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► **To cite this version:**

Tarek Mohamed, Jérôme Duriez, G. Veylon, L. Peyras, P. Soulat. A 3D-DEM Model for Tropical Residual Soils Under Monotonic and Cyclic Loadings. *Journal of Geotechnical and Geoenvironmental Engineering*, 2023, 149 (11), 10.1061/JGGEFK.GTENG-11323 . hal-04189055

HAL Id: hal-04189055

<https://hal.inrae.fr/hal-04189055>

Submitted on 28 Aug 2023

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A 3D-DEM Model for Tropical Residual Soils Under Monotonic and Cyclic Loadings

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ABSTRACT

Tropical residual soils are found in different parts of the world and consist of mixtures of different types of soil such as sand, silt and clay, resulting in intricate microstructures and mechanical responses. In this context and inspired by the soil's composition, a 3D-DEM model is developed in which two different contact models are assigned among idealized spherical particles to represent the coarse and fine parts of the tropical soil with two distinct sets of numerical parameters. A simple linear rolling resistance contact model is used to represent the coarse, cohesionless, component, while a softer adhesive rolling resistance contact model with a linear approximation of the van der Waals attraction force is used for the fine, cohesive, component. The numerical coarse network is continuous in terms of interparticle contacts and represents the main skeleton of the DEM sample, whereas so-called fine contacts form a local force network between the coarse particles. After a parametric study on the effects of adopting such a numerical mixture, the model is calibrated for a drained compression triaxial test with a specific void ratio. In order to estimate the equivalent DEM model void ratio, a proportionality between the real soil void ratio and the DEM model void ratio

24 is efficiently employed. During the validation phase, successful model predictions are achieved on
25 drained and undrained triaxial tests and cyclic tests with different strain amplitudes and moderate
26 (hundreds of kPa) confining pressures.

27 **PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS**

28 Tropical residual soils are proposed to be simulated through a grain-based numerical model
29 using the Discrete Element Method, being inspired from the microstructure and the physical
30 components of those soils. The proposed model may contribute to reliable numerical modeling
31 of existing or new earthfill structures under monotonic and cyclic loadings in tropical areas in a
32 diverse manner. First, with an understanding of its limitations, e.g., regarding grain breakage,
33 the model can complement lab mechanical tests, which are often scarce, to consider additional
34 loading conditions. Doing so, it may inspire a better definition of analytical constitutive relations
35 for tropical soils since the model outputs a wide range of macro- and micro-scale information,
36 e.g., elastic properties, the influence of the fine content, etc., on the mechanical behavior of mixed
37 soils. Finally, with significant computational resources, it could be directly employed for 3D multi-
38 scale discrete-continuum modeling of a structure as a boundary value problem, whereby analytical
39 constitutive models are bypassed and the constitutive response of the material is instead derived
40 through direct stress-strain computations in the proposed model.

41 **INTRODUCTION**

42 Tropical residual soils appear in different places over the world and can be used in different
43 geotechnical structures such as earthfill dams. They are formed by the process of in-situ chemical
44 weathering of a parent rock under humid tropical conditions. Tropical residual soils present very
45 specific properties due to the resulting physico-chemical composition (Futai et al. 2004; Futai and
46 Almeida 2005; Lopes et al. 2022; Mouali 2021). Depending on the weathering grade, residual soils
47 may preserve macrostructure inherited from the parent rock as well as its microstructure in terms
48 of fabric, pores and bonds between soil aggregates. Moreover, the composition of the tropical soil
49 of different types of soils such as sand, silt and clay induces a complex mechanical response that

50 requires an advanced numerical model able to take into account the effect and the evolution of the
51 different ingredients on the mechanical behavior. The features of elasto-plastic models developed
52 so far to model the behavior of residual soils (Mendoza and de Farias 2020) are not sufficient to
53 model their cyclic behavior, in particular because they do not take into account the effect of the
54 evolutions of the microstructure and of inter-granular bonding during loading-unloading paths.

55 On the other hand, the DEM approach has been widely used to simulate the mechanical behavior
56 of granular materials over the last several decades, demonstrating a high capability to reproduce the
57 different characteristics of sand under monotonic (Hosn et al. 2017; Sibille et al. 2019; Karapiperis
58 et al. 2020; Mohamed et al. 2022) and cyclic loadings (Wang et al. 2016; Gu et al. 2020). Previous
59 DEM (Gong et al. 2019) and experimental (Yang and Liu 2016) studies of granular mixtures
60 demonstrate the effect of fine content on the soil mechanical response by which maximum shear
61 modulus G_0 decreases with increasing fine contents F_C . They have shown how a higher $\alpha = D_c/D_f$
62 ratio (D_c and D_f are the sizes of coarse and fine particles) helps fine particles to occupy voids
63 between coarse particles. Gong et al. (2019) uses size ratio $\alpha = 5$ to study the effect of a moderate
64 fine content $F_C \leq 20\%$ on the mechanical behavior of natural sand. Compared with other DEM
65 simulations, Shire et al. (2016) adopts a higher value, $\alpha = 6 - 10$, during his DEM simulation of
66 gap-graded soil. The general conclusion of the latter studies is that as α increases, fine particles are
67 able to fit more efficiently within voids between coarse particles without significantly disturbing
68 the main skeleton formed by coarse particles.

69 Cohesive soils have been studied by the DEM approach (Tsuji et al. 2012; Gu et al. 2016;
70 Li et al. 2018) much less frequently than cohesion-less ones. The existing applications of the
71 DEM method to complex in-situ or mixed soils are thus limited so far in spite of its capabilities to
72 reproduce mechanically important microstructural phenomena that also exist in clayey soils, such
73 as aggregate orientation (Hattab and Fleureau 2011).

74 As such, taking a step further and simulating mixed soils is the concern of this study. Namely,
75 this article presents a quantitative modeling approach for the mechanical behavior of tropical soils,
76 by applying the DEM approach to a tropical soil found in Guadeloupe, France, which is a highly

77 seismic zone posing clear challenges to geotechnical engineering. As it will be shown, such a
78 mixed soil requires different contact models to reflect the different evolution logic of the different
79 components of the tropical soil in addition to the preceding needs of particle size considerations.
80 Inspired by the existing mixture of sand, silt, and clay and the microstructure of tropical soils, the
81 DEM model will contain a mixture of so-called coarse and fine contacts by using a sample with
82 two different contact models (cohesive and non-cohesive contact models) to reflect and simulate
83 the effect of the fine and coarse materials of the tropical soil on the mechanical response. The
84 simulations are performed using the commercial software PFC (Itasca 2018).

85 The article consists of three main sections. The first section describes the general formulation of
86 the 3D-DEM model with its two contact models and a wide particle distribution, which is inspired
87 by the physical characteristics of the studied tropical soil from Guadeloupe. The second section
88 presents a parametric study on the effect of different contact mixtures and contact parameters, as
89 well as the model calibration procedure. Finally, we provide the validation results for the DEM
90 model under different loading paths, including monotonic (oedometer tests, drained and undrained
91 triaxial compression) and cyclic (undrained triaxial tests) loadings for different values of initial
92 void ratio and confining pressure.

93 **GENERAL FORMULATION OF THE DEM MODEL FROM SOIL CHARACTERISTICS**

94 **Physical characteristics of tropical residual soil**

95 Tropical soil samples have been collected in (Mouali 2021; Suez Consulting 2016) from the
96 construction site of an earth dam in the French West Indies (Guadeloupe). The representative grain
97 size distribution is shown in Fig. 1 together with a plasticity chart. The soil contains around 50% of
98 clay, 25% of silt and 25% of sand-sized particles. The clay minerals contain kaolinite and halloysite
99 in a random contact state. The liquid limit is (62-73%) and the plasticity index is $I_p = 12 - 27\%$
100 corresponding to non-plastic silts. The average value of the specific gravity of soil grains, G_s , is
101 2.71. While the particle size distribution could naturally vary with the extraction depth and from
102 one location to another, it has been checked that the different experimental sources used here for this

103 site (Mouali 2021; Suez Consulting 2016; Mouali et al. 2019) share nearly the same granulometry
104 as previously described.

105 **Model formulation from a wide particle size distribution and different contact models**

106 For the purpose of DEM modeling, spherical particle shapes bounded with rigid walls are
107 considered for computational simplicity since this assumption enables simulations to run approxi-
108 mately 10 to 100 times faster (Duriez and Bonelli 2021; Mohamed et al. 2022) on a given hardware.
109 The REV with a number of 5100 particles is used for the current DEM model. As was proven
110 (Mohamed et al. 2022) for a similar sample preparation method it is sufficient to give a uniform
111 distribution of porosity inside a DEM sample and an unaffected stress-strain response when the
112 number of particles exceeds this value. While it would be impossible to replicate in the DEM
113 model the several decades-wide particle size distribution of the real soil in Fig. 1, a large $\frac{D_{max}}{D_{min}} = 10$
114 maximum-to-minimum particle size ratio is still set in this study for the 3D-DEM particle size
115 distribution model, see Table 2 and Fig. 2. This ensures the possibility of having small parti-
116 cles occupy the voids between the coarse particles, likewise to the real soil, which is successfully
117 achieved as shown in Fig. 2.

118 As another key ingredient of the model, particles interaction is herein described through two
119 different contact models already implemented in the PFC software (Itasca 2018) and which are used
120 to reflect the different physics of the granular and cohesive ingredients of the tropical soil. Fig. 3
121 illustrates the micro-scale interpretation of using different contact models in the DEM model.

