**Modeled changes on functional diversity and carbon storage driven by reduced precipitation in the Amazon forest: a plant-trait vs. PFT-based comparison**

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**Abstract**

The impacts of projected reduced precipitation and other climatic changes on functional diversity and how its different components (richness, evenness and divergence) modulates the Amazon carbon sink remain poorly explored and understood. Here, we investigated if trait variability inclusion in a vegetation model allows a better representation of net primary productivity (NPP) and carbon storage in current climatic conditions. Besides, we applied 50% reduction in precipitation to assess how it affects functional diversity in its three components and thereafter carbon stocks in the Amazon. We used two modeling approaches in which functional diversity is represented by: (i) using three plant functional types (PFTA) with fixed trait values, and (ii) using a varying trait-based approach (TBA; semi-random combination of trait values creating 3000 plant life strategies). Six functional traits were considered as fixed/variant: carbon allocation and residence time on leaves, aboveground woody tissues and fine roots. Our results showed that TBA presented a better performance in representing carbon stocks and NPP compared to referential estimations. Also, the applied precipitation reduction caused a widespread loss of biomass carbon in both approaches, however, TBA presented an increase in fine roots investment to deal with the lower water availability, what enabled this approach to maintain carbon stocks in some areas where none PFT was able to establish. However the investment in fine roots compartment was at the expense of investment especially in aboveground woody tissues, what led to a relative lower carbon storage in some locations when compared to the PFTA. On the other hand, because of its limited capacity to change community functional structure, the use of a PFTA seems to overestimate the impacts of environmental changes. The higher TBA ability to functionally reorganize is corroborated by our findings regarding functional diversity components in which TBA presented a much higher magnitude of change in all of them. Hence, despite our results showed that, in general, more diverse communities (TBA) can be more resilient to environmental changes, if the ability to store carbon is used as the only proxy for ecosystem resilience, it may result in limited interpretations about the response of ecosystems to climate change. Our findings show that including trait variation in vegetation models in fact plays a paramount role in projections in current climatic conditions and also allow us to look into processes such as the change in communities functional structure, refining the investigation on the susceptibility when environmental changes are applied.

**Keywords:** trait-based modeling, climate change, carbon allocation, functional composition, functional structure, tropical forest

**Introduction**

It is projected, for the 21st-century, that Amazon forest will experience more frequent and more extreme moisture stress (Duffy, Brando, Asner, & Field, 2015; Esquivel-Muelbert et al., 2017; Hubau et al., 2020; Lewis et al., 2011)⁠, which can impact directly the forest ability to store carbon (da Costa et al., 2010; Hubau et al., 2020; Phillips et al., 2010)⁠ and induces biodiversity shifts, including changes in functional diversity - the values, ranges of values and relative abundance of functional traits in a given community or ecological unit (Díaz et al, 2007) - (Aguirre-Gutiérrez et al., 2019; Esquivel-Muelbert et al., 2018; Zhang, Niinemets, Sheffield, & Lichstein, 2018)⁠. All these changes caused by reduced precipitation have been already observed in Amazon forest through long-term inventory plots (Esquivel-Muelbert et al., 2018, 2017)⁠, ecosystem-scale field experiments (Nepstad, Tohver, Ray, Moutinho, & Cardinot, 2007)⁠, as well as in other tropical forests (Aguirre-Gutiérrez et al., 2019; Fauset et al., 2012)⁠. However, the degree and direction (increase or decrease) in which the ecosystem process of carbon storage will be affected remain uncertain (Bonal, Burban, Stahl, Wagner, & Hérault, 2016; Hubau et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2018). In addition, both the role that functional diversity plays on this ecosystem process and the impact of the foreseen reduced precipitation on functional diversity itself and on its different components (richness, divergence and evenness; (Carmona, de Bello, Mason, & Lepš, 2016; Mason, Mouillot, Lee, & Wilson, 2005)⁠ is poorly explored (Esquivel-Muelbert et al., 2017; 2018; Poorter et al., 2015; Sakschewski et al., 2016) and still present many knowledge gaps (Aguirre-Gutiérrez et al., 2019)⁠.

Vegetation models have been widely used to explore the fate of Amazon forest carbon sink under unprecedent climatic conditions such as reduced precipitation, providing substantial contribution to our current knowledge of the Amazon forest susceptibility (Cox et al., 2004; Galbraith et al., 2010; Huntingford et al., 2013; Lapola, Oyama, & Nobre, 2009; Rammig et al., 2010; Sitch et al., 2008)⁠. Nonetheless, their results are still contradictory and often divergent (Huntingford et al., 2013; Powell et al., 2013; Rammig et al., 2010), although most of them tend to project a drastic loss in carbon stock (P M Cox, Betts, Jones, Spall, & Totterdell, 2000; Peter M. Cox et al., 2004; Koch, Hubau, & Lewis, 2021⁠)⁠, together with a replacement of the predominant vegetation by a drier-affiliated one in large portions of Amazon forest (Hutyra et al., 2005; Lapola, Oyama, & Nobre, 2009; Salazar, Nobre, & Oyama, 2007).⁠

One of the sources for the uncertainties and divergence the models may relies on the way that the diversity of vegetation is represented in most of these models: they commonly use the concept of plant functional types (PFTs) to represent vegetation, a very small, discrete, and *a priori* defined set of plant types, in which the parameters that represent functional traits responsible for ecophysiological process and the connection with environment (i.e., the responses and effects) are fixed in space and time for each PFT (Reu et al., 2014; Scheiter et al., 2013; Verheijen et al., 2015)⁠. This simplification of vegetation diversity seems to overestimate the impacts of environmental changes (Pavlick, Drewry, Bohn, Reu, & Kleidon, 2013; Sakschewski et al., 2016; Verheijen et al., 2015), since the diversity of responses and the possibility for selecting alternative strategies that deal better with the new climatic condition are very limited (Fyllas et al., 2014; Mori, Furukawa, & Sasaki, 2013; Sakschewski et al., 2016))⁠. Hence, the community functional reorganization (Aguirre-Gutiérrez et al., 2019; Enquist & Enquist, 2011; Fauset et al., 2012, 2015; Wieczynski et al., 2019), which is an important process that can confer resilience to novel and unprecedented climatic conditions (Aguirre-Gutiérrez et al., 2019; Enquist & Enquist, 2011; Fauset et al., 2012, 2015; Wieczynski et al., 2019), is very restricted or even not captured(Sakschewski et al., 2016; Verheijen et al., 2015)⁠ in the fixed plant functional type approach (Sakschewski et al., 2016; Verheijen et al., 2015)⁠.

