



Dicle Demircioğlu



Pınar İlki Emekçi

A New Era in Airport Terminal Design

In our interview with Dicle Demircioğlu and Pınar İlki Emekçi, the Joint Managing Partners of GMW MIMARLIK, we discuss the company's impressive international experience, award-winning projects and concepts, and the protection and promotion of human and environmental health as an integral part of post-pandemic architecture and design.

AV Aviation Turkey: First off, thank you so much for your time for this interview. GMW MIMARLIK is an architectural office that is known for various projects including Airport terminal projects. Could you briefly inform us on the structure of your company?

DD: GMW Architects, a London-based company founded in 1949, is an architectural and interior design office with many years of international experience. Under the leadership of Ali Özveren, one of the senior partners

of the company at that time, they came to Turkey for the first time in 1997 upon winning the competition opened for the Istanbul Airport New International Terminal project. Following the completion of this project in 2000, GMW MIMARLIK was established in Turkey, again under the leadership of Mr. Özveren. Pınar and I had managerial duties since 2008 and became partners of GMW MIMARLIK in 2011 after being approached by Mr. Özveren to develop and transfer the knowhow and experience gained over generations and to ensure sustainability. We are presently the joint managing partners responsible for the overall management of the company. Ali Özveren is of course our biggest supporter as our founding partner. In the meantime, GMW Architects was acquired by another British architecture company in 2015, so there is currently no organic relationship between the two offices.

Since the date of our foundation, we, as GMW

MIMARLIK, have been competing especially on international platforms, undertaking large-scale projects and producing projects at international standards and with up-to-date technologies by maintaining our professional principles, organizational culture and ethical values, and by continuously improving ourselves. During this 20-year period, we have taken part in various important international projects, especially in transportation projects in many different countries of the world.

The services we provide can be summarized as architectural project and design coordination services, design management, design and technical evaluation and consultancy, and BIM (Building Information Modeling) management services, from the feasibility and concept project stage to the delivery stage. We perform all these processes in the BIM environment using state-of-the-art technologies.

As a result of the design management work of a prestigious project we assumed in Montenegro, we opened an office with an average of 15 staff there in 2018 and currently we have licenses to perform architectural projects in Montenegro.

AV Aviation Turkey: In the aviation industry, we know your company as the architect office of the Ataturk Airport International Terminal constructed in 2000 and you have fulfilled many other projects since then. Do you have other completed or ongoing projects in Turkey after the Ataturk Airport International Terminal project?

PIE: Immediately after the completion of the Ataturk Airport New International Terminal in 2000, we assumed the expansion project of Ataturk Airport. Then, we undertook the redesign project of the Antalya 2nd International Terminal, which had been designed by Tekeli-Sisa

Architectural Office for five million passengers in the 1990s, and we redesigned it according to the seven million passenger capacity and present-day conditions. Within this scope, we adapted the existing concept and prepared the as-built projects in record time, as in the Atatürk Airport project, until the completion of the construction, and performed field supervision. Mus Airport was our latest project in Turkey which was designed by our company as well.

Due to our lack of experience in the Turkish tender process in our initial years, we missed opportunities in some important airport projects; much less experienced companies managed to obtain prequalification while we were unable to get prequalified. Besides, since we quietly focused on producing only the best projects with the motto “the best advertisement is our performance”, which is one of our fundamental principles, our company was not well recognized in the local market except for very few people who were interested and curious in this matter. However, thanks to this principle, we have become more well-known abroad, as the groups we work with on international projects offer cooperation in different projects.

We never said we would do every project; on the contrary we developed ourselves in airport terminals and additional buildings. As a result of



Atatürk Airport

the importance we place on specialization, we have had the opportunity to take part in very significant international airport projects. We have worked with world-renowned consultants and multinational project teams on these projects. Accordingly, we have gained considerable knowhow and large-scale project experience at different international standards. Therefore, our projects in Turkey were mainly for the private sector, where the international experience in large-scale projects is obligatory.

Aviation Turkey: GMW MIMARLIK performs activities in airport terminal projects throughout the globe as well as Turkey, either directly or through consultancy services. Could you please talk briefly about these projects?

DD: We expanded our international experience, which was previously limited only to the Middle East, North Africa and the Balkans, by adding the experience we gained from our projects in Europe and Asia in the last 5 years.

Assuming roles in airport projects in more than 20 different geographies such as Cairo, Medina, Skopje, Riga, Moscow, Riyadh, Tehran, Rome, Amsterdam, Kuwait, the Philippines and Tashkent has been very valuable for us in terms of know-how and experience that we gained. In each of these projects, we provided services at different scopes for the terminal building and/or any other functional building available at an airport, according to the requirements of that project and the employer. In some, we undertook all architectural project



Riyadh Airport

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services from the concept project stage until the completion of the as-built projects, in some others we prepared only a concept project, or we performed project development, coordination and as-built projects for an existing concept.