122 As for the granular part, a classical rolling resistance contact model is used. It first includes an
123 elastic normal contact force \vec{f}_n being defined as follows:

$$124 \quad \vec{f}_n = K_n \vec{\delta}_n \quad (1)$$

$$125 \quad K_n = E_{mod} \frac{\pi r^2}{R_1 + R_2} \text{ with } r = \min(R_1, R_2) \quad (2)$$

126 where $\vec{\delta}_n$ is the relative normal-displacement parallel to the contact normal \vec{n}_c and K_n is the normal

127 stiffness being a function of a stress-like parameter E_{mod} together with R_1 and R_2 the radii of the
 128 two contacting spheres. In addition, a shear force is updated incrementally as follows:

$$129 \quad \vec{f}_s = \vec{f}_s^0 + K_s \Delta \vec{\delta}_s \quad (3)$$

130 where \vec{f}_s^0 is the shear force at the beginning of a time step and K_s the contact tangential stiffness.
 131 Eq. (3) holds until a Coulomb friction condition is imposed to limit the shear force of the contact
 132 as follows:

$$133 \quad \|\vec{f}_s\| \leq \|\vec{f}_n\| \mu \quad (4)$$

134 where μ is the coefficient of friction at the contact level. The contact model finally includes
 135 interparticle torques or moments that resist relative rolling, as per the following rolling stiffness
 136 and moment incremental laws:

$$137 \quad K_r = K_s R_m^2 \quad (5)$$

$$138 \quad \frac{1}{R_m} = \frac{1}{R_1} + \frac{1}{R_2} \quad (6)$$

$$139 \quad \Delta \vec{M}_r = K_r \Delta \vec{\theta}_b \quad \|\vec{M}_r\| \leq \mu_r \|\vec{f}_n\| R_m \quad (7)$$

$$140 \quad \Delta \vec{\theta}_b = \Delta \vec{\theta} - \Delta \theta_t \vec{n}_c \quad (8)$$

141 where μ_r , R_m , $\Delta \vec{\theta}$, $\Delta \vec{\theta}_b$ and $\Delta \theta_t$ are defined as the rolling friction coefficient, effective radius, rotation
 142 increment, relative bend-rotation increment and the relative twist-rotation increment respectively.

143 For describing the fine component of the tropical soil, an adhesive rolling resistance linear
 144 model (Gilbert et al. 2007) is used with attractive forces that are responsible for the cohesion of
 145 the material and the existence of macroporous (inter-particles) microstructures in fine-grained soils
 146 (Li et al. 2018; Sun et al. 2018). The adhesive rolling contact model, illustrated in Fig. 4, adds

147 a cohesive component to the above rolling resistance contact model via a linear approximation of
 148 van der Waals attraction force (electrostatic forces) within an attraction range (0 - D_0) for the gap
 149 distance between two grains, g_s . The attractive force F^a is maximum, equal to F_0 , when g_s has
 150 negative values as shown in Fig. 4. In between $g_s \geq 0$ and $g_s = D_0$ the adhesive force is updated
 151 as follows:

$$152 \quad F^a = \begin{cases} F_0, & g_s \leq 0 \\ F_0 \left(1 - \frac{g_s}{D_0}\right), & 0 < g_s < D_0 \\ 0, & g_s \geq D_0. \end{cases} \quad (9)$$

153 Despite the fact that actual van der Waals forces exist on a smaller scale for tropical soil clay
 154 particles than for DEM particles, this concept can introduce a soft behavior for the cohesive force
 155 and prevents brittle failure at the level of contacts that can happen in the case of the classical linear
 156 contact bond model with a constant cohesive parameter (bonded or unbonded interface), which
 157 is more suited to materials such as concrete and rocks (Potyondy and Cundall 2004). It is also
 158 worth mentioning that the attraction force parameter F_0 is directly input as a force quantity by the
 159 user, instead of adopting an adhesive rolling resistance model that would be normalized according
 160 to the dimension of particles. As a result, the cohesive strength of the sample is proportional
 161 to the size of particles contained within the packing making particles' absolute diameters part of
 162 model parameters (Table 2). The total contact force F_c of the adhesive contact model is eventually
 163 described as follows:

$$164 \quad \vec{F}_c = \vec{F}^l + F^{adh}, \quad F^{adh} = -F^a \vec{n}_c \quad (10)$$

165 where $\vec{F}^l = \vec{f}_n + \vec{f}_s$ and F^{adh} represent linear and adhesive forces respectively.

166 These two key model ingredients (the particle size distribution and the use of two different
 167 contact models) are unrelated in the sense that attributing one or another contact model to a
 168 particle pair does not follow particle size considerations but instead derives from a specific packing
 169 preparation phase, described below.

Preparation of numerical samples

The preparation phase (under no gravity) is responsible for specifying heterogeneity in contact model properties and controlling, to a desired value, the proportion between the so-called fine contacts following the adhesive contact model and those that will follow the simple rolling resistance contact model and account for the coarse component of the soil.

The procedure actually relies on an ad-hoc initial generation of the packing (obeying the granulometry discussed above) where a controlled number of spheres overlap. Then, DEM cycles are performed to bring the model to equilibrium under zero external stress (almost no internal contact). At this stage, all active contacts (very few contacts) and inactive contacts (an inactive contact refers to a pair of particles which have been touching previously but no longer do) are registered and they directly define the list of all possible coarse contacts which will be assigned the rolling resistance contact model in case these contacts would later reform. Through controlling the number of overlaps at the very initial stage, this process enables to control the proportion of the coarse component to be simulated (the more the overlap, the more important the coarse phase), as shown in Fig. 5.

So-called fine contacts following the adhesive rolling resistance contact model will then appear during the subsequent simulation stages (starting with the confining phase), through any new contact which would not be part of the above list. It is to recall the definition of a fine contact does not follow particle size considerations and may also apply between small and big spheres as shown in Fig. 3. The portion of each contact model in the global force network is separated and shown in Fig. 6 where it clearly appears that the main skeleton of the sample is formed by the coarse contacts and that the fine contacts form less continuous force networks which represent the trapped fine particles within the main skeleton.

Heterogeneity in contact properties is further enhanced by applying two distinct sets of numerical parameters in the common portion of the contact models, with a lower modulus E_{mod} and a lower rolling friction coefficient μ_r for the so-called fine contacts, as it will be shown in more details in the forthcoming calibration phase

197 Regarding the packing properties, the anisotropy of the sample is important in DEM simulations,
198 as highlighted e.g. by [Mohamed et al. \(2022\)](#), and is herein quantified as an anisotropy scalar A
199 for the fabric tensor F_{ij} , which is defined as the ratio between the norm of the deviatoric part of
200 the fabric tensor and one-third of the first invariant of the fabric tensor. By taking into account the
201 axisymmetric condition of the triaxial test around axis Z and the principal nature of axes X, Y, Z ,
202 the equation yields to:

$$203 \quad A = \frac{3(F_{ZZ} - F_{XX})}{F_{ZZ} + 2F_{XX}} = 3(F_{ZZ} - F_{XX}) \quad (11)$$

204 Here, the packing has an initial anisotropy value between $A = 0.02-0.05$ at the end of the
205 compaction phase. This value is insignificant compared to the anisotropy value of $A = 0.26$ in
206 the 3D-DEM polyhedron model of Toyoura sand prepared under gravity and X-ray tomography of
207 laboratory sand samples on Hostun sand prepared by the air pluviation method in ([Mohamed et al.](#)
208 [2022](#)) and ([Wiebicke et al. 2020](#)) respectively.

209 In terms of void ratio, its initial value is controlled by changing the friction coefficient during
210 the compaction and no equality is sought between the DEM model void ratio and the real soil void
211 ratio. Indeed, for the same mechanical behavior obtained after calibration (see below), the DEM
212 sample will be shown to conform a lower void ratio value, which can be explained by the fact that
213 the DEM void ratio does not account for the intra-aggregate pores that exist in the aggregated silty
214 clay particles of tropical soils as shown in Fig. 3, and which actually justify the previous choice
215 of a lower E_{mod} value for the fine contacts. On the other hand, the model will be calibrated for a
216 specific void ratio value and a proportionality between the laboratory and model void ratios will
217 be efficiently used throughout the manuscript as shown in Table 1, directly switching from the
218 real soil void ratio to the one of DEM samples through a multiplicative coefficient that is defined
219 within the calibration phase in the next section. While this idea shares some similarities with the
220 consideration of a common relative density between lab samples and DEM packings, e.g. ([Salot](#)
221 [et al. 2009](#); [Angelidakis et al. 2021](#)), it is somewhat simpler since it does not require the definition
222 of minimum and maximum void ratios in the DEM.

223 Also, during the subsequent triaxial shearing phase, the quasi-static condition is assured by the

224 following condition of the inertial number $I_r \leq 10^{-4}$.

225 **PARAMETRIC STUDY AND MODEL CALIBRATION**

226 **Effects of different coarse and fine mixtures**

227 The role of the considered contact mixture in the model is first illustrated by performing a
228 drained triaxial simulation in three different cases that will adopt respectively the mixture or just
229 one kind of contact (model): either coarse or fine. Corresponding results are shown in Fig. 7,
230 together with experimental data obtained by [Mouali et al. \(2019\)](#) for the tropical soil at hand. As
231 expected, the results show that the model exhibits a greater contraction behavior for the sample
232 with only fine contacts, while the sample with mixed contacts falls somewhere in between the two
233 extreme cases. As for the deviatoric vs axial strain curve, the sample with only coarse contacts
234 shows a stiffer behavior and a higher maximum deviatoric stress than the other samples. In addition,
235 that sample with only coarse contacts shows a dilation tendency starting from an axial strain value
236 $\epsilon_a \approx 11\%$ which is not the case for the experimental data. The sample with only fine contacts,
237 on the other hand, exhibits very soft behavior in the $q - \epsilon_a$ curve and purely contracting behavior
238 in the $\epsilon_v - \epsilon_a$ curve. Finally, the sample with a contacts mixture shows a very good agreement
239 with the experimental data. The existence of fine contacts in the mixed sample has a greater effect
240 on the volumetric strain behavior than on the stiffness and deviatoric response as shown in Fig. 7,
241 indicating the importance of the fine contacts in capturing the tropical soil's continuous contraction
242 volumetric response for these loading conditions. While the DEM simulations are here stopped
243 at an axial strain value $\epsilon_a = 20\%$ as a limit being consistent with the experimental data, a similar
244 mixture case will be presented until $\epsilon_a = 50\%$ in Fig. 13 within a subsequent parametric study and
245 confirm that volumetric behavior.

