principles and rights enshrined in the Italian Constitution and the European Union”.⁴⁴

For Claudio Silingardi, in Emilia-Romagna, the political and social meaning that is still prevalent in the public discourse is “continuing Resistance.”⁴⁵ Starting from this point of view is comprehensible to understand the peculiar connection between the locations of memory and the specificities of the territory. The entanglements of private initiatives and local institutions were so strong to enforce the connection of the Resistance account, not without mythization, with the communities that live in the areas. The civil environments in which the partisan memorials of Palazzo d’Accursio in Bologna, Monte Sole, and a huge number of other remembrance locations were born is an example of this way of popular participation in memory making. The local authorities – and the public money – were often given the role of financing these places and avoiding this memory being lost.

On a significant minority of these places, memorials or monuments, the attention of this double local initiative brought to the creation of a plethora of little museums of the Second War World and the Partisan Experience. The House Cervi, as the place of memory of a particular form of Resistance, was born properly from the connection between local authorities, political interest, mass participation, and Resistance myth and lived this transformation from a memorial to a museum.⁴⁶ This process of preservation and evaluation of the House could not have been possible without the creation of the Institute Alcide Cervi.

The case study of the Institute Alcide Cervi

As we introduced, in this framework of studies, the Institute Alcide Cervi represents an exemplary case to investigate the entanglements between politics of memory, physical locations, and the transformation of the Resistance’s value in developing the Italian Republic.

⁴⁴ Consiglio regionale Emilia Romagna, ‘Legge Regionale 31 marzo 2005, n. 13», Statuto della Regione Emilia Romagna’, Bollettino Ufficiale della regione Emilia Romagna, 2005, <https://demetra.regione.emilia-romagna.it/al/articolo?urn=er:assemblealegislativa:legge:2005;13> (here is the original text in Italian, the Emilia-Romagna ‘si fonda sui valori della Resistenza al nazismo e al fascismo e sugli ideali di libertà e unità nazionale del Risorgimento e si basa sui principi e i diritti sanciti dalla Costituzione italiana e dall’Unione europea’).

⁴⁵ Claudio Silingardi, ‘Musei della Resistenza e politiche della memoria’, *Italia Contemporanea* n. 251, giugno (2008): 276.

⁴⁶ Silingardi, 283–85.

The institution was born officially in April 1972 in the town of Gattatico, a few kilometers away from Reggio Emilia. The founders of the institution were related to the political and economic environment of the “Red” Emilia: the municipality of Gattatico itself, the Provincial Administration of Reggio Emilia, the National Farmers’ Association (ANC), and the National Association of the Italian Partisans (ANPI). The aim, following the historiographical development of the 1970s, was “to promote the study of the history of the peasant movement and agriculture, anti-fascism and the Resistance in the countryside”.⁴⁷

The Institute was created after the old Alcide Cervi's death to remember his family's memory in their proper house. The execution of his sons, the seven brothers Cervi, on the 28th of December 1943, was one of the flags of the Resistance in Emilia Romagna. The decision of the fascist administration to opt for a strong act of retaliation against the partisan actions had something peculiar: killing an all family was an act of cruelty without precedents during the fascist regime. The figure of Alcide, who survived the horrors of the war, with his personality and the rooting to the farmland culture, gave a prosecution and a symbol to remember this page of the war. The history of the Cervi family, on one hand, is not only related to 1943-1945 but starts during the interwar period and crosses over the history of the Republic, becoming part of the narration of the Resistance memory in all the country and the political agenda. The remembrance of the Cervi family is also in the speech of politicians, poets, and musicians that enforce the popular account of the family's heroism at the armed Resistance's prodromes.

The history of the Cervi family was also put as the focal point of a complex mythology of Resistance and Antifascism in the post-war period. At the cult of the death, culminating in the massive participation for the funerals of the seven brothers – and at the annual remembrances of the happenings – is combined with the idea of peaceful resistance, based on freedom, rural scholarship, and contraposition versus the fascist elites. In this framework, the image of the good “Pater Familias”, Alcide, was used and abused to sacralize the place of the house itself and create a kind of civil ritual. In this template, the strong role of the Italian Communist Party is perfectly recognizable. As Ilaria Tabusso Marcyan said:

⁴⁷ Viviana Bonazzoli, ‘L’Istituto «Alcide Cervi»’, *Quaderni storici* settembre/dicembre (1977): 894 (here is the italian version: ‘promuovere lo studio della storia del movimento contadino e dell’agricoltura, dell’antifascismo e della Resistenza nelle campagne’).

“[...] the antifascist activities of the Cervi family during WWII became part of the political agenda of the Italian Communist Party (PCI). This agenda served as an important mode to spread communist values throughout the population.”⁴⁸

Alcide Cervi, even in the difficult 1950s, was the only polar figure who conveyed a positive image of the Resistance: his solid bond with the land, the sacrifice of his sons, and the Catholic faith lived without contradiction with his membership of the Communist Party, make him a solid moral reference point on a national level.⁴⁹ It is also important to underline how strong the political and cultural role of the Italian Communist Party has been in making this affair a symbol of “Communism with a human face”, especially through the extraordinarily wide distribution of the book, edited by Renato Nicolai, *I miei sette figli* (My seven sons), from the first version of 1955.⁵⁰

From the immediate post-war period, the Cervi house became the destination of a sort of laic pilgrimage by all those who recognized themselves in the Resistance and the anti-fascist struggle. Individual citizens, groups, and delegations visit the house and meet “Papà Cervi” to be told the story of the life and death of his heroic sons. They often bring small objects as gifts, which take on great symbolic and political significance. And it was precisely to display all these objects, and to meet the visiting groups, that in 1961, on the initiative and with the economic support of the Reggio Emilia Communist Federation, the living part of the house was enlarged, and a small exhibition hall was built.⁵¹

Due to these premises, the process of Institutionalization of the Cervi Public memory assumes a significant role in seeing how politics have influenced the persistence and the use of the Italian Resistance in the actual political discourse. The transformation of the memory of the Cervi story in a physical cultural institute with a proactive role in creating initiatives and shaping historical knowledge will be studied from the side of those who founded this organization and allow it to grow and survive across the history of the Italian Republic.

⁴⁸ Ilaria Tabusso Marcyan, 'The Cervi Family. A Peasant Story', Pasquale Verdicchio, ed., *Ecocritical Approaches to Italian Culture and Literature* (Lanham, Maryland [etc.]: Lexington books, 2016), 60.

⁴⁹ See Stephen Gundle, 'The “Civic Religion” of the Resistance in Post-War Italy', *Modern Italy* 5, no. 2 (November 2000): 113–32, <https://doi.org/10.1080/713685680>.

⁵⁰ See Alcide Cervi, *I miei sette figli*, ed. Nicolai, Renato (Roma: Edizioni di Cultura Sociale, 1955).

⁵¹ Silingardi, 'Musei della Resistenza e politiche della memoria', 284.

Methodology and sources

As previously discussed, this study employs three key methodological assets to gain insight into the relationship between the institutionalization of the Resistance and the political-sponsored initiative. These assets include an analysis of the national framework of Resistance memory wars, the role of the Left in cultural institutions in Italy, and the system of public funding for cultural institutions, which are typically private but politically financed.

The observation of how these three elements emerge in the Institute Alcide Cervi foundation, structure, and activity, will allow us to assess the extent to which political actors could influence the institutionalization of the Resistance in the Republic of Italy from an inside perspective.

To understand the reasons behind the connection between the Institute Foundation and politics, the research will take into account the long memorialization that took place from 1943 to 1970. With regard to existing studies, it should be noted that numerous contributions have been published on the subject of Cervi public memory. However, with the exception of a few internal publications, particularly on the Museum, there is a notable research gap in relation to the Institute Alcide Cervi. This absence of research, which is precisely the subject of our investigation, is reflected in the actual status of the Archive related to the Institute itself, which is uncataloged.

In light of these considerations, it was imperative to undertake an institutional history of the organization in order to recover the Institute's functional and administrative structure through an analysis of the documents pertaining to the decision-making process. In two separate research periods at the Institute Alcide Cervi in September 2023 and March 2024, with the invaluable assistance of the Institute's staff, a comprehensive examination of the current archives was conducted. Working in a current archive presents both advantages and disadvantages for the historian. One advantage is that the researcher can analyze files that have not yet been appraised and have thus not been subjected to a process of selection based on methodical criteria. A significant quantity of material can also be accessed.

In the recognition process, organized in a major “Administration” Fond, five series will be imagined, created, and partially digitized: Administration Committee resumes. 7 folders. 1972-2008; Associates’ Assembly resumes. 4 folders. 1972-2007; Yearly Institute budget resumes. 1973-2008 (partially collected); Cultural Activities register. 1987-2008 (partially collected); Miscellaneous. 1 folder.

The research also examined the Emilio Sereni Archival Holding and the cataloged folders related to the foundation of the Institute in the early 1970s. Additionally, the research investigated the photo and video material conserved in the Institute Archive and other digital repositories, with a particular focus on the AAMOD repository. In addition, the national and local press, particularly the communist *L'Unità*, were examined in conjunction with the pivotal moment in the Institute's history to assess the relationship with the broader national political context. The research also examined national and regional funding legislation for cultural institutions, as well as the photographic archive of the Presidency of the Italian Republic. Finally, four original interviews were conducted with individuals who interacted with the Institute during the 1980s. These interviews aimed to elucidate the complex interplay between political initiatives, the personalities involved, and the role of workers, Cervi family heirs, and volunteers in shaping the Institute's activities.

Thesis outline

The introduction underscores the pivotal role of the Resistance in the Italian Republic discourse, as well as identifying the key actors involved in the so-called memory war and providing a comprehensive chronology. The process of institutionalization and its connection to politics in the Italian context will be introduced and explained. In conclusion, an introduction to the places of memory of the Resistance in Emilia Romagna and the Institute Alcide Cervi as a meaningful case study will be provided.

Chapter I reconstructs the formation of public memory surrounding the Cervi family, with a particular focus on the political interventions of the State and the Italian Communist Party (PCI) from 1943 to 1970. The chapter commences with an examination of the seven brothers' massacre, with particular emphasis on their roles as antifascists and farmers and the identification of the principal elements that have contributed to their memorialisation. The political interventions, notably the PCI propaganda campaign, elevated the Cervi story to national prominence, emphasizing its importance in post-war Italian national reconstruction.

Chapter II examines the ideological and political foundations of the Institute Alcide Cervi in 1972. In consideration of the Institute's operational structure up to 1986, the section highlighted a dichotomy between Rome's national focus and the regional base in Reggio Emilia-Gattatico,

reflecting financial disparities and local significance. Cultural initiatives, which are of an academic nature, serve to reinforce the scientific authority and national aspirations of the Institute.

Chapter III charts the evolution of the Cervi Institute from a decentralized structure to a unified operation centered at the House Cervi in Gattatico in 2008. During Montanari's presidency, challenges such as the neglect of the House Cervi and financial sustainability emerged in the late 1980s. Montanari's tenure, characterized by political discord and organizational stagnation, culminated in the appointment of Massimo Bellotti as interim leader. Nevertheless, financial difficulties persist, prompting renewed efforts under President Ugo Benassi. Benassi's presidency saw the implementation of comprehensive renovation projects, which were met with political and financial support. This culminated in the establishment of the Museum in 2001 and the unification of the Institute in Gattatico in 2008. The 1990s saw a shift towards public and educational initiatives amidst economic challenges. The House Cervi assumed a central role as a national memorial site commemorating the Resistance.

In the conclusion, an image of the House Cervi and its role in promoting the Italian Resistance is provided, along with final remarks on the investigation and future prospects for research.

Chapter One: Contextualizing the memorialization of the Cervi Family story. 1943-1972

28 December 1943: a brief story of the Cervi family up to the seven brothers' execution.

“7 brothers?”⁵²

This handwritten annotation, with a surprised interrogative point, was posed by an unknown author on the official document produced by fascist authorities of the Italian Social Republic, in early January 1944, to explicate one act of reprisal that happened a few weeks before. On the morning of December 28, 1943, around 7.00 a.m., the seven Cervi brothers and their companion Quarto Camurri were executed in the Reggio Emilia shooting range.⁵³ The decision, that followed the killing, on December 27, by partisans, of Davide Onfiani, the fascist municipal secretary of Bagnolo in Piano, represents a traumatic personal point for a family history that contributed to the rising of the antifascist Resistance in Emilia's countryside. Contemporary, the massacre contributes to establishing a collective memory, that becomes one of the foundations of the Resistance's values and that, nowadays, is still recognized in the political discourse around the 25 April, the anniversary of the Liberation of Italy from the nazi and fascist occupation.⁵⁴

Gelindo (7 August 1901), Antenore (30 March 1904), Aldo (9 February 1909), Ferdinando (19 April 1911), Agostino (11 January 1916), Ovidio (13 March 1918) ed Ettore (2 June 1921) were the seven brothers that lost their life after Christmas 1943 and portrait, with the dad, mother and sister, in a photo taken in 1937 and conserved nowadays in the Alcide Cervi Institute.⁵⁵ The family's history, strongly connected with its agricultural activity, was characterized by their early opposition to the Fascist regime, which began in the 1930s. This

⁵² 'Lettera Del Questore Di Reggio Emilia al Capo Della Polizia Di Roma', 2 January 1944, Museo Alcide Cervi.

⁵³ Eva Lucenti, *I Fratelli Cervi, Nascita Di Un Mito*, Annali Dell'Istituto Alcide Cervi 27–28, 2005/2006 (Reggio Emilia: Tecnograf, 2006), 55.

⁵⁴ Philip Cooke, 'What Does It Matter If You Die? The Seven Cervi Brothers', in *Assassinations and Murder in Modern Italy: Transformations in Society and Culture*, ed. Stephen Gundle and Lucia Rinaldi, Italian and Italian American Studies (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2007), 33–34, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230606913_4.

⁵⁵ AIAC, Fond "Archivio Fotografico", Series "Famiglia Cervi, Alcide Cervi, Funerali di Alcide Cervi, anni '30-1970", available online at https://bbcc.regione.emilia-romagna.it/pater/loadcard.do?id_card=198003&force=1.

choice was driven by the family's Catholic roots and their desire to maintain their civil identity. Alcide Cervi, the father of the Cervi brothers and a member of the Popular Party until 1921 and aware of the socialist movement gaining ground in rural areas, instilled in his sons a sense of civic responsibility and religious faith. From their mother Genoveffa Cocconi, the nine children (including daughters Rina and Diomira) inherited a passion for reading, cultural curiosity, and a thirst for knowledge. The Cervi brothers, by self-taught, were driven by a desire for social emancipation that was realized through their involvement in agricultural work, and their pursuit of innovations within this field.



Figure 2. The Cervi Family, 1937.

On the other hand, they were precursors in Emilia-Romagna in seeking to diversify their economic and social circumstances during the early years of the Fascist regime. In the 1930s they transitioned from sharecroppers – the “mezzadria” - to tenants, buying the Campirossi farm in 1934 between Caprara and Praticello, in the municipality of Gattatico. By implementing novel agricultural techniques inspired by recent scientific literature, they enhanced the productivity of their holdings. Simultaneously, Aldo Cervi, the third-born brother, developed an accomplished anti-fascist conscience. During a period of incarceration between 1929 and

1932 in Gaeta for insubordination, he embraced the communist ideology, despite having previously been a front-line activist for the local Catholic Action.⁵⁶

From this moment their antifascist activity becomes an active issue. From 1932 to 1934, through the official coverage of the Popular Library, supported by the Fascist Government, the Cervi family and a group of communist militants led by Didido Ferrari, future PCI Commissary of the Partisan Formation in the area, diffused prohibited books in Campegine. The seven brothers resisted the call to the army, from the Ethiopian war to the Second World Conflict, except the youngest, Ettore. From the fight against the “ammasso” (the forced contribution to the agricultural production regime) to the first leaflets, Casa Cervi became a laboratory of applied anti-fascism. Information on this family of restless peasants, and of clear communist sympathies, piled up on the tables of the authorities. Not only Aldo but also Gelindo and Ferdinando were the subject of reports and restrictive measures between the end of the 1930s and the early 1940s.

Through personal encounters with other opposers to the fascist regime, Cervis became gradually proactively involved in opposing activities. The meeting with Lucia Sarzi, an itinerant actress and former communist militant, brought Aldo and his brother's new operational spaces, contacts, and links with the clandestine centers of the nascent resistance.⁵⁷ In the meantime, the Cervi family did not give up their project of progressive agriculture. The first tractor, a machine of the future in those years, arrived in 1939, followed by the more powerful hot-headed Landini two years later. The same house was enlarged to accommodate the farm's productive expansion in 1941. Casa Cervi, from 1942, became a place for clandestine meetings, a refuge for communists and a place for printing propaganda pamphlets against the regime. But the jump in the typology of actions comes from the sabotage of an electric pylon near the Sant’Ilario d’Enza train Station in early 1943.

The fall of the regime on July 25, 1943, gave the chance to organize a public event for celebrating, on the 27 July, offering a dish of “pastasciutta” - a plate of pasta - to all the people that attended the central square of Campegine. Marco Cerri, in his book, argued that almost 100 people were served. But the peace hope and the gradual crumbling of the fascist political system lasted only a few months. After the Armistice with the Allies, diffused by Badoglio’s radio speech of 8 September 1943, the aspiration for peace was strongly interrupted. As Franzini, in

⁵⁶ Toni Rovatti, Alessandro Santagata, and Giorgio Vecchio, *Fratelli Cervi. La storia e la memoria*, Collana dell’Istituto Alcide Cervi 7 (Viella, 2024).

⁵⁷ See Lucia Sarzi, *Una giovane attrice intelligente: lettere di Lucia Sarzi (1938-1940)*, ed. Laura Artioli and Luciano Casali, Collana dell’Istituto Alcide Cervi ; 2 (Roma: Viella, 2021).

his story of the Resistance in the Reggio Emilia province said, from midnight to the nine of 9 September the German troops put under siege the barracks and the Prefecture of the city.⁵⁸ On 23 September, with the liberation of Mussolini by the Germans, in the Center and North of the country, the puppet Italian Socialist Republic was established.

The Cervi brothers, at that point, decided to go up to the mountains and create the conditions for a military Resistance. In October 1943, they alternated, in company with companions, including five Russians, two Britain and one South African, between actions in the mountain, such as the assault on the Toano barrack and the meeting with Don Pasquino Borghi in Tapignola, and 'blows' in the plains, such as the disarming of the Carabinieri garrison in San Martino in Rio and the failed assassination attempt on the secretary of the Republican Fascist Party, Giuseppe Scolari.

In November, isolated by the local political initiative, for security reasons, the Cervi Brothers came back to Gattatico. House Cervi became a center of Resistance and refugees. This fact was well known by the fascists, who decided to act. After a shoot between the family and almost 50 fascist soldiers that put the House under siege, Alcide Cervi, his seven male sons, and Quarto Camurri, a young antifascist, were captured, on the night of 25 November 1943.

As we introduced at the start, after one month of incarceration, on 28 December 1943, in the worst possible way, the curtain fell on Cervi's direct involvement in the Reggio Emilia Resistance. Alcide Cervi, who wasn't killed with his sons, will manage to survive and become a witness. Genoveffa Cocconi, the mother, disappeared in 1944 due to a heart attack, after a fire posed to the House by fascists. The symbolic role of the Cervi public memory begins, which will run through the entire history of the local and national Liberation, through Resistance partisan formations and the power of the martyrdom that they lived. That signification was at the base of the mythization process that their story faced during the long story of the Italian Republic, where the role of the family, in evaluating the Resistance as a foundation value, was central.

Historiographical background and mythization elements

About the story of the Cervi family, up to 2024, the historiographical interest was quite poor. The main contribution up to the 1990s was considered the autobiography of Alcide Cervi,

⁵⁸ Guerrino Franzini, *Storia della Resistenza reggiana*, 3 ed (Reggio Emilia: ANPI, 1982), 5.

curated by Enrico Nicolai in 1955.⁵⁹ Several other contributions, with principally an educational purpose, were also published.⁶⁰

Several academic articles, strongly based on the relation between mythization and Resistance values, were also published.⁶¹ Between them, a mention goes to Marco Cerri, a sociologist, who dedicated two books to studying the family Cervi and the origin of the fest of the antifascist “pastasciutta”.⁶² One of the main books that focuses on the mythization of the Cervi history was Eva Lucenti’s *Fratelli Cervi. La nascita di un mito* (Cervi Brothers. The birth of a myth), published in 2006 on the series *Annali dell’Istituto Alcide Cervi*.⁶³ Lucenti, supervised by the historian Luciano Casali, worked using newspaper articles to analyze the myth establishment of the Cervi history, the connection with the communist values, and the impact on the public sphere from 1945 to the late 1960s.

Considering these valid contributions, the work of Toni Rovatti, Alessandro Santagata, and Giorgio Vecchio, published in late April 2024, represents, at this stage, the most recent reconstruction of the Cervi family story.⁶⁴ The book investigates the peasant universe in which they lived, following the different paths that led them to oppose fascism, reject the war, to choose partisanship, up to their arrest and execution. The study retraces the subsequent years, in which the narrative of their sacrifice took shape, and their myth was structured, revealing differences and conflicts that emerge from the analysis of the relationship between history and celebration.

Considering these premises, the following paragraphs will focus principally not on the gradient of mythization of the Cervi history in the post-Second World War period, but rather on underlining the main reasons why political actors, especially the PCI actively participated and promoted the memorialization process. To understand this point, it’s needed to briefly investigate the characteristics that simplified the antifascist narration around the Cervi Brothers. These three main factors, despite the differences in intentional political use by different actors,

⁵⁹ See Cervi, *I miei sette figli*.

⁶⁰ For a complete list, see Lucenti, *I Fratelli Cervi, Nascita Di Un Mito*, 284–93; Claudio Silingardi, Paola Varesi, and Zanoni, Mirco, eds., *La scelta della libertà. Museo Cervi. Il percorso di visita* (Gattatico: Istituto Alcide Cervi, 2022), 150–51.

⁶¹ See Alberto Preti, Marco Minardi, and Mirco Dondi, eds., *Guerra, guerriglia e comunità contadine in Emilia Romagna, 1943-1945*, RS libri (Reggio Emilia: ISTORECO, 1999); Cooke, ‘What Does It Matter If You Die?’; Luciano Casali, ‘Il Trattore e Il Mappamondo. Storia e Mito Dei Fratelli Cervi’, *Storia e Problemi Contemporanei*. 47 (2008): 125–38; Massimo Papini, ‘Sette Fratelli Sette, Tra Storia e Mito’, *Storia e Problemi Contemporanei*. 54 (2010): 207–2012, <https://doi.org/10.1400/148591>.

⁶² Marco Cerri, *Papà Cervi e i suoi sette figli : parole della storia e figure del mito* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2013); Marco Cerri, *La pastasciutta dei Cervi : fame, dono e sfida antifascista in una festa del luglio 1943* (Roma: Viella, 2023).

⁶³ See Lucenti, *I Fratelli Cervi, Nascita Di Un Mito*.

⁶⁴ See Rovatti, Santagata, and Vecchio, *Fratelli Cervi. La storia e la memoria*.

as we will see in the next section, were at the base of the political, memorial, and ideological capital that the Cervi history brought to the public discourse, in the construction and empowering of the Republic's values.

First, as we saw, they were actively antifascist, doing direct and indirect actions of the opposition to the Regime, before and during the Second World War. Secondly, their political story entangled catholic values, impersonated by Alcide Cervi and his father, and communist ones, through Aldo's personal experience. Third, the nature of farmers, despite their eccentric and innovative points of view, allows us to make a spontaneous connection between the rise of the antifascist Resistance and the countryside, broadening the idea of massive and popular participation in the movement itself. These three points were used and transformed, with a time framework that crossed the Italian Republic story, for political and propaganda purposes.

Marco Cerri, especially, connected the fortune of the Resistance account of the Cervi Family to the rhetoric of sacrificial and heroic death, to which origins could be found in catholic martyrdom tradition: this model was used, during the Second World War, to idealize a stoic and mite death of the heroic partisans. The shooting at the same moment of seven brothers, all the young males of a farmer family, was a unicum in the Italian Second World War and increased the chances of creating a myth. This numeric dimension of the Cervi brothers' death was also enriched by the fact that they hadn't killed anyone in their actions, probably, as Cerri underlined, because they hadn't enough time. And, on their political opposition to the regime, Cerri summarized:

“A generic antifascism was evoked for several of the seven Brothers: the strategies of exemption from military service, the recruitment and accompaniment of young partisans in the Apennine mountains, the work of supplying weapons and materials to the partisan bands.

Far more substantial was the symbolic dimension of their sacrifice, defined as ‘one of the most horrific crimes perpetrated by fascism’.”⁶⁵

These points, to martyrdom and “generical antifascism”, were, in fact, at least up to 1953, the main points for which the Cervi story was remembered, with less attention to the social context in which they lived. Even though they died at the start of the armed phase of the Italian

⁶⁵ Cerri, *La pastasciutta dei Cervi : fame, dono e sfida antifascista in una festa del luglio 1943*, 31–32.

Resistance, emotionally speaking, they were a name that inspired partisan formations and antifascists during the arc of the war.

The memory of the Cervi brothers could count, so, on a powerful story to be institutionalized, such as the peculiarity of the family massacre and the antifascist vocation of the family that suffered a process of generalization that, in the historiography, is still living a difficult phase in distinguishing the individualities.⁶⁶ But, the real power of the Cervi account was the existence, in the afterwar period, before books, films and monuments, of immediately recognizable elements that entered rapidly into the collective memory: the body of the Cervi Brothers, as well as their tomb, inaugurated in the actual shape in 1952 in Campegine Cemetery, but especially the figure of the old father Alcide Cervi, an alive and stoic witness of his family trauma and the House Cervi, that gradually became, as a physical place of memory, a laic sanctuary in the Italian Republic. The image of him, alone with his sons' widows and grandchildren, in 1945 gave a powerful example after the Second War World.⁶⁷ Surely, despite the importance, in the Reggio Emilia Province, of this story, since 1943, without the intervention of external actors, these elements could not become nationally recognizable, as we will see, in the years after.



