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“We Are All Venetians Now”. These words were written by architect Witold Rybczynski who observed in 2003 that Venice was becoming a node in a global economy marked by flows of tourists, workers, capital, and knowledge. This quote not only attests to the metropolitan interconnectedness of the world, but captures the zeitgeist of this committee’s comparative approach over the past decade.

This Review indeed depicts Venice as one node in the north-east Italian, European, and global systems. It is a city-region that, because of its geography and demographic patterns, confronts many challenges that other regions feel free to ignore. Yet, as an increasingly integral part of the global economy, Venice shares many of the problems that inevitably confront other cities throughout the OECD, such as immigrant assimilation, an ageing population, and vulnerability to flooding.

My remarks today will stress the importance of a metropolitan response to these three issues. Given that so many issues – from production systems to infrastructure – “spill over” multiple jurisdictions, a conceiving of the Venice city-region as one economic system could better inform policy. If cities are to be seen as “built thought”, the good news is that initiatives like the area’s Regional Metropolitan Railway System (Sistema Ferroviario Metropolitan Regionale) reveal an emerging metropolitan logic, which already is producing results. Nevertheless, building metropolitan synergies remains an unfinished project and cannot be confined to infrastructure provision alone. This brings me to three key areas where Venice could benefit from a metropolitan approach.

First, the Venice city-region has experienced a rapid influx of immigrants, whose assimilation depends on metropolitan-wide programs. Though at 8% the documented foreign-born population in the city-region is much lower than in neighbouring Munich (23%) or Vienna (17%), it is projected to more than double in less than 20 years. Few metropolitan regions have encountered such a meteoric rise. To effectively integrate these growing communities, authorities will need to reinforce and expand many of their promising programs, which have only recently been launched. Increasing the use of existing labour-matching services, which have been built to provide information to immigrants

and employers, remains a priority. As the service economy develops and highly skilled immigrants arrive in the Venice city-region, the accreditation of foreign qualifications and experience will also be of cardinal import. More sophisticated monitoring tools at the metropolitan level could be used to evaluate the implementation and outcome of integration programmes. Given the resources accorded to immigrant integration, it is puzzling that governments in the Venice city-region have not undertaken an exhaustive audit of the services that are provided. Improved monitoring could be achieved by adopting indicators for assessing integration governance structures, e.g. the performance of inter-departmental committees for immigrant assimilation, the public reporting of results of immigrant integration policy, and the cost-effectiveness of inter-departmental work on these themes. A more rigorous system is required, especially given that integration services – housing, education and employment – are all handled by different departments.

Second, the Venice city-region contains one of the oldest populations among OECD metro areas, which raises particular challenges of how to integrate older workers into the metropolitan labour force. Effects are particularly acute in Venice's historic centre, where the average age is 49 years old. Improvements could be made: in 2004, only about one-quarter of Veneto's workers between 55 and 64 were economically active, significantly less than the EU15 average of 42%. Well-designed vocational training designed for older workers could increase their employability throughout the metropolitan region. Older workers in the Venice city-region are particularly vulnerable, given their high activity rates in SMEs, which tend to offer less job-related training than larger businesses. Municipalities in the Venice city-region could adopt policies to help older workers find jobs and become better prepared for the latter stages of their careers. Such policies include the establishment of elderly employment support centres providing assistance to older workers interested in developing more flexible pathways to retirement. These services would need to be complemented by efforts such as information campaigns intended to overcome employers' reluctance to employing older workers.

Third, as we all know, Venice is burdened by extreme vulnerability to flooding whose complexity merits an ecosystem-based approach. The sensitivity of Venice derives both from geography – 75% of the province of Venice is below mean sea level – and the effects of climate change. The application of a metropolitan “climate lens” could materialise in concrete climate change action plans, which have

already been developed at the metropolitan level in London, Hanover and Portland. Climate change adaptation policy in the Venice city-region would be more effective if it were drafted and implemented at a regional scale, especially given the area's complex hydrological system, encompassing not only the 550 square kilometres of the Venice Lagoon, but over 1,000 kilometres of channels and 200 kilometres of coastline. In terms of water policy, greater support for multi-level governance strategies could economise service provision and maintenance. This might begin with voluntary and informal networking and might expand upon the recent success of water supply consolidation in the Venice city-region. Together, such efforts will better safeguard the Mediterranean's largest wetlands and some of the world's most prized cities. Given projections of rising sea levels, temperatures, and changes in Lagoon morphology, programmes for climatic resilience will require continual adaptation and refinement. As Dwight Eisenhower stressed when preparing for the invasion of Normandy during WWII, "Plans are nothing, planning is everything".

I'm convinced that the city-region is well positioned to reorient itself to confront the three challenges I have mentioned. The accumulated work in transportation, economic development, and infrastructure planning clearly shows that Venice is entering a new metropolitan era. This era – as with previous eras – will provide an optic to observe trends which surface throughout metropolitan areas in the OECD and beyond.

In 1972 Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* made this point elegantly. In this novel, Marco Polo tells Kublai Khan of his travels to countless cities of limitless scale and shape. In the end, they turn out to be different perspectives on the same city of Venice, which embodies different features of the world's urban heritage. When asked by Kublai Khan why he didn't specifically mention Venice, Marco Polo responded, "To distinguish the other cities' qualities, I must speak of a first city that remains implicit. For me it is Venice."

Venice is a bellwether for the future and a microcosm of the themes which emerged in each one of the city-region's analysed in the OECD Metropolitan Review series. We undoubtedly look forward to learning from the rich experience of this area in the future. After all, in a world of porous borders and expansive transnational networks, "we are all Venetians now".