246 Also, the evolution of the coordination numbers Z^{Coarse} or Z^{Fine} (average number of coarse or
247 fine contacts per particle) and mechanical coordination numbers $Z_{mechanical}^{Coarse}$ and $Z_{mechanical}^{Fine}$ for the
248 coarse and fine contact networks (average number of coarse or fine contacts per stress-transmitting

249 particle) are used to obtain more insights in the DEM sample:

$$250 \quad Z^{Coarse} = \frac{2N_c^{Coarse}}{N_t} \quad \text{and} \quad Z^{Fine} = \frac{2N_c^{fine}}{N_t} \quad (12)$$

$$251 \quad Z_{mechanical}^{Coarse} = \frac{2N_c^{Coarse}}{N_t - N_r} \quad \text{and} \quad Z_{mechanical}^{Fine} = \frac{2N_c^{fine}}{N_t - N_r} \quad (13)$$

253 where N_c^* denotes the number of contacts of a specific type and N_t and N_r are the total number of
 254 particles and rattlers (showing 0 or 1 contact of any type), respectively. From a micro-scale point
 255 of view, it is noted from Fig. 8 that the initial (pre-shearing) percentage of the fine contacts in the
 256 mixture case is higher than the one of coarse contacts and represents 71% of the total number, which
 257 is consistent with the presence of about 75% percent of clay and silt in the studied tropical soil, as
 258 shown in Fig. 1. The evolution of the $Z_{mechanical}$ for the two contact types in the mixed sample
 259 during the shearing phase shows a continuous increase in the number of fine contacts starting from
 260 $\epsilon_a = 3\%$ coinciding with a decrease in the number of coarse contacts (Fig. 9).

261 **Effect of adhesive parameters F_0 and D_0**

262 The effect of the adhesive component parameters F_0 and D_0 in Table 2 is next investigated.
 263 Three triaxial tests with different combinations of F_0 and D_0 are performed with confining pressure
 264 and the initial DEM void ratio equal to 100 kPa and 0.71, respectively. The results in Fig. 10 show
 265 that the values of F_0 and D_0 have an important role in the constitution of fine contacts during the
 266 preparation phase and significantly affect the evolution of fine contacts during the shearing phase.
 267 Also, the macroscopic results of the triaxial tests in Fig. 11 show that the volumetric behavior can
 268 be converted from contractive to dilative depending on the number of fine contacts in the sample,
 269 indicating an upward shift to the critical state line as a function of fine contacts. However, the
 270 F_0 and D_0 parameters have less effect on the $q - \epsilon_a$ curve which is consistent with the previous
 271 observation in Fig. 7.

272 On the other hand, the Fig. 12 compares the effect of different clay contents on the critical state
 273 line of tropical soils, using data from the Guadeloupe site and from (Futai et al. 2004) for tropical

274 soils found in Ouro Preto, Southeast Brazil. Following the same methodology, as (Futai et al.
275 2004), the critical state line (CSL) is derived for Guadeloupe tropical soils using data from (Mouali
276 et al. 2019; Suez Consulting 2016) for drained and undrained triaxial tests at a large axial strain
277 $\epsilon_a = 25\%$ and essentially no change in the volumetric strain or pore pressure curves in the drained
278 and undrained cases, respectively. Sometimes critical state conditions could not be achieved, and
279 data close to critical state conditions was used. The analysis of the experimental results in Fig.
280 12 shows that the CSL is very sensitive to the different soil mixtures. The CSL tends to move
281 downwards on the $e - p'$ plane as sand or silt content increases relative to clay content, which is
282 consistent with the previous DEM results in Fig. 11 about the shift in DEM CSL caused by the
283 number of fine contacts.

284 **Evolution of fabric tensor and effect of rolling resistance parameter of fine contacts**

285 In this section, the effect of the rolling resistance parameter of fine contacts is studied by
286 performing two triaxial tests with different values of $\mu_r=0.37$ and 0.05 for that contact phase. Also,
287 the evolution of the fabric tensor for the coarse and fine particles is observed until a large axial
288 strain value $\epsilon_a = 50\%$. The results in Fig. 13 show that the μ_r parameter of fine contact has
289 a limited effect on the deviatoric stress until $\epsilon_a = 25\%$. Then, at a larger axial strain value, the
290 deviatoric stress is affected by changing the value of the μ_r which indicates that the critical state
291 condition of the soil is influenced by the fine contacts. The evolution of the fabric tensor in Fig.
292 14 indicates once again that the coarse contact has a larger influence at the first stage of the test
293 until $\epsilon_a = 10\%$ since the continuous network is essentially formed by coarse contacts (Fig. 2). At
294 $\epsilon_a = 50\%$, the value of the anisotropy parameter A for the fine contacts is very close to the value of
295 the total anisotropy, which confirms that the critical state is mainly determined by the fine contacts.
296 Finally, Fig. 14 shows the force network at the end of one triaxial test which demonstrates that the
297 main force network is at this stage no longer formed by coarse contacts only but that fine contacts
298 now contribute heavily.

299 **Model calibration**

300 As it was shown above, the percentage of fine and coarse contact plays an important role in the
301 mechanical behavior of the DEM model and is first calibrated, based on the previous parametric
302 study of different mixtures and in agreement with the granulometry of the tropical soil studied. The
303 rest of the model is then calibrated for one drained compression triaxial test by using a trial and
304 error strategy, that applies to all other DEM model ingredients (contact parameters in Table 2 and
305 the coefficient of proportionality between the void ratio of real soil and the DEM model in Table
306 1). Although we have calibrated the nine parameters of the two contact models from one drained
307 triaxial test, we consider that a single drained triaxial test is sufficient for an efficient calibration
308 since the fine contacts almost do not contribute to the stress-strain behavior (at least for the first stage
309 of tests, until 25% of axial strain) as it is shown in Fig. 11. From the same figures, we can actually
310 observe that the volumetric strain behavior of the mixture depends mainly on the fine contacts
311 (amount of fine contacts + fine contact parameters). As it is shown clearly during the previous
312 parametric study, this means that different contact types influence deviatoric stress and volumetric
313 strain in an almost uncoupled fashion and this is the reason why the mechanical behavior of this
314 type of soil is very special. This feature of the soil makes it easier to obtain calibration parameters
315 from just one drained triaxial test and the robustness of that calibration will be furthermore checked
316 through blind predictions in a subsequent validation step.

317 **VALIDATION OF THE DEM MODEL UNDER DIFFERENT LOADING CONDITIONS**

318 In the next sections, the model will be validated under oedometer tests and different drained
319 and undrained monotonic and cyclic loadings.

320 **Oedometer Test**

321 In this section, the prediction of the DEM model for one-dimensional compression tests is
322 assessed. Two experimental oedometer tests (Mouali 2021) are considered as references, for
323 remolded samples of tropical soils with different initial void ratio values: 1.06 and 1.51, as shown
324 in Fig. 15. In DEM, no strictly adequate packing (i.e., with a void ratio scaled by the calibrated
325 proportionality factor 1.6) could be created for the loosest case, unlike for the densest one, and

326 the discussion will only be qualitative for that test. It is worth mentioning that the numerical and
327 experimental tests are compared up to a maximum mean pressure $p' = 3$ MPa. Beyond this value,
328 an excessive overlap at fine contacts in the DEM and particle-crushing phenomenon in experiments
329 would invalidate the DEM model results. However, the behavior of this soil under excessively high
330 pressure is beyond the scope of this study.

331 In this framework, the DEM model results are shown to be coherent with the experimental
332 data in Fig. 15. First, both the experimental data and the DEM have close slopes for the loading-
333 unloading line (elastic swelling) and the normal consolidation line. Second, for the DEM model, the
334 degree of over-consolidation OCR increases as the initial void ratio decreases, which is consistent
335 with the experimental data. Furthermore, the DEM model offers a reasonable evolution for the
336 K_0 coefficient during the over-consolidated stage when compared to the behavior observed in the
337 literature, for example, in (Lee et al. 2013) in which the K_0 value for the over-consolidated sample
338 is higher than the K_0 value for the normally consolidated sample.

339 **Drained Triaxial Tests**

340 Fig. 16 presents the model's prediction together with experimental results from (Mouali et al.
341 2019) for three drained triaxial tests with an initial DEM void ratio $e = 0.71$ in Table 1 and different
342 confining pressures. Three intermediate loading-unloading cycles are shown in the simulations
343 that are not present in the experimental data. The simulation results for both the deviatoric $q - \epsilon_a$
344 and $\epsilon_a - \epsilon_v$ curves show very good agreement with the experimental data, indicating the model's
345 capability in following the strongly nonlinear behavior of the tropical soil in the $q - \epsilon_a$ curve at
346 various stages of the tests, such as initial slope and maximum strength under different confining
347 pressure values. Also, the model can capture the continuous contraction behavior of the tropical
348 soil until a relatively high axial strain value $\epsilon_a = 14\%$.

349 **Undrained Triaxial Tests**

350 Further investigations for the model predictions under monotonic loading are carried out by
351 considering an undrained condition (constant volume) for the triaxial compression. As shown in
352 Table 1, the predictions are tested for two different void ratios, with various confining pressures

353 (100, 300 and 510 kPa) in each case (Suez Consulting 2016).

354 Again, the simulations in Fig. 17 and Fig. 18 illustrate a good agreement with the experiments
355 on the curves of $q - p'$ and $q - \epsilon_a$ for the different confining pressures and different void ratios.
356 First, the DEM model and the real soil have nearly identical strength envelopes and critical state
357 lines in the $q - p'$ plane $M = q/p'$. Second, the numerical results in $q - \epsilon_a$ have a very close
358 slope and softening regime to the experimental data. We emphasize here that the DEM model can
359 directly capture the influence of the different void ratio values on the undrained results (different
360 contractive or dilative behaviors) through the straightforward proportional definition of the DEM
361 void ratio with respect to soil void ratio (Table 1).

362 Finally, because the numerical and experimental data for the drained and undrained tests are
363 nearly identical at the final stages of the $\epsilon_v - \epsilon_a$ and $q - p'$ curves, the numerical results suggest that
364 the DEM model shares similar CSL datapoints as the real soil in the $e - p'$ plane with a shifting
365 parameter equal to the proportionality coefficient in Table 1.

