Sediment flows in South America supported by daily hydrologic-hydrodynamic modeling

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Key Points:

- First assessment of natural spatio-temporal sediment dynamics in South America from physically based model
- Floodplains anticipate the peak of suspended sediment discharge, and large wetlands retain almost 53% of these sediments
- South America exports 2.76 Mt/day of suspended sediments to the oceans; 39%, 8% and 5% come from Amazon, Magdalena and La Plata rivers

Abstract

Suspended sediments (SS) contribute to the maintenance of several ecosystems. However, intense soil erosion can lead to environmental, social, and economic impacts. South America (SA) has very high erosion and sediment transport rates. Here we present a detailed description of the spatio-temporal dynamics of natural SS flows in SA using the continental sediment model MGB-SED AS. We evaluate the model with daily in-situ data from 570 stations, information from regional studies and a global model. The model performance analysis showed that, in general, there was a better adjustment of the simulated data with those observed than with the information found in regional studies and of the global model. The use of the hydrodynamic propagation method has allowed a better representation of sediment flows in rivers and floodplains. Based in the calibrated model results, SA delivers 1.00×10^9 t/year of SS to the oceans, in which the Amazon (3.89×10^8 t/year), Magdalena (7.57×10^7 t/year) and La Plata (5.07×10^7 t/year) rivers are the main suppliers. The floodplains play an essential role, retaining about 9.4% (1.11×10^8 t/year) of the SS loads reaching the rivers. In this study, datasets related to SS flows in SA were generated and can be used to support other large-scale researches or policymakers and stakeholders for adequate management of continental land use.

Key words: Continental-scale; Erosion; MUSLE; MGB

1 Introduction

Understanding erosion and sediment transport processes are relevant to comprehend geological changes and landscape evolution (Latrubesse et al., 2005; Syvitski and Milliman, 2007; Zhang et al., 2004), biogeochemical cycles (e.g., Beusen et al., 2005; Doetterl et al., 2012; Galy et al., 2015; Ito, 2007; Kuhn et al., 2009; Lal, 2003; Müller-Nedebock and Chaplot, 2015; Naipal et al., 2018; Tan et al., 2017; Van Oost et al., 2007; Willenbring and Von Blanckenburg, 2010), and impacts of human activities, such as land use/ land cover changes (e.g., Murphy, 2019; Oliveira et al., 2015; Panagos et al., 2017; Wang and Van Oost, 2019) and dams construction (e.g., Best, 2019; Cohen et al., 2014; Forsberg et al., 2017; García-Ruiz et al., 2015; Latrubesse et al., 2017, 2005; Restrepo et al., 2006; Syvitski et al., 2005). In the last 8,000 years, the conversion of natural vegetation into agriculture has resulted in an accumulated erosion of about 27,187± 9,030 Gt worldwide (Wang and Van Oost, 2019). Meanwhile, it is estimated that the impact of soil erosion on global GDP (Gross Domestic Product) is an annual loss of ~USS $8 billion, threatening the food security, leading to a global reduction in the production of 33.7 Gt/year and a consequent increase in water withdrawals of 48 billion m³/year (Sartori et al., 2019).

A large number of rivers with the largest sediment transports world (>100 Mt/year) are in South America (SA, Borrelli et al., 2017; Doetterl et al., 2012; Latrubesse et al., 2005; Mouyen et al., 2018; Naipal et al., 2018; Syvitski et al., 2014, 2005; Wuepper et al., 2019). The Amazon River is at the top of the list transporting about 1,000 Mt/year, according to Latrubesse et al. (2005). Borrelli et al. (2017) observed high erosion rates (>10 t/ha.year) in SA in 2012, which increasing tendency compared to the 2001 year. This severe erosion has contributed to generate, for example, a reduction in food production of 8,170 Mt/year in Brazil (Sartori et al., 2019). Researches have shown that climate changes will impact the land use/ land cover (Almagro et al., 2017; Brêda et al., 2020; Cohen et al., 2014) and that the implementation of many dams will affect even more the connectivity of water flows, sediments, nutrients, and aquatic organisms (Forsberg et al., 2017; Grill et al., 2019; Latrubesse et al., 2017).

In the last decades, great efforts have been dedicated to understanding and quantifying sediment loads around the world. The use of in-situ measured data is one of the main used tools to estimate the transport in rivers (e.g., Best, 2019; Dearing and Jones, 2003; Latrubesse et al., 2005; Mouyen et al., 2018; Murphy, 2019; Niu et al., 2014; Restrepo et al., 2006) or watershed erosion rates (e.g., García-Ruiz et al., 2015). However, there is a lack of measurements of sediments in both intra-basin (e.g., García-Ruiz et al., 2015; Kettner et al., 2010; Lima et al., 2005) and near the Oceans, where less than 10% of rivers have monitoring of sediment delivery to coastal zones (Syvitski et al. 2005). Notably, in the era of big data and big science, there are still so few hydrological, sediment, and nutrient data available in the world's large rivers (Best, 2019). The lack of data represents a major barrier to develop analyses for large scales (continental or global) that require long time series (Dearing and Jones, 2003).

Computational sediment models have helped to fill this gap of sediment information. For the global scale, several applications have been carried out with Universal Soil Loss Equation (USLE, e.g., Xiong et al., 2019, 2018) – developed by Wischmeier and Smith (1978) – and its revised version RUSLE (e.g., Borrelli et al., 2017; Naipal et al., 2018, 2015; Sartori et al., 2019; Wuepper et al., 2019; Yang et al., 2003). According to Alewell et al. (2019), USLE and RUSLE are the most used models around the world. However, approaches that used these models were focused only on soil loss spatial representation, with long-term average estimates, which do not allow to understand the dynamic processes that involve sediment flows, such as the loads transported by the rivers. In this perspective, global sediment transport models were developed to estimate the impact of human activities on sediment delivery to the oceans (Syvitski et al. 2005), characterize rivers in terms of transported sediment loads (Cohen et al., 2013; Pelletier, 2012), and assess regional trends and variabilities (Cohen et al. 2014). The global models are generally empirically-based and have few input parameters, which facilitate applications on these scales. Nevertheless, these models have been poorly validated, they were focused on estimating long-term annual averages (e.g., Cohen et al. 2013; Pelletier 2012; Syvitski and Milliman 2007), and are based on simplified methodologies to estimate hydrological variables and sediment routing.

Despite the barriers encountered in the model applications on a global scale, few papers are found in the literature regarding continental scales. Panagos et al. (2015) used the RUSLE2015 model to estimate erosion rates for the reference year 2010 across Europe, with a spatial resolution of 100 m. Campagnoli (2006) used an approach (not fully described) focused on geological and geomorphological aspects to generate an annual sediment yield map of South America. However, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, these approaches are not capable to fully describe dynamic sediment processes.

The global model WBMsed used by Cohen et al. (2014) uses the simplified Muskingum-Cunge routing method (Wisser et al., 2010). The global models of Pelletier (2012) and Syvitski and Milliman (2007) do not explicitly consider the rivers flow routing. Studies performed in several South America regions have shown that simplified methods are sometimes not suitable to represent backwater and floodplain effects, which can be driving factors in flow routing in large basins (e.g., Angarita et al., 2018; Bravo et al., 2012; Paiva et al., 2013, 2011; Pontes et al., 2017; Siqueira et al., 2018; Zhao et al., 2017).

On the other hand, when we compare the sediment modeling studies with hydrological-hydrodynamic modeling studies, one can see that significant advances have been made in the later for global and continental scales. For example, studies made by Hanasaki et al. (2006), Hanasaki et al., (2008a, 2008b) and Hanasaki et al. (2018) showed global scale simulations with many capabilities to represent the global hydrological cycle and the human interference on it, such as water abstractions and rivers impoundments. The van Beek et al. (2011) study used the global PCR-GLOBWB model to evaluate water availability and water stress on a monthly scale for the whole globe. Meanwhile, the study by Beck et al. (2017) shows how extensive global hydrological models development research is, while evaluating the runoff estimates generated across the globe by six global models in addition to four land surface models. Other examples, with a greater focus on the fluvial hydrodynamic representation, are the studies of Yamazaki et al. (2011) and Yamazaki et al. (2013), which showed global model applications for flooding applications, including the impact of floodplains. Also, most of the models developed in recent years simulate processes on a daily scale (Bierkens, 2015). Many of them have the concept of "hyperresolution models" as their motivation, which aims to simulate processes on a global scale, but whose results are useful on a local scale (e.g., Bates et al., 2018; Wada et al., 2014; Wood et al., 2011).

On the continental scale, progress in the development of hydrological and hydrodynamic models also stand out, with dam representation (Shin et al., 2019) and improvements in fluvial hydrodynamics (Siqueira et al., 2018). The National Water Model (NWM, http://water.noaa.gov/about/nwm) developed in 2016 by National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), which has been conducting simulations and streamflow forecasts for the United States, can be mentioned as an example. Especially the study of Siqueira et al. (2018) applied for the first time a continental-scale fully coupled hydrological-hydrodynamic model for the whole South America. The Siqueira et al. (2018) results showed that limitations on flow estimation by state-of-the-art global models could be reduced using better calibrated continental models, which represent relevant processes (e.g., hydrodynamics) for the area of interest, and which are built on previous experience of regional-scale studies.

While these cited examples of hydrologic and hydrodynamic modeling with continental and global scales have increasingly appeared in the literature, including the goal of attaining "hyperresolution" models, no study has been found in the literature to estimate continental-scale sediment transport having hydrologic-hydrodynamic processes integrated. There is then a gap between the advances in large scale hydrologic and hydrodynamic modeling and the advances in sediment modeling at continental and global scales.

Bridging the gaps between recent advances in hydrologic and hydrodynamic modeling at continental scales and sediment modeling provide some opportunities: (i) obtain models that allow the comprehension and comparison of spatial and temporal dynamics explicitly, and that still represent important processes such as backwater effects in the rivers and the lateral flow exchange of water and sediments with floodplains (e.g., Buarque, 2015; Cohen et al., 2013; Grill et al., 2019; Paiva et al., 2013, 2011; Pontes et al., 2017; Rudorff et al., 2018); (ii) obtain continental or global scale models that are well-validated to provide locally relevant information at multiple time scales and suitable for policymakers and stakeholders (Bierkens, 2015; Fleischmann et al., 2019b; Siqueira et al., 2018); (iii) acquire continental sediment discharges information not only in the outlets of large rivers but also intra-basin. These items, therefore, become the interest of this study, which has South America as a subject of study, and aims to answer the following specific questions from modeling results: what is the accuracy of the proposed continental sediment model? What is the potential transported loads by the rivers in the continent? What are the spatial and temporal dynamics of sediment flows over South America? What is the impact of fluvial hydrodynamics on sediment transport and deposition? In which regions do suspended sediments deposit the most? To answer these questions, we have developed and evaluated the performance of sediment erosion and transport model for the entire South American domain.

2 Overview of Sediment-Related Processes in South America

South America (SA) transports ~20% of the sediments reaching the oceans (Syvitski et al., 2005), and the Amazon and Magdalena rivers (Figure 1: South America showing: a) major hydrological regions according to FAO and Agência Nacional de Águas do Brasil (ANA) classifications, relief map based on the Bare-Earth SRTM (O'Loughlin et al., 2016), including main rivers, flooded areas (Fluet-Chouinard et al., 2015) and artificial lakes (Lehner et al., 2011); and b) existent dams from GRanD v1.3 product (>0.1 km³ Lehner et al., 2011 - http://globaldamwatch.org) and from ANA (> 30MW), and sediment stations from ANA, Base de Datos Hidrológica Integrada da Argentina (BDHI) and Instituto de Hidrologia, Meteorologia e Estudos Ambientais da Colômbia (IDEAM). -a) are among the world's largest sediment delivers (Mouyen et al., 2018). SA has the second-highest potential erosion rate on the planet and the highest increase in the last century (Wuepper et al., 2019). This increase also attributes to SA the highest rate of particulate organic carbon erosion. (Naipal et al., 2018). Among the causes of these changes are agricultural expansion and deforestation (Borrelli et al., 2017), which have been increasing, causing concerns in the Amazon basin (Aguiar et al., 2016; Aragão, 2012).

Most of the SA is located in tropical regions that have little variability between sunrise and sunset and receive high solar incidence. The Intertropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ) directly influences the establishment of dry and rainy seasons; El Niño events; and the South Atlantic Convergence Zone (SACZ), which causes heavy precipitations in the summer. Annual precipitation variability is strong, with desert regions in Chile and rainfall reaching approximately 10,000 mm in Colombia (Latrubesse et al., 2005).

Rivers that drain the Andean region transport the highest sediment load on the continent. According to Restrepo et al. (2006), the Magdalena River is the one with the highest average sediment yield (690 t/km².year). More than 90% of the suspended sediment (SS) load of the Amazon Basin comes from the Andes (Latrubesse et al., 2005). Filizola and Guyot (2011), using in-situ measured data, indicate that the Madeira River (Figure 1: South America showing: a) major hydrological regions according to FAO and Agência Nacional de Águas do Brasil (ANA) classifications, relief map based on the Bare-Earth SRTM (O'Loughlin et al., 2016), including main rivers, flooded areas (Fluet-Chouinard et al., 2015) and artificial lakes (Lehner et al., 2011); and b) existent dams from GRanD v1.3 product (>0.1 km³ Lehner et al., 2011 - http://globaldamwatch.org) and from ANA (> 30MW), and sediment stations from ANA, Base de Datos Hidrológica Integrada da Argentina (BDHI) and Instituto de Hidrologia, Meteorologia e Estudos Ambientais da Colômbia (IDEAM). -a) contributes almost 50% to the Amazon River solid discharge, in which the Beni and Mamoré rivers represent about 72% and 28%, respectively, of the Madeira transport. (Guyot et al., 1999). The Ucayali River drains the Peruvian Andean part and is also one of the SA rivers with the highest SS load (Latrubesse et al., 2005). Rivers originating in the South Andean regions also carry high SS loads, such as the Bermejo River, which provides about 90% (Amsler and Drago, 2009) and the Pilcomayo river about 140 Mt/year of the total load carried by the Paraná River (Latrubesse et al., 2005). Lima et al. (2005) observed that smaller rivers like Parnaíba, Paraíba do Sul and Doce (Figure 1-a), although they do not have the highest sediment yield rates (t/year.km²), they have high values of suspended sediment concentrations

(SSC) (Lima et al. 2005). According to Latrubesse et al. (2017), Cratonic rivers such as the Negro, Tapajós and Xingu present low SS loads. At the same time, the results of Latrubesse et al. (2005) indicate that the Araguaia, Tocantins, Paraná and Orinoco rivers have intermediate values of SS yield.

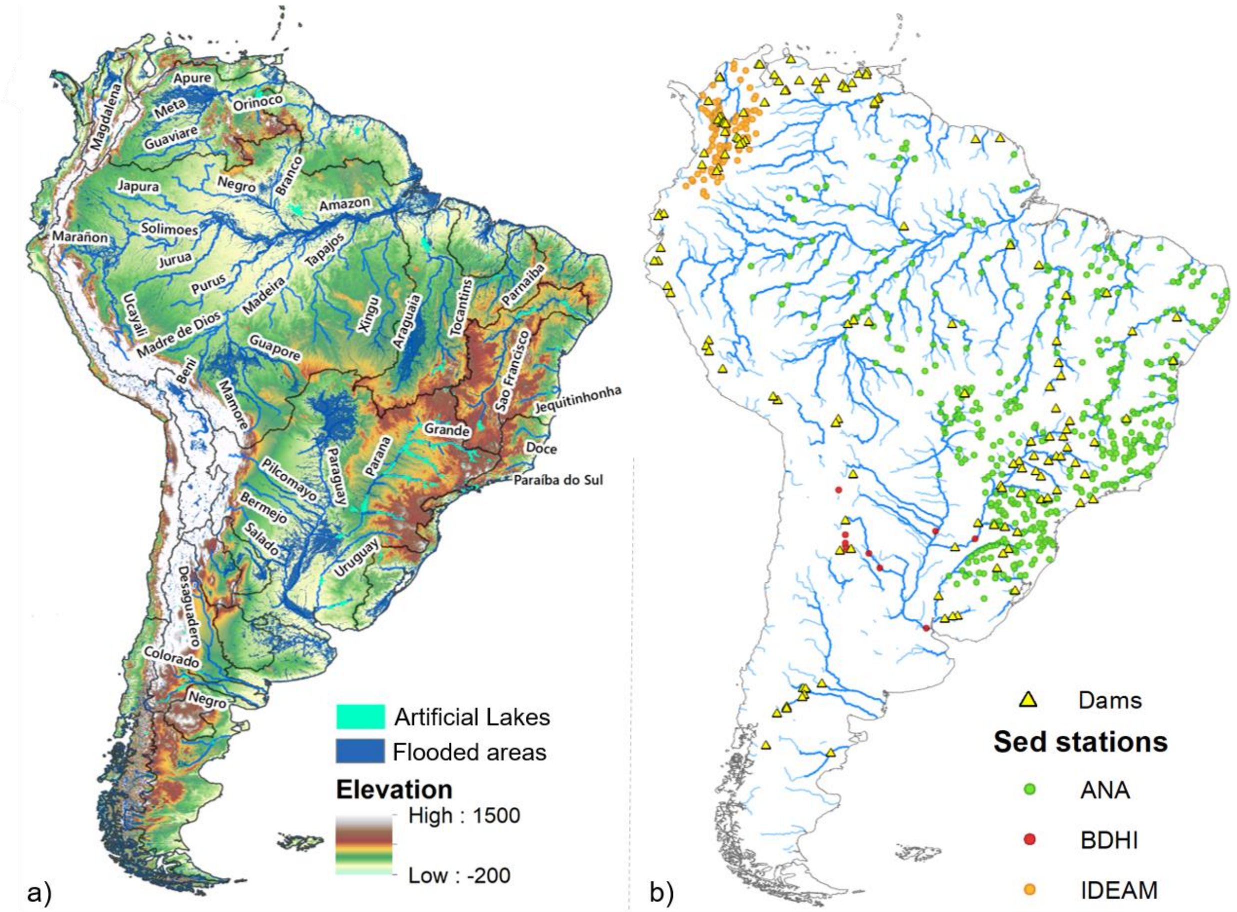

Figure 1: South America showing: a) major hydrological regions according to FAO and *Agência Nacional de Águas do Brasil* (ANA) classifications, relief map based on the Bare-Earth SRTM (O'Loughlin et al., 2016), including main rivers, flooded areas (Fluet-Chouinard et al., 2015) and artificial lakes (Lehner et al., 2011); and b) existent dams from GRanD v1.3 product (>0.1 km³ Lehner et al., 2011 - http://globaldamwatch.org) and from ANA (> 30MW), and sediment stations from ANA, *Base de Datos Hidrológica Integrada da Argentina* (BDHI) and *Instituto de Hidrologia, Meteorologia e Estudos Ambientais da Colômbia* (IDEAM).