Figure 3. Alcide Cervi with his sons' widows and grandsons, 1945.

⁶⁶ Marco Cerri tried, in his work, to underline the peculiarities of the seven brothers, in a tentative of detaching their peculiarities from the unitarian myth create later on. See Cerri, *Papà Cervi e i suoi sette figli : parole della storia e figure del mito*.

⁶⁷ AIAC, Fond "Archivio Fotografico", Series "Famiglia Cervi, Alcide Cervi, Funerali di Alcide Cervi, anni '30-1970", available online at https://bbcc.regione.emilia-romagna.it/pater/loadcard.do?id_card=198003&force=1.

Whose Resistance? Alcide Cervi, the State and PCI

“After one harvest there comes another.”

Alcide Cervi pronounced this phrase during the funeral of his sons, held on October 20, 1945. The Funeral, from Reggio Emilia to the Campegine Cemetery, was the first massive, participated moment of the public narration of the Cervi family. The photographs conserved in the Alcide Cervi Institute Archive as well as the pivotal organization support of the PCI sections of Campegine and Reggio Emilia, give the dimension of the event: Maria Cervi remembered in her memories of the tribune realized for the political intervention and the unexpected participation to the funeral march.⁶⁸



Figure 4. Funeral of the Seven Cervi brothers in Reggio Emilia and Campegine, 25 October 1945.

⁶⁸ Lucenti, *I Fratelli Cervi, Nascita Di Un Mito*, 107–14.

The years 1945-1947 were crucial for the re-foundation of Italy after twenty years of Fascism. Remembering the climate of political violence, between the fascist epuration, private acts of revenge and alert for a potential Communist Revolution is fundamental to understanding how the story of the Cervis was used in the political agenda. Alcide Cervi was perceived as a positive and transversal example for enriching a unified idea of national building in the new Italian Republic: he was an old man who survived the massacre of his family and continued to bring his family to the future, without looking for revenge and witnessing the tragedy that he lived.

As Cerri remembers, up to his death in 1970, Alcide Cervi was an example for:

“[...] one was looking for an exemplary story in which to recognize and bear witness to one's belonging, not only politically and socially but also sentimentally and emotionally, to the world, to one's world of militant anti-fascists and, often but not exclusively, communists.”⁶⁹

The strong relation between Resistance and Cervi's public memory, as well as from a private traumatic dimension to a collective memory, could not be possible without the intervention of external actors: according to Cooke “it is unlikely, though, that the Cervis would have become the national heroes that they are without some kind of state intervention”.⁷⁰ The British historian suggests, as a pivotal moment, the 7 January 1947. On that date, the Presidente of the Italian Republic, Enrico De Nicola, pinned on the chest of Alcide Cervi received seven silver posthumous medals for his sons. The ceremony was the 150th anniversary of the Italian Tricolour invented, so it is claimed, in Reggio Emilia. This peculiar initiative from the principal guaranteed figure of the Italian State elevated the significance of the Cervi Story in the Italian Republic and must be inserted into the political broader framework that we anticipated:

“In early 1947, therefore, before the fourth De Gasperi government and the expulsion of the left, the Cervi family were linked with patriotism and enjoyed privileged—iconic—status in the process of rebuilding the nation after the ravages of the war. At this stage, therefore, the Cervis and all they represented were entirely acceptable to an Italian state that was then characterized by a broad political compromise. It is inconceivable that the same honors would have been

⁶⁹ Cerri, *La pastasciutta dei Cervi : fame, dono e sfida antifascista in una festa del luglio 1943*, 29.

⁷⁰ Cooke, ‘What Does It Matter If You Die?’, 34.

bestowed in 1948, in such a public demonstration, in the run up to the crucial elections where the cold war atmosphere polarized Italian political discourse. The posthumous fame of the Cervi is thus inextricably linked with the vicissitudes of the Resistance movement from the establishment of the Italian Republic up to the present day.”⁷¹

The State wasn't the only actor involved in this memorialization process. Also, the PCI had a crucial role in enriching and shaping the figure of the Cervi story and Alcide Cervi as a witness of this experience. Eva Lucenti, in his work on the birth of the myth about the Cervi family, explored deeply the intersection between politics, especially communism, and the Cervi, up to the 1960s.⁷² She remembers especially the speech of Togliatti, PCI Leader, to the Youth Italian Communist Federation (FGCI), on 23 May 1949 in Reggio Emilia:

“Young Communists! What does it mean to be a young communist? Do you know the young communist? Yes, Italian society is familiar with the young communist. [...] They are the Cervi Brothers of Reggio Emilia, the youngest of whom was 23 years old and the oldest just over 40, all mowed down by the lead of the Germans and the fascist traitors, fighting for the cause of the Italian people.”⁷³

Lucenti argued that the PCI found in the Cervi Brothers a model of inspiration for Italian Communism, to the point that the party organized an entire propaganda campaign around them.⁷⁴ The models of the afterwar period, Togliatti and Gramsci, created a strong cultural base for the intellectual sector of the PCI, but the problem faced was to make concrete for most of the population these values. In this sense, the rediscovering of Gramsci's humanism required practical examples to be used as inspiration to break the distance between intellectuals and the people. Sandro Curzi, a PCI member of the press and propaganda commission in the 1950s, who was interviewed by Lucenti on 8 December 2004, affirmed that “The campaign on the Cervi was simultaneous with the start of a campaign on Gramsci, who had meanwhile taken a back seat.”⁷⁵

⁷¹ Cooke, 34.

⁷² Lucenti, *I Fratelli Cervi, Nascita Di Un Mito*, 169–73.

⁷³ *La Verità*, 29 May 1949.

⁷⁴ Lucenti, *I Fratelli Cervi, Nascita Di Un Mito*, 236.

⁷⁵ Lucenti, 237.

For Cerri, Lucenti and Cooke, the moment in which the narration of the Cervi changed is identifiable in 1953-1954, with the ten anniversaries of the Cervi shootings and Resistance. From the dimension of martyrdom, finally, also the social and political dimension of the Cervi story started to emerge, to create a moment of education and propaganda. On 18 January 1954 Alcide Cervi, who was in Rome for attending the National Committee of the A.N.P.I at the Teatro Eliseo, was invited to see the President of the Republic Luigi Einaudi. Alcide, who took a long account of his family and life on the Farm, was accompanied by the distinguished jurist Domenico Peretti Griva; Arrigo Boldrini, gold medal of the Resistance, PCI senator, and president of the ANPI partisan association; and Carlo Levi, who had painted a portrait of the seven brothers. This encounter, which Einaudi remembered later with surprise and admiration, legitimized again the Cervi story on a national level.



Figure 5. Alcide Cervi meets the President of the Republic Luigi Einaudi, Rome, 18 January 1954.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ AIAC, Fond "Archivio Fotografico", Series "A.N.P.I Associazione Nazionale Partigiani d'Italia - Comitato Nazionale Roma - A Papà Cervi", available online at https://bbcc.regione.emilia-romagna.it/pater/loadcard.do?id_card=197154; the meeting was scheduled for 12.30 p.m., as written in the personal schedule of the President' visits on the 18 January. See <https://archivio.quirinale.it/aspr/diari/EVENT-002-001256/presidente/luigi-cinaudi>.

Alcide Cervi became, so, contemporary, an alive symbol of the Italian Resistance on a national level, recognized by the State through the figure of the President of the Republic and, contemporary, a strong instrument of the PCI Propaganda on a national and international level. For instance, on 8 May 1955, for his 80th birthday, the Reggio Emilia PCI Federation organized a public celebration in the main theatre of the city.⁷⁷ The iconography realized for the event, was eloquent. As Gabriella Gotti, an actual Educative Worker for the Institute Cervi, shows in a 2024 article, the speech of the PCI representative Mario Licata and the thousands of wishing letters and gifts sent by the Young Pioneers Association (API), positioned ideologically in the Left area, increased the perception of massive participation in the event. Finally, a huge portrait of Alcide, encircled by his seven sons, was shown at the center of the stage, as well as a pivotal phrase: “We honour the Italian Resistance in Dad Cervi”.



Figure 6. Celebrations for the 80th birthday of Alcide Cervi in the municipal theatre of Reggio Emilia, 8 May 1955.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Gabriella Gotti, ‘Vacanze estive in Appennino reggiano negli anni Settanta. Il Campeggio internazionale dell’amicizia Papà Cervi’, *E-Review. Rivista degli Istituti Storici dell’Emilia-Romagna in Rete*, 22 January 2024, 9–11, <https://doi.org/10.52056/9791254693117/15>.

⁷⁸ AIAC, Fond “Archivio Fotografico”, Series “Festeggiamenti per l’80°”, available online at https://bbcc.regione.emilia-romagna.it/pater/loadcard.do?id_card=197161.

In the subsequential phases, from the 1956 URSS invasion of Hungary and the 1960s, Alcide continues to be used by the State and PCI as a broader and positive symbol of Resistance, through commemorations, visits, press, film, and books. His presence, on 9 May 1965, on the 20th anniversary of the Liberation organized by the Partisan Associations in Milan was, in this sense, incredibly significant. The images and video conserved in the Audiovisual Archive Foundation of the Workers' and Democratic Movement (AMOOD), and the Institute Alcide Cervi Archive showed us the entire day: the figure of the old man, 90 years old, crossing the street near the Cathedral in a car, waving to the cheering crowd of 200.000 people, represents one of the strongest moments of his unifying popular value related to the Resistance.⁷⁹ As *L'Unità* remembered, after the event, Alcide came back to the House Cervi in Gattatico where he received the visit of the PCI Leader Luigi Longo who gave him the Gold Medal of the Party.



Figure 7. *L'Unità*, 10 May 1965.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ For an account of the day and of the clip recorded, see documentation attached to the clip conserved in AAMOD, Fund "Filmoteca e Videoteca", Series "PCI - Unitefilm", *Ventennale della liberazione. Milano, 9 maggio 1965*, available at <http://patrimonio.aamod.it/aamod-web/film/detail/IL8600002185/22/ventennale-della-liberazione-milano-9-maggio-1965.html?startPage=0&idFondo=>; AIAC, Fond "Archivio Fotografico", Series "Famiglia Cervi, Alcide Cervi, Funerali di Alcide Cervi, anni '30-1970", available online at https://bbcc.regione.emilia-romagna.it/pater/loadcard.do?id_card=198003&force=1.

⁸⁰ *L'Unità*, 10 May 1965, https://archivio.unita.news/assets/main/1965/05/10/page_005.pdf.

At the moment of his death, in 1970, a huge moral and political capital was conserved in his figure. The central role of the State and PCI, which compete in memorializing the Cervi story as an example of the Resistance in creating the Italian national identity in the first Republican phases, is undoubted, as well as the shift on the Left that these ideas got.

Films, books, pilgrimages, gifts: consolidating the Cervi public memory until the late 1960s.

The construction of the Cervi public memory, as we saw, was the result of the political initiative, especially the PCI one, in spreading and transforming this story for propaganda purposes. This process was, voluntarily and involuntarily, effectuated through a plethora of cultural and mediatic instruments, such as the press, books, and films, and found its main assets in two main existing physical objects of memorialization of the Seven Brothers massacre: the figure of Alcide Cervi and his House in Gattatico. In fact, the local and national press, especially *l'Unità*, had a vital role and helped to explain how important for the PCI the figure of Alcide was. Eva Lucenti, mapped, only for the period 1944-1956, 82 articles referred to the Cervi family in the principal communist newspaper.⁸¹ In this section, we will briefly explore the main ways in which the Cervi public memory was promoted until the death of Alcide Cervi.

As we introduced before, Alcide was invited as a special guest as a Resistance symbol on several occasions related to the Resistance all over Italy and abroad. As the photographic archive conserved in the Alcide Cervi Institute shows, for instance, he was in several celebrations of the Resistance, and he visited political party offices, places of memory, and associations. In 1955, he also went to the URSS, with a journey realized under the PCI supervision and support.⁸²

But the gradual rise of Alcide Cervi's fame corresponded with the increasing significance of the House Cervi as a place of memory or, as we can say, a laic sanctuary. As Cerri remembers:

“The Cervi house immediately became the recipient of demonstrations of affection and participation by citizens, militants, ex-partisans, etc., until, from

⁸¹ Lucenti, *I Fratelli Cervi, Nascita Di Un Mito*, 297–300.

⁸² AIAC, Fond “Archivio Fotografico”, Series “Famiglia Cervi, Alcide Cervi, Funerali di Alcide Cervi, anni '30-1970”, available online at https://bbcc.regione.emilia-romagna.it/pater/loadcard.do?id_card=198003&force=1.

1954-1955, there were real mass pilgrimages; every Sunday, hundreds of people crowded the house in Campi Rossi di Gattatico. And they found to welcome them the widows of the seven Brothers, the grandchildren, but above all, until 1970, the year of his death, Alcide Cervi, the Old Father who survived the family massacre.”⁸³



Figure 8. Alcide Cervi meet Togliatti, PCI-Leader, in Rome, 1954.

As introduced before, the House became a place of memory since the end of the War, but the role of the PCI slightly increased, through the organization of organized tours of Partisans associations and local PCI sections, the numbers involved. Togliatti, to exchange the visit that Alcide had made to the PCI national headquarters in Rome in January 1954⁸⁴, went to his House on 17 September 1954. As reported in an article of *La Verità* of 24 September 1954:

“Those who thought about the reason for Togliatti's coming to Campegine could

⁸³ Cerri, *La pastasciutta dei Cervi : fame, dono e sfida antifascista in una festa del luglio 1943*, 28.

⁸⁴ AIAC, Fond “Archivio Fotografico”, Series “A.N.P.I Associazione Nazionale Partigiani d'Italia - Comitato Nazionale Roma - A Papà Cervi”, available online at https://bbcc.regione.emilia-romagna.it/pater/loadcard.do?id_card=197154.

easily guess that it was due to a visit by Papà Cervi. In fact, it could not have been otherwise. When Togliatti and Cervi met, they threw their arms around each other's necks. The intense emotion that had gripped Togliatti and Cervi was transmitted to everyone present. One felt that this meeting went beyond its immediate significance.”⁸⁵

The article continues to explain why this event was so insightful for the political engagement of the PCI electoral pool in the 1950s:

“On the one hand, there was the PCI, with its past of gigantic struggles for the emancipation of the proletariat from capitalist and agrarian exploitation, on the other hand, there was a man [Alcide Cervi] who associated in himself all the sacrifices of the Liberation struggle, who represented the glorious legacy of a War of Liberation that cost heroic sacrifices, sublime holocausts.”⁸⁶

Another interesting point about the visits to the House is the question of the gifts for Alcide Cervi. The groups that came there often brought small objects as gifts, which take on great symbolic and political significance. And it was precisely to display all these objects, and to meet the visiting groups, that in 1961, on the initiative and with the economic support of the Reggio Emilia PCI Federation, the living part of the house was enlarged, and a small exhibition hall was built.⁸⁷ This room, as well as the gifts received and the objects conserved by Alcide about his sons, is considered the origin of the future Cervi Museum. Substantially, the origin of the Museum of the Seven Cervi Brothers was based prevalently on the objects donated by other people to their father,



Antolij Tarasov e Alcide Cervi dopo la liberazione.

Figure 9. Alcide Cervi and Anatolij Makarovič Tarasov, House Cervi, 1965.

⁸⁵ *La Verità*, 24 September 1954.

⁸⁶ *La Verità*, 24 September 1954.

⁸⁷ Silingardi, ‘Musei della Resistenza e politiche della memoria’, 284.

instead of objects that come directly from their life and activities. Through these objects, still conserved in a dedicated room in the actual museum, is possible to observe the evolution of the visits to the House, as well as the presence of numerous foreign Soviet-bloc delegations. Among the others, it's to mention the coming, to House Cervi, of partisans' delegation from Russia, because the family Cervi gave them protection in the Fall of 1943: significant was the visit of Anatolij Makarovič Tarasov, a soviet partisan that fought in the Italian Resistance, in 1965.



Figure 10. Alcide Cervi welcomed the visitors in the first room of the museum that was realized with the support of the Reggio Emilia PCI Federation, House Cervi, 1961.

A fundamental step is the release, in August 1955, of Alcide Cervi's book, edited and revised by journalist Renato Nicolai, *I miei sette figli* (My Seven Sons).⁸⁸ Published by Editori Riuniti, it is the first volume in the new *Biblioteca della Resistenza* series and sells 30,000 copies in two months. In 1956, the publisher decided to print a paperback edition, which was a resounding success with 500,000 copies sold in just a few months, thanks above all to the PCI's commitment propagation, which, with this book with its strong pedagogical content, saw an opportunity to reaffirm the national and popular character of the party. As Lucenti remembers, already on 1 October 1955, as reported by the communist *Quaderno dell'Attivista*, "the book

⁸⁸ Cervi, *I miei sette figli*.

of Dad Cervi had constituted a huge editorial success” and “the first edition was finished in a few days”.⁸⁹ It’s interesting how Curzi, in the 2004 interview with Lucenti already cited, referred to how the book was a product of the PCI Propaganda Campaign and which kind of possible developments could be imagined:

“We thought of doing this campaign in the name of the Cervi brothers, and in order for it to become mass media, we thought of developing a suitable tool, i.e. a booklet telling the story, so that it would spread; on television, you would try to make a television script.”⁹⁰

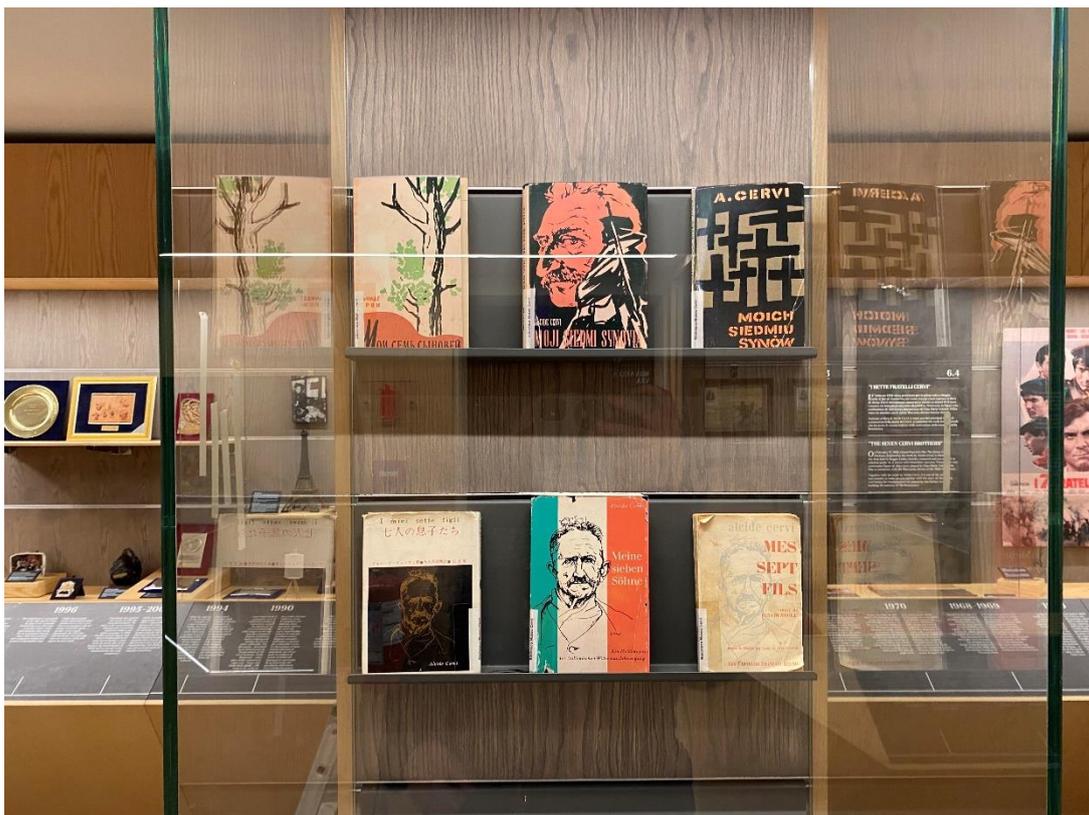


Figure 11. Gifts Room, House Cervi Museum, Gattatico, 15 December 2021.

In the following years, the book was translated and circulated in fourteen other countries, achieving great success in the Soviet Union, Japan, Argentina, Romania, China, and France. In 1971, a year after Alcide Cervi's death, a new edition came out, this time however completely purged of explicit references to the Soviet Union, to *L'Unità*, to Stalin, to communism. As Lucenti has underlined, making a comparison between this later version and the 1955 one, the

⁸⁹ Lucenti, *I Fratelli Cervi, Nascita Di Un Mito*, 263.

⁹⁰ Lucenti, 263.

operation was carried out to make this story more acceptable in the new social context, after the 1968 movement.⁹¹ Many children's editions of this version also came out later, and then, in 2010, edited by Luciano Casali, Einaudi published *I miei sette figli* in its original version. In the gift room of the actual Museum Cervi, a glass is dedicated to the political and crucial value that this text had to the memorialization and fixation of the Cervi story in the public memory.⁹²

The Cervi memory was also enriched by literature and music. Italo Calvino, who, in the 1950s, worked as a special reporter for *L'Unità*, wrote, on 27 May 1954, a touching article describing his visit to House Cervi.⁹³ Musically speaking, an event contributed indirectly to consolidating attention to the Cervi story, particularly in the world of youth. On 7 July 1960, during a strike proclaimed by the Reggio Emilia Chamber of Labor to protest the Tambroni government, five workers were killed. To commemorate the episode, the following year Fausto Amodei wrote the song *Per i morti di Reggio Emilia* (For the Dead of Reggio Emilia), which expressly links the Cervi brothers to these fallen soldiers. The song became very popular in the following years, resounding at demonstrations, occupied schools and universities, and popular festivals.⁹⁴

Lastly, let's consider briefly how, during Alcide Cervi's life, films contributed to the memorialization, and partial mythization, of his family story. Before starting, it is to take into account the difficulties of making a fictional film of the Cervis in the 1950s: the Director Cesare Zavattini, was enchanted by a visit to the House Cervi in 1954, at the point of imagining a neorealist film that was produced only fourteen years later, according to Guerra in 2016, due to political and social constraints.⁹⁵ Among the first tentatives, is to be mentioned *I sette contadini* (The seven farmers), directed by Elio Petri in 1958 and focused on an interview with Alcide.⁹⁶ A similar modality is to be considered for the 1963 Gassman, a famous Italian actor, meeting with the old Cervi, produced for the program *Il gioco degli eroi* (The Heroes Game) screen on the national public television RAI.⁹⁷ But, for our analysis, we are focusing prevalently on the

⁹¹ Lucenti, 268–83.

⁹² AIAC, Digital photographic depository, Album “Nuovo Museo Casa Cervi, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/istitutoalcidecervi/52119417545/in/album-72177720299491677/>.

⁹³ *L'Unità*, 27 May 1954, https://archivio.unita.news/assets/main/1954/05/27/page_003.pdf.

⁹⁴ For a broader view of narrative books, poems and songs related to the Cervi story, see Morena Vannini, ed., *Nel mio cuore finì la loro storia: scrittori, poeti e cantautori per la memoria dei Cervi* (Gattatico: Istituto Alcide Cervi, 2022).

⁹⁵ See Michele Guerra, ‘In omaggio ai Cervi, al grande tema: Zavattini e il film impossibile sui sette fratelli’, *Cinema e storia: rivista annuale di studi interdisciplinari*: V, 2016, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.1400/250389>.

⁹⁶ AAMOD, Fond “Filmoteca e Videoteca”, Series “PCI – Unitefilm”, *Papà Cervi*, directed by Elio Petri, 1958, <http://patrimonio.aamod.it/aamod-web/film/detail/IL8600001240/22/i-sette-contadini.html?startPage=0&idFondo>.

⁹⁷ Rai Teche, digital repository, *Gassman racconta i fratelli Cervi, 1963* <https://www.raisplay.it/programmi/gassmanraccontaifratellicervi>.

1968 film *I 7 fratelli Cervi* (The 7 Cervi brothers), directed by Gianni Puccini, and the documentary *Papà Cervi* (Dad Cervi) by Franco Chiarini.⁹⁸ Despite the different typologies, the first is historical fiction and the second a documentary, both movies explore and idealize the Cervi story. If the first is working especially on the seven brothers and their heroism, the second investigates the figure of the old Cervi, almost 94 years old, through his words and the point of view of Ferruccio Parri, CLN member, antifascist, and Prime Minister in 1945. Both the productions received a direct promotion by the PCI propaganda committee of the party but it's interesting to underline some other differences.



Figure 12. *I 7 fratelli Cervi*, film poster, directed by Gianni Puccini, 1968

Puccini's film came to the Cinema at the start of 1968, the year of the general political elections in Italy, which were in May. At the same time, as anticipated briefly, between April and May the entire country was crossed by numerous student turmoil, that arrived to include, in 1969, the world of workers. The PCI, unprepared for these manifestations, continued the election campaign and tried, with alternate success, to negotiate and assimilate part of 1968's movements.⁹⁹ An electoral propaganda supplement for voting PCI published with *L'Unità* on 28 April 1968 offers a meaningful round table summary related to the public perception of the film *I 7 fratelli Cervi* and the reaction of the living family members. Regarding the fortune of the screening, Puccini argued:

“So far, two months after the ‘premiere’, the film has grossed over 400 million. It does not enjoy the same success everywhere. In Emilia, in Tuscany, in the north in general, it is evidently doing better than in the center-south, where

⁹⁸ AAMOD, Fond “Filmoteca e Videoteca”, Series “PCI – Unitefilm”, *Papà Cervi*, directed by Franco Chiarini, 1969, <http://patrimonio.aamod.it/aamod-web/film/detail/IL8600001182/22/papa-cervi.html?startPage=0&idFondo>.

