

# Post-doc project: A complex food-web theory of stability against perturbation

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## 1 Rationale

### 1.1 Perturbation ecology

- Multiple perturbation affect simultaneously mortality rates of species
- We can assume that those multiple stressors can be summed into environmental stochasticity

### 1.2 Correlation among perturbations

- Depending on the nature of the stressors and niche of species, we can expect different scenarios
- Perturbations such as fishing will affect primarily some species (e.g. top-trophic level)
- Perturbations in habitat quality will affect species more globally (however some might benefit).
- Perturbation in temperature will affect differently species according to their thermal niche

All the above scenarios can result in quite complex combinations of situation that can be tricky to generalize. Another way to tackle this situation is to test more general theories of ecological communities.

I see four different scenarios of perturbation correlations among species that I name as the following homogeneous, null, guilds, hidden niches. The homogeneous scenario considers that all species are affected in the same way, which would correspond to a general perturbation such as a general improvement/depletion of habitat quality. The null scenario considers that all species respond randomly to stress, i.e. they do not share perturbation, i.e. their perturbations are uncorrelated. The guilds scenario assumes that intra-guild perturbations are positively correlated and that interguild perturbations are not correlated, it is a scenario that assumes that species sharing the same trophic level share the same niche, i.e. there is no intraguild response diversity. The hidden niche scenario comes the theory of the same name (Scheffer and Nes 2006; Barabás et al. 2013; Martínez-Blancas, Belaustegui, and Martorell n.d.). It assumes that cluster of species having similar traits (here food-web trophic position) would have hidden niche dimensions that stabilize their

coexistence, such as species in the same guild will have response diversity (portfolio effect), anti-correlated perturbations.

While all the above scenario can seem abstract at a first glance, it is possible to draw realistic situations where they can apply.

The homogeneous scenario can apply in situations where stressors select for homogeneous response to stressors as for example, as it might be the case in altered environments where we can end up with the same functions (i.e. the same food-web) but where the diversity of other niche dimensions have been shrunk (lost of diversity hypothesis). The guild scenario supposes a full niche conservatism where species on the same feeding guild are likely to share the same evolutionary history and such they respond in the same way to environmental perturbation. The hidden niche is the reverse of the former, intraguild species are anti-correlated, such as there is maximal response diversity (insurance hypothesis), which is the mechanism by which biodiversity is thought to maintain long-term stability of ecosystem functions.

While response diversity has been well studied in small food-web modules and competitive communities, it has been overlooked in more complex food-webs. The complex relationships among species across food-web might dampens (compensate), propagate or just scale with food-chain and small food-web modules.

### 1.3 Stability in food-webs

The question at 1bn pound is “what is driving stability?”, i.e. the propagation of perturbations across food-webs. Early studies focused on the effect of removing one species either by looking at the topology (e.g., Dunne, Williams, and Martinez 2002) or dynamic (Stouffer and Bascompte 2011). In that sense, it would be interesting to see if environmental stochasticity predicts the same pattern that species extinction (i.e. perturbation for one species only).

The big other ingredient of food-web stability is the strength of species interactions. The tremendous early work of McCann and other authors about the distribution of interaction strength is really interesting, showing that coupling weak interactions to strong one stabilize food-web dynamics. Interestingly, I see two schools on the definition of interaction strengths in the Bioenergetic model. McCann defines it by modulating consumer preference ( $\omega$ ) such as  $I_{ki} = \omega_{ik} * x_i * y_i / B_{0i}$  while Brose, Williams, and Martinez (2006) modulates interaction strength by modulating predator/prey mass ratios (Z) such as Z increases the metabolism of predators decreases relative to prey (i.e.  $x_i$  and  $y_i$ ). Thus increasing Z decreases  $I_{ki}$ . The main difference between Brose and McCann approaches is that the Brose approach of modulating interactions also modulates metabolic losses ( $x_i y_i B_i$ ). Then the approach of McCann has the advantage to only change feeding rates but it is rather phenomenological modelling while Brose approach is more mechanistic (fully metabolic) but it changes two things at the same time.

#### 1.3.1 Stability in small modules

- McCann (2000), McCann, Hastings, and Huxel (1998), Vasseur and Fox (2007), Ripa and Ives (2003)

#### 1.3.2 Stability in food-chains

- Barbier and Loreau (2019), Shanafelt and Loreau (2018)

#### 1.3.3 Stability in complex food-web

- Thébaud and Fontaine (2010), Brose, Williams, and Martinez (2006)

## 2 Research questions

- How does response diversity drive food-web stability?
- How does response diversity affect coupling between predator and preys?
- How does response diversity effect on stability is modulated by interaction strength distribution?

## 3 Methods

### 3.1 Simulation framework:

- Start analysis with really robust food-webs (high Z and type III functional response) to avoid species extinction
- Really general propagation: one species pertubated at the time (are there differences with extinction pattern ?)
- Modulating interaction strength distribution: generate random asymmetric consumer preference ( $\omega_{ij}$ ) but with constraints on predator ( $\sum \omega_i = 1$ ) and preys (prey should be involved in one strong interaction at the time may be).

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