

Accepted Manuscript

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PII: S0959-6526(15)00867-7

DOI: [10.1016/j.jclepro.2015.06.134](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2015.06.134)

Reference: JCLP 5793

To appear in: *Journal of Cleaner Production*

Received Date: 13 November 2014

Revised Date: 25 June 2015

Accepted Date: 28 June 2015

Please cite this article as: Anand CK, Bisailon V, Webster A, Ben Amor M, Integration of sustainable development in higher education – A regional initiative in Quebec (Canada), *Journal of Cleaner Production* (2015), doi: 10.1016/j.jclepro.2015.06.134.

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Word count with spaces-56,783

Integration of sustainable development in higher education – A regional initiative in Quebec (Canada)

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ABSTRACT: Integration of sustainable development in education is now being addressed in numerous educational institutions across the globe. Based on different integration approaches, various teaching methods are being developed, applied and evaluated. Efforts are also being made in the direction of strengthening pedagogical approaches as well as educator training to address issues such as, lack of awareness and resources required for a better transfer of sustainable development knowledge from educator to students. There is a strong need for these two approaches (integration & pedagogical) to work in close association for an improved level of integration. Regional collaborations are an effective way to address such issues. They can play a key role in achieving sustainability regionally while being influenced by, and influencing, both local and global communities, and that is the main hypothesis of this paper. The goal of this paper is to present a regionalized educational initiative for integration of sustainable development in higher education made by two universities and five colleges in Quebec (Canada). This project is not only dedicated to teaching or application of approaches but is also expanded to: 1) professors' support using various activities (conferences, workshops and short lectures); 2) program integrations; 3) integration at institutional level, (as some institutions have adopted various policies and actions regarding their overall missions of research, community outreach and operations); and, 4) regional collaboration between the seven academic partners, which is a unique characteristic of this project. As a result, this regional collaborative approach helped in building a critical mass of practitioners in the field and launched a community of practice and integrated sustainable development in the member institutions at different levels, strengthening the educator's knowledge on sustainable development pedagogy. Based on the preliminary analysis of surveys taken by students, this integration has helped in developing the understanding of sustainable development by students and has also resulted in a positive attitude towards sustainable development. In addition, the integrations as a result of the collaboration show that integration of sustainable development in higher education is accomplished not only through pedagogical and extracurricular activities but is also embodied in the overall student experience on campus.

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