⁹⁹ See Giulia Strippoli, ‘Le PCF et le PCI face au mouvement étudiant de 1968’, *Cahiers d'histoire. Revue d'histoire critique*, no. 112–113 (1 July 2010): 99–112, <https://doi.org/10.4000/chrhc.2181>.

fortunately there are also some truly unexpected positive results: in Cagliari, for example, and in Sicily.”¹⁰⁰

The discussion was also clearly influenced by the ongoing students' protests: considering a consensus by the family about how the protagonists were represented, the article focused on the difficulties, for the younger generations, in understanding the Cervi story. The general feeling was that fiction requires clearer didactic tools to be explained and understood by a broader audience.

The 1969 Cigarini documentary, conserved in the AAMOD Archive, represented instead the same story from the perspective of the old Alcide, crossing rapidly his life, his family tragedy, and the role of his figure as a symbol in post-war Italy. As also the transcription conserved demonstrates, the already cited May 1965 parade in Milan for the National Partisans' meeting was shown, as well as the meeting with a Soviet ambassador, Luigi Einaudi, and Palmiro Togliatti. The images of Alcide Cervi and his House, looking at old photos of his family, were alternated with the historical background of the Cervi shooting and the fall of fascism. Alcide, the witness of this tragedy, was depicted with a huge emotional feeling, mourning at the tomb of his sons and his wife Genoveffa, but contemporarily showing how his life went on, taking care of the farm and his grandsons and being a proactive member of his community.

The video, which opened with images of Ferruccio Parri that speak to Alcide, lying in a bed, surely comes from the idea of the urgency of doing a non-fiction film that could account, touching, the story of the still-alive old man. At the same time, here, we could make the hypothesis that this documentary was the answer of the PCI for giving a didactic and engagement overview of what the Cervi story was, with the finality of replying for the clarity that Puccini's work required. The documentary was used inside the House Cervi for educational purposes up to the 1990s and the arrival of a new video on the new museum contents. Chiarini, who had the chance to meet Alcide in the last stage of his life, recorded also several shots of his funeral in Reggio Emilia that are conserved in his personal Archive and partially available online.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ *L'Unità*, 28 April 1968, https://archivio.unita.news/assets/main/1968/04/25/page_010.pdf.

¹⁰¹ The Franco Chiarini Found is digitally available online. For of the video related to the Funeral of Alcide Cervi on 7 July 1970, see https://www.memoryscapes.it/it/clips/2753_funerali-papa-cervi-viii.

Conclusive thoughts: a political-promoted Cervi public memorialization with a shift on the Left.

This chapter reconstructs the process of the creation of Cervi's public memory in its entanglements with political-sponsored interventions, especially the PCI one, from 1943 to 1970. The analysis started with a brief account of the seven brothers' massacre, focusing on the characteristics of their political and social experience, as well as their connection with the Resistance and the Communist Party. All the narration about their memory turns around their duplex role as antifascists and farmers. These connections will occur in all the successive phases of memorialization and, later, in shaping the main goals of the Institute Alcide Cervi itself.

After a brief historiographical review, the two main elements that allow the empowerment in the public sphere of the Cervi Brothers' martyrdom were essentially two: the figure of the old dad Alcide Cervi, survived the execution and positive witness of his family tragedy, and the House Cervi, as laic sanctuary of a Resistance story. Despite these strong points, strengthened by the significance of the acquisition of the Cervi name by partisans' formations, the creation of the Cervi public memory could not have been possible without an external political intervention. Since the funeral of the seven brothers, in 1945, the local PCI Federation of Reggio Emilia was an important factor in creating a stage for the Cervi story, but was the intervention of the President of Republic De Nicola, in 1947, to elevate the question on a national level as an element of the national re-building in the Italian Republic.

Through commemorations, press, books, film, pilgrimages, and visits to the House, the story of the Cervi brothers, using the powerful proxy of Alcide Cervi, become a competitive memory ground for State and PCI, with the last one that, since 1953-1954, with a strong propaganda Campaign, took the control of this story and acquire Alcide Cervi as a positive communist symbol of the Italian Resistance. This use of his figure was connected with the cultural and political environment that the party faced, ideologically and electorally, in the 1950s and 1960s, passing by the 1956 URSS invasion of Hungary, the Center-Left Governments in the 1960s, and the 1968. With the death of the 95-year-old Alcide, in 1970, the memory capital inside his figure had to be preserved and the street for a political solution for an institutionalization of this political value was opened.

Chapter Two: Founding the Institute Alcide Cervi. 1972-1986

After the funeral of Alcide Cervi. How to preserve Cervi's public memory?

“The passing of a great patriot. A farmer. A communist.
The Italy of the Resistance honours Papà Cervi.”

L'Unità, 28 March 1970¹⁰²

On March 27, 1970, Alcide Cervi died at the age of 95 in the Sant'Ilario Hospital, near Gattatico, in the northern part of Emilia-Romagna.¹⁰³ From the 28, as recorded in the communist newspaper *L'Unità*, the burial chamber was held in the municipal house of Reggio Emilia.¹⁰⁴ That decision was made, at first, for the dimension of the tribute to Alcide Cervi, which could not be guested by the family house in Gattatico. Secondly, the choice of exposing the body in the “Tricolore” room, the one dedicated to the Italian national flag, strengthened the connection between the figure of Cervi and the Italian Republic foundation that he and his family contribute to found. Before being buried with his sons, on 30 March his laic funeral was held in the city, with a massive participation of 200.000 people. Giorgio Amendola, for the Communist party, and Ferruccio Parri, former Prime Minister in the immediate post-WWII period and, at that time, President of the National Institute for the Story of the Liberation Movement, pronounced a touchy funeral oration. Sandro Pertini, socialist President of the Chamber of Deputy, and several other political personages presented their condolences to Maria Cervi, nephew of Alcide, and other family members, as the photos taken on that day show.¹⁰⁵

The politicization of this event is strongly visible from the materials that were conserved in the Photographic Archive of the Cervi Museum and that took every phase of the funeral, from the funeral chamber in Reggio Emilia to the burial in Gattatico. The combination of the popular adhesion, with an overwhelming presence of PCI flags and the attendance of some of the highest exponents of the Republic and the Italian Left, give us the dimension of the effects of the

¹⁰² *L'Unità*, 28 March 1970, https://archivio.unita.news/assets/main/1970/03/28/page_001.pdf.

¹⁰³ Cerri, *Papà Cervi e i suoi sette figli : parole della storia e figure del mito*, 199–200.

¹⁰⁴ *L'Unità*, 29 March 1970, https://archivio.unita.news/assets/main/1970/03/29/page_006.pdf

¹⁰⁵ AIAC, Fond “Archivio Fotografico”, Series “Reggio Emilia, Campegine - 30 marzo 1970 - Funerali di Alcide Cervi”, Volume II, available online at <https://bbcc.regione.emilia-romagna.it/samira/link/geytimzz>.

political memorialization of the Cervi family story in the postwar period which, as Lucenti said, was the product of a research of identification on values of communism and Resistance.¹⁰⁶



Figure 13. 30 March 1970, Reggio Emilia. Alcide Cervi's funeral procession.¹⁰⁷

Considering these premises, the funeral opens the ground to the problem of preserving the huge moral and political capital, conserved, and promoted by the figure of Alcide Cervi as the main witness. As the sociologist Marco Cerri argues, "Alcide's death had broken the delicate balance between the place of a family's productive, everyday life and the symbolic space of collective memory [...]."¹⁰⁸ The House Cervi, the location of political pilgrimages¹⁰⁹, without the symbol of the Cervi story, abandoned by most of the family members, risked losing its value as a place of memory. Following Cerri, "with Alcide went the possibility of holding together reality and representation, concrete physicality and symbolic iconography, what had perhaps been the secret of the extraordinary and painful popular success that the Cervi family had since the end of the war."¹¹⁰

For a better understanding of the ideological power of this story, is to consider the evolution of the political and social environment that the Italian Republic was living in the late 1960s. On

¹⁰⁶ Lucenti, *I Fratelli Cervi, Nascita Di Un Mito*, 236–40.

¹⁰⁷ AIAC, Fond "Archivio Fotografico", Series "Reggio Emilia, Campegine - 30 marzo 1970 - Funerali di Alcide Cervi", Volume II, available online at <https://bbcc.regione.emilia-romagna.it/samira/link/geytimzz>.

¹⁰⁸ Cerri, *Papà Cervi e i suoi sette figli : parole della storia e figure del mito*, 200. [original quote translates from Italian]

¹⁰⁹ Cerri, 176–84.

¹¹⁰ Cerri, 200. [original quote translates from Italian]

one hand, the rise of the New Left after 1968 required to recontextualize and making alive, for propaganda purposes, the strong values connection between the Communist Party and the Italian Resistance.¹¹¹ On the other hand, the consolidation of the control, on a regional and local level, of the political structures by the Communists, usually in alliance with the socialist party, gave the chance to experiment with a local cultural politic that could be different from the national one.¹¹² That environment was allowing local administrations to represent the major sponsor for cultural and political initiatives that could aspire to have a national impact.¹¹³

Considering that, its undeniable that the role of the PCI, on a local level, supporting Alcide Cervi in its desire of memory preservation, and on a national one, giving the political support and the cultural value, was central, as in the memorialization phase, in finding a solution for preserving the Cervi Memory. Which street could be followed? The Cervi Family memory, as the PCI contributed to stabilize in the collective memory, represented the relation between the farmers and the antifascist Resistance movement, in a continuity with the fights of the farmers movements in the post-Second World War period. The creation of a cultural Institute, inspired by similar ones, like the national Institute for the Resistance, could grant, with public founding, the operativity of an Institute and the preservation of the memory, with a strong focus on the academic production.¹¹⁴ To understand how from a place of memory such as the Cervi House a national Institute was formed it's needed to investigate which ideological and political actors were involved in this decision and from when they started this plan.

The process of institutionalization, in fact, started slightly before the dead of Alcide and, substantially, could be summarized with the combination of two initiatives: first, the donation letter of Alcide Cervi to the Provincial Administration of Reggio Emilia and the Municipality of Gattatico, in 1964, and secondly, by the Emilio Sereni, PCI politician and historian of the Italian agriculture, of his library to the future Institute, posed in a written form in 1970.

On 18 September 1964 Alcide Cervi, at that time almost 90 years old, sent a letter to the Mayor of Gattatico and the President of the Reggio Emilia Province to raise the issue of the conservation of the materials related to its sons and its house. An extract of this letter appears on the deliberation extract of the Reggio Emilia Provincial Council, dated 5 October 1964

¹¹¹ Claudio Natoli, 'La sinistra del Pci negli anni Sessanta', *Studi storici: rivista trimestrale dell'Istituto Gramsci* 55, no. 2 (2014): 474.

¹¹² For a chronology of the role of PCI in the local administration in Emilia Romagna Carlo De Maria, ed., *Storia del PCI in Emilia Romagna: welfare, lavoro, cultura, autonomie (1945-1991)*, OttocentoDuemila. Italia-Europa-mondo ; 9 (Bologna: Bologna University Press, 2022), 11–29.

¹¹³ See Berber Bevernage and Nico Wouters, 'State-Sponsored History After 1945: An Introduction', in *The Palgrave Handbook of State-Sponsored History After 1945*, ed. Berber Bevernage and Nico Wouters (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2018), 1–36, https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-349-95306-6_1.

¹¹⁴ See Zazzara, *La storia a sinistra. Ricerca e impegno politico dopo il fascismo*.

entitled to the acceptance of the Cervi museum donation.¹¹⁵

The extract of the letter focuses on the need to look for a future for the “collection of the collection of memories and testimonies of the holocaust” of the seven Cervi brothers and on the worries about the potential disaggregation of this memory. Citing textually:

“Will what has been collected and preserved over so many years of patient work be dispersed at some point, I asked myself? Won't there remain a concrete trace to indicate to the people the path trodden by my seven sons and the significance of their sacrifice I found the answer by thinking that the [Gattatico] Municipality where we were born, the [Reggio Emilia] Province, to whose name we always, when we are far away, return, do not perish. Men pass away, but institutions remain, even if, as sometimes happens, they are transformed.”¹¹⁶

Alcide also proposed the creation of a dedicated Commission for managing the collection, composed by seven members: a member of his family and two representatives each for the Italian National Partisan Association (ANPI), the Provincial Administration of Reggio Emilia and the Municipality of Gattatico. He also expresses the desire that the collection remain physically conserved in the House Cervi after his death and, for granting that, proposed the concession to the Province Administration of the free use of the building.

The Provincial Council, strongly led by a government based on the local alliance between Communist and Socialist, took care of that request, sustaining that “it is certainly opportune to be able to give continuity to this preservation of documents, acts, and works.” It’s interesting how the document underlines the importance of the visits to the house, estimated to be a monthly number of 400, and defines the actual location as an “institution”. Despite a little discussion, proposed by the Democristian council group, related to moving the material to the Museum of Risorgimento in Reggio Emilia, the Province Council accepted the donation with 18 votes in favor and 8 abstentions. Considering the strength of the Communist group in Reggio Emilia, accepting without changes the organization proposed by the donor and nominating two members for the Commission for managing the Cervi materials, it’s hypnotizable that the

¹¹⁵ AIAC, Fond “Archivio Documentario della Famiglia Cervi”, Series “Azienda Agricola Cervi ai Campi Rossi (1937-1970)”, box n.5, folder n.25, *Accettazione donazione del Museo ‘Cervi’. Estratto di Verbale di deliberazione del Consiglio Provinciale di Reggio Emilia*, 5 October 1964.

¹¹⁶ AIAC, Fond “Archivio Documentario della Famiglia Cervi”, Series “Azienda Agricola Cervi ai Campi Rossi (1937-1970)”, box n.5, folder n.25, *Accettazione donazione del Museo ‘Cervi’. Estratto di Verbale di deliberazione del Consiglio Provinciale di Reggio Emilia*” 5 October 1964.

proposal was conceptually prepared by the Reggio Emilia's PCI, to fulfill the desire of Alcide Cervi himself and to ensure the political involvement in the preservation of the Cervi public memory.

A similar donation acceptance document is findable in the acts of the Gattatico municipal council, in 1966.¹¹⁷ Here a second letter from Alcide Cervi dated 28 February 1966 was partially transcribed. Like the previous one, Alcide insisted on the desire that the material must be conserved in his house, in Gattatico, and on the free concession, apart from alienation cases, of the building. As well as the Province of Reggio Emilia, in the Municipality of Gattatico the deliberation passed with 10 votes in favor and 5 in contrariety from the Democristian opposition. Both Administrations, for the first time, dedicated a small amount of their budget for the maintenance of the Cervi collection and of the building, giving the start to the direct financial public support of the Cervi memory.

If the letters of Alcide Cervi give the sense of the local involvement of PCI, especially in the key of preserving the house Cervi as a museum, with a strong connection with the territory of birth of the family, the donation of Emilio Sereni introduces the question of creating a cultural Institute. For understanding, it is important to underline how Sereni and Attilio Esposto, President of the National Farmers Alliance (ANC), of which Alcide was nominated honorary President in 1955,¹¹⁸ and Emilio Sereni, both deputy members of the PCI in the Italian National Chamber, were the major representatives of the Rome ideological founding group of the Institute Alcide Cervi.

Emilio Sereni was a communist, partisan, and historian with a great influence in methodologically analyzing the connections between the agricultural landscape and the evolution of the farmers' movements.¹¹⁹ Specifically, he held a major private library, that, as a manuscript document dated 1° May 1966, confirmed, was already planned to be donated to the communist-led Gramsci Institute.¹²⁰ After the death of Alcide Cervi, something was changed. During the national ANC Conference, held in Rome on April 28, to examine the problems related to the institution of the Regions in Italy, Sereni commemorated the recently disappeared figure of the old Dad Cervi. As the article in *Nuova Agricoltura* reported on 9 May 1970:

¹¹⁷ AIAC, Fond "Archivio Documentario della Famiglia Cervi", Series "Azienda Agricola Cervi ai Campi Rossi (1937-1970)", box n.5, folder n.25, *Accettazione di donazione disposta da Papà Cervi. Copia di deliberazione del Consiglio [Comunale di Gattatico]*. [1966].

¹¹⁸ "Italian farmers' honorary president: papà Cervi named to the honorary presidency of the National Farmers' Alliance", in *Lavoro*, weekly periodical, 22 November 1955.

¹¹⁹ See Abdon Alinovi, ed., *Emilio Sereni: ritrovare la memoria* (Napoli: Doppiavoce, 2010).

¹²⁰ AIAC, Fond "Archivio Emilio Sereni", Series "Istituto Alcide Cervi", box n.3, folder n.10, *Lettera di Emilio Sereni a Luigi Longo*, Rome, 1 May 1966.

“On behalf of the Alliance, the Honourable [Deputy] Sereni proposed the establishment of a ‘Cervi Foundation’ for the history of the Italian peasant and rural world. The proposal, said Sereni, has already been enthusiastically welcomed by the National Association of Partisans and the Province of Reggio Emilia.”¹²¹

It is not surprising that, on 12 December 1970, in a letter to Attilio Esposto, Sereni donated his library to the ANC, despite maintaining the collection in his house due to consultation and the impossibility of finding enough space for collocation in the Alliance’s spaces. At the same moment, he proposed an alternative final conservative destination for his cultural patrimony:

“I learned that the Alcide Cervi Institute is being established, an initiative to which I have contributed and that the Alliance is participating in it. I also learned that among its contributions, it intends to entrust the Institute with the preservation of its publications and books on history and economics, giving them the name of Biblioteca Emilio Sereni, and this to allow public consultation of the aforementioned works.”¹²²

Sereni concluded thanks the presidency of the Alliance, for the “decision [...] that is conformed to our continued efforts, in the spirit of the perennial values of the Resistance, and the ever-expanding development of the farmer movement”. That initiative gave the Institute the cultural and intellectual patrimony that it needed for connecting farmer movements and the Italian Resistance in the name of the Cervi family, on the inspiration of the short-lived ANC’s Center for the History of the Peasant Movement, 1952-1956, and strengthening the connection with the national Parliament members.¹²³

This primordial initiative, promoted by Sereni, is also confirmed by an authenticated extract conserved in a *Statuti Vecchi* (old Statutes) conserved in AIAC and related to the meeting of the Farmer Alliance on 17 April 1972. There, confirming the original proposal by Sereni, the ANC formalized the delegation, with Esposto at the head, in charge of funding the Institute Alcide

¹²¹ *Nuova Agricoltura*, 10 May 1970.

¹²² AIAC, Fond “Archivio Emilio Sereni”, Series “Istituto Alcide Cervi”, box n.3, folder n.10, *Lettera di Emilio Sereni a Luigi Longo*, Rome, 1 May 1966.

¹²³ See Giorgio Bigatti, ‘Tra Politica e Storia. La Breve Esperienza Del Centro per La Storia Del Movimento Contadino in Italia’ (Unpublished, available on the personal Academia page of the Author, 2016).

Cervi through the Statute signing and the formation of the function organisms.¹²⁴

From this duality, the ideological donation of Alcide Cervi, that followed up the local PCI project, and the active role of the Roman PCI elites, the Institute Alcide Cervi took life. This bicephalic structure was an answer, on one side, to the preservation of a place of memory, the Cervi house, where the political pilgrimages could talk to a wider public, and, on the other, to create something new, to write down the historiographical cultural premises for connecting Resistance and Farmer Movements. With a strong national and local political involvement, midway between memory preservation and a cultural-based activity, this Institution moved its first steps in this polycentrism, looking to affirm its position in the 1970s Italian cultural and scientific scenario.



Figure 14. Reggio Emilia 30, March 1970, Alcide Cervi funeral, funeral chamber in the Tricolour Room. Sandro Pertini, President of the Chamber of Deputies, greets Maria Cervi, Alcide's niece, daughter of Antenore, one of Alcide's seven slaughtered sons.



Figure 15. Reggio Emilia 30, March 1970, Alcide Cervi funeral, funeral chamber in the Tricolour Room. Sandro Pertini, President of the Chamber of Deputies, pays homage to the body.

¹²⁴ AIAC, Fond "Institute Alcide Cervi" [not cataloged], Folder "Statuti Vecchi", *Estratto Autentico. Verbale della riunione dell'Alleanza Nazionale Contadini in data 17.4.1972.*

Founding a cultural institute with a national vocation between Rome, Reggio Emilia and Gattatico.



Figure 16. *Nuova Agricoltura*, 25 May 1972.

On 24 April 1972, at the vigil of the 27° Anniversary of Liberation Day, the constitutional act for the foundation of the “Alcide Cervi Institute for the history of the peasant movement and agriculture, anti-fascism and the Resistance in the countryside” was signed in Reggio Emilia. The main subscribers were Arrigo Boldrini, for the ANPI, Attilio Esposito, for the ANC, Ugo Benassi, as representant of the Provincial Administration of Reggio Emilia, and Gianfranco Pisi for the Municipality of Gattatico. All of them, at that time, were PCI politicians actively involved in local or national political administrations. The President was indicated in Ivano Curti, Socialist politician born in Reggio Emilia, using a consuetudinary practice of power positions division in PCI-PSI leded cultural institutions and public administrations. An article on *L'Unità* describe the new organism, in its title, as an “Institute of agricultural studies dedicated to Alcide Cervi”.¹²⁵ For the communist newspaper, the Institute had specific goals to reach: “[..] it will preserve the Cervi museum, i.e. the material donated by Alcide Cervi to the

¹²⁵ *L'Unità*, 26/04/1972, https://archivio.unita.news/assets/main/1972/04/26/page_006.pdf

Municipality of Gattatico, and conserve the 'Emilio Sereni Library', currently owned by the National Farmers' Alliance.”¹²⁶

The duality between Rome, where the ANC was based, and the axis Gattatico-Reggio Emilia, were at the base of the Institute's first structuring phase. In this regard, it's clear how, during this stage, the Rome political and cultural initiative, such as the national vocation of the Institute, was prevalent in shaping activities and functions.

In fact, the first meeting of the Administration Committee (CDA), the main operative organism of the Institute, was held in Reggio Emilia and coincided with the foundation act, while the second one, on 4 July 1972, was realized directly headquarters of the mixed group of the Chamber of Deputies, in Rome.¹²⁷ Following this line, a third one was held in the same place on 26 October 1972.¹²⁸

During these two meetings in the Italian capital three questions had to be solved: first, finding the economic sustainability for initiating the activities; second, creating a Scientific Committee that could operate in this sense; third, finding headquarters for the Institute.

The problem of how to finance the Institute's activities was raised immediately. Curti, Esposto, and Boldrini proposed to ask for the reconnaissance of the Institute by the Italian State as a moral entity of public law. In this way, it could be possible to pursue for a yearly State-sponsored contribute, as the one that the National Institute for the History of the Liberation Movement (INSMLI) have obtained in 1967.¹²⁹ In the meantime, a constitutional found provided by the Reggio Emilia Province, ANPI, ANC, and Gattatico was found. The choice of nominating Sandro Pertini, socialist, at that time President of the Deputy Chamber that, as we saw, had an important connection with Alcide Cervi's story, was included in the idea of giving the Institute the maximum political support available.¹³⁰

Regarding the composition of the Scientific Committee, the members' choice was given to Sereni, Esposto, and Curti, to hire high estimated Professors in agrarian and historical studies. Given these premises, and for granting a place that could function as the future Roman Office, on 26 October President Curti took the mandate for renting the Palace of the Ospedali Riuniti, in Piazza del Gesù, Rome. That prestigious building, in the future, should be the consultation

¹²⁶ *L'Unità*, 26/04/1972, https://archivio.unita.news/assets/main/1972/04/26/page_006.pdf .

¹²⁷ AIAC, Fond “Institute Alcide Cervi” [not cataloged], Series “Verbali dei Consigli di Amministrazione”, b1, *Verbale Consiglio di Amministrazione n.1*, 24 April 1972; *Verbale Consiglio di Amministrazione n.2*, 4 July 1972.

¹²⁸ AIAC, Fond “Institute Alcide Cervi” [not cataloged], Series “Verbali dei Consigli di Amministrazione”, b1, *Verbale Consiglio di Amministrazione n.3*, 26 October 1972.

¹²⁹ ‘Legge 16 gennaio 1967, n. 3, “Riconoscimento giuridico dell’Istituto nazionale per la storia del movimento di liberazione”’.

¹³⁰ AIAC, Fond “Institute Alcide Cervi” [not cataloged], Series “Verbali dei Consigli di Amministrazione”, b1, *Verbale Consiglio di Amministrazione n.1*, 24 April 1972

and conservation place for the Library Sereni, a location for cultural initiatives as well as a representative place.

Pertini also confirmed the intention of supporting a national presentation of the Institute, in the Fall of 1972, in the Capital. The official presentation event was organized in Rome, in the Capitolium, a prestigious building of the municipality, on 23 November 1972, near the centre of political power.¹³¹ The *Lectio magistralis* of Emilio Sereni, entitled “Countryside Resistance and Democracy in Italy”, is considerable as the first cultural initiative of the Institute.¹³² High-level cultural events, such as conferences, lessons, and research, will be, as we will see, the major and most important typology of activity proposed up to the late 1980s.



Figure 17. *L'Unità*, 24 November 1972¹³³

What happens, in the meantime, in Reggio Emilia and Gattatico? The city of Reggio Emilia, which officially, as the Statute said, was considered the main headquarter, was prevalently only

¹³¹ *L'Unità*, 24 November 1972, https://archivio.unita.news/assets/main/1972/11/24/page_006.pdf

¹³² *Nuova Agricoltura*, 25 November 1972.

