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Cultivating the biophilic self: Urpo Harva as a theorist of environmental adult education

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Abstract

This article presents ecological thinking of the Finnish educational philosopher, Urpo Harva (1910–1994). Harva's theories of adult education are strongly linked to the theory of self-cultivation developed in Finnish educational theory particularly in the early 20th century, according to which adults need to develop themselves as moral agents in their relations with others and the ecological environment to reach mature adulthood. In addition to his work as a professor, Harva was an active social debater, writing a significant number of columns and essays for Finnish magazines. The present article uses abductive content analysis on 31 of these columns and essays written between 1971 and 1994 to uncover the basics of Harva's environmental adult education theory. The analysis showed that readers are encouraged to adopt a "biophilic" or nurturing attitude towards nature, as this will provide the necessary skills for ensuring a more sustainable future.

Keywords: environmental adult education, self-cultivation, biophilia, Urpo Harva

Introduction

As the first professor of adult education in any of the Nordic countries in 1946, Urpo Harva (1910–1994) was a seminal influence in his field (e.g., Heikkinen et al., 2019). One of the key ideas he promoted was that adult education should above all else work towards an ecologically sustainable future (see e.g., Harva 1955; Alanen 1994; Salo 1994). Testament to Harva's pioneering role is that he first put forward this idea already in the 1950's. Indeed, Harva identified himself as the first professor in Finnish academia to include in his teaching nature conservation, environmental education, and active critique of the ideal of continuous economic growth (Salo, 1994). Although awareness of environmental destruction and the lethal effect of unrestrained economic growth on it is



widespread (e.g., IPCC 2022), discussions on these the topics are still marginal in the field of adult education (see e.g., Schöni 2022; Berkowitz et al., 2005).

Due to the current threats to the environment, there is an urgent need for developing environmental adult education¹ (henceforth EAE) not only in practice but also in theory (e.g., Walter 2009; 2020). In the field of adult education community learning and development (e.g., Gregorčič, 2017), democracy education (e.g., Wildemeersch & Fejes 2018) and citizenship education (e.g., Kloubert 2018) provide a strong theoretical basis to deepen the development of more environmentally sustainable lifestyles in both theory and practice (Walter, 2009). In addition, I argue that the history of Finnish educational theory includes fruitful way to enrich the theory of environmental adult education: the theory of self-cultivation (in Finnish *itsekasvatus*²). By self-cultivation, I mean a goal-oriented educational activity directed at the self, in which a person develops her or his own thinking, her or his ability to reflect on her or his feelings and her or his own actions in a relational relationship with other people, the environment and society (e.g., Kallio & Pulkki 2022; Kallio et al., 2022; Saari et al., 2022; Saari 2021).

Self-cultivation as an exercise proceeds from reflection to the transformation of practical action and finally to the collective effects of action, and its different phases may also occur and develop simultaneously. Therefore, self-cultivation can serve as a meaningful method of environmental education, as it allows adults to critically examine prevailing social norms and the values that guide their own actions (Kallio & Pulkki, 2022; Kallio et al., 2022). Self-cultivation can take place as part of the non-formal and non-vocational adult education field in the Nordic civic education system (see Manninen, 2017) but its practice does not necessarily require any kind of structured educational structures. Self-cultivational exercises can include, for example, reading circles, keeping a diary (*hypomnemata* in ancient Greek), meaningful conversations with a close friend aimed at locating the ideas and values hidden in everyday life that guide one's behaviour (Nussbaum, 2008; 2018; Hadot, 2002), or practising meditation, such as the *metta* exercise that develops Buddhist kindness (e.g., Frewen et al., 2015).

Urpo Harva (e.g., 1963; 1964; Alanen 1994; 1997) was one of the Finnish theorists of self-cultivation, and he saw that adult education should encourage and support the ability and willingness of adults to self-cultivate. Harva also carried out this work, for in addition to developing the theoretical side and contributing to academic debate, he also took seriously his role as a folk educator (in Finnish *kansansivistäjä*). For more than 40 years he participated in various public debates, and over 100 of his columns and essays were published in Finnish journals (Mäki-Kulmala, 1995; Alanen, 1994; 1997), the last of which appeared only three months before his death (Harva, 1994).

Harva's adult age was a very ideologically tense time in Finland due to WWII and post-war development, development of welfare state, Finland's geopolitically unique position as a Cold War buffer state and the rise of Marxism in the universities which have arguably affected his philosophies (e.g., Koski & Filander, 2013; see Harva, 1982b; 1987c; 1990b; 1991b). Despite of this, Harva was nicknamed the 'modern Socrates' as he was always eager to debate with anyone – whatever the topic (Mäki-Kulmala, 1995). Towards the end of Harva's life, growing ecological concerns began to take precedence over remaining politically unaffiliated and in the 1980s he decided to join the green movement (Alanen, 1994; 1997; Mäki-Kulmala, 2010; Filander, 2012).

Urpo Harva has been remembered as a value philosopher of adult education; I argue in this paper that he should also be understood as a theorist of environmental adult education. Harva's published essays and columns on environmental topics all share the ethical concern that adults cannot achieve maturity in a society based on consumption alone (e.g., Harva, 1964; Mäki-Kulmala, 1995). I therefore suggest that Harva, in his

essays and columns, encouraged his Finns readers to adopt a *biophilic*, nurturing attitude to both living and non-living things in nature (e.g., Blom et al., 2020, pp. 8-10; Orr, 2004, pp. 131-152). This nurturing attitude Harva suggested could be achieved, I argue, by active inner work of self-cultivation which I interpret as cultivating both the knowledge and emotions that would further ecologically more sustainable habits (e.g., Harva, 1982a). It should be noted at this point that biophilia and its opposite, *biophobia*³, are terms that Harva himself never used. However, since the meanings of the concepts correlate well with Harva's thinking, I have decided to utilise them in this article, as they help to locate Harva's thinking in the international research field.

To build my argument, I use Harva's essays and columns to shed light on his otherwise largely neglected efforts to make environmental awareness a key part of adult education through self-cultivation. Although many in Finland (e.g., Jaaksi, 1997; Vilkkä, 1997; Alanen, 1994; 1997; Värri, 1997; Mäki-Kulmala, 1995) acknowledge Harva's environmentalism and its connection with adult education, only two pieces of research have so far been published of his ecological thought by the Finnish philosophers Leena Vilkkä (1997) and Vesa Jaaksi (1997), respectively. While there is some discussion of Harva's work in the international literature (e.g., Heikkinen et al., 2019; Saari et al., 2014; Koski & Filander, 2013; Filander, 2012; Räsänen, 1997; Jones, 1986), studies into his ecological ideas are quite non-existent. One reason for the scarcity of research, even in the Finnish research literature, must surely be because Harva did not publish any one piece specifically devoted to the subject (Vilkkä, 1997; Jaaksi, 1997). The only way to put together his environmental theory of adult education is by combining his various columns and essays with his earlier theories.