The so-called trait-based vegetation models have been developed to try to overcome these limitations regarding the underrepresentation of functional diversity by using PFTs (e.g., Fyllas et al., 2014; Joshi et al., 2020; Pavlick, Drewry, Bohn, Reu, & Kleidon, 2013; Sakschewski et al., 2015; Scheiter, Langan, & Higgins, 2013)⁠. This modeling approach represents plant types in a less discrete manner by replacing the fixed-value parameters representing the functional traits in PFTs by variable ones (Pavlick, Drewry, Bohn, Reu, & Kleidon, 2013⁠; Reu et al., 2014; Webb, Hoeting, Ames, Pyne, & LeRoy Poff, 2010; Wullschleger et al., 2014). It timely provides the opportunity for models to look beyond biogeochemical variables (e.g., biomass and productivity) allowing them to explore a multiplicity of functional ecology-related questions (Sakschewski et al., 2016; Darela-Filho et al., in prep.)⁠. For example, the role of the different components of functional diversity (richness, divergence and evenness) on resilience against environmental changes (Mason, Mouillot, Lee, & Wilson, 2005; Song, Wang, Li, & Zhou, 2014) and also the identification and prediction of processes that determine community assemblage and structure (Mouillot et al., 2013).

Despite the promising potentiality established for trait-based models to explore this type of question many of them remain under or unexplored by the modeling studies so far (but see Hofhansl, Chacón‐Madrigal, Brännström, Dieckmann, & Franklin, 2021⁠). For example, despite the known importance, few studies have explored how environmental changes impacts the different functional diversity components (Carmona, de Bello, Mason, & Lepš, 2016; Mason, Mouillot, Lee, & Wilson, 2005; Mouillot, Graham, Villéger, Mason, & Bellwood, 2013)⁠. Furthermore, the ability of trait-based models to effectively capture (and improve) the representation of ecological processes that are commonly considered in standard vegetation models such as net primary productivity (NPP) and carbon storage is yet to be assessed, as well as the comparative difference in the plant functional response to environmental changes.

Here, we present a new trait-based model, the CArbon and Ecosystem functional-Trait Evaluation (CAETÊ) model. First, we evaluate CAETÊ’s performance in representing vegetation carbon storage and NPP for the Amazon basin region (Fig. SI.6). In order to assess if the inclusion of trait variation improves the representation of these biogeochemical variables we compared two approaches of CAETÊ: one representing vegetation through a small number of PFTs (i.e., low functional diversity; hereafter PFTA) and the other one representing vegetation using variant functional traits (i.e., high functional diversity; hereafter TBA). Six traits were defined to be fixed (PFTA) or variant (TBA): carbon allocation and residence time in three plant compartments (leaves, aboveground woody tissues and fine roots). We also applied, for the same region. these two modeling approaches in a scenario of reduced precipitation for the sake of representing moisture deficits predicted to Amazon region. By using this scenario we aimed to evaluate how functional diversity (and its different components) impacts Amazon forest ability to store carbon stocks and also how moisture stress change functional diversity considering richness, evenness and divergence. Therefore, the following hypothesis were tested:

(H1) TBA will cause less changes in forest carbon stocks in the face of the imposed reduced precipitation, since a model approach with higher variability of traits values and combinations than with the PFT approach would provide better capacity to functionally reorganize the community under the new environmental conditions (Fauset et al., 2015; Lohbeck, Bongers, Martinez-Ramos, & Poorter, 2016; Yachi & Loreau, 1999)⁠, constituting an ensure in the face of local extinctions of strategies and thus a more resilient ecosystem (Cadotte, Carscadden, & Mirotchnick, 2011; Mori et al., 2013; Sakschewski et al., 2016; Schmitt et al., 2019).

(H2) The functional reorganization in communities, especially in the TBA, will prioritize strategies with higher investment (higher allocation and residence time) in fine roots to increase the acquisition of the most limited resource (water in this case). This prioritization of strategies relies on the optimal partitioning theory (Cannell & Dewar, 1994; Metcalfe et al., 2010; Thornley, 1972)⁠, and may take place due to the expected environmental filtering of a small subset of functional trait combinations more suitable to cope with the applied precipitation reduction.

(H3) The selection towards more restrict functional traits values may lead to a scenario of communities with lower functional richness (Cornwell et al., 2006; Funk et al., 2017; Kleidon, Adams, Pavlick, & Reu, 2009; Perronne & Gaba, 2017). This restriction would decrease evenness, as the density of traits values would be less regularly distributed, which also might push the values towards more extreme regions of the functional space, favoring strategies with specialized functional trait values, yielding an increase in divergence (Mouillot, Graham, Villéger, Mason, & Bellwood, 2013; Mouillot, Villéger, Scherer-Lorenzen, & Mason, 2011)⁠. Together, the decrease in evenness and increase in divergence is supposed to conduce to lower utilization of the functional space (De La Riva et al., 2017; Hillebrand et al., 2008; Mason, Mouillot, Lee, & Wilson, 2005; Mouillot et al., 2011)⁠.

**Material and Methods**

*The CAETÊ model: an overview*

Here we present an overview of the CAETÊ, and an in-depth description of the model (including all the ecophysiological processes equations and input data) can be found in Supporting Information SI.1. As a trait-based model, CAETÊ focus on representing a higher variability of plant functional traits and, whenever possible, the range of functional diversity found in plant communities. As such, vegetation is represented by a set of functional strategies (hereafter called plant life strategies, PLS), each of which refers to a unique combination of functional traits values. The combination of such trait values describes the ecophysiological behavior of plants and their relationship with the environment. These traits control, for example, the differential acquisition of carbon, light and water, ultimately defining how the strategy copes with the environment and, together with the other PLSs of the community, determine ecosystem functioning (Fig. 1).

The underlying premise to create these PLSs is that the range of values of a functional trait observed in nature can be regarded as one axis of a multidimensional hypervolume formed by the combination of *n* chosen functional traits (Blonder, 2017; Villéger, Mason, & Mouillot, 2008)⁠. In that sense, each point inside of this hypervolume is a unique combination of values for each of the functional traits, a PLS. The volume that all points together occupy can be seen as a functional trait space. The values of functional traits that compose the hypervolume are semi-randomly sampled from the complete range of values (for more details see Supporting Information SI.1.1.a.). The combination of all sampled values generates a large number (>105) of combinations within the functional space. Similar to other trait-based models (e.g., Pavlick, Drewry, Bohn, Reu, & Kleidon, 2013; Reu et al., 2011), CAETÊ follows the assumption that sampling an appropriate number of PLSs from the potential functional space (see sensitivity test in Supporting Information SI.2.) combined with an environmental filtering mechanism together with a representation of competition allow the model to produce reasonable biogeochemical and functional diversity patterns.