¹³³ *L'Unità*, 24 November 1972, taken by the Author in AIAC, Fond “Archivio Emilio Sereni”, Series “Istituto Alcide Cervi”, box n.3, folder n.10.

a point for meetings and institutional celebrations, as we will see.¹³⁴ The first CDA held in Emilia-Romagna was only one year after the foundation, on 19 November 1973.¹³⁵ The Province offered a space for this scope. The main reasons behind this choice were creating a local event for the thirty Anniversary of the Cervi Brothers shooting, trying to propose the creation of a local Scientific Committee, and imagining a future for the Cervi house – even though both these two purposes, despite the involvement of personalities from Emilia-Romagna, were not realized in practice in the 1970s.

Gattatico, and specifically the House Cervi, lived a more complex history. On 11 April 1972, as shown in an official deliberation, the Reggio Emilia Province, to clarify the question of the property of Alcide Cervi heirs, started the practices for buying it.¹³⁶ The negotiation with the family started in February of the same year and was conducted during the promotion of the Institute Alcide Cervi Foundation. Considering the technical procedures behind the buying, conserved in the Archive of the Institute, the passage of property to the Province of Reggio Emilia, that it is still the owner of the building and nearby farm, was concluded only in 1975.¹³⁷

It's to consider that the "Museum Cervi", which Alcide defined as a series of objects related to his family and donated with the letter to the Reggio Emilia Province and Gattatico, was literally only a collection, with any concrete museological conceptualization behind. The memorabilia, especially the gifts' room where Alcide was used to guest the visitors, organized primordially with the help of the Reggio Emilia section of the PCI in 1961, as Siligardi said, was the only area for guests in the House Cervi.¹³⁸ For this reason, although visits continued, only the custody of Cervi Family members and volunteers continued granting the opening of the house on request of partisan and political groups.

Maria Cervi that was part of the CDA since the foundation, as family member, given to us the dimension of the lack of a real use of the building and the necessity expressed from part of the Cervi heirs, witness, and local community of gifting live to the Museum in the Cervi House. In a CDA meeting in 1983:

“[Maria] Cervi intervened, proposing that on the occasion of the 40th

¹³⁴ *Annali dell'Istituto 'Alcide Cervi'*, vol. 1 (Bologna: il Mulino, 1979), 433.

¹³⁵ AIAC, Fond "Institute Alcide Cervi" [not cataloged], Series "Verbali dei Consigli di Amministrazione", b1, *Verbale Consiglio di Amministrazione n.5*, 19 November 1973

¹³⁶ AIAC, Fond "Archivio Documentario della Famiglia Cervi", Series "Azienda Agricola Cervi ai Campi Rossi (1937-1970)", box n.5, folder n.25, *Accettazione donazione del Museo 'Cervi'. Estratto di Verbale di deliberazione del Consiglio Provinciale di Reggio Emilia*, 11 April 1972.

¹³⁷ Provincia di Reggio Emilia, ed., *Istituto Alcide Cervi: luogo di memoria e di ricerca per la storia della resistenza e della cultura contadina* (Reggio Emilia: Provincia di Reggio Emilia, 2008), 9.

¹³⁸ Siligardi, 'Musei della Resistenza e politiche della memoria', 283.

[anniversary of the shooting of the Cervi Brothers] a cultural initiative be organized at the Cervi museum, further enhancing its value and proceeding to make it increasingly a living cultural moment for the whole surrounding area.”¹³⁹

The Institute's Statute of 4 July 1977: main goals, decision-making process, and funding system.

As we saw, the Institute was born with a polycentric structure that reflects the peculiarity of the founding actors involved in the process. On the other hand, political entities influenced the Institute's activities slightly before the foundation. But what happened from inside? How could they address the main goals through Committees and financial support? To understand better the mechanisms behind the functioning it needed to consider, from inside, the base guidelines that moved the Institute's activity, especially in the 1970s and 1980s. Like other cultural institutions that were born in Italy after the end of the Second World War, on the border between public contribution and cultural and academic engagement, the Institute Alcide Cervi follows similar patterns and structures.¹⁴⁰

The Institute Alcide Cervi Statute, published on the first number of the “Annali” on the 4 July 1977 version, it's a helpful instrument for understanding how political action could directly influence the life of the organization.¹⁴¹ That text, with small modifications from the original 1972' one, corresponds to the end of the first structural phase of the Institute, exactly after the death of Emilio Sereni, on 20 March 1977. The Institute, from the Statute, had a central headquarters in Reggio Emilia (Art.1) and a second in Roma, for the Scientific Committee and the Library Emilio Sereni (Art 5). The Institute also got the free use of the House and the Cervi Farm, in Campirossi, Gattatico, bought in 1975 from the Provincial Administration of Reggio Emilia (Art. 6). The main goal of the Institute was:

¹³⁹ AIAC, Fond “Institute Alcide Cervi” [not cataloged], Series “Verbali dei Consigli di Amministrazione”, b1, *Verbale Consiglio di Amministrazione n.18*, 12 November 1983.

¹⁴⁰ See Trimarchi, *Economia e cultura: organizzazione e finanziamento delle istituzioni culturali*; Massimo Baioni, ‘Istituzioni e musei storici tra fascismo, guerra, Repubblica’, *Laboratoire italien. Politique et société*, no. 12 (26 November 2012): 81–95, <https://doi.org/10.4000/laboratoireitalien.639>; Zannino and Casalena, ‘Gli istituti culturali tra Stato e regioni’.

¹⁴¹ *Annali dell'Istituto 'Alcide Cervi'*, 1979, 1:433–38.

“Article 2. The ‘Alcide Cervi’ Institute promotes scientific and cultural activities in the field of agrarian studies and elaborations, from a historical, economic, social, and juridical point of view, in relation to the needs for the development of agriculture and the elevation of the peasantry, and in relation to studies on the Resistance movement.”¹⁴²

The ideological connection between Resistance and Farmers comes from the story of Alcide Cervi, recorded, as we saw, by Renato Nicolai.¹⁴³ The reference to the Resistance recurs as well in article 3: “In order to achieve its aims, the Institute [...] will facilitate all initiatives aimed [...] at regional, national, and international relations, in the spirit of the Resistance and the Constitution of the Italian Republic”.

To achieve its goals, the Institute, as mentioned in Article 4, focuses the attention on creating, on a national level, through the action of the Scientific Committee, “conferences, courses, debates, seminars, surveys, publications and similar forms of cultural activity”. Due to the relationship between Scientific Committee members and universities, the main public of this kind of activity was prevalently small and specialized. As an example, Renato Zangheri, who was Director of the Scientific Committee from Sereni’s death to the 1983, year of his election in the Deputy Chamber for the PCI, was Full Professor in the Bologna University since 1965.

But how did the decision-making process work? Following Article 8, the honorary Presidency, Associates Assembly, Administration Committee, President, and Board of Auditors were the main organisms of the Institute. It is to underline that all the President of the Institute, except for Massimo Bellotti, Italian Agricultural Confederation (CIA) vice President – former ANC - in the 1990s, had a proven political affiliation, covering an institutional role such as national parliament deputies, Province administrators, mayors. Following the list below, all of them were also involved in the Cervi Institute foundation or the activities of the House in Gattatico and were born around Reggio Emilia, again except Bellotti. The President, as we will see, will be central not only in representing the image of the Institute outside but also in defining the vision of the organization and future activities.

¹⁴² *Annali dell’Istituto ‘Alcide Cervi’*, 1:433.

¹⁴³ Cervi, *I miei sette figli*.

Table 1. List of the Institute Alcide Cervi's Presidents. Data aggregation made by the Author.

President	Presidency period	Political affiliation
Ivano Curti	1972-1986	Italian Socialist Party of Proletarian Unity (from 1964)
Otello Montanari	1986-1991	Italian Communist Party (up to 1990) Democratic Left Party (from 1991)
Massimo Bellotti	1991-1994	-
Ugo Benassi	1994-2006	Italian Communist Party (up to 1991) Democratic Left Party (from 1991)
Rossella Cantoni	2006-2015	Independent of Left
Albertina Soliani	2015-ongoing	Democratic Party (from 2007)

To them, it is to add the figure of the General Secretary, Attilio Esposto, born in Campania and PCI Politician in Rome. He oversaw the connections with the Roman headquarters, as we will see, demonstrating a key role in maintaining there the Emilio Sereni Library up to the early 2000s.

In terms of power balance inside the Institute, it is to clarify how the Institute organisms were composed and renovated. According to Article 7, was founded by the 4 Founders – Reggio Emilia Province, ANPI, CIA, Gattatico - and could accept ordinary associates. It is to be considered that, in the 1977 Statute, while the founders could have 8 representatives each in the Associates' Assembly, the ordinary ones could present only one representative. Considering that the Assembly had the power to elect the Administration Committee, as Article 11 said, where effectively most of the decisions were discussed and taken, the power weight of the founders granted them control of the Institute in the long term. The founders' representatives also had to be the half plus one member granted of the fifteen that composed the Administration Committee (Art. 12).

Finally, in this section, it is to consider the problem of financing a public-promoted cultural Institute. Referring to Keynes, who, in 1936, supported the necessity of public financing the culture through the “unjustified burden of taxation”, Trimarchi, a cultural economist, argued:

“As for the forms of public intervention in the cultural sector, Keynes essentially refers to indirect instruments, such as the encouragement of cultural consumption [...]; or to infrastructural intervention and capital endowment,

essentially the construction and allocation of buildings in which cultural events can be made available to the public, and through which cultural institutions can become financially autonomous. However, Keynes' confidence in the capacity for autonomous growth for state-supported cultural institutions only in the first phase of their existence will be belied by the facts.”¹⁴⁴

With these premises, investigating how the involvement of politics was relevant in the life of the Institute Cervi for granting the activities and surviving, is crucial to catch up with the main sources of funding that the Cervi Institute could count on. Central was finding money for hiring people, renting properties, paying maintenance, financing Conferences, and conducting research. The first financial fund was created through the founder's subscription for a total of 15.500.000 million Italian Lira.¹⁴⁵ The Article 17 of the Statute codified the main modality of contributing to the Institute funds:

“Article 17. The Institute provides for its operating expenses: a) With annual subscriptions and contributions of the participating entities; b) With any ordinary or extraordinary contributions from the State, the Regions, public bodies, and private citizens; c) With revenues from publications and other activities of a scientific nature d) With any income from patrimonial assets.”¹⁴⁶

For most of the Institute life, the major economic sponsors of the Institute were the Founders, with the Region Emilia Romagna. As the budgets of the Institute show, the main modality of contribution was a yearly subscription to the Institute, which, over time, saw the participation of municipalities, associations, provinces, other cultural institutes, and universities. For instance, in the one that summarizes the first years, from 1973 to 1976, the Municipality and the Province of Reggio Emilia, as well as the Region, result to be the principal actors that support economically the Institute structurization.¹⁴⁷ From time to time, as we will see later, the Institute received extraordinary funds *una tantum*, based on specific Institute projects, such as the renovation of the Museum, or participation in applications for cultural funds.

¹⁴⁴ Trimarchi, *Economia e cultura: organizzazione e finanziamento delle istituzioni culturali*, 27–28. [original quote translate from Italian]

¹⁴⁵ AIAC, Fond “Institute Alcide Cervi” [not cataloged], Series “Verbali dei Consigli di Amministrazione”, b1, *Verbale Consiglio di Amministrazione n.3*, 26 October 1972.

¹⁴⁶ *Annali dell’Istituto ‘Alcide Cervi’*, 1979, 1:437.

¹⁴⁷ AIAC, Fond “Institute Alcide Cervi” [not cataloged], Series “Bilanci”, b1, *Bilancio dal 1 Settembre 1973 to 31 Gennaio 1976*.

7

Bolderni, è accolto all'unanimità.

Il Consiglio incarica l'On.le Bolderni di raccogliere le firme degli On.li Esposito, Lambelli, Giolitti, Lombardi, Delandì (Amadei), Feroli (Pogliardi), Zaccagnini, Compagna, Piasini, Morini e Corvi.

Il Presidente e il Segretario Generale ad autorizzare trattative con gli Ospedali, Municipi proprietari di un immobile posto in Piazza del Gesù, da destinare a sede dell'Istituto. All'uopo, dovendo eventualmente versare cauzioni o anticipi, è necessario che gli Enti preposti al finanziamento provvedano a versare le quote di competenza all'Istituto. Tali quote, da considerare come fondo costituito dell'Istituto debbono essere così ripartite:

Provincia	=	5.000.000 =
Alleanza Naz. le Contadini	=	1.000.000 =
Associazione Naz. Partecipazioni	=	1.000.000 =
Comune di Gattatico	=	500.000 =

Inoltre la Provincia, provvederà ad iscrivere a Bilancio, per l'esercizio 1973, un contributo di 8.000.000 =

Il Consiglio autorizza il Sen. G. Sereni e l'On.le Attilio Esposito di ricercare il personale adatto per la Segreteria dell'Istituto.

Alle ore 14 la seduta viene tolta.

Letto, approvato e sottoscritto.

Il Presidente
(On.le Ljano Curti)
Ljano Curti

Il Segretario
(On.le Attilio Esposito)
Attilio Esposito

Figure 18. Minute of the Administration Committee Meeting n.3, 26 October 1972. Extract relating to the first financial budget report of the Institute Alcide Cervi (amount in Italian Lira).¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸ AIAC, Fond "Institute Alcide Cervi" [not cataloged], Series "Verbali dei Consigli di Amministrazione", b1, Verbale Consiglio di Amministrazione n.3, 26 October 1972.

The problem that emerges is granting the stability of the money flow, considering that most of the funds, as the budget shows, came from yearly subscriptions of public entities that must be

deliberated and paid from time to time. Political changes in public administration, elections, and payment problems could create deficits in planning the budget expenses for each year. Also, the payments were delayed

several times, leading to discrepancies between the prospected entrances and the expenses. Due to these premises, a discourse around the difference between National, Regional, and local funding is to be defined.

The tentative of having a State stable funding, which, as mentioned, was the idea of Curti and Esposto in early 1972, took time to find success. The proposals of law presented in the Chamber of Deputies were launched twice, the first in 1973¹⁴⁹ for granting eighty million lire and the second in 1977¹⁵⁰ for 100 million lire for a year, found several difficulties to be approved. Despite this delay, through the direct involvement of Sandro Pertini, the Law n.123 for financing the Cultural Institutions passed on 2 Aprile 1980 and the Institute Alcide Cervi was inserted in the financing tables.¹⁵¹ The tables were revised every three years, with possible changes in the quantity of the yearly subsidy based on the political majority and national budget issues. Also, the Region Emilia Romagna, created only in 1970, had a crucial role in stabilizing the Institute funding: the administration, solidly led by an Alliance between PCI and PSI,

CONTO CONSUNTIVO		Importo dell'Entrata
DALL' 1.9. 1973		
Art.	Parte 1 ^a - ENTRATA	
	<u>Titolo 1^o - Entrate effettive</u>	
	<u>Sez. 1^a - Entrate ordinarie</u>	
	a) Contributo Amministrazione Prov.le di R.E.	14.000.000
	" " " di Bologna	1.499.850
	" " " di Bologna	6.000.000
	Contributo Comune di Reggio Emilia	4.999.950
	" " di Bologna	999.850
	" " di Campegine	500.000
	" " di Cadelbosco Sopra	200.000
	" " di Quattro Castella	50.000
	" " di Vezzano s/Crostolo	1.000.000
	" " di Correggio	1.000.000
	" " di S. Ilario d'Enza	20.000.000
	" " Regione Emilia-Romagna	3.000.000
	" " A.N.P.I. (residuo attivo)	500.000
	" " Comune di Campegine (residuo attivo)	4.000.000
	" " Alleanza Nazionale Contadini	17.000.000
	" " Prestito da rimborsare	
	b) Offerte da visitatori museo "A.Cervi" in Campegine	55.000
	c) Interessi su saldi bancari e postali	571.234
	TOTALE ENTRATE	75.375.884

Figure 19. Institute Cervi balance sheet, entrances from 1 September 1973 to 31 January 1976.

¹⁴⁹ Camera dei Deputati – Portale Storico, Atti Parlamentari, *Proposta di Legge n.1615 “Concessione di un contributo dello Stato all’istituto “Alcide Cervi” per la Storia della Resistenza e del movimento contadino*, 2 February 1973 <https://documenti.camera.it/dati/leg06/lavori/stampati/pdf/16150001.pdf>

¹⁵⁰ Camera dei Deputati – Portale Storico, Atti Parlamentari, *Proposta di Legge n.1405 “Concessione di un contributo dello Stato all’istituto “Alcide Cervi”*, 28 April 1977 <https://documenti.camera.it/dati/leg07/lavori/stampati/pdf/14050001.pdf>

¹⁵¹ ‘Legge 2 Aprile 1980, n. 123, “Norme per l’erogazione di contributi statali ad enti culturali”’, *Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana*, 8 April 1980.

considering that the communists were excluded from national governments, had all the interest in having an autonomous local cultural politic.¹⁵² With the Regional Law n.7 of 1977, Emilia Romagna Regional Administration allocates a yearly budget:

“[...] to promote the protection and enhancement of the historical, cultural and political heritage of anti-fascism and the Resistance, which it recognizes as fundamental values of the constitutional order of the State and the Region [...]”¹⁵³

This law, strongly based on the concept of Antifascism, in the broader framework of the rise of the spreading contraposition between Left and Right political terrorism in Italy in the 1970s, as the historian Dondi remembered, gave several cultural institutions and associations a chance to ask for regional funding.¹⁵⁴ The list of eligible entities was made selecting the ones in charge, on the Regional level, of writing, preserving, and disseminating the Resistance's history and memory:

“1) the Emilia-Romagna Deputation for the History of the Resistance and Liberation War; 2) the provincial historical Institutes of the Resistance formally established and operating in Emilia-Romagna; 3) **the ‘Cervi’ Foundation**; 4) the Partisan Associations or Federations with a national structure, which are recognized as moral entities; 5) study and research centers pursuing aims similar to those provided for by this law; 6) the Committee for honoring the Fallen of the Municipality of Marzabotto - gold medal for military valor.”¹⁵⁵

It's interesting to note that, except for the Emilia-Romagna Deputation for the History of the

¹⁵² See Carlo De Maria, ‘La questione regionale tra anni Settanta e Ottanta dalla prospettiva dell’Emilia Romagna. Lineamenti di un dibattito comparato’, *E-Review. Rivista degli Istituti Storici dell’Emilia-Romagna in Rete*, 31 May 2013, <https://doi.org/10.12977/ereview22>.

¹⁵³ ‘Legge regionale 31 gennaio 1977, n.7, “Tutela e valorizzazione del patrimonio storico, culturale e politico dell’antifascismo”’, available, with revisions up to 2001, at https://demetra.regione.emilia-romagna.it/al/articolo?urn=er:assemblealegislativa:legge:1977;7&dl=LR/2/1977/LR_1977_7_s1/LR_1977_7_s1_v1.xml&dl_db=y&dl_t=text/xml&dl_a=y&dl_id=10&pr=idx.0;artic.1;articparziale.0#not2.

¹⁵⁴ Mirco Dondi, ed., *I neri e i rossi : terrorismo, violenza e informazione negli anni Settanta*, Controluce. Riflessi ; 4 (Nardò: Controluce, 2008); Mirco Dondi, *L'eco del boato : storia della strategia della tensione, 1965-1974*, Economica Laterza ; 1028 (Roma: Laterza, 2023).

¹⁵⁵ ‘Legge regionale 31 gennaio 1977, n.7, “Tutela e valorizzazione del patrimonio storico, culturale e politico dell’antifascismo”’, available, with revisions up to 2001, at https://demetra.regione.emilia-romagna.it/al/articolo?urn=er:assemblealegislativa:legge:1977;7&dl=LR/2/1977/LR_1977_7_s1/LR_1977_7_s1_v1.xml&dl_db=y&dl_t=text/xml&dl_a=y&dl_id=10&pr=idx.0;artic.1;articparziale.0#not2.

Resistance and Liberation War, nowadays called *Istituto Parri*, in Bologna that was yearly subsidized by the law, the other institutions received money not on a fixed basis but on the political evaluation of their activities and proposals. Due to this premise, both national and regional funds were a continued object of political discussion, with the risk of being canceled or delayed: the Institute Alcide Cervi administration had to stay strongly connected with national and regional politicians, on an institutional but also personal basis.

The smaller entities, that, for the Institute, represented another fundamental source of money, worked in a more complex way: to understand the mechanics of ordinary funding for smaller political entities. on the border between personal connections and negotiation, let's take, for instance, the yearly Associates' Assembly held on 12 May 1984 in the provincial council chamber of Reggio Emilia.¹⁵⁶ The presentation of the balance sheet showed a deficit due to the “failure to adjust members' contributions ordinary, in some cases stopped for years” e in undervaluation of the costs of the Institute structure and scientific activities. Luciano Marzocchi¹⁵⁷, representing the Administration of Forlì's Province, intervened saying:

“[Marzocchi] is committed to overcoming the Forlì Provincial Administration's arrears and to requesting an immediate payment of arrears and a significant increase in the fee, as well as to promote the accession to the Institute of cities such as Cesena and Rimini that are part of the Forlì area.”¹⁵⁸

On the question of granting the Institute life based on an intermingling between public administrations and personal relationships, Professor Giulio Bonfiglioli, a member of the CDA, added:

“The budget [...] does not present any immediate dangers but forces the Institute to live an uncertain life. He believes that the Institute must be based

¹⁵⁶ AIAC, Fond “Institute Alcide Cervi” [not cataloged], Series “Assemblee dei soci”, b2, *Assemblea ordinaria dei Soci del 12 Maggio 1984, n. II*.

¹⁵⁷ Luciano Marzocchi, PCI politician in Forlì, wich was President of Forlì Resistance Institute from the 1978 to the 1989 and, at the same time, member of the Forlì Provincial Administration, was similar to the role covered by the Presidency in the Cervi Institute. This study, that the Author of this thesis conducted in 2021, explains the entanglements between the biography of a communist politician - and a partisan - and the political initiative behind the creation of the Forlì Resistance Institute, as well as dynamics of public-funding. Edoardo Bastianini, ‘Luciano Marzocchi e l’Istituto Storico Provinciale della Resistenza di Forlì. Linee biografiche, attività politica e ruolo nell’Istituto’ (Tesi di laurea magistrale in Storia contemporanea, Relatore Prof. Carlo De Maria, Correlatore Prof. Roberto Balzani, Bologna, Università di Bologna, 2021).

¹⁵⁸ AIAC, Fond “Institute Alcide Cervi” [not cataloged], Series “Assemblee dei soci”, b2, *Assemblea ordinaria dei Soci del 12 Maggio 1984, n. II*.

essentially on relations with public bodies (State, Regions, Provinces and Municipalities) towards which it must operate, above all by making itself known for its continuous capacity for cultural and scientific production. It must have personal relationships with public administrators to make the Institute known.”¹⁵⁹

In terms of expenses, the main voices were related to the maintenance and rent of the Rome building in Piazza del Gesù, for research, conferences, and publications and, in small part, for Reggio Emilia and ordinary expenses of the Cervi House in Gattatico, such as heating and electricity. The gradual increasing value of the expenses related to Rome during the 1980s, due to personnel hiring, will require a reflection, in the 1990s, on the economic sustainability of the Institute structure which was the center of the following transformations.

The Conferences period: cultural activities of the Institute Cervi up to 1987.

For all the Curti's Presidency, up to the Omar Montanari nomination in 1986, most cultural initiatives proposed by the Institute Alcide Cervi were focused on giving, to the new organism, on one hand, a strong scientific base, and, on the other, a national vocation that transcended from its physical headquarters in Reggio Emilia Province and Rome. To investigate this activity flow is possible to count on the minutes of the Administration Committee meetings and of the yearly Associates Assembly, as well as the balance sheets and the Annali. For our research, in this section, 1987, the first year of Montari's Presidency, will be also partially considered since several events were the product of decisions taken previously.

During Curti's Presidency, Emilio Sereni gave the cultural address, up to 1977. Later, the Professors in charge of the Scientific Committee, in cooperation with Curti and connected by the activity of the General Secretary Esposto, led the research activities focusing, in the Institute goals area, on their specific study interests. The consequence was the realization, on all the national territory, of a series of Conferences and Seminars, which were, in part, the product of the research sponsored by the Institute budget.

¹⁵⁹ AIAC, Fond “Institute Alcide Cervi” [not cataloged], Series “Assemblee dei soci”, b2, *Assemblea ordinaria dei Soci del 12 Maggio 1984, n.11.*

Starting from the official presentation of the Institute, in 1973, to 1987, fourteen Conferences were organized. The series of major Congresses related to the History of the Peasant Movement, in 1975, 1980 and 1986 confirm that the main topic was the investigation of the farmer movement's history, concerning Resistance and Antifascism. All these events focused prevalently on a literate public, with previous historical knowledge or academic formation, and were presented by local authorities from universities and political administrations. The national vocation of the scientific activities was, in that way, granted from the broad coverage of the locations proposed, for prestige purposes of all the actors involved in the organization.

Table 2. Institute Cervi Conferences from 1973 to 1987. Data aggregation made by the Author.

