
DE DIKKE BLAUWE

JURY REPORT

DE DIKKE BLAUWE 100, 2020-2021 edition

Ranking of the most influential people in the world of donating & social investing

1. Michael Rutgers

Connector, innovator, booster

Winners of the annual DDB100 ranking of 'most influential people in Dutch philanthropy' do not come out of the blue. They are not the one-hit wonders or the overrated ones, but the influentials with a long track record in The Land of Doing Good. They have consistently contributed to 'a' or 'the' good cause over a longer period of time; they have been innovative, have created demonstrable societal impact and have inspired others in the sector.

The new number one of the DDB100, 2020-2021 edition, has more than met all these criteria.

Director of the Dutch Lung Foundation Michael Rutgers, who already received high marks in all previous editions, now deserves this honour, according to the jury.

Michael Rutgers has been director of the Lung Foundation since 2006, which was at the time called the Asthma Foundation. We refer to him as 'director', but Rutgers does not see himself that way. He calls himself more of an 'opinion leader', a booster and a connector. This characterisation has everything to do with Rutgers' view of the role and meaning of civil society organisations, such as 'his' Lung Foundation. That way of thinking is not recent. As early as 2015, Rutgers, at the time in front of the cameras of DDB's predecessor *Filanthropium*, made a case for the transition from 'charities' to social actors. Rutgers believes that active civil society organisations should deploy their specific strengths to solve complex cascading problems (and these include 'health' and 'clean air') and claim their role alongside government and industry. This 'triple helix idea' does require a degree of self-awareness, courage and leadership, especially since 'philanthropy' is often still seen as a well-intentioned hobby corner for private initiative.

However, so far, no one has been able to catch Rutgers in a 'Calimero complex'. His natural lack of reverence for authority-for-authority certainly plays a role in this. As the leader of the Long Foundation, he assumes a decisive and natural leadership role, and also as chairman of the Collaborating Dutch Health Foundations (SGF), which Rutgers compares to a big wave: if you surf on it together you develop more mass, strength and direction than you would solo on your little surfboard...

Triple helix

Rutgers knows better than anyone that, bearing the triple helix approach in mind, paradigm shifts - for instance, a world in which everyone can breathe freely - are only possible in consultation with all stakeholders. Constructive consultation with the government and the business community is, therefore, a game of give and take that goes beyond the cliché role of an exclusively acting and protesting citizen group: it is nice when it is clear what you are against, but what *solutions* are you proposing subsequently? It requires the right balance between political agility on the one hand and heavy mission-driven steadfastness on the other because in the triple helix you can also quickly squander your uniqueness through endless compromises.

Rutgers understands that the path to his mission cannot be straight. This became clear during the negotiations of the National Prevention Agreement, in which he played a vital role, also on behalf of the SGF. The sugar tax, for example - the pricing of unhealthy food products, which has proven to be effective in other countries - has for now been successfully lobbied against by the food industry. But Rutgers sees that the tide is turning and that the tax will eventually become a reality. Structural change comes about with a clear strategy. Rutgers knows that the support for his organisation in society - about a quarter of a million people who are committed to the theme of healthy lungs and air - can be a factor in the political decision-making power in The Hague. By mobilising his 'supporters' as a politician, as part of the electorate, doors suddenly open which previously remained closed. A thrust is created that turns out to be extremely effective. When a campaign by Lung Foundation Netherlands, together with the Dutch Heart Foundation and the Dutch Cancer Society KWF, had actually made more than fifty per cent of the schoolyards smoke-free, the national implementation by law could follow. That is how democracy works.

Chess player

The Clean Air Agreement that was signed in early 2020 by Minister Stientje van Veldhoven with 36 municipalities and nine provinces proves that chess on the boards in The Hague also requires perseverance. In 2016, Rutgers and his Lung Foundation already stood with a school class from Amersfoort, and with the support of doctors and other patient organisations, on the doorstep of the Dutch House of Representatives to present a petition. In this, they called on politicians to come up with a new national air quality plan, in which health is central. Four years later, the Clean Air Agreement was established. "Together we have made sure that healthy air is now on the map," said Michael Rutgers, "It is unacceptable that so many people get sick or die from the air they breathe. As far as we are concerned, it cannot go fast enough".

During the corona crisis, Rutgers proved that he could also be a speed chess player. In March 2020, together with the Lung Alliance the Netherlands, he immediately took the initiative for the "Corona Lung Diseases Action Plan". With the help of Zilveren Kruis, the digital platform Coronalongplein was launched in a short time. It was designed to be a place for digital care for corona patients, where they felt heard, supported and advised. It turned out to be a resounding success. And the lessons learned from this pandemic pressure cooker are taken to all people with lung disease.

To have an impact, it is not only necessary to make yourself heard to the ruling, decision-making power, but also in the for-profit world. Under Rutgers' leadership, the Lung Foundation has entered into several partnerships with companies that can contribute to the clean air and health objectives. Not through simple sponsorships, but, for example, by making their technology and reach available to consumers, as in the case of Philips: manufacturer of medical equipment, but also products for a healthy indoor environment in buildings.

Rutgers is also wary of all kinds of greenwashing effects and loss of individuality: he must be able to explain it quickly and straightforwardly to his supporters. If that is not possible, it is off the table.

Entrepreneur

Going off the beaten track also means that you take on a role as an entrepreneur. When Rutgers saw that, in the pulmonary field, far too few scientific solutions were offered to the patient, in comparison with cancer research, for example, he came up with a solution. He founded Lunghealth Ltd.: a company from which other start-ups surrounding patents in the pulmonary field can grow. The Lung Foundation makes its knowledge and networks available free of charge to this *start-up generator*. This also applies to the patents and intellectual property resulting from the Accelerate study, set up by Rutgers' Lung Foundation: a unique combination of pulmonologists, immunologists and stem cell biologists from the Netherlands, England, Germany, Belgium, the United States and Australia. Together with Professor Hans Clevers of the Hubrecht Institute and Dr Hermelijn Smits of Leiden University, Rutgers and his Lung Foundation brought together the international experts in two

separate research teams - asthma prevention and repair of damaged lung tissue - with one instruction: To from now on, more intensively than ever, work together under the direction of the Lung Foundation to enable the decisive breakthrough within seven years.

Doer-thinker

And this way, Rutgers and his team have experienced far-reaching consequences from the desire to prioritise the impact. This not only blurs the traditional boundaries between The Land of Doing Good and the Kingdom of the Netherlands but also those between the Netherlands and the rest of the world. The solutions transcend nationalism and protectionism.

Of course, Rutgers did not accomplish this all by himself. It is a team effort by the entire Long Foundation, but to be able to deliver, the team must also be willing and able to follow Rutgers' ambitions. And the latter truly is a solo performance. Because of his style of leadership (nonhierarchical, accessible and 'manager at Starbucks') but also because of his personal drive, Rutgers knows how to convince and bring 'his' people along. It is leadership, partly formed by personal experiences with health problems ("showstoppers of the highest order") and with a long history as a doer-thinker, that makes Michael Rutgers the leader-guide who lives his purpose completely authentically and subsequently lets this purpose live on in virtually everyone with whom he speaks. He is a connector, innovator and booster pur sang.

Taking everything into consideration, it is therefore with great pleasure - and with full conviction after ample deliberations - that the jury appoints **Michael Rutgers** as the most important and influential difference-maker in the world of donation & social investing for the philanthropic year 2020-2021.