The floodplains have an important ecosystem function and storage part of the sediment loads transported in the SA. In the Amazon basin, about 50% of the sediments leaving the Andes are deposited in the floodplains (Guyot et al., 1989), and in the Pilcomayo basin (Figure 1: South America showing: a) major hydrological regions according to FAO and Agência Nacional de Águas do Brasil (ANA) classifications, relief map based on the Bare-Earth SRTM (O'Loughlin et al., 2016), including main rivers, flooded areas (Fluet-Chouinard et al., 2015) and artificial lakes (Lehner et al., 2011); and b) existent dams from GRanD v1.3 product (>0.1 km³ Lehner et al., 2011 - http://globaldamwatch.org) and from ANA (> 30MW), and sediment stations from ANA, Base de Datos Hidrológica Integrada da Argentina (BDHI) and Instituto de Hidrologia, Meteorologia e Estudos Ambientais da Colômbia (IDEAM). -a), this value is even greater (Latrubesse et al., 2005). Sediment trap also occurs through anthropic factors, such as the presence of impoundments (Figure 1: South America showing: a) major hydrological regions according to

FAO and Agência Nacional de Águas do Brasil (ANA) classifications, relief map based on the Bare-Earth SRTM (O'Loughlin et al., 2016), including main rivers, flooded areas (Fluet-Chouinard et al., 2015) and artificial lakes (Lehner et al., 2011); and b) existent dams from GRanD v1.3 product (>0.1 km³ Lehner et al., 2011 - http://globaldamwatch.org) and from ANA (> 30MW), and sediment stations from ANA, Base de Datos Hidrológica Integrada da Argentina (BDHI) and Instituto de Hidrologia, Meteorologia e Estudos Ambientais da Colômbia (IDEAM). -a), which cause disturbances in river systems, decreasing the sediment load and affecting the geomorphology and the downstream floodplain productivity (Almeida et al., 2015; Grill et al., 2019; Latrubesse et al., 2017, 2005; Restrepo et al., 2006). The highest sediment trap rates in SA dams are found in the Amazonian rivers such as Madeira (e.g., Rivera et al. 2019), Upper Solimões and Tapajós (e.g., Latrubesse et al. 2017), and in São Francisco, Tocantins and Paraná rivers (e.g., Syvitski et al. 2005).

Despite the knowledge provided by previous studies, some things are not yet fully understood: the effect of fluvial hydrodynamics on sediment flows; thoroughly and accurately, the spatiotemporal patterns of denudation rates, concentration (SSC), solid discharge (QSS) and suspended sediment deposition; the driving factors in the relation between SSC/QSS and water discharge; the annual sediment balance of the SA and its main rivers; the potential consequences of climate changes on the patterns of these variables; the impact of dams on rivers and those with the greatest potential to be affected; the relevance of landslides in the sediments transport of each river; and the relative contribution of the anthropic activities, such as mining, to the sediment flows.

3 South America Sediment Model

To comprehend South America sediment flows, we used the MGB-SED sediment model (Buarque, 2015; Fagundes et al., 2019, 2020; Föeger, 2019) coupled to hydrologic-hydrodynamic model MGB AS, presented by Siqueira et al. (2018). This modeling configuration was chosen for three main reasons: (i) it is the first fully coupled hydrologic-hydrodynamic model, developed for regional scales, applied for South America's continental domain; (ii) the model has a high temporal resolution (daily outputs) and was validated in most of SA using in-situ and other sources of hydrological data, showing that hydrological variables were well represented; and (iii) the performance of sediment models can be strongly affected by the performance of hydrological models (Cohen et al., 2013; Shen et al., 2012), and the MGB AS has a better performance compared to the global models evaluated by Siqueira et al. (2018).

3.1 MGB AS Hydrologic-Hydrodynamic Model

The *Modelo Hidrológico de Grandes Bacias* (MGB) was initially developed by Collischonn et al. (2007) and further improved to address different questions (e.g., Fleischmann et al., 2019, 2018; Paiva et al., 2011; Pontes et al., 2017; Siqueira et al., 2018). It is a conceptual model, semi-distributed, and has spatial discretization defined by unit catchments (Pontes et al., 2017), each with its own river stretch and floodplain. Precipitation is the main driver of the model (it does not consider snow or ice melting), from which hydrological processes are simulated, such as: canopy interception, soil infiltration, evapotranspiration, and routing of surface, subsurface and groundwater flows. Each unit catchment can have several Hydrological Response Unit (HRU), which is a combination of soil type and soil cover (Kouwen et al., 1993), where water and energy are computed. Surface, subsurface, and groundwater volumes are stored in simple linear reservoirs and further routed to the stream network.

In the following, a brief description of the methodology used by Siqueira et al. (2018) is presented. We use the same MGB AS settings and structure, as well as the input data used by the authors. They found agreement between the simulated and observed flows that resulted in a Nash-Sutcliffe efficiency coefficient (NSE) > 0.6 in more than 55% of the analysed stations.

Flow routing in the drainage network is performed using the local inertial method (Bates et al., 2010; Pontes et al., 2017). The continuity equation is used to estimate the stored volume, flooded area, and streamflow and floodplain water level. Floodplains are represented as storage areas that compute evaporation in open waters, assuming that water level is constant for the whole unit catchment. Floodplains water infiltration for unsaturated soils are still considered (as described by Fleischmann et al. 2018), specifically for the Pantanal wetlands.

MGB AS model also allows using the Muskingum-Cunge (MC) method to routing flows. This method takes a time interval that is subdivided into smaller intervals and also split the total river reach length into sub-reaches to route the flows. The MC method enables the representation of flood wave translation and smoothing, that routes at a velocity c (celerity) higher than average streamflow velocity in a specific time interval and river reach. Among the method advantages are the more straightforward implementation, lower computational efforts, and numeric stability. As for disadvantages, there are the non-representation of backwater effects and lateral exchanges between river and floodplain, which may play an important role in large basins (Getirana and Paiva, 2013).

In the MGB AS pre-processing, Siqueira et al. (2018) used the flow direction map from HydroSHEDS, 15arcsec (Lehner et al., 2008), a 1,000km² drainage area threshold to onset the river network, and unit catchments and river reaches were delineated using a fixed-length vector-based discretization of Δx=15 km. The Digital Elevation Model (DEM) Bare-Earth SRTM v.1 (O'Loughlin et al., 2016) was used to compute the Height Above Nearest Drainage (HAND), from which the floodplain topography was estimated at a sub-grid level. River hydraulic geometry was set using the global data set of Andreadis et al. (2013), enhanced using information from regional studies (Beighley and Gummadi, 2011; Paiva et al., 2013, 2011; Pontes, 2016).

Precipitation data from global Multi-Source Weighted Ensemble Precipitation – MSWEP v1.1 (Beck et al., 2017) were used. The climatic variables used to estimate evapotranspiration were temperature, atmospheric pressure, income shortwave solar radiation, relative humidity, and wind speed obtained from Climate Research Unit (CRU) Global Climate v.2 (New et al., 2002). They are long-term monthly averages (1961-1990) and have 10' spatial resolution. South America HRUs map from Fan et al. (2015) was used to represent soil type (shallow and deep) and soil cover.

For more details about approaches, equations, and data, a full description can be found in Siqueira et al. (2018).

3.2 MGB-SED sediment model

The *Modelo de Sedimentos de Grandes Bacias* (MGB-SED) was firstly introduced by Buarque (2015) and improved in other studies (e.g., Fagundes et al., 2020; Fagundes et al., 2019; Föeger, 2019). The MGB-SED has three modules (basin, river and floodplain) and enables the simulation of rill and interrill erosion processes in hillsides, bed river erosion and deposition, sediment transport through the river network, and deposition of suspended sediment in the floodplains.

The sediment volumes from hillsides to river reaches in each unit catchment is the primary information estimated by the model using the Modified Universal Soil Loss Equation (MUSLE) (MUSLE, Williams, 1975) :

$$Sed = \alpha.(Q_{sur} * q_{peak} * A)^{\beta}.K.C.P.LS_{2D} \tag{1}$$

where Sed[t/day] is the sediment yield, Q_{sur}[mm/day] is the specific runoff volume, q_{peak}[m³/s] is the peak runoff rate, A[ha] is the unit catchment area, K[0.013.t.m².h./m³.t.cm] is the soil erodibility factor, C[-] is the cover and management practices factor, P[-] is the conservation practices factor, LS_{2D}[-] is a bidimensional topographic factor; and α and β are the fit coefficients of the equation (which are calibrated afterward), whose values originally estimated by Williams (1975) were 11.8 and 0.56, respectively.

Q_{sur} and q_{peak} values are estimated by the coupled hydrologic model (MGB AS in this study). P factor is estimated from the knowledge of soil management and conservation practices but has been adopted as 1 in most large scale applications (e.g., Benavidez et al. 2018; Borrelli et al. 2017; Naipal et al. 2015; Phinzi and Ngetar 2019). C factor is usually calculated from field experiments but has been usually adopted from literature for each soil cover, as presented by Benavidez et al. (2018) and Phinzi and Ngetar (2019). MGB-SED model computes K factor from Williams (1995) equation, in which considers the soil texture (sand, silt and clay percentages) and amount of soil organic carbon. LS_{2D} factor is estimated by the model using a DEM (Buarque, 2015) and more details about the LS_{2D} estimates can be verified in the supplementary material S1.

The approach used by MGB-SED to estimate sediment yield using MUSLE equation is the same used in other models, as SWAT (Arnold et al., 1998), CREAMS (Knisel, 1980), PERFECT (Littleboy et al., 1992) and SWIM (Krysanova et al., 1998). We know the limits of this approach, for example, it does not explicitly consider all erosive processes, such as those related to mass movements. Studies such as Tan et al. (2018) have already improved the estimates of a sediment model by including the representation of shallow landslides. However, as an initial approach and because it has already presented itself sufficiently in other large-scale modeling applications (e.g., Buarque, 2015), we use it, and we are aware of the limitations it imposes on the analysis of the results.

After computing sediment yield by MUSLE, the estimated volume is divided into three classes of particle sizes (silt, clay and sand), according to the percentage of these classes in the soil. Three linear reservoirs (one for each class) are used for the sediment routing from the hillsides to the drainage network. Each soil particle size is then routed from upstream to downstream using the following approaches: (i) for the fine loads (silt and clay), the unidimensional transport equation without the diffusion term is used, and the sediments are transported in suspension, without deposition in the channel; (ii) for sand, considered as bed load, the Exner sediment continuity equation is used together with the Yang transport capacity equation (Yang, 1973) to quantify the transport in the channel, the erosion or deposition in the bed.

In the floodplains, a zero longitudinal velocity is assumed, and only river-floodplain exchanges are possible. The perfect mixing in the floodplains is also assumed, which implies constant concentrations of silt and clay in the vertical profile. Floodplains working as storage areas, where fine particles can be deposited but cannot be resuspended.

More details about model equations can be found in the supplementary material S1. A summary of the coupling between the two models that resulted in the MGB-SED AS, main input data, processes, and outputs are shown in Figure 2: MGB-SED AS scheme. The blue (brown) part is related to the hydrological (sediment) model, its structure, main input data, processes, and main outputs..

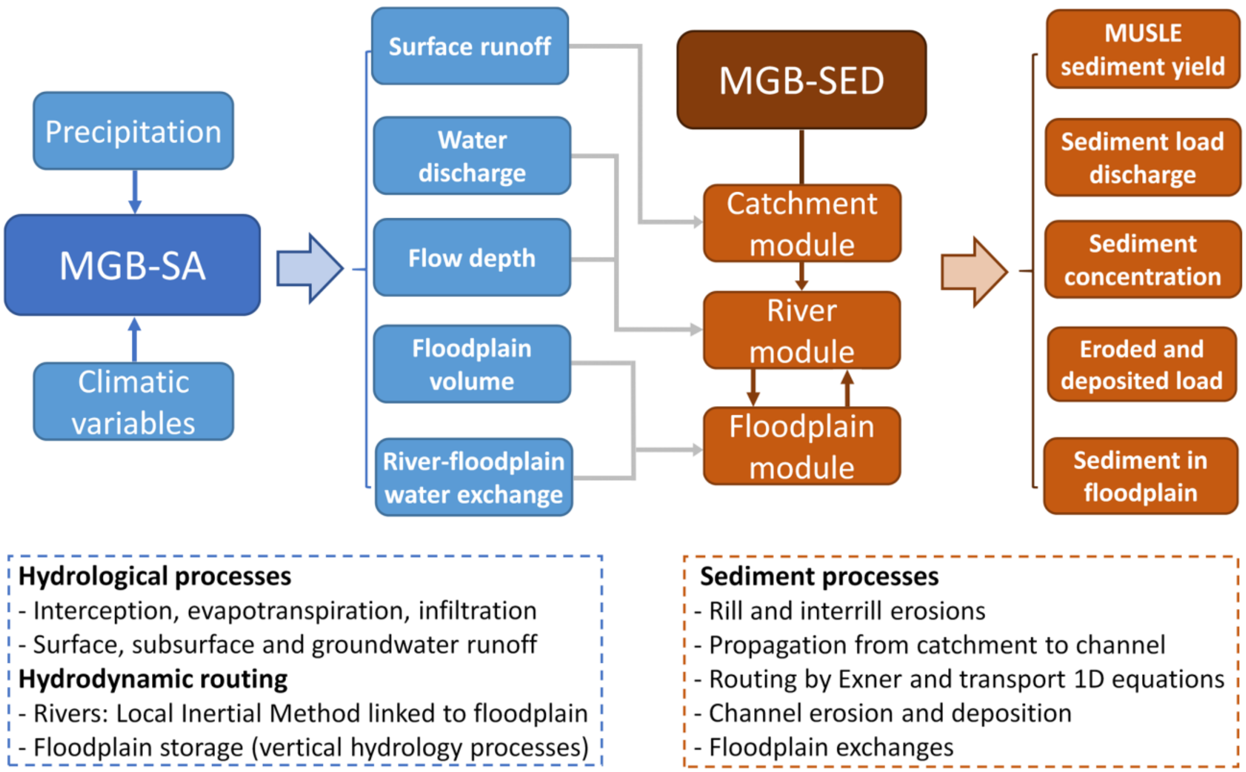

Figure 2: MGB-SED AS scheme. The blue (brown) part is related to the hydrological (sediment) model, its structure, main input data, processes, and main outputs.

3.3 Simulation Input Datasets

MGB-SED model requires topographic, soil type, texture and cover, and surface runoff to estimate daily sediments using the MUSLE equation. To compute K factor (Figure 3-a), we use percentages of silt, clay, sand and organic carbon for each soil type from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations (FAO/UNESCO, 1974). LS_{2D} factor (Figure 3-b) was estimated using Bare-Earth SRTM v.1 DEM (O'Loughlin et al., 2016). We use each land cover identified in URH South America map (Fan et al., 2015) to compute C factor (Figure 3-c) based on previous studies (Benavidez et al., 2018; Buarque, 2015; Fagundes et al., 2019). It is worth mentioning that C values for the forest were not the same throughout SA, due to the heterogeneity of forest coverings. P factor was adopted equal to 1, since in that scale there is no detailed information about soil conservation practices.