The environmental filtering mechanism acts in the model such that each PLS within the trait space performs differently under the same environmental conditions such as temperature and precipitation; Diaz, Cabido, & Casanoves, 1998; Webb et al., 2010)⁠. All grid cells are initiated with the same set of PLSs (number and identity) in a condition analogous to a bare soil. Therefore, even though all trait combinations are equally probable to occupy a given grid cell, it is expected that some PLSs will survive and present different performances and abundances and some of them will perish in the simulation. PLSs that do not survive are excluded from the grid cell (and cannot be reestablished in that grid cell in this model version).

The differential survival and abundance between PLSs are made possible because each functional trait in the model is related to at least one trade-off (cost-benefit relationship) leading to different relative performances and ability to deal with the environment. The trade-offs also prevent the model from creating the so-called “Darwinian demons” (i.e., maximizing all the functions that contribute for fitness; Scheiter et al., 2013)⁠. Since functional traits both respond to and affect ecosystem-level processes (Díaz et al., 2013; Funk et al., 2017; Lavorel & Garnier, 2002)⁠ the varying PLSs ecophysiological performance generates heterogeneous biogeochemical fluxes and stocks and functional diversity through space and time. Such model outputs are aggregated to the grid cell scale according to the modeled abundances of PLSs, which are determined on the basis of the biomass-ratio hypothesis (Grime, 1998; see Supporting Information SI.1.1.b.). The ecophysiological processes linked to each functional trait, its trade-offs, and associated formulations are summarized in Table SI.3. and described in Supporting Information SI.1.10.

*Simulations setup*

In this study we employed, for the Amazon basin, a non-dynamic version of the CAETÊ model, which calculates equilibrium solutions based on long-term mean monthly climate variables (for the period between 1980 and 2010). A spinup simulation period of ????? years was carried out to initialize carbon stocks in different plant compartments (see Supporting Information SI.1.1.c.)

Two versions of the model considering two different approaches were employed in this study: one using, as the majority of current vegetation models, the PFTA [ with a low functional diversity initialization: 3 PFTs (Table SI.1.)] and the other, TBA, using a varying trait-based approach [with a high functional diversity initialization: 3000 PLSs (Table S.I.2.)]. Despite the difference in the number of plant types and in the way that functional traits values are chosen, the general model formulations and principles are the same for both approaches.

We employed six functional traits that are variable between PFTs/PLSs. Since our focus of analysis here is on the process of carbon storage three of them regard the percentage of the carbon distributed to different plant compartments [i.e. carbon allocation to leaves, roots and aboveground woody tissues (hereafter ABGW)] and the other three traits represent carbon residence time - how long the carbon remains in living plant tissues - in each one of the plant compartments above cited. Together, these functional traits ultimately define the amount of carbon in each plant tissue of a PLS or PFT at each time step, and are of primary importance for determining absorption and storage of carbon in the study system (Chambers, Fisher, Hall, Norby, & Wofsy, 2012; Fatichi & Leuzinger, 2013; Malhi, 2012; Norby et al., 2005)⁠.

Three tropical PFTs were defined in the PFTA to describe the vegetation encompassing the majority of PFTs previously used in standard vegetation models. The parameters that represent the functional traits used for this study were *a priori* defined following values already used in previous other vegetation models (Table SI.1.). In the trait-based model approach, the initial range of values for each functional trait considered as variable (from where some of them will be sampled to create the hypervolume) are indicated in Table SI.2. CAETÊ works at a spatial resolution of 0.5º x 0.5º and is coded mainly in Fortran 90 with some modules written in Python.

*CAETÊ performance evaluation*

A first simulation run was designed to evaluate and compare the performance of the two CAETÊ approaches in representing the spatial distribution of vegetation carbon storage and NPP in the Amazon region. For this we compared our model results with reference data obtained from literature and databases through linear regression and by computing the absolute difference between values simulated by CAETÊ and those reference ones for each grid cell. For carbon storage we used data from Baccini et al. (2012) and Saatchi et al. (2011), and for NPP we used data from the MODIS NPP Project (MOD17A3; data available at http://www.ntsg.umt.edu/project/mod17).

For carbon storage only the aboveground carbon was considered (leaves and aboveground woody tissues) since Baccini’s data comprises this vegetation portion and Saatchi’s data include estimates of belowground biomass through allometric equations. Besides, the reference data accounts for living biomass instead of only carbon content (as simulated by CAETÊ). Therefore, we considered that 47.5% of living biomass depict carbon content (Thomas & Martin, 2012 ).

Furthermore, we also compared CAETÊ results regarding carbon storage and NPP with *in situ* measurements available in literature (Table SI.7) throughout the study area (Fig. SI.6.). The comparison was made using linear regression. For coordinates where more than one measurement was available a mean value was considered. When the data corresponded to living biomass, only 47.5% of the value was considered (Thomas & Martin, 2012).

*Representation of functional diversity and composition*

The value of each of the six variant functional traits in each grid cell is represented by a mean value that is estimated according to the relative abundances of PFTs/PLSs (see Supporting Information S.I.1.1.b.) using the Community Weighted Mean (CWM) metric (Díaz et al., 2007; Grime, 1998)⁠. Here we focused on a large-scale analysis of functional diversity for the whole Amazon basin, in that sense the trait values distribution used to evaluate functional diversity corresponds to the values obtained for all the grid cells; hence the trait variation within a grid cell is not considered.

Following the definitions and methods by Carmona et al. (2016) we considered that single-trait functional diversity can be decomposed into three components: (i) functional richness: the portion of the total functional trait space, i.e, the total range of values for a specific functional trait, that is occupied in an ecological unit derived from the variance of trait values of all the considered organisms (PFTs/PLSs in our case); (ii) functional evenness: the regularity of the density distribution of the PLSs’ or PFTs’ trait values in the functional trait space; (iii) functional divergence: the degree to which the abundance of PFTs/PLSs’ trait values are distributed towards the extremes of their functional trait space. Carmona’s method uses probability density distributions for the calculation of the components, the so-called TPDs (trait probability distributions). A detailed description of the method and of the R library can be found at <https://CRAN.R-project.org/package=TPD>.

