

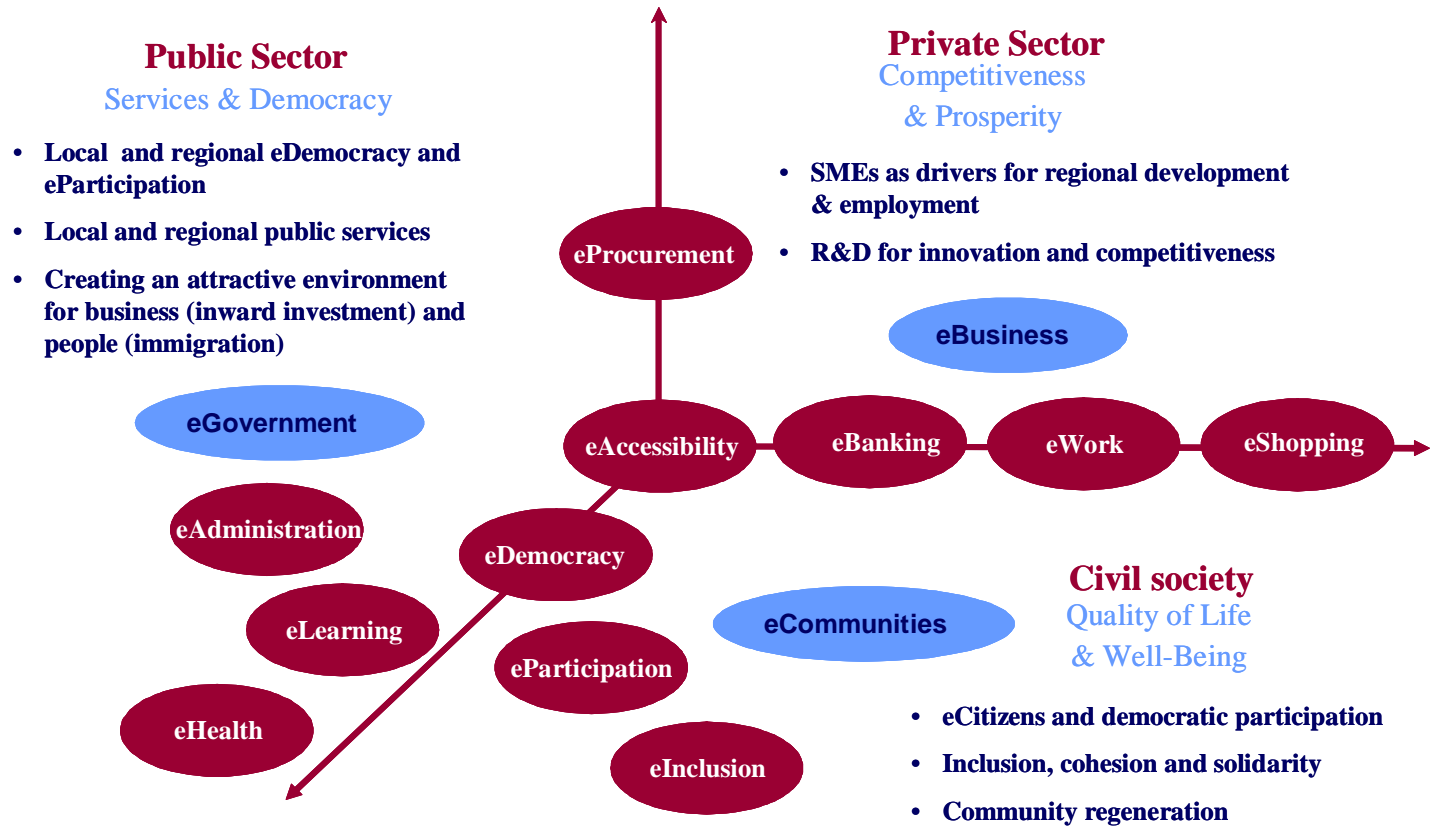
Opinion of eris@

[The European Regional Informational Society Association]

- * It is a paradox that those who are presently most excluded from the benefits of the information society tend to be the very people who could benefit most from access to ICTs.
- * It is often lack of relevant eSkills (rather than cost or lack of access) that leads to exclusion from the benefits of the information society.
- * Access to an affordable, ubiquitous Broadband infrastructure is now a prerequisite but there is no single template for success.
- * Regions – and local and regional authorities - have an important role to play in ensuring e-Inclusion, both as an economic actor and as a catalyst for change, particularly in cases of “market failure”.
- * Good practice exists eg aggregation of demand, but we need to develop better mechanisms to ensure effective dissemination.
- * eris@ and CoR now working with the Commission to explore new approaches.

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- * **Policies, programmes and actions should concentrate on**
 - Engaging more the representatives of civil society, especially voluntary groups and disadvantaged communities themselves;
 - Encouragement for local and regional authorities to collaborate to support local eInclusion initiatives and cement fragmented markets ;
 - Active support for industry-led solutions to the digital divide and eInclusion problems.
 - Deployment - increased take-up and use of existing technology rather than too much preoccupation with future technology;
 - Research & Development targeted in a few specific areas of greatest need (e.g. Ambient Assisted Living for an Ageing Population).
 - Improved access to ICT skills development and, through this, to other forms of education and training, as well as employment.
- * **At almost any level, and from every perspective, overcoming the digital divide is a priority – not an option.**
- * **Regions are ready to play their part – but need a clear role within a European framework.**