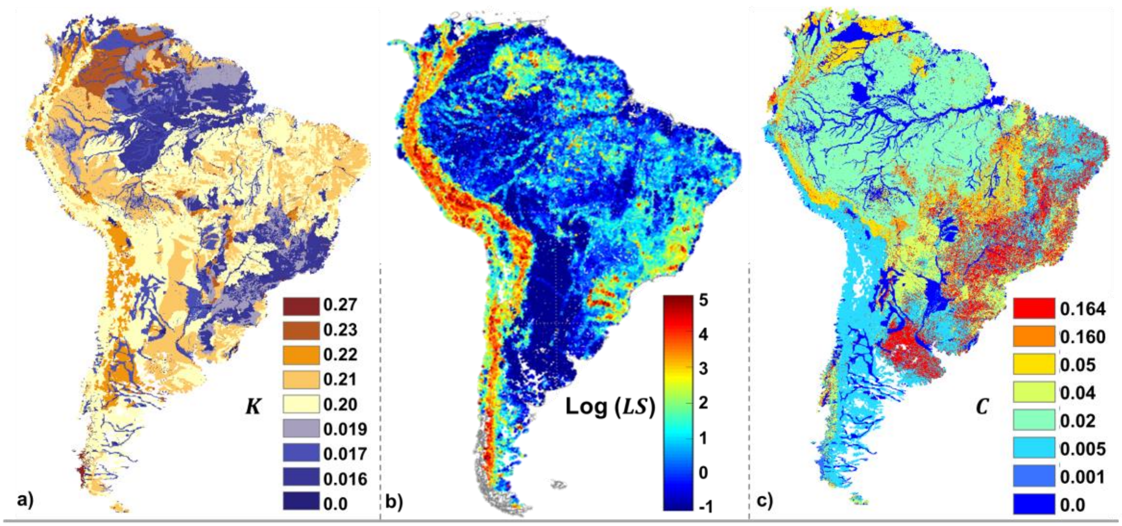

Figure 3: MUSLE parameters adopted for South America: a) K [0.013.t.m².h./m³.t.cm] factor; b) Log (LS_{2D}) [-] factor; and c) C [-] factor.

As mentioned before, the daily runoff was estimated by MGB AS and it was also used to compute q_{peak}. From this data and other simulated hydrological variables (e.g., river discharge and water level, and floodplains stored volumes), it was possible to compute soil loss and sediment transport using the same spatial discretization of MGB AS. We have chosen to change the values of the adjustable parameters α and β, as it has been done in several works (see the review presented by Sadeghi et al. (2014)), including previous applications with the MGB-SED model (e.g., Fagundes et al., 2019).

3.4 Experimental Design

3.4.1 Model Calibration and Evaluation

The base period for the analysis and performed simulations using the MGB-SED AS model was 1990-2009, in which the first two years were used to warm up the model. Initially, we performed a mass balance to check if the model was generating numerical errors, adding or removing mass in the simulation.

In order to know the natural (without impoundments) simulated sediment loads transported by the rivers, it was necessary to evaluate the performance of the MGB-SED AS model. For that, we used suspended sediment discharge (QSS) of the 570 in-situ stations (Figure 1: South America showing: a) major hydrological regions according to FAO and Agência Nacional de Águas do Brasil (ANA) classifications, relief map based on the Bare-Earth SRTM (O'Loughlin et al., 2016), including main rivers, flooded areas (Fluet-Chouinard et al., 2015) and artificial lakes (Lehner et al., 2011); and b) existent dams from GRanD v1.3 product (>0.1 km³ Lehner et al., 2011 - http://globaldamwatch.org) and from ANA (> 30MW), and sediment stations from ANA, Base de Datos Hidrológica Integrada da Argentina (BDHI) and Instituto de Hidrologia, Meteorologia e Estudos Ambientais da Colômbia (IDEAM). -b) in Brazil - ANA (450), Colombia - IDEAM (109) and Argentina – BDHI. To better explore the data, stations having at least 4 measurements in the period of 1992-2009 and drainage area above 1,000 km² were selected.

In the calibration (2002-2009), 64 stations were used, with drainage areas ranging from 3,045 to 4,700,503 km². The calibration stations were selected as follows: i) we always choose stations with the largest drainage area for each monitored sub-basin; ii) in case stations were located downstream of one (or more) reservoir (Figure 1), the one upstream with the largest drainage area would be used; iii) when there was just one station in a sub-basin, it was used to calibrate the model. The exception was Brazo Largo. If we applied these rules to this station, most of the basin of the La Plata river would not be calibrated, mainly due to lack of data in the western part of the basin and so many dams in the Paraná river (Figure 1)

The calibration was performed in two stages: an automatic calibration followed by a manual calibration. Automatic calibration was performed with the optimization algorithm MOCOM-UA (Yapo et al., 1998) and based on the recommendations proposed by Fagundes et al., (2019). A population of 100 individuals was used; three objective functions: Nash-Sutcliffe (NSE, Nash-Sutcliffe, 1970) efficiency coefficient, $BIAS$, and duration curve slope error between 10% and 50% ($DCPerm$, Kollat et al., 2012); maximum of 500 iterations; and α, β and Ɣ (Equation 2) calibrated parameters was adjusted to each sub-basin.

$$ʦ = Ɣ . TKS \tag{2}$$

TKS (s) is the parameter which indicates the delay time of the surface linear reservoir output; ʦ (s) indicates the travel time of the sediments to the drainage network (see supplementary material S1); Ɣ [-] is the adjustment factor between the two aforementioned parameters. The range of the calibrated parameters α,β and Ɣ was, respectively, 0.01-25.0, 0.1-0.5 and 0.1-5.0.

For the basins where we did not get data, a simple transfer of parameters from the calibrated sub-basins was made. The transfer process was based on the physical and climatic characteristics of the region.

For the validation (1992-2009), the same criteria of the calibration stage were used, resulting in the selection of 52 sediment stations. A global evaluation of the model performance was carried out using the 570 stations. It was a conservative decision, which includes the model evaluation for the 1992-2009 period with the stations used (64) and those not used (506) in the calibration process. In addition to the metrics already mentioned, the model performance was evaluated using Pearson's correlation coefficient (r), Kling-Gupta (KGE) efficiency coefficient and relative value of Root Mean Square Error ($RMSE$).

MGB-SED AS results were compared to estimates from the regional studies of Latrubesse et al. 2005, Lima et al. 2005 e Restrepo et al. 2006. The comparison was performed using data of long-term average annual QSS from 47 sites exceeding a drainage area of 5,000 km² (see Table1 and Figure 1, supplementary material S2). The agreement between QSS simulated and those of regional studies was evaluated from the relative difference between the annual values (Equation 3).

$$Diff(\%) = 100x \frac{QSS\ MGB\text{-}SED\ AS - QSS\ reg.studies}{QSS\ reg.studies} \tag{3}$$

Positive (negative) $Diff$ values mean that MGB-SED AS model calculated values higher (lower) than those from regional studies used in the comparison.

QSS simulated was also compared to the outputs of the global sediment model WBMsed (Cohen et al., 2014). This model was selected because it is the only one with data freely available for society. It is a grid model with 6 arc-min (~11km) spatial resolution and uses the Muskingum-Cunge method to route daily water streamflows (Wisser et al., 2010). To estimate the QSS, firstly, the model computes the long-term average values using global empirical equation

BQART (Syvitski and Milliman, 2007) and then it uses the Psi model (Morehead et al., 2003) to compute daily data. In the version presented by Cohen et al. (2014) the floodplains ware represented as temporary (final) storage areas for water (sediment). It means that the flows reach the floodplains when the bankfull discharge is exceeded, and water can return to the river when discharge is below bankfull.

The $Diff(\%)$ was also used for the comparisons between MGB-SED AS and WBMsed outputs in 21 sites (see Table 2 and Figure 1, supplementary material S2). The WBMsed grid cells identification was performed manually, and the selected sites are the same as the in-situ stations used for the comparisons against regional studies, which enable contrasts between scales and studies. Long-term average QSS were computed with both models in the period 1993-2009. The WBMsed outputs can be obtained at https://sdml.ua.edu/datasets-2/datasets/.

3.4.2 Analysis of Sediment Flows in South America

A study of QSS patterns was conducted using time series, from the calibrated model. QSS were simulated using the inertial and Muskingum-Cunge routing methods to assess the impact of fluvial hydrodynamics and floodplains on sediment transport and deposition. We also evaluate the effect of calibration and hydrodynamic routing on sediment delivery to the Oceans. For this purpose, we compared the estimated loads from a simulation considering hydrodynamic routing without calibration (i.e., setting the values 11.8 and 0.56 for parameters α and β, respectively) versus simulations using the inertial and Muskingum-Cunge methods to estimated loads considering the calibrated model.

To understand the spatial dynamics of the sediment flows in the SA, long-term averages of SSC, denudation rate, deposition of suspended sediment in the floodplains, and water discharge were calculated. We identified the major floodplains where the highest deposition rates occur, but the results were only presented for those basins where the model was calibrated, i.e., where there was no transfer of parameters, as in the case of the Orinoco River basin. We also computed the annual sediment balance at the outlets of the large rivers and for the whole SA.

4 Results and Discussions

4.1 Model Validation

4.1.1 Simulated data vs. in-situ observations

The mass balance analysis (Table 3, supplementary material S2) showed that the MGB-SED AS model remained stable throughout the simulation. Numerical errors were of the 10^{-3}% order, mostly coming from variables truncation in the operations.

The simulated QSS was compared against observed daily values, and the performance of the model was evaluated in Figure 4 in terms of r, $BIAS$ and NSE. Other metrics are shown in Figure 2 of the supplementary material S2.

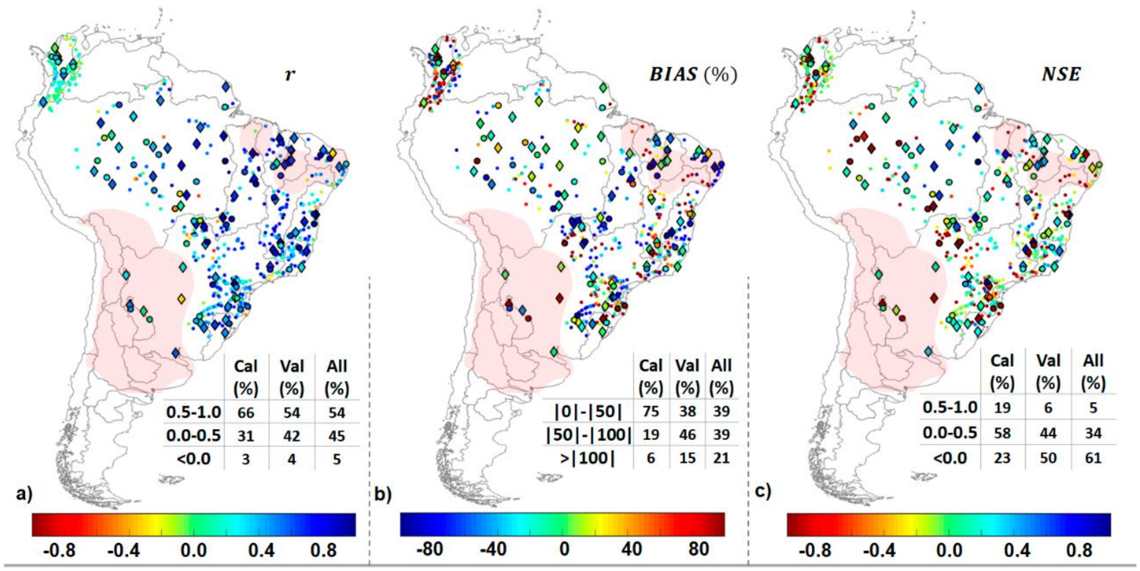

Figure 4: MGB-SED AS performance over South America in terms of suspended sediment discharge: a) correlation (r); b) $BIAS$ (%); and c) Nash-Sutcliffe efficiency (NSE) . Diamonds and bigger dots refer to stations used in calibrating (Cal) and validating (Val) steps, respectively. Small dots refer to other station used to evaluate the model. Tables summarize the percentage of sediment stations in each performance class and corresponding step. Marked regions represent those with poor hydrological-hydrodynamic performance (see Siqueira et al., 2018).

Figure 4-a indicated agreement between model estimates and observed data in terms of correlation, in which 66% and 54% of the stations had values higher than 0.5 in the calibration (Cal) and validation (Val) steps, respectively. In terms of $BIAS$, 94% (Cal) and 85% (Val) of the stations had values between -100% and 100% (Figure 4-b). For NSE, 78% and 50% of the stations had positive values (Figure 4-c).

In the evaluation using all stations (All), Figure 4 shows that MGB-SED AS model had a lower performance in comparison to calibration and validation. We observed a better model performance to simulate QSS for stations used in the calibration, and worse model performance (r, NSE<0.0 and $BIAS$>|100) was noticed especially in three situations. The first one is related to the regions where the hydrological model performed poorly (Figure 4), characterized by arid or semi-arid climate; regions where snow melting plays an important role for the runoff generation; and regions influenced by orography (Siqueira et al., 2018). The second one is represented by rivers influenced by the presence of dams, which affect the sediment transport, such as the São Francisco, Jequitinhonha, Tocantins, Paraná, Salado, Madeira, Parnaíba and Doce rivers (See Figure 1: South America showing: a) major hydrological regions according to FAO and Agência Nacional de Águas do Brasil (ANA) classifications, relief map based on the Bare-Earth SRTM (O'Loughlin et al., 2016), including main rivers, flooded areas (Fluet-Chouinard et al., 2015) and artificial lakes (Lehner et al., 2011); and b) existent dams from GRanD v1.3 product (>0.1 km³ Lehner et al., 2011 - http://globaldamwatch.org) and from ANA (> 30MW), and sediment stations from ANA, Base de Datos Hidrológica Integrada da Argentina (BDHI) and Instituto de Hidrologia, Meteorologia e Estudos Ambientais da Colômbia (IDEAM). and Figure 4). The third one is for the stations having small drainage areas. For the latter situation, Figure 5 presents a detailed description of the modeling results that relate the drainage area of each station to the NSE and $BIAS$ values. It is noted that for areas larger than 100,000km², the $BIAS$ range is reduced (values between -67% and 200%), remaining mostly between -50 and 50% (Figure 5-b). For the NSE, most values are over -0.5 (Figure 5-a).

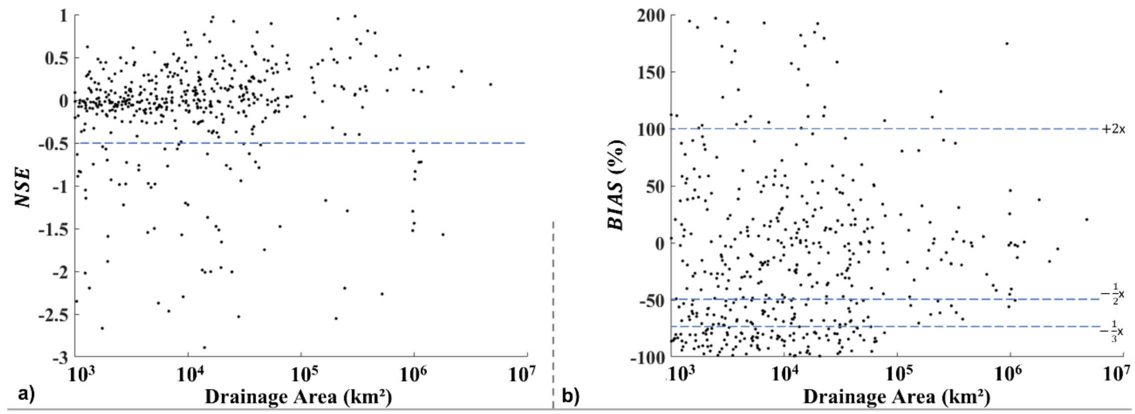

Figure 5: NSE and $BIAS$ (%) between observed and simulated QSS compared against the drainage area. Dashed blue lines in b) represent how much MGB-SED AS model over or underestimate QSS values.

Many stations that have small drainage areas are found in Colombia, for example. The results of Figure 4 in this region do not show a specific pattern, and the NSE and $BIAS$ values are sometimes negative, sometimes positive. These basins also have high slope values and are characterized by the occurrence of strong storms (Restrepo et al., 2006). The resolution of the models input data and the computational resources generally available difficult the representation of these features in continental-scale models.

In Table 4 of the supplementary material S2, we present an analysis of the model performance for several stations and the period when the model was calibrated (2002-2009) and the non-calibrated (1992-2001). The analysis shows that temporal extrapolation performed better than spatial extrapolation. The temporal extrapolation refers to the model evaluation for calibrated stations in another period. Spatial extrapolation refers to the model evaluation in the same period as the calibration, but for stations not used in that process.

4.1.2 Simulated data vs. other studies

The comparison between simulated annual QSS and estimated annual QSS by regional studies showed an R^2=0.90 (Figure 6-a). 45% of comparisons revealed that the MGB-SED AS estimates range between half and twice the values found in regional studies.

Figure 6-a also shows a trend for MGB-SED AS QSS to be lower than the regional studies QSS. Figure 6-b presents a comparison of $BIAS$ (MGB-SED SA and in-situ measured data) versus $Diff$ (MGB-SED SA and regional studies). The results indicate that the $BIAS$ and $Diff$ median were, respectively, -7% and -50%.