Additionally, functional diversity is regarded here both from the perspective of its single-trait components as well as its multi-trait component (i.e., the combination of traits). The single-trait element allows to interpret more precisely how the different traits interact (affects and responds) with the environment (Lepš, de Bello, Lavorel, & Berman, 2006; Ricotta & Moretti, 2011)⁠, while the multi-trait component gives information about the ecological strategy as a whole (i.e., as a coordinated trait syndrome), thus accounting for the coordination of traits, including its trade-offs, and also how the community occupies the given possible functional space (Barros, Thuiller, Georges, Boulangeat, & Münkemüller, 2016; Blonder, Lamanna, Violle, & Enquist, 2014)⁠⁠.

For multi-trait functional diversity, we used a hypervolume metric following Blonder et al. (2014; <https://CRAN.R-project.org/package=hypervolume>), which combine the distribution of *n* trait values to calculate functional diversity components (Barros et al., 2016; Blonder et al., 2018)⁠, as, for example, the volume size, that indicates how much of the possible functional space an ecological unit occupies (i.e., the variance of values; Barros et al., 2016), that can be interpreted as functional richness. Also, the distribution of values within the hypervolume informs, together with the centroid (that indicates the mean values), about system functional composition.

As recommended in the study by Barros et al. (2016), before elaborating the hypervolumes, we performed a principal component analysis (PCA) with a centered and scaled method (for more details see Supporting Information SI.3.) This previous step was necessary because our traits showed correlation and also exceeded the maximum number of variables for constructing the hypervolume in the used metric (Blonder et al., 2014)⁠. Then, the PCA allowed the delineation of the hypervolume using the factor scores of the chosen PC’s (indicated in Supporting Information SI.3.).

*Decreased precipitation experiment*

We applied a homogeneous reduction of 50% on precipitation for the whole study area to explore the potential effects of functional diversity on the Amazon’s carbon storage in a scenario with reduced precipitation, as well as the response of functional diversity *per se*. With homogeneous we mean that the reduced precipitation was applied for the whole period of the study and for all the grid cells equally. Then, specifically, in this modeling experiment we were interested in testing if a plant community with higher functional diversity (trait-based approach) responded differently to the climate in its ability to store and partition carbon compared to a community with lower functional diversity (PFT approach).

With this experiment we did not intend to make reliable predictions regarding the foreseen drought for the region, since we are aware that the tendency for drought is not homogeneous along the basin neither through time. Hence, this applied scenario in this study lends itself as proof of concept by showing: (i) the feasibility of trait-based models in being used to explore the effects of environmental changes in ecosystem functioning and in functional diversity (taking into account its different facets); (ii) that models based in PFTs to represent vegetation may overestimate the effects of these changes given the underrepresentation of functional diversity; and (iii) that the functional diversity of an ecosystem is tightly related to ecosystem processes and functioning, playing a vital role in its responses to environmental changes.

For the analysis related to carbon storage we compared the degree of change in carbon stock either considering the whole plant or the compartments separately for both modeling approaches. In the single-trait analysis, we compared the TPDs generated by the two climatic scenarios for each of the six traits. For this, the dissimilarities between the two TPDs (regular climate and reduced precipitation) were computed by calculating the degree of overlap between the two distributions (dissimilarity index that can vary from 0 – completely functionally similar - to 1 – completely functionally different; Carmona, de Bello, Mason, & Lepš, 2016). This index shows if functional structure of the community was significantly modified by the new climate scenario (Carmona, de Bello, Mason, & Lepš, 2019)⁠⁠. We also compared how the three facets of functional diversity aforementioned changed after the drought.

For the multi-trait analysis four hypervolumes were constructed and compared using the factor scores of the PCA: one for each model approach and climatic scenario. After, we compared the changes in hypervolumes driven by reduced precipitation in terms of its sizes (richness), the distances between the centroids [i.e., central tendency, that represents the change in mean values and in the occupied region of trait space (Boersma et al., 2016)⁠], and finally, the degree of overlap through Jaccard similarity index that ranges from 0 (completely dissimilar) to 1 (completely similar). These three metrics together indicate the magnitude of change in functional diversity and composition in response to the applied scenarios considering the two applied modeling approaches.

**Results**

*CAETÊ model performance evaluation*

Figure 2 (a, b and d, e) shows the differences between simulated aboveground carbon storage and two reference maps, Saatchi et al., (2011) and Baccini et al. (2012), considering two different CAETÊ approaches (PFTA and TBA). We also show in Figure 2 (c, f) a direct comparison between the simulated and the reference values for each grid-cell.

Both CAETÊ approaches show some over or underestimated values for carbon stocks when compared to the reference data, which can be seen both by the map differences and in the direct comparison. PFTA tends to overestimate carbon stock in most of the Amazon basin, mainly in the central region and at the basin edges, hence, in general, PFTA shows low agreement and large discrepancies in the range of values relatively to the data used as reference. On the other hand, TBA presents better agreement with references, matching the observed values reasonably well, presenting more areas with no differences between simulated and reference values (white cells in Fig. 2b and e) as well as higher number of points closer to the 1:1 line (Fig. 2c and f). However, where TBA simulation doesn't totally match with the estimations by Saatchi et al., (2011) and Baccini et al., (2012) it tends to subestimate mean carbon values, for example in the east and southwest of the basin. The same way as for PFTA, TBA overestimates carbon stocks mainly at the edges of the studied region.

Within the studied region, the model CAETÊ simulated a total aboveground carbon stock of 127.89 and 85.99 PgC for PFTA and TBA, respectively; while Baccini et al. (2012) estimated 80.23 PgC and Saatchi et al. (2011) 71.67 PgC; it demonstrates that TBA also better agree with references regarding carbon stored in Amazon basin.

The comparison with remote sensing NPP estimates (MODIS) reveals that TBA is able to capture the broad spatial patterns of NPP reasonably well (Fig. SI.3b), despite of an underestimation at Andean region and a small overestimation in the northwest/central basin region. On the other hand, PFTA presents a widespread and prominent overestimation for this variable (Fig. SI.3a), except for the underestimation, likewise TBA, at the Andean region. The higher agreement of TBA with MODIS data when compared to PFTA can also be seen in Figure SI.4c, which shows a grid-by-grid cell performance comparison between CAETÊ and MODIS.

The CAETÊ model simulated a total annual NPP of 122.28 PgCyr⁻¹ for Amazon basin when considering PFTA and of 76.05 PgCyr⁻¹ when considering TBA. MODIS estimations reach a value of 74.61 PgCyr⁻¹ for the same variable. Thus, the total NPP value simulated by CAETÊ in its trait-based version (TBA) is much closer to the value estimated by MODIS, which, together with the comparisons related to the above-ground carbon stock, evidences the ability of the TBA approach to better represent key biogeochemical variables.