366 **Cyclic Undrained Triaxial Test With Different Strain Amplitudes**

367 The DEM model prediction and the experimental data (Mouali 2021) of three undrained cyclic
368 triaxial tests for initial $p' = 100$ kPa are presented in Fig. 19. Each test comprises 50 cycles
369 with a constant amplitude in axial strain among (0.2%, 0.5% and 1%) and may serve to assess
370 the liquefaction ability of the tropical soil. The performance of the DEM model shows a good
371 agreement with the experimental data at different cyclic amplitudes. In general, more strength
372 degradation is observed by increasing the cyclic strain amplitude and by increasing the number of
373 cycles.

374 On the other hand, Fig. 20 shows the evolution of the deviatoric stress as a function of the
375 effective mean pressure for the case of a strain amplitude = 1%. By increasing the number of
376 cycles, a continuous decrease in effective mean pressure is observed. Also, the maximum mean
377 pressure is observed on the extension side coherently with the experimental data. Finally, the
378 DEM model gives a very close qualitative prediction of the experimental data at different stages
379 of the test. For example, at the start of the test, both the experimental data and the model show

380 a faster rate of decrease of the effective mean pressure and the decreasing rate becomes slower as
381 the number of cycles increases. It is remarkable that the DEM can reproduce such an evolving
382 behavior during cyclic loading with a very limited number of parameters, if one compares it to a
383 phenomenological approach, e.g. the elasto-plastic model by Duriez and Vincens (2015) with 17
384 independent parameters.

385 CONCLUSION

386 This article presents a quantitative application of the DEM approach to a complex in-situ
387 tropical soil which contains different types of soil among sand, silt and clay. A 3D-DEM model
388 is developed with simple spherical particles conforming a wide size distribution to allow small
389 particles to occupy the void and to form local force networks between the large particles, i.e., the
390 main skeleton. Two different contact models are assigned to represent the different physics existing
391 within tropical soil's coarse or fine components. The linear rolling resistance contact model is used
392 to represent the coarse component and the adhesive rolling resistance contact model is used for the
393 fine and cohesive component. The latter contact model simulates cohesion by introducing a linear
394 approximation of the van der Waals attraction force, characterized by a maximum attraction force
395 and a maximum gap distance.

396 The parametric study performed on the effect of the adhesive parameters F_0 and D_0 reveals
397 the important effect of these parameters on the number of fine contacts during the preparation and
398 shearing phases. For the same initial void ratio, more dilative behavior is observed by increasing
399 the number of fine contents implying an upward shift for CSL in the $e - p'$ plane with increasing
400 the number of fine contacts. These numerical results are consistent with the analysis of the effect
401 of clay contents on the CSL of tropical soils. Also, the parametric study on the effect of using
402 different mixtures highlights that the coarse contacts have more influence on the deviatoric stress
403 curve however fine contacts impact more the volumetric strain behavior. In addition, the evolution
404 of the fabric anisotropy shows that the coarse contacts control the mechanical behavior of the soil
405 during the first stage of a triaxial test until $\epsilon_a \approx 25\%$ whereas, near the critical state, the behavior
406 is highly impacted by the composition of fine contacts.

407 After a parametric study on the effects of using such a numerical mixture, the model is calibrated
408 for a drained triaxial test with a specific void ratio. The calibration result agrees very well with
409 the experimental data of tropical soils. For other tests, a proportionality between the real soil void
410 ratio and the DEM model void ratio is proposed to obtain equivalent mechanical behaviors. The
411 proportionality coefficient is shown to be effective during the validation phase for a wide range of
412 void ratios and different stress paths.

413 The validation of the DEM model for drained, undrained triaxial (constant volume) and oe-
414 dometer tests at various confining pressure and void ratio values shows a high level of agreement
415 with the experimental results. Furthermore, the validation of the model under undrained triaxial
416 cyclic tests shows a remarkable agreement with the experimental data at different cyclic strain
417 amplitudes for the stress-strain and deviatoric-effective mean stress curves.

418 As for the limitations of the proposed DEM approach, in addition to the absence of the grain-
419 crushing phenomenon, the use of soft contacts to simulate silty clay aggregates could lead to
420 excessive elastic deformation and biased unloading behavior under very high mean pressure, ren-
421 dering the model invalid under those conditions.

422 Still, this 3D-DEM model could be used within a multi-scale, hierarchical, modeling approach
423 to efficiently assess the structural behavior of earth dams built, or under construction, in tropical
424 areas, being for instance provided that structure dimensions lead to moderate confining pressures
425 being compatible with the present study.

426 **DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT**

427 Some or all data, models, or codes that support the findings of this study are available from the
428 corresponding author upon reasonable request.

429 **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

430 The authors would like to express their sincere thanks and gratitude to the Itasca Educational
431 Partnership Program (IEP, Zhao Cheng and Sacha Emam) for their valuable support and for
432 providing PFC software, to SUEZ-SAFECE for the funding of the PhD associated with this article

433 and for providing the data for the considered construction site, and to ANTEA Group (Lila Mouali)
434 for providing raw experimental data.

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506 **List of Tables**

507 1 Real tropical soil and DEM void ratio values for different simulations 22

508 2 DEM parameters for the different contact models 23

TABLE 1. Real tropical soil and DEM void ratio values for different simulations

	initial void ratio (e)	void ratio (e)	void ratio (e)
Simulation	Drained triaxial	Undrained triaxial	Undrained cyclic triaxial
Real soil	1.12	1.07-1.312	1
DEM model	0.71	0.66-0.82	0.62

TABLE 2. DEM parameters for the different contact models

Contact model	Contact						Packing			
	E_{mod} (MPa)	K_n/K_s (-)	μ (-)	μ_r (-)	D_0 (mm)	F_0 (N)	D_{min} (mm)	D_{max}/D_{min} (-)	N_b (-)	Initial A (-)
Linear rolling resistance for coarse network	370	1	0.4	0.7	-	-	4	10	5100	0.02-0.05
Adhesive model for fine network	30	1	0.4	0.37	0.5	1.5				

509 **List of Figures**

510 1 The plasticity chart and particle size distribution (envelope of six different samples)
511 of the tropical soil samples used in this study and collected from an earth dam
512 construction site in Guadeloupe, France (Mouali 2021). 27

513 2 Particle size distribution of the proposed 3D-DEM model (itself in the inset, where
514 different colors correspond to different radii) for tropical soil. 28

515 3 Micro-scale interpretation of using different contact models in the DEM. The so-
516 called coarse DEM contacts correspond to the soil’s granular components, whereas
517 the so-called fine contacts account for much smaller silty clay solid particles and
518 intra-aggregate pores. 29

519 4 Adhesive rolling resistance contact model and van der Waals approximation for
520 attraction force vs gap distance between particles (Itasca 2018). 30

521 5 Visualization of all possible particle pairs serving to describe the coarse component
522 of the soil, as defined during the initial preparation stage. The maximum possible
523 coordination number Z in that "coarse contacts" phase is variable (increasing from
524 left to right) and is controlled by a numerical parameter defining the very initial
525 stage of the packing (through overlap considerations, see text). 31

526 6 The fine (in blue) and coarse (in red) contact networks of a sample with an initial
527 confining pressure = 100 kPa and an initial void ratio = 0.71 in Table 1. The force
528 network of the coarse contacts is more continuous and represents the main skeleton
529 of the sample, whereas, the fine contacts represent the local force network between
530 the coarse contacts. 32

531 7 The effect of using a contact mixture on the mechanical response for a drained
532 triaxial test with confining pressure 535 kPa and a DEM initial void ratio $e = 0.71$
533 equivalent to the experimental one (see Table 1). Experimental data from (Mouali
534 et al. 2019). 33

535	8	Evolution of the coordination number Z and mechanical coordination number	
536		$Z_{mechanical}$ for the various contact types in the mixed sample of Fig. 7 during a	
537		preparation phase towards a final $p' = 535$ kPa and DEM void ratio = 0.71.	34
538	9	Evolution of the mechanical coordination number $Z_{mechanical}$ for the various contact	
539		types in the mixed sample of Fig. 7 during the shearing phase with confining	
540		pressure 535 kPa and a DEM initial void ratio $e = 0.71$	35
541	10	The evolution of the coarse and fine contacts for the DEM model with different	
542		combinations of F_0 and D_0 during drained triaxial tests with confining pressure =	
543		100 kPa for a DEM void ratio $e = 0.715$	36
544	11	DEM model results for different combination of F_0 and D_0 under a drained triaxial	
545		test with confining pressure = 100 kPa for a DEM void ratio $e = 0.715$	37
546	12	Different critical state lines for different tropical soils with different clay contents.	
547		Solid lines represent the best-fitting model for the different soils.	38
548	13	The effect of the rolling resistance parameter of fine contacts μ_r^{fine} on the mechan-	
549		ical response for a drained triaxial test with confining pressure 535 kPa and a DEM	
550		initial void ratio $e = 0.71$	39
551	14	Left: the evolution of fabric for the coarse and fine contacts for a drained triaxial	
552		test with 535 kPa confining pressure, initial DEM void ratio = 0.71 and $\mu_r^{fine} = 0.37$.	
553		Right: the force network at $\epsilon_a = 50\%$ (blue is fine contacts and red is coarse	
554		contacts) and the size of cylinders represents the force magnitude.	40
555	15	Left: DEM model prediction for two oedometer tests vs experimental data from	
556		(Mouali 2021). Right: evolution of $k_0 = \sigma_h / \sigma_v$ coefficient during one oedometer	
557		test with one unloading-reloading cycle.	41
558	16	DEM model validation under different drained triaxial tests with different confining	
559		pressure values including one calibration curve for confining pressure = 535 kPa	
560		for a DEM void ratio $e = 0.71$, see Table 1. Experimental data from (Mouali et al.	
561		2019).	42

