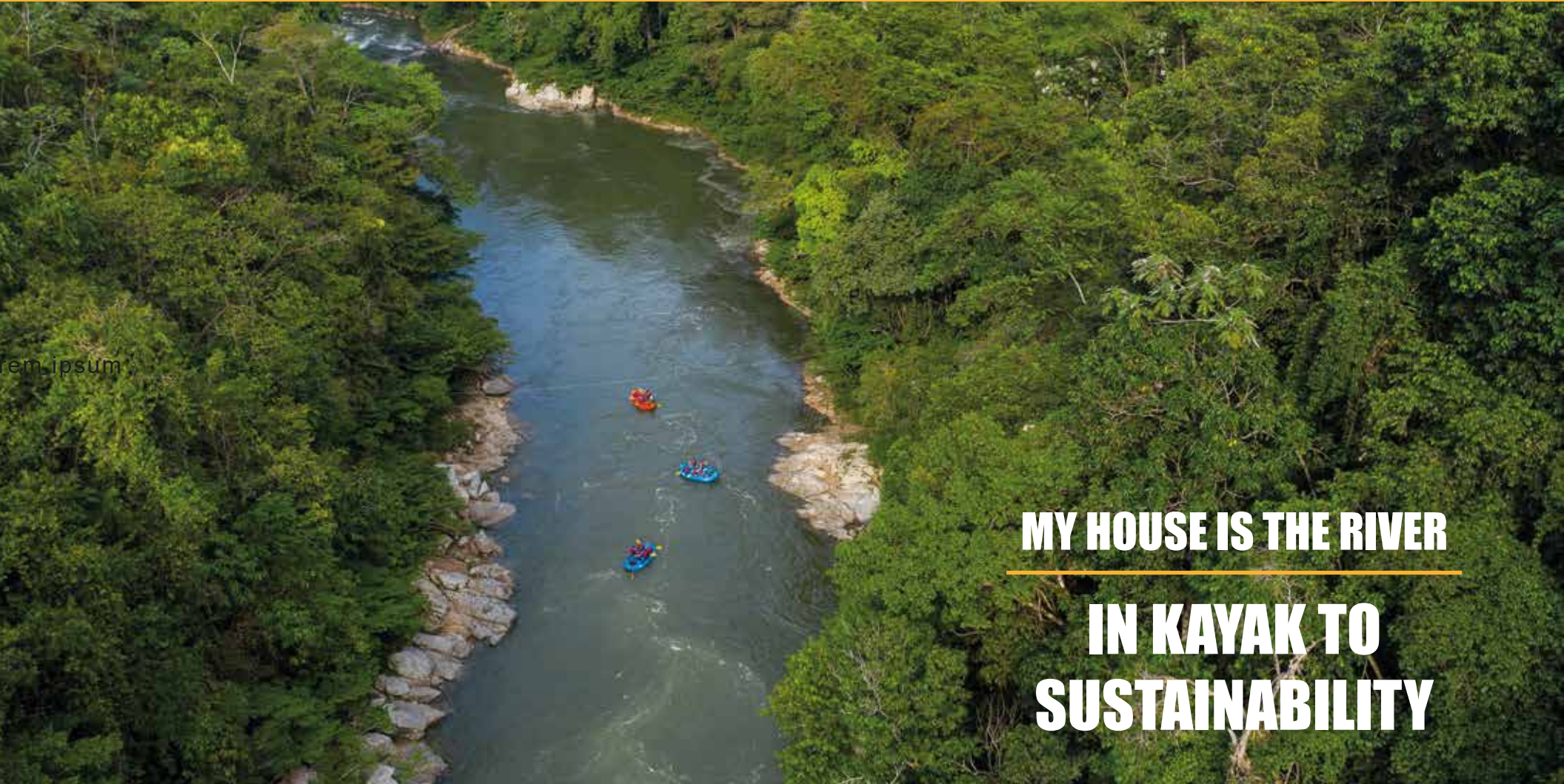


# Almanac of the Future

A STORY OF SUCCESS

Motivational Experience No. 36



rem ipsum

**MY HOUSE IS THE RIVER**

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**IN KAYAK TO  
SUSTAINABILITY**

*Jules' life revolves around kayaking and rivers, the veins of the territory. He shares his discoveries, from harmony with nature to the river's tale of developmental tragedies. His socio-environmentally inspired tourism venture is part of a web with different threads of actions and his philosophy of life works for him, always in alliance with others and where possible in the kayak.*