Direct comparisons between simulated values and *in situ* measurements of aboveground carbon storage, total carbon storage and NPP showed similar patterns to previous comparisons, i.e, overestimation of all variables by PFTA and underestimation by TBA (Fig. SI.4).

*Reduced precipitation impacts on carbon storage and partitioning: trait-based vs. PFT approach*

As expected, the 50% reduction of precipitation caused a widespread depletion of carbon stocks along the basin both for the high and low degrees of functional diversity employed in the model, including grid cells that presented a total carbon loss (Fig. 3a and b). However, in line with the hypothesis H1 the spatial pattern of carbon loss driven by the imposed moisture deficit differed between the trait-based and PFT approaches: TBA was able to maintain carbon stocks in some areas where in PFTA carbon stocks were completely lost, that is, none PFT survived in those grid cells. This was more evident in central Amazon and in naturally drier areas, such as the transition between the Amazon forest and the savannah (*cerrado*) in the southeast region. It is noteworthy also that the loss of carbon in TBA was more gradual, i.e., there is a smoother gradient between a grid cell value and its neighboring cells, and also across different basin regions. On the other hand, in the PFTA the carbon loss was more abrupt both between neighboring cells and along the regions of the basin.

Supporting our hypothesis H2 specific plant compartments have shown different patterns of changes when comparing the two approaches (Fig. 3c and 3d for fine roots and Fig. SI.5a and b for leaves and Fig. SI.5c and d). None of the compartments has shown, for any area, an increase in carbon stock with precipitation reduction, except for the fine roots compartment in TBA (blue areas in Fig. 3d). It was more evident in the transitions from humid and evergreen forest to the Brazilian savannahs (*cerrado*) and also in the northwest of the basin (naturally drier sites). The increase in fine roots investment also indicated change in carbon partitioning (root:shoot relation) towards higher belowground investment in TBA but lower belowground investment in PFTA: we found an average increase of 74.74% on this variable for TBA while for PFTA an average decrease of 7.73% was observed.

An interesting and important result with the experiment scenario was the unexpected higher total carbon storage in PFTA when compared to TBA in grid cells where both approaches were able to maintain at least a minimum carbon stock (Fig. 3a and b). It goes against our hypothesis H1 in which we predicted higher carbon stocks maintenance for TBA.

*Effects of reduced precipitation on functional composition*

In our hypothesis H2 we predicted a functional reorganization in communities driven by the reduced precipitation. As we expected, the applied reduced precipitation scenario caused a modification in the density distribution of the six variant functional traits both for PFTA and for TBA (Fig. 4). For all the traits, the shape of the curves changed considerably, with dissimilarity index close to 1 (Table 1), which indicates that they became functionally different with the new climatic condition. A clear change in the pattern of traits distribution was observed: dominance reduction (decrease in the curves peaks) of a previously restricted range of values, and density increase of other trait values that were previously rare (very low density), or absent, enabling their co-occurrence in the trait space (Fig. 4). The occurrence of a small subset of trait combinations with the reduced precipitation due to the stronger environmental filtering was not so evident, as expected by our hypothesis H2.

Although the two approaches have shown functional reorganization, the degree of change was quite different between them: when considering traits separately, the PFTA showed a trimodal distribution, with three clear and discrete peaks along the trait space when the precipitation is reduced, while in TBA the distribution showed a higher diversity of values that had their density increased, resulting in a much more diffuse distribution within the functional space. This pattern can also be seen when considering all traits together through the hypervolumes: for the PFTA it is possible to observe three clear data grouping under drought (Fig. 5a), and a much less discretized data distribution from the TBA (Fig. 5b).

Also, corroborating with our conjectures based on optimal partitioning theory (Cannell & Dewar, 1994; Metcalfe et al., 2010; Thornley, 1972)*⁠,* TBA showed an increase in density towards higher values of carbon allocation in fine roots and towards lower values of carbon allocation in leaves and, especially, in ABGW (Fig. 4a-c), and an increase in residence time for leaves and for fine roots but a decrease for ABGW (Fig. 4g-i). Despite our results showing a change in the values’ occurrence patterns along the trait space for PFTA in the applied low precipitation scenario, the magnitude of this change in values throughout the functional space is much lower than for TBA, i.e., with almost no alteration in the range of values (see x axis in Fig. 4). These differences support our assumptions (H1) that a trait-based model show a higher capacity to functionally reorganize the community under the changes in environmental conditions.

*Reduced precipitation impacts on functional diversity facets*

The above-cited changes drove alterations in the three facets of functional diversity within the two employed modeling approaches (Fig. 6). Contrasting to our predictions in H3 that the applied precipitation reduction would decrease the richness of trait variation in the communities, we found an increase in functional richness for all traits in both approaches (Fig. 6a), except for residence time in ABGW for the PFTA. Also, the percentage of change in this facet was much higher in TBA, for example, while the TBA presented an increase of 15.15% in richness for leaf allocation, PFTA showed an increase of only 0.47% for the same variable. For all the traits in the TBA, we observed an increase superior to 100% for functional evenness facet, while in the PFTA, the result was the opposite: traits showed a decrease in this functional diversity component, except for allocation and residence time in AGBW (Fig. 6b). The result for evenness under the TBA differ from our assumptions pointed out in H3 that this functional diversity facet would decrease because of the expected selection of a narrow range of trait values. In line with richness, the change in evenness for the PFTA traits was in a much lower degree of change (74% maximum) when compared to TBA. While leaf allocation displayed an increase of more than 200% for functional divergence, the other TBA traits presented reduction in this variable, mostly in disagreement to our H3 (Fig. 6c). However, in accordance with our third hypothesis, divergence in the PFTA presented an increase in its functional traits, with the exception of leaf allocation and residence time in ABGW (Fig. 6c). Likewise, the other functional diversity facets, the changes observed for PFTA was in a smaller magnitude than for TBA.

Also, with the applied change in precipitation, the hypervolumes for TBA and PFTA showed a pronounced change (Fig. 5 and SI.7; see Movie SI.1 for a 3D animated representation): under natural climatic conditions the size of the volume that the data occupy was equal to 1.71 and 0.007 for TBA and PFTA, respectively; while under reduced precipitation the volume size increased for both approaches: 47.84 for the former and 0.75 for the latter. This result reinforces the refutation of our second hypothesis. The overlap degree between hypervolumes (before and after the drought scenario) yielded a value of 0.038 for the TBA and of 0.009 for the PFTA, indicating almost no similarity between the hypervolumes. Finally, the distance between the centroids of the two hypervolumes after imposing a climatic change indicated a change in the mean values: the centroid distance for the TBA was 5.25 and 0.937 for the PFTA, that is, the mean values were modified in a higher magnitude for the former approach with the applied reduced precipitation.