562	17	DEM model predictions for the undrained triaxial condition and a DEM void ratio	
563		$e = 0.69$, see Table 1. Solid lines are simulations and points are the experimental	
564		data from (Suez Consulting 2016).	43
565	18	DEM model predictions for the undrained triaxial condition and a DEM void ratio	
566		$e = 0.82$, see Table 1. Solid lines are simulations and points are the experimental	
567		data from (Suez Consulting 2016).	44
568	19	DEM model predictions for undrained cyclic triaxial tests with different strain	
569		cyclic amplitudes (0.2%,0.5% and 1%) under confining pressure = 100 kPa for 50	
570		cycles. Left: DEM model and right: experimental data from (Mouali 2021). . . .	45
571	20	Deviatoric stress versus effective pressure for the test with strain cycle amplitude =	
572		1% for 50 cycles. Left: DEM model and right: experiments (Mouali 2021). . . .	46

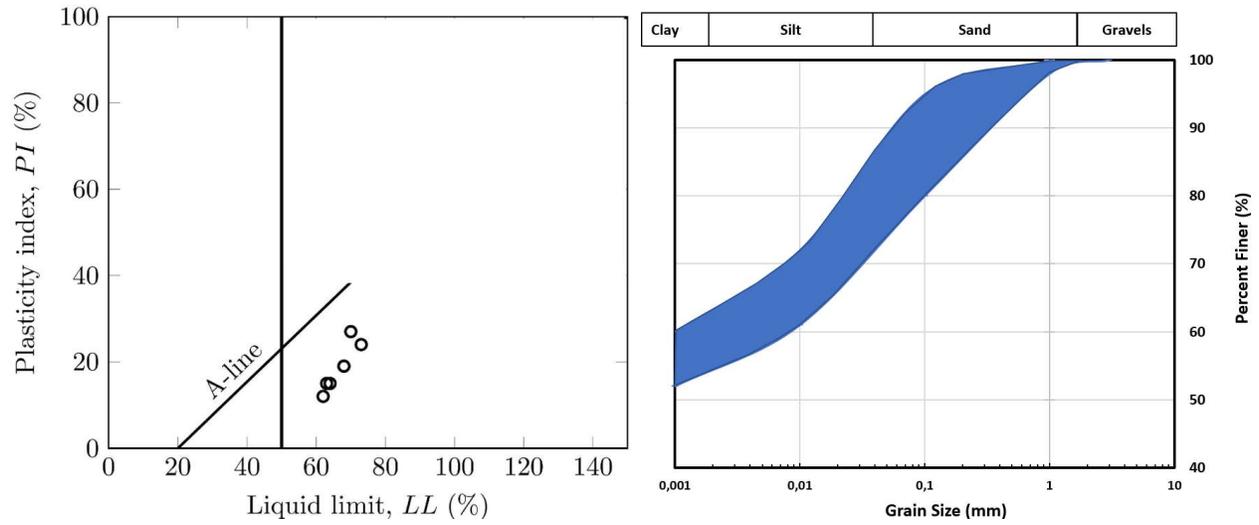


Fig. 1. The plasticity chart and particle size distribution (envelope of six different samples) of the tropical soil samples used in this study and collected from an earth dam construction site in Guadeloupe, France (Mouali 2021).

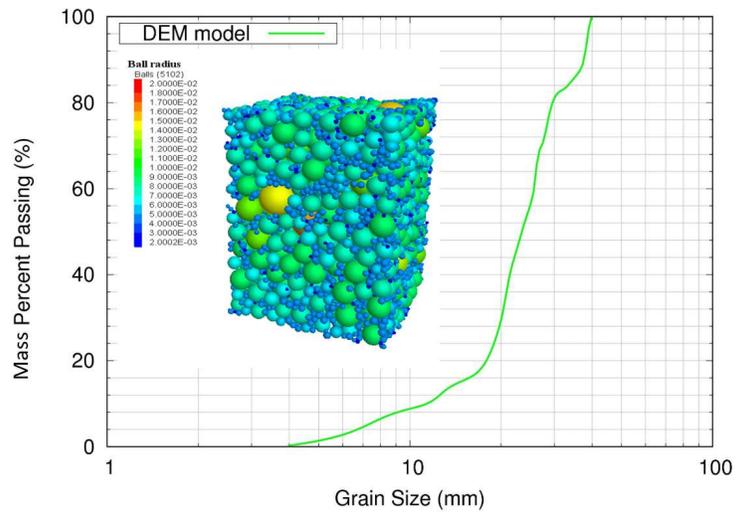


Fig. 2. Particle size distribution of the proposed 3D-DEM model (itself in the inset, where different colors correspond to different radii) for tropical soil.

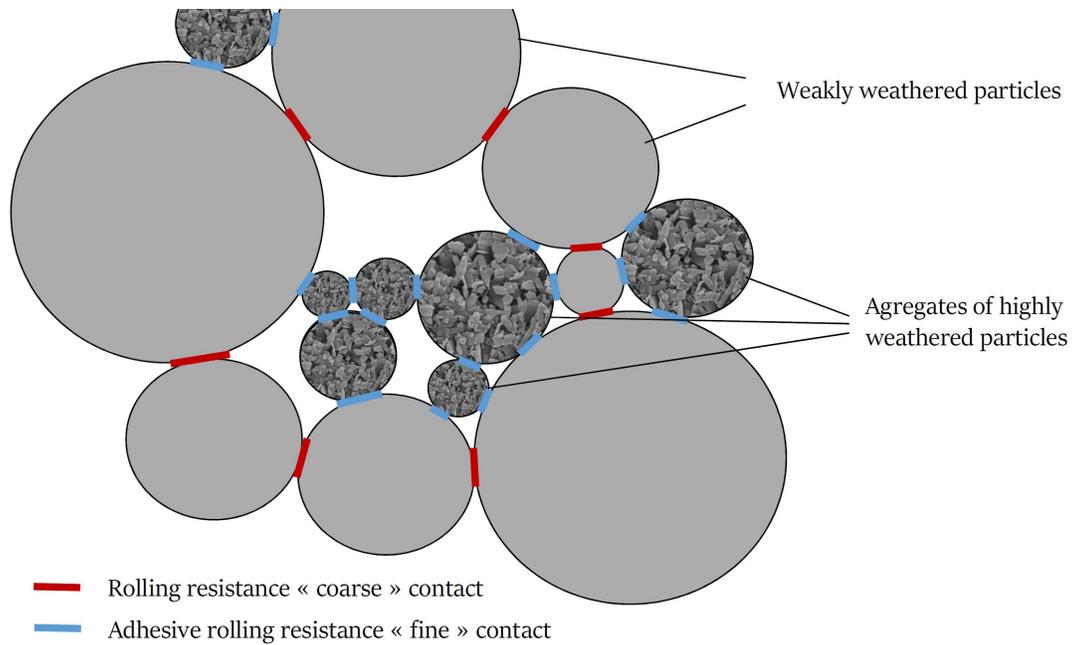


Fig. 3. Micro-scale interpretation of using different contact models in the DEM. The so-called coarse DEM contacts correspond to the soil's granular components, whereas the so-called fine contacts account for much smaller silty clay solid particles and intra-aggregate pores.

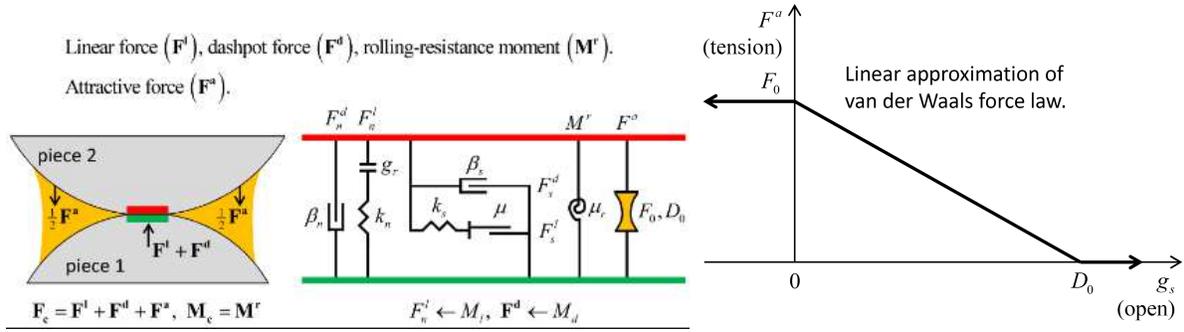


Fig. 4. Adhesive rolling resistance contact model and van der Waals approximation for attraction force vs gap distance between particles (Itasca 2018).

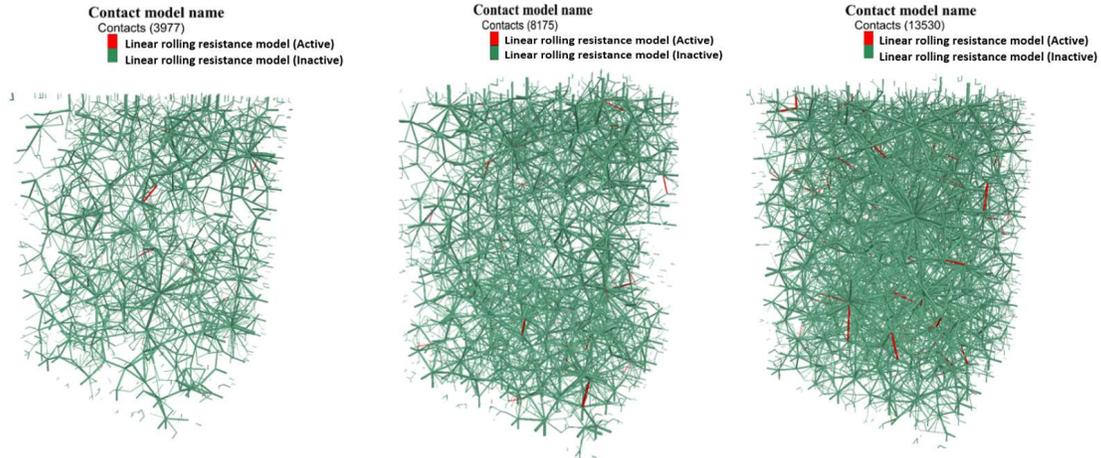


Fig. 5. Visualization of all possible particle pairs serving to describe the coarse component of the soil, as defined during the initial preparation stage. The maximum possible coordination number Z in that "coarse contacts" phase is variable (increasing from left to right) and is controlled by a numerical parameter defining the very initial stage of the packing (through overlap considerations, see text).

