

Connect the Networks (CtN)

1. Introduction

Connect the Networks (CtN) is a European initiative that unites professionals, researchers, activists, and organizations dedicated to sustainable sanitation and resource recovery. **VaLoo (Switzerland), NetSan (Germany), and RAE (France)** are co-organizing the event. The event aims to strengthen cross-border collaboration, share knowledge, and develop strategies that promote ecological sanitation practices in policy and in practice.

The first and most recent CtN event took place in Dübendorf, Zurich, Switzerland, in November 2023, with **96 participants from eight countries**. The event provided an opportunity for open dialogue, advocacy, and building partnerships. CtN emphasizes that sanitation and nutrient recovery present social, political, environmental, and technical challenges that require collective solutions. The 3-day program included presentations, workshops, visits, an open marketplace, and social evening activities such as movie projections, board games, a gathering around a fireplace, and a **shitting open-ended party with a DJ**.

The main goal of this first event was to get to know each other.

[Recap Video](#)

[Presentations](#)

[3-Day Program](#)

2. The Organizing Networks

Professionals from France, Germany, and Switzerland all agreed that the topic was too large for one country to tackle alone and that collaborating with others would be beneficial. This is how these national networks began. Over time, they realized the need to facilitate cross-border exchanges. Here are some specifics about these networks, which are waiting for other national networks to join the European team.

VaLoo (Switzerland)

- Founded in 2021, with 120 members (2025).
- Brings together diverse actors: research institutions, NGOs, private companies, and individuals.
- Focus: advocacy, networking, and knowledge exchange to promote nutrient recovery and ecological sanitation.

[Website](#)

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NetSan (Germany)

- Founded in 2018, with 67 members (2023).
- Structured around working groups that focus on themes such as advocacy and agriculture.
- Strong track record in publishing standards and policy documents.
- Known for innovative outreach projects, such as the "You Don't Know Shit!" campaign and the Lootopia installation.

[Website](#)

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RAE – Réseau Assainissement Écologique (France)

- Founded in 2006, with 113 members (2023).
- Runs 11 thematic committees on advocacy, agriculture, and more.
- Hosts the annual **Les Intestinales** event and supports projects in urban urine reuse.

[Website](#)

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These three networks form the backbone of CtN by pooling their expertise and providing a platform for collective action.

3. Purpose and Themes of CtN

CtN focuses on three essential areas for advancing ecological sanitation:

1. **Advocacy:** addressing regulatory challenges, promoting nutrient recycling, and creating supportive political frameworks.
2. **Knowledge Management:** sharing experiences, tools, and data across networks and countries.
3. **Collaboration:** building strong international links to amplify impact and avoid duplicating efforts.

Through panel discussions, workshops, and informal exchanges, participants identified common obstacles and promising strategies for scaling sustainable sanitation solutions.

4. Key Challenges

While participants shared barriers specific to their countries, they also identified many common barriers:

- **Regulatory Ambiguity:** urine and feces are not clearly defined in waste regulations, leading to uncertainty.
- **Lack of Incentives and Standards:** few financial or policy mechanisms encourage nutrient recycling.
- **Mandatory Sewer Connections:** laws often require conventional wastewater treatment, leaving little room for alternatives.
- **Fragmented Legislation:** waste, water, and agriculture laws are often managed by different ministries, which complicates the approval process.

However, there are also promising developments:

- In 2018, Switzerland approved **Aurin** (processed urine) as fertilizer
- Discussions in Europe are advancing a **phosphorus strategy for 2026**
- Contradictions in existing laws can be used as entry points for change

5. Knowledge Sharing & Capacity Building

Knowledge management was a central theme at CtN. The networks use various tools to organize and share information:

- Collaborative platforms (Nextcloud, Miro, Etherpad).
- Mailing lists and newsletters.
- Member maps and websites to increase visibility.
- Annual symposia and congresses to connect theory with practice.

Key reflections included:

- Translating documents for international use.
- Setting up shared international newsletters.
- Considering a biennial in-person meeting of the three networks.

6. Outreach & Public Engagement

Creative outreach is crucial for engaging with society and politics. Examples presented at CtN include:

- **VaLoo – Flushlight Roadshow:** A traveling interactive exhibition that uses visuals (e.g., a big pink toilet room filled with carrots to symbolize nutrient recovery).
[Website](#)
- **NetSan – Public Installations & Campaigns:** This includes the “You don’t know shit!” [interactive campaign](#), the [Lootopia](#) garden and the participation at the Venice Biennale.
- **RAE – Urban Pilot Projects:** Urine separation and reuse in Paris, with projects ranging from office urinals to residential apartment buildings.

These initiatives have sparked media attention, political interest, and public awareness, proving that sanitation can be engaging and relevant.

7. Future Collaboration

CtN2023 marked **the beginning** of structured international cooperation. The discussions revealed that the key challenges are a common theme. These challenges demonstrate the need for us to collaborate on advocacy and knowledge sharing, ensuring that constituents can see what is being done in other contexts. Here are some key takeaways for the future:

- Explore collaboration with **SuSanA (Sustainable Sanitation Alliance)** to align with global efforts.
- Strengthen joint advocacy at national and European levels.
- Apply for funding opportunities together.
- Organize CtN as a **regular event every two years** to maintain momentum.

8. Conclusion

Connect the Networks is more than just a conference – it's a growing community dedicated to sustainable sanitation and nutrient recovery. Through advocacy, knowledge exchange, and creative outreach, the networks aim to change how society values human waste, viewing it not as waste but as a resource.

CtN offers the following to **newcomers**:

- Access to a dynamic international network.
- Opportunities to learn from pioneering projects.
- A platform to influence policy and practice.

The journey continues, and each new participant strengthens the collective effort. Together, we can connect networks and shape the future of sustainable sanitation.

Contact us for more information or to join the organizing team!