To understand the differences presented in the previous paragraph, we highlight that: i) the medians of $BIAS$ and NSE were, respectively, -7% and 0.13 for the 21 analyzed stations; ii) in the Fazenda Vista Alegre station, for example, the daily $BIAS$ and NSE were, respectively, 1% and 0.39, but in comparison with Lima et al. (2005) study, the MGB-SED AS has estimated for this station QSS values 56% lower; iii) the Lima et al. (2005), Latrubesse et al. (2005) and Restrepo et al. (2006) studies provided estimates using regression methods between QSS and water discharges. From the three points presented, we realize that MGB-SED AS had better agreement with in-situ data than with estimated data from regional studies. Besides, the regression methods used in the aforementioned studies are simplified, and they consider some assumptions that may increase their estimates, such as: the use of few in-situ measured data, in which the majority belonging to the low-concentration period, to represent the temporal dynamics of sediments; Q enough to explain QSS; the increase of QSS is always increasing with Q. However, because of hysteresis effects, it is known that these premises often do not occur in nature, especially for large rivers, which is clearly demonstrated for the Amazon in studies performed by Bourgoin et al. (2007), Filizola et al. (2011) e Fassoni-Andrade and Paiva (2019). A broader discussion on this topic is presented in the next section.

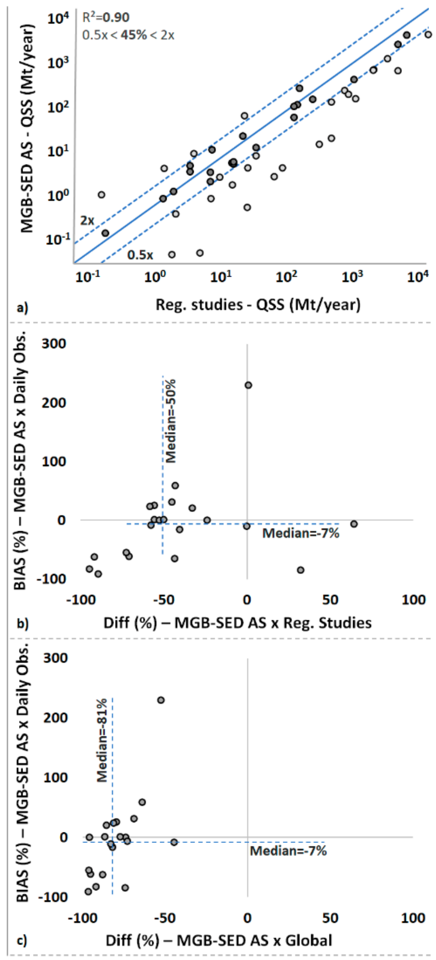

Figure 6: Performance of the MGB-SED AS model against the results of regional and global studies. a) comparison between MGB-SED AS annual suspended sediment discharge (QSS) and QSS from regional studies; light gray dots refer to when the MGB-SED AS estimated more than double or less than half the regional studies values. b) comparison between MGB-SED AS and QSS in-situ daily observations ($BIAS$) against MGB-SED AS and annual QSS from regional studies ($Diff$). c) comparison between MGB-SED AS and QSS in-situ daily observations against MGB-SED AS and annual QSS from the WBMsed global model (Cohen et al., 2014), using $BIAS$ and $Diff$, respectively.

Figure 6-c presents a comparison between the results of MGB-SED AS and those of the WBMsed global model (Cohen et al., 2014). The median $Diff$ between the MGB-SED AS and the WBMsed model was -81%, and the highest value was -44%. It shows that the estimated values by MGB-SED SA are considerably lower than those predicted by WBMsed. In this case, although the WBMsed model does not consider the only Q to estimate QSS, it is based on a

global empirical equation, which may have limitations given the different variables around the globe. The WBMsed model was neither calibrated nor validated by Cohen et al. (2014) in SA.

The tables used to generate Figure 6 graphics can be found on the supplementary material S2 (Table 1 and Table2).

4.2 Analysis of Sediment Flows in South America

4.2.1 Time Series

Figure 7 presents the comparison between daily simulated and in-situ QSS data for several large South American rivers. The presented statistics were calculated considering only the values of observation dates. Apavi station, on the Magdalena river (Figure 7-1), offers a lot of observed data, and, in general, there was an agreement between the simulated and observed data ($BIAS$=-14% and NSE=0.25). In the Amazon basin, suspended sediments were well represented for several stations, which can be seen in the Óbidos (Figure 7-2), Fazenda Vista Alegre (Figure 7-3) and Altamira (Figure 7-3) stations. The latter had $BIAS$=0% and NSE=0.78. It is pointed out that the variability of the QSS estimated by the sediment model is strongly influenced by the variability of hydrological variables calculated by MGB AS.

The impact of fluvial hydrodynamics on sediment transport can be observed at Fazenda Vista Alegre and Óbidos stations, where the floodplains act storing sediments and, consequently, reducing the peaks of QSS (QSS MC > QSS IN). In other places, the effect of hydrodynamic routing is less significant, as in the Propriá (Figure 7-5) and Paraná (Figure 7-9) stations, the QSS MC and QSS IN curves are closest, differing only at the highest points. These are usually regions where the presence of floodplains is less expressive, and the average slopes of the rivers are higher.

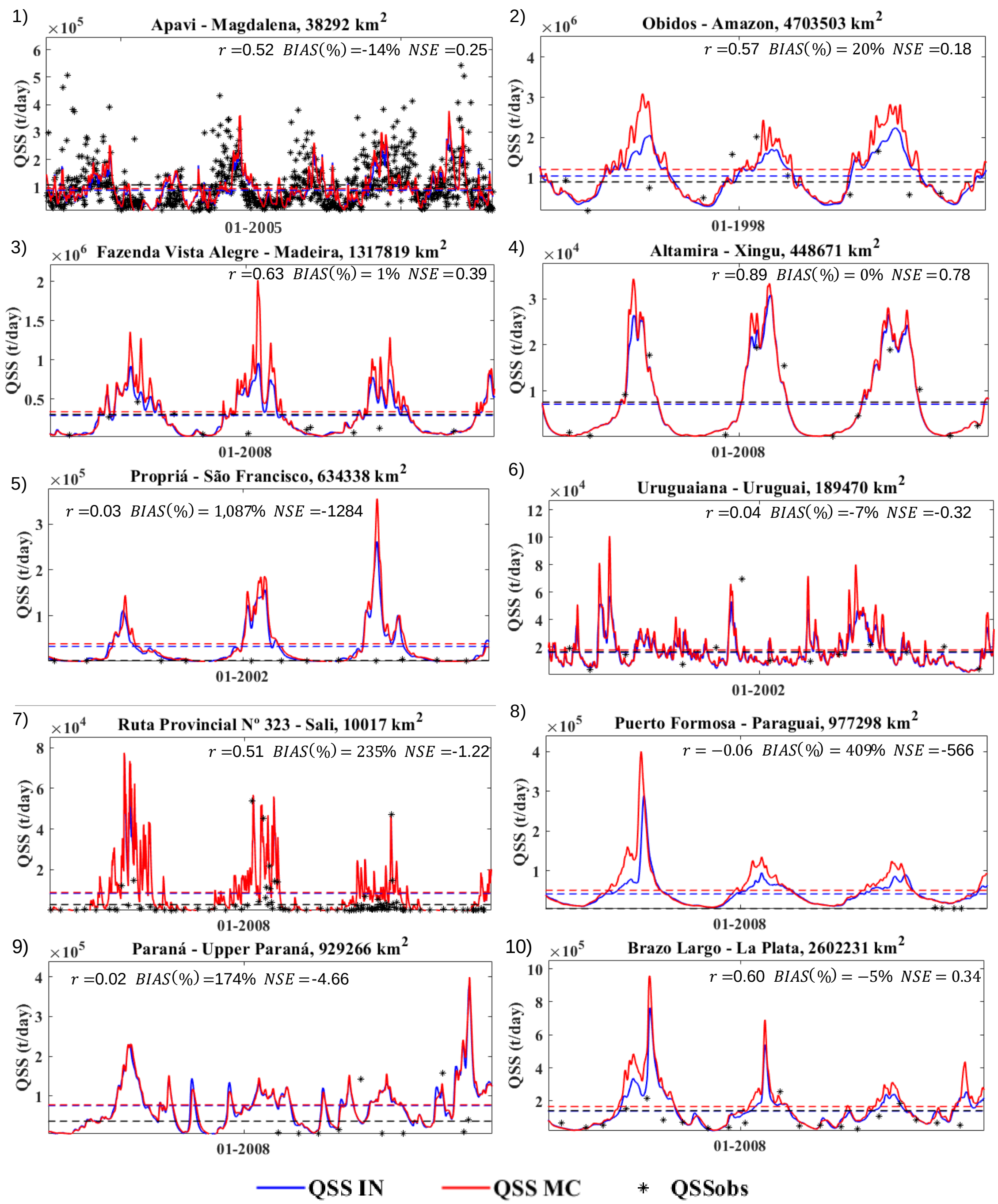

Figure 7: Comparison between observed (QSSobs - black asterisks) and simulated suspended sediment discharge (QSS) for some large rivers of South America. Model performance is presented in terms of correlation (r), $BIAS$ (%) and Nash-Sutcliffe efficiency (NSE) for hydrodynamic modeling (QSS IN). Daily QSS simulated time series are presented for both inertial (QSS IN - blue lines) and Muskingum-Cunge (QSS MC – red lines) routing methods. Dashed lines show the respective long term averages. The sediment stations locations are presented in Figure 8-a.

In the Propriá station, the $BIAS$ was 1,087%, and in-situ QSS values were always very low (Figure 7-5). In this case, as for other stations like Paraná (Figure 7-9), these low observed values are associated with sediment trap in large dams located upstream. Highlighting this phenomenon is important because, in these cases, the observed temporal dynamics are inconsistent with the simulated natural sediment discharge in the rivers.

The Puerto Formosa station (Figure 7-8), in the Paraguay River, also showed low performance, which can be related to the weak performance of the MGB AS model in the upstream drained region. Also, this region is strongly influenced by the Pantanal wetlands, where a complex rivers network having bifurcations and diffuse flows in the floodplains are noted, which are not well represented by one-dimensional models, such as the MGB AS. The low performance may also be related to the lack of in-situ data (only 4 in total), which compromises a proper comparison between simulated and observed data. Despite the low performance of the hydrological model in a large area of the La Plata river basin and the several impoundments in the Paraná River, the model presented a $BIAS$ of -5% and an NSE of 0.34 at the outlet of the La Plata River (Figure 7-10).

In many places, the model estimates and in-situ observations did not match, which may have been caused by the non-representation of reservoirs in the modeling process. In the São Francisco River, sediment trapped by reservoirs may approach 70% (Creech et al., 2015). Syvitski et al. (2005), considering impoundments, estimated that sediment flows to the oceans in SA were reduced by about 13%/ year. The expectation of the construction of new dams in the SA and their impacts on water and sediment flows, mainly in the Amazon Basin (Latrubesse et al., 2017), have grown. So, it is crucial to consider these structures in simulations aiming to quantify sediment flows in the present and future scenarios.

4.2.2 Spatial Analysis

Figure 8-a presents the long-term average annual QSS (t/year). From the simulated results, the Amazon River is the one with the highest QSS (3.89×10^8 t/year), followed by the Magdalena (7.57×10^7 t/year) and La Plata (5.07×10^7 t/year) rivers. The Magdalena carries a load six and ten times greater than those carried by the São Francisco (1.20×10^7 t/year) and Tocantins (7.29×10^7 t/year) rivers, which have twice their drainage area. The average flows of the São Francisco and Tocantins rivers are 56% lower and 88% higher, respectively, than the Magdalena river. The Doce River transports a suspended load of 4.81×10^6 t/year, which is equivalent to 40% of the load carried by the Tocantins River, although the Doce River has a drainage area (flow) ten (fourteen) times smaller.

A QSS value of 3.77×10^7 t/year was estimated for the Orinoco river, a value almost five times lower than that (15.0×10^7 t/year) estimated by Latrubesse et al. (2005). The Orinoco river basin was not calibrated, as we did not have stations with data observed in this region. The comparison of annual QSS values with estimates made by regional studies is presented in supplementary material S2.

The simulated QSS for the most downstream stations of each basin agreed with the observed values ($BIAS$ values, Figure 4), which allows us to make more accurate estimates, from our perspective, of the natural loads reaching the oceans. Thus, Figure 8-a represents a potential transport situation in the rivers since a sediment trapping in dams was not considered in the sediment modeling. Rivers such as the São Francisco and Paraná, for example, currently have clearer waters downstream from the dams.

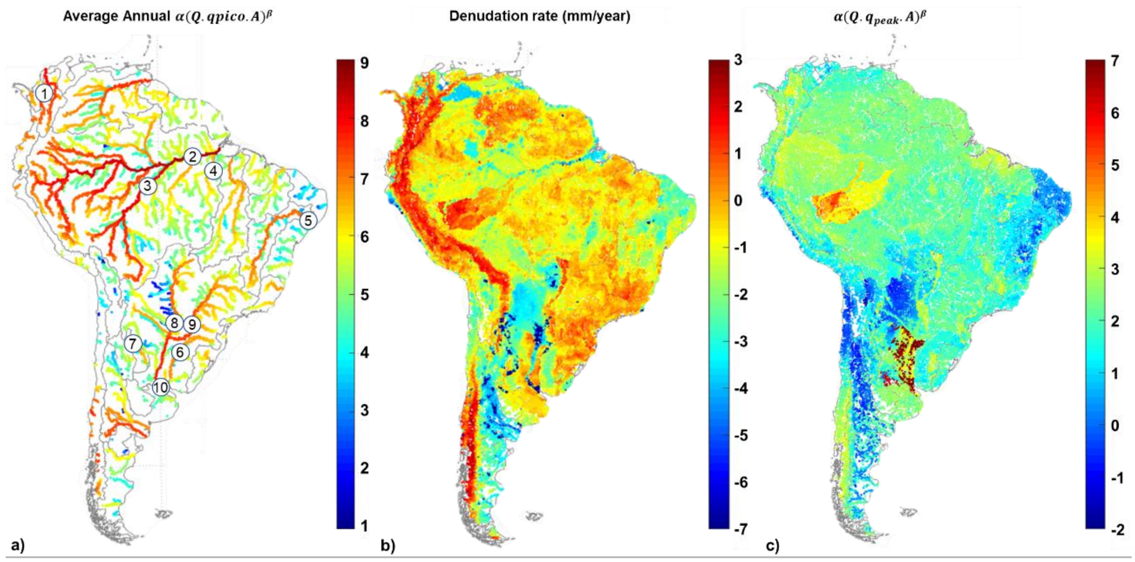

Figure 8: Average Annual a) suspended sediment discharge (QSS) over South America; b) denudation rate (silt+clay+sand); and c) $\alpha(Q.q_{peak}.A)\beta$. Colorbar values are in the logarithmic scale. Numbers in c) refer to stations showed in Figure 7.

Figure 8-b shows spatial patterns of denudation rates (soil loss in mm/year; sediment density equal to 2.65 t/m³ was used for the unit conversion, see Morris and Fan, 1998). The SA average value is 2.90 mm/year. With 16.67 mm/year, the Magdalena basin presented the highest mean denudation rate. The Amazon basin had the second-highest denudation rate of 3.35 mm/year. In the Juruá, Solimões and Madeira river basins, denudation rate was 8.58, 6.28 and 3.70 mm/year, respectively. For the Negro, Tapajós and Xingu watersheds, these values were 0.41, 0.40 and 0.28, respectively. While we found a 0.41 mm/year, Wittmann et al. (2011) found a denudation rate ten times lower for the Negro River through estimates based on cosmogenic nuclides of Beryllium and Aluminium.

The high denudation rates calculated for the Magdalena and Amazon river basins are mainly associated with the high slopes and strong storm events in the Andean region (see Guyot et al., 1996; Restrepo et al., 2006). The Restrepo et al. (2006) analysis, between 1986 and 1996 using more than 30 stations, indicated an increasing trend of erosion in the Magdalena basin. Among the causes for this increase are catchments with small drainage areas having high relief and narrow alluvial plains, heavy precipitations, and changes in land use and land cover. Furthermore, compared to the Amazon, the Magdalena basin is more influenced by the Andes and has fewer flat regions (Figure 1: South America showing: a) major hydrological regions according to FAO and Agência Nacional de Águas do Brasil (ANA) classifications, relief map based on the Bare-Earth SRTM (O'Loughlin et al., 2016), including main rivers, flooded areas (Fluet-Chouinard et al., 2015) and artificial lakes (Lehner et al., 2011); and b) existent dams from GRanD v1.3 product (>0.1 km³ Lehner et al., 2011 - http://globaldamwatch.org) and from ANA (> 30MW), and sediment stations from ANA, Base de Datos Hidrológica Integrada da Argentina (BDHI) and Instituto de Hidrologia, Meteorologia e Estudos Ambientais da Colômbia (IDEAM).).

