

Interactive comment on “Using a nested single-model large ensemble to assess the internal variability of the North Atlantic Oscillation and its climatic implications for Central Europe” by Andrea Böhnisch et al.

Anonymous Referee #2

Received and published: 6 November 2019

In this study a regional climate model (CRCM5) is employed to dynamically downscale a single global climate model (CanESM2) large ensemble of climate change simulations to investigate the nature of downscaled responses to the modeled North Atlantic Oscillation (NAO) and its influence on future European climate. By employing a large ensemble, the authors are able to evaluate future downscaled responses associated NAO inter-annual variability in addition to mean changes. The authors set out four key questions related to, documenting the properties and fidelity of the modeled NAO in both the GCM and RCM; the associated screen temperature and precipitation re-

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sponses in both models; and how such properties change under future external forcings (following the future CMIP5 pathway RCP8.5).

This is an interesting paper and ultimately worthy of publication. The authors present the problem from the perspective of downscaling teleconnections that exist in the driving data (ie the NAO). This is a subtle but critically important shift in focus for the dynamical downscaling community. The proper communication of teleconnection patterns/relationships from driving data to the RCM is essential for credible downscaled results. The use of a large GM/RCM ensemble pair positions the authors to say something definitive about this problem and offer guidance to the community.

The four key questions represent a clear and sensible plan for the paper. However, I found it difficult at times to cleanly connect a particular analysis performed by the authors with an answer to some of these questions. Specifically, I do not think that the authors addressed the first part of their question 3, "Do GCM NAO impulses propagate correctly into the RCM realizations" (l. 71). Perhaps a better way of stating this is, does the RCM faithfully represent the NAO pattern present in the driving data? This is a critical question in the authors' "model chain" (l. 65) that needs to be addressed before one moves on to evaluate the NAO responses. That is, if the large-scale NAO pattern is not faithfully represented in the RCM domain in some location, the downscaled responses in that location would be less credible. The increased resolution and potentially improved physical processes present in the RCM themselves cannot correct the large-scale NAO pattern within the RCM domain. As the authors discuss, the NAO pattern is governed by "planetary wavebreaking in the polar front" (Benedict et al., 2004), which is intern influenced by external factors such as sea-ice, snow cover, sea-surface temperatures, ENSO, stratospheric circulation variability, solar variability, volcanic eruptions and the Quasi-Biennial Oscillation (eg Hall et al. 2014 <https://doi.org/10.1002/joc.4121>).

Given that the European domain is relatively small, and the experimental design employs spectral nudging in the RCM, the NAO pattern, and its interannual variability,

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should on balance be reasonably represented in the RCM. For the authors' stated plan, however, this needs to be verified. Given that the authors employ a large ensemble in their study, they are in the unique position to definitively address this issue and provide an example to the community of the type of analysis that is required to support the credibility of downscaled results in such complex problems. It is my recommendation that, prior to publication, the manuscript undergo major revision to address this issue and to improve its overall clarity. My detailed comments follow.

Major Comment:

RCM reproduction of NAO teleconnection in driving data

As part of the authors' model chain, it is essential to verify that the large-scale year-to-year variations of the NAO pattern in surface pressure are faithfully reproduced (each year) in CRCM5 when driven by both ERA-I and CanESM2. Inspired by Fig. 2, the sort of analysis required would be as follows:

- interpolate monthly-mean timeseries of sea-level pressure (SLP) in the driving dataset onto the RCM grid (such interpolation is already done for the driving-data winds used for spectral nudging). Call this field SLP_Drive.

- take the difference of the RCM and driving data monthly-mean SLP on the RCM grid $SLP_RCM - SLP_Drive$,

and then smooth the result retaining large scales that are representative of the driving data resolution:

$$D_m(i,j,t,n) = [SLP_RCM - SLP_Drive]_{LRG}$$

Here, i,j are lateral spatial coordinates of the RCM grid, t is time in units of years, n is ensemble member, and the subscript m corresponds to month (1-12). The smoothing operation, represented by the operator $[]_{LRG}$, can be performed with the same double-cosine transform used for the spectral nudging.

