Geotechnical parameters of very soft clays from CPTu

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ABSTRACT: Results of piezocone (CPTU) tests carried out on very soft soil deposits of Barra da Tijuca and Recreio in the city of Rio de Janeiro are presented together with data of geotechnical properties. Data of vane shear strength are compared with piezocone data, and values of cone factor $N_{kt}$ are obtained. Values of the coefficient of consolidation from piezocone dissipation tests are also compared with values from laboratory oedometer tests.

1 INTRODUCTION

Piezocone (CPTU) tests have been carried out in Brazil in various marine deposits along the Brazilian coast (Danziger and Schnaid, 2000; Coutinho, 2008; Schnaid, 2009) and also in the state of Rio de Janeiro (Almeida & Marques, 2003; Almeida et al. 2008a).

This paper presents data of in situ (mainly piezocone) and laboratory tests carried out on very soft clays deposits of Rio de Janeiro city at eight sites located in the Barra da Tijuca and Recreio dos Bandeirantes districts, west of the city of Rio de Janeiro. These results allowed the creation of a geotechnical data bank for these areas and also made it possible to compare the geotechnical properties of the sites.

2 DESCRIPTION OF THE SITES

The eight sites presented here are distributed along a 7.4 km² area, where the thickness of soft clay deposits varies from 2 to 30 m (Almeida et al. 2008a). The stratigraphy of these eight sites obtained from 443 boreholes is shown in Figure 1. The water table in general is quite shallow, at about 0.5 m depth. At the majority of the sites the soil beneath the soft deposit is sand with gravel. As these sites are surrounded by rivers or lagoons, the upper layer in many cases is either peat, dredged material, or uncontrolled fills.

Figure 2 shows an example of geotechnical characteristics of the Panela deposit. This site presents very high water content, void index, and compression ratio $CR = C_c/(1+e_o)$. 
Figure 1. Stratigraphy of the sites.

Figure 2. Geotechnical characteristics of the Panela deposit.
Some geotechnical properties and characteristics of the eight soft clay deposits are presented in Table 1. The high values of the compression ratio CR observed for SESC/SENAC, for example, led to an extensive study of secondary compression at that site (Garcia, 1996), which showed that important secondary settlements could occur at the sites. The results presented in Table 1 show that geotechnical parameters have a wide range despite the relative proximity of some deposits.

Table 1. Geotechnical parameters and characteristics of Barra da Tijuca and Recreio soft clay deposits.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deposit</th>
<th>SESC/SENAC</th>
<th>Panela</th>
<th>PAN</th>
<th>Península II</th>
<th>Outeiro</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>w0 (%)</td>
<td>72–500</td>
<td>126–488</td>
<td>116–600</td>
<td>61–294</td>
<td>75–119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wL (%)</td>
<td>70–450</td>
<td>121–312</td>
<td>100–370</td>
<td>52–93</td>
<td>118–133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IP (%)</td>
<td>47–250</td>
<td>80–192</td>
<td>120–250</td>
<td>100–300</td>
<td>97–105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% clay</td>
<td>28–80</td>
<td>26–54</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>23–71</td>
<td>32–65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>γnat (kN/m³)</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>9.8–13.4</td>
<td>11.6–12.5</td>
<td>10–12.7</td>
<td>13.5–15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CR=Cc/(1+e0)</td>
<td>0.29–0.52</td>
<td>0.40–0.84</td>
<td>0.36–0.50</td>
<td>0.35–0.79</td>
<td>0.25–0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cv (10⁻⁸ m²/s)</td>
<td>0.17–80</td>
<td>0.6–8.8</td>
<td>0.4–1.2</td>
<td>0.9–15</td>
<td>2.1–49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e0</td>
<td>2.0–11.1</td>
<td>3.3–8.2</td>
<td>4.8–7.6</td>
<td>4.03–12.37</td>
<td>1.8–3.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Su (kPa)</td>
<td>2.0–11.2</td>
<td>3.0–38</td>
<td>5.0–23</td>
<td>4.0–29</td>
<td>7–41(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nkt</td>
<td>7.5–14.5</td>
<td>4.0–16</td>
<td>4.0–9</td>
<td>6.5–15</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deposit</th>
<th>Crespo Neto</th>
<th>Life</th>
<th>Máximo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>w0 (%)</td>
<td>72–496</td>
<td>114–895</td>
<td>72–1200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% clay</td>
<td>14–49</td>
<td>15–60</td>
<td>19–60 (3) - c_v values from oedometer and piezocone tests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>γnat (kN/m³)</td>
<td>11–12.4</td>
<td>9.2–14.0</td>
<td>10.9–14.2 (4) - Su values from piezocone tests (Nkt = 13).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CR=Cc/(1+e0)</td>
<td>0.27–0.46</td>
<td>0.22–0.49</td>
<td>0.27–0.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cv (10⁻⁸ m²/s)</td>
<td>0.07–0.6</td>
<td>0.3–3.3</td>
<td>1.3–6.3 (3) - c_v values from oedometer and piezocone tests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e0</td>
<td>3.8–15.0</td>
<td>3.0–15.1</td>
<td>2.0–11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Su (kPa)</td>
<td>3.0–19</td>
<td>4.0–18</td>
<td>2.0–19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nkt</td>
<td>5.0–13</td>
<td>4.0–16</td>
<td>5.0–14.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3 UNDRAINED STRENGTH