The Doce and the Paraná river basins also stand out with high denudation rates: 2.12 mm/year and 1.31 mm/year, respectively. These basins have a strongly undulating and hilly relief, soils covered mainly by agriculture and degraded pastures, and a very seasonal rainfall pattern, with heavy rainfall for the November-January period. Despite the Parnaíba and São

Francisco river basins having a hilly relief, they are in a semi-arid region, for which lower denudation rates are estimated (0.28 mm/year and 0.85 mm/year, respectively).

The relations between denudation rate, slope (represented by the *LS* factor), and precipitation (represented by the Aridity index) are presented in Figure 9. This figure shows, in agreement with Figure 3 and Figure 8, that high denudation rates can occur for high and low slopes, and are found mainly in humid areas (Aridity Index <100, Figure 9-a), but arid regions always have very low denudation rates (Figure 9-b). Figure 9 shows that a pattern between the denudation rate, *LS* factor and aridity index does not exist. We expected this, since the model considers several processes based on what occurs in nature, and not only the water discharge, to estimate erosion and sediment transport. García-Ruiz et al. (2015) identified, from several studies around the world, that almost all erosion rates can occur for any climate condition. The authors also pointed out that a significant effect of the increase in erosion rates occurs as precipitation and slope rise. This increase tends to reach, on average, a limit when the slope and precipitation reach ±0.2m/m and ±1,400mm/year, respectively.

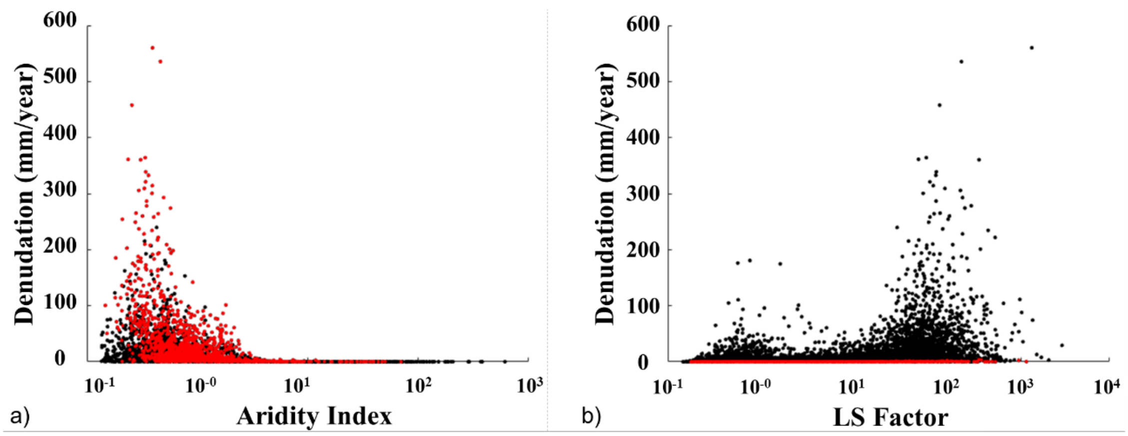

Figure 9: Denudation rate versus: a) Aridity Index (red dots represent *LS* values above the percentile 95%); b) *LS* factor (red dots represent Aridity Index values above the percentile 95%).

The MUSLE factor related to the ability to remove soil particles is the $\alpha(Q.q_{peak}.A)\beta$. In regions such as Brazilian northeast, Chaco, Atacama Desert, and others in the south of the continent (Desaguadero, Colorado and Negro river basins), the values of this factor are comparatively low concerning the rest of the SA. High values are found in the Purus River basin, part of the Juruá River basin, and in the lower La Plata river basin (Figure 8-c). It is noticeable that some spatial patterns presented in Figure 8-b are directly related to the standards presented in Figure 8-c, showing the influence of the $\alpha(Q.q_{peak}.A)\beta$ factor in the denudation rate.

In the Purus River, even the $\alpha(Q.q_{peak}.A)\beta$ factor values being higher, the simulated QSS tended to underestimate the observed values (Figure 4). Thus, we believe that these highlighted values may be related to the calibration parameters of the hydrological model and the spatial discretization performed by Siqueira et al. (2018), which was more focused on hydrological processes than sediment processes. Also, no pattern was observed in the maps of the input parameters (Figure 3) that could explain the observed pattern for the Purus and Juruá river basins in Figure 8-b. The reach of the lower La Plata river was calibrated using a station that is affected by the sediment trap in the Paraná River dams. This effect may have led the optimization algorithm to compensate for the sediment supply by increasing the values of the $\alpha\left(Q.q_{peak}.A\right)\beta$ factor in this region.

4.2.3 Multiple relationships: water discharge, sediment concentration and deposition

4.2.3.1 Overview

Figure 10 shows SA rivers with the highest Q and SSC values according to the modeling results. The figure illustrates that largest SSC values in the Amazon basin are located in the upper Madeira River and other rivers having the headwaters in Andean regions, as already known by previous studies (Amsler and Drago, 2009; Cohen et al., 2014; Latrubesse et al., 2005). The pattern found in the river reaches with higher and lower concentrations in the central Amazon matches well with the results found by Fassoni-Andrade and Paiva (2019) using remote sensing. The greatest differences are found downstream of the confluence between the Amazon and Tapajós rivers, where the SSC (Figure 10) keeps decreasing, while Fassoni-Andrade and Paiva (2019) observed an increase downstream of the confluence with the Xingú River. The authors concluded that this difference could be associated with sediment resuspension caused by variations at the Amazon estuary, which are not represented in the MGB-SED AS model.

The Magdalena, Pilcomayo, and some rivers in the south of SA (Negro and Desaguadero) showed high concentrations, but only Magdalena can be calibrated and validated. The Amazonian rivers without headwaters in the Andes have low SSC, such as the Negro, Tapajós and Xingu rivers (Figure 10), having high water discharge values (>9,700 m^3/s in average, see Latrubesse et al., 2005).

It was estimated that 1.17×10^9 t/year of suspended sediment (SS) arrived in SA rivers under natural conditions (i.e., without impoundments). Of these, about 1.11×10^8 t/year (9.4%) are trapped in the floodplains before reaching the Oceans.

The effect of SS deposition on the floodplains is quite evident in the highlands of the Madeira river basin (Figure 10), causing a sharp reduction in SSC values from upstream to downstream. For example, Guyot et al. (1996), using regressions between observed Q and QSS data, estimated a 43% and 63% reduction in QSS and SSC values, respectively, at two points on the Beni River. Taking the same locations as a reference, we estimated that there was a 10% (58%) increase (decrease) in simulated QSS (SSC). In Mamoré River, the authors used the same approach and also estimated a reduction for QSS and SSC of 54% and 95%, respectively. In comparison, we estimated a 34% (76%) increase (decrease) for QSS (SSC).

The region assessed on the Mamoré River drains a large amount of sediment originating in the Andes. The same happens with the Pilcomayo River. The Mamoré River flows through regions with dynamic and complex fluvial geomorphology, with avulsion and silting mechanisms of the bed in the Llanos de Moxos floodplain. It was estimated that about 5×10^6 t/year of SS are deposited in this floodplain (Figure 10). The Pilcomayo River flows through and floods the flat regions of the Chaco, losing water to the atmosphere through evapotranspiration (Martín-Vide et al., 2014). The Pilcomayo River basin also presents great complexities, similar to those described for the Mamoré River (see Martín-Vide et al., 2014). In the upper Pilcomayo, near the Andes, Martín-Vide et al. (2014) estimated a mean SSC of 15×10^3mg/L, while SCC simulated was 168 mg/L, about 100 times lower. Guyot et al. (1996) estimated a mean SSC of 13×10^3mg/L in Abapo (Figure 10), about six times higher than estimated with MGB-SED AS

($2{\times}10^3$ mg/L) and a bit more than double estimated by Buarque (2015), in which it was found $5{\times}10^3$ mg/L (personal communication) using a regional model.

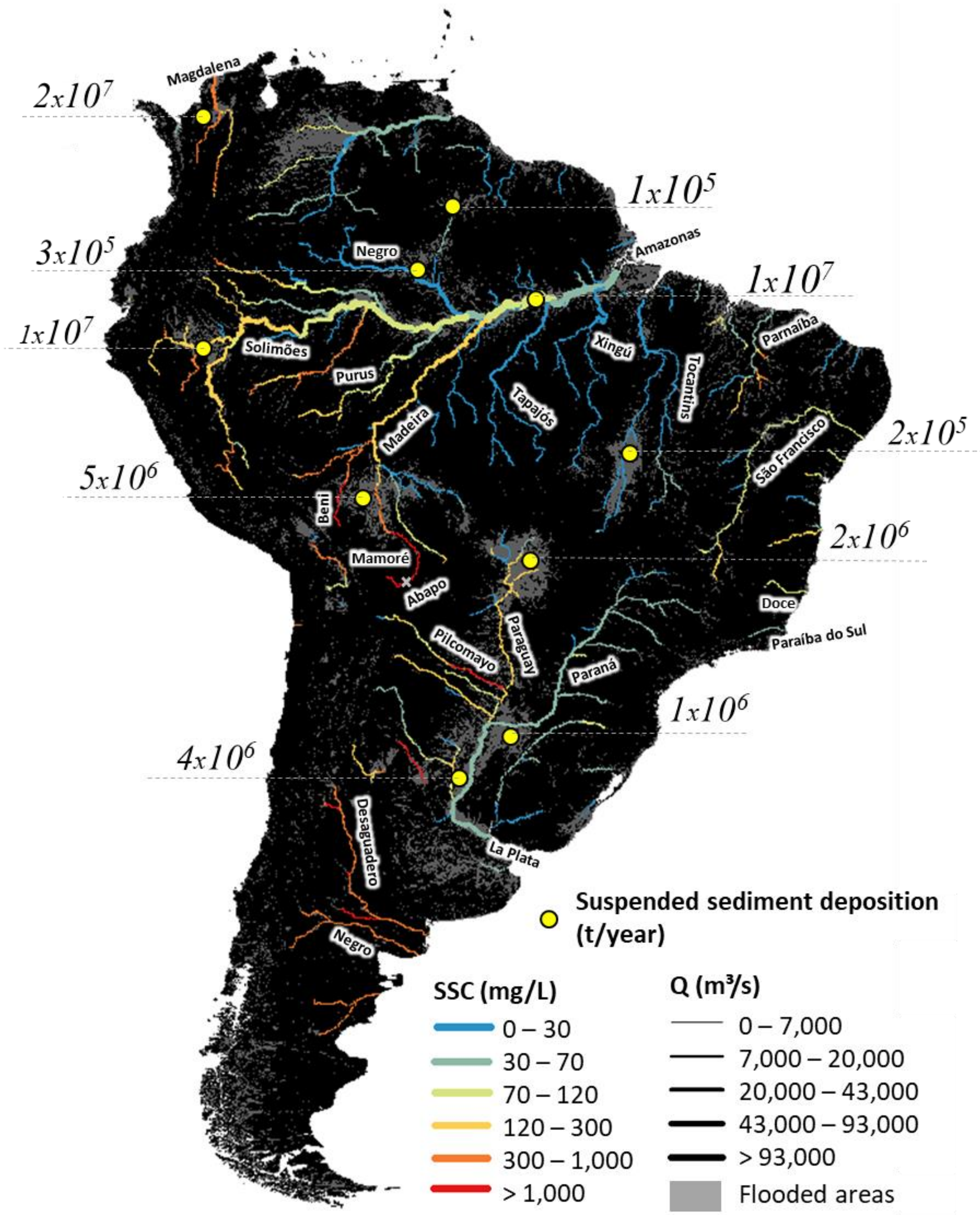

Figure 10: Annual average of suspended sediment load deposited in the main floodplains of South America; long-term daily average of suspended sediment concentration (SSC) and water discharge (Q) for main large rivers. Flooded areas were acquired from Fluet-Chouinard et al. (2015).

Therefore it is possible to notice that MGB-SED SA has estimated lower SSC values in the Mamoré and upper Pilcomayo rivers as we compare to studies made by Guyot et al. (1996) and Martín-Vide et al. (2014), respectively. The main differences found could be related to the following aspects: i) there was difficulty in calibrating the continental-scale model in the regions of upper Madeira and upper Pilcomayo, with the available data; ii) the processes observed in the Andean region, such as landslide-driven sediment flux, are not well represented in the proposed modeling as discussed by Buarque (2015), which shows that significant uncertainties for these regions may exist. As the model shows lower estimates of SSC in these two areas, the deposition values are possibly higher than those estimated.

The Pilcomayo River was the only river that showed an increase in concentrations from upstream to downstream (Figure 10). It happens because simulated Q values increase from the upstream to the middle Pilcomayo and decrease again next to the outlet. Martín-Vide et al. (2014) noted that the increase in Q is not proportional to the SSC for the Pilcomayo River. This behavior was identified using MGB-SED AS for the Mamoré River, which differs from the approach used by Guyot et al. (1996). Using the MGB-SED model, which considers several processes and variables and not only Q to estimate the QSS, Buarque (2015) found a NSE=0.7 in the Fazenda Vista Alegre station (Madeira River). This indicates that the connection suggested in some studies (e.g., Guyot et al., 1996; Latrubesse et al., 2005; Lima et al., 2005; Restrepo et al., 2006), that QSS always increases with Q, cannot always be applied.

The assessment in large flooded areas (Figure 10) indicated that 53% (5.26×10^7 t/year) of SS is deposited in them. The three plains having the highest amounts of deposited SS are the Magdalena Delta (2×10^7 t/year), central Amazon floodplains (1×10^7 t/year) and the interfluvial floodplains of Peru (1×10^7 t/year). In the whole Amazon basin, about 2.54×10^7 t/year of SS are deposited in floodplains (Figure 10). All other floodplains outside the Amazon and Magdalena river basins retain annually 7.2×10^6 tones (Figure 10).

4.2.3.2 Annual Sediment Balance

The impact of model calibration and hydrodynamic routing in South America was also assessed by the suspended loads leaving the continent. When using the hydrodynamic model without calibration, the QSS reaching the oceans was 2.86×10^9 t/year. After calibration, this value was 1.00×10^9 t/year, which means that the calibration of MGB-SED AS provided estimates 65% lower. When the calibration and Muskingum-Cunge routing method were considered, the value increased by 12% (1.12×10^9 t/year). Syvitski et al. (2005) estimated for "prehuman" period that QSS delivered from SA was, on average 2.68×10^9 t/year, a value 268% (6%) higher (lower) than estimated with calibrated (non-calibrated) MGB-SED AS. In their global study on tropical rivers, Syvitski et al. (2014) highlighted that most modeling projects use boundary conditions without considering sediment depositions in the deltas, which could reduce the value of the SS that effectively leaves the continent. In this paper, we partially represent this effect, since the model does not consider coastal basins and islands with A<1,000km² or submerged coastal regions.

Naturally (without considering impoundments), the daily water (SS) transport of 3.10×10^{10} m³ (2.76×10^6 t) by the SA rivers to the oceans was estimated using MGB-SED AS. Of this total, 57% (39%) of the water (SS) volume comes from the Amazon basin.

Figure 11 presents a monthly balance of SS and Q for South America and several of its major rivers. In addition, to expand the understanding of the different relations between Q and SSC, a map with the Delay Index (DI) calculated between these two variables is also presented in this figure. Values in red (blue) shades show how many days the SSC peak is ahead (behind) in relation to the Q peak.

The DI map (Figure 11) shows that, especially in flat regions, the SSC peak in rivers occurs earlier than the Q peak. In the Magdalena River, DI values become higher in and after crossing floodplains. In Figure 11-a and Figure 11-b, the occurrence of the QSS peak before the Q peak is also observed. This information again suggests that expressing the QSS increase as a function of Q, from a regression with an always increasing curve, may not be adequate in all cases. Figure 11 map also shows that in some places, as in the flatter regions of the Amazon basin, negative values of DI occur. For several of these regions the simulated SSC had very low values (<10mg/L, Figure 10), which decrease even more in high flow periods. For these places, water volumes dominate the SSC values, with a higher or lower dilution of the SS loads. In the Paraná, São Francisco, Upper Paraguay, Doce, and Paraíba do Sul river basins, DI values are closer to zero. A common feature of these basins is that they have hilly relief regions and few flat areas, facilitating the water and sediment transport. Most of these basins also have a well-defined seasonal precipitation pattern, raining heavily in the summer.

Throughout the year, the simulated QSS in AS ranged 40-60×10^6 t/day, in which higher values were occurring between February and July (Figure 11-d). The SS deposition on the floodplains has higher values between January and June.

In the Amazon River, the sediment supply (MUSLE) peak was in March, together with the floodplains deposition (Dep_fp) peak, and the QSS peak only occurs in April (Figure 11-a). The Amazon River dynamics is mainly influenced by lateral contributions, which is related to the variation of the rainy periods in the south and north of the basin (Villar et al., 2008). In the south, there is the Madeira River basin with high sediment yield (27% of all Amazonas) and the occurrence of QSS and Q peaks, respectively, in January and April. In the north, there is the Negro River with low sediment yield (2.5% of all Amazonas) and the occurrence of QSS and Q peaks, respectively, in June and July. The Solimões River is the one that, in fact, determines the standards of the Amazon River, delivering 65%, on average, of the Amazon SS load upstream of the confluence with the Purus River. In this place, the QSS peak occurs in April, and the peak of the sediment supply and deposition in the floodplains occurs concomitantly in March.