## **FASCINATING HARMONY WITH NATURE**

Jules Domine, today thirty years old, a quite Latinized French, remembers the path of life from his childhood and how the kayak appeared in his life. “My parents, mom a social worker and dad a researcher on the climate emergency, practiced kayaking. I watched videos of them kayaking and started this water sport when I was seven years old. As a child I was not very interested in television, nor did we have it at home. It fascinated me - and continues to fascinate me - the harmony of the kayak with nature; the water, travel without leaving a trace, once in, there is no other option but to follow as it is, once in the currents. The harmony of flowing with water.” Jules' interest in social life and nature is undoubtedly inherited from his parents.

For the young man it was obvious he wanted to live life in a different way, escape from the typical, check the impossible... and where possible by kayak. At thirteen, due to the activities of his father, Jules lived in Alaska for about two years. His desire to travel the world came from his parents. The school didn't appeal to him much. He completed his institutionalized training as a graduate in hydrology. "In France and in Europe I did not feel this immensity of nature like the one I was able to experience in Alaska, Canada, Africa, and also in the south of the Americas," says Jules. ***“Traveling by kayak through the water without leaving footprints, traveling along the river, has become a metaphor for how I want to live. In kayaking I can build a relationship with the river”.*** Jules traveled the world for five years, working as a kayak guide. He came to know Colombia in 2010. Friends had told him about the country and, particularly, its rivers. He navigated with his kayak through many rivers, in 2012 he was the first to go down the Alto Magdalena; the same happened in the Samaná River.



## RIVERS

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### MIRRORS OF DEVELOPMENT TRAGEDIES

During one of his first excursions on the Samaná River, Jules remembers a conversation with a man who lives on the riverbank: ***“It is good that you got to know it so beautiful, because they also want to take it away.”*** He referred to the fact that the other rivers in the region were destroyed by the hydroelectric complex of Guatapé, Punchina and Playas in the 1970s.

The Samaná is the last river, free of dams in Antioquia. This phrase was etched into Jules' memory. **"The rivers faithfully reflect the tragedies and consequences left by the developmental society.** Traveling through the Samaná I understood this, with the presence of the armed conflict in the territory, with a peaceful war over water resources and plans to build more hydroelectric dams, deforestation on its banks, and the ravages of mining in its riverbed, surrounded by the social marginalization of those who inhabit these territories. I believe that this understanding was the trigger for my idea of acting in favor of the protection of rivers. The only thing I knew how to do at this time was to be a tour guide and to create an enterprise could bring people to the river, and at the same time try to communicate this problem and also to make known this hidden beauty of the river, surviving deep in the Antiochian jungle."

## ENTREPRENEURSHIP WITH A SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL INSPIRATION

Jules, when he lived in Canada, had already dedicated himself to offering rafting trips, kayaking, and as a guide. His meeting with the Samaná River made him see that friendly and sensitizer tourism could be a powerful way to strengthen the self-determination of the territory in its different dimensions such as social, environmental, and hydrological-fluvial.

**"Taking people to the river is like taking them to the cinema where one is the voice and the landscape puts the images,"** says Jules. He began to build his company, applying the motto of "hold on where you can" and the collaborative idiosyncrasy, so Colombian, helped in this. User safety to the European standard was always the main criterion.

With great impetus and always in alliance, he took on the task. **The main purpose of the company was the defense of the rivers and, particularly, the Samaná River and its territory.** The audience of »Expedition Colombia«, the name of the venture, are people who want to do something different, to know themselves. "They are cool people. In the six years that Expedition Colombia has been in operation, I remember only 5 detestable ones," Jules shares. "Our audience are tourists that are a bit out of the ordinary, in the process of transition, seeking to add purpose to their life or looking for authentic experiences and live the real Colombia; also curious neighbors and even scientists. But not all those who come share my reading of things. I love talking to these people because it gives me the possibility to confront all points of view. At the end of your stay, I recommend that when you return to your hotel or home, turning on the light, remember that this energy most likely comes from a hydroelectric plant on a river".



Jules loves to chat with people. “For me, the important thing is to enter into conversation and not so much that the people with whom I talk think the same way as I do. Given a chance, I like to convince or at least awaken greater environmental sensitivity”.