In Brazilian geotechnical practice, piezocone data are used in combination with vane data to obtain the undrained strength Su profiles. The cone factor Nkt is obtained using corrected tip resistance (qt) of the piezocone tests and Su values of vane tests at each depth of vane results, as follows:

\[ N_{kt} = \frac{(q_t - \sigma_{vo})}{S_u(\text{vane})} \]  

where \( \sigma_{vo} \) is the total vertical stress.

In order to obtain Su profiles, for all depths of the piezocone tests, an average cone factor Nkt is then used. Values of Nkt of the eight deposits are presented in Figure 3(a), which shows a wide range of Nkt values of these sites, which are not too far from each other. Values of Nkt obtained for other coastal Brazilian clay deposits are
shown in Figure 3(b) for comparison. It seems that even compared with Brazilian coastal clays, the range of $N_{kt}$ values at these eight sites are wider and this may be due to the large soil variability in the region.

Profiles of $N_{kt}$ of two sites shown in Figure 4 indicate the large variation in $N_{kt}$ with depth. Therefore, difficulties are encountered in obtaining an average value of $N_{kt}$ even for a single site.

The experience of 20 years of piezocone tests carried out in Brazilian coastal clays (Danziger & Schnaid, 2000), as well as the wide range of values shown in Figures 3 and 4, indicates that $N_{kt}$ values should be obtained for each deposit. This could be attributed to a number of factors such as soil variability and strength anisotropy. Some studies indicate that the cone factor $N_{kt}$ is also dependent on the equipment used at each site (e.g., Ladd & De Groot, 2003). Two types of piezocone equipment were used in the studies reported here: a COPPE piezocone and a commercial piezocone.

Figure 5 presents uncorrected $S_u$ from piezocone and vane tests data of the Peninsula II deposit. Tests data show slightly higher $S_u$ values at the top of compressible peat layers and then an increase with depth. This trend has been found in most deposits studied in the region (Borba, 2007; Crespo Neto, 2004; Almeida et al. 2008a; Nascimento, 2009). However, the higher $S_u$ values of the top peat layers are due to the presence of fibres and organic matter that are not yet decomposed.
Field evidences indicate that this strength is not mobilized in situ, and thus a strength profile increasing with depth without a crust is usually considered in design.

Figure 4. N_kT profiles obtained at two sites.