Conference name	City, Region	Year
Institute Official Presentation with Emilio Sereni's lesson "Countryside Resistance and democracy in Italy"	Rome, Lazio	1973
1st Congress on the History of the Peasant Movement on "Antifascism, Resistance, Peasants"	Reggio Emilia, Emilia-Romagna	1975
Rome office inauguration Conference "The Peasant Movement and the History of Italy. Reflections on post-World War II historiography"	Rome, Lazio	1976
Conference on "Peasants and the Agrarian Bloc in Sicily from the Giolittian Age to Fascism"	Palermo, Sicily	1977
Conference on "Fascism and the countryside in Basilicata and the Mezzogiorno"	Potenza, Basilicata	1978
Conference on "Emilio Sereni scholar and historian of agriculture"	Volterra, Tuscany	1978
Conference on "Rebellion, social protest, resistance organization in the countryside of sharecropping Italy"	Urbino, Marche	1979
Conference on "Peasant Documentation and Museography"	Cuneo, Piedmont	1980
2nd Congress on the History of the Peasant Movement on "The conditions of the Italian countryside and the agrarian policy of the anti-fascist coalition governments from September 1943 to 1947"	Salerno, Campania	1980
Conference on "Agriculture and peasants in Lombardy between war and Resistance"	Brescia, Lombardy	1982
Conference on "The Thought and Work of Ruggiero Grieco"	Foggia, Puglia	1983
Study conference on "La boje! Peasant movements and rural society in the Po Valley in the second half of the 19th century"	Venezia, Veneto	1984
3rd Congress on the History of the Peasant Movement on "Sharecroppers and Democracy in Italy"	Siena, Tuscany	1986
International Conference on "The European Agricultural Landscape from the Middle Ages to the Contemporary Age"	Cesena, Emilia-Romagna	1987

To understand how selected and small the public this kind of initiative was, it is meaningful to investigate briefly how the outcome of the Conferences was divulged. The main way was the “Annali dell’Istituto Alcide Cervi”.¹⁶⁰ Published in 1979 and edited by Gaetano Arfè and Franco Cazzola (co-director), they, but not always, repropose editorially selected study materials from the conferences organized by the Institute. The purpose, as Gaetano Arfè underlined in his presentation to the first number, was to give new life to the figure of the “militant historian”, in the space of rigorous scientific research.¹⁶¹ Up to the number 4, they also contained a small appendix, called “Notiziario”, related to the Institute's activities.¹⁶² This heavy publication represented, up to 2007, the main academic divulgation instrument in the hands of the Institute, which, from the mid-1970s, also occasionally published pamphlets, catalogs, and other minor publications.

The Institute also aimed to give students of the Farmers movement scholarships and prizes but, in this regard, one of the only concrete initiatives that took place during the Curti Presidency was the award of 4 study grants of 500,000 lire for the two best graduates from the Faculty of Agriculture of Reggio Emilia and Portici, near Naples.¹⁶³

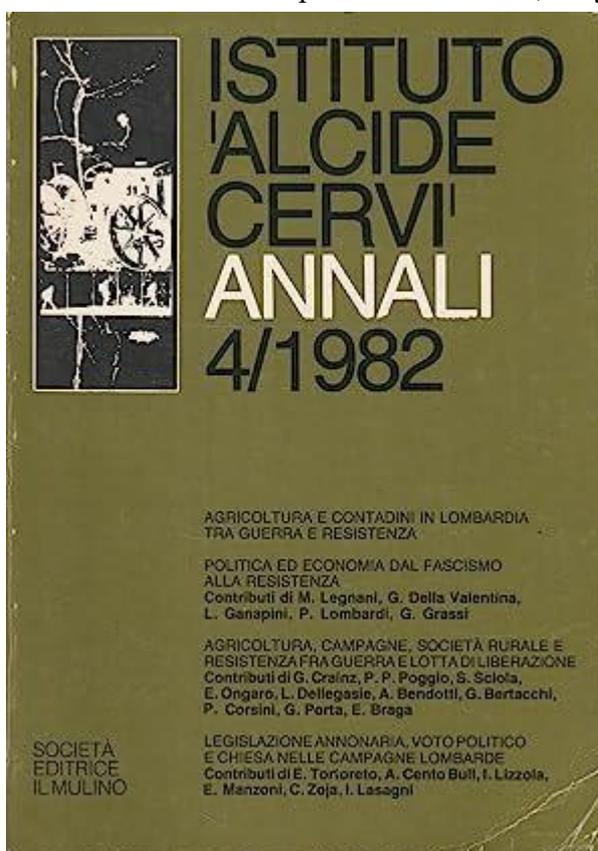


Figure 20. "Annali dell'Istituto Alcide Cervi", 4, 1982.

The celebration was held on the 5 June 1977 in Reggio Emilia 1977.¹⁶⁴ A second edition of this prize was promoted in 1980, with the thematic “The professional organizations of Italian peasants from '45 to the present.”¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁰ The ‘Annali’ n.17-18, published with a single volume, offer the index of all the precedent numbers. See *Annali dell’Istituto ‘Alcide Cervi’*, vol. 17–18 (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1996).

¹⁶¹ *Annali dell’Istituto ‘Alcide Cervi’*, 1979, 1:5.

¹⁶² For the first number, *Annali dell’Istituto ‘Alcide Cervi’*, 1:423–38.

¹⁶³ AIAC, Fond “Institute Alcide Cervi” [not cataloged], Series “Verbali dei Consigli di Amministrazione”, b1, *Verbale Consiglio di Amministrazione n.9*, 22 November 1977.

¹⁶⁴ *Annali dell’Istituto ‘Alcide Cervi’*, 1979, 1:423.

¹⁶⁵ AIAC, Fond “Institute Alcide Cervi” [not cataloged], Series “Assemblee dei soci”, b1, *Assemblea ordinaria dei Soci n.6*, 24 November 1979.

The Rome office, inaugurated officially with a presentation of Renato Zangheri on “The Peasant Movement and the History of Italy. Reflections on post-World War II historiography” in December 1976, oversaw the Emilio Sereni Library and, from the 1980s, the Archives of the Farmer movement associations.¹⁶⁶ In terms of public initiatives, the space was used especially, for book presentations and scientific lessons for the academic public. Between the others, let’s remember here the first cycle of book presentations made in the years 1978-1979¹⁶⁷ and the series of lessons on the history of agriculture done in 1981.¹⁶⁸

The Institute took also care of the realization of several exhibitions: the figurative arts exhibition on the theme of Art and the rural world (1980, Turin and Matera); the exhibition about Bicycles verboten (1983, Gattatico, Reggio E.); *I fogli contadini*. The clandestine press 1943 - April 1944 (1984, Reggio Emilia); *La boje! Moti contadini e società rurale padana nel secondo Ottocento* (1984, Venice); Iconographic and documentary exhibition Peasant uprisings and rural Po Valley society in the second half of the 19th century (1984, San Benedetto Po, Mantua). As the report of the Presidency showed, in 1987, several of these exhibitions were still on an itinerant tour in schools and municipal buildings across Italy, revealing themselves as the first educational and didactic initiatives that the Institute opened to the younger public.¹⁶⁹

The last and most important public initiatives promoted by the Institute were the commemorations, based around a sort of civil calendar created on the border between the story of the Institute Alcide Cervi and the memory of the family itself. Up to the 1990s, the main dates to be remembered were the shooting of the Cervi Brothers and the death of Alcide Cervi and Emilio Sereni. The accent on these anniversaries reinforces the idea of the strong ideological and dialogical role of these two founders in recognizing, on the border of Cervi’s brothers’ myth, the cultural and moral authority of the Institute.

It is also interesting to observe how the commemorations were one of the biggest moments of reconciliation with the territory of origin of the Cervi family and with the House-Museum in Gattatico. As reported in the first number of the “Annali”:

“The beginning of the Institute's activities can be traced back to the celebrations for the 30th anniversary of the Resistance, during which the Institute

¹⁶⁶ *Annali dell’Istituto ‘Alcide Cervi’*, 1996, 17–18:353–88.

¹⁶⁷ AIAC, Fond “Istituto Alcide Cervi” [not cataloged], Series “Assemblee dei soci”, b1, *Assemblea ordinaria dei Soci n.6*, 24 November 1979.

¹⁶⁸ AIAC, Fond “Istituto Alcide Cervi” [not cataloged], Series “Assemblee dei soci”, b1, *Assemblea ordinaria dei Soci n.10*, 15 May 1982.

¹⁶⁹ AIAC, Fond “Istituto Alcide Cervi” [not cataloged], Series “Assemblee dei soci”, b2, *Assemblea ordinaria dei Soci n.14*, 19 August 1987.

promoted events in memory of the sacrifice of the seven Cervi Brothers in Campegine, Reggio Emilia [December 1973] and Rome [February 1974]”.¹⁷⁰

This reconciliation between Rome and Reggio Emilia based on the Resistance is at the origin of the maintenance of the moral and political value of the Cervi public memory. On 26 April 1980, on the occasion of the celebrations for the 35th anniversary of the National Liberation and the tenth anniversary of the death of Alcide Cervi, Sandro Pertini, who meanwhile, became the President of the Italian Republic, visited the House, where a small restructuration was done in the plan to transform Casa Cervi into a national “Museum of the Resistance in the Countryside”.¹⁷¹ He also paid homage to the common tomb of Alcide and his sons in the Gattatico Cemetery.¹⁷² With a similar modality, a Commemoration of the tenth anniversary of Emilio Sereni's death was led by PCI Senator Valenzi on 15 March 1987, in Cervi Museum at the presence, citing the 1987 Associates Assembly minute, of three generations of the Sereni family and a large audience.¹⁷³

Apart from a few commemorations, mostly attended by family members and local communities, and a pair of photographic exhibitions held in 1982, the House Cervi was far to live the pilgrimages and the big participations of the late stage of Alcide's life. Also, the building from the late 1970s was under small renovation works, but any plan of creating a real museum was put into action and realized. The 1980 plan for a national Museum of Resistance in the countryside, with the collaboration of the INSMLI revealed itself as only a hypothesis. The visits and the custody were managed by Irnes Cervi, paid occasionally by Gattatico municipality, and hired by the Institute Cervi on 1 January 1980.¹⁷⁴ With the help of volunteers, the house, as a place of memory, was maintained open to the public, made prevalently by former partisans and political groups, that, unfortunately, in the course of the 1980s, gradually decayed. From 1986, with the new Montanari Presidency, as we will see, the house had to live a new phase of its story, starting from a concrete project of musealization.

¹⁷⁰ *Annali dell'Istituto 'Alcide Cervi'*, 1979, 1:423.

¹⁷¹ AIAC, Fond “Institute Alcide Cervi” [not cataloged], Series “Assemblee dei soci”, b1, *Assemblea ordinaria dei Soci n.7*, 29 October 1980.

¹⁷² *L'Unità*, 27 April 1980, https://archivio.unita.news/assets/main/1980/04/27/page_002.pdf

¹⁷³ AIAC, Fond “Institute Alcide Cervi” [not cataloged], Series “Assemblee dei soci”, b2, *Assemblea ordinaria dei Soci n.14*, 19 August 1987.

¹⁷⁴ AIAC, Fond “Institute Alcide Cervi” [not cataloged], Series “Assemblee dei soci”, b1, *Assemblea ordinaria dei Soci n.6*, 24 November 1979.

Conclusive thoughts: establishing scientific premises for a cultural Institute affirmation under Rome prevalently initiative.

This chapter shows how the Institute Alcide Cervi was ideologically and politically founded through the strong role of the PCI and PSI. This process started slightly before the death of Alcide Cervi, the main witness of the Cervi public memory and catalysator of the associations of the farmers' movements to the Italian Resistance during the Second World War. Alcide Cervi and Emilio Sereni, through their donations, the first of the House Cervi in Gattatico and the collections of objects about his sons, the second with his Library, were the two ideological Founder. The key role of the Province of Reggio Emilia, which accepted the challenge posed by Alcide of preserving his memory, and of the National Farmers Alliance, based in Rome, both PCI led since the post-war period, were at the centre of the political-sponsored process of institutionalization of the Cervi history.

What emerged from the foundation, in 1972, and the first structurization of the Institute was the duality between Rome and the axis Reggio Emilia-Gattatico. The first fifteen years, up to 1986, see a strong prevalence of Rome, and its national vocation, in the Emilia Romagna section. That decision stride looking at the provenance of the money: in fact, after the failed tentative for a State stable public funding, most of the financial subscriptions for the Institute came directly, in their majority, from Emilia-Romagna. Due to these circumstances, the Rome office was financed mostly by local funds from Emilia Romagna, where the opening of House Cervi for visitors, not yet properly musealized, was let to part of his family and volunteers, without a continuous cultural program.

A look at the cultural initiatives proposed by the Institute showed, as well, the prevalence of academic-oriented Conferences, book presentations and exhibitions, to affirm the scientific authority of the newborn institute. The connection with universities across the country gave the dimension of national aspiration, with the falling of the local power of the Cervi brother's story, including the participation of a general and massive public. The commemorative events, done with the presence of politics, such as the anniversary of the Cervi brothers shooting, the Alcide Cervi and Emilio Sereni disappearances, reconnected these two souls, remembering the ideological connections between the Cervi brothers' story – and their house and tomb – with the finalities of the cultural Institute founded in their names.

Chapter Three: Crossing the 1990s. The Cervi Institute's transformation. 1986-2008

Doing “mass” initiatives. Problems and innovations of the Montanari Presidency. 1986-1991

“Since the birth of the Institute, important cultural projects have been realized, but [Institute] Cervi's activities, continuing along the path followed to date, can and must, in relation to society's renewed needs, achieve new and more important goals, at the moment only hindered by a heavy financial situation.”¹⁷⁵

“Institute Alcide Cervi”, a pamphlet made by the Reggio Emilia Province, 1987.

In the 1980s, during the last stages of Curti's Presidency, the life of the Institute Alcide Cervi saw a first phase of difficulties, perceivable reading the Administration Committee and Associates' Assembly meetings reports. There were three main issues to be faced: the prevalence, that we described previously, of the Institute's national vocation on the axis Reggio Emilia-Gattatico, the economic sustainability of the growing structure, and the broader crisis of the Resistance values,¹⁷⁶ which reflected in a gradual and continuous fall of visits to the House Cervi. As Cooke remembers, despite the involvement of the President of the Republic Sandro Pertini in empowering the connections between the Resistance and the Republic in public events, the anti-fascist paradigm was put under attack prevalently by the political battle between PCI and PSI.¹⁷⁷

As we described, if, on the one hand, Curti and Esposito organized the Institute through a solid academic-focused vocation, taking care of the connections with political actors and universities, on the other side the centrality of Rome as the main representative point for the

¹⁷⁵ Inside front cover of Amministrazione Provinciale di Reggio Emilia, *L'Istituto Alcide Cervi* (Reggio E.: Tecnograf, 1987).

¹⁷⁶ See Massimo Legnani, 'Crisi e vitalità di un paradigma 1986-1994', *Italia Contemporanea* 213 (1998): 807–16.

¹⁷⁷ Cooke, *The Legacy of the Italian Resistance*, 2011, 127–33.

Institute's scientific production was evident. The House Cervi, as its potential as a place of memory, wasn't used for any major cultural initiatives but only for sporadic visits, commemorations, and small exhibitions. The Rome Office, instead, was in charge, from the 1980s, of conserving the Sereni Library and the archives of the Farmers' movements, which, over the decade, were gradually cataloged and made accessible to the public.¹⁷⁸

It is also to consider how this structural tripartition impacted the economic sustainability of the Institute. As mentioned, most of the funds came from local administrations, especially the Emilia Romagna Regional Government and the Province of Reggio Emilia, and, with the law n.123 of 1980, from an annual contribution of the national Minister of Culture.¹⁷⁹ The Rome office, with a prestigious location in Piazza del Gesù, with its costly rent and employees, was one of the main reasons for the rise of the stable functioning expenses in the Institute budget. On the other side, the costs for research and conferences realized prevalently outside the Institute headquarters, covered an increasing, although inconstant, amount of the yearly budget, while the administration in Reggio Emilia and the small renovations in House Cervi took only a smaller percentage of the total money available. In general terms, in 1986, for instance, the expenses were 400.824.851 million lire, with 36,18% of the resources dedicated to “cultural and scientific initiatives” and the rest for the ordinary administration, such as office expenses and personnel.¹⁸⁰ The continuous delay in the payments from the associate entities, in synergy with the rising costs, contributed decisively to a reach of concrete passivity in the budget in the late 1980s. The problem, which will become central later on, of how to make the activities sustainable and, at the same time, how to engage and maintain the reliability of the local authorities' money flow, considering that most of the funds come from there, started to be at the center of the discussed problems in the Institute Leading Committee.

Lastly, the Institute life, due to the presence inside the Committee, of PCI politicians and former partisans, suffered tangentially from the Resistance values crisis in the 1980s. In this sense, it's meaningful to remember the words of the ANPI President Arrigo Boldrini in the 1987 Associates' Assembly:

“[...] recently, certain sectors of the Italian press and political circles have been engaged in a historical-cultural counter-offensive that takes the form of

¹⁷⁸ Provincia di Reggio Emilia, *Istituto Alcide Cervi: luogo di memoria e di ricerca per la storia della resistenza e della cultura contadina*, 2–3.

¹⁷⁹ ‘Legge 2 Aprile 1980, n. 123, “Norme per l'erogazione di contributi statali ad enti culturali”’.

¹⁸⁰ AIAC, Fond “Institute Alcide Cervi” [not cataloged], Series “Bilanci”, b1, *Bilancio al 31 dicembre 1986*.

historical misinformation of the events linked to the Resistance; a counter-offensive tending to reduce the significance of facts that instead contributed greatly to the restoration of democracy in Italy. We must not, therefore, allow a tendency to debase the historical value of one of the most glorious periods in recent history.”¹⁸¹

Boldrini refers, as the historian Focardi remembers, to the anti-fascist narrative that was put under indictment and shaken hard during the 1980s. What determined the process of radical criticism of the anti-fascist paradigm was the change in the political framework, characterized by the birth of the so-called *Pentapartito (Five-Party)*, the government political alliance led by PSI, and the renewed isolation, as opposition, of the PCI. This important stimulus to memory revisionism came from the political need for a profound institutional renewal promoted since the early 1980s by Bettino Craxi's Socialist Party. The so-called 'great reform', of which Craxi became the advocate, found in the structure of the Constitution 'born out of the Resistance' an obstacle to be overcome to found that “new Republic” that, in the intentions of the socialist leadership group.¹⁸² To put a limit to this political derive, and to transform the Institute Alcide Cervi as a proactive actor in this debate. Boldrini, proposed:

"[...] it is necessary to broaden the social base [of the Alcide Cervi Institute] not only to obtain more contributions but particularly because this serves to spread what the Cervi Institute is and what its initiatives mean.”¹⁸³

The issue of enlarging the membership base was very much on the Institute's mind. As shown by estimates reported in the 1986 report of activities, the Assembly of Members continually lamented the progressive reduction of visitors to House Cervi. Through the help of the administrative officer Sabrina Montipò, in March 2024, an untied file in the current AIAC Archive related to statistical data on House visits. Four reports, that underlined that this question was a crucial problem for Institute CDA, were collected together: the ones with data referred to 1984, 1986, 1989, and 1990. Considering that the data were taken with a large margin of

¹⁸¹ AIAC, Fond “Institute Alcide Cervi” [not cataloged], Series “Assemblee dei soci”, b2, *Assemblea ordinaria dei Soci del 19 Settembre 1987, n.14*.

¹⁸² Focardi, *La guerra della memoria*, 56–57.

¹⁸³ AIAC, Fond “Institute Alcide Cervi” [not cataloged], Series “Assemblee dei soci”, b2, *Assemblea ordinaria dei Soci del 19 Settembre 1987, n.14*.

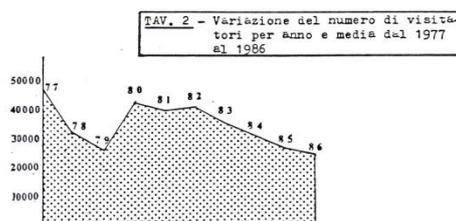
estimation,¹⁸⁴ it's interesting to see that, if in 1977 the visits to the House reached 48.500 visitors during the 1980s the visits decreased continuously up to 12.351 in 1988.

To catch up on the connection between the Resistance values crisis and the fall of museum visits it's important to make a few considerations. First, the Institute's focalization on scientific activities gave the House Cervi a secondary role, more representative and political but less interesting for the mass public. Secondly, the spaces of the House, as well as the people in charge of opening it, were not organized as a proper museum up to the early 1990s, with a first reorganization, but especially up to 2001, the year of the inauguration of the new set up. As Cerri remembered, up to the 1990s, the Museum continued to guest visitors in the House, visiting the living spaces, and the farm and showing, counting stories about the Cervi's life, documents, and objects that were owned by the seven brothers and Alcide.¹⁸⁵ There were also small temporary exhibitions, insufficient for the visitors' engagement, and their publicization of them was almost inexistent, relying on the fame of Alcide Cervi. Third, and most important, the fall of the visits is to

Table 3. Statistical data tables on the House Cervi's visits from 1977 to 30 September 1989.

ANNO	PULMAN	VISITATORI
1977	388	48.500
1978	272	34.000
1979	222	27.750
1980	352	44.000
1981	327	40.875
1982	338	42.250
1983	288	36.000
1984	254	31.750
1985	218	27.250
1986	203	25.375
TOT.	2861	357.750
MEDIA	286.1	35.775

TAB. A - Numero di pulman per anno e totale dei visitatori.



Dati statistici affluenza Museo

MUSEO CERVI
Bilancio provvisorio affluenza al 30/9/1989

	1987	1988	1989 (al 30 sett.)
Visitatori	12738	12351	12285

¹⁸⁴ Up to 1986, the criteria for estimating the visits was, as reported in the 1987 report, calculating 50 visitors for each bus for organized visits and calculating that those visits represented 40% of the total. Only from 1987, the calculation of the visitor without organized groups were covered properly, allowing a reduction of the estimation, in favor of more real data. AIAC, Untied File in the current administrative archive, *Raccolta di dati statistici sulle visite al Museo Cervi dal 1977 al 1990*.

¹⁸⁵ Cerri, *La pastasciutta dei Cervi: fame, dono e sfida antifascista in una festa del luglio 1943*, 158.

be inserted in the change of the public involved. The loss of radicalization in the society of the PCI and the gradual disappearance of the Partisans, direct representation, for age reasons, “Age of Witness” as termed by Annette Wieviorka Wiervoka’s definition, of the legacy of Italian Resistance, required a better understanding of how the audience evolved.¹⁸⁶ The 1990 Report, produced in Reggio Emilia on 5 March 1991, put at the center the question of the shift in the user typology: the huge decline of the “organized trip”, organized by diversified different entities, especially partisan associations, was characterized prevalently by the old age of the visitors, more than 60 years old, and a few national and international delegations. Instead, the schools' affluence, especially elementary school students and teachers, was gradually increasing. As the monthly 1990 table shows, April, which coincides with the Liberation Day Anniversary, was the most attended month, especially by occasional visitors.¹⁸⁷ The educational and generational shift that started in the 1990s is still perceivable in the actual activity of the Museum, where school trips represent most of the Museum visitors.

Table 4. Statistical monthly data table about House Cervi’s visitors in 1990, with a comparison with 1989.

Tab.1-Dati affluenza visitatori 1990

Mese	singoli	scuole	gite	iniziative	delegaz.	TOTALE	1989	+/-
GEN.	93	30	42	0	0	165	194	-29
FEB.	149	0	127	0	0	276	224	52
MAR.	219	105	185	150	0	659	1254	-595
APR.	1238	1687	650	90	11	3676	3389	287
MAG.	792	796	564	0	17	2169	3316	-1147
GIU.	244	0	994	0	6	1244	1268	-24
LUG.	150	0	150	600	5	905	783	122
AGO.	368	0	59	30	40	497	605	-108
SETT.	457	50	784	100	40	1431	1252	179
OTT.	130	110	878	40	0	1158	1678	-520
NOV.	153	0	100	0	0	253	253	0
DIC.	118	0	0	25	0	143	140	3
	4111	2778	4533	1035	119	12576	14356	-1780

Looking back with nostalgia at the funeral of Alcide Cervi in 1970 and the mass participation they had achieved, at that time memory of a distant past, the Institute was preparing for a new phase in its activities. Already in 1980, someone inside the Institute raised the question of popularizing the activities and public perception. Otello Montanari, PCI politician, in the

¹⁸⁶ See Annette Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness*, trans. Jared Stark, 1st edition (Ithaca, N.Y. London: Cornell University Press, 2006).

¹⁸⁷ AIAC, Untied File in the current administrative archive, *Raccolta di dati statistici sulle visite al Museo Cervi dal 1977 al 1990*.

middle of a meeting focused on the development of the research activities and on the temptations of creating a functional Emilia-Romagna local scientific committee, had done an intervention related to expanding the academic-focused aims of the Institute:

“[Montanari] considers that Pertini's visit [Casa Cervi, 1980], on the one hand, relaunched the problem of rural history at a national level and, on the other, highlighted the popular character of the Institute [...]. He then argued the need:

[...]

b) to organize, every year, a mass moment in addition to the celebrations for the death of Papà Cervi and the seven Brothers, as it is important to qualify the Institute's initiative from a scientific point of view, but also with mass initiatives.”¹⁸⁸

Montanari was an influential member of the Institute throughout the 1980s. He was a former partisan, a representative of Reggio Emilia but with national experience as national deputy in the 1950s and 1960s, and, above all, he had a personal relationship with Alcide Cervi and the PCI propaganda campaign that was carried out during his lifetime. In 1955, he was assigned to accompany Alcide Cervi on his tour of the USSR. He was also the founder of the First Tricolour Committee, an association to recognize the origin of the Italian Flag in the Reggio Emilia of 1797, in contrast with Craxi. For these reasons, when, due to age and health problems, Curti was forced to resign, in 1986, Boldrini, on behalf of the ANPI, proposed his name as successor.¹⁸⁹

To understand how the Montanari vision and attitude impacted the Institute, it's interesting to analyze briefly the proposals included in the 1988 Annual CDA Report for the Associates' Assembly.¹⁹⁰ The 24-page document, supposed to be read during the Assembly, presents several ongoing initiatives and proposals to be corrected and fixed. The document, from which also the economic situation emerged again, wasn't well organized and its interpretation resulted in complications: the difficulties in distinguishing ongoing initiatives from future projects are perceivable from the reading, as well as the absence of an integrated and feasible programming

¹⁸⁸ AIAC, Fond “Institute Alcide Cervi” [not cataloged], Series “Assemblee dei soci”, b1, *Assemblea ordinaria dei Soci del 28 Novembre 1980*, n.7.