The Magdalena River showed two Q and two QSS peaks (Figure 11-b), where the first peaks are about two months apart (May-July) and the last in about one month (November-December). The two peaks of SS deposition on floodplains occur in June, between the first QSS and Q peaks, and in November, concomitantly with Q and QSS peaks. In the La Plata River, the Q and QSS peaks were observed in March. The SS supply peak was observed in February, and about 4% of these sediments are then deposited on floodplains, in which the deposition peak occurs in April (Figure 11-c).

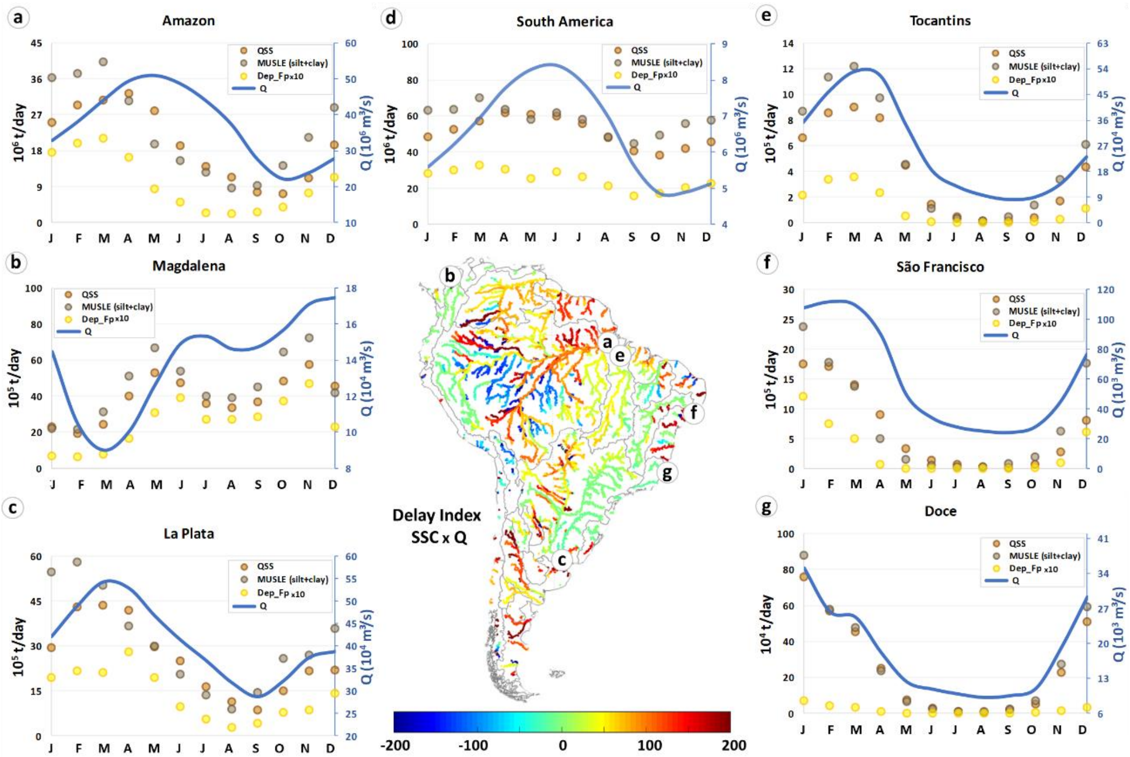

Figure 11: Annual sediment balance for South America and some large rivers. Figures a-g show water discharge (Q) in blue lines, suspended sediment load estimated with MUSLE equation in gray circles, suspended sediment discharge (QSS) in brownish circles, and suspended sediment deposited in floodplains (Dep-fp) in yellow circles. Dep_fp values are one order bellow other sediment values, so in the figure, we raised the values tenfold. The central map shows de Delay Index, calculated between de suspended sediment concentration (SSC) and Q. Reddish (blue) values show how many days the SSC peak is ahead (delayed) in relation to the Q peak.

The Tocantins (Figure 11-e) and São Francisco (Figure 11-f) river basins have a similar area, are geographic close to each other but have very different sediment flows. The Tocantins River (Figure 11-e) has a large floodplain on the Araguaia River, while the São Francisco River has almost no floodplains (Figure 1**:** South America showing: a) major hydrological regions according to FAO and Agência Nacional de Águas do Brasil (ANA) classifications, relief map based on the Bare-Earth SRTM (O'Loughlin et al., 2016), including main rivers, flooded areas (Fluet-Chouinard et al., 2015) and artificial lakes (Lehner et al., 2011); and b) existent dams from GRanD v1.3 product (>0.1 km³ Lehner et al., 2011 - http://globaldamwatch.org) and from ANA (> 30MW), and sediment stations from ANA, Base de Datos Hidrológica Integrada da Argentina (BDHI) and Instituto de Hidrologia, Meteorologia e Estudos Ambientais da Colômbia (IDEAM).). Despite this, the São Francisco river basin has a more deposited SS load than that of Tocantins. This occurs because the São Francisco transports a larger load with lower flows, which facilitates deposition and because the Araguaia River has a lower sediment yield in its headwaters (Figure 8). The SS supply, floodplains deposition and transport occur in January to the São Francisco and in March to the Tocantins.

The Doce River presents a straightforward relationship between water discharge and sediments, and similar monthly variations (Figure 11-g). The Q and QSS peaks occur in January, and only about 0.6% of the sediments reaching the drainage network (this value can be zero for dry season) are deposited in floodplains.

Figure 11 shows that in basins with larger flat areas (e.g., Magdalena, Amazonas and La Plata), the SS supply peak occurs concomitantly with the deposition peak. In the Doce and São

Francisco river basins, the SS supply peak occurs together with the deposition and Q peaks. It means that only for the highest flows the SS reach the floodplains of these basins. In the Tocantins river basin, this fact may be related to the low sediment transport in the Araguaia River, which is the main tributary and has the largest flat regions.

5 Conclusions

In this research, we performed the coupling of the MGB-SED sediment model with the hydrologic-hydrodynamic model of South America (MGB AS). From this coupling, the MGB-SED AS was developed and assessed. Using the model results was possible to investigate and understand temporal and spatial patterns of suspended sediment (SS) flows on a continental scale.

The main conclusions related to the process of development, performance evaluation, and application of the model for the comprehension of continental standards are:

- The MGB-SED AS model was able to perform accurate estimates at several sites, which was evaluated against in-situ measurements. The calibration of the model parameters improved the estimates of the SS flows, obtaining an export value from AS, under natural conditions (without impoundments), equivalent to 65% of the values estimated without calibration.
- The use of the hydrodynamic routing method enabled better SS estimates, especially the simulated QSS peaks in places having floodplains. By using the simplified routing method and without floodplains, estimates of annual loads have increased by 12%.
- We observed that the MGB-SED AS results agreed with in-situ observed QSS. The model tends to estimate QSS values smaller than with the estimates from regional studies and the global model used as comparison. The use of the continental model does not exclude the use of models at regional and local scales for smaller-scale studies.
- The Amazon (3.89×10^8 t/year), Magdalena (7.57×10^7 t/year) and La Plata (5.07×10^7 t/year) rivers presented the highest suspended sediment yield, meaning 39%, 8% and 5% of total South America discharges values to the ocean.
- Floodplains play an important role by retaining about 9.4% (1.11×10^8 t/year) of SS carried by the rivers. About 53% of the total deposition occurs in large flooded areas, for which the Magdalena Delta (2×10^7 t/year), central Amazon floodplains (1×10^7 t/year) and the interfluvial floodplains of Peru (1×10^7 t/year) representing the three regions with the highest deposition rates.
- The increase in Q does not always result in an increase in SSC/QSS. Especially in rivers with large floodplains, Q and SSC/QSS peaks can occur up to months apart.
- Catchments with higher slopes and higher rainfall have higher SSC, while QSS tends to be higher where flows are higher.

Results presented in this work enabled the comprehension of the spatiotemporal dynamics of SS flows in South America. Generated maps present the annual rates of denudation, transport (discharge and concentration), and deposition (in the plains) of SS throughout the continent. Charts of the annual sediment balance were also generated for some rivers chosen as having high sediment transport. These information may be useful for other studies on a continental scale, for example, related to reservoirs, fish productivity, nutrient transport, carbon balance, and other studies related to ecosystem maintenance and soil conservation. Besides, this information can support decision making, planning, and management of continental land use. Studies such as that of Latrubesse et al. (2017) have shown a possible increase of dams in South America in the future. Thus, to have a better knowledge of sediment fluxes in the present, it is necessary to consider these structures in sediment modeling, which is part of the continuation of this research.

Acknowledgments

The first and second authors thanks the Brazilian CNPq (*Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico*) for supporting this research under the Grants Number 167867/2018-0 and 305636/2019-7.

Datasets for this research are included in this paper: Siqueira et al. (2018).
Data supporting this research are available in http://www.snirh.gov.br/hidroweb/ (ANA), http://bdhi.hidricosargentina.gob.ar/ (BDHI) e http://www.ideam.gov.co/ (IDEAM).

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Figure 1.

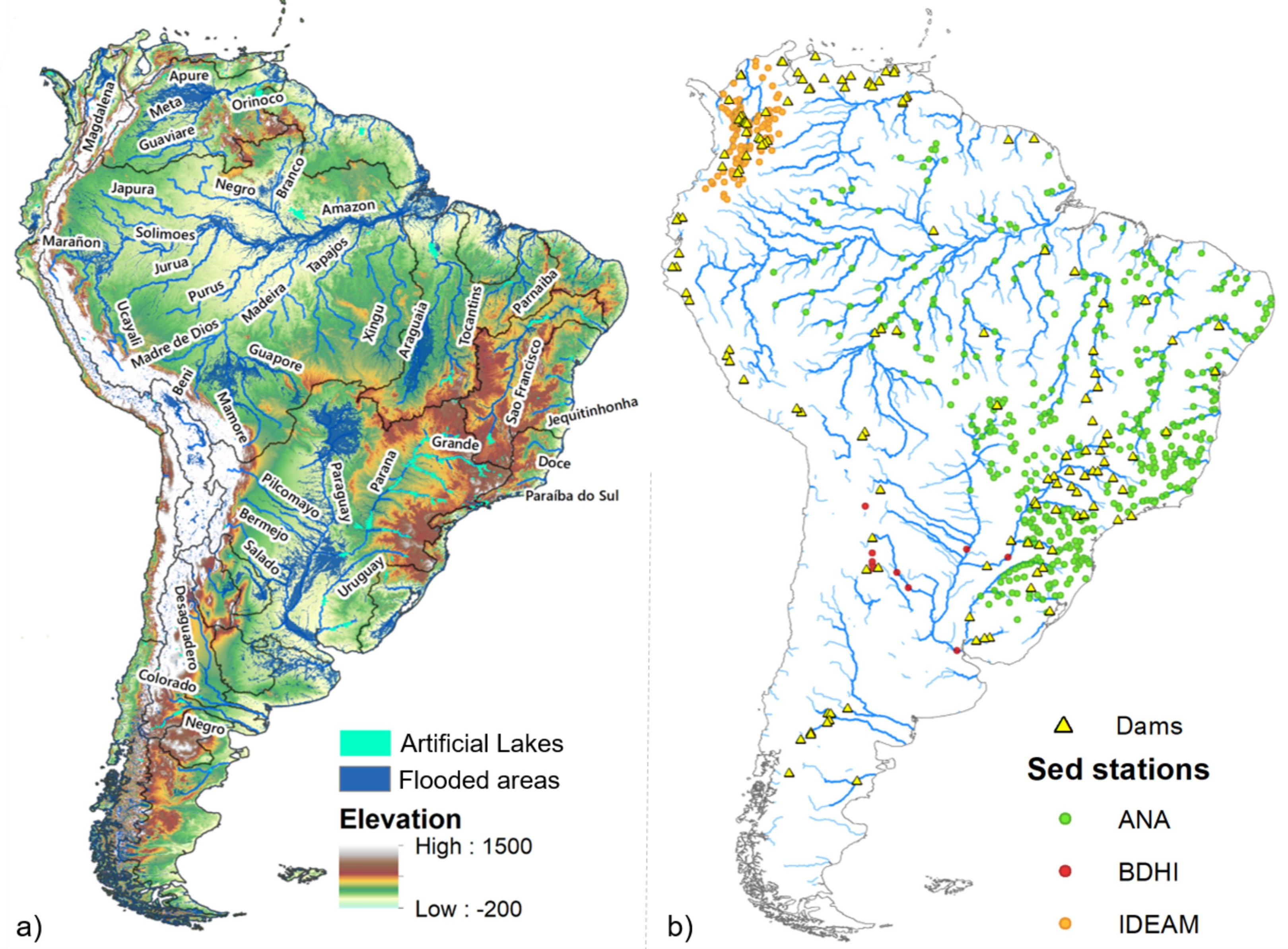

Apure
Orinoco
Meta
Magdalena
Guaviare
Branco
Negro
Japura
Amazon
Solimoes
Marañon
Tapajos
Jurua
Parnaiba
Purus
Tocantins
Madeira
Xingu
Ucayali
Araguaia
Madre de Dios
Sao Francisco
Guapore
Beni
Jequitinhonha
Mamore
Grande
Doce
Pilcomayo
Paraguay
Parana
Paraíba do Sul
Bermejo
Salado
Uruguay
Desaguadero
Colorado
Negro
Artificial Lakes
Flooded areas
Elevation
High : 1500
Low : -200
a)
Dams
Sed stations
ANA
BDHI
IDEAM
b)

Figure 2.