To do this, I analyse 31 environmental articles written by Harva between 1971 and 1994 (listed at the end of the article), including 16 columns and essays that have not been systematically analysed before. The text sample is thus the largest body of journal data to date that has been used to explore the principles of Harva's environmental adult education. Given the importance Harva attached to popular education, the analysis is based on the idea that these texts summarise the key features of his environmental thought. I analyse the data using an abductive content analysis guided by the following two research questions:

1. What are the societal structures Harva thinks should be targeted by environmental adult education in the pursuit of more ecologically sustainable practices?
2. What forms of self-cultivation does Harva think might question the values these societal structures represent?

These two research questions together form the synthesis of my research aim, which is to locate the main philosophical premises of Harva's environmental adult education. In the article, I interpret Harva's environmental education as an exercise of self-cultivation which is carried out in the way outlined in research question 1, within certain social structures, and in the way outlined in research question 2, through a certain kind of self-cultivation.

I begin the article by describing the field of environmental adult education and its philosophy, especially in the Nordic countries and in Finland. Secondly, I present the historical development of theory of self-cultivation in Finland and the closely related environmental awareness that is intrinsically linked to it, which will provide theoretical background for Harva's thinking. With this theoretical background, thirdly, I examine the main features of Harva's thinking and his work as an academic and teacher of popular education. Fourthly, I briefly outline how I have carried out the research. Fifthly, I present the result of my analysis, biophilic self-cultivation, and outline its main features. Finally,

I summarise the main findings of the paper, assess the choices I have made in it and consider the reflective contribution Harva's thinking can bring to the current discussions.

Foundations of environmental adult education

Environmental adult education is a relatively new field which, as the name suggests, aims to increase environmental awareness through adult education. EAE first emerged as a concept in academic international discussions during the 1970s (Haugen, 2009), though at the grass-roots level of popular education, it had been going on for some decades already (e.g., Walter, 2009; 2020; Clover, 2003). As with popular and adult education in general (e.g., Koski & Filander, 2013), the biggest challenge facing EAE has been its limited class appeal to only the middle classes (Haugen, 2009).

Canadian professor of adult education Pierre Walter, following the philosophical framework of Elias and Merriam (2005), identifies five major philosophical approaches that have historically guided EAE theory and practice: liberal, progressive, behaviourist, humanistic, and radical. I will use these philosophical premises to fulfil the aim of my article. All of these premises include non-formal learning approaches too (Walter, 2020), such as self-cultivation.

The liberal EAE approach has its rationalist roots in the classical philosophy of Ancient Greece and Rome, and thinkers such as Socrates (Walter 2009; 2020, p. 315). The teachings of the ancient philosophical schools also figures in the historical development of self-cultivation (e.g., Hadot, 2002), and prevailing educational theories in the west (e.g., Salo, 2007; Saari, 2021). But when it comes to the modern day, Walter (2009) sees American medical doctor, activist, and professor Alice Hamilton (1869–1970) as the founder of the liberal EAE approach since she scientifically proved how industrial toxins were damaging the environment. Instead of the liberal EAE, the most popular and well-known underlying philosophy of EAE is progressive, which originated in the 1920s in the footsteps of John Dewey's pragmatist philosophy of education and relies on an experiential and learner-centred approach as the philosophical basis for environmental adult education (Walter, 2009; 2020, p. 315).

The third philosophical premise, behaviorism, emerged in the 1970s and focuses on shaping of the human behavior in the society by affecting the mind through rewards and punishments following stimuli. The complete opposite of behaviourism is represented by humanistic EAE theory which focuses on the spiritual growth of the individual after on the stories of ancient people since the beginning of time utilised and developed by, for example, transcendental philosophers in the 1800s such as Henry David Thoreau (1817–1962). The fifth philosophical premise is called radical EAE and it focuses on collective consciousness raising and direct activism in the spirit of Paulo Freire's (1921–1997) liberating education aiming towards a more socially just society. In the radical EAE emerged especially after mid-1980s, this philosophical orientation is broadly reflected in various areas of adult education that emphasise social learning, for example in the field of transformative learning and popular education, rejecting the behaviourist approach entirely but incorporating partly humanist and liberal philosophical premises. (Walter, 2009, pp. 14-20.) Since the last decade, various new forms of environmental adult education based on the philosophy of radical EAE have developed significantly (Walter, 2020), including, for example, ecojustice education introduced by Martusewicz et al. (2020).

Interestingly, radical and progressive approaches of EAE in particular continue to feature in current academic debates on the subject; while liberal, behaviourist and humanistic approaches are largely excluded, despite being the most commonly used

starting points in environmental education fieldwork (e.g., Walter, 2009; 2020). However, as Darlene E. Clover (2003) remarks, the ecological crisis has its roots in the ideological and systemic connection between government and big business, so EAE alone will never be enough to repair the current crisis. Nevertheless by creating awareness and encouraging social activism in individuals, EAE is paving the way for societies to become more ecologically sustainable (e.g., Walter & Kluttz, 2020; Kluttz & Walter, 2018). By encouraging critical evaluation and intersectional understanding, issues such as using land sustainably, can be combined with pushing for the dismantling of colonialism and hierarchical thinking, as they all contribute to current ecological problems (e.g., Walter, 2020). In Europe, for example, EAE is now integrated as part of citizenship skills and is being developed in various research projects and initiatives (e.g., EPALE, 2020).

In Finland, environmental adult education (in Finnish *aikuisten ympäristökasvatus*) has a long but marginalised history as a concept (Manninen & Nokelainen, 2021, p. 141). In 1971, just as EAE was starting to get mentioned in international research, the values that had traditionally been cherished in the field of Finnish adult education since the 1850s were changing dramatically: it was no longer generally thought that prosperous and flourishing people would form a stable society, rather, this general view was replaced with the economically driven ideology of continuous growth. In other words, economic growth was seen as representing individual growth and well-being on a larger scale (Koski & Filander, 2013). In this version of Finnish society, there was very little call for environmental adult education and indeed by the 1990s, it was the case that only one book was published about the subject (Kajanto, 1992) under that term (see Manninen & Nokelainen, 2021). Today however, the pendulum has swung back, and ecosocial education (in Finnish *ekososiaalinen sivistys*) – focusing on Earth's ecological limits, human rights, and a sustainable global economy – is quite popular once again in Finnish educational theory and EAE discussions (e.g., Manninen & Nokelainen, 2021, p. 141).