**Discussion**

In summary, our results showed:

(i) TBA presented better performance in representing carbon stocks and NPP against observational estimates in comparison to PFTA;

(ii) moisture stress induced more subtle or smoother carbon losses in the TBA throughout the studied area, which also occupied areas where none PFT were able to survive ;

(iii) biomass carbon was reduced in all the plant compartments under decreased precipitation , except for fine roots in TBA, that presented an increase of investment in this tissue to deal with the lower water availability. This increase in fine roots investment for TBA can be attributed to the higher capacity of this modeling approach to functionally reorganize its community composition;

(iv) both modeling approaches showed changes in the three facets of functional diversity under reduced precipitation, however the magnitude of the change was much higher in TBA because of the available trait variability.

*CAETÊ performance against references*

Trait-based models developers have argued that the inclusion of trait variation allows not only the representation of biogeochemical cycles but to improve accuracy when compared to models based on PFTs. Theoretically, this improvement emerges from the fact that by representing vegetation with only a few PFTs and fix values representing their functional traits widely contrast with the massive trait variation observed in nature, especially in hyperdiverse ecosystems such as Amazon, and as a consequence do not account for the responses to local environmental heterogeneity and constraints (Ackerly and Cornwell, 2007; Freschet et al., 2011; Westoby et al., 2002, Verheijen et al., 2013). In order to test these statements and contribute to the development of trait-based models we here implemented trait variation in a version (TBA) of the vegetation model CAETÊ and compared it with a version using a PFT approach (PFTA).

Our results show that the inclusion of trait variation in vegetation models in fact plays a key role in predicting vegetation carbon cycle: the TBA was not only able to represent NPP and carbon storage reasonably well when compared to references both considering geographical distribution and total values, but also showed higher agreement when contrasted to PFTA (Fig. 2 and Fig. SI.3.). The accuracy improvement in represent biogeochemical variables by adding trait variability was already observed in other modeling exercises (Fyllas et al., 2014; Sakschewski et al., 2015; L. M. Verheijen et al., 2013; Lieneke M. Verheijen et al., 2015). We attribute this improvement to trait variability inclusion, since it confers a higher diversity of responses in communities to environmental filtering derived from climatic heterogeneity allowing a more realistic simulation of the community assembly (Keddy, 1992)⁠ and, as a consequence of the biogeochemical cycles (Sakschewski et al., 2015; L. M. Verheijen et al., 2013)⁠.

The PFTA presented a generalized overestimation of aboveground carbon storage and NPP (Fig. 2, Fig. SI.3) when contrasted to reference maps that is derived from the fact the PFTs (chosen by previous PFTs implemented in DGVMs) are already parameterized to present a high performance (or optimal trait combination) in the climatic envelope found in regions with predominance with tropical forests (Scheiter, Langan, & Higgins, 2013; L. M. Verheijen et al., 2013)⁠. It allows a higher occurrence of PLSs with high carbon storage, which is especially important in our simulations, since our upscaling from the community to the grid-cell is weighted by the biomass of PFTs present in this cell.

PFTA and TBA presented some common mismatch with the reference maps regarding carbon storage. Both approaches present an overestimation of values at the edges of Amazon basin when compared to the maps estimated by Saatchi et al. (2011) and Baccini et al. (2012). This is linked to the fact that these regions that are known to be heavily deforested, but the model CAETÊ still do not incorporate human land use nor fire for determining vegetation distribution. Also, either PFTA and TBA present a tendence for overestimating carbon storage and NPP in central/northwest of Amazon basin. It might be linked to forcing linked to ecological processes (such as competition and demography) and edaphic features (such as available nutrients, especially nitrogen and phosphorus) that are still not represented in CAETÊ.

*Carbon stocks under reduced precipitation: does the modeling approach matter?*

As expected, the 50% reduction in precipitation caused a pervasive decrease in the basinwide carbon stock in both modeling approaches, concentrated mainly on the Amazon basin edges and other naturally drier regions (Fig. 3a and b). This massive decrease of Amazon forest ability to store carbon in reduced precipitation scenarios is in agreement with experimental (da Costa et al., 2010; Nepstad, Tohver, Ray, Moutinho, & Cardinot, 2007)⁠⁠, observational (Brienen, Phillips, Feldpausch, & et al., 2015; Enquist & Enquist, 2011; Phillips et al., 2009, 2010)⁠⁠ and previous modeling studies (Lapola, Oyama, & Nobre, 2009; Powell et al., 2013; Rammig et al., 2010)⁠. In our model, this decrease is a result of the strengthened soil moisture stress that reduces photosynthetic rates and net primary productivity, meaning that the carbon available to be invested in plant compartments is reduced, a mechanism also known as carbon starvation (Doughty et al., 2015; Rowland et al., 2015)⁠.

Despite the general decrease in carbon stocks, we found important differences between PFTA and TBA regarding the geographical pattern of carbon loss: first, it is noteworthy that under the TBA it occurred in a much smoother gradient between a grid cell value and its neighboring cells, and also across different basin regions; and second, TBA was able to maintain carbon stocks in some areas where in PFTA carbon stocks were completely lost, that is, none PFT was able to establish. This was more evident in naturally drier areas, such as the transition between the Amazon forest and the savannah (*cerrado*) and central Amazon, that, in general, were the more affected regions. It corroborates with our H1 and with previous literature in which it is widely accepted that a more diverse (both taxonomically and functionally speaking) ecosystem tends to be less impacted by environmental changes (Cadotte, Carscadden, & Mirotchnick, 2011; Mori et al., 2013; Sakschewski et al., 2016; Schmitt et al., 2019)⁠.

This connection between functional diversity and resilience to environmental changes emerges from the fact that higher variability of traits (and plant strategies) also provides higher diversity of responses under new conditions, so that the community can restructure and maintain the ecosystem processes or decrease the impact of change, showing, hence, higher resilience (Fauset et al., 2015; Lohbeck, Bongers, Martinez-Ramos, & Poorter, 2016;Mori et al., 2013; Yachi & Loreau, 1999)⁠. Previous theoretical, experimental and modeling literature have already shown that environmental change is able to cause a modification on functional structure (Enquist & Enquist, 2011; Hillebrand, Bennett, & Cadotte, 2008; Mouillot, Villéger, Scherer-Lorenzen, & Mason, 2011)⁠, dominance (Hillebrand et al., 2008; Schmitt et al., 2019; Valencia et al., 2015)⁠, composition (Aguirre-Gutiérrez et al., 2019; Esquivel-Muelbert et al., 2018; Nepstad, Tohver, Ray, Moutinho, & Cardinot, 2007)⁠ and diversity components (Hillebrand et al., 2008; Zhang, Chen, & Reich, 2012)⁠. In fact, our results showed that the modeling approach with higher diversity (TBA) presented a significant functional community reorganization of Amazon forest in terms of composition, dominance relationship, functional richness, evenness and divergence with the applied precipitation reduction scenario (Fig. 4a-c and g-i, Fig. 6).