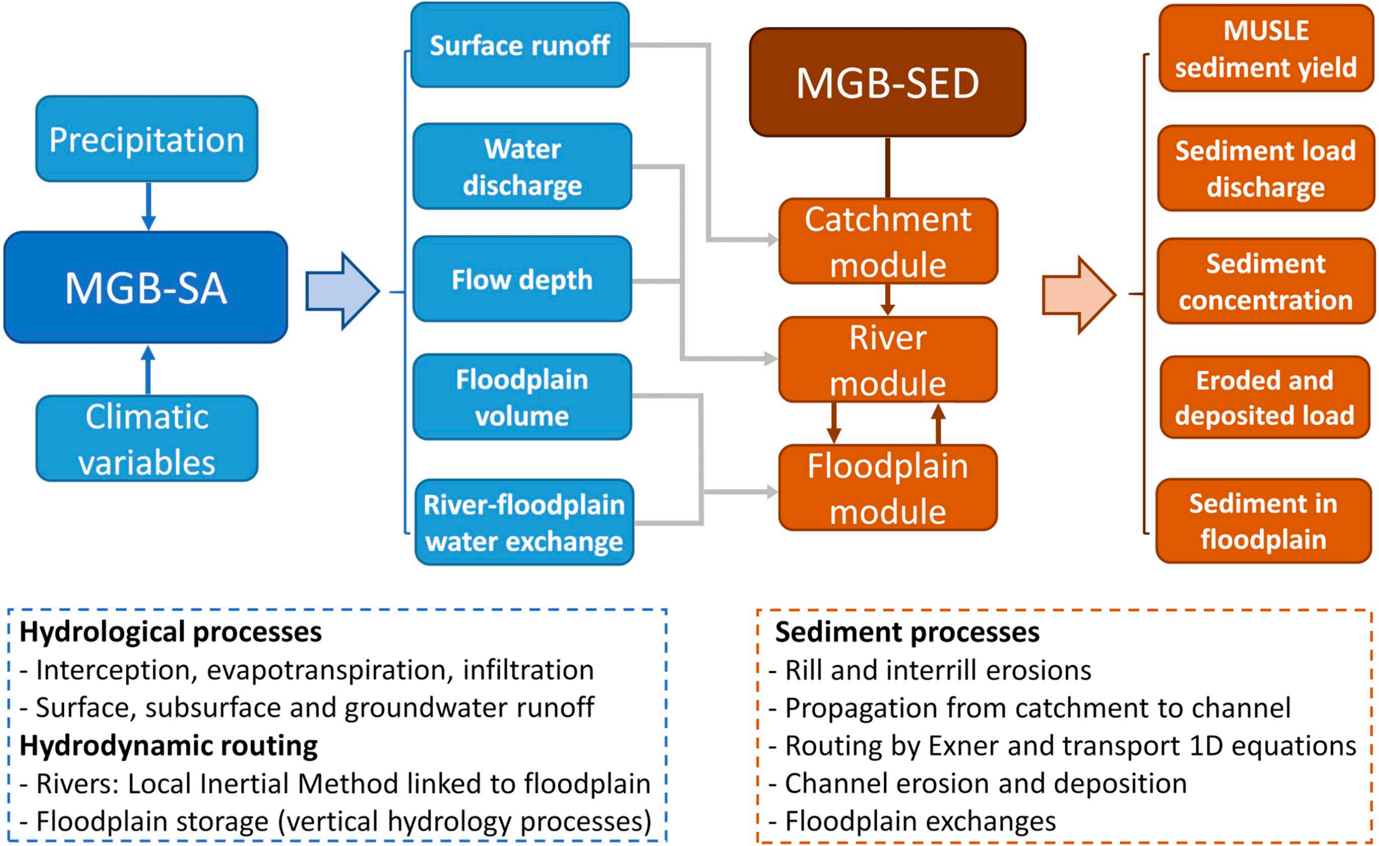
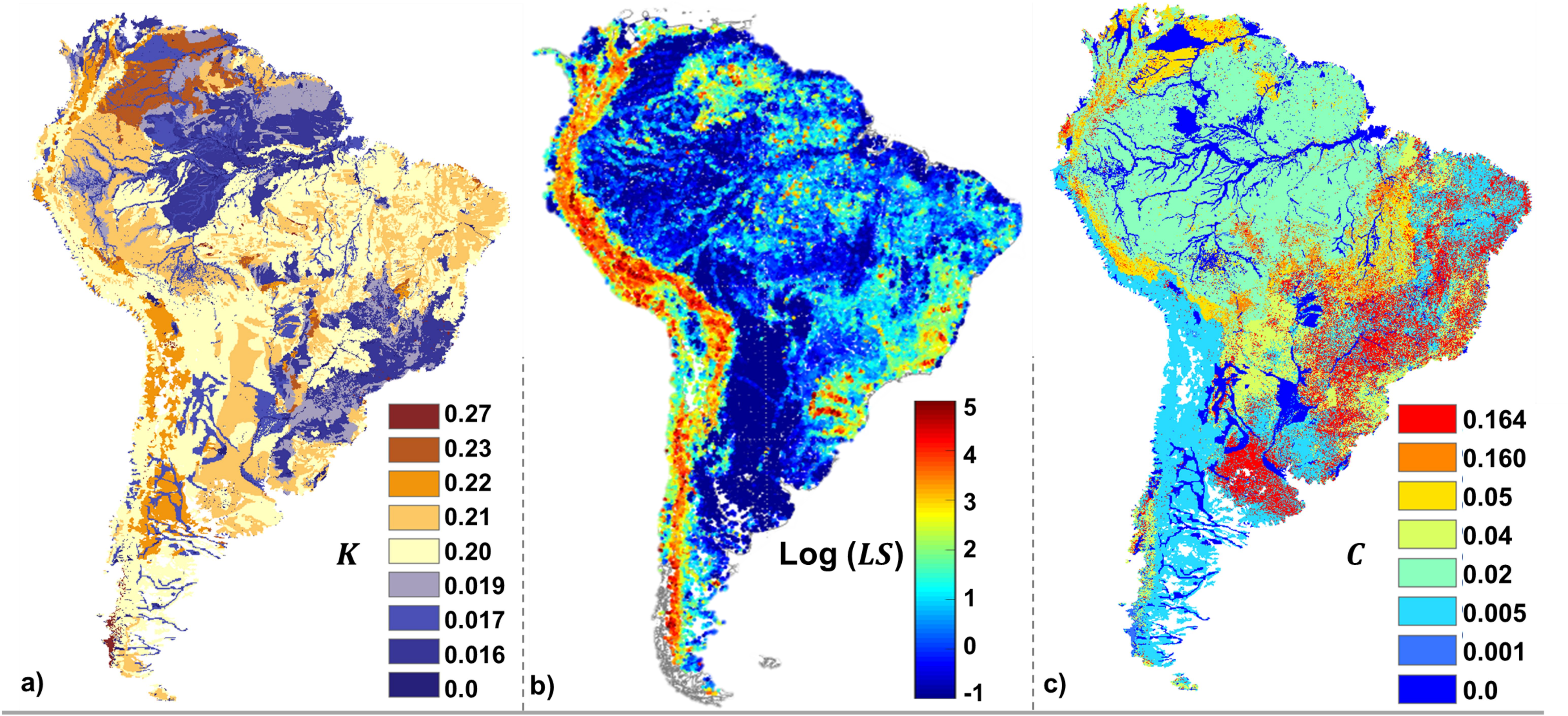

Precipitation
MGB-SA
Climatic variables
Surface runoff
Water discharge
Flow depth
Floodplain volume
River-floodplain water exchange
MGB-SED
Catchment module
River module
Floodplain module
MUSLE sediment yield
Sediment load discharge
Sediment concentration
Eroded and deposited load
Sediment in floodplain
Hydrological processes
- Interception, evapotranspiration, infiltration
- Surface, subsurface and groundwater runoff
Hydrodynamic routing
- Rivers: Local Inertial Method linked to floodplain
- Floodplain storage (vertical hydrology processes)
Sediment processes
- Rill and interrill erosions
- Propagation from catchment to channel
- Routing by Exner and transport 1D equations
- Channel erosion and deposition
- Floodplain exchanges

Figure 3.



a)
K
0.27
0.23
0.22
0.21
0.20
0.019
0.017
0.016
0.0
b)
Log (LS)
5
4
3
2
1
0
-1
c)
C
0.164
0.160
0.05
0.04
0.02
0.005
0.001
0.0

Figure 4.

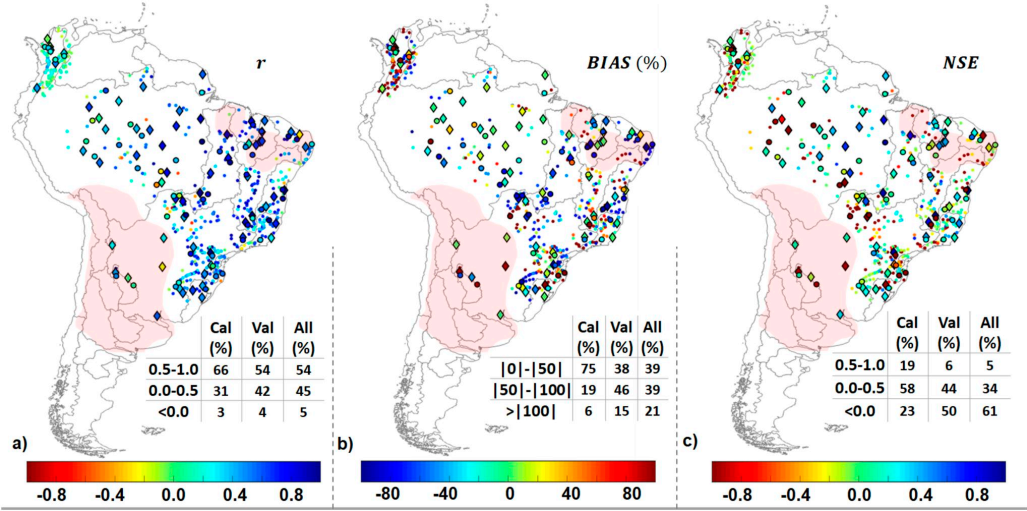
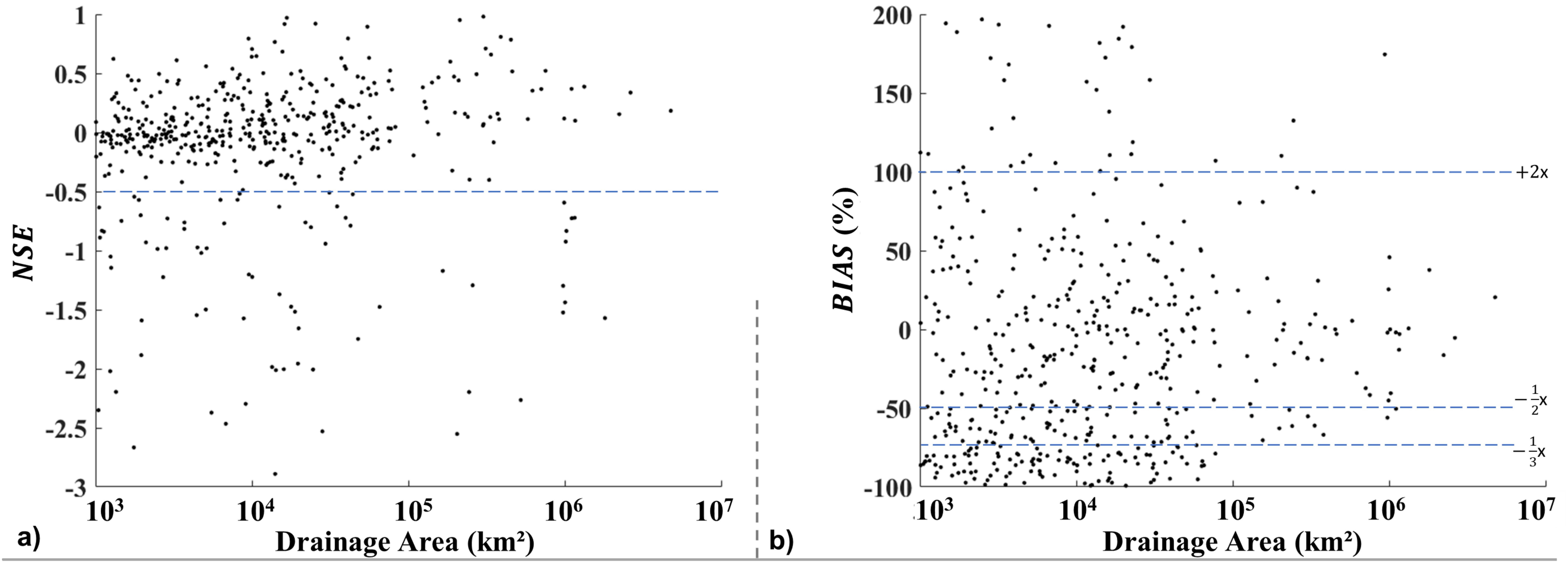
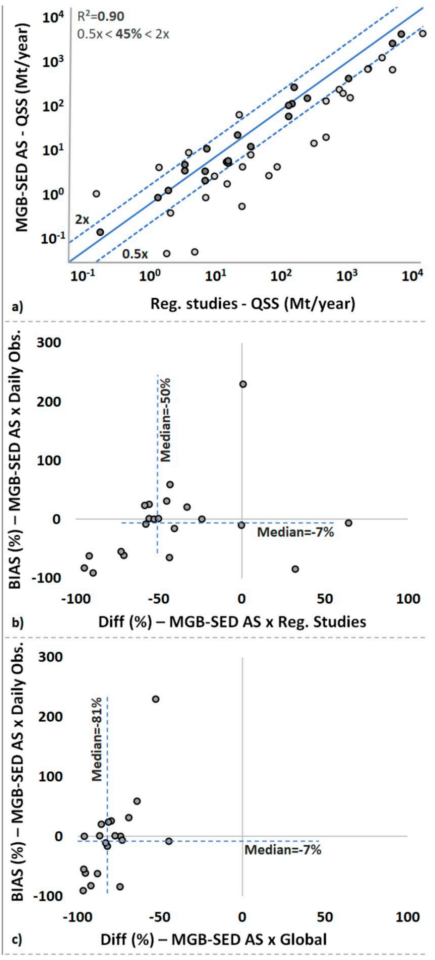

r
BIAS (%)
NSE
a)
b)
c)
Cal (%) | Val (%) | All (%)
0.5-1.0 | 66 | 54 | 54
0.0-0.5 | 31 | 42 | 45
<0.0 | 3 | 4 | 5
Cal (%) | Val (%) | All (%)
|0|-|50| | 75 | 38 | 39
|50|-|100| | 19 | 46 | 39
>|100| | 6 | 15 | 21
Cal (%) | Val (%) | All (%)
0.5-1.0 | 19 | 6 | 5
0.0-0.5 | 58 | 44 | 34
<0.0 | 23 | 50 | 61
-0.8
-0.4
0.0
0.4
0.8
-80
-40
0
40
80
-0.8
-0.4
0.0
0.4
0.8

Figure 5.



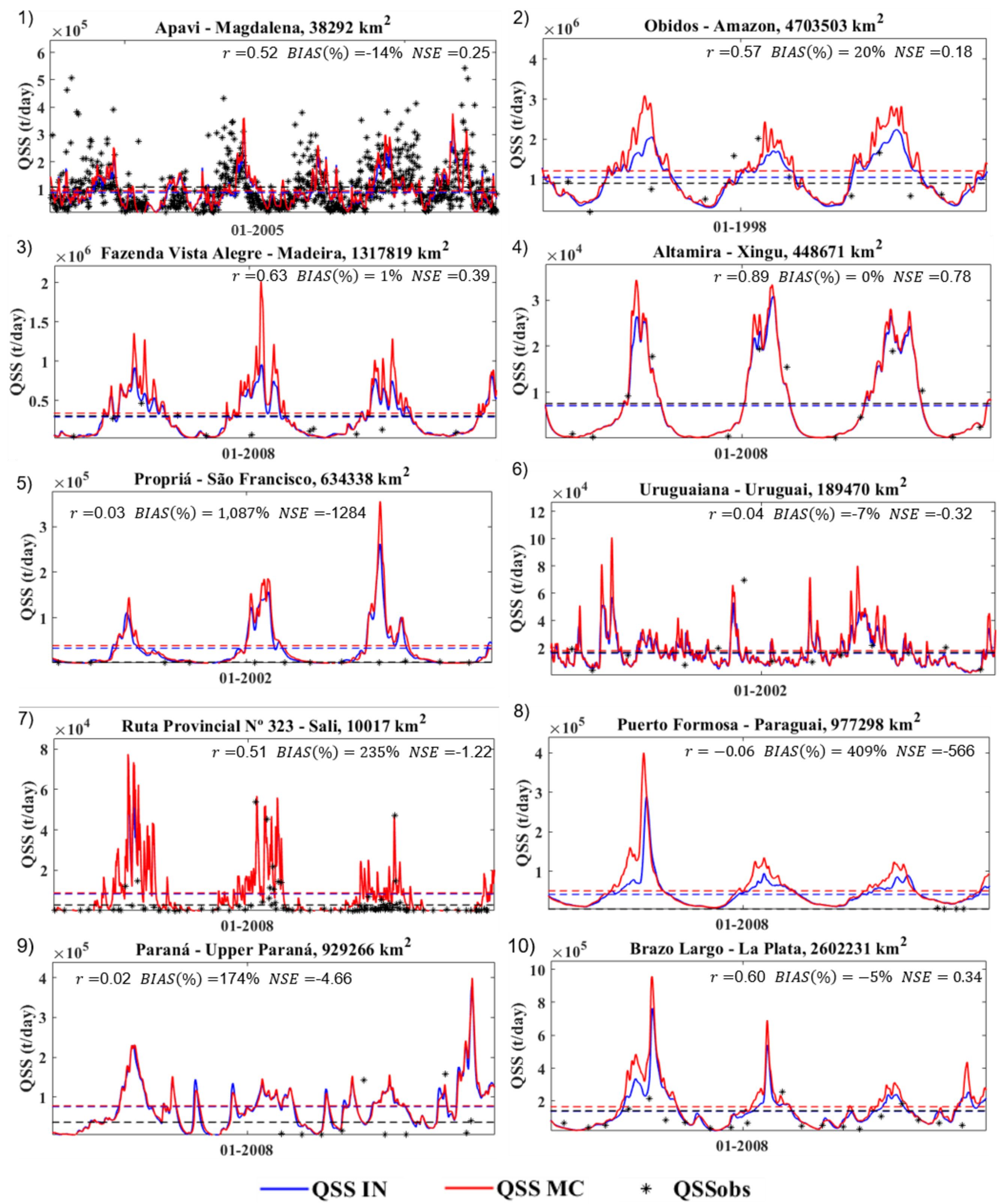
a)
NSE
1
0.5
0
-0.5
-1
-1.5
-2
-2.5
-3
10^3
10^4
10^5
10^6
10^7
Drainage Area (km²)
b)
BIAS (%)
200
150
100
50
0
-50
-100
10^3
10^4
10^5
10^6
10^7
Drainage Area (km²)
+2x
$-\frac{1}{2}$x
$-\frac{1}{3}$x

Figure 6.



