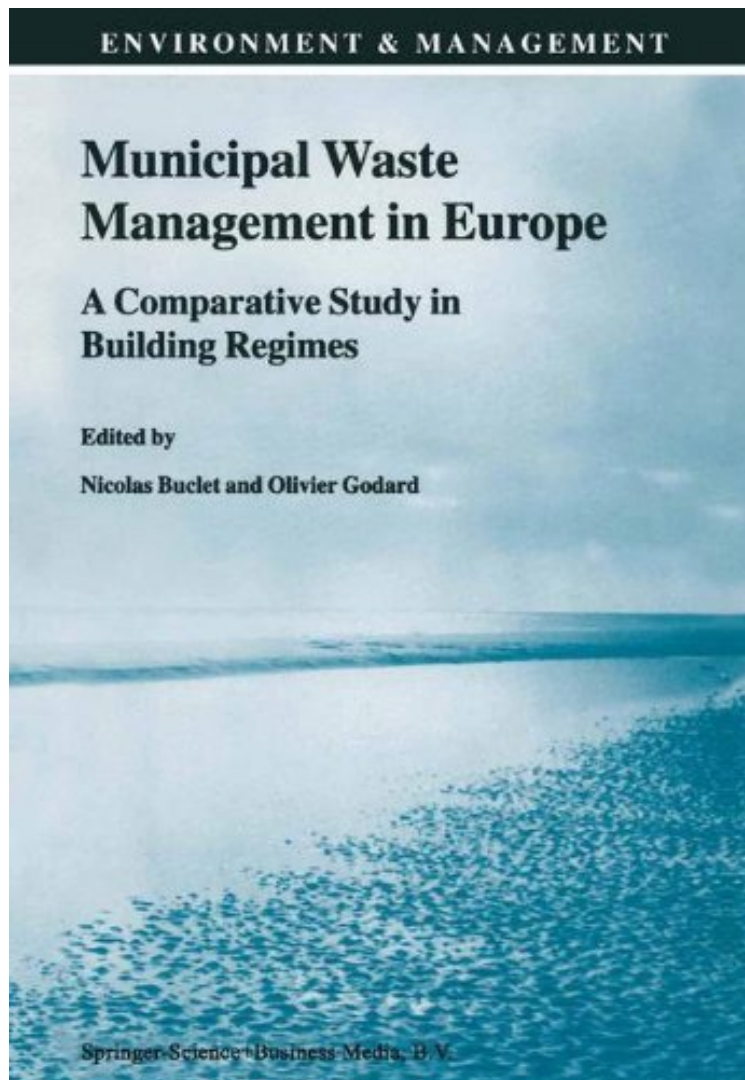


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Nicolas Buclet and Olivier Godard In terms of economic scale, waste management is one of the two most important environmentally oriented sectors. 1 It stands at the cross-roads in the material organization of society, resource management, changing lifestyles and consumption patterns, and ecological issues. For many years waste management has been perceived as a resource and health issue, confined mainly to dense urban areas, and not an environmental issue. In contemporary affluent societies, however, the scale reached by waste flows, the inheritance of accumulated deposits in soils from the waste of previous generations and increasing levels of public concern about environmental protection and quality of life have all conspired to impose a fresh look at what waste really implies for a modern society. We are obliged to focus our attention on such questions as how the circulation of matter is at present organized by society and can be modified and controlled if economic development is to become more environmentally sustainable. This is the period we live in. Significant changes in waste management in European countries have been introduced during the last decade or so. To some extent the transition between traditional regimes mainly based on local disposal and new regimes based on a revised organisation of flows of waste matter is still in the making, involving new attitudes, new activities, new technologies and new incentives, reducing the pressure on virgin natural resources and eliminating the huge dissipation of various pollutants into the environment.