

## Marta Serrano, Spain



*“You must be proactive, have different ideas, be flexible, the sector is changing very quickly. People have different views on how to get around. As women, we must always show that we deserve to be where we are.”*

### Marta Serrano’s professional background

- She is one of the **high-profile leaders** of the Association Women in Motion (WiM);
- She worked in small consulting companies and in big national and regional ones, both in the private and in the public sector, for 15 years;
- She was a **Project Manager** in transport and urban infrastructures for 5 years.
- In 2015 she was hired as Director of Communication and Consulting at the public transport company in Madrid, becoming the **first woman to hold a management position** in the history of the company, a position in which she has remained for 4 years.
- In 2019 she has been one of the main trainers of the training course given between Alamys and UITP “The **Inclusion of diversity and gender in urban transport**”, which was held in Santiago de Chile with the assistance of operating companies from all over Latin America.
- Currently she is **manager director** of a public transport company in Valencia.

### Marta Serrano’s story

Fifteen years the world of transport has given our interviewee the possibility to explore this sector in all its facets, and what she still has to know, learn and share. Like few other women, Mrs Serrano chose the career of urban planning, with the aim of developing an activity that would have a strong, immediate positive impact on the society around her. After studying Civil Engineering, Transport and Urban Design, she spent 5 years working as Project Manager in transportation and urban infrastructures. Driven by her eagerness to know and share knowledge, in the last 15 years she has been alternating jobs, where she has performed more technical functions (Senior transportation

engineer, transport mobility consultant) and others more devoted to education and training (Training Advisor in the Area of Road Maintenance and Operation) After these experiences she gave a twist in her career landing in a large public passenger transport company. She did not know exactly what she was going to meet there, but expectations were high. She was the first woman to take up a manager position. At the local level, women were encouraged to join the public company and the interviewee proved to be the right person in the right place at the right moment.

Mrs. Marta Serrano is now one of the visible heads of the Association Women in Motion (WIM) that was born two years ago in ITF Forum in Leipzig,

Germany, at the “Women mobilize Women” conference, with the aim of promoting the incorporation of inclusion and equity in the construction of sustainable and safe cities. One of the objectives is to consolidate and empower women's leadership in the sustainable agenda. It is not by chance that the interviewee has been one of the main trainers of the training course on gender equality in urban transport, which has been given in Latino America where several people from different cities of the world attended it. The main content ranged from an explanation of the current context, with the situation of women in the world of transport to the cultural roots of this gap and the generation of resources to solve this situation. The course was very well received, the attendees ended up satisfied and currently, they are trying to implement policies that promote equality in their respective companies.

In 15 years of working in small consultancies and large companies at national and regional level, in both the private and public sectors, she has faced the most disparate situations in all types of work and cultural. The main difficulties she experienced were not related to the field of work but her gender. Our interviewee faced some barriers along her career, she witnessed managers sponsoring young male engineers. In her particular case, she saw how the company supported another male colleague rather than on her, even though he didn't have the skills required to the position. Another company, other colleagues, but the same story.. The interviewee had a solid technical background, recognized leadership and team management skills, but, well, she was a young woman. *“The most challenging thing was to gain the credibility of my co-workers, both other managers and collaborators in my team”*.

She remembers a meeting where she presented a manual that she had rewritten completely in inclusive language and one colleague director underestimated the effort that she invested. Despite the relationship with the directors, with the team's collaborators it was even more surprising. In the manager positions, sometimes was difficult to find a way to work with her team. The hierarchical structure was in the DNA company and affected not only the manners but also the way of working. They were so used to a working relationship based on

orders sent from above that they were unable to understand the way the interviewee worked, which was more focused on teamwork and centered on closeness and trust. She had a hard time implementing this other point of view, since at first her colleagues interpreted it as a lack of demand on her part. However, she did not give up and leading with the example, she managed to establish new principles and a new vision of work. *“The support of my team or the other direct ones was a slow, slow work, with small actions and in view of the results.”* During her term of office, she managed to promote many initiatives, aimed at including the gender perspective in transport. First was the adoption of inclusive language, then the introduction of gender blind CVs, and finally the modification of some of the aptitude assessment processes for recruitment.

In spite of the barriers faced, She also had the confidence and support from many of her bosses, specifically in the public company her boss always supported and trusted her, her initiatives were endorsed by him, from the blind CV to the inclusive language. Her boss used to say: *“On these issues, whatever Marta says.”*

All this was made possible thanks to her belief that you have to listen to people to know what they want. *“If you are a woman, you must have a lot of stamina and perseverance, because you have to constantly prove that you deserve to be where you are.”* Women must break down more entry barriers to get into leadership positions, but the truth is that unity is strength and knowledge is power. More specific formal trainings in this field and, above all, a support network of women working in transport and logistics would be of great help: *“It is complicated to enter the existing networks, but as soon as you get in, you know everybody and above all, everybody knows you”*. She sees this as a key element for professional development and this is one of the drivers that led her, together with other founding members who shared her vision, to found “Mujeres en Movimiento” (Women in Motion) which includes an active network of cooperation and governance of the civil, private and public sector.

This is what Marta Serrano is doing. She has recently started working in a new employment with a transport company, a new challenge that she is delighted about and looking forward to face.

This is a major step that is in line with other European initiatives, such as Public Transport for All, where more work is needed and above all “taking a clear stand” on the need to promote the role of women in transport to make this a “cross-cutting issue” that reaches all levels of the sector globally. Good practices could be disseminated in the European transport white paper and then methodologies could be implemented to assess the validity of the measures taken in each country or company. One could even start with the inclusion of quotas in the male-dominated sectors *“I do not share this method, but it can be very useful in allowing access to valuable women, while there is no other solution.”* What is clear is that, beyond the external support, for a woman to be successful in this sector it is crucial to have the right attitude.

Transport is viewed and told as a ‘man's world’. This is the reason why Marta Serrano prefers to talk about mobility instead of transport these days, although it appeals more to the world of moving people than goods. *“It is necessary to change the focus and start talking about the importance of the mobility services for the quality of cities.”*

***“Don't let other people's comments make you small, you are valuable, your point of view is as valid as others', so stay calm, be resilient, and keep fighting.”***



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