¹⁸⁹ AIAC, Fond “Institute Alcide Cervi” [not cataloged], Series “Assemblee dei soci”, b2, *Assemblea ordinaria dei Soci del 7 Giugno 1986*, n.14.

¹⁹⁰ AIAC, Fond “Institute Alcide Cervi” [not cataloged], Series “Assemblee dei soci”, b2, *Relazione del Consiglio di Amministrazione sull'attività svolta dal luglio 1987 al Maggio 1988. Letta dal Presidente Otello Montari, 11 giugno 1988*.

of the initiatives proposed. Considering these premises, it's meaningful to consider several main ideas underlined by Montanari.

First, Montanari gave space to propose several Commemorations, to enlarge the ones related to the Cervi family memory, overshadowing Conferences and research: in the documents, he cited the 10 years from the death of Emilio Sereni, the 40 years from the Italian Constitution, the bicentenary of the France Revolution and the 100 years of the Workers Day, on the 1° May. It's interesting, as well, the plan of a "large meeting of youths" for 25 April 1989, called "Youth and Europe Fest", that wasn't realized.

Secondly, Montanari insisted on giving a "clearer popular and cultural identity and great democratic value of the Institute, Museum and Library Sereni." His goal was to obtain mass participation in the Institute's initiatives and its facilities, especially House Cervi, with the Museum in Gattatico, and Library Sereni in Rome: in this way, he substantially criticized, softly, the strong scientific focus that the organization had up to that moment. In a justification attempt, Montanari, who underlined the importance of the historiographical approach of the Institute, supported the idea that the cultural process promoted by the Institute wasn't only for specialists and specialists, and that closing in the academic-based knowledge could have isolated the Institute from the life components of the society and the new youth movements.

Third, as a consequent point, considering the death of Irnes Cervi in 1986, who oversaw opening and maintaining the good state and cleanliness of the House Cervi. and the decreasing number of visitors, "far from the generation of the direct Resistance experience", he proposed an acceleration of the musealization of the House Cervi, intending to create a "European Museum of the Farmers' Resistance".¹⁹¹ This process had to be completed in 1988-1990, through the renovation of spaces, cataloging of the documental heritage, and the reorganization of the museum, which, in the idea of Montanari, had to be done by Massimo Storchi and Antonio Canovi, two young historians that were working with the Institute in Reggio Emilia in organizing little exhibitions and research.

In the idea, the museum opening had to be granted with paid operators and the support of a new Association, born in Gattatico. The *Circolo "Amici e Volontari del Museo Cervi"* (Club "Friends and Volunteers of Cervi Museum") was constituted on 30 May 1988 to organize and support the voluntary in favor of the Cervi Museum.¹⁹² With Maria Cervi as secretary and

¹⁹¹ AIAC, Fond "Institute Alcide Cervi" [not cataloged], Series "Assemblee dei soci", b2, *Relazione del Consiglio di Amministrazione sull'attività svolta dal luglio 1987 al Maggio 1988. Letta dal Presidente Otello Montari, 11 giugno 1988.*

¹⁹² Cerri, *La pastasciutta dei Cervi : fame, dono e sfida antifascista in una festa del luglio 1943*, 158–59.

through the participation of the local civil society, the club was central in giving life, especially in the local community, to the House Cervi during the late 1980s and half of the 1990s and represented an answer to the decline of the Museum as the main place of memory for the Cervi story. Relevant, in this sense, is the account of Rossella Cantoni, interviewed by us on 16 April 2024, later Mayor of Gattatico and President of the Institute, who, in 1988 participated in the founding of the association: her memory, she remembered the duplicity between the Institute and the dimension of the House.

“Because an association had been set up at the House Cervi, [...] called the ‘Friends and Volunteers of the Cervi Museum’, which brought together those who for years had been conducting guided tours for groups who came to visit the museum, the Cervi home, and also those who were approaching, hearing about and doing other activities, bringing cultural activities into the Cervi home.

[The Association] was also born at a time when the Cervi Institute, since we are also talking about an institute, was rather fragile from a certain point of view, as there was that Roman activity [...] of research. Then there was this place in Reggio Emilia that had a lot of ideal strength, and we felt it, at least, and in any case, the people who came to visit felt it, and it needed, in our opinion, to become more and more the center of the cultural aspect, not just the ideal aspect, of the Cervi Institute.”¹⁹³

Entering the merit of the feasibility of Montanari’s proposals is a complex matter. At the same time, it is interesting to understand his main line of thought about the life of the Alcide Cervi Institute: inserting the organism in a broader political agenda, involving mass participation in the initiatives, and revaluing the House Cervi and his Museum. These processes weren’t at the center of the previous Presidency.

Montanari had surely a strong connection with the local PCI and the Provincial Administration of Reggio Emilia, and this element contributed to his desire to propose initiatives for revaluing the local Cervi’s places as the base of the Institute, in synergy with the Rome Office. He also considered national political legitimization, visiting, for instance, with a Cervi family delegation, the President of the Republic Cossiga for the 20th Anniversary of the death of Alcide Cervi, on 27 March 1990.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ Interview of Edoardo Bastianini to Rossella Cantoni, 16 April 2024

¹⁹⁴ Portale Storico della Presidenza della Repubblica, Digital Repository, *Il Presidente della Repubblica Francesco*



Figure 21. The President of the Republic Francesco Cossiga receives the visit of Otello Montanari, President of the Cervi Institute, with a delegation of the Cervi relatives, on the 20th anniversary of Alcide Cervi's death, Rome, 27 March 1990.

At the same time, his ambition could not be understood without considering his personality. To help us, the interview with the historian and archivist Massimo Storchi, who worked for the Institute during the Montari Presidency, helped us to investigate this grey zone behind his personage.¹⁹⁵ Storchi didn't portray Montanari with a positive image of his election, strongly connected with the Reggio Emilia PCI Federation:

“Montanari's appointment arrives, then it is clear that all appointments were political, 100 percent, of course, but Montanari's appointment leaves many perplexities [...]. The management of the newcomer was rather complicated. First of all, because he related to Rome in a very [silent – taking time] ... not well known, very nice, very open, very Emilian, but he had no preparation, even

Cossiga riceve la visita di Otello Montanari, presidente dell'Istituto "Alcide Cervi", con una delegazione dei familiari dei fratelli Cervi, in occasione del 20° anniversario della scomparsa di Alcide Cervi, 27 Marzo 1990. <https://archivio.quirinale.it/aspr/fotografico/PHOTO-001-082988/presidente/francesco-cossiga/il-presidente-della-repubblica-francesco-cossiga-riceve-visita-otello-montanari-presidente-istituto-alcide-cervi-delegazione#n>.

¹⁹⁵ Interview of Edoardo Bastianini to Massimo Storchi, 19 March 2024.

though he was convinced that he had all the necessary preparation.”¹⁹⁶

In contraposition to Montanari, there was Esposito, in Rome. It's interesting to observe here how Storchi, who met also the General Secretary, perceived his figure, underlining the bicephalic nature of the Institute:

“I always remember him [Esposito] with great pleasure. [...] He was of Abruzzese origin, he was Mr. of the South in a certain sense, by trait, by manner, irony. Sovereignty was very clear: Rome was Esposito, he was Rome, Reggio was Reggio.”¹⁹⁷

Storchi also cited, in his accounts, the entanglements of the Institute life with other interests, especially the First Tricolour Committee, that Montanari pursued during the year of the Cervi Institute's Presidency.

“Another aspect is that Montanari had been running two committees for a few years then, one being the Committee for the First Tricolour and the other the Democratic Committee [...]. And he brought these committees into Cervi. [...]. Sabrina [Montipò] found herself acting as secretary for these two committees”¹⁹⁸

Another account was also the case of two travels conducted with his wife, one in West Germany and one in France, to enlarge the Cervi Institute's relations abroad, both covered by the Institute's budget. From the France travel, Montanari bought several stamps for organizing an exhibition in the Cervi House on the Bicentenary of the French Revolution in 1989. At the end of this story Storchi, lapidarily, in the interview asked himself, “What did Cervi have to do with the French Revolution?”.

The results of the Montanari Presidency were that, up to the crucial 1990, 29 August, the economic crisis continued, the scientific activity output decreased, bringing almost to paralysis, and the activities in House Cervi were mostly taken alive from the cited “Friends and Volunteers of Cervi Museum”.

¹⁹⁶ Interview of Edoardo Bastianini to Massimo Storchi, 19 March 2024.

¹⁹⁷ Interview of Edoardo Bastianini to Massimo Storchi, 19 March 2024.

¹⁹⁸ Interview of Edoardo Bastianini to Massimo Storchi, 19 March 2024.

“Chi sa, parli!”: The Institute Cervi crisis at the end of the First Republic.

The early 1990s changed again the political scenario. The 1989 and the international crisis of the Communist movements all over the world opened the streets for a shift in the ideological bases on which the Italian Republic based itself from its origin in 1946.¹⁹⁹ The positive valuable connection between PCI and Resistance, under pressure for all the previous decade, experienced a new series of direct and indirect attacks that came not only from external actors but also from internal debates in the Left. Ideologically, the rise of the new studies in France by Paxton and Rousso on the controversy regarding the Vichy regime²⁰⁰ and the research by Quazza²⁰¹ and Pavone in Italy²⁰² opened the ground for a new interpretation of the Resistance movements, viewed as a Civil War. Politically speaking, especially in Emilia-Romagna, the question of the “triangle of death” and the political violence that was in the region in the years 1945-1947, was used as a weapon for attacking the role of the Communists in the Resistance movement and the democratization of the country.

Looking at the broader national framework, the dissolution of the geo-political order formed after the Second World War and the so-called “cold war” - which we can symbolically summarize in the demolition of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 - initiated in the PCI an acceleration of the process of revising its history, which would lead, starting from the Bolognina and through successive stages, to the January 1991 congress with the birth of the PDS. Achille Occhetto, secretary of the PCI, launched, on 12 November 1989 in Bolognina, the proposal to change the Party's name: the two factions, ‘yes’ and those of ‘no’ bring to the fractioning of the political group, with the birth of the *Partito Democratico della Sinistra* (Democratic Left Party), moderate and reformist, and the scission, in November 1991, of the *Partito della Rifondazione Comunista* (Communist Refoundation Party), led by Cossutta and Ingrao.²⁰³

This major crisis of the PCI, and, more broadly, of the Italian Party System, entered directly into the life of the Institute Alcide Cervi, through the direct initiative of the politicians in its

¹⁹⁹ Focardi and Groppo, *L'Europa e Le Sue Memorie. Politiche e Culture Del Ricordo Dopo Il 1989*, 51–90.

²⁰⁰ Here are reported the two French editions of the texts. If the American Paxton wrote in English his first version in 1972, Rousso's text was translated into English in 1992. The details help to understand the connections and the interests of the British and American intellectuals on the Resistance and Collaborationism in the Vichy's France. See Robert Paxton, *La France de Vichy: 1940-1944* (Paris: Seuil, 1976); Henry Rousso, *Le Syndrome de Vichy: 1944 a nos jours* (Paris: Seuil, 1987).

²⁰¹ See Quazza, *Resistenza e storia d'Italia: problemi e ipotesi di ricerca*.

²⁰² See Pavone, *Una guerra civile. Saggio storico sulla moralità nella Resistenza*; Here also the 2014 english translation. Claudio Pavone and Stanislao Pugliese, *A Civil War: A History of the Italian Resistance*, trans. Peter Levy, Reprint edition (London: Verso Books, 2014).

²⁰³ Glauco Bertani, ‘La Lente Dei Media. Settembre 1990: «operazione Verità»? «La Repubblica Nata Dalla Resistenza» Tra Storiografia, Politica e Mass Media’, *Ricerche Storiche*, no. 93 (July 2022): 29.

leading Committees. As we will show, the happenings that started in August 1990, concurred to demonstrate how the Institute and its connections to the Resistance were strongly influenced by political actors and their use of memory for propaganda purposes, at the point of compromising cultural activities and requiring a re-modulation of the organization for granting the survival. This process will also confirm how much the role of the President, as the major representative, was central to the Institute's life.

In May 1990, Montanari, who used to write occasionally for the local Reggio Emilia press, wrote a draft for an article and asked Storchi for a revision.

“[Montanari said] ‘You're a historian!’ May read it to me and said, ‘Listen, I'd like to do this, what do you think?’

I [Storchi], by the way, was working on those themes there, because my first essay is on the post-war period in Modena, so on that stuff there. I read it and say, ‘Can I say what I think?’ [Montanary replied] ‘Ah, sure, please!’

[Storchi] ‘I think it's crazy bullshit because it's full of errors, it doesn't say anything new. What's that got to do with it?’²⁰⁴

Montanari's piece, regardless of this suggestion, was published on August 29, 1990, in the national newspaper *Il Resto del Carlino*, with the title “*Rigore sugli atti di "Eros" e Nizzoli*”²⁰⁵. The article, which passed in history as “*Chi sa, parli!*” (Those who know, speak!) took as its starting point the forty-fifth anniversary, on 31 August 1945, of the killing of Arnaldo Vischi, Director of the Reggian Officines. The authors of that crime, individuated in two communist partisans whose battle nicknames were Eros and Nizzoli, were never confirmed as the concrete actors of the murder. Montanari argued that the responsibility of that crime, 35 years later, had to emerge. According to Montanari Togliatti, the PCI leader, had a double approach to the question: on one side, he came to Reggio Emilia and proclaimed a “very firm, repeated condemnation” of the postwar violence while, on the other, never acted to help the true to emerge. In this way, Montanari endorsed, more or less indirectly, the thesis that within the Reggio Emilia PCI there were two lines, one democratic-reformist and the other Stalinist and violent, which had not abandoned the methods of the armed struggle.²⁰⁶ The article finished with the now-famous plea: “If you know something speak up, contribute, correct, and even

²⁰⁴ Interview of Edoardo Bastianini to Massimo Storchi, 19 March 2024.

²⁰⁵ *Resto del Carlino Reggio*, 29 August 1990

²⁰⁶ Bertani, ‘La Lente Dei Media. Settembre 1990: «operazione Verità»? «La Repubblica Nata Dalla Resistenza» Tra Storiografia, Politica e Mass Media’, 13.

contest what I have written”.²⁰⁷

The journalist Glauco Bertani wrote, in 2002, based on a Conference paper, an essay for *Ricerche Storiche*, the academic journal of the Reggio Emilia Resistance Institute, to analyze deeply the Montanari contribution and its explosive effect on the public debate.²⁰⁸ Bertani, connecting a press survey with the political crisis of the PCI, gave his interpretation of the operation:

“It has gone down in history as ‘*Chi sa, parli!*’ the historiographical revision operation on the Resistance, with strong political overtones, which exploded in the summer of 1990. It was an authentic bombshell that shook the political world and the partisan associations and that started a ‘new’ season of Resistance historiography and studies on the origins of the Republic. [...] The content of the letter by the former partisan, former communist parliamentarian [Otello Montanari] and, at the time, president of the ‘A. Cervi’ Institute, does not reveal - according to many opinion leaders and politicians who took pen and paper or made statements on radio and television at the time - any mystery. However, they clearly implied that the crimes and violence were genetically inherent to the ideology that the Communist Party represented. And the togliattian duplicity was its perverse political manifestation.”²⁰⁹

Surprisingly, the hype generated and spread through mass media, by the Montanari letter, was huge and prolonged over time, alighting an endless polemic around the role of the PCI in the immediate post-war period. According to Bertani’s survey and considering the difficulty in surveying the foreign press, 1321 articles (more or less significant) appeared in September alone, a wave that started at the end of August and culminated on 7 September 1990 with 119 articles.²¹⁰

In light of these premises, Bertani argued that the “operation truth” of Montanari had to be understood considering the political-historical environment that, as we introduced before, was shaking the PCI in 1989-1991. Montanari's public sortie may be part of the struggle between the two camps, the future PDS and PRC. In other words, on the part of the proponents of the

²⁰⁷ *Resto del Carlino Reggio*, 29 August 1990

²⁰⁸ Bertani, ‘La Lente Dei Media. Settembre 1990: «operazione Verità»? «La Repubblica Nata Dalla Resistenza» Tra Storiografia, Politica e Mass Media’.

²⁰⁹ Bertani, 11.

²¹⁰ Bertani, 37.

reformist PDS change, there was a need to unblock the Italian political system through a real reckoning with all the dark points of communist history, starting precisely from the years of the founding of the Republic. Seeing the PSI aimed at ‘socialist unity’, with the desire to incorporate the PCI, one can understand the significance that Otello Montanari's ‘revelations’ assumed in legitimizing the birth of the new center-left, independent from the Craxi’s fusion project. Undoubtedly, greater clarity coeval with the criminal episodes involving the PCI and partisans in the post-war period would probably have defused its excesses propaganda aimed at branding Emilia as the “triangle of death”.²¹¹

This huge visibility of Montanari, which continued to contribute to the debate in the press, coincided with also an undesired light on the Institute Alcide Cervi. The debate on the PCI's role in the political violence, as well as the Resistance revisionism, embarrassed the CDA and the Associates’ entities. Looking briefly at the 1990-1991 CDA resumes, the negative impact of the mediatic pressure on the Institute’s functionality was clear, bringing to the simultaneous reduction of cultural activities, political support, and money flow. In the Associates’ Assembly of 30 November 1990, the debate started to point out Montanari's responsibilities, starting from his desire to increase the Reggio Emilia dimension of the Institute. For Mario Lasagni:

“The Institute's activity seems to be unbalanced more on a Reggio dimension to the detriment of the European dimension [...]. The Institute's image is still tied to the Reggio-Rome dualism as if they were two separate sections: it is an image that must be erased to achieve greater homogeneity [...]. Reggio's contribution is indispensable but from a national perspective, while the recent controversies have been local and have played no part in anyone's interest.”²¹²

But was Luigi Arbizzani, historian of the Resistance Institute in Bologna, to underline how “the actions carried out by the President affected the prestige of the Institute”. Esposto, diplomatically, recalled that “it is necessary to bring back [...] our concerns to the clear maintenance of the nature of the Institute, which is one of study and research”. At least for all of 1990, the tentative was to mend the rift between the Institute's governing bodies and Otello Montanari, supported almost exclusively by the leaders of the Provincial Federation of the PCI of Reggio Emilia. On the other hand, the President avoided the discussion, presenting a self-

²¹¹ Bertani, 29–30.

²¹² AIAC, Fond “Institute Alcide Cervi” [not cataloged], Series “Assemblee dei soci”, b.3, *Assemblea ordinaria dei Soci del 30 Novembre 1990*, n.17.

apologizing and late relation of the activities pursuing justification for the deficiency that the Institute was facing, especially the breaking point reached between Montanari and the Scientific Committee according to the polemics that he started on the Resistance.

The negotiation table collapsed in 1991. In the Associates' meeting of 14 June, after another relation of the President like the previous one, the discussion on the future of the Institute, in difficulties due to Montanari's absence of auto-critic and the tensions in the Assembly, started.²¹³ Esposito and Bellotti, the CIA President, underlined how the chronicle excess had damaged the internal cohesion, the public image, and the finalities of the Cervi Institute. Like other counselors, they supported the principle of defending the "cultural and political autonomy" of the organization. But more cutting were the words of Maria Cervi:

"Maria Cervi [...] declared herself to be highly critical of President Montanari's work; she also acknowledged the efforts made by the Board [CDA] and the Administrative Secretary [Catelli] and in particular by the Secretary-General [Esposito] to prevent the Institute from continually slipping into the most diverse initiatives, to the detriment of the usual and valid research [...]. The controversy that arose tarnished the image of the Institute. He recalls the position of the Scientific Committee [blocked and opposed to Montanari]. Even concerning the work of the volunteers at the museum, there were absolutely negative repercussions. Moreover, the presence of volunteers at the Institute and the position of the President even makes it impossible for them to work together and also distorts the attention of quite a few visitors to the Cervi Museum. With regret [...] asks that [...] a profound change be made."

Due to this discussion, the elections that took place saw the affirmation of Massimo Bellotti: President of the CIA, the ANC's heir body, was the first one without a strong political tradition attached to him, even though he was an autonomous left-wing man. We can define him, without too much margin for error, as a technical ferryman figure, in an attempt to lead the Institute towards the necessary restyling of its public image and organizational structure. The main lines of his activity were defined in the speech to the Associates' Assembly presented on 27 May 1992: re-establishing the autonomy and the internal unity of the Institute, reforging his public

²¹³ AIAC, Fond "Institute Alcide Cervi" [not cataloged], Series "Assemblee dei soci", b.3 and 4, *Assemblea ordinaria dei Soci del 14 Giugno 1991, n.18.*



Figure 22. Massimo Bellotti meet the President of the republic Oscar Luigi Scalfaro, Rome, 15 December 1993

image but, especially, resolving the problematic deficit of the budget that was paralyzing the Institute functions. To achieve this purpose, on one side, Bellotti worked in looking for a new broader political legitimization. For the 50th anniversary of the Cervi shooting, he invited to House Cervi for a visit the Deputy

Assembly President Giorgio Napolitano, a former PCI passed to PDS, in July 1993 and went, on 15 December 1993, with Maria Cervi and a small delegation, to Rome for meeting the President of the Republic Scalfaro.²¹⁴ Economically, he proposed: finding new associates that could finance the Institute, looking for private or economic actors to avoid the dependency on

political entities; increasing the monthly quote of each contributor; restructuring the Institute canceling the Reggio Emilia administrative office, and focusing on a pure dualism between Rome as scientific center and the Museum in Gattatico.²¹⁵



Figure 23. Maria Cervi meet the President of the Republic Oscar Luigi Scalfaro, Rome, 15 December 1993.

Unfortunately, despite

²¹⁴ Portale Storico della Presidenza della Repubblica, Digital Repository, *Massimo Bellotti, presidente dell'Istituto Alcide Cervi, con alcuni esponenti, in occasione del 50° anniversario dell'eccidio dei fratelli Cervi, 15 Dicembre 1993*, <https://archivio.quirinale.it/aspr/fotografico/PHOTO-004-007011/presidente/oscar-luigi-scalfaro/massimo-bellotti-presidente-istituto-alcide-cervi-alcuni-esponenti-occasione-del-50-anniversario-eccidio-fratelli-cervi#>.

²¹⁵ AIAC, Fond "Institute Alcide Cervi" [not cataloged], Series "Assemblee dei soci", b.4, *Assemblea ordinaria dei Soci del 27 Maggio 1992, n.20; Assemblea ordinaria dei Soci del 22 Maggio 1993, n.21, Assemblea ordinaria dei Soci del 26 Febbraio 1994, n.22.*

his tentative, Bellotti partially failed in his purposes and decided to not renew his availability to cover the Presidency in 1994. The reasons were external and internal. The 1992 and 1994 elections, as well as the tribunal trial *Mani Pulite* (Clean Hands), showed everyone the late stage of the Party System crisis, leading to the end of the journalistic so-called First Republic. Due to the new changes and the reduction of public expenses, especially on a local level, granting national and local funding to the Institute was more complicated to achieve. Not only the PCI but also the DC disappeared from the electoral ballots, giving the space for the rise of new Parties, far from the ideological background that characterized the Italian memory cultural agenda up to 1994.

The lack of money, united with the unsatisfying initiatives for celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Cervi Shooting was crucial in Bellotti's choice. As Sabrina Montipò remembered in his interview, Bellotti focused prevalently on Rome, from which he was proposed for the Presidency, instead of Reggio Emilia.²¹⁶ This point of view, led the President, on one side, to not be so appreciated by Emilia Romagna's members, who felt the ideological and political distance from him, and, simultaneously, gave more freedom to the volunteers' and workers' initiative in House Cervi: their role in conserving, promoting, and proposing was central for maintaining the House alive, visitable and lived by the local community. Maria Cervi, who on Montanari's firing, took strongly the word in the Assembly and became influential in shaping the future of the organization and in reviving, through her figure, the power of being a witness of the Cervi story, as the grandfather Alcide.

In an article entitled *Il museo sta morendo* (The museum is dying), published on La Gazzetta on 29 December 1993 and taken from an interview for the national newspaper Repubblica, Maria Cervi opened a bitter polemic with the Institute's leading Committee. Starting from her dissatisfaction with the initiatives around the 50th anniversary of the massacre, she summarized also the main problems of the early 1990s and her vision of the future.

"This is not how we imagine the 50th anniversary. When [...] Grandfather Alcide, in agreement with the family, fell this house and the memories, he did not want to create a mausoleum, but to pass on values. Today we recall that this is no longer the case. The post-war controversies have damaged an institution, undermined a muse that should have served to hand down values." [and, on the Institute activities] 'Congresses yes, but stuff for specialists. For the general

²¹⁶ Interview of Edoardo Bastianini to Sabrina Montipò. 21 March 2024

public little or nothing, the library cannot be consulted, courses for teachers have been suspended, research is no longer being done... The truth is uncomfortable: the museum is in crisis because it no longer knows how to offer anything appropriate to the times.”²¹⁷



Figure 24. *La Gazzetta di Reggio*, 29 December 1993.

Gattatico and the House Cervi, through Maria's local focus, in the balanced logic of the Institute, started gradually to take weight and relevance, not only as a simulacrum for commemorations but also as a proactive center of cultural production.

"If a museum is only about historical memory, it cannot live for long, a museum cannot live if it is not alive. The museum remains a central theme for Italian democracy. it is now clear that there is a need to move beyond the phase of the secular 'sanctuary' to open up spaces for the future in verifying how the history of a people is embodied in the museum and not a mythological vision.”²¹⁸

Montanari, in one of his visions, auspicated, in 1990, this Institute development. The open space that the Museum - and the House – must become to a broader public, was the focus of the transformation process that the Institute lived up to the late 2000s.