Since 2006 there has been an interest in the hydro-energy potential of the Samaná River, with a project that seeks to install dams for the generation of electricity. In 2015, the authorities granted the environmental license. But to date, the intervention on the river has not begun. **“Around the Samaná River, alliances were made between defenders of the river: people from the river and the territory, environmentalists, and non-environmentalists. This connectivity has allowed resistance measures, promoting the rejection of the communities in the face of extractivist interventions”.** In the case of the Samaná River, the project was paralyzed, but the struggle is long-term. Jules has lived

in the city of Medellín for several years, but according to him the physical and mental presence in the territory is important; obedient to his own convictions, he moved to San Francisco, an Antioquian community located near the river.

“We were quite clear, from the beginning, that entrepreneurship, formalized as a company, must be a means to contribute to the defense of the territory and not an end in itself ”

Jules recalls and adds something else: “It has happened to me that when a company or an undertaking starts to work well at the same time it becomes a bit boring”. The threats to the Samaná River and the territory have not disappeared. Along these lines, it is unlikely (although highly desirable) that Jules would get bored.



## THE SPIDER WEB

Jules' tourism venture offers rafting on the Samaná River as well as other rivers or social and cultural projects where other similar problems are evident, where tourists do not normally arrive. "In the guild of tour operators there is everything and there is no shortage

of those who have discovered environmental and social sustainability as an image and a sales pitch without being attached to the territory." ***Expedition Colombia carries out collaborative activities with community initiatives in the territory, organizing workshops to allow the people of the territory to have a voice***

**where they did not have a voice.** "You have to work with people who do not agree at first but who are warm as a person," explains Jules. "The foundation of collaboration is trust. That is why it is so important that people feel free, it is the basis of trust."

Where the community outreach of the tourism company ends, the work of the »Yumana Foundation«, another collective initiative of Jules, begins. ***We decided to open ourselves to other activities that help the autonomous development of communities and empower them to build their own projects, giving value to their products and marketing without intermediaries; without their own economic alternatives, communities are more vulnerable to yielding their culture and territories to large companies or external interests.*** Along these lines, the foundation, together with small cocoa producers in the area, is carrying out the plan to process cocoa of ancestral varieties to produce

chocolate. The idea originally came from a state program seeking to replace coca cultivation. But the strategy used did not foresee a greater involvement of small producers. Yumana is supporting the appropriation of this strategy by the people of the territory and the region. The price of a kilo of dry cocoa in the market is approximately two US dollars; for a kilo of processed cocoa the value is ten times higher. There is a lot of interest and participation from many farmer families in the process.

Jules has several facets: at times a guide and an associative entrepreneur, always a socio-environmental activist, sometimes dedicated to the media production company »Amazon Icons«. “It seems a lot at first glance, but in reality, they are just different threads of a spider web for my activities that I share with equals.”

## POWER OF EMOTIONS

“Freedom helps to feel confidence and awakens emotions in people,” Jules mentions while preparing his luggage for a trip that will take him to Bogotá, attending a testimony hearing within the popular action he filed as a plaintiff against the Ministry of the Environment and the largest cement company in Colombia around the environmental license for the Porvenir 2 project, with an intervention on the Samaná River, violating environmental

laws in many points. He then continues traveling, to enter the Orinoquia concluding a film about its rivers and its people. **“The pandemic has changed many things, but the power of emotions to make changes has not changed. Life is constantly being transformed and we must not close to the new, being clear that a battle may be lost, but these challenges at the same time encourage us to seek changes.”**

Apparently this philosophy works for Jules, always in alliance with others and where possible in kayak.



# MESSAGES TO THE FUTURE

- **A concept of entrepreneurship where the company is not an end in or of itself, focused mainly on profit, but a means to achieve common good purposes.**
- **Discovering rivers for what they are - the veins of the territory, is an experience that facilitates a better understanding of the beauty of nature and at the same time the damages and environmental and social threats, caused by extraterritorial interests in the name of development.**
- **»Territory is all of us, those of us who live in it, those who feel responsibility for it and those who enjoy it«**

In memory of Camilo Duque, a very talented man, who lost his life doing what he loved, and who will forever remain a source of inspiration and admiration. Both for his love of woodworking, and for his love of rivers, but most of all, for his benevolent attitude.





# Almanac of the Future

**Text:** The text was prepared, based on conversations in situ by Jorge Krekeler, (MISEREOR facilitator commissioned by AGIAMONDO) and agreed with Jules Domine, to whom a special thanks for his openness, time and sincerity.

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