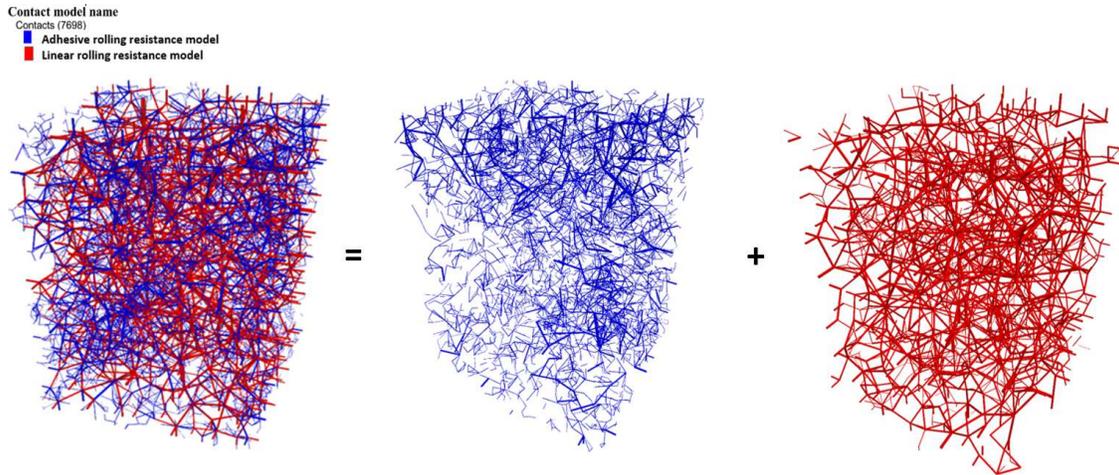


Fig. 6. The fine (in blue) and coarse (in red) contact networks of a sample with an initial confining pressure = 100 kPa and an initial void ratio = 0.71 in Table 1. The force network of the coarse contacts is more continuous and represents the main skeleton of the sample, whereas, the fine contacts represent the local force network between the coarse contacts.

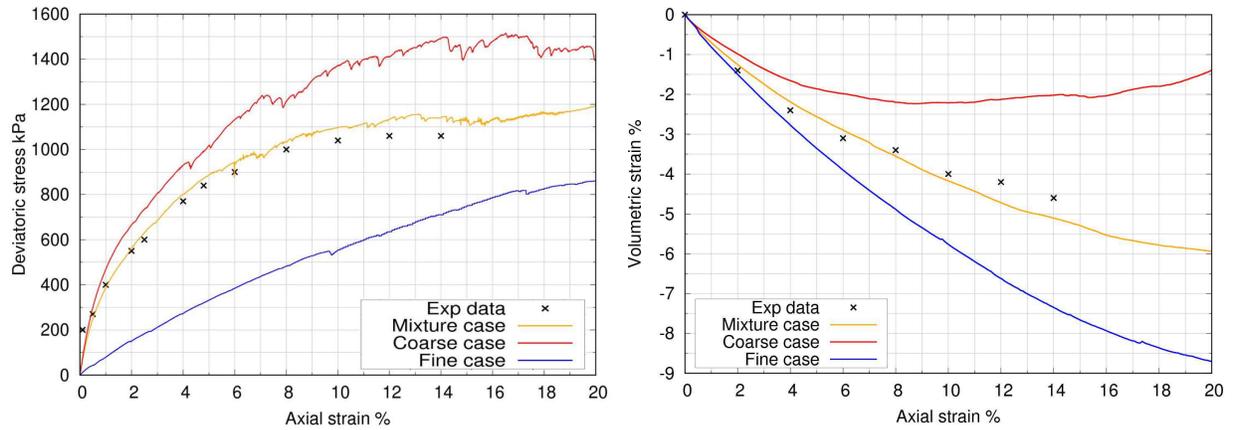


Fig. 7. The effect of using a contact mixture on the mechanical response for a drained triaxial test with confining pressure 535 kPa and a DEM initial void ratio $e = 0.71$ equivalent to the experimental one (see Table 1). Experimental data from (Mouali et al. 2019).

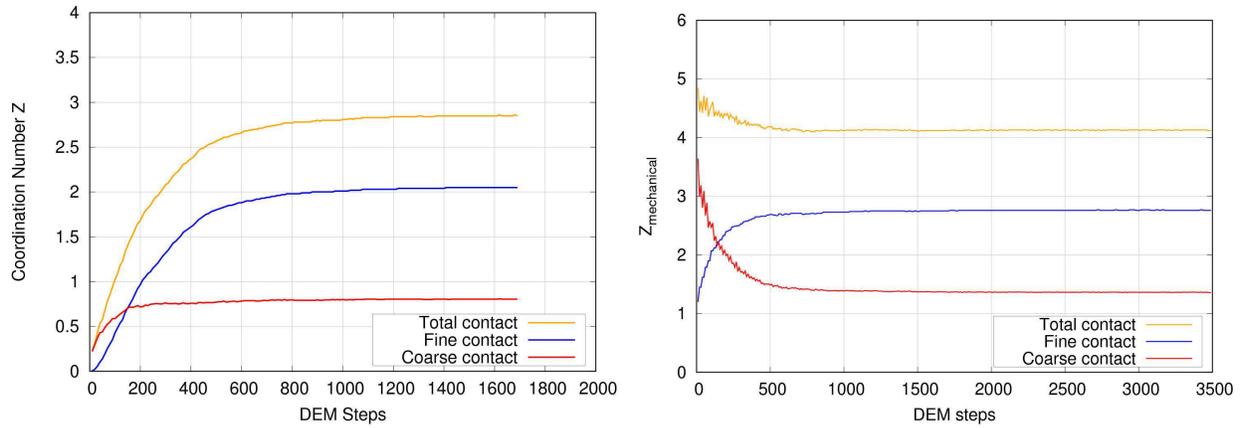


Fig. 8. Evolution of the coordination number Z and mechanical coordination number $Z_{mechanical}$ for the various contact types in the mixed sample of Fig. 7 during a preparation phase towards a final $p' = 535$ kPa and DEM void ratio = 0.71.

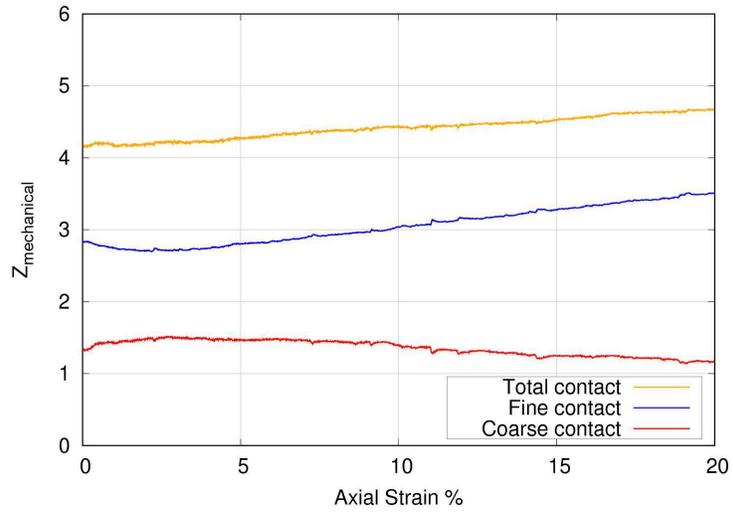


Fig. 9. Evolution of the mechanical coordination number $Z_{mechanical}$ for the various contact types in the mixed sample of Fig. 7 during the shearing phase with confining pressure 535 kPa and a DEM initial void ratio $e = 0.71$.

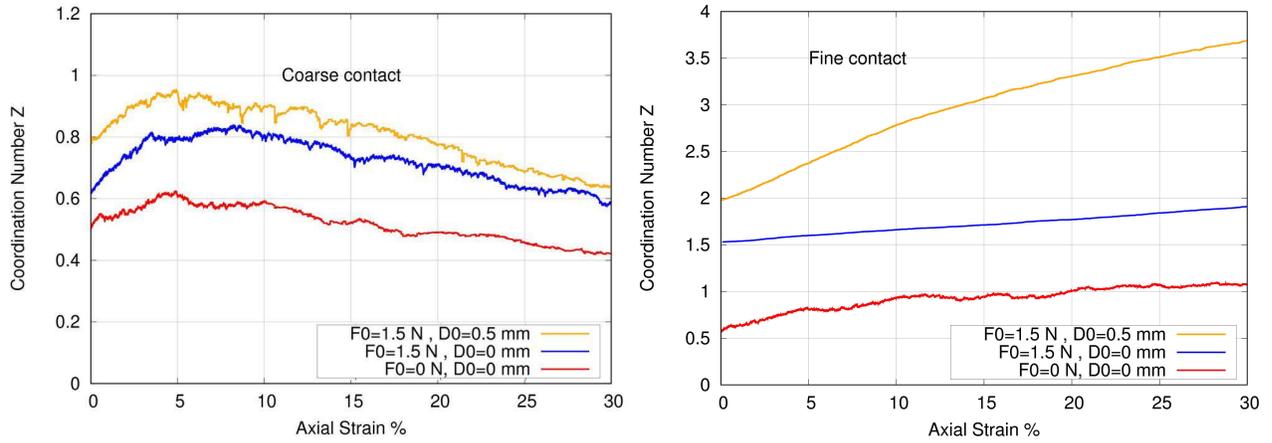


Fig. 10. The evolution of the coarse and fine contacts for the DEM model with different combinations of F_0 and D_0 during drained triaxial tests with confining pressure = 100 kPa for a DEM void ratio $e = 0.715$.