²¹⁷ *La Gazzetta di Reggio*, 29 December 1993.

²¹⁸ AIAC, Fond "Institute Alcide Cervi" [not cataloged], Series "Assemblee dei soci", b.3, *Assemblea ordinaria dei Soci del 30 Novembre 1990*, n.17.

Ugo Benassi's Presidency and the centralization of the Cervi Institute in Gattatico. 1994-2008.

In the 1990s, the accusation leveled at the Resistance in the previous decade was transformed into an open solicitation on the institutions of the state to promote a new 'pacified' public memory, freed from the fascism/anti-fascism opposition. Here again, the driving factor is to be found in the change in the political framework that occurred after the collapse of communism and the crisis of the so-called First Republic. On the one hand, the collapse in 1992, with 'Tangentopoli', of the political parties that were the protagonists of the Resistance, Christian Democracy, the Socialist Party, the Liberal Party, the Republican Party, and the transformation of the Communist Party into a force of European democratic socialism, paid for with a split and a drastic downsizing of forces. On the other hand, the affirmation of two new political players such as Forza Italia and Lega Nord, with no links to the historical heritage of resistance to anti-fascism, and the political legitimization of the Italian Social Movement with its participation in Berlusconi's government in 1994, followed by the birth of a new post-fascist political entity, *Alleanza Nazionale*.²¹⁹

The 1994 elections, on 27 and 28 March, started the first Berlusconi Government, center-right positioned, with a radical shift in the precedent ideological and political background on a national level. In Reggio Emilia and Emilia Romagna generally, where the elections were solidly in favor of the PCI, the new Left parties managed to maintain control of most of the local Administrations. In this framework is to be inserted the rise to the Presidency of the Alcide Cervi Institute of Ugo Benassi. On the Associates' Assembly of 26 February 1994, anomaly anticipated, Massimo Bellotti confirmed his intention, proposed already in 1993, of leaving the Presidency: in his account was evident the perception of the crucial moment that, the Italian Republic was facing.

“Our Assembly is being held at a time when public opinion is gripped by the start of the electoral campaign for the forthcoming general political elections, from which the start of the Second Republic is expected, as some improper claim. [...] A new course does not mean, in any case, abandoning the principles on which the Republic is founded, or the culture and memory indispensable to nourish it, or the discussion of those values which the Cervi Institute, for its part,

²¹⁹ Focardi, *La guerra della memoria*, 61.

is called upon [...] to disseminate and defend through the enhancement of the Cervi Museum, dissemination activities, contact and cooperation with social, democratic and anti-fascist organizations and with the administrations expressed in the elected bodies”²²⁰

Bellotti, before leaving the Presidency, also remembered the project of rationalization of the Institute structure on the House Cervi and the Rome Office, closing the Reggio Emilia office, which made him unpleasant for the Emilia Romagna Institute components. Talking about the relation between these two national entities, he proposed to establish rules to make them autonomous, from a certain level, from the other:

“It is necessary to prevent one pole from conflicting with the other [House Cervi and Rome Office], while together they constitute the originality and uniqueness of the Cervi Institute, and this does not seem to me to prevent, but rather should suggest that both poles receive spheres of self-determination, regulated by statute, for an actual management based on internal resources and alter to be acquired in support of each individual Project.”²²¹

The Bellotti position, slightly sided on the Rome Office, in synergy with Esposto, could not find enough support from the Associates’ Assembly. The 1994 elections for the CDA and, consequently, the Presidency, were held only after the national political ones due to the efforts of most of the Institute members in the political campaign, showing the coming back to a figure more connected with the local authorities of Reggio Emilia. The CDA, renewed on 21 May 1994, met for the first time in Reggio Emilia on 27 May of the same year. There the name of Ugo Benassi for the Presidency, proposed by the Province Administration, was made. Benassi was the mayor of Reggio Emilia from 1976 to 1987 and PCI Senator from 1987 to 1992. Through his adhesion to the PDS, after Ochetto’s Bolognina maneuver, he represented a political figure with a national dimension and a strong relationship with the local territory.

The question of his *reggianità* (Reggio Emilia’s character) was a major point that came out during the brief discussion before the election. For Maria Cervi, who now had a major influence

²²⁰ AIAC, Fond “Institute Alcide Cervi” [not cataloged], Series “Assemblee dei soci”, b.4, *Assemblea ordinaria dei Soci del 26 Febbraio 1994, n.22*.

²²¹ AIAC, Fond “Institute Alcide Cervi” [not cataloged], Series “Assemblee dei soci”, b.4, *Assemblea ordinaria dei Soci del 26 Febbraio 1994, n.22*.

on the CDA:

“She is convinced that if we make Benassi our President we will have the conditions to relaunch the Institute and mend the deep rifts that have been created. Some people say that the Institute is in danger of sinning, but with this proposal we will overcome all the difficulties.”²²²

To raise doubts was General Secretary Esposto who, as Rome representant from the foundation of the Alcide Cervi Institute, underlined again the importance of maintaining stable the power relation between the two areas of the Institute. In its comments, he remembered:

“It is a fact that the Institute is characterized by its presidents, we have had specific phases relating to each of them. [...] However, the relationship between the Reggio Emilia dimension and the Roman and national dimension of the Institute is the axis around which the Institute's development can be organized. [...] The Institute has been a victim and follower of political influences, so I hope for a condition of autonomy and a serene internal climate that will lead to a return to statutory legality.”²²³

Benassi, thanking for the debate, the nomination to the Presidency, and underlining the difficult political environment in which the Institute had to face its renovation, guaranteed to Esposto “the balance between the Institute's Reggio Emilia character and its national importance.”²²⁴ That doesn't stop Esposto from sending to the CDA, on 23 March 1995, a letter for leaving his position as General Secretary and his sequent substitution with the CIA member Rossi Afro. This event signed ineluctably the future Reggio Emilia-Gattatico transformation that the Institute will face in the late 1990s.²²⁵ Rossella Cantoni, representing the Gattatico municipality, was elected as vice president with Arbizzani and Azzoni. From 1994, she, who was already a volunteer for the House Cervi, took an important role in proposing, in synergy with Maria Cervi and Benassi, initiatives related to the Museum. As she remembered:

²²² AIAC, Fond “Institute Alcide Cervi” [not cataloged], Series “Verbali dei Consigli di Amministrazione”, b.4, *Verbale Consiglio di Amministrazione n.61*, 27 May 1994.

²²³ AIAC, Fond “Institute Alcide Cervi” [not cataloged], Series “Verbali dei Consigli di Amministrazione”, b.4, *Verbale Consiglio di Amministrazione n.61*, 27 May 1994.

²²⁴ AIAC, Fond “Institute Alcide Cervi” [not cataloged], Series “Verbali dei Consigli di Amministrazione”, b.4, *Verbale Consiglio di Amministrazione n.61*, 27 May 1994.

²²⁵ AIAC, Fond “Institute Alcide Cervi” [not cataloged], Series “Verbali dei Consigli di Amministrazione”, b.5, *Verbale Consiglio di Amministrazione n.67*, 22 March 1995.

“ As culture councilor [and future Mayor of Gattatico Municipality] during the 1990s, I took on the role of vice-president of the Cervi Institute in the Cervi Institute, partly as, shall we say, a representative of the municipality of Gattatico, which was one of the founding members [...] but also because with the then president, Ugo Benassi, who had been there since 1994, I took on this role and we started to work very closely together on a very long process of relaunching the Institute.”²²⁶

Proclaimed President, Ugo Benassi had to face the ongoing problems that, since the Montanari presidency, were paralyzing the Institute: the lack of funding due to the instability of the money flow and excessive structural expenses, the inactivity of the Scientific Committee, the equilibrium of the Rome-Reggio Emilia relationships and the renovation of the Museum in the Cervi House. His figure, compared with the predecessor, was more incisive in concretizing facing those problems as the CDA resumes shows. In the years from 1994 to 1997, he focused his actions on correcting the money balance of the Institute and working to strengthen the political legitimization of the Institute. As he underlined, in 1995 that the problem that was graven on the budget was the disparities between entrances and expenses, as well as their typology. Talking about the 1994 balance, arguing that the Reggio Emilia office had to be incorporated with the local Resistance Institute and that the CIA had to help in the maintenance of the Rome office and of its Archives there conserved, he said:

“We know that against an income of 290 million [Lira] a year, 200 million [Lira] are spent on personnel and over 90 million on living expenses. The situation is unsustainable in that it leaves no margin for expenditure on initiatives, and unless a solution is found to make the Institute live by investing substantial resources in cultural activities, the Institute has no reason to exist. The real crux is therefore the question of expenditure. [...] This will be the beginning of a turnaround.”²²⁷

For this operation of stabilization, Benassi makes a strong personal effort. On 27 April 1995,

²²⁶ Interview of Edoardo Bastianini to Rossella Cantoni, 16 April 2024

²²⁷ AIAC, Fond “Institute Alcide Cervi” [not cataloged], Series “Verballi dei Consigli di Amministrazione”, b.5, *Verbale Consiglio di Amministrazione n.68*, 27 April 1995.

Benassi thanked the Reggio Emilia's bank Foundation Manodori, which he was also President, for giving the Institute an extraordinary contribution of 110 million Lira for doing an urgent interview on the House Cervi rooftop.²²⁸ In 1995, 71 million Lira of extra funds came also from the founders, especially the Reggio Emilia Province, to cover the expenditure deficit. These momentaneous solutions required, however, a plan of rationalization of the Institute. For Benassi, the employees enrolled had to be reduced in terms of number and type of collaboration, passing to part-time and projects.²²⁹ The Rome Office, with three workers huge costs compared with Reggio Emilia and Gattatico, where the Provincial Administration paid directly rent and basic maintenance expenses, had to be supported strongly by the already mentioned CIA, which stored there its archives and the Library Sereni, to maintain them accessible to the public. It's exactly on this point, with the resistance of the CIA, that the prolonged negotiations about the survival of the Rome Office continued up to 2000.

This process crossed parallel to the question of maintaining the House Cervi, doing renovations, and establishing a Museum of the Cervi Family and their Resistance experience. As we saw, the money for preserving the building was initially financed with extraordinary contributions from local actors, especially the province, but one event, in 1997, set a major change. It's from the Museum renovation process that Benassi, with the support, from inside, of Maria Cervi, Rossella Cantoni, and the new employees gave a radical shift to the Institute's structure and functions, starting the complex process of centralization that ended in 2008 with all the Institute sections converged in Gattatico. The answer to this decision is to be searched in the fact that, due to the personal political connections of Benassi, brought to the House Cervi an unexpectedly impressive amount of money during his Presidency.

Benassi, since its election, continued to support the connection with major political actors, as, for instance, when he invited the President of the Republic Scalfaro to the House Cervi on 30 January 1995.²³⁰ Of the several visits, the most meaningful for the Institute life was the 1997 one by the Minister of Cultural Heritage Walter Veltroni, for the 25 April Liberation Day. Vice-President of the First Italian national Government of Romano Prodi, between 1996 and 1998, former PCI passed to PDS, Veltroni represented the first active Government Minister that visited the House. During the visit, the Minister, who knew the electoral and political

²²⁸ AIAC, Fond "Institute Alcide Cervi" [not cataloged], Series "Verbali dei Consigli di Amministrazione", b.5, *Verbale Consiglio di Amministrazione n. 68*, 27 April 1995.

²²⁹ AIAC, Fond "Institute Alcide Cervi" [not cataloged], Series "Verbali dei Consigli di Amministrazione", b.5, *Verbale Consiglio di Amministrazione n. 74*, 3 May 1996.

²³⁰ Portale Storico della Presidenza della Repubblica, Digital Repository, *Visita del Presidente della Repubblica alla città di Reggio Emilia, in occasione delle manifestazioni per il 50° anniversario della Resistenza e della Guerra di Liberazione, 30 Gennaio 1955*.

importance of defending the Resistance's antifascist values in contrast with Berlusconi's anti-communist propaganda, gave an important relevance to the event and proposed the Cervi brothers as a national symbol. Here are a few lines from the article related to the 25th April Celebrations published by *L'Unità* on the 26 April 1997:

“The dead [during the Resistance]. How many? But then some have left a stronger mark. The home of the Cervi brothers is in Gattatico, in the Reggiana plain. Vice-Premier Walter Veltroni arrives there apologizing. 'Yes, sorry for the delay... it's the first time a Minister has visited here... Yet the Cervi brothers are the name of the Italian Resistance...’”²³¹

Per la festa della Liberazione decine di iniziative. Il presidente Scalfaro alle Fosse Ardeatine

Veltroni a casa dei fratelli Cervi «Festa di tutti, senza dimenticare»

Il vice presidente del Consiglio a Gattatico: «Scusate il ritardo... è la prima volta che un ministro viene qui. Eppure i Cervi sono il nome della Resistenza». Il presidente del Senato Mancino: «Nessuna interpretazione riduttiva del 25 aprile».

Figure 25. L'Unità, 26 April 1997

In a moment of crisis, were the reduction of the funding to the local authorities and the revision of the sum of money provided by the tables with the 1980's Law n.123, the direct connection between the Minister and the Institute Leaders was a powerful way to open a new direct funding channel. For granting money, the Institute had to propose a project that could be politically and culturally relevant on a national level. The search for giving new power to the Resistance narration put the choice to the House Cervi and the creation of the Museum. Benassi was aware of these possibilities to the point of insisting on proposing and organizing the event properly: on 16 December 1996 CDA, he said that “we must focus on Veltroni and the Museum Project”.²³² Through this direct support, the Institute received, from the Culture Ministry, 2 billion lire for the renovation of the House Cervi, the renovation of the existing collections, and the creation of the first organic museum layout, that was inaugurated in 2001. The State intervention opened also the ground for the Region Emilia Romagna, the Province of Reggio Emilia and the Manodori Foundation for increasing their money effort in the musealization

²³¹ *L'Unità*, 26 April 1997. https://archivio.unita.news/assets/main/1997/04/26/page_016.pdf.

²³² AIAC, Fond “Institute Alcide Cervi” [not cataloged], Series “Verbali dei Consigli di Amministrazione”, b.5, *Verbale Consiglio di Amministrazione n.78*, 16 December 1996.

process.²³³ Veltroni, who continued to be a relevant representative of the Left, in 2001 as Mayor of Rome and, in 2007, as the main founder of the *Partito Democratico* (Democratic Party), maintained a strong personal connection with the museum and with Maria Cervi, that he visited again on the 28 December 2001.²³⁴



Figure 26. *Ultime Notizie*, Reggio Emilia, 29 December 2001

Despite this huge political effort to complete the revaluation of the House Cervi in Gattatico, the economic sustainability of the Rome Office remained a problem for all of the late 1990s, at the point that assumed the necessity for a rationalization, Benassi arrived, in 2000, to force the hand and proposing its closing. The 2001 Associates' Assembly resumed all the debates that saw the contraposition between the Italian Agricultural Confederation, the CIA, and the Reggio Emilia associates' members, the majority, in taking this crucial decision of centralization. The CIA's property of the Library Sereni and the Archives of the Farmers Movements, conserved in Rome, were the center of the discussion, due to the desire of the CIA, especially Esposto, Rossi,

²³³ Provincia di Reggio Emilia, *Istituto Alcide Cervi: luogo di memoria e di ricerca per la storia della resistenza e della cultura contadina*, 23–25.

²³⁴ *La Gazzetta di Reggio*, 29 Dicembre 2001.

and Bellotti, to maintain in the Capital that cultural patrimony. Secondly, Esposto had huge perplexity that the scientific production, that acquired value and authority in the Rome Office years, especially with Conferences and the yearly publication of the *Annali*, could continue in Gattatico. Benassi, supported by the Reggio Emilia Province, the local entities, and Maria Cervi, had a clear idea of the reasons behind the Institute structure rationalization:

“The need to rationalize and simplify the organizational structure of our Institute, which for more than 20 years has consisted of two cultural centers - one in Rome, with the Sereni Library, and one in Reggio, with the Cervi Museum in Gattatico - has been the subject of discussion and reflection, at least since 1996 [...] It is enough to look at the minutes of the Council, the reports of the Institute's activities approved by the Annual General Meetings of the members, and the contents of the meetings in Rome with the CIA to confirm this. The proposal to unify the organization and management of the archives, libraries, museums, and the production of cultural and research activities at the Cervi Museum in Gattatico, must be considered the real moral, cultural, and political reason for the birth of the Institute, matured, in fact, as the final phase of a fairly complex and not simple path.”²³⁵

Politically speaking, the Assembly had to act rapidly, as Benassi underlined, due to the imminent imagined change in the national political government.

“This assembly takes place a few months after political elections and the formation of a center-right government. The new Political Framework will affect the activity of our Institute, which draws on values, traditions, and the history that comes from the Resistance and which we consider essential foundations of our Republic.”²³⁶

After a long Assembly, in the course of 2001, the CIA gave up: on 8 August, Maria Cervi went to Rome and convinced the CIA to move their archives to House Cervi; a few months

²³⁵ AIAC, Fond “Institute Alcide Cervi” [not cataloged], Series “Assemblee dei soci”, b.4, *Assemblea ordinaria dei Soci del 29 Settembre 2001*.

²³⁶ AIAC, Fond “Institute Alcide Cervi” [not cataloged], Series “Assemblee dei soci”, b.4, *Assemblea ordinaria dei Soci del 29 Settembre 2001*.

later, the family heirs of Emilio Sereni, with a letter to Benassi on 28 October, to informally accept positively the transfer of the Library to Gattatico. The battle for the unification of the Institute in the House Cervi was finished.

One main problem had to be solved: where could have been possible to position, in the Cervi House, Archives, Library, and administrative office? The renovation process of the Museum hadn't taken into account this opportunity. To solve this issue, the Province of Reggio Emilia, in synergy with the Region Emilia Romagna, projected a new building to be erected on the farm near to the House, capable of hosting all the Institute activities. In 2003 the Rome Office was officially closed and the Archives momentaneous stored in a warehouse in Reggio Emilia.

The centralization of the activities, that were completed with this building in 2008 and which saw Benassi as the principal promoter, was characterized by two other moments of tension. In 2006 Rossella Cantoni became the President, with the support of Maria Cervi, and Benassi started a momentaneous internal opposition to the new CDA. The same Maria died in 2007, leaving a huge hole in the Institute story as well as the Cervi memory. The President shift, according to Rossella Cantoni, was done for operative difficulties in the Institute in the last years of Benassi, but operated in substantial continuity with the previous administration:

“We hadn't changed anything after that, I mean it's not that you changed the activity, the modalities, the address, the address was what we had started together [with Benassi], which was then continued, then other things were added. [...] Maria Cervi died after that. This was also a transition that marked a change in the institute, because if before a lot of the testimony was direct testimony, and so there was this ideal bearing even of storytelling, which came directly from those who were part of that situation, part of the story in some way you would say, after that we didn't have that anymore. Everything was mediated afterward.”²³⁷

The library-Archive Emilio Sereni, financed with almost 1.9 million Euros of public funding, was inaugurated on 15 March 2008, in the presence of Romano Prodi, center-left President of the Government: a new phase for the Institute Alcide Cervi, finally unified in the place of memory of the family, started.²³⁸

²³⁷ Interview of Edoardo Bastianini to Rossella Cantoni, 16 April 2024.

²³⁸ Provincia di Reggio Emilia, *Istituto Alcide Cervi: luogo di memoria e di ricerca per la storia della resistenza e della cultura contadina*, 63.



INAUGURAZIONE
BIBLIOTECA ARCHIVIO "EMILIO SERENI"
Sabato 15 Marzo 2008 Ore 11,00
Museo Cervi di Gattatico (RE)



Alla presenza dell'on. ROMANO PRODI
Presidente del Consiglio dei Ministri



interverranno al taglio del nastro:

ROSSELLA CANTONI	<i>Presidente Istituto Alcide Cervi</i>
SONIA MASINI	<i>Presidente Provincia di Reggio Emilia</i>
VASCO ERRANI	<i>Presidente Regione Emilia-Romagna</i>
SABINA FERRARI	<i>Soprintendente ai Beni architettonici di Bologna, Modena, Parma, Piacenza e Reggio Emilia</i>
<i>conclusioni di:</i>	
ROMANO PRODI	<i>Presidente del Consiglio dei Ministri</i>

Al termine della cerimonia e degli interventi si terrà la visita guidata ai locali della nuova struttura, e seguirà un rinfresco per tutti i partecipanti.



Il prossimo appuntamento:

INAUGURAZIONE SCIENTIFICA
BIBLIOTECA ARCHIVIO "EMILIO SERENI"
venerdì 18 aprile 2008 > "Suggerimenti sereniane, paesaggio agrario, cultura popolare e vita rurale"

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Figure 27. Poster about the Inauguration of the Library and Archive "Emilio Sereni" at a new building of the Museum Cervi, Gattatico (RE), 15 March 2008.

From academic-focused to massive participation initiatives: a reflection of the shift in Institute identity up to 2008

The process of centralizing the Institute in Gattatico has resulted not only in a reduction in costs but has also led to a reexamination of its nature and the use of the Cervi story.

An examination of the folders about Institute Cervi's activities from 1987 to 2008, which are partially available, though uncataloged, in the Administrative Archive, allows one to reflect on the impact that the political and economic difficulties that the Institute endured from the late 1980s had on the typology of cultural initiatives it promoted and on the public it involved. In this concluding section, we will present several considerations regarding this pivotal shift in the relationship between the Institute and the broader national political context.

The first observation is that the transition in the initiatives commenced due to economic and coordination contingencies that the Rome office and the Scientific Committee began implementing during the Montanari presidency, which commenced at the beginning of 1990. The lack of funding, coupled with the limited fruition of the Library of the Serene and the archival holdings conserved in Rome, constituted the primary challenge confronting the Rome office, which, at that time, absorbed the majority of the Institute's expenses. The Institute's leading Committee was unable to secure funding to engage in scientific programming due to the lack of funding which could increase the yearly deficit. For these reasons, the last significant research outputs that were financed by the Institute to a significant extent were completed by 1993. It is reasonable to posit that research activity continued in some form after this period, albeit with a greater degree of autonomy and with a smaller direct intervention of the Institute's financial resources.

The second point to consider is that the House Cervi and its process of renovation, which had as its main focus the museum, is fundamental for understanding how the initiatives, up to the 1980s, were focused on scientific production, passed to be open to a mass public and to be educational-oriented. This process commenced precisely at the time of the Institute's most significant economic and memory-related challenges, following the passing of Irnes Bigi in 1986. Her disappearance, which coincided with the Institute's financial and memory difficulties, prompted the local community to become involved in efforts to maintain the house's accessibility. In 1987, the Club for the Friends and Volunteers of the Cervi was established to promote various initiatives within the house. These included dinners, book presentations, theatrical and musical performances, association meetings, film projections, and other events

designed to engage with the local community. These initiatives marked the beginning of a significant transformation.

Montanari, who since the 1980s had been advocating for large-scale initiatives at the house with a sense of “nostalgia” derived from the charismatic figure of Alcide Cervi, endorsed these initiatives because they did not impose significant costs upon the Institute. After him, Bellotti, who was not physically present in the House due to his residence in Rome, afforded the Associations and employers considerable leeway to propose initiatives within the House. This process has two important implications. Firstly, it opened the ground to increase, due to the capacity of operate, the power of the political faction that, inside the Institute leading Committee, supported the thesis of concentrating in House Cervi all the organization offices, passing, apparently, from a national vocation to a local one. Secondly, consequently, it provided the impetus for the establishment of the Institute's operational headquarters at the House Cervi, which would serve as a living repository of the Institute's history and activities. This would facilitate greater public access to the Cervi legacy, particularly as the direct witnesses to its history were no longer available to share their experiences.

The third and final element to be considered is the relaunch of a national vocation for the Institute Cervi, which commenced precisely from the House Cervi at the moment the Museum was inaugurated officially in 2001. This concept was derived from a reinterpretation of the spaces to disseminate the Cervi narrative to a broader audience in the 21st century. The House Cervi and the Museum, which were originally established with a focus on school visits, have since become a venue for a variety of exhibitions, book presentations, and meetings that have transcended the boundaries of the Italian Resistance to encompass a broader range of political and social issues. These include feminist demands, the challenges posed by international threats to democracy and freedom, the fight against organized crime and terrorism, and the necessity of combating mafia and terrorism.

On the Resistance topic three main yearly events took place: From 2001 was organized a yearly Resistance Theatre Festival, but, especially from 2004 onwards, the Liberation Day Fest was held on the farm of the House Cervi on 25 April each year. Attendance at this event was in the thousands, with notable figures from the worlds of music, politics, and the Italian Resistance in attendance.²³⁹ In subsequent years, the event attracted a broader audience, including members of wider civic society. Additionally, is to be mentioned the event related to the Antifascist "Pastasciutta", organized originally by the Cervi Brothers on July 27, 1943, in Campegine, the

²³⁹ *Ultime Notizie, Reggio Emilia*, 26 April 2004

day the Fascist Mussolini Government collapsed. This event, proposed by the Association in 1988, became a national phenomenon in the 2010s, with the establishment of a network of related events across the country.²⁴⁰



Figure 28. *Ultime Notizie, Reggio Emilia, 26 April 2004*

It should be noted that the scientific output did not cease to exist; rather, it underwent a process of transformation. Should the Institute continue to provide research support, the scientific output will shift from the Resistance to the history of the agrarian landscape. The stop, in 2006, to the *Annali*, permitted the emergence of a smaller publication, the *Quaderni*. However, the majority of the Institute's activities shifted their focus from the general public to a broader audience, to disseminate information about the Cervi brothers and the Institute's work on a national scale.

