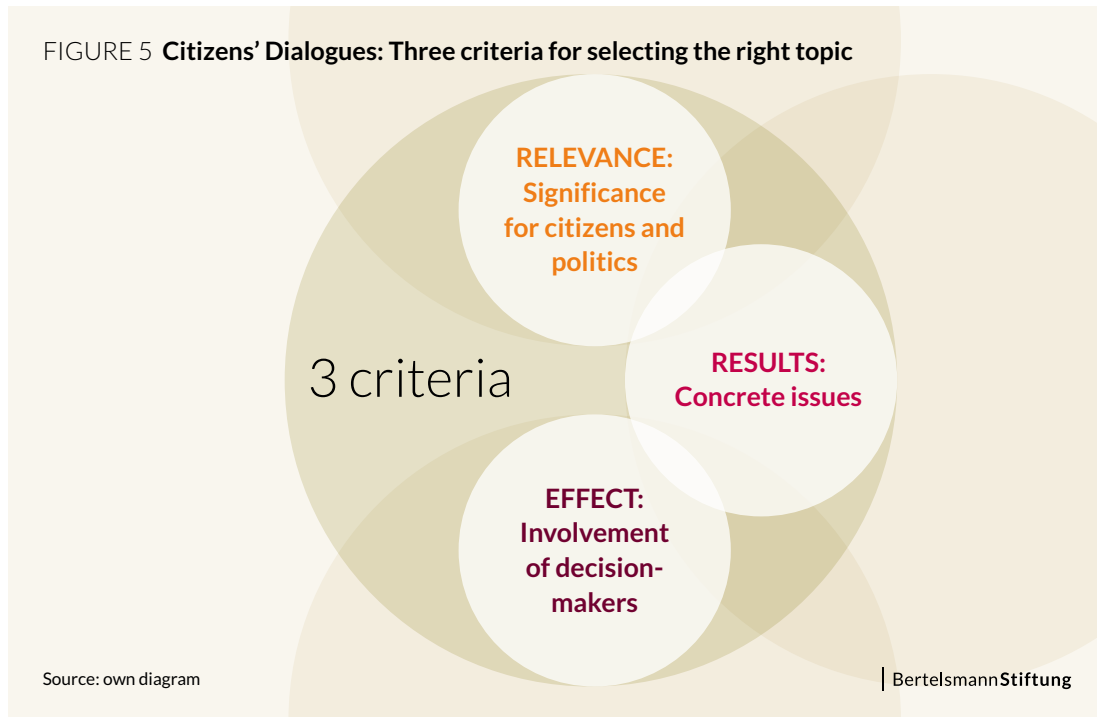


FIGURE 5 Citizens' Dialogues: Three criteria for selecting the right topic



The first criterion is RELEVANCE. Initiators of Citizens' Dialogues should ask themselves: which topic is relevant for the citizens of my city, my region(s)? Which topic is relevant for politicians? For Citizens' Dialogues concerning the Conference on the Future of Europe, not only European politicians but also local or regional politicians need to be involved. Which politicians have power and influence over which issue? Are there issues where important political decisions will be taken soon? Are there issues where there is still disagreement and where the citizens' perspective could be useful for decision-making?

The second criterion is RESULTS. This is about the focus of an issue. The more substantive and detailed the results of a Citizens' Dialogue are, the more likely politicians will be willing to address citizens' proposals, and the greater the chance that policy changes will be made. If

several megatopics are discussed in a general way in a Citizens' Dialogue, the citizens may only scratch the surface and come up with general recommendations which, empirically, have little relevance for political decisions. It is therefore advisable to narrow down the topic for the Citizens' Dialogue and to work on the basis of specific questions.

The third criterion is EFFECT. In the Citizens' Dialogues conducted in the context of the Conference on the Future, several political levels are addressed: local, regional, national, transnational and European levels. It is advisable to choose a topic where a) politicians from the different levels have authority and b) politicians from the different levels can commit to a follow-up process that can lead to real policy changes.