Figure 5. Vane and CPTu uncorrected undrained strength S_u profiles: Península II site.
As these clays present very high plasticity indexes, the Bjerrum correction that is usually adopted, also based on back analysis of failures, is around $\mu = 0.60$ (Almeida et al. 2008b). Thus, $S_u$ design strengths are extremely low, making it impossible to build single stage embankments over these deposits. The construction techniques adopted in the region include, for instance, stage construction with berms, reinforcements, surcharge, and drains, all used concomitantly at the same site, but piled embankments have also been used at some sites (Almeida et al. 2008a,c).

4 COEFFICIENT OF CONSOLIDATION

The coefficient of consolidation obtained by laboratory oedometer tests and in situ piezocone dissipation tests were compared. Laboratory samples were collected with stationary piston Shelby tube following the recommendations of the Brazilian code NBR-9820/1994 as well as complementary specifications adopted at COPPE/UFRJ (Aguiar, 2008). The laboratory $c_v$ values were obtained by Taylor’s square root method.

The specimen preparation procedures proposed by Ladd and De Groot (2003) were adopted in order to reduce the remoulding effect during the extraction of the soil from the Shelby tube. However, due to the nature of these very soft clays, most were not good quality samples according to the criterion proposed by Lunne et al. (1997). Coefficient of consolidation values were calculated from piezocone dissipation tests using Houlsby and Teh's method (1988) and the standard procedures proposed in the literature (Lunne et al. 1997; Schnaid, 2009). The coefficients of consolidation $c_{hoc}$ values at the overconsolidated range were calculated for 50% pore-pressure dissipation at the cone shoulder, and the $t_{50}$ values were obtained from $\Delta u - (\log)t$ curves using the time factor $T*_{50} = 0.245$. The clay stiffness index $I_r = G/S_u$ adopted was equal to 50. In the majority of the deposits in the region the $I_r$ range is between 50 and 100. For correction from the overconsolidated to the normally consolidated range, a ratio between RR (recompression ratio) and CR (compression ratio) equal to 0.10 was adopted. Values of the coefficient of consolidation $c_h$ from piezocone tests presented in Table 1 were obtained using the ratio $k_v/k_h =1.5$. The variation in the coefficient of consolidation with depth obtained for the eight sites is shown in Table 1.

The variation in $c_h$ values with depth from oedometer and piezometer results from the Outeiro deposit are shown in Figure 6. This wide range of $c_h$ values was observed in the majority of the sites, and thus the monitoring of field behavior is very important in order to obtain more reliable data. The $c_h$ obtained from data from the monitoring of an embankment constructed over vertical drains on SESC/SENAC deposit, of about $6 \times 10^{-8}$ m$^2$/s (Almeida et al. 2005), was inside the range of tests results. For the Recreio deposit, $c_h$ results from field monitoring, for example, were about $2.5 \times 10^{-8}$ m$^2$/s (Almeida et al. 2008a).

5 CONCLUSIONS

The results from laboratory and field tests carried out of Rio de Janeiro clays in Barra da Tijuca and Recreio are part of extensive studies carried out on soft clay deposits in
these neighborhoods, which are being used as reference for geotechnical designs in these areas. However, it seems that due to the high variability of parameters, it is not possible to obtain characteristic properties of these deposits, even though they are very close.

The SPT boreholes profiles and stratigraphy are similar, but parameters as simple as Atterberg limits are quite different, as are compression parameters and strength parameters. Thus, for construction over these deposits in this area, high quality tests must be carried out.

![Graph showing consolidation characteristics](image)

Figure 6. Coefficients $c_h$ values of the Outeiro site from oedometer and piezocone results.

The scatter of coefficient of consolidation data is also very high, and it seems wise to be conservative when choosing design $c_v$ values.

The very low strength of the upper layers of these deposits and the occurrence of layers of peat lead to difficulties in the building of the first stages of embankments. The variability of $N_{kl}$ values, even for single sites, is also a problem when evaluating $S_u$ values.

REFERENCES


