Amvrakikos Gulf is the largest gulf in Western Greece covering an area of approximately 405 km² and one of the largest enclosed gulfs of Greece (fjord-type gulf; about 40 km long and 15 km wide). The gulf got its name from the ancient Ambracia, a city built on the river Arachthos in the place of the current city of Arta. Amvrakikos gulf, also known as the Gulf of Arta or the Gulf of Actium (Greek: Αμβρακικός κόλπος). Along the north shoreline, there is a major lagoon complex composed of Logarou lagoon (26 km²), Tsoukaloi lagoon (16 km² with Avlери lagoon) and Rodia lagoon (13 km²). The gulf is geographically located between the coordinates: North: 39° 50’ - 39° 10’ and East: 20° 40’ - 21° 10’. The entrance to the gulf is the narrow passage between the peninsula of Aktio and the city of Preveza, 600 m wide and with a depth range between 5 and 15 m. This is a closed inland sea with an average depth of 26 m and maximum depth of 65 m. The northern part of the Gulf is shaped by three rivers and their catchment areas and consequently a complex of associated river plains, estuaries/deltas, fresh and salt water marshes and lagoons has been formed. The gulf is considered to be one of the most important areas of Greece (according to CMD 16.611/93) and has been placed under protection by the RAMSAR International Convention on the protection and conservation of waterfowl and waders since 1975. The area has recently been included in the NATURA 2000 Network (code number GR2110001; Title: AMVRAXIKOS KOLPOS, DELTA LOUROU KAI ARACHTHOU (PETRA, MYTIKAS, EVYTERI PERIOCHI)) and is considered to be a very important biotope for flora and fauna and especially for birds (including migratory species and red list species) that are nesting and breeding in such type of habitats. The total area of the NATURA park is 28787.56 ha with 12468.95 ha on land and the rest water areas. The gulf has been proposed as a Site of Community Importance and is a designated Wetland of International Importance.

The ARCH team of Hellenic Centre for Marine Research selected from the start to involve and include in the activities all potential stakeholders of N. Amvrakikos gulf wetlands. These stakeholders include:

A. Management administration
   One (1) Management Agency established by the Ministry of Environment, Energy and Climate Change
B. Political administration
   The region of Epirus, 2 Regional Units and 4 Municipalities share the wetlands; two (2) Fisheries Administrations of the Regions
B. Exploitation
   Local citizens for hunting; fishermen cooperatives who rent the lagoons for fisheries exploitation in the form of natural and artificial fishstocking of the waters with fish originating from the gulf and local hatcheries (gilthead sea bream, Sparus aurata) respectively
C. Protection
   Several citizen groups acting as environmental NGOs

In addition to the above and since it is the decision of the Ministry of Environment, Energy and Climate Change to merge all 3 local Management Agencies (N. Amvrakikos Wetlands, Kalamas-Acheron rivers and their deltas and Messolonghi-Etolikon lagoon and adjacent areas), it was decided to involve also representatives of these additional Management Agencies. This increased the number stakeholders to:

Regions - 2; Epirus and Western Greece
Regional Units - 4; Arta, Preveza, Thesportia, Messolonghi
Municipalities - 9; Arta, Georgios Karaissikis, Nikolaos Skoufas, Preveza, Parga, Ioumenitsa, Filiata, Messolonghi, Nafpaktia
Fishermen cooperatives - 5

The second workshop which was organised within ARCH project, resulted to a mutually agreed list of 27 management issues most of which are unsolvable due to mainly political, legislative and budgetary reasons. In summary, the following groups of issues were identified:

- Lack of a management plan
- Climate change effects on the coastline
- River water mismanagement
- Primary production activities (fisheries, agriculture, livestock) and byproduct mismanagement; poaching; lack of marketing
- Industrial development and mismanagement of wastes
- Tourism
- Fishermen cooperatives
- Legal framework
- Lack of infrastructure
- Political intervention
- Science and RTD
- Administrative incoordination

The most important issues recognised are:

1. Legal framework (distribution of jurisdiction; lack of administration coordination)
2. Illegal activities within the primary production sector
3. Climate change: unknown effects; no consideration especially for the public works

OUTCOME

Three (3) different types of roadmap were designed. One hierarchical, one time-dependant and one geographical, in order to depict the different management scales required for the target area.

In the unfortunate absence of policy and policy plan on behalf of the Management Agency (eventhough obliged by their establishment law since 2008), the main contribution of ARCH documents, deliverables and workshops is to provide the administration with tools which can help them establish their management plans and new ideas and experiences in environmental management.

In other words, ARCH provided a concrete foundation (both methodological and political) which can be directly used for management.