Functional reorganization can occur through a compensatory dynamic process so called as “functional density compensation” when the composition (that is, the occurrence or abundance of trait values) of a community adjust to the new conditions enabling types of plants - or trait combinations, in our case - that previously exerted a less relevant functional role (i.e. low density) to increase their dominance and vice-versa (Gonzalez & Loreau, 2009; Mori, Furukawa, & Sasaki, 2013; Sakschewski et al., 2016), then, changing the way that community occupy the functional space⁠. Such a functional density compensation followed by functional reorganization and its restriction by traits variability was well captured in our modeling results: reduced precipitation led to an expressive wider range of traits values in functional space for all the considered traits for TBA, while PFTA presented a restricted probability of the occurrence of new trait values, presenting trimodal curves with lower precipitation, product of the previousdefinition of trait values. This was also observed in the multi-trait analysis of functional diversity: the wider occupation of the functional space with the reduced precipitation was much stronger in the TBA when compared to the PFTA, as well as the centroid distance before and after disturbance.

The capacity to functionally reorganize enabled a paramount change on TBA that corroborates with our H2: the increase in the abundance of traits with higher values of allocation and residence time for fine roots (Fig. 4c and e) led to higher investment in this plant compartment to the detriment of investment in leaves (Fig. 4a and g) and ABGW (Fig. 4b and h), a result imposed by the CAETÊ trade-offs. It reflected in carbon partitioning for TBA, that is, a bigger root:shoot when compared to the regular climate condition. The higher investment in fine roots increased the uptake of water, which makes the community better able to deal with drought and maintain carbon stocks or reduce the degree of loss. These results corroborate with the well known effect of climatic change, such as drought, in inducing changes on C partitioning patterns (Doughty et al., 2014; Kannenberg et al., 2019)⁠ including a prioritization of root investment at the expense of other tissues (Doughty et al., 2014; Phillips et al., 2016; Rowland et al., 2014)⁠. On the other hand, given the limited trait variability, PFTA did not show this plasticity in carbon partitioning, avoiding its PFTs to establish in some grid cells, especially those that naturally show lower levels of precipitation (Fig. 3a).

Understanding the shift in carbon partitioning due to climate is of primary relevance for the future of Amazon carbon stocks (Doughty et al., 2015; Friedlingstein et al., 2006; Koch et al., 2021)⁠,⁠ and is especially reasonable if the carbon is allocated towards pools with shorter turnover, such as fine roots or even root exudates (Jiang et al., 2020)⁠, that contribute to a lesser extent to total carbon storage comparatively with other pools such as wood tissues (Chave et al., 2009; De Kauwe et al., 2014; Kannenberg et al., 2019; Luo, 2003)⁠. Our modeling exercise was able to capture this process: the reduce moisture triggered an increase in investment in fine roots in the TBA that provided greater resistance to drought, preventing the total loss of carbon in several grid-cells, and also caused a lower carbon storage in other tissues, mainly on ABGW and led to a relative lower carbon storage in some locations when compared to the PFTA. In that sense, if the ability to store carbon is used as the only proxy for ecosystem resilience, as is commonly used, e.g., Sakschewski et al. 2016; Huntingford et al., 2013; Levine et al., 2016, it may result in limited interpretations about the response of tropical forests to climate change. Also, our results showed that the approach used in vegetation models that seek to represent the impacts of environmental change in ecosystems indeed matters: the use of a small set of PFTs with fixed parameters to represent vegetation can overestimate the impacts of these changes and impose limitation on looking into processes such as the change in communities functional structure.

*Community reorganization change functional diversity facets*

Few studies have explored how reduced precipitation impacts the different functional diversity components (but see Hofhansl, Chacón‐Madrigal, Brännström, Dieckmann, & Franklin, 2021)⁠ despite the known importance of them for ecosystem functioning and resilience (Carmona et al., 2016)⁠. Here we explored, for the first time, the impact of reduced precipitation on Amazon functional diversity considering its three primary components: richness, evenness and divergence, and also examined functional diversity considering all the six chosen functional traits together.

The functional reorganization found in our results modified the three evaluated functional diversity facets both for single and multi-trait analysis, in accordance with hypothesis H3 (Fig. 6). But, as expected, because of the lower ability of PFTA to reorganize its functional diversity, alterations considering this approach were in a much lower degree when compared to TBA (Fig. 6). One of the main mechanisms that underlies change on diversity facets in communities is the differential occupation of functional space driven by a disturbance (Boersma et al., 2016)⁠, such as moisture stress. The occupancy of distinct regions in functional space after disturbance can be caused by a change on the central tendency, occurrence, abundance and dominance relationship of trait values (Boersma et al., 2016; Carmona, de Bello, Mason, & Lepš, 2019)⁠, as we observed in our results (Fig. 4 and Fig. 5).

Our H3 has been supported for a variety of studies (Boersma et al., 2016; Mason, Mouillot, Lee, & Wilson, 2005; Swenson et al., 2012; Webb, Hoeting, Ames, Pyne, & LeRoy Poff, 2010)⁠. Nonetheless our results displayed a completely opposite tendency: the reduced precipitation increased the occupancy of functional space and richness in a great order of magnitude, both when looking into traits separately (Fig. 4 and Fig. 6a) and traits together (Fig. 5). It might be explained by the decisive role that the decrease in dominance exerted after the new precipitation scenario was applied, since it allowed new combinations of traits to establish or to increase their occurrence. These results provide further evidence that, in some cases, functional richness can increase in disturbance scenarios if the environmental change affects mainly the dominant strategies or trait values (Boersma et al., 2016; Funk et al., 2017; Mouillot et al., 2013).⁠

Also contrary to H3, evenness exhibited an increase for all considered traits for the TBA (Fig. 6b). On the other hand, the PFTA showed a decrease in this functional diversity component for the majority of traits (Fig. 6b). The evenness increase in TBA is tightly related to the observed decrease of dominance and increase of abundance of trait values that were very rare before the disturbance. The decrease in evenness for PFT approach can be explained by the fact that the reduced precipitation decreased the dominance of a very restricted range of trait values (dominance of one PFT) and allowed the occurrence of the other 2 PFTs. Since the difference between the PFTs is very discretized, the occurrence of trait values ended up concentrated in three peaks of density hence turning the distribution less even (Fig. 4d-f and j-i). Evenness can also be interpreted as an evidence of the effectiveness in using the functional niche space⁠: the higher the evenness, the higher the utilization of the total functional space (De La Riva et al., 2017; Hillebrand et al., 2008; Mason, Mouillot, Lee, & Wilson, 2005; Mouillot et al., 2011)⁠. Therefore, our results indicate that a change in the environment can force the community to better occupy the functional niche space, contrary to our expectations in H3, providing, in that matter, lower sensibility to environmental changes, if it presents a sufficient variability in its trait values, as we observed for the TBA.