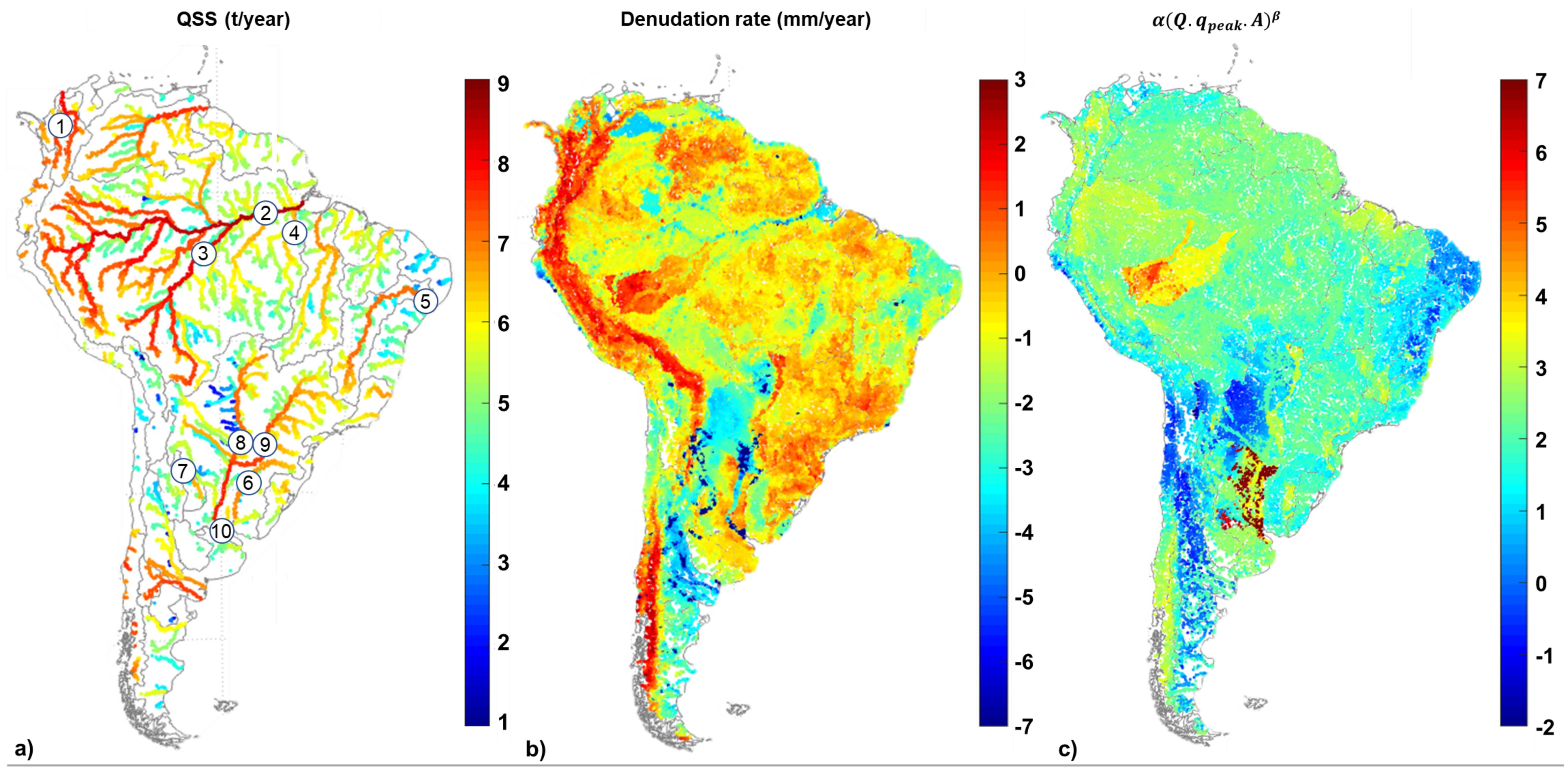
R^2=0.90
0.5x < 45% < 2x
MGB-SED AS - QSS (Mt/year)
2x
0.5x
Reg. studies - QSS (Mt/year)
a)
BIAS (%) – MGB-SED AS x Daily Obs.
Median=-50%
Median=-7%
Diff (%) – MGB-SED AS x Reg. Studies
b)
BIAS (%) – MGB-SED AS x Daily Obs.
Median=-81%
Median=-7%
Diff (%) – MGB-SED AS x Global
c)

Figure 7.



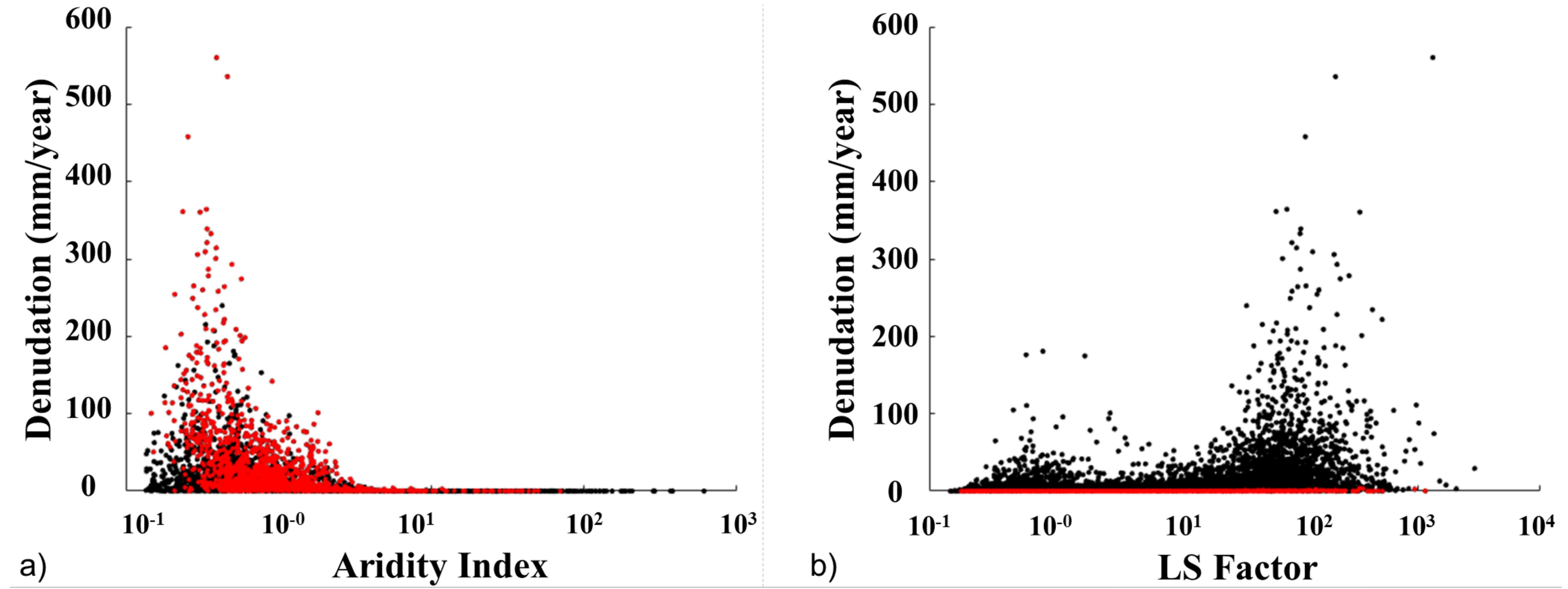
1) Apavi - Magdalena, 38292 km^2
r =0.52 $BIAS$(%) =-14% NSE =0.25
01-2005
2) Obidos - Amazon, 4703503 km^2
r =0.57 $BIAS$(%) = 20% NSE =0.18
01-1998
3) Fazenda Vista Alegre - Madeira, 1317819 km^2
r =0.63 $BIAS$(%) = 1% NSE =0.39
01-2008
4) Altamira - Xingu, 448671 km^2
r =0.89 $BIAS$(%) = 0% NSE =0.78
01-2008
5) Propriá - São Francisco, 634338 km^2
r =0.03 $BIAS$(%) = 1,087% NSE =-1284
01-2002
6) Uruguaiana - Uruguai, 189470 km^2
r =0.04 $BIAS$(%) =-7% NSE =-0.32
01-2002
7) Ruta Provincial Nº 323 - Sali, 10017 km^2
r =0.51 $BIAS$(%) = 235% NSE =-1.22
01-2008
8) Puerto Formosa - Paraguai, 977298 km^2
r = −0.06 $BIAS$(%) = 409% NSE =-566
01-2008
9) Paraná - Upper Paraná, 929266 km^2
r =0.02 $BIAS$(%) =174% NSE =-4.66
01-2008
10) Brazo Largo - La Plata, 2602231 km^2
r =0.60 $BIAS$(%) = −5% NSE = 0.34
01-2008
QSS (t/day)
QSS IN
QSS MC
QSSobs

Figure 8.



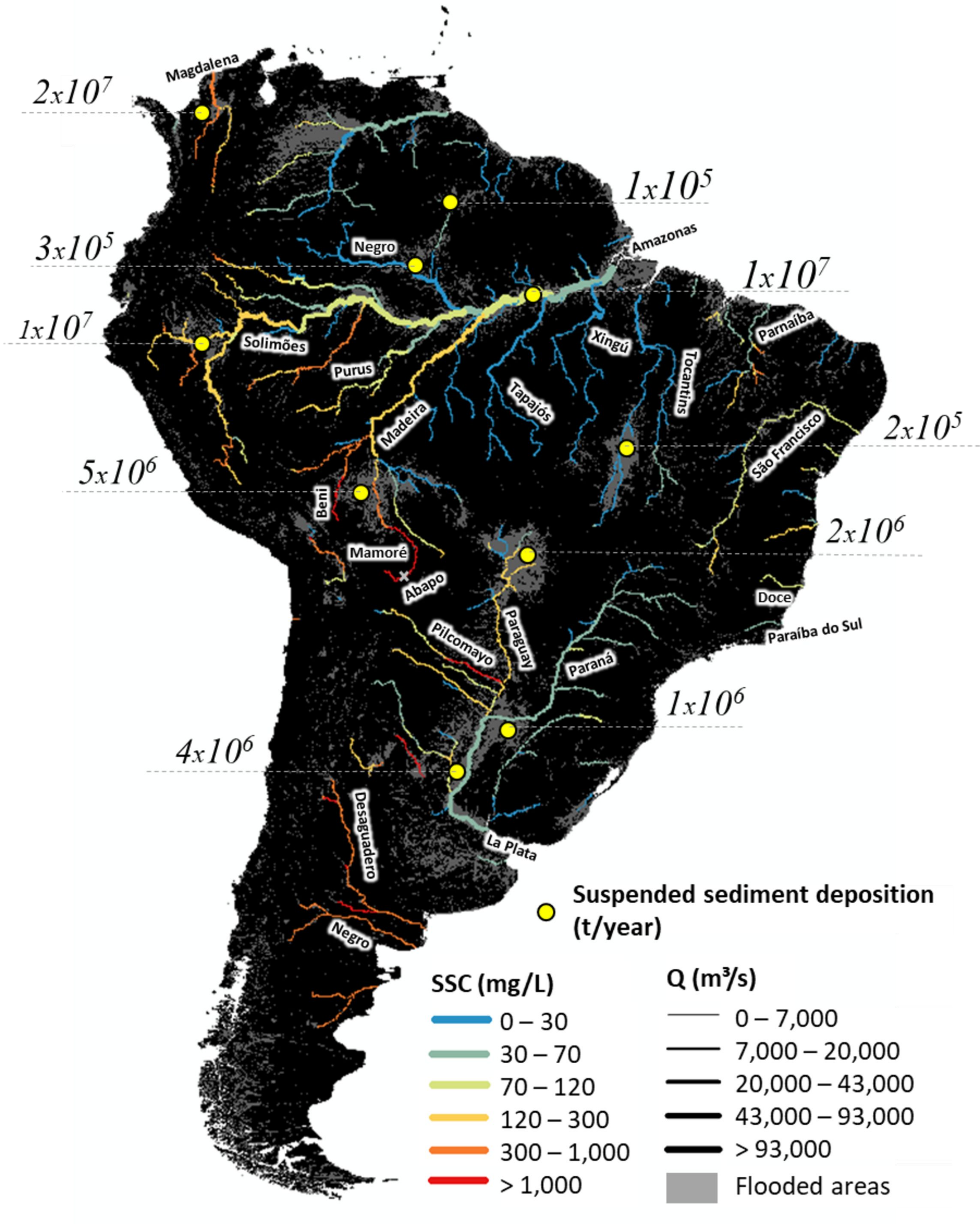
QSS (t/year)
Denudation rate (mm/year)
$\alpha(Q.q_{peak}.A)^{\beta}$
9
8
7
6
5
4
3
2
1
3
2
1
0
-1
-2
-3
-4
-5
-6
-7
7
6
5
4
3
2
1
0
-1
-2
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
a)
b)
c)

Figure 9.



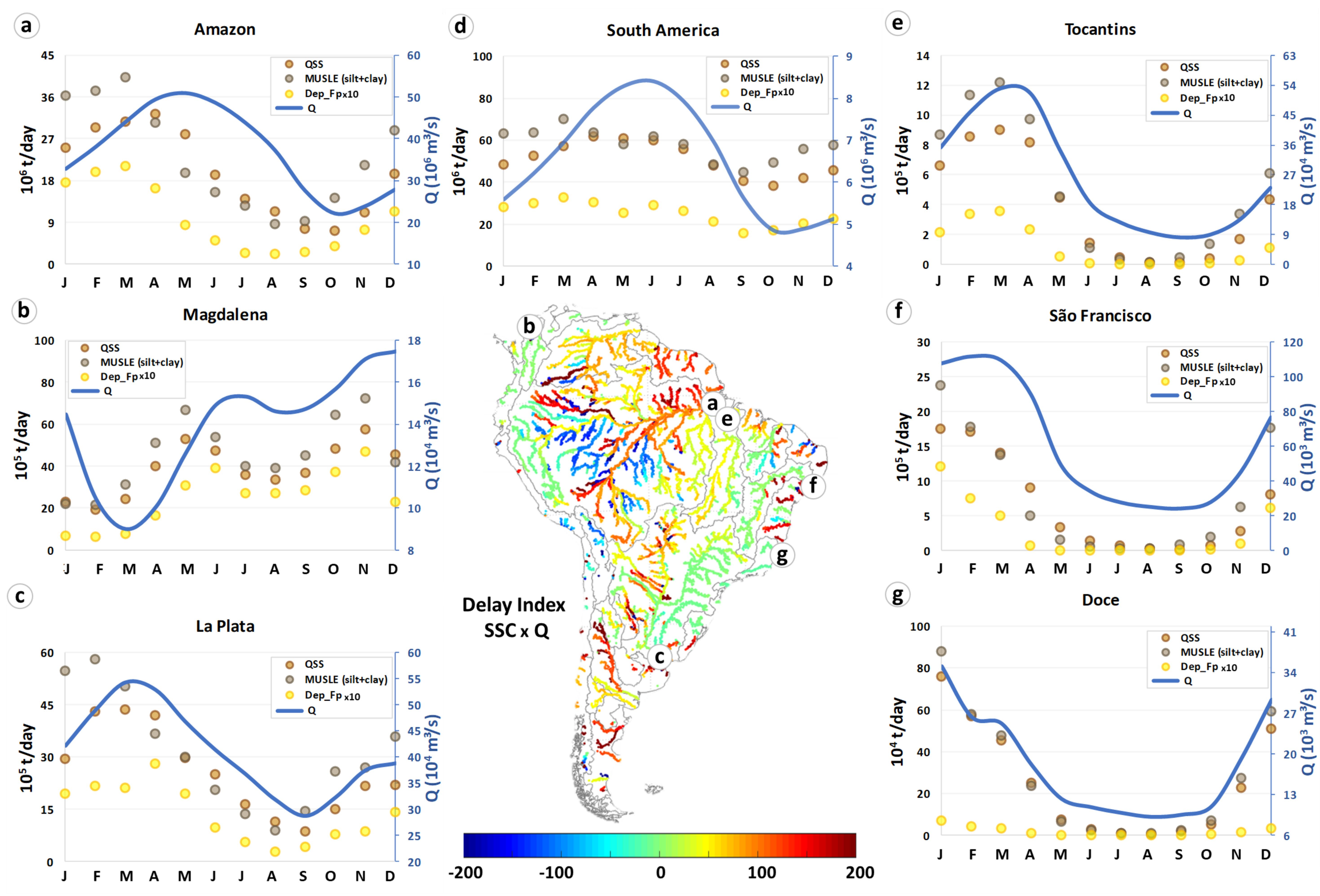
600
500
400
300
200
100
0
Denudation (mm/year)
10-1
10-0
101
102
103
a)
Aridity Index
600
500
400
300
200
100
0
Denudation (mm/year)
10-1
10-0
101
102
103
104
b)
LS Factor

Figure 10.



Magdalena
2x10^7
1x10^5
3x10^5
Negro
Amazonas
1x10^7
1x10^7
Solimões
Purus
Xingú
Parnaíba
Tocantins
Tapajós
Madeira
2x10^5
São Francisco
5x10^6
Beni
Mamoré
2x10^6
Abapo
Doce
Pilcomayo
Paraguay
Paraíba do Sul
Paraná
1x10^6
4x10^6
Desaguadero
La Plata
Negro
Suspended sediment deposition (t/year)
SSC (mg/L)
0 – 30
30 – 70
70 – 120
120 – 300
300 – 1,000
> 1,000
Q (m³/s)
0 – 7,000
7,000 – 20,000
20,000 – 43,000
43,000 – 93,000
> 93,000
Flooded areas

Figure 11.



a
Amazon
QSS
MUSLE (silt+clay)
Dep_Fpx10
Q
10^6 t/day
Q (10^6 m³/s)
b
Magdalena
10^5 t/day
Q (10^4 m³/s)
c
La Plata
10^5 t/day
Q (10^4 m³/s)
d
South America
10^6 t/day
Q (10^6 m³/s)
e
Tocantins
10^5 t/day
Q (10^4 m³/s)
f
São Francisco
10^5 t/day
Q (10^3 m³/s)
g
Doce
10^4 t/day
Q (10^3 m³/s)
J F M A M J J A S O N D
Delay Index
SSC x Q
-200 -100 0 100 200