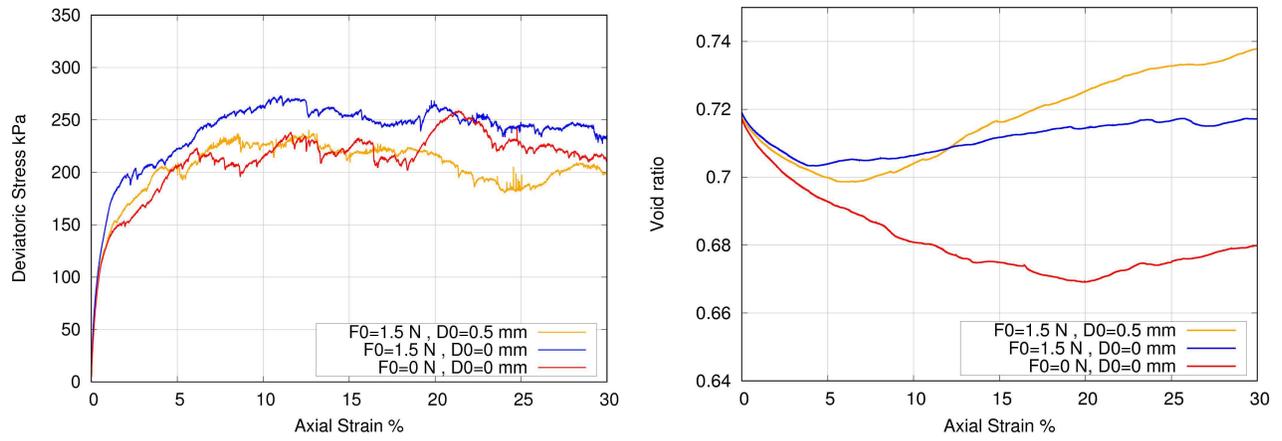


Fig. 11. DEM model results for different combination of F_0 and D_0 under a drained triaxial test with confining pressure = 100 kPa for a DEM void ratio $e = 0.715$.

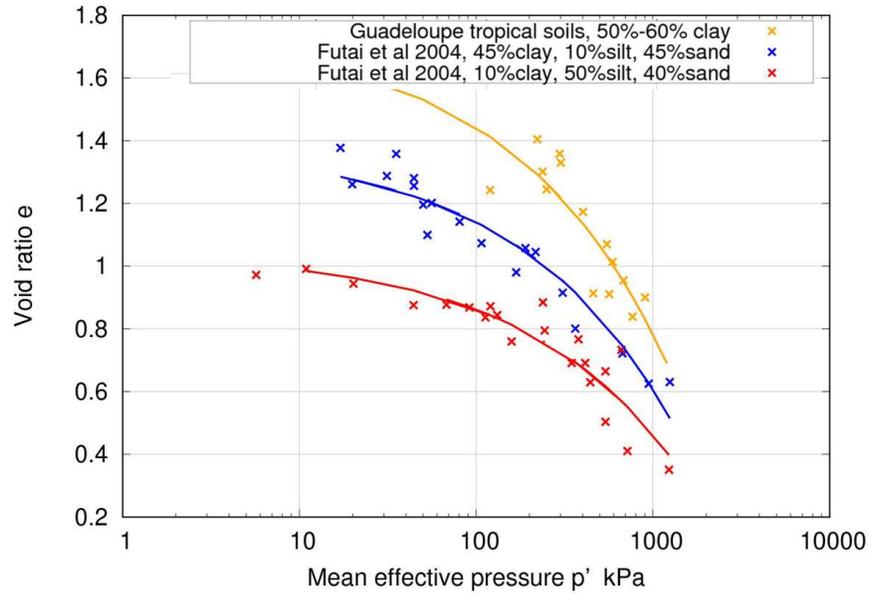


Fig. 12. Different critical state lines for different tropical soils with different clay contents. Solid lines represent the best-fitting model for the different soils.

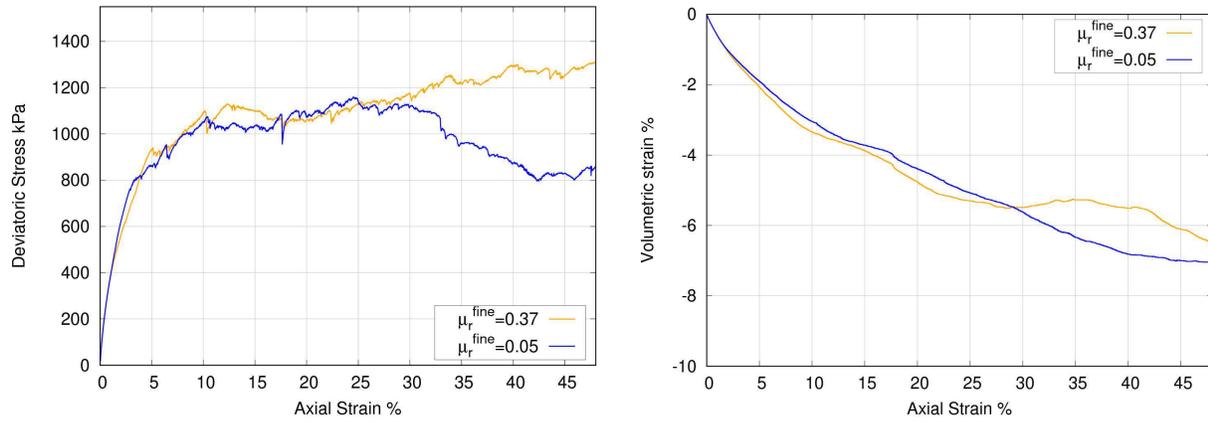


Fig. 13. The effect of the rolling resistance parameter of fine contacts μ_r^{fine} on the mechanical response for a drained triaxial test with confining pressure 535 kPa and a DEM initial void ratio $e = 0.71$

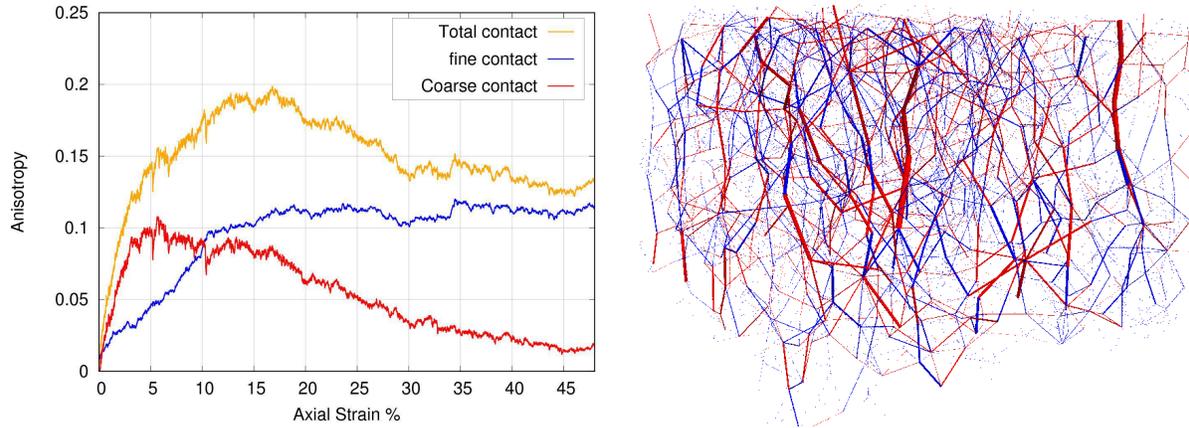


Fig. 14. Left: the evolution of fabric for the coarse and fine contacts for a drained triaxial test with 535 kPa confining pressure, initial DEM void ratio = 0.71 and $\mu_r^{fine}=0.37$. Right: the force network at $\epsilon_a = 50\%$ (blue is fine contacts and red is coarse contacts) and the size of cylinders represents the force magnitude.

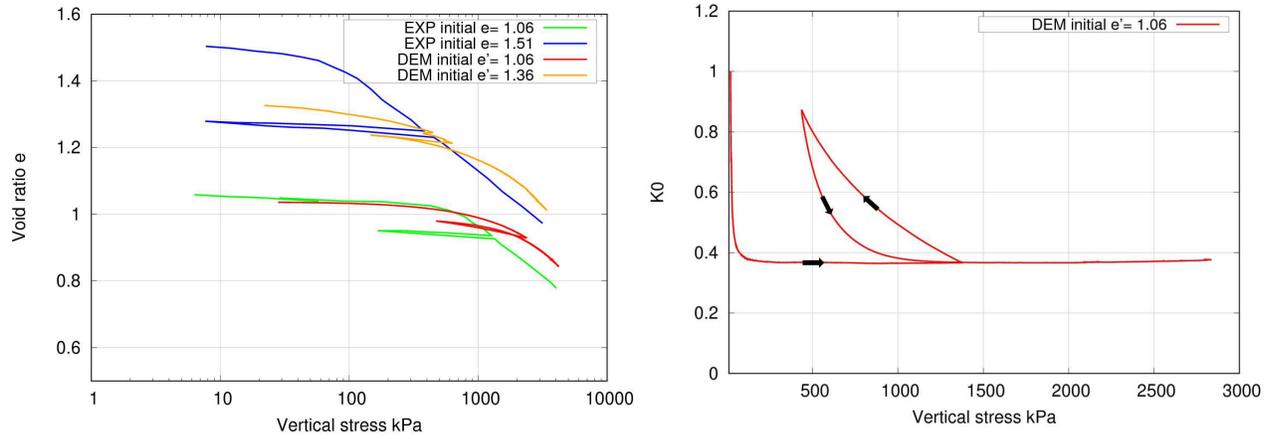


Fig. 15. Left: DEM model prediction for two oedometer tests vs experimental data from (Mouali 2021). Right: evolution of $k_0 = \sigma_h/\sigma_v$ coefficient during one oedometer test with one unloading-reloading cycle.