Besides these, we would also like to talk about our terminal planning consultancy services which we are proud of. After receiving consultancy services from international companies specialized in terminal planning during airport projects for which we have been providing architectural project services for many years, we have started to provide consultancy services in this domain in the last few years, thanks to the related training we have added to our knowledge base in different projects. In 2016, we provided terminal planning consultancy to airport administration within the scope of the Rome Fiumicino Airport North Campus Master Plan Revision and then to international project groups for the Amsterdam Schiphol Pier A and the Kuwait Temporary Support Terminal.

PIE: Terminal planning consulting starts with the determination of passenger capacity, for which the terminal building will serve, and then continues with determining the number of areas and operators that will be needed, taking into account several criteria



Skopje Airport

such as transaction times specific to the geography and passenger demographics. Then, the layout of these areas and operators are prepared with options in accordance to international standards, laws and regulations specific to that country, and the management criteria and objectives of the businesses and administrations. By taking the project budget and schedule into account, the building size and layout are finalized by discussing the details with all stakeholders.

Sometimes we come up against those talking about type-terminal design, but the terminal requirements of each country or geography are

different; the users, climate, budget, laws, operators are different and accordingly the terminals should be different. Every day technology is developing, environmental and human health awareness levels are increasing and such aspects should be reflected in the planning of each new terminal. Sometimes, a specification or planning we have prepared years ago comes back to us in the form of a requirement list for a new terminal, or an employer planning to start the activities says “you probably have an available planning/design for us”. In such cases, we may have to tell the employer why this work should be different. For all these reasons, we expect employers to be willing

to work with specialized companies or consultants.

Aviation Turkey: Your Company adopts a modern and environmentalist approach to airport terminal projects, and you prioritize passenger comfort with this approach. You have been awarded by Airport Council International (ACI) three times for achievements in your projects. Could you tell us about these successes?

PIE: Until the early 1990s, airport terminals were considered as prestigious buildings because they were the gate of the country that passengers had to use for flights. In the early 2000s, commercial activities



Tashkent Airport

gained importance and airports turned out to be a kind of shopping mall, and this is the period when the “passenger” is considered the “customer”. Recently, airport terminals, especially large terminals referred to as “hubs” used for transfer/transit purposes, are regarded as the buildings preferred to be visited or stopped by. Accordingly, the “passenger” is now seen as a “guest” and his psychology, comfort and quality of the time spent in the terminal has started to be valued above anything else. Today, areas such as butterfly gardens for relaxation, entertainment, and areas for sports and art have started to be allocated within the terminal buildings. With the increase of the importance given to the environment with this change, the service quality of a terminal that was previously measured in direct proportion with the area per person is now measured with the quality of the place rather than the area itself, and optimum areas are recommended instead of large areas. In addition, the aspects such as accessibility, gender equality, local differences and needs, and the developments in technology are reflected in architectural projects more than ever before.

Airport Council International (ACI) conducts surveys on Airport Service Quality every year and determines the best airports of the year, based on the category, with the feedback received from users. Although this



Medina Airport

selection seems to be related with the operator, it is an indication of the satisfaction obtained as a direct result of our architectural design. As a consequence of many architectural decisions experiences are impacted, from the transportation routes of the terminals to the waiting times, from the spatial impressions of the passenger to the layout of the commercial area, from the efficiency of the operating offices to the easy direction-finding system. Our Macedonia Skopje Airport was deemed worthy of this award four times by passengers since its launch. Many of our airport terminal buildings, not only Skopje, but also Ataturk and Medina airport buildings, have been deemed worthy of this award several times too.

✈️ Aviation Turkey: Following the COVID-19 outbreak, restructuring activities and measures are taking place across all sectors. The most critical measures will probably be taken in the aviation industry,

which is the most affected sector. Within the framework of these severe measures, does your company plan to carry out restructuring activities for airport terminal projects, as the heart of airports and accordingly the aviation industry? What kind of activities are you planning for airport projects that you are currently working on in the new era?

DD: Frankly speaking, we think that not many different structuring, programs and plans can be implemented in the long term due to the COVID-19 outbreak, especially at airports. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, we have always prioritized flexibility and adaptability, and the importance of this approach now becomes more apparent. Instead of designing a building that has an economic life of 30-40 years according to an epidemic that exists today but may not repeat for the next decades in the same way, we believe

it is necessary to design buildings to have flexibility and adaptability by considering all possible different scenarios, having positive effects on environment and human health and concepts that will not lose their functionality for many years.

Moreover, we can say that the global warming and climate change issue, which is said to be directly associated with this pandemic by many people, will be much more determinant for large investments like airports in the future. On the other hand, in the aftermath of this pandemic, it is possible to say that the effective utilization of big data and technology, which has been highlighted at airports for quite a while, will continue to expand and become a crucial mechanism in this sense. Such efforts, which have been implemented at airports to increase passenger satisfaction, will now be used more widely and effectively to serve the measures to be taken 🌐