WHAT FUTURE FOR THE EUROPEAN ARCHITECTURE COMPETITION?
The winning team's project responded to the problem of developing the seashore by proposing a series of strategies designed to reactivate the seashore and to create a sort of boundary between it and the city. Following the competition (1996), there were four years of silence because of a change of Mayor. In 2000, the previous mayor was re-elected and recalled the team. For another two years, the process dragged: the municipality didn't really know what it wanted and was short of money. In 2002, however, the city obtained a massive contract with central government to develop the whole city of Heraklion. The local plan was updated and provided a framework within which the implementation of the European project could begin. A first contract was signed for the production of a layout plan for the whole area and for the design of building plans for a more specific site belonging to the municipality. The municipality's goal was to turn this zone into a sort of park, a balcony on the sea, and it didn't want any programmes on the site. The team had to negotiate at length to explain the inappropriateness of a green space next to the sea in Heraklion’s extreme climatic conditions and to show the advantage of incorporating public programmes into the site. It was backed by the technical departments, which helped to persuade the Mayor. The team then worked on variations on the public spaces for the programmes and their location, with proposals for roofed spaces, low spaces, high spaces, open spaces... On the part of the site earmarked for building by the municipality, the team proposed a social programme around a neighbourhood centre (youth centre, Internet cafe, workshops...) on the site of the former fruit market. In 2003, the layout plan and the preliminary studies for the neighbourhood centre were approved by central government and funds were released for the construction. For the team, it was a way to show that the project was well underway and that it could do the rest, still with the idea of reactivating the boundaries between the city and the sea. During these different stages of the process, the team's biggest task was educational: explaining, demonstrating, convincing, negotiating with the different municipal and outside figures (who changed considerably over the 12 years of the process), to achieve a shared language and progress together whilst maintaining the full coherence of the project. The process was further prolonged by the fact that the site overlapped into an area 500 m from a historic monument. The team was obliged to have every stage of their project assessed and approved by a committee of 18 people, primarily archaeologists. In November 2008, 12 years after the competition, the building and the outdoor public spaces were inaugurated, marking the beginning of a long process of regeneration for the Heraklion seashore.