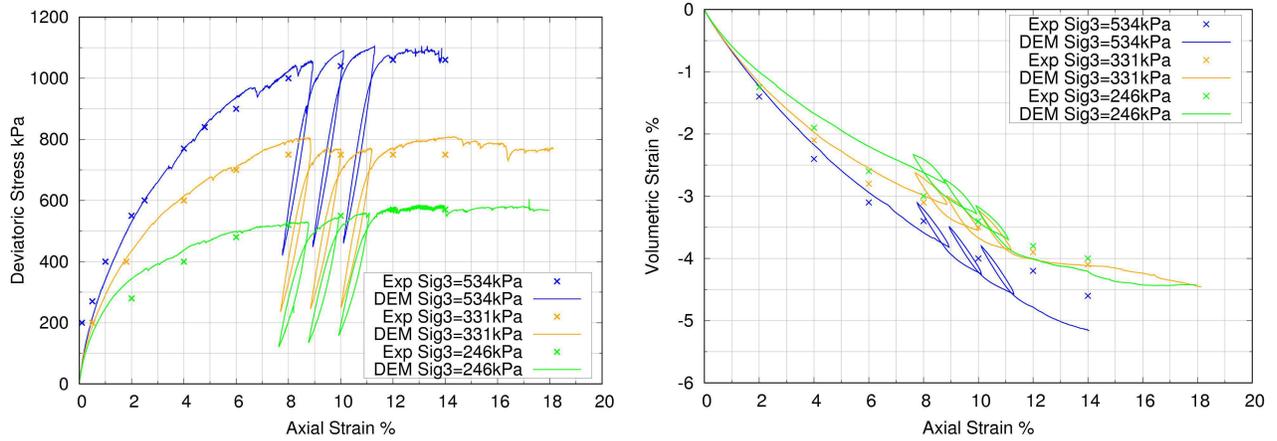


Fig. 16. DEM model validation under different drained triaxial tests with different confining pressure values including one calibration curve for confining pressure = 535 kPa for a DEM void ratio $e = 0.71$, see Table 1. Experimental data from (Mouali et al. 2019).

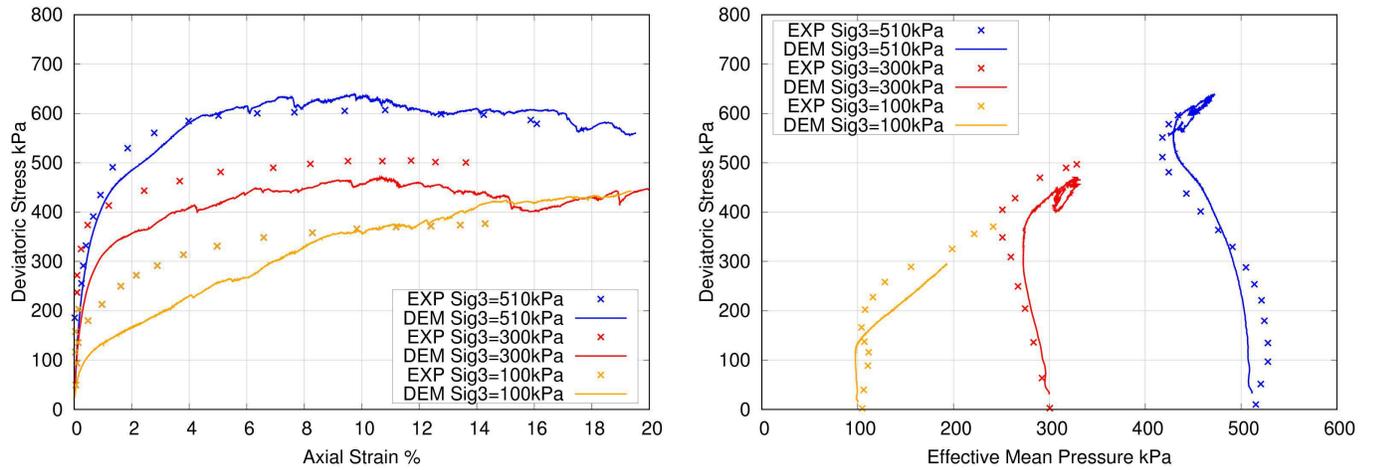


Fig. 17. DEM model predictions for the undrained triaxial condition and a DEM void ratio $e = 0.69$, see Table 1. Solid lines are simulations and points are the experimental data from (Suez Consulting 2016).

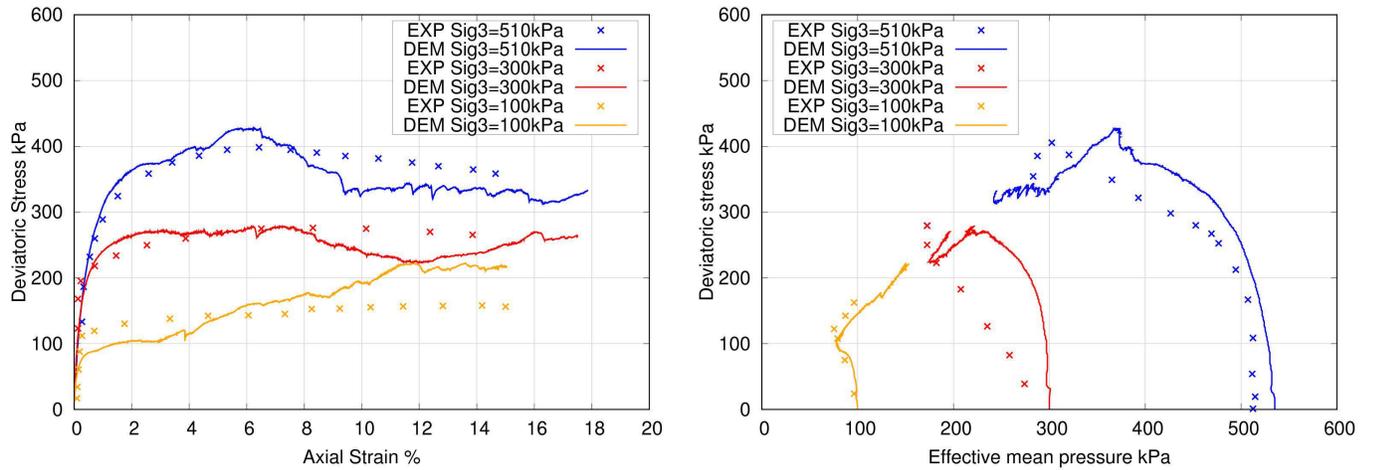


Fig. 18. DEM model predictions for the undrained triaxial condition and a DEM void ratio $e = 0.82$, see Table 1. Solid lines are simulations and points are the experimental data from (Suez Consulting 2016).

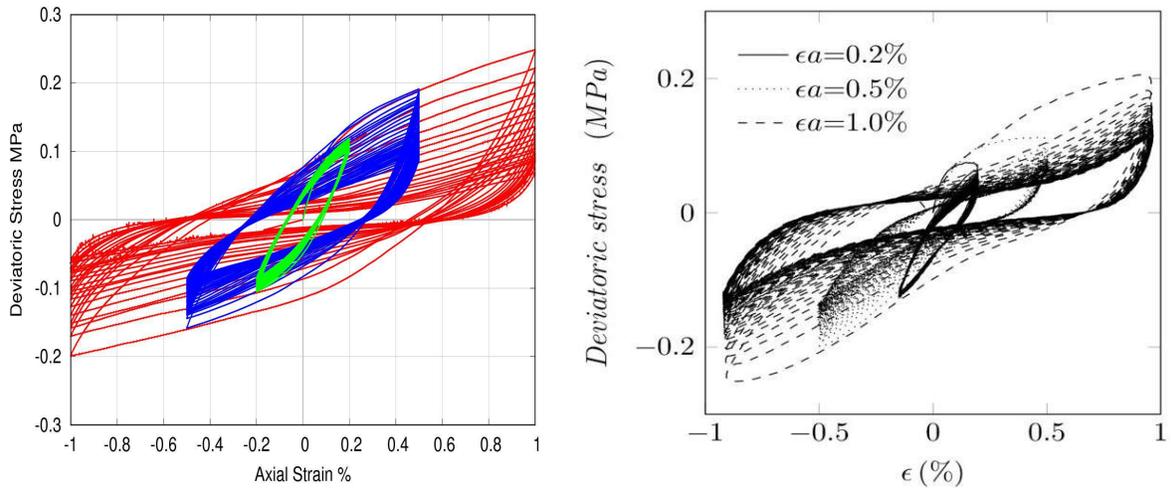


Fig. 19. DEM model predictions for undrained cyclic triaxial tests with different strain cyclic amplitudes (0.2%,0.5% and 1%) under confining pressure = 100 kPa for 50 cycles. Left: DEM model and right: experimental data from (Mouali 2021).

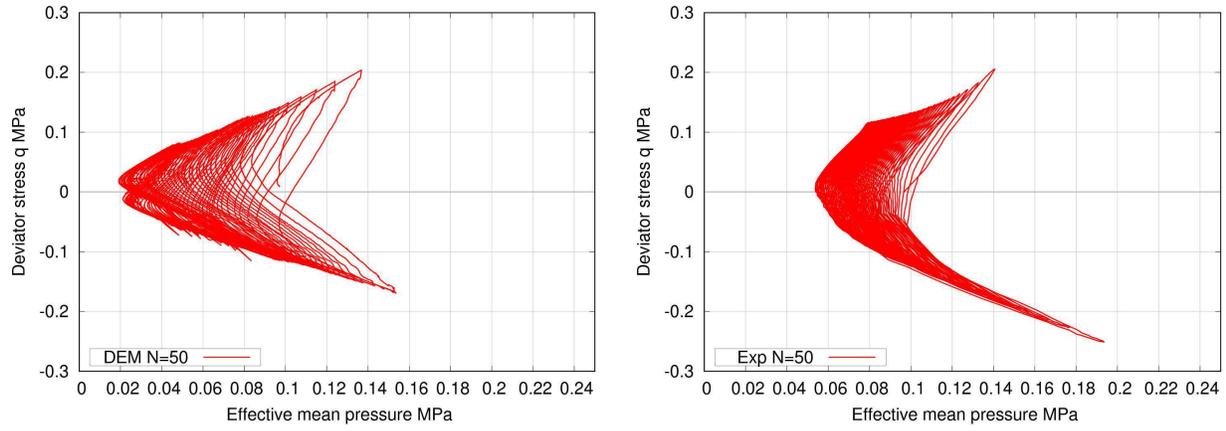


Fig. 20. Deviatoric stress versus effective pressure for the test with strain cycle amplitude = 1% for 50 cycles. Left: DEM model and right: experiments (Mouali 2021).