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- derive a normalized root-mean-square difference map for extended winter, over the two 30-year periods displayed in Fig 2, over all ensemble members:

$$\text{RMS}(i,j) = \text{Ave}_m(m=12,1-3) \{ \text{Ave}_n \{ \text{SQRT} [\text{Ave}_t \{ D_m(i,j,t,n)^2 \}] / \text{Var_Drive}_m(i,j,n) \} \}$$

where, Ave_x is a simple averaging operators for the quantity x and Var_Drive_m is the variance in time of the driving data for each month and each ensemble member:

$$\text{Var_Drive}_m(i,j,n) = \text{Ave}_t \{ [\text{SLP_Drive}_m(i,j,t,n) - \text{Ave}_t \{ \text{SLP_Drive}_m(i,j,t,n) \}]^2 \}.$$

Normalization by Var_Drive_m is important as it indicates the size of an rms difference relative to the interannual variability in the NAO pattern at that location. Such an RMS map would provide a sensible measure of the difference in the driving data and RCM SLP patterns associated with the NAO, which need to be faithfully reproduced in each year. If RMS « 1 at a given location, then the large-scale NAO pattern is well represented there and one can conclude that the downscaling is consistently being performed on the "correct" large-scale flow. The larger RMS is, towards O(1) values, the more suspect the downscaled responses are at that location (ie a large-scale flow disconnected from the NAO in the driving data was being downscaled in these regions). One should also do a significance test and indicate this by, say, filling in contours by color in only those regions that are significant at the 5% level. Given the size of the GCM/RCM ensemble, this should be quite robust (ie much of the canvas should be colored) and definitive statements could be made.

This test would seem to be most well posed for the case of observational driving of the RCM (ie ERA-I driving of CRCM5 over the historical period 1981-2010). The large scales in that data are well observed and, because they came from the real system, they were influenced realistically by all processes and scales. Significant deviations in RMS(i,j) for ERA-I (ie RMS_ERA-I) would necessarily indicate a degradation of the NAO teleconnection in those regions of the CRCM5 domain. If regions of NAO deviation in RMS_ERA-I were consistent with regions of NAO deviation in RMS_CanESM2 (in the historical and even the future periods), then this would indicate a systematic

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issue with the reproduction of the NAO pattern in the European domain in these locations and care should be taken in the interpretation of the downscaled responses in this, and possibly other RCM studies using the same domain.

Minor Comments:

I.2 - "natural variability". Later it seems, "internal variability" (I. 16) is used to refer to the same phenomenon. It would be helpful to be consistent throughout.

I. 5-6. "its transfer from the driving model CanESM2 into the driven model CRCM5." Perhaps better wording might be "its representation in the driven model CRCM5 relative to the driving model CanESM2."

I.11 "(b) impulses from the NAO in the CanESM2-LE produce" The use of the word impulses implies causality, which may be true for the one-way nesting/spectral nudging methodology but is not for the NAO itself. To avoid confusion perhaps say, "(b) reproduction of the CanESM2-LE NAO flow patterns in the CRCM5-LE produce"

I. 21 "is to apply slight differences in" -> "is to perturb"

II.21-22 "with similar long-term climate statistics" This refers to a response rather than an experimental setup. I think it might be more correct to say "under identical external forcings"

I. 44 "its dynamics in a future climate" -> "its fidelity in a future climate"

I.61 "is transferred correctly from the driving GCM into the driven RCM". Inter-member spread is not "transferred" from the driving model to the RCM. It would be clearer to say, "is represented consistently between the driving GCM and the driven RCM". Also, from my major comment, representation of NAO inter-member spread is a necessary condition from credible downscaled responses.

II. 65-66 "finding robust NAO patterns which exceed the uncertainty due to internal variability in the ensemble." The phrase, "exceed the uncertainty due to internal variability"

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is confusing in this context. Perhaps say, "finding robust NAO patterns by significantly reducing sampling uncertainty associated with internal variability"

I. 71 "Do GCM NAO impulses propagate correctly into the RCM realizations" perhaps better stated as, "Does the RCM correctly represent the NAO pattern present in the driving data" (ie my major comment)

II. 68-74. These are excellent focal points/topics for the paper. It would be very helpful if these were better referred back to in the analysis, discussion, and summary sections so the reader can more easily keep track of which of these you are addressing and what progress you have made on each.