History of environmentally conscious self-cultivation in Finland

In the late 19th and early 20th century, several Finnish educational philosophers advanced the theory of self-cultivation (Sivonen, 2006). It was strongly inspired by the idea of the ancient Hellenistic schools that one should have a moral responsibility towards others as part of the aspiration to be a cosmopolitan, i.e., a world citizen (e.g., Nussbaum, 2019; Grayling, 2007). It also had its roots in the nascent labour movement and romantic nationalism that gave birth to Finland as an independent nation (Koski & Filander, 2013). This Finnish tradition included a number of thinkers who believed that self-cultivation included the idea of cherishing and appreciating nature and life in all its forms. In other words, human beings could not flourish without close connection with nature (e.g., Kallio & Pulkki, 2022). In this respect, I interpret these theories of self-cultivation as an early form of EAE.

Self-cultivation has its roots in ancient philosopher Cicero's (106–43 BC) *cultura animi* – the idea that the development of the soul being at the foundation of western philosophy and society – and in the first part of the 20th century, a lot of Ancient Greek philosophy was translated into Finnish (Paakkola, 2007). One of the first educational philosophers in independent Finland to focus on adult education and the theory of self-cultivation was Zachris Castrén (1868–1938). He defined self-cultivation as the expansion and deepening of human knowledge and the cultivation of emotions in the manner of the ancient ideal (Koski & Filander, 2013, p. 590; Alanen, 1994). However, he did not overly stress the fact that every adult should be willing to cultivate themselves;

the most important thing was for a nation simply to guarantee the possibility that those who were interested could do so.

After Castrén, several educational theorists linked “cultivation” (which literally means shaping the earth) and self-cultivation to humankind’s relationship with the natural environment. Unlike Castrén, for instance, Santeri Alkio (1862–1930) – who was also a politician – thought it the duty of every citizen to ensure they were civilized, in the sense of being morally informed and aware of their environment. Alkio was in favour of promoting a civilized agrarian culture based on self-sufficient small farmers living in harmony with nature and God (e.g., Mäki-Kulmala, 2012).

Another who advocated a closer relationship with nature was Juho August (J. A.) Hollo (1885–1967), believing there was a mysterious life force hidden in everything that grows (Hollo, 1931; Harni & Saari, 2016; Kallio & Pulkki, 2022). Hollo was clearly indicating that a person should educate oneself holistically to be part of nature on a larger scale than just the land they were cultivating. In this respect, Hollo’s theory is very close to the humanist EAE approach (Walter, 2009; 2020). At roughly the same time, his contemporary – Jalmar Edward Salomaa (1891–1960) – was developing his own view of self-cultivation as the mission to discover one’s personally defined inner calling, and among his pupils was Urpo Harva.

When Urpo Harva in his turn became a professor, in his social debates he emphasised the importance of “civilising the soul” and self-cultivation by bringing people closer to nature (Alanen, 1994, p. 297; 1997, p. 28). Both Alkio, Hollo and Harva base their thinking on the humanist premise that the organic environment exists fundamentally for human beings. This view, now understood as anthropocentric, is in line with the moral view of early 20th century adult education about the uniqueness of human beings in relation to other living beings (Koski & Filander, 2013).

Urpo Harva – Professor, philosopher and popular educator

As the university’s Chair of Adult Education in Tampere (1946–1973), Harva placed theories of adult education within the broader framework of educational theory and practice (e.g., Jokinen, 2017; Alanen, 1997). These broader frameworks pointed out the shortcomings in contemporary society’s increasing reliance on technology to solve all its problems, and the dangers of this uncritical reliance for educational theory (Vilkka, 1997). Harva’s seminal role in Finnish adult education (in Finnish *aikuiskasvatus*) lies in the fact that he defined and named the field, along with its various concepts (Alanen, 1994; Mäki-Kulmala, 1995; Harva, 1981). By the 1970s, however, the practices and values of adult education had changed quite significantly and rapidly from the way Harva originally defined them (Jokinen, 2017).

In the process of developing the theory of adult education in Finland, Harva was clearly intent on challenging practitioners of it to really question the values and norms behind their field (Harva, 1955; Mäki-Kulmala, 1995). The need to be aware of this value base in adult education is still relevant because, as Leena Koski and Karin Filander (2013) point out, Finnish adult education has throughout its history shaped its fundamental values and operating principles to match the prevailing societal value bases. Harva strongly opposed an education geared towards current labour-market needs; according to him, adult education should instead be focused on the holistic development of adults, to enable them to develop their unique personality, with educational structures amenable to this development (Alanen, 1997). The priority was thus to develop the willingness and ability of adults to cultivate themselves – in line with the Finnish tradition of self-cultivation (Harva, 1955; Alanen, 1994).

According to Harva (1963), self-cultivation required the adult to be constantly motivated to develop themselves, and for this development to be visible in the way they interacted with others. The major difference between Harva and the ancient Hellenistic traditions of self-cultivation, is that he was emphasising the well-being of the individual over that of society (Autio, 1997, pp. 41-42). Society could only become great, Harva reckoned, once the individuals within it had discovered what they needed to achieve maturity through self-cultivation (Mäki-Kulmala, 1995; Alanen, 1997).

As well as self-cultivation, Harva (1955) felt that adult education was about treasuring and valuing the environment one lived in. Reminiscent of Hollo's thoughts on this matter, Harva had the following to say:

The concept of conservation has nowadays become an extremely relevant topic because, as industry expands, more of nature is being destroyed and we have become increasingly cut off from it. Because our nation is lagging in the field of conservation, our cultural landscape is also being destroyed. This is because conservation is not only concerned with things of economic value, but also those which have aesthetic and moral value. As questions of conservation apply to many kinds of adult education, the topic should be given more attention than previously. (Harva 1955, pp. 53-54).