Modifications in functional divergence indicates changes in the total abundance that is supported in a community by the PLSs with the most extreme functional traits, *i.e.*, that occupy the extremes of functional space (Mouillot, Graham, Villéger, Mason, & Bellwood, 2013; Villéger, Mason, & Mouillot, 2008)⁠. In that sense, a higher divergence means that the community is supported by more specialist strategies (Mouillot et al., 2013; Villéger, Miranda, Hernández, & Mouillot, 2010)⁠. Since we expected a more restrict occurrence of trait values, we also assumed that the occupation would be towards the extremes of the functional space (H3), *i.e.*, a higher degree of specialization in terms of trait values to deal with the imposed environmental change. However, contrary to our expectations the TBA presented a general decrease in divergence (Fig. 6c). In the TBA approach the most plausible cause for the decrease in divergence seems to be the expressive decrease in abundance of dominant trait values, which tended to concentrate at the extremes of functional spaces; as a consequence, other trait values that were not so expressive before became significant for the community. Based on an empirical evidence by analyzing a disturbance gradient, Mouillot et al. (2013) also found a decreasing divergence the greater the disturbance, which was attributed to a declining abundance of the specialist species that were the most impacted by the disturbance. In addition, this decrease in divergence can be an evidence that the frequency distribution of trait values in the functional niche space maximizes the total community variation in functional characters (Mason et al., 2005). On the other hand, PFTA showed a general increase in divergence (Fig. 6c), that may be only a product of the emergence of the three peaks on traits distribution previously determined; for this approach an improvement in the occupation of functional space (low divergence) is impossible considering its very low diversity of trait values available, which can confer higher sensibility to disturbances (Villéger et al., 2010).

**Caveats**

The first, and probably most important caveat of this study is that the model does not present a plant hydraulics module yet, then we were not able to use direct variant traits that are connected to moisture stress impacts on essential plant hydraulics features, such as vulnerability to cavitation and embolism. This representation is crucial considering that several studies have claimed that the decrease in carbon storage due to moisture stress is not, necessarily, linked to a decrease in carbon availability (i.e., carbon starvation) but much more related to hydraulic failure (Eller et al., 2018; Doughty et al., 2015; Phillips et al., 2010; Rowland et al., 2015). Also, our model does not consider the effects of biotic interaction such as mechanistic competition and facilitation, what seems to play a vital role in determining community assembly and ecosystem functioning (Mori et al., 2013). Also, nutrient cycling representation on vegetation models, mainly nitrogen and phosphorus, have been shown to be essential for a reliable representation of carbon storage along Amazon basin. In that sense, we strongly recommend that further studies using vegetation models, including CAETÊ, that aim to understand the impacts of moisture stress on Amazon forest carbon stock, should consider plant hydraulics traits, biotic interactions and nutrient cycling. All these features are being implemented in CAETÊ.

Regarding functional diversity analysis, for this study, we considered the whole Amazon basin as a single ecological unit, which may lead to an oversimplification of diversity within the basin. To avoid this, we strongly recommend that future studies consider using the framework described in Carmona et al (2016) to integrate functional diversity across scales, in this case from grid cells to the whole Amazon basin. By employing this framework, it would be feasible to investigate functional diversity in different Amazon basin regions, and it could be used to advance further on the understanding of the connection between functional diversity and ecosystem functioning.

**Conclusions**

The need for a more reliable representation of functional diversity in vegetation models and, consequently, a higher confidence in its projections have led to the development of trait-based models. However, few studies so far have investigated in depth if the inclusion of trait variability in fact improves the representation of ecosystem properties such as NPP and biomass, an important refinement that could improve reliability of projections of terrestrial ecosystems under ongoing climate change. However, the potentiality of trait-based models to tackle functional ecology-relevant questions is yet to be unveiled.

In this modeling exercise, we compared for the first time how the use of a PFT approach (widely used by vegetation models) differs from a trait-based approach in terms of current representation of carbon storage and NPP; the impacts of a reduced precipitation scenario on how these two approaches simulate carbon storage and functional diversity and how changes on functional diversity components are connected to carbon storage responses. The use of a PFTA and a TBA in the same vegetation model provides a proof of concept on the significance of incorporating functional diversity in vegetation models. Our results evidenced, for example, that the inclusion of trait variability can improve accuracy in representing biogeochemical variables and also show that trait-based models, such as CAETÊ, are important tools to investigate mechanisms and processes that link biodiversity (mainly functional diversity) and ecosystem functioning. Consistent with expectations, we found that more diverse communities (trait-based approach) could deal better with environmental changes since it provided a higher range of responses, which enabled a community functional reorganization that could buffer, by maintaining or diminishing, the impacts of disturbances in ecosystem properties. On the other hand, because of its limited capacity to change community functional structure, the use of PFTs may overestimate the impacts of environmental changes.

Moreover, the TBA provided a reasonable framework for studying the different components of functional diversity (richness, evenness and divergence) against climate change and its connection with ecosystem functioning. In that sense we found, unexpectedly, that a harsher environment can increase functional richness instead of decreasing it, which can be attributed to a reduction in hyperdominance and then creation of new ecological niches for new combinations of functional traits to occupy in the functional space, and as a consequence, a lower sensibility of the ecosystem. This type of result can also be used to understand mechanisms such as community assembly rules.

In conclusion, this study demonstrated that the CAETÊ framework for including trait diversity in vegetation model is feasible and can be used in future studies, being flexible enough to be applied in several climatic scenarios and using different variable functional traits, hence, constructing a robust foundation to advance in the understanding of the impacts of climate change in Amazon forest and other hyperdiverse tropical ecosystems.

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**Data availability**

Model’s code, as well as the results, can be found at https://github.com/BiancaRius/CAETE\_Rius\_etal\_2021.

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