Considering these points, the dimension of the political visit, especially in coincidence with the commemorations of the Cervi civic calendar and the Italian Republic, remained central in the Institute life. Paola Varesi, that is the Museum responsible since its foundation in 2001,

²⁴⁰ Cerri, *La pastasciutta dei Cervi : fame, dono e sfida antifascista in una festa del luglio 1943*, 23–25.

remembers:

“So, first of all, the visit: here, another thing I forgot, that political leaders were really many. I led Ciampi, Napolitano, Mattarella, three Presidents of the Republic, but then came party leaders like Veltroni, Franceschini, all when they had political roles. [...]

And these were moments of institutional and public participation. Then, the political leader represented a people, basically, and so the participation, I don't know how to say, see Veltroni, was strong and recognized. [...] And these were recognized mass moments, you know, as you say. Let's say that the museum was the mass museum in the sense that there was this spontaneity even of the organized visit, coaches that maybe organized without booking and came here.”²⁴¹

Let's conclude with the words remembered in the little pamphlet published by the Reggio Emilia Province in 2008, for the conclusion of the unification project in Gattatico:

“Gathering the extraordinary patrimony of values represented by the figure of Alcide Cervi, together with the memory of his seven sons' martyrs of anti-fascism, the Institute starts from the experience of the Emilian countryside to work with consistency and commitment to safeguard the values underlying the Republican Constitution.”²⁴²

Conclusive thoughts: the Institute Alcide Cervi unification from a national to local dimension and vice-versa.

This chapter examines the transformation of the Cervi Institute from a polycentric structure, with offices in Rome and Reggio Emilia, to the unification of its operations in the House Cervi in Gattatico. The presidency of Montanari, a PCI politician with strong ties to Reggio Emilia, started facing the Institute's difficulties in the late 1980s. These challenges included the gradual abandonment of the House Cervi in favor of the Rome Office, the economic sustainability of

²⁴¹ Interview of Edoardo Bastianini to Paola Varesi, 18 March 2024.

²⁴² Provincia di Reggio Emilia, *Istituto Alcide Cervi: luogo di memoria e di ricerca per la storia della resistenza e della cultura contadina*, 6.

the Institute structure, and the crisis of the "antifascist" paradigm. Montanari's personality and his concept of undertaking mass initiatives in Reggio Emilia and Gattatico also revitalized the idea of renovating the House Cervi as a modern museum - a project that had to wait until 2001.

The 29 August 1990 article by Montanari, which came to be known as "Chi sa, parli," thrust the Institute, which was already grappling with functional issues, into the maelstrom of the 1989 PCI transformation and the collapse of the First Republic. The obstinacy of the President, with his personalism, made the political phase more challenging, resulting in the Institute's paralysis. Massimo Bellotti, a representative of the CIA in Rome, served as the Institute's interim leader from 1991 to 1994. However, he was unable to resolve the Institute's financial difficulties: his plan to close the Reggio Emilia office, which was currently under the control of a majority of local entities, was unsuccessful, and he relinquished the position.

In 1994, Ugo Benassi, the newly appointed President, with the enthusiastic support of Maria Cervi and Rossella Cantoni, initiated a comprehensive renovation project. Through personal connections and the pivotal support of local and national political figures, he was able to advocate for the values of the Resistance during the Berlusconi era. His efforts resulted in a significant financial contribution that enabled the extensive refurbishment of the Cervi House and the establishment of the Museum in 2001. In the same year, Benassi managed to start the unification of the Institute in Gattatico. Despite the change of the presidency to Rossella Cantoni in 2006 and the death of Maria Cervi in 2007, the project of unification was completed with the inauguration of the new building for the library and archive, the Emilio Sereni building, in the House Cervi farm in 2008. The 1990s saw a shift in the Institute's focus from scientific-based activities to a greater emphasis on public and educational initiatives, in response to the economic difficulties of the period. The role of the House Cervi, its museum, and the local communities was pivotal. In a process of national to local and vice-versa, the 25 April Celebrations that commenced in 2004, involving youth and massive public, paved the way for the House to assume a new role as a site of memory of the Resistance.

Conclusions.

Reflecting on the House Cervi and the Resistance in the 21st Century.

Today, the Institute does not only include the museum on the Campirossi grounds, but also a series of buildings and functions connected to the community: in addition to the exhibition, there is Emilio Sereni's library, a multifunctional space for schools and educational activities, conference rooms and open-air areas for public initiatives. The House and the buildings connected to it are also enlivened by celebrations, conferences, and educational and recreational events inspired by the anti-fascist context. To understand this choice of values and its actualization in the contemporary world, it is necessary to identify the actors and financiers of the initiatives of the House.

For economic sustainability, the situation that we described improved in the last twenty years, as well as the modalities for obtaining fundings. As of June 2, 2017, not only public bodies and associations but also private individuals who share the values and statutory principles of the Cervi Institute can register. Also, the Alcide Cervi Institute was included, with the 2018 budget law, on the proposal of a group of ten parliamentarians from the Democratic Party, center-left, in the five nationally funded locations of the memory of the Second World War. The text, signed first and foremost by Senator Antonella Incerti, in amendment no. 333, states:

“To protect and promote the moral, cultural and historical heritage of the places of memory of the fight against Nazi-Fascism, Resistance and Liberation, the expenditure of 1 million euros for the year 2018 and 2.5 million euros from the year 2019 is authorized for the following institutions: Civic Museum of the Risiera di San Sabba - National Monument, Fondazione ex Campo Fossoli, Alcide Cervi Institute and Museum, Regional Committee for Honoring the Fallen of Marzabotto, Sant'Anna di Stazzema National Peace Park.”²⁴³

²⁴³ ‘Legge 27 dicembre 2017, n. 205. “Bilancio di previsione dello Stato per l’anno finanziario 2018 e bilancio pluriennale per il triennio 2018-2020.” Emendamento n.333’, *Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana* N. 302 (29 December 2017).

After all, with an analysis of the budgets, the public origin of most of the budgeted revenue is immediately identifiable.²⁴⁴ The bulk of the funds, as of 2018, comes annually from the State and the Ministry of Culture, amounting to more than 500,000 euros per year, while the rest of the revenue is related to subscriptions signed annually by local authorities and administrations, associations, and universities. In 2021, the total revenue exceeded 900,000 euros. It emerges from this that the main promoters of the Institute's initiatives are still politicians: Albertina Soliani, a former senator of the Democratic Party, is, as mentioned above, the current President of the Institute, and several members of the Board of Directors are local administrators.

From this perspective, it is possible to understand how the link between House Cervi, politics, and the territory, where the presence of the social-democratic left is preponderant, has remained strong even following the crisis of the First Republic.²⁴⁵ On the other hand, local subscriptions can vary from year to year depending on the decision of the funding bodies and the eventual local development of political majorities, widely varying the possibilities for renewal, and sometimes jeopardizing the very survival of cultural institutes, museums, and memorials linked to the Resistance and Anti-Fascism. The Institute is also part of the Italian Landscapes of Memory network²⁴⁶ and, since 2017, the Network of Historical Institutes of the Resistance.²⁴⁷

But today, in what ways does the Institute interpret the value of the Resistance in the 21st century, through the story of the Cervi brothers? To understand the forms and directions followed, it is necessary to go back to the origin and identify the subjects that create, live, and influence the new semantics of this memory.

The first element to take into consideration is the story of the seven brothers. It is a family story and, at the same time, a war story, imprinted in memory in the form of a family trauma that becomes, by extension, a public and collective trauma.²⁴⁸ The narrative that follows, combined with the use that the Reggio Emilia partisan movement itself made of execution in

²⁴⁴ Through the 'Amministrazione trasparente' section of the webpage on the Institute's website, it is possible to find a record of all budget revenue from 2018. The Institute also publicly provides a list of promoted activities online. However, it is not clear how the money is spent and used in the individual initiatives. See 'Amministrazione Trasparente', Istituto Alcide Cervi, accessed 22 December 2022, <https://www.istitutocervi.it/istituto-alcide-cervi/amministrazione-trasparente/>.

²⁴⁵ To understand the political environment of the Italian cultural and memory politics proposed by the Left see Zazzara, *La storia a sinistra. Ricerca e impegno politico dopo il fascismo*.

²⁴⁶ 'Luoghi', Paesaggi della memoria, accessed 26 December 2022, <http://www.paesaggidellamemoria.it/luoghi/>.

²⁴⁷ 'La rete degli istituti', Istituto Nazionale Ferruccio Parri, accessed 26 December 2022, <https://www.reteparri.it/chi-siamo/la-rete-degli-istituti-insmli/>.

²⁴⁸ For the concept of Trauma politics, see Jolande Withuis and Annet Mooij, *The Politics of War Trauma: The Aftermath of World War II in Eleven European Countries* (Amsterdam: Aksant Academic Publishers, 2010), https://doi.org/10.26530/OAPEN_353811.

its activities, creates a direct connection between Resistance, knowledge, and peasant antifascism.

The second element is the place, House Cervi. The location, memorial to the arrest of the male members of the family, on 25 November 1943, but, above all, to the intellectual and peasant activity, lends itself to be the ideal stage for the Resistance and its memory. It should be remembered, clearly, that much of the memorial and historical dimension of the building transcend, through the figure of Alcide Cervi, the period of the conflict, making it a true monument of symbols and values also for Italian democracy.²⁴⁹

The third element is the actors who, to date, create, modify and influence this memory in the public sphere. House Cervi, in its heterogeneity of functions and objectives, is, in this context, a special case among similar cultural institutes. First, we must consider the Institute itself, its objectives, initiatives, and communication line, putting together the management component - and its political influences -, employees and volunteers. Starting with the board of directors, as we have seen, the weight of the political actors, from administrations to political parties, must be considered, and thirdly, the social component is made up of associations and individual citizens who live in the spaces of the Cervi museum. All these subjects contribute, through different sensitivities and perceptions, to create a collective memory of the Cervi family and to update, sometimes in an “invention of tradition”²⁵⁰, its history, and values.

Understanding the evolution of the Institute's objectives is part of this memorial path: from being a center of Resistance antifascism with communist traction, in the 1970s it became a point of valorization of peasant values and the memory of the rural world. Today, though, above all, celebrations, it is a focal area for the promotion and dissemination of the values of peace, democracy, and, above all, “freedom”.

The sacredness of House Cervi, between civil religion and the memory of the Resistance in the present time, fits into this framework. To understand its public dimension, it is helpful to analyze how the area is used, today, in the context of the notable and participated dates of House Cervi's particular civil calendar, summarized on 25 April, 25 July, 25 November, and 28 December. The result is a proliferation of celebrations, conferences, shows, and theatrical and musical Festivals that bring together arts and people from different backgrounds and with different perceptions of the Cervi family's Resistance. On these occasions, the Institute and its

²⁴⁹ See John Foot, ‘The Resistance’, in *Italy's Divided Memory*, ed. John Foot, Italian and Italian American Studies (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2009), 147–82, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230101838_7.

²⁵⁰ See Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

leadership interface with current issues and debates in the public space, not without contradictions. Political rituals, like Festivals and commemorations, as recalled by the American anthropologist David Kertzer, are full of “repetitive, socially standardized symbolic behavior”, “an action wrapped in a web of symbols” that serves to “channel emotions, guide knowledge and organize social groups”²⁵¹.

Some of these most significant dates will be examined below. The 25 April 2022 Liberation Day from Nazi-fascism, at House Cervi, was, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, a mass celebration²⁵². The house, thanks to performances but, above all, to the memorial value of the building itself, is populated by people from all over the country, for a celebration based on the values of the Resistance. But what are the values shown by the organization of the celebrations? Which actors appropriate this narrative? What is the response and interaction of the public?

To answer these questions, it is necessary to understand how, although the primary initiative is taken by the Institute and its Directorate, the role of local politics is strong and present. The event, which reads “100 years of antifascism” on the playbill, was sponsored by numerous local administrations and was attended by a large group of institutional greeters from the Democratic Party, in an appropriation of values and symbols that pointed, in their speeches, to respect for democracy, civil rights, and freedom. There was no lack of references on stage to the actualization of Resistance values, through the intervention of the President of LIBERA, an anti-mafia association, Don Luigi Ciotti. However, the most explicit reference to Resistance activity is given by someone who, that memory, experienced it first-hand, namely Giglio Mazzi, partisan of the 37th GAP “Vittorio Santini”. The continuity between a lived antifascist Resistance and a future of Resistance inserted in a fragmented memorial context is well present in this multiplicity of visions.

This scenography is contrasted by a stall where the Palestine banner appears, with references to a Resistance forgotten by Italian politics, and red flags, with clear references to the hammer and sickle and Communism, in an effect of 'nostalgia' that contrasts with the social-liberal values of the center-left parties of post-Berlusconi. The “sentimental” dimension of this collective narrative is enriched by musical interventions, first and foremost by Cisco Belotti, former lead singer of the Modena City Ramblers. The return to a political musicality takes us back to the world of the musical subculture of the 1970s and 1980s, made up of an axiom linking the struggles of the working-class world and the Resistance, contributing to the creation of a

²⁵¹ David I. Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power*, Reprint edition (New Haven: Yale Univ Pr, 1989), 18.

²⁵² The materials uploaded on the website related to the celebration of 25 April 2022 are an interesting base of visual data to start this discussion. See ‘Festa della Liberazione a Casa Cervi’.

true secular liturgy. The ever-present “Bella Ciao”, an international hymn on the borderline between Resistance values and mass culture, completes this collective picture.

At this point, one wonders how this new meaning is experienced by the new generations and in the actualization and internationalization of Resistance values. A few months later, on 25 July 2022, Albertina Soliani introduced the anti-fascist *Pastasciutta*, a ritual started by the Cervi family in 1943, relating the Cervi experience to the Resistance to the coup d'état in Myanmar in February 2021. Finally, during the demonstrations for the execution of the brothers, on 28 December 2022²⁵³, the Institute gave space to young people under the age of 30 who had experienced Casa Cervi and who tried to bring its history and meaning up to date in the present-day: there was no lack of references to the struggle in Ukraine, the resistance to climate change and the protests in Iran.

Seen from this point of view, the link between the memorial past built by Alcide Cervi and the Communist Party would seem to have disappeared, but this is not the case. The red of Adelmo Cervi's overalls, which seem to come from a peasant and worker past long gone, and his flamboyant speech against the victory of the Right in the October 2022 general election, which he remembers as bearing the symbol of the Italian Social Movement's “tricolor flame”, bring back a nostalgic feeling of Resistance that seemed lost and that underlies the memorial structure built on Casa Cervi. The left fists raised, in a collective liturgy to the notes of “La Pianura Dei Sette Fratelli” and “Bella Ciao” performed by the Gang, in the room of the museum dedicated to peasant objects and the skillful use of peasant tradition - the mappemonde room - complete this symbolic picture halfway between the past and the future. The emotions of the words of poets, musicians, former partisans, and illustre figures of the Republic are visible in an audience far from the lived story of the Cervi Family.²⁵⁴

As we have been able to see, the interpretation of Resistance taking shape at House Cervi, as a *lieux de mémoire*, today has a new value, which has evolved from the years of anti-fascism-anti-communism dualism. The important participation of the local population and national components in the 25 April events, above all, as well as the expansion of the tradition of the anti-fascist *pastasciutta*, sponsored by local sections of the ANPI, however, does not give the possibility of interpreting the Resistance and its use in the 21st century in a massive and

²⁵³ The author was personally present at the celebration and register a part of the audio of the interventions. ‘Celebrazioni del 79° anniversario della fucilazione dei Fratelli Cervi e di Quarto Camurri’, Istituto Alcide Cervi, accessed 29 December 2022, <https://www.istitutocervi.it/79-anniversario-fucilazione-fratelli-cervi-quarto-camurri/>.

²⁵⁴ Regarding the Cervi story influence on mass culture, art, music and literature, see Morena Vannini, ed., *Nel mio cuore finì la loro storia: scrittori, poeti e cantautori per la memoria dei Cervi* (Gattatico: Istituto Alcide Cervi, 2022).

univocal way. Firstly, the State has failed to create a national civil religion²⁵⁵: consequently, the values of Resistance and Patriotism, the idea of a Second Renaissance, and the unity of the anti-fascist front have clashed with the harsh political conflict between Communism and Christian Democracy and, after 1994, between the Centre Left and Berlusconi. Secondly, the idea of Resistance has tended to generalize, to the interface, and take the right cut to dress the great challenges of contemporaneity and to insert itself, as an instrument of values, in the proliferation of new memories. This is the case of the actualization of Resistance values with those of anti-mafia and anti-terrorism. In some cases, one even goes so far as to affirm that the Resistance has value, as we saw, in the fight against climate change.

Finally, one must consider, in the sacralization of Resistance spaces in public discourse, the generational gap, made evident by the disappearance of the generation that lived that period and the end of a kind of “era of witness”²⁵⁶. The houses of the former partisans, the memorials of the great traumas, the new artistic operation, as the *Partigiano Reggiano* house, need, in the new generations, who have no outcropping memory, the creation of a new semantics of values that, in the civil use of memory, can be brought up to date with the present time. It follows that Casa Cervi, amidst civic rituals, poetry, music, and history, becomes a temple of the Resistance with a function that goes beyond the idea of the one-way influence of society but evolves, over time, in the furrow of modernization of constructed and past values, in the wake of a traumatic event. By the way, for the historian Alessandro Barbero, opinion is interested not for his direct knowledge related to the Resistance but for his impact on the public sphere, especially online, if the celebrations of the Italian Risorgimento have been lost in time, those of 25 April will also decline.

At this juncture, speaking historiographical about the present has a vulnerability vulns for the historian who, nevertheless, cannot fail to observe the dynamics and understand how the interactions between the actors moving at this juncture influence the public debate. Without a doubt, the place that is related to the Resistance memory has a central role in the evolution of the feelings related, especially after the ostracism of memory created at the start of the Berlusconi Era. It should be interesting to start a debate on the present memory of the Italian Resistance and its future, especially in the last ten years, where the fractionalization of the political environment and the rise of one right inspired by fascist symbols is rising again in October 2022. A new national museum related to the Resistance is being built in Milan, while

²⁵⁵ See Gian Enrico Rusconi, *Resistenza e postfascismo* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1995).

²⁵⁶ See Alessandro Barbero, ‘Alessandro Barbero su Resistenza e 25 aprile’, *Pandora Rivista* (blog), 27 April 2020, <https://www.pandorarivista.it/articoli/alessandro-barbero-su-resistenza-e-25-aprile/>.

the new political administrations, on a local and national scale, are starting a new politics of memory, redrawing the fascist era. In the plethora of mixology of new forms of memory, the House Cervi, which answers these issues as an alternative example of freedom and fights for a more equal and democratic society represents, in this idea, the political space for a discussion and starts a discourse of new activism.

Conclusive remarks

This investigation reveals the pivotal role of political actors in selecting and promoting the Italian Resistance in the Institute Alcide Cervi. While the institutionalization of the Cervi public memory through a cultural institute may seem neutral, it is important to recognize the ideological and political underpinnings that shaped its foundation. These roots extend back to the memorialization of Alcide Cervi in the immediate post-war period and continue to influence the institute's identity and programming today.

The competition between state and local authorities, as well as between political parties, became an extension of the cultural policy that only on a local level the PCI, excluded by the national government, could implement. It is not surprising, therefore, that when Veltroni, a former PCI member, was in the government in 1997, the majority of the national funds to revolutionize the institute were financed.

The impact of the aforementioned restructuring of the Institute's structure, which involved a shift from a national polycentric model with Rome, Reggio Emilia, and Gattatico to a centralized model centered on the House Cervi in 2008, serves as a powerful instrument for elucidating the underlying reasons behind the contemporary shift from academic and scientific-focused activities to a prevalent massive and educational public search. To develop this branch of research, two paths could be followed:

Firstly, a comprehensive catalogue of the Institute's cultural activities must be compiled, categorised and analysed in terms of their intended audience. This necessitates a more detailed archival structuring and conservation of the relevant material, including that related to the Institute Alcide Cervi. Secondly, a more extensive oral history project could be initiated,

utilising the existing interviews and seeking further volunteers and participants in the Cervi Institute initiatives since the 1980s. This approach will facilitate an examination of the relationship between the public and the initiative, as well as an analysis of the community's engagement with the initiative's promotion and proposal, which in turn shapes and disseminates the memory of the Cervi brothers' story and their Resistance.

Appendix: places of the Alcide Cervi Institute.



Figure 29. Google earth map made by the Author with the main centers of the Alcide Cervi Institute from 1976 to 2003.



Figure 30. House Cervi and Library-Archive Emilio Sereni in 2021, Gattatico.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Uncatalogued and unpublished Archive Institute Alcide Cervi records.

Note: this document presents a provisional inventory of the archival funds identified during the current research project at the Alcide Cervi Institute, conducted between September 2023 and March 2024. The list is not exhaustive but provides a starting point for further investigation. The aforementioned sources have yet to be cataloged and require the input of an archivist to become accessible to researchers. The records were digitized for this study, and a provisional hierarchy has been proposed. While only a portion of the available archival sources have been used for this study, the list of resources provides potential avenues for a more in-depth examination of the history of the Institute Alcide Cervi and the evolution of its cultural activities.

“Archivio dell’Istituto Alcide Cervi” [Institute Alcide Cervi Archive – AIAC]

Fond: “Amministrazione” [Administration]

Actual status: in current use - uncataloged

Series: Assemblea dei Soci [Associates’ Assembly]

Activity done: Fully photographed.

Folders:

- 1) N. Verbale 1-10 (2-04-1974,16-04-1983)
- 2) N. Verbale 11-18 (12-05-1984, 14-06-1991)
- 3) N. Verbale 19-23 (15-08-1991, 21-05-1994)
- 4) N. Verbale 24... (26-05-1995, 8-07-2006)

Series: Consiglio di Amministrazione [Administrative Committee]

Activity done: Fully photographed.

Folders:

- 1) N. Verbale 1-18 (24-04-1972, 12-11-1983)
- 2) N. Verbale 19-26 (27-04-1984, 14-03-1987)
- 3) N. Verbale 27-46 (8-05-1987, 27-05-1992)
- 4) N. Verbale 47-61 (10-09-1992, 27-05-1994)
- 5) N. Verbale 62-... (16-06-1994, 25-09-1997)
- 6) 25/09/1997 – 16/04/2004
- 7) 30/06/2004 – 26/05/2008

Series: Collegio dei Revisori dei Conti [Accountants' Council]

Activity done: Just A few pictures on the 3 Provincial Acts on House Cervi (1970')

Folders:

- 1) Da 16-01-1984 a 30-09-1988
- 2) Da 30-03-1989 a 25-01-1994
- 3) Da 21-09-1994 a 10-04-2006
- 4) 1981, 1988, 1991 (miscellaneous)

Series: Bilanci e report annual [Budgets and Annual Reports]

Activity done: Partially photographed and partially photocopied.

Folders:

- 1) Effective and Provisional Budgets from 1973 to 1993 + miscellaneous
- 2) Effective and Provisional Budgets from 1994 to 2007 + Members' Assembly Annual

Series: Consiglio di Amministrazione [Administrative Committee]

Activity done: Partially photographed.

Folders:

- 1) Iniziative Concluse 1987 -1995
- 2) Iniziative Concluse 1995-1995
- 3) Iniziative Concluse 1996-1997
- 4) Iniziative Concluse 1997-1999
- 5) Iniziative Concluse 2000-2001
- 6) Iniziative Ottobre 2001-Aprile 2002
- 7) Iniziative Aprile 2003-Dicembre 2003
- 8) Iniziative Gennaio 2004-Dicembre 2004

- 9) Iniziative Ottobre 2005 – Settembre 2006
- 10) Iniziative Novembre 2006- Dicembre 2007
- 11) Iniziative 2008

Series: Miscellanea (Untied Records)

Activity done: Partially photographed.

Folders:

- 1) Visite al Museo Alcide Cervi dal 1977 al 1990.
- 2) Statuti Vecchi
- 3) Commemorazioni 28 Dicembre

Other Archival Holdings consulted

- Archive Institute Alcide Cervi

Fond: Emilio Sereni

Fond: Archivio Documentario della Famiglia Cervi

Fond: Archivio fotografico

Digital audio-video depositories on Vimeo, Youtube and Flickr.com

- Archivio audiovisivo del movimento operaio e democratico

Fond: Filmoteca e Videoteca

Series: PCI

- Portale Storico della Presidenza della Repubblica

National and Reggio Emilia local press

L'Unità, national newspaper.

Il Resto del Carlino, national newspaper.

Nuova Agricoltura, monthly periodical journal.

La Gazzetta di Reggio, local newspaper.

Ultime Notizie, local newspaper.

La Verità, local newspaper.

Original Interviews with workers, volunteers, and administrators of the Alcide Cervi Institute.

Note: The recordings, at the time of writing of this research, as well as the transcripts, are available under request to the author of this thesis and previously the consent of the people interviewed. It is in discussion the acquiring of the original files from the Archive of the Alcide Cervi Institute. The interviews were taken in a semi-structured way, which started from:

- 1) Personal brief profile of the interviewed
- 2) Role in the Institute Alcide Cervi

List of interviews taken and utilized:

Interviews of Edoardo Bastianini to Paola Varesi, 18 March 2024, 50 minutes.

Interviews of Edoardo Bastianini to Massimo Storchi, 19 March 2024, 1.08 hours.

Interviews of Edoardo Bastianini to Sabrina Montipò, 21 March 2024, 44 minutes.

Interviews of Edoardo Bastianini to Rossella Cantoni, 16 April 2024, 1.48 hours.

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Silvio Berlusconi, *Forza Italia* (centre-right liberal-conservative Italian Party), Leader:

"I will be overjoyed to meet Dad Cervi [Alcide] to whom all my admiration goes."

Fausto Bertinotti, *Rifondazione Comunista* (Communist Refoundation Part), Leader:

"Unfortunately, he is dead [in 1970]."

Porta a Porta, TV show, RAI, 6 October 2000