Harva continued to link adult education with nature conservation until the end of his life. When Harva retired from his professorship, he increasingly moved to share his ideas on environmental protection through columns, essays and commentaries published in Finnish newspapers. He even joined the Green movement in the 1980s and became one of the founding members of Finland's Green Association for the Protection of Life (VESL) (Vilkka, 1997, pp. 194-196) which still exists to this day. Interestingly, in her analysis of Harva, Leena Vilkka (1997, p. 205) draws attention to the fact that Harva's environmental philosophy seems to resemble much the environmental philosophy of Harva's American colleagues at the time. However, Vilkka does not specify which American philosophers she is referring to – nor does Harva himself actively bring the ideas of his international contemporaries to the discussion.

In spite of his many newspaper articles that could be seen as nature conservation activism, Harva (1987b) defined himself only as a "greenish humanist". This suggests that he saw humanism as the central basis of his theories, and indeed the strong humanist undercurrent of his thinking is widely acknowledged (e.g., Alanen, 1994; Jokinen, 2017). Harva, however, did not understand humanism as the natural value base for human action, although its achievement in individual action was not entirely impossible (e.g., Alanen, 1997, p. 36). Adopting a humanistic attitude to life required a lot of work – it was an educational challenge.

By the end of his life, however, it was clear that Harva had moved from careful academic impartiality to a more radical agency which he felt obliged to express in his public columns, whether or not these met with the approval of his academic contemporaries. Although Harva had always been a very active debater, he had hitherto always remained neutral; but now, towards the end of his life, he was making real the kind of adult education he saw as important in his educational theories. Although he did not consider himself an active green activist, his diligence as a writer on environmental awareness suggests otherwise.

Applications of abductive content analysis

The data for the study consisted of 31 environmental columns and essays written by Urpo Harva and published in the Finnish newspapers *Aamulehti* (n = 26) and *Vihreä lanka* (n

= 5) between 1971 and 1994 – a full list of which can be found at the end of this article. Aamulehti has been published in Tampere since 1881 and is still the second largest local newspaper in Finland. Urpo Harva is known to have written more than 100 columns for the paper during his lifetime between 1961 and 1994 (Jokinen, 2017). After 36 years in print, *Vihreä lanka* became the best-known magazine supporting the green movement in Finland, yet however its last issue was published in December 2019.

As Harva saw his role as a popular educator important and continued to write diligently for local newspapers even after his retirement (Alanen, 1994; 1997, p. 33), I see the texts as educational efforts to influence public opinion. Since Harva's theory of adult education is based on giving adults the capacity for self-cultivation (Harva, 1963; 1964), I interpret the newspaper articles in this light as materials that encourage and support the practise of self-cultivation.

I utilised abductive content analysis as my analysis method in this article. Abductive content analysis is described as a theory-driven method of analysis, as the analysis of the data starts with the conditions of the data content, but is finally integrated into an existing theoretical framework (e.g., Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). The method of analysis does not proceed systematically, step by step, but forces the researcher alternately to approach and distance themselves from their subject and to engage deeply with their subject, allowing new knowledge to emerge through time-consuming and in-depth reflection (Earl Rinehart, 2021; Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). Kenny Earl Rinehart (2021, p. 3) even argues that abductive analysis is a potential response to the current intensity- and time-pressured research field: because it inevitably takes time, its results are also often more reliable than those of inductive or deductive content analysis.

In this article, the abductive analytical approach is reflected in the way how I first formulate a general idea of Harva's environmental education and its philosophical starting points, based on newspaper articles. I then extend my analysis by considering the theoretical premises central to Harva's thinking; namely that adult education should always support the possibility of practicing self-cultivation. From these premises, I form the actual result of an abductive content analysis, i.e. I interpret Harva's environmental philosophy as a practice of self-cultivation and, based on the data, I formulate a social framework of unsustainable structures that are central to the practice of self-cultivation.

I made use of the ATLAS.ti software to analyse the data and the analysis proceeded as follows: in the first step, I coded the data into 31 thematic categories, such as 'technology' and 'overconsumption'. I then created eight subcategories from these thematic categories around which I built the argumentation of the article. These were 'value philosophy', 'humanism', 'desirability', 'avoidability', 'moral agency', 'self-cultivation', 'biophilia' and 'biophobia'. I chose to focus on the last four of these in this article, as they were the most comprehensive and contained codes for the largest number of data collection.

The use of these four sub-categories meant that enough data had been collected to reach a saturation point and that no further value could have been added if more data had been collected. Indeed, the same themes seem to recur again and again in Harva's texts, often using the same ancient Greek examples, notably Icarus flying too close to the sun or the Greeks' own fear of technology (Harva, 1979; 1982a; 1987a; 1987c; 1988c; 1988f; 1991a). Another of Harva's favourite examples is the vicious 'new science' of René Descartes (1596–1650), based on dualism, which he claims has put nature at the service of humanity and thus sown the seeds of destruction for the current ecological crisis (1971; 1982a; 1987a; 1987c; 1990a).

The ethical issues involved in this research are worth mentioning, since abductive content analysis is always an interpretation of what is written. By starting from the data

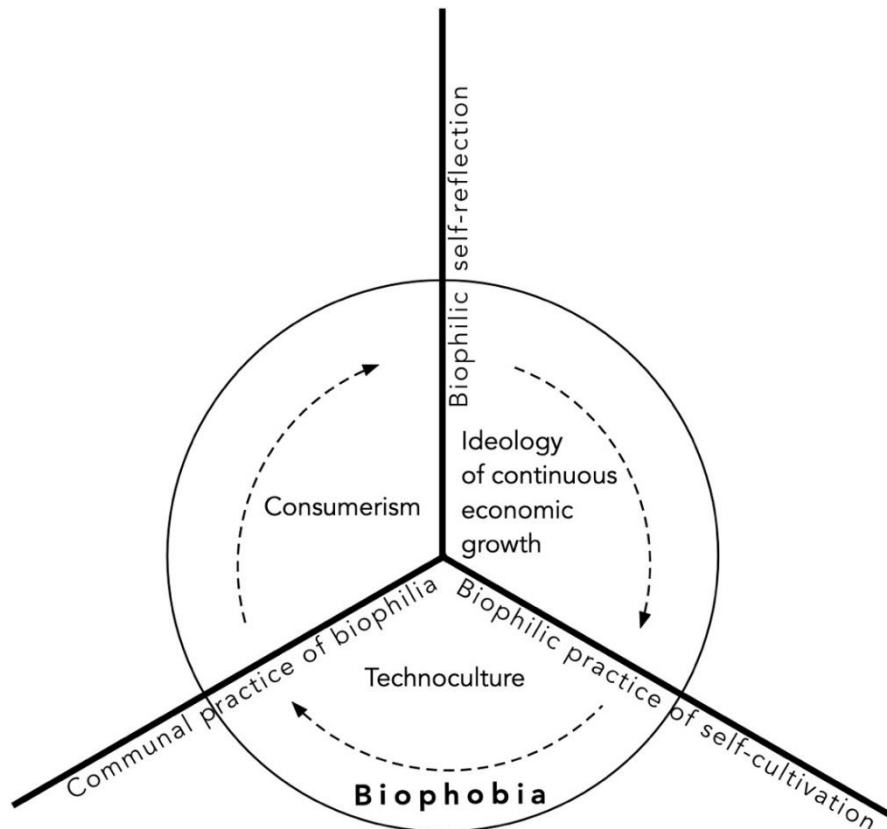
itself, I have done my best to avoid the bias that would result from reading my own hypotheses into the data. Therefore, I only deepened my understanding of Harva's theory after I had already analysed the data once – and then deepened my analysis further utilising Harva's theory. However, despite these precautions, the results of the analysis are still my interpretation of what Harva has written, and are of course influenced, for example, by the stories I have been told before about Harva's personality and behaviour – for example by Emeritus Professor Veli-Matti Värri and Associate Professor Karin Filander. My interpretation may also have been influenced by other historical texts written by Harva or commenting on his thinking that I have not realised to mention in this article.