II.101-103. two names are presented for each of three variables (eg msl/psl, t2m/tas, and tp/pr). I did not see a reason for this. If there is a reason it should be stated. If there isn't, then it would be clearer if just one name was presented for each and used throughout the paper.

II.120-139. It would be very helpful here to provide a schematic, say of the range/extent displayed in Fig.2, where the RCM domain is indicated and where all of the regions discussed in this section were labeled . Not until I got to Fig 2 did the layout of things become clearer to me. Even then I had to look up Leduc (2019) to understand the relative positioning of the RCM domain.

I. 200 Fig.1 This figure is very faint and it is very hard to distinguish between the three cases being presented here. The authors should work on making these results clearer by using more vivid colours and/or fills.

I. 208 "Pairwise correlations between the members". As discussed in Leduc et al. (2019), The CanESM2-LE was spawned in 1950 from 5 independent historical realizations (separated by 150 years of coupled integration each - including 50 years of preindustrial simulation between the launch of each ensemble member). As such, each of the 5 groups of 10 are highly independent of each other. The question of inde-

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pendence applies to the members within each group of 10 which has only 30 years of coupled integration to develop independence prior to the 1981-2010 analysis period. Wouldn't a better check of independence be to form two correlation groups? The first would involve pairwise correlations between each member and the 40 other members from the 4 other groups that were spawned from a different CanESM2 realization in 1950. This first group would form a control assumed to be highly independent. The second group would involve pairwise correlations between each member and the 9 other members of the same group spawned from the same CanESM2 realization in 1950. Plots like figure 1b for this latter group could be compared to similar plots of the control group to assess the independence of the ensemble members most likely to have residual correlations during the 1981-2010 period.

I. 211 " They are not systematically related to the ERA-I (the \u201creference\u201d realization)." Why would they be? I don't understand the reasoning behind this correlation. If you are looking for a control group, a much larger group could be formed by the suggestion immediately preceding this point.

I. 214 "positive, negative and indifferent index values" -> "positive, negative and neutral index values"

I. 223 "it backs the choice" -> "it supports the choice"

II.312-390 Discussion section. The references and discussion here are quite detailed and require constant back-and-forth reference to the earlier sections. For example, the opening statement of the second paragraph states, "The strong psl gradient suggests an overestimation of the local atmospheric circulation with too strong westerlies over the North Atlantic in the background state within the CanESM2-LE." What gradient? Where? The reader has to stop to review the previous sections to determine the context of this statement. This extends to the use of quantities that were defined in previous sections. For example, "Concerning NAO responses, they are most reliable in regions where r is significant (i.e. $|r| > 0.361$ for $p \leq 0.05$,...". " r " may have been

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define earlier but the reader must stop here to find where that was to understand this context. (Also "Historical values" I. 327.) This discussion needs to be elevated somewhat out of the details of the previous section, summarize those outcomes and their implications, and connect back to the 4 key issues outlined in the introduction.

I. 321 "less prone to incidental fluctuations of single realizations" -> "less prone to sampling uncertainty"

II. 323-325 "On the other hand, lower correlation values ($|r| < 0.361$) suggest that climate variability at the local scale evolves differently from the global teleconnection. In these cases, the NAO is not the most important contributor and β in Eq. (2) is dominant. Since the index was obtained from raw psl data, it contains the NAO contribution, but possibly also of other teleconnection patterns and noise." There is also the possibility that the large-scale NAO pattern in these regions was not reproduced correctly in the RCM. See my major comment.

II 341-343 "Another possible explanation could be that the control exerted by CanESM2 through the CRCM5 lateral boundary conditions (LBC) is insufficient, but this is unlikely given the relatively small CRCM5 domain". Adopting the suggestion in my major comment would explicitly address this key issue.

Interactive comment on Earth Syst. Dynam. Discuss., <https://doi.org/10.5194/esd-2019-58>, 2019.

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