Self-Cultivation in Harva's footsteps: Cultivating the biophilic self

I present the results of the analysis in Figure 1 below, where the wheel represents the social values and structures that Harva considers harmful to the environment and people because they perpetuate ecological unsustainability. In this sense, the values and structures within the wheel, namely consumerism, the ideal of continuous economic growth and technoculture, reduce people's opportunities for an ecologically sustainable and good life. In my interpretation, the values and structures within the wheel in Figure 1 are permeated by a biophobic attitude that seeks to dominate and control nature, and in doing so leads to an ever deeper alienation from nature (e.g., Orr, 2004, pp. 74-77; pp. 131-137).

The wheel in Figure 1 is intersected by three sticks that prevent it from moving. They illustrate, as a result of my analysis, the forms of more ecologically sustainable, biophilic, self-cultivation that can mitigate the effects of the ecologically unsustainable values and structures described within the wheel. The first stick describes biophilic self-reflection, which allows to recognize and acknowledge the moral challenges people face in a society where values and cultural norms influence their thoughts and behavior (e.g., Harva, 1960, pp. 71-73, 89-90; 1955, pp. 28-30, 32, 43-46). The second stick describes the practice of biophilic self-cultivation, i.e. how concrete biophilic practices can be used to achieve a more ecologically sustainable change in behaviour and thinking, and self-cultivation through a variety of exercises (e.g., Harva, 1960, p. 90; 1955, pp. 50-55). The third stick extends personal biophilic practices into communal ones: that is, it involves the practice of self-cultivation through interaction with others and action in community (e.g. Harva, 1963, pp. 89-90, 118-120).

Figure 1. Framework of biophilic self-cultivation (author's own figure)



Defining the wheel: Rotten roots of ecocrises

According to Harva, the ecocrisis has its roots in modern natural science, which originated in Europe with the Cartesian dualism of philosopher René Descartes. Harva (1987c; 1988a; 1988b; 1988c; 1988e; 1991b) calls this new era *technoculture*. Whereas previously nature and its mysteries had been treated with respect, technoculture led to a tendency to see all the environment only in terms of matter. This materialism also includes animals, which have been left in the role of *automata* without emotions or cognitive abilities (Harva, 1971; 1982c; 1987a; 1991c). This cultural norm has created the need to control nature through a growing collective knowledge – modern natural science.

Technoculture causes suffering to nature, animals, and humans alike, because it disconnects people from their natural connection with nature (Harva, 1987c; 1988b). In this, Harva's thinking is similar to that of, for example, the psychoanalyst Erich Fromm (1900-1980), who argued that human suffering is fundamentally caused by the loss of connection with nature as understood in capitalist societies (Fromm, 2001). Fromm's books were widely translated into Finnish in the 1960s and 1970s, when they were read with enthusiasm, especially by Finnish teachers (Moisio, 2008, p. 138). In this sense, Fromm's works may also have contributed to Harva's thinking, although he does not mention this possible connection himself.

Harva sees *consumerism* as a destructive form of instrumental thinking. He writes quite bitterly about advertising, especially billboards, and how they take us away from our natural environment, not only aesthetically but also morally (Harva, 1978; 1988c; 1988i; 1990c). According to Harva (1978; 1986a; 1988b; 1988d; 1988g), people become

overly secularized by advertising and begin to value consumption more and more, and this in turn isolates people further and further from nature. The consumer culture is therefore, according to him, an obstacle to mature adulthood, as it causes people to become too attached to material values at the expense of spiritual ones (Harva, 1964; Mäki-Kulmala, 1995).

Consumerism, on the other hand, is fuelled by *the ideal of continuous economic growth*: for Harva, it is the real rotten root of modern society, leading to ecocrises. According to Harva (1978; 1988g), the most problematic aspect of the idea of continuous economic growth is its religious aspects:

Today we live under the spell of an ideology of economic growth, an ideology that has taken on the characteristics of a religion. This religion has spread, or is spreading, everywhere, regardless of economic and political systems. Continuous growth is seen as the salvation of humankind from poverty, disease, social injustice, even, to some extent, from the tyranny of death. The ideology of economic growth sees nature merely as a raw material for industry, which humans can use at will to satisfy their material needs. (Harva, 1978)

The best way to counteract these cultural norms of continuous economic growth and relentless consumerism, Harva ventures, is to nurture our link with nature back to health. He also recognises the naivety of assuming that the current technoculture would ever want an equitable balance between humankind and the rest of nature (Harva, 1979). Reflecting contemporary Cold War concerns, he paints a stark reality:

Cultural evolution is now in a dangerous state. The most painful point is the conflict between nature and humankind; humankind's relationship with nature has been shaken, endangering its very existence. Culture is torn by life-threatening contradictions, such as capitalism versus communism, rich versus poor nations living under the threat of the atomic bomb. (Harva, 1982b)

Here Harva's text strongly resembles the concept of biophobia – it reflects a fear of living nature, an emotional reaction to an uncontrollable and immeasurable nature, which is one of the main problems of contemporary society by preventing the sustainable use of the earth's limited resources (e.g., Orr, 2004, p. 136). In 1982, after watching a documentary on industrial meat production in a rather sentimental state, Harva wrote about how indifferent – one might say biophobic – attitudes are instilled in children from a very young age:

This writing is a protest for animals. That is why I also protest against butterfly collecting. Butterflies are among the most beautiful, fragile and helpless creatures on Earth. Collecting them has become a fad. Even children are taught to capture them, to push them into glass jars and to murder them with poison. In this way, an attitude towards animals is instilled in children from an early age, the horrific results of which were seen in the film 'Animals'. (Harva, 1982c)

Thus, as I argue in this paper, Harva seems to be pursuing a new cultural ideal of living according to ecologically sustainable principles and values – that is, Harva was formulating a form of cultural ecological reconstruction (e.g., BIOS, 2019). Harva thus focused both on the power of enlightenment, i.e. his environmental thinking has traits of liberal EAE (e.g., Walter, 2020, p. 315), and on appealing to the reader's relationship with nature on an emotional and spiritual level, i.e. his thinking at this stage also seems to have traits of humanist EAE (e.g., Walter, 2020, p. 316). What seems to be central to him in these writings is precisely to maintain the role of the popular educator and his goal in

accordance with his theories of adult education (Harva, 1955; 1963): to educate the reader and, on the other hand, to appeal to reader emotionally as well – in my interpretation, to encourage self-cultivation.

The sticks to stop the wheel: Cultivating the biophilic self

The first step in self-cultivation is to practice self-reflection and orient oneself towards a reflective attitude towards oneself, the society and the environment. Harva (1980, p. 13) stresses that it is necessary for human beings to reflect on the ethical issues central to life – and the human relationship with the ecocrisis-permeated environment is clearly such a central ethical issue for life. As I have noted before, Harva seemed to have gone to great lengths to bring into the public discussion a critical perspective on current social practices and values that perpetuate ecologically unsustainable structures. The basis of these practices and values is found in a techno-materialist approach to the environment. According to Harva, capitalism and the ideal of continuous economic growth maintain and reproduce this instrumental relationship with nature and perpetuate the values associated with it at the level of society. Because Finnish adult education has historically changed its form according to prevailing societal values, the way to define mature adulthood, active citizenship and, for example, work-based adult education are still closely linked to the ideals of economic growth (Koski & Filander, 2013, p. 595).

Harva (1964, p. 50, 57) opposed such an economic growth-oriented task of adult education and argued that the whole field should rather be harnessed to promote meaningful leisure activities alongside nature conservation work by supporting practice of self-cultivation. Harva made it clear that people should seek personal fulfilment less in work and more in leisure (see also Mäki-Kulmala, 1995, pp. 29-30; Alanen, 1997, p. 35). This is quite radically different from the general consensus in the 20th and 21st centuries, which values creativity, flexibility, emotional control and total dedication to work (see Koski & Filander, 2013, p. 594). Perhaps Harva's thinking today could be thought of as a good mirror for the extent to which economic interests guide our education and placement in society, and how this value base in turn influences the mitigation of deepening ecocrises in society.

Researchers Pasi Takkinen and Jani Pulkki (2022) draw attention to our relationship with the technosphere as an important part of environmental education, since even so-called 'sustainable growth' is still growth, and not necessarily enough to avert ecological disaster. Urpo Harva (1989; 1991b) did not completely reject the idea of sustainable growth, but he also believed that people's current standard of living, or at least their expectations of what it is, must change:

I believe that technologists can invent pollution-free cars, planes, ships, non-toxic fertilisers and pesticides, and other technoculture that is environmentally friendly, such as solar energy. However, it takes so much time that, in order to preserve nature, humans are forced to compromise a great deal on economic growth. (Harva, 1991b)

Given the limited resources of the planet, multi-faceted educational efforts are needed to promote the adoption of more ecologically sustainable practices on a larger scale. While responsibility for more ecologically sustainable practices is not only the responsibility of individuals, but rather of governments and large corporations (e.g., Clover, 2003; Davies, 2016), individuals can be part of a collective movement that drives change towards more ecologically sustainable practices (e.g., Klutetz et al., 2020; Maeckelbergh, 2009; Saari et al., 2022). Communal practice of self-cultivation can serve as a means of motivating such civic engagement, as it is a method for perceiving and reflecting on the relationality of

human life. Through deep reflection, practices and finally, communal aspects of one's behaviour, a change in the value system that guides individual's behaviour thus becomes possible during the process of self-cultivation (e.g., Kallio & Pulkki, 2022; Kallio et al., 2022).

Indeed, Harva (1963; 1980, p. 13) writes that a practice of self-cultivation helps people to reflect on the ethical implications of their own actions and to perceive one's own responsibility for the well-being of the environment and other people. Above all, however, he urges people to take for their fellow human beings at the national level:

Market forces are spoken of as if they were natural laws over which human has no control. However, *market forces can be countered by more powerful moral forces* (italics added). If we are so morally reckless that we buy foreign food cheaper than domestic food, we will put an end to our agriculture, increase the number of unemployed by six figures and have to pay them unemployment benefits. (Harva, 1992a)

This moral responsibility to others did not, however, include the global South or even other Western countries, let alone other animal species. In this sense, his vision of communal act of ecologically sustainable practices, biophilia, is quite limited compared to, for example, aims of modern radical EAE, since he did not recognise global human responsibility and unjustly distributed resources, let alone the impact of, just to name one, colonialism (see, Kluttz et al., 2020). As philosopher Heikki Mäki-Kulmala (2010) writes, it seems that Harva did not develop a biosphere-centric worldview because it would have been in stark contrast to the fundamental humanist approach to his thinking. However, Harva's humanism did not exclude the great human responsibility for the environment: caring for nature (Harva, 1978; 1982a; 1986c; 1988b; 1988c; 1988g; 1988h; 1989) and opposing technological values (Harva, 1979; 1982a; 1986c; 1987a; 1987c; 1988a; 1988b; 1988d; 1990a; 1991b) was necessity to survive, even though in his thinking human was always superior to other species and nature (Harva, 1971; 1979; 1982a; 1986c; 1987a; 1987b; 1987c; 1989; 1990a; 1990b).

Just as adult education, according to Harva, did not fulfil its potential to promote ecologically conscious, biophilic self-cultivation, neither have organised religions been successful in transmitting more ecologically conscious values. For Harva, it was not so much that beliefs themselves had caused the ecological crisis – Harva (1971; 1988a; 1989) strongly defends Christianity, Judaism and Buddhism, for example – but that the Lutheran and Catholic churches in particular are “shameful” institutions because they have positioned themselves in many societies as the forerunners of modern science (Harva 1988c). On the basis of these ideas, both Vilkkä (1997, pp. 202-203) and Jaaksi (1997), drawing on Harva's own words (1978), define Harva as formulating a kind of ‘theology of nature’ in his ecological thinking.

Thus, the basis of Harva's self-cultivation seems to be a progressive EAE approach, based on a strong emphasis on spiritual, personal connection and on encouraging experientialism (Walter, 2009; 2020, p. 315). He seems to have encouraged an appreciation of nature as a precious gift to be experienced (Harva, 1982a), and highly valued the pursuit of a unique and individual relationship with the natural world around us (Harva, 1971; 1978; 1982c; 1987a; 1988c; 1988g). Such a strong unique relationship with nature is often described in the research literature as a biophilic attitude (e.g., Blom et al., 2020; Joye & De Block, 2011; Orr, 1995; 2004, pp. 131-152; Rolston, 1995; Wilson, 1984). Drawing on these points, I argue that Harva's writings encouraged Finns to adopt an environmentally caring, biophilic attitude, and thus I understand his theory of environmental adult education as essentially an attempt at biophilic self-cultivation in which this nature-nurturing attitude is cultivated.

My argument that Harva's writings encourage the adoption of a biophilic attitude towards nature is further supported by the fact that the concept of biophilia centrally involves the role of emotions (e.g., Blom et al., 2020; Orr, 2004). Indeed, Harva (1982a; 1987a; 1988g) acknowledged the important role of the presence of emotions in extending one's moral responsibility towards nature. He saw that answers to the question of the absolute value of nature cannot even be found rationally (Harva, 1987a; 1982a; Vilkkä, 1997, p. 198), but 'In nature, we can experience experiences that are difficult to describe, such as the 'speech of silence'' (Harva, 1982a). Since Finnish theory of self-cultivation has encouraged, as an educational activity, to include the cultivation of both knowledge and emotions in practising self-cultivation, and Harva (e.g., 1963) also sees the practice of both skills as an important part of self-cultivation, it makes sense to attach his thinking to a strong concept of environmental emotions – especially when my aim is to locate the environmental-philosophical starting points of his thinking.

At first glance, the strong presence of emotions seems to move Harva's EAE theory towards a more humanistic starting point, but according to Walter (2009; 2020, p. 316), the humanistic EAE approach is characterised by the fact that the achievement of an emotional connection does not aim significantly, or at least not primarily, at changing human behaviour. Rather, it relies on the self-directed nature of human beings and assumes that each person is essentially morally good and acts in accordance with their own morality. This differs from Harva's view that humans did not naturally know how to act according to humanistic virtues, but they had to grow in order to develop as a moral agent (e.g., Alanen, 1997, p. 36). Thus, while the humanist EAE approach seeks to enhance human happiness and self-esteem (Walter, 2020), it does not, in my view, adequately account for Harva's efforts to influence the actions and thinking of his readers. The attention to emotions and experientialism combined with an action-driven grip locates Harva's environmental adult education rather within the progressive EAE approach (Walter, 2009; 2020, p. 315).

Thus, the philosophical starting points of Harva's EAE theory seem to be, on the one hand, a progressive approach in the light of his columns and essays, but also, on the other hand, liberal approach through the Finnish theoretical tradition of self-cultivation. Harva sees it as important both to create an experiential connection to nature by seeking its proximity and, on the other hand, to acquire knowledge about the state of the environment – even if it arouses strong emotions (e.g., Harva, 1982c). For Harva, the most important thing seems to be to encourage his readers to biophilic self-cultivation through these two approaches.

These philosophical premises underlie the three sticks shown in Figure 1: they prevent the reinforcement of ecologically unsustainable social values and structures and together, as a result of my analysis, form a model of biophilic self-cultivation. In it, (1) *biophilic self-reflection* guides a change in action and thinking that requires an experiential approach to the environment, a realisation of the link between self and environment, and a recognition and acknowledgement of the social norms that maintain and further degrade the ecological state of the environment (Harva, 1971; 1978; 1982c; 1987a; 1988c; 1988g), (2) *the practice of biophilic self-cultivation* involves concrete action to effect this change in one's life, i.e., the adoption of new, more environmentally friendly values to guide one's actions (Harva, 1955; 1963; 1979; 1980; 1989; 1990a), and (3) *the communal practice of biophilia* extends one's sphere of action through interaction to the wider environment through one's interactions with other people, animals, and the environment (Harva, 1960, pp. 118-120; 1987c; 1988e; 1991a). In this way, biophilic self-cultivation expands from the individual's internal reflection, contemplation, and practice towards a communal perspective, and each of these stages of self-cultivation that

prevent the wheel from turning works overlappingly and partially simultaneously, influencing not only the individual's own thinking and action but also others through their actions.

Conclusion

In this article, I argued that Urpo Harva's columns and essays were part of Harva's popular educational mission to encourage Finns to adopt a biophilic attitude towards the environment. Since Harva saw encouraging self-cultivation as the background to all adult education activities, I argued that his background motive in the environmental writings that were the subject of my study was to encourage his readers to be environmentally aware in their self-cultivation, i.e., to engage in biophilic self-cultivation. As a result of my analysis, Harva seem to emphasises a strong experiential, emotional connection with nature, and the concept of biophilia is used in contemporary literature to describe the environmental relationship portrayed by Harva.

My first research question sought answers to the social structures that environmental adult education would need to respond to in order to succeed in its mission of building a greener future. The social structures that emerged from the data were technoculture, consumerism and the ideal of continuous economic growth. Interestingly, the debate on capitalism, to which Harva's theory is also closely linked, is not active in the field of adult education (Milana et al., 2021), although the discipline is in many ways attached to markets (e.g., Schöni, 2022).

In my research as a second research question, I sought answers to what forms of self-cultivation in my data texts and in Harva's academic books could challenge these social challenges that Harva identified for environmental adult education. These were biophilic self-reflection, the practice of biophilic self-cultivation and the communal practice of biophilia, which functioned as sticks that could help stop the previously defined cycle of social structures.

Based on these two research questions, my research aim was to locate the philosophical premises of Harva's EAE theory. I utilised the five philosophical starting points of environmental adult education as defined by Walter (2009; 2020), and Harva seemed to form his own EAE theory from a combination of progressive and liberal approaches; his aim, based on my analysis, was to increase the reader's knowledge of the environmental catastrophe (liberal EAE) and, on the other hand, to emphasise experientialism and deeply personal relationship with the environment (progressive EAE).

At this stage, it is worth reminding that the aim of this article was also to provide the first in-depth analysis of Harva's environmental philosophy in the 21st century. In the absence of recent research on Harva, many aspects that overlap with his environmental thinking have been left out of this article. For example, I would have liked to have studied in more detail Harva's personal transformation from a politically uncommitted academic to a rather radical environmental activist, as this would also shed light on Harva as a partly inconsistent, sometimes emotionally based figure (e.g., Harva, 1978; 1982c; 1988a; Alanen, 1997, pp. 32-33) and thus as a human breaking the normative image of the "white academic man", dedicated to the causes he considered important. Unfortunately, this and many other research topics are beyond the scope of this article.

Critical attention should also be drawn to the fact that my material is not independently capable of shedding very deep light on the features of Harva's environmental thinking (see Jaaksi, 1997, p. 207). My article therefore aimed at outlining Harva's environmental thinking and locating his starting point in the field of

environmental adult education in order to prove my claim that Harva can also be considered a theorist of environmental adult education. This is an interesting finding, as it shows that Finnish environmental adult education theory has been developed earlier and more extensively than is often acknowledged. At the same time, Urpo Harva's significant contribution to the discipline of adult education as its first professor in the Nordic countries is extended beyond basic concepts and philosophy to environmental education theory. The debate can continue on the extent to which the theoretical tradition of self-cultivation in Finland, which formed the basis of his theories, can be considered a precursor to environmental adult education.

Notes

- 1 Also known as adult environmental education (AEE), but to link this paper on the previously more widely established expression on research field, I will use the form of environmental adult education (EAE).
- 2 It should be mentioned that literally the Finnish term 'itsekasvatus' would be translated into English as 'self-education', but since this translation does not match the meaning of the Finnish equivalent of the concept, I will instead use the concept 'self-cultivation' in this article (see more, Varpanen et al., 2022, pp. 351-352).
- 3 The concept of biophilia and necrophilia, which refers to biophobia, were originally developed by the German psychoanalyst Erich Fromm (1900–1980). Biophobia was first used as a counterpart to biophilia by the American biology professor Edward Wilson (1929–2021), who enriched the concept of biophilia by including a concern for everything in nature (Wilson, 1984; 1993; Blom et al., 2020; Joye & De Block, 2011, p. 190).

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Appendix

List of Analysed Columns and Essays

- Harva, U. (1971, October 9). Luomakunnan huokaus [The Sign of Creation]. *Aamulehti*.
- Harva, U. (1978, September 2). Luontosunnuntai [Nature Sunday]. *Aamulehti*.
- Harva, U. (1979, February 17). Luonnon vikapisto [Nature's Mistake]. *Aamulehti*.
- Harva, U. (1982a, June 25). Ihminen ja luonto [Human and Nature]. *Aamulehti*.
- Harva, U. (1982b, October 16). Elossasäilymisoppi on pelastusoppi [The Doctrine of Survival is the Doctrine of Salvation]. *Aamulehti*.
- Harva, U. (1982c, November 27). Eläinten filmi [Animal Film]. *Aamulehti*.
- Harva, U. (1982d, September 22). Linkolan puolustus [Linkola's Defense]. *Aamulehti*.
- Harva, U. (1986a, July 7). Pako maaseudulle [Espace to the Countryside]. *Aamulehti*.
- Harva, U. (1986b, September 1). Vihreä yhteiskunta [Green Society]. *Aamulehti*.
- Harva, U. (1987a, June 18). Ihminen ja luonto, erottamattomat [Human and Nature, Inalienable]. *Aamulehti*.
- Harva, U. (1987b, July 27). Matka Hämeeseen [Trip to Häme]. *Aamulehti*.
- Harva, U. (1987c, November 28). Tuhoaako ihminen elämän? [Does the Human destroy the Nature?]. *Aamulehti*.
- Harva, U. (1988a, January 11). Vihreä jumaluusoppi [Green Theology]. *Aamulehti*.
- Harva, U. (1988b, February 8). Vihreää tiedettä [Green Science]. *Aamulehti*.
- Harva, U. (1988c, March 21). Kristinusko ja luonto [Christianity and Nature]. *Aamulehti*.
- Harva, U. (1988d, May 5). Vihreitä mietteitä [Green Thoughts]. *Aamulehti*.
- Harva, U. (1988e, May 16). Väestönkasvu [Population Growth]. *Aamulehti*.
- Harva, U. (1988f, May 30). Eläinten oikeudet [Animal Rights]. *Aamulehti*.
- Harva, U. (1988g, December 24). Vihreä jouluku, luonnon juhla [Green Christmas, Nature's Celebrity]. *Aamulehti*.
- Harva, U. (1988h). Mitä Harva todella tarkoitti [What Did Harva Truly Meant]. *Vihreä lanka* 1/1988.
- Harva, U. (1988i). Ohjelmakeskusteluun [Discussions Concerning Program]. *Vihreä lanka* 13/1988.
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- Harva, U. (1990a, March 18). Ekoetiikka yhä tärkeämpi etiikan ala [Ecoethics is More and More Important Part of Ethics]. *Aamulehti*.
- Harva, U. (1990b, September 10). Johannes Salminen hyökkää tuulimyllyjä vastaan [Johannes Salminen is Attacking Against Windmills]. *Aamulehti*.
- Harva, U. (1990c). Huomautuksia Vihreän Liiton ohjelmaluonnokseen [Notifications on The Green Associations Program Draft]. *Vihreä lanka* 8/1990.
- Harva, U. (1990d). Urheilu tuhoaa luontoa [Sports Destroying Nature]. *Vihreä lanka* 35/1990.
- Harva, U. (1991a, April 7). Voidaanko luontoa vastaan tehdä rikos? [Can a crime be committed against nature?]. *Aamulehti*.
- Harva, U. (1991b, December 19). Syntymä, lisääntyminen, kuolema, suhde luontoon [Birth, Reproduction, Death, Relationship with Nature]. *Aamulehti*.
- Harva, U. (1992a, February 28). Luonnonläheisyys on itseisarvo [Closeness to Nature is an Intrinsic Value]. *Aamulehti*.
- Harva, U. (1992b, October 22). Väestönkasvun hillintä kehitysavun ehdoksi [Population Growth Control as a Condition to Development Aid]. *Aamulehti*.
- Harva, U. (1994, April 26). Turhaan Linkola paavia syyttää [Linkola Blames the Pope in